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The Effect of Misogyny on the Persecution of Women as Practitioners of Magic
In Ancient Greece, Rome, Medieval and Early Modern Europe

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Introduction

This paper will look at the history of magic from the time of the ancient Greeks, to its development and integration into the culture of the Romans, and finally its evolution, downfall, and outlawing in the Medieval and Early Modern Europe. More specifically, this paper intends to focus upon the gender of practitioners of magic.¹ There is a discrepancy between classical literature and non-literary sources of who actually were practitioners of magic. Women prevail as practitioners in Greek and Roman literature but non-literary sources say that men too were practitioners of magic. Glimpses of misogynistic thoughts can be found in the writings of classical sources. When the non-literary sources are compared to literary sources, a different picture is formed as to who the practitioners of magic were in antiquity. In late Medieval Europe and the Early Modern Era of Europe, women were persecuted more so than men as practitioners of magic. Of all the witch trials that occurred in Europe, it is estimated by historians that eighty percent of the defendants were women.² Michael Bailey says, “The history of magic is incredibly complex, and the associations drawn between gender and magic are perhaps the most complicated aspect of that history.”³ This thesis does not plan to pinpoint the exact cause for the persecution of women as practitioners of magic in Greece, Rome, and medieval Europe. While this paper explores potential factors that contributed to the disproportion of persecuted women as practitioners of magic, the idea of misogyny seems to be the strongest contributing factor to the

¹ This paper will use the term “practitioners of magic” in reference to those who used magic instead of terms like “witch,” “sorcerer,” “wizard,” etc. The reason for doing so is to prevent any discrepancies between chapters as some authorities debate what made a witch different from a sorcerer. The terms also meant different things than our modern notion of them. For instance both men and women could be witches in Medieval times. For more information on this matter see the following sources:

Scarre, Geoffrey. *Witchcraft and Magic in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1987. 3-6.

Maxwell-Stuart, P. G. *Witchcraft in Europe and the New World, 1400-1800*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001. 62-68.

² Scarre, 25.

³ Bailey, Michael D. *Magic and Superstition in Europe: a Concise History from Antiquity to the Present*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007. 33.

persecution of women as practitioners of magic. Hence this paper will demonstrate the correlation between misogyny and the persecution of women as practitioners of magic.

Chapter One
Magic in Greece

The idea of magic and religion are closely intertwined, and the definition of magic depends heavily upon the notion of what religion is. In the *Laws*, Plato distinguishes between the two stating that magic makes every effort to persuade the gods, whereas the truly religious behavior is to leave the gods a free choice (10.909). To put it in better terms, magic forces the gods, and religion subjects itself to their power.⁴ Plato's definition of magic and religion will be applied in this chapter to define and characterize practitioners of magic as it is suiting to use a contemporary's definition to define what magic, witchcraft, and sorcery were like in ancient Greece at that time. After applying Plato's definition of magic to instances of females as practitioners of magic in Greek literature, this chapter will examine the sentiments of Greek men towards women in didactic poetry, tragedy, comedy, and philosophy.

Practitioners of Magic in Greek Literature

The oldest literary reference to magic within Greco-Roman literature is to Circe in Homer's *Odyssey*.⁵ Circe encounters Odysseus' men when they come to her house and are invited in by her. She prepares for them a meal in which "she blended baleful drugs into the food, so that they should forget their homeland completely. But when she had given it to them and they had drunk it down, she immediately struck them with her wand and shut them into pigsties (10.236-238)." Besides her use of φάρμακα or drugs to change Odysseus' men (and other sailors who had gone astray) into animals, Circe also changes Odysseus' men back into human form with an ointment (10.388-399); she can make herself "unseen" or invisible (10.569-574); she is well trained in necromancy because she instructs Odysseus how to reach the house

⁴ Graf, Fritz. *Magic in the Ancient World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997. 27.

⁵ Luck, Georg. *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds : a Collection of Ancient Texts*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985. 39.

of Hades (10.504-541); and because Odysseus must make Circe swear not to make him “cowardly and unmanly” once he has taken his clothes off, she is capable of erotic magic (10.281–301, 10.325–35).

Homer sometimes refers to Circe as a “goddess or woman,” (10.255) and this may suggest the notion of a mortal woman with supernatural powers, although Circe is also defined as a goddess without qualification.⁶ By instructing Odysseus how to reach the underworld, Circe undermined the power of Hades by allowing Odysseus to communicate with the dead. Circe also undermines the powers of the gods by turning Odysseus’ men into animals. The gods are then forced to send Hermes to Odysseus to give him a drug that will render Circe’s drugs powerless. Circe forces the gods to act in order to prevent the harm of Odysseus, and she toys with the fate of Odysseus and his men.

Another powerful witch, who, according to Diodorus in *Bibliotheca Historica* 4.45, was the sister of Circe, was Medea.⁷ Medea appears in Apollonius’ *Argonautica*, Euripides’ *Medea* and many other classical works. In Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica*, Hera persuades Cypris to convince her son Eros to make Aeetes's daughter, Medea, fall in love with Jason. Medea helps Jason all throughout the *Argonautica* by giving him the advice he needs to succeed in his tasks to obtain the Golden Fleece. First, Medea instructs Jason on how to make himself strong enough to withstand the charge of the bulls with bronze hooves so that he might plow the plain of Ares. Medea orders Jason to concoct the drug, which according to Appolonius’ *Argonautica* 3.1042-1045, “There will be boundless might in you and great strength. You will think yourself equal to the immortal gods rather than to other men.”⁸ Jason realizes that Medea is a huge help to him and

⁶ Ogden, Daniel. *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: a Sourcebook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 98.

⁷ Ogden, 78.

⁸ Ogden, 83.

promises to marry her in return for her help. Medea then helps Jason capture the Golden Fleece by putting the dragon that guards the Golden Fleece to sleep with a potion, and she uses enchanting spells to convince Talos (a bronze giant, who has only one vein, which is corked by a giant nail) to remove the nail, and thus drain his blood.⁹ Medea tells Pelias' daughters that she could make their father younger by chopping him up into pieces and boiling the pieces in a cauldron of water and magical herbs. Pelias' daughters agree after watching Medea perform the same magic on a sheep and turning it into a lamb. Medea refused to add the magical herbs after Pelias' daughters chopped up their father, and thus Pelias died. Pelias' son, Acastus, drove both Medea and Jason out of Iolcus, and Medea and Jason settled down in Corinth. In Corinth, Jason fell in love with Creusa, who was a daughter of the king of Corinth. Medea goes crazy and plots her revenge against Jason. She kills her two sons that she had by Jason, and she rubbed ointment on a dress for Creusa, which cause Creusa to combust and die.

Medea is a practitioner of the magic defined by Plato. She used her magic not only to help Jason, but she also used it to destroy him. She usurped the power of the supernatural to form her fate and overrode the power of the gods in doing so. For example, having been held by Eros' love spell to Jason, Medea used ointments and drugs to destroy him so that she would no longer love him. She overcame the power of the gods for her own benefit.

Another witch in classical literature is Simaetha, who can be found in Theocritus' *Pharmakeutria*. Simaetha concocts a love potion to win back her lost lover, Delphis. Simaetha uses both erotic-attraction magic to bring Delphis back and erotic-separation magic to make him forget any potential rival.¹⁰ Simaetha blames Aphrodite and Eros for leading her Delphis astray, and plans to use the love potion to overpower the gods. Therefore because Simaetha plans to use

⁹ Apollonius. *Argonautica*. Translated by William H. Race. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. 4.1636–1693

¹⁰ Ogden, 111.

supernatural means, in this case a love potion and spells, to influence the will of the gods, she falls into Plato's category of a practitioner of magic.

Origins of Magic in Greece

The term *μαγεία* or magic is the art of the *μάγος*. While Homer in his *Odyssey* makes the first mention of a person using methods of bewitching, *κατέθελεξεν* (10.213) around the 8th century B.C., the first literary reference to the *μάγοι* is to be found in Herodotus' *Histories* (I.101) in the 5th century B.C. Herodotus says that they are a tribe of the Persians, who are responsible for the royal sacrifices (7.43), funeral rites (1.140), and for the divination and interpretation of dreams (1.120, 128). Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* says that the *μάγοι* are specialists "in everything concerning the gods." (8, 3.11).¹¹ Practitioners of magic began to have several names attributed to them. In the 4th century B.C., Plato referred to *ἄγύρται*, begging priests, and *μάντις*, diviners or soothsayers, in his *Republic*:

And begging priests and soothsayers go to rich men's doors and make them believe that they by means of sacrifices and incantations have accumulated a treasure of power from the gods that can expiate and cure with pleasurable festivals any misdeed of a man or his ancestors, and that if a man wishes to harm an enemy, at slight cost he will be enabled to injure just and unjust alike, since they are masters of spells and enchantments that constrain the gods to serve their end (364b-c).

Plato also referred to bewitching in his *Laws* as *γοητεύοντες* (10.909), which comes from *γόης*, meaning sorcerer or enchanter. Plato, in his ideal city, wished to place punishments on those:

Who, just like wild beasts, are not content to deny the existence of the gods or to believe them either negligent or corruptible, despise humans to the point of capturing the spirits of a good number of the living by claiming that they can raise the ghosts of the dead and

¹¹ Graf, 20.

promising to seduce even the gods, whom they bewitched by sacrifices, prayers, and incantations, who out of a love of money, make every effort to ruin individuals, whole families, and cities from top to bottom (10.909).

Graf suggests that Plato and other Greeks disliked those who practiced magic because they were seen as a danger since they threatened the relationship that unites humans and gods.¹² The threat towards this relationship returned humans to the savage state prior to any civilization.¹³ Plato also gives an idea of how Greeks felt about magic in his *Meno*. Meno accuses Socrates of being a wizard or in this case a “γόης.” Meno says to Socrates, “You are well advised, I consider, in not voyaging or taking a trip away from home; for if you went on like this as a stranger in any other city you would very likely be taken up for a wizard (80b).” Athens did not pass harsh laws against “black” magic, which is why Fritz Graf believes that there are such a large number of curse tablets and magic figurines from Athens in this era.¹⁴

There is a misrepresentation in classical literature concerning who the practitioners of magic actually were. Although Thracian Orpheus, Musaeus, and Melampus, are examples of men practicing magic in Greek literature, the female gender predominated.¹⁵ If the Greek *Magical Papyri*, a collection of magical spells, enchantments, incantations, and many other magical techniques written circa the 2nd century B.C. to around the 5th century A.D., is compared to literary texts concerning practitioners of magic, one would get a much different sense of the identity of those who practice magic. In the *Magical Papyri*, with the exception of a handful of cases, it is normally a man who tries to attract, bind, and possess a female victim.¹⁶ In the *papyri*

¹² Graf, 25.

¹³ Graf, 26.

¹⁴ Graf, 25.

¹⁵ Versnel, H. S. "Magic." *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Third ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. 909.

¹⁶ Graf, 185.

it is normally ὁ δαίμων acting upon τῆν δαίμονα, or even sometimes a homosexual relationship is demonstrated by ὁ δαίμων acting upon τόν δαίμονα.

There are a variety of spells, incantations, and magical procedures described in the Greek Magical Papyri exclusively for men. An example of such a spell is thus: “Eternal spell for binding a lover: Rub together some gall of a wild boar, some rock salt, some Attic honey and smear the head of your penis (*PGM* VII.191-192).”¹⁷ While another spell says, “For swollen testicles: Take cord from a coin bag and say with each knot ‘Kasror’ once, ‘Thab’ twice (*PGM* VII.209-210).”¹⁸ Since these magical spells exist, it can be inferred that there were men who were practitioners of magic.

The Demotic Magical Papyri, a collection of texts that are similar to the Greek Magical Papyri, were found in Thebes, and date to around the third century A.D. The following is a love spell taken from the Demotic Magical Papyri.

To make [a woman] mad after a man: You should bring a live shrew-mouse, remove its gall and put it in one place; and remove its heart and put it in another place. You should take its whole body. You should pound it very much while it is dry; you should take a little of what is pounded with a little blood of your second finger and the little finger of your left hand; you should put it in a cup of wine; and you should make the woman drink it. She is mad after you. If you put its gall into a cup of wine, she dies instantly. Or put it in meat or some food. If you put its heart in ring of gold and put it on your hand, it gives your great praise, love, and awe (*PDM* xiv.1206-19).¹⁹

¹⁷ Betz, Hans Dieter. *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, including the Demotic Spells*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996. 120.

¹⁸ Betz, 121.

¹⁹ Betz, 250.

Curse tablets, like the Magical Papyri, are non-literary sources that give proof and nondiscriminatory evidence of who actually practiced magic. The following is a Greek curse tablet found on the Greek island of Amorgos dating between the second century B.C and the second century A.D.

(Side A) Lady Demeter, my Queen, I prostrate myself before you as your slave and suppliant. A certain Epaphroditus has ensnared my slaves to teach them evil; he has given them advice; he has plotted with them; he has corrupted them; he has rejoiced with them (over my plight); he has stirred them up to run about in the agora; he has advised them to flee. He himself has cast a spell on a slave girl, against my will, in order to take her as his wife; for this reason she fled along with the others. Lady Demeter, I have suffered these things and, bereft, I have fled to you. May I find you merciful and just. See to it that the one who has put me into this condition finds no satisfaction, whether at rest or in motion, in body or in spirit. Let him find no help from male or female slaves, from the small or the great. If he undertakes something, let him not be able to accomplish it. May a binding spell seize his household. Let no child cry (for him). Let him not set a happy table. Let no dog howl and no rooster crow. If he sows, let him not reap...Let neither earth nor sea bear him fruit. Let him have no blessing or rejoicing, neither he nor anything that belongs to him, until he perishes.

(Side B) Lady Demeter, I appeal to you as one who has suffered wrongs. Hear me, goddess, and render justice, so that you bring the most terrible and painful things (on) those who think such things about us and who rejoice together against us and bring

suffering on me and my wife, Epiktesis, and despise us. Oh Queen, lend an ear to those of us who suffer and punish those who look happily on such as us.²⁰

These examples of spells and curse tablets provide evidence that men too participated in practicing magic.

Greek Sentiments towards Women

Females in Greece were considered to be hardly more important than slaves. A respectable woman was raised for marriage, confined to the home, uneducated, married whoever her father arranged a marriage with, and birthed children.²¹ As important it is to discuss the role of women in Greek society, it is more important to discuss the sentiments of the Greek men towards women. These attitudes shall be observed through Greek literature. It is important to keep in mind that these writings are the writings of men.

Hesiod, who lived around the 8th century B.C., wrote about the first woman, Pandora. Hesiod claims that she was given to man by Zeus as a repercussion of the trickery of Prometheus. Hesiod says in his *Theogony*:

But when he had made the beautiful evil to be the price for the blessing, he brought her out, delighting in the finery which the bright-eyed daughter of a mighty father had given her, to the place where the other gods and men were. And wonder took hold of the deathless gods and mortal men when they saw that which was sheer guile, not to be withstood by men. For from her is the race of women and female kind: of her is the deadly race and tribe of women who live amongst mortal men to their great trouble, no helpmeets in hateful poverty, but only in wealth. And as in thatched hives bees feed the

²⁰ Gager, John Goodrich. *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. 165-167. The ellipsis (...) indicate a series of unreadable letters in the original text. Parentheses indicate interpretive expansions or clarifications of the original text.

²¹ Agonito, Rosemary. *History of Ideas on Woman: A Source Book*. New York: Perigee, 1977. 23.

drones whose nature is to do mischief -- by day and throughout the day until the sun goes down the bees are busy and lay the white combs, while the drones stay at home in the covered skeps and reap the toil of others into their own bellies -- even so Zeus who thunders on high made women to be an evil to mortal men, with a nature to do evil (ll. 585-602).²²

Hesiod also discusses women in his *Works and Days*. This story is similar to his story in his *Theogony*, but here Hesiod goes into detail about the first woman, Pandora.

And he bade famous Hephaestus make haste and mix earth with water and to put in it the voice and strength of human kind, and fashion a sweet, lovely maiden-shape, like to the immortal goddesses in face; and Athene to teach her needlework and the weaving of the varied web; and golden Aphrodite to shed grace upon her head and cruel longing and cares that weary the limbs. And he charged Hermes the guide, the Slayer of Argus, to put in her a shameless mind and a deceitful nature. So he ordered... And he called this woman Pandora, because all they who dwelt on Olympus gave each a gift, a plague to men who eat bread... For ere this the tribes of men lived on earth remote and free from ills and hard toil and heavy sickness which bring the Fates upon men; for in misery men grow old quickly. But the woman took off the great lid of the jar with her hands and scattered all these and her thought caused sorrow and mischief to men. Only Hope remained there in an unbreakable home within under the rim of the great jar, and did not fly out at the door; for ere that, the lid of the jar stopped her, by the will of Aegis-holding Zeus who gathers the clouds. But the rest, countless plagues, wander amongst men (54-100).²³

²² Hesiod. *The Theogony, Works and Days, and The Shield of Heracles*. Trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White. Stilwell: Digireads.com, 2008.

²³ Ibid.

In this next example, a glance of the uselessness of women can be observed in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*. In this example, King Eteocles is addressing the women who have thrown themselves to the feet of the images of gods while Thebes is under attack.

I would not choose to live with the female sex either in bad times nor during a welcome peace. For if a woman has her way, her boldness is unendurable, and if she is fearful, she is even worse for home and state. And now, by your flight and panic you stir up weak minded cowardice in our citizens. While affairs outside are going so far as possible in our favor, we are destroyed from within by them – that's what you get from living with a woman... The outside is a man's concern – a woman should not consider it; she should stay inside and not cause damage (186-201).²⁴

In Euripides' *Medea*, a glimpse of misogyny can be found while Jason is trying to reason with Medea about his marriage to the princess of Corinth.

You would agree with me, if you weren't annoyed about our marriage, but all you women are alike in this, when your marriage goes well you think you've got everything, but if anything goes wrong in your marriage, you turn what's best into what's most inimical. Men ought to beget children somewhere else, and there should be no female race (569-575).

Men also equated women with evil as demonstrated from a few fragment of plays. Carcinus II in his lost play *Semele*, says, "O Zeus, why need one say evil of women in detail? It would be enough if you say merely woman." Another fragment comes from Eubulus that demonstrates that the faults of a few are ascribed to the entire "race" of women.

²⁴ This translation as well as the subsequent 5 translations are from the following source:
Lefkowitz, Mary R., and Maureen B. Fant. *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: a Source Book in Translation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005.

I wish the second man who took a wife would die an awful death. I don't blame the first man; he had no experience of that evil. The second man knew what kind of evil a wife was! Oh honored Zeus, shall I ever say something unkind about women? By Zeus, may I perish then! They are the best possessions one can have. Medea was an evil woman, but Penelope was a good thing; some might criticize Clytemnestra, but I'll set Alcestis against her. Maybe someone will criticize Phaedra – but, by Zeus, there must be another good wife! Who? Oh, poor me, I've run out of good women, and I still have so many more bad ones to talk about (*Chrysilis*, Fr. 77).

Finally, from this last piece of literature, it can be surmised that women were not to be educated as men were. Menander in his *Synkrisis* says “A man who teaches a woman to write should recognize that he is providing poison to an asp (1.209-210).”

Philosophers too comment on the superiority of men over women. In his *Politics*, Plato, while speaking of the three parts of household management, mentions the rule of the husband over the wife says:

A husband and father rules over wife and children, both free, but the rule differs, the rule over his children being a royal, over his wife a constitutional rule. For although there may be exceptions to the order of nature, the male is by nature fitter for command than the female, just as the older and full-grown is superior to the younger and more immature (1259a37).

Aristotle too despised magic and its practitioners. Aristotle says in his *History of Animals*:

Hence woman is more compassionate than man, more easily moved to tears, at the same time is more jealous, more querulous, more apt to scold and to strike. She is, furthermore,

more prone to despondency and less hopeful than the man, more void of shame or self-respect, more false of speech, more deceptive, and of more retentive memory (9.1).

Conclusion of Chapter 1

From the information presented in this chapter it can be said that Greeks had negative attitudes towards practitioners of magic, and Greek men had negative attitudes towards women. Men as writers of both myth and history chose to portray practitioners of magic as females. After observing their attitudes towards women in didactic poetry, tragedy, comedy, and philosophy, it can be established that there were misogynistic views present in Ancient Greece.

Chapter 2
Magic in Rome

As Rome developed over the centuries, witchcraft and magic too developed. However, laws that had cropped up over the years during Rome's growth now threatened those who practiced magic. These laws as well as the ideas that we can pull from the literature of authors like Horace, show us the main portrayal of witches in Roman times. The passing of the laws and decrees against practitioners of magic is a direct result of magic being identified with revolution against the state. Clyde Pharr writes,

In Roman law the antisocial use of magic was prohibited, with increasing strictness, but with indifferent success, from the time of the Twelve Tables; and magic of all kinds was under continual suspicion because of its secrecy, mystery, violation of tombs, human sacrifice (ritual murder), philters, sex crimes, sacrilege, and foreign provenance, and because of its connection with sedition, treason, paganism, and heretical religious sects.²⁵

After demonstrating how non-literary sources such as curse tablets and laws that were prescribed against practitioners of magic as a whole were not gender biased, this chapter will look at how women were portrayed as practitioners of magic in Roman literature. The aim of this chapter is to highlight the discrepancy between the actual practitioners of magic and those who were depicted in Roman literature as the practitioners of magic.

Magic and Roman Law

The first identification of magic and the law in Rome was in the XII Tables. More specifically, Table VIII recommends the death penalty for forms of *malum carmen incantare* (to charm with evil incantations), *(malum) carmen occentare (condere)* (compose or sing evil charms), *fruges incantare* (to charm crops), *fruges excantare* (to charm away crops), *segetem*

²⁵ Pharr, Clyde. "The Interdiction of Magic in Roman Law." *American Philological Association* 63: 269.

pellicere (to entice away crops).²⁶ *Segentem pellicere, fruges incantare, and fruges excantare* mean to enchant grain away from a field by means of magic. *malum carmen incantare, and (malum) carmen occentare (condere)* were thought to deal with personal injury in the form of slander and libel by Cicero (*Tusculan Disputations* 4. 2, 4), Horace (*Satire* 2.1, 82; *Epistle* 2, 1, 152), Festus (*De Verborum Significatione*. 181), Arnobius (*Adversus Gentes*. 4.34), Paulus (*Sententiae* 5.4, 6), and Cornutus (*Satire* 1, 137), but Clyde Pharr writes, “Of late, the tendency has been to interpret them as prohibitions of malicious magic.”²⁷

Magic, it seems, was tolerated; the law seems to have respected a man’s right to practice magic.²⁸ The magic used was not allowed to interfere or harm any other person or their property. Established religion despised magic because those who practiced it normally did so secretly. According to Pharr,

Although the various forms of the state cult may embody sundry forms of magic, both helpful and harmful, yet it is under social control. The magician on the other hand usually is a free lance and operates not publicly and in broad daylight for the common good, but privately and frequently under cover of darkness, for private benefits, often in opposition to the public good. Thus magic, except in a very primitive community, is regularly a type of social and religious heresy, and as such bound to incur the wrath of the leaders of the established religion.²⁹

The magical elements that were performed in official religious rites in Rome were accepted because they were performed publicly and on behalf of the state, but magic that was performed in secret was seen to be in association with antisocial goals, which brought about criticism by the

²⁶ Pharr, 277.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Pharr, 278. The proceeding paragraph uses the same citation.

²⁹ Ibid.

state. There was a distinction between black magic and white magic although the line between the two is blurred.

Black magic was considered harmful magic. Curse-tablets, incantations, the use of drugs and poisons, voodoo dolls, the harming of people and their property fall under the category of black magic.³⁰ White magic was seen as innocent or beneficial, and spells that created protection against evil, the attraction of material and non-material benefits, and healings were attributed to it.³¹

Sorcerers and diviners had been associated with revolutionary threats against the state in the age of the Republic. In the age of the Empire, the state had become identified with the emperor, and the threat now tended to be seen as focused on his person.³² Therefore laws were passed against practitioners of magic in the hopes of preventing revolution.

For example, Cornelius Hispalus expelled the Chaldaeans and a Jewish sect in 139 B.C. Valerius Maximus tells us that the Chaldaeans were expelled because, “they were profiteering by fogging up weak and foolish minds with their lies and bogus readings of the stars,” and the Jews were expelled because they were “trying to corrupt Roman morality with their cult of Jupiter Sabazius.” Sulla proposed a law in 81 B.C that prescribed punishment for those who made, sold, or kept poisons/drugs for killing. Cicero in his *Pro Cluentio* 148 also states that this same law outlawed the selling, buying, possession, and administering of harmful drugs.³³ Augustus burned the books of the prophets in 31 B.C. Suetonius in his *Augustus* reports, “he gathered together from all quarters over two thousand books of prophetic writings in Greek and Latin, commonly

³⁰ Versnel, 909.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ogden, 281.

³³ Ogden, 280.

held to be anonymous or penned by insufficiently suitable authors, and burned them.”³⁴

Augustus also banned the art of divination on the subject of death. Dio Cassius reports this saying, “It was forbidden that diviners should give divinations to individuals or to give any divination on the subject of death, not even if other people were present.”³⁵ Pseudo-Paulus’ *Sententiae* 5.21.3 tells us that Tiberius too banned all forms of divination and more specifically the date for the emperor’s death. Libo Drusus was condemned by Tiberius in 16 C.E. Tacitus (*Annals* 2.27-32) reports:

At about the same time Libo Drusus, from the family of the Scribonii, was indicted for revolutionary activity...Although Tiberius could have put a stop to everything Libo was saying and doing, he preferred just to bear them in mind, until a certain Junius, whom Libo had asked to call up underworld ghosts with incantations, reported this evidence to Fulcinius Trio.³⁶

Because these laws were not prescribed against any particular gender, it can be assumed that both men and women practiced magic. Though many laws were prescribed against magic as a whole, Roman literature is heavy with examples of magic being performed by women.

Witches in Roman Literature

Horace, a Roman poet who lived between 65 B.C. and 8 B.C., portrays witches in two different manners. In *Epode* 5, Horace depicts witches in a frightening and menacing manner. However, in *Satire* 1.8, the same witch appears in a comical situation. The combination of the two stories makes it difficult to know what Horace’s position on witchcraft truly was, but Horace does help develop a stereotype for the witch in Roman times.

³⁴ Ogden, 281.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ogden, 282.

In *Epode 5*, Horace depicts the witches as unsightly. While speaking of Veia, Horace says *horret capillis ut asperis echinus aut currens aper*, or, her hair bristled, like a sea urchin with its spikes, or a wild boar. (*Epod.* 5.27-28). Also in *Epode 5*, Horace introduces Canidia writing, *rodens irresectum pollicem livido dente*, or, gnawing at her untrimmed thumbnail with blue tooth (*Epod.* 5.47-48). *Epode 5* is more frightening than *Satire 1.8*, because it reflects the true existence and gravity of witchcraft in Rome. In *Epode 5* witches murder a child for the magical purposes of creating a love potion from the boy's liver.³⁷ The liver, which is the main ingredient of the love potion, of the boy is grown by the witches by burying the boy in a pit so that only his neck and head are above ground. Then they place food in front of the boy that he cannot reach. Eventually the boy will starve to death while staring at the food, and his desire for the food will increase the potency of his liver.

In *Satire 1.8*, Horace yet again describes Canidia as *pedibus nudis*, bare foot, and *passo capillo*, hair unbound (*Sat.* 1.8.24). He even calls Canidia and her partner in crime, Sagana, *horrendas adspectu*, horrible to look at on account of their pallor (*Sat.* 1.8.25-26). Also Canidia is portrayed almost like an animal, as she and Sagana tear apart a black lamb it to pieces with their teeth (*Sat.* 1.8.27). In *Satire 1.8*, the witches use voodoo dolls and an evocation to accomplish their magic. Canidia and Sagana *coeperunt scalpere terram unguibus*, dig up the earth with their fingernails (*Sat.* 1.8.26-28). Then once the pit is dug they began *divellere pullam agnam mordicus*, tear apart a dark lamb with their teeth (*Sat.* 1.8.27). Usually such pits for evocations were normally dug with a sword, and after the pit was dug, the black sheep would have been slaughtered using the same sword.³⁸ However, Horace here is showing how animal-like these two witches are, so he has them digging the earth with their nails, and they tear the lamb to

³⁷ Luck, 29.

³⁸ Ogden, 116.

pieces with their teeth as if they were indeed beasts. The spirits that the witches are hoping to evoke are Hecate and Tisiphone; Hecate of course is the goddess of witches, and Tisiphone is one of the three Furies. Hecate and Tisiphone are two rather important spirits, so the work conducted by the witches can be assumed to be grim.

As stated earlier, it is difficult to determine Horace's position on witchcraft due to his conflicting writings on the subject. Georg Luck says that regardless of Horace's belief in witchcraft:

That witchcraft was practiced in ancient Rome by women who looked more or less like Horace's Canidia cannot be doubted; that many people were afraid of these women is equally certain. On the whole, however, they seem to have lived underground, so to speak, in the slums of Rome, threatened by laws, which, though not always enforced, provided for drastic punishment.³⁹

Horace's account of Canidia is not the only account of women as practitioners of magic in Roman literature.⁴⁰

Roman Literature vs Non-literary Sources

It was stated earlier that women are more prevalent in Classical literature representing practitioners of magic. Daniel Ogden says, "Female sorcerers, or 'witches,' are far more prominent than their male counterparts in mainstream classical literature, which is not to say that women were more inclined than men to turn to sorcery in reality."⁴¹ Michael Bailey agrees:

³⁹ Luck, 30.

⁴⁰ Indeed there are many accounts of females practicing magic in Roman literature. Lucan describes Erictho, another female witch, in his *Pharsalia*. Tibullus in his *Elegies* describes a witch but does not name her. Ovid not only talks about Medea in his *Heroides*, but also describes himself as the victim of binding spell via a voodoo doll in his *Amores*. Propertius talks about how Acanthis worked her magic against his girlfriend.

⁴¹ Ogden, 78.

In ancient literature, witches were almost always depicted as female... The antique world seems clearly to have associated harmful magical forces principally with women at least in its literary imagination. There appears, however, to have been little reality behind this association.⁴²

Bailey maintains that by observing information from non-literary sources such as court cases, the physical remains of curse tablets, and other sources, it can be determined that men appear to have been the practitioners of magic as much as women.⁴³ There are a few possibilities that could account from this mismatch between literature and actuality. An example of such a court case involving a male being accused of witchcraft can be found in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*.

I cannot resist reporting an example taken from antiquity, which can show that the custom was of presenting before the people even affairs concerning agriculture and how the men of that time defended themselves. C. Furius Cresimus, a freedman, reaped from a small field harvest much more abundant than his neighbors with vast properties; so he was much envied and suspected of having attracted the harvests of others by evil spells. Summoned for this reason before Spurius Albinus, the curulian edil, and afraid of being convicted by the voting of the *tribus*, he brought all his farming equipment to the forum and all his slaves, sturdy and, as Piso says, very well-groomed and well-dressed people, well-made tools, heavy pickaxes, weighty plowshares, well-fed cattle. Then he said, "these are my evil spells, citizens, and I cannot show you or bring to the forum my nights work, my watches, and my sweat." So he was unanimously acquitted (18.8).

⁴² Bailey, 32.

⁴³ Bailey, 33.

The following curse tablet was not found in Roman Britain around the beginning of the fourth century A.D. The curse tablet is in Latin, and was written completely in reverse order meaning that the first letter inscribed in the first line is actually the last letter of text.

(Side A) Whether pagan or Christian, whether man or woman, whether boy or girl, whether slave or free, whoever has stolen from me, Annianus (son of) Matutina, six silver coins from my purse, you, Lady Goddess, are to exact (them) from him. If through some deceit he has given me ... and do not give thus to him but reckon as the blood of him who has invoked this upon me.⁴⁴

As stated earlier, curse tablets offer non-discriminatory evidence as to who the practitioners of magic actually were because they were written not for audiences, like literary sources were, but for practical purposes.

The misrepresentation of women as practitioners of magic in Roman literature can be due to the mere fact that we do not have all written documents that may have concerned witchcraft from Roman literature or we do not have all the physical remains or recordings of court cases. Michael Bailey disagrees. While admitting that the associations drawn between magic and gender is the most complicated aspect of the history of magic, Bailey says that this misrepresentation may be caused by the fact that “the authors of history and legend were all men and so naturally used female images to depict the absolutely strange and sinisterly other.”⁴⁵

Conclusion of Chapter 2

This chapter has shown how several laws were proscribed against practitioners of magic as a whole, not just women, in ancient Rome. Similar to the writers of literature in Greece, despite evidence to the contrary, the writings of Roman men mainly suggest that women were

⁴⁴ Gager, 195.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the practitioners of magic. Men are seldom mentioned as practitioners of magic in literature, but the laws, court cases, and physical remains indicate that both men and women practiced magic.

Chapter 3
Magic in the Middle Ages

The witch in medieval times had changed and evolved over the centuries. Magic in the Middle Ages had evolved into a practice that drew from its classical roots, while still developing its own identity. Maxwell-Stuart says:

Practitioners of magic in Mediaeval Europe inherited from the Greeks and Romans a long tradition of both amateur and professional attempts to manipulate the natural and supernatural worlds with a view to achieving, for their own gratification, ends such as curing illness, divining the future or destroying one's enemies, which it was believed would not have been attainable by any other means.⁴⁶

In the Middle Ages, it would be difficult for a commoner to distinguish his feelings towards a cure worked for him by a practitioner of magic and a cure worked for him by a holy relic or prayer. Would he see the cure worked for him by a witch as a marvel or a miracle? Would he even really care or would he just be grateful that he was no longer suffering his affliction? Most likely the latter, but it is important to note that magic was sometimes considered to be just as good of a solution to a problem as religion was. This chapter will attempt to do what the commoner in Medieval Europe rarely did—distinguish between magic and religion while at the same time demonstrate how difficult it was for people of every class in the Middle Ages to do so.

Magic vs. Religion

Magic in the Middle Ages was affected by the development of Christianity, which grew and developed into a significant religion since the days of the late Roman Empire, and it had gathered a community of believers. Many people however used magic in some shape or form on a regular basis. Maxwell-Stuart tells says:

⁴⁶ Maxwell-Stuart, 2.

Europe at this time, one must remember, was not the monolithic Roman Christian entity of myth and popular assumption. Large tracts of it had scarcely been converted more than skin-deep, whole areas were still to all intents and purposes pagan, and since the purpose of the missionaries was to win over pagans from both their native religions and their magical practices, there was a tendency to run paganism and magic together and treat them as though they were more or less one and the same.⁴⁷

The problem is that these people did not see the harm in performing rituals and traditions because they did not see them as magic. People from every level of medieval society employed these practices to some degree.⁴⁸ Common Christians did not see the harm that was caused by flitting in and out between the Christian world and the pagan world. This caused the Church such difficulty in defining its identity and setting up firm barriers for itself. Maxwell-Stuart says:

One must remember that it is common experience for people, and indeed institutions, to live their lives on several different levels without necessarily being conscious that they are doing so. They can therefore accommodate different and even contradictory beliefs, one coming to the fore at one time, another at another.⁴⁹

There are several examples throughout history where Christian figures have been observed mixing contradictory beliefs. The monks of Canterbury were accused of working miracles through magic in 1171; Russian clergy often used spells instead of prayers; and a Bohemian priest was found to be carrying an umbilical cord trying to ward off death. Paul Stoller, an anthropologist from West Chester University says that it is like “some one who is multilingual. How do you keep both languages in your head? Depending on the context, a purely Catholic belief may be in order, but in another context in a different situation, these other beliefs come to

⁴⁷ Maxwell-Stuart, 23.

⁴⁸ Bailey, 80.

⁴⁹ Maxwell-Stuart, 15.

the surface.”⁵⁰ For Christians who practiced magic, it was like flipping a switch and applying the right belief to the situation.

There are a few distinct actions that would render any act of magic as witchcraft. The intention of the practitioner was to do harm by preternatural means. The actual deed of the practitioner was carried out by means of harmful magic. The practitioner made a pact or deal between themselves and an evil spirit. If any person were to be found guilty of participating in any of these acts, they would be considered to have dabbled in witchcraft.⁵¹ The following forms of magic are the most common forms of magic that were used in the high and late Middle Ages.

Forms of Magic in the Middle Ages

The most basic purpose for magic at this time, whether it was spells, incantations, herbs, or charms, was to heal because disease was so prevalent in Europe, and this is the start of modern medicine as a science.⁵² What makes the field of medicine fall under the category of magic at this time is the combination of charms, amulets, herbal potions, and unguents with the healer’s knowledge of the human body.

Magic was also employed for protective purposes. People would employ magic to protect themselves and families from diseases. As the agricultural system was an important aspect of medieval life, it only made sense for people to use spells and incantations to protect their crops and livestock as well. These spells warded off insects, ensured the fertility of the soil, as well as brought forth favorable weather.⁵³ People would enlist the forces of witches to help them when

⁵⁰ Stoller, Paul. "Witchcraft." *Taboo*. National Geographic. 2002. Television.

⁵¹ Maxwell-Stuart, 13.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Bailey, 81.

they were in need. These witches would help attempt to cure, use divination to predict the future, identify one's enemies, counter evil magic, and locate lost property for a fee.⁵⁴

As magic could be used for protection and healing, it could also be used to harm. Whereas many people would probably admit to performing the types of magic listed above, many would deny knowledge of magic to harm. People believed that magic was capable of injury, illness, death, overpowering other's will, harming animals, and harming crops.⁵⁵ In addition to all of these forms of magic, typical *maleficia*, the act of causing harm by occult means, seen in European witch trials also included causing sexual impotence, raising bad weather, and interfering with the manufacturing of butter, cheese, and beer.⁵⁶

Medieval Writings Against Witchcraft

In 1428, Hans Fründ, a lay official in Lucerne, Switzerland described the actions of practitioners of magic as those who killed, caused diseases, and other harms by meeting in secret at night, denouncing the Christian faith, worshiped demons, engaged in sexual orgies, and feasted upon the flesh of babies.⁵⁷ Around 1436, Claude Tholosan, a secular judge and chief magistrate of Briançon in French Dauphiné, wrote about the same cultic activities in his treatise *Ut magorum et maleficiorum errores manifesti ignorantibus fiant* (That the Errors of Magicians and Witches May Be Made Manifest to the Ignorant) based on the trials that he supervised.⁵⁸

A picture of witchcraft was painted by such accounts, and thus it was almost universally believed that at Sabbats, ritual meeting places, practitioners of magic enacted a parody of the Eucharistic feast by offering up the bodies of children, stolen from Christian families or the

⁵⁴ Scarre, 5.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Scarre, 4.

⁵⁷ Bailey, 131.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

offspring of previously held witch orgies, to the Devil.⁵⁹ If there were a neophyte present, an initiation ceremony would be held where the neophyte would swear to keep the secrets of the cult, renounce her Christian faith, and would have to kill a young child.⁶⁰ After such events, an orgy was believed to have taken place before the witches left the Sabbat.⁶¹ This description is interesting because it is similar to the rites performed at the festivals of Dionysus. Livy speaks of the Bacchanalia in his *History of Rome*:

To their religious performances were added the pleasures of wine and feasting, to allure a greater number of proselytes. When wine, lascivious discourse, night, and the intercourse of the sexes had extinguished every sentiment of modesty, then debaucheries of every kind began to be practiced, as every person found at hand that sort of enjoyment to which he was disposed by the passion predominant in his nature. Nor were they confined to one species of vice---the promiscuous intercourse of free-born men and women; but from this store-house of villainy proceeded false witnesses, counterfeit seals, false evidences, and pretended discoveries. From the same place, too, proceeded poison and secret murders, so that in some cases, not even the bodies could be found for burial (39.8).⁶²

The festivals of Dionysus became a blueprint for the rites supposedly performed by the medieval practitioners of magic.⁶³

In 1484, two inquisitors, those who investigated heresy, named Heinrich Kramer and Jakob Sprenger complained to Pope Innocent VIII about the resistance they were receiving from local authorities while they were investigating witchcraft. Pope Innocent VIII issued the bull

⁵⁹ Russell, Jeffrey Burton, and Brooks Alexander. *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007. 37.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Translation found in Thatcher, Oliver J., ed. *The Library of Original Sources*. Vol. III. New York: University Research Extension, 1907. 66.

⁶³ Russel, 31.

Summis desiderantes affectibus (*Desiring with Greatest Ardor*), which expressed his concerns of the present witchcraft that was taking place in German lands, and openly gave Kramer and Sprenger the permission to take action against suspected witches.⁶⁴ Kramer still met opposition in Innsbruck in 1485, so he began to write *Malleus maleficarum* (*The Hammer of Witches*). In 1487, Kramer published the treatise and attached the bull *Summis desiderantes* in order that the treatise was given an air of papal approval even though it had nothing to do with his work.⁶⁵ *Malleus maleficarum* served as a convenient handbook detailing the activities and identities of witches, and laid out exactly how authorities should proceed in cases of witchcraft.⁶⁶ More specifically however, *Malleus maleficarum* lent itself to the gender aspect of witchcraft. The following is an excerpt translated by Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters:

As for the first question, why a greater number of witches is found in the fragile feminine sex than among men...the first reason is, that they are more credulous, and since the chief aim of the devil is to corrupt faith, therefore he rather attacks them...the second reason is, that women are naturally more impressionable, and...the third reason is that they have slippery tongues, and are unable to conceal from their fellow-women those things which by evil arts they know...But the natural reason is that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives...And this is indicated by the etymology of the word for Femina comes from Fe and Minus, since she is ever weaker

⁶⁴ Bailey, 137.

⁶⁵ Bailey, 138.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

to hold and preserve the faith... To conclude. All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable.⁶⁷

Kramer's *Malleus maleficarum* was not the only comprehensive manual that exclusively associated witchcraft with females. Johannes Nider wrote his *Formicarius*, and it explained women's tendencies to practice witchcraft. Nider, based on sound biblical and Aristotelian knowledge, claimed that women were inferior to men physically, mentally, and spiritually; more susceptible to demonic allurements; more carnal than men; quicker to anger and so desired power to take action against those they believed to be alleged enemies; and more prone to gossip, so that once one woman attained access to demonic power, she would soon spread this knowledge to others.⁶⁸ Kramer's *Malleus maleficarum* was printed in fourteen separate editions between 1486 and 1520, and it was reprinted an additional sixteen times from 1576 to 1669.⁶⁹

Conclusion of Chapter 3

As demonstrated in this chapter, magic in the Middle Ages was practiced by every level of society. Also, the misogynistic thoughts of men can still be traced at the end of the Middle Ages. Their misogynistic thoughts, linked with their thoughts on who were the practitioners of magic, were reprinted and read throughout the Early Modern Era and had an impact upon those who were persecuted. Historians speculate from the remains of court cases from sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that of all the witch trials that occurred in Europe, roughly eighty percent of the defendants were women.⁷⁰ This leads to the question, "Why women?" There have been many different theories that try to explain why women were persecuted in the Middle Ages. Theories of why witches and witchcraft were persecuted will be discussed in the following

⁶⁷ Kors, Alan Charles, and Edward Peters. *Witchcraft in Europe, 1100-1700; a Documentary History*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1972. 114-127.

⁶⁸ Bailey, 132.

⁶⁹ Bailey, 139.

⁷⁰ Scarre, 25.

chapter. Some historians speculate that during the Early Modern Era, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in Europe, a maximum figure of 100,000 executions occurred, which means a maximum figure of 80,000 women could have been executed for practicing witchcraft.⁷¹

⁷¹ Scarre, 19.

Chapter 4
Theories of Witch-hunting

Regardless if one believes that witchcraft really does work or not, one must believe that it exists. It cannot be denied that witchcraft existed, after all witchcraft is tangible, it has been recorded and documented. This chapter is not looking to see whether or not a spell uttered by a practitioner of magic will turn a person into a newt just as much as whether or not words uttered by a priest over a piece of bread and cup of wine will turn them into flesh and blood. The purpose of this chapter is to look at the different theories that explain witchcraft, and furthermore, why women were persecuted for practicing magic. First this chapter will look at statistical data that shows that women were persecuted as practitioners of magic more so than men. Then this chapter will examine theories as to why witches were persecuted in medieval Europe.

Statistics on the Persecution of Women as Practitioners of Magic

As stated in the previous chapter, it is estimated by historians that nearly eighty percent of witch trials that occurred in Europe involved a woman as the defendant. It should be noted that these numbers generated by historians are speculation based off of what available primary sources that are available such as court records. The availability of court records vary from region to region as well as from time period to time period. For example, court records in Scotland pre-Reformation have all been lost.⁷² Where an unknown number of court records have been lost, many court records are fragmentary and laconic, therefore it is difficult to rely entirely upon such sources.⁷³ Nevertheless, court records are the most basic primary source available, and although the exact number of court cases is impossible to determine, as well as the number of

⁷² Hair, Paul, ed. *Before the Bawdy Court: Selections from Church Court and Other Records Relating to the Correction of Moral Offences in England, Scotland and New England, 1300-1800*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1972. 15.

⁷³ Hair, 11.

females and males who were tried for practicing magic, the remaining evidence points to the fact the women were persecuted more than men as practitioners of magic. The following statistics are generated by Geoffrey Scarre concerning the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe based off of other secondary sources who conducted surveys of European geographical regions during the sixteenth and seventeen centuries. In Basel, ninety-five percent of the defendants at witchcraft trials were women. In Essex, ninety-two percent of the defendants were female. In Namur, which is Belgium today, eighty-two percent of the defendants were female. In Germany, eighty-two percent of the defendants were female. In Venice and Ostrobothnia, which is Finland today, seventy-eight percent of the defendants were female. In Geneva and Franche-Comté seventy-six percent of the defendants at witchcraft trials were women. In Saarland, seventy-two percent of the defendants were female. In Castile, seventy-one percent of the defendants were female.⁷⁴ Bailey's estimation for the number of women persecuted as practitioners of magic in Europe in the Early Modern Era is around seventy-five percent of all trials, but rose to over ninety percent in some areas like Sienna where, in the late sixteenth century, the defendant of ninety-nine percent of more than two hundred witch trials was a female.⁷⁵ Maxwell-Stuart suggests that men only made up twenty-five percent of the defendants of witch trials, and he cites Robin Briggs for this statistic.⁷⁶ Robin Briggs claims to have analyzed as many court records as possible and says that after the number of trials rose and as records improved dramatically, this became easier to do.⁷⁷ Maxwell-Stuart goes on to say that

⁷⁴ Scarre. 25.

⁷⁵ Bailey, 148.

⁷⁶ Maxwell-Stuart, 63.

⁷⁷ Briggs, Robin. "Many Reasons Why: Witchcraft and the Problem of Multiple Explanation." *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*. Ed. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. 59.

Defendants who were found guilty of practicing magic but were lucky enough to escape death could be punished by imprisonment, flogging, fines or exile.⁷⁸ Scarre also is able to give statistical information on the percentage of people executed in certain areas during the Middle Ages. In Mergentheim during the 1628 panic, ninety-three percent of defendants were executed. In Pays de Vaud and Luxembourg, ninety percent of defendants were executed. In Namur, fifty-four percent of defendants were executed. In the Channel Islands, forty-six percent of defendants were executed. Poland during the sixteenth century executed only four percent of their defendants, but from 1701 to 1750, forty-six percent were executed. Moscow in the seventeenth century executed thirty percent of their defendants.⁷⁹ Bailey writes that while statistics varied in Europe from country to country, “In general not only were far more women than men accused of witchcraft, but of those accused a higher percentage of women were convicted, and of those convicted a higher percentage of women were executed.”⁸⁰

Theories of the Cause of the Witch Craze

W. G. Soldan wrote in his *Geschichte der Hexenprozesse* his belief of why witches were persecuted as much as they were in the Middle Ages.⁸¹ Soldan believed that practitioners of magic were persecuted for financial greed. Soldan believed this because in some cities in Europe, when a witch was persecuted, the state confiscated all of her possessions. Scarre tells us that, “fees were payable to judges and other court officials, torturers and executioners: and occasionally, too, a professional witch-hunter like the notorious Balthasar Ross at Fulda was

⁷⁸ Scarre, 29.

⁷⁹ Scarre 30.

⁸⁰ Bailey, 148.

⁸¹ Scarre, 35.

motivated by the hope of gain.”⁸² Scarre disagrees with this theory however because mainly lower-class women were prosecuted, and some cities did not practice confiscation of property.⁸³

Another theory that seems to have some potential is that the Catholic Church linked witchcraft with Judaism in order to establish its dominance over the Jewish religion. While there is not much proof for this theory, there are traces of anti-semitism found in the words related to witchcraft. For example, the witches Sabbat or Sabbath were meeting places for witches. Sabbath is the Jewish term for the weekly day of rest from sundown on Friday until the appearance of three stars in the sky on Saturday night.⁸⁴ Also the place where witches met for the Sabbath was called a synagogue.⁸⁵ A synagogue is the name for the place of worship for Jews. As Jews did not believe in Jesus Christ, they were seen to renounce Him just as witches who made pacts with Satan. Jews were also believed to steal the consecrated Eucharist to use in magical practices as well as to desecrate.⁸⁶ The notions of Judaism and the Occult would carry all the way to World War II. Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer of the SS, a military commander, and a leading member of the Nazi Party, created a *Hexen-sonderkommando*, which literally means Special Witch Unit in German, within the SS.

Some theories are so far-fetched that simply mentioning them is merely for entertainment. Margaret Murray was an Egyptologist who wrote *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*, in which Murray argues that witchcraft was actually the main religion of Europe in the Middle Ages until the Reformation.⁸⁷ Murray argues that the witches worshipped Janus or Dianus, who is also known as Diana. Murray’s theory goes into further detail saying that Joan of

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Scarre, 34-35.

⁸⁴ Grunfeld, I. *The Sabbath: a Guide to Its Understanding and Observance*. New York: Feldheim, 2003. 18-19.

⁸⁵ Maxwell-Stuart, 19.

⁸⁶ Bailey, 86.

⁸⁷ Murray, Margaret Alice. *The Witch-cult in Western Europe; a Study in Anthropology*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1921. 4-5.

Arc was actually a witch and she belonged to the ancient religion, not to the Christian religion.⁸⁸ Joan of Arc as well as William Rufus were sacrificed, according to Murray, as part of a ritual that resulted in “all crops and herds as well as the women were rendered fertile, and that barrenness was averted.”⁸⁹ Murray however builds her theory “with staggering disregard of the requirements of proof.”⁹⁰

Another possible explanation for the prosecution of witchcraft can be observed by examining peaks in prosecutions as well as circumstances that took place in those years. There were peaks of prosecution in the last years of the sixteenth century, 1630, and the 1660s. The mitigating circumstances that need to be observed are the poor harvests during the 1590s and 1620s, the bubonic plague in the 1630s, and war, as well as the threat of war in the 1590s, 1620s and the 1660s.⁹¹ These circumstances of course led to negative attitudes towards witches because people normally blamed suffering and evil on witches.⁹² There also happens to be evidence that contradicts this claim as well. There are years in France-Comté (1635-1644) where there are few trials even though there was war present. Also there was a decline in witch-hunting in southwestern Germany in the 1630s with a strong presence of the Thirty Years War, famine, and economic hardships.⁹³

The work of Hugh MacFarlane and Keith Thomas looks at the social structure and interactions of villages in the Middle Ages. MacFarlane and Thomas believe that those who ended up being charged with witchcraft brought the charge upon themselves. MacFarlane and Thomas believe that those who made themselves unpopular on account of being bad neighbors,

⁸⁸ Murray, 102.

⁸⁹ Murray, 112.

⁹⁰ Scarre, 36.

⁹¹ Scarre, 38.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Scarre, 38-39.

had loud and aggressive natures, or were always begging were usually accused of witchcraft.⁹⁴ One can see how this could potentially happen if the scene is reconstructed. Imagine that a beggar approached a villager in the street and demanded money from that person. If the villager refused, the beggar would shuffle away muttering under their breath. If the slightest amount of misfortune were to befall the villager who refused to give the beggar money, that villager would instantly accuse the beggar of being a witch. There are accounts of such happenings. In Suffolk, 1645, Mary Edwards asked Marianne May for milk. Marianne gave Mary some, but not enough, and Mary was seen walking away muttering. One of Marianne's children later died, and Mary was accused of murdering him on account of witchcraft.⁹⁵ In Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1667, Emma Gaskin was accused of witchcraft after being refused money by a maid of Margaret Sherburne, and Emma uttered that she wished "either she would break her neck or hang herself before night." Margaret reported that her maid went into a seizure that night, and she had a vision of Emma floating through the door.⁹⁶

Some have theorized that due to the importance of religion in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, witch-hunts were the result of social control. Both churches and states were obsessed with keeping their populations in control, and the maintenance of general conformity and allegiance were an imperative. Scarre says:

Secular rulers found themselves invariably drawn into the contending churches' struggle for dominance, and lent their weight to energetic campaigns to instruct the populace in the principles of the church of their choice, and to suppress, by violence if necessary, anything that smacked of deviation from the prescribed norm. In such circumstances, the

⁹⁴ Scarre, 41.

⁹⁵ Ewen, C. *L'Estrange. Witchcraft and Demonianism: a Concise Account Derived from Sworn Depositions and Confessions Obtained in the Courts of England and Wales.* London: Heath, Cranton, 1933. 287.

⁹⁶ Ewen, 403.

practice of village witchcraft, which had for centuries seemed too insignificant a phenomenon to merit much official concern came to appear as an unsightly and intolerable blemish on the landscape of rural life, and a clear target for extirpation.⁹⁷

This is the theory of Christina Lerner, John Elliott, and Robert Muchembled. These theorists believe that the peasants of Europe did not take to Christianity until after the Reformation, and authorities drove home the idea of Christianity by smothering magic and witchcraft.

My own theory for the hunting of witches in the Middle Ages combines this social control theory with the notion of misogyny that had been intact for millennia. A long successive line of male thought can be traced back for thousands of years that men were superior to women mentally and morally. Therefore, many would have assumed that women were more susceptible to witchcraft and temptation. This theory can be applied not only to the women persecuted during the Middle Ages, but to all examples of witchcraft that have been pointed out in previous chapters.

Applying my theory to ancient Greece one can see that the Greeks once loved Medea for helping out Jason and the Argonauts. But once Jason betrayed Medea, Medea worked her witchcraft and magic against Jason. Hence Medea broke the unwritten law of men. She made herself more powerful than Jason and men in general. Hence, in an attempt to restore social control, a role reversal had to be put into effect in order to restore balance. Medea was made to look evil, and this negative spotlight reflected upon the manner in which she inverted her power over Jason—her witchcraft.

The countless laws prescribed against witches in the Roman period follow this theory perfectly as well. In the age of the Republic and in the age of the Empire, the state had become identified with the emperor. Because magic had been associated with revolutionary threats

⁹⁷ Scarre, 44.

against the state, the threat now tended to be seen as focused on his person. Social control was once again exercised towards those practitioners of magic. Horace makes fun of Canidia and her band of witches in an attempt to humiliate them for possessing secret knowledge of magic. By poking fun at these women who practice magic, Horace hopes to reassert his manhood and dominance over these women who are out of place according to the norms and constrictions of society.

In Medieval and Early Modern Europe, countless women were persecuted for the centralization of power in Europe. So many women were convicted of performing magical arts in order to create fear in women in a hope of keeping them in their place. This fear along with the desire of spreading Christianity to all of Europe crippled and diminished the appearances of witches as well as keeping women from taking power and control. Martin Luther spoke of women as the most beautiful of God's creations, but thought they were as inferior to men as the moon is the sun.⁹⁸ Martin Luther also said in a sermon on 1 Peter, "It is commonly the nature of women to be timid and to be afraid of everything. That is why they busy themselves so much about witchcraft and superstitions and run hither and thither, uttering a magical formula here and a magical formula there."⁹⁹

Taking a more modern perspective, the hunting of women as practitioners of magic can be paralleled to the crime of physical violence and men. Maxwell-Stuart says:

These crimes are associated with men because the common cultural expectation is that men rather than women commit such crimes; and indeed our prisons are full of confirmatory evidences. But physical violence is not exclusive to men and if some

⁹⁸ Maclean, Ian. *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: a Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1980.

⁹⁹ Wiesner, 218.

women are found guilty of it, their conviction causes slight surprise (because it is relatively unusual) but not disbelief.¹⁰⁰

Therefore, just because the medieval expectations of witchcraft were normally associated with women, does not mean that either sex could perform magic equally as well.

Conclusion of Chapter 4

All the evidence presented in this thesis demonstrates that there is a correlation between misogyny and the persecution of women as practitioners of magic throughout the ages. Correlation is the relationship between two variables that exist independently as opposed to causation which is the direct effect of one variable upon another. Although correlation does not equal causation, the amount of evidence stacked against misogyny incriminates the concept as one of the factors that caused the persecution of women as practitioners of magic, and therefore still can contribute as a part of causation. In ancient Greece, practitioners of magic were looked down upon as they were seen as a danger to society because they threatened the natural unity between the gods and men. There are glimpses of misogynistic thought preserved in the ancient texts of the Greeks in the various styles of didactic poetry, tragedy, comedy, and philosophy. Women too were depicted by male authors to be practitioners of magic in literary texts, whereas in reality, according to non-literary sources such as the Greek Magical Papyri and the remnants of curse tablets men too were also practitioners of magic. Michael Bailey claims that by observing information from these non-literary sources, it can be determined that men appear to have been the practitioners of magic as much as women if not more so. Nevertheless, the antique world seems clearly to have associated harmful magical forces principally with women at least in its literary imagination despite what actually was happening around them. The Romans looked down upon magic similarly as the Greeks did. Various forms of the state cult embodied various

¹⁰⁰ Maxwell-Stuart, 63.

forms of magic, but it was accepted because it was under social control. However, those who practiced magic as free lancers were seen to be practicing magic in opposition to the public good. The various techniques of magic practiced by those outside of the state religion were under continual suspicion because of its secrecy, mystery, violation of tombs, human sacrifice (ritual murder), philters, sex crimes, sacrilege, and foreign provenance, and because of its connection with sedition, treason, paganism, and heretical religious sects. Hence laws were put in place against those who were practitioners of magic. These laws refer to groups of people and are not gender specific. Therefore it can be reasoned that these laws referred to both men and women who practiced magic. Also, court cases and curse tablets remain as primary sources that support the evidence that both men and women practiced magic in Roman times. However, the fact that both men and women practiced magic can barely be surmised by reading the works of Roman authors such as Horace. The concepts of magic in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Era had their roots in classical magic. Just as the practitioners of magic in medieval Europe inherited from the Greeks and Romans a long tradition of both amateur and professional attempts to manipulate the natural and supernatural worlds with a view to achieving their ends, medieval society too inherited the misogynistic attitudes from the Greek and Roman men who held sentiments that it was women who practiced magic, and women in general were inferior. Magic in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Era were affected by the development of Christianity. The misogynistic thoughts of men can still be traced at the end of the Middle Ages. Their misogynistic thoughts, linked with their thoughts on who were the practitioners of magic, were reprinted and read throughout the Early Modern Era and had an impact upon those who were persecuted. As stated earlier, it is impossible to know exactly how many trials actually took place throughout Europe due to corrupt and missing court records. Although, some historians can

make estimations as to how many women and how many men were persecuted as practitioners of magic, their estimations are based off incomplete records. Nevertheless, a trend can be observed in the majority of records—that women were persecuted as practitioners of magic more so than men. The discrepancy between classical literary sources and non-literary sources as to who the practitioners of magic were gives significance to the fact that the authors of myth and history displayed misogynistic views. These misogynistic views remained in late Middle Ages and Early Modern Era in Europe, and they are a significant contributing factor for the unequal persecution of females as practitioners of magic.

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