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978-0-521-48258-5 - Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria: Popular Magic, Religious Zealotry and Reason of State in Early Modern Europe

Wolfgang Behringer

Excerpt

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# 1 Introduction

## WITCH TRIALS IN HISTORIOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Since the 1970s, the researching of witch trials and their background has developed into an autonomous historical field – witchcraft studies.<sup>1</sup> However, historical interest in witchcraft has an even longer tradition: demonologists of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries often substantiated their own opinions through references to historical accounts and preced-

<sup>1</sup> H. Lehmann, 'Hexenprozesse in Norddeutschland und in Skandinavien im 16., 17. und 18. Jahrhundert. Bemerkungen zum Forschungsstand', in C. Degn *et al.* (eds.), *Hexenprozesse. Deutsche und skandinavische Beiträge*, Neumünster 1983, 9–14, for example uses the term 'witch researcher', *ibid.*, 9. No bibliography has yet been produced. The resurgence of witchcraft research in the 1960s was marked by three essays: H.C.E. Midelfort, 'Recent Witch Hunting Research, or Where Do We Go from Here?', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 62 (1968), 373–420; D. Nugent, 'Witchcraft Studies 1959–1971: A Bibliographical Survey', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 5 (1971), 711–25; and E.W. Monter, 'The Historiography of European Witchcraft: Progress and Prospects', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2 (1972), 435–51. At about the same time a series of essays began, which made access to the scattered specialist literature much easier: E.W. Monter (ed.), *European Witchcraft*, New York 1969; M. Douglas (ed.), *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, London 1970; A. Kors and E. Peters (eds.), *Witchcraft in Europe 1100–1700. A Documentary History*, Philadelphia 1972; S. Anglo (ed.), *The Damned Art. Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, London 1977; G. Becker, S. Bovenschen, H. Brackert *et al.* (eds.), *Aus der Zeit der Verzweiflung. Zur Genese und Aktualität des Hexenbildes*, Frankfurt am Main, 1977; C. Honegger (ed.), *Die Hexen der Neuzeit. Studien zur Sozialgeschichte eines kulturellen Deutungsmusters*, Frankfurt am Main 1978. Some paradigmatic new researches have been discussed in collective reviews which are worth reading: L. Stone, 'The Disenchantment of the World', *New York Review of Books*, 2 December 1971, 17–25; H.C.E. Midelfort, 'The Renaissance of Witchcraft Research', *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences*, 13 (1977), 294–7. Information on the state of witchcraft research in Germany is given by G. Schormann, *Hexenprozesse in Deutschland*, Göttingen 1981. As witchcraft research has since become very popular in Germany too, Schormann's survey now has the character of an interim report.

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ents, in addition to revelation, classical authors or scholastic authorities.<sup>2</sup> Opponents of trials also found it in their best interests to cite historical precedents or to stigmatise the outbreak of persecutions as a wrong turn on the path of history. To that extent, some historical awareness of 'witches' always existed in Western Europe.<sup>3</sup> Even Enlightenment thinkers were rooted in this tradition, although their examples had a different aim. Whereas precedent previously underscored the necessity of persecution, history served an apologetic function in the Enlightenment, unveiling the 'darkness' of a bygone era. Later, historical precedent provided them with a political weapon in the fight for enlightened reforms<sup>4</sup>, only to regain an apologetic function shortly thereafter. Hardly any other theme lent itself so well to exalting the present at the expense of the past.

Historians initially treated the ostensibly exotic topic of witchcraft with negligence and, with few exceptions,<sup>5</sup> the field was tilled by outsiders. Theologians, jurists, archivists and journalists all took an early interest, followed by psychologists, physicians, sociologists, ethnologists and folklorists. While a journalistic approach often led, indeed still leads, to

<sup>2</sup> The basic works are J. Hansen, *Zauberwahn, Inquisition und Hexenprozess im Mittelalter und die Entstehung der grossen Hexenverfolgung*, Leipzig 1900; J. Hansen, *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und der Hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter*, Bonn 1901. In the early sixteenth century a north Italian Inquisitor investigated the archives of the Inquisition and fixed the beginning of this new heresy at around 1350, Hansen, *Quellen und Untersuchungen*, 454. Similar examples are quoted by H.C. Lea, *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft*, 3 vols. New York/London 1957, I, 232. Not until the later sixteenth century do examples become plentiful: J. Bodin, *De Daemonomania Magorum*, Strasbourg 1581; *Theatrum de Veneficiis*, Frankfurt 1586. On the other demonological literature of the period: J. Janssen and L. Pastor, *Culturzustände des deutschen Volkes seit dem Ausgang des Mittelalters bis zum Beginn des Dreissigjährigen Krieges*, 8 vols., Freiburg im Breisgau 1885–94, VIII, 494–644.

<sup>3</sup> More radical opponents branded the executions of witches as an overt injustice, above all J. Weyer (Wierus), *De Praestigiis Daemonum*, Frankfurt am Main, 1586 (1st edn 1563). In our context the view of a Jesuit leader of opinion from Bavaria is interesting; he believed that the new witches had been known since 1475! A. Tanner, *Theologia scholastica*, 4 vols., Ingolstadt 1626–7, I, col. 1503f.

<sup>4</sup> B. Bekker, *Die bezauberte Welt*, 4 vols., Amsterdam 1693; C. Thomasius, *De crimine magiae*, Halle 1701. The 'historicising' approach to the alleged truths of the faith is clear from the title of G. Wahrlieb, *Deutliche Vorstellung der Nichtigkeit der vermeynten Hexereyen und des ungegründeten Hexenprocesses*, Amsterdam, nach der Erfindung der Hexerey im dritten Seculo und nach der Einführung des Hexen-Processes ins Jahr 236, Halle 1720. It is often overlooked that editions of sources began very early: E.D. Hauber, *Bibliotheca Acta et Scripta magica. Gründliche Nachrichten und Urtheile von solchen Büchern und Handlungen, welche die Macht des Teufels in leiblichen Dingen betreffen*, 3 vols., Lemgo 1736–45.

<sup>5</sup> One of the few exceptions was S. Riezler, *Geschichte der Hexenprozesse in Bayern. Im Lichte der allgemeinen Entwicklung dargestellt*, Stuttgart 1896. Riezler (1843–1927) had qualified as a lecturer in 1869, and the first volume of his monumental *Geschichte Baierns* (8 vols., Gotha 1878–1914) appeared in 1878. Riezler was appointed to the first chair of Bavarian history and became a co-editor of the *Historische Zeitschrift*.

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eccentric interpretations,<sup>6</sup> most researchers (excluding special interest groups) accepted the explanations proposed in nineteenth-century German literature,<sup>7</sup> which could claim the detailed reconstruction of an elaborated concept of witchcraft pervasive in Western Europe from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries as its major accomplishment. Regional and chronological concentrations of trials and persecutions, though noted, never came to the foreground. One leading researcher, Joseph Hansen, identified the accumulated beliefs of sorcery and heresy subsumed in the fifteenth-century concept of witchcraft, and his findings are still valid today, but Hansen was over-generous when he conceded that early modern persecutions were

only the natural echo of ideas fully developed around the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern era, influenced little by the Reformation, persisting far into the nineteenth century, and not effectively opposed until they came under the influence of a modern world-view based on science, and not theology.<sup>8</sup>

In Hansen's day, most researchers assumed that witch trials flowed into the continuous stream of persecutions from the end of the Middle Ages to

<sup>6</sup> Examples of eccentric interpretations of the witch theme from three leading modern German publications: *Der Spiegel*, 43 (1984), 117–28; *Stern*, 36 (1982), 58–65; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Münchener Stadtanzeiger*, 65–70 (1984).

<sup>7</sup> Besides S. Riezler and J. Hansen the chief protagonists of the older German witchcraft research included G.W. Soldan, *Geschichte der Hexenprozesse*, Darmstadt 1843, whose work was repeatedly augmented and received its final form as G.W. Soldan, H. Heppe, H. Bauer, *Geschichte der Hexenprozesse*, Hanau 1912. It is still one of the basic standard works (reprinted 1972). Besides Janssen and Pastor the following must be mentioned: J. Diefenbach, *Der Hexenwahn vor und nach der Glaubensspaltung*, Mainz 1886; G. Längin, *Religion und Hexenprozess*, Leipzig 1888; O. Snell, *Hexenprozesse und Geistesstörungen. Psychiatrische Untersuchungen*, Munich 1891; L. Rapp, *Die Hexenprozesse und ihre Gegner im Tirol*, Innsbruck 1874 (enlarged edition, Brixen 1891); B. Duhr SJ, *Die Stellung der Jesuiten in den deutschen Hexenprozessen*, Cologne 1900; N. Paulus, *Hexenwahn und Hexenprozesse, vornehmlich im 16. Jahrhundert*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1910; also important are G. Roskoff, *Geschichte des Teufels*, II, Leipzig 1869; and H. Hayn and A.N. Gotendorf, *Bibliotheca Germanorum Erotica et Curiosa*, III, Munich 1913, s.v. 'Hexenwesen' 171–258. The older German research into witchcraft laid solid foundations for modern international research. Many an apparently new idea will be found in some detail in the authors named above. The view that gained currency among American psychiatric historians, under the influence of G. Zilboorg, *The Medical Man and the Witch During the Renaissance*, Baltimore 1935, and was for a time a received opinion, but is now again disputed, that witches were mainly psychiatric cases, is already found in Snell. The function of witch trials as an instrument of social discipline, over-emphasised by R. Muchembled, *Kultur des Volkes – Kultur der Eliten*, Stuttgart 1982, was as prominently defended in F. Stieve, 'Der Hexenwahn' in his, *Abhandlungen, Vorträge, Reden*, Leipzig 1900, 300–18. Also completely based on the old materials are Lea, *Materials*; H.R. Trevor-Roper, 'The European Witch Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in his *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change*, London 1967, 90–192; K. Baschwitz, *Hexen und Hexenprozesse*, Munich 1963.

<sup>8</sup> Hansen, *Quellen und Untersuchungen*, Foreword.

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the beginning of the Enlightenment. While occasional antiquarians might describe a single trial, they otherwise contented themselves with the prevailing paradigm. Individual cases served them only as examples and a systematic investigation was ignored, because this 'could accomplish little more than confirm the well-known pattern with grisly uniformity'.<sup>9</sup>

A few nineteenth-century researchers voiced concerns about the accuracy of this portrayal, but only recently has the challenge culminated in a true paradigm shift. New studies demonstrate major spatial and temporal fluctuations between trials conducted in a manner lacking any essential uniformity. They reveal how an event once scorned by 'enlightened' historians as a 'witch craze' actually displayed significant regional and individual anomalies, rightly pointing out pronounced variations in persecutions. In the 1960s, historical interest in early modern witch trials shifted from the ruling elites traditionally targeted for research – nobles, jurists and theologians – onto the 'lower' social strata of the population and their attendant actions and reactions; firm believers in witchcraft, they were more immediately affected than the highest echelons of society. Witchcraft studies broke new ground after several historians unearthed a mass of surprising information.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of chronology, international researchers now largely agree that witchcraft persecutions peaked between 1560 and 1630,<sup>11</sup> albeit with distinct conjunctures during this seventy-year period. If consensus seems unimportant, one should appreciate that the new chronology renders many former hypotheses obsolete and demolishes older explanatory models. Contrary to popular opinion, there was never any broad stream of witch trials running from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century.

<sup>9</sup> Hansen, *Zauberwalm*, Foreword. Similarly also Riezler, *Geschichte der Hexenprozesse*, (1896) (henceforth *Geschichte*), 6.

<sup>10</sup> The chief paradigmatic works are J. Caro Baroja, *Die Hexen und ihre Welt*, Stuttgart 1967 (1st edn Madrid 1961, English translation, *The World of the Witches*, Chicago 1964); R. Mandrou, *Magistrats et sorciers en France au XVIIe siècle. Une analyse de psychologie historique*, Paris 1968; A. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, London 1970; K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, London 1971; H.C.E. Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562–1684*, Stanford 1972.

<sup>11</sup> The period 1560–1630 is explicitly named by Muchembled, *Kultur*, 236; Trevor-Roper, 'European Witch Craze', 143f.; and Honegger, *Die Hexen*, 107; it can also be implicitly inferred from Janssen and Pastor, *Culturzustände*, VIII, 619–95; or Soldan *et al.*, *Geschichte der Hexenprozesse*, I, 481–563 and II, 1–130. H. Kamen, *The Iron Century, Social Change in Europe 1550–1660*, names 1550–1660; Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, 201–19 refers to 1570–1630 as does P. Chaunu, *Europäische Kultur im Zeitalter des Barock*, Munich 1968, 651. Monter, *European Witchcraft*, xiii and following him Schormann, *Hexenprozesse* (1981), 55 consider 1580–1630 to be the decisive phase. C. Andresen and G. Denzler, *dtv-Wörterbuch der Kirchengeschichte* (Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag), Munich 1982, 261, following F. Merzbacher, *Die Hexenprozesse in Franken*, 2nd edn Munich 1970, see an even shorter period, 1590–1630, as the core period of witch hunting. Cf. also Lehmann, 'Hexenprozesse', 11.

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Following witch trials conducted by papal inquisitors around 1500, we now know that executions for witchcraft actually declined for decades, compelling contemporaries to remark that witches were hardly ever executed.<sup>12</sup> This decline coincided with the reign of Charles V, the age of the Reformation and its popular mass movements, and an epoch of benign capitalism (Braudel). One leading physician, Johann Weyer, launched a frontal assault on the dominant concept of witchcraft elaborated by later scholasticists in his epoch-making *De praestigiis Daemonum* of 1563. However, although he condemned persecutions as a ‘slaughter of the innocents’, Weyer’s voluminous polemic was not intended as an attack on witch trials per se, but rather on the unexpected occasion of their resumption; by that time, he had hoped, they were long ‘abolished and done away with’.<sup>13</sup> Obviously, we need no longer search the Middle Ages (perhaps not as ‘dark’ as they once seemed) for causes behind a rise in witch hunting after 1560, but instead in the ‘iron century’ (Henry Kamen) which now commands ever more attention from historians. Furthermore, the ‘new’ endpoint of the European witch craze has similarly unsettling implications. While Cartesianism and the early Enlightenment certainly played a decisive role in the marginalisation of witchcraft as a crime, they hardly explain the marked decline in persecutions as early as the first decade of the seventeenth century, even more pronounced after 1630.<sup>14</sup>

Recently, interest in the apex of witchcraft persecutions between 1560 and 1630 has mounted. Heightened public interest provided an external stimulus, but the scholarly bankruptcy of traditional explanations acted as a catalyst more endogenous to the historical community: repeated assertions of a connection with the Counter-Reformation or the tumultuous wars of religion are simply unfounded.<sup>15</sup> In Germany, the epicentre of witch hunting,<sup>16</sup> the first waves of persecution occurred during an extended period of peace between the Schmalkaldic War and the Thirty Years War.

<sup>12</sup> This view was defended by J. Trithemius, *Antipalus Maleficiorum*, Ingolstadt 1555 (MS of 1508), on which see Lea, *Materials*, 369f. and Baschwitz, *Hexen*, 15–18. The complaint of lack of persecuting zeal is found in many authors on witchcraft before 1580.

<sup>13</sup> Weyer, *De Praestigiis*, Foreword, i verso (cf. note 3); ‘benign capitalism’ is a phrase found in Braudel, ‘Europäische Expansion und Kapitalismus 1450–1650’, in E. Schulin, *Universalgeschichte*, Cologne 1974, 255–94, 280.

<sup>14</sup> As does Trevor-Roper, ‘European Witch Craze’, 163–71; cf. the discussion in Honegger, *Die Hexen*, 126ff. A clearer perspective is that of Thomas, *Religion*, 681 and H. Lehmann, ‘Hexenverfolgungen und Hexenprozesse im alten Reich zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung’, *Jahrbuch des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte (Tel Aviv)*, 7 (1978), 13–70, quotation from 54ff.

<sup>15</sup> G. Schormann, *Hexenprozesse in Nordwestdeutschland*, Hildesheim 1977, 7; *idem*, *Hexenprozesse* (1981), 110–16.

<sup>16</sup> Monter, *Witchcraft in France*, 191, assumes that ‘probably more witches were killed within the confines of present-day Germany than in the rest of Europe put together’.



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Interdisciplinary methods clearly provided new impulses for witchcraft studies. Apart from psychological and sociological theorems,<sup>17</sup> ethnographic methods long employed to study witchcraft in ‘primitive societies’ proved particularly fruitful.<sup>18</sup> Initially, research on witchcraft profited greatly from the general rapprochement between social history and social anthropology<sup>19</sup>, most pronounced in an exchange between English and American anthropology and English witchcraft studies that resulted in several decisive encounters. Social anthropologists approached their subjects outfitted with different questions than historians, seeking the function of witchcraft in existing societies, rather than its origins or essence. Field research allowed them to test theories through direct interaction, never confined to the leading members of society – chieftains or shamans – as was customary in historical research. Instead, the ‘popular magic’ of a given society was considered within a cultural totality, neither as an isolated phenomenon, nor as some abtruse intellectual error. Unlike most historians, who viewed witchcraft beliefs as a virus infecting the intellectual body of European culture<sup>20</sup>, ethnologists accepted the

<sup>17</sup> Stone, ‘Disenchantment’, 17, referred to the ‘raids’ of the historians of mentalities on Max Weber and E. Durkheim. References to older sociological and psychological attempts at interpretation in the English-speaking world are discussed in Midelfort, ‘Recent Witch Hunting Research’, 378f. and some more recent socio-psychologically oriented works are reviewed in Midelfort, ‘Renaissance’, 294ff. The necessity of sociological analysis is emphasised by R. Horsley, ‘Who Were the Witches? The Social Roles of the Accused in the European Witch Trials’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 9 (1979), 689–714, 692. Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, 4ff. warned against oversimplifying sociological correlations and functionalist theories. T.J. Schoenemann, ‘The Role of Mental Illness in the European Witch Hunts of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: An Assessment’, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 13 (1977), 337–51, objected to overemphasis on the psychopathological aspect.

<sup>18</sup> E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford 1937 (German translation, *Hexerei, Orakel und Magie bei den Zande*, Frankfurt am Main 1978) had the most lasting influence. Explicit application of social-anthropological theories in Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, 211–54, with discussion of ethnological theories and approaches.

<sup>19</sup> As such one should appreciate the special numbers of two journals: *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 12 (1981–2), with a thematic block of articles on ‘Anthropology and History in the 1980s’; *ibid.*, 227–78; and *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 10 (1984), Heft 3, ‘Sozialgeschichte und Kulturanthropologie’. The theme of the 35th Historians’ Conference in West Berlin of 1984 was ‘Ways of life, mentalities, forms of action. Anthropological dimensions in history’.

<sup>20</sup> When Riezler, *Geschichte*, 197 places the members of the Bavarian princely house, because of their fear of witchcraft, ‘auf jene Stufe, auf der wir viele heidnische Negerstämme treffen’, this *bon mot* may have thrown light on an unknown side of Counter-Reformation piety, but it can no longer be appreciated as showing an understanding of the magical culture of the time in a social-anthropological sense. It is striking how little space is given to this central aspect of pre-industrial mentalities in historical standard works and textbooks. Only higher magic in its relationship to the emerging natural sciences is mentioned in the contributions to T. Schieder (ed.), *Handbuch der europäischen Geschichte*, III, Stuttgart 1971; T. Schieder (ed.), *Handbuch der Europäischen Geschichte*, IV, Stuttgart 1968, 126–36 *passim*, merely refers to ‘superstition’ which was repressed.

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'otherness' of the mentalities they studied without ethnocentric arrogance.<sup>21</sup>

If functionalists sometimes regarded witchcraft as a stabilising factor in 'primitive' societies,<sup>22</sup> Malinowski was quick to notice that an exacerbated fear of bewitchment related to historical processes in a given society. The historicisation of social anthropology by Evans-Pritchard<sup>23</sup> strengthened the perception that fear of bewitchment rises in times of social turmoil. The view of 'popular magic' as a self-regulating mechanism preserving social and moral equilibrium was thereby altered as accusations of bewitchment began to be regarded as symptoms of heightened internal tensions. Suspicions of witchcraft indicated a society that, as a whole, could no longer resolve problems by traditional means – a society in a state of crisis, so to speak.<sup>24</sup>

English witchcraft studies incorporated this paradigm, thereby achieving a novel interpretive quality for European history. Keith Thomas expressed this most clearly, stating:

Witch-beliefs are therefore of interest to the social historian for the light they throw upon the weak points in the social structure of the time.<sup>25</sup>

From inauspicious beginnings as a trivial preoccupation with an apparently irrelevant cultural aberration, witchcraft studies forced their way into the heart of historical debate to stake a claim as a leading field of early modern research.<sup>26</sup>

The emancipation of witchcraft studies became clear when leading historians in England and France suddenly began to concern themselves with the topic, and continued to do so for many years.<sup>27</sup> As initial forays

E.W. Zeeden in H. Grundmann (ed.), *Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, IX, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag (3rd edition), Munich 1978, 175–80, at least addresses the problems. There are only scattered references in M. Spindler (ed.), *Handbuch der bayerischen Geschichte*, II, 2nd edn Munich 1977, and III, 2nd edn Munich 1979.

<sup>21</sup> E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theorien über primitive Religionen*, Frankfurt am Main 1981, 159f., refers to Mauss (note 17).

<sup>22</sup> So for example M. Douglas, 'Das Problem des Bösen', in her, *Ritual, Tabu und Körper-symbole. Sozialanthropologische Studien in Industriegesellschaft und Stammeskultur*, Frankfurt 1981, 152–71; E. Gillies, 'Introduction' to the German translation of Evans-Pritchard (1978), 7–36, 26f.

<sup>23</sup> E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Anthropology and History*, Manchester 1961; B. Malinowski, 'Gedanken zum Problem des Zauberes', in his, *Die Dynamik des Kulturwandels*, Vienna 1951, 185–96.

<sup>24</sup> Malinowski, 'Gedanken', 190ff.; Gillies, 'Introduction', 28–30; Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, 249ff. <sup>25</sup> Thomas, *Religion*, 669.

<sup>26</sup> This was heralded in Midelfort, 'Renaissance', 294.

<sup>27</sup> To name only a few: L. Febvre, 'Sorcellerie, sottise ou révolution mentale', *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 3 (1948), 9–15; P. Chaunu, 'Sur la fin des sorciers au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 24 (1969), 895–911; Mandrou, *Magistrats*; Muchembled, *Kultur*; Stone, 'Disenchantment'; Kamen, *Iron Century*; Thomas, *Religion*.

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passed into an experimental phase, attempts were made to link witchcraft with all sorts of social changes in the later Middle Ages and early modern period. Initially, historians rather naively sought to explain witchcraft persecutions by citing unique causes, such as the alleged self-enrichment of the judges, the sexual perversions of monks, the intended destruction of religious enemies, the eradication of ancient cults or secret medical lore, misogyny, or the fault of the Church, jurists or other social groups.<sup>28</sup> None of these explanations was entirely satisfying and more ambitious interpretations gradually made their appearance. They included the ‘collapse’ of the medieval ‘cosmos’ through ‘rapid political, social and religious change in the fifteenth century’,<sup>29</sup> a transformation of mentalities during the transition from feudalism to capitalism,<sup>30</sup> the potential for conflict in pre-industrial European village communities,<sup>31</sup> the birth of the absolutist state,<sup>32</sup> the disappearance of Catholic protective magic after the Reformation,<sup>33</sup> social disciplining and suppression of popular culture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,<sup>34</sup> the ‘price revolution’ of the sixteenth century,<sup>35</sup> and changes in family structure, especially in the role of women in society.<sup>36</sup> A complete list of the factors linked to witchcraft persecutions in recent years would be redundant. Not all connections made equal sense, but it is no exaggeration to suggest that the socio-anthropological paradigm of ‘fear caused by social change’ has proven most fruitful indeed. It won general recognition among historians for the central role of witchcraft in the life and thought of early modern Europeans, at all social levels, albeit relative to a broad scale of social interpretations.<sup>37</sup>

A glimpse at the complex and burgeoning secondary literature indicates that little consensus remains about the connection of witchcraft to specific historical phenomena, leaving the impression that we lack fundamental information or an ability to differentiate adequately. The consequences are obvious, when some researchers suspect witch trials only in remote mountain regions, while others find them in highly developed centres of early capitalism. An interpretation of ‘backwardness’ dominates in the first

<sup>28</sup> Schormann, *Hexenprozesse* (1981), 80–9, 100–23.

<sup>29</sup> J.B. Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca/London 1972; partially translated into German in Honegger, *Die Hexen* (1978) 159–87, cited from 165.

<sup>30</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, 205f. Also Thomas, *Religion* (1980 edn), 669ff., 675f.

<sup>31</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, 205f. <sup>32</sup> Lehmann, ‘Hexenverfolgung’, 31f.

<sup>33</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, 250f.; on this see Stone, ‘Disenchantment’, 19f., 24.

<sup>34</sup> Muchembled, *Kultur*, 232–77, explicitly 239, 241, 249; cf. note 7.

<sup>35</sup> Kamen, *Iron Century*, 249f.

<sup>36</sup> Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, 184ff., makes this suggestion but does not draw the full conclusions from it.

<sup>37</sup> Further interpretative approaches in Schormann, *Hexenprozesse* (1981), 123f. A discussion of various approaches in Lerner, *Enemies*, 15–28. The increasing acceptance of the theme is shown by its inclusion in important surveys, e.g. Kamen, *Iron Century*, 239–51; R. van Dülmen, *Entstehung des frühneuzeitlichen Europa 1550–1648* (= *Fischer Weltgeschichte*, vol. 24), Frankfurt am Main, 1982, 285–91.



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example, 'fear caused by social change' in the second.<sup>38</sup> There are also a variety of opinions as to whether the witch craze was a rural or an urban phenomenon, or whether a greater proclivity to persecute witches existed among particular religious confessions, forms of government or economic structures. Marked regional and temporal variations make it difficult or even impossible to generalise at the present time and, as with other specialised historical fields such as the history of the family, the topic remains a minefield for non-specialists. For example, when the English historian H.R. Trevor-Roper published his brilliantly formulated essay 'The European Witch Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', he provoked reactions among historians of witchcraft ranging from ridicule, indignation, vigorous rejection or, at best, ambivalence.<sup>39</sup> In a lofty *tour d'horizon*, Trevor-Roper combined shrewd insights with absurd generalisations taken from the secondary literature unchecked or incapable of being checked against any sources.<sup>40</sup> The revival of Delrio's old 'mountain' theory was employed to suggest a belief in witches indigenous to Europe's mountainous regions: the Alps, the Pyrenees and elsewhere. Trevor-Roper's social psychology, limited to conjecture about 'thin mountain air' causing 'hallucinations' in the 'imagination of the mountain peasants', served as the basis of proof for the witchcraft concept edified by the Church. Nor was that all: Trevor-Roper reduced the witch craze to a 'crusade against the Alpine peoples'.<sup>41</sup> Although this last quote is a crass example of disturbingly learned nonsense, one could, in principle, just as easily present other unfounded statements, confidently put forward as axioms, to assert the contrary.<sup>42</sup>

We can only arrive at more viable hypotheses through regional studies conducted on compact geographic areas, which explain where and when witch trials and witchcraft persecutions actually occurred, what triggered

<sup>38</sup> Here the interpretation of Russell, *Witchcraft*, 268, is opposed to that of Trevor-Roper, 'European Witch Craze', 107 (backwardness).

<sup>39</sup> Trevor-Roper, 'European Witch Craze' (cf. note 7).

<sup>40</sup> The verdict of the advanced witchcraft researchers was annihilating: Macfarlane (*Witchcraft*) wrote: 'the essay has nothing to say which is helpful ... The real defect of the essay is that its tone implies that we know a great deal about "witchcraft" and all that is needed is synthesis. In fact we know far too little.' Stone, 'Disenchantment', 22, even considered the essay an 'egregious error': 'almost all of Professor Trevor-Roper's over-confident assertions are either false or unproven'. Also critical is Thomas, *Religion*, 595, 684. Harsh criticism was also levelled at Russell: Midelfort, 'Renaissance', 294; and at Mandrou, who had to suffer the verdict of Soman: 'Mandrou's thesis simply bristles with fallacies': A. Soman, 'The Parlement of Paris and the Great Witch Hunt (1565–1640)', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 9 (1978), 31–44, quotation from 33.

<sup>41</sup> Trevor-Roper, 'European Witch Craze', 106, 109, 133, 136, 160, 292; on this see Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, 9. The attempt to harmonise witch hunts and topography is obviously persistent: Schormann offers, instead of Trevor-Roper's exploded 'high mountain theory', a 'middle mountain theory', but on the same page he speaks of low-lying Westphalia and Mecklenburg as chief regions of witch hunting in the Empire.

<sup>42</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, 9; Stone, 'Disenchantment', 22; see also note 40.

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## 10 WITCHCRAFT PERSECUTIONS IN BAVARIA

them, how they developed, what reactions they provoked, what expectations were coupled with them, which chronological, local and sociological differences accompanied them and why trials eventually came to an end. Only then can we establish a sensible international comparison and correlate the events with other historical processes on a broad basis.

Earlier regional studies in German-speaking countries (Bader for Switzerland and Byloff for Austria,<sup>43</sup> Riezler's research on the Duchy of Bavaria, the studies of Liebelt and Spielmann for Hesse<sup>44</sup> and the monographs of Merzbacher and Wittmann for Franconia,<sup>45</sup> to name only a few for southern Germany) have enhanced our knowledge of witch trials and have already presented a partial challenge to the earlier paradigm of German witchcraft studies. Nevertheless, their authors were caged by this paradigm insofar as their conclusions remained naive (blaming the Church, for example), the interpretation of trials unearthed as grisly examples of the age prior to the Enlightenment was retained (albeit with certain local and chronological concentrations), no new or illuminating queries were entered, and results were presented as curios of cultural history. As far as quantification is concerned, we remain in the dark as to their methods or the representative character of their sources. The authors usually examined trial records only, informing the reader, at best, that they were fragmentary. The heterogeneity and lack of intellectual rigour exhibited by many of these early regional studies make them inappropriate for any comparative survey on the 'national' level.<sup>46</sup>

Only with the 1960s did the onset of methodologically reflective witchcraft studies<sup>47</sup> lead to systematic, comparative, regional studies posing innovative questions.<sup>48</sup> Early in the 1970s, two extensive regional studies

<sup>43</sup> F. Byloff, *Hexenglaube und Hexenverfolgung in den österreichischen Alpenländern*, Berlin 1934; G. Bader, 'Die Hexenprozesse in der Schweiz', Dr. jur. thesis, Zürich 1945.

<sup>44</sup> K. Liebelt, 'Geschichte der Hexenprozesse in Hessen-Kassel', *Zs. der. Verf. f. hess. Gesch. u. Landeskunde*, 58 (1932), 1–144; H.K. Spielmann, *Die Hexenprozesse in Kurhessen. Nach den Quellen dargestellt*, 2nd edn Marburg 1932; for Hesse see also the work of C. Grebner, 'Hexenprozesse im Freigericht Alzenau (1601–1605)', *Aschaffener Jahrbuch für Geschichte, Landeskunde und Kunst des Untermaingebietes*, 6 (1979), 141–240.

<sup>45</sup> F. Merzbacher, *Die Hexenprozesse* (cf. note 11); F. Merzbacher, 'Geschichte der Hexenprozesse im Hochstift Würzburg', *Mainfränkisches Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Kunst*, 2 (1950), 162–85; P. Wittmann, 'Die Bamberger Hexenjustiz 1595–1631', *Archiv für das katholische Kirchenrecht*, 50 (1883), 177–223.

<sup>46</sup> Schormann, *Hexenprozesse* (1981), 65–71, gives the first approximate quantitative geographical survey of the distribution of witch hunts in Germany, for which he was able to make use above all of the materials of the *H-Sonderkommando* (see chapter 2, pp. 35–64).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. notes 1 and 10.

<sup>48</sup> Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, 232, note 28 was still able to cite only Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*. Soman, 'Parlement', could also refer to Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, E.W. Monter, *Witchcraft in France and Switzerland; the Borderlands during the Reformation*, Ithaca/London 1976, and the work of Larner, then in progress. Larner, *Enemies*, for her part, cf. note 160, also knew G. Schormann (*Hexenprozesse*, 1977). The essays in Degn *et al.*, *Hexenprozesse*, should also have been added.