

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE
Department of History

History 1V
Autumn 2009
Tuesday, 1:15-4:00
Trotter 215

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History 1V
Witches, Witchcraft, and Witch hunts
(Writing course)

Why has belief in witches and witchcraft been found so widely throughout history? What were central doctrines about witchcraft and how did beliefs vary over time and space? Under what conditions were witches imagined as female or as male? How was witchcraft linked to religion, magic, and demonic possession? What were the relations between elite and popular witch beliefs? Why did belief in witchcraft die out in some places and survive in others? Was witchcraft in Europe similar to witchcraft in other societies?

This seminar will consider these and related issues by close attention to primary sources and recent historical studies. Considerable attention will be devoted to conceptual and historiographical issues, to careful reading and informed discussion, to developing research skills, to analytical and expository writing, to revising, editing, and shaping explanations. Each student will develop expertise on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor and pursued through a number of research and writing steps culminating in a report delivered both in class and in a final paper. Each student will have and be a partner who will provide close critiques of the various written assignments and the culminating report. Critiques will engage with both the content and the form (mechanics, style, scholarly apparatus, etc.) of the paper being critiqued.

The requirements for the seminar include:

- 1) Regular, on-time attendance in class.*
- 2) Informed, consistent and respectful participation in the weekly discussions.
- 3) A prospectus of at least 5 typed pages on the topic you have chosen to study during this semester, due at the beginning of class on 15 September. Your topic **MUST** be approved by me no later than 10 September. A full explanation of the assignment is posted on Blackboard.
- 4) A critique of at least 2 typed pages of your partner's prospectus, due at the beginning of class on 22 September. A separate posting gives full details.
- 5) A bibliography and revised prospectus, totaling at least 7 typed pages, due at the beginning of class on 29 September. A separate posting gives full details.
- 6) A critique of at least 2 typed pages of your partner's bibliography and revised prospectus, due at the beginning of class on 6 October.
- 7) An historiographical essay of at least 5 typed pages, due at the beginning of class on 27 October. A separate posting gives full details.
- 8) A critique of at least 2 typed pages of your partner's historiographical essay, due at the beginning of class on November 3.
- 9) A first draft of your entire paper, due at the beginning of class on November 17.

- 10) A critique of at least 2 typed pages of your partner's first draft, to be e-mailed to your partner by 1.15 pm November 24.
- 11) A report on your paper, delivered orally in class on either 1 December.
- 12) A critique of at least 2 typed pages of your partner's report, due via email by 5 pm, Saturday, 5 December. A separate posting gives full details.
- 13) The final draft of your paper, of at least 20 pages, due no later than 5 p.m. on Sunday, 13 December.

There is no hour test and no final examination.

*The history department has implemented the following policy on attendance: Students are required to attend all classes for the successful completion of the course. Unexcused absences will result in a lower grade.

At the end of the semester, students should have perfected their skills in the following areas:

- Analytic reading of primary sources, including the ability to identify and accurately summarize the main subject of sources and the ability to use them as the building blocks of their own arguments and interpretations;
- Analytic reading of secondary works, including the ability to identify and accurately summarize the main and subordinate thesis, the ability to evaluate the evidence used to support the thesis, and the ability to judge the validity of an author's argument;
- The ability to identify a significant subject and to articulate a clear, strong, significant, and original thesis about it;
- The ability to locate and build on existing interpretations of the subject or similar subjects (historiography);
- The ability to deploy evidence that persuasively supports the thesis;
- The ability to pose important questions to (i.e., analyze deeply) the sources employed;
- The ability to propose interesting answers to the questions posed (i.e., creative and rigorous interpretation);
- The ability to organize the material logically, with a clear introduction and conclusion;
- The ability to cite primary and secondary sources accurately in the correct form;
- The ability to write up findings in a persuasive, grammatically and mechanically correct style.
- The ability to offer, receive, and use constructive criticism of their writing;

During our first meeting, we will discuss the paper assignments and the selection of the specialized topics on which we will each develop expertise during the semester, and organize the seminar. Thereafter, weekly discussions will be based on common reading and/or viewing, supplemented at times by readings of your choice from supplementary lists.

Every student should buy the following paperbacks:

Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb, and Joseph Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 3rd ed.
Alan Kors and Edward Peters, eds., *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: a Documentary History*

Suggested:

MLA Handbook, 7th edition (2009), available in the Bookstore and in McCabe

This course, like any other, is premised on mutual respect and honesty. Thus I expect that the work you submit is your own. Plagiarism will be severely penalized: any work containing plagiarized material will be granted the grade of no credit and may subject you to prosecution before the CJC. In order to clarify the issue of academic honesty, I will distribute copies of the History Department's guidelines. When in doubt, check with me.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. September 1. What was witchcraft? Who were witches? How is the history of these subjects written?

Reading:

Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700*, "Introduction" (pp. 1-40)

Richard Golden, ed., *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft, The Western Tradition* (ebook through Tripod), "Introduction" (pp. xxxiii-xxiv), and "Witch and witchcraft, definitions of" (pp. 1200-1203 only—through "flying or transvection")

Some topics for discussion:

How has witchcraft been defined? Who have been identified as witches? How does magic differ from witchcraft? How should we study these topics historically?

Witchcraft in Medieval and Early Modern Europe

2. September 8. Medieval Christian Definitions

Reading:

Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700*, Parts I-II (pp. 41-86)

Richard Kieckhefer, "The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic," *American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 813-36 (Blackboard)

Booth, Colomb, and Williams, *Craft of Research*, skim chaps. 1-2; read Prologue and chaps. 3-4 (pp. 31-67) carefully

Some topics for discussion:

How did medieval Christians understand and judge magic? Sorcery? Who performed acts of magic and sorcery? What differences do you see in the views of the various authors read? Do you see any changes over time (the selections are arranged chronologically)?

Be able to summarize Kieckhefer's thesis and describe the principal kinds of evidence that he deploys. Evaluate his argument. Are you persuaded? Why or why not? How does his article help us understand the primary sources in Kors and Peters's collection?

Provide a brief verbal outline of a topic that you're thinking of working on and some questions that the topic suggests.

3. September 15. The Demonization of Witches and Witchcraft: Toads, Sabbats, Heresy, etc.

Reading:

Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700*, docs. 17 (pp. 105-111), 18 (pp. 114-116), 22-23 (pp. 120-132), 27-29 (pp. 155-166), 31 (pp. 169-172), 34 (only p. 189 bottom through p. 204 middle); Figures 1 (p. 139), 5 (p. 142), 7 (p. 144), 9-13 (pp. 146-148), 35 (p. 385)

Some topics for discussion:

What intellectual developments resulted in the devil being imagined as intrinsic to witchcraft? What was diabolic knowledge and how did it differ from other forms of knowledge? How did the idea of the witches' sabbat arise, and what role did it play in the imaginaries of both the learned and the less learned? In what ways was magic redefined? How and why did witches come to be considered heretics?

Prospectus DUE at beginning of class (see requirement #3 above)

4. September 22. Witch Crazes: Ingredients and Instigators

Reading:

Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700*, docs. 36-39 (pp. 230-247), 40-42 (pp. 259-273), doc. 43, parts I, IV, VI, VII, XXIV only (pp. 273-275, 277-280), 45 (pp. 290-302), 49-51 (pp. 322-345), 58-59 (pp. 367-379); Figures 19 (pp. 253), 21 (p. 254)

Some topics for discussion:

What did popular preaching contribute to the onset of the witch crazes that swept across substantial parts of Europe and New England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? What were the contributions of the formal writings of religious leaders both Catholic and Protestant (popes, Luther, Calvin, etc.)? What ideas were shared across confessional divides and what was different? What were the contributions of non-ecclesiastical scholars like Bodin and Glanvill? And what did a playwright like Jonson contribute? Our goal is to understand the powerful mix of ideas and emotions that underlay the broad and sustained attack on witchcraft and those deemed witches.

Critique of prospectus DUE at beginning of class (see requirement #4 above)

5. September 29. Who Were Identified as Witches, and Why?

Reading:

Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700*, docs. 24 (pp. 133-137), 30-31 (pp. 166-172), 34 (only pp. 180-189), 43 part V only (pp. 275-277); Figures 6 (p. 143), 8 (p. 145), 14-16 (pp. 249-251), 30 (p. 381), 34 (p. 384), 40 (p. 390)

One essay or chapter from supplementary reading list (to be distributed)

Booth, Colomb, and Williams, *Craft of Research*, chaps. 5-6 (pp. 68-101)

Some topics for discussion:

It is well known that women were disproportionately targeted in accusations of witchcraft. But it is a matter of great debate just why this happened. We will examine this question in two broad ways. First, we will look at contemporary documents and see why they single out women. In particular, we want to consider continuities and changes over time in the reasons that were given for deeming women to be witches. Second, we will discuss some of the vast scholarship on the topic, to see how historians and others have interpreted the gendered nature of European witchcraft.

Finally, we will discuss issues involved in locating and deploying sources.

Bibliography and revised prospectus DUE at beginning of class (see requirement #5 above)

6. October 6. Prosecutions and Confessions

Reading:

Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700*, docs. 34 (only p. 204 middle - p. 229), 46-48 (pp. 302-322), 52-57 (pp. 345-367); Figures 25-26 (pp. 256-257)

Some topics for discussion:

Learned disquisitions on witchcraft, popular ideas about witches, inquisitorial manuals—all these provided justification, incitement, and organization for witch trials. But did they actually have much influence on what went on in courtrooms? Were trials conducted according to the theories, prejudices, and procedures that, we have found, were widely dispersed throughout early modern European society? Today's discussion seeks to answer these and related questions.

Critique of bibliography and revised prospectus DUE at beginning of class (see requirement #6 above)

AUTUMN VACATION

7. October 20.

Reading: The Great Witchcraft Debate

Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700*, doc. 44 (pp. 280-289), and Part X (pp. 392-448); Figures 37-39 (pp. 387-389)

Some topics for discussion:

As early as the sixteenth century, scholars like Johann Weyer raised questions about the reality of witchcraft, the identification of witches, and other important aspects of contemporary beliefs and practices. The discussion gathered steam in the seventeenth century, and by the later eighteenth century, if not before, learned opinion had turned decisively against earlier theories and explanations. Today's readings include selections from the most important participants in this important debate. We will discuss the new understandings and interpretations that skeptics put forth and the attempts by believers in witchcraft to answer these new objections. We will also consider the extent to which skeptics relied on old ideas, as well as the emergence of new ideas among defenders of the reality of witchcraft. Finally, we will want to evaluate the degree to which proponents and opponents of new ideas were occupying the same intellectual terrain, and the degree to which they were arguing past each other.

Witchcraft Lives! (Sort of)

8. October 27. Witchcraft in Contemporary Popular Culture

Viewing:

The class will choose a film from a list distributed separately; students should see it before class so that it can be discussed knowledgeably.

Reading:

Elspeth Whitney, "International trends: The witch 'she'/the historian 'he'," *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 7, no. 3 (1995), pp. 77-101 (Blackboard)

Some topics for discussion:

Though witch hunts of the early modern variety have largely ended in the contemporary first world, the subject of witches/witchcraft remains very much alive. Some of the best known representations are to be found in movies, so today we will discuss the images and ideas found in a prominent film. We'll want to consider such topics as the extent to which old attitudes, stereotypes, and beliefs about witches and witchcraft are replicated in contemporary popular culture; the kinds and extent of changes in these; the meaning of witchcraft to contemporary people. You will certainly have many more topics.

We are also going to discuss what historiography is and how to write it. Elspeth Whitney's article, though much longer and more detailed than the essay that you are to submit, provides some valuable guidance here; you should read it not (simply) for its content but mainly for the model of historiographical analysis that it provides.

Historiographical essay DUE at beginning of class (see requirement #7 above)

Global Witchcraft

9. November 3. Witchcraft in Amazonia

Reading:

Neil L. Whitehead and Robin Wright, eds., *In darkness and secrecy: the anthropology of assault sorcery and witchcraft in Amazonia* (online through Tripod): your choice of an essay from among those listed on a separate assignment sheet

Booth, Colomb, and Williams, *Craft of Research*, chaps. 7-11 (pp. 105-170)

Some topics for discussion:

This week we will begin our discussion of witchcraft outside Europe. As you read your selection, develop questions that probe the differences and similarities between European witchcraft and witchcraft in other parts of the world. You might want to think about how witchcraft was defined, what kind of people were identified as witches, what the objectives of witches and witchcraft were imagined to be, how witches were dealt with, and other issues that you consider important. Our overall goal is to consider whether witchcraft in Amazonia and Europe were varieties of the same phenomenon, or whether they were fundamentally different.

Based on the readings in *The Craft of Research*, we will also discuss how to develop and sustain an argument in a research paper. Among the topics to be considered is what is a credible claim in a scholarly paper, how is such a claim supported, how to organize your argument, and how to write defensively.

Critique of historiographical essay DUE at beginning of class (see requirement #8 above)

10. November 10. Witchcraft in Africa I

Reading:

One article or chapter from the additional assignment list

Booth, Colomb, and Williams, *Craft of Research*, chaps. 12-13, 15-16 (pp. 173-202, 213-248)

Some topics for discussion:

This week we continue to discuss witchcraft outside Europe, focusing on the largest group of societies in which witchcraft remains a living experience for much of the population. While reading your selection, develop questions that probe the differences and similarities between European and African witchcraft. Here, again, you might think about how witchcraft was defined, what kind of people were identified as witches, what the objectives of witches and witchcraft were imagined to be, how witches were dealt with, and other issues that you consider important. Our overall goal is to consider whether witchcraft in Africa and Europe were varieties of the same phenomenon, or whether they were fundamentally different.

Based on the chapters in *The Craft of Research*, we will discuss organizing and drafting your paper. Carefully consider the issues raised by Booth et al.

11. November 17. Witchcraft in Africa II

Reading:

A **second** article or chapter from the additional assignment list

Some topics for discussion:

This week we conclude our comparative discussions of witchcraft outside Europe with that found in Europe. The questions we have been considering during our last two classes continue to be relevant, for (to repeat) we are trying to ascertain whether witchcraft (and accusations of witchcraft) has involved basically the same body of beliefs and practices across space and time, or whether “witchcraft” encompasses such a variety of attitudes and actions that employing any single term to describe it does violence to its actual historical manifestations and meanings.

First Draft DUE at beginning of class (see requirement #9, above)

12. November 24. **NO CLASS: Thanksgiving week**

Student appointments in my office, scheduled between 11.30 am and 4.00 pm

Critique of first draft (see requirement #10, above) to be mailed to your partner by 1.15 pm today.

13. December 1. Reports

Reading:

Booth, Colomb, and Williams, *Craft of Research*, chaps. 14 and 17 (pp. 203-212, 249-269)

Some topics for discussion:

This week you will each be reporting on your project by summarizing your paper (issues/questions, sources, findings, arguments/interpretations). Your presentation should concentrate on the main points of each of these, telling why the issues you focused on were significant, how you found your primary sources, which secondary works provided the best guidance or the most stimulating interpretations to test, and what your major findings are.

You should also be prepared to ask questions of and propose suggestions to your classmates, based on their presentations.

The two chapters in *The Craft of Research* offer some very helpful tips for the process of revision that you will be undertaking during the next two weeks.

See requirement #11, above

Saturday, December 5: Critique of your partner's oral report, due via email by 5 pm,

See requirement #12, above

December 13, 5 p. m.

Final Drafts DUE (see requirement #13, above)