

Witches in Mediaeval England

Witches in Mediaeval England:

Myth, Reality, and Persecution

By

Albin Wallace

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With grateful thanks to my family in England and Australia
for your love and patience.

“A religion so strong and hearty as that of Pagan Greece begins with the Sibyl to end in the Witch. The former, a lovely maiden in the broad daylight, rocked its cradle, endowed it with a charm and glory of its own. Presently it fell sick, lost itself in the darkness of the Middle Ages, and was hidden away by the Witch in woods and wilds: there, sustained by her compassionate daring, it was made to live anew. Thus, of every religion woman is the mother, the gentle guardian, the faithful nurse. With her the gods fare like men: they are born and die upon her bosom.”

—From *The Witch of the Middle Ages*, by J. Michelet (trans. by L.J. Trotter). London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1863.

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INTRODUCTION

*“They enquired of witches and of wise sorcerers,
and eke of their false gods, concerning God's handmaid.”*

Contrary to the popular modern view, there was little systematic persecution of witches in England during the Middle Ages, and the practice of witchcraft was not officially banned until the Early Modern era. It was not made a capital offence in England until 1563, although it had been classified previously as heresy and was condemned as such by Pope Innocent VIII in 1484. It was between that date until around 1750 that some 200,000 (mostly female) witches were tortured, burnt or hanged in Western Europe.

There are few documented records of official witch-hunts from the mediaeval period. The archetypal (or at least stereotypical) figure of the evil witch was only formally recognised by the state in England and elsewhere in the latter decades of the fifteenth century, fuelled by a spate of treatises on demonology. These publications would contribute significantly to the growth of the officially sanctioned witch-hunt.

As religion and the state were inextricably linked, the Church's and the government's fear of diabolical activity gradually increased, along with the obsession to prosecute and punish all those who were suspected of involvement in it. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this led to a significant number of legal prosecutions, the result of which many thousands of women were persecuted, arrested, tortured, and executed. This book will focus on the time leading up to the already well-documented Early Modern era during which witch-hunting reached its peak.

The figure of the witch had long been deeply embedded in the cultural and social fabric of England, during and before the Middle Ages. The concept of witchcraft during this period was shaped by a complex interplay of religion, folklore, and societal anxieties. Witches had been sometimes seen as malevolent figures, consorting with the devil and practicing harmful

magic and the persecution of witches, which reached its zenith during the Early Modern period, had its roots in the mediaeval era, where fear and suspicion of the supernatural were pervasive. Mediaeval England, a period marked by profound social and religious transformations, provided a particularly fertile ground for the evolution of witch beliefs and their impact on society.

As well as appearing in folklore, there were many other religious, social and cultural contexts for the origins of witchcraft beliefs. The belief in witches in mediaeval England can be traced back to a blend of ancient pagan practices, early Christian theology, and local folklore. Before the European dominance of Christianity, the Anglo-Saxon tribes held beliefs in various forms of magic and supernatural beings. These beliefs were not necessarily malevolent; in fact, some forms of magic were considered beneficial. However, with the accelerating spread of Christianity, pagan practices were increasingly demonized. In the early mediaeval period, the concept of witchcraft was largely intertwined with paganism. Pre-Christian beliefs, which often centered around nature spirits and female deities, persisted in popular culture beyond these earlier times. These figures, while often seen as benevolent, could also be perceived as dangerous if angered or misunderstood. As Christianity gradually supplanted paganism, these older deities were increasingly demonized and recast as witches.

The Church played a significant role in shaping the perception of witchcraft. Early Christian texts sometimes equated pagan rituals with devil worship, and those who practiced such rituals were seen increasingly as heretics. The *Canon Episcopi*, a text from the early mediaeval period, argued that belief in witchcraft was a delusion fostered by the devil. However, by the thirteenth century, the Church's position had begun to shift. Witches were no longer being seen as merely deluded or insane but were identified as active agents of Satan, capable of causing real harm. Early Christian theology emphasized dualism, a worldview that divided the world into good and evil. This framework also provided a convenient receptacle for the transition of pagan beliefs into a Christian interpretation. The Church's doctrine of original sin, combined with the belief in demonic possession, created a climate of fear and suspicion. In the patriarchal society, women

were seen as more susceptible to demonic influence, possibly due to their perceived association with nature and their traditional role as caregivers.

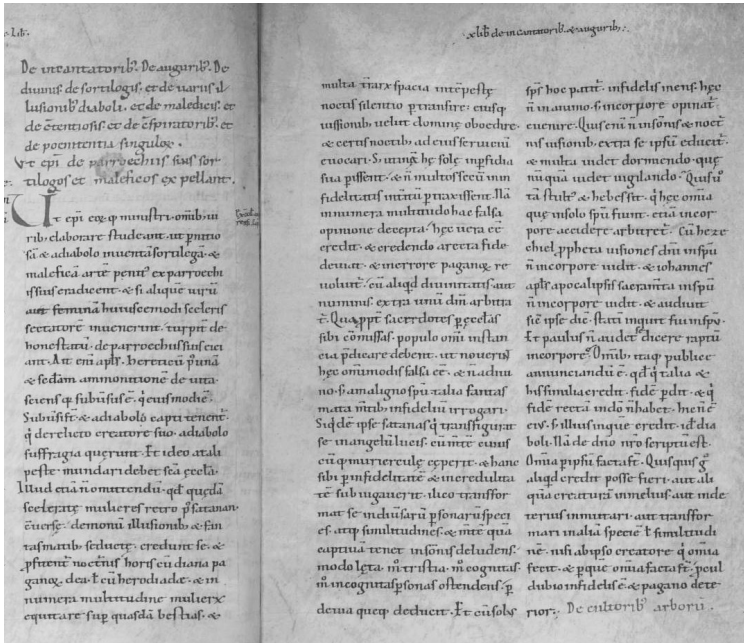


Fig. I.1. *Canon Episcopi* by Burchard of Worms. Public Domain.

The supposed characteristics and powers of witches were widely known and feared during the Early Modern era. From mediaeval times, in England witches were usually depicted as women, although men could also be accused of witchcraft. The association of women with witchcraft was partly due to prevailing gender norms. Women, especially older, unmarried, or widowed women, were more likely to be accused because they lived on the margins of society. They were sometimes poor and dependent on charity, with their social vulnerability making them easy targets for accusations.

Witches were believed to possess a variety of supernatural powers, which could cause illness, death, or misfortune to their neighbours by the use of spells, potions, or by invoking demonic forces. In Europe especially, witches were also thought to have the ability to transform into animals, fly,

and participate in nocturnal gatherings known as sabbats, where they would consort with the devil.

Later, witchcraft trials and persecutions became mainly associated with early seventeenth century society. However, although the full-scale witch-hunts of the Early Modern period had not yet begun, there are some isolated recorded instances of witchcraft trials taking place in mediaeval England. The legal framework for dealing with witchcraft was initially based on church law, which sought to punish heresy. However, secular courts also became involved, especially from the fourteenth century onward.

One of the earliest recorded witch trials in England took place in 1324, involving a woman named Alice Kyteler. In contrast to the later perceptions of witches being impoverished, Kyteler was a wealthy woman from Kilkenny, Ireland, who was accused of practicing witchcraft to kill her husbands in order to amass their wealth. She was also accused of sacrificing animals to demons and using potions to harm others. Kyteler managed to escape punishment by fleeing the country, but her servant, Petronilla de Meath, was not so fortunate; she was tortured and burned at the stake.

The case of Alice Kyteler highlights the connection between witchcraft accusations and social tensions. Accusations were often levelled at individuals who were seen as socially disruptive or who challenged established norms. In many cases, accusations were motivated by personal vendettas, property disputes, or local power struggles. The fear of witches was also exacerbated by events such as the Black Death (Wallace, 2023), which led to widespread social and economic upheaval. In times of crisis, witches became convenient scapegoats for explaining misfortune.

Folklore and popular belief played a crucial role in shaping the evolving image of the witch in mediaeval England. Tales of witches, often passed down orally, depicted them as dangerous figures capable of invoking evil spirits. These stories were deeply ingrained in the rural communities of England, where belief in the supernatural was strong. Folklore also influenced the way witchcraft was perceived by the authorities. For example, many of the 'confessions' obtained during witch trials were

shaped by folkloric motifs, such as the idea of witches making pacts with the devil or engaging in shapeshifting.



Fig. 1.2 Title page from a 1669 edition of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, a handbook on witchcraft originally published in 1487. Public Domain.

The *Malleus Maleficarum*, a treatise on witchcraft written by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger in 1487, was heavily influenced by both folklore and theological doctrine. Although the text was written at the very end of the mediaeval period, it codified many of the beliefs and prejudices that had developed over the previous centuries. The *Malleus Maleficarum* described witches as being primarily women, driven by their perceived inherent moral weakness to consort with the devil. This text would later serve as a handbook for witch-hunters during the witch trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The decline of witchcraft beliefs did not properly begin until the early years of the Enlightenment, and by the end of the mediaeval period, the groundwork had been laid for the witch-hunts of the Early Modern era. However, paradoxically, at the end of the Middle Ages there were also social forces at work that would eventually lead to the decline of witchcraft beliefs. The rise of the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution brought about new ways of thinking that challenged traditional beliefs in the supernatural. The development of legal standards that required concrete evidence also made it more difficult to prosecute individuals for witchcraft.

Despite these changes, the legacy of mediaeval witchcraft beliefs persisted for centuries. The fear of witches had strongly influenced European societies, leading to the infamous witch-hunts of the Early Modern Period, during which thousands of people, mostly women, were executed. It was not until the eighteenth century that witchcraft beliefs were largely discredited, and witch-hunts came to an end.

The belief in witches in mediaeval England was a product of a society deeply rooted in religious and superstitious thought. Witches were often seen as dangerous individuals who could invoke supernatural forces to harm others, and this fear was reflected in the legal and social practices of the time. While the full-scale witch-hunts had not yet begun, the foundations for these persecutions were laid during the mediaeval period. The figure of the witch, shaped by a combination of Christian theology, folklore, and societal anxieties, would remain a powerful symbol of fear and persecution for centuries to come.

The figure of the witch is a pervasive and enduring archetype in Western culture. Rooted in a complex interplay of religious, social, and cultural factors, the witch has been alternately feared, revered, and condemned throughout history.

However, it is essential to resist the temptation to view all accusations of witchcraft as mere products of religious hysteria. While undoubtedly influenced by theological doctrines, the institutionalised witch-hunt also reflected broader social anxieties and tensions. Economic hardship, social unrest, and demographic changes created a sense of vulnerability and

uncertainty. Accusing someone of witchcraft provided a convenient scapegoat for these anxieties. Moreover, the witch-hunt often served as a mechanism for social control. As well as the poor and marginalised, women who challenged traditional gender roles or who possessed independent wealth or power could also be vulnerable to accusations. O'Leary's 2013 paper on '*Where there are many women there are many witches!*': *The Social and Intellectual Understanding of Femininity in the Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) analyses the social and intellectual understanding of femininity contained in Question Six of the first part of *Malleus Maleficarum* and serves as a useful catalyst for discussions around witchcraft, femininity and feminism.

The figure of the witch was clearly shaped by several factors. Ballads, tales, and other forms of oral tradition preserved a rich and varied array of beliefs about witches. Some of these stories portrayed witches as benevolent figures, capable of healing and providing wisdom. Others, however, depicted them as malevolent creatures who caused harm to humans and livestock. These narratives contributed to a complex and often contradictory image of the witch in the popular imagination.

The witch-hunt reached its peak in England during the Early Modern Period. The infamous trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had resulted in the execution of thousands of people, overwhelmingly women. The decline of the witch-hunt in the eighteenth century marked a significant shift in attitudes towards witchcraft. The Enlightenment emphasis on reason and empirical evidence undermined the belief in supernatural forces. Moreover, the rise of secular authority challenged the Church's monopoly on knowledge and power. While the figure of the witch has persisted in popular culture, its meaning and significance have evolved over time.

This book examines the mediaeval witch as a complex and multifaceted figure whose image has been shaped by a variety of factors, including religion, society, and culture. The history of England in the Middle Ages provides a particularly rich context for exploring the evolution of witch beliefs and their impact on society. By examining the historical and cultural forces that shaped the perception of witches, it is hoped that this book will

provide a deeper understanding of this enduring archetype and its significance in Western culture.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ORIGINS OF WITCHCRAFT BELIEFS IN MEDIAEVAL ENGLAND

*“And if by his witchcraft he can quench the fire,
torment them all, behold, how thou wilt.”*

Around 1159 John of Salisbury, the ecclesiastical statesman, wrote that:

“...there are people who claim that a certain Herodias or Mistress of the Night holds nocturnal gatherings and feasts, where she lords it over her various servants, and that witches there are offered babies, - some to be torn to bits and eaten, others to be laid back in their cradles. Who is so blind as not to see that this is all a mischievous illusion caused by demons? This is shown, if by nothing else, by the fact that it is always the simpler men and women, and those less firm in the faith, that believe these things.” (Murray, 1976, 63).

As Murray observes, there is a certain learned scepticism about witches' sabbaths in John's statements. Although penances were imposed for believing in such things, these beliefs were thought to be only held by uneducated people. However, by the close of the Middle Ages, belief in dark, magical practices was more widespread, and severe punishments were in place for those taking part in such gatherings.

Russell (1972) argues that the early Church itself had traces of magical elements. Christianity synthesized Judaeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, and Celto-Teutonic cultures together and reshaped them into a new religious value system. Despite the Church pointedly rejecting magic, there was still a popular belief in the practice of exorcism, a credulity around miracles and a public susceptibility to charismatic religious leaders.

Although the Church had its own practice of “magic”, its leaders were wary of pagan magical practices. These were condemned by the Church and

officially suppressed as early as the fourth century. It may be argued that only the deliberate endeavours of Church leaders prevented Christianity itself from becoming a magical cult. Russell also argues that Christianity escaped this fate by assimilating the prevalent belief in traditional, pagan magic whilst at the same time suppressing it. To eliminate it completely was impossible. Mediaeval Christian people persisted in following ancient superstitions in surreptitious ways, and eventually pagan and magical elements were absorbed into the cults of saints. The Church's strategy was to destroy paganism by drawing parallels with witchcraft and by teaching that attachment to the old gods was actually demonic worship. It was axiomatic that demons were inherently evil by nature. The Church leaders accused the pagan followers of demonolatry, and mediaeval writers followed suit by documenting (without any evidence) how many people at that time were actually worshipping Satan.

Christianity initially subsumed pagan practices from southern Mediterranean Europe. As the new, monotheistic religion spread north between 400 A.D. and 900 A.D., it also absorbed Celtic and Teutonic influences. As these northern rites were more recently integrated, mediaeval witch practices and beliefs were seen as belonging to northern European rather than southern cultures. However, the beliefs and practices were, like mediaeval society itself, an amalgamation of traditions.

Mitchell (2011) notes that as Scandinavia was increasingly becoming influenced by Christianity from circa 1000 A.D., cultural understandings of magic and witchcraft were increasingly influenced by surrounding areas of Europe. By the High Middle Ages, ideas about the supernatural resounded between the local Scandinavian population and adjacent cultures, especially in Hanseatic-influenced cities with large foreign settlements such as Copenhagen, and Stockholm. "Nordic witchcraft," was not a definitively understood concept at the time, although there were patterns of similar beliefs held by the Scandinavian-speaking peoples of the Middle Ages. The Greco-Roman and Teuto-Celtic pagan gods that survived in a largely Christianized Europe were from the underworld rather than from heaven. They were more private and personal than the universal or heavenly gods that were socially established and publicly worshipped. Pagan practices therefore more easily evaded official detection in early Mediaeval society,

which largely revolved around agricultural and hunting practices. The Christians also saw a connection between fertility gods and an underworld populated by ghosts and demons.

Many southern pagan fertility rites bore a resemblance to the later 'witch cults'. The rite of Dionysius incorporated frenzied dancing and song, ritual chaos, public sex acts and the consumption of raw meat. Although not directly linked, the later witches' sabbaths were supposed to demonstrate similar uninhibited debauchery. Elements of these practices continued openly into the Middle Ages in the form of the Feast of Fools which closely resembled the Roman Saturnalia.



Fig. 1.1 A 14th century representation of the Feast of Fools. Public domain.

Medusa is a figure in Greek mythology that is sometimes interpreted as being a witch or a symbol of protection. In *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes how Medusa was transformed into a Gorgon after being raped by Neptune in Athena's temple. Athena punished Medusa for the violation of her temple by turning her into a monster. Medusa is often interpreted as an apotropaic symbol, similar to the modern evil eye.

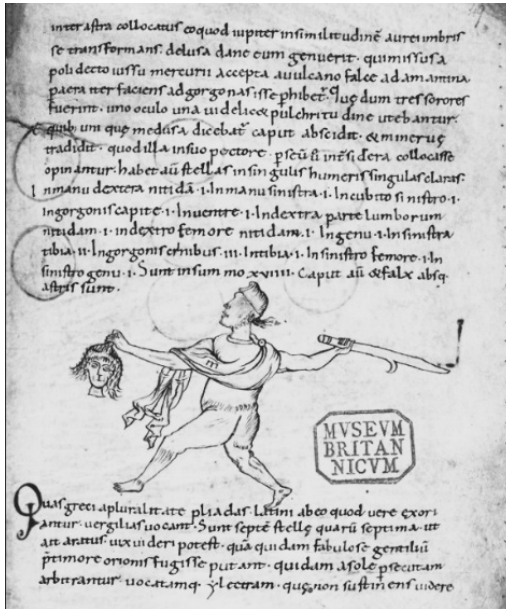


Fig. 1.2 Perseus holding the head of Medusa, in a copy of Scholia in Germanicum Sangermanensia (London, British Library, MS Harley 3595, f. 49r).
Public Domain.

However, the most significant explicit southern European influence on mediaeval witchcraft was the Roman cult of Diana, identified by the Greeks as Artemis. She is depicted as a virgin hunter, a moon goddess who metamorphoses young lovers into animals and then kills them. There is a biblical connection in St. Paul's meeting with Diana of the Ephesians, the fertility goddess of Asia Minor. This maiden hunter was also a protector of animals. However, in this incarnation, the moon goddess was no virgin but a patroness of procreation and childbirth. The pull of the moon and the lunar

connection with human menstruation also made Diana the guardian of fertility.



Fig. 1.3 Roman fresco depicting Diana hunting, 4th century AD, from the Via Livenza hypogeum in Rome. Public Domain.

Although a goddess of the heavens, she was also associated with the underworld, where she appears in the form of Hecate, goddess of hell, fertility, and death, and mistress of evil magic. Hecate was worshipped at the crossroads, and her three faces personify dominion over Earth, heaven, and hell. This dark manifestation of fertility emerges as a supposed leader of witches in the early Middle Ages through to the Early Modern Era.

The northern European cults of vegetation and carnality have even more pronounced similarities with mediaeval witchcraft. The Norse Valkyries were female shape-changers, who rode abroad at night and met with trolls, where uninhibited revels took place. Odin, the widely revered god of Germanic paganism could likewise transform himself along with the fertility goddess Freya, who hunted with him. The Teutonic tradition most closely associated with witchcraft was the *Wilde Jagd*, in which a procession of supernatural beings ravaged the countryside taking delight in killing, destroying, and eating all in their path. The leader of the hunt could take the form of vegetation, or sometimes a hunting goddess or god.



Fig. 1.4 Triple-formed representation of Hecate. Marble, Roman copy after an original of the Hellenistic period. Public Domain

Ancient pagan festivals survived in the public imagination due to their regularity and place within the calendar. They were mainly seasonal festivals, responding to the dying of the winter light, spring renewal, growth and harvesting of crops, and hunting of animals. The later fixing of the witch rites to Christian feast days, such as those in November, February, May, and August, was not a mockery or deliberate travesty of Christianity, but rather due to the fact that Christian feasts fell (or were made to fall) upon the same

days as the old pagan festivals. The feast of All Souls, St. Walpurga and the Circumcision should no more attract the scorn of pagan devotees than Easter or Christmas. From November to February, the pagan rituals focused on the restoration of the light from the Sun. Long before 31st October had become Hallowe'en, the Eve of All Saints' Day, it was celebrated as Winter Eve, when the *nod-fyr* ('needfire') was kindled to encourage the rebirth of the light after the winter darkness. Guy Fawkes' Night is a secular displacement of this old fire festival. Between Christmas and Epiphany, the mediaeval Feast of Fools was often held, where a ritual return to chaos was performed in the form of uninhibited sexuality and hedonism. This represented the winter solstice rite signifying the beginning of a new year and a new life. The Roman Saturnalia of 17th-24th December was also a rite of solar renewal. The birth of Mithra happened on 25th December, and that of Osiris on 6th January, later to become the Christian Epiphany. On the first day of the new year, northern Europeans in the early Middle Ages practiced palaeolithic rites designed to protect and increase the supply of animals to be hunted. The rites included the wearing of animal skins, horns, or masks. The ancient fire festival of 1st February became the Christian Candlemas. 30th April, the eve of St. Walpurga, was also the eve of May Day, which the Romans had celebrated as the Floralia fertility festival with rituals including the maypole and the Green Man. 23rd June, the eve of St. John the Baptist, was Midsummer Eve, the fertility celebrations. Russell (1972) quotes Runegberg in concluding that the witches' sabbath may be explained as an esoteric form of those pagan fertility rites which survived in Western Europe centuries after the official introduction of Christianity. Morris also points out that:

“The lascivious witch is a manifestation of the demonization of women in mediaeval Christian culture and offers a sharp contrast to the idealized secular and religious figures of courtly women and the Virgin Mary, which were otherwise so characteristic of mediaeval European attitudes. The concept of female witches was not purely a product of the Middle Ages but can be found in Graeco-Roman literature and religion, in Judeo-Christian culture, in Nordic mythology and in indigenous folklore.” (Morris, 2011, 1).

Morris goes on to discuss that in pre-Christian Europe, the witch was actually a figure whose nature could be either benevolent or malevolent. It

was after the introduction of Christianity that the witch became gradually demonized. The most exaggerated of her evil characteristics was her sexuality, which became anathema to the Church. She could ride on, change into, or copulate with beasts. Many texts describe how she would allegedly engage in orgies at the sabbath and have intercourse with the Devil, often in the form of an animal. By the fourteenth century, the witch was seen as a carnal heretic engaging in obscene rituals at the sabbath. This distorted manifestation of feminine sexuality had links to the earlier, pagan traditions.

However tantalising the above correlation between pagan and Christian dates are, it is not possible to directly link the two together. Later witch practices which occurred on seasonal festival days may be coincidental, although it is true that several pagan festivals, including the Feast of Fools, the hunting masques of January, and others did continue through the Middle Ages and contained elements that included dancing, eroticism, feasting, animal disguises, and the leadership of a ritual king. The fertility festivals were only one part of the traditions of witchcraft, albeit a very significant one.

Some consistent ideas emerge in the folk traditions of the witch concept including familiars, shapeshifting, and flight. The small demons that would become the witches' familiars in the later Middle Ages were originally the northern European dwarves, fairies, elves, and the Green Men. The dwarves were spirits of darkness and the underworld and were often seen as malevolent spirits. The elves were originally spirits of light. Robin Hood may have originally been a Green Man, with his hood not an article of clothing but a stag's head.

Such spirits were equated with demons by the mediaeval Church, and although they were sometimes seen as mischievous, their powers were also feared. They were given distinctive names that remained when they became witches' familiars, including Heineken, Rumpelstiltskin, and Robin Goodfellow. These demons could assume the shape of wild animals or small men, in addition to rendering themselves invisible. As well as becoming witches' familiars, towards the end of the Middle Ages, they also could become witches themselves. This shape-changing was credible in the mediaeval world view in which transubstantiation, as well as consubstantiation



Fig. 1.5 Illustration from the title page of *Robin Goodfellow: His Mad Pranks and Merry Jestes* (1629). Public Domain.

were realities within the Christian Church. These demons or spirits were thought to ride out at night to perform blasphemous, lustful or vexatious acts. They sometimes appeared as werewolves or vampires, often riding broomsticks (although not until much later in England). Hanen (1900) suggested that witches flew to the sabbaths to avoid pursuit, whereas Robbins (1959) argues that the reported flying of witches was a method of manipulating evidence. If it was proven that a witch was innocently in one place, then arguments could be fabricated to show that she could almost simultaneously be some distance away causing mischief.

Knapp (2023) describes how in England, pagan practices and witchcraft were common throughout the Christian Anglo-Saxon period from Augustine's mission in 597 to Alfred's rise to power in 871 and beyond. The numerous invasions by the Danish pagans led to an increased fear of paganism amongst the Christian Anglo-Saxons. Davies (1989) argues that:

“The Anglo-Saxons took witchcraft seriously. They legislated against it in secular and ecclesiastical law codes, they preached against it in homilies and saints’ lives, they condemned it in penitentials and in pastoral letters” (Davies, 1989, 41).



Fig. 1.6 Martin Le Francs. *Le Champion des Dames*. Public Domain.

Towards the end of the tenth century, Abbot Ælfric of Eynsham was expressing his concern about witches in rural England (Skeat, 1881), describing how they stood at pagan sites to summon the devil (see Appendix One). The ancient England landscape, especially areas with burial mounds of the pre-Christian inhabitants of the island, was regarded with unease by early mediaeval writers.

To Ælfric, witchcraft was a very real danger (Weikart, 2021). Both Christian and Jewish authors in the early Middle Ages quoted from several sources including the Biblical story of the witch of Endor. The tale is found in the Torah, and in the Old Testament, and relates how King Saul, exhausted from

his attempts to defeat the Philistines, sought an oracle to summon up the spirit of the prophet Samuel for advice. With all diviners having been banished from the kingdom, the king ordered that the one remaining witch in the city of Endor be brought before him.

After protesting against the king's request, the witch summoned Samuel from the afterlife, who then accurately predicted Saul's decline. As witchcraft, magic and divination were regarded with suspicion in the Middle Ages, justifications for Saul's behaviour were sought. Around the middle of the eleventh century Samuel ben Hofni wrote that the woman must have deceived the king, and that neither divination nor witchcraft were used. However, most mediaeval Christian and Jewish writers still believed that a devil had appeared in the shape of the prophet Samuel.

Demons or devils were central figures in the emergent mediaeval beliefs about magic and witchcraft. They were thought to be the embodiment of evil spirits that could wield supernatural powers, but only within the confines of the natural world (Lipscomb, 2020). These beliefs may also be traced back to Mesopotamian beliefs in demons, early Islamic jinns and ancient Greek spirits.

Early Christian philosophers and writers may also have been influenced by these ideas. Augustine believed that demons were real and could possess humans. For these Christians, the Devil (also referred to as Satan, Lucifer, Baal, or Beelzebub) was the prince of these demons, which were under his command. The Devil was central to Renaissance demonology, rooting the study of demons in Christian belief and perpetuating charges of heresy against those accused of practicing evil magic, including witches. However, these beliefs are traceable to the Middle Ages. In the preface to his *De la Démonomanie des Sorciers*, the French philosopher Jean Bodin refers to a mediaeval text explaining that "... the demon is judged to be an undaunted and implacable adversary of God and man."

Drawing on the mediaeval and earlier Christian hierarchies of angels, these texts sometimes listed the names of demons in order of their importance, along with instructions on how to summon them. An example of such a classification system occurs in the Ars Goetia section of *The Lesser Key of*

Solomon which identifies seventy-two demons. This list may be based on the *Pseudomonarchia Daemonum* or “False Monarchy of Demons” (see Appendix Eight).

Texts and ideas such as these became more dominant in the Early Modern Era. As Maraschi states:

“Despite common misconceptions among the general public (and sometimes even among a more learned audience), the figure of the witch as a woman who seals a pact with the Devil is not a ‘mediaeval’ invention.” (Maraschi, 2020, 9).

Although the linking of witches to demonic pacts became more widespread during the Renaissance, the mediaeval figure of the witch is best traced from Greek and Latin texts from pagan eras. Amongst the Romans it was popularly believed that men were by nature inclined to stealing, whereas women were inclined to witchcraft and poisoning (Levack, 2001). Quintilian asserts that “...latrocinium facilius in viro, veneficium in femina credas” (...you may believe that robbery is easier in a man, than that of poisoning in a woman). Greek pagan texts, however, provide concrete archetypes of witches, each reflecting a different dimension of their sorcery. Circe and Calypso were believed to use sex to control men, whilst Medea is a tragic heroine driven to despair by sorcery. Throughout the Classical world, archetypal female figures appear in a form of a hierarchy. At the top as demi-goddesses, in the middle as lovers described by the lyric and erotic poets, and at the bottom, in the form of country women casting evil spells, or antique crones of hideous appearance. The latter most closely aligns with European mediaeval concepts of the witch. In the Classical world these female figures are represented as being associated with feminine, nocturnal entities such as the moon, Selene, Diana, or the crossroads figure of Hecate. In the Middle Ages, it can be seen in the penitential canons that witches could fly, and in Norse and Germanic folklore especially, they are depicted as malevolent female spirits haunting magical mountains or caves.

Goodare (2013) argues that there were four inter-related archetypes of witchcraft that evolved through the Middle Ages into the Early Modern era. These were the demonic witch, the village witch, the folkloric witch and the