

THE IN A HURRY SERIES

Witches *in a Hurry*

The witch trials, and the panic behind them

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The Whole Thing in One Page

The witch trials arrive in memory as a medieval bonfire: hooded priests, ignorant villagers and millions of women burned for knowing too much. Almost every part of that picture is wrong. The great hunts were mainly early modern, concentrated between the later sixteenth and the middle seventeenth centuries. Their geography was jagged. Some districts killed hundreds while neighbouring courts convicted few or none. Historians estimate that about 100,000 people were prosecuted across Europe and its colonies, of whom roughly 40,000 to 60,000 were executed. Most were women, but the proportions changed sharply by place. No single church office, law book or ruler directed the campaign.

What linked the hunts was a sequence of translations under unequal power.

First, misfortune became personal. A child sickened, cattle died, butter would not come or a storm flattened grain. Someone remembered a refused request, a quarrel or a muttered threat. The first suspect was usually a known neighbour. Accusation gave loss a human author.

Second, learned demonology enlarged the suspected act. Harmful magic, or maleficium, was joined to a pact with the Devil, secret assemblies, demon helpers and a concealed assault on Christian society. The *Malleus Maleficarum* helped articulate this cumulative witch, though it neither invented every element nor governed Europe. A suspected curse could now imply membership of an invisible sect.

Third, gender shaped who stood nearest suspicion. Women made up about 75 to 80 per cent of those accused across Europe. Household work, dependence, age, reputation and explicit learned misogyny made some women unusually exposed. Yet men predominated in several regions and entered large chain trials elsewhere. Misogyny was central, not sufficient.

Fourth, courts decided whether suspicion became proof. In many continental jurisdictions, torture could produce the confession treated as decisive evidence. Interrogators already knew the expected story. Once a

prisoner confessed, pressure to name accomplices turned one file into many. England lacked routine judicial torture, but bodily searches, prolonged watching and paid witchfinding created other forms of coercive evidence. Salem admitted spectral testimony and rewarded confessions that widened the plot. Different methods shared one danger: the process could manufacture the agreement it cited as corroboration.

Belief alone therefore cannot explain the map. Large hunts required plausible enemies, officials prepared to act, legal permission, money, weak review and a way to connect defendants into a group. Spain's inquisitors could restrain Basque accusations while persecuting religious dissent elsewhere. Bamberg built a specialised prison and expanded. Nearby jurisdictions stopped earlier. Panic was not a spell cast over Europe. It was a chain reaction that particular authorities accelerated or interrupted.

The decline followed the same fault line. Critics questioned demons, but prosecutions contracted when judges distrusted tortured confessions, children's stories, spectral assaults and accomplice lists generated by previous prisoners. Appeals, record review and higher proof thresholds gave doubt institutional force. Witchcraft belief survived. The state's willingness to kill on that evidence did not.

The accused did not need to be witches. They needed a culture that made the charge plausible, social relations that made them available and institutions that could turn accusation into self-confirming proof.

That is the book.

Why You Should Care

In July 1628, Johannes Junius wrote to his daughter from a prison in Bamberg. He had served repeatedly as the city's mayor. Now his hands were so damaged that the letter took days to complete. He explained that he had denied witchcraft until torture made denial impossible. He invented a pact with the Devil, a witch name, a flying animal and a sabbath. Then came the question that allowed one false case to reproduce: whom had he seen there?

Junius tried to avoid naming anyone. His interrogators threatened more pain. He supplied names. Some had already accused him under the same pressure and privately asked his forgiveness. His formal confession described a satanic conspiracy. His secret letter described how the court had produced it. His execution followed in August.

That letter is the reason to care. The trials are often reduced to irrational crowds, as though panic descended like weather on foolish people. Crowds mattered, but Junius was not killed by rumour alone. He was arrested, confined, questioned, documented, convicted and sentenced by educated officials using recognisable law. Bamberg built a cellular prison for suspected witches. Persecution became formidable when a frightening belief acquired repeatable administration.

The case is also about the lives on which the charge first landed. A household lost a child, an animal or a crop. A neighbour already carried a reputation for anger, begging, healing or difficult speech. Gender, poverty, age, kinship and local ideas about magic shaped who could plausibly be blamed. Learned demonology then made that neighbour part of a war against God. Procedure did not invent the entire accusation. It took a socially available suspect and gave the charge reach.

A hidden crime presents a genuine evidential difficulty: direct proof will be scarce. One response is to admit that the case cannot be proved. Another is to lower the standard, treat denial as cunning, suffering as guilt, accusation as corroboration and the absence of ordinary evidence as proof that the

enemy is unusually secret. Once those moves are accepted, innocence becomes hard to express. Whatever the accused does enters the theory against her.

The contrast with Spain makes the point sharper. After a Basque panic, inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frías gathered statements, compared stories, tested alleged substances and asked how witnesses had influenced one another. He did not need to become a modern secularist to recognise contaminated proof. The Spanish Inquisition, an institution of religious coercion elsewhere, became a restraint in this field. The dividing line was not intelligence, denomination or modernity. It was what a culture made plausible and what an authority accepted as evidence.

The subject changes how you see gender too. Women formed the large majority of the accused across Europe. That pattern cannot be separated from women's unequal authority, household labour, old age, reputation and learned claims about female weakness. Yet some regions accused mostly men. A serious account must explain both the asymmetry and the exceptions rather than treating misogyny and legal process as rival answers.

Historical capital prosecutions receded, but witchcraft accusation did not become harmless. In 2021 the United Nations Human Rights Council addressed violence linked to accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks, followed by a human-rights study in 2023. Modern settings differ too much to collapse into one continuous European story. The recurring danger is narrower: illness, death or bad luck is assigned to a human enemy, who is punished for an invisible act that no available test can disprove.

The next hour is not an invitation to laugh at dead believers or to use witch hunt as a loose name for every public attack. It asks more exact questions. Who made misfortune personal? Why was this suspect credible? Who enlarged injury into conspiracy? How was the evidence produced? Which authority allowed the case to spread, and which one could have stopped it?

Follow those questions and the bonfire becomes the result, not the

explanation.

The Core Ideas

Misfortune Needed a Human Author

Begin before the Devil, with a damaged cow.

Many early modern Europeans did not treat natural cause, divine purpose and malicious human agency as mutually exclusive. Illness might have a bodily cause, carry a providential meaning and have been sent by an enemy at the same time. A healer could use herbs and prayer. A household might seek medical advice, make a counter-charm and ask which neighbour bore a grudge. These were overlapping responses rather than rival departments of reality.

Witchcraft accusation offered something chance could not: intention. A child did not sicken at random. Someone had wished it. Milk did not fail because weather, infection or feed had changed. Someone had spoiled it. The answer was frightening, but it made an event morally legible. Once harm had an author, the community could remember the threat that preceded it.

Many surviving accusations begin in relationships. A poorer neighbour asked for food, fuel, milk or credit and was refused. Angry words followed. Days later an animal died or a person fell ill. The sequence hardened in memory: refusal, curse, harm. Historians sometimes call this the charity-refused model. It captures a recurring pattern in England and parts of western Europe, where growing pressure on customary help could turn dependence into resentment on both sides. It is not a universal key. Accusations also arose from family conflict, sexual rivalry, elite conspiracy, child possession and inherited reputation. Its value lies in showing that the alleged witch was often known too well, not feared as a stranger.

Reputation accumulated. One unexplained incident might be dismissed. Several incidents attached to the same person became a biography. An old quarrel was reread as an early warning. A sharp tongue became a weapon.

Survival after a spouse's death became suspicious. A woman who treated illness could be blamed when treatment failed, though healers were not accused as a class. The label condensed years of uneasy exchange into a claim about hidden power.

Before criminal law entered, many disputes passed through attempted repair. The suspected person might be asked to bless the sick child, undo the harm, accept reconciliation or endure a counter-charm. Such responses kept the accusation inside a relationship: dangerous and sometimes violent, but not necessarily capital. Prosecution began when a private theory of injury acquired a public forum. A magistrate, minister or local elite could decide that an old reputation now belonged in a criminal file. The same rumour could remain gossip for twenty years and become evidence in one season.

Accusers were not all cynical and the accused were not all passive. Some people threatened magical retaliation because the threat worked. Some practised charms, divination or healing that neighbours understood as useful until the relationship broke down. Some confessed without torture, drawing on beliefs available to them, seeking attention, making sense of distress or responding to sustained questioning. The historical task is not to force every testimony into either truth or fraud. It is to see how a shared language of magic made social injury prosecutable.

This first translation was the social base of the hunt: from something bad happened to someone did it. It explains why accusations felt intimate and why they often moved along lines of dependence. It did not explain mass trials. For that, the suspected neighbour had to be rebuilt as a larger religious enemy, then carried into institutions able to punish and multiply the charge.

The Witch Was Assembled from Two Crimes

A curse and a satanic conspiracy are different accusations. The great hunts joined them.

The older offence was harmful magic, usually called maleficium by learned

writers. It covered alleged injury to bodies, animals, crops, fertility or weather through occult means. Similar suspicions long predated the large European hunts and existed far beyond Christian Europe. They could be handled by local retaliation, counter-magic, penance or a criminal charge. A person might fear a neighbour's curse without imagining that the neighbour belonged to an organised anti-church.

The second offence was diabolism: a deliberate pact with the Devil and betrayal of God. During the later Middle Ages, theologians, inquisitors and legal writers drew scattered ideas into a cumulative concept. The witch renounced Christianity, swore loyalty to Satan, travelled to secret assemblies, worshipped him, received a demon helper and joined collective plots against Christian society. Older stories of night travel, heretical meetings, ritual inversion and magical harm were welded into one enemy.

That synthesis was neither inevitable nor accepted everywhere. An influential medieval canon had treated women who believed they rode at night with a supernatural company as deluded rather than bodily transported. Later demonologists argued that demons could carry, deceive or assist witches, and that apparent impossibility proved nothing against spiritual power. Debate over flight, transformation and demonic sex mattered because the physical reality of the sabbath turned isolated maleficium into organised treason.

The *Malleus Maleficarum*, first printed in 1486 or 1487 and associated chiefly with the Dominican inquisitor Heinrich Kramer, gave this construction a fierce and portable form. It argued for the reality of witchcraft, stressed women's supposed susceptibility, answered sceptical objections and discussed prosecution. Its printing history made it influential. Popular memory has promoted it into the handbook that commanded Europe. It had no such authority. Courts did not share one code, many major hunts came later, and demonology developed through numerous Catholic and Protestant writers.

The pact also solved an evidential problem for prosecutors. A person could be guilty of apostasy even when no victim could prove a particular curse,

while every alleged act of maleficium could be treated as the outward sign of the pact. The two offences reinforced each other's weak points. Harm supplied a visible consequence. Diabolism supplied intention, secrecy and organisation. Joined together, they made an invisible crime appear complete and made an ordinary acquittal look dangerously naive.

The exchange ran in both directions. Learned interrogators supplied questions about pacts, sabbaths and demon lovers. Accused people answered with local stories about animals, food, sex, neighbours and night journeys. Published confessions then appeared to confirm what the learned books predicted. Elite theory did not float above village belief. Examination brought the two together, and each altered the other.

This enlarged the stakes. A woman accused of spoiling beer could once appear as a dangerous neighbour. Recast as a servant of Satan, she became part of an enemy network whose secrecy justified exceptional methods. The hidden pact explained why ordinary character evidence could be ignored. The sabbath explained why one accused person must know others. Diabolism transformed a finite allegation into a crime with no natural boundary.

The composite witch was therefore built from below and above. Local harm supplied the suspect. Learned diabolism supplied the hidden crime and its imagined network. The trials became catastrophic when courts treated that combined figure as a fact waiting to be uncovered.

Gender Shaped the Suspect Pool

Across Europe, women formed roughly three quarters to four fifths of those accused. In Scotland's national survey, women account for about 84 per cent of all recorded accused people. Any account that treats this as incidental has missed the structure.

The aggregate is not one demographic portrait. It combines districts where female accusation exceeded nine in ten with regions where men predominated, and it combines different kinds of case: neighbourhood maleficium, learned sorcery, family chains, possession scares and political

prosecutions. Gender operated through these routes. The question is not why women were witches, as if the category were natural. It is why particular forms of suspected power, danger and disorder attached to women more readily in particular societies.

Early modern law, theology and household economy placed men and women differently. Women had less formal authority, weaker property rights in many settings and greater dependence on marriage, kin and neighbourly exchange. Their work put them near the points where unexplained harm became personal: childbirth, infant care, dairying, food preparation, nursing, livestock and the circulation of small goods. Failure in those areas was visible, intimate and dangerous.

Age could deepen exposure. Widows and older women might possess less male protection while depending more on informal help. A request for milk or fuel carried a history of obligation. Refusal could be followed by anger, and anger by an event interpreted as revenge. A reputation for quarrels, cursing or intrusive speech mattered in cultures that expected female deference. This did not make every accused woman poor, old or marginal. Married women, prosperous women, servants, children and elite women also entered the records. Regional profiles differ too much for one victim type.

Learned demonology added a gendered theory. Kramer and other writers portrayed women as physically, intellectually or morally weaker, more lustful and easier for the Devil to deceive. The imagined witch inverted approved womanhood: disobedient rather than submissive, sexually uncontrolled rather than chaste, destructive of children rather than nurturing, joined to a demonic household rather than a Christian one. Male writers did not invent every local accusation, but their categories made female suspicion legible as a cosmic threat.

Women also accused women. That fact does not cancel misogyny. Patriarchal systems are enforced through ordinary relationships, not by men acting alone. Women competed over reputation, work, charity, marriage, healing and household standing. They were frequently the first witnesses to illness, food failure and neighbourhood quarrels. Gender structured the field

in which everyone acted.

The exceptions matter. Men formed the majority of accused people in Russia and Iceland, and substantial male minorities appeared in parts of the Baltic and Nordic worlds. Men could be targeted as sorcerers, healers, ritual specialists, relatives of accused women or members of a supposed sect. In large chain-reaction hunts, the demand for accomplices could cross class and sex, reaching councillors, clergy and children. Bamberg eventually consumed male officeholders such as Junius.

A single-cause claim that witch-hunting was a planned war on women cannot explain those patterns. A gender-blind account cannot explain the continental majority. The stronger model is a set of gendered pathways into suspicion, altered by local concepts of magic, work, law and authority. Women were more exposed because the imagined crime attached to roles, dependencies and fears already coded female. Where witchcraft was imagined differently, the ratio changed.

Gender was therefore neither decoration nor a complete cause. It shaped who stood nearest accusation before any court opened a file. Local law, authority and evidence determined what happened next.

Courts Could Manufacture Proof

A secret crime creates a procedural trap. If the alleged offence leaves no ordinary trace, the court can admit that it cannot prove the case, or it can change what counts as proof.

Witchcraft was often treated as an exceptional crime, a *crimen exceptum*. The phrase did not erase every legal rule, but it encouraged judges to relax safeguards because the Devil's servants were thought skilled at concealment. Suspicion that would be too weak in an ordinary murder could justify interrogation. A prisoner's resistance could be read as demonic assistance. Failure to confess did not clear her; it showed that stronger measures were needed.

Continental criminal procedure placed great weight on confession. Torture

was regulated in principle. Codes required prior indications, limited sessions and confirmation afterwards. Practice could turn those limits into paperwork around coercion. Interrogators used thumbscrews, suspension, leg vices, sleep deprivation, confinement and repeated threats. A confession repeated after torture could be recorded as voluntary even though the prisoner remained under threat of renewed pain.

Rules could be defeated by relabelling repetition. A code might forbid torture without new evidence, yet officials sometimes called later sessions continuations, found new indications or obtained a technically free confirmation after the body had learned what refusal cost. The file preserved dates, formulae and a signature rather than the atmosphere of the chamber. Regulated coercion could therefore produce a neater record than open violence while remaining coercion. Later reviewers had to inspect how the evidence was made, not merely whether the correct boxes had been filled.

The questions carried a script. When did the Devil approach? What name did he give you? Which animal carried you? What happened at the sabbath? Whom did you see? A prisoner trying to end pain learned the required world from the examination itself. Details that later readers treated as independent folklore could be answers shaped by the official asking them.

Naming accomplices was the multiplier. A private curse might produce one defendant. A sabbath required a group. Confessors were pressed to identify faces, and those names were treated as fresh evidence. The accused in the next cell then heard a similar questionnaire and supplied another list. Repetition looked like corroboration even when it came from one procedure working on several frightened people.

Johannes Junius's case exposes the mechanism because two records survive. His formal confession contained the expected pact, witch name, demon animal, sacrilege and assembly. His secret letter said he had invented the story under torture and named others only after threats of more. Bamberg's purpose-built Malefizhaus added solitary confinement, surveillance and spiritual pressure to physical pain. The prison did not

merely hold suspects. It organised the production of compliant accounts.

Formal torture was powerful, not indispensable. English witchfinders kept women awake, watched them for familiar spirits, searched and pricked their bodies, used swimming tests and moved from town to town with reputations and fees. Salem judges admitted spectral evidence, in which an afflicted person claimed to see the accused's apparition. Confession could improve a suspect's chance of survival while denial exposed her to conviction. These systems created different incentives but shared the same defect: the process generated the material it then cited as confirmation.

This is why procedure matters more than a catalogue of cruel devices. Torture did more than cause pain. It converted a theory into testimony. Leading questions supplied the shape of an invisible crime. Accomplice naming gave each accused person a pressured route to enlarge the supposed network.

Once a court treated the outputs of its own coercion as independent inputs, prosecution could reproduce itself.

Europe Did Not Hunt as One Place

People across Europe feared witchcraft. They did not prosecute it at the same rate.

That gap is the central comparative fact. Trials clustered in particular territories and decades, especially within parts of the Holy Roman Empire, Switzerland, France, Scotland and some Nordic regions. Other places sharing Christian theology and magical assumptions produced far fewer executions. Spain, Portugal, much of Italy and the Dutch Republic were comparatively restrained. England prosecuted many people but killed on a smaller scale than the worst German territories. Within a single kingdom, one county could experience a surge while the next remained quiet.

The map often follows institutions more closely than broad belief. Early modern Europe contained royal courts, princely courts, town councils, village jurisdictions, church courts, travelling assizes and inquisitorial

tribunals. Rules on accusation, torture, appeal, proof and review varied. So did the ambitions of magistrates. A local authority might see energetic prosecution as godly government. A higher court might see the same case as a procedural embarrassment.

Fragmented jurisdictions could be dangerous because a small court had enough power to begin a prosecution and too little scrutiny to correct it. This helps explain the severe hunts in some German prince-bishoprics and small territories. It is not a law of size. Central rulers could encourage persecution, and local judges could resist it. The safer generalisation is that hunts expanded where initiating authority was broad and stopping authority was weak, absent or politically costly.

Cost and review helped shape the map. Detention, guards, interrogators, messengers, executioners and paperwork had to be paid for. Some communities pressed ahead because local bodies could raise the money; others recoiled when a campaign became expensive. More important, a sentence that had to survive a distant court faced a different test from one delivered by the same men who began the inquiry. Appeals did not guarantee mercy. They separated accusation from final judgement and forced one institution to expose its reasoning to another.

The Spanish Inquisition supplies the corrective to the familiar picture of one persecuting church. After the Basque panic of 1609-1611, inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frías travelled through the region, offered a limited opportunity for reconciliation and tested claims. He found contradictions, failed demonstrations and stories spreading through suggestion. The tribunal's 1614 instructions demanded greater caution and independent proof. Witch beliefs continued, but large executions did not follow. An institution created to police religious error became, in this area, a brake on local accusation.

Württemberg gives another kind of contrast. Hundreds of people were tried across centuries, yet central legal oversight, documentary procedure and cautious use of torture produced many acquittals and a lower execution rate than a stereotype of Germany predicts. Rothenburg's council could prosecute while also worrying about disorder, false accusation and damage

to authority. Courts were never modern havens of due process, but their interests were not identical to a crowd's demand for cleansing.

England shows how legal form changed content. Common law did not permit routine judicial torture in ordinary felony trials. Accusations therefore stayed closer to alleged harm, witness testimony, confessions outside formal torture and physical signs. The continental sabbath was less central. This reduced one route to vast accomplice chains, though civil-war disruption later allowed Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne to build a deadly alternative.

The lesson is exact. Widespread belief made witchcraft accusations intelligible. Law and government determined their reach. To explain a hunt, ask less whether people feared witches and more which authority agreed to turn that fear into a capital case.

Panics Became Chain Reactions

A hunt was not every witch trial. Most accusations remained isolated or ended without execution. Panic began when officials and communities stopped treating cases as separate and began treating them as evidence of a concealed population.

Escalation changed the meaning of each new case. At the start, ten accusations might describe ten quarrels. Once officials announced a sect, the same ten accusations appeared to corroborate one discovery. The denominator vanished. Nobody counted the hundreds of angry exchanges followed by no harm, or the illnesses that ended without a culprit. Selection made the cluster look rarer, tighter and more intentional than the community around it. A theory of conspiracy turned ordinary background conflict into a membership pattern.

Several pressures could make that leap attractive. War weakened ordinary supervision, moved frightened people and made divine anger feel present. Harvest failure and disease produced losses in need of explanation. Confessional competition encouraged Catholic and Protestant rulers to display disciplined Christian government. Sermons and printed pamphlets

made distant cases available as local scripts. Possession by children or young people gave accusations an emotionally powerful voice. None of these conditions reliably produced a hunt on its own. They enlarged demand for action when a court was prepared to supply it.

The timing shows clusters rather than a smooth rise. European prosecutions increased from the later fifteenth century, surged in many regions after about 1560 and reached their most destructive concentrations around the decades on either side of 1600, with later peaks in Scotland, England, Sweden and colonial New England. The Thirty Years' War overlapped with terrible German hunts, but war cannot explain every German territory or every quiet year. Climate studies find associations between colder conditions, harvest stress and trial activity in some datasets, yet definitions, regions and lags vary. Weather made some fears easier to mobilise. It did not issue warrants.

Escalation required decisions. A minister interpreted affliction as diabolic. A magistrate accepted the interpretation. A physician supplied no satisfying natural cause. A council paid investigators. A ruler authorised a commission. A court admitted a type of evidence. A gaoler isolated suspects. A printer publicised confessions. Each decision lowered the cost of the next accusation.

People also learned from success. Once one accusation produced an arrest, old grievances could be restated in the approved language. Confession showed others what officials expected. Once children's claims of invisible assault drew sustained adult attention and arrests, further allegations could acquire a recognised form. Professional or semi-professional hunters carried methods between communities. Property confiscation and fees could create interests in continuation, though profit was rarely the whole explanation and sometimes cost governments heavily.

Restraint is as revealing. Neighbours could refuse to testify. Clergy could interpret symptoms differently. Physicians could diagnose illness. Magistrates could demand dates and independent witnesses. Higher courts could insist on records, appeals or limits on torture. Rulers could fear that

trials were consuming respectable subjects and discrediting government. Panic was collective, but its continuation depended on identifiable permissions.

This makes the word panic useful only when kept precise. It does not mean everyone lost reason at once. It means institutions and communities entered a positive feedback loop in which each official response increased the plausibility and supply of the next accusation. Fear became cumulative because action taught people what to fear and how to report it.

The hunt spread when enough decisions pointed in the same direction.

The Trials Ended When Proof Changed

Witch trials did not stop because Europe woke up one morning enlightened. They declined unevenly, through arguments and institutional changes that began while major hunts were still killing people.

The retreat followed no single timetable. The Dutch Republic and some Italian jurisdictions became cautious early, while parts of central and eastern Europe continued later. New law sometimes followed a practical collapse in conviction rather than causing it. A statute could remain available while judges stopped using it, or be repealed after decades in which prosecutors no longer trusted the proof required to secure a sentence. The end was often a withdrawal of enforceability before it became a public declaration of disbelief.

Some critics challenged the ontology. The physician Johann Weyer argued in 1563 that many accused women were melancholic, deceived by the Devil or wrongly blamed, though he did not deny the Devil. Reginald Scot attacked English prosecutions in 1584 and treated many magical claims as fraud, error or natural effect. Later thinkers narrowed the range of events demons were allowed to explain. These arguments weakened confidence, but a sceptical book could not overrule a determined local court.

More immediate critics attacked method. Salazar Frías asked whether claims could be independently checked and found that many could not.

Friedrich Spee's *Cautio Criminalis* of 1631 exposed a circular process: torture produced confession; confession produced names; the names justified more torture; refusal to confess produced more pain. Even judges who accepted the possibility of witchcraft could reject a procedure unable to distinguish guilt from endurance.

Higher authorities increasingly did so. Central courts reviewed local records, demanded stronger indications before torture, limited the use of accomplice testimony and reversed sentences. Prosecutors became wary of spectral evidence, bodily marks and children's claims. In some territories, the same growth of administration that had made systematic persecution possible now made local excess visible. Paper could spread a hunt. It could also create an appeal file.

The change was self-reinforcing. Once a court acquitted, refused torture or punished a reckless accuser, the expected reward from accusation fell. Once officials treated confession under coercion as contaminated, accomplice chains lost their engine. Once natural or medical explanations became institutionally respectable, unexplained harm no longer pointed as directly to a human enemy. Doubt needed a place in procedure before it could protect anyone.

Statutes followed at different speeds. Britain repealed its witchcraft laws in 1736 and shifted the offence towards pretending to possess magical powers. Other jurisdictions had already reduced prosecution through practice, while some executions continued later. There is no clean European finishing date. Legal categories, appeals and punishments differed too much for one last case to close the file.

Nor did belief end. People continued to consult cunning folk, fear curses, attack suspected witches and use magic in private. The state withdrew before the culture did. That distinction completes the causal loop. The hunts began with the move from unexplained misfortune to a named human agent, then grew when courts accepted every later step from suspect to satanic conspirator. They receded when institutions forced those steps apart and made each one harder to prove.

The permanent lesson is not that educated people ceased believing strange things. It is that a society can reduce persecution without first achieving agreement about reality. It can refuse to let fear prove its own accusation.

How It Actually Works

Before the great hunts

Medieval Europe punished magic, but it did not begin with the cumulative witch of later trials. Church law condemned divination, charms, conjuring and dealings with demons. Secular rulers punished harmful sorcery when it injured a person or threatened authority. Learned necromancers, often educated men, could also attract prosecution. Most cases were scattered and small.

An older clerical tradition could doubt the most extravagant claims. The text known as the *Canon Episcopi*, carried through medieval church law, described women who believed they travelled at night with a supernatural company. Its judgement was that demons deluded their minds rather than transporting their bodies. This was not modern disbelief in magic. It did create a problem for later writers who wanted night flight and collective meetings to be physically real.

The change gathered force around the western Alps during the fifteenth century. Trials and treatises began to combine sorcery, heresy, apostasy, secret assembly, child murder and sex with demons. The enemy was no longer an occasional magician committing a bounded offence. It was a hidden sect attacking Christian order. The model drew on earlier campaigns against heresy and on conspiracy stories attached to other persecuted groups.

Practice and theory developed together. Judges questioned suspects about meetings and accomplices. Writers used trial material to describe the sect more fully. The next court inherited a denser enemy than the previous one had possessed. No single theologian invented the witch.

The enlargement changed the possible scale. An alleged act of magic raised questions about one injury. Membership of a satanic sect promised a list.

Printing the enemy

Heinrich Kramer had pursued suspected witches in the German-speaking lands and met resistance. At Innsbruck in 1485, local authorities rejected his methods, and the bishop's representative considered his conduct scandalous. Soon afterwards Kramer produced the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the *Hammer of Witches*.

The book defended the reality of witchcraft, answered sceptical objections, described alleged practices and discussed prosecution. Its misogyny was direct. Kramer treated women's supposed weakness, lust and defective faith as openings for the Devil, then used that theory to reinterpret female conduct. A quarrelsome woman could appear dangerous because learned argument had made her sex evidence of susceptibility.

Repeated printing made the *Malleus* influential, not sovereign. It did not trigger an immediate European wave or govern courts through one code. Other demonologists rearranged or rejected parts of Kramer's account. Catholic and Protestant writers alike could support prosecution. Confessional rivalry gave rulers and clergy reasons to display disciplined Christian government, but no denomination owned the hunt.

Print supplied portable vocabulary. A magistrate could use the book as reassurance, a preacher as warning and a later writer as raw material. Trial pamphlets carried stories of pacts, sabbaths and familiars into new districts. A judge no longer had to invent the questions. Once asked in court, those questions returned as testimony and could be printed again as apparent confirmation.

Books made the enemy easier to imagine. Local law still decided whether imagination became a capital case.

Law catches up

From the sixteenth century, states placed witchcraft more firmly inside criminal law. England enacted statutes in 1542, 1563 and 1604, with changing definitions and penalties. Scotland's 1563 act made witchcraft and consultation with witches capital offences. Continental territories worked through Roman-canon procedure, local ordinances and the imperial *Carolina* of 1532, whose restrictions on torture could be reinterpreted or evaded.

The route through court differed, but its decisions can be followed. A complaint or denunciation opened an inquiry. Neighbours supplied depositions. Magistrates decided whether those statements amounted to sufficient indications. Where torture was permitted, confession could complete the legal proof and accomplice names could open fresh files. A later confirmation, sentence and execution made the sequence look orderly in the archive. Each stage could also be where a cautious official stopped it.

The main European surge came after about 1560. France, the Rhine-Moselle region, Switzerland and parts of Germany experienced severe concentrations. Scotland developed repeated national and local hunts. Nordic kingdoms later produced their own waves. The pattern was intermittent. A prosecution could widen for months, then stop when officials changed, money ran out, a higher court intervened or accusations reached people able to resist.

Village life supplied the first material: requests for food, angry words, illness and remembered rumours. Courts translated those accounts into harmful magic, then tested for diabolism. A difficult neighbour could leave the record as a member of a universal conspiracy.

A king finds witches at sea

In 1589 James VI of Scotland sailed to marry Anne of Denmark. Storms disrupted the voyages surrounding the marriage, and accusations soon gathered in Denmark and Scotland. In the North Berwick trials, suspects were accused of raising storms, meeting the Devil and plotting against the king.

The surviving narrative is shaped by official examinations and the sensational pamphlet *Newes from Scotland*. Geillis Duncan, a servant with healing knowledge, was pressured by her employer and confessed, implicating others. Agnes Sampson, a respected healer, was interrogated and accused of repeating private words exchanged by the royal couple, a detail presented as proof of supernatural access. James accepted that witches had targeted him.

Coercion and leading questions drove the expansion. Duncan was searched and pricked for an insensitive mark. Sampson was restrained, searched and repeatedly examined before confessing. The pamphlet displays these methods as victories over concealed guilt. Read against its purpose, it shows officials teaching the public what their methods were supposed to have uncovered.

The trials outlived their victims. James published *Daemonologie* in 1597 to defend witchcraft's reality and answer sceptics. When he inherited the English throne in 1603, Parliament enacted a harsher witchcraft statute in 1604. That sequence does not prove one direct command from king to statute, but James's convictions gave diabolic witchcraft unusual political weight across his kingdoms.

North Berwick changed the level of the charge. Storms became attempted regicide. Local healers became members of a treasonous sect. Elite fear did not wait for a village crowd. It travelled from a throne.

Spain: a panic investigated

In 1609 a witch panic crossed the western Pyrenees from the French Basque country into Navarre. Children and adults described night journeys, sabbaths and neighbours who had carried them from their beds. Accusations multiplied through villages. The tribunal at Logroño accepted enough of the story to stage an *auto-da-fé* in 1610 at which several convicted people were executed.

One of its three inquisitors, Alonso de Salazar Frías, had become doubtful. He then travelled through the affected region under an edict that invited admissions and reconciliation. The visitation produced a mass of confessions and denunciations, many involving children. Quantity could have been treated as proof. Salazar instead asked how the accounts had been made.

He compared statements for consistency. He investigated alleged ointments and magical substances. He asked whether children had discussed stories before repeating them, whether supposed journeys could be checked and whether material evidence behaved as claimed. Confessions were retracted. Descriptions changed. Witnesses who agreed on the existence of a sect often failed to agree on its observable details. Salazar concluded that contagion, instruction and pressure had produced much of the apparent corroboration.

The response mattered because it altered the institution rather than one verdict. In 1614 the Spanish Inquisition issued instructions requiring caution, independent inquiry and closer control of local accusations. The Holy Office remained a coercive religious tribunal and continued persecuting other forms of belief and identity. In witch cases, however, its central review could distrust the evidence that frightened communities supplied.

The Basque episode is the book's cleanest firebreak. The panic generated more testimony than any court could want. Investigation made the abundance less persuasive, not more.

Pendle: a family enters the record

On a Lancashire road in March 1612, Alizon Device met the travelling pedlar John Law and asked him for pins. He refused. Angry words followed. Law soon collapsed and was left partly paralysed; his family blamed Alizon. Questioned by the magistrate Roger Nowell, she confessed that she had caused the harm and accused members of two local families with reputations for magic.

Alizon's confession did not emerge from nowhere. Her family lived within an economy of begging, healing, charms and hostile reputation, and she appears to have accepted that her anger might possess harmful force. When Law was brought before her, she asked his forgiveness. Sincere guilt, official pressure and an available magical explanation could coexist. The case did not require a calculating liar at either end.

The inquiry widened through kinship. Alizon's mother Elizabeth Device, her grandmother Elizabeth Southernns, known as Demdike, and rivals associated with Anne Whittle, known as Chattox, entered the case. A meeting at Malkin Tower was interpreted as a gathering to plan crimes and rescue prisoners. The chief witness against the Device family was Jennet Device, a child of about nine, brought into court to identify her mother, brother and sister.

Twelve people became the Pendle accused. Demdike died in prison. Jennet Preston was tried separately at York and executed. Ten defendants were tried at Lancaster in August; one was acquitted and nine were hanged. The case survives in unusual detail because the clerk Thomas Potts published *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* under judicial patronage.

That abundance is a trap. Potts arranged contested testimony into a moral victory for the court. Pendle reaches us as a prosecution built from interrogation, family hostility, a child witness and an official author showing that the magistrates had found what they sought.

Bamberg: the chain without a brake

The largest lethal concentrations occurred in German-speaking territories, though there was no German state or common witch-hunting policy. Jurisdictions within the Holy Roman Empire probably account for about half of European executions. The figure describes concentration across a crowded legal map. Prince-bishops, towns and small territories operated with different advisers, finances and routes of appeal. Extreme persecutors stood beside cautious neighbours.

Bamberg's rulers presented persecution as Christian government. In 1627 the prince-bishopric opened the Malefizhaus, a cellular prison designed to isolate suspected witches. Surveillance, regulated visits, spiritual pressure, interrogation and torture worked together. The building did more than hold defendants. It organised the production of confessions on which a chain prosecution depended.

Johannes Junius arrived in June 1628 after other prisoners named him. He had served repeatedly as mayor. He denied the charge and asked to confront witnesses. Torture followed. His formal confession supplied the expected pattern: seduction by a demon, renunciation of God, a witch name, an animal spirit, flight, a sabbath, sacrilege and people he claimed to have seen there.

His hidden letter to his daughter explains how that account was made. He had decided to say with his mouth what he had not done, hoping later to confess the lie to a priest. He invented details to stop the pain. When officials rejected his first list of accomplices, threats forced him to name more people. His hands remained damaged as he wrote. He was executed in August.

The campaign did not end through one rescue. Families appealed beyond Bamberg. Imperial institutions pressed the prince-bishopric to observe legal limits. Opposition within and outside the territory grew, while the investigation disrupted civic and economic life. Then the Thirty Years' War reached Bamberg: Swedish advance helped break the ruler's protected

authority and forced political flight. Review, resistance and military collapse converged.

Bamberg did not discover that its witch population had vanished. It lost the political and legal conditions that had allowed accusation, confinement and coerced naming to continue as one chain.

Witchfinding in civil-war England

England's common-law system made the continental route harder. Local suspicions still became indictments, but judges and juries expected testimony about harm, confession or bodily signs, and formal judicial torture was unavailable in ordinary felony trials. During the civil wars of the 1640s, travelling justice and central supervision were disrupted in East Anglia. Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne stepped into the opening.

Hopkins styled himself Witch-Finder General. The title was self-bestowed, not a royal office. He and his associates moved between towns, encouraged accusations, examined bodies for insensitive marks, watched suspects through the night for familiar spirits and used the swimming test. These were not the rack, but exhaustion, exposure, isolation and relentless questioning could break prisoners. Towns paid investigation and gaol costs, giving the campaign an administrative life beyond one complaint.

The witchfinders arrived as men who knew what signs to find. One town's payment advertised their expertise to the next. Watching turned insects, ordinary movement or exhaustion into encounters with familiars. Bodily search produced marks because bodies contain marks. A travelling method could create the uniformity it claimed to detect.

The mass trial at Chelmsford in 1645 produced many convictions, and further trials followed across the eastern counties. The campaign contributed to an exceptional concentration of English executions, but no secure personal total can be assigned to Hopkins. It slowed as costs rose, criticism spread, judges resumed firmer control and the methods attracted scrutiny.

The episode shows why torture cannot bear the whole explanation. A panic can form without an official torture chamber when investigators monopolise interpretation, keep suspects awake, produce bodily signs and carry a successful script from town to town.

Salem: evidence without a bonfire

In early 1692, girls and young women in Salem Village suffered fits, cried out and accused three women: Tituba, enslaved in Samuel Parris's household; Sarah Good, who was poor; and Sarah Osborne, whose standing in the community was already contested. Tituba confessed under pressure and described a wider diabolic plot. The case ceased to concern three suspects. Massachusetts now appeared to contain an organised enemy.

Good and Osborne denied the charge. Tituba supplied the court with a book, meetings, animal spirits and other witches. Her account drew on questioning, local fears and her vulnerable position. It also gave officials a reason to continue. A confession that enlarged the plot was more useful to the prosecution than denials that closed it.

Accusations spread through families and towns. The special Court of Oyer and Terminer heard trials from June. Judges admitted claims of spectral attack: afflicted witnesses said the accused person's apparition had pinched, bitten or tormented them. The defendant in court could sit still while an invisible double committed the alleged crime. Confession and the naming of others could postpone danger. Continued denial could lead to trial and execution.

The colony was already strained by political uncertainty, church division, local faction and frontier war against French and Indigenous forces. Mary Beth Norton has shown how memories and participants from that war entered Salem's accusations. The link adds important context, but it is not a complete cause. Other communities experienced war without creating Salem. The court's treatment of evidence remains necessary to explain the deaths.

More than 200 people were accused. Nineteen were hanged. Giles Corey was pressed to death after refusing to plead, and several prisoners died in custody. Nobody was burned. By autumn the accusations had reached prominent people, ministers had challenged spectral proof and Governor William Phips dissolved the special court. The Superior Court that followed in 1693 did not give spectral claims the same independent force, and most remaining defendants were acquitted, reprieved or pardoned.

The afflicted did not cease making claims at once. The legal consequences changed because the next court demanded more from them.

The brakes take hold

Resistance had existed throughout the hunts. Accused people retracted. Neighbours defended suspects. Clergy challenged possession cases. Physicians offered natural explanations. Lawyers objected to torture and defective records. By the later seventeenth century, more of those objections could alter a sentence.

Friedrich Spee supplied one of the strongest attacks in 1631. He accepted enough of the religious premise to expose the legal circle: pain yielded admission, admission supplied names, those names prompted new arrests, and continued denial invited more pain. A process that could not distinguish innocence from endurance could not secure the certainty it claimed.

Appellate and central authorities narrowed local discretion at different times. The Parlement of Paris increasingly reviewed provincial cases and often reduced or reversed sentences. Roman and Spanish inquisitorial authorities demanded consultation and documentary scrutiny. German and Dutch jurisdictions developed their own routes to restraint. These institutions were not modern rights courts and could persecute in other fields. Their contribution here was to insert reviewers whose authority did not depend on proving the local conspiracy.

Judicial scepticism did not require disbelief in witches. A magistrate could accept that harmful magic was possible and still decide that a child, a spectral image or a coerced accomplice did not prove this defendant guilty.

That separation mattered more in court than an abstract declaration that demons did not exist.

By the eighteenth century, prosecutions had become rare across much of western and central Europe. Britain's 1735 Act came into force in 1736, repealing the old statutes and redirecting punishment towards fraudulent claims to occult power. Other jurisdictions changed through decrees, appellate practice or refusal to prosecute. Isolated later trials and executions make one final European date misleading.

Popular fear and violence outlived capital law. The state withdrew first.

How we know

Witch trials produced abundant records and unreliable voices. Court clerks summarised speech, translated dialect into legal categories and organised testimony around the offence they expected. Confessions may preserve belief, performance, coercion or all three. A statement repeated after torture was often recorded without the pressure that made it possible. Printed pamphlets selected the strangest details and advertised judicial success.

Survival is uneven. Scotland's database identifies 3,837 accused people, including named and unnamed entries, but missing records prevent a final total. English assize records have gaps. German territories range from rich files to lost archives. Informal accusations and violence rarely left the paper trail created by execution.

The safest account compares kinds of record: indictments, interrogations, appeal files, private letters, financial accounts, statutes, demonological books and sceptical critiques. Junius's case is rare because the official confession and private explanation survive together. Most accused people reach us through the institution that condemned them.

Totals are therefore built jurisdiction by jurisdiction rather than read from one complete register. The headline figures used in this book sit within the ranges accepted by major comparative syntheses, but their outer edges remain estimates. Precision beyond those ranges would imitate the courts'

old error: turning an incomplete record into confidence.

What People Get Wrong

“The witch hunts belonged to the Middle Ages”

The pointed hat, castle dungeon and bonfire have pushed the trials backwards in time. The large European hunts were mainly early modern. Their intellectual foundations formed during the later Middle Ages, but the most destructive phase came after the Reformation, especially from about 1560 to 1630, with major later episodes in Scotland, East Anglia, Sweden and Salem.

The correction matters because chronology changes the explanation. These trials did not belong to a Europe without universities, printing or organised states. They expanded alongside printed books, more ambitious government, confessional discipline and developing criminal administration. Bamberg built a specialised prison. Scottish commissions created files. English magistrates sent defendants to assizes. Salem appointed a special court.

Calling the hunts medieval turns them into debris from a dark age waiting for modernity to clear it. Much of the danger came from newer capacities attached to older fears. The state could reach further, write more, classify more and repeat a procedure across a territory. The bureaucracy was not the cure by definition. In the wrong arrangement, it was the carrier.

“Millions of witches were burned”

The historical death toll was appalling and far below the numbers repeated in popular culture. Current scholarship generally places prosecutions near 100,000 across Europe and colonial America, with roughly 40,000 to 60,000 executions. Records are incomplete and regional estimates remain open, so a narrow exact total would be false precision. Millions are not credible.

Nor were all victims burned. Burning was common in many continental jurisdictions, sometimes after strangling or beheading. Scotland often

burned bodies after execution. England and colonial New England usually hanged convicted witches. Salem burned no one: its courts hanged nineteen people, pressed Giles Corey to death and saw several prisoners die in custody.

The inflated figure grew through polemic, weak demographic guesses and repetition detached from archives. Correcting it does not minimise the crime. Forty thousand lives do not require an extra zero to matter. The accurate range reveals something more useful: persecution was concentrated. The question is why particular courts produced heavy killing while comparable neighbours did not, not how one uniform machine consumed an invented continental total.

“The Church ran one European extermination campaign”

Christian theology made the diabolic witch imaginable, and clergy, bishops and church institutions sometimes promoted prosecution. That is not the same as one church directing one campaign. Catholic and Protestant territories hunted witches. Most capital trials were conducted by secular authorities or mixed local jurisdictions. Europe had no central command, common timetable or single rule book.

Some inquisitorial institutions were comparatively restraining. The Spanish Inquisition reviewed the Basque panic, exposed weak evidence and issued cautious instructions in 1614. The Roman Inquisition often demanded procedural standards that limited executions. Local secular courts in parts of Germany could be far more lethal than institutions now remembered as professional persecutors.

The myth survives because “the Church” is easier to picture than a field of prince-bishops, town councils, royal commissions, assizes, kirk sessions and appellate bodies. It also captures a truth badly: religious ideas and confessional government were indispensable. The correction keeps that truth while restoring agency. Particular officials opened or closed particular gates. Responsibility becomes clearer when it is not dissolved into a single

institution that never existed.

“The accused were pagan healers and midwives”

The idea gives the victims an identity more satisfying than the records usually permit: wise women preserving an ancient religion until church and state destroyed them. There is no evidence that Europe's accused witches formed one surviving pagan faith, met in organised covens or understood themselves as a persecuted movement. The sabbath was mainly an allegation, often shaped by questioning.

Some accused people healed, divined or supplied charms. So did many people who were never accused, including men. A healer could gain trust when a remedy worked and suspicion when it failed. That does not make medical knowledge the main target.

Midwives appear in trial records, but no reliable European evidence makes them the typical defendants. A 2024 secondary analysis of Scotland's national survey identified 142 accused people whose cases involved folk-healing or midwifery. Almost all in that selected group were folk-healers; ten were accused for reasons connected with midwifery. The study concerns one country and a subset defined by surviving records, but its scale is incompatible with the claim that Scotland's thousands of accused people were chiefly midwives.

Communities also depended on midwives, and courts sometimes used their expertise to search women's bodies or assess pregnancy. Occupational knowledge could create exposure without making the occupation itself the target.

The myth grew from nineteenth and twentieth-century theories of a surviving pre-Christian religion, then gained new life in feminist retellings that recast the victims as organised keepers of female knowledge. It turns diverse people into the coherent sect imagined by their prosecutors. Sympathy does not improve when it borrows the prosecution's fantasy.

“Only women were accused”

Women formed the large majority of defendants across Europe, often estimated at 75 to 80 per cent, and the imbalance requires explanation. It reflected gendered theology, economic dependence, household work, age, reputation and expectations about obedience. Erasing that would erase the main pattern.

“Only women” creates a different error. Some northern and eastern regions produced male-majority patterns because local ideas attached dangerous magic more readily to male ritual specialists or sorcerers. Large chain trials created another route: once prisoners had to supply names for a hidden sect, the original social profile could break down. Bamberg's campaign eventually reached men in civic and clerical office as well as women from ordinary households.

The variation shows that witch was not a timeless synonym for woman. It was a category built from local ideas about who possessed hidden power and what that power looked like. In much of western and central Europe, those ideas attached more readily to women. Elsewhere they attached to male forms of magic or authority.

A useful explanation must preserve both facts: prosecution was strongly gendered, and its gender ratio was historically produced rather than biologically fixed.

“A bad harvest caused the panic”

Cold years, failed crops, disease and war could intensify fear. Scholars have found associations between climatic stress and witch trials in some regions and periods. The tempting story is a straight line: weather worsened, food failed, frightened peasants blamed witches.

The line breaks under comparison. Bad harvests occurred without hunts. Hunts occurred without exceptional harvest failure. Climate datasets, trial datasets, regions and time lags do not always match. Even where a correlation is strong, weather cannot explain why one court tortured for

accomplices while another dismissed the complaint.

Crisis is best treated as an accelerant. It increased losses needing explanation, strained charity, sharpened conflict and made divine punishment plausible. Confessional competition, war and political disorder could do similar work. None supplied the criminal process.

Single-cause accounts are attractive because they make panic impersonal. Weather did it. Religion did it. Misogyny did it. Greed did it. Each identifies a pressure and then skips the conversion. The sharper question is what turned pressure into a named suspect, the suspect into a hidden conspirator and the accusation into admissible proof.

“Reason arrived and superstition disappeared”

The trials declined before popular belief vanished. Educated scepticism mattered, but it often remained partial. Weyer doubted many accusations while retaining a Christian Devil. Spee attacked torture without needing to deny witchcraft. Judges could believe harmful magic possible and still reject spectral evidence, children's testimony or a confession obtained under pain.

That distinction explains the timing better than a parade of philosophers. Prosecution fell when courts raised standards, appeals widened, central authorities reviewed local cases and officials became less willing to let exceptional crime excuse ordinary proof. Britain repealed its witchcraft statutes in 1736, yet people continued to fear curses, consult magical practitioners and attack suspected witches outside court.

The clean Enlightenment story flatters the present and hides the mechanism of reform. Societies rarely wait for everyone to agree before reducing injustice. They change who may accuse, what evidence may enter, who reviews a decision and what penalty the state will enforce.

Belief can survive a procedural defeat. That is hopeful, but not comforting. Harmful witchcraft accusations continue in some modern settings under different beliefs and institutions. No century owns immunity. The brake has to exist where fear seeks authority.

Use It

Separate belief from prosecution capacity

Stop treating belief as action. Early modern Europeans could fear witches without arresting anyone. A magistrate could accept the possibility of magic and reject a particular case. Communities might answer suspicion through gossip, avoidance, counter-magic or attempted reconciliation. Passage into criminal punishment required authority, procedure and resources.

Use that distinction whenever a society appears to share an alarming idea. Ask what the belief permits people to do, through which institution, under what evidential rule and with what penalty. Ten thousand private suspicions may cause less organised harm than one office able to turn suspicion into a warrant.

“They believed in witches” cannot explain variation between neighbouring courts. The missing variables are concrete: who can initiate, who approves, who pays, what proof is admitted, whether the accused can answer and whether another authority reviews the record. Plausibility supplied possible cases. Public power selected which ones became punishments.

Ask why this person

Before examining a charge, examine the distribution of credibility. Why could this person carry the blame? The European answer often involved sex, age, household work, poverty, reputation, kinship and local ideas about who possessed dangerous magic. The accused were diverse, but suspicion did not fall at random.

Translate the label back into an action. Replace “the witch” with “the person whom these neighbours and officials accused of witchcraft”. The longer sentence reveals who named whom and what still needs proof. It also prevents a category from swallowing every fact. Poverty can become envy, wealth suspicious success, anger a curse, calm demonic control, confession guilt and denial secrecy.

Then test the exception. If women predominate, ask which social and learned pathways exposed them. If men predominate elsewhere, ask what local image of magic changed. A good explanation should account for both the main pattern and the people it does not fit.

Follow every conversion

A witch hunt joined claims that should be kept separate. Something bad happened. A person caused it. The cause was occult. The occult act proved a pact. The pact implied a network. The network justified exceptional evidence. Each sentence added a proposition, yet panic made the sequence feel like one fact.

Break the chain back into conversions. What establishes the harm? What establishes agency? What links the agent to the accused? What turns one alleged act into membership of a group? What evidence supports the group rather than presuming it?

Early modern courts often knew that a cow died, neighbours quarrelled and somebody carried a bad reputation. They lacked independent evidence that a demonic sabbath caused the death. The unsupported step hid inside a fluent narrative. A chain can contain familiar parts and still fail at every link.

The same discipline protects against moral compression. A person may be difficult, disliked or wrong about many things without being guilty of the invisible act used to organise those facts.

Audit how the evidence was produced

Evidence has a history before it reaches you. Junius's confession existed, but it was not independent of thumbscrews, isolation, leading questions and threats. Several prisoners supplied similar accounts, but their agreement was not separate corroboration when the same interrogators supplied the structure.

Ask who created the record, what answer was rewarded, what answer was punished and what information the witness had already received. Check whether repeated statements share a source. Similarity may reveal a

common questionnaire rather than a common event.

Confession feels powerful because it appears to run against self-interest. People can confess falsely under pain, exhaustion, fear, hope of survival, religious pressure or the belief that resistance is useless. They may absorb an official interpretation and repeat it sincerely. Do not assume every confession false. Refuse the shortcut from confession happened to crime happened.

Then ask whether the method could have cleared an innocent person. A process that reads denial as guilt and confession as guilt has no test. It has a method for conviction, not a test of guilt.

Compare the panic with the place next door

Dramatic cases pull attention towards where something happened. Explanation often lies where it did not. Scotland prosecuted heavily while England followed another legal route. Bamberg expanded while nearby German territories restrained cases. Salem convulsed while many communities under similar pressures did not.

Choose the nearest plausible comparison: similar religion, language, economy or crisis, but a different outcome. Find the changed gate. Did a higher court review files? Was torture unavailable? Did a minister reject possession? Could defendants confront witnesses? Did officials fear disorder more than a hidden enemy?

This tests favourite causes. If harvest failure explains the hunt, the quiet district under the same weather becomes awkward. If misogyny alone explains it, male-majority regions demand a new account. If theology alone explains it, cautious inquisitors and aggressive secular magistrates reverse the expected map.

Counterexamples make causes conditional. A useful explanation should account for the fire and the firebreak.

Find the veto and the appeal

Every expanding hunt passed through decisions that could have gone the other way. Someone accepted a complaint, authorised confinement, admitted spectral testimony, permitted more torture or decided that names supplied by one prisoner counted as evidence against another. Panic can feel collective while remaining built from identifiable permissions.

Map the vetoes. Who could refuse the next step? Was that person independent? Did refusal carry religious or reputational cost? Could an outside authority inspect the record? An appeal matters because it transfers the case to people with different information and incentives.

Centralisation is not protective by itself. A ruler can intensify persecution. The useful feature is friction: recorded reasons, divided authority, independent review and a requirement that one official persuade another who did not build the case.

A system with no stopping point treats momentum as proof. A credible veto can prevent one accusation from becoming a population.

The limits

The witch trials are not a master key to every panic or prosecution. Early modern witchcraft involved a specific Christian demonology, legal culture, household economy and theory of invisible harm. Calling every political investigation, health fear or online attack a witch hunt erases those differences and makes a historical atrocity do cheap rhetorical work.

The records also constrain the lesson. Authorities created them, clerks filtered them and archives preserved them unevenly. Neighbour conflict appears prominently because courts asked about it. Inner belief is harder to recover. One confession may contain court language, local folklore, strategic compliance and sincere fear in proportions no historian can separate.

Procedural explanation does not absolve belief or prejudice. Better evidence rules would have saved lives, but gendered ideas placed women in danger

before a judge opened the file. Theology made an impossible enemy coherent. Poverty and dependence affected who could resist. Institutions acted on a hierarchy they did not create.

Restraint guarantees nothing beyond restraint in this field. A court can reject witchcraft evidence and punish poverty, dissent or fraud instead. The lesson is narrower: procedure can amplify an unfounded accusation, and procedure can interrupt it before a culture reaches agreement.

The one thing to keep

Keep the sequence visible.

A cow dies. That is an event. A neighbour caused it. That is an attribution. This neighbour is the kind of person who could have caused it. That is a social judgement. She used hidden power. That is a mechanism. The power came from a pact. That is a theology. Others joined her. That is a conspiracy. Their secrecy requires weaker proof. That is a legal choice. The steps can be spoken in one breath. Each needs evidence of its own.

The trials became lethal when those steps disappeared inside one label. Once a woman was called a witch, her history became confirmation and the court's methods became discovery. Torture created confession. Confession created accomplices. Accomplices created the scale that justified more coercion. The prosecution searched for an enemy while generating the evidence of its size.

Restraint began by pulling the claims apart. An official might still believe in harmful magic yet ask whether this illness had another cause, whether this defendant had been selected through an old grievance, whether witnesses had exchanged stories, whether a confession survived without pain and whether an outside court would accept the file. Doubt acquired rules, records and somewhere to appeal.

That is what should now be different in your sight. When fear presents a complete enemy, slow the account down. Ask why this suspect became credible. Find the first unsupported step. Examine how the evidence was

produced and who can refuse the next permission. You do not need to settle every belief before preventing a punishment.

A hunt begins when separate claims are allowed to prove one another. It stops when each claim must stand on evidence that the accusation itself did not create.

Terms

Witchcraft

A criminal and cultural label for harmful occult power. Early modern courts often joined alleged injury to a pact with the Devil. The word described an accusation, not a proven social identity.

Maleficium

Harm caused through magic, from the Latin for an evil deed. Alleged victims blamed it for illness, death, infertility, failed food, damaged animals, storms or other losses.

Sorcery

The use of ritual, charms, objects, words or spirits to produce an effect. Early modern people could distinguish useful magic from harmful sorcery, though suspicion could erase that boundary.

Diabolism

The learned theory that witches entered a deliberate relationship with the Devil. It enlarged a suspected curse into apostasy, treason against God and membership of a concealed enemy.

Devil's pact

An alleged agreement in which a witch renounced Christianity and accepted power or assistance from the Devil. Courts treated the pact as the source of magical ability and loyalty.

Sabbath

The imagined secret assembly of witches, usually described as involving Devil worship, feasting, sex, sacrilege and plans for harm. Its collective form made accomplice naming central to prosecution.

Familiar

A spirit thought to assist a witch, often appearing as an animal or small creature. Familiars were prominent in English cases but far less central in many continental traditions.

Cunning person

A practitioner consulted for healing, divination, finding lost property, identifying witches or breaking spells. Cunning people could be trusted specialists, rivals of clergy or suspects themselves. Their standing depended on reputation.

Demonology

Learned writing about demons, their powers and their dealings with humans. Demonologists disagreed, but their books supplied courts with a structured enemy and questions for interrogation. Their disagreements also mattered.

Malleus Maleficarum

The Hammer of Witches, issued in the late 1480s and written principally by Heinrich Kramer. Influential and misogynistic, it never became Europe's universal witchcraft code.

Canon Episcopi

A church-law passage inherited from the Middle Ages. It treated women's reports of nocturnal travel with a supernatural retinue as demonic deception rather than bodily journeys. Later demonologists resisted that sceptical implication.

Crimen exceptum

An exceptional crime. Witchcraft could receive this label because its alleged secrecy made normal proof difficult. The category encouraged courts to relax safeguards while claiming necessity.

Constitutio Criminalis Carolina

The Holy Roman Empire's criminal code of 1532. It regulated evidence and torture in principle, but territorial courts interpreted, supplemented and sometimes evaded its restrictions during witch trials.

Roman-canon procedure

A family of written criminal procedures used across much of continental Europe. Judges gathered evidence, questioned suspects and sought formal proof, often giving confession decisive weight.

Common law

The legal tradition governing English felony trials. Juries assessed testimony, and judges could not formally order torture in ordinary cases, producing witch prosecutions unlike many continental proceedings.

Indicia

Signs or preliminary evidence considered strong enough to justify further examination, including torture in some jurisdictions. What counted as an indication could decide whether suspicion entered coercive procedure.

Torture

Pain or severe pressure used to obtain information or confession. Rules claimed to limit it, yet repetition, threats, suspension, crushing devices and sleep deprivation could make those limits hollow.

Confession

A suspect's admission of witchcraft. Courts prized confession as strong proof, but coercion, leading questions, exhaustion, religious pressure and hope of survival could shape every detail.

Accomplice naming

The demand that a confessing suspect identify other witches. It converted one prosecution into many and made accounts generated by the same questioning appear to corroborate each other.

Spectral evidence

Testimony that the accused person's spirit or apparition harmed someone while the physical body was elsewhere. Salem judges admitted it before later courts rejected its evidential force.

Devil's mark

A blemish or insensitive spot said to mark the Devil's ownership of a witch. Bodily searches turned ordinary scars, moles and numb areas into signs of an invisible pact.

Pricking

Piercing the body with pins or needles to find an insensitive Devil's mark. Professional prickers could use blunt or retractable tools, making guilt easy to manufacture and hard to escape.

Watching

Continuous observation of a suspect, often combined with sleep deprivation, to detect familiar spirits or prevent magical escape. In English hunts it functioned as interrogation outside formal torture.

Swimming test

An ordeal in which a bound suspect was placed in water. Floating was interpreted as rejection by the baptismal element. Ropes usually prevented drowning, but the test remained dangerous and coercive.

Possession

A condition interpreted as control or assault by a spirit. Fits, pain, speech and visions attributed to possession could generate accusations, especially when afflicted children named invisible attackers.

Assize

A travelling session of the English royal courts. Judges and juries tried serious offences, including witchcraft, bringing central criminal authority periodically into counties such as Lancashire and Essex.

Commission of justiciary

An authorisation from Scotland's central government allowing named local people to hold a criminal trial. Many witch cases were prosecuted through such temporary courts, whose records often disappeared.

Kirk session

The local governing court of a Scottish parish. Ministers and elders disciplined conduct, heard complaints and gathered witchcraft evidence, though capital sentencing belonged to criminal courts. They could pass cases onward.

Court of Oyer and Terminer

The special Massachusetts court created in 1692 to hear Salem cases. Its judges admitted spectral evidence and convicted rapidly before the governor dissolved it in October.

Moral panic

A rapid escalation in which a person or group is presented as a grave threat and authorities intensify control. The term helps only when specific actors, evidence rules and permissions remain visible.

Go Deeper

The overview

Julian Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt* (Routledge, 2016). This is the best next step after a one-hour account because it keeps the whole European map in view while explaining accusation, demonology, procedure, gender, politics and decline as interacting causes. Goodare is especially strong on why panics formed, how local elites drove them and why torture mattered without becoming the sole explanation. The book is scholarly but readable, with enough comparison to prevent England, Salem or Germany from becoming the norm. Read it with the regional variation in mind: every broad proposition has places where the mechanism worked differently.

The procedural witness

Friedrich Spee, *Cautio Criminalis, or a Book on Witch Trials*, translated and introduced by Marcus Hellyer (University of Virginia Press, 2003). First published anonymously in 1631, this is the sharpest contemporary attack on the prosecution system. Spee was a Jesuit who accepted the Christian possibility of witchcraft while arguing that torture, repeated interrogation and accomplice naming made innocence almost impossible to demonstrate. That position gives the book its force. He does not need modern secular assumptions to dismantle the trials from inside their own legal and moral world. Hellyer's introduction explains the German setting and the text's complicated publication history.

The neighbours

Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft*, second edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2002). Briggs moves below statutes and demonological books into quarrels, charity, healing, reputation and the moral economy of village life. He shows why an accusation could feel persuasive before a magistrate touched it, and why suspected witches were often familiar people embedded in long relationships rather than strangers at the edge of society. The warning is also its strength: the French material and social approach do not explain every large hunt. Read it beside Goodare to see local accusation and institutional escalation fitted together rather than made rivals.

The case

Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2002). Norton reconstructs Salem through households, churches, depositions, frontier conflict and the people moving between them. Her central argument links the crisis to recent warfare against French and Indigenous enemies, showing how language and fear travelled from the frontier into the courtroom. It is a major interpretation rather than a settled master cause, and nearby communities exposed to war did not all produce Salem. That makes the book useful twice: as a gripping, evidence-rich case study and as an example of how a strong causal thesis should be tested against procedure and comparison.

Notes and Sources

Scope, chronology and scale

What this book calls a witch hunt. The manuscript distinguishes belief in harmful magic, an isolated accusation, a criminal trial and an expanding hunt. Julian Goodare, Brian Levack and the contributors to *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* support that separation. The book uses *panic* for a positive feedback process in which official action increases the credibility and supply of further accusations. It does not imply that every participant abandoned judgement at once.

Dates and geography. The learned construction of the diabolic witch developed during the later Middle Ages, especially in and around the western Alps, while the largest European prosecutions were early modern. The main surge after about 1560 and the severe concentrations around the decades on either side of 1600 follow Levack, Goodare, Michael Bailey, Richard Kieckhefer and Stuart Clark. Dates varied by jurisdiction. Later major episodes in Scotland, East Anglia, Sweden and colonial Massachusetts prevent one narrow peak from becoming the whole chronology.

Numbers. Surviving archives are incomplete and historians reconstruct totals from jurisdictions with sharply unequal records. The broad estimates retained here, near 100,000 prosecutions and roughly 40,000 to 60,000 executions across Europe and colonial America, fall within the ranges used by current major syntheses. Around half of the executions occurred within German-speaking territories of the Holy Roman Empire, though those territories had no common witch-hunting policy. The figures are ranges, not a census, and no claim depends on choosing one exact total within them.

Misfortune, neighbours and accusation

Robin Briggs, Alan Macfarlane, Keith Thomas and James Sharpe support the importance of quarrels, reputation, charity, healing, household exchange and remembered threats in many western European accusations. The sequence often described as charity refused is strongest in particular English and western European settings. It is used here as a recurring route, not a universal social law. Family conflict, possession, elite prosecution, political fear, inherited reputation and local concepts of sorcery produced other routes.

The manuscript does not treat accusers as one psychological type or every confession as strategic compliance. Trial testimony could combine sincere fear, local magical practice, religious categories, performance, coercion and an attempt to survive. The surviving record rarely permits those elements to be separated with confidence. The claim that accusation made misfortune morally legible is an interpretive synthesis grounded in the repeated movement from injury to suspected intention, not a claim that early modern people rejected natural or providential causes.

The composite witch and demonology

Bailey and Kieckhefer supply the later medieval development from scattered magical offences towards a cumulative enemy involving heresy, apostasy, night flight, collective assembly and demonic allegiance. Clark is central to the account of demonology as an organised intellectual language rather than a collection of bizarre propositions. The manuscript avoids one inventor or one publication date for the witch stereotype because trials, theology, folklore and legal practice altered one another over time.

The *Canon Episcopi* treated women's claimed night journeys as demonic delusion rather than bodily travel. Its later use and reinterpretation were more complicated than a direct contest between sceptics and believers. The book retains only the contrast needed to show that physical flight and the sabbath required argument even inside learned Christianity.

Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum* was first printed in 1486 or 1487.

Christopher Mackay's complete translation and introduction support the account of its theology, misogyny, evidential arguments and publication history. The manuscript rejects two opposite errors: the book was influential, and it was never a universal European code. Kramer's failed Innsbruck campaign and the local criticism of his conduct are used to show that authority had to be accepted rather than presumed.

Law, proof and institutional variation

Levack and Goodare supply the comparative legal frame. Roman-canon criminal procedure, common law, local ordinances, church discipline and ad hoc commissions differed in who initiated cases, what counted as an indication, whether torture was permitted, how confession operated and whether a sentence faced review. The 1532 *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina* regulated proof and torture in principle. Territorial practice could observe, reinterpret or evade those controls.

The phrase *crimen exceptum* did not place witchcraft wholly outside law. It marked an exceptional crime whose alleged secrecy encouraged relaxation of normal safeguards. The manuscript therefore describes it as an enabling argument rather than one uniform doctrine. Torture is treated as a multiplier because it could produce both confession and accomplice names, not as the sole cause of every hunt.

Gustav Henningsen's study of Alonso de Salazar Frías and the Basque cases supports the account of investigation, comparison, failed tests and the cautious Spanish instructions of 1614. The example does not acquit the Spanish Inquisition of persecution in other fields. It demonstrates that an institution committed to religious discipline could restrain witch cases when it distrusted the evidence.

H. C. Erik Midelfort and Alison Rowlands support the contrasts within German-speaking Europe. Courts in Württemberg and Rothenburg could prosecute witchcraft while applying more review, documentary caution or concern about false accusation than the severe prince-bishoprics. Those cases are not modern due-process systems and do not prove that

centralisation is inherently protective. They show that broad belief cannot explain judicial variation by itself.

Spencer Weinreich supports the account of Bamberg's Malefizhaus as a purpose-built cellular prison that joined isolation, surveillance, interrogation, religious pressure and torture. Friedrich Spee's *Cautio Criminalis* supplies the contemporary attack on circular proof. Johannes Junius's official confession and private letter are read through documentary collections and modern scholarship. The manuscript paraphrases rather than reproduces unstable translated wording. His letter is unusually revealing and cannot stand as a representative account of every prisoner.

Gender and social position

Levack, Goodare, Lyndal Roper, Laura Kounine and Lara Apps with Andrew Gow support the broad European female majority and the importance of regional exceptions. The manuscript uses roughly 75 to 80 per cent women as a continental orientation, while avoiding a single demographic profile. Scotland's Survey of Scottish Witchcraft records 3,837 accused people, including 3,212 named and 625 unnamed entries, and reports 84 per cent of the total as women. Missing records and database classifications prevent that Scottish figure from becoming a European denominator.

Women's unequal legal standing, dependence on household and neighbourly exchange, work around food, illness, care and animals, and expectations of female speech and obedience created recurrent paths into suspicion. Learned demonology added explicit claims about female weakness and sexuality. The text does not infer that domestic work caused accusation or that all accused women were poor, old, widowed or marginal.

Male majorities in Russia and Iceland, and substantial male minorities in several northern and eastern settings, follow Apps and Gow and comparative scholarship in the Oxford Handbook. Those cases refute a timeless equation of witch and woman without cancelling the aggregate gender pattern. Women accusing women is treated as action within gendered institutions, not evidence that misogyny was absent.

The midwife and healer correction uses the Scottish survey and the 2024 secondary analysis by Nicola Ring and colleagues. That study identified 142 accused people whose surviving cases involved folk-healing or midwifery; 98 per cent of the selected group were folk-healers, and ten were accused for reasons connected with midwifery. The database's older occupational count and the study's accusation-based count measure different things and are not combined. Scotland cannot settle every European region, so these figures reject a typical-midwife claim rather than denying that individual healers and midwives were accused.

Crisis, climate and panic

War, confessional competition, political disorder, disease and harvest stress are retained as accelerants. Wolfgang Behringer and Emily Oster provide influential quantitative arguments linking climatic or economic stress to trial activity. Their units, periods and causal interpretations differ, and later scholarship has warned against treating correlation as a complete mechanism. The manuscript therefore makes no claim that the Little Ice Age caused the European hunts.

Comparison is the control. Similar weather or war could coincide with different prosecution levels because jurisdictions differed in evidence, authority, local leadership and review. The Thirty Years' War supplied a severe background for several German hunts, but quiet territories and mismatched timing defeat a direct war-to-trial law. Mary Beth Norton's connection between frontier warfare and Salem is presented as a major interpretation whose explanatory force remains conditional on the colony's courts, factions and evidence rules.

North Berwick, Pendle, Bamberg, East Anglia and Salem

Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts, James VI's *Daemonologie* and *Newes from Scotland* support the North Berwick narrative. The pamphlet is sensational, interested and shaped by official prosecution. Claims about storms, royal conversation and supernatural meetings are presented as allegations and displays of proof, not established events. James's personal commitment is secure. The manuscript treats his influence on the 1604 English statute as political context rather than one mechanical cause.

Thomas Potts's *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* is the central surviving source for Pendle. Robert Poole and English witchcraft scholarship guide its use against the grain. The sequence of twelve accused people, Demdike's prison death, Jennet Preston's York execution, the ten Lancaster defendants, one acquittal and nine hangings is retained. John Law's reported collapse and partial paralysis are paraphrased from the record without a modern diagnosis, and no exact age is assigned to Alizon Device. Potts supplied unusual detail under judicial patronage, so apparent speeches and orderly chronology cannot be treated as transparent transcription.

Roper, Weinreich, Midelfort and Spee support the German and Bamberg material. Weinreich establishes the Malefizhaus as a purpose-built cellular prison and argues for confinement as a driver of the campaign. The narrative uses the less absolute description of a cellular prison designed to isolate witch suspects. Imperial pressure, legal opposition, disruption within the territory and Swedish advance are treated as converging brakes rather than one clean rescue. Military occupation alone did not change local belief or explain the ending.

Malcolm Gaskill and Matthew Hopkins's own *Discovery of Witches* support the East Anglian account. The title Witch-Finder General was self-bestowed. Watching, bodily search, pricking, swimming and town payment are documented, though exact responsibility for every execution remains difficult to assign. The final manuscript avoids a precise personal body count

and treats the campaign as an exceptional share of English prosecution rather than an independently governed national office.

Bernard Rosenthal's edited *Records of the Salem Witch-Hunt*, Mary Beth Norton and Carol Karlsen support Salem. More than 200 people were accused. Nineteen were hanged, Giles Corey was pressed to death after refusing to plead, others died in custody and nobody was burned. The Court of Oyer and Terminer admitted spectral evidence. Governor William Phips dissolved it in October 1692, and the replacement Superior Court treated the evidence more restrictively. This change did not instantly end every accusation, but it broke the capital feedback loop.

Decline and legal withdrawal

Johann Weyer, Reginald Scot, Salazar and Spee show that criticism began well before a general Enlightenment chronology. Their positions differed. Some retained belief in demons or harmful magic while challenging particular accusations or methods. The manuscript therefore gives greater causal weight to changes in proof, appeal, review and prosecutorial confidence than to a sudden disappearance of supernatural belief.

The 1735 British Witchcraft Act came into force in 1736, repealing the earlier English and Scottish statutes and redirecting prosecution towards people claiming magical powers for fraudulent purposes. Other jurisdictions withdrew capital enforcement through different combinations of legislation, appellate practice, executive intervention and declining willingness to prosecute. Isolated later cases make one European end date misleading.

Modern accusations and the boundary of comparison

The United Nations Human Rights Council adopted resolution 47/8 on 12 July 2021 concerning harmful practices related to accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported on resulting violations, vulnerable groups and state responses in A/HRC/52/47 in 2023. These sources establish that accusation-linked violence remains a current human-rights issue.

The manuscript does not present modern cases as the survival of one European early modern system. Cosmologies, legal orders, colonial histories, family structures, economic pressures and political authorities differ. The comparison is limited to a conversion pattern in which misfortune is assigned to a human agent accused of an invisible act and punishment is imposed without a test that could clear the accused.

Evidence and surviving voices

Court records dominate because prosecution generated paper. The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft demonstrates both the analytical value and the incompleteness of a structured national dataset. Pamphlets such as Potts's account and *Newes from Scotland* preserve detail while advertising official success. Private writing such as Junius's letter is rare. Acquittals, informal reconciliation, unrecorded accusation and violence outside court leave weaker traces.

No scene, private thought or dialogue in the manuscript is invented. Reported actions and statements are paraphrased from documented sources. Where a source is prosecutorial, polemical or shaped by translation, that limitation is made visible in the narrative or here. The central institutional model is a synthesis across regions, not a claim that one procedure or cause governed every trial.

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