

History 291H: European witchcraft in comparative perspective

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Spring Semester 2001

Tues. & Thurs., 2:30–3:45, Herter 640 (Schedule #284588)

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Office hours: Tues. 11–11:45, Wed. 1–2:15, Thurs. 11–11:45, and by appointment.

This syllabus is also available on the World Wide Web:

<<http://www-unix.oit.umass.edu/~ogilvie/courses/spring01/291H/>>

(link available on the University Web-enhanced Courses page)

Note: This is the revised syllabus, as of 2/2/01, with a couple of errors corrected. The corrections were announced in class on 2/1/01.

Brief description of course

Belief in witchcraft seems to be almost universal in human societies. In early modern Europe, this belief led to widespread persecutions in which thousands of Europeans, both women and men, were executed as witches. Ever since, historians have been trying to explain why.

This course will examine European witchcraft belief and the early modern witch-craze in comparative perspective. We will look at the origins of belief in witchcraft, reasons for believing that particular individuals were witches, and the causes and consequences of the waves of trials and executions that disrupted families and villages. By comparing the European persecutions with the Salem witch craze and with witchcraft beliefs in non-western societies, we will deepen our understanding of witchcraft as a universal phenomenon and our knowledge of the historical particularity of the early modern European witch-craze.

Our examination of witchcraft will raise some fundamental questions in the study of history: How do historians know about the past? How do they choose and interpret sources? Can modern science and psychological theory be used to understand the past? Why do historians choose particular events to study? We will also address more specific questions relating to witchcraft as a historical phenomenon: Were there really witches? Were witchcraft persecutions motivated by misogyny? Can we use trial records, evidence obtained by torture, and other biased sources to understand “what really happened”? Can one explanation really account for centuries of persecution, or were witch-crazes complex phenomena with multiple causes?

Seminar meetings will focus on exploring these questions through discussion of common readings; the course will be devoted to inquiry, not to presentation of fixed conclusions. Several short papers will allow students to practice the art of history and develop their own conclusions about the witch-craze and its causes. As a sophomore seminar, this course should teach not only the history of witchcraft but also skills that will help students in future history courses.

Course goals

This course has several different goals. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- Identify the leading modern explanations for the European witch-craze and assess their strengths and weaknesses.
- Find primary and secondary sources in the library.
- Interpret a primary source, including identifying possible sources of bias or inaccuracy.
- Identify the main point of a secondary source and its biases.
- Express your ideas confidently in oral discussion.
- Write a ten-page argumentative essay that effectively uses primary sources to respond to arguments in secondary sources.

Your goals for the course

You have just read my goals for the course. You should now take the time to reflect on those goals and think about any others you might have. In the space below, you can write the reasons *you* are in this course and what you want to get out of it.

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Course requirements and grading

As an honors seminar, this course has high standards and demands a fair amount of work. You are expected to participate regularly; you will also be expected to do some reading beyond what is required on the syllabus, and you will write about 35-40 pages over the course of the semester.

There are seven basic requirements for this course:

1. Attendance and class participation

Attendance and participation are vital for a successful seminar. In the seminar room, we will discuss the issues raised by reading assignments. You must come to class prepared to participate. My role is to choose readings, raise questions, answer points of information, and moderate the discussion; the quality of your classroom experience also depends on **you** and your classmates. Therefore, I expect you to attend each of the 25 meetings (after the initial day). You are allowed three absences; for each absence beyond the third, your participation grade will be lowered by one full letter grade. If you are called on to read your one-page essay (see #2, below), and you don't have it, you will be marked as absent.

If you must miss a class, you should inform me in advance of the reason, or provide documentation (such as a note from the doctor) afterwards. You may send e-mail or leave messages on voice mail (545-1599). Athletes should present a complete schedule of the days they will miss, in writing, by February 22. If a religious holiday will prevent you from attending class, please inform me in writing by February 22. Please note that *all* absences count against your limit, except those that are due to religious holidays, athletic events, or other University-related travel; exceptions will be made only for bona fide emergencies with documentation from the office of the Dean of Students.

If you attend regularly and speak at least once in each seminar meeting, your attendance and participation grade will be a B or better. If you participate frequently (while showing that you have read and thought about the assigned reading and discussion questions), it will be an A.

2. Weekly one-page essays

Most weeks you will be required to write a one-page essay addressing one of the discussion questions for the day. Most of these essays will be due on Thursday (see the course schedule for specific dates). You will not be required to hand them in, but each day they are due, three students will be selected at random to read their essays in order to start the discussion. If you are called and do not have your essay, you will be marked as absent for that discussion. At the end of the semester, you will choose your three best essays for your course portfolio (see below, under “Grading”).

3. Three annotated bibliographies

Early in the semester, you will produce two annotated bibliographies, one of primary sources and one of secondary sources (we will discuss the difference in class). At the end of the semester, you will include these in your course portfolio. After spring break, you will hand in an annotated bibliography for the final ten-page paper.

4. Primary source analysis

Over the course of the semester, you will write one short (three-page) analysis of a primary source. At the end of the semester, you will include a revised version in your course portfolio.

5. Secondary source critique

Over the course of the semester, you will write one short (three-page) critique of selected secondary sources. At the end of the semester, you will include a revised version in your course portfolio.

6. Two peer critiques

Over the course of the semester, you will write two brief (one-page) peer critiques of your fellow students’ secondary source critiques and primary source analyses. At the end of the semester, you will include these in your course portfolio.

7. One ten-page argumentative essay

At the end of the semester, you will hand in a ten-page (2500 word) minimum argumentative essay, which will use primary sources to address a problem raised by secondary sources. You will discuss your essay topic and sources with me during office hours; in the penultimate week of class you will make a brief presentation of your research to the seminar.

Grading for the course

You will receive detailed instructions and grading criteria for each assignment. Additionally, you will receive grades during the semester for assignments 3-6, and you will receive a midterm assessment of your attendance and participation grade to date. Here is how the final course grade will be determined:

Attendance and participation (requirement #1)	25% of final grade
Final course portfolio, consisting of:	
• Best three one-page papers (requirement #2)	15% (5% each)
• Two annotated bibliographies (requirement #3)	10% (5% each)
• Primary source analysis (requirement #4)	10%
• Secondary source critique (requirement #5)	10%
• Two peer critiques (requirement #6)	10% (5% each)
• Ten-page argumentative essay (requirement #7)	20%

You may rewrite the first four items in the portfolio (the one-page papers, annotated bibliographies, source critique, and source analysis) if you like; rewritten items will be regraded *if the original is also included*, and the *higher* grade used to calculate the final course grade. If the original is not included, the first grade will stand.

Policy on late assignments

Late assignments will have the maximum grade reduced by one-half letter grade for each working day they are late (weekends and holidays do not count). Exceptions will be made only when an extension is granted at least two days in advance of the due date, or in the case of a bona fide emergency (documentation from a medical professional or the dean of students may be required).

If an assignment is handed in late, the same penalties will apply to any rewrites that you do for the final course portfolio. For example, if your first bibliography is two days late, and you get a “C” on it, the maximum grade for the rewrite will also be “B.”

If the annotated bibliography for the final essay (due March 27) is more than a week late, the maximum grade for the final essay will be reduced by one letter grade. If the required first draft of the final essay is not turned in within a week, the maximum grade for the final essay will be reduced by one letter grade.

Policy on academic honesty

Plagiarism is grounds for failure in the course. Plagiarism consists of either (a) copying the exact words of another work without both enclosing them in quotation marks and providing a reference, or (b) using information or ideas from another work without providing credit, in notes, to the source of the information or ideas. Submission of a paper copied from another work, or which contains fictitious or falsified notes, will result in automatic failure of the course. Please refer to the *Undergraduate Rights and Responsibilities* booklet for the University’s full policy on academic honesty.

Why is plagiarism so bad? Learning depends on trust—the student trusts the teacher to know the subject and to teach about it clearly, and the teacher trusts the student to show evidence of learning through exams and other assignments. Plagiarizing a paper breaches that trust. It is also theft of someone else’s intellectual property.

Books for course

The following **required** books have been ordered through Food For Thought Books (106 N. Pleasant Street, Amherst, tel. 253-5432). They are also on reserve in the DuBois Library. I have given ISBN numbers in case you want to order them yourself; I encourage you to support local businesses. They are listed in the order we will use them, but bookstores begin to return unsold books around the beginning of November: be sure to buy them while they’re still available. The **suggested** books are not in the bookstore but you can order them if you want.

Required books

Wayne C. **Booth**, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, *The craft of research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). ISBN 0-226-06584-7. \$13.

Mary Lynn **Rampolla**, *A pocket guide to writing in history*, 3rd ed. (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001). ISBN 0-312-24766-4. \$10.

Alan C. **Kors** and Edward Peters, eds., *Witchcraft in Europe, 400-1700: A documentary history*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000). ISBN 0-8122-1751-9. \$22.50.

Robin **Briggs**, *Witches and neighbors: The social and cultural context of European*

witchcraft (New York: Penguin, 1997). ISBN 0-14-014438-2. \$16.

Carlo **Ginzburg**, *The night battles: Witchcraft and agrarian cults in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983). ISBN: 0-8018-4386-3. \$16.

Paul **Boyer** and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem possessed: The social origins of witchcraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974). ISBN 0-674-78526-6. \$16.

Suggested books

Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Ten lessons in clarity and grace*, 6th ed. (New York: Longman, 2000). ISBN 0-673-98243-2. \$22.50. The best guide to improving your writing.

Williams combines detailed explanations of how to write better with exercises in which you turn bad writing into better writing.

American Heritage College Dictionary, 3rd ed. (New York: American Heritage, 1993).

ISBN 0-395-67161-2. \$25. Every student should have a good college dictionary; this is the best. If you can spring for the 4th edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* (the full dictionary on which the college edition is based), you won't regret it—though it may take up a lot of room on your shelf.

A note on readings

Additional **required readings** will be available on **electronic reserve** through the library web page. Electronic reserve is a pilot project of the library reserve department, and this is one of seven courses in the pilot. All reserve readings will also be available in traditional reserve format on the third floor of the library. Electronic reserve is a way to save you big \$\$\$ on course packs while still offering the convenience of 24/7 access to the reserves.

Because this course is a seminar, you should bring careful notes on the readings to each meeting. If you can, bring the books or articles too. However, when reading Booth, you don't need to take careful notes—just get the main ideas. You will want to refer back to Booth when working on your written assignments.

Course schedule with topics, readings, and assignments

Tues. 1/30 Introduction to the course
Getting to know one another.
What is history?
Why study witchcraft?

Please note: there is a reading assignment due on Thursday. Plan to hit the bookstore or the library soon.

Part I: Investigating European witchcraft

In these sessions, we will study sources and historians' overviews to establish a narrative for witchcraft traditions in Europe and gain familiarity with the important sources for studying witchcraft. Our main focus will be the first four "Ws": who, what, when, and where?

- Thurs. 2/1..... Introduction to historical research
Read: Booth, through p. 84. Familiarize yourself with the contents of Rampolla.
- Tues. 2/6..... Introduction to the study of witchcraft
Questions: How do Kors and Peters describe the history of witchcraft in Europe? How do you think this affects their choice of sources? Why are historians interested in witchcraft?
Read: Kors, through p. 57; Briggs, through p. 13.
- Thurs. 2/8..... Witchcraft belief in the Middle Ages
Questions: How do the primary sources characterize witchcraft? Why do they think it is bad? Do they believe in it? What evidence do they have for it?
Read: Kors, §§5-17 (pp. 58-111).

Assignment due: One-page essay

- Tues. 2/13 Witch-hunting from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries
Questions: Why was the Inquisition placed in charge of witchcraft investigations? What was heretical about witchcraft? How was witchcraft related to other heresies?
Read: Kors, §§18-22, 25-31 (pp. 112-127, 149-172).

No assignment due (because of a mixup on the bibliography assignment handout, **both** bibliographies are due on Thurs. 2/15)

- Thurs. 2/15 ... The *Malleus Maleficarum*: A demonological compendium
Questions: How did Krämer and Sprenger characterize witchcraft? What elements did they emphasize that were not part of the earlier medieval tradition?
Read: Kors, §§33-34 (pp. 176-204). Note: we will not discuss all of §34 this week.

Assignment due: Annotated primary source bibliography AND
Annotated secondary source bibliography

- Tues. 2/20 NO CLASS (Monday class schedule in effect)

- Thurs. 2/22 ... Popular witchcraft belief I • Making historical arguments
Questions: How did the “popular” image of the witch differ from the learned view? Who are “the people” anyway?
Read: Briggs, pp. 15-59, Kors, §§23-24, 36-39 (pp. 127-137, 230-247), Booth, pp. 85-148.

Assignment due: One-page essay

- Tues. 2/27 Popular witchcraft belief II
Questions: What did witches allegedly do to their victims? What sort of phenomena fell under the rubric of witchcraft?

Read: Briggs, pp. 61-133; Kors, §§32, 49 (pp. 172-175, 322-329).

Tues. 2/27, Wed. 2/28, Thurs. 3/1: Meet with Prof. Ogilvie in office hours to discuss your final paper topic. I will schedule extra office hours to accommodate everyone's schedule.

Thurs. 3/1..... Witchcraft trials I

Questions: What procedures were inquisitors supposed to use in investigating and trying suspected witches? Were these procedures fair? Why or why not?

Read: Kors, §§34-35 (pp. 204-229).

Assignment due: One-page essay

Tues. 3/6..... Witchcraft trials II

Questions: Did inquisitors and other officials follow the rules they were supposed to follow when trying witches? How did critics of witchcraft trials respond to them?

Read: Kors, §§46, 52, 57, 60-63 (pp. 302-308, 345-348, 359-367, 392-419); Christina Lerner, "*Crimen exceptum?* The crime of witchcraft in Europe" [RESERVE].

Assignment due: Primary source analysis

Tues. 3/6, Wed. 3/7, Thurs. 3/8: Meet with Prof. Ogilvie in office hours to discuss your final paper topic. I will schedule extra office hours to accommodate everyone's schedule.

Thurs. 3/8..... Witchcraft persecutions

Questions: How many people were tried for witchcraft, and how many were killed? What patterns characterized witchcraft persecutions? Did these patterns vary by region?

Read: Briggs, pp. 169-218; Kors, §§45, 47-48, 53-55, 65 (pp. 290-302, 308-322, 348-355, 425-429).

Assignment due: One-page essay

Tues. 3/13 Witchcraft and the family

Questions: How did family and other social relations affect witchcraft accusations?

Read: Briggs, 219-256.

Assignment due: Peer critique #1

Thurs. 3/15 ... Did witchcraft exist?

Questions: In what ways does it make sense to say that witchcraft existed in the early modern period? In what ways does it not make sense?

Read: Ginzburg (entire book).

Assignment due: One-page essay

SPRING BREAK: If you haven't started the reading for your final paper, you may want to do so over break. Note that the annotated bibliography for your paper is due the Tuesday after break.

Part II: Explaining European witchcraft

In these sessions, we will turn to the fifth "W": why? After tackling whether witches really existed, we will explore different explanations for witchcraft belief, assessing their strengths and weaknesses.

Tues. 3/27 Witchcraft and gender I

Questions: What aspects of "female nature" were associated with witchcraft? Why did witches frighten men and women? Were witchcraft accusations a way to keep women in their place?

Read: Clarke Garrett, "Women and witches: Patterns of analysis" [RESERVE]; Alan Anderson and Raymond Gordon, "Witchcraft and the status of women—the case of England" [RESERVE]; J. K. Swales and Hugh V. McLachan, "Witchcraft and the status of women: A comment" [RESERVE]; Carolyn Matalene, "Women as witches" [RESERVE]; Susanna Burghartz, "The equation of women and witches: A case study of witchcraft trials in Lucerne and Lausanne in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries" [RESERVE].

Assignment due: Annotated bibliography for final paper. Please remember the grade penalty if this bibliography is not turned in.
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Thurs. 3/29 ... NO CLASS (Prof. Ogilvie is at a conference).

Tues. 4/3 Witchcraft and gender II

Questions: Were most witches women? How does the answer to this question affect our interpretation of witchcraft? Why have historians argued about this question?

Read: Briggs, pp. 257-286.

Thurs. 4/5 Persecution from below: village rivalries or economic hardships?

Questions: Whom did villagers single out for accusations of witchcraft? What was the economic position of accused witches? Were accusations more common in bad times than in good?

Read: Briggs, pp. 135-169, 287-316.

Assignment due: One-page essay

Tues. 4/10 Witchcraft and social control

Questions: What did central authorities think about witchcraft? Did witchcraft trials or witch crazes serve to strengthen the state's control over its subjects?

Read: Briggs, pp. 317-367; Joseph Klaitz, "Witchcraft trials and absolute monarchy in Alsace" [RESERVE].

- Thurs. 4/12 ... Witchcraft, the Reformation, and science
Questions: Did Reformers and Catholics differ in their witchcraft beliefs? In the fervor or efficacy with which they persecuted alleged witches? Did the rise of modern science bring about a decline in witchcraft belief? Can changes in what elites believe affect what "common people" believe?
Read: Kors, §§40-44, 50-51, 56, 59, 64, 66, 68-69 (pp. 259-289, 330-345, 355-359, 370-379, 419-425, 429-435, 438-448); Allison P. Coudert, "The myth of the improved status of Protestant women: The case of the witchcraze" [RESERVE]; Stuart Clark, "The scientific status of demonology" [RESERVE].
- Tues. 4/17 Critiquing other people's research, and reporting your own
Read: Booth, pp. 149-258.
(If necessary, we will continue last Thursday's discussion today.)

Assignment due: Secondary source critique

Part III: Comparisons

In the last part of the course, we will examine a few comparative cases, in order to determine what was unique about early modern European witchcraft, and then we will discuss general issues about witchcraft, historical method, and the relation between the present and the past.

- Thurs. 4/19 ... Salem village witchcraft I
Questions: How did the witch craze in Salem develop? How does its development compare to European witch crazes?
Read: Boyer, through p. 79; Kors, §58 (pp. 367-370).

Assignment due: One-page essay

- Tues. 4/24 Salem village witchcraft II
Questions: Why did the Salem witch craze take place? Which of the explanations we have discussed seems most appropriate for this case? Why did witchcraft persecutions in Salem take place at a time when they had all but vanished in Europe?
Read: Boyer, p. 80 to end; Kors, §67 (pp. 436-437).

Assignment due: Peer critique #2

- Thurs. 4/26 ... Witchcraft among the Azande
Questions: What role did *mangu* play in Azande society? How similar is it to European and early American witchcraft? How does Evans-Pritchard's approach to witchcraft differ from that taken by historians we have read?
Read: E. E. Evans-Pritchard, "Witchcraft (*mangu*) amongst the A-Zande" [RESERVE].
- Tues. 5/1 Anthropological study of witchcraft
Questions: How does witchcraft belief function in other societies? How is it connected to religious beliefs and practices? How do anthropological

approaches to witchcraft differ from historical approaches?
Read: M. G. Marwick, "The study of witchcraft" [RESERVE]; John Middleton, "Witchcraft and sorcery in Lugbara" [RESERVE]; Thomas J. Schoeneman, "The witch hunt as a culture change phenomenon" [RESERVE].

Assignment due: One-page essay

Thurs. 5/3..... Presentation of research results: Group 1
(5-minute presentations followed by questions)

Assignment due: First draft of final paper (group 1)

Tues. 5/8..... Presentation of research results: Group 2
(5-minute presentations followed by questions)

Assignment due: First draft of final paper (group 2)
N.B. I will not comment on first drafts that are received after May 10.

Thurs. 5/10 ... "The Burning Times": Modern-day witches look at the past
The film *The Burning Times*, directed by Donna Read, will be screened.

Tues. 5/15 Concluding reflections: witchcraft past and present
Questions: What is your overall impression of witchcraft belief and persecution? What can historians learn, and what can't we know? How do modern Wiccan and other "witch" movements compare with historical witchcraft? Does our society have any equivalents to the witch-hunt?
Read: Briggs, pp. 369-411; Christina Lerner, "Witchcraft past and present" [RESERVE]; Marilyn R. Pukilla, "The literature of contemporary Wicca: Formalists, feminists, and free spirits" [RESERVE].

Assignment due: One-page essay
First drafts of final papers will be returned today

Tues. 5/22 . Course Portfolio Due by noon in Herter 624!

Tips for success

History 291H is not an easy course, but if you keep a few simple points in mind, it will be a lot easier. Here are some tips for doing well in the course. They all are really aspects of one overarching principle: TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN EDUCATION!

- Read the syllabus carefully, and write down in your organizer the dates on which assignments are due. This will help you budget your time for the weeks when there is more work than normal.
- Plan to spend 4-8 hours every week, outside of class, working on the course.
- Complete all the assigned readings every week in a timely fashion, preferably in one or two study sessions, and jot down important points in your notes after finishing the readings. This should take about four hours every week, or possibly more. As you read each assignment, think about how it relates to earlier readings and lectures, and jot down some of those thoughts in your notes. Don't use a highlighter for note-taking; it substitutes motion for thought.
- Use reference works to look up unfamiliar words and concepts.
- If your apartment or dorm room aren't quiet places to study, go to the library or somewhere else quiet. The main level of DuBois Library is a good place because it has lots of dictionaries and encyclopedias. If you need coffee while studying, try the Newman Center. Study a lot during the day, then you can relax in the evening without feeling stressed out or guilty.
- Ask questions about what you don't understand, but only after you have tried to answer them yourself. Part of your college education is learning to be self-reliant. Who should you ask? Prof. Ogilvie, of course; if your question is factual, you can also ask a reference librarian.
- Take advantage of Prof. Ogilvie's office hours if there are questions you did not have time to raise in seminar.
- Arrive for class on time, and pay attention to what everyone says. Take good notes. If you need guidance on note-taking, Learning Support Services (DuBois Library, 10th floor) offers a Note Taking Workshop several times each semester. They also offer workshops in time management and test-taking should you feel in need of help in those areas.
- Start work on each written assignment as soon after you receive it as your schedule allows. Complete a rough draft of the primary source analysis and secondary source critique at least five days before they are due, and revise all your papers at least once before you hand them in. Be sure to copyedit and proofread your papers carefully.
- Consider forming an informal study group.
- Talk to Prof. Ogilvie if you feel overwhelmed or if you are falling behind in the course. My main goal is to help you learn.