



European Witchcraft From Series Major Issues in History

E. William Monter

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The importance of witchcraft as a subject of historical inquiry can be traced back to its appearance in the years 1450-1750 as a particularly virulent blend of sorcery and heresy. Where sorcery is a universal concept appearing in societies throughout history and aiming at supernatural effects through magic and ritual, heresy comprises the specifically Christian element in witchcraft: the pact with the Devil and the black mass. Both of these concepts existed and were condemned by numerous laws in medieval Europe. What brought them together to be combined in witchcraft theory was the presence of the Devil; and sorcery came to be regarded as a particular kind of heresy achieved through diabolical means. The Enlightenment spelled the end of the era of witchcraft and belief in the Devil. This is one reason why it is so difficult to reconstruct the events and theories that were embodied in the concept of witchcraft. The attempt must be made, however, if we are to fully understand the history of the development of western civilization. T this end Professor Monter has assembled a valuable collection of documents and essays which provide a unique source of information on a fascinating topic



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