

The Scottish Witch Hunt In Context

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this book is a collection of essays on scottish witchcraft and witch hunting which covers the whole period of the scottish witch hunt from the mid 16th century to the early 18th it particularly emphasizes the later stages since scholars are now as keen to explain why witch hunting declined as why it occurred there are studies of particular witchcraft panics

including a reassessment of the role of king james vi the book thus covers a wide range of topics concerned with scottish witch hunting and also places it in the context of other topics gender relations folklore magic and healing and moral regulation by church and state

shortlisted for the 2008 katharine briggs award witch hunting in scotland presents a fresh perspective on the trial and execution of the hundreds of women and men prosecuted for the crime of witchcraft an offence that involved the alleged practice of maleficent magic and the worship of the devil for inflicting harm on their neighbours and making pacts with the devil brian p levack draws on law politics and religion to explain the intensity of scottish witch hunting topics discussed include the distinctive features of the scottish criminal justice system the use of torture to extract confessions the intersection of witch hunting with local and national politics the relationship between state building and witch hunting and the role of james vi scottish calvinism and the determination of zealous scottish clergy and magistrates to achieve a godly society this original survey combines broad interpretations of the rise and fall of scottish witchcraft prosecutions with detailed case studies of specific witch hunts witch hunting in scotland makes fascinating reading for anyone with an interest in witchcraft or in the political legal and religious history of the early modern period

this book brings together twelve studies that collectively provide an overview of the main issues of live interest in scottish witchcraft as well as fresh studies of the well established topic of witch hunting the book also launches an exploration of some of the more esoteric aspects of magical belief and practice

scotland as with the rest of europe was troubled from time to time by outbreaks of witchcraft which the authorities sought to contain and then to suppress and the outbreak of 1658 1662 is generally agreed to represent the high water mark of scottish persecution these were peculiar years for scotland for 9 years scotland was effectively an english province with largely english officials in charge but in 1660 this suddenly changed the tension between imported official english attitudes to witchcraft and the revived fervor of calvinist religion combined to produce a peculiar atmosphere in which

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between april 1649 and july 1650 over 500 people were accused of witchcraft in scotland this period represented one of the five peaks in witch hunting in early modern scotland identified by christina lerner in her landmark work on the scottish witch hunts enemies of god 1983 to this date there has been no in depth study of the 1649 50 scottish witch hunt this thesis offers an examination of the 1649 50 witch hunt considering the response of the central authorities to the outbreak of witch hunting in the localities and the efforts to organise and control the witch hunt it also considers the actions of the local presbyteries and kirk sessions in the synod of lothian and tweeddale in responding to community pressure for action on suspected witches a unique approach has been adopted in considering the nature of covenanting government and how it shaped the central response to the witch hunt and the attempts to control the witch hunt from above this thesis combines an examination of the volatile political situation in 1649 50 with an analysis of the complex social nature of witchcraft accusations this thesis brings together the social and political history of the period in the context of explaining the 1649 50 witch hunt with particular regard to the synod of lothian and tweeddale

the years between 1600 and 1700 were a period of war famine plague and religious upheaval in scotland a time when ordinary women and men of the scottish borders who fell under the suspicion of the kirk would face interrogation and torture a time when fear of auld nick turned the world upside down and the cry of witch would almost always

lead to the rope and the flame mary craig explores this tremulous period of scottish history and examines the causes and effects of the 17th century witchcraft trials and executions in the scottish borders

along the coast of fife in villages like culross and pittenweem history records that some women were executed as witches nevertheless the reality of what happened the night that janet cornfoot was lynched at pittenweem is hard to grasp as one sits by the harbour watching the fishing boats unload their catch and the pleasure boats rising with the tide how could people do this to an old woman why was no one ever brought to justice and why would anyone defend such a lynching the task of the historian is to try to make events in the past come alive and seem less strange the details of the witch hunt are fascinating some of the anecdotes are strange the modern reader finds it hard to imagine illness being blamed on the malevolence of a beggar woman denied charity or the economic failure of a sea voyage being attributed to the village hag not bad weather witch hunting was related to ideas values attitudes and political events it was a complicated process involving religious and civil authorities village tensions and the fears of the elite the witch hunt in scotland also took place at a time when one of the main agendas was the creation of a righteous or godly society as a result religious authorities had control over aspects of people s lives which seem as strange to us today as beliefs about magic or witchcraft it was not accidental that the witch hunt in scotland and specifically in fife should have happened at this time this book tells the story of what occurred over a period of a century and a half and offers some explanation as to why it occurred

this study explores witchcraft and witch hunts in scotland from the middle of the sixteenth century to the early eighteenth century the research follows witchcraft into the present to understand how it was transformed from an act of heresy into a tourist industry for scotland the relationship between the church and witchcraft has been thoroughly explored however the public s perception of witchcraft has had far less historical consideration this thesis tracks the protestant church as well as the scottish crown s stance on witchcraft throughout the years a record of events relevant to the evolution of the perception of witchcraft in scottish society is included the historiography

of scottish witchcraft is well established many documents exist regarding the church s stance on witchcraft anentis witchcraftis 1563 and the government s stance on witchcraft the witchcraft act of 1604 additionally many documents from witch hunt trials an account of the tryal and examination of the north berwick witches 1590 91 have been preserved while documents regarding witchcraft are not in short supply very few of the extant texts focus on the laypeople s perception by using surviving church and government documents newspaper articles folklore art songs traditions and written work of the time this research provides a better understanding of the laypeople s concerns and feelings towards witchcraft this study also revealed the impact of pre existing societal norms and beliefs including the ways in which they played into scottish policy making and the public s reactions the conclusions of this research allow for a greater understanding of the scottish peasantry s perception of witches witchcraft and witch trials they also provide significant insight into how the scottish witch trials were transformed from a dark mark in history into a thriving tourist industry the electronic version of this dissertation is accessible from hdl handle net 20 500 11875 2235

this pioneering collection concentrates on witchcraft beliefs rather than witch hunting it ranges widely across areas of popular belief culture and ritual practice as well as dealing with intellectual life and incorporating regional and comparative elements

taking an interdisciplinary perspective witchcraft and folk belief in the age of enlightenment represents the first in depth investigation of scottish witchcraft and witch belief post 1662 the period of supposed decline of such beliefs an age which has been referred to as the long eighteenth century coinciding with the scottish enlightenment the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were undoubtedly a period of transition and redefinition of what constituted the supernatural at the interface between folk belief and the philosophies of the learned for the latter the eradication of such beliefs equated with progress and civilization but for others such as the devout witch belief was a matter of faith such that fear and dread of witches and their craft lasted well beyond the era of the major witch hunts this study seeks to illuminate the distinctiveness of the scottish experience to assess the impact of enlightenment thought upon witch belief and to understand how these beliefs operated across all levels of scottish society

witches of the north scotland and finnmark is a comparative study of witchcraft persecution in scotland and finnmark norway a wide range of quantitative and qualitative analyses based mainly on legal documents shed light on the witch hunts in the two regions during the seventeenth century statistical analyses give information about tendencies in the source material in total the qualitative chapters contain close readings of trial documents wherein the various voices heard during a trial are analysed the voice of the scribe the voice of the law the voice of the accused person and the voices of the witnesses the analyses combined provide a broad view of the historical phenomenon in question as well as in depth studies of individual witchcraft cases

the book provides an overview and analysis of the witch trials in the scottish borders in the 17th century the 17th century was a time of upheaval in scottish and british history with a civil war the abolition of the monarchy the plague and the reformation all influencing the social context at the time this book explores the social political geographical religious and legal structures that led to the increased amount of witch trials and executions in the scottish borders as well as looking at specific trials the book also explores the role of women both as accuser and as accused

this book presents a selection of original texts of scottish witchcraft trial records with historical commentary these are the essential sources for understanding the intensity of witch hunting in scotland witchcraft was a statutory offence in scotland between 1563 and 1736 and the authorities held many trials and executions for witchcraft in this period this book presents a representative selection of original records of these trials with historical commentary the documents are selected mainly from the records of local kirk sessions presbyteries and burghs and the central justiciary court some records include statements by neighbours about alleged bewitchment these narrate quarrels illness and healing and misfortunes in everyday life in other records the accused witches themselves are interrogated about alleged dealings with the devil the resulting confessions can include fantastical accounts of visionary experiences and encounters with fairies each case has its own uniqueness these are all individual human stories often tragic ones the records show the local church authorities and the criminal courts investigating and unwittingly creating an impossible crime

in the summer of 1590 shortly after returning from denmark with his new queen james vi of scotland later james i of england made the decision to attend the trials of several accused witches from the small kirk of north berwick the accused attempted to murder james by using witchcraft to sink the ship upon which he had journeyed of all the figures that stand out during the witch hunts of early modern europe none is more noticeable than james vi of scotland later james i of england although more famous for his commissioning of a translation of the bible his involvement in the which trials have an important and dark place in history james perhaps due to his station in life is considered by many to be the most avid of all witch hunters he has become a sinister figure in the history of witchcraft in most writings prior to this century historians burden him with the deaths of thousands of accused witches

the european witch hunt seeks to explain why thousands of people mostly lower class women were deliberately tortured and killed in the name of religion and morality during three centuries of intermittent witch hunting throughout europe and north america combining perspectives from history sociology psychology and other disciplines this book provides a comprehensive account of witch hunting in early modern europe julian goodare sets out an original interpretation of witch hunting as an episode of ideologically driven persecution by the godly state in the era of the reformation and counter reformation full weight is also given to the context of village social relationships and there is a detailed analysis of gender issues witch hunting was a legal operation and the courts rationale for interrogation under torture is explained panicking local elites rather than central governments were at the forefront of witch hunting further chapters explore folk beliefs about legendary witches and intellectuals beliefs about a secret conspiracy of witches in league with the devil witch hunting eventually declined when the ideological pressure to combat the devil s allies slackened a final chapter sets witch hunting in the context of other episodes of modern persecution this book is the ideal resource for students exploring the history of witch hunting its level of detail and use of social theory also make it important for scholars and researchers

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this book is a scholarly edition of primary sources for witch hunting and demonic possession in scotland it contains narratives of remarkable witchcraft prosecutions and tracts expounding witchcraft theory the narratives provide the intense emotional drama eye catching colour and nightmarish horror that made witchcraft such a compelling idea the accused witches own voices are sometimes heard under the harrowing circumstances of interrogation under torture meanwhile educated ministers and lawyers develop their theoretical ideas about witches and the devil not every theorist agrees with the prosecutions and doubts arise that would eventually lead witch hunting to lose its credibility the book s most detailed narrative concerns the bargarran witches of 1697 in which seven witches were executed for the demonic possession of the 11 year old christian shaw the book shows how this was connected with the sensational witchcraft panic in 1692 at salem massachusetts

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