

Marko Nenonen and Raisa Maria Toivo, eds. *Writing Witch-Hunt Histories: Challenging the Paradigm*.

Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 173. Leiden: Brill, 2014. xiv + 220 pp. \$165. ISBN: 978-90-04-25790-0.

The volume of scholarly work devoted to the study of European witchcraft over the past fifty years makes historiographic studies of the field extremely valuable but also quite difficult. This is particularly true today, when traditional paradigms are collapsing under the weight of new research and new analytical, geographic, and social perspectives. This welcome contribution focuses on the historiography of the

witch-hunts themselves, and the eight constituent essays aim to review past scholarship while at the same time challenging traditional paradigms — geographic and interpretive — that resulted from scholars' fixation on the mass trials of Western Europe. Thematically, these essays are extremely varied, ranging from Marianna Murayeva's and Gunnar Knutson's geographic surveys of the witchcraft historiography of Russia and Spain, to Charles Zika's essential examination of the use of visual images in witchcraft research, to the methodological studies of gender by Raisa Maria Toivo and of ethnicity by Rune Blix Hagen. Together, however, these essays pose two distinct but related arguments about the danger of historical generalization.

First, they point out that a great deal of scholarly research over the past fifty years has revolved around erroneous perceptions of what was characteristic of witch trials. In "Russian Witchcraft on Trial," for example, Murayeva observes that discussions of Russian trials begin almost invariably with the observation that most Russian witches were men. Yet recent research has shown that this claim is valid only because the tsarist judiciary prosecuted as witchcraft crimes such as the possession of magic books, for which the accused were overwhelmingly male. Yet women were more often accused of using malevolent magic or casting spells, and were punished more severely. Russian witches may thus appear typically male not because of innate Russian beliefs, but because the state prosecuted the possession of illicit reading material more frequently and aggressively than harmful magic. Similarly, in his study of witchcraft historiography in Spain, Knutson dissects the almost universal assumption among nonspecialists that witchcraft prosecutions essentially ceased in Spain after the Inquisition made its skepticism clear following the Zagarramurdi trials of 1614. Knutson shows, however, that trials continued, but shifted to secular and episcopal courts outside the Inquisition's direct control.

Second, these essays demonstrate that even when generalizations are valid, focusing on assumed normative cases leads to limited perspectives: only through an analysis of the data in its totality can we thoroughly understand the place of witchcraft in early modern thought and society. Toivo, for example, demonstrates that the dichotomous view of gender arising from the assumption that the normative witch was female is completely inappropriate to an analysis of Finnish witch trials. Hagen makes a similar point in his fascinating analysis of witch trials in Finnmark. Although past research has tended to minimize and marginalize their experience, Hagen shows that male Sami sorcerers played significant roles in the trials alongside larger numbers of accused Norwegian women. Further, their records shed valuable light on the difficult problem of the relationship of witchcraft to shamanism.

Any attempt to engage current scholarly discourse historiographically must wrestle with the problem of relevance, and here this collection's success is mixed. Often the problem lies not in the author's scholarship but the pace of current publication. Murayeva's assessment of the state of Russian witchcraft studies, for example, already suffers from the omission of Valerie Kivelson's splendid 2013 book on seventeenth-century Russian witchcraft. On the other hand, Marko Nenonen's attempt to evade the issue entirely and focus his somewhat polemical

attack on witch-panic historiography (“The Dubious History of Witch-Hunts”) on such mid-century authors as Norman Cohn, Hugh Trevor-Roper, and Keith Thomas, robs his analysis of much of its impact.

Although individually these essays offer valuable insight to anyone interested in the state of current witchcraft scholarship, the collection is more than just the sum of its parts. It acknowledges that as historians we must generalize and impose arbitrary limits on the scope of our research. At the same time, however, these essays insist that we must do this critically and self-consciously, and that we must challenge our impulse to think about historical processes in generalized and geographically and categorically limited terms.

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