

*Agents of Witchcraft in Early Modern Italy and Denmark.*

Louise Nyholm Kallestrup.

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Louise Nyholm Kallestrup has provided a study that specialists of the Reformation and of the history of witchcraft will find interesting and useful. Based on archival sources, this work aims to compare the judicial treatment and popular understanding of witchcraft in Catholic Italy and Lutheran Denmark. Comparing cases tried by the Roman Inquisition in the Tuscan town of Orbetello and by the provincial tribunal in Viborg in Jutland,

Kallestrup begins this study with a striking contrast in the sentences passed against two convicted witches: in 1650 the Inquisition condemned a friar to a fine and jail term, whereas the provincial court in Viborg sentenced a woman to be burned at the stake in 1620. The author attempts to explain the causes behind the dramatically different treatment of witchcraft cases by the Roman Inquisition, which throughout Italy executed virtually no one for witchcraft from the late sixteenth century on, and by lay courts in Denmark, where roughly a thousand persons were executed for witchcraft following the Reformation.

Comparing the procedures against witchcraft in Italy and Denmark, Kallestrup notes that while the Inquisitor initiated and prosecuted trials *ex officio*, Danish courts continued to use the accusatorial system, in which the aggrieved party or parties (i.e., those who believed that they were the victims of witchcraft) played an active role in the prosecution of witchcraft cases. This is a very important distinction that lies in the face of what one might expect; Brian Levack has argued that a major factor behind the great witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the shift from the accusatorial to the inquisitorial judicial system and that regions where the former survived tended to have fewer trials and executions for witchcraft. It would have been good to offer an explanation as to why the accusatorial system did not serve as a brake on the prosecution of witches in Denmark. Perhaps this can be explained by the Danes' requirement of the testimony of witnesses to the good character of the accused as the means of proving her innocence; failure to produce such character witnesses ensured a guilty verdict. Also key was that in Jutland suspects were interrogated only after the verdict had been rendered.

Kallestrup's findings for Orbetello, such as the prevalence of cases of divination and especially love magic rather than *maleficia*, reinforce what we have learned from other studies of the Roman Inquisition. One decided difference, however, is the much greater proclivity to use torture; the author asserts that all those convicted of witchcraft in Orbetello were subject to torture before they were sentenced. Inquisitors applied torture much more sparingly in other parts of the Italian Peninsula. In Denmark, the principal aim of torture was to elicit a confession, not for a conviction — torture was applied only after a guilty verdict — but rather for the salvation of the person found guilty. Since it was understood that a witch had abjured the Christian faith to become a servant of Satan, a full confession of her sins under torture could save her soul, though not her life. While the Inquisition viewed witchcraft above all as the sin of heresy that required atonement, in Denmark, where love magic was rare, judicial authorities and common folk stressed the harm that witches caused. Moreover, Danish Lutherans' growing conservatism and increasingly hard line against witchcraft resulted in a huge increase in cases after 1617.

The Inquisition's records are far more detailed than those of Jutland, but Kallestrup on the whole does a good job of contrasting these widely divergent court records. She persuasively demonstrates, for example, that the accused in Italy were generally poor and often included prostitutes and concubines, who were apt to employ love magic with the aim of getting a man to marry them. In Denmark, as in Italy, most suspects were women,

but they were usually married or widowed and were not among the poorest members of society. The author could have spent a bit more time explaining why women were especially prone to being accused of witchcraft, a subject of profound interest to historians of witchcraft. All told, this comparative study makes a worthy contribution to the huge body of literature on the subject of early modern witchcraft.

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