



Historical Approaches to Child Witches

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Introduction

“Historical Approaches to Child Witches” is a bibliographical survey of research literature related to children involved in witchcraft trials. The main emphasis is on children accused of witchcraft in the Early Modern Period in Europe and Colonial America. In addition, some references are included dealing with children as witnesses as well as victims in witchcraft trials. Bibliographical references to the topic of children who allegedly were possessed by the devil have not been included in this bibliography. Chronologically, children were accused of witchcraft throughout the period of witchcraft persecution. There were early cases from the late 16th century and the early 17th where children were believed to be witches and were accused of witchcraft, particularly in Germany and Spain. However, the bulk of children involved in witchcraft trials are found at the end of the witch-hunt, during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. In this late era of the witch-hunt, we find several witchcraft panics, linked witchcraft trials taking place during a concentrated period of time, where children were involved, for instance in Scandinavia and in Colonial America. However, the increasing tendency was that trials involving children were sent to courts of appeal, as the juries in local courts found these cases difficult. From the late 17th century, skepticism made itself felt as to the possibility of regarding witchcraft a crime, and courts of appeal acquitted many children accused of witchcraft. The notion that children were sacrificed to the devil by their mothers is presented already in 1486 in the demonological treatise *Malleus Maleficarum* by Jacob Sprenger (b. 1436–d. 1496) and Heinrich Kramer (b. 1430–d. 1505). The ideas about children possibly being witches were not discussed more thoroughly until Peter Binsfeld gave out his demonology in Trier in 1589. He argued for torture to be used to bring children below fourteen years of age to confess to witchcraft as well as for taking children’s denunciation of adults seriously. Ideas related to children being ensnared by the devil had by 1662 found its way even to the district of Finnmark in northern Norway. In a panic taking place in 1662–1663, the confessions contained notions about a pregnant woman carrying a devil, not a child, the devil fathering a child, the mother sacrificing her eldest daughter to the devil, and the impossibility for a family to get rid of the devil as soon as he had gotten a foothold in a family. As a select bibliography, the entries below are aimed to give information about research related to children in witchcraft cases all over Europe, in addition to the 1692 cases in Salem in Colonial America.

General Overviews

The general overviews include articles focused on child witches in general, not necessarily related to a particular country or region. Trends in the period as for persecution of children are pointed out, particularly the change from very young children being targets of witches during the initial phases of the witch-hunt to children taking more active parts in the trials during the later phases of the hunt. The persecution of children is seen in connection with important demonological treatises, books spread in the European book market about the powerful devil and what he could accomplish on earth, with an emphasis on alleged witches entering into a pact with the devil. In this way they got hold of the power of the devil and were able to perform harmful witchcraft, including the ability to shape-shift and to fly through the air, while also taking part in witches’ gatherings and collective witchcraft operations. Throughout the period of witch-hunting, there were increasing numbers of children accused of witchcraft, as new demonological ideas were more widely known among people. [Behringer 1989](#) argues that increased knowledge of demonological ideas as time went by influenced the stories told by children during interrogation, and [Monter 2006](#) gives a chronological survey of the role of children during the period with witchcraft trials, while [Walinski-Kiehl 1996](#) focuses on arguments for using torture against children accused of witchcraft.

- [Behringer, Wolfgang](#). “Kinderhexenprozesse: Zur Rolle von Kindern in der Geschichte der Hexenverfolgung.” *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 16 (1989): 31–45.

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The article focuses on the changing role of children through the period of witchcraft persecution. The number of trials involving children increased at the end of the period of witchcraft persecution, due to the fact that diabolical knowledge to a greater and greater degree was mediated and received by children and made into their own stories as time went by. Children finally played an active role during witchcraft persecution, not least because of them taking part in denunciation of others, children as well as adults. (Title translation: Witchcraft trials against children: The role of children in the history of witchcraft persecution.)

Find this resource:

Monter, William. "Children." In *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Edited by Richard M. Golden, 183–185. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

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This article gives an overview of research focused on children in witchcraft trials, drawing major lines from the earliest phases of witchcraft persecution to the final stages. At first, very young children were involved in witchcraft trials because they were targets of witches and even killed and eaten at Sabbaths. As the persecution continued, older children began taking part in roles as denouncers, accusers, and witch-finders. By the beginning of the 17th century, children below the age of majority were imprisoned and punished for witchcraft in most parts of Europe.

Find this resource:

Walinski-Kiehl, Robert S. In "The Devil's Children: Child Witch-Trials in Early Modern Germany." *Continuity and Change* 11.2 (1996): 171–189.

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The text discusses demonological notions of the possibility of children being witches. Mention is made of the German bishop Peter Binsfeld, who approved of torture of children below fourteen years of age and allowed testimonies of children to be used against adults. The main argument was that witchcraft was an exceptional crime; therefore, extraordinary methods had to be used. Prior to the 1580s, jurists had paid little attention to the issue.

Find this resource:

Reference Works

Two major reference works on witchcraft in general have appeared in printed editions. The first, Richard M. Golden's edited four-volume *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition* was published in 2006 ([Golden 2006](#)). Brian P. Levack's edited one-volume work *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* was published in 2013 ([Levack 2013](#)). These works contain information about child witches mostly included in a number of articles, either geographically or thematically focused. The information about child witches contained in these two reference works is rendered in the section [General Mention in Articles](#). In addition, Golden's encyclopedia contains an article by William Monter, "Children," which deals with children in witchcraft trials more generally ([Monter 2006](#), cited under [General Overviews](#)). Both the mentioned reference works are available online. The two reference works contribute, by the geographic variety of articles and the numerous perspectives, to bring aspects of the topic of children in witchcraft trials to the fore and include this specific element of witchcraft trials in articles which have a broader scope.

- **Golden, Richard M., ed. *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006.**

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In addition to the article by William Monter on children in witchcraft trials, the encyclopedia contains mentioning of children in the article "Infanticide" by Oscar di Simplicio, where the notion of witches devouring children or sucking their blood is emphasized, and in the article "Cannibalism" by Charles Zika, which discusses the idea of eating children, pointing to the fact that this is one of the fundamental characteristics of the witch in the popular culture of European societies. Children are also mentioned in articles with a geographical frame, like the entries on "Mora Witches" in Sweden ([Sörlin 2006a](#), cited under [Scandinavia and the Netherlands](#)), "Lorraine," "The Netherlands," and "Salzburg."

Find this resource:

Levack, Brian P., ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

DOI: [10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001) [Save Citation](#) » [Export Citation](#) » [E-mail Citation](#) »

This book mentions children in various contexts throughout: abduction of children, eating of children, children as accusers, children as witch-finders, children as witnesses, accounts of Sabbaths given by children, children being possessed by the devil, and exorcism.

Find this resource:

Textbooks and Chapters in Textbooks

The entries in this section deal with monographs as well as chapters in textbooks dealing with child witches. As very few monographs exist on this topic, it has been seen as fruitful to combine these two types of publications. The chapters in textbooks are related to different areas of Europe as well as Africa, and they are written mostly as parts of broader regional studies. [Kieckhefer 1998](#) deals with the early phases of the witchcraft persecution, taking up the theme of witch-vampires killing and devouring babies, and how this fear is handled by the authorities. [Dillinger 2013](#), [Schulte 2000](#), [Roper 2010](#), and [Rau 2006](#) all deal with close readings of German cases, discussing structures in cases against children as well as demonological ideas in such cases. [Monter 1993](#) discusses children participating in witches' gatherings in several European countries. As for Scandinavia, close readings of cases against children during the 1660s in northern Norway and Sweden are performed by [Willumsen 2013](#) and [Lagerlöf-Génétaï 1990](#), respectively. [Brain 1970](#) focuses on Cameroon after the arrival of the Europeans and its failure to cope with the new situation, resulting in the belief that child witches were everywhere. [La Fontaine 2009](#) draws attention to contemporary Africa, particularly highlighting the link between children, devil possession, and witchcraft.

- **Behringer, W., and C. Opitz-Belakhal, eds. *Hexenkinder—Kinderbanden—Strassenkinder*. Bielefeld, Germany: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2014.**

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The book contains a number of articles about child witches, focusing on children as victims and offenders in Early Modern witchcraft trials, childhood and belief in witches, African child witches in the present, and child deviance and the law. In addition, the book has articles on street children and gangs of children in the past and the present. (Title translation: Child Witches—Gangs of Children—Street Children).

Find this resource:

Brain, Robert. "Child-Witches." In *Witchcraft: Confessions and Accusations*. Edited by Mary Douglas, 161–179. London: Tavistock, 1970.

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The chapter explores the psychology of child witchcraft among the Bangwa of Cameroon. Most accusations of witchcraft had to do with unexplained sickness and death, so also the accusations against suspected child witches. After an introductory presentation of the belief system and the social context of witchcraft, a close reading of a child's confession is performed. The ways of interrogation are seen as an invitation to children's fantasies.

Find this resource:

Dillinger, Johannes. *Kinder im Hexenprozess: Magie und Kindheit in der Frühen Neuzeit*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013.

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After an introductory chapter focusing on the view of childhood in the Early Modern Period, the author gives in the main chapter a number of close readings of primary sources from various parts of Germany. In a concluding chapter, patterns and structures of witchcraft trials against children are discussed. (Title translation: Children in witchcraft trials: Magic and childhood in early modern period.)

Find this resource:

Kieckhefer, Richard. "Avenging the Blood of Children: Anxiety over Child Victims and the Origins of the European Witch Trials." In *The Devil, Heresy and Witchcraft in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey B. Russell*. Edited by Alberto Ferreiro, 91–109. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1998.

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This essay deals with the early phases of the witchcraft persecution, when alleged witches and witch-vampires were accused of killing and eating babies. Three types of examples are given: firstly, witch-vampires charged with killing children in their cradles; secondly, conspiratorial witches charged with killing children and taking their bodies to the Sabbath; and thirdly, witches charged simply with causing bodily harm and death to children by their bewitchment.

Find this resource:

La Fontaine, Jean. *The Devil's Children: From Spirit Possession to Witchcraft: New Allegations that Affect Children*. London: Ashgate, 2009.

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The book deals with aspects of possession and witchcraft related to children. A number of cases of serious child abuse have resulted from beliefs that children may be possessed by evil spirits and may then be given the power to bewitch others. Misfortune, failure, illness, and death may be blamed on them.

Find this resource:

Lagerlöf-Génétaï, Birgitta. "De svenske häxprocessernas utbrottsskede 1668–1671." Doctoral diss., Stockholm University. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wicksell International, 1990.

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This dissertation examines the outbreak of the intense Swedish witchcraft trials of the 1660s and 1670s. Following a description of the sources is the main chapter, which consists of a close reading that pays particular attention to the accused, the accusers, and the contents of the confessions. Children and the role they played are highlighted throughout, as children's testimonies were decisive during these particular trials. In an additional chapter, the trials are contextualized, giving the background of the trials, also with regard to children's upbringing and living conditions. (Title translation: The outbreak of the Swedish witchcraft trials 1668–1671.)

Find this resource:

Monter, William. "Les enfants au sabbat: Bilan provisoire." In *Le sabbat des sorciers, XVth–XVIIth siècles*. Edited by Nicole Jacques-Chaquin and Maxine Praud. Grenoble, France: Jérôme Millon, 1993.

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The book contains proceedings from an international conference, and the chapter by Monter deals with children mentioned as taking part in witches' Sabbaths in several European countries: France, Spain, Germany, and Belgium.

Find this resource:

Rau, Kurt. *Augsburger Kinderhexenprozesse 1625–1730*. Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2006.

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This book deals with witchcraft trials against children centered around the ideas of diabolical witchcraft. Forty-five girls and boys from seven to seventeen years of age were accused of witchcraft in Augsburg during the 17th and early 18th century. They received severe sentences, even sentences of execution. In order to contextualize the trials, the book throws light on contemporary political, economic, and confessional conditions. In addition, solid analyses of primary sources are carried out. (Title translation: Witchcraft trials against children in Augsburg 1625–1715.)

Find this resource:

Roper, Lyndal. "Child Witches in Seventeenth-Century Germany." In *Childhood and Violence in the Western Tradition*. Edited by Laurence Brockliss and Heather Montgomery, 292–299. Oxford: Oxbow, 2010.

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The article deals with a group of children accused of witchcraft in the prince-bishopric of Würzburg in Germany during the 1620s. Particular attention is paid to the case against the twelve-year-old boy Hans Merckler and the ideas coming to the fore in his confession, including renouncing God and being in league with the devil as well as the intention of setting up a witches' school.

Find this resource:

Schulte, Rolf. "Ein Kinderhexenprozess aus St Margarethen." In *Wider Hexerey und Teufelswerk: Von Hexen und ihre Verfolgung*. Edited by A. Chmielewski-Hagius, 48–54. Itzehoe, Germany: Museum Prinzesshof, 2000.

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This chapter was published in connection with a museum exhibition. It deals with the trial of a twelve-year-old girl from the parish of St. Margarethen in the district of Steinberg in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, near the border of Denmark. The text was written in relation to an exhibition at the Museum Prinzesshof in Schleswig-Holstein. (Chapter title translation: A trial against a child witch from St. Margarethen; book title translation: Against witchcraft and the devil's work: On witches and the persecution of these.)

Find this resource:

Voltmer, Rita. "Jesuiten und Kinderhexen. Thesen zur Entstehung, Rezeption und Verbreitung eines Verfolgungsmusters." In *Hexenkinder—Kinderbanden—Strassenkinder*. Edited by W. Behringer and C. Opitz-Belakhal, 201–232. Bielefeld, Germany: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2014.

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This chapter deals with links between the Jesuit order and the increasing number of child witches and children as witnesses in witchcraft trials. During the late 16th-century massive witch-hunts in the city of Trier and the surrounding areas, and in the territory of the Imperial abbey of Saint Maximin, male and female children were accused in witchcraft trials, and executed when they reached a juvenile age. In his treatises from 1589, 1591 and 1596, Peter Binsfeld emphasized the confessions of child witches. With the help of the Jesuit network, the notion of child witches was spread to Catholic Europe and even Protestant England. (Chapter title translation: Jesuits and Child Witches. Theses Concerning the Origin, Reception and Transmission of a Persecution Pattern.)

Find this resource:

Willumsen, Liv Helene. "The 1662–1663 Panic." In *Witches of the North: Scotland and Finnmark*. By Liv Helene Willumsen, 273–298. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2013.

DOI: 10.1163/9789004252929 [Save Citation](#) » [Export Citation](#) » [E-mail Citation](#) »

The chapter investigates the trial of twelve-year-old Maren Olsdatter. She is interrogated during the last panic in the district of Finnmark, northern Norway, 1662–1663, wherein five other small girls were also accused of witchcraft. Answering in a detailed way, she seemed to have thorough knowledge of demonological ideas before she was imprisoned. All children's cases were sent to the court of appeal, and they were all acquitted.

Find this resource:

Willumsen, Liv Helene. "Als Hexen angeklagte Kinder in Nord-Norwegen im siebzehnten Jahrhundert." In *Hexenkinder—Kinderbanden—Strassenkinder*. Edited by W. Behringer and C. Opitz-Belakhal, 309–334. Bielefeld, Germany: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2014.

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The chapter deals with the witchcraft trials against six small Norwegian girls in the district of Finnmark, northern Norway, 1663. Through analysis of courtroom discourse the voices of the girls are brought to the fore, as well as the voice of the scribe and the voice of the law. Demonological ideas are seen as important for witchcraft accusations against children in Finnmark, Norway. (Chapter title translation: Children Accused as Witches in Seventeenth-century Northern Norway.)

Find this resource:

Bibliographies

Bibliographies on literature related to child witches are most often found in literature lists at the end of textbooks, articles, or book chapters dealing with the topic. They tend to be limited, often with an emphasis on a particular region or country. Therefore, a selection of bibliographies with different geographical scopes has been listed in this section. The sources cover Germany, northern Europe, Scotland, and Scandinavia. Emphasis is on notions of children within the demonological doctrine, the way children are treated by the judiciary, and the story-telling of children as it comes to the fore as part of their confessions before the court. See [Dillinger 2013](#), [Goodare 2013](#), and [Willumsen 2013](#).

- **Dillinger, Johannes.** "Quellen und Forschungsliteratur." In *Kinder im Hexenprozess: Magie und Kindheit in der Frühen Neuzeit*. Edited by Johannes Dillinger, 256–264. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013.

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A bibliographical survey of primary sources and secondary literature on child witches mainly related to Germany and central Europe. Also mentions some general studies on witchcraft, central demonological treatises from the 16th and 17th centuries, and some European works on childhood from the 17th century. (Title translation: Sources and research literature.)

Find this resource:

Goodare, Julian. "Bibliography of Scottish Witchcraft Research." In *Scottish Witches and Witch-Hunters*. Edited by Julian Goodare, 234–245. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

DOI: [10.1057/9781137355942](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137355942) [Save Citation](#) » [Export Citation](#) » [E-mail Citation](#) »

An updated bibliography of witchcraft research related to Scotland.

Find this resource:

Willumsen, Liv Helene. "Children Accused of Witchcraft in 17th-Century Finnmark." *Scandinavian Journal of History* 38.1 (2013): 18–41.

DOI: [10.1080/03468755.2012.741450](https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2012.741450) [Save Citation](#) » [Export Citation](#) » [E-mail Citation](#) »

The reference section (pp. 39–41) offers a bibliographical survey of literature on child witches mainly focused on northern Europe.

Find this resource:

Journal Articles

The entries in this section have child witches as their main thematic concern. General as well as more specialized studies are presented, the latter for instance from Germany and Scandinavia. [Eilola 2009](#), [Willumsen 2011](#), [Willumsen 2013](#), and [Östling 2006](#) all represent close readings of court records, paying attention to narrative structures in the children's confessions as well as the motif of witches' gatherings. [Roper 2000](#) is based on a psychoanalytical point of view, draws attention to the relations between mother and child in different phases of a woman's life, and links this to the notion of child witches. See also [Walinski-Kiehl 1996](#).

- **Eilola, Jari.** "Lapsitodistajien kertomukset Ruotsin noitatapaukissa 1668–1676." *Kasvatus and Aika* 3 (2009).

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An article with particular focus on children as witnesses in the Mora mass trials in Sweden in the 1660s and 1670s. The narrative structures of the children's testimonials are highlighted, and the conclusion is that children's voices in the Swedish witchcraft court records are personalized and characterized by oral features. (Title translation: Child witnesses' stories in witchcraft trials in Sweden 1668–1676).

Find this resource:

Östling, Per-Anders. "Blåkulla Journeys in Swedish Folklore." *Arv: Yearbook of Folklore* 62 (2006): 81–122.

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This article deals with the notions of the witch Sabbath of Blåkulla, the Swedish equivalent to the German Brocken, as these ideas appear in Swedish folklore in the 19th century. The conceptions of Blåkulla have their origins in demonology. A large number of children witnessed during the Swedish Mora trials of the 1660s and 1670s that they were taken away to Blåkulla by adult witches.

Find this resource:

Roper, Lyndal. "'Evil Imaginations and Fantasies': Child-Witches and the End of Witch Craze." *Past and Present* 167 (2000): 107–139.

DOI: [10.1093/past/167.1.107](https://doi.org/10.1093/past/167.1.107) [Save Citation](#) » [Export Citation](#) » [E-mail Citation](#) »

The article takes a psychoanalytical approach to the topic of child witches, focusing on the mother, the "bad mother" more specifically, and the stages of life a woman went through. In particular, elderly women influenced witchcraft cases related to children. Roper sees the witch related to old women's lack of fertility. All around Europe, the witch was an old and infertile woman, and this woman attacked children.

Find this resource:

Walinski-Kiehl, Robert S. "The Devil's Children: Child Witch-Trials in Early Modern Germany." *Continuity and Change* 11.2 (1996): 171–189.

DOI: [10.1017/S0268416000003301](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0268416000003301) [Save Citation](#) » [Export Citation](#) » [E-mail Citation](#) »

The article has an introductory part discussing the general pattern of European child witch-trials (see [Walinski-Kiehl 1996](#), cited under [General Overviews](#)). Then, analyses of cases against children in three German areas are presented: Würzburg, Calw, and Bamberg. Based on these studies, it is concluded that witchcraft trials against children usually were brought about by a combination of adult pressure from judges and parents and the testimonies of children whose vivid imaginations often led them to blur the distinction between fantasy and reality.

Find this resource:

Willumsen, Liv Helene. "Barn anklaget for trolldom i Finnmark: En narratologisk tilnærming." *Heimen* 48.3 (2011): 257–278.

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Analysis of witchcraft cases against children in Finnmark, northern Norway, from a narratological angle, highlighting narrative structures in the confessions of the accused children. The confessions are structured like stories, allowing personal adjustments to be used. (Title translation: Children accused of witchcraft in Finnmark: A narratological approach.)

Find this resource:

Willumsen, Liv Helene. "Children Accused of Witchcraft in 17th-Century Finnmark." *Scandinavian Journal of History* 38.1 (2013): 18–41.

DOI: [10.1080/03468755.2012.741450](https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2012.741450) [Save Citation](#) » [Export Citation](#) » [E-mail Citation](#) »

The article deals with six small girls accused of witchcraft in the district of Finnmark, northern Norway, during a panic in 1663. The girls had mothers also accused of witchcraft, and were said to have learnt from their mothers or aunts. The six girls were first tried before a local court, but their cases were sent on the court of appeal, where they all were acquitted.

Find this resource:

Mention in Textbooks

Several textbooks dealing with witchcraft in a more general sense have children mentioned as part of a broader discussion. The entries in this section are such mentioning. They vary in length. Geographically, these sources deal with Spain, France, and Germany. As for Spain, [Henningsen 1980](#) discusses a group of children accused, in addition to one inquisitor who at the beginning of the 17th century was skeptical about the truth of the children's confessions. The area of Lorraine in France is represented by [Briggs 1996](#) and [Briggs 2007](#). With regard to Germany, [Roper 2004a](#) and [Roper 2004b](#) present close readings of two cases against girls, both rather late cases, and [Rowlands 2003](#) discusses one early case against a boy. For witchcraft in early New England, [Demos 1982](#) and [Karlsen 1998](#) mention children as part of a broader approach to the field of witchcraft studies.

- **Briggs, Robin. *Witches & Neighbours*. London: HarperCollins, 1996.**

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This book, dealing with Lorraine, discusses children as accused of witchcraft, as accusers, and as victims in several places. In particular, children and tales of the Sabbath have been given attention. Briggs underlines the fact that children's appearance as accusers, witnesses, and suspects in witchcraft cases was dangerous, but also double-edged, because it is easy to extract false statements from young people in the circumstances of interrogation during a criminal trial.

Find this resource:

Briggs, Robin. *The Witches of Lorraine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198225829.001.0001Save Citation »Export Citation »E-mail Citation »

The book mentions children in several contexts: killing of children as part of witchcraft rituals, children accused of witchcraft, children as accusers both of other children and of adults, children telling stories about being taken away to the Sabbath as part of their confession.

Find this resource:

Demos, John Putman. *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.

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In this book, children and young persons are mentioned repeatedly in the chapters dealing with psychology, sociology, and history. Much of the witch persecution in New England and Salem targeted young women.

Find this resource:

Henningsen, Gustav. *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft & the Spanish Inquisition*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1980.

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The discussion of child witches is incorporated in broader framed chapters. Around 1610 several children were involved in witchcraft trials in several villages in the Navarra area, confessing they had been to witches' Sabbaths together with relatives. The children denounced others, mainly children. The book gives long quotations from primary sources (see pp. 107–142; 203–226; 307–356). Particular attention is given to the inquisitor Alonso de Salazar, who early in the 17th century was skeptical to the validity of witches' confessions.

Find this resource:

Karlsen, Carol. *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*. New York: Norton, 1998.

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The book deals with Colonial America and has a clear gender perspective, and the author mentions children and adolescents intermittently throughout the work. The Salem trials in 1692–1693 are discussed, wherein fourteen young and unmarried women were tried, most of them daughters and granddaughters of reputed witches (see pp. 71–72). Several of the New England witches were suspected of bearing illegitimate children and with infanticide prior to their witchcraft accusations (see pp. 141–144). It is argued that witchcraft power in New England was tied to Puritanism, and that the presence of children and men among the accused could be explained by this connection, so could the simultaneous demise of witchcraft trials and Puritan hegemony (see pp. 3, 198–202, 253–257).

Find this resource:

Roper, Lyndal. "Family Revenge." In *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany*. By Lyndal Roper, 182–203. London: Yale University Press, 2004a.

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This chapter deals with the trial against an adolescent girl, Juditha Wagner, accused of witchcraft in Augsburg in 1689. Her trial started in 1670. She started telling stories about herself being a witch. She confessed that she entered into a pact with the devil when she was six years old and that she had killed six children. In May 1690 she was executed with the sword and her body was thrown on the fire and burnt to ashes.

Find this resource:

Roper, Lyndal. "Godless Children." In *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany*. By Lyndal Roper, 204–221. London: Yale University Press, 2004b.

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The chapter deals with the trial of an adolescent girl, Regina Goninger, in Augsburg the year 1702. She had gone about claiming to be a witch. Her story, repeated at school and in the neighborhood, concerned a black man who visited her at night. Demonological elements were introduced during the interrogation, but she only laughed and insisted the whole affair was caused by gossip. She was acquitted.

Find this resource:

Rowlands, Alison. "'One cannot. . .hope to obtain the slightest certainty from him': The First Child-Witch in Rotherburg, 1587." In *Witchcraft Narratives in Germany: Rothenburgh, 1561–1652*. By Alison Rowlands, 81–104. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003.

DOI: 10.7228/manchester/9780719052590.003.0004Save Citation »Export Citation »E-mail Citation »

The chapter deals with a six-year-old boy, Hans Gackstatt, who in Rothenburg in 1587 told a tale of nocturnal flights to a witches' gathering. Allegedly, his mother and he, accompanied by a black man, had flown through the air on fire irons smeared with magical salve. The story spread to the neighbors and several people were imprisoned, tortured, and interrogated. Thus, his story started a severe investigation against several persons. Hans was finally released.

Find this resource:

General Mention in Articles

This section contains entries about child witches mentioned in articles with a general scope. [Levack 2006a](#), [Levack 2006b](#), and [Levack 2013](#) discuss the role of children mostly within a judicial framework, often related to demonology. Also, [Kieckhefer 2013](#) discusses demonological notions, while [Simplicio 2006](#) and [Zika 2006](#) focus on infanticide and cannibalism. [Bever 2013](#) takes up folkloric notions related to children.

- **Bever, Edward.** "Popular Witch Beliefs and Magical Practices." In *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Edited by Brian P. Levack, 50–68. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

DOI: [10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001) [Save Citation](#) » [Export Citation](#) » [E-mail Citation](#) »

This article discusses witchcraft and the devil in popular culture and mentions that the devil liked to disrupt childbirth because it presented the opportunity to snatch the baby's soul before it was baptized (p. 57).

Find this resource:

Kieckhefer, Richard. "The First Wave of Trials for Diabolical Witchcraft." In *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Edited by Brian P. Levack, 159–178. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

DOI: [10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001) [Save Citation](#) » [Export Citation](#) » [E-mail Citation](#) »

The article mentions an early case involving killing of children in Valais, 1467; the case brought to the fore vigorous skepticism (pp. 176–177). Three women were accused of witchcraft, including killing a child and taking its body to the synagogue, where they ate it. It was argued that the witches could not have killed the baby in a place surrounded by houses without being seen or heard.

Find this resource:

Levack, Brian P. "Age." In *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*. 3d ed. 149–155. London: Pearson Longman, 2006a.

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This chapter points out that even if children were more famous as the source than as the object of witchcraft accusations, in some hunts they were persecuted in large numbers. It was believed that witches could acquire their powers from their parents, sometimes by instruction, sometimes by heredity. It can be assumed that the increased persecution of children played a significant role in the decline and end of witchcraft.

Find this resource:

Levack, Brian P. "Sex." In *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*. 3d ed. By Brian P. Levack, 141–149. London: Pearson Longman, 2006b.

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The chapter brings to the fore situations wherein children were victims of *maleficium*, suggesting that accusations tended to come from another woman, due to tensions among women, particularly between the housewife and the woman who was engaged in caring for children after a childbirth. The alleged harming of children took place because the witch was seen as the inverse of both the good wife and the good mother.

Find this resource:

Levack, Brian P. "The Decline and End of Witchcraft Persecutions." In *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Edited by Brian P. Levack, 429–446. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

DOI: [10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001) [Save Citation](#) » [Export Citation](#) » [E-mail Citation](#) »

This article points to the fact that central governments played a part in reducing witchcraft persecution in their own territories at the end of the 17th century. As an example is mentioned the situation in Stuttgart, Germany, where the central council of the duchy took steps to regulate the justice administered by local magistrates. After a wave of persecution the early 1660s, it was insisted that local magistrates should not accept testimonies from children or from melancholic old women. See especially p. 439.

Find this resource:

Simplicio, Oscar di. "Infanticide." In *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Edited by Richard M. Golden, 550–551. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

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The article discusses different views on infanticide related to demonological witchcraft trials. When the witches' Sabbath was first described in the 15th century, murdered babies provided vital ingredients for its perverse rituals. In the heyday of European witch-hunting, witches no longer confessed to eating children at Sabbaths, but they continued to be accused of murdering them. Demographic and social factors revived and adapted these beliefs.

Find this resource:

Zika, Charles. "Cannibalism." In *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Edited by Richard M. Golden, 163–164. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

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The article deals with cannibalism, which has become one of the fundamental characteristics of the witch in the popular culture of European societies. It marks the witch as “other” and signifies her relationship to all that is terrifying and taboo. Cannibalism was commonplace in demonologies from the 15th to the 17th century. In visual representation, the vampire witch, drinking the blood of children, is well-known.

Find this resource:

Germany and Austria

Several articles treating witchcraft in a broader sense have brief mentioning of child witches. This section gives bibliographical entries referring to such articles. Often, they give examples of child witchcraft trials from different geographical areas. This section relates to Germany and Austria. The sources cited in this section, [Behringer 2006](#), [Blécourt 2013](#), [Voltmer 2009](#), [Robisheaux 2013](#), [Rowlands 2013](#), [Raith 2006](#), and [Muelleder 2006](#), deal with areas of central and western Germany which suffered severe witchcraft persecution.

- **Behringer, Wolfgang.** “Bavaria, Duchy of.” In *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Edited by Richard M. Golden, 97–101. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

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In Bavaria, several of the late trials were triggered by children. The last Bavarian witch was an orphaned fourteen-year-old girl. She confessed extensive narratives of demonological character, about seduction by the devil, witches’ flight, and Sabbath. She was executed. Even if the judge found the case difficult, it was argued that they had to convict a confessing witch.

Find this resource:

Blécourt, Willem de. “Sabbath Stories: Towards a New History of Witches’ Assemblies.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Edited by Brian P. Levack, 84–100. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001 [Save Citation](#) » [Export Citation](#) » [E-mail Citation](#) »

The article discusses the case of nine-year-old Stine Teipel from Oberkirchen in Sauerland, 1630, who told the court that she had flown to a witches’ gathering, where she recognized several other participants. She also confessed having been to a witches’ gathering at a mountain, with the devil present. Stine Teipel was executed. See p. 96.

Find this resource:

Muelleder, Gerald. “Salzburg, Price-Archbishopric of.” In *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Edited by Richard M. Golden, 1000–1001. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

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This article deals with witchcraft trials in Salzburg, which was an ecclesiastical state governed by a prince-archbishopric until 1803. Witchcraft trials took place from 1565 onwards, with cases involving first *maleficium*, later demonology, but in very modest numbers until 1677. Then, Jacob Koller, called *Zauberer Jackl*, the son of a woman already accused of witchcraft, was accused. Jack collected a group of young male beggars around him and reputedly apprenticed them to the devil.

Find this resource:

Raith, Annita. “Württemberg, Duchy of.” In *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Edited by Richard M. Golden, 1227–1230. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

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The article deals with the witchcraft trials in the duchy of Württemberg in southwestern Germany during the period 1497–1700. More than 300 investigations and trials took place, resulting in at least 197 executions. Of the accused, 85 percent were women. Children became increasingly involved in the witchcraft trials in the second half of the 17th century. However, the children were never sentenced to death in Württemberg; their punishment combined a spanking with religious instruction by a minister or schoolmaster.

Find this resource:

Robisheaux, Thomas. “The German Witch Trials.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Edited by Brian P. Levack, 179–198. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001 [Save Citation](#) » [Export Citation](#) » [E-mail Citation](#) »

In Salzburg in 1678–1680, witchcraft trials revolved around adolescent and young men, with Jacob Koller, a vagabond, their suspected witch leader. One hundred forty of his alleged followers were tried and executed. In the 1680s, witchcraft trials were rare. In Calw, a panic involving the children in the town was averted in 1683–1684. See p. 185.

Find this resource:

Rowlands, Alison. "Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe." In *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Edited by Brian P. Levack, 449–467. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

DOI: [10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001)[Save Citation »](#)[Export Citation »](#)[E-mail Citation »](#)

The article points to the large number of boys accused of witchcraft in late-16th-century Trier (see pp. 455–456). They allegedly had attended Sabbaths as pipers and dancers, reflecting realities of village life. Attention is drawn to the fact that not only women, but also men, could attend witchcraft Sabbaths.

Find this resource:

Voltmer, Rita. "Witch-Finders, Witch-Hunters or Kings of the Sabbath? The Prominent Role of Men in the Mass Persecutions of the Rhine-Meuse Area (16th–17th Centuries)." In *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe*. Edited by Alison Rowlands, 74–99. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

DOI: [10.1057/9780230248373](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230248373)[Save Citation »](#)[Export Citation »](#)[E-mail Citation »](#)

This article points to the significant number of boy witches in witchcraft trials in the late-16th-century trials centered round Trier in Germany. The number of boys and men brought to the fore the image of a dual-gendered Sabbath. The boy witches were pressed to confess that they had played music at Sabbaths. This reflected the reality of village life, where men were the pipers and drummers at communal festivities.

Find this resource:

France and Spain

Several articles treating witchcraft in a broader sense have brief mentions of child witches. This section gives bibliographical entries referring to such articles. Often, they give examples of child witchcraft trials from different geographical areas. This section relates to France and Spain. [Henningsen 2006](#), [Monter 2006](#), and [Monter 2013](#) are nestors within European witchcraft research and have performed studies with profound importance for the field.

- Henningsen, Gustav. "Basque Country." In *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Edited by Richard M. Golden, 94–97. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

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This article deals with witchcraft trials during the period 1538–1798 in the Basque country. A special feature for the Basque witchcraft trials was the notion that the witches carried children and young people off to the Sabbath while they lay asleep in their beds, thus recruiting them to their evil sect. The Basque child witches first appeared at an *auto de fe* in Pamplona in 1540, involving thirty boys and girls aged ten to fourteen.

Find this resource:

Monter, William. "Boguet, Henry." In *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Edited by Richard M. Golden, 133–134. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

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The article deals with the French demonologist Henry Boguet, who lived c. 1550–1619. In 1602, he published a handbook for conducting witchcraft trials, *Discours exécration des Sorciers* (Discourse on witches). Boguet's book mainly focused on one witchcraft trial involving an eight-year-old girl as the most important witness. This girl was allegedly possessed by five devils and later delivered from them. Boguet emphasized how deeply children could be tainted by witchcraft.

Find this resource:

Monter, William. "Witchcraft in Iberia." In *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Edited by Brian P. Levack, 268–282. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

DOI: [10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001)[Save Citation »](#)[Export Citation »](#)[E-mail Citation »](#)

The article mentions the early-17th-century witch craze in Navarre's Basque country (see especially p. 271). During the follow-up activities of the Inquisition's execution of several witches at Logrono in 1610, the tribunal's junior inquisitor, Alonso Salazar y Frias, investigated almost 2,000 confessed witches, most of them children and adolescents, and found that the offence was purely imaginary.

Find this resource:

Colonial America

Colonial America, particularly the Salem witch-hunt, has attracted great interest among scholars as well as among the reading public. The Colonial witch-hunt was a relatively late outrunner of the European witchcraft trials ([Godbeer 2006](#)).

- **Godbeer, Richard.** "Salem." In *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Edited by Richard M. Golden, 996–1000. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

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This article deals with the Salem witch-hunt of 1692, the largest and most famous witch-hunt in Colonial American history. During one year, formal charges of witchcraft were brought against more than 150 people. By October 1692, nineteen persons had been hanged and one man had been killed for refusing to plead. The trials were characterized by demonology. Several of the accused were very young girls, from the age of four. The two girls first involved were nine and eleven years old.

Find this resource:

Scandinavia and the Netherlands

Several articles treating witchcraft in a broader sense have brief mentions of child witches. This section gives bibliographical entries referring to such articles. Often, they give examples of child witchcraft trials from different geographical areas. This section relates to Scandinavia and The Netherlands: [Birkelund 1983](#), [Hagen 2013](#), [Sörlin 2006a](#), [Sörlin 2006b](#), and [Vanysacker 2006](#).

- **Birkelund, Merete.** "Alder." In *Troldkvinden og hendes anklagere: Danske hekseprocesser i det 16. og 17. århundrede*. By Merete Birkelund, 62–63. Århus, Denmark: Arusia, 1983.

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Children do not occur as accusers during the Danish witchcraft trials and very rarely as victims or witnesses. This has to do with the fact that children under the age of fifteen were not allowed to give testimonies. In the material underlying this study only three examples of children taken away to Sabbaths are found, which gives a picture very different from the one in Germany and late Sweden. (Chapter title translation: Age; book title translation: The witch and her accusers: Danish witchcraft trials in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.)

Find this resource:

Hagen, Rune Blix. "Witchcraft Criminality and Witchcraft Research in the Nordic Countries." In *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Edited by Brian P. Levack, 375–392. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

DOI: [10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578160.001.0001) [Save Citation](#) » [Export Citation](#) » [E-mail Citation](#) »

The article points to the large number of children involved as witnesses in the Swedish Blåkulla trials of the 1670s and 1680s, also called the Mora trials. Attention is drawn to the fact that these trials have been predominant in Swedish witchcraft research, and that research on Swedish witchcraft trials also ought to include other sources. See p. 379.

Find this resource:

Sörlin, Per. "Mora Witches." In *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Edited by Richard M. Golden, 783–785. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006a.

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The article deals with the great Swedish witch-hunt of 1668–1676. Children played a prominent role in this witch-hunt, as a substantial number of children witnessed that they were taken by alleged witches to a place called Blåkulla. An eleven-year-old girl from the parish of Älvdalen disclosed strange and terrible tales of consorting with the devil. Further testimonies passed by children gave rise to seven death sentences in March 1676, including four children. The witch-hunt spread to the neighboring village of Mora in 1669 and continued until 1671.

Find this resource:

Sörlin, Per. "Witch Finders." In *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Edited by Richard M. Golden, 1206–1208. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006b.

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The term witch-finder could refer both to a human agent and to a method. Children made up a special category of witch-finders. In Sweden during the intense trials 1668–1676, children identified witches in various ways. They could identify the witch who had taken them to Sabbath and recognize the other participants at the Sabbath. In addition, children could pick out alleged witches based on the physical appearance and clothing of women.

Find this resource:

Vanysacker, Dries. "Netherlands, Southern." In *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*. Edited by Richard M. Golden, 814–818. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

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The article deals with witchcraft trials in the southern Netherlands. Witchcraft trials took place here from 1450 until 1685. At least 2,564 witches were executed during the period of persecution. The crime of sorcery was increasingly mixed with demonological trials, influenced by works of Jean Bodin, Nicolas Rémy, and Martin Del Rio.

Find this resource:

LAST MODIFIED: 03/10/2015

DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780199791231-0156