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Sarah Alderson

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Malleus Marginalia:

What can be learned from the marginalia in PSU's edition of the *Malleus Maleficarum*

In 1487, two men composed a manuscript they named the *Malleus Maleficarum* or *The Hammer of Witches*. Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer were writing in response to a growing concern in Europe over the danger of malevolent witchcraft.¹ The concept of witchcraft was not new to Europe – even ancient cultures had their own concept of witches. However, the early fifteenth century ushered in a new concept of witches that still reverberates in our imaginations today. These new perceptions of witches mark the beginning of two waves of witch-hunting in the early modern period. The first wave began in the early fifteenth century in continental Europe, and historian Ronald Hutton notes that by the 1420s, secular authorities were prosecuting women accused of witchcraft in areas such as the Pyrenees Mountains between France and Spain, Rome, and the Swiss Alps.² The second wave began in 1560 and ended in 1640.

The copy of the *Malleus* obtained by Portland State University is a second edition, published in 1490. It was bound with a copy of the *Fasciculus temporum*, a world history written by Werner Rolevinck. There is a hand-written Latin poem in the pages between the two texts, as well as a fragment of writing in German. Scrawled across the codex are notes written by at least three separate note-takers, representing three owners of the book: the poem scribe, the St. Nabor

¹ Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters, "The Hammer of Witches," in *Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700 A Document History*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 176.

² According to Ronald Hutton, the Swiss Alps were a main region for the prosecution of witches. Ronald Hutton, *The Witch: A History of Fear, From Ancient Times to the Present*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 171-72.

scribe, and J. Winnenmacher or Wirnenmacher (the Winnenmacher hand). These notes mark various paragraphs and sections with underlining, “nota bene,” drawn hands pointing, lines alongside the text, as well as hand-written notations on the text. As each of the hand-writing examples is unique and visible on the title page, we are able to distinguish which note-taker wrote many of the notes in the text.

My report focuses on the marginalia in the *Malleus*, and what information it conveys in regard to the note-takers. Aside from representing three readers during the late Middle Ages, the notes taken along the margins of the codex can portray much about the manner in which the book may have been used. The marginalia can be used to reconstruct information each notetaker may have been interested in specifically. Finding and attempting to understand the use of this particular codex may offer fuller insight into the perception of witches and witchcraft in the Holy Roman Empire as well as contemporary religious movements.

The three hands

The three hands in the text are easily distinguished: the poem scribe wrote quickly and messily; the St. Nabor scribe’s handwriting was shaky; and the Winnenmacher hand is full of flourishes. While all three of the writers’ hands appear on the title page, only the poem scribe made notations in the *Fasciculus*. The St. Nabor scribe and the Winnenmacher hand focus only on passages in the *Malleus*.

On the title page, the poem scribe wrote “no[ta] gesta Roma[norum],” which translates to “notes [on the] deeds of the Romans.”³ The *Fasciculus*, however, covers all of world history known to Rolevinck at the time, and is not restricted to the Romans; the poem scribe took notes

³ I am assuming an ‘-is’ or ‘-orum’ is missing from the end of ‘Roman-.’

on many bible stories that had nothing to do with the Romans. For example, he noted the paragraph on Noah's Ark and the Flood, as well as the Tower of Babel and the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. This poem scribe rarely took notes, instead making paragraph notations to show pertinent sections.

The St. Nabor Scribe has the fewest number of notes in the entire codex. One of the more interesting notes is on whether or not a sorceress can make men have feelings of love or hate. According to the *Malleus*, the devil cannot create feelings, and sorceresses use the devil for their magic, meaning a sorceress cannot control a man's feelings. While the reason for this particular note is not clear, it hints at something the note-taker was interested in: what type of power sorceresses (witches) held.

The Winnenmacher scribe seemed to prefer to take notes on the *Malleus* text over the *Fasciculus*. While we can only guess at his identity at the present, the name Johannes Wannemacher has emerged through our research as a possible connection. Wannemacher lived from 1485 until 1551, mostly in Basel, Switzerland, on the border between France, Germany, and Switzerland. Basel is an estimated 147 miles south of the abbey of St. Nabor, the abbey featured on the title page. Wannemacher was a composer and humanist who was exiled by the church in 1514.

The fact that the Winnenmacher hand appears only in the marginalia for the *Malleus* and not in the *Fasciculus*, could be an indication that he did not own the two books bound together, but as his name appears on the title page, and as the "ex monasterio" on the table page is in his handwriting, it is more likely that the *Malleus* was simply more pertinent to his research. The Winnenmacher hand highlights intriguing passages such as the steps to an exorcism and how to question witches, with the steps for questioning a witch numbered 1 through 12 in the text. In

part two, chapter six Winnemacher highlights a fairly long section dealing with the difference between superstition and Christianity. The notation is ended but then resumes on the following page with the story of the enchanter and the snake. As the story goes, an enchanter decides to rid Salzburg and its surrounding area of snakes. The enchanter is able to lead all the snakes within a mile radius of the city to a ditch just outside the city. The largest, meanest snake was not inclined to go into the ditch, and instead leapt across the ditch and grabbed the enchanter, pulling him into it. The moral of the story was that all magic should be done with both reverence to God as well as benevolently. The Winnemacher hand notes this story with the word “exemple.” Could this be an example of Winnemacher’s argument about superstition?

Locations for the Codex

Two of the note-takers in our copy of the Malleus mention the monastery of St. Nabor. At the top of the tables page, one hand has written “S. Naboris,” while on the bottom another hand wrote “ex monasterio S. Naboris” (“from the monastery St. Nabor”). These same two examples of handwriting are also found on the title page: one reads “Mon[aste]rii s. Naboris” (“monastery St. Nabor”), and the other “Ex libris J Winnemacherii” (“from the library of J. Winnemacher”). The inscription “ex monasterio S. Naboris” is written in the Winnemacher hand, while “Mon[aste]rii s. Naboris” is in the same hand as the “S. Naboris” of the table of contents page. These two separate note takers may both be from St. Nabor, or, as seems more likely Winnemacher bought/took/was given the codex by the monastery, and is noting its previous owner.

The monastery of St. Nabor is located in Saint-Avold, France. Saint-Avold is in the district of Lorraine, roughly thirty miles east of the cathedral in Metz, and less than twenty miles

from the border with Germany. The abbey was under the control of the bishop of Metz and was just inside the western border of the Holy Roman Empire during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Witch-hunting in the Holy Roman Empire

In the fifteenth century, witch-hunting in the Holy Roman Empire (modern Germany and parts of eastern France), changed. Brian Levack, an historian of witch-hunting in late medieval Europe, explains that while witchcraft and sorcery had long been a problem for authorities, “beginning around 1420 the history of European witchcraft prosecutions entered a new distinct phase.”⁴ Hutton notes that the image of the early modern witch developed slowly in accordance to the mythologies of different regions, but was grounded in ancient folklore, specifically the myth of nocturnal demons who kill children.⁵ The new idea of the witch developed and spread quickly, and the first wave of witch-hunts ran from 1420 until 1520. There was a break of approximately forty years before the witch-hunts resumed with more intensity. Levack notes that the second wave of witch-hunting began with earnest first in the Low Countries in 1562, and then England and Scotland within a year. The hunts were fueled by food shortages and the Protestant reformation.⁶ Hutton tells us that the period of the most deaths occurred in this second wave, from 1560 to 1640, and that the second wave coincided with a peak in religious turmoil between the Catholic and Protestant faiths.⁷

⁴ Brian Levack, *The Witch-hunt in Early Modern Europe*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 205.

⁵ Hutton, *The Witch*, 170.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 206

⁷ Hutton, *The Witch*, 180.

Next Steps

It may never be possible to fully understand the note-takers or the meaning behind the notes they made in the codex. It may be possible, however, to find J. Winnenmacher. Learning who Winnenmacher was could give historians insight into what the note-takers may have been trying to learn and give historians further insight into the Holy Roman Empire and the witch-hunts during the sixteenth century. It could also help to enlighten historians as to the concept of witches as seen by ecclesiastics and laypeople alike. The investigation into the marginal notes and note-takers in the PSU Codex is ongoing.

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