The first wave of trials for diabolical witchcraft

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Abstract

This article discusses the first wave of trials for diabolical witchcraft. It suggests that when we examine the trials in a particular region, and when we read late medieval writings about witchcraft, we find that ideas were brought together in discernible but fragile coalescence, then sometimes diffused over broader areas, and in the process fused with ideas taken from different sources; and when we look back at the cluster which was once formed, we may find that in its diffusion it has become attenuated, with key notions abridged or omitted. The article suggests some of the ways this more complex pattern of coalescence and attenuation, diffusion, and fusion is reflected in sources from the late medieval West. It shows that what late medieval witch-hunters and demonologists bequeathed to early modern Europe was not a fixed set of convictions and anxieties, but a more complex network of issues that called to be resolved, and which eventually were, at great cost.

Diabolical edited by Peter Grey & Alkistis Dimech, Scarlet Imprint Publishing, Hardback /338pp/ full colour illustrations/£35no isbn Ten Years of Triumph of the Moon edited… Also received and reviewed next time Magic, Witchcraft & Ghosts in the Greek and Roman World a sourcebook prepared by Professor Daniel Ogden, Oxford University Press (The author teaches history of Greek & Roman "necromancy" at Exeter). Billed as an alternative to Georg Luck's earlier collection "Arcana Mundi". But there again one of the first essays is by Paul Hughes-Barlow and concerns the so-called Testament of Solomon - a compilation apparently made and incorporating many manuscripts from Roman Egypt. In other words this is a very early grimoire that still shows its debt to the Kemetic tradition.