



Malleus Maleficarum, Or: The Hammer of Witches

Heinrich Godfrey Kramer

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Like Hitler's "Mein Kampf," Kramer and Sprenger's "Malleus Maleficarum" is a book that is read for historical importance rather than enjoyment. As such it should form a part of every thinking person's library as a warning beacon, if for no other reason that it is a seminal textbook on the inhumanity of humanity. First written in 1484 (and reprinted endlessly), "Malleus Maleficarum" was immediately given the imprimatur of the Holy See as the most important work on witchcraft, to date. And so it remains—a compendium of fifteenth century paranoia, all the more frightening for its totalitarian modernity. ("Anything that is done for the benefit of the State is Good.") In form, it is a "how to" guide on recognizing, capturing, torturing, and executing witches. In substance, it is a diatribe against women, heretics, independent thinkers, romantic lovers, the sensitive passions, human sexuality, and compassion. In writing the Malleus, Kramer and Sprenger claimed to be doing "God's work" These men, and those who followed them worshiped only their own arrogance. Read it and be afraid! Forming a portion of every working law library for 300 years, there is no estimate of how many women and men were put to death through the mechanism of this book. Some historians estimate that the numbers may run into the millions. The text is rife with "case law" examples of witchcraft, some of which are clearly delusional and some downright silly, or would be, if they hadn't ended in gruesome deaths for the accused. Take the case of the poor woman who was burned for offering the opinion that "it might rain today" shortly before it did. Of note are Kramer and Spenger's assertions that prosecutors are (conveniently) "immune" to witchcraft, and their instructions to Judges to tell the truth to the witch that there will be mercy shown (with the mental reservation that death is a mercy to those prisoner to the devil). Such twisted logic is the cornerstone of the Malleus. The translator, Rev. Montague Summers, waxes rhapsodic on the "learning" and "wisdom" of the authors of the Malleus. He was apparently of a mind with Kramer and Spenger, and wrote two embarrassingly effusive and bigoted introductions (in 1928 and 1946), praising the "brilliance" of this work and its importance in this "feministic" era. Summers' commentary is as frightening as anything Kramer and Sprenger wrote in the text proper, the more so for being 20th century, and particularly post-World War Two. Like the Papal Bull of VIII which is now considered integral with the Malleus, future commentators will make much of the statements of Summers, a "modern" man. As a license to kill, the "Malleus Maleficarum" was used too often and far too freely. Kramer and Sprenger's madness did not die with them—though millions have died because of the madness presented in this book.

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