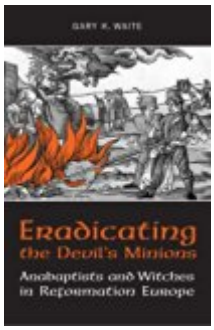
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Gary K. Waite. *Eradicating the Devil's Minions: Anabaptists and Witches in Reformation Europe, 1525-1600.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. xvi + 319 pp. Illustrations $65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8020-9155-0.



Reviewed by Ellen Yutzy Glebe

Published on H-German (February, 2009)

Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

Multiple strands of relatively recent advances in late medieval and early modern European historiography converge in this volume, Gary K. Waite's most recent monograph. In addition to the themes the reader expects from the title, Waite's book also addresses the extent to which Waldensians were associated with diabolical conspiracies in the late Middle Ages and the transposition of host desecration accusations from the Jews in the medieval period to Anabaptists and witches in later eras. These issues are examined within a broad geographical scope which includes the Netherlands, Tirol, and the German Empire. In the process, through a novel comparative approach, Waite raises a number of important issues that make the book an intriguing, if sometimes problematic, read. In the introduction, Waite states his intention to compare "polemical characterizations and judicial treatment of two heretical groups that so terrified magistrates, princes, and populace that they relaxed the normal judicial rules and arrested, tortured, and executed them in large numbers" (p. 4). In his view, although there had been medieval witchcraft trials, the persecution and execution of Anabaptists paved the way for the later, more extensive and brutal campaigns against witchcraft. Waite cites a variety of cases in which witch trials immediately followed the extinguishing of the Anabaptist movement; in short, as long as the "real" threat of Anabaptism persisted, little danger of a judicial campaign against the "invented" one of witchcraft was present.

The book is arranged around a basically geographical framework: two opening chapters provide an overview of sorcery and the miraculous in the medieval and early modern world, and the following four chapters proceed to examine Anabaptism and witchcraft in the northern Netherlands, the southern Netherlands, southern Germany, and the Austrian Tirol. A brief conclusion draws the threads from the individual geographical chapters together while attempting to make Waite's conclusions relevant to modern society.

The first chapter deals with Anabaptists, magic, and witches in the sixteenth century, and it establishes the medieval context for heresy and witchcraft. Anabaptists shared a variety of characteristics with Waldensians, whom medieval inquisitors often accused of devil worship. Important in this chapter is the role of burnings as "an expiatory element of communal purification" (p. 19) as well as the repercussions of Protestantism for what Robert W. Scribner termed the "economy of the sacred" (p. 22). Integral to popular religion prior to the Reformation was a system of sacraments and sacramentals that lent people a sense of control over everyday existence. Lutheranism's revision of this system, and the more radical one advocated by Zwingli and the Anabaptists, made the issue of sacrality central in the sixteenth century. This transformation is particularly clearly illustrated by the cases of miracles following host desecration and disrespect involving Anabaptists presented in chapter 2, which also outlines the types of propaganda against the Anabaptists propagated by the three major confessional groups.

The first of the geographical chapters concerns the northern Netherlands. It relates a variety of individual cases concerning diabolical accusations made by or about Anabaptists and analyzes data from several regions or cities within this area for "broad patterns that hint at subconscious collective attitudes or social trends" (p. 74). Although the specifics vary from one place to another, a general pattern can be found of witch trials occurring only after the demise of (or between phases of) persecution of Anabaptism. The relatively tolerant atmosphere in the Netherlands in the later sixteenth century, which included the rejection of demonizing anti-Anabaptist propaganda, also meant the dissipation of fears of witchcraft (p. 96). The chapter on the southern Netherlands establishes a similar pattern: "it was extremely rare for both Anabaptists and witches to be executed in the same year" (p. 126). Waite concludes that civic authorities believed "both heresy and sorcery were polluting the community and had to be excised as a means of diverting God's wrath" (p. 126). Here, too, where the authorities decided that Anabaptism posed no serious inherent risk to society, there was little danger of a campaign against witchcraft (p. 129).

A chapter on the situation in southern Germany focuses on how the Anabaptists' alleged claim of universal salvation to include the devil himself raised fears, and how reports of secret nocturnal meetings of Anabaptists may have provided the basis for later stories of the witches' sabbat. The clergy answered anticlerical criticism by attempting to tarnish the reputation of seemingly pious Anabaptists with stories of sexual excess and diabolical activity. As in the Netherlands, witch panics in the Holy Roman Empire tended to occur in areas where Anabaptists were no longer present (p. 157). The case of Hesse illustrates the ability of a relatively tolerant ruler to limit trials for both Anabaptism and witchcraft; after Landgrave Philip's death in 1567, his sons used increasing persecution on both fronts to define contested confessional bounds (pp. 161-164). (A minor correction: the reference to a letter from a Hessian pastor on behalf of Anabaptists in "Eisfelde" should have mentioned that the region in question--at least according to the edition of the source cited--was in fact Eichsfeld [p. 158].) In contrast to the general suggestion in the Netherlands that officials turned to witches only when "real" heretics had been defeated, this chapter concludes that, in the Holy Roman Empire, witch hunts distracted from the campaign against Anabaptism (p. 165).

The final chapter examines the situation in the Austrian Tirol and focuses on the melding of anti-Anabaptist propaganda from elites with witchcraft in the popular imagination. Because Tirol remained staunchly Catholic under Habsburg rule, a greater need was perceived there to defend orthodox miracles like transubstantiation from heretical challenges. The medieval schema of host desecration provided fodder both for the persecution of Anabaptists and of witches. An im-

portant distinction is to be made, however, between the trials of Anabaptists and witches, in that witches were more likely to cave under judicial pressure to confess diabolical intent or association. Waite attributes this to the "strong self-image" of Anabaptists as "God's chosen people," which meant they could draw on the "psychological resources to resist pressure" (pp. 194-195).

The conclusion voices the concern that "demonizing rhetoric against a threatening group ... might again penetrate the mindset of the populace and be readily redirected to other 'outsiders'" (p. 197). It attempts to cast the work's conclusions not only as providing historical insight but also a cautionary tale about the persecution of "outsiders" in modern societies. Otherwise, the final section draws on and reiterates the individual themes of the chapters outlined above.

By placing the categories of "witchcraft" and "Anabaptism" next to each other and examining them from this angle, the book raises a variety of interesting points. The relationship of Anabaptists and witches to their neighbors is certainly an issue worthy of more attention from historians, as is the role of the sacramental (or magical) in both phenomena. Both of these questions are promising not only within their own narrow focus but also for the insights they might yield into early modern society in a more general sense.

It may be read as a sign of the book's success in establishing the importance of the subject, however, that the reader may conclude that necessary aspects have been overlooked in the analysis. Although the diabolical--in the form of references to the devil and sorcery--is central to much of book, its discussion of early modern conceptions of the devil is at most cursory. While one learns that there were "two major schools of thought about the devil's interaction with humans" in the Middle Ages, namely, those who ascribed little independent power to the devil and those who considered his power real and significant (pp. 25-26), no extended study is made of the ways in which the devil was referenced in contemporary dialogue or to what extent such references are to be taken literally or figuratively. The commonality between witchcraft and Anabaptism seems to have been that references to the diabolical are frequent in accounts of both, but these references often remain somewhat too undifferentiated. If Anabaptists were sometimes portrayed as victims of the devil, while witches willingly entered his employ, is that not an important distinction? A different organizational scheme, around themes rather than geography, might have allowed for more depth in these questions.

This imprecision of language and examination of usage plagues the text in several cases. For example, Waite cites a text issued by Archduke Ferdinand in 1534 that instructed a Tirolian magistrate to send monks to interrogate three imprisoned Anabaptists. The text states that the monks should "exorcize [***beschwören***] them with the word of God, and sprinkle them with holy water, as if they were possessed by the devil, [using] similar exorcism and sprinkling with holy water, also chastisement with the rods, which has here and in other regions borne fruit in such cases, that the people will be turned away from such Anabaptist error and whatever clings to it" (p. 180). According to Waite's analysis, in this text "Ferdinand implied that Anabaptists were literally under the devil's control" (p. 180). Might one not, however, read the "as if" in Ferdinand's statement to mean precisely that he was at most uncertain that they were in fact possessed, and the latter part of the statement to imply that the exorcism was as much meant as a deterrent to others as a crucial element in the successful interrogation of the Anabaptists in question? By propagating the association of Anabaptism with the devil, authorities might have hoped to scare others away from the movement. Their views about the actual role of the devil in Anabaptism were then only secondary in the language they used in propaganda to this effect.

This seemingly naive reading of the source material affects the analysis of the book in a deeper sense. Although the microanalysis of witchcraft and medieval heresy trials has brought new insights in both fields in recent decades, the field of Anabaptist history has only recently begun to profit from these methodological advances. It seems likely that such study of Anabaptist records will bring similar revisions in historians' understanding of the early Anabaptist movement, and, while Anabaptism may not have been as purely a result of the inquisitorial process as witchcraft is widely held to have been, similar dynamics no doubt played a role in the development of Anabaptist identities. Thus the repeated juxtaposition of Anabaptism as a "real" heresy and witchcraft as an "invented" one may prove to be overly simplistic.

Likewise, the characterization of Anabaptists' neighbors seems inconsistent. In some instances, they are portrayed as sympathetic toward the Anabaptists, in others, as antagonistic: chapter 1, for example, claims at one point that the Anabaptists' opponents "were frequently frustrated by the inaction of local authorities or the resistance of local populations, many of whom saw their Anabaptist neighbours as non-threatening" (p. 21), and at another, "the self-designation of Anabaptists as saints and their depreciation of diabolical activity did little to improve their image in the broader society" (p. 31). Later Waite writes that whereas Anabaptists were "pursued by the authorities, often without the support of the populace," witches were "denounced by their neighbors, often against the wishes of the authorities" (p. 133). This issue warrants more careful analysis, for the attitudes of society towards these victims must play a crucial role in underpinning any theory of social purification associated with the persecution.

These reservations notwithstanding, the book represents an important contribution to the field, for it challenges historians to transcend traditional historiographical categories in their studies of religious dissidence in early modern Europe and begins to unlock some of the potential for studies of heterodoxy to reflect on the characteristics of society more generally. It would be a great tribute to Waite's work if other scholars were to answer his call.

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Citation: Ellen Yutzy Glebe. Review of Waite, Gary K. *Eradicating the Devil's Minions: Anabaptists and Witches in Reformation Europe, 1525-1600.* H-German, H-Net Reviews. February, 2009.

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