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Introduction

The *Malleus Maleficarum* is undoubtedly the best known (many would say most notorious) treatise on witchcraft from the early modern period. Published in 1486 (only a generation after the introduction of printing by moveable type in Western Europe), the work served to popularize the new conception of magic and witchcraft that is known in modern scholarship as satanism or diabolism, and it thereby played a major role in the savage efforts undertaken to stamp out witchcraft in Western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (a series of events sometimes known as the "witch craze"). The present work offers the reader the only full and reliable translation of the *Malleus* into English,[1] and this introduction has a very specific purpose: to set out for the reader the general intellectual and cultural background of the *Malleus*, which takes for granted and is based upon a number of concepts that are by no means self-evident to the average modern reader, and to explain something of the circumstances of the work's composition and the authors' methods and purposes in writing it. That is, the aim here is the very restricted one of giving the reader a better insight into how the work would have been understood at the time of its publication. Hopefully, this will help not only those who wish to understand the work in its own right but also those who are interested in the later effects of this influential work.

At the outset, a word about terminology. As is explained later (see below in section e of the "Notes on the translation"), for technical reasons relating to the Latin text, male and female practitioners of magic are called "sorcerers" and "sorceresses" respectively in the translation,

[1] There is another modern English translation in the form of P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *The Malleus Maleficarum* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007). This is only a partial translation (it merely summarizes large portions of the text in order to stay within some arbitrary length prescribed by the publisher) and is based on a late edition of the text (Frankfurt, 1588).

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and the term for their practices is "sorcery." In the preceding paragraph, the term "witchcraft" was used, but this term comes with a lot of unwelcome modern baggage that can only serve to confuse the strictly historical discussion that follows. Accordingly, "sorceress" and "sorcery" will henceforth be used in place of "witch" and "witchcraft" to emphasize the point that what we are dealing with are the notions that were held about magic and its practitioners in the late medieval and early modern periods.

In view of the intended audience, the material here is largely laid out very briefly as a straightforward discussion without elaborate footnotes or citation of relevant authorities. Apart from the further reading given at the end, the reader who wishes to learn more detail about the various topics or to find out specific citations of sources is directed to the far more elaborate General Introduction to be found in volume I of my bilingual edition entitled *Malleus Maleficarum* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

AUTHORS

According to the Author's Justification of the *Malleus*, there were two authors – Jacobus Sprenger and an unnamed collaborator – whose respective roles in the composition of it are not specified. In the public declaration that constitutes the Approbation of the work, Henricus Institoris indicates that he and his colleague as inquisitor, Jacobus Sprenger, wrote the *Malleus*. There is some dispute about this joint authorship in modern scholarship, but, before turning to this, we should look at what is known of these two men.

As both men were Dominican friars, a few words about this institution may be helpful. The Order of Preachers (the official name of the order) was founded in the early thirteenth century to combat heresy. Though Dominicans took the same sort of vows of poverty as monks, these friars did not withdraw from the secular world by joining a monastery, but lived in society as part of their mission to root out heresy and enforce orthodoxy among the laity. Since the Order was intended to subvert heretical opposition to Church teachings, the Dominicans soon became involved in theological studies in order to sharpen their skills in spotting and rebutting heretical views. Hence, there was often a close connection between the local Dominican convent and the theological faculty at a neighboring university. These skills made it natural for the papacy to appoint Dominicans as inquisitors into heretical depravity.

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Jacobus (the Latinized form of Jacob) Sprenger was born in about 1437, and presumably came from the area of Basel, as he is first attested joining the Dominican convent in that city in 1452. He went on to become an important figure in the Dominican Order, and was mostly associated with the convent of Cologne and the university of that city. Sprenger eventually became a professor of theology, serving as an administrator in both the theological faculty and the university as a whole. Sprenger was also interested in practical piety. He actively promoted the reform movement within the Order, which advocated a return to a simpler way of life among the residents of Dominican convents, and he was assigned the task of imposing reform in a number of these, even in the face of opposition from the residents. Sprenger would have been most famous in his lifetime for playing a prominent role in the spread of the practice of reciting the Rosary. Though he was appointed as an inquisitor in the Rhineland in 1481, there is no evidence for any active participation in this activity on his part (he is attested as being consulted in a few cases). Sprenger also showed little inclination for writing. Apart from an unpublished theological commentary written in connection with his early academic studies, his only composition was a short work about the society he founded to promote the Rosary. He died in 1495.

Henricus Institoris (the Latinized form of the German name Heinrich Kramer) was born around 1430 in the Alsatian town of Schlettstadt (modern Séléstat). He joined the local Dominican convent, but went on to be attached to a number of other convents in the southern German-speaking lands. Like Sprenger, he became a professor of theology, but unlike Sprenger he did not pursue an academic career. Instead, Institoris was more interested in missions among the laity, and he tended to work on his own. He was deeply involved in the sale of indulgences, and in particular he undertook a number of tasks connected with the defense of papal privileges and the enforcement of orthodoxy. He spent his last years combatting the Hussite heresy in Bohemia, where he died in 1505.

Institoris clearly had a strong personality, and was something of an individualist. He got into a certain amount of strife with his fellow friars, and at one time went so far as to rebuke the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III in a sermon, for which he himself was censured by the Order. But none of this undermined the clear trust that was placed in Institoris by his superiors, who continued to employ him on important tasks. Institoris was a respected figure, who preached before the king of

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Bohemia, was entertained by the wealthy Fuggers family in Augsburg, and was consulted by the city council of Nuremberg on the correct method of prosecuting sorceresses. Institoris was apparently a man who enjoyed writing. In addition to the *Malleus*, the *Memorandum* written for the bishop of Brixen, and the *Nuremberg Handbook* (for the latter two works, see below), he composed works in defense of papal supremacy and against the Hussites.

Institoris enjoyed the support of Popes Sixtus IV and Innocent VIII, and was appointed by them as inquisitor into heretical depravity in a number of German dioceses. Unlike Sprenger, Institoris enjoyed the task of acting as an itinerant inquisitor. In the *Malleus*, he claims to have had 48 women condemned for the crime, and in the later *Nuremberg Handbook* the number rises to 200. Oddly, there is little evidence for this activity, even in the *Malleus*. There are several references in the text to the trial and execution of Agnes the bath keeper and Anna of Mindelheim for sorcery as the result of an inquisition conducted in Ravensburg in 1484. As it happens, a report on this inquisition written by the burgermasters and city council of the town is preserved, and this indicates that the inquisition was conducted by a "Brother Heinrich," and confirms the general outline of events as laid out in the *Malleus.* Another inquisition that is reported in some detail in the *Malleus* took place in Innsbruck in late 1485 and early 1486. Institoris investigated sorcery among the population of Innsbruck and neighboring towns, and eventually laid charges against eight women. There were objections to his handling of the case from the start, and eventually Bishop George of Brixen, in whose diocese Innsbruck lay, took over the proceedings. At first, Bishop George took the line that, even though he took some exception to his methods, Institoris's credentials as inquisitor meant that there was no choice but to assist him. In late October, however, the bishop had to intervene directly in the case, which was basically allowed to lapse. Even though the bishop made it clear to Institoris that there were objections to his involvement, he did so diplomatically, and Institoris turned over to the bishop the protocol of his investigations and a memorandum (the *Memorandum* cited above) on the legal method of prosecuting sorceresses, apparently under the assumption that the bishop would go on with prosecuting the cases. In February, the bishop had to write a letter demanding that Institoris leave the diocese. Nonetheless, he wrote in such a way as to avoid direct criticism of the friar, who, to judge from the positive terms in which the bishop is mentioned in

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the *Malleus* (95A, 136D[2]), bore the bishop no ill-will as a result of his dealings with him.

The argument is frequently made that the description of the work as a joint composition is a falsehood perpetrated by Institoris, who in fact wrote the whole thing himself. For this claim, there is little solid evidence. The argument was first made by the nineteenth-century German historian Joseph Hansen, who took a dim view of the late medieval and early modern *Hexenwahn* ("witch craze") and of those who carried it out. He based his case on certain procedural irregularities in the drawing up of the Approbation, the fact that the Approbation was initially published separately from the main text of the *Malleus*, and an unsubstantiated statement in a later source that two of the signatories of the Approbation asserted that they had not in fact signed it. The procedural irregularities signify nothing (after all, if the text were a forgery, why would it include proof of its own falsehood?) and the separate publication is easily explained (see below). As for the evidence of a later disavowal on the part of some signatories, this is indeed interesting, but since we know of this only from a short and much later remark and the records of the university have mostly been lost, there is not much that can be made of this (even if true, the two men may have had their own reasons for dissociating themselves from the proceedings that had nothing to do with a forgery on the part of Institoris). Later scholars have attempted to add small pieces to the argument, but it is fundamentally nugatory. Only an imbecile would have fabricated a claim to joint authorship in a sworn document that would be included with the forgery and which it would be impossible to keep from coming to the notice of the man who was being falsely associated with the work. In any event, what good would it do Institoris? He was clearly a man of no little prominence in his own right as both inquisitor and theologian, and he did not need to steal the name of a scholar from Cologne who was most noted for his propagation of the Rosary to validate his work about sorcery.

Is it then possible to divide up the composition among the two authors? Comparison with the *Memorandum* shows very close parallels with Pt. 3, which clearly must be attributed to Institoris. The numerous references in Pt. 2 to the prosecutions in Ravensburg and Innsbruck also suggest that it too is the work of Institoris. In addition, that part deals mainly with the practices of sorcery and the cures for these, and such topics are far more likely to be ascribable to the inquisitor

[2] For the method of citing the text used here, see below in section a of the "Notes on the translation."

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Institoris than the academic Sprenger. That leaves Pt. 1, which is mainly taken up with the demonstration of the existence of sorceresses and of a particular theological interpretation of sorcery, a demonstration that is presented in the special form of argumentation (the "disputed question," which is discussed below) characteristic of contemporary academic practice (scholasticism). While Institoris's academic background must have made him familiar with the discourse of scholasticism, surely this mode of argumentation would have been most familiar to the academic Sprenger (one might also note that the question at the start of Institoris's Pt. 3 is drawn up in a clumsy manner). As already noted, Sprenger was not particularly given to writing, so it is conceivable he either restricted himself to Pt. 1, or perhaps simply vetted the arguments. This is mere speculation, but whatever the exact nature of Sprenger's participation, the arguments adduced in support of Institoris's supposed concoction of such participation out of whole cloth are not at all cogent.

PURPOSE OF THE WORK

There was no single audience for whom the *Malleus* was intended, and the three parts served different purposes. Numerous references in Pt. 1 indicate that it was meant to provide material for the correct method of preaching on the topic of the reality of sorcery. The reason for this was the perceived need to counteract the preaching of priests who denied this reality. Though it may have been thought that any priest could benefit from reading the work, presumably the main audience foreseen for the scholastic argumentation of the *Malleus* were other members of the Dominican Order, who were specifically obligated to study theology – unlike the rather poorly educated secular (i.e., parish) clergy of the time – and whose very purpose was to spread this learning through sermons. The case is not so clear with Pt. 2, which deals with the procedures of the sorceresses and the ways to counteract these. At one point, it is stated that a certain explanation has been provided for the purposes of preaching (106D), but at another it is indicated that some of the matter should not be preached (142C). Finally, Pt. 3 seems to have a distinct and separate purpose of its own. It lays out the method of prosecuting heretical sorceresses, and an introductory passage (193D) indicates that it is addressed to both ecclesiastical and secular judges for their practical use.

Thus, the general purpose of the work is to demonstrate the view about sorcery held by Institoris (and presumably also Sprenger), against

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the opposition of unspecified critics both secular and ecclesiastical. The work attempts to prove the reality of sorcery, delineates the practices of sorceresses, and lays out the way to directly counteract those practices and to deal with the problem as a whole by exterminating the practitioners of sorcery through their conviction in court and execution. This overall conception is reflected in the title of the work.

The phrase *malleus haereticorum* ("hammer of heretics") was a term of approbation dating back to antiquity to designate those zealots of orthodoxy who were noteworthy for their efforts to "smash" heretics (adherents of Christian doctrines rejected by the Church). The term was transferred to a literary work with the *Malleus Judeorum* ("Hammer of Jews") of the inquisitor John of Frankfurt, which appeared around 1420. This set the precedent for the title of our *Malleus*, with the heretical sorceresses (*maleficae*) replacing the traditional heretics as the object of its attack. The *Malleus Maleficarum* is thus a hammer to be used to smash the conspiracy of sorceresses that was thought to be threatening the very existence of Christendom (this belief is treated below).

COMPOSITION AND PUBLICATION OF THE WORK

By a happy coincidence, it was discovered in the 1950s that some internal business records of Peter Drach, the man whose press in the western German town of Speyer issued the first edition of the *Malleus*, had been reused as part of the backing of a book, and some of these records relate to the *Malleus.* The book was already being dispatched for sale in February 1487, and another record refers to an unnamed treatise on sorcery being dispatched in an unspecified December; since the later records refer to the work by name, it would seem that the December in question was in 1486. The *Malleus* itself refers to events from 1485 pertaining to Institoris's abortive inquisition in Innsbruck. Since the task of typesetting and actually printing the work would have taken some time, it would seem that the clean copy must have been submitted by the fall of 1486. The actual composition of the work may date to an earlier period, with the anecdotes about Innsbruck being added in a final revision (it's hard to imagine such a long work being put together in just a few months in 1486).

The first edition of the *Malleus* is peculiar in that two short sections from the front of what was meant to be a single work were actually published separately and were added to the main text only with the second edition. Before discussing the reason for this seemingly odd procedure,

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it would be useful to discuss the content of the various sections of the work in the order in which they appear here.

Justification

The first section of the main body of the first edition is the Author's (Self-)Justification (*apologia*). This section is the equivalent of a modern introduction and/or preface. Here, it is stated in the first person plural that Jacobus Sprenger and an unnamed co-author had produced the work because of their realization that sorcery forms a particular element in Satan's final assault on God during the End Times. The fact that the word "author" appears in the singular has been cited as evidence that Institoris was the real author and made up Sprenger's participation, but not much should be made of this. In the first place, it may simply be a clumsy conversion into Latin of a German form (note the confusion in English as to whether it's Veterans' Day or Veteran's Day). In any event, Institoris would have been a pretty clumsy forger if he himself left such blatant evidence of his own fraud.

Bull

A papal bull is a form of official letter issued by the pope and authenticated with a special seal (*bulla*). The bull reproduced here (known as *summis desiderantes* after its opening words in Latin) was issued by Pope Innocent VIII in 1484 to help Institoris and Sprenger overcome opposition that they had met in connection with exercising the office of inquisitor. This bull follows the standard format. After the sterotyped salutation, the document lays out the situation that led to its issuance, and then specifies the actions that the pope authorizes or mandates. In this instance, the general harm that sorceresses are inflicting in Germany is first described at some length, and the connection of these activities with Satan is emphasized. It is then noted that Institoris's and Sprenger's efforts to stamp these activities out had met with opposition in the form of technical objections relating to the specific offenses that were covered by their appointment as inquisitors, which the pope then overrides by reiterating and amplifying the terms of the inquisitors' appointment.

Why was this document included? Clearly, Institoris believed it to be a papal validation of the view of sorcery that he advocated. Not only is the bull cited several times in the *Malleus* in these terms, but he still

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referred to it for the same purpose in the *Nuremberg Handbook* of 1491. For the same reason, modern critics who wish to ascribe the views in the *Malleus* to the Catholic Church (and censure the Church for approving these views) not surprisingly cite this bull. Given the procedures for the production of papal bulls, the body of the text giving the background to the order at the end was taken more or less verbatim from the petition in which the bull was requested.[3] This means that both the conception and phraseology go back to Institoris. The pope presumably knew nothing independently about the matter, though obviously he raised no objections since he granted the request (and borrowed its language).

Approbation

The "Approbation" is an official certification of the orthodoxy of the *Malleus* plus a validation of four specific points relating to sorcery that represent the general thrust of the work's argument. This approbation takes the form of a public document drawn up on May 19, 1487, at the request under oath of Institoris, on behalf of himself and Sprenger as the authors of the *Malleus*. The proceedings are then carried out under the careful guidance of Lambertus de Monte, the head of the theological faculty of the University of Cologne, who first states his own approval of the questions to be approved, and is then followed with greater or lesser enthusiasm by other members of the faculty who were present. The proceedings were based on the faculty members' prior reading of the work.

Joseph Hansen made much of the fact that the notary public who drew up the document states that he had to leave at one point, and combined this with the now lost notice that two of the other theology professors later objected that they had not in fact been present. As already noted, we have no idea what these objections actually consisted of, and it hardly makes sense to use the evidence of the document itself to prove that the proceedings were invalid (why would someone who concocted such proceedings put in irregularities to undermine their credibility?). It is sometimes misunderstood that Hansen claimed that the document was a forgery, but what he actually claimed was that the proceedings were flawed. As it is, Hansen could give no explanation of why Institoris should have engaged in such an effort to produce a false document to

[3] Interestingly enough, the text of the petition was recently found in the papal archives (this appears as an appendix to the bilingual edition).

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claim Sprenger as a co-author, much less why the head of the theological faculty and the notary should have co-operated in such a pointless and dangerous fraud.

As for the actual purpose of the exercise, while Institoris could only produce implicit papal confirmation of the views propounded in the *Malleus* via the background information in the bull of 1484, here he acquired direct validation of the work itself in the form of the approval of one of the most prestigious theological faculties in Germany – one, moreover, that had a reputation as a staunch upholder of standard orthodoxy.

After an elaborate table of contents, the main body follows. This consists of three parts known as books. The work has a large number of cross-references, which for the most part hold true. There are, however, a few that indicate that there was some reordering of the material before the work reached its final form, and the table of contents shows a few deviations from the actual content. On the whole, such inconsistencies are few, and given the elaborate structure of the work and the conditions under which it was produced, it is commendable that the signposting of the work is so accurate.

Part 1

Part 1 is meant to demonstrate, against skepticism on the part of both laity and certain clergymen, the reality of sorcery. After a general proof of the reality of sorcery, the book is organized in three sections corresponding to the elements considered to be necessary in the commission of sorcery: the sorceress herself, the demon, and the permission of God. The argument in this book is mostly theoretical discussion based on Thomas Aquinas, and it consists almost exclusively of disputed questions characteristic of scholastic argumentation (see below).

Part 2

Part 2 treats the actual practices of sorceresses and is itself divided into two parts, the first dealing with the actions of the sorceresses themselves and the second with legitimate methods of counteracting them. There is some evidence that the original intention was that the second part of this book was to be combined with Pt. 3 as a general treatment of how to counteract sorcery by undoing the act in practical terms and by exterminating the sorceresses themselves judicially. There are still

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