

Michael D. Bailey. Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to the Present (Classical Issues in History). New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007. Bibliography. Index. x+274. \$75.00 (cloth). \$24.95 (paper). ISBN-10: 0-7425-3386-7. ISBN-10: 0-7425-3387-5.

Magic intrigues and fascinates not only folklorists but scholars from other disciplines. As a broadly defined phenomenon, magic allows numerous approaches and various interpretations. In his new book, Michael D. Bailey presents a comprehensive historical overview of magic. Magic's shifting definition is quite problematic, and Bailey looks at both magic and superstition as overlapping, but not identical, categories. He presents magic as an integral part of European history, a "serious subject for serious men," (p. 1) rather than an exotic issue. This subject is covered through seven chapters and conveniently unfolded before the reader in chronological order.

Although Bailey stresses the permanent fidelity of the laity to various magical practices, his main method is the analysis of the archival records, "of what authorities approved or condemned" (p. 74). Magic and superstition, therefore, appear in the book as they were seen or interpreted by the society's elites; there are few subaltern voices presented. Due to this, the book is rather an investigation into the dynamics of the European power structure, i.e. how secular and religious authorities (those at the center of power) defined magic and treated magic practitioners (people they saw as being in the margins of power).

Bailey traces these dynamics, from the ancient world up to the modern period. He defines familiar facts about magic clearly and challenges popular myths about their moral and legal condemnation. Thus, we learn that there was no major distinction between religious and magical practices in the pre-Christian times: concerns over magic started growing only after the establishment of Christendom, when "the apostles of Christ or other early Christians competed with practitioners of magic to win believers by demonstrating superiority of their power" (p. 48). Although magic was a threshold demarcating Christian and pagan worlds until the year 1000, Christianity was concerned mainly with expansion and converting pagans in the European territories. Magic was tolerated because it was seen as a remnant of pagan beliefs and practices, foolish but not threatening.

Not until the High and Late Middle Ages - when Christianity defined the Satan figure - did the dramatic shift occur, and an idea of

magic as a learned diabolical craft emerged. Bailey reveals how natural and man-made disasters occurring in medieval Europe contributed to concerns about magic as a deliberate heretical deviance and thus to the zeal of the emergent Inquisition. Magic became a field of serious study, and various theorists of witchcraft attempted to explain how it functioned. Many rare pictures in Bailey's book reveal the misogyny of those theorists.

In the early modern period, witchcraft was feared and began to be seen as a group crime, not an individual occupation. Using available statistics, Bailey demonstrates that the intensity and spread of witch hunting varied across different regions of Europe. He confirms that the major period of witch hunting corresponded to the Reformation, but challenges the widespread myth about the nine million executions in Europe. According to Bailey, skepticism replaced the zeal of witch hunting, and this tendency was strengthened from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment when magic faded from the intellectual discourse of the period and stopped being perceived as real.

Bailey presents in detail how magic was overtaken by occultism and natural philosophy thanks to the humanists who revived interest in ancient thought. Figures like Paracelsus, Nostradamus, Giordano Bruno, or Campanella held that magic was natural, not demonic, that it was experiential and rather experimental. Some of their explanations of nature and the spirit world challenged church doctrine. The magical practices of previous centuries were changed and adapted into Hermetic, Kabbalistic, astral, or alchemical magic, and thus continued to survive.

Generally, Bailey stresses the continuity of European magical traditions. They survived the Scientific Revolution whose representatives like Copernicus, Kepler, Bacon, Newton, etc. regarded superstition as scientific error and magic as superstition. Later, Enlightenment thinkers fought to eradicate both superstitions and institutionalized religion.

Despite all attempts, magic has not been replaced by technology, even in modern times. On the contrary, states Bailey, protest against the scientific view of the world has led to a new interest in magic. The occult revival in the nineteenth century engulfed first of all educated people. They became fascinated with esoteric systems of knowledge that various societies such as the Theosophical Society, or Golden Dawn, and various schools of magic provided. In the twentieth century, magical movements like Neopaganism and Wicca continued to flourish, and Bailey provides very interesting facts about "Europe's first and only "pro-witch"

government, the Nazi regime” (p. 236). Ultimately, modern witchcraft shifted from Europe to the United States and became feminist in nature.

Bailey’s style of writing is captivating and the results of his archival research are impressive, yet there are a few weak points in his book. The word “Europe” in the title is misleading for those who would like to know more about Eastern European magic: Bailey warns at the beginning that “Europe itself will be defined largely as Western Christendom, the boundaries of which fluctuated but generally centered on Western Europe” (p. 6). It is, however, not clear why Bailey chose religious criterion for division (Catholicism and Protestantism vs. Byzantine Orthodoxy) but then applied contemporary geographical division and excluded Poland and Hungary calling them Eastern Europe. A brief mentioning of the war “between Sweden and Russia” (p. 169) (where in fact Russia was a secondary participant) makes the picture of Polish witch hunting very difficult to grasp. Bailey then attempts, for the sake of comparison, to cast a brief light on Orthodox Muscovy of the seventeenth century (he calls it Russia) in one paragraph on pp. 169-170. It is not clear why the author chooses Russia, for it certainly was neither the only Orthodox state nor the first one to accept Orthodoxy on European territory. Unfortunately, Bailey provides no references for those interested in this particular matter.

At the same time, Bailey seems to be fascinated with the magical tradition of the past so that he completely rejects politics and presents the magical worldview of the nineteenth-century peasants as the main reason for the birth of folklore as a discipline: “So strange and foreign did the great majority of Europe’s people now seem to the educated classes that intellectuals began to engage in ethnographic studies of various social groups, and especially of rural populations, within European lands” (p. 215).

As Bailey himself suggests, his study can become a basis for further research. His book would certainly be useful for a wide audience and for any folklorists dealing with the topic of magic and superstition in cultural context.

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