

Final Project: Meta Analysis

LIS:681 – Doctor Annette Lamb

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For the purposes of this final project, I chose a subject that has fascinated me since my youth: the infamous fifteenth-century witch-hunting manual, *Malleus Maleficarum*. While I have read the *Malleus* several times over the years, I have never subjected the book to intense historical investigation for its own sake; instead, most of my analyses *vis-à-vis* the *Malleus* revolved around its influences on Colonial America's notorious Salem Witch Trials of 1692. Despite previous readings and research, I never had the chance to read the *Malleus* in its original Latin, so when I happened upon Christopher Mackay's new edition containing an extensive introduction, new translation, and the original Latin text, I thought a critical rereading of the primary source in Latin, along with in-depth examination of secondary scholarly expositions, would prove perfect for the objective, historical examination required for this final project. My methodology would be simple: construct a historical biography of the *Malleus* by situating it within a theoretical model explicated by *book historians* with the goal of extrapolating insights based on a holistic understanding of the text.

Furthermore, a single and somewhat broad research question remained in the foreground while the data was collected and analyzed: *How influential was this book on the development of the Western European Hexenwahn (Witch Craze)?* As I explain in my introduction, many academics and non-academics hypothesize that the publication of *Malleus Maleficarum* not only sparked, but proved to be the principal, driving force behind the *Hexenwahn*, and that this book is directly responsible for the deaths of nearly one hundred thousand innocent victims (80 percent, of which, were women). However, and very similar to the *chicken vs. egg* argument within the academic study of the development of Gutenberg's printing press, others aver that the *Malleus* was, indeed, a product of the sociocultural, politicoeconomic, and historioreligious context within which it arose. With my extensive background in *anthropology*, I unequivocally agree, but my agreement does not release the *Malleus* or its authors from agential culpability. Thus, agential expression (*Malleus Maleficarum*) and processual context (macrocultural paradigm) must be understood as part of the same comprehensive unit; effectively arising and giving form to one another in a complex yet subtle process of interchange and mutual dependency. When analyzed in this way, all printed titles, even those deemed sacred by religious groups (e.g. the Judeo-Christian Bible), must be seen as nothing more than products of history that – once produced – impact and influence the preexisting paradigm.

Once the data were collected and situated within the appropriate categories, I then subjected it to two different kinds of analyses. The first consisted of a microanalytical approach where each datum was considered in close detail. During this first stage of extrapolation, deeper insights into the nature of the

material and the continuing need for ongoing research presented themselves. Thus, some questions were answered that, in turn, engendered new questions worth exploring in the future. This is the nature of academic scholarship; it never ends, but merely deepens through the transmutation of relevant questions. Then, once this initial process was completed (for lack of a better term), the second stage of analysis could commence. This second stage utilized a macroanalytical understanding of the disparate units of data so that a general understanding of the *Malleus*' place in history could be extrapolated. In this case, it allowed for the answering of the general question concerning how influential the book was on the subsequent history of the Western tradition.

Of course, a book as notorious, infamous, and, yes, influential within and on the development of Western Civilization since the last decades of the fifteenth century cannot be thoroughly investigated as part of a final project in a graduate-level class. Scholars have devoted their entire careers to the subject. However, this does not mitigate the contribution (however meager it may be) of the research done. *Academia* is an ongoing conversation between countless individuals within myriad discipline-based groups trying to come to a better, more holistic understanding of nature, humanity, reality, and some would dare aver, *truth*; and any voice adding to the discussion in this dizzying milieu is most certainly welcomed as long as it is predicated on minimizing ignorance, subjectivity, and bias. Perhaps, in the end, awareness of the need for further research will prompt aspiring young scholars to make researching *Malleus Maleficarum* and the resulting *Hexenwahn* their lives' work. Thus, the conversation continues.