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DOCTORAL THESIS

Visions about hell in the 15th century: case study Malleus Maleficarum

-Summary-

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One of the most important demonological treaties is the *Malleus Maleficarum*, *Maleficas, et earum haeresim, ut phramea potentissima conterens*, or the *Witches Hammer, which destroys the witches and their heresy as a double-edged sword*, treaty that will define the the genus as such. The *Malleus Maleficarum* appeared in 1487 and it is the work of two general-inquisitors Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger.

All subsequent treaties will take examples from this work (e.g. concerning the different capacities of the witches), or certain methods for the interpretation of canonical sources or, or even methods of applying torture. The treaty is divided into three main parts, which in turn are subdivided into questions and answers/solutions. In these, are discussed the evidences of witchcraft, the agents that are involved in the practice of sorcery, the evil practices and their remedies, and various aspects regarding the legal side of this phenomenon.

The authors take examples and ideas from predecessors and contemporary demonologists, which they used in a productive way, in order to give a series of strong arguments to their own theories. The treaty had the role of a guidebook for inquisitors, a working tool, since in the contents of this work are refined the capacities, attitudes, the charms witches/wizards would have done. At the same time are indexed the Devil's actions which are carried out with the help of witch/warlock, as well as the independent ones.

Within this thesis, which we have intitled *Visions about hell in the 15th century: case study Malleus Maleficarum*, we aimed to analyze the concepts of the two authors with regard to: a) the witchcraft beliefs and practices (harmful charms, initiation rituals and the belief in the existence of sabbatic meetings) and b) details about the demonic characters (devil, incubus and succubus demons) and demonolised (witches, warlocks) and the underworld.

Our thesis has in its begining an unit with an introductory role, followed by five chapters, devoted to a few important issues, and in the end we have a unit reserved for the conclusions. In the introduction we ve presented the theme chosen, the reasons that led to the choice of this theme, the research history, but also aspects that were out of sight until now and last but not least, our own contribution brought to resolve the aspects listed above.

Chapter I, entitled *Religion and superstition in the fifteenth century*, was devoted to the historical context in which it the treaty *Malleus Maleficarum* was drafted. Throughout this chapter we have illustrated the main superstitions and fears that dominated Western European Christian culture throughout this century. Later, we presented several important aspects relating to the literature devoted to superstitions, magic and exorcistice practices. In the second part of the chapter we examined the relationship between Christian religion and heresy, by presenting the four main processes of heresy (Jan Hus, Joan of Arc, Gilles de Rais and Girolamo Savonarola).

Chapter II entitled *The witch in the Malleus Maleficarum* we had summarized all the aspects pertaining to the practices carried out by witches. In this chapter we have systematized the information relating to the three major types of witches (young sorceress, the mature midwife and the deadly hag). In addition, we examined and some of the charms of these witches practice, among which we can mention: the injury of impotence, hitting the women with infertility, the incitement of storms.

Chapter III entitled *The warlock in the Malleus Maleficarum* has released a series of stories relating to the men engaged in acts of witchcraft. From the analysis of these reports we extracted the information necessary to outline the typologies of sorcerers of this treaty. We began by investigating the three branches of witchcraft: sorcerers-archers, charmers of weapons and necromancers, followed by a case study- the sorcerer Stadlin.

Chapter IV entitled *The devil and demons in the Malleus Maleficarum*, we analyzed the descriptions of the infernal creatures, as well as given an inventory of

these powers and of the unclean spirits. In the first part of the chapter we turned our attention to the figure of the devil, and to the many capabilities it possesses. In the second part of the chapter we have referred to the demons under his command, with special emphasis on the incubus and succubus demons. We also detailed all aspects of the inferno.

Chapter V entitled *The cultural impact of the Malleus Maleficarum*, we listed some of the traces that this treaty has left to the subsequent generations. First we spotlighted a number of influences in connection to the demonological literature, calling for the treaties, Ulrich Molitor *De lamiis et phitonicis mulieribus* (1489), Giovanfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, *Strix sive de ludificatione daemonum* (1524), Johannes Weyer, *De praestigiis daemonum* (1563) and Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584).

Then, we watched how the ideas expressed in the *Malleus Maleficarum* were illustrated in the field of fine arts. We had in mind the engravings made by masters like Albrecht Dürer in *Initiation into the society of witches* (1497) and *Witch riding a goat* (1500/1502), Hans Baldung Grien in *The Witches Sabbath* (1510), *New Year Greeting* (1514), *The young witch and the Dragon* (1515) and *The bewitched groom* (1544) and Niklaus Manuel in *The old Witch* (1518).

The last pages of the thesis were devoted to conclusions and in them, we have summarized the main features of the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

The *Malleus Maleficarum*, emerged in an era characterised by a crisis of religious authorities and the attempts to reform this authority, but also by the existence of a tendency more and more often, to control popular beliefs and related practices.

The fifteenth century is the age of a profound spiritual crisis, in these age appear even more divine messengers, inspired political and military leaders are falling prey to sins against nature, and the line of demarcation between the miracle of the divine and the demonic illusions is increasingly thin. In this century a very important impetus of literature devoted to the devil and his servants, and the first major trials of witchcraft ocure.

Unease on the part of the authorities of the clergy, the growing fear of the devil and witchcraft trials constitute the general framework in which Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger compose their work of demonology. Throughout the *Malleus Maleficarum* the central character is the witch. Along the work, the witch appears in a

variety of poses: from the old to the young, from the charming and seductive female to the the companion of demons.

In countless pages of the work, we find precious information and details about the activities of witches. These women appear to be us making love charms or stirring up storms, destroying crops and killing domestic animals, but also in the context of nocturnal meetings chaired by the devil, or maintaining uneasy relations of sexual type with the incubus demons.

Of the various categories of witches, the two dominican monks choose the penitente witches to illustrate the veracity of these facts. Although in turn, they belong with the rest of the sect during the run of the devil, they are used by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger to punctuate certain ideas that require a surplus of 'authority'. This authority stems from the fact that witches penitente have information straight from the source. This distinction made between various categories of witch is one of the main features of this treaty. Often, Kramer and Sprenger achieves real antithetic relationships between the various characters within the stories included in the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

These relationships are predominant in witch-related stories (the penitent #witch, the witch # little witch, the young witch # old witch, the loathsome woman # the pious wife). When the *Malleus Maleficarum* describes episodes in which several witches are mentioned, there are elements of differentiation and hierarchy between them. We will have older or younger witches, more wicked or less harmful witches. The same is true for the wizards. The figure of archers wields a central role, while those of the charmers and the necromancers play an almost peripheral role. There is also a shift between individualisation and generalization; of the total of sorcerers' accounts, only two figures are particularly highlighted (Punker of Rohrbach and Stadlin).

The forces of good are represented by the Almighty figure of God, the preached images of the Savior and His holy mother, Virgin Mary, the holy angels, representatives of the Christian church, and the faithful who obey the commandments of the church; while the forces of evil are represented by the prince of demons, fallen angels, infernal demons, the witch and sorcerer's sect, as well as the many heretics, apostates and forcibles.

Throughout the treaty, when the two authors talked about the witches victims, we mention either a precise number of victims (see below, the case of the

man from city of Ravensburg to whom the witch killed 23 horses), or used syntaxes as "admitted he had killed a lot children ".

From reading carefully the accounts of the devil, fallen angels and demons, we notice that there is interchangeability between the terms devil/demon. Although in the Christian theological writings, the term devil is used exclusively for the leader of the infernal beings, the two dominican monks also use it, to designate the fallen angels and demons. Also related to these malignant spirits, we must mention that they have a duplicative behavior in their relationship with their human collaborators (witches, wizards). This is evidenced by the two authors several times within the treaty.

As a means of protection against demons and their human acolytes, in the *Malleus Maleficarum* treaty we find the use the sign of the holy cross and the prayers addressed to God and to His saints (see the cases dedicated to the figure of the old witch). These means of protection also serve as markers for identifying positive characters.

Of all the charms performed by the devil's servants in the demonological work, the emphasis is on sexual relations (theft of penises, preventing sexual intercourse between husbands, provoking men's impotence, injuring women with sterility and lack of sexual appetite, copulation witches with incubus demons, copulation of succubus demons).

Another feature of this treaty is the tendency to structure and hierarchize the servants of the devil, depending on the activities. As for the witch, we have three typologies (1. midwives, 2. seductive young women and 3. corrupt old ladies), and as far as wizards are concerned, we also have three categories (1. archers, 2 charmers of weapons and 3. necromancers).

a) The associations between the profanation of the *ostia* and the pierced crucifix, between thunderstorming and killing by arrows, b) demon-witch-witch-archer-demon pairs, c) antagonisms between the offering of the babies to the demons # the baptism of the Christian baptism, the blasphemous ritual of the wizards- archery, highlights that both the witch and the wizard have the same roles to play in the actions of the devil, the only differences being related to the instrument used and the area in which they perform each activity. Each sex uses only the elements that are specific to his or her gender.

Of the three great infernal characters in *Malleus Maleficarum* (devil, witch, sorcerer), the information about the witch predominates in quantitative terms, with the devil and the sorcerer being placed on a secondary plane. The two inquisitors turn all faces, everything related to her powers, to her actions, and to the relationships she has with the devil, the inferior demons or the people.

Regarding the rituals of initiation to which witches and sorcerers are subjected, we must mention that they are very similar. Both witches and witches with older members of the demonic sect are denying Christian faith, profanating Christian objects, paying homage to the devil with body and soul, and signing the covenant with him.

In all types of initiation (how many kinds of witches we have, so many rituals of initiation) we have combined physical actions or gestures, with vowing, shouting or blasphemy. By these ways, the witch and the sorcerer teach the devil with body and soul through action and speech, and as a reward they receive supernatural abilities. In this transaction between the two parties lies the effectiveness of the evil ceremony.

In general, initiation in the occult mysteries was an experienced witch, who chose the victim according to her virtues, then through vain promises she was drawn into a sexual relationship with a demon transvestite in the man, getting help to him, and in turn, once he reached the age of old, assumes the role of mentor and continues the recruitment cycle for the demonic sect (old witch → virgin → demon → witch → old witch).

All of the treaty stories about witchcraft practices have a standard pattern: a brief introduction (identifying the place and time of the action) → mentioning the victim / victims → mentioning the product charm → identifying the offender / offender → details of the victim's suffering / victims → the protagonist's decision to act → the witch / witch's public prosecution → the witch / witch arrest → the condemnation of the offender / offender → his / her execution → the return of the victim to the normal state.

Very often within the treaty, the two inquisitors give little identification, with more emphasis on the actions presented than on personal information. As with the witch or the wizard and the devil and infernal henchmen, we receive a number of important information in the *Malleus Maleficarum*. These important issues debated widely by the two authors were related to: a) the metamorphosis of the demons, b) the

uniqueness and superiority of Lucifer over the rest of the fallen angels, c) the similarities between the false signs of the Antichrist and the demonic ones, d) the ways in which incubus and succubus demons damage people, e) the relationship between astrological practices and demonic actions, and f) the name of the devil and demons.

Though very powerful, the devil is still in a relationship of subordination to God. This relationship of subordination to the devil is repeated many times in the intriguing work, becoming a common place. Regarding the relationship between the devil and the people, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger point out that not all sins are made at his instigation. Some of them are produced because of the will of man. And this opinion is common in the treaty, serving as a reminder for readers. In the work of Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, the aspects related to the sphere of infernal creatures are much discussed (the relations of demons with people, their attributes and functions), but surprisingly, about their place of residence, the two authors touch the subject only in passing and in a lapidary manner, it is deficient in information.

The first mentions about hell in the *Malleus Maleficarum* treaty, appear in a discussion of where the demons are living. The two inquisitors mention that the demons have two dwellings, one temporary (the overhead areas) and one permanent, hell. They live in the temporary one until the arrival of the Last Judgment, and from then on they will be imprisoned in hell. The two authors conclude that the demons have their home in the air, based on the interpretation of the passage in the *Book of Job* in which Satan appears for the first time.

One of the features of these two authors in the *Malleus Maleficarum* is the tendency to hierarchize and order. Going along this path, the two inquisitors tell us that "even in hell there will be an order based on authority and the punishment, but as the tortures to which the demons and sinners will be subjected and here the order will be imposed by God and not by them (demons)". Depending on the rank in the hierarchy, demons will deal with the punishment of their counterparts and sinners, but these tortures will not be done according to their will but according to God's will.

Hell is mentioned a few times when it comes to heretics who do not want to abjure, and they are in danger of death and destined to burn in hell. Another mention of hell is related to a passage on the practice of invoking the dead. Kramer and Sprenger let us know that when they think he is invoking the dead from hell, to

answer their questions, the demon appears by taking the face of the one called and responding. The last mention of hell is represented by a statement of aphorism: "Just as grace is followed by the vision of the heavenly house, so the guilt is followed by punishment in hell."

In the *Malleus Maleficarum* treaty hell appears rarely mentioned, being positioned from the point of view of the two authors' interest, on a totally secondary plan. However, we can see that hell is a home of both the dead and demons, and a place of torture where divine justice is enforced.

The *Malleus Maleficarum* treaty played a particularly important role in structuring beliefs about witches and their demonic practices, but also in the dissemination of these beliefs. These beliefs have been taken over by philosophers or doctors (see the cases of Giovanfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Weyer) or by various authors, from fellow theologians (see the case of Ulrich Molitor).

In addition to the take-backs from the scholarly environment, we also have some easy-to-understand influences in the field of graphic representations. Various artists have been influenced directly by the stories and information contained in the *Witches Hammer*. The richness of the details contained in their works Albrecht Dürer, Hans Baldung Grien, Niklaus Manuel translate into the visual field, which Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger put on the paper.