

Witch Hunt: medieval barbarity or timeless cruelty?



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Caccia alle streghe



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Between superstition and religion, the analysis of a phenomenon and its modernity.

At the end of the Middle Ages begins the so-called “witch hunt.” According to the bill Summis desiderantes, promulgated by Pope Innocent VIII in 1484, the witches would create a sect determined to attack Christianity as never occurred before. But what is the phenomenon of witchcraft and the subsequent witch hunt? It is an offensive against the universe folkloric and popular superstitions? It is a reaction to the diversity of society?

On the basis of a careful analysis of the sources, and the writings, it is possible to draw a general framework from which the “hunt” emerges as a constitutive element of modernity. In particular, this phenomenon is not only typical of the “barbaric Middle Ages,” but it persists even and especially in the times in which we like to think that the triumph of reason and law prevail.

Marina Montesano teaches Medieval history at the University of Messina. Among her publications: *Medieval History* (with Franco Cardini), Florence, 2006.

