Witchcraft In Early Modern Europe

'Witch' - where did this term originate?

- **Wicce/Wicca** - old Saxon term for someone who uses magic, for good or bad
- **Hex/hexe** - German (modern) terms
- **Maleficia** - malicious magical acts of any kind, from which the term 'malefactor' is derived. **Maleficarum** also
- **Strega** - Italian word for witch, original meaning was 'screech owl'.

**Key Terms:**

- Witch trials throughout Europe (at different times) between roughly 1400-1600s, although some are later
- First recorded witch trial was of Alice Kyteler in 1324, a wealthy and well-connected woman from Kilkenny, Ireland. After this, there is a noted gap before more witch-trials were performed in Britain/Ireland.
- There were more witch-hunts in Scotland, possibly (but not definitely) due to the influence of James I
- Essex was one of the counties with the most trials and executions, possibly due to its closer links with the continent.
- Men were more likely to be accused as an accessory to the witchcraft, often the relatives or husbands of the women in question.
- Old/widowed women were often accused, petty squabbles/disagreements between rural neighbours were often a reason to declare someone a witch.
- Estimated between 300 - 1000 men and women were executed in England, although it's suspected to be on the lower side.
- Linked with misogyny and the strong religious influence of the time.
- Though both men and women were accused, women were a more common target.
- The witchcraft ‘craze’ seemed to move through Europe at a slow rate, arriving at some places quicker than others. France was a key element in the formation of witch-hunts.
- The Cathars and Templars - early examples
- Heresy and witchcraft Are similar - but not the same
-Links with other maligned social and religious groups, such as Jews, lepers and homosexuals.
- Links between witchcraft and misogyny and the strong religious influence of the time.

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