

Mastering the Essay

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AP European History Modified DBQ #4

4. SKEPTICISM AND WITCHCRAFT

Exercise Question: Analyze and assess the arguments for the existence of witchcraft 1500-1700.

Document A

SOURCE: Pope Alexander VI, from the papal bull *Cum acceperimus*, 1501

Since we have learned that in the province of Lombardy many people of both sexes give themselves over to diverse incantations and devilish superstitions in order to procure many wicked things by their ventry [sexual] and vain rites, to destroy men, beasts, and fields, to spread great scandal, and to induce grievous errors, we decree, in order both to fulfill our pastoral office from our high commission and to restrain these evils, scandals, and errors, that they shall cease. That is the reason why we send to you, commit to you, and order you and your successors appointed in Lombardy our full confidence in the Lord, that you may seek out diligently those people of both sexes (either by yourself or with the aid of a company which you shall choose) and secure and punish them through the medium of justice.

Document B

SOURCE: Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 1584

Excommunicated persons, partakers of the fault, infants, wicked servants, and runaways are to be admitted to bear witness against their dames in this matter of witchcraft: because (says Bodin the champion of witchmongers) none that be honest are able to detect them. Heretics also and witches shall be received to accuse, but none to excuse a witch. And finally, the testimony of all infamous persons in this case is good and allowed. Yea, one lewd person (says Bodin) may be received to accuse and condemn a thousand suspected witches.

Document C

SOURCE: Michel de Montaigne, "Concerning Cripples," 1588

The witches of my neighborhood are in mortal danger every time some new author comes along and attests to the reality of their visions. . . . He who imposes his argument by bravado and command shows that it is weak in reason. . . . To kill men, we should have sharp and luminous evidence My ears are battered by a thousand stories like this: "Three people saw him on such-and-such a day in the east; three saw him the next day in the west. . . ." Truly, I would not believe my own self about this. How much more natural and likely it seems to me that two men are lying than that one man should pass with the winds in twelve hours from the east to the west! How much more natural that our understanding should be carried away from its base by the volatility of our untracked mind than that one of us, in flesh and bone, should be wafted up a chimney on a broomstick by a strange spirit!

Document D

SOURCE: Friedrich Spee, from *Precautions for Prosecutors*, 1631

And so, as soon as possible, she is hurried to the torture, if indeed she be not subjected to it on the very day of her arrest, as often happens. For in these trials there is granted to nobody an advocate or any means of fair defense . . . and whoever ventures to defend the prisoner is brought into suspicion of the crime as are all those who dare to utter a protest in these cases and to urge the judges to caution; for they are forthwith dubbed patrons of the witches.

Document E

SOURCE: Thomas Hobbes, from *Leviathan*, 1651

. . . I find in Scripture that there be Angels, and Spirits, good and evil . . . but not that any man's body was possessed, or inhabited by them. . . . Nevertheless, the contrary Doctrine . . . hath hitherto so prevailed in the Church, that the use of Exorcism, is thereupon built . . . That there were many Demonic in the Primitive Church, and few Madmen . . . whereas in these times we hear of, and see many Mad-men, and few Demonic, proceeds not from the change of Nature; but of Names.