

Machielsen, Jan, ed, *The Science of Demons: Early Modern Authors Facing Witchcraft and the Devil*, London, Routledge, 2020; paperback; pp. 324; R.R.P. € 34.00; ISBN 9781138571839.

Early modern European demonological scholarship, in its modern incarnation, seems to operate on a twenty-year cycle. Sydney Anglo's *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft* (Routledge, 1977) effectively established the state of the art for this field. Two decades later, Stuart Clark published his paradigm-shifting *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (1997). Engaging with the legacy of these two influential texts, Jan Machielsen's edited collection *The Science of Demons: Early Modern Authors Facing Witchcraft and the Devil* is another significant scholarly intervention in this field. Presenting a panoramic survey of demonological scholarship by an extensive line-up of distinguished scholars, this excellent work will undoubtedly become an essential resource for readers seeking to understand the historical and intellectual development of diabolic 'science' in Europe.

Demonology is the systematic study of demonic mechanics and agency (particularly in relation to witchcraft). Demons were a constant presence in early modern thought as these entities transcended disciplinary boundaries and offered insight into the realms beyond human perception. Demonology, writes Machielsen, "was the first properly interdisciplinary science, touching not only on theology and law [...] but on areas of natural philosophy and medicine as well" (p. 10). Early modern audiences clearly did far more than simply think about demons: they lived with them.

The Science of Demons sets itself two principal objectives for the study of demonology. Firstly, this volume charts its "rise and elaboration from its late medieval roots to the heyday of the witch-hunt (1570–1630), when perhaps as many as 90% of its victims perished" (p. 4). Secondly, it explores how "demonological beliefs, as they spread across the continent [...] interact[ed] with and make sense of folkloric beliefs", illustrating "how demonologists, from Spain to Poland and from Italy to Scotland, were able to adapt demonology to the local customs and beliefs of their regions" (p. 5). It succeeds on both fronts. *The Science of Demons* features nineteen erudite, yet somewhat brief, essays that cover a myriad of European demonologists and their published works. Notably, this collection is not merely concerned with the advocates of demonology as it also dedicates space to 'sceptics' such as the Englishman Reginald Scot. Demonology was not solely about

the belief in demons but addressed how these entities did, or did not, interact with the material realm.

The Science of Demons is divided into five sections, chronologically surveying the development of European demonological beliefs over different geographical and disciplinary areas. The first section, “Beginnings”, covers the emergence of the fundamental demonic pact and witches’ sabbat concepts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These concepts, after gaining traction, inspired the first wave of printed witchcraft texts (the subject matter of Part 2) a century later. Part 3, the most substantial section, centres on the sixteenth century debates as Reformed and Catholic demonological writers began to take increasingly diverging paths. These debates also generated scepticism with many writers finding substantial fallacies with the prevailing demonological traditions. The final two sections extend the scholarly analysis into the early seventeenth century, examining how authors conceptualised demonology within the purview of theology and natural law. *The Science of Demons* concludes in this period, at the height of the European witch-hunt and well before its eventual decline.

A major theme in this work is the European witch-hunts: a cultural phenomenon that resulted in the death of approximately 40,000–50,000 men and woman over a period of three hundred years. *The Science of Demons* further contextualises the demonology underpinning the witch hunts but, wisely, does not delve into their decline. Machielsen explains: “There is a dreary repetition to the writings of later witchcraft theorists [...] the later defence of the reality of witchcraft was no more than a rehash of arguments that had already been made” (p. 12). Ultimately, the ‘decline of magic’ has been a confounding subject matter for scholars and requires an entire dedicated volume. The latter sections of this work certainly highlight the developing conflict between demonology and other disciplines over the seventeenth century, yet the contentious debate on this decline is not part of the narrative that *The Science of Demons* outlines.

Overall, *The Science of Demons* stands as a significant scholarly contribution to early modern demonology. Accessible, engaging, and profound, it offers a precise snapshot into the thought-world of early modern demonological authors. The nineteen essays in this collection adeptly chart the development of demonological paradigms over the late medieval and early modern period, establishing the far-reaching interdisciplinary nature of this field. Readers should note that, because of obvious practical limitations, this collection is more of a jumping-off point than a comprehensive study of the featured demonologists. *The Science of*

Demons is not attempting to be an all-encompassing 'Dictionary of Demonological Biography' (p. 12), but rather a concise survey of early modern demonology. In this respect it succeeds on all fronts and will soon be recognised as the standard scholarly work on early modern European demonology.

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