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A well-written book review.

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HIST 610
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Critical Book Review

It would be helpful to the reader to have some background on Klaitz - is he a professional historian and what else has he written?

Klaitz, Joseph. *Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985.

McCarthyism in the 1950s gave a new definition to the term "witch hunt."

Ferretting out communists was the object of these recent witch hunts. The original witch hunts, which were mostly between 1560 and 1680, were concerned with a more mythical and powerful creature: real witches. In his book, *Servants of Satan*, Joseph Klaitz examines the witch craze atmosphere that existed during and after both the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter Reformation.

same as hysteria was in the 1690's

Though Klaitz gives a good background of the centuries preceding the witch craze, *Servants of Satan* is a social history of Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. His thesis is that the witch craze was not a social aberration and that it reflected the dark side of the political, social, religious, and cultural changes that were occurring throughout Europe during ^{that} this time. His background material sets up this thesis by showing the construction of traditional beliefs that support the concept of a "white" witch, that is, a witch that is beneficial to the community in some way. Europeans had a long tradition of belief in witchcraft that served to explain supernatural or strange happenings. The interference of the values and stereotypes of the educated upper class and their need to

control the lower class through politics and religion steadily changed the popular cultural concept of the witch from a benign community helper to a savage and vicious person – almost always a woman – who was sexually involved with Satan himself.

The changing perceptions of European society, Klaitz argue, deeply intertwine with the rise and fall of the witch craze. Changing perceptions of magic helped usher the craze in. No one debated that magic came from the power of Satan. Wizards and witches used the Devil's power to work their magic. When the perception changed from people using the power of Satan to people being used by Satan, the witch craze began to grow. Similarly, changing perceptions of women helped usher the witch craze out. Early on, women, due to their uncontrollable lustfulness, were vulnerable to the sexual advances of Satan and therefore made them likely to become witches. Later, in the mid-17th century,

their carnality became more acceptable. Women finally came to be seen as asexual and no longer a threat to men through their sexual vulnerability to Satan. When the asexual view of women became prominent, the witch craze faded quickly.

It is easy to trace Klaitz' train of thought from the most innocent peasant view of a witch through to the mid-16th century popular view of witches. He draws logical lines through both popular culture and the mindset of the elite classes. Klaitz also discounts as frivolous the popular rumors that witches were members of drug cults. The rising availability of translations of ancient texts describing magic and the supernatural helped

This is clear status of women didn't make them more vulnerable? That status had not changed significantly by 1600's.

fuel the anti-witch fire; the ancients had a much less benevolent view of witches than the Europeans.

Discussions of the classic witches and the classic accusers enable Klaitz to give the reader insight into the mindset of this period. Beggars and midwives were the classic witches and the people they "possessed" or affected in some adverse way were the classic accusers. Fear and misunderstanding were the primary problems that led to accusing beggars and midwives as witches. Townspeople almost always shunned the beggars.

When something bad happened to the person who turned the beggar away, the peasant accused the beggar of being the source of the misfortune – a witch. Midwives performed a task considered below the duties of doctors. Since there was so much naiveté and fear regarding the sex organs and their functions, especially in women, midwives with their advanced practical knowledge of these organs were suspect from the start. High infant mortality rates did not help the plight of the midwives much; ignorant villagers often accused midwives of killing babies before baptism for evil purposes.

Klaitz uses secondary sources from a variety of countries and in several different languages, some of which date back to the 19th century. The lack of primary sources is somewhat troubling. In the light of his social history approach, however, it may be that he doesn't need the raw data of a primary source but rather the interpretations of the data that is found in secondary sources. He includes both endnotes and a bibliography.

While this shows he is thorough, it is redundant.

DO OTHER
AUTHORS
SUBJECT
PRIMARY
IT MIGHT
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Klaitz's

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The topical organization combined with Klait's smooth writing style produce a scholarly work that is also a good read. He clearly states his thesis and arguments and supports them well throughout the work. Just about anyone interested in witchcraft, the witch craze, or the society that surrounded the witch trials would find this book useful.

Though it does get into detail, *Servants of Satan* is a good overview of the witch craze.

EXCELLENT
CONCLUSION -
BOOK REVIEW
ENCOURAGED
KLAIT'S
- you
has
to read