

1612

Report of Spanish Inquisitor Fra Alonso de Salazar to the Suprema of the Spanish Inquisition on the Logroño Witchcraft

(excerpts; see also selection in Kors and Peters #39)

Salazar:

My colleagues are wasting their time in maintaining that the more theoretical and complex aspects of this can be properly understood only by the witches, since in the event witchcraft has to be dealt with by judges who are not members of the sect....It is not very helpful to keep asserting that the Devil is capable of doing this or that....nor is it useful to keep saying that the learned doctors of the church state that the existence of witchcraft is certain. Nobody doubts this.

The real question is: are we to believe that witchcraft occurred in a given situation simply because of what the witches claim? NO. It is clear that the witches are not to be believed, and that the judges should not pass sentence on anyone, unless the case can be proven by external and objective evidence sufficient to convince everyone who hears it. And who can accept the following: that a person can frequently fly through the air and travel a hundred leagues in an hour; that a woman can get out through a space not big enough for a fly; that a person can make himself invisible; that he can be in a river or in the sea and not get wet; or that he can be in bed and at the sabbat at the same time; and that a witch can turn herself into the shape she fancies, be it housefly or raven? Indeed these claims go beyond all human reason and may even pass the limits of the powers permitted to the Devil by God.

Reply of Inquisitors Alonso de Becerra y Holquin and Juan de Valle Alvarado:

We marvel that he tries to insinuate that the majority of the witches' confessions and everything else that emerges from the visitation are dreams and fantasies, for it is clear that the tricks, intrigues and contrivances of the Devil have been powerful and strong enough to blind the understanding of many people. All of this, naturally, has allowed the Devil better to protect his witches.

Reply of Salazar:

In order to resolve the contradictions which emerge from the confessions, my colleagues divide the defendants into three categories: those of good, bad and indifferent confessions. We have, however, no method or rule which allows us to evaluate each confession other than the arbitrary one that my colleagues have used, and refer to in their report. Thus the note of 'bad' is given to some confessions which another judge might call good, and vice versa.

On the career of Salazar, see Gustav Henningsen, The Witches' Advocate (1980)