Witches: More that Pointy Hats and Broomsticks

OLLI Winter 2022                                      Dr. Heidi Chretien, Dr. Les Adler

**Course Description:**
The past ten years or so have seen a plethora of new publications about witches. Some of these are scholarly texts, others are fictional and a few are targeting the younger audience. When I received a notice about the republication of the notorious sixteenth century treatise, Malleus Maleficarum (The Hammer of Witches), I realized that this was a topic that deserved more serious attention and exploration. Witches have occupied the human imagination since ancient times while witchcraft and its ensuing persecution of witches have endured to the present day.

**Week 1**
We will begin our study with a deep exploration of the origins of both ideas and images that created witches; who they were, what did they look like and what sorts of activities were they involved in. We begin in the Ancient Middle East, move on to Greece and Rome and finally to the Early Middle Ages and the transformation of witches after the advent of Christianity.

**Week 2**
This class will explore the changing definition of who and what were witches and the ensuing persecution of those that practiced witchcraft. Even though men were sometimes considered witches, it was primarily women who bore this stigma and accusation. Early Modern Europe of the 14th-17th centuries that saw the greatest number of witch burnings and hangings. It was also at this time that early settlers to the New World carried with them the same ideas and practices that dominated northern Europe. The most well known were the famous Salem witch trials.

**Week 3**
The terms witch and witch hunt is still with us today. This class, given by Dr. Les Adler, will consider witch hunts in 20th and 21st century America with primary focus on the McCarthy hearings of the 1950s culminating with the execution of the Rosenbergs.

**Some Useful Names and Terms:**
Harpies  Furies  Hecate  Diana  Bacchanalia  Striga  Witches Sabbath
Circe  Medea  Malleus Maleficarum  St. Augustine  Thomas Aquinas
Martin Luther  Jacob Sprenger  Heinrich Kramer  Jean Bodin,
Cotton Mather  Satan
Brief Bibliography: This is just a few of the more useful titles

1. Kors and Peters Eds. *Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700 A Documentary History*
4. John Demos. *The Enemy Within 2000 years of Witch Hunting in the Western World*