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Review Essay: Bodin, Jean. *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*

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Bodin, Jean. *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*. Trans. Randy A. Scott. Intro. Jonathan L. Pearl. Toronto Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, Victoria University, 1995. 218 pp. Paperback. U.S.\$ 12.00. Cdn\$ 15.00.

On the Demon-Mania of Witches is the first translation into English of *De la demonomanie des sorciers* by the French lawyer Jean Bodin (1530–1596), originally published in 1580 in Paris. The work reflects the *Zeitgeist* of the sixteenth century, which was permeated by fear of witches and their subsequent persecution in virtually every Western society. The book contained twenty-six chapters (the translation omits five), ranging from “The Definition of a Witch,” “On the Association of Spirits with Men,” and “On Formal Invocations of Evil Spirits” to more legal aspects as in “Lawful Means to Prevent Spells and Witchcraft,” “On the Investigation of Witches,” and “On the Punishment That Witches Merit.” The titles alone reveal Bodin’s belief in the reality of witches. Formally a Catholic, but favoring Protestantism, Bodin endorsed every facet of the witch mania of his time and became a fervent advocate of prosecuting and executing witches. His opinion differed little from the notorious *Malleus maleficarum*, which he quotes copiously. Scholars of political and legal studies familiar with Bodin’s book think that it probably even fueled that

mania and find the book amazing, for they primarily know Bodin for his writings on political and legal matters. In fact, many modern lecturers in law schools and departments of political science are oblivious to Bodin's interest in witchcraft and know him only from his still-esteemed contributions to political science, such as his *Les six livres de la republique* (1576).

Some critics consider Bodin's impassioned involvement in the witch-hunt a personal aberration explicable only by his private reflections on the matter. That Bodin had a very intimate involvement with the occult can be exemplified by his belief that a spiritual entity (guardian angel?) was his constant companion and was monitoring all his decisions, identifying them as good or bad by tweaking either his right or left earlobe, thus endowing him with a sort of infallibility. (Strange that Bodin does not mention his spirit guide in *Demonomanie*.) His treatise on the witches played a major role in the controversy between the ideas of Johann Weyer, medicus at the court of the Duke of Cleve, who believed the witch phenomenon to be a medical problem, and the witch-hunters, who believed it to be a satanic problem. Bodin takes the side of the hunters and attacks Weyer's thesis in a specific part of the original edition (excluded from Scott's translation).

It is surprising that *Demonomanie* has not been translated into English earlier, for the witch-hunt was nearly as fervent in English-speaking societies in 1580 as in other countries and continued for at least another hundred years after the book's appearance. *Demonomanie* was speedily translated into German (Strassburg, 1581), with a number of subsequent editions—Italian (1589, 1592), Latin (1581, 1590, 1603, 1690), and Dutch.

Professor Scott is to be congratulated for presenting a long-delayed translation of an ominous book and for extensive footnoting that clarifies and adds information.

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