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FM 106: History of Witchcraft and Charm Magic

TF: Katie Kohn

**Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe**

For my final project, I chose to do a visualization of the witch trials that took place in Europe. Even though our lectures had often talked about trends or comparisons across different countries, it was hard for me to keep track of all the relationships between trials in different countries. Thus, I decided to make an animated map that would actually show how many trials occurred in varying European countries in the 16th through 18th centuries. The entire project is available at <https://alenafarber.github.io/witchtrials/>. Not all features of the website work on mobile, so please make sure to look at it on a laptop (and probably the bigger the screen, the better). I hope the site is self-explanatory in terms of navigation and it works fine on my laptop, but please let me know if you have any questions about anything! If you want to look at the actual files that go into making the website, they’re available at <https://github.com/alenafarber/witchtrials>.

I used Emily Oster’s “Witchcraft, Weather and Economic Growth in Renaissance Europe” to figure out where to get country-by-country data for the witch trials. Unfortunately, the data was not always very specific. Most countries had the data broken down by decade, which is a short enough time span that I could visualize changes and trends. The Essex Assizes actually had their data year-by-year and I combined it into decades to match the rest of the data. Unfortunately, data in Switzerland was apparently only available in extremely unorthodox time intervals—sometimes as long as 100 years. I ended up discarding all the Swiss data because it didn’t match the rest. I also wasn’t able to get information about executions in all jurisdictions, so I only show it where available. All the data I collected can be found in the attached file called “full-trials-data.csv”. I then needed to map each data point to a geographical location, which I did with a python script. I’ve attached that script as “Final Project Notebook.ipynb”.

Without getting into too much detail as to the actual coding, suffice to say that one of the hardest parts of making the map was making the timeline work properly—the viewer can either pick a specific year, play through the range, or click on a point of interest to be jumped to that year automatically. Once the actual map was coded, I realized that visualizing the witch trial data like this actually did allow me to see certain spikes in witch trials that I hadn’t thought about. Seeing those spikes made me add the “Dates of Interest” panel, which not only directs the viewer to some interesting data points, but also hazards explanations for why there was a spike in trials at that time.

This research proved to be the most interesting part of the project. Some of the data was easily explained—we had talked about England’s Witch Finder Generall and the return of Mary Tudor’s exiles in lecture. Other things were more complicated, like why France had such an increase in witch trials at the turn of the 17th century, or why Hungary’s witch craze came so late compared to the rest of the continent. Some of my explanations were pulled directly from the same sources as the data, while others were based on trends discussed in class and some independent research.

Overall, I’m very happy with how the map turned out. I wish I had been able to aggregate more data, both for more jurisdictions and broken down by nicer time intervals. However, I think that given the available data, the map displays it in a user-friendly way and effectively highlights some of the important events that are shown.

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