being the first art historian to discriminate between Greek originals and their inferior Roman copies.

Winckelmann’s *Reflections* were quickly translated into several languages and found a wide audience. In 1755, with his intellectual reputation established, Winckelmann, encouraged by a group of Jesuit dignitaries visiting Dresden, moved to Rome, where he would be able to pursue his studies and personal inclinations more freely. By 1763, with Cardinal Alessandro Albani (1692–1779), the Vatican’s chief librarian and a leading patron of the arts, as his sponsor and confidant, Winckelmann became papal antiquary, a position that included escorting visiting dignitaries through Rome’s art and antiquities collections. In Rome, Winckelmann set to work on his most important book, *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (1764; The history of ancient art), an ambitious, multivolume account of the art of antiquity in Egypt, Greece, and Rome, written in a style that mixes the sentimental with the clinical and the platonic. Winckelmann narrated the course of each of these cultures as a kind of life cycle showing “the origin, progress, change and downfall of art, together with the different styles of nations, periods and artists,” and drew for his studies upon the concentrations of collections of antique art and artifacts in Rome. Elaborating on the thesis first offered in his *Reflections*, he argued that the felicitous cultural situation of ancient Greece—including political freedoms and unfettered opportunities to view and appreciate the naked body—could not be repeated in modern times. Following a logic reminiscent of the Socratic doctrines of love and beauty, he lamented the passing of Greek art and the beautiful male bodies that inspired it, but found consolation in the historian’s ambition to know about it.

Winckelmann met with an untimely death at the hands of an unemployed cook and thief, Francesco Arcangeli, in a hotel in Trieste on 8 June, 1768, while on a diplomatic mission. The motive for the murder was never determined, although speculation about this and other details of Winckelmann’s very public private life has inspired numerous literary treatments and plays.

See also Ancients and Moderns; Art: Art Theory, Criticism, and Historiography; Dresden; Early Modern Period: Art Historical Interpretations; Neoclassicism; Rome, Art in; Sculpture.

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**WITCHCRAFT**. Despite a generation of excellent research, the history of witchcraft remains bedeviled by a host of misperceptions. Ordinary readers often assume that the major witch-hunts occurred in the Middle Ages, that they were conducted by the Catholic Church, and that they reflected the prescientific notions and sexual fantasies of fanatics and neurotics. Elsewhere one can read that huge chain reaction witch trials constituted a “women’s holocaust” accounting for millions of deaths, and that the witch-hunters especially targeted midwives and female healers. All of these conclusions are both wrong and misleading. The great age of witchcraft trials came after 1430, and primarily after 1570. The prosecuting magistrates were almost always secular officials, imbued with the best thinking of prominent theologians, philosophers, and even scientists. The numbers of those executed have often been exaggerated by a factor of one or two hundred. Men made up perhaps a quarter of those executed, and there is little evidence that midwives or healers were singled out for suspicion anywhere. But historical prejudices are hard to uproot.
UNDERSTANDINGS OF WITCHCRAFT
Depending on one’s definition, various histories of witchcraft are defensible. It was once common, for example, to understand the crime of witchcraft as consisting essentially of having a pact with the devil, an agreement in which one exchanged one’s eternal soul for monstrous powers. Such a crime of diabolism had not existed in the ancient world and only slowly emerged from the medieval campaign against magic and heresy, especially against medieval heretics such as the Cathars and Waldensians, groups who challenged both Catholic doctrines and papal jurisdiction. By the late fourteenth century, however, canon lawyers, prominent inquisitors, learned academics, and several popes came to agree that by means of a contract with the devil, whether explicit or only implicit, a magician might work genuine harm in this world. These theorists also gradually worked out a composite view of all the different sorts of crimes and activities their heresy involved. It was increasingly believed that witch-heretics flew off to a “sabbath” where they renounced their Christian faith and baptism, worshipped the devil, danced together, and enjoyed a cannibalistic feast, devouring children whom they had killed while using their fat or other body parts to make loathsome potions. They were also thought to receive instruction in working harmful magic by which they might destroy their neighbors’ crops, interfere with the fertility of their cattle, and with the sex lives of those around them. Most luridly, witches were thought to have sexual relations with the devil or with lesser demons. During the fifteenth century large numbers of heretical “witches” or sorcerers began to be discovered, and increasingly they were women.

Another definition of witchcraft emphasizes the continuity of magical practices that witches had used in the West ever since classical times and the similarities between such practices and those found all around the world. On such an understanding, witchcraft is the belief in and use of unusual, secret, or even supernatural forces in order to force or promote specific desired ends. The ancient Greeks had believed in such magic but had not seen it as much of a daily threat. They originally thought that “magic” (magia) was the strange, foreign religious practice of Persian priests (the magi) and of beggars or other dishonorable Greeks. Magic seemed both alien and disreputable. In Greek literature, the figure of the witch included characters such as Circe and Medea, women who used destructive magic to express their anger, lust, and frustration, but magic does not seem to have been a prominent fear among the Greeks. With the ancient Romans, however, harmful magic (maleficium) was forbidden in the earliest set of laws (the Twelve Tables, 451 B.C.E.) and was punished with increasing severity. The Roman historian Livy (History 39.41.5 and 40.43.2f) recounts episodes when apparently thousands of persons were executed by jeryty judicial officials, and, in the late first century C.E., the Romans began to crack down on fraudulent magicae vanidades (“worthless magic”), practices that included healing, divination, and astrology. Thus, this understanding of witchcraft did not require a devil or a pact but insisted on the dangers lurking in the hidden practices of lustful and veneful witches.

A third notion of witchcraft may be found in the injunctions of the Old Testament, in which the authors of Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Kings, for example, forbade necromancy and divination, practices that competed with the rituals of the Levites and sacrificial priests while also challenging God’s sovereignty over the dead and the future. From this point of view, witchcraft represented not diabolism or a physical danger but an abomination, not a conspiracy in league with the devil but impiety, a denial of God’s omnipotent control over blessings, punishments, and history (and hence the future as well); such witchcraft constituted an attempt to gain knowledge or advantages that were for God alone. Over time the Israelites intensified their prohibitions against magic, sorcery, divination, and consulting the dead (necromancy), which all hinted at popular polytheism during the exilic and post-exilic period.

All of these notions of witchcraft blended together in various proportions during the late Middle Ages and early modern periods. Some jurists and demonologists were more concerned about a supposed Satanic conspiracy, whose goal seemed to be the destruction of humankind and Christianity. Others remained convinced that witches were primarily a physical danger to their neighbors. Still others were inspired by the image of idolatrous or irreligious magicians who did not constitute a physi-
cal danger to anyone and were not members of some hideous conspiracy, but were committed to “heathenish practices” and to foretelling the future by means of astrology, numerology, or other illicit means. In the seventeenth century some writers began to think that the basic crime of witchcraft consisted in being antisocial, regardless of any actual harm done or religious error.

**THE GROWTH OF FEARS OF WITCHCRAFT**

In the early Middle Ages, these components had not yet blended to any extent, and so one finds approaches to the crime of witchcraft concentrating on the old Roman or Germanic fear of harmful magic, while churchmen felt free to express deep skepticism about other elements of witchcraft. In perhaps the most important early medieval text, the *Canon Episcopi* (c. 910; “Bishops,” a title taken from the first word of this admonition), Regino of Prüm condemned *maleficium* (“wrongdoing”) and *sortilegium* (harmful magic and ‘fortune-telling’) harshly in his first paragraph, but also went on to express deep doubts about the stories told of women who supposedly went out at night to ride on the backs of beasts with the goddess Diana. Such persons were dreaming or hallucinating, he thought, and any Christian who believed these tales was guilty of conceding too much power to a pagan goddess. This canon found a prominent place in Gratian’s *Decretum* (1140; Resolution), the most important medieval codification of canon law. From then on, all commentators had to concede that anyone who thought he or she flew might well be deluded.

Following the notion of witchcraft as diabolical heresy, one can trace the rise to prominence of an ecclesiastically flavored fear of a new and growing sect of witches. In the early fourteenth century, Pope John XXII (reigned 1316–1334), for example, repeatedly condemned his enemies for using charms, wax figures, and incantations in their efforts to kill him. In a couple of papal bulls aimed at combating these threats, Pope John widened the understanding of heresy to claim that sorcery involved heresy and a pact with the devil. It was once thought that his reign also witnessed the beginnings of large-scale witchcraft trials with hundreds of executions in southern France, but research in the mid-1970s established that the sources purportedly describing these trials are in fact nineteenth-century forgeries. Consequently, historians over the past twenty-five years have relocated the beginnings of major witch-hunts to the fifteenth century, and especially to the 1430s.

**THE EARLIEST WITCHCRAFT TRIALS**

The earliest trials seem to have sprung up around Lake Geneva, to the east in the Valais and Vaud, to the north in Fribourg, Neuchâtel, and Basel, and to the southeast in Leventina (Ticino) and Valle d’Aosta (Italy). During that decade, several authors elaborated the notion of the witches’ sabbath and expressed a sharpened sense of the dangers of a witches’ conspiracy. For example, the Dominican Johannes Nider (c. 1380–1438) wrote extensively in favor of church reform and against witchcraft. Although he maintained a skeptical attitude toward the flight of witches, he helped propagate the view that witches assembled for dancing, feasting, and sexual orgies and for murdering babies and eating their flesh. Gradually the notion took hold that witches gathered regularly at meetings called *sabbaths* or *synagogues*, terms that make the parallel with Jewish assemblies obvious. Frequently, however, these newly detected witches were seen as analogous to medieval heretics, especially to the Cathars and Waldensians. One treatise (c. 1450) described the “heresies” of the witches under the title *Errores Gazariorum* (The errors of the Cathars, referring to the dualist heretics), while many texts referred to fifteenth-century witches as Vaudois (Waldensians, another prominent medieval heresy). Although the concept of witchcraft drew on ideas of how medieval Jews and heretics were organized, there is no credible evidence that the European witchcraft trials were actually directed at Jews or surviving pockets of heresy or paganism.

**THE MALLEUS MALEFICARUM**

By the late fifteenth century many ecclesiastical writers had concluded that witchcraft was a fairly new heresy with its origins in the 1380s. In 1484 Pope Innocent VIII (reigned 1484–1492) issued a papal bull, *Summis desiderantes affectibus*, reporting the wide extent of the threat and authorizing two Dominicans, Jacob Sprenger (c. 1436–1495) and Heinrich Kramer (for centuries called *Institoris* [Latin for ‘merchant’]; c. 1430–1505) as inquisitors to root out the heretics, especially in southern
Germany and in the alpine regions of Tyrol. Secular magistrates were to cease obstructing their efforts and offer their assistance. Despite the bull, Kramer continued to have trouble prosecuting witches, partly because of continued secular and ecclesiastical resistance to his haughty and brutal methods. In the diocese of Constance, Kramer seems to have overseen the conviction and execution of at least forty-eight women, but at Ravensburg he secured the conviction of only two, while many other suspects were released. In 1485, Bishop Georg II Golser of Bressanone quashed Kramer’s investigations at Innsbruck and exiled Kramer, noting that he seemed credulous, unethical, and perhaps crazy in his use of torture and in his wild imaginings of what witches did.

While licking his wounds, Kramer composed what is perhaps the most famous treatise on witchcraft, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (late 1486 or early 1487; The hammer of witches), in an effort to justify his fear that witchcraft was gaining ground against Christendom and that lustful women were naturally attracted or seduced into a life of devil worship, demonic sex, and harmful magic. Historians have often thought that the more distinguished Cologne theologian and inquisitor, Jacob Sprenger, was the coauthor of this book, but the evidence for this collaboration is thin. It is worth noting that Kramer’s *Malleus* never embodied accepted Catholic doctrine and that Kramer himself, after being banned from Innsbruck, was rusticated to the mission fields of Bohemia, where he died in obscurity in 1505.

In the *Malleus* Kramer laid out both the new theological understanding of witchcraft and the harsh inquisitorial methods by which one could force suspects to confess and to implicate others in their heresy-crime. Kramer also pleaded successfully for the intervention of secular officials in the prosecution of witchcraft, and, indeed, after 1500 most of the trials north of the Mediterranean were run by secular magistrates and according to secular laws. The vast majority of witchcraft executions came at the hands of ordinary secular magistrates who enforced secular laws and did not follow the prescriptions or share the peculiar phobias of the *Malleus*.

**HERESY OR HARM?**

Those who define *witchcraft* as a sort of heresy have often argued that by the end of the Middle Ages the construction of the crime was complete and that the great witch-hunts that followed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were only the automatic result of this late medieval construction. On this view, common among certain medievalists, the “great witch craze” merely combined this fantastic crime with the supposedly relentless procedures of the Inquisition. Those who have emphasized the nature of witchcraft as harmful magic, however, have thought that the emphasis on heresy and inquisition seriously underestimates the fear of witchcraft among humble villagers, who were always more concerned about their crops, herds, and families than any supposed deviations in belief, and point to the slow adoption of witchcraft statutes by the civil authorities of northern Europe. Emperor Charles V’s (ruled 1519–1556) imperial penal code (*Constitutio Criminalis Carolina*, 1532; The criminal code of the Emperor Charles), valid for the whole Holy Roman Empire, described the crime in these words: “When someone harms people or brings them trouble by witchcraft, one should punish them with death, and one should use the punishment of death by fire. When, however, someone uses witchcraft and yet does no one any harm with it, that person should be punished otherwise, according to the custom of the case” (Article 109). There was no mention of pacts with the devil, no sabbath, cannibalism, flight, or heresy. This secular code was obviously most concerned with *maleficium*, ‘harmful magic’.

A similar emphasis is visible in the English statute of 1563, which threatened the death penalty for any witchcraft, enchantment, charming, or sorcery if it resulted in the death of a human being; but if these dark arts were less successful (if the victim was maimed or if animals were killed), the witch was to be punished with only a year’s imprisonment. Reduced penalties were introduced for the lesser crimes of using magic to find lost or stolen goods, or to incite someone to illicit love. Other secular states also continued to consider witchcraft as first and foremost an attack on others by magical, supernatural means; it was only in the seventeenth century that some of these northern European states finally adopted a fully diabolized understanding of witch-
craft, one that made it a capital crime to “consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit to or for any intent or purpose,” as the English statute of 1604 put it. Just as most secular states in northern Europe continued to place maleficium at the heart of witchcraft accusations, so too most jurisdictions under an ecclesiastical law (for example, the Mediterranean regions of Italy, Spain, and Portugal) persisted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in seeing witchcraft mainly as a spiritual offense. But that did not mean that the inquisitorial regimes were fiercer. Rather, it meant that throughout southern Europe the scrutiny of witchcraft rumors, accusations, and confessions was more intense, and executions for the crime of witchcraft correspondingly scarce.

VARIATIONS IN TIME AND SPACE
The wave of recent research into witchcraft trials across Europe has underscored dramatic variations from time to time and from place to place. No region was ever subject to a hundred years of terror; the worst witch-hunts came in waves or spasms, starting in the 1560s and 1570s in southern Germany and in Lorraine, rising again in the 1590s, again in the 1610s and late 1620s, and coming to an end in the 1660s. Across the Holy Roman Empire, the largest persecutions occurred in smaller territories, especially those under the secular jurisdiction of a prelate, an imperial abbot, or some other ecclesiastical administrator. The bishoprics and archbishoprics of Trier, Mainz, Cologne, Augsburg, Würzburg, Bamberg, and Eichstätt were among the fiercest in all of Europe, while the Duchy of Lorraine was perhaps the worst secular territory. Together they accounted for about 10,000 executions.

It was not only Catholic territories that proved to be zealous prosecutors of witchcraft. The Swiss territory of Vaud (under the general control of Bern) conducted perhaps the most extensive witchcraft trials in any Protestant land (perhaps 2,000 executed in all), but the reformed courts of Scotland probably executed 1,000 witches as well. Lutheran Mecklenburg, a land of splintered jurisdictions and widespread noble autonomy, may well have executed 2,000 of the approximately 3,700 persons tried there for witchcraft. In these large persecutions, village accusations of witchcraft usually proliferated in the wake of some climatic disaster, a late frost or a cold, rainy summer that ruined crops, as was common in Germany in 1626, “the year with no summer.”

Magistrates responded to local pressures demanding punishment for the witches thought responsible for these disasters; by the seventeenth century some magistrates were ready to interpret such crop failures and the resulting famine as the consequence of a satanic conspiracy. Thus, village suspicions were reinforced by elite fears. In general, however, it appears that larger secular territories with better-developed appeals courts were able to contain the panic of witchcraft more effectively. The Electoral Palatinate, for example, never carried out witch-hunts of any magnitude, and Bavaria after the 1590s also displayed an increasing skepticism. The Parlement of Paris, the appeals court responsible for a huge jurisdiction that took in most of northern France, became increasingly skeptical from the 1580s onward and, after 1624, made the prosecution of witchcraft almost impossible. After a high point in much of Central Europe in the 1620s, another wave of witchcraft trials erupted in the 1660s from Germany north to Sweden, but then became rare except in Poland, where trials continued until about 1725. By then, witchcraft trials were long over elsewhere. It was long supposed that the last German execution for witchcraft occurred in 1775 in Kempten, but it is now known that the suspect there, though condemned, was not actually executed. In 1782 the Protestant canton of Uri executed a woman as a witch, and a few Polish trials resulted in executions even after that.

Witchcraft remained a crime mainly prosecuted in Catholic and Protestant Europe. The thoroughly developed notion of the pact with the devil was never introduced into the lands of Eastern Orthodoxy, so there were basically few trials (and no massive chain-reaction trials) in Russia. Even in Catholic Poland it appears that earlier accounts of huge witchcraft trials are seriously exaggerated. Suspicions of magic and a variety of other popular spiritual beliefs remained common among the Russian peasantry, however, right down to the twentieth century. Altogether, for all of Europe and over a period of about 300 years, scholars now estimate that perhaps 40,000 to 50,000 people were executed for the crime of witchcraft, a large number to be sure, but small compared to estimates that sug-
gest nine million executions, a number for which there is no basis.

Variations in the severity of witch-hunts and punishments imposed on those accused of the crime-heresy of witchcraft seem to have depended on whether local convictions could be appealed to a distant (and usually more skeptical) court. Where local courts could act autonomously, local excesses were difficult to moderate. It may even be that the term witch-hunt is misleading because, in many of the worst cases, magistrates were not actively hunting anyone but were, instead, responding to accusations that bubbled up from neighborhood suspicions. In a surprising number of cases, the original accusations were launched by village women against one or more other women suspected, sometimes for decades, of causing local harm.

**WITCHCRAFT AS “SUPERSTITION”**

The third definition of witchcraft as impiety surfaced in early modern Europe among magistrates who reacted in horror at the “superstition” of common villagers whose impious attitudes, magical practices, illicit charms, and devotion to local magical healers or shamanlike prophets seemed to prove their adherence to irreligion and witchcraft. Such “superstitious” peasants seemed to deny God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and sovereignty over the future and over all blessings and troubles. From this point of view, witchcraft accusations seem connected to efforts of churchmen and magistrates to enforce severe reforms of parish and devotional life. This pattern has been found in Friuli, north of Venice, among villagers who confessed that some of their neighbors regularly went forth “in the spirit” at night to combat the witches who threatened their fields.

Another study has examined the similar case of an alpine horse wrangler who confessed that he traveled with the “phantoms of the night” to learn the secrets of life and death and to gain healing powers. Pastors and priests, however, complained that their parishioners were too quick to blame their pains on witchcraft instead of recognizing the ways that God tested and punished them for their deviation from the devotion expected of them. So the common notion that ordinary people were “superstitious” did not automatically lead to charges of witchcraft among them. Instead, it often happened that elite judges sitting in provincial or national capitals disdained to take seriously accusations or convictions at the village level.

**SOCIOLOGY OF WITCHCRAFT TRIALS**

Much recent research has concentrated on the sociology of the victims of witchcraft trials. The old notion that midwives and popular healers were singled out for repression has faded in the light of evidence that most of those convicted were more often women and men who failed in their neighborly obligations. The fantasies and tensions that led some women to accuse other women of witchcraft, for example, have been examined. In the German lands and in Britain about three-quarters of the executed were women, but elsewhere the proportion of men could be higher. In northern France men and women seem to have been executed in about equal numbers, while in Iceland and Finland men made up the majority of convictions. It was once held that women were the targets of misogynistic (and supposedly celibate) inquisitors, but it has become clear that most magistrates responded to pressures for witch trials from below and that the Mediterranean lands of the Inquisition (together with Ireland) were among the safest places to suffer local suspicions. There is also little evidence that those suspected of witchcraft were mentally ill or “hysterical.” Many of those convicted may, however, have seemed like “bad neighbors,” quarrelsome or dangerous, isolated and suspected of harboring vengeful feelings toward fellow villagers.

**THE RISE OF SKEPTICISM**

There was never a time when “everyone believed in witchcraft.” Even at the height of witchcraft trials, some people expressed doubts about the crime itself, about details (for example, whether witches could really fly to the sabbath), or about judicial procedures (whether torture could reliably force suspects to confess the truth). Johann Weyer (Wier; 1515–1588), personal physician to the Duke of Jülich-Cleves-Berg, reacted to the renewal of witchcraft trials by publishing *De Praestigiis Daemonum* (1563; On the deceits of demons), which questioned whether the crime of witchcraft was even possible. Although Weyer conceded large powers to the devil, in his view magic could never be effective (and therefore maleficium could never harm anyone); no one could really have a binding pact with
the devil, and so confessions of guilt suggested that the suspected witch (usually an old woman) was actually melancholy (mad). In 1584 Reginald Scot (1538–1599), a Kentish gentleman, published his *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, an even more radical rejection of witchcraft that questioned even the power of demons to produce wonders or harm of any sort. During the seventeenth century these sorts of skepticism were reinforced by a growing procedural skepticism of the sort expressed anonymously by Frederick Spee, S.J. (1591–1635), in his *Cautio Criminalis* (1631; A warning concerning criminal cases). Spee movingly criticized the brutal employment of torture, the reliance on perjured testimony, and twisted interpretations of the law, so that in his view no one once accused could expect to escape conviction. Doubts like these finally made an impression all across northern Europe, so that the secular courts there became as skeptical as the Roman and Spanish Inquisitions had been ever since the mid-sixteenth century. Only after witchcraft trials had almost died away did a more fundamental skepticism spread, a philosophical or theological doubt that spirits of any sort could have any physical effects in this world. Here we may point to the example of Balthasar Bekker (1634–1698), the Dutch reformed theologian, whose *Betoverde Weereld* (1691; The world bewitched) did not challenge the existence of demons but tried to show that they could not affect human affairs or the natural world. In his view the doctrine of demons had crept into Catholic Christianity from the pagans and needed to be thoroughly reformed. Christian Thomasius (1655–1728), a celebrated jurist of the University of Halle, took a similar position in *De Crimine Magiae* (1701; Regarding the crime of magic).

It is noteworthy that witchcraft remained controversial, at least among theologians, well after the crime of witchcraft was essentially no longer pursued. The Netherlands had ceased prosecuting this crime around 1600 and the Parlement of Paris had made witchcraft hard to prove by the early seventeenth century, but it was not until 1682 that King Louis XIV (ruled 1643–1715) prohibited witchcraft trials in France, while England did not abolish the crime until 1736, and Austria and Hungary waited until 1755 and 1768, respectively, for this step. Even after these legal reforms were imposed, certain theologians and many villagers continued to believe in magic and to fear the powers of witchcraft.

*See also* Astrology; Charles V (Holy Roman Empire); Crime and Punishment; Folk Tales and Fairy Tales; Inquisition; Magic; Midwives; Popular Culture; Religious Piety; Thomasius, Christian; Women.

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WITT, JOHAN AND CORNELIS DE
(Johan 1625–1672; Cornelis 1623–1672), Dutch statesmen and patriots. The de Witt brothers, leading statesmen of the Dutch Republic and opponents of the House of Orange from 1653 to 1672, were born in Dordrecht, a city in the south of the province of Holland, where their father, Jacob de Witt, had already served several times as alderman and burgomaster. Together Johan and Cornelis went to the Latin School and studied law at the University of Leiden. They completed their education with a grand tour through France and England. About this time it was evident that Johan possessed extraordinary mental powers, notably in the field of mathematics. In the course of his busy life he would find time to publish a pioneering work on geometry, *The Elements of Curved Lines* (1659), and his masterpiece, *The Worth of Life Annuities Compared to Redemption Bonds* (1671), which is regarded today by historians of insurance as the foundation of modern actuarial science.

The brothers started their careers in a turbulent time when international developments and national events created unprecedented opportunities. First there was the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which ended the wars the Dutch had fought for eighty years (1568–1648) against the Spanish oppressor. The treaty was an official recognition of the Dutch territory as the United Provinces. The treaty also brought peace, and it was precisely this peace that caused havoc. The princes of Orange had led the army against the Spanish, and the cities had provided the funds, but now the peace broke up their confluence of interests. The merchants wanted to reduce the army budget and use their money for investments in trade and for the reduction of their enormous debts, but the young prince of Orange, William II (1626–1650), could not accept the prospect of being stripped of this glamorous part of the family heritage.

The second development took place across the English Channel, where Oliver Cromwell had put an end to the kingship of Charles I, William II’s father-in-law. When Charles was beheaded in 1649, William wanted to bring the Stuarts back to power, which meant starting a new war. This was anathema to the regents of Holland, the wealthy non-noble patricians of the cities. The conflict between the prince of Orange and the cities of Holland therefore escalated rapidly. In 1650 William incarcerated several leading regents, one of whom was Jacob de Witt, and tried in vain to conquer Amsterdam. William died of smallpox that same year, and a collective aversion to monarchical power surfaced among the regents. This mood was not tempered by the birth of William III eight days after the death of his father. Holland and the six other provinces decided that the Dutch Republic could do without a singular authority, that the state would be governed by the city aristocracies, and proudly called this “True Freedom” (*de Ware Vrijheid*). Along with it came a tolerant attitude toward various religious groups and a keen eye for the connection between peace and prosperity. Of this set of values Johan de Witt became the eloquent spokesman.

Johan and Cornelis went separate ways, but both achieved powerful positions. Cornelis became a foremost member of the administration of his hometown of Dordrecht and married the daughter of an important aristocrat from Rotterdam. With the help of his brother, he became chief justice of a large area. Johan’s star rose higher. On 30 July 1653, at the age of 28, he was appointed *raadpen- sionaris* or grand pensionary of Holland, chairman of the assembly of the States of Holland. Because this province was by far the wealthiest and most powerful of the Dutch Republic, it dominated the assembly of the States-General, so Johan became in fact the political leader of the nation. In 1655 he married Wendela Bicker, whose father was the most influential regent of Amsterdam and had been the leader of the resistance against William II.

Before Johan started his term as grand pensionary, the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–1654) broke out. Johan managed to strengthen the navy and to conclude the war as quickly as possible, but he paid a high price for the peace: the Act of Secul- sion (1654), a secret concession to Cromwell, which stated that no prince of Orange was to be