The crime of witchcraft was to become a cause of prime concern for many communities and authorities in early modern Germany. During the fifteenth century, contemporary understandings of witchcraft underwent a steady transformation, and an expanded notion of witchcraft, often referred to as a new cumulative concept of witchcraft, was developed. And, what is more, this new concept was disseminated through the medium of print. The basic component of this new idea of witchcraft was that all magic, good or bad, involved a pact with the devil. In this way traditional *maleficium*, or harmful magic, became increasingly interlinked with apostasy. Witches were believed to reject God, entering into a pact with the devil in return for magical powers. In addition, witches were no longer viewed as acting in isolation but were thought to be conspiring together, meeting at nocturnal assemblies. This chapter will examine what role broadsheets played in reporting the news of witchcraft during the period of prosecutions. It will begin by providing some background context, before moving on to an examination of the treatment of witches’ crimes and punishments in news broadsheets. As the concept of witches acting collectively had a substantial impact on the dynamic of prosecution, an investigation of the witches’ sabbath in illustrated broadsheets will be included. Finally, the purpose of such works will be considered. Why did authors pen, and printers print, these accounts?

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In recent years, historians have begun to examine the development of this new cumulative concept of witchcraft, which was a key factor in enabling large scale prosecutions. Some years ago, in her seminal work on the printing press as an agent of change, Elizabeth Eisenstein speculated that the new burgeoning age of print might have had something to do with the spread of ‘the mania’ for hunting witches, as it contributed to the standardization of demonologies. Through print, an organised systematic demonology became possible on a scale unthinkable before. In the hope of understanding the rationale behind early modern witch prosecutions, historians have judiciously studied and translated works by demonologists such as Heinrich Kramer, Jean Bodin, Martin del Rio and Pierre de Lancre. However, such demonologies were only one part of what has been termed the ‘extended mediazation’ of witchcraft. There were other significant publications that helped to familiarise audiences with the crime of witchcraft, amongst them broadsheets and pamphlets. Undoubtedly, news reports printed as pamphlets and broadsheets helped to make the crime of witchcraft well-known and recognisable, even somewhat stereotypical. Unlike the expensive, learned and lengthy treatises, news reports could be disseminated to the broader public and more easily comprehended.

The sixteenth century witnessed the first wide-scale witch prosecutions within the Holy Roman Empire. The gruesome crimes attributed to witches and their public execution, enacted upon them by ‘pious’ authorities, attracted the attention of numerous anonymous authors. Accounts of witches’ confessions and crimes made headlines and were printed in pamphlets and

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3 Ibid.