

Royal Saints, Witch Hunting, and Divine Visions: Gábor Klaniczay Discusses All That's Holy

Interview with Gábor Klaniczay

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Prof. Gábor Klaniczay is a very well-known scholar and founding member of CEU's Department of Medieval Studies, who has guided its trajectory for the last quarter century. Graduating from ELTE in 1974, he became head of its Department of Medieval History two decades later. In 1992 he founded the Department of Medieval Studies at our own Central European University, directing it for several years since its inception. During those years he produced some remarkable publications including *The Uses of Supernatural Power* (Cambridge, 1990) and *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses* (Cambridge, 2002), which deals with the sainthood and cults of monarchs – quite a regular phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe's Middle Ages. Just recently he was elected as a foreign corresponding member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

His work has often been concerned with saints and their cults, miracles, mysticism, witchcraft, and the historical anthropology of modern religion. Though he boasts many accomplishments and a breadth of experience as author, teacher, and conventional historian, there is something startling novel in his work in medieval studies. He approaches the texts with the eye and training of not just a historian, but rather an anthropologist, eternally curious about humankind's motivations, quick to notice patterns while slow to dispense judgments from our own prevailing moral perspective. We were honored when he stopped by the studio to share some of his research.

Saint Kings and Royal Sanctity

CM: Now I wanted to start off our interview by telling you that I first heard about you years ago from reading your book *Holy Rulers* and

Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe. The main idea, as I understood it, was that it was a history of holy kingship and sacral rulership. I wanted to talk about that for our first segment here, starting off with a very generic question: What makes a particular king holy, in your opinion?

GK: Well, in Christianity there are very precise standards for that. “Holy” or “Saint” is someone who is declared by the Church to be a saint. In the case of the Hungarian saint kings, at least for St. Stephen (r. 997-1038), that was at the time he was canonized in 1083. He was the first Christian ruler of Hungary and after his death, one of his successors, St. Ladislaus (r. 1077-1095),⁷⁴ who himself was canonized later on, proposed that the founder of the Hungarian state should get the title of sainthood. In 1083, five Hungarian saints were canonized by the Church following the initiative of the king. At that moment the Church meant above all the local church so it was the Archbishop of Esztergom who was active in these canonizations. These were local canonizations – canonization meaning making someone a saint – that meant elevating the remains and inscribing the name into the church calendar and having a yearly celebration of the memory of that saint. Later on, from the twelfth century, the papacy, the pope in Rome decided to reserve the privilege of declaring someone a saint to himself, and from that time on, from the beginning of the thirteenth century, local churches could only suggest that an investigation be initiated, and then somebody could be made a saint. The development of the papal monopoly occurred partly also because (and this is getting to your question of holy rulers) local dynasties were very keen on having also some saintly members. It meant prestige for the whole dynasty to have some saintly ancestors, in other words, a kind of sacral legitimation of the dynasty, an aura of divinity around them. And this is something very old. The pharaohs were considered to be gods, the Roman Emperor was also after a time claiming to be a god

⁷⁴ Ladislaus I, known in Hungarian as László, was a highly celebrated king around whose reign many legends grew. Historically, he instituted many harsh laws, promoted Christianity, and saw the canonization of his ancestor, Stephen I. This activity was likely partly driven by his attempts to shore up the legitimation of his own reign. He, in turn, was canonized in the late twelfth century during the reign of Béla III (r. 1172-1196).

or a divine being, and in the Middle Ages when Christianity was the state religion, there had to be some way to give a substitute for that because the divinity of the ruler was no more recognized.



A late medieval fresco, showing the oft-depicted story of St. Ladislaus versus the Cuman, found at the Homoródkarácsonyfalva / Crăciunel, Unitarian church, in Transylvania. (Image courtesy of Béla Zsolt Szakács)

In Christianity there was only one God and that could not be the earthly emperor. This was naturally a problem for all the monarchies because the king needed a kind of sacrality. There were various ways to mediate this – the king was anointed, the king was ruling out of divine grace, the king was surrounded by all kinds of rituals; all the insignia (the orb, the throne, the scepter), everything contributed to a sacrality. One specific way to do it was also to have somebody canonized, but that was not a simple thing.

Sainthood was a particular kind of status in Christianity and the saints had to be special persons. Originally it was the martyrs or people who lived a very exemplary life from the point of view of religion. The ruler could be exemplary, but the ruler also had to pass death sentences, which is a problem with the Ten Commandments (“Thou shalt not kill”), and the ruler had to have a family and engender legitimate offspring. That was not seen in itself as a bad thing, only not in line with the ideal of sainthood, the refusal of all earthly pleasures. There was a kind of tension between the claims to sacrality by the rulers of the dynasties and the norms which were given by the church to sainthood. What I was interested in was how this tension was somehow managed in the medieval period because power will have its ways. We know that in history. Especially in places where Christianity was new, these royal dynasties were really making a strong claim, especially if somebody had died as a martyr in the fight against pagans. Some of the earliest rulers were killed in battle against pagans. Already in Anglo-Saxon England there were some famous saints like that – St. Oswald, St. Edmund, and many others.⁷⁵ In Scandinavia also: St. Olaf or St. Knut. But in Hungary St. Stephen was not a martyr. He was a victorious founder of the state, he converted his people, he was an apostle to the Hungarians, and this is how he was, in the eyes of the church, meriting the title of sainthood, even though he was living like a layperson.

CM: What struck me as very interesting in this work is the three medieval royal saints in Hungary you identify as St. Stephen, St. Imre [Emeric] (d.

⁷⁵ Oswald was a Christian Anglo-Saxon king of Northumbria in the seventh century, who was reported to have died in battle against Penda, the pagan king of Mercia. Saint Edmund was a ninth-century king of East Anglia, who was martyred by the Vikings.

1031) and St. Ladislaus, who you mentioned earlier. That work has created a sort of typology where St. Stephen is sort of the “wielder of justice” and an apostle. There was St. Imre who was living in a chaste marriage, the “virgin saint”, and then later on with St. Ladislaus we get the “warrior saint”. I thought it was a very interesting notion that there were three very different ideas of what makes a holy ruler, all presented within the first couple of generations of Hungary becoming a kingdom. The only type of saint who is not included in this mix is that of the “martyr”. Do you see these sort of typologies spread all across Europe, or is this something very Hungary-specific to have three different saints all represented in these very early years?

GK: This question is concentrating on dynastic and royal saints. If we take it more broadly (and I think we have to cast the net a bit more widely), then this is precisely why sainthood is so popular and such a good tool for showing a number of ideals to people because it is with individual incorporations of merit and virtue and precisely like this there can be a great variety of saints. There are bishops who are saints, and hermit saints and virgin saints, but there are also married women saints, peasant saints, urban saints – all types. And sainthood itself is precisely so efficient because it is providing individualized ideas and models for realizing a generic idea – that of Christian virtue.

Now, in a more limited sense, ruler saints can also be different and there can be basic types. Hungarian royal saints, this trio of royal saints, one of whom was not a king (Stephen was king and Ladislaus was king, but Emeric died before he could ascend to the throne. He should have been the successor to Stephen, but he was killed in a hunting accident). So that was a particular case in Hungary because Hungary had an unusually large concentration of dynastic saints. Although this idea was everywhere, there were not so many elsewhere. I could tell of similar examples from Scandinavian countries. Norway, Denmark and Sweden each had one royal saint, one principal royal saint (because Denmark had some additional ones). But these three saints, Olaf for Norway was the first, killed in 1030; then Knut, who died in the second half of the eleventh century, and St. Erik (the Swedish one) in the twelfth century were somehow also identified with three functions. Olaf was that of the fighter, and he was identified with Thor, the Scandinavian mythological god, who had various principles among the deities, and one of the most

important was that of being victorious in war. Then there was Knut, who was identified with Odin, the principal deity of wisdom and religious cult, and Erik, strangely enough, was identified with the half-feminine Freya, the divinity of fertility. And this was a very good thing for some experts on mythological studies. There was a French mythological expert, Georges Dumézil,⁷⁶ who studied Scandinavian and other mythological pantheons because he called them the “three basic function” – the divinity (or the divine cult), the war, and the fertility. Three functions which had to be mastered by the ruling gods.

Now these three functions cannot be precisely rediscovered in the Hungarian trio because, if so, then Imre is not representing fertility but rather the opposition of that. Although that might be an interesting thesis how Christianity is somehow not following necessarily, but rather opposing, the traditional ideas because virginity and the refusal of fertility is partly having an aura of sacrality in and of itself. One fact is true, that once these saints who are gathered in a kind of pantheon are grouped, then by the nature of things there is a division of labor or a division of functions, a specification of the character which comes into play. With these three Hungarian saints it came only towards the end of the Middle Ages in the fourteenth century, when the Angevins were making a display of their ancestors. They were a newcomer dynasty, and they were very keen to show themselves also as descendants of the Hungarian saint rulers. The depictions of the three Hungarian saint kings, prepared in their times, show St. Stephen with grey hair and with a grey beard, the old sage representative of wisdom. Ladislaus, canonized in the twelfth century, the period of the Crusades, was incorporating the ideal of a warlike hero. A famous story from his life narrated how he liberated a maiden abducted by a Cuman warrior; a lot of frescoes depict that. He was also called *athleta patriae*, defender of the country. Imre was styled as a virgin youth because that's what he was in fact and also because it came precisely in the twelfth century that the Church wanted to oppose somehow the cult of the holy rulers.

The papacy and the empire were in a prolonged rivalry. There was a

⁷⁶ Georges Dumézil (1898-1986) was a philologist, whose work on the Classics gradually moved to a focus on Proto-Indo-European culture and its recurring myths and motifs found in many diffuse sets of folklore. He was highly influential on a generation of scholars.

big fight between these two powers in the time of popes like Alexander III (r. 1159-1181) and emperors like Frederick Barbarossa (r. 1155-1190). The emperor called himself “sacred” or “sacral”. He said that he was the principal mediator between God and humanity, whereas the Pope said “No, no, no, the emperor gets the crown from me, I am the principal mediator. He is just representing the secular branch of power.” The Church very much wanted to destroy that sacred understanding of rulership. While the emperor got an antipope to canonize Charlemagne (r. 768/800-814), the Church was putting a kind of filter on the institution of canonization. And in the cases of St. Ladislaus and St. Imre, what we have here is that the cult of these two saints unfolded in the twelfth century when the church had the ideal that it was okay to have some saintly rulers, but they should be perfectly in line with the teaching of the Church. At the time, the Church was pushing for the celibacy of the priests, was pushing for the ideal of virginity, pushing for the idea that the kings should respect the admonitions of the Church given to them on how to rule. Imre was a very good person for that because he received the *Admonition* from St. Stephen for how to rule, whereas Ladislaus was good for the other side, good for the warrior ideal of the Crusades.

Witchcraft in the Middle Ages

CM: Now we talked in the first portion about some of your research on saintliness and kingship. I wanted to focus here on some of your other research projects. In particular, I'm really interested in the work you've done on witchcraft and folk magic. For me and for, I think, a lot of listeners at home, the sort of idea that we have about witchcraft in the Middle Ages comes from films like Monty Python and the Holy Grail, where there's this witch with a carrot on her nose, who is brought to town and the people are asked, “How do you know she's a witch?” and the people respond, “Well, she looks like one!”⁷⁷ One of the questions that I wanted to lead with is that these sorts of attitudes towards witches

⁷⁷ This popular movie (1975) from the British comedy troupe, Monty Python's Flying Circus, is a must-see for all medievalists. If not an accurate picture of life in the Middle Ages, it at least provides a convenient survey of many modern preconceptions about medieval society.

and trials like that... is that more of a medieval thing or does that have more to do with the Reformation and later centuries, in your opinion?

GK: Well it's a question of facts about witch hunts. Belief in witches was always there, but the witch hunts that perceived witchcraft as a real big and destructive social and cultural problem came in the Early Modern times. I would not say the Reformation, nor would I blame the Reformation for it because the Catholics were just as well or even more into it than the Reformation, but it was the Early Modern time when we had these large witch hunts.

My interest in all this came very early, actually parallel with my interest in sainthood because what I was interested in was a more general overview of popular beliefs. There is good and there is bad. There are beliefs and ideals about positive powers and there is also the dark side, and the two belong together. I started some common research projects with ethnographers and folklorists very early on, and I was enjoying the opportunity to work with them. It was also very interesting from a methodological point of view because I got acquainted with recent research done by anthropologists on African and American witchcraft, founded in a different methodology than that of traditional historiography or even ethnography, researches which wanted proposed insight for understanding, something which is, in our eyes, very irrational. In the twentieth century and even earlier, people were looking back with sincere shame at these centuries where it was so easy to make believe and also to bring proof in front of justice that someone is a lover of the devil, a witch who is able to kill by looking at somebody or by doing something with an occult technology of magic, and to sentence that person to be burned alive. This is a horrible memory in European history; thousands and thousands, or tens of thousands were burned under this accusation, and this was an evil mechanism which seemed to be later on fully un-understandable and irrational.

So this is a challenge for historical studies to understand – why people were doing this. And it is, I would say, a much more demanding task than to conceive why people saw in some persons such positive ideals that they could be venerated as saints. Although there too, there are some aspects which need to be more thoroughly examined. For instance, the miracles at the shrines which were places of massive healing and not only targets of pilgrimage. The way to prove sainthood had to include the

capacity to perform miracles after their deaths. A miracle was transcending the laws of nature just like *maleficium* or witchcraft. Bewitchment was a kind of negative miracle where the witch could make somebody ill or die, or just lose the capacity for fertility, whereas miracle was healing these types of things. Very frequently, saints were healing the bewitched, and, on the other hand, witches were seen as rivals of saints. Saints serve God, and witches serve Satan. This is a religious system, and when I started to work on that, it was with the ambition to understand this underlying set of oppositions in the history of folk belief.



A woodcut depicting witches, Hans Baldung Grien, *Le Sabbat des sorcières* [The Witches' Sabbath], 1508 (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, A 138 n 1508). PD-US-expired. (Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>)

CM: Along the lines of folk belief, I have to ask a question reminiscent of Glinda the Good Witch from *The Wizard of Oz*: Are there good witches and are there bad witches?

GK: Good question. So, good witches...this designation is also used by historical analysts. In the popular universe of handling witchcraft matters there is also an important place for healers, kind of shamanistic figures who have the capacity and the willingness to protect the people from the harm of the witches. But in the eyes of the Church (and this is the interesting thing), they are the same evil kind. Folk healer or witch – neither of them have vested power from God. They operate both with tools acquired from the devil. Even if they claim that they are good witches, they are witches nevertheless; that's what the Church said. And this is something that helps us to understand why witchcraft accusations became sources of mass panics and chain accusations in the Early Modern times.

In traditional societies, in village conflict, there was an easy way to go about dealing with witchcraft. There is someone accused of being a witch or having the reputation of being a witch, and then those persons who share this suspicion go to a witch-finder or healer, and that person makes a kind of counter-witchcraft to constrain the witch to back off and reverse the spell – that's the way how a person who felt bewitched could be healed. But if you drag the person whom you suspect of witchcraft in front of a judge and make a legal claim against that person, the Church enters the affair with its tradition of a well-developed demonology. The judges claim that the capacities of the presumed witch is coming from the devil; they torture the person and make them confess that they had indeed been allies of the devil. This is not only destroying the traditional way of handling such problems – which is not a good way but is a much more moderate way as regards violence – and it's also exterminating these people. That is why in witchcraft accusations, among the people brought to court one finds many persons who were exercising folk healing: midwives, healers or shamanistic figures. In Hungarian folk belief, there was, for example, a shamanistic sorcerer called *tálto*; there were some trials against them. In Italy, there is a famous book by Carlo Ginzburg on witch-healers who called themselves “*benandanti*” – people who are

walking in the good case,⁷⁸ so actually good witches, that's what they said about themselves. Nevertheless, they were accused by the Inquisition, and finally they were sentenced as witches, just the same way as those whom they claimed to fight against.

CM: That sounds very interesting. What proof was usually offered that someone was claimed to be a witch?

GK: The question of proof is actually what interests me very much in all of these processes. Both sainthood and witchcraft demanded such proofs. The fact that somebody was a saint had to be seen not only in the merits in life but also how that saint could really operate miracles that could be proven. For this, medieval canon law was resorting to Roman law; proof is something which can be testified by ocular witnesses. So, the canonization proceedings were actually recording the testimonies of ocular witnesses, and if there were many ocular witnesses for something which was claimed to be a miracle, a resurrection or healing or whatever, then they took this for a real proof.

Likewise with witchcraft, the witch trial was a trial where they collected the proofs in the form of testimonies, witnesses who were claiming that they or their children or their animals had been harmed and saying that the witch was indeed passing there, was menacing, and then the harm happened. It was considered to be proof when some people pronounced a curse or said, "You will regret that," and indeed the curse seemed to have caught. But then there were also factual proofs, like objects. People doing folk healing possessed all kinds of herbs and unguents and other things. And for the witches there was a supreme proof: confession; something which one couldn't have with a saint, because the saint was by definition a dead person when their sanctity was investigated. However, the witch was alive. And to get that confession, torture was used. That was the crown of proofs, if someone confessed

⁷⁸ Ginzburg, Carlo. *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. *John and Anne Tedeschi* (London, 1983) (1983). These people claimed that their spirits rose up in the night to fight against witches on a spiritual plane. The Hungarian *táltos* was a person with attributed shamanistic powers, usually presaged by a physical sign at birth like surplus fingers or teeth, but this person was allowed a helpful role in society, unlike witches.

to be a witch. And this was something which by all measures they wanted to achieve, and there were very few who could resist, because if one sees the whole arsenal of torture available to Early Modern justice... And here one should not think of the Inquisition as the worst. The worst were secular courts, and they were really doing everything to prove a case. There was even a special discourse to that: Bodily pain was something which was validating the statement. It was a proof that was tied to this situation, presuming that in pain they would really say what is hidden normally. So, these were the so-called “proofs of witchcraft.” Then, at the moment when the legal system became a bit more aware of its own principles – like in France when accused witches could appeal to the Paris Parliament – it turned out that most witnesses' testimonies could be located in personal animosity that was not given much weight in a real legal procedure. Various physical proofs and confessions extracted by torture were not taken at face value. That put an end to the witchcraft prosecutions.



Single-sheet print depicting a witch-burning, *Zeitung Derenburg* [Derenburg Newspaper] (Derenburg: Grafschaft Reinstein, 1555). PD-US-expired. (Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>)

Divine Visions and Gábor's Recent Projects

CM: So, we've had a lot of talk about your previous research thus far on saintliness, holy kings, witches, folk belief and I wanted to spend this last segment talking a little about some more of your current research work and some of your upcoming projects. For instance, you recently gave a talk at CEU about the presence of stigmata. Would you mind telling us a little bit more about that talk?

GK: Well, this is something which is related to my interest of a third territory: visions and apparitions. So, it was there in sainthood and witchcraft also – one thing is the specific supernatural standing of a person who is recognized by the Church or pronounced by justice or the Inquisition and calling the person a saint or a witch and glorifying or destroying that person. Another thing is the specific religious experience associated with it, which interested me also, and that has been part of many saints' lives. Much of that has been said about witches – that these saints frequently had visions and apparitions, a personal experience of an exchange with the divinity. Miracle accounts sometimes describe that miracles happened with the direct intervention of the saint, already no more among the living, but a saint who appeared, for instance, in somebody's dream and who then healed that person.

As to witches, there is also the mythology of the Witches' Sabbath,⁷⁹ which is basically a vision – a vision where the witches are said to fly on broomsticks, or on any other object, to a huge gathering and meet with the devil. But there has already been a discussion in the age of the witch hunts whether this really happened or was just a dream. And if it really happens, do the witches go there in their bodies or just with their soul. In any case, many of the bewitched persons speak about such experiences. The tale goes that in the night witches came into one's home through the window, turned one into a horse, and they rode on his or her back to the Witches' Sabbath. To prove it, they were showing their wounds caused by the saddle or the spur. We talked earlier about the proofs of the supernatural. Bodily proof was a very important proof that

⁷⁹ A Witches' Sabbath was an imagined supernatural meeting of witches in isolated areas to carry out witchcraft, often characterized by flying on animals, casting spells, and performing blasphemous rituals.

these visions occurred not only in the mind but that they also affected the body, so they were really true. To prove the truthfulness of visions, already since the early Middle Ages there were some stories – Bede the Venerable, an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon churchman wrote about some people who had the experience of going to the other world. In this type of vision people saw others in Hell or in Purgatory. They were seeing them in a kind of trance. In this strange bodily phenomenon, one lies, one does not move or perceive anything, and the soul is claimed to be leaving the body and going somewhere having an experience. The reality of that experience is frequently being proven by the fact that the body is transformed in some way. For example, Bede talked about a certain Furseus, Furseus,⁸⁰ who went to the other world and who was meeting somebody whom he knew. He was pushed towards a fire and he burned himself – and he was showing his wounds when he got back from this vision, saying, “I got them in the other world.” This intended to show the permeable nature of the borderlines between this world and the other world. As we have seen, there are also similar arguments in witchcraft accusations, people were showing the wounds from witches or from the Witches' Sabbath.

The most well-known sign that one has had contact with the supernatural in visions were the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi (d. 1226), a towering saint of the late Middle Ages. Two years before his death he had a vision where a seraph, a six-winged creature also looking like a crucified man, reminiscent of Christ, appeared to him. When he was struggling to understand this apparition, he felt that the wounds of Christ were coming out of his two hands, his feet, and his side. These are the five wounds called the stigmata. St. Francis, according to his followers, was “stigmatized”; his body was transformed to an identical one with that of the Savior. This was also representing his high standing: He was considered to be the New Christ, an “Alter Christus” by his order. And indeed, in the Middle Ages, the way he was following the message of Christ, his voluntary poverty and his personal way of showing an example was not only the founding act of a very influential religious

⁸⁰ St. Furseus, or Furseus (d. 650) was an Irish monk and missionary, a rough contemporary of Bede, who experienced and reported several visions of the afterlife.

order, that of the Franciscans,⁸¹ but it was the model of Christ for the Middle Ages. What I am dealing with currently is that this model was not only an individual model for the Middle Ages, a second coming of Christ (or almost), but it was also a source of a lot of debates whether or not this was possible. A lot of very religious people were saying that this is a kind of sacrilege – one cannot claim to be God. But there were also others who wanted to imitate and say, “I was also stigmatized”. Actually, the Catholic Church (this was only a Catholic phenomenon) has up to the present more than 300 documented cases where people were claiming to be stigmatized. They were showing their bleeding wounds to their admirers. Their bleeding and not healing wounds were periodically bleeding, mostly on Fridays. This was a phenomenon which counted as an extreme proof of the existence of God and Christ's working in the life and in the body of true believers. One of the recent saints is Padre Pio from Italy, a popular saint, a Capuchin friar who was stigmatized towards the end of the First World War. He was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2002, and currently he is the most popular saint in Italy – every church has his little statue [of him].

Apart from St. Francis and Padre Pio, most of the stigmatized were women. That's again a very interesting phenomenon. And that was also a source of a big debate because Franciscans were, above all, doubting how the body of the male Christ could manifest itself in a female body. Is that possible at all? Are the women (and that's a more serious question – their role in religion), are they worthy to be representatives of Christ in front of other believers? In the late medieval period, there was an ecstatic female religiosity which brought an unexpected triumph of women. One of the most popular female mystic and visionary, a Dominican tertiary, Catherine of Siena,⁸² was claimed to be stigmatized in 1375, and was the first stigmatic woman to be recognized as such and as a saint by the Church. However, there were other claims for female stigmatics before her. One of these claims was related to the Hungarian saintly princess

⁸¹ The Franciscan Order, founded by Francis of Assisi in 1209, was one of the mendicant orders, the other prominent one being the Dominicans. They emerged in the 1200s, driven largely by a desire to align practices with the austere ministry and life of Jesus Christ.

⁸² Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) was a tertiary of the Dominican Order, who experienced stigmata and was canonized roughly a century later.

Margaret (d. 1271), daughter of King Béla IV (r. 1235-1270), who lived her life as a Dominican nun – this is what made me interested in stigmatized saints in the first place. Margaret was, after her death, the object of a canonization investigation, but she was only canonized in the twentieth century because some of the canonization investigations were very slow to get to a conclusion. Yet, she was cultivated in the Middle Ages, and in Italy Margaret was attributed with this privilege and painted to have been stigmatized in the fourteenth century. This probably happened because the Dominicans were eager to propose an alternative stigmatic to counterbalance their rivals, the Franciscans. This invented fame of the stigmata of Margaret of Hungary was instrumental in founding the claim of the stigmata of the more successful Dominican saint, Catherine of Siena. And it showed also that stigmatization, as everything in the history of religion inevitably became also an object of rivalries, jealousies, worldly uses, abuses. One of my first books was called *The Uses of Supernatural Power*. Here we can see it precisely how these things are being used and abused. I'm writing a book now which is trying to see how stigmata have been discussed, debated and used from St. Francis to the present.

CM: We're here for our final segment on *Past Perfect!* with Gábor Klaniczay, and I wanted to end with a question on the notion of spiritual experience. Why do you think that experience is so important in talking about these things like mysticism, religion, witches, etc.?

GK: In the first place, it appeals to me because I think there are two ways to understand religion and related things. One is to see how things work in the world – I have worked a lot on that –, but this is something which does not consider why people are doing what they are doing and how they live. So, it's better to be like an anthropologist who tries to understand why people are doing what they are doing, what they think they are doing and what they feel when they are doing it. Then you have a better understanding of their ways and maybe also why these beliefs can be so attractive and also so destructive, so varied. This is what's always puzzled me. It puzzled me also because it's very easy to do away with beliefs such as miracles and witchcraft or others on the basis of an Enlightenment type of rationalism or also on the basis of a Marxist type of thinking and focus only on how they are related to very powerful

interests. And I see the reasons and accept the justification of these approaches, but I have always desired to go beyond that. As I was starting, my education was giving me these tools and I was never satisfied with them because I never understood the attraction of it, despite all this. Natural sciences or the Enlightenment or sociological analysis could have explained people why one shouldn't engage in religious practices, and yet these things are around us and these things are very powerful.

CM: Yes. Well thank you very much, it's been a real pleasure having you here today. For the listeners back home, visit us on our website at www.medievalstudies.ceu.hu/radio, be sure to send us an e-mail to medievalradio@ceu.hu and be sure to like us on Facebook. Thank you very much for listening – good bye!