

Syllabus

Witchcraft Across Classical, Medieval, and Early-Modern Cultures in Europe: Researching and Teaching a Long-Term Historical Issue

Central European University

Summer University

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Course directors:

Fabrizio Conti, John Cabot University, Italy

Gábor Klaniczay, Central European University, Hungary

Course instructors:

Fabrizio Conti, John Cabot University, Italy

Gábor Klaniczay, Central European University, Hungary

Michael Bailey, Iowa State University, USA

Marina Montesano, University of Messina, Italy

Teo Ruiz, UCLA, USA

Rita Voltmer, Trier University, Germany

a. Brief Overview of the Course

Beliefs in witchcraft, the power of humans to intervene in the flow of life events and to harm others by supernatural means, is widely distributed both geographically and chronologically. How in European history the accusations were developed and put together with the elaboration of a sufficiently coherent framework of reference can be the focus of historical attention. This is indeed part of a wider process of formation of scapegoat images through time and on different social targets, from the heretics to the lepers, and from the Jews to ultimately witches. All this, along with the late medieval construction of the concept of the diabolic witches' Sabbath, constitute a historical issue, the discussion and the understanding of which demand the involvement of a multidisciplinary way of approaching historical inquiry as well as an open-minded sight. This course aims to lay out the rise and downturn of witch-beliefs in medieval and early modern Europe, tracing the multifaceted roots leading to their construction, from the Classical Greek and Roman literary traditions, to medieval lore and popular beliefs, up to the outburst of the "witch-craze" in early modern Europe. The thousands of executions taking place in that period, with women as main - although not exclusive - target, proved to be only the final outcome of a long and complex scapegoating process involving social, cultural, literary, judicial, and religious elements as well as climatic and economic reasons behind the processes shaping such a multifaceted and widespread concern as belief in witchcraft with its related accusatorial patterns.

The course will discuss the formation and the historiographical uses of categories such as magic, superstition, heresy, and witchcraft, the development of relevant rituals and traditions, and the scapegoating process through which the above-mentioned groups – such as the leper, the Jew, the heretic, and eventually the witch – were identified or modelled. We will also consider the gendering of witchcraft and the related issue of male domination, as well as the roots of ideas about witches and witchcraft in Greco-Roman traditions and in popular beliefs and folklore.

Particular emphasis will be given to three aspects, which are the analysis of primary sources, the discussion of modern methodological approaches, and the instruments and places for research. The analyses of primary sources aims to discuss the genesis and the evolution of the image of the witch through time and according to different cultural models, from Classical authors such as Horace, Ovid, and Apuleius, to the various Medieval literary and folkloric traditions, to early-modern developments, with the core role played by Heinrich Kramer's *Hammer of Witches* (1486), and the juridical procedures aimed at identifying witches and making them confess to their alleged crimes. Modern historiographical theories aiming to explain the historical construction of witchcraft will be discussed and challenged, from Brian Levack's systematization of the classical "cumulative concept" idea, to Richard Kieckhefer's new approach towards the identification of

multiple “mythologies” of witchcraft, and from Carolyn Merchant’s consideration of the gender issue and the relationship between nature, the feminine, and the male domination issue, to Carlo Ginzburg’s comparative and morphological approaches that he has employed to study his Benandanti or for deciphering the witches’ Sabbath.

b. Pre-Requisites for the Course

The course in *Witchcraft Across Classical, Medieval, and Early-Modern Cultures: Researching and Teaching a Long-Term Historical Issue* is open to any graduate/post-graduate student/scholar aiming at fostering his/her knowledge of the themes discussed during the course and to acquire new perspectives concerning the topics at the core of the course. The course will also be happy to accommodate a few interested advanced undergraduates, such as those studying at institutions belonging to the Open Society University Network (OSUN), whose colleges and universities will advertise the program.

c. Course Schedule

- ✓ Each session lasts 60 minutes and has a mixed lecture/seminar format. The first session starts every day at 15:30 CET.

20 July, Tuesday

15:30 – 16:00 Introduction: Course, Faculty, Participants

Fabrizio Conti and Gábor Klaniczay

16:00-17:00 Session I: Witchcraft Accusations: Anthropological, Psychological, and Historical Explanations

Gábor Klaniczay

- Research on witchcraft beliefs and persecutions is an eminently interdisciplinary one. The founding work on the subject is the monograph on the North-African Zande witchcraft by the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard, which inspired the unfolding of historical-anthropological inquiries in the 1970s (Alan Macfarlane, Keith Thomas), also named the

“sociology of accusation”. The rich source material provided an insight into the internal tensions and conflicts of early modern urban and rural communities, pointed to the uneasy relations within the families, among neighbors, landlords and lodgers, different ethnicities, locals and strangers. For understanding these conflicts starting with hidden animosities and degenerating in mass-panics, psychological approaches were of great use (Jeanne Favret-Saada, Lyndal Roper). And all this got framed in recent decades by a multilayered historical research dealing with the opposition of ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ culture, the interrelationship of wars (especially wars of religion), diseases and famines with witch-panics, the rise of oppressive judicial mechanism in the early modern times and subsequently the gradual decriminalization of witchcraft.

17:10-18:10 Session II: The Witches of Rome: The Classical Roots of Witchcraft

Marina Montesano

- The Classical roots of witchcraft will be discussed and analyzed through the several literary accounts about the so-called *striges* (or *strigae*) – such as the famous witches Canidia or the Thessalian Erichtho – in Latin authors such as Ovid, Horace, Apuleius, and Lucan. It was on those literary female figures, bearing specific traits such as the ability to shapeshift and blood-sucking that the later medieval witch as a diabolic old woman will be modelled.

18:20-19:20 Session III: Magic and Superstition in Antiquity and Beyond

Michael Bailey

- This lecture will examine the conceptual limits of “magic” primarily through the related (but far from identical) category of “superstition.” Primary focus will be on the Roman category of *superstitio* and its redeployment by Christian authors in late antiquity. Some comparative attention will also be given to the category through the medieval period and into the modern period.

21 July, Wednesday

PUBLIC LECTURE

15:30-16:30 Session I: Folkloric and Classical Motives in the Construction of Witch-Beliefs Through Late-Medieval Sermons

Fabrizio Conti

- This seminar will discuss how it is possible to trace the different cultural substrata giving shape to witch-beliefs and shed light on their process of amalgamation. Folkloric and Classical literary motives were intertwined in the fifteenth century by Franciscan and Dominican friars such as Bernardino of Siena, Bernardino Busti, Antonino of Florence, to produce a coherent and multifaceted picture of witchcraft-related beliefs. By relying on my monograph *Witchcraft, Superstition, and Observant Franciscan Preachers* (2015) as well as on new research, this lecture aims at discussing how such a process of combination of various cultural traditions gave shape to the construction of witch-beliefs such the witches' shapeshifting, night-flight, or the ability to cast spells.

PUBLIC LECTURE

16:40-17:40 Session II: Deciphering the Sabbath: Archaic Beliefs and the Historiographical Debate

Gábor Klaniczay

- Witches' Sabbath – the secret nightly meeting of witches, presided by the devil and degenerating into horrific orgies – is the most original mythological construct of witchcraft beliefs in European history. Historical research has recently pointed out, that its appearance is the result of a long-term, complex historical evolution (Norman Cohn, Richard Kieckhefer), where archaic practices and suspicions of harmful magic (*maleficium*), and ancient mythologies of evil demons got mingled with the accusation of 'black mass' turned first by the pagan Romans against Christians, then by the Christian church against heretics. The biggest recent debate in this field was provoked by Carlo Ginzburg's analyses and interpretations of the Sabbath in his *The Night Battles (I Benandanti, 1966; En. Ed. 1983)* and *Ecstasies (Storia notturna, 1989; En. Ed. 1991)* with his "morphological" approach in analyzing the role played by ancient agrarian cults and shamanistic-beliefs spread across vast geographical, cultural, and historical domains. More recently many new historical documents were uncovered on the full-fledged concept of the diabolic witches' Sabbath that appeared by the end of the 14th century, which was largely responsible for the explosion of massive witch-persecutions in the 15th and 16th centuries, and the rise of the new genre of demonology (Martine Ostorero, Stuart Clark).

17:50-18:50 Session III: Magic, Witchcraft, and Christianity in Medieval Europe

Marina Montesano

- This session will discuss the relationship between magic, witchcraft, and the Church, which was particularly strict throughout the medieval age. From the penitential handbooks, such as the seventh-century *Penitential of Theodore*, to ecclesiastical canons such as the tenth-century *Canon Episcopi*, and other forms of religious literatures, such as the twelfth-century *Policraticus* by John of Salisbury, the lecture will analyze how the Church aimed at shaping religious identities through the identification and condemnation of specific sets of beliefs connected to the world of magic and witchcraft, between the 6th and the 12th centuries.

19:00-20:00 Session IV: Aspects of Witchcraft: The Gender Issue

Michael Bailey

- This lecture will explore the complex role gender has played as a component of witchcraft. Some attention will be given to all time periods, from antiquity to the modern. Major attention will focus on the ascription of conspiratorial, demonic witchcraft to women in the fifteenth century, from Johannes Nider to Heinrich Kramer.

22 July, Thursday

15:30-16:30 Session I: Belief and Skepticism in Renaissance Italy

Fabrizio Conti

- This seminar aims at discussing the difficult path leading to the consideration of witchcraft as an unreal phenomenon and the debates growing around this issue after the medieval period. The opposition between different stances pointing to the reality or the unreality of witch-beliefs became prominent in the Renaissance in works such as the *Strix* by Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1523), which affirms witch-beliefs to be true. The skeptical approach towards witchcraft has a long tradition, however, starting at least with the famous 10th-century canon *Episcopi* and going on up to the later Middle Ages when the realistic stance becomes the norm with the *Malleus maleficarum* (1486). A specific attention will be devoted to the early development of the skeptical point of view among the 15th-century Milanese Franciscan Observant community and the subsequent debate between Franciscans (Samuele Cassini) and Dominicans (Vincenzo Dodo) at the beginning of the 16th century with their intellectual legacy.

16:40-17:40 Session II: Healers, Cunning Folk, Midwives, Shamanistic Sorcerers in the Witch-Trials

Gábor Klaniczay

- In witchcraft accusations and related conflicts, a constant actor is the person of the healer: a role that can be played by a variety of cunning folk. These “positive” magicians are providing a healing strategy for their clients by directing their suspicion, frequently by divination techniques, to blame a human agent for their misfortune and get remedy by an action against them – denouncing them as witches and get them executed, or just constraining them to “lift the bewitchment” by other means. This ambivalent role is, however, dangerous for them, because they themselves get sooner or later accused to be witches by their professional rivals, or by their clients, convinced that those who can heal, can harm as well with their magical expertise.

PUBLIC LECTURE

17:50-18:50 Session III: Classical Culture and The Italian Witch Between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance

Marina Montesano

- This lecture explores the relationships between ancient witchcraft and its modern incarnation. Stories of witchcraft circulated in Greek and Latin texts, and treatises dealing with witch-beliefs referenced them. Still, the role of humanistic culture and classical revival in the developing of the witch-hunts and the construction of the figure of the witch has not yet been fully discussed. In this seminar we will examine how particular features of Classical Greek and Latin *striges* were carried into the Late Middle Ages, through the Renaissance and into the fifteenth century, when early Italian trials recall the myth of the *strix* common in ancient Latin sources and in popular memory.

19:00-20:00 Session IV: The Sabbat or Sabbath (Sabazius, a Phrygian deity)

Teo Ruiz

- This session will discuss the nature and the development of belief in the witches’ Sabbath, covering some of the constitutive aspects of this topic, such as the influence or ancient religious beliefs of Phrygian origins in its appearance; the great or main Sabbath vs the little Sabbaths (the Walpurgis Nacht on 30 April; the significance of May Day; St. John the Baptist’s eve on 23 June); belief in child murders; midwives and the professionalization of medicine; belief in witches’ cannibalism and the boundaries of humanity; sexual orgies and ritual dancing; the role of animals at the Sabbath.

23 July, Friday

15:30-16:30 Session I: Witch Panics – Structures and Factors of Witch-Hunting

Rita Voltmer

- The term “witch panic” should only be applied to the prosecution of a larger group of suspects. A cluster of factors needed to coincide to give rise to severe witch-hunts or to avoid major witch panics, inter alia social, economic, political and/or religious crises, or the fear of imminent multiple crises to come. In an European context, the lectures explains the model of top-down / bottom-up witch-hunts, the role of legal procedure and torture as well as the impact of the so-called “human factor”, since believing in magic, detecting witches, accusing them of witchcraft, excluding one’s neighbors as minions of Satan, acting as a witness, scribe, minister or father confessor, accepting charges, conducting witch trials, interrogating and torturing suspects, were all choices. Such choices had a very decisive impact on whether single trials generated linked trials.

16:40-17:40 Session II: The Rise of Demonology in the Later Middle Ages and the *Malleus Maleficarum*

Michael Bailey

- This lecture will address the major developments in demonology and conceptions of demonic magic from the 13th through the fifteenth centuries. It will begin with the scholastics (Aquinas, William of Auvergne), continue through major legal developments in the 14th century (John XXII and Nicholas Eymeric), and will culminate with sources addressing demonic witchcraft and the witches’ sabbath. The most important of these texts will be the *Malleus Maleficarum*, although we will also consider the limits of the *Malleus*’s influence.

17:50-18:50 Session III: Thinking with Demons and Witches: Early Modern Media (Sermons, Broadsheets, Images) and the Circulation of Knowledge

Rita Voltmer

- Ideas of demonology and witchcraft were transferred, exchanged, negotiated, and elaborated with the help of the media. Sermons, tracts, pamphlets, broadsheets, and images transmitted – sometimes in translation – these ideas into local and regional milieus of Europe. The lecture focuses the fact that the circulated narratives crossed political, confessional, linguistic, and social boundaries, with a constant flow of ideas and practices. The circulation of knowledge happened through the medium of texts and images (e.g. pamphlets, leaflets, tracts, correspondence), in specific situations (e.g. trials, exorcisms), and – most of all – because of travelling, reading, hearing, speaking, and working with demons, performed by individuals.

PUBLIC LECTURE

19:00-20:00 Session IV: How to Become a Witch Without Really Trying: The *Compendium Maleficarum* of Francesco Maria Guazzo

Teo Ruiz

- Drawing on Guazzo's *Compendium Maleficarum* (1608) this seminar aims at discussing some of the most striking features of how the witch-stereotype was created and identified. From the pact with the devil, to the devil's mark on the body of the witch, from the abjuration, to casting away rosaries, from paying homage to the devil to sacrilegious baptisms, and from magic circles to sacrifices, this lecture will discuss the formation of stereotypes and the scapegoating process through one of the important, but often neglected, sources at our disposal.

24 July, Saturday

15:30-16:30 Session I: Myths about Witches. The Constructions of Enlightenment, Romanticism, Neopaganism, and Feminism (18th-21st century)

Rita Voltmer

- In the 1970ties, an invention of tradition connected the fight for women's liberation with the figure of the witch. This narrative grounded in male interpretation of the witch-persecution, stemming from the Protestant Enlightenment and mainly from male phantasies of the 19th century (Grimm, Michelet). According to it, church and state led a joint campaign to eradicate rebellious wise women and their pagan (Celtic or Germanic) knowledge about the so-called Old Religions. The myth of the "wise woman" (or midwife), combined with the myth about the use of hallucinogenic salves, was elaborated by feminists of the 19th century in Germany, and Italy, whilst some French Feminist fought against it. The German Nazi ideology re-worked the pattern. The narrative gained ground in the European, the transatlantic and the postcolonial Women's Movements (Silvia Federici), especially in Argentina. The lecture clarifies that the narratives about the "wise woman" has to be labelled as "faked history news".

16:40-17:40 Session II: Skepticism in the New World: Beyond the Salem Trials

Michael Bailey

- The famous Salem witch hunt is often taken to be characteristic of colonial American witchcraft altogether. This lecture will survey the (relatively light) intensity of witch trials elsewhere in the Anglo-American colonies, including in New England. More detailed attention will then focus on the abortive witch hunt in Stamford, Connecticut, ca. 270 km

southwest, also in 1692. Unlike in Salem, initial accusations in Stamford did not generate excessive fear on the part of either authorities or the community. Ultimately, only one person was convicted, and even she was later acquitted.

17:50-18:50 Session III: Witchcraft and *The Terror of History*

Teo Ruiz

- This lecture contextualizes witchcraft and witch-hunts on the background of a reflection on Western humanity's efforts to escape from history and its terrors – being witchcraft precisely one of these - from the existential condition and natural disasters, to the endless succession of wars and other man-made catastrophes. Drawing on historical episodes ranging from antiquity to the recent past, and combining them with literary examples and personal reflections, this seminar explores the embrace of religious experiences, the pursuit of worldly success and pleasures, and the quest for beauty, power, and knowledge as three primary responses to the individual and collective nightmares of history. This is an invitation to a profound meditation on how men and women in Western society sought to make meaning of the world and its disturbing history.

25 July, Sunday

15:30-16:30 Session I: Superstition, Magic, and Witch-Trials in Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Lands

Rita Voltmer

- A global paradigm of “witch-hunting” cannot cover the linguistic, religious, cultural, economic and political diversities, which took vital impacts on local, regional and territorial witch trials. But neither helpful are national paradigms of distinctly English, French, Scottish, German, or Russian witch persecutions. Some Protestant lands like the Northern Netherlands, England and the Scandinavian kingdoms saw a rather moderate quota of witch trials, whilst it was in Protestant Scotland that the most severe witch-hunts in the northern peripheries of Europe occurred. Catholic Ireland was largely spared from the witch trials, whereas in the southern and western ecclesiastical territories of the Holy Roman Empire massive witch-hunts took place. Orthodox Russia prosecuted about 490 witches during the seventeenth century and approximately the same number again the following century. The lecture focuses at the similarities as well as diversities in defining and prosecuting superstition, magic, and witchcraft in different religious milieus, including the specific voices of skepticism.

16:40-17:40 Session II: Iconographic Female Models – From the Pagan Goddess to the Old Wicked Witch

Fabrizio Conti

- This seminar aims at discussing the iconographical representation of the witch against some of the main female models functioning as a source of inspiration in that regard. From the Gorgon monster to the Aphrodite Pandemos of the Greek mythology, Classical models are behind some of the representations of the witch, as in the case of Albrecht Dürer's "Witch riding backwards on a goat" (1501-02). The first flying witches, however, were represented as common women, although heretic ones, riding broomsticks in a miniature on the margins of a 15th-century manuscript of *Le Champion des Dames*. Not always represented as an old, wicked lady, the witch as a woman has been imagined in different ways according to the features considered most representatives as well as to the intellectual and artistic tastes of the different epochs. Iconography will be discussed as an instrument for visualizing and representing historical - imaginative - realities.

17:50-18:50 Round Table Discussion: Old and New Witches: Fortune and Perspectives of a Long-lasting Historiographical Theme

- Final discussion on the results and the perspectives of the course with the participation of all faculty. Particular emphasis will be put on the future of studying witchcraft, and also on the application of the same methodological approach for the understanding of new forms of identity formation and persecutions.

18:50: Farewell

d. Bibliography

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