Klaniczay, Gábor, and Éva Pócs (eds). *Communicating with the Spirits. Demons, Spirits, Witches, vol. I.* Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2005. Index. Illustrations. viii + 295 pp. $51.95 (cloth). ISBN 978-963-7326-13-8.

Klaniczay, Gábor, and Éva Pócs (eds). *Christian Demonology and Popular Mythology. Demons, Spirits, Witches, vol. II.* Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2006. Index. Illustrations. viii + 284 pp. $51.95 (cloth). ISBN 978-963-7326-76-9.

Klaniczay, Gábor, and Éva Pócs (eds). *Witchcraft Mythologies and Persecutions. Demons, Spirits, Witches, vol. III.* Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2008. Index. Maps. viii + 351 pp. $51.95 (cloth). ISBN 978-963-7326-87-5.

This three-volume series, *Demons, Spirits, Witches* is the result of an interdisciplinary conference that was held in Budapest in 1999. Its forty-three papers collectively explore "the relationship, coexistence and conflicts of popular belief systems, Judeo-Christian mythology and [learned—SK] demonology in medieval, modern, and contemporary Europe" (p. 5). The articles vary considerably in methodology but they also complement each other, turning the series—like the conference upon which it is based—into a meeting point of ethnographers, historians, art and literary scholars, anthropologists, and students of religion. Like the series, my review will follow a three-part structure and address only a selection of articles from each volume.

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The first volume addresses the question of communication with the other world. Its essays are divided into three focus groups. The first part centers on the discernment of spirits and the various historical interpretations, which the phenomenon of possession—especially as related to the female experience—was accorded in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Nancy Caciola's and Moshe Sluhovsky's essays inspect the standards by which the clergy judged whether the mystical experiences of possessed women stemmed from divine or diabolic sources. Both scholars argue that regardless of the numerous attempts by the theologians to create an intricate system of evaluation, where the key element would be the idea that evil spirits possess only the body, while divine spirits enter the soul directly, no one reached an understanding of the physiology of possession, because behavioral patterns were similar in both cases. In this failure Sluhovsky sees the origins of the Catholic

Church's rising suspicion as to the divine nature of (especially) the female possession (p. 56). Two other articles in this group (by Renata Mikolajczyk and Sophie Houdard) point to the gradually increasing tendency among theologians to seek rational explanations behind the possession phenomenon. Mikolajczyk investigates the writings of Witelo, a thirteenth-century Silesian scholar, whose interest in natural philosophy urged him to interpret demonic visions as related to a possible illness of the mind or optical illusions, rather than a product of supernatural causes. Houdard considers a similar interpretation taking place in the seventeenth century. She observes that the clerics at this time also began to perceive such phenomena as fraud. They no longer believed that possession resulted when a demonic spirit (a tangible entity) entered the body of the possessed. Rather they saw it as a sin of self-pride and desire for glorification (a symbolic notion). This view transformed the visionaries-to-be into moral sinners in the eyes of the Church. Neither Mikolajczk nor Houdard take their investigation further by considering the origins of the rational interpretation of supernatural phenomenon. For instance, Mikolajczyk's discussion of Witelo's reliance on the medieval medical theory to explain the occurrence of the demonic visions could have been enriched had she taken into account St. Augustine's theory of the *phantasm.*

Part II focuses on the fusion of Christian and pagan practices of communicating with the spirits and the dead. Wolfgang Behringer investigates the unstudied origins of the association between the Waldensians (the fifteenth-century heretical sect in Dauphiné and Piedmont regions) and witchcraft. Archival sources and judicial documents allow him to uncover beliefs in the extraordinary abilities (possibly of hereditary nature) of the Waldensians' "holy brothers." Such beliefs were formed on the basis of the syncretism of surviving pagan elements in the region and Christianity. In addition, the folklore of the inhabitants of the region (such as a belief in "good people" or phantoms of the night who could produce heavenly music, dance and invite people to "to fly with them during the night" [p. 179]) added to the admixture of perceived notions about the brethren. Thanks to the association of the phantoms of the night and the Waldensian sect (whose meetings often took place at night, and people were invited to join them), theologians drew a connection between the Waldensians (who could otherwise have been perceived simply as heretics) and witchcraft with its essential elements of night flying and the Sabbath. Behringer makes an important contribution to the field of Waldensian studies by proposing that the

witchcraft association was not a mere labeling process but came as a result of central practices of the sect and was even further strengthened by the participation of many women (p. 182).

The third part is devoted to the ontology of various trance and shamanistic experiences. Christa Tuczay studies different methods of divination, obtained in a state of trance, distinguishing between its technical and intuitive modes. She catalogues various forms, utilized for the establishment of the link to the supernatural realm through the ages, covering the period from antiquity to Early Modernity. Two other essays focus on the elements of shamanism in medieval Scandinavian literature (Peter Buchholz) and on Christian IV's (king of Denmark-Norway) encounter with the sami shamans of Northern Norway and the Russian Empire (Rune Blix Hagen). The latter proposes that such a seemingly minute event might have been the trigger behind the growing association between the witchcraft of Europe and the shamanistic practices of the Lapp (sami) people that ultimately prepared the ground for witch hunts in Finland.

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The second volume explores the manner in which learned demonology and popular culture nourished each other. The result of such reciprocal influences was "a syncretistic pagan and Christian universe peopled by demons, protecting, escorting, harming, possessing, and healing spirits, and the figure of the ever-present Christian devil that is, in many respects, related to all the previously mentioned beings" (p. 2). The first cluster of essays focuses on learned demonology, drawing its material from Central and Northern Europe, areas poorly explored by scholars. Benedek Láng studies, for instance, a Polish magical handbook from the early fifteenth century. He establishes that the book in question belongs to the category of image magic, but according to the nature of the texts it compiles is not necromantic. Láng speculates about the possible owners of the book, which allows him to move the discussion to a broader sphere. He raises questions about the Polish "clerical underworld"—i.e., the "intellectual circle to which such a book belongs" (p. 29). While he is unable to answer to what extent Polish clerics were interested in the image magic, Láng does point to the emergence of blurred boundaries between the "tolerated and illicit magic," (p. 32) as well as to the fusion of magic with healing practices—a bond, which was prohibited *de jure,* but practiced *de facto.* György E. Szőnyi's article complements Láng's study by focusing on magical practices, allowed by the tenets of the Church. Such practices "were propagated and conducted by distinguished humanists with—at least in their own interpretations—

most pious intentions, normally in hope of getting nearer to God" (p. 73). By studying the various traditions that nourished the emerging Renaissance *magi*—not the least among which came from the discovery of antique learning (a layer of knowledge, detested by medieval practitioners)—Szőnyi argues that these scholars no longer hid in the "intellectual underworld" (as opposed to their Polish predecessors from the Láng's study) but could practice within the framework of Christian piety. Szőnyi offers an interesting psychological perspective on such phenomena, by suggesting that the practice of magic could have been motivated by the Renaissance scholars' subconscious desire for deification: "the drive for *exaltatio* which has never ceased to be a major ambition of humankind" (p. 81).

The subsequent section focuses on the meeting of the learned and the popular, investigating the evolution of ecclesiastical concepts of the Devil and the saints. Karen P. Smith's study researches the hagiographical narratives of St. Margaret of Antioch, unearthing a layer of pagan beliefs that associated St. Margaret with the ancient Goddesses of fertility, as well as with Goddess-like demonic creatures. This led to the transformation of this untouched virgin-dragon's slayer into the protector saint of childbirth and fertility.

The final section of the volume deals with popular beliefs and covers a vast territory—from Carpathian Rus, Slovenia, Macedonia and the Balkans, to Mongolia. Two articles by L'upcho S. Risteski and Anna Plotnikova address the world of folkloric demons. The former focuses on the evil dead, hostile to humans, as well as the preventative rites that sought to eliminate or lessen the possibility of the transformation of people into evil spirits. In the eyes of the community the most susceptible to such transformation were individuals whose social status placed them on the margins of community life before their untimely death—e.g., the unmarried, the unbaptized or those who had suffered a violent death. Plotnikova, on the other hand, addresses the protecting demons of places (the *genii loci*) and their ambiguous role as simultaneously evil beings and as guardian spirits of the community (similar to the saints). The concluding article of this section investigates the various portrayals of evil in Mongolian lore, uncovering the distinct pre-Buddhist and Buddhist representations of the world of spirits and demons. Its author, Ágnes Birtalan, proposes that original Mongolic lore did not explicitly perceive a realm of evil, seeing the world only as an opposition of the good *vs*. the bad. Elements of the demonic/evil and the notion of "hell" penetrated Mongolian mythology only with the advance

of Buddhism as a means of psychological control of population: "representation of different kinds of pain, and demonic spirits of the hell were spread… to terrify people, and prevent them from acting against the rules of Buddhism" (p. 254).

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The third volume is the longest of the series and reflects the central theme of the conference, addressing two focal questions: "the historical formation of witchcraft mythologies and the social-judicial context of witchcraft prosecution" (p. 1).

Its first part is devoted to the theme of the witches' Sabbath. Martine Ostorero investigates the manner in which fifteenth-century authors of demonological tractates formulated the concept of the Sabbath. She approaches such texts from the socio-cultural perspective, which allows her to discern in their writings the considerable influences of the surrounding world. In particular, Ostorero identifies anti-Jewish attitudes, the fear of conspiracy and heresy, as well as alpine folklore as the mechanisms behind the conceptualization of "witches' Sabbath." Adelina Angusheva's article compares and contrasts the witchcraft prosecutions of the Orthodox Bulgaria and Catholic Europe, noting Orthodoxy's tendency to fight witchcraft mainly with the help of sermons and treatises, rather than taking the drastic measures of physical persecution, characteristic of the Catholic Church and the Inquisition (p. 92). Per Sörlin's essay addresses the involvement of children, who were believed to be carried away to the Sabbath by witches, during the witchcraft epidemic in Scandinavia. He investigates the psychological side of the children's testimonies, who were the main and, often, the only witnesses in the courts of law. He also considers the impact of popular beliefs, peer pressure and the courtroom hearings on the structure of their testimonies. The comparative analysis of the Swedish Sabbath and a similar Basque phenomenon allows Sörlin to identify the specific characteristic of the Scandinavian vision of the Sabbath, which at first was perceived to be more dualistic in nature, containing a bright (white) side and a dark (evil) side. However, as the phenomenon became more and more stereotyped, it gradually turned into a darker and dismal concept.

The second part deals with judicial trials and accounts. Péter G. Tóth's study of the water ordeal of witches traces the origins of this ritual to antiquity (Ancient Mesopotamia, in particular) but also pays attention to its possible Christian antecedents, such as the rites of baptism and the liturgical trial by water, implemented regularly between the ninth and the twelfth century in the ecclesiastical legal practices to solve the disputes

and to punish ordinary crimes. The most intriguing part of the article is the investigation of the change in the technical aspects of the ritual. Specifically, Tóth discovers that the ancients judged that the death of the accused proved their guilt, whereas if the victim floated, s/he was believed to be innocent—something, which was later reversed in the legal practices of early Christendom and continued in early modern witch trials. Ildikó Kristóf provides a detailed textual investigation of the witchcraft confessions, especially those, containing the episode of the pact with the Devil. The researcher traces in these testimonies—often extracted from the accused under the torture—elements of existing legal practices of the time. Such treatment helped the accused "witches" shape delirious fantasies into appropriate court statements. Polina Melik Simonian turns her attention to seventeenth-century Muscovy—a territory often ignored by scholars. Her study investigates the proportion of foreigners among those accused of witchcraft. Noting their high number, the scholar sees traces of xenophobia among the native population who sought to demonize the "other."

In the final section of the book Iveta Todorova-Pirgova describes her fieldwork in the peasant communities of the present day Bulgaria, noting the intriguing acceptance of the magic by the local Orthodox priests as well as a strange cooperation of priests with not only the local "healers," but also with the Muslim imams—a phenomenon stemming from the long history of co-existence of Muslims and Christians in the region. The concluding article, by Mirjam Mencej, presents an interesting investigation of the manner in which the witchcraft accusations are still utilized in the contemporary Slovenian rural communities by "function[ing] as a kind of communal institution managing… internal tensions and conflicts" (p. 10).

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The trilogy contains a rich layer of research on the intricate co-existence, reciprocal influence, origins, and the resulting contemporary legacy of the European Medieval and Early Modern demonological tractates and popular beliefs in demons, spirits, and witches. It addresses almost every angle pertaining to such beliefs and related phenomena, but its special focus is, of course, the thorough and systematic investigation of the judicial and trial accounts of the witchcraft prosecutions—mostly those, belonging to the hereto unexplored areas of Central, Southern, Northern and Eastern Europe—which complements the thriving field of the study of the West European witch hunts. However, one area left unattended by the scholars is the contamination of the supernatural figure of a witch with other numinous beings such as vampires and werewolves,

which is reflected not only in their similar overlapping characteristics and abilities, but often in the terminology as well (e.g., the Greek term 'vrykolakas' can signify a werewolf, a vampire, and also a sorcerer/a witch; see, for example, Jan Louis Perkowski's *Vampire Lore: From the Writings of Jan Louis Perkowski* or Leslie A. Sconduto's *Metamorphoses of the Werewolf: A Literary Study from Antiquity Through the Renaissance*). Thus, if further conferences or publications on the topic are planned, it would be interesting to see scholars approach this issue in more detail.

On a technical side, I should also say that the trilogy, unfortunately, suffers from the typical drawbacks associated with the publication of the conference proceedings, i.e., many essays seem to be left—at least in the view of this reviewer—on the level of their "conference" form, regardless of the fact that almost six years passed between the date of the conference and the publication of the first volume, and the editors' reassurance that the papers have been considerably reworked (vol. 2, p. 1). A few contributions still read as conference presentations (e.g., Renata Mikolajczyk's or Iveta Todorova-Pirgova's) with one essay even being left in the point-format without any conclusions (L'upcho S. Risteski's), while the others seem to have only the bibliography updated, but with it being precisely this—bibliography—and not the works cited, it is hard to say whether the text was reworked as well.

Such criticism notwithstanding, the trilogy presents a pioneering investigation—even though, at times, only preliminary—in the area of demons, spirits, witchcraft phenomena and mythologies, and will be of interest to folklorists, historians, scholars of religion or literature, working in the field of the European learned demonology, popular lore, or literary tradition encompassing some of its elements (e.g., the Gothic or Romantic literary movement). The volumes could be used together or separately in comparative courses, dedicated to the study of folklore beliefs in Early Modern Europe or in courses devoted to the case study of witches and witch hunts per se.

Svitlana Krys
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
Canada