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**Report from the 2nd Olomouc Religious Studies
Conference held in Olomouc, Czech Republic, 20–21
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The 2nd Olomouc Religious Studies Conference held in Olomouc, Czech Republic, 20–21 September 2017

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On 20 and 21 September 2017, the 2nd Olomouc Religious Studies Conference took place in the Corpus Christi Chapel at the Centre of Arts of Palacký University Olomouc. It was organised by the Department of Sociology, Andragogy and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Arts of Palacký University Olomouc under the auspices of the Czech Association for the Study of Religions. The second conference was opened by an interdisciplinary seminar on magic and witchcraft, an entirely unique seminar in Czech academia. This international seminar attracted a number of prominent Czech as well as foreign historians, anthropologists and Africanists studying witch trials, magic, Satanism and vampirism in European history as well as present-day sub-Saharan Africa.

The opening speeches delivered by Palacký University's Rector, Professor Jaroslav Miller, and the main organisers of the event, Dr. Kateřina Mildnerová and Associate Professor Tomáš Bubík, were followed by the first conference panel named "Magic and Witchcraft from the Historical Perspective." This panel was opened by the keynote lecture of Manfred Tschaikner, Associate Professor at the University of Vienna. Belonging to the most respected European researchers in the field, Tschaikner focuses his research on witch trials in Early-Modern-Age Austria. His contribution revised the events preceding the creation of the famous book, the "Hammer of Witches" (*Malleus Maleficarum*, 1487). Tschaikner spoke about the inquisitor Heinrich Kramer, the author of the book mentioned, who wrote it on the basis of his experiences during a court trial in Innsbruck in the autumn of 1485, and the following events. Tschaikner presented the audience with previously unknown historical sources found in the archives, which shed an entirely new light on the issue.

This lecture was followed by Petr Kreuz and his research on the activities of Heinrich Kramer (Institoris) in Moravia, in the Olomouc diocese, in 1499–1505. Kreuz, a prominent Czech historian, who deals with the history of crime and criminal justice, is at present the most respected expert on witch trials in the Lands of the Czech Crown.

Another foreign guest at the history panel was Johannes Dillinger, Professor of Early Modern History, teaching at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz and Oxford Brookes University. Dillinger is one of the brightest stars of present-day world-level witchcraft research. His extremely interesting contribution explained to the audience the relation between witch trials and the contemporary perception of children. Professor Dillinger focused in particular on the roles children played in witch hunts. He presented them as witnesses, victims, but also accusers, and thus distanced himself from the older interpretations presenting children exclusively as innocent victims or, on the contrary, as insidious culprits.

Another contributor to the history panel was Professor Rita Voltmer from Trier University, a long-term witchcraft researcher. Together with Wolfgang Behringer, she presides over the scientific working group AKIH (*Arbeitskreis Interdisziplinäre Hexenforschung*), which associates researchers in interdisciplinary witchcraft research. Voltmer delivered a speech on the role of Jesuits in processes of cultural exchange, the translation and transfer of witchcraft knowledge in the Early Modern Age. She presented a typology of functions and positions occupied by Jesuits in this context, and explained them with examples from Bohemia and Moravia.

The second panel of the seminar on witchcraft, dedicated to the anthropological investigation of magic and witchcraft at present, was opened by a keynote lecture by Dr. Isak Niehaus – a social anthropologist and Africanist working at the Brunel University in London. Since the 1990s, his field of interest has been research in witchcraft, Satanism, violence and crime in the Lowveld region in the South African Republic. In his contribution, Niehaus focused on the comparison of local conceptualizations of Satanism and witchcraft within the Lowveld region and their role in the socio-economic context of the every-day life of the local inhabitants. He explained that there is a close connection between the ideas of witchcraft and Satanism and

the life situation of the Lowveld inhabitants, and described various forms of the phenomenon. Based on his own research data, Niehaus also demonstrated how the local collective ideas have been changing over time in the context of the social and economic dynamics of the particular community.

Anthropological research in magic and witchcraft in present sub-Saharan Africa is also the subject of several Czech researchers. A contribution on gender aspects of syncretic divination among the Southern African Venda people was presented by Dr. Vendula Řezáčová from the Institute of Sociological Studies at Charles University, Prague. In the following presentation, Kamila Axmannová, a doctoral student of ethnology at Charles University, presented the results of her research on the magic-related exploitation of albinos in Tanzania. The anthropological-Africanist panel also included a paper by the German anthropologist Dr. Felix Riedel on witch-hunts in present-day Ghana.

Fifteen speakers in total delivered their papers on the first day of the conference. A number of interesting discussions took place, attended by a large amount of students, scholars and others interested. A facultative programme was prepared for foreign visitors to the conference, including a visit to the State District Archive Olomouc or a tour of the historical centre of the city.

The second day of the conference was dedicated to general topics in religious studies. The aim of this section was to enable researchers from various fields who share an interest in the study of religion to present the results of their research connected to the situation of religion in the Czech Republic and elsewhere in the world. There was also space for discussions on current methodological approaches in the study of religion, including critical reflection of the history of research on religion. This panel also hosted fifteen presenters with topics reflecting the situation of religion in the Czech and the Slovak Republic, as well as various forms of religion and spirituality in the present-day world. The most prominent guests of this section included Professor Milan Kováč from the Comenius University in Bratislava, and Professor Josef Kandert from Charles University in Prague.

Milan Kováč, a founder of Mesoamerican and Maya studies in Slovakia, is one of the most respected researchers in the field in Central

Europe. His international activities in education have influenced many disciplines connected to Mesoamerican studies in Austria, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. His main speech introduced the audience to the topic of the spirituality of blood in the context of the early rituals of Maya kings. Based on the latest findings of the Slovak archeological project made in Uaxactun, Professor Kováč presented a new view of the institution of the Maya king in its earliest period.

The other main contributor was Josef Kandert, a prominent Czech Africanist and ethnologist active at Charles University. Kandert is a long-term researcher in cultures and communities of sub-Saharan Africa and Central Europe: in both these fields, he has executed a number of field research projects. He presented the issue of European rationalism, its limitations and restrictions occurring when Europeans encountered the socio-cultural and religious differences of non-European nations.

Another guest of the morning panel was Associate Professor Jan Váně from the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, with a paper on successful and unsuccessful inter-generational religiosity transfers in the Czech Republic. The panel also hosted two co-organisers of the conference from Palacký University: Professor Dušan Lužný, with a contribution on Czech Catholics in Chicago, and Associate Professor Tomáš Bubík, with a paper on humanity and infidelity in the context of the Czech libertarian movement.

Highly interesting was a discussion panel led by Jana Valtrová and Michaela Ondrašínová from Masaryk University in Brno, dedicated to the position of female researchers in the Czech Republic, not only in the field of religious studies.

The two-day international religious studies conference was concluded by speeches by the organisers, who thanked the paper presenters for their interesting contributions, appreciated the intellectually stimulating atmosphere of the conference and emphasised the importance of regular meetings of researchers to exchange research results on the current platform in Olomouc. The main output of the conference will be a special issue of the magazine *e-Rhizome* focused on magic and witchcraft from an interdisciplinary perspective. This international, peer-reviewed journal is published by the Department of

**Sociology, Andragogy, and Cultural Anthropology of Palacký University
in Olomouc.**

