

Gabor Klaniczay

Charisma



Born 1950 in Budapest, Hungary. History, English and medieval studies at the Eötvös Lorand University, Budapest. 1976: A semester in Paris at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and the Sorbonne. 1974-1978: Religious history editor for the Journal *Vilkgossg.* 1978-1984: Scientific researcher of the Institute for Historical Research at the Hungarian Academy of Science. Dr. Phil. 1983 Budapest. Since 1984 lecturer of medieval history at the Eötvös Lorand University, Budapest. 1985-1990: Secretary of the National Commission of Historians in Hungary. Since 1989: Editor of the quarterly *Budapesti Könyvszemle — BUKSZ — Budapest Review of Books*. Publications: *The Uses of Supernatural Power. The Transformations of the Popular Religion in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Polity Press – Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990); *A civilizáció peremén. Kultúrtörténeti tanulmányok* (On the Fringes of Civilisation. Studies in Cultural History) (Budapest, Magvető, 1990); *Heilige, Hexen, Vampire. Vom Nutzen des Übernatürlichen* (Berlin, Wagenbach, 1991). Central aspects of study: the cult of saints, belief in miracles, popular Christianity, belief in witchcraft in the Middle Ages and Early Modern period. — Address: Bölcsészettudományi Kar, Eötvös Lorand University, POB 107, 1364 Budapest, Hungary.

I came to the Wissenschaftskolleg with basically two interrelated projects: completion of a monograph on the *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses. Dynastic Sainthood in Hungary and Medieval Europe*, and the elaboration of the framework for a future research topic, "Historical Representatives of Charisma in Medieval and Early Modern Europe".

The monograph on the holy rulers, upon which I have been working during the past five years, basically proposes a new synthesis of the evolution of these cults from the 11th to the 14th century. Relying upon the singular historical sequence and variety to be observed in this respect in medieval Hungary (where nearly all important medieval saints — Stephen, Imre, Ladislaus, Elisabeth, Margaret — came from the ruling Arpadian dynasty), I examine how the persistent cult-type of the saintly ruler was re-

adjusted and reinterpreted several times during this period in order to suit various new historical circumstances. Out of what could be called a typical exercise of comparative historical analysis between the Hungarian cults and the European parallels, I have tried to develop a new general evaluation of the problem of the cult of saintly rulers, a follow-up to the ones written by Frantisek Graus (1965), Erich Hoffmann (1975) and Robert Folz (1984).

My stay in Berlin not only gave me the opportunity to complete my research and access to a vast amount of source editions and secondary literature unavailable to me in Hungary, as well as the stimulating advice, comments of my colleagues here in the Wissenschaftskolleg and elsewhere in German universities, but also provided me with an unexpected opportunity to rethink the whole book project: the annual conference of the *Konstanzer Arbeitskreis für mittelalterliche Geschichte*, which was held in October 1990 and March 1991, centered upon the problem of "Politik and Heiligenverehrung im Hochmittelalter". I was invited to speak there about "Königliche and dynastische Heiligkeit in Ungarn", and had the chance to discuss these and related comparative problems with a large number of German medievalists.

The many new extensions and insights provided by these encounters and readings led me to embark upon a considerable amount of further research on the topic, instead of concluding the writing of the book in the first months of my stay here as originally intended. And although I must now look forward to completing the manuscript at home (at present three quarters finished), this extension proved both fruitful and useful, enabling me above all to reformulate the whole comparative characterization of the thirteenth century female version of dynastic sainthood in Central Europe (a problem touched upon by my study in this volume).*

The research on royal sainthood was at the same time the starting point for the subject of the historical representations of charisma. Not only because the word itself became related to it ("*die germanische charismatische Auffassung des Königtums*" — as it is frequently called), but also because situating the holy rulers in the long-term evolution of sacral kingship, and explaining its constant transformations in the more limited time-span of the Middle Ages, which I have been analyzing, it is linked inevitably with the problem of how royal sainthood is related to various historical perceptions of charisma. The ideal of the holy ruler had been modified from century to century: martyr king, apostolic converter of his people — ca. 600-1000 A.D.; learned legislator, "rex iustus" — ca. 1000-1300 A.D.;

* See below, pp. 224–252.

chivalrous, invincible warrior, "Athleta Patriae" — ca. 1100-1400 A.D.; saintly widow and princess — ca. 1200 —1300 A.D. The changing content of the cults and legends, the varying success of one or another type, the susceptibility of some rulers to veneration as saints, and some others not — could all be examined using the theoretical insights provided by the sociological category of charisma.

The project of charisma was equally connected with my previous research: my investigations into how medieval heretical prophets had been using bodily symbols, dresses, spaces, ideologies of "marginal", "liminal" origins (cf. Victor Turner); how popular healers, shamans, mystics resorted to techniques of ecstasy (cf. Eliade, Lewis); what kind of "morphology" could be observed in the descriptions of the workings of the miraculous power of the saints (cf. Vauchez, Sigal) and in their negative counterpart: in the malefices of the witches (cf. K. Thomas, J. Favret-Saada); what kind of similarities existed between the experiences of late medieval and early modern visionaries, fools, mystics and the possessed (cf. Foucault, M. de Certeau). I had the opportunity of rethinking the interrelatedness of these various phenomena, while writing the introduction to and supervising the German translation of my book *Heilige, Hexen, Vampire. Vom Nutzen des Übernatürlichen*, which was published by the Wagenbach Verlag during my stay here.

Originally I imagined embarking upon a vast research project on this subject, based on a sequence of detailed historical case studies: the hermit, the heretical prophet, the holy ruler, the Antichrist-like tyrant, the fool, the mystic, the possessed, the cunning folk, the witch, and the vampire. It would embrace a time-span ranging from the 11th to the 17th centuries, and I would draw my examples, where possible, from Central European history, but also illustrate several types by the better documented cases to be found in German, French or Italian history. The problems to be addressed seemed to me to be the following:

1. How supernatural power is attributed to human persons in these various cases (by whom, according to which criteria, in which moments, contexts, etc.);
2. How this charismatic position is experienced by the persons concerned (the one to whom the role is attributed, and the ones who attribute it to him/her);
3. What the symbols, rituals, techniques related to this charismatic power are and where they come from (relation of religious traditions to a kind of "bricolage" out of the concrete cultural context; explanation of the changing preferences for this or that type of charismatic person in various contexts and periods).

On the basis of these historical case studies, I intended to come back to

the sociological, psychological and anthropological theories on charisma (Max Weber, Edward Shils, Brian Wilson, Clifford Geertz, Wolfgang Lipp, etc.). Whereas theoretical thinking on charisma has mostly been limited to a type of religiously founded irregular form of political leadership, I intended to use it to describe a wide range of persons, who are ascribed a mediating role with superhuman, supernatural spheres on the grounds of their personalities. Another important aspect is that my understanding of charisma as a dualistic concept, where the nature of the supernatural power can be positive, negative or ambivalent, and where there is a delicate historical correlation between the positive and negative aspects of, for example, holy rulers and tyrants, miracles and malefices, ecstasies and possessions, female saints and witches.

While presenting the initial results of my work upon this problem during the course of this year to my colleagues (at various seminars or lectures here in the Wissenschaftskolleg, and also at the Freie Universität, Technische Universität, Berlin, at Kings College, London, at All Souls College, Oxford, at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Münster, and at the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel), the whole research project underwent important modifications. As I had initially hoped, it became concretized into several more concise and coherent subjects.

The first of these, the framework of which I was more or less able to elaborate during my stay here, is the historical comparison of late medieval narratives on miracles (to be read in the canonization investigations) with early modern accounts on bewitchments (narrated by the witnesses of early modern witch trials), which amounts to an analysis of an underlying common set of rules on how a supernatural event can be performed and by whom, to the comparative evaluation of the "charisma" of the saint and that of the witch. My study in this volume is the first result of this enquiry.

A second project, which I hope to begin after completing this examination, is a combined analysis of late medieval and early modern mysticism and possession, where various personal experiences of contact with the supernatural could be analyzed by cautious application of the historical psychology of religious experience. The whole issue will also be related to the problem of the sacral, transcendent roles ascribed to madness in the late Middle Ages.

The long term project on the historical sequence of charismatic figures in 600 years of European history, that I originally intended to work on, could be a further development based on the above investigations on the royal saints, sainthood and witchcraft, and mysticism and possession. It may well, however, take several years to reach this point, should I choose to persist with this rather fragile notion of charisma as a means of explaining their common features and differences (I must confess that I have some

doubts on this point, although I still maintain the original idea of the inter-relatedness of these historical personifications of supernatural power).

These are some of the insights that I have gained from quiet moments of research, reflection, the stimulating collegial criticism, and the pleasant and efficient working conditions provided here in the Wissenschaftskolleg. I would like to take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to the staff of the Kolleg, whose kind cooperation helped to make this possible.