

The Public Defense of the  
Doctoral Thesis in Comparative History

by

**Ádám Mézes**

on

“Doubt and diagnosis:  
Medical experts and the returning dead of the southern  
Habsburg borderland (1718-1766)”

will be held on

**Wednesday, 3 June 2020, 11:00 am**

Due to the extraordinary measures introduced by CEU in regard to the Covid-19 virus situation, the doctoral defense will take place on-line. For further information, contact Margaretha Boockmann, PhD coordinator ([boockmannm@ceu.edu](mailto:boockmannm@ceu.edu)).

Examination Committee

Katalin Szende – Chair (Medieval Studies, CEU)

László Kontler – supervisor (Department of History, CEU)

Gábor Klaniczay – supervisor (Medieval Studies, CEU)

Emese Lafferton – CEU internal member (Department of History)

Dániel Bárány – external member (Institute of Ethnology, ELTE)

Francesco Paolo de Ceglia – external member (Department of Humanities, University of Bari Aldo Moro)

The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection. Should you wish to access it, please contact Margaretha Boockmann ([BoockmannM@ceu.edu](mailto:BoockmannM@ceu.edu))

## ABSTRACT

The dissertation interprets the vampire as a case of extraordinary knowledge production on the margins of the known world. I directed the focus at experts entrusted to apply their specialized knowledge on diagnosing the vampiric attack and on regulating the unruly dead. Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, these experts served various social groups: local communities, administrative-judicial structures, aristocratic circles, the republic of letters and aulic political spheres. Thus, historical sources produced on vampires unveil actors, interests, and intense negotiations about what is ‘normal’ death and decay, about who is an expert, and what is proof. I argue that knowledge production is social, political, and bears the mark of the environment where it was produced.

The doctoral research reconstructed the biography of a text, a forensic comparative autopsy report that Habsburg medical experts prepared on supposed vampires in 1732. As a first step, I placed this report back into its historical context, the southern Habsburg borderland, using the revenant infestations of the Moravian-Silesian border region as a comparative case-study. Based on archival research and a systematization of published sources, the research shows that the revenant-problem was more widespread than previously thought. In both regions local communities managed to ‘enchant’ the secular and ecclesiastical authorities and enforce their interests, but the institutions came up with two different theoretical frameworks to accommodate local experiences. The research demonstrates that the southern borderland’s public hygiene-centred environment fostered empirical knowledge production through practices of investigation and documentation.

Focus is then shifted to noble and learned circles. While the report was a curio item and was used as a test-case for natural philosophical and theological polemics, it also led the learned onto the untrodden path of empirical research on human bodily decay. At a time when the possibility of corporeal supernatural activity was less and less in vogue, but the prestige of empirical experiments was rising, a forensic

report proving the living dead was both attractive and repulsive. The vampire was an opportunity to discuss the evidentiary value of historical tradition, judicial decisions and naturalist observations and of personal and communal experience vis-à-vis each other. I suggest that since there were several acceptable ways to explain the harmful dead, the deepest cutting criticism was not based on ontology, but on a distrust in historical examples and a judicial-medical case-by-case deconstruction of evidence and expertise.

Finally, the research suggests that even though vampirism at an administrative level was a problem of disciplining unruly subjects, the projects aimed driving back the practice of mass revenant executions in the 1750s came not only from the Viennese centre but also from local levels, where fashioning oneself as an expert on vampirism could be used to build social capital. I also argue that Queen Maria Theresa's legislation against revenant executions was a centralizing measure, much more so than a secularizing one. In addition, giving expertise on vampires had political dimensions and learned experts needed to close ranks at the face of challenges to their authority.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

*Ádám Mézes*

### EDUCATION

2013-2019 PhD Program, Central European University (Budapest), History Department

- 2018 Lent Visiting Student: University of Cambridge (UK), Department of the History and Philosophy of Science
- 2017 Fall Guest Lecturer: Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest), Department of Economic and Social History
- 2015 Fall Visiting Student: Cornell University (Ithaca, NY), Science and Technology Studies Department

2013 MA in Comparative History, Central European University, Budapest

2012 MA in History and in English Language and Literature, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

### WORK EXPERIENCE

2019- Research Analyst: Wealth-X (Budapest)

2019 - Research Assistant to historian Emese Lafferton: Central European University (Budapest)

2018-2019 Technical Support Analyst (German speaking): DXC Technologies (Budapest)

2017 - 2019 Review Editor: Hungarian Historical Review (Hungarian Academy of Sciences)

2017 Fall Contracted Translator: East Central Europe (BRILL Journals)

2017-2018 Contracted Translator: Pangea Translators' Office

2016-2019 Contracted Translator: Aimflorida Real Estate

- 2013 Historical Researcher for a local history monograph: Local Council of the City of Kerepes
- 2012 Facilitator: Bring-Art Bike Painting Workshops (Budapest)
- 2006-2012 Assistant Editor: Solomnis Publishing Limited Partnership (Budapest)
- 2006-2009 Contracted Designer: Heti Világgazdaság (HVG) Weekly Newspaper (Budapest)
- 2004- Facilitator: Budaörsi SC Karate Club (Budaörs)

### **OTHER EXPERIENCE**

- 2018 The Sacred in Conflict: Disagreements between and within Religions, Center for Religious Studies Doctoral Conference (Conference Organizer, CEU, Budapest 28-30/06/2018)
- 2015 Fall Academic Event Series (Organizer, Telluride Association, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY)
- 2014-2015 Departmental Research Seminar Series (Organizer, CEU, Budapest, Department of History)
- 2014 Trust and Happiness in the History of Political Thought (Conference Organizer, CEU, Budapest, 17-19/09/2014)
- 2013 Current Theoretical Interfaces: Iconicity, Semiotics, Historicity (Conference Organizer, Budapest, 27-29/05/2013)

### **AFFILIATIONS**

- 2014-2018 External member of the East-West Research Group in Religious Ethnography [Kelet-Nyugat Vallásetnológiai Kutatócsoport] (Budapest-Pécs)
- 2012-2018 Science Studies Program, Central European University (Budapest)

2012-2018 Center for Religious Studies, Central European University (Budapest)

2008- Historical College, Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest)

### **AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS**

2018 Doctoral Research Support Grant (CEU), University of Cambridge (UK)

2017 Global Teaching Fellowship Program (CEU), ELTE University (Budapest)

2015 Reese-Miller International Exchange Scholarship, Telluride Association, Cornell University (Ithaca, NY)

2013 Hanák Prize for the best MA thesis of the year (CEU)

### **COURSES TAUGHT**

2017 Fall Mummy Powder, Bloodletting and the Wandering Womb – Medicine in 16-18th-Century England (Visiting Professor, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Department of English Studies)

2017 Fall To Believe or Not to Believe – The Decline of Magic in 17-18th-Century Europe (Visiting Professor, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Department of Economic and Social History)

2016 Fall Historiography: Themes in History and Approaches to its Theory (Teaching Assistant to Professors Carsten Wilke, Daniel Ziemann, CEU, Department of History, Budapest)

### **PUBLICATIONS**

2018 Georg Tallar and the 1753 Vampire Hunt - Administration, medicine and the returning dead in the Habsburg Banat. In: Éva Pócs (ed): *The Magical and Sacred Medical World*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle upon Tyne, 2019. 93-136.

2014 Visum Repertum: Georg Tallar és az 1753-as Vámpírvadászat [Visum Repertum: Georg Tallar and the 1753 Vampire Hunt] In: Gábor Klaniczay & Éva Pócs (eds.): Boszorkányok, varázslók és démonok Közép-Kelet-Európában [Witches, Sorcerers and Demons in Middle-East Europe] Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, 2014. 109-154.

2014 Witchcraft at Hand - Review Essay of The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America, edited by Brian P. Levack, Oxford University Press, 2013. European Review of History 21 / 5, 749–787.

2012 Walks in the Past [Múltbéli Séták] - Review of Péter Katalin: Marriage in Old Hungary – 16-17. Centuries. [Házasság a Régi Magyarországon – 16-17. Század] L'Harmattan Kiadó, Budapest. Századok 146 / 2, 494-496.

### **SELECTED CONFERENCE PAPERS AND TALKS**

2018 'Who's afraid of vampires? Negotiating expertise on death in the Habsburg Banat, 1718-1755' – 'Encountering Knowledges: Geographies, Concepts and Materials from the Early Modern Period to the Present' (University of Cambridge, Faculty of English, 27/09/2018)

2018 'Cultures of Disease: The Swamp, the Onion and the Vampire on the 18th-Century Habsburg Military Frontier' – Yearly Meeting of the GWMT, the German Society for the History of Science (Bochum, 12-14/09/2018)

2018 'Fear, Superstition and Contagion in the 1732 Learned Debate on Vampires' - Emotions and Religious Sentiments across Central and Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean Seminar Series (ARC Centre for the History of Emotions, CEU Institute for Advanced Studies, Budapest, 18/06/2018)

2018 'Blood Does Not Turn into Water: Proving and Argumentation in the 1732 Vampire Accusations' Paper at the Popular Religion at the Border of Eastern and Western Christianity: Continuities, Changes and Interactions Conference (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Humanities Research Centre, Budapest, 04-06/05/2018)

2018 'Blood will tell? Constructions of the Vampire-Problem in the 18th Century' – Talk at the Cabinet of Natural History Seminar Series (University of Cambridge, 22/01/2018)

2017 'Reconstructing the Supernatural? Medical Argumentation in Anti-Superstition Writings of 18th-century Vienna' - Enchantments, Disenchantments, Re-enchantments: Religion, State, and Society through History Doctoral Conference (CEU, Budapest, 29/06-01/07/2017)

2017 'Seen and Discovered – the Diagnosis of Vampirism in 1730-1750's Habsburg Empire Annual Postgraduate Conference of the British Society for the History of Science (European University Institute, Florence, 05-07/04/2017)

2016 'Quarantine Stations as Hubs of Imperial Medicine and Administration – Sanitary Journals from Pancsova, 1754-57', Talk at the Intertwined Enlightenments - Studies of Science and Empire in the Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian Realms during the Eighteenth-Century Workshop (CEU, Institute for Advanced Study, Budapest, 19-20/05/2016)

2016 'Unusual Corpses, Customary Burials – Vampires in 18th-Century Banat', Paper at Before and Beyond the Norm Conference (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, 07-08/03/2016)

## **TRAININGS**

2018 Special FX Makeup Course, Glamour Makeup Academy (Budapest)

2016 C1 German intensive language course, Goethe Institut (Budapest)

2015 A2 Russian language course, Cornell University (Ithaca, NY)

2013 Webdesign Basics, Central European University (Budapest)

2013 Geographical Information Systems, Central European University (Budapest)

2013 Get Ready for Youth Entrepreneurship Seminar, SALTO-YOUTH (Rome)

2009 English-Hungarian oral translation seminar, Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest)

2007 B2 Spanish intensive language course, STS (Salamanca)



## LANGUAGE SKILLS

Reading/Writing	Speaking/Listening	
Hungarian	native	native
English	proficiency	proficiency
German	upper-intermediate	intermediate
Spanish	upper-intermediate	intermediate
Latin	intermediate	-
Russian	beginner	beginner

## COMPUTER SKILLS

Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, Power Point, Outlook)

Adobe Photoshop, Acrobat

Web Design (Wix, WordPress)

Quantum GIS, Google Maps

Social Media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Academia.edu)

## AREAS OF SPECIAL ACADEMIC INTEREST

early modern social and cultural history

history of science