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The frightening borderlands of Enlightenment: The vampire problem

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Abstract

Between 1724 and 1760, in the frontier area of the Habsburg empire waves of a hitherto unknown epidemic disease emerged: vampirism. In remote villages of southeastern Europe, cases of unusual deaths were reported. Corpses did not decay and, according to the villagers, corporeal ghosts were haunting their relatives and depriving them of their vital force. Death occurred by no later than three to four days.

The colonial administration, alarmed by the spread of an epidemic illness dispatched military officers and physicians to examine the occurrences. Soon several reports and newspaper articles circulated and made the untimely resurrection of the dead known to the perplexed public, Europe-wide. "Vampyrus Serviensis", the Serbian vampire, became an intensively discussed phenomenon within academe, and thereby gained factual standing.

My paper depicts the geopolitical context of the vampire's origin within the Habsburg states. Secondly, it outlines the epistemological difficulties faced by observing physicians in the field. Thirdly, it delineates the scholarly debate on the apparent oxymoron of the living dead in the era of enlightened reason. Fourthly, the early history of vampirism shows that ghosts and encounters with the undead are not superstitious relics of a pre-modern past, or the Enlightenment's other, but intimate companions of Western modernity.

Keywords: ghost, military medicine, mind-body problem, revenant, rationality, vampirism

1. Introduction

‘The disenchantment of the world means the extirpation of animism.’ This sentence is taken from Max Horkheimer’s and Theodor W. Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 2). As a departure point for what follows, this simultaneously descriptive and programmatic yet ambivalent assertion seems appropriate. With the concept of animism, which first appeared in the nineteenth century, and which juxtaposes scientific modernity with a magical, pre-modern age, we are addressing a threat scenario in which a belief in spirits and their efficacy plays an important role. The David of scientific rationality takes on the Goliath of age-old human ignorance.

This figure of thought, originating in nineteenth-century optimism about progress, sharply opposes religion to science. Andrew D. White, pedagogue, author and co-founder of Cornell University, described the ‘Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom’ as a necessary precondition for the development of the natural sciences, and, in a very fundamental way, for a secular world picture (White, 1896). Both White’s ‘Warfare of Science’ and Horkheimer and Adorno’s ‘extirpation of animism’ are intimately linked to Western modernity and self-assurance over the significance of Enlightenment. The passage from the darkness of superstition into the light of reason has become a well-worn formula, one which requires virtually no explanation. The debate over the reality of bloodthirsty Undead illustrates this struggle in the most graphic manner, and without further ado we can add a new episode to

the successful series ‘Science Conquers Superstition’.

On closer inspection, however, we might experience some doubts about this version of events, especially given that the phenomenon of the ‘Mystifying Enlightenment’ cannot be underestimated (Summerfield, 2008). The ‘dynamic of historical change may have been less dialectical than is generally supposed,’ as David Lederer (2006, p. 3) has observed in his study on the origins of modern psychology and psychiatry in early modern Europe. It cannot be doubted that a remarkable shift did take place at the beginning of the eighteenth century. This was the moment when the distinction between ‘natural, preternatural, and supernatural’, instituted by Thomas of Aquinas and upheld by theologians and natural philosophers alike until the end of the seventeenth century, broke down. Up to then, the category of the ‘preternatural’ had included curious phenomena and objects which did not count as ‘wonderful’ in the strict sense. The term ‘supernatural’ was reserved for true wonders and signs from God. ‘Marvelous facts and miraculous evidence’ nevertheless increasingly disappear towards the end of the seventeenth century. Instead, the process of ‘naturalisation of the preternatural’, as Lorraine Daston shows, gathered pace (Daston, 1991, p. 100). Both sides were involved in this process. Theologians became more rational, and natural philosophers more theological, than had previously been the case. This is particularly evident in the realm of medicine, where bodily and spiritual health were closely connected to personal salvation by a moralising discourse. Nosology and etiology classified diseases under one of these two rubrics (Lederer,

2006, pp. 6-8). At the same time, however, there was friction between professional Enlighteners and professionalised Christianity, between empirical science and religious belief. Ever since the case of Galileo, the threat of charges of heresy had had to be reckoned with. The mind-body problem was particularly troublesome in this regard, as were questions concerning the nature of life and death (Lederer, 2006, p. 8).

The claim that the dead could come back to life was provocative for both sides. The vampire represents an epistemological void between life and death, between this side of the grave and the great beyond. This void—the explanation of the inexplicable—became a productive challenge for the European learned world, one which also touched on questions of responsibility for knowledge and of the monopoly over knowledge. Christian theologians had traditionally advised on the question of life after death, especially since the founder of their religion had himself returned from the grave and was the subject of particular reverence as a result. However, the credibility of their account had diminished in the face of a growing plurality of worlds and interpretations. Demonology, the scholarly science of spirits, which systematically described the agency of intermediate beings and messengers from the other side, had long been under fire from within its own ranks. The Devil himself, eternally responsible for everything (im)possible, had been suffering an identity crisis ever since it had become possible to deny the existence of Hell itself. What had until recently been a cherished double bill coupling the fear of hell with the promise of salvation was becoming ever more difficult to sustain. In the final quarter of the seventeenth century, the

Devil's margin for manoeuvre was becoming ever smaller, and doubt was cast upon his ability to drive people insane. Human weakness took his place: deception and credulity now came to be incorporated into the domain of the preternatural, even if no-one challenged the fundamental fact of the Devil's existence.¹

As it increased in authority, natural philosophy offered alternative interpretations of the world and of man. One of these was medicine, which more than any other science brandished the banner of a paradigm based on evidence, and in consequence embraced both rationalism and empiricism. In so doing, medicine promised to supply a valid answer to a question of general significance: at what point could a man be judged to be dead? Lastly, a further example will be discussed: the case of the army, which had the task of deflecting the vampire threat. Under its protection, and with bureaucratic thoroughness, expeditions were despatched to vampire-infected regions. Here, observations were collected, and minutes were taken and transmitted to the centre of power, where they were annotated and filed. Without the army, there would be no reliable vampire knowledge. Military and medical ambitions colluded and both, medicine and military, were subject to the spatial conditions and power dynamics of centre and periphery in the Habsburg empire.

The vampire with whom physicians, philosophers, theologians, and the army concerned themselves so intensively in the first half of the eighteenth century first saw the light of day in the age of Enlightenment, and since that time has never been successfully put to death. Some

¹ See Daston (1991), pp. 117, 122.

partial victories can be reported; after the first wave of anxiety and fear generated by his paradoxical existence and life-threatening intrusions, the vampire was scientifically dissected, disembodied, reclassified as a ‘superstition’ and finally reduced to a figure of fun. Prematurely, however: for after over a century of peaceful rest in his grave, the vampire woke again, this time in the form of a hollow-cheeked, melancholy aristocrat with needle-sharp canines. Ever since that time, he has tirelessly revisited the world of the living, fed by the power of the imagination wielded by a public of readers and cinema-goers with limitless appetites.²

This situation presents no small difficulty for historical research. When the discussion comes around to the topic of vampires, everybody already *knows* what is at stake. Even Voltaire knew who the real blood-suckers were: stockmarket speculators, merchants, and tax-collectors.³ Karl Marx knew that capital was ‘dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour’ (Marx, 1867, p. 257). As psychoanalytically inspired literary theorists and folklorists know, a vampire is primarily a projection created by the death of a close relative (Dundes, 1998). At the very least, we can conclude from these examples that vampires are good to think with. It is not the purpose of this essay to explain why that is the case. However, the fact that the vampire has become a

sociopolitical metaphor, a product of depth psychological symbolising, a figure of reflection and discussion, an aesthetic model or a pop culture symbol of an ubiquitous companion to modernity, cannot be explained without reference to the vampire’s media career. This began in 1897 with Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, and was still producing new successes in the twentieth century, mostly in the cinema (see Miller, 2005; Butler, 2010). The vampire offered both a powerfully expressive narrative and a repertoire of images, apparently endlessly reusable and capable of producing affect. The modern vampire myth is a stable component of common knowledge, and it encapsulates knowledge about what a vampire definitely *cannot* be, namely an actually existing undead person: *mortuus non mordet*.

At the beginning of the vampire’s career, none of this was so clearcut. Rather, it was the vagueness of knowledge about its ontological status that first made the vampire into a ‘problem’ and aroused fear from several perspectives. Above all, what was threatening was the absence of knowledge among enlightened scholars themselves. The effort to overcome this would lead to remarkable intellectual struggles.

2. *Vampyrus Serviensis* - a phenomenon of occupation

The story begins at the start of the eighteenth century, at a time before the vampire had even been invented, in the occupied regions of the Habsburg monarchy.⁴ Klaus Hamberger (1992) and,

² The literature on vampires is immense. The following is a representative selection with emphasis on publications in the German language, predominantly based on documents from the Habsburg cases. Schroeder (1973), Hamberger (1992); Sturm & Völker (1994); Kreuter (2001; 2001/02; 2002; 2005; 2006).

³ Voltaire included an article on ‘Vampires’ in his 1764 *Dictionnaire philosophique*. Cf. Voltaire (1786), pp. 386-392.

⁴ The work of Thomas Schürmann (1990) on the harmful dead in Central Europe is particularly

more recently, Jutta Nowosadtko (2004) have demonstrated that the vampire's birth was closely bound up with the construction of the Austrian military border. The area involved was that region of south-eastern Europe stretching in a crescent from Slovenia to Bukovina. In 1718, following the Treaty of Passarowitz, the Turkish wars had been brought to an end. The much-celebrated hero, Prince Eugene, had repeatedly defeated the Austrians' arch-enemy, forcing the Ottomans to yield considerable tracts of land to Austria, including Lesser Wallachia, substantial parts of Serbia and the northern part of Bosnia. With these victories, the Habsburg monarchy attained its greatest land extent; it would shrink again after the Treaty of Belgrade in 1739.⁵ From 1719 onwards, Karl Alexander, Duke of Württemberg (1684-1737), resided in the fortress of Belgrade as imperial general governor or *Generalgubernator* of the newly conquered lands (*Neoacquistica*). Reports of curious deaths and undecayed corpses began to arrive at his headquarters. These were more frequent in winter, and provoked hysterical reactions in the affected villages and garrisons. Four such vampire scandals occurred during the Duke of Württemberg's eighteen-year period of office alone. In consequence, the most important sources for this study come from the pens of military surgeons and one *Kameralprovisor*. The western European discovery of the vampire during the first half of the eighteenth century was a phenomenon of occupation, as Jutta

Nowosadtko has shown (2004, p. 153). The returning Undead and their victims also preoccupied the other side, the Ottoman military bureaucracy. There are indications of this, though no scholarly studies exist (Hamberger, 1992, pp. 66-71).⁶ After this initial episode, a succession of new waves of vampire cases ensued in south-eastern Europe. Thus a series of cases came to be documented between 1724 and 1760.

The organisation of the military bureaucracy, which owed its loyalty to the empire, is not insignificant to the process of investigation into the question of returning Undead. The Habsburg colonial project pursued 'political, economic, social and religious interests, and thus always represented a multifunctional project'.⁷ All relevant occurrences from the empire's borders were to be reported to Vienna and, conversely, the orders coming from the metropolis were to be faithfully implemented.

The occupied areas served as a buffer zone for the clashing superpowers for decades. As a result, they were desolate areas whose main use was as pastureland. In the spirit of cameralistic economy, settlement by German and Catholic colonists, spurred on by suitable rewards, was encouraged. The migrant pastoral economy was to be converted to a settled

helpful in summarising the older literature on the history of *Nachzehrer* and vampire representations. See also Barber's study (1988) on the folklore and reality of the Undead.

⁵ See Nowosadtko, 2004, p. 153; Hochedlinger, 2003, pp. 83-86, 219-222.

⁶ The Ottoman army's handling of the phenomenon, as well as the theological positions of Muslims and of the Orthodox church as regards vampirism, are areas warranting further research, as Nowosadtko (2004), p. 154n., remarks. Elvira Bijedić (2001) has provided an interesting contribution to this area with her master's thesis on 'Vampirism in the Balkans under Ottoman rule'. I thank the author for allowing me access to her unpublished work.

⁷ Nowosadtko (2004), pp. 154-155; see also Roth (1988), pp. 23f.

agrarian economy. In order to recruit an unpaid militia, Greek Orthodox Serbs, known to the Habsburgs as *Rätzen* or *Raitzen*, were promised free land on condition that they undertake military service in wartime. The militia of Banat numbered 4,200 men, both cavalry and infantry (Nowasadtko, 2004, p. 157). Thus the border area was inhabited by a mixed confessional and ethnic population.

3. The disease symptoms of vampirism

How did vampires make their appearance? In the first instance, in memoranda suggesting the existence of an epidemic in the border region. The accompanying circumstances were upsetting: corpses were being exhumed, burnt, beheaded or staked. *Feldscherer* or military surgeons, who were medical artisans in military service, were despatched, and their enquiries *in situ* revealed a pattern. Prior to the corpse-burnings, there had been cases of sudden death exhibiting a most peculiar configuration of symptoms, as summarized by Klaus Hamberger:

Shivering, enduring nausea, pain in the stomach and intestines, in the kidney region and in the back and shoulderblades as well as the back of the head, further, a clouding of the eyes, deafness and speech problems. The tongue has a whitish-yellow to brownish-red coating, and dries out to the accompaniment of unquenchable thirst. The pulse is erratic (*caprinus*) and weak (*parvus*); on the throat and in the hypochondria, that is to say, in the area of the belly (*abdomen*) beneath the chest cartilage, livid or reddish spots (*maculae rubicundae vel lividae*) are to be seen, though in part only after death. The paroxysm

exhibits itself in extreme night terrors, associated with a loud cry, strong trembling, a spasmodic contraction of the muscles of the upper body (*thorax*), a constriction of the airway and hot flushes; with the additional symptom of constriction of the heart (*praecordium angusta*), that is, a sensation of anxiety in the hollow of the breast, associated with pain in the mouth of the stomach; lastly nightmares (*incubus*), which frequently evoke the image of the returning dead.⁸

Death ensued between one and three, or at most four, days later. Since deaths proliferated in particular localities, the condition was classified as an epidemic disease (*morbus epidemicus vel epidemicus*). The extent to which the disease was infectious remained unclear. Nevertheless, it quickly became clear that ‘in the regions in question, only the Serbian, Rätzian and Wallachian customs officials, cattle-rearers and mountain folk, all of the Orthodox faith, were attacked, while the local soldiers and settlers of German origin were spared’ (Hamberger, 1992, p. 10). The responsibility for deaths of this kind was attributed by village residents to resurrecting corpses, themselves recognisable by means of a particular collection of symptoms: the dead under suspicion had not putrefied, and liquid blood came from their noses and mouths.

In 1725, *Kameralprovisor* Frombald was commissioned by the Belgrade military administration to investigate cases occurring in the northern Bosnian town of Kisolova, in the Gradisca boundary district. Nine people had died there over an eight-day period, after just 24 hours of illness.

⁸ Hamberger (1992), pp. 9f. Peter Mario Kreuter (2001, 2001/02, 2005) examines the reports of Austrian military physicians in detail.

Peter Plojovic, who had been buried slightly earlier, was accused of having sought out the victims in their sleep, lain on top of them and throttled them. In the presence of the *Kameralprovisor* and together with the local Orthodox clergy, the grave was opened. Frombald testified as an eyewitness to the fact that Plojovic's body was

quite fresh, apart from the nose, which was rather sunken; his old hair and beard, and even his nails, had been shed, and new ones had grown; his old skin, which was whitish, had flaked away, and a fresh new one had appeared underneath it; his face, hands and feet, and his whole body could not have been formed more perfectly in life than they [now] appeared. In his mouth I saw, not without astonishment, some fresh blood, which, as all agreed, he had sucked from those he had murdered.⁹

Frombald did not attempt to explain the phenomenon for himself. He merely added:

After both Popp and I had seen this spectacle, though the mob was becoming increasingly irate rather than shocked, they and the servants hastily sharpened a spear with which to stab the dead body, [and] put it to his heart. During the stabbing, not only did lots of fresh blood flow from the ears and mouth, but other strange signs also occurred (which I will spare you on account of my great respect). At last they burnt the body in question, *in hoc casu* customary practice. Which we now lay before a Most praiseworthy administration, while at the same time most humbly and dutifully requesting that if there has been a mistake made in this matter, it should not be laid to

my account but to that of the mob, which was beside itself with fear.

Imper. Provisor to the district of Gradiska.¹⁰

An extract from this report was sent to the Austrian national newspaper *Wiener Diarium*, corrected for style and published without further commentary on 21 July 1725. Shortly afterwards a flysheet, entitled *A Dreadful Occurrence in the Village of Kisolova in Upper Hungary a few Days Ago*, was published, thus converting a medical memorandum into a text for hawking to a broader readership (Hamberger, 1992, p. 45; Hock, 1900, p. 37). For the first time, the existence of those blood-sucking dead 'known as vampyri' was made known to the Viennese public. As Peter Mario Kreuter (2005) has shown, the expression 'vampiri or bloodsuckers' was added later on the document (Kreuter, 2005, p. 7, 115n; Hamberger, 1992, p. 43).¹¹ The unknown archivist who conferred a title upon the report alluded to Frombald's observation of fresh blood in the corpse's mouth, and to the indications of the villagers that the victim had been sucked dry of blood.

Vampire researchers are agreed that the origin and etymology of the word 'vampire' is obscure. Linguistic indications suggest Old Slav, with a Turkish regional emphasis (Wilson, 1985; Kreuter, 2001, pp. 68-73; Kreuter 2006). The term 'vampire', as we shall see, began to establish itself as a German loanword after the events of 1725.

¹⁰ Hamberger (1992), p. 45.

¹¹ The original document is titled '*Copia des vom Herrn Frombald kayszerlichen Cameral Provisore zu Gradiska im Königreich Servien erlasenen Briefs anno 1725. Die im Königreich Servien damals in Schwung gegangenen sogenannten vanpiri oder Blutsanger betreffend*' and is archived under that title in HHStA Vienna, StAbt Türkei 1/191, Konvolut 1725, fol. 25-26.

⁹ Hamberger (1992), pp. 44f., quoting from the newspaper report. See also Kreuter (2005), p. 115.

After General Commander Karl Alexander von Württemberg had made his final report in August 1725, the case was consigned to the files. The Viennese administration appeared unimpressed; at any rate, no further measures were authorised.

Seven years later, the situation would change. A case in the Medwegya town of Morawa was the trigger which would make the vampire known throughout Europe. The villagers, among them hajduks from a militia company, reported thirteen deaths to the acting army commander. *Obristleutnant* Schnezzer, concerned lest the deaths marked the start of an epidemic, despatched the ‘Contagions-Medicus’ Glaser, an imperial physician charged with the investigation of epidemics, to the village. The latter was unable to find any evidence that an infectious disease was involved.¹² Rather, he suspected that the symptoms of ‘fever, the stitch and chest complaints’ were caused by the fasting practices of the Rätzen, in other words, that they were a product of the custom of fasting followed among strict Orthodox believers. Following pressure from the villagers, who regarded ‘vambyres or bloodsuckers’ as responsible for the deaths, Glaser had several graves opened. He remarked with astonishment upon the undecayed condition of the corpses, and finally requested that permission be granted for the suspect corpses to be put to death, since the villagers were threatening to desert the area (Kreuter, 2005, p. 117). After a short hesitation because the locus of responsibility was not clear, the

administration in Belgrade ordered a ‘surgical Inspection’, this time carried out by Johann Flückinger, accompanied by two journeymen apothecaries.

On 7 January 1732, Flückinger began his enquiries into the prehistory of the cases. It was revealed that five years earlier, a hajduk named Arnont Paule had died in an accident. In life, Paule had claimed to have been attacked by a vampire while on military service in Greece. After death, he appeared to the local inhabitants, killing four of them, and furthermore also attacked cattle, sucking their blood. It was felt appropriate to exhume, stake and burn Paule’s corpse. Flückinger questioned the villagers intensively, and reported not only on their beliefs but also on their family relationships and official roles. The autopsy of thirteen bodies by the three surgeons was recorded in detail. Flückinger’s review reveals a consistently meticulous scientific style. For example, he described a woman named Stana,

twenty years old, who had died 2 months ago after a 3-day illness in childbed, and who before her death herself proclaimed that she had painted herself with the blood of a vampyre, whereupon both she and her child which had died straight after birth, and which had been almost half eaten by their dogs for having been buried foolishly, would have to become vampyres themselves, [her corpse] was quite whole and undecayed. On opening the body a quantity of freshly exuded blood appeared in cavitate pectoris [in the chest cavity], the Vasa [vessels] such as arteriae et Venae [arteries and veins] near the Ventriculis cordis [heart ventricles] was not, as is otherwise customary, congested with coagulated blood; yet the whole of the Viscera from Pulmo, Hepar, Stomachus, Lien and Intestina [lungs, liver, stomach,

¹² The report, ‘Bericht des Contagions-Medicus Glaser an die Jagodiner Kommandatur (nach dem 12.12.1732)’, can be consulted in Hamberger (1992), pp. 46-49.

spleen and intestines] were as fresh as in a healthy person; the uterus however was very large and much inflamed on the outside, because the placenta and lochia had remained inside and the same had putrefied as a result.¹³

On this occasion, Flückinger came to the conclusion that Stana had died of a retained placenta.

Clearly, Flückinger had the power to authorise the destruction of the supposed Vampyre, for he continued: ‘After the inspection was concluded, some gypsies who were present cut the heads off the Vampyres and burnt them together with their bodies. The ashes were thrown into the river Morova, but the rotted bodies were replaced in their graves’ (Kreuter, 2005, p. 119). Flückinger’s behaviour was distinctly different from that of *Kameralprovisor* Frombald. Where the latter was seized with wonder and bafflement, Flückinger was driven by a nearly ethnographic eagerness. Both his gaze into the body’s interior, and his efforts to enter into the belief world of the villagers, were impelled by scientific curiosity. The connection between knowledge and truth was indebted to the scientific ideal of empiricism, as is evident from the authority accorded to vision. The combination of truth and eye-witnessing also has a juridical dimension, as becomes clear in the closing statements of the report. The surgical journeymen, *Oberleutnant* Büttner and J. H. von Lindenfels, an ensign, all signed the document:

¹³ Flückinger’s review is titled *Visum et Repertum Über die sogenannten Vampyrs oder Blutsanger so zu Medwegya in Servien an Türkischen Gränzen den 7 Januarii 1732 geschehen* (HKA Wien, Hoffinanz Ungarn, Rote Nummer 654 [February 1732], fol. 1138-1140.) Quoted in Kreuter (2005), p. 118; see also Hamberger (1992), pp. 49-54.

We the undersigned hereby attest to the fact that everything witnessed in connection with the Vampyres by the regimental surgeon of the estimable Fürtenbusch Regiment and the two surgical journeymen signing alongside him, is in keeping with the truth and was undertaken, inspected and examined in our very presence. This we corroborate with our own signatures. Belgrade, 26 Jan. 1732.¹⁴

4. Vampires as a Media Sensation

It was not the first case of vampirism, occurring in Kisolova in 1725, which was to make the figure of the vampire internationally famous. Rather, it was a series of vampire deaths in Medwegya in 1731. These deaths would become the subject of learned disputes across Europe, at the same time as a wide public interested itself in vampires. Flückinger’s informative report surely played its part in this process, but it was his predecessor, the epidemics physician Glaser, who put ‘Vampyrus Serviensis’ ‘in the media’, and thence into academy and household. For it was Glaser who sent a copy of his report to Vienna’s Collegium Sanitatis, as well as to his father, Johann Friedrich Glaser, also a physician. In his capacity as the Viennese correspondent of a new medical weekly, *Commercium Litterarium ad rei medicae et scientiae*, founded in 1731, Glaser senior wrote to the Nürnberg editors of the newspaper. He informed them of his son’s position as imperial physician in the Turkish regions of Serbia, and of what he had observed: that a

magical plague has been rampant there for some time. Perfectly normally buried dead

¹⁴ Quoted in Hamberger (1992), p. 54.

are arising from their undisturbed graves to kill the living. These too, dead and buried in their turn, arise in the same way to kill yet more people. This occurs by the following means: the dead attack people by night, while they are asleep, and suck blood out of them, so that on the third day they all die. No cure has yet been found for this evil.¹⁵

Götz and Treu, for their part, were members of the *Academia Naturae Curiosorum*, otherwise known as the *Leopoldina*, and it was they who brought the case into learned circles. That same year, one Alexander Freiherr von Kottwitz, an ensign in the Belgrade regiment, addressed an enquiry to the Leipzig professor of medicine Michael Ernst Ettmüller (1673-1732), director of the *Leopoldina*. Kottwitz's letter has an apprehensive tone, for he asked whether such 'man-suckers' were capable of 'desolating a whole village full of people and cattle in a short time, giving rise to many complaints before the authorities here'.¹⁶ There followed a tale of a dead hajduk, who was rumoured to have returned as a ghost by night to his wife and impregnated her. The resulting child

had the full proportions of a boy, but not a single limb, instead it was like a pure lump of flesh which shrank up after three days like a sausage. Because a rare wonder is being made out of it here, I have allowed myself to ask most humbly for your personal view, as to whether this is

something sympathetic, devilish, or the workings of astral spirits...¹⁷

On account of pressing business connected with his inheritance, the chief commander, Duke Karl Alexander, travelled to Stuttgart at the start of 1732. Here he made contact with the Tübingen professor of philosophy Georg Bernhard Bilfinger (1693-1750), who was a member of the philosophical school of Leibniz and Wolff, which paid particular attention to the relationship between soul and body.¹⁸

The journey allowed Duke Karl Alexander not only to engage in diplomatic powerplay, but also to astound court society with reports of the scandalous incidents. As the head of command in Serbia, Karl Alexander was kept up to date with events in Medwegya even while he was away.¹⁹ In March he paid a visit to the Prussian king, Friedrich Wilhelm I, and presented him with a copy of Flückinger's work. For his part, the Prussian king undertook to have the *Königliche Preussische Societät der Wissenschaft* report on the publication. The scholars' explanations were all characterised by marked scepticism. In the final analysis, the vampire's mode of existence, his blood-sucking activities and any possibility of transmission of vampirism by infection were all flatly denied.²⁰ Nevertheless, this report stimulated further studies, as well as

¹⁵ From Glaser's letter of 13 February 1732 to the Nuremberg editor Götz, quoted from Hamberger (1992), pp. 54f. The original letter was in Latin; Hamberger offers a translation.

¹⁶ 'Aus dem Brief des Fähnrichs von Kottwitz an Ettmüller (26. Jänner 1732)', reproduced in Hamberger (1992), p. 56.

¹⁷ Hamberger (1992), p. 56.

¹⁸ Encouraged by Karl Alexander's reports, Bilfinger (1742) included a 'Disquisitio de Vampyris' in his book *Elementa Physices*. See Hamberger (1992), p. 111; Schroeder (1973), p. 63.

¹⁹ Details are in Schroeder (1973), pp. 62-64.

²⁰ *Gutachten der Königlich Preussischen Societät derer Wissenschaften von denen Vampyren oder Blutaussaugern (11.3.1732)*, reproduced in Hamberger (1992), pp. 111-114. The report was reprinted in Fritsch (1732). See also Schroeder (1973), p. 65.

reports from personal and court physicians (Schroeder, 1973, pp. 66-69).

In effect, the vampire and the question of people returning from the dead had infected the European scholarly public sphere. The reports of individuals like Glaser, Flückinger, and Kottwitz constituted a textual corpus which was regularly referred to. In learned journals, especially in Nürnberg's *Commercium litterarium*, the vampire debate went on in lively vein. This periodical appeared between 1731 and 1745. In its founding period, during the 1730s, the spectacular incidents in Serbia intervened at just the right moment to make the journal renowned. Seventeen articles were published on the events of 1732 alone. The weekly newspaper was primarily directed at doctors, and since the articles were all written in Latin, it also had international subscriptions and sales.²¹

A search for an ancient prehistory for the vampire, as well as for relatives of the Serbian vampire in Moravia and Silesia, now began. Older incidents were publicised, and the latest current procedures were documented. The proximity of vampirism to magical practices was discussed, and explanations in theological and hermetic terms were attempted (Hamberger, 1992, p. 71). Learned treatises and dissertations appeared, forming a new scientific genre of 'Vampyrology'. Their places of publication

included Leipzig, Halle and Jena as well as London, Amsterdam and Vienna. In the period up to 1735, at least twenty-two printed treatises and articles can be identified.²² Michael Ranfft, who summarised the state of learned writing on the subject in his *Tractat von dem Schmatzen und Kauen der Todten* (1734), observed that only the so-called *petit-mâitres* were active in this area, not the great scholars of the day. However, Aribert Schroeder suggests that some of them may have concealed their authorship with a pseudonym (Schroeder, 1973, p. 69). The French ambassador in Vienna, de Bussy, translated Glaser and Flückinger's writings and sent them to his superior in Paris (Schroeder, 1973, pp. 60-62). Vatican circles were not only well informed about, but also very interested in, the topic of vampires. Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758) himself took a sceptical view, while King George II (1683-1760) of England was firmly convinced of the existence of vampires, as the letters of Horace Walpole reveal (Schroeder, 1973, p. 156).

The case of 1731-1732 also found its way outside diplomatic and learned circles and academies into more entertaining formats, such as newspapers, weeklies and theological journals. Aribert Schroeder (1973), who has traced the forms of literary communication within the nobility and the educated bourgeoisie in the European metropolises, particularly highlights the growing importance of newspapers at the start of the eighteenth century (Schroeder, 1973, pp. 70-113). Reading the newspaper became a leisure activity undertaken in company and often in association with smoking. People either read aloud, or, at court, employed a reader

²¹ Schroeder, 1973, pp. 85f. Besides this journal, *Commercium litterarium ad rei medicae et scientiae naturalis incrementum institutum* (Norimbergae: Societas Litteris Joh. Ernesti Adelbulneri, 1731-1745), the debate was also covered in *Neue Zeitungen von Gelehrten Sachen* (Leipzig, 1715-1784), *Auserlesene Theologische Bibliothek oder Gründliche Nachrichten von denen neuesten und besten theologischen Büchern und Schriften* (1724-1736), *Miscellanea Physico-Medico-Mathematica* (1731-1734).

²² The titles are listed in Hamberger (1992), pp. 271ff.

who was also responsible for the choice of materials and for leading the ensuing discussion. The vampire phenomenon was discussed ‘in those newspapers which reached the largest possible number of readers in Germany’ (Schroeder, 1973, p. 94). This occurred within a short time of the events of 1731-1732, thanks to a network of correspondents. During the 1730s, the vampire transformed from a military and medical problem case into a media sensation.

The word ‘vampire’ quickly took root within the German-speaking world and travelled from there into other European languages. At the same time, biting and bloodsucking became trademarks of the Undead, although this was not reflected in pathological findings. The ‘vampire sucked people dry, not of blood but of life energy. No bodily contact was necessary for this, and the end result was the same’, as Peter Mario Kreuter concludes (2001, p. 170). The figure of the vampire developed far beyond external scholarly evaluations and their appropriation in the mass media during the 1730s and 40s, and from then on led an independent existence in the European imagination. In popular reading matter, the vampire fuelled a craving for sensation, evoked frissons of fear, and mobilised the fantasies of a bourgeois public sphere in European metropolises. Rumours abounded. Among other things, it was reported that the French king Louis XV had commissioned his Viennese special envoy, the duc de Richelieu, to report on vampire cases.²³ As learned circles knew, the emperor himself showed great interest in vampirism (Schroeder, 1973, pp. 81f.;

²³ This was claimed by Calmet in his *Gelehrte Verhandlung* (1751b), although the special envoy denied it. See Hamberger (1992), p. 215.

Hamberger, 1992, pp. 117f.) and so too did the grand duke Franz Stephan von Lothringen (1708-1765) (Schroeder, 1973, pp. 59f.). In Viennese circles, it was even put about that a princess, Eleonore von Schwarzenberg (1682-1741), was a practising vampire.²⁴

5. Vampires - spawn of a ‘dark and disturbed phantasy’

Daniel Arlaud (2007) has recently demonstrated that between 1731 and 1756, there was a structural transformation in the medical understanding and evaluation of the vampire phenomenon. Two vampire texts and their authors set new standards (Arlaud, 2007, pp. 127-144). These were a report by the regimental surgeon Georg Tallar (1756), and a treatise by the emperor’s personal physician and *Protochirurgicus* or head surgeon of the army, *Freiherr* Gerard van Swieten (1755).²⁵

The trigger for these events was a series of deaths in Banat, Moravia and Wallachia between 1754 and 1756. Unlike the procedures in the 1730s, the investigations of these deaths were now embedded in a massive anti-superstition campaign. The learned account, in which vampirism had been a subject of general aberration of the imagination which lay in the realms of fantasy, had long been

²⁴ See the television documentary *Die Vampirprinzessin* (Austria, 2007).

²⁵ Van Swieten’s vampire report existed in manuscript form in 1755 as ‘Remarques sur le vampirisme’, and was published in translation as an appendix to *Abhandlung des Daseyns von Gespenster* (Mayer & Swieten 1768). Georg Tallar’s *Visum Repertum Anatomico* was written in 1756 and published in 1784. On the dating of Tallar’s manuscript, see Schroeder (1973), pp. 137, 146n.

dominant. Medicine played a prominent role in this account of vampirism, since it fell to it to distinguish between bodily and mental plagues. This mission was headed by the reformer of Habsburg military hygiene, the Dutch Baron Gerard van Swieten (1700-1772).²⁶ In the foreword to his *Abhandlung des Daseyns von Gespenstern* (Mayer & Swieten 1768), van Swieten referred, always in a dramatic way, to the dreaded Other of the sciences: 'Nothing is more harmful to the domain of the sciences, than when the multiple idols of superstition and prejudice come to be venerated there' (Arlaud, 2007, p. 133). It was only now, in the middle of the eighteenth century, and not earlier, that this vocabulary of superstition and prejudice was coming to be current in the vampire debate. In parallel with the use of this language, another rhetorical pattern was being developed: that of centre versus periphery, or in other words, civilisation versus barbarity. The eastern part of the Habsburg domain was becoming the 'Wild East', the 'other', uncivilised Europe which it has remained to this day in the collective imagination (see Wolff, 1994). The 'geographical distance was represented as a cultural discrepancy' (Arlaud, 2007, p. 139), and also, indeed, as a religious one, for it was the 'schismatic Greek simplemindedness', in Tallar's words, which was to blame for Wallachian superstition.²⁷

The uneducated rural population was taken to be stupid by the Orthodox clergy, and stupidity was conducive to superstition and fear. Baron van Swieten supported this confessional polemics: 'For all these occurrences are only to be found

in areas where ignorance still prevails. It is also likely that the schismatic Greeks are the principal source.'²⁸ Behind van Swieten's pejorative statement about the Orthodox church lies concealed a profound research problem. Elvira Bijedic' (2001) sees the Orthodox clergy, or at least local priests, as in fact partly responsible for the continuity of vampire beliefs in south-eastern Europe. The fear of becoming a vampire if one's faith wavered was a compelling appeal. All who were ejected from the true religion, on whatever grounds, were afflicted with the curse of becoming undead. They were to find no rest in their graves until they were forgiven and ritually re-assimilated into the Orthodox church.²⁹

The exhumations of bodies, as well as the stakings and decapitations, all took place in the presence of Orthodox clergymen, and priests were paid well for the rite of rehabilitating a (dead or living) excommunicant. They also received money for another rite described as 'inspection of decay', the second burial service which was commonplace in Macedonia. This was the custom of exhuming the body and cleaning the bones, which were temporarily stored in the church followed by reburial. Such practices worked to prohibit the transformation of the dead person into a vampire and required the involvement of Orthodox ritual specialists (Bijedic' 2001, pp. 40-42).

The thesis that the Orthodox clergy fostered vampire beliefs for apologetic and financial reasons is sound and has received too little attention in vampire research to date. It serves to explode the easy but

²⁶ On van Swieten, see Klaniczay (1990).

²⁷ Tallar (1784), p. iii; reproduced in Arlaud (2007), p. 139.

²⁸ Mayer & Swieten (1768), quoted in Hamberger (1992), p. 248.

²⁹ See Bijedic' (2001), p. 40, referring to Lawson (1964).

vague opposition between popular and elite culture, directing attention towards processes of exchange. In addition, from this perspective the elite monopoly on meanings implicated in the construction of 'popular culture' also becomes a subject of analysis.

Back to the historical events: In a town near the Silesian and Moravian border, the corpse of a Russian woman, Rosin Polakin, was dug up in 1755, then decapitated and burnt. Empress Maria Theresia (1717-1780) was distressed by this incident and requested an immediate explanation. As enquiries revealed, the desecration of the corpse had been sanctioned by the bishops' Consistorium. Not only this, but, it became clear, as long ago as 1731 the same administrative body had had nine vampires burnt, including seven children. The matter disturbed 'her i[mperial].r[oyal]. Apostolo[lic]. Maj[esty's]. Gentle Temper so much..., that she despatched Mr. Wabst, first personal physician to the imperial royal armies, and Mr. Gasser, as Professor of Anatomy, to the spot.'³⁰ As Hamberger (1992) writes, the involvement of Wabst and Gasser was the first occasion on which established physicians had been involved. With Gerard van Swieten, 'whose pamphlet on vampirism drew on their report, the notorious silence of the 'great' physicians on the theme of vampires was broken' (Hamberger, 1992, p. 85).

The investigation was followed with the greatest of interest by Baron van Swieten, who for his part wrote an account which identified backwardness as an essential element of the vampire superstition. 'What ignorance! Quite frightful stupidity!' he ejaculated of the

situation in the border regions.³¹ In van Swieten's efforts, according to Arlaud (2007), we can recognise institutional and professional strategies which allow the 'case of vampirism to be interpreted as an element of the imposition of medicopolitical views [...] State, economic and hygienic priorities were being represented in exemplary form, staged by means of the body of the vampire victim.' (Arlaud, 2007, pp. 134-135). A further step in this direction was the deployment of the German military physician Georg Tallar to Wallachia and Banat in 1755. Tallar was born in Mainz in 1700, and the date of his death is unknown. He obtained his diploma as a military surgeon in Strasbourg and entered military service in Transylvania in 1724. Besides his mother tongue, Tallar also spoke Hungarian, Romanian and Latin.³² Tallar was the right man in the right place at the right time: he had military experience, language skills and above all, he was committed to the fight against superstition. This plague would not be overcome by means of legislation alone, he wrote, for 'be the administrative and official ban never so strongly worded, [the forces of superstition] ensure that a whirlwind like this is propagated from one sex to the other and is thus deeply entrenched'.³³ Besides science and legislation, the project of Enlightenment demanded pedagogy.

Tallar's method of procedure was new in the sense that he concentrated his investigations more directly than had hitherto been the case on those victims who were still alive, although severely ill.

³¹ Van Swieten, quoted in Arlaud (2007), p. 138.

³² On Tallar's life, see Magyar (2002), Kreuter (2005), pp. 123-127, Arlaud (2007), p. 135.

³³ Tallar (1784), quoted in Arlaud (2007), pp. 135-136.

³⁰ Van Swieten, quoted in Arlaud (2007), p. 134.

The foundation of his enquiry was a standardised model for a medical census. The first stage consisted of a meticulous description of the symptoms, the second of an analytical aetiology, in other words, an enquiry into causes. To this was added an account of the circumstances of the disease. Tallar quickly recognised that this was no epidemic, since neither the German colonists nor the garrisoned soldiers were falling ill. This drew his attention to the customs and habits of the affected Greek Orthodox Wallachians. The long winter fast, associated with an imbalanced diet consisting of bread-thickened broth, onions, garlic, cabbage and pumpkin, overconsumption of brandy and the excesses associated with the breaking of this fast were described in detail. Tallar systematically unfolded a chain of argument which, supported by appeal to empiricism and the natural sciences, abutted in a clear diagnosis: anæmia, caused by poor nourishment and excessive fasting.³⁴ Tallar's evidential procedure was applauded by colleagues in the field, for he provided exemplary support for a view which had long since achieved consensus. To the learned world, the ontology of the vampire was no longer an issue which required prolix explanations. Vampires did not exist. Something else was at stake: a search 'for the methods and guarantees of an expert procedure which could put a stop to the general unrest'.³⁵ A transformation was in process: the criminal case was becoming a medical study. Military medicine, as represented by Georg Tallar, was becoming the ideal instrument of a pedagogy of the body. Tallar saw himself not only as a surgeon but also as a

missionary of Enlightenment, and he paraded the way reason would prevail before his readers' eyes.

To what lengths, to what trouble did we not go at the beginning to persuade them to take a remedy, even if it was offered for free. As soon as they saw that their sick, who had been practically at death's door, became well again so quickly, however, they recognised the error of their views, and came many miles to beg us for remedies.³⁶

Tallar prescribed a carefully thought out regimen for the sufferers. It encompassed bloodletting (surgery), the abandonment of fasting (dietetics), and the distribution of emetics (pharmacology). But the first stage involved a moral remedy, as Hamberger emphasises:

The dead body had to vacate the space in the sick person's imagination that ought to be occupied by a belief in the true nature of their own sickness. Therapy was here understood as practical Enlightenment; the disciplining of the body had its converse in the education of the imagination to a 'cognizance of the body' (Hamberger, 1992, p. 31).

6. Revenants from a theological viewpoint

In the final analysis, Tallar could rejoice. The problem seemed to be resolved, or at least, the route to a solution was demonstrated. Professional theologians managed the challenge in a far less triumphant manner (Hamberger, 1992, pp. 34-37). After all, a vampire was like the Christian saint 'also "a very special dead" [...], whose corpse resisted decay, whose grave radiated with a special light, whose

³⁴ Tallar (1784), quoted in Arlaud (2007), p. 133; Kreuter (2005), pp. 124-125.

³⁵ Arlaud (2007), p. 134.

³⁶ Tallar (1784), quoted in Arlaud (2007), p. 136.

fingernails and hair kept growing—like those of several medieval saints (...)’ (Klaniczay, 1990, p. 181). Blood too was part of the story: in one case sucked out of the victim, in another spilt as sacrifice. Here the Catholic model of holiness was blasphemously inverted. At the same time, however, the vampirical revenant also mirrored the Orthodox belief that excommunicants did not decay. It goes without saying that Protestant authors, who understood themselves to be the advocates of rational Christendom, saw in revenants the contradiction to the divine plan of salvation, which made provision for the human body to fall to dust and the soul either to rise or to fall to its damnation. ‘In consequence, all that has been said and gossiped about the return of the dead and their deeds among the living, is merely a fabrication of vanity which no reasonable Christian can applaud in good conscience’, as the *Weimarische Medicus*, an anonymous author, put it in 1732 (Hamberger, 1992, p. 198).³⁷

At the same time, the vampire phenomenon was used to fire polemical salvos against Papist theology. The doctrine of purgatory, it was argued, required that the soul’s journey be interrupted, and the doctrine of sainthood claimed as a mark of recognition the undecayed nature of the body. Although the gauntlet was not taken up on the Catholic side, this way of posing the problem was. There was general interest in proving that a belief in vampires was an ‘error, superstition and prejudice’. Serbian vampires could not be allowed to have anything to do with purgatory, and the ability to resist decay was not to be

³⁷ The author of the book is identified as Johann Christian Fritsch (1675?-1735), a physician in Weimar and Eisenach. See Fritsch (1732).

identified with the process of beatification or canonisation. These positions were defended by prominent figures, such as the Benedictine abbot Dom Augustin Calmet (1672-1757), the Archbishop of Trani, Giuseppe Davanzati (1665-1755), and Prospero Lambertini (1675-1758), subsequently Pope Benedict XIV. In general, there was concern about the monopoly over definitions in matters of belief. Christian articles of faith such as God’s monopoly over the awakening of the dead, and Christ’s exclusive ability to return from the dead, had to be preserved. The Benedictine abbot Calmet considered the possibility that vampirism was God’s punishment, and started out by entertaining the possibility that vampires existed. By the second edition of his survey of ghosts, Calmet had changed his mind, and now allied himself with Davanzati’s view that vampirism was sheer fiction.³⁸ This view was shared by Pope Benedict XIV, who felt justified in adding a chapter to the third edition of the handbook on the canonisation of the holy, underlining the ‘vanity of vampire beliefs’ – ‘De vanitate vampyrorum’ (Klaniczay, 1990, p. 182).

Both Protestant and Catholic opinion leaders were as one in their defensive attitude. While the Catholic side also avoided resurrecting old demonological concepts from celebrated witch-finders such as Remy, Boguet, Guazzo or del Rio, there were quarrels over the influence and powers of the Devil among the Lutheran faction. The body-soul problem became a body-devil problem

³⁸ Calmet published his dissertation in 1746. The book quickly sold out, and was followed by two new editions and a German translation (Calmet, 1749, 1751a, 1751b). See Klaniczay (1990), pp. 180-181. On Calmet’s vampire tract, see Huet (1997), and Vidal (2007).

(Klaniczay, 1990, pp. 36-37; Israel, 2002, pp. 396-399). The Devil's right to exist was in no way questioned, for even men like van Swieten did not engage in any fundamental criticism on this head. However, the possibility of his bodily incarnation and of his power of physical action was widely denied. God had placed limits on the powers of the Evil One, but even if the power to wake the dead lay outside his scope, he was at least capable of producing the illusion that the dead were walking.

A further dispute touched on the three souls model of Aristotelian scholasticism. According to this, under certain circumstances the *anima vegetativa* could be preserved after death. The theory of an astral and world soul which was advanced by the Pietist camp, and once again provoked the Lutherans, also tended in this direction. If theological attempts to explain the phenomenon could not rival the solutions to the problem that were offered by physicians, they nevertheless served to nourish the vampire fascination. The range of meanings on offer grew in tandem with the medical diagnosis. Natural magic, spiritualist and psychological explanations for the 'power of the human Phantasy' were offered. Vampires were alternately presented as incubi, visions, drug-induced hallucinations, or products of the existence of an astral spirit, a *vis vegetans* or magical infection, *contagium magicum*. The condition and characteristics of apparent death were described in detail by theologians, philosophers and doctors.³⁹ In other words, the vampire debate stimulated essential questions about life and death, about this life and the afterlife. It should be taken into account that, as Lucian Hölscher

has remarked, in the eighteenth century 'the distance between life before and after death still appeared [...] to be small': the 'Beyond was closer to and more commensurate with earthly matters' (Hölscher, 2009, p. 739).

7. Vampires as fact and fantasy - concluding remarks

It is no coincidence that the vampire appeared on the margins of empire. The invasion of foreigners threatened and mobilised military defences, but so did the invasion of the foreign. Vampires were a stumbling block for social order. Threats by village inhabitants to desert the border settlements unless effective action were taken against the undead intruders were taken seriously. 'The "untimely resurrection of the dead" caused havoc, eluded all attempts at legislation, and robbed the State of taxpayers', as Daniel Arlaud remarks. Just as the soldiers in the occupied colonial regions had to repel enemy intruders and secure the territorial ambitions of the hegemonic power, so too the military physician had to act on the bodily plane. Vampirism was understood in the first instance as a disease, and only in the second instance as a phantasm of the uneducated people. The politics of the body was conducted with scientific materials, somewhat like an instrument of 'biopower' in Foucault's sense; the order to ward off the vampire epidemic as a moral and physical plague came from the top.⁴⁰

Philip Sarasin has shown that in the post-9/11 era, a hitherto unknown phantasm has preoccupied the greatest

³⁹ On this subject, see Kessel (2001).

⁴⁰ Arlaud (2007), pp. 127, 134, with reference to Michel Foucault (2001).

military power in the world: anthrax as a supposed weapon of mass destruction. The microbe was identified as an invisible parasitic intruder, and epidemic controls were implemented in a military manner. The greatest fear was that of infection caused by global terror. A ‘biologisation of politics’ began (Sarasin 2006). This comparison may be somewhat far-fetched, but nevertheless, the theme of vampirism (as fact and fantasy) illustrates nicely how the fears of central government abut in a policy which combines military and medical measures, so that it is possible to speak of a medicalisation of colonial policy or of a militarisation of medicine. From this standpoint, the vampire becomes, in the words of Daniel Arlaud (2007, p. 141), the ‘type of the bad subject’. Mary Douglas would have appreciated this connection, for in her *Purity and Danger* (1966) she demonstrated the complex manner in which the boundaries of the body, whether social, political or individual, are determined in many cultures so as to protect the self from threatening pollution by the foreign.

Within the discursive field of vampirism, various expert cultures were active. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that the vampire debate does not lend itself to the construction of an opposition between science and religion. The existence of this dichotomy is widely assumed, but that is to read the present back into the past. Eighteenth-century physicians and theologians were both equally interested in the question of whether ‘the relationship between the dead body and an illness of mind and body should be understood as a sympathetic, astral or diabolical effect’ (Hamberger, 1992, p. 167). In the first half of the eighteenth century, we are not dealing with

a single epistemic competition so much as a plurality of forms of knowledge, observing one another critically even as they communicated with one another. The debate over the vampire phenomenon in the first half of the eighteenth century was, let it be observed, just the prelude to a later and much more serious controversy over the existence of ghosts. The manifestation of the dead became contentious towards the end of the eighteenth century, and the heyday of spirits was the technologically-obsessed nineteenth century, as became evident in the transnational phenomenon of spiritualism. The vampire debate cannot therefore serve to exemplify a late process of disenchantment, unless we confuse the proposals of a few intellectuals with the spirit of an epoch, or else scent proto-Kantian ideas where in reality it was a question of the ‘discursive plurality of knowledge about the other world’ which represented ‘innumerable goal-directed agendas, countless variations of faith and individual adaptive strategies’ (Sawicki, 2002, p. 357).

Early in the eighteenth century, the vampire was at first a completely new and wonderfully gruesome manifestation, which only became a scientific phenomenon—in other words, a disease symptom and a hygienic problem—thanks to an empiricist take on the subject and the dissecting gaze of military physicians. This transformation recapitulated, on the small scale, a process characteristic of the development of modern understandings of rationality towards the end of the seventeenth century. As Lorraine Daston has shown, ‘preternatural phenomena lose their religious meaning as signs’ and become facts.⁴¹ Empiricism and

⁴¹ Daston (1991), p. 108; see also Daston & Park (1998).

quantification excluded the extraordinary from the catalogue of items worthy of serious scientific attention. ‘No’ to rising from the dead; ‘yes’ to disease and bad diet—thus went medical diagnoses. But this statement only sheds light on one facet of the vampire debate, and as I have argued above, the walking dead were in no way destroyed once and for all by science.

Lastly, we know too little about the responses of the unenlightened to the measures and efforts of the enlighteners. Both the vampire epidemic and the metropolitan public sphere’s interest in it did indeed abate on the periphery of the Habsburg realm. Yet, well into the twentieth century, cases of vampirism were not unusual in the area. The idea that progress in knowledge will inevitably lead to factuality and truth is a dream of Enlightenment, and of some historians. But conversely, the diversity of discursive contexts and the lack of homogeneity of social groups and hierarchies must always be taken into account. A peculiar ‘dialectic of disenchantment and re-mystification’ becomes evident here (Stadler, 2005, p. 135). Both manifestations by the undead and the fear of them increased as the fight against them gathered pace. Disagreements over vampires produced knowledge which might not be pursued any further within academies and universities, but which nevertheless circulated, growing in appeal and efficacy as ‘occult knowledge’.⁴² What becomes authorised knowledge and what does not is a phenomenon underpinned by social as well as other determinants. Since the beginnings of modernity, at the very latest, ‘official’ meanings for man, nature and history have always also been in tension with alternative meaning patterns.

This is evident not only in the case of the so-called New Age sciences, but also in explanations for the hole in the ozone layer, or in domains where institutional medicine and alternative healing come into conflict. Ever since, the vampire debate has stood for the ‘interference of cultural systems’ typical of modern European religious history (Stuckrad, 2009, p. 444). There too, as I have shown, the phenomenon of vampirism had its place, and not only in the history of medicine.

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⁴² Klaniczay (1990), p. 182; Arlaud (2007), pp. 130-131.

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