



# **The Stake & the Cross**

**CHRISTIANITY & THE VAMPIRE**

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# History of the Vampire:

## From Religion to Folklore

A local or regional set of beliefs loses adherents

- Social movement, political – ecclesiastical change, dislocation
- Here: Byzantine Orthodoxy encountered pre-Christian believers

Certain practices are retained by some believers

- Sacrifice, for example, and beliefs about the afterlife are resistant to change

The ascending religion tries to incorporate indigenous divinities and practices into its canon

- Here: “pagan” divinities and spirits become saints or demons (Devil)

Non-canonical beliefs become folkloric (“superstitions”)

In literate societies, folkloric stories are written as “literature”

# Vampire and Christianity:

## Abridged Version

The term “**vampire**” (**вампир**, ‘*vampir*’) is of Slavic origin, and is first attested in medieval (X-XI CE) Bulgarian Orthodox Christian manuscript

The word did not refer to anything horrific or supernatural

It emerges in the context of Christianization of the Balkans

Byzantine proselytizers were hostile to indigenous or Slavic “pagans”

- Especially those continuing blood sacrifice and Dionysan revelry

**Pagans** are replaced by **Bogomils** (dualists) as target of Christian polemics

- Russian ‘upyr’ (vampire) and ‘eretik’ (heretic) are synonymous in XIV CE

As **heretics** disappear, the term starts to be applied to *excommunicates*

# **Vampire and Christianity:**

## **Abridged Version, continued**

Excommunication requires burial outside of the village churchyard

- Path of the soul to the “Other World” is disrupted
- Funeral rites are infelicitous

The term always referred to Outsiders, hence possible **scapegoats**

- Gradually, ‘vampire’ becomes “folklorized”, vampires become responsible for social problems requiring mitigation (blame)
- Killing the dead is preferable to killing the living (Inquisition); no one gets hurt

Austro-Hungary needs to explain vampire “epidemics” in Slavic regions

- Period known as *Magia Posthuma* – Enlightenment and Catholic “explanations” of vampire outbreaks
- Leads to German and French literature

# Three Periods of “vampires”

## Christianization of the Balkans - The earliest meaning

- Pagans & sacrifice
- Heretics (Political)
- Excommunicates

## Humanization. Scapegoat.

- Excommunication and the path of the soul. Behavior. Outsider.
- Vengeance of the excommunicated.
- Merger with Slavic, Greek beliefs about Unquiet Dead, Revenants

## The Enlightenment Vampire. Literature and Film.

- “Magia Posthuma”. Investigations.
- French/German literature. English literature: Polidori/ 1819
- *Dracula* (novel: 1897; movie: 1931)





## Christians against Sacrifice

- *Oration of St. Gregory the Theologian concerning how the pagans worshipped idols*
  - Dating: Paisievskii MS – XIV C; copy of text from latter half of XI C;
  - Explicit condemnation of *piry* [feasts]
    - “Polluted pagans... conduct sacrifices taught by the Devil”
  - XI C – sacrifice is forbidden; perceived as excuse for *revelry* and *abandonment*
  - “Accursed Dionysus” [Thrace = Bulgaria]
    - Pagans had a more *circular* view of time, versus Christians (more *linear* – end of Time)
    - Dionysus – wine libation, loss of Self

Byzantine  
Macedonia  
& Thrace  
(1045)





# ***Vampir - Earliest evidence***

- **Sacrifice**
  - Epitomized **paganism** for early and medieval Christians
    - The One True God is not in need of sacrifices performed by men
    - Jesus is the Only Sacrifice
  - “Miracle of St. George and the Bulgarians”
    - “Boris... turned away from **dark and deceitful and stinking and God-hating sacrifices**”
  - Contemporary Bulgarian/Islamic *kurban* (animal sacrifice), St. George's Day followed by festival
  - XIX and XX C: folkloric images of the vampire as bag of blood (animal skin)





# Based on the slender evidence...

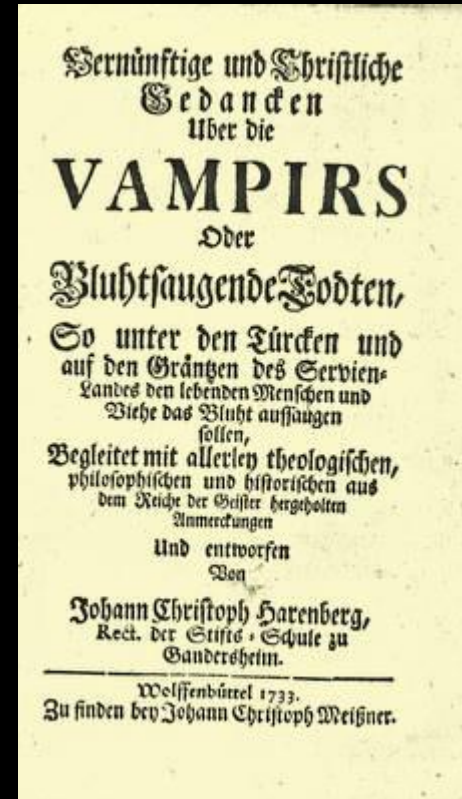
“The first **vampires** may have been individuals who practiced blood sacrifice, despite open hostility to the practice expressed by the early Bulgarian Orthodox Church. Early Slavic writings by Christian apologists exhibit antipathy first toward sacrifice as a vestige of polytheism and paganism, and later toward the dualist heresies that became prevalent in the Balkans.”

*Sacrifice, Scapegoat, Vampire: The Social and Religious  
Origins of the Bulgarian Folkloric Vampire*  
Bruce A. McClelland. Doctoral dissertation, University  
of Virginia, 1999

# Enlightenment vs Endarkenment: Science, Religion and Posthumous Magic



Dom Augustine Calmet



Dr. Gerard van Swieten

# Magia Posthuma

- Early XVIII C. – Enlightenment Medical Materialism
  - Outbreaks of “vampirism” in Slavic regions of Austro-Hungary
    - Johannes Flückinger, “Visum et repertum” (1732), etc. Case of “Arnont Paole”
    - Earlier outbreaks in Moravia, Silesia and Poland
  - Empress Maria Theresa wants to avoid resurgence of witch hysteria
  - Recruits a Dutch physician, Gerard van Swieten (= van Helsing) to investigate vampire “epidemics”
- Dom Augustine Calmet
  - *Dissertation sur les Revenants en Corps, les Excommuniés, Les Oupirs ou Vampires, Brucolaques, etc.*
  - Needs to explain vampire phenomena from a theological perspective
  - Animated corpse – cannot be God’s work, therefore the Devil

# Magia Posthuma, continued



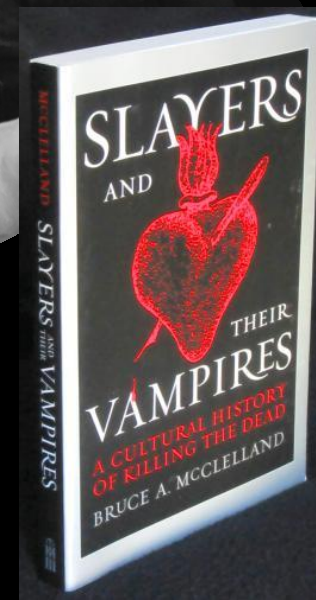
Voltaire

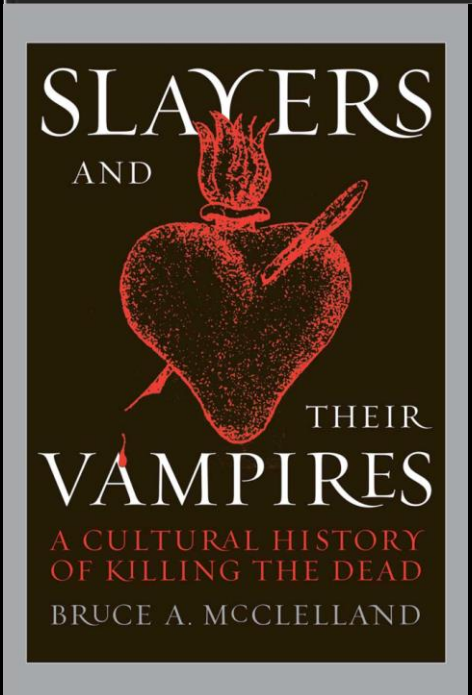
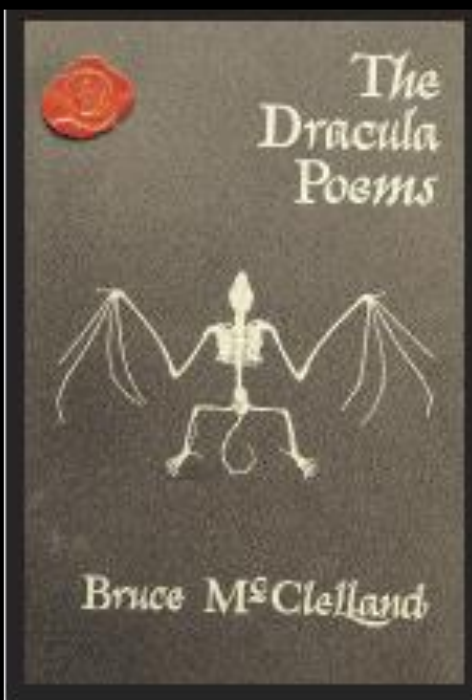
- **CATHOLIC POINT OF VIEW**
  - Supernatural characteristics of both vampires and witches were taken to have some degree of reality
  - How to explain the lack of decay, etc.
- **ENLIGHTENMENT POINT OF VIEW**
  - Scientific/rational explanation must be sought to describe phenomenology
    - Status of the body upon exhumation
  - “Medical materialism” persists to this day: “scientific” and medical explanations for vampires
    - Peasants are ignorant of biological and pathological decay processes
- Why did main theorists of vampirism fail to see the functional similarities between the torture of witches and the torture of vampires?
- Why did Enlightenment authors seek to remove and dissect only the vampire, while ignoring other members of Slavic folk religion (“lower demonology”)



DRACULA  
By  
Bram Stoker

The rest is history...





# My Related Writings

## BOOKS

*The Dracula Poems*. New York: Sixpack Press, 1978 (OP)

*Sacrifice, Scapegoat, Vampire: The Social and Religious Origins of the Bulgarian Folkloric Vampire*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1999

*Slayers and Their Vampires: A Cultural History of Killing the Dead*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006. <https://www.press.umich.edu/22395>

## ARTICLES

The Anathematic vampire: Concepts of Matter and Spirit in Orthodoxy, Dualism and Pre-Christian Slavic Mythology

History vs. Nature: Purification and Time in the South Slavic Ritual of the Unclean Days,

Pagans or Heretics? The Scapegoat Process, Nezhit, and the Bulgarian Folkloric Vampire 2000

Slavic Religion. Encyclopedia article, in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*

Untrue Blood: The Politics of Artificiality. In *True Blood and Philosophy: We Wanna Think Bad Things with You*

By Whose Authority: The Magical Tradition, Violence and the Legitimation of the Vampire Slayer. In *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies*

Enlightenment versus Endarkenment: Science, Religion, and Posthumous Magic. Talk given at University of Chicago Divinity School, 2007.



***Thank you, & Blessed Hallows' Eve***

