

Stakeholder Reports: How Bureaucracy, Print, and Science made the Vampire a Subject of  
Enlightenment Inquiry

By

Holland Jean Venhuizen

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Dr. Cheong Soon Gan

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The vampire is a figure which has been dramatically warped and overtaken as time has progressed. Here he is an elegant, tall, slim, caped man with jet black hair and a vague Eastern European accent. There he is a bloated, horrific bloodsucker, one born of death, decay, and fear. And even still, in another place and another time, he is a beautiful, perpetually teenaged and often sparkling boy upon whom girls around the world laud their praises and adoration. The vampire is elusive in this way, resisting any singular or stable definition. Before all of these variations and divergences, however, and before Western cultures became fascinated with the vampire as a figure of literature, he first emerged as a source of scientific curiosity and intrigue, of serious forensic and pathological inquiry. In fact, without such a presence of scientists and thinkers studying the vampire in the early 18th century, it is entirely possible and even likely that the vampire would simply not exist outside of the localized, folkloristic beliefs of Eastern Europe, specifically the Balkans. Folkloric belief by itself was not sufficient enough to carry the vampire into the broader European imagination. It was only when vampirism became enmeshed within scientific investigation, bureaucratic authority, and concerns over public order that it was perceived as credible and worthy of widespread attention. This blending of rational methodologies and irrational, folkloric subjects lead to the vampire holding a unique place in the imagination of Western Europe in this era — one of serious curiosity and creative fascination.

The history of vampires is by no means a new addition to any field of study. Many literary critics and historians alike boast extremely in-depth and masterful chronologies and timelines documenting the changing nature of the vampire over time, as well as things the vampire has come to represent in many societies. Nina Auerbach penned an excellent cultural and literary criticism of vampires in *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, positing that each era creates its own unique vampire by way of bigotry and fear.<sup>1</sup> So too does literary critic James Twitchell

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<sup>1</sup> Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

document the psychology of the vampire and the framework through which he is imposed on various cultures in *The Vampire Myth*, as well as how that develops according to different societies.<sup>2</sup> Another aspect of vampires which is generally less commonly approached by scholars is the genuine belief and fears that many had of vampires in the Middle Ages, continuing all the way through the 18th century. One scholar who does an excellent job of cataloguing these encounters is Paul Barber, specifically in *Vampires, Burial, and Death*. This work is seen by many as a sort of masterwork on vampires, compiling almost all of the most famous vampire studies, reports, and encounters throughout history.<sup>3</sup>

A different lens through which to analyze the history of vampires, which is also the one I aim to tackle in this thesis, is by analyzing the actual reports themselves, how they were disseminated, and why this is so important to their trajectory over time. One historian who is instrumental in this precise field is Heidi Crawford, especially in her work [insert name], which documents the flow of information and through what mediums vampires were discussed, especially as they were just emerging in the wider European consciousness.<sup>4</sup> By analyzing these same reports as well as several other works from the early 18th century, I aim to identify how, why, and when the vampire transitioned from a localized folk figure into a being of genuine scientific study and inquiry.

The legend of the vampire begins in Eastern Europe, and is predominantly concentrated in the Balkan region, usually defined as Bulgaria, Serbia, and Romania. Up until around 1718, this legend remained predominantly localized, and was generally scarce in the Western European record entirely. The reason that the year 1718 is so vital is because it is the year in which the

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<sup>2</sup> James Twitchell, "The Vampire Myth," *American Imago* 37 (Spring 1980): 83-92.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Heidi Crawford, "The Cultural-Historical Origins of the Literary Vampire in Germany," *Journal of Dracula Studies*: Vol 7: No. 1, Article 1, 2005.

Austro-Turkish war ended, and the Treaty of Passarowitz (sometimes referred to as the Peace of Passarowitz) was signed and put into action.<sup>5</sup> This treaty, overseen by Great Britain and the Netherlands, gave portions of Ottoman controlled lands to Austria, leading to a shift in rule for many Balkan natives. These areas included Banat, (an Ottoman stronghold in Hungary,) Little Walachia, and Belgrade with parts of northern Serbia. Austria was controlled by the Habsburgs in this period, more specifically by Karl VI, (sometimes anglicized to Charles VI,) and this annexation was seen as a major victory by Habsburg general Eugene of Savoy who had greatly contributed to the defeat of the Ottomans.<sup>6</sup> Though the treaty only lasted for twenty-four years, its cultural consequences were immediate and significant. The Carpathian mountain range made it so that the two cultures in question, Habsburg Austria and Ottoman ruled Balkans, rarely interacted. The cultural divides became far more apparent, however, when Austrian forces entered the newly acquired territories and quickly began seeing and hearing reports of the dead rising from their graves and exacting revenge on the living.

Interestingly enough, however, the first well-documented source of a vampire report can be found in a somewhat unassuming French periodical known as the *Mercure Gallant*, far before this annexation occurred. This magazine had quite a strong reputation at the time of its publishing — in retrospect, it's often seen as one of the very first fashion magazines in print, and coined several artistic-cultural terms, such as baroque. Not only this, but it was also considered to be rather unserious in nature, usually providing information on marriages and style to the upper echelon of French society.<sup>7</sup> Jean de La Bruyere, a famous French philosopher and satirist, once spoke on the periodical, stating that “Le Mercure... est immédiatement au dessous de rien,”

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<sup>5</sup> Britannica Editors, "Treaty of Passarowitz," *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

<sup>6</sup> Britannica Editors, "Treaty of Passarowitz.”

<sup>7</sup> Deborah Steinberger, ‘Fake News’ in Seventeenth-Century France: The Case of *Le Mercure Galant*, *Past & Present*, Volume 257, November 2022, pages 143-171.

which translates to “The Mercure... is immediately below nothing.”<sup>8</sup> A scathing review, but *Mercure Gallant* served its own purpose beyond high-brow cultural commentary and philosophy, and was one of few publications during its time to feature almost exclusively gossip, fashion, and culture articles.

In 1693, the periodical published an article on a so-called vampire epidemic occurring in Poland and Russia. This report is said to be from Pierre Des Noyers, a Polish official who reported directly to the monarchy. In this article, vampires are described in a horrific fashion, terrorizing villagers and appearing as disgusting, putrid entities. In the *Mercure Gallant's* own words with translation provided by Paul Barber,

“They appear from midday to midnight and come to suck the blood of living people and animals in such great abundance that sometimes it comes out of their mouths, their noses, and especially, their ears, and that sometimes the body swims in its blood which has spilled out into its coffin. They say the vampire has a kind of hunger that causes him to eat the cloth he finds around him. This revenant or vampire, or a demon in his form, comes out of his tomb and goes about at night violently embracing and seizing his friends and relatives and sucking their blood until they are weakened and exhausted, and finally causes their death.”<sup>9</sup>

It is posited by Koen Vermer in “Vampires as Creatures of the Imagination” that the reason that vampire stories such as this were common in the 17th century was due to a prevalence of scholars across Europe who were beginning to become interested in the occult.

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<sup>8</sup> George Saintsbury, “Le Bruyere, Jean de,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. 16, 1911.

<sup>9</sup> *Le Mercure Gallant* as quoted in Paul Barber, “Forensic Pathology and the European Vampire,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 24, no. 1 (1987): 1–32.

Following this article on Polish vampires, more articles were published in *Le Mercure* in January and February of 1694, again about vampirism and the conditions and elements associated with their presence. Many of these scholars refused the demonic explanation for vampires, but importantly did not yet see them as a unit of scientific inquiry – rather, they were more an object of spiritualism, of nature, and of the imagination.<sup>10</sup> This is a distinct stepping stone in the change of vampires as a figure of study because they are subtly removed from folkloric positioning, even if just due to formal publication instead of oral transferrance, but they are not yet being positioned in a medical, scientific, or pathological framework.

The article from the *Mercure Gallant* is vital in understanding the transition of vampires from a localized folk belief into a subject of scientific curiosity because it provides a complete look at what the localized folk belief was composed of. The *Mercure* was not a scientific journal, and the intent of this article was never to give a complete or forensic survey into their existence. To the contrary, the article doesn't question the incident, does not delay in giving vivid and lurid details into the creatures, and weaves a sort of terrifying narrative rather than laying out objective details. Additionally, despite presenting these vivid accounts, the *Mercure* failed to generate widespread intellectual or institutional response. Its framing of the vampire as sensational, cultural gossip rather than a matter of inquiry of public concern limited its impact. This suggests that dissemination alone was insufficient in spreading the story of the vampire. Without the authority of science or the urgency of administrative concern, vampirism remained a curiosity rather than a crisis.

In 1725, the imposing creature from Eastern Europe now known as the “vampire” made some significant steps in its emergence in the wider Western European consciousness,

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<sup>10</sup> Koen Vermeir, “Vampires as Creatures of the Imagination,” Brepols Publishers, 341–373, 2012.

particularly among elites, the wealthy, and those who were literate, due to the localized spread of a particular account of vampires in Kisolva. Kisolva was a small Balkan village, one within the territories annexed during the Treaty of Passarowitz. Ernst Frombald, an Austrian official, was sent to this village to further investigate the claims being made regarding a revenant figure which was causing terror and destruction in this small village, and his report became relatively well known, especially for the time — mostly because it was truly the first of its kind. As far as the historical record is concerned, Frombald's report is the very first report on vampires to be conducted through both an investigative line of inquiry and through official, authoritative channels. While the report from the *Mercure Gallant* was conducted by an official of the Queen's court, the report here differs in both who it was intended for and why it was composed. As such, Ernst Frombald's account of vampires in Kisolva was the first known and heavily documented case of vampiric inquiries being elevated from folk gossip to an actual investigation on behalf of an official government. This moment marks a crucial shift where vampirism is no longer confined to rumor or folk story, but becomes a matter of state concern. By entering official administrative channels, the vampire is transformed from folklore into a subject requiring documentation and response.

As an Imperial Provisor for the districts of Ram and Valiko gradiste, Frombald was charged with many tasks under the rule of Austrian governance, not the least of which would have been maintaining peace and order in the newly acquired Balkan territories. It is unclear as to how Frombald first heard of the incidents at Kisolva, but it is implied in his report that the villagers made specific requests to him to help them with the incidents in question.<sup>11</sup> The name of

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<sup>11</sup> Ernst Frombald, "Letter from the Gradisk District." *The Wienrisches Diarium*, July 21, 1725, 11-12.

the vampire was Petar Blagojevic,<sup>12</sup> and it was said that he had been terrorizing the village since he was laid to rest. In Frombald's own words,

“After a subject by the name of Petar Blagojevic had died, ten weeks past - he lived in the village of Kisolva, in the Ram district - and had been buried according to the Raetzian custom, it was revealed that in this same village of Kisolva, within a week, nine people both young and old, died also, after suffering a twenty-four hour illness. And they said publicly, while they were yet alive... that the above mentioned Petar Blagojevic... had come to them in their sleep, laid himself upon them, and throttled them, so that they would have to give up the ghost.”<sup>13</sup>

The accounts goes further to describe the panicked and frantic state of the villagers, claiming that they would not be satisfied with any investigation or dispelling of fears, but that they were indeed convinced that there was vampiric activity underway and would not settle until their own way of getting rid of a vampire was completed. Frombald, having strong allegiance to (and likely fear of) the Austrian authorities, pleaded with the villagers to first seek higher council in Belgrade before committing to any brazen plans such as the exhumation of Blagojevic's corpse, the solution universally agreed on by the villagers. However, the villagers were convinced that, in the amount of time it would take to report the incident and receive permission to act upon the exhumation, the village and its people would already be destroyed. Frombald

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that this man's name has been changed several times over the course of multiple reports and historical inquiries. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen one of several versions of his name, Petar Blagojevic, and continue with it throughout this work..

<sup>13</sup> Frombald, "Letter."

could not “hold these people from the resolution they had made,” and so returned to Kisolva with a Gradisk district religious official to perform an exhumation.<sup>14</sup>

At this point, the report becomes quite curious. It is explicitly not forensic in nature and comes across more as a cause for alarm, such as an incident report, than a true investigation. Frombald does not seem interested in interpreting the signs he finds odd in the deceased – lack of odor, fresh skin, fresh blood in the mouth, etc. – and instead merely presents them unfettered and raw, possibly as reasoning for the actions he would later take to solve this problem.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, it is clear that the dissemination of evidence of vampires had not yet become purely scientific and pathological, but instead remained firmly in a gray area of disorganized and slightly unclear messaging. Frombald has no basis on which to report the information he has found regarding this so-called vampire, and because of that, the report itself presents as a bit chaotic and elusive. This contributes to the idea that, at this time, vampires were an extremely new foray in terms of inquiry, and there were no procedural guidelines in regards to how to deal with one. The transition from a localized folklore system to a deep, continent-wide scientific inquiry was still in its very beginnings.

The account itself is also perplexing because, while Frombald does not seem to be outright convinced of vampires, he certainly seems to imply that something strange and out of the ordinary was going on. He insists on the odd state of the body, and seems adamant that the administration knows these details. This also would imply that he was not using scientific reasoning, and was instead reporting what he found at face value — likely what he was sent to do in the first place. In any case, after all the investigation was said and done, and the exhumation and execution had been completed, Frombald finished his report with a plea

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<sup>14</sup> Frombald, “Letter.”

<sup>15</sup> Frombald, “Letter.”

(interestingly, omitted from the published version sent directly from the Vienna Court Chamber to the *Wienerisches Diarium*, a Viennese newspaper,) that he not be punished if the exhumation and execution was out of line, but instead that the “mob” be held accountable, as they were so fearful and would not settle until the incident was sorted out.<sup>16</sup> This line removes any culpability from himself, and, indeed, there is nothing in the historical record which would indicate that he was punished in any way, meaning this style of execution was at least tolerated at the time by the administration. This would further indicate that vampire studies was still in its infancy, as there was no agreed upon procedural arrangement in terms of how to handle a situation such as this one.

Ernst Frombald’s account of vampirism and subsequent report was the first of its kind, and as such paved the way for future reporting and inquiry. While the subsequent reception was likely similar to the *Mercure Gallant* article, Frombald’s approach of detailed and objective reporting not designed to glamorize or sensationalize was revolutionary for the time. Though there is no evidence to suggest that the article was as buzz-worthy as some later reports, it would be remiss to say that his account had no bearing on the future of vampire accounts. It is possible that it was just too early to be as widespread as it could have been — historian Thomas Bohn posits, “In order to understand why there was so little vampire hype in 1725, we must try to explain things in the spirit of the time... an enlightened public was just beginning to form at this time.”<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, what distinguishes Frombald’s report from the *Mercure* and any previous vampiric gossip or inquiry is not its reception or the fallout it did or did not generate. Its context is what primarily matters in this case, as vampirism was beginning to be tackled as a matter of

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<sup>16</sup> Frombald, “Letter.”

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Bohn, “A Historical-Critical Reading of the 1725 Frombald Letter on Vampirism in Kisiljevo,” *Journal of Vampire Studies* no. 5, 2025, 4–20.

governance, science, and stability, transforming it from a rumor into an issue requiring official response. This shift toward bureaucratic intervention marks the moment when vampirism begins to acquire the institutional weight necessary for broader cultural transmission. So, though Frombald's account never became extremely famous in its own right, it was indeed the first of its kind, and as such it was the very first entry in a very well known dissertation regarding vampires, one which would be published just a few years afterward.

Michael Ranft, born in 1700, was the son of a Protestant pastor. Being a clergyman himself as well, he would go on to defend a dissertation regarding a particularly controversial entity slowly taking over Europe at the time — the vampire. His 1727 dissertation, later modified several times in 1728 and beyond, is roughly translated to “On the Chewing and Smacking by the Dead in their Graves”.<sup>18</sup> This work would go on to gain widespread notoriety among scholars and literati for its analysis of vampires as an entity throughout history.<sup>19</sup> Though Ranft's case was not entirely scientific and instead blamed the vampire epidemics on a kind of natural magic, the report itself would greatly influence how vampires were approached in subsequent reports. Unlike the *Mercure Gallant*, Ranft sought to approach the vampire as a natural phenomenon rather than an emotional, sensationalist figure. Indeed, also unlike Frombald's report, Ranft's work contains deep skepticism and attempts at wholly understanding the vampire as a force of nature.<sup>20</sup> He applied tactics and methods congruent with the Enlightenment which was underway at the time, effectively further opening the door to rational approaches to the vampire.<sup>21</sup>

Though not an explicit step in the vampire's emergence as a purely scientific entity, Ranft's dissertation clearly utilizes the methodology and ideals proposed by the scientific

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<sup>18</sup> Crawford, “Cultural-Historical Origins,” 1.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Ranft, translated by Brett Warren, *Tractate on the Chewing and Smacking of the Dead in Graves*, Esoterica Press, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Ranft, translated by Warren, *Tractate*.

<sup>21</sup> Crawford, “Cultural-Historical Origins,” 1.

Enlightenment to better understand the vampire. In addition to his assertions that a sort of natural magic may be at play, he also posited that it was possible that the types of soils and chemical processes underway in the specific soils of different villages could account for differing decay processes. This scientific estimation was later confirmed to be a potential factor by further forensic research, such as that documented by Sturm and Volker almost a century later.<sup>22</sup> As such, Ranft's account is a vital one in the trajectory of the vampire as an entity of folklore to one of science, as the account itself helped shift the narrative into one of further scientific inquiry and study, even if that nature was an unintentional skew and influence provided by the author himself.

In 1727, during and throughout the same time in which Ranft's dissertation and his methodology was growing in popularity, reports of vampire activity in a small Serbian village called Medveda reached Austrian officials stationed in Belgrade who were there representing the Habsburgs. Allegedly, four people had died as a result of this blight, and there was still a present danger in the eyes of those residing there.<sup>23</sup> As the years continued, the incident was taken more and more seriously by those in administrative and official positions as more and more reports of deaths and attacks came through to Belgrade. Eventually, in response to these incidents, a contagious diseases physician was sent to investigate by the name of Johann Freiderich Glaser. Upon arrival, Glaser began to approach the vampire as a sort of epidemic and disease, and in this made great steps in truly allowing the vampire to be utilized and seen in a scientific manner. By approaching vampirism as a contagious disease, Glaser did not dismiss the phenomenon but instead reframed it within the logic of Enlightenment science, further legitimizing it as something real enough to require explanation. Glaser's report on vampires is critical to the

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<sup>22</sup> Crawford, "Cultural-Historical Origins," 2.

<sup>23</sup> Johann Friedrich Glaser, "Report by Glaser," *Commercium Litterarium ad rei Medicae et Scientiae Naturalis Incrementum Institutum*, Nuremberg, 1732, 83.

understanding of the vampire's transition as a figure from folkloric to forensic because it not only was the first report to examine vampirism as a potential infectious disease; it also directly spurred on one of the most famous and official reports on vampirism in the whole of European history. In addition, its dissemination was unique in that it was turned over to proper military authorities in addition to being published in an independent scientific journal.

In the small village of Medveda, Serbia, before all of the vampire fears and worries began, a Hajduk (or, in other words, a Balkan freedom fighter, rebelling against Ottoman rule,) by the name of Arnold Paole<sup>24</sup> fell off of a hay wagon and broke his neck. This is at the very least how the story goes according to the villagers of Medveda — Arnold Paole does not appear in the historical record any time preceding his untimely death, so it is impossible to know exactly who the man was and how exactly he met his end.<sup>25</sup> According to the villagers, the man was put to rest shortly after this tragic incident, and around a month later, he reemerged from his grave as a restless revenant, or, to these villagers, a vampire. For four years, reports here and there continued regarding Paole, but by 1731 these reports had steadily grown and become too consistent to ignore. According to Glaser's report, by the 12th of December, 1731, thirteen people had died over the course of just 6 weeks.<sup>26</sup> Following these reports, Glaser was sent by Lieutenant Colonel Schnezzer of the Jagodina District, the district in which Medveda was located, to the town to investigate the epidemic.

The village in question was a Hajduk-dominant village, which meant that any official matters fell under the direct jurisdiction of the military instead of any local governance in

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<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that this man's name has been changed several times over the course of multiple reports and historical inquiries. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen one of several versions of his name, Arnold Paole, and continue with it throughout this work..

<sup>25</sup> Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> "Report by Glaser," 83.

accordance with rule at the time.<sup>27</sup> Important to note as well is that Glaser was not merely a member of the military, nor was he a forensic physician; rather, Glaser was the “imperial quarantine physician,” or what professionals would generally refer to today as a contagious diseases physician.<sup>28</sup> This is a critical distinction from many of the other reports because it implies that vampirism is being treated as if it is an epidemic or plague, not a singular, non-transmissible condition. Being a man of science and a man of the Enlightenment, it is not surprising that Glaser entered the village a skeptic, and also eventually left the village one, too. Upon his arrival, he found absolutely no evidence of a contagious disease and instead blamed the deaths occurring as well as much of the illness and general poor condition of the village on the detrimental effects of Eastern Orthodox fasting, and consequently the severe malnutrition such a practice can cause.<sup>29</sup> However, the villagers of Medveda were insistent that there was something paranormal underway, so Glaser continued his investigation, this time with a focus on those who had already succumbed to the plague that was ravaging this village. He approved the exhumation of some of the deceased, and did agree that many were decomposing in an order incongruent with what could be expected. As aforementioned, he was unconvinced of anything deeper going on, but he still requested the higher command that the villagers be allowed to “execute” the vampires, even if just to pacify the frightened people of the town.<sup>30</sup>

Following his encounter, Glaser handed over his report to the responsible military authorities which sent him. In response, these authorities sent another physician to the area to do further research and testing, already making Glaser’s report entirely seminal and vital to the

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<sup>27</sup> Adam Mezes, “Vampire Contagion as a Forensic Fact,” *Historical Studies on Central Europe I*, no. 1, 2021, 149-176.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Pickering, “Vampires, Ottomans, and the Specter of Contagion: The Intersectionality of Fear on the Periphery of the Habsburg Monarchy,” *Fear in the German-Speaking World*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> “Report by Glaser,” 83.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

transition of vampires from folkloric to scientific – without his report, it is possible that a higher jurisdiction would not have been called upon to do further testing and research, further catapulting the vampire into a zenith of scientific enlightenment and inquisition. Before he handed in this report, however, he made sure to keep a copy of all his findings, which he sent to his father — also named Johann Friedrich Glaser, who for the purpose of clarity will be referred to as Glaser (father) — who happened to work for a journal in Nuremberg called *Commercium Litterarium*. Glaser (father) presented his son’s findings to the editors at the journal, Gotz and Treu, who were greatly intrigued by it, and Glaser’s report was published in *Commercium Litterarium* on the 22nd of March, 1732.<sup>31</sup> His father’s letter to the editors can actually be found in its full form, published in Klaus Hamberger’s 1992 anthology *Mortuus non Mordet*. Here is an excerpt:

My son, who lives in Parakin in the Turkish regions of Serbia, 27 miles from Belgrade, as the imperial physician (physicus imperialis), wrote to me on January 18th that a magical plague has been raging in this region for some time... Normally buried dead rise from their undamaged graves and kill the sleeping. These, in turn, both dead and buried, rise up likewise and kill others. This happens as follows: At night, the dead attack the sleeping and suck their blood, so that everyone dies by the third day. No cure has yet been found for this evil. Since many have died in this way in a short time, the local authorities ordered a more thorough investigation. Among those appointed for this purpose was my son, as both physician and naturalist (medicus et physicus). The assembled local judges/village leaders and jurors (Uudices|praetores et iuratos), when questioned and citing various pieces of evidence, declared that these events had indeed occurred; however, they did not know how.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Klaus Hamberger, *Mortuus non Mordet*, Turia und Kant, Wien, 1992. 54–55.

It is not fully known what the reception of this precise article being published was, as there is little to no publically available information regarding audience, ratings, or anything of that nature, nor are there any available reviews in the historical record about the journal at all, let alone Glaser's article. However, it can be assumed that it wasn't received poorly, as the journal would go on to publish seventeen different articles on the subject of vampirism in 1732 alone.<sup>33</sup> Clearly, at the very least, the editors of the journal were fascinated by this subject. More likely is that stories like these drove up sales and were of great interest to scholars of the time, as there would be no greater incentive to publish so many reports and articles of this nature.

Glaser's report on vampirism is often skimmed or completely overlooked in secondary literature on the subject of vampire history, but this is a mistake in many ways when observing the chronology of the vampire and the transition from its identity as a folkloric figure to a scientific subject. First, this report was the first fully fleshed foray into vampirism being treated as an epidemic or plague of sorts rather than a singular physical condition. This is significant because it is even further proof that vampires are being treated as objects of scientific study rather than that of folklore: different approaches are being taken, almost as if different hypotheses are being put forth and tested accordingly. Second, it was disseminated by way of a German medical journal, expanding the vampire's reach greatly into the world of German science. Again, it is unclear how people felt about Glaser's report precisely, but given that it was the very first of its kind and spurred seventeen more articles like it in the span of just 12 months, it is clear to see how this report gave way to an entirely new avenue of study for many scientists and thinkers within Germany. Third, unlike earlier accounts, this report frames vampirism in a way which embeds it wholly within a scientific realm. This reframing grants the phenomenon both urgency and legitimacy, which transforms the vampire into a subject of inquiry and

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<sup>33</sup> Nick Groom, *The Vampire: A New History*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018. 13.

discussion able to be spread across Europe. Finally, Glaser's report is important to the transition of vampires from folkloric figures to those of scientific inquiry because his findings directly influenced another physician, Johannes Flückinger, to go and investigate as well, spurring on a new, intensive obsession with vampires and their potential to inform about death and disease.

Shortly after Glaser's report entered the hands of officials at Belgrade, Flückinger was sent by the Habsburg officials (specifically Vice-Governor Marquis Anton Otto Botta d'Adorno) alongside a regiment of high-ranking medical officials to further investigate the goings on at this Serbian village.<sup>34</sup> In fact, Flückinger arrived in Medveda around 3 weeks after Glaser began his commission, as Glaser arrived on December 13th, 1731, and Flückinger arrived on January 7th, 1732. When Flückinger arrived, the village was still deeply troubled by the vampiric activity afoot, but almost miraculously (especially considering the frenzied and panicked state Glaser implies in his report) no action had been taken regarding the vampires. With his regiment in tow, Flückinger began exhuming and examining the bodies, noting and documenting almost everything that could prove useful in understanding what was going on in Medveda. Johannes Flückinger's report, disseminated in a document called *Visum et Repertum*, is perhaps the most well known vampire report, and for good reason. The widespread circulation of *Visum et Repertum* did not simply document the event at hand. It standardized the language, imagery, and physical characteristics of the vampire, and in doing so, it provided a shared conceptual context that later reports, scientists, and political figures could draw upon. The report itself catapulted vampire studies as a whole into the wider Western European consciousness because it was the first widely circulated vampire account to provide a forensic, anatomical account of the exhumation and inspection of the corpses in question, and as such is very detailed in its nature, leaving very little unsaid.

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<sup>34</sup> Mezes, 165.

With the case of Arnold Paole and the report by Glaser leaving much desired in terms of a true resolution to this unsettling case, Flückinger and his regiment arrived in January to the ravaged village of Medveda. In slight incongruence with Glaser's investigation – that being a report conducted under the assumption of a contagious disease, epidemic, or something of that sort – Flückinger was a surgeon, and as such utilized the method of forensic autopsy to solidify a reason the village had been so wracked by death and destruction, as well as to determine what had been plaguing individuals afflicted by the so-called sickness. After gaining the consent from the local people to exhume the bodies of those who had been affected by the blight, his investigation commenced. According to his report, each body was cut open and fully dissected, inspected for anything out of the ordinary within the decomposition process. No less than thirteen bodies were exhumed and observed, with the complete details of each noted and explained. From this investigation, the unique document known most commonly as *Visum et Repertum* was developed.

In regard to the report, it should be noted that the name *Visum et Repertum*, translated to “seen and discovered,” was a relatively common title during this time for any report wherein an autopsy was conducted and there would be a potential judgement made by a court of law. As for the actual content of this document, however, Paul Barber describes it well by stating, “The report itself is a curious document... it is difficult to translate: the language is stilted, the author is indifferent to questions of grammatical parallelism...”<sup>35</sup> Much of the common vampiric motifs of the time were observed: the corpses did not decay, fresh blood was found, and overall the death process was not what could generally be expected from corpses that had died months ago. However, in this report, through the autopsical lens, there is an astonishing — indeed, almost excruciating — amount of detail. A translated version of part of Flückinger's report is as follows:

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<sup>35</sup> Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, 15.

“A woman by the name of Stana, 20 years old, who had died in childbirth two months ago, after a three-day illness, and who had herself said, before her death, that she had painted herself with the blood of a vampire, wherefore both she and her child - which had died right after birth and because of a careless burial had been half eaten by the dogs- must also become vampires. She was quite complete and undecayed. After the opening of the body there was found in the cavitate pectoris a quantity of fresh extravascular blood. The vessels of the arteries and veins, like the ventriculis ortis, were not, as is usual, filled with coagulated blood, and the whole viscera, that is, the lung, liver, stomach, spleen, and intestines were quite fresh as they would be in a healthy person.”<sup>36</sup>

Such a viscerally descriptive report which leaves little unsaid was and remains clearly provoking and evocative, and this was almost certainly a contributing factor to just how widely it was circulated among politicians and elite in Europe following its publication. Paul Barber describes the fallout of this report as a sort of “early media event,” one where an unforeseen amount of educated Europeans became acutely aware of these vampire practices which were by no means new, but were certainly new to them.<sup>37</sup> The report itself particularly caught the attention almost immediately of Karl VI, the Austrian emperor at the time, who circulated it widely and, in historian Heidi Crawford’s words, acted as a sort of “public relations representative” in the wake of this vampire craze.<sup>38</sup> After its official submission to the Habsburg court, the report was published in several journals and newspapers. Through Karl VI and other so-called public relations representatives’ spread of the material contained in the report, more

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<sup>36</sup> Johann Flückinger. *Visum et Repertum*. 1732.

<sup>37</sup> Barber, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Crawford, 2.

scholars and elites became fascinated with the idea of these vampires of Eastern Europe, and almost immediately transformed the vampire from a curious superstition to a serious enlightenment study.

A significant shift in the cultural understanding of the vampire occurs in 1748, when the figure is presented for the first time through a creative lens – yet is still embedded within the context of scientific inquiry. In 1748, the short-lived scientific journal called *Der Natursforcher* needed additional material for an upcoming issue. Christlob Mylius, the editor for this journal, called upon his friend Heinrich Ossenfelder, a renowned and talented German poet, to write a poem about a subject being tackled in the edition of the journal. This was not at all unusual; during the German Enlightenment, it was common to see artistic and scientific works appearing side by side. Indeed, it was also not rare for the eccentric Mylius to end the journal installments with lighter pieces, such as artistic works, to provide contrast from the darker, more stoic and firm inquiries.<sup>39</sup> The subject in question for the May 25, 1748, two-issue run of *Der Natursforcher* just so happened to be vampires, and through his work, Ossenfelder effectively transformed a subject of scientific debate into a creative work, illustrating how rational inquiry and folklore could coexist within the same intellectual space. I thought it inappropriate to only paraphrase or excise quotes from this work of verse, so I have included the full translation below.

**“The Vampire”<sup>40</sup>**

My dear young maiden believeth

Unbending, fast and firm

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<sup>39</sup> Brian Forrest, “Blood Ties: The Intertwined First Mention of Vampires in Poetry and Fiction,” *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov, Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2025), 37.

<sup>40</sup> The translation used here has been adapted by Crawford, but is based on a translation by Gordon J. Melton provided in *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead*.

In all the furnished teachings  
Of her ever-pious mother;  
As people along the Tisza  
Believe staunchly and heyduck-like  
In vampires that bring death.  
Just wait now, dear Christiane,  
You do not wish to love me;  
On you I take revenge.  
And in Tockay today  
Will drink you into a vampire.  
And when softly you are sleeping  
From your rosy cheeks  
Will I the color suck.  
Then will you be startled  
When I kiss you thus  
And as a vampire kiss:  
When you then start to tremble  
And weakly, like one dying,  
Sink down into my arms  
Then to you I pose my question,  
Are not my teachings better  
Than those of your good mother?"

Unfortunately, as it stands, a majority of *Der Natursforcher* is unavailable to most modern scholars. As Brian Forrest states in his article on Ossenfelder, “An exhaustive reading of the journal was not possible... as the old German block script requires a skilled transcriber before translation is even possible.”<sup>41</sup> Interestingly enough, though, even when this edition of *Der Natursforcher* was widely available in the immediate aftermath of the issue’s release, there is nothing to indicate in the historical record that the poem caused any sort of commotion, positive or negative. No contemporary reviews exist of the work, it did not get republished in any form for over two centuries, the poem itself eluded even poetry anthologies of Ossenfelder’s own works, and there is no indication whatsoever that the piece left Germany within the 18th or 19th century.<sup>42</sup> However, the themes of Ossenfelder’s poem align so strongly with pervasive, stable, and continual vampiric tropes that it is striking that the poem left no discernible trace in the historical record following its publication, especially considering how scientific and political discourse had already made the vampire a subject of widespread attention. With this poem being the first work to effectively transform the vampire into something creative, it would be expected to see more of a reaction by the public.

As for the nature of the poem itself, Brian Forrest argues that the poem does not depict a literal vampire, but instead casts a human narrator in vampiric terms, drawing on imagery already familiar to German audiences. While this is plausible, the distinction ultimately matters less than the imagery itself: the poem clearly mobilizes established vampire motifs, whether metaphorically or literally.<sup>43</sup> I agree with Forrest in his assertion that it is possible that Ossenfelder was inspired by Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d’Argens – a poet whom Ossenfelder ran in the same circles with – but I think it is equally likely that Ossenfelder himself

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<sup>41</sup> Forrest, 41.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>43</sup> Forrest, 49.

was familiar with the vampire stories that were already present in the widespread post-Enlightenment German imagination and simply turned these events, the vampire attacks themselves, into a more tangible and creative situation than a scientific one. For this reason, it cannot be definitively concluded that the poem excludes a literal vampire; rather, it occupies an ambiguous space between belief and interpretation that characterized contemporary scientific discussions of vampirism.

Even with all this in mind, it is still true that the common, century-long vampire tropes are present here in Ossenfelder's poem. Despite the fact that it is unclear whether they are literal or figurative in application, they are clear and consistent with what one would expect in even a modern poem about Dracula, Nosferatu, or some other literary vampire. This uncertainty, however, is not unusual, especially not in this era. A 1725 vampire report from Kragujevac, for instance, disappeared from the historical record for decades before resurfacing in 1791.<sup>44</sup> As scholar Alvaro Garcia Martin argues, the report's disappearance likely reflects an archival loss, with the work likely being displaced from official records and archives in the loss of Belgrade from Austria in 1739, rather than a fabrication.<sup>45</sup> Its absence did not negate its existence, only its visibility. In Ossenfelder's case, the absence of evidence regarding future publications, reviews, and other public means of acknowledging the work does not preclude influence, it only limits the ability to trace it.

That being said, it is also impossible to prove a piece is authentic, or, in Ossenfelder's case, influential and important, simply because it reemerged in the historical record at some point in time. For this reason, Ossenfelder's poem remains elusive and difficult to squarely pin down. Despite the lack of direct evidence, the poem's distinctly vampiric motifs – the ties to

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<sup>44</sup> Alvaro Garcia Martin, "Analysis of a 1725 Report on Vampirism in Kragujevac," *Journal of Vampire Studies*, volume 1, no. 2 (2021): 140.

<sup>45</sup> Martin, 146.

Christianity, the odd sexual undertones, the general metaphor for non-consensual relations – closely anticipate later literary treatments. For example, John Polidori's work *The Vampyre* (1819) has shockingly similar themes, tones, and motifs, ideas which would consistently reemerge up until the modern era. Again, there is no distinct, discreet evidence entirely proving that Ossenfelder's poem was an influence to others writing vampire fiction. Ossenfelder's poem shows and perfectly exemplifies a crucial stage in the evolution of the vampire: a moment in which a figure shaped by scientific and political inquiry becomes equally viable as a subject of creativity. Even if its direct influence cannot be proven, it demonstrates how the blending of rational investigation and folkloric belief allowed the vampire to emerge as both an object of study and a lasting literary figure.

Throughout the early 18th century, the vampire underwent a transformation that was not necessarily quick or linear, but instead was created through a series of overlapping and differing methods of dissemination. What began as a localized folkloric belief, preserved through oral tradition and rooted in misunderstandings of death and decay, was gradually pulled into broader European conversations surrounding science and Enlightenment thinking through print culture, administrative direction, and scientific curiosity. This evidence suggests that folklore does not achieve widespread significance through mythological transmission alone, but instead requires validation through systems of authority – scientific, bureaucratic, and political – to be perceived as credible and important. This pattern is visible across the reports examined here, from the sensationalist account in the *Mercure Gallant*, to the uncertain but authoritative investigation of Frombald, to the increasingly scientific and methodological approaches of Ranft, Glaser, and Flückinger, all demonstrate that the vampire did not simply become a subject of scientific curiosity at a singular point in time. Rather, it gradually transitioned from one point to the other,

simultaneously treated as superstition as well as a source of scientific curiosity, until the transformation was complete.

Equally important to this transformation was not only how vampires were studied, but how those studies were disseminated, as the shift from obscure regional myth to European fascination relied on the mechanisms of communication which brought these reports into the realm of scholars and officials across the continent. Newspapers, dissertations, reports and journals all reframed the vampire in significant ways, forming its perceived legitimacy and possibilities. By the time Flückinger's *Visum et Repertum* was in circulation, the vampire had become much more than a localized curiosity, and was now a figure of study to be examined and understood within the world of the Enlightenment period. These forms of dissemination aforementioned did not only serve as a way to spread information, but they also inherently conveyed legitimacy and allowed vampiric accounts to circulate as credible knowledge rather than local superstition.

Ultimately, the emergence of the vampire as both a scientific and literary figure was not the result of folklore alone or of science in a vacuum. It was the two acting in conversation with one another that led the vampire to become the figure it did so pervasively within fiction and literature as a whole. The Enlightenment did not dispel folkloric belief in the vampire; instead, it transformed it into a legitimate object of inquiry by embedding it within scientific, bureaucratic, and administrative contexts. By rationalizing the irrational, Enlightenment scholars and political officials inadvertently preserved and emboldened the very figure they sought to explain away. It is through this convergence of fear and reason that the vampire secured its enduring legacy within the Western European imagination, and Western culture as a whole for generations to come.

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