Augustin Calmet and the Construction of the Eighteenth-Century Vampire

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Abstract
This article examines the role played by Augustin Calmet, a Benedictine, in the construction of the vampire. In the eighteenth century, Calmet embarked upon a thorough examination of the evidence for the existence of reported vampires in the lands of Hungary, Moravia, Serbia, and Romania. In order to complete this task, Calmet would investigate numerous incidents of apparent vampirism as well as the particular qualities that define these claims. However, Calmet's emphasis and focus upon these features of "vampirism" would assist in the creation of an archetypal vampire, which would endure for the next three centuries.

Article
During the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the intellectual and medical elite of Western Europe became captivated by reports emerging from the territories lying between Habsburg Austria and the Ottoman Empire that spoke of a spreading supernatural epidemic known as "vampirism."[1] Amid swathes of apparently reliable testimony from local civil and military authorities, the "vampire debate" became entangled in the "enlightenment" discussion of science and religion and elite knowledge and popular belief. The former sought to understand what was labelled as superstition, while the later, spearheaded by ecclesiastical philosophes, sought to use this supernatural "other" to exemplify their understanding of truth. The most important writer within this contest spoke to both sides of the debate.

Dom Augustin Calmet (1672-1757) was a French Benedictine monk, antiquarian, and Counter-Reformation apologist who wrote extensively about the many "mysteries" and other unexplainable phenomena found throughout the Bible. While largely advocating for a literal interpretation of the Bible, Calmet argued that belief in one miracle necessitates belief in the plausibility of all miracles.[2] Since highly unlikely events, such as the

[1] During the eighteenth century, no collective identification of these territories on the periphery of Europe as "Eastern Europe" existed. Instead, this terminology emerged later as a creation of the "Western gaze" and the writings of Western travelers. See Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). However, by lumping these territories together as the location of these superstitions, Calmet assisted in the creation of later Western conceptions of this region (although not called Eastern Europe yet) as a zone of superstition.
[2] Bertram Eugene Schwarzbach, "Reason and the Bible in the So-Called Age of Reason," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (2011): 460-461.

immaculate conception, lay at the heart of Christian religion, he argued we cannot dismiss any apparently impossible phenomenon.[3] In these instances, Calmet believed that it was appropriate to forgo a literal, rationalistic reading of the text. These views placed Calmet outside the mainstream of intellectual "enlightenment" thought. The growing scientific revolution of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had asserted the regularity of nature and the superiority of reason over dogma.[4] As a result, everything that deviated from the laws of nature must be summarily rejected. However, Calmet, alongside many of his fellow "enlightenment" ecclesiastical scholars, had been educated before the natural sciences had permeated French university education.[5] Consequently, Calmet stood alongside several other "enlightenment" figures, such as Jean Meslier (1664–1729), who remained "intellectually remote from the scientific revolution" and free to engage in discussion about the supernatural.[6] In fact, Calmet even asserted the value of scientific interpretation, so long as it did not contradict or conflict with Christian teaching. Ultimately, these philosophical views would have great consequences for Calmet.

During the early eighteenth century, Habsburg officials stationed in Vienna began to receive reports from local civil and military authorities in Hungary, Serbia, and Moravia concerning strange local disturbances. These reports claimed that local communities had been menaced by the undead spirits of recently deceased individuals. It was claimed that upon exhumation the suspected culprits, who had been buried for several months or years, were found with their "blood in a liquid state, the flesh entire, the complexion fine and florid, the limbs flexible and pliable."[7] These persons, known locally as *ouipres* , arose from their graves at night to drink the blood of the living before returning to their slumber before sunrise. In Calmet's view, investigating the veracity of these incredulous claims emerging from Hungary, Moravia, and Transylvania about vampires was within the interests of both science and religion. Unlike witchcraft, which had been a long-standing phenomenon in Western Europe, vampirism was totally new to Western intellectuals and, therefore, suspect.[8] During this time of profound challenge to the Catholic Church, the Church increasingly attempted to re-establish the boundaries of truth to determine what resided within and outside Christian society. However, the sudden explosion of supernatural claims, particularly vampirism, threatened this agenda. Considering this issue, Calmet believed that if vampirism was illusory, it was "of consequence to the interests of religion to undeceive those who believe in its truth and destroy an error which may produce dangerous effects."[9] Moreover, regarding science, if these claims are proved true, then greater knowledge about the processes of life can be unlocked. Therefore, for these reasons and to maintain his intellectual integrity, Calmet felt compelled to provide an answer to these reports.

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[3] Schwarzbach, "Reason and the Bible in the So-Called Age of Reason," 460-461.
[4] Schwarzbach, "Reason and the Bible in the So-Called Age of Reason," 462.
[5] Schwarzbach, "Reason and the Bible in the So-Called Age of Reason," 461.
[6] Schwarzbach, "Reason and the Bible in the So-Called Age of Reason," 464.
[7]Augustin Calmet, *The Phantom World or, The philosophy of spirits, apparitions, &c, &c*., trans. Henry Christmas (Philadelphia: A. Hart, Late Cary & Hart, 1850), 250.
[8] Kathryn Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 4, no. 2 (2015): 182-183.
[9] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* p. 247.

Through his investigation, Calmet would amass a vast collection of Western European knowledge regarding vampires, the undead, and other supernatural phenomena. By doing this, Calmet would attempt to determine what a vampire was, what it looked like, what it did, and how it could be destroyed. This enterprise would result in the publication of the *Dissertations sur les apparitions des anges, des démons et des esprits, et sur les revenants et vampires de Hongrie, de Bohême, de Moravie et de Silésie* (Essays on apparitions of angels, demons, and spirits, and on ghosts and vampires from Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia; 1746).[10] Aside from examining a variety of supernatural topics, such as spiritual apparitions, magic, and witchcraft, Calmet's objective was to provide a rational, scientific, and philosophical answer to the vampire reports from Hungary, Bohemia, Silesia, and Moravia. By doing so, Calmet hoped to erode the foundation of popular superstition in these regions. However, rather than dispelling superstition, Calmet would give a distinct name and character to the vampire of the eighteenth century, which fueled its popularity. Furthermore, Calmet's reliance upon letters, personal testimonies, military reports, popular gazettes, and earlier texts about vampirism meant that he only reported what Western intellectuals already "knew," often mistakenly interpreted, about these remote and largely non-urbanized regions. Therefore, rather than contributing to Western understanding about these regions, Calmet would only perpetuate popular prejudices and mistaken intellectual assertions. Ultimately, Calmet unintentionally assisted in the construction of an enduring popular conception of "Eastern Europe," which would commonly associate this region with superstition and mysticism. This article examines the major features of vampirism investigated by Calmet in the *Dissertations*. By doing this, the role played by Calmet in the creation of the "archetypal vampire" becomes clear. Finally, the article demonstrates how this construction would create a stereotyped image of "Eastern Europe" that would endure into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The Origins of the Vampire

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, various regions of Eastern Europe became the focus of greater intellectual attention in Western Europe. As Western travelers, usually elite intellectuals, increasingly explored these territories, they were confronted with societies and cultures completely alien to them. These largely rural regions had remained relatively sheltered from the political centralization of Western Europe and the re-Christianization efforts of the Catholic Church. Consequently, belief in various pagan concepts, superstitious practices, and supernatural entities remained widespread amongst the ordinary population.

One of the most prevalent local Slavic superstitions encountered by Western travelers was belief in the existence of evil, undead revenants that fed upon the flesh of the living. These

[10] No English translation of Calmet's work, which was produced in French, existed during the eighteenth century. Therefore, this article will make use of an English translation produced by Reverend Henry Christmas (1811-1868) during the middle of the nineteenth century. Rev. Christmas was the editor of several English periodicals, including *The Church of England Quarterly Review, The Literary Gazette, The British Churchman,* and *The Churchman.* Also, Rev. Christmas was a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and a professor of English history and archaeology. This background likely gave Rev. Christmas interest in Calmet's subject matter.

creatures possessed various local names and features, such as the Serbian *mullo* (one who is dead), which preyed upon livestock, and the Bulgarian *obour* that, like the Turkish ghoul, fed on carcasses. Furthermore, among the Greeks, it was commonly accepted that those who died under excommunication would return as vengeful, undead creatures known as *vrykolakas* (vampires). These creatures were formed from the "bodies of criminal and malevolent men" which they use "to frighten mortals, and cause their death."[11] While these beliefs originated in the medieval period, by the time of Calmet's publication in the mid-eighteenth century, belief in these superstitions was so extensive that, according to Calmet, "anyone who thought otherwise would be regarded almost as a heretic."[12] In Transylvania, Slavic folklore spoke of undead revenants that arise from their graves to drink the blood of their relatives. These creatures rest in their graves "perfectly putrefied" and can only be destroyed by driving "a stake through the dead body, from whence … blood flows as if the person were alive."[13] These revenants were known locally as *strigoi* or *upir*. In fact, *upir* is the root verb for the various local variations in Russia, Serbia, Poland, and Bulgaria.[14] In their attempt to make sense of what they saw and heard, Western travelers created an image of this region of primitiveness, superstition, and backwardness that prevailed for almost three centuries. However, this construction, which Calmet would reinforce within the *Dissertations*, would only serve to strengthen popular and elite misconceptions about Eastern Europe.

Alongside the belief in undead revenants arose a multitude of apotropaic practices to protect the local community from these creatures. These practices informed participants about the characteristics and capabilities of the undead revenant, which would become key aspects of later vampire beliefs. Since it was believed that *strigoi* escaped their graves to prey upon the living, potential *strigoi* were buried face down to prevent them from rising.[15] These individuals were usually those who had existed on the margins of the community or whose death had attracted stigma, such as the unmarried, criminals, and those who had died by suicide, plague, or murder.[16] From the ninth century, numerous Romanian and Hungarian graves contain iron sickles, either buried in the heart or resting around the neck so that the *strigoi*'s neck would be severed if they rose from the grave.[17] Additionally, numerous Serbian and Romanian burials have been found with iron rods or needles driven through the roof of the deceased's mouth. It was not unusual for particularly dangerous individuals to be disposed of in bodies of water. These "vulnerable" corpses, like plague victims, were quarantined from other burials outside consecrated ground and far from any habitation, commonly along boundaries or at crossroads.[18] While the English historian William of Newbury reported tales of vengeful revenants in the twelfth century, neither

[11] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 302.
[12] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 376.
[13] Samuel Johnson and William Oldys, *The Harleian Miscellany: A Collection of Scarce, Curious, and Entertaining Pamphlets and Tracts, as Well in Manuscript as in Print*, Vol. 11 (London: Robert Dutton, 1808), 232.
[14] Katharina M. Wilson, "The History of the Word 'Vampire,'" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46 (1985): 577-583.
[15] Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 47.
[16] Paul Barber, "Forensic Pathology and the European Vampire," *Journal of Folklore Research* 24 (1987): 5.
[17] Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death,* 50.
[18] Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death,* 55-56.

these nor similar apparitions, like the Scandinavian *draugrs* (corporeal revenants), were known to drink the blood of the living. Therefore, the multitude of apotropaic practices found within Slavic and other cultures emphasizes the danger associated with *strigoi*. Consequently, as reports of *strigoi* began to spread into Western Europe, these superstitions presented a significant threat to the survival of the entire Christian community. Thus, these reports became the focus of intense intellectual and popular attention as Western European intellectuals sought to uncover the truth of these claims.

In the face of reports emerging from Eastern Europe concerning the undead, the intellectual and ecclesiastical elite of Western Europe began to categorize these loose sets of beliefs into a single concept—vampirism. One of the first appearances of the *strigoi* in Western intellectual circles was in *The Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches* (1679) by the British diplomat, Paul Rycaut (1629-1700). In this piece, Rycaut attributed the overuse of excommunication by Orthodox officials in giving rise to "a pretended demon, said to delight in sucking human blood, and to animate the bodies of dead persons, which when dug up, are said to be found florid and full of blood."[19] However, Rycaut never used the word "vampire." Nonetheless, as reports began to emerge about an apparent "vampirism epidemic" in Serbia from 1725 to 1732, the "vampire" slowly began to enter the popular vernacular of Western Europe.[20] In the subsequent process of identification and categorization by elites, the *strigoi*, with its unique thirst for human blood, would become the archetypal vampire.[21] An early application of this new terminology can be witnessed in the English travelogue, *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* (1610), which detailed a romanticized version of the adventures of the Shirley Brothers as they journeyed to Persia. [22] While initially published as a pamphlet, the popularity of this travelogue meant that it was adapted into a stage play less than six weeks after its publication. Among many other things, this travelogue spoke of "vampyres, which come out of the graves in the night-time, rush upon people sleeping in their beds, suck out all their blood and destroy them."[23] However, within the vampire's purported homelands, the term was little used. In fact, it was over a century after its emergence within the vocabulary of Western Europe that it appeared in Eastern Europe.[24] This terminology indeed never became widely used in the region. Instead, these creatures continued to be referred to by their traditional names. In this way, the "vampire" essentially became a linguistic creation of Western intellectuals to describe a set of complicated and diverse local superstitious beliefs, which they sought to categorize and to discredit. By doing so, they sought to destroy, whether for religious or intellectual reasons, the last vestiges of paganism and superstition residing upon the frontiers of "civilized" Europe.

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[19] Wilson, "The History of the Word 'Vampire,'" 580.
[20] Wilson, "The History of the Word 'Vampire,'" 583.
[21] G. David Keyworth, "Was the Vampire of the Eighteenth Century a Unique Type of Undead-Corpse?," *Folklore* 117 (2006): 256.
[22] This text can be found within *The Harleian Miscellany*—a collection of material from the library of the Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer—which was collated and edited by Samuel Johnson and William Oldys and published by Thomas Osborne in 1753. The text cited within this essay belongs to a reprinted edition in 1808 by Robert Dutton.
[23] Johnson and Oldys, *The Harleian Miscellany*, 232.
[24] Wilson, "The History of the Word 'Vampire,'" 582.

A Restless Slumber

Throughout the reports and incidents investigated by Calmet, the most recognizable feature of the vampire that he identified was the ability of the deceased to rise from the grave. Calmet informed his readers that these reports are "so singular, so detailed, and invested with such probable circumstances … that one can hardly refuse to credit the belief, which is held in those countries, that these revenants come out of their tombs and produce those effects which are proclaimed of them."[25] To uncover the truth of these occurrences, Calmet sought answers within the writings of antiquity and medieval Christendom. Firstly, Calmet explained that according to ancient writers, such as Pliny and Origen, the body serves as a vessel, which a spirit can inhabit and reanimate. In discussing the destruction of the soul of Hermotimes of Lazomene, Pliny stated that his enemies destroyed his body, which deprived "the soul of the means of returning to lodge in its envelope."[26] Furthermore, Calmet suggested that among the pagans, it was commonly "believed that the bodies of the dead rested not, neither were they safe from magical evocations, so long as they remained unconsumed by fire, or undecayed underground."[27] Calmet also explained how William of Newbridge had reported in the twelfth century how a deceased man "appeared bodily, as when alive, three succeeding nights to his wife, and after that to his nearest relatives." In William's view, these claims would have appeared doubtful "if several instances had not occurred in his time, and if they did not know several persons who believed in them."[28] At a Church Council held at Limoges in 1031, the Bishop of Cahors relayed the story of a cavalier who died under excommunication but was interred by his comrades without the bishop's permission. Subsequently, "the next morning his body was found out of the ground and thrown naked far from the spot; his grave remaining entire, and without any sign of having been touched." Following reinterment, the corpse was again found "outside the tomb, without its appearing that anyone had worked at it."[29]

After establishing the precedent of reanimation within ancient and medieval cultures, Calmet turned his attention to the vampires of Hungary and Moravia who apparently shared these traits. In each incident as recounted by Calmet, the vampire is stated to "come out of his grave … to embrace and hug violently his near relations or his friends."[30] When this task is complete, the vampires "return to their graves without anyone seeing how they re-enter them."[31] While this pattern of behavior is, according to Calmet, grounded in reliable testimony, the reader is informed of "how the vampires come out of their graves to haunt the living, and how they return to them again … without informing us either of the way or the circumstances." As a result, Calmet found it absurd that a "body covered with four or five feet of earth, having no room to move about and disengage itself … can make its way out … and how after that it returns to its former state, and re-enters underground,

[25] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 244.
[26] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 357.
[27] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 284.
[28] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 283.
[29] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 292.
[30] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 276.
[31] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 250.

where it is found sound … and in the same condition as a living body."[32] According to Calmet, it has been suggested that these vampires are those that "had been interred alive, and returned naturally to themselves, and came out of their tombs."[33] However, not only are some of these individuals interred for months before disturbances, but also Calmet found no reason why a victim of premature burial would return to the grave from which they just escaped. Moreover, since the earth is left undisturbed, it must be assumed that the vampire can pass through the ground "like the water and vapours which enter into the earth."[34]

While Calmet was skeptical of the idea that vampires arise physically from the earth, he does not totally reject these claims. Instead, Calmet suggested other possibilities that could account for these reports. According to some philosophers, Calmet found that the soul does not immediately abandon the body upon death "until after the entire dissolution of their body."[35] During this time, the body can be reanimated by the deceased's soul or other spiritual entities, which could manifest as a spiritual apparition. Consequently, Calmet wrote that some people have come to believe that God "permits or commands them to come back to earth, and resume for a time their own body." However, Calmet wondered why God would allow the deceased to return to do harm to their relations. As a result, Calmet contemplated if it is a "demon who causes these revenants to appear, and by their means does all the harm he occasions both men and animals."[36] Yet, how can a spiritual being inhabit a material body "without destroying the configuration of its parts … and render this body incapable of appearing, showing itself, acting and speaking." Furthermore, as far as we understand, God has not given the devil the power of reanimation. Despite this, while the possession of vampires by demons "is a thing asserted without proof or likelihood," God has never fully revealed the power given to demons so that "we must then keep silence on this article."[37] In the end, Calmet's views upon this issue are not entirely clear. To conclude, Calmet opted to cite the opinions of the author of the *Lettres Juives*, or *Jewish Letters* (1738), on the issue.[38] While acknowledging that "the return of vampires is neither impossible nor incredible" to the ancients, the author firmly believes that vampirism is "chimerical and beyond all likelihood … whatever may be the number and quality of those who have believed it," since the return of vampires to the earth is something "unmaintainable and impracticable."[39] Nevertheless, the quantity of testimonies championing these ideas throughout this work serve to solidify this concept within the reader's mind.

The Living Dead

[32] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 357.
[33] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 248-250.
[34] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 357.
[35] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 356.
[36] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 248.
[37] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 358-359.
[38] The *Lettres Juives* was an epistolary novel written by Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquise d'Argens. This text contained over two hundred letters purportedly written by five rabbis residing in different regions of Europe. These letters provided an overview and discussion of their respective regions.
[39] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 269.

Aside from its power of reanimation, the appearance of the deceased was, according to Calmet, the most reliable indicator of a dormant vampire. Most notably, it was the apparent absence of decomposition that contributed to the identification of the recently deceased as vampires. Throughout the reports examined by Calmet, the bodies of vampires are said to maintain the "mobility and suppleness of the limbs, the fluidity of the blood, and the flesh remaining uncorrupted."[40] Among the local populations who reported the presence of vampires, it is believed that those who perish from "plague, poison, hydrophobia, drunkenness, and any epidemical malady, are more apt to return, apparently because their blood coagulates with more difficulty."[41] Furthermore, the beard, hair, and nails of the deceased were found to have grown anew. These "vampires" can be found "entire, their blood vermilion and fluid, and their limbs supple and pliable."[42]

To demonstrate this pattern, Calmet examined the well-known vampirism case of Peter Plogojovitz (Blagojević). The details of this incident are provided by the Lutheran pastor and historian Michael Ranft (1700-1774), who was well-known for his writings of vampirism. In his work entitled *De Masticatione Mortuorum in Tumulis* (*On the Chewing of the Dead in Their Tombs*; 1728), Ranft brought the details of this incident to Western audiences. According to Calmet, Ranft reported that Blagojević, who had died in 1725 and killed nine persons in the village of Kisilova in lands gained in 1718 by the Habsburgs from the Ottomans (likely the modern village of Kisiljevo in Serbia), appeared "as when alive … that his hair and beard had grown, and instead of his nails, which had fallen off, new ones had come."[43] Moreover, Blagojević was found "not at all putrid, no ill smell about him, save the mustiness of his grave clothes, his joints limber and flexible, as those that are alive."[44] These criteria were presented as key to judging cases of vampirism. The apparent bloating of the corpse was particularly important to local authorities, since it suggested that the deceased had fed recently, thus confirming its affliction. According to Calmet, when the deceased was discovered by local people with these features and "without worms or decay," they are immediately "given up to the executioner, who burns them."[45] For example, within the village of Kisilova, two officers from the tribunal of Belgrade arrived to investigate reports of further supernatural disturbances within the community. Following their arrival, the two officers, alongside an executioner, opened the graves of all those who had died within the timeframe of the disturbances. Consequently, they discovered the corpse of an old man "with his eyes open, having a fine colour, with natural respiration … whence they concluded that he was most evidently a vampire."[46] After this discovery, the corpse was destroyed after which the disturbances ceased. These details were relayed by an Imperial officer who served as an ocular witness to the events and were contained within the *Lettres Juives*, which Calmet paraphrased.

[40] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 262.
[41] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 343.
[42] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 248.
[43] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 342.
[44] David Keyworth, "Was the Vampire of the Eighteenth Century a Unique Type of Undead-Corpse?," 252.
[45] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* p. 262.
[46] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 264.

Following his discussion of Blagojević, Calmet turned his attention to the famous case of Arnold Paule who lived in the village of Medveđa in modern Serbia. As with the case of Blagojević, Paule lived in lands only recently brought under Habsburg control. The version of the story known to Calmet came from an Austrian army surgeon, Johann Flückinger, who was sent to investigate the stories about Paule and compiled a formal report on the case as a *Visum et Repertum* (*Seen and Discovered*) in 1732. Following local reports that the recently deceased Paule was terrorizing the community, Flückinger had led a formal military investigation into the incident. During the investigation, the local inhabitants, as well as local military officers, were interviewed about apparent disturbances. Furthermore, Flückinger had Paule disinterred, who was found "quite complete and undecayed, and that fresh blood had flowed from his eyes, nose, mouth, and ears; that the shirt, the covering, and the coffin were completely bloody." Moreover, the "old nails on his hands and feet, along with the skin had fallen off, and that new ones had grown."[47] Following the presentation of Flückinger's report to the Council of War in Vienna, the details of Flückinger's findings quickly became widely known. In response, a wave of intellectual treatises on the subject followed as elite writers with the seeming implausibility of the incident.[48] Within Calmet's *Dissertations*, Flückinger's report was heavily used to provide an archetypal example of vampirism. However, in Flückinger's original report, he never refers to vampirism. Nevertheless, Calmet utilized this terminology frequently when recounting Paule's previous experiences with a "Turkish vampire" and the role of the justice of the village "who was skilled in vampirism." In fact, after vividly describing the apparent appearance of Paule's corpse, Calmet concluded that the investigators found all the signs of "an arch-vampire." These key features for identifying a "vampire" were at the core of Calmet's discussion of the subject. Conditional upon the veracity of these reports, Calmet admitted that "the ghosts of Hungary, Moravia, and Poland are not really dead … the blood, which is found in them being fine and red, the flexibility of their limbs … all prove that they still exist."[49]

Despite his consideration of numerous incidents of corpses remaining absent from decomposition as well as conceding to the possibility that these creatures exist, Calmet remained highly skeptical of these claims. Instead, Calmet believed that the "suppleness of these vampires" can be attributed to "the vegetation of the human body," which "may produce all these effects."[50] Firstly, he argued that advances in science have taught physicians that "those who die without malady and a sudden death; or of certain maladies" can appear fluid and subtle for a time after death. Furthermore, there remains "a certain slow and imperceptible circulation of the humors, which causes this growth of the nails and hair."[51] In fact, modern medicine has sided with Calmet's naturalistic explanations. Since it was not unusual for corpses to be buried face-down, this would have resulted in the coagulation of the blood in the face and extremities. As a result, the deceased would appear to possess a ruddy and lively appearance. Furthermore, since "dangerous corpses" were

[47] Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," 182.
[48] Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," 182.
[49] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 267.
[50] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 357.
[51] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 377.

disposed of with far greater urgency, these graves would likely have been much shallower. Such was the haste with which some corpses were buried that "sometimes some are buried who are not quite dead … from fear of the infection they would cause."[52] Consequently, there was a greater likelihood that the community would encounter the complex processes of decomposition, which they misinterpreted as vampirism.[53]

Since vampires are only native to Eastern Europe, Calmet suggested that perhaps its cold winters and soil allow the temporary preservation of the deceased in the earth. Similar to those birds and fish who become frozen within lakes and rivers yet maintain vitality, Calmet speculated that once the exhumed "vampire" is exposed to the sun or "laid in a room of temperate heat … they are seen to revive, and perform their ordinary functions, which had been suspended by the cold."[54] Consequently, the deceased, who is mistaken for a vampire, would be given the appearance of vitality with the resumption of blood flow within the veins. Therefore, the suspicions of the community about their affliction would appear to be confirmed. Moreover, Calmet asserted that there are "certain kinds of earth which will preserve dead bodies perfectly fresh" and allow "some augmentation in those parts which do not demand a vital spirit" like the hair and nails.[55] To support this statement, Calmet cited a contemporary French journal, the *Glaneur historique* (Historical Gleaner; 1731-1732), which stated that certain particles within the soil can enter the blood and cause decoagulation when heated.[56] In Calmet's opinion, these factors produced the apparent lifelike appearance of the would-be vampire. Additionally, Calmet addressed the assertion by Orthodox Christians that it was excommunication that prevented decomposition and eventually allowed for the reanimation of the deceased as a *vrykolaka*. Calmet completely dismissed this idea (with some religious polemic) since the Church Schism would mean that "all the Greeks towards the Latins, and the Latins towards the Greeks, would be undecayed, which is not the case." Therefore, "we cannot maintain that all those who die in a state of excommunication, are incorruptible." As a result, such claims are "very frivolous, and nothing can be concluded from it" and "the instances cited by the Greeks either prove nothing, or prove too much."[57] In fact, Calmet greatly mistrusted such stories, stating that "if well examined, many of them would doubtless be found to be false."[58]

A Thirst for Blood

After establishing the appearance and abilities of vampires, Calmet turned to an examination of their behavior. According to local testimony and written letters from Moravia and the Hungarian lands in Serbia, certain "persons who were dead … have been

[52] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 343.
[53] Barber, "Forensic Pathology and the European Vampire," 8.
[54] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 356.
[55] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 271-272.
[56] This popular French journal can be found in *Publications de l'Institut d'Etudes Françaises et Occitanes de l'Université d'Utrecht* [Publications of the Institute of French and Occitan Studies of the University of Utrecht] *6* (1971).
[57] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 377-378.
[58] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 378.

seen to return … and torment men and animals, suck their blood, and cause their death."[59] Once attacked, victims quickly develop anemia, eventually dying within a few days. Although there existed "in the twelfth century in England and Denmark, some revenants similar to those of Hungary," Calmet found that within "no history do we read anything so usual or so pronounced, as what is related to us of the vampires of Poland, Hungary, and Moravia."[60] Through his research upon Transylvania and Moravia, Calmet discovered that the peoples of these regions "believe that certain dead persons, whom they call vampires, suck all the blood from the living."[61] As a result, Calmet would align his conception of a vampire with the features of the Slavic *strigoi*. By doing this, Calmet would assist in transforming the *strigoi* of Slavic folklore into the vampire of the eighteenth century.

While this theme runs throughout the incidents cited by Calmet, it is best illustrated by the case of Arnold Paule. In the words of Calmet, Paule's affliction first began after he was attacked by a "Turkish vampire" upon the frontiers of Serbia. Consequently, Paule succumbed to the same illness. Soon afterwards, Paule claimed several victims in the local community. While vampirism was not initially suspected, upon examination, it was found that these individuals had died "in the same manner in which according to the tradition of the country, those who die are molested by vampires." Although Paule's corpse was disinterred and destroyed, five years later, seventeen people within the community suddenly "died of vampirism." Upon these corpses the authorities reportedly found "the most evident signs of vampirism"—bite marks.[62]

Although the Arnold Paule case was the most typical example of vampirism, Calmet included in the *Dissertations* numerous incidents where vampires reportedly sucked upon the blood of the living. These incidents, from which Calmet built his investigation, were largely reported second-hand by Western pamphlet literature and periodicals. One of the most important pamphlets was the *Mercure Galent* (Mercury Galant; 1693), which concerned stories of vampirism in Poland and Russia. [63] According to this text, which Calmet reproduced, the revenant "goes by night to embrace and hug violently his near relations or his friends, and sucks their blood so much as to weaken and attenuate them, and at last cause their death."[64] Following the attack, "a person finds himself attacked with languor, loses his appetite, grows visibly thinner and at the end of eight or ten days, sometimes a fortnight, dies, without fever, or any other symptom than thinness and drying of the blood."[65] Calmet also provided a letter written to him that recounts the details of a lengthy military investigation into a Hungarian count who, despite being deceased for thirty years, returned and "sucked the blood and caused the death of two of his sons."[66] Furthermore, according to Calmet, within a work entitled *Philosophical and Christian*

[59] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 252.
[60] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 244.
[61] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 265.
[62] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 265-266.
[63] The *Mercure Galent* was a French gazette and magazine operating from the early seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries. It informed readers about fashion, luxury goods, and intellectual and artistic debates.
[64] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 273.
[65] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 276.
[66] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 263.

Thoughts upon Vampires, by John Christopher Herenberg (1733), it is stated that the people of Slavonia believe vampires "to be the authors of the death of those whose blood they were said to suck."[67] Additionally, Calmet cited Karl Ferdinand von Schertz's *Magia Posthuma* (Magic Posthuma; 1704) for evidence of similar revenants in Moravia who harmed the living.[68] The discussion upon blood-sucking vampires is revealing of Calmet's methodology. Calmet's examination was based upon the study of contemporary journals, written reports, intellectual treatises, and periodicals on vampire superstitions, which he pieces together into a single compendium.

Far from being a "quack researcher," Calmet presented an empirical observation of the vampire phenomenon using the scientific and natural philosophical principles of his time. Since Calmet had to rely totally upon external testimony, he stated that he approached the subject "as a historian." As a result, Calmet evaluated each reported case on both internal evidence, such as witness testimony, and external evidence, which entailed the attempted reconciliation of incredulous claims with existing knowledge.[69] The latter was particularly important in the eyes of "enlightenment" thinkers who were becoming increasingly critical of events that lay outside the accepted course of nature.[70] Nevertheless, Calmet gave far greater weight to the value of testimonial evidence than was usual. Consequently, after carefully considering all these various accounts of vampire attacks, Calmet arrived at the conclusion that these attacks were the result of "epidemical fanaticism."[71] He wrote that when a man finds himself afflicted with "the least illness, he fancies that he is seized with the epidemical disease." Ultimately, this fear brings about the death of the individual rather than the affliction. In Calmet's view, a similar process was underway in relation to cases of vampirism. As stories spread within communities about apparent attacks and visitations, an internal revolution was brought about whereby people imagine themselves attacked by a vampire. Once these pretended apparitions have occurred, they allow the "mind to be more vividly struck by them."[72] Consequently, belief in vengeful vampires stalking the community spreads like an epidemic.

One of Calmet's principal sources, known as the *Glaneur de Hollande* (Dutch Gleaner, 1733), espoused similar ideas, which basically mirror Calmet's conclusions.[73] The *Glaneur de Hollande* compared vampirism to "the bite of a mad dog, which communicates its venom to the person who is bitten; thus, those who are infected by vampirism communicate this dangerous poison to those with whom they associate." As a result, this disease produces "the wakefulness, dreams, and pretended apparitions of vampires."[74] Since these creatures

[67] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 267.
[68] This work is believed to be one of the earliest works upon vampire superstitions. However, the preservation of this work is not entirely clear. In most cases, when writers cited this work, they cited Calmet's quotations.
[69] Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," 187.
[70] Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," 187.
[71] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 270.
[72] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 271.
[73] The *Glaneur de Hollande* was a Franco-Dutch newspaper that operated during the eighteenth century. This newspaper published many apparent cases of vampirism, including a translation of Johann Flückinger's report.
[74] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 273.

were only known to Hungary and Moravia "where the people, being badly fed, are subject to certain disorders … and augmented by prejudice, fancy, and fright," Calmet concluded that these beliefs have their "foundation only in ridiculous prepossessions of the mind."[75] In this way, superstitious beliefs, represented by the "vampire epidemic," were associated with the social conditions of Eastern Europe. Within these territories, relatively isolated from the control of "civilized" Western governments and Church leadership, these superstitions were free to spread among the population, who were clearly seen as ignorant and simple, like a virulent disease.

Despite Calmet's dismissal of the phenomenon, he continued to include a vast array of evidence and testimony in its favor so that his precise views on the issue may well have escaped the attention of many readers. Following his support of the arguments of the *Glaneur de Hollande*, Calmet suddenly stated that "this phenomenon is too well averred for it to be doubted."[76] To illustrate this point, Calmet included two letters that were communicated to him on the subject. In the first letter, the writer, who was the aide-de-camp to Prince Alexander of Württemberg, stated that he was part of a formal deputation sent by Charles VI that investigated incidents of vampirism in Serbia. To begin, the writer stated that "concerning vampires … nothing is more true or more certain than what he will doubtless have read about it in the deeds or attestations which have been made public and printed in all the gazettes in Europe."[77] Following this, the writer recounted their examination of local victims of vampirism, the bodies of suspected culprits, and the discovery and the destruction of the vampire. In relation to the vampire's thirst for blood, the writer informed Calmet that "at the place where these persons are sucked a very blue spot is formed." In fact, this is "a notorious fact, attested by the most authentic documents, and passed or executed in sight of more than 1,300 persons, all worthy of belief."[78] In the second letter, an officer stationed in Wallachia told Calmet that he cannot be too circumspect on this issue, since "there are certain facts so well attested that one cannot help believing them."[79] During his deployment within those territories recently acquired from the Treaty of Passarowitz, the officer related numerous incidents where his troops were drained of life by undead spirits. These calamities were only ended after a corporal performed a series of local rituals. While several natural explanations could explain the experiences of Catholic Hungarian soldiers in these regions, whose culture and beliefs were totally alien to them, by the time these reports reached Western audiences of gazettes and periodicals, we see how Moravia, Hungary, Serbia, and Romania are all part of some composite region of superstition to the Western mind.

To Slay a Demon

As Calmet examined the various cases of vampirism presented in the *Dissertations*, a consensus among the local populations of these territories about how to destroy these revenants became visible. Within popular folklore, it is apparently believed that only "by

[75] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 344.
[76] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 284.
[77] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 274.
[78] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 275.
[79] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 276.

exhuming them, impaling them, cutting off their heads, tearing out the heart, or burning them" can the visitations of a vampire be ended.[80] Consequently, when a corpse is found possessing the features of vampirism, "the people of those countries impale them, cut off their heads, burn them, to deprive their spirit of all hope of animating them again, and of making use of them to molest the living."[81] Once these actions are taken, they "appear no more."[82] However, one must approach Calmet's assertion about what was "commonly believed" with great caution. Ultimately, Calmet had no personal experience of these cultures or local disturbances, which were highly sporadic and mostly occurred in remote rural areas or along borderlands. Instead, Calmet relied upon Western periodicals and reports and letters from elite doctors and military officials to support his investigation. These regions were viewed by Western travelers through the lens of Western intellectualism, which shaped their perception of what they encountered. These perceptions were then reproduced for popular consumption by gazettes and periodicals in the West. As a result, Calmet's knowledge about local beliefs and practices only extended as far as the understanding of Western travelers and reporters who witnessed them. In this way, Calmet would assist in the creation and propagation of popular Western ideas about the territories on the periphery of Western Europe.

Despite his reliance upon the opinions of Western observers, Calmet repeatedly raised examples of the process whereby vampires are destroyed by local communities. In particular, the work of the German author Michael Ranft, *De Masticatione Mortuorum,* mentioned previously, which dealt with incidents of vampirism in Hungary and Germany, was central to Calmet's efforts. Ranft provided the details of the famous case of Peter Plogojovitz (Blagojević) in the Serbian lands, which has been discussed previously. Ranft noted that upon the exhumation of Blagojević's corpse and the identification of various features of vampirism, the local officer "persuaded that he was the true cause of the death of their compatriots, ran directly for a sharp-pointed stake, which they thrust into his breast." When this was done "the peasants placed the body on a pile of wood and saw it reduced to ashes."[83] Additionally, Calmet cited Karl Ferdinand von Schertz's *Magia Posthuma*, which stated that "the only remedy for these apparitions is to cut off the heads and burn the bodies of those who come back to haunt people." Furthermore, according to von Schertz, witnesses were called before the law, their arguments were examined, and the body inspected for "any of the usual marks which lead them to conjecture that they are the parties who molest the living."[84] In the course of his investigation, Calmet found that these practices first began among the "ancient northern nations" as those people "knew no remedy so proper to put a stop to this kind of apparition as to cut off the head of the dead person, or to impale him, or pierce him through the body with a stake, or to burn it." Subsequently, these practices spread so that they are "now practiced to this day in Hungary and Moravia with regard to vampires."[85] In the end, the emphasis placed upon the

[80] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 244.
[81] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 356.
[82] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 250.
[83] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 342.
[84] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 262.
[85] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 198.

destruction of the vampire's body allows Calmet to conclude that it is "very true and very real, that they appear in their own bodies."[86]

The Existence of Vampires

Upon the culmination of his investigation, Calmet concluded that vampires were "morally impossible." Firstly, existing theological and philosophical methods cannot be "rationally applied to the matter of apparitions or of vampires." So long as we are not being duped, there can be other ways to "act on this question than to absolutely deny the return of these vampires."[87] Furthermore, after consulting various letters sent to him and official documents received from Vienna, including verbal acts drawn upon by the emperor regarding several incidents in Moravia, Calmet has "not found in them the shadow of truth, nor even of probability, in what is advanced."[88] Consequently, where incidents of vampirism cannot be reconciled with existing knowledge, it must be concluded that they are the result of "stricken imaginations." However, since "moral implausibility" was not absolute as we cannot fully understand creation, Calmet allowed a slim possibility for the existence of vampires.[89] The vast swathe of vampire reports emerging from Eastern Europe could not be dismissed as a collective delusion, since they were "made juridically, in proper form, and attested by several officers who were garrisoned in the country, by the chief surgeons of the regiments, and by the principal inhabitants of the place." These certificates of authority give "a plain demonstration of the reality of the most absurd story."[90] Therefore, it was only through thorough analysis that truth could be separated from superstition.

The Reception

Prior to undertaking the *Dissertations*, Calmet was acutely aware that such a task was likely to open himself up to criticism from both sides of the debate. On the one hand, those who believed in the existence of vampires "will accuse me of rashness and presumption, for having raised a doubt on the subject, or even of having denied their existence and reality." On the other hand, intellectuals "will blame me for having employed my time in discussing this matter which is considered as frivolous and useless by many sensible people."[91] In fact, the contradictory and uncertain nature of the subject almost made Calmet abandon the work.[92] Nonetheless, Calmet believed that this was an important task, since superstitions can hold both falsities and truths.[93] Through intense examination, dubious beliefs could be shown to be true, false, or equivocal.[94] Therefore, the process of examination cannot be avoided, since it risks overlooking potential elements of God's majesty. Furthermore, it allows writers to dispel the dangers of superstition.

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[86] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 253.
[87] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 361.
[88] Calmet, *The Phantom World,* 377.
[89] Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," 191.
[90] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 266-267.
[91] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 245.
[92] Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," 183.
[93] Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," 192-193.
[94] Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," 192.

The intellectual response to Calmet's *Dissertations* would be emblematic of the growing divide within the European intellectual tradition during the eighteenth-century "enlightenment." While some intellectuals like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, noting the tension between obvious implausibility and reliable testimony, would side with Calmet's conclusions, this work would come under scathing criticism from Voltaire. While Calmet believed that superstition should be understood, Voltaire maintained that science should dismiss superstition without consideration.[95] In this way, Voltaire was among those who rejected the existence of vampirism as "chimerical, and as an effect of the prepossession and ignorance of the people of those countries, where they are said to come back or return."[96] In the eyes of this strain of "enlightenment" thinkers, only science could determine the boundaries of reality, not religion. Anything that lay outside the limits of science resided in the domain of fantasy and error.[97] Furthermore, any testimony that spoke in favor of these fabulous beliefs should be rejected out of hand since they only encouraged superstition. To Voltaire, Calmet treated a subject seriously that did not belong as a matter of proper inquiry in the present age, concerned perhaps that reason appeared largely ineffectual in preventing the malicious spread of superstition. As a result, by reporting upon vampires so heavily, Voltaire believed that Calmet was helping to spread this superstitious disease.[98] Voltaire viewed Calmet as having been duped by superstition.

Conclusion

Despite scathing criticism from the likes of Voltaire, Calmet's *Dissertations* proved to be a massive popular success in Western Europe.[99] It did not take long for the *Dissertations* to completely sell out.[100] Furthermore, Calmet's publication of the *Dissertations* would result in him being inundated with countless letters, personal testimonies, military reports, and other treatises detailing different experiences with vampirism. Due to the huge quantity of new material sent to him, Calmet published a greatly expanded edition of the *Dissertations* three years later. The second edition of the *Dissertations* would include many of the letters, reports, and other writings sent to Calmet. In many instances, these testimonies, in contrast to Calmet's intentions, spoke in favor of the existence of vampires. As a result, the intellectual consequences of this text were far from what Calmet had intended. Calmet's extensive analysis and publicization of the characteristics of vampirism, which were placed within the context of reliable military and medical reports, had assisted in their solidification in the popular imagination. Moreover, Calmet's attempts to create a singular, uniform entity out of a series of vastly different local beliefs helped to assist the believability of this phenomenon. Consequently, Calmet would assist in transforming the *strigoi* of Slavic folklore into the archetypal vampire of the eighteenth century. Therefore,

[95] Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," 183.
[96] Calmet, *The Phantom World*, 247.
[97] Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," 196.
[98] Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," 195.
[99] An analysis of the immense popularity of the *Dissertations* and its importance to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century vampire literature can be found in Marie-Helène Huet, "Deadly Fears: Dom Augustin's Vampires and the Rule over Death," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21 (1997): 222–232.
[100] Huet, "Deadly Fears," 222.

perhaps Voltaire was correct when he condemned Calmet's discussion of the topic for spreading a disease while failing to offer any cure.[101]

The most significant consequence of Calmet's *Dissertations* was its association of vampire superstitions with the regions of modern-day Eastern Europe, such as Hungary, Moravia, Serbia, and Romania. By focusing the existence of vampires on the European periphery, Calmet contributed to the psychological alienation and barbarization of these territories. Aside from its depiction as a rural and uncivilized expanse, the people of these regions were depicted as ignorant, uneducated, poorly nourished, and prone to ridiculous fancies. For these reasons, these peoples, who remained isolated from the Catholic Church, were shown to be easily duped by the most outrageous superstitions. The presentation of the experiences of Western military officers and medical professionals in these territories further illustrated the psychological remoteness of this region. Consequently, Calmet's investigation of the vampire phenomenon would assist in the creation of a popular perception of "Eastern Europe" as a realm of illusion and superstition. The territory of Transylvania, which would become synonymous with superstitions about vampires and the supernatural, would suffer most from this fallout. One must only browse the contents of late nineteenth and twentieth century travel writings in Transylvania to see these consequences.[102]

[101] Morris, "Superstition, Testimony, and the Eighteenth-Century Vampire Debates," 196.
[102] For a sample of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travel writers, see Emily Gerard, "Transylvanian Superstitions," *The Nineteenth Century* 18 (1885): 130-150; and Patrick Leigh Fermor, *Between the Woods and the Water: On Foot to Constantinople from the Hook of Holland: The Middle Danube to the Iron Gates* (London: Penguin, 1986).