

# MAGIA POSTHUMA:

## a Weblog Approach to the History of Central and East European Vampire Cases of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

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first publication

In 2006 I started working on a history of vampires. As a teenager and young man from the late 1970's and into the 1980's I had been fascinated by vampires, and over the years collected a great number of books on the subject. In time my interest developed from a fascination with anything related to vampires to a search for sources on the historical vampires. In general, however, I got increasingly dissatisfied with the books I obtained, and as other aspects of adulthood required attention, for many years I only occasionally resurrected my interest in vampires.

Returning to the subject decades later, I found that a few important studies had been published, mainly in German, and that the internet provided me with an important source for all sorts of relevant information. Internet shops made it easy to purchase books that would otherwise have been almost impossible to obtain. Online library database enabled me to get hold of specialist literature, and some books were even available online. A lot of background information was easily at hand through online dictionaries, newspapers, geographical services etc. Not least it had become easy to get in touch with other people through e-mail and other online services.

### Recovering the Vampire of History

One basic aim of my work has been to recover the vampire from the mythical »Neverland« where it has been located by authors of both fiction and non-fiction books. The sloppiness of some popular books<sup>1</sup> in getting the facts right, in my opinion, is not only caused by a lack of access to source material, but in many cases rather a lack of care for the fine line between fact and fiction when it comes to the subject of vampires.

One central aspect of my work consequently has been to go *ad fontes* to investigate, to put it popularly: »what really happened«, which not only requires the use of textual sources, but also a certain amount of contextual information: geography, contemporary events, historical background information, etc. So, instead of just focusing on the vampire and the isolated descriptions of vampires, my aim has been to get a grasp of the vampire and how it was conceived by its contemporaries as *part of history*.

Fortunately, a few scholars have provided important research, in particular Aribert Schroeder and Klaus Hamberger, but also others like, e.g., Karen Lambrecht and Peter Mario Kreuter.<sup>2</sup> Schroeder visited a number of archives around Europe to look for archival material on vampires. He did, however, not visit my native country, Denmark, although even here one finds a connection to the vampires of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that provides another example of the interest in vampires in the 1730's.

According to the standard Danish dictionary,<sup>3</sup> the earliest use of the word »vampyr« in the Danish language occurred in the May 29, 1732 issue of *Nye Tidender om lærde og curieuse Sager*<sup>4</sup> in connection with a mention of a book on vampires by Otto von Stein.<sup>5</sup> But even earlier that year the Danish government of King Christian VI received a letter from Count Christian August von Berckentin, then royal envoy in Vienna, dated February 9, 1732, in which von Berckentin mentions a »curieuse piece« about »so-genannte Wampyre oder blutsaugende Todten«. Von Berckentin enclosed a copy of the curious text: the famous report of an investigation of a vampire case in the Serbian village Medveđa, the *Visum et Repertum*.<sup>6</sup>



Count Christian August von Berckentin (1694-1758), Danish diplomat in Vienna from 1722 to 1740. Part of a painting attributed to George Desmarées ca. 1738-1740. Photo by NP.

1 One notorious example is the *Checklist of Vampirism* published in Haining, Peter: *The Dracula Centenary Book*. London: Souvenir Pr. 1987, pp. 142-146.

2 Schroeder, Aribert: *Vampirismus. Seine Entwicklung vom Thema zum Motiv*. Frankfurt/M.: Akad. Verl.ges. 1973; Hamberger, Klaus: *Mortuus non mordet: Kommentierte Dokumentation zum Vampirismus 1689-1791*. Wien: Turia + Kant 1992; Lambrecht, Karen: *Hexenverfolgungen und Zaubereiprozesse in den schlesischen Territorien*. Köln: Böhlau 1995; Kreuter, Peter Mario: *Der Vampirglaube in Südosteuropa*. Berlin: Weidler 2001.

3 Ordbog over det danske sprog, originally publ. 1919-1956. Available online at <http://www.ordnet.dk/ods/>.

4 Published under various titles since 1720, this was the most popular Danish magazine of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, inspired by a.o. the German *Neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen* published in Leipzig since 1715.

5 The unpublished *Unverlohnnes Licht und Recht der Todten unter den Lebendigen, oder gründlicher Beweiß der Erscheinung der Todten unter den Lebendigen, und waß jene in der Ober-Welt untern den Lebendigen, und waß jene vor ein Recht unter denselbigen haben können*.

6 The letter and the copy of *Visum et Repertum* are stored at the national archive, *Rigsarkivet*, in Copenhagen.

Cf. Olsen, Poul: Blodsudgydelse i Serbien. In: Siden Saxo 9/3 [Copenhagen: Statens Arkiver] (1992), pp. 5-10.

7 Oldridge, Darren: Strange Histories. *The Trial of the Pig, The Walking Dead*, and other Matters of Fact from the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds. London: Routledge 2007, p. ix. Cf. also Oldridge, D.: »Dead Man Walking«: The Historical Context of Vampire Beliefs. In: Day, Peter (Ed.): *Vampires: Myths and Metaphors of* Rodopi 2006.

8 E.g., Pohl, Christopher J.: *Dissertatio de hominibus post mortem sanguisugis vulgo sic dictis Vampyren*. Leipzig: Christian Langenhem 1732.

9 Cf. also Kremer, Peter: *Draculas Vetter: Deutschlands vergessene Vampire*. Düren: PeKaDe 2006.

To my knowledge, the vampire cases that caused a stir in other parts of Europe did not leave any other traces at the court of Christian VI, but evidently von Berckentin found cause to notify the Danish court of the vampire report and the speculations it provoked.

Von Berckentin's letter shows vampires as part of history, and to understand why they caused a sensation and learned speculations is in my opinion more interesting than following the latest developments in the vampires of fiction. Understanding the vampire as part of history is, as all history, an attempt at understanding the development of human concepts and ideas. In that sense, I concur with Darren Oldridge, when he says:

As historians have often noted, our failure to comprehend the beliefs of people in the past is a measure of the distance that separates us from them. It is the very strangeness of these ideas – from a modern perspective – that makes them worth looking at. If we can begin to understand why a French judge warned people about demonically possessed apples in 1602, we might start to unravel the intellectual context in which he lived.<sup>7</sup>

So, to me, the vampires of history are not only worthwhile studying, because I grew up with a fascination for the subject itself, but rather because it serves as an interesting case in point of how fundamental concepts and views developed during the so-called »Enlightenment«.

Whereas in the 17<sup>th</sup> century all sorts of tales and evidence concerning dead bodies were collected as *miracula mortuorum*, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century a discrimination is established between these phenomena, as collecting evidence from written sources is superseded by empirical studies. The history of vampires then can be viewed as, e.g., history of the development of science in that period, in particular of medicine, but in a broader sense it also concerns the development of our understanding of, e.g., phenomena related to death or the concept of »superstition«.

For that reason my interest in vampires focuses to a large extent on findings in archival sources or books from that period concerning vampires and related topics. These vampires, however, do not necessarily display the traits that we nowadays would associate with vampires.

Although von Berckentin refers to blood sucking in his description of vampires, and blood sucking immediately entered the literature, as some authors chose to use the Latin word *sanguisuga*, usually referring to a leach, for the vampire,<sup>8</sup> it is apparent from a number of the original vampire cases that there is very little evidence of blood sucking *per se*. The victims rather talk of being suffocated by the vampire. For this and other reasons I have come to view vampires as one aspect of a broader set of traditions and beliefs concerning revenants, which includes the so-called posthumous magic, *magia posthuma*.<sup>9</sup>

### In Search of *Magia Posthuma*

While searching for source material and other information, I was particularly annoyed by the inaccessibility of one book referred to by Augustin Calmet in his *Dissertation sur les apparitions des anges, des démons et des esprits, et sur les revenans et vampires*:<sup>10</sup>

Ces apparitions ont donné occasion à un petit ouvrage intitulé: *Magia posthuma*, composé par Charles Ferdinand de Schertz, imprimé à Olmutz en 1706. dédié au Prince Charles de Lorraine Evêque d'Olmutz & d'Osnabruch.

[These apparitions have given rise to a little work, entitled *Magia Posthuma*, printed at Olmutz, in 1706, composed by Charles Ferdinand de Schertz, dedicated to Prince Charles of Lorraine, Bishop of Olmutz and Osnaburgh.]

Referred to by Gábor Klaniczay as »the first widely read book on vampires«,<sup>11</sup> I considered it important to find out if and in what way this book was actually associated with vampires. Not least as I found it highly improbable that a book published in Moravia about two decades before the word »vampire« got printed in connection with a vampire case in Kisljevo in North Eastern Serbia<sup>12</sup> should actually contain that word.

An initial inquiry at the Royal Library in Copenhagen in 2006 left me with a message saying that the book could not be verified in the standard databases used by the library. Even the literature left little hope, as various scholars during the 20<sup>th</sup> century had been unable to obtain the book:

10 Paris: de Bure 1746. Here quoted from Paris: de Bure 1751. Tome II, p. 32f.

11 The decline of witches and rise of vampires in Oldridge, D. (Ed.): *The Witchcraft Reader*. London: Routledge 2001, pp. 387-398, here p. 393. An updated version of the paper is available in Bertschik, Julia/Tuczay, Christa Agnes (Eds.): *Poetische Wiedergänger*. Tübingen: Francke 2005.

12 *Wienerisches Diarium*, July 28, 1725 [Wien: Johann Peter v. Ghelen], p. 11f.

13 Hock, Stefan: Die Vampyrsgen und ihre Verwertung in der deutschen Literatur. Berlin: Ductner 1900, p. 36.

14 Schroeder, Aribert: Vampirismus. Seine Entwicklung vom Thema zum Motiv. Frankfurt/M.: Akad. Verl.ges. 1973, p. 247.

15 Lambrecht, Karin: Wiedergänger und Vampire in Ostmitteleuropa. In: Jb. f. deutsche und osteuropäische Volkskunde 37 [Marburg: Elwert] (1994), pp. 49-77, here p. 67.

- Stefan Hock, 1900: »Mir leider nicht zugänglichen *Magia posthuma*.«<sup>13</sup>
- Aribert Schroeder, 1973: »Das Werk konnte nicht eingesehen werden.«<sup>14</sup>
- Karen Lambrecht, 1994: »Karl Ferdinand von Schertz berichtete in seinem nicht mehr zugänglichen Werk von 1706.«<sup>15</sup>

Apparently few, if anyone, had read the book since Calmet, as no one else seems to have quoted from or referred to the contents. The book seemed so hard to find, that at times I wondered if the book had in fact been lost, as was apparently the conclusion reached by Karen Lambrecht.

As *Magia Posthuma* could not be verified in standard library databases, I considered trying to contact other people via the internet to find out if anyone happened to know the whereabouts of a copy. The same might be the case for locating other kinds of information, e.g., local information from places where vampire cases took place.

### **Magia Posthuma Online: The Weblog**

16 The English Wikipedia defines a »weblog« or »blog« as: »A blog (a contraction of the term »weblog«) is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order.«

17 Google's free tool for blogging at <http://www.blogger.com>.

18 Using the Blogger address: <http://magiaposthuma.blogspot.com>. Later on I purchased the domain <http://www.magiaposthuma.com>, which refers to the blog. The blog can also be accessed on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Magia-Posthuma/63043307934>.

19 <http://magiaposthuma.blogspot.com/2007/05/welcome-to-magiaposthuma.html>.

20 Really Simple Syndication (RSS) is a web feed: a data format that allows web browsers or other applications to obtain frequently updated content.

I was, however, apprehensive about going online with my interest in the subject. The internet is full of web sites, blogs, mailing lists and forums about vampires, and most of them are either mainly associated with the vampires of fiction or cater for subcultures inspired by fictional vampires. So I was concerned about being considered another »vampire freak«.

Consequently I felt that I had to dissociate myself from other web sites about vampires. For that reason I chose to rather use the term *magia posthuma* and use it as a kind of »brand«, as it could stress my emphasis on the historical context and a broader and serious approach to the subject.

As for the format, I needed one that would allow me to add information and communicate with others without spending too much time on it at a time, so that it would be easy to update it frequently. The weblog<sup>16</sup> (or simply: blog) format seemed most suitable for these purposes.

So on May 2, 2007 I published my first blog post on a Blogger<sup>17</sup> blog called *Magia Posthuma*:<sup>18</sup>

#### *Welcome to Magia Posthuma*

There are literally thousands of web sites on vampires, but practically none of them are dedicated to the themes that are of particular interest to me. My primary aim is to understand what happened in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century cases of vampirism, how people viewed and debated these occurrences, and how they are related to the general evolution of ideas, society, and religion. I want to get the historical facts right, and I want to understand the thoughts and backgrounds of the people who investigated and wrote about vampires.

In creating this blog it is my hope that I will get in touch with other people around the world who like me are intrigued by the facts and thoughts of those early modern Europeans who tried to investigate and understand vampire cases, in particular those that occurred on the periphery of the Habsburg empire during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. To stress that this is the primary subject for this blog, I have decided to name it ***Magia Posthuma***: posthumous magic, which was the term used by some writers of that day to describe the phenomena of uncorrupted corpses harassing the living and the means used to stop the activities of these corpses.<sup>19</sup>

Initial posts concerned my search for the book *Magia Posthuma*, Gerard van Swieten, various 18<sup>th</sup> century texts on vampires, texts available on the internet, a Yugoslavian TV vampire movie, and recent books about vampires and other related subjects. I chose to write the posts in a more formal, »intellectual«, and even arrogant style.

Slowly, the number of visits grew and I began receiving comments and e-mails from visitors. To avoid spam and harassment comments were allowed by moderation only.

The number of visitors has remained relatively limited. As of mid June 2009 there were typically between 20 and 40 unique visitors a day, and approximately 600 unique visitors a month. Apart from these, there are those who subscribe to either RSS feeds<sup>20</sup> or e-mails from the blog. By mid June 2009 there were around 50–70 subscribers to RSS feeds, and about 10 e-mail subscribers.



Graphical presentation from Google Analytics of the geographical distribution and number of visits (»Besøg«) to the *Magia Posthuma* blog during one month: from June 22 to July 22, 2009.

21 <http://magiaposthuma.blogspot.com/2008/09/visum-et-repertum.html>

22 <http://doav.blogspot.com/2008/07/just-quick-one.html>

23 Michael Szollosy on his blog *Excretera*: <http://michaelszollosy.blogspot.com/2008/08/magia-posthuma.html>

Some of the most visited blog posts are the ones presenting more in depth information on original vampire sources, e.g., concerning source texts or the Medveđa vampire case.<sup>21</sup> As for what people are searching for when following a link to the blog, by mid June 2009 the »top 10« of most popular search terms were:

1. Magia posthuma
2. De cruentationibus cadaverum
3. Ferdinand de Schertz
4. Vlado Vlačić
5. *Magia Posthuma* by Karl Ferdinand von Schertz
6. Vampire cases
7. Visum et Repertum
8. 1740, Maria Theresa, werewolves
9. 18<sup>th</sup> century Vienna
10. Princess Eleonore von Schwarzenberg

In general the feedback has been very positive. It has come from like minded people, »fans« of vampires or horror fiction, school pupils, graduate students, PhD students, researchers, and people who just happened to stumble on the blog. I have even been contacted by a couple of people who claim to be descendants of 18<sup>th</sup> century persons related to the history of vampires.

I am told by visitors that my blog has stimulated their interest in the subject, even influenced some project choices of students and researchers. It has also been an inspiration for other bloggers, including the so-called *Amateur Vampirologist* from Australia who mentioned »Niels K. Petersen's brilliant *Magia Posthuma*« as one of the sources of inspiration in his initial post to the blog *Diary of an Amateur Vampirologist*.<sup>22</sup>

Generally, the blog has been linked to and mentioned in a number of other blogs. It was e.g. referred to this way by a lecturer in literature and psychoanalysis on his blog:

*Magia Posthuma* is a blog dedicated to the study of vampires, but not in a vulgar, another-goth- freak-thinking-death-is-cool sort of way. As the blog's mission statement makes clear, it's about contextualising the idea of the vampire in the social and cultural history of knowledge.

It is the sort of history, the sort of project, that Foucault would applaud, and one that I find particularly fascinating.<sup>23</sup>

So far the blog has only experienced one slight case of harassment, by someone using the *nom de plume* »The Overseer«. The harassment included appropriating a portion of text from my blog, which was however removed on my request.

**Magia posthuma by Karl Ferdinand von Schertz**

24 At the Národní knihovna České republiky in Prague, and at the Benediktinské opatství Rajhrad.

25 <http://magiaposthuma.blogspot.com/2007/05/carl-ferdinand-von-schertz-magia.html>.

26 Ranft, Michael: *Tractat von dem Kauen und Schmatzen der Todten in Gräbern*. Leipzig: Teubner 1734.

27 The *Remarques* were not published until 1756 in Italian, and in 1768 in German. According to the *Vorrede* to the translation in *Abhandlung des Daseyns der Gespenster* (Augsburg 1768), the text was actually translated into German already in 1756: »Sie ist bald hernach im Hornung 1756. von einer gleichfalls gründlichen Feder ins Deutsche versetzt worden.« I am, however, not aware, if this translation was actually published.

28 Theresianisches Gesetzbuch. Vol. III. Wien: Joh. Georg Mößle 1786, p. 172.

29 Calmet 1751, Tome II, p. 36.

Although I have obtained some information on the whereabouts of Karl Ferdinand von Schertz's *Magia Posthuma* with the help of the visitors of my blog, it was through my own efforts that was finally able to point the *Royal Library* in the direction of a copy.

My search has made me aware of three copies of the book, two in the Czech Republic<sup>24</sup> and one at the *Bibliothèque municipale de Nancy* in France. As Augustin Calmet was an abbot in Nancy before going to Senones Abbey in 1719, it is likely that the copy in Nancy was the one that Calmet himself read. An anonymous visitor to the blog notified me of this copy.<sup>25</sup>

In the fall of 2007 I was finally able to review a microfilm copy of von Schertz's *Magia Posthuma per Juridicum illud Pro & Contra Suspenspo Nonnullibi Judicio Investigata*. Judging from the book alone, it must have been written no later than early 1704, as the approbation of censors are dated February and July 1704.

In his preface von Schertz notes that: »leges isthic quiddam non facilè lectum alibi«, i.e. what the reader reads in his book would not have been easy to read elsewhere before. So, von Schertz is conscious of the fact that previously very little had been written on this particular subject, and his book may actually be the first one to use the term *magia posthuma*.

Curiously, the term and von Schertz's book seem to have disappeared from the literature until Calmet's *Dissertation* in 1746. Neither the term nor the book is mentioned in the numerous articles on vampires in the journal *Commercii litterarii ad rei medicae et scientiae naturalis*. Michael Ranft who claims to have reviewed »alle von dieser Materie bißher zum Vorschein gekommene Schrifften« does not mention the book in his comprehensive list of books on vampires.<sup>26</sup> Even the Catholic Archbishop Giuseppe Davanzati mentions neither the book nor the term in his posthumously published *Dissertazione sopra i vampiri* (1774).

But after Calmet referred to von Schertz's book in the first edition of his *Dissertation* in 1746, the term *magia posthuma* is used in 1755 by Gerard van Swieten in his *Remarques sur les Vampyrisme de Silesie de l'an 1755*<sup>27</sup> and by Maria Theresia in her March 1 1755 order No 385 *Der Aberglauben ist abzustellen*.<sup>28</sup>

The connection between vampires and *magia posthuma* is even more explicit in the introduction to the 1768 German translation of van Swieten's *Remarques*, as they are identified as one and the same phenomenon:

Der Aberglauben vom Vampyrismus wird lateinisch *Magia Posthuma*, oder Zauberey der Abgestorbenen, genennet.

Von Schertz, however, does not use the word »vampire« in any form. Most likely he did not know the word. Furthermore there is no mention of blood sucking in *Magia Posthuma*. The closest one comes, is this sentence:

Pecora quoque mortificantur: vaccæ velut exsangves reperiuntur prostratæ.  
[The cattle were also killed: Cows were found prostrate as if bloodless.]

Evidently *Magia Posthuma* was neither a widely read book, nor a book about vampires *per se*, and it seems to have had no impact on the vampire debate before Calmet's *Dissertation*.

Having von Schertz's book at hand, it is possible to compare Calmet's references with the original text, e.g., in this short passage where Calmet reports from von Schertz that:

et l'on a vu depuis peu à Olmuz, continue toujours notre auteur, un spectre qui jetait des pierres, et causait de grands troubles aux habitants.<sup>29</sup>  
[And within a short time, continues our author, a spectre was seen at Olmutz, which threw stones, and caused great trouble to the inhabitants.]

Calmet based this on the following passage in von Schertz's book:

Recentissimè Olomucij Moravorum spectrum turbulentias cievisse lapidum projectione viderunt incolæ. Déque tali lapidum projectione meretur legi Delrio Almæ Societatis JESU gloriosus scriptor. Disquis: mag: 2.27. 2.15.  
[Recently the inhabitants of Olmutz in Moravia saw a spectre who caused alarm by throwing stones. About such throwing of stones one should read Del Rio, the famed author of the Society of Jesus, Disquis. Mag. Book 2, questions 27 and 15].

30 In his partial translation, Del Rio, Martín: Investigation Into Magic. Manchester: Manchester UP 2000, P.G. Maxwell-Stuart prefers to translate »daemon« as »evil spirit«, cf. p. 25.

31 »Dæmones lapides iacere queant & alia huiusmodi operari, quæ videntur manus & corpora instrumenta requirere.«

32 »Qui idem casus una demonstrat, non veram esse illam sententiam famosissimi (utroque sensu) Hobbezij: non dari ulla spectra.«

33 Emler, Josef (Ed.): Fontes rerum bohemicarum 3. Hildesheim: Olms 2004.

34 »Acsi, inquam, incorruptio non ex causis naturalibus proveniret!«

35 Die Stellung des Deutschen Ordens zum Aberglauben am Beispiel der Herrschaften Freudenthal und Eulenburg. In: Arnold, Udo: Von Akkon bis Wien: Studien zur Deutschordensgeschichte vom 13. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert. Marburg: Elwert 1978, pp. 261-271.

Here von Schertz refers to parts of the second book of Martin Del Rio's famous *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex* (1599-1600), where this Jesuit theologian discusses demons or evil spirits<sup>30</sup> that are able to throw stones and work other things which would otherwise require hands and bodily instruments.<sup>31</sup>

Apparently Calmet was mainly interested in extracting information about the revenants and the way they were treated, whereas von Schertz carefully established the connection to prevalent legal and theological literature. Von Schertz's aim was to analyze how to handle instances of *magia posthuma* in practice: Would the practice of, e.g., burning the corpses suspected of posthumous magic be permitted from a legal point of view, and could there be alternative ways of dealing with these spectres?

So, *Magia Posthuma* is a book in the tradition of Catholic demonology, relying on various Jesuit authorities. Von Schertz certainly does not question the existence of posthumous magic or of *spectra*, spectres. In fact, at the end of his thorough examination of a particular case, he notes that it refutes the claim of Thomas Hobbes that spectres do not exist.<sup>32</sup>

The 118 unpaginated pages of von Schertz's *Magia Posthuma* overall consists of

1. a dedication to Charles Joseph of Lorraine (1680–1715), bishop of Olomouc (1695–1711),
2. an introduction,
3. a discussion and analysis of a case of *magia posthuma* along with further examples,
4. an appendix of sources and even more examples,
5. some further questions (*quæstiunculæ*),
6. the approbation of the censors.

The case of posthumous magic concerns a woman (referred to as »Mævia«, anywoman) who in life had been suspected of magic, but despite having received the last rites and being buried in consecrated ground, returned to haunt and harm both men and cattle. It is extensively retold by Calmet.

Von Schertz gives away neither the name of the village where it occurred (he only refers to it as: »in Pago N.«), nor the year in which the events took place, and so far I have not been able to identify the case with any of those mentioned in the literature.

The most prominent further examples of *magia posthuma* mentioned by von Schertz are from the same region of Europe and are well-known in the literature on vampires, namely the stories of the shepherd from Blov, and the »witch« of Levin. Both tales are from the 14<sup>th</sup> century and recounted in the *Kronika Neplachova*.<sup>33</sup> Von Schertz knew them only from the later chronicler Hagecius (Václav Hájek z Libočan), whose original text on the former case he reprints in the Czech language with a translation into Latin.

Von Schertz takes the sceptical point of view of a lawyer and examines the cases and the *modus operandi* carried out to stop the spectres. He, e.g., discusses the notion that incorruptibility is a sign of posthumous magic, and points out that incorruptibility can in fact be caused by natural means,<sup>34</sup> and here he once again refers to Del Rio. Furthermore he suggests that instead of exhuming and burning the corpse, one might try exorcising it by masses and prayer, because he himself has experienced that as being helpful against »den Polter-Geist«.

The nature of the haunting related to *magia posthuma* – usually referred to by von Schertz by words meaning »running around«, e.g., »circumcursitat Spectrum« – is of a kind not typically attributed to vampires, cf. the abovementioned stone throwing spectre. Obviously the spectres haunt the living in various guises and cause a lot of alarm and tumult. In that sense it seems appropriate to use the term *Poltergeist*, which is also the term chosen by Winfred Irgang in his paper on the subject.<sup>35</sup> But even phenomena usually related to *incubi* and *succubae* are connected to the spectres. A witness in the case concerning »Mævia« testifies that

Vidi Mæviam, prout erat in vivis: Incuba immisit s.v. in os meum urinam; quæ viscera, velut ignis urebat, & nequij tantæ resistere violentiæ; quam tum ab ipsa [...] perpeusus eram.  
[I saw Mævia, just as she was when alive. Sitting on top of me she let urine into my mouth, her flesh burned like fire, and I could not resist the force. How I then suffered from her.]

36 »Erat de magia suspecta, ut pote  
Psevdobenedictionibus deblaterandis  
dedita, amuletis mirabilibus mederi  
solita.«

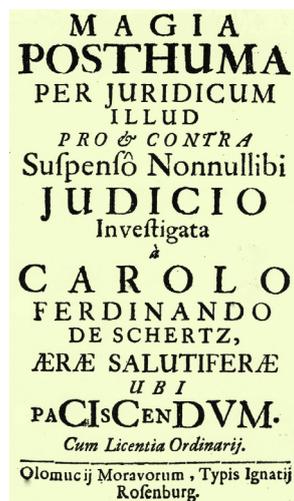
Other witnesses clearly accused the old woman of being a witch (*malefica*), although von Schertz says that the accusations only concerned »pseudo-blessings« and amulets.<sup>36</sup>

After much deliberation on what to do based on various judicial points of view, von Schertz concludes that if the woman was considered to have been a witch, she would have been burned at the stake if she was found guilty of the crime while alive, but now that she was dead she could be punished in a similar fashion posthumously.

He also mentions the belief that the *magia posthuma* of one cadaver can spread to other corpses, even though they had belonged to people who were not guilty of witchcraft (»Der gemeine Mann glaubet, es pflüge das erste Gespenst, die andere todte nach-begrabene Körper anzublasen.«). Consequently he found good reason to deal with corpses suspected of posthumous magic.

Although apparently von Schertz's *Magia Posthuma* was not widely read, it provides an insight into the revenant beliefs of the Moravian populace and in particular into the way revenant cases were considered and handled by the authorities in this part of Europe at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, it presents us with an interesting link between witchcraft and revenant cases in that region of Europe.

But *Magia Posthuma* is more than a historical document. Through Calmet the title of von Schertz's book has entered popular culture as a household name in the literature on vampires, cropping up in the fictional library of »Baron Vordenburg« in Sheridan Le Fanu's short story *Carmilla*, and even lending its title to the name of a Belgian »black metal« rock band, before I borrowed the title and term for my blog *Magia Posthuma* in 2007.



Karl Ferdinand von Schertz: *Magia posthuma* (published 1704 or 1706).

### The Future of the *Magia Posthuma* Blog

It can be difficult to evaluate the effect a blog has. Only a minority of the blog's visitors can be expected to give feedback, and the impact it has on the visitors is difficult to assess.

Evaluated on the feedback I have received, very few people seem to be actively involved in the study of the historical vampire. However, people seem to get easily interested in, perhaps even fascinated by the approach to the subject that the *Magia Posthuma* blog represents. In that respect I hope that I have inspired others in their understanding of the subject of vampires, perhaps even inspired new research into this or related topics.

From a personal point of view the blog has provided me with a platform for promoting my own views and theories, as well as for getting into contact with people with a similar interest. Because of the blog I have had the pleasure of getting in touch with a few like minded people around the world, and I have received some pleasant feedback and useful information.

The blog format, however, is very sensitive to the blogger's other activities, i.e. to the amount of time the blogger has available for blogging. Since it started in May 2007, the *Magia Posthuma* blog has seen long periods of almost daily updates, but also periods of



## **MAGIA POSTHUMA**

by Niels K. Petersen (Copenhagen)

infrequent activity. Although any blogger wishes to keep his blog frequently updated, it is perhaps also difficult to go on writing new information on vampires day after day over several years. In any case, the *Magia Posthuma* blog is a *con amore* project, so there will probably continue to be both peaks and troughs in blog activity. But as long as I am involved in excavating more information on vampires and *magia posthuma*, and while there is no other recurring source of similar information and debate on the subject, the *Magia Posthuma* blog should have a future.



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