

# IUN

## International Upire News

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**Catalunya (Catalonia)**

*Paisos Catalans (Catalan Nations)*

## **Sofia's New Dramatic Theatre Opens Season**

The Sofia New Dramatic Theatre "Salza i Smyah" opened its doors for the new season on Monday morning after it was fully renovated.

The Culture Ministry spends BGN 888,000 for the refurbishing of the stage and the hall. The new season will kick off officially on Monday evening with the play "Beautiful bodies" with actresses Silviya Lulcheva, Stefaniya Koleva, Iskra Angeloga and singer Antoaneta Dobрева, aka Neti.

In November the theatre will stage the premiere of "Vampire" by Anton Strashimirov, the director of the theatre Pavel Vashev said at the press conference. Now scientists are examining three dead dogs she found near her ranch in Cuero, Texas, to see if they are a new breed or mutated from wild ones.

Novinite.com, 1 Oct. 2007

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## **Frankenstein, Dracula and the birth of the modern-day vampire**

NEW YORK - Turns out that vampires weren't always as sexy and seductive as Dracula. Benita Blessing, a history professor at Ohio University, who teaches a popular course called Vampires in Myth and History, says that vampires have existed in myth for centuries. But mostly the creatures preyed on peasants and paupers, and they left the higher reaches of society alone. According to Blessing, that changed with a tale made famous by association with poet Lord Byron in the 19th century. One night in Switzerland, Lord Byron and his guest Mary Shelly and others were sitting around the fireplace telling ghost stories. He challenged them all to write a spooky story. From that meeting Shelly produced the famous "Frankenstein." A lesser known author named John Polidori penned a poorly written tale about a titular vampire known as Lord Ruthven who was high-class, attractive and smooth in addition to being deadly. His similarities to Byron were striking. The story was published without an author and people initially thought Byron had wrote it and was making fun of himself. Polidori, alas, didn't garner much fame, but his description of a creature with grey flashing eyes who was attractive to the ladies lived on. A short while later, Bram Stoker wrote "Dracula," and the myth of the vampire changed forever.

Agencies, 10 Oct

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## Chinese 'Vampire' gets two months in jail

Everyone gets a little thirsty after a bender -- but there's no excuse for drinking blood. Li Man-yiu of Hong Kong was sentenced to two months behind bars, one for each vial of blood he downed while in a drunken stupor at Yan Chai Hospital last September. The 28-year-old, dubbed "vampire" by the ever-so-creative local media, claimed "he did not realize the contents of the vials until he finished the second one," and according to the Hong Kong Standard, "then went to the washroom where he vomited." The local magistrate was reportedly lenient with his sentencing since "stupidity," not blood lust, was to blame.

Emil Steiner

Blog.washingtonpost.co, 16 Oct.

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## The real vampire slayers

In 2004, Romanian police were called to investigate the desecration of a grave in a remote village just south of Transylvania. What they discovered there could have come straight from a Hammer Horror film. Here, renowned cannibalism expert Dr Timothy Taylor revisits the scene of the crime

My first trip to the Romanian province of Transylvania in 1981 was a subject of wonder to many of my friends. They assumed it to be as fictional as Anthony Hope's Ruritania, made up by Hammer Horror as a pastiche of the dark heart of Europe and shot, day-for-night, in a Forestry Commission plantation near Elstree. The reality, with Ceausescu in power and an oppressed peasantry, cocksure secret police force, rampant criminality, simmering ethnic problems, little or no food, bears, wild boar, wolves, truly vicious dogs with spiked collars of medieval design, and unspoilt mountain meadows of breathtaking beauty was... well, quite clearly another reality. I was captivated, and returned several times up until 1988, making friends, getting in fixes, and attempting to steep myself in the language and culture.

I mention this as a preamble to an account of something that happened in a country cemetery in 2004, and my experiences interviewing those involved, because it might be easy to think that I have some mission to depict primitivism and reveal barbaric practices. In fact, what I will describe is deeply cultural and appears rough and brutal only to our insulated and sometimes rather vacuous sensibilities.

As an archaeologist specialising in things visceral, such as human sacrifice and cannibalism, I was travelling with my anthropological colleague, Professor Kathryn Denning, and a film crew, making a documentary about the sources of Bram Stoker's iconic vampire, Count Dracula. This meant encounters with haematologists, the lawyers of convicted blood-drinking psychopaths, London Zoo's dentist (a world expert on

fangs), cultists in a New York S&M club and vampire bats in Brazil. The Romanian leg of our investigation was, in part, to reveal the true "Dracula", the 15th-century warlord, Vlad the Impaler, whose name Stoker stole for his anti-hero, and partly to visit a sleepy village in the Romanian plains which had briefly been, unwillingly, in the media spotlight.

Before telling the tale of the Toma family, from the village of Marotinu de Sus, and what was done to the corpse of Petre Toma, the head of the clan, it is worth noting a few things about vampires – what they are and are not, what vampire specialists argue about, and the universal fears and behaviours embodied in the myth and the reality.

Folklorists agree that there was an outbreak of vampirism in Eastern Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. Individuals committing strange and/or aggressive behaviours, from earth-eating to rape, terrorised communities. Some people later claimed to have seen the perpetrators as living corpses, continuing the same activities after their recorded deaths. The Spanish neurologist Juan Gomez-Alonso believes that a rabies outbreak caused the panic, as the disease increases sexual aggression as well as causing hydrophobia and sensitivity to light, a more esoteric theory points to the rare blood disease porphyria, which restricts sufferers to solely nocturnal activities. In any case, the scares became a mass hysteria which the church authorities, compromised by their need not to undermine belief in the possibility of actual physical resurrection, were ill-equipped to counter. At times, indeed, they joined in the disinterment and staking of the "problematic" dead.

Fear of the dead, and of people who cannot die properly because they were not born – or did not live – is found in many places around the world, as are beliefs that blood is an animating force. And corpses – as every forensic pathologist knows – are not always tractable outside a climate-controlled morgue. They swell and bloat and bleed and change colour; mouths gape; teeth bare themselves; the skin recedes from fingernails and sinks in around stubble giving a semblance of continued vitality, the dead may clench their fists and, by degrees, sit up. Sometimes they even explode, a feature that requires a degree of circumspection from any stake-wielding wannabe Buffy. Perhaps because of this, there is more than one way to deal with a vampire.

There is no agreement on the etymology of the word vampire. It may come from an old Tartar word, *umpyr*, meaning a witch or demon, or it may be a Slavic word meaning a nocturnal flying spirit. In any case, the Romanians prefer not to have vampires: they have enough to be getting on with with the local *strigoi* and *moroi* (two forms of undead), and the *varcolak* (essentially a ravaging lycanthropist).

Petre Toma died just before Christmas 2003. Often there are reasons to believe that a man, and less often a woman, is in danger of becoming a *strigoi*. As a child, they may have cut their upper teeth before the lower ones; or a cat may have leapt over, or a bat flown over the newly dead corpse as it was left out, under vigil, in the family kitchen. In Toma's case there were no prior signs, though neighbours' and family accounts of his life vary a good family man, but also (hardly unusual in the rural depths) a heavy drinker with a temper. After his death, his niece suffered nightmares and appeared

seriously ill. She claimed that her uncle was visiting her at night and feeding from her heart; that he was a strigoi. Toma's brother determined to act. The sequence of events was normal for Marotinu de Sus but, through a constellation of circumstances to do with urbanisation and Romania's imminent acceptance into the EU, became rapidly notorious. There were many newspaper reports, all equally lurid, and each with plausible features, but their information was often contradictory. So Kathryn and I were lucky to arrive in Marotinu de Sus with the Romanian social anthropologist Mihai Fifor. We were also lucky, as it turned out, that the local constabulary had instructed Petre Toma's brother not to talk to us (local TV footage, which we viewed later, depicted a very intemperate-looking man). Thus left us in the cemetery at the edge of the village nearly, but not quite, alone.

Fifor proved a good guide, and we wandered through the graves, taking care not to fall into them. This was not always easy, as the form of the cemetery allows easy access to corpses. Wide cracks and gaps in concrete capstones reveal skulls and long bones spilling from broken coffins. Most graves are for couples, and some are preparatory, with the names engraved but the dead absent. The filled graves are marked by sometimes elaborate stone crosses (modelled on the posh cemeteries in town), but only ever in addition to the wooden ones, recalling Christ's, the sine qua non of proper burial. I asked Fifor why many of the graves had little hearths in front of them, with the remains of cooked food and sometimes a wine glass. "Well," he replied, "this is where the village women light fires on the three nights from Maundy Thursday - it's to give the dead some light. The dead are cold and afraid of the dark, and they are often hungry and thirsty." The dead of this cemetery are diligently cared for during the first seven years. After that, the skeleton is washed in wine and returned to become increasingly disarticulated; the soul is presumed to be in heaven, nourished by prayer.

Even more critical than the first seven years are the first 40 days. During this period, a corpse may be an unquiet strigoi, moving in its grave and travelling at night in a not quite re-embodied form, to feed off the blood of the living. After 40 days it will morph into moroi - the actual, incarnate, walking dead, able to appear during the day and mount vicious attacks. As Fifor explained the theoretical background, we were challenged by an old fellow brandishing a very large scythe.

There is nothing like fear and anxiety for prompting the recall of useful foreign phrases, and my rather rusty Romanian began to creak into action. My greeting allayed the swearing about foreigners and the demand that we get out of the cemetery. Ten minutes later there was a handshake, and then a long and increasingly engaged conversation. I had good malt in my pocket which, produced at an appropriate moment, extended the cultural meeting further than I had reckoned. It ended in a very wet, full-on-the-lips, kiss.

If I had known in advance that I'd have to snog an old man in a cemetery, I probably could not have imagined a more decent partner than Niculae Pedescu - at 76 or 78 years old (he's not sure) he had the steady eye of a man who has learnt enough to not care about anything other than the truth. He had been present at more than one event where

strigoi were dealt with. He had not been at Toma's grave in 2003, but the proceedings had apparently gone to form, at least at first

After the niece became ill, he said, Petre's brother had had to wait, because he could not act within the 12 days of Christmas. On 8 January, the corpse was checked and deemed to be a strigoi. At midnight the next day, six men disinterred it and cut open the chest. I asked Niculae what they used for this and he looked at me as if I was mad, before brandishing his scythe again. Apparently, the chest was cut crosswise with a scythe tip, and the heart removed through the ribcage. Again, I asked what tools had been used. This time we needed help to interpret the words and gestures. It was with a growing image of James Whale's 1931 classic *Frankenstein* that I understood Fifor to say, as neutrally as possible, "He says it was with a pitchfork. Yes." The subsequent description failed utterly to dispel my horror-film image. The men took the heart, spiked aloft, to the crossroads outside the village. There they roasted it over a brazier and, as far as I could understand, stuffed glowing coals into the ventricles. Held up in the night sky, the heart shed charred flakes that were caught in a tea towel. These were taken to the niece's house, ground up and mixed in a glass of water. "The niece drank it," Fifor confirmed, "and in the morning she said she felt better... in this way she was cured."

None of this would have come to public attention had it not been for a family rift. One of Toma's daughters, who had married an urbanite, was outraged. She alerted the police who dug Toma up again in full view of the public and media. His body was examined in a procedure one would be hard-pushed to call forensic. Although in village terms, this was desecration, that was what the court found Toma's brother guilty of, and he received a prison sentence. It was only through the intervention of Fifor, who was able to articulate the logic of peasant traditions, that this was commuted, although not quashed.

After Niculae left with his trophy from Scotland, Kathryn and I wandered in the cemetery while the crew took pictures. We met two women, one quite old, and one so old that she was blind and scared of us. She seemed to think that Kathryn was some kind of visiting angel. She and Kathryn drifted off leaving me with the other woman, who told me about how her husband had himself been in danger of becoming a strigoi. Tending his grave with drink and flowers, she chatted to him in a three-way conversation, deferring to him on particular facts. As a child, he had suckled his mother while she slept, and the mother had therefore told her daughter-in-law, my collocutor, to be sure to put a silver needle through his heart when he died. He had made her promise to do this to allow him peaceful rest, and she confirmed to me that she had done so. Her matter-of-factness no longer surprised me, but I was taken aback when she asked me whether I would like to go with her and "make pee-pee" behind the graves. The twinkle in her eye and a taunting laugh at the dead man interred under a few inches of mould beneath us left me in no doubt that this was a come-on.

In England, before we set out, I'd had a T-shirt made for Kathryn which I thought might be a fun thing to use when we were filming; in the end, the sentiment did not suit the breezy format of the *Real Vampires* show. The slogan read: *Iar umbra fetei stravezii!* E

alba ca de ceara/ Un mort frumos cu ochii vii/ Ce scinteie-\* afara The words are from "Lucifer", one of the greatest poems of Mihai Eminescu, and mean something like: "His shadowed and translucent gaze/ Is white as candle wax/ A handsome corpse with living eyes/ Flickering like hot embers" The events in Marotinu de Sus, and the things that were said to me in the cemetery, were unforgettably lively and vital. There was no denial of death in the eyes of the old people tending the dead. But sadness was leavened with wit and gallows-humour. And above and behind all that, there was a sure sense of the art of living as souls within wayward bodies

Dr Timothy Taylor  
news.independent.co.uk, 28 Oct.

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### **Vampires in Afghanistan? Soldiers say it's true**

(Salem, Ore.) - During my two months on assignment in the Afghanistan combat theater last winter, I covered all kinds of military operations for Salem-News.com and Oregon's KFTV FOX-12. While I was there I spent time on forward combat bases, I went on infantry foot patrols, flew in helicopters, and witnessed levels of disparity that were hard to imagine.

But the only time I thought I was going to vomit in that faraway land was when a very strange American soldier found it necessary to tell me about the Afghan vampires. Call it a coincidence, maybe it was the coffee, I will never know for sure, but twenty minutes with this guy sent me running for the men's room.

I've been asked to write more about the haunted side of Afghanistan, so I figured the vampire story would have to be told. I can't say I had ever heard of an Afghan vampire, though you can sort of imagine it in that ancient place. Now I learn that Director John Moore's new movie *Virulents* is about lost soldiers in Afghanistan who stumble upon a nest of vampire zombies. It is a strange coincidence at best, but the notion of Afghan vamps is certainly nothing new.

The day I met this soldier I was at the Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan, waiting for a series of flights which would lead me to Kyrgyzstan, then Turkey, then Germany and then back to the states.

I don't know why this soldier decided to approach my friend and I, there were plenty of soldiers around, but he walked up and almost instantly asked if we knew about the vampire problems people in the local area experienced. My friend Rick was a major who had spent most of his time at Camp Phoenix at Kabul, I on the other hand had moved around the country to several places, but I'd only spent part of a day at Bagram. Neither of us had heard anything about Afghan vampires.

This soldier said it was common lore in the area, and that the vampires struck horror in the hearts of the people around certain parts of Afghanistan more than the Taliban.

"They are really terrified of them," he said. "It scares people half to death if they just think one is around," he said.

Tim King

Salem-News.com, 29 Oct.

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## **Trail doesn't go dead for archaeologists traveling back in time**

Beliefs about spirits coming in the night to eat the flesh of the living were pervasive among early New Englanders, and may have inspired the creator of "Dracula" -- and fear of blood-sucking vampires lurking in the night.

Although it is unlikely that the early settlers of Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont and New Hampshire used the term "vampire," historical evidence shows rampant belief in the undead.

Unlike modern interpretations involving imposing castles, pale faces and menacing bats, vampires that were perceived to lurk in the backwoods and farmlands of Connecticut looked more like malnourished farmers.

"We have found evidence of a vampire folk belief throughout New England," said Nicholas Bellantoni said, Connecticut's state archaeologist. "The accounts we have documented have primarily shown up in rural areas, with hot spots in eastern Connecticut and western Rhode Island."

The fears may have been stoked by an outbreak of tuberculosis, which caused extreme abdominal pain, particularly at night when lying down. Some victims bled from their mouths, said Michael Bell, a Rhode Island author and folklore expert.

Tuberculosis was the leading cause of death in 19th-century New England, accounting for 25 percent of all deaths at the time, Bell said.

Although there were reports of unearthing the dead because of fears of vampires in Chicago, northern Pennsylvania and upstate New York, the folklore is rooted in New England, Bell said.

People did not understand germs or the disease, or how it spread, Bellantoni said.

"The idea of the undead was used to explain the epidemic death," he said.

About two dozen cases of what could be considered vampirism were reported in five New England states from about 1784 to 1892, Bell said.

"When these family members died and other people began to suffer similar symptoms, some people believed the people who died could spread the disease," Bellantoni said.

"People were dying and had no way to explain why."

Bellantoni compared this spread of tuberculosis with diseases that are not understood today



"These people were frightened and trying to save loved ones. They were willing to do whatever was necessary to save their lives," he said.

It is more than coincidence that the vampires the farmers feared share traits with Bram Stoker's "Dracula," he said.

"Stoker had newspaper articles of New England and New York cases," Bellantoni said.

"He was collecting evidence on the undead from around the world."

All the documented cases in New England occurred outside the Puritan heartland of Massachusetts and central and western Connecticut, Bell said. They took place in "fringe" areas where folk practices migrated from Eastern Europe, he said.

Dr. Michael Parry, director of infectious diseases and microbiology at Stamford Hospital, said tuberculosis, a highly contagious respiratory illness, is almost always spread through droplets in the air. It usually travels to the lungs and battles the immune system for about two weeks. It could become dormant for decades before flaring up again when the immune system weakens.

Victims primarily had severe cough, fever and weight loss.

"As the illness progresses, the cough could become bloody and include chest pains," Parry said. "It goes on for months and months and becomes increasingly worse."

A victim might develop nightmares or delusions from the fever, and leave blood on their bed linens from coughing -- things that some believed were caused by vampires.

Bell studied one victim in southeastern Connecticut known as JB who is believed to have died between 1820 and 1840 in Griswold near the Rhode Island border.

"On the lid of the hexagonal, wooden coffin, an arrangement of brass tacks spelled out 'JB-55,' presumably the initials and age at death of this individual," Bell wrote in his book, "Food for the Dead: On the Trail of New England's Vampires." "When the grave was opened, JB's skull and thigh bones were found in a skull and crossbones pattern on top of his ribs and vertebrae, which was also rearranged."

Bell and Bellantoni concluded the grave was opened five to 10 years after JB's death and his bones rearranged with the hope of preventing his spirit from terrorizing the village.

"We do find certain references, about 22, that mention this going on," Bellantoni said.

"One is from a doctor. He was outraged people were going into the graves. He ... wrote an article in the local newspaper saying this should not be done."

Two brothers, Elisha and Lemuel Ray, also in Griswold, were exhumed and burned in the hope of saving the life of their brother, Henry Ray, in 1854, though he died months later.

People sometimes dug up a person they suspected was a vampire, burned the heart and fed the ashes to a victim, Bell said. In other cases, they burned the entire body and had the victim inhale the ashes. Most people avoided speaking about the taboo practice.

Similar cases were reported in West Stafford, Conn.; Exeter, West Greenwich, Foster and Cumberland, R.I.; Plymouth, Mass.; Barnstead and Loudon, N.H.; and Woodstock, Manchester and Dummerston, Vt.

"We do know it was going on," Bellantoni said. "These are probably not families who want to do this but are doing it as a last resort to save a loved one."

After the publication of "Dracula" in 1897, vampire rituals seemed to stop, he said.

"Two things, I think, are happening," he said. "In the late 1880s, you're getting a more medical answer where there's a scientific approach and information of how to deal with the disease, and once 'Dracula' addresses it, it becomes a huge social stigma."

Jamie DeLoma

Greenwich Time, 31 Oct.

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