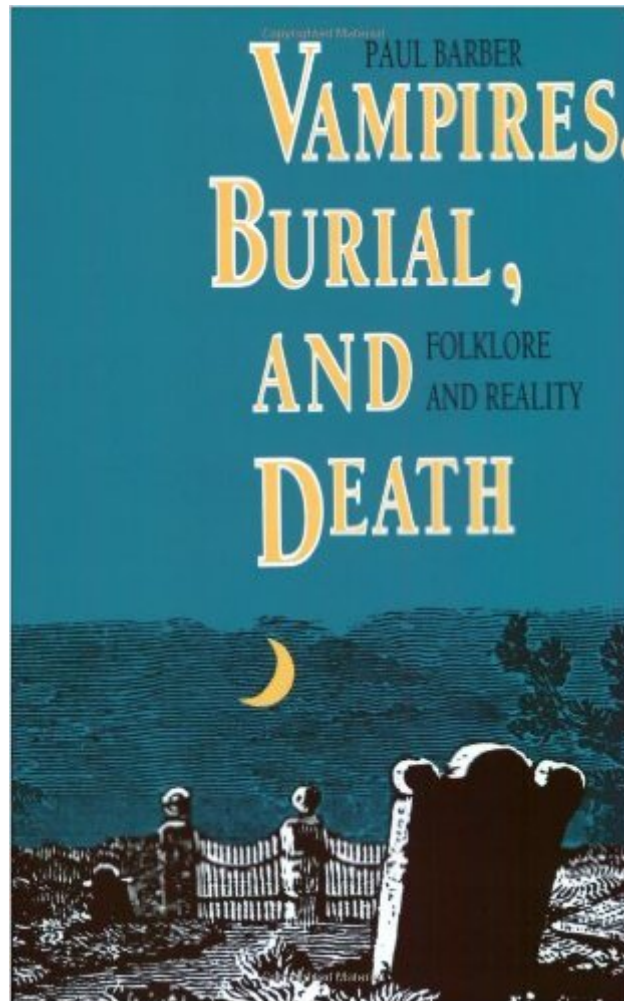


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Vampires, Burial, And Death: Folklore And Reality



Synopsis

In this engrossing book, Paul Barber surveys centuries of folklore about vampires and offers the first scientific explanation for the origins of the vampire legends. From the tale of a sixteenth-century shoemaker from Breslau whose ghost terrorized everyone in the city, to the testimony of a doctor who presided over the exhumation and dissection of a graveyard full of Serbian vampires, his book is fascinating reading.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Warning: gross discussions of corpses, and the handling thereof, ahead. It's good that Paul Barber can take his vampire studies with a bit of humor; I'd be sad if he had forgotten the comical roots of what became a very serious scholarly study of attitudes toward death. Hence in the middle of a very long and interesting section on what, specifically, happens to bodies after death, we have the footnote on page 163 that begins, "While we are dwelling on the unutterably loathsome . . ." and this one on 176: "I would guess that Giure Grando's cry resulted from the manipulation of the corpse but can really not say much about the matter, since I almost never have occasion to decapitate a corpse with a shovel." The process of decomposition is endlessly fascinating -- something I realized vaguely, but not really in detail until I read Barber's book. For instance, it hadn't occurred to me that dumping a body in the water -- even with a good bit of weight -- is often not enough to keep it down; bacteria in the intestines produce a great quantity of methane, which often make the body swell to twice or three times its living volume. Hence if you really want to kill someone and dump his body in

the water, you should slice open his stomach and intestines before you dump it; the gases will escape before they have time to puff up the body. Barber's introduction suggests that physiological details such as these -- fun as they are -- weren't part of his original plan. He wanted to track down the roots of beliefs in vampires, which eventually led him to realize that belief in vampires comes from ignorance of disease.

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