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psychiatry in history

An 18th-century view of demonomania. 2: Vampirism – stories

Fiona Subotsky

The three stories are taken from Martinus Martini’s 1782 dissertation on demonomania.

The Man from Morea

A man fled from Morea because he had committed a serious crime and took himself to Milo island – by which he escaped judicial penalty but not ecclesiastical condemnation. As he had been rightly ejected from the communion of believers, he was buried in a remote deserted place when he died. The inhabitants of the island were tormented at night by spectres, and so, stricken with fear, they decided to exhume the body of the dead man. When they did this the man who had died not long before was now apparently living; the veins were swollen with blood and the tomb was filled with grapes, apples, nuts and other things to eat.

The islanders referred the issue to the Patriarch of Constantinople, asking that he be reconciled to the Church and be absolved by dire execrations. Meanwhile they brought the corpse to the temple and there committed it to earth. Suddenly during prayers and other sacred acts a murmuring noise was heard in the tomb. The people believed this had occurred at the very same time as the Patriarch had given absolution.

Martini remarks that ‘Great faith is required’!

The story of Plogowitz

In 1725 . . . Plogovitz strangled nine people over the course of eight days after his funeral . . . He was dug up, and there was no corruption, no putrefaction, no blemish whatever except for his nose . . . His hair, beard, nails had grown . . . His mouth was full of blood, which people claimed he had drained from the veins of living men. They transfixed his heart with a sharp stake, which caused much fresh blood to pour out of the mouth and ears. Then his corpse was condemned to the flames.

The Story of Arnold Paole

A soldier called Arnold Paole had died after a fall . . . While still alive he had said that having been previously tormented by a vampire, he had eaten earth from its tomb, and had washed himself with the blood in order to overcome this evil . . . Twenty or thirty days after his death many people complained about Paole, because they were tormented by him, indeed by now he had killed four people . . . Around forty days after the death his corpse was exhumed and found to be uncorrupted; fresh blood flowed from the eyes, ears and mouth, and new nails were growing . . . When they transfixed the heart with a stake, it gave out a perceptible sound, and the corpse was consigned to the flames.

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