

Vampires, Revenant Souls, and Objects of Healing

Religious Remedies in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Czech Lands

Tomáš Malý 

Department of History, Masaryk University, Arna Nováka 1, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic;
malytomas@phil.muni.cz

Monika Enenklová 

Department of History, Masaryk University, Arna Nováka 1, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic;
enenklova@phil.muni.cz

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Abstract. This study searches for the characteristic features of religious healing in three phenomena of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: veneration of miraculous images, apparitions from Purgatory, and vampire incidences. All the examples originate from the Czech lands, and all were in some way related to the Catholic renewal or strengthening the Catholic faith in this region. Individual cases have been analyzed with regard to the social relevance of religious remedies, their connection to social problems, and the interaction between the actors involved. The authors draw attention to the link between physical and mental healing and show the key role of local spiritual authorities, especially members of religious orders and parish priests, in spreading practices of spiritual healing. The study reveals that, however theologically sensitive they might have been, the practices analyzed were apparently encouraged by the clergy and the social elites in the local communities, therefore they can hardly be associated only with the so-called popular piety of the rural folk.

Keywords: religious healing, miraculous images, apparitions, purgatory, vampires, Czech lands, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

In the following study,¹ we look at healing by religious means within Catholic societies in Central Europe during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. We understand the term ‘healing’ to mean any help which aims to alleviate the physical as well as mental suffering of both the living and, in some cases, also the deceased

1 The study was prepared within the project Rites of Reverence: Roman Coronations of Miraculous Images as a Means of Cultural Translation in East Central Europe (Czech Science Foundation, project no. GA22-04023S).

members of a society. This is based on two premises: firstly, religious healing was highly relevant during this period partly because medical science was not yet capable of challenging religious doctrines in this field, at least not on a society-wide level. Another reason was the feeling of being threatened, which people expressed in various forms and testimonies, and which historians have explained as being due to the crises of the era: wars and the establishment of absolutist monarchies; the fundamental reform of (religious) education, which led to a change in piety and eventually to a relativization of the official theology; heightened anxieties linked to eschatological expectations apparent in astronomical phenomena (comets, solar and lunar eclipses); the repression of Jews, witches and other groups (even though this repression was less severe in Western Europe at the end of the seventeenth century, in East Central Europe it was reaching its height); and finally the mobilization of consolatory, ethical-educational means to overcome different forms of fear.² The phenomena we have analyzed are also linked to fear caused by social insecurity and climatic events, the awareness of the universality of death, the eschatological perspective, and fear of God and the Last Judgment. The belief in and relationship to God represented the basic framework for therapy.³ In the seventeenth century, more precise ideas about how the body functioned, which highly influenced the concept of pain, did not fundamentally undermine the belief in the inseparability of the human physical body and the soul. Descartes and his followers argued that physical pain was felt in the soul rather than in the body. According to Descartes, the external senses, which played a key role in his theory, allowed humans to become aware of what was either beneficial or harmful rather than the true nature of pain itself.⁴

Secondly, the healing rituals exemplify how the cultures of the authorities and of the lay communities merged. David Gentilcore came to the conclusion that local ecclesiastical authorities were often tolerant of unofficial practices, and the majority of the elements of religion were characterized by a process of communication and interaction between different social strata: between the clergy and laity, the educated and the uneducated, and the center and the periphery.⁵ Throughout the seventeenth century, the elites adapted to popular beliefs, i.e., they often appropriated unofficial ideas and cults. This resulted in a diffusion of ideas and cultural models, while from the perspective of how religious principles were received, we observe the “internal dynamic of a shared religious culture and occasionally conflicting priorities, needs, and solutions in different regions and social groups.”⁶

2 Lehmann, *Das Zeitalter des Absolutismus*, 114–44; Maravall, *La cultura*, 55–128.

3 Different types of seventeenth-century discourses of fear were analyzed by Bähr, *Furcht und Furchtlosigkeit*.

4 Rey, *The History of Pain*, 71–88; Toellner, “Die Umbewertung des Schmerzes,” 36–44.

5 Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch*.

6 Johnson, “»Everyone Should Be Like the People«,” 206–24, note 218.

In the following text, we analyze three examples from the Catholic Czech lands which we believe to demonstrate the same phenomenon, despite being different in terms of type and time: apparitions from Purgatory before the middle of the seventeenth century, a vampire incidence from the second half of the seventeenth century, and the issue of miraculous images covering the second half of the seventeenth and the first third of the eighteenth century. All these examples are in some way related to the Catholic renewal, i.e., to the enforcement of the doctrine. They also reflect the social situation on a regional or local scale: in accordance with Stuart Clark, who referred to revenants, we can state that these cases refer to moral and social rules, as well as to the needs of local communities.⁷ They belong to an era which preceded the transformation in the attitudes of intellectuals and state authorities towards these phenomena. Prior to the mid-eighteenth century, a part of society registered their distrust of such phenomena and called for superstitions to be resisted. Gradually, in the works of philosophers, moralists, and even in state decrees we find increasingly frequent mention of the madness surrounding magic and sorcery, the inclination of the idiotic crowd towards superstition, and the folly and ignorance of the people who are incapable of distinguishing between reality and illusion. Marian visions and the appearance of spirits were declared superstitions, fairy tales, or hallucinations, for which scientific explanations could be found, such as a hyperactive imagination caused by madness, an injury to the brain, too much fasting, or too little sleep.⁸

The Czech lands or the lands of the Czech crown were a strongly re-Catholicized region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This applies especially to Bohemia and Moravia, where Catholicism was the only permitted denomination after 1627–1628 (and definitely, after 1648) where means of forced conversion and systematic recordings of believers were put into practice, especially in towns. In Silesia, the third country covered by this study, bi-confessionality persisted, but only with a limited scope for non-Catholic worship. However, the Catholic revival was rather slow and not entirely successful in the Czech lands due not only to the insufficient parish organization, but, as Marie-Élizabeth Ducreux showed, also to the specific manner of re-Catholicization, in which, for example, the activities of Catholic missionaries played a role.⁹ Still, the majority of society proved a Catholic identity by the end of the seventeenth century, and groups of secret non-Catholics were concentrated in the peripheral, eastern and north-eastern regions of Bohemia and Moravia. Between the 1640s and 1760s, various forms of Catholic piety flourished in these countries. They were partially initiated, backed, and supported by the

7 Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 205–6.

8 Klaniczay, “Decline of Witches,” 165–80; Keyworth, “The Aetiology of Vampires,” 158–73; Johnson, “»That in Her the Seed«,” 259–70.

9 Ducreux, “La mission,” 31–46; Ducreux, “La reconquête catholique,” 685–702.

ruling Habsburg family, bishops, and aristocracy, but their diffusion and development were impossible without the activities of other social groups, especially members of the religious orders, burghers, and manorial officials. The interaction and reactions of these groups significantly shaped the nature of religiosity as expressed in the veneration of the saints, the Virgin Mary, and the Eucharist, in the development of pilgrimages, in the promotion of religious processions, or in the building of a Catholic sacral landscape. One of the typical elements of religious and social life was pious confraternities whose expansion—with the peak between 1660 and 1730—contributed substantially to the promotion and spread of the Catholic religious practice, such as Corpus Christi processions, receiving the sacraments, recital of the catechism, requiem services, the Loreto litany, penitent meditations, rosary prayers, and the use of the scapular. Both the veneration of the Virgin Mary and the cult of souls played a significant role in the religious change. New forms of religious practice were bound to them, affecting broad areas of social behavior, and providing an important impetus for the finances of ecclesiastical institutions. They also created the space for the spread of unofficial, doctrinally questionable practices and beliefs, which did not fully match the ideas of the Cardinals at the Council of Trent.¹⁰

Miraculous images

Countess Anna Dorota of Thurn, who as Controller of the Royal Household (*Hofmeisterin*), accompanied the Austrian archduchess and future Queen of Portugal Mary Anne, reported in a 1708 letter to her husband—when she was spending time on a ship in Portsmouth in England—chronic spleen pains that were immediately alleviated when a picture of an icon from Brno's Church of the Augustinians, which she apparently always had with her, was placed on the sore area.¹¹ As we are informed by a local book of miracles from 1662–1751, the statuette of the Madonna in Svatá Hora (Holy Mountain) near Příbram was able to convert sinners to the true faith, with cases including a Calvinist soldier after demonstrating “great zeal, contrition, and entreaty”; a Lutheran following a nightmare and making a general confession for his entire life; the wife of a dying man who was subsequently saved; a soldier suffering from melancholy who wanted to commit suicide; non-Catholics who doubted

10 Winkelbauer, *Österreichische Geschichte*, Vol. 2, 63–70 and 112–239; Čornejová et al., *Velké dějiny země*, Vol. 8, 288–327; Zuber, *Osudy moravské církve*, Vol. 1, 181–248; Zuber, *Osudy moravské církve*, Vol. 2, 175–335 and 378–477; Louthan, *Converting Bohemia*, 16–82 and 179–210; Keller et al., eds, *Adel und Religion*; Ducreux, “Emperors, Kingdoms, Territories”; Mikulec, *Náboženský život*, 154–212; Mikulec, *Barokní náboženská bratrstva*.

11 MZA, E 4, sign. 5:30, Miracles caused by St Thomas icon (seventeenth to eighteenth century), fol. 211r.

the veneration of images; and an adulteress to whom a terrible dragon appeared in her dreams and warned her that if she did not confess at Svatá Hora, it would devour her.¹² The Jesuits in Svatá Hora kept statistics of miraculous conversions and healings according to specific types of illnesses—Markéta Holubová counted seventy-six types of illnesses listed in their books.¹³

Examples and evidence of miraculous help and healing were typical phenomena of early modern Marian piety. They developed significantly throughout the seventeenth century when they were utilized in the building of chapels, churches, and places of pilgrimage, in the popularization of the Catholic doctrine, and in polemics with Protestants. During this period, the theme of miracles and healing also became an important link between the representations of the images that were crowned in East Central Europe in the eighteenth century, in particular in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the Habsburg monarchy. These were miracles connected to the discovery of the image, the protection of places of pilgrimage, towns, or countries, and to the aid of individuals—mostly lay people.¹⁴ Tomasz Dywan provides the following typology of miracles related to the miraculous images of the southeastern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: healing including bringing someone back to life (in particular children who died at or shortly after birth), conversions (Protestants and Jews), the prevention of injustices (courts), help in times of misfortune, the protection of livestock, and protection from natural disasters.¹⁵

The theme of miracles also played a fundamental role in the coronation of three Bohemian-Moravian Madonnas, which took place in 1732–1736. The Jesuits at Svatá Hora near Příbram kept meticulous records of Marian miracles, which were then used by the historians of this pilgrimage site. Bohuslav Balbinus, relying heavily on the Svatá Hora archive, devoted a large part of his well-known work to the local miracles, and if he was not the actual founder, he was at least the codifier of the tradition of highlighting the significance of Svatá Hora.¹⁶ The author of the largest history of this holy site and its image, the Jesuit Ignatius Popp, took the same approach when

12 NA, ŘR, inv. no. 118, sign. P-152, History of Svatá Hora near Příbram, Book III (1751).

13 Holubová, *Panna Marie Svatohorská*, 99–120. Extensive data on the miracles of Marian images in Moravia and Silesia have been collected by Eichler, *Poutní místa*.

14 For the Virgin of Pochaiv, see: Łoś, “Księga cudów,” 111–30. For the so-called Our Lady of Sapiehas in Vilnius: Janonienė, “Sapiegų Švč. Mergelė Marija,” 116–33; Berazo-Komarynska, “Słynący cudami wileński obraz,” 97–112. For Czestochowa, briefly: Szafraniec, “Jasna Góra,” 32–7.

15 Dywan, *Kształtowanie kultury prowincjonalnej*, 128–77. P. M. Kruk interpreted the miracles associated with images as topoi testifying to the “occidentalization of the cult of icons”, i.e., the penetration of the “sensualist concept of miraculous images” into Eastern Europe: Kruk, *Ikony-obrazy*, 162–92.

16 Balbinus, *Diva Montis Sancti*, 153–472.

he dedicated most of his book to the miracles.¹⁷ The original book of miracles was probably the inspiration for the iconographic decoration of the cloister, which began in 1732 on the occasion of the coronation of the image.¹⁸ The same themes were highlighted on a triumphal arch placed at the main entrance to the pilgrimage site during the coronation. It presented Marian signs for the blind (Mary's power to illuminate them with rays), the good fortune of air (the ability to deflect lightning from towns), earth (the power over lightning, the heavens and earth), fire (the ability to pacify Vulcan and, conversely, to ignite the flame of love for one's country), and water (serving as a harbor for castaways). The upper sections featured shields with motifs referring to the miracles of the Madonna: healing the blind, the mute, the insane, grout sufferers, the infertile, the fatally wounded, expectant mothers, and sinners.¹⁹

From the seventeenth century, these motifs were also among some of the elements most used to describe the history of the pilgrimage site of Svatý Kopeček (Holy Hill) near Olomouc.²⁰ At the coronation of the image in 1732, the triumphal arches commemorated miraculous healing and the intercession of the Virgin Mary in times of hardship or at the moment of death. The arch at the entrance to the church depicted twenty specific miracles, while the second, which was situated at the foot of Svatý Kopeček, showed a further eighty. They depicted people with various afflictions, looking up towards Mary with pious gestures and tears in their eyes, and subsequently being relieved from their suffering: the blind, mute and deaf, the lame and wounded, those drowning or suffering from fever, infertile women, people in danger or in confinement, those falling from heights, those lacking spiritual strength or suffering from different forms of despondency, people experiencing Marian apparitions in their dreams, women freed from magic or incantations, repentant sinners and people converting to Catholicism.²¹ The miracles of the Madonna of Svatý Kopeček were also mentioned in the coronation sermons, and some of them even offered statistics. In relation to this, one of the preachers urged worshippers to tour the cloister and look at the images depicting miracles of Madonna.²² In the Moravian capital of Brno, where an icon from the Augustinian Church of St Thomas was crowned in 1736, the theme of miracles during the celebrations was of more peripheral interest. However, this does not mean that it did not have a significant role as an argument when applying for permission for the coronation. This can be seen in a collection

17 Popp, *Historia Divæ Virginis*, 221–374.

18 Holubová, “Zázračná uzdravení,” 219.

19 *Regina Cæli*, A2^a–F1^a.

20 [Siebeneicher], *Mons Præmonstratus*, 131–348; [Wancke], *Mons Præmonstratus*, 96–210; [Kayser], *Sanctum Sæculare Marianum*, I^b–X^a.

21 Described by [Kayser], *Enthronisticum Parthenium*, g2^a–tt1^b.

22 [Kayser], *Enthronisticum Parthenium*, a2^b.

of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documents which served as the basis for proving the miraculous nature of the image. It has been preserved under the title *Ad acta coronationis* and contains 271 records of different miracles—usually healings—which took place between 1626 and 1679.²³

The miraculous images were threatened by heretics—they were protected or hidden from them, they caused miracles and even meted out punishment to those who would destroy them (mainly Swedes and Ottomans in the lands of the Habsburg monarchy). The images referred to a glorious past though they could also be a useful new instrument in the suppression of paganism or a means of Christianization. A historical perspective, i.e., a description of the image's history, evidently supported this line of imagination. During its coronation in 1736, the St Thomas Icon (Brno) was presented as the source of all sources (*fons fontium*), i.e., the source of the wine which brings and symbolizes conversions. This was because wine was the bearer of God's mercy and, thus, of conversion, and was also a bearer of the Virgin Mary's grace and, therefore of refreshment. Conversion was offered to someone in the sense of turning towards God on the path of repentance (*via peccatorum*), a return to the arms of the Virgin Mary and setting out on the path to salvation (*via salutis*).²⁴ The history of the Marian statuette at Svatá Hora near Příbram, written down by the Jesuit Jiří Konstanc, contains numerous stories about people moved to repent by the image.²⁵ The Svatá Hora book of miracles also notes a number of cases of conversion, as has already been shown. These examples share similar features for the stages in repentance: from despair (the recognition of sin), through the intervention of the image (the miracle) to bravery (the confession) and hope. As was precisely laid out by the Ignatian (Loyola) model, all the sinners finally recognized the horror of their wrongdoings and felt the appropriate contrition. The confession, presented as an examination (*examen*) and the searching of one's conscience (*Erforschung des Gewissens*), was to be simplified by the appearance or even the mere thought of the Virgin Mary as a refuge. Therefore, the image was attributed with the power of protection against falling into hopelessness, "into the depths of sorrow and despair".²⁶ During the coronation, one of the preachers at Svatá Hora spoke of two sinners who, out of shame, had concealed their guilt for fifteen and twenty years respectively, and only repented when the Virgin Mary "enlightened them through sickness."²⁷

The miraculous Madonnas in the Bohemian–Moravian coronations were triumphant queens, but primarily they were intercessors, protectors, and helpers in

23 MZA, E 4, sign. 5:30, Miracles caused by St Thomas icon (seventeenth to eighteenth century).

24 *Conchylum Marianum*, i1^{a-b}.

25 Konstanc, *Svccvrre Miseris*.

26 [Kayser], *Enthronisticum Parthenium*, 'f2^{a-b}.

27 [Kayser], *Enthronisticum Parthenium*, "o2^a.

times of need. The people—residents of towns and their surrounding areas, or even from the whole country—were presented as being under permanent threat from adversaries, enemies of the faith, natural disasters, epidemics, illnesses, the devil, and sin. From a sociological perspective, this approach was somewhat justified, as in the first third of the eighteenth century there were indeed several demographic crises in Bohemia and Moravia caused by the 1713–1715 plague and other epidemics in the years 1719–1721 and 1736–1738. On the other hand, the coronations of the images concerned happened in a period which was still benefiting from the demographic growth of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, whereas a serious population crisis occurred due to the wars in the 1730s and 1740s.²⁸ From a socio-psychological perspective, other phenomena must also have played a role, for example—if we consider the crucial importance of the motif of Christianization and conversion—the pressure of re-Catholicization during the reign of Charles VI, which was quickly transferred from the legislative level to a social practice in the towns and countryside (investigating the presence of secret non-Catholics and the possession of non-Catholic literature); or on a wider scale, the new challenges for missionary activity in the form of contact with non-Christianized populations and the efforts to confirm the superiority of European Christian culture (see the reports from Jesuit missionaries) or the need to defend against the Ottoman danger threatening East Central Europe. Although these issues were not always explicitly referred to in the coronations—instead medieval Christianization was mentioned—they could have resonated in the minds of eighteenth-century people and become fertile ground for defensive responses. Historicization and revived (or indeed constructed) memory belonged to the basic legitimizing elements of the coronations. Therefore, one of the aims of the ritual was to increase the protective effects of the miraculous images.

There was never any doubt about the miraculous power of the images. Even though theological treatises by prominent Catholic writers at the turn of the seventeenth century emphasized in their polemics with Protestants the fact that reverence was not linked to the material substance of the sacred images but rather to the figures who were represented there, in reality the boundary between the symbolic and material concept of the image was not so sharply defined. This can be clearly seen in the Marian treatises that do not doubt the true miraculous powers of the images themselves. It was thought they could alter the observer's consciousness, rectify it, and bring about conversion.²⁹ The Austrian Capuchin Prokop of Templin, author of one of the largest works on the Virgin Mary, trod a thin line between orthodoxy and a magical-cult concept of the reverence of images. He believed that God had given Mary the power to affect people not only personally but also through images, i.e.,

28 Dokoupil et al., *Přirozená měna*, 71–3, 92–5.

29 See Haydt, *Mariale Augustinianum*, 1–96.

through what a person could see or touch.³⁰ The Moravian parish priest Valentin Bernard Jestřábský wrote that to the pious viewer it seemed as if Christ or the Virgin Mary were really present in the images, that through prayers to the depicted Mary miracles happened, and that the image (Mary) provided protection to its holder. He recommended carrying along Marian images.³¹ Therefore, when preachers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries talked about Mary as a crowned queen in the image painted by St Lucas and mentioned the pilgrimage sites “where Mary is venerated in her holy images as though she were present in person,” or when the image—albeit “dead on the wood”—is attributed with the power to communicate and grant graces and mercies, then it becomes difficult to see the line between orthodoxy and idolatry. Accounts concerning the remarkable changes to the faces of the Madonnas constitute important evidence which reveals the way the images were perceived. Depending on the specific situation, the image speaks by changing the colors of Mary’s face, shedding tears, sweating, turning her face away, announcing calamities, expressing sadness, or darkening before sinners. Clerics and visitors to pilgrimage sites observed the images and watched for any change in facial expression or color, expecting miracles. The *Svatá Hora* books of miracles contain a number of testimonies. These accounts, which were written down, sealed, and eventually published,³² reveal the fascination with the ‘living image’ which communicates directly with people—i.e., through physical, sensory means. In various sources, we therefore see the materialization of a reverence of miraculous images, often on or beyond the border of orthodoxy as was defined by the documents of the Council of Trent and the Catechisms.

Apparitions from Purgatory: a case in Southern Bohemia³³

At the end of 1648 and the start of 1649, the baker Gregor Exelius in Jindřichův Hradec (Neuhaus) in Southern Bohemia was visited by the apparitions of several souls who asked that he and his acquaintances should perform good deeds so that they might be delivered from the fires of Purgatory. The souls always appeared towards evening or at night and their arrival was often shrouded in smoke so that no-one other than Exelius saw them. In addition, the spirits spoke in a deep voice

30 Von Templin, *Mariale*, vol. I, 214–20.

31 Jestřábský, *Stellarium novum*, 27–40.

32 NA, ŘR, inv. no. 118, sign. P-152, History of the Holy Mountain near Příbram, Book III (1751); Konstanc, *Svccvrre Miseris*; Balbinus, *Diva Montis Sancti*, 153–358; Popp, *Historia Divae Virginis*, 221–374.

33 In the following we develop considerations presented in Malý and Suchánek, *Images of Purgatory*, 170–92.

and the people around could only distinguish some kind of mumbling or ‘babbling,’ as one of the witnesses said. Exelius described the souls as having black bodies wrapped in white robes, while after deliverance they had beautiful, shining faces. They won over the disbelieving witnesses by offering different evidence of their sufferings, and in the end their demands were met with at least two souls finding redemption.³⁴

This incidence is significant because it contains vital aspects of the Catholic representation of Purgatory. The documents preserved refer to many details of great significance for the construction and popularization of the doctrine on Purgatory after the Council of Trent. Here, however, we are more interested in those involved in the case and their role in providing or receiving spiritual medicine. All the documents were collected by the governor of the castle in Jindřichův Hradec, Georg Miller of Rothenburg.³⁵ His motivation became clear when it transpired that one of the returning souls was his deceased wife Sibyla. Miller’s role, therefore, was to organize a mass, distribute alms to the poor, purchase candles for the mass, and go on a pilgrimage to the important Styrian pilgrimage centre of Mariazell. In order to convince him, the souls told him through Exelius that by that moment the enemy could have killed him three times if the saints had not intervened on his behalf. Miller had three charters drawn up by representatives from the towns of Žirovnice and Počátky, and by Jan Uničovský, whose daughter’s godmother had been Sibyla. The documents confirmed that as an ardent Catholic the deceased Sibyla had led a pious and praiseworthy life, attended mass practically every day, went to confession frequently, and helped the poor; she was a faithful wife and prepared for death in the Christian Catholic manner: she confessed her sins to the parish priest, received the sacrament of the altar and last rites, all in the presence of her husband and others.

Miller appears to have been the main organizer of the examination of the witnesses, although the local nobility, the Slavata family seems to have had some role as well. Together with the Martinitz family, the Slavatas were the most important promoters of souls (Purgatory) worship in Bohemia: they financed the establishment of soul chapels, supported the activities of religious brotherhoods, and used various channels to promote and help in the publication of the histories of the revenant souls.³⁶ The owner of the Jindřichův Hradec estate, the High Chancellor of the Bohemian Kingdom Wilhelm Slavata of Chlum and Košumberk, who as the

34 The basic outlines of the case have been described by Wolf, “Očistec a revenanti,” 71–8. Petr Mat’a put the case into the wider context of the Jesuit strategies of written self-representation: Mat’a, “Die Konstruktion der Wunderereignisse,” 75–81.

35 The statements of witnesses and in particular a detailed relation of governor Miller, written on 25 January 1649, are archived at the NA, APA, box 2629, inv. no. 4006, sign. D 136/1, unpag.

36 Mat’a, “Familie und Fegefeuer,” 124–27.

vice-regent in 1618 was thrown from a window of the Old Town Hall by representatives of the Bohemian Protestants, had already had experience with spirits from 1646–1647, when he ‘ordered’ the Jesuit exorcist Hieronymus Gladich in Bratislava (Pressburg) to deliver ten souls of his relatives from Purgatory.³⁷ Slavata had a weakness for Gladich and the apparitions of souls. In 1648, when he heard from two Hungarian Jesuits how Gladich had delivered souls in Styria, he had these stories written down and dedicated them to his own memory.³⁸ In addition, during their lifetime the two Jindřichův Hradec souls which had been identified were in the service of Slavata’s deceased wife, Lucie Otýlie of Hradec. One of them, the governor’s wife Sibyla—who had been happily delivered from Purgatory thanks to Exelius—allegedly failed to fulfil her oath to go on a pilgrimage to Mariazell in her youth. She later decided to substitute her original intention with a pilgrimage to the nearby Bavarian town of Altötting, but she repeatedly failed to do so.³⁹ In light of the fact that Lucie Otýlie was buried in Altötting, an important Marian pilgrimage site, her story may have served as a model that inspired the events at Jindřichův Hradec castle and which reflected the experiences of the nobility.

The baker Exelius was a medium in this case and, as such, was evidently a very pious man well-versed in religious habits: he often went to confession and received the sacrament of the altar; on St Stephen’s Day, he sang Latin and German Christmas carols in front of the governor’s family. Exelius’s colleagues at the castle (a painter, tailor, and glazier) also knew the main prayers—*Our Father*, *Ave Maria*, the *Litany*, and the *Oficium Defunctorum*—which they recited together after each apparition. One evening he met the governor, his wife, and elder daughter and, one after another, they read selected chapters from the Ecclesiastes. This is important for the entire case because these aphorisms focus on the impermanence of life, obedience, humility, and the vanity of human possessions, while the end also deals with merciful acts, the fear of God, and the following of God’s commandments. The revelations brought terror and suffering to Exelius. The castle residents normally found him terrified, shaking, or lying helpless on the floor. The revenant souls beat on his window, door, or furniture, tore his pillow from him, slapped him, and frightened him with burnt furniture. If he slept in another house, they appeared to him and ordered him to return to the bakery—evidently because the revelation of each soul was linked to a specific place. When he refused to continue to help one of the spirits and sent it to bother someone else with its demands (best of all a governor or Jesuit rector who

37 Mat’a, “Die Renaissance des Fegefeuers,” 151.

38 SOA Třeboň, o. Jindřichův Hradec, FA Slavata, cart. 15, inv. no. 111, sign. III A 2b, Wilhelm Slavata to Jaroslav Bořita of Martinice about the Jesuit Gladich, Vienna, 22 April 1648.

39 Lederer, “Living with the Dead,” 47, also refers to the apparition of a soul from Purgatory who had been punished for thirty years for not making the promised pilgrimage to Altötting.

could offer a better chance of deliverance), the spirit was not deterred and tormented the baker until he fainted. As soon as he wanted to escape from his room, the apparitions forced him back and made him listen to their demands. Naturally, these and other things—such as Exelius's coat burned by the soul which embraced him—also terrified the people working at the castle, who listened to Exelius's instructions in fear and obediently knelt down together to pray for the savior of the souls. The question arises why the purgatorial apparitions were represented by such wicked and powerful spirits, addressing what was basically a legitimate claim. In the later revenant literature, the souls are somewhat 'kinder'. In any case, the baker had to make some kind of a sacrifice in order to atone for the sins of the apparitions. And this sacrifice was not limited to the usual suffrage of alms, prayers, and masses, but also involved physical and psychological strain on the part of the benefactor.

The revenant souls mainly described to the living the reasons why they were in Purgatory: the maid Dorotka had made superstitious concoctions and had been ashamed to mention them at confession (she did not think it a sin), and so had remained in Purgatory for twenty-six years; the governor's first wife Sibyla had already spent six years in the flames because during her lifetime she had been in debt for goods which she had bought purely for her own benefit. The souls warned against sin, they told their benefactors to faithfully observe the Ten Commandments, and even provided the baker with some secret information about misdeeds being committed in the castle. They also had to convince those who did not believe them, which they were able to do by presenting 'touched' objects with their hands still burned onto them: Exelius's fur coat, a crucifix, a consecrated stole, a Candlemass candle, and a box of relics. And, not least, there was also a stool on which one of the souls sat in order to prove to governor Miller that it was real, who then asked the souls for permission to keep the object.

The Jindřichův Hradec Jesuits were involved in the events from the very start of the case. The rector of the local college was the baker's confessor; when he found out about the apparitions, he gave Exelius instructions on how to distinguish between a good and bad spirit as well as how to behave in such incidences. With the prefect of the seminary, a Czech Jesuit preacher and guardian of the Franciscan Monastery, Exelius quickly examined all the evidence and ensured the necessary suffrage in the form of masses and prayers. The Jesuits also wrote ten questions to ascertain whether it was indeed the apparition of a soul from Purgatory or an evil spirit. Exelius took these questions to one of the meetings and after sprinkling the revenant with holy water—on the Jesuits' advice—he asked it to answer the questions. The Jesuit preacher Widmon undertook to say mass twelve times a day, with the local Franciscans following suit. On the final day, attended by Jesuit students as well as many clerical and lay individuals, the rector of the college celebrated a funeral mass in the parish church's

chapel of the dead. A joyful, delivered soul appeared to Exelius at the moment of the elevation of the host on the epistle side of the altar. When the mass ended, the baker approached this place, knelt down, and kissed it reverently several times. At the end, he was taken to the sacristy, where he described his vision and swore on the Gospel that it was true in front of the rector, several other clergymen, and the governor.

The aspects described above featured in other well-known cases as well. For example, a revenant soul appeared in 1641–1642 to the burgher and convert, Hans Clement, from Pressburg. This story gave rise to the creation of a wooden carving called Piety around which an extensive souls cult developed supported by the Bratislava (Pressburg) Jesuits, chapter, and archbishop.⁴⁰ There was also the soul of the Prague archbishop, Johann Fridrich of Waldstein, which appeared to the Premonstratensian nun Maxmiliana Zásmucká of Zásmuky in Doxany in 1694.⁴¹ Another case is that of Katharina Taschnerin's soul, which was freed by a pious girl Mariana in a village near Brno in 1762. However, this incidence occurred at a time when both the secular and ecclesiastical elites professed skepticism towards the revenant stories.⁴² Petr Maťa described the fascinating story of Hieronymus Gladich, a Jesuit from the Pressburg College who managed to convince members of the imperial court that he was able to communicate with the souls of the dead and deliver them from Purgatory. When the Imperial Diet was sitting in Pressburg in 1646–1647, the Jesuit acquired clients from among the ministers and diplomats and contacted fifty souls at their request and helped them by celebrating between three and seven masses. However, this was only a fraction of his extensive intercession: over a period of only three years, Gladich was responsible for the deliverance of a thousand souls.⁴³ Maťa highlighted the fact that Gladich's activity and that of other similar 'charismatics'—the Carmelites Cyrillus a Matre Dei (1590–1675), Paula Maria de Jesus (1586–1646), the Jesuit Martin Stredovius (1587–1648), and the Premonstratensian Maxmiliana Zásmucká (1655–1718)—were part of the re-Catholicization strategy of the post-Tridentine monasteries. However, influential laymen played an important role as supporters of these initiatives, whilst the ecclesiastical elites were occasionally more suspicious of them—in fact, Gladich was finally thrown out of the Order.⁴⁴

The apparitions that we have looked at represent a mere fraction of early modern ideas concerning the appearance of spirits from the other world. These were nothing new in the seventeenth century. They were widely documented in the

40 Maťa, "Familie und Fegefeuer," 124–27.

41 Wolf, "Sny v literárních rukopisech," 274–75; Maťa, "Die Renaissance des Fegefeuers," 139–60; Havlík, *Jan Fridrich z Valdštejna*, 232–43; Hrbek, *Proměny valdštejnské reprezentace*, 230–37.

42 Malý and Suchánek, *Images of Purgatory*, 188–91.

43 Maťa, "Arme-Seelen-Rettung," 75–97.

44 Maťa, "Zwischen Heiligkeit und Betrügerei."

Middle Ages, then even in the Protestant world, and by the reformers themselves, who adopted stories with a moral message usually related to the bad life and death of the revenant soul.⁴⁵ Since the Protestants rejected the teachings on Purgatory, they interpreted (theologically) any contact of the souls of the dead with the earthly world as evidence of the victory of Christ's power over death, and (philosophically) as the appearance of Paracelsian human spirit.⁴⁶ In the Catholic theology and philosophy, particularly in the seventeenth century, various aspects of the faith were more precisely defined and spirits were also categorized in more detail. Prominent demonological writings, such as Del Rio's *Disquisitionum Magicarum libri sex* (1600), drew on Paracelsus' distinction of the celestial, infernal, and human spirits.⁴⁷ However, due to uncertainties about the physical body, the astral body, and the shade of the soul, as distinguished by Paracelsus, the concept of spirits remained visually ambiguous, vague, even 'paradoxical'. There were no clear criteria for distinguishing the 'real' from the imagined nature of an apparition, nor was the difference between the visible (perceptible) and invisible clearly defined.⁴⁸ The uncertainty as to whether the spirit was an angel, the devil, or the soul of the dead made the apparitions from Purgatory a tricky subject. This was also reflected in individual cases, as we have seen in Jindřichův Hradec, where the Jesuits had to investigate the apparition to see if it was indeed a soul from Purgatory.

The events in Jindřichův Hradec were linked to the suffering in Purgatory. These revenant souls required spiritual healing in the form of pious acts in order to be delivered from the flames. The living then required spiritual encouragement for greater piety—Exelius was the medium for just such encouragement. It was evidently no coincidence that most of the revelations took place in the bakery or, more precisely, in the room where the loaves were stored.⁴⁹ The documents make regular mention of bread and there may be a symbolic parallel to the Eucharist as the 'food of the soul' (*geistliche Seelennahrung*), as the popular metaphor in Baroque literature stated.⁵⁰ One critical aspect was the promotion of the doctrine of Purgatory and good deeds. We should remember that in the Czech lands it was only from the end of the sixteenth century that the topic was more frequent in religious literature.

45 Gordon, "Malevolent Ghosts," 87–109.

46 Ittzés, "The Knowledge," 193–213.

47 Neuber, "Die Theologie der Geister," especially 29–30.

48 Göttler and Neuber, eds, *Spirits Unseen*; Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 209–27; Lederer, "Living with the Dead," 25–53.

49 The relevance of information about the place and time of the apparitions for understanding the meaning of these events was pointed out by Greenblatt, with reference to Geertz's 'thick description'. Greenblatt, "The Touch of the Real," 22–8.

50 For the Corpus Christi Confraternity in Brno, a print was published in 1690 under the title *Kräftege Geistliche Seelen-Nahrung*.

Non-Catholic polemic against Purgatory included several works by Czech Utraquist priests and a Czech translation of the tract by Wittenberg professor Joachim von Beust entitled *Enchiridion de arte bene beateque moriendi* (1599, in Czech 1610). A stronger Catholic defense of the doctrine had also rarely occurred before the end of the sixteenth century and was strengthened in the 1620s and 1630s, when Czech, German, and Latin editions of the treatises of prominent Jesuit authors, such as Antoine Sucquet, Martín de Roa and Hieronymus Drexelius, were issued.⁵¹ Still, not much literature on apparitions was available in 1648, because only in the second half of the seventeenth century did larger collections of revenant histories appear in Central Europe, in connection with the expansion of lay religious brotherhoods and their promotion of the cult of remembrance.

The events described above with the revenants belong to a wide set of post-Tridentine tactics by which the principles of the faith were communicated and reflected upon. They included the promotion of soul altars and chapels, the production of Purgatory paintings and sculptures, the publication of the meditational literature, and books on the last things of man. The case of Exelius the baker contains all the important facets of post-Tridentine teachings on Purgatory: the phenomenon of fear and the ways in which it was aroused; the role of images and meditation; the characteristics of sins and penance; the role of prayer, Mass and *memento mori*; and the significance of elevation at the funeral Mass. This image of Purgatory was built by the local elites, particularly the Jesuits who—together with the Carmelites and Capuchins—were the most important promoters of the doctrine on Purgatory, especially its popularization. In the written sources, there was a particular group of influential promoters of this reverence linked to archbishops and the Jesuits—the Jesuits supplied the stories about revenant souls, while specific individuals (e.g., in Bohemia Wilhelm Slavata of Chlum and Jaroslav Bořita of Martinice) showed considerable interest in them and financed their publication.

Vampires in Friedlandt

In 1674, there was a case on the Sovinec estate of the Order of the Teutonic Knights that was to unite the lower clergy, the village administration, the manorial authorities, and the bishop consistory in Olomouc in the fight against magic for the next eighty years. At the end of March, an elderly widow named Marina Fischerin died in the village of Friedlandt (today: Břidličná municipality). Shortly afterwards, the town's inhabitants started to be plagued by night-time disturbances, which they were quick to attribute to the deceased woman, accusing her of posthumous magic.

51 Malý and Suchánek, *Images of Purgatory*, 29–33.

This was a prevalent belief in northern Moravia and Silesia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. People believed that some individuals were able to return to the living after they died, inflicting numerous torments on them. Terrified witnesses of the night-time disturbances testified *en masse* to the nocturnal attacks that spared neither people nor livestock. The posthumous witch or wizard was said to lay on their victim in the night, pressing down their body so hard that they could hardly breathe. The unfortunate individuals hastened to relate their woes to the reeve and the parish priest, since it was up to them as the main authorities of the village to try to remedy the situation.

The first references to the restless dead appear as early as the Middle Ages. The chronicler Neplach recorded the case of the shepherd Myslata in the village of Blou near Kadan in 1336. The man allegedly rose from his grave and called his neighbors by name, who subsequently died within eight days. Although his body was pierced with a stake, he continued to appear to people. Only after his remains had been burned did his actions cease. There was a similar case in 1344 in the village of Levín, where a dead woman caused several people's death. Peace was only restored when her body was burned.⁵² However, the Moravian-Silesian borderlands were the real scene of the trials of the returning dead almost three hundred years later. Although civil registers recorded the first cases of the restless dead who ended up on the pyre as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century, the real hysteria started more than half a century later. In this context, Branislav Martinek noted that during the period when 'classical' witch trials were on the decline, cases proliferated related to the complex of superstitions about so-called vampirism and afterlife magic. The growing number of cases prompted the Secret Councilor of the Bishop of Olomouc, Karl Ferdinand Schertz, to write a treatise entitled *Magia posthuma* and published in 1706.⁵³ Daniel Wojtucki also pointed out that executions of the dead broke out on a mass scale in the early eighteenth century, when it was no longer possible to prosecute living people and accuse them of witchcraft and magic in the area studied.⁵⁴ He sees the 1674 Friedlandt case as one of the other cases, but the first to be so thoroughly documented.⁵⁵ We can therefore say that it started a wave of cases with a specific scheme of procedure, which periodically waxed and waned in the Moravian-Silesian border region until the mid-eighteenth century.

Unfortunately, the sources dealing with the case have only been preserved in a book of copies and charters. This means that the earliest source available to us dates back to June 1674. Its wording suggests that the matter had begun much earlier,

52 *Neplacha, opata opatovského*, 480–81.

53 Martinek, "K otázce," 37.

54 Wojtucki, "Wampiryczne dzieci," 217.

55 Wojtucki, "Martwe czarownice," 171.

since the parties involved had already responded to the nocturnal aberrations and their repercussions. To see how the case started, it is necessary to go back three months to 28 March, when Marina, the widow of Hans Fischer, died in the village at the age of ninety-four.⁵⁶ The woman was buried in the local cemetery without any objections. Further information can then be found in a decree from the commander (*Komtur*) of the Order of the Teutonic Knights, Friedrich von der Asseburg, addressing the representatives of Friedlandt in a letter of 13 June 1674. Although the interment of Marina Fischerin in the hallowed ground of the cemetery was not a source of controversy in March, it quickly turned into a serious problem the commandry was starkly confronted with. The commander initially took exception to a situation where the people of Friedlandt refused to bury their dead in the Friedlandt cemetery and sought to have them interred at the cemetery in nearby Albrechtice u Rýmařova (Albrechtice). The commander denounced this as impudence, which in his own words stemmed from nothing but fear and an overactive imagination.⁵⁷

At the same time, he was careful to emphasize that the Friedlandt cemetery had been consecrated in 1655 by the bishop of Olomouc himself and therefore offered the same spiritual provision as the cemetery in Albrechtice. He also pointed out to the representatives of the village that the manorial authorities had not given consent for the bodies to be moved. The commander regarded the fear of the ghost, described in the letter as a *Polter Geist*, as mere gossip, prescribing a fine of ten gulden for anyone who continued to spread it. The economic factor was of paramount importance to the commander since, as he said, the general panic affected the economic well-being of the community, because the prevailing atmosphere of fear deterred travelers and foreigners from spending the night in the village, which had a negative impact on the trades of the local inhabitants.⁵⁸ The fear of burying the dead in the cemetery where the alleged afterlife witch lay stemmed from a belief in the possible transmission of infection. People believed that not only relatives of the afterlife witches were susceptible to the same fate. The transformation was also thought to be caused

56 ZAO, Sbíрка matrik Severomoravského kraje, Roman-Catholic Parish Břidličná, N, Z, O 1657–1720/1848, sign. R V 2, inv. no. 7442, fol. 166, The death register entry, March 28, 1674.

57 ZAO, ÚS ŘNR, inv. no. 118, fol. 63, Komtur Fridrich von der Asseburg to the representatives of Friedlandt (copy of a letter), 13 June 1674. In this context, Karen Lambrecht pointed out the sceptical attitude that the Order had towards the trials of afterlife magic. On 8 January 1675, the Komtur of the Order, Johann Caspar von Ampringen, asked Statthalter Zocha for detailed information and the involvement of experienced lay and clerical persons. He did not consider the established procedure legally acceptable and wanted to have the phenomenon investigated within the Order and the university. Whether this action took place and what the outcome was is not known. Lambrecht, *Hexenverfolgung*, 392.

58 ZAO, ÚS ŘNR, inv. no. 118, fol. 63, Komtur Fridrich von der Asseburg to the representatives of Friedlandt (copy of a letter), 13 June 1674.

by being deposited in the same soil. This belief reflected general attitudes towards unclean bodies, of which they were wary. People feared not only the bodies of criminals, but also those who died through no fault of their own, such as those who were murdered, and such bodies were buried outside the cemetery.⁵⁹ On the issue of burying suicides, Daniela Tinková points out that burials on church grounds could lead even to cemetery riots in early modern and modern Europe.⁶⁰

From the surviving records we know that a further development occurred on 16 August, when the bailiff and the compurgators met to examine the remains of the deceased Fischerin. The copy of the original memorandum does not state who the text was intended for, but it is likely that it was meant for the *vogt* (governor) of Sovinec, Melchior Ferdinand Riedl. Friedlandt's secular authorities referred to a meeting between the parish priest Valentin Heinrich and the *vogt*, which resulted in an agreement to subject the suspect body to an examination consisting of a search for unnatural post-mortem anomalies, such as the presence of red marks on the body, flexibility of the limbs, or fresh blood in the tissues. The sources indicate that the local parish priest and his colleagues from the neighboring villages first attempted to intervene using spiritual means. They repeatedly blessed houses in the village and celebrated masses for the dead. However, this approach apparently failed to produce the desired respite, which is why a more drastic solution was adopted. The men in attendance confirmed that during the examination of the suspect body they saw fresh bloody tissue with their own eyes after scratching the skin with a shingle nail. Their testimony was corroborated by other witnesses, the foreman of the hammer works, and a certain Geörg Maÿer.⁶¹

The investigation gave new momentum to the case. Upon receiving the results of the 'test', Melchior Riedel promptly contacted the *Landkomtur* (*Statthalter* or governor) of the Teutonic Order Johann Wilhelm von Zocha, informing him of the state of affairs and confirming that the body was indeed in an unusual condition. He appealed to Zocha, drawing his attention to the fact that people had been afflicted for a long time and even the current, more moderate protective measures did not restore peace. He recommended that the *Landkomtur* refer the entire matter to the bishop consistory in Olomouc for resolution.⁶² Shortly afterwards, the representatives of Friedlandt headed by the bailiff and the compurgators contacted Zocha to plea for

59 Navrátilová, *Narození a smrt*, 305.

60 Tinková, "Hřbitovní vzpoury," 169.

61 ZAO, ÚS ŘNR, inv. no. 118, fol. 64, The representatives of Friedlandt to the Sovinec Vogt Melchior Riedel (copy of a letter), 16 August 1674.

62 ZAO, ÚS ŘNR, inv. no. 118, fol. 62, Melchior Riedel to the Statthalter of the Teutonic Knights Joh. Wilhelm von Zocha (copy of a letter), 17 August 1674.

remedial action and an end to the aberrations.⁶³ Zocha yielded to the pressure and sent a letter to the Olomouc consistory informing them in detail about the case.

In spite of the initial attempt to resolve the case on ‘home turf’ in a more moderate way, Zocha reassessed his original position. He notified the consistory that, despite the use of spiritual means, the situation had not improved, and people were still being plagued by a restless spirit or spectre (*unruhige Geist oder Gespenst*) which was said to roam through the village, causing all kinds of trouble for the Friedlandt community. He also informed the consistory of the residents’ opposition to burials taking place in the local cemetery. Zocha supported his intention to leave the matter for the Olomouc office to decide with the approval of the dean of Bruntál, Eberhard Cronberger and the parish priest of Albrechtice, and administrator of Friedlandt, Valentin Heinrich.⁶⁴

What made Zocha change his mind and perform a significant about-face? One of Zocha’s main goals as *Landkomtur* of the Order was to ensure the economic recovery of the ravaged estate. In a letter from June addressed to the representatives of Friedlandt, he explicitly warned against spreading panic which, in his words, led to economic instability for the village. In spite of his efforts to deal with the case on his own without outside intervention, he had to yield to the agitated people. The episcopal consistory in Olomouc responded quickly and sent the dean Cronberger instructions on how to proceed. In the letter, signed by the Bishop of Olomouc, Karl of Liechtenstein-Castelcorno, and a member of the consistory, Joannes Petrus, the prelates justified the outlined course of action, being careful to repeat the established fact that the spiritual means used had proved ineffective.⁶⁵ Once again they stressed the fact that more moderate methods had failed to stop the spree of witchcraft, which justified a further examination. Although the dignitaries in Olomouc advised proceeding with caution, they gave permission for the body to be exhumed and submitted to an inspection. The men present were to search the body for “signs of evil or a pact with the devil” (*signa maleficj vel pactj sathanici*).⁶⁶ This remark helps to shed light on the relationship between witchcraft practised by living persons and the posthumous magic people were accused of after death. The church officials understood posthumous magic, which entered the consciousness of educated circles

63 ZAO, ÚS ŘNR, inv. no. 118, fol. 65, The representatives of Friedlandt to Joh. Wilhelm von Zocha (copy of a letter), 18 August 1674.

64 ZAO, ÚS ŘNR, inv. no. 118, fol. 65, Joh. Wilhelm von Zocha to the Bishop Consistory in Olomouc (copy of a letter), 20 August 1674.

65 ZAO, ÚS ŘNR, inv. no. 118, fol. 66, The Bishop Consistory in Olomouc to the dean in Bruntál, Cronberger (copy of a letter), 27 August 1674.

66 ZAO, ÚS ŘNR, inv. no. 118, fol. 66, The Bishop Consistory in Olomouc to Cronberger (copy of a letter), 27 August 1674.

in the eighteenth century as ‘vampirism’,⁶⁷ as a type of magical practice which was no less problematic than the sorcery practiced by the living. As was the case with witch trials, posthumous witches also ended up being burned at the stake.

Based on the instructions of the consistory, the manorial authorities progressed to the final stage of the case. The individual steps taken during this phase were recorded in a comprehensive report dated 6 September 1674. In the introduction to the memorandum, the author described the matter, identifying the main actor as Marina Fischerin, who died on 28 March. The desperate plight of the Friedlandt community compelled the authorities of the Order of the Teutonic Knights to cooperate with the Olomouc consistory.⁶⁸ To a large extent, the author’s account of the case casts the individual actors in specific roles. The village of Friedlandt appears in the role of a victim whose fate lies entirely in the hands of the manorial authorities. The latter, together with the bishopric, will then take action to remedy the situation. Acting as intermediaries between these actors are the representatives of the village and the local clergy, who on the one hand are familiar with their community, and on the other hand present their requirements to the manorial authorities. On both sides we can see the positive character of the secular and ecclesiastical representatives, who are able to secure the necessary peace and restore the prosperity of the village by working together. The author thus depicts an idealized power scheme, which essentially corresponded to the re-Catholicization policy in the Czech lands.

Although we do not know the author’s name, we may assume that he was an eyewitness to the events. In his memorandum, he recorded the important individuals who took part in the proceedings: the dean of Bruntál, Eberhard Cronenberger, and the dean of Opava, Maximilian Linder, both of whom were priests in the Order of the Teutonic Knights; the parish priest of Albrechtice, Valentin Heinrich, acting as the local ordinary; the *vogt* of Sovinec, Melchior Riedel; the foreman of the Friedlandt hammer works, Baltzer Schindler, and the scribe of the hammer works, Michel Herolt; the bailiff and the compurgators of Friedlandt.⁶⁹ The men listed apparently witnessed the exhumation of the body and its subsequent examination.

67 The word ‘vampire’ was publicly used to describe this type of case in a reprint of an official report that appeared in the Vienna newspaper *Wienerisches Diarium* on 21 July 1725, referring to a case in the village of Ksiljevo in the Habsburg part of Serbia. See: “Copia eines Schreibens.” Daniel Wojtucki argues that this term is not entirely correct for a precise definition of the phenomenon under study. It should be associated with witches and wizards rather than the phenomenon of a being rising from the grave and feeding on blood. According to Wojtucki, it was possible to practise magic not only in life but also after death, hence the later term *magia post-huma*, which can be found in the works of eighteenth-century authors. Wojtucki, “Der Glaube,” 190–91.

68 ZAO, ÚS ŘNR, inv. no. 118, fol. 67–8, Record of Marina Fischerin’s execution.

69 ZAO, ÚS ŘNR, inv. no. 118, fol. 67, Record of Marina Fischerin’s execution.

The body of Marina Fischerin was removed from the grave for a visual inspection, whose outcome had probably been anticipated by those present. Although Marina Fischerin had been dead for over five months and her remains exhibited the natural signs of decay, it only took a few changes in the body for the men present to decide on the outcome of the case. Although, according to the record, the front of the body was blackened and decomposed, after turning it and cutting through the tough skin, those present saw bright red tissue supplied with blood. Together with the testimonies about the night-time disturbances, it was decided, in accordance with the decree of the Olomouc consistory, that the remains would be handed over to the secular authorities represented by the *vogt* of Sovinec, whose competence the subsequent disposal of the body was. Throughout this time, the body was handled by a gravedigger who was given the job of digging up the remains and handing them over to the secular authorities across the cemetery wall. After that, the body was left under the supervision of a special guard while preparations were made for it to be executed the next day, a task which fell to an executioner called in from the village of Rýžoviště. He loaded the body onto a cart along with the tools that had been used to handle the body. The execution site was the boundary of the neighboring villages of Friedlandt, Moravský Kočov, and Valšov. On his way there the executioner was accompanied by a procession of onlookers. Once there, the body was dismembered and burned. The ashes were placed in a hole prepared in advance and the soil excavated from the grave was thrown into the water. The grave was then filled in so that no-one else could be laid to rest in the incriminated location. With that, the case was closed.⁷⁰ The participation of the actors listed above in the execution of Marina Fischerin was vital. Posthumous magic stood on thin legal ground. Although it was a case of magic, posthumous sorcery was not covered by any penal code at the time. Moreover, the accused could not take their place in the dock as they were already dead. The main form of evidence was the accused's confession, which could not be obtained in this case and was therefore replaced by eyewitness accounts of the nighttime disturbances.⁷¹ The presence of representatives of the secular authorities, the clergy, and the inhabitants of the village provided the much needed legitimacy to the verdict and expressed approval of the conduct of the trial and the punishment.

However, it was still necessary to settle the financial liabilities—significant costs had been incurred by the trial. Four accounting entries are recorded in the book of copies, with the most interesting one dated 8 May 1674. This date is significant in terms of the spiritual means the parties repeatedly mention in their correspondence. On that day, the parish priests of the villages of Rýžoviště, Dolní Moravice, Velkruby, and Albrechtice apparently officiated at masses for the dead, for which they were

70 ZAO, ÚS ŘNR, inv. no. 118, fol. 67–8, Record of Marina Fischerin's execution.

71 Wojtucki, *Magia posthuma*, 208.

entitled to refreshments to the value of 3 gulden and 6 kreuzer.⁷² Although neither the type nor the content of the masses is specified, it is most likely that this was one of the spiritual means referred to in the letters. We know that the masses were celebrated for the dead and were supposed to ensure their protection. As noted above, in connection with posthumous magic, people believed that the ‘unclean’ body was capable of infecting other deceased persons buried in the cemetery. This may have been one of the main reasons why the people of Friedlandt refused to bury their dead in Friedlandt and sought to have the bodies transferred to Albrechtice.

What role did the church, especially the lower clergy, play in posthumous witch trials? The case of Marina Fischerin clearly shows that it was very important, if not essential. After the deprivation and hopelessness that accompanied the Thirty Years’ War, the Catholic Church offered spiritual comfort and a helping hand. However, the belief ordinary folk in the countryside had in supernatural beings cannot be ignored. Early modern man and his life cycle were inextricably linked to the land and agricultural production, which provided for his material needs throughout the year and ensured the family’s survival in the barren winter months. It took very little—bad weather, a wet summer, or a disease among livestock—for all his work to come to naught.⁷³ A critical milestone in the life of the rural population was the Little Ice Age. The interval between 1619 and 1679 was a very cold period⁷⁴ whose impact was intensified by the beginning of the Thirty Years’ War and ending with the incursion by the Ottoman Turks. If we look at Marina Fischerin’s case through the optics of the climate, we discover that it did indeed coincide with a climatically adverse period. The woman died at the end of March 1674, with the subsequent proceedings lasting almost half a year. According to weather records of the time, we know that it was a severe winter with abundant snow, and in late March, when Marina passed away, people were still having to contend with ice and snow. This is a significant fact, since the unseasonably cold weather may have preserved the body, initially deposited in the ground, to a considerable extent, thus contributing to its ‘unnatural’ appearance during the examination. Even the spring did not bring about a dramatic temperature rise. According to contemporary records, it was cool and wet, as was the summer, when temperatures were average but there was a great deal of rain.⁷⁵

Harsh weather was not the only problem early modern villagers had to contend with. The limited availability of medical care in the countryside was a reason why people

72 ZAO, ÚS ŘNR, inv. no. 118, fol. 68, List of costs for spiritual care, 8 May 1674.

73 Vondra, *České země*, 302; Brázdil, Dobrovolný, Štekl, Kotyza, Valášek and Jež, *History of Weather*. Adverse weather and natural disasters affecting economic activity were often blamed on witches. Bever, *Popular Witch Beliefs*, 54; Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts*, 159.

74 Svoboda, Vašků and Čilek, *Velká kniha*, 323.

75 Svoboda et al., *Velká kniha*, 352.

turned to herbalists, who often augmented their knowledge with supernatural elements in times of illness and affliction. If disease struck livestock and domestic animals, that represented a major problem for the household, which is why it was necessary to prevent such situations. People often resorted to protective magic that was supposed to ensure a good harvest, as well as preventing livestock from falling ill or being bewitched. Popular means of protection included liturgical or consecrated objects. Scapulars, rosaries, holy water, oil, candles, medals, crosses, pictures, and relics held a special attraction for the early modern believer. They combined elements of the sacred and the magical, categories that many people found difficult to distinguish. These so-called 'sacramentals' enjoyed enormous popularity in Catholic regions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and despite contradicting official church doctrine, worshippers used them as mediators of grace and an effective means of help with the trials and tribulations of everyday life. The magical function did not only relate to the well-known images of saints and the Virgin Mary, which were attributed a protective and curative power or the ability to ward off bad weather, but also to the aforementioned rosaries, scapulars, and other devotional artifacts of an amuletic nature. These objects were essentially treated as talismans, protective objects. This view was supported not only by the practices of lay religious brotherhoods but also by the catechetical handbooks of the time that made reference to the power of the artifacts that drive away storms, help put out fires, provide relief during childbirth, prevent a person from drowning, or offer protection against spells.⁷⁶ In his publication *Zrcadlo Náboženství* (The Mirror of Religion, 1642), the Catholic priest Jindřich Ondřej Hoffmann defended individuals who brought various herbs into church to have them blessed. According to Hoffmann, their motives for doing so were pious rather than superstitious, and people used the consecrated plants as protection against sorcery, storms, or disease.⁷⁷

The belief in the power of consecrated objects was, therefore, not limited to rural populations but was shared by some of the clergy. A specific example is found in the last case of posthumous magic, which took place in the Moravian-Silesian border region in 1754–1755. In Svobodné Heřmanice, which then belonged to the estate of the Cistercian monastery in Velehrad, a healer called Marianna Saligerin died and was accused of posthumous magic. At the very outset of the investigation, the parish priest of Velké Heraltice, Johann Metzner, who was personally involved in the case, informed the Olomouc consistory about the use of protective amulets among the terrified people.⁷⁸ The Latin term *amuletis*, which Metzner used in the

76 Greyerz and Conrad, eds, *Handbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, 86–9; Scribner, *Popular culture*, 38; Zuber, *Osudy moravské církve*, 240–45; Mikulec, *Náboženský život*, 118–31.

77 Hoffman, *Zrcadlo Náboženství*, 185.

78 ZAO-OL, ACO, sign. C13, inv. no. 2279, fol. 273, The parish priest Johann Metzner to the Bishop Consistory in Olomouc, 23 September 1754.

letter, undoubtedly referred to consecrated objects commonly used by church officials, even though it could suggest the use of amulets employed within magical practices, which were forbidden by the church.⁷⁹

In the case of Marina Fischerin, during the night-time disturbances, the first phase involved spiritual means, such as the reading of masses and exorcism (*mitmaßleßen alß and[eren]n gewöhnlichen Exorcismis*), which were supposed to help calm the situation.⁸⁰ But what was the meaning of the term ‘exorcism’ within the context of posthumous magic? The third book of a manual from twenty years later, *Agenda seu rituale Olmucense*, gives instructions on the correct procedure for performing an exorcism.⁸¹ The text records a dialogue between a clergyman/exorcist and a possessed individual. In the case of a posthumous witch or wizard, this was an individual who had died, although it was believed that they visited their neighbors, either in their own form or even more frequently in animal or other form, and tormented them in various ways, especially at night. If the unknown author of the Friedlandt record did mean the enactment of the procedure described, this may have been an attempt to use spiritual means, such as holy water or a crucifix, to make the restless spirit leave the dwelling under attack. Despite the fact that a reference to spiritual healing appears several times in the course of the Moravian–Silesian posthumous witch trials, it never succeeded in putting a stop to the case, and it was always necessary to proceed with an invasive solution.

Cases of posthumous magic occurred mainly on three estates: Bruntál and Sovinec (Order of the Teutonic Knights), Libavá (bishopric of Olomouc), and Velké Heraltice (Cistercian monastery of Velehrad). Their manorial authorities represented an important Catholic entity committed to actively implementing the policy of re-Catholicization. The approach of the Komtur of the Order shows that, despite distancing themselves from superstition, the authorities did not take people’s concerns lightly. The involvement of the lower clergy, who interpreted the episcopal directives to the village folk during sermons, contributed significantly to spreading Catholic supremacy in remote mountain regions. After the Thirty Years’ War, people in these areas faced a number of crises to deal with. One way of doing so was to identify and present a culprit responsible for the problems. Most often, the spotlight fell on an inconvenient individual who behaved differently from the others and disturbed the established order in the village. Although young women, men, and children

79 The efforts of the church to combat superstitious behaviour were reflected, for example, in the resolution of the Prague Synod of 1605, which targeted problematic practices, namely idolatry, witchcraft, sorcery, or the use of amulets. *Synodus Archidioecesisana Pragensis*, 20; Sedlák, “Některá zvláštní ustanovení,” 606–7.

80 ZAO, ÚS ŘNR, inv. no. 118, fol. 67, Record of Marina Fischerin’s execution.

81 *Agenda seu rituale Olmucense*, 76–7.

also faced accusations of witchcraft, it was the image of the witch as an old woman, often on the fringes of society, that dominated among the common people. Marina Fischerin was regarded as an unpleasant person; she was old, widowed and, therefore, potentially dangerous. Although she died in the bosom of the church and was given a formal burial, it did not take long for her to become the prime suspect. For the most part, the rural clergy did not suppress this fear but, instead, responded to the common need to ‘purge’ the community. It provided spiritual comfort in several phases. The initial purification involved the repeated blessing of houses and the celebration of masses and, in all likelihood, the provision of religious objects too, as we find in other cases. The next level consisted of removing the ‘infected’ body from the cemetery and taking the remains away from the village. Once again, this purified the safe space of the village. The burning of the remains was also purificatory in nature—not only for the community, but also for the deceased person. From the clergy’s point of view, the process represented a legitimate protective act by which the community was once again purified and unified. Posthumous magic was not just a manifestation of the belief of simple, frightened people. It also encompassed a number of aspects that clearly reflect a ‘crisis of the Early Modern Age’. Above all, it became a social phenomenon that gave the moods, feelings, and concerns of the time a material form in the posthumous witch as a punishment and a purifying instrument for society in the second half of the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century.

It is possible that the official invitation to intervene against posthumous magic in remote regions of northern Moravia and Silesia proved useful for the episcopal consistory in Olomouc. Perhaps this affair could even be regarded as part of the church’s response to the danger of the emergence of non-Catholicism in a region strongly affected by the Lutheran Reformation. The Bishop of Olomouc, Karl of Liechtenstein-Castelcornio, who was involved in the cases of posthumous magic between 1674 and 1679, also played a role in the infamous witch trials in Velké Losiny, where the fear of non-Catholicism appears to have been a factor in the individual cases.⁸²

The problem of non-Catholics, especially the hidden ones, was still a topical issue at this time. The origins can be traced back to the Thirty Years’ War, when the non-Catholic nobility and burghers of the royal towns had two options: convert to Catholicism or go into exile. The inhabitants of the other towns and people in the countryside did not have the right to emigrate and were theoretically obliged to convert to the Catholic faith. However, there was another option, i.e., illegal migration to another estate or abroad, where the religious conditions were more acceptable to them. The last option was to outwardly convert and conform, but secretly retain the original faith.⁸³ It is therefore not surprising that the clergy were concerned about the religious life of their subjects, who often adhered to their doctrinally different

82 Parma, “Biskup Karel z Lichtensteinu-Castelcornia,” 88–9.

83 Mikulec, *České země*, 61–3.

ideas, mixed with superstition. Wojtucki's research helps illustrate this problem. The records of the Court of Appeals in Wrocław, which dealt with cases of the restless dead in 1632, 1641 and 1644, show that these people were good Christians, as confirmed by witnesses. It was all the more difficult to understand why they were causing harm in the community after death. People explained this fact by witchcraft, which the accused were said to have practiced during their lifetime.⁸⁴ The inadequate personal situation of the parish organization, especially in the northern and eastern regions of Moravia, was perhaps the reason why even in the first half of the eighteenth century the bishop consistory in Olomouc did not leave the fear of secret heretics. In an attempt to maintain its spiritual dominance in the area, it used various means, including trials of posthumous witches and sorcerers.

Trials against witches and vampires continued throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, even though a part of the church had already expressed considerable skepticism about such matters. The last major case of posthumous magic took place in Svobodné Heřmanice in 1755. The trial, which entailed the execution of nineteen bodies, did not escape the attention of the sovereign, Maria Theresa, who had the matter investigated by her personal physician Gerhard van Swieten. In her correspondence with the Bishop of Olomouc, Ferdinand Julius Troyer, she strongly condemned the practices adopted. The priesthood did not escape her criticism; according to the Empress, they should have maintained a distance from superstitions of this kind, rather than reinforcing the ignorant population's belief in them. A definitive end to the persecution was brought about by the decree of 1 March 1755 forbidding the desecration of bodies.⁸⁵

The reform period brought about a change in the treatment of the dead. A court decree, printed in Prague on 2 August 1784, discussed the new way of dealing with bodies and a simplified form of burial. It included a prescription for the abolition of cemeteries in the villages and their transfer to the outskirts. Hygienic standards also focused on the appropriate location. The new cemeteries were to be located away from watercourses and were not to be on land whose properties would prevent decomposition.⁸⁶ Emperor Joseph II supplemented the previous instruction with a decree to shorten the time of funeral ceremonies. The bodies of the deceased were to be taken to the church for prayers and then buried in the ground outside the village, placed only in linen sacks and covered with quicklime.⁸⁷

84 Wojtucki, "Der Glaube", 192.

85 MZA, B1, book no. 213, fol. 748–51. A decree of 1 March 1755.

86 *Dritte Sammlung*, 66.

87 *Dritte Sammlung*, 66–7.

Facit

We have seen in three examples that there were two dimensions to the spiritual medicine of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: it concerned both physical healing (common diseases, protection against the risk of death, and disposal of an unclean body) and spiritual healing (sinful behavior and conversion), two phenomena that were inextricably linked. Furthermore, it became apparent that local spiritual authorities, especially members of religious orders and parish priests, played a key role in spreading this type of thinking. As preachers, confessors, and investigators of suspicious matters, they provided orientation to the faithful, gave instruction, issued authorization for contentious cases, constructed a historical tradition of cult locations, and communicated with other authorities. In his fascinating analysis of the ‘anatomy of Catholic learning’, Robert Evans observed the separation of intellectual and popular culture, that apparently occurred in the seventeenth century due to the fact that intellectual discourse was given scope for self-expression, while popular culture was subject to increasing regimentation. What Evans had in mind was primarily specific phenomena, such as ghostly apparitions, exorcisms, miracles, prophecies, and witchcraft, to which he linked the attacks on folk magic.⁸⁸ Traditionally, ‘popular piety’ also encompasses the topic of miraculous images and pilgrimage sites, which are associated with a ‘popular’ unofficial approach to faith. These assumptions are largely justified, especially from the perspective of comparing medieval and early modern piety. Nevertheless, they obscure the fact that in the seventeenth century, in both the Czech lands and Bavaria, those who upheld these practices—however theologically controversial and sensitive they may have been—were also representatives of the social elite. Therefore, these were not practices associated exclusively with the rural folk, as it was claimed by intellectuals and state authorities around the mid-eighteenth century, and for a long time also by post-Enlightenment historiography.

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