

2003

The Journey of the Damned Coffin

Jordi Ardanuy
Universitat de Barcelona

Luis Romero

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Recommended Citation

Ardanuy, Jordi and Romero, Luis (2003) "The Journey of the Damned Coffin," *Journal of Dracula Studies*: Vol. 5: No. 1, Article 7.

DOI: 10.70013/91d8e9f0

Available at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/dracula-studies/vol5/iss1/7>

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The Journey of the Damned Coffin

Cover Page Footnote

Jordi Ardanuy is a professor of the Universitat de Barcelona in New Technologies, with degrees in Physics, Library Sciences and Anthropology. He has published *Vampire: Posthumous magic in Spain and the outer* (1994). Luisa Romero is a marketing director, with a degree in Biology and an MBA. Both are members (Jordi is president) of the CEEV (Spanish Society for the Study of Vampires).

The Journey of the Damned Coffin

Jordi Ardanuy and Luisa Romero

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The Spanish writer Miguel Gómez indicates in his book *Vampiros: magia póstuma de los no-muertos* (Vampires: posthumous magic of the undead) which is, despite its shortness, one of the few works dealing with events of vampirism in Spain, that “we can talk about some isolated events of vampirism at Montes de Toledo, at the height of the Baroque period and, last century, of an event happened near Cartagena, which was caused by a Serbian gentleman, who tormented and frightened some small villages close to the important Murcian harbour.”

In Autumn 1983, this Spanish writer had received some information about the research work of a lawyer in Madrid, who was interested in heraldry. The author made a report, never published, according to which the coffin arrived at the port of Cartagena, where it was stored some time until an individual from A Coruña claimed it. It was then moved by road, making intermediate stops at several towns. A few days afterwards, a number of vampiric events took place in Alhama del Segura (a city which does not exist in the Spanish Kingdom, being maybe Alhama de Murcia or Molina del Segura), Almería, Toledo, Santillana del Mar, Comillas and A Coruña. The inference is that these attacks took place in cities and towns through or near which the coffin passed.

The coffin was soon sent back to Cartagena, where a Serbian nobleman took charge of it. This person was of meagre means, since he stayed for some nights – during the day nobody succeed in seeing him – in an inn located at the Mayor street of Alhama de Murcia. Were the Serbian and the corpse the same character? So suggests the story.

According to the lawyer’s research, an old man from this place stated to have met in Murcia, in 1915, a Polish aristocrat of great resemblance to the Serbian. This person disappeared suddenly and the coffin was buried in the Cartagena cemetery some time after. The grave has now just a nominal inscription.

Miguel Montero de Espinosa explains in an article dedicated to vampirism, published in the magazine *Ritos*, once edited by Miguel Gómez himself, that a Balkan corpse appeared for a time in Cantabria by the First World War, until an occultist group decided to assemble to fight it. A witness of that seance reported, according to Montero de Espinosa, that “the whole room became filled with a putrefaction smell that could scarcely be hold out, something similar to putrid meat.” The temperature, it is said, dropped alarmingly to around fifteen degrees (the seance took place at the height of midsummer heat). One of those present, whose name was Luisa, a well-known older medium, was on the point of fainting since, from what she said, she felt as if her whole body seemed to be taken up and her forces vanished through several points of her body, particularly her armpits and her solar plexus. Afterwards, a member of the ACEF association, which was then presided by Miguel Gómez, showed me in a personal communication of April 1993, that “about the strange event of vampirism or assumed vampirism that concluded with several deaths in different Spanish places during the first third of this century, we know the papers are at the Santillana de Mar (Cantabria) files.”

This is the somewhat contradictory information that has come to my hands. The longing for

knowledge is an excellent reason to remove dust from travelling bags and to update information, especially when all this is carried out accompanied with Catalan researchers.

Since the story begins in Cartagena, I will also begin my report there. In that city there are two cemeteries of common use: the oldest one is “Nuestra Señora de los Remedios,” located in one end of Santa Lucía district; the other is known as “San Antón,” which gives its name to the surrounding area. The records of both graveyards contain, as it usual, the date and time of the reception of the deceased, the ordering number, personal data, burying standard with chronological entry, paid taxes and other remarks.

Our investigation shows that there is no entry corresponding to the account in the report sent to Miguel Gómez. It can be noticed that there are in those files some accounts about unknown people who were found dead, as it is the case of a human male in his sixties, buried on 20 January 1915, at 1 p.m. in general standard in judicial order. In the case of our interest, the deceased was not unidentified, since it had been claimed from A Coruña and a Serbian man had later taken charge of it.

If the authorities were responsible for his burying, it would have fallen to the general rate, as concluded from the report, with a grave in earth for a six years period, with the remains then moved to the common charnel-house. In case someone wanted to prevent this, a new burying should have been paid, which is very unlikely. Therefore, it is impossible that any grave of the assumed vampire still remains nowadays. Several local historian were consulted in quest of any testimony that could strengthen the story somehow. But all attempts failed. Likewise the files of the Cartagena navy do not shed any light. The manager of the Cartagena Sea Customhouse reported that documents that old are not kept, but are periodically destroyed. Testimonies from experts and managers assure that the coffin would have gone through customs (since it came from abroad) and health department certificates should have been exhibited as well. When coming back from A Coruña and following the Serbian man’s disappearance, a warning would have been published at the Official Province Journal by the Governor, in order to get someone taking charge of the burying. There is no trace of any of this.

One way to move the corpse from Cartagena to A Coruña would have been through Calasparra – where there is no memory or recording of events of vampirism – to Madrid. About fifty kilometres at the south of Madrid in Toledo province there is Borox, a village of just over a thousand of inhabitants. The beginning was not very promising, since nobody had ever heard about a personage named “The Borox Vampire.” But finally, the kind Secretary met a sexagenarian woman who had heard about him when she was a child. Because of the time elapsed, she could only remember that it was “a man who sucked blood” from other fellows, without recollection of any more detail. After this small success, I went to the social club for the elderly, where I was very kindly entertained and richly informed about stories and anecdotes of the village and the Baja Sagra country, but nobody knew about the morbid vampire story. I was leaving Borox somehow pessimistic when the always timely Secretary told me that another independent source corroborated the memory of the “Vampire,” but the old man was not in a sufficient state of health to give more details. But the vampire legend, with or without a basis, had once existed.

The steps carried out in Santillana del Mar and Comillas proved useless. There is no document in those Cantabrian cities that could provide any evidence. It is very difficult to explain the odd route taken by the coffin to have gone from Madrid to A Coruña if it had to turn aside to Cantabria. Maybe he aimed at other purposes? Was he running away from the district as a consequence of the esoteric exorcism related by Montero de Espinosa?

Unfortunately, in A Coruña there is not a preserved trace of the sinister coffin’s passage across the region. Perhaps this destination was only an excuse. After leaving Cantabria, it could perfectly go east or south again, without even stepping on Galician soil. Almería, Toledo or Alhama do not contribute further either. But something is certain: in a small Toledan village, some terrible bloody events – real or not – compelled speculation about the Borox Vampire.

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