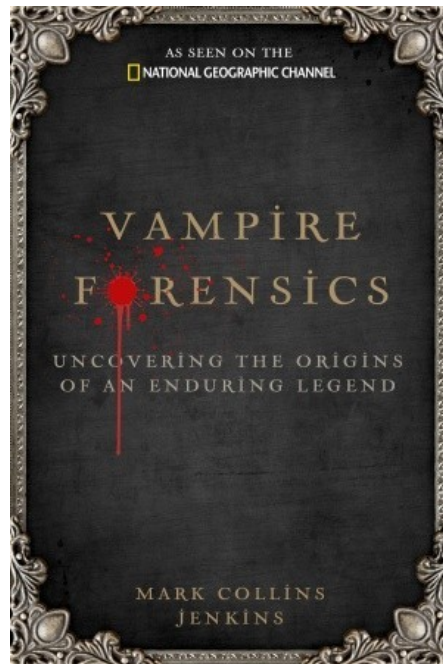




Vampire Forensics: Uncovering the Origins of an Enduring Legend

Mark Collins Jenkins

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Mark Jenkins's engrossing history draws on the latest science, anthropological and archaeological research to explore the origins of vampire stories, providing gripping historic and folkloric context for the concept of immortal beings who defy death by feeding on the lifeblood of others. From the earliest whispers of eternal evil in ancient Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome, vampire tales flourished through the centuries and around the globe, fueled by superstition, sexual mystery, fear of disease and death, and the nagging anxiety that demons lurk everywhere.

In *Vampire Forensics*, Mark Jenkins probes vampire legend to tease out the historical truths enshrined in the tales of terror: sherds of Persian pottery depicting blood-sucking demons; the amazing recent discovery by National Geographic archaeologist Matteo Borrini of a 16th-century Venetian grave of a plague victim and suspected vampire; and the Transylvanian castle of "Vlad the Impaler," whose bloodthirsty cruelty remains unsurpassed.

Jenkins navigates centuries of lore and legend, adding new chapters to the chronicle and weaving an irresistibly seductive blend of superstition, psychology, and science sure to engross everyone from Anne Rice's countless readers to serious students of archaeology and mythology.

Vampire Forensics: Uncovering the Origins of an Enduring Legend Details

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Mark Collins Jenkins

From Reader Review Vampire Forensics: Uncovering the Origins of an Enduring Legend for online ebook

Faye Hollidaye says

A very interesting, all-encompassing tale of the walking dead throughout the lands of time. I highly recommend for people who are truly interested in where today's vampire, zombie, ghost, et cetera stories, myths, and legends originated. This book will get you to the roots. I also suggest Matthew Beresford's book in accordance with this one, since his is also very-well written and if anything a little less tedious than this one.

Chris says

I've skimmed over half the book. I might pick it up again; I might not.

Here's the problem.

If you've read *The Vampire: A Casebook* or any other book about vampires, you know everything that this book is talking about.

Honestly, I also would have thought that some one working for Nat Geo would have gotten Mary Shelley's relationship to Clare Clairmont correct.

So I went back and finished it. There are better vampire studies out there. It's slightly interesting for the bit about Venice, but the last bit seems a bit of a hodgepodge.

Stacey says

found this exploration into the myths and legends of vampires underwhelming, in a word.

I expected the book to delve into the historical and literary evidence for vampires, and to a certain extent, that is what the author does. However, the exploration jumps around, and at times the author doesn't explain how one factor/myth/legend/story indicates the existence of, or belief in, vampires.

In the last chapters, the author enumerates (yes, it is essentially a list) of various traditions in distant regions (i.e. not Eurasia, whose legends have the most definitive connection to the modern-day vampire) of the world, even though they are not vampires. It's as if the author only wants to say that traditions of ghouls, witches, sorcerers, and demons exist all over the world, in many diverse cultures. Their connection to modern-day vampires is never made.

Additionally, the author never draws a firm conclusion. The most compelling evidence provided in this book is that some corpses decompose differently than others - with distinctive characteristics that tend to match the characteristics our Eurasian societies have given to "vampires."

I did enjoy learning about the history of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and where Stoker got his material, as well as

the Hollywood versions and Bela Lugosi's culture-changing performance. I would have enjoyed a bit more literary forensics, investigating where other foundational authors and film writers/producers/actors found their material for vampires. I also found the connection to the Plague fascinating, and now I want to read more about that world-consuming disease. I also found interesting the exposition of differing burial practices.

At times, I am not sure the author researched as deeply and thoroughly as he could - throughout much of the text, the writing seems to be sensational (in some cases, even crass). Indeed, I think the intended audience for this work is more interested in gory tales than about historical evidence. I wonder, too, why many of the secondary sources used by the author are 19th century historians and others, whose methods of research may not stand up to scholarly scrutiny today. After all that, I sound like a snob - I just may have been looking forward to a more scholarly work, with a focus more on historical details and archaeological evidence.

Ultimately, this book is a gruesome and morbid collection of historical tales and perceptions of the dead, and how humans may have arrived at the conviction that vampires exist. Recommended for those who like a bit of horror in their history, and National Geographic, as well as vampire tales and folklore.

Recommendation: If you're interested in this book, or liked Dracula, try The Historian.

Lindley Walter-smith says

A messy and hurried book, full of inaccuracies (some amusing), that feels like it was thrown together to try and cash in a bit too late on the teen paranormal craze.

It has no real structure or argument. It begins with random references to vampire novels, the requisite going on about Vlad Dracul as if he was actually Dracula, and then proceeds to random accounts of every belief about undead or death rituals that the author can think of, tenuously linked to vampirism. While the vampire-related material that actually relate are interesting, the whole thing is pretty much a mess. It needed someone to structure this properly, develop the relevant material, get rid of the rest - and, yes, an anthropologist would have been nice, because the Orientalism is a bit of a worry, too.

Renee says

Screw it. I've been reading this book for two weeks now, and even though I love the topic (vampire folklore), and even though I've ruthlessly skipped the boring bits, I can't get through it.

It's too bad, because I wanted to like this. I enjoyed the beginning enough that I put it on our Staff Recommends wall (and pulled it down today in shame).

On the surface, what's not to like? *Vampire Forensics* purports to be a non-fiction history of the vampire myth, and unlike some of the more schlocky entries on that subject, bears National Geographic's seal of approval. The book starts well; the first 100 or so pages, while jumbled & hampered by weird transitions, sees the author stay mostly on topic.

But never on *one* topic. In those short 100 pages, Jenkins touches on Polidori, Lord Byron, Vlad Tepes, Bram Stoker, and lesser known but influential hits like *Varney the Vampyre* (who commits suicide via Mt. Vesuvius), and *Carmilla* (a female vampire with a penchant for young women). He also addresses grave-

robbing, serial killers who claimed vampirism, the Victorian fear of being buried alive (Chopin's fear of it was so intense that he had his heart removed before burial), diseases ranging from rabies to tuberculosis, and how their symptoms mirrored those described of vampirism, and the revolting conditions of Victorian cemeteries.

If that paragraph left you feeling overwhelmed, I do not suggest reading this book. It's that hyperactive (and as a result, superficial). Points are brought up, then dropped; Jenkins relates anecdotes not to build a case for something, but just...because.

At first, I enjoyed the asides; they were all delightfully gooey and ewwy and contributed to the book's gothic atmosphere, for example:

"[Percy Bysshe Shelley's:] carcass cracked open; where the skull rested on the red-hot iron bars, the brains literally seethed, bubbled, and boiled as in a cauldron, for a very long time.' When the flames subsided, there remained only ashes, some bone fragments--and Shelley's heart, somehow undamaged."

The fate of Shelley's corpse is only tangential to vampire myth--he was merely in the vacation group, along with Byron, Polidori, and Mary Shelley, that spawned both *The Vampyre* & *Frankenstein*. But I don't mind tangents, provided they're fun, and boiling, seething poet brains are.

As I went further, though, the detours became longer (all delivered in a laborious style and rounded out by rhetorical questions), until eventually Jenkins abandons his original subject. My breaking point came halfway through, when I read (consecutively) about werewolves, gruesome burial methods, and several medieval revenants/ghouls, three things which have only one thing in common: they are all NOT VAMPIRES. True, they may be related to vampires, but Jenkins doesn't tie them in convincingly. Nor are they related to each other, and Jenkins doesn't make clear why he stacked them together. It's disorienting, and not in the fun way.

Finally, as the last turd on the turd cake, this book lacks visuals. No timeline of events, no maps of the regions discussed, no photos or drawings--nada. Sigh.

UPDATE: See!

Nosferatu is also appalled at the lack of visuals in this book.

Read more: Check out more reviews over at Scienceblogs (one, two); see also the website for the original National Geographic documentary.

Riku Sayuj says

Takeaway tidbit:

The vampire's very existence was an infernal parody of the resurrection, and its chief means of sustenance was a diabolical twist on Christ's words: "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life."

As that shows, the book is a mostly western exploration (except for a very small section that mention other myths in passing) and fails to take into consideration that vampire myths predate christian perversions and even gothic folklore, and probably originated in Africa for all we know. I need to get a proper scholarly book to clear up the mess this book has made for me.

I picked it up thinking it will allow me to reel off some high-brow vampire trivia the next time someone talks of a popular vampire based book/movie/tv show. Turns out the book was capable of boring me even more than what I was counting on inflicting upon my would-be listener. Serves me right.

Tiia says

While the subject of "Vampire Forensics" was well researched and interesting, the overall reading experience suffered from the convoluted narration. Lacking in perspective and boundaries, it was excessively detailed and focused too much on historic minutia. There was no clear red thread to follow as the author aimlessly wandered from one lore to another, occasionally skipping ahead or returning to an already closed subject without much of a warning.

The tone of the narration was irritating to say the least. Personally I think that when you're dealing with a grim subject involving death, decay and disease, a dramatic and overly empathic tone comes across as comic instead of somber. A plain, analytic stating of the facts would have been sufficient.

I understand that, when taking the reader backwards in time, the author was trying to slowly strip away the embellishment of entertainment and multiple levels of superstitions and literally "uncover" the bare core of vampirism. Conceptually it is an okay idea (though most of the time it is easier to follow narratives that go from past to present) and it might have worked if it wasn't for the poor structure of... just about everything. This book could have been much better just by naming the chapters aptly (instead of coming up with vague bullshit like "Corpi Morti" and "The Larvae").

All in all, "Vampire Forensics" contains a lot of fascinating information for anyone interested in the vampire myth, but is frustratingly obscured by the overall lack of definition and direction.

Lauren says

Good read if you are interested in the history of where the vampire idea arose.

I found it a quick, engaging read, and I don't read many non-fiction books.

If you or your friends have an obsession with (or even kind of interest in) read this, it's well worth the time spent.

It's practically Halloween anyway...

Jenn says

My rating for Vampire Forensics is mostly based on the loads of factoids that I will take away from this book. Although I enjoyed it immensely, there are a few things that the potential reader should be aware of.

First, the book is slightly disorganized. The topics jump around the timeline and from one location to the

next with very little warning. In addition, not only do the chapters stand alone with little connection to the others, each section of a chapter has only a tenuous connection to what came before it or what will come after it.

Second, this book is not for the hardcore horror fanatic. It does not distinguish 'vampire' from 'zombie' or other forms of the walking dead. Also, those who are very familiar with the topic will likely not find any new information in this volume.

I, however, enjoyed the book despite these complaints. The disjointed properties of the chapters and subsections didn't affect me much because I read a little piece at a time and rarely read large chunks in one sitting. The lack of organization would be more likely to bother someone wanting to read the book in one sitting. For me, this book really hit the spot: it provided an overview of the folklore and literary figures of the walking and vampiric dead.

Gabriel says

There were too many cool bits of knowledge that I will pull away from this book to really mark this lower ... but for the discerning reader, there are probably significantly better tomes on the fanged menace.

Yes, reading about the fear of the dead and the numerous ways that different cultures have dealt with this fear (mostly through the removal of some body part, often the head, with dismemberment/cremation to follow) was great to learn. It was interesting as he crossed cultures for Mark Collins Jenkins to point out the similarities; even if most astute readers would note them on their own. Cool also to hear about various undead creatures that menaced the evenings from India to Mexico to the (of course) Gypsy/Romani cultures.

But to call this a study of the Vampire is, I think, deceitful. Not every undead that feeds on people is a Vampire ... in fact, we currently call it a Zombie (and they are referred to specifically only in relation to Haitian Voodoo in this book, tsk tsk). Sure, we would not get the cool graphic design elements traditional with current vampire literature if this was called Undead Forensics, but it would be closer to the truth.

Also, it's fine to uncover the legends by starting with the current and going back in time, but if this is the temporal path being trod by this NON-FICTION book, then it needs to be consistent. Too often I was confused by the quick change in time and culture with little to no correlation to what came before (this was tightened up by the last few chapters, though. Kudos to the editor for at least that much). Unfortunately, so much of what makes the current vampire as intriguing a character as it is was not mentioned. Mark Jenkins lets it linger in Stoker's Dracula, a brief mention of Le Fanu's Carmilla and Lord Byron's poem "The Vampyre." But any farther and we lose the sexual predation of the creature; the trademark of the current incarnation and, according to Stephen King's Danse Macabre, the essential ingredient in the vampire mythology.

Without sex, the vampire is nothing more than a zombie, which is exactly the problem with this book. With no disclosure that, for folks in the olden days (?) vampire = zombie, this book loses impact as a non-fiction origin tracing book. Though the notes show that his sources almost all contain the word "vampire" in the title, there is no clear correlation to the current vampire and thus it calls into question whether those count as accurate accounts of the vampire myth.

In short, fear of zombies is traditional. Zombies became vampires at some point through their various incarnations. Literature could do more with vampires than zombies and so here we are. Reviewing a book

about zombies cast as vampires.

DJ says

What a great find! This book tries to uncover the origins and myths surrounding vampires and our present fascination with them. What was most interesting to me was how various illnesses can mimic what people think of as vampire behavior. The author really ran the world's cultures looking for vampire myths and legends. Very well written, entertaining and educational.

Laudys says

Well... That was interesting. And that's pretty much it.

The book is brimming with information not only on vampires, but on all kinds of undead on general. I must say, though, that the information doesn't feel well connected, the author goes back and forward, back and forward and not everything feels cohesive and properly edited.

But let me tell you, with this book you'll have lots of "Did you know..." facts for that next awkward silence. I never knew the origins of vampires could be traced so far back into human history and believe me, the most modern representations are nothing like the originals. They truly are a construction of our deepest fears.

~?~Autumn♥♥ says

With all this spring snow I was up to three am and so finished. There are many interesting things and people are sure crazy but it was too gory. I got a laugh out of vampires being for aristocrats and werewolves being middle class. So where does that leave zombies? They are blue collar. I meant to do an NE question on that so you all could be amused too but its a wonder I am online at all with this snow so piled up.

I think in some of these cases that people were NOT dead but were buried too soon. One case that springs to mind is the man who would go get into bed with his wife at night. On the third night she got 3 people to wait with her and one hit him with an ax. Why did they not realize that he was NOT dead? This type of thing happened a lot. He had been in some sort of crypt.

Some of the vampires also had rabies and some had TB. There was also very strange cases in Italy during the Black Death which were most baffling.

T. K. Elliott (Tiffany) says

This book was OK. But no more than that.

If you want a well-written, coherent account of the origins of the vampire myth - or even a discussion of the various walking-corpsey-type myths available - then look elsewhere. You won't find it here.

This book reads more like a blog-published-as-book - an accumulation of short pieces written on similar topics, and then published as a book. It's interesting to read, but if it had been more organised, it would have been a better book. Not only does it jump about in time, but also in geography and in myth-type. The author (or editor, or *someone*) would have been better to pick a method of classification and then stick with it.

The book also gives quite a lot of direct quotes from other sources, which is not in itself bad, but it then fails to follow up by discussing them properly, or comparing them to other similar quotes. Also, many of these quotes don't seem to serve any purpose related to the stated topic of the book (i.e., the origin of the vampire legend) but appear to have been included only to titillate. Which leads back to the impression of blog-as-book; the whole book seems disjointed, as if the author just wrote it as a kind of macabre stream-of-consciousness, rather than as a credible work of non-fiction.

Content-wise, it's interesting, but because Jenkins has tried to cover an awful lot of ground - geographically, temporally and mythically - in relatively few pages, he doesn't go into anything in any depth. It's like a coffee-table book, except if you put this on your coffee-table probably nobody would visit you ever again. This is the kind of book where you put it down and say to yourself "Now, where can I find a real book on the origin of the vampire legend?"

Final verdict?

1. Disorganised.
2. Superficial.
3. Easy enough to read.
4. Does not require any prior knowledge of the subject matter (in fact, if you *have* prior knowledge, you probably won't find anything new in this book.

Do I regret reading it? No, oddly enough. I knew most of the contents already, but there were a few bits and pieces here and there that were new.

Would I recommend it? Not to anyone with a serious interest in vampires, but possibly to someone looking for a reasonably light and entertaining overview of post-death superstitions.

Amanda says

Written by historian Mark Jenkins, Vampire Forensics is an insightful non-fiction novel that explores the vast history of vampires. In the book, legend and lore are examined through the lens of history, archaeology, anthropology, and forensic science.

I have been studying vampires personally and professionally for more years I care to count and have read virtually every non-fiction vampire text I could get my hands on – that being said, this book revealed very little that I hadn't know already. It was a bit disappointing in that respect, I expected a book promoted by The National Geographic to have a little something more. However, in spite of that this book is by no means a bad book. It truly is a superb collection of information on the history of vampires.

The author of Vampire Forensics most certainly did his research and did it well. SO very much is covered in this book and it is all done with perfect accuracy. Readers will learn about Bram Stoker's Dracula, about the darker history behind other famous vampire stories, about diseases that triggered vampiric beliefs, age-old superstitions, vampire lore around the world and so much more. I can't possibly describe every vampire topic covered in Vampire Forensics; let's just say that you will learn plenty.

As I said above, this book told me a lot of what I had previously known, however, it did delve much deeper into those topics than other books I have read before. So, while I did know a lot of this information beforehand, I learned even more about each particular subject thanks to this book.

Something else I adored in this book was Jenkins' writing style, it was fantastic. Instead of reading like a boring text book (like many non-fiction books do) his beautifully written words came off more like a haunting horror story. He covered the history in a way that wasn't dull, but rather in a way that was both chilling and stimulating.

Now, like all books, Vampire Forensics wasn't 100% perfect. There were many sections in the book that, while absolutely fascinating, had very little to do with vampires or the history behind them. For example, the chapter on grave robbing and the history behind it was morbidly interesting, but didn't play a real role in the history of vampires. Were potential vampire graves dug up? Yes, but not with the intention of robbing them. It was an enjoyable read, but one that could have been cut out. The off-topic chapters happen so frequently that it muddles the book and the point it's trying to make. It makes the book a little less clear and left me wondering what the point of it all was and why the author didn't focus strictly on vampires.

Overall, I really enjoyed this book and would recommend it to any hardcore vampire (or history) fan. However, while it is packed full of vampire history, I don't feel that it accomplished what it set out to do. I was expecting a clear and chronological history on vampires, and well, I totally didn't get that (which is why the book, while informative, didn't get higher stars). If the history of vampires truly fascinates you I would pick up Vampire Forensics alongside other non-fiction vampire books.
