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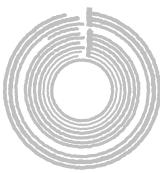
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THE SOUL, EVIL SPIRITS, AND THE UNDEAD: VAMPIRES, DEATH, AND BURIAL IN JEWISH FOLKLORE AND LAW

Saul Epstein and Sara Libby Robinson

ABSTRACT

When discussing Jewish burial laws, Radbaz, a sixteenth-century rabbi, quotes a story about a dead woman possessed by a vampire-like demon, causing hundreds of deaths. The story attributes the woman's transformation to the fact that her corpse had remained unburied for three days—violating statutes that require standing vigil over a dead body and then burying it as soon as possible. While this story conforms to the well-known tropes of epidemiology and social marginalization found in the scholarship of vampire folklore, it also underscores the importance of adhering to Jewish burial laws, and stresses society's collective responsibility in caring for all people.

KEYWORDS

Vampires; Judaism; Radbaz

For nearly two millennia, Jewish rabbinic tradition has mandated detailed practices around death and dying. From the time a person lies on his or her deathbed until the last clump of dirt covers the grave, Judaic systems of law are designed to bring order to a period of acute crisis. These guidelines help those preparing for life's end, those who interact with them as they die, and those who prepare them for burial. In their writings, rabbis throughout the ages have attempted to derive deeper meaning from these detailed laws and customs. The rabbinic literature that has developed over time, therefore, stresses that death serves as a means of atonement for the sins of the deceased and his family, and emphasizes the respect to be shown to the deceased's body. As Jewish tradition believes the dead will be resurrected in the messianic era, burial preparations also focus on preparing the corpse for this anticipated event.¹ Unlike other areas of rabbinic law (*halakha*), many of the rules regarding burial practices, which are practiced to this day, seem to have developed for the most part in the absence of

any formal documentary guide. Indeed, a single rabbinic treatise, *'Evel Rabbati*, which records funerary and mortuary practices of the second and third centuries, remained the primary text on this subject for the next 1,400 years. Beyond this example, however, Judaic customs around death and dying passed orally from generation to generation through to the early modern era.²

This changed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the emergence of a new body of texts that sought to consolidate and preserve customary practices. Part of the impetus for this change came from the establishment of societies called *hevra kaddisha*, whose members were charged with preparing corpses for burial.³ Members of these societies frequently found the rituals they needed to apply intricate and involved, so they sought written texts about the subject. But there were other reasons for this comparatively sudden shift toward the written word. At just this time, significant numbers of Jewish exiles from Spain and Portugal—known as Sephardim—were beginning to arrive in eastern Europe, and to mingle with their Ashkenazi brethren there. Sephardic Jews, of course, followed customs often quite different from the Ashkenazim. Both communities sought the composition of such manuals to maintain a vital link with their own unique traditions.⁴

But this was more than just a process of consolidation, for, with the advent of printing, all parts of the Jewish world enjoyed greater exposure to the esoteric works of the kabbalah, and these had many things to add about the practices related to death.⁵ So while these works preserved many of the venerable, trusted precepts found in *Evel Rabbati*, they also borrowed from kabbalistic teachings, creating a host of new traditions.⁶

However, many rabbis saw the increasingly complicated web of laws and rituals around dying as having more than just spiritual significance. As heirs also to a rich folklore centering on evil spirits, demons, and monsters, these rabbis saw the rituals as vital in protecting the dying and the deceased from such evil creatures and other malevolent beings.⁷ Indeed, they understood that a dead body bereft of a soul could attract demons that had it within their power to possess the body and then make use of it. As a result, much of the literature on death that emerges at this point tends to justify the rituals it describes in terms of the kabbalah, and as protection against some of the preternatural beings believed to roam the world in Jewish folklore.⁸

Nevertheless, one monster that seldom appears in Jewish texts is the vampire—the dead that leave their graves at night in order to attack and kill living members of their community, either by sucking their blood or through suffocation.⁹ The rarity of vampires in Jewish folklore may have to do, in part at least,

with the way in which vampirism was coded in distinctly anti-Christian terms.¹⁰ But it is also likely a consequence of the passage in Leviticus that explicitly prohibits Jews from ingesting blood, stating, “The life of the flesh is in the blood.”¹¹ But this article takes as its starting point a spellbinding story told by an anonymous storyteller found in a work by the sixteenth-century Egyptian rabbi David ben Solomon Ibn Abi Zimra (Radbaz), later republished in a book of customs and traditions in 1896, that offers the cautionary tale of what appears to be a distinctly Jewish “vampire.” The story concerns the body of an old woman that was—significantly—left unburied and unguarded for three days. During this liminal period the body seems to have become possessed by a vampire-like demon. After she was finally interred, the storyteller describes how she would appear to residents of her neighborhood, who, shortly afterward, would die. After just forty days, the death toll had climbed into the hundreds.

Because of the relative scarcity of Jewish vampires, Radbaz’s citation of this story deserves close attention, and needs to be examined on a number of levels. Fundamentally, stories about the preternatural tell us much about the societies that created them. But what was this particular vampire supposed to teach its target audience? As this article will show through a close reading of Radbaz’s text, this vampire story seems to have been intended to underscore two crucial aspects of Jewish burial law: the need for a quick burial, and the need to guard the body (*shmirah*). Radbaz’s use of a Jewish vampire story to help him make his point at this period of ritual reformulation also brings into play some crucial issues related to Jewish notions regarding the nature of the soul, respect for the dead, respect for the living, and ultimately, respect for God.

TWO ESSENTIAL LAWS OF JEWISH BURIAL

Before we can analyze the Jewish vampire story in its context, we must first review some of the Jewish burial laws that underlie Radbaz’s text.

Burying the Dead in a Timely Fashion

One of the few laws dealing with the dead that can be found directly in the Hebrew Bible concerns the timing of the burial. Deuteronomy 21.23–24 describes a case where a person has received capital punishment and is then hanged.¹² After the hanging, the verse states, “his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt surely bury him the same day; for he that is hanged

is a reproach unto God [*Elo-him*].” The meaning of the second half of the verse is disputed in the Jewish exegetical tradition on the basis of the translation of the Hebrew word *Elo-him*. Commentators who focus on a more literal reading of the text, like the medieval Samuel ben Meir, prefer to understand *Elo-him* as “judges.” Accordingly, they interpret this passage to mean that one must bury a convicted criminal to prevent anyone who disagreed with the sentence from blaspheming the judges who imposed it. By burying the corpse as soon as possible, all reminders of the judge’s ruling are removed from sight.¹³ Other commentators, though, follow the early rabbinic interpretation of the verse, and translate *Elo-him* as God.¹⁴ The Mishnah, the third-century c.e. rabbinic presentation of the laws of the Torah, states in Tractate Sanhedrin that one who sees the corpse of someone condemned to be hanged for blaspheming God would be reminded of the embarrassment to the Divine caused by the offender.¹⁵ The Gemara, which contains discussions and interpretations of the Mishnah, and with it constitutes the Talmud, discusses this issue in detail. Rabbi Meir cites a parable explaining the prohibition: “To what is this matter [of not letting a corpse hang overnight] comparable? To twin brothers [who lived] in one city; one was appointed king, and the other took to highway robbery. At the king’s command they hanged him. But all who saw him exclaimed, ‘The king is hanged!’ Whereupon the king issued a command and he was taken down.”¹⁶ Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi)¹⁷ explains this parable by drawing on the Jewish tradition that understands man as created in “God’s image” (Genesis 1.27). Accordingly, a human corpse must be treated with great respect in order to avoid bringing shame upon the divine.¹⁸ Thus both Maimonides and Rabbi Yosef Karo, in their respective compilations, the *Mishnah Torah* and the *Shulchan Aruch*, understand that the law requires a corpse to be buried as soon as possible.¹⁹

That said, Jewish law does permit exceptions in a few particular circumstances. For instance, the Mishnah allows a delay in burial for the sake of the deceased’s “honor” in order to gather the things necessary for interment.²⁰ This was extended by later rabbinic authorities to allow time for the dead’s relatives and friends to gather. Burial might also be delayed if death occurred on a major Jewish holiday, when many types of work are prohibited. But apart from these narrow exceptions, any delay of the burial is frowned upon in the Jewish tradition.²¹

Guarding the Corpse

Jewish tradition dictates that a deceased’s body may not be left alone from the time of death until burial, a practice called *shmirah* (guarding).²² While keeping

the vigil of shmirah, individuals must remain awake and typically spend their time reciting Psalms.²³ The term first appears in the Babylonian Talmud in the context of discussions regarding the Shema prayer, which must be recited twice daily.²⁴ According to an anonymous statement in the Talmud, whoever performs shmirah, even if he is not related to the deceased, is exempt from all the commandments of the Torah, including the recitation of the Shema.²⁵ Rashi explains in his commentary that one is exempt because he is “involved with a commandment.”²⁶ Further on, the text records an apparent dispute regarding the behavior appropriate for two people, both of whom have the responsibility of guarding a dead body: “If there were two [watching], one goes on watching while the other recites [the *Shema*], and then the other watches while this one recites. Ben ‘Azzai says: If they were bringing it in a ship, they put it in a corner and both say their prayers in another corner. Why this difference?—Ravina said: They differ on the question [of] whether there is any fear of mice [on board the ship]. One held that there is a fear of mice and the other held that there is no fear of mice.”²⁷ Ravina, who lived in the last generation of rabbis recorded in the Talmud, explains that both opinions in this dispute agree that the need to guard the deceased takes precedence over the recitation of the Shema. The guardians must protect the body from vermin eating it, and the dispute centers on whether one must worry about this concern on a boat. Maimonides and Rabbi Yosef Karo, though, record in their legal codes that in all circumstances, a person who performs shmirah is exempt from reciting the Shema.²⁸

SOME JEWISH MONSTERS AND VAMPIRES IN FOLKLORE

One of the best-known characters in Jewish folklore is a female demon known as Lilith. According to legends recorded in the Babylonian Talmud, Lilith was Adam’s first wife. In folklore, though, one of her roles is analogous to that of the succubus, the female monster who seduces men while they sleep, causing them to have seminal emissions. More frighteningly, she was also believed to attack newborn babies (particularly boys who had not yet received their circumcisions and girls who had not yet undergone their naming ceremonies) and women who had just given birth.²⁹

Another well-known folkloric spirit manifestation, common from the sixteenth-century onward, is the dybbuk, the spirit of a dead person who enters the body of the living. Parasite-like, the dybbuk speaks in the voice of the deceased and acts through its host, engaging in transgressive acts of

sexuality, heresy, and sometimes even bodily violence.³⁰ Dybbuk spirits tended disproportionately to be male; they were the souls of sinners who could not find rest in the afterlife, and who either wished to seek refuge from the torment of their limbo or to continue to enjoy the sins of the flesh through the body of their host.³¹ By contrast, some two-thirds of their victims were women, and nearly all were under thirty. Dybbuks could be banished through exorcism ceremonies, usually performed by rabbis. Ultimately, the publicity accorded dybbuk possession served as a communal lesson in repentance and reform in preparation for the afterlife, and although the dybbuk's victim might temporarily act out transgressive behavior, such episodes ultimately reinforced community norms of behavior.³² According to recent scholarship, recorded cases of dybbuk possession became widespread during the sixteenth century and continued in various communities until the early twentieth century.³³

Disembodied demons and dybbuks, however, are not vampires.³⁴ Unlike Lilith, who enjoyed a pervasive presence in Jewish folklore for centuries, or dybbuk possession, which boasted several dozen recorded cases, examples of Jewish vampires in folklore are extremely rare. One possible exception might be the estrie, a vampire-like monster described by the renowned Jewish folklorist Joshua Trachtenberg. According to Trachtenberg, the estrie is a cross between a monster and a shape-shifting witch who takes the form of a woman and lives on a diet of human blood—particularly that of children. He retells the story of an estrie who fell ill and attempted to attack the two women who were attending her. Unfortunately for the estrie, the women thwarted her attack, denying her the blood she needed, causing her to die.³⁵ While interesting in and of itself, Trachtenberg's text gives little context for the story, and makes no effort to assess its sociological or anthropological significance. Thus, for a better understanding of the issues at play in Radbaz's story, and the wider lessons to be learned about vampire folklore, we must turn elsewhere.

In his seminal work *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, Paul Barber examines the vampire and its related folklore from the perspectives of anthropology, sociology, and forensic science. According to Barber, vampire lore helps cultures explain issues of disease, death, and decomposition. As he comments, from antiquity, people's instinct has been to "blame death on the dead."³⁶

Much of Barber's source material comes from institutional reports filed during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that describe suspected vampires and the steps taken by local populations to deal with them.³⁷ One of the best known of these cases centered on a Serbian man named Peter Plogojowitz who died in 1725. Within ten weeks of his death, nine people had died after

suffering from a short illness. From their sickbeds, each claimed that Plogojowitz had visited them in their sleep, lying on them, and throttling them, “so that they would have to give up the ghost.”³⁸ Because of the uproar caused by these deaths, Plogojowitz’s body was exhumed and examined for signs of vampirism. According to the report, the villagers found him in a much more preserved state than expected, and he exhibited traces of blood on his mouth. Declaring him a vampire, the villagers first staked him, and then burned his body to ash.³⁹

For Barber, the Plogojowitz story is illustrative, for it suggests that one of the principal sociological roles of the vampire is as a scapegoat in the face of an epidemic. When villagers exhumed and “killed” suspected vampires, they did so because they believed that the corpse turned vampire was causing more deaths. Indeed, “*Nosferatu*,” one of the synonyms for vampire, means “plague-carrier.”⁴⁰ And this seems to hold true, for the majority of documented vampire hunts usually occurred in response to some unexplained illness in the community.⁴¹

Barber’s other crucial observation centers on the relationship between social marginalization and folkloric perceptions of the predisposition for vampirism. It was often believed, for instance, that illegitimate children or those born with birth defects might later become vampires—so, too, might the antisocial, alcoholics, the immoral, the promiscuous, and the excommunicated. But it was not just one’s body or personal failings that could lead to such an abhorrent fate; the cause of one’s death, particularly if it was sudden and violent, could also trigger vampirism. Barber cites the case of a Greek vampire whose eternal destiny was sealed by a triple curse of fate: he was “sullen and quarrelsome” in life, and later murdered “no one knew by whom nor how.”⁴² Although portrayed as supernatural, there are biological explanations for all aspects of the vampire myth. Unlike the pale, gaunt vampire of our own contemporary fiction, vampires identified by these troubled villagers were usually heavyset, with flushed or darkened faces.⁴³ Moreover, when exhumed, suspected vampires were found relatively less decayed than was to be expected—their hair and fingernails had grown longer, and new skin was growing beneath the old. Some reports suggest that they bled freely when cut and even showed traces of fresh blood on their lips.⁴⁴ The body of Peter Plogojowitz matches this description point for point; indeed, one report noted that the corpse had “some fresh blood in his mouth, which, according to the common observation, he had sucked from the people killed by him.”⁴⁵ When he was subsequently staked, “much blood, completely fresh, flow[ed] also through his ears and mouth.”⁴⁶

Bloating and the appearance of new skin, nails, and hair are all part of decomposition. Lacking oxygen, the blood darkens, giving the corpse’s face a

darker color. Noises the corpse seems to make in the grave, such as the apparent sound of “chewing,” or the groans it emits when a stake is plunged into its heart, are all the result of the release of pent-up gases. It is not at all unusual for blood to remain liquid, and details such as the blood around the mouth—as with Plogojowitz’s corpse—can be attributed to the work of maggots, for their bites can resemble stab wounds. In addition to causing the appearance of blood at the mouth, pressure from gas can force blood out of the eyes and nose. When moisture from around the mouth is exposed to material from the deceased’s shroud, it can become plastered to the face, causing it to look as if the corpse was chewing at its burial clothing.⁴⁷ As we will see, all these explanatory variables—epidemiology, marginalization, and forensic science—will play important roles in Radbaz’s story of a distinctly Jewish vampire.

RABBI DAVID IBN ABI ZIMRA’S VAMPIRE STORY

This Jewish vampire story appears in a text written by Radbaz titled “Mezudat David” (David’s fortress).⁴⁸ Radbaz was born in Spain around 1479. His family left Spain when the Jews were expelled in 1492 and first moved to Morocco then Safed, in what is now northern Israel, where he studied in some of the religious seminaries located there. By 1514, he had moved to Egypt, where he was appointed the *av beit din* (chief justice) of the rabbinic court of Cairo, rising eventually to become the city’s chief rabbi. In this latter capacity he served for forty years, becoming wealthy and widely esteemed. Radbaz was a great scholar, with an almost encyclopedic knowledge of rabbinic texts. He is well-known for his collection of close to three thousand legal responsa that dealt with the wide range of issues over which he presided during his years in Egypt and the Holy Land. He was also a prolific writer, authoring several Talmudic commentaries, a work on the methodology of the Talmud, and some important liturgical pieces.⁴⁹ But he was also widely recognized as one of the preeminent scholars of the kabbalah, writing, among other works, a kabbalistic interpretation of the Hebrew alphabet, and another of the Song of Songs. He then retired, first to Jerusalem and later to Safed, where he lived out the rest of his life. The date of his death is not known precisely, though most scholars place it around 1573.⁵⁰

Radbaz wrote the *Mezudat David* around 1554. This work is part of a genre of rabbinic literature called *taamei hamizvot* (the reasons for the commandments) that seeks to explain the reasoning behind the 613 commandments (*mizvot*) of the Torah.⁵¹ Radbaz objected to the approach adopted by Maimonides,

which sought only rational explanations for the mizvot. Some commandments, according to Radbaz, could be explained only esoterically. For him, a person who understands the mystical repercussions that the observance of certain commandments will create on high will be more likely to focus more on their proper intent (*kavanah*). Radbaz hoped that the focus of the *Mezudat David* on the relationship between daily observance and the workings of the divine would improve Jews' relationship with God as they lived their everyday life.⁵²

Mitzvah 436 in *Mezudat David* concerns the impurity of the dead. Radbaz turns to the biblical source of this mitzvah, Numbers 19.11, which states that anyone who touches a dead person will be ritually impure for seven days. To return to purity, this person must be doused with a mixture of water, various plants, and the ashes of a red heifer on the third and seventh days of his impurity. He must then immerse himself in a ritual bath (*mikveh*) at the conclusion of this period. Radbaz notes that just five verses later, at Numbers 19.16, any person who enters a building containing a corpse must also go through the same purification ritual. In both cases, the impure person is considered an *av hatum'ah*, a chief level of impurity. Lepers,⁵³ men who have seminal emissions, and the carcasses of animals also have the status of *av hatum'ah*. However, only a dead body can transmit its impurity to a person, either directly or indirectly, causing those in its presence to become an *av hatum'ah*. Thus a human corpse is deemed to be the most impure type of thing, and so is called *avi avot hatum'ah* (the grandfather category of impurity).⁵⁴ Given this unique status of the corpse, Radbaz goes on to explain why this is the case.

The concept of ritual impurity in Judaism is very complex and scholars through the centuries have tried to elucidate its meaning.⁵⁵ Recognizing the difficulty in understanding these tenets logically, Radbaz turns to more esoteric modes of understanding. He begins by explaining that a dead body retains remnants of the impure vices in which a person engaged while alive. Since these stains remain, it is important that people should separate themselves from the corpse. He further explains that a Jewish soul has an intrinsic "spirit of holiness and purity" to it, a spirit that can purge itself of any "impure spirits and powers" that wish to attach themselves to the body. For Radbaz, this means that when a person dies and this holy spirit departs the body, the corpse becomes akin almost to a vacuum in that it can no longer prevent penetration by impure spirits. As a result, the body becomes contaminated and spreads this to everything it meets. To Radbaz, then, it is the flight of this purifying spirit at death that explains why the principle of *avi avot ha-tum'ah* applies only to the corpse of a Jewish person.⁵⁶

Radbaz's description of a dead body bereft of its pure soul becoming a vacuum vulnerable to demons and evil spirits, is in keeping with other widely held beliefs prevalent in the Jewish world during the sixteenth century. Among these was the idea that demons caused illness and epidemics.⁵⁷ In order to thwart the evil spirits who might wish to take over the newly vacated body of the deceased, or to spread illness among those present at the deceased's bedside, a number of protective measures needed to be taken. Mourners were to be careful that none of the deceased's limbs should hang over the bed, but rather remain decorously folded close to the body. Other actions included lighting candles (since evil spirits fear light), opening windows, and reciting Psalms.⁵⁸ It was also common to throw out all the water contained in vessels in the house of the deceased, making sure that it was poured into the ground rather than into other bodies of water.⁵⁹

Radbaz uses these ideas as the basis of his kabbalistic explanation of the mizvot related to the treatment of the dead. First, he explains, it is clear that the dead need to be buried as soon as possible after death, for the "powers of impurity" operate more often at night, and "anywhere they turn, they will act wickedly."⁶⁰ Further, the rule that the body must be guarded until it is interred is obviously to prevent these evil spirits from entering the body at all. He then quotes "the words of one of the great [scholars] in a commentary of Genesis Rabbah but I do not know his name," who expounds on the verse in Deuteronomy 21.23–24.⁶¹ The anonymous author cited by Radbaz explains that the reason a corpse should not be left hanging overnight is to protect the body from those "spirits and demons" that "control" the night, looking for souls from which they can derive enjoyment and dead bodies which they can possess. The anonymous author then begins a tale that reinforces the importance of burying a body immediately—the story of a Jewish vampire.⁶²

Listen my son to the story of an old woman who lived to be nearly one hundred years old. The residents of her village considered her stingy toward the poor⁶³ and she was suspected of causing [bad things to occur] all her life. She had sons, daughters, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law, but she did not live with any of them. She [rather] lived alone, although her children provided for her, in addition to traveling and trading [for their business purposes].

She died while her sons were away on business, and her death remained unknown for three days. When her sons came to her house, they found her lying dead in the middle of her house, her mouth open, her hands and

legs bent, her tongue hanging out of her mouth, and her eyes open. After they had buried her, every night, she would visit those who were ill. They were awake, but they imagined they saw her in their waking imagination or [she] would call to them or hit them, and within seven days they would die.

After forty days, more than two hundred people had died, and all testified that she had called out to them in their imagination and hit them. The deaths, plagues, and her appearances did not stop until they burned [her corpse]. And fifteen [days after her death] when they opened her casket,⁶⁴ they found that she had half-swallowed her [burial] hat.⁶⁵ Her headdress was unrecognizable save for its strings, and blood was flowing from her mouth and eyes.⁶⁶

This story is also cited by Abraham Isaac Sperling in his seminal work on Jewish customs, *Sefer Taamei haminhagim u-mekorei Ha-dinim*, originally published in 1896. Sperling's book examines all aspects of Jewish life and identifies reasons for certain traditions. In the section dealing with Jewish death, burial, and mourning practices, he attempts to explain the reason for shmirah. In doing so, Sperling cites *Ma'avav Yabbok*, one of the most comprehensive texts regarding Jewish death and burial practices in seventeenth-century Europe.⁶⁷ Written by Rabbi Aaron Berakhiah of Modena as part of the canonization of death ritual discussed above, *Ma'avav Yabbok* devotes a chapter to shmirah for the deceased and the problem of why people are exempt from performing other commandments during this time. In this, Rabbi Aaron's explanation largely agrees with that of Radbaz, connecting it with the evil spirits that roam the earth, and their desire to take on a body for themselves. When one of these evil spirits gets access to a dead body, Rabbi Aaron concludes, "woe to the person who turns toward them." Guarding the body of the deceased from evil spirits is so very important that those who perform this service do not need to recite the *Shema* or other obligatory prayers.⁶⁸ To reinforce this concept, Sperling quotes in later glosses the story from *Mezudat David*, citing it in "the name of one of the Great Ones."⁶⁹

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY

Radbaz's story bears several striking resemblances to the vampire scares explored by Barber. Like the Greek murder victim-cum-vampire, the woman is described as antisocial. She fails to give charity to the needy. Her neighbors appear to view

her as a source of bad luck, or perhaps as someone in possession of the evil eye, who can make bad things happen to those she dislikes. Clearly, this woman was not only marginalized by her neighbors, but also lived in a self-imposed isolation. She had a large family that provided for her, but rather than live with any of her children, she preferred to live by herself. No one else appears to have lived near her or visited her regularly; if they had, her death would have been noticed much sooner, and the danger perhaps averted.

In the story, the unfortunate manner of her death—alone and unnoticed—quickly devolved into a classic epidemic turned vampire hunt, à la Peter Plogojowitz and his undead brethren. Even though the story does not include all aspects of the archetypal Christian vampire tale, there are certainly enough diagnostic elements here to justify the use of the term “vampire”: after the old lady’s death and eventual interment, she appears to the sick people in her community, shouting at them or hitting them, and subsequently they die; her neighbors focus on her as the reason for this spate of deaths and conclude that in order to halt the epidemic, it is necessary to disinter and cremate her body.

The fact that the old woman’s remains were disinterred and then cremated should be taken as a sign—either of the desperate lengths to which the community was willing to go in order to halt the epidemic in their midst, or to the fact that the story is most likely apocryphal and did not actually happen. Cremation is diametrically opposed to the Jewish laws of burial. In *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, Maurice Lamm states categorically that Jewish law forbids cremation, and that a person who has been cremated cannot be buried in a Jewish cemetery. Moreover, even in the event that the deceased left instructions to be cremated, his final wishes should be ignored. The mere act of disinterment is also strictly prohibited and allowed only in a few circumstances, such as if an individual was accidentally buried in a non-Jewish cemetery and their body is being transferred to a Jewish cemetery, or if their body is being reburied in Israel.⁷⁰

Several things are clear from the description of the woman’s body. As described in the story, the state of her corpse does nothing to dispel the community’s idea that she is the cause of the plague. They find that the corpse appears to have chewed on and half swallowed its burial headdress, and blood is coming out of her mouth and eyes. As noted by Avriel Bar-Levav, the mere circumstance of a corpse’s mouth being open and swallowing its shroud was considered the catalyst for plagues in a community.⁷¹ Of course, we know from Barber’s study of forensic science this can be attributed to the normal process of decomposition.

According to Barber's conception of the relationship between perceptions of vampirism and social marginalization, we need look no further for an explanation of why this reclusive, miserly old woman was blamed for causing this rash of deaths from beyond the grave. Something more, however, is at work in Radbaz's vampire story, for despite her miserliness and reclusiveness, becoming a vampire was not the fault of the old woman. Rather, the story implies that her sons and the rest of her family should be held accountable for her fate. They had not paid proper attention to her welfare; by extension, it was they who were responsible for her vampirism. If they had simply delegated someone to check on her regularly, for example, her dead body would not have remained alone and untouched for three days. Rather, it would have been buried properly, according to the tenets of Jewish law, and no vampire scare and hunt would have ensued.⁷²

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STORY

If the old woman is a possible Jewish vampire, it is important to understand the significance this story has in context. Why did Radbaz find it necessary to relate such a story in a work dedicated to explaining the reasoning behind the commandments? In Radbaz's worldview, demons and other supernatural beings existed. He also acknowledged the power of dreams and the messages they carry. In one of his responsa, for instance, he required that an individual take action to remove a decree of excommunication that he foresaw in a dream.⁷³ This could explain why the community members of the vampire story excavated the body and cremated it, despite the severity of the prohibition against cremation within Jewish law. By presenting this story from an anonymous source, Radbaz apparently viewed the graphic description of the old lady's transformation as reinforcing the need to treat the dead properly.

For the "great scholar" quoted by Radbaz, this is a prime example of why one cannot leave a body unburied overnight. He sees the fact that the old woman was not buried for three days as the reason for her supernatural appearances in her community and the death of two hundred individuals. When discussing the commandment not to leave an individual unburied overnight, in *Mizvah 552*, Radbaz could have also cited this story. Instead, he gives an esoteric explanation similar to that of the *Talmud* in *Sanhedrin* regarding the respect that is due to the image of God found in the deceased.⁷⁴ By deciding to tell the story in the context of his discussion of the need for *shmirah*, Radbaz surely thought that its message would help explain this legal requirement. It might also have served for

him as a mystical rationale for shmirah in situations with no cause for concern about vermin and rodents. Rabbis, from the fourteenth century to the present, have debated this question. All seem to agree that the requirement applies in all cases, but they give only the vaguest arguments in its support, citing obliquely such things as the honor of the deceased.⁷⁵ Thus Rabbi A. I. Kook, the first chief rabbi of Palestine under the British Mandate, writes that later authorities require shmirah for unnamed “other reasons.”⁷⁶

In a book trying to explain the reasons behind all the commandments, Radbaz was certainly attempting to find an esoteric meaning behind this practice, for understanding what could happen to the dead if shmirah does not take place will give Jews the proper attitude when performing this sacred practice. The gory description of the corpse serves as a reminder of what can happen if a body is left alone. Living a couple of generations prior to the emergence of canonical texts dealing with the treatment of the dead, Radbaz nonetheless supported the establishment of a responsible group within the Jewish community dedicated to handling the dead.⁷⁷ Like Aaron Berakhiah of Modena, Radbaz sought to give deeper meaning to the burial rituals. His explanation of spirits attacking the empty body, also cited in *Maavar Yabbok*, has become an accepted explanation of this tradition.⁷⁸ In Radbaz’s hands, the story of the old grandmother thus gave strength to the long-standing practice of shmirah.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, there is something quite fundamental, even transcendent about Radbaz’s tale of a Jewish “vampire.” The story serves as an arresting and entertaining illustration of the importance of both shmirah and immediate burial in Jewish law. In exploring these key tenets of Jewish burial traditions, however, it becomes clear that there are even more important things at stake in the story. One is the responsibility of the community for the welfare of the individual. Essentially, Radbaz’s vampire story turns Barber’s paradigm of social marginalization on its head. Despite the old woman’s reclusiveness and miserliness, neither of these negative character traits made her a vampire and a danger to her community. It was, and is, the community’s responsibility to care for all its members and to monitor the welfare of each person in order to safeguard everyone’s ultimate well-being. Regardless of whether a person is well liked, or even likeable, whether a person enjoys a place at the heart of the community or clings to its periphery, everyone must be cared for, and no one may slip through the cracks.

At its deepest roots, the burial laws and explanatory stories explored in this article are a testament to Judaism's perspective on the divinity of the human soul. All are created in the image of God and carry a sacred spark in their soul. As such, the same rules of swift burial and respectful vigil apply to everyone, even old, mean-spirited, antisocial grandmothers and criminals sentenced to capital punishment. Even when the sacred spirit and divine spark depart, the body retains an echo of God's image. The reverence shown toward the dead in according them a proper burial testifies not only to a person's ultimate vulnerabilities, but also to God's majesty and care for all His creations.⁷⁹

APPENDIX

Hebrew text from *Mezudat David*, Mizvah 436 (Zolkiew, 1862), 63b.

ישמעו בני מעשה באשה אחת זקינה שהפליגה בקרוב לך' שנים וספרו
עליה אנשי מקומה כי עניין'(ה) רעה בענינים והיתה חשודה כל ימיה
והיה לה בנים ובנות וחתנים וכלהות ולא היה דרה עםם אלא יחידה
בביתה ובניה היו מסדרין לה פרנסתה והולכין בסחרורה כללו של
דבר מהה בעוד היו בניה בסחרותם ויתר בג' ימים לא נודע מיתתה
וכאשר באו בני'(ה) מצאו מתה באמצע הבית מושלחת ופיה פתוחה
וידה ורגליה עקומות ולשונה תלוי' חוץ לפיה ועניין'(ה) פתוחות. וכאשר
קברוה בכל לילה ולילה הייתה באה בהקץ לחולמים בדמיון שליהם או
קורא אותם או מכח אותם ובחור ד' ימים הי'(ה) מת. ועד מ' יום מתו יותר
ממאתיים נפשות וכולם טרם מיתתנן העידו על קראתה אותם בהקץ או
על הכתה אותם ולא נפסק המות והדבר ודמיון ממנה עד שטרופה
וכמו ט"ו למיתתה פתחו הקבר ומצאו מגבעת של בלועה בחור פיה
ולא היה ניכר מכל המצתפת רק השביבים בלבד והיה דם נובע מפיה . . .

NOTES

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1. For contemporary Jewish death and burial practice, see Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1969); Samuel C. Heilman,

When a Jew Dies: The Ethnography of a Bereaved Son (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). For an historical perspective, see Sylvie-Anne Goldberg, *Crossing the Jabbok: Illness and Death in Ashkenazi Judaism in Sixteenth- Through Nineteenth-Century Prague*, trans. Carol Cosman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

2. Goldberg, *Crossing the Jabbok*, 13–21. On the shift from secondary burial and the collecting of bones in ossuaries to current Jewish burial practices, see Avriel Bar-Levav, "We Are Where We Are Not: The Cemetery in Jewish Culture," *Jewish Studies* 41 (2002): 15–46.

3. Literally "holy societies." On this innovation, see Avriel Bar Levav, "Ritualization of Jewish Life and Death," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 47 (2002): 69–82; Goldberg, *Crossing the Jabbok*, 92–98.

4. Goldberg, *Crossing the Jabbok*, 75–76. On the impact of Jewish migrations in early modern times, see David Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 23–55.

5. Avriel Bar Levav, "Rabbi Aaron Berakhiah of Modena and Rabbi Naftali Hakohen Katz: Founding Fathers of Books for the Sick and the Dying," [Hebrew] *Assufot* 9 (1995): 191. On the influence of printing, see Zeev Gries, *The Book in the Jewish World: 1700–1900* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007). On kabbalah and its primary text, the Zohar, see Boaz Huss, *Like the Radiance of the Sky: Chapters in the Reception History of the Zohar and the Construction of Its Symbolic Value* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute and Bialik Institute, 2007).

6. On the relationship between halakha and kabbalah, see Jacob Katz, "Post-Zoharic Relations Between Halakha and Kabbalah," in Bernard Cooperman, ed., *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 283–307.

7. Avriel Bar Levav, "Games of Death in Jewish Books for the Sick and the Dying," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 5 (2000): 11–34.

8. On the genre of Jewish folklore, see Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Herman Pollack, *Jewish Folkways in Germanic Lands (1648–1806): Studies in Aspects of Daily Life* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971).

9. Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 4, 7.

10. Vampires were undead—not resurrected; they were repulsed by Christian symbols, especially the crucifix; and they were killed by means of a stake, itself an inverted cross. Montague Summers, *The Vampire in Europe* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1929), 78; Clive Leatherdale, *Dracula: The Novel and the Legend: A Study of Bram Stoker's Gothic Masterpiece* (Northamptonshire: Aquarian Press, 1985), 27; Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, 37.

11. Leviticus 17.11. All translations of biblical verses come from the *Jewish Publication Society Bible* (Philadelphia, 1917).

12. The rabbis in the Mishnah, Tractate Sanhedrin 6.4, point out that all individuals who were killed by means of stoning were then hanged. The Mishnah, Tractate Sanhedrin 7.1, lists four possible means of execution: stoning, burning, beheading, and strangulation.

13. Commentary of RaSHBaM (R. Samuel Ben Meir) on Deuteronomy 22.23. Found in *Torat Hayyim Chumash*, ed. Mordechai Leib Katzenellenbogen (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1991), 7:184.

14. See, for instance, Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 1996), 984.

15. Mishnah Tractate, Sanhedrin 6.4. Found in Pinhas Kehati, *Mishnah Seder Nezikin*, trans. Moshe Sober (Jerusalem: Eliner Library Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 1995), 2:72–76.
16. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 46b. All Babylonian Talmud translations come from *The Talmud*, trans. Isidore Epstein (London: Soncino Press, 1961). On the Talmud and all the rabbis cited, see Alfred J. Kolatch, *Who's Who in the Talmud* (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1964). A version of this parable with slight variations is also cited in another early rabbinic work, the Tosephta Sanhedrin 9.6 (accessed on *Snunit*, <http://kodesh.snunit.kt2.il/b/f/f44.htm>), where Rabbi Meir gives another cryptic explanation.
17. Rashi was an eleventh-century commentator on the Talmud. Avraham Grossman, *Rashi: Rabi Shlomo Yizhaki* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2006).
18. The wider point is that any desecration of the body, even an autopsy, is an insult both to the deceased and to the deity. Lamm, *Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, 8–12.
19. Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides), Mishneh Torah Laws of Mourning 4.7; Yosef Karo, *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah* 357:1. See also Yechiel Michel Tukazinsky, *Gesher Hahaim* (Jerusalem: Solomon Publishing, 1960), 2:21–28.
20. Mishnah Sanhedrin 6.4.
21. During the European Enlightenment, many governments worried that speedy burials might result in occasionally burying of people alive. But even when the secular authorities passed laws that required bodies to remain unburied for three days, leaders of Jewish communities continued to defend the practice of prompt burial. For a detailed examination of Jewish burial customs, see Lamm, *Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, 18–21. But see also the important work by Moshe Samet, "Halat metim: Le-toledot ha-pulmus 'al keviat zeman ha-mavvet," *Assufot* 3 (1989): 413–65. Also useful are Alexander Altman, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1973), 288–89; and Goldberg, *Crossing the Jabbok*, 195.
22. Lamm, *Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, 35; Goldberg, *Crossing the Jabbok*, 109–10.
23. Lamm, *Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, 5.
24. Alan Mintz, "Prayer and the Prayerbook," in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, ed. Barry W. Holtz (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 408–13. On Judaic prayer and its development, see Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993); and Stefan C. Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
25. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Berakhot 18a.
26. "Oseq bimizvah." Rashi, Tractate Berakhot 18a, s.v. "patur." This refers to a well-known principle in the Talmud that one who is engaged in fulfilling one biblical commandment is exempt from all others. See Tractate Berakhot 16a. Rashi also argues that the exemption from performing other commandments while guarding a corpse follows this principle. For another example of the exemption of performing one command when busy with another, see Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sukkah 25a.
27. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Berakhot 18a.
28. Mishnah Torah Laws of Reciting Shema 4.3; *Shulchan Aruch Orach Haim* 71.3. See also "The Concept of Shmira," National Association of Chevra Kadisha, http://www.nasck.org/article_ooo3.html.

29. Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Atheneum, 1975), 36–37, 42. On the phenomenon of Jewish magic, see Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

30. Yoram Bilu, “The Taming of the Deviants,” in *Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Matt Goldish (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 54–55, 59.

31. J. H. Chajes, *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 11, 22–23; Bilu, “Taming of the Deviants,” 45–46, 48, 50.

32. Bilu, “Taming of the Deviants,” 64.

33. Joseph Dan, “Introduction,” 34; and Tamar Alexander’s “Love and Death in a Contemporary Dybbuk Story: Personal Narrative and the Female Voice,” 307–45, both in *Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Matt Goldish (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003).

34. The transgressive nature of the dybbuk’s actions through his host body, particularly his sexual nature, is far more suggestive of the folklore related to werewolves than to vampires. Harry Senn, *Werewolf and Vampire in Romania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1, 56, 65.

35. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 38–39. For a short presentation of some passages from the medieval Sefer Hasidim relevant to estries, see Eli D. Clark, “Vampires and Witches in Sefer Hasidim” *Torah Musings*, October 26, 2011, <http://www.torahmusings.com/2011/10/vampires-and-witches-in-sefer-hasidim/>.

36. Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, 2–3.

37. *Ibid.*, 5.

38. Cited in *ibid.*, 6.

39. Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, 6–7.

40. Leatherdale, *Dracula*, 22.

41. Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, 3, 96, 112, 121, 124.

42. *Ibid.*, 13, 24, 29–31, 37; quotation on p. 21. See also Senn, *Werewolf and Vampire in Romania*, 72; Montague Summers, *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1960), 77, 167; Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu, *In Search of Dracula: The History of Dracula and Vampires* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 94; Leatherdale, *Dracula*, 27–28.

43. Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, 4, 109.

44. *Ibid.*, 7, 114.

45. Cited in *ibid.*, 6.

46. *Ibid.*, 7.

47. Barber, *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, 101, 105, 109, 115, 119, 127.

48. This should not be confused with the eighteenth-century biblical commentary of the same name. See Tovia Preschel, “Altschuler, David,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 3:783.

49. Israel M. Goldman, *The Life and Times of Rabbi David Ibn Abi Zimra* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1970), 17–21. See also Samuel Morell, *Studies in the Judicial Methodology of Rabbi David Ibn Abi Zimra* (Dallas: University Press of America, 2004).

50. Goldman, *Life and Times of Rabbi David Ibn Abi Zimra*, 1–16.

51. Isaac Heinemann, *The Reasons for the Commandments in Jewish Thought: From the Bible to the Renaissance*, trans. Leonard Levin (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008). In his introduction to 2003 edition of *Mezudat David*, Moshe Tzuriel identifies fifteen different texts prior to Radbaz's work that focused on *Taamei Hamizvot*. *Mezudat David* (Jerusalem: Yerid Sefarim, 2003), 22.

52. Radbaz's viewpoint on *Taamei Hamizvot* can be connected to his kabbalistic theology. Melila Hellner, "Torat Ha-gilgul bi-Sifrei Ha-Qabbalah shel R. David Ibn Zimra," *Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 43 (1990): 16–50, esp. 18–24.

53. Referring to the biblical leprosy described in Leviticus 12–14.

54. Kehati, "Introduction," in *Mishnah Seder Tohorot*, trans. Moshe Sober (Jerusalem: Eliner Library Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 1995), 1:3.

55. For a recent summary of different rabbinic opinions, see Shlomo Spiro, "On Rationalizing Biblical *Tum'a*," *Tradition* 43, no. 1 (2010): 23–37.

56. David ben Solomon Ibn Abi Zimra, *Mezudat David*, Commandment 436 (Zolkiew, 1862), 63a.

57. Goldberg, *Crossing the Jabbok*, 151. For a description of accepted modern practices, see Lamm, *Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, 3–4.

58. Goldberg, *Crossing the Jabbok*, 108–10.

59. Interestingly, this elimination of standing water would be one of the best strategies that could have been undertaken at this time to prevent the spread of disease. The added precaution of pouring the water onto the ground so that it would not go directly into the water supply is a further safeguard for preventing future epidemics. *Ibid.*, III.

60. *Vehol asher yifnu yarshiu*. See 1 Samuel 14.47 for the parallel language to which Abi Zimra is clearly referring.

61. Genesis Rabbah is a Midrashic exegesis on the book of Genesis. Attempts to locate this original source have not been successful. It seems evident that this line of the text is corrupted. The verses quoted prior to the story come from Deuteronomy. The 2003 annotated edition of *Mezudat David* does not cite the source of this commentary. In the introduction to the 1856 text, the editors note that they had difficulty reading the original manuscript they had obtained and that some of the letters were not recognizable. Abi Zimra, *Mezudat David*, 2.

62. The following translation of the text was done by Saul Epstein. See the appendix to this contribution for the original Hebrew text.

63. Literally "her eyes were evil to the poor."

64. The story has an internal discrepancy as to the number of days that had passed between the woman's death and her disinterment. This may be attributed again to the difficulties in reading the original manuscript.

65. All Jews are buried in the same white clothing, which includes a hat. For a full list of shrouds worn by the deceased in Jewish tradition, see Lamm, *Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, 12.

66. Abi Zimra, *Mezudat David*, 63b. The storyteller also notes that an incident occurred in the time of "R. Yehuda Hachasid the son of R. Samuel the Prophet of blessed memory the head of our family," referring to Rabbi Yehudah Hachasid of Regensburg, a twelfth-century mystic, liturgist, and author whose traditions and teachings were recorded in the classic work *Sefer Hasidim*. On this personality and his spiritual movement, see Ivan Marcus, *Piety and*

Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany (Leiden: Brill, 1981). He also cites a similar event that occurred with “Issac the Mazzik,” referring to a Devil-like spirit known for causing damage. See Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 27.

67. Bar Levav, “Rabbi Aaron Berakhiah of Modena.”
68. Aaron Berakhiah Ben Moses Mordena, *Maavar Yabbok, Sefat Emet* 2:24 (Amsterdam, 1732), 210.
69. Abraham Isaac Sperling, *Sefer Taamei minhagim u-mekore Ha-dinim* (Jerusalem: Shay Lamoreh Publishing, 1989), 428n3. Sperling’s citation reproduces exactly the 1856 edition of Rabdaz’s text. Sperling does switch the order of the text, first telling the story, then quoting the verses in Deuteronomy along with its explanation.
70. Lamm, *Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, 56–57, 70–73. For an analysis of the controversy regarding Jews and cremation, see David Malkiel, “Tekhnologia va-Tarbut be-‘Inyan Serefat ha-Metim: Nituah Histori u-Fenomenologi,” *Italia* 10 (1993): 37–70.
71. Avriel Bar-Levav, “Death and the (Blurred) Boundaries of Magic: Strategies of Coexistence,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 7 (2002): 57.
72. Barber also notes cases of vampirism arising when burials are performed improperly—when, for instance, the dead are left unattended, or even not buried at all. But such cases are usually associated with times of major social upheaval, such as war or plague. *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, 37–38.

One further issue deserves a brief mention before concluding this discussion of death, Jewish burial laws, and vampires, in relation to the text found in *Mezudat David*. Despite the fact that the “vampire” grandmother has very little in common with dybbuks, they do share one factor: their gender. Kabbalistic texts, grappling with the preponderance of women possessed by (usually male) dybbuks, asserted that women, tainted by Eve’s original sin, were more vulnerable to the evil spirits constantly on the watch for the opportunity to take over human bodies and wreak havoc with them. While it is possible that the Jewish grandmother’s corpse proved more vulnerable to demon possession after death merely because she was a woman, this issue does not come into play in the text itself. Bilu, “Taming of the Deviants,” 46.

73. Goldman, *Life and Times of Rabbi David Ibn Abi Zimra*, 138.
74. Abi Zimra, *Mezudat David*, Commandment 552, 78b–79a.
75. Israel Isserlin, *Responsa Terumat Haedeshen*, #283 (Benebarak, 1971), 102; Moses Feinstein, *Responsa Igrot Moshe Section Yoreh Deah*, #225 (New York: Noble Book Press Corp., 1959), 1:456–57.
76. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Responsa Da’at Kohen*, #221.4 (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1969), 414.
77. Goldman, *Life and Times of Rabbi David Ibn Abi Zimra*, 5.
78. Rabbi Avraham Danzig, in his work on the laws of mourning and death, attempts to synthesize the Talmud’s explanation about the need to protect bodies from vermin with the kabbalistic approach. He explains that the vermin that attack corpses are really wandering spirits. The argument regarding the boat centers on whether spirits can enter the boat. Abraham Danzig, *Chochmat Adam Hilchot Aveilut Matzevet Moshe*, par. 14 (Jerusalem: Meqor Sefarim, 1996), 582–83.
79. Lamm, *Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, xi, 3.