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**ОБРАЗ ВАМПИРА В ТУРЕЦКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ**

**Аннотация:** в настоящей статье речь идет о трех оригинальных романах о вампирах, которые были написаны в Турции и турецкими писателями. В художественном сознании турецких писателей персонажи - вампиры воспринимаются не просто как представители нечисти, зла, а это отражение актуальных для турецкого общества в тот или иной период времени проблем.

**Ключевые слова:** вампир, турецкий роман, турецкая массовая культура

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**THE IMAGE OF THE VAMPIRE IN TURKISH LITERATURE**

**Summary:** This paper deals with three original novels about vampires that were written in Turkey by Turkish authors. In the mind of Turkish writers, vampire characters are perceived not only as representatives of evil, but also as a reflection of the problems experienced by the Turkish society at one time or another.

**Keywords:** Vampire, Turkish novel, Turkish mass culture.

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УДК: 821.512.161

If you ask any Turk today what he or she knows about Romania, the most probable answer will be: a vampire called Dracula. In this, however, he/she will not differ much from any other fan of mass cinema and literature in any country.

The genre of the “vampire novel” has come to be absorbed by the Turkish popular culture only relatively recently –– in the past fifteen or twenty years –– due to the newly arising demand for it by the contemporary readers familiar with the Western mass culture. Understandably, the topic has barely been explored by researchers so far. We can cite here the following works: 1. The paper by Nilay Kaya, a researcher from Istanbul Bilgi University (İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi), Türk Edebiyatında Vampir[[1]](#footnote-1). 2. The book titled “Türk Kültüründe Vampirler. Oburlar, Yalmavuzlar ve Diğerleri" by Sechkin Sarpkaya and Mehmet Berk.

Both Turkish readers and researchers are quite fond of the common etymology which traces the word “vampire” back to the Turkic ***obyr / uvyr / obyr*** [5]. Some researchers insist on the Turkic origin of vampires [10].

Similar characters can certainly be found in the Turkic mythology. For example, in the mythology of the West-Siberian Tatars, there exists an evil demon, myatskay (metskei, kupkyn). According to legends, the myatskay was the spirit of a dead sorcerer who left the cemetery and continued to live among people. He was believed to be indistinguishable from the living, but sometimes one could notice his long red tongue hanging down to the ground. The myatskay could fly at night in the form of a ball of fire above the ground. He drank blood from people and sent diseases and epidemics. Some said that one could become a myatskay even during one’s lifetime - "if he swallows a pyare", that is, an evil spirit, or "he is swallowed by a pyare". The same demon was also known among some Bashkir groups [3].

In the mythology of the Kazan Tatars this evil demon occurs as the ubyr. The ubyr takes the place of a sorcerer's soul, which the latter has sold to Shaitan, and controls him while he is still alive. A sorcerer inhabited by a ubyr was called ubyrly keshe or ubyrlykarchyk. He was believed to have magical powers that could harm people. He is especially dangerous for pregnant women, as he can abduct children from the womb and hide them. At night, the ubyr sometimes leaves the body of the sorcerer, usually through a hole in his armpit. Then the ubyr takes the form of a fireball, a wheel, a dog, a cat, a pig, and sometimes a human fleshless from behind, according to Bashkir beliefs. He steals young livestock, sucks milk from cows and mares, which makes them ill, drinks blood from cattle, and sends diseases to people. After the death of an ubyrly keshe, the ubyr lives on in his grave, leaving it through a hole and continuing to cause harm. To destroy an ubyr, it was necessary to drive an oak stake into the grave or pierce a foot of the deceased with a needle. In fairy-tales the ubyr usually appears as an old woman who drinks blood from young girls [5].

Some "vampire" features can be observed in Al Basti, a cross-Turkic character of lower mythology.

In the Turkish mythology per se there is a similar character called ***hortlak***. The fact that this word is explained in Turkish Wikipedia through the term “zombie” serves as evidence of how little contemporary Turks know their own mythology [7]. The newspaper "Milliyet" says to its readers: "...Did you happen to know that the creature that is known today as a zombie is actually called Hortlak or Hortan?" [8]. According to traditional beliefs, this is a person who cannot stay still in his place after death, “rising” from the grave on the very first night. In the Ottoman language, he was described with the term ***Mevta olmamış*** “unmoved, restless”. It was assumed that the person who became a hortlak after death had been a bad person, a gossip, an atheist, a sinner in life, with no place for him in paradise. Becoming one was a punishment. A hortlak that has emerged from the grave walks around wearing the shroud, runs faster than a horse, is stronger than any person and can beat anybody, wields weapons, can attack a house, steal an adult or a child, may take residence in a house abandoned by people in the form of an animal. In the folk mind, there is gender differentiation: bad men turn into hortlaks, while bad women into jadas / jadas / jazz - witches[[2]](#footnote-2)2. Curiously enough, according to modern Turkish dream dictionaries, to see a hortlak in a dream is a sign that either a missing person or a lost fortune will soon return! [10]

As for the appearance of a hortlak, his body is half decayed. To avoid meeting a hortlak, it was and still is recommended to refrain from loitering nearby a cemetery, to say as many prayers as possible, and to perform namaz as often as possible.

Nowadays, the belief in hortlaks and jadas is most popular in the province of Giresun. In the province of Rize, the images of the hortlak and the ubyr are merged together. Therefore, in Rize the following way to get rid of the walking dead is proposed: you need to drive an oak stake into his grave with the words “Go away, ubyr, go away, ubyr!” –– and scatter around garlic, onions and radishes.

Interestingly, the history of the Ottoman Empire has one “real” story associated with vampires. It is the case of the Tyrnovo vampires (Tırnovo Cadıları) that was a sensation at its time. The famous Turkish historian Ilber Ortayly describes it as follows. In 1833, the qadi of the town of Tyrnovo (now Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria) Ahmet Sukru Pasha sent to the sultan's court office a report on the execution of two vampires, Janissaries Tekinoğlu Ali Alemdar and Apti Alemdar, who had been notorious for being most outrageous criminals. The execution was performed by a sorcerer called Nikola in compliance with all the necessary rituals: piercing their hearts with stakes and boiling them, and, finally, burning their bodies [9].

This story has a logical explanation. By the beginning of the 17th century, the corps of the Janissaries had lost their military significance and ceased to be an elite unit. Many janissaries were no longer professional soldiers, but became engaged in trade and craft and had families. The corps was engaged in extorting money from the state and intervened in politics, contributing to the decline of the Ottoman Empire — as a result of the Janissary riots, several sultans were overthrown or killed. By 1826 the janissaries had come to be hated throughout the empire. Seeing that Sultan Mahmud II is forming a new army and hiring European artillerymen, the capital’s janissaries started a riot, which was brutally suppressed. The instigators and many rebels were executed, their property was confiscated by the Sultan, while the young janissaries were expelled or arrested. However, the Janissaries continued to pose danger to the Sultan's authority since they could find support among the ordinary people. Therefore, one of the tools employed by the state policy to fight with their popularity was the dissemination of such rumours. So a report on the execution of vampire janissaries was published on the pages of one of the first and most important newspapers in Turkey, the official Takvim-i Vekai (Takvim-i Vekai, Calendar of Events), of October 6, 1833 [9].

It turns out that vampires are still a Western phenomenon, and they occupy a much less important place in Turkish mythology than “jinnies”, “peri”, “witches”, and “evil spirits and demons”. This is partly due to the fact that the Turks are Muslims, and Islam does not recognize “resurrection” or “immortality”, unless bestowed by Allah.

On the other hand, the unpopularity of vampires, or rather, of their main literary representative –– Count Dracula, is partly due to the memory of his historical prototype –– Vlad III Basarab-Tepes (ruled 1448, 1456-1462, 1476). Vlad Tepes is perceived as a collective image of the Balkan, i.e. internal, enemy of the Ottoman Empire, who encroached on its authority and territory.

The unpopularity of the Western image of vampires can also be seen in modern Turkish literature. Most often, vampires have appeared as comic book characters that were very popular in Turkey in the 1980s.

This paper deals with three original novels about vampires written by Turkish writers in Turkey.

The first novel about a vampire, and about Count Dracula himself, was written by a historian, naval officer and writer Ali Riza Seyfi (Ali Rıza Seyfi, 1879-1958). It is called "Kazıklı Voyvoda". That was what Vlad Tepes was called by the Ottomans. The novel was published in 1928 in the famous literary almanac “Resimli Ay” (Illustrated monthly, Resimli Ay). It was printed in Arabic script. Then in 1931 it was republished in the Latin alphabet. 1953 saw its cinema adaptation entitled “Dracula in Istanbul” (Drakula İstanbul’da). In 1997, in the honour of the centenary of Bram Stoker's Dracula, the novel “Dracula in Istanbul” was published with illustrations. On the one hand, the novel by Ali Riza Seyfi is an example of an adaptation of a European work, which was common in the Ottoman-Turkish culture in the late 19th - early 20th centuries. As was a popular practice, the representatives of the Turkish enlightenment borrowed well-known European stories, gave Turkish names to the characters, transferred the action to Turkey and retold the plot as they understood it. Here too, instead of the lawyer Jonathan Harker, who went to the castle of Count Dracula in Transylvania from London to sell some property, Count Dracula in his castle is visited by lawyer Azmi for similar reasons. Like Harker, Azmi has a bride in Istanbul, to whom he writes letters. Day by day the Turkish lawyer approaches the mystery of the castle owner, who is feared by all the surrounding peasants, and, eventually, Azmi’s stay there turns into a nightmare. Count Dracula, with a pale face, sharp fangs and nails, turns into a bat at night and terrifies people. Therefore, he forces Azmi to take him to Istanbul on a ship. In Istanbul, not only Azmi, but also his bride Şadan and the Turkish version of Van Helsing, Dr. Resuhi Bey, come to grips with Dracula. The originality of the Turkish novel lies in the fact that from the very beginning it is emphasized that Count Dracula is a foreigner, a stranger. “The local places (i.e. Transylvania) are not like your homeland. Customs and beliefs are different,” Dracula himself says to Azmi, the lawyer [12]. By the middle of the book, the gap between the Turkish people and the Europeans becomes even more obvious. Resuhi Bey finds out that Count Dracula, who is now in Istanbul, is none other than the long-standing and famous enemy of the Turks, the Walachian ruler Vlad Tepes, the famous Kazykly Voyvoda. Now the novel demonstrates patriotic poignancy[[3]](#footnote-3)3. I.e., Count Dracula is not just a vampire, an evil spirit, a threat, but the image of the enemy of the Turkish nation occupying Istanbul. The novel was written in 1927-28, when the National Liberation War in Turkey had recently ended (1919-1923) and the invaders had been expelled not only from Istanbul, but from the entire territory of the new Turkish Republic. The Treaty of Lausanne was concluded with many European states, including Romania. It is symbolic that the name of the heroic Dr. Resuhi Bey resembles the name of an associate of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, his main adjutant Ryusuhi Savaşçı. Thus, for the characters of the novel, the fight against the "enemy of the Turkish people", Count Dracula, is historically justified, for they "avenge their compatriots impaled on the banks of the Danube" [12]. This corresponded to the general trend of that period: everything was supposed to celebrate the feat of the Turkish people during the liberation. However, the weapon in the fight against Dracula, which is used in the novel, is quite classical –– it is the Qur’an, garlic, mirrors (apparently, to detect the vampire). It is curious that Dracula is killed with a Dagestan dagger (kama), a legendary weapon that was a symbol of many Caucasian and Turkish secret patriotic societies [12: 148]. Plus, Azmi, the lawyer, wears the Enam-i Sheriff (En'âm-ı Şerif muskası) amulet around his neck, representing the most important suras and prayers from the Qu'ran, and also carries the earth from the grave of Prophet Mohammed. On the whole, the novel can be called patriotic-nationalistic.

The second original work about vampires was written in 1958. The author is the writer Kerime Nadir (Kerime Nadir, 1917-1984). Her novel is called “Dehşet Gedgesi” (The Night of Horrors, Dehşet Gecesi). It also features a vampire, more precisely a vampiress, also with foreign roots, the Iraqi princess Ruhihayal (Ruhihayal, transl. *dreamy soul*). The protagonist of the novel, a journalist named Mümtaz, is invited to the unveiling of an expensive and luxurious hotel in the province of Hakkari (Hakkari). A novel titled “Kyzyl Pooh” (Red Eagle-Owl, Kızıl Puhu), supposedly based on a true story, falls into the hands of Mümtaz. On the train, Mümtaz sees a bizarre stranger and finds certain resemblance between her and the woman on the cover of the novel. Together with Mümtaz we learn the story of the protagonist of “The Red Eagle-Owl”. His name is Cengiz, he also went to Hakkari, the castle of the Iraqi princess Ruhihayal, which his bride had inherited. There he met a woman whom he initially took for his bride’s aunt, but then found out that she was an Iraqi princess who had already become a vampire 200 years before. In Cengiz she saw Prince Maha, with whom she had been in love a long time ago and who had not reciprocated her love. Over time, this fateful princess, whose soul is restless because of holding a grudge at the prince and craving true love, lures young men into her castle with sorcery, seduces them, turns them into vampires and makes them slaves. She has the ability to turn into a red eagle-owl. Cengiz finds out about this when he hurts himself while shaving, because there are no mirrors in the castle, as in any vampire housing. The journalist who has read the adventures of Cengiz also falls into the trap of an Iraqi princess. Here, of course, it is interesting that, although the woman is an example of “a femme fatale, a vamp”, she is obsessed not with blood, but pure love! Therefore, the novel was popular among Turkish readers in the 1950s.

The theme of love, but in a new perspective, is present in another Turkish novel about a vampire. This is a novel by Mehmet Bilal (Mehmet Bilal) titled “Osmanlı’da Bir Vampir, Bela” (“Bela, the Ottoman Vampire” (2013).

The name of the main character, Bela, on the one hand, calls to mind Bela Lugosi, an American actor of Hungarian origin (Bela Ferenc Deje Blashko, 1882-1956) who played in the film “Dracula” (1931), on the other hand, it is a play on words, as "bela" “means woe, trouble». Bela is a young man who lives in the early 19th century Romania, at the time part of the Ottoman Empire. At the age of 27, he takes a large dose of medication and dies, but is turned into a vampire by an elderly vampire, a Turk, who is later called “Beybaba” (Beybaba, Mentor). Together with him, he leaves for Istanbul and continues his immortal existence there. The protagonist is truly modern (death from an overdose, life of a “rock star”); neither religion, nor the former homeland (mini-Europe) are of any importance to him. He is more interested in existential questions: when the elderly vampire asks him if he wants to find a new life, Bela replies: “Will it really be a new life, or will I continue my existence from the point where I broke it off?”. Bela wonders which creature is worse, a vampire or a human? According to his mentor, a human commits much more evil to his equals than a vampire does, etc. Since Beibaba gives him the right to choose between evil and good, Bela chooses the path of “humane vampirism”, he helps suiciders and seriously ill people to escape from life, thus providing himself with food. The novel also discusses the issue of "alienation" of the protagonist. Bela is a stranger in Istanbul / Turkish society, but the reason for his alienation is different. He is homosexual. During his 200-year-old vampire life, he only once managed to experience mutual love. While still living in the 19th century Istanbul, Bela became a famous dancer, a köcek in meikhan. The köcek is a tradition of performing erotic dances by boys or young men dressed in women's clothes. As a rule, the artists were of various ethnic origins. Their career ended when they reached the age of 25-30. So, Bela fell in love with a janissary, who was fugitive after the dispersal of the janissary corps. His feeling was so strong that, according to him, “language, race, colour, gender, political preferences, philosophical preferences, religion” lost their meaning. The author of the novel avoided the clichés that are often used in vampire novels by focusing on the problem of same-sex love and self-identification[[4]](#footnote-4)4.

In the mind of Turkish writers vampire characters are seen not only as representatives of evil, but as a reflection of the problems experienced by the Turkish society at one time or another. Thus, “Dracula in Istanbul” is about an “external enemy”, “The night of horrors” deals with a women's issue (the image of a strong woman who has been hurt by men), while “Bela, the Ottoman vampire” concerns the problem of homophobia in a society dominated by masculinity.

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1. Currently, there is no access to this paper by Nilai Kai at [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2 It is noteworthy that in the 16th century Sheikh-ul-Islam Mehmed Ebussaud-efendi (Khoja Chelebi, 1490-1574), known as the one to legalize the shadow theatre of Karagöz, included religious and legal recommendations on fighting vampires in one of his fatwas [11, p. 86-91] [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3 It is no coincidence that members of the secret (?) society “Group of Heroes” (Kahramanlar Grubu) participate in the murder of the vampire. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4 The theme of sexual deviations is not new in the world’s multifarious and multi-genre “Vampiriad”; it will suffice to name the cult film by Jess Franco “Vampire Lesbians” (Vampyros Lesbos, 1971), which, by the way, takes place in Turkey. [4: 120-124] In 2010, Eksmo publishing house released a Russian translation of the book "Dracula. The Last Confession” by Chris Humphreys, which is based on Dracula’s biography and features interesting stories of the homosexual relationship between Dracula and his Turkish teacher. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)