



Countess Dracula: The Life and Times of Elisabeth Bathory, the Blood Countess

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This is the story of Elisabeth Bathory, a 17th-century Transylvanian countess. She was tried as a vampire and became an inspiration for depraved murderers up to the present day.

Countess Dracula: The Life and Times of Elisabeth Bathory, the Blood Countess Details

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From Reader Review Countess Dracula: The Life and Times of Elisabeth Bathory, the Blood Countess for online ebook

Roxanne says

First of all, this book is very poorly titled. Thorne states in one of the first chapters that calling Elisabeth Bathory "The Blood Countess" or "Countess Dracula" is completely sensationalist, and this is really a sober and well-researched account of her life, so the title doesn't fit at all. I'm guessing Thorne picked the title to draw attention to the book, or he got it forced on him by the publisher, but whatev. On to the book itself.

This book is a fairly well written and extremely well researched account of Elisabeth Bathory's life and times. Thorne discusses the Bathory myths and legends, then delves deep into the archives of eastern Europe to find and translate firsthand accounts, letters, and reports from the trials. Thorne presents all the possibilities: was Bathory a sadistic murderess as accused? Or was she simply a woman with a lot of power and money and some big political enemies who wanted her out of the way? Thorne doesn't draw any definite conclusions, but he looks at evidence from all sides. He also presents research onto the lifestyle of Hungarian aristocrats in Bathory's day, giving us a window into what her life may have been like and providing some reasons and explanations for her "crimes".

This is definitely more of a scholarly account than a mass-market page turner--the book is extensively end-noted* and includes a substantial bibliography, and the language is much more scholarly than not. Still, though, if you're interested in the subject matter, this is a pretty darn definitive survey. Recommended.

*(My one major complaint with the book was in the design--whoever chose the running headers didn't coordinate with the person who set up the Notes section, because the running heads gave a description of the chapter content ["A Notorious Dynasty":] while the Notes were organized by chapter number only ["Chapter Ten":], which was irritating. I'm not reading the whole damn book in one sitting, I'm flipping back and forth on the train here, and I don't always remember which chapter I'm in the middle of!)

Alex says

The most important thing you can ask yourself before picking up this book is: what are you looking for? Have you heard of Elizabeth Bathory and want to know more about her life and the crimes she was convicted of committing? Or have you read about her extensively and want to know more about the nitty gritty details of her trial and the historical and political context in which it occurs?

If that second option isn't your answer, steer clear of this book. Thorne should be commended on the exhaustive and comprehensive amount of research that he clearly put into this, but as a reader it's a difficult slog through an intense amount of information. More frustrating - for me at least - is that no conclusions are drawn by the end of the tome. To a degree this is inevitable given the lack of documentation that remains concerning the Countess's life, but boy was it disappointing to get to the end and feel like my knowledge of the case and the woman herself had only grown incrementally compared to now knowing more than I ever desired about Hungarian politics of the era.

Lauren Albert says

Definitely a believer in Bathory's innocence--at least as to the worst charges (since he thinks that elites were often cruel and that could lead to unintentional death). I thought he should have spent more time on the other side to give the story balance. I think the title should have been different since, in his quest to prove his point, he focused a lot of time on background and on the stories of similarly accused women and not that much on Bathory herself. Sometimes I felt his reasoning was a stretch but without more of the side of the accusers, it was hard to judge.

Alisa says

I loved this book about Bathory for it's great depiction of both possible paths through history: did she commit all of those heinous murders...or was she merely framed for it by men eager to get her out of the way and get their hands on her money? It's difficult, if not impossible to separate fact from fiction in this case, but both sides of the story are well rendered. And how cool is the Bathory crest on the cover??

Janina says

I had heard of Elizabeth Báthory before in the context of her being obsessed with blood, drinking and bathing in it. So when I stumbled over the book in my local library, I thought it might be quite interesting to learn how and who she really was. And after it took me ages to get through this book, I still can't really tell.

I really do understand that the author had a very hard time here because there are so little documents concerning Elizabeth Báthory left. In that respect Tony Thorne did an incredible job! Still, I didn't enjoy reading this book (Not only because of the cruelties people committed to each other. Very lovely times indeed.)

I quite often lost the thread because he digressed from the topic, so when he finally came back to the original topic I hardly remembered anymore what it was all about really.

Another thing was that I had a hard time with the Hungarian names, keeping up with who is who (which was especially interesting since it seems that there are only a handful of first names people used to have back then). Something I found quite irritating was that the author anglicized most of the first names but used the Hungarian last names.

Although the author hinted that the crimes, Elizabeth Báthory was accused of, might have been healing rituals, he never got really into detail, which I would have found quite interesting. Neither did I really understand where this blood drinking and bathing in blood myth comes from.

All in all I must say that I learned more about Hungary in the 15th and 16th century and her enemies, than about Elizabeth Báthory herself.

Michelle Brandstetter says

Countess Dracula is a book detailing the twisted crimes of Countess Elisabeth Bathory & several people in

her employ. It's a very detailed & unbiased look into the charges, torture & trial of the countesses servants, their subsequent punishment, and the fate of the countess herself. It is extremely factual, although can grow rather tedious as we review the responses from each witness as they collaborate previous testimony. I found it an interesting read because I was under the incorrect impression that all serial killers were male. This is obviously not true as Countess Bathory is said to be responsible for the deaths of 650 young virgin girls. As the details are exposed, it gives credence to the argument that the original Dracula by Bram Stoker was based more on the private life of Elizabeth Bathory than Vlad the Impaler. Creepy reading.

The Badger says

This biography (written through historical documents), was nothing short of amazing. My perspective on Erszebet Bathory has certainly changed. I no longer see her as a mass murder (comparable to her distant cousin, Vlad Tepis), but a woman railroaded into crimes she probably did not commit because she had the audacity to consider other male rulers her equals, and the "misfortune" to own a good deal of coveted land. Court records question whether ANY deaths happened (other than those of her tortured servants during after their trials), especially as the only girls eligible to serve the Countess were nobility AND related to her. (And yet, the Countess was convicted of soliciting peasant girls--who did not even speak her language--and killing up to 600 of them). It's interesting to note that the Countess was not allowed to attend her own trial.

Irka says

One of the best books on this subject I've ever read. Author really makes you think if she really killed 600 girls? To me, it seems way to high, she was "just a woman" in "an age of paid witnesses, faked testimony, of prosecuting counsel who were alloed to do almost anything they liked, and defendants who were allowed no counsel at all" - and I think this quote sum up perfectly her story.

Super ksi??ka, porówna? j? mog? tylko do "Draculi" M.Cazacu. Wida?, ?e autor zg??bi? temat, zmusza czytelnika do zastanowienia si? ile prawdy jest w tym co s?ysza? o El?biecie Batory, jednocze?nie nie narzucaj?c swojego zdania. Warta przeczytania (trzeba si? tylko uzbroi? w cierpliwo?? bo s? takie kwiatki jak "Jagie??on" i "Craców" ;)), szkoda ?e nie ukaza?a si? w polskiej wersji j?zykowej.

Darrell says

Erzsébet (Elizabeth) Báthory, a contemporary of Queen Elizabeth I, was said to have murdered hundreds of girls and bathed in their blood in order to retain a youthful appearance. If you're thinking it's not possible to bathe in blood due to coagulation, think again. The stress of a sudden violent death causes the body to overproduce fibrinolysin, an anti-coagulant. So, the blood could indeed remain liquid for hours after death, plenty of time to take a nice warm bath.

The story of Countess Dracula, or the Blood Countess of Hungary, has been retold countless times, including by the Brothers Grimm. Even most non-fictional accounts take the lurid details of her trial at face value. However, Tony Thorne digs deeper into the historical record and even produces previously unpublished

letters to get at the truth behind the legend.

Far from the dullard he is usually depicted as, Elizabeth's husband Francis Nádasdy was an educated nobleman and a national war hero who wasn't afraid to take politically unpopular opinions. He was mostly absent from Elizabeth's life however, due to the Fifteen Year War with the Turks.

While he was away, and after he died, Elizabeth had a lot of responsibilities. In addition to being a mother, overseeing her servants, cultivating and trading in honey, milk, and eggs, and attending to her herb garden, Elizabeth also resolved disputes amongst townspeople. Additionally, Elizabeth spent a lot of time traveling to oversee her estates and attend to her dignitary duties.

She was likely a healer since there was no doctor or barber surgeon in her court and noblewomen often filled the role of healer, especially since there weren't any doctors around during the war. However, to a modern eye, the mock surgical techniques employed by amateur healers such as bleeding would often be indistinguishable from torture. Here, we get one explanation for the atrocious acts witnesses claimed she committed. Another explanation is found in the realm of discipline.

Elizabeth Báthory was said to have used creative punishments, such as forcing girls who stole coins from her to hold heated up coins in their hands. This is not cruel or unusual punishment when taken into context. One fellow called the Peasant King, who led a revolt against the Hungarian nobility, was punished by being placed upon an iron throne with an iron crown upon his head. The metal was then heated up until he burned to death. The middle ages were a brutal time to be alive, not just in Hungary, but in all of Europe. Torturing peasants was common. If a servant died while being beaten by his master, it was considered an accident, not murder. Even killing a noble could be excused if you paid off the victim's family.

During her trial, Elizabeth was accused of torturing servants in a variety of ways including sewing their lips together and making them eat their own flesh. She was also said to have bitten them, stuck pins in them, held candles up to their genitals, and made them bathe in icy cold water. Some descriptions given by witnesses seem to be taken from contemporary descriptions of Hell, such as the accusation that she inserted red hot iron rods into her victims' vaginas.

Elizabeth, like any other noble of the time, certainly would have punished her servants severely for minor infractions and her attempts at healing would have appeared to be torture to someone who didn't know what she was doing. However, the witnesses, who were testifying after being tortured themselves, likely made up a lot of the details.

Supposedly, Elizabeth Báthory had to travel to far away towns to recruit servants since all the nearby townspeople were frightened of her. This, however is untrue. It was a great honor to be a seamstress or chambermaid in a noble's court and Elizabeth was related by either blood or marriage to all of her alleged victims. She had no difficulty finding help.

When her servants died, the Countess held funerals for them, not secret burials like one would expect from a murderer. The story that dogs had dug up a body was most likely true, since Elizabeth would have had to bury several servants over the years who had died of illness after her attempts at healing had failed.

Usually, high ranking officials such as Countess Báthory were notified in advance of any criminal charges against them and the trial would take years, but Elizabeth was taken by surprise and her servants were executed unusually quickly.

In court proceedings of the time, quantity of evidence was more important than quality and confessions obtained through torture were permissible. In the case of Elizabeth Báthory, the witnesses' accounts differed wildly from each other and were mostly hearsay.

Suspiciously, the proceedings were conducted entirely by persons either dependent upon or in the pay of the Palatine George Thurzó. Thurzó had a history of jumping to hasty conclusions and executing the innocent. He was originally friends with Elizabeth and her husband, and admired her intelligence. Unlike his barely literate wife, Elizabeth knew several languages including Latin and Greek.

However, Thurzó's patrons, the Habsburgs, were long time rivals of the Báthorys who owned more square miles of the country than he or the King. When Elizabeth's nephew Gábor became Prince of Transylvania, his friendship with Báthory and her husband became strained. There was also religious tension between the Lutheran Thurzó and Calvinist Báthory.

The case against Elizabeth Báthory's servants was very flimsy. None of the victim's families had called for a trial. The arrest, investigation, and imprisonment were not carried out legally. The required coroner's report was not included. Not all of the witnesses spoke Hungarian. Bodies weren't exhumed and survivors were not called to testify. Thurzó didn't interview anyone in the east of the country where he had no political influence. Also, Thurzó never officially tried Elizabeth, despite repeated requests from King Matthias, perhaps because he could have faced execution for bringing false charges against her. After Elizabeth's imprisonment, his wife looted her treasury.

Thorne finishes up by telling us of other similar cases. It was common to accuse widows of witchcraft or other unspeakable acts in order to take their property. In sum, Elizabeth Báthory probably didn't treat her servants any worse than other nobles of the time, she just had the misfortune of owning desirable land and being related to an enemy of the Habsburgs.

Grace says

Very interesting and well written. Not an era or person who we can ever get a whole picture of. The fact that the author explored the possibility of her not being guilty was interesting as well as putting her actions into the context of the time period so her possible brutality is more understandable in the context.

If that makes any sense.

A good read although I think I am burned out about this time period and its brutality for a while now!

Raquel says

O relato bem informado e minucioso do que se conhece da Condessa Sangrenta, ainda hoje a mais prolífica entre os assassinos em série mais conhecidos, uma lista na qual, curiosamente, não constam muitas mulheres.

Ann says

Interessant onderwerp maar de schrijver lijkt zelf niet goed te weten wat hij ermee aan moet. In elk hoofdstuk worden een hoop zijsporen gevolgd en telkens andere conclusies getrokken. Het helpt ook niet dat

zoveel mensen dezelfde naam hebben.

Greg Kerestan says

This book, an interesting blend of legend and medieval true-crime, wasn't as lurid and gothic as I had expected. Countess Elisabeth Bathory lives on in legend as a bloodthirsty lesbian vampire-witch cannibal goddess succubus queen, but this book allowed for little of the gruesome or titillating in its narrative. Rather, it contrasted the legend of Bathory with the reality of the situation, positing that Bathory, while not necessarily innocent, may have been nothing but a stern authoritarian whose harsh but not atypical methods of justice were exploited into an urban legend to usurp her throne. Horror and history fans alike can dig into this one with equal abandon.

Drew Martin says

There's a fine line between a good biography and a bad biography relating to the given history of the time and place. We, as readers, need some sort of introduction. Our table needs to be set in order to dive into the main course, the subject's story. As a rule, we don't need six spoons and five forks. Too much history introducing a biography can and often does ruin the reading experience. We need a little background, but that's not the reason we're reading. Tony Thorne's 1997 book, Countess Dracula: The Life and Times of Elisabeth Bathory, the Blood Countess is a prime example, bloated like a happy leech ruining an interesting subject. It disappointed me to find another entry for the "so bad I couldn't finish" shelf...

To read the rest of this review go to <https://drewmartinwrites.wordpress.co...>

Amber says

Okay, so I gave this book fairly decent rating because I learned a lot and it had a lot of really great information. The reason this book didn't rate higher - it was really boring. This book took me almost two months to read and the only reason it got read was because I forced myself to read one chapter a day. There was too much geographic detail that got really old, really fast. For such an interesting topic, the book was incredibly dry, in my opinion.
