

ABSTRACT

Václav GRUBHOFFER, *Zdánlivá smrt. Noční můra osvícenské Evropy* [Apparent Death. A Nightmare of the Enlightened Europe], Praha – Polička: Městská knihovna Polička – Nakladatelství Argo, 2018, 324 p.

The scientific monograph *Zdánlivá smrt. Noční můra osvícenské Evropy* [Apparent Death. A Nightmare of the Enlightened Europe] focuses on fear of apparent death in the 18th and 19th-century Europe with a particular stress on the Czech lands. The category of so-called apparent death is a multi-layered theme running through European cultural history, which is located on the border of historical eras, various scientific disciplines, serious research, and the area of curiosities. However, it is closely connected mainly with the history of medicine of the second half of the 18th century. The present monograph deals firstly with period growing professionalization of the medical field and hence of forensic medicine in the 17th and in the 18th century and shows that the leaders of medical discourse began to be concerned with the temporal status of biological death no later than the 1740s. The period central question was how to determine conclusively that death had occurred, which permitted the burial of the dead person. Yet this was also a time when people became more concerned with the possibility that individuals might not have died and could recover by themselves. The more modern medicine progressed, however, the more people listened to anecdotal evidence about apparent deaths and premature burials. During the second half of the 18th century this originally medical issue crossed the boundaries of scholarly discourse, among other things, as a result of medical treatises being published in national languages, and became a real nightmare of the Enlightenment. The apparent death became a theme of preromantic and romantic fiction.

The author discusses the theme of apparent death as a cultural and culture creating phenomenon – as an essential topic of cultural history. While the western historiography – and particularly romance historiographies, have been dealing with this topic for several decades, there has been no comprehensive and extensive contribution in the Czech historiography. The monograph based on strictly interdisciplinary approach including for instance history of everyday life, history of science, medicine and literary history tries to fulfil such a gap. From the methodological point of view the research has been inspired especially by history of mentalities, historical anthropology, intellectual history, and body history. It is also important to emphasize that the author analysed sources (including for instance period fiction, folklore testimonies, state decrees and medical treatises) written in five different languages (German, English, Italian, French, and Latin).