

# FROM WALLACHIAN DUKE TO THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS

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**ABSTRACT:** *The materials that were used as the basis of this paper represent parts of works and studies of the most competent historians (Giurescu, Florescu, Stoicescu), whose main study focus was the medieval Romanian state and particularly Vlad III Draculea. It should be noted that even in these scientifically recognized works there is no complete agreement about certain moments and events from the life of Vlad Draculea, therefore only the facts that showed the most consistence were used. However, the accuracy of the data can not be guaranteed because, for a long period since the myth of Dracula exists, history many times mingled with folklore. The aim of this paper is primarily the presentation of Vlad III Draculea as a ruler, warrior and historical figure, stripped of fictional predicates attached to him in novels and Hollywood horror films, in order to make a parallel between the actional man and fictional character exploited by the tourism industry.*

**Keywords:** *Vlad III, Dracula, Dracula tourism*

## INTRODUCTION

History and geography as sciences, especially in the 20th and 21 century with the development of modern means of transport and aggressive marketing, greatly contributed to the emergence and development of many special forms of tourism. The travel industry is using historical and geographical facts and research to create a tourism product or at least raise the attractiveness of existing products. However, for the same purpose, sometimes, fictional elements of literary works, mythology, folklore, movies are being used... In certain cases, historically-geographical and fictional elements are combined in order to maximize the effect of attractiveness. One of these special forms of tourism presents the so called "Dracula tourism". Although Vlad III Draculea was a real person whose life still provokes controversy and vigorous debate among historians, the development

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of specific forms of tourism based on his character, has very little to do with historical and even geographical facts.

The global popularity of Vlad III began after the publication of the novel “Dracula” by Bram Stoker in the year 1897. It is not exactly known why the Irish writer chose the Walachian Duke as the main protagonist of his novel, a Transylvanian vampire, but the fact is that without Stoker, Vlad Draculea would probably remain known only within his home country Romania. The highest popularity of Vlad III begins with the advent of the film industry, when Hollywood starts the exploitation of literary and fictional versions of his life in the form of countless adaptations on an almost industrial scale.

Considering the fact that until 1989, Romania was a country under a totalitarian communist regime and the people there had very little knowledge about the global popularity of their Duke, “Dracula tourism” was practiced by only a few foreign tourists, enthusiasts who, at their own risk, visited the places described in Stoker’s novel. Romania’s government had during that time very little economic gain from Draculea’s new-found fame. One of the reasons was the lack of knowledge about the existence of the literary version of their national hero and the other was a complete closure of the country to the western world (Dracula was in Romania first published in 1990). The situation changed after the fall of the communist regime. Realizing the potential for serious economic benefits, Romania began branding the life and work of Vlad III. However, the direction and manner that is chosen to achieve this goal, and the effect accomplished so far, caused many controversies and criticism of the Romanian state in particular by eminent historians.

## MATERIALS AND OBJECTIVE

The materials that were used as the basis of this paper represent parts of works and studies of the most competent historians (Giurescu, Florescu, Stoicescu), whose main study focus was the medieval Romanian state and particularly Vlad III Draculea.

It should be noted that even in these scientifically recognized works there is no complete agreement about certain moments and events from the life of Vlad Draculea, therefore only the facts that showed the most consistence were used. However, the accuracy of the data can not be guaranteed because, for a long period since the myth of Dracula exists, history many times mingled with folklore.

The aim of this paper is primarily the presentation of Vlad III Draculea as a ruler, warrior and historical figure, stripped of fictional predicates attached to him in novels and Hollywood horror films, in order to make a parallel between the actional man and fictional character exploited by the tourism industry.



Picture 1. Vlad III Dracula

Source: <http://www.npr.org>

## THE HISTORICAL VLAD III DRACULEA - WALLACHIAN DUKE

*“History is a set of lies agreed upon”*

**Napoleon Bonaparte**

Vlad III (rum.Vladislaus III Draculea) was born in the year 1431, apparently in the fortress of Sighisoara, as the second son of Vlad Basarab Dracula II. The term Basarab is referred to the family line or Dynasty to which Vlad II and his sons belonged to. However, neither Vlad II nor his descendants ever officially used this name.

His mother was most likely the Moldovan Princess Cnaejna (Snow White) Bathory, daughter of the Moldavian prince Musat. According to historical data, he spent part of his early childhood in Sighisoara. The education of young Vlad, was for most of the time, his mother’s responsibility, Princess Cnaejna. Vlad’s mother died quite early so that his education was continued by Eupraxia, one of his grandmothers. But in one version of the story, Princess Cnaejna and Eupraxia were the same person. According to this tale, Cnaejna changed her name for religious reasons but there is no reliable historical data to support this statement.

The primary education, which at the time was reserved exclusively for nobles, Vlad and his brothers received on the court in Targoviste. Vlad had also to go through an extensive war training conducted by a senior commander, a friend of the family whose name is left unrecorded.

Vlad III had three brothers: Mircea (? -1447 ), Radu III called “The Beautiful” (1438-1500) and Vlad Mircea called “The Monk” (? -1496 ). However, in some historical sources

**Table 1.- The house of Draculesti (Drăculești)**

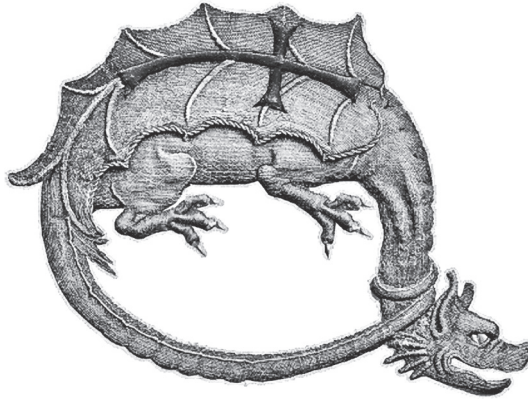
Name	Years of rule	Father
Vlad II Dracul	1436-1442, 1443-1447	Mircea cel Bătrân
Mircea II	1442	Vlad II Dracul
Vlad III Drăculea	1448, 1456-1462, 1476	Vlad II Dracul
Radu cel Frumos	1462-1473, 1474	Vlad II Dracul
Vlad Călugărul	1481, 1482-1495	Vlad II Dracul
Radu cel Mare	1495-1508	Vlad Călugărul
Mihnea cel Rău	1508-1509	Vlad III Drăculea
Mircea III Dracul	1510	Mihnea cel Rău
Vlad cel Tânăr	1510-1512	Vlad Călugărul
Radu de la Afumați	1522-1523, 1524, 1524-1525, 1525-1529	Radu cel Mare
Radu Bădica	1523-1524	Radu cel Mare
Vlad Înecatul	1523-1524	Vlad cel Tânăr
Vlad Vintilă de la Slatina	1532-1534, 1534-1535	Radu cel Mare
Radu Paisie	1534, 1535-1545	Radu cel Mare
Mircea Ciobanul	1545-1552, 1553-1554, 1558-1559	Radu cel Mare
Pătrașcu cel Bun	1554-1558	Radu Paisie
Petru cel Tânăr	1559-1568	Mircea Ciobanul
Alexandru II Mircea	1568-1574, 1574-1577	Mircea III Dracul
Vintilă	1574	Pătrașcu cel Bun
Mihnea Turcitul	1577-1583, 1585-1591	Alexandru II Mircea
Petru Cercel	1583-1585	Pătrașcu cel Bun
Mihai Viteazul	1593-1600	Pătrașcu cel Bun

*Source: Istoria românilor vol. II*

es it is mentioned that Vlad II had only three sons, although the family tree of the Drakulesti Dynasty states that he had four offsprings. It is possible that an error occurred in the recording data and we should not exclude the possibility that Vlad III had only two brothers.

In the same year he was born, his father Vlad II was introduced into the military crusade “Dragon” Order (German Drachenorden; lat. Societas Draconistrarum), in Nuremberg by the German emperor and Hungarian king Sigmund. This earned him the nickname “Dracul”, under which he and his descendants would be best known in the history books. The word Dracul is derived from the Latin word Draco – Dragon, while Drăculea, the name under which his son Vlad III would be known, means: son of the Dragon (Florescu, McNally, 1989). From then on Vlad II and his sons, name their Dynasty Drakulesti (Drăculești).

The “Dragon” order was inspired by the Knights of St. George order. These Knights were originally dedicated to the protection of the royal family of Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire Sigmund (at the time when he was still the king of Hungary). Members



Picture 2. The symbol of the Dragon order

Source: [www.geschichtenerzaehlerin.de](http://www.geschichtenerzaehlerin.de)

of the order were called Draconis. The charter of the order, which was announced on December 13th 1408, stated that their main task would be the defence of the Cross from enemies, especially Turks. Among the 24 knights who took part in the establishment (or renewal) of the order in 1408 the most prominent were:

- Sigmund of Luxembourg, King of Hungary
- Stefan Lazarevic, Despot of Serbia
- King Alfonso of Aragon and Naples
- Ladislav II , King of Poland
- Vitovt of Lithuania, the great prince
- Ernst of Austria, Duke
- Christopher III, Duke of Bavaria and King of Denmark
- Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk ( after the 1439th year )
- Vlad II, Duke of Wallachia
- Philip The Hungarian and Pipo of Ozora , Italian and Hungarian aristocrat (Kuzdrzal -Kicki, 1978).

Vlad Dracula II was entrusted with the task of fighting off the Turks on the border of Transylvania and Wallachia. Vlad II would not seriously pursue this task because he wanted to avoid open war with the Turks, who considered him if not an ally then at least a loyal subject of the Ottoman Empire. In 1436 Vlad Dracul overthrew Alexandru Aldea from the throne of Wallachia and started his rule as the Wallachian prince. By the time he secured his position on the Wallachian throne he noticed that the balance of power is changing in favor of the Ottoman Sultan Murad II. The situation worsened with the death of Sigmund of Luxembourg in 1437 (Giurescu, 1976). Although he never openly showed enmity to the Turks, but moreover some (probably insincere) loyalty, from that moment he took a neutral stance toward the Ottoman Empire. It is assumed that his goal was, as his fathers Mircea Bătrîn, the establishment of an independent Wallachian state. Wallachia had then (as well as the entire territory of today's Romania) all natural conditions to be a rich and prosperous country. Wallachia had consid-

erable mineral wealth, fertile land and over its territory important trade routes passed through. Cool attitude and neutrality that Vlad II openly manifested toward the Turkish court, made Murad II highly suspicious. Therefore, the Sultan demanded that Vlad II leaves his sons Vlad III and the younger Radu as hostages on the Turkish court, for safety and proof of loyalty. Vlad was 11 and his brother Radu 6 years old. Wanting at all costs to avoid open conflict with the Ottoman Empire and oppression against the Christian population, Vlad II agrees to leave his sons on the Turkish court and forms alliance with Murad. According to data from the Turkish Historical Archives, Vlad III and his half-brother Radu were first sent to Egrigiz in western Anatolia, and after that to Murad's court in Adrianopolis, where they were put under house arrest. About the time Vlad and Radu spent in captivity, little is known. However, it is certain that this period had a profound psychological impact on the young Vlad Dracula. In several sources it is stated that Vlad and his younger brother have often been victims of cruel abuse. It is also known that on countless occasions they both witnessed cruel punishments that Murad II exercised over his subjects and servants for the slightest infractions. History remembers Sultan Murad II as a very cruel ruler which was just another aggravating circumstance for the young princes. As the older one, Vlad felt responsible for the safety of his younger brother. The entire time he spent in captivity, in order to facilitate his brothers stay in inhuman and harsh environment, Vlad behaved extremely protective of Radu. That kind of behaviour was not received with much sympathy by the Turkish court. Although his rebellious behavior has been repeatedly sanctioned with cruel punishments, he never changed his manners and attitude.

A famous story says that after years of captivity, opposed to his half-brothers blind obedience, Dracula began to cause fear amongst their jailers. This period had undoubtedly significant influence in the creation of a very suspicious and distrustful person, with strong hatred towards the Turks, how scientific history describes Vlad Dracula III. The events he experienced in the Turkish court were undoubtedly one of the reasons for the enormous hatred which Vlad eventually developed towards Sultan Murad and later Mehmet. It was probably while watching the Turkish methods of torture, when he developed a strong sense of cruelty, which, in contrary to common belief, during his reign, he mainly practiced on Turkish soldiers and serious criminals. During this period, in the Ottoman empire, the punishment for homosexuality, rape and murder was impalement. As Vlad Dracula later became famous for this particular way of execution, especially against the Turks, the question remains whether he was actually sending a message to Sultan Mehmed what he really thought about the Turkish empire? The fact is that this method of executing the Turkish prisoners, was causing great shame and insult to the Sultan. With regard to the situation in the Balkans and in Europe, Murad II wanted loyal and easily controlled vassals on the thrones of states that were ruled by the Ottoman Empire. In the young Vlad the Sultan saw a potential future ally and repeatedly proposed to him to renounce the Christian faith and convert to Islam. In return he was promised the support of the Turkish court in taking over the throne of Wallachia. However, this did not happen, because even in the harsh conditions of captivity Vlad Dracula stubbornly held on to his beliefs and principles. In opposite to Vlad's refusal to adjust to the system of the Ottoman Empire, his brother Radu needed very little incitement

to succumb to the offers of Sultan Murad. After a little persuasion, Radu sided with the Ottoman court. Vlad Dracula must have had a very difficult time to accept that fact. After years of imprisonment he felt betrayed and alone. Moreover, because of his rebellious behavior, he was often physically punished and forced to attend classes in which he was supposed to learn the duties and responsibilities of the future Turkish vassal. Such a future he did not want neither for himself nor for his country. It is most likely therefore that he decided to make use of trickery when he was not able to apply force. In order not to cause too much suspicion of his captors, he did not renounce the Christian faith but began intensively to learn all he could on the Turkish court, which he believed could be useful in the future. Among other things he studied intensively the Turkish language, Ottoman military strategy, behavior and conduct of Turkish nobles. It is stated that he was secretly spying on Turkish military tactics and gathered information about the character of Sultan Mehmed. That information would eventually create him some day a huge advantage on the battlefield against the Ottoman Empire.

Very often he astonished his teachers with intelligence and learning speed. When he later sat on the throne of Wallachia, Vlad already spoke nine languages without accent and various dialects of these languages.

Meanwhile, his father, Vlad II Dracul, although aware of the risk of losing his children, renewed his previous oath as a member of the Dragon order. Although hesitant he joined the struggle against the Turks. The oath he gave to the Sultan was resolved by the pope. His son Mircea actively participated in the great crusade in 1443, when the Turks took over fortress Giurgiu (Smederevo) (Treptow, 1976). Smederevo was eventually freed with the San Stephan peace treaty in 1444. However, the campaign to Varna in 1444, although progressed close to the Black Sea, and was initially very successful, ended up being a complete failure. The conquest of Varna consisted of three battles in two days and ended with the defeat of the Turks. Victors were the united Serbian and Hungarian troops. After that a peace treaty was made between the opposite sides, that was later violated by the Hungarian king Sigismund of Luxembourg and Janos Hunyadi (in Serbian popularly known as Sibirjanin Janko). George Brankovic, despot of Serbia, made a separate peace with the Turks. After this event a war broke out between the Hungarians and Turks resulting in the capitulation of the Hungarian troops. Dracul II and Mirceta accused the leader of the campaign Janos Hunyadi to be the reason for the debacle and he was sentenced to death but was pardoned because of his past merits. In 1447 Hunyadi attacked Wallachia with the intention to take over the Wallachian throne for Vladislav Danesti. Dănești were another branch of the Basarab Dynasty and pretenders to the throne of Wallachia. During Hunyadi's attack, the boyars of Targoviste raised rebellion and captured Mircea. After cruel torture they buried him alive. Vlad II was able to escape, but the rebels caught him in the swamps near Bucharest, and cut off his head.

Vlad III was still held hostage by the Turkish court when he received news of his father's and brother's death in 1447. In the same year he was freed of hostage status by Sultan Murad and given a rank in the Turkish army, probably in the troops of the Janissaries. Radu remained in the Turkish court, apparently already accustomed to the life there.

In September 1448, the Turkish army captured Hunyadi and Vladislav Danesti near Kosovo. Vlad III, even though still very young, led the Ottoman army in an attack on

Wallachia and without serious opposition seized the town of Targoviste. Vladislav Danesti managed to escape from Turkish captivity and gathered an army with which he started a major counterattack on Vlad III. Finding himself before a far more numerous opponent he is forced to retreat after which he spends some time in the wilderness. From December 1449 till October 1451, he lived on the court of Bogdan of Moldavia. On the Moldavian court, Vlad completed his education together with Bogdan's son Stephan cel Mare. In October 1451, Bogdan was killed by his brother Petru Aron, which at the time was a common practice in the fight for the throne. Vlad III and Stephan barely managed to escape and save their lives. After the death of Murad II, in February 1451, the new Sultan became his son Mehmed II, which was welcomed by the vast majority of European rulers. Based on his experience from years spent in Turkish captivity, young Vlad Dracula advised European leaders to be cautious, as he knew all too well what kind of Sultan the Christian world would face. It is undisputed that Vlad harbored indescribable hatred towards the Sultan but just how much his warnings will turn out to be true, proves the fact that Sultan Mehmed, later Sultan Mehmet al Fatih will remain known as the conqueror of Constantinople.

Sultan Mehmed conquered Constantinople and from the year 1453, the Eastern Roman Empire ceased to exist. After the conquest of Constantinople, Vladislav Danesti manages to get close to the Sultan and establishes good relations with the Turkish court. At approximately the same time a reconciliation between Vlad III and Janos Hunyadi occurred. In Buda Vlad attended the coronation of Ladislas V of Habsburg king of Hungary, where he was appointed as protector of Transylvania, with a seat in the city of Sibiu (Florescu, 1989).

Vlad III finally gets his opportunity in 1456 when Janos Hunyadi started a campaign in Serbia in response to an attack by Mehmed II on Belgrade, which was then under Hungarian rule. Janos Hunyadi came to aid the besieged crew of Belgrade with the help of the Vatican monk Ivan Capistrano. He led about 70,000 men, defeated the Turks at Belgrade and forced them to retreat. But in the same year he died of plague somewhere along the Danube. Vlad takes advantage of the situation and in June, under the glow of Halley's comet in the sky, leads his army through the Carpathian mountains and invades Wallachia. By the end of July of the same year, Vladislav Danesti was killed in one of the battles, after which Vlad III Dracula finally takes the Wallachian throne in Targoviste. According to one of the legends, Danesti was slain on the battlefield by Vlad personally but this story has never really been proven. From this moment on, the most, historically speaking, controversial period in the life of Vlad III begins. Ascended on the throne, Vlad III immediately begins to rearrange the foreign and domestic politics. He was first confronted with the same problems that were troubling the previous ruler of Wallachia: to maintain balance between the Hungarian and the Ottoman Empire, and at the same time keep the independence of their country. Vlad Dracula immediately, at the beginning of his rule introduced, in today's terms horrible ways of punishment, both for foreign enemies and offenders and for hard criminals in Wallachia. If his intention was to intimidate and horrify his opponents, his methods proved to be a huge success. His favorite method of punishment, which was probably introduced by the example of the Turks and later became a synonym for Vlad's brutality, was impalement. Regarding his ways of execution, he



would after his death, be best known as Vlad the Impaler (rum. Țepeș) from the Romanian word “teapa” meaning “to impale”. However his cruelty must be viewed in the light of historical circumstances, the objectives and policy he pursued and what is most important the era in which he lived and ruled. Rulers who were contemporaries of Vlad III, from King Louis XI of France, the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II, through Henry V of England and King Charles of Burgundy were also known for conducting callous and cruel punishments in order to intimidate their enemies (Stoicesku, 1978). Even in the famous legal code of Tzar Dusan, cruel punishments that are incomprehensible today, were ordered for the even smallest crimes. However, unlike the punishments enforced by the Code of the Serbian Tsar, where the nobility received more lenient sentences than normal subjects, in the state of Vlad III all criminals were treated in the same way, regardless of their social status. Although Vlad’s methods of punishment must have been horrific, both to his enemies and those who broke the law, among ordinary subjects he seemed to gain approval, as of this time the myth of Vlad Dracula as a national hero began to emerge. The reason was probably that the number of those who dared to conduct any criminal activities and face Vlad’s law was negligible. It is said that at that time, Wallachia was in the state of a “gravelike tranquility”. Internal political conditions were far from simple. The main problem that he initially faced were the boyars who supported the Danesti Dynasty. Although in some stories it is claimed that Vlad invited the boyars to dinner, made them drunk and left the room, letting them to gossip and brag about their deeds and misdeeds, concluded that they were not faithful to his politics and killed them all, the truth is that he solved the problem of their lack of loyalty in a long run by increasing his power and influence over them, and not in one bloody act. Positions changed only some nobles who were considered disloyal. In the field of foreign policy, at the first period of his first reign, he tried to maintain a fragile peace, skillfully balancing the interests of the Hungarian and the Ottoman Empire in Wallachia. However this situation was for a longer period of time simply unsustainable. It is assumed that due to conspiracy, hatched against him by the Hungarians who supported the dynasty Danesti, a conflict broke out between Wallachia and Hungary where Transylvania was also involved. The fightings lasted for several years, interrupted by some brief periods of truce. Between 1460 and 1461, Vlad succeeded to obtain independence from Hungary, recover territories from Transylvania and eliminate rival pretenders to the throne of Wallachia. At that time he terminates all relations with the Ottoman Empire, ceases to pay tribute, and begins to prepare for war (Treptow, 2000). The war against the Turks began in the winter of 1461, when Vlad decides to attack the neighboring Turkish fortifications and advances deep into the territory of the Ottoman Empire. The most famous incident that consolidated the reputation of Dracula’s Christian crusader and warrior, was the conquest of the Ottoman territories in the 1461, when he and his army killed about twenty four thousand Turks, and burned all the Turkish Fortresses that he could not possess. In response to Vlad’s actions, the Sultan decided to invade Wallachia and appoint Vlad’s brother Radu to the throne. Facing a far more numerous enemy, Dracula was forced to retreat, but before that, he tried to kill the Sultan himself in a daring night campaign. The withdrawal caused horror among the rising Ottoman army as Vlad left behind him a field full of Turkish soldiers impaled on high stakes. However, eventually he was forced to retreat and his brother Radu occupied the throne of Wallachia. Af-

ter his withdrawal, under circumstances that were not entirely clarified, Vlad was taken prisoner by the Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus. About the time he spent in captivity, very little is known except that he was considered a political prisoner. In 1476, facing a new threat of a Turkish invasion, Matthias Corvinus frees Vlad Draculea, urges him to stop the advance of Ottoman Empire and regain the Wallachian throne, but under the condition that he renounces the Orthodox Cross and converts into Catholicism (Stoicescu, 1978). Vlad accepts Corvinus's conditions and after inflicting a heavy defeat on the Moldovans who supported Radu, for the third time he ascends to the throne of Wallachia. Unfortunately, shortly afterwards he was killed in one of the clashes with the Turks. It is believed that he was buried in a small insular monastery called Snagov.

As with all historical figures where reality mixes with mythology, there are several versions of the story about Vlad's death. The most widespread is the belief that he died in December 1476, during a battle with the Ottoman Empire, near Bucharest. Another version states that he was killed by disloyal Wallachian boyars just before he defeated the Turks on the battlefield. There are also claims he had fallen in battle, surrounded by the bodies of his loyal Moldavian bodyguards (the troops that Stephan III the Moldavian prince had lent him and who remained loyal to Vlad). Others argue that Vlad was killed by one of his men in the moment of triumph against the Turks. "The only indisputable fact" is that the Turks cut off Vlad's head and sent it to Istanbul preserved in honey, where the sultan showed her on a stake as proof that "Kazikli Bey" (The Impaler), was finally dead.

## THE GREATEST HISTORIC AND GEOGRAPHIC MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT VLAD III DRACULEA

### *Transylvania*

Although it is often stated, in some cases even at high schools and Universities, that Vlad Draculea ruled and lived in Transylvania, the truth is that he spent very little time in that particular territory. Vlad III, was the Duke of Wallachia and for some time even in conflict with Transylvania. The misconception comes probably from Stoker's novel "Dracula", where he presented his main character as a Transylvanian count. Even the castle Bran which is presented to tourists as his residence and which is described in the novel "Dracula", is a place where most likely Vlad Draculea never set foot in.

### *Dracula, The Impaler, Tzepesh or Tepesh*

His name was like his fathers - Vlad III Draculea. The name Dracul is derived from the Latin word "Draco" - the Dragon, that Vlad II took when he entered the Order of the Dragon, and the word Draculea in the Romanian language means "Son of the Dragon". Originally, the Dracul family belonged to the Basarab dynasty but they never officially used this name. Although known as Vlad the Impaler or Tepes, a term coming from the Romani-

an word “teapa” meaning “to impale”, there is no relevant historical record or source, that states that he was known under this name during his lifetime. The name Vlad Tepes became popular after his death, and was probably introduced by the Turks who called him “Kazikli Bey” (The Impaler). Later this name became generally accepted.

### *Vampirism*

The first association when mentioning the name of Vlad III Dracula is vampirism. But this was for the first time associated to him at the end of the 19th century, after the publication of Stoker's novel. In no historical source, both Romanian nor Turkish, was he described with the characteristics of a vampire for which he later became world famous. Moreover, even today in most of Romania, Vlad III is considered to be one of Romania's greatest rulers and heroes.

### **DRACULA BRANDING**

Dracula branding was for years the main concern of the Romanian state. The initiative was launched by the Ministry of Tourism in order to increase the number of foreign visitors to Romania and is currently a priority for the state on the path to permanent and sustainable sources of income. But as most of the postcommunist countries in transit, Romania is stuck with a dilemma: to emphasize a tourist brand myth of Dracula, which has very little to do with the history of the state, try to create tourist products which will present the country in the right light or opt for “balancing” between myth and reality?

There are two types of tourists who participate in “Dracula tours”: historical enthusiasts and sensationalist whose focus of interest is vampirism. The last scenario is usually practiced to the greatest extent, often well planned, where the main role have tourist guides. The reason for this presentation of Romania as a country and its most famous national good - Vlad III is the sensationalistic tourist demand, which differs greatly from the actual offer. As in each group of tourists there are always individuals who are also interested in the historical aspect of the Dracula story, the clumsy mixture of fiction and reality seemed like the best solution. Under the principle “the truth should not be hidden, but neither should the thirst for sensation be ignored” the tourists are presented with dark and mystical scenery of castles where Vlad Dracula probably never set foot in, created in the tradition of Stoker's description of the Transylvanian vampire lair. The anecdotes from the life of Vlad Dracula with which the historical aspect is being satisfied are usually more folklore and myth than fact.

But here arises the moral dimension about this kind of presentation of the country. That way is most being criticized by Romanian historians and scholars: “Is this the way we want to be portrayed and known in the world”, “can the economic benefit justify the falsification of historical data”? Some believe that the “Dracula tours” should be promoted as literary tourism, without any historical notes, but in this case the event would largely lose its attractivity and thereby reduce the economic effect, and for the majority of officials in the Romanian tourism sector this scenario is unacceptable.

The culmination of Vlad Dracula's exploitation was achieved with the construction of "Dracula Park" in Sighisoara, which is designed to attract both tourists with smaller budgets and those with higher incomes. More and more often serious criticism in Romania can be heard that the fictional movie character based on Vlad Dracula is shameful and humiliating for the Romanian people and especially the way he is used to boost the economic benefits: bloody coulisses, vampirism, dark and ominous fortresses. While "Dracula tourism" undoubtedly has a significant positive effect on the state budget of Romania, this form of presenting a destination does not contribute in raising the notion, image and opinion of tourists, especially foreign about the country in which he was traveling. The achieved effects might even be just opposite, because obviously there is a devaluation of the basic aims and objectives of the term "branding".

## CONCLUSION

For many Western tourists the synonym to Romania is Count Dracula. Ever since Bram Stoker published his novel "Dracula" in 1897, Transylvania and Romania became the main associations with vampirism and mysticism in the present Western world. Even in the mid 20th century, enthusiastic individuals are traveling independently to Transylvania in search of the mystical and supernatural phenomena and places described in the novel by Bram Stoker. This type of tourism puts Romania in a serious dilemma and even problem. On the one hand, Dracula is a unique tourist product which currently brings remarkable economic benefit and on the other, associating Romania solely in the context of vampirism, the supernatural and mysticism, seriously affects the image of a country that wants to present itself as a modern, developed European country. Another negative consequence is the impossibility of exploiting the real tourist values that Romania has in abundance: unique natural attractions, historical and cultural monuments, many manifestations, rural areas... The focus on "Dracula Tours" has sparked a sort of a counter effect, so that the interest in the real values of Romania is currently on a very small scale.

Romania currently remains divided regarding the opinions and strategies of "Dracula tours". It seems that the State officials are reluctantly encouraging the promotion of this type of tourism. It is most likely that the tourist identity crisis in which the country found itself will remain unresolved for a long time to come.

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