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HISTORY, LEGEND, LITERATURE: Prince Vlad Tepes alias Count Dracula

Abstract: Although exactly five centuries passed after the time of count Vlad Tepes Dracule, his unusual character never ceases attracting the attention of scholars and public in general. Seeing that history, legend, and literature portray him in different ways, the author tries to examine all the three sources and to expose the matter on which his literary profile was based. The author offers this paper as a contribution to the celebration of the first-novel-on-Dracule's centennial.

It is hard to imagine an „expert on Dracula“ calmly resisting the charm of great jubilees: five centuries since the real life and one hundred years since the literary life of Walachian Prince Vlad Tepes Dracula. „Experts on vampires“ must endure the same trial, so the author of the paper should be included among those who were unable to resist the charm.

In order to make our task as difficult as possible, we were tempted to enlighten Dracula's figure from three angles: historical, legendary and literary. Soon it became evident that the first two are almost inseparable, which should have been apparent from the start, or at least when we began a study by Romanian author Stefan Andreescu, which begins with the same conclusion.¹ We will nevertheless abide by our original intention, hoping amid the ocean of information to at least partly distinguish the historical from the legendary.

¹ „Vlad Tepes este unul dintre putinii domni români a căror biografie nu se poate reconstitui în afară de legenda.“ Stefan Andreescu, *Vlad Tepes (Dracula), Intre legendă si adevăr istoric*, Bucuresti, 1976, p 5.

Historical Dracula

As becomes such a personality as Dracula, no one knows exactly when he was born. Most scholars set the date at 1431, others believe Dracula was born some years earlier.² Even the date of his death is disputed - not the year - all agree it was in 1476, but the month is uncertain; it was most probably December, as Dracula began his third reign over Walachia on November 26, 1476.

Regardless of other doubts, one thing is certain: Walachian Prince Vlad Tepes Dracula was a contemporary of the last generation of the Serbian Brankovic family. Events in which he took part occurred in the immediate vicinity of the Serbian state, and he was himself a prominent figure in 15th-century Balkan history. In addition to this, „during his lifetime, Vlad Tepes became a well-known European personality. Military exploits, the energy and rigor that quenched every opposition put him among the political figures of the epoch /.../“.³

His birth was preceded by important events with impact on Serbia, Hungary, Byzantium, Turkey, and the Dracula dynasty. Confronted with the most onerous task of the century - resistance to the looming Ottoman Turks, who were advancing from the southeast, trampling the Balkan states and principalities, threatening to reach Central Europe - Hungarian King Sigismund of Luxembourg founded in 1408 the Knight Order of the Dragon which he bestowed on select noblemen, distinguishing them from other members of the aristocracy around his court.⁴ The immediate task of the order was to oppose Turkish onslaught and the spread of Islam. Among the first knights selected was Serbian Despot Stefan Lazarevic, and subsequently (some say in 1431) Walachian Prince Vlad, Dracula's father. This explains the son's inherited knightly insignia Dracul. Viewed chronologically, the Turkish siege of Constantinople (1422) and Ottoman domination over Serbia (1427) are two other big events preceding the birth of Vlad Tepes.

² Among the former are, for instance Radu Florescu and Raymond T. McNelly *In Search of Dracula*, 1972 (Р.Флореску Р. Мекнели. *У појрази за Дракулом*, Београд 1988, 23), while Nicolae Stoicescu is among the latter (*Vlad Tepes*, Bucuresti, 1976, p 227). Toponimus, personal names, and pagination are given here according to: Флореску, Мекнели. *У појрази за Дракулом*, Историја румунскиг народа знд Мариана Дан, *Фантасџика у румунској књижевности*.

³ *Историја румунског народа* (edited by Andrej Ocetea, member of the academy), Novi Sad, 1979, p 129.

⁴ Taken from Јованка Калић. *Срби у поном средњем веку*, Београд, 1994, 73.

Doubts as to the birthdate of Vlad Tepes arise perhaps from the belief that his parents took him to Nuremberg in February 1431, where his father received the insignia of the knight order, the princely throne of Walachia, and title of duke of Transylvanian regions Almas and Fagaras.

As most Walachian princes at the time, so Vlad (the father) was forced alternately, sometimes simultaneously, to court two empires - Hungary and Turkey. Attached at first to Hungary (whose king had instituted him to the throne), old Vlad, a cunning and able politician, quickly perceived that circumstances favored the ambitious Turkish Sultan Murad II, so he contracted a secret alliance with him. Bound by the contract, Vlad took part in the Turkish assault on Transylvania in 1438. However, Murad was not absolutely sure of Vlad's loyalty and sincerity. He enticed him with his sons Dracula and Radu (some say in 1443, others 1444), and imprisoned them. Old Vlad offered Murad his sons as hostages, to keep his throne and stay alive. They were transferred to Egrigis in Asia Minor, where young Dracula remained until 1448. His brother Radu, known as Handsome, and a favorite with the sultan, remained in the Turkish court much longer.

Resentful because of the betrayal, Hungarian King Janos Hunyadi ordered the capture and death of old Vlad. This took place in Baltena swamp near an old monastery, in 1447. Hunyadi was not appeased, but ordered a cruel death for his eldest son and heir, Mircea. He appointed a prince from the rival family Danesti to reign over Walachia. (The Danesti family was founded by prince Dan, one of Dracula's grand-uncles.)

As most of the princes from the Danesti family were unswervingly loyal to the Hungarian kingdom, the Turks attempted in many ways to oust them, and, releasing young Vlad from prison, to put him to the throne, well aware of his hatred toward the Danestis. They still kept Radu as a guarantee. All this coincided with the second Battle of Kosovo (October 17, 1448) where the Turks defeated Hungary and wished to have the loyal prince Dracula, notorious for his shrewdness and cruelty, near the Hungarian border.

Thus begins Dracula's first reign over Walachia (of three that history has recorded), ending only two months later when Vlad was forced to take refuge in Moldavia, threatened by his father's killers. The choice of this most northern Romanian principality was not accidental. Moldavia was ruled by Stefan the Great, with whom Dracula had good relations. The two vowed to help one another always, with armies when required.

In October 1451, Tepes left for Transylvania. He judged political relations in the Balkans correctly, when he foresaw that this time Janos Hunyadi

would help him recapture the throne, as Walachian Prince Vladislav II Danesti suddenly turned to Turkey. On July 3, 1456, Hunyadi informs the Saxons that he had entrusted the southern borders of Transylvania to Duke Vlad Tepes.⁵

Dracula mounted the Walachian throne again most probably in July (before August 20, 1456, when Vladislav II died), and proclaimed Trgoviste as the capital. This was his longest reign - until 1462. The beginning of his reign coincides with significant events in the Balkans: unsuccessful Turkish siege of Belgrade and the death of Janos Hunyadi (of bubonic plague), and ends quite dramatically, and, judging by legends, romantically, mysteriously and dreadfully.

On the plane of internal politics during the second reign, relations with the boyars were extremely strained. The reason should be sought in Tepes' centralistic rule, which completely marginalized the role of boyars in political and state affairs. Paraphrasing Romanian scholars,⁶ it could be said that Dracula introduced authoritarian rule, forcing the nobility, with stern measures, to bow to his policies unquestioningly. He literally destroyed a large part of the rebellious boyars and replaced their private troops with a standing army, mustered from the troops of submissive boyars and subjugated peasants. The measures incurred the hatred of the boyars which lasted literally till his death.⁷

During the second reign, specifically from 1461, the Turks demanded that Tepes renounce his alliance with Matthias Corvinus (son of Janos Hunyadi and King of Hungary from January 24, 1458). As Tepes rejected the order, the sultan sent Hamzi Pasha (in some sources Hamzi Bey) to seize him by guile. But quite the reverse occurred. Tepes captured the pasha and his men and killed them all. Knowing that the sultan would now advance on Walachia with his huge army, Tepes informed Corvinus of his conquest and the impending danger. The Hungarian king promised to come with his troops to Transylvania to unite with Tepes' army, but reneged. The sultan's grand army crossed the Danube in mid-May, 1462, and spread across Walachia. Tepes retreated with his army, and attacked only by night, inflicting heavy losses on the Turkish army. The sultan ordered retreat.⁸

⁵ Such precision is enabled by the chronological tables of N. Stoicescu, *Ibid.*, pp 227-229.

⁶ On this occasion Stefan Andreescu, *Ibid.*, p 268

⁷ *Istorija...*, p 129.

⁸ See above cited work for information about Dracula's strategy.

The Turks lay siege to Kiliya in June, and wounded Prince Stefan⁹ the Great. The troops were led by Radu the Handsome, Dracula's brother, who was joined by the rancorous Walachian boyars, who, as we know, bore a grudge against their prince. On August 15, 1462, the Transylvanian authorities recognized Radu the Handsome as the ruler of Walachia.

Fortunately, most of these stormy events were recorded by Serbian-born Constantin Mihailovic from Ostrovica, a notable member of the Turkish Janissary Corps, who neatly penned everything that took place. The notes were published by professor Djordje Živanović (Belgrade, 1966), under the title *Јаничарево сећање или турска хроника* (A janissary's memories or Turkish chronicle). The events mentioned above are related in chapter 33.⁹

Finally, early in October 1462, Matthias Corvinus ordered the arrest of Tepes. Dracula remained a prisoner of the Hungarian king for the next twelve years. His release was granted, at the insistence of Stefan the Great of Moldavia (or perhaps due to some love affairs to be related later on in the text), and Tepes renounced his Orthodox religion and with the aid of Matthias Corvinus reclaimed the Walachian throne, though briefly. Official records state that Dracula was killed in a battle near Bucharest, by Lajota Basarab and the Walachian boyars.

Contrary to the above account, the „official“ historical version of the Walachian prince Dracula, additional details may be uncovered from other sources. The story of Tepes' childhood, youth and maturity, the places he visited, the castles, cities and monasteries he had built, the portraits preserved and lost, and, finally, (German, Russian and Romanian) accounts, excerpts of which are cited at the end of the text, interesting the moreso for their variety in description and evaluation of the same historical figure.

Above all, this minor, or better still, intimate history of Tepes contains much information to which the official records are indifferent. It claims that Dracula was not born in Walachia but in Transylvania, in the old German fortified city of Sasburg (Sigisoar in Romanian), about a hundred kilometers south of Bistrica. Dracula spent his entire childhood there, traveling frequently to Germany. Knowing this, one might suppose the boy's development was influenced by German culture.

⁹ The chapter is titled *О влашском војводи, зосподару доње Молдавије*, and concerns Vlad Tepes, i.e., Duke Dragula (as Constantin refers to him) and his entire political role from Turkish imprisonment till his release, ascension to the throne and conflicts with Turks in mid-May, 1462.

Analogous to this, one might assume that during his six-year captivity in Turkey (1442-1448), Dracula mastered the Turkish language, and became acquainted with the customs and culture of the great, powerful, Asian empire that Turkey was at the time. The Hungarian influence on the formation of Dracula's character requires no particular mention: it was profound despite the twelve years spent in the dungeons of Matthias Corvinus (1462-1474).

Following the dark years of captivity, Dracula can undeniably be said to have been - above all else - a firm, hardened ruler, highly trained in the historical, political, social and cultural circumstances of the Balkans and beyond. Romanian historians that are firmly insistent on separating the historical from the legendary, portray Dracula as a prominent, hard, courageous and responsible ruler who played a significant role in the difficult period of 15th-century Romanian history, with a vision of Romania as a free and united single country prominent not only the Balkans but the whole of Europe.

Though Kampulung was the first capital of the Walachian princes, Dracula moved the seat to Trgoviste, a city situated on the slopes of Transylvanian mountains. Today only vestiges of the princely castle bear testimony of the capital. The capital and castle were destroyed and rebuilt again and again. Besides Trgoviste, Dracula fortified Bucharest in 1459 as the strongest bastion against Turkish onslaught.

Though some sources maintain that Dracula had erected five monasteries, there is evidence only of the church of Trgsora. The account related to the discovery of the church resembles an adventure story. Young scholar Constantin Djurescu visited the village of Stresnjik in 1922. Standing in the churchyard, conversing with a local priest, Djurescu spotted a stone protruding from the ground, with the inscription „With the mercy of God, I, Count Vlad, prince of Walachia, son of grand duke Vlad, had this church built and completed on June 24, 1461“.¹⁰

There is more information on Dracula's portraits and all of them are rather mysterious. The only full-size portrait hangs today in Ambras castle near Innsbruck. It was founded by Ferdinand II, the grand duke of Tirol, who desired portraits of unusual and „terrifying“ historical figures. Dracula was already dead at the time, so the presence of the painting in the gallery

¹⁰ *Ibid.* This information attests to a much more reliable source: Stoicescu, *Ibid.*, Chronological tables, p 228.

has been variously interpreted. The most widespread version is that one of his descendants, fleeing Walachia sometime in the 17th century, carried the painting, and fell captive to the Jesuits who handed the painting to the grand duke.¹¹



The same source mentions three portraits of Dracula. One was kept in Anif castle near Salzburg. As the account related to it is mysterious, the following is a quotation from the source. „It was discovered late in the previous century, under rather unusual circumstances. A member of the Florescu family, Demetar, a lawyer by profession, traveling through Salzburg in 1885, received an invitation to dine with Count Arko-Steperg, the owner of Anif castle. After the dinner, the count took his guest on a tour of the oriental paintings in the gallery. Demetar was surprised to see a portrait of Dracula, having several days before seen another picture of him in Ambras castle.

¹¹ Florescu and McNelly, *Ibid.*, pp 51-52.

The owner was unable to explain how his family obtained the painting,¹² nor has there been any discovery of it since the extinction of the family. It disappeared without trace.

The two other portraits have been preserved till the present day. One is exhibited in the art gallery in Vienna (oil miniature, most probably a copy of the painting in Ambras). „The other was discovered by chance by V. Peters, a German expert on Romanian history, in the summer of 1970. Titled the ‘Torturing of St Andreas’, the picture shows Dracula, a symbol of evil in the eyes of the 15th-century Austrian painter, as an observer enjoying a horrific scene.”¹³

Though historical sources do not state any particulars of his marital life, we learn from his private records that he married twice. His first wife was a boyar’s daughter, and died in 1462.

His second marriage is dubious. Some sources claim Dracula married a cousin of King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, others that he married the king’s sister and that the connection enabled his release from captivity.

These are the most important facts from the history of Prince Dracula.

The Legend of Dracula

The very name of Vlad Tepes Dracula is mysterious. The middle name (a soliloquy, in fact) is seen as the workings of legend: tepes in Romanian means stake, i.e. one who impales, as the people seemed to prefer. The name Dracula (despite the noble ancestry) in Romanian, and other languages, is associated with dragon and the devil. One can easily picture the fright of superstitious peasants seeing the symbol of the dragon on the standard of the Draculas. It is absolutely possible that the old prince was seen as the devil and his successor as the devil’s son.

Serious scholars well acquainted with Romanian folklore, as Mariana Dan, once told us of the „imported“ (western) origin of the legend of Dracula. Such a stand is backed in *Istorija rumunskog naroda*,¹⁴ (History of the Romanian people) which says that it was King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary himself who helped spread the legend of the Walachian prince as a blood-thirsty tyrant. Dan set out in her book, *Fantastika u rumunskoj kniževnosti*

¹² *Ibid.*, p 52.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p 53.

¹⁴ See note number three where *Istorija ...* is cited with the necessary bibliographical data, including page number.

(The fantastic in Romanian literature) that „cherishing horrors and terrors is not part of the Romanian spirit, testimonial to which is the fact that the legend on Dracula, so widely in use today, is not of Romanian origin; it is a ‘western construction’”.¹⁵

However, Florescu and McNelly, who toured Romania recently with their associates, recorded that the legend of Dracula still lives in the most remote parts of Romania, among peasants in particular. Nevertheless, it is possible that the legend is indeed of western origin and had thence reached and spread across Romania. Mariana Dan does not dispute the opinions of the above authors in her book, she even refers to them when saying, „It appears that the interpretation of Dracula’s pilgrimage in Romania (narratively, not actually) is owed to the fact that the geographic name was attractive, especially for such events (Transylvania in Romanian denotes beyond the woods, an attractive name, with a mysterious sound, seeming just the right place for such events to occur). On the other hand, it appears the vague starting point of the legend of the historical figure of Vlad Tepes Dracula /.../ a great warrior and ghastly personality, who apparently impaled not only dishonorable persons and captive Turks but also sparrows and mice (when he was in prison).”¹⁶

Taking into consideration available literature, it would appear that Stefan Andreescu was only partly right when he noted that the legends of Dracula were of two kinds: those inspired by friends and others instigated by enemies. Based on our inspection, if they are to be divided, the legends should be distributed in three groups: the first of German origin, the second of Russian, and the third of Romanian. Those originating from Germany are the most venomous. They portray Dracula as a matchless bloodthirsty fiend, no surprise to those acquainted with Dracula’s stand toward the Saxons. The Russian accounts are less severe: they blame Dracula not so much for his brutality but for renouncing the Orthodox faith and embracing Catholicism. The Romanian legends are the least critical. They depict Dracula as a brave justice-loving ruler, not a tyrant steeped in cruelty; a match only for the most hardened criminals.

In any case, when history recounts Dracula’s brutal accounts with enemies, the legend descends to the minutest, bizarre details. There has to be at least a little truth in it, considering Dracula’s soliloquy Tepes, and the use

¹⁵ Mariana Dan, *Fantastika u rumunskoj knjževnosti*, Belgrade, 1997, p 97.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 97-99.

of impalement as a favorite means of torture. He had developed a kind of „black ritual“ with every detail strictly planned and thoroughly elaborated.

However we might flinch from these details, the task we have taken on does not allow euphemisms. Judging by tradition, impalement was for Dracula not only a method of punishment, but an act of great pleasure. So it was to last as long as possible, for days, if possible, and to this aim Dracula developed a particular method. He ordered his executors that the stake must not be too sharp as it would easily penetrate and pierce a victim's inside, causing a quick death. On the contrary, the tip of the stake was to be rounded. Horses were tied to the victim's legs. Class, age and gender of a victim played a role in the entire procedure. Social status determined the length of a stake (longer or shorter, thicker or thinner), the position of the victim (with head or feet upright, impaled through the navel or heart) and other atrocities. According to some legends, Dracula had so perfected the technique of impalement that he was attentive also to the „aesthetic“ aspect. The place where impalement would take place was spatially and geometrically exact. Mostly, the stakes were placed near the entrance to a city, visible to everyone, and jabbed in concentric circles.¹⁷

When history records the Walachian boyars' revolt against their prince, the legend takes up, from the beginning of his second reign. As soon as he reclaimed his throne, Dracula invited notable boyars, rulers and priors, even the metropolitan, to court. His father had already been killed and Dracula judged the killer had to be among the guests. He asked them all the same question, „How many reigns have you lived through so far, my loyal subjects?“ After everyone replied, Dracula ordered the immediate impalement of more than five hundred, near the castle, to be left until their bodies were eaten by crows. The horrific scene was allegedly captured by Teodor Aman, a contemporary Romanian painter.¹⁸

Dracula's first wife is believed to have committed suicide, according to a folk tale. The princess had supposedly learned of the hopeless position of the court during the 1462 Turkish siege, and before anyone could stop her, ran up the circular staircase and, dreading Turkish captivity, threw herself from the top of the tower into the Ardjes River. That part of the river is known today as Riul Doamnei - the princess' river.¹⁹ This is the only account mentioning Dracula's first wife.

¹⁷ Florescu and McNelly, *Ibid*, p 48

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 64

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 74

Various tales accompany the proclamation of Trgoviste as capital and the erection of the prince's castle. The castle was perched at the very source of the Ardjes river, a place virtually impregnable. Before the castle stretched out a magnificent view of the Walachian plains, and the high Fagaras hills beyond, leading to which was a secret passage.

Added to the inevitable secret passages and dark tunnels in tales and legends are data from Tepes' captivity in Hungary. Unusual and frightful rumors have been circulated regarding the event. According to some, even in prison, Dracula was unable to curb his bloodthirsty passion, and, befriending the guards, was regularly supplied with small animals (mice, rats, chicken etc.) which he happily dismembered or impaled. Other, more poetical, and romantic accounts, relate the passionate love between the sister of King Matthias and Dracula. She had a secret passageway dug from her chambers to the prison. The romance ended in the proper release of Dracula, wedding bliss and his reascension to the Walachian throne.

The meagre historical facts of Dracula's death have been mentioned. They seem most likely correct in stating that responsibility for his death lies with the boyars. According to one account, the whole affair was quite a tragicomic event. When the Turkish troops were losing strength, Dracula, certain of victory, climbed to a nearby hill to see his army deal the final blow. Suddenly realizing he was cut off from his own men, Dracula disguised himself as a Turk. He was spotted by one of his own men who thought before him stood a stray Turkish soldier, and (how ironic) pierced him with a long spear.²⁰

Both accounts (the long and brief) maintain that Dracula was buried in the monastery of Snagovo, situated on an island of the same name.²¹ There are no specific details related to the monastery at that time. There are, however, documents attesting that many notables of the Dracula house made generous donations to the monastery and that it was considered their endowment. It seems the monks, fearing his enemies, laid Dracula in an unmarked grave (a standing place in legends and folklore generally) in one of the monastery's three chapels, the only one that remains to this day.

The legend would be incomplete without a buried treasure involved. Thus the Turks burned part of the monastery, and destroyed another part, so

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p 118

²¹ Mainly in *Documenta Romaniae Historica, B, Tara Romaneasca*, v, I, Bucharest, 1966.

the monks, anticipating the event, hid Dracula's entire treasure in the lake. There is another mysterious account, in the manner of every good legend. Soon after Dracula's death, a violent storm gathered and in its rage uprooted the Uspenska church and belfry and plunged it into the lake (the church is one of two in the monastery). Local peasants claim they hear chimes whenever the lake is disturbed.

These are the legends so far of the frightful Prince Dracula.

The Literary Character of Dracula

Dracula was first portrayed in literature about a hundred years ago in a novel of the same name by Bram Stoker.

The complex task of his creation can be reconstructed to the minutest detail today. Even details from Stoker's private life that led him in that direction are known.

Stoker was born in Dublin in 1847, and christened Abraham, after his father. Everyone called him Bram, though. He was a sickly and weak child, and spent the earliest years of his life in confinement, always in bed with his mother keeping vigil. An Irishwoman from Sligo, she told Bram fairy tales and stories, some of them might today be included in the horror genre. A writer with an unusual name, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, lived in Dublin. Le Fanu wrote *Karmila*, one of the best stories about vampires. Bram Stoker must have read it, and it left a deep imprint on him, considering that soon after its publication Stoker began eagerly collecting material for his novel on Dracula.

Acquaintance with the renowned Orientalist, Sir Richard Burton, was of exceeding importance. Burton translated into English *The Arabian Nights* (which includes a vampire tale) and several Indian stories about vampires. One should remember that this was the time when Jack the Ripper was active. Strange rumors of the vicious murderer must have kindled Stoker's vivid imagination.

He was fortunate in 1890 to have met Hungarian scientist Armin Vamberi, who related tales of the historical and legendary Walachian prince. Though evidence is lacking, it is assumed that Stoker corresponded with Vamberi on the latter's return to Budapest. Vamberi was surely the one to inform Stoker of the distant and mysterious land of Transylvania as the setting for his hero. He supplemented additional information found in old books about Eastern Europe, exploring them passionately in the British Museum. At the time, the Museum happened to come by one of the many German

pamphlets that depict the Walachian prince as a most horrid character. Convinced that mysterious Transylvania was the best setting for his novel, Stoker gathered every information he could about it: a guide through eastern Europe, geographic maps, everything on the popular legends of Dracula, spread more or less among the people who lived then in the territory of what is today Romania.

The literary environs in which Stoker developed were favorable to the future author of *Dracula*: the inheritance of the Gothic tales, popular in 18th-century England, to narratives and novels of horror and gloom, such as, for instance, Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1817), Polidor's (or Byron's) *Vampire* (1819), a drama of the same name by Dumas pere (1820), *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Robert Matthewryan, to *Vernej vampire or the blood feast* (1847) by Thomas Prescott-Prest.

Stoker now had everything he needed: a historical figure and his imprint in legend, the vampire cult in Western European literature and an ideal frame for the macabre events - Transylvania.

The novel was published in London in 1897, becoming soon a bestseller in England, then in America, and worldwide. It was translated into many languages, printed in countless copies that are reissued today. Stoker's *Dracula* has always been a fascination to film-makers, inspiring many pictures about him, such as *Nosferat* starring Max Sreker in 1922, *Dracula* with Bella Lugosi (considered the best interpretor of Dracula on film to this day) in 1931, *Fear of Dracula* with Christopher Lee in 1958, till the most recent, with special attention on Francis Ford Copolla's *Dracula*, which closely followed the original.

There is every possibility that the 100th anniversary of the novel will arouse fresh interest and evaluation.

Besides all we know about Stoker's preparation for writing the novel, and the material he selected for its basis, literary criticism has long judged that *Dracula* reflects less the historical facts on the brutality and bloodthirstiness of the prince, and more the legend - some say the myth on the vampire - on the popular belief in vampires.

Its place in the history of literature is known as a „standing“ place, and justly, too. Our standpoint is similar, with the difference that we recognize in *Dracula*'s character, and the ambience pervading the novel, central European, romantic variants, where vampires are depicted as polished characters from aristocratic circles, elegant, refined, well-bred and highly educated gentlemen with a somewhat decadent appearance concealing a seem-

ingly bizarre disposition, but in fact having the most horrific, mysterious and bloodthirsty urges. Such vampires are found in *Vampire*, by Alexei Tolstoy, or in our own *Gospodja vampirica* (Miss Vampire) by Bozidar Kovacevic.

These are well-known facts so we will mention only the latest review of Stoker's novel that departs from the common pattern. The author is Joanna Labon, from London (Brunel University and Birkbeck College) who brought forth a fresh, original stand in a recent lecture in Belgrade, organized by the British Council, titled „A Hundred Years of Dracula and The Demonisation of Eastern Europe“. The author could not have picked a better time and place to broach the question on demonization of Eastern Europe.

Opening the lecture, Ms Labon asked why Stoker's *Dracula* was so popular in Britain when it is known that the then Eastern Europe was not under the patronage of the British Empire, nor could it be controlled, as the subjugated races in the colonies. The author links the answer to the well-known phenomenon *fin de siecle*, evinced in England as an affinity toward mythic figures capable of transformation, including Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, or Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray*. The purpose of such stories should be sought in their ability to show, externalize and, finally, destroy a certain constellation of contemporary fears. We, of course, know this to be the most ingrained explanation of the popularity of horrors (whether in literature, film, or other form of art).

However, what followed in the lecture really excited interest. The author said that an important collective fear in England (one might say in the whole of western Europe), mediated by the novel *Dracula*, was a fear of Jews. It did not emerge by accident at the turn of the 20th century. The immigration of Jews in England was a subject of fierce dispute in the 1890s. About 120,000 Jews settled in England between 1880 and 1914, mainly from Eastern Europe. Having, most probably, no social or political aspirations, Stoker nevertheless depicts an uncivilized homeland of Jewish settlers. His Transylvania is, in fact, the European East End.

Though many Jews were expelled to Russia and Poland around the year 1500, fear of their invasion remained. It was said that a secret Jewish horde was in the east, and waiting to be beckoned to assault Christianity and destroy it.²² Stoker's hero has an aquiline nose, thick, dark, curly hair - very „Jewish“-looking.

²² Joanna Labon here cites Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation, Minority Groups in the Middle Ages*, London, 1991, p 101.

Another English „delicacy“ was woven into the whole matter: nobility and education were automatically placed with the hostile category, against the middle class which dominated Victorian England. In contrast to westerners, who generally have only one profile (lawyer, doctor etc.), Stoker's count has many talents: he is a brilliant linguist, polyglot, he is in possession of an admirable library, and has serious plans to „capture“ London. Traditionally, pluralism is characteristic of central European intellectuals. There were many Jews and intellectuals among the Austro-Hungarian nobility such as Dracula, from whence another contemporary fear could have been kindled: not only of the poor eastern European Jews, but of the capable Jews, business people who were included in the international conspiracy to capture England through trade (Dracula uses a Danube international bank) or even via parliament (Jews were allowed access to parliament in 1858).

Because of all this, Joanna Labon believes that the vast literary, theatrical and film production inspired by Stoker's Dracula (i.e. the myth on the vampire) contributed largely to the demonization of Eastern Europe during the cold war in the 20th century. To make matters more interesting, the production, instead of dropping, has increased, since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Stoker describes Dracula's homeland as a backward, feudal, barbaric country in the East. The empire that occupies that country is evil, because it is not British, and dark, because it is not illuminated by Victorian progress.

Worst of all, the stand still affects western notions about Eastern Europe. For instance: Eastern Europe is „naturally“ outside the European community, its arts and sciences are „naturally“ marginal, etc. Considering the British stand toward the war in the former Yugoslavia, the Balkan peoples appear somehow „naturally“ primitive, pugnacious and bloodthirsty. One might imagine that such myths emerged during the cold war, and they certainly developed over the past fifty years, but their origins are much older. Stoker's „myth on Dracula“, which is 100 years old, is such an example.

However, the „barbarians“ in Austria-Hungary, or the Hapsburg empire at the close of the 19th century would hardly recognize themselves in Stoker's novel. Historical sources are completely in contradiction with Stoker. Budapest and Vienna were two commercially and culturally powerful capitals in the Hapsburg empire. Budapest was a modern city with first-class hotels, glass windows, electric tramways and the biggest parliament building in the world. It was among the first to have a subway, and the railway station, completed in 1883, was one of the biggest and most modern in Europe. Budapest was a bustling cultural and commercial center, the triumph

of modern civilization. Transylvania, on its eastern borders, was a beautiful country with luxuriant forests, suitable for tourism and hunting. At the time when Stoker was writing his novel, trains for Transylvania were on time.²³

Stoker's novel *Dracula* might be thus interpreted. Experience with the vampire motive and *Dracula*'s image in Serbian literature adds to the political, ideological and historical background.

Commencing with *Tenac*, an excerpt from the short story *Prokleti kam* by Stjepan Mitrov Ljubisa, through *Ljudi sa cetiri prsta* by Miodrag Bulatovic, to the novel *Kako upokojiti vampira* by Borislav Pekic and *Testament* by Vidosav Stevanovic, political, ideological and historical planes are the basic foundations on which images of vampire and *Dracula* are built and where evil, in sanguinary form, is transposed to totalitarian political systems, to all forms of dogmatic ideologies (from nazism, and fascism to communism), and, finally, to history as a compulsion that devours like a heated pot not only individuals and nations, but the entire human race today.²⁴

In Serbian literature, only one writer has shown interest in the character of *Dracula*: Miodrag Bulatovic. The character appears in the aforementioned *Ljudi sa cetiri prsta*, under the name of Jozef Franc *Drakula*. As in Stoker's novel, the structure of *Dracula*'s character in Bulatovic's novel is not based on historical facts about the Walachian prince, but on the mythic, vampiric matrix. Judging by the name of the character, Bulatovic touched on history lightly (giving his hero a name so suggestive of Franz Joseph), going no further than that. The period of the novel is not during the reign of Austria-Hungary's „dungeon of people“: on the contrary, the time is set in the recent past, the years following the Second World War, and the theme is political emigration and terrorism, led by *Dracula*, the personification of eternal evil.

Bulatovic borrowed from mythical heritage the chief characteristics of a demon. His *Dracula* lives only in an unsocial space (a dark house on an isolated plane), moves about in the dark only (whether at night or in the house with the blinds down), dresses in black, and is crippled in the right arm.

²³ To avoid any misunderstanding of a „supporting“ attitude, the most interesting parts of Ms Labon's lecture have been transposed without any claims on style, aiming only at accuracy, the „word for word“ technique.

²⁴ See my study *Мотив вампира у митју и књижевности*, Beograd, 1996, for a more thorough explanation of the cited stands.

Bulatovic borrowed the essential from popular belief in vampires: habitation, scene, and method of killing a vampire. Jozef Franc Drakula spends most of his time in an antiquated coffin resembling closely that of a vampire, torments people, kills and sucks blood. Finally, his victims know well that the only way to destroy the evil is to pierce Drakula with a hawthorne stake.

Had he been more fortunate, Miodrag Bulatovic would have written a „real“ book on Dracula, according to data offered by history and legend on the Walachian Prince Vlad Tepes. There is real, material, evidence to the statement.²⁵ Prior to his death, Bulatovic was engrossed in his research on Tepes, published in 24 sequels in the Politika newspaper (from February 2-26, 1990), entitled „Ljubavnik smrti ili U potrazi za Drakulom“. The material is assembled in the form of a chronicle on the writer's travels through Romania, adventures he experienced, knowledge he acquired, thoughts and associations (political and ideological primarily) that emerged during his travels. Unfortunately, it all remains in rudiments, unsorted, even chaotic, without distinction in literature. For investigators of Dracula's character, however, the material is an oddity. It shows clearly in what direction a writer can move when such a topic is selected for a future work, all the angles from which the historical and legendary character of Dracula can be observed, and finally, how it can reflect today in these parts, where a terrible war was waged led by bloodthirsty political tyrants. Even if the possibilities were not so wide, the chronicle about Dracula is an excellent opportunity to peep into the writer's workshop.

There are few works on the character of Vlad Tepes Dracula in his native country. This might be used as evidence in favor of arguments that the legend was „imported from the West“ and that tales of horror and gloom are alien to the Romanian spirit. The earliest Romanian works on the topic are of inter-genre, or, more precisely, multidisciplinary, character, where historical and literary aspects play an equal role. They appeared in the same area (Transylvania) where the earliest texts on medieval history emerged.²⁶

²⁵ One is of personal nature: knowing that I was closely working on the vampire motif while he was interested in Dracula, Bulatovic phoned me on one occasion, and for more than an hour we exchanged information about Dracula. He was interested mostly in the connection between the legendary and literary character of Dracula and the vampire motif.

²⁶ Seeing we are no experts on Romanian literature, we felt free to quote Andreescu in giving information about Romanian works inspired by Dracula, chiefly because his much quoted work devotes an entire chapter on the subject.

The most notable is the *Ciganijada*, by distinguished Romanian writer Jon Budai-Deljanu, a member of the celebrated Erdelj school which has been so valuable to Romanian culture in general. *Ciganijada* appeared in 1800, first as a heroic-satirical epic in twelve songs. The final version, published in 1812, is based on an anecdote about Gypsies whom Vlad Tepes forced to fight against the Turks (the same that appeared in German records of the dreadful Walachian prince Dracula). According to some contemporary Romanian scholars,²⁷ the message of *Ciganijada* is directly linked with the Romanian social and political situation in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Another work on Tepes appeared also from the Erdelj school, by Georg Sinkai, titled *Hronika Rumuna i drugih naroda* (A Chronicle of Romanians and other peoples), 1810. Sinkai is today viewed as an author who approached every task with deep scientific thoughtfulness. He ranks among Romania's most prominent historians who seriously investigated basic historiographic problems and the author that most objectively depicted the historical character of Vlad Tepes.

In addition to the above, most important authors, there were others who dealt with the personality of Walachian prince Dracula in the 19th century (among them Aron Florian and Mihail Kogaljnicanu). Prior to the 1848 revolution, Vlad Tepes first appeared as a hero in a drama. The drama, titled after the prince's name, was written by Jon Katina. In 1863, Dimitrije Bolintineanu had published in Bucharest *Zivot Vlada Cepesa i Mirce Starog* almost simultaneously with the appearance of the well-known evocation *Nekoliko sati u Snagovu* by Aleksandar Odobescu, considered one of the most successful works on Dracula.

The destiny of Vlad Tepes in 20th-century Romanian literature has not improved. He is, however, mentioned in one place by renowned author Mihaj Eminescu,²⁸ and in another, by lesser known Aleksandar Vlahucu (only in fragments in the first act of his only and unfinished drama), finally in the work *Sirotinjski praznik* by Mihail Sorbul, inspired by 15th-century legends.

Judging by these data, Dracula did not inspire Romanian authors, nor did anyone write any work that do justice to his prominent role in Balkan 15th-century history.

Thus Stoker's novel continues to be the first „real“ novel about Dracula, and the one that comes to mind when the personality of the Walachian prince is viewed in the literary context.

²⁷ Andreescu, *Ibid.*, p 260.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p 264.

Viewed as a whole, the literary treatment of the motif on Dracula confirms two old rules. According to the first, when a writer decides on a classical (in the sense of an old, standing or wondering) motif, his very choice leads him to heritage. If the heritage encroaches on different areas of culture, the writer will always select the one closest to literature. In the case of Vlad Tepes, he will sooner turn to legend and chronicles than to history. According to the other rule, literary treatment of a model depends mostly on the time when a literary work is being created, i.e. on the current literary and cultural situation. Testifying to this is not only Stoker's novel, but the works in Serbian and Romanian literature.

As a model of a bloodthirsty satrap, Dracula is easily placed in every time and space. Linked to the vampire motif, he moves in a comparatively broad semantic field, acquiring symbolic functions and personifying negative categories of a given moment, mainly on the ideological and political plane, as literature shows.

Supplement

German Chronicles

(taken from Manuscript No. 806, Sen Galein monastery library)²⁹

There are 32 and they all charge Dracula with horrific crimes. In every one of them, Dracula does nothing but burn villages, dismember, impale and behead people, quarter women and dissect their insides. Below are a few citations.

Under No. 3: „Then Dracula burned villages and castles in Transylvania near Hermanstat (Sibiu), and burned to the ground a fortress in Transylvania and the village of Berkendorf (Benesti), Holtznec (Hosmanul).“

Under No. 5: „Dracula shut up the tradesmen and coachmen from Vicerland, on a holiday, and impaled many of them.“

Under No. 26: „He once had some noblemen beheaded, and their bodies prepared as food. He invited their friends and had them eat the food. He then said, 'Eat the bodies of your friends'. He impaled them after.

²⁹ Not only German, but other chronologies that we will cite here have been extracted from Supplements I, II and III of the afore cited book *U potrazi za Drakulom*, by Radu Florescu and Raymond McNelly. We need not fear the liberty taken by the authors, as the sources are stated with precision.

Russian chronicles

From the oldest Russian manuscript on Dracula: MC 11/1088
from the Kirilov-Belozerski monastic collection
in the Saltikova-Shchedrina national library
in Saint Petersburg

These chronicles belong to a few preserved, authentic, and signed documents from the 15th century. Many ascribe their source to Fyodor Kuritsin, a Russian diplomat at the Hungarian court in the 1580s.

“Whoever was the real author, he was disturbed more that the prince turned his back on the Orthodox church, than that he was cruel.”³⁰ We will cite only the history that states precisely this.

Under No 15: „Since the prince has died, the Hungarian king sent a messenger to Dracula in the dungeon, asking him if he would like to become Walachian prince, as he had been before, and conditioning it on his embracing the Latin faith. If not, he will die in prison. Dracula preferred the pleasures of this life much more than the eternal world. He abandoned Orthodoxy, renounced truth and light, and accepted darkness. Unfortunately, he was unable to bear the transient pains of prison, and was prepared to endure endless torture in hell, abandoning our Orthodox faith and embracing the fallacious Latin religion. The king gave him not only reign over Walachia, but his sister for a wife. She bore him two sons, and he lived ten more years, ending his life as a heretic.“

Romanian chronicles

(from popular traditions, written and oral)

Romanian chronicles contain many variants, a milder approach to Dracula, and morals. We will cite only one about a tradesman:

Under No. 1, variant A: „When Dracula reigned over Walachia, an important merchant from Florence traveled the country, with many goods and much money.

Arriving in Trgoviste, the country’s capital at the time, the merchant went to the prince’s palace, and asked Dracula for servants to protect himself, his goods and money.

Dracula commanded him to leave his goods and money in the city square and come to night at the palace.

With no other choice, the merchant obeyed. Still, 160 gold ducats were stolen from his coach that night.

On the morning of the following day, the merchant found the goods untouched, but missed the 160 ducats. He went to Dracula immediately, informing

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p 171.

him of his loss. Dracula told him not to worry, the money and gold would be found. He ordered his servants to reimburse the gold ducats from his own treasury, and to add one more ducat. He told the people in Trgoviste to seek out the thief, or the capital would be demolished.

Meanwhile, the merchant returned to his coach, counted the money, once, twice, three times, surprised at finding all his money, and an extra coin.

He returned to Dracula as says, „Sire, I have found my money, but there is a surplus of one ducat.“

The thief was brought to court at that moment, and Dracula told the merchant, „Be gone with peace. Had you failed to inform me of the surplus, I would have had you impaled together with the thief.“

Thus Dracula behaved with his subjects, with believers and heretics.

Translated by Dragana Vulićević

ИСТОРИЈА, ЛЕГЕНДА, КЊИЖЕВНОСТ: КНЕЗ ВЛАД ЦЕПЕШ алиас ГРОФ ДРАКУЛА

Резиме

Време великих јубилеја - у овом случају пет векова од историјског и сто година од књижевног живота влашког кнеза Влада Цепеша Дракуле - по правилу је доба када се обнавља интересовање за „слављенике“.

Будући да је овога пута реч о истакнутој историјској фигури позног средњег века која је имала великог значаја у спречавању Османлијског царства да се преко Балкана домогне Средње Европе, историјској личности, дакле, која је истовремено постала предмет легендарних предања и књижевних обрада, пут од реалног, преко фолклорног, до фикционалног лика грофа Дракуле водио је аутора кроз три области.

Претрага историјских података показала је да се ради о храбром и самовољном владару, подвргнутом снажним притисцима двеју великих царевина (Турске и Угарске) и степшеном између њихових супротстављених интереса. То је био кнез коме румунски научници приписују идеју о уједињењу румунских области у једну државу, довољно снажну и добро уређену да у сваком часу може да одбрани сопствену самосталност. О Дракулином приватном животу и његовој нарави, историја бележи само толико да је био деспотске природе и суров према непријатељу.

Насупрот историографији, легенде се плету управо око Дракулиног карактера. У зависности од места настанка, оне га приказују као страшног крволока (саске), великог грешника који из православља прелази у католичанство (руске) и као суровог али праведног и истинољубивог владара (румунске).

Најзад, књижевни лик грофа Дракуле највећим се делом темељи на народном веровању у вампире. Он, дакле, увек симболише вечно зло и у зависности од средине и времена настанка везује се за доминантне негативне категорије за које се у протеклих сто година показало да су махом идеолошке и политичке природе.

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