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Cover Page Footnote

Dr. Duncan Light is associate professor of Geography at Liverpool Hope University(UK). He is currently investigating the ways in which Romania has responded to Western interest in Dracula over the past four decades.

The Status of Vlad Țepeș in Communist Romania: A Reassessment

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Introduction

It has become widely accepted that Vlad Țepeș enjoyed an exalted status in Romania during the Communist period (1947-1989). With the increasing Western interest in the figure of Vlad the Impaler from the 1970s onwards, a number of authors have drawn attention to his “treatment” by Romania’s Communist regime. In particular, since Communist Romania was infamous for its cavalier distortion of history, many writers have highlighted (either implicitly or explicitly) the ways in which the significance of Vlad Țepeș was manipulated for ideological ends. Thus, Communist historians are said to have “rehabilitated” Vlad (Sweeney 27; Rady 46) after decades during which he was almost entirely overlooked by Romanian historiography (Florescu and McNally, *Dracula: Prince* 219). Similarly, the Communists are reported to have elevated him to the status of a national hero (Florescu and McNally, *Dracula: Prince* 220; Gilberg 175; Trow 252) and attempted to justify or excuse his cruelty. We are also told that no less a person than Nicolae Ceaușescu, the former General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party exalted the Impaler (McNally and Florescu, *Search* [1994] 4). In addition Romania’s Communist regime used the occasion of the 500th anniversary of Vlad’s death for (apparently) extravagant commemorations (McNally and Florescu, *Search* [1994] 4-5), including books, works of art, press articles, television programs and a speech by Ceaușescu himself that evoked Vlad’s memory (Florescu and McNally, *Dracula: Prince* 219; Frayling 78).

There is some validity in these claims. Nevertheless, I argue that many of the assertions about the way that Communist Romania treated Vlad Țepeș are either oversimplified or exaggerated. In this paper I consider in more detail the status of Vlad the Impaler in Communist Romania (for reasons of space I confine my analysis to the period up to the end of the 1970s): the issue of “rehabilitation”; the nature of the 1976 commemorations of his death; and Ceaușescu’s supposed admiration for him. While it is not in any sense my intention to defend Romania’s Communist regime for its blatant manipulation of the country’s history, I argue that the situation concerning Vlad Țepeș is more complex than has been previously suggested. Overall I suggest that while Vlad was clearly held in high esteem in Communist Romania, he was very much a secondary hero and not the exalted figure that has sometimes been implied.

Romanian historians and Vlad Țepeș before the Communist Period

Despite the famous German, Slavic and Ottoman stories about Vlad Țepeș, Romanian historical sources say surprisingly little about him. In the Walachian chronicles he appears as an unexceptional prince who built the Poenari fortress (using forced laborers from Târgoviște) and Snagov monastery (Boia 199). However, the scantiness of Romanian documentary sources is compensated by a rich folkloric tradition that has preserved his memory, particularly in the area around Poenari. These narratives portray him as a strong and just leader who restored order to his country and defended its independence from Ottoman attack.

Many of these oral histories were collected and documented by ethnographers during the nineteenth century; thus the life and deeds of Vlad Țepeș became more widely known among the Romanians. At the same time, nationalism was taking hold among the Romanian intelligentsia who sought emancipation from both the Ottoman and Russian empires. Their nation-building project was accompanied by the search for an idealized national history for the Romanian people. In the medieval voivodes who had fought to defend their country's independence from the Ottomans, nationalist historians found the model heroes for a Romanian national past (Boia 50, 192). The most significant figures were Michael the Brave (1558-1601) and Stephen the Great (1433-1504), but Vlad Țepeș also enjoyed considerable esteem. At the same time, in the context of nineteenth century Romanticism, the figure of Vlad Țepeș had a powerful appeal for artists, writers and poets. Perhaps the best known evocation is that of Mihai Eminescu, Romania's foremost poet. In a diatribe against the immorality and corruption of politicians, he famously asked, "[W]hy do you not come Lord Țepeș?" (240; my translation).

In the late nineteenth century, nationalist and Romantic approaches to the past gave way to a more analytical approach to the study of history (Andreescu 7; Boia 63). In this context, historians were less inclined to overlook Vlad's cruelties. Thus, in the first full history of the Impaler to be published in Romanian, Ioan Bogdan¹ argued (from an analysis of the German and Slavic sources) that Vlad had been a tyrant and was someone of whom the Romanians should be ashamed (Boia 200). Yet this view did not find widespread acceptance. For example, A.D. Xenopol described him as one of the most interesting figures from Romanian history and while accepting his cruelty, argued that he was motivated by the desire to restore order in his land (293). Similarly, Nicolae Iorga, Romania's foremost historian, initially disapproved of the Impaler's actions but later described him as "a ferocious hero, for whose toil and desire to defend the country, so much can be forgiven" (193). Constantin Giurescu, another eminent twentieth-century historian went further, dedicating a chapter of his *Istoria Românilor* (History of the Romanians) to Vlad. He argued as follows:

Vlad Țepeș was, in truth, a cruel Voivode who fully justified his nickname. The tortures and executions that he ordered did not originate from a whim, but

¹ Ioan Bogdan, *Vlad Țepeș și narațiunile germane și rusești asupra lui* (București: Editura Librăriei Soceco, 1896).

always had a reason and purpose, very often a *reason of state*. They served as a true example for pretenders to the throne and their supporters who wanted to upset the institutional order, then for doers of evil (who were so numerous as a result of the ceaseless internal struggles), finally even for external enemies who realised that there was a strong leader in the country. As a matter of fact we should not forget that in the whole of Europe there was an atmosphere of cruelty at that time. (41)

In Giurescu's formulation, the Impaler's cruelty was unexceptional and was in any case justified by a political imperative, namely the defence and strengthening of the state. By the start of the Second World War this had become the accepted position: Vlad was a cruel leader but one whose actions were justified in the context of the times in which he lived. Indeed, the Impaler was held in considerable esteem at this time (Iulian 88).

We can gain a more complete indication of the status enjoyed by Vlad in the early twentieth century from looking at public commemoration in Romania's capital, Bucharest. Urban landscapes are not politically neutral but instead are inscribed with particular meanings so as to express and institutionalize the values of the dominant political order (Levinson 10). Commemoration – which includes activities such as raising statues and monuments or naming streets – is central to this process. An examination of who (or what) is commemorated in public space, as well as how and where, gives an important indication of the ruling order's conception of national history and identity. What, then, does Bucharest's landscape tell us about the status of Vlad Țepeș? As early as 1898 he was commemorated by a street name² and by 1934 there were four streets named “Țepeș Voda.”³ However, at the same time there were six streets carrying the name of Michael the Brave and nine named after Stephen the Great. While Vlad Țepeș was an important historical figure, he was overshadowed by other medieval voivodes, in particular his contemporary and cousin Stephen. It is also significant that both Iorga and Giurescu accord considerably more attention in their respective syntheses of Romanian history to Stephen the Great than to Vlad the Impaler.

Nevertheless, the claim of Florescu and McNally that Romanian historians before the Communist period had dismissed the Impaler in “only a sentence or two” (*Dracula: Prince* 219) is questionable. Instead, all of Romania's major historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century accorded varying degrees of attention to him. The manner in which Vlad Țepeș was commemorated in the urban landscape of Bucharest confirms his status as a significant historical personage well before the Communist period. As I shall argue in the following section, this makes the suggestion that the Communist regime was the first to rehabilitate Vlad more problematic to sustain.

Communist-Era treatment of Vlad Țepeș

² G. I. Lahovari, C. I. Bratianu, and G. G. Tocilescu, *Marele Dicționar Geografic al României, Vol 1* (București: Societatea Geografică Română, 1898).

³ Anon. *București: Gid Oficial* (București: Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă “Regele Carol II”), 1934.

Following the Communist takeover of power in Romania at the end of 1947, the nature of historiography – and therefore the ways that Romanian historians thought about Vlad Țepeș – changed dramatically. Romania's Communist leadership was unsurpassed in its total loyalty to Stalin. Consequently, Romania embraced the Soviet Union's resolute socialist internationalism and attempted to suppress entirely the emphasis on national values that had formerly been so dominant (Verdery 104; Boia 71). This anti-national offensive brought about a radical rewriting of Romania's history (Georgescu, *Romanians* 241; Deletant 68). Following the principles of Marxism-Leninism, class struggle replaced the national idea as the key to Romania's historical development. Moreover, in an attempt to isolate Romania from its historical links with the West, historians now emphasized the Slavic contribution to Romania's history. As Deletant (67) notes, long-standing historical and cultural ties with Russia were emphasized (or, if necessary, invented). Rigid censorship was applied and the publications of many pre-war historians were banned. Many of those intellectuals and historians who had been active before the takeover were dismissed or imprisoned (among them Constantin Giurescu). A new generation of party hacks assumed the role of writing and supervising Romania's history.

This new context inevitably changed the way in which Romanian historians thought and wrote about Vlad. Since any expression of nationalism was suppressed by the regime, to talk of him as a national hero was no longer acceptable. Indeed, many of the medieval leaders who had been previously regarded as heroic leaders and nation-builders were interpreted in entirely new ways. Even Michael the Brave was not spared. Before the Second World War Michael was regarded as a national hero on account of his efforts in 1600 to unite all Romanians in a single state. Communist historians re-interpreted him as a feudal boyar whose actions had been motivated by the desire to protect the interests of the ruling classes (Cioranescu, "Michael" 3).

In this context, Vlad Țepeș was largely overlooked in favor of other figures who had had closer ties with Russia (Ștefan Andreescu, personal communication). He did not disappear entirely from the historical narrative, but the importance attached to him was much reduced. For example, one of the most infamous Stalinist-era syntheses of Romanian history (Roller 102-4) allocates two pages (in a book of more than 750 pages) to Vlad Țepeș. The account blandly describes the key events of his second (1456-1462) and third (1476) reigns without identifying anything heroic about them. Roller briefly acknowledges Vlad's "very cruel measures" (102) and notes (predictably) the treachery of the boyars who opposed his leadership. Other historians sought to interpret the Vlad's actions through the lens of class struggle, stressing (again) his struggles with the ruling boyars and his attempts to impose a form of centralized control over the economy (Treptow 25).

During the late 1950s and 1960s everything changed as Romania's leadership gradually started to draw away from the Soviet Union. This culminated in the so-called "declaration of independence" in 1964 in which Romania asserted its right to follow its own path of economic and political development within the Communist Bloc. As a result, socialist internationalism was abandoned in favor of a renewed emphasis on national

values (Boia 73). This policy was to be pursued with particular vigor by Nicolae Ceaușescu after 1965. Katherine Verdery has argued that in Romania the national idea was so entrenched that more than a decade of socialist internationalism had made little headway in eradicating it (99). Moreover, in a state like Romania where the Communist Party enjoyed little popular support, an appeal to the idea of the nation was one of the few ways in which the leadership could gain any form of popular legitimacy. Thus, the Party – and Ceaușescu in particular – sought to appropriate national ideology for their own ends.

Again, this new context had major implications for the writing of history. During the 1960s, nation replaced class to become once again the dominant theme in Romanian historiography, while the pro-Slavic emphasis of the 1950s was categorically abandoned. Some pre-war historians were released from prison, including Constantin Giurescu who resumed his university career in 1963 (Boia 75). The medieval voivodes who had fought to preserve the independence of Walachia and Moldova in the face of Ottoman expansion were restored to the pantheon of national heroes. Once again Vlad Țepeș was subject to new interpretations. As early as 1964 he was described as “one of the most shining figures from the history of our country” (Popescu 18). By 1970 he was once again being evoked in heroic terms. One synthesis of Romanian history described Vlad as “a remarkable man of state and a leader devoted to the defence of the independence of his country” (Otetea *et al* 144). He is praised for his defence of Romanian interests, his centralized authority and his successes against the Turks. There is no mention of impalement but only a reference to the “energy and severity” with which he suppressed any opposition (144). By 1976, when the regime commemorated the 500th anniversary of his death, the Impaler had fully regained his exalted status. Thus Nicolae Stoicescu praised Vlad as “one of the most important personalities in the history of Romania, a most remarkable statesman and a faithful and keen leader in the defence of his country’s independence” (238).

So was this the rehabilitation of Vlad the Impaler by Romania’s Communist authorities? At first glance this may appear to be the case. Certainly from the late 1960s onwards historians were full of praise for him and had restored him to the status of hero. But this was not a rehabilitation *ex nihilo* that was specific to the Communist era. Instead, this development needs to be seen in the context both of the anti-national phase of Romanian historiography during the 1950s, and the nature of historical discourse about the Impaler from before the Second World War. What Communist historians were saying about Vlad Țepeș during the 1970s is not far removed from what Xenopol, Iorga and Giurescu were saying in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: he was a cruel leader but he was motivated by the need to protect the state from internal and external threats. Hence, I suggest that, rather than representing the rehabilitation of Vlad by Romania’s Communist regime, this is simply a return to the pre-War discourse about him that had been completely suppressed during the anti-nationalist historiography of the early Communist period.

This of course is not to say that Romania’s Communist regime did not exaggerate Vlad’s significance and achievements. Indeed, this was almost to be expected in a regime

that routinely manipulated history for ideological ends, particularly to legitimate the position and policies of the Romanian Communist Party and its General Secretary.⁴ Again a consideration of the broader context is necessary. During the 1970s an extraordinary personality cult enveloped the figure of Ceaușescu. The General Secretary was no longer presented as a hero of the working class but instead as the successor to a long line of princes, kings and voivodes to rule Romania (Georgescu, *Romanians* 256). State hagiographers frequently likened Ceaușescu to the medieval warrior-leaders of Walachia and Moldova (Rady 46; Ștefan Andreescu personal communication) and insisted on the continuity between Ceaușescu's leadership and that of the heroic figures of the past.

Consequently, Vlad Țepeș was interpreted in new ways that suited the regime's purpose. Cioranescu provides a detailed analysis of some of the ways in which this took place ("Vlad the Impaler" 4-10). Communist historians emphasized the political goal of Vlad who upheld order and sought to defend his state from internal and external threats (a position almost identical to that of Giurescu in the inter-war period). He was presented as motivated by a sense of civic duty echoing the values that the Romanian Communist Party sought to instil in Romania. Vlad was described as an exponent of centralized authoritarian rule, again evoking parallels with nature of Communist Party rule. He was also credited with invention of the "people's army" and of psychological warfare. In more overt comparison with Ceaușescu, Vlad was portrayed as struggling to preserve Walachia's independence in the face of a far more powerful empire (for Ottomans read Soviet Union) demonstrating what a small country could achieve under the right leadership. In this sense Vlad's "foreign policy" provided an early model for that pursued by Ceaușescu.

Any discussion of the significance of Vlad Țepeș in Communist Romania cannot overlook the impact of *In Search of Dracula* written by Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu and first published in 1972. This influential and best-selling book was to have a significant impact on perceptions of Vlad the Impaler, both in Romania and the wider world. As is now well known, McNally and Florescu argued that Bram Stoker had discovered the figure of Vlad Țepeș during his research for *Dracula* and that the voivode had been the model or inspiration for Stoker's fictional vampire. Moreover, *In Search of Dracula* was relentless in its portrayal of Vlad as an absolute tyrant and, while stopping short of accusing him of vampirism, was insistent that the vampire is an integral part of Transylvanian folklore.

In Search of Dracula was not published in Romania, although Romanian historians seem to have been familiar with its contents (perhaps from the French edition published in 1973). The claims of McNally and Florescu have been subject to a vigorous critique in recent years based on an analysis of Stoker's working notes (Miller, *Reflections* 1-24; *Sense* 180-223) but in the 1970s Romanian historians were not to know of this. As such, they accepted the argument that Stoker had based Count Dracula on Vlad Țepeș but at the

⁴ See the following: Dennis Deletant, "Rewriting the past: trends in contemporary Romania," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 14 (1991): 64-86; Katherine Verdery; Lucian Boia.

same time they were at pains to reject any connection between the fictional and historical Draculas. In their subsequent writings for a Romanian audience, historians sought to defend the reputation of the voivode from any associations with Stoker's vampire (although since *Dracula* had not been translated into Romanian at this time one can only wonder what Romanian readers made of all this!). The efforts to safeguard Vlad's reputation also took on an international dimension. Nicolae Stoicescu's 1976 monograph on the Impaler was issued in English and Japanese editions (Stoicescu, "Vlad Țepeș și Dracula" 10). Even Romania's foreign-language tourist promotion was mobilized to this end: for example, an article in *Holidays in Romania* sought to establish the "truth" about Dracula (Neagoe 9).

What was the position of Communist historians regarding Vlad the Impaler's cruelty? McNally and Florescu (*Search* [1994] 4) claim that Party historians played down or sought to rationalize the atrocities. At first sight this certainly seems to be the case. For a start, some historians argued that many of the reports of the Impaler's cruelty were exaggerations by his Saxon and Hungarian enemies who were intent on blackening his reputation (e.g. Andreescu 206-7; Stoicescu *Vlad Țepeș* [1976] 186-87). But notwithstanding such arguments, Communist-era historians do not deny that Vlad was an exceptionally harsh leader (e.g. Giurescu, *Vlad Țepeș* 11; Ștefănescu, *Vlad Țepeș* 1655; Stoicescu, *Vlad Țepeș* [1976] 204). However, they argue that his deeds need to be seen in a wider context. For example, Stoicescu (204) argues that throughout Europe the Middle Ages was an era of great cruelty (Andreescu 269 makes a similar point) and that Vlad Țepeș was a man of his time whose behavior was not exceptional. He also points out that impalement was not unique to, or invented by, Vlad. Other historians argued that Vlad's cruelty did not arise from sadism or some form of (mental) illness but was instead underpinned by political motives, particularly the desire to strengthen and defend the state (Ștefănescu, *Vlad Țepeș* 1655; Stoicescu, *Vlad Țepeș* [1976] 207; Ștefănescu, *Cuvînt înainte* 9; Giurescu, *Vlad Țepeș* 11; Giurescu and Giurescu 296).

So it appears that Communist-era historians were indeed prepared to rationalize or explain away Vlad the Impaler's notoriety. But this is not the whole story. For a start, this was not a position that was unique to that era. From the late nineteenth century onwards Xenopol, Iorga and Giurescu had (in varying ways) attempted to justify Vlad's cruelty as being driven by political motives and the need to maintain order within the state. Similarly, the argument that the voivode's actions were consistent with his age was also established before the Second World War. Again, Communist-era historians were simply resuming an earlier discourse about the Impaler rather than adopting a new position that sought to apologize for, or justify, the Impaler's actions. This also raises a wider point about the way in which history is written. Postmodern perspectives on historiography question the existence of such a thing as "real" or "true" history. Instead there is a multitude of ways in which history may be written depending on who is writing it and the context in which they are doing so. Inevitably, every attempt to write history will be selective and in some way incomplete. This is especially the case with the writing of national histories. Nationalist historians in all contexts reify certain stories, events and personalities that accord with a nation's view of itself and its past; at the same time other

figures and deeds are overlooked or downplayed. Therefore writing about national history is often as much about forgetting as it is about remembering. Indeed, one writer has claimed that “getting its history wrong is part of being a nation” (Renan, quoted in Hobsbawm 12). Thus, in the case of Vlad Țepeș I suggest that the attempts by Communist historians to rationalize or justify his cruelty and severity are consistent with nationalist historiography in all sorts of contexts – rather than being something specific to Romania’s regime.

Commemorating Vlad Țepeș in Communist Romania

As Vlad Țepeș regained his status after the anti-national phase of the 1950s the Communist regime undertook various acts to commemorate him, among them the restoration of key sites associated with him. The Princely Court at Târgoviște was excavated and restored between 1961 and 1973 (Moisescu 63-4). Another of Vlad’s palaces, Curtea Veche (the Old Court) in Bucharest, was excavated in 1967 and opened as a museum in April 1972 (Panait and Ștefănescu 5, 8). Similarly, the Poenari fortress was excavated and restored between 1968 and 1972 (Ciobanu *et al* 39, 44) and steps from the road below were added. After restoration, these sites were all opened and promoted as tourist attractions. They were initially intended for Romanians, since nation-states have long used domestic tourism as part of the process of nation-building (Franklin 25)) but as Vlad the Impaler gained increasing global recognition after 1972, they were increasingly popular with international tourists.

Vlad was also commemorated through the usual means of raising statues and naming streets (see Miller, *Reflections* 112). Yet the scale of this is more limited than might be expected. A directory of statues and monuments in Romania published in 1983 lists two busts of Vlad Țepeș at Târgoviște (1968) and Ploiești (1971) and a statue at Giurgiu (1977).⁵ There may also have been other, smaller statues and busts raised during the Communist era, but significantly, there is no statue to Vlad in Bucharest – the city he reportedly founded!⁶ But to put this into perspective, Romania raised four statues to Stephen the Great during the 1970s, including the massive equestrian statue at Suceava. As for street names, a 1982 street guide lists just one street in Bucharest named after Vlad Țepeș.⁷ This is a small and fairly insignificant thoroughfare, some distance east of the city centre. At the same time there were three streets named after Michael the Brave. One of these is a major boulevard (Bucharest’s inner ring road) another part of which is named after Stephen the Great. Once again, the nature of such commemoration tells us much about the status of Vlad Țepeș relative to other medieval leaders.

⁵ Florian Tucă and Mircea Cociu, *Monumente ale Anilor de Luptă și Jertfa* (București: Editura Militară, 1983).

⁶ However, a bust of Vlad Țepeș was placed outside the National Military Museum in Bucharest which opened in its current location in 1988. Here the Voivode was just one among a large number of Romanian military heroes and state-builders (see Boia 222). The same is true of the bust of Vlad located in the foyer of the Museum of National History.

⁷ Alexandru Ionescu and Constantin Kiriac, *București: Ghid Străzilor* (București: Editura Sport-Turism, 1982).

Much has been made of the commemorations in 1976 of the 500th anniversary of Vlad's death. For Florescu and McNally this occasion was proclaimed "Dracula Year" (*Dracula: Prince* 219)⁸ and was an opportunity for some apparently remarkable celebrations:

Panegyrics, commemorative eulogies, discussion panels, lead articles in the press and in scholarly journals (the popular *History Magazine* dedicated its entire issue of November 1976 to Dracula), radio and television commentaries, and films were devoted to the subject. Even Romania's president Ceaușescu invoked the memory of Vlad. A special commemorative stamp was issued. (*Dracula: Prince* 219-20)

The same authors also tell us that Nicolae Ceaușescu was an ardent admirer of Vlad:

One incredible example of this admiration was the manner in which the five-hundredth anniversary of Dracula's death was celebrated in 1976. Throughout Romania eulogies and panegyrics were ordered by Communist Party members; monographs, novels, works of art, a film – even a commemorative stamp was issued – to praise the Impaler. (*Search* [1994] 5)

At this point it is important to note that the public commemoration of a historical figure was nothing unusual in Communist Romania. From its very beginning the regime had sought to bolster its legitimacy through commemoration of almost any historical figure or event considered appropriate by the regime (see Georgescu, *Politica* 67). We can put the 1976 commemoration of Vlad Țepeș into perspective by looking at other events and personalities commemorated in *Scînteia* (the Communist Party's daily newspaper) during the course of the year. These included 16 centuries since the founding of the city of Bacău; the anniversary of the Russian revolution of 1917; 156 years since the birth of Engels; 58 years since the founding of Greater Romania; and 375 years since the death of Michael the Brave. In this sense the commemoration of the death of Vlad Țepeș was not exceptional and as Ștefan Andreescu (personal communication) points out was no different in scale from that of any other historical figure.

In what ways was Vlad Țepeș commemorated in 1976? For a start there was an article in *Scînteia* on 14 December that predictably was full of praise for the Impaler (Căzănișteanu 4). But again this needs to be put into perspective: this article was printed on page 4, while the front page featured a piece about the 375th anniversary of the death of Michael the Brave. There was a similar article about Vlad on page 4 of the Communist Party's youth newspaper (*Scînteia Tineretului*) and in a number of other daily newspapers. There were also articles in various political and literary journals in

⁸ I have not found any reference in Romania to "Dracula Year" and I suspect this was a label attributed by Florescu and McNally. In any case, the Romanians rarely used "Dracula" as a name for Vlad Țepeș during the Communist era.

December 1976 (see Cioranescu *Vlad* 1-9). Two biographies were published.⁹ This was a departure from previous commemorations of a medieval ruler when a single book had been published (Ștefan Andreescu interview). Both biographies appear to be intended for an academic rather than a popular audience, particularly Stoicescu's work which includes numerous quotations in French, Latin, English and other languages. One history journal – *Revista de Istorie* (Journal of History) did dedicate most of its November 1976 issue to papers about the Impaler. Yet this is a solidly academic publication and not a “popular” journal as Florescu and McNally claim (*Dracula: Prince* 219). On the other hand, *Magazin Istoric* (History Magazine), a monthly periodical that appears to have been genuinely intended for a wide audience, featured a picture of Vlad Țepeș on the cover of the December edition but only a brief (three-page) article about him inside.

Overall, it appears that the commemoration of Vlad's death in 1976 was largely confined to political, historical and literary circles. The extent to which it impacted upon the wider public arena is difficult to judge.¹⁰ Certainly, there do not appear to have been any public parades or celebrations during 1976. Perhaps the most visible public commemoration of the Impaler was the issue of a stamp featuring Vlad's image. There has been a tendency to exaggerate the significance of this stamp (e.g. Dresser 203; Trow 3, 167) but I argue that it was nothing exceptional. From the outset Communist Romania used stamps (in the same way as banknotes) as a medium of propaganda and a means of introducing the regime's ideology into the fabric of everyday life. Thus, stamps that had a propagandist element were very common. Moreover, the medieval voivodes regularly appeared on such stamps: 28% of those issued between 1970 and 1989 featured the images of such figures (Drăgușanu 39). For example, stamps were issued in 1975 to commemorate both Michael the Brave and Stephen the Great. And Vlad Țepeș himself had previously appeared on a stamp in 1959 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the founding of Bucharest (Drăgușanu 35). The 1976 stamp featuring the image of Vlad was a routine action, not an indication of any special status.

Nevertheless, in the years after 1976, Vlad Țepeș does seem to have gained a higher profile in the wider public arena. A film about him was released in 1978. Yet again this was nothing exceptional: the regime had previously issued films about Michael the Brave (1971), Stephen the Great (1975) and Dimitrie Cantemir (1975) (Boia 221). A play about the Impaler by Martin Sorescu – *A treia țepa* (The Third Stake) – was published in 1978. Vlad Țepeș and his era enjoyed prominent coverage in Romania's National History Museum that opened in Bucharest in 1970 and in Bucharest's Central Military Museum (see Horne 185) but so too did the other voivodes. Three other books about Vlad appeared in the late 1970s¹¹ with one in particular (Stoicescu) clearly being intended for a

⁹ Ștefan Andreescu, *Vlad Țepeș (Dracula)*, 1976; Nicolae Stoicescu, *Vlad Țepeș*, 1976.

¹⁰ There are, perhaps, parallels with the commemorations that took place throughout 2004 of the 500th anniversary of the death of Stephen the Great. I spent most of 2004 in Romania and so was able to observe these events at first hand. These commemorations intruded little into the public arena beyond occasional television features and articles in the press. It should be noted that Stephen is a figure held in much greater esteem than Vlad Țepeș (he was canonized by the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1992).

¹¹ Ion Stăvărș, *Povești medievale despre Vlad Țepeș-Dracula* (București: Editura Univers, 1978); Radu S. Ciobanu, *Pe Urmele Lui Vlad Țepeș* (Editura Sport Turism, București 1979); Nicolae Stoicescu, *Vlad Țepeș*, 1979.

popular audience. Unsurprisingly, all of them continued in a highly patriotic style to praise the achievements of the Impaler.

Nicolae Ceaușescu and Vlad Țepeș

Finally I want to look at the assertion of McNally and Florescu that Nicolae Ceaușescu himself hero-worshipped Vlad Țepeș (*Search* [1994] 4). I am unconvinced by such a claim. While Vlad may indeed have offered a model of strong and authoritarian rule, the same traits were shared by many of the medieval voivodes. Ceaușescu did not need to pick Vlad as a model. We also need to consider Ceaușescu's efforts during the 1970s and 1980s to project himself as an international statesman and peacemaker. Ceaușescu had nothing to gain (and everything to lose) by strongly associating himself with a figure that even Romanian historians regarded as exceptionally cruel. And at a time when Vlad Țepeș was increasingly being equated with Count Dracula, why would Ceaușescu want to identify with a figure that the West confused with a vampire? In any case, there were many other historical figures who achieved far more than Vlad Țepeș (whose reign, on top of being exceptionally violent, was short and ultimately unsuccessful). For example, Vlad's cousin, Stephen the Great battled the Turks for almost 50 years to defend Moldova from the Ottoman threat. Ceaușescu is reported to have stated that "a man such as me comes along every 500 years" (McNally, cited in Radford 2). While it is often assumed that Ceaușescu is talking about Vlad Țepeș, I think it far more likely that he was referring to Stephen the Great.

One indication of Ceaușescu's view of Vlad can be found by examining his speeches. All of Ceaușescu's public utterances were collected into an interminable multi-volume collection entitled *România pe drumul construirii societății socialiste multilateral dezvoltate* (Romania on the Road to Constructing the Multilaterally Developed Socialist Society). Volumes 12 and 13 deal with 1976, when the regime commemorated the anniversary of the Impaler's death.¹² None of Ceaușescu's speeches during this year mention Vlad Țepeș. Another set of his speeches on Romanian history was published in 1983.¹³ While this does contain six references to Vlad, in each case the name is simply given within a list of medieval leaders who fought for the independence of the Romanian lands. There is no evidence of hero-worship here.

In any case, Ceaușescu had other heroes. Of the voivodes he frequently made reference to Michael and Brave and Stephen the Great (Gilberg 51) and seems to have particularly admired the former (Boia 220). He is also known to have held Mircea the Old (the grandfather of Vlad Țepeș) in high esteem. This was perhaps the reason for Mircea's elevation to "the Great" during the 1980s (Boia 79). There was even talk during 1986 (when the regime commemorated the 600th anniversary of the start of his reign) of

¹² Nicolae Ceaușescu, *România pe drumul construirii societății socialiste multilateral dezvoltate*, vols 12 and 13 (București: Editura Politica, 1976/1977).

¹³ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Istoria poporului roman: Culgere de texte* (București: Editura Militară, 1983).

Mircea's former capital, Târgoviște, being declared the second capital of Romania (Ionescu 21-24). When Ceaușescu took flight to Târgoviște during the 1989 Revolution I suggest that it was to Mircea's capital – rather than Vlad's – that he was heading.

Conclusions

Not much has been written about how Romania's Communist regime treated Vlad Țepeș. Instead, there are brief and isolated observations – particularly in writing intended for a popular audience – on particular aspects of the situation. Yet some of these have been accepted uncritically and so frequently repeated that they have almost acquired the status of myth, notably that Communist Romania “rehabilitated” Vlad the Impaler, tried to justify or overlook his cruelty, and turned him into a national hero of the highest rank. My contention is that some of these statements are exaggerated and/or over-simplified and that a more complete and more nuanced understanding of the historical and political context of Communist Romania is necessary.

If we understand rehabilitation to be a restoration to former status, then in one sense the Communist authorities did rehabilitate him. But the Communist regime was not the first to do so. Instead, Communist-era historians simply resumed an established discourse of Vlad – as a hero and statesman whose cruelty was justified by political ends – that existed well before the Communists came to power and which was temporarily suppressed by the attempt to eradicate any sort of national values from Romanian historiography. Similarly, while Communist historians may have played down the Impaler's cruelty, this was again a position that had been around well before the Communist regime. Having said this, the regime clearly did exaggerate the significance of Vlad Țepeș, both to legitimate its policies and to enthrone Ceaușescu as the worthy successor to the great leaders of the past. But we do need to remember that the same applied to most of the medieval voivodes and not just to Vlad.

What was Vlad Țepeș' position in Communist Romania's hierarchy of national heroes? I suspect that his importance has been exaggerated. As Cioranescu has argued, Vlad was a figure that could only perform limited service for the Romanian Communist Party (“Vlad the Impaler” 5). His reputation for extreme cruelty was too well established and, particularly after the publication of *In Search of Dracula*, the confusion between Vlad Țepeș and Count Dracula only served to compromise the reputation of the former. Vlad's short and ultimately unsuccessful reign was insufficient to elevate him to the top rank of the pantheon of national heroes. The real heroes of Communist Romania were, as Lucian Boia (214-226) has noted, figures such as Mircea the Old, Michael the Brave, Stephen the Great, Tudor Vladimirescu, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Nicolae Bălcescu as well as a number of Dacian kings. Vlad Țepeș appears to have been regarded as a significant historic figure, worthy of note for his attempts to defend Walachian independence but whose other achievements were limited.

The nature of the public commemoration of the Voivode in Bucharest confirms his status as a secondary figure. Certainly, the commemorations of the anniversary of his

death in 1976 do not seem to have been as spectacular as has sometimes been claimed and there is no evidence that this was the most important commemoration to take place during that year. Neither is there much evidence that Nicolae Ceaușescu held Vlad in any special esteem, at least during the period considered in this paper. Overall, I suggest that Vlad Țepeș was not (as is sometimes implied) an exalted and idealized figure from the top rank of the national pantheon but instead a “second rank” hero: someone held in high esteem, but whose usefulness to the regime was limited.

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