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When was Dracula first translated into Romanian?

Cover Page Footnote

Duncan Light is an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography, Liverpool Hope University. He is currently investigating the way that Romania has responded to Western interest in Dracula over the past four decades.

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Introduction

Dracula is one of the world's best-known books. The novel has never been out of print since its publication and has been translated into about 30 languages (Melton). Yet, paradoxically, one of the countries where it is least known is Romania. The usual explanation given for this situation is Romania's recent history, particularly the period of Communist Party rule (1947-1989). *Dracula*, with its emphasis on vampires and the supernatural, was apparently regarded as an unsuitable or inappropriate novel in a state founded on the materialist and "scientific" principles of Marxism. Hence, no translation of Stoker's novel was permitted during the Communist period, a fact noted by several contemporary commentators (for example, Mackenzie 20; Florescu and McNally, *Prince* 220). As a result, Romania was entirely unprepared for the explosion in the West of popular interest in *Dracula* and vampires during the 1970s. While increasing numbers of Western tourists visited Transylvania on their own searches for the literary and supernatural roots of Bram Stoker's novel, they frequently returned disappointed since hardly anybody in Romania understood what they were searching for. For example, Romanian guides and interpreters working for the national tourist office were often bewildered when asked by Western tourists for more details about *Dracula* and vampires in Romania (Nicolae Păduraru, personal interview). It was not until after the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu's Communist regime that the first Romanian translation of *Dracula* was published in 1990, much to the surprise and puzzlement of many Romanians (Boia 226).

This article closely examines the issue of when *Dracula* was first translated into Romanian. In particular, I question the frequently repeated claim that Stoker's novel did not appear in Romanian until after the fall of Communism. Instead, I argue that there is strong evidence (albeit circumstantial) that some form of translation existed during the interwar period and, furthermore, that a full translation was prepared (even if never published) at some stage during the Communist period.

A Romanian translation from the Interwar Period

Several Romanians have suggested that some form of translation of *Dracula* was in existence before the Communist era. Historian Ștefan Andreescu, author of an authoritative biography of Vlad the Impaler, claims that parts of Stoker's novel were published in the period between the First and Second World Wars (personal interview; see also Andreescu 247 n.3). Considering the wider context, this is entirely plausible. Romanians know the interwar period as *România mare* ("Greater Romania"). The country had enlarged considerably as the result of territorial gains (including Transylvania) after the First World War. During this era of political stability and relatively democratic rule, Romania enjoyed a high level of economic development and was a major exporter of agricultural produce. This period also saw a remarkable flowering of cultural, artistic and scientific activity. Moreover, at this time Romania was more closely integrated with the rest of Europe than ever before. In particular, Romania looked to France for inspiration and the Romanian elite eagerly embraced French styles, fashions and trends, to the extent that Bucharest was known for a time as "the Paris of the Balkans." In this context, it is entirely plausible that a Western novel such as *Dracula* would become known in some form in Romania (particularly since the novel starts and finishes in Transylvania). Indeed, the French-speaking Romanian urban elite may have encountered *Dracula* through the French translation of 1920.

Another claim for a Romanian translation of *Dracula* from this period has been made by Alexandru Misiuga, the former head of the County Tourist Office for Bistrița-Năsăud, and a leading figure in the development of “Dracula tourism” in the Bistrița area. Misiuga recounts having read a Romanian translation of *Dracula* by Ion Gorun, published in 1923 (Alexandru Misiuga personal interview; Misiuga “Cum am ajuns”). However, I am not convinced that such a translation exists since there is no record of it in any of Bucharest’s deposit libraries. The National Library contains an American edition from 1902 while the Romanian Academy library contains the French edition of 1920 and an English version from 1921. I suspect that Misiuga may have misremembered the details or that he may have read a version of *Dracula* in a language other than Romanian.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that Ion Gorun played some role in bringing *Dracula* to the attention of a Romanian readership. In his biography of Vlad the Impaler (197), Emil Stoian makes a tantalizing reference to an article by Gorun entitled “Dracula, romanul unui vampire de scriitorul englez Bram Stoker” (“Dracula, a vampire novel by the English writer Bram Stoker”). It was apparently published in 1928 in a journal entitled *Revista noastră ilustrată*. Here, however, the trail runs cold since none of Bucharest’s research libraries has any record of such a journal having ever existed! Perhaps Stoian was mistaken with this reference. Alternatively the journal may have been a local publication that did not make it to the central deposit libraries in Bucharest.

Another possible source for an early translation of *Dracula* is a magazine called *Realitatea ilustrată*. Ioan Mânzat, one of Alexandru Misiuga’s collaborators in Bistrița, recalls encountering a translation of the *Dracula* story in this magazine that he came across in the house of a neighbour in the 1950s. Since he had been born in the Bârgău (Borgo) Pass, Mânzat paid the story particular attention (Ioan Mânzat, personal interview). *Realitatea ilustrată* (*Illustrated Reality*) was a glossy weekly magazine, published between 1927 and 1944 to cater to Romania’s pro-Western middle class. It specialized in celebrity gossip, fawning articles about the royal families of Romania and other European countries and a wide range of features of general interest. Between 1934 and 1944 the magazine included a supplement entitled “De toate pentru toți” (“Something for everyone”) which specialized in stories of horror, real crime, the strange and the unexplained. It seems to have offered its readers an escape and distraction at a time when Romania was sliding towards fascism, dictatorship and, ultimately, war.

There are a number of articles in *Realitatea ilustrată* on themes related to *Dracula*. For example one issue of 1935 includes a feature on vampire bats, while a 1939 edition contains a broader feature on vampires. Furthermore, an edition from 1936 includes an article about Elizabeth Bathory. The supplement also regularly featured heavily abridged serializations of foreign novels, particularly those with horror themes. Thus, it seems entirely possible that a condensed version of *Dracula* was published in this magazine. But here, once again, the trail disappears. There are few Romanian libraries that include *Realitatea ilustrată* and its supplement in their collections while in other cases, the collection is incomplete or not currently available for public access. Consequently I have been unable to locate editions that include a serialization of *Dracula* and, for now, their existence must remain a matter of conjecture. Perhaps, at some stage in the future, when Romania’s deposit libraries have been reorganized and re-catalogued for public access, the relevant editions of *Realitatea ilustrată* and its supplement will come to light.

However, there appears to be sufficient circumstantial evidence that some form of translation of *Dracula* existed in the interwar period. I suspect that the story would have appeared in a heavily abridged form and, to judge from Stoian’s summary of the novel’s plot (196) probably included only those parts of the story that take place in Romania. It is impossible to say how many people read this translation of *Dracula* (or, for that matter, translations in other languages such as French). Nevertheless, there would have been a small number of educated urban Romanians who had some knowledge of *Dracula* at the time of the Communist takeover of power.

A Communist-era translation of *Dracula*

At the end of 1947 Romania was declared a People's Republic and the Communist regime rapidly set about creating a new society. An important component of creating the "new" involved destroying the "old"; in 1948 legislation was introduced to dismantle the political, economic and social structures of the former regime and replace them with new laws and institutions appropriate for a Communist state. Communist Romania also turned its attention to the cultural production of the former regime. In 1948 a list of forbidden books was drawn up which included the work of over 2000 authors, both Romanian and non-Romanian (Ficeac 38). In particular almost all books by authors from capitalist countries were banned. Those that already existed in libraries were withdrawn and placed in a "Fond special" ("Special Collection") to which access was strictly controlled. Only books that the regime considered acceptable (and which conformed to the orthodoxies of socialist realism) were published. The buying and selling of second-hand books was also virtually forbidden (Troncotă 149).

In these circumstances any copies of *Dracula* in English, French or any other language would have been withdrawn from circulation and placed in the "Fond special." Similarly *Realitatea ilustrată* would certainly have been withdrawn on account of its focus on Romania's now-exiled royal family. Knowledge of Stoker's novel would now have been confined to the limited number of people who had read it before the introduction of censorship.

This situation continued until the 1960s. In 1965 Nicolae Ceaușescu succeeded Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej as General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party. Ceaușescu continued Dej's policy of increasingly asserting Romania's independence from the Soviet Union, while at the same time displaying a greater openness towards the West. This was also a period of relative liberalization in Romanian cultural life (Georgescu 251-252; Verdery 112). In this context censorship was relaxed, so that numerous novels by Western authors were published (or republished) in Romanian translation, often with minimal changes demanded by the censors (Troncotă 158). This openness and liberalization also extended beyond the world of books. For example, Western television programs were shown on Romanian television and even a Pepsi-Cola bottling plant was opened in the country (Deletant 113).

Among the foreign novels published at this time in Romanian translation was *Frankenstein* (in 1973) indicating that the Romanian censors were apparently fairly relaxed about Western Gothic horror. Even more significant was the publication in 1967 of a Romanian edition of Jules Verne's *Le Château des Carpathes* (*The Castle of the Carpathians*). The novel tells the story of a Wallachian aristocrat travelling in Transylvania who comes upon a supposedly haunted castle that strikes terror into local villagers, and determines to explore it for himself. In many ways Verne's representation of Transylvania is similar to Stoker's (though Verne seems to have known less about Transylvania's history and geography than Stoker). For Verne, Transylvania is a remote and backward corner of Europe, inhabited by fearful, superstitious peasants who have a well-developed fear of the supernatural. There are also many references to local beliefs in vampires. This was hardly a flattering portrayal of Romania, particularly for a socialist state that was intent on sweeping away rural superstitions and "modernizing" rural life. Yet Romania's censors appear to have had few reservations about approving a Romanian translation of Verne's story. Indeed, the National Tourist Office also developed a themed tour for Western tourists based on places featured in the novel. This willingness to engage with Western novels that did not represent the country in a favorable way is, perhaps, an indication of Romania's openness and self-confidence at this time. In such circumstances we might ask why the Romanian authorities did not consider a translation of *Dracula* to accompany the many other foreign novels published at this time.

Indeed, by the early 1970s an increasing number of Romanians had some knowledge of Stoker's novel (although this is not to say that *Dracula* was widely known in Romania). In 1969 Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu had published a short paper in a popular Romanian history journal (*Magazin istoric*) explaining their research into the life and deeds of Vlad Țepeș (McNally and Florescu, "In cautarea"). The article also introduced Stoker's *Dracula* to a Romanian audience and briefly examined the novel's popularity in the West. Moreover, some Romanians were even able to read the novel for themselves at this time. Among them were guides working for the National Tourist Office who read English-language copies of the novel left or donated by Western visitors (Păduraru, personal interview). Others may have encountered *Dracula* during visits abroad. Romanians had increasing opportunities for

foreign travel during the liberalization of the late 1960s. For example, 365,000 Romanians were able to go abroad in 1969, visiting more than 30 countries (Petrescu 15-16). Although most of these trips were to other socialist states, some were permitted to visit Western European countries and more than a thousand Romanians were even able to visit America. Some would have come across Stoker's novel on their travels. For example, the historian Ștefan Andreescu recounts finding and reading an English-language copy of *Dracula*, presumably on a visit abroad (245).

In this context, there is convincing evidence that a Romanian translation of *Dracula* was being prepared in the early 1970s. There is a reference to such a translation in an article published in a literary journal in 1971. The author reviews a travel book written by Constantin Giurescu (one of Romania's leading academic historians) after a visit to the United States of America. Giurescu, who had worked closely with McNally and Florescu, gave a lecture to American students on the subject of Vlad Țepeș. The reviewer noted the huge interest in *Dracula* in the English-speaking world and remarked in passing that "the book will soon appear in a Romanian version" (S. Cioculescu 5). A similar indication can be found in the preface to the first full Romanian edition of the novel, published in 1990 after the fall of Ceaușescu's Communist regime. Barbu Cioculescu, one of the translators, notes: "publication of the translation of the book was stopped – for two decades" (B. Cioculescu 17). Again, this strongly suggests the existence of a translation in the 1970s.

Why, then, did the Romanian censors permit the translation of *Dracula* into Romanian but subsequently prohibit the publication of that translation? There are two likely explanations. The first is the changing political context. By 1971 the period of liberalization that Ceaușescu had introduced was coming to an end. During a visit to China and North Korea Ceaușescu had been stirred by the choreographed public spectacles and extravagant cult of personality surrounding the leaders of both countries. He returned to Romania set on introducing something similar (Deletant 119). In a speech on July 1971 Ceaușescu spoke out against the earlier liberalization and re-introduced stricter ideological controls over all fields of cultural production. The effect was the tightening of censorship and the re-establishment of a list of prohibited books (Verdery 113; Deletant 119). In these changed circumstances it is not difficult to imagine that a translation of a "decadent" Western novel such as *Dracula* was now discordant with a renewed emphasis on socialist realism. Hence, the plans to publish the Romanian version of the novel were abandoned.

Another factor that undoubtedly derailed the Romanian translation of *Dracula* was the publication of *In Search of Dracula* in 1972. As is now well known, Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu argued that Bram Stoker had based the fictional Count Dracula on the historical figure of Vlad the Impaler (McNally and Florescu, *In Search*). For good measure they were relentless in portraying the Impaler as a psychopathic tyrant, as well as claiming that vampires were an integral part of Transylvanian folklore. They followed their work with a more scholarly bibliography of the Voievode (Florescu and McNally, *Dracula*). Although neither book was published in Romania, several of the country's medieval historians seem to have been well aware of their contents and, while they appreciated the scholarship of McNally and Florescu, they were dismayed at the conclusions they had drawn. At this time Vlad Țepeș was enjoying an increasingly exalted reputation in Communist Romania. Although this never reached the level of hero-worship that has sometimes been claimed (see Light, "Status") the Voievode was widely evoked as a heroic "national" leader who had fought to defend the independence and sovereignty of medieval Wallachia. Consequently, there was a concerted effort by Romanian historians to defend the reputation of the Impaler and disassociate him from Stoker's fictional vampire.

In these circumstances the Romanian authorities seem to have concluded that if Westerners could confuse Vlad Țepeș with a fictional vampire, Romanian readers might do the same if they had the opportunity to read *Dracula* for themselves. Anything that compromised or undermined the reputation of a figure that the state was increasingly evoking in heroic terms would have been discouraged. Therefore, the simplest way to safeguard the reputation of Vlad Țepeș was to keep the Romanian public in the dark about the vampire Dracula. This was easily achieved by suppressing the publication of the Romanian translation of the novel.

Nevertheless, while the Romanian edition of *Dracula* was not published, I suspect that it did not disappear completely. In 1973 an edition of *Holidays in Romania* (Romania's main English-language tourism promotional magazine) cautiously examined what Romania had to offer Western tourists who were searching for both Stoker's vampire and Vlad Țepeș. One of the articles includes a number of quotes from *Dracula*. But these are not quotes from Stoker's original English-language version. Instead, they have clearly been translated *back* into English from another language. Compare the two passages below: the first is Stoker's original, while the second is from *Holidays in Romania*:

It was on the dark side of twilight when we got to Bistritz, which is a very interesting old place. Being practically on the frontier – for the Borgo Pass leads from it into Bukovina – it has had a very stormy existence, and it certainly shows marks of it. Fifty years ago a series of great fires took place, which made terrible havoc on five separate occasions. At the very beginning of the seventeenth century it underwent a siege of three weeks and lost 13,000 people, the casualties of war proper being assisted by famine and disease. (Stoker, *Dracula* 11)

It was quite dark when we reached Bistrita, a very interesting and old little town. Situated practically on the frontier – through the Bîrgău pass you get to Bukovina – the town has indeed had a troubled existence the traces of which are still be seen. Fifty years ago, huge fires ravaged the town causing great damages, five times. At the beginning of the 17th century a three-week siege caused the death of 13,000 inhabitants, besides those who died of starvation or of diseases. (Docsănescu 6)

Of course this second passage could have been translated from any one of a number of languages (for example, French) and not necessarily Romanian. However, there is strong evidence that it is derived from a Romanian version of the novel. For a start the passage uses the Romanian spellings for “Bistritz” and “Borgo.” It also expresses dates numerically (“17th century”) following the Romanian practice (in which centuries are indicated by Roman numerals): this differs from Stoker's original (“seventeenth century”). Furthermore, in the second passage Bistrița is described as a “little town” (whereas Stoker describes it as an “interesting place”). Romanian uses the word “orașel” for “little town” and a Romanian translator would have described Bistrița in just such terms. Indeed, Bistrița is described in this way in the Romanian translation by Barbu Cioculescu and Ileana Verzea that was published in 1990 (Stoker *Dracula* [1990], 40). Moreover, the latter translation contains a footnote explaining to Romanian readers that “Bîrgău” is written as “Borgo” in the original version “according to the transcription of the old maps” (Stoker *Dracula* [1990] 40). In Docsănescu's article (6) an identical footnote appears (now in English) at the same place in the text. This leads me to suggest that the version of *Dracula* published in 1990 was the same translation that had been prepared in the early 1970s and which was available (for a short time at least) to the writers of the 1973 edition of *Holidays in Romania*. Incidentally, Barbu Cioculescu was the author of another article (about Vlad Țepeș and Count Dracula) in that same edition of *Holidays in Romania*.

However, after 1973 I have found no further traces of a Romanian version of *Dracula*. The fact that Romanians did not have the opportunity to read Stoker's novel for themselves does not mean that they were unaware of its existence or the essence of its plot. On the contrary, there are occasional references to the novel, particularly in historical and literary circles. The commemoration in 1976 of the 500th anniversary of the death of Vlad Țepeș was marked by the publication of two books about the Voievode (Andreescu; Stoicescu [1976]). Both make references to *Dracula* although Nicolae Stoicescu can barely conceal his disdain for the novel (which he does not appear to have read). On the other hand, Ștefan Andreescu (who *had* read the novel and offers readers a brief summary of its plot) was prepared to acknowledge its popularity and influence, whilst rejecting any association between Stoker's vampire and Vlad Țepeș. Two further biographies of the Impaler were published in 1979. Radu Ciobanu includes a summary of the plot of *Dracula* (possibly derived from Andreescu) in his study although he is dismissive

of its merits. Stoicescu's second account of the Impaler's life continues to be contemptuous of the fictional Dracula, even attributing the popularity of the novel to a "collective psychosis" (Stoicescu [1979] 189).

The relatively mild criticism of Stoker's novel of the 1970s gave way to more extreme reactions in the 1980s. In an article in a literary magazine in 1986 one of the Communist regime's "Court poets" denounced the Dracula of Western popular culture as an attack and slur on Romania itself and "just a page from the great pact of political pornography through which our enemies work against us" (Păunescu 13). Although Păunescu's views were not universally shared (Ionescu 21), we can only wonder what Romanian readers made of all this. Indeed, given such hostility towards *Dracula*, it is not surprising that some Romanians (mostly younger, well-educated urban dwellers) came to believe that the novel was in some way subversive and dangerous for the Communist regime. Paradoxically, the regime's hostility and opposition towards the fictional Dracula had the effect of arousing greater interest and curiosity about the novel among some sections of the Romanian public. Certainly by the time that Ceaușescu's regime was overthrown, many educated Romanians had some understanding of what the novel was about, including the central role played by a vampire.

The first full translation of *Dracula*

Following the "revolution" of December 1989, Romania rapidly set about dismantling the structures of Communism. Censorship ended immediately (and was later formally prohibited by the constitution of 1991). At the same time, formerly state-owned publishing houses were free to publish what they wanted and found themselves for the first time having to respond to the demands of the market. During 1990 there was a huge pent-up demand among readers for books – whether by Romanian or Western writers – that had been prohibited by the Communist regime. The rumor that a book had been subject to censorship seems to have been enough to guarantee high sales (see Verdery 183). Thus in 1990 a wave of new titles appeared on the shelves of Romanian bookshops.

In this context, the first full translation of *Dracula* was published in November 1990 by Editura Univers. It included an introduction by Barbu Cioculescu. The novel was printed on poor-quality paper, which indicates the state of the Romanian publishing industry after the austerity of the 1980s. Unusually, this first Romanian edition of the novel started with the story "Dracula's Guest." *Dracula* is described as having been first published in the United States of America in 1897 and in Great Britain in 1912! This indicates not only how little Romanians knew about the novel but also how strongly *Dracula* had become associated with America in Romanian eyes.

The rapid publication of the Romanian edition deserves comment. Even today, Romanian translations of Western novels do not usually appear in bookshops until a couple of years after their original publication. Yet *Dracula* was published within eleven months of the end of state censorship—at a time of major upheaval and restructuring when printing technologies were less sophisticated than at present. Was it really possible to locate a copy of the novel, translate it into Romanian, typeset it and publish it within such a short space of time? Perhaps, in the euphoria of the post-Communist period such a thing was achievable. But, as I have argued earlier, I suspect that the version of *Dracula* published in November 1990 was the same one prepared for publication in the early 1970s. With the translation already available, publication could proceed swiftly and any publishing house would recognize that it was likely to be a popular choice with the Romanian public.

There appears to have been considerable early interest in *Dracula* after the Romanian translation was published. But this initial enthusiasm gave way to disappointment as readers discovered that *Dracula* was simply a Gothic novel and not a piece of subversive, anti-Communist literature. As a result the book is not difficult to find in second hand bookshops in Bucharest. Newer editions of the same translation were published in 1997 and 2004 and are also widely available in the capital. However, it is difficult to detect any great enthusiasm in Romania for the novel. I have only met two Romanians who have read *Dracula* and both of them gave up without finishing it! Even today, Bram Stoker's most famous novel remains largely unknown and unread in the country with which it is most closely associated.

Conclusion

Dracula, perhaps more than most other novels, has come to be surrounded by misconceptions, inaccuracies and myths (see Miller *Sense*). The matter of the first Romanian translation of the novel is one such example. It has been frequently stated that *Dracula* was not translated into Romanian until after the fall of the Communist regime, a claim that has now become accepted as fact. However, in this paper I have argued that there is strong circumstantial evidence for a much earlier translation of the novel. There are a number of verbal reports that point to the existence of an abridged version of *Dracula* dating from the interwar period. I have not succeeded in locating this version although a possible source may be the interwar magazine, *Realitatea ilustrată*. In addition there is textual evidence suggesting that a Romanian translation of *Dracula* was prepared (even if never released for publication) during the early 1970s. At some stage in the future when there is more complete access to Romania's Communist-era archives, it may be possible to confirm the existence of a translation from the 1970s as well as throwing further light on Communist Romania's ambivalent approach to Stoker's novel.

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