

Vlad the Impaler, the Truth Behind the Myth: His Youth and Fight Against the Ottoman Empire

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Abstract

Vlad Țepeș “the Impaler” is the most famous figure of the Romanian Middle Ages. Sadly, his world fame is due to Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel. For over 120 years, imagination proved to be stronger for the public at large than historical truth. We do not wish to get into an argument regarding the myth of the cruel, bloodthirsty or even vampiric prince. It is neither the place nor our role to venture onto such moving sands. What we have been concerned with is the openness with which Romanian specialists have dealt with this hero of the Middle Ages, whom they have thoroughly explored. Still, the enthusiasm and willingness to turn Vlad the Impaler into a hero, into a man of moral probity beyond his epoch, have made historians treat the first part of his life tersely and even insufficiently interpret aspects of his glorious moments, i.e. the confrontations with the Ottoman Empire. His period is therefore a puzzle whose pieces must still be arranged. That is what we are going to do in this study, namely to bring forward some additional facts of his tumultuous existence by reviewing some of the most important hypotheses issued in historiography and by permanently relating to the foreign context of his policy.

Keywords: Vlad Țepeș, peregrination, Transylvania, Ottoman Empire, Hungary, tribute, sultan’s campaign.

1. Youth years and his peregrinations (1431-1456)

Who was Vlad the Impaler? That is a question which still needs many answers. Historians have tended to support the theory according to which he was the second legitimate son of the voivode Vlad Dracul and his lady, Anastasia, one of the daughters of the Moldavian Prince Alexander the Good.¹ However, legend, taken as such by some specialised writings, has it that Vlad was in fact the offspring resulted from Vlad Dracul’s affair with a noblewoman from Transylvania and came into the world in the city of Sighișoara, in the late 1431 or the beginning of the next year. We should note the birth date, which cannot be doubted, hence we consider that folk tradition tried to find in Transylvania a common ground, an anti-Ottoman battlefield for three emblematic figures of Romanian history, whose lives intertwine within the space bounded by the Carpathians: John Hunyadi (voivode of Transylvania, governor of Hungary, captain general of Hungarian armies), Vlad the Impaler and Stephen the Great (ruler of Moldavia).

¹ Virgil Ciocâltan, *Între sultan și Împărat: Vlad Dracul la 1438*, in *Revista de Istorie*, XXIX, 1976, nr. 11, p. 1782.

Despite this somewhat idyllic history, the first part of Vlad the Impaler's life was not easy. His father, Vlad Dracul, had carried out a hesitant policy. A Christian, Vlad Dracul had been crowned at Nuremberg by Sigismund of Luxembourg, the Roman-German Emperor,² but once he became a ruler of Wallachia, he was forced to renounce his convictions. The Turkish force exerted tremendous pressure on the Wallachian state, which had become a transit area for the Ottoman armies on their way to Transylvania and Hungary.

The Wallachian ruler's political oscillations caused anger at Adrianople, so, in 1442,³ Vlad Dracul was forced to leave his two minor sons, Vlad and Radu, as hostages of the Turks, in the fortress of Eğrigöz, identified on an arid plateau in the Anatolian Mountains.⁴ The exile was actually a genuine prison from which there were no chances of escaping. There are no clear data about these years in the life of the young princely offspring. In terms of historical logic and considering the subsequent course of events, we may assume that here Vlad the Impaler, aged 11-12, learnt the Turkish language, acquired military and political knowledge and was trained to be used as a strong claimant to the throne of Wallachia.

The events involving his family, the Basarab family, were to bring him to the forefront of Romanian politics sooner than expected. His father's closeness to the Ottoman Empire hastened his removal from the Wallachian throne. The plan was set up by the mighty governor of Hungary, John Hunyadi, who broke into Wallachia leading a powerful army and ordered the decapitation of Vlad Dracul and his firstborn, Mircea, in December 1447.⁵ Late Wallachian chronicles would mention the terrible tortures they had been put through when the older brother of Vlad the Impaler had been buried alive.⁶

About half a year after these events, against the background of the great defeat suffered at Kosovo Polje by the Christian army led by John Hunyadi himself, Sultan Murad II decided to appoint Vlad the Impaler as the head of the Wallachian country. The memoirs of the Serbian janissary Constantin of Ostrovitsa include some of the conditions of this appointment: comity and yearly presence in the capital of the Empire to pay the tribute.⁷

Surprisingly, the Ottoman Empire would passively accept the removal of its protégé two months later. The specialised literature would advance the idea that Vladislav II, the former prince, reoccupied the throne with some help from Moldavia. This theory was supported by a paragraph of the Byzantine chronicler Laonikos Chalkokondyles, which mentioned that an envoy had been sent to the Prince of Moldavia, Peter II, to negotiate peace and alliance by marriage.⁸ It is hard to accept that such negotiations were carried out overnight, so we do not exclude the assumption that Vladislav II may have been re-enthroned with the tacit consent of the Ottoman Porte.

Just as unexpectedly, during his short reign from October to November of 1448, young Vlad had had time to send a letter to Transylvania announcing he would make peace with John

² Constantin Rezachevici, *Cronologia critică a domnilor din Țara Românească și Moldova. a 1324-1881, I Secolele XIV-XVI*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2001, p. 92.

³ Virgil Ciocâltan, *Între sultan și împărat...*, p. 1781.

⁴ Raymond T. Mc Nally, *În Anatolia pe urmele viitorului voievod*, in *Magazin Istoric*, XVIII, 1984, nr. 10, p. 51.

⁵ I. Thuroczî, *Chronica Hungarorum*, în *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum*, ed. I. G. Schwandtner, Viena, 1746, p. 259.

⁶ *Letopisețul Cantacuzinesc. Istoria Țării Românești*, Editura Academiei, București, 1960, p. 4, 205,

⁷ *Călători străini despre țările române*, vol. I, cared by M. Holban, Editura Academiei, București, 1968, p. 125-126.

⁸ Laonic Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, translated by V. Grecu, Editura Academiei, București, 1958, p. 65.

Hunyadi after his return from the anti-Ottoman campaign.⁹ The document puts a different light on the lack of Turkish support Vlad would feel after losing the throne, once he returned to the capital of the Empire, Adrianople.

Under the shelter of the imperial court, the wandering prince intended to wait for the right moment to regain power. The lack of a reaction from the sultan strengthens the idea of a conjunctural understanding with the new voivode of Wallachia, Vladislav II.

Vlad's option of leaving the Ottoman Empire points to the fact that his life must have been in danger. In fact, the wish of Prince Vladislav II to rid of a young pretender, who had already ascended to the throne and benefited from the Turks' favours, is perfectly explainable in the spirit of the age.

The former prince deemed the best decision to take was to go to Moldavia. The presence of the ex-voivode in Moldavia remains one of the most mysterious stages of his peregrinations that lasted almost eight years (1448-1456). The chronology of events seems uncertain due to the lack of documentary information that should clarify the political circumstances in which the young princely claimant was involved.

Admitting that Vlad the Impaler went straight to Moldavia, in the early 1449, he would find the minor Alexander the Young, who was under the protection of Poland, on the throne. Alexander, barely 11 years of age when he had ascended to the throne of Moldavia, had no ability to manage the country's affairs that were in the hands of the boyars of the Princely Council. With their assistance, Vlad must have obtained the consent to stay in Moldavia. Most of these boyars had Polish sympathies and it is but natural to think that he was received and accepted rather as a former protégé of the Ottoman power with which the Kingdom of Poland was in peaceful relations.

The appointment of Bogdan II as a ruler, at the end of 1449, with military aid from Transylvania, did not change the situation of the former prince of the Wallachian state. The support granted by Bogdan II, a Christian prince, was argued starting from the existence of some kinship, as Vlad may have been his maternal nephew.¹⁰

Besides, Wallachia had been the shelter of the current ruler of Moldavia in his youth years full of danger, at the very court of Prince Vlad Dracul.¹¹ The return of this favour remains a hypothesis to consider.

Moldavia's rapport with Hungary and the anti-Ottoman front is reaffirmed by means of two alliance treaties concluded with John Hunyadi, in the early 1450, amid intense Polish military actions aiming to re-enthroned Alexander the Young.

The struggles for preserving the Moldavian throne proved difficult, with Poland's claimant managing to occupy the capital, Suceava, temporarily, while Bogdan II would retain control of some part of Moldavia including the city of Roman. Most likely, Stephen, the ruler's son, the future prince Stephen the Great, took part in the armed confrontations, especially since he would use the experience gained in the decisive battle of Crasna, 6 September 1450, decades later, in another famous clash with the Poles: the battle of the Cosmin Forest, on 26 October 1497.¹² The good relationships between Vlad the Impaler and Stephen during the peregrinations following the year 1451 may prompt us to believe that the former participated actively in the Moldavian-Polish

⁹ C. Șerban, *Relațiile lui Vlad Țepeș cu Transilvania și Ungaria*, in *Revista de Istorie*, tom. 29, nr. 11, 1976, p. 1701-1702.

¹⁰ Nicolae Stoicescu, *Vlad Țepeș*, Ed. Academiei, București, 1976, p. 33.

¹¹ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria lui Ștefan cel Mare povestită neamului românesc*, București, 1904, p. 43.

¹² C. Rezachevici, *Cronologia critică...*, p. 517.

fighters. During his detention years, he had become skilled at handling weapons, which was of much use to a ruler like Bogdan II, who was almost always on the battlefield.

After only one year of respite, the former voivode of Wallachia was again put in a dangerous situation. On the night of 15-16 October 1451, Bogdan II fell victim to a plot and was assassinated at Răuseni. The shock must have been all the greater since the murder had been planned by a less known pretender, Peter, also supported by the Poles through the former Prince Alexander, with whom he was supposed to share the power. Vlad the Impaler was in danger for the first time since his arrival in Moldavia. The fidelity towards the dead prince created a barrier between the new power and his claims.

The transformations that Moldavia was experiencing prompted Vlad to leave these places with young Stephen, heading for the south of Transylvania.¹³ The evolution of relationships between the great powers in the area was not favourable either. The conclusion of the Treaty of Adrianople, on 20 November 1451, between the Ottoman Empire and Hungary was holding back Vlad the Impaler's plans, consolidating the position of the prince of Wallachia, Vladislav II.

Due to the deft policy of maintaining the balance between the two forces, the Wallachian state would secure significant guarantees following the signing of the 3 years' armistice. Wallachia would pay tribute to the Porte, while the other two states would guarantee Vladislav II his reign and non-involvement in domestic affairs.

To Vlad the Impaler, the situation seemed hopeless. Maybe that is why he went for the extreme solution: attack Wallachia and seize power. The information emerges from a document sent by John Hunyadi to the Transylvanian city of Braşov, on 6 February 1452, in which he demanded that the former prince be sent back to Moldavia and not be granted military support, because he was trying to stand against Vladislav II without his knowledge and will.¹⁴ Such an action would put Hungary and the Turkish-Hungarian treaty in a delicate position. If the document of 6 February hinted about a return to Moldavia of the Wallachian claimant, John Hunyadi's next letter, of 30 March 1452, sheds more light on this case.¹⁵ In it, the voivode of Transylvania would announce the heads of Braşov that Vlad had returned to Moldavia.

His coming back to Moldavia, viewed in terms of these two documents, is indubitable. The situation here was tense following the power struggles between Alexander the Young and Peter Aron. Obviously, at the time of his return, the power was in the hands of the former, for it is hard to accept that Peter Aron would have agreed to provide shelter to the ex-ruler of Wallachia.¹⁶

His stay in Moldavia must have been short. The conflict between Hungary and Wallachia caused by the monetary reform introduced by Vladislav II, in the autumn of 1452, by which the Wallachian ducat was assimilated to the Turkish akçe, completely changed the situation of the former voivode. The return of Vlad the Impaler to Transylvania must have occurred in the context of this rupture, therefore in the late summer of 1452.

¹³ Leon Şimanschi, *O cumpănă a copilăriei lui Ştefan cel Mare: Reuseeni, 15 octombrie 1451*, in vol. *Ştefan cel Mare și Sfânt-Portret în istorie*, Editura "Muşatinii", Putna, 2003, p. 45.

¹⁴ *Documenta Romaniae Historica, D, Relatiile dintre Țările Române*, vol. I (1222-1456), volume create by Ştefan Pascu, Constantin Cihodaru., Konrad G. Gundisch, Damaschin Mioc, Viorica Pervain, Editura Academiei R.S.R., Bucureşti, 1977, 424.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 425.

¹⁶ Şerban Papacostea, *Cu privire la geneza și răspândirea povestirilor scrise despre faptele lui Vlad Țepeș*, in *Evul mediu românesc*, Ed. Corint, Bucureşti, 2001, p. 119.

Prince Vlad arrived in Transylvania under the wing of the great protector of Christian Europe, John Hunyadi and it was only a matter of time before the captain of the Hungarian army sent him to rule Wallachia.

What today may seem a paradox was commonplace in those days. Vlad the Impaler accepted the protection and support of the man who had actually had his father and brother killed. Furthermore, we have reasons to believe that his anti-Ottoman policy, so praised during his second reign, relied on the principles instilled by the very person who had proved, on the battlefield, that Turkish armies were not invincible.

Here, in Transylvania, John Hunyadi, Vlad the Impaler and Stephen the Great would helplessly watch the fall of the Byzantine Empire and each in his own way would draw the necessary lessons from this great defeat of Christianity. John Hunyadi understood that only a general mobilisation of Christian forces could stop the Ottoman colossus that was heading for the centre of Europe; Vlad the Impaler realised that power came from the inside and only a consolidated country might have been able to withstand the Turks; and Stephen the Great was aware that diplomacy should come first in the relationships with the greatest power of south-eastern Europe.

It is equally clear that an action plan was worked out in order to strengthen the anti-Ottoman front on the Danube by appointing two princes, who had not been under the influence of the crescent moon empire, as rulers of Romanian countries. Amid the campaign for the defence of the city of Belgrade, John Hunyadi would not forget to place a small Transylvanian army corps at Vlad the Impaler's service in order to penetrate into Wallachia and dethrone Vladislav II.

2. Vlad the Impaler and foreign policy directions in his second rule (1456-1462)

So, at the age of 25, after a journey that seemed endless, Vlad the Impaler ascended to the throne of Wallachia again – a reign which would make him famous all throughout Europe and would bring him, as it becomes those who write history, the laurels of glory and the bitter taste of defeat.

Seizing power did not mean the onset of the anti-Ottoman policy. The situation of Christianity was still delicate despite the victory of Belgrade and there were signs that the Ottoman Empire, under the reign of Mehmed II, would become the most powerful state in this part of Europe.

However, Wallachia was meant to be the last outpost of Christianity on the Danube front and, in order for that to happen, Vlad the Impaler realised that a good internal organisation was needed. This programme included some measures to increase trade efficiency by establishing stricter relationships with the main commercial centres of Transylvania, Braşov and Sibiu, alongside of tough measures taken against the boyars that seemed to support a policy of understanding with the Turks. Feudal justice was to be enforced by the prince by means of a practice that was to bring him fame, although it was quite spread in mediaeval Europe, i.e. impaling.

The policy of Sultan Mehmed II after the failure at Belgrade did not avoid the Black Sea basin and the Romanian space. As early as 1454, a fleet had been sent to the Black Sea to establish a trade blockade, with the expected results: the capitulation of Moldavia, the other Romanian state, and of the Genoese colony of Caffa. The pressure was doubled by Poland's moving the centre of its political focus from the Black Sea towards the Baltic Sea, following the claims

made in the area by the Teutonic Order. This movement meant that Poland's anti-Ottoman policy became a closed chapter.¹⁷

The difficult international conjuncture made Vlad the Impaler take firm actions with a view to consolidating the anti-Ottoman front. On 6 September 1456, the Wallachian ruler concluded a vassal treaty with King Ladislaus of Hungary.¹⁸ The formal nature and the proclaimed fear of the Turkish threat reveal the rush in which the document was signed. In the face of the ever-increasing Turkish pressure, Vlad the Impaler needed security guarantees that could be provided, in that political context, only by the traditional ally: the Kingdom of Hungary.

This aspect can be noticed in the letter sent to the chiefs of the powerful city of Braşov, on 10 September 1456, in which Vlad the Impaler drew attention to the Ottoman legations that had come to Wallachia in an attempt to obtain the neutrality of the Wallachian state with a view to initiating plundering actions in Transylvania.¹⁹ However inconsistent Turkish initiatives were for the moment, the Wallachian state was not on such a strong foreign position as to ignore these signals and adopt a trenchant attitude.

The Wallachian country policy, in relation to the Ottoman Empire and Hungary, had been duplicitous for almost a decade and the abandonment of this system promoted by the former voivode Vladislav II could only be achieved gradually.

Wallachia accepted the Ottoman suzerainty through the regular payment of tribute, as revealed by the chronicle of the Serbian janissary Constantin of Ostrovitsa. Here it is mentioned that the son of Dracula came two years in a row to the emperor's court to bring the tribute. After simple calculations, taking into account that in 1459 Wallachia was to postpone the payment of contributions,²⁰ it follows that 1457 and 1458 were the years when Vlad the Impaler presented himself at Adrianople.

The acceptance of Turkish vassalage deteriorated the relationships with Hungary that wished Wallachia's position had been one of open hostility in its affairs with the High Porte. One of the first testimonies of the state of tension between the two countries is the document of 17 December 1456 in which King Ladislaus V demanded Braşov to help the pretender Dan seize the Wallachian throne, as Vlad the Impaler had broken his promises made to Hungary. The Hungarian king's attitude can also be analysed in the light of Vlad the Impaler's having renounced a firm anti-Ottoman policy, especially since Hungary was increasingly pressed by western powers to re-open hostilities with the Turks.

During this time, Vlad the Impaler resolutely went through all the stages needed to organise the country in order to start an open conflict with the Ottoman Empire, for he was sure that at the moment of the decisive confrontation no domestic disturbance should happen.

The first turning point occurred in 1459, when Wallachia ceased to pay tribute to the Ottoman Empire. The action was not sudden and did not entail reprisals from the Turks as a result of the negotiations initiated by Vlad the Impaler.

The first proofs in this respect come from 1460, when there was an exchange of messages in which the voivode justified to the sultan that he was unable to pay, following the

¹⁷ Şerban Papacostea, *Moldova, stat tributar al imperiului otoman în secolul al XV-lea: cadrul internațional al raporturilor stabilite în 1455-1456*, in *Evul Mediu Românesc*, p. 113-114.

¹⁸ *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor culese de Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki*, volumul XV, partea I, 1358-1600, publish by Nicolae Iorga, Bucureşti, 1911, p. 45.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

²⁰ Nicolae Iorga, *Acte și fragmente cu privire la istoria românilor*, Bucureşti, 1897, p. 12.

campaigns in Transylvania, which was providing shelter for claimants to the throne of Wallachia.²¹ Mehmed II believed the Wallachian prince or perhaps he was preparing the campaign against Trebizond, the last remnant of the Byzantine Empire, and would not engage additional troops in solving the problems in Wallachia.

The next year's negotiations were conducted in different circumstances. Having returned victoriously from the campaign against Trebizond, in the autumn of 1461, Mehmed II received the deputation from Wallachia, but sent an answer by which he summoned Vlad the Impaler to present himself to the High Porte with the residual tribute.

The Turkish chronicler Tursun Beg recorded the prince's request to send one of his commanders to the Danube to protect the country for fear that the nobility, with the help of Hungary, should bring someone else to the throne.²² Another version is that of the Byzantine chronicler Laonikos Chalkokondyles. He recounts that Mehmed II sent the bey of Nicopolis Hamza Pasha only to capture the prince, but Vlad the Impaler had got used to this trick since the years of his captivity. Accompanied by a part of his cavalry troops, he thwarted this plan, caught the Turkish commander and impaled him.²³

A letter from Vlad the Impaler to King Matthias Corvinus, dated 11 February 1462,²⁴ confirms this course of events: the Romanian prince captured the small Ottoman army in a battle near the fortress of Giurgiu, which, on this occasion, was again under the rule of Wallachia. It was, first and foremost, a strategic gain, for Giurgiu, raised by Vlad's grandfather, Mircea the Elder, played an important role in defending the Danube line in the face of Turkish armies.

If we accept this development, we can establish that in the second part of 1460 Vlad the Impaler had lost the Turks' trust and that the mission of Hamza beg was actually to seize the entire territory of Wallachia and turn it into a pashalik.²⁵

Taking advantage of the surprise element, Vlad the Impaler continued his offensive and crossed the Danube to the southern bank, penetrating into the Turkish territory, burning towns and important fortifications such as Dârstor, Sistova, Rahovo, causing losses of over 20,000 people to the Turks, as mentioned in the 1462 letter to the King of Hungary.²⁶

3. The war against the Ottoman Empire (1462)

When Vlad the Impaler entered the war against the Ottoman Empire, he did it as a great army commander. On 4 March 1462, the ambassador of Venice in Buda pleaded the doge for subsidies for Hungary, which had to go to Transylvania in order to support the glorious deeds of the Wallachian voivode.²⁷

What is important to mention is that Wallachia's going into the anti-Ottoman battle should be viewed in a broader context, that of the crusade against the Turks preached by Pope Pius

²¹ *Cronici turcesti privind țările române*, Extrase. Volumul I, prepared by M. Guboglu și M. Mehmet, Editura Academiei Române, București, 1966, p. 68.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 125-126.

²³ Laonic Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, translated by V. Grecu, Editura Academiei, București, 1958, p. 72.

²⁴ Ioan Bogdan, *Vlad Țepeș și narațiunile germane și rusești asupra lui. Studiu critic*, București, 1896, p. 76.

²⁵ Ștefan Andreescu, *Vlad Țepeș Dracula*, Editura Enciclopedică, ediția a II, București, 1998, p. 106.

²⁶ Nicolae Iorga, *Scrisori de boieri-Scrisori de domni*, second edition, Văleni de Munte, 1925, p. 166-167.

²⁷ I. Bianu, *Ștefan cel Mare. Câteva documente din arhivele de stat de la Milan*, in *Columna lui Traian*, 1, 1883, p. 34-35.

It ever since 1459, at the beginning of his popedom. Within this front created on the Lower Danube, Hungary was supposed to play the main role, while Wallachia was the spearhead. The gap of the defensive line on the Danube was Moldavia, which, following the treaty signed with Poland, would leave the anti-Ottoman camp in 1459 and along with it the plan that the governor of Hungary, John Hunyadi, had established at the time of the siege of Belgrade in order to support the ascension to the throne of Vlad the Impaler and Stephen the Great.

The narrative sources²⁸ which mention the aid given to Stephen the Great by Vlad the Impaler in 1457 are rather ambiguous and therefore we do not know for sure if the ruler of Moldavia gained the longest reign in the Romanian Middle Ages (1457-1504) due to an anti-Ottoman military project in which Wallachia and Hungary had been actively involved.²⁹ Regardless of the motivation, the Moldavian prince Stephen the Great moved away from the anti-Ottoman front, thus causing an estrangement from Wallachia and Hungary.

The second important moment of 1459 is connected to the full conquest of Serbia after the fall of the last redoubt into the Ottomans' hands: the Smederevo fortress. Vlad the Impaler needed to get out of this circle created by the states surrounding his country, which were either under Turkish rule or in a relationship of subordination.

The decisive step was taken through the conclusion of the treaty with Hungary, a moment that cannot be accurately placed in time, but could not go beyond 1460 either. The treaty sanctioned, according to existing data and in keeping with the customs of the age, a matrimonial alliance, with Vlad marrying a sister of Matthias Corvinus.³⁰

In the letter of 11 February 1462, the Wallachian prince asked Hungary for help before St. George's Day, which was impossible to accomplish considering that Matthias Corvinus would convoke the nobiliary Diet on 10 May and the most optimistic scenario was that the army should have been ready to cross the Carpathians in late August. The crisis of Wallachian manpower seems obvious, as Vlad the Impaler had managed, according to data, to raise about 15,000-20,000 people, most of them from the boyar cavalry troops.

In the spring of the same year, Mehmed II had started extensive preparations for war, with an army which was not as large as that sent against Constantinople, but which numbered around 60,000-80,000 soldiers and a war fleet of 25 triremes and 150 transport ships³¹ that set off to conquer the key-fortress of the Wallachian defence on the Danube: Chilia. It was not the only assault that the mighty Danubian fortress had to face. In full sultanic campaign, Chilia was attacked on land, on 28 July 1462, by the Moldavian army, most likely because Stephen the Great was trying to prevent a Turkish conquest of the fortress.

In early June 1462, the Turkish army crossed the Danube and was attacked by the Wallachian troops in an attempt to stop the stationing of artillery – an unsuccessful action which required inland retreat. In his memoirs, the Serbian janissary Constantin of Ostrovitsa recounts that the Turkish shots routed the Wallachian army.³²

The failure on the Danube decided the Wallachian strategy for the entire campaign. The defensive system of Wallachia had been designed, ever since the previous century, depending on the relief, with the final resistance in the pre-mountainous and mountainous forested area,

²⁸ *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI publicate de Ioan Bogdan*, revised and completed edition by P. P. Panaitescu, editura Academiei, București, 1959, p. 15, 28, 49, 61.

²⁹ Marian Coman, Ovidiu Cristea, *Istorie paralele, istorii convergente. Moldova și Țara Românească în 1457 și 1476*, in *Analele Putnei*, XI, 2015, 1, p. 106.

³⁰ Nicolae Iorga, *Scrisori de boieri-Scrisori de domni*, p. 164.

³¹ Matei Cazacu, *Dracula*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2008, p. 199-200.

³² *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. I, p. 127.

where women and children were usually dislocated.³³ The destruction of water and food supplies in the path of the Turkish army added to it.

Actually, Vlad the Impaler avoided any confrontation in the open, as he was aware of the enemy's superiority and engaged only in skirmishes against the detachments that strayed away from the main army in search of supplies.

The most important episode of the campaign featured the Wallachian ruler who, on the night of 17-18 June 1462, launched an attack on the Turkish camp with a view to assassinating Sultan Mehmed II. According to the Turkish chronicler Enveri, an uproar burst and the attack was repelled by the Rumelian troops which set off in pursuit of the Wallachian cavalry, causing them heavy losses.³⁴

Although the attack did not cause significant damage to the Ottoman army, it created panic, increased by another moment that remained in the memory of chronicles. A few kilometres from the capital of Târgoviște, the Sultan and his army found a field full of impaled Turkish prisoners. Apparently the impact was so powerful that, according to some Byzantine sources, Mehmed II stated he could not take the land of a man who knew how to use his rule and his subjects so well.³⁵

Until the junction with his fleet, which occurred in the port of Brăila on 29 June 1462, Sultan Mehmed II fought one single important battle, in the Buzău area, mentioned in Turkish and Byzantine sources. In terms of the number of forces involved, it seems to be the most terrible confrontation of the campaign for the submission of Wallachia. The chronicler Tursun Beg stated that here there was already a small army of Vlad the Impaler, which was supposed to defend the border with Moldavia³⁶ and which had probably been consolidated by the voivode, thus numbering 15,000 men. The departure of Mehmed II from Wallachia some days after this event makes us assume that the Turks had not gained the expected victory this time either.

Following this campaign, which was rather odd for a mediaeval confrontation, one might wonder who could be declared a winner. If we relate to biased Turkish sources, the victory belonged to the Sultan. Still, the purpose of the campaign, namely the removal of Vlad the Impaler and turning the country into a pashalic, had not been attained. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that the Wallachian ruler did not win any battle and, therefore, the indecisive result of the whole action seems to be the most natural to support.

If we consider the subsequent course of events, we may establish that Mehmed II managed through diplomatic channels to achieve what he had not by war. Barely two months after the war against Wallachia, the Sultan's protégé, Radu the Handsome, Vlad's brother, would occupy the throne with the help of a small Ottoman army. It is the result of intense negotiations with the great Wallachian boyars and especially of the distinctive position proposed by Vlad the Impaler. In anticipation of the Hungarian support, he was willing to continue the fight with the Turks while the internal forces considered the action doomed to failure from the beginning. This is the equation of the rapid loss of power which entailed Vlad's retreat to Transylvania and ultimately the loss of the throne. Moreover, militarily and strategically, the claimant Radu had the Danubian

³³ Sergiu Iosipescu, *Carpații sud-estici în evul mediu târziu (1166-1526). O istorie europeană prin pasurile montane*, Muzeul Brăilei-Editura Istros, Brăila, 2013, p. 327.

³⁴ *Cronici turcești privind țările române*, I, p. 42.

³⁵ Laonic Chalcocondil, *Expuneri ...*, p. 289.

³⁶ *Cronici turcești privind țările române*, I, p. 69.

frontier in his hands, with its important points Brăila and Giurgiu and, most likely, he had reached some agreements with Braşov and the Saxons.³⁷

4. Conclusions

Starting from these premises, we may state that the failure of Wallachia's anti-Ottoman actions and, implicitly, the removal of Vlad the Impaler from the throne were influenced by two developments at the level of international relations.

Firstly, it is the attitude of Venice, which after the fall of Constantinople chose to adopt a neutral position in its relationships with the Ottoman Empire. The position of the Republic of the Lagoons was clearly formulated in the letter sent to the papacy, on 30 October 1458, pointing out that Venice would not act against Ottoman Empire unless there was a well-established system of alliances.³⁸

The next extremely significant step was taken a year later, at the Council of Mantua, when Venice requested, in exchange for its participation in a possible anti-Ottoman coalition, the payment of all war expenses, the dispatch of 8,000 people to equip its vessels and the organisation of an army of 50,000 horsemen and 20,000 footmen that was supposed to go to Hungary.³⁹

Due to the unacceptable conditions, the crusade plans promoted by Pope Pius II had no practical finality and the anti-Ottoman front established on the Danube border received no assistance from the West.

The second moment which deprived the Wallachian country from a reliable ally against the Turks was entailed by the complications that had emerged in the Central Europe and which involved Hungary. The German Emperor Frederick III of Habsburg, through the guardianship exerted on his nephew, Ladislaus V, the Hungarian king, aimed to annex Austria, Styria, Carinthia, Carniola, Hungary and Czechia, thus creating an empire capable of successfully opposing western European states.⁴⁰

The ascension to the Hungarian throne of King Matthias Corvinus changed these plans and led to the exacerbation of the conflict, which reached its climax in 1459, when Frederick III was himself elected King of Hungary with the help of a strong internal nobiliary party.⁴¹ In such circumstances and under threat of an attack from the Roman-German Empire, Matthias Corvinus maintained, only theoretically, the idea of an anti-Ottoman action alongside Wallachia despite subsequent pressures from the papacy and Venice. In order to justify the subsidies sent by the two royal powers, the King of Hungary levelled allegations of betrayal at the Wallachian voivode, accusing him of collaborating with Sultan Mehmed II.

Therefore, we may conclude that the entire international political context in the years of the second rule acted against Vlad the Impaler, who found himself gradually involved in an unequal conflict with the Turkish power, a conflict which finally was to lead to a more obvious subordination of Wallachia to the High Porte in the second half of the 15th century.

³⁷ Hurmuzaki, vol. XV/I, p. 58.

³⁸ Eugen Denize, *Vlad Țepeș, lupta antiotomană și Veneția. Câteva considerații*, in *Revista Istorică*, nr. 3-4, 1995, p. 379.

³⁹ Nicolae Stoicescu, *Vlad Țepeș*, p. 87.

⁴⁰ Ileana Căzan, *Dușmani de temut aliați de nădejde. Țările române în epoca lui Ștefan cel Mare în contextul politicii central-europene*, ed. Minerva, București, 2004, p. 12-13.

⁴¹ Șerban Papacostea, *Cu privire la geneza și răspândirea povestirilor scrise despre faptele lui Vlad Țepeș*, p. 130.

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