ESTONIA, ITALY AND ROMANIA – COMMON HISTORY, AND THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Roxana-Magdalena BÂRLEA,
The Academy of Economic Studies of Bucharest
roxanabirlea@yahoo.fr

Abstract:
The study develops the idea according to which the social, political and economic history of countries was not as isolated as commonly thought – even during the Middle Ages – and the process of globalisation had begun many centuries before the birth of the term itself. More than the actual history of the peoples, the aspect that has evolved the most was the international character of *research*: an event or a person that belonged to a certain historical and geographical context generated interest for researchers throughout the world. Several researchers have proven this fact using the example of the Romanian prince Vlad Țepes (*Vlad the Impaler*), known as "Dracula".

Keywords:
History, scientific research, localisation, globalisation, Dracula.

1. Preliminaries

1.1. Dracula has long ceased to be a Romanian country brand. In an era of globalisation, this character has rapidly become not only a theme for literary and artistic creation (including cinematography, drama, music, and various visual arts), but also a subject for scientific research in many domains (among which, those to which this subject belongs): history, anthropology, psychology, ethnography, etc. From these perspectives, both the *character* and the historically-determined real *person* (who has given birth to the character) have generated interest for such research.

1.2. It is interesting to note that the research proves how the "Dracula" the mereveals a very early globalism – attested as such even during the very era that has given birth to this prototype – more precisely in our case, the reign of the Romanian prince Vlad the Impaler and the

BDD-A20383 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 21:38:59 UTC)

international historical context. We are used to affirming that globalism is a trait of modern history, more precisely belonging to postmodernism. In fact, the theme we are discussing here imposes a correction of this idea: globalism has accentuated very much, indeed, with the advance of communication technology and the new means of material interaction. However, the dialogue between cultures and civilizations had always existed – even including the period mistakenly named the "dark" Middle Ages. Researchers often mistakenly hold the implicit idea that this period is characterized by a conglomerate of isolated social and political and economic communities that were reduced to more or less autonomous forms of government, ranging from a state to a feud. Neither the isolation, nor the political, economic or spiritual self-determination of these peoples have been as powerful or widespread as commonly believed. The communication, the circulation of people, merchandises, ideas, and alliances – often strategically strengthened through family bonds – have assured the international character of human society, even with the conditions that were available at the time.

1.3. Directly linked to this globalization – a phenomenon that is both old and new – the myth of Dracula proves once more how fertile and effective international and interdisciplinary research can be. Actually, the topic itself is fertile in suggestions for human knowledge, but the interdisciplinary approach enhances its richness of ideas.

2. The end of Vlad III Drăculea – the beginning of new scientific investigation

2.1. The funerary monument of Naples and the Estonian-Italian research

A Romanian globetrotter notes in his travel log[1] the birth of a new piece of information regarding the place where the earthly remainders of Prince Dracula (known throughout history under the name of Vlad the Impaler, 1431-1476) have been buried. It is the *Santa Maria la Nova* church of Naples, a real religious monumental complex, which includes a museum

[1] Alex Săvulescu, „*Greenacord 2014 (4) – Mormântul lui Vlad Ţepeş din Napoli*", in: *Dilema Veche*, XII, nr. 578, 12-18 March 2015, p. 19. The author of the article is a journalist, translator and photographer who specializes in problems of communication pertaining to environmental issues – and has repeatedly signalled important data for European history.

BDD-A20383 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 21:38:59 UTC)

of contemporary religious art, in itself a masterpiece of artwork[2]. The information has become public after three Italian historians primed by an Estonian researcher have signed an article in the "*Il Matino*" newspaper of 17thJune 2014[3]. The three experts[4], have researched one of the tombs sheltered within the church – a funerary monument that had been very well-conserved and beautifully ornamented – a sign that inside the grave there were the remainders of a very important person. The symbolism of the adornments that were sculpted on the tombstone seemed very similar to that of the Dragon Order – a very strong order in Europe during the XIVth and the XVIth centuries[5]. It is known that Vlad Dracul, the son of Mircea the Elder and the father of Vlad the Impaler had been accepted in this exclusive princely organization[6]. Secondly, on the tombstone there are two sphinxes

[2] In fact, the entire area is filled with medieval religious monuments, well integrated with modern buildings and elements. The aforementioned author of the article mentions that nearby one can find the *Toledo* metro station – a masterpiece of urban utilitarian architecture, built in 2012 and already recognized as one of the most beautiful underground metro stations in the world.

[3] Cf. http://foto.ilmattino.it/italia/dracula-sepolto-a-napoli-ricercatori-al-lavoro/0-71742.shtml (17.06.2014). The news has been copied by the newspaper *Il Gazettino* and other Italian newspapers. We understand that the Ferillo family grave is situated somewhere close to the Santa Maria Nova place. What has always been known is that in this grave was buried, among others, the very person that was believed to be Vlad Ţepeş's "son-in-law".

[4] We are talking about Nicola Barbatelli, the director of the Old Populations Museum, and the Gini brothers, Giandomenico and Raffaelo.

[5]*The Order of the Dragon*, a European military and religious society with a Christian character, comparable to the *Sovereign Order of Malta* and the *Teutonic Order*, has been founded in 1387 by Sigismund of Luxembourg (king of Hungary, who later became the Emperor of Holy Roman Empire) and his wife, Barbara Cillei. The King of Naples himself, Ferrante D'Aragona, has belonged to this Order. Cf. Şt. Andreescu, 1998, pp. 189-191.

[6] Not only the father, Vlad Dracul the Ist, has been a member of this powerful organization, but also his son, Vlad Ţepeş himself was received among its members in Nürnberg, in 1431, as a good defender of Christianity that he was until that moment. However, in 1436 he was erased from the list of knights because he has made a pact with the Ottoman Empire just one year after being ordained by Sigismund of Luxembourg. Indeed, history attests that he has personally led the Ottoman army group to the siege of the Castle of Severin, leading to the killing of all Teuton knights who were defending the citadel at the time. Shortly afterwards, during the same year (1432), Vlad II Dracul strikes again, contributing to the conquest of the Castle of Caransebeş. This time, his breaching of the oath made in Nürnberg was even more severe: he has utilized his Order of the Dragon status to determine

BDD-A20383 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 21:38:59 UTC)

facing each other, which constitutes the symbol of Thebes. The aforementioned researchers have superficially performed a popular etymology – approaching the nickname of Vlad, *Ţepes* (="*the Impaler"*) to that of the popular (both antique and contemporary) Greek citadel of *Thebes*. This is a seductive phonetic association; however it is lexically and semantically unsupported, as can be clearly observed by any speaker of Romanian or Greek, even without having studied philology. However, the interpretation of the third sign seemed more believable: the three stars engraved on the tombstone could signify one element inŢepeş' title that has made him known throughout history – Vlad Drăculea the III[rd], the three Italian historians assert[7]. However, the fact that this information has appeared in a newspaper instead of a peer-reviewed scientific publication shows that the historians have not given this idea enormous credit. Therefore, this is only an interesting hypothesis…

2.2. The death of Vlad Ţepeş – the Italian version

The mysterious disappearance of the controversial Romanian prince in December 1476 (after a war with the Ottoman Empire nearby Bucharest), has fuelled – as expected – different explanations and speculations in the historical literature of all times and in all geographical locations. The identification of the tomb in Santa Maria Novo of Naples can only be justified *if one can explain the way* in which the remainders of Vlad the Impaler have arrived to Italy – at the foothills of Vesuvius.

Here intervenes a less known version of the history pertaining to the Wallach ruler's last stage of existence. This version is agreed upon and recalled by the local historians. They assert that one of Vlad Tepes' daughters[8] – namely *Maria* – had been sent to Naples *incognito*, from the

the guardians to open the gates of the citadel, and then decimated its population, unleashing a series of hold-ups and acts of harassment, taking a good portion of the population of Banat and southern Transylvania into slavery towards the South of Danube. Cf. N. Stoicescu, *op. cit.*

[7] According to other opinions, Vlad Ţepeş was Vlad the II[nd] Drăculea, and the III[rd] was his son, *Vlad Ţepeluş*.

[8] Officially, Vlad has had four sons and only one daughter: Radu and Vlad (Ţepeluş), were given birth by his first wife, Cnaejna. Mihai and Mihnea (the Wicked) were given birth by his second wife, Jusztina. Zalesca was brought to the world by his third wife, Ilona, cf. N.

BDD-A20383 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 21:38:59 UTC)

time her father was in power. During difficult times, when neither he nor his family have been exempted from misfortunes[9], the loving father wanted to protect at least one child from everything that was happening. Maria, aged seven at the time, was allegedly adopted by a noble Italian family and taken to Naples. Subsequently, she married the count Giacomo Alfonso Ferillo, and the newly-wed couple received the Acerenza Basilicata land property as a gift. According to information that is as disputable as other authors' hypotheses about the death of Vlad the Impaler, he was not assassinated in 1476, but captured and held hostage by the Turks: a situation in which Vlad Ţepeş has found himself many times before, for many accumulated years of his life[10]. It is known that the Turks would accept the liberation of a person that they were holding captive – but only under certain conditions, and when these people were bought back for a very high ransom. Such a transaction has allegedly happened in this particular case, according to some documents referred by the historians of the University of Tallin, Estonia, in a study whose results were later utilized by the Italian researchers. The person who generously paid their ransom was precisely the Wallach ex-prince's Italian son-in-law, who also assured his refuge in his palace, in Naples. Vlad the Impaler allegedly spent the last few years of his life here, in rest and quietude, far from the noise of the Balkan world. When he died, he was

Stoicescu, *op.cit.* Therefore, is Maria a fictitious character? The Italian versions of history maintain that the girl was adopted by a noble Neapolitan family and brought to Italy from the age of seven, cf. Hannnah Roberts "*Dracula's final resting place?*", in: Mail Online, 11 June 2014.

[9] He provoked the death of Vladislav the II[nd], who was both his enemy and his relative, cf. R. St. Vergatti, 1996, p. 14.

[10] From the age of 11 (since 1442) Vlad and his younger brother, Radu the Handsome, have been sent as hostages to Istanbul, as a guarantee of the unconditional submission to the Ottoman sultan Murad the II[nd], who had ordered the enthronement of Vlad the father at the head of Wallachia, at the Royal Court in Targoviste. Vlad the son has remained hostage to the Turks for over five years (until 1447), when their father was killed by Vladislav the II[nd]. Radu the Handsome remained in Istanbul for 20 years (until 1462). Between 1462 and 1474, Vlad the Impaler was incarcerated at Visegrad. The order for his incarceration was issued by Mathias Corvin. Vlad spent the time period between 1474 -1476 under house arrest in his home in Buda. Therefore, 19 of his 45 years of life have gone by in different forms of reclusion.

BDD-A20383 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 21:38:59 UTC)

buried with due ceremonies and ritual in the basilica where today we find the mysterious grave.

The fact that the building of the Santa Maria la Nova church (using associated styles – Renaissance and Baroque) only began in 1596 (namely, a century after the last records of Vlad the Impaler) does not seem to infirm the researchers' theory. The history of the landmark shows that the church was built in the place of an older church, mentioned in historical documents since 1279.

It is true that the Romanian version of the historiography differs very much from the above-described scenario. According to very largely accepted hypotheses, Vlad the Impaler was allegedly assassinated in 1476 by the Romanian boyars, and among them there were some of Vlad's very close relatives. This happened in the context of fratricide fights for the supreme function in governing the Romanian province Țara Românească (Wallachia), and in the context of the complicated relations with other Romanian provinces – Transylvania and The Country of Moldavia, as well as with the other forces in that geographical zone: Hungary, Austria, Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and others.

The head of Vlad's corpse has allegedly been taken to Istanbul, as proof for the complete execution of an order given from the highest instances of the Ottoman Empire. The body was allegedly buried, either at the Comana Monastery, or at the Monastery of Snagov – the available historical data is, in this respect too, contradictory[11].

3. Globalisation – from historical realities to scientific research

3.1. The trajectory of academic and scientific mobility

The person who is responsible for creating this new, alternative chapter of the history of Vlad Drăculea the III[rd], was not "*a PhD student from Tallin*" (as maintained by Alex Săvulescu, whom otherwise makes very well-researched statements) but the Neapolitan researcher Giandomenico Glini. He was the one who, after obtaining a scholarship from the University of Tallin in Estonia and beginning his research, stumbled upon the historical study that valued the legendary burial of Vlad Ţepeş in Naples. The perimeter of their archaeological investigations (that

[11] Cf. Constantin Rezachevici, 2012.

BDD-A20383 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 21:38:59 UTC)

were carried out by him, together with his brother, Raffaelo, and Nicola Barbatelli, the director of the Neapolitan Museum of Ancient Populations) was outside the church, namely, in the Santa Maria la Nova Place. There was, indeed, a young PhD student, Erika Stella, but she is of Italian origin, not Estonian, and her intervention took place shortly *after* the event with the three historians at the landmark. While preparing her thesis, she had arrived during her investigations to the mysterious tomb at the basilica of Santa Maria La Nova of Naples. She has signalled the collected data and formulated the first hypotheses, e-mailing the information not only to her Italian professors, but also the entire community of historians interested in this topic – including those in Estonia.

Therefore, today's system of international mobility for academic teaching and deepening scientific research programs has managed to reunite experts from a Baltic country, Estonia, and from a Western European country (Italy) in the face of a Romanian topic, the death of Vlad the Impaler, ruler of Wallachia. The bibliography that was used and the expertise of several specialists in the field has implied, of course, a broadening of the field of interests.

Romanian specialty studies have been revived and used, as well as studies done in Turkey, Greece, Germany, Hungary, United Kingdom and France. In today's research, no matter how local, national, and/or restricted to a certain geographic area the research topic may be, the research can only offer palpable results by being placed in an international and interdisciplinary context.

3.2. The Baltic countries, the Balkan countries and Western-European countries – historical connections

3.2.1. "The Neapolitan story" – as titled by the above-mentioned Romanian journalist – draws our attention to the connections made possible by the research topic – even when approached anecdotally. However, as we have stated, in the realm of the sciences, such connections impose themselves powerfully, for validating plausible conclusions, even though such conclusions may come after years of work and in-depth investigations. On the other hand, even in the day-to-day existence of human communities, the crossroads between destinies is a given of history. Facts that we are tempted to consider as isolated, belonging to a certain people, says the

BDD-A20383 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 21:38:59 UTC)

quoted author, prove themselves to be strongly linked to the existence of other peoples, no matter how far apart they were geographically and spiritually. That is because the whole of humanity constitutes a system – and this is not a recent acquisition of modern science, but a fact known throughout history – although ideas such as "structuralism" and "systematisation" seem to belong to contemporary thinking.

3.2.2. After all, why would a tomb bearing the memory of a Romanian historical personality interest a group of Lithuanian researchers? Even for Italian researchers, the fact that the monument is situated inside the territory of their country could have not engendered more than local interest. Yet, *the real person* (Vlad the Impaler) in Romanian history has become – thanks to the realm of *arts –a fictional character* (Dracula). Of course, we are talking about a symbol of evil that could dominate the history of humankind. However, this remains only an abstraction…

The answer is as simple and accessible as it is hidden in plain sight. The history of the three ethnic and cultural entities has been closely knit together, even from the era of Vlad the Impaler. Although considered a Wallachian – since his family has resided in Tîrgovişte (the capital of Wallachia at the time). Tîrgovişte was the location of his royal throne, for which he has fought and managed to hold for three consecutive times in his lifetime, and from which he has been ostracized and assassinated. However, Vlad the Impaler was born in Transylvania. Indeed, he had been born in Sighisoara[12], but when his time came to become married, he married, several times, women of Hungarian lineage belonging to the Magyar aristocracy from either Transylvania or ancient Hungary[13].

Continuing the thread of our argumentation, in the preceding century, the Fourteenth, Wallachia and the Kingdom of Naples had been, even though only briefly and in different times, under the suzerainty of the King Ludovic (Luis/Ladislau) the Ist of Hungary. In these conditions and given the context, the fact that in subsequent generations the members of his Romanian-Hungarian family have become siblings with families belonging

[12] Some historians hypnthesize the birth of Vlad the Impaler in Nürnberg, cf. R. St. Vergatti, 1998, p. 11.

[13] The first wife was, as outline previously, Cnaejna Bathory, the second – Jusztina Szilagy, and the third – Ilona Nelipici, Mathias Corvin's cousin.

BDD-A20383 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 21:38:59 UTC)

to Italian aristocracy is of no wonder today. Even Michael the Brave (1558-1601), as well as some of the most patriotic of the Romanian rulers have had such international family bonds, not only in neighbouring countries, but also in cities belonging to major powers such as Russia or Turkey – that is to say, precisely with families belonging to major enemies' territories. It was a form of manifestation of the phenomenon of "globalisation" – as we would call it today – specific to the era itself. Today it occurs as naturally as it did throughout history, but to a larger scale and at all levels of society. However, the phenomenon does not raise as much interest anymore, and is not considered as belonging strictly to royalty. It has become a mundane, everyday phenomenon.

On the other hand, Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia and other states have found themselves in strategic political relations, with military, economic and cultural consequences, and with "guarantees" of family bonds throughout those centuries. In the Sixteenth Century, the king Stefan Bathory was the ruler of the portion of Hungary that lied beyond Tisza, but also of Transylvania and, at the same time, he was the supreme leader of the Polish-Lithuanian Union. He was the one who issued from Vilnius (the ancient and modern capital of Lithuania) the Foundation Decree for the University of Cluj, in 1581. The first rector of this institution was a Lithuanian scholar[14].

Therefore, interests become interwoven on all plans, in real history, in scientific research and in the abstract world of artistic fiction.

4. Conclusions

1. The history of the world's peoples has been interwoven to a much more profound, and, at the same time, more subtle level than we are ready to believe today. Today's globalisation has strong roots in the past.

2. "Knowledge-driven society" is a term we use nowadays that implies the globalisation in the field of research more than any other field.

[14] On the 12th of May 1581 Stefan Bathory has issued, from Vilnius, the Diploma of Foundation of the Jesuit College of Cluj, with the grade of academia, and, at the same time, the order for naming Jakon Wujek (Vangrovitius) as rector. The institution was situated on Platea Luporum (today, the M. Kogalniceanu street) and has organized courses for 230 students, who studied their degrees in Latin.

BDD-A20383 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 21:38:59 UTC)

3. The real society and scientific and academic research sustain each other and both manifest a tendency towards universalization.

4. The real, "objective" data available about the lives of real-world characters seems to be complemented by something that seems its opposite, but is, in reality, its complement: the field of *fiction*. The proof lies in the fact that the number of tourists visiting the Santa Maria la Nova church has raised since July 2014.

Bibliography

ANDREESCU, Vlad, 1998, *Vlad Ţepeş (Dracula) - între legendă şi adevăr*, Bucureşti: Editura Enciclopedică. Cf. şi *Vlad the Impaler (Dracula)*, Romanian Foundation Cultural Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999.

DJUVARA, Neagu, 2010, *De la Vlad Ţepeş la Dracula Vampirul*, Bucureşti: Humanitas Junior.

FLORESCU, Radu; McNELLY, Raymond, 1972, *Dracula - Prince of Many Faces. His Life and His Times*, New York/Boston: Brown and Company.

REZACHEVICI, Constantin, „Unde a fost mormântul lui Vlad Ţepeş? (II)", în: *Magazin istoric*, Bucureşti, nr. 3, 2012, p. 41.

SĂVULESCU, Alex, „Greenacord 2014 (4) – Mormântul lui Vlad Ţepeş din Napoli", în: *Dilema Veche*, XII, nr. 578, 12-18 martie 2015, p. 19.

STOIAN, Emil, 1989, *Vlad Ţepeş – mit şi realitate*, Bucureşti: Editura Albatros.

STOICESCU, Nicolae, 1976, *Vlad Ţepeş*, Bucureşti: Editura Academiei. Cf. şi versiunile în limbile engleză, japoneză şi greacă.

VERGATTI, Radu Ştefan, 1996, *Vlad Ţepeş - Dracula...*, Bucureşti: Editura „Minerva".

BDD-A20383 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 21:38:59 UTC)