

# VLAD THE IMPALER

## THE MAN BEHIND THE MYTH

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In 1442, the ruler of Wallachia (present-day Romania) embarked on a diplomatic mission into the heart of the Ottoman Empire. Vlad II, had been fighting against the Ottomans in defense of Christianity for the past eleven years. While Vlad II's attention had been on the Ottoman Empire, the prince of Transylvania had begun to encroach upon Wallachia and Vlad II needed Murad's help. Vlad, who had been given the surname Dracul (Romanian for "dragon") knew it was a long shot but decided to take his chances anyway. He journeyed to make his plea in person along with his two sons: seven-year-old Radu and eleven-year-old Vlad III, also known by the name Dracula ("son of Dracul").



Vlad II ultimately received the military support he sought from the Ottomans, but it came at a price. In addition to an annual fee, the Wallachian ruler agreed to leave his two sons behind as political prisoners to ensure his loyalty until Wallachia was secured. The boys were held hostage in a picturesque citadel high atop a rocky precipice over the town of Tokat. During his five years of captivity inside the fortress, bitter anger festered inside young Vlad III and his hatred of the Ottomans surged. After his release and eventual succession to the Wallachian throne, the prince's venom against the Ottoman Empire would be unleashed in such a brutal fashion that centuries later he is known simply as Vlad the Impaler and is the real-life inspiration for a classic horror tale.



Now, according to Turkish newspaper, Hurriyet Daily News, archaeologists working on the restoration of Tokat Castle in northern Turkey have discovered the dungeons where the Ottomans held Vlad III and his brother hostage. The dungeons inside the ancient fortress were "built like a prison," archaeologist Ibrahim Cetin told the Turkish newspaper. "It is hard to estimate in which room Dracula was kept," Cetin admitted, "but he was around here. The castle is completely surrounded by secret tunnels. It is very mysterious."

What isn't as mysterious is what happened to Vlad III after his release from Tokat Castle around the time his father was brutally killed in 1447. He ascended to the throne in 1456 and maintained his barbaric rule through torture, mutilation and mass murder. Victims were disemboweled, beheaded and skinned or boiled alive.

By 1462 Vlad, now prince of Wallachia and Transylvania, was at war with the Ottomans. Greatly outnumbered, Vlad III and his troops hid in the Romanian forests and relied on savage guerilla tactics. His forces poisoned wells, burned crops and paid diseased men to infiltrate Ottoman ranks and pass along their illnesses. It was a gruesome mass killing, however, that led to his nickname, the Impaler, when he ordered

20,000 Ottoman prisoners to be impaled on wooden stakes outside. This barbaric act sickened the Ottoman prince into retreat.

The legend of Vlad the Impaler's brutality grew after his death as stories spread that he dined on the impaled bodies of his victims and even dipped his bread into their blood. The dark tales served as inspiration for Irish novelist Bram Stoker who, in 1897, penned a Gothic novel about a vampire who shared a Transylvanian connection and nickname with Vlad the Impaler—Dracula.

