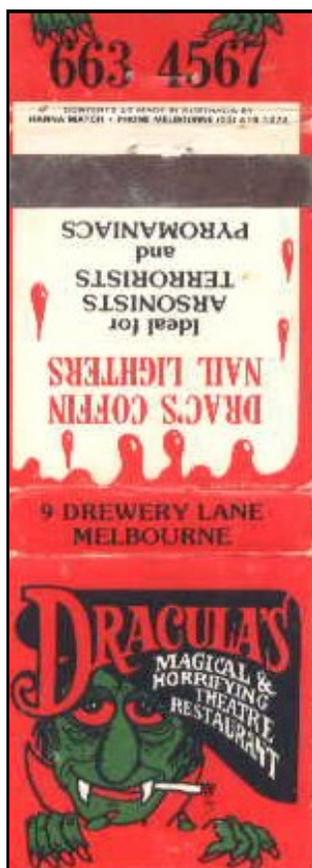


Dracula -The Life of Vlad III (1431-1476)

Little is known about the early years of Vlad III's life. In 1444, at the age of thirteen, young Vlad and his brother Radu were sent to Adrianople as hostages, to appease the Sultan. He remained there until 1448, at which time he was released by the Turks, who supported him as their candidate for the Wallachian throne. Vlad III's initial reign was quite short (two months), and it was not until 1456, under the support of Hunyadi and the Kingdom of Hungary that he returned to the throne. He established Tirgoviste as his capitol city, and began to build his castle some distance away in the mountains near the Arges River. Most of the atrocities associated with Vlad III took place during this time.

In 1461 Mohammed II, the conqueror of Constantinople, a man not noted for his squeamishness, returned to Constantinople after being sickened by the sight of twenty thousand impaled Turkish prisoners outside of the city of Tirgoviste. This gruesome sight is remembered in history as "the Forest of the Impaled." Thousands were often impaled at a single time. Although impalement was Vlad Dracula's favorite method of torture, it was by no means his only method. The list of tortures employed by this cruel prince reads like an inventory of hell's tools: nails in heads, cutting off of limbs, blinding, strangulation, burning, cutting off of noses and ears, etc. No one was immune to Vlad's attentions. His victims included women and children, peasants and great lords, ambassadors from foreign powers and merchants. However, the vast majority of his victims came from the merchants and boyars of Transylvania and his own Wallachia. Many have attempted to justify Vlad Dracula's actions on the basis of nascent nationalism and political necessity, but few deny that he derived a perverted pleasure from his actions.

Vlad Tepes' atrocities against the people of Wallachia were usually attempts to enforce his own moral code upon his country. He appears to have been particularly concerned with female chastity. Vlad also insisted that his people be honest and hard working. Merchants who cheated their customers were likely to find themselves mounted on a stake beside common thieves.



Although Vlad III experienced some success in fending off the Turks, his accomplishments were relatively short-lived and the Turks finally succeeded in forcing Vlad to flee to Transylvania in 1462. Vlad escaped through a secret passage and fled across the mountains into Transylvania and appealed to Matthias Corvinus for aid. The king immediately had Vlad arrested and imprisoned in a royal tower. There is some debate as to the exact length of Vlad's confinement, but during this period he was able to gradually win his way back into the graces of Matthias Corvinus and ultimately met and married a member of the royal family and fathered two sons. It is unlikely that a prisoner would be allowed to marry a member of the royal family. As the eldest son was about 10 years old at the point Vlad regained the Wallachian throne in 1476, his release probably occurred around 1466.

In 1476 Vlad was again ready to make a bid for power. Vlad 'Dracula' (= son of Dracul) and Prince Stephen Bathory of Transylvania invaded Wallachia with a mixed contingent of forces. Vlad's brother, Radu, had by then already died and was replaced by Basarab the Old, a member of the Danesti clan. At the approach of Vlad's army, Basarab and his cohorts fled. However, shortly after retaking the throne, Prince Bathory and most of Vlad's forces returned to Transylvania, leaving Vlad in a vulnerable position. Before he was able to gather support, a large Turkish army entered Wallachia. Vlad was forced to march and meet the Turks with less than four thousand men. Vlad Dracula was killed in battle against the Turks near the town of Bucharest in December of 1476. Some reports indicate that he was assassinated by disloyal Wallachian boyars just as he was about to sweep the Turks from the field. Other accounts have him falling in defeat, surrounded by the ranks of his loyal Moldavian bodyguard. The one undisputed fact is that ultimately his body was decapitated by the Turks and his head sent to Constantinople where the sultan had it displayed on a stake as proof that the horrible Impaler was finally dead. He was reportedly buried at Snagov, an island monastery located near Bucharest.