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FROM VLAD THE IMPALER TO DRACULA THE VAMPIRE

TRANSLATED FROM ROMANIAN BY
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STORY
NEAGU DJUVARA

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Page 1: Modern engraving by Radu Oltean
Page 2: The Tîrnava altar – late fifteenth-century (detail)

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1. Where does the cognomen *Dracula* or *Drăculea* come from?

Dear Friends, we parted in sadness, at the death of our great Prince Mircea the Elder. After a thirty-two-year reign, full of great deeds, he had been forced by inimical fate to cede land to the Turks, yielding them the Danube forts and paying an annual tribute, but preserving the country's independence, with its ruling prince (*Domn*), institutions, customs, boyars and, above all, its Church.

31 January 1418:
the death of
Mircea the Elder.

His older son, Mihai, whom, as I have told you, he had made joint ruler to ensure that he would succeed him without fail, unfortunately died only one and a half years later. There followed a sixteen-year period of struggle for the throne: according to our ill-starred system of succession, not only Mircea's other sons, but also the "Dănești", the descendents of Dan, Mircea's older brother, seized the throne in turn, each being the tool of one of the boyar "parties". Of the sons of Mircea, can you imagine that one, Radu, who reigned twice for short periods, was nicknamed Radu



The city of Nuremberg – period engraving (fifteenth-century). On 8 February 1431, in the city’s cathedral, a ceremony took place to receive Wallachian Prince Vlad into the ranks of the Knights of the Order of the Dragon.

Prasnaglava, which in Slavonic means “empty-head”, in other words “Radu the Stupid”!

January 1437: Vlad Dracul ascends the throne.

Alexandru Aldea, another of Mircea’s sons, revealed himself to be so subservient to the Turks, in spite of them constantly pillaging the land, that a group of boyars fled to Transylvania and sought the help of Sigismund of Luxembourg, the King of Hungary (with whom you will be familiar from when I told you about the great Battle of Nicopolis). They asked him to help them overthrow Alexandru Aldea and replace him on the throne with Vlad, who was also one of Mircea’s sons. And so it was that Vlad came to the throne. He was to reign eleven years in all, with

Sigismund of Luxembourg, the King of Hungary and then Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, towards the end of his life, as the future Prince Vlad Dracul knew him



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