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## THE IMAGE OF DRACULA IN THE LIGHT OF THE IDEOLOGICAL ISSUES OF "THE TALE OF DRACULA THE VOIEVODE"

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### Abstract

"The Tale of Dracula the Voievode" is presumed to have been written by a Duma deacon Fedor Vasil'evič Kuricyn around 1484 in Akkerman (Principality of Moldova). Fedor Kuricyn met with Stephen the Great on a diplomatic visit in Suceava and with Matthias Corvinus in Buda. In Moscow, where a significant Moldavian diaspora existed at the time, he was one of the supporters of Stephen's daughter, Elena Voloshanka, and her son Dmitrij, in their struggle for the Moscow throne. Despite being authored less than ten years after Dracula's death, the "Tale" does not assume a biographical character. Instead, it represents a utopia (or dystopia, depending on one's perspective) with elements of anti-conduct, addressing the image of an ideal ruler.

This article analyzes the work from the perspective of the peculiarities of medieval consciousness and worldview, primarily focusing on religious beliefs and attitudes toward cruelty and explores the poetics of "The Tale".

The uniqueness of the work lies in the fact that "The Tale" is the first known record of original Russian fiction, a narrative that did not enter into chronicle compilations and was dedicated to a hero who lacked significance as a historical figure. The author was well-informed about the circumstances of the real Vlad Dracula's life, but not only did he not strive to describe well-known events consciously, but deliberately avoided such an opportunity. The author clearly saw the distinction between the negative portrayal of Vlad Dracula from the "German pamphlets", the real voievode Vlad III Basarab, and his own fictional character. The author did not adhere to medieval biographical templates; he did not mention the hero's name, did not recount his origin and childhood years, and avoided describing details of the prototype's life. The character of the hero was contradictory and ambiguous, not conforming to any of the conventional archetypes in medieval Russian literature – be it the ideal prince, the clergyman, the boyar, the warrior, the saint, or the holy fool. The author refrained from moralizing and expressing an explicit stance toward the hero, a departure uncommon for the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. "The Tale of Dracula the Voievode" represents a utopia, and the land of "Muntenia" serves as an anti-world, a fantastical realm where the impossible becomes possible in the conventional world. The narrative did not belong to the genre of contemporary church-moralistic literature and did not align with any of the recognized genres and styles of Old Russian literature.

The parable of the two monks constitutes the central episode in "The Tale of Dracula the Voievode". The monks' judgments anticipatorily echo the polemics between Ivan the Terrible and Andrej Kurbskij, as well as the discussion on the role of the Orthodox Sovereign that unfolded in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the works of Russian scribes. The reader is

invited to choose the side of one of the monks, and the key to the parable lies within the framework of Russian providential doctrines.

**Keywords:** *Dracula, Fedor Kuricyn, the parable of the two monks, cruelty, the image of the ideal ruler, martyrdom and tyranny, the Third Rome, the Middle Ages, Russian literature, utopia.*

### Rezumat

„Povestirea despre Dracula Voievodul” se presupune că a fost scrisă de un diacon al Dumei Cnezatului Moscovei, Fiodor Vasilevici Kurițîn, în jurul anului 1484 la Cetatea Albă (Țara Moldovei). Fiodor Kurițîn s-a întâlnit cu Ștefan cel Mare într-o vizită diplomatică la Suceava și cu Matei Corvin la Buda. La Moscova, unde exista o diasporă moldovenească însemnată la acea vreme, el a sprijinit facțiunea formată în jurul fiicei lui Ștefan, Elena Voloșanka și a fiului ei Dmitri, în lupta facțiunii pentru scaunul Moscovei. În ciuda faptului că a fost scrisă la mai puțin de zece ani de la moartea lui Dracula, „Povestirea” nu își asumă un caracter biografic. În schimb, ea reprezintă o utopie (sau distopie, în funcție de perspectiva aplicată) cu elemente de anti-conduită, abordând imaginea unui conducător ideal.

Articolul analizează lucrarea din perspectiva particularităților conștiinței medievale și a viziunii asupra lumii, concentrându-se în primul rând pe credințele religioase și atitudinile față de cruzime și explorează poetica „Povestirii”.

Unicitatea operei constă în faptul că „Povestirea” este primul text cunoscut al ficțiunii originale rusești, o narațiune care nu a intrat în compilații de cronici și a fost dedicată unui erou care nu prezenta interes ca personaj istoric. Autorul a fost bine informat despre împrejurările vieții adevăratului Vlad Dracula, dar nu numai că nu s-a străduit să descrie în mod conștient evenimente cunoscute, dar a evitat în mod deliberat o astfel de ocazie. Autorul a văzut clar distincția dintre portretizarea negativă a lui Vlad Dracula din „pamfletele germane”, adevăratul voievod Vlad al III-lea Basarab și propriul său personaj. Autorul nu a aderat la modelele biografice medievale; nu a menționat numele eroului, nu a povestit despre originea și anii copilăriei acestuia și a evitat să descrie detaliile vieții prototipului. Caracterul eroului era contradictoriu și ambiguu, neconform cu niciunul dintre arhetipurile convenționale din literatura rusă medievală – fie că este vorba despre prinț, duhovnic, boier, războinic, sfânt sau nebun întru Hristos. Autorul s-a abținut să moralizeze și să exprime o poziție explicită față de erou, o abatere neobișnuită pentru sfârșitul secolului al XV-lea.

„Povestirea despre Dracula Voievodul” reprezintă o utopie, iar Muntenia servește drept anti-lume, un tărâm fantastic în care imposibilul devine posibil în lumea convențională. Narațiunea nu aparține genului literaturii bisericești-moraliste a timpului și nu se alinia la niciunul dintre genurile și stilurile recunoscute ale literaturii ruse vechi.

Pilda celor doi călugări constituie episodul central din „Povestirea despre Dracula Voievodul”, judecățile călugărilor fac ecou anticipator la polemicele dintre Ioan cel Groaznic și Andrei Kurbsky, precum și la discuția despre rolul Suveranului Ortodox care s-a desfășurat în a doua jumătate a secolului al XVI-lea în lucrările scribilor ruși. Cititorul este invitat să ia partea unuia dintre călugări, iar cheia pildei se află în cadrul doctrinelor providențiale rusești.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *Dracula, Kurițîn, pilda celor doi călugări, cruzime, imaginea domnitorului ideal, martiriu și tiranie, a treia Roma, Evul Mediu, literatura rusă, utopie.*

## 1. The Image of an Ideal Ruler and Ideas about the Role of the Sovereign in a Christian State

Researchers of medieval texts do not always take into account the peculiarities of the consciousness of individuals in the past – the intensity of eschatological experiences, a more relaxed attitude towards cruelty and violence, the belief in magical rituals, a propensity for mysticism and superstitions, the attention to omens and prophecies, the heightened emotionalism, the coarseness of manners, and so forth. It is important to delve into the intricacies of medieval thought, to understand the theology (soteriology, eschatology) of that time, particularly the notions of the special role of the divinely appointed ruler for collective salvation in a pious state.

Concepts regarding the special role of the divinely appointed ruler for collective salvation in a pious state significantly predate the "Moscow - Third Rome" concept and the legends of the Rurikids' descent from the Emperor Augustus. In the "Primary Chronicle" (*Повесть/ Povest'*, p. 182), we find: "So he thought in his pride, not knowing that 'God gives power to whom He wants, for the Most High appoints the emperor and prince as He pleases'. But if any country becomes pleasing to God, then He appoints for it a righteous emperor or prince who loves justice and law, and grants a ruler and judge to govern. For if the princes are just in the land, many sins are forgiven that land; but if they are wicked and deceitful, then even greater calamity does God send upon that land because the prince is the head of the land" (possibly a reminiscence of the Book of the Prophet Daniel, warning King Belshazzar about the inevitable retribution).

The Chosen Sovereign cares about the purity of faith, becoming a defender of justice and an executor of God's punishments, as the world lies in evil, and human nature is defiled by sin. His ultimate goal is to guide his subjects towards obtaining eternal life, and by punishing the guilty, the lord saves them not from earthly fire but from the fire of the afterlife. By punishing his subjects, the king, willingly or unwillingly, may harm his own soul and perhaps even sacrifice personal salvation. However, the Sovereign is more likely to save others – rather than himself, and only his trust in God's mercy can strengthen him spiritually.

The impending retribution for the king's own sins does not exempt subjects from the obligation to obey him, nor does it diminish his charisma. Another characteristic of medieval thinking is worth noting here: a sinner, whether ruler or priest, does not save his soul, but this does not diminish the effectiveness of the sacramental acts he performs. The king is not subject to human judgment and is not obliged to be accountable to his subjects, let alone share power with them. Attempts to hold the king accountable were dismissed as manifestations of wickedness and even blasphemy. The Sovereign is subordinate only to God and serves only Him; subjects receive the law from the sovereign and are obligated to obey him entirely as a person anointed by God.

At the same time, the Church occasionally insisted on its exclusive right to determine under what circumstances a monarch ceases to be a divine appointee since only the Church proclaims the will of God. Only it alone is capable of distinguishing between "Tyrannus" and "Rex Iustus," and only the Church can release subjects from the obligation to obey a tyrant. Advocates of unlimited monarchy pointed to the contradiction with the well-known saying of the apostle Paul, asserting that one must submit to all authorities since there can be no authority that is not from God (*Epistle to the Romans*, Chapter 13). Thomas Aquinas also writes about this in the "Summa Theologiae": it cannot be excluded that the ruler's arbitrariness is an evil sent to the subjects for their sins; in any case, resistance is a sin.

Medieval writings often contain poorly reconcilable ideas: freedom of will and divine predestination; earthly and posthumous retribution; the personal responsibility of the Sovereign as a human and as a servant of God. The illogicality of these contradictions might go unnoticed or be perceived as apparent, for God is the truth, and if something is incomprehensible or seems contradictory to us mortals, it is merely a consequence of our imperfection. The word of God, as it appears in any work of Christian literature, is not only created by faith but also perceived through faith.

To a modern person, it may seem that submission to one God implied the arbitrariness of royal authority. Here is how V. Val'denberg wrote about it: "Some find that the doctrine of the afterlife responsibility of kings before God is an insufficient restraint for selfish aspirations and that earthly responsibility would appeal more to people. But this is hardly entirely true. For religiously inclined people who have a living faith, the afterlife responsibility is a very real force and can restrain where responsibility before any earthly tribunals would be powerless" (Вальденберг/Val'denberg, 2006, p. 174). The limit of royal authority lies in the truths of the Orthodox faith, and the king cannot change them; he is obliged to observe them in any case.

In Rus, the limits of princely power were discussed by scholars in several aspects: the possibility of the prince's intervention in church affairs (particularly the possibility of punishing heretics), the church's involvement in secular matters (the question of monastery property), and the role of boyars in state affairs. Both before the reign of Vasile the Dark and afterward, there were two directions—one recognizing the prince's intervention in church affairs and another denying his right to intervene; both of these directions continued to exist and had their prominent representatives (*idem*, p. 145).

## 2. The Concept of Russian Messianism and the Doctrine of the "New Rome"

Perceptions of the exclusive role of the ruler in an ideal state were seen as part of the doctrine of the "wandering kingdoms," stemming from the Book of the Prophet Daniel (Daniel, 2: 36-45). According to the prophecy, in the

earthly human history, there will be four kingdoms endowed with special divine grace, but the fourth kingdom will fall under the pressure of the forces of the Antichrist. Then, an eternal kingdom of God will be established: "In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (Daniel, 2: 44). The Book of the Prophet Daniel, as well as its interpretations from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, were known in Rus. In the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, as part of the Gennadij's Bible, the Third Book of Ezra was translated, which also contained prophecies about the end of the world and the four kingdoms.

The "Romean kingdom" appears with the coming of the Savior to the Earth, as Christ, according to the testimony of the evangelist Luke, "registered itself under Roman authority" - declared himself a citizen of the Roman Empire. Thus, divine grace through Christ passed on to Rome, transforming it into a mystical image of the "indestructible" Christian Kingdom.

After the fall of Byzantium (attributed by Russian theologians to the Florentine Union and the sins of the Byzantine elite), the Christian world, in the understanding of the Orthodox Church, contracted almost to the borders of Rus, and Moscow bore the greatest historical responsibility - to be the defender of Orthodoxy. The first decades after the catastrophe were marked by expectations of the miraculous liberation of Constantinople from the infidels. However, it became evident that Rus had to be the "New Rome," and this idea began to be articulated as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century: Metropolitan Zosima the Bearded formulated the foundations of the doctrine of "Moscow as the Third Rome," and later, Elder Philotheus, a monk of the Pskov Eleazar Monastery, wrote (*Послание.../Poslanie...*, 2000, p. 290): "Know, O lover of Christ and God, that all Christian kingdoms have come to an end and descended into the one kingdom of our sovereign, according to the prophetic books, namely, the Roman Empire. For two Romes have fallen, but the third stands, and there will be no fourth". The doctrine of "Moscow as the Third Rome" emerges as a religious doctrine of the continuity of the world's Christian kingdoms, an eschatological teaching based on a providential approach to the destinies of the world, but not on the idea of national exclusivity or Byzantine heritage.

We are currently examining the situation at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century when the ideology shifted from an eschatological concept of the "End times" to the concept of the Third Rome. However, messianic ideas began to appear in Rus almost from the time of its baptism. In the "Word on Law and Grace," Metropolitan Hilarion of Kiev (*Слово.../Slovo...*, 1997, p. 26) retells the Old Testament story of Hagar, Abraham's maidservant, and his wife Sarah, equating Isaac ("the son of the free woman") with the followers of Christianity and Ishmael ("the son of the slave woman") with the Jews. Hilarion emphasizes that the Law appeared before Grace, just as Ishmael was born before Isaac. Therefore, just as Abraham rejected Hagar, the Lord rejected

Israel (Matthew, 21: 43). The Gospel will spread throughout the land, while the "lake of the Law has dried up." Hilarion likens the old wineskins from the parable to the Jews and the new ones to the pagans who embraced grace through baptism and communion. Rus adopted Christianity later than other "tongues" and there was a short time between the baptism of Rus and Hilarion's speech, undoubtedly carrying a providential meaning.

### 3. On Cruelty

In the works of historians and cultural scholars dedicated to the peculiarities of medieval consciousness (A. Gurevich, F. Ariès, M. Bloch, J. Huizinga, C.-G. Jung, and others), we do not find attempts to comprehend the connections between the phenomenon of cruelty and the epoch. Of course, there are plenty of descriptions of the tortures themselves, for instance, in P. Ganuškin's works. Statements are made that the phenomenon of cruelty had its own understanding and interpretation in different historical epochs, distinct from others, but such understanding usually comes from philosophers, legal historians, and not philologists.

People of the Middle Ages were sincerely convinced of the necessity of severe punishments - Christian love had no relation to criminals. What mattered was that the punishments were just - "like fault, like punishment," as the well-known saying goes. Calls for "gentleness" from monks and scholars should not deceive anyone - the same people advocated ruthless punishment for heretics, and the contradictions between cruel executions and the commandment "thou shalt not kill" were not apparent to the people of that time.

In the nature of things, there is nothing that could distinguish good from evil: good is what aligns with the will of God, and evil is what contradicts it. "If someone kills by the will of God, every act of human compassion is the best killing; and if someone shows mercy and compassion through the will of God, and it is not pleasing to Him, such mercy will be more dissimilar to killing; for it is not the nature of things, but the judgments of God, that make good and evil" (J. Chrysostom, *Against the Jews*, Discourse 4).

Cruelty was considered to be unmotivated, senseless violence, much like it is today. However, the mere sight of death, blood, and tortures did not disturb the medieval person. In Western Europe, torture was a completely ordinary, normal method of conducting investigations (ordeals) not only in the dark Middle Ages but also in the Renaissance of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. In Russian legislation, trial by combat persisted until the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Grotesque cruelty, in the modern sense, was entirely compatible with righteousness for medieval people, as were other actions and manifestations that seem unacceptable to us today. Each era has its truths and misconceptions, and to learn to understand, one must look into the past without condemnation or servility, without imposing one's own misconceptions and truths on the time.

#### 4. The perception of the phenomenon of cruelty in the tradition of studying "The Tale of Dracula the Voievode"

Here is what we read from Y. Lur'e: "Let us note once again: we by no means consider the 'Tale of Dracula' an official work whose purpose was to depict the ideal ruler. No authority in the world would acknowledge its identity with the 'devil' feasting among stakes on which the bodies of those executed by him decayed" (Лурье/Lur'e, 1964, p. 56). Let's try to show that this opinion is mistaken – the authority could very well wish to appear exactly like that. To do this, we will compare Dracula with the "Voievode Stephen of Moldova" mentioned in the "Narrative." Stephen the Great (Stephen III Mushat) in some sense is the historical counterpart of the real Vlad III Basarab: Stephen was Vlad's contemporary and cousin, their methods were externally indistinguishable – Stephen also cruelly punished boyars, impaled traitors, and employed scorched-earth tactics against the Turks, while Vlad engaged in charity and monastery construction, making donations to Mount Athos. Perhaps Stephen was more calculated and fortunate, but when it comes to cruelty, it is unlikely that a modern person can discern shades of brutality and recklessness between Stephen and Vlad.

Here are several excerpts from the "Moldavian-German Chronicle" (*Молдавско-немецкая летопись/Moldavsko-nemeckaja letopis'*, 1976, p. 48): "In the month of February, on the 27<sup>th</sup> day, Voievode Stephen went to Braila in Muntenia and shed much blood, burned the market, and did not spare even a child in the mother's womb; he cut open the bellies of pregnant women and hung the infants by their necks. The Lord helped him to destroy them, those whom they caught alive, he ordered to be impaled on stakes in a cross-like manner through the navel, approximately 2300 in total; and he was occupied with this for two days (...) and went to Suceava with a great booty and joy, praising the Lord God with his bishops and deacons, because with His help, it was possible to accomplish such".

"In October, on the first day, Voievode Stephen again set out with Basarab and a large army to Muntenia and approached the castle called Telezhan, took the governor captive, and cut off his head. And captured many of his Gypsies who were there, and ordered many Gypsies to be cut down, so that blood flowed from the castle; and he set Basarab again as the ruler of the country, handed over the country to him, and punished many boyars who did not want to obey him" (*idem*, p. 50).

It might seem that the chronicler was an enemy of Stephen the Great, but - nothing of the sort, the chronicle was commissioned by the ruler of Moldova, moreover, it was written in the German language to present the Lord to Europe in a dignified manner. There is no doubt that this is exactly how he wanted to be perceived. Who, besides the Lord, could grant victory to Stephen? It was God's will for Stephen to eliminate traitors in Braila to the last man, and the Church was by the Lord's side.

In 1502, Stephen sent the chronicle to Nuremberg, a quarter of a century after Vlad's death. It is highly likely that Stephen was familiar with the writ-

ings about Dracula and could observe the effect produced by these writings. But perhaps Stephen did not need this – he knew his contemporaries. Thus, the "Moldavian-German Chronicle" could exaggerate Stephen's cruelty. In any case, the existence of such documents should change the researcher's attitude toward the "Tale of Dracula" (*ibidem*).

Here is what the philologist M. Odesskij writes: "Dracula's cruelty was pathological even for those dark times. Cruel to enemies, allies, and subjects alike: he chopped heads, burned, skinned, forced cannibalism, boiled alive, disemboweled, impaled on stakes, etc. The stakes varied - depending on the social status of the condemned - in length, diameter, color, and were arranged into elaborate geometric shapes, something like a 'garden of torture'" (Михайлова, Одесский/Мihajlova, Odesskij, 2009, p. 74). "Europeans perceived his bloodthirsty sophistication as some kind of Eastern exotic, absolutely inappropriate in a 'civilized' state" (*idem*, p. 80). In other words, M. Odesskij is convinced that the real Vlad III Basarab stood out for pathological cruelty (which, in general, is not derived from anywhere), and considers cruelty precisely as a method of execution. The researcher seriously believes that such a barbaric method of execution was exotic and inappropriate in Europe. However, legal historians tell us that "qualified executions" (various sophisticated punishments for different crimes) came to Eastern Europe from the West, where executions were more frequent, for a greater number of offenses, and differed in greater diversity (РоЖнов/Rožnov, 2008, p. 42-59). The practice of public sadistic executions in Western Europe continued significantly longer: just remember the execution of Robert-François Damiens, which took place in the Greve Square in Paris on March 28, 1757 - only thirty-six years before the French Revolution. Details of this execution are reproduced in the testimonies of contemporaries and the periodical press of that time.

"Damien was supposed to be quartered, but first he was pulled on the rack, then burned with burning sulfur, pieces of muscle were torn with red-hot tongs, nipples were pulled out, and molten lead, boiling oil and burning resin were poured into fresh wounds. The priests at this time called on him to repent. He was then tied to four horses to be torn to pieces. The horses were torn, they were whipped, Damien screamed terribly, but they still could not tear off at least one leg or arm. We added more horses, tried to direct the horses differently, but to no avail. After several attempts, one of the horses fell. Then Damien's body was cut at the hips and armpits, the horses pulled and tore off his leg. The crowd in the square and the aristocrats in the windows clapped their hands. When all the limbs were torn off, the body was still breathing, the victim's eyes scanned the crowd. What was left of Damien was thrown onto the fire, and after burning, the ashes were scattered to the wind" (Емельянова/Emel'janova, 2012, p. 65).

In discussing Italians, Y. Lur'e acknowledges that "cruelty" can be useful and necessary for a ruler (Лур'е/Lur'e, 1964, p. 51): "Thus, the cruelty of



Dracula did not contradict Bonfini's assessment of him as a just ruler. On the contrary, cruelty and rage (as well as 'Phoenician cunning') were deemed by the Italian humanist as necessary attributes of rulers in certain cases. Here, inevitably, we are reminded of a like-minded contemporary of Bonfini, the Florentine Niccolò Machiavelli". At the same time, Y. Lur'e consistently condemns Ivan the Terrible, repeatedly referring to him as the "Russian Dracula" (Лурье/Lur'e, 1964, pp. 53, 71, 76 and others), without considering the ruler's motivations. However, if one delves into the number of victims and the intricacy of executions, Torquemada, Henry VIII, and Cromwell significantly exceeded Ivan the Terrible. Moreover, Ivan the Terrible condemned the beating of Huguenots during the St. Bartholomew's Night.

Perhaps, due to immersion in the literary image, researchers overlook the piety of the real Vlad III Basarab - no one mentions the churches he built, the lands and villages he donated to monasteries, or the sacrifices made at Mount Athos, as it does not align with the image of the mythical Dracula. Meanwhile, well-known charters to monasteries in Cozia, Tismana, Comana, Snagov, and the Monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mount Athos have been preserved and are well known to Romanian historians. In the Govora Monastery, there is a bell with the inscription, "This bell was cast in the name of our Lord God and St. Nicholas in the year 6965 (from the creation of the world)" - that is, in 1457, at the beginning of Vlad's rule. In the church near the town of Târgșor, a stone slab with the following inscription has survived: "By the grace of God, Vlad, Voievode and lord of all the land of Wallachia, son of the great Voievode Vlad, built and completed this church on June 24, in the year 6969 (1461), indiction 9" - and this is only what has come down to our time.

##### **5. Plot and Composition of "The Tale"**

Between Vlad's death and the creation of the narrative, less than ten years elapsed, yet "The Tale of Dracula the Voievode" is by no means a biographical account. In terms of structure and composition, the work can be divided into two parts. The first part comprises a collection of parable-like stories united by a common character and theme, while the second part is connected by a certain plot - the story of Dracula's fall from converting to Catholicism to his demise.

It is essential to highlight a significant structural feature of "The Tale," as noted by Y. Lur'e (Лурье/Lur'e, 1964, p. 67): the plot unfolds as a series of trials and riddles, some of which lack unequivocal answers. A similar "play with the possibility of drawing several parallels" is found in other Russian literary monuments, with Y. Lur'e seeing a connection to the "epic" traditions of Old Russian literature. The revenge of Olga against the Drevlyans in the "Primary Chronicle" is built on riddles and their metaphorical interpretation, inaccessible to the interlocutor. Importantly, a riddle often does not

presuppose finding an answer from the uninitiated, and the language of riddles can sharply differ from the language of other folk genres, heading towards incomprehensibility. Some episodes in "The Tale" – the parable of the two monks, the parable of the burned beggars, stories of an honest merchant, of the golden ring – have their particular design but are also constructed as trials.

The parable of the two monks constitutes a central episode in "The Tale of Dracula the Voievode" essential for comprehending the work's underlying concept. The parable unfolds as Dracula presents the monks with the bodies of executed individuals and poses the question, "Am I doing well"? The first monk responds, "No, sovereign, you commit evil; it befits a ruler to be merciful. Those whom you impaled on stakes are martyrs". Conversely, the second monk asserts, "You, sovereign, are appointed by God to punish evildoers and reward the virtuous. They committed evil and are punished according to their deserts." What was Dracula's response to them? It is noteworthy that dying in torment did not automatically confer martyrdom; martyrs were only those who died for faith and a just cause. Someone slain by the hand of a wicked king, a tyrant, indeed fell into this category, becoming a martyr and attaining salvation in the afterlife. However, without knowing who and for what reason they were punished, one cannot judge whether they were martyrs. From our extended explanations, it is evident that the first monk passed judgment without knowing the circumstances – if the executed individuals were ordinary criminals, they could not be martyrs. Dracula rebukes the first monk, saying, "Why have you left your cell and monastery, wandering in the courts of great rulers if you understand nothing? You said these people are martyrs. Be a martyr with them," and orders him to be impaled. To the second monk, he declares, "You are a wise man," and sends him home with honors.

Compare the literary Dracula's response to the first monk with Ivan the Terrible's reaction to the letter from Andrej Kurbskij: "How can you not be ashamed to call villains martyrs without considering for what reason each one suffers? (*Пепенуска.../Perepiska...*, 1979, p. 19). "The king further writes: if you consider me an unjust ruler, then accept death at my hands and become a martyr, for this is not death but a gift of goodness; after all, one must die anyway: "If you are righteous and pious, as you say, why are you afraid of an innocent death, the Lord's, which brings good to those who suffer for doing good? And if you are righteous and pious, why have you refused, a disobedient ruler, to endure suffering and inherit the crown of life"?

Thus, the "wise" monk succinctly articulated a certain understanding of the concept of power – the right to execute and pardon belongs only to the Sovereign, who is not subject to human judgment, as the Sovereign is accountable to God. Attempts to call the king to account were perceived as blasphemy. We see such an attitude in Ivan the Terrible's response to the accusations of Andrej Kurbskij: "Who appointed you judge or teacher? Will you answer for my soul on the Day of Judgment"?

The message of "The Tale" is nowhere explicitly stated, allowing the reader to take any side in the argument. This is unusual for medieval literature, whether European or Russian. However, for a medieval reader, Dracula's response sounds quite definite, suggesting that the author may not have needed anything else.

One way or another, the parable of the two monks anticipates discussions on the role of the sovereign for collective salvation in the Byzantine Empire, on martyrdom and tyranny, on the limits of royal power, which unfolded in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the works of Russian writers, as well as in the polemic between Ivan the Terrible and Andrej Kurbskij.

The interpretation of the parable of the beggars, whom Dracula invited to a feast and burned alive, presents a certain complexity (*Сказание... / Skazanie...*, 1999, p. 462). Dracula explains his actions – he freed people from poverty and spared them from suffering. He sent the beggars to heaven not as sinners but as martyrs, to whom the gates of paradise were open.

Almsgiving, considered a virtue that today might be termed as compassion or philanthropy, is one of the obligatory virtues of canonized Russian princes. It was also a means of supporting the impoverished population, a kind of social institution for income redistribution. It was believed that charity was more needed by the almsgiver than the beggar because it was a concern for one's soul. On the other hand, the necessity of labor was also prescribed for Christians – "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground" (Genesis, 3: 19).

The Church collected funds not only for the poor but also for those who suffered from fires, refugees, and for the ransom of Russians enslaved abroad, which justified the existence of monastery property. "The Tale" emerged during a period of intense debate between those opposing land ownership by monasteries ("nestiazhateli"), including figures like Fedor Kuricyn, and the Josephites advocating almsgiving. It can be argued that this parable engages in a polemic with Joseph Volockij, yet even in this case, the author allows the readers to draw their own conclusions.

The phrase uttered by Dracula before the battle with the Turks may be perplexing to a modern reader: "Whoever wishes to contemplate death, let him not go with me, stay here." A devout Christian has always been obligated to contemplate death; disdainful attitudes towards death, esteeming oneself as ready for the heavenly Kingdom, constituted a sin, although cowardice was also considered a sin. On the other hand, secular recklessness was not welcomed, deemed madness, and even blasphemy. Thus, Dracula's statement should be interpreted as reverential towards God.

In "The Tale," there are several episodes, transparent in content, where Dracula asserts certain virtues through cruelty and justice. These include the punishment of cowardly warriors wounded in the back, the episode with the golden cup that no one dared to steal, the episode with an honest merchant declaring an extra gold coin, the punishment of a woman neglecting her

husband, and the penalty for adultery. One could also add the execution of a squeamish servant disapproving of Dracula's cruel methods and the remark about Dracula's rejection of evil. The latter remark is intriguing in its implicit proclamation of the equality of common people, boyars, and priests before the decrees of the Sovereign: "And hating evil in his land, if anyone commits any evil—murder or robbery or any falsehood or injustice, he shall not live. Whether a great boyar, or a priest, or a monk, or a commoner, even if someone possessed great wealth, they cannot escape death, and he is so fearsome" (*Сказание.../Skazanie...*, 1999, p. 462).

In addition to the parable of the two monks, "The Tale" features several other episodes affirming the exceptional status of the God-chosen Sovereign. One such episode involves the trial of an ambassador through the spectacle of a gilded coin (*idem*, p. 466), where the ambassador tells Dracula: "Sovereign, if I have committed anything worthy of death, do as you wish. You are a just judge - my death will not be your fault, but my own." The episode about Turkish envoys who did not remove their caps in Dracula's presence and the episode where Dracula beheads a constable daring to enter the ruler's house in pursuit of a criminal are also present (*idem*, p. 468). The episode with the Turkish envoys is a "wandering plot," found in German pamphlets as well, but the episodes of the gilded coin and the slain constable are absent in German sources (Лурье/Lur'e, diagram between pp. 32-33), suggesting that these are original episodes.

A fabrication by the author is the episode of Dracula's death, according to "The Tale," during the Turkish invasion. We have a record (Bogdan, 1913, p. 342) of a message from Stephen the Great about Vlad's death, read by Archimandrite John Tzambalak on May 8, 1478, before the Venetian Doge and senators in the Palace of the Doge (translated by S. Lyžina from the Latin original, excerpt): "However, I took care to have the Voievode Basarab (referring to Layota Basarab) expelled from Wallachia, and another Christian ruler named Dracula (in the Latin document Drachula) was appointed because he had been known before (as an enemy of the Turks). And I expected that His Majesty, the King of Hungary (referring to Matthias Corvinus), would be inspired by this idea, and I argued to him that Vlad (Vladislav) Dracula should become the ruler. And eventually, I convinced the king, and I was allowed to gather warriors to carry out my intention and propose the mentioned ruler to the throne in Wallachia. I immediately gathered the warriors, and when they came, I joined forces with one of the royal captains (referring to Stefan Báthory of Ecsed), and uniting, we brought the mentioned Dracula to power. And when he came to power, he asked us to leave some of our people as guards because he did not trust the Wallachians too much, and I left him 200 of my people. And when I did this, we (with the royal captain) withdrew. And almost immediately, that traitor Basarab returned and, catching Dracula without us, killed him, and all my people, except for ten,

were also killed". As we can see, Stefan does not mention the Turkish invasion and does not note any supernatural phenomena.

It should be noted that the presumed author of "The Tale," Fyodor Vasiliievich Kuritsyn, led a diplomatic mission to Stephen of Moldavia and Matthias Corvinus, visited Suceava and Buda, and was in close contact with Stephen's daughter Elena Voloshanka and the relatively numerous Moldavian diaspora in Moscow. The text of the narrative was most likely written in Akkerman. At the same time, the author never names Dracula directly and refers to the capital of "Mutenia" as "his city." One of the copyists in the 17<sup>th</sup> century "filled the gap" and invented the name "Mutyian" for the city. In reality, the capital of Wallachia was quite prosaically called Târgoviște, meaning "marketplace." It seems that the Russian ambassador knew well what the Wallachian capital was called, but does such an ordinary name befit the capital of the "wise and cruel" Dracula?

## 6. The Originality of the Story about Dracula

D. Lihačev, speaking about the secular spirit of the second edition of the Chronograph, mentions "The Tale" (Лихачёв/Lihačev, 1970, p. 8): "Contradictory traits can be observed in the portrayal of Dracula in 'The Tale of the Mutyian Voievode Dracula' (he is just and simultaneously perversely cruel), in the portrayal of individual chronicle heroes, etc. However, the contradictory nature of the historical figure has never been noted in literature before. It was not consciously recognized or declared by the authors, although it was unintentionally depicted. Historical writers never deliberately aimed to describe this contradiction. It emerged as if spontaneously, in the reader's consciousness, not in the intentions, and especially not in the declarations of the authors. Only in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century did historical writers openly speak about the contradiction of human character for the first time." In other words, the author of "The Tale of Dracula" described the contradictory nature of the hero involuntarily, unconsciously, "spontaneously."

"Ancient Russian literature did not know openly fictional characters. All the characters in Russian literary works from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century are historical or claim historicity: Boris and Gleb, Vladimir Svjatoslavič, Igor Svjatoslavič, Alexandr Nevskij, Dmitrij Donskoj, or Metropolitan Cyprian - all these are princes, saints, church hierarchy people who existed, high in their social status, and participants in significant political or religious events. Writers from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries seek for their works significant figures, significant events - not in a literary sense, but in a purely historical sense. They aim to write about real historical figures, events that took place in a specific historical and geographical context, resorting to references to contemporaneous accounts and material traces of the activities of their heroes. At the same time, all the fantastical and miraculous is conceived as objectively real, historically accomplished" (*idem*, p. 109).

Medieval historicism demands idealization; the medieval author seeks to portray in the hero a true prince, a true saint, and even a true villain, which often makes the images appear predictable and stereotypical. "Idealization was one of the ways of artistic generalization in the Middle Ages. The writer invested his created image of a person (a state or church figure, a saint) with his ideas about what this person should be like, and he identified these ideas about what should be with what actually is. This was a kind of expression of the medieval preference for deductive over inductive reasoning: the writer sought to derive everything existing from general truths instead of generalizing life experience" (*idem*, p. 86).

It is evident that in the case of the "Tale," things are quite different: the Wallachian ruler is not a significant historical figure for the Russian reader, the image of Dracula does not conform to any template, and there is no need to talk about "idealizing biographism". Fedor Kuricyn, well-informed about the circumstances of the real Vlad Dracula's life, not only does not strive to but consciously avoids the possibility of describing the circumstances of the hero's life that are well-known to him.

Another feature of the narrative, noted by N. Karamzin, is the departure from the usual moralizing of that time: "The author could have concluded this tale with a beautiful moral, but did not do so, leaving readers to judge the philosophy of Dracula, who treated his subjects for villainy, vices, weaknesses, poverty, and diseases with one remedy: death" (КАРАМЗИН/ Karamzin, 2016, p. 597).

Thus, the peculiarity of the work lies in the fact that the "Tale" is the first known monument of original Russian fiction, a narrative that did not enter into chronicle compilations and was dedicated to a hero who did not pose any interest as a historical figure. The author of the "Tale," presumably the Duma deacon Fedor Kuricyn, was well-informed about the circumstances of the real Vlad Dracula's life. However, he not only did not strive to, but consciously avoided the possibility of describing well-known events. The author clearly saw the difference between the negative image of Vlad Dracula from the "German sheets," the real voievode Vlad III Basarab, and his fiction character. The author of the narrative did not mention the hero's name, did not narrate about his origin and childhood years, avoided describing details of the prototype's life, and did not adhere to medieval patterns of hagiography. The character of the hero was contradictory, ambiguous, not corresponding to any of the familiar images of an ideal prince, clergyman, boyar, warrior, saint, or fool. The author rejected moralizing, the opportunity to express an attitude towards the hero in an explicit form, which is unusual for the late 15th century. "The Tale of Dracula the Voievode" represents a utopia (or anti-utopia, depending on the perspective) with elements of anti-behavior concerning the image of an ideal ruler, and the land of Muntenia is an anti-world, a fairy-tale kingdom where the impossible is possible in the ordinary world. The narrative was likely "soulless," not belonging to the genre of

church-moral literature of its time, and did not correspond to any of the known genres and styles of Old Russian literature.

A. Isakov and V. Neupokoeva characterize Kuricyn's political concept as Renaissance, specifying that it was a "subversive, almost Machiavellian form of the Renaissance" (Исаков, Неупокоева/Isakov, Neupokoeva, 2015, p. 641) with characteristic ideas of state sovereignty, the primacy of law, and universal justice implemented by the sovereign. However, Kuricyn's understanding of the limits of royal power and the role of the sovereign in the Christian kingdom is traditional. If it differs from the views of the Josephites, it leans towards prioritizing the king over the church, as evidenced by the parables of the two monks and the burning of the beggars. Kuricyn's views were close to those of Peresvetov and Ivan the Terrible, somewhat ahead of his time.

A separate question concerns the manifestations of the Renaissance in Eastern European civilization. D. Lihačev makes an interesting observation: "Meanwhile, Baroque in the West emerged precisely as a successor to the Renaissance, and its features are largely determined by this. Baroque in the West was a partial return to the Middle Ages. In Russia, however, Baroque came after the Middle Ages and assumed many functions of the Renaissance" (Лихачёв/Lihačev, 1970, p. 156).

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