

The Tomb of Vlad Tepes The most probable hypothesis

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Lacking any documentary evidence and quoting a so-called “tradition” (which dates from the nineteenth century), Romanian historians without exception set the tomb of Vlad Tepes at Snagov monastery. Why? As a rule, a domestic chronicle is mentioned, the “Cantacuzino Chronicle,” which recorded a “tradition” stipulating that Vlad “made the holy monastery of Snagov.” Aside from this inexact information, the chronicle -- from its origin in the middle of the seventeenth century to its variants at the end of the same century -- made no mention of the existence of Vlad’s tomb there.

Then why should this tomb be at Snagov? As early as 1855, the erudite writer Alexandru Odobescu noticed that Vlad Tepes was not the builder of that monastery, citing evidence of the existence of the church long before Vlad’s time, including an icon of the Virgin Mary donated to the monastery on June 7, 1438 (actually 1431) by Draghici, a high dignitary.

Indeed, since 1933, archaeological research has revealed the existence of a first church of the monastery on the island of Snagov, dating from the time of voyevod (prince) Vladislav I (Vlaicu), 1364-1376, or right after his reign. There is a grave with a coin from Vlaicu’s reign under the southern foundation of the second church, as well as another one under a column of the naos of this second church. The foundations of the first church, preserved on the western, southern sides and under the altar, show that it was larger than the second church -- built in the same place by Neagoe Basarab. The first church was repaired, or cells and a wall were built by Mircea the Old (1386-1418), Vlad Tepes’ grandfather, who spoke of “my majesty’s monastery at Snagov” in an original document which also confirmed the donation of a village to the monastery, made by his brother, Staico. Close to the second church, a tomb was found containing a ducat minted by Mircea the Old. The monastery received donations and confirmations of donations in 1428-29 from Dan II, cousin of Vlad Dracul, Tepes’ father. (These two cousins established the two rival families: the Danesti and the Draculesti.) In 1441 the monastery received a donation from Vlad Dracul himself, then, in 1464 another one from his third son, Radu the Handsome. But there are no documents whatsoever regarding the monastery of Snagov from Vlad Tepes himself.

This first church was demolished and then rebuilt by Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521) from the foundations on the site of the first building; the re-building may have taken place, very likely, in a first phase, during the first four months of his reign, i.e. between February 8, 1512 when the coronation took place, and June of the same year, when the prince buried in this church his formal father, the husband of his mother, the great dignitary Parvu Craioveanu, who died on June 3, 1512.

The first church had to be demolished and rebuilt (the one in which Vlad Tepes’ tomb was supposed to be) by Neagoe Basarab -- as proven by the archaeological findings: two graves from the first church, the scattered foundations of this first church and the finding of a clay pot encased in bricks, on the outer side of the northern wall, even with the altar, “used as candle on the occasion of the laying of the foundation of this church.” This pot used to be an ornament on the wall of the first church and it was recovered during demolition. Neagoe’s church was then repaired on orders

from Mircea Ciobanul (1545-1552; 1553-1554; 1558-1559); the inner painting, dating from 1563 shows these latest builders and their families -- of the second church, the one in existence today. Normally, Vlad Tepes does not appear as builder in this second church. Yet, in spite of this, a senior of the Snagov monastery, Ghermano Bratianu, pushed by an overzealous bout, wrote on a mural painting in the church representing Prince Neagoe Basarab the following caption of a comic, bizarre anachronism: "I, Mihail Prince Tepes Basarab the IV Prince" as writer Alexandru Odobescu put it. The egumen lived at Snagov between 1855-1864.

Unfortunately, some continue to refuse even today that there are no grounds for the so-called "tradition" about the erection of Snagov monastery by Vlad Tepes, and his burial here. Not even the little church dedicated to the Virgin Mary's death, built in 1453 by Vladislav II near the main church, could host the tomb of Vladislav's rival, Vlad Tepes. As for the second little church, dedicated to the Annunciation -- demolished, like the other, before 1844 -- this one is out of question, as it was built, according to the inscription preserved to this day, by metropolitan Serafim in 1588. Paul of Alep, who visited the monastery of Snagov in 1657, attributed the main church to the last builder, (prince) Mircea Ciobanul and his sons Petru the Young and Radu, adding (prince) Matei Basarab; Paul of Alep did not mention Vlad Tepes.

To summarize, the so-called "tradition" about the erection of the monastery by Vlad Tepes, or about his tomb there, was recorded by Alexandru Odobescu after 1855 and held as a strong belief by the nineteenth-century monks. Odobescu's guide on the island would never give up the conviction that "Vlad Tepes built the monastery and he endowed the church with all that inventory." The same monks on the island, the creators of the "tradition," informed Odobescu that Tepes arranged "in the southern buildings, a torture room in which the culprit -- after subjection to fire and iron -- was thrown into the lake by catapult or pulley. With the demolition of the old houses, the torture room and the pulley disappeared."

As if such a fantastic absurdity about the projectile-culprit was not enough, the monks attributed to metropolitan Filaret (1792-1793), whose name was very popular with the monasteries of Wallachia, the initiative "to have the letters on the tombstone of the unhappy prince erased, as he engineered those terrible machines, then have the tombstone placed, as eternal punishment or as forgiveness for his wretched soul, under the feet of the priest -- as he leaves the altar."

Eight decades later, the so-called initiative of metropolitan Filaret regarding the tombstone *attributed* to Vlad Tepes, the one in front of the doors of the altar, had been forgotten. But in 1942, priest G Dumitriu mentioned another so-called "tradition," that time stemming "from folk roots": "The tombstone placed from North to South, and not from East to West, as it would have been normal, was placed so -- according to the folks -- in order for the priest to step over it and thus forgive the sinner beneath."

In the meantime, the archaeological excavations of 1933 had proved there was no tomb under the stone -- so priest G Dumitriu believed that the stone was brought there from among the northern columns of the church "as a result of the profanation of the tomb, so that the deed of the profaner should remain unknown." The profaners would have left behind a golden ring rimming a stag; therefore it could have been Vlad Tepes' tomb. The priest suspected that the profanation was done by Greek monks in 1815, when they also set a new acknowledgement stone of the church (pisanie).

To round off his fantasy, the priest believed he also found the tomb of Vlad Tepes' wife, on the side and parallel to Tepes, not knowing she was a Catholic relative of Mathias Corvinus. The reason for this belief was the presence of another golden ring which looked feminine to the priest, belonging "maybe to Vlad Tepes' lady"(?). Just like that!

The case above is not an isolated one. Even today, in 2002, various parish priests try to find all kinds of princely tombs in their churches, and if they cannot find them, some are ready,

unfortunately, to invent them, then demand approval to carve tombstones for them. One such priest in Harlau upholds that prince Petru Rares (son of Stephen the Great) was buried in his church, although contemporary documents placed the tomb in his own church, the monastery Pobrata Noua.

Each epoch has, therefore, its own legends. The archaeological excavations made by Dinu V Rosetti at the main church of Snagov, in June-October 1933, both verified the monkish "tradition" of the nineteenth century; and (after the publication of the results in 1935) gave birth to a new legend. Seven decades after Odobescu's visit, the archaeologist was presented there with another version of the so-called "tradition": that "under Tepes tombstone bones of horses and donkeys were found, placed there as a mockery to that cruel prince, by the Greek monks." Why the Greek monks, with whom Vlad was on good terms, making substantial donations to Mount Athos? The answer may lie in the fact that the Greek monks started to be looked upon with hostility in the Phanariote epoch (1714-1821), when they controlled many Romanian monasteries. The excavations proved the tradition unfounded. "Under the tombstone attributed to Tepes there was no tomb. Only many bones and jaws of horses," wrote Rosetti. "Under closer examination I found here a pre-historic pit, ceramics and ... many bones of animals."

The tradition was too deeply rooted to vanish. Even today, on top of the tombstone in front of the altar doors, a candle burns in front of a portrait of Vlad Tepes. Rosetti made no concession at the time (1935) to the "tradition" which is still accepted, despite any solid evidence, by most Romanian historians. Rosetti revealed, from among many others, a tomb "close to the entrance" in which fragments of a funerary purple veil were found along with pieces of a yellow-brown velvet coat, silver buttons and buttons made of golden thread. Attached to a button-hole was a golden ring, which had "a stone which had decomposed, or a piece of rusted iron." Almost unnoticed at the time was a segment of a golden thread on which three faience buttons, adorned with petals of garnet on a golden plate, looking like flowers; in-between the buttons were two or three turquoise caught in metal. The archaeologist affirmed at the time (1935) that it *adorned the coat*. Who could have suspected that decades later (after it vanished) this thread will pompously be called, as we shall see, the wreath of a tournament winner!

Finally, on top of the rotten coffin, with "bones decimated by time," there was a clay pot. Nothing else. No inscription, no indication that the anonymous grave belonged to Vlad Tepes. Rosetti, the archaeologist, left not even the slightest reference for such an identification. His excavations of June-October 1933 revealed nothing on Vlad.

It was only in 1973, four decades after these excavations, that Rosetti resumed the theme, attributing that tomb to Vlad Tepes. He made his subjective justification, actually, a mere hypothesis, known to a journalist, Simion Saveanu, who, as befits his job, broke it as a sensational discovery, later resumed in a collection of articles occasioned by the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Vlad's death. What was the basis of this hypothesis? It was "the legend [but which legend?] that affirms that the dreaded Dracula was buried by the entrance of the church, so that people would step over his grave." The wording belongs to the journalist, who had to place the tomb in the way of the church-goers, even if it actually lies in pronaos, to the left of the entrance door; now it lies "right in front." Then Saveanu resumed the description of the inventory of the tomb: this time, the modest segment of golden thread with floral buttons and turquoises, becomes "the most valuable item: a golden wreath studded with precious stones" generously described, then underlined: "The whole piece was of a singular beauty"! The little golden ring without inscription, tied to the button-hole for reasons unknown, also became a very important piece.

Then the journalist stated the second reasoning of Rosetti in attributing this tomb, considered princely according to its inventory, to Vlad Tepes: the dimensions of the tombstone attributed to Tepes, in front of the altar, corresponded to "the traces of the lost tombstone on top of the vaulted crypt by the church entrance." It could be a simple coincidence (so many tombstones have similar sizes), but the main issue here is that one hypothesis cannot be proven by another hypothesis. There

is no evidence whatsoever aside from the so-called nineteenth-century monkish "tradition" -- whose worth we stated -- that the tombstone in front of the altar belongs to a grave of Vlad Tepes.

Then the archaeologist himself voiced his opinion on the golden wreath and the ring, calling them "the basic items of the enigma. They alone could lead to the discovery of the true identity of the person interred in front of the door of the Snagov church." Beside many details with no bearing on the subject, the following syllogism is forwarded: the two items would represent trophies of a tournament that the deceased participated in. Therefore he was buried by the entrance of the church in Snagov.

According to the rules of logic, one hypothetical premises leads to a hypothetical conclusion. It is known from the times of Mircea the Old that Romanians had participated in Western-style tournaments in Central Europe, including pretenders to the throne, blending in Europe's feudal life. But there is no clue that Vlad Tepes participated in a tournament, ever. Beside, to identify the two items with tournament trophies is extremely risky. Isn't there a contradiction in placing the dead so that everyone would step over him (which is absurd, as the whole perimeter encompassed by the church is holy), yet ignoring the ornaments pointing to an ornate burial? Nothing in these suppositions belongs to historic reality; the one buried close to the entrance door of the second church at Snagov withholds his anonymity.

Regarding this second church, the one we see today, built by Neagoe Basarab, added to by Mircea Ciobanul -- let me underline again, because this fact seems to be constantly overlooked, that it is not the church existing in Vlad Tepes' time. In such cases, according to archaeological evidences the tombs in the first church were either emptied or destroyed, or were left deeper under the floor of the new construction. In any case they were clearly distinguishable from the ones belonging to the new church, as also in the case of Snagov, where the two graves mentioned before were found under the foundation of the second church. The grave in question, attributed by Rosetti to Vlad Tepes, belongs to the second church, and even if it were of a prince, or of a princely family, *it is from the sixteenth century!*

After the publication in 1935 of the photos of the wreath and the ring, later on attributed by Rosetti to Vlad, these small objects, stored at the Museum of the Municipality of Bucuresti, were lost under unknown circumstances. In the 1970s, George D Florescu, director of this museum, spoke of "the ornaments in Vlad Tepes' tomb at Snagov, discovered by me and by Dinu V Rosetti in the excavations of 1933-34." "He told me", remembers Matei Cazacu, "of the feminine ring tied to the little finger of the deceased [sic!], of the tournament wreath and of the belt made by rhomboidal plates, described by Rosetti in his brochure of 1933 [1935], but lost after a removal." The hypothesis has become, by the passing of time, certainty. Florescu recalled "the deceased, in its entirety, decomposing in a few seconds, under his eyes, in the oblique sun-rays entering through the door of the church at Snagov" as having his head covered by a handkerchief. So it couldn't have been Vlad Tepes, whose head was not buried with the body (it was sent to Constantinople). Later on, Matei Cazacu advanced the possibility that "only the skin of the scalp and of the face was sent to the Porte, not the skull," which is, again, yet another hypothesis, so that the tomb "located in the middle of the pronaos [sic] at a great depth [sic]" could belong to Vlad Tepes. This is how the existing church of the monastery of Snagov continues, to this day, to be taken as the resting place of the dreaded prince, ignoring that we are looking at a sixteenth-century church which did not exist in Tepes' time!

As a rule, the works of the dilettantes start from Alexandru Odobescu's notes from 1855, coloured with archaeologist Rosetti and journalist Saveanu's affirmations, plus insignificant details picked from Vlad Tepes' historiography, even from that of Snagov; this category of authors never

doubted that Tepes' tomb is in the present-day church of Snagov. The historians have shared the above point of view, even if they employ sometime the phrase "it is said," in connection with the tomb at Snagov. But the well-informed authors of the history of Snagov monastery, starting from the negative results of Rosetti's archaeological excavations of 1933, point out that, aside from local subjective opinions (Nicolae I Serbanescu), there are no clues to assert that Vlad Tepes was buried here (Mircea Deac). Historians Constantin C Giurescu and Dinu Giurescu affirmed that "The whereabouts of the grave are not known," dismissing the "tradition" which placed it at Snagov.

Why is there such a strong tradition, originating in the nineteenth century, connecting Vlad Tepes' tomb to Snagov, in the absence of historical evidence? Vlad Tepes was not even the builder of the first church (the fifteenth century one) at Snagov. But let us, for a moment, accept the absurd, ie. Rosetti's calling it Vlad Tepes' tomb. Builders of churches were never buried close to the entrance. Moreover, the right side of the pronaos -- reserved for builders /founders -- has no tombs.

Besides, had Vlad Tepes been buried in the first church from the fifteenth century, at Snagov -- which no documents or proofs confirm -- why would Neagoe Basarab have moved the tomb into the second church, which, again, was uncustomary? Answering this rhetorical question, I note that Neagoe Basarab -- both on the line of his family, the Craiovesti, and on the line of his natural father -- Basarab the Young Tepelus -- would hardly have any interest to move into his church the tomb of the father of Mihnea the Bad, from the rival family of the Draculesti: Mihnea oppressed, at 1509 or 1510 the Craiovesti, demolishing their Oltenian monastery with gun-fire. Let us not forget that Neagoe Basarab demolished, in turn, the metropolitan see built by Vlad Dracul, Tepes' father; in its stead, the monastery of Curtea de Arges was raised; this victory over the Mihnesti or Draculesti was marked in heraldry -- by a horned horse piercing the dragon (the coat of arms of Vlad Dracul). It is therefore difficult to believe that, given the enmity between these families, the tomb of Vlad Tepes could be under the roof of Neagoe's church at Snagov.

Where did this pseudo-tradition about the existence of Vlad Tepes' tomb in the second church of Snagov (Neagoe Basarab's) come from?

There was a statement (not confirmed, even contradicted by fifteenth-century sources) made in a seventeenth-century chronicle which called Tepes the builder of Snagov (first) church, from which grew the opinion that the tomb belonged there. There is no certitude, but it is possible that the church at Snagov (the one we see today) got a bloody reputation ever since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which matched, more than other churches, the kind of person Tepes was. The church at Snagov sheltered the remains of boyars executed on orders of the voyevodes: "it was the cemetery of the politically beheaded." Among the beheaded -- by the inscriptions on the tombstones preserved to this day -- were four sons of dignitary Dragomir. Another was dignitary Dima -- on orders by Michael the Brave in 1594; before beheading, Dima had his right hand cut, for treason, as revealed by the archaeological research of his tomb.

The seventeenth century witnessed a famous execution at Snagov -- that of dignitary Constantin Cantacuzino, by orders of his past protégé Grigore Ghica -- on December 30, 1663. The condemned was brought to Snagov in the morning; he was allowed to attend the sermon and to pray; then, at dinner, he was strangled, which sparked, in the coming years the fight between the boyar families of Cantacuzino and Leurdeanu.

Far from Bucuresti, isolated on an island, the monastery of Snagov then turned into a political prison for boyars, beginning with Stroe Leurdeanu, the main prosecutor of Cantacuzino; Leurdeanu was forced to become a monk here, in 1669. Then came the turn of dignitary Serban Cantacuzino, the future prince, to be arrested on orders of Gheroghe Duca: "and they took him to monastery Snagov, to kill him there, as prince Grigorie killed Serban's father, postelnic Canstandin." Serban Cantacuzino ascended to the throne in 1678 and took revenge on his enemies the next year. Thus, captain Patrascu Urziceanu was arrested, taken to Snagov where "after terrible tortures, they hanged him." Then dignitary Valcu, after several trials, "was removed to Snagov and killed there, after many tortures." In 1690, prince Constantin Brancoveanu repulsed the invasion into Valahia of

the imperial (Austrian) troops under general Donat Heissler and arrested some pro-imperial boyars; dignitary Vlaicu spent a long time in the jail of Snagov.”

As a result of so many executions of boyars, of tortures and long prison-terms, well into the eighteenth century, no wonder that Snagov got a bloody reputation -- an ideal placement for the tomb of Vlad! Besides, in 1840, Snagov was the first monastery officially turned into a place of confinement for revolutionaries of the 1848 movement. In 1853 or 1854, the ferry overloaded with chained detainees went down, drowning all -- which increased its notoriety.

All that was missing from this so-called “tradition” about Vlad Tepes’ interment at Snagov was a written document. Well, this document has appeared! It is a letter dated April 3, 1534, addressed to this monastery by Vlad Vintila, issued in Slatina, which stated: “my majesty has found in the holy monastery of Snagov the document of the great voyevod Vlad the Old, who met his death near the village of Balteni, and also the document of voyevode Basarab the Old, which were brought to my majesty.”

There is no doubt that Basarab the Old is Basarab Laiota, Vlad Tepes’ rival. But which Vlad the Old had the document in mind: Vlad nicknamed Dracul, or his son Vlad nicknamed the Impaler? And especially which Balteni? If we consider the village of Balteni in the Ilfov county, west of Snagov, as all historians believe without exception, then it is easy to see why Vlad Tepes’ tomb might have been placed at Snagov. As a rule, the voyevods were interred in the churches they built themselves, therefore Snagov was built by Tepes. This is how the *Cantacuzino Chronicle*, of the first half of the seventeenth century, came to report that Vlad Tepes built the monastery at Snagov. But that would have to mean that Vlad voyevode died at Balteni. Did he?

We know, approximately, when and how Vlad Tepes was killed: before January 10, 1477, as a result of a plot of the boyars loyal to Basarab Laiota, helped by the Turks. But nobody has seriously researched *where* the killing took place. Clarification of that location could help in establishing the burial site. Unfortunately, the great historian Nicolae Iorga, with his well-established scholarly authority, has for a long time oriented the researcher toward the northern parts of Bucuresti, mentioning Tepes’ killing “as a treacherous act, placed by tradition at Balteni, near Bucuresti, where there is a beautiful church, rebuilt in the XVII century; the belief is that his body is under a tombstone without inscription in the church of Snagov - full of tragic tombs.” The great historian also mentions the “tradition” and “belief” that Vlad Tepes was buried at Snagov.

Actually, the “tradition” alluded to by N Iorga referred to Vlad Dracul, Tepes’ father, chased and killed by the army of Iancu of Hunedoara at the end of 1447: “who met his death near village Balteni”; this information is not folk tradition, but is recorded in a document dated April 3, 1534. Although the document (available since 1905) refers to Vlad Dracul, Nicolae Iorga kept for his whole life the opinion that the information mentioned above regarded Vlad Tepes. As for Vlad Dracul, Iorga said: “He could be the last prince buried at monastery Cozia.” (Iorga did once confuse Vlad Dracul with Vladislav II, believing that Dracul and his son Mircea “were cut at Tarsa”.) Even Nicolae Stoicescu, the historian who has written the most thoroughly documented monograph on Vlad Tepes, fell under the influence of the great historian, thus influencing foreign historiography as well.

Balteni, where Vlad Dracul was killed, is not the one in the county of Ilfov, as believed until now. It is the Balteni in the Dambovitza county, located between Contesti and Racari, half-way between Targoviste and Bucuresti. The army of Iancu of Hunedoara started from Targoviste (the army commander was there on December 4, 1447), caught up with and killed Vlad Tepes’ father as he retreated toward Bucuresti, along the “Salt Road” which crossed the large estate of Balteni, on to Bucuresti, then to Giurgiu, by the Danube.

Given that Basarab Laiota, Vlad Tepes’ rival, came from the South, from the Danube, with Turkish soldiers after him, the battlefield should be sought South of Bucuresti. The documents of the time did not say where. Only in “Tales about Tepes,” the 18th tale, written in Slavonic in 1487,

then translated into Russian, do we get a clue as to the topographic area of the battle: when Tepes' army repelled the Turks, "Dracula, full of joy, climbed a hill to see his soldiers cutting the Turks, so he separated himself from the army," falling prey to the plotters. This topographic detail fits the southern part of Bucuresti, on the old road between Giurgiu and Bucuresti. North of Bucuresti all the way to Snagov, there are no hills.

Undoubtedly, Vlad was killed somewhere on the road between Bucuresti and Giurgiu. His body, without head (sent to Constantinople), was buried by his rival, Basarab Laiota, without special ornaments or a more distinguished tombstone, in the nearest church built by or connected to his name. One such monastery was in the area, documented as Tepes' since September 27, 1461 -- the monastery of Comana in the county of Vlasca, placed in a strategic position -- to the left and by the middle of the old road between Bucuresti and Giurgiu. In 1728, prince Nicolae Mavrocordat (1716; 1719-1730) dedicated the "metoh" of Comana to the Patriarchy of Jerusalem, to the Holy Grave. All historians agree that Comana was built by Vlad.

Also in 1461, Tepes built a church in the town of Targsor, showing a preoccupation of the prince to build such churches, in the year of mobilization against the Ottoman empire. Tepes started hostile actions against the Turks in the second part of the year 1461, so the land offerings to monastery Comana on Sept. 27, 1461, may have been done in this circumstance. Furthermore, Comana, even if not fortified in his time, held a strategic position on an elevation, surrounded by the waters of river Calnisteia, making it difficult to conquer.

Visiting it in 1657, Paul of Alep wrote: "This monastery is emplaced like an island, surrounded by lakes and ponds, by invincible marshes. And there is no road leading to it. The monks say: 'if the sultan would wage war against us, with all his army, he could not win,' which seems true, as its position is strong, the water here never freezes, not even in the harshest winter; there is sand under the water and silt." In 1861, Cezar Bolliac also noticed the impenetrable position of Comana: "river Calnisteia splits here in two branches, protecting an elevation on 3 sides. The monks helped nature and deepened the river, so the peninsula is unattainable." These ponds and marshes were partially dried "on 500 hectares" in 1876, so only one pond is to be seen today.

Vlad Tepes as builder of Comana is not a "tradition." The donation act of 1461, of the village of Calugareni to the monastery, has been confirmed by Ioan Brezoianu who also saw other documents of the monastery before they were misplaced by the Greek monks, after 1850. The founder of Comana is undoubtedly Vlad Tepes. So why would Basarab Laiota, Tepes' adversary, who came from the South -- something overlooked so far -- send the body far away, beyond Bucuresti, to monastery Snagov (not connected with Tepes), when the monastery of Comana was conveniently close? Tepes' interment in the first church of monastery Comana is of course a hypothesis, but the most plausible one.

Unfortunately, this first church of monastery Comana, where the tomb might have been, along the whole architectonic complex of the fifteenth century, no longer exists. The first church was clearly outlined archaeologically as a result of excavations and restoration in 1971-72: a wooden church on a foundation of quality bricks, and short oak pillars. The shape was rectangular, with a polygonal altar (3 sides). Dimensions: 12 x 10 metres. Under the church was a layer of ash from clearing the construction site from trees by fire. This first church is now on the southern side of the present monastery, partially under a row of cells. It had plaster on both sides, painted inside and floored with bricks. Inside, a tomb was discovered by the middle of the southern side, which could not be identified. Outside, the tombs were dated, by the coins inside, to a period between 1444 and 1574. Three metres away from this first building, direction North-East, under the naos of the present church, the brick foundation (4 x 4m) of a wooden bell-tower were discovered, belonging to the fifteenth-century church. One more metre to the West was a small group of cells. This was, therefore, the unfortified monastery built by Vlad Tepes in the middle of woods and waters.

Lacking a tombstone, the grave on the southern side of the first church of the monastery, although set in the proper place for a founder, can only hypothetically be attributed to Vlad Tepes. If this is not the one, then Tepes' tomb, located in the same church, may have not yet been

discovered, or, even more likely, was removed, destroyed with the whole first church by the end of the sixteenth century.

In 1589, 130 years after its inception, dignitary Radu Serban of Coiani (Mironesti, the county of Giurgiu), future prince of Valahia (1601; 1602-1610; 1611) demolished Vlad Tepes' monastery (church, bell-tower, cells), building "from foundations" a new monastery Comana, much larger than the first. The new builder, rich inheritor of the Craiovesti boyars (the Vlasca branch) resided only 8 km. away from Vlad Tepes' monastery. The new monastery looked like a regular fortress of the fields: square-shaped (61 x 56 m), walled, with 5 towers and shooting slits. This fortified monastery has never been conquered or burnt, in spite of frequent battles with the Turks in the neighbourhood. It was repaired in 1700 by dignitary Serban Cantacuzino; more repairs took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Radu Serban's church shelters his own tomb, as well as those of his two daughters, and of their followers. There is nothing reminiscent of the first, wooden church built by Vlad Tepes, the foundations of which lie since 1583 under the kitchen and attic on the southern side of Radu Serban's monastery. No wonder that no tradition regarding Vlad Tepes' tomb was preserved here. It was only after 1861, when Ioan Brezoianu found the document issued by Vlad Tepes on September 27, 1461, that word came out about the founder of the first monastery Comana. By 1960 there was even a village named Vlad Tepes -- 4 km. west of Comana.

Then, what of the legend of Vlad Tepes' interment at Snagov, made up by the monks there in the second half of the nineteenth century? Nothing, of course. Most legends dissipate under a closer scrutiny. In 1933, a talented reporter, F. Brunea-Fox, dived in Snagov to find the so-called fallen wooden church (the small church built by Vladislav II, demolished prior to 1844). He found nothing. In his words: "Void. Because this is the fate of legends, dear readers -- when you investigate them."

