

**TOURIST PROMOTION OF THE HISTORICAL CHARACTER  
VLAD THE IMPALER – HISTORICAL TRUTH AND LEGEND  
CHARACTER AT THE POIENARI FORTRESS**

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***Abstract:** Traces of historical events over time are now becoming more and more transformed in attractions. Each geographical region of Romania has high specific buildings in different historical epochs, most of them bearing the imprint area in events occurred that period. In this category is also included Poienari fortress, or castle of Vlad Tepes, as it is known by locals. Today there are only ruins, ruins that hold valuable historical information that can be used for tourism purposes. They can be close to reality, often architectural or historical nature, and legends, which often are those that draw heavily on tourists. This study provides evidence in evolution of the number of tourists and tourist attraction actual reason and details about the historical truth used as a tourist attraction. Current arrangements have increased the number of tourists. Sights are focused on enhancing legends about building the city and what is supposed to be held there in a certain time.*

**Key words:** culture, fortress, marketing, tourism development, tourism

**Cuvinte cheie:** amenajare turistică, cetate, cultură, marketing, turism

**Rezumat:** Urmele lăuate de evenimentele istorice de-a lungul timpului sunt astăzi din ce în ce mai mult transformate în atracții turistice. În fiecare regiune geografică din România există un anumit specific al clădirilor ridicate în epoci istorice diferite, cele mai multe dintre ele păstrând amprenta evenimentelor petrecute în zonă în acea perioadă. În această categorie se încadrează și Cetatea Poienari, sau Cetatea lui Vlad Țepeș, așa cum este ea cunoscută în zonă. Astăzi sunt doar ruinele cetății, ruine ce dețin informații istorice valoroase ce pot fi folosite în scop turistic. Acestea pot fi apropiate de realitate, de cele mai multe ori de natură arhitectonică sau istorică, dar și legende, care de cele mai multe ori sunt cele care îi atrag foarte mult pe turiști. Studiul de față încearcă să pună în evidență evoluția numărului de turiști și motivul atracției turistice actuale, precum și amănunte legate de adevărul istoric folosit ca atracție turistică. Amenajările actuale au dus la creșterea numărului de turiști. Atracțiile turistice sunt orientate spre amplificarea legendelor legate de ridicarea cetății și de ceea ce se presupune a se fi întâmplat acolo într-un anumit interval de timp.

## 1. Introduction

Most of the time one seeks the touristic valuation of an objective, references are made to the less usual particularities, including legends. It was in this manner that Dracula brand was created, including in geographic areas where it has not been promoted until present. There is a close connection between the historical character Vlad the Impaler and the legendary Dracula, the latter appearing in all the places where the ruler (real character) was involved or present at one point in time in relation to various events.

Nevertheless, following the analysis of the Romanian touristic market, certain lacks are observed in the promotion of historical values, which could increase the amounts from touristic services. This practice of designing fortresses with design elements specific to certain historic eras results in a marketing policy. In the case of Poienari Fortress in Argeș County, this is more than illustrative. During the period when the fortress could be visited only for what had been left from its original aspect (ruins and perhaps the adventure of climbing the 1480 steps), the number of tourists was quite low, among which students and pupils were predominant, groups who tried to discover the historic and cultural values of their own country, there were fewer people interested in “Dracula”, who were mostly foreign tourists [7],[10]. A similar case is found in Alba Iulia [9], by the existing setups (hard to compare with those at Poienari Fortress) or at Hunyad Castle. It becomes obvious that the number of all categories of tourists increases proportionally to the setups and designs.

## 2. Objective of the study

The present study attempts to highlight the importance of setting up a fortress or a historical value space for the development of cultural tourism in Romania. The

cultural value of Romania's nowadays objectives is special, but there completely lack the possibilities to visit and to inform tourists regarding what these spaces represent and what historical events happened within them [2], and equally regarding the period of construction or architectural details. The lack of these information directly impacts the tourists' interest, which may lead to fewer or no tourists at all. At present there are ancient [3] or middle-age fortresses with both historical and touristic potential, but receiving the visit of no more than a few scores of tourists along one year, or of no tourists at all in the majority of time. This promotion miss leads to no money from touristic services. The promotion of Poienari Fortress as starting point for a touristic route led by the main character of ruler Vlad the Impaler is a form of attracting tourists. It is mandatory though to provide historical and scientific truths and not to sell erroneous information about a legendary character. The „sale” manner of the touristic product, referencing space-specific legends, represents a practice used more and more often. It is precisely this that should be understood in order to promote the idea of historic and cultural knowledge and not to follow a false, legendary road.

Considerable income can be earned from an adequate real promotion marketing policy for Romanian fortresses, from tourism as economic activity. The promotion of Poienari Fortress within the touristic routes by proper setups and professional guiding leads to promoting the cultural values and generally to the development of tourism, to which there may be also added the importance of creating jobs in touristic services [11] (even for a determined period of time).

### 3. Location of Poienari Fortress

Poienari Fortress is located in the North-West of Argeş County (fig. 1), on exiting Căpățâneni village. Its ruins can be observed by all those who cross the road from Lake Vidraru to Curtea de Argeş or reversely (fig. 2).

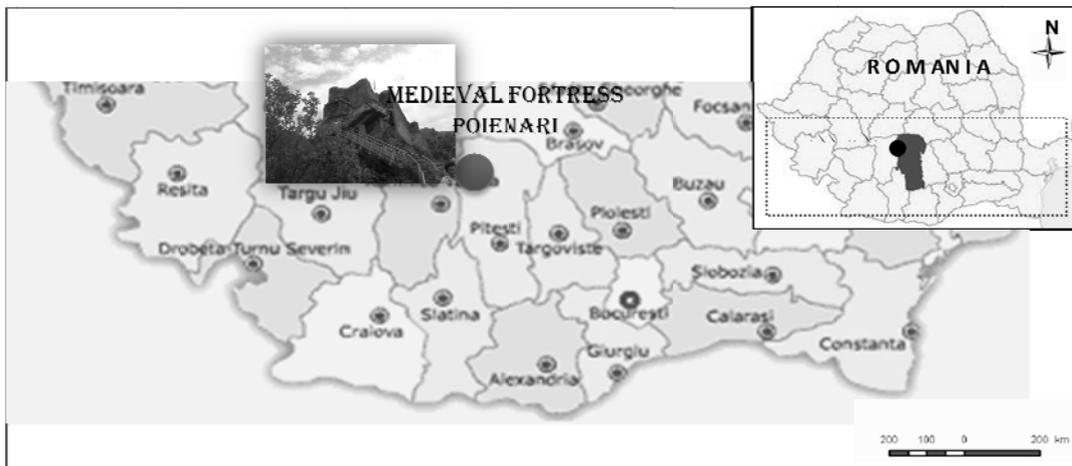


Fig 1. Locating Poienari in the country and Arges County



**Fig 2. Fortress Poienari - View from Electric Plant**

#### **4. Methodology of the touristic project**

The proposed steps for achieving this project for a medieval fortress are the following:

- historical analysis and filtration of the historic detail related specifically to the fortress;
- geographic and environmental research with the aim to know the parts inside and near the fortress;
- designing the touristic valuation model by involving the human element, from guiding to presenting the past living moments and architectural setup.

#### **5. Results**

The results of the study span on various directions:

- a. knowledge and promotion of historical information, as starting point in historical promotion;
- b. designing the connections between the historical aspect and environmental elements;
- c. understanding the local legends and their way of transmission from a generation to another;



d. touristic satisfaction by offering „Dracula elements”, which can represent major attraction points.

### 5.1 Historic presentation of Poienari Fortress – starting point in touristic promotion

Poienari Fortress, citadel or better said small fortress but rich in historic events, represents a first step of presentation of the many places where the real ruler Vlad the Impaler left his mark. For those impressed by his reign or even more, by the legend woven around it, it is recommended to start from historical truths and then make the connection with the highly advertised Dracula character [7], [p], [1].

Poienari Fortress is part of the category of citadels built in the Middle Ages. Poienari highlights as an older part of the building a square tower of raw stone, guarding the notch of Argeş from a high rock. The masonry and elevation of this tower can be compared to the fortresses in Transylvania built in the first half of the 13th century. That is why it is believed there is a connection between the building in Poienari and those in Transylvania from the same period. The other parts of the fortress - curtains and circular towers do not belong to the first core, both because structural differences and execution manner. The curtains close an elongated, slightly triangular space, adorned in the three corners with a cylindrical tower, embedded in the curtain. The position of the fortress is perfectly adapted to the ground - an abrupt cut-off, separated from the massif through a lap [5], [6], [12].

Characteristic and significant is the absolute preference for cylindrical towers, present in the military architecture from Transylvania. Anyway, it should be remembered that the Byzantine citadels from the Balkan Peninsula exclusively display semi-cylindrical bulwarks and that cylindrical towers are also a characteristic of the Oriental fortification systems. Thus, we see cylindrical bulwarks also in the Byzantine citadels in Dobrogea and in a series of Byzantine citadels in the Balkan Peninsula, and such bulwarks are also used by Bulgarians. These analogies justify at least the knowledge status regarding the construction of Poienari Fortress, mainly that the square tower was built by the uplander rulers by the principles of the Balkan military art. It is probable that this was the fortress of Basarab I, who is described in „*Chronicon Pictum*” on the expedition of Carol Robert in 1330. The fortress also functioned later, being deserted only in the second half of century XVI-lea. In time repairs were performed and circular towers were restored.

The ruins of the fortress come from a small haven fortress, placed in a hardly accessible location and perfectly adapted to the ground. Here, the defensive system is mainly based on the indestructible character of the location and of the fortification itself. Poienari Fortress can be considered characteristic for the organization period of the feudal state in Țara Românească.

The plan of Poienari Fortress can be easily observed today. This structure of the plan is owed to the walls built directly in stone, even in the parting point of the mountain steep slopes.

The most interesting part of the fortress is inside: once in the fortress the 30m long aisle if the first detail to observe. It is only 2,4m long and narrows towards the central part, reaching only 1,6m, in order to expand again towards the terminal end. The structure of the aisle shows that it was destined to capture attackers, especially in

its first part, up to the narrowest point; in the eastern area of the fortress, the space opens after the median wall ends. It was destined to shelter animals - the bottoms can be easily observed even nowadays.

Inside the fortress, toward the North-Eastern corner one can observe very polished stone block constructions - which seems to have functioned also as water basins for the inhabitants of the fortress.

## **5.2 Modalities of touristic highlight and valuation**

### **5.2.1. Touristic information along the route**

The entire route of 1480 steps and the whole fortress require special setup, by which the tourist is offered the necessary information about the area, about the construction period, its restoration and the past events happened on location.

The touristic information panels mounted along the route have a double role:

- offer information related to the touristic objective and local historical events;
- touristic stopover, thus making the long and difficult route also accessible for those who walk with difficulty.

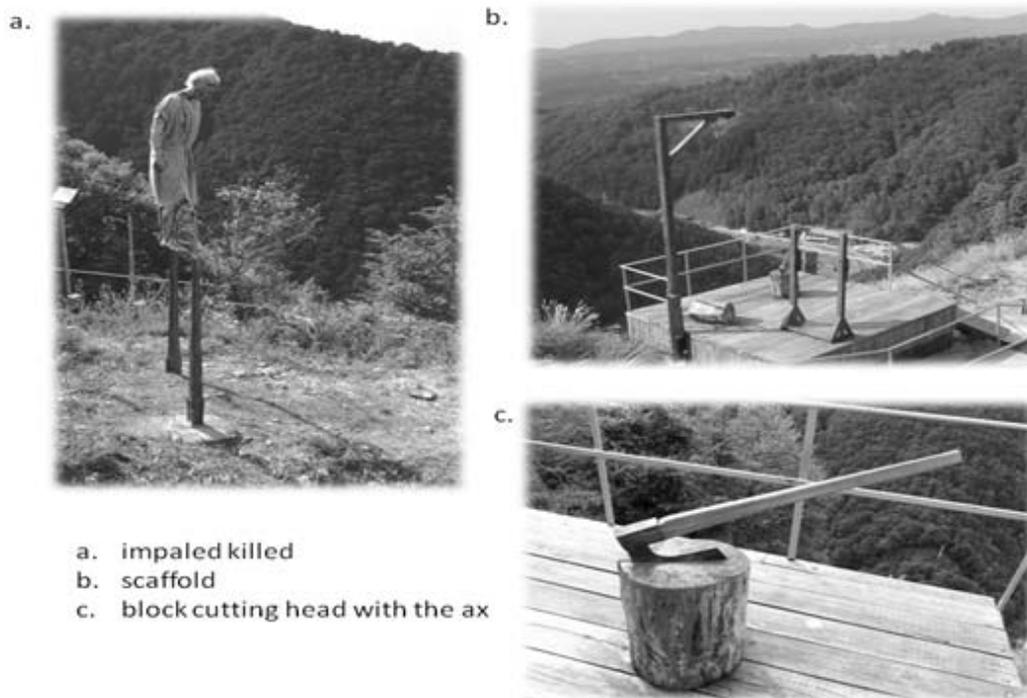
The guide, dressed according to the era he represents, could be another attraction for the groups of tourists.

The touristic information panels without direct approach, are not enough, they could only enrich the touristic information. The images of characters portrayed on information panels must be performed in colors and garments as closest as possible to the historical reality.

### **5.2.2. Existence of characters in the area of the fortress**

#### **- human guide and torture objects and the „supreme punishment – impaling”**

The introduction in the era's atmosphere when the fortress was built could be the most important way to attract tourists. The link between Poienari Fortress and ruler Vlad the Impaler, touristically promoted and adopted by foreign tourists as „Dracula”, is quite tight. This could represent a form of touristic promotion. If the historical information, character and legend are combined, the result is a greater attraction. „Impaling” is a real deed of ruler Vlad the Impaler, so that the presence of these models in the area of the fortress and along the route can represent elements of historical reality. The presence of the guide is necessary; his speaking should contain explanations on the cause or reason for which people were impaled. The visual and auditive impact is much stronger on tourists than would be that of a simple visualization or reading of the information on touristic panels. „Impaling” simulation of tourists or their „torturing” on the especially designed platforms would amplify the touristic attraction.



### 5.2.3. Vlad the Impaler and Dracula – legend, historical truth and possibilities of touristic promotion

#### - legend of the reconstruction by people in Targoviste

The punishment of people in Targoviste rendered in the legend circulating in Căpățâneni village, is also inserted in the oldest chronicle of Țara Românească – the Annals of Cantacuzino: „Ruler Vlad the Impaler, he built the fortress of Poienari...He also did something with the inhabitants of Târgoviște, for a larger guilt they did took on themselves from a brother of Vlad the ruler. On the Easter day, being them all feasting and the young caught in dancing, with no word out to them, they impaled them and ran the town with them along, and the young, as adorned for Easter day, were all brought to Poienari and worked until they clothes tore on them and were left bare naked and footed...”

In order to touristically promote these places and objects, perhaps it is needed to spread and keep alive the legends or fragments of these, considering the promotion done until present or the knowledge about Dracula more than about the real Vlad the Impaler. The legend promotes the idea of reconstruction of Poienari Fortress, which could represent a starting point. For those interested in more than a legend, the direct explanation of the real construction period is indicated, regarding the materials used for building, the work force and the restoration of the fortress.

The guide’s explanations must include the historical truth or the truth written in historical chronicles as well as examples to support the writings. Departing from this legend, one must present the historical events between 1457- 1458. The target of

these presentations can bear multiple meanings: understanding the differences between the building materials, the different architecture of towers, as well as the understanding of those interested in the history of the period;

- *why was it necessary to restore the Poienari fortress? Why and how did the fortress degrade?*

#### **- legend of Vlad the Impaler's refuge at Poienari Fortress**

One legend about Poienari Fortress tells the story about how Vlad the Impaler found refuge at Poienari and about how fortifications were besieged: „*The Impaler ruler, he with seven of his trustworthy captains, have secretly sat and advised how to go and bear down the sultan with whom plentiful had he to settle. And how they sat around the table, disguising in all manners of ways, pock! An arrow hit the window and blew down the snuff on the table. All were in surprised. What could this be? Bad sign? Good news? A wonder perhaps?*

*One of them gets the spunk, sparks and lights it. On the table the arrow wrapped in bundle of paper.*

*The impatient Ruler spreads it quickly and, io and behold!, a message: Your Highness, the Turks are close, they put the cannons on Pietrăria and want to break the fortress. Flee fast!. ..3 days of furious rumbles passed, and they proceeded to attack, climbing on all fours on the walls of the stones. When they got to the Fortress, nobody! Dead or alive, nobody!”*

#### **- legend of the Lady's River**

The terror provoked by the Ottomans and threats with torture was observed and noted by another legend of the fortress. It is known as the *Lady's River*: ...”*the ruler's wife, knowing the Ottomans are close and seeming to her she has no escape, climbed on the ramparts towards river Argeş and from there screamed to the soldiers she'd rather throw herself in the abyss than serve for the Ottomans. Then the first lady jumped in the abyss, her body crushed on the stones touched by the river's waters”*.

The natives who relate this etiological legend, in order to be more persuasive, show one spot where the stones in the former river bed are reddish due to the iron ore in their composition; they say they are reddish because they were stained by the first lady's blood.

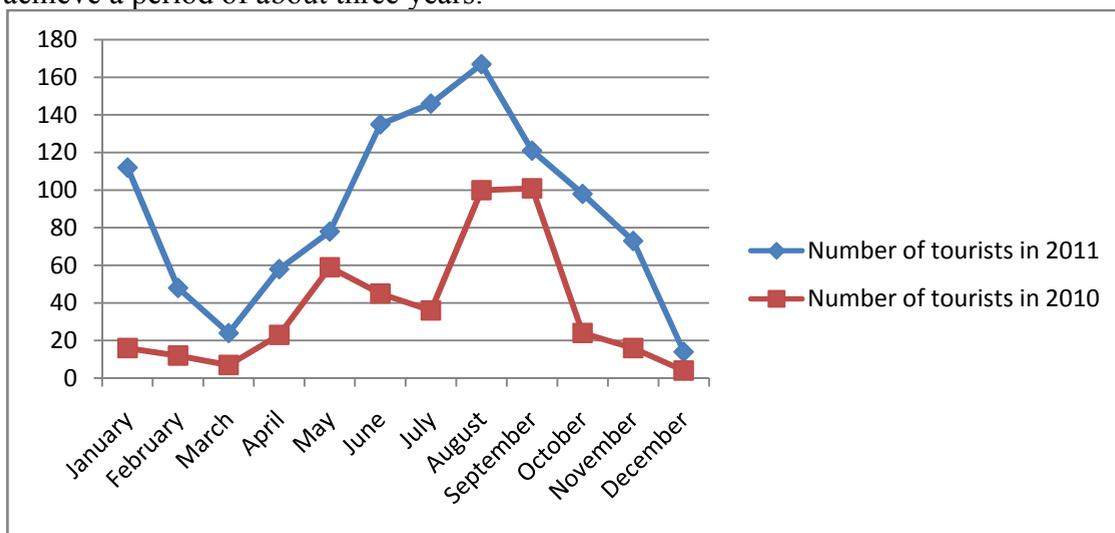
Touristic promotion is, in this geographic area, one of the activities which could bring financial gains to the natives [4]. The development of cultural tourism based on the rural values or on the ruins of castles and fortresses may represent real living resources for the population. Without proper promotion, these objectives shall remain forever only ruins.

## Conclusions

### Assessing the number of tourists and payback possibilities made the fortress Poienari

Travel arrangements made from the city and billboards with information about historical events have contributed to the increasing number of tourists who visited the city.

After arrangements made, the number of tourists began to grow visible, leading to greater leisure use of the lens. Thus return on investment was calculated to achieve a period of about three years.



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