



STEPHEN THE GREAT



The holy and right-believing Prince Saint Stephen the Great was ruler of Moldova from 1457 to 1504. He was a great statesman and military tactician as well as being a devout Orthodox Christian.

He was responsible for defending Moldova against the Ottoman invasion, building a church or monastery in thanks to God after each victory.

Stephen the Great was glorified, along with his spiritual father St Daniel the Hermit of Voronet by the Synod of the Church of Romania in 1992. His feast day is July 2.

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- St. Stephen (also spelled Stefan) is honoured as a saint throughout the Orthodox Church.
- Despite his earthly failings (somewhat comparable to the Psalmist and Patriarch David), he was a great defender of the True Faith against the onslaught of the Ottoman-Muslim Empire during the last half of the fifteenth century.
- St. Stephen defeated Mehmet at a famous and decisive battle in a place called Vaslui (not far south of Iasi in the province of Moldova). Had he not done so, little would have stood between Mehmet and the Ukraine—and the obliteration of the rest of the Orthodox world. Mehmet met his match shortly after having sacked Constantinople. With the rest of the Balkan peninsula falling to Islam's sword, Mehmet must have seemed unstoppable to Christians everywhere, yet none of the Western powers nor the Western Church would lift a finger against the Ottomans. Thus, Stephen stood more or less alone in defence of Christianity and his homeland.
- Perhaps of equal or greater significance to this great saint's life is that he built many churches and monasteries—one after each of his 47 successful battles against the Ottomans, including many of the most beautiful monuments to Orthodoxy in the entire world. These monasteries still stand today and despite over 500 tumultuous years, including 50 years of Communist persecution of the Faith, they continue to thrive as a home to thousands of monastics.
- Stephen's monasteries include the famous "painted" monasteries, referring to the fact that the outsides are frescoed and, remarkably, have survived 500 years of weather—except on the north sides. These include the fabulous painted monasteries of Voroneț, Moldovița, and Suceavița, as well as Putna (where Stephen reposes) and Neamț. At the west end of the south exterior wall of Voroneț, interestingly enough, is a vibrantly coloured fresco of the siege of Constantinople.
- Based undoubtedly on his zeal for the Church, he was commonly referred to as holy even during his life.
- St. Stephen's son founded the Probota Monastery, a magnificent monument to his own faith, still thriving today as a monastic community for women.
- Ironically, as depicted in the iconography on the west wall in the nave of its main church, St. Stephen's grandson—the son of Probota's founder—gave himself to Islam, no doubt preferring the easier life it falsely promised him.
- St. Stephen lost two battles and built nothing after them, probably believing that he did not have God's blessing to do so.
- Although he did have one son who resulted from an adulterous relationship, that son and his wife founded the painted monastery, Probota.