

# BIOGRAPHY



STEPHEN THE GREAT



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# STEPHEN'S TREE

**CHARACTER:** STEPHEN THE GREAT

**DATES:** Borzești, 1433/ Suceava, 2 july 1504

**COUNTRY OF ORIGIN:** ROMANIA

**HISTORICAL PERIOD:** 15th century

**SUMMARY:** Stephen the Great, a Moldavian prince, reigned for 47 years (1457/1504).

After losing a battle against the Turks, he retired to the vicinity of a hermitage. Here he received the suggestion to build new churches for every battle he won, wherever his arrow fell.

**KEY WORDS:** ARROW, OAK TREE, MONASTERY

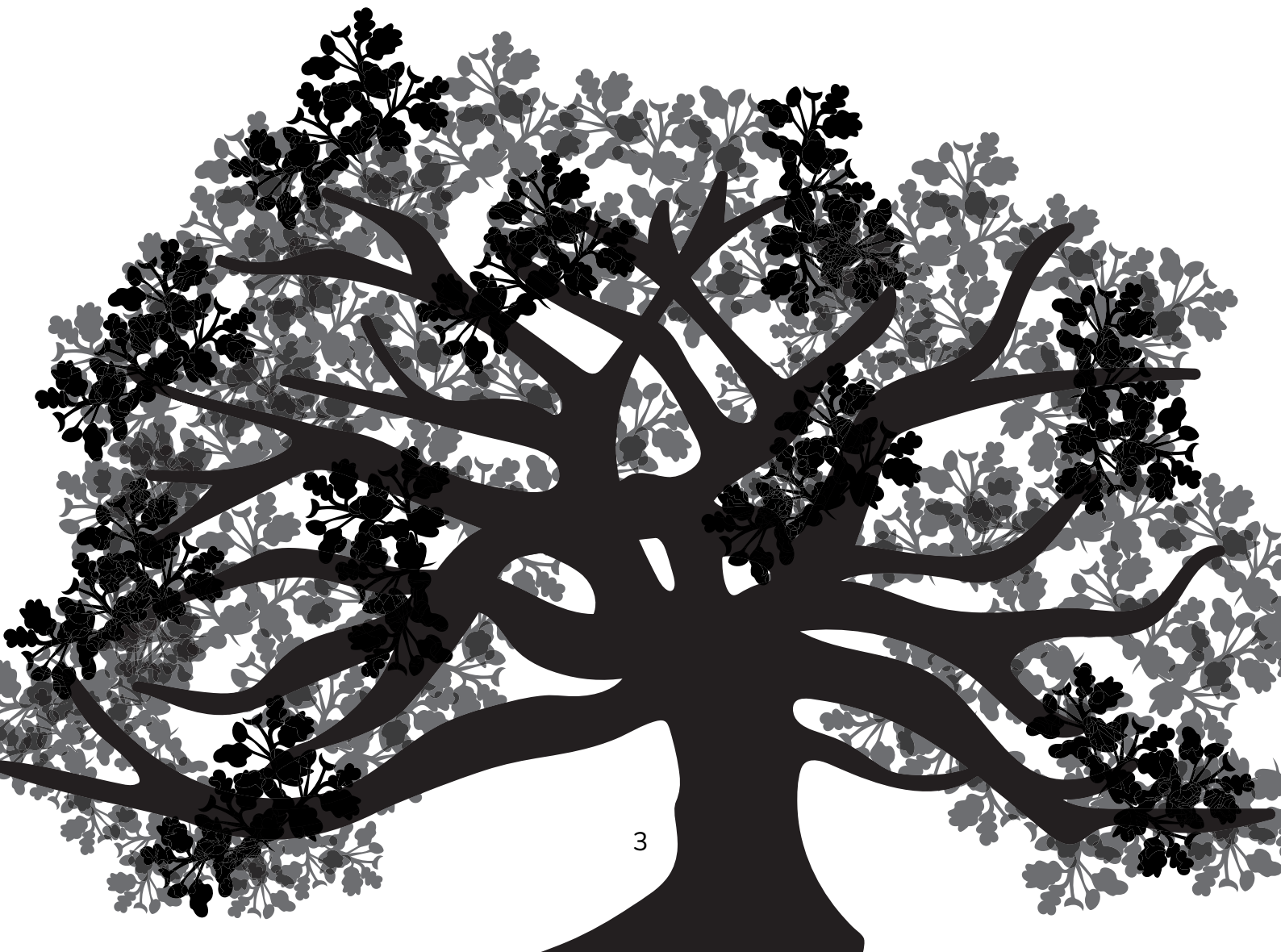
**GENRE:** BIOGRAPHY

**AGE:** 5 - 6 YEARS

**AUTHOR:** Barbara Lachi

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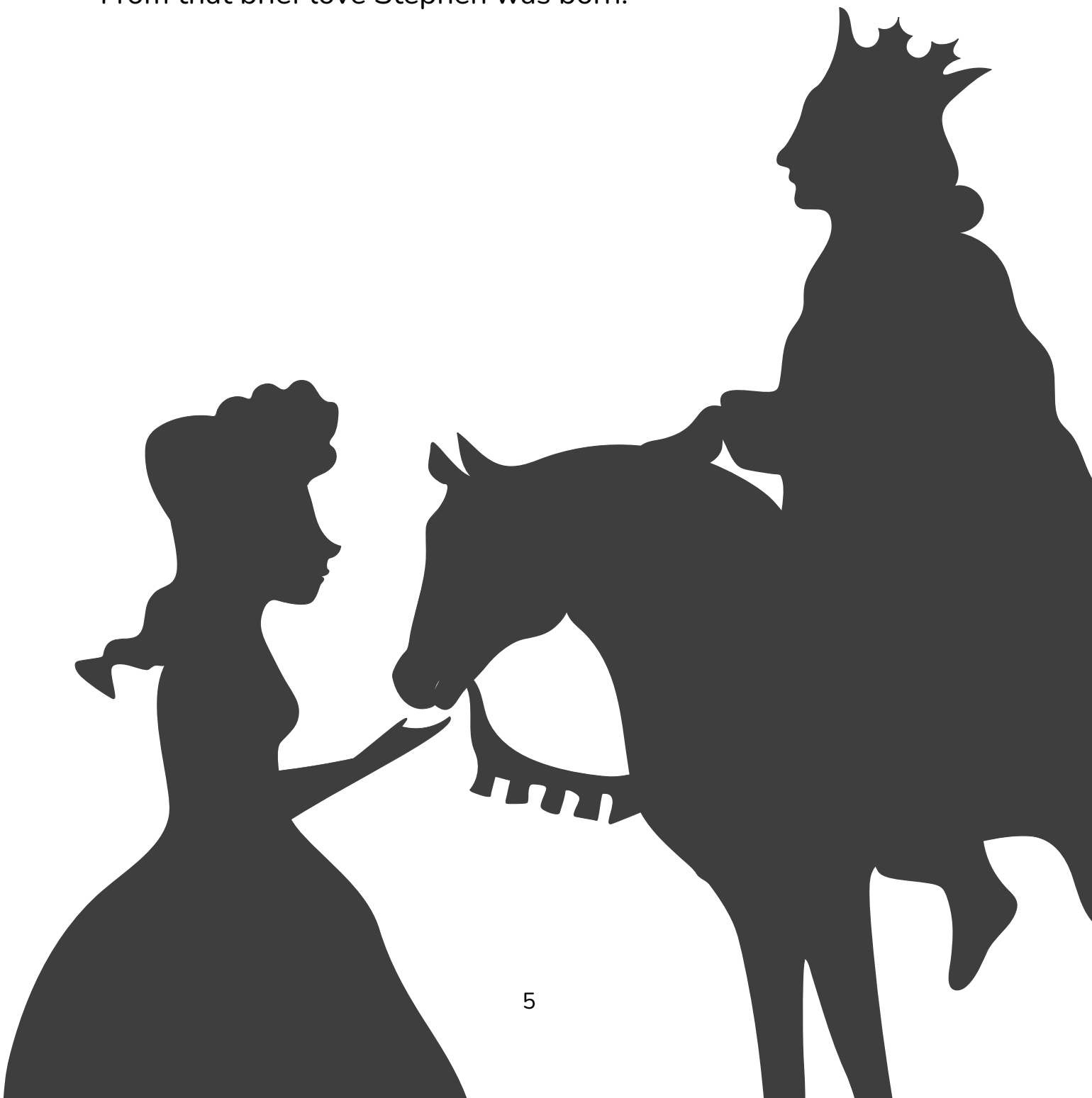
I live in the city of Cobilea, I have existed for a very long time. I am a big oak tree, and some call me majestic but I, more humbly, would say that I have grown so much during my considerable seven hundred and fifty years. The windswept foliage sways and seems to whisper stories or legends that have settled and wrapped themselves around the rings of my large and vast trunk. By sitting close to me and remaining silent you can hear them. I breathe deeply, and let the wind creep through my foliage to shake my canopy, so that the leaves rustle, swaying faintly as the first breath rises.



The men who live near me have decided to dedicate me to a prince called Stephen the Great, who is also called «The Athlete of Christ» and celebrated as a saint. His life was one of adventure, in which reality and fantasy entangled themselves just as ivy sometimes twines itself around the trunk of a tree.



Among the many stories told about him, one of the more notable ones is about his father, Bogdan II of Moldavia, and how he stopped in the town of Borzesti on his way to Suceava. While riding through the streets he was struck by the enchanting beauty of a young widow. The prince wanted to meet her and stay with her. The next day when he wished her farewell with a final embrace, he gave her his ring with the royal coat of arms. From that brief love Stephen was born.



The years passed quickly and little Stephen had a serene childhood, living with his mother and away from his father. One day, however, a terrible accident happened and a child of the same age was killed. Stephen was falsely accused and the soldiers brought him, along with his mother, in front of the prince who was none other than his father. The young woman then mustered up courage in front of the prince, showing the ring she received as a gift and said, «Your Majesty, if there is still in your heart the memory of that distant day ten years ago, I want you to know that this is the most beautiful gift you left me,» but instead of pointing to the ring she showed her son Stephen.

Moved by her words and by the presence of his son, Bogdan took Stephen under his protection.



I watched Bogdan and Stephen as the great oak tree that I am. Not many know the wind as I do. The wind often changes direction, sometimes it blows lightly and creeps gently to caress my leaves. Sometimes, however, it blows impetuously and violently, disrupting my fronds and breaking branches, bending younger trees and sometimes even tearing them from the ground.

So, too, is the history of men and not very long after, Stephen's father was killed, so the young prince had only to flee and hide. The sky grew dark as the days followed until, now in his early twenties, he returned to take back his throne and power.

When all this occurred, I had been living on this land for a little over a hundred years. I was young, too, but I had already seen many things happen and I knew many stories.

Men like Stephen were waging wars and battles, building towns and cities, erecting bridges and churches. A long time ago, at the place where Putna Monastery now stands, there was a great ancient forest where many of my brothers lived.



From them I learned of this legend that is mixed with history, or perhaps vice versa.

Stephen had lost a battle against the Turks, so tired and disappointed he retreated into the forest. The fronds of the many trees there swayed as he passed by, having recognised him. Stephen needed comfort.

Knowing that in that forest, in a small monastery carved into the rock, lived the monk Daniil , Stephen sat down on a rock, waiting for the chance to meet him.

After the prayers were over, Danil let Stephen in.

However, his defeat was so painful that he could not find the words and he remained silent in front of the monk.

The monk then shared with him what little he had.

Then he ordered him to sleep, watching over him all night.





The next day as Stephen woke up, he felt soothed. The monk Daniil said, «I know what makes your heart heavy but I am here to help you. Kneel down.» Stephen thought they would pray together but the monk continued, «rest your ear on my left foot.» Stephen obeyed. Voices came out of the monk's foot, which sounded like cries and moans. Stephen raised his head thinking that those voices were inside him that he had not yet fully awakened. So, he leaned his head back and again he heard the same voices, moaning and crying. «What do you hear?», the monk asked. «The cries of my people», Stephen answered, so the monk ordered: «Now listen to my right foot and tell me what you hear.» Stephen leaned his ear again and now heard singing: «I hear singing, as of prayer and thanksgiving.»



«If that is so, then go out on the hill, draw your bow, and where your arrow lands in where you will build a monastery.»

Stephen obeyed. The arrow swiftly crossed the sky.

Like a gust of wind, it grazed the foliage of my brothers, sticking on the trunk of a fir tree.

Stephen ran as the arrow flew swiftly with a hiss until it came close to the fir tree.

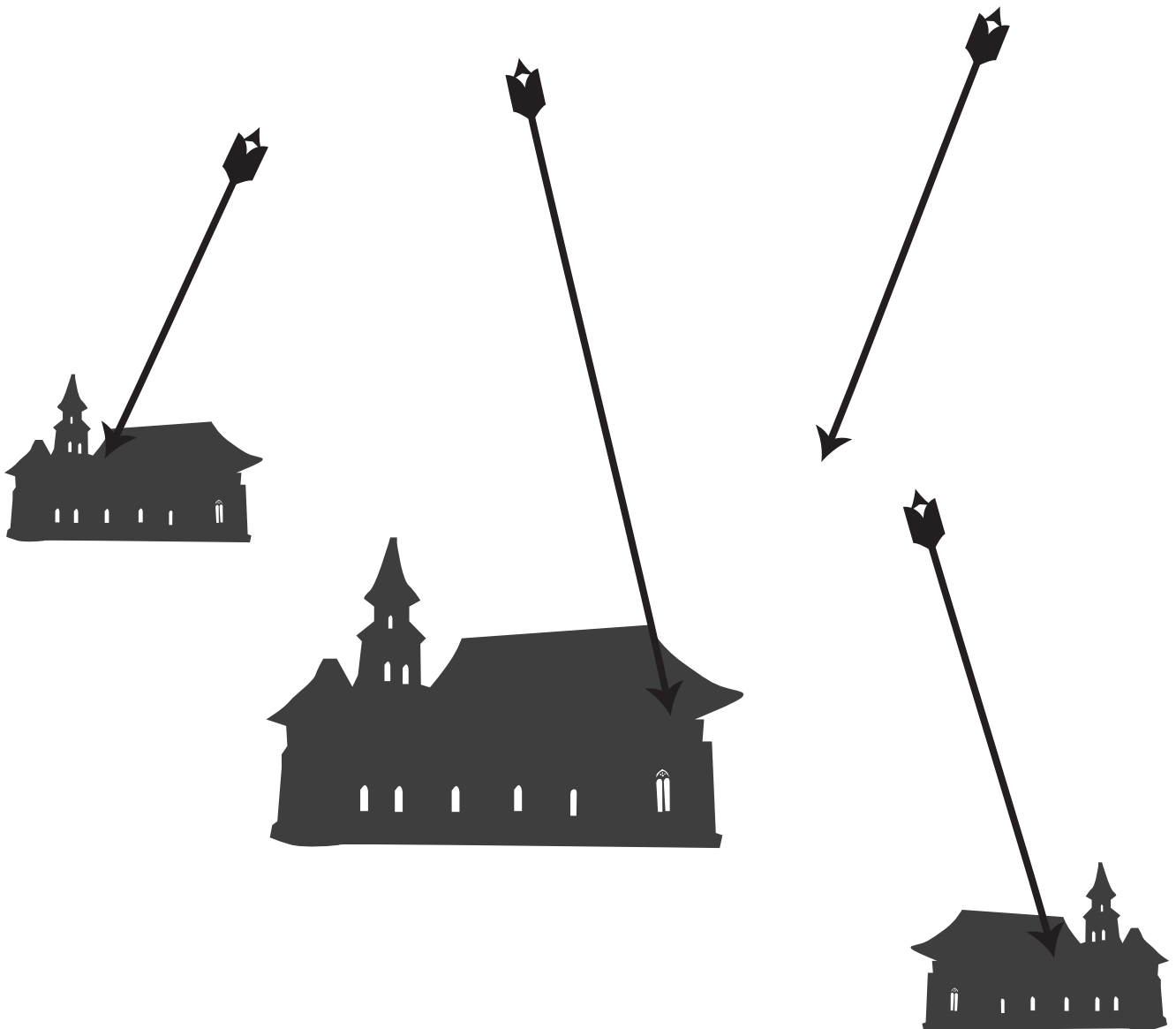


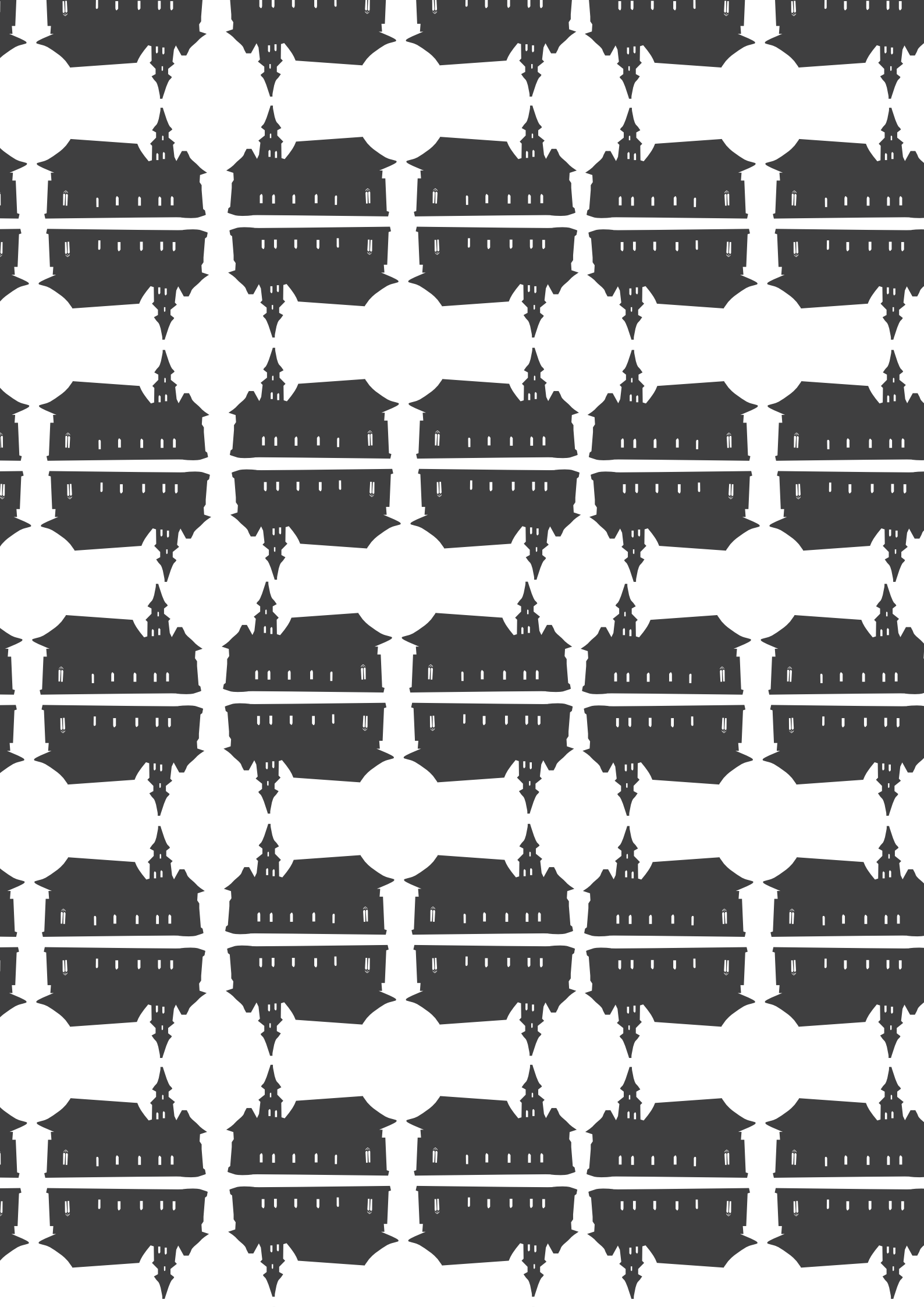
There he built his first monastery and with the trunk of the tree he made the altar. It was the 10th of July, 1466.

Stephen often returned to this place, I think he felt serene and found comfort here.

In his life as a prince and warrior there were many victorious and lost battles. And in such a distant past where history is often mixed with legend, separating what is true from what is only part of a fantasy story is not always easy.

For every battle Stephen won he erected a monastery at the place where his arrow landed.





Among the many monasteries he built he especially loved the first one and when he died many years later in July 1504 he asked to be buried there. Nowadays the forest is gone but the story I have told you still remains among our people, so that you can also tell it to the wind that will carry it far away.







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