

THE MONASTERIES IN THE BULGARIAN LANDS – RESOURCE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE GEOGRAPHY OF CULTURAL TOURISM

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Abstract

In Medieval times in the Bulgarian lands was created a network of large monastery centers. Long centuries the monasteries kept manuscripts, old books, beautiful mural paintings and woodcarvings or in other words – Bulgarian culture. Today they can be used as a resource for cultural and religious tourism. Religious sites are very visited especially on temple holidays and other religious feasts, and because of this they are included in the tours of route-cognitive tourism, together with other sites of different nature.

Key Words: monasteries, religious tourism, cultural tourism, Bulgaria

Resumo

No período medieval nas terras búlgaras criou-se uma rede de grandes centros monásticos. Ao longo de muitos séculos estes mosteiros guardaram manuscritos, bonitas pinturas murais e entalhes em madeira ou, por outras palavras – Cultura Búlgara. Nos dias de hoje este património pode ser utilizado como um recurso para o turismo cultural e religioso. Os locais religiosos são de facto muito visitados, especialmente em feriados ou festas religiosas e, por consequência, estão incluídos em circuitos turísticos, reunindo-se a outros locais de natureza distinta.

Palavras chave: mosteiros, turismo religioso, turismo cultural, Bulgária

1. Introduction

We specify the monasteries in the Bulgarian lands as resource for development of the geography of cultural tourism. They are product of the cultural achievements during the Middle Ages. Their appearance has been preceded by many processes, which resulted in literature works, Old-Bulgarian manuscripts and religious movements. One of them – the Bogomil movement, led to the appearance of the “apocryphal books” and to their introduction in folklore art. As they were copied, these books formed the spiritual peace of the people in many regions.

To the authors of books we add also the master-builders of monasteries and churches, the wall-painters, who created amazing decorative elements inside the temples. The original icon-paintings reveal the inner philosophy and social vitality, adequate to the conception the medieval man had of the world.

The monasteries in the Bulgarian lands are some of the most interesting objects of medieval culture, which preserved and preserve the memories from past times and the sacred spirit of the personal conception of the world.

In the Bulgarian history great was the significance of the literature schools in Pliska, Preslav, Ohrid and Tarnovo as a factor for the emergence of the territorial localization of religious cultural monuments. They are objective evidence of the degree of people's self-organization, for the world outlook and the way of living. They are materialized expression of its value system.

2. Monasteries as a Resource for Tourism

On the Balkans, where the prosperity of a nation is by default connected with the problematic survival of other, rules the polar model. It has infiltrated all spheres of life – economy, culture, religion. One of the main motive powers of cultural processes and center of spiritual energy is the religious site – church, monastery, religious monument. In Medieval times in the Bulgarian lands was created a network of large monastery centers. As a cultural phenomenon, they had the functions of literature centers, in which with sacred respect was preserved and reproduced the written word. The so needed for preservation of the family memory continuity was realized in them, books were created in them, that were structured usually about local cults. They are the active incubators of people's aspirations and spreaders of the feeling of life belonging. They are accelerators of the emergence and management of religious tourism. Religious sites are very visited especially on temple holidays and other religious feasts, and because of this they are included in the tours of route-cognitive tourism, together with other sites of different nature.

With a view to the numerous definitions, concerning its nature, we can conclude that religious tourism is a type of alternative tourism, which is connected with visiting of religious cult objects, provoked by the religious and spiritual necessities of the travellers.

Its basic resource are the cult monuments – religious sites, such as: holly springs, chaplets, monasteries, churches, religious temples.

As peculiar culture centers with interesting architecture and woodcarving they arouse professional, but also tourist interest.

Which, from the state's point of view, should be valorized.

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The presence of numerous monastery complexes in Bulgaria presumes larger increasing of the number of monasteries as sites of route-cognitive tourism. From the Hundred national tourist sites eight

are monasteries – Aladzha monastery, Bachkovski, Dryanovski, the monastery in Patleyna, Preobrazhenski, Rilski, Troyanski and Shipchenski monastery. Another two of the monasteries are in a settlement, which is declared a national tourist site – the monasteries of “The Mother of God” and “St. Nikolas” in the village of Arbanasi.

From the eight Bulgarian sites under the protection of UNESCO three are monasteries – the Ivanovo Rock-hewn Churches, the Aladzha monastery and the Rila monastery.

Being anthropogenic tourist resources monasteries have peculiarities, too different from these of the natural resources, mostly from the point of view of the territorial organization of tourism. Generally we can distinguish the following:

1. In the visit of monasteries central role has the cognitive effect, but it is possible to be combined with recreative effect.
2. The acquaintance of particular monastery complex is not so long process, which allows the combination with visits to other anthropogenic sites.
3. Monasteries attract tourists with wider interests and higher culture. The formation of the tourist flow to them is influenced by factors, such as age, intellect, profession, nationality and others.
4. Only a small part of the monasteries are situated in settlements. Mostly they are 4-5 kilometers away from the nearest settlement and are situated in nature, which taken alone represents tourist attraction with recreative aesthetic value. The monasteries are usually built in more inaccessible areas, which create some difficulties regarding the direct access to them.
5. Monasteries don't have natural restoration capability. This imposes the need for protection, preservation and timely restoration.
6. Monastery complexes are immovable objects, which requires transportation of the tourists to them.
7. The influence of the tourist on the monastery complexes goes through several stages: getting general information about the object, direct visual contact, detailed exploration, critical assessment. Usually for the route-cognitive tourism are typical the first two stages, and the next are typical for the group of tourists having special interest and culture.
8. Monasteries have educative and aesthetic impact and are sites of great worldview value.

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If in the ages before the conquering of Bulgaria by the Turks, mainly the rulers took care for the monasteries, who donated to them fields, lawns, water-mills and so on, during the Turkish rule the whole population made great efforts to preserve the privileges and lands monasteries had. Because of this after XIV century monasteries were usually built in mountainous regions, in areas which were suitable for defense. The predominant mountainous terrain in the Bulgarian lands is an advantage for the construction

of many monasteries, especially in the time of the Turkish rule. Numerous are the monasteries in the Balkan, Sredna Gora, Rila, Kraishteto. Not so many are they in the Rhodopes, where the Turkish and the Greek element, because of the territorial nearness, have negative influence. During the conversion to Mohammedanism of Bulgarians in the region of the Rhodopes many medieval churches and monasteries were demolished. Evidence for that are the chronicle notes of priest Metody Draginov from XVII century, in which is mentioned that the Turks “ruined all the churches from Kostenets to Stanimaka – 33 monasteries and 218 churches”.

Typical phenomenon for the Bulgarian lands is the grouping of a number of monasteries around one central monastery or around a settlement. On the analogy of the monasteries on the Athos Peninsula a lot of monastery groups emerged and the places where they are concentrated are also called “Sveta Gora” (Mount Athos). A model of the medieval monastery group is the one of Tarnovo, in the lead of which is the monastery of “Holy 40 Martyrs”. Significant monastery groupings during the Middle Ages were situated around Sliven, Asenovgrad and Vidin. Very popular are the four monasteries near Sofia, known by the unifying name “Malka Sveta Gora” (“Small Mount Athos”).

There are regions without monastery complexes – in North-Eastern Bulgaria, The Eastern Rhodopes, in the central part of the Danubian Plain and the Upper Thracian Lowland.

The biggest concentration of monasteries is in Western Bulgaria – around Sofia, Pernik, Vratsa, Montana, Vidin, also around Veliko Tarnovo and Gabrovo.

Along the Seaside today there is only one well preserved monastery – the one of Pomorie.

In the map called “Better Known Bulgarian Monasteries” which is enclosed to the “Encyclopedia Bulgaria” are represented 74 monasteries, 55 of which are on the territory of Bulgaria and 17 in Serbia and Macedonia, as well as the Hilendarsky Monastery and the Bulgarian Zografsky Monastery on the Athos Peninsula.

G. Chavrakov and S. Dobrev consider that on the territory of the country exist about 130 monastery complexes or independent monastery churches (Chakarov, G., Dobrev, S., 1974).

According to I. Bogdanov their number is 100 (Bogdanov, I., 1971), and other researchers register 160 monasteries, 41 of which are larger and suitable for the tourist flows.

The Holy Synod considers that today there are around 20 monasteries in Bulgaria.

As anthropogenic tourist resources the exploration and evaluation of monasteries is based on the following principles:

1. Chronological. The objects are divided according to the age to which they belong. The monasteries in Bulgaria as objects of exploration originated mainly in the years of the First and the Second Bulgarian state, and their contemporary appearance they have from XIX century – in the age of the Bulgarian national revival or in the beginning of XX century.
2. Typological.
3. Spatial.

4. Functional. The monasteries of international and national significance are objects of intensified visiting, and the smaller monasteries of regional and local significance can be used for short-time recreation.

For characterization of the monasteries in the Bulgarian lands are used different indicators. The cultural-ethnographic approach is connected with the following algorithm: significance of the monastery; architectural completeness; cultural-historical heritage; written monuments and documentation; museum collections and monastery expositions; transport accessibility; existence of material base at the object or near it; condition and maintenance of the monastery; attendance; perspectives and possibilities for tourism.

3. Most Significant Monasteries in Bulgaria

Here we present some short information about the most significant monasteries in the Bulgarian lands by the first indicator:

Rila Monastery “Saint Ivan of Rila” (figures 1 and 2). This is the most impressive monument of Bulgarian architecture and arts, and the biggest spiritual and literary center of the Bulgarian national revival in our lands from the time of the Turkish rule. Its establishment in X century is related to the life and activity of the Bulgarian hermit Ivan Rilsky. The oldest building in the monastery is a fortified defensive tower from XIV century. In 1469 from Veliko Tarnovo were brought the relics of St. Ivan Rilsky. In its contemporary outlook it has been preserved from 1834. Its main church impresses with its mural paintings. It gave shelter for many fighters for the Bulgarian Liberation. In 1961 it was declared a national museum, keeping a lot of manuscripts, documents, icons and etc., and from 1983 UNESCO gave it the greatest recognition – monument of the world culture.



Figure1- Rila Monastery “Saint Ivan of Rila”.



Figure 2 - Rila Monastery "Saint Ivan of Rila".



Figure 3 - Bachkovo Monastery "Dormition of the Holy Mother of God".

Bachkovo Monastery "Dormition of the Holy Mother of God" (figure 3). It was established in 1083 by the Georgian brothers Gregory and Abazy Pakourianos, occupying high positions in the Byzantine army. In XI century here originated the Bachkovo literary school. Some translations of Sophocles, Euripides and others were made here. The main church is from 1604. Interesting is the miraculous icon "The Mother of God" (figure 4), which was brought from Georgia, and which is covered

with gold and silver. The monastery is connected with Euthymius of Tarnovo, who spent the last years of his life here.



Figure 4 - Bachkovo Monastery – procession with the miraculous icon “The Mother of God”.

Troyan Monastery “Dormition of the Holy Mother of God” (figures 5 and 6). It is third by size in Bulgaria. It was established in 1600 and became an important spiritual center from the time of the Bulgarian national revival. Zahariy Zograf made the mural paintings in the church “Assumption of the Mother of God”. The monastery is famous for its miraculous icon “The Mother of God of Three Hands”. It provides accommodation.

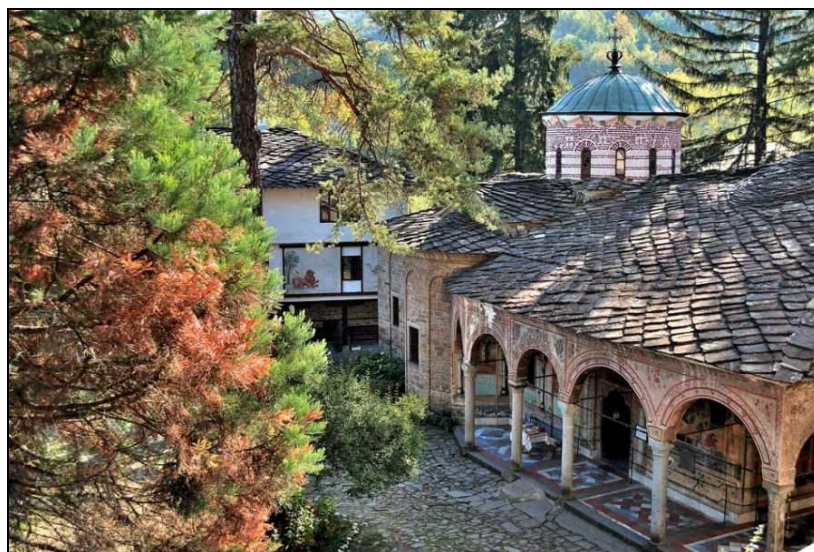


Figure 5 - Troyan Monastery “Dormition of the Holy Mother of God”.



Figure 6 - Troyan Monastery – external mural paintings.

Aladzha Monastery (figures 7 and 8). It is situated 14 km to the east of Varna. It was established in the early Christian era, but in its present appearance it was constructed in X century, when in the Bulgarian lands spread reclusion. In the years of the Second Bulgarian state under the influence of the Hesychastic movement the rock monasteries in Bulgaria reached their highest development. Then also Aladzha Monastery reached its bloom. It was abandoned in XVIII century and today it is one of the most visited sites along the Bulgarian seaside.



Figure 7- Aladzha Monastery from outside.



Figure 8 - Inside Aladzha Monastery.

Dryanovo Monastery (figures 9 and 10). It was established at the end of XII century. In XIV century the monastery was one of the main centers of Hesychasm. During the Ottoman rule the monastery was burned twice and at its present place it was built in XVII century. In that time in it worked a church school. The monastery possessed a copy of the history by Paisiy, made in 1783-1793. A revolutionary committee was established at the monastery, in order to help for the organization of the April Uprising in 1876 against the Ottoman Empire.



Figure 9 - Dryanovo Monastery.



Figure 10 - Dryanovo Monastery from above.

4. Final Considerations

Monasteries are not only successors of the spiritual and material wealth, but also creators and organizers of spirituality in the Bulgarian lands for centuries. They are centers of the most cultured and active for their time Bulgarians, who communicated with other nations, acquired and spread new ideas, compositions, pictorial techniques in arts and so on.

Except for stimulation of the cultural-cognitive and religious tourism, monasteries, this living religious tradition and part of the Eastern Orthodoxy, help also for the preservation of the national sentiment in the conditions of increasing globalization and the more and more marginalizing multiculturalism.

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