

## MONASTERIES IN BULGARIA AS A RESOURCE AND DESTINATION FOR RELIGIOUS TOURISM

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### Abstract

Religious tourism is one of the modern types of tourism. It is developing very dynamically also in Bulgaria. A prerequisite for this is the rich cultural and historical heritage and the numerous religious temples preserved in the Bulgarian lands. Among them, the monks play a leading role.

**Keywords:** tourism, religion, monasteries, churches, Christianity

### Résumé

Le tourisme religieux est l'un des types de tourisme modernes. Il se développe très dynamiquement aussi en Bulgarie. Une condition préalable à cela est le riche patrimoine culturel et historique et les nombreux temples religieux conservés dans les terres bulgares. Parmi eux, les moines jouent un rôle de premier plan.

**Mots-clés:** tourisme, religion, monastères, églises, christianisme

### 1. Introduction

One of the biggest wealth in Bulgaria is the great number of monasteries situated over the unapproachable peaks or enclosed by mountains and surrounded by incredible nature. The Bulgarian monasteries are unique, because of their rich architecture, icons and wall paintings, as well as with the legends and sagas, bringing a mythical outlook to some of them. Intensive monastery construction in Bulgaria started right after Christianity was officially adopted in the country in 865 AC. They became a Slavic writing, culture and orthodox religion centres. The monasteries preserved the national spiritual values during the hard times for the Bulgarian state. Most of the Bulgarian literature and painting was created in these holly cloisters. During the time of Ottoman rule the monasteries preserved not only the religion, customs and culture but they were also the heart of the revolutionary movement. Because of the Turkish attacks or as a result of the time small part of the today's operating monasteries have kept their original look. However visiting them is a great experience that gives the feeling of spiritual

calmness and leaves long lasting memories. Nowadays there are about 160 operating monasteries in Bulgaria and some of them are listed in UNESCO book including the exceptionally interesting rocky monasteries. Cutted in a cliff rocks, they are symbol of the strong will of the Bulgarians and their ability to survive during the hard times (Dimitrov, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to examine the monasteries in Bulgaria as a tourist resource and an opportunity for the development of religious tourism.

As leading factors for the development of religious tourism in Bulgaria, we can say:

- Religious tolerance characteristic of Bulgarian society;
- Temples of various religions located on the territory of the country;
- High cultural and artistic value of a large part of the religious temples;
- Pilgrimage, characteristic of both past epochs and nowadays;
- Specific syncretism of some religious practices, traditions and centers - common sites for the worship of different religions;
- Relatively good infrastructure of the most visited sites.

Thanks to this, religious trips in Bulgaria have grown from 25,000 participants in 1979 to over 1.7 million today. Of these, 93,746 are foreigners or 5% of the visits. The visits of the three Bulgarian-Bulgarian monasteries - Rilski, Bachkovski and Troyanski amount to 3 779 572 people, 285 490 of whom foreigners - 7,5% of the visitors.

## **2. Different methodological approaches of this heritage**

Religious tourism in Bulgaria continues to be connected with visiting mainly monasteries. Despite the worrying state of the vast majority of them, more than 40 monasteries are involved in economic turnover through tourism (figure 1). They can be grouped by location as follows:

1. Monasteries in northwest Bulgaria: Chiprovsky, Lopushanski, Bistriski, Karlukovski;
2. Monasteries in Northern Bulgaria: Cherepishki, Etropole, Glozhene, Teteven, Troyanski, Batoshevski, Dryanovski, Kilifarevski, Plachkovski, Kapinovski, Lyaskovski, Arbanashki, Preobrajenski, Ivanovski rock monasteries, Aladzha monastery, etc.;
3. Monasteries in the region of Sofia: The Seven Thrones, Kurilovski, Seslavski, Lozenski, Dolopasaraleski, Alinski, Dragalevski;
4. Monasteries in Southwestern Bulgaria: Transki, Zemenski, Boboshevski, Rilski, Rozhenski;
5. Monasteries in Southern Bulgaria - Sopotski, Shipchenski, Maglizhki, Kuklenski, Bachkovski, Arapovski and others (Kostov, 2001).

A. Kazakov grouped the monasteries according to their accessibility, as follows:

- Excellent accessibility - Airport presence within 20 km or no more than 20 km, asphalted road to the monastery and securely placed signs;
- Very good accessibility - airport or train station not more than 50 km away, a macadam road and reliable signs;



Figure 1 - The most visited monasteries in Bulgaria (own production)

- Medium accessibility - Availability of an airport or train station of no more than 50 km, presence of a macadam road, but lack of plates or extremely insufficient ones;
- Poor accessibility - Availability of an airport or train station of no more than 50 km, dirt road.

According to the time of creation, the monasteries of Early Christian (IV - IX century), Medieval (X - XV century) and young (XVI - XX century) were divided.

Kazakov also offers other criteria such as: geographical location (about 60% of which are located in the mountains); distance from existing settlements (there is only one monastery 10 km distant, 12 are located between 5 and 10 km and all are within 5 km or in the settlement itself); availability of accommodation base; respect for monastic brotherhoods for visitors and tourists, etc.(Kazakov, 2013).

Based on the capacity of the monastery (number of monks), the following main types of monasteries are classified:

- Monomonastery - with a monk;
- A small monastery with two to five monks;
- Middle monastery - five to twenty monks;
- A large monastery with twenty to forty monks;
- Lavra - with over forty monks.

### 3. Some examples of religious heritage enhanced by tourism

Small and medium-sized monasteries predominate in Bulgaria. Depending on their location, tourism companies include them in their programs (general and specialized). The most frequently offered monasteries are Rilski, Bachkovski, Aladzha, Rozhenski, Troyanski, Preobrajenski, Dryanovski and others. Undoubtedly the greatest interest for tourists and especially for foreigners is the Rila Monastery (Kostov..., 2001).

#### 3.1. Rila Monastery

The “St. Ivan Rilski” monastery is the biggest monastery complex in Bulgaria. It is situated at 117 km away from Sofia at 1147 m above the sea level in Rila Mountain (figure 2). Rila Monastery was declared as national historical monument and was listed in UNESCO book.

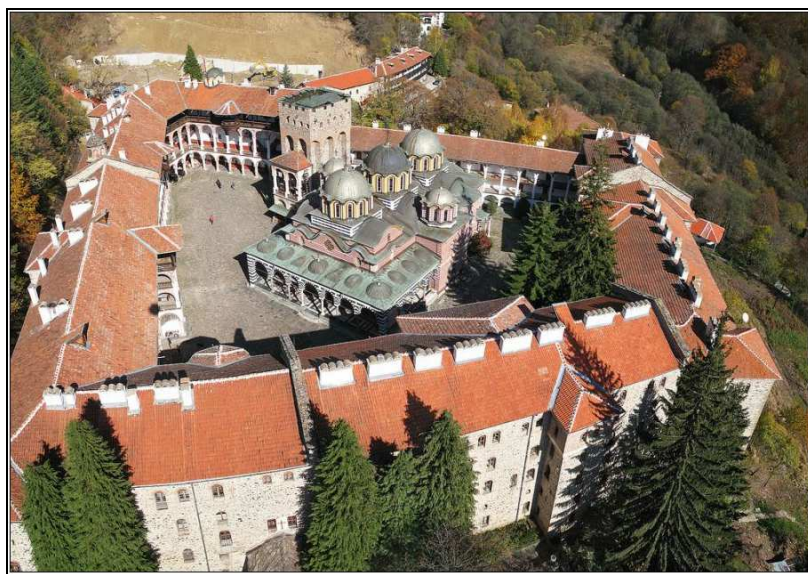


Figure 2 - Rila Monastery (Source: <http://www.bulgariamonasteries.com>)

The monastery was founded by the hermit St. Ivan Rilski in the 10th century. Ivan Rilski is one of the greatest Bulgarian saints. He was born about 867 in village of Skrino near Dupnitsa town. He was a shepherd and at the age of 25 he went in “St. Dimitar” monastery in Osogovo Mountain. He got his ecclesiastical education here and became a monk but soon he left the monastery and became a hermit. At last he settled in the marvelous Rila Mountain where he lived to the end of his life. He started healing the locals and preached the words of God in a way that anyone could understand. The Rila monk became popular and soon the rumour spread all over, and even the Bulgarian king Petar I came from the capital Preslav in Rila to see him. But Ivan Rilski just bowed to the king from a

distance. He didn't accept the gold that king Petar I send him as well. People started to respect him even more and other monks and hermits came to him to be his disciples. They built hovels around and thus the foundation of the most famous Bulgarian monastery was laid.

The local lord Stefan Dragolov (Hreljo) built the monastery at the place where it is now, but only the monument "Hreljova Tower" left from the middle aged building. The Rila monastery enjoyed great privileges and all the rulers and lords made a costly gifts and donations. During the 15th century the monastery was destroyed by the ottomans. The beginning of 19 century marks the start of the renovation of the complex. During this period the residence complex and the church "Virgin Mary's nativity" were built.

The most precious wealth of the monastery is the unique wall paintings. The oldest are in the chapel of "Hreljova Tower". They perform three stages of the St. Ivan Rilski life. The paintings date back from the 14th century. The oldest icon preserved in the monastery is from the same period as well. It is devoted to St. Ivan Rilski. Most of the other wall paintings are made by the great icon - painter Zhari Zograf. During the 19th century he painted most of the churches and monasteries in Bulgaria (Stamov, 2015).

### **3.2. Bachkovo Monastery**

The "Assumption" monastery is the second large monastery in Bulgaria. It is situated in the western part of Rodope Mountain 10 km away from Asenovgrad (figure 3).



Figure 3 - Bachkovo Monastery (Source: <http://www.bulgariamonasteries.com>)

It was founded by Grigoriy Bukuriani – Georgian military commander who was at the service of the Byzantine Emperor. After the Ottomans conquered Bulgaria in the end of 14 century the heroic patriarch St. Evtimiy Tarnovski was send into exile in the monastery, were he stayed until the end of



the life. He was buried here. At first the monastery survived after the Ottoman attacks but later it was burned down and plundered. During the 15th century it was renovated, and the main monastery church was built in 1604. The wall paintings in the refectory date back from 1643 and they are of great art value. There are stages of "the Doomsday", figures of holy monks, stages from the Orthodox Church history and many other mural paintings. The icon of Virgin Mary is very attractive too. It is said that the icon is miraculous. 103 manuscripts and 252 old printed books were found in the monastery in the beginning of 20th century and were called "a real literature depository" (Stamov, 2011).

### **3.3. Troyan Monastery**

The third large monastery in Bulgaria is the "Assumption". It is situated in Stara Planina Mountain 10 km away from town of Troyan on the bank of Cherni Osum river. The legend says that the monastery was found by a hermit monk in the beginning of the Ottoman slavery. He came in the mountain to be closer to God and built a small chapel. Later the local people built a church in honor of Virgin Mary at the same place. The monastery was burned down many times, since it was built and the monks were killed by the Turks. In 1830 the priests procured some privileges for the monastery successfully and the prosperity of the temple started. The most significant monument of culture in the Troyan monastery is the "Assumption" church.

Troyan monastery like other monasteries in Bulgaria is centre of revolution in the 19th century. In the middle of the 18th century, a cell school was found in the monastery. Many important revival persons got their education here. The famous icon painter Zahari Zograf left the traces of his mastership in the monastery (Ivanov, 2012).

### **3.4. Klisura Monastery "St. St. Cyril and Methodius"**

The Klisura Monastery is hidden in the picturesque valley of Vreshtitsa river, at the foot of Todorini Kukli peak in the western part of the Balkan mountain. It is situated 4 km away from the village of Klisura, about 9 km away from the town of Berkovitsa, 28 km away from the town of Vratsa and 54 km away from Bulgaria's capital city, Sofia.

Klisura Monastery was founded in 1240 as at that time it was named Vreshetski. The monastery was devastated by the Ottoman conquerors in the 15th century and consequently it remained uninhabited for a long period. It was renovated in 1742 by donations of Klisura's residents. However, 40 years later it was destroyed once again. Nevertheless, the monastery for consecutive time has been brought to life because of the efforts of monks and local residents.

The year 1862 has been marked as a tragic in the history of the Klisura Monastery. On the celebration of the day of St St Cyril and Metodii, the cloister was burnt to ashes and all monks and

pilgrims were slaughtered by the Turkish pasha from Berkovitsa, Yusuf Bey and his soldiers. All valuables were stolen, 120 people were dramatically killed and the monastery itself was torn down.

The Klisura Monastery was renovated in 1869 and its present-day Renaissance appearance is a result of the heap of the archimandrite and church-donor Antim Damyanov. The church "St. St. Kiril and Metodii" was officially consecrated in 1891 by the Vidin's Metropolitan Bishop.

Architecture and present condition: At present, the Klisura Monastery is fully operational and it consists of two churches, residential and farming buildings.

Klisura Monastery The main church "St. St. Kiril and Metodii" is three-domed, three-apse, cross-domed building. It has an open narthex on both sides of which high church-towers are situated. The iconostasis is an original piece of art of the master Stoicho Fandukov. The icons in the old shrine date back to the 18-19th century and they were created by the famous Bulgarian icon-painter Nikola Obrazopisov. The church was painted later in 1937 by the renowned Bulgarian artists, Gospodin Zhelyazkov and Georgi Bogdanov.

A few years ago a new, but significantly smaller church, the chapel "St. Nikola" has been built.

Many precious objects such as old icons, books, church plates are kept in the Klisura Monastery, but the most valuable ones are the saints' relics.

The so-called "live water" was found in 2000 in the holy spring of the Klisura Monastery. It flows of the Todorini Kukli mountain peak. The spring water is low-mineralized and is believed to be curative. The holy cloister of the Klisura Monastery is declared to be a monastery's complex (Kostov, 2000).

### **3.5. Cherepish Monastery**

The "Assumption" monastery is situated at the foot of the amazing rocks in Stara Planina Mountain along the valley of the Iskar river. It is 29 km away from Vratsa. During the time of Ottoman rule the monastery was one of the fortresses that kept the Bulgarian culture and spirit and it was destroyed many times. Cherepish monastery took a part in the battles for the national liberation and church independence. In the holy cloister a Bulgarian church literature had been created for centuries.

In 1798 the great Bulgarian St. Sofroniy Vrachanski found an asylum in the monastery as he left Vratsa because of the Turkish slaughters. He stood there till 1799 and continued creating and working in favor of Bulgaria.

There are many legends about hidden gold and treasures around the monastery.

### **3.6. Gabrovo - Sokolski Monastery**

The Assumption Sokolski Monastery is situated in Stara Planina Mountain along the upper river valley of Yantra, 12 km away from Gabrovo and 4 km away from the Etara architectural ethnographic reserve. An eco path connects the monastery with the reserve.

In 1833 the famous fighter for church independence Joseph Sokolski came back to his home town Gabrovo and with the help of priest Agapius built a small wooden chapel in front of the nearby cave. A small wooden house was built near the church. One year later people from the local villages made donations and helped for the construction of the big temple that can be seen today. The consecration of the church was carried out in 1834.

According to another hypothesis, there was an operating monastery at that place during the Medieval that was reconstructed by two monks in the 30s of the 19th century. The Sokolski Monastery became a centre of the education and the liberation movement. During the rebel in 1856 and the April uprising in 1876 the monastery was a headquarter. During the Russian – Turkish war of liberation it was a military hospital. There is small museum that keeps some relics from the time of the battles for freedom.

The monastery was a friary until 1959, when the convent in Gabrovo was torn down and nuns moved to Sokolski Monastery. Today the monastery is operating. It is a complex of a church, residential buildings and farm buildings. A white stoned fountain with 8 spouts, decorated with statues of falcons is rising in the middle of the vast monastery yard, full of flowers and verdancy. It is supposed that the fountain was built by Kolio Fitcheto in 1856.

The icons of the Holly Mother and Jesus Christ painted by Zahari Zograf are reserved in the monastery chapel. There is another icon of the Holly Mother with the Son which is believed to be miraculous.

The wall-paintings of the church were made in 1862 by a priest Pavel and his son Nikolay. Later, other masters left painted icons on the walls of the church. The frescoes and the monastery itself are restored (The Bulgarian Monasteries, 1997).

### **3.7. Dryanovo Monastery**

St. Archangel Michail Dryanovo monastery is huddled in the picturesque gorge of Dryanovo river in Stara Planina Mountain. It is about 5 km away from Dryanovo, 15 km away from the town of



Gabrovo and about 220 km away from Sofia. The monastery is easy to reach by car, driving down the main road from the town of Veliko Turnovo to Gabrovo.

The monastery is surrounded by picturesque mountain walls, high limestone rocks, caves and a greeat variety of flora and fauna.

The monastery haas an ancient history. The first traces of life date back to the pre historical epochs when people lived in the caves surrounding the monastery. The earliest artifacts proving the existence of human life were found in Bacho Kiro cave and date back to the second half of the Old Stone epoch (100 000 – 10 000 years b.c). There are more than 6000 archeological findings.

During the Early Byzantine epoch the strategic importance of the mountain region increased. The Byzantines built two fortresses near the rivers in the areas “Boruna” and “Grada” in the middle part of Stara Planina mountain. In the 5th century they left the fortresses when the region was settled by the Slavic tribes. The two fortresses defended the old Bulgarian capital Tarnovo.

St. Archangel Michail Dryanovo monastery dates back to the time of reign of the Assen dynasty, the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, the 12th century. It was built in relation to the celebration of the victory of Bulgaria over Byzantium in 1187. During the centuries it beecame one of the centers of Bulgarian culture and literature.

During the Ottoman rule Dryanovo monastery is one of the main symbols of the insubordinate Bulgarian spirit and struggle for the liberation. One of the main quarters of the Bulgarian Central Revolutionary Committee in Turnovo was located exactly in thy monastery and famous rebel leaders such as Vassil Levski and his adherents were often to be found there.

The monastery played important role in the April uprising. When the uprising burst out in 1876, 200 revolutionaries led by Pop Hariton, Lieutenant Peter Parmakov and Daskal (teacher) Bacho Kiro defended the unassailable fortress for 9 days. But the numerous Turkish army shattered the outbreak of the brave rebellions. The monastery was burned and destroyed.

The monastery was rebuilt in 1880. A new residential part and a museum were added to the existing buildings. The bell-tower was erected in 1925.

The church is without wall-paintings and the holes from the shells of the turks were left in the stonewalls and the museum collection tells us about the epic battles

At present, the friary is operating. The contemporary monastery is one of the 10th most honored cloisters of the Bulgarian Orthodox church. It is national historic monument and one of the most visited tourist destinations. The monastery offers accommodation and food.

### 3.8 - Preobrazhenski Monastery

The “Lord’s Holly Transfiguration monastery” is situated amidst beautiful countryside about 7 km away from the middle aged capital Veliko Tarnovo (figure 4). It is one of the biggest monasteries in Bulgaria and one the most interesting because it was built and decorated by two of the greatest creators and masters in Bulgaria – Zahari Zograf and Kolio Ficheto. In fact the monastere was founded in the 14th century with the donations made by Queen Teodora Sara but during the Turkish slavery it was completely destroyed. In 1832 the Turkish Sultan gave his permission a new church to be built in the place of the old monastery. In 1834 the genius master Kolio Ficheto completed the church. After that the icon painter Zahari Zograf painted the church, which took him three years. The whole monastery was reestored in 1882. The wall paintings like the “Doom day” and the “Circle of life” are of great cultural significance. The second picture shows the transience of the human life. The gold – plated iconostasis is another monument of the wood – carving art in Bulgaria (Prashkov, 1990).



Figure 4 - Preobrazhenski Monastery (Source: <http://www.bulgariamonasteries.com>)

### 3.9. Kilifarevo Monastery

Kilifarevo Monastery is situated on the right bank of Belitsa River, 12 km south of Veliko Tarnovo and 2 km of Kilifarevo. The monastery is surrounded by magnificent nature.

The monastery was founded about 1348 – 1350 under the rule of King Yoan Aleksandar. Famous St. Teodosi of Tarnovo had searched for a calm, secluded site, so he built a great cloister there. The monastery grew up and became an important literary and spiritual centre of the Tarnovo Kingdom. The books, written there, had reached Serbia and Russia and made the monastery and its

founder, St. Teodosi, very popular. The brave defender of Tarnovo, Patriarch Evtimii, continued his work.

The monastery was destroyed by the Ottoman invaders and was uninhabited for a long period of time. The contemporary Kilifarevo Monastery was built in 1718 at the foot of the previous ruins. "The Birth of Holy Mother" church was built at the same time.

In 1840 the great master Kolio Ficheto built another temple, the present "St. Dimitar" church. It is rich decorated and there are very interesting wall paintings from 1718. They are an important cultural monument.

### **3.10. Shipka Monastery**

Shipka is a real cultural centre of the Bulgarian lands. The town is situated just 5 km from the beautiful rose town of Kazanlak, in close vicinity to Koprinka Dam and the valley of the Thracian Kings. The beauty of the area, the good climate and fresh mountain air of Shipka ensures relaxing holidays throughout the whole year.

One of the most popular attractions and a symbol of the town is the Russian Church of Shipka. In honour of the perished Russian soldiers and Bulgarian volunteers in the Russian – Turkish war of liberation a large beautiful monastery "Nativity" was built at the foot of Stara Planina above the town of Shipka. The monastery was constructed in period 1885 – 1902 and the land property was granted by local people.

The monastery church "Nativity" is very impressive. It is real masterpiece of architecture and was declared as a monument of culture. The temple was built in the Russian cathedrals traditional style from 17 century. The golden domes are shining far from the distance and the versicoloured inlays are like alive. There is 53 m long bell tower with 17 bells. The biggest one weights 12 t. The visitors can see 24 marble plates with the names of 18,491 Russian and Bulgarian soldiers who gave their life in battle at Shipka and Kazanlak.

### **3.11. Rozhen Monastery**

The "Virgin Mary's Nativity" monastery is one of the few monasteries that is preserved ever since it was built in the middle ages. It is situated in the lower south western part of Pirin 6 km away from Melnik.

A marvelous view to the magnificent peaks of Pirin and Belasitsa mountains and the unique Melnik pyramids reveals from here. The monastery was built in the remote 890 year. In the 17th century the monastery was burned out but it was restored in the 18th century.

Many men of means made rich donations to renovate the temple. During the 19th century the Rozhen monastery was in its apogee and it was a cultural and spiritual centre. The flourishing period was ceased by the revolutionary Yane Sandanski who conquered its lands. Just like the other

monasteries Rozhen monastery has its miraculous icon of Virgin Mary that protects the monasteries and the thousand of pilgrims. The legend tells that the icon belonged to a widow from Nikea (Greece). The Byzantine emperor Teofilous who struggled against the icon cult wanted to destroy the icon and the widow throw it in the river and the icon reached "Ivrion" Monastery in Greece. Later it was moved in Rozhen Monastery (Ivanov, 2012).

### **3.12. Glozhene Monastery**

One of the most interesting monasteries in Bulgaria – "St. Georgi the Victorious" is rising in the marvelous Teteven Balkan in Stara Planina Mountain on the top of a unapproachable rock.

It is known as Glozhene monastery and looks more like medieval teemple. It is situated 100 km away from Sofia.

The monastery was found by the prince Georgiy Glozh who came from South Russia chased by the Tatar hordes. The Bulgarian king let him build Glozhene village and started the construction of the monastery. At first the monastery was built in the Gradishteto site and was named "Transfiguration". But as it was built the edifice started to ruin and the miraculous icon of St. Georgi the Victorious which the Russians had brought disappeared. Later it was found at the foot of Kamen Lisets peak. It was a sign that the monastery should be built at this place. For short period of time there were two monasteries connected by a tunnel. The monastery is closely connected with the Bulgarian history and the liberation struggles. The monastery brotherhood developeed serious enlightened activity and the revolutionary Vasil Levski often visited the temple as he founded a revolutionary committee in Glozhene village. Many times he ran from the Turks trough the tunnel which is covered up now. The destiny of the great social person - metropolitan Kliment is also connected with the monastery. His mundane name was Vasil Drumev. He was send into exile here by Prince Ferdinand after his speech in defence of Orthodox Christianity. He left in the monastery for 9 months and the merciful monks gave him food through an inappreciable hole on the ceiling (The Bulgarian Monasteries..., 1997).

### **3.13. Aladzha Monastery „St.Trinity”**

The Aladzha Rock Monastery is located just a few kilometers south of the seaside resort Riviera and 2 km from the Golden Sands sea resort. It is part of the Golden Sands Nature Park. The distance to Varna is only 16 km.

Aladzha Monastery was founded in the 11th and 12th centuries when the firstborn inhabited it. However, his caves were inhabited since the Byzantine period, as the monastere was under the influence of a religious doctrine, which at that time was widespread in the Byzantine and Bulgarian lands.

The first archaeological finds, coins and ceramic pieces were found in the caves. The religious movement teaches the energy of God - "ishism" or "hesychasm" (a religion with a basic principle of

silence and isolation from society). Under the influence of "ishism", the sacred rock monastery survives its flourishing during the Second Bulgarian Kingdom.

Life in Aladja Monastery has fallen as Bulgaria falls under Ottoman domination.

The name of Aladzha Monastery comes from the word of Turkish origin for colorful ("Aladja", "Aladja"), probably due to the bright colors of its frescoes, dating back to the early Middle Ages.

It is supposed that all the unique creations and frescoes in the monastery of the monks are probably sprayed with color at the same time. On the walls of the Aladzha Monastery can be seen differently colored incredible frescoes from the 13th to the 14th century, but only a few of them are preserved.

The history of the monastery enchants all its visitors, who always come back again. An unforgettable trip through history and religion!

Aladja Monastery has been declared a national monument of culture and antiquity.

Architecture and Present Situation: Today the Aladzha Monastery is not functioning, there are no monks living there and they become a monument of culture and museum. Due to the destruction and tectonic processes, the present appearance and condition of the monastery is slightly different from the original one. At present, the remains of 20 living quarters and three churches, cut into two levels in the nearly 40-foot limestone rock and connected through an external staircase dug in the rocks, will charm the visitor.

Aladzha Monastery - Fragment of the Murals In the lower floor are the private cells of the monks, the common rooms (ie the kitchen, the dining room) and the small church, and the upper level is dedicated to a chapel.

On the eastern side of the first level is the entrance to the monastery. At the other end of the hall, behind a stone wall, part of which still existed, was the crypt (the tomb). To the left of the entrance there is a cutting in the rock staircase leading to an inner corridor and to the dining room, the kitchen and the six monks. Immediately over the entrance and the crypt there was a chapel. Like other Orthodox churches, it is also decorated with frescoes, but unfortunately most of them are damaged. The second level of the monastery is a natural niche where the chapel on its eastern side is located.

The other two chapels in the Aladzha Monastery are at the end of each floor. The most preserved is at the last level. It is curious to know that only well preserved frescoes dating back to the 14th century can be found here. Interesting fragments of five monks are decorated on the southern wall. The ornament on the ceiling is even better preserved, in the center of it is depicted Jesus on the Throne with a wide-decorated frame and a bright aureole. Four figures of flying angels surround the main wall.

The Catacombs (catacombs) are a group of caves that have a similar history as those of the Aladzha Monastery, but have suffered even more during hard times and are now in even worse condition than the well-preserved monastery. They are located less than a kilometer west of the

Aladzha Monastery. Archaeologists have found there pottery and coins that prove that the Catacombs were inhabited in the period of Early Christianity between the fourth and sixth centuries.

### **3.14. Ivanovo (Cut – in – the – Rock) Monastery**

The unique rock monastery complex "St. Archangel Mihail" is situated in the picturesque canyon of Rusenski Lom River, near the village of Ivanovo and 20 km from the town of Rousse (Northeastern Bulgaria). It is also known as the "Cut-in-the-Rock" monastery. The monastery complex consists of 20 medieval churches, chapels and about 300 cells carved in rocks 32 m above the river and connected with paths and rocks. Ivanovo Monastery is included in the UNESCO book as part of the World Heritage.

The churches of the complex are small - 20-30 square meters. From the 11th to the 14th century they were inhabited by monks, scribes and writers. It is believed that during this time the Second Bulgarian Kingdom had a great cultural and spiritual life. Many Christians worshiped the monastery. Many workers and artists were sent to dig new churches and draw new icons. Monk Joakim came to the monastery from the capital of Turnovo. It is believed that King Ivan Terter (1279-1292) spent the rest of his life in the monastery. So, due to Ivanovo Monastery and other Bulgarian medieval rock churches and monasteries, the valley of the Roussenski Lom River has become a popular and important Orthodox and literary center.

Part of the rocky complex is destroyed by earthquakes, rain, ice and sun. People have forgotten the true names of the preserved churches and call them their own way: Gospodev Dol because there is an icon of Jesus Christ "Letters" because there are signs, notes and legends "The Buried Church" and simply "The Church".

The Ivanovo Monastery owes its unparalleled cultural and historical value to the beautiful and well-preserved frescoes of the 13th and 14th centuries and preserved in five of the rock churches. Talented artists hurt them with realistic frescoes, exquisite in color and composition, making them a real treasure of Bulgarian medieval painting.

The main church in the complex has valuable wall paintings depicting scenes from the Bible: Lord's Supper, Christ's Agony, icons of the apostles and saints. One of the preserved churches is "Gospodev Dol". It has the richest murals. His frescoes portray scenes with Jesus Christ.

Another impressive church is the "buried church". There is a portrait of Tsar Ivan Asen II. He holds a replica of the church - a characteristic feature of the church donor portraits.

The third remarkable church was probably founded by Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371). There are valuable biblical frescoes.

In the 14th century, the Rocky Monastery of Archangel Michael was the center of Ishisias, during the centuries of the Ottoman rule, gradually abandoned. In the 18th century the monastery was reborn and today is one of the most popular cultural destinations visited by thousands of tourists (Kandjeva..., 2009).

### **3.15. Basarbovo (Cut - in – the – rock) Monastery**

Basarbovo Rock Monastery is located in the picturesque valley of the river Rusenski Lom, near the village of Basarbovo and 10 km from the town of Rousse (Northeastern Bulgaria).

The basarabian monastery is the only functioning one cut in the rock monastery in Bulgaria and one of the few populated rock monasteries in the Balkans.

On the banks of the Roussenski Lom River and its influx there are more than 300 caves. Over 40 of them are rock churches or premises of rock monastery complexes.

We do not know exactly the date of their occurrence, but the archaeological finds show us that the caves near the Roussenski Lom River were inhabited in ancient times in the 4th and 6th centuries. Thy development of the rock monasteries has its apogee during the Seecond Bulgarian Kingdom in the 14th - 15th c.

The rock quarters are associated with the names of Theodosi Tarnovski and Joakim - patriarch of the old Bulgarian capital Tarnovo, and church donors are Tsar Ivan Asen II, Ivan Alexander, Georgi Terter and Qeen Teodora Basarab.

There are few suggestions for the etymology of the monastery's name. The second name of Queen Teodora is Basarab, and the second name of the Romanian leader is Basarab. He made a donation to build the monastery. Perhaps the name derives from the Thracian word "basaraba", meaning "fox".

The earliest historical records of the monastery date from the 15th century and are found in some tax registers of the Ottoman Empire.

It is not known when the monastery remained without its permanent residents during athe Ottoman domination in Bulgaria. In 1937, a mank named Hadji Hrisnt of the Preobrazhenski Monastery settled there and began to restore the monastery. After him many other monks took care of the monastery. One of them is Dimitriy Basarabovski, whose name is the monastery.

At present, the Basarbovo Rock Monastery is well maintained and cares well.

The monastere is preserved till nowadays. Believers enter a beautiful green courtyard and the driveway leads them to a well dug by Saint Demetrius. Two rooms and a cave dining room, built in 1956, are located at the foot of the rocks. 48 rocky steps lead to a rocky landing where, according to legends, Dimitri Basarbovcki has slept. On the right visitors can see the rock church with a carved wooden iconostasis. Next to him hang a great icon of the saint in full length, surrounded by 10 scenes of life with inscriptions in Romanion and Greek.

Other stone steps lead to a natural cave, where monk Hrisant was buried. Later the cave hid the bones of other deceased monks from the monastery.

Guests can visit the museum exhibition of the monastery (Prashkov, 1992).

*Religious tourism in Bulgaria has not exhausted its development potential. Unlike the cultural tourism, which is in fact the kind of tourism, the religious tourism in Bulgaria is not as modern as a*



*theme for conversation of historians, archaeologists, museum curators, statesmen, municipalists and tourist experts. The probable cause is the respect of the secular tourists to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and to the institutions of the other official religions ruling the sites of interest for religious tourism and events in the country. If, however, a country wishes to take a decent place on the map of international religious tourism, its stakeholders should hold a serious discussion to assess and improve the conditions for religious travel in the destination.*

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