

## *Monastic Culture in Late Medieval Bulgaria*

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My dissertation is devoted to the monastic culture in medieval Bulgaria. I take functionalist perspective. I look at monasteries as a social structure, and at monastic culture as a complex system of symbolic and material artefacts. All of them serve the monastic community to achieve its aim. And as Basil the Great teaches us: the monastic life has one aim, that is one's soul salvation.

The first chapter of my dissertation is devoted to define the corpus of sources. Apart from the texts in which the late medieval reality was reflected, such as the lives of the then-living saints and the hagiographies or paraeneses written at that time I take under consideration the texts which created the monastic culture: normative documents and parenetic writings read in monasteris such as *Ladder of Paradise* by John Climacus. There were no monastic orders in the Christian East, but individual monasteries, each with its own set of regulations (typika). Hence prescriptions for monastic life varied from one house to another, with different degrees of strictness, length of prayer but having certain features in common. No late medieval typika preserved from Bulgarian lands. However information on organisation of monasteries we can derive from other sources – nomokanons (CIAI 1160, *Codex Berlinensis*). To justify the widespread use in this work of paraenetical texts from distant regions and epochs, I considered it necessary to start with some observations on the importance of reading in monks' lives.

The main part of my work, devoted to monastic culture, begins with the presentation of the ideals of ascetic life. Answers to further questions: The purpose of the life of the monks, the hierarchy of ideals and the importance of specific elements of monastic ethos I present on the basis of all the above-mentioned types of sources. They provide information both about the patterns themselves and how they were implemented.

Another subject of my reflections are monastic lifestyles: communal, eremitic and semi-eremitic. Each of them allowed its adherents to attain salvation in a slightly different way. Sources also point the existence of the fourth form of asceticism, condemned both by the

masters of spiritual life and in normative texts, that is idiorrhythmia. Out of practical necessity monastic organization was hierarchical, with the superior and his chief officials at the top. The monastic community was also patterned on familial structure, with the abbot or abbess as parent and the monks and nuns as their spiritual children. Generally monastics were divided into two groups, the better educated and literate ones who chanted the monastic offices, and the less educated who performed menial duties within the monastery and in the gardens and fields outside.

The last element of monastic culture analyzed here is the social involvement of monks. The teachers of spiritual life had an ambivalent attitude towards it – neither did they forbid nor approve it. I addressed the problem whether the monks, devoting themselves to public activity, did not misrepresent their vocation, which required them to be fully focused on the main purpose of their lives. In this subsection, I based my observations almost exclusively on the lives of the late Bulgarian monks and the donor documents of the tsars. Monasteries provided spiritual services for lay people as well as for their own residents. The laity often used monks at nearby monasteries as their confessors and spiritual advisers, and attended services at monastic churches. Laypeople enjoyed the celebration of feast days at local monasteries, went on pilgrimage to monastic sanctuaries (sometimes very remote), and might seek healing from the relics of a saint deposited in the monastic church. Provision of social and charitable services was another important function of monastic houses.

Sources gives as an extant information on the variety of ways how monks interacted with laypeople and how important was role of monasteries in social life of medieval Bulgaria. I mean here: spiritual services, art, literature, agriculture. We can see this topic other way as well: main social goal of monasticism was to meet people's need of security. One could enter monastery and stay there to achieve salvation or just ask monks to pray for him.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wolke', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.