

reforms gave a decisive impulse to the militarization of the island and introducing the thematic system on it.

L. Santagati likes digressions, sometimes interesting, but not always justified by the subject he writes about (information about literary texts devoted to Belisarius, p. 55, a vast part concerning the Lombard invasion in northern Italy, p. 77–79, or the description of Rome by Al-Idrisi, p. 251–253). These passages could have been removed in favour of expanding

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end can also be found in *Vita P. Marciiani, Vita P. Pancratii* and *Encomium* of St. Martian.

the parts more important to the main subject of the book.

What I have above should not discourage the reader to reach for the book by Luigi Santagati. It is certainly an interesting attempt to make the reader acquainted with a fairly unknown history of Sicily at the times when it was a part of the East Roman Empire. I am particularly enthusiastic about the authors careful reconstruction of human settlement on the island and I am glad to recommend it to the readers.

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**БИСТРА НИКОЛОВА, *Монашество, манастири и манастирски живот в средновековна България* [Monasticism, Monasteries and Monasterial Life in Medieval Bulgaria], vol. I, *Манастирите* [Monasteries], vol. II, *Монасите* [Monks], Алфаграф, София 2010, pp. 861.**

The topic of monasticism in medieval Bulgaria has attracted unceasing interest of scholars for some time now. Numerous separate studies have touched upon almost all aspect of that movement. It is surprising that we had to wait until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for its monograph. The reason for that might lie in the peculiarity of the source material, which does not present a coherent picture of the history of Bulgarian monasticism. To complain about the small number of preserved sources would be an exaggeration, but in comparison to source materials on Byzantine or Serbian monasticism there are some easily recognizable and scholarly troublesome deficiencies: not one of the medieval Bulgarian *typica* has been preserved (existence of one – John of Rila Testament – is still a matter of debate), only a small number of donative documents survived, while majority of monasterial manuscripts have been lost.

The matter of monasticism in medieval Bulgaria is a complex and vast area of study. The author's monograph consists of a staggering 850 pages, although, as she remarked

at the beginning of her work (p. 8), she has not presented a fully exhaustive analysis of the subject but only her subjective overview of it. The volume of the work is partly affected by the author's methodology. She has devoted a lot of space to a detailed description of the discovered by archeologists monasterial locations and she has included a number of side subjects.

The first volume focuses on monasteries, their architecture, material conditions of monastic life and on selected issues that archeological discoveries have brought to daylight. It is composed chronologically, with consecutive chapters relating to: monasteries from the 9<sup>th</sup> until the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, from the period of Byzantine reign and the Second Bulgarian Tsardom. Because of the peculiarity of the subject and the problem of dating such sights a whole separate chapter has been devoted to the presentation of materials on rock monasteries. It is clear that the author's interest focuses on the earliest period of Bulgarian monasticism, since the first chapter takes half of the volume.

Materials are presented in a systematic fashion. Each monastery is meticulously described and the author presents the layout and size of chambers (if such information is included in published archeological data), information about inscriptions, graffiti, equipment and paintings.

The main theme of the first chapter (p. 13–269) are the criteria for identification of monasteries among the remains of buildings. Bistra Nikolova rejects many such identifications on the basis of topographic analysis. The author describes a set of features characterising a cenobitic monastery – enclosed space, within which one can find the church, the cells and the refectory. The properly monasterial functionality of those places is preserved as long as they are directly connected. In a distance there may be utility and storage facilities, scriptoria or workshops. Nikolova contests the idea that objects such as The Great Basilica in Pliska, Pod Zăbuite, Avradaka, Tuzlalăka and Patlejna in Preslav should be recognised as monasteries. Even if her arguments are too unorthodox to be commonly accepted, the very fact that they were raised may have positive effects. It is difficult not to agree with the author when she claims that in numerous publications of archeological discoveries on medieval Bulgarian monasticism the conclusions are formulated in an arbitrary manner.

The passage in which the author states that she does not believe that some of the bigger and better equipped living quarters belonged in fact to hegumen (p. 108–113) is a very valuable observation. Bistra Nikolova claims, that no distinction should be made in Bulgarian monasteries of 9<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries as to the quarters of the superiors, because they usually lived in ordinary cells, which were hardly different from the rest. The author's considerations lead, however, to a somewhat paradoxical situation, because she devotes the most space (p. 111–113) to the question of supposed hegumen cells in the Tuzlalăka and Pod Zăbuite complexes, which, according to herself, cannot be classified as monasteries.

For the same reason it might be surprising for the reader to find considerations about the number of monks living in the complexes in

Preslav, the monasterial character of which has been put into question (p. 85–99). Moreover, the information concerning the diet of the Bulgarian monks is based on data collected from those places (p. 145–146). Some of the analyses presented by the author, then, do not lead anywhere because the analysed objects are not monasteries. The long passage on ceramic icons (p. 161–182) is a clear example of that. The author begins with considerations on the importance of icons in the world of Eastern Christianity, then describes the process of production and stylisation. Having noted that, analogously to Byzantium, monasteries could own ceramic workshops, she presents an opinion that this was not the case with Bulgarian monasteries.

In chapter two (p. 270–343), which focuses on monasteries on Bulgarian lands during Byzantine reign (11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century), the author presents very interesting ideas about the monastery in Rila and its earliest history (p. 274–285). Taking the *Anonymous life of St. John of Rila* to be the most reliable source, she concludes, contrary to information provided by Euthymius of Tărnovo, that John has not set up any monastery and that the beginnings of the monastery in Rila should be dated for the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. That line of thought is continued on p. 626–628, 791–814. As a result of such an arrangement of the contents some of the conclusions are repeated three times. It could have been avoided if the book contained unambiguous annotations referring the reader to other parts of the work devoted to the relevant ideas. Frequent repetition of “as mentioned before” or general references to previous chapters are not very useful for finding scattered information. Unfortunately, the book does not contain an index of proper names.

In the second chapter the author also describes monasteries connected to the figure of Prochorus of Pčinja, Gabriel of Lesnovo, Joachim of Osogovo, St. George monastery near Skopje, Theotokos Eleusa monastery in Strumica, Theotokos monastery near Tetovo and the Bačkovo Monastery.

Chapter three (p. 344–404) is devoted to rock monasteries. The author enumer-

ates and describes them in geographical order and draws interesting conclusions from the collected data. More rock monasteries were built around important centres of spiritual life but geology remained the most important determinant for localisation. And so during the lifetime of Boris-Michael and his successors the terrain that was best suited for the creation of rock monasteries was located near Pliska, Preslav and Dorostolon and near Tărnovo and Červen in the Second Bulgarian Tsardom. Bistra Nikolova tries to identify some of the mentioned congregations as cenobias or lauras.

In the last chapter of this volume (p. 405–536) we can find an overview of monasteries created in the Second Bulgarian Tsardom. There is a separate discussion part for the capital monasteries (p. 405–456), one for the provincial ones (p. 457–492), one for those from Bulgarian-Byzantine border (p. 492–515) and one for those from the Black Sea coast (p. 515–536).

Volume two – *Монаси [Monks]* – is built thematically, it contains of the chapter *Българският средновековен монах и неговият манастир [Bulgarian medieval monk and his monastery]*. The author in the first sub-chapter (*Монашеският институт [Monasticism as an institution]* p. 539–545) refers briefly to the different forms of monastic life (anachoretism, cenobitism, idiorhythmia) and circumstances in which they appeared. In that strangely superficial overview there appeared some imprecisions.

Bistra Nikolova considers Pachomius to be a co-creator of the first lauras, which is an opinion not to be found in the academic literature (p. 541). Her opinion that cenobitic monasteries were different from lauras in that they required strict obedience towards the hegumen (expressed elsewhere, p. 629–630) is unsubstantiated. In fact it was a requirement present in both types of congregations<sup>1</sup>.

In the next sub-chapter – *Раждането на манастира [The birth of a monastery]*,

p. 545–549) – we can find a short overview of matters connected with the creation of monasteries – who started them, why, what determined the choice for localisation of the congregation. Majority of the considerations presented here have been developed either in chapter one or in the following sub-chapters.

On the following pages of the book, the author deals with motivations of people who chose to join a monastery, analyses the ethnic and social background of soon-to-be monks, their previous occupations, tonsuring ceremony and taking the habit and the habit itself (*Мотивация [Motivation]*, p. 550–572; *Преди манастира [Before the monastery]*, p. 573–595; *Постригването на монах/монахиня. Монашеско облекло [Tonsuring. Monk's clothing]*, p. 596–616). She devotes a lot of space to rulers, members of the ruling house and aristocracy. The major part of the sub-chapter focuses on the identity of tsar Peter and Peter Černorizec. The author rejects the hypothesis that these are one and the same person, the only argument in favour of such claim she does not contest, is the sameness of names of these saints (p. 578–582). Fragments devoted to tsar Peter can be also found in different parts of the book (p. 562–563, 826–843).

Next sub-chapter – *Изборът на манастир [The choosing of the monastery]*, p. 616–741 – consists of six loosely connected parts: typology of monastic life and monasterial congregations, number of monks in the monastery, the monastery and its surroundings, conditions of monasterial life, economic status of monks and monasteries, legal status, monastic liturgy. The author states here that in assessing the number of monks living in a given monastery it is a more reliable practice to consider the size of the church rather than the number and size of the cells (p. 85–99, 643–646). That claim is entirely unconvincing. Arguments against adopting such approach are presented by the author herself on page 646. Some inconsistencies can be found in the part on economy. On page 676 the author declares that she is going to list the types of estates, which were the main sources of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A.-M. TALBOT, A.P. KAZHDAN, *Lavra*, [in:] *ODB*, vol. II, p. 1190.

income for the monastery, but she then enumerates both real and movable properties (*Основна собственост, тази от която идват главните приходи на манастирите, била недвижимата собственост [...] и движимата собственост*). On page 686 of the book Bistra Nikolova quotes Dimităr Angelov's opinion on the duties of the rural folk towards monasteries and in the footnote on page 392 she mentions an opposing view of Genoveva Cankova-Petkova. Because of the way that B. Nikolova puts them, however, both of these opinions are compatible. That sub-chapter shows most clearly the contrast between the studiously written parts of the book in which the author presents scrupulous analyses supported by in-depth reflection and long studies and the fragments written in a cursory and somewhat hasty manner.

In the following sub-chapters the author analyses the subject of the monks' participation in the intellectual life of medieval Bulgaria. In doing so she focuses on monasterial schools (p. 741–751) and monastic literature (p. 751–761). Trying to define the term "monastic literature" Bistra Nikolova poses three questions: which pieces does the monk transcribe and translate, what does he read and what does the monasterial collection of manuscripts contain. In her conclusions the author emphasises the ambiguity of distinction between the monastic and non-monastic literature.

In the subsequent parts of the book we can find information about the regulations in monks' life (p. 768–783), cults of saints which developed in monasteries (p. 783–846) and monasterial ktitors and donors (p. 846–854). It seems that the basis for the source in the first of the chapters mentioned here is incomplete. The author included *Sermon against the heretics* by Cosmas the Presbyter, *Poenae monasteriales* from the Berlin Codex, penitentials published by Vatroslav Jagić<sup>2</sup>. It lacks for instance *Rule for*

*hermits* or relevant parts from *Pseudo-Zonaras Nomocanon*. Bistra Nikolova has presented a very interesting methodology in working with the collected material: she compared binding norms with models presented in hagiographic works and she supplemented her conclusions with an analysis of a collection of quotations from marginal notes made by Bulgarian monks. It is all the more unfortunate that the author omitted such important sources.

The book is finished with a laconic ending (p. 855–858) followed by an index of abbreviations (p. 859–861).

Lastly a few remarks on some major editorial errors. I would not mention numerous misspelling had they not appeared in the Church Slavonic quotations (p. 620, 679, 792), titles of books and names in bibliography (p. 270, 271, 291, 305, 388 [note 172, name Vălov written as Vălčev, wrong title], 587, 639, 770, 771, 819, 850, etc.) which can be a problem for those willing to independently analyse the material and identify the quoted texts. There are many problems with the bibliography. The author makes a mistake even when quoting the title of her own article in the footnote 214 on page 616 where she writes: *Названията на монаси и манастири в старобългарската книжнина*, instead of: *Монаси и манастири в средновековната българска терминология*. The maps and illustrations are of low quality and some of the plans are illegible (p. 36, 79–81, 377, 443 etc.).

The book has a number of merits of which I mentioned only a few. It also has a number of shortcomings most of which I took the liberty to remark on. Extensive source base, the vastness of the discussed material, original and inspiring interpretations and observations of the author make this book a must-read for all those interested in spiritual culture of medieval Bulgaria and the whole of Byzantine Commonwealth.

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<sup>2</sup> V. JAGIĆ, *Opisi i izvodi iz nekoliko južnoslovenskih rukopisa*, Star 6, 1874, p. 131–133.