

“Encyclopaedia Slavica Sanctorum” Ten Years Later: Main Trends and Questions

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Abstract. The paper discusses users’ activities in the period 2011-2022, mostly types of searches, in an electronic encyclopaedia on saints. The e-product contains information in Bulgarian on orthodox church calendar and texts dedicated to saints as preserved in medieval Slavonic manuscripts and in popular Bulgarian culture (as represented in fieldwork interviews). The most frequently used options are “view object” and “view date”. Most often articles on popular saints amongst Bulgarians were read, such as St. Basil the Great, St. Kliment of Ohrid, St. George, and St. Petka of Tarnovo. Less often are searches by combined parameters and an increase of their frequency is observable in 2019-2021.

Keywords: Electronic Encyclopaedia, Saints, Folklore Texts, Medieval Slavonic Manuscripts.

1 Introduction

The electronic (henceforth e-ESS) has been available online at <http://www.eslavsanct.net> since June 2011; see (Goynov, et al., 2011), (Rangochev, et al., 2012), (Rangochev, et al., 2013), (Rangochev, et al., 2014), (Rangochev, et al., 2015). This platform is a calendar-oriented multimedia resource aiming at representing *die Rezeption* of the Christian saints’ cults amongst the Bulgarians since the Middle Ages to the present day. It was developed within the frames of the joint research project entitled “Saints and Holy Places in Bulgaria: Encyclopaedia Slavica Sanctorum (in Electronic and Guthenberg Versions)” of St. Kliment Okhridski University of Sofia (Faculty of Slavic Philologies) and the Institute of Literature, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Department of Old Bulgarian Literature), supported by the Bulgarian Science Fund (project DDVU 02/68 (2010).

2 Project Main Research Areas

The veneration of Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary, and saints is the basis of Christianity. The narratives of their endeavours and teaching reflect the deepest dimensions of human experience in the Christian world. In many cases, saints have been perceived as integral emblematic figures of self-identification of Christian communities. The number of the saints in Christianity is huge, some cults are universal, while others have local dimensions; see, among others (Brown 1981), (Zhivov 1994), (Karagyozev 2006), (Pavlov, Temelski, 2010), (Angusheva et al. 2012). The formation of the church calendar and cults of saints in Bulgaria started in the Middle Ages in the framework of Byzantine-Bulgarian religious and cultural dialogue and developed its specifics, including original compositions for highly venerated local saints. The e-ESS encompasses data culled from medieval and early modern Bulgarian and more generally Slavonic manuscripts and early printed books, also fieldwork records of interviews made in Bulgarian villages and towns in the late twentieth century, thus allowing for examining the complex relations between the written church tradition and popular culture [on popular culture and Christianity in Bulgaria, see, among others, (Georgieva, 2012)].

3 Structure of the Data in the e-ESS and Types of Data Input

The e-ESS brings together the following types of data (see the structure of e-ESS in Fig. 1):

- Sanctoremes (commemorations of saints on particular dates) as identified in medieval Slavonic manuscripts (more than 100) containing church calendars or structured according to the church calendar. Initially, materials from Iskra Hristova-Shomova's research on the calendar of the *Apostolos* manuscripts (Hristova-Shomova 2012) were input in the e-ESS and later they were enriched with data from other medieval Slavonic books, such as calendars in Gospel or Bible manuscripts, different types of Synaxaria (Taseva 2010), (Petkov, Spasova, 2008-2013), and others – in comparison with the Greek church calendar.
- Information on saints' lives, endeavours, and miracles according to medieval Greek and Slavonic writing.
- Information on texts, both translations and original compositions, dedicated to saints that were available to Bulgarians in medieval manuscripts and in early modern manuscripts and printed books (including history of translations from Greek and dissemination)
- Diplomatic editions of original texts concerning saints' cults culled from medieval and early modern Slavonic manuscripts, such as *vitae*, *encomia*, offices, prayers, and others.
- Records of stories and beliefs about saints in popular Bulgarian culture.
- Information on images and sacred places dedicated to popular saints.

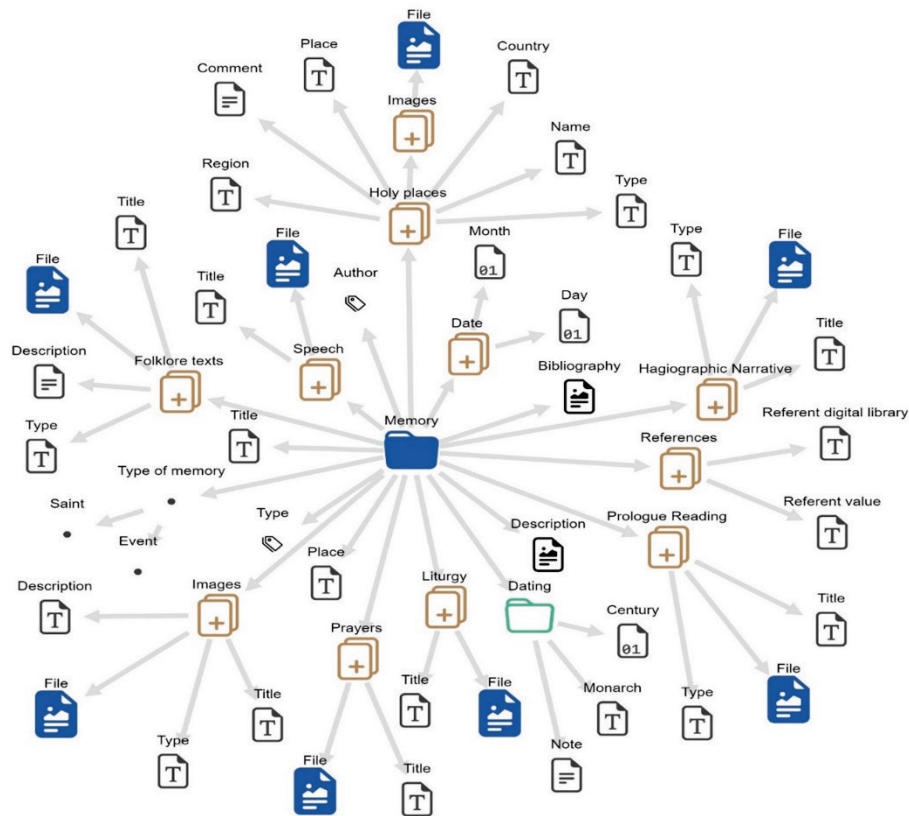


Fig. 1. Structure of the data in the e-ESS

All this information is in Bulgarian. Amongst the desiderata is translation into English.

The metadata are structured by particular parameters and thus searching in the e-ESS can be made in three different manners:

- by viewing a chosen date in the calendar (“view date”). Using this search option, one receives information about all the saints commemorated on a chosen date according to numerous medieval manuscripts and early printed books;
- by viewing lists (12) of object types, viz. a list of the saints’ names in the e-ESS and their calendar dates; a list of the rulers during whose reigns the saints enumerated lived; lists of genres of texts dedicated to the saints included in the e-ESS; a list of the places where the saints in the e-ESS lived or died, and others;
- by searching by different parameters, one or many under “pamet”[commemoration], chosen by the user, for instance searching for a particular name; or one could get a list of the martyrs’ names who died in Rome in the third century if one prefers a combined search.

4 Trends in the use of the e-ESS (2011—2022)

The e-ESS was most actively used in 2012, that is, at the beginning: most of the materials were input in 2011—2012. Its popularity rapidly grew in 2019—2021. During the ten-year period, 2012-2022, the search option “view object” was preferred by the users, followed by the option “view date”. The former option is twice more frequent than the latter (see Fig. 2)

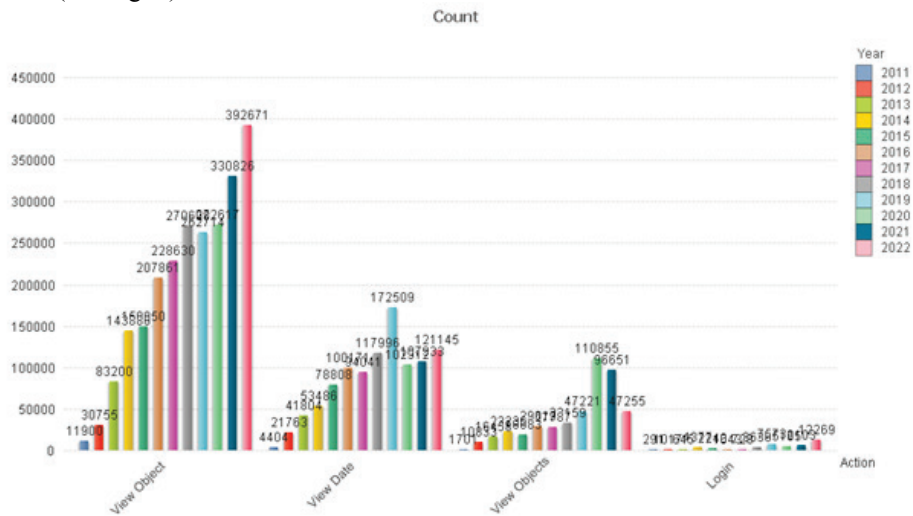


Fig. 2. Users’ activity in 2011 – 2022 r.

The search option “view object” remained dominant during all these years but we notice a peak of growth of the frequency of the option “view date” in 2019 (70% more frequent in 2019 in comparison with 2020) and similarly of the option “view objects” in 2020 (15% more frequent than in 2021) (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). The peaks of users’ activities in March 2018 and April 2019 may be due to the fact that Easter was in early April in 2018 and in late April in 2019 when searches in an electronic encyclopedia containing information on Church feasts are expected to be more frequent; see Fig. 3.

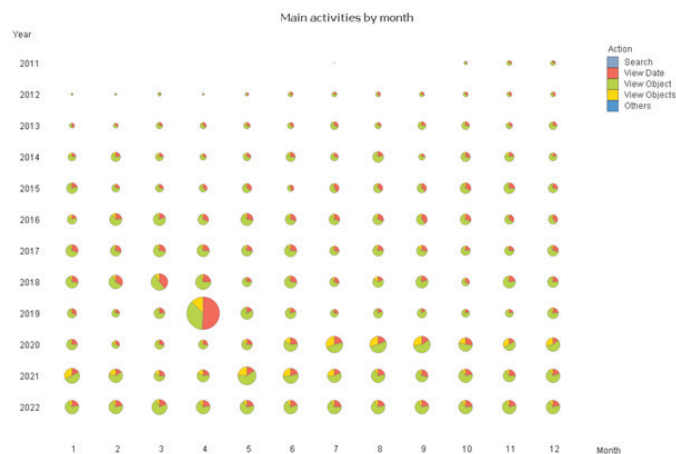


Fig. 3. Main users' activities by month

The dynamics of users' activity in 2011–2022 shows two important trends – expected and unexpected. The unexpected trend is the steep peak in 2019, which cannot be precisely analysed for now (see Fig. 4). The expected trend is the steep peaks in different years in the period March-April and December-January. In these months are the major Christian feasts, Easter and Christmas, and it is quite natural to expect and observe peaks in user activity.

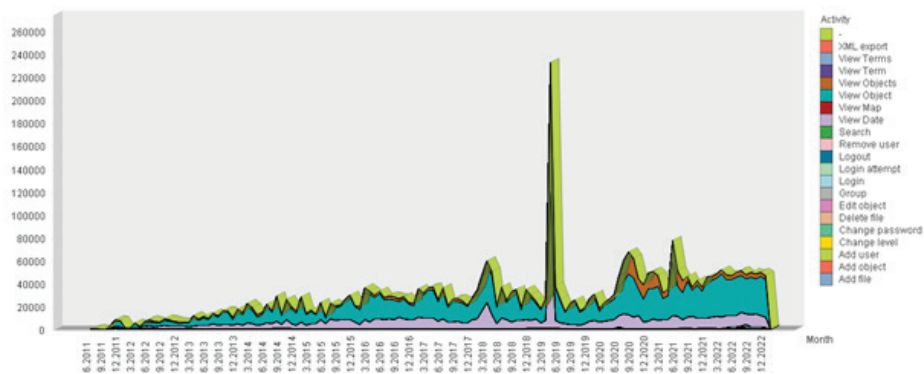


Fig. 4. Dynamics of users' activities in 2011 – 2022

As mentioned, the search in e-ESS could be made by one or more parameters (after click on “pamet” [commemoration]). The most frequent parameter (category/ term) is the name of a saint (see Fig. 5). Then follow century and place of living. What is worth mentioning is that the search by folklore texts occupies the fourth position in frequency, while the searches by the types/ genres of the written texts dedicated to the saints are relatively rare – probably because they are of interest mostly to specialists of medieval literature and liturgy. Still, we should mention here that the publication of both canon-

ical written church text and oral narratives from popular culture and folklore about particular saints (usually about the most popular saints and feasts, such as St. Elias, St. Basil, and St. George) in an encyclopedia makes this multimedia product unique in scholarship. These two types of texts show different perceptions of sainthood in culture that exist simultaneously and which interact in one or another way. The frequency of the search by “place” indicates the present-day interest in mapping the sanctity. If a combined search is aimed – by century, ruler, place, type of saint (martyr, anchorite, or apostle, teacher) – one could receive important information about the place and time of the bigger monastic or ascetic centers, or about the place and time of the most numerous martyrdoms.

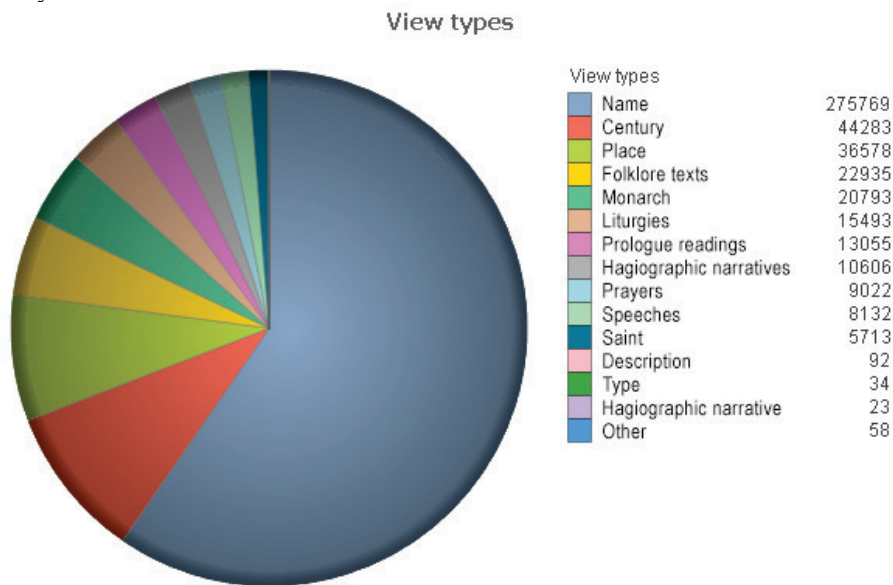


Fig. 5. Search by different parameters (categories/terms)

The itemization of the types of searches by parameters (categories) in the different years in the period analyzed (see Fig. 6) follows the tendency described above.

The most frequently searched saints’ names are expected to be those of popular saints amongst the Bulgarians, such as St. Basil the Great, St. Kliment of Ohrid, St. George, St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki, and St. Petka of Tarnovo (Paraskeve of Epibatai) (see Fig. 7). Popular feasts (and non-working days) are related to them, such as January 1, November 25/ December 8 (students’ celebrations), and April 23/ May 6 (day of the Bulgarian army). Moreover, the names Vasil/ Vasilka, Georgi/ Gergana, Dimitar/ Dimitrina, Petko/ Paraskeva are popular in Bulgaria. Another reason for the interest towards these particular saints is that the e-ESS contains rich information on them, including both metadata and edited medieval and folklore texts. The popularity of Sts. Cyprian and Justina is not surprising because this saint is believed to protect against magic. Various could be the reasons for the popularity of Sts. Forty Martyrs (of Sebastia): interest in popular spring feasts, popularity of the medieval church dedicated

to them in Veliko Tarnovo, the presence of their vita in the tenth-eleventh century *Codex Suprasliensis* and its inclusion in students' manuals in Old Bulgarian.

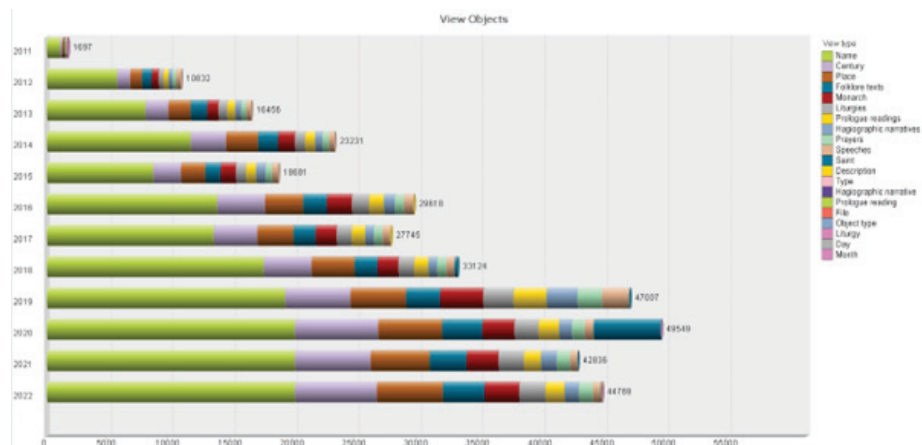


Fig. 6. Searches by different parameters (categories) in 2011 – 2022

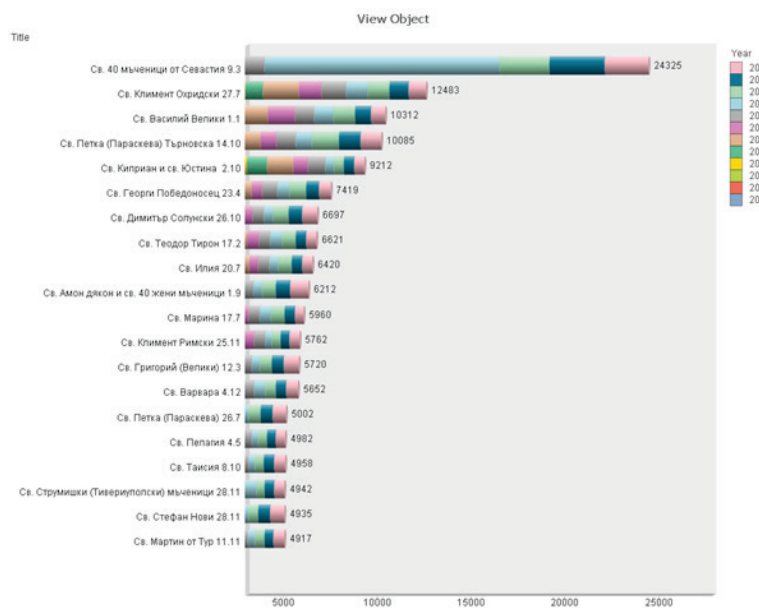


Fig. 7. Most frequently visited articles for saints in 2011 – 2022 г.

5 Conclusions and Future Work

The diagrams discussed about the use of the e-product Encyclopedia Slavica Sanctorum shows that this is a needed product. An important characteristic of it is its integration

with another e-product entitled “Virtual Encyclopedia of Bulgarian Iconography” (<https://bidl.cc.bas.bg/>) which gives opportunity to compare texts (written and oral) and images. A result of the simultaneous development of the two virtual libraries and of their linking is that in both of them users’ searches have increased significantly since 2019 and especially in 2020 – 2022. Among the desiderata, the first and more important task is the enrichment with new metadata and editions of original texts and images. Another path of further development could be to look for an opportunity of learning more about the profiles of the users and their needs – for instance, by questionnaires and by putting together a bibliography of scholarly papers, students’ works, and other publications in which e-ESS is quoted/ mentioned.

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