

The Bulgarian Catholic Book in the System of the Bulgarian Publishing (1878–1944). Geographic Information Systems as a Tool in Presenting and Preserving Literary Cultural Heritage

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Abstract. The paper introduces the concept and framework of a scientific project concerning the printed Catholic books in the Bulgarian publishing system between 1878 and 1944. It describes the purpose and the outcomes of implementing Geographic Information Systems within interdisciplinary studies in the Bibliography and Book History scholar fields.

Keywords: Bulgarian Catholic Books, Publishing, Book history, GIS.

1 Introduction

Catholic printed books are a significant part of the overall picture of the literary culture of religious institutions in Bulgaria (along with Orthodox and Protestant ones). Its elaborated research for the period 1878–1944 will contribute to the development of Bulgarian book history and the history of Christian religion and culture in general. The book-publishing practices of the various religions with their branches and denominations worldwide continue to be a current scientific problem for specialists in the humanities and social sciences. Some of the world-famous theorists who developed the scientific concepts of book history and bibliology, such as Robert Darnton, Henri-Jean Martin, Elizabeth Eisenstein, Robert Estival, and John Feder, postulate the study of political, social, religious, and intellectual history, reader reception, economics, bibliography and the development of printing technologies of leading and peripheral social groups as an indispensable part of in-depth studies of social and civilizational development. These factors are directly related to the objectives, methods, rates, and limitations of print production in every conceptual segment of science and literature. They are especially valid to the literary heritage on religious matters of foreign influences in a rather conservative and orthodox traditional society such as ours. The

use of a wide range of interdisciplinary tools in solving a given research problem is a guarantee of the quality and significance of the results obtained.

2 Research Concept and Framework

The emergence of Catholic printed books dates to the 17th century, with a notable increase in the mid-19th century when mass publishing occurred in Bulgarian literary history. These books focused primarily on religious, moral, and educational themes to serve the spiritual needs of the Catholic diaspora in Bulgaria. After the failed union with the Roman Catholic Church (1860–1863), publishing activity for Bulgarian Catholics declined but was gradually restored after 1875.

After the Liberation of Bulgaria, there was a significant ascending in the publishing rate. The predispositions for the positive shift occurred due to the consolidation of the Catholic clergy and the Vatican's policy towards Balkan Catholics. The years between 1878 and 1944 are notable because of the favorable publishing conditions in post-liberation Bulgaria. Despite this, Bulgarian Catholic books from this period remain insufficiently studied. This statement is also validated by the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (ULSIT) project “Bibliographic Expedition Malko Tarnovo 2015” whose purpose was to supplement the Bulgarian retrospective bibliography. The project's team identified “bibliographic blind spots” in libraries across the Strandzha region due to its late accession to Bulgaria in 1913. These geopolitical factors caused challenges to bibliographic research and the proper integration into the national deposit system. (Zagorov & Zlatkova, 2016)

Some contemporary research has focused on the language peculiarities in the Catholic manuscript and printed literary tradition of the 17th and 18th centuries (Abadzchieva, 2024). Other recent studies have dealt with case studies of the history of Catholic books during the Bulgarian Revival (Angelova & Zlatkova, 2023). The general development of the doctrine, communities, and Roman Catholic diplomacy in Bulgaria has been studied in several directions by Lyubomir Georgiev, Svetlozar Eldarov, Ivan Elenkov, and other scholars.

The review of the academic works reveals a lack of comprehensive studies in Bulgaria that examine the authorship, translation, publication, and dissemination of Catholic texts between 1878 and 1944. It is unclear what factors influenced the appearance of distinct texts in our spiritual life and what historical and social mechanisms made them visible to publishers and printers. It also questioned whether the print production of these books met the religious and cultural demands of the Community and how exactly the books reached the readers. The study aims to locate, research, and systematize the authors, publishers, and printing houses involved in the book publishing intended for Bulgarian Catholics. The primary Project objective is to identify the geographic publishing centers of Catholic books between 1878 and 1944.

2.1 Objective and Methodology

Achieving the project's goals requires the application of interdisciplinary methodology. The primary task is the selection of geographical locations and settlements in administrative-territorial centers known for a concentration of Catholic population, a religious institution, or order. For this purpose, it is necessary to research the historical background of the cultural and religious institutions of the regions to understand their current potential. The mapping is followed by searching for regional and local cultural and religious institutions (churches, libraries, archives, museums) and conducting preliminary bibliographic research using electronic library catalogs or direct contact with the authorities of the institutions.

The secondary phase involves creating a digital platform to promote the project's activities, results, and end products. This phase includes organizing the database's information infrastructure, selecting a content management system, choosing an open-source product for the GIS, and incorporating it into the platform.¹

The GIS and the various sections of the website will be gradually completed with the bibliographical and biographical empirical data to set the final digital product.

3 Geographic Information Systems as a Tool in Book History Studies

The solutions offered by the open-source GIS are preferred since such systems have proven to be an effective instrument for systematizing scientific information in the humanities and social sciences. The GIS has the capacity to display the geographic coverage, the tendencies, and the development of publishing practices through bibliographic data and visual information.

At the turn of the century, Canadian researchers Fiona Black, Bertram MacDonald and Malcolm Black developed the theoretical principles for the application of GIS in Book History. They suggested that the geographical visualisation of the key agents (author, publisher, printer, distributor and user) of the theoretical models of Book History can provide a comprehensive insight into the mutual interaction between these factors (Black et al., 1998).

Through the geographical visualization of systematized data on the creators, promoters, distribution and consumption of books, a complete picture of the interaction between these units in socio-cultural and historical terms can be derived. Through this versatile tool, we can track the shifts and the development of print culture not just on a global scale, but also within a relatively distinct religious community such as the Bulgarian Catholic community. The conceptual model proposes the development of a chronological-geographical plan of the publishing, printing and consumption of Bulgarian Catholic books between 1878 and 1944. The goal is to use the geographical system to identify concrete conclusions about the stable and changing aspects of these

¹ The selection of an open-source geographic information system is yet to be determined. There are various Bulgarian projects in bibliography and book history whose outcome is related to a GIS product. However, they do not use systems with an open-source license.

activities during the period. The system will help to answer the following basic research questions:

- What was the approximate volume of Bulgarian-Catholic books published during the period?
- What are the bibliometrics of publishing output in the context of geographical distribution?
- In which years did the publishing of Catholic books shows growth and decline?
- Did the Bulgarian Catholic community have a clearly defined and centralized publishing centers?

The questions proposed are primary but as a constantly renewing structure, the geographical information systems in the book history field have the potential to answer much more inquiries

In the last ten years, GIS has been used in Bulgarian humanities and book science with excellent results. A notable example is the product of the project “History of the Bulgarian Book from the Liberation to the Independence (1878–1908)” DMU 03/50. The interactive map reflects chronologically and geographically various indicators of the history of the Bulgarian book: quantity of published books, printshops, publishers, bookstores, and bookbinders (BgBookHistory, n.d.). This project develops the first of its kind specialised GIS in the field of Book History in Bulgaria. The authors emphasize that the key factors for the functioning of the system are the accumulation of systematised data and the organisation of semantic links between them. For the purposes of research and completion of the system, 15 800 bibliographic records of books published between 1878 and 1908 were used. (Zagorov & Boyadzhiev, 2013)

Another key work in this field was the project “Digitisation of the Repertoire of Books from the Bulgarian Revival (1801–1878)” DN 05/2. The latest trends in digital humanities are reflected in the product development. (Knigopis, n.d.) The product comprises a Bibliographic information retrieval system and a GIS, which provide an analytical representation of the data of the Bulgarian books published in the period from the beginning of the 19th century until the Liberation of Bulgaria (1800–1878). (Zagorov & Encheva, 2017)

Other relevant example of GIS in the field of Bulgarian literature and literary studies is the project “Bulgarian Literature after Liberation (1878) – Personalities and Processes, Documents and Artefacts (Digital Dictionary)”. The work focuses on providing biographical data of Bulgarian authors according to their place of birth. (DictionaryLit, n.d.)

4 Conclusions

As noted in the paper, successful examples of this type of humanitarian sector have been implemented in Bulgaria for ten years. The results of these interdisciplinary approaches are relevant and have been acknowledged in scientific communities.

The current project involves scientific research, which is new and significant for the modern Catholic community and the religious diversity of Bulgaria. The successful implementation of a database and geographic information system with up-to-date

information related to the topic will increase interest and hopefully foster future developments in this field.

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