

# Medieval Sources and Present-Day Folklore Materials on Saints in an Electronic Encyclopedia

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**Abstract.** This paper discusses the variety of the digitized content of an electronic encyclopedia on the veneration of saints according to Bulgarian sources. The emphasis is on medieval Slavonic Church manuscripts and on present-day records of Bulgarian folklore narratives and songs. The combination of these sources provokes discussion of the so-called folklore Christianity and adds new dimensions to the understanding of the role of the cults of saints for culture and of the religiosity of the Bulgarians.

**Keywords:** Digital Libraries, Electronic Encyclopedia, Saints, Texts, Images, Folklore

## 1 Introduction

The project *Encyclopaedia slavica sanctorum: Saints and Holy Places in Bulgaria* has several objectives, one of which is to produce an electronic encyclopedia with information on Bulgarian sources for veneration of saints ([www.eslavsanct.net](http://www.eslavsanct.net))<sup>1</sup>. These sources include texts culled from medieval Slavonic manuscripts which belong to various ecclesiastical genres, in particular vitae, synaxarion readings, homilies, prayers, offices, and calendars following the Church year. Also, for the first time in a Bulgarian internet product, the publication of medieval sources is combined with

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publications of original folklore records (mostly narratives) for saints. Thus, the encyclopedia comprises different types of witnesses aiming at integral representation of the role of saints and their feasts in Bulgarian culture. This is one of its *differentiae specifica*e which distinguishes it from other internet resources on saints and holy places and from publications such as [9].

## 2 Encyclopaedia Content Specifics

The main idea is to provide the reader with a “polyphony” of the voices of primary sources: both medieval and modern ones. Thus, for every date in the calendar, one can find all the saints who are present in medieval Slavonic Church calendars attached to four types of manuscripts: Gospel manuscripts (Euangelia), Acts and Epistles (Apostoloi), Bibles, and Typica. The original phrases introducing the numerous Church feasts and commemorations in these types of manuscripts are reproduced in their original orthography. As Iskra Hristova-Shomova has noted, this information could help scholars trace the history of the Slavonic calendars, their early versions and later developments [6, 7].

Further, a long-term goal of the project is to provide the users with articles on the texts for every saint as identified in medieval Slavonic sources (both original compositions and translations from Greek). Already there are such articles for St. Basil the Great, St. George, St. Theodore, St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki, St. Clement of Okhrid, Prophet Elijah, St. Marina (Margaret), and several others. As mentioned, the peculiarity of this electronic encyclopedia is that it places the emphasis on the publications of original texts for the saints. Thus the structure of every article is the following: 1. Information on the medieval Slavonic texts (translated or original) about the saint chosen. This information culled from Slavonic sources is viewed in the context of the Byzantine texts dedicated to the saints (reference books such as [11-15] and several others are used as well as the original research of the particular authors of the e-articles); 2. Publication of original texts: mostly diplomatic editions rendering the original orthography of the sources chosen and in some cases, translations into present-day standard Bulgarian. Some of the texts are edited with reconstructed Old Bulgarian (Old Church Slavonic) orthography and are accompanied with basic variant readings (cf. such an approach in [3]). Most of the texts are published for the first time in the electronic *Encyclopaedia slavica sanctorum*. A small number of them, mostly readings from synaxaria, were reproduced from already existing publications. These publications, however, are either not easily accessible or represent the texts dedicated to a given saint in a context other than that chosen in the encyclopedia. Most of the already published texts are reproduced in the same form in the e-encyclopedia but others are recopied by the authors of the e-articles with reconstructed Old Bulgarian orthography so that these new editions could be included in future in bigger machine searchable corpora of medieval Slavonic texts and could be used for production of e-dictionaries.

The idea of the electronic *Encyclopaedia slavica sanctorum* is to bring together as many as possible texts dedicated to a particular saint. Thus, such a context will give

opportunity for further scholarly interpretations and developments based on the examination of primary sources. Next, the e-encyclopedia contains information on holy places and images and several photographs are published here for the first time. There are also links to another digital library: Bulgarian Iconographical Digital Library.

### **3 The Assembly of Medieval Content with Present-Day Folklore Texts and Images**

In this paper, we will further comment on the character of the combination of the two types of primary sources in one e-product: a) medieval texts and images and b) present-day folklore texts (interviews, narratives, and songs) and images. The folklore materials are selected for publication from the rich archives of Ongal Association of Anthropology, Ethnology and Folklore Studies (see <http://www.ongal.net/>). Certainly, the volume of the folklore materials for the different saints varies since it depends on the popularity of the saint in a given community and period. For instance, there 20 texts published for St. George (<http://www.eslavsanct.net/viewobject.php?id=2374>), among which folklore narratives about: St. George's life from Borovo, Lūki region; A story about the dragon, St. George, and a bear fly – Chereshovica, Berkovitsa region; Swings on St. George's day – Juper, Kubrat region; Other rites on St. George's day from different regions: rites for sheep, maids, herbs, and several others; A Story how St. George saves one's son from a car accident – Dospej, Samokov region; Witches steal the milk on St. George's day -- Lūkavitsa, Lūki region; and also songs about St. George visiting the fields, or killing the dragon from different regions. In contrast, there are only two texts for St. Vitus's day (Vidovden) (June 15), viz. Lisei and Vidovden – Lipen, Montana region; "A good day for visits and celebration is called "Vidovden" – Govedartsi, Samokov region (<http://eslavsanct.net/viewobject.php?id=1571>).

The combination of two types of texts in one e-product, i.e. canonical ecclesiastical texts and folklore texts, again opens the discussion on the methodologically important question how to approach and treat the so-called "folklore Orthodox Christianity". Different terms to denote this cultural phenomenon have been used in scholarship, such as *битово християнство* [everyday Christianity], *фолклорно християнство* [folklore Christianity] [1], and even *утилитарна сакралност* [utilitarian sacredness/sacrality] [2], which are opposed to canonical Orthodox Christianity [4]. Such terms suggest a dichotomy which, in practice, does not exist or is at least out of date [5]. In our view, a more adequate and analytical approach is an approach which we can term "theological approach" and which could be seen in the *e-Encyclopaedia slavica sanctorum*.

For the first time in this e-product, the main idea is to concentrate on combination of authentic materials that vary in nature: written and oral texts and visual materials culled from various sources, from Church books and from folklore records. It should be mentioned that the e-encyclopedia provides precise information on the nature of the sources quoted and published. For the written sources, there is information on the

date, location, provenance, orthography, content of the manuscripts used; for the oral (folklore) texts, there is information on the place and time of the interviews and records, on the interviewers and interviewees; also, the original dialectal speech with accent signs is rendered. Thus, different viewpoints and manifestations of faith are revealed: the beliefs in the power of a given saint to help and punish, forms of celebrations of his/her feast, popular rites and rituals, songs, and narratives about him/her, Church rites, hymns, narratives, and norms, and their perception in different communities. As in the case with the medieval texts, most of the folklore texts are published here for the first time. Some of them are specific for particular regions, some are much more widespread. The records have been made in the last 20 years in different regions of Bulgaria.

#### 4 Conclusion

The software architectural model of the encyclopedia is developed following flexible concept, considering all the specifics of the target content. It allows for various types of search, preview and sort using combined criteria. For instance, one could have a list of all saints martyred in the third century for whom synaxarion readings are published in the e-encyclopedia; or one can get a list of all saints who lived or died in Alexandria in the second century. Thus this opportunity to search according to a combination of criteria could help find information on particular items but also could reveal a wider panorama of the Bulgarian culture and of the attitudes towards the sacred and sainthood seen as an integral phenomenon in its Church canonical and everyday aspects which are closely related. Thus the encyclopedia gives an idea of the rich variety of sensitivities and manifestations of faith and beliefs in Bulgarian culture.

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