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The Slavonic Manuscript Heritage of the Zograf Monastery on Mount Athos – Past and Present

Abstract: The literary treasures of the Holy Monastery of St. George the Zograf (widely known as Zograf Monastery) on Mount Athos, Greece, have attracted the scholarly attention for almost two centuries now. Built back in the X c., the Monastery has been inhabited by Slavic monks, predominantly Bulgarian in origin, for a millennium. Numerous medieval books have been taken by different visitors from the Monastery's Library and "migrated", mainly to the lands of the former Russian Empire. Despite that, due to the relative difficulties in terms of access, the Library and its manuscripts have neither seen proper cataloguing so far, nor have been studied to a sufficient extent. The present article makes an overview of several topics. First, it sketches the history of cataloguing attempts made for Zograf's Library since XIX c. to contemporary undertakings. Second, it describes the current state of the Library's repertoire, which is by far wider than expected until recently, and the formation of several teams with different fields of research in order to cover the whole range of thousands of hand-written books and documents spanning all over ten centuries. Third, the article traces the stages of the decade lasting (and still continuing) process of digitalization of the Zograf's literary heritage and the attempts of providing its accessibility to the scholars – at least for its most valuable pieces, if not in total.

Keywords: Zograf Monastery – Mount Athos – manuscripts – archives

Introduction

The Monastery of St. George Zograf¹, called Zograf Monastery or, in short, Zograf, is a cenobitic monastery, mainly populated by Bulgarians, in the monastic republic of the Holy Mountain (Άγιο Όρος) on the peninsula of Mount Athos, Greece. Today it is one of the few Athonite monasteries where the monks are almost exclusively of Slavic origin.

The history of Zograf is thousands of years old. Monastery's tradition states that the monastery was founded in 919 by three brothers from Ohrid – Aaron, Moses and John Selima. According to some scholars, the earliest written evidence of the Monastery's existence dates back to 972 – in that year a painter (ζωγράφος) named George signed his name in Greek in the *Tragos* – the first Charter or Statute of Mount Athos, approved by Emperor John Tzimiskes. Others argue that such a testimony is actually a contract of 980 for the sale of a property of the Zograf to the hermitage of St. Apostles, where the abbot of the monastery, Hieromonk Makarios, affixed his signature in Slavonic. Having gone through many difficulties, the Zograf Monastery has preserved its Bulgarian character until modern times and even today, it still officially defines itself as a “Slavic-Bulgarian” monastery.

Like most monasteries, Zograf has been a literary and educational centre throughout its existence. Despite the adversities and disasters it suffered, including its burning in 1276 by “Latin” (Catholic) knights, it occupied an important place in the development of Bulgarian literature in the Middle Ages. Some of its literary heritage has been destroyed over the years, some scattered: dozens of Zograf manuscripts are preserved in book repositories in various parts of the world, mainly the lands of the former Russian Empire. However, a considerable number of manuscripts are preserved to this day in the monastery Library.

As with the other Athonite monasteries, access to Zograf is restricted. Orthodox pilgrims are allowed to stay on Mount Athos by means of a permit, a kind of visa that allows them to stay overnight either in one particular monastery or in any of the monasteries. The length of the visa depends on the type of visit, but usually covers three or four days. The visa is obtained after the pilgrim approaches the monastery he wants to visit, and the monastery approaches the Parliament of the Holy Mountain, the Holy Community (Ιερά Κοινότης), and it gives permission for the visit. Orthodox clerics must additionally obtain permission from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul.

1 The accepted Romanization of Μονή Ζωγράφου should be “Zograph(ou)”; however, the brotherhood of the Monastery, following a millennium lasting Slavic tradition, prefers a single letter transliteration of /φ/ – Zograf, which is therefore used in this article.

For Catholic and Protestant visitors, there is a quota common to the entire Holy Mountain, which is highly restrictive – no more than ten non-Orthodox visitors per day.

Women are prohibited to enter the Holy Mountain under any circumstances. This rule has very rarely been broken in the past, usually by force – for example, during World War II, when Mount Athos, along with much of Greece, was occupied, some of the officers of the occupying garrisons brought their wives with them. There were only a few occasions in the history of the monastic republic when women were officially allowed to visit the Holy Mountain. In modern times, attempts by women to infiltrate the Holy Mountain have led to great social tension.

Despite the fact that all these circumstances follow an ancient tradition, they do nonetheless affect the scholarly work nowadays – and that is the reason why they are worth mentioning. All of these conditions make it very difficult, and sometimes impossible, to work with the literary heritage of the monasteries of Mount Athos. E.g., the reader will notice that a great part of the scholarly team working on Zograf's manuscripts consists of female researchers; therefore, their access to the Library is restricted to work with digital copies only. Therefore, the team had to develop a strategically flexible approach of task delegation, as male and female members had to distribute the research activities in a way, which was unaccustomed for both of them.

History of research

One of the first to study the Library of the Zograf Monastery from a scientific point of view was Antun Mihanović (1796–1861). During his diplomatic service (1836–1858) in Belgrade, Thessaloniki, Smyrna and elsewhere, Mihanović visited Zograf Monastery, appreciated the great importance of some manuscripts – for example, the Zograf Glagolitic Gospel from the XI c. – and made their existence known to the scientific community.

The Slavist Viktor Grigorovich (1815–1876) was the first to work extensively in the Zograf Library. In 1844–1845, Grigorovich undertook a scientific journey through the Balkans. He arrived at Zograf at the end of September 1844. In the Library, he became acquainted with over 100 manuscripts, of which he described 35².

A few years later, the famous ecclesiastic and scholar Bishop Porphyrius Uspensky (1804–1885) also worked in the library of the Zograf Monastery. Bishop

2 В. Григорович, *Очерк путешествия по Европейской Турции (с картою окрестностей Охридского и Преспанского озер)*, Москва 1877. Phototype reprint: Sofia 1978.

Porphyrus described fifty manuscripts, mainly Slavonic, which he considered to be of particular importance³.

In 1902, the Bulgarian historian and ethnographer Anton Popstoilov, at that time a teacher at the Thessaloniki Bulgarian Male Gymnasium, visited the Zograf Monastery. He recorded the existence of 257 manuscripts and classified them according to their content, language and time of writing, noting some important marginal notes and some fragments⁴.

In 1908, the Russian Slavist Grigorij Il'insky (1876–1937) printed his article *Manuscripts of the Zograf Monastery of Athos*, in which he made the first short catalogue (check-list) of the collection. The number of manuscripts he described was 184⁵.

In 1916, during the First World War, the Bulgarian historian and archaeologist Yordan Ivanov took part, among many other scholars, in the Scholarly Expedition to Macedonia and Pomerania, a project of the General Staff of the Bulgarian Army. Part of Ivanov's research was in the Zograf Monastery. As a result, in 1931 he published a second, greatly expanded edition of one of his most significant works, *Bulgarian Antiquities in Macedonia*⁶.

During the Second World War, the Bulgarian state also sent a scholarly expedition to Mount Athos. The description of the Slavic manuscripts from various Athonite monasteries – including Zograf – was undertaken by the Slavist Petar Dinekov (1910–1991), and the photographic filming of the material was done by the historian Veselin Beshevliev (1900–1992). The notes of P. Dinekov are preserved today in his archive fund at the Central State Archive – Sofia⁷; however, he never systematized them and did not publish a description of the manuscripts he studied. After the death of V. Beshevliev, his personal archive was not handed over to a single scholarly institution where its study would be possible, but was torn between different collections. Part of the archive, containing some photographs of Zograf, including several images from manuscripts, has been donated to the Southwestern University “Neofit Rilski” in Blagoevgrad. Unfortunately, the fragmentary state of the transferred part of the archive does not allow for a systematic study.

3 П. Успенский, *Второе путешествие по Святой горе Афонской Архимандрита, ныне Епископа, Порфирия Успенского, в годы 1858, 1859 и 1861, и описание скитов Афонских*, Москва 1880.

4 А. Попстоилов, *Преглед на славянските ръкописи в Зографския манастир*, “ТЦърковен Вестник” 1903.

5 Г.А. Ильинский, *Рукописи зографского монастыря на Афоне*, София 1908. Отпечаток с “Известия Русского Археологического Института в Константинополе” 1908, Vol. 13, pp. 253–276.

6 Й. Иванов, *Български старини из Македония*, 1. изд., София 1908; 2. поправено и доп. изд., София 1931.

7 Central State Archive, Sofia, Personal Fund No. 1987K. See also: В. Билярска, *Кирилometодиевистиката в личния архив на акад. Петър Динеков в ЦДА. Автореферат на дисертация за присъждане на образователната и научна степен “доктор”*, София 2015.

In the mid-1970s, a new initiative started for a new study and inventory of the manuscripts in the Zograf Library. A group of scholars was sent to the Monastery in two successive expeditions of several weeks each in the summer of 1978 and the winter of 1979⁸. These were: Hristo Kodov (1901–1982) from the Church History and Archives Institute of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church; Bozhidar Raykov (1939–1935) from the National Library of Bulgaria; and Stefan Kozhuharov (1934–2000) from the Institute for Literature of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS); accompanied by Todor Sabev (1928–2008), Director of CHAI. In the course of the work, the researchers decided to prepare a short catalogue and to initialize work on a detailed inventory of the available manuscripts, starting with the Biblical books. The death of H. Kodov put an end to the undertaking. In 1985, only the first volume of the inventory was published⁹, and only in 1994, with the help of the Austrian Slavist Heinz Miklas, the short catalogue was finally issued¹⁰.

The microfilms of Slavic manuscripts taken during the 1978–1979 expeditions were handed over to the Central State Archive in Sofia. An inventory of this collection was made by Klimentina Ivanova. The microfilms are available for use at the CSA, but the inventory remains available only in working form and – unfortunately for the Slavist community – has not been put to print.

Meanwhile, another collection was formed at the CSA, consisting of microfilms of documents from the archives of many monasteries on Mount Athos. The history of this collection needs a separate study and will not be presented here. This microfilm fund (together with microfilms from various Greek archival institutions and several visits *in situ* on Mount Athos) is the main basis of the productive work of Cyril Pavlikianov, who has published in the last two decades numerous studies upon the Greek and Slavic documents in Athonite archives¹¹. Pavlikianov's research is independent, as he is not a participant in the scholarly team, organized by the Monastery.

8 Б. Райков, *Със Стефан Кожухаров на Света гора*, “Старобългарска литература” 1994, Vol. 28–29, pp. 3–9.

9 Х. Кодов, Б. Райков, С. Кожухаров, *Опис на славянските ръкописи в Библиотеката на Зографския манастир в Света гора*. Т. 1, София 1985.

10 Б. Райков, С. Кожухаров, Х. Миклас, Х. Кодов, *Каталог на славянските ръкописи в библиотеката на Зографския манастир в Света гора*, София 1994.

11 The extensive research work of Pavlikianov, published in multiple papers, is not to be easily resumed even in a separate article; therefore, here one can suffice to mention some of his summarizing monographs, namely: С. Pavlikianov, *Medieval Slavic Acts from Mount Athos 1230–1734. Bulgarian and Serbian Acts from the Monasteries of Karakallou, Kastamonitou, St. Paul, Vatopedi and Xenophontos. Moldavian and Wallachian Slavic Acts from the Monasteries of Docheiariou, Kastamonitou and Zographou. Critical Edition and Commentary of the Texts*, Sofia 2018, “University Library” Series of SU “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Vol. 516; idem, *The Mediaeval Greek and Bulgarian Documents of the Athonite Monastery of Zographou 980–1600. Critical Edition and Commentary of the Texts*, Sofia 2014, “University Library” Series of SU “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Vol. 512; idem, *The Early Years of the Bulgarian Athonite Monastery of Zographou (980–1279) and its Byzantine Archives*, Sofia 2011.

Later, the Centre for Cultural Research “St. Cyril and Methodius” in Thessaloniki published the catalogue *Slavonic Manuscripts of the Athonite Monasteries*, prepared by Russian scholars Anatolij Turilov and Lyudmila Moshkova, edited by Anton-Emil Tahiaos¹². This catalogue, however, is based on the existing research at the time, so we find no new data on the Zograf Library in it.

Preservation and digitization work

The modern stage of the study of the manuscript heritage of the Zografsky Monastery began in 2009. At that time, the idea of digitizing the monastery’s literary and archival holdings appeared simultaneously in two institutions. In Zograf, this idea was born after a visit of a part of the brotherhood to the Hilendar Monastery and getting acquainted with the work done there for digitization and preservation of the archives of the Serbian monastery. At the same time at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” a scholarly team was finishing the project for digitization of the manuscript collection of the Rila Monastery “St. Ivan of Rila”. This project marks the beginning of the Digital Archive “Bulgarian Manuscript Book” at the Department of Cyrillo-Methodian Studies at the Faculty of Slavic Philology. The scholars of the Department decided to ask the Zograf Monastery if it would be possible to digitize the books from its Library. Thus, in the summer of 2009, Bulgarian scholars visited the Monastery and agreed on the terms of work and the principles according to which the archive would be digitized. A special room was prepared in the Monastery to house the necessary equipment. Of the various options for achieving digital copies, the photographic method was chosen as relatively quick, convenient and practical. The Monastery provided the necessary equipment and the digitizing of the monastery’s literary treasures began.

In the initial phase of the work, the main team was composed of Dimitar Peev and Petko Petkov from the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and Rev. Kozma (Krasimir) Popovski from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, who at that time was a doctoral student at the Cyrillo-Methodian Research Center (CMRC) of BAS. Hieromonk Athanasius, librarian at the Zograf Monastery, and other monks, provided their work. The team was also assisted by Nikifor Haralampiev from the Center for Slavo-Byzantine Studies “Ivan Duychev” and the National Academy of Arts, and later joined by Andrey Boyadzhiev from the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”¹³.

12 А.А. Турилов, Л.В. Мошкова, *Каталог славянских рукописей афонских обителей*, ред. А.-Е. Тахиаос, Београд 2016.

13 [Свещ.] К. Поповски, *Зографската електронна научноизследователска библиотека в Софийския университет “Св. Климент Охридски”*, “Старобългарска литература” 2015, Vol. 52, pp. 177–182.

The main part of the digitization completed by 2012. In the meantime, however, the librarian Hieromonk Athanasius continued to search both the Monastery itself and its other properties for manuscripts and fragments (e.g., the Monastery's guesthouse in Karyes, the "capital" of Mount Athos). New and new manuscripts appeared and were photographed in stages, mainly by Rev. K. Popovski. Thus, the whole digitization process continued for practically a decade.

At the same time, under the guidance of Hieromonk Athanasius, the necessary work was done to preserve the literary treasures. Two new rooms were provided for the monastery Library. The first of them, a book vault, is intended for storing the manuscripts, charters and various archival materials – in it all necessary fire precautions are taken, and a microclimate with specific requirements for humidity, temperature, etc. is maintained. The materials from this vault were subjected to anaerobic treatment. Physical access to them is kept to a minimum for preservation purposes; the researchers mostly use digital copies. The second room is dedicated to the printed publications, ranging from old printed books to modern ones. New bookcases were provided, the books were mechanically cleaned, and the compilation of a modern electronic catalogue began. Dozens of scholars and students from various institutions were involved in the cataloguing work, and over several years, they were able to re-organize the vast book collection and to fill in the bibliographical data into an electronic database. Although the printed editions housed in this section of the Library are less valuable than the manuscripts, great efforts were made to keep the books untouched by humidity, temperature, or pests. To preserve them, a research team of specialists in natural sciences was invited to develop innovative, highly effective repellents based on aromatic oils extracted from plants from Mount Athos itself.

In the course of work on this catalogue of the printed books, two other important undertakings were realized. First, the manuscript digitization team also photographed a number of important old printed editions. Second, in describing the printed editions, all manuscript fragments included in them were noted so that they could be the subject of future research. However, the process of cataloguing them has yet to begin.

Current state of the literary wealth of the Zograf Monastery

Today the Zograf Monastery preserves:

- Over 700 Slavic manuscripts. The main part of them – about 600 in number – are of Biblical, liturgical and patristic content, as well as other collections of different composition and purpose. The earliest manuscript dates from the end of the XI c. and the latest from the second half of the XX c. The remaining more than 100 Slavonic manuscripts

are ecclesiastical music collections with neumatic notation (*Psaltikia*) from the XVIII to the XX c.;

- About 200 manuscripts in Greek, the earliest dating from the XII c., and including church musical manuscripts, some of them from the period before the reform of church music by Metropolitan Chrysanthos of Madytos;
- Over 1,000 medieval and pre-Renaissance charters and documents (Bulgarian, Byzantine, Moldo-Wallachian, Ottoman and Russian);
- A huge archive from the time of the Bulgarian National Revival and from the post-Revival era – over 100 thousand archival items;
- Almost 30,000 printed editions, hundreds of which are rare old printed editions, many of which are missing in Bulgarian libraries or are available in defective copies.

Modern research

During the attempt to inventorize the literary treasures in the Zograf Monastery, it became clear that even cataloguing them was not within the power of the small number of Paleo-Slavic scholars who had been working in the Monastery Library. This led to the idea of differentiating several research sub-teams to study and describe the literary and archival heritage.

- The “Slavic Team” is led by Margaret Dimitrova from the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. In the preparation of the catalogue of Slavonic manuscripts together with her began work: Rev. K. Popovski from the CHAI; A. Boyadzhiev and P. Petkov from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”; Elisaveta Musakova from the National Academy of Arts in Sofia; Lyubka Nenova from the Southwestern University “Neofit Rilski” in Blagoevgrad; K. Ivanova and Andrey Bobev from the CMRC at BAS. The first volume of this catalogue, edited by K. Ivanova, was completed¹⁴. Meanwhile, a catalogue of the manuscript fragments of the collection was published¹⁵. Subsequently, the team was joined by Tatiana Mostrova (CMRC at BAS), Dilyana Radoslavova (Institute for Literature of BAS) and – briefly – by Veneta Savova (Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”). This team is currently working on the preparation of the next volume of the catalogue, which should cover the remaining 200 or so manuscripts.

14 К. Иванова [et. al.], *Каталог на славянските ръкописи от Зографската света обител* (№ 287–405), ред. К. Иванова, София 2017.

15 П. Петков, свещ. К. Поповски, А. Бояджиев, *Пергаментни кирилски откъслечи от библиотеката на Зографската света обител*, София 2019.

- The “Moldo-Wallachian Team”, which includes Bulgarian researchers Ivan Bilyarski (Institute for Historical Studies of BAS) and D. Peev (Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”), and their Romanian colleagues Petronel Zahariuc (Faculty of History, “Al. I. Cuza” University, Iași) and Gheorghe Lazar (University of Bucharest). This team has already published a check-list of the documents they studied¹⁶.
- The “Ottoman Team” – Grigor Boykov and Maria Kiprovska from the Centre for Regional Studies and Analyses (Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”), Damyan Borisov (Plovdiv University “Paisiy Hilendarski”) and Phokion Kotzageorgis (Aristotle University, Thessaloniki), describing the Ottoman documents from the Zograf archive¹⁷.
- “Byzantine Archives” Team – Kostis Smyrlis (New York University), Christophe Giros (Université Lumière Lyon 2), Guencho Banev (University of Athens), Demetrios Kyritses (University of Crete) and Alexis Chrysostalis (Centre national de la recherche scientifique / Collège de France) describe the Greek documents, kept at the Zograf Library.
- “Greek Manuscripts” Team – Olivier Delouis (Centre national de la recherche scientifique / Sorbonne), Eleftherios Despotakis (University of Crete) and Alexis Chrysostalis (Centre national de la recherche scientifique / Collège de France) constitute the team, that undertakes the cataloguing of the main part of Greek manuscripts of the Monastery.
- “Greek Musical Manuscripts” Team is represented by Gregorios Stathes (University of Athens).
- “Slavonic Musical Manuscripts” Team – the church musical manuscripts (*Psaltikia*) in the Monastery Library are described by the colleagues Gotse Risteski (Ohrid, Republic of North Macedonia) and Daniel Yordanov (Veliko Tarnovo University “St. Cyril and Methodius”)¹⁸.
- “Library Team” consists of Antoaneta Dimitrova (Bulgarian Library and Information Association), Tsveta Uzunova (“Peyo Yavorov” Regional Library – Bourgas), Deyan Dimitrov (electronics engineer), Tsvetan Vasilev, Nikolay Yanev and Dimitar Dragnev (Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”), and Krasimir Ivanov (National School for Ancient Languages and Cultures “St. Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher”).

16 П. Захарюк [et. al.], *Чек-лист на влахо-молдавските документи в архива на Зографския манастир*, [in:] *Зографски съборник. Зографският архив и библиотека. Изследвания и перспективи*, гл. ред. Д. Пеев, ред. М. Димитрова [et. al.], София 2019, pp. 256–317.

17 М. Кипровска, Г. Бойков, *Колекцията от османски документи от архива на Зографския манастир: предварителни бележки върху нейното състояние, значимост и перспективи за работа*, [in:] *Зографски съборник...*, pp. 318–349.

18 Г. Ристески, *Сбирката от певчески ръкописи на Зографската света обител*, [in:] *Зографски съборник...*, pp. 61–72.

They maintain the electronic catalogue of the printed editions, kept in the Library.

- “*Kondikas* Project” Team – Nadya Danova (Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology of BAS), Keta Mircheva (independent scholar), Olga Todorova (Institute for Historical Studies of BAS), Svetlana Ivanova (Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”) study Monastery’s *Kondika* manuscripts. *Kondikas* are a specific type of church books – while in parish churches they are basically parish registers, monastery *Kondikas* combine the functions of income and expenditure books, monastery annals, correspondence and contract copy-books, etc., thus becoming extremely important source of historical information.

Meanwhile, many scholars from various institutions have been busy researching and preparing editions of individual Slavonic manuscripts from the monastery collection. This multitude of scholarly projects cannot be listed here and deserves a publication of its own. Researchers worked on some of these projects independently, others in small groups of two or three people. In general, the thematic distribution of the endeavors can be stated as follows:

- Preparation for publication of manuscripts significant in their characteristics (content, language, paleography), liturgical and nonliturgical – e.g. *Radomirov Psalter* (XIII c.), *Dragan Menaion* (XIII c.), *Zograf Miscellany* (XIV c.), etc.;
- Preparation for publication of texts that constitute a complete liturgical complex, e.g. a corpus of texts related to the veneration of St. Dimitar of Basarbovo;
- Preparation for the publication of thematic corpora from the documentary and archival heritage of the Monastery, which have important cultural and historical significance.

To avoid overlap in the research field, all group and individual projects are coordinated with the monastery’s librarian, Hieromonk Athanasius, and receive the approval of the monastic brotherhood and the Hegumen, Archimandrite Amvrosius. Both research teams and individual researchers may send a request to the Monastery for digital copies of manuscripts or documents of interest to them, and, upon permission, to obtain them for scholarly work and/or publication.

The Zograf Electronic Research Library at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

The creation of a digitization room in the Zograf Monastery and the digital photographing of the Slavic manuscripts was only the first step in a necessary large-scale undertaking: to make the monastery’s cultural heritage accessible to scholars and to all those interested in its history. An indispensable next step

was to make the resulting digital content available to those from whom it could be read, understood, explored and promoted.

Thus, after a series of conversations between representatives of the Zograf Monastery and Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” on 30.06.2014 a contract was signed between the two institutions, whereby the Monastery provided electronic copies of the photographed materials for local use. This way the Zograf Electronic Research Library at Sofia University was founded, popularly known as the “Zograf Room”. This specialized collection is only available offline in the Philology Branch Library of the University Library. The corpus of digitized Zograf manuscripts forms the basis of the Zograf Room, but later digitized manuscripts from other Bulgarian and foreign institutions were also added to these copies: from the Vatican Apostolic Library; from the Dragomirna Monastery (Romania) and from the Troyan Monastery, as well as from the Monastery of St. Dionysius on Mount Athos; digital collections of the National Library “Ivan Vazov” (Plovdiv); digital collections of Sofia University itself – from the Center for Slavo-Byzantine Studies “Ivan Duychev” and from the University Library itself; from the National Historical Museum (Sofia); from the Historical Museum “Acad. Yordan Ivanov” (Kyustendil), from the Regional Historical Museum in Varna and from the City Historical Museum in Samokov; as well as from the People’s Community Centre “Saglasie 1869” (Pleven). In total, the Zograf Room holds digital copies of over 650 Slavonic manuscripts, accessible to students, researchers and connoisseurs of art, history and literature. According to the University Library, around 200 researchers use the resources of the Zograf Room each year; most of these scholars are from abroad.

Meanwhile, the Monastery independently promotes another part of its literary treasures through the official website of the “Heritage of the Holy Monastery of Zograf” Foundation, especially the printed editions stored in the Monastery Library. So far (March 2023), more than 60 old and rare editions have been published in the “Digital Library” section of the website. Most of these books are difficult to access or unavailable in conventional libraries, or the book copies stored there are in poor condition. In contrast, the paper exemplars in the Zograf Library are usually very well preserved, which has enabled the production of quality digital copies to meet the needs of researchers. E.g., in contemporary Bulgarian libraries there are just a few copies of the edition of the Life and Service of st. Ivan of Rila, published in Kyiv in 1671 by Antony Radivilovsky, and all these copies have sustained certain damage over time; but the Library of Zograf preserves an intact copy, that was digitized and enabled a much needed re-print in 2020¹⁹.

19 Л. Ненова, А. Бобев, *Покаяния основание. Служба и Житие на св. Иоан Рилски (Київ, 1671 г.). Текст и изследване*, Благоевград 2020.

Conclusion

The work of preserving, digitizing and popularizing the cultural heritage of the Zograf Monastery began like any other initiative with an uncertain future, but gradually turned into the largest scientific undertaking of the Bulgarian humanities in recent decades. As it is shown above, the research teams and the individual projects include literally tens of scholars from various European countries plus USA, thus forming an unique research network, unmatched by any scholarly undertaking in the field of Medieval studies in contemporary Bulgaria. Thanks to the initiative of the librarian, Hieromonk Athanasius, the support of the abbot, Archimandrite Amvrosius, and the correct assessment of the importance of this activity by the monastic brotherhood, today the literary heritage of Zograf Monastery has become a personal cause for dozens of researchers from several countries, united in several research teams and engaged in numerous collective and individual projects. As has been the case many times before in Bulgarian cultural history, Zograf is now once again becoming one of the leading literary and cultural centres. The monastery became the unifying unit of a unique “think tank”, encompassing dozens of humanitarian and even natural science institutions, united in a common movement, in pursuit of a common goal. The Bulgarian scientific community of recent decades knows of no other such joint venture comparable to this in scale and significance. Once again, the Zograf Monastery, as it has done many times in the past eleven centuries since its foundation, becomes more than a priceless treasury of times gone by – it becomes a bright cultural centre in the present and the initiator of a scientific and spiritual revival to look forward to in the future.

List of Abbreviations

BAS – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
CMRC – Cyrillo-Methodian Research Centre at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
CHAI – Church History and Archives Institute of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church
CSA – Central State Archive in Sofia
SU – Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

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