

Volumen 6 - Número Especial - Octubre/Diciembre 2019

# REVISTA INCLUSIONES

REVISTA DE HUMANIDADES  
Y CIENCIAS SOCIALES  
ISSN 0718-4760

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**THE BULGARIAN NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE UNDER THE AEGIS OF UNESCO.  
ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONALITY<sup>1</sup>**

**EL PATRIMONIO NATURAL Y CULTURAL BÚLGARO BAJO LOS AUSPICIOS DE LA  
UNESCO. ORGANIZACIÓN Y FUNCIONALIDAD**

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**Fecha de Recepción:** 09 de junio de 2019 – **Fecha Revisión:** 10 de julio de 2019

**Fecha de Aceptación:** 10 de septiembre 2019 – **Fecha de Publicación:** 16 de septiembre de 2019

**Abstract**

The paper examines the functional and hierarchical structure of the sites under the aegis of UNESCO in Bulgaria and categorizes them by individual lists according to the genesis, development and functioning of each site. The emphasis is placed on the sites which are part of the list of the world (natural and cultural) heritage of “outstanding universal value”. An in-depth analysis of the selected sites has been made in terms of geographic location and interaction with the specific area of their location. The sites have also been analyzed in terms of tourism and attendance, as well as trends in their development as tourist destinations. Finally, the paper focuses on the opportunities for increasing the tourism attractiveness of certain UNESCO World Heritage sites in Bulgaria.

**Keywords**

UNESCO – Bulgarian heritage – Functionality – Organization

**Resumen**

El documento examina la estructura funcional y jerárquica de los sitios bajo la égida de la UNESCO en Bulgaria y los clasifica por listas individuales de acuerdo con la génesis, el desarrollo y el funcionamiento de cada sitio. Se hace hincapié en los sitios que forman parte de la lista del patrimonio mundial (natural y cultural) de "excepcional valor universal". Se ha realizado un análisis en profundidad de los sitios seleccionados en términos de ubicación geográfica e interacción con el área específica de su ubicación. Los sitios también han sido analizados en términos de turismo y asistencia, así como tendencias en su desarrollo como destinos turísticos. Por último, el documento se centra en las oportunidades de aumentar el atractivo turístico de ciertos sitios del Patrimonio Mundial de la UNESCO en Bulgaria

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<sup>1</sup> "This work is supported by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science under the National Program for Research “Young Scientists and Postdoctoral Students”.

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**Palabras Claves**

UNESCO – Patrimonio búlgaro – Funcionalidad – Organización

**Para Citar este Artículo:**

Penerliev, Milen y Petkov, Veselin. The Bulgarian Natural and Cultural Heritage under the aegis of UNESCO. Organization and functionality. Revista Inclusiones Vol: 6 num Especial (2019): 29-42.

## **Introduction: Functional classification of Sites Under the aegis of UNESCO**

Various sites and events exist in the structure of UNESCO World Heritage in terms of origin, location, function and thematic scope. The cultural value of the different sites is different; therefore, they are all included in different lists for the purposes of their preservation for the future generations, as well as for encouraging good practices and cultural exchange among the peoples. The most famous of those lists is that of the UNESCO Cultural and Natural World Heritage List, where different sites have been included since 1972.

### **Theoretical background**

#### **World Heritage sites of “outstanding universal value”**

UNESCO World Heritage List includes sites nominated and approved under the World Heritage Program of the United Nations World Heritage Committee. The program catalogues, names and preserves sites of various cultural or natural significance for the common heritage of mankind. Some sites, after meeting certain conditions, may receive funding from the World Heritage Fund. As of the beginning of 2019 there were 1092 sites on the List, of which: 845 “cultural”, 209 “natural” and 38 “mixed”. Geographically, those sites are distributed in 165 countries. Bulgaria participates with a total of 10 sites, out of which three are “natural”.

#### **Sites included in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**

Apart from the World Heritage List, following 2003, the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was created. As of the beginning of 2019 that list included 508 sites or events throughout 122 countries around the world, while 7 of the approved and enlisted sites are located in Bulgaria.

#### **World Network of Biosphere Reserves**

The list of biosphere reserves includes 686 sites from 120 countries, 20 of which are cross-border reserves, managed by the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme. The main paradigm of the Programme is the preservation of species and biodiversity, as well as the enhancement of the sustainable development of the territories. As of the beginning of 2019 Bulgaria is represented in the Network by 10 biosphere reserves, while in the past couple of years four other biosphere reserves were removed from the Network for various reasons.

#### **Memory of the World Register**

In 1992, the so-called Memory of the World Register was established by UNESCO, incorporating elements of the documentary heritage of huge historical role. Those are mostly written documents and archives, extremely valuable in historical and socio-cultural aspect. Bulgaria is represented in the Register by 3 documentary medieval historical scrolls:

- The Enina Apostle (an 11<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript) – enlisted in the Register in 2011;
- The Book of Boril (or Boril Synodic) – enlisted in the Register in 2017;

- The Four Gospels of Tsar Ivan Alexander – enlisted in the Register also in 2017.

### UNESCO Global Geoparks

As of today, no sites from Bulgaria have been added to that list.

### UNESCO Atlas of World's Languages in Danger

This is a relatively less popular list of languages that are threatened with extinction, mostly due to the reduction of the communities that speak them. Bulgaria participates in that list with 6 such languages, spoken by the specific ethnographic groups of the Gagauz, the Tatars and the Alevi people (known also as Alian, Bektash and Kizilbash).

#### *UNESCO Creative Cities Network*

The Network was created in 2004 to promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development. Today, the Network comprises 180 cities from 72 countries. Bulgaria is represented in the Network by two cities: Sofia (since 2014) and Gabrovo (since 2017).

### Data and methods: General description of the Bulgarian sites under the aegis of UNESCO

Bulgaria is represented in almost all categories, as seen from Table 1:

Category	Site/Event
World Heritage sites of "outstanding universal value"	Madara Rider, The Rock-hewn Churches of Ivanovo, the Boyana Church, the Thracian Tomb of Kazanlak, Ancient City of Nessebar, the Rila Monastery, Pirin National Park, Srebarna Nature Reserve, the Thracian Tomb of Sveshtari, the Primeval Beech Forests in the "Central Balkan" National Park
Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity	The "Surva" International Festival of the Masquerade Games, the tradition of carpet-making in Chiprovtsi, The Nestinarstvo (fire-dancing), The Bistritsa Babi folklore singing, the Festival of Folklore in Koprivshitsa, The Bulgarian Chitalishte community cultural centre, the Martenitsa and cultural practices for the 1 <sup>st</sup> of March
World Network of Biosphere Reserves	Alibotush, Bistrishko Branishte, Bayuvi Dupki – Dzhindzhiritsa, Mantaritsa, Uzunbudzhak, Parangalitsa, Srebarna, Chervenata Stena, Chuprene, Central Balkan
Memory of the World Register	The Enina Apostle, The Book of Boril, The Four Gospels of Tsar Ivan Alexander
Atlas of World's Languages in Danger	Aromanians, Dobrudzha Tatars, Gagauz (of the Ludogorie and of the seaside), Torlaks, Gypsies, European Jews
Creative Cities Network	Sofia, Gabrovo
<b>TOTAL:</b>	35*

\*Srebarna Nature Reserve and the Primeval Beech Forests in the "Central Balkan" National Park fall into two categories, but have only been counted once.

Table 1

Bulgarian sites and events, part of the UNESCO World Heritage List (as of 2019)

As it is seen from Table 1, Bulgaria is well-represented in the different UNESCO lists with a number of cultural and natural sites, and cultural events. Out of all 35, 10 are listed in the list of World Heritage sites of “outstanding universal value” (28% of all), another group of 10 – in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, followed by the cultural events listed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (accounting for 19.4% of all), and so forth.

Another categorization is possible based on the material nature or the time vector of the sites and events (Table 2):

Site/Event	Classification
Natural	11 ( <i>incl. all biosphere reserves from Table 1 and Pirin National Park</i> )
Historical	8 ( <i>the Thracian Tomb of Sveshtari, Madara Rider, The Rock-hewn Churches of Ivanovo, the Boyana Church, the Thracian Tomb of Kazanlak, The Enina Apostle, The Book of Boril, The Four Gospels of Tsar Ivan Alexander</i> )
Other sites (including architectural)	5 ( <i>Ancient City of Nessebar, The Bulgarian Chitalishte community cultural centre, the Rila Monastery, Sofia, Gabrovo</i> )
Vocal (spoken languages, etc.)	6 ( <i>the languages in danger and the unique polyphonic singing of the Bistritsa Babi</i> )
Events	5 ( <i>The “Surva” International Festival of the Masquerade Games, The Nestinarstvo (fire-dancing), the Martenitsa and cultural practices for the 1st of March, the tradition of carpet-making in Chiprovtsi, the Festival of Folklore in Koprivshitsa</i> )

Table 2

#### Typological classification of the UNESCO World Heritage sites in Bulgaria

According to the proposed typology, the natural sites dominate (11), followed by the historical ones. If we simply divide the sites into natural and anthropogenic ones, it will turn out that it is the latter that actually prevail. Out of their total number, 24 sites or cultural events (69%, or more than 2/3 of all) represent works of human activity, which demonstrates the desire to preserve the present and the past of human civilization.

Only a certain part of the UNESCO sites or events can be attributed a specific geographic location – 26 of all, since the *martenitsa* and its accompanying customs, for example, as well as some of the languages in danger, are not exhibited in a specific location or area only. So are the medieval manuscripts, although it is known where they are stored. Out of the 26 sites and events only 9 (34%) are located in Northern Bulgaria, while the other 17 are in Southern Bulgaria. With very few exceptions, all natural sites are geographically located in Southern Bulgaria. The Primeval Beech Forests in the “Central Balkan” National Park, on the other hand, occupy a border position between Northern and Southern Bulgaria. It should be mentioned that in geographic terms there are two sites that go beyond the boundaries of Bulgaria itself – the *martenitsa* is common for Bulgaria, the Republic of North Macedonia, Romania and Moldova, while the Primeval Beech Forests represent a shared natural heritage between Bulgaria and 11 other European countries<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> The full title according to UNESCO is “Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe”

## World Heritage sites of “outstanding universal value” – general description

Europe is home to the largest number of UNESCO World Heritage monuments and sites of cultural and natural significance. The European list includes 482 sites, accounting for 46.8% of all UNESCO World Heritage sites. Terziyska (2015, p. 28) sums up the criteria (10) to be met by each site so as to be included in the list. One of the criteria is that the sites represent a masterpiece of human genius, an exceptional example of a type of building or traditional settlement, strongly connected to the living traditions, beliefs, etc.

One of the indicators that gives us a clear idea of the place the individual countries hold in the European natural and cultural “treasury”, is the relative share of sites and monuments in each country. According to Vladev (2015), Italy is the leading country with a total of 51 (10.6% of the European total), followed by Spain 44 (9.1%) and France 41 (8.5%). For example, Bulgaria ranks 16<sup>th</sup> with 10 sites (1.0%), Albania – 36<sup>th</sup> with 3 sites (0.4%), while the Republic of North Macedonia is 46<sup>th</sup> with just one UNESCO World Heritage site (0.2%).

Another indicator is the density of sites per 1000 km<sup>2</sup> of area. By this indicator Bulgaria ranks 25<sup>th</sup> in Europe, while if the same indicator is applied per 1 million inhabitants, the country ranks 21<sup>st</sup>.

The average number of sites per inhabitant per km<sup>2</sup> is another important indicator. In that case Bulgaria ranks 13<sup>th</sup> (Vladev, 2015). As we can see by any of those indicators Bulgaria ranks among the top 25 countries in Europe, which demonstrates the country's significance in terms of cultural monuments and natural landmarks in the continent.

The natural and cultural world heritage sites in discussion have been described and systematized by various authors. In this paper, the description of Dimitrov, Penev, Petkov, Bello (2018) are offered.

**Pirin National Park** (located in the northern part of Pirin Mountain, covering an area of 40 332 hectares). In ancient times the Slavs settled in the mountain and named it after their god Perun, hence the name of the mountain nowadays. The history of the oldest national park in Bulgaria began in 1962 when the Vihren National Park was declared, renamed to Pirin National Park 11 years later. The relief of the Park is typical alpine, while the highest point is Vihren Peak, standing at 2914 m above sea level. The flora and fauna are represented by 1315 species of higher plants, over 2000 invertebrate species, over 200 species of vertebrates and 159 bird species. There are 113 species which are listed in the Red Data Book of the Republic of Bulgaria, 42 of which are protected by law. A total of 114 endemics species have been identified in the Park, 60 of which are endemic for Bulgaria and 54 for the Balkans as a whole. One of the oldest reserves in Bulgaria "Bayuvi Dupki-Dzhindzhiritsa" (since 1934) is located in the Park, whose main purpose is to preserve natural relics of white (*Pinus peuce*) and black (*Pinus heldreichii*) fir – Balkan endemic species. In 1994 the “Yulen” reserve was also declared. In order to protect the unique diversity of landscape, vegetation and animal species, Pirin National Park was included in the list of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage in 1983. The Park is home to the oldest coniferous tree species in Bulgaria – the Baikusheva fir – a 1300-year-old tree, 22 m high, with a trunk circumference of 7.8 m. The established hiking trails in the Park give tourists access to the numerous natural landmarks, beautiful glacial lakes (176 of them), coniferous forests and rich biodiversity.

**"Srebarna"** is a biosphere reserve situated 2 km to the south of the Danube River and 16 km west of the town of Silistra. The reserve covers an area of 600 ha and includes Lake Srebarna and the adjacent areas. In 1975 Lake Srebarna was declared a wetland of international significance under the Ramsar Convention, while in 1977 it was declared a biosphere reserve. Since 1983 Srebarna has been part of the UNESCO World Heritage List and in 1990 the reserve was given the status of a site of ornithological importance. The significance of the reserve is related to the fact that it is located right on the path of migratory birds migrating from Europe to Africa, known as Via Pontica, which is the cause of the massive presence of diverse and unique bird species. Some of the most interesting species that inhabit the lake area are the Dalmatian pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*), the lesser white-fronted goose (*Anser erythropus*), various types of ducks (*Anatidae*), the bearded reedling (*Panurus biarmicus*), the great white egret (*Ardea alba*), and the mute swan (*Cygnus olor*). The reed (*Phragmites australis*) on the other hand represents the dominant plant community in the reserve and occupies 2/3 (400 ha) of its total area. The gray willow (*Salix cinerea*) and the red willow (*Salix purpurea*) also occupy certain areas in the reserve. The second most common plant species is the narrowleaf cattail (*Typha angustifolia*), as it is more abundant than the broadleaf cattail (*Typha latifolia*). Of the 139 plant species in the reserve, 11 are considered rare and endangered. There are 24 fish species in the reserve, 21 species of amphibians and reptiles and 41 species of mammals. The fowl are represented by a total of 230 species. The nesting colony of the Dalmatian pelican is regarded as the pearl of Srebarna. The reserve mainly aims at protecting rare and endangered species of both water fowl and water plants. In 2017, at suggestion of Bulgaria, the reserve's territory was expanded so as to achieve a more effective biodiversity protection.

**The Thracian tomb in Kazanlak** is included in the UNESCO list of historical and architectural monuments of global importance in 1983. It is located in the northern part of the town of Kazanlak, Central Bulgaria, and dates back to 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. The tomb belonged to an unknown Thracian ruler. It consists of an antechamber, a chamber and a dome, connected by a narrow corridor. The monument owes its global fame to the remarkable frescoes in the corridor and the dome, which are considered as some of the best-preserved works of ancient painting from the Early-Hellenistic era. They frescoes cover a surface of some 40 m<sup>2</sup> and represent a valuable form of art gallery. The drawings are very realistic and include compositions depicting the military, the everyday and the afterlife aspect of a noble Thracian ruler. The frescoes are a display of amazing artistic skills, representing an outstanding example of Thracian art. The tomb's diameter is 2.65 m, while the height is 3.25 m. It was built of bricks that were not known as construction material to the Romans until a couple of centuries later. Blocks of stone and clay were used as binding material. The original tomb is closed for visitation in order to preserve its unique frescoes, but an exact copy has been built next to it, which is the one actually accessible for tourists. The original tomb can also be visited, but only for a few minutes and under certain conditions. Otherwise, access to the copy of the Kazanlak tomb is provided all year round.

**The Thracian Tomb of Sveshtari** is situated in Northeastern Bulgaria, some 2.5 km southwest of the village of Sveshtari, 7 km from the town of Ispirih and 43 km northeast of the local administrative center Razgrad. This tomb dates back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and was discovered in 1982. The mound, where the excavations were made, is known by several names – Sveshtarska, Mumdzhilarska, Omurtagova, Gininata, etc., and a total of 21 Thracian tombs are located in its vicinity. Like the Kazanlak tomb, the Sveshtari tomb was built of stone and covered with a large earth mound. Its construction is

similar to the other Thracian buildings of that kind, but the decoration of its funeral chamber is unique and strikes with its richness. The entrance of the tomb is connected by a corridor (dromus) to three chambers. The capitals of the pilaster columns are decorated with red, blue and Ionic kymation, with colored rosettes embedded under them. The capitals support a large plate emblazoned with bas-relief frieze of four bucrania – stylized ox skulls, double rosettes and garlands. It is in this tomb where a combination of rich sculpture and picturesque decoration was observed for the first time. There are two stone beds in the central funeral chamber, indicating that the tomb was a family tomb, probably royal. The ten female caryatid figures are really impressive – standing in full height (1.20 m) – three on the east and on the west side, and four on the north side. In the northern and southern corners, the consoles are decorated with two stylized embossed eagles with their wings spread. Such decoration had not yet been found in the territories inhabited by the Thracians. The funeral ritual, the construction techniques, the architectural design and the decoration all suggest that the tomb is of a Thracian ruler, worshiper of the Great Mother Goddess. There is an assumption that in this royal tomb the Getae ruler Dromichaetes was buried, considering the fact that not far from the tomb, the remains of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC city of Helis were discovered, which is considered the capital of the Thracian Getae tribe. In 1985 the Sveshtari tomb was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

**The Rock-hewn Churches of Ivanovo** are located near the village of Ivanovo, 20 km to the south of the city of Ruse. The monastery complex, uniting the rock temples, is known as "St. Archangel Michael" and was founded in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It represents a web of small rock-hewn churches, chapels and cells carved in the rocks of the picturesque canyon of the Rusenski Lom River, at a height of 32 meters above the river bed. This cloister is the most famous of the rock monasteries in the Dobrudzha region because of its beautiful and well-preserved frescoes. The caves were inhabited by monks from the 13<sup>th</sup> till the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. As of today the chapels of Gospodev Dol and Zatrupanata Tsarkva (the buried church) are preserved. The monks settled in the area by digging cells, churches and chapels in the rocks. During the apogee of the religious complex, the rock-hewn churches numbered about 40, while the monastic cells and other rooms – about 300. Most of those have not survived to this day. The Rock-hewn Churches of Ivanovo owe their fame to their unparalleled cultural and historical value, but mostly to the wall frescoes from the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> century, preserved in five of the rock-hewn churches. The main church in the Ivanovo complex is that of Sveta Bogoroditsa (Virgin Mary). A portrait of the Bulgarian ruler Tsar Ivan Alexander can be seen in the church. Of the preserved churches, Gospodev Dol is the one with the richest frescoes. In some of the monastic cells, writings of secret confessions of the monks can also be seen. Another well-preserved church is the Zatrupanata Tsarkva in the Pismata locality. Despite its name and the impact of the elements, its frescoes are of high value. One of the church's ktetors was Tsar Ivan Assen II, who spent there moments of solitude. It is believed that the third remarkable church in the complex, which is known simply as Tsarkvata (the church), was founded by Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371) himself. That church too exhibits precious frescoes recreating biblical scenes in the style of the Justinian Renaissance through the eyes of local masters. The Rock-hewn Churches of Ivanovo were included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1979. The monastery complex can easily be reached by car from the city of Ruse. Not far from the complex itself, the beautiful Orlova Chuka Cave is located, while within the limits of "Rusenski Lom" Nature Park, yet another interesting landmark is the Basarbovo Monastery – the only active rock monastery in Bulgaria. All those landmarks represent an important prerequisite for the development of tourism in this part of Bulgaria.

The town of **Nessebar** is situated 36 km northeast of Burgas, on the Black Sea coast. Due to its unique combination of ancient history, antique remnants and Bulgarian Renaissance architecture, the Ancient City of Nessebar was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1983. The old town occupies the peninsula of Nessebar, 3 km northeast of Cape Akrotiria. The peninsula is linked to the mainland, where the new town of Nessebar and its sandy beaches are located, by a road along a narrow isthmus. In 1954 Nessebar was declared a climatic sea resort of national importance. Nessebar is one of the oldest cities in Europe – it is the successor of the ancient Thracian city of Mesembria, meaning “the city (in Thracian – *bria*) of Melsa”. In 510 BC it became a Greek colony under the same name. From 11<sup>th</sup> century on, the Slavic name of Mesebar or Nessebar was used, along with the name Mesembria. The apogee of the economic and cultural development of the port city was during the reign of Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371). The Mesembrian charters testify to the donations that the city received for construction of churches and monasteries, which were more than 40 at the time. In 1956, the old part of Nessebar was declared an architectural, city-planning and archaeological reserve. It included an ancient fortress wall with a gate from 5-4<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Nessebar churches of the early period (5-6<sup>th</sup> century) and of the Middle Ages (10-14<sup>th</sup> century). The following churches have survived until modern days: “Starata Mitropoliya” (the Old Bishopric), “Sveti Yoan Krastitel” (St. John the Baptist), “Sveti Stefan” (St. Steven), “Novata Mitropoliya” (the New Bishopric), “Christ Pantocrator”, “Sveti Todor”, “Sveti Arhangeli Mihail i Gavrail” (Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel), “Sveti Yoan Neosveteni” (St. John Aliturgetos), and “Sveta Paraskeva” – with their valuable altars, icons and frescoes. Among those, the ruins of the churches “Sveti Kliment”, “Sveti Georgi Maliy”, “Sveti Georgi Golemiy”, “Sveti Spas” and the so-called seaside basilica – “Sveta Bogoroditsa Eleousa” (Holy Virgin Mary Eleousa) – can still be seen. The Nessebar gold treasure, discovered in 1958, is also of great value, together with around 100 restored Bulgarian Renaissance houses from the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which are united in several ensembles. Those so-called Black Sea style houses, with its bay windows and wooden plank facades, give the town a unique appearance and atmosphere. The most interesting of them are the Bogotovata, the Kapitanovata (of captain Pavel), the Rusievata (the House of Evlambius), the Lambinovata, the Tulevata house, and the house of Hadzhi Tranosh. Three of the numerous Nessebar windmills which existed in the past, have been restored. The old Turkish bath from the 18<sup>th</sup> century has also been preserved. In 1956, an archaeological museum was founded in the church of St. John the Baptist, while in the Muscoyani's house, built in 1840, an ethnographic exhibition has been arranged. Excavations and underwater archaeological research are constantly carried out in Nessebar.

**The Boyana Church** of “Sveti Sveti Nikola i Panteleimon” (St. Nicholas and St. Panteleimon) was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1979. The unique temple is located in Sofia's Boyana district, 8 km southwest of downtown Sofia. The Boyana Church is one of the cultural symbols of Bulgaria. It was built in three stages: the 11<sup>th</sup> century; the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and is one of the few medieval monuments of Christian art that have survived till present day. The murals inside the Boyana Church are considered a masterpiece. The eastern part of the church is a small, mono-apsidal, cross-dome construction with built-in props that form an inscribed cross. The first painting, covering the entire eastern part of the temple, dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. During the 13<sup>th</sup> century, with the donation of sebastocrator Kaloyan and his wife Desislava, who ruled the Sofia (Sredets) region at that time, the second two-storey part of the church was built, which part belongs to the two-storey church-tomb type of churches. The ktetor's inscription speaks of re-painting which took place in 1259. The two painters – Vasilie and Dimitar – whose names were discovered during restoration

activities, laid a new layer of paintings on top the first layer in the old part of the church, and covered with paintings the two floors of the new part of the church. The Boyana Church owes its worldwide reputation to the frescoes of 1259, which reflect the outstanding achievements of the Bulgarian medieval culture. Each of the images, totaling over 240, exhibits individuality and high artistic value. The portraits of the ktetors – sebastocrator Kaloyan and his wife Desislava, as well as those of the Bulgarian Tsar Konstantin Asen Tih (1257-1277) and Tsaritsa (Queen) Irina, are some of the oldest preserved portrait depictions of historical persons. In the narthex, the life of St. Nikolay – one of the temple's patrons – is illustrated through 18 scenes, which include elements of the lifestyle of the contemporaries of the artists. Among the images of saints depicted in the church, the oldest preserved portrait of the Bulgarian national priest Ivan Rilski (saint John of Rila), who lived in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and who founded the Rila Monastery, is also present. Among the images of monks, the image of Saint Ephraim the Syrian is also present, whose mysterious eye “follows the visitors” constantly.

The **Madara Rider** was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1979. The unique rock relief is situated in the northeastern part of the country, 1.5 km east of the village of Madara, 18 km east of the city of Shumen and 10 km south of the town of Pliska. The Madara Rider was discovered for science by Felix Kanitz, who referred to the image as to “the Thracian Rider”. This is a medieval rock relief, carved some 23 m above the base of a vertical rock in the Madara Plateau. The Madara Rider is a composition depicting a human and three animal figures. It represents a scene where a horseman is followed on his right by a dog running behind him, while a lion pierced by a spear is depicted before the front leg of the horse. The image of the horseman is 2.72 m in length and 2.85 m in height, while that of the dog is 1.34 m in length. The horse is moving forward, while its head is facing the viewer. The dog is aiming forward, the lion moves in the opposite direction to the horseman, it is wounded, and with his head turned to the viewer. The rock relief can be regarded as a regular hunting scene, but it rather is a triumphant scene where each element is multi-faceted. The Madara relief – more than any other Bulgarian monument – symbolizes the creation of the Bulgarian state. The year in which the relief was created is not known, and scientists have not agreed on the question of who exactly the depicted horseman might be. It is supposed that the image is of Khan Tervel because the composition is supplemented with three groups of inscriptions (chronicles): the top inscription dates back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century and the time of Khan Tervel, while the two other inscriptions – under the first one – are from the time of Khan Kormisosh (again the 8<sup>th</sup> century) – the left inscription – and from the time of Khan Omurtag (the 9<sup>th</sup> century) – the right inscription – who created a cult complex on the rock terrace in the foothill of the rocks where the horseman was carved. The entire archaeological reserve of “Madara” is dotted with remarkable evidence of human presence on these lands since prehistoric times (as early as 4000 BC). High and inaccessible rocks surround the small and easily guarded plateau on both sides, while the numerous caves, rock formations and lush vegetation have attracted man since antiquity. The rock relief is one of a kind (of the ones dating from the early Middle Ages) in Europe. In 2008 the Madara Rider was designated as the global symbol of Bulgaria. A fully renovated building hosting a museum exposition operates in the “Madara” archaeological reserve, in which archaeological artifacts from all historical epochs can be seen, subject to research for hundreds of years. The beautiful scenery and the rich cultural and historical heritage attract numerous tourists to the “Madara” reserve.

**The Rila Monastery** of “St. Ivan Rilski” (St. John of Rila) is the largest monastery complex in Bulgaria. It is situated 3 km east of the town of Rila, hidden in the bosom of the majestic Rila Mountain, at elevation of about 1140 m, on the right bank of the Rilska

(Manastirska) River, at the place where its tributary – the Drushlyavitsa River – flows in. The monastery was founded by Ivan Rilski in 941, in the locality of the Belite Kili (the White Cells) – some 3 km away from its current location, where it existed until the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The monastic brotherhood was founded in the 10<sup>th</sup> century by the hermit who was later declared a saint. His death on 18 August 946 put the beginning of his legendary glory as a protector of the Bulgarian people. The Rila Monastery occupies a total area of 8800 m<sup>2</sup>. The exterior architecture is strict, exhibiting a stronghold appearance. The monastery yard is picturesque, rich of arches, columns, verandas, kiosks and covered staircases. The architectural image of the monastery was created through a skillful artistic combination – in different forms and proportions – of two architectural elements – the arch and the column. The rugged stronghold appearance of the monastery walls contrasts with the cheerful architecture of the church and the open galleries (verandas) in front of the cells. In the four-storey residential wings there are over 400 cells, four chapels, guest rooms for the pilgrims and the monastery kitchen (*magernitsa*) with its creative construction. The Rila Monastery is considered one of the most important cultural and educational centers throughout Bulgarian history. It reached a great literary boom in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century when prominent men of letters worked there. Today, valuable historical monuments can be seen in the monastery. The ones representing extreme interest are the main monastery church, the Hrelyovata tower (built in 1334-1335 – the oldest preserved building in the monastery), the monastery kitchen, the mill, the cells of Paisii Hilendarski and Neofit Rilski and so forth. The Rila Monastery shelters unique icons, many ancient artifacts, a gold and silver church plate, as well as a rich coin collection. Items such as the cross, which took 12 years for the monk Raphael to make, containing 36 scenes with several hundred figures, the geographic globe of Neofit Rilski, the weapon and the clothing of the monastery guards (the so-called *panduri*), the "Testament" of St. Ivan Rilski (a transcript from the 13<sup>th</sup> century), the charter of Tsar Ivan Shishman, the Gospel Book from Suceava, the Krupnitsa Gospel Book, the transcript of Paisii Hilendarski's "Slavo-Bulgarian History", etc. The monastery library, which is one of the oldest in Bulgaria, has over 3200 volumes. It contains the archives of the monastery from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and many incunabula, documents and compositions – about 250 manuscripts from 11-19<sup>th</sup> century, 9000 volumes of incunabula, manuscripts, Bulgarian Renaissance graphical prints, etc. In 1961 the Rila Monastery was declared a national-historical monument of culture and in 1983 – a monument of world culture – and was included in the UNESCO Natural and Cultural World Heritage List. The Rila Monastery is the largest and most visited Bulgarian monastery. Tourists are attracted by its interesting architecture and valuable works of art (frescoes, icons, etc.), the impressive celebrations of church feasts and ecclesiastical rituals, as well as its beautiful scenery. The monastery is visited all year round by tens of thousands of pilgrims and some 500 000 Bulgarian and foreign tourists annually, while some 160-180 000 visit the monastery museum alone.

The **Primeval Beech Forests** encompass the nine reserves located on the territory of the "Central Balkan" National Park: "Boatin", "Tsarichina", "Kozya Stena", "Steneto", "Sokolna", "Peeshtite Skali", "Stara Reka" "Dzhendema" and "Severen Dzhendem". The forests represent the latest UNESCO World Heritage site in Bulgaria, since in 2018, Bulgaria, together with Austria, Albania, Belgium, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Italy, Croatia, Germany, Ukraine and Slovakia, agreed to protect the *Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe*. The presence of so many countries in the preservation of a "single" natural site was unprecedented in UNESCO's heritage protection history. The beech forests in the "Central Balkan" National Park included in the protected UNESCO site cover a total combined area of almost 11 000 ha, which is about 55% of the reserves' area and over 15% of the total area of the Park. They

are identified as forests with the necessary qualities for UNESCO's World Heritage List as they are representative, age-old, of high biodiversity and possess a strict legal status according to national legislation and the Park Directorate, with an established management mechanism which ensures their preservation. The average age of the beech forests in the Bulgarian sector is 133 years, according to data from the Park. At certain locations there are live forests at over 240 years of age. Many of the old natural forests fall into the category of "pristine" forests, which means that practically no human interference has ever taken place in their development. The beech forests occupy the hypsometric belt between 800 and 1600 m above sea level. In the system of reserves, "Boatin" is the oldest one, declared a protected area in 1948, preserving some of the most representative beech forests in Stara Planina Mountain (the Balkan Range) at an average age over 150 years and height of individual trees up to 40 - 45 m.

## Results and discussion

### Attendance and revenues from the World Heritage sites of "outstanding universal value" in Bulgaria

An important part of the analysis of UNESCO sites is their tourist attendance. This is because, besides preservation, the protected sites all play significant educational and tourism role. They give *the identity* of certain territories – an important category for the education of young people, local and other population. The protected UNESCO sites preserve the spirit, the culture and the natural landscapes for the future generations. Last but not least, the World Heritage sites of "outstanding universal value" are considered supranational and belong to the world, not just to a particular country. Therefore, the UNESCO World Heritage sites represent an attractive force for national and foreign visitors. The attendance analysis gives an idea of the role of a certain site both as a national and international destination, but also at the regional level.

Site	Total number of visitors	Bulgarian visitors	Foreign visitors	Revenue (thousand BGN)
The Thracian Tomb of Kazanlak	41 000	24 000	17 000	165
The Thracian Tomb of Sveshtari	14 584	12 241	2 340	100
The Rock-hewn Churches of Ivanovo*	18 800	6 356	12 444	100
Madara Rider	67 700	58 243	9457	200
Ancient City of Nessebar (museum)	125 000	15 000	11 000	600
The Rila Monastery (museum)	79 000	N/A	N/A	540
Srebarna Nature Reserve	7671	4594	77	N/A
The Boyana Church	75 500	N/A	N/A	500-700
<b>Total:</b>	<b>429 255</b>	<b>120 434</b>	<b>52 318</b>	<b>~2.3 mln.</b>

\*Data for 2018 – N/A, therefore, 2017 data has been used.

**Note:** Some of the revenues have been calculated based on the number of visitors and the average entrance fee, while some of the figures have been approximated.

Table 3.

Attendance and revenues from the World Heritage sites of "outstanding universal value" in Bulgaria (in 2017; based on various sources)

As far as certain sites are concerned, it is not possible to specify the exact number of visitors – namely – Pirin National Park and the beech forests reserves in the “Central Balkan” National Park – because of the restricted access. As for some other sites, such as the Rila Monastery and the Ancient City of Nessebar, the calculations have been made based on tourists who visited the museum expositions and paid the respective entrance fee, since it is impossible to estimate the number of tourist who attend the town of Nessebar itself, for obvious reasons. According to different data sources, the pilgrims in the Rila Monastery are about 80 thousand per year. It can be seen that the total attendance of all the sites listed in Table 3 (considering the specified calculation mechanisms) is around 500 000 people as of 2017, or an average of 62 500 people per site. Obviously the most popular is the Ancient City of Nessebar with over 125 thousand visitors, followed by the Rila Monastery and the Boyana Church. Srebarna Nature Reserve exhibits the lowest number of visitors, but it should be taken into account that the figure only represents the number of visitors with access to the visitors’ center with its museum exposition. In our opinion, the number of foreign tourists in general is relatively low – just over 50 thousand, or a mere 10% of the total. It should be borne in mind that these are sites of “outstanding universal value”, which should imply significantly higher attendance than the recorded tourist contingent. According to Table 3 the Kazanlak Tomb is the Bulgarian site under UNESCO protection which is most preferred by foreigners. It also has the highest share in the total number of foreign visitors (1/3<sup>rd</sup> of all). As in the case with the total number of visitors, it is again Srebarna with the lowest number of foreign visitors. The revenues generated by all sites listed in Table 3 together, although calculated with certain conditionality and in some cases indirectly, were over 2.3 million BGN for 2017 alone. The Boyana Church, the Rila Monastery and the Ancient City of Nessebar are leaders in that aspect, with about 500 thousand BGN on the average for each of those three top sites.

## Conclusions

The paper only examines in greater detail the UNESCO World Heritage sites of “outstanding universal value” in Bulgaria. At the same time, the principles of categorization of the various types of sites under the aegis of UNESCO have also been systematized. It is clear that the different categories include different sites and (or events) such as interactive cities, intangible cultural heritage, biosphere reserves, etc. Each of those, depending on the group which they belong to, have gone their way and have met the specific requirements so as to be recognized as UNESCO World Heritage sites. The main conclusions that can be drawn in terms of Bulgaria’s sites of “outstanding universal value” are:

- The anthropogenic sites outnumber the natural ones;
- A large part of those sites are from the time of the Thracian civilizations on the territory of modern-day Bulgaria;
- The Madara Rider is the most famous site and is considered a global symbol of Bulgaria;
- The Ancient City of Nessebar is the most visited site;
- It is necessary to promote the popularity of certain sites and to increase their tourist attendance.

Generally speaking, Bulgaria holds one of the leading places in Europe by number and density of the UNESCO Cultural and Natural World Heritage sites. Given that those sites represent heritage belonging not only to Bulgaria but also to the world, they must be purposefully preserved for the future generations.

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