

Rila Monastery

St. Ivan of Rila Monastery is a Bulgarian Stavropegial monastery, one of the most important cultural monuments in Bulgaria, a symbol of the country, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

It is located in southwestern Bulgaria, Kyustendil district, Rila municipality. It was founded in the 10th century by St. It was founded in the 14th century by St. John the Wonderworker of Rila on the upper course of the Rila River.

History

The present monastery is located near the village of Pastra - not far from the site of its original construction. The Rila River flows past it. It is the largest monastery in Bulgaria - 5 floors, 4 of them are visible. This peculiarity of the building is explained by the restrictions imposed by the Ottoman power in 1834, when the present buildings were constructed. The ground floor houses the museum.

The Monastery of St. John of Rila was built on the site of an old post-convent in 927-941 by St. John of Rila. According to some authors - by his disciples) in Rila Mountain. In the yard of today's monastery in 1335 a defensive tower and a small one-aisle church were erected by the local feudal lord Proto-Sevast Hreljo. The tower is the oldest preserved building in the monastery complex. At the top of the tower is the Chapel of the Holy Transfiguration with valuable frescoes from the 1430s.

King Ivan Shishman (1371 - 1393) issued the Rila Charter on 21 September 1378, signed and sealed with a gold seal, granting 20 villages, together with their lands, to the monastery as feudal fiefs.

As early as 1402, the Ottoman government ordered the Kadija of Kyustendil to confirm the monastery's pre-existing rights. A tax register from 1520 - 1521 lists 21 monks living there by name.[3] In 1469, with the help of Mara Brankovic, the relics of Sts. John of Rila were brought back from Tarnovo to the Rila Monastery.

From its foundation the monastery became a literary and educational centre. Neofit of Rila developed a great pedagogical activity in it, who founded a school here during the revival. The monastery gave shelter to great Bulgarian revolutionaries, including Vasil Levski, Ilyo Voyvoda, Gotse Delchev, Peyo Yavorov and others.

In 1778 the monastery "Sv. In 1778, the monastery of St. John of Rila fell victim to a fire. It was rebuilt in 1784 by Alexi Rilets, who designed and built the eastern, northern and western wings in 1816-1819. A significant part of the monastery was burnt down again in 1833, and its reconstruction was again carried out by Alexi under the direction of the then abbot Joseph the Builder. In 1840 a new iconostasis of the church was made by Peter Filippov, Anton Stanishev and Dimitar Stanishev.

According to the testimonies of American missionaries who visited the monastery in 1862, there were 350 monks, and 400 guests stayed there on Easter Eve.

Today the monastery ensemble covers an area of 8800 m², of which 5500 m² is built-up area. The monastery wings, built at different times on 4 and 5 floors, surround on all sides the only courtyard in the shape of an irregular pentagon.

Raids and ravages

During the Ottoman rule, the monastery was poorly fortified and was a frequent victim of raids. "... and it was difficult to respect such desert monasteries from the main and private estates, from which they are still suffering at the present time, and the colms even more so then."