

Multi-local Actors of Change and Two Religious Sites in Northeast Bulgaria: Between Traditions and New Everyday Practices

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The authors analyze the correlations between two rural religious sites – Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke (village of Obrochishte) and the Church of St. Dimitar (village of Gurkovo) in northeast Bulgaria – and the multi-local actors of change that contribute to the transformation of local communities' traditions and the emergence of new everyday practices. The study is based on historical-ethnological research carried out in May 2022 that builds on earlier periodic observations.

▪ **Keywords:** multi-local actors, cultural heritage, Bulgaria, everyday practices, religious sites

Avtorici analizirata povezave med podeželskima verskima središčema – Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke (vas Obročište) in cerkvijo sv. Dimitrija (vas Gurkovo) v severovzhodni Bolgariji – in vlogami multilokalnih akterjev, ki prispevajo k preoblikovanju tradicij lokalnih skupnosti in nastajanju novih vsakdanjih praks. Študija temelji na zgodovinsko-etnološki raziskavi, izvedeni maja 2022, ki gradi na prejšnjih občasnih opazovanjih.

▪ **Ključne besede:** multilokalni akterji, kulturna dediščina, Bolgarija, vsakdanje prakse, verska središča

Introduction

In May 2022, we observed a festival of local folklore groups at the late medieval Muslim architectural complex of the Dervish sanctuary known as Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke in the village of Obrochishte, revered by Shia Muslims in northeast Bulgaria. The pilgrims who customarily visit the Muslim shrine were not there, but we were surprised to see a multi-national dance company from the village of Gurkovo, cheered on by Bulgarians and Britons, present-day settlers in that village area. Many questions arose in our minds, but most of all “What is going on here?”, “Why are these people here?”, and “What is the cause of this change?” These questions compelled us to take a deeper look and start researching multi-local actors and their connection to changing cultural heritage in both villages in the Balchik region in northeast Bulgaria.

The article focuses on two sacred sites, a Muslim and a Christian one, both having visible and invisible content in which perceptions of different worlds – *ours* vs.

that of *others*, the earthly vs. the otherworldly – intersect. From the time of their construction during the period of Ottoman rule in Bulgarian lands to the present day, the Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke and the Church of St. Dimitar have changed both their ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ features under the impact of various ‘multi-local actors’. Both religious sites are recognized under the Cultural Heritage Act of Bulgaria as “immovable cultural heritage of local importance.” Our research curiosity was provoked primarily by the fact that out of the 12 such cultural monuments managed by the Balchik Municipality and the Balchik Historical Museum, they are the only two that are protected and are significant for the locals. The preservation or conservation of the Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke and the Church of St. Dimitar is effectuated mainly through the activity of the local residents, who, despite changes in their ethnic and religious composition occurring over time, continue in one way or another to link their daily and festive culture to these religious sites.

The two cultural heritage sites can also be seen through the theoretical concept of ‘landscapes’ considering the fact that, over time, they have expanded their symbolic meanings through the interaction of various local and multi-local actors, the rituals performed at these places, and the stories told about them. Following the explanation of Margaret C. Rodman that “a physical landscape can be multi-local in the sense that it shapes and expresses polysemic meanings of place for different users” (1992: 647), we assume that multi-local people are actors of change who contribute to the construction of new meanings of the religious sites. Thus, we apply a ‘micro approach’ that focuses on “how the landscape can become an ‘inscribed place’ through an interpretative process that transforms the landscape into an ever-evolving ‘substantive property’ based on different narratives and practices” (Bulian, 2021: 113). Nicki Lisa Cole explains micro-level studies as focusing on “smaller groups, patterns and trends, mainly at the community level and in the context of everyday lives and experiences of people” (2019). In our study, the micro approach is applied in two directions: that of the multi-local actors together with their narratives and practices of religious sites as well as that of the establishment of new patterns of everyday life. The structure of the article consists of the research design, followed by a description and analysis of the two case studies, presenting as well the correlations between the religious sites and the multi-local actors.

Case studies research design

The aim of our article is to analyze the interconnection between, on the one hand, the rural religious sites of Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke and the Church of St. Dimitar and, on the other, the multi-local actors contributing to the transformation of local community traditions and the emergence of new everyday practices. In May 2022, we carried out

a historical-ethnological study that builds on earlier periodic observations. In addition to reviewing data from the scientific literature on the history of the two sites, we also examined strategic documents of the local government and national state institutions as well as conducted ten in-depth semi-structured interviews (six with experts, and four with local residents of the two villages). We also carried out observations as well as preparatory and follow-up interviews before and after May 2022 and up to April 2023.

We present the two cases in two different ways: in the first case, we proceed in chronological order from the past to the present, and in the second, from the present to the past. The first case, that of Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke, has been observed by the first author during the last ten years and was visited by both of us during our field trip there in May 2022. That is when the second case drew our attention, being the second cultural monument of local importance preserved and visible in the Balchik region as pointed out above. We began to explore the immovable cultural heritage, particularly the Church of St. Dimitar, and realized how fascinating it was in the perspective of contemporary international migrations, multi-locality, and mobile ways of living – all topics of research that interest both of us. Thus, besides the church as the main focus in the second case, we examine and analyze the multi-local context of the village Gurkovo and its re-composition resulting from the settlement of foreigners there during the last 20 years, who are not the focus of the study.

The analysis of the collected research data not only enabled us to find answers as to how the two religious sites have been preserved and how their meaning has changed, but also revealed the role of new local actors whose experience could be defined as multi-local. Our understanding is that multi-local people are actors of change who influence the construction of new meanings of the religious site, particularly in the first case, and, in the second case, of the religious site itself and the entire multi-local context in the village. In the first case, the multi-local actor lives in-between two places – the home town and the office; in the second case, the first multi-local actor lives in-between the village and a foreign country, and the second actor in-between the village and the nearby town.

In our cases, multi-local actors are defined as people that regularly move for job and/or family-related reasons between habitual places of living (homes) and professional settings (offices, etc.) – or they are bearers of special mobility between different settings. We thus share the understanding of Johanna Rolshoven that multi-local persons “experiment with cultural techniques in which movement is a determining factor, and which allows them to organize their everyday lives between living, working and having time off, as well as shift between moving and staying put” (2007: 19).

In this article, we discuss the historical data, the development of the two sites, and the impact of multi-local people on them. Based on the presented and analyzed material, we expect to add new dimensions to conceptualizing multi-local actors, their relations, and their impact on people’s perceptions of local cultural heritage (Greinke, Lange, 2022: 67–81).

Case 1: Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke and the multi-local actor

The village of Obrochishte is located between the cities of Varna and Balchik, both on the Black Sea coast. Since the 1940s, the population of the village has fluctuated between 1,200 and 2,600 people; it totaled approximately 2,300 in 2022.¹ Our survey has shown that the ethnic composition of the population includes Orthodox Bulgarians, Turkish-speaking Muslims, Romanian-speaking Orthodox, and Evangelical Roma.

Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke² is located at the exit of the village in the direction of the nearby sea resort Albena. The complex consists of an *imaret* (inn), believed to have been part of a Muslim monastery, and a *türbe* (tomb), which the Shia Muslims in north-eastern Bulgaria believe to be the burial place of one of their greatest religious leaders, Ak Yazılı Baba. His memory is associated with beliefs in his ability to perform miracles during his lifetime and after his death. Since the late 20th century, the *tekke* (a dervish and Sufi place of worship in the Ottoman Empire) has changed in function and significance under the impact of the settlement of new people, national and local politics, and contemporary multi-local people whose professions are linked to this complex.

The management of the tekke went through several complex stages. Until 2014, it was under the direct authority of the Balchik Historical Museum, whose director had a vision for its development as a tourist site. Until then, just one curator had been appointed in the tekke – a female local resident. According to our earlier observations and conversations with her, she maintains traditional legends and allows the performance of various cultural and religious practices by locals and Shia Muslim visitors. Between 2014 and 2021, the tekke was managed directly by the Balchik Municipality, which was then implementing a project related to the restoration of the tekke. The Balchik History Museum had no involvement in its management during that period. Apart from the physical changes to the architecture of the monument, a new employee – a man from the town of Balchik – was appointed as a curator at that time. He was

¹ There are almost no studies on the characteristics of the population of Obrochishte or the influence of its people on the site's significance (Erolova, 2017: 137–144). According to the publicly available data of the National Statistical Institute, the population of the village as registered in the 2011 census was 2,263. Of these, 1,921 people answered the question (not obligatory) as to their self-identification. Of those who answered, 1,255 (65.3%) identified as Bulgarians, 539 (28.1%) as Roma, 95 (4.9%) as Turks, and the rest as “others”. There are no official data about the religious composition of the village; the ethnographic observations of the first author are discussed further on in this article.

² Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke has attracted strong interest on the part of Bulgarian and Turkish researchers, historians, art historians, folklorists, theologians, etc. (Eyice, 1967: 558; Margos, 1972; Mikov, 2001: 187–196, 2005: 58–60; Koçak, 2003: 223–234; Cebecioğlu, 2009; and others), due to the variegated range of beliefs associated with the Muslim saint Ak Yazılı Baba. Like other such Muslim architectural complexes in Bulgaria (Radionova, 1994: 70; Melikoff, 1999: 14–20; Gramatikova, 2001: 212–227; Yankova, 2007: 59–84; and others), this site is associated with a number of superstitions that are central to the traditional worldview not only of Shia Muslims, but also of Sunni Muslims and Orthodox Christians. These superstitions bring to mind the vivid words of Bulgarian ethnographer A. Goev, that traditional culture “teems with magic” (1992: 6).

instrumental in changing the mythology of the sacred site, and his role is examined further in the article. In practice, he was the manager of the site. We had a brief conversation with him in 2018.

In 2021 and 2022, the Balchik Municipality again entrusted the direct management of the tekke to the Balchik Historical Museum. Both curators (female and male) were dismissed from their positions, and two new employees, both local residents, were appointed in their place and were formally performing their duties. The director of the History Museum, who is a woman, currently determines the way the monument functions and its accessibility. We had a number of interviews and meetings with her, and she identified the main issue of preserving and socialization of the site to be its financial provision. In this context, several layers emerged in our micro-study that are key to the development of the tekke as a historical, cultural, and tourist site. Scientific knowledge about the tekke serves as a foundation that offers various opportunities for scholarly discussions in the fields of religion, late medieval architecture, and tourism. Moreover, traditional Muslim and Orthodox Christian legends maintain the sacredness of the site for both communities. Finally, contemporary local policies that turn the tekke into a tourist site find expression in restoration changes. Passing through complex stages of management between the Historical Museum and the Balchik Municipality, we observed during our 2020 field trip the continued influence of one of the officials on changing the functions of the sacred site and thus the composition of its visitors.

Historical and demographic data

It has been proven that Ak Yazılı (Ibrahim) Baba was a real person who lived in the late 15th and the first half of the 16th century. He was the spiritual leader of the Bektashi order and successor to Othman Baba, who had arrived with the first Ottoman troops and died in 1478/9 (Melikoff, 1999: 11–18; Gramatikova, 2002: 71–102; Alexiev, 2005: 144; Mikov, 2005: 61). Evidence of the life of Ak Yazılı Baba can be found in the 16th-century literary works of the Bektashi. Prominent in these sources are the writings of the leader's followers: the Hurufi poets Muhyeddin Abdal and Muhammad Yemini. In their works, they praise Ak Yazılı Baba as the successor to Othman Baba, calling him *kutb* (trans. in most studies as “pole”, in the sense of cosmos, star, highest spiritual standing, bearer of providence), and describing him as “Ibrahim Sani”, i.e., as “second Ibrahim” or “second Abraham” (Koçak, 2003: 223–234).

The sanctuary founded by Ak Yazılı Baba attracted a number of dervishes (travelling Muslim monks) and became a sort of center of one of the branches of the Bektashi order. After the death of Ak Yazılı Baba, the settlement of Tekkeyedzhik was founded (Mutafova, 2013: 207–208). Historical sources confirm the tekke was built in the first half of the 16th century during the reign of the Ottoman ruler Suleiman (1522–1560). In the middle of the same century, it was registered as a religious and social-economic center in the Ottoman tax registers (*tahrir defters*) (Dimitrov, 1994: 90–91).

According to descriptions made by the Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi, who visited the European provinces of the empire in the 17th century, the *türbe* of Ak Yazılı Baba was built by his follower Gazi Mihaloglu Arslan Bey (Gadzhanov, 1909: 671–672; Koz, 2006: 454). Evliya Çelebi gives information about the tekke and provides a partial picture of life there (Gadzhanov, 1909: 671), comparing its wealth to that of the tekke of Imams Ali and Hussein in Baghdad.

The *imaret* was a seven-walled building with a built-in chimney and roof, where the dervishes could receive temporary shelter and food – and perform their rituals (Melikoff, 1999: 19). The roof structure was probably destroyed during the Russian-Ottoman War of 1768–1774 (Margos, 1972). The *türbe* has an atrium, and both its rooms have roof structures in the form of hemispherical cubes. In the middle, there is a sarcophagus placed in an east-west direction. On the ceiling of the building (including the vestibule), there is a colorful painted decoration consisting of geometric and stylized vegetal ornaments in Baroque style, probably dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries according to Lyubomir Mikov (1998: 520–523).

Over the centuries, the village around the tekke grew in size. The village and the whole geographical area of Southern Dobrudzha formed part of the Romanian state from 1919 to 1940, after which they once again fell within the borders of Bulgaria. The village was renamed from Tekkeyedzhik to Obrochishte in 1942.

During Bulgaria's Communist period (1945–1989), state measures for the preservation of the Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke as a site of Muslim cultural heritage were inconsistent and most likely followed the state's contradictory policy towards its Muslim population (Eminov, 1997). Improvements were made to the infrastructure of the complex in the second half of the 1950s, evidence of which is the inscription “1957” upon the arch spanning the central entrance of the complex as well as the existing arbor. Archaeological excavations were carried out two years after this date. In 1972, Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke, along with other monuments of immovable cultural heritage in the Balchik area and other Muslim architectural sites, was officially given the status of “monument of local cultural importance”.

Legends related to the tekke and its transformation into a bi-ritual sacred place

After the Bulgarian state gained independence from the Ottoman Empire, the importance of the tekke as a sacred place for Muslims gradually changed. The Czech historian and Bulgarian politician Konstantin Ireček (at the end of the 19th century) as well as the Bulgarian geographer and ethnographer Vasil Kanchov (in the early 20th century) suggested there had once been a Christian monastery at this location that had been converted by the dervishes into a Muslim monastery (Kanchov, 1901: 11; Ireček, 1974: 897). There are no scholarly arguments supporting this hypothesis. The suggestion was most probably influenced by the existence of a special cult of St. Athanasius the Great of Alexandria (c. 293/297 – 2 May 373) among the Bulgarian

population that moved to the settlement in the 1870s, coming from the village of Vaysal in Eastern Thrace. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the cult of Ak Yazılı Baba underwent a transformation, and the tekke became a bi-ritual sanctuary. According to the Bulgarian researcher Diana Radionova, “Christians began to use the prayer house in the settlement, despite its being Muslim, and imposed the cult of the Christian saint, who had been worshipped many years in their homes” (1994: 70–72). The cult was later adopted by the Orthodox Roma Rudars (the so-called “cradle-makers”), who settled in the village in the period 1919–1940, during which time Southern Dobrudzha was still part of the Romanian state (Erolova, 2010: 109–110). At first glance, there seems to be a contradiction in simultaneously worshipping a Muslim and a Christian saint; however, the inhabitants of the village and surrounding area managed to unite their veneration for the two through a number of legends, beliefs, and rituals.

Current legends among the local population portrayed the two saints as possessing similar miraculous powers: to build impressive edifices, to heal, to come back from heaven and appear as living people, to be lords of animals, and to ‘watch over’ justice. According to some legends, Ak Yazılı Baba is able to appear in dreams or in visions to the righteous and the purest in spirit, and St. Athanasius walks around during the night, having been herding cattle if his shoes and the hem of his *yamurluk* (coat) are seen to be wet. People have sometimes heard the voices of both saints (Radionova, 1994: 65; Alexiev, 2005: 114). Both are believed to punish those who do not believe in their powers. Muslims in the nearby village of Lyahovo consider the land of the tekke to be sacred. Many years ago, a man decided to make a *chiflik* (farm) on this land, but setting out to plow the soil and demolish the existing buildings, he angered Ak Yazılı Baba. When the farmer’s livestock began dying and he himself became lame, he fled, terrified (Radionova, 1994: 65). Similarly, there is a legend about a woman who did not believe in the healing powers of St. Athanasius and, pretending that her hand was ill, stuck it in the hole of his grave but afterward could not withdraw it. Several villagers tried to pull her hand out but were powerless to do so, and the woman died after a few days (Alexiev, 2005: 115). This story is still told today. The recorded accounts related to Ak Yazılı Baba and St. Athanasius (Erolova, 2017: 137–144) are too numerous to be listed here. Importantly, in popular belief the two saints figure as friends. In some narratives, it is said that after the death of one, the other built a stone tomb for the deceased (in some accounts, Ak Yazılı Baba is the one who outlives his friend and in others, St. Athanasius). In any case, the builder of the tomb brought the stones from a great distance overnight. According to one belief, Ak Yazılı Baba bathed in the spring located in the park of the tekke. It is also said that St. Athanasius died there next to a large stone, and water began to flow from the stone (Irechek, 1974: 897; Alexiev, 2005: 115). Since the two saints were equally known for their healing powers, the water of this spring is considered to have curative virtues.

The tekke in Obrochishte is known among the whole Shia community in Bulgaria as a place of worship – mainly for people in northeast Bulgaria. Although most Muslims primarily visit the nearby Demir Baba Tekke located near the village of Sveshtari in the Razgrad region, some prefer to perform the *kurban* ritual (animal sacrifice) at the tekke of Ak Yazılı Baba. The most frequent occasion for such visits is the holiday Nevruz, 21 March, which marks the beginning of spring and the new year. This is an important holiday for them, as it is believed to be the date of Ali's birth as well as that of his wedding to Fatma, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad. Worshipers spend the night there and leave gifts (towels, socks, etc.) upon the saint's sarcophagus (Georgieva, 1991: 74). In present times, the tradition of spending the night in the shrine is not actively practiced, and leaving gifts is seldom done.

With the spread of the Christian cult of St. Athanasius, the Obrochishte village feast came to be held on 2 May, the day on which the Orthodox Church commemorates the saint's death. According to people from the local community, *kurbans* were conducted in his honor in the recent past on two days of the year at the *imaret* of the tekke. Bulgarians would gather there on 18 January, the so-called Winter Athanas, and have a *kurban* with pork meat. The Romanian-speaking Orthodox Roma would do *kurban* with other kinds of meat – often goat – on 5 July, the so-called Summer Athanas. Thus, the cult of St. Athanasius the Great, who lived in the 4th century, is mixed with that of St. Athanasius of Athens, who lived in the 10th century. When visiting the tekke, Orthodox Christians light candles before the icon of St. Athanasius, which is located in one of the chambers of the *türbe*. Believers continue lighting candles to present day. The *kurbans* offered by the local population in honor of St. Athanasius were intended to bring health and prosperity, which has led to his veneration as a healer saint and protector of domestic livestock (Erolova, 2017: 79).

Since the 1990s, the spread of evangelism among the Roma population (Slavkova, 2007: 205–247) has reached the inhabitants of Obrochishte. Roma evangelists here have stopped their followers from worshipping at the bi-ritual shrine and performing *kurban*.

Although the hypothesis that St. Athanasius was buried in the *türbe* remains unproven (Radionova, 1994: 70), the tekke is today also associated with the worship of this Christian saint. We may see this as complementing or expanding the cult of the Muslim spiritual leader. The legends and beliefs, which are associated with this leader and form part of the folkloric heritage of Shia Muslims in Bulgaria, have thus been supplemented by more recent ones of the Christian saint. This combined worship is an important element of the local cultural identity of the population as a whole in Obrochishte. Carrying out *kurban* is a tradition that can be interpreted as an element of local identity and culture (Kovalcsik, 2007: 109–136), but it is not observed any more. However, Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke remains recognized and respected by locals, according to our field materials (Erolova, 2017: 80). This bi-ritual shrine is not the only

one in Bulgaria; shrines of this kind have been discovered and researched in different parts of Bulgaria (Yankova, 2007: 59–84). To a large extent, the continued belief in the legendary accounts of Ak Yazılı Baba and St. Athanasius can also be explained following Mircea Eliade, according to whom “myths are true because they are sacred, because they tell of sacred beings and events” (1961 [1952]: 59). Thus, the preservation of the myths of either or both saints contributes to the sacred character of the place in which they are believed to be buried and where they are said to still exercise their supernatural powers today.

The modern transformation of Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke from a place of pilgrimage to a tourist destination

The village of Obrochishte is located within the municipality of Balchik, and management of the village – including its immovable cultural heritage – falls under the authority of the municipal institutions. Since 2016, with the changes made to the Cultural Heritage Act, the management of the tekke has been transferred from the state level to the municipal level (from the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture to the Balchik Municipality). The Balchik Historical Museum is a municipal institution that takes part in the management of the tekke, as well as the second cultural monument in this municipality. For the local authorities, however, Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke is primarily a cultural monument that has the potential to become a tourist attraction more than a pilgrimage site. In the first decade of the 21st century, there was a tendency to advertise the site under the name St. Athanasius Monastery. At that time, the management of the complex was under the direction of the Historical Museum – Balchik.

Between 2005 and 2013, the International Festival of Religious Singing St. Athanasius was held at the *imaret* each year, in the middle of May. National and foreign choirs from Serbia, Romania, Croatia, Ukraine, and Moldova took part in the festival. Some editions of the festival were included in the cultural development plan of the Balchik Municipality, which provided financial support for the event. Some of our earlier observations in Obrochishte showed that, despite the international format of the festival, it failed to attract the local community or tourists. Due to a lack of public interest in the new musical event, local authorities decided to discontinue it in 2014.

In parallel with the efforts of the municipal institutions, particularly of the Historical Museum, to make the tekke a tourist site, new pseudo-historical hypotheses are voiced. For a while, the notion spread that king Władysław III Warnenzyk Jagiello (1424–1444) was buried in the *türbe*. He was King of Poland (1434–1444) and Hungary (1440–1444), Supreme Prince of Lithuania (1434–1440), and a significant figure in Bulgarian history that perished near Varna in 1444 during a crusade against the Ottoman Empire (Dnesplus.bg, 9.11.2013). However, this idea was promoted by a local film director and is not based on scholarly discussion – nor is it accepted by the municipal authorities, museum experts, or the local residents.

Between 2014 and 2016, Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke was one of the sites included in the project of the municipality titled ‘Improvement of tourist attractions and related infrastructures on the territory of the Municipality of Balchik’.³ The main objective of the project was the conservation, restoration, and exhibition of immovable cultural property – as well as the presentation of the region’s rich cultural and historical heritage of local and national importance. Numerous changes were implemented under the project. They include the construction of a new administrative building between the *türbe* and the *imaret*; the introduction of admission fees and fees for taking photos or shooting videos; the appointment of two curators; plastering the stone flooring with cement and repainting the frescoes; building a roof on the *imaret*; plastering its stone floor with cement; whitewashing the chimney and walls; and painting the windows on the inside of the building. We will not dwell here on all the restoration works, but it should be noted that the lack of expertise in effectuating them has had a number of negative consequences (we observed cracks in the walls, leaks, etc., when visiting in 2019 and 2022). Paid access to the tekke discourages Muslim visitors and pilgrims who were used to going there for free. Upon arriving on buses, when they learn they must pay to enter the *türbe* or the *imaret*, or to take pictures, they forgo the visit.

The architectural complex was under the direct management of the Balchik Municipality from 2014 to 2021, but was once again under the authority of the Historical Museum of Balchik from 2021 onwards. The two curators, appointed under both administrations, are from Balchik and the village of Obrochishte. Only one of the curators has an education corresponding to his position, and we turn to focus on his activities and their importance for the preservation and the popularization of the sacred site.

The influence of the multi-local actor: The curator

During earlier fieldwork at the Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke in 2019, we were interested to see the ‘new’ look of the complex after the restoration works and were disappointed by the results. We talked to one of the curators there, whom we shall discuss in more detail, considering his multifaceted and multi-local experience. Born in Balchik, he received higher education at the National Sports Academy in Sofia and spent years building a career in sports in Balchik and Sofia. He later switched professions and obtained a Doctor of Education and Science degree in Archaeology in 2014 from Konstantin Preslavsky University in Shumen. He was then immediately appointed as a curator at the Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke complex.

The curator lives in Balchik and travels daily (15 km) to his workplace, the tekke in the village of Obrochishte; from 2014 to 2021, this was the most stable trajectory of his daily life. How has this curator influenced the functioning of the tekke as a

³ Approved under the grant scheme of the Operational Programme Development of Regions 2007-2013 BG161PO001/3.1-03/2010 ‘Support for the development of natural, cultural and historical attractions.’

tourist destination and pilgrimage site? During our meeting, he gave a convincing tour presentation, which is also available in a number of media publications (for example, see Dobrudja.bg, 17.9.2021). The highlight of his talk was his argument that there had previously been, consecutively speaking, a Thracian sanctuary, a Greek and Roman Hellenistic temple, and a Byzantine monastery where the tekke now stands. He said he aimed to show the ‘antiquity’ of the site. He made no reference to St. Athanasius or king Wladyslaw III Warnenszyk Jagiello as historical figures connected with the tomb, but believed that the sarcophagus in the *türbe* contained the remains of Ak Yazılı Baba, basing this opinion on the description given by the Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi. In this newer narrative, the Muslim saint figures primarily with his healing powers. In fact, miraculous healing was a leading feature associated with the tekke at the time the curator was appointed to work there; the site was referred to as the House of the Healer of Healers. Access to the spring water from the tap was no longer free, and the price of a 500 ml bottle of water was 1 BGN.

In addition, there was a change in some practices that were related to new myths. A glass jar is placed next to the sarcophagus. During one of the field trips in Obrochishte, the curator explained to us that a visitor must circle the sarcophagus three times, make a wish, and leave money in the jar in order for the wish to come true. The gifts placed on the sarcophagus were periodically removed. The pragmatic approach to managing the tekke was not just about the paid admission, the paid use of spring water, or the glass wishing jar. A yoga instructor from Varna conducted her sessions at the *imaret* as well, which further represented a change in the character of a site held sacred by Shia Muslims.

Much can be said regarding the influence of the curator, which at first glance seems rather negative. One cannot help but note that his aim was, nevertheless, to turn the tekke into a cultural and tourist destination tied to new healing practices. He contributed to the promotion of the Muslim complex as a sanctuary with healing powers through a number of media publications. In an interview with a regional online media outlet, the curator said: “It is the largest mausoleum on the Balkan Peninsula dedicated to a healer. Opening its door, you open the door to health and happiness” (Pronewsdobrich.bg, 9.12.2019).

In fact, in order to develop a tourist destination, it is important to maintain a mythology about it that will attract visitors. Although the curator is not ‘bringing back’ Muslim pilgrims, his approach is nevertheless successful, as he manages in raising public interest in the healing properties of the spring water and attracting visitors from different parts of the country. During our last visit in May 2022, when the curator was no longer an employee of the complex and access to the spring water was free, we witnessed elderly families coming to wet themselves with the ‘healing’ water and fill their bottles with it. They had no interest in the *türbe* or *imaret*, but they left satisfied.

This narrative suggests that if we look at the curator not as an expert but as a leader who is used to holding positions of authority, we will remark on his determination and vision in managing the late medieval complex. Appointed by the municipality, the curator, using his expertise, knowledge, and a specific approach, has changed the meaning of the site from a place of pilgrimage to a destination for health tourism, resulting in a commercialization of the site. Regarding the curator's multi-local way of living, his personal presence has had no direct economic, political, or social effect on the village or town between which he travels daily. However, it has had some effect on increasing the number of tourists visiting the place. Hence, though in a different context, the statement that “tourist areas could both benefit and lose out from multi-locality” (Greinke, Lange, 2022: 67–81) seems relevant to the activity of this multi-local curator.

Case 2: Gurkovo and its multi-local people

The village of Gurkovo⁴ is at a distance of 9 km from the town of Balchik. The population of the village is about 500 inhabitants, most of whom are ethnic Bulgarians. Local respondents mention that several Roma families live in the village. They work abroad most of the time, returning to the village mainly in the summer, on the occasion of important events such as weddings (which go on for weeks) – and then go back to Belgium or other countries in Western Europe. Some of the local residents (as is typical for the whole region) are descendants of Bulgarians from North Dobrudzha who resettled here after the Treaty of Craiova (August 21, 1940), when South Dobrudzha was returned to Bulgaria.

There are no scientific historical studies devoted to the village of Gurkovo and its inhabitants. Information available on the website of the Municipality of Balchik⁵ tells the story of the place since the time of Ottoman rule, when the name of the village was Gyaur Koyusu, which, as one of our respondents explained, means “the village of non-believers.” According to the stories of other locals, this Turkish name means “the well of the Christians” and testifies to the presence of a Christian (Bulgarian) population in this place three or four centuries ago. There is a legend about how the village was founded: the Turkish military commander Skenderbeg was awarded land

⁴ There are no scientific studies available on the Church of St. Dimitar in the village of Gurkovo; its history is being recollected mainly through the devoted work of the current clerk of the church, who inherited this job from her mother and does her best to preserve all the relics in the church and the stories she has heard from old people in the village – the most important fact being that the church was built in the 1830s and is the oldest in the region. During the last seven years, local historian Tzonka Sivkova has done extensive research on all the churches in Balchik and the region, including the one in Gurkovo, and is about to publish a book on the topic; as of yet it is not ready.

⁵ URL: <https://balchik.bg/bg/infopage/158-%D1%81%D0%B3%D1%83%D1%80%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE> (accessed 6.12.2023).

by the Sultan. Within the age-old forests that once covered the fertile Dobrudzha plain, he chose a meadow 3 km away from the present-day borders of the village (that area is still called Skenderli today). In the years 1828 and 1829, Bulgarians returning from Bessarabia and Wallachia settled in the locality of that *chiflik*. There is some information about the village's first teacher, who taught school there in 1830 – the year when, as one respondent revealed, the construction of the village church began. The village was renamed Gurkovo around 1900 in honor of the Russian general Gurko. In 1930, 30 families of colonists from the Macedonian mountains, fleeing repression against Bulgarians in Macedonia, settled in Gurkovo. After Southern Dobrudzha was returned to Bulgaria, families from Northern Dobrudzha settled here. In 1952 the neighboring village Polyana was joined to Gurkovo. During the time of communism, the settlement Makedonka ceased to exist as a village due to a decree on closure of villages with declining functions, and its inhabitants moved to Gurkovo.

After the start of democratic changes in 1989, the first new settlers from Western Europe – some Britons – bought houses in the village; this was around 20 years ago, our respondents recalled. The new arrivals did not feel comfortable among the local population and left. An interlocutor described those first foreigners (just a couple of families) as noisy: they would often get together and drink beer, and they were too loud. The respondent did not know whether anyone among the locals had made any remark to them about this; in any case, they moved away, selling their houses to other British citizens.

British, German, Polish, and Swiss citizens are living in the village now, having settled there during the last ten years. Looking for a small, peaceful place to live, these foreigners found the village attractive. It is near the sea without being on the coast itself, where real estate property is much more expensive. Gurkovo is very picturesque, and, although its residents are mostly pensioners, it is not among the villages that have fallen into disrepair. Lately, it appears to have become a very multicultural place, popular also among foreigners. We visited it on a warm spring day and found its atmosphere very pleasant.

The villagers and their meeting places

In most Bulgarian villages, the main buildings a visitor sees in the center are the office of the mayor, the community center, and the church. Gurkovo is not an exception to this rule. Situated in the core of the village are the mayor's office, the community cultural center Freedom-1897 (*chitalishte 'Svoboda-1897'*), and the Orthodox Church of St. Dimitar. There are also two shops with tables and chairs where people meet, drink coffee or beer, and mainly exchange news, recipes and gossip. On a Sunday afternoon, you may meet more Britons than Bulgarians in the center, which, a respondent told us on a positive note, is one of the charming aspects of the place. The majority of the local people, being pensioners, mainly take care of their houses and gardens, grow

their own fruits and vegetables, and raise chickens (for the eggs) and small livestock. In general, life there is peaceful.

Besides the shops, the two main meeting places are the community center and the church. In the community center, there is a library and halls where people hold dance rehearsals. Although its population is relatively small, the village is proud of its several active folklore groups. Also, since the beginning of 2023, the pop band Retro Boys Band – Gurkovo has been revived at the community center. The singing and dance groups meet and practice regularly and take part in various folklore festivals, such as the one we happened to attend at the tekke in Obrochishte. There, we became acquainted with the amateur singing group Preselski Nakit, the amateur musical club Multi-Kulti (the members of which are ladies of several nationalities who sing and dance), and the dance company Folklore Magic.

The Church of St. Dimitar is also a gathering place in the village. This nicely renovated, functioning church is open mainly on holidays. The local priest, who is under the authority of the Varna diocese, holds religious services here and in several other churches in the region. The people who regularly attend religious services are mostly from the village, but people from other villages in the surrounding area also visit the church. In 1992, the church was declared an architectural and artistic immovable cultural heritage site (State Gazette No. 41 of 1992). Its construction in the early 1830s was funded entirely by donations from the villagers. According to the church clerk, it was opened in 1834 – the date was inscribed on the church bell, which was unfortunately stolen some years ago.

In the Bulgarian tradition, the cult of St. Dimitar, whose feast day is 26 October, is associated with the start of winter. His twin saint, St. Georgi, whose feast is on 6 May, is associated with the beginning of summer. Many churches in Bulgaria are dedicated to St. Dimitar. St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki⁶ was born there in the 3rd century; his father, the governor of the city, kept an icon in a room in his house and introduced him to Christianity. After the death of his parents, Demetrius, then holding a high military rank, was ordered to persecute Christians, but he protected them instead.⁷ During our stay in Gurkovo we did not hear any stories about why the church was dedicated specifically to St. Dimitar. We learned that the local historian Tzonka Sivkova was about to publish a book on churches in Balchik and the surrounding area, but when we contacted her, she refused to give us information about the Gurkovo church before the book is published.

We were very impressed by the church clerk, whom we interviewed at the church. She is a lively and gregarious person, energetically pursuing a variety of activities.

⁶ https://www.pravoslavieto.com/life/10.26_sv_Dimitar_Solunski.htm (accessed 6.12.2023).

⁷ This information is available in the “Bulgarian Orthodox Catalogue”, an online encyclopedia of Orthodox Christianity in Bulgaria.

Among other things, she is one of the key organizers, dancers, and singers in the community center's folklore groups. We consider her to be a multi-local actor as well, as she now resides mostly in the village of Gurkovo but regularly lives for shorter periods of time in Balchik, where she worked as a teacher and where her children currently live.

Thus, in these two places, the community center and Church of St. Dimitar, we encountered two women who are important for our research. One is the chairperson of the community center, a woman with international experience who had lived more than 15 years in Germany and recently returned to the village. The other, mentioned above, is the church clerk, who has lived mainly in Balchik and returned to the village about ten years ago in order to look after her elderly parents and the parents of her husband. Both women have experienced, and still pursue, different ways of multi-local living – international (between two countries) in the first case, and national (between two places in Bulgaria) in the second. Their rhythm of multi-locality varies – from several times per year in the case of the community center chairperson, to several times per month in the case of the church clerk. We define both these women as multi-local actors of change that devote their time and expertise to reviving the village community and preserving its landmark sacred site. In this part of the article, we pay more attention to the village community than to the church as a religious site because it is within context of the village's multicultural and multi-local life that the significance of the church stands out.

Local and multi-local actors of change

The chairperson of the community center had lived in France and Germany for nearly 20 years, working there as an interpreter (with English and German). After the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, she realized that the quality of life in the village would be better for her, given that she could continue practicing her profession of a translator and interpreter by doing distance work from there. Thus, in 2020, she decided to return to Bulgaria and the village of Gurkovo. Many things changed for the local community with her return. Her fluent knowledge of English and German made her a key figure for bonding and exchange in community life; moreover, her energetic and friendly personality makes her a natural mediator. She soon became the chairperson of the community center, working on a voluntary basis. There, she created the Multi-Kulti dance group, in which women of different nationalities dance together. Also, she recently convinced an Italian drum player and a Belgian guitarist to join the revived pop band Retro Boys Band – Gurkovo.

As to how things have evolved in the last two years for the other multi-locals in the village, she explained:

Most of them settled [here] from 5-6 years to 10 years [ago], they live in Gurkovo mostly and visit their countries on special occasions. Until now,



for one reason or another, they were not part of the village community. I speak English and German, I am an English teacher and that helps a lot. In the community center, and particularly the musical formations [companies], they have found a place where they feel complete. And as soon as they joined, they also wanted to give. They donated a lot to our charity bazaars. One lady knits amazing fluffy mittens and hats. For Christmas, we were raising money for one of our female conductors from the Dobrudzha folk choir; these women supported the cause. One of the men gave us 1,000 leva [to buy] a professional camera. They want to be part of us and contribute. (Female in her early 50s, April 2023)

Visiting the festival at the tekke, we were fascinated by the Multi-Kulti dance company and wanted to know more about it. The dance group,⁸ created in the middle of 2021, includes people of five different nationalities: five Britons, one German, one Pole, three Ukrainians, and two Bulgarians. The creator of the group is the chairwoman of the community center. She has dual citizenship (Bulgarian and German) and dances wearing both the Bulgarian and German flags on her dress during performances. She explains how the idea of creating the company arose:

In general, it was my idea because I wanted to learn Bulgarian dances myself, and slowly the idea changed, since when we started getting together, it turned out they were willing to teach us their Renaissance dances, so we dance their dances, too, and now we are learning Ukrainian dances, and we are also starting [to learn] Sirtaki (a Greek dance). The idea behind the dance company is to exchange cultures from all over the world, not just the five countries that are represented in the club. It is open to anyone who wants to join and who is of another nationality because there are also Swiss people in the village, they have not yet confirmed that they will join, but we have invited them. I started with the idea of [us] dancing for health, for a good mood, getting together once a week, but the idea developed further, they proposed a dance from the 17th century, then a second, a third one and it became very interesting, really like an exchange of cultures between countries. (Female in her early 50s, April 2023)

⁸ Only the leader of the dance company (who is also the secretary of the community center) had some previous dancing experience, albeit as an amateur. She teaches the group after learning the dances herself. They also create the choreography for some of the songs, such as the song *A Dark Cloud is Coming Up*, which will be performed at the community center's Easter concert. The latest member of the club, who joined a month ago (in the beginning of 2023), is a professional choreographer from Ukraine. She has started teaching the group Ukrainian dances. Last year, during the New Year season, the chairwoman conducted a campaign to expand the group with new members, and as a result, three Ukrainian women joined the club in 2023. These women were married to Bulgarians and had come to Bulgaria before the war in Ukraine.

In the opinion of the chairwoman, all the people who settled in the village have come here to enjoy life. Some of them are trying to socialize, others are rather reserved people who do not go out of their houses much and communicate mainly with their neighbors. The chairperson describes these different groups as follows:

The ones looking for contacts want to fit into the community, to be part of it, of our life, and others are very closed and isolated, and they encapsulate themselves, which is bad. But a little bit at a time, with a lot of goodwill, when we emphasize that we are doing it [gatherings, activities] for a noble cause, to make them feel part of us, of our village, then they also show understanding and get involved. Here now, one of the most reserved Germans paints pictures and she promised me to organize an exhibition in the community center, but otherwise she is a very reserved person. There are introverts and others who are more sociable. (Female in her early 50s, April 2023)

About the community of foreigners, another respondent from the village explains:

They communicate mostly with their neighbors. A house where there are English people, next to them there are our people, the Bulgarians, they exchange cooking recipes, they talk to each other about holidays, about crops; English people have no experience, they watch the neighbors plant tomatoes, peppers or something, they show interest, how the soil should be cultivated, how to plant in it. For example, my foreign neighbors, they made a great garden and orchards. (Female in her mid-60s, May 2022)

Most of the foreigners, being Catholic, do not often visit the village church. However, the church clerk told us she had noticed that they liked the calm and peaceful atmosphere of the church, showed some interest in the icons, and wanted to donate money to buy what is necessary for the church. A difference is visible in the case of the Russian-speaking community in the village and the region in general. As they are of the Orthodox confession, the clerk sees them as true believers who help her with certain tasks in the church such as cleaning or selling candles for religious services. They also sing with her during services. The clerk mentioned two Russian-speaking women (she did not know, and had never asked, whether they were from Russia, Ukraine, or some other country). She was impressed by their diligence in visiting the church for every service and by the help they gave her:

They live in Kranevo, they are mother and daughter, and the son comes, too, the whole family lives here in Bulgaria. From Kranevo to Gurkovo



is quite a distance, and they [come to] Gurkovo for every service. The mother speaks very good Bulgarian and the daughter sings very well, she sings at the service. They pray on their knees, they do it very devotedly, it is very impressive. (Female in her mid-60s, March 2023)

Religion was prohibited during the communist period in Bulgaria, which explains why the church became an immovable cultural heritage only after the political changes in Bulgaria (in 1992). The clerk finds her job at the church, which she inherited from her mother in 2015, fulfilling. Since she started working there she has been doing her best to learn more about saints, religious services and rituals; she has also been buying new books about how the service is conducted, etc. She is very communicative and is good at telling stories as well as attracting the attention of visitors (she previously worked as a teacher). She explained to us:

The priest is very pleased because he sees in me a good helper, and at the same time people started visiting the church, attracted by the calm atmosphere, by the many worries that have been piling up lately, whether illnesses or lack of money and other domestic and health problems. They began to find support in the church. The interesting thing is that not only villagers arrive [to the church] ... because we are a small village most of the people are elderly, but when they can, when the weather is good, they will come. When the weather is bad they can't, but I was surprised to notice that people from the golf hotel have started visiting as well, [the hotel] where Ukrainian people are accommodated now, for example, near the village, these are Ukrainians and other foreigners that are Christians; they need it [coming to church] for [their] spiritual well-being. They are interested [to know] when there will be a service, the history of the church, and they ask me, and I try to explain as best I can. (Female in her mid-60s, March 2023)

Thus, changes in village practices and village life are slowly coming about through the active participation of these two multi-local women in Gurkovo – one with trans-local experience between countries, and one with multi-local experience between the nearby town and the village. Both women are creating new multicultural opportunities for their fellow villagers through culinary events; the exchange of recipes; the exchange of dances, songs, and music; learning about different cultural norms and habits; appreciating the local culture and heritage; and learning words in different languages:

They even know our names now, I am surprised when I pass by them and they shout at me 'Dimkaaa, hello', as they pass by walking their dogs

and wherever they meet me, I see that they behave like that to other people as well; how should I say, we Balkan people are warm-hearted, open, we are very different, they are colder people. It was very difficult, it took them years to be able to open up, to be able to receive us, even to this day you can very rarely go into the home of an English person, for example, they neither visit nor invite anyone. We try to invite them to public buildings, where they are not obliged to do anything and whoever wants to may come, and we started making the announcements in English and Bulgarian so they can read about what is happening in the community center and we can welcome them there. (Female in her mid-60s, May 2022)

What unites all the people is their care for the village as a whole. They take part in community work like painting the fence of the community center, donating to certain causes, and being active in keeping the village clean. They collect garbage not only when participating in organized occasions but on a daily basis, when making their early morning hike and walking their dogs. Thus, both old and new local members of the community are creating new meanings in one remote village in northeast Bulgaria, making it a multicultural place through the constant exchange of old and new traditions and practices. Within this multicultural context, the village community manages to preserve the Church of St. Dimitar as its main religious site despite community members being of different religions or not particularly religious. This is mostly due to the example of the church clerk and her devoted work at the cultural and religious site. Understanding the significance of the church for the history of the village and its people, she not only keeps the keys but also looks after the valuable old objects in the church such as religious books and icons as well her personal family relics, including a tapestry she inherited from her mother, who was from North Dobrudzha. The other multi-local actor, the chairperson of the community center, also plays a very important role as her knowledge of foreign languages and community-building skills enable her to attract donations and thus help preserve and popularize the church as a place where anyone can find peace and seclusion.

Conclusions

On the basis of the examined research cases, we can conclude that the active migration processes and demographic changes that have taken place from past times to the present in the region of the two villages, Obrochishte and Gurkovo, have had an important impact on the preservation and change of the cultural heritage there. We have focused special attention on three multi-local actors: the curator in Obrochishte, the chairperson

of the community center, and the church clerk in Gurkovo. All of them were defined as multi-local people because of their living and working simultaneously in more than one place. Their active roles have had a strong influence on promoting the villages and their immovable cultural heritage – Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke and the Church of St. Dimitar.

Against the backdrop of the historical development and continuous transformation of the folkloric image of the Muslim saint Ak Yazılı Baba, we see that, under the curator's influence, recent changes have occurred in the mythology related to the tekke. These changes have resulted in the site being popularized through a new narrative. The experts from the municipality, the former and current employees at the Historical Museum Balchik and the tekke, as well as the local residents did not discuss the curator's influence. However, according to our observations, his presence left an impact that was at least attested to by casual visitors who came not to venerate the saints Ak Yazılı Baba or St. Athanasius but to pour 'healing' water. Thus, the importance of the tekke as a place of pilgrimage is diminishing, while efforts are made to turn it into a tourist destination. This can be interpreted through the optic of Noel Salazar, according to whom:

Tourism imaginaries are easily re-embedded in new contexts by a process that constantly alters both the imaginaries and the contexts, building on local referents to establish their meaning and value...Imaginaries often become the symbolic objects of a significant contest over economic supremacy, territorial ownership, and identity. (Salazar, 2012: 880)

In the case of the tekke, the 'tourism imaginaries' have changed through the commercialization of practices related to belief in the spring water's healing properties or through new practices. In order for visitors' wishes for health to be fulfilled, they must put money in a glass jar placed at the head of the sarcophagus. Moreover, the fees required for entering the *türbe* and *imaret* and for taking pictures or videos aim to enhance the economic effect of visits to this cultural site.

In the second case, the initiative of the community center's chairperson has had an impact on the dynamics of social relations in Gurkovo in terms of people's care for the preservation of the church. While this site is continuing its initial religious tradition and practice more closely, changes in the village population's composition, resulting from migrations and the presence of multi-local actors, bring additional meaning to the Church of St. Dimitar. This transformation is visible at the two ends of the range of church visitors. The multi-cultural actors from West European countries, being mainly Catholic, consider the church as a place where one finds solace, a peaceful atmosphere, and a possibility to contribute with small donations. At the other end, for the new multi-cultural actors coming from Orthodox countries, the church is a traditional sacred place where they can practice their religion devotedly and contribute with work for the religious site.

As for the local citizens, it appears they can be placed in the middle range between the two categories in terms of their everyday practices. They regularly visit the church on major Orthodox holidays (such as Easter and Christmas), perform the respective rituals that make the church a sacred place, and socialize there with other villagers. The church clerk, while attending to her duties, is witness to a variety of practices and meanings that the church has for different visitors. However, despite the varied meanings implied by people's everyday practices related to the church, the sacredness of the site has been preserved, in contrast with the commercialization of the tekke.

From our study of these two religious sites linked to two main religions in Bulgaria, we may conclude that, in the first case, the meaning of the tekke and the practices related to it have changed from sacred to touristic and rather commercial. However, in the second case, within the dynamic of a multicultural context, the sacredness of the religious place is affirmed. These tendencies we observed and studied are developing due to the attitudes, expertise, and devotion of the multi-local actors in drawing attention to, preserving, and/or bringing change to the sites.

We interpreted these two cultural heritage sites as multi-local and multi-vocal landscapes where, as Margaret Rodman states, “different actors construct, contest, and ground experience in place” (2006: 212). Thus, following Rodman, we conclude that the two sites have polysemic meanings for their different users, and multi-local actors play key roles in bringing out the multi-vocal dimensions of the sites.

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Multilokalni akterji sprememb v dveh verskih središčih na severovzhodu Bolgarije: med tradicijami in novimi vsakdanjimi praksami

Avtorici analizirata povezave med podeželskima verskima središčema – Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke (vas Obročičšte) in cerkvijo sv. Dimitrija (vas Gurkovo) v severovzhodni Bolgariji – in multilokalnimi akterji sprememb, ki prispevajo k preoblikovanju tradicij lokalnih skupnosti in nastajanju novih vsakdanjih praks. Po razlagi Margaret C. Rodman (1992: 647), da je »fizična pokrajina lahko multilokalna v smislu, da oblikuje in izraža večpomenskost kraja za različne uporabnike«, predvidevamo, da so multilokalni ljudje akterji sprememb, ki prispevajo k oblikovanju novih pomenov verskih središč. Muslimansko obredno svetišče Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke in krščanska pravoslavna cerkev sv. Dimitrija sta zgodovinska in kulturna spomenika, ki sta po bolgarskem zakonu o kulturni dediščini priznana kot »nepremična kulturna dediščina lokalnega pomena«. V obeh vaseh živijo predvsem priseljenci različnih etničnih izvirov, t. i. življenjsko-stilski migranti (iz Anglije, Nemčije in Poljske), in ljudje, ki trenutno delajo v teh krajih in se dnevno vozijo iz bližnjega mesta Balčik; v tej študiji so obravnavani kot multilokalni akterji. Avtorici v članku obravnavata, kako uvajajo nove vsakdanje prakse ter vplivajo na pomen in pomembnost mitologije, povezane z obema svetiščema. Primer omenjenih sprememb je, da pretekle slavnostne obrede *kurban* (verski obredi, ki temeljijo na žrtvovanju živali) v Ak Yazılı Baba Tekke nadomeščajo folklorni in družabni dogodki. V primeru cerkve sv. Dimitrija je pozornost namenjena temu, kako novi prebivalci – državljani iz različnih držav in glavni multilokalni akterji – s skupnimi kulturnimi nastopi popularizirajo cerkev in vas kot celoto. Raziskava prispeva k poglobitvi mikropristopa pri preučevanju heterogenosti multilokalnega življenja v majhnih podeželskih krajih, njihovih razmerij in vpliva na dojetje lokalne kulturne dediščine (Greinke, Lange, 2022). V članku so uporabljene pripovedi in intervjuji, zbrani med etnografskim terenskim delom leta 2022 v raziskavi Politike za ohranjanje in spodbujanje nepremičnih kulturnih vrednot lokalnega pomena v Bolgariji: etnološka analiza na primerih občin Balčik, Kavarna, Garmen in Sandanski pri projektu BG05M2OP001-1.001-0001 Ustvarjanje in razvoj Heritage BG, Center odličnosti.