

**The Greek Biblical Manuscripts in Albania
The Purple Codex of Berat and the Golden
Codex of Anthimos**



New Testament

Keywords: The Purple Codex of Berat, Anthimos' Golden Codex, Batiffol.

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to underline some of the characteristic features of two of the oldest biblical manuscripts found in Albania and more specifically of "The Purple Codex of Berat" and "Anthimos' Golden Codex", or as they are known in scientific circles the "Codex Purpureus Beratinus Φ" and "Codex Aureus Anthimos", dating back in the VIth and IXth centuries respectively. The Purple Codex of Berat (known also as Beratinus – 1) , in spite of its indisputable values related to its age, is of great importance for the textological critique, which deals with the historical study of the biblical texts. Meanwhile, the second Codex known as the "Golden Codex Anthimos", so called by Batiffol in honor of the Bishop of Berat during the mid-nineteenth century. The Golden Codex of Anthimos carries uncommon artistic values. The description made to each codex implies specific data, graphical ways of writing, decorations and of each codex. At the same time there are mentioned the first researchers of these codices who have spoken to them. There are also concisely described other valuable manuscripts which do not exist anymore. In this article we provide important clues about the history of these manuscripts, the risks and challenges they have undergone to survive, as well as the environment in which they are held and continue to be hold. In conjunction to that, the reader will also be acquainted to some recent data mainly provided by Italian manuscript specialists, who have declared themselves mainly about "The Purple Codex of Berat". This article aims at providing a more complete description of these codices as well as the story they carry.

Introduction

The biblical, evangelical and liturgical manuscripts of Albania constitute one of the most eminent cultural traditions in the country. The Albanian heritage includes a considerable number of manuscripts which belong to the historical period of the VI-th - XV-th century, as well as later manuscripts of less importance, reproduced during the Ottoman period up to the XVIII-th century. Among the earliest biblical manuscripts, the central place is certainly held by "Codex *Purpureus Beratinus Φ*" (The Purple Codex of Berat) of the VI-th century, or Beratinus 1, as it is now known, and "Codex Aureus Anthimos" (Anthimos' Golden Codex) of the IX-th century, or Beratinus 2, as it is identified by some scholars. The number of the discovered codices reproduced until the XV-th century, has reach up to 100 volumes; at the same time, there should not be exluded evidence of other codices which could still be preserved in different families or by private collectors⁶⁴.

The fact that Albania has inherited a considerable number of manuscripts since the beginning of the Middle Ages has to do with the rich cultural legacy of the country. That is clearly indicated by the popular ancient urban centres in this country, such as Dyrrahu, (Δυρράχιον) Butrinti, (Βουθρωτός) Bylissi (Βούλλις) etc. An excellent Greco-Roman culture is recorded in these centres. A well-known fact is also the spread of Christianity in the place where Albania is now located since the apostolic time.

⁶⁴Aleks Buda, Zëri i popullit, 28 Janar 1972.

Hence, in the Bible, in the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Paul writes: “I preached the Gospel of Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum”; this is also evidenced by archived and archeological sources, as well as by a set of paleochristian cultural monuments which have been discovered and are still being discovered in different sites in Albania, out of which there should be mentioned the mosaics of the church in Lin and Tushemisht (Pogradec), the basilics in Elbasan and Saranda, the baptizer of Butrinti etc⁶⁵, which date back to the IV to VIII AD. These mosaics and basilics are closely related to the archival documents, and to the articles of the ecumenical councils of the Christian Church, where the oldest bishops of the episcopacies of our country took place and signed in. Among them, there could be mentioned the bishop of Pulheriopol (Berat), whose name is to be noticed in the Articles of the First ecumenical Council of Nicaea⁶⁶. Even during the Middle Ages, the Christian Church, driven by the tendency to extend to all the social strata, led to the tradition of writing and books as a means of communication for the church and liturgical literature.

Thanks to the establishment of the arch-episcopacy of Ohrid by Justinian the Emperor, who had under its jurisdiction almost all the episcopacies of today’s Albania⁶⁷, there is perceived the flourishing of culture, reflected in the paleochristian, mosaical and manuscriptal monuments preserved until today. In the later centuries, almost during the whole period of the Middle Ages, it is known that Albania was part of the Byzantine Empire, which had also a great influence on country’s culture. Part of this influence are also the medieval codices found within Albanian territory nowadays, written in Greek, which was the written language during the Middle Ages in the Byzantium, as Latin was in the West.

Scholars Who Have Studied These Codices Time After Time

Concerning the existence of the codices in Albania, the first who wrote about them, is Anthimos Alexudis, the metropolitan of Berat, who, in the second half of the XIX-th century wrote in his book “Σύντομος Ιστορική Περιγραφή της Ιεράς Μητροπόλεως Βελεγράδων”⁶⁸ (A Quick Historical Description of the Metropolia of Berat) about the church manuscripts, starting with the paleochristian until the modern times. In this work, which is about the episcopacy of Berat, he also described the six manuscript codices of his churches.

The second scholar, who was engaged in the (study) of manuscript codices after Aleksudi, is the French writer Pier Batiffol, who came to Berat during the XIX-th century to study the manuscript treasure of the churches in town. In his work “Les manuscrit grecs d’Albanie et Codex Purpureus Beratinus Φ 043”⁶⁹ (Greek manuscripts of Albania and the Purple Codex Beratinus), he added a small catalogue of the manuscripts in Berat giving some of their characteristics, all in all,

⁶⁵ Neritan Ceka, Buthrotum, Tiranë 2002, fq 67 – 78

⁶⁶ Κυορίλας Ευλόγιος Βιβλιογραφία Ηπειρώτου και Αλβανίας, Ηπειρωτικά Χρονικά 3. 1928 σελ. 50 – 102

⁶⁷ Heinrich Gelzer, Der Patriarchat von Achrida. Geschichte and Urkunden. Leipzig 1902.

⁶⁸ Ανθυμος Αλεξούδης, Σύντομος Ιστορική Περιγραφή της Ιεράς Μητροπόλεως Βελεγράδων, εν Κερκύρα 1868, σελ. 112).

⁶⁹ Pier Batiffol, Les manuscrit grecs d’Albanie et Codex Purpureus Beratinus Φ. 1887, 98 – 104.

16 codices from those he managed to see. In this publication he has transcribed the first and the oldest codex in the country, which he called “Codex Purpureus Beratinus”.

The third scholar who dealt profoundly with the study of the codices was Theofan Popa, an Albanian theologian and archeologist, who in 1970 - 80, studied all the medieval codices collected at the State Central Archive in Tirana and especially the two above mentioned codices. Considering the published catalogues by Aleksudi and Batiffoli, he revised a more complete cataloguing of the Albanian medieval codices,

identifying the main characteristics in each of their files (passports)⁷⁰. Out of this study, data of special interest can be drawn in relation to the medieval culture history in Albania today.

Meanwhile, the British scholar Dr. Roderic L. Mullen, referring to the fund of the manuscripts of the Central Archive in Tirana, after a thorough study made on the manuscripts and especially on the codices “Beratinus 1” and “Beratinus 2” stated: “In the world there are numbered 7 purple codices. Two of these are found in Albania. Just think that out of seven such luxurious publications, two are found in Albania! This is a great thing. The manuscripts which were produced on the parchments in red colour are expensive publications. Only the rich people, the big churches and strong countries could order such works”⁷¹.

“The Purple Codex of Berat”, recognized internationally as “Beratinus – 1”, recorded in the biblical literature world register with the figure “042 Φ”, is evaluated as one of the oldest written proofs of the New Testament⁷². For this reason, it is an object of study not only to the paleographers, but also to the bibliographers.

Dr. Francesco D’Aiuto,⁷³ [vice-prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Library, a scholar of paleography, an expert in the tradition of the holy writings, under whose care there was made a professional classification of the manuscripts exhibited in “I Vangeli dei popoli” (The Gospels of the nations, Rome 2000)], considers the purple codex of Berat, as one among the oldest two or three codices in the world and in this exhibition, this codex was classified the second regarding the importance and chronology.

Description of the codices

⁷⁰Theofan Popa, Pasaporta e kodikëve të fondit 488, 1983, dorëshkrim, AQSH.

⁷¹Roderic L. Mullen, Katalogët e Shqipërisë, Tiranë 2003, fq 230.

⁷² Francesco D’Aiuto, I Vangeli dei popoli, edizioni Rinnovamento nello Spirito Santo, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Romma 2000. p. 122 – 123.

⁷³ Francesco D’Aiuto, Vangeli dei popoli, Romma 2000. p. 164.

“Codex Purpureus Beratinus Φ 043” and “Codex Aureus Anthimus”

Beratinus I.

The Purple Codex of Berati “Codex *Purpureus* Beratinus Φ” is the oldest manuscriptal treasure in Albania composed of only two gospels - The Gospel after Mathew and The Gospel after Mark. This Codex consists of 190 parchments coloured in purple and scarlet, but which look very pale (vague dim obscure) today. The graph of the Codex is in melted silver letters. Some words are written in gold with uppercase letters of a mixed quadrant type (unicalle majuscule). Writing is continuous with no spaces between the words. The initial letters are big, with no decorations. The format of the pages is 314 x 268 milimetres. The text is divided in two columns, consisting of 17 rows per column and having a simple decorative pattern.

In spite of the calligraphy which is nowadays evaluated and considered as art in itself, the codex is decorated with heart patterns which have an inner form of three petals, a very interesting pattern which attests the seniority of the codex. The pattern is set within two parallel vertical lines, which are crossed horizontally, thus creating a right angle. According to the scholar Theofan Popa, this simple pattern which symbolizes man’s spiritual epicenter as one of the oldest, is identically inherited among the later codices, respectively, in Codices nr 4. and nr 5. of Berati⁷⁴. This decorative pattern is also found in some other codices, for example in Codices nr. 5 and nr. 11 of Vlora. The Purple Codex of Berati was damaged during the Second World War, having been hidden for a long time in Berat. Although being restored, today it appears to be damaged.

Letters’ analysis and the comparison to some preserved few texts of this type have led specialists to draw the conclusion that this codex belongs to the VI⁷⁵ century, as the time of its writing testifies.

The Purple Codex of Berati, except for its priceless material values in regard to its seniority, is of great importance for the textological critique, which deals with the study historical evolution of the biblical texts.

So, to closely and accurately define the initial text of the Bible, its oldest variants should be recognized, and through them, the scholars could study the main family groups of these variants, thus shedding light on the historical formation of the Holy Scriptures.

⁷⁴Theofan Popa, *Katalog i Kodikëve Kishtarë Mesjatarë të Shqipërisë*, Tiranë 2003, fq. 87 – 88.

⁷⁵Hunger H. *Codices Historici. Codices Philosphici et Philologici*, Wien 1961 Museion NF 4\1).

Beratinus 2.

This Codex was labeled “Codex Aureus Anthimi 1143” (the Golden Codex of Anthimi) by Batiffol in honor of the bishop of Berat, during the middle of the XIX century - Anthimos Aleksoudis, who had helped Batiffol to familiarize with the antiques of the city_during his visit in Berat. This Codex is composed of the 4 Gospels of the New Testament and consists of 420 parchment pages of a 240 x 190 milmetres format, (the text is written in lines, the writing is in small letters of old-type golden lines, and each page amounts to 17 lines.)

The Codex was ornamented with four images of the evangelists with broad frames_and four stickers, out of which, three are preserved, though much damaged, while the fourth does not exist any more. The remaining parts of the frames and stickers have enabled their reconstruction fully in an identical copy of this codex. Every image of the evangelists is painted within a tetragon measuring 12 x 19 centimetres. These miniature icons are plainly painted, without any special decorations, even without the writing desk as we have been used to see the evangelists’ icons. They are painted within such a narrow tetragon that John the Evangelist’s image comes out a bit over the upper bordering line. Despite that, these icons are presented with delicate care and very beautifully. John the Evangelist is introduced sitting on a throne with a high back, arched on the upper part, while the evangelists Mark and Luke are presented on little wooden benches, bowing down a little on the open gospel which they hold on their laps. Concerning the portraits of these images, since the XIX century Batiffol declared that, “they are completely erased”. Today, we can see them as silhouettes. The other parts of the images are damaged as well.

The proportions of the slightly bent images, if compared to those of the best miniature of the X-th century of Constantinople, would surely seem as almost naive type, as exposed even by Batiffol. In order to enrich these simple images, the artist has adorned (trimmed) them with threefold beautiful frames filled with geometrical motives and combined stripes with little medallions like golden beads all made of gold, over the purple background, in a dark blue tone.

These adornments of the frames with their floral design and geometrical motives_constitute a unique artistic decoration which, being a compound and inherent part of the composure in entirety, adds to the artistic value of the painted image. Without the decorations of the frames, the images would appear excessively poor and truncated.

As mentioned above, out of four stickers, only three have been preserved. These, too, are drawn in a right-angled tetragon form, made up of four girdles filled with geometrical figures and floral designs with extra motives inside little medallions set in a zig-zag form. The artist has created triangles with them. The inner fields of the stickers bear the name of the respective gospel. In the sticker of the Gospel after Luke, the title has been written in the form of a cross set in a thick line. In the sticker of the Gospel after Mark, the title is drawn in two big circles and in the Gospel after John the title is given within a quadrilateral field.

Due to the golden lower case calligraphy, the old cursive type of letters, the undeveloped initials in the stylized geographical and floral motives of the frames, as well as the elegant technique of treating the images, the specialists think that Alexudi's Golden Codex or Beratinus 2, as it is being now called, might belong to the second half of the IXth century; it could date back to as far as the last decades of this century⁷⁶. In favour of this dating there are also suggested the parallels drawn between the codex being spoken about and the Codex Cod. Gr. 53 of Saint Peterburg, of which the scholar K. Witzmann thinks that it belongs to the IXth century.

This codex is called the golden one because it was written with melted golden letters on a parchment and based on the paleographic analysis the scholars think that this codex could belong to the IXth century. The text of Anthimi's Golden Codex is not of any special interest because the transcript of the New Testament was already determined by the beginning of the IXth century.

With the exception of the Codex "Beratinus 1", (labelled by the French writer Batiffol, and defined by him to be dated in the VIth century and be part of the oldest medieval group of codices with a graph of melted silver upper case letters on a purple parchment), and the codex called "Anthimi's Golden one" (belonging to the IXth century, and written in melted golden small letters), the other codices are written in brown and different nuances.

Unique Manuscripts Which Are Found Nowhere Else

Unfortunately, some of the codices recorded in Batiffol's list do not exist anymore, among which "Λειτουργία του Αγίου Ιωάννου του Χρυσσοστόμου" (Liturgy of Saint John the Golden-tongued), whose text according to the description given by Batiffol, was presented in a cursive emaciated silver handwriting written on a purple parchment. This manuscript together with "Beratinus 1" and "Anthimis' Golden Codex", are appraised as rare riches in the world list of the crisographic codices of the Byzantine type. It is worth mentioning that at present this small list of the crisographic codices contains less than a dozen of exemplars.

Referring to Batiffo again, another precious manuscript was "Το Δίπτυχο του Ναού του Αγίου Γεωργίου" (The Diptic of Saint George's Church), in the castle of Berat. According to Batiffol, it was very precious for its seniority and beauty. Unfortunately, this codex is not preserved in the collection of the codices any more. In this manuscript, there were mentioned a written episode related to the protection of the manuscript treasure and the name of a distinguished person in Berat called Skuripeqi. This name is also found in the second Codex of Berat, pages 44 – 45. The note wrote that Skuripeqi and his wife, the countess, and his son, Fotinoi, being Christian believers of Saint George's Church in Berat, in 1356, while the Serbian armies were about to attack the city, which was abandoned by the helpless population, with the prayers of the monk Theodhul, they managed to protect the churches' treasures. Thanks to their care, there were saved 27 manuscripts kept in the monastery of the Theologian in the castle of Berat and the Saint George's Church. Meanwhile, in the 27th codex of Berat, four marginal notations are found, being

⁷⁶Koder, Johannes and Erich Trapp, Katalog der Griechischen Handschriften in Staatsarchiv zu Tirana, Jahrbuch der Osterreichischen Gesellschaft 16, 1967, 214.

thus the latest notes when the codex was copied. In these marginal notations, the name of a priest called Foti Skuripeqi and his wife's, the countess Skuripeqi⁷⁷ were found. They might have come from the renowned Skuraj family. In these manuscripts "Beratinus 1" was also included. The manuscripts were hidden in a tower in the castle. The list of the manuscripts and the precious objects hidden in the tower were firstly published in the last pages of Batiffol's book "Les manuscrits grecs d'Albanie et Codex Purpureus Beratinus Φ". From the manuscripts published in this list, a great many of them are not preserved anymore.

Today, the Purple Codex of Berat and Anthimus' Golden Codex, after having been restored in China in the 70's, are to be found in the State Central Archive in Tirana.

Other data regarding codices

According to Aleksudis, for the first time "The Purple Codex of Berat" was endangered by the Campanese Francs, which means, the francs of the Champagne region. (fr. Champagne). The presence of campanese francs is historically related to the Anzhuin conquest in Epir, during the XII century. In 1356, when Berat was endangered by Tzar Uroshi's armies, as it was mentioned above, a countess, a monk called Theodhulos, and a citizen of Berat called Skuripeqi, saved the codex and 26 other old manuscripts from being damaged. During and after the Turkish conquest, especially during the two World Wars, the dangers were countless, but thanks to the citizens and the clergy's of Berat, continuous care and conspiracy, this codex and Anthimi's Golden Codex called "Beratinus – 2", survived.

Being an extraordinary work, "Beratinus – 1", has been preserved with much care. Until the middle of the XX century, it was presented to the believers once a year, on 27 January; when it was celebrated the day in honour of Saint Joan the Golden-tongued, the archbishop of Constantinople (Hrisostomos), who passed away in 407⁷⁸. Touching this codex was the privilege of the higher clerics, the bishops and metropolitans. Believers could only kiss it on the commemoration day of the Saint, which was thought to be its author. "The Purple Codex of Berat" is chronologically related to a period of time not later than the middle of the VI-th century, but it could also be earlier. According to a testimony given by father Zef Valentini⁷⁹ in 403, Saint John the Golden-tongued, (Joanis Hrisostomos) was deported to the regions of Epir, i.e. in the inner area of the Balkans. The opinion that this codex is the earliest one belonging to the IV century, is based on the datum that the age of the profound purple way of the continuous writing, "scriptio continua" with biblical upper-case initial letters, as it was written, dates back in the III, IV⁸⁰ centuries.

⁷⁷ Kosta Naço, Shkenca dhe jeta, nr. 3. Viti 1991, fq 3.

⁷⁸ Bruce M. Metzger, Der Text des Neuen Testaments, Stuttgart 1966, s. 89.

⁷⁹ Zef Valentini, AQSH, Dosja nr 73, 1929.

⁸⁰ Crisci Edoardo, I Vangeli dei popoli, op. cit. p. 131.

Moreover in Aleksudis' book, "Σύντομος Ιστορική Περιγραφή της Ιεράς Μητροπόλεως Βελεγράδων"⁸¹, in the chapter speaking about the old codices (pg 114), he gives us important information about the origin of this codex, the way it was found in Berat, in Saint John the Theologian's monastery and about its author; thus, he writes: "Επειδή γουν κομμάτια ήσαν τα τέσσερα Ευαγγέλια, το γουν παρόν Ευαγγέλιον Ματθαίου και Μάρκου εστί, ο δε Λουκάς και Ιωάννης εχάθη το τοιούτον κομμάτιον, ο γάρ κτήτορ του Θεολόγου έφερε ταύτα εν τη Μονή αυτού ένεκεν θέας και θαύματος μόνο, εις τιμήν του Αγίου Χρυσοστόμου και εις ένδειξιν του πόθου αυτού όν είχε προς τον Χριστόν." Although there have been four Gospels, this manuscript contains the Gospels according to Mathew and Mark; John and Luke's gospels have been lost. The builder of Saint John the Theologian's monastery, brought them in this Monastery simply to view and venerate them, solely in honor of Saint John the Golden-tongued, (Joanis Hrisostomos) and as an indicator of his love to Christ...).

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⁸¹ Άνθυμος Αλεξούδης, Σύντομος Ιστορική Περιγραφή της Ιεράς Μητροπόλεως Βελεγράδων, εν Κερκύρα 1868, σελ. 114).