

THE BYZANTINE CODICES: *BERATINUS-1* & *BERATINUS-2*, TWO CULTURAL TREASURES FROM THE CITY OF BERAT. FROM THE BEGINNING – TODAY ON THE LIST OF “*MÉMOIRE DU MONDE*”, UNESCO (PART I)

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ABSTRACT

It is a well known fact that in the entirety of the records of cultural and historic heritage the codices of the Christian cult hold an important place. They can make every people feel proud in terms of their number, time of writing, values and conservation by their believers. In this paper, I aim at providing an historical overview on two of the earliest codices retained in Albania, like a heritage from the period of Paleo-Christianity. The first part focuses on the spread of Christianity, as an illegal religion in Albania; then the second part describes the first researches made about the codices, followed by a chronological table. The third part: Christianity (now a legal religion), and Albania being divided into four periods and contains a description on two codices. A further research (part IV) is a study about Medieval Period in Albania. It will be continued to the second part of the paper.

Keywords: codex, Berat, Paleo-Christianity, heritage, culture, parchment.

I. INTRODUCTION: *Codices and Paleo-Christianity in the Albanian Regions*

The study of the codices is an inevitable part of ethno-cultural sciences, which would assess and explain in a more thorough way the world of their inner, outer and overlaid values. Biblical and evangelical manuscripts, part of the early and late Christianity culture, are the expression of general development and appraisal of Christian thought as part of human thought history in general. *The moment when Christianity emerged as a religion of the future was the period when the Roman Empire was experiencing its general political, economic, judicial, cultural, and moral crisis. Under such different, social and spiritual circumstances, the current cults (pagan, polytheist) could not reply to the essential problems of the spiritual and moral crisis sweeping the whole empire* "9, 80". After the Emperor Constantine proclaimed the *Sunday Decree* (year 321), in which the holy day of the Christians was proclaimed an official holiday and the Christianity itself became an official religion, a

flourishing period was seen in the Albanian area also due to the impact of the Eastern Empire. The city of Berat was distinguished here, which in the IV – VI century becomes very important "12, 10". Furthermore, the historian Lavardin writing a manuscript in 1621 about the ancientness of Dukagjini family in northern mountains, mentioned that: *inside this province (in 1576) marble monuments can be seen, on which the names of many Roman emperors are read...,or evidence, that show obviously that St. Paul the Apostle preached to the people Son of God's Law* "7, 209".

A general division in the Holy Scriptures, as far as calligraphy is concerned, is seen in the gospels written in capital letters – *majuscule*, applied in the *Purple Codex of Berat* (Fig. 1); and the gospels in small letters – *minuscule* in *Golden Codex of Anthimos* (Fig. 2). Such works are popular among sacred scriptures, where we find ornamentations in the initial letters and generally a beautiful calligraphic writing.

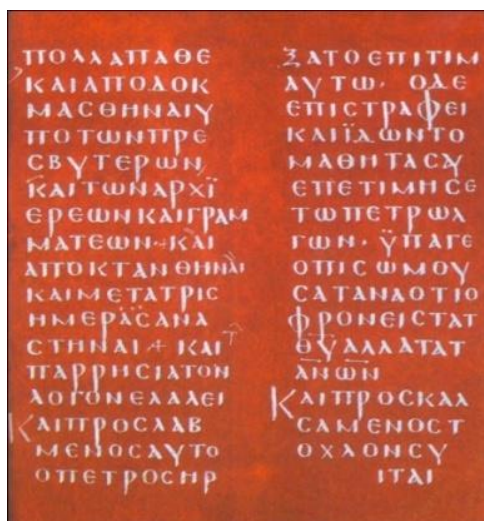


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Figure 1. A renewed page of *Beratinus-1* (*majuscule* writing), **Figure 2.** An original page of *Beratinus-2* (*minuscule* writing)

The existence of a local school for sacred scriptures is closely linked with the introduction of Illyrian-Albanian realm in the area of biblical sources which date from 1st century A.D. As it is widely known, the first missionaries of Christianity addressed initially the Jewish communities, dispersed in the Balkan Peninsula. Testimonies deriving from indirect sources and from biblical books themselves, lead to the conclusion that even in Illyria existed Jewish communities. Some toponyms of coastal Albania can be mentioned here, such as the name of the antique city *Phoenixe* – with the history of which some of the letters of the apostles are linked, or the toponym *Galilee* in the rear of Himara has an Aramaic origin. In the Holy Scriptures is written: "...from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ" "3; Epistle to the Romans, 15:19". From years 53 – 56, St.

Paul spent one of the winters in Actia Nicopolis and stayed in the city of Apollonia (Illyria). Even the first bishop of *Dyrrah*, Caesar, is thought to have been ordained just during the missionary St. Paul's journey, *after which they passed in Amphipolis and Apollonia they finally arrived in Thessaloniki...*"3; Acts of Apostles, 17:1".

Of the first martyrs of Christianity is Saint Astius, respectively the Bishop of Durrës (Dyrrachium) (Fig. 3), who was executed by 117. In 4th century A.D, with the legalization of the Christian religion, even in the Albanian areas, church centers started, such as in Nicopolis, Amantia, Aulón (Vlorë), Pulcheriopolis (Berat), Apollonia, Lissus and Shkodra.



Figure 3. City of Durrës (engraving, 1573)

II. FIRST STUDIES ON CODICES IN ALBANIA

From Greek, *κοδικος*, derives from Alexandrian school of scriptures where the old Greek literature was *codified* in the form of scriptures by the oral tradition, thus the *codices* were created. Thus, the codices are manuscript books where the first holy scriptures were documented. In 1885, Berat Orthodox Metropolitan was visited by the French Catholic theologian Pierre Batiffol (1861 – 1929). According to him, there were up to three *chrysographic* codices with Paleo-Christian style and written in gold and silver, at a time when 12 codices in total of this type existed all over the world. Albania is one of the countries that has inherited a rich library of manuscripts of such kind, in spite of the fact that many materials were destroyed by wars and conquests. The scholars mention in their studies that on the margins of the codices it's written about stocks of codes that were kept in churches and monasteries.

Batiffol was one of the first figures that we know, who as a visitor in the Holy Metropolitan described 16 books to the extent he was allowed by the city church authorities. He published

this partial list of codices in Paris, in 1886. Later on, other foreign scholars, especially from Austrian-German schools produced publications on the church manuscripts, for example, the author Johannes Koder and Erich Trapp with their book namely *The Catalogue of Greek-Byzantine Church Manuscripts in Tirana* (1968). From 1980 onwards, the Central State Archive started the preparation of an inventory of the codices in Albania. The scholar Theofan Popa established a fund where 100 full codices and 17 other fragmented codices from all over Albania were included. *Codex Purpureus Beratinus* and *Codex Aureus Anthimi* which are also identified as *Beratinus-1* and *Beratinus-2*, represent the two earliest codices from the city of Berat.

Codices in Albania: In Chronological Order

Until now scholars list 7 purple books with parchment (περγαμνή) paper, which are presented in the following table:

Number	Title on List	Name	Location
1.	Codex N022	Petropolitanus	National Library, St. Petersburg
2.	Codex O 023	Sinopensis	National Library, Paris
3.	Codex Σ 042	Rossanensis	Diocesan Museum, Rossano
4.	Codex Φ 043	Beratinus-1	Central State Archive, Tiranë
5.	Codex 565	Greek 53	National Library, St. Petersburg
6.	Codex 1143	Beratinus-2	Central State Archive, Tiranë
7.	Codex l-46	Vindobonensis	National Library, Napoli

III. CHRISTIANITY: Four Main Historical Periods

Nowadays the international compilers identify four main historical periods, since the beginning of Christianity until 19th century for which as benchmark, they are based on the essential and important events that occurred in the history of the church and the mankind itself in general. Here we should stress that the codices which nowadays are kept in the Central Archive originate from four periods, which are as follows:

1. The Paleo-Christian Period (1st – 4th century)

The period of the unification (canonization) of text on the Holy Word. The Eastern Church as officially refers to *the 39th Festal Letter of Athanasius* (367), whereas the Western Church refers to *Synod of Carthage* (August 397). Nevertheless, different scholars refer to it as a period until the end of 6th century.

The Purple Codex of Berat or *Beratinus-1* belongs to this period. The material was written when the evangelical thought was still moving. That is too important to show the evolution of

evangelical thought in its beginnings, the competence of human reason and the role of human individuality as an impact on the formulation of the holy word.

The Purple Codex of Berat (*Codex Purpureus Beratinus* Φ) represents a manuscript of historical importance for the beginnings of biblical literature and is ranked in the foundations of Eastern rite church literature. According to the writing technique, it is a manuscript which dates back into no later than 6th century A.D. It has 190 pages and contains two gospels: according to Matthew and Mark. It is written with cast letters in silver on parchment paper. The background on which these letters are casted, is emphasized red (purple), hence the name. Some important parts of the codex text are dyed in gold. The cover dates back into centuries later than the manuscript, a metal work with biblical ornaments in relief, where the crucifixion of Jesus and the figures of St. Mary and St. John the Baptist are distinguished. Guardian angels stay around them. In one part of the area, is worked the Resurrection of Christ with angels surrounding from four sides. The cover (Fig.4) has imprinted on it the year 1804 as manufacturing date.



Figure 4. Two parts of the metal cover

The bishop of Berat city, Anthimos Alexoudes (Ανθεμους Αλεξουδης, 1824 – 1909), was the first scholar who started studies for the codex during the time he served in Berat. He published a book (1868) in Corfu (Κέρκυρα) in respect with a part of evangelical manuscripts that were kept in the city churches. However, the theologian Louis Duchesne (1843 – 1922) would be the person who in a script published in the magazine *Bulletin Critique* (1881) gave it its current name: *Codex Purpureus Beratinus*. He was based on three features namely: *manuscript type, the parchment's colour and location* (Fig. 5). Then, in 1886 a third scholar is Pierre Battifol¹), whom was provided help by bishop Alexoudes in his research (Fig. 6). Alexoudes has also mentioned the first dangers regarding the acquisition of the codex by foreign invaders: the Franks of Champagne (1081) and Angevin army (1271)²).

¹) See: *First Studies on Codices in Albania*.

²) See: *Codices: Survival in the course of time and history* (2nd part of paper).



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Figure 5. A paper: original and reproduced. The purple colour of parchment is distinguished

Figure 6. Transliteration of a page by the cleric Batiffol

The purple codex is mentioned for the first time in a “Diptych (δίπτυχον) of St. George’s Church” in Castle quarter of Berat. In a note cited from this manuscript, it is written about the danger of the acquisition of the codex in 1356 by Serbian army of Tsar Stephen Uroš V (1336 – 1371)³).

The Purple Codex of Berat was not only a book (manuscript) for the library but also a liturgical text. The manuscript was used for ecclesiastical mass purposes once a year, which was preached according to the gospels of this text. The writing is with capital letters, a fact that identifies with the early scripts and a part of evangelical text indicates pre-canonical features. The papers do not contain decorations but the calligraphic style of writing is evaluated by the scholars as an applied art. The initial letters are gold whereas the continuation of the writing is with dissolved silver. The dating is determined in 4th – 8th century due to the style of writing and the usage of *uncial* and *majuscule* letters which are an indication of the Paleo-Christian period. They were capital letters, similar to the subsequent typographical, quadratic writing. Moreover, the writing is continuous without spacing between words, divided into two columns per each page. The size of the papers is approximately the same as those of *Codex Alexandrinus* (Fig. 7), but with the letters being much larger. The manuscript comprises the two first gospels of the New Testament, *Gospel according to Matthew* and *Gospel according to Mark*, 190 papers in total, red parchment with some damaged fragments. Even the text has small losses in both gospels. The gospel according to Matthew ends on the page 120. The Bishop Alexoudes hypothesizes that the material would have had four gospels, but the two others that follow the church heritage namely *Gospel according to Luke* and *Gospel according to John* may have lost during Norman military campaign: *where the books of monasteries of Theologian were stolen by the Franks of the Champagne province* "14/2010; 380". In this codex, God’s name is considered

³) The same chapter cited in footnote 2.

untranslatable and it is written in a special form. It cannot be found in another codex of the same or later period.

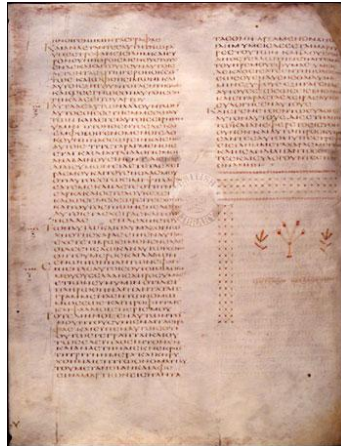


Figure 7. Paper image from *Codex Alexandrinus*

2. Second Period: from canonization of evangelical literature until the greatest schism of the year 1054 (*East – West schism*)

The long and continuous disputes between the Eastern and Western church would bring the great schism in 1054. The contradictions had started since two centuries ago with the death of Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Photius I, in 893. One of the following successors, Michael I Cerularius (c. 1000 – 1059) made charges – not only political ones – against the Church of Rome, the same as Emperor Leo III the Isaurian had done previously. The charges consisted of political relations the Church of Rome had with the Frank Empire, their position in their service and the thoughts about religious rites. But the most unacceptable viewpoint for the Eastern Church was that Christ was defined as unequal Son (*filioque*) with the Father from the Western Church. The viewpoint advanced that the holiness derived from Father. In contrast, the Eastern Church supported the viewpoint that the Holy Trinity was and continues to be One and undivided. In addition, the Eastern Church did not accept the mass with unleavened bread and a biscuit. That and other enough dogmatic reasons were the cause that Patrick Cerularius declared the separation of the Eastern Church from the Western Church in July 1054 and burned the decree of Pope Leo IX, which threatened him with excommunication. He also called a synod and excommunicated the Pope "11; 57, 58 / 2, 162".

From this period, which started with the canonization of evangelical literature and ended with the great schism of 1054, we possess today in Albania the *Codex Aureus Anthimi* or *Beratinus-2* as a cultural heritage, which in spite of being prepared in the limits of the church schism, were written with the spirit of ecclesial unity.

The codex books of this period have reached our days as treasures of cultural heritage and are preserved from two churches: the Roman and Byzantine ones, despite the fact that the Greek language is used in almost all the books. This language and culture had an influence for a very long time on the life of the church. Even the gospels were written for the first time in Greek, except from *Gospel according to Matthew*.

Anthimos Golden Codex (*Codex Aureus Anthimi*). The second codex on chronology, entitled also as *Beratinus-2* (Fig. 8, 9). The clerk Batiffol in tribute to the contribution offered by the Bishop of Berat, Alexoudes (*friend of knowledge*, evaluated by Batiffol) would name and identify the study of manuscript after him. Due to the fact that the letters are gold and dissolved in red purple parchment⁴), the scholar Batiffol gave it the name it is identified even today namely *Codex Aureus Anthimi*.



Fig. 8

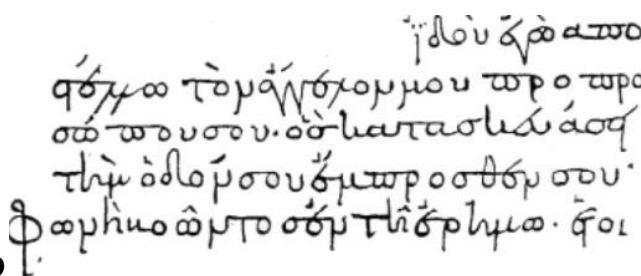


Fig. 9

Figure 8. Nowadays reproduction of *Beratinus-2* **Figure 9.** Transliteration of a fragment from Batiffol

According to Batiffol and other subsequent scholars, the production of codex is defined in 9th – 10th century. The dating derives from the usage of golden letters, calligraphic style of writing is *semi-uncial* and the used letters are small: *miniscule*. Four gospels are fully preserved: *according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John* in 420 pages. The resemblance to *Codex Theodora* (Fig. 10) is an additional fact, which dates back to 9th century, whereas the graphic has a little resemblance to the St. Petersburg school of writing, from which is *Codex Greek 53 (Codex Petropolitanus, II 041)* (Fig. 11). The world list is registered: **Minuscule 1143**.

⁴) Also the first codex, *Beratinus-1*.



Fig. 10

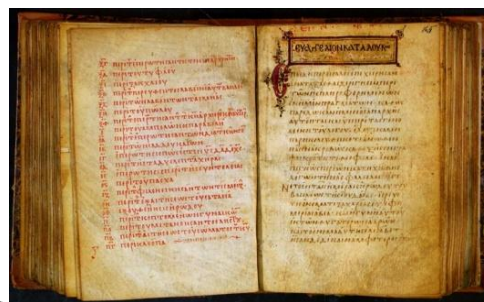
Figure 10. Image of *Codex Theodora*

Fig. 11

Figure 11. Image of *Codex Greek 53*

The figures of evangelists have decorative frames (Fig. 12, 13, 14), which are built with floral and geometrical motifs (circles with flowers), but without direct Christian semiotics and with secular and pagan spirit. Plain ornaments are inscribed in the text.

Along with *Codex Purpureus Beratinus*, it was in danger of acquisition from invading armies during different wars⁵).



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

Figure 12. Apostle John (miniature), Figure 13. Ornament in the beginning of a paper
Figure 14. Decoration (reconstruction)

3. Third Period: 1054 – 1385 (from East – West schism until the first Ottoman invasion in Albania)

According to the well-known scholar Theofan Popa, the number of the preserved manuscripts since year 1000 until the final invasion of Albania (the fall of Shkodra, 1479) is 62. Regarding the number of the manuscripts, help was provided by the note written in the margin of the 27th *Codex of Berat*⁶), which transmits the control of the Serbian army of Tsar Uroš V, who kept the Berat city besieged in 1356. According to the note: an anonymous

⁵) The same chapter cited in footnote 2.

⁶) The codex preserved until now, along with more further margins, 4 (four) in total.

noble countess from the family *Skuripekis*, monk *Theodulos* and servant *Fotinoi* secretly transported the 27 most important manuscripts of Berat Orthodox Metropolitan⁷).

Today, from the registered codices in the Fund no. 488 of the Central State Archive, numbers 12 – 52 are dated in this period. The scholar Kosta Naço has noticed that in this period, much of the evangelical literature was written and copied. What is more, the paper or the parchment of older codices, which became unreadable from the obsolescence and the usage in time, thus that turned being unusable for the church liturgy, is recycled for the production of covers belonging to the mentioned period. The purpose was simple: strengthening the relation with the new codices. This proves a fact: the number of the codices has been some times higher "6, 208".

4. Fourth Period: from 1479 (Ottoman invasion) onwards

The production of church codices type started to decline. The main cause was the invention of Gutenberg's press (1436). In the Central State Archive, this can be seen on the list of the codices in Fund no. 488, where out of 100 manuscripts listed, about 20 of them date from the 4th Period.

IV. CODICES OF ALBANIA: a Monumental and Cultural Treasure for Albania

The existence of a local school of Holy Scriptures is associated with other cultural traditions developed as continuation in Albania, especially with those of the applied church arts, such as the mastery of carving in iconostasis, iconography / frescoes, liturgical music and the artistic construction for churches and monasteries. It is also linked with the involvement of the Illyrian-Albanian realm, in what is called *area of biblical source* since 1st century A.D. The evangelists and the first missionaries of Christianity addressed to the Jewish communities that were spread even in the Paleo-Balkan area. The Jewish communities have also existed in Illyricum, especially along the coastline. The evidence comes from indirect sources and from the Bible itself as well.

Data about a local school of writers and scriptorium

A large part of church manuscripts that are today in the Albanian archives are ordered by the noble families of Medieval Arbanon period, especially Scanderbeg's period. Church manuscripts were too expensive. At first, the people who ordered (ktetors, κτήτωρ) a codex were the emperors themselves and then would be the rich families or high functionaries of the

⁷) The same chapter cited in footnote 2.

state or church. The noble families of Muzaka/Musachi and Thopia are mentioned through the documents. In a manuscript, it is even mentioned a great personality called “George the Great,,. The scholars think that it could be about George Araniti Thopia Comneni, who would later become Scanderbeg’s father-in-law. The scholar Alex Buda in reference of a chronical note (year 1410) in one of the codices of the city of Berat mentions that the noble Theodore II Muzaka⁸⁾ ordered as a ktetor, the copying of a new gospel in year 1410 "4, 3". Even, the writer Ismaïl Kadaré has written that the great feudal families of the Principality of Arbanon, at the time they left their homeland to settle in Italy, they took with them coat of arms, seals, emblems, bells and old church manuscripts. During this migration time, many codices of the Middle Age migrated towards the West.

Gospel writers regularly noted the name of the ktetor who had paid the costs of the performed work and to which church or monastery he was dedicated. Within the church manuscripts, especially in the marginal scripts, data about the Albanian feudal families are identified: Ar(i)aniti and Balshaj (Balšić, Balsich) family. Even the *Codex Purpureus Rossanensis* (6th century) (Fig. 15, 16). Different scholars have introduced the idea that the codex can originate from Albania, because that region of the Southern Italy is inhabited by Albanian population that migrated after the Ottoman invasion.



Fig. 15

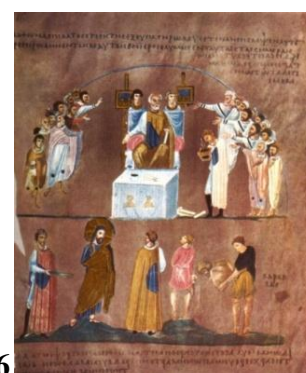


Fig. 16

Figure 15. Miniature of *Codex Rossanensis*: the Last Supper, **Figure 16.** Christ before Pilate

⁸⁾ Name of *Myzeqe* region in Albania is a heritage from this Medieval noble family.

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