

## 2.5. The CODICES of ALBANIA

Albanian Codices makes up one of the most important cultural assets of the Albanian people and a significant contribution to the wealth of world heritage. These are monuments to Christian culture and civilization and bear the stamp of the biblical-ecumenical space where the Albanians and their ancestors have been living. They are a source of pride for bibliologists, for the connoisseurs of sacred

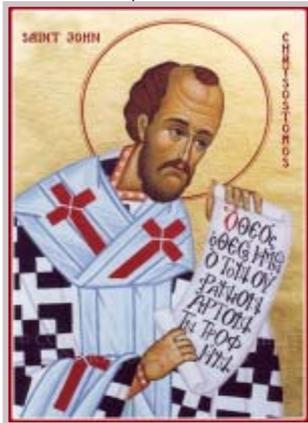


writings and the church, and also an object of research for ethnopsychology, language and the technique of writing, calligraphy, applied figurative arts and iconography. The codices are genuine encyclopedias of Christian thought.

This Codices collection that is housed in the State Central Archives (SCA) is made up of 100 volumes, constituting both complete works (manuscripts) and 17 fragments which all together are known as "*Collection 488*". Apart from this collection, 200 codex manuscripts are preserved also at the SCA. A catalogue for these codices, which are mainly chronographic, does not yet exist. There is no inventory and the informing schedules concerning their content are scattered. There are two catalogues compiled by the Greek scholars N.Beis and O.Poulitza, mainly about the codices of Drinopuli's metropolis. Besides in the SCA, codices have also been held at the Museum of Medieval Art in Korça. There are also codices at the National Library, the National History Museum and personal collections as well.

For the first time, the existence of Albania's codices was made known through a publication of Berat's bishop (Aleksudes, A. - 1868) In 1886, the French-Belgian scholar Pierre Batiffol described briefly in a catalogue 16 codices that he was allowed to see in the archives and libraries of the Orthodox Church in Berat. Batiffol, who was com-

Pages from The Purple Codex of Berat (Berat 1, p.163 & Berat 1, Contraguardia) Albanian State Archives, Tirana.

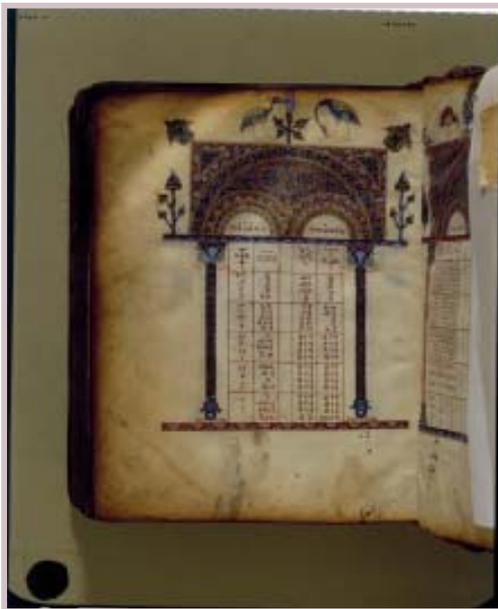


*Saint John Golden-Mouth*

plaining in his article that local monks “did not allow him” access to many other manuscripts, named three of the most ancient codices of Albania: the “*Codex Purpureus Beratinus*” - The Purple Codex of Berat (also styled as “*Beratinus-1*”); the “*Codex Aureus Anthimi*” - Anthimi’s Golden Codex (styled as “*Beratinus-2*”); and the Liturgical Codex of John Chrysostome (ad litteram: Golden-Mouthed). Until that time, the world list of known Byzantine Christian literature numbered less than a dozen manuscripts of the “*codex*” type. With the passage of time, from this list certain names of important liturgical works have disappeared, including the Codex of John Golden-Mouthed that formerly had existed in Albania.

The full name of “The Purple Codex of Berat” is “*Codex Purpureus Berantinus*” 043”, and the full name of the “The Golden Codex of Antini” is “*Codex Aureus Antini* 1143”. Descriptions of these two codices are found in the Gregory-Aland list and in all lists of the earliest, the most important international and ecclesiastical manuscripts.

Albania’s codices constitute a stock of world importance as to the development of the history of old biblical, evangelical, liturgical and hagiographic (from Greek “*agios*” - “sacred”) literature. Chronologically, these codices follow one another over 15 centuries in succession (from the 6<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century).



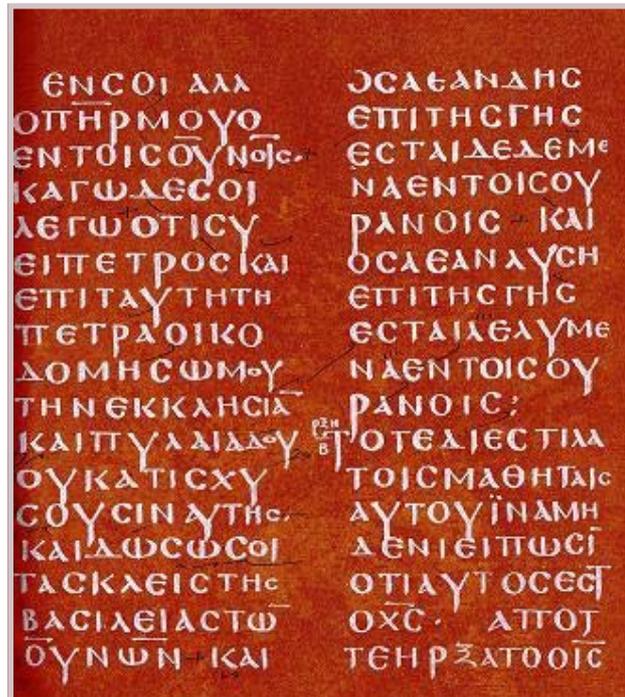
Purple Codex of Berat,  
Nr. 4, pp. 3, recto  
canon

Written but one and a half-century after “*La Vulgata*”, a Latin translation of the Bible according to St. Jerome Eusebius, the *Purple Codex of Berat* constitutes a manuscript of historical importance as to the origins of biblical literature. According to bibliologists and paleographic scholars who make reference to the technique of writing, it is a manuscript of no later than the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. “*Berantinus-1*” and “*Berantinus-2*” are two among only seven purple codices around the world, that have resisted time. “*Berantinus-1*” represents one of the three “schools” of the early Christian era. It is an intercalated school, standing between the siro-palestine and the west. The evangelic texts in this manuscript begins according to the eastern school and develops according to the western one. According to Batiffol, in this codex, there are some phrases called “conflate readings” which give the text a precanonical character. The scholars of hermeneutica sacra science or the canonic translation and interpretation, have insisted for a long time that there are no neuma (songs of the musical alphabet) in this codex. However according to a recent study, there is a musical writ-

ing simultaneous to the linguistic one and with a similar subject matter on page 156 of the manuscript. On the other two pages there is a later musical writing (in black paint). This fact gives the “Berantinus-1” codex a world wide importance because the musical writing was documented for the first time in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

Domestic authors, such scholars as Theofan Papa, Ilo Mitkë Qafëzezi, Aleks Buda and Kosta Naço have been distinguished by their specific researches on these codices.

Being a contemporary of such famous manuscripts as “*Petropolitais*”, “*Vindeoboneusis*” and “*Sinopencis*”, the Purple Codex of Berat is classified as pertaining to the foundations of the ecclesiastical literature. Berantinus-1 is a rare manuscript with a “unicale” letters (which is often mistaken with the initial writing) and totally in majuscule (which is wrongly interpreted as “capitals”). The purple parchment and the golden and silver writings were a very expensive luxury for that time. Some researchers think that “The Purple Codex of Berat” was initially kept in Apollonia, Fier, which is also mentioned in the “New Testament”, then in Bylis-Gllavinice for a few centuries and by the end by the 10-11<sup>th</sup> century became a possession of the Christians of Berat. It would remain there until the 20<sup>th</sup> century when it was made part of the national patrimony of Albanian State Archives in Tirana.



Beratinus 1, pp. 45

According to final studies it was concluded that the two codices (*Beratinus-1 & 2*) had been written in parchment (goatskin tanned and dyed). The background on which the letters are cast is deep red (purple), from which it has taken its name. In the beginning of Christianity, the colour of this manuscript was known as the “imperial colour” and later as “the divine colour”. With the passage of centuries, the colour has faded. Some important parts of the codex text were cast in gold. The capital letters are usually golden letters as well as the name “God” in both forms: “*Qews*” and “*Kgrios*”. The applied fonts are small capital letters. The cover of the manuscript is made of metal, with biblical ornaments, but it is estimated to be several centuries later than the work itself.

The text of this codex has been written after the antique style *scripta-continuae*, that is, without dividing words from one another and without any accents or other signs for the separation of words. It

is placed on a background containing stylized hearts. Inside the hearts that ornate the page there are floral motifs of three-petaled roses (azaleas). The decorations are located along the borders of two parallel vertical lines, which turn to square angles horizontally. The vertical line can be interpreted as a divine inclination, while the horizontal line as symbolizing the mortal/transitory fate of man. Bibliologists hold that such a motif, which is to be retaken in the later biblical, liturgical or hagiographic manuscripts that are housed in Albania, represents the *spiritual equilibrium of the individual*.



Frontpiece of the  
The Purple Codex of  
Berat, exhibited at "I  
Vangeli dei Popoli",  
June, 2000

For the first time, the Purple Codex of Berat is referred to in the *Diptych of the Church of St. George*, situated in the castle of Berat. In one note quoted from this manuscript, reference is made to the danger hanging over this Codex in 1356, when Serb armies besieged the city of Berat. The invaders were said to have their eyes only on the libraries of Theologu's monastery and the Church of St. George, the biggest treasury of the city. According to this note, one person from Berat's nobility, Skuripekis, "Skurabecho", a well-known patron of Albanian middle-age aristocracy, "together with Madam Countess", worthy devotees of Christianity, being as careful as a monk, achieved to save this treasury and did hide it in one of the castle towers.

The Berantinus codices were also requested by the fascist army in the autumn of the year 1943, when the Nazi's asked the vassal government for the reserve gold of the nation's bank, the Jews' lists and the two Berantinus Codices. The Codices and Jews were saved, but not the gold and the coins. The story says that when Nazi general asked the priest to hand over the Purple Codex the priest answered that they have not any Codex in the church. Once the the Nazi general went away the priest went in front of one of the many Jesus icons and said "God Forgive me for not saying the truth ...". They protected and conserved the codices by inserting them into a metallic chest, which was hidden beneath the neck of a well. For some time in the following years, "Beratinus-1" and "Beratinus-2" were reported missing. They were rediscovered at the church in the city's castle in 1968 in very poor condition.

In 1971, under an intergovernmental agreement, both the Purple Codex of Berat and the Golden Codex of Anthim were sent for restoration at the Archaeological Institute of China, where an identical duplication of them was made. The originals were restored, their critical condition being repaired and a promise of longevity was secured by

hermetically sealing each single page between two sheets of glass in vacuum. After the restoration, “*Beratinus-1*” was divided into nine volumes, and “*Beratinus-2*” in 21 volumes, which are now housed in the State Central Archives in Tirana.

The codex was included in the exhibition “*I Vangeli dei Popoli*”, organized by *Biblioteca Apostolica* of the Vatican on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christianity. Within the country it has been exhibited only twice with the permission of the highest official authorities.

According to Aleksudes, the Purple Codex of Berat must have been written “by the hand of St. John Chrysostome” (Golden-Mouthed). But Batiffol thinks, “it doesn’t seem to be exactly the hand of St. John Chrysostome”. St. John Chrysostome was one of the patriarchs of the Christian Church, and it was verified that he had been in the Balkan hinterland in Epir in the latest years of his life. However he died in the first decade of the 5<sup>th</sup> century while the manuscript belongs to the mid 6<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps this indicates that it is the same letter but not the same handwriting of St. John Chrysostome.

From the fact that more than 100 manuscripts of the “*codex*” type are housed in Albanian archives, among the sacred writings that have been copied out over 15 centuries in succession, such as the “*Old Testament*”, the Gospels and others texts of church service, it is believed that they must have been written by local monks. These manuscripts create a tradition of ecclesiastic literature, which is corroborated by other supportive evidence.

St. Niketa and St. Jerome, who enriched the culture of Western Christianity, worked on the same lines as other contemporaries and followers who made great contributions to the enrichment of Eastern Christianity through translations of the Gospels in Old Greek and in manuscripts of the “*codex*” type.

*The Purple Codex of Berat* has been registered on the list of the most important works of mankind, a list known by the name of “*Memoire du Monde*” (The Memory of the World) and is holds status under UNESCO as a World Treasure.



The Codex of Vlora Nr. 5, pp. 1 verso the text of the letter Eusebit sent to Karpiani.



UNESCO Certification of inscription for the Codex Purpureus Beratinus 1& 2



Beratinus 2, pp.656  
(early miniature)

The *Purple Codex of Berat* contains 190 leaves, and “*Beratinus-2*” with 420 leaves.

The second codex (chronologically), also called “*Beratinus-2*” or “*Anthim’s Codex*” and sometimes also “*Codex Aureus Anthimi*” — because of the golden letters used in it — belongs to the 9<sup>th</sup> century. It contains the four Gospels (according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). The codex once featured the four images of these evangelists, however that of Matthew has disappeared. The evangelists’ images have decorative frames, built up of floral and geometric motifs (circles and flowers). Stylistically it has been compared to one codex being housed in the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg, which the German scholar Kurt Witzman identified as a manuscript of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The Codex of St. Petersburg is known as the “*Greek Codex 53*”.

(Apart from “*Beratinus-1*” and “*Beratinus-2*”, in the rich stock of Albania’s codices tens of other manuscripts are included that have been baptized after the towns where they have been discovered (*The Codex of Vlora*, 10<sup>th</sup> century; the *Codex of Përmet*, 14<sup>th</sup> century; the *Codex of Shkodër*, 14<sup>th</sup> century, the *Codex of Gjirokastër*, 16<sup>th</sup> century; the *Codex of Fier*, or of St. Kozmai, of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century).

The codices belonging to the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards also contain ethnographic data, rules about building a common life, giving a title, inheriting a fortune by means of a betrothal or a separation, or about the change of status in case of changing the religion. In the manuscripts of the last two centuries, secular issues assume a greater importance. In one of the late codices of Korçë (18<sup>th</sup> century), some of the basic problems taking a central place include: the distinction between the wise and the learned; what the wise and the learned think of God; the opinion of the learned about religion; eternity and freedom; and the opinion of the learned about the kind man and virtue.



Page with miniature  
from Codice of  
Vlora of 11-th  
Century

In the Albanian Codices there are biblical evangelists, patristic-patrolitic, agiographic, martrologic, liturgic, musical features. A manuscript of the year 1292 known as “The 23<sup>rd</sup> Codex of Berat” is considered by scholars as the first complete octeh (octave) in the world. An editorial created by the United Bible society in London (2007), in the preface, John’s evangelist has evaluated and thanked the Albanian people for

preserving this richness which has a historical and world wide importance. This editorial has an incredible importance as a primary source of critical evangelic texts.

In 1968, the Library of Vienna offered the Albanian Government a price of one million dollars as an offer for talks about buying this Codex before being restored. Albanian authorities refused this offer, as they did with an offer from the Academy of Sciences of China. The Purple Codex of Berat assumes a greater value because of the fact that it had been written at a time when Biblical matter had not yet been canonized. The two Gospels it contains include certain deviations from standard texts. This is why one part of it could be read only once a year at a public service.

The Albanian Codices are considered as a local writing *school*. In medieval times, the native writers had their parlours which were professionally created (craftsmen, confraternitas). In the Albanian Codices, the information has a laic and historical character for most patronymic families; Balshaj, Skuraj, Muzake, Arianite-Komnene. The local Albanian Christian writings *school* is remarkable for its ecumenist character. There are writings of western Christianity, translated for the needs of the eastern church. There are typical Venetian ornaments that illustrate the evangelists or the liturgic books of the Byzantine rituals. There are Christian manuscripts which have acts in the Ottoman language. The culture of the native people to preserve these texts and the specific feature of ecumenic and proficiency the writing's characters (or breath) make these codices monumental inheritances of Albania and of the whole world.

Author: *Dr. Shaban Sinani*

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