

Dr. Luc BROGLY,

Independent Scholar

Dr. Didier LAFLEUR,

Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes, CNRS-Paris

EXPLORING ARCHIVES BETWEEN ALBANIA AND FRANCE: HOW RESEARCH USES ARCHIVAL WORK?

Since decades, most certainly centuries, Albania and France are close to each other and this paper gives us the opportunity to recall the proximity of these two countries. At the end of the 19th century, two of the most important figures of both Greek paleography and Biblical studies, Anthimos Alexoudis, Metropolitan of the city of Berat and the French priest Pierre Batiffol, met and revealed a unique Albanian treasure: the Greek manuscripts housed in Berat where Batiffol stayed in 1885 at the Metropolitan's place. For decades, Pierre Batiffol remained the first and unique Western Biblical scholar to travel to Albania.

As many attendees gathered for this conference about "Archives and Archival Work in Albanian Territories", we have a double position because we are both archivists and scholars. Our main interest during the numerous stays we did here, in Tirana, was the Greek manuscripts housed in the Fonds 488 of the Albanian National Archives and, in that way, special thanks are due to the General Direction of the Archives, especially to Professor Nevila Nika and Dr. Ardit Bido.

We will first focus on our own experience as archivists, classifying and organizing the archival fonds of Pierre Batiffol in Paris; second, we will emphasize our own scholarship experience in the Albanian National Archives.

In order to fulfill our research on Pierre Batiffol, we had to check his archives, private and academic, in Paris, at the Saint-Sulpice Seminary, an ecclesiastical order founded during the 17th century. When Batiffol died in January 1929, his family preserved all his books and papers and for decades these archives remained unchanged until another Catholic priest, Father Trinquet, began a research on Batiffol's life and works at the end of the sixties, beginning of the seventies. He often visited Batiffol's family and got the opportunity to survey the papers, letters and so on. He took, with the permission of the niece of the priest, all Batiffol's papers to his own place. His archival work consisted in typing copies of all the handwritten documents he has found, checking all the words, names and surnames he didn't know or understand, writing to many institutions to gather more information. Nevertheless, his main and first task was to classify this huge heap of documentary sources. We still guess that he wanted to write Batiffol's biography, but he never published a single line. When

he died in 2002, this important and entire archival fonds was left mixed up and abandoned. Nowadays, the fonds consists in twenty-four cardboard boxes, full of documents in great disarray. Nobody knows how and when these documents came to the Seminary.

For us, the question was: How to organize this material? Which methodology to use? Our first work was to clear each box, to check each paper and, after a first survey, to begin a classification. We put together the original documents with their copies which were apart; then we built up different corpuses, either thematic or chronological. At each step of the process, we noted down every change so that, at any time, we and the archivists of the Saint-Sulpice Seminary may know the new location of the documents. This methodological process was not only of use to us; it also was a necessary duty for future scholars.

As an example, three-quarters of the handwritten documents are original with copies by Father Trinquet. In other cases, the priest sent back the original documents; some of them got certainly lost and we have then only the copies. How far may we trust copies? This question is perhaps less important concerning private matters, but how problematic can it be when it comes to vital issues as for instance nowadays for Albanian citizens? To summarize, we would like to emphasize some important issues about archivistics. First is the importance of the best and most extent conservation; second, is the necessity of a strict follow-up of all documents, and third, is the need of an accurate classification.

Working on Batiffol's papers shows us that archival work remains the keystone of all research because preservation and evidence of documents are not only necessary steps into fulfilling legal State obligations but also to save the memory of the past and these two goals provide scientific material to scholars. In order to achieve it, archival work should be then explored from both sides, inside and outside, not only from a citizen point of view but also from a scholarship perspective.

Concerning the Greek manuscripts housed in the Fonds 488 of the National Archives of Albania, it has to be said that these documents are still preserved in spite of the numerous jolts of History in the Balkan region. Furthermore, two manuscripts of this collection, dated respectively VIth and IXth century, were sent to China for restoration and they remain today the unique examples of such journey in the history of codicology. May we recall here that this collection, which is a rich and coherent collection, offers several examples of good preservation: first, as far as we know, all the Greek Byzantine and Post-Byzantine manuscripts are housed in a single place which is the strong room; second, at each manuscript corresponds today only one shelfmark. Concerning archival, curatorial, codicological and philological works and studies made on the manuscripts, and in spite of very rare surveys about them, one may also praise the continuity of the research within the Albanian Archives. It is obvious that the descriptions of the manuscripts made by Theofan Popa, an Orthodox scholar who dedicated his life to the Albanian historical heritage, may be considered as

an extension of the studies of the Metropolitan Anthimos Alexoudis, the one who warmly welcomed Pierre Batiffol in Berat. We may add to the above scholars, two Austrian students, Johannes Koder and Erich Trapp who studied the manuscripts during the sixties. In addition to the social and political context of Albania and, may we say, as everywhere in the world, difficulties arise here and there, especially in the identification of the manuscripts and their texts but we also know that, since the eighties, there is an important renewed interest amongst the Albanian scholarship which will succeed in this long-term work.

As a short conclusion, it is obvious that the Greek manuscripts housed in the National Archives of Tirana are a cultural heritage, a direct window on the past. These manuscripts are not only part of the UNESCO Programme, "Memory of the World", they are, first of all, part of the memory of the Albanian history.