

= Vangjel Meksi =

Vangjel Meksi (1770 ? 1821) was an Albanian physician , writer , and translator . One @-@ time personal physician to Ali Pasha , the 19th @-@ century Albanian ruler of the Pashalik of Yanina , Meksi produced the first translation of the New Testament into Albanian with the help and sponsorship of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) . Meksi did not live to see his work 's publication however , which was supervised by Gregory IV of Athens . As a member of Filiki Etaireia , a secret society whose purpose was to establish an independent Greek state , Meksi joined the Greeks in the Siege of Tripolitsa during their war of independence against the Ottoman Empire and died shortly afterwards .

As well as its value to Albanian Christians , who could for the first time read the Gospels in their own language , Meksi 's work advanced the study of written Albanian , and in particular informed the work of 19th @-@ century linguists and philologists such as Joseph Ritter von Xylander , August Schleicher , and Johann Georg von Hahn . Their studies of the Albanian language were significantly influenced by Meksi 's Bible translation .

= = Early life = =

Meksi was born in 1770 in Labovë , a village near Gjirokastër , a member of Meksi family and pursued secondary studies in Ioannina , then an important Ottoman provincial center (now in Greece) . His first employment was as a folk physician to the court of Ali Pasha , the Albanian ruler of the Pashalik of Yanina , a position he held until 1803 . Armed with a letter of recommendation from Ali Pasha , Meksi was admitted to the University of Naples in Italy , where he studied medicine under Dr. Nicola Acuto and practiced in a hospital administered by the parish of San Giovanni a Carbonara . After completing his studies in 1808 , Meksi returned to Yanina and once again served in Ali Pasha 's court , this time as one of his four physicians . His colleagues were Dr. Metaxa , (degree in medicine from the University of Paris) , Dr. Saqeralliu (degree in medicine from the University of Vienna) , and Dr. Loukas Vagias , (brother of Thanasis Vagias , with a degree in medicine from Leipzig University) .

= = Philological activity = =

After falling out of favor with Ali Pasha , for reasons unknown , Meksi left the court in 1810 to travel around Europe . During a brief stay in Venice he began to develop an interest in the Albanian alphabet and grammar . He published two translations into Albanian during 1814 , both now lost , one of which was a religious work by Abbé Claude Fleury (1640 ? 1723) .

Meksi also wrote a grammar of the Albanian language in Albanian . It too has been lost , but it is mentioned in many letters reporting Meksi 's work as an Albanian philologist written by Robert Pinkerton to his superiors at the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) , which subsequently sponsored the translation of the New Testament into Albanian . The work must have been written before 1819 and may be either the first Albanian grammar or the second , after that of Jani Evstrat Vithkuqari ; it is not known which was published first .

In this period Meksi also created a new Albanian alphabet , rationalizing and consolidating the many different pre @-@ existing alphabets , employing a mix of Greek and Latin characters . Using his new alphabet , he wrote a book called Orthography of the Albanian language , (Albanian : Drejtshkrimi i gjuhës shqipe) .

= = Translation of the New Testament = =

Pinkerton , who in 1816 was the BFBS 's representative in Moscow , had met that year with a community of Albanians in Vienna , then capital of the Austrian Empire . They assured him that a translation of the New Testament into Albanian was indeed possible . In a letter to his superiors at the BFBS , dated August 28 , 1816 , Pinkerton wrote that the Albanian nation occupied a large part

of the ancient Illyria , that they spoke a language completely different from Slavic , Turkish , Greek , or Latin , and that for the Albanian Orthodox the mass was recited in Greek , a language that believers and even some of the priests did not understand . According to Pinkerton , the translation could be done by one or more Albanians from the Ionian islands under the supervision of an Albanian bishop .

In 1819 , apparently with the blessing of his superiors at the BFBS , Pinkerton met with Meksi (referring him as Evangelos Mexicos) in Istanbul . Meksi , who was then a teacher in Serres , had been recommended to Pinkerton because of his Albanian grammar book . Pinkerton also relates in one of his letters to the BFBS that Meksi was well regarded by the Albanian community , the Greek Orthodox Church , and by Patriarch Gregory V of Constantinople . Gregory , according to Pinkerton , also offered to find two suitable clergymen to assist Meksi in his endeavor . Lastly , Pinkerton recommended that the Greek alphabet be used as the most suitable for the Albanian language . On October 19 , 1819 , Pinkerton and Meksi concluded a contract to translate the New Testament into Albanian on behalf of the society . It was agreed that the Bible would have to be translated into the Albanian dialect of Yanina . Meksi completed the work in two years , ten months earlier than the contract 's deadline .

Early in 1821 Mr. Leeves of the BFBS visited Thessaloniki to supervise the translation . On February 8 , 1821 he wrote that the work had been completed , and that the only outstanding task was a final review by a competent person , who had already been assigned to the task . In 1822 the revised manuscript was sent to Malta to be printed , and in 1823 Leeves sent from Malta to the representative of the society in Corfu the first copy of a printed New Testament in Albanian . Meanwhile , the New Testament had had a final revision performed by the Archimandrite of Euboea , Grigor Gjirokastriti , an Albanian who subsequently became Archbishop Gregory IV of Athens . Archimandrite Grigor had recommended that the Bible be printed in a large typeface in two columns , one in Albanian and the other in modern Greek , because Albanians would rather read modern Greek than Koine .

On March 16 , 1824 Mr. Lowndes , the BFBS 's secretary in Corfu , sent a letter to the society in which he mentioned that the sum paid to Meksi for his work was 6 @,@ 000 piastras and that Archimandrite Grigor was paid 60 crowns . On September 5 , 1824 the Saint Matthew 's Gospel was published in Albanian . According to Lowndes ' letters , the Albanian community of Missolonghi was extremely excited when mass was said with a piece from Saint Matthew , as since its translation they had been impatient to hear it in Albanian . In July 1827 the form in which the first 500 copies of the New Testament were to be bound was decided in London . The entire edition amounted to 2 @,@ 000 copies .

Although Gjirokastriti 's edition of the New Testament was written in Albanian , it used the Greek alphabet . It is not known which alphabet Meksi used in his own manuscript .

The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople was not against the work of Meksi or the Bible Society at that time . On the contrary , for the translation the British missionaries successfully appealed to Gregory V and enlisted the help of an Orthodox bishop , Gjirokastriti , for the final edition of the New Testament in Albanian .

= = Greek War of Independence = =

Meksi was a member of the Filiki Etaireia , a secret society whose purpose was to overthrow Ottoman rule over the Balkans and to establish an independent Greek state . When the Greek War of Independence broke out in 1821 , after his translation had been completed , Meksi joined the Greeks in the Siege of Tripolitsa . Despite suffering from a serious bout of pneumonia , he continued to work as a physician during the war . He is also said to have taken part in the negotiations leading to an agreement proposed by Theodoros Kolokotronis that permitted the Albanians who were defending Tripolitsa to leave unharmed , an arrangement that helped the Greeks to capture the town from the Turks .

= = Legacy = =

Meksi did not live to see the 1827 publication of his translation of the New Testament ; he had died a bachelor six years earlier , at the age of about 51 . The first publication of a Bible translation from Greek to a modern Balkanic language , it ran to 2 @, @ 000 copies , a huge number for the time . It preceded the modern Bulgarian version by two years and the Romanian translation by twenty . A second edition was published in 1858 in Athens , but as it had not been revised by any native speakers of Albanian it was full of errors .

Meksi 's work was important for the development of written Albanian , and his endeavors strengthened the conviction that a stable Albanian alphabet had to be created . His translation served as the basis for Joseph Ritter von Xylander 's studies of the Albanian language , which definitively refuted the thesis that the language had a Tatar origin . Von Xylander concluded that Albanian had an Indo @-@ European root .

Two other international scholars also studied the Albanian language mainly based on Meksi 's translation of the New Testament : August Schleicher , who stated that his knowledge of the conjugation of Albanian verbs was based on Meksi 's work , and Johann Georg von Hahn an Austrian diplomat , philologist , and specialist in Albanian history , language , and culture , who translated the Bible into Gheg Albanian with the help of Kostandin Kristoforidhi .