

THE ALBANIAN LEXICON OF ARNOLD VON HARFF, 1497

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Of the national languages of Europe, Albanian is among the latest recorded. The earliest records of the language go back to the fifteenth century, preceding in date only the Baltic languages, which despite their archaic character were first recorded in the sixteenth century.

Before the appearance of the first Albanian book, the Liturgy of Gjon Buzuku, 1555, remnants of written Albanian are however rare, although there is reason to hope that more texts and glosses will come to light in the future. The liturgy itself has already been the subject of critical studies by Martin Camaj and by the late Eqrem Çabej, and need not be dealt with further here.

Of the records predating the liturgy, we may note the following:

1. a baptismal formula dating from 1462, traditionally thought to be the oldest Albanian text, found in the Laurentian Library (Ashburnham 1167) in Florence: *Unte paghesont premenit Atit et birit et spertit senit* 'I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.'
2. a short curse from the year 1483: *Dramburi te clofto gogle* 'May your mouth tremble.'
3. the so-called Easter Gospel, fifteen lines based on the Gospel of St. Matthew, in a Greek ms. (133) in the Ambrosian Library in Milan. The text is difficult to date. General consensus of opinion places it at the end of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century.
4. the Von Harff Lexicon, 1497, which comprises twenty-six words, eight phrases and twelve numbers, recorded by Arnold Von Harff, a German traveller on his way to the Holy Land.

The Von Harff Lexicon is the first substantial datable text of written Albanian. Arnold Von Harff was born about 1471 into a noble family of the Lower Rhineland (Harff on the Erft, northwest of Cologne). In the autumn of 1496 he set out on a journey, ostensibly a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which took him to Italy, down the Adriatic coast to Greece, Egypt, Arabia, Palestine, Asia Minor, and then back through central Europe to France and Spain. He returned to Cologne in the autumn of 1498 or 1499 and died in 1505.

He collected the Albanian material during a stop-over in the port of Durrës in the spring of 1497, as he was sailing aboard a merchant galley from Venice to Alexandria. The vessel also laid anchor in Ulcinj and Sazan.

Von Harff showed constant interest in foreign customs and languages during his travels, giving in addition to the Albanian, a short lexicon of words and phrases in Croatian, Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish, Hungarian, Basque and Breton. These constitute what one might call essential pocket vocabularies for travellers, usually including items of food, household and travel necessities, and useful phrases such as: "Good morning," "how much does this cost?" and "Woman, shall I sleep with you?"

The account of his journey was first published in 1860 by E. Von Groote and is considered one of the best representatives of the period of this genre of travel narrative which was very popular at the end of the Middle Ages. The text of the narrative is in Ripuarian (Lower Rhine) German and suffers from the usual erratic orthography of the time.

The Von Groote edition was based upon three manuscripts from the Harff family archives, the oldest of which was more or less contemporaneous with the author, although apparently not of his hand. The three manuscripts have since disappeared.

Indeed Schloss Harff and the whole village of Harff (Kreis Bergheim) have disappeared.

The site of Arnold Von Harff's ancestral home, having fallen victim to the mining industry around 1975, is now a gigantic coal-pit.

Of the eight extant manuscripts traced by Honemann in his article on the Von Harff manuscript tradition, six contain the Albanian lexicon. They are:

- A. Bonn. Universitätsbibliothek. cod. 447, f. 48 and 49 (dated 1591).
- B. Cologne. Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln. cod. W *382, f. 59 (16th century).
- C. Darmstadt. Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek. cod. 138, f. 38 (early 17th century).
- D. Giessen. Universitätsbibliothek. cod. 163, f. 45 (second half of the 16th century, 1582?).
- E. Munich. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. Cgm 2213/32, f. 49 (dated 1554).
- F. Trier. Stadtbibliothek. cod. 2424/2387 (fragments), f. 79 and 80 (16th century).

Given here is the lexicon, which I have numbered for the sake of convenience, in the Von Groote version, then a transposition of the Albanian text into standard modern Albanian and an English translation of the German text, and finally the variants from the six above mentioned mss.

Item van Dulcina zo Duratzo lxx mijlie

voeren wir gar mit boesen wyndt. dit is eyn groysse verstoerde stat van deme Turcken, yeztont vnderworffen den Venecianern. item dese stat licht in Albanijen dae sij ouch eyn eygen spraiche haynt, der man nyet wael geschrijuen en kan, as sij geyn eygen litter in deme lande en hauen. item van deser albanyescher spraecken hayn ich etzliche woert behalden, as mit namen sij hie vnden geschreuen staynt nae vnsz litteren zo schrijuen.

Item albanische spraiche

- 1. *boicke broyt*
- 2. *vene wijn*
- 3. *oie wasser*
- 4. *mische fleysch*
- 5. *jat kese*
- 6. *foeije eyer*
- 7. *oitter essich*
- 8. *poylle eyn henne*
- 9. *pyske vyssche*
- 10. *krup sals*
- 11. *myr goyt*
- 12. *kyckge buesse*
- 13. *megarune essen*
- 14. *pijne drincken*
- 15. *tauerne eyn wirthuys*
- 16. *geneyre eyn man*
- 17. *growa eyn frauwe*
- 18. *denarye wijsgelt*
- 19. *sto ja*
- 20. *jae neyn*

21. *criste* got
22. *dreck* der duuel
23. *kijrij* eyn kertz
24. *kale* eyn pert
25. *elbe* hauer
26. *fijet* slaeffen
27. *mirenestrasse* guden morgen
28. *myreprama* guden nacht
29. *meretzewen* guden daich
30. *ake ja kasse zet ve* wat haistu dat mir beuelt
31. *kess felgen gyo kaffs* wat gylt dat
32. *do daple* ich wyl it gelden
33. *laff ne kammijss* wessche mir mijn hempt
34. *ne kaffs* wie heyscht dat Tzellen
35. *nea* eyn
36. *dua* tzwey
37. *trij* drij
38. *quater* vier
39. *pessa* vunff
40. *jast* sees
41. *statte* seuen
42. *tette* acht
43. *nante* nuyne
44. *dieta* tzien
45. *nijtgint* hundred
46. *nemijgo* dusent

Item from Ulcinj to Durrës 70 miles

we travelled with a very bad wind. This is a great city ruined by the Turks, and now subject to the Venetians. Item this city lies in Albania, where they also have their own language, which cannot be written well, as they do not have their own letters in this country. Item I have noted down several words of this Albanian language, which are written below in our letters.

1. *bukë* bread
2. *verë* wine
3. *ujë* water
4. *mish* meat
5. *djathë* cheese
6. *ve* eggs
7. *uthull* vinegar
8. *pulë* a chicken
9. *peshk* fish
10. *kripë* salt
11. *mirë* good
12. *keq* bad
13. *për të ngrënë* to eat
14. *pijnë* to drink
15. *tavernë* a tavern

16. *një njeri* a man
17. *grua* a woman
18. *denar* money
19. *ashtu* yes
20. *jo* no
21. *Krisht* god
22. *dreq* the devil
23. *qiri* a candle
24. *kalë* a horse
25. *elb* oats
26. *fjetë* to sleep
27. *mirë ndeshë të rashë* good morning
28. *mirë mbrëma* good night
29. *mirë se vjen* good day
30. *a ke gjëkafshë të re* what do you have that I like
31. *qish vlen kjo kafshë* how much does that cost
32. *do ta blej* I'll buy it
33. *laj një këmishë* wash my shirt
34. *një kafshë* what is that called Numbers
35. *një* one
36. *dy* two
37. *tri* three
38. *katër* four
39. *pesë* five
40. *gjashtë* six
41. *shtatë* seven
42. *tetë* eight
43. *nëntë* nine
44. *dhjetë* ten
45. *njëqind* hundred
46. *njëmijë* thousand

Variants

1. A. *boncko*, B. *boicke*, C. *vocko*, D. *boicke*, E. *boicke*, F. *bouke*.
2. A. *vene*, B. *vene*, C. *vene*, D. *vene*, E. *vene*, F. *vene*.
3. A. *oie*, B. *oie*, C. *die*, D. *oie*, E. *oir*, F. *oie*.
4. A. *mische*, B. *mysche*, C. *mischa*, D. *mische*, E. *mische*, F. *mische*.
5. A. *jatt*, B. *jat*, C. *jat*, D. *jatt*, E. *jat*, F. *jat*.
6. A. *fogie*, B. *foeye*, C. *fogie*, D. *foeye*, E. *ffoeye*, F. *foeye*.
7. A. *oyter*, B. *oyter*, C. *oyter*, D. *oyter*, E. *oitter*, F. *oitter*.
8. A. *pollio*, B. *poyllle*, C. *poillo*, D. *poyllle*, E. *poyllle*, F. *poille*.
9. A. *piske*, B. *pyske*, C. *piske*, D. *piske*, E. *pyske*, F. *pyske*.
10. A. *krup*, B. *krup*, C. *krup*, D. *krup*, E. *krup*, F. *krup*.
11. A. *myr*, B. *myr*, C. *myr*, D. *mir*, E. *myr*, F. *myr*.
12. A. *kuckge*, B. *kyckge*, C. *ricke*, D. *kickge*, E. *kyckge*, F. *kyckge*.
13. A. *megarane*, B. *megarune*, C. *megarane*, D. *megarune*, E. *megarime?*, F. *megarune*.
14. A. *pine (pitte?)*, B. *pyne*, C. *pirce*, D. *pine*, E. *pyne*, F. *pijnn*.

15. A. *tauerne*, B. *tauerne*, C. *tauerne*, D. *tauerne*, E. *tauerne*, F. *tauerne*.
16. A. *geneire*, B. *geneyre*, C. *genere*, D. *geneyre*, E. *geneyre*, F. *ge[]yre*.
17. A. *grolla*, B. *grolba*, C. *grolla*, D. *grolba*, E. *grolba*, F. *grolta*.
18. A. *denarie*, B. *denarie*, C. *denarie*, D. *denarie*, E. *denarie*, F. *denarie*.
19. A. *oto*, B. *sto*, C. *oto*, D. *oto*, E. *sto*, F. *sto*.
20. A. *ja*, B. *ja*, C. *ja*, D. *ja*, E. *ja*, F. *ja*.
21. A. *cristo*, B. *chrste*, C. *christo*, D. *criste*, E. *chrste*, F. *criste*.
22. A. *dreck*, B. *dreck*, C. *dreck*, D. *dreck*, E. *dreck*, F. *dreck*.
23. A. *kern*, B. *kyrn*, C. *kern*, D. *kirn*, E. *kyry* (*kyrn?*), F. *kyrij*.
24. A. *kale*, B. *kale*, C. *kole*, D. *kale*, E. *kale*, F. *kale*.
25. A. *elbe*, B. *elbe*, C. *elbe*, D. *elbe*, E. *elbe*, F. *elbe*.
26. A. *fiet*, B. *fiet*, C. *fiet*, D. *fiet*, E. *ffyet*, F. *fyet*.
27. A. *mirene strasse*, B. *mirenestrasse*, C. *mirene strasse*, D. *mirenestrasse*, E. *myrenestrasse*, F. *mirenestrasse*.
28. A. *mire prama*, B. *mireprama*, C. *mira prama*, D. *mire prama*, E. *myre prama*, F. *mireprama*.
29. A. *mire zebben*, B. *miretzebben*, C. *mire zebben*, D. *mire zebben*, E. *myre tzewen*, F. *miretzebben*.
30. A. —, B. *ake ja kasse zet ve*, C. —, D. *ake ia kasse zet ve*, E. *a ke ja kasse zet ve*, F. *a ke ja kasse ze[]*.
31. A. —, B. *kes felgen gyo kaffs*, C. —, D. *kes felgen gio kaffs*, E. *kes felgen gyo kaffs*, F. *kes felgen gyo kaffs*.
32. A. —, B. *do da ple*, C. —, D. *do duple*, E. *do da ple*, F. *do da ple*.
33. A. —, B. *laff ne kammyss*, C. —, D. *laff ne cammis*, E. *laff ne kammyss*, F. *laff ne kammyss*.
34. A. —, B. *ne kaffs*, C. —, D. *ne kaffs*, E. *ne kaffs*, F. *ne kaffs*.
35. A. *nea*, B. *nea*, C. *nea*, D. *nea*, E. *nea*, F. *nea*.
36. A. *dua*, B. *dua*, C. *dua*, D. *dua*, E. *dua*, F. *dua*.
37. A. *tri*, B. *try*, C. *tri*, D. *try*, E. *try*, F. *trii*.
38. A. *quater*, B. *quater*, C. *quater*, D. *quater*, E. *quater*, F. *quater*.
39. A. *pessa*, B. *pessa*, C. *pessa*, D. *pessa*, E. *pessa*, F. *pessa*.
40. A. *jaff*, B. *jasta*, C. *jaff*, D. *jast*, E. *jast*, F. *jast*.
41. A. *satte*, B. *statte*, C. *statte*, D. *statte*, E. *statte*, F. *statte*.
42. A. *tette*, B. *tette*, C. *tette*, D. *tette*, E. *tette*, F. *tette*.
43. A. *nantte*, B. *naute*, C. *nantte*, D. *nante*, E. *nante*, F. *nante*.
44. A. *dieta*, B. *dieta*, C. *dieta*, D. *dieta*, E. *dieta*, F. *dieta*.
45. A. *nitgint*, B. *nytgint*, C. *nitgind*, D. *nytgynt*, E. *nytgint*, F. *nytgint*.
46. A. *nemygo*, B. *nemygo*, C. *nemigo*, D. *nemygo*, E. *nemygo*, F. *nemygo*.

Of the six extant versions, B, E and F would appear to be the earliest and generally as reliable as (and therefore roughly contemporary with ?) the Von Groote version. Mss. E and F preserve the Von Groote word order intact.

The Von Groote version is the only one to have the original form *growa* (item 17); all extant mss. containing a misreading of the *w*. Mss. B, E and F on the other hand preserve item 32 as three words, which Von Groote gives as two, and ms. F preserves the form *bouke* (item 1), which corresponds more closely to what Von Harff must have heard (cf. mod. Alb. *bukë*).

It may be noted in passing that ms. C, which is obviously much later, is related to ms. A; the similarities being: a) the *o* misreading of the endings of items 1, 8 and 21, b) *oto* for *sto*, here

also in D (item 19), and c) the absence of items 30, 31, 32, 33 and 34.

Von Harff imposed his native German orthography on Albanian which of course could not take account of the Albanian phonemes differing from the German. His transcription of Albanian is however no worse than that of other texts of the period, including those written presumably by native speakers. The Gheg (northern) dialect, which he would have encountered in Durrës, can be seen in items 2, 10 and 13.

Remarks on individual items

- 1 As mentioned above, the Trier fragments (ms. F) record the form *bouke* ‘bread.’
- 2 *vene* ‘wine’ is the non-rhotacised Gheg form corresponding to standard modern Albanian *verë*
- 10 *krup* ‘salt’ comes closer to the Gheg form *krypë* than to the standard *kripë*.
- 13 *megarune* ‘to eat,’ here transposed into standard *për të ngrënë*, is the Gheg infinitive *me ngrânë*.
- 14 *pijne* ‘drink’ is a participial form of the verb *pi*; cf. standard 3pp. pres. indic. *pijnë*.
- 16 *geneyre* corresponds to standard *një njeri* ‘a (one) man.’
- 17 *growa* ‘a woman’ is the simple indefinite form.
- 18 *denarye* is of course the money of the period; cf. the modern Yugoslav currency. For the Croatian, however, Von Harff gives *benese*.
- 19 *sto*, standard *ashtú*, more accurately ‘thus’, is used here for standard *po* ‘yes’.
- 20 As all six extant mss. have *ja* at variance with the Von Groote reading, we may safely assume this to be the original form.
- 21 *criste* is of course Christ.
- 22 *dreck* is the indefinite form.
- 23 Although Von Harff specifies ‘a candle,’ at least four of the six extant mss. give a variant with *n*, which occurs in the standard plural *qirinj*.
- 25 *elbe* is actually barley, not oats.
- 26 *fijet* is a non-infinitive form of the irregular verb *fle*; cf. participial form *fjetur* and 3ps. optative *fjettë*.
- 27 *mirenestrasse* is used here for standard *mirë mëngjës* ‘good morning,’ cf. standard *mirë ndesh të rasha* ‘to go to meet someone.’
- 29 *meretzewen* is more accurately ‘welcome.’
- 30 *ake ja kasse zet ve*, literally ‘do you have something else (new) ?’ *ve* is probably *re* ‘new.’ The German text would be standard ‘Was hast du, das mir gefällt?’ (cf. Dutch *bevallen*) used here by Von Harff for bartering probably. Letts wrongly translated ‘What are your orders?’
- 31 *kess felgen gyo kaffs*, literally ‘What is this thing (animal) worth?’
- 33 *laf ne kammijss*, literally ‘Wash a shirt.’ *Laff* comes close to the standard 2ps. pres. optative *lafsh*; which Von Harff would have transcribed **lafsh*, being then in the mss. easily confused with *laff*. The optative mood is however usually restricted to congratulatory wishes or curses.
- 34 *ne kaffs*, literally ‘a thing, an animal.’ Here we may imagine Von Harff pointing to something to elicit ‘What is that called?’ and receiving an answer rather than a question.
- 38 *quater*, the *u* is simply the orthographic interference of Latin which Von Harff is known to have spoken.

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