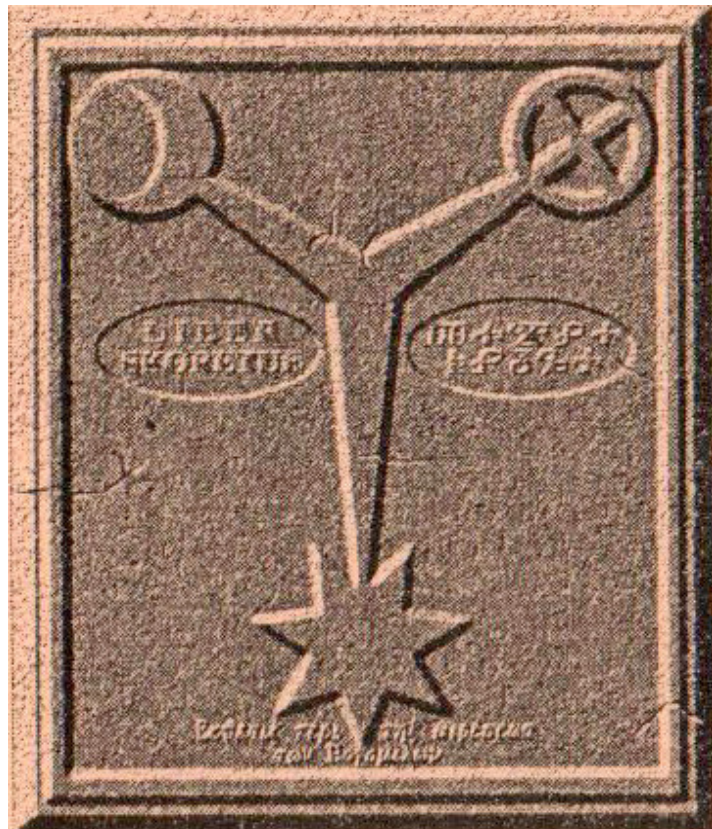


Basil Chulev

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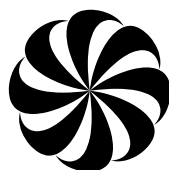
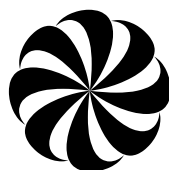
THE BOGOMILS IN MACEDONIA - MEDIEVAL ROOTS
OF PROTESTANTISM, RENAISSANCE AND SOCIALIST
MOVEMENTS
THE SECRET BOOK OF BOGOMILS



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Skopje, Macedonia 2015

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Abstract:

Acts of Cathar Assembly, held in 1167 in San Felix de Carmen, near Toulous, France, represent an important historic source when the question of existence of heretic church organizations is considered. Pope Nikita of Constantinople, who belonged to heretic Bogomil church of *Dragovitia* (in Aegean Macedonia), known for its strict dualistic orientation, chaired the assembly. There he speaks of the existence of churches of *Romania* (i.e. Eastern Roman empire), *Dragometia*, *Melingia*, *Bulgaria* and *Dalmatia*, and points out that they are separated from the churches of old Rome and Constantinopolitana Nova Roma, and that they are strong and live in peace.

Introduction: The mediaeval heresies were convulsive reaction on the feudal oppression and widespread corruption of the Christian church. When Constantin I the Great made the Christianity official religion of the Roman empire he couldn't predict that the Christian church will become one with the power of the government. At first it was meant to be in the service of the state and its supreme ruler, the emperor, but the things went wrong, for the rulers and for the Christianity as well. Further, following the division of the Roman empire in Eastern and Western parts, the church refined its political doctrine, and developed its structure in a way that could penetrate and absorb the function of the government to its purposefulness. Thus abandoning its own foundations based on the teachings as recorded in the Old and New Testament.

In the fifth century the western Roman empire crawled and was sacked by the invading barbarian tribes. What happened after was that the new order emerged from the rubble - the Roman popes. The church profited by the void of power created after the destruction of Rome and its emperors. Further, they combined the previous authority of *Caesar*, who in the old empire was called *Pontifex Maximus* (the Pontiff), with the authority of Christ, using the title *Vicarius Christi* (the 'Vicar of Christ') meaning "*the substitute of Christ*." Thus, by entitling themselves as "*Christ substitutes*" on earth, seemingly enthroned by God himself, they started to exert limitless power over their subjects. Through the Papacy, the claims of spiritual power over heaven and hell combined with their earthly power as supreme ruling institution rapidly grew, and the church became an entity which enthrones and deposes rulers, castigates and condemns people, and exerts tyranny through religion in the name of god.

The situation was similar in the Eastern Romeian part, with its holy see in Constantinopolitana Nova Roma (the City of Constantin 'New Rome'), where the church became the omnipotent executive body of the ruler's power. The only difference here was that the *Pontifex Maximus* remained the emperor, and unlike the new *Holy Roman Empire* on the west, he remained the bearer of the authority of Christ as well. The Eastern Romeian emperors had uninterrupted lineage of dynasties, since the old Roman empire, and like in the old times of late antiquity here the Romeian emperor was the pope and the holy king, supreme ruler with claims of spiritual power over heaven and hell, which legitimated his undisputed and limitless earthly power. The church was only second in command and in emperor's service with pledge of allegiance, in order to guarantee the obedience of the oppressed plebeian flock.

East or west, with Romeian emperor or Roman pope, the church effectively silenced those who opposed any of its corrupt doctrines or dirty practices, and truly became an undisputed and exclusive religious enterprise of the Middle Ages. Together with the local feudal rulers, they gathered in ruthless exploitation around their helpless prey, impetuous of human suffering and misfortune. The perversion of the faith that followed was only result of the general alienation of the Christian church from the human being. Various 'heretics' rebelled against this despotic behavior, both by the feudal rulers and high religious offices that entered the political sphere. Of course, there were also heresies that dealt exclusively with the internal dogmas of the Christianity, like for example the *Arianism*.¹ But this heresy, of the Alexandrian priest Arius (lat. *Arius*; AD 250- 336), was only inflicting with the divinity of Christ, regardless of the believers life conditions.

Nevertheless, other heresies stood in defense of the common citizens and peasantry, who became helpless victims of both the feudal rulers and Christian church. Above all, they organized themselves in religious movements, because, essentially, the religion was the only mass-medium practiced by all the people in those times. In their antagonistic effort to withstand against the cleric tyrants, on the whole, they were religious-fashioned movements. Of all heretic movements in Europe first appeared the movement of the *Bogomils*, i.e. *Bogomilism*, a mass anti-clerical, religious-socialist group. Born in Macedonia in the middle of 10th century this dualistic movement spread very quick across the Balkans and further in Europe. In an effort to steer their new credo away from the corruption of the church, Bogomils were able to constitute their own religious doctrine, beliefs and practices. They had no special orders and priests, nor complex institutional hierarchy. Instead, they elected spiritual guides among one another. Bogomils rejected all material aspects of church service (e.g. church buildings), baptism, icons, wealth. Prayers and chanting hymns, the sacraments and ceremonies were not to be part of any public religious service or institution. Rather, the Bogomils felt that prayers were private matter and only to be said within the confines of private houses. The Bogomils rejected monasticism, and were iconoclasts. Finally, the Bogomils believed that God (not Jesus) would execute the final judgment.

¹ Arianism maintained that the Son of God was created by the Father and was therefore neither coeternal with the Father, nor consubstantial.

But, because their rebellion endangered the wealth, luxury and power of their oppressors, they were incessantly persecuted and condemned to death by the christian church and ruling monarchies. Severely chased and equally anathematized by both Eastern-Rightfaithful and Western-Catholic church, the Bogomils were hunted like dangerous animals. The centennial onslaught that followed culminated in western Europe, with the creation of *Inquisition*, a special court designed to punish the followers of the theories considered perilous for the powerful church institution. As such it was a threat to the catholic church and after numerous failed attempts to sway Cathar followers away by persuasion, Pope Innocent III sponsored a crusade to put down the heretic faith in 1209. The bloody campaign lasted for 50 years and was led by French warlord Simon de Montfor who also perished during this massacre.

The Bogomil doctrine in the centuries to follow gave the birth of many other anti-clerical and social movements. The Bosnian *Patareni*, Croatian *Glagolitic Benedictans*, French *Cathars* and *Albigenses*, etc. are only some of the mediaeval heresies that were initiated by Bogomilism. They later resulted in the *Protestant Reformation* of the 16th century – a religious, political, intellectual and cultural upheaval that splintered the Catholic Europe, setting in place the structures and beliefs that would define the continent in the modern era.

BOGOMILISM - THE ORIGIN OF THE PROTESTANTISM AND SOCIALIST MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE

No event in the mediaeval history of the Balkans has attracted more interest and investigation than the Bogomil spiritual movement. Originating in Macedonia about the middle of 10th century it spread to many other European countries (especially in the Balkans) and for five centuries shook the whole feudal order in Europe. The Bogomil movement is one of the most important and interesting cultural and social manifestations in the Middle Ages. As a socio-religious movement, Bogomilism was a real heresy in the eyes of the official church, which regarding it as its major adversary took severe measures to suppress it. These were aimed above all at destroying of all the most important sources for the ideas of the Bogomils, so that historians have been obliged to obtain information about them from indirect sources, namely from the polemical acts of their bitterest enemies.

Manifestations of the spirit and intellect of man like that of the Bogomils, whose doctrine shook the mediaeval social relations to their foundations, are rare in the history of human progress and thought. The official church was seriously hit, because she was the principal guardian of the feudal order, and found great difficulty in the fight against the Bogomil teaching, which preached freedom of conscience, brotherhood and equality among all people and all nations, that the kingdom of God and perpetual peace might be realized on earth. The Bogomils repudiated all the mysticism and manipulative symbolism of the official church and brought real faith to the feelings and understanding of the people. As all men were equal in their eyes, no one had the right to command others, his equals, his brothers. And therefore every power contrary to the teaching of Christ on equality and brotherhood must be abolished.

As the bottom line of Bogomil gnosticism was introduced the principle of unity in nature and the inviolability of laws; that is to say, at its basis there is the law regarding the correlation between the cause and effect-fact. This shows that priest Bogomil and his school did not remain outside the influence of classical philosophy: he follows in the footsteps of Pitagora (lat. *Pythagoras*), who taught that there is a general order in the world, and also Aristotel, who showed that everything in nature has a beginning and an end, a cause and an effect. As a dualistic doctrine, Bogomilism is akin to the anthropomorphism of the apostles, the spiritualism of the Middle Ages, and the mythology of the ancient pantheons.

All these premises of Bogomil teaching concerned the very basics of the mediaeval politico-social reality, so that the leaders of feudal society were directly hit and threatened by it as regards their material interests. These immediate allusions to the concrete injustice of the feudal reality also contained the fundamental principle of the dualistic teaching of the Bogomils on the existence of the two opposing forces: light and darkness, good and evil, the antagonism between the God and the Devil.

Since the whole cultural and social life of the Middle Ages was governed by the church, the new teaching of the Bogomils was bound to assume a religious form. The Bogomils

knew that, with their adversary's weapons, they would unmask all its greatest weakness more quickly and more easily. The adherents to the doctrine of the Bogomilism were divided into various categories: the *perfect* (lat. *perfectii*; i.e. the *babuni* – 'elder leaders'), the semi-perfect, and simple hearers. The "*perfecti*" couldn't get married, nor have property or money, and they sacrificed themselves for the salvation of the world. They campaigned against universal violence, preaching perpetual peace. Accordingly, the christian church launched crusades against them.

Looked at in this way, Bogomilism was essentially a particular religious sect which the Christian church proposed officially for its own improvement. With its principles, its clear straightforward ideas, Bogomilism was a completely original social and cultural teaching, which arose out of the feudal and social conditions of mediaeval life in Macedonia. Then, from being a religious sect in opposition, Bogomilism became to a large extent a movement for social tendency, it was quickly able to attract a mass of followers among the lowest classes, especially among the peasants and, with its preaching of equality and its struggle against feudal abuses, it incited them to open rebellion against the feudal power. Thus Bogomilism prepared the way for many peasants revolts not only in Macedonia and the Balkans, but also in the rest of Europe.

The Bogomils proposed to expropriate the lands and all the goods of the monasteries, the churches and the feudal landlords, and also to abolish the differences between the classes and distribute private property fairly. By thus safeguarding and defending the interests of the masses, Bogomilism appeared as one of the most advanced social and cultural movements.

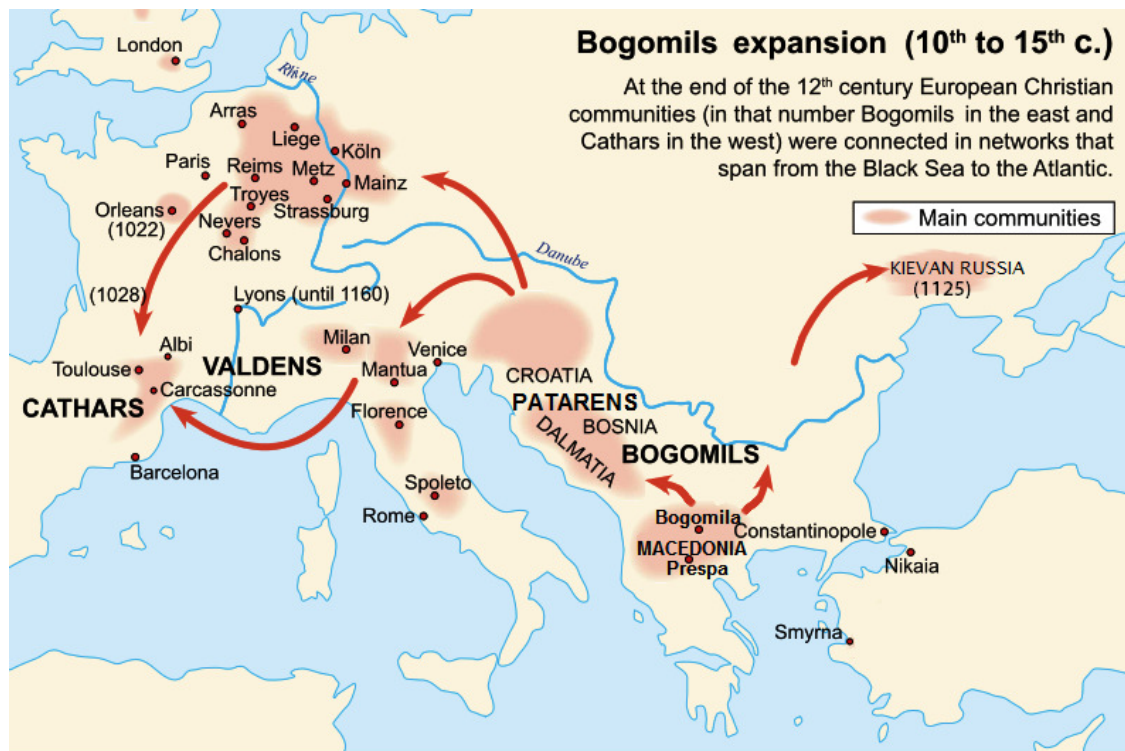
On the basis of the scanty written sources of the Bogomils and particularly of their opponents, the prevailing opinion among scholars is that this movement began in Macedonia in AD 935. According to some historians, in order to establish the name of the founder of the Bogomil heresy, it is necessary to set out from the "Discourses" of the elder priest Kozma, who, right at the beginning of his book, says: "*It came to pass in the days of king Petar that a priest appeared in the 'Bulgarian world' called **Bogomil** (i.e. "God-beloved")², but who should more correctly be called 'Bogonemil' (i.e. "God-not-beloved"), since he was the first to preach heresy on 'Bulgarian soil'...*". We know that king Petar reigned from 927 to 969. As regards presbyter's Kozma's statement that Bogomilism began "*on Bulgarian soil*" – it has been definitely established that the Macedonian regions formed part of the kingdom of Petar, and therefore Macedonia in that time was a subject state under Bulgar occupation, as it had been under Roman rule before.

Who really was this priest Bogomil? Was he a myth or an historical person?

² Etymologically the name *Bogomil* means "dear to God", and is a compound of the Macedonic words for "*god*" (in plain Macedonian: *bogo) and "*dear/beloved*" (in plain Macedonian: *milъ). From there the common Macedonic personal names: *Bogomil* (i.e. 'God-beloved'), *Bogoslav* (i.e. 'God-worshiper'), *Bogoya* (i.e. 'Godly'), *Božidar* (i.e. 'God's-gift'), *Božin* (i.e. 'God's'); and common Macedonic surnames as: *Bogoevski*, *Bogevski* and *Božinovski* (i.e. "God's"), *Bogomilski*, etc.

He was born in one of the towns or villages of South-west Macedonia of a noble Macedonian family. Priest Bogomil was a very cultured person for that period; he knew all the arts and sciences that the schools of Romeian empire could give such a student in the Middle Ages. According to Anna Comnena, the Bogomils had a plain, austere outward appearance: they had long hair, wore the toga and also the religious hat, drown down over their eyes. Bogomil himself was of a severe countenance and very simply dressed. His sermons created a tremendous impression among people. Very soon he was surrounded by a great number of devoted followers, who traveled throughout the Macedonian Peninsula preaching the new doctrines.

The teaching of the Bogomils appeared first in Macedonia, because there the feudal oppression was most severe, and the people were determined to free themselves from their cruel sufferings as soon as possible. Hence the Bogomil movement found the soil most favorable for its growth here. In Macedonia, which was under Bulgar occupation, Bogomilism took advantage of the internal differences in the feudal order, introduced by the Bulgarian state and supported by the official Christian church with See in Constantinople. From Macedonia it soon spread through the Balkans, then to Servia, Dalmatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Kievan Russia, and until the early 13th century there was a network of Bogomils and followers of similar philosophies, including *Paulicians* and *Cathars*, that stretched from the Black Sea to the Atlantic Ocean.





Left: A Cathar coin found in Montségur, France

Moreover, some Macedonian place-names show that Macedonia really was the centre of Bogomilism. We may cite for example, the village of *Bogomila*, the mountain *Babuna*, (the name by which the elder leaders of the movement were called in the earliest time). Also the names of the villages *Bogdanci*, *Bogoslov*, *Kalughertsi* and *Negilovo* were in one or another way connected with the work of the Bogomils in those parts. According to the common tradition, priest Bogomil's place of birth was in the village of *Bogomila* (south of Veles), which was called after him, and his grave and a small church in its vicinity, near the so called 'church-yard' (mkd. *Tsrkvishte*), served as a house of prayer of Bogomils. It is believed that during the persecutions priest Bogomil's tomb was used as a shelter for followers. The village is located in the area of Azot on the river *Babuna* (the right tributary of Vardar), west of Veles. On the other hand, the name has been derived from the same anthroponym, the name of the founder of the doctrine, priest Bogomil; while from the semantic point of view *Bogomila* it has the colloquial meaning – 'village of God'.³

Thus the politico-social and economic conditions of the Macedonian people about the middle of the 10th century, namely the feudal-ecclesiastical exploitation in the medieval Bulgar kingdom, were the main cause, as well as the precondition, why this religious and social teaching appeared first in Macedonia, from where it spread throughout Europe. The distance of the Macedonian regions from the Bulgar capital further aggravated the abuses of the ecclesiastical and feudal overlords so that the socio-economic state of the Macedonian people under their occupation became steadily worse. Macedonian historian Dragan Tashkovski wrote: "*In the internal structure of Macedonia a sharp class*

³ Beside the *Bogomili* and *Babuni* in Macedonia there were several other names for the members of this religious movement – *Patareni*, *Kutugeri* (in BiH) and *Cathars*, *Valdenses*, *Albigenses* and *Perfecti* (in Italy and France).

The meaning of the term *babun* basically is – 'a man with a wrinkled face', i.e. elder Bogomil. It is basically acceptable to assume that the term *babun* was used for old, spiritual fathers. This appellation is evident in many toponym-markers in Macedonia: the Mt. Babuna (a mountain between Prilep and Veles), the river Babuna, the area called Babuna in the western part of Klepa mountain, which is situated along the basin of the river Babuna, the village of Babuna, at the mouth of the river Babuna in Vardar, etc.

distinction was applied. The state, a prey to the most tremendous corruption, intensified the class differences to an extreme degree. The people, deprived of land and without means of subsistence, were ripe for rebellion. It needed only spark for the great conflagration to break out. It was not long in coming and the fire spread in Macedonia in the regions where the exploitation was harshest. Then the protest and revolt of the people appeared under the name of Bogomilism."

Regarding the appearance of Bogomilism in Macedonia, we learn much from the book on the life of St. Clement Ohridski⁴ written by archbishop Theophylact, who relates how Clement, not long before his death "was called upon by the people of Ohrid to drive out of Macedonia the wicked heresy" which had spread so quickly among the people. St. Clement was considered by the people of Ohrid as a holy man, protector of the city and its surroundings; so it is not surprising that Theophylact wrote in this book that the people called upon their own saints to help them. It is highly probable that the official church, taking advantage of this excessive devotion of the people of Ohrid to St. Clement, used his name against the Bogomils, whose teaching had been so well received by the masses. Their denial of the value of oaths, and the rejection, at least in theory, of capital punishment, rendered impotent the basis of the Christian state in the eyes of many devoted Christians.

Spreading rapidly across the Balkans and Eastern-Roman empire, Bogomilism soon became a serious problem and a real danger to the governments in the west too. Among other things, it threatened to raise the Macedonic population in full-blown revolt against the foreign oppression. For this reason, Bulgarian kingdom and the Eastern-Roman empire, although mortal enemies, took joint action to suppress the Bogomil movement, as is clearly shown by the letter which Theophylact, the patriarch of Constantinopolitana Nova Roma (eng. *Constantinople*) send to king Petar of Bulgaria, instigating him to take a decisive action against the Bogomils and eliminate them as quick as possible. The acts of cruelty and monstrosities that were inflicted on the Bogomils are clearly illustrated by many documents: "*But those who persist in this evil and feel no need to repent Holy Church ... the civil law provides death penalty for them.*" The fact that the death penalty was actually applied in an inquisitional way is proved by written documents, including the book "Naratio de Bogomils" by Evthymius Zygavenus, an ecclesiastical writer who gives the clearest evidence of these lamentable facts. Presbyter Kozma rightly stressed that the Bogomils "had suffered in thousands," and this proves that their numbers were really impressive.

The revolt instigated by the Bogomils reached its peak in the *Komitopuli* rebellion (969-971), which marked the rise of the second Macedonic empire, after the one of Alexander the Great some 1300 years before. That Bogomilism had distinct features of a liberation movement is supported by the fact that the komitopuli (lat. *comites*) David, Moysey, Aron and Samoil, sons of the komitai Nikola, accepted Bogomilism and began a rebellion in 869, resulting in breaking Macedonia free from the foreign occupation, establishing the second great Macedonic state. After the victory of the komitopuli and the establishment

⁴ Ohridski - 'of Ohrid' in plain Macedonian.

of a Macedonian kingdom, the Bogomils ceased to verbally attack the upper Macedonian classes - the king, royal officials and high clergy, and allied with them, although Samoil's state was as feudal as those before him. There is a simple explanation for the sympathy of Tsar Samoil toward the Bogomils and their participation in his rebellion - the Bogomils were the only organized anti-Byzantine party in Macedonia with a clear Macedonic orientation. It is interesting that the rebellion of the Macedonians broke out in the region where Bogomilism was strongest, in the territory defined by the triangle of the Vardar River, Lake Ohrid and Mt. Shar.

Bogomils performed real patriotic deeds and gave their assistance to Tsar Samoil when he and his brothers started the revolt against the feudal yoke of Bulgars and Romeians from Constantinopolitana Nova Roma. During his forty-years reign in Macedonia he incorporated Bogomil movement in the reformed Macedonian church, with the See in Ohrid and Prespa, and allowed them to live freely in his empire that stretched from the Adriatic to the Black Sea and from Thessaly to Danube. The power of his Macedonian state was largely due to the support of Bogomils. Moreover, the Bogomil movement in Macedonia also had clear anti-Bulgar and anti-Romeian character. But, the acceptance of this popular form of christian religion by Samoil is also one of the reasons why his empire was finally defeated - Eastern Romeian and Western Roman Church made desperate effort to crush his state that officialized the Bogomilism. The measures taken by them and their Bulgar suzerains against this "evil heresy" were very severe.

The patriotic role of the Macedonian Bogomils continued even after Tsar Samoil's state fell in 1018 and was re-occupied by Eastern Romeian empire once again. The Bogomil movement was particularly strong from the 12th to the 13th century, when it spread to many countries across Europe. It is noted from the Eastern Romeian chronicles that the Bogomilism movement reached its peak during the reign of Romeian dynasty of Comneni. It is definitely known that in the 12th century one babun (monk-bishop) of the Bogomils, Nasaria, took the Secret Book of the Bogomils to Lombardy and gave it to the followers there.

Acts of Cathar Assembly, held in 1167 in San Felix de Carmen, near Toulous, France, represent an important historic source when the question of existence of heretic church organizations is considered. Pope Nikita of Constantinople, who belonged to heretic Bogomil church of Dragovitia (in Aegean Macedonia), known for its strict dualistic orientation, chaired the assembly. There he speaks of the existence of churches of Romania (i.e. Eastern Roman empire), Dragometia, Melingia, Bulgaria and Dalmatia, and points out that they are separated from the churches of old Rome and Constantinopolitana Nova Roma, and that they are strong and live in peace.

Thus, by the end of the 12th century, Bogomil movement first reached Bosnia, and its followers there, known as *Patareni* and *Kutugeri*, appeared during the reign of Ban Kulin (1180-1204). There are controversial opinions concerning the rite orientation of Bosnian Church of that time, but in the official science the opinion which prevails is that it was a dualistic institution, which had similar tendencies to Bogomil movement in questions of theology and dogmatism. Central and South-West Bosnia with their specific features

represent transitive territory for the Bogomilism. The records of Pope John XXII in his writings to prince Stephen of Bosnia, testify warning of gathering “heretics”, who were migrating throughout the province of Herzegovina.

In Bosnia they produced the cultural phenomenon of grave stones, so called *stećci*, which apparent connection with the esoteric doctrine of Bogomilism and Patareni/Cathars movement is more than obvious. There were two stone-carving art schools on the territory of Bosnia: in East-Hercegovina and East-Bosnia (sarcophaguses with floral and sun motives, etc.). According to the statistics the most numerous necropolises with *stećci* (2000-3000 pieces) are in the territories of Nevesinje, Konjic, Rogatica, Trebinje, Stolac, Ludmer, Livno, and almost half of the inscriptions come from those areas.



The vicinity of Dubrovnik to Trebinje might have dictated the development of the region, the character of population, its culture and religious inclination, in accordance with the social and political situation. These circumstances directed the line of movement of the

Secret Book, as an area which offered favorable conditions for its dispersion and transition.

Bogomilism spread further through the foundation of Dalmatian heretic church – due to the vicinity of extremely strong Bosnian Bogomil centers, and also because strong trading connections between Macedonia, Bosnia and Dalmatia, where the route of movement of Cathars and dualists can be followed in the period of the year 1250. Although the influence of the Split archbishopric, which gained its primacy during the time of king Tomislav (the beginning of 10th century) on basis of historic right, was also very strong, it narrows its jurisdiction during the 11th and 12th century, when the influence of Hungarian church rises, as well as that of Zagreb, Zadar and Dubrovnik archbishoprics.

Nevertheless, Split as an important political, trading, diplomatic and communicational centre of medieval period fulfilled the role of a bridge for goods and religious movements from East to West. Many Bogomil followers founded their churches on the numerous Adriatic islands, in order to avoid persecutions by the church of Rome.



Above: **The Bogomilism diaspora in northern Italy at the end of the 12th century**

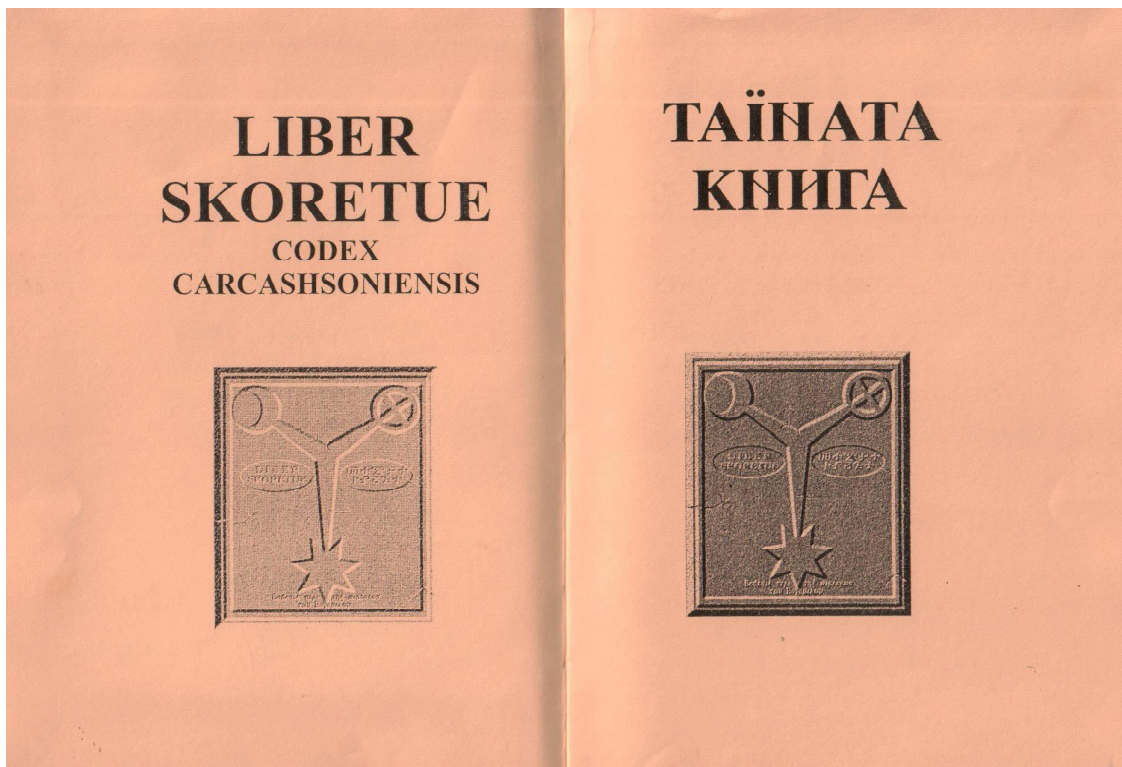
Eckbert von Schönau provides the first recorded uses of the term *Cathari*, denouncing Gnostic heretics from Köln in 1181: "*Hos nostra germania catharos appellat.*"

Admitting that Cathars movement in Albi was very strong between 1185 and 1227, Ellie Grif says that it is still not possible to conclude that in those places Cathars were numerous or a majority because there are no evidence of that. Cathar bishops Bernard Oliba and Aymeric of Collet were witnessed preaching and organizing hierarchy in Lombardy around 1272-1273. For the time being it can only be given a relative picture of the number or of the Cathars strength. This point of view can be broadened by a dynamic examination of Cathar movements in Octicania in Northern Italy, especially in Lombardy, which became a promised land to heretics after the fall of Montségur in 1244. In the second book of Inquisition Gerard mentions '*ductores hereticorum*', as well as names of people whom those leaders transferred from Octicania through the Mediterranean Alps, Nice and Col de Tend to Roccavionea, and from there to the valley of Cuneo, known as *Introitis Lombardiae*. This is the evidence of living and dynamic connections of Cathars in the region of Octicania and Lombardia. On the eve of the *Albigensian Crusade*, there were six bishoprics: Agen, Lombers, St. Paul, Cabaret, Servian et Montsegur. Among the seats of the deacons were Moissac, Cordes, Toulouse, Puylaurens, Avignonet, Fanjeaux, Montréal, Carcassonne, Mirepoix, Le Bézu, Puilaurens, Peyrepertuse, Quéribus, Tarascon-sur-Ariège.

Recently Borst found out that in the radically dualistic Octicania by the end of the 13th century, the doctrines of ancient-bogomil-moderate dualism often appeared, and that Italian Cathars envoys often visited their mother bishoprics in Macedonia, which also proves their frequent relations in the later periods. This on the other hand supports the relevance of the idea of continuous transfer of ideas in the medieval period.

THE SECRET BOOK OF BOGOMILS

Many rulers and enlightened nobles had embraced the Bogomil teachings and were sympathetic toward the humanism and progressive ideas spread by Bogomilism. Starting with their acceptance as official religion during the rule of Tsar Samoil in Macedonia, their thoughts were written and transmitted to followers in other places and countries. It has been discovered that the famous *Novgorod Pages* are the remains of the Macedonian Imperial Gospel from the 10th century, probably sent by Samoil together with other books. The unquestionable relationship between the 11th century Russian manuscripts with the 10th century Ohrid Glagolitic version, and the Preslav manuscripts as well, provides the basic information about the formation of the Old Russian orthography on the foundations of the Macedonian Bogomil tradition.



The Secret Book, a product of the medieval theosophy, also known in the literature as *Gospel of John*, belongs to apocryphal literature with apocalyptic and visionary orientation. The content of *The Secret Book* implies heretical elements, mainly typical for dualistic doctrines and especially for the doctrine of Bogomilism. In its content it describes the prehistory of creation of the world, the creation itself, and also uncovers the future history of the mankind, in which, in cosmogony sense, it mixes christian believes with non-christian ones, based on religious-philosophical concept of moderate dualism and gnosticism. This text, today, is known only through two transcriptions in Latin, *Parisian* and *Viennese* versions, known by the names *Carcashsonien Codex* and *Vienna Version*. The translation in Latin is directly connected with the missionary work of the Bogomil babun *Nasaria* in 1170, whose goal was to spread the ideas of Bogomils among

devotees of Catharism.

The presumable ubiquity of the path of the Secret Book begins in Macedonia. Based on certain Latin sources we could deduce the area, where the Secret Book came from, in the heretic stronghold in Macedonia, the region of Lake Prespa. Such data are given in documented Latin sources, such as "The History of Crusade to Jerusalem" by Petar Tudebod, which refers to the First Crusade, whose participants traveled along the important communication route *Via Egnatia*, passing through south-west part of Macedonia. The author writes that in the period of 1096-1099 there was a fortified settlement of the heretics (lat. *castrum hæreticorum*) in Pelagonia, situated in some lake (lat. *in quodam lacus*). The imprecision of this date allows more different opinions concerning its precise ubiquity. The process of dispersion of the Secret Book still represents a not-completely solved puzzle, as the sources are not entirely precise, and a great many of them are destroyed because of their heretic character. But most scholars agree that it is the area around the Lake Prespa, as it is the only big lake in the Pelagonian plane.

Macedonic-Glagolitic Script:
Macedonian-Latin transcript: T A Y N A K N I G A
English: (SECRET BOOK)

Above: The 'Secret Book' as written in its original Old Church-Macedonic Script or the so called *Glagolitic* alphabet, its transcription below in modern Macedonian-Latin script, and the translation in modern English language

Below: Standardized version of the Glagolitic alphabet (Old Church-Macedonic script)⁵, antecedent of the Cyrillic

ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ
A	B	V	G	D	E	Zh	Dz	Z	Y	I	J
ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ
K	L	M	N	O	P	R	S	T	U	F	X
ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ
OO	Ts	Tsh	Sh	Sht	bi	Yi		b	IA	IO	IU
ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ	ⱮⱮ
ON	ES	ION	IEN	Teta	Izh						

⁵ 'Standardized' because different transcription schools had their slightly different letters and syllables, according to the different styles of handwriting; generally the version shown above is the most standard form of Glagolitic.

S. Antoljak connects the modern day village of Asamati on Lake Prespa, according to its written name in Koine script -, to the sect of Bogomils, and assumes that the very place of Asamati was above the mentioned town of heretics which was situated by a lake or near a lake. T. Tomovski, in his study “Prespa in the Middle Ages” points the island of *Golem Grad* as a possible location of the heretic *castrum*. E. Bosoki, in his book about the Secret Book gives his opinion that its voyage began exactly in 1096, when the Bogomil holy city on the island *Golem Grad* in the Lake Prespa was burnt down by the crusaders.



Above: **The island of *Golem Grad* in the Lake Prespa, Republic of Macedonia**

The Secret Book from Macedonia through Bosnia arrived in Croatia, and then was transferred to Lombardia, a strong center of Cathars. The described itinerary of its trip allows us to determine the total of some 12 toponym-markers on its movement through time and space, starting from the island of *Golem Grad* (i.e. ‘Big City’) in the Lake Prespa in Macedonia, through South-East Europe, then across Italy to *Carcassone* in South France. Thus, the Secret Book passed from **Lake Prespa** through **Mt. Babuna** and **Bogomila** (in Macedonia), to **Trebinje** and **Mostar** (BiH), then through Makarska and Dalmatian coast to **Imotski**, **Split** and island of **Krk** (in today *Croatia*), **Lombardy** and **Concorezzo** (in Italia), **Carcasson** and **Monsegur** (in France).

Mythical and real stories interweave here, and J. Plevneš found one of them in his researches in the library of Vatican, where he discovered a written note about a monk-crusader, who with his tongue cut off, carried the book from the island, through the Balkans, to Italy and France. The story was first found somewhere near Venice and written down by the Croatian publicist Antonio Jerkovin in a magazine *Relacion Macedonia*, published in Rome in the 1960's.

Before the translation in Latin appeared, the original linguistic and language features of the Secret Book, and its original Glagolitic alphabet, found a fertile soil on the island of Krk, where the centuries long tradition of Glagolitic alphabet schools is most evident. The well known incscription on the Bašča slab (Baščanska Ploča, around AD 1100) from the island of Krk proves it. It is written in 13 lines in Glagolitic alphabet.



The irrefutable evidence that the Secret Book of Bogomils passed through Carcasson is the *Carcashsonien Codex* transcription in Latin itself. As said above, the translation in Latin is connected with the missionary work of the Bogomilian babun Nasaria in 1170. He brought apocryphal scriptures of the first and second centuries, attributed to St. John the Apostle, in 1190's from Macedonia to northern Italy. The appearance of *Carcashsonien Codex* translation in Latin is connected with the missionary activities of the Bogomil monk Nasaria (lat. *Nasarius*), which had a goal of spreading the ideas of Bogomils among the Cathar devotees. Nasaria in 1170 already presented a part of its content to the audience, but it is believed that it had been completely translated around the mid 12th century. The works in question were titled "*Interrogatio Iohannis*," "*Apparellamentum Confession of Sins*," and the "*Traditio: Immersion into the Community of Parfaits* (i.e. *Perfecti*)." The latter two tracts were taken from the Lyons Ritual, also various archaic tracts ascribed to the Essenes and Johannite sects traveled by the hands of Cathars and Bogomils from Macedonia via Mediterranean shipping routes into southern France and Italy.

In the second half of the 13th century we find an allusion on the Secret Book made by Reiner Saconi, who, in 1230, when writing about Cathars and the Poors of Lion - points out that he learnt that illusion from the elder son of Bogomils church, Nasaria, about 60 years earlier. The Italian theologian and inquisitor Anselmo of Alexandria in his "Treatise on Heretics", written from 1260 to 1270, who at the end of Carcashsonien transcript underlines: "*This is a secret of the heretics of Concorezzo, full of illusions, brought from Macedonia by their bishop Nasaria.*"

It is apparent that Cathar's sects (called *Albigenses* in southern France also at Castle of Monteforte near Asti, Piedmont and Florence in Italy) possessed a very comprehensive religious literature, nevertheless with some few exceptions systematically destroyed, partly by the Catholic church, and partly by the *Perfecti* themselves during the persecutions initiated in the *Albigensian Crusades*.

In 1347 the famous Czech king Karlo IV of Luxemburg built a Glagolitic Convent 'Emaus' in Prague, where eighty Croatian Benedictines from the island of *Pashman* and *Seni* were invited to teach. It is remarkable that the convent is not far from the famous 'Karlovy' University, built the next year, in 1348 (Karlo IV also founded the University of Vienna in 1365).

One of these Glagolitic books from this convent (Emaus) in Prague came to Reims in 1574, where the French kings (Charles IX, Henri II, Louis XIII, Louis XIV) for centuries were sworn by putting their hand on this holy book, known under the name 'Texte du Sacre' or 'L'Evangile de Reims'.⁶ This Glagolitic book was written in 1395, and represents a copy of an older holy book, written probably in the Illyrian Omišali, in today Croatia. In fact, the Glagolitic book was bound together with a Cyrillic book dating from the 11th century (the Cyrillic part has 16 leaves, and the Glagolitic part has 31 leaves). The book was ornamented with gold, precious stones and relics, and according to Dolbeau, probably calligraphed on the island of Krk or in a Czech monastery. And the island of Krk was one of the strongholds of the Bogomilism. These Dolbeau's pages are available at '*Studia Croatica*'.

The French kings were, according to the contemporary testimonies and sources, sworn on this Glagolitic book with the following words: "*Ainsi le jurons, vouons et promettons sur la sainte et vraie Croix et le saint ...vangile touché.*"

⁶ Reims Gospel ('L'Evangile de Reims') links: <http://www.croatianhistory.net/etf/reims.html>; <http://www.croatianhistory.net/etf/reims.html>; <http://www.bm-reims.fr/>



Above: 'L' Evangile de Reims' – the Holy Book of French kings written in Glagolitic and Cyrillic, from the Library of Reims

Another issue that remained in the memory from the days of Bogomils, Patarens and Cathars is the Bogomil calendar. The year consisted of ten months, each month had 36 days, every week six days. Every sixth day was a public holiday, a celebration over 5 working days was forbidden. Naming the days by calendar year with human names was also prohibited. The months names were: Yar, Fiar, Mar, Rar, Yuar, Avrar, Sevar, Okar, Noar and Dekar. At the end of these ten months the Bogomil calendar adds 5 'dead days' without name, a festive period dedicated to the divine power of creation.

THE PERSECUTIONS OF THE BOGOMILS

The inhuman repercussions and cruel crusades on Bogomilism was already mentioned above. Official Christian church responded with all available means against this threat for its dominance. This remains one of the main reasons why the Middle Ages are also known as the 'Dark Ages', a period of human history when the progressive thought and ideas were seen as illness, and have been promptly suffocated by the official church and their vassals.

The first recorded execution of confessed "*perfecti*," which called themselves "*good Christians and Bogomili*" were burned at Orléans in AD 1022. The synods issued at Charroux in 1028 and Toulouse in 1056 publicly condemned the "*good Christians*" settling in the region from the Balkan and Pyrenees merchant routes. During a decade, spanning 1030-1040 a Cathar fraternity was discovered at the castle of Monte Forte, with the community there received everywhere, accessible to all strata of society. *Perfecti* at Monte Forte were seized by the bishop of Asti and chose to burn rather than become proselytes.

In the east, Theophylact, the patriarch of Constantinopolitana Nova Roma (eng. Constantinople) was waging his crusade against Bogomils in Macedonia. From the preserved documents and letters of Theophylact to the suzerains and clerics from the local eparchies can be seen his frantic call upon arms, in order to destroy the heretics. The acts of the eastern christian church cruelty and its radical anti-Bogomilism were nonetheless applied in an inquisitorial way. Many testimonies from the first half of the 12th century give us the clearest evidence of the horrible golgotha of the Bogomils in Macedonia and Balkans. Here is the excerpt from the Tsar Dushan Codex: "85. *O babunskoj reči i ko rekne babunsku rec, ako bude vlastelin, da plati sto perpera, ako li bude sebar da plati dvanaest perpera i da se bije štapovima.*"⁷

The Council of Toulouse (France) convened in 1119 by pope Callistus III condemns heretics whom reject the sacraments of the Holy Roman Church. A Council of Tours convened in 1163 condemned the Albigenses as a cancerous religious sect with papal anathema. Pope Innocent III was the first vicar to invoke the forces of the world to destroy christians who allegedly ceased to be "*Catholic*."

In the town of Montségur⁸, in 1196, a hundred years after the presumed writing of the Secret Book, the biggest execution of Cathars was committed. Upon the order of Simon de Monfor 3260 Cathars were burnt alive. When Monfor was asked if all should be burnt as there might've been righteous ones among them from whole Europe who believed the true God, Monfor stated the known statement: "*Burn them all, and in Heaven God will recognize the righteous ones.*"

⁷ Translation: "About the babuns sermons and who spreads the babuns sermons, if its noble, to pay hundred perepers, if it's peasant twelve perpers and to be beaten with sticks."

⁸ Mont-Segur – 'a secure mountain' in plain French; denoting the Cathar's refugee high in the mountains.

The fall of Constantinople in 1204 (to Crusaders) no doubt utterly fueled the fetishes of fear in the Papacy already weakened by sectarian fighting across whole Europe.

The epilogue of the Albigenses and Cathars took place at Montségur citadel in midsummer of 1243. High in the Pyrenees at Ariege, 2000 meters above sea level, surrounded by thick pine forests, rushing torrents and vertiginous cliffs, Montségur was seiged by troops of the seneschal of Carcassonne and the archbishop of Narbonne. It has been told that to Montségur were brought Albigensian riches, holy books, and, according to legend, the sacred Holy Grail. Like pagan Arkona from the far north, Montségur became a last sanctuary from the Inquisition for the Cathars (*perfecti*). There was food and grain for years to come stored in subterranean chambers. The siege lasted almost a year, until 16 March 1244, as under cover of night soldiers invaded the fortress. According to accounts of William of Puylaurens, ‘about 200’ perfecti marched to their deaths and into the bonfires singing praises.

*“So red was the flame that rose toward the sky, so high and pillar like the smoke, that those Toulousains, Lauraguais and Albigeois, who raised their eyes toward Ariege, knew by this sign that their heroic brethren had been annihilated and that the last hope of the soul had died.”*⁹

⁹ Maurice Magre “Magiciens et Illumines”



In 1276, Toulousan Cathars were seized at Sirmione, and in 1278, others were captured at Verona. As before, the Cathars were burned. The last professed ministers admitting to the performance of Bogomilism were allegedly hanged or sentenced to life in prison at the village of Villerouge-Terménes and at Catalonia by 1325.

But, the terrifying misfortune of these martyrs couldn't stop the unstoppable. No torture, no killing, could've be effective in exterminating the human thought.

THE BOGOMILS LEGACY

The Bogomilism was the first real political danger and direct mortal threat for many feudal rulers and monarchs in Europe, as well for the ecclesiastical hierarchs. It was actually the first Protestantism, many centuries before Luther, a distant herald of the Socialism and never achieved Communism. The progressive spirit of Bogomil teaching is to be found above all in the principle of the socio-economic equality of all men, whether noble or peasant, patrician or plebeian, and in the abolition of discriminatory privileges. Making themselves interpreters of the feelings and interests of the most oppressed classes of the feudal society of that time, the Bogomils soon gained an enormous number of adherents. Not even the international christian church coalition, which was particularly inhuman in the means it chose to suppress their movement, was able to put down the 'forest fire' instigated by the Bogomils and tear them away from the masses. Their social movement set the public life of Europe in ferment, and it soon became the first real political force, thinly disguised under a veil of religion.

Only a few written records remained to testify their deeds and achievements and the immense impact of the Bogomil movement in Europe. The inquisitional machinery destroyed almost everything that opposed the official church, and reduced to dust and ashes the innumerable works of Bogomil writers, technically known as Apocryphal Literature.

Nevertheless, the Bogomilism never actually disappeared from the politico-social stage they set in Europe. Their descendants, the Patareni and Cathars, continued the course set by Macedonian Bogomils and later gave the birth of the Protestant movement, Socialism, and other humanistic movements in modern Europe. The precise theology of this movement is still kept a closely guarded secret to this day, and the groups themselves will provide disinformation to further their secrecy. The Bogomil practices were preserved and deconstructed in such spiritual threads that became vulgarized in *Freemasonry*, while stretching to the Bavarian order of *Perfectibilists*, or the Illuminated Seers of Bavaria, the *Rosicrucian Fraternity*, and *Thule Society* of 1914. The term *Crypto-Cathar* is also used to describe descendants of Cathars who still (generally secretly) maintain some Bogomil traditions, often while adhering to other faiths. Their progressive thought also survives through many Bogomil movements founded in the 20th and 21st century.

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