

**Codex argenteus, готская традиция в Швеции  
и готское возрождение в Болгарии**

**Codex argenteus, the Gothic tradition in Sweden,  
and the Gothic Revival in Bulgaria**

**Codex argenteus, готська традиція у Швеції  
та готське відродження у Болгарії**

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Самым драгоценным сокровищем Библиотеки Университета Упсала является рукопись *Codex argenteus*, более известная как Серебряная Библия. Она представляет собой копию четырех Евангелий, евангелиарий, написанную на готском языке в начале 6 века н. э. В докладе представлены: 1) общее описание рукописи, ее история, физическое состояние и роль в шведской традиции (лингвистика, национальная символика и мифы); 2) краткий обзор готской традиции в работах великих шведских историографов — Rudbeck, Stiernhielm и др.; 3) краткое описание недавно вспыхнувшего интереса к готам в современной Болгарии, многостороннего интереса (филологического, исторического, археологического и т. п.), в центре которого стоит епископ Ульфила, выполнивший перевод Библии на готский язык в 4-м веке н. э.

The crown jewel of manuscripts in Uppsala University Library is *Codex argenteus*, very often called the Silver Bible. It is a copy of the four Gospels, an *evangeliarium*, written in Gothic in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century. The paper gives: 1) a general presentation of the manuscript, its history, its material status, and its role in Swedish tradition (linguistics, national symbolism, and myth); 2) a synopsis of the Gothic tradition in Swedish great power historiography (Rudbeck, Stiernhielm, and others); 3) a short presentation of the newly awakened interest in the Goths in today's Bulgaria, a multi-disciplinary interest (philological, historical, archaeological, and so on), which has its focus upon Bishop Wulfila, who translated the Bible into Gothic in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

Найдорогоціннішим скарбом Бібліотеки Університету Упсали є рукопис *Codex argenteus*, більш відомий як Срібна Біблія. Вона являє собою копію чотирьох Євангелій, євангеліарій, написаний готською мовою на початку 6 століття н. е. У доповіді представлено: 1) загальна характеристика рукопису, його історія, фізичний стан і роль у шведській традиції (лінгвістика, національна символика і міфи); 2) короткий огляд готської традиції в роботах великих шведських історіографів — Rudbeck, Stiernhielm і др.; 3) короткий опис інтересу, що з'явився останнім часом, до готів в сьогоденній Болгарії, багатостороннього інтересу (філологічного, історичного, археологічного і т. п.), в центрі якого стоїть єпископ Ульфіла, що виконав переклад Біблії на готську мову в 4-м столітті н. е.

The crown jewel of manuscripts in Uppsala University Library is *Codex argenteus*, very often called the Silver Bible. It is Sweden's most valuable book treasure and one of the world's most famous manuscripts. It is not a complete Bible, but a copy of the four Gospels, an *evangeliarium*, written in Gothic. The translation from Greek into Gothic was made in the fourth century by the Gothic bishop Wulfila, who also constructed the Gothic alphabet for that purpose. Until then, the Goths had used runes.

The Silver Bible — or more accurately the Silver Book, *Codex argenteus* — was written in the early sixth century in northern Italy, probably in Ravenna, during the Ostrogothic rule, perhaps even explicitly for the king, Theoderic the Great. Through a C14 analysis in early 1998, we know for sure that the parchment of the codex is from the early sixth century.

The manuscript was written in gold and silver ink on very thin, purple-coloured parchment of extremely high quality. For a long time, it was alleged that the parchment was made from the skin of new-born or even unborn calves, but modern research shows that it was more likely made from the skin of very young goats. The purple colour does not come from the purple snail but from vegetable dyes. The silver writing is predominant, which explains why the book is called «the Silver Book,» or *Codex argenteus*. It was written to be a luxury book, which may be difficult to understand at first sight today. Presumably, it was originally bound in deluxe binding, decorated with pearls and jewels. The text of the Silver Bible is one of the oldest and most comprehensive documents in the Gothic language now extant.

Beside the Silver Bible, we can find Gothic texts today in a few *palimpsests* (that means re-used parchment documents), some marginal notes in a manuscript, and some small fragments of Gothic manuscripts.

The writing surface on the leaves of the Silver Bible has been filled according to the principle of «the golden section,» i. e., the height is related to the width in the same way as the sum of the height and width is related to the height. The four arches at the bottom of each page are *canon tablets*, one for each evangelist. They contain a system of cross references to Bible passages. This is the so-called *Eusebian* system, which was the *synopsis* of the Gospels designed by Eusebius of Caesarea (d.339/40). The shape of the arches reminds us of Theoderic's palace and other buildings in Ravenna.

The Silver Bible was known to exist in the sixteenth century, when it was kept in a Benedictine monastery in Werden, near the river Ruhr. Before the year 1600, it came into the possession of Emperor Rudolf II and was in Prague when the Swedes invaded the city in 1648. It was brought to Stockholm as Swedish war booty and incorporated into Queen Christina's library. After the queen's abdication, it passed into the hands of one of her librarians, Isaac Vossius, who took it to the Netherlands.

From there, it was bought by Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie, the Swedish Chancellor and also the Chancellor of Uppsala University, who donated it to the university in 1669. On presentation to the library, the Silver Bible was furnished with a binding of chased silver.

The Silver Bible originally consisted of at least 336 leaves. Of these, 187 are extant in Uppsala. One more leaf (as far as we know) has been preserved for posterity, in Speyer in Germany. It was found sensationally in 1970 in the Speyer cathedral, along with some hidden relics of a saint. This leaf — judging from its format and other details — must have journeyed along other paths than the other leaves before it came to light again. The discovery of this leaf, which has been named «the Haffner leaf» after its discoverer, Frans Haffner, gave new life to the discussions of the fate of the Silver Bible between sixth century Ravenna and sixteenth century Werden.

The Silver Bible is surrounded by mysteries and myths. Its fate between Ravenna and Werden has been the inspiration for much speculation. Even the known parts of the history of the manuscript are filled with material that fires the imagination: hidden Gothic treasures, hidden relics of saints, Rudolf II's magic book collection, war booty, shipwrecks, and thefts. Large sections of the original Silver Bible have been lost or else are concealed. In 1970, the latest leaf was found. Perhaps some day in the future, let us hope so, more leaves from this manuscript will see the light of day.

But what happened to the manuscript between Ravenna and Werden? This is the Mystery of the Thousand Years, and there are several theories about this mystery.

My own theory is that the Silver Bible was first taken to the Vivarium monastery in southern Italy, founded by Theoderic's chief minister, Cassiodorus. The Vivarium library collection is said to have been transferred to the Lateran library in Rome. From there, a shipment of manuscripts was sent to Cologne (Köln) in the early ninth century, and this shipment included the Silver Bible, which then ended up in Werden. But, as I said, there are several theories, and they are all very well grounded.

The text of the Silver Bible has been published in several editions. The first was made by Franciscus Junius in 1665. The philologically most complete edition was carried out by Anders Uppström in the 1850s. The latest and most influential edition was the facsimile made in 1927 using advanced technological equipment and the sharpness and competence of, among others, the Swedish Nobel Prize winner, Theodor Svedberg. This edition is now digitised by a scholar in Tampere, Finland, David Landau, and linked to the homepage of Uppsala University Library. Address: [www.uu.se](http://www.uu.se)

The Goths were a Germanic people that once emigrated from the southern regions of Scandinavia. This is the traditional story of the Goths. It is very much debated, but nevertheless it may be true. At the time when *Codex argenteus* was written, The *Visigoths* (western Goths) ruled what is now Spain and southern France. The *Ostrogoths* (eastern Goths) ruled Italy. During the last days of Theoderic the great, the two Gothic reigns were combined under his crown.

Gothic is a Germanic language. Through the wanderings of the Goths, the language has been strongly influenced by other languages, especially Latin. What the Goths above all left to posterity from a literary point of view was segments of Wulfila's Bible translation, of which the Silver Bible is the primary document. This is what gives this manuscript its greatest value today.

When De la Gardie donated *Codex argenteus* to Uppsala University in 1669, the manuscript also had another — a symbolic and more prestigious — value. It was the Word of God such as it was revealed to the Goths, our ancestors, the original inhabitants of Sweden, and the origin of all people.

All people have their myths, and almost every people has its own *original* myth, a myth about the people itself. So have the Swedes. It is the myth about the Goths, and it goes like this.

Once upon a time Sweden was inhabited by the Goths, and the Goths were the origin of all peoples. They were a brave and glorious people (of course) that spread all over the world. From Sweden, the island Skandza, today known as the peninsula Scandinavia, they emigrated with three ships under their king Berig.

Something like that was the myth from the beginning, written down by the Gothic historiographer Jordanes in the sixth century in his attempt to write the history of the Goths. The myth wasn't very vivid in Sweden until the

seventeenth century, but then it became the more important. During this great historic era of Sweden, the myth was very useful to give the country a brilliant and suitable antiquity. At that time it also got two additions: the myth about the Hyperboreans and the Atlantis myth, both antique myths, but now given a dusting and fitting the chauvinistic Swedish need for an original myth. The Gothic myth was melted together with these myths, and so Sweden had its own great antiquity. The best known manifestation of this mythology is the famous work *Atland eller Manheim* by the Swedish polyhistor Olof Rudbeck the senior.

Its first volume came in 1679, and the printing of its fourth and last volume started in 1702. In Rudbeck's work Sweden was the true Atlantis in Plato's tale of the sunken island (though it wasn't literally sunken), and the Swedes were the Hyperboreans living under the Great Bear, that was shining over Boreas, the north wind. They lived in a beautiful land with good harvests and without war and hate. They became so old, that they finally, after a splendid dinner, sated with life, rushed into the sea from a rock. All of them were priests serving Apollo, who visited them every 19<sup>th</sup> year accompanied by music, dancing, and playing the kithara.

But peace-loving and harp-playing rendered not much of prestige in the brutal world of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. And here the Goths were welcome. The old Swedes were not only Hyperboreans, they were also Goths! And as we know, they took their ships and left. They crossed the sea, they crossed the continent, and they spread all over the world. They wandered, and they made war, and they conquered even the Romans. They founded great and mighty kingdoms.

These ideas about Hyperboreans and Goths were not born in Rudbeck's head. As we know, Jordanes had told the beginning of the story. We can find the continuation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Olaus Magnus' great work of the Nordic peoples, for instance. Olaus Magnus often wrote his name *Olaus Magnus Gothus*.

He was the man who put Sweden on the map. His great map of the Nordic countries, the *Carta marina*, exists today in two known copies: one in Munich (München) and one in Uppsala. Olaus Magnus refers to the map as «*Charta Gothica*». In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the works of Johannes Bureus and Georg Stiernhielm carried on the Gothic tradition. The myth had a strong life in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Goths represented militarism, but also chivalry. The Swedish king Gustavus II Adolphus was in his days by his wars and his conquests regarded both as a continuator and a renovator of the Gothic. The Goths were often called «göter» in Sweden at that time. And the King of Sweden was even called «Götes Konung», king of the Goths.

The Age of Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century meant a moderation of chauvinistic dreams. The Goths bided their time. But when the nationalistic and folkloristic movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century began, they were there again. Now they were definitively called «göter». «Götiska Förbundet», the «Gothic Society» was founded in Stockholm in 1811. The Swedish author Erik Gustaf Geijer was its most famous founder and member. The rites were «Gothic» or «götiska», that is generally Old Norse: reunions, guild feasts, drinking from horns, and so on. During all the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were folkloristic, nationalistic, Scandinavianic, and other tides, that towards the end of the century united their waters in a new national romantic wave. All this was especially vivid in student circles. Swells from the Gothic wave were discernible even in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

One could say, that the Gothic myth, the Swedish original myth, was officially repealed on the 15 September in 1973, when Carl XVI Gustaf ascended the Swedish throne as the King of Sweden. His predecessor was Gustavus VI Adolphus, King of Swedes, Goths, and Wends. Carl XVI Gustaf adopted the motto «For Sweden — With the times». In 1973 the Gothic myth was no longer *with the times*.

Today it is interesting to see how the Goths become more and more important for the national image of Bulgaria. Archaeological excavations and findings show traces from Gothic settlements from many places in Bulgaria. Today's Bulgaria was once the area, where the Goths lived, worked, and made war now and then in the old days, as they did all around the Black Sea. Novae in Bulgaria was the first residence of Theoderic the Great before he went into Italy and settled down in Ravenna. And long before him, Bishop Wulfila lived in Moesia on the Danube with his «Small Goths», *Gothi minores*, who adopted the Christian religion in order to be accepted to live within the borders, the *limes*, of the Roman Empire. Here they lived as simple and peaceful shepherds, while Wulfila translated the Bible into Gothic and tended his Gothic herd.

To me the name Wulfila is very familiar, since I spend my days in the house of *Codex argenteus*, remnants of the Gothic Bible. Wulfila isn't myth, of course, it is history, but it is early history, and the name has a sweet touch of saga. Realize my feelings when I found myself spending some days (and nights) in Wulfila's House on a visit to Bulgaria in February this year! Together with Dr. Ulf Erik Hagberg, the former director of the Swedish National Historical Museum, I had been invited to Sofia to discuss cooperation concerning Gothic history.

Wulfila's House was an old villa, but not as old as Wulfila himself. It was the headquarters of the Wulfila Foundation, and the headquarters of a network of scholars interested in the Goths, especially in the Goths in what is now Bulgaria. The network is interdisciplinary, and the *primus motor* is Dr. Rossen Milev, historian, and president of the Balkan Media Academy.

The Gothic project in Bulgaria has a very wide program for the years 2002—2011, published in the book *Gotite* in 2003. It means everything from exploration and systematization of Gothic heritage in Bulgaria on an interdisciplinary

nary basis and in cooperation with foreign scholars to creation of a cultural route called «The Route of the Goths across Europe» together with Unesco and other international institutions. It means including Gothic monuments like Theoderic's first capital Novae in Unesco's heritage list. It means the planning of archaeological excavations, and of restoration of Gothic monuments. And it means much much more. An important task is creating an international research center in Sofia concerning the Goths and the early Europe. All this may seem very optimistic, but one has to admit, that Bulgaria (not a very rich country) has reached far during the first two years of the project. They have established contacts with many scholars in the Gothic field in many countries. They have organized an international conference on the Goths and they have invited foreign lecturers to Sofia. The project has published two books, one is *Gotite*, which I mentioned before, and the other is a book about Wulfila by Rossen Milev. Here Milev talks about «the Gothic factor» in the history of Europe. It is about Wulfila's Goths, the *Gothi minores*, and their adaption to the Roman Empire, but also about their own impact on their neighbours. Milev makes Wulfila the symbol for Europe in creation. It is the humanist Wulfila, the peacelover, the ecumenical, the man of light and leading. Wulfila the Integrator. It is a very well chosen icon for Bulgaria preparing its membership of the European Union in 2007.

All this is very interesting for a Swede, since the Goths have been a vivid part of the Swedish national identity for many hundreds of years. And since the 1660<sup>th</sup> *Codex argenteus* has been the strongest symbol of the Gothic heritage known in Sweden. And it is very pleasant to see, that the Bulgarian Gothic identity (if I may say so) has its focus on Bishop Wulfila and his peaceful and cultural heritage, and not — as in the old Swedish tradition — in the martial and true barbaric image of the Goths.