

Exarch Antim I

(the first Exarch of the autonomous Bulgarian Church)

Antim I was born in 1816 in Lozengrad, in the Ottoman Empire (Kirkclareli in European Turkey) as *Athanas Mihaylov Tchalukov*. His parents come from the village of Tatarlar, in the same district. His education starts in a Greek religious primary village school. The young boy was dedicated to monkhood in the Hilendar Monastery in 1837 and adopted the name *Antim*.

In 1843–1844 his education continued in the renowned Grand People's School in Phener (in Turkish - *Fener Rum Erkek Lisesi*). Antim worked as a teacher in Lozengrad (1849-50) and in Smyrna (now Izmir, Turkey) in 1850-52. Graduated with the first class of the Theology Seminary in Halki (on the Princes' Islands near Constantinople). With support from the Russian consul in Smyrna he was sent to continue his religious studies in the Odessa Seminary (the Russian Empire). There he received a Master Degree in theology in 1856.

Upon his graduation he returned to Halki to teach and later became Rector of the Theology School. In 1861 he was nominated by the Ecumenical Patriarch Ioachim II as a Bishop of Preslav (now Bulgaria), which post he refused in a sign of discontent with the unsettled status of the Bulgarian orthodox flock. Antim became Bishop of Sissani (now district Grevena, Greece) and in Korcha (now in Albania) in 1862. On December 20th 1862 he was sent to the Poleni diocese (town of Kukush, now Kilkis in Northern Greece) as a vicar to the then Bulgarian Metropolitan Partheni of Zograph. (This diocese was rebellious and problematic for the Constantinople Patriarch and despite his efforts retained its Bulgarian character). In 1868 Antim became Metropolitan of Vidin (Northwest Bulgaria) replacing the hated and destitute after local people's uprising Greek Paissius. The Vidin congregation imposed on Antim a policy of confrontation with the Constantinople Patriarchate, seeking independent Bulgarian Church.

So, in December 1868 during a holy liturgy for a first time Antim does not mention the name of the Patriarch. The same year he ranged with the demands and petitions of the Bulgarian congregation in Tzarigrad (Constantinople) and rejected the canonical leadership of the Patriarchate. In February 1870 a Provisional Synod of the Bulgarian Exarchate was founded and Antim is among its first members. He takes part as a delegate at the *Church People's Synod* in 1871 and was elected in its first governing body, with support by the Metropolitans Hilarion of Makariupol, Panaret of Plovdiv, Hilarion of Lovech and by many clerical and laic members. He actively participates at the redaction of the first *Constitution* of the Bulgarian Exarchate.

On February 16 1872 Antim I was elected as a head (Exarch) of the Bulgarian Exarchate.

In an official statement (*Berat*) on April 3 1872 the Ottoman government (the Diwan) recognized Antim as a spiritual leader of the Bulgarian Church. On April 12 he received the high Ottoman distinction "Medjidie", 1st class. On May 11th, during the Holy Liturgy, Antim read the *Decree of the Establishment of Autonomous Bulgarian Orthodox Church*, overruling the ban issued by the Patriarch. The Patriarchal Synod reacted by **defrocking** Antim I and **excommunicating** the other Bishops. The decision on the unilateral declaration of **autocephaly** by the Bulgarian Church was not accepted by the **Patriarchate of Constantinople**.

The subsequent Council in Constantinople, chaired by Ecumenical Patriarch **Anthimus VI**, in September 1872, wherein the Patriarchs of **Alexandria**, **Antioch** and **Jerusalem** (the latter

declined to sign the Council's decisions) also participated, declared on September 18 the Bulgarian Exarchate **schismatic** and declared its adherents **excommunicated**.

Antim worked energetically against the Uniate-catholic expansion and propaganda. He played an active role in the establishment of the Exarchate and its institutions, for the cultural and educational advancement of the Bulgarian people, for unified educational system, teachers' congresses and so on. After the April Uprising in 1876 and its crushing with military power, Antim did everything possible to reveal to the international community the Turkish atrocities. Especially his *Memorandum* to the diplomatic representatives of the Western powers at the Ottoman Empire played a significant role to provoke an outrage against the oppression of the Bulgarians. The Ottoman authorities pressed hard Antim to refute his own statements, which he refused. As a result Exarch Antim I was discharged by the Ottoman government immediately after the outbreak of the **Russo-Turkish War, 1877-78** on April 24, 1877, and was sent into exile in **Ankara**.

At the general amnesty in March 1877 he was released and the new Exarch Yossif consecrated him again at the Vidin Archbishopric. Upon his return to the newly independent Principality of Bulgaria he was the first President of the Constituting Assembly followed by the Grand People's Assembly (1879). This first Bulgarian Parliament adopted the Bulgarian Constitution. Antim also led the delegation of Bulgarian dignitaries to the Russian Emperor's Alexander II's court to express gratitude for the liberation of the country. On May 12 1879 he consecrated the monument on Shipka Peak in memory of the fallen Bulgarian and Russian defenders at this epic battle.

The Serb-Bulgarian War in 1885

During this war Serb troops blockaded the Vidin fortress. Its commandment and the prominent citizens of Vidin urged Antim to seek refuge on the opposite Romanian side of the Danube. The Metropolitan refused with the words:

“To me it is not fit to hide: if I fall, my body should be with the bodies of my fallen people and soldiers.”

So Antim remains on his post in the blockaded Vidin and supports morally Vidin until the successful rejection of the Serbs. He dies in Vidin on December 1st 1888 and is buried in the Metropolitan church of St. Nicolas. In 1934 a mausoleum to his honour was erected in the yard of the Vidin Archbishopric.

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using material of Wikipedia (https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Антим_I#)

and Orthodox Encyclopedia (Russian) (<http://www.pravenc.ru/text/114146.html>)