

A GLAGOLITIC INSCRIPTION IN KONAVLE

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Fort Sokol, according to known sources, was first mentioned in 1391 in a charter by which the Sankovići, the lords of Hum, conceded Konavle to Dubrovnik, along with Cavtat.¹ With regard to numerous Roman ceramic remains, it could rightly be supposed that a fort had already existed there during the Roman times, built with the purpose of controlling the important route leading inland from Epidaurum.² Subsequently, most probably during the domination of Dioclea, the fort underwent a reconstruction. In the years 1423-1426, as part of Konavle, the fort came into the possession of the Republic of Dubrovnik, in which it had an important strategic role. In the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Ragusans pulled down this fort in order to erect a new one, the remains of which can be seen today. The fort was abandoned after the great earthquake in 1667. The villagers from the neighborhood helped themselves to the carved stones from the devastated fort, and used them for building their own houses and the church in the near vicinity.

¹ Fran Miklosich, *Monumenta Serbica spectantia historiam Serbiae Bosnae Ragusii*. Viennae: apud Gulielmum Braumüller, 1858: pp. 217-218.

² D. Živanović i D. Vuković, »Soko-grad u Konavlima.« *Anali Historijskog instituta JAZU u Dubrovniku* 3 (1954): p. 376; Lukša Beritić, »Tvrđava Sokol u Konavlima.« *Anali Historijskog instituta JAZU u Dubrovniku* 10/11 (1966): p.104.

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The above might explain for the discovery of a stone, built into the church wall, bearing Glagolitic inscription. In 1990 the decayed construction of the church of Our Lady, sited in the immediate vicinity of the Soko fort, was pulled down in order to be replaced by a new building.³ During the reconstruction, a small flat marble fragment was located. It was 3.5 cm thick with a Glagolitic inscription. As the stone is broken, the fragment is quite damaged so that the closing part of the text of unknown length is missing. The author of the Glagolitic inscription made use of a stone-piece with a previously inscribed Roman text, the proof of which is to be found in the letters on the back of the plate. Only two letters from the last line (...VL...) have been partially preserved.

The surviving text consists of eight lines. Because the lower part of the plate is broken, only vague remains of the eighth line are visible, and a part of the seventh line is missing, too. Any reading, i.e., analysis, of the contents of this lapidary inscription is also obstructed by the fact that the opening of the text has been lost as well.

The inscription most likely originates from the period when Konavle was being ruled by Dioclea, that is, during the eleventh and twelfth century, most definitely before the death of the Emperor Manuel I Comnenus in 1180, the year when Byzantine protection over these territories ceased, and a new era of the expansion of Rascia commenced. Paleographic characteristics, i.e. the elements of the triangular Glagolitic alphabet⁴ on the plate, also point to this time of origin.

This inscription is of particular significance because it represents the first Glagolitic text found east of the Trogir-Bihać line, contributing to the thesis that not only did the Glagolitic alphabet arrive in Croatia from Moravia via the northern route, but also by the southern route from Bulgaria and Macedonia, across Herzegovina and the Dubrovnik region toward northern parts of the Croatian coast (Krak, Istria). The same route enabled the penetration of

³ The old church building had also been constructed on the ruins of an older one at the close of the nineteenth century. The material was taken from the fort Sokol. See L. Beritić, »Tvrđava Sokol u Konavlima.«: pp. 103-134.

⁴ Marica Čunčić deals with the triangular Glagolitic, the origin of which dates back to the ninth century. See Darko Žubrinić, *Hrvatska glagoljica*. Zagreb: Hrvatsko književno društvo sv. Jeronima(sv. Ćirila i Metodija), 1996: p. 89, quoting Marica Čunčić, *Metodologija analitičke paleografije i osnovni oblik glagoljskog pisma*. Zagreb: Ph. D. thesis, 1985.

the Cyrillic alphabet, as proven by several Cyrillic letters in the inscription. Some more recent Cyrillic inscriptions sited in front of the church of St. George in Popovići, Konavle,⁵ contain two Glagolitic letters in support of the above thesis, but also proving that Cyrillic was to replace the Glagolitic alphabet, as early as the thirteenth century, during the rule of Rascia.

This Glagolitic inscription may prove significant for the history of Croatia and of the Glagolitic alphabet. Therefore, our intention is to submit the text to scholarly readers in order to prompt further analysis and evaluations.

⁵ Vid Vuletić-Vukasović, »Starobosanski nadpisi u Bosni i Hercegovini.« *Viestnik hrvatskoga arheološkog društva* 14/1 (1892): pp. 5-7.



