

# A FEATHER OR A SWORD? ABOUT COUNT NOVAK AND HIS GLAGOLITIC MISSAL<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** BOTICA, Ivan – NEKIĆ, Antun. *A Feather or a Sword? About count Novak and His Glagolitic Missal*. The paper deals with the life of count Novak Disislavić of the Mogorović kindred, a Croatian nobleman who served as a knight of the Hungarian king Louis of Anjou. It examines his military engagements and cultural contributions and challenges the conventional view of Croatian paleo-Slavic studies, which identifies him primarily as the scribe of the “Missal of count Novak” of 1368. From an early age, Novak actively participated in all of king Louis’ military campaigns, demonstrating bravery during sieges and even saving the king himself during a hunt. His bravery was rewarded with possessions, honors and a prestigious position as a knight at the royal court from 1350 at latest. Apart from his military exploits, Novak’s role as a judge and advisor in the Kingdom of Dalmatia and Croatia after the expulsion of the Venetians from the eastern Adriatic coast in 1358 strengthened his standing in Croatian society. His cultural contribution is the aforementioned Glagolitic missal, which, as noted in the colophon (f. 269), is attributed to him as the author due to the indication “napisah”. This missal is considered one of the exemplary Croatian Glagolitic missals and served as one of the models for the first Glagolitic incunabula in 1483. These are precisely the reasons why Novak could not have transcribed the missal personally, as the production of such a cultural work is extremely complex. As a patron, he was directly involved in its creation and possibly supervised its production.

**Keywords:** Angevin ruler in the Kingdom of Hungary, Kingdom of Dalmatia and Croatia, Count Novak Disislavić, Mogorović kindred, Missal of count Novak (MNov), Roman rite on Old Church Slavonic, Glagolitic script

The colophon of the missal, known as the *Missal of count Novak* (f. 269), begins with these words in contemporary Croatian and English:<sup>2</sup>

*Ljeta Gospodnjega 1368. Ja knez Novak, sin kneza Petra, vitez silnoga i velikoga gospodina Ludovika, kralja ugarskoga, vitez njegova dvora. U to vrijeme, dok sam u Ugarskoj bio šalgovski, a u Dalmaciji ninski knez, napisah ove knjige za svoju dušu i neka se dadu crkvi u kojoj će mi grob biti vječnim počivalištem;*

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<sup>2</sup> “Lěť g(ospod)nih’ ·č·t·m·z· è knez’ n|ovakъ s(i)нь kneza petra vite|zъ silnoga i velikoga g(ospo)d(i)na | loiša krala ugr’skoga nega | polače vitezъ ·v’ to vr(è)me b|udući knezъ na ugrih’ šolgo|vski ·a v dalmaciji ninski na|pisah’ te knjige za svoú d(u)|šu ·i onoi cr(b)kvi da se dadu v’ k|oi legu vèki v(è)čnimъ leža|niemъ” (MNov 269’).

*In the Lord's year 1368. I, count Novak, son of count Peter, knight of the mighty and great Lord Louis, the King of Hungary, a knight of his palace. At that time, when I was the Count of Salgó in Hungary and the Count of Nin in Dalmatia, I wrote these books for my soul, and let them be given to the church where the grave will be my eternal resting place.*

The record was written in angular Glagolitic script, a mixture of Croatian Church Slavonic and Croatian vernacular, and it is found immediately after the end of the liturgical text, at the very end of the missal (f. 269r). The *Missal of count Novak* (further in the text, MNov) occupies a special place in the Croatian national imagination. First of all, it is the oldest dated missal of the Roman rite in Old Church Slavonic, so carefully compiled that after 115 years of uninterrupted liturgical use, i.e. in 1483, it served as the main model for the first Croatian printed book and the first book printed in non-Latin script in history, the *Misal po zakonu rimskoga dvora* (*Missale Romanum*), known in Croatian culture and Paleo-Slavic research as *Prvotisak*. It is therefore an artefact that had a lasting influence on the development of written culture in Croatia. In 2020, a luxurious facsimile edition of the MNov was presented to the public. The timing of the publication of this edition was not coincidental, as the facsimile was published two years after the 650th anniversary of its creation. This facsimile edition was accompanied by a volume of scholarly essays on the Missal. Old and new findings about the Missal were presented, but one important aspect was omitted: the life of the alleged scribe of this Missal, count Novak. Why is knowledge of the life and works of count Novak important for a better understanding and interpretation of his Missal?

A look at Novak's life, no matter how sketchy the information we can gather, allows us to assess whether Novak wrote the missal himself or whether he commissioned it. Novak is generally regarded as the author, scribe or writer of the missal. Some even go so far as to attribute to him the role of the painter responsible for the illuminations and miniatures in the missal (Pantelić 1971, 327; Stipčević 2004, 62-63). Count Novak's name is indelibly linked with the written word and literacy due to his significant contribution to Croatian cultural history. This contribution has cemented his reputation as a national figure. The suspicion of his authorship had therefore rarely been voiced.

Mateo Žagar hints at this possibility when he writes that Novak "could have written it himself", and when he states that the missal was written by a single hand, he adds that "it was, although for a scribe of advanced age, count Novak himself, or a skilled scribe on Novak's commission" (Žagar 2020, 8-10). Nikola Jakšić stands alone with his remark that the Missal was not written by Novak, but commissioned by him, without explaining this further (Jakšić 2006, 144). This paper attempts to answer the question of the authorship of this missal, which is based on only part of the sentence in the colophon (*napisah ove knjige*), and it will show that Novak was primarily a knight whose tool was a *sword* rather than a *pen*. This insight also opens up the possibility of placing this missal more precisely in the social and cultural context of the time in which it was created. Vjekoslav Klaić wrote the first and practically only paper dedicated exclusively to count Novak (Klaić 1900, 177-180). He revealed that he belonged to the Mogorović kindred, presented his family tree and explained that his family seat was castle Ostrovica, located near the present-day town of Gospić in the Lika region.<sup>3</sup> When he wrote his paper, Klaić did not yet have the documents from the Esterhazy archive, which were then kept in Eisenstadt, which Ferdo Šišić would publish only five years later.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> On the Mogorović kindred, who owned considerable land in Lika and the hinterland of Zadar, and on their role in late medieval Croatia, see Pavičić (1962, 19-48) and Majnarić (2018, 284-296).

<sup>4</sup> The documents transcribed by Šišić in his collection of documents "Iz arkiva u Željeznom", which was published in 1905 in the journal *Vjesnik Kraljevskog hrvatskog-slavonskog-dalmatinskog zemaljskog*

Most of the surviving sources about Novak come from this family archive, and among them two documents are particularly revealing when it comes to his life. These are the two royal charters of grant issued by Louis the Great in 1351 and 1352. Typical of this type of charter issued by the rulers of the Kingdom of Hungary, to which the Kingdom of Croatia had belonged by personal union since 1102, is the description of the brave or heroic deeds performed by the grantee in royal service (Engel 2001, 93). These two documents, in which Novak is referred to as a knight of the royal palace (*aula*), show that Novak and his father Peter fought against the Venetians outside the walls of Zadar in June and July 1346, when king Louis the Great, at the head of a large army, attempted to lift the siege of the city, which was besieged by the Venetians.<sup>5</sup> Not only that they fought under Zadar, but Novak's father was killed in the battle, and Novak suffered serious injuries (CD XII, doc. 101, pp. 142-144). Novak also took part in Louis's efforts to avenge the death of his brother Andrew, who had been killed in Naples in 1345, and to obtain the Neapolitan crown, which Louis believed belonged to him. The royal documents in question state that Novak accompanied the king to Italy, without specifying whether this happened on both occasions when Louis personally fought in southern Italy (CD XII, doc. 11, pp. 14-15; doc. 101, pp. 142-144). Namely, Louis personally led the campaigns of 1347/1348 and 1350 (Csukovits 2019, 27-49). If Novak followed his master on both occasions, this means that Novak most likely became a knight immediately or shortly after the siege of Zadar. Knowing how badly Louis suffered the loss of his men under the walls of Zadar, it would not be surprising if he had taken Novak under his wing shortly after 1346, as the young man was wounded and lost his father in these combats against the Venetians. The second possibility is that he only became a royal knight later, around the time of the second Neapolitan campaign. One indication of this is the fact that Novak is mentioned in April 1349, albeit without the title of knight of the royal palace (CD XI, doc. 395, p. 523). Be that as it may, we can ascertain that Novak was constantly in Louis' retinue in 1350 and 1351. The following year, Novak again distinguished himself in battle, this time during Louis's unsuccessful siege of Belz castle in present-day western Ukraine, during Louis's campaign against the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (CD XII, doc. 101, pp. 142-144).

The next information about Novak does not come from the narration of royal grant deeds, but from the text of the anonymous author(s) in the *Chronicon Dubnicense*, which describes the events surrounding Louis the Great between 1345 and 1355 (Dunphy 2010, 103-104). It states that the king had a particular passion for hunting and once went hunting in November 1353 near Zvolen, one of his favorite hunting grounds in present-day Slovakia, where he was attacked and seriously wounded by a bear. It is said that the bear would have killed the king had it not been for the bravery of János Besenyő, who "loved the king more than himself" and therefore rushed to the king's aid and killed the bear, regardless of the danger to himself. The anonymous author(s) went on to say that John received no reward because of the malice of some men and especially of Novak from Croatia, who came to the king's aid only after the bear had been killed by John (*Chronicon Dubnicense* 1884, 166).<sup>6</sup> The entire discourse, however, is characterized by a tone that favors Ivan. As Sándor Domanovszky has already noted, Ivan is not only mentioned as a hero in this instance

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*arkiva*, are included in the volumes of historical documents *Codex diplomaticus regni Dalmatiae, Croatiae et Slavoniae*. When we cite these documents, we are therefore referring to the Codex (CD).

<sup>5</sup> Details of the siege itself can be found in the local chronicle of the time, *Obsidio Iadrensis* (2007).

<sup>6</sup> *Chronicon Dubnicense* 1884, 166. (...) "et nisi Johannes Bessenew nutu diuino ibidem peruenisset, idem ursus ferox et furibundus regem Lodouicum interfecisset. Sed dictus Johannes Bessenew plus regem diligens quam se ipsum, periculo mortis se interponendo ursum regem inuadentem aggrediens cum suo gladio interemit, et regem a mortis faucibus liberavit. Tandem idem Johannes pro illo facto, propter incusancium rabietatem, et specialiter Nowak de Croacia, nullam recepit remunerationem. Ipse enim tunc venerat, quando iam Johannes dictum regem liberando ursum intermerat prenotatum".

when it comes to saving the king's life from a bear, but he is also portrayed as a hero earlier in the text of the chronicle in an episode during the king's campaign in southern Italy (Domanovszky 1899, 68-71). A further argument can be added.

In the anonymous text included in the *Chronicon Dubnicense* (1884, 163-164), much space is devoted to the above-mentioned description of the siege of Belz in 1352. The deeds of no less than seven men are mentioned, but not a word about Novak, who fought bravely under the castle and was seriously wounded in front of Louis, as stated in the above-mentioned deed of gift (CD XII, doc. 101, p. 143). Despite the bias of the anonymous author(s), one can conclude that the king and the other men regarded Novak as the one who had saved the king, and unlike János Besenyő, Novak received an appropriate reward. What was this sign of appreciation? In all likelihood, this was the post of castellan of Salgo castle, which Novak held until the end of his life. Although the first information indicating Novak's post as castellan of Salgo dates only from 1358 (Engel 1996/I, 403), given that this was the biggest change in Novak's status since 1353 that we see, and that he retained this post until his death, it can be assumed that this was the reward Louis gave him for saving his life.

János Besenyő (*Iohannes Bissenus*), commonly known in Croatian historiography as Ivan Bissen, was later to occupy a similar position to Novak when he became count of Moson and castellan of Óvár in 1361 (Engel 1996/I, 156). In the following two decades he had a brilliant career (Engel 1996/1, 232, 311, 379, 480).<sup>7</sup> It seems that Ivan and Novak did not get along well at all. Around 1380, towards the end of Novak's life, Ivan was appointed count of Bužane, the region directly bordering the county of Lika, where count Novak's family property and inheritance were located. It seems that this further exacerbated tensions between the two. In 1384, John's vice-count Paul filed a lawsuit against Novak and his son Peter because they had violently attacked him some four years earlier and caused his lord more than 300 gold ducats worth of damage (Karbić – Katušić – PISAČIĆ 2007, doc. 23, pp. 57-59). The animosity between Novak and John must have been deep-rooted and long-lasting. In the 1350s, both were members of a royal court teeming with ambitious and competitive young men (Kurcz 1988, 218), in which questions of honor played an important role so that an episode like the one in the forest of Zvolen obviously determined their relationship.

Returning to Novak's award, which was given as a sign of gratitude for saving the king's life during a hunt in the vicinity of Zvolen, it should be emphasized that Novak was not appointed castellan of Salgo castle in Transylvania, as is occasionally stated in Croatian historiography (Klaić 1900, 177; Pantelić 1967, 6), but of Salgó castle from the Hont county in the hills of Börzsöny (Engel 1996/I, 403). This castle was located less than 20 kilometers from Visegrád and the royal court. From this we can see that the castle with which Novak was awarded (*honor*) was anything but randomly chosen: the king wanted his loyal palace knight close to him (*njega polače vitez*).

Unfortunately, there are no other comparable sources, nor royal charters of grant nor narrative texts, which give us an insight into Novak's life as we have outlined it for the period between 1347/1350 and 1353. But this part of Novak's life shows us that he was constantly in royal service, often as part of the king's immediate entourage. There is no reason to believe that things were any different thereafter. There was certainly no shortage of opportunities, as Louis was more than active on the battlefields until the end of the 1360s. As a knight of the royal palace (*miles aulae regiae*), Novak must have followed his master in these military ventures, such as the conflict with the Golden Horde and Serbia in the mid-1350s and the war against the Venetians between 1356 and 1358. Novak was certainly involved in the latter, as he had the necessary local knowledge that

<sup>7</sup> In Croatian historiography, he is best known as the founder of the Pauline monastery in Streza (cf. Kolar Dimitrijević 2003, 104-105; Pleše 2012, 125-133).

was needed in the battles to recapture the Dalmatian towns. This local knowledge also came into play later.

In the summer of 1358, Novak was in Croatia when the royal commission was establishing order in Croatia and Dalmatia, and his presence probably had to do not only with the protection of his landed interests but also with the presence of the commission (CD XII, doc. 388, pp. 504-505; on the royal commission, see Karbić 1999, 524-525). A similar situation dates from the end of 1376 when Louis's wife, queen Elizabeth, traveled south accompanied by the royal judge. After reaching the royal town of Knin, queen Elizabeth continued her journey to Zadar, while the royal judge remained in Knin to preside over a general assembly for Croatia (Nekić 2022, 220-221). In this case, we know that Novak was in Knin, so he was part of the royal judge's entourage. He must have followed him and the queen back to Visegrád, because his presence there is attested for January and February 1377 (CD XV, doc. 176, p. 248; doc. 177, pp. 249-250; doc. 183, pp. 256-257).

It has already been mentioned that Novak belonged to the close circle of persons responsible for the implementation of the king's policy in Croatia. It is said that in 1362 he served as an advisor to the Ban of Croatia and Dalmatia in the administration of Dalmatian towns (Klaić 1900, 177). He was also in the royal presence in 1364 when he requested the confirmation of two deeds of donation on May 30 (MNL OL, DL 87255, 87277), which means that he must have been at the royal court in Visegrád, since the king's presence is attested there in June (Halász 2023, 246). Novak was again at the court in Visegrád in February 1372 (CD XIV, doc. 293, pp. 397). Finally, it must be added that Novak was appointed count of Nin in 1366 (Praga 1936, doc. 26, pp. 47) and held this title, with some interruptions, until 1381 (Praga 1936, doc. 30, pp. 54). This is also the last year in which he is recorded as being alive. It turns out that he died shortly before or at the same time as his master, whom he followed faithfully throughout his life – king Louis the Great (1382).

What do these fragmentary data reveal about Novak's life? They indicate that Novak was a courageous man who proved himself in royal service and managed to rise above the local Croatian level. He positioned himself as an important link in the machinery with which Louis ruled the kingdom, at the highest level of the Angevin elite, a social status that Novak's sons were unable to maintain.<sup>8</sup> A pattern emerges that suggests that Novak was constantly in Louis' service, often accompanying him on peaceful journeys and military campaigns or staying with him in Visegrád. He also became involved in Croatia and Dalmatia, using his local roots to forge the necessary connections that the central government needed to effectively assert its authority in these lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen. In essence, Novak was both a warrior and an administrator.

Is it plausible that he single-handedly wrote the Glagolitic missal with such a status, such an attitude, and such a lifestyle? Novak lived in a world where men were destined for a certain role in life from an early age and the knowledge of a scribe, like that of a knight, was laboriously acquired, as it required talent and years of training. It is clear from his life that he wielded a *sword* from a young age, which raises the question of when he might have acquired the good skills of a scribe. The codex of MNov, as it reached the Austrian National Library in Vienna in 1820, contains 272 parchment leaves measuring 32x24.5 cm, divided into about 30 quires (Žagar 2020, 8).<sup>9</sup> The corpus of the missal, which was dated 1368 with Novak's name, consists of 269 inscribed leaves. The text is arranged in two columns in the tradition of medieval liturgical manuscripts, with the number of lines (29 per column) and spacing optimized for oral reading (Žagar 2020, 10; Paro 2020, 47). The brushstrokes of the Glagolitic letters were immaculately written on the parchment.

<sup>8</sup> About his sons and their fate, see Pavičić 1962, 21, 24, 42; Pantelić 1967, 7-8; Majnarić 2018, 285-287, 295.

<sup>9</sup> In the MNov, 67 high-quality sheepskins were used, corresponding to just over one and a half flocks of 40 sheep each (Paro 2020, 41).

Even if Novak had such skills, the craftsmanship involved in using a skillful *feather* would mean that it took tireless work, at least a year (cf. Stipčević 2004, 64),<sup>10</sup> to complete the codex. Where could Novak find such an amount of “free” time?

The MNov is a masterfully crafted codex. The high quality of the parchment, the illuminations and the initial letters, the perfect arrangement of the lines in columns, and the harmonious ductus of the scribe bear witness to the fact that this liturgical book was a demanding project that must have been the work of a book expert. The palaeographic analysis confirms the precision and harmony of the Glagolitic pen and emphasizes that it is the work of a single scribe who transcribed the entire text skilfully and carefully in a relatively short time (Žagar 2020, 19-22). Art-historical analyses emphasize the high quality of the Gothic miniatures and the decorative ornaments around the initials (Priatelj – Priatelj Pavičić 2020, 38-39). In the absence of similar examples in books from the Adriatic region, it is assumed that this is an exceptional work by a local master.

It is instructive to compare these conclusions with what we know about the literacy of the nobility of the Kingdom of Hungary and the members of the courtly elites during the Angevin period. As for the nobility, Erik Fügedi argues that “the overwhelming majority of medieval nobles in Hungary did not have any interest in writing” (Fügedi 1986a, 21). He describes this social milieu as one that lived in a predominantly oral culture, since “the demands of medieval Hungarian nobles to written documents did not go beyond the need for securing their landed property and administrating their estates” (Fügedi 1986a, 24), and the use of written documents for the latter did not become widespread until the 15th century. Was it different at the level of the courtly elites? We know of educated members of this elite, but these were young men who were destined for a career in the church from an early age, and who could not pursue this career in the church without the support of their families. Even the king himself, who was well educated at court, could read fluently, but there is no evidence that he also learned to write. Similarly, there is no clear evidence that any of the secular members of Louis’ court elite knew how to write (cf. Csukovits 2019). In her influential study of the knightly culture, Ágnes Kurcz considered Novak to be the author of the Glagolitic missal and concluded that he was unique among the courtly elites (Kurcz 1988, 153). However, this is at odds with the way she portrayed this elite. Her remark about Novak’s uniqueness in the society to which he belonged should therefore be understood as a signal that the mere expression *napisah* should not be taken as proof of Novak’s authorship of the missal.<sup>11</sup>

All this is less important than the fact that count Novak was the driving force and supporter behind this endowed project. He dedicated his precious missal to the peace of his soul and donated it

<sup>10</sup> On average, medieval scribes could write eight folios in four days, but precise estimates are impossible due to various factors affecting writing speed and type. These include, for example, the refilling of ink, the recutting of nibs, the time needed for the eyes to rest, breaks for personal daily rhythms, the state of health, slowness due to fatigue, etc. Even the writing speed varied depending on the season; in harsh winters, cold fingers could slow or stop production. Read more about this in Gullick 1995, 39-58. According to this calculation, the scribe of MNov would have had to work diligently for at least 134 working days. This calculation does not consider the extensive preparations before writing, such as the spatial arrangement of the individual pages for the miniatures (there are 6) and the illuminated initials (there are 460), or the supervision of the binding of the codex (cf. Brčić 2022, 188-193). In all of this, it should not be forgotten that almost half of the year consisted of Sundays and church holidays on which no work was done.

<sup>11</sup> The old verb *pisati* (‘to write’) also refers to drawing and painting, so that some had speculated that count Novak might also have illuminated this codex (Pantelić 1971, 327).

for liturgical use in the cemetery church of his Mogorović relatives in Ostrovica.<sup>12</sup> What complicates matters is the verb *pisati*, which today has a fairly clear meaning. Fortunately, in the colophon of Kolunić's Miscellany from 1486, there is an indication that the root of the verb *pisati* had two different meanings: on the one hand, it meant to invest one's money or possessions in a particular project (*spisati*), and on the other, to rewrite a text (*pisati*). This codex was copied by the scribe Broz Kacitić from the Kolunić kindred, commissioned by the vicar Levnardo from the Doljanin kindred, in Levnardo's house in Kneževska Vas near Otočac in Gacka (Štefanić 1970: 17).<sup>13</sup>

The MNov belongs to the “southern group” (Krbava-Zadar) of Croatian Glagolitic liturgical codices (1967, 69), i.e. it belongs to a more recent redaction of Croatian Old Church Slavonic, which began to form liturgical texts at the beginning of the 14th century at the earliest (Reinhart 1990, 203). In its translational elements and the calendar of saints, this missal shows characteristics of “urban Glagoliticism” with a pronounced context of Zadar (Pantelić 1967, 69-71). It originates from an unknown Glagolitic scribal school that developed in the political, cultural and intellectual environment in the Zadar area that emerged after the establishment of the “Pax Angevina” on the Adriatic. This period began in 1358, when Zadar, the most important city on the eastern side of the Adriatic in the late Middle Ages, once again became part of the lands of the Crown of St. Stephen. Bartol of Krbava, one of the famous Glagolitic scribes from the first half of the 15th century, is known for his handwritten Glagolitic missals that found their way to Roč and Beram in Istria (Pantelić 1964, 13-17), probably also belonged to this school of Glagolitic scribes. One of his works is the Berlin missal, which is attested by the colophon of 1402 (MBerl, 119r). It has been noted that this missal is written in a very similar style to MNov (Hercigonja 2009, 121). It is also important to point out that both missals, MNov and MBerl, were made for the needs of Glagolitic churches in the diocese of Nin: one for the church in Ostrovica in Lika county (MNov), the other for the Benedictine monastery church of St. George near Obrovac on the Zrmanja river in Krbava county (MBerl).

This MNov marks the beginning of the “golden age of Glagoliticism”, a period from the middle of the 14th to the first decades of the 16th century, during which almost the entire known corpus of Croatian Glagolitic missals and breviaries was compiled (Mihaljević 2014, 19). Consequently, it occupies a prominent position, as it marks the beginning of this flourishing era in Croatian medieval culture. What did the production of such a missal mean for Novak? The colophon quoted at the beginning continues:

<sup>12</sup> Since the missal was sold to Istria in 1405, Pantelić believes that the missal did not belong to the church where Novak was buried, but remained in the hands of his sons Peter and Paul, who took the surname Novaković (Pantelić 1967, 7). Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Novak did not immediately give the missal for use in the church in Ostrovica, where members of the Mogorović kindred were buried. The other question, however, is how Novak's sons later came into possession of the missal and sold it in 1405.

<sup>13</sup> “Ѡ господнь lev' nar'do plemenemь dolani|nь polozihь učiniti sv|it'lo delo ko bi bilo na | služ'bu b(o)žiū i sv(e)te cr|ik've za grihi moe . spis|ahь sie k'nige moimь bla|gomь čistimь . (119<sup>v</sup>) || I se knige i siū rubriku p|isahь ê brozь žakanь b|uduči v redu e(va)j(e)lskomь | z' bužanь ot kacitićь z du|bovika plemenemь kolun|ič komu esu grisi boga|tstvo grobь otočastvo | zemla mati” (119<sup>v</sup>). *Kolunićev zbornik, 1486. (Arhiv HAZU, III A 51)* [https://izvori.stin.hr/index.php?menu=200&kopija\\_id=683&page=4](https://izvori.stin.hr/index.php?menu=200&kopija_id=683&page=4).

*I pomisli vsaki hrstjanin  
da sa svit ništare ni,  
jere gdo ga veće ljubi,  
ta ga brže zgubi.*

*Nu jošće pomisli vsaki sada:  
ča se najde ot nas tada,  
gda se duša strahom smete,  
a dila nam se skruti nete.<sup>14</sup>*

These verses come from *Pisan na spomenutje smrti*, an eschatological poem that was very popular in late medieval Croatian literature (Kapetanović – Malić – Despot 2010, 121-124). They express the image of transience, perishability, and the nothingness of life (f. 269r). These verses, contained in the above-mentioned colophon, represent the first confirmation of Croatian syllabic-tonal versification in Croatian literature (Malić 2002, 61). The scribe continues this colophon poetically by emphasizing how important it is to come before the mighty and Eternal Judge with good deeds (f. 269r), and at the same time asks the priests and clerical students who would offer prayers from this missal to the merciful, good and kind Lord God to also mention the soul of count Novak in their prayers (f. 269v).<sup>15</sup> The MNov differs from other missals of the Roman rite in that it contains no fewer than 70 votive prayers and 20 masses for the deceased (Kuhar 2020, 28). This underlines the purpose and intention of this missal: it served the liturgical function of the cemetery church of the manuscript's patron. Furthermore, the editor of the liturgical text proved to be someone who had recently embraced liturgical innovations and was even ahead of his time in this respect. Particularly noteworthy is his inclusion of passages from the sequence *Sudac' gněvanъ hoćet' priti* (f. (269r), a Croatian Old Church Slavonic translation of the famous Latin *Dies irae* by Thomas of Celano, a poignant poetic prayer that was used for centuries on the last Sunday after Pentecost and at the Requiem Mass, even before it was included in the Latin missals of the Roman rite (Kuhar 2020, 28-29). Consequently, the missal had a pious character that followed liturgical trends.

The missal not only fulfilled its pious function but was also a symbol of the social status of its owner. This can be seen in the MNov's impeccable craftsmanship and opulent decorations, which inevitably drove up production costs. It is therefore not surprising that Novak's sons sold it in 1405 for a good price of 45 gold ducats (MNov, 269v). Such a luxurious object was undoubtedly made to impress and in some way reflect the social status of its commissioner. The timing of completion of the work in 1368 also indicates that the commission was not given arbitrarily. Assuming that Novak was appointed Count of Nin (*knez ninski*) in 1366, and considering that it probably took around a year for the missal to be completed, the question arises: was the commissioning of the missal related to the significant change in Novak's status when he became Count of Nin? Ultimately, Nin was one of the most important cities in Croatia and the center of a diocese that included Lika, the region where Novak's inheritance was located. Moreover, during a general assembly for the Kingdom of Dalmatia and Croatia held there in April 1371, king Louis referred to Nin as his principal town in Dalmatia (Nekić 2022, 219).<sup>16</sup> Novak's local prominence after his appointment as Count of Nin may have been expressed through a luxurious object such as the missal. The fact that Novak chose to have his missal written in Glagolitic script suggests that he

<sup>14</sup> . i pomisli v'saki h(r)st)ĕnin' | da sa svĕt ništare ni ere | gdo ga veće lŭbi ta ga b'rž|e z'gubi . nu oĕe pomisli v's|aki sada ĉa se naide ot nasъ | tada . gda se d(u)ša strahomъ | smete . a dila n(a)mъ se skruti | nete (MNov, 269r)

<sup>15</sup> zato kada n(a)mъ se dĕl|a skruti nete · tada vsak|j pridi z dobrimi dĕli prĕd' | strašnoga i silnoga vĕki (MNov, 269r) || v(ĕ)ĉnago sudĉa · a sada pro|šju vsakoga p(o)pa i diĕka ki | budetъ va te knige oficiĕ|ti m(o)li m(i)l(o)stivoga i drago|ga i slat'koga g(ospo)d(i)na b(og)a i v'|spomeni moŭ d(u)šicu v' m(o)l(i)tv|ah' svoih' i m(o)li g(ospo)dina b(og)a za | nu (MNov, 269v).

<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, the colophon of MNov also states that Nin is in Dalmatia (269r) and not in Croatia, as is the case.



wanted to demonstrate his status in the local community. Alternatively, we could also say that his homeland was a cultural environment in which the use of the Glagolitic script for liturgical books was deeply rooted.

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