

Epigraphic Relics from the Age of Mathias I

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Abstract:

The end of gothic maiuscula style can be put generally to the end of 14th century. In Hungary, similarly to other European territories the gothic minuscula style didn't replace the maiuscula on coins as it still appeared after the end of the 14th century. On the coins of Mátyás the features of the maiuscula style is found. So, it would seem that coins are the most conservative in the usage of gothic maiuscula.

The secret seal of Mátyás (1459) is of gothic minuscula style. The latter's great pendant seal, first Czech king's seal, second secret seal (1485) also bear minuscula letters. This style was also used on stone-inscriptions until the end of his reign, so the popularity of the Gothic minuscula style lasted throughout the 15th century, too. The relief version of the Gothic minuscula appears in the first decade of the 15th century. This type was used continuously from the middle until the end of this century.

The creation of the humanistic (or renaissance) capitals was performed in Italy, both in its early version and in the classical version inspired by the ancient Roman characters. The Italian style humanist capitalis lettering appeared in Hungary very early on the golden seal of Mátyás (1464), on which only the G letter is early humanist. The same lettering is used on his secret Czech ruler's (1486) and Austrian prince's (1487) seals. The humanist capitalis type dominates on seals from this point.

The first known apparition of the humanistic capitals can be exactly dated, as the year 1467 is figured on the half-pillar head of Vetési Albert. During 1480's and 1490's the font type became common throughout the whole country, slowly replacing the gothic minuscula.

The early version of the humanistic capitals was found in Hungary too, which can also be considered as being an alternative version. This early shape was used as a transitory writing and also become popular by panel pictures of the van Eyck brothers from Netherlands. This type was in use until the years of the decade starting with 1520.

In Hungary, the first early capitalis type lettering appears in 1472 on the secret Hungarian-Czech ruler's seal of Mátyás, the same year when the archbishop Vitéz János deceased. His grave covering stone was ornamented with the same lettering type. The epitaph of Vitéz János is written in these characters in a relief form,

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whereas the lateral plate of the tomb bears relief inscriptions made in Gothic minuscula.

This series of relics continues with the ornamental well in Visegrád, decorated with the coat-of-arms of the Hunyadi family, traced down by art historians to 1483.

The relief inscription of Mátyás in Bautzen bearing the year 1486 joins in this queue.

While the pure classical version of the humanistic capitals stood under the direct influence of the Italian writing, the early version was most probably transmitted from the German-speaking areas.

As it can be observed well, the age of King Mátyás is rich in epigraphic relics, and these relics are bearing four different lettering types at the same time.

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