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The Fragmentary Inscription on the Hungarian Raid of the Year 943 – New Epigraphic Analysis and Interpretations

Ioan ALBU*

Abstract

One of the oldest extant Slavic epigraphic testimony, the inscription discovered at Mircea Vodă (Romania) referring to župan Demetrius, dating in 943, has long been regarded as referring to the Greeks. Based on thorough epigraphic analysis, however, the inscription could stimulate a reevaluation of the data. The inscription refers to a Hungarian raid which is equally evidenced in chronicles in April 943, and not to the Byzantines (Greeks). It also remains open if župan Demetrius is mentioned in connection with these events or at a slightly later time.

Keywords: *epigraphy, inscription, župan Demetrius, Hungarians, Greeks.*

The inscription dating back in the year 943, found at Mircea Vodă (Romania), was long regarded as the oldest Slavic epigraphic testimony with Cyrillic letters. Later on, the discovery of the incised graffiti in the rock walls of the Krepcha Monastery (Provadia), near Targovishte (Bulgaria), dated in the year of the Byzantine creation era 6430 (921), in the month of October, referring to the death of a monk, of the „servant of God Anthony” („раба Божия Антония”), as well as an inscription on pottery in Preslav, dated in 930-931 proved to be earlier.¹

Like many other early Medio-Bulgarian inscriptions, the inscription mentioning or commemorating Demetrius in the year of the Byzantine church era 6451 (943) has spawned a lot of discussion and controversy. Eugen Comşa and Dorin Popescu reported about the archaeological research in the autumn of 1949, when they found several stone blocks at the bottom of the old stone wall, without mortar link, from Acsandemir Tabiasi (Mircea Vodă), on the Dobrudgea shore of the Danube, near

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¹ Казимир Константинов, „Два старобългарски надписа от скалния манастир при с. Крепча, Търговишки окръг,” *Archaeologia* 19/3 (1977), 19-28; Стефан Смядовски, „Епиграфско-текстологични добавки върху още два български надписа,” *Archaeologia* 2/2 (1982), 38-42; Казимир Попконстантинов, „Разпространение на старобългарската писменост през IX–XI век (по епиграфски данни),” *Старобългарска литература* 17 (1985), 39-70, aici 54; Ivan Biliarsky, *Word and Power in Mediaeval Bulgaria (East-Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450*, volume 14, nr. 8, general ed. Florin Curta (Leiden-Boston, 2011); K. Popkonstantinov, O. Kronsteiner, *Starobălgarski nadpisi/Albulgarische Inschriften*, vol. I-II (Die slawischen Sprachen) Salzburg, (Bd. 36) 1994; (Bd. 52) 1997; PK, I, 49; Kiril Petkov, *The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, Seventh-Fifteenth Century: the Records of a Bygone Culture. East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450* v. 5, nr. 55, ed. Florin Curta (Leiden-Boston, 2008), 40.

the Cernavodă bridge. The researchers assumed that the inscribed block was part of the foundation wall, giving the photo and translation of the inscription in the Romanian language („... *pe Greci în anul 6451 ... pe Dumitru ...*” / „... *the Greeks in the year 6451 ... Demetrius*), where both nomina are rendered in the Accusative. As the stone block was still under research, the authors do not transcribe the Cyrillic Medio-Bulgarian inscription and do not specify whether the wall had been raised after the date mentioned in the inscription.²

In the same year (1951) issued the paleographical and linguistic–semantical study of Damian P. Bogdan, where the text of the inscription was likewise not transcribed, and it is only the exposition of the letter morphology that the reading of the author is inferred. Consequently, the name in the inscription appears as ДЪБИМИТРЪ, a form regarded as a popular „phonetism”. The translation in this case sounds: „... *Greci / în anul 6450 (943) / era în vremea lui Dumitru / jupan ...*” / „... *Greeks, in the year 6450 (943) in the time of Demetrius Župan*”. Notable is the Byzantine year 6450 instead of the year 6451, referring therefore to the months September to December. The author rejects the possibility that the stone block comes from a funerary plate, and also the possibility that it certifies the foundation date, considering it to be a commemorative inscription which „should be rowed among those funerary stelae or commemorative columns of historical deeds which are a tradition in the Bulgarian epigraphy”.³

A few years later, the same author Damian P. Bogdan subsequently published a study with some revisions and a more consistent bibliographical support.⁴ Here the author lastly provides his reading:

... / [...] **ЪИ ГЪ•РЬЦЪХЪ ...** /
[В]Ъ ЛЪТЪ ѠС•: ѰН•А /
П]РИ ДЪИМИТРЪ ВЪ /
-- ЖОУПАНЪ

Bogdan’s translation into Russian is similar to the Romanian translation of his above-mentioned study. The beginning of the inscription is translated as „against the Greeks” (*против греков*), a translation which was further on picked up widely and unanimously.⁵

² Eugen Comşa, Dorin Popescu, „Cercetări arheologice pe traseul canalului Dunăre-Marea Neagră,” *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche* I/2 (1951), 170-171, fig. 1.

³ Damian P. Bogdan, Eugen Comşa, P.P. Panaitescu, „Inscripția slavă din Dobrogea din anul 943,” *Studii (Revistă de istorie și filosofie)* III / 4 (1951), 122-134.

⁴ Damian P. Bogdan, Eugen Comşa, P.P. Panaitescu, „Добруджанская надпись 943 года. Палеографический и лингвистический очерк,” *Romanoslavica*, 1, 1958, 88-104.

⁵ Живко Войников, *Алано-Древнобългарското писмо* (Велико Търново, 2011), 157; Florin Curta, *Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages (500-1300)*, vol. 19 (Leiden-Boston, 2019), 233-234.

Although the word *npomue* (against) already appears in the documents of the 10th century,⁶ its is not a part of the inscription and therefore merely assumed.

The delimiter (dividing) signs seen by Damian Bogdan are deterioration traces in their majority and have nothing in common with the inscription itself. Subsequent studies on the subject were issued later on, related to the previous ones, without bringing anything new,⁷ except for the article signed by Grigore Nandriș, who declares the inscription as *spuria*, although he lacks convincing arguments, and the answer of Damian Bogdan, who admits that the inscription must have been written in two subsequent stages.⁸ The first two lines mentioning the year 6451 being considered as the former inscription, whereas the last two lines must have been added at a slightly later time. Starting from this observations, it was speculated that the stone was reused in the construction or reconstruction of the wall.⁹ A different opinion was advanced by archaeologist Uwe Fiedler, who considers that the wall was erected before 943 during the last years of Tsar Simeon (893-927) or during the reign of Tsar Peter I (927-970).¹⁰

Based on the analysis of available information regarding the discovery of the stone block with the inscription of Demetrius one can conclude that it originally

⁶ Mikosich, „Lexikon,” in *Monumenta linguae palaeoslovenica e codice supraliensi*, ed. Miklosich (Vindobonae, 1851), nr. 233; *Letopisek Perejaslavlja-suzdaljskago, sostavlennyj v nacale XIII veka*. Izdan K.M. Obolenskim (Moskva, 1851), nr. 10; nr. 37; *Monumenta servica spectantia historiam Serbiae, Bosnae, Ragusii*, ed. Miklosich (Vindobonae, 1858), nr. 384, 481.

⁷ Damian P. Bogdan, „Древнеславянские графити, обнаруженные в Добрудже. Добруджанская надпись 943 года” (*АН СССР. Сов. комитет славистов*), 139-140; Васил Гюзелев, „Добруджанският надпис и събитията в България през 943 г.,” *Исторически преглед* 6 (1968), 40-48; Иван Божилов, „Надпись на жупан Димитър от 943 г. Теории и факти,” *Известия на Окръжния исторически музей и Българското историческо дружество - Толбухин* 1 (1973), 37-58; PK, I, 109; PVMB, 38, nr. 51; Biliarsky, *Word and Power in Mediaeval Bulgaria (East-Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450*, 20, N 21.

⁸ Grigore Nandriș, “A Spurious Slavonic Inscription from the Danube Canal,” *SEER (The Slavonic and East European Review)* 38 / 91 (1959/1960), London, 530-534. R ăspunsul lui Damian Bogdan la această suspiciune cu privire la autenticitate în, Damian P. Bogdan, *Paleografia româno-slavă. Tratat și album* (București, 1978), 151: „dacă cineva ar fi creat un fals, dădea un text întreg, cum este de pildă cel al cunoscutei inscripții pseudo-tombale a patriarhului Eftimie de Târnovo, apoi caracterele grafice și limba celor două inscripții nu provoacă absolut nici un dubiu în comparație cu celelalte inscripții și grafitice chirilice slave vechi din sec. X – aceasta numai dacă se cercetează *sine ira et studio*.”

⁹ Alexandru Madgearu, “Were the Župans really Rulers of some Romanian Early Medieval Polities?,” *Revista de istorie socială IV-VII (1999-2002, 2004)*, 15-25; Alexandru Madgearu, *Organizarea militară bizantină la Dunăre în secolele X-XII* (Târgoviște, 2007), 19-20; Vezi și ediția engleză: Alexandru Madgearu, *Byzantine Military Organization on the Danube, 10th–12th Centuries (East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450*, volume 22, ed. Florin Curta (Leiden-Boston, 2013), 26-27.

¹⁰ Uwe Fiedler, „Bulgars in the Lower Danube Region. A Survey of the archaeological Evidence and of the State of current Research”, in: *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans* (ed. Florin Curta; Roman Kovalev, East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, 2), Leiden-Boston, 2008, pp. 151-236, aici p. 168.

stood next to the wall, most likely not being used for the construction of its foundation. A keen research of morphology of the letters, the less neatly carved rows 3-4 may have been added later, but within a short time, which can be seen from the same morphology of the letters. The inscription can be read differently, and possible letter restorations are also varied.

[ПРОТ]ИВ /
 [. . .]УНГЪРЪЦѢХЪ... /
 [В]Ъ ЛѢТО □S.: УН•А /
 [П]РИ ДѢИМИТРѢ БЪ[...] /
 [. . .] ЖОУПАНѢ [. . .]

Letter **Н** is heavily deteriorated. The first line could also be read as [. . .]УНГЪРЪЦѢХЪ..., since the inscription is carved in *scriptio continua*, as such referring to Hungarians / Magyars. Nevertheless, further investigation should be undertaken, in order to determine whether this form might have existed in the 10th century. It is known from several sources that a huge Hungarian raid occurred in April 943, so that the inscription might be connected to this event:

Indictione prima mense Aprili, rursus Turci cum ingentibus copiis Romanae dicionis fines invaserunt. Egressus vero Theophanes patricius accubitor pacis cum eis foedus percissit, acceptis obsidibus ex illustrioribus; hincque adeo contigit in annos quinque pacem indutiasque servari.

(On the first year of the indiction, in the month of April, the Turks invaded again the frontiers of the Roman territory with massive armies. Theophanes patrikios and parakoimomenos went out and signed peace with them, once he accepted hostages among the most illustrious. And from then on, he could preserve peace for five years.)¹¹

The reading and letter restoration [П]РИ in the beginning of the 3rd row seems correct and the formula is also present on the slightly later dated funerary slab of Mostich. Ivan Biliarsky notices that all the bearers of the *župan* title until this time had Turkic Bulgar, non-Slavic names, and considers the case of *župan* Demetrius to be an exception, since he bears a Christian name of Greek origin, a name which does not necessarily communicate his ethnicity.¹² The fragmentary text БЪ, between the name ДѢИМИТРѢ and his title ЖОУПАНѢ, was rendered as the particle БЪ, in

¹¹ Georgius Monachus Continuatus, in *Theophanes Continuatus*, 917, nr. 53; В. М. Истринь, *Книги времения и образныя Георгия Мниха. Хроника Георгия Амартола в древнем славянорусском переводе. Текст, исслед. и словарь*. Т. 1. Текст. Пг. (Петроградъ, 1920), 566; Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages*, 189.

¹² Biliarsky, *Word and Power in Mediaeval Bulgaria (East-Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450*, 20, 369, N 21.

Damian Bogdan's reading. Most probably, **бъ** is the beginning of a word. One cannot exclude the possibility that the passage was **бъ[івъїи] жоупанѣ** („former župan”), a syntagm which also appears in the inscription of Mostich. In this case, the inscription would have a funerary role.

Another possibility, sticking to Bogdan's reading, would be **въликїи жоупанѣ** („great župan”), connected to the title existent in the First Bulgarian Empire. The formula is attested in the 9th century in the inscription on the cup of Sivin, great župan of Bulgaria (СНВНН / ЗУПАНОС / МЕГАСНС ВОУРГА/РНАН).¹³

From all these considerations, the inscription could stimulate a reevaluation of the data. As we have seen, the inscription might refer to a Hungarian raid and not to the Byzantines (Greeks). It also remains open if župan Demetrius is mentioned in connection with these events or at a slightly later time.



Fig. 1: The block with the inscription, Muzeul Național de Istorie a României, nr. inv. 18883 (public domain picture).

¹³ Веселин Бешевлиев, *Прабългарски...*, 160, fig. 34; Kiril Petkov, *The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, Seventh-Fifteenth Century: the Records of a Bygone Culture. East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450 v. 5*, ed. Florin Curta (Leiden-Boston, 2008), 37, nr. 48.