

ИЗСЛЕДВАНЕ НА СРЕДНОВЕКОВНИТЕ СЛАВЯНСКИ ПАМЕТНИЦИ: ДАТИРОВКА И ИДЕНТИФИКАЦИЯ

DATING THE VAROŠ INSCRIPTION FROM PRILEP

SEBASTIAN KEMPGEN (BAMBERG)

1. In the monastery “Holy Archangel” (“*Sveti Arhangel*”), in the former village of Varoš, now part of the city of Prilep, Macedonia, below the rocks and fortifications of ‘King Marko’s Towers’ (*Markovi kuli*), an inscription has been preserved on the first column outside the entrance of the church.¹ This marble column had been found in 1861, when the grounds around the church were excavated and cleaned up during restauration works. Two other columns were brought into the monastery from nearby ruins (Иванов 1908: 27). All three columns found a new use supporting the roof covering the entrance to the church and were painted over. The inscription was first noticed by Archimandrite Antonin [Andrej Kapustin] in 1865,² who published his notes and thoughts in 1879 (АНТОНИН 1879: 325–326.). Archimandrite Antonin obviously had a keen interest in inscriptions: he had already published a book about Christian inscriptions in Athens some years earlier (1874), and he was also the person who added the Glagolitic alphabet in his own hand-writing to the newly found Kiev Folia in 1872 (see Kempgen 2015: 266ff.).

Archimandrite Antonin published a drawing of the inscription at the end of his book (АНТОНИН 1879: 5). He, himself, called it a “facsimile,” although it was not very precise (АНТОНИН 1879: 326); see fig. 1.

¹ A map of the area is included in Микулчиќ 1996, and the site “Old Prilep” has a gallery of more than one hundred old and recent photographs of the monastery online (<http://www.oldprilep.com/prilepska-crkovna-opstina/sv-arhangel-mihail-varos.html>). The monastery itself published a nice brochure (Манастир Варош 2010) that also shows the inscription.

² Dujčev incorrectly states that the inscription was found in 1861 (Дуйчев 1941).

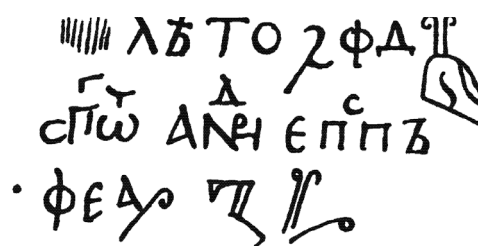


Fig. 1. “Facsimile” by Archimandrite Antonin [Kapustin] in 1879

Jordan Ivanov visited Prilep in 1907 during his travels through Macedonia, he cleaned the column from dirt and paint and made an off-print of the inscription, which he published a year later in his book called *Bulgarian Antiquities from Macedonia*, where he devoted 3 pages to it.³ Ivanov also gave the inscription its “official” name, the Varoš Inscription.

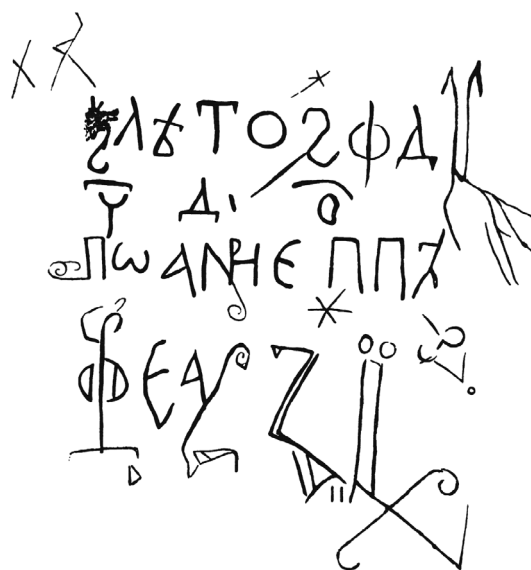


Fig. 2. The Varoš Inscription (Иванов 1908: 28)⁴

³ Иванов 1908: 27–29; pp. 26–28 in the revised edition from 1931.

⁴ The same drawing, only slightly modified in the area of the ‘въ’, is also on a display at the City Museum of Bitola, next to the Bitola Inscription. A less reliable drawing (after Бабиќ 1986) can be found in the book by Mikulčić (Микулчиќ 1996, 252). This same version is also used by the monastery itself in a printed brochure (Манастир Варош 2010: 8).

The inscription is now commonly read like this:⁵

ВЪ ЛѢТО ҃2ФД
пѡ҃ АНДРИ ЕП҃ПЪ
ФЕР҃ ЗІ

Fully written out, this spells:

ВЪ ЛѢТО ҃2ФД [996] пѡ҃(и) АНДРИ(ѣ) ЕПИСКОПЪ
ФЕР҃(ОУАРИ) ЗІ [17]

As such, the translation does not present a problem: “In the year 996, bishop Andrie died February 17.” This dating makes it one of the oldest Cyrillic inscriptions preserved, right along with the famous Mostič inscription (950–960) from Preslav, Tsar Samuil’s inscription from 993, and the Bitola inscription from 1015–1018. Therefore, the Varoš inscription has at one time been proudly called the “third oldest inscription” in the Slavic world, “the second oldest one” or “the oldest epitaph written in Cyrillic” (Полевой 1883: 11).

Looking at the drawing published by Archimandrite Antonin (see above, fig. 1), it becomes a bit more understandable why he made a mistake and misread the Slavic word ‘пѡ҃[и]’ “died” as the Greek ‘agiō’ “holy” (see Антонин 1879: 326), which is very frequent on icons. Mixing languages and alphabets like this, however, is somewhat strange, and it remains a bit puzzling why the author did not recognize the common formula used in such inscriptions.

2. There are some details in the reading that would merit further discussion. For example, the boundary between the two words in the middle line is not absolutely clear: it could be “Andrie попъ” or “Andri episkopъ” who passed away. These two readings have been proposed by Ivanov only in the second edition of his book (Иванов 1931: 28), and quite rightly so. He still considered the earlier interpretation more probable. The letter “e” certainly is closer to the name than to the title, though. Is the raised letter above the second word really a < c > or an < o >? It does look more like the vowel < o >, but a < c > would be normally expected as an abbreviation

⁵ Bulgarian Wikipedia has a separate article on the inscription (https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Варошки_надпис).

sign in this title. If it is a < c >, then it would have been carved out in an ‘outline’ form. We will leave this discussion open for now.

3. In the present paper, we will focus on another detail of the inscription – its two numbers. They are $65[0]4 - 5508 = 996$ for the year and 17 for the day of the month. The Bulgarian Wikipedia article goes on to say this: „В надписа се споменава името на епископ от Прилеп, където се е намирало и епископското седалище по време на управлението на цар Самуил.“ As is well known, Samuil first defeated the Byzantine army in 996 around Thessaloniki, but was himself wounded and his army destroyed in another battle later in July 996 (or 997) – the so-called “Battle of Spercheios”, a river in Central Greece. After his co-ruler Roman, who was captured in the same battle, died in Constantinople, he became Tsar of Bulgaria in 997 and remained so until he died in 1014. Dating the inscription to 996 would lead us to assume that a Bulgarian bishop had his seat in Prilep even before Samuil began his reign as the sole emperor of Bulgaria – a slight contradiction if the two events are connected as is usually thought. Anyway, the seat of the bishop was later moved from Prilep to Ohrid, when this city became Samuil’s capital, so it did not stay very long there.

4. First, let us have a look at the number for the day. Isolated from the rest, it looks like this (fig. 3):



Fig. 3. Number $\epsilon\zeta\iota$ = ‘17’ = 7-10

Both letters have been carved in ‘outline’ form. ‘17’ or < $\zeta\iota$ > is written literally as 7-10, as the numbers between 11 and 19 were written in the order they are spoken: ‘seven–teen’. Interestingly enough, Archimandrite Antonin, who discovered the inscription, read it as ‘7’, not recognizing the last two strokes as the “decimal i” in the Cyrillic alphabet.

5. Now, let us turn to the year. Again cleared of the rest, it looks like this in the current reading, consisting of three letters (see fig. 4):

✱
2φΔ

Fig. 4. Number ϕφΔ = 65[0]4 = 996

After Archimandrite Antonin, a Russian archeographic expedition visited the monastery in 1898, only to read the year as ϕφΔκ, i.e. recognizing four numbers in the first row, which leads to 6524 – 5508 = 1016. In fig. 5, we are reproducing the relevant portion of Miljukov (Милюков 1899: 125), in which he also offered his own ‘facsimile’ of the inscription. From his drawing, it becomes somewhat clearer, why he saw a < κ > as the fourth letter. This letter, however, would be completely out of proportion compared to the rest of the text – for which he also offered a very different reading (ουσπε < πωчи(на); Данил < Андри(e)). The Russian expedition continued to read the day as Archimandrite Antonin had read it before them, i.e. as < ζ > ‘7’. In general, the drawing of Miljukov is closer to the one by Antonin than it is similar to the one later made by Ivanov – it is just that the interpretations given by Archimandrite Antonin and Miljukov differ.

(Grafito на колоннѣ передъ входомъ теперь покрашено краской; но черты все же выступаютъ лѣвственно и оказываются неполнѣ сходными съ факсимиле Антонина: (см. рис. № 49)

Антонинъ читалъ эту надпись: (въ) лѣтѣ 6504 (= 996) αγιωτ(ατος) вѣиηъ аѣри февр ζ¹). Наше факсимиле наводитъ на другое чтеніе: в лѣтѣ ϕφΔκ (6524 - 1016) ουσπε дани(л) вѣиηъ февр ζ . . . (въ оригиналѣ слѣдующіе знаки идутъ росчеркомъ внизъ; можетъ быть, тутъ скрывается индиктъ?)

8Λζτο 2φΔκ
спωδμεηηζ
φ(4) ζηη

Рис. № 49. Надпись на колоннѣ церкви мон. св. Архангела. Варошъ вонѣ Прилѣна.

Fig. 5. Miljukov on the Varoš inscription (Милюков 1899: 125)

The relevant section in Ivanov’s off-print which contains the year looks like this (fig. 6):

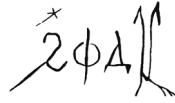


Fig. 6. Number $\text{ϣ}ϷϤΔκ = 6524 = 1016?$

Interpreting this as $\text{ϣ}ϷϤΔκ$, i.e. 6524, is not only impossible to substantiate optically, it also would be unusual for '24' to be written in the order '4–20', as it would have to be here. Without mentioning this additional argument, Ivanov returned to the interpretation as $\text{ϣ}ϷϤΔ = 65[0]4 = 996$ and corrected the day to be read as $\text{ϣ}ζ\text{̑}$, i.e. '17'. Also, one might add that in 1016 Tsar Samuil was already dead and buried, and the bishopric had been moved to Ohrid years ago (with the patriarchate remaining at Prespa), so following this interpretation, the historical fitting of the inscription is worse than before.

6. What is puzzling about the interpretation of the year as $\text{ϣ}ϷϤΔ = 65[0]4 = 996$ is that the part behind the last numeral is now brushed aside as an "ornamental sign", as Ivanov calls it (Иванов 1908: 28).

A closer inspection of the inscription in the monastery reveals two things: a) there are some small horizontal lines in the upper endings of the stem-like structure at the end of the first row, thereby closing the 'triangles', and b) the top line that closes the 'outline i' in the number '17' can hardly be seen in reality (and in any case less clear than the horizontal lines in the triangles). In the modified drawing (see fig. 7) we have stripped the numbers of the surrounding content and moved them a bit closer for comparison. Also, we have removed the top line of the 'outline i' in the lower number and added the closing lines in the upper part.



Fig. 7. Modified numbers ($\text{ϣ}ϷϤΔ\text{̑} = 6514 = 1006$ and $\text{ϣ}ζ\text{̑} = '17'$)

To us, it seems obvious what comes to one's mind: If in the lower number the day has first been misread because the < ĭ > 'ten' has not been recognized – what if the same applied to the upper number? Are not those lines a drawing of the same number? Essentially, the only difference is that we have rounder dots in the '17' and triangular forms in the upper number. If we interpret the lines at the end of the first row as an < ĭ >, we arrive at the year $\text{ϣϥΔĭ} = 6514 = 1006$, in which the inscription would have been carved in the column. It is interesting to see that Archimandrite Antonin drew the two letters in question very similar to each other (see above, fig. 1), with round dots on both cases (although he recognized only one of them as a letter). With the small corrections applied, the year looks like this (fig. 8):

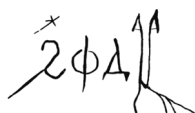


Fig. 8. Number $\text{ϣϥΔĭ} = 6514 = 1006$

8. What does the new interpretation mean in historical context? First, it obviously makes the inscription ten years *younger* – which does not make it less important, the more so because this does not change its rank among the oldest inscriptions. However, it would now fall right into the middle of the reign of Tsar Samuil (997–1014), not outside it. This interpretation also presents less problems in assuming a seat of a bishop established in Prilep. At the same time, it offers an interpretation for the last lines in the first row, mistaken earlier either as a Cyrillic < κ > or not recognized as a letter at all. Paleographically, '14' is a number which according to tradition would have been written in exactly the same order as '17', i.e. as the parts are spoken, so this, too, fits perfectly.

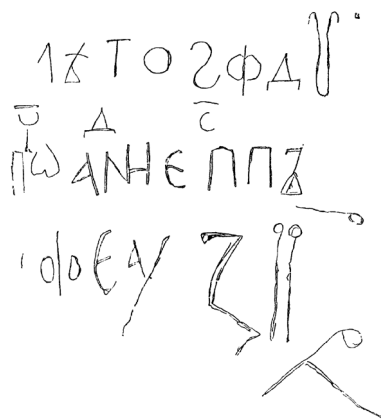
9. To sum up, our reading of the inscription would be this, correcting only the year:

ВЪ ЛѢТО ϣϥΔĭ
 ПΩ^ϣ АНΔρι επ^ϣ ПЪ
 Φερ ζĭ

Also, in the light of the information given above, namely that the bishopric moved to Ohrid along with Samuil taking his residence there, the question raised by Ivanov (Иванов 1931: 28) can now be discussed in a new perspective: is it still as probable or as improbable as before that a ‘pop Andrej’ was buried in the monastery? If not, and we think it is not so, the inscription could equally well read like this:

ВЪ ЛѢТО 828 ДѢ
 ПѦ ѦНДРИЕ ПѦПЪ
 ФЕРЪ ЗІ

10. On a very interesting side-note, we would like to direct the reader’s attention to what seems to be the *oldest* drawing of the inscription. This can be found in an unlikely place, namely the *History of Russian Literature* by P. Polevoj, first published in 1871 with several editions soon to follow (Полевой²1874, ⁵1883). As one of only three illustrations in the first chapter of his book, the author includes the following drawing of an inscription (Полевой 1883: 11), calling it “the oldest epitaph inscription written in Cyrillic” (fig. 8):



Древѣйшая надгробная надпись (986 г.), писанная кириллицей.

Fig. 9. Drawing from Polevoj (Полевой 1883: 11)

The drawing is astonishingly good, though not as precise or complete as the later off-print from Ivanov – the preposition ‘въ’ is missing, for example. When Polevoj published his book in 1871, Archimandrite Antonin had

already discovered the inscription (in 1865), but he published his reading of the inscription only in 1879, i.e. *after* the first edition of Polevoj's book. The archaeographic expedition (1898) has not yet been undertaken and would eventually produce still another drawing (much worse than the one published by Polevoj). Polevoj's drawing obviously remained unknown to Ivanov, who would have mentioned it for sure in his book in 1908. Although Polevoj included the inscription (which did not yet carry the name Varoš Inscription) as a *drawing* in his book, he did not mention it in his text, gave no reading or other information besides the caption "Древнѣйшая надгробная надпись (996 г.), писанная кириллицею" that went along with the illustration (Полевой 1883: 11). The riddle from whom and when Polevoj could have received the drawing, is solved by Archimandrite Amfiloxij (Амфилохий 1872) who in his talk – given at the 1st Congress of Archeologists in Moscow in 1869 – described this inscription and let his audience know the circumstances of its discovery. Thus, according to Amfiloxij (Амфилохий 1872: 5) the inscription had been discovered by A. F. Hilferding (Gil'ferding) in Prilep, Macedonia, and had been copied by him onto a transparent paper. Hilferding, Amfiloxij went on to say, had allowed him to publicly present the inscription, to make a second copy and to have a lithography of it made. Amfiloxij did not say when Hilferding had discovered the inscription, but from his biography it is known that he spent the late 1860's on trips to Macedonia to collect old books, inscriptions etc. The year 1868 is expressly mentioned in one source so we will take that year as a reference. When Hilferding died in 1872, his materials remained unpublished, and parts of them obviously are to this day, but some fragments were published later by others, just as Amfiloxij did (with due reference given). So, the inscription seems to have been discovered twice in a short period of time, unbeknownst to each other: by Antonin in 1865 and by Hilferding in 1868. According to Amfiloxij, Hilferding seems to have deciphered the year and proposed the reading $\pi\omega\tau\epsilon$ Дани[лѣ] ѿп[и]сѣ, and from him the year went into Polevoj's book. As to the drawing, Polevoj's version could be based on Hilferding's own drawing, or, more probably, on the lithography made by Amfiloxij. Amfiloxij proposed to read the name as "Andrej" and succeeded in deciphering the date further (Feb 17), but did not publish his drawing.

As it turns out, the discovery by Hilferding, his drawing and its publication by Polevoj (1871) as well as the reading proposed by Amfiloxij remained unknown to Archimandrite Antonin [Kapustin] and later authors whose drawings and decipherments actually were a step back initially in comparison to what already had been achieved. Although Archimandrite Antonin had actually discovered the inscription first, he managed to publish his finding only after Hilferding's discovery and drawing had already been published (Полевой 1871; Амфилохий 1871/1872).

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ДАТАТА НА ВАРОШКИЯ НАДПИС ОТ ПРИЛЕП

СЕБАСТИАН КЕМПГЕН (БАМБЕРГ)

Статията предлага ново четене на т.нар. Варошки надпис от Прилеп, Република Македония, открит през XIX в. Новата интерпретация на посочената в него година позволява да се заключи, че той е писан през 1006 г., а не през 996 г., както се приема досега. Тази датировка е и исторически по-достоверна, тъй като съответства по-добре на управлението на цар Самуил. Статията представя най-ранния отпечатък от надписа – рисунка, публикувана в изследване по история на руската литература (Полевой 1871, 1883 г.). Това трябва да е копието, снето от А. Ф. Хилфердинг (Гильфердинг), открил надписа скоро след архимандрит Антонин (вероятно през 1868 г.), за което съобщава архимандрит Амфилохий (1872).

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ФОНДАЦИЯ
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