

Croatian as an international language in the 16th and 17th centuries: evidence from the Vatican Archives

Stjepan Krasić 

Dominican Monastery, Dubrovnik,
Croatia

Aim: To perform a detailed analysis of documents from the 16th and 17th centuries concerning the Croatian language preserved in the Vatican archives.

Methods: The study was conducted in the historical archive of the former Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*) and focused on periods of intensive missionary activity and the linguistic policies of the Catholic Church during the 16th and 17th centuries, when strategies for the evangelization of Slavic peoples were being formulated.

Results: Based on consultations with prominent linguists, the Catholic Church selected the Croatian language (*lingua croatica*) as the most suitable for communication with Slavic populations. Consequently, in 1599, the Academy of the Illyrian Language (*Academia linguae Illyricae*) was established at the Roman College, as “Illyrian” was at that time a common term used in Italy to refer to the Croatian language. This article presents the letter from Slovak linguist Theophilus Kristek to Spanish linguist Alfonso Carrillo, dated September 27, 1599, advocating for Croatian as the most appropriate Slavic language for inclusion in the educational system, and Carrillo’s subsequent letter to the Jesuit Superior General Claudio Acquaviva, dated January 24, 1600, recommending Croatian as the most suitable language for printing liturgical books for the Eastern Slavic peoples. The article further reproduces the Decree of Pope Gregory XV dated December 6, 1622 mandating the teaching of Illyrian and Arabic throughout the Venetian Republic; the Decree of Pope Urban VIII dated October 16, 1623, which includes Hebrew, Greek (both classical and vernacular), Arabic, Chaldean, and Illyrian in the curricula of the most prestigious European universities; the official instructions from the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, dated 17 December 1624, to all heads of religious orders concerning the thorough linguistic preparation of future missionaries; and the correspondence between the Congregation and the Dominican Order on the same matter, which concluded in 1628 with a text adopted by the General Chapter of the Order.

Correspondence to:

Stjepan Krasić
Dominican Monastery
Ul. Sv. Dominika 4, 20000 Dubrovnik, Croatia
skrasic1938@gmail.com

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Conclusion: In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Croatian language acquired a prestigious status within European intellectual circles as an “international language”, enjoying equal importance with traditionally esteemed languages such as Hebrew, Chaldean, Greek, Latin, and Arabic. Church authorities promoted Croatian as a pan-Slavic language, elevating it to a status of an obligatory curricular study subject. It was studied at the most distinguished European universities, including those in Paris, Salamanca, Oxford and Bologna.

Keywords: Croatian language, *Academia linguae Illyricae*, Slavic peoples, early language manuals, Faust Vrančić, Bartol Kašić

Introduction

The Croats, like other Slavic peoples, did not possess a script of their own when they began settling the eastern Adriatic coast. The first script they encountered was Latin. Their literacy was enriched with the arrival of Methodius’s disciples from Moravia in the 9th century, who introduced both the Old Church Slavonic liturgical and literary language and the Glagolitic script. The latter enabled them not only to graphically represent the characteristic Slavic sounds absent in the Romance and Germanic languages, but also to resist the cultural hegemony of those traditions. This occurred at a time when other peoples, from Ireland to the Elbe, from the Alps to the Adriatic, had already accepted Christianity for several centuries and belonged to the Latin and Roman cultural world (1).

Thanks to this liturgical bilingualism, literacy adapted to the vernacular speech of the time. With the later adoption of Cyrillic (bearing specific domestic features), the dualism of the vernacular and Latin languages (as a typical feature of Croatian cultural reality) evolved into a double trialism, with three dialects (Chakavian, Shtokavian, and Kajkavian) and three names of the language itself (Croatian, Illyrian, and Slavonic) (2). The existence of so many dualisms and trialisms in such a small territory discouraged, for a long time, any serious attempt to harmonize or standardize them in a manner befitting a modern literary language.

The resolution of this issue was prompted by an initiative from Rome. Faced with Protestantism in the West and North, Orthodoxy in the East and North, and the advance of Islam up to Buda, the Catholic Church recognized the necessity of dialogue with the Islamic world and Slavic Orthodoxy. Pope Clement VIII asked the Superior General of the Jesuit Order, Claudio Acquaviva, to investigate which Slavic language would be most suitable for compiling a dictionary and grammar for the Slavic peoples.

The Croatian language was selected, and in 1599, the Academy of the Illyrian Language (*Academia linguae Illyricae*) was established at the Roman College, as “Illyrian” was at that time the most common term in Italy for the Croatian language. At the outset, students and lecturers at the Academy made use of the five-language dictionary *Dictionarium*

quinque nobilissimarum Europae linguarum: Latinae, Italicae, Germanicae, Dalmati[c]ae & Ungaricae by Faust Vrančić (3), the only such resource available at that time.

Since no grammar of the Croatian language yet existed, the task of compiling one was entrusted by Acquaviva to Bartol Kašić (1575–1650), a young member of the Jesuit order and a professor from the Croatian island of Pag. After approximately four years of work, his *Institutionum linguae Illyricae libri duo. Editio prima* (4) was published in Rome in 1604. Written in Latin, it was intended to serve students of other nationalities at the Illyrian Academy in learning the Illyrian language. The underlying assumption was that those who knew Illyrian would be able to communicate without significant difficulty with other Slavic peoples, including the Orthodox populations of Eastern Europe. The language merely needed to be more clearly defined and standardized in order to serve as a *lingua franca* or a kind of *koinê* for the vast Slavic world.

This marked the beginning of a scientific approach to the Croatian language, and the appearance of this grammar represented a major development in Croatian cultural history. It signified not only the beginning of the systematic and scholarly study and teaching of the Croatian language, but also the first important step toward its codification (standardization), with orientation toward the Shtokavian dialect as the broadest dialectal base – one which has remained authoritative to this day. This brought the Croatian language a degree of prestige previously unseen among other Slavic languages.

The writing of dictionaries subsequently followed, as did the publication of liturgical books, pastoral and catechetical manuals, and the development of an extensive literature in the most widely spoken vernacular, among other advances. In this way, the Croatian language came to receive the necessary attention within papal language policy. This article analyzes the key documents relating to this development.

Methods

The primary sources of the data presented here were documents preserved in the Historical Archive of the former Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome (*Archivum historicum S. Congregationis de Propaganda Fide* – acronym: AHSCPF – or simply Propaganda), one of the former central administrative *dicasteries* (governing bodies) of the Catholic Church (Figure 1).

The older archival material of this Congregation pertains to the period of 1622–1892. It is divided into eleven archival collections, each comprising between two and ten series: *Acta Sacrae Congregationis* (328 volumes); *Scritture riferite delle Congregazioni generali* (correspondence from bishops, missionaries, rulers, nuncios, delegates, visitors, consultants, and others); *Congregazioni particolari* (sessions and meetings of various commissions on significant issues, 161 volumes); *Scritture riferite nei Congressi* (meetings concerning the management of current affairs, 1346 volumes); *Miscellanea* (undated documents, 119 volumes); *Collegi* (documentation of individual “national” colleges, including the series *Visite e Collegi*); *Udienze di Nostro Signore* (252 volumes); *Istruzioni* (7 volumes); *Lettere* (388 volumes).

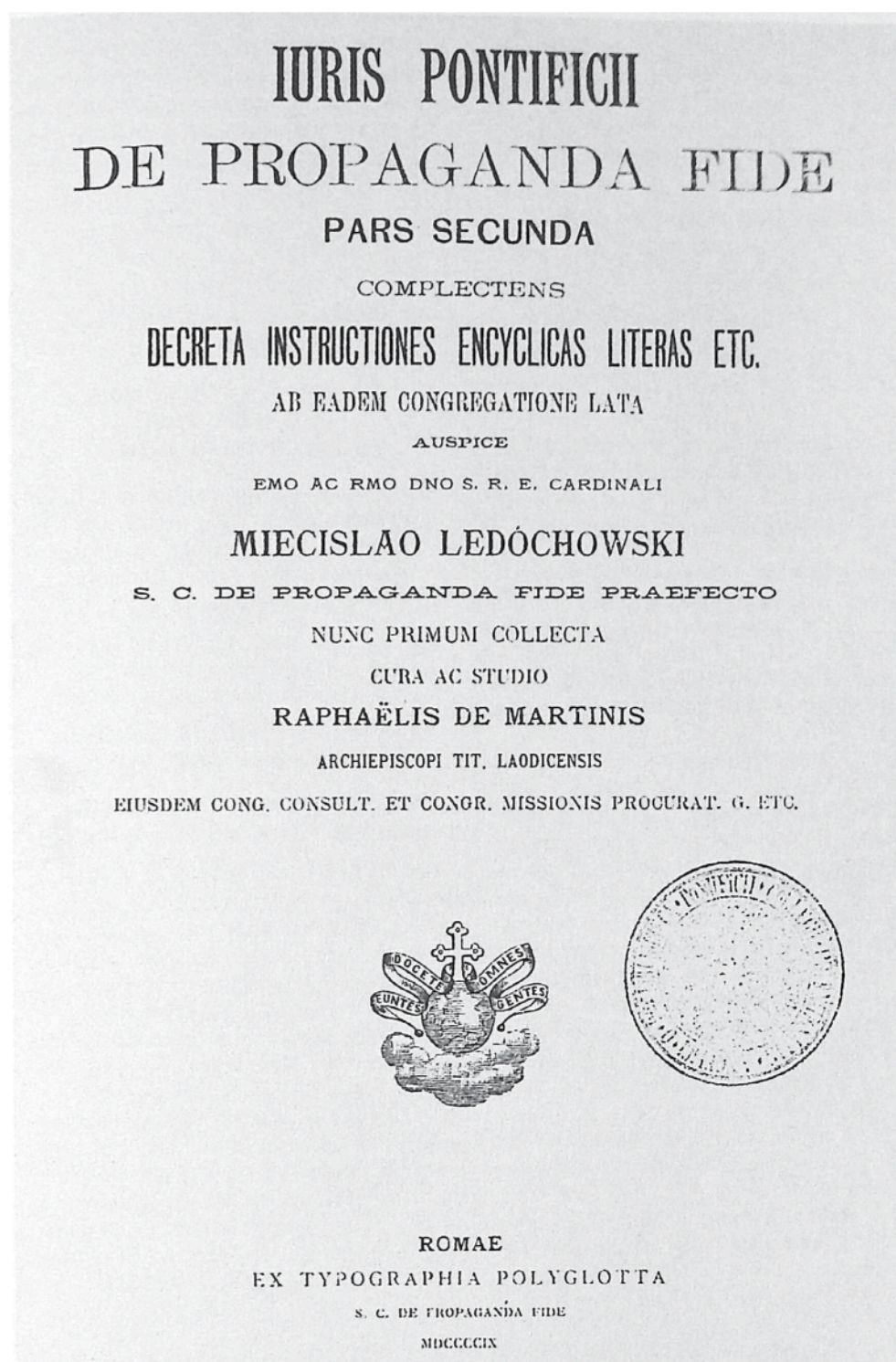


Figure 1. Front page of the official edition of the most important papal decrees in the collection of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (S. Congregatio de propaganda fide).

Since the Croatian territories under Ottoman and Venetian rule were also under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Propaganda, they are frequently represented in its documentation, and were also investigated. The following materials were examined:

- *Acta Sacrae Congregationis*, vols. 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20;

- *Scritture originali riferite nelle Congregazioni generali*, vols. 8, 11, 13, 19, 27, 30, 36, 38, 46, 53, 55, 60, 66, 73, 80, 125, 126, 140, 146, 152, 157, 160, 262, 264, 267, 3125, 389, 392, 393, 394, 396, 397, 398, 401, 402, 405, 410, 414, 415, and 421;
- *Congregazioni particolari*, vols. 1, 4;
- *Istruzioni*, vols. 2–3, fols. 3216r–3218r;
- *Lettere*, vols. 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 17, 19, 25, 26, 27, 30, 46, 146, 152, 262;
- *Memoriali*, vols. 389, 405, 1396;
- *Miscellaneae variae*, vols. 16, 22;
- *Visite e Collegi*, vols. 2–4 and 7.

These sources were supplemented by the finding of several already published, yet highly significant documents. The relevant excerpts from these documents are available in original Latin and in English translation (translated with the use of ChatGPT, with subsequent verification by author) through the [Zenodo repository](#):

1. A letter from the Slovak linguist Theophilus Kristek to Alfonso Carrillo, rector of the seminary in Vágsellye (*Sellia* in Latin), dated September 27, 1599, in which he advocates for the Croatian language as the most suitable Slavic language to be introduced in schools (Document 1).
2. A letter from the Spanish linguist Alfonso Carrillo to the Superior General of the Jesuit Order, Claudio Acquaviva, dated January 24, 1600, in which Croatian is proposed as the most appropriate language for printing church books for the Eastern Slavic peoples (Document 2).
3. A decree of Pope Gregory XV, dated December 6, 1622, mandating the compulsory study of Illyrian and Arabic in the territory of the Venetian Republic (Document 3).
4. A decree of Pope Urban VIII, dated October 16, 1623, ordering the inclusion of Hebrew, Greek (both classical and vernacular), Arabic, Chaldean, and Illyrian in the curricula of the most important European public universities (Document 4).
5. A subsequent decree by Urban VIII granting priority for entry into the priesthood to candidates from those regions from which they originate and in which they would later serve (Document 5).
6. Correspondence between the leadership of the Congregation and the Dominican Order on this subject continued for some time. The historical sources of the Dominican Order contain detailed documentation on this matter (Document 6). The matter was ultimately resolved by a definitive decision of the General Chapter of the Order in 1628 (Appendix to Document 6).

Reasons why the Catholic Church required a common Slavic language

The Catholic Church's heightened interest in the Croatian language arose following the emergence of a need to compose religious literature in vernacular languages. This necessity was not due to any major political or cultural dispute, but to the Protestant religious revolution (1517), elicited by a seemingly simple theological question: how does the mortal and earthly human being attain heavenly and eternal salvation – through one's own efforts and deeds, or through faith alone? The Catholic Church taught: through both faith and good works, whereas the German Augustinian monk Martin Luther (1483–1546) summarized his doctrine in three “*solas*”: by faith alone (*sola fide*) in Jesus Christ, by God's grace (*sola gratia*), believing only what is explicitly stated in the Holy Scriptures (*sola Scriptura*).

Although neither Luther and his followers nor the Catholics aimed to create a national literature *per se*, but rather to disseminate their own religious convictions among the people, national languages perhaps reaped the greatest benefit from this development. Contrary to a widely held belief, Luther was not opposed to Latin, which was the language of European science and culture. In fact, in addressing the learned circles of his time, both within and beyond Germany, he wrote the majority of his works in that language. He resorted to the vernacular only when addressing the general populace. He was aided in this by the invention of the printing press, which placed in his hands a powerful instrument of propaganda and dissemination on an unprecedented scale – one that, in turn, revolutionized the very nature of religious struggle. Those who knew how to make more effective use of the press had a better chance of success.

The Catholic Church's response to the spread of Protestantism

While Luther and his followers were attempting, through the translation and publication of books, to win over Slovenes and Croats and, through them, other Slavic peoples, the popes, guided by the spirit of the recently concluded Council held in the northern Italian city of Trent (1545–1563), prepared a much broader plan for comprehensive renewal under the slogan “reform from above and below” (*renovatio in capite et in membris*). Special emphasis was placed on the reform of ecclesiastical discipline and the sciences, in accordance with the humanist aim of returning to the classical sources. This led to the establishment of educational institutions and the flourishing of theological and humanist schools, which were intended, to some extent, to compensate for the losses brought about by the Reformation (5–7).

At the center of this effort was the need to decide which language should be used to address the people: Latin or the vernacular. Since the Protestants, in their propaganda efforts, relied predominantly on the vernacular and had succeeded in detaching about half of all European Catholics, particularly in the Germanic world, the Catholic Church sought to counter this expansion by employing both Latin and the vernacular, as well as through initiatives to unite with the Orthodox peoples of Eastern Europe.

The need for a language comprehensible to the people

The polemics between Luther and the Catholic Church, as well as between Catholics and Luther's followers, initially revolved around appeals to the original biblical texts in Greek, Hebrew, Chaldean, and the *Vulgate*, i.e., their translation into popular Latin, which had been undertaken by St. Jerome at the request of Pope Damasus in the late 4th century. From that point on, the Scriptures were being rapidly translated into vernacular languages. However, even before Gutenberg's invention of movable-type printing (1455), the Bible had already been translated into 33 world languages. With Gutenberg's invention, its distribution accelerated at an astonishing pace, with printing houses established in 260 European cities (8).

Thus, the 16th century, more than any other, became marked by the Bible. From the beginning of the Reformation (1517) until Luther's death (1546), 163 editions of the Bible were printed, and between 1546 and 1600, 232 editions of the entire Bible in Latin were published. German printing houses rapidly produced thousands of copies not only of Luther's works, but also of polemical writings by other reformers, precisely at a time when many laypeople had learned to read and write in the numerous urban schools.

Although language was not initially a central concern for either the Protestants or the Catholics, it inevitably became one. In polemical exchanges, the advantage naturally belonged to those who spoke more clearly, persuasively, and correctly. As polemics intensified, the demand for works in the vernacular grew. In Luther's Wittenberg alone, which at that time had no more than 3,000 inhabitants, three printing presses operated almost continuously to publish their writings (9, 10).

In an effort not only to preserve Catholic populations, but also to shield the Orthodox peoples of Eastern Europe from Protestant influence and unite them into a front against the Turks, in 1581, Pope Gregory XIII, dispatched the experienced Italian diplomat Antonio Possevino (1533–1611) to Poland and Russia. However, the Russians refused to discuss any anti-Turkish alliance, and were even less willing to consider a union with the Catholic Church. The Pope attempted once more to win them over to these goals by sending, this time to Moscow, Aleksandar Komulović (1548–1609), a distinguished prelate from Split, in the hope that the Russians might better understand and more willingly hear a fellow Slav and Croat than the Italian Possevino. Yet all efforts were in vain (11–13).

Nonetheless, the Russians' refusal did not discourage the Pope, whose diplomatic efforts bore fruit elsewhere. Unlike Russia, positive signs of ecclesiastical unity began to emerge from Ukraine, where in 1595 a portion of the local Orthodox clergy at Brest-Litovsk accepted an union with the Catholic Church. Only a year later, the Patriarch of Peć, Jovan, sent two monks to Rome bearing a detailed memorandum and his own declaration: "We are subject to Your Holiness and to the Mother Church" (14). Between 1645 and 1685, there were several such delegations of Serbian bishops and monks who expressed their desire for an union with the Catholic Church (15, 16).

Protestantism and Croatia

It was not Protestant missionaries who played a crucial role in the spread of Protestantism in Croatia and Slovenia, which until then were Catholic countries, but rather German soldiers serving as defenders against the Turkish advance, inspired by the idea that books in the Croatian and Slovenian languages could not only spread the Reformation as far as Constantinople, but also ignite an uprising throughout the entire Turkish Empire to the benefit of the Reformation and the conversion of the Turks to Protestantism (17). For this purpose, a special printing press was established in Urach near Tübingen, where in just four years (1561–1565), 25 different books were printed solely in Croatian, in all three scripts that were then in use in Croatian regions, with a total print run of 30,000 copies (18, 19).

Reasons for designating Croatian as the Pan-Slavic language

Catholics did not remain idle. A well-conceived, intensive, and organized effort to create a unified linguistic toolkit for printing liturgical and non-liturgical books for the needs of Slavic peoples began as early as the late 16th century. There was a need to prepare new editions of Old Church Slavonic religious books for the domestic clergy, in accordance with the decisions and regulations of the Council of Trent, and to create a common language to enable the unrestricted development of national literature. A strong impetus for reviving this awareness came from the Catholic Reformation, which sought a unified or at least harmonized language over the broadest possible area. In the Middle Ages, this role had been fulfilled by the Old Church Slavonic language, which was initially understood by all Slavic peoples. However, they effectively drifted away from it over time, as each developed its own “recensions” for daily use (20).

Deliberations on language selection

Aware of this issue, the Catholic Church reflected on which languages it could, within its financial means, publish books in for all Slavic peoples without excessive cost, thus helping them access needed literature and protecting them from Protestant influence. Croats were the only Catholic people in Western Christendom who used the vernacular language in the liturgy. Through this vernacular, many cultural achievements of Western Europe reached the Orthodox peoples of Eastern Europe. Now they received a clear message that the use of the vernacular in the liturgy would not be forbidden, as it had been by Pope John X in the 10th century. A shared liturgical language could become the most suitable tool for integration with Slavic Orthodoxy. This also had practical advantages, as there was no need to spend large sums on printing religious books in the various dialects of the Slavic peoples. In short, the Croatian language was expected to play among Eastern Slavs the same role that Old Church Slavonic had previously played.

Consultation on the choice of a language for all Slavs

Specifically, Pope Clement VIII (1592–1605) tasked Claudio Acquaviva, the head of the Jesuit Order, which had numerous educational institutions in Europe and the Far East, particularly in China and Japan, to consult with the Order's linguists and assess the actual situation, especially whether Croatian was the most widespread and most suitable language for publishing books for all Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe. Acquaviva, in 1588/1589, sought the advice of his experts, and the responses from two rectors of Jesuit colleges in Central Europe have been preserved.

Response of Slovak linguist Theophilus Kristek

The response of Slovak Jesuit Theophilus Kristek (1561–1622), a polyglot and rector of the college in Turóczu, Hungary, is of great importance in the history of the Croatian language. Unlike authors who used the Italian term “Illyrian”, he referred to the Croatian language by its proper national name, lavishing praise on its antiquity, beauty, spread, and expressive capacity like no other Slavic language ((21), p. 280–281):

[...] I can judge, regardless of the value of my opinion on this matter, and report to Your Reverence, as requested and required. Therefore, I consider it to be the Croatian language. It is said to be the most widespread in the Turkish territories, especially at the courts. It also appears to be the mother and root of the other languages. Thirdly, it is the sweetest in pronunciation, without hiatus, collisions of hard consonants, etc. Fourth, because it seems to be the closest to that ancient language called Glagolitic, whose script is said to have been given by St. Jerome. That language was also allowed by certain popes to be used in worship. [...] This is especially true for the Illyrian or Croatian language itself, as seen in the translation of the catechism of Father Canisius printed in Rome in 1582 in Latin script, made by Aleksandar Komulović. [...] There is no doubt that such unification, at least in terms of the script, would contribute in some way to the unity of the Slavic people with the Roman Church.

The entire letter from Kristek is provided as Document 1 in the [Zenodo repository](#).

Response of Spanish linguist Alfonso Carillo

The second response came from Alfonso Carillo, former professor of theology in Paris and Vienna, and at that time rector of the seminary in the Slovak town of Šaľa nad Váhom. His letter, dated 24 January 1600, merely confirmed what Kristek had already stated. It read: “I have consulted many experts and see that the Croatian language is more suitable than other dialects to assist the peoples of the East” ((21), p. 388).

The full letter is presented in Document 2 in the [Zenodo repository](#). By the term “peoples of the East,” Carillo meant Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and other Orthodox peoples of Eastern Europe. Kristek's and Carillo's letters were published by the Hungarian Academy in 1943 ((21), p. 277–281).

Founding of the Academy of the Illyrian Language

Based on the results of that survey, in 1599, Acquaviva founded the Academy of the Illyrian Language (*Academia linguae Illyricae*) at the Roman College (*Collegium Romanum*), the university of his Order, as its Grand Chancellor. This was a special section where, in addition to the general program, students received specialized training by studying specific languages, music, public speaking (*academiae*), and more. It was here that the Illyrian language was for the first time professionally studied, taught, and lectured at the university level. It is not entirely clear which textbooks were used at that time; the only one we know of with certainty was the previously mentioned five-language dictionary by Vrančić. What was lacking was a grammar, without which no language could be properly understood, let alone learned or taught. As already noted, in 1599, Acquaviva entrusted the task of writing it to a young member of his order and professor from the island of Pag, Bartol Kašić (1575–1650). This was a turning point in Croatian linguistics and the first major step toward its standardization, which earned that grammar significant prestige among other Slavic languages (22–24).

A similar grammar appeared some thirty years later under the title *Grammatica Emmanuelis Latino-Illyrica* (Rome, apud Franciscum Caballum, 1637), as the first Croatian adaptation of the Latin grammar *De institutione grammatica libri tres* (1st edition, Lisbon, 1572) by the well-known Portuguese Jesuit Manuel Álvares (1526–1583) (25), which was a mandatory manual in Jesuit institutions until the end of the 18th century.

Discovery of documents on the supranational importance of the Croatian language

In the Historical Archive of the former Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, I discovered several important documents that shed entirely new light on the importance of the Catholic Church – a global institution to which almost all renowned European universities owe their founding – for the Croatian language. During the Catholic Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Church included in its curriculum the study of the “pillar” languages of the universal and European Christian religious and cultural heritage: Hebrew, Chaldean, Greek, Arabic, and Croatian. The first three were considered essential for understanding the Holy Scriptures, that is, the Judeo-Christian revelation; Arabic was necessary for dialogue with the Islamic world; and Croatian was a means of communication with Slavic Catholic and Orthodox peoples in place of the former Old Church Slavonic, which few people understood.

These decisions were adopted in the form of two decrees or legal mandates that obligated all known public and church universities at the time to include the study of these languages in their curriculum for a minimum of two years. The requirement applied both to ordinary students and to professors.

Decree of Pope Gregory XV, 6 December 1622

The first such decree was issued on December 6, 1622, by Pope Gregory XV (1621–1623), ordering the superiors of religious orders who had monasteries within the territory of the Venetian Republic to establish schools or chairs for the Arabic and Illyrian languages. I discovered it in the Historical Archive of the former Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in the *Congregazioni particolari* series, vol. 1 (Figure 2 and Document 3 in the [Zenodo repository](#)).

<p>An. G. 1622 8</p> <p>autem lectiones illi tantum admittantur, qui ad proficiendum apti et ad missiones idonei videbuntur. Lectiones vero in determinatis Collegiorum et Monasteriorum praedictorum locis peragantur. Non obstantibus.</p> <p>Romae die 12 Septembris 1622.</p> <p>ANT. CARD. SANCTIUS.</p> <p>Loco ✕ sigilli.</p> <p>Franciscus Ingoli secretarius.</p> <p>III.</p> <p><i>De quibusdam Canonici haereticis, qui cupiunt fieri catholici, sed vellent retinere titulum aut resignare cum reservatione fructuum canonicatus (1).</i></p> <p>DECRETUM SAC. CONGREGATIONIS DE P. F. HABITAE CORAM SSMO DIE V NOVEMBRIS MDCXXII (2).</p> <p>5 nov. Cardinalis Zollernus proposuit dubia infrascripta, quae ego per manus transmiseram, videlicet:</p> <p>— Quidam Canonici haeretici cupiunt fieri catholici, sed, quia uxores habent et, per conversionem, Canonicatus amitterent, et consequenter vitae subsidiis carerent, quaeritur: 1° An possit et debeat cum eis dispensari, ut Canonicatus post conversionem retinere possint; et, quatenus negative respondeatur, 2° An possit eis concedi, ut resignent titulos occulte cum reservatione fructuum vel pensionis in aliquem Catholicum habilem, et post resignationem se gerant tanquam Canonici, praeterquam in haereticis actibus, ad effectum ut possint fructus percipere et sibi retinere vel dividere cum habente titulum, si pensio reservata fuerit. —</p> <p>Ad quae dubia cum omnes Cardinales quoad potestatem Papae affirmative respondissent, quo vero ad honestatem et</p>	<p>IUR. PONT. DE P. F. PARS II.</p> <p>decentiam dispensationis petita negative, SSMus mandavit, ut cogitaretur modus, quo honeste et sine scandalo Canonico- rum saluti et indigentiae consuli possit, quia tunc dispensationem petitam libentissime concederet.</p> <p>IV.</p> <p><i>De seminario in monasterio Coirae instituendo (3).</i></p> <p>DECRETUM S. CONGREGATIONIS DE PROPAG. FIDE DIE XXI NOVEMBRIS MDCXXII.</p> <p>Rm̃us Vives de hoc negotio cum Generali Praedicatorum agat, significando eadem necessitatem et utilitatem seminarii constituendi in Monasterio Coirensi. (V. inferius decretum IX.)</p> <p>21 nov.</p> <p>V.</p> <p><i>De linguarum studiis in Venetiarum monasteriis erigendis (4).</i></p> <p>DECRETUM S. CONG. DE PROP. FIDE HABITAE CORAM SSMO DIE VI DEC. MDCXXII.</p> <p>SSM̃us in Christo Pater et D. D. Gregorius divina providentia Papa XV, animadvertens inter ea, quae ad propagandam fidem utilia seu necessaria sunt, nil praestantius esse linguarum cognitione, in Congreg. coram Sanctitate Sua habita die 6 Dec. 1622, Religionum Generalibus, qui Monasteria seu Conventus Venetiis, seu aliis in locis, habent, in quibus periti linguae illiricae et arabicae haberi possunt, praecipi ac mandari iussit, ut quamprimum iis in locis linguarum praedictarum studia erigant, accitis ad eas addiscendas ex suis subditis Regularibus iis, qui aetate, moribus ac doctrina ad Missiones idonei eorum arbitrio videbuntur, ut,</p> <p>6 dec.</p>	<p>An. G. 1622</p>
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(1) Ex collectione *Doctrinae, Resolutiones...* missi Benedicti XIV. etc.

(2) Primitus habebantur Congregationes in Palatio ap. coram Pontifice, iuxta constitutionem *Inscrutabili studio* praedictae Gregorii XV; postea circuitum domibus Cardinalium consultorum; deinde conventu supra Minervam; nunc vero aguntur in eisdem Congregationis aedibus. (N. E.)

(3) Ex collectione *Scripta carta* etc., ubi etiam legitur: « Mons. Nuntio de Svizzera representando la necessità et utilità d'un numeroso seminario in Coira, propone per espediente dismembrar dalla Religione di S. Domenico un Monastero, che haveva detta Religione in Coira, e d'applicarlo con la Casa, e rendite che ha quando si saranno riemperte al futuro seminario, e questo almeno per qualche tempo finche si possa dotare il seminario con altre rendite et con la riserva del dominio a detto ordine di S. Domenico. E supplica a nome del Vescovo e dei Canonici che si procuri questa gratia da Nostro Signore essendo tanto relevante per la propagatione della fede nella Rhetia ».

(4) Ex eadem collectione *Scripta carta* etc.

Figure 2. Decree of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith issued on December 6, 1622, in the name of Pope Gregory XV, mandating the compulsory study of the Illyrian and Arabic languages throughout the territory of the Venetian Republic ((26), n. V, p. 8–9). The full text is presented as Document 3 in the [Zenodo repository](#).

Decree of Pope Urban VIII, 16 October 1623

The sudden death of Pope Gregory XV on July 8, 1623, prevented him from implementing his plan. That task fell to his successor, Pope Urban VIII (August 6, 1623 – September 29, 1644), who not only continued, but also expanded his predecessor's work through a decree dated October 16, 1623 (Figure 3).

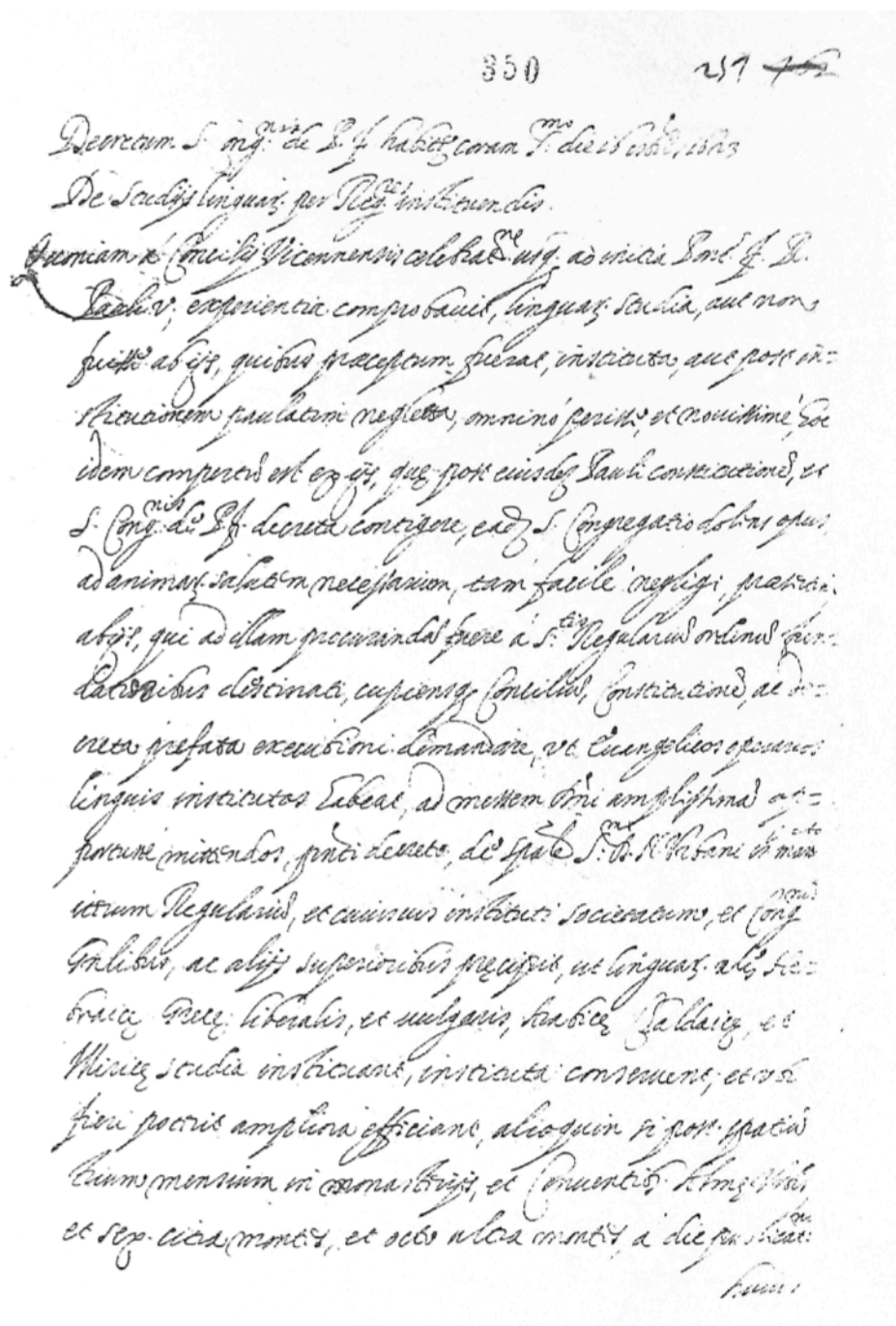


Figure 3. Decree of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith issued on October 16, 1623, in the name of Pope Urban VIII, mandating the inclusion of Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, Chaldean, and Illyrian in the curricula of all major universities in Europe. Facsimile of the first page of the manuscript ((26), n. IX, p. 10–11); see Document 4 in the [Zenodo repository](#).

With this decree, he obligated all superiors of religious orders, congregations, and other institutions engaged in the formation and education of missionaries for service in various parts of the world to establish, wherever possible in Europe, chairs for the teaching of Hebrew, Greek (both classical and vernacular), Arabic, Chaldean, and Illyrian, in addition to Latin (Document 4 in the [Zenodo repository](#)).

The decree was to be taken with utmost seriousness and implemented accordingly. The Pope established specific and brief deadlines for its enforcement: in Rome, no later than three months from the date of its publication; six months for other parts of the Italian Peninsula; and eight months for regions beyond, especially in cities where notable universities existed, such as Bologna, Padua, Paris, Toulouse, Valencia, Vienna, Ingolstadt, Cologne, Leuven, Salamanca, and Complutum (Alcalá de Henares, Madrid). However, this list of public universities required to integrate the aforementioned languages into their curricula as mandatory subjects did not end there; it also extended to the universities of Rome and Oxford, which owed their existence to papal initiatives, as well as all universities governed by religious orders ((26), *Miscellaneae diverse*, vol. 22, ff. 501r–5013v; Document 6 in the [Zenodo repository](#)).

In cases of non-compliance with the decree, the Pope threatened the most severe penalties and sanctions. Superiors of religious orders would be suspended from exercising any sacramental acts (*suspensio a divinis*) reserved to the Holy See. Should they persist in disobedience, they would be suspended from holding office entirely. Religious superiors were charged with ensuring that any member of their order who had not yet reached the age of forty within three years of the decree's enactment, or any future entrant into the order, regardless of age, would not be permitted to obtain a doctorate, any other academic degree, or promotion in office unless, in addition to completing the required theological studies according to the rules of their order, they had attended lectures in one of the mandated languages for at least two years and demonstrated sufficient proficiency. This knowledge was to be assessed by individuals designated by the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. If anyone outside this designated authority allowed the conferral of doctorates or assumption of the specified offices contrary to the decree's provisions, such acts would be considered null and void, and the religious superiors involved would lose their passive voting rights (Document 4 in the [Zenodo repository](#)).

Aware that threats of punishment are not always the most effective means of achieving desired outcomes, Urban VIII included measures of encouragement in his decree. Since, as the Pope wrote, some individuals are more easily led to virtue by reward than by punishment, he ordered that religious students engaged in language study be entitled to all the privileges normally granted within their order to candidates for doctorates in theology. Those who successfully completed the two-year course in any of the mentioned languages would, according to the rules of their order, be eligible for promotion to Doctor of Theology or similar positions. Conversely, any election or promotion in violation of these conditions would be declared null and void.

To ensure the decree would never lapse into obsolescence or be forgotten, the Pope mandated that it be read at all general and provincial chapters of religious orders and that all participants swear an oath to uphold it before the conclusion of such gatherings. The

decree further threatened strict penalties for anyone acting contrary to it: the automatic loss of both active and passive voting rights, regardless of any contrary papal decrees, regulations, rights, or privileges previously granted to them (Document 4 in the [Zenodo repository](#)).

Decree of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith of December 17, 1624, concerning preferential admission into the ecclesiastical state of candidates from the regions where they would serve

This document was composed in the context of major geographical discoveries and the realization of the existence of entire continents and civilizations previously unknown to Europe, for the evangelization of which the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith was founded in 1622. Its specific mission was to coordinate all missionary activities, provide directives for each missionary region, train local clergy, and offer financial support for their subsistence, among other tasks. On December 17, 1624, the Congregation instructed the superiors general of religious orders that, in addition to establishing language institutes, they were henceforth to ensure that some of the novices accepted were always from the corresponding nations and linguistic groups (Document 5 in the [Zenodo repository](#)). Missionaries were to be intellectually, spiritually, and culturally prepared to operate in specific regions, taking into account their culture, language, and customs.

Responses and observations from the leadership of religious orders regarding Papal decrees on the introduction of languages at all public and ecclesiastical universities

Alongside the handwritten text of the aforementioned decree of Pope Urban VIII dated October 16, 1623, several replies from superiors general of religious orders have been preserved. These reported to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and the Pope himself on the implementation of the decree, thereby confirming that it was treated as a serious and official directive which had to be executed ((26), vol. 1, ff. 476, p. 123–127).

While the discovery of these decrees was in itself a pleasant surprise, an even greater one followed when, after examining all accessible sources, I found that some of them had already been published in the official edition of the most important papal decrees ((26), n. IX:10–11), indicating that they held legal force throughout the Catholic Church.

Particularly noteworthy for the Croatian language is the response of Sebastian Fontana, the general of the Carmelite Order, who on December 22, 1622, wrote to the cardinal prefect of the Congregation ((26), vol. 1, f. 47):

Most Illustrious and Reverend Lord, my most esteemed Master! Just as I have never failed to promptly implement all other decrees of the Holy Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, I shall likewise carry this one out with the same diligence. Now, concerning the new decree on the Illyrian and Arabic languages, in accordance with the directives issued by His Holiness and Your Lordship, whom I shall always be most willing to serve with my blood and

even my very life. To Your Most Illustrious Lordship I most humbly kiss the hem of your robe, praying that the Lord God may always gladden you.

From Transpontus, December 22, 1622.

Even more interesting is the response from Giacomo Da Bagnacavallo, the Minister General of the Order of Conventual Franciscans, dated January 18, 1623, who informed the Congregation's leadership that a chair of Arabic already existed in one of the monasteries of his order in Malta. He would request the Dalmatian provincial to appoint a professor of Illyrian at the monastery in Split and ensure that gifted students attended that chair. He intended to do the same in Venice, where Greek and Hebrew instruction would also be introduced ((26), vol. 1, f. 67).

The reply from the head of the Dominican Order, Nicola Ridolfi, is much more detailed and complex. On April 10, 1625, he wrote that he would do everything possible to implement the papal directive, but did not fail to highlight certain difficulties. His Order had, since the time of the Council of Vienne (1311–1312), contributed significantly to nurturing the study and teaching of the “biblical” languages within the Church. One example is the biblical scholar and theologian Sisto Senese O.P. (1520–1569), a convert from Judaism, who possessed excellent knowledge of Hebrew. In his work *Bibliotheca sancta ex præcipuis Catholicæ Ecclesiæ auctoribus collecta* (1566) (27), the first encyclopedic work of Catholic doctrine after the Council of Trent, he demonstrated an impressive command of dogmatic teaching, ecclesiastical tradition, and methods of translating the Holy Scriptures.

Also worthy of mention is Friar Juan de Palencia, professor of biblical sciences at the University of Complutense in Madrid. Ridolfi also cited the example of Cardinal Thomas de Vio Cajetan (1469–1536), renowned for his learned disputations with Martin Luther, among others.

As for funding the various language institutes, Ridolfi argued that the financial burden was distributed unevenly. For example, it was stipulated that the cost of instruction in Hebrew, Arabic, and Chaldean at the University of Rome would be borne by the Papal Curia and those at the universities of Paris and Oxford by the respective monarchs, whereas the costs at Italian and Spanish universities would be shifted onto cathedral chapters, monasteries, institutes, and rectors of individual churches. His Dominican Order, by the decision of the Council of Vienne, already included Hebrew, Chaldean, and Arabic in its curriculum, and by order of Pope Paul V had introduced Greek. Now, in addition to Latin, they were also required to introduce Illyrian, placing the Order in a very difficult financial position. Besides the aforementioned universities, he also had to consider 46 of the order's own institutions. The expense of hiring 200 new professors for the required languages would amount to 10,000 ducats, with the additional risk that no one might show interest in spoken Greek, Arabic, or Illyrian. Moreover, since Dominican missionaries were soon to be sent to other regions, it was likely they would be required to know additional languages such as Turkish, Sarmatian, Gothic, and others ((26), vol. 22, ff. 501r–503v; (28), p. 132–141). (Document 6 in the [Zenodo repository](#)).

Correspondence between the Dominican Order's leadership and the Congregation continued until 1628, when the Order's general chapter finally accepted the papal decrees in a slightly modified form ((29), Appendix to Document 6 in the [Zenodo repository](#)). Thus,

the papal decree of October 16, 1623, became official and definitive within the Dominican Order as of 1628, that is, from the moment both sides had come to a mutual agreement. The decree had been partially implemented even prior to that date, albeit in the hope that the Congregation and the Pope would show understanding toward a religious order that had no fixed income, yet had to care for 46 of its own universities, and somehow raise 10,000 ducats annually to employ and support 200 new professors for the prescribed languages.

The role of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in the publishing and standardization of the Croatian language

After the outbreak of the religious revolution in Germany and the successful conclusion of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the Catholic Church began to devote significantly more attention to the publication of books than ever before – an effort which greatly benefited many nations, including the Croatian people. This was especially true in the period following Pope Gregory XV's foundation of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith on June 5, 1622, with the aim of spreading the faith among non-Christians and promoting ecclesiastical unity with the Orthodox peoples of Eastern Europe. In 1623, Pope Urban VIII established a university for the education of missionaries, which still bears his name (*Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana*), followed by the creation of the renowned Polyglotta printing press. For a long time, this press was regarded as the only one capable of publishing texts in any language or script, and it was specifically intended for the dissemination of Catholic literature in the various languages missionaries encountered across the globe.

The printing of liturgical books in the Croatian language

Recognizing the necessity of publishing new liturgical books in a language closer to that of the common people, Pope Gregory XIII entrusted this task to Šime Budinić of Zadar (1530–1600). Budinić published *Pochorni i mnozi ini psalmi Davidovi sloxeni v slovignshi iazich nai miru* (30), *Ispravnik za erei izpovidnici i za pokornici* (31), a translation of J. Polanco's Latin manual for confessors, and his twelve-syllable verse adaptation of Canisius's catechism titled *Summa nauka kristjanskoga* (32), written in both Latin and Cyrillic scripts and intended for South Slavs of the Eastern rite. Budinić was the first Croat to attempt to simplify the orthography of the time by introducing diacritical signs for č and ž.

His collaborator in editing Croatian language editions was Aleksandar Komulović of Split (1548–1608), a professor of Croatian at the Illyrian Academy. Among other contributions, Komulović authored *Nauk karstjanski za slovinjski narod* (33), the first Catholic catechism written for the laity in Croatian, and in 1603, *Nauk karstjanski kratak*, composed in the Shtokavian-Ikavian dialect with Čakavian elements (34).

Following the establishment of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in 1622, the editing and publication of books in Croatian were entrusted to Franjo Glavinić of Kanfanar in Istria (1585–1652), Rafael Levaković of Jastrebarsko (1590–1650), and Ivan Tomko Mrnavić (1580–1637), followed later by Ivan Paštrić (1636–1708) and Matej Karaman

(1700–1771). Each of these individuals had authority over their respective domains to carry out all customary tasks related to editing and standardizing the books they published.

No fewer than one hundred titles were printed in this standardized language in Rome alone during the 17th and 18th centuries. These included missals, breviaries, catechisms, rituals, theological and educational manuals, sermon collections, saintly biographies, and more – most of them issued by the Vatican's Polyglotta press. Some works went through multiple editions. When one also accounts for books printed in other centers such as Venice, Bologna, Padua, Graz, Trnava, etc., as well as those published by individual members of religious orders (Bosnian Franciscans, Jesuits, Paulines, Dominicans, etc.), the total number of Croatian language publications more than doubles.

As these works were used across a broad geographical area spanning from the Adriatic to the Drava River, they played a vital role in expanding literacy, enlightening the people, and unifying the linguistic expression, contributing to the formation of a common national identity. Without them, the eventual creation and acceptance of a unified Croatian literary language would be difficult to imagine (35–38).

The founding of Croatian language academies in Croatia

Inspired by the revived interest in the language and influenced by Enlightenment currents from neighboring Italy and Western Europe, learned societies known as “academies” began to emerge in Dalmatia and Istria toward the end of the 17th century. These academies were devoted to the cultivation of the national language, the collection of linguistic treasures, the study of its roots among the people as their natural source, and, through this, the development of awareness regarding their own identity. It was during this period that high culture, likely for the first time, began to move from academic halls and elite salons into the countryside and among the people, who thereby began to shift from being mere objects of culture to becoming its subjects and bearers (39).

Italian-Croatian literary relations in the 18th century are discussed in *Anali Historijskog instituta JAZU u Dubrovniku* (*Annals of the Historical Institute of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in Dubrovnik*), vol. X–XI (1966).

Regardless of its name, Croatian is one language

For the purposes of this article, it is important to emphasize that, for various, but primarily political reasons, the Croatian language in Italy was referred to as Illyrian, and elsewhere by other names: Illyrian, Croatian, Slavic, *slovinski*, Slavonian, *slavjenski*, Dalmatian, Bosnian, vernacular (*lingua vernacula*), popular, our (*naš*), etc. Nonetheless, the three predominant names were: Illyrian, Slavic or *slovinski*, and Croatian. However, there is abundant evidence that “Croatian” and “Illyrian” were synonymous terms, with the former being much older than the latter (7). For the sake of clarity, only a few of the oldest attestations will be mentioned here; a detailed account of the naming of the Croatian language will be the subject of a separate study.

The Poljica Statute (1400)

The Poljica Statute (*Poljički zakonik*) from year 1400 already stated: “*Ovo nek se zna, kako pripisismo ovi poštovani statut iz staroga u ovi virno i pravo, ni uzmaknuv ni primaknuv, nego da se bolje razumi hervacki i latinski.*” This translates to “Let it be known that we have transcribed this venerable statute from the old into this one faithfully and correctly, without omitting or adding anything, so that it may be better understood in Croatian and Latin” (38).

Judita (1501)

In the title of his *Judita* from 1501, Marko Marulić wrote: “*Istoria svete udovice Judite, u versih haruacchi složena.*” This roughly translates to “The history of the holy widow Judith, composed in Croatian verses” (37). Hanibal Lucić of Hvar (1485–1553) states that, having stripped Ovid’s book from its Latin garment, he redressed it “*u našu harvačku*”, or “in our Croatian” (38).

Korizmenik (1508)

Petar Jakovčić and Silvije Bedričić of Senj, in their commentary on the *Korizmenik* from 1508, add that they produced it “*na hervacki*”, meaning “in Croatian” (38).

The Jampšić case

The legal status of the Illyrian language was clarified in the case of the priest Ivan Jampšić. Born in Rome to a Slovene father from Ljubljana, Jampšić sought to enjoy the privileges and benefits afforded to members of the institutions of the Brotherhood and Chapter of Saint Jerome in Rome. In 1651, he submitted a petition to the cardinal protector of the Brotherhood for a vacant position in the Chapter, the Brotherhood, and their hospice. Croatian members opposed his request, citing the papal bull *Sapientiam Sanctorum* issued by Pope Sixtus V on August 1, 1589, which granted the Chapter of Saint Jerome in Rome a kind of extraterritorial status akin to that of independent states. The bull specified that only those born in Illyricum or, at the very least, speakers of Illyrian could be members. Jampšić refused to undergo an examination in Illyrian and submitted a legal complaint to the court of the Papal States in Rome.

The legal dispute came down to whether Carniola, the historical region encompassing the territory of present-day Slovenia, was part of the Illyricum. The highest ecclesiastical court of the Papal States, the *Sacra Rota Romana*, delivered its judgment on April 24, 1656, in favor of the Croatian side. The verdict, an excerpt of which is provided here alongside a translation, clarified the equivalence of the terms “Illyrian” and “Croatian” with the following words (40–42):

Quod spectat ad provinciam gentis Illyricae [...], dicimus, declaramus, decernimus, statuimus et pronunciamus veram et propriam gentis Illyricae provinciam fuisse, esse et intelligi

debere - secundum Bullam et mentem dicti Sixti V – Dalmatiam seu Illyricum, quarum partes sunt Croatia, Bosnia et Slavonia, ex quibus penitus excluduntur Carinthia, Styria et Carniola.

[Translation]: As for the province of the Illyrian people [...] we say, declare, decree, determine, and pronounce that the true and proper province of the Illyrian people was, is, and must be understood to be, according to the bull and the intention of the said Sixtus V, Dalmatia or Illyricum, of which Croatia, Bosnia, and Slavonia are parts, and from which Carinthia, Styria, and Carniola are completely excluded.

Solum illi qui ex dictis quattuor provinciis oriundi sunt, possunt competere tam ad loca canonica et beneficia ecclesiastica dictae ecclesiae collegiatae [...], quam etiam ad hospitalitatem in eadem Sancti Hieronymi Confraternitate.

[Translation]: Only those originating from the aforementioned four provinces may compete both for canonical positions and ecclesiastical benefices of the said collegiate church [...], and also for hospitality in the same Brotherhood of Saint Jerome.

For the purposes of the court, the Roman cartographer Andrea Buffalini drew a map of “Illyricum” on parchment in 1663 based on testimonies from the most esteemed Roman jurists, geographers, and historians (Figure 4). This map included Dalmatia, Bosnia, Slavonia, and Croatia – territories which were granted rights to the institutions of Saint Jerome in Rome ((7), p. 445–458). The upper right corner contained a Latin inscription, which is translated as follows (7, 40, 43):

Just as the Brotherhood of the Illyrian people was established by Illyrians from Dalmatia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Slavonia who came to Rome, so we, their compatriots or those who originate from there and speak “slovinski,” may share in their rights. [...] Therefore – to avoid misunderstandings or frauds, these four kingdoms and their regions have been mapped so that it may be clear which places are to be included, and which excluded.



Figure 4. A copy of the former Illyricum, i.e., the countries and regions that the Papal State administration considered “Illyrian” (Dalmatia, Bosnia, Slavonia and Croatia proper) in an ethnic-cultural sense, whose members had the right not only to that name but also to all the services of the brotherhood, inn, hospital and church of St. Jerome.

According to this map, Illyricum encompassed the area between the Adriatic Sea to the south and Hungary (*Hungaria*) to the north and northwest, extending up to Carniola (Slovenia), and southeast to Serbia and Albania. Each of the four kingdoms was marked with its respective royal coat of arms, and 250 localities were identified.

Discussion

This research presents many previously unknown facts significant for understanding the history of the Croatian language. First and foremost, it is evident that the process of standardizing the Croatian language already began at the end of the 16th century, despite very unfavorable political circumstances (44). This occurred in parallel with the Renaissance movement which first spread from Italy to the eastern Adriatic coast, and then to other parts of Central and Western Europe. This complex process began when Croatian national integration started taking shape within the tense and dynamic relationships between proponents of the Protestant religious revolution and the Catholic Church's response. Although these divisions between Protestants and Catholics primarily concerned religious and political matters, cultural issues could not be bypassed. Every word, especially when it came to the Holy Scriptures, carried or could carry decisive weight. Therefore, it had to be not only as accurate as possible, faithful to the sacred text's meaning, but also as understandable as possible to contemporary readers, which demanded exceptional scholarly and intellectual effort from all parties involved.

Such was the case with the Croatian language, as well: the Catholic Church took all necessary measures and steps to evaluate its status within the family of Slavic languages as its principal representative. To this end, it ensured that the language received basic scholarly tools: first a dictionary and grammar, and then an orthography and other resources to make it accessible for study at the university level. It also introduced the teaching of the language as a compulsory subject at prestigious European universities, offering rewards to those who mastered it and penalties for those who refused to comply. All of this is documented in the records of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome (26). The fact that, in the 17th century, the highest authority of the Catholic Church intended for the Croatian language to be introduced as a mandatory subject at leading European universities placed before it an extraordinarily complex and responsible task of shaping and standardizing the language.

The popes' interest in the Croatian language was motivated by a dual purpose: to protect Slavic peoples from Protestant influence and to draw them into ecclesiastical unity. They had effective collaborators who, amid the dire conditions of Turkish invasions from the east and Protestant reformation from the west, found both time and will to engage with linguistic matters. It seems almost unbelievable to what extent they developed and promoted the language of the small Croatian nation, which at the time lacked both a state and central cultural institution, introducing its study at the most eminent European academies and universities founded by the popes themselves. This can be explained by the fact that the Balkan Peninsula served as a natural watershed, but also as a crossroads of two worlds: the Latin, Catholic Western Europe, and the Slavic, Greek-Orthodox Eastern

Europe. It was also more than that – it was a meeting point between the European and Asian continents.

It is important to note that, in terms of the cultural, scientific, and literary standards of that time, only three dead or biblical languages (Hebrew, Chaldean, and Greek) and three living ones (modern Greek, Arabic, and Illyrian) were considered relevant. Modern Greek was regarded as important because of its prestige in the Orthodox world, while Arabic was crucial because of the vast Islamic world with which dialogue was necessary. Croatian (Illyrian), meanwhile, was considered the most beautiful and suitable as a mediator between the Catholic West and Slavic Orthodox East. As such, it was chosen to be the pan-Slavic modern language in which the Catholic Church intended to publish all necessary church books in place of the former Old Church Slavonic, which even priests could no longer understand. Latin is not specifically mentioned because it was the general spoken and working language used for instruction in all schools, from the lowest to the highest levels.

To achieve the goals set before the Church by the Council of Trent, the reforming popes found their strongest support and collaboration in religious orders, especially the newly established Jesuit Order, founded in the year 1540. Although it was not initially envisioned as a missionary order, it became one due to changing circumstances. The popes entrusted it with important missions in both Christian and non-Christian regions. Its General Rules included a provision that all members of the order must learn the language of the country in which they intended to work; in regions where suitable textbooks for doing so were not available, they were to be created. Such was the case with the Croatian language.

Croatian historiography long held the belief that the Croatian literary language was standardized only during the Illyrian Revival in the first half of the 19th century (7). However, the findings presented here show a significantly different picture of the history of the Croatian language: it not only had its own specific history of standardization beginning in the late 16th and throughout the 17th century, but also an equally important prehistory, about which almost nothing had previously been known. Abundant authentic documentation has been uncovered and presented here, demonstrating that the Croatian language was known and recognized internationally to the extent that it was taught at European universities.

Viewed in total, the history of the Croatian language depended far more on Rome than on internal developments within the homeland. Due to unfavorable domestic circumstances, it was in Rome that, for the first time, its nature and structure were studied, evaluations made of its distribution, its relation to other languages assessed, its importance for a broader region recognized, and even its very name considered. At home, no one had even thought of such things, nor would it have been possible due to unsupportive social, cultural, and political conditions. It is therefore unsurprising that Croatian, like the languages of other nations, was not studied or standardized until the 15th and 16th centuries.

It is worth noting that international linguistic experts documented praise for the Croatian language (Documents 1 and 2 in the [Zenodo repository](#)). This aligns with the fact that Czech, Slovak, and Polish linguists considered it the “mother and root of other languages,” the “language used by diplomats at the Ottoman court,” the “oldest,” “most beauti-

ful,” “most refined” language in the Slavic world, and the “most widespread across the vast territories of Eastern Europe and Asia”, on the same level as the “biblical” languages (Hebrew, Chaldean, and Ancient Greek) and the languages of global literacy of the time (Latin, Arabic, and Modern Greek) (45). A detailed account of this topic will be treated in a separate study. In any case, the hardships the Croatian language endured in the 19th and 20th centuries (2) did not damage its centuries-old national identity or its long-praised beauty (46).

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