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Ivan Mance, Kosinjska tiskara – povijesna, informacijska i kartografska studija (Velika Gorica: Kvaka, 2023.)

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Uvod: Knjiga Ivana Mancea *Kosinjska tiskara: Povijesna, informacijska i kartografska studija* opsežno je i ambiciozno znanstveno djelo posvećeno jednomu od najintrigantnijih pitanja hrvatske kulturne i knjižne povijesti – mogućemu mjestu djelovanja prve hrvatske glagoljske tiskare. Autor interdisciplinarno pristupa problematici, povezujući povijesnu analizu s informacijskim znanostima, kartografijom, proučavanjem glagoljske baštine, arhivskih izvora i materijalnih obilježja hrvatskoga Prvotiska. Upravo je širina metodološkoga pristupa jedna od najizraženijih vrijednosti ove studije.

Ključne riječi: Kosinjska tiskara, Kosinj, Bočać, Ivan Mance, Prvotisak, Misal iz 1483., Kosinjski brevijar iz 1491.

Ivan Mance, The Kosinj Printing House – A Historical, Informational, and Cartographic Study (Velika Gorica: Kvaka, 2023)

Introduction: Ivan Mance's book, *The Kosinj Printing House – A Historical, Informational, and Cartographic Study*, is a substantial and ambitious scholarly work devoted to one of the most intriguing questions in Croatian cultural and book history: the possible site of operation of the first Croatian Glagolitic printing house. The author takes an interdisciplinary approach to the subject, bringing together historical analysis, information science, cartography, the study of Glagolitic heritage and archival sources, and the material characteristics of the First Printed Croatian Book. The breadth of this methodological approach is one of the study's most distinctive strengths.

Keywords: Kosinj Printing House, Kosinj, Bočać, Ivan Mance, editio princeps, Missal of 1483, Kosinj Breviary of 1491

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BOOK REVIEW

Starting from the fact that the place of printing of *Misal po zakonu rimskoga dvora* of 1483 is not stated in its colophon, the author systematically examines the various theories that have emerged in historiography concerning the place where the First Printed Croatian Book was produced. Rather than treating the question of Kosinj in isolation, he places it within a broader historiographical and cultural-historical context. This approach allows the reader to trace the development of the individual hypotheses, the arguments supporting them, and the position of the Kosinj hypothesis within the long-standing scholarly debate. The study itself clearly demonstrates the complexity of determining the place of printing of the earliest Croatian Glagolitic incunabula and the extent to which this requires bringing together different types of sources.

A particular scholarly strength of the book is the author's effort to subject the historical sources to methodologically structured analysis and synthesis. This is especially apparent in the examination of Broz (Ambroz) Kacitić's entry in *Novak's Missal* and the blind press in the First Printed Croatian Book. Rather than considering an individual instance of blind press in isolation, the author seeks to analyse all instances as a connected whole. The book specifically stresses the need for a methodological approach and adherence to the principles of scholarly research, while the blind press is examined collectively and contextualised in relation to other historical evidence.

Another important contribution of the study is its use of modern information technologies. The digitisation of source materials and the analysis of high-resolution images enabled the author to examine the graphic elements of the First Printed Croatian Book in detail. The research identified nine locations of blind press across five pages, with a total of 340 characters. The author links these findings to Broz Kacitić, his name, and a possible Pauline context in Kosinj. Regardless of how future research may assess the individual interpretations, the detailed recording, comparison, and systematisation of this material provide an important foundation for further scholarly debate.

The extent of the author's direct work with the sources is also impressive. The analysis of the blind press lasted more than a year and a half and involved communication with libraries in the Vatican, the United States, Russia, and Austria, as well as the examination of surviving copies available in Croatia. Such a research process attests to the seriousness of the author's

approach to the material and his effort to base his conclusions on the broadest possible corpus of available copies and documentation.

One particularly valuable segment of the book is its cartographic study of Kosinj and the surrounding area. The author analysed no fewer than 225 historical geographical maps, tracing Kosinj's appearance on maps from its earliest representations to the end of the nineteenth century and identifying thirty forms of its toponym. Cartographic sources thus cease to be merely an illustrative supplement to the historical discussion and become an independent means of understanding Kosinj's historical visibility and significance. This section demonstrates particularly well the book's interdisciplinary character and the potential of the digital humanities to open new research questions in Croatian historiography.

The value of Mance's study therefore lies not only in its support for the Kosinj hypothesis, but also in the quantity of material it collects, systematises, analyses, and makes available to future researchers. The author combines historiography, archival research, cartographic sources, the written Glagolitic heritage, and the possibilities offered by modern information tools, demonstrating how traditional historical questions can be investigated using new methodological procedures.

The book is particularly commendable for reopening scholarly discussion of Kosinj as an important centre of Croatian Glagolitic and book culture. The author's interpretation of particular evidence will undoubtedly be the subject of further scholarly discussion. This is also one of the hallmarks of sound scholarship: it does not close research questions, but encourages their renewed examination, verification, and further development through new sources and methods.

The Kosinj Printing House therefore represents a valuable contribution to the study of Croatia's Glagolitic heritage, printing history, and wider cultural heritage. It is a substantial study distinguished by scholarly perseverance, an interdisciplinary approach, and an effort to examine the complex question of the beginnings of Croatian printing from several interconnected perspectives. The book will be of particular interest to historians, researchers of Glagolitic culture and Croatian incunabula, information professionals, cartographers, and all those who study Croatian cultural heritage.

Ultimately, the monograph's greatest value may lie in taking Kosinj beyond its local historical context and returning it firmly to the debate on the beginnings of the Croatian printed word.

Mance's research presents a wealth of scholarly material, raises new questions, and offers arguments that future research will not be able to overlook. The book therefore deserves the attention of the scholarly and professional community and encourages further interdisciplinary study of one of the most interesting chapters in Croatian cultural history.

The study gains additional weight from the author's work with archival materials, particularly the manuscript papers of Zvonimir Kulundžić held by the State Archives in Osijek. This exceptionally extensive body of material comprises tens of thousands of pages, a considerable portion of which still requires systematic archival processing. Despite the constraints under which the research was conducted, the author identified unpublished manuscripts, newspaper articles, private correspondence, and photographic documentation relevant to the question of the Kosinj Printing House. Even this partial examination demonstrates how much significant material may still lie hidden in archival collections and how much scope remains for further research.

This openness to new sources is an important scholarly feature of the monograph. The author does not confine himself to the familiar and frequently cited literature, but seeks to broaden the study's source base. The archival material is not used merely for illustration: the primary and secondary sources discovered there guided the subsequent analysis of the blind press, prompted additional historical research, and also led to fieldwork in Kosinj itself. This reciprocal linking of archival records, written sources, material heritage, and field research is methodologically especially valuable because it permits multiple forms of verification and the contextualisation of individual historical traces.

The fieldwork component further demonstrates the author's commitment to the sources. In November 2021, documentation, books, records, and the premises of several churches in Kosinj were examined, including sacristies, cellars, attics, and parish offices. This approach also led to the discovery of noteworthy Glagolitic material that had not previously been sufficiently known to the scholarly community. The research thus moves beyond the confines of traditional desk-based historiography and demonstrates the importance of direct work at historical sites in the study of cultural and ecclesiastical history.

The author's critical approach to earlier historiography also deserves emphasis. Mance does not automatically adopt the conclusions of previous authors, but analyses them in terms of their sources, methodology, and the internal logic of their arguments. In individual chapters,

he applies inductive reasoning, analysis and synthesis, and the comparative evaluation of different types of data. The author himself explicitly emphasises the interdisciplinary nature of the questions surrounding the earliest Croatian printing houses and the need to involve different academic disciplines in their study. This gives the study a methodological breadth that is particularly important in a field where the lack of direct sources requires the careful correlation of numerous indirect indicators.

The cartographic section of the monograph also reflects an awareness that a historical map is not merely a geographical representation, but also a product of the period, political circumstances, and cultural context in which it was created. The author examines different cartographic traditions and groups of mapmakers, paying particular attention to the earliest representations of Kosinj and the various forms of its toponym. The earliest confirmed cartographic representation discussed in the book appears on the 1528 map *Tabula Hungariae*, while particular attention is also devoted to the Italian cartographic tradition and Giacomo Gastaldi. Such an analysis is valuable not only to the question of the printing house, but also to the history of the region and its settlements, and to perceptions of Kosinj in early modern Europe.

Another important feature of the book is its exceptional documentary richness. The large number of sources, appendices, maps, photographs, tables, reproductions, and analytical illustrations makes the monograph a research repository in its own right. Even when readers do not agree with every interpretative conclusion reached by the author, the quantity of material presented enables them to form their own judgements and permits alternative readings. This is an important quality in a scholarly work because the value of research derives not only from its final thesis, but also from the transparent presentation of the path by which that thesis was reached.

The research into the blind press in the First Printed Croatian Book deserves particular emphasis. The author stresses that a single instance of blind press cannot be considered in isolation and that all known instances of blind press must instead be analysed as a whole. In doing so, he also draws on the earlier methodological cautions of Academician Anica Nazor. This approach results in an attempt to integrate all the detected elements into a single interpretative structure. The procedure demonstrates an aspiration towards a comprehensive

reading of the sources and constitutes one of the book's most methodologically interesting features.

The monograph is also important because it clearly demonstrates the potential of the digital humanities in the field of book history. High-resolution images, digital measurement, the processing of graphic elements, and the possibility of comparing geographically dispersed copies of the same incunabulum open up research possibilities that were unavailable to previous generations of scholars. The author himself stresses that the digitisation of library and archival materials has provided access to large quantities of historical source material held by institutions around the world. This was crucial to both the cartographic and information-science components of his research.

In this sense, *The Kosinj Printing House* may also be read as an example of a contemporary model for researching cultural heritage, in which traditional historical scholarship is not opposed to technology but enhanced by it. The author shows that a digital tool is not evidence in itself, but that it can significantly improve the identification, measurement, comparison, and visualisation of historical material. The combination of traditional source criticism with new possibilities offered by information technology represents one of the most promising directions for the future development of humanities research.

The scholarly value of the study is also evident in the fact that the author does not give the impression that the research process is complete. On the contrary, he explicitly proposes further work at several points, particularly the comprehensive processing of Kulundžić's archival papers. In the author's assessment, the systematic examination and digitisation of this material could reveal an entire series of new historical sources and result in future articles and monographs. This position demonstrates an awareness of the provisional nature of scholarly conclusions and of the need to test them continually against new sources.

It is especially significant that the book succeeds in connecting the local history of Kosinj with much broader processes: the development of European printing, Glagolitic culture, the activities of the Paulines, the history of the Frankopan family, medieval literacy, cartography, and the transition from manuscript to print culture. In the book, Kosinj is thus presented not merely as a geographical location, but as a place where different cultural, linguistic, ecclesiastical, and political traditions intersect. This capacity to connect a microhistorical

setting with major processes in European cultural history gives the study additional interpretative force.

The work also deserves praise for its courage in reconsidering a question that has for decades been burdened by various historiographical assumptions. It is particularly important in scholarship that interpretations, once accepted, should not become untouchable postulates. Mance's book demonstrates the value of reopening old questions when new sources, new methods, or new possibilities for correlating existing evidence emerge. This should be recognised as one of its most important scholarly messages.

At the same time, the scholarly contribution of this book should not be confined solely to the question of conclusively locating the first Croatian printing house. Equally important is its reconstruction of the cultural and intellectual environment in which it was possible to create a work as demanding as the Croatian Glagolitic Missal of 1483. In this context, the study re-examines the people, ecclesiastical institutions, textual tradition, manuscript exemplars, communication networks, and local Glagolitic culture. Such a contextual approach is extremely important because the history of printing is not only the history of the printing press, but also the history of the knowledge, people, and social networks required for a printed book to come into being.

The reader is thus presented with a picture of Kosinj as a place of layered cultural memory. Glagolitic fragments, historical records, cartographic representations, ecclesiastical documentation, toponymy, archival materials, and material traces are considered as parts of a broader historical whole. In this respect, the book also contributes significantly to the recognition of local heritage without reducing its importance to the local level. On the contrary, local heritage becomes a point of departure for understanding national and European cultural processes.

It is particularly commendable that the author devotes considerable effort to systematising previous research. The book thereby also serves a historiographical purpose: it presents a new interpretation while tracing the development of a long-standing scholarly debate. This overview is extremely useful for future researchers because it allows them to follow the emergence of individual hypotheses and their acceptance, criticism, and transformation over time.

CONCLUSION

In view of all the above, it may be concluded that this monograph significantly enriches scholarship on Croatian incunabula and Glagolitic culture. Its strength lies primarily in the breadth of its source material, its interdisciplinary character, the author's scholarly perseverance, the use of new technologies, and the courage to raise questions that have not yet been definitively resolved.

Mance's *The Kosinj Printing House* may therefore be regarded as a valuable impetus for a new cycle of research into the beginnings of Croatian printing. Its conclusions invite verification, its sources call for further study, and its methodology encourages interdisciplinary dialogue among historians, philologists, information professionals, cartographers, codicologists, and other researchers of Croatia's written heritage.

The book also deserves recognition for returning a fundamental question of Croatian cultural history to the centre of scholarly attention: where, in what intellectual and social environment, and through whose efforts did the first Croatian printed book emerge? Posing this question through new sources, digital methods, archival research, and a reassessment of earlier hypotheses is itself a substantial contribution.

Therefore, *The Kosinj Printing House – A Historical, Informational, and Cartographic Study* can be recommended as a rigorous, richly documented, and intellectually stimulating scholarly work. It sustains awareness of the importance of Croatia's Glagolitic heritage while showing how that heritage can be discussed in the language of contemporary scholarship. Regardless of how the debate on the place of printing of the First Printed Croatian Book develops, this monograph will remain an important point of reference for studying Kosinj, Croatian Glagolitic culture, incunabula, and the history of the Croatian printed word. The author deserves recognition for his many years of research, thorough collection of sources, and effort to examine an exceptionally demanding historical problem from numerous perspectives. *The Kosinj Printing House* is not merely a book about one possible printing house; it is a book about Croatian literacy, cultural memory, the power of sources, and scholarship's enduring need to reopen questions whose answers remain unsettled.

For precisely these reasons, this work deserves a prominent place in contemporary Croatian scholarly and professional literature and the attention of everyone engaged in the history of the Croatian book and the nation's cultural heritage.