

Who Was the *Real* Collaborator of the Copyist Damijan-Iosif?

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Abstract. This study re-evaluates the manuscript corpus attributed to the Serbian copyist Damijan-Iosif through the application of the Cyrillic Palaeography Toolkit, a digital instrument enabling detailed script analysis. By reassessing six manuscripts bearing his name or monogram and examining two additional codices previously linked to an anonymous collaborator, the study attributes them all to Damijan-Iosif. A further manuscript reveals the presence of a collaborator, distinguished through palaeographic and layout features. These findings shed new light on collaborative practices within the Hilandar scriptorium and demonstrate the potential of digital methodologies to enhance traditional palaeographic attribution frameworks in South Slavonic manuscript studies.

Keywords: South Slavonic Palaeography, Cyrillic Palaeography Toolkit, Hilandar Monastery, Serbian Copyists.

1 Introduction

The mid-fourteenth century and the two subsequent decades witnessed a significant increase in Cyrillic manuscript production by South Slavonic scribes, renowned for their exceptional craftsmanship in both script and illumination. Among the monastic communities and hermitages of Mount Athos, Hilandar Monastery emerged as a leading locus of this activity, despite the relatively small number of extant manuscripts from its scriptorium that preserve colophons or explicit information regarding commissioners, provenance, or date of composition. Within this context, the work of the Serbian copyist Damijan-Iosif and his collaborators is instrumental in reconstructing one of the distinct divisions of the Hilandar scriptorium active during the sixth and seventh decades of the fourteenth century.

Scholarly investigation into South Slavonic scribal activity and scriptoria was undertaken within the framework of the project “Fourteenth Century South Slavonic scribes and scriptoria (palaeographical attribution and online repertorium)” (N° KP-06-N50/4, 2020–2024), and is currently being advanced through the initiative “Development of the Cyrillic alphabet from the 9th to the 14th century in the South Slavic lands:

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research and digital presentation” (N° KP-06-N90/9, 2024–2027). These projects have supported the creation of a web-based “Repertorium”, compiling data from over 1.400 South Slavonic manuscripts dated to the fourteenth century (Paneva-Marinova, et al., 2022) and the formulation of a structured model for the palaeographic description of Cyrillic script (Riparante, 2024).

Central to this effort is the ongoing development of the “Cyrillic Palaeography Toolkit” (hereafter referred to as CyPaT), a web-based digital platform designed to support the structured description, processing, and comparative analysis of digitised Cyrillic manuscripts. In addition to accurately recording the physical features of manuscript folia, CyPaT enables a detailed investigation of scribal practices by capturing measurements such as letter height and width, stroke thickness, proportional relationships, writing angles, and text inclination – all described using a standardised palaeographic terminology. The platform provides tools for image correction, dimensional calibration, and interlinear spacing analysis through automated pixel segmentation, ensuring precision in the preparatory phase of analysis. Built entirely with open-source technologies (Vue.js, Vuetify, NodeJS, and MongoDB), CyPaT is accessible via any modern browser and facilitates seamless interaction between image-based annotation and structured data. Particularly innovative is the ‘Match Pattern’ function, which tracks individual letterforms across a folio to identify graphic variants, stylistic shifts, or contributions by multiple scribes. By integrating these capabilities into a unified environment, CyPaT not only improves the accuracy and reproducibility of palaeographic research but also opens new avenues for collaborative and data-driven manuscript studies.

This level of analytical precision, when integrated with the analysis of extra-scriptural elements, has proven indispensable in addressing complex questions of attribution, particularly in distinguishing between closely related scribal *hands*. For instance, it has prompted a re-evaluation of long-standing palaeographic hypotheses concerning the authorship of manuscripts № 46 from the Dečani Monastery (i.e. Deč.) and № 19 from the Archive of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (i.e. ASASA), associated with the manuscript corpus produced within the same scriptorium of Damijan-Iosif and tentatively attributed to an anonymous collaborator (Cernić, 1981). While previous scholarship acknowledged stylistic affinities, it could not conclusively determine whether these manuscripts were produced by a distinct copyist trained within the same tradition, or by Damijan-Iosif himself.

The present study aims to refine these attributions through the application of the Cyrillic Palaeography Toolkit, undertaking a comprehensive palaeographic and graphical analysis of the manuscripts associated with Damijan-Iosif and his circle of collaborators. The first part of the study (Section 2) reviews the current state of research on this principal Serbian scribe, with particular focus on manuscripts bearing his colophon, that are the mss. № 126, № 390 from the Hilandar Monastery (i.e. Hil.), Cod. Slav. 24 from the Austrian National Library (i.e. ÖNB), or bearing his monogram, that are Deč. 5, Deč. 73, and F.п.I.115 from the Russian National Library (i.e. RNL). This is followed, in Section 3, by an analysis of two manuscripts (Deč. 46, ASASA № 19) while Section 4 revisits a less studied portion (pt. 2) of ms. RNL – F.п.I.115, offering new

insights into the activity of a previously unidentified contemporary copyist. Each manuscript is examined with attention to both codicological and palaeographical features, reassessed using the functionalities of the CyPaT currently under development. Particular consideration is given to script type, rhythm, and visual appearance – including slant, module, and the ratio of nib width to letter height (Table 1, 2) – as well as the presence of additional graphical (Fig. 2) and punctuation marks (Fig. 3). The formation of select letterforms, such as *в*, *ж*, *з*, *и*, *ч*, *х*, and *ѣ* (Fig. 1) is also examined, as the basis for a comparative palaeographic assessment across the analysed corpus.

2 The Copyist Damijan-Iosif

The scarcity of explicit scribal data within the South Slavonic manuscript tradition, evident in the fact that fewer than 10% of fourteenth-century codices preserve such information according to the “Repertorium” database, positions script as the primary criterion for attribution. In rare yet significant cases, however, palaeographic analysis is supported not only by colophons, which offer a more secure basis for reconstructing a scribe’s corpus, but also by a range of additional corroborative features. The case of Damijan-Iosif stands as a compelling example of this phenomenon.

The first scholar to identify “Damijan, a Hilandar monk” as responsible for copying both manuscripts Hil. 126 and Hil. 390 was D. Bogdanović (1978) that transcribes the copyist’s notes in the description of each manuscript: for ms. Hil. 126, on f. 251v (ll. 21–22) — *ѡ всѣхъ бл(а)гын Г(оспо)ди слава тебѣ, Дамиганъ (мон)ахъ(ь)*, translated ‘oh Lord of all goodness, glory to you, monk Damijan’, and for ms. Hil. 390, on f. 355r (ll. 12–22) — [...] *написа се сѣга книга гл(агол)юмыи зла(тоо)усть. с(ве)тыи и великыи м(оучени)це. ѡт[ъ] фарисеа. до соуботе велии. при игоуменѣ иеромонасѣ кырѣ доротеи. трѹдомъ же и потыцаниемъ многогрѣшнаго дамигана монах[а] [...]*, ‘this book, called the Chrysostomus, was written from the beginning of Lent until Holy Saturday, during the abbacy of the hieromonk Kyr Dorotei, through the work and effort of the greatly sinful monk Damijan’. Bogdanović also mentions the note on the bottom margin of the first flyleaf (f. Iv) — † *Дамиганъ Яверкиевъ ипсрѹгъ а синь [...]*, ‘Damijan, hypourgos of Averkije and son [...]’. However, neither the consultation of the manuscript via microfilm, which does not allow for a clear reading of the note, nor the palaeographic characteristics of the visible letters provide certainty that it was written by Damijan-Iosif.

A comprehensive study of the copyist’s manuscript production was later carried out by L. Cernić (1981), who was the first to mention the monk’s second name, Iosif. This name appears in the form of a cross-shaped monogram, where the letters *и* and *ѡ* are interwoven with additional dashes and dots. Alongside the two manuscripts held in the Hilandar collection, Cernić also attributed three further codices to Damijan-Iosif, that are the mss. Deč. 5, Deč. 73, and ÖNB – Cod. Slav. 24. Not only do the manuscripts Deč. 5 (on ff. 2v, 71v, 73r, 118r, 193r, 263v) and Deč. 73 (on f. 273v) contain the monogram for the name Iosif, but the ms. ÖNB – Cod. Slav. 24 includes both the monogram on f. 225v and the scribe Damijan’s note on f. 309r (ll. 10–13) — [...] *трѹдомъ же потыцаниемъ многогрѣшнаго дамигана монаха. въ монастыри же гл(агол)юмыи*

Хиландарь [...], ‘by the work and effort of the greatly sinful monk Damijan in the monastery called Hilandar’ and on f. 309v (bottom margin) — † ПОМЕНИТЕ ЖЕ И ТРЪДНАШАГО СЕ ДАМИЈАНА (МОН)АХ(А), ‘pray also for the one who worked, Damijan the monk’. Moreover, on the basis of the script analysis, Cernić also assigns to the same copyist the mss. № 5 from the St. Panteleimon Monastery collection (i.e. Pant.) and № 34 from the Scientific Archive of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (i.e. SA-BAS).

Further contributions were made by Grozdanović-Pajić (1995), who attributed the ms. Hil. 48 to the copyist, and by A. A. Turilov and L. V. Moškova. In the first edition of their catalogue (1999), Turilov attributes to him the mss. Pant. 10 and Voskr. 115 from the State Historical Museum in Moscow, and in the second edition (2016), not only he suggests that ms. Pant. 10 may have originally been part of a set with the ms. SA-BAS № 34 but also lists one more manuscript copied by the same scribe, the ms. RNL – F.п.I.115, that contains the monogram on f. 62v. The most recent attribution known to us is that of K. Mano-Zisi (2000), who assigns the mss. № 852 from the SS. Cyril and Methodius National Library and № 254 from the Hilandar Monastery to the scribe. In conclusion, it’s necessary to highlight that Iosif has also been identified as the illuminator of manuscript Hil. 258, which was copied by the well-known Serbian monk Iov (Bogdanović & Medaković, 1978); (Prolović, 1986); (Grozdanović-Pajić & Stanković, 1995).

Table 1. Palaeographic script description of the six mss. bearing the name and/or monogram of Damijan-Iosif, based on the analysis conducted using the CyPaT.

Hil. 126. Octoechos, parchment, 1341–1360 (Bogdanović & Medaković, 1978). I, 253 ff. (270 × 205 mm); text field ~175 × 120 mm; 22 ll./p. Uncial script with strong vertical–horizontal visual contrast, carefully executed with consistent flow. Slanted terminal dashes on vertical strokes. Letters are aligned to the quadrilinear system. Slight rightward slant (~15°, towards end). Square module (0.8 mm nib tip width, 3.5 mm letter height; ~1:4), despite detectable nib change.
Hil. 390. Lenten Triodion Panegyricon, paper, 1355–1365 (Stanković, 2000; 2007). I, 356, I ff. (285 × 180 mm); text field ~200 × 130 mm; 24 ll./p. Uncial script with marked vertical–horizontal contrast, consistently executed yet with a steady rightward slant. Uneven presence of slanted terminal dashes on vertical strokes. Uprightness occasionally uneven, but letters are aligned to the quadrilinear system. Square module maintained (0.9–1 mm nib tip width, 4 mm letter height; ~1:4).
ÖNB, Cod. Slav. 24. Pentecostarion, paper, 1351–1375 (Prolović, 1986; 2002). 311, I ff. (295 × 197 mm); text field ~200 × 120 mm; 22 ll./p. Uncial script with strong vertical–horizontal contrast, written with consistent flow and slight rightward slant. Uprightness occasionally uneven, but letters are aligned to the quadrilinear system. Uneven presence of slanted terminal dashes on vertical strokes. Square module (0.9–1 mm nib tip width, 4 mm letter height; ~1:4).
Deč. 5. Four Gospels (Tetraevangelion), paper, 1360–1370 (Bogdanović, et al., 2011). I, 264, I ff. (285 × 208 mm), with f. 72 added in the 17th century; text field ~195 × 120 mm; 22 ll./p. Uncial script with weak vertical–horizontal contrast, likely due to nib angle (~15°). Slanted

terminal dashes on vertical strokes. Rightward slant is uneven (10–15°), and occasional deviations from the quadrilinear system create an unstable rhythm. Square module (0.8–1 mm nib tip width, 3.8–4 mm letter height; ~1:4), with nib change evident.

Deč. 73. Ladder of Divine Ascent, paper, 1360–1370 (ff. 1r–326v), 1395–1400 (ff. 327r–380v) (Bogdanović, et al., 2011). 384 ff. (215 × 145 mm); text field (main section) ~160 × 90 mm; 23 ll./p. “Uniform uncial” script with weak vertical–horizontal visual contrast likely due to rounded nib. Uneven presence of slanted terminal dashes on vertical strokes. Deviations from quadrilinear system and varying writing angle, with vertical strokes slanted ~10°. Square module (0.7 mm nib tip width, 3 mm letter height; ~1:4).

RNL – F.п.І.115 (pt.1). Octoechos, parchment, 1341–1360 (Levšina, 2021). III, 258, VII ff. (260 × 190 mm), with additional III ff. inserted between ff. 117 and 118, and I f. between ff. 132 and 133; text field ~190 × 133–135 mm; 27–29 ll./p. Copied primarily by Damijan-Iosif (ff. 2r–3v, 16r–258v). Uncial script with strong vertical–horizontal contrast and a consistent rightward slant (~15°). Slanted terminal dashes on vertical strokes. Square module (0.7 mm nib tip width, 2.8 mm letter height; ~1:4), with detectable nib change. Letters are aligned to the quadrilinear system followed, though slanted terminal dashes affect writing angle assessment.

In summary, a total of fourteen manuscripts have been attributed to the copyist Damijan-Iosif and a detailed palaeographic examination of the six codices bearing his name and/or monogram (cf. Table 1) reveals a remarkable consistency in scribal execution, notwithstanding some variation in graphic and punctuation features. All manuscripts conform to a broadly uncial script style, with a visual contrast between thick vertical and thin horizontal strokes, and a clear preference for a square module – hallmarks of a scribe working within a conservative tradition. This coherence extends to script proportions: each manuscript adheres to a 1:4 ratio between nib tip width (ranging from 1 to 0.7 mm) and letter height (4 to 2.8 mm), and consistently exhibits a rightward slant, albeit with some degree of fluctuation. A stroke-level analysis of selected letterforms (cf. Fig. 1) confirms that Damijan-Iosif did not deviate from his established script, demonstrating a disciplined adherence to characteristic patterns. This is particularly evident in the execution of the five-stroke letter *ж*, the form of *χ* with its distinctive terminal dashes on the left-right inclined vertical stroke, and the letter *ѣ*, whose serifs are rendered with a first rectangular form and a second triangular one. While this structural stability underscores the singularity of the script, the use of graphic additions (cf. Fig. 2) introduces a degree of variation that, rather than undermining scribal authorship, reflects the flexibility inherent in his practice. The recurring dash in the second element of *ѡ*, frequently observed in Hil. 390, Cod. Slav. 24, and Deč. 73, suggests a stylistic preference rather than a rigid orthographic rule. Similar tendencies are seen in the selective use of a dash in the longer vertical stroke of *ѱ* and a dot in the horizontal stroke of *Ѡ*, while the more sporadic additions to *п*, *Ѳ*, *Ѣ*, and *Ѡ* indicate discretionary embellishment rather than systematic application. Patterns in punctuation (cf. Fig. 3) follow a comparable logic of visual and contextual adaptation. The interpunct prevails across most manuscripts, especially in Cod. Slav. 24 and F.п.І.115 (pt. 1), whereas the dot’s frequency varies considerably, undermining any hypothesis of rigid syntactic function-

ality. Damijan-Iosif's apparent conflation of the dot and interpunct, used interchangeably, coupled with the selective appearance of more elaborate signs such as the comma or four-dot cluster with tilde, reveals a pragmatic, visually informed punctuation system, shaped less by grammatical precision than by habitual and perhaps context-driven choices. While the scriptural framework points unequivocally to a single hand, variations in orthography and punctuation reflect a flexible yet consistent scribal style.

3 Rethinking Attributions: The Presumed Collaborator

The earliest hypothesis suggesting a collaborator of the copyist Damijan-Iosif originates in the research by L. Cernić, who observed a notable similarity between his script and the handwriting preserved in mss. Deč. 46 and ASASA № 19, defined “an example of scripts most likely originating from the same scriptorium” (Cernić, 1981). Further commentary on the matter was later offered by Grozdanović-Pajić and Stanković (1995), who confirmed that the watermarks of ASASA № 19 exhibit striking parallels with those found in other Hilandar manuscripts. In their view, such correspondences may be plausibly explained only by assuming that both scribes received their training within the same scribal milieu, namely, the scriptorium of Hilandar Monastery.

Table 2. Palaeographic script description of the two mss. attributed to a collaborator of the copyist Damijan-Iosif, based on the analysis conducted using the CyPaT.

Deč. 46. Psalter, parchment, 1360–1370 (Bogdanović, et al., 2011). 115 ff. (195 × 135 mm), text field ~130 × 85 mm; 19 ll./p. Uncial script with vertical–horizontal visual contrast. Slanted terminal dashes on vertical strokes. Letters are aligned to the quadrilinear system, with a slight rightward slant (~10°). Square module (0.7 mm nib tip width, ~2.7 mm letter height; ~1:4), despite detectable nib change.
ASASA № 19. Lenten Chrysostomus, paper, 1360/1375 (Cernić, 1981). 212 ff. (292 × 215 mm), text field ~206 × 150 mm; 19 ll./p. Uncial script, with weak vertical–horizontal visual contrast likely due to rounded nib. Uneven presence of slanted terminal dashes on vertical strokes. Letters are aligned to the quadrilinear system, with a slight rightward slant (~5–10°). Square module (0.7–0.8 mm nib tip width, 3 mm letter height; ~1:4).

The palaeographic analysis of these two manuscripts (cf. Table 2), however, does not support the hypothesis of a separate collaborator, but rather strengthens the argument that both were copied by Damijan-Iosif himself. When considered alongside the six manuscripts discussed in Section 2, Deč. 46 and ASASA № 19 demonstrate a striking palaeographic coherence, both in terms of letter formation (cf. Fig. 1) and the recurrent use of identical punctuation marks (cf. Fig. 3). Minor differences in visual contrast, slant, and graphic additions (cf. Fig. 2) fall well within the stylistic range already observed in Damijan-Iosif's corpus. Rather than indicating a different scribe, these divergences reflect the versatility of a single, experienced copyist, highlighting Damijan-Iosif's capacity for adaptation within a consistent scribal framework.

4 Shared Scribal Activity: New Anonymous Collaborator

The close analysis of ms. RNL – F.п.I.115 revealed that the second half of the first quaternion and the second quaternion – that is, from f. 4r (l. 2, after the interpunct) to f. 15v – exhibit a series of consistent divergences from the rest of the codex. These variations, which include distinct letterforms (cf. Fig. 1, F.п.I.115 pt. 2), differences in the use of punctuation (cf. Fig. 3), and the innovative insertion of a dot within the horizontal conjunction stroke of the letter *ѡ* (cf. Fig. 2), point to the intervention of a second copyist. Although anonymous, this collaborator can be confidently associated with the circle of Damijan-Iosif, not only due to the shared scriptorial tradition, but also through a range of textual and material indicators. The attribution is reinforced by the presence of interpolations and corrections on f. 4r (ll. 1–2), f. 12r (l. 16) and f. 15r (ll. 12–13) executed by Damijan-Iosif, some of which appear to have been added in direct dialogue with the collaborator’s transcriptional activity. Further support is provided by divergences in the folia layout: while the anonymous scribe adhered to a ruling system of 25 or 26 ll./p. (text field $\sim 194 \times 132$ mm on ff. 4r–5v; $\sim 188 \times 132$ mm on ff. 6r–15v), Damijan-Iosif consistently employed a denser format of 27–29 ll./p. This contrast not only reflects differing approaches to *mise-en-page* but also strengthens the hypothesis of collaborative copying in the production of this Octoechos section.

5 Conclusions

The results presented in this study highlight the critical potential of applying a systematic, scientifically grounded approach to palaeographic research. In particular, the development and implementation of the Cyrillic Palaeography Toolkit has proven to be a decisive step forward in the analysis of images of medieval Slavonic manuscripts. By shifting the focus from subjective assessments to quantifiable criteria, the study demonstrates how the application of digital tools can lead to more precise and confident scribal attributions. This approach has not only reaffirmed previous identifications associated with the Serbian copyist Damijan-Iosif but has also enabled the attribution of two more manuscripts to his corpus. Equally significant is the identification of a *real* collaborator, whose interventions point to a structured yet flexible working relationship under the supervision of Damijan-Iosif. These traces open a valuable window into the collaborative dynamics within the Hilandar monastic milieu during the second half of the fourteenth century, enriching our understanding of manuscript production in this context. Taken together, these findings point towards the gradual development of what might be termed a “Digital Slavic Palaeography”: a field in which traditional palaeographic expertise is enhanced, rather than replaced, by the use of digital methodologies. The CyPaT provides a means of describing script in a way that is both analytically rigorous and communicable, fostering a shared framework through which findings can be more easily compared, replicated, and expanded upon. As such, this study offers not only specific advances in the attribution of individual codices, but also a model for future research – one that is anchored in empirical analysis, yet sensitive to the historical, cultural, and material complexities of the Slavonic manuscript tradition.

	Б	Ж	З	М	У	Х	Ѧ
Hil. 126							
Hil. 390							
Cod. Slav. 24							
Deč. 5							
Deč. 73							
Fn.I.115 (pt. 1)							
Deč. 46							
SASA № 19							
Fn.I.115 (pt. 2)							

Fig. 1. Selected letterforms at true scale for palaeographic comparison.

	†	Н	П	Ѡ	Ѹ	Ѣ	Ѧ	Є
Hil. 126	0.4%	26.8%	10.6%	0.4%	17.7%	44%		
Hil. 390	0.2%	0.5%	3.8%			95.5%		
Cod. Slav. 24	2.9%	1.2%	1.4%			94.3%		0.2%
Deč. 5	7.4%	15.6%	3.9%	2.3%		70.3%		0.4%
Deč. 73	0.4%	0.4%				99.2%		
F.п.I.115 (pt. 1)	0.3%	35.4%	5.5%		14.7%	43.3%		0.7%
Deč. 46		1.5%	43.3%		37.3%	3%		1.5%
SASA № 19			6.9%	4%	83.8%			
F.п.I.115 (pt. 2)	0.6%	0.6%	1.9%			77.3%	19.5%	

Fig. 2. The percentage frequency of additional graphic elements in relation to letterforms, based on a selection of 24 folia.

	•	◦	‚	˙	;	:-	⋯
Hil. 126	17%	44.1%	15.1%		0.1%		23.7%
Hil. 390	37.8%	39.1%	21.9%		0.2%		1%
Cod. Slav. 24	17%	67.2%	15.4%		0.2%		0.2%
Deč. 5	44.3%	27.6%	27.7%		0.4%		
Deč. 73	38.1%	27.2%	33.9%	0.1%			0.7%
F.п.I.115 (pt. 1)	12.5%	53.7%	10.2%				23.5%
Deč. 46	43%	35.1%	19.3%		0.4%		2.2%
SASA № 19	54.6%	54.6%	14.2%		0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
F.п.I.115 (pt. 2)	65.7%		12.1%				22.1%

Fig. 3. The percentage frequency of punctuation marks, based on a selection of 24 folia.

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