**Glagolitsa: the oldest known Slavic script**

The Glagolitic alphabet or Glagolitsa (Croatian: glagoljica) is the oldest known Slavic script which was introduced in mid-9th century and was used in the Slavic world until the 16th century, when it was eventually replaced by the Latin script (Croatian: latinica).

It is interesting to note that Glagolitsa was used in Croatia – and only in Croatia – up until the 19th century, which means it was the official script in Croatia for 1000 years!

The name of the script is derived from the Croatian verb glagoljati, which has 2 meanings: (1) to speak, to utter, and (2) to serve mass in the Old Church Slavonic\* language.

It is believed that the creators of Glagolitic characters were the Saint brothers Cyril and Methodius, Christian missionaries from Thessalonica in the Byzantine Empire (now Thessaloniki, Greece).

More precisely, the invention of Glagolitic script is attributed to Cyril. It is believed that he devised the script in order to introduce Christianity and writing among the illiterate, pagan Slavic tribes.

However, the origin of Glagolitsa is a bit more complex than that, and there are no less than 43 different theories on its genesis!

There are 41 characters of Glagolitsa as we know it today, but this number can vary from type to type.

How many letters were there in the original Glagolitic script is not known. All of the letters had names, e. g.: a – az, b – buky, v - vêdê etc. (the positioning of the letters was, of course, different from today's alphabet).

The script is therefore called azbuki (Croatian: azbuka) – the name derived from the names of the first two letters, az and buky. Oh, and by the way, the term alphabet is coined by the same analogy: alpha + beta.

What's more, Glagolitic letters were also used as numbers. Their numerical value is correspondent to their alphabetical order and they were easily recognised as numbers because they either had dots on each side or a ligature above.

There are 2 types of Glagolitic script: round and square, according to the shape of the characters. The round type was used in the entire Slavic-speaking world, while the square Glagolitsa, introduced in the 13th century, is exclusively Croatian! Actually, there is also the third type, the triangular variant – this type is the oldest one and its existence was discovered much later.

Baška tablet (Croatian: Bašćanska ploča, from around 1100) is one of the oldest – and probably the most famous – monuments containing Glagolitic inscription.

This monument has great historical significance: It is the oldest known document in which the adjective Croatian (hrvatski) is mentioned, as well as the name of a Croatian ruler in Croatian language (kralj Zvonimir). The document was named after Baška, a town on the island of Krk where it was found. Nowadays it is kept in the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb.

