

New Runiform Inscription from Dombó

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ABSTRACT

Until now, medieval Hungarian runiform inscriptions were known almost exclusively from the Szekler land. The article discusses an inscription on a pilaster of the medieval abbey of Dombó (Szerém County) from the end of the 11th c., which was found in Bánmonostor. It is dubious whether the inscription is contemporaneous with the pilaster or whether it is a graffito from the 12th–14th centuries, or possibly from a secondary usage (15th c. – beginning of the 16th c.). It contains the following letter sequence in a mirrored Hungarian runiform script: ZBTÚT IRVN (or IRVK¹) ++D (or ++ †).

The first word is certainly *‘z b^etűt* ‘that writing (Acc.)’. The second one is a conjugated form of the verb *ír* ‘write’, but it can be interpreted in three ways, according to the deciphering of the last character; it is probable in an archaic and perhaps unusually formed aoristos tense. The third one contains unidentifiable characters; it must refer to the writing person(s) – either with two maker’s marks and a cross, or with a three-letters name that we cannot read.

The inscription, based on the forms of the words, was certainly made later, after the 11th c. It was most probably cut in during the existence of the Romanesque abbey; simpler possible interpretations of the second word suggest a 12th or 13th c. date.

KEYWORDS: runiform inscription, Dombó abbey, Szerém County, mirrored script, pilaster

Medieval Hungarian runiform inscriptions are mostly known from Eastern Transylvania, more precisely the Szekler land,¹ from the 13th c. onwards. Other medieval data – from every other region of the Carpathian Basin) are rare and they can hardly prove the general use of the runiform script: 1) the inscription of Alsóbű (10th c.) is a doubtless item, but

1 KMRE 170–176., 181–208., 210–213., 215–217.

it was argued that its origin could be related to Western Szeklers;² 2) the potsherd from Káposztásmegyer³ was probably an artefact belonging to the renaissance high culture,⁴ 3) it is dubious whether the inscription of Pécs is runiform at all;⁵ 4) all the known data from Upper Hungary are dubious and mostly suspected forgeries.⁶

It is not surprising that the mainstream of Hungarian script historical research says – in the last decades – that the medieval runiform script was an exclusively Szekler phenomenon,⁷ and nowadays it is mostly called simply Szekler script.⁸ Anyway, it could not be denied until now, that in its earliest attested form, in the 13th–15th centuries, the authentic monuments all originate from the Szekler land.⁹

2 Vékony 2000, 223.

3 KMRE 177¹.

4 Fehér 2020. It is a relatively late inscription anyway (2nd half of the 15th or 1st half of the 16th c.), and consequently it is irrelevant when one investigates the origins of the Hungarian runiform. The second inscription of Káposztásmegyer (KMRE *180.) is, in my opinion, a forgery based on the first one.

5 KMRE *219.: the inscription is authentic, but the two letters in question may be runiform, or may be interpreted as imitated writing.

6 The contemporary (17th or 18th c.) sporadic mentions are relatively reliable sources. Ferenc Otrokócsi Fóris maintained that he received the alphabet from ‘the western part of Hungary’ (Otrokócsi 1693, 320.), but that was more an impression of his than a fact; on the other hand, it is possible that this alphabet was a secondary information, learned from books (for example, Thelegdi’s *Rudimenta*). The data of Mátyás Bél (Bél 1718, 15–16.) speak of a real literacy, but possibly it was in another kind of alphabet. (About the reliability of Bél see Fehér 2022, 54–57.) On the contrary, the actual relics of ‘western’ literacy are mere phantoms (KMRE *310–312.): the inscription of Felsőszemeréd is in Latin letters; those from Körmöcbánya are forgeries, those from Szokolya are nothing more but direction marks. The so-called ‘Lócse inscription’ remains, actually a mention in manuscript (Csallány 1972, 147.) which seems to have been lost and the few preserved data resist interpretation. The general view is that it was a forgery, but I do not think it can be proven. The multiple misreadings suggest an incompetent source who recorded something *bona fide*; yet we have to calculate with a relatively late description which could have preserved a secondary knowledge learnt from books.

7 Pre-modern scholars naturally presumed that it was a pan-Hungarian phenomenon, Károly Szabó, Károly Antal Fischer were of this opinion, and the 1902 investigation by the Academy of Sciences on the question, whether there were any living vestiges of the runiform literacy, was extended to the whole country. But this investigation ended with an essentially negative conclusion (*Jelentés* 1903); after that, the researches were concentrated almost entirely on the Szekler land. Gyula Sebestyén used the terminus *Hungarian runiform* in his monograph, but always spoke of a writing in practice among the Szeklers, and considered it unlikely that it had had a pan-Hungarian tradition in the era of the Hungarian conquest (Sebestyén 1915, 115. – according to his hypothesis, the writing of the Szeklers was of Kabar origin). Modern researchers add that the renaissance high culture spread the knowledge of the ‘Szekler script’ beyond Transylvania (Róna-Tas 1985/86, Sándor 2017), and afterwards the Protestant scientific network functioned in the same way (Zsupos 2019).

8 The terminus *technicus* probably came from Gábor Vékony (Vékony 1999; Vékony 2004).

9 It is generally accepted that the stone inscriptions from Homoródkarácsonyfalva and Vargyas

In this article, I describe a runiform inscription that contradicts the mainstream hypotheses and clearly proves that runiform script *was* also known of in medieval Hungary, outside Transylvania. The item was published more than 30 years ago but has not been evaluated until now.¹⁰ The monument itself can be traced back to the medieval Benedictine abbey of Dombó, Szerém county (today: Novi Rakovac, Serbia). The ruins of the abbey were excavated in the 1970s and 1980s, and since then, we have gained a relatively exact knowledge of its structure and carved stone material. It is generally accepted that the Romanesque style abbey dates to the 2nd half of the 11th or the 1st half of the 12th century, the latest and most accurate surveys dating it to the very end of the 11th century.¹¹ In the 1st half of the 15th century, a Gothic church of lesser size replaced the old abbey church.¹² The large part of the remaining carved stone material was either secondarily built into the Gothic church,¹³ or dug into the earth as debris, but some items had a different fate. The stone monument I will now discuss was found not in Dombó but in the neighbouring Bánmonostor (today: Banoštor, Serbia), built into a cellar of the early modern age.¹⁴ That is, it was at least its third use – the secondary use must be dated to the 15th–16th centuries; otherwise, it is not retracable at all. The object is a pilaster of limestone, 85x16–19(top)/20–23.5(bottom), Museum of Vojvodina inv. nr. AS 2418. A short vertical inscription of tiny characters can be observed in the nether part of its octagonal shaft.¹⁵ At the first sight, the characters do not seem to belong to a uniform system, but if we realize that they run from left to right,¹⁶ we can identify almost all of them with the mirrored Hungarian (Szekler) runiform

(KMRE 172–173.) should be dated to the 13th or 14th c.; in my opinion, the inscription from Erdőszyörgy (KMRE 174.) also belongs to this group. The authenticity of the Firtosvár inscription was also proven (KMRE 170., probably from the 13th c.). In addition, there are some examples of the ‘classical’ runiform inscriptions which must be dated to the 2nd half of 14th, 1st half of 15th century: Berekeresztúr-3rd floor, Csíksomlyó-Csobotfalva, Bögöz (KMRE 175., 182–184.), and we cannot exclude that other, later monuments also belong to a pre-renaissance literacy: Berekeresztúr, Székelydálya, Bágy.

- 10 My attention was called to this inscription by Tamás Rumi and Gábor Hosszú, at the end of 2021.
- 11 Szakács 2010, 671., for the exact date *ibid.* 707.
- 12 Tóth 2010, 716.
- 13 Stanojev 2010, 649.
- 14 Szabo 1928; Stanojev 2010, 659. Kat.n.8. The first publisher, Đuro Szabo did not realize that the monument originated from Dombó. Sándor Nagy who excavated Dombó, did not perceive it either: Nagy 1985, 22., Nagy 1987, 24. Stanojev was the first to express the opinion that it undoubtedly came from Dombó.
- 15 Stanojev 2010, 654.
- 16 The formation of the letters shows the direction of cutting in: the hastas that were meant perpendicular (to the line of letters, disregarding the fact that the line itself was vertical in the whole shaft), are slightly curving to left downward.

letters¹⁷ – except for the last three letters, which are grouped as a separated word. The first one is a character which is known only from an early Szecler runiform inscription,¹⁸ but which is absent from the standard alphabets. The second one shows a form which has been several times assumed to occur, but we had not a real and sure example until now.¹⁹ Although the last one is very similar to a regular runiform D, but it is a phenomenon in a medieval church and this fact allows us to think that it is a cross which ends the text.

So far, only Stanojev described the inscription and he dismissed the idea of runiform script.²⁰ He tried to interpret it as Latin letters, but only 4 characters can be identified with Latin graphemes without difficulty, and these do not give a coherent text (and the 1st, 4th and 10th characters are by no way Latin). Therefore Stanojev's partial reading is not acceptable. By the way, this inscription is not connected with the other Latin inscriptions found at Dombó²¹ in terms of style or letter type – yet one may say that it is due to the fact that they date from different periods.

Stanojev modelled how the pilaster had originally been placed;²² according to him, it was built into the choir, in such a position that the writing on its lower half was hardly perceptible. The tiny letters do not seem to have formed an official inscription. Therefore they may either be contemporary with the pilaster, or they were made later as a graffito, so we cannot date them directly.²³ There are several possibilities:

1. The inscription was cut in when the pilaster was carved, and it is contemporary with the church, dating from the 2nd half or rather the end of the 11th century (since the style of the pilaster is the same as that of the other carver works, it could not have been in a second-

17 It is not the only example of mirrored letters: cf. the inscription of Constantinople (KMRE 218.) and the pasquill of Szamosközy (KMRE 214.), although we can find no connection between them. At present, we are not able to form a hypothesis, whether they are separately, occasionally mirrored, or they belong to a certain branch of the tradition.

18 Here it is identical with the normal <i/y> letter, but here it is mirrored. The 'mirrored <i>' character appears in Homoródkarácsonyfalva (KMRE 172.).

19 Hosszú–Zelliger (2014, 422–427.) suppose its occurrence in the Alsóbü and Székelydála inscriptions and give it a value /β/. I have confirmed by autopsy, that both supposed characters are of different form. The seemingly similar character in Dálnok is a ligature. On the other hand, this character existed in the Avar-period runiform script (Nagyszentmiklós type), where Vékony 1985, 150., 158. (and also his later writings) read it as /v/ (properly: /β/). Doubtless, this hypothesis inspired Erzsébet Zelliger and Gábor Hosszú, when they ascribed a value to the grapheme – although Gábor Vékony himself did not find this character in the inscription of Alsóbü (Vékony 1999).

20 Stanojev 2010, 655.

21 Nagy 1987, 31. Nos. 1 and 5–6.

22 Stanojev 2010, 653.

23 The date recommended by Stanojev 2010, 655. was based on his deciphering in Latin letters, and consequently it must be rejected, of course.

ary usage).²⁴ It is the simplest hypothesis, but it requires that the text must be a building inscription in the strict sense.

2. It was made while the pilaster was built in its original place, during the existence of the Romanesque style church, that is, approximately in the 12th–14th centuries. The position of the text slightly contradicts it: in a place where it had been uncomfortable and impractical to scratch a graffito – at least according to Stanojev's reconstruction. Still, the possibility is not excluded, but weakened, since the tiny letters were probably not intended for the wider public, and the formation of the characters makes us to acknowledge the possibility of a very inconvenient writing posture. We cannot propose a stricter date than the 12th–14th centuries; in any case, renovation works were observed from the 12th century.²⁵

3. In a secondary usage, after the demolition of the Romanesque church, that is, in the 15th c. or perhaps later (a probable *terminus ante quem* is the Ottoman invasion²⁶). Regrettably, virtually nothing is known about the secondary usage of the pilaster, which had been found re-used at least a third time. Still, we must exclude that the inscription was created in the early modern age, since the plaster spoors on the surface indicate that it was built in at that time.²⁷ If it had been incorporated into the wall of the Gothic church before this time, then it is unlikely that its position had been appropriate for a graffito; but since we cannot exclude that the stone was in a completely different place and in another function, we cannot definitely reject this hypothesis either.

That is indeed unusual: there are strong arguments against all possible production dates. In consequence, whichever hypothesis will be proven, it must be a hypothesis which was previously considered unlikely.

Clearly, the inscription contains 12 characters which are divided into three groups by spaces: 5 – 4 – 3 characters. Between the 5th and 6th characters, in the first space there is a cavity. As for its size, depth and irregular position, it is similar to the lesions made by erosion, which appear sporadically over the entire surface, but its rectangular form differs from the typical triangular appearance of these lesions, and therefore it is perhaps an interpunction. Between the 9th and 10th characters, in the second space there is a greater cavity, and the rhomboid form of its original elaboration is undeniable, therefore it is an interpunction mark. Consequently, we must reckon with three words or short syntagms.

24 Szakács 2010, 707.

25 Nagy 1987, 17.

26 Several stones were built into the Greek orthodox monastery (erected in 1553, Nagy 1987, 19.) in a secondary or third usage. Naturally, then the inhabitants must have been Serbians, and it is hardly credible that they could use the Hungarian runiform scripture.

27 Stanojev 2010, 655.

The hastas of the characters vary greatly in depth and width (but never very deep or wide), some of them are quite superficial (the oblique hastas of the 3rd and 10th characters), partly bent or broken; one oblique hasta of the 8th character was rewritten. It is evident that the sequence in which the hastas were cut was random: sometimes the vertical hasta was made earlier and sometimes the oblique one. They were cut from the top downwards; their downward ends are mostly very shallow and gradually ceasing or sometimes obliterated by surface erosion. The cutting appears to have been made with an inapt instrument, or in a very awkward posture. These facts weaken the hypothesis that the inscription was made when the stone was not built in; we cannot exclude that it was cut in a vertical position. There are parallel stone inscriptions which were vertical in their original position: those from Homoródkarácsonyfalva (KMRE 172.) and probably from Bágy (KMRE 192.).

Even the forms of two characters are debatable. The top of the 1st character is uncertain, due to wear, scratches and splitting off the surface. In the sketch published by Stanojev, the letter is open at the upper end, but I think it more probable, based on my autopsy, that there was originally a parallel third incision over the two oblique transversal hastas, but it was executed weakly and largely perished. That would certainly make a /z/ value.²⁸

As for the 9th character, there is an oblique incision under it, which is presently not connected, but it is deepening downwards, and the character itself becomes shallower downwards and to the right. It is possible that it was all the same curving incision, the middle and sloppily made part of which was deleted by superficial detrition. Nevertheless, the separate incision may be an independent and later lesion too, because it exceeds beyond the line of the letters.

All the characters are identifiable with the letters of the late medieval runiform script, apart from letters 11–12. There are different traditions in runiform script; the 4th character is not connected to the alphabet of the Constantinople and Bologna runiform texts, but to the post-medieval manuscript alphabets – where it has the value /ü/. This character also occurs in the medieval texts, but there it has the value /ö/²⁹ or it is unidentifiable.³⁰ The ‘irregular’ characters of the early runiform inscriptions³¹ do not occur, except for the 12th character, which is a ‘mirrored <i>’. According to the presently known data, this alphabet slightly differs from the early Szekler tradition, but we cannot say it is due to any kind of

28 Without it, the letter theoretically should be <č>. However, exceptionally it was used instead of <z>, as in the alphabet of Mihály Bonyhai Moga (cf. Benkő 1996), where it is an evident misspelling, and in the next verse he wrote the regular <z> letters.

29 KMRE 188., 189., and the Nikolsburg Alphabet. In our inscription, the value /ü/ gives a simple and natural meaning (*b^etű*), but the value /ö/ is not unthinkable either, because the word could have a variant **bető* too.

30 KMRE 206.

31 Such as x5, 41’ (?), 22, 06’, 39 (using the numeric code of KMRE). Presently the value of these is uncertain.

regional differentiation, and it seems to be closer to the later runiform style – which is a proof that the tradition of the Thelegdi canon must be traced back to much earlier times.

Most of the letters of the inscriptions can be easily deciphered according to such an alphabet. The first letter group is intelligible in Old Hungarian, it must be read <zbüt>, and explained *‘z b^etűt*. It must be interpreted as ‘this writing’ (Acc.), and this is exactly what is expected from a typical runiform inscription; the next two words are presumably a verb (referring to the production) and the denomination of the writing person. The date of the inscription is more precisely defined too, not earlier than the 12th c., because previously these words had been written in the form **z btyt*.³² Therefore, we can exclude the possibility that the inscription was written when the pilaster was erected; it must have been cut in afterwards.

The second word contains four letters, three of which are unambiguously identifiable, but the fourth is either <n>, if the lower shallow incision is not part of it, or it is more probably a letter <k¹> if it is. According to the Thelegdi canon, its reading is <irvn> or <irvk¹>. We are expecting a verb of the production and so the verb *ír* ‘write’ is obvious, with the two remaining letters at the end being suffix(es). Regrettably, the identification of this suffix is not easy. The participial adverb *írván* occurs, but there is no other word in the short inscription, which could be taken as a predicate, and therefore it must most likely be a *verbum finitum*, and not an *infinitum*. Besides, long vowels (as *á*) are very rarely omitted in the Sze-kler runiform inscriptions, this was an irregularity (but it cannot be excluded *per se*, since we know a few counter-examples too).³³

At the end of a *verbum finitum*, the last grapheme is possibly a personal suffix. Now if the value of the letter is /n/, it might be a S/3 person suffix in the imperative mood, but the epigraphic situation argues against it, and we find no character which could be a modal suffix. In a rare verbal type (as the verbs *teszen/tőn* etc.) it might be a suffix in the indicative present tense and aoristos,³⁴ but until now, no example was found that the verb *ír* was conjugated according to this type. A further problem is that the suffix *-n* belongs to the indefinite voice, but we definitely expect the definite voice after the first word (*z*), that is,

32 Nothing suggests a shift in the value of the letter <ü> (***/γ/ > /ü/*); on the contrary, the phoneme /γ/ was written as ‘mirrored <r>’ in the reconstruction of Vékony 2004, 18–24. or as the Csík-szentmiklós type <ö> in the reconstruction of Fehér 2021, 231. – In addition, if the exact value of the letter <ü> was a long /ü/ and no more an element of a diphthong, then the inscription seems not to be earlier than the 13th c. – but it cannot be verified from the mere letters.

33 KMRE 194. (the Bologna runiform text) 681,2,1., 683,1,8., 683,2,14.; KMRE 218. (the Constantinople inscription) 3rd verse 2nd word, and KMRE 182. (Bögöz) too, if we accept the proposed reading *Atyai Están*.

34 I prefer to call this tense aoristos, because its function is quite similar to the classical Greek aoristos (a past tense regardless of its state of perfection and duration), and I think the typical Hungarian denomination (‘historical past’) would be not only unusual for the Europe-centred grammar, but also misleading.

a demonstrative pronoun. Yet it is known from archaic and dialectal examples that its use was expanded to the definite S/3 person in the present and past (= perfect) tenses,³⁵ and we can also cite runiform examples. The reading *irtán* (S/3) of the Constantinople runiform inscription (KMRE 218) is widely accepted.³⁶ It is reasonable to suspect the same conjugation ending in the inscription of Vargyas (KMRE 173).³⁷ This same verbal form cannot be read, because the grapheme <t> occurs two times in the first letter group, but it is absent in the critical point; yet we need not stick to the perfect tense, there is no reason why this personal suffix could not have spread to other tenses, as well. However, if we suppose that the verb *ír* assumed a few analogous forms from the paradigm of the *tesz* type of verbs in the Old Hungarian period, we have to count with a *double* irregularity, and therefore we have to say the /n/ value of the 9th character is at least doubtful.

If, in spite of all this, we risk such an explanation, then the exact verbal form can be defined on the assumption that the early value of the morpheme <v> was certainly different from the later one, in Thelegdi's canon. A phoneme /β/ is obvious, since it is the normal antecedent of /v/,³⁸ and based on the parallel ambivalence /i/j/, which is also attested much later,³⁹

35 Horger 1931, 87.

36 Németh 1934, 9–10. It was accepted by Csallány, Kósa, Püspöki Nagy, Vékony, Ráduly; moreover, J. Ráduly claimed that he identified the same form in several inscriptions which were found later (Ráduly 1995: *irtán*, Ráduly 2015: *írján*, Ráduly 2007: *rakán/raktán*), but his claim is hardly acceptable.

37 Ráduly 1995 read the word *irtán*, and later Benkő and Harmatta followed him. Kósa 1994 read another verb, in the form *tán*. However, T. A. Szász denied it (Szász 1994), he meant to find the name of God: *Istán*, and G. Vékony gave a quite different interpretation (Vékony 2004, 18–24.); since then, several researchers favour Vékony's reading (Hosszú 2013, 97–98., Szentgyörgyi 2019, 44–46.). Yet, this interpretation cannot be maintained as a whole, because he missed an interpunction. This interpunction would favour Ráduly's views, but the first letter of the word is probably not <i>, but one of the 'mysterious' characters of the early Szekler script. That character was read as /o/ by Vékony loc. cit., and no other interpretation was published until now. By all means, we may suspect a phoneme that perished from the Old Hungarian after the period of this very early (13. c.?) inscription. The second character is also doubtful: it is a mirrored equivalent of the normal <r>. However, occasional mirroring of letters is a well-known type of mistakes, most of all in the letter form similar to that <r> (in the Roman Pannonia the most frequent letter mistake type is the mirroring of N and S, cf. Fehér 2007, 415.; in more recent ages, the most typical error is S-Z, cf. Keszi 1998, 730.; there is at least one similar mirroring in the inscriptions of the Nagyszentmiklós treasure. Therefore, we are not obliged to refuse the reading /t/. The certain part of the four-letter word is the (grammatically debated) ending <tn>. Now I propose an interpretation which is in accord with these facts – while I admit that presently it cannot be proven –: *džirtán* 'made it', from the Old Hungarian form of the verb *gyárt*. The two-syllable root of this verb was used until the 16th c., in its original sense 'make' (at the end of the century by János Decsi), cf. TESz I 1123., MNytSz I 1153.

38 Although in the reconstruction of Hosszú and Zelliger, the grapheme for /β/ is quite different, see Hosszú–Zelliger 2014, 422–427.

39 By the way, it is a quite general phenomenon of the different ancient alphabets, including Latin: the phonemes /i/j/ and /u/β/ have common graphemes.

we can suppose a double value /u/β/ without much difficulty.⁴⁰ The character then speaks for an aoristos form, either formed according to the *tesz/tőn* type, in a form *írún*,⁴¹ or much alike the aoristos forms of the Funeral Sermon (henceforward FS) *hadlaua*, *feledeue*, differing only as much as it took the *-n* suffix, in the form *ír^aβ^an*. Supposing it was the latter form, it was hardly later than the 12th–13th centuries, because we do not know this verbal form in texts later than the FS. The former one can be accepted until the end of the Old Hungarian period.

A much less questionable reading is <k¹> (pronunciation: /ak/); it means that the verbal form is Pl/3, in the definite voice, which is to be expected. Although the verb cannot be conjugated on the pattern of the *tesz/tőn* type (because it is unknown in this person), but it is quite possible to interpret it as an analogous form with the aoristi of the FS: *ír^aβ^ak*.⁴² So we can more easily suppose the omission of a long *a* vowel, because the *a/á* phonetic value is included in the grapheme.⁴³ This hypothesis narrows the date of the inscription to a more restricted period, the 12th–13th centuries.

There is no logical obstacle to the use of aoristos, since in our opinion it is not a building inscription but a later graffito. (Runiform building inscriptions always used the perfect tense, but we do not know of any obligatory scheme for graffiti.) Naturally, we have to take into account that the Szekler textual schemes are not unconditionally fit to an inscription from South Hungary.

An obvious possibility is that it was written instead of <m> (S/1 person). If we grant the double value /u/β/ to the character <v>, it certainly appears to be an archaic present tense: *íru Γm¹*.⁴⁴

Both of these latter explanations suggest a definitely early date of the inscription, probably the 12th or 13th centuries. Yet, it cannot be stated until the first explanation is not refuted.

40 Vékony 1985, 79. and Vékony 2004, 9–16., 18–24. recommended an explicit /u/ (or occasionally /ü/) value for the earliest inscriptions. There is only one question which can raise some doubts: whether the double value of the letter was due to the influence of the Latin script (it is not obligatory, since this feature occurs in several other, Asian alphabets too, and may be simply the consequence of the phonetic affinity of these phonemes). Supposing a Latin influence, it suggests a relatively later chronology.

41 The known paradigms of such verbal forms see Kräuter 1913, 319–320., Horger 1931, 104–106. Naturally the verb *ír* was never recorded among them.

42 The Funeral Sermon used such a verbal form only in S/3 person, but it is a quite consistent explanation that its use also spread to Pl/3 (cf. Horger 1931, 84–85.). As for the Pl/1 person, it is excluded by the fact that before <k¹> the vowel /a/ is obligatory (although we know a few writing mistakes from the middle ages where it stands instead of <k²>).

43 Cf. KMRE 200. 12. word; 218. 1. verse 5. and 10. words.

44 Roughly the same chronological layer as that of the Lamentation of Mary, or even earlier. Only one more question can emerge: why was the short vowel *u* written at all?

The last group of three characters must refer to the writer's person, regardless of whether he wrote in the 1st or the 3rd person. But the deciphering of these characters is still doubtful. First, we cannot be sure that a real text can be deciphered. The first character is very rare and it is one of the early 'mysterious' signs, and the second one is presently quite unknown. It cannot be excluded that these are not letters (that is, graphemes) but the maker's marks or other graphic symbols which refer to certain persons, and if letters, maybe monograms.⁴⁵ It is quite probable if we have to count with a verb in Pl/3, that is, more than one writer. Then, the last character is perhaps a cross, contrary to all previously stated arguments. On the other hand, if the last character is a runiform letter, we must read a 3-letter name ending in <d>, not a rare phenomenon of the later Árpád period; but a 3-letter sequence containing 2 unknown letters⁴⁶ cannot be identified.⁴⁷ Naturally, it is most plausible if the verb is in singular, but it is not quite impossible in plural either, since it is possible that one writer spoke for the whole group of makers.

In sum, it is certain that the pilaster bears a runiform inscription in Old Hungarian, and a greater part of it can be read without doubt – but not in every point. Originally it was not clear whether it was a building inscription or a graffito from the time when the monastery was in use, or from a later secondary usage, after the 15th-century rebuilding of the monastery. Based on the readable words, we have to stick to the latter option and date the inscription between the 12th c. and the early 16th c. (evidently until the Mohács battle). Most of the possible explanations of the written verbal form suggest an earlier date within this period, probably the 12th–13th centuries. That is, the newly identified inscription of Dombó must undoubtedly be an early example of the Hungarian (Szekler) runiform script from the earlier Old Hungarian period. We have only limited amount of textual evidence from this period. In addition to its importance in the Hungarian linguistic history, it is the first inscription from the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, which proves beyond any doubt the use of the runiform script outside the Szekler land. The previously known data could not prove this, but now we can accept without hesitation, that runiform script was a pan-Hungarian cultural phenomenon, although we must concede that it was used most

45 A very similar partially mirrored maker's mark appears in the tiles of stove from Székelykeresztúr which were erroneously described as written in runiform (KMRE 231.), after the name of the maker *Flo. Lach.* (?).

46 Although one can make some proposals for the first letter: it is possibly the same as its mirrored equivalent <i/y>, or perhaps <p>, according to the parallel letter of the Farkaslaki manuscript. The latter possibility was proposed by Erzsébet Zelliger and Gábor Hosszú, I owe my thanks to them, since they granted me the citation of their presently unpublished idea.

47 Another proposal of Erzsébet Zelliger and Gábor Hosszú was the possibility of the word *apoβ †* 'gaffer' or *apoβd* (= *Opoudi*, a known name from the Árpáadian age). Naturally if it proves to be true, it makes necessary to find a different reading for the letter group <irvn/irvk[†]>, because of the different graphemes for v~β. I am very grateful that they also shared their opinion with me.

frequently and the longest by the Szeklers, and that it had probably become extinct in all other regions by the 14th century. Yet we must not forget that its provenance, Szerém county is a region where the devastation of the Ottoman rule was more profound than in any other region, and it is therefore difficult to imagine how many written monuments could have perished in this region. ■

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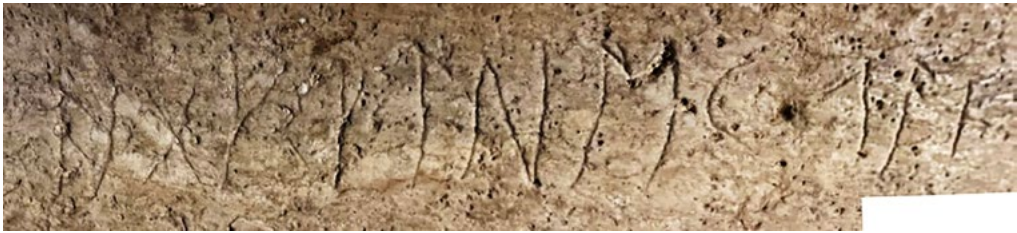
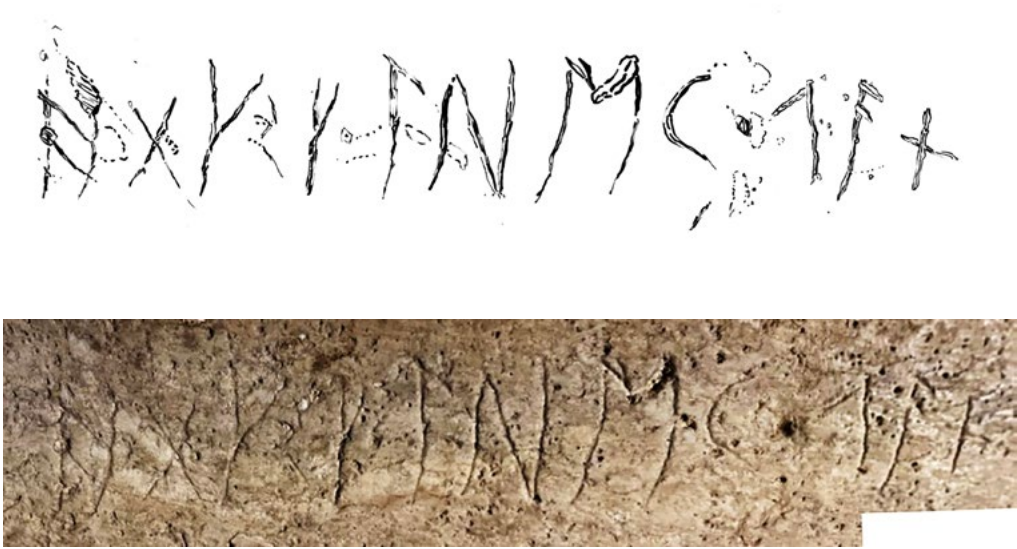
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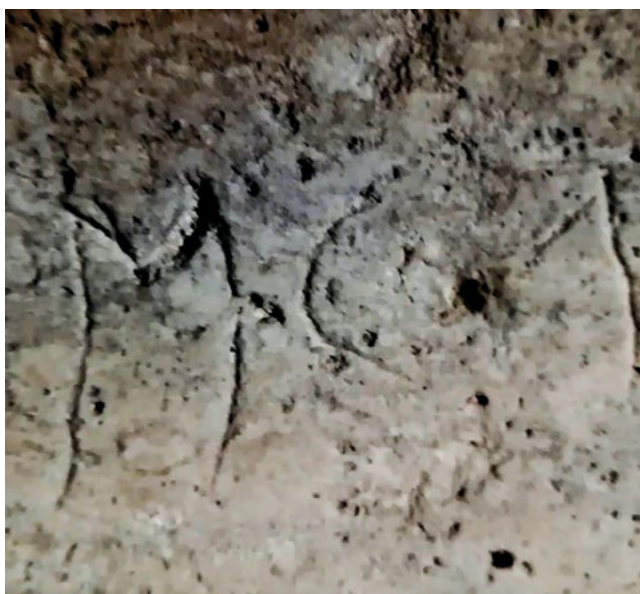
FIGURES



1–2. Drawing and photo of the inscription (made by the author)



3. Detail with the 1st letter (photo by the author)



4. Detail with the 9th letter (photo by the author)

KIVONAT

Egy új rovásfelirat Dombórol

Eddig középkori rovásfeliratok szinte kizárólag Székelyföldről voltak ismeretesek. A cikk bemutat egy feliratot a középkori dombói apátság (Szerém vm.) egyik, XI. sz. végére datálható törpepillérjéről, amely Bánmonostoron került elő. Bizonytalan, hogy a felirat a pillérrel egykorú vagy graffito a XII–XIV. századból, esetleg másodlagos felhasználásból (XV. sz. – XVI. sz. eleje). A felirat tükrözött magyar rovásírással az alábbi betűsort tartalmazza: ZBTÚT IRVN (vagy IRVK¹) ++D (v. ++ †).

Az első szó olvasata biztos: *ez b^etút*. A második az *ír* ige ragozott alakja, de a kiolvasástól függően három megoldás is elképzelhető, valószínűleg régies és talán különös módon képzett elbeszélő múlt. A harmadik szó azonosíthatatlan jeleket is tartalmaz, az író személy(ek)re utal, de talán csak két mesterjeggyel és egy kereszttel, vagy pedig egyetlen hárombetűs névvel, amelyet nem tudunk azonosítani.

A szavak hangalakja alapján bizonyosan utólagos, a XI. századnál későbbi feliratról van szó, legvalószínűbben a román apátság fennállása idején vésték be, a második szó egyszerűbb értelmezési lehetőségei a XII–XIII. századot sugallják.

KULCSSZAVAK: rovásfelirat, dombói apátság, Szerémség, tükrírás, törpepillér