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The indulgence letter for the monastery of Kostanjevica (1347, November 6): A case study with notes on the process of making illuminated indulgence letters *

1 Introduction

The stylistic analysis of the Kostanjevica charter's decoration is based on the comparisons with the Avignonese indulgence letters published thus far. These comparisons have proven valid when trying to answer the perennial questions raised when dealing with indulgence letters (or illuminated charters in general): Where and when was the decoration executed? Was it executed by an illuminator or possibly by the scribe? Was it the work of a single hand or the result of a collaborative undertaking? What meaning did the decorated document hold for the beneficiary? What prompted them to have the document issued to begin with? And so on.¹ The present article addresses these questions in the case of the Kostanjevica charter (1347, November 6; image 1), kept in the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia (AS 1063, a. e.² 5964).³

The scarcity of documentary sources that would provide particular information on indulgence letters, their making, and the people involved in the process, is considerable. When trying to answer the above-mentioned questions, we can only depend on

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1 See the studies dealing with indulgence letters and their decoration that have been published thus far: Nordhoff, 1880; Rest, 1925; Delehay, 1926, 1927, 1928; Homburger and von Steiger, 1957; Holter, 1963; Radocsay, 1967, 1970, 1971; Frenz, 1982; Seibold, 2001; Roland and Zajic, 2011, 2013; Hrdina and Studničková, 2014; Doublier, 2018; Bartz, 2019; etc.

2 I.e. archival unit.

3 After the monastery of Kostanjevica had been dissolved, the charter was first brought to the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna and was kept there under the shelfmark RII/16 (*Gesamtinventar des Wiener Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv* (Inventare Österreichischer Staatlicher Archive, Teil 5: Inventare des Wiener Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchivs, Bd 4), ed. Ludwig BITTNER, Wien, 1936, 231; *Gesamtinventar des Wiener Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv* (Inventare Österreichischer Staatlicher Archive, Teil 5: Inventare des Wiener Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchivs, Bd 6), ed. Ludwig Bittner, Wien 1938, 352–356). In 1979 it was transferred – together with 105 other documents – to the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia in Ljubljana, then called the Archives of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (*Vodnik po fondih in zbirkah Arhiva Republike Slovenije. III*, Ljubljana, 1999, 415; on executing the archival agreement of 1923 between the Republics of Austria and Slovenia, then the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes: Marija Oblak Čarni, “Bogo Grafenauer in izvajanje arhivskega sporazuma z Avstrijo”, in *Grafenauerjev zbornik*, ed. Vincenc Rajšp et al., Ljubljana, 1996, 143–150; with German abstract). The discussed document was subsequently digitized, together with all of the charters kept in the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia.



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the known material and studies published thus far, and can hardly provide undisputable conclusions. In this respect, an extensive corpus of comparative material is of vital importance and the virtual archive at monasterium.net provides precisely that. It offers a large collection of indulgence letters⁴ (among other categories of illuminated charters) with invaluable descriptions and definitions, comparisons, art-historical analyses, and innumerable illustrations. Consequently, the number of studies dealing with illuminated indulgence letters has been increasing in the last few years. As the virtual archive is easily accessible, art historians may use it as a starting point for new considerations regarding the decoration of indulgence letters, as well as other groups of illuminated charters: for example, there can now be hardly any doubt that a workshop for issuing and decorating indulgence letters was organized in Avignon.⁵ At the same time, however, we are unsure about the work process adopted within it.

Such comparative evaluations are at present the only way of evaluating the existent theses or proposing new ones with the intent of encouraging new considerations. The present article aims to do precisely that, while discussing an indulgence letter, which – yet to be published at monasterium.net – presents a valuable contribution to the currently known corpus of such letters.⁶

2 The Kostanjevica indulgence letter and its decoration

Indulgence letters were frequently issued in the High Middle Ages by bishops and cardinals, either individually or in groups, for churches and monasteries, in order to raise funds for various building projects and/or their subsequent maintenance (Wolter, 1999, 46).⁷ As they were meant to capture the attention of the faithful while hung on church doors on important holidays (Santifaller, 1962–1964, 115; Radocsay, 1967, 214),⁸ emphasis was put on their decoration, usually limited to the initial and the rest of the first line of the document's text.⁹

The indulgence discussed in this study letter was issued in Avignon by Jacobus Sebastensis and fourteen other titular bishops¹⁰ on 6 November 1347 for the Cistercian mon-

4 monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/collection [3. 12. 2019] Currently, there are more than 760 indulgence letters published at monasterium.net.

5 See below.

6 So far, the charter's regest and reproduction has been published only in: Dolinar, 1993, 117 (Slovene regest), 119 (German regest).

7 For additional information on indulgence letters, see Paulus, 1922–1923.

8 Sometimes, traces of hanging are visible – e.g. silk, parchment, or metal loops, nail holes and rust stains, faded ink, tears, etc. (Frenz, 1982, 238; Homburger and von Steiger, 1957, 135; Rest, 1925, 160–161.)

9 The decorative features are described below.

10 They are listed in the charter as follows: *Jacobus Sebastensis*, *Thom[as] Tinien[ensis]*, *Adam[us] Perpenensis*, *Joh[ann]es Tribunien[ensis]*, *Niclis Accien[ensis]*, *Jacobus Heren[ensis]*, *Gregorius Oppiden[ensis]*, *Gregorius Salunen[ensis]*, *Augustin[us] Destillarien[ensis]*, *Franciscus Canticen[ensis]*, *Fra[n]cisc[us] Vrehen[ensis]*, *Ana[n]ci[us] Xanchien[ensis]*, *Joh[ann]es T[er]mipolen[ensis]*, *Petr[us] Callien[ensis]*, *B[er]tra[n]d[us] Adiacensis* *ep[iscop]i*.





astery of St Mary in Kostanjevica¹¹ in present-day Slovenia. It granted the indulgence of forty days to anyone who visited the monastery on St Mary's and other listed holidays.¹² The document specifically mentions its petitioner: we learn that the document was issued at the request of Laurentius, the abbot of the Kostanjevica monastery.¹³ The first mention of Laurentius as the abbot of the said monastery is found in a charter dated June 9 1333, and the last in a document dated April 8 1353. Laurentius was thus the abbot of the Kostanjevica monastery for at least twenty years, which could attest to his suitability for this position. Indeed, his abbacy is one of the periods in which the monastery of Kostanjevica grew and developed considerably (see Mlinarič, 1987, *passim*). Nevertheless, the question of what *precisely* prompted Laurentius to have the indulgence letter issued must for the time being remain unanswered, since the historical sources relating to the Kostanjevica monastery do not mention any exceptional events in the middle of the 14th century that would encourage him to have such a document issued.

We do not know where the charter was kept within the monastery. The inventories of the Kostanjevica monastery testify that important documents (e.g., the monastery's founding charter of 1249) were kept in a chest or an armoire in the abbot's room or even in his desk drawer (Mlinarič, 1987, 104). Therefore, knowing the indulgence charter's exact location within the monastery would contribute to our understanding of its significance for this institution compared to other documents. A detailed inventory of all of the monastery's possessions was made in 1786 by Commissary Johann Nepomuk Ursini von Blagay and States accountant Philip Jacob Elsner after Emperor Joseph II had dissolved the monastery on 5 December 1785 (Mlinarič, 1972, 147).¹⁴ The monastery's archivalia are listed in the ninth book of the inventory, but the Kostanjevica charter is never explicitly referred to; the same holds true for some of the earlier inventories.¹⁵ Nonetheless, several chests and armoires "holding manuscripts

11 In the charter referred to as *Monasterium fontis Beate Marie Virginis prope Lanstros ordinis cisterciensis Aquilegienis diocesis*.

12 Christmas, Feast of the Circumcision of Christ, Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, Feast of Corpus Christi, Feast of the Discovery of the True Cross, Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Feast of St Michael, Feasts of St John the Baptist, St Peter, St Paul, and of all other apostles and evangelists, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, Kermis, Feasts of Saints Stephen, Lawrence, George, Martin, Nicholas, Gregory, Mary Magdalene, Catherine, Margaret, Octaves of these Feasts, and all Sundays. The indulgence was also granted to those who attended holy masses, sermons, matins, vespers, or other rituals; to those who attended exequies and funerals; to those who participated in carrying the Body of Christ and consecrated oil to the sick; to those who kneeled to recite three Hail Marys during the evening Angelus bells; to those who contributed to building, illumination, and decoration of the monastery; to those who testamentarily donated gold, silver, clothes, books, chalices, oil lanterns, or other necessities; to those who prayed for the buried at the monastery's cemetery, for the monastery's abbot Laurentius, his parents and relatives, and all benefactors of the Kostanjevica monastery, either alive or deceased.

13 *Laurentio abbate eiusdem monasterii istius indulgentie impetratore*.

14 The inventory is preserved in the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia in Ljubljana and is kept under the shelfmark SI AS 746. It is composed of ninety-four books and forty-three fascicules.

15 E.g., the inventories of 1621 or 1631; both are kept in the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia in Ljubljana (SI AS 746, fascicule 4).





and documents” are recorded in the inventory of 1786, which leads us to conclude that the studied indulgence letter lies hidden in one of these inventory entries.

Even though we do not have any specific information regarding this question, we may infer that the discussed document was certainly kept somewhere safe, as it has suffered hardly any damage over the centuries. This is no small feat, since the Kostanjevica monastery was located on a piece of the Slovenian territory that was exposed to various devastations in the second half of the 15th century, caused mainly by the Turks. Later on, in the 16th and the 18th centuries, two major fires broke out in the monastery, which had catastrophic consequences for the majority of the monastery’s written heritage.¹⁶ The focal indulgence letter, on the contrary, survived intact, indicating that it was indeed an object of significant importance for the monastery of Kostanjevica, and, as such, carefully protected.



Image 1: Ljubljana, ARS, AS 1063, a. e. 5964: Indulgence letter for the monastery of Kostanjevica (1347, November 6).

16 Abbot Anton Gallenfels (1688–1719) in his letters to Jesuit Antonij Steyrer mentions that older documents were hard to find for a number of reasons: because the monastery had burnt down several times, because it had been destroyed by attackers, and because its church had been rebuilt in the past. (Mlinarič, 1987, 104.)





The parchment charter measures 56.7/58.1 x 78.9/80.8 cm, the plica alone 50.7 to 60.1 cm. Only five of originally sixteen seals are preserved, either whole or damaged. The ruling is still slightly visible in its present state, while there are no remnants of pricking. The document's text extends over twenty-one lines¹⁷ and is written in brown ink in *textualis*. Slight differences in script are visible in the third and fourth lines, suggesting that the names of the issuing bishops were written in subsequently.¹⁸ Two cursive postscripts below the charter's text tell us that the listed indulgences were confirmed by the Pope and once more by Bertrand, Patriarch of Aquileia, who added his own seal to the charter on 26 December 1348. There are no medieval marks on the reverse side of the charter.

The red initial "U" of the Kostanjevica indulgence letter measures 248 x 270 mm. A black boundary line encircles it and a trimming with black tendrils encloses the letter on the left side. The left letter shaft (the foliate ornament in it has almost completely faded) ascends into the top margin and ends in a rounded serif with two leaves growing out of it. The petitioner with a crosier occupies the right letter shaft, while the image of the Virgin Mary and Christ on a throne fills the inner initial space. While this motif is commonly found in indulgence letters, it undoubtedly also relates to the petitioning monastery (*Fons beatae virginis Mariae*) and its church, dedicated to the annunciation of the Virgin Mary.

St Mary, holding Christ in her arms, sits on a throne in front of a light brown background covered with black tendrils. She wears a red mantle with white lining over her lightly coloured dress. The Virgin's face is drawn in only a few strokes. A slight touch of red emphasizes her lips, but otherwise, no colour is applied either to her face or hands. A red nimbus encircles her crowned head with long wavy hair falling freely on her shoulders. Christ is invoking a blessing with his right hand, while holding a book in his left. He wears an ochre mantle over a white garment. A cross nimbus surrounds his head and his face is, like Mary's, drawn with only a few strokes and without the use of colour.

The Virgin and Child direct their gaze towards the kneeling petitioner on their left. He is tonsured and dressed in a black habit with a hood. While the garment is painted relatively precisely, no colour is applied to his roughly drawn face, only a touch of red accentuates his lips. The petitioner is joining his hands in prayer and is, at the same time, holding a crosier terminating in a foliate motif. Apart from the strokes in

17 The lines measure approximately 60 centimetres in length and 2 centimetres in height, except for the first line, measuring ca. 5 centimetres in height.

18 It seems that the differences in script are not the result of a different hand, but are due to the surplus of the pre-reserved space, because of which the scribe was forced to use slightly higher and wider letters, consequently not as sharply pointed as the rest. The remaining part of the text (including the monastery's name, the petitioner and the date) was written at the same time. On the practice of filling-in the data into pre-prepared formularies, see: Rest, 1925, 157–160.





dark grey, complementing some of the letters of the enlarged top line and some of the capital letters in the remainder of the text, no other decorative element embellishes the discussed document.

3 The ascription to the Avignon workshop of indulgence letters

Before looking at the Kostanjevica charter specifically, some preliminary remarks on the decoration of indulgence letters need to be made. It is important to stress that indulgence letters issued in Avignon share an unvarying inner form, as well as an outward appearance, irrespective of the beneficiary's origin. The uniformity of the decoration of the known material has led art historians to the conclusion that a workshop responsible for decorating indulgence letters was organized in Avignon after the Popes moved there from Rome in 1309 (Nordhoff, 1880, 148; Hann, 1894, 68).¹⁹ Nevertheless, it seems that the workshop was organized only in the 1320s, when it is first possible to follow the work of a single individual for a longer period of time ("Zeichner mit den Masswerkmotiven", active 1324–1342), and the use of templates is obvious. This was also when a decisive change in the decoration and script of indulgence letters became apparent: the year 1323 marks the time when it is possible to observe the shift from monochrome initials (usually written in brown or black ink, like the remainder of the text) with simple ornament, such as spirals and foliage, or occasionally, figural motifs. After this particular year, painted initials gradually became the standard decoration of indulgence letters (e.g. Rest, 1925, 161; Roland, Zajic, 2013, 321ff). Along with the change in decoration, the transition from chancery hands to a formal book minuscule script took place (Rest, 1925, 161).

The indulgence letters issued after 1323 show a relatively uniform approach to decorating. Usually, the first line of the text, which reads *Universis Sancte Matris (Ecclesia)*, is richly decorated.²⁰ As in all solemn documents, the lettering of the top line is significantly larger than the rest of the text. In addition, each word starts with an even larger letter, at times adorned with foliate ornament within its body. The second letter in *Universis* may display the same decorative treatment. The inner field of the initial "U" is reserved for the image of Christ's bust, St Mary with Child, or other holy figures (usually patrons of the receiving authority). One of the shafts of the initial "U" is commonly occupied by a kneeling figure of a petitioner, often holding a narrative band

19 The earliest known indulgence letter issued in Avignon dates back to 1311 (5 July; Delehay, 1927, 327). The charter is accessible at: monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkunden/1311-07-05_Essen/charter [3. 12. 2019]. On the workshop and the arguments for its existence, see also Gabriele Bartz's introductory text at monasterium.net/mom/index/IIIUrkGlossar/WerkstattderAvignonerBischofsammelindulgenzen [3. 12. 2019].

20 The remaining part of the text is not decorated, but individual letters may be emphasized with a touch of colour in order to form clear textual divisions.





with his request. The more elaborate examples are additionally adorned by sacred figures in the margins, at times accompanied with foliate ornament (see Nordhoff, 1880, 143; Rest, 1925, 164; Roland, Zajic, 2013, 322ff).²¹

The motif of St Mary and Child enthroned, as seen in the Kostanjevica document, may be found in the Avignonese indulgence letters at least since 1329.²² Thereupon, it became increasingly recurrent as well as diverse, which reached its peak in the 1340s. The compositions of the miniatures varied far more than before: the Virgin either stands or sits on a throne while holding her child with one or both hands. Christ's position is also the one that illustrates this: he either stands or sits in his mother's lap, sometimes he is breastfed, turns his gaze either towards his mother or the petitioner, etc.²³ The figure of the petitioner, found in the discussed document, is another motif that is commonly found in the indulgence letters from Avignon. As far as the known material suggests, petitioners became a frequent component of the decorative scheme of indulgence letters from at least 1323.²⁴ From the 1330s onwards, the petitioner was usually depicted in one of the shafts of the initial letter.²⁵

Furthermore, the 1340s mark the time when significant changes occurred in the way the figures themselves were depicted. Their bodies were slimmer and curved in an S-line; they had small heads and soft, doll-like faces with pointed noses and short chins; their feet, turned outwards, appeared from underneath their garments; also evident was the greater movement of the figures in general, which resulted in freer compositions in comparison to earlier examples. One may also observe more foliate details incorporated into the decorative wholes: tendrils growing out of the initial letter, acanthus leaves under the right shaft of the initial, and so on were not merely sporadic occurrences anymore (see Hombruger, von Steiger, 1957, 156).²⁶ The earliest known example showing these stylistic features is the indulgence letter for the Fröndenberg church (1342, January 2).²⁷

Some authors suggest that the listed stylistic novelties and the higher level of diversity of decorative features were most probably the result of the growth and development

21 See also Bartz, *U Initiale* (monasterium.net/mom/index/IllUrkGlossar (Illuminierte Avignoner Bischofsammelindulgenz, U Initiale) [3. 12. 2019].

22 The earliest known example was issued for the Cistercian monastery in Benninghausen on 24 October 1329 (accessible at: monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkunden/1329-10-24_Muenster/charter [3. 12. 2019]).

23 See Bartz, *U-initiale*: monasterium.net/mom/index/IllUrkGlossar/UInitiale [3. 12. 2019].

24 The earliest known example was issued in June 1323 for Trier Cathedral. (Bartz, *Historisierte Avignoner Bischofsammelindulgenz*: monasterium.net/mom/index/IllUrkGlossar/HistorisierteAvignonerBischofsammelindulgenz [3. 12. 2019]).

25 The first known example was issued on 1 September 1330. (Bartz, *Der Petent*: monasterium.net/mom/index/IllUrkGlossar/DerPetent [3. 12. 2019]).

26 See also Martin Roland's and Gabriele Bartz's records on monasterium.net (e.g. monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkunden/1342-04-12_Wien/charter; monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkunden/1343-04-06_Stuttgart/charter; etc.).

27 monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1342-01-02_Muenster/charter [3. 12. 2019].





of the Avignon workshop of indulgence letters in the 1340s. Christoph von Steiger suggests that a new collaborator joined the workshop in 1341 or 1342 respectively. (Homburger, von Steiger, 1957, 156), while Jan Hrdina and Milada Studničková maintain that the changes in the treatment of figures and the motif diversity appeared around 1338, which could be linked to the arrival of illuminators from Beauvais and Paris (Hrdina, Studničková, 2014, 19). Most recently, Martin Roland and Gabriele Bartz suppose that a new collaborator (or even a group of them) joined the Avignon workshop in 1342 and either reinterpreted the old templates, used for decorating indulgence letters, or introduced new ones to the work process, resulting in the high level of decorative diversity.²⁸ In their opinion, this new co-worker did not acquire his painting skills in Avignon.²⁹

The aforementioned diversity in the rendering of the motifs makes it difficult to identify individual illuminators within the workshop and ascribe the decoration to a specific hand.³⁰ This also holds true for the Kostanjevica indulgence letter. It does not offer any information regarding its decoration, while it – as other medieval documents – tells us exactly when and where it was *written*. The eschatocol clearly informs us where and when it was issued.³¹ Moreover, its text conforms to the typical wording and the date formula of the Avignon notaries,³² and the charter was sealed in Avignon by all of the prelates named in the text. Keeping this in mind, it is surprising that the script does not correspond with the palaeographical features usually encountered in Avignon.³³ Since there is no doubt that the document was written and sealed there, we must consider the possibility that it was written by a foreign (possibly German) scribe active in Avignon at the time. Considering Avignon's notable international character, this does not seem entirely beyond the bounds of possibility.

28 monasterium.net/mom/index/IIIUrkGlossar/WerkstattderAvignonerBischofsammelindulgenzen [3. 12. 2019].

29 See e.g. monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1342-06-14_Koblenz/charter; monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1342-08-04_Trient/charter; etc. [26. 11. 2019]. It is worth noting that Francesca Manzari labels the style of indulgence letters originating from the 1340s onwards as “Italianizing”, when she ascribes the decoration of the indulgence letter for the church of St Catherine in Maaseik (1342, March 22) to a “miniature italianizzante” (Manzari, 2006, 122–127, 135, 356–357). The charter is accessible at: monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1342-03-22_Maaseik/charter [3. 12. 2019].

30 This holds true for most indulgence letters from Avignon. Nevertheless, D. Radocsay ascribes to a single illuminator the following indulgence letters: for the church of St Martin in Pergkirchen (1342, March 27), for the church of St Michael in Pusarnitz (1342, April 12), and for the chapel of St Magdalene in the cemetery of St Stephen in Vienna (1343, January 22). (Radocsay, 1970, 12) Martin Roland and Gabriele Bartz have proposed some names for individual illuminators and ascribed to each of them a number of indulgence letters (e.g. Zeichner mit den Masswerkmotiven, Maler der Hirsauer Indulgenzen, etc.). For more names and full lists of ascriptions, see: monasterium.net/mom/index/IIIUrkGlossar [3. 12. 2019].

31 *Datum Avinione VI die mensis Novembri Anno Domini M°CCC°XLVII° et pontificatus domini Clementis pape VI anno sexto.*

32 See Homburger and von Steiger, 1957, 136.

33 I thank Dr. M. Smith for this observation.





The question when, where, and who decorated the focal indulgence letter is not as easy to answer. Since we do not have any documentary sources to rely on, stylistic evaluation and comparative analysis are the only approaches that can be used. Looking at the Kostanjevica charter independently, its style points to Central Europe rather than Avignon. The soft, round face of the Virgin, elongated body proportions, overall elegance of the figure, among other features, conform to the so-called soft style that reached the Slovene territory from Bohemia via several Austrian locations, especially Vienna, around 1400, and developed fully in the following decades. Considering this, we could maintain that the charter's decoration was not executed in Avignon in 1347 or shortly after, but at the beginning of the 15th century by an illuminator in the monastery's proximity. Adding the decoration subsequently was not an uncommon practice in medieval illuminated charters,³⁴ as many were handed over to the recipient undecorated and, although the space for it was provided, the beneficiary often never had the decoration made.³⁵

The relation of the initial and adjoining text in the Kostanjevica charter (the first letter overlaps the following text) clearly shows that the initial and its ornament were painted subsequently in the space provided by the scribe. Therefore, we could easily maintain that the discussed indulgence letter was adorned at a later date and by a local illuminator, following the decorative scheme current in the Avignon workshop. Judging by their number and the habit of their public presentation, illuminated indulgence letters were undoubtedly known to a wide audience, and thus easily reproduced. However, if we take a look at the preserved examples which have been adorned by the beneficiary, we invariably see clear iconographic and stylistic deviations from the Avignon formula,³⁶ and cannot assume a general inclination towards imitating indulgence letters decorated in Avignon.

Having the corpus at monasterium.net at hand, we are drawn further away from the conclusion that we are dealing with illumination executed subsequently in the beneficiary's environment. The comparisons with the material published thus far show that the decoration of the Kostanjevica charter fundamentally conforms to the usual artistic treatment of the indulgence letters issued in Avignon from 1323 onwards and especially after 1342.³⁷ The stylistic and iconographic affinities between the Kostanjevica charter and other known contemporary indulgence letters, undoubtedly adorned in Avignon,

34 See Elizabeth Danbury's study of English illuminated charters, where she allows the possibility that the decoration was added by the beneficiary at a considerably later date. To corroborate this assumption, she cites the charter of Thomas Beauchamp for the citizens of Warwick issued in 1359 (Warwick County Record Office, CR, 2389). Based on the stylistic analysis, it was decorated no earlier than 1400–1420. (Danbury, 1989, 162–163).

35 See Ljubljana, ARS, AS 1063, a. e. 4670, 4671, 4672.

36 E.g. the following indulgence letters: monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1343-06-07_London/charter; monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1343-05-06_Nuernberg/charter; monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1343-05-05_Paris/charter; etc. [3. 12. 2019]

37 For the decoration of indulgence letters issued before 1323, see e.g.: Roland and Zajic, 2013, 308–321.





are such that they seem more than merely coincidental: the motif itself, the rendering of the depicted figures (especially the Virgin's round, soft face, short chin and pointy nose, the soft, curved silhouette of her neck and upper body, the figures' skin appearing as unpainted parchment surface), the interaction between the Holy couple and the petitioner, the tendrils in the background, the treatment of the initial shaft, etc.

These are the features on which the existent ascriptions – though difficult and few in number – rely on.³⁸ For example, M. Roland and G. Bartz ascribe to the same illuminator the following three indulgence letters that were without doubt adorned in the Avignon workshop: for the parish church of Heiligenkreuz and the monastery church in Schwäbisch Gmünd (1345, May 13);³⁹ for the Flagellant confraternity in Cividale del Friuli (1345, November 28);⁴⁰ and for the parish church in Unlingen (1345, December 5).⁴¹ Along with the overall rendering of the slim figures, they corroborate this ascription with the observation that they all show black tendrils in the inner initial field and the *grisaille* palmette motif within the left initial shaft.⁴² It is noteworthy that such foliate additions are seen only in the indulgence letters issued after 1342, and that the *grisaille* foliate motif appears only six times in the present corpus – beside the listed examples, we may find it in the indulgence letters for St Peter's parish church in Naklo (1348, March 3),⁴³ for the provost's house in Frauenberg (1344, April 28),⁴⁴ and in the document that is the main focus on this study. Since we are dealing with a comparatively large corpus of indulgence letters this low number of examples should not be overlooked and must be taken into account when trying to determine the stylistic placement of the Kostanjevica indulgence letter within the known material.

The Kostanjevica indulgence letter – as stated previously – conforms to the decorative scheme employed in the Avignon workshop, showing all of the specifically

38 Only a few ascriptions, relevant for the discussed document, are mentioned in the present article. See monasterium.net for other comparisons and possible ascriptions.

39 monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkunden/1345-05-13_Stuttgart/charter [3. 12. 2019].

40 monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1345-11-28_Udine/charter [3. 12. 2019]. Castelnovo (1987), stating that indulgence letters were decorated in several illuminating workshops, believed that the decoration was the work of a French workshop, open to Italian influences. Similarly, Manzari (2006, 357) ascribes its decoration to an Avignonese illuminator. Hrdina and Studničková (2014, 55), like Roland and Bartz, link this indulgence letter with the Unlingen (1345, December 5) and the Heiligenkreuz and Schwäbisch Gmünd (1345, May 13) examples.

41 monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1345-12-05_Stuttgart/charter [3. 12. 2019].

42 See monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkunden/1345-05-13_Stuttgart/charter [3. 12. 2019]. Indeed, the listed indulgence letters do not form a closed group and other documents can be added to it based on stylistic accordance: e.g. the indulgence letter for the parish church in Weiczelsriet in the Konstanz Diocese (1347, March 6); indulgence letter for St John's castle chapel in Flaschberg (1345, April 11); etc. There is no reason to doubt they were all decorated in one place – the Avignon workshop – as they show a similar appearance regardless of the recipient's origin (see the corresponding entries at monasterium.net).

43 monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1348-03-03_Laibach/charter [3. 12. 2019].

44 monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1344-04-28_Marburg/charter [3. 12. 2019].





mentioned features in the above listed group of documents. While we cannot deny the formal resemblance of individual details, the differences in their execution are considerable. The lower quality and less refinement in the decoration of the Kostanjevica charter (compared to, for example, the Naklo or the Cividale examples mentioned above) at first serve to deter the ascription to the Avignon workshop. Nevertheless, we must consider the qualitative differences with regard to the beneficiary's financial abilities that prompted him to opt for a less (or even the least) expensive option.⁴⁵ They could also be the result of the weather conditions that the document was presumably exposed to⁴⁶ – the finishing touches could fade due to both light and humidity. It is certainly curious that parts of the illumination are almost invisible at present (the leaves growing out of the serif, the half-palmette in the left initial shaft), while others seem to have gone entirely unaffected. A closer look reveals the possibility that parts of the illumination were retouched with little attention to detail: there are traces of faded red paint seen between the tips of the Virgin's crown, along the edge of her mantle, and around the crosier top. A subsequently applied layer of red colour would certainly change the overall appearance and consequently render difficult the art-historical evaluation and ascription of the discussed indulgence letter to the workshop in Avignon.

Taking into consideration all of the above, we may conclude that the Kostanjevica indulgence letter was decorated in Avignon before December 1348, when it was confirmed by the Patriarch of Aquileia and handed over to the beneficiary. At the same time, the mentioned particularities lead us to the assumption that we are not dealing with the same illuminator that decorated the listed examples. As far as the document's present state allows for such a judgement, we are looking at a Central-European illuminator active in Avignon in the middle of the 14th century. The international character of Avignon's artistic setting once again offers support for this statement.

4 Some notes on the process of making illuminated indulgence letters

The process of making illuminated indulgence letters will be discussed in the case of the Konstanjevica charter with reference to other examples from the published corpus.

45 See monasterium.net/mom/index/IllUrkGlossar/HistorisierteAvignonerBischofsammelindulgenz [3. 12. 2019]. Martin Roland and Gabriele Bartz present the possibility that decorative details in the indulgence letters of the so-called *Blattrankentyp* were composed like a jigsaw puzzle according to the petitioners' wishes and financial abilities. (monasterium.net/mom/index/IllUrkGlossar/Blattrankentyp [3. 12. 2019])

46 We may assume that the focal indulgence letter hung on church doors on the listed holidays, seeing that there are two semi-circular incisions on the upper edge – this may imply that the document has been punctured in order to be hung. It seems that the top margin was cropped subsequently with the intention to hide the existing holes. This was not entirely successful, but a lower cut would have damaged the charter's decoration. The exposure to unfavourable weather conditions would explain the faded colours, especially in the left part of the initial letter.





Firstly, we need to emphasize that two different inks were used for the initial's outline and remaining text, meaning that the scribe of the text was probably not the one who drew the outlines of the initial. The same characteristic can be found in several other indulgence letters issued in the 1340s.⁴⁷ By contrast, in the earlier examples the ink and the quill used to draw the initial were usually the same as for the remaining text, suggesting that the outline of the initial letter was the scribe's contribution at that time.⁴⁸ The following examples will help illustrate this statement. In the indulgence letter for the chapel of Saints Peter and Paul in the Kaiserstuhl hills (1333, August 20),⁴⁹ only the outline of the initial is seen. Judging from the ink colour and the quill's width, it can be inferred that the scribe drew it. Presumably another person was supposed to add the figural ornament and colour, but for some reason the initial was left unfinished. On the other hand, a later example, the indulgence letter issued on 9 January 1346 for the St Stephen's church in Pescia,⁵⁰ shows an empty space at the beginning of the text, implying that at this point the drawing of the outlines was not solely the scribe's task

47 E.g. indulgence letters, issued on the following dates [all accessed on 3. 12. 2019]: 1342, August 4 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1342-08-04_Trient/charter); 1342, August 12 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1342-08-12_Trient/charter); 1342, September 10 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1342-09-10_Halle/charter); 1343, January 22 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1343-01-22_Wien/charter); 1343, April 4 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1343-04-04_Mainz/charter); 1343, April 6 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1343-04-06_Stuttgart/charter); 1343, April 15 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1343-04-15_Muehlhausen/charter); 1343, June 6 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1343-06-06_Basel/charter); 1344, November 20 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1344-11-20_Muenster/charter); 1345, December 5 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1345-12-05_Stuttgart/charter); 1347, July 3 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1347-07-03_Cividale/charter); 1347, August 28 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1347-08-28_Helmstedt/charter); 1348, March 3 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1348-03-03_Laibach/charter); etc.

48 For example, indulgence letters issued on the following dates [all accessed on 3. 12. 2019]: 1330, January 28 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1330-01-28_Koblenz/charter); 1331, May 9 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1331-05-09_Oxford/charter); 1332, November 15 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1332-11-15_Arnstorf/charter); 1335, July 2 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1335-07-02_Imola/charter); 1336, September 15 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1336-09-15_Marburg/charter); 1337, May 20 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1337-05-20_Wien/charter); 1338, September 11 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1338-09-11_Lucca/charter); 1339, October 20 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1339-10-20_Magdeburg/charter); 1340, April 20 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1340-04-20_Basel/charter); 1340, August 31 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1340-08-31_Angers/charter); 1342, June 14 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1342-06-14_Koblenz/charter); etc.

49 monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1333-08-20_Karlsruhe/charter [3. 12. 2019].

50 monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1346-01-09_Lucca/charter [3. 12. 2019].





anymore. Judging from the known material, the change in the scribe's contribution to the making of the indulgence letter occurred around 1342, which is precisely the time when the number of collaborators in the workshop supposedly increased. The resulting larger number of workers would enable the scribe to hand this task over to a co-worker, most probably an illuminator. After 1348, when the workshop production presumably came to an end, the scribes of indulgence letters were once again – in most cases – the ones who drew the initial's outline.⁵¹

The previously mentioned overlapping of the initial and adjoining text⁵² in the Kostanjevica charter is also important in this respect, as it could be ascribed either to the illuminator's limited skills, or to the haste in the decorating process due to the workshop's large-scale production. Both may also explain the unfinished look of the focal charter's decoration. The outlines of the trimming on the left side of the initial do not join in the lower left corner and under the letter, giving the impression that the initial is missing some foliate endings. Judging from the extensive comparable material, a tendril should be growing out of the initial's lower left corner and an acanthus leaf should find its place under the right initial shaft. The latter is curved at the bottom in the discussed charter, as if ready to be adorned by such a decorative detail. Other indulgence letters in the existing corpus give the same impression. For example, the initial in the indulgence letter for the parish church in Unlingen (1345, December 5)⁵³ seems to be lacking some final additions, since the lines under the initial do not join and the acanthus leaf is missing. Such details could suggest that another workshop collaborator was supposed to add the foliate endings and that the decoration was the work of more than one hand. While this is a valid assumption, some factors speak against it. Both the Kostanjevica and Unlingen charters are already adorned with some foliate motifs, which probably would not occur had the workshop employed a person responsible solely for executing foliate decoration. Furthermore, a person specialized in executing tendrils and other vegetal motifs would have produced far more elaborate

51 E.g. indulgence letters, issued for the parish church in Rickenbach (1350, January 25), and for the Kreuzkirche in Hannover (1351, June 21). They are accessible at: monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1350-01-25_St-Gallen/charter; monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1351-06-21_Hannover/charter [3. 12. 2019].

52 This is often the case with the indulgence letters issued in the last few years preceding the workshop's apparent cease of existence in 1348, such as the indulgence letters, issued on the following dates [all accessed on 3. 12. 2019]: 1344, June 27 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1344-06-27_Linz/charter); 1344, June 27 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1344-06-27_Wien/charter); 1344, July 25 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1344-07-25_Wien/charter); 1344, November 20 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1344-11-20_Muenster/charter); 1344, December 5 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1344-12-05_Paris/charter); 1346, April 27 (monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1346-04-27_Koblenz/charter); etc.

53 monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1345-12-05_Stuttgart/charter [3. 12. 2019].





foliage. Keeping in mind also the overall quality-level of the workshop production, it seems more likely that the unfinished impression is either the consequence of the hastiness in the work process or limited financial abilities of the beneficiary. Both could prevail upon the illuminator not to carry out the originally planned decorative scheme.

Roland and Bartz presume that the arrival of the new collaborator(s) in 1342 could lead to significant changes in the organisation of work. While stressing that further research is needed, they call attention to the possibility of division of labour being established within the Avignon workshop – meaning that the decoration of one document is the work of more than one person.⁵⁴ While this would certainly explain the iconographic and stylistic variety, the answer to the question of diversity might have to be sought elsewhere. Division of labour is usually established in a work environment that produces large quantities of written objects (see Santifaller, 1968, 36; Koch, 2003, 411–419) and it seems that the Avignon workshop was such an establishment.⁵⁵ In it, formularies were obviously prepared in advance in order to speed up the work process, which is apparent from differences in the script within one document.⁵⁶ These are the result of inserting the omitted data at a later stage, especially bishops' and the beneficiary's names (as is also the case with the focal charter). Furthermore, recurrent grammatical mistakes found in indulgence letters' texts also suggest large-scale production, as the Avignon workshop – most probably for economic reasons – did not always hire only highly skilled scribes to perform the required assignments (Homburger, von Steiger 1957, 135–137). Moreover, both the grammatical mistakes and use of pre-prepared formularies suggest that in addition to large-scale production the division of labour was also established in the workshop. Nevertheless, such organisation is usually expected in an environment where a large number of professionals, highly trained in several different jobs, worked side by side. The mediocre quality of the decoration of most known indulgence letters from Avignon, together with the abovementioned grammatical mistakes, imply that we are dealing with a commercial establishment in which (mostly) people with limited professional skills were employed. In such a work environment the fully developed division of labour – beyond scribes collaborating with illuminators – is unlikely.⁵⁷

While all indulgence letters issued after 1342 in general conform to the same style, it is significant that certain documents share more common features than others, and

54 See monasterium.net/mom/index/IllUrkGlossar/WerkstattderAvignonerBischofsammelindulgenzen [3. 12. 2019].

55 Ca. 400 indulgence letters are currently known from the period of the presumed existence of the workshop (1324–1348).

56 E.g. monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1345-04-11_Privatbesitz/charter; monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1345-10-18_Imola/charter; etc.

57 While this assumption seems valid for the indulgence letters with “simple ornament”, to which all of the cited examples belong, other possibilities may have to be considered for more elaborately adorned indulgence letters.





these are not necessarily limited solely to decoration. It has proven useful to turn our attention to the script and the wording of the documents that are related with regard to their decoration. For example, the wording of the Kostanjevica charter is identical⁵⁸ to that of the indulgence letter for the parish church of Heiligenkreuz and the monastery church in Schwäbisch Gmünd (1345, May 13).⁵⁹ The script comparison suggests they could also both be written by the same hand. The fact that the beneficiaries do not belong to the same ecclesiastical territory can be understood as a clue that the beneficiary's origin did not play a part when distributing the assignments within the workshop. To corroborate this assumption, we may also take a look at the indulgence letters intended for beneficiaries belonging to the same ecclesiastical territory and confirmed by the same Church authority. Bertrand, Patriarch of Aquileia, who added his seal to the indulgence letter discussed in this study, also confirmed, among others, the indulgence letter for St John's castle chapel in Flaschberg (1345, April 11),⁶⁰ and the indulgence letter for St Peter's parish church in Naklo (1348, March 3).⁶¹ While all of these share common decorative features, they were without doubt written by different hands. Further and very illustrative examples are the following four indulgence letters: for the parish church, for St Agatha's chapel, and for St. Peter and St. Margaret's chapel, all in Deutschnofen (1342, August 4, 12, and 14),⁶² and for the chapel of the Three Kings in Bolzano (1342, August 13).⁶³ All of these got the necessary confirmation in November of the same year by the relevant authority, Bishop Nicholas of Trent. The three charters for Deutschnofen were obviously written by an Italian scribe, while the script in the Bolzano document does not reveal any Italianizing features. This is yet another clue that the distribution of work assignments was not in any way dependent on the beneficiary's origin and, at the same time, that there were obviously co-workers of different nationalities present in the Avignon workshop at the same time. What exactly it was that determined the way the assignments were distributed among them is a question that must be left unanswered. At present we can merely assume that the distribution of assignments depended primarily on the beneficiary's financial ability and collaborators' current workload.

58 Indeed, apart from the names of the bishops, the beneficiary's and the petitioner's name, and the date.

59 monasterium.net/mom/IlluminierteUrkunden/1345-05-13_Stuttgart/charter [3. 12. 2019]. The indulgence letter of 1345 is transcribed in Hrdina and Studničková, 2014, 55.

60 monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1345-04-11_Privatbesitz/charter [3. 12. 2019]

61 monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1348-03-03_Laibach/charter [3. 12. 2019].

62 monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1342-08-04_Trient/charter; monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1342-08-12_Trient/charter; monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1342-08-14_Trient/charter [3. 12. 2019].

63 monasterium.net:8181/mom/IlluminierteUrkundenBischofsammelablaesse/1342-08-13_Litomerice/charter [3. 12. 2019].





5 Conclusion

At present, there is no way of knowing how the work was divided among the workshop's collaborators; however, judging from the mostly mediocre quality of its production, the possibility of one initial being the result of a collaborative undertaking is questionable. The existing studies on indulgence letters are few and far between and there is still a long way before we are able to verify if the offered suggestions – related to a small group of documents – could be applied to the work process within the Avignon workshop in general. Since, as stated above, we are dependent mostly on comparative analysis, the further publication of previously unknown documents, like the Kostanjevica indulgence letter, will hopefully stimulate and enable further research.

Lastly, we should emphasize that the apparent lack of artistic excellence of illuminated indulgence letters should and does not deprive indulgence letters of their art-historical importance. It is not negligible that the stylistic features seen in indulgence letters issued after 1342 are in line with the International Courtly Style. Many authors believe that the latter originated precisely in Avignon in the middle of the 14th century. From there, the so-called soft or beautiful style spread all across Europe with the help of dynastic ties. Thanks to Charles IV of Luxembourg, who studied at the University in Paris and also nurtured tight dynastic contacts with the French Royal Court and the Papal Court in Avignon, the new stylistic tendency reached Bohemia, which became the leading force in cultivating the soft style.⁶⁴ Bohemian artistic production exerted great influence on Slovenian art in the last third of the 14th century and into the 15th century.⁶⁵ It is intriguing to see that stylistic features, seen in the most important works of the soft style in Slovenia, were already present in Kostanjevica half a century earlier. Without claiming that indulgence letters exerted any essential influence on the emergence and evolution of this new style in Bohemia and other European territories,⁶⁶ this is yet another piece of evidence showing that illuminated charters are an integral part not only of manuscript illumination, but of art in general.

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64 On the soft style in Bohemia, see e.g. *Die Parler*, 1978; *Prague*, 2005; Schmidt, 2005; etc.

65 On Slovenian art around 1400, see e.g. *Gotika*, 1995.

66 This theory was already denied by Joseph Rest (1925, 166) and by Otto Homburger (Homburger and von Steiger, 1957, 157–158).





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Nataša Kavčič

The indulgence letter for the monastery of Kostanjevica (1347, November 6): A case study with notes on the process of making illuminated indulgence letters

Keywords: Kostanjevica, indulgence letter, illuminated charter, decorated charter, Avignon, workshop, chancery

The present article offers an art-historical analysis of the indulgence letter issued in Avignon on 6 November 1347 for the monastery of Kostanjevica in present-day Slovenia. It is believed that a workshop responsible for writing and decorating indulgence letters was organized in Avignon after the Popes moved there from Rome, and several iconographic and stylistic affinities speak in favour of the Kostanjevica charter being decorated precisely in this work environment. The Avignon workshop supposedly expanded in the 1340s, which presumably led to the division of labour within the workshop, meaning that one charter's decoration could be the result of a joint effort. The present article discusses possible evidence to corroborate or reject this statement in the case of the Kostanjevica indulgence letter.





Nataša Kavčič

Indulgenčna listina za samostan Kostanjevica na Krki (1347, november 6): študija primera s pogledom na postopek izdelave iluminiranih indulgenčnih listin

Ključne besede: Kostanjevica, indulgenčna listina, listina z odpustki, iluminirana listina, okrašena listina, Avignon, delavnica, pisarna

Članek z umetnostnozgodovinskega vidika obravnava iluminirano listino z odpustki, ki je bila izstavljena v Avignonu 6. novembra 1347 za samostan Kostanjevica na Krki. Domnevamo, da je bila v Avignonu po selitvi papeža iz Rima organizirana delavnica, v kateri so pisali in iluminirali indulgenčne listine. Okras kostanjeviške listine se v slogovnem in ikonografskem pogledu ujema z običajno dekorativno shemo sočasnih avignonskih listin, na podlagi česar je mogoče trditi, da je bil njen okras izdelan v avignonski delavnici že ob zapisu besedila in ne kasneje v prejemnikovem okolju. Število mojstrov v avignonski delavnici naj bi se v 40. letih 14. stoletja povečalo, kar bi lahko vodilo do delitve dela v izdelavi okrasa. Članek se posveča tudi temu vprašanju in povezavi s kostanjeviško listino.

O avtorici

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