

The Light of the Glagolitic

All things alive are alive because of light. In the first pages of the Bible, after everything had been in chaos, God created light, and separated light from darkness, night from day. Thus began the path of all life. Obsession with light is an obsession with life. From the beginning of time fire and flame not only give light but they also change the character of matter and of the elements: they turn water into steam, trees into ashes, ore into metal, and clay into brick, as well as into pot, bowl, and beaker. And then they help bake and boil the food: bread, milk, meat. So the food becomes healthy, tasteful and imperishable.

What joyful moments they must have been when the first nugget of glass was made, a bead for decoration, a drinking beaker, and flat glass so that daylight can illuminate the dwelling. By the hearth knowledge was transmitted, stories were told, heroic poems were sung, and books were read which educated the young and the old in courage, goodness, righteousness and persistence in good deeds.

The light of the oil lamp or the wax candle did not only drive away darkness but it also lengthened the day for work, companionship and joy. A long time ago many a manuscript was written in the still of the night by a lamp informing the writing with the characteristics of brightness, optimism, and a breadth of erudition and insight. After oil lamps and candles were replaced by carbide lamps and petroleum lamps, there increased the risk of fire in homes, stables, villages and towns,

which explains the large numbers of firefighter companies in our parts (pompjeri), who were in charge of protecting lives and property. What a turning point ensued when at the turn of the 20th century the dangerous open light, the light of fire, was replaced by light contained in pear-shaped or apple-shaped glass.

The light bulb contained a thread in a closed glass bulb that spread a bright and clear light in all directions; it was more powerful than tallow candles and wax candles, it was safe, it did not consume oxygen, and it could not cause a fire. Firefighters became folk musicians. The workday stretched into three shifts; workers did not faint for lack of oxygen, and newspapers were printed at night so that they could get to their readers in the morning, like freshly baked bread. In this evolution and revolution of domesticated light enduring tribute goes to our man Nikola Tesla, a modern Prometheus.

Art also took part in this festival of light. In hallowed halls, theatres, churches, and in the streets, light entered every corner to bring the optimism of life, new perspectives on spaces filled with people and monuments, houses and trees lining streets, paintings and sculptures in churches, and furniture in homes.

It is no wonder then that at the outset of the 20th century Louis Comfort Tiffany made, following these technological developments, his lamps in the manner of the art style of the day, Art Nouveau. It is as if he aspired, intended and succeeded in bringing the light of ancient stained glass from cathedrals into the many homes in which the light of many colours and many kinds spread not only throughout the home, the apartment, the room, but also in the souls that relished the gift of co-

loured light. After all, God created the world in colour

In their workshop in Rijeka, the wife and husband Željka and Boris Rogić took on the challenge of making table lamps and standing lamps in the Art Nouveau style, after the manner of L.C. Tiffany. Arranging glasses of many colours and sizes into dense metal grids they produced many pieces of artwork. Their work, resembling the accomplishments of European mannerists, great masters of arts and crafts, is recognized as a great accomplishment of applied art. The Rogićs moved on as well, from making replicas to a free interpretation of domestic art traditions, especially Croatian *pletter* (three-strand pattern). In this way the Tiffany lamp becomes accepted as a product of our part of the world.

Church restoration and decoration always involved a special attention to windows. Following the revival of Gothic art in the 19th and 20th centuries a new contribution to this interplay of light and shadow was given by Croatian painters and skillful artisans. The Rogićs have taken part in this renaissance of an old form of art and crafts, but in a special way—using Glagolitic signs within the framework of multicoloured and joyful light. This was easily expected: after all we are characterized by the Glagolitic: it has formed Croatian written culture, from stone and fresco inscriptions to manuscripts and printed books.

The Rogićs live in a city intensely permeated by the Glagolitic heritage. At Rijeka churches masses were served by Glagolitic priests, songs were sung in Croatian by the pious folk, and during the Holy Week Rijeka fraternities staged dramatic performances, church mystery plays. The Zadar-born bishop Šimun Kožičić Benja founded in the middle of the 16th century a Glagolitic printing house in his Rijeka home, in which he worked himself. At that time books by Croatian Protestants reached Rijeka from Urach in Germany. At Trsat above Rijeka the Franciscans care for the sanctuary of Our Lady of Trsat, where

the Holy House from Nazareth was kept in safety for a time, after which it was taken on the hands of angels to Loreto. Pious pilgrims made pilgrimages every year to Trsat and Loreto, to the consecrated ground where the Holy Family coped with the troubles of everyday life, meeting with joy every new day, which is heralded by the dawn, by light, by bird song, that is, by joy.

Why are the Rogićs drawn to the Glagolitic? Because they, while meticulously arranging pieces of glass for their Tiffany lamps, thought of the Glagolitic as the light of the mind, that beam of spiritual light that goes through the eyes into the region of the mind, and then of the heart, or as a beautiful and seductive riddle, its letters small pieces of glass combining into a complex and comprehensive view of our history, culture and literacy.

When the Holy Brothers Constantine Cyril and his older brother Methodius set out among the Slavs to bring the light of knowledge and the promise of love that is the Gospel in their own language and in a new script, they were aware that they were bringing the Light of Truth to the Slavs. Jesus referred to himself as the Way, the Truth and the Light. The central character of their script designed by St. Cyril was the Slovo - **ꙗ** - which is precisely called that. This character carries within itself all the depth of theology and philosophy; it has the same elements of meaning as the Greek word *Logos* (Λόγος), or the Latin *Verbum*, or in the language of today—Word. And Slovo in the old language meant mind, reason, but also the second divine person, or Jesus Christ. But, the Slavs also associate their national name with the word Slovo, for *sloviti* means to speak, to communicate in words and language. Namely, the Slovjenci (Slavs) speak the language (they *slove*) and recognize through speech one another as brothers in one language. The Glagolitic character of slovo **ꙗ**, as designed and graphically shaped

by St. Cyril, consists of a circle and a triangle. The circle signifies the fullness of Divinity, and the triangle symbolizes the Holy Trinity. The first character of Cyril's script is named Az, meaning I. At first it was the sign of the cross \dagger , which then received additional elements on the horizontal line h ; namely, accepting Christianity, we accept it as persons, consciously and with reason, pronouncing "I", I personally. I am marked by the cross, I bear the cross, I fight for the fruit of the cross—love of all creation. The sign of the next character is B . Its name is Buky, and it also contains the characteristics of Divinity in Trinity, since we cross ourselves pronouncing the names of the Holy Trinity, and at that time one crossed oneself with three fingers. This was done as a personal testimony, and later in our parts as a sign of pledging, a strong acceptance of truthful testimony. The word Buky itself denotes the Book, that is the Holy Scripture, but also the script it is written in. In the depth of knowledge it denotes God (Bog), but God's name should not be taken in vain. And so in order: the character X with which the name of Jesus begins is a reverse shape of the character for slovo S . Initially, the capital A repeated on several levels repeated the sign of the Holy Trinity, the true Divinity.

It is to these sacred characters that Željka and Boris Rogić dedicated a very special and a very personal attention. In the technological procedure, which the Rogićs took on as a challenge, the Glagolitic characters came out of their lab more joyful, airier, more unusual. They accomplished this innovation by using the method of glass fusion, a procedure of melding finished pieces of glass into a whole. In this technique heat ("fire") changes dispersed diversity into a wholeness of the diverse. This no longer requires a mesh to keep the diverse pieces together. New visual and design shapes are formed by the heat of fire that makes glass pliable.


Just as making Tiffany lamps as a product of applied art and high quality craft had been a challenge for the Rogićs, so there was also a new challenge

that they have been preparing for years to take on. That is the festival of the Glagolitic. The City of Rijeka Museum will be comprehensively marked by the Glagolitic. Three sets of 33 Glagolitic characters will be displayed on the ground floor of the Museum, artistically and technologically prepared in a special way. The 99 characters will be presented in a small house made of aluminium, which the Rogićs cast, polished and finished to a highest quality based on their own design. Each character will be illuminated by a small light bulb revealing the form, the line and the extension of the character. The Glagolitic alphabet in 33 large wooden frames will be displayed on the first floor of the Museum. Here too every character is illuminated by a separate light. Lamps decorated with Glagolitic characters will certainly be especially attractive

The Glagolitic as light

Light as the Glagolitic.

Along with the big projects celebrating and honouring the letter as a symbol of wisdom and mutual communication through language, there will also be a smaller, more modest segment for those who appreciate the beautiful—a gift for keepsakes, a souvenir. Coasters for beakers done in different colours are decorated with characters of the entire Glagolitic azbuka (alphabet). We say azbuka because each Glagolitic character has a name and an appellation, beginning with, az, buki, vedi, ...The initial sequence of characters is as follows: Az', buky, vede, glagoljon, dobre, jest', živet, zelo, zemlja, which means: I knowing the characters say that it is very good to live on the land! In addition to the joy afforded by a beautifully shaped glass, and the drink in it, the coaster too contributes to the joy of living, socializing, companionship and conversation, but also to the understanding of the foundations from which spring the joys of



living and the knowledge of the beauty which, once we accept it, encompasses and overwhelms our senses: sight, taste, smell, touch. A set of six coasters with Glagolitic characters is stored in a beautifully shaped wooden case, with a lid containing a round bronze plate with Glagolitic characters, of the same design as the ones recorded in our first printed book and our most beautiful incunabula, the 1483 Missal. Holding this case in hands the mind flies by itself to those memorable words about a box of lead characters which are the finishing words of Miroslav Krleža's novel Banket u Blitvi: "A box of lead characters, and that is not much (...), but it is the only thing man has invented until today as a weapon for the defence of his human pride."

The Glagolitic characters of the Rogićs are a visible and vocal sign against forgetting that script, book, writing have defended and guarded us over centuries, and that the word written in our language has maintained and supported us in our human and national dignity. Over centuries all the way to the present.

