

# Life of Memory - Croatian Latin Heritage

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## 1 At the threshold of Europe

Ladies and gentlemen. I am here today because Croatia is on the threshold of the European Union, expecting to be admitted to the club after ten years of testing and negotiating, after twenty years -- almost half of my life -- of hoping for admittance. These years of hoping and waiting, of tests and negotiations, of compromises and disappointments, have not been meaningless. They dispelled many illusions and made many things clearer. In Croatia today, we are well aware that by entering the European Union we're not entering a utopia. Europe is not an idyll, but a stock exchange dealing in power and profit, a ruthless game of cold calculation and cynical utilitarianism, bringing to the weak social disruption and economic insecurity. The greatness of Europe, however, lies in the fact that it is at the same time the antithesis of this ruthless stock exchange. It is also the Europe of culture, of equality, brotherhood, and freedom, of the cosmopolitan circulation of knowledge and values. Today, Croatian people know both these Europes. In the same way, Europe knows both Croatias it will receive: one, a country of luxury villas and tourism, of Swiss bank accounts and SUVs, of culture and beauty -- and its antithesis, a country of 350.000 unemployed out of the 4.5 million total population, of 50 billion Euro of gross national debt (that is, more than 50% of gross national product), of underground economy, of people underpaid, or on strike, or rising at four in the morning to go to work.

Today, in this proud and impressive place which rightly invites us to explore the world's knowledge, we can easily prove that Croatia and her people have contributed to this knowledge, and to world's culture as well. We can also prove that these contributions have been recognized

and valued. We can show that Croatia shares with the European whole a common Greco-Roman and Christian core, that the country which is to be admitted as the 28th member of the European Union has long been one of bulwarks defending Europe. Croatian Dubrovnik is an ancient free merchant state, fascinating in its smallness and its conservativity; Croatian capital, Zagreb, is a typical Central European city with a modest Austro-Hungarian flair; regions of Istria and Dalmatia, Croatian mountains and Adriatic islands -- these are all hidden gems. And they all count little in the game played by the community we call Europe for thousands of years, in the game where there is no getting up from the table to which we are now sitting down, in the game where, paradoxically, the weakest have to be the strongest in order to persist and endure.

At some level, people about whom I am talking today have been aware of all that. That is why they chose to write in Latin.

## 2 Why write in Latin?

Today, when people -- especially in the European Union -- want to share their thoughts and sentiments, and to manage their affairs, across national borders, they often use English, as you know. But this Euro-English, as it is sometimes called, while effective for administrative or educational purposes, has two major drawbacks. First, it is not English as native speakers know it. By this I don't mean only that people who use it speak with foreign accents and incorrectly. There is something worse. Euro-English simply isn't beautiful. It is ugly, limited, and full of ominous clichés (such as "market", "redundancy", "restructuring", "growth rates", "budget cuts"). It is based on a bureaucratic jargon. It isn't language of Shakespeare and Dickens, of John Keats and Philip Larkin.

With Latin, it was a different matter. For nearly 1500 years Latin was the principal medium for European intellectual discourse, a requirement for anyone with any pretensions to education and literacy. Latin was thus an almost universal language of Europe, although -- or rather: precisely because -- no one spoke it as a native tongue. As the language of Cicero and Virgil, of the Roman Empire and the Church in the West, Latin enjoyed the prestige of antiquity. Moreover, it was distinguished by the virtue of stability. In the world where vernacular languages were learned by ear and by imitation, and therefore subject to constant linguistic change -- change because of which the author of Beowulf would have found even Chaucer's English incomprehensible -- Latin has already, for almost a thousand years, been standardized by teachers, texts, and grammar books. Certainly, usage of Latin was restricted to small groups of literate and cultured people, almost exclusively male. Still, Latin was accepted in all Europe as the language of record and the language of schools. Moreover, it was used not only for legal

documents and education, but also for the writing of history, philosophy, and the natural sciences -- and for what we today call "literature" as well. In this way, together with the Christian Church, Latin contributed to the idea of Europe as a community -- even as the European states, rulers, and armies fought, massacred, and betrayed each other.

For a long, long time Latin, as everybody's second language, put everybody on an equal footing, it provided equal opportunity, simply by being equally hard for everyone. The rich and the poor, clergy and laity, noble and commoner, servants and princes, the English and the Croatian -- everybody had to toil and sweat to master Latin, and everybody was judged on the same standards, the standards equally foreign to all. You learn to appreciate such cruel, but equal opportunities and standards -- if you happen to be talented, but born in a small, poor, constantly endangered province, far from centres of civilization, affairs, fashion and fame.

Latin had even more to offer. I mentioned that it was standardized as the language of the great Roman authors, of Cicero and Virgil. The standard was aesthetic as well as linguistic. Latin came with a long and sophisticated poetic tradition, a rich store of words and phrases, images and metres. Much of that the vernaculars (especially those of small national communities) lacked, at least during the Middle Ages. Furthermore, Latin had means to express complicated or abstract concepts, and to order and present thoughts in a variety of refined ways. Writing in Latin therefore required of authors and helped them to express themselves not only functionally, but also beautifully and carefully -- contrary to the basis of Euro-English that I mentioned above.

### 3 Writing Latin in Croatia: a typology

When Croatian people settled in what was once Roman Dalmatia -- roughly at the time of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in Sutton Hoo -- the new Croatian homeland was already occupied. They found there Roman cities, such as Split and Zadar, and the Catholic Church (the fifth-century Latin author today known as St Jerome was born in Dalmatia, and his apocryphal excuse for his rash temper was "Parce mihi Domine quia Dalmata sum", *Forgive me, Lord, because I am Dalmatian*). The Roman cities and the new Croatian princes all used Latin language for their official documents and inscriptions. And this practice of writing in Latin did not stop. Croatian tradition of Latin flows uninterruptedly for at least a thousand years, from the ninth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. Moreover, an analysis of books by Croatian authors printed from the fifteenth century to the year 1850 shows that the books written in Latin outnumber those written in Croatian by at least a one-third.

But, apart from official documents, what did Croatian authors write about in those Latin books, and how? I won't present here a list of

names and works, of genres, periods, and regions. I won't do it partly because this has already been done (I can recommend several titles from the bibliography), partly because such lists would be as boring as they would be informative. Today I want to experiment with a different approach. I will propose a broad typology of Croatian authors writing in Latin. The typology will be based primarily on where they wrote -- that is, whether it was in Croatia or abroad.

There are four categories of people connected with Croatia and writing in Latin. First, there are those who came to Croatia and wrote in Latin; then there are people from Croatia who went abroad -- often to study, because there was no university in Croatia until after 1650 -- and later returned home; third, there are Latin authors from Croatia who never went anywhere, or anywhere much (and still some of them managed to achieve international fame); fourthly and finally, there are people from Croatia who left home never to return. Among people who left a written, literary trace -- such as authors of books -- the second group, of those who returned to Croatia after time spent abroad, seems the most numerous.

### 3.1 Foreigners

Foreigners who came to Croatia sometimes came precisely because of their knowledge of Latin (and also Greek): they worked as teachers and notaries -- such as Nardino delle Celine and Palladio Fosco, two Italians who quarrelled in Zadar around 1415 about who was the better connoisseur of ancient Greek and Latin literature -- or other public officials, such as the surgeon Jacobinus de Maynentibus, who served in Zadar in 1393 when he copied a translation of Aristotle's Politics which is now in the British Library on microfilm (it was sold to Bruxelles in 1966), or the Frenchman Ludovicus de Gavilla, who first copied Gellius in the Venetian fortress in Šibenik (1448) and later copied Cicero's letters in Split (1455). There were also bishops and members of their entourage, such as Lodovico Beccadelli and his secretary Antonio Gigante, in Dubrovnik 1555-1564 (let us note in passing that a life of cardinal Reginald Pole, the last Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury, written by Beccadelli in 1558, was translated from Italian to Latin by a Croatian, Andrija Dudić). Some foreigners were travellers, such as Ciriaco d'Ancona; he visited Dalmatia during his searches for remains of classical antiquity, but also found engagement in Dubrovnik as the author of a classicizing inscription (1438) which you can today see there on the Fountain of Onofrio.

### 3.2 Croatia for life

As an example of a Latin author who lived their whole lives in Croatia let us mention the copyist of a manual on Latin orthography by the

Italian humanist Gasparino Barzizza. The manuscript, copied and decorated by Ambroz Mihetić from Šibenik, probably in 1478, is today the manuscript Burney 313. In 1487, this Ambroz Mihetić, calling himself an old man, sent from Šibenik a Latin letter to the twenty-two year old Venetian humanist Cassandra Fedele, at the time the most renowned woman scholar in Italy (several editions of Cassandra Fedele's letters, including the exchange with Mihetić, are held by the British Library).

Another author who never left Croatia for a long time is Marko Marulić, or Marcus Marulus, famous, at least in Croatia, as the author of the first epic in Croatian, the Judith (first published in 1521, in Venice -- there weren't any significant printers in Croatia). Marulić also composed a Latin epic on King David, and a commentary on Catullus -- Marulić added his notes to the manuscript that preserved, among other texts, the longest and most famous episode of Petronius' Satyricon, Trimalchio's banquet, "a masterpiece of Roman bad taste"; once in Trogir and Split, the manuscript is now in the Bibliotheque nationale, and a digital copy is accessible online. Marulić commented on a collection of ancient Roman inscriptions as well, some of them from Split, seen and transcribed *de visu*. But the writer from Split was best known as the author of two religious bestsellers of his time, the *De institutione bene vivendi per exempla sanctorum* and the *Evangelistarium*, which have seen, in the 16th and 17th century, altogether about seventy editions, and have been translated in a dozen languages. Thus, staying put in Split, relying on the printing press and on the importance of religion, his main theme, Marulić reached a great part of Europe. Marulić's books had several distinguished readers -- at least one of them has a special relationship with Britain and the British Library. It was in 2009, to considerable excitement at least on my part, at the British Library Symposium dedicated to Marko Marulić, that Andrea Clarke confirmed that the handwritten notes in a copy of Marko Marulić's *Evangelistarium* from the Royal Library indeed come from the hand of Henry VIII, as it was proposed earlier by the French scholar Charles Béné. Andrea came to Split and gave a paper on the King's notes in Marulić's book, and the paper was published in the twentieth volume of the *Colloquia Maruliana*, a Croatian yearbook dedicated to scholarship on Marko Marulić and Croatian Renaissance.

But let us return to the Croatian Latin writers. The third group -- the most numerous, as I have said -- comprises authors who returned home after studying or working abroad. Some of them, such as Ilija Crijević from Dubrovnik, returned as poets of some fame. Others returned after a career in diplomacy, such as Trankvil Andreis from Trogir and Mihovil Vrančić from Šibenik. Still others had behind them stints of overseas trade, such as Crijević's fellow citizens and friends Jakov Bunić and Damjan Beneša (both of them composed long epics on Jesus Christ, slightly sooner than Girolamo Vida). Some authors took part in military campaigns; such was the case of Koriolan Cipiko, who around

1474 commanded a warship from Trogir in the Venetian fleet of Lodovico Mocenigo; back in Trogir, Cipiko wrote a Latin historical work about the campaign, which was printed many times, as it celebrated Venetian success against the Ottomans. But Cipiko also used his part of the spoils of war to build a tower on the Trogir seaside, a fortress which will provide shelter to peasants working his lands, endangered by Ottoman raids.

There were also authors who could not return to their home towns, because they were taken by the Ottomans; such was the case of the theologian Juraj Dragišić (or Georgius Benignus) from Srebrenica in Bosnia (the town equally unhappy then as today), who left Florence for Dubrovnik after Lorenzo de' Medici died.

All the authors I mentioned lived before the year 1600, but the situation did not change much in later years. What was different mostly was that writers had more choice -- like Marulić, some of them chose to write both in Croatian and in Latin. At the end of the 17th century this was the choice of Ignjat Đurđević (Ignatius Georgius), a teacher and poet from Dubrovnik who also wrote about Homer and about St Paul's supposed shipwreck on a Dalmatian island of Mljet; Đurđević also translated the beginning of his own *Uzdasi Mandaljene pokornice* (Sighs of Repentant Madalene) into Latin.

Similar decisions on language choice were made also by several generations of intellectuals from northern, continental Croatia -- both priests and laymen who, sometimes as administrators of the Croatian-Hungarian Kingdom under the Habsburg rule (as nobody's national language, Latin was the official language of the Lands of the Crown of St Stephen until the 1850s), used Latin in office, in private correspondence, but also in their non-fiction and political writings. So, when Croatian national awakening starts with the Illyrian movement in 1830s, a lot of people -- who all had Latin at school and at the university -- used the universal Latin to express their enthusiasm for the new nation which was being built on the vernacular language, on Croatian.

A similar divided allegiance will be found at the beginning of the 20th century in the person of Frane Bulić, the Dalmatian priest and archaeologist best known for his excavations at the site of ancient Salona near Split (don Frane Bulić composed his own Latin epitaph re-using texts from inscriptions he discovered), and in the poet and priest Ivan Golub, who, after studying in Rome, in 1984 in Zagreb published a collection of lyric verse in Biblical Latin, with facing Croatian translations by the author himself.

But for me personally, the most poignant testimony of Latin writing in Croatia comes not from famous authors, nor from literary works, but from reports which were, at the end of the 16th century, during the Ottoman Wars, sent regularly from the fortress of Sisak, in the zone of constant danger and warfare, to Zagreb, some sixty kilometers to the north. The letters, written by canons of the Archbishopric

of Zagreb who were in charge of the Sisak fortress, report, day after day and from day to day, on lack of resources, demoralization, weakness, fear. At times, to drive home the point of urgency and danger, the canons -- perfectly fluent in Latin -- mix Latin with Croatian, composing letters such as these [EXAMPLE].

### 3.3 Never return

It is against this atmosphere of constraints and insecurity that we have to consider the last group of Latin authors -- those who left Croatia never to return, sometimes exchanging their homeland for brilliant careers. For some who succeeded abroad we can't say what was their relationship with the country they left behind -- those are authors such as Hermannus Dalmata, who was in the 12th century one of the first translators of the Qur'an (a manuscript from the 14th century with one of Hermannus' theological works is today British Library's Cotton Ms Titus D IV). Others used their positions to help their country in need -- such was Stjepan Gradić (1613-1683), priest in Rome and director of the Vatican Library, author of Latin poems and translator of Appianus into Latin. Gradić engaged in diplomatic efforts to protect and rebuild the republic of Dubrovnik, when the city suffered heavy damage and losses in the mighty earthquake of 1667.

Gradić wasn't the only Croatian Latin writer attaining high posts and respectability in the papal state. Before Gradić, in 1474, Nicolaus, bishop of Modruš, author of a funerary speech for the cardinal Pietro Riario, nephew of Pope Sixtus IV (the speech, the first text of a Croatian author to find its way into print, was at the same time one of the most often reprinted funeral orations in the Quattrocento). After Gradić the Vatican enlisted a triad of his fellow citizens from Dubrovnik, educated in Jesuit schools: Rajmund Kunić, Ruđer Bošković, Bernard Zamanja. Of them, Ruđer Bošković, a scientist and professor of mathematics at the Collegium Romanum who, as one of the first in continental Europe, accepted Newton's gravitational theories, wrote on optics, astronomy, gravitation, meteorology and trigonometry, developed, independently of Kant, the "force-shell atom theory", and was elected, here in London, a member of the Royal Society, in 1761. Boscovich not only published his main work in Latin (the *Theoria philosophiae naturalis reducta ad unicam legem virium in natura existentium*, 1758), he also found time to compose Latin poetry -- from a didactic epic on the eclipses *De solis ac lunae defectibus* to occasional, improvised epigrams. On the east, some Croatian Latin authors had successful careers in the Kingdom of Hungary-Croatia. Those were, in the 15th and 16th century, the poet Janus Pannonius, diplomats Stjepan Brodarić and Antun Vrančić -- Vrančić wrote brilliant letters in style of Erasmus -- and Antun's nephew Faust Vrančić, as an earlier and more modest version of Bošković, joined Latin writing and interest for science. Vrančić's sketch of

the parachute bears, as you can see, an inscription in Latin.

The story would not be complete without the malcontents, those who used Latin as a medium for shaping public opinion, for furthering change, political and religious. After the Battle of Mohacs (1526), in which the army of the Kingdom of Hungary-Croatia was defeated by Suleiman the Magnificent, Bartol Jurjević wrote in Latin almost journalistic reportage of his own capture by the Turks and the ensuing ten years of slavery; Jurjević's books were at the same time reports on exotic customs and encounters, as well as exhortations for an all-European crusade against the Ottoman Empire.

Other Croatian authors strove for religious change. Matija Vlačić Ilirik, or Matthias Flacius Illyricus, born in Istrian town of Labin in 1520 (four years before Marulić's death) went from Venice to German lands to join the Lutheran Reformation and become first a distinguished student of Hebrew, then a pioneer in church historical studies, the most learned Lutheran theologian of his day, and theological controversialist who during 1550s, in his polemics with Philipp Melanchthon, created a lasting rift within Lutheranism. Markantun de Dominis (Marco Antonio de Dominis), born on the island of Rab in 1560, appointed first bishop of Senj and Modruš, then archbishop of Split. In 1611 de Dominis published a scientific Latin treatise on light and rainbow, appreciated by Newton. Later de Dominis resigned from his archbishopric and left for England in 1616. In England, under the auspices of James I, de Dominis wrote anti-Roman sermons and published his chief work, *De Republicâ Ecclesiastica contra Primatum Papae*, but later departed, attacking the English Church equally violently as the Pope, in *Sui Reditus ex Anglii Consilium* (Paris, 1623) declaring that he had lied in all that he had said against Rome; this did not save him from the Inquisition -- he was accused of relapse into heresy, and his corpse was burned together with his works in 1624. His Latin books await modern interpretation: was he a greedy, irascible adventurer, or a tragic philosopher and visionary?

#### 4 Croatiae auctores Latini

Many of these authors, and other that I chose not to mention, can be found not only in the British Library, but all over the internet -- mostly in various digitized old books, which are today readily available in greater numbers than ever in human history. There is also a collection of digital texts by Croatian Latin writers prepared by a project which I'm leading at the University of Zagreb. This collection is called *Croatiae auctores Latini*, CroALA for short, and it comprises at the moment almost five million words in some 400 texts by some 170 authors. The texts were written from year 976 to 1984. This is not a collection of digitized books -- we don't publish images of pages, but digital texts which allow different kinds of linguistic searches -- and our



aim is to have in one place as many Croatian Latin texts as possible.

## 5 Reading Croatian Latin: a demonstration

Because I don't agree with talking about literature and texts without actually reading any literary text, I would like to conclude this lecture with a brief interpretation -- an *explication de texte*, if you like -- of a poem by Ilija Crijević. It is a poem on peaches, a letter actually, addressed to his friend and fellow citizen, Marin (or Mario) Bunić (or Bona). The poem has a short, playful prose introduction, which says: "I've promised to you that my peaches will talk, although they came to you speechless. Look, they speak now on their own, and with their advice they try to persuade you to follow their example and take care of your flame." Flame meaning here an erotic passion.

The poem follows; you can see here its first six lines (I've added a Latin prose paraphrase as well). You'll notice that it is composed in the deceptively light metre of Roman poetry, in hendecasyllables, which Catullus used, for example, for his deceptively light poem on Lesbia's sparrow. It is also to be noticed here that the peaches don't actually speak. We don't know who speaks, but the voice speaks *about* the peaches. It tells us something strange: in their homeland, peaches are poisonous, but "here" they are sweet. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the exile was good for peaches. Equally strange is the fact that the peaches are personified -- they are spoken of in terms of people who migrate to another country and return home from there -- but it is not clear whether they are personified as species or as individuals. The change obviously affected the species, but a species cannot return to its place of origin. *Individuals* return (in case of peach trees, as individual grafts), and why should they change back into the original poisonous state? Crijević finds reason for this conceit in ancient Roman law. Because peaches are like people, the law of postliminium could apply to them as well -- only, in the case of peaches (where the change was for the better), it doesn't.

How did Crijević connect these familiar but strange, law-abiding but exceptional peaches with the other proclaimed theme of his poem -- with the romantic passion of Marin Bunić? I'll invite you to discover this by reading the poem yourself; in original Latin, it is easily available. In the internet, it is part of the *Croatiae auctores Latini* collection. It was also printed as part of Ilija Crijević's works, edited by Darko Novaković, "Autografi Ilije Crijevića (I): Vat. lat. 1678" ("Autographs of Ilija Crijević, part one"), in *Hrvatska književna baština* volume 3 (2004), 9-251. British Library shelfmark of the series is General Reference Collection ZF.9.a.5605.