

A First Look into the Corpus of Humanist ‘Laudationes Urbis’ on the Eastern Adriatic Coast

Neven Jovanović
University of Zagreb
neven.jovanovic@ffzg.hr

April 5, 2010

When this project started, the task seemed simple: to put in one place all Renaissance Latin texts which praise cities of the Eastern Adriatic coast, and to explore the corpus. The aim was to improve our knowledge of how the Eastern Adriatic Renaissance civic communities wanted to be represented and imagined. This aim still stands. However, the task does not seem so simple anymore.

The corpus of texts under a working title of *Laudationes urbium Dalmaticarum* comprises at the time more than fifty documents -- fifty-five, to be exact -- written over three and a half centuries, between 1268 and 1608. I must confess I had no idea that so many texts would turn up. Also, it became necessary to include writings which both chronologically and stylistically belong to the Middle Ages, and not to the Renaissance. So the first part of this speech will introduce you to the corpus of the *laudationes* and to the motives in shaping it. The middle part will briefly present some of these texts. The final part will outline some results, surveying what is invariant in the corpus; what aspects of reality are absent in the *laudationes*, but present in other documents of the period; which texts stand out, and why. However provisory the findings, the corpus, as you will see, remains accessible and open to further investigation: *Laudationes urbium Dalmaticarum* are freely available online,¹ in the edition supported by two digital tools which make possible complex textual analyses -- the TEI XML standard for encoding machine-readable texts in the humanities, and Philologic, a full-text search, retrieval and analysis system. *Patent portae*.

¹Cf. <http://www.ffzg.hr/klafil/croala>.

1 Introducing the corpus

Let me first sketch the *status quaestionis*. Histories of Croatian literature regularly qualify six or seven Latin texts as “praise of Dalmatian cities”. (For the geographical distribution of these praises see Figure 1.) These best-known *laudationes* are, in chronological order:

- Filippo Diversi from Lucca (c. 1390 - post 1455), *Situs aedificiorum, politiae et laudabilium consuetudinum inclitae civitatis Ragusii*, (1440)
- Juraj Šižgorić (Šibenik, c. 1445-1509?), *De situ Illyriae et civitate Sibenici* (1487)
- Ilija Crijević (Dubrovnik, 1434-1520), the “Ocelle mi, Ragusa” lyric poem (1495) and the epic *De Epidaurō* (c. 1505)
- Vinko Pribojević (Hvar, d. after 1532), *Oratio de origine successibusque Slavorum* (1522, published in Venice, 1525)
- Ivan Bolica (Kotor, c. 1520-1572), the epic poem *Descriptio Ascrivienſis urbis* (c. 1538-1551)
- Didacus Pyrrhus (Eborā, 1517 - Dubrovnik, 1599), *De illustribus familiis quae hodie Rhacusae exstant ad amplissimum Senatum elegia* (published in Krakow and Venice, 1582)

Three of those texts are prose chorographies. The description of Dubrovnik by Diversi is rich and detailed (and much used by modern historians), though in a style which is definitely not humanistic. Texts by Šižgorić and Pribojević present their respective cities, Šibenik and Hvar, as parts of the bigger picture -- for Šižgorić it is Dalmatia, for Pribojević the whole Slavic world.

Other four texts are in verse. The iambic ode by Crijević praises Dubrovnik with tongue in cheek: *Quod interire me, nec emori sinis*.² Bolica’s poem is a descriptive hexameter topography of the Bay of Kotor, and the city of Kotor itself. Crijević left also an (unfinished) epic combining description of Dubrovnik and story of its mythical origins of Dubrovnik; the same themes were tackled in elegy by Didacus Pyrrhus.

Five *laudationes* were composed by native citizens, and other two authors were wandering scholars employed in Dubrovnik as school teachers

²Dubrovnik, the most praised of Eastern Adriatic cities, is also the only one to receive *vituperationes*. Another noble Crijević from Dubrovnik, the Benedictine Ludovik Crijević Tubero (d. after 1532), composed around 1520 a *Commentariolus de origine et incremento urbis Rhacusanae*, hitting sharply at the very source of self-esteem among Dubrovnik aristocracy: “Nec equidem aut fabulas ab aliis confictas sequar aut ipse nouas componam per studium huius urbis clariore origine nobilitandae -- quum nulla prorsus ciuitati a re militari abhorrenti solique mercaturae deditae dari possit nobilitas -- uerum omnia uel ex uero hausta, uel quam simillima ueri in medium proferam”.

(Ilija Crijević also served as a teacher in his home town): Diversi taught there from 1434 to 1441, and Didacus Pyrrhus, a Portuguese Marrano, from 1555 to his death in 1599. Only two of the texts -- the speech by Pribojević and elegy of Didacus Pyrrhus -- saw print at the time of writing.

The short list of *laudationes urbium* presented above called to be expanded: after all, there are more cities in Dalmatia (where are Split, Trogir, Zadar?), and we know about writers who were neither born nor employed in Dalmatia, but still wrote in praise of its communities; a fine example is the poem to which Crijević clearly alludes in his lyric "Ocelle mi Ragusa" -- that is, the *De laudibus Rhacusae* by the Greek poet-soldier Michele Marullo, written some time before 1489, which contrasts the peace in Dubrovnik with the revolutions in Naples.

So the research started, as usual, with assembling the *membra disiecta scriptorum*, first putting together scattered notices about *laudationes*, and afterwards chasing the texts themselves. Soon a more precise definition was needed: what exactly do we mean by *laudatio urbis*?

2 Presenting the corpus

In this corpus a *laudatio* is any description (written in Latin), even a short one, that can be interpreted as a compliment -- or a criticism, its antithesis -- of an Eastern Adriatic city. This means we include topographies, such as the one of Istria by Flavio Biondo (in *Italia illustrata*, 1448), or of Dubrovnik by Giacomo Filippo Forèsti da Bergamo (in *Supplementum chronicharum*, 1483), but leave out praise of civic patron saints. Also excluded are texts in Croatian or Italian,³ and various non-verbal material.⁴

As announced at the beginning, the corpus of *Laudationes urbium Dalmaticarum* comprises at the moment 55 Latin works in prose and in verse, written between 1268 and 1608. The majority was created between 1435 -- therefore well after the period 1409-1420, when all this territory (except for Dubrovnik) became part of the Venetian *Stato da Mar*, and also after the end of the first Ottoman-Venetian War (1423-1430) -- and 1608 (cf. the chronological chart in Figure 2). A large number of texts was written between 1460 and 1525. Then a noticeable gap follows until 1537 (remember that 1527 is the year when Dubrovnik achieved its definitive independence from the Kingdom of Hungary-Croatia). Another

³The most famous *laudatio* in Croatian is the poem *U pohvalu grada Dubrovnika* (c. 1520) by Hanibal Lucić from Hvar (1485-1553). An interesting praise of Split in Italian was written by Antonio Proculiano from Bar and printed in Venice in 1567: *Oratione al clarissimo m. Giovan Battista Calbo degnissimo rettor, et alla magnifica comunita di Spalato*. This speech follows the model of Bruni's praise of Florence.

⁴E. g. visual symbols such as communal seals, coats of arms, paintings; also music, social rituals, etc.

gap in composing of *laudationes* is visible during 1582-1600. These are the years of relative peace in the Mediterranean, the years when the drama of “big history” shifts outside of it.

Figure 3 shows that in the corpus the following cities and regions are praised (in geographical order, from North to South): Trieste, Istria, Dalmatia, Zadar, Šibenik, Trogir, Split, Brač, Hvar, Korčula, Ston, Dubrovnik, Kotor, Shkodër. Most often praised is Dubrovnik, with 31 texts in its honour. Next comes Split, theme of nine texts, three of which were written before 1400. Dalmatia as a region is celebrated in six texts, Istria in three. Just once praise goes to the island cities Brač, Hvar, and Korčula, as well as to the unhappy city in Venetian Albania, Shkodër (taken by the Ottomans in 1479).

2.1 Authors

There are 50 authors in the corpus. They fall into three groups.⁵ As noted already, there are native citizens of Dalmatian cities -- twenty-two of them -- and foreigners employed there, mainly as school teachers (besides de Diversi mentioned above, there is Palladio Fosco from Padova, writing in 1504-1509, Nardino Celinesese from Maniago in Friuli, c. 1521, Nascimbene Nascimbeni from Ferrara c. 1564; otherwise employed are Lodovico Beccadelli, archbishop of Ragusa 1555-1560, and his secretary Antonio Giganti from Fossombrone). Most foreign professionals are Italians, an exception here being Didacus Pyrrhus.

The third group are eleven foreign authors not professionally engaged in Dalmatia. Some are travellers, like Ciriaco d’Ancona who, when he made a stop on his *iter epigraphicum* in 1435-1436, celebrated Dubrovnik by drafting two classicizing inscriptions for its public works. But many of such authors never even visited Dalmatia (e. g. Flavio Biondo, Francesco Filelfo and his eldest son, the wild Giovanni Mario, Aldo Manuzio and his son Aldo Manuzio il Giovane, the French political philosopher Jean Bodin). It must be noted that, with exception of Ciriaco, non-visitors praise exclusively Dubrovnik.

An important intermediate group are people from Eastern Adriatic shore who celebrate not only their home towns, but other cities; they are simultaneously locals and strangers, insiders and outsiders. So around 1464 Raffaele Zovenzoni from Trieste in an epigram addressed to Jacopo Antonio Marcello paid a compliment to Split -- precisely to the “*sacellum / Quod tenet Aspalatum delitiisque fovet*”, which is more important than all the world’s architectural wonders -- and in 1469 Zovenzoni’s friend from Šibenik, Juraj Šižgorić, honored Trieste. In 1475 Dubrovnik is admired by Koriolan Cipiko from Trogir, in *Petri Mocenici imperatoris gestorum libri III* (Cipiko’s qualification of difference between the aristocracy and the people of Dubrovnik, *Patricii*

⁵Figure 4 shows authors by number of *laudationes* they wrote.

soli rem publicam administrant, plebs tantum suis rebus studet: de publicis minime curiosa est, will be included almost literally in later accounts by Forèsti and Barletti). Twenty years later Dubrovnik is praised by the Bosnian Juraj Dragišić from Srebrenica, who came to Dubrovnik from Firenze in 1499. Another expatriate, Marin Barletti, who left his native Shkodër for Venice, presented praise of Dubrovnik as a speech of a character in his life of Skanderbeg in 1508. After further thirty years, in 1538, Dubrovnik is admired by Nikola Petrović from Korčula -- Petrović sees Dubrovnik as a republic flourishing under the rule of best possible laws.⁶

2.2 Genres

Poetic genres represented in the corpus bring no surprises, as they are those standard in humanist literary communication (cf. Figure 5). Most often encountered are epigrams and elegies.

In prose, a prominent genre is the dedicatory letter, a preface to a book. Earliest example of such praise are dedications to three of Aldo Manuzio's editions from 1498, *editiones principes* of Aristophanes, early Christian poets, and Demosthenes. The dedicatory letters are addressed to Daniele Clario from Parma, who was at the time employed as school teacher in Dubrovnik. Manuzio referred, at appropriate places, to "inclyta ista urbs alumna virorum nobilium Epidaurus, cui nunc Rhacusae est nomen". Later, in 1564, Nascimbene Nascimbeni from Ferrara dedicated his own commentary on Cicero's *De inventione* explicitly to the Senate of Dubrovnik, citing respectfully "splendor nobilitatis uestrae fulgentissimus, antiquitas gentis, celebritas reipublicae, res a uobis praeclarissime terra marique gestae, demum plurimae nobilium familiae". Here are *in nuce* listed all important aspects from which the city of Dubrovnik likes to be celebrated.

A classical occasion for praising a city in prose is the funerary oration, in the tradition of Thucydides' Pericles and Leonardo Bruni. Speaking at the funeral of Ivan Gučetić, Ilija Crijević -- the same one who, as you will remember, praised and criticized his native city in verse -- reminds the citizens of glory of Dubrovnik and Illyria: "nam patria est caput Illuriae in sinu Adriatico secunda (Venetis enim semper primas partes tribuo)".⁷ In the same funerary speech Crijević discusses legendary origins of the city: "Hoc tamen ex nostris annalibus et vetustatis memoria eruimus Epidauru a Vandalis eversa huc illos

⁶After the middle of the century, in 1567, Ilija Tolimerić from Šibenik celebrated Split in an elegy directed to its *senatus populusque*; another elegy was written in praise of Trogir around 1604 by Ivan Pridojević from Skradin.

⁷As an aside on this topic, elsewhere Crijević called his native city "Roma pusilla"; at about the same time, the theme of *Ragusium altera Roma* is picked up by Barletti. In 1561 Andrea Rapicio will claim that the *miracula Polae* are greater than those of Rome.

cives migrasse; mox etiam Romanos ad Illuriam recuperandam Bellum regem secutos.”

3 Some findings and observations

Tolstoy observed that happy families are all alike. Accordingly, when there is a city to be praised-- and such a city is necessarily *la città felice* -- the authors in this corpus follow a standard pattern: first they give information on the location and then discuss the origins, trying to connect the city with a classical myth (Troy and Antenor, Argonauts) -- in case of Giovanni Mario Filelfo the myth is pseudo-classical -- and a classical author (Strabo, Lucan, Pliny are cited most often). The story of origins usually ends with incursions by Attila, the Goths, or the Slavs. Memorable local ruins from antiquity are mentioned, as well as public buildings (preferably churches) and famous citizens.

To us this template looks not only bland and general, but curiously shy of the main question, that is: *how do people actually live there?* The reasons for avoiding this can be guessed if we compare the *laudationes* with official reports compiled by Venetian *reggitori* at the end of their term in a Dalmatian city.⁸ The *how do people actually live* reported by Venetian officials seems uniformly bleak: poverty, danger of famine, narrow space, insecure borderline life (in mainland Dalmatia the Ottomans are always just five or ten kilometers away), internal strife among nobles and “the people”. Against such reality, praise of ancient past is at the same time safe (you do not have to mention the unpleasant things) and reassuring; classical roots guarantee a city legitimacy, place in history, an identity.⁹ Lack of specifics can also imply that people here are just like everybody else.

In the corpus there are, however, also cases of praise inspired by stronger self-awareness: a city suddenly *gains* an identity. This may be caused by an important event -- Anton Rozanović celebrates Korčula in a narrative of its successful resistance to the Ottoman fleet in the year of Lepanto -- or by a peculiar situation -- when Vinko Pribojević praises Hvar in a speech from 1522, the island city is at the same time an important Venetian harbour on the Levantine route and a place scarred by prolonged peasant and civic rebellion several years earlier (1510-1514).

In conclusion: compared to Venice, Florence, or papal court, in Dalmatian communes -- even in Dubrovnik, which is, according to Jean

⁸Conveniently collected in Ljubić, Š. and Novak, G., eds. (1876-), *Commissiones et relationes Venetae*, Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium Vol. 6, 8, 11, 47-51, Sumptibus Academiae Scientiarum et Artium, Zagrabiae.

⁹This identity can be shaped by *lacrimae rerum* (ruins of Salona make Marko Marulić paraphrase Vergil “Fuius Troes, fuit Illium et ingens gloria Teucrorum, nunc nulla”).

Bodin, "ciuitatum fere omnium quae sunt in Europa minima" -- number of people with enough interest, competence, and opportunity for writing Latin literature remains restricted. Therefore each *laudatio urbis Dalmaticae* that we have today presents in fact a small wonder, a coincidence of talent, motive, and chance. All those coincidences are now together in one place; they await further investigation.



Figure 1: Dalmatian cities praised in seven best-known laudationes.

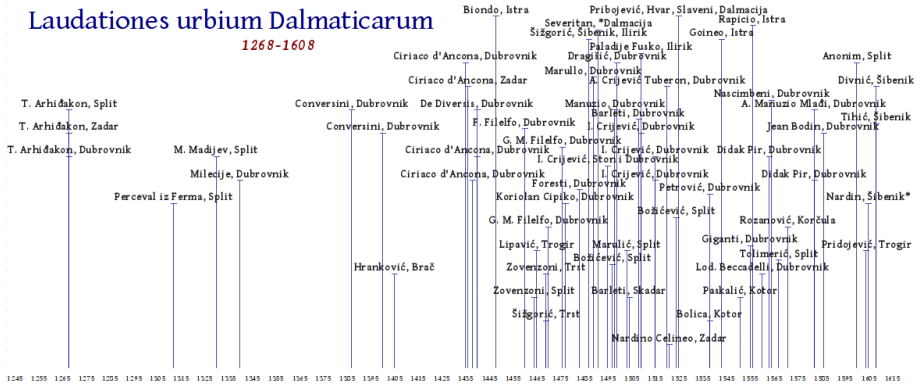


Figure 2: A chronology of laudationes urbium Dalmaticarum.

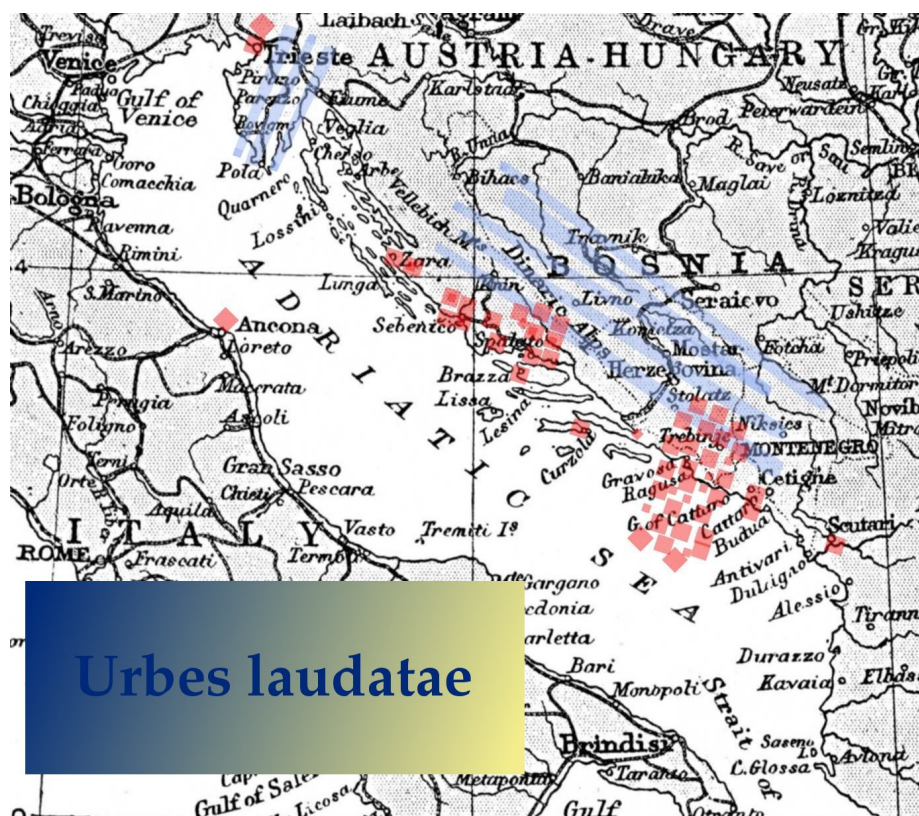


Figure 3: Cities and regions praised in the corpus. One laudatio is represented by one red mark. One blue stripe represents one praise of entire region (Istria and Dalmatia).



Figure 4: Authors of laudationes urbium Dalmaticarum by number of texts. Image from <http://www.wordle.net/>.



Figure 5: Poetry genres in the laudationes, by number of texts. Image from <http://www.wordle.net/>.

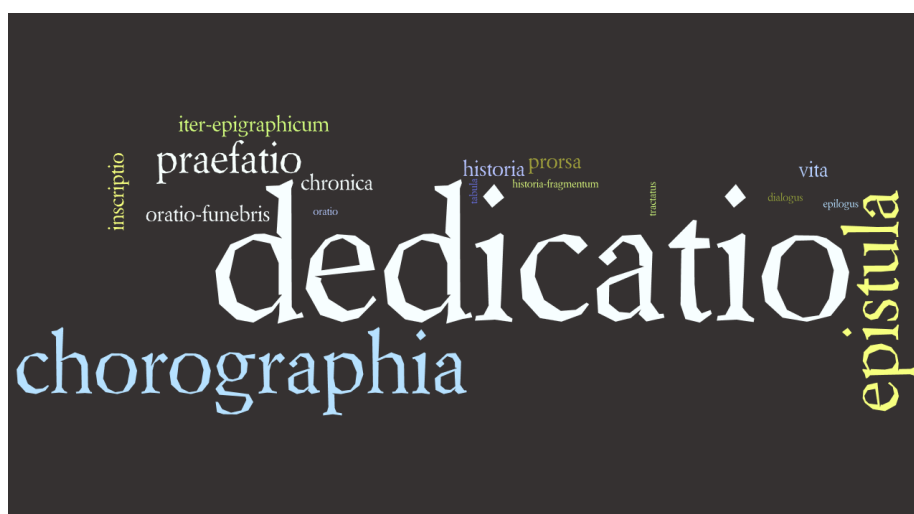


Figure 6: Prose genres in the laudationes, by number of texts.
Image from <http://www.wordle.net/>.