

Michael Marullus Tarchaniota's *De laudibus Rhacusae* and His Early Years

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Introduction

This paper is divided into two parts, the first of which provides an analysis of the historical and biographical sources related to Michael Marullus Tarchaniota, while the second casts light on his poetic work. A structure such as this suggests that attempts to reconstruct a poet's biography call for a clear-cut distinction between the poet's real personality and his poetic persona (Nichols 1997, cited in Haskell 1999: 111). In the present case one may easily be led astray due to very sparse reliable information and because previous scientific papers mainly underlined the autobiographic features of Marullus' production. The fact that Croatian literary scholarship (not only contemporary)¹ has completely neglected Marullus comes as an additional drawback to this study.

The earliest years of Michael Marullus (?-Volterra, 1500)², a prolific Humanist poet of Greek origin, remain rather obscure. The place and the year of his

¹ Without analysing Marullus' work, Neven Jovanović mentions the poet in two of his articles devoted to the praises of the cities (Jovanović 2011, 2012).

² Michael Marullus Tarchaniota belongs to a wide group of Greek poets who left for Italy after the fall of the Byzantine Empire and significantly contributed to the shaping of the Italian Humanism. He spent most of his life in Naples and the end of his days in Florence, where he enjoyed the company of the most prominent exponents of the Medicean Humanism.

birth are uncertain, which, as proved later on, was essential for the interpretation and evaluation of his poetical work. His early childhood years are marked by exile from the recently fallen Byzantine Empire, a short and unconfirmed stay in Dubrovnik and, finally, by his arrival in Naples. Having examined an array of sources, we aim to elucidate, at least partly, Marullus' life before his arrival in Naples, and also determine the period he spent in Dubrovnik.

The second part of this paper deals with Marullus' praise of Dubrovnik (*De laudibus Rhacuse*), the purpose of which surpasses a mere description of the city he had probably visited but also portrays the political context of that time. Misinterpretation of this work has given a fresh impetus for its rereading in order to demonstrate that it speaks more about the relations on the eastern Mediterranean than about Dubrovnik itself.

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1. Where and when?

As Michael Marullus admitted, he was not more than an embryo in his mother's womb at the time when his homeland was conquered (Marullus 2012: 80):

Vix bene ad huc fueram matris rude semen in alvo,
Cum grave servitium patria victa subit³.

This apparently clear testimony conceals two details which have offered grounds for further discussions about his biography, namely about the place and the date of his birth. According to the established works of reference, Marullus was born in Constantinople, at the very end of 1453, although both the date and place of his birth are still surrounded with controversy. In this introduction, it is necessary to point out that Marullus signed the first edition of his *Epigrammata*⁴ as *Costantinopolitanus*, and that the same gentilic (demonym) was used in *De Greacis illustribus* collection, while Paolo Cortesi referred to him as *Bizantinus* in his treatise *De Cardinalatu* (Coppini 2008). This identification with Constantinople led many scientists to the conclusion that Marullus was indeed born there. Therefore, *patria* should stand for Constantinople in his poetry, on the basis of which we might assume that he was born either at the end of 1453 or at the beginning of 1454. A lucid conclusion of M.J. McGann is that the major uncertainty of this kind of interpretation is whether *patria* and Constantinople represent the same location (McGann 1986: 145). If so, Marullus must have been conceived before 29 May 1453 and the Ottoman conquest of the city. If not, he might not necessarily have been born in 1453. The question is why Marullus calls himself a citizen of Constantinople, which according to M.J. McGann

³ *Epigrammaton, Liber secundus, XXXIII Ad Neaeram*; 65-66.

⁴ The first printed edition is without date, while the first dated edition was printed in Florence in 1497 together with *Hymni naturales* collection.

is not unusual for a Greek of that period (McGann 1986: 147). Yasmin Haskell gives a rather convincing explanation by arguing that the purpose of Marullus' intention to present himself as a refugee was the creation of a 'different' identity (Haskell 1999: 122), which represents a rather convincing conclusion based on his activity in the context of Italian Humanism. Therefore, *patria* is not and does not need to be a physical location but a symbol of a very recurrent and occasionally painful nostalgia Marullus' poetry is permeated with. For example, in the aforementioned collection entitled *De Graecis illustribus*, Leontius Pilatus, a translator of Homer, born in Calabria, is mentioned as *Thesalonicensis* (Hody 1742: 337) because, according to a Petrarca's letter to Boccaccio, being a Greek was considered more virtuous than being an Italian (Pertusi 1979: 37). In the same collection, Manillus Cabacius Rhallus, Marullus' friend, contemporary and colleague from the same Academia Pontiniana of Naples, is correctly mentioned as *Spartanus* because he indeed was born in the city of Mistra in the Morea. The differences between these two examples lead us to the conclusion that gentilicis were rather arbitrary, and hence *Constantinopolitanus* does not necessarily mean that Marullus was really born in Constantinople.

The lines that immediately follow (Marullus 2012: 80):

Ipse pater, Dymae regnis electus avitus,
Cogitum Iliadae quererere tecta Remi⁵.

suggest that Marullus' father drew his origins from the ancient city of Dyme in Achaea, in the north of Peloponnese, which belonged to the Despotate of Morea⁶ since 1430 and from where he fled to Italy. Marullus' family probably traces its descent from that area, which further adds to our speculation about *patria victa* actually standing for Morea (McGann 1986: 145). If this is the case, Marullus could not have been born in 1453 but probably in 1461, as proposed by McGann (1986: 145), considering that the Ottomans conquered the Despotate of Morea in May 1460.

Morean origin of Marullus' mother, Euphrosyne Tarchaneiotissa, is not to be doubted. Multiple ties between the renowned Tarchaniota aristocratic family⁷ and the Palaeologus had existed since the era of Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus, who founded the Palaeologan dynasty⁸. These ties continued well after

⁵ *Epigrammaton, Liber secundus, XXXIII Ad Neaeram*; 67-68.

⁶ The city of Dyme was most probably already destroyed by the Romans before Christ. The destiny of Achaea was equal to that of the majority of Greek provinces under the Byzantine Empire, except in the period from the end of the Fourth Crusade (1204), when it became a vassal state of the Latin Empire known as the Principality of Achaea.

⁷ Some sources claim that the family's origins are in the small town of Tarchanaion in Thrace (Polemis 1968: 183).

⁸ Tarchaniota family did not have ties only with the Palaeologus. Their continuous presence at the imperial court goes back to the tenth century, when, during the reign of Emperor Basil II, nicknamed Slayer of the Bulgars, Gregory Tarchaneiates was appointed *katepánō* of Italy. In the mid-13th century, Nikephoros Tarchaneiates provided much assistance to his

1380, the year in which the Palaeologus took power in the Despotate of Morea and remained particularly pronounced in the period of Thomas Palaeologus⁹, the despot who ruled the western part of the Morea at that time¹⁰. Marullus' nephew, historian Giovanni Tarcagnota, describes his family's destiny by reporting that his great-grandfather, Michele Tarcagnota, died while defending Morea in a battle against the Ottomans¹¹. Although Giovanni Tarcagnota does not make any reference to the time of these events, the aforementioned clearly implies that they took place in 1460. He provides yet another important detail: after Michele Tarcagnota had perished, his family fled from the city of Mistra to Corfu¹². According to him, the family lived in the capital of the Despotate of Morea (Mistra), which makes the assumption about the Constantinopolitan origin of our poet even less plausible. His description of the family's exile after the Ottoman conquest through intricate family ties takes us as far as Dubrovnik, where a part of Marullo and Tarchaniota families found their temporary residence. Marullus' verse contrasts sharply with the facts that shed a completely new light on a somewhat hazy episode of his birth¹³, and undermine the generally accepted opinion concerning an extensively autobiographic nature of his poetry. The possibility that some of Marullus' ancestors were originally from Constantinople may not be ruled out, yet their exile after 1453 is beyond question¹⁴. Marullus' work makes reference to geographical locations on the Peloponnese as many as nine times, rarely mentioning those in Thrace, which would have been expected had that region been his homeland. A cursory and non-critical analysis of the two verses resulted in an almost fatalistic construction regarding the poet's birth in the crucial year for global history and in the city deemed its paragon. On the basis of his comprehensive work,

brother-in-law, Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus, in assuming the power and introducing the rule of the Palaeologan dynasty. For his merits he received the title of *megas domestikos*, i.e. commander-in-chief. For more details, see *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (ODB) 1991: *sub voce*, Macrides 2007 and Nicol 1993.

⁹ One of the examples is also Thomas's paternal great-grandfather, Andronicus Arsenus, who married the daughter of the famous *protostrator* Michael Tarchaneiotes Glabas. For more details see Kidwell 1989.

¹⁰ The assumption that Marullus' family origins are in Dyme in the former Achaea and in the north-western part of the Morea of that time, as well as the fact that there were family ties between his family and Thomas Palaeologus, additionally support McGann's assertion that Marullus' real homeland was Morea.

¹¹ “Nelle tante calamità, e conflitti, che in questi infelici tempi la povera Morea sentì, essendovi per la patria, e per la religione morto valorosamente combattendo co' barbari, Michele Tarcagnota, che con la morte sua fe l'onore della sua famiglia vi e maggiormente chiaro [...]” in Tarcagnota 1598: 797.

¹² “[...] fuggendo, di Misistra in Corfu [...]” in Giovanni Tarcagnota 1598: 797.

¹³ For more about the assumption that Marullus was not born in 1453 see Enenkel 2008: 368-428.

¹⁴ Although there is not much information about his origin and link with Marullus, *protospatharius* Gregory Tarchaneiotes was sent from Constantinople to Italy, where he took over the duties of *katepánō* of Italy (at the end of the tenth century).

it is quite clear that Marullus failed to make an explicit statement of this kind, but left enough signs to show the path.

2. *Delle Historie del Mondo*

Since the information at our disposal is rather scarce, the analysis of the Dubrovnik episode will not start with Marullus' famous praise *De laudibus Rhacusae* but with a testimony of his already mentioned nephew, historian Giovanni Taragnota. After the fall of the Morea, his father Paolo (a boy at the time) and his family found shelter on Corfu, then in the city of Coron, and finally, he was sent to Dubrovnik from where Manilio Marullus (Michael Marullus' father) took him to Calabria, where Marullus' mother already lived¹⁵. The journey to Calabria most likely led via the Ionian island of Leucas. Although Giovanni Taragnota does not specify the time of the events, he reveals a precious detail: at that time a certain Despota d'Arta also stayed in Calabria, i.e. Melissa d'Arta, wife of Leonard III Tocco, Count of Cephalonia, Ithaca and Zakynthos, Duke of Leucas and ruler of Epirus. She was better known as Milica Branković, daughter of despot Lazar Branković and granddaughter of Thomas Palaeologus. *Terminus post quem* of the Calabrian episode is mid-1463, while *terminus ante quem* is the end of 1464, when Milica died at childbirth (Zečević 2006: 171). This conclusion is based on the fact that the wedding of Milica Branković and Leonard III Tocco took place in Dubrovnik on 1 May 1463¹⁶. It is possible that some members of Marullo and Taragnota families, who were in Dubrovnik at the time, set out for Leucas together with Milica and her mother, Jelena Palaeologus¹⁷. Due to the family ties between the Tocco, Branković, Taragnota and the Palaeologus, this course of events is not impossible, especially taking into account the fact that Leucas and the rest of Epirus were conquered by the Ottomans only in 1497. For example, it is well known that Thomas Palaeologus was entertained on Leucas by Leonardo III Tocco in the summer of 1460, before his journey to Rome via Dubrovnik and Venice. Therefore, if despot Thomas travelled from Leucas to Italy via Dubrovnik, a journey back along the same route may also have taken place, i.e. from Dubrovnik to Leucas and then to Naples via Calabria. The already abandoned

¹⁵ “Ne so’, se una sorella di Dimitrio, che essendo in Coro vedova, ne venne tosto in Corfu a prendere di questi pupilli cura [...] Il terzo, che era Paolo mio padre, à Ragugia il mandò da Manoli Marulo, che Eufrosine Taragnota sorella di Dimitrio moglie haveva. Egli ne venne Paolo in Ragugia; e fu da Manoli raccolto, e menato seco poco appresso in Italia [...]” in Taragnota 1598: 797.

¹⁶ For more details see Zečević 2006.

¹⁷ Jelena and Milica's sojourn in Dubrovnik is briefly described by chronicler Junius Resti: “Elena, moglie di quondam Lazzaro despota, arrivò con una nave anconitana a Lacroma. Si terminò mandarle tre nobili, per domandarla della causa della sua ventua. Fu ricevuta a Ragusa con 25 persone e regalata dalla repubblica. Dove si trattenne insino all'anno seguente, fino che facesse feste per la maritazione di Miliza, sua figliola, sposata a Leonardo, despota di Santa Maura. Questa festa si fece nella sala del maggiore consiglio, concessa dalla repubblica a richiesta d'essa Elena” (Resti 1893: 361).

assumption about the arrival of Marullus' family in Italy via Ancona is additionally weakened by the fact that the estates of the Toccos were *de facto* part of the Kingdom of Sicily, so taking the Ionian route to Italy is absolutely logical, as well as the arrival in Naples, a cultural and economic centre of the Italian South. Lively trade relations between Dubrovnik and the Byzantine Empire, and later with the Despotate of Morea, should not be ignored, nor the strong cultural influence of Byzantium in Dubrovnik¹⁸, which contributed to the development of this Adriatic communication route. There is no doubt that the immediate Ottoman threat after 1453 helped consolidate the network of the "semi-noble" families in Morea, which is clearly visible in the Palaeologus – Toccos – Tarchaniotas triangle. If Giovanni Tarcagnota's claims are trustworthy, Marullus could not have stayed in Dubrovnik after 1464 – that is, until the age of four at the latest.

3. Ragusan sources

By mentioning Bariša Krekić's discovery of the records of the State Archives in Dubrovnik testifying that a certain Emanuel Marulla Grecus, for whom Apostolos Vacalopoulos claims to be Marullus' father (Vacalopoulos 1970: 245, cited in McGann 1986, p. 146), practised medical profession in Dubrovnik from 1465 to 1470 (McGann 1986: 146), M.J. McGann gives more solid grounds for his assumption about the poet's Morean origin. Moreover, he does not see any significant discrepancy between Krekić's discovery and Giovanni Tarcagnota's story. Namely, he assumes that Giovanni's father, Paolo, arrived in Dubrovnik in 1465 at the earliest (1986: 146), which is possible if one takes into account Giovanni's statement that Paolo initially stayed with his father's other sister in the town of Koroni conquered by the Ottomans only in 1500. How does then the Calabrian episode fit into the whole story? According to Krekić, among Greek refugees in Dubrovnik, there is no trace of the Marullos before 1460. Hence, they could have arrived in Dubrovnik in 1461 at the earliest, which is probably true. Considering Marullus' statement that his father went to Italy after leaving the Morea, it is clear that the journey could not have lasted nine years, five of which the father would have spent working as a doctor. For that reason it is hardly possible that Emanuel Marulla Grecus is Marullus' father. All the refugees that Krekić identified after the fall of Constantinople stayed in Dubrovnik temporarily (Krekić 1956: 133) and, most likely, very shortly¹⁹. This also applies to the Marullus because, based on what we know today, apart from the records

¹⁸ For more details see Janeković Römer 2007.

¹⁹ A good example is that of despot Thomas Palaeologus for whom Krekić claims to have stayed in Dubrovnik in 1461. It is certain that his stay there was extremely short if one considers that since the spring of the same year he was in Rome where he arrived via Venice. Junius Resti mentions that Thomas stayed for a very short time not in Dubrovnik, but in the port of Gruž, where Ragusan ambassadors were sent to meet him. See: Resti 1893: 358.

of Giacomo di Pietro Luccari, there is no direct or solid evidence of their stay in Dubrovnik (Luccari 1605: 100):

I suoi cittadini, che poterono salvar la vita si sparsero per tutt'il mondo; et alcuni nati dell'illusterrime famiglie de' Lascari, Comneni, Paleologi, Catacusini, Rali, e Boccali, capitaron a Rausa; et fatto lor dalla Republica mutari i panni de Schifo, ne' qual erano involti, e rivestendogli d'altri nuovi, et di preggio, gli mandarono, in Italia, facendoli provisione di danari per viaggio. Alcuni altri huomini dati alle lettere, derivati però dal nobil sangue, e in particolare Giovanni Lascari, Demetrio Calcondila, Manoili Marulo, Paolo Taragnota, padre di Giovanni Historico, e Marrulo Taracagnota et Teodoro Spandugino, che scrisse l'*Historia de' Turchi*, i magistrati intendendo la loro necessità, senza esser richiesti, li sovennero d'albergo, di roba et di danari.

This testimony does confirm Marullus' sojourn in Dubrovnik yet fails to provide any accurate details on his arrival and the time he spent in the city²⁰. It is possible that the first group of the families, mentioned by Luccari, arrived in Dubrovnik immediately after the fall of Constantinople, but this certainly cannot be said for the rest. Giovanni Lascari (Giano Lascaris) was the only one born in Constantinople, though his chances of being there in 1453 were fairly poor (Ceresa 2004). Demetrio Calcondila, however, was born in Athens, and by 1449 left for Italy (Petrucci 1973), while Theodore Spandoneus was born in Venice (Spandounes 1997: IX). Luccari himself provides no clue as to whether the second group of families arrived in Dubrovnik from Constantinople because he identifies as citizens only the most prominent families (*i suoi cittadini*). The other persons (*alcuni altri huomini*) are mentioned only because they happened to be in Dubrovnik at some point after or before the fall of the Byzantine Empire. The only link between them is their Greek origin, and not the status of refugee from Constantinople, nor the same time of sojourn in Dubrovnik. Luccari identifies all members of the Marullus-Tarchaniota family whose stay in Dubrovnik was also mentioned by Giovanni Taragnota, yet he, too, failed to specify the date of these events.

There is another Ragusan source testifying to Marullus' stay in Dubrovnik. *Bibliotheca Ragusina*, written relatively late (1744) by Seraphinus Maria Cerva, brings biographies of 435 Ragusan writers and, in comparison to all of the aforementioned, offers quite a "radical" interpretation of Marullus' Ragusan episode. In the introduction, Cerva does not have any doubt concerning Marullus' origin (1977: 410): "origine procul dubio Bizantinus". This is followed by a short description of the fall of Constantinople, of the attempts of Pope Nicolas V to provide assistance to the exiled population, and, finally, the most important part of Cerva's story about our poet (1977: 410):

²⁰ Luccari's testimony has been also used by Jorjo Tadić, who stated that by the time he wrote his work (1939) there had not been found any records in the Dubrovnik Archive regarding Marullus' stay in Dubrovnik but those of Luccari. See Tadić 1939: 291.

Hos inter Marullus Tarchaniota, quo de agimus, vel admodum puer a parentibus delatus est, ut ipse deinde ignoto sibi patrio solo se Ragusinum et crederet et praedicaret, vel potius parentes eius eum caeteris exilibus Ragusium commigrarunt ibique Marullum in lucem ediderunt, quot facile luculento ipsiusmet testimonio mox confirmabimus; sed primum placuit, quae Iacobus Luccari de Graecorum optimatum in Ragusinam urbem adventu litteris mandavit, describere.

Cerva sees two possibilities: Marullus was either (*vel*) taken to Dubrovnik by his parents as a boy, which might explain why he considered Dubrovnik to be his homeland, or (*vel*) Marullus was born in Dubrovnik, which Cerva finds more likely (*potius*). This can be proven by a clear testimony (*luculento testimonio*) presented in the poet's praise of Dubrovnik, whose first four stanzas Cerva quotes in the text that follows²¹. Before that point he quoted a part of the already mentioned Luccari's work about the arrival of refugees from the Byzantine Empire, but this is only to prove that Luccari erroneously concluded that Marullus arrived in Dubrovnik at an advanced age (*aetate iam integra*). Like many contemporary scholars, who fell victim to biographical fallacy and thus misinterpreted the first part of *De laudibus Rhacusa*, Cerva's approach is also void of criticism, prompting him to assert that Marullus must have been born in Dubrovnik (1977: 412):

Iam vero primas querelas et lamenta miseri exilii, quasi recens tunc deprehensi, non potuit puer Ragusii emittere, nisi natus Ragusii, quod Luccarus, rem summatim narrans, nec ullam adiunctorum habens rationem, minime expressit. Vide igitur, qua ratione Marullus Ragusinorum scriptorum numero est ascribendus.

Cerva objected to Luccari's assertions by criticising his succinctness, and also failure to mention that Marullus was born in Dubrovnik. However, Cerva draws an erroneous conclusion about Luccari's belief that Marullus reached Dubrovnik as an elderly person, simply because Luccari makes no mention of it. While referring to Marullus among the Byzantine writers who lived in Dubrovnik, Luccari does not consider him as an already accomplished writer by that time, this being viewed one hundred years after the poet's death. As demonstrated earlier, Luccari's work should be approached with reserve due to the vagueness in terms of date, a step that Cerva certainly failed to take. With the rich library of the Dominican Monastery in Dubrovnik at his disposal, it is obvious that he did not trace any documents in support of Marullus' sojourn in Dubrovnik. For that reason, he used the only Ragusan source, i.e. *Copioso ristretto degli annali di Rausa*.

²¹ This proves that in Dubrovnik there was a copy of the *Epigrammata* at the time when Cerva wrote his work, as confirmed by Stjepan Krasić. In note 2 of the text about Michael Marullus Tarchaniota from the second and third volume, Krasić states that it was an edition from 1503. See Cerva 1977: 577.

Cerva continues the account about Marullus' departure for Italy, military service, stay in Florence and marriage with the daughter of Bartolomeo Scala, however, without mentioning his stay in Naples. He also reports on his drowning in the Cecina in 1500. At the end of the text he quotes a completely unconfirmed and wrong assertion (1977: 412): "At Ragusinam urbem non secus ac patrium solum semper suspexit [...]".

By informing that Marullus was praised by many, Cerva obviously made an attempt to justify Marullus' presence among Ragusan writers, mentioning the praises of Giampietro Valeriani (*De infelicitate litteratorum*), Lodovico Moreri (*Magno dictionario*) and Paolo Giovio as example.

However, given the fact that Cerva neglects some crucial events in Marullus' life, and fails to provide any solid grounds for his story, his argumentation should not be considered relevant.

In conclusion, the family (or at least Marullus and his father) arrived in Dubrovnik in 1461 and left for Italy by the end of 1464, according to Giovanni Tarcagnota. Their brief stay in Dubrovnik may be accounted by the Ottoman menace in the hinterland of Dubrovnik²² as well as a plague epidemic that broke out in that period (Ravančić 2009: *sub voce* "kuga").

4. The poet about himself

Having sifted through biographical sources, we shall shift our focus to the famous praise of Dubrovnik itself (Marullus 2012: 80).

Amica quondam dulcis, ubi puer
Primas querelas et miseri exili
Lamenta de tristi profudi
Pectore non inimicus hospes²³.

By the poet's testimony, during his sojourn in Dubrovnik "his sinking heart gave away the first distress and lamentations about the unhappy exile". This might suggest that it was in Dubrovnik that he wrote his first poems, which does not correspond to any of the assumptions about the first years of his life. It is almost certain that these verses are only a metaphoric presentation of the first words he spoke at the age of one and a half and later, and not a testimony that his education started in Dubrovnik, as Nichols considered (1997). There is little probability that Marullus clearly remembered his stay in Dubrovnik, as Carol Kidwell (1989: 1, 12) supposes, but it goes without any doubt that at the time of his praise to the city he was acquainted with Dubrovnik's landscape and position and with its political circumstances. He pointed out its freedom and

²² Bosnia surrendered to the Ottomans in 1463, and it was feared that the city could be attacked, therefore Ragusan authorities ordered destruction of a number of small churches close to the city walls. See Beritić 1960: 72.

²³ *Epigrammaton, Liber quartus, XVII De laudibus Rhacusae*; 9-12.

rule of law, and its art of surviving between Venice and the Ottomans, which he opposed to the turbulent situation in Naples where he spent most of his life. Apparently autobiographic, this praise shows how convincingly Marullus uses an almost marginal episode of his life to describe the situation of that time. The verses (Marullus: 2012: 80)

Quo te merentem carmine prosequar
Non falsus aut somno petita
Materia, sine teste, inani²⁴?

convey a justification of the mistakes he was going to make while describing the city, which might imply that Marullus did not clearly remember his sojourn in Dubrovnik. In the second part of this paper, we will show that the descriptions of the city's physical landscape are to a great extent credible, whereas those of a wider geographical and historical context remain disputable.

Such interpretation of the earliest years of the poet's life is contrary to the claims of Carol Kidwell and many others taking 1453 as the year of his birth, which is most likely to be wrong, as well as many other arguments based on the presumed highly autobiographical note of his poetry. It is believed that after his departure for Naples and beginning of education, at the age of sixteen Marullus served as a mercenary (*stratiot*)²⁵ in the region called Skitia, i.e. an area to the east of today's Romania which comprised most of today's Ukraine, its coast and Transcaucasia (Haskell 1997: 117). Marullus left many 'testimonials' about his visit to faraway countries in the Black Sea area²⁶, quite difficult to locate because he often attributed anachronistic or mythical names to them. He also mentioned his service for a mighty ruler (Kidwell 1989: 31-41), which led many to conclude it was one of the rulers who had fought the Ottomans in Eastern Europe (Vlad III the Impaler or Stephen the Great of Moldavia)²⁷. An unconfirmed but probable assumption is that in 1480 he took part in the battle of Otranto and in its liberation in 1481. The link between all of the aforementioned events is the name of Mehmed the Conqueror, i.e. his defeats. Sultan's army, headed by Hadim Suleiman Pasha, was defeated in 1475, in the Battle of Vaslui, and in 1481, after Mehmed's death, Gedik Ahmet Pasha was forced to withdraw from Otranto. We consider it likely that Marullus did not suspend his schooling to

²⁴ *Epigrammaton, Liber quartus, XVII De laudibus Rhacusae*; 6-81.

²⁵ For more information about stratioti see Paolo 1996 and Nadin 2008.

²⁶ "Inter quae memorant mutua dum invicem/Quaeruntque, admonitae forsitan et mei, Narrant nunc Boreae sedibus intimis/Visum, qua vagus alluit//Rhodo Mesta suos, nunc Byce lintea/ Dantem plena, modo littora Dacica/Scrutantem et veterum saepe etiam patrum/Cirae imper- via plurima", (Neniarum, Liber Primus, II. Nenia, 29-36.) in Marullus 2012: 316.

²⁷ Indeed, Italian Humanists were familiar with the Ottoman expansion throughout Europe, which is proven by the works of Theodore Spandounes and Andrea Cambini. For more information see Masi 2005. Both works were published after Marullus' death, which, however, does not eliminate the possibility that he was aware of the Ottoman battles in the eastern part of Europe.

leave for Skitia, but that he uninterruptedly remained in Naples in the circle of his colleagues and friends from Accademia Pontiniana even though we cannot exclude the possibility of his participation in some of the wars of the second half of the 15th century in Italy. Genuine grief with which he described the fall of Constantinople, where he had never been, as well as vividly depicted remote and hostile eastern lands convey Marullus' desire to compose an impressive piece.

5. Homo Costantinopolitanus or homo cosmopolitanus

Homo adriaticus or homo mediterraneus

Since the 8th century BC the Italian Mezzogiorno was marked by a strong Greek influence, which gradually lost in its intensity with the decline of the Western Roman Empire. Greek culture was reintroduced during Justinian's reconquest, in the middle of the 6th century, but despite previous circumstances, the dissemination of the Greek language was fairly slow (Setton 1956: 3). In fact, it was not until the 15th century that the Greek heritage began to flourish in Renaissance Italy, thanks primarily to Greek refugees. On their arrival in Italy, many Greeks became most prominent intellectuals of the time, such as Constantine Lascaris, Demetrios Chalkokondyles, John Argyropoulos, Michael Apostolius, Theodorus Gaza and many others. They should be credited with a strong development of the Renaissance spirit, in terms of acquainting Italy and Europe with another, older culture of the Antiquity, of which little was known until that time. Within this context, the name of George Gemistus Plethon should be emphasised. Upon the prompting of this Byzantine philosopher, Cosimo de' Medici founded the famous Platonic Academy (1462-1523) in Florence, which was to become one of the symbols of the Florentine Renaissance. The Academy gathered outstanding figures, such as Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Angelo Ambrogini (Poliziano), Leon Battista Alberti and many others, including Bartolomeo Scala, Marullus' father-in-law. Considering that from 1489 on Marullus lived in Florence, where he married Alessandra Scala, it remains unclear why his name is not linked to the activities of the Platonic Academy²⁸, especially taking into account the Neoplatonic background²⁹ of his collection *Hymnes naturales*. His poetic work, fully immersed in Humanist poetics, vividly reflecting Ovid's *Tristia* and interwoven by love poems dedicated to the beloved Neaera, is always clearly and strongly detached from reality (Nichols 1997, cited in Haskell 1999: 111). However, nostalgia and sorrow caused by the fall of his Greek homeland and belief in its liberation, as well as Constantinople as a distinct identity marker, did not suffice to finally marginalise Marullus as an exclusively Greek poet in search of sympathy for the lost homeland. Margin-

²⁸ The reason might lie in his very bad relations with Poliziano.

²⁹ On Marullus' friendship with Pico e Ficino, and on the Neoplatonic reading of *Hymens naturales* see Alessandro Perosa 2000: 255.

alisation of this kind was not even possible because, according to Haskell, his development (Haskell 1997: 112) was not influenced by the Greek but by the Italian culture. In sum, Marullus writes in a highly pure Latin, not in Greek, and he finds his own way to use that as an advantage, i.e. to tell the story about “double exile”: from his homeland and from his language (Nichols 1997: 158), neither of which he could have been influenced by. It seems that Marullus did everything to present himself as “*homo Costantinopolitanus*”, contrary to the Humanist idea of “*homo cosmopolitanus*” (Haskell 1997: 122).

Humanism being almost completely a Mediterranean ‘product’, hence a Humanist poet is *homo mediterraneus per se*. This is understandable, since Humanist culture is embedded in the heritage (first Roman, and then Greek) of the classical times. Marullus’ poetry mentions over eighty geographical locations in the Mediterranean, either mythological or real, without including those on the Black Sea. Most of them are in the territory of the former Byzantine Empire and Italy, but he also mentions Spain, France and North African coast. He mentions the Adriatic Sea three times, and Adriatic locations seven times. Three geographical names (Dubrovnik, Epidaurus and Mount Srd) are referred to in *De laudibus Rhacusa*, the analysis of which will be separately presented, while the others are: Illyria, Venice, Brač and Budva. Apart from being mentioned in the praise of Dubrovnik, the Adriatic Sea also appears in *Ad Manilium Rhallum*³⁰ and in *Mercurio*³¹. It is worth mentioning that, except for his arrival and departure from Dubrovnik at an early age, Marullus never again navigated the Adriatic, which might account for the implicit nature of his images. His perception and representation of the Adriatic Sea, for example, ranges from the rough and navigation hostile³² as in *Ad Manilium Rhallum*, across stormy³³ in *Mercurio*, to neutral as in the praise of Dubrovnik. Notwithstanding the presence of Adriatic geographical locations in Marullus’ poetic work, he cannot be regarded as *homo adriaticus*. Apart from his Dubrovnik episode, he never lived on any of its shores, nor took part in any form of transadriatic communication. Although Marullus spent much of his life on the Neapolitan shore of the Tyrrhenian Sea, the sea theme does not play a significant role in his opus. There is no information whether he had any relations with the persons from the eastern coast of the Adriatic in the way his contemporaries did through intense cultural exchange. We know that Marullus was in contact with the members of Accademia Pontiniana, first and foremost with Giovanni Pontano, Jacopo Sannazaro, Zanobi Acciaiuoli and with Manilio Rallo, his senior compatriot from Peloponnese peninsula. He was also present in the Florentine Humanist circles of the day, yet his participation in

³⁰ “Nec vagus Adria/Secura patitur currere navitam/Pinu perpetua fide” (*Epigrammaton*, Liber tertius, XLVII *Ad Manilium Rhallum*; 2-4) in Marullus 2012: 140.

³¹ “Tu procellosa vagus hospes alno/Adria curris freta” (*Hymnes naturales*, II, VIII *Mercurio*; 42-43) in Marullus 2012: 227.

³² See Nichols 1997: 158.

³³ See Haskell 1997: 122.

the cultural contacts with the eastern coast of the Adriatic was rather passive. Similar inactivity may be ascribed to his role in the dissemination of the Greek culture in Italy, especially with regard to his use of the language, for Marullus was a Latin poet *par excellence*. Throughout his poetic art he sought to present himself as homecomer which he could not attain for he had no place to return to, making his nostalgia groundless. The poet's true homeland can only be Naples, not Morea or Constantinople, where he practically had never set foot in.

II

1. *De laudibus Rhacusae*

The 'praise of cities' is not easy to define in terms of genre. According to Andrea Pellizzari, it falls somewhere between rhetoric, literature and epigraphy (Pellizzari 2011), and it should be noted that it is a valuable source for current historiography, despite many scholarly efforts to come forward with its accurate genre status. The praises stem from ceremonial speeches (*genos epideikton*) of the ancient Greek rhetoric. Known as *laudatio*, they are present in the works of Latin authors, such as Ovid, Marcialus and Statius. In the late Antiquity and early Middle Ages classical rhetoric was a much-debated topic³⁴ whereupon Menander Rhetor set the frame of this written form. Thus, they were to contain information about the city's location, origin, undertakings and actions (Garcia Gavilan 2009: 82), and, according to a damaged Lombard manuscript from the eighth century, description of the city walls, fertile land plots, water resources and local customs (Romagnoli 2014: 61). Praises surviving from the early Middle Ages are those of the Italian cities, such as Milan, Rome, Verona and Aquileia, as well as of the English cities of London, Durham and York. As a most important Italian economic center of that period, Milan earned a notable place in both poetry and fiction, followed by Rome, greatly admired by medieval minds despite its sudden fall after the Gothic Wars.

Most of the praises of that period are strongly imbued with religious contents, providing biographies of bishops and saints, accounts of the transfer of the holy relics, and the construction of churches. It was not until the development of the communes that by the end of the eleventh century in Italy and Flanders, and later on in France, Spain and on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, the praises gained in popularity, tending to lean on the late classical models. Apart from their dedication to urban community, 15th-century praises also present clear political objectives, such as Leonardo Bruni's *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*, which celebrates the victory of Florence over Milan, or Pietro Candido Decembrio's *De laudibus Mediolanensium urbis panegyricus*, which describes Milan's superiority over Florence.

³⁴ Cf. Curtius 1998: 71-90.

The descendants of the Marullus and Tarchaniota families have left three praises of cities. The mentioned Giovanni Taragnota describes Naples in *Del sito, et lodi della città di Napoli*, while Marullus wrote a praise of Siena (*De laudibus Senae*) and the previously mentioned praise of Dubrovnik. In Marullus' days, the need to prove one's belonging to an urban community was less pronounced, and the praises tended to express a personal perception of a city, but always with clearly outlined, often political, objectives³⁵.

The purpose of *De laudibus Rhacuse*, written before 1490, is not to flatter the authorities of Dubrovnik, which, however, does not mean that it is devoid of any political elements. Although containing descriptions of the power relations between the Sublime Porte and Venice and the position of Naples, it seems that the praise is primarily concerned with Dubrovnik, which is described according to the mentioned pattern. As it was not written during his stay in Dubrovnik, nor immediately afterwards, and since it was not intended for Ragusan audience, this praise might be read exclusively as a description of the city. However, a meticulous analysis shows that Dubrovnik represents a mere setting for the poet's description of the current political moment in the eastern Mediterranean.

Similar to most praises, Marullus' description starts with a story about the origins of Dubrovnik. At the very beginning, he mentions its double origin, yet not its Epidaurian and Roman or double Roman origin, but Epidaurian and Sicilian. Strongly promoted by the Dubrovnik Church authorities throughout the Middle Ages, and thus generally accepted, it is not surprising that the myth of the Epidaurian origin of Dubrovnik was incorporated into this praise. Most likely due to its complexity, Marullus does not even touch upon the story about the Roman origin of the city, which was given a new interpretation at the turn from the Middle Ages to Renaissance (Kunčević 2015: 31). It is obvious that such constructions did not strike a responsive chord outside the narrow circles of Dubrovnik, the reason for which Marullus was not even informed about them by the members of his family who stayed in Dubrovnik as refugees. This praise presents the Sicilian origin, which is probably an allusion to the homonymic link with the Sicilian Ragusa. It is interesting to note that the first Ragusan historian, Ludovik Crijević Tuberon (1459-1527), mentioned in his work *De origine et incremento urbis Rhacuse* that according to some sources the name of the city derives from the Sicilian Ragusa³⁶, but it is difficult to conclude whether Tuberon really made reference to Marullus, even though the assumption about the Sicilian origin of that name is very scarcely represented.

Starting with a remark about Dubrovnik's shores being washed by the sea in the invocation, Marullus then embarks upon a description of his personal life experience in Dubrovnik. An indirect function of this description is to emphasise the author's Constantinopolitan identity, because Marullus repeatedly mentions

³⁵ Cf. Diversis 2004.

³⁶ "Nomen urbis quidam a Rhausa Siciliae oppido, eius insulae putantes coloniam, deducunt" (Rezar 2013: 100).

the hardship of the exile and the lamentations he composed. This could also be interpreted in the light of the growing Humanist individualism that exceeded the limits of communal collectivism in which it developed.

What follows is an authentic description of the city's appearance and location. The description itself contains virtually none of the features of the detailed medieval scrutiny, it is extremely concise and hermetic at some points. This difference can be interpreted as a shift in poetics, in that the medieval utilitarianism gave way to the *licentia poetica*. The author's parallel between Dubrovnik's wider geographical location and the mythological Scheria, the land of the Phaeacians, i.e. the last Odyssey's residence before return to Ithaca, is ill-founded. His intention was probably to assign to Dubrovnik's outskirts the characteristics of the Scheria in Homer's epic poem. The author then zooms in on the slopes of the Mount Srd, which protects the city from northern winds, and the nearby coast laced with bays and harbours. The description of the city starts with a realistic image of its double walls. He also mentions the steep cliffs streaming down into the abyss and up again towards the sky. The final part is dedicated to the city harbour. He admires its Cyclopean layout, noting that it is a source of Dubrovnik's prosperity, which suggests that the size and importance of Dubrovnik's merchant navy may have reached his ears. Marullus' description greatly departs from reality. In true fact, the city harbour often proved too small to host all the ships and passengers, and the vessels frequently had to seek anchorage off the coast of the island of Lokrum (Ničetić 1996: 158-159). According to the praise, Dubrovnik's wealth by far exceeds that of the antique cities of Syracuse and Corinth. Since Syracuse was one of the most important cities of the Magna Graecia, and by referring to it as mother (*Mater Syracusae*), the author most likely reiterates the statement about his Greek identity. The five stanzas of Marullus' description of the city make no explicit reference to any urban landmark or building inside the city walls, not even to those symbolising its secular or religious authorities (for example, the Cathedral or the Rector's Palace). This can all speak in favour of the conclusion that Marullus lived in Dubrovnik at a very early age, which might explain the arbitrary nature of his personal memories, yet on the other hand, the view of the bustling city harbour and especially of the imposing city walls may have left a deep impression on him as a child. With the development of Dubrovnik as a commune and the diminishing role of the city walls as defensive barrier, the stone walls tended to become a symbol of the demarcation between the urban and the rural, between untamed nature and man's ability to shape the landscape. It is highly likely that the city walls found their place in Marullus' praise thanks to their symbolic significance. Notwithstanding the laconic and selective approach, this description of the city can be included among the fairly authentic representations of Dubrovnik, at least among those in verse, for it certainly cannot compare with the praises written in prose, such as De Diversi's paradigmatic and programmatic work *Situs aedificiorum, politiae et laudabilium consuetudinum inclytiae civitatis Ragusii*. The remarkable linguistic perfection of Marullus' praise contributes to its harmony and unobtrusiveness, as if mirroring the *modus vivendi* of the Dubrovnik Republic itself.

This is even more noticeable at points where he depicts his own position in the contemporary political context. The author states that Dubrovnik brilliantly defends its ancient laws and the freedom of ancestors, balancing between the Serenissima and the Sublime Porte, to draw attention to a completely different situation in Naples. In all likelihood, he refers to the so-called Conspiracy of the Barons (*Congiura dei Baroni*) in 1485, which considerably jeopardised the reign of Ferdinand I of Naples, known as Ferrante³⁷. Marullus' acquaintance with the ringleaders of the conspiracy, Antonello Petrucci and Antonello Sanseverino, spurred him to flee for Florence soon after the conspiracy's frustration. His stay in Florence was confirmed in 1489, adding a reminiscent tone of his days in Naples to this praise. The political situation on the Apennine peninsula at the close of the 15th century was marked by extreme turbulence. It all started with the so-called First Italian War in 1494 and continued intermittently until 1559. For Marullus, this First Italian War proved of particular importance, as the French emperor Charles VIII intended to conquer Naples, expel the Aragons and finally occupy Istanbul. Since Marullus was personally affected by the turmoil in Naples, it seems that these very events inspired his praise. Dubrovnik acts as a mere backdrop for what follows after its description: it represents a counterpoint to Naples. In our opinion, Marullus dedicated three substantial stanzas to Naples, which immediately precede the grand finale of the praise (Marullus 2012: 80):

Heu, quae suetum nec patitur iugum
 Nec, si carendum sit, ferat otium,
 Incerta votorum suisque
 Exitio totiens futura!
 Nam quae remotis usque adeo iacet
 Gens ulla terris, quod mare tam procul
 Ignotum acerbis Appulorum
 Exiliis Calabrumque cladi?
 Non his beati quaeritur artibus
 Quies honesti, non bona strenuae
 Virtutis et frugi parata
 Regna domi populique pace³⁸!

Naples cannot bear peace; by ignoring its own ambitions, it brings ruin upon its own people, and is therefore unable to attain moral virtue. This is the key difference in relation to Dubrovnik, which leads us to the real object of the poet's admiration: *libertatem avorum*. By abandoning medieval con-

³⁷ It was a conspiracy organised by Campanian noblemen, among whom were Antonello Petrucci and Antonello Sanseverino, in order to reclaim the Anjouian estates and rise against the Aragon centralisation of power in Naples. The conspirators were supported by the Papal States and Venice, but King Ferrante, assisted by his allies Milan and Florence, crushed the conspiracy and banished its ringleaders.

³⁸ *Epigrammaton, Liber quartus, XVII De laudibus Rhacusae;* 45-56.

cept of freedom, seen as a possibility of accepting or refusing God's project, in the Renaissance political thought freedom represents a possibility for man to master his own destiny. Freedom is seen as one of the perfect consequences of man's actions. A famous work by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola *Oratio de hominis dignitate* follows that thread. Being a close friend of Pico della Mirandola³⁹, Marullus was certainly aware of the new concept of freedom that his "fictional" homeland could not enjoy, and neither could Naples, according to the author. Notwithstanding its great cultural flourishing under the rule of the Aragonese, Marullus condemned Naples as a city without freedom due to the fact that he himself belonged to the defeated pro-Anjouian party. Although it might sound like a paradox, he obviously believed that the freedom of Naples laid in an action aimed at the restoration of the ancient Anjouian reign in response to the tax reform and Ferrante's attempt to undermine feudalism. Or, on the other hand, he might have deemed that it was a way of stopping the conflicts and establishing peace (*pace*), since he regarded it as one of the main features of freedom. In Marullus' view, it was Dubrovnik that brought to perfection the myth of enjoying freedom since the city's foundation (Kunčević 2015: 80) and served as an example of a Renaissance community that used its own forces to create and safeguard peace. In the political context of that time, marked by the swift Ottoman progress towards the centre of Europe, by Venetian and Genoese actions on the Levant, by turmoil on the Apennine peninsula, Marullus certainly could not find a better example than the flourishing Dubrovnik Republic, best epitomised in the closing verse of his praise (Marullus 2012: 80):

Sed haec silenti non patiens amor,
Tu vero coeptis artibus, optima,
Rem auge decusque et nationum,
Ut merita es, caput usque vive⁴⁰.

A tiny State at the very edge of the Catholic Europe should therefore be a leader in safeguarding and establishing peace, however, the author was not completely aware of the fact to which extent the prosperity of Dubrovnik was backed by the stability and power of the Ottoman Empire, against which Marullus' opus mostly speaks. It may come as odd, though highly possible, that the author did not have access to any direct or up-to-date information about Dubrovnik during his stay in Naples and Florence, which is evident not only in the physical description of the city, but also in the poor knowledge of Dubrovnik's political situation. Apart from minor quibbles and the fact that the praise was to serve another purpose, this Marullus' work offers a reduced image of Dubrovnik, that of the Italian Humanists, far from the cultural and trade connections in the Adriatic. Marullus' example shows that the ties between the two coasts of the Adriatic.

³⁹ For more details see Perosa 2000: 254.

⁴⁰ *Epigrammaton, Liber quartus, XVII De laudibus Rhacusae; 57-60.*

atic in the period of Humanism and Renaissance should be neither questioned nor overly idealised, nor taken for granted nor attributed too much importance without any credit.

Conclusion

Supporting the assumption of M.J. McGann, who put into question the place and year of Michael Marullus Tarchaniota's birth (and remained quite isolated in this belief), we have offered and analysed several groups of sources which prove, quite convincingly, that Marullus was not born in 1453 in Constantinople, but in the Despotate of Morea in the year of its fall under the Ottoman rule (1461). The turmoil that the Morea witnessed at the time, the multiple ties between many semi-noble families and the Palaeologus family as a common link, as well as the pro-Western orientation of despot Thomas Palaeologus, triggered a wave of refugees towards the Apennine Peninsula, where among the Italian intellectuals they propagated the knowledge about classical Greek writers. En route to Naples, Marullus' family almost certainly spent some time in Dubrovnik, but due to the scanty and vaguely dated sources, the scholars have speculated on the date and duration of that sojourn. They are additionally puzzled by the very verses of Marullus' praise of Dubrovnik and the assumption about the pronounced autobiographic character of his poetry, which needs to be rejected. By analysing historical sources and the poet's opus, we have reached quite convincing answers to the questions concerning Marullus' Ragusan episode, which was so often misinterpreted.

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Abstract

This paper deals with Michael Marullus Tarchaniota's early childhood years marked by exile from the recently fallen Despotate of Morea, a short and unconfirmed stay in Dubrovnik and, finally, by his arrival in Naples. A vast array of heterogeneous sources have been sifted in order to elucidate Marullus' life before his arrival in Naples, i.e. in the turbulent period marked with Ottoman advance into the heart of Europe. The second part of this paper deals with Marullus' *De laudibus Rhacuseae*, which speaks more about the broader political context than about Dubrovnik itself since inspired by the turmoil that affected entire Apennine peninsula of that time.

Keywords: Michele Marullo Tarcaniota, Dubrovnik (Ragusa), *De laudibus Rhacuseae*, 15th Century, Greek scholars in the Renaissance.