

From Croatian into Latin in 1510:
Marko Marulić, Regum Delmاتيę atque
Croatiei gesta

Neven Jovanović

University of Zagreb,

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

neven.jovanovic@ffzg.hr

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1 Croatia in the Middle Ages

Croatia is a small country across the Adriatic from Italy. It comprises a part of what was once the Roman province of Dalmatia, and a part of what was Pannonia. In late antiquity these parts were the area

of contact between the Eastern and the Western Roman Empire. In the Middle Ages, the Romans (living in Latin cities on the coast) met the Slavs there. It was the sphere of influence of both the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Church. From the 10th until the 12th century an independent Croatian kingdom had existed there. Its rulers embraced Roman Catholicism and were recognized by the Pope. The kingdom was later forced into a union with Hungary, and eventually it was divided among Venice, the Habsburgs, and the Ottoman empire. Only the city state of Dubrovnik, or Ragusa, achieved and retained relative autonomy.

2 Gesta regum Sclavorum

Medieval literature of the region was written in three languages: Latin, Old Church Slavonic (it was a “common Slavic” liturgical language created for the Slavs on early Byzantine models, and written in its own Glagolitic script), and, finally, the Croatian vernacular. Texts in Old Church Slavonic and the vernacular were for the most part translated from Latin, Greek, sometimes Italian. The predominant narrative prose genres were religious, such as hagiography, exempla, vision literature.

What survives of Croatian medieval historical prose narrative is not much. There are five texts in all. One of them stands apart, both by its scope and its language, or languages. It is the anonymous

Gesta regum Sclavorum (known also as the Annals of the priest of Doclea). While other histories centre on a particular city or a particular event, the Gesta regum Sclavorum are a genealogy of rulers of the Croatian kingdom.

The GRS tell who were the princes and kings of the Slavs (whom they call Goths) as they invaded Dalmatia and Pannonia “during the lifetime of St Bernard”. This people later accepted Christianity and formed a state under the auspices of the Pope. Furthermore, the GRS show which rulers were good and which ones bad, and what they did until the eleventh century. Then, somewhere around the time of the Domesday Book, the GRS report that the Croats who did not want to go on a Crusade murdered their last king, Zvonimir. Before his death the king cursed his people, and the curse brought about the loss of Croatian independence.

The Gesta regum Sclavorum survives both in Latin and Croatian version (the Croatian one is called Croatian Chronicle). The two are not identical: the Gesta regum sclavorum are longer, but the Croatian Chronicle covers a more extended historical period (and includes the legend of the murder and the curse of the last Croatian king).

The authorship and date of the text have long been the subject of controversy. The Gesta regum Sclavorum could have been written by a churchman -- residing in Split or Bar or both -- anytime between

the twelfth and fourteenth century, that is between the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth or Chrétien de Troyes, and the time of Dante, Petrarch, or Chaucer. The Croatian Chronicle could have been written before or after the *Gesta regum Sclavorum*, it could have been composed in Croatian from the start or translated from Latin, and so on.

However, what we know for sure is that the Croatian Chronicle was discovered in the year 1500 in a region near the Dalmatian city of Split, and that in 1510 the chronicle was translated into Latin under the title *Regum Delmاتيę atque Croatię gesta*. The translator was a local Renaissance humanist, Marko Marulić or Marcus Marulus.

3 Marulić

From the year 1420 most Dalmatian cities -- Šibenik, Zadar, Trogir, Split, Hvar, Kotor -- were under the rule of Venice. The *Stato da Mar* brought to the cities protection from local warlords as well as a market demand for goods “de partibus Sclavoniae”.

Later on, with the steady encroachment of Ottoman Turk power, Dalmatia will turn into a war zone racked by poverty and plague; but for a time the prospering economy enabled the cities to live the good life. Among other things, the cities were able to offer their sons humanist education, hiring fine teachers, often Italian. The results were considerable: Croatian Humanism began already in

the first decades of the 15th century. Marulić represents the full development of this humanism, when Croatian authors write in various prose and poetic genres, on a wide range of themes, in elegant Latin, Croatian, and Italian.

Born in Split in 1450, Marulić was a descendant of an elite family, the eldest child of a father with strong humanist interests of his own. The earliest text by Marulić that we can date was written in 1464, when he was fourteen years old; it was a Latin epitaph for a married couple killed by the Turks.

As he set to work translating the *Regum gesta* in 1510, the sixty years old Marulić had already composed the *Judita*, a retelling of a biblical story in six cantos and the first epic in Croatian. This work brought Marulić the title of the founding father of Croatian literature. Moreover, in 1510 Marulić already had behind him one of his Latin successes, the *De institutione bene uiuendi per exempla sanctorum*. It was first published in Venice in 1507, to be republished in at least 15 Latin editions during the 15th and 16th centuries. It was also translated, with numerous reprints, into Italian, German, Portuguese, French, Czech. Marulić's other main Latin work, the *Euangelistarium*, in 1510 awaited publication. This book of practical Christian ethics will be printed in Venice in 1516, to go through 15 Latin editions and to be translated into Italian, Spanish, Flemish, and French. (The *Euangelistarium* will have two important English readers - Henry

VIII, whose annotated copy survives, and Thomas More).

Marulić has had practice as a translator already before the *Regum Delmاتيę atque Croatiaę gesta*. In 1507-1508 he has translated into Croatian the *De Imitatione Christi* by Thomas a Kempis. And immediately after the *Regum gesta*, in 1511, he will compose a version of Petrarch's canzone *Vergine bella* in Latin elegiac verse. This translation will be a supplement to the *Euangelistarium*. And Marulić will provide a similar supplement to his ambitious, but unpublished Biblical epic *Dauideas* (written during 1510-1517). It will be a Latin hexameter translation of the Canto I from Dante's *Inferno*.

4 *Regum Delmاتيę atque Croatiaę gesta*

A foreword to the RDCG is a short letter addressed to Marulić's friend and fellow citizen Dmine Papalić (Dominicus Papalis) -- it was he who discovered the manuscript with the Croatian text and persuaded Marulić to translate it. The letter gives two reasons for the undertaking:

Res certe digna relatu et quam non solum nostrae uernaculae
linguae gnari, sed etiam Latinae, intelligant. Ex hac enim
historia et boni exemplum petere poterunt quod imitentur,
et mali per quod sese corrigant.

For Marulić, literature is primarily didactic. The *Regum gesta* have a twofold didactic purpose -- they intend to be informative (*quam*

intelligent) and also moralistic (*exemplum petere*). But for the text to be successful as information and moralizing, translators' intervention was necessary. Marulić acknowledges this in a very short afterword to *Regum gesta*:

Hucusque historiam uernaculo gentis nostrae sermone compositam
uidi et quam potui diligenter fideliterque in Latinum transposui,
nihil de sententia dimittens, licet aliqua de uerbis, quae
superflua uidebantur, mutilans ne lectori oneri essent.

The translator ensures credibility here by admitting two things: that he translated as much text as possible, and that he changed it. Marulić stresses the cutting changes (indeed, the extent of this intervention is visible at once as we scroll down the parallel texts of *Croatian Chronicle* and *Regum gesta*). But, as we will see, the range of translation tactics in the *Regum gesta* is broader. Marulić consistently raises the cultural and stylistic levels of the text. By doing so, he brings it closer to Renaissance humanist historiography.

This invites a larger question. It is the one that, I believe, makes research in Latin translation challenging. When a writer such as Marulić decided to transform a medieval chronicle into a piece of Renaissance humanist history, what were the choices he had to make? What stylistic and grammatical features did he perceive as characteristic of an elegant historical narrative in Latin?

To find the answer in this case I will compare the Croatian Chronicle and Marulić's *Regum Delmاتيę atque Croاتيę gesta*. The comparison will also include the third point of the triangle, the *Gesta regum Sclavorum* -- the longer, Latin version which for the first 28 chapters reads mostly as a literal translation of the Croatian version (or vice versa). These three texts provide an opportunity to watch medieval Latin get translated into medieval Croatian, and from there into an authorial, writerly Renaissance Latin.

5 A sample sentence

Now let us go through the cola et commata of the first sentence from the *Gesta regum Sclavorum* (here GRS), the Croatian Chronicle (CC) and the *Regum Delmاتيę atque Croاتيę gesta* (RDCG). The Croatian text is accompanied by a word-for-word English translation. I will follow Peter Newmark's categorization of translator's techniques.¹

[3.1] GRS *Regnante in urbe Constantinopolitana*

imperatore Anastasio,

CC *Kraljujući cesar u gradi basiliji cesarstva,*

Ruling the king in the city Basilia of the kingdom

RDCG *Iustiniano partibus Orientis imperante*

¹Newmark, P. (1988), *A Textbook of Translation*, Prentice-Hall International, New York.

At the beginning we find four kinds of changes. [1.] *Transposition*, a change of syntax. Croatian present participle “kraljujući” is transposed into Latin ablative absolute, and Croatian prepositional phrase “u gradi basiliji cesarstva” is transposed into a dative object. Accordingly, the perspective has shifted from where the emperor rules to the region over which he rules. [2.] The word order has been *recast*. That means that the position of participle and noun is inverted -- compare it to the GRS version -- even though the syntactic unit still encloses its supplements. The [3.] change is *explanation and clarification*. Marulić supplies the name of the emperor, trying to make sense of a jumble that we read instead of the name of Constantinople. [4.] Marulić *adapts* the wording for a cultured readership: his readers would know who Justinian is and where he rules. And while the phrase “partibus Orientis” may sound vague, such turn of phrase has a classical pedigree, going back at least to Cicero.² It can be found numerous times in authors of Christian Latin (including historians such as Eusebius of Caesarea) and late antiquity. -- We can also consider this change as translator’s implicitation, leaving out information which is readily inferred from the context.

The next remark was omitted from the Croatian Chronicle and the *Regum gesta*:

²Cf. Cic. fam. 12, 5, 3: nunc autem opto ut ab istis Orientis partibus virtutis tuae lumen eluceat.

[3.2] GRS qui se et alios multos Eutychna haeresi maculaverat,

CC *om.*

RDCG *om.*

[3.3] GRS Romae vero praesidente Gelasio papa [secundo]

CC *om. (cf. [3.6])*

RDCG anno Christianae salutis DXXXVIII,

In [3.3] Marulić reorders the sequence of units; this would be *recasting* again. Marulić gives a precise date immediately, unlike Croatian Chronicle, which has first the *relative* dating by bishops and Benedict. Note that for the date Marulić uses an *accepted translation*: the phrase anno Christianae salutis is an equivalent to the “year of Our Lord”. Marulić did not use the more common (but less elegant) “anno Domini” that we moderns would perhaps expect. And you have noticed that Marulić *corrected* the date as well.

[3.4] GRS eo tempore praeclaruerunt multa sanctitate in Italia
Germanus Capuanus episcopus

et Sabinus Canusinae sedis episcopus

CC u vrime u ko se bihu prosvitlili blaženi muži

German biskup pristolja kapitulskoga

i pristolja Kanužije Sabin biskup,

in the time when there shone blessed men

German the bishop of the see of Kapitul

and of the see of Kanužija Sabinus the bishop

RDCG quo tempore Germanus et Sabinus episcopi erant,
uitae sanctitate nobiles,

[3.5] GRS atque venerabilis vir Benedictus apud Cassinum montem;
cc i tolikoje počtovani i blaženi muž Benedik
blizu gore Cicilijanske pribivaše,
*and the so much honored and blessed man Benedict
near the mountain of Cicilija (!) was dwelling*

RDCG et Benedictus abbas Montis Cassini,

In [3.4] and [3.5] Marulić made five kinds of transformations:

- [1] *grammatical transposition*: “in the time when” becomes quo tempore;
- [2] *reduction* of epithets, verbs and clauses. Both techniques ensure
- [3] greater *concision*. We notice also two recurrent tactical moves:
- [4] *adaptation* for the educated readers and [5] *correction* of geographical mistakes.

[3.6] GRS om.

cc na lit gospodnjih trista i pedeset i sedam,
on the years of the Lord three hundred and fifty and seven

RDCG cf. [3.3]

[3.7] GRS exiit quoque gens a septentrionali plaga,
cc i tada izide niki puk i mnoštvo ljudi od istoka,
*and then there came out a people and a multitude of men from the
east*

RDCG om.

In passages [3.7-11] two of Marulić's techniques are prominent:

[1] *omission*: one motif is transferred to the next sentence, the three fabular brothers are dropped altogether. And [2] another *recasting* on the narrative level.

[3.8] GRS quae Gothi nominabantur, gens ferox et indomita,
CC ki se zovihu Goti,
ljudi tvrđi i golemo ljuti prez zakona kako divji;
who were called Goths,
people hard and much vicious lawless as wildmen

RDCG om. (*moved to the next sentence in text*)

[3.9] GRS cui erant tres fratres principes, filii regis Senudslavi.
CC kim ljudem bihu gospoda tri bratinci,
ki bihu sinove kralja Sviholada,
to which people were the lords three brothers,
who were sons of the king Sviholad

RDCG om.

[3.10] GRS Quorum nomina sunt haec:
primus Brus, secundus Totila, tertius vero Ostroyllus.
CC kim bratincem biše ime:

prvomu Bris, drugomu Totila, tretomu Stroil.
to which brothers was the name:
to the first Bris, to the second Totila, to the third Stroil.

RDCG om.

[3.11] GRS Itaque Brus qui maior caeteris erat,

CC Bris, koji biše najstariji, *Bris, who was the eldest*

RDCG om. (cf. [3.13])

[3.12] GRS defuncto patre,

CC umarši otac njih,

having died the father of theirs

RDCG Sfiolado rege uita defuncto

In [3.12] we meet again some already familiar transformations:

[1] *Cohesion and economy* via the ablative absolute. [2] *Recasting*:

the name is again placed at the beginning of the sentence. There

is also [3] *Classicizing collocation*: uita defuncto is found in

Vergil, Ovid, Aulus Gellius, while the Christian writers use just

defunctus more often than *uita defunctus*.

[3.13] GRS Brus sedit in solio eius,

CC sede na pristolje i misto očevo,

sat on the throne and in the place of his father

RDCG Brissus inter liberos eius natu maior successit in regno.

In [3.13] there is more [1] *Grammatical recasting*. Marulić uses

also [2] *Equivalence*, letting a technical term “successit in regno”

replace Croatian descriptive metonymy. There are [3] *Reduction* and

[4] *Expansion*, but *Natu maior* is expanded by *inter liberos eius*

and not by *ceteris*. Such addition is classicizing, and it makes explicit

what was only implicit in Croatian.

6 Some translation tactics

7 Conclusion

The differences between two medieval versions and Marulić's translation reveal that Marulić tried to make the *Gesta regum Sclavorum* both a better read and a more convincing story for the educated international public; the *Regum Delmاتيę atque Croاتيę gesta* are a distinctly *cultural* translation.³

To achieve this cultural shift, Marulić found classicizing equivalents for certain military, legal, and religious terms; by elegant variation he avoided repetition and by finding anaphoric pairs he embellished the ends of sentences. The condensed syntax delivered more information at a faster pace. The narrative was streamlined and made more coherent: Marulić left out the boring bits and introduced motives for the characters' actions.

Behind the change of style in the RDCG it is tempting to imagine a certain political agenda. As he made Croatian warlords and kings more like rulers out of Livy and Sallust, as he stressed continuity between the Romans and the Croats, Marulić engaged with the European tradition according to which language reflects the speaker's moral,

³In the sense of Peter Burke; see Burke, Peter & Hsia, R. Po-chia: *Cultural translation in early modern Europe*, Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press (2007).

character, and level of civilization. The very same story which revealed his people as barbarians and murderers of their own king conveyed discreetly, through Marulić's humanist Latin, an impression of Croatian and Dalmatian deep cultural roots.