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Croatian Renaissance Philosophy

Abstract

Turbulent political situation and no continuity of organized philosophical activity on the territory of the present-day Croatia in the Renaissance period allow only for an overview of individual philosophers who originated from that territory, or conducted their philosophical activities there, between the 15th and the 17th century. A few of these thinkers were influenced by the cultures of Central Europe, but most came from the coastal area which belonged to the Italian cultural and political sphere, especially that of the Republic of Venice. Most philosophers in this entry received their education and pursued their careers abroad, in cities of Italy and other European centres. Biographies, achievements and main works of these thinkers are grouped into four topographic sections: (1) the continental area, (2) the northern coastal area, (3) central Dalmatia and (4) south Dalmatia, in particularly the Republic of Dubrovnik. Within each section, philosophers are listed in chronological order. Philosophers of wider renown are mentioned briefly, mainly to situate them in this context and to refer the reader to the corresponding biographical essays.

Biographies, achievements and main works of Croatian Renaissance philosophers

(1) THE CONTINENTAL AREA

Apart from →**Giulio Camillo Delminio**, who originates from Tomislavgrad (Lat. Delminium) in present-day Bosnia, and →**Pavao Skalić**, who was born in Zagreb, the continental area saw few philosophers in the Renaissance. One person of note was **Andrija Dudić** (Andreas Dudith; Buda, 1533 – Wrocław, 1589), whose father comes from Orhehovica near Čakovec. He was educated in Buda, Wrocław, Brussels and Paris, and he travelled widely as a Church diplomat. Dudić was appointed bishop of Knin in 1562 and of Pecs in 1563, the position which he held until his conversion to Protestantism in 1567. After a diplomatic career, he retired to Wrocław in 1579, where he composed most of his works and maintained cordial correspondence with notable anti-trinitarians. He wrote on astronomy (*De cometarum significatione commentariolus*, 1579), history, rhetoric and politics.

(2) NORTHERN COASTAL AREA

Matija Vlačić Ilirik (Matthias Flacius Illyricus; Labin, 1520 – Frankfurt, 1575) is one of the most influential Protestant theologians of the 16th century. After education in Venice, Basel and

Tübingen, he went to Wittenberg, where he received the title of Magister of Liberal Arts. There he befriended →**Philipp Melanchthon**, but they soon came into conflict. Melanchthon hoped for a reconciliation with the Catholic Church, whereas Vlačić was resolutely against it. In 1549 Vlačić moved to Magdenburg, where he started working on his 13-volume *Centuriae Magdeburgenses*, a detailed church history. Vlačić's adamant positions contributed to the preservation of Protestantism in its original form. Vlačić taught at the University of Jena from 1557 to 1561, but was expelled for theological conflicts with Melanchthon. Having moved to Regensburg, he argued for a foundation of a Protestant university that would cover Austria, Czechia and the South Slavic lands. There he wrote a catechism in the Croatian language (1566) and started his most important work, *Clavis scripturae sacrae seu de sermone sacrarum litterarum*, which he continued composing in Antwerp and Frankfurt. Vlačić is considered one of the founders of the interpretative and philosophical method known as "hermeneutics". Of special note is Vlačić's work *De materiis metisque scientiarum, et erroribus philosophiae, in rebus divinis* (1563), in which he explains his understanding of the relation between theology, philosophy, and the liberal arts. He wrote more than 200 works in Latin and German, most of which remain unpublished in various German libraries.

The most original and influential Renaissance philosopher of Croatian origin is →**Frane Petrić** (Patrizi/Patricius/Patritius; Cres, 1528 – Rome, 1597). He left his native island of Cres at the age of 9, travelled across the Mediterranean, spent time in Ingolstadt, Venice, Padua, Ferrara before settling in Rome. Towards the end of his life, he was eager to enter the Society of St. Jerome in Rome, a Croatian confraternity, which required a proof of Croatian origin and probably some knowledge of Croatian vernacular to admit new members.

Marko Antun de Dominis (Rab, 1560 – Rome, 1624) received his early education at Rab, studied in the Croatian College in Loreto and in Padua. He taught mathematics, rhetoric and philosophy in Brescia from 1592 to 1595. In 1597 he was appointed bishop of Senj and in 1602 he became bishop of Split. Having renounced his clerical duty in 1616, he went to England, where he was awarded a doctorate in theology in Cambridge and elected the Dean of Windsor in 1618. In England he published his main work, *De republica ecclesiastica* (1617 – 1622) and several anti-Catholic treatises. In 1622 he returned to Rome, where he received formal absolution under Pope Gregory XV. However, Pope Urban VIII ordered the trial of de Dominis to be reopened, followed by his imprisonment. De Dominis was declared guilty *post mortem*, his body, image and books being publicly burned in Rome in 1624. As a theologian, he was closer to Protestantism than Catholicism. As a philosopher, he adhered to the scholastic tradition, but also used mathematical and experimental methods in his research. He published two treatises on natural philosophy, *De radiis visus et lucis in vitris, perspectivis et iride* (1611), and *Euripus seu de fluxu et refluxu maris sententia* (1624).

Matija Frkić (Matthaeus Ferchius; Krk, 1583 – Padua, 1669) studied in Bergamo, Padua and Rome, where he obtained a doctorate in theology. He taught philosophy and theology in Padua, while holding high offices in the Franciscan order in Krk. His main work is *Vestigationes peripateticae de quibusdam philosophicis ad mentem Aristotelis* (1639), in which he interpreted Aristotle as a thinker who anticipated some central Christian doctrines, such as *creatio ex nihilo*. He responded to criticisms of his work in *Defensio Vestigationum* (1646). Frkić also published a

treatise on the life and philosophy of Duns Scotus (*Discussiones Scoticae*, 1638) and an essay on Anaxagoras (*De caelesti substantia et eius ortu ac motu in sententia Anaxagorae*, 1646).

Although of Italian origin, **Antonio Zara** (Aquileia, 1574 – Pićan, 1621) served from 1601 to his death in 1621 as the bishop of the ancient diocese of Pićan (Latin *Petina*, Italian *Pedena*) in Istria. While in Pićan, Zara wrote his encyclopedic work *Anatomia ingeniorum et scientiarum* (1615), in which he connects all forms of talent and knowledge, from magic arts to seven liberal arts, with one of the three cognitive faculties (imagination, intellect, and memory) and presents them systematically in four large “sections” as “members” under a single “head”. The work is followed by a very detailed alphabetical index of subjects.

(3) CENTRAL DALMATIA

Although known mostly for his erudite poetry, →**Marko Marulić** (Marcus Marulus Spalatensis; Split, 1450 – Split, 1524) wrote several books that discuss the fundamentals of Christian ethics and extol Christian virtues, notably *Evangelistarium* (1500), *De institutione bene beateque vivendi* (1506) and *Quinquaginta parabolae* (1510).

Federik Grisogono (Grisogonus, Chrysogonus, Chrisogonus; Zadar, 1472 – Zadar, 1538) studied law, philosophy and medicine in Padua. In 1507 he obtained his doctorate in philosophy and medicine and was appointed professor of astrology and mathematics in Padua. In 1509, Grisogono returned to Zadar, where he worked as a physician. However, we have evidence of an incident caused by his erroneous astrological prophecies in Venice in 1512. To avoid conviction, he returned to Zadar where he died in early 1538. Two of his books were published in his lifetime. *Speculum astronomicum terminans intellectum humanum in omni scientia* (1507) deals with mathematics and its various sub-disciplines: arithmetic, astrology/astronomy, geometry and music. The other work is *De modo collegiandi, prognosticandi et curandi febres* (1528), a manual of astrological medicine. This work contained two interesting appendices. In the first appendix (*De felicitate et humana perfectione*), Grisogono claims that astrology, of all human disciplines, contributes most to human flourishing. The second appendix (*De fluxu et refluxu maris*), with Grisogono’s explanation of tides, is his most important contribution to the history of science.

Ivan Polikarp Severitan (Joannes Barbula Pompilius, J. Polycarpus Severitanus; Šibenik, 1472 – ? c.1526) received his early education in Rome, then studied philosophy and theology in Ferrara and Bologna. He was appointed to various offices in the Dominican order in Šibenik, Perugia, Ancona and Rome. He was a humanist polymath who wrote poetry, commentaries on classical authors, local histories, texts on grammar, metric, geology, logic and theology. He published one work of political and moral philosophy, *Monoregia ex qua coniiicitur totius humanae vitae modus libri quattuor* (1522).

Fran Trankvil Andreis (Andronicus Tranquillus Parthenius; Trogir, 1490 – Trogir, 1571) was a diplomat, writer, poet and philosopher. He was educated in Trogir, Dubrovnik, Vienna, Padua and several other Italian cities. He first taught rhetoric in Leipzig and then embarked on a diplomatic career, serving in Vienna and Istanbul. After a failed diplomatic mission to the Turkish Sultan, he withdrew to Poland and eventually returned to Trogir in 1550. He published many works in fine Latin style imbued with many references to contemporary events. His main

philosophical works are *Dialogus Sylla* (1527), a fictional dialogue between Caesar and Sulla, on the best form of government and a praise of private life, and *Dialogus philosophandumne sit* (1545) in which he defends philosophical lifestyle as a way to increase cognitive capacities and attain happiness.

Faust Vrančić (Verantius, Verancius, Veranzio; Šibenik, 1551? – Venice, 1617) studied in Padua and served from 1581 to 1594 as a secretary to king Rudolph II in Prague, where he was in contact with Kepler and Brahe. In 1594 he went back to Šibenik and later moved to Italy. In 1598 he acted as a bishop of Chand in Hungary, and later became a Barnabite monk in Rome. Vrančić is most famous for his book on mechanical inventions, *Machinae novae* (1595?). His *Dictionarium quinque nobilissimarum Europae linguarum* from 1595 was a dictionary of five main European languages, expanded with two other languages in the second edition of 1605. As a philosopher, he published two texts: *Logica suis ipsius instrumentis formata* (1608), reprinted with significant changes as *Logica nova suis ipsius instrumentis formata et recognita* in 1616 in which Vrančić argues both against Aristotle (refuting metaphysics) and the humanist logic of Petrus Ramus. His other philosophical text is *Ethica Christiana* from 1610, reprinted in 1616.

(4) SOUTH DALMATIA

The earliest philosopher from South Dalmatia who deserves a mention is →**Nicholas of Modruš** (Nikola Modruški, Nicholas of Modrussiensis/Machinensis), born in c. 1427 in Kotor, present-day Montenegro.

Juraj Dragišić (Georgius Benignus; Srebrenica, 1445 – Barletta, 1520) was a philosopher and theologian. He received his initial education in the Bosnian town of Srebrenica, and from 1464 to 1469 he studied theology in Ferrara. While staying in Rome he was accepted in the intellectual circle gathered around Cardinal Bessarion. He taught philosophy in Urbino, Pisa and Florence. He was Bishop of Cagli and Archbishop of Nazareth based in Barletta. In 1496 he was living in Dubrovnik. In the trial against the Dominican →**Girolamo Savonarola** he took the side of the defendant with the text *Profeticae solutiones* (1497). In 1512 he wrote *Defensio praestantissimi viri Ioannis Reuchlin* and a treatise on logic *Artis dialecticae praecepta vetera et nova* (1520). His most significant work is *De natura caelestium spirituum quos angelos vocamus* (1499).

Klement Ranjina (Clemens Araneus; Dubrovnik, 1482 – Dubrovnik, 1559) was educated in Dubrovnik and studied theology in Padua, Perugia and Naples. After returning to Dubrovnik, he joined the Dominican order. He carried out diplomatic missions for the Pope Paul III, and the Habsburgs. Ranjina is the author of several theological treaties, such as *Quodlibet declamatorium* (1541), *Expositio super epistolam Pauli ad Romanos* (1547).

Antun Medo (Antonius Medus Calossius; Dubrovnik, 1530 – Dubrovnik, 1600?) was born to a family of Greek immigrants in Dubrovnik, had no formal training in philosophy and earned a living as a merchant. He was an autodidact who enjoyed encouragement from his younger contemporary Juraj Dubrovčanin. Medo published commentaries on two books of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (*In librum duodecimum Metaphysicae Aristotelis expositio*, 1598; *In librum septimum Metaphysicae Aristotelis expositio*, 1599), both marked by a close reading of

the text, relative independence from other commentators, and reluctance to reconcile Plato and Aristotle. Medo also published a polemical treatise on Porphyry's *Isagoge* (*Quaedam animadversiones in Praedicabilia Porphyrii*, 1600), which he blames for many misunderstandings of Aristotle's philosophy.

In contrast with Medo, →**Nikola Vitov Gučetić** (Nicolaus Viti Gozzius; Dubrovnik, 1549 – Dubrovnik, 1610) was born to a distinguished patrician family, educated entirely in Dubrovnik but well-connected with leading lights in Italy. He was a member of four Academies (two in Dubrovnik and two in Perugia), and he was elected to the position of the Dodge of Dubrovnik seven times. There is no evidence of his interactions with the other two of his contemporary philosophers from Dubrovnik, Antun Medo and Juraj Dubrovčanin.

Juraj Dubrovčanin (Georgius Raguseus; Dubrovnik, 1550 – Padua, 1622) was educated in Venice and Padua, where he studied philosophy, mathematics, medicine and theology. He taught philosophy in Padua from 1601, competing against →**Cesare Cremonini**. He published *Peripateticae disputationes* (1613) in which he comments on 24 then controversial issues in Aristotle's philosophy, showing familiarity with a broad range of interpretative traditions and arguing against both Christianizing interpretations of Aristotle as well as blind adherence to his authority. An early treatise on the form of the elements (*Tractatus de formis elementorum*, 1605), written against Cremonini, was incorporated in the *Disputationes*. Dubrovčanin published a treatise on astrology and other forms of divination (*Epistolarum mathematicarum seu de divinatione libri duo*, 1623), in which he explains phenomena such as magnetism, healing properties of gems and plants, etc. with reference to effluences (*defluxus*) from the heavenly bodies. His unpublished texts include commentaries on the logic of Raymond Lull and on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, *Epistolae morales, dialecticae et mathematicae*.

Marin Getaldić (Marinus Ghetaldus; Dubrovnik, 1568 – Dubrovnik, 1626) was a mathematician, physicist and philosopher. He received his early education in Dubrovnik. In 1595 he travelled to London with →**Nikola Vitov Gučetić**. He also travelled in Germany, Belgium, Rome, Paris and Padua. Getaldić was interested in optical instruments and corresponded with Galileo Galilei. His first book was on physics (*Promotus Archimedis seu de variis corporum generibus gravitate et magnitudine comparatis*, 1601) and the last on mathematics (*De resolutione et compositione mathematica*, 1630). Getaldić's treatise on cosmology, *De sphaera mundi seu cosmographia* is preserved in a single manuscript.

Stjepan Gradić (Stepanus Gradus; Dubrovnik, 1613 – Rome, 1683) studied civil and canon law in Fermo and Bologna, where he obtained a degree in theology. He was a deputy archbishop of Dubrovnik and Dubrovnik's long-standing ambassador to Vatican. He wrote one unpublished treatise on philosophy (*Peripateticae philosophiae pronunciate disputationibus*, ms. c. 1634), in which he provides a comprehensive treatment of Aristotelian logic, physics and metaphysics. He corresponded extensively with illustrious men across Europe, among others with Honoré Fabri on the subject of probabilism and epistemology. Gradić left unpublished texts on astronomy (*Astronomia geometrica*), natural science (*De acceleratione motus naturalis*), scientific instruments (*De horologis et telescopis*), history and biography.

Heritage and rupture with the tradition

Following the standard classification, Croatian philosophers can be divided into three main groups: Aristotelians, Platonists, and Concordists. Those working solely or predominantly in the Aristotelian tradition are Matija Frkić, Juraj Dubrovčanin, Klement Ranjina, Antun Medo and Stjepan Gradić. Philosophers who embrace the Platonic tradition, often in open opposition to Aristotelianism, are Giulio Camillo Delminio and Frane Petrić. The Concordists, who combine or switch between different traditions, are Pavao Skalić, Federik Grisogono and Nikola Vitov Gučetić.

Some Croatian Renaissance philosophers were engaged in religious disputes of their times, mostly concerned with the rise and spread of Protestantism. Matija Vlačić Ilirik contributed greatly to Protestant doctrines, especially to Biblical exegesis. Dudić and De Dominis converted to Protestantism, whereas Juraj Dragišić, Nikola Vitov Gučetić and Faust Vrančić openly defended Catholicism. Pavao Skalić switched sides several times over.

Several Croatian philosophers of the Renaissance period tapped into the topics and ways of thinking characteristic of what came to be known as the Scientific Revolution, notably Antun de Dominis, Marin Getaldić, Stjepan Gradić, and Faust Vrančić. The tension between the old and the new ways of thinking is ostensibly felt in Grisogono's works on astrology.

Innovative and original aspects

Frane Petrić was one of the boldest thinkers of the Renaissance. His originality extends from philosophical innovation (e.g. the replacement of the Aristotelian four causes with space, light, heat and fluid, all emanating from God) to philological insights (e.g. the idea that Aristotle's book *Metaphysics* is not a coherent unity, but an assemblage of different treatises) and anticipations of some key aspects of the modern scientific world-view (e.g. the geometrization of space).

Matija Vlačić Ilirik's most influential work, *Clavis Stripturae sacrae*, is considered to be the first hermeneutical encyclopedia of the Bible. In this work, Vlačić Ilirik defends the position that the Bible should be interpreted through itself and by itself, in isolation from other ancient texts as much as from the established exegeses.

Pavao Skalić, with his work *Encyclopaedia seu Epistemon*, stands at the beginning of a long tradition of authors who aimed to provide a comprehensive account of all knowledge. However, he understood knowledge in an indiscriminately broad way and executed his account without much system, which cannot be said for Antonio Zara's *Anatomia*.

Faust Vrančić's *Logica nova* is an original attempt to formulate the principles of logic in logic itself, without any metaphysical, epistemological or rhetorical underpinnings. For him, logic is formal and analytic, in the sense that he thinks of it as a mere tool of presenting already acquired knowledge, incapable of producing any new insights.

Impact and legacy

Frane Petrić has been quoted by leading thinkers of the 16th and the 17th century, including Johannes Kepler, Jan Amos Komenský, Thomas Hobbes and Henry More. Pierre Gassendi openly acknowledged Petrić's influence on his thinking about space and atoms, and he was mentioned by Leibniz and Mersenne. However, Petrić's indirect influence may be more significant. One of his followers, and a person who inherited Petrić's chair at *La Sapienza* in Rome, was Jacopo Mazzoni, a teacher of Galileo Galilei. There is an identifiable line of thought that goes from Petrić's philosophy, developed in opposition to Aristotle's, to the mathematization of nature in Galileo.

Matija Vlačić Ilirik is considered one of the founders of hermeneutics by →**Wilhelm Dilthey** and Hans-Georg Gadamer. In his exegetic works he introduced the concept of "scope" (the original intention of a work) and operated with what came to be known as the "hermeneutic circle" (the whole work is understood in terms of its parts, and each part is understood in terms of the whole).

Federik Grisogono's theory of tides in terms of a combination of celestial influences and motions inherent in the element of water with calculable results, sparked some interest among thinkers of the Renaissance, such as Petrić and →**Gerolamo Cardano**.

De Dominis' theory of rainbow as a result of refraction of light in the interior of water droplets was praised by Isaac Newton and Christian Wolf and criticised by Christiaan Huygens and Ruđer Bošković.

Faust Vrančić's work *Machinae novae* (1595), containing detailed pictures with accompanying descriptions of 56 different machines and contraptions of new or improved design, including the parachute and the mill powered by tides, had very small circulation at the time, but was later recognized as a major contribution to civil engineering.

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