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# Quadrato lapide - Ancient Architectural Terms in Dalmatian Renaissance Latin

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(On the page <http://croala.ffzg.unizg.hr/eklogai/quadrato-rsa-2024/> you will find the texts, findings and links mentioned in this talk; if you access the page, you can explore it at ease - I will go through that rather quickly.)

My main question is: how do Renaissance authors writing in Latin use words connected with architecture? The answer that immediately comes to mind may be "they reproduce what they have read in Vitruvius, Pliny the Elder and Frontinus". I consider this answer as a hypothesis to be tested, and an imprecise hypothesis at that. **What exactly** have the Renaissance authors read and appropriated in Vitruvius, Pliny and Frontinus? Were their choices and impressions the same as ours? And were the classical writers on architecture their only sources?

Before I present the answers, let us consider a secondary question. I say "Renaissance authors writing in Latin" - but who are those authors? They are obviously **not** everybody who wrote in Latin from the year 1400 to 1600.

My object of study is a collection of Latin texts connected with regions that are today Croatia. The collection is digital, it can be found on the internet, and its title is *Croatiae auctores Latini*, CroALa for short. It was first published in 2009, fifteen years ago. Since then it has grown both quantitatively and conceptually. In its latest release, CroALa comprises about 560 documents and 5.8 million words. Its texts were written between the year 976 and 1984 (so the Renaissance texts are only a subset). In CroALa there is prose and poetry, belles-lettres and translations, epigraphic and archival documents. Initially CroALa concentrated on authors born on the territory of modern Croatia. This traditional and nationalistic approach was both anachronistic and scholarly limiting. In a way it even betrays the main point of writing in Latin: to write in a *common* language of the Republic of Letters. Currently we are expanding CroALa to include texts *about* the Croatian regions and its people, as well as texts written in Croatia by authors

coming from elsewhere.

My search started from a modern word list of classical Latin architectural terms. I used the list of Michael Binns, published on the site *Pompeii in Pictures*, based on modern archaeological literature and developed for students visiting Pompeii. I searched for terms from the Binns's list in CroALa and recorded the searches. The first pass led to two insights. First, there are classical architectural terms which *do not* appear in CroALa; they include such words as *caryatis*, *metopa*, *tablinum*. Second, in CroALa there are passages which stand out as especially *rich* in architectural terms. Just to give you a preview here, such passages include a description of the city of Dubrovnik by Filippo Diversi, sketches of cities and ancient sites in the Aegean and the Ionian sea by Koriolan Cipiko, descriptions of both Diocletian's Palace in Split and of the royal palace of the biblical king David, by Marko Marulić, a view of the island city of Hvar by Vinko Pribojević, and reports about Ottoman architecture by the former Turkish slave Bartul Đurđević and by the Habsburg diplomat Antun Vrančić.

A word about the presentation of examples. I use the digital medium and the internet because they enable me to make research

*reproducible* – so that other people can look exactly at passages from which I have drawn my conclusions. At the page that I am showing this is done by writing down the links for searches in CroALa. Wikidata and its lexicographical section help me to deal with multiple meanings of a word. So the basis procedure of my research was connecting specific sense of a word, recorded in Wikidata, with relevant passages from CroALa.

I will illustrate that with an overview of the adjective *turritus*. It is derived from *turris* 'tower', and it has three senses. In Wikidata they are marked as S1, S2, S3 (after the ID number starting with L). The first sense is literal, and it is strictly architectural. *Turritus* means 'having towers' and the towers are buildings. The occurrences listed under numbers 1-4 fit this category. The URL addresses given there will take you directly to the relevant passages (parts of which I have also quoted on the page).

But *other* things except buildings can be described as having tower-resembling structures. Such things can be a rocky island, in the case of Juraj Šižgorić, Venetian warships for Koriolan Cipiko, a house for Pavao Skalić.

By concentrating on *height* as a prominent characteristic of a

tower, *turritus* develops a sense 'high' and it turns into a poetic epithet. In such way it is used by Ilija Crijević, who tells a mythological story about founding of Dubrovnik, and by Jakov Bunić, who retells the New Testament in hexameterverse.

The same combination of sorting by sense and recording passages can be done for any term. It is especially welcome when a term appears frequently. One such case is the noun *columna*, which occurs in CroALa over three hundred times. As I sorted out the passages, it was clear that most of the dictionary senses of *columna* appear in CroALa - but I also began to realize that in CroALa even the basic, literal sense, of a 'structural element sustaining the weight of a building' can have special, emotional overtones. In passages 17-19, by Ciriaco d'Ancona, Koriolan Cipiko and Franjo Trankvil Andreis, the columns are signs of magnificence, indicating to Ciriaco and Cipiko the splendor of classical antiquity, and the splendor in general to Andreis. *Columna* has a figurative sense too; such examples, 22-24, from the *Institutio bene vivendi* by Marko Marulić, demonstrate two points. First, the Bible, biblical antiquity and biblical language are sources of architectural terms just as important as Vitruvius and other classical Latin writers. Second - see

the Example 24 - the Bible, interpreted allegorically, can lead Renaissance authors to make a full circle, imbuing every detail of a technical description with a moral meaning.

A more focused exploration of sources is possible when the terms used are rare. One such case is *siphunculus*, 'a small pipe'. This word is read only once in CroALa, in the brief (but extravagant) description - again of Diocletian's Palace - by Frano Božićević Natalis (see Example 25). *Siphunculus* is rare also in classical Latin; it was used by Pliny the Younger in the description of his villa (which is still read in schools today). This description attracted attention of Niccolò Perotti in his vast commentary on Martial, the *Cornucopiae* (first printed in 1489). Perotti's passage could have helped Natalis notice the word.

The greatest surprise of my search for architectural terms was the sense of Latin *architectus* as used by Filippo Diversi, an Italian humanist who around 1440 served as a chancellor of Dubrovnik. Diversi, as you can see from the examples 26-29, regularly uses *architectus* in the sense of 'vault' (what is usually in Latin called *fornix*) or 'apse'. He is the only author in CroALa to do so; actually, at about the same time and in the

same place, in 1438 in Dubrovnik, Ciriaco d'Ancona composes a public inscription for the new fountain built by Onofrio de la Cava, which begins "Posuerunt Onofrio Iordani filio Onosiphoro Parthenopeo egregio nostri temporis architecto municipes" - *architectus* here certainly means 'architect'. Outside CroALa, the use similar to Diversi's is not recorded by dictionaries. It is attested, however, in archival documents about construction works in Rome in 1466-1470, the period somewhat later than Diversi. The word was probably interpreted as a composite of *arcus*, 'arch', and *tectus* 'covered'.

In 1443, the architect Juraj Dalmatinac in an inscription identified himself as the author of the cathedral in Šibenik, announcing at the same time that he had made an *opus cuvarum*. This is again unexpected. The phrase is obviously formed on the classical model of *opus albarium*, *opus caementicium*, *opus latericium*. But the word *cuvarum* comes from *cuva*, which is attested as 'vault' or 'apse' in Latin documents from Rijeka (1442) and Zadar (1444). *Cuva* comes from the Italian word *cuba* meaning 'vault' or 'dome'. So, in the case of Juraj Dalmatinac, we meet a kind of a back-formation: an Italian word crosses into Latin, and then an elegant architectural expression is



created on a Roman model.

The phrase from the title of my talk, *quadrato lapide*, is even *explained* in CroALa. The explanation was provided by Matija Vlačić Ilirik (in the history of Reformation known as Matthias Flacius Illyricus). In 1581, Vlačić wrote *quadratis lapidibus aedificare est splendide ac superbe aedificare*. So the phrase *quadrato lapide*, which to modern ears may sound prosaic and technical, had, as Vlačić tells us, a strong positive connotation during the Renaissance, indicating – once again – wealth and magnificence.

Occurrences in CroALa confirm Vlačić's interpretation.

But how exactly did that special meaning of *quadrato lapide* emerge? Vitruvius uses it in contexts which are more technical, although historians of architecture know that building *quadrato lapide* was for the Romans, who usually built in brick, a luxurious way of construction. With clear connotation of that luxurious aspect the phrase appears in other writers, in a number of memorable passages: in an account of how the Capitol was built, by Livy; in a description of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon by Curtius Rufus; in Seneca's report on the villa of Scipio Africanus; in Pliny the Elder's chapter on labyrinths,

and in Pliny the Younger's letter to Traianus on problems with the aqueduct for the city of Nicomedia. There are notable uses in the Bible too - this is actually why Vlačić talks about *quadrato lapide*. We cannot say which passage precisely caught the eye of authors in CroALa, or whether they found it in a classical text or through secondary Renaissance sources. It is clear, however, that the original contexts highlighted the positive value of the phrase in an impressive way, just as the precisely shaped blocks of stone were themselves impressive and amazing objects. In this way classical literature and classical architecture, the words and the things, supported each other.

(Conclusions)

Coming to grips with a specific set of words in a large collection of texts requires precise pointing and citing. We also want to make our research reproducible, to enable other people to see what I have seen.

The architectural terms in CroALa - such as *columna* and *quadrato lapide* - can have emotional overtones, connoting both wealth and virtue. Probably these connotations were more present in Renaissance minds than in ours.

The authors from CroALa, who were for the most part not architects, learned their architectural terms not only from classical Latin writers we call 'technical', but also from the Bible and from a number of fascinating individual passages, sometimes transmitted by Renaissance commentaries (such as Perotti's *Conuocopiae*).

There are also cases of innovative usage: Juraj Dalmatinac latinized an Italian term, Filippo Diversi brought to literature the language of building and construction (as attested in Renaissance Rome).

Unexpected emotions, unexpected sources, unexpected senses: this is what we find when we look for architectural terms in a Neo-Latin text collection.

Thank you.