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EPIGRAPHY AS A HUMANIST ACTIVITY – TWO EXAMPLES FROM ISTRIA: SERGIUS POLENSIS AND MARIN MARINČIĆ

Izvlaček

Pričujoči prispevek predstavlja dva primera renesančnega navdušenja nad starimi napisi, oba povezana z vzhodnim Jadranom – Istro, Kvarnerjem in Dalmacijo. Prvi primer (najverjetneje ponarejen) je šaljiv latinski epitaf, ki je bil v renesansi in pozneje precej priljubljen ter pogosto prepisan in ponatisnjen; drugi primer je epigrafski prispevek duhovnika iz Labina v Istri: z zbirateljem je delil prepis več starorimskih napisov (danes izgubljenih) z otokov Lošinj in Cres. Tako humoristični epitaf kot duhovnik iz Labina sta bila vpeta v intelektualne mreže renesančnega humanizma.

Sintesi

L'epigrafia come attività umanista – due esempi dall'Istria: Sergius Polensis e Marin Marinčić

L'articolo presenta due esempi epigrafici, entrambi legati all'Adriatico orientale: all'Istria, al Quarnero e alla Dalmazia. Il primo è rappresentato da un epitaffio latino, umoristico e molto popolare, spesso trascritto e ristampato durante il Rinascimento e in epoche successive, molto probabilmente è stato contraffatto - non essendo supportato da reperti archeologici, e il suo contenuto e la sua forma rivelano un autore rinascimentale ignoto e divertente. Il secondo riguarda un contributo epigrafico di un sacerdote di Albona in Istria, il quale ha condiviso con

un collezionista, una delle tante trascrizioni romane (purtroppo smarrite) dalle isole di Lussino e Cherso. Sia l'epitaffio umoristico che la trascrizione del sacerdote di Albona, come dimostrerò, sono aberrazioni, rinchiuse nelle correnti di pensiero dell'umanesimo rinascimentale.

* * *

The Renaissance was fascinated with ancient inscriptions. Two examples of that fascination will be presented here, both related to the eastern Adriatic – to Istria, the Quarnaro and Dalmatia. Both examples remain on the margin of the story we usually tell about the Renaissance humanism. The first example is a humorous Latin epitaph that was quite popular and often transcribed and reprinted during the Renaissance and in later times; it is most probably forged – it is unsupported by archaeological findings, and its content and form point towards an unknown, playful Renaissance author. The second example is an epigraphic contribution of a priest from Labin in Istria; he shared with a collector a transcription of several ancient Roman inscriptions (today lost) from the islands of Lošinj and Cres. Both the humorous epitaph and the priest from Labin are, as I will show, enmeshed in intellectual networks of Renaissance humanism.

1.

Renaissance humanists treated the ancient past differently from how our own time treats it. For the humanists, as Fritz Saxl noted in 1940, all their notions, divine and human, public and private, found their models in classical antiquity; the ancients had a superior way of living, a superior style of learning and writing.¹ An access to these superior ways and styles was offered by the ancient inscriptions – even by the ordinary and conventional ones. Today, we think otherwise. For us moderns, classical antiquity is not a means of approach to Truth and Beauty, but a normal

¹ Fritz Saxl, "The Classical Inscription in Renaissance Art and Politics: Bartholomaeus Fontius: Liber monumentorum Romanae urbis et aliorum locorum," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 4, no. 1/2 (October 1940 – Januar 1941): 19–46.

part of our own past. This change of view, observed Saxl, came at a price: it led to destruction of the classic ideal as perceived by the humanists.

The large-scale collections of ancient inscriptions, first produced in the 19th and 20th century as printed books and later, in our own time, migrated to the digital medium to become accessible over the internet, have consistently pushed into the background the personalities of the Renaissance humanists who first collected the inscriptions (even though the collections dutifully listed the humanist *syllogae* as sources). “Why they copied the texts, what selections they made, what personal use they made of the material – these were no problems for the 19th century epigraphists”, wrote Saxl. The 21st century brought a certain change of attitude: collectors and their interests, previously only rarely taken into account by the majority of people studying inscriptions, have become objects of specialized research. And yet, the Renaissance collectors and their interests might have a wider cultural significance, because they contributed to shaping cultures of the past on the local, regional, even national level.

2.

The inscription we will here consider is the mock epitaph of Sergius Polensis, actor and parasite. It is a long comical text transmitted in many manuscripts and in many printed epigraphical collections. Its comical nature was regularly acknowledged, and it is precisely that quality which has brought the text its popularity in the Early Modern period. The inscription was presented as a forgery at least from its publication in the *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum* – as we shall see, it was recognized as spurious already during the Renaissance – although it is listed as belonging to Pola (modern Pula in Istria) or Salona (modern Solin in Dalmatia).

In the epitaph, the voice addressing the travellers first announces that it will detain them for a while; then it expresses its puzzlement: is it possible to speak from the stone, when the stone lacks a mouth? Can the words be said to be written, when they are incised? Only after these questions, when the middle of the inscription has already been reached, the speaker introduces himself as the deceased Sergius (sometimes Sercius,

or Sertius) Polensis, actor and parasite.² The proof that it is he who is buried there is the flavour of wine coming from the ground. Sergius asks the travellers to acclaim him and warns them not to relieve themselves on his grave. Pleased at the laughs he is getting, Sergius adds that the reason for his frequent slips of the tongue (actually puns like *scriptum / sculptum, sitio / sentio*) is that the Truth, his “assistant parasite”, is equally thirsty as the Sergius’ ashes. He asks for a libation, and – presumably, having received it – bids the travellers goodbye.

Frequent joining of words which sound very similar (*miremini si moramini, uocat quod uacat, uoluit ualuitque*) as well as the choice of words which occur rarely except in Plautus (*dicaculus, litteratus* in the sense “bearing letters”, *hui, temetum, supparasitor, inuocatus* meaning “uninvited”) place the text into the tradition of Roman comedy. Other word choices point to Late Antiquity (*offirmo* in the sense of “halt”, *pendulus* in the sense of “in a state of uncertainty”, *celte, faciliter*) or even to the Middle Ages (*trufa* “scurrilous anecdote”).³

When the epitaph of Sergius Polensis was published in the fifth volume of Mommsen’s *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum (Inscriptiones regionis Italiae decimae, 1872)*, it was placed as the text 1* in the *Inscriptiones falsae vel alienae* section, under the heading *Pola*. The earliest source Mommsen was able to identify was the sylloge of Felice Feliciano from Verona (1433–1480). In one of manuscript copies of the sylloge, today in Venice, as Marcianus Lat. X, 196 (= 3766; written 1464–1472), the epitaph is annotated “Sergii Polensis parasiti histrionis parasiti (!) per Iacobum Baduarium Venetum”.⁴ The other manuscript copy of Fe-

² “Parasite” is treated in the inscription as it in the comedies of Terence, but it could also refer to the (mimic) actors’ association of *Parasiti Apollinis*, attested already in the first century BCE; E. J. Jory, “Associations of Actors in Rome,” *Hermes* 98, no. 2 (1970): 224–53. A mime actor Sergius was attested by Cicero, Plutarch and Appian as a member of the circle of Marcus Antonius; Léon Herrmann, “L’építaphe de Sergius,” *Latomus* 17, no. 1 (January – March 1958): 97–101.

³ For vocabulary analysis see Remigio Sabbadini, “Parasiti epitaphium,” *Classici e neolatini* 2 (1907): 187–188 and Nicholas Horsfall, “Two notes: 1. Horace, Carm. 4.2.29: 2. CIL V.1,” *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 12, no. 9 (1987): 136.

⁴ The formulation according to Mommsen; Giovanni Girolamo Orti Manara, *Illustrazione di un’antica lapida inedita Istriana scoperta nel 1827 in Pola* (Verona: Tip. Poligrafica di G. Antonelli, 1856), 9, claims that Feliciano “nel suo manoscritto” (without further information provided by Orti Manara) notes: “In lapide mirae magnitudinis, quam (!) Iacobus Baduarius Venetus Sergio Polensi parasito hystriioni posuit”.

liciano locates the epitaph in Salona, Dalmatia (Verona, Biblioteca civica, Mss. 2006, f. 52–53v: “Salonae”). Different provenance is described by the edition of Georg Fabricius (Georgius Fabricius Chemnicensis, 1516–1571) in his *Antiquitatum libri duo* (Basileae: Oporinus, 1560). Fabricius connects the inscription with Ciriaco d’ Ancona (Cyriacus de Pizziccoli, 1391–1455) and, expressly, with Pola: “descriptum a Cyriaco Anconitano apud Polam Istriae urbem (...) nunc ad me missum a Melchioro Pisone avunculo”. The oldest known printed edition (not listed in CIL), where the epitaph is one of the appendices to *Probus grammaticus de interpretandis Romanorum litteris* (ed. Joannes Bonardus, Venice, Johannes Tacuinus de Tridino, 20 Apr. 1499, presents the inscription as “epitaphium Scitu (!) Polensis parasiti historisque (!) festivissim (!) apud Salonam urbem Dalmatiae in lapide mire magnitudinis”.

Seventy-five years after Mommsen, in 1947, preparing an edition of the epitaph for the *Inscriptiones Italiae* series (*Volumen X – Regio X. Fasciculus I – Pola et Nesactium*), Bruna Forlati Tamaro believed to have identified the inscription of Sergius in a manuscript source older than the one of Feliciano.⁵ That source is the Marcianus Lat. VI, 268 (= 3141), f. 58–58v, where the epitaph bears the title “Epygramma repertum in agro Polae in saxo vetusto”. Forlati Tamaro claims the first part of the codex was written by Piero Paolo Vergerio the Elder (1370–1444), a humanist from Justinopolis, modern Koper. Because in the manuscript the epitaph follows almost immediately Vergerio’s own *De ingenuis moribus*,⁶ Forlati Tamaro dates at least that part of the codex between 1402 / 1404, when Vergerio completed the *De ingenuis moribus*, and 1414, when he left Italy for Basel (and, later, Hungary). Forlati Tamaro’s claim is incorrect. Valentinelli’s catalogue of the manuscripts in Marciana attributes the writing of the whole manuscript expressly to Pietro Dolfin, son of Giorgio: “codicem universum sua manu scripsit Petrus Delphinus” (p. 190); the attribution relies on a note from the end of the *De ingenuis moribus* (f. 23), which says: “ego Petrus Delphinus Georgii filius transcripsi a quodam libello ingenui adolescentis Petri Delphini Victoris filii, ab eo

⁵ Bruna Forlati Tamaro, *Inscriptiones Italiae: Vol. 10, Fasc. 1* (Roma: La Libreria dello stato, 1947), xxxiv, 268–269.

⁶ Between the two texts are the *Epistles of Phalaris* translated by Francesco Accolti or Aretino (c. 1416–1488).

propria manu transcripto anno Christi optimi 1462, V Kal. Novembris” (p. 189).⁷ Because Pietro Dolfino, son of Vittore, lived 1444–1525, this note, as well as the dates of Francesco Accolti, translator of the *Epistles of Phalaris*, refute Forlati Tamaro. The codex cannot be older than 1462. Therefore it would be contemporary to the sylloge of Feliciano, written 1464–1472.

The epitaph of Sergius Polensis had a lively manuscript transmission; I have been able to check the following twelve items:⁸

1. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Ms Hamilton 26, 69r–70r (1450–1500)
2. Clermont-Ferrand, Bibliothèque du Patrimoine, Ms 104, f. 70v–71r
3. Copenhagen, Royal Danish Library, GKS 3553, f. 95r–95v
4. Durham, North Carolina, Duke University, Rubenstein Library and University Archives, Latin Ms 37, f. 1r–1v
5. Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 76, f. 34
6. Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, C 112 inf., f. 105r–105v (dedicated to Giovanni Andrea Lampugnani, (d. 1476); on 111r dated c. 1503–1529)
7. München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 10801 (Johannes Bembus: Vermischte Schriften, Autograph, 1490–1536), f. 91
8. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. Français 22560 (Recueil de pièces de vers, chansons, sonnets, triolets, sur les guerres de religion, formé par le chirurgien protestant François Rasse des Neux, mort le 17 novembre 1581), f. 49r
9. Princeton, Princeton University Library, Garrett Ms 158, Giovanni Marcanova, *Collectio antiquitatum*, 1471 (?) or after 1473, Italy (probably Bologna), f. 203r–204r
10. Vatican, Vat. lat. 5243, f. 56r–v
11. Vatican, Barb. lat. 1871, f. 3

⁷ Giuseppe Valentinelli, *Bibliotheca manuscripta ad S. Marci Venetiarum, codices mss. Latini, Tom. IV* (Venetiis: Ex typographia commercii, 1871), 189–190.

⁸ Aside from the manuscripts in Marciana mentioned at the beginning of the article, I have not yet been able to inspect the transcription in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits, Latin 5825F (where the title of the inscription is “Epitaphium Scerii, Polensis parasiti et histrionis”); the manuscript was written in 1465 by Giovanni Marcanova.

12. Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 3492, f. 13v (1500-1520)⁹

Some of the manuscripts from the list above were not mentioned or taken into account by either Mommsen or Forlati Tamaro: numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9. Of these, numbers 3 and 4 bring new information.

Latin Ms 37 from the Rubenstein Library and University Archives, number 4 in the list, displays several variants in the text of the epitaph which agree only with one other manuscript – with the Marcianus Lat. VI, 268 (= 3141), taken by Forlati Tamaro as the basis for her edition in the *Inscriptiones Italiae*.¹⁰

The manuscript in the Royal Danish Library (GKS 3553, no 3 in the list) adds the following descriptive title to the inscription: “Epitaphium Sircii Polensis parasiti hystrionis festivissimi editum a domino Jacobo Baduario, qui postea fuit archiepiscopus Spalatinus”. The information agrees with Feliciano’s in Marcianus Lat. X, 196 (= 3766), as reported by Mommsen. The GKS 3553 additionally reports that the Badoer responsible for the inscription was an archbishop of Split. This would explain the alternative location of the inscription – not in Pola (modern Pula), but in Salona, which was metropolis of the province Dalmatia during the Roman times; the site of the ancient city is near the former palace of Diocletian (which grew into medieval Split).

Following the pointer from the GKS 3553, we find a Jacopino (Jacopo) Badoer da Peraga which actually was the archbishop of Split. He was born in Venice, to Geremia, perhaps around 1393. Jacopino held the archbishopric of Split from 1441 (he was elected in 1439) to his

⁹ Codex 3492 does not actually include the epitaph. The manuscript was written around 1507 by Augustinus Prygl Tyfervus (born in the 1470s at Laško / Tüffer, in modern Slovenia; died by 1537). Tyfervus collected Italian inscriptions in the first decade of the Cinquecento. In the manuscript he adds a note stating that the epitaph of Sergius Polensis is widely known, so there is no need to include it: “Epitaphium Sergii Polensis parasiti etc. quia commune est huc adnectere nolui ego Aug.” (CVP 3492, f. 13v; cf. Doris Marth, *Der sogenannte Antiquus Austriacus und weitere auctores antiquissimi* (Wien: Holzhausen, 2016), 108).

¹⁰ These variants of Forlati Tamaro (FT) and the Rubenstein Library Ms (Rb), in contrast with Mommsen’s edition (M), are: turmatim M: cateruatim FT, Rb; erit gratum M: erit gratiae FT, Rb; succintus M: suffarcinatus Rb, subsaranatus FT; ut iuuat M: et iuuat FT, Rb; ualuitque haec olim M: ualuitque hoc. Haec olim FT, Rb; olet temetum M: olet maluaticum FT, Rb; caesi fustibus M: caesi fustibus et saxis FT, Rb.

death in 1451; he was buried in the cathedral of Split.¹¹ He is attested as popular in Split, which was no mean feat. The *Dizionario biografico Italiano* claims about him: “nutriva per gli autori dell’antichità romana una passione ben più viva che per i severi studi canonici”, and adds that Badoer was mentioned by Renaissance humanists Antonio Baratella (c. 1385–1448) and Siccò Polenton (c. 1375–1447).

The link with Polenton provides some clues for the possible authorship of the epitaph of Sergius Polensis. First, in several letters from the 1410s Polenton described finding the bones of Titus Livius, the historian, in 1413, in Padova, in a Roman grave near the Abbey of Santa Giustina (at the site of the necropolis of ancient Patavium); from Polenton we learn that either Jacobo Badoer or his brother Giovanni was among the people who helped move the bones; and the finding was later commemorated by a bust of Livy which included an inscription.¹² The episode confirms Badoer moved in (Padovan) humanist circles interested in Roman antiquity and epigraphy. Next, in 1419 Siccò Polenton dedicated to Badoer the comical play *Catinia*, composed in prose, one of the first works of Renaissance humanist theatre. The play, set in a tavern in Anguillara (near Padova), presents five lowly characters which merrily

¹¹ On a fragment of Badoer’s sepulchral monument (today in the Split Archaeological Museum) attributed to the sculptor Andrija Aleši, see Arsen Duplančić, “Prilog o nadgrobnim spomenicima starijeg doba u Splitu,” *Kulturna baština: časopis za pitanja prošlosti splitskoga područja*, no. 34 (2007): 129–254.

¹² Siccò Polenton’s texts are cited from Siccò Polenton, *La Catinia le Orazioni e le Epistole di Siccò Polenton; edite ed illustrate da Arnaldo Segarizzi* (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d’arti grafiche, 1899). Polenton’s letter to Niccolò Niccoli, from Padova, 28 October 1414, on transferring Livy’s remains: “Andreas Dandulus, veneto ex senatu clarus, capite uno, ego ipse altero capsam ligneam (iam pro commoditate premissam, quod pondere plumbea tractari non posset) extulimus, exportavimus. succurrerunt illico cives ornatissimi, qui iuarent, Peraginus de Peraga, Palaminus de Vitalianis, milites egregii.” Peraginus de Peraga is identified by the editor, Arnaldo Segarizzi, as Jacobo Badoer (de Peraga). From the description of the planned “mausoleum” in which the remains were to be placed, in the same letter: “titulus litteris priscis inscriptus: T. LIVIUS PATAVUS RERUM ROMANARUM HISTORICUS ILLUSTRIS, rubens denique saxum vetusto de more auriculatis angulis et culmo eminens urnam teget. demum imago Livii pedum quinque cathedram insidebit, ea quoque rubentis quidem petre, preter faciem, manus, pedes, librum: hec marmoris candentis, reliquum opus quadratis lapidibus albis rubeisque: rubei veronensis, albi histri.” The description bears some similarity to the memorial plate with a bas-relief of Livy existing today in Padova, in the wall of Palazzo della Ragione (“il Salone”); the inscription there runs: OSSA·T(ITI)·LIVII·PATAVINI·VNIS·O(MN)IVM·[MORTA]VLIV[M·IUD]ICI[O·D]IGNI·CVIVS·PROPE·INVICT[O·]·CALAMO[·INVICT]I·P(OPVLI)·R(OMANI)·RES·GESTE·CONSCRIBE[R]JEN[TVR·].

praise eating and drinking and make fun of scholars, soldiers and theologians. “Bibamus, o socii, comedamus, gaudeamus” is repeated almost as a refrain. The guests, their attitudes somewhat similar to Shakespeare’s mechanicals, indulge in puns and repetitions of the following kind:

Catinius: Nullo equidem in ganeo bibalia pulciora vidi, quam ista tua, Bibie, sint. bibalia plurius bibii parva tenent, que adeo parva sunt, quod nec bino nec quino haustu sitim mulcent, parvitate sua sitientem cruciant, sitim augent, non demunt sitim. quotiens ego talia in manu habui, reiecta fregi, quod bibalia parva michi odiosa atque inimica sint, hec autem ista tua bibalia (sine adulatione dicam), Bibie, michi pergrata sunt, magna sunt, commoda sitienti sunt. at vero, ut bibamus, Bibie, affer si quid vel salsi vel assi habes.¹³

Later the host, Bibius, accuses one of the guests, who wants to settle the account and leave, of offending the *lex Bibia*:

Questius: Bibie, quid est, quo mulctari posses?

Bibius: Lege Bibia, quam bibii omnes habent.

Q. Qua?

B. Ita nostris institutis bibii omnes commonefacti sumus, ne quisquam, qui vinum vendit, computum de vino computet, ni quidquam vini sit.

Q. Intellego atque illud dixerim tua cum venia, Cumane, quod crimen et maximum crimen sit, quidquam de vino loqui ubi vinum desit.¹⁴

The comic connection of wine, drinking and legal provisions is yet another motif that points towards the epitaph of Sergius Polensis, as well as the theatrical inscenation; the name *Sergius Polensis* sounds vaguely similar to *Sicco Polentonus*, and Polenton’s letters abound with allusions to Plautus, Terence, their plays, and to Gnatho, a famous parasite from

¹³ Polenton, *La Catinia*, 6.

¹⁴ Polenton, *La Catinia*, 16.

Terence's *Eunuchus*.¹⁵ Finally, in a letter to Badoer (Padova, 25 November 1419),¹⁶ Polenton apologizes for calling Badoer "Nasonianus noster" and requesting from him "Bibiolum nostrum" (the reference is to a manuscript copy of *Catinia* borrowed to Badoer):

Ad Iacobum Baduarium Peraginum.

Quod ad te, Iacobe mi, nasonianum pridie scripserim et Bibiolum nostrum postulaverim, non irascaris, precor. hanc enim fiduciam michi dedit humanitas tua, quod perfamiliariter continue tecum loquar. potest fortasse id evenisse, quod ex philosopho sapientissimo Hesiodo narrat de catulo et asello Esopus fabulator noster. ex Anneo quidem tragico memini sententiam, et veram sententiam istam esse, quod, qui nimium potest, vult posse quod non potest. tantum enim posse apud te michi visum est, quod nichil sit, quod apud te putem me non posse. itaque cum de Bibio nostro sermo, ut nova de re solet, inter quosdam et claros et studiosos viros fuisset et precibus eorum stimulatus essem, ut repetere oporteret, plenus risu, qui ex re ortus esset, ita raptim ad cancellum et frequente pretorio ad te scripsi atque te nasonianum inscripsi, quod reminisci viderer, me iam vidisse quedam poemata tua, que ipso a Nasone profecta putarentur.¹⁷

¹⁵ Polenton's letter to Antonio Bergamasco (1415): "etsi enim ista, que, quanvis patentia, occupatus oculus pretermisit, detegere michi facile persuaserim, non tamen satirus mordax sum, neque Gnato sum," (Polenton, *La Catinia*, 87); to Andrea Biglia (1419): "iam huic rei finem dabo, ne ad te loquens gnato puter alibi et apud alios locus erit," (Polenton, *La Catinia*, 98); to Giovanni Veronese (1420): "Vertam itaque me ipsum alio et positus nugis illis, que homini magis assentatori et gnatonico quam amico pertinent..." (Polenton, *La Catinia*, 126). From Polenton's apology of *Catinia* to Fantino Dandolo (1419), referring to the translation of Lucian's *Parasite* by Guarino Veronese (between 1408 and 1418): "Guarinus item Veronensis, quem litteris et latinis doctissimum et grecis doctiorem illis ipsis, quos Grecia genuisset, fatentur omnes, de parasitica vita, que gulosa et scurrilis est, multa dixit cum iocunditate summa. quid de Nasone ipso dixerim? studia ipse amatoria docuit. sed repetamus iam superiora. quid Plautus, quid Ennius, quid Terentius, quid omnis comicorum turba illa? patrie quidem sue non infamia, quod turpi de re dixere, verum eterna fama quesita est, quod viri eloquentissimi ex suis urbibus floruerunt," (Polenton, *La Catinia*, 107).

¹⁶ Another short letter of Polenton to Badoer, probably from 1431, is preserved in three manuscripts in Krakow; Polenton congratulates to Badoer on his being nominated to the office of papal chamberlain by the pope Eugenius IV. The letter refers to friendship of Polenton and Badoer, shares some information on Polenton's writings, and alludes to Vergil's *Aeneid*, but there are no references to Roman comedy or epigraphy. Cf. Anna Horeczy, "Sicco polacco: Due epigrammi e una lettera inedita dai mss. di retorica di Johannes de Ludzisko nelle biblioteche di Cracovia," in *L'Umanesimo di Sicco Polenton. Padova, la "Catinia", i santi, gli antichi*, ed. G. Baldisin Molli, F. Benucci, R. Modonutti (Padova: CSA, 2020), 255–268.

¹⁷ Polenton, *La Catinia*, 102.

Badoer, himself interested in poetry and moving in the literary circles of Sicco Polenton, among people interested in antiquity,¹⁸ seems a likely candidate for the authorship of the comical pseudo-inscription of Sergius Polensis. He may have composed the epitaph around the time Polenton dedicated *Catinia* to him and addressed him as *Nasonianus*, that is c. 1420.¹⁹ For my research, which aims to illustrate some Renaissance epigraphic connections to the Eastern Adriatic, it is important to note that this fictive epitaph, widely known and disseminated, brings – by the toponymic of the speaker, by the site of the imagined inscription, and by the place of residence of the probable author – both Pola and Salona into the field of Renaissance epigraphy. Finally, we have to remember that Renaissance epigraphy is the field which is not always strictly serious and sober.²⁰

¹⁸ From the letter of Polenton to Badoer: “in eam quidem etatem venimus, que amat vehementer antiqua.” (Segarizzi ep. XII p. 103)

¹⁹ Sabbadini, “Parasiti epitaphium,” 187–188, edited the epitaph of Sergius “da un codice cart. sec. XV del signor Gamucci di Pistoia”, where it was part of Marcanova’s collection (with a dedication dated 1465); Sabbadini seems not to have realized that the epitaph was already published as a (false) inscription in CIL. Sabbadini, however, relying on a vocabulary analysis, without hesitation attributes the text to an unknown Renaissance humanist: “la lingua sua è umanistica, umanistico anche il vezzo eccessivo dei giuochi di parola”. Some fifty years later, Herrmann, “L’építaphe de Sergius,” 97–101 tried to reconsider the epitaph as a metrical text from late antiquity, similar to the “Testamentum porcellii”. Herrmann offered not only an edition the text but his own reconstruction of “primitivement 72 octosyllabes rimés ou assonancés” as well; the extent of changes that have to be undertaken to achieve metrical form far surpasses the usual range of scribal errors. Horsfall, “Two notes,” 136, uses Forlati Tamaro’s (mistaken) information and lexical analysis to reject Herrmann’s idea: “examination of language rules out both a late Republican date and the identification of *Sergius Polensis parasitus histrio vester* with Sergius the late Republican mime (...) classicists have not rediscovered a neglected sty-fellow for M. Grunnius Corocotta”.

²⁰ The humanists were well aware of the droll nature of Sergius’ epitaph; it is often categorized among *ludicra* or *ioci*. The practice of jesting epitaphs is attested in Roman antiquity as well; Herrmann refers to a poetic “Epitaphium Vitalis mimi” (*Anthologia Latina*, Riese 487 a, at the beginning of the 20th century found also as a fragmentary inscription, cf. Esther Artigas, “De quodam Vitali mimo eiusque Barcinonensi adventu,” *Liburna: Revista Internacional de Humanidades*, no. 14 (may 2019): 37–52). Another jesting epitaph is the undoubtedly ancient verse inscription of Leburna, magister mimariorum, found in Siscia (modern Sisak, Croatia), today in Budapest (CIL 3, 3980), where the deceased informs us “vixit annos plus minus centum; aliquoties mortuus sum set sic nunquam”. In 1823 it was hard for one of the first editors of the inscription, Peter von Köppen, to accept its playful nature; he added a note: “αὐτόπτης, alioquin Ligorianam putares”.

3.

Sergius Polensis is a character from a fictive epitaph; Marin Marinčić, a 16th century priest from Labin in Istria, was a real person, but we know very little about him, almost less than what we know about Sergius. Until recently, Marinčić was known primarily as somebody who transcribed three Roman inscriptions from the Quarnaro islands Cres and Lošinj: CIL 3, 3137 from the town of Osor (on Lošinj),²¹ and CIL 3, 3149 and 3154 from the town of Cres (on Cres).²² The transcriptions exist today as loose pages in the collection of Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672–1750). From there Mommsen included the inscriptions in the third volume of the CIL, and nobody ever tried to refute their authenticity (although the stone slabs are not preserved). The pages in Muratori's collection were prepared by a historian from Udine Jacopo Valvasone di Maniago (1499–1570). The confirmation of Marinčić's activities, in the form of a note "presbyter Marinus Marincich Albonensis, canonicus Polensis manu propria", can be found on page 8 (of 16), at the bottom of the first column. Marinčić's note is preceded by several inscriptions from Italy; Mommsen concluded that Marinčić had provided only the transcriptions from Osor and Cres. Nevertheless, the pages contain also inscriptions from Pula, as *Epitaphia Polae et agri*, without any information about its transcriber; as we shall see, we must not rule out the possibility that Marinčić was involved in transcribing these as well.

Scholarly literature recognized Marinčić as an Istrian collaborator of Renaissance epigraphers, but supposed that he was active in 15th century.²³ The archival documents, however, mention a "Marinus de Marinis, presbiter, canonicus Albonensis ac Polensis" as witness (in 1541 also as beneficiary, styled "venerabilis dominus presbiter Marinus Marincich")

²¹ Text of the inscription according to CIL: "Lartiae T(iti) f(iliae) / Maximae / L(uci) Magii Nei / huic d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) ob / merita patris / funus publice / datum est // Magiae L(uci) f(iliae)".

²² CIL 3, 3149: "Q(uintus) Fonteius Raeci / f(ilius) v(ivus) f(ecit) sibi et / Volsounae Oplicae / Pl[a]etoris f(iliae) / coniugi suae". CIL 3, 3154: "Vinioca Sp(uri) f(ilia) Max(imilla) sibi et M(arco) Vinioco Primigenio viro / libertis libertabusque / v(iva) f(ecit)".

²³ The first modern mentions of Marinčić as an epigrapher are by Jadranka Neralić, "Povijesni izvori za antičku epigrafiju u Dalmaciji," *Građa i prilozi za povijest Dalmacije* 24, no. 24 (2012): 295–332 and Bratislav Lučin, "Litterae olim in marmore insculptae: humanistička epigrafija na istočnoj obali Jadrana do Marulićeva doba," *Croatica et Slavica Iadertina* 10/1, no. 10 (2014): 191–230.

in testaments composed by notary from Labin Bartholomeus Gervasius in the period 1540–1543.²⁴ This makes Marin Marinčić a contemporary of Jacopo Valvasone.

In 2019, Fulvia Mainardis described a manuscript of a more extensive collection of inscriptions composed by Valvasone, kept today in British Library as Additional Ms 49369.²⁵ According to Mainardis, the collection was written by two hands, one belonging to Valvasone. It includes inscriptions from Emona (modern Ljubljana, Slovenia, on f. 50v), 19 inscriptions from Pola (f. 79-83r) and the epitaph of Sergius Polensis (f. 84; it was transcribed by the hand A, and Valvasone added a comment “alibi in Salonitanis”). The inscriptions from Osor and Cres transmitted by Marinčić appear at f. 67v (CIL 3, 3137) and f. 70v (CIL 3, 3149, 3154) without any note on provenance or location. The British Library manuscript shows, firstly, how transcribed inscriptions might along the way of transmission lose information on their context; secondly, it is the only handwritten sylloge known to me which brings together the epitaph of Sergius Polensis and the inscriptions once transcribed by Marin Marinčić from Labin.

4.

Fascination of Renaissance humanism with ancient inscriptions was more than a useful incentive for preservation and collection of inscriptions themselves; the fascination reveals to us attitudes of people involved as well as the extent of their interrelations. The inscriptions were objects of admiration, but they also inspired readers, transcribers and collectors to express themselves in a similar style; moreover, admiration did not always or necessarily imply pious reverence – comedy, parody, fun were also possible. And the simple act of sharing transcripts can serve as a signal of a relationship previously unknown to us.

²⁴ Zoran Ladić and Elvis Orbančić, *Knjiga labinskog bilježnika Bartolomeja Gervazija (1525-1550)* (Pazin: Državni arhiv u Pazinu, 2008; Spisi istarskih bilježnika I, Spisi labinskih bilježnika, sv. 1).

²⁵ Fulvia Mainardis, “Per uno studio dei falsi nel manoscritto inglese di Jacopo Valvasone di Maniago (1499–1570),” in *La falsificazione epigrafica. Questioni di metodo e casi di studio*, ed. L. Calvelli (Venezia: Edizioni Ca’ Foscari, 2019), 161–178.

The playful attitude towards inscription is represented here by the long epitaph of Sergius Polensis, actor and parasite. The epitaph, whose fictional location was either Pola in Istria or Salona in Dalmatia, was very popular during the Renaissance and in the whole Early Modern period. Attempts to attribute the text to a Late Antiquity parodist (writing in the genre of *Testamentum porcelli*) or to a humanist from the early Quattrocento turned out to be unconvincing. Clues from manuscript copies lead us to see as possible author of the parody Jacopino (Jacopo) Badoer da Peraga, from 1439 / 1441 the archbishop of Split, and previously, in 1420s, a member of the Padovan humanist network of Siccio Polenton, interested in antiquity, Plautus and Terence, and inscriptions.

Epigraphy as a sign of humanistic interest is attested by the connection between a 16th century historian Jacopo Valvasone di Maniago and a canon of Pula and Labin in Istria, Marin Marinčić. The connection is indicated by notes in Valvasone's hand which attribute to Marinčić the transcription of three inscriptions from Osor and Cres; the stones with original inscriptions do not exist today. Archival documents show that Marinčić was Valvasone's contemporary, active 1540–1543. Valvasone's notes are the only proof of Marinčić's humanistic interests; Marinčić obviously acted as a link toward the (less accessible) traces of Roman antiquity on the two Quarnero islands.

The epitaph of Sergius Polensis and a small contribution to epigraphy by Marin Marinčić had different destinies. The epitaph, although early recognized as a fake, got printed and transcribed again and again, obviously being read as an instance of truthful imagination (*se non è vero è ben trovato*). Marinčić's transcriptions, whose authenticity was never questioned, fell into oblivion until Mommsen rescued them from Muratori's schedae. Both cases show Istria, the Quarnero and Dalmatia participating in the formation of the classic ideal as it was understood by Renaissance humanists.

Appendix: text of the epitaph of Sergius Polensis

The text follows Mommsen's 1872 edition with a number of corrections.

uiatores optumi uel aduenae, siue bini siue singuli inceditis, siue turmatim, quod magis erit gratum, offirmate gressum nec miremini si moramini aliquantisper. dicaculus equidem fui; succinctus sermo dari uobis non potest.

ut iuuat uobiscum esse ac ab ore meo pendulos detinere ut iuuat semper! saxum hoc uos uocat. quid inquam? ut uiuus assueui prudens imprudens, mortuus item uos fallo. nam non uos uocat quod uacat ore, uerum is, quouis cinis hic latet, olim quomodo potuit, nunc huc uos uocari uoluit ualuitque haec olim sua uoluntas uolentis uos legere hoc scriptum – uah quid loquor? immo sculptum; quam aegre ueritas adhuc se mecum conciliat; nam neque hic atramentum uel papirus aut membrana ulla adhuc sed malleolo et celte litteratus silex silens.

quid hic latet quod ego efferi et effari gestio? Sercius Polensis parasitus, histrio uester festiuissimus, hic cubo; hoc unum quidem tandem sponte dictum uerum est. siquis dubitat, hanc olfaciat humum; olet temetum et florem uini ueteris, quo satur satis uiuens uixi; at si uexi uitam tam uobis gratam quam notam urbi et orbi, non minus munus a uobis impetrem portet. adeste mihi et fauete edictoque huic uos subscribite et obsignate.

siquis sibi uesicam onustam senserit, domum onus hoc reportet in cloacam; si uero festinus fuerit, citerior uel ulterior hoc loco pro religione se euacuet. qui non paruerit, haec multa illi esto: teste altero careat. canes quoque caesi fustibus edictum hoc sentiant.

affuistis, fauistis et obsignastis, uideo, quam uos risum dare sitio – hui! sentio dictum uolui; quid hoc est quod tam faciliter istuc procedit ueritas? profecto contagione mei sitit ipsa et mihi supparasitatur quae ultro potum inuocata aduenit.

nunc si urbani perhiberi uultis et ueritati supparasitanti et arenti meo cineri cantharo piaculum uinariu festinate; post ualete, abite in rem uestram, uiatores optumi, his nugis, truffis ambagibusque meis condonati postumis.

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