

# Mathias Flacius and the “Bible Institute” in Urach

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**Abstract** *The history of the printing press at Urach near Tübingen is very important for the early history of Slavic publications, yet does not feature the name of Matthias Flacius (1520-1575). Flacius found ways to contribute to the success of the press. The fact that he was not a major contributor is due to the persecution inflicted upon him by Elector August of Saxony. Awareness of the Elector’s ruthless opposition to Flacius could contribute to the scholarly discussions about authorship.*

When Matthias Flacius was driven out of the University of Jena in 1562, an obvious occupation for him was at the new press in Amandenhof at Urach, not far from Tübingen. The grand project, recently brought to attention by E. Benz (1971), Stanko Jambrek (1998; 2007a) and most recently by Alojz Jembrih (2007), was the initiative of General Hans von Ungnad, Baron of Sonneck, once commander of the imperial forces in Styria, Carniola and Croatia, and famous for fighting the Turks. Dismissed from his office in 1556 because of his Lutheran faith, Ungnad determined to devote the remainder of his life to “a Christian work, begun from the grace of God” (Benz, 1939:395). Primož Trubar, in his dedication to the *Novi Testament (New Testament)*, wrote about that vision:

So now we will help these people with books in their language, so that they may have opportunity, like us to know the true faith...In this way, there is no doubt that the people in Turkey and on Turkish borders, who have much earnestness and zeal, but little religious understanding, will receive the new faith. These two new presses will open the people’s minds, that they may know the one and only true faith. They in turn will take this faith to the Turks so that this Christianity will be of great benefit (Bučar-Fancev, 1938).

Backed by Duke Christoph of Württemberg, it also drew support from Archduke Maximilian, later Emperor Maximilian II, who contributed 400 gulden (Schnur-

rer, 1799:35). An important chapter in the history of Lutheran missions, the press was meant to spread the Reformation in the south by publishing in “Wendish, Croatian and Cyrillic,” and was supported by a network of smugglers. Ungnad hoped that winning converts might even help liberate the Slavs in the south from the Turks.

The books produced at the press were read in the Balkans and as far as Moldau and Wallachei. Among them were the *New Testament*, the *Augsburg Confession*, Catechisms of Luther and Brenz, a *Postill*, and a *Hymnal* (*Verzeichnis*), including thirteen books in Glagolitic, eight books in Cyrillic, and nine in Latin. 300 Urach prints survive.

In the *Bibliotheca Bibliographica Aureliana*, Petar Zoranić expresses disappointment that Matthias Flacius, the most prominent Croatian Protestant, wrote so little in his native language (Badalić, 1966:18). An exception was reported by Jürgen Sydow: “Important are the Reformation publications printed in the years 1566 to 1568 in Slovenian, which were stimulated primarily by the residence in the city by Flacius 1566” (1956:18).

“No one is more qualified at present” to work at the Urach press, Klombner wrote to Ungnad on April 4, 1563, “than Illyricus. He was born twenty miles from there [Laibach=Ljubljana] in Austria, can [use] Croatian, Glagolitic, and Cyrillic” (Kostrenčić, 1874:67).

But Flacius was foiled again by Elector August. He contributed 200 gulden with the proviso that they could not be used to pay Flacius (Stökl, 266). He made clear that “the Bibles and Doctor Luther’s House Postil, etc. may be speedily printed and prepared in the languages mentioned, but not “the little tracts and Schwärmerei of Illyricus” (Kostrenčić, 67; Stökl, 266).

Despite the Saxon elector, Flacius had a hand at the Urach press. He sent Matthias Klombner a sample of a Cyrillic text in Russian, wondering whether if it were printed in their alphabet, Russians could read Croatian (Benz, 1939:445). He seems to have been consulted by Stephan Consul about the Croatian translation of the Augsburg Confession, Spangenburg’s Postills, and Luther’s Hauspostill (Bučar, 1910).

His *De Vocabulo Fidei* was published anonymously at Urach in Slovenian with Trubar’s 1550 catechism, the first printed book in the Slovenian language (Trubar, 1992). Modified by Trubar, it appeared again in 1561 in Croatian (Glagolitic and Cyrillic print) and 1564 in Latin print, as *Primi Truberi Sermo Croatiae redditus: De vocabulo fidei*.<sup>1</sup> According to Mirković, he published two books at Urach in 1563,

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<sup>1</sup> *Katehismus: edna malahna kniga, u koi esu vele potrebni i prudni nauki i artikuli prave Krstianske vere, s kratkim istomačenem, za mlade i priposte ljudi. I edna predika, od kriposti i ploda prave karstianske vere* (Tübingen, 1561). Reprint of glagolitic catechism was prepared and edited by Alojz

(the year he visited Venice), a translation of the 1543 *Beneficium Christi amoris*, popular in Italy, *Govorenje vele prudno*, and *Jedna kratka suma nikih prodik od tlče i od čarnic*, which deals with the problem of evil, witches and charms (Mirković, 54). Josip Bratulić thinks that Flacius participated in, or at least influenced, the last book published at Urach, the *Vsih prorokov stumačenje hrvatsko* of 1564 (Mirković, 55).<sup>2</sup>

The elector's opposition may be the reason that authorship remains unknown for two of the most important protestant publications: *Rasgovaranje megiu Papistu i gednim Luteran* (*A Conversation between a Papist and a Lutheran*) of 1555, the first book published in Croatian<sup>3</sup>, and the *Otrozhia Biblia*.

The *Razgovaranje* is "a most independent, most militant and most sophisticated document not only in Croatian but also in Slovene Protestant literature" (Mirković, 1980, II, 176). Christina Marshall furnishes a summary.

The Lutheran, called "Christian," argues that salvation is not by good works, but by faith in Christ; that one cannot be converted by free will, but is drawn by God; there is no other head of the church but Christ. The only authority is the scripture. Christian takes the Lutheran position on purgatory, communion, clerical marriage, the sacraments, the saints, etc. At one point Christian quotes almost word for word the central theme of the Catalog, published one year later (1977, 128).

Forgotten in the Counter-Reformation, *Razgovaranje* was discovered by Theodor Elze, a Protestant pastor in Venice. Two copies are extant, one in the Bibliotheca Marciana in Venice and the other in the National and University Library in Zagreb.

Considering the speculations of Theodor Elze, Ivan Šercer, Branko Vodnik, Franjo Bučar (1918) and Matija Valjavec, the author of *Razgovaranje* was Vergerio. Ervin Wedel (1975, 23-35) agreed, as did Walter Hovecar (1936, 628). Angel-

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Jembrih (Pazin: Istarsko književno društvo "Juraj Dobrila"; Buzet: Katedra Čakovskog sabora; Želježno/Eisenstadt: Hrvatsko kulturno društvo u Gradišću; Beč: Hrvatski akademski krug, 1994). Reprint of Latin catechism was also prepared and edited by Alojz Jembrih (Pazin: Istarsko književno društvo "Juraj Dobrila"; Buzet: Katedra Čakovskog sabora; Želježno/Eisenstadt: Hrvatsko kulturno društvo u Gradišću, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Reprint of Book of Prophets from 1564 was prepared and edited by Borislav Arapović under the name *Proroczi MDLXIII: prvotisak Proroka Starog zavjeta na hrvatskom jeziku: studija i preslik* (Mostar: Sveučilište, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Antone Segnianine (Anton Senjanin) [pseudonym]. *Rasgovaranje megiu papistu i gednim Luteran. Padua: Gracioze Percacine* [Tuebingen: Ulrich Morhart] 1555. Reprint was published in 2005 under the name *Razgovaranje: pretisak i transkripcija djela Razgovaranje meju Papistu i jednim Luteran(om) tiskanim 1555. g.* (Zagreb: Bogoslovni institut i Nacionalna i sveučilišna knjižnica). Reprint was prepared and edited by Alojz Jembrih and Stanko Jambreč.

ica Hauser (1980) objected, however. Vergerio could not write in Croatian. Based on theological analysis, Stanko Jambrek (1999, 141-152) concluded that there is no sure evidence of the author, but that the use of theological terms is nearer to Vergerio's legal/theological style than Flacius' linguistic/theological style. Others think it was Primus Trubar, "the first fruits of his interest in Croatian" (Stabej, 1968, 128), or perhaps Antun Dalmatin.

Mirković (1980, II, 176) thought the author was Flacius. It is written in the Italian pasquinade form that Flacius had used earlier. Its language is the dialect of Labin in southeast Croatia, with specific colloquialisms. The style is more mature than the rest of the Protestant literature in that language. The names of particular saints against which Flacius argued, terms of opprobrium, individual thoughts, and even whole sentences are similar to his works. Beatrix Schmidt concurs with Mirković's judgment.

Elector August's ban is also relevant to the discussion of the possible authors of the *Otrozhia Biblia* (*Children's Bible*) of 1566. It was printed for the Laibach school in five languages: German, Croatian, Italian, Slovenian and Latin.<sup>4</sup> The Croatian section was meant for Istria, the coastlands and the military boundaries; the Slovene for Slovenia, the German for the Slovene nobles and bourgeois; the Italian for the Italian population of Istria, Görz (Gorizia) and the neighboring areas.

The *Children's Bible* has been attributed to Krelj (Rupel, 1965, 238) and to Trubar (Stabej, 1958, 123; Kidrič, 1924, 125). Mirković argues that the Croatian section was written by Flacius, the first realization of his plan to present his theological concepts in the vernacular. He thought it shows influences of the poetry of Dalmatian Croatian, and of the Razgovaranje. It was a "living trace of Flacius' thought" (Kidrič, 1924:121-125), a typical Flacian comparison of evangelical and papal doctrine with an emphasis on original sin. The style, he argued, was better than the other Protestant literature (Mirković, 1954).

Especially interesting is the included Alphabetum Slavonicum which attempted to produce the sounds of Croatian and Slovenian in Latin letters instead of Cyrillic, and to lay the basis for a written language. The Latin capitals and small letters were printed in the order of the old Slavic alphabets with their Latin equivalents.

This deals with an original and broadly-viewed attempt at laying the basis for a new writing and orthography among the Croats and Slovenes. The alphabet conceived by Flacius renders the sounds of Croatian and Slovenian more adequately and more consistently than the publications from the time at Urach,

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<sup>4</sup> *Otrozhia Biblia. Ein Handbüchlein. Darin ist unter anderm der Catechismus von fünfferlei Sprachen.* Regensburg: Johann Burger, 1566.

Venice or Padua (Wedel, 1975, 32).

Jože Stabej (1958, 128; Cf. Kidrič, 1924, 125) attributes the alphabet to Trubar. Mirković sees it as Flacius' work, the initial realization of his plan to present his theological concepts in the vernacular. The work, he argues, was based partly on books of Dalmatian Croatian, partly on the Razgovaranje, and was partly a new creation. Beatrix Schmidt shares his judgment (1993, 53-64).

The alphabet could have had great cultural significance. Unfortunately, on December 15, 1564, Archduke Karl II ordered all copies of the *Children's Bible* to be destroyed (Kidrič, 1924, 59f). The last copy of the *Children's Bible* in Germany vanished in the bombing of Dresden. Only two copies survive, one in the British Library; the other in the Vatican library. After the demise of the Urach press, almost two centuries passed before a purely Slovene book was published again.

## Conclusion

The Urach press was responsible for printing about 30,000 books: 15 in Glagolitic, 9 in Cyrillic, 6 in Latin and 6 in Italian. The story of its demise is part of the sad story of the Counter-Reformation.

The Protestant Elector on one side and the Counter-Reformation on the other prevented publications Flacius otherwise certainly would have written. Its disappearance was another reason that his homeland was deprived of publications in early printed Croatian by Matthias Flacius.

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**Sažetak** *Povijest tiskare u Urachu, blizu Tübingena, važne za ranu povijest slavenskog tiska, ne ističe ime Matije Vlačića (1520-1575). No Vlačić je našao načine doprinosa uspjehu tiskare. To što nije bio glavni suradnik izravno je povezano s progonstvom od strane izbornika Augusta iz Saksionije. Svjesnost o njegovu neumoljivu protivljenju Vlačiću može dati doprinos znanstvenim raspravama o autorstvu nekoliko djela.*