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FIGURE OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI IN MARULIĆ'S *DE INSTITUTIONE*:  
SOURCES AND MESSAGES

Whoever sought to describe a person and convey a message thereby, sooner or later became aware of the insurmountable obstacles and the frustrating partiality of his success. Also, to recognize the present in a moment of the past does not mean telling »all« about it but only that part which is relevant and accessible to the present generation.

For centuries the figure of St Francis of Assisi, *fratrum quoque Minorum institutor*, has been a source of inspiration. His personality and mission have inspired and challenged the imagination of generations of artists and writers. In Marulić's *De institutione* the episodes from the Saint's life are described with great religious zeal. He invokes, with the first »brothers«, »*Sed quid nunc de te, pater Francisce, dicam?*« Yet, he addresses the Saint as he would address a contemporary. He digs into the sources in search of *exempla* topical in his day, and explains them in the light of his, already assigned, theme.

As his goal, the author sets out not only to identify the sources of the Franciscan *exempla*, but to add this new voice to a host of Francis' biographers, reminding the reader that with the Saint's death dissensions flared up among his followers concerning the original intentions and ideals of the movement and gave rise to different traditions each striving to found its own legitimacy on the selected examples from the Saint's life. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the differences became so great that Paul Sabatier posed the question of the authenticity of Franciscan sources in circulation (the so called Franciscan question), which in the years that followed gave rise to a respectable body of historical-critical studies in the matter.

The synoptic comparison between the texts *Marulić – Fontes Franciscani* (Thomas of Celano's *Vita prima* and *Vita secunda*, St Bonaventura's *Legenda maior* and *Legenda minor* and other hagiographic writings) reveals, in chronological order, numerous parallels between Marulić and the Franciscan sources available in his day, as well as some resourceful interventions on the part of the Croatian writer.