

WHAT HAS FLACIUS TO DO WITH ERASMUS? THE BIBLICAL HUMANISM OF MATTHIAS FLACIUS ILLYRICUS

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The sixteenth-century Croatian-born Lutheran theologian Matthias Flacius Illyricus was impacted by Renaissance humanism through his studies at the school of San Marco in Venice, under the teaching of the prominent Renaissance humanist Giovanni Battista Cipelli, Egnazio. As a student of Egnazio's, who was a scholar and friend of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, young Flacius was introduced to humanistic ideas.

The influence of humanism on young Flacius continued as he moved to study at the university in Basel in 1539. The emphasis on learning Biblical languages, especially Hebrew and Greek, in this phase of his education later proved crucial for Flacius in his work on Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. Flacius further encountered humanism during his studies in Tübingen and then in Wittenberg, most notably through his teachers and mentors Matthias Garbitius Illyricus and Philipp Melanchthon.

This article investigates the various sources and strands of humanist influence on Flacius by exploring in greater detail the intellectual and scholarly milieu in the cities where he spent his student years. Furthermore, it explores expressions of what was to develop into Flacius' biblical humanism, most importantly through the example of his 1570 *Glossa Compendiaria in Novum Testamentum*. The central question the author sets out to answer is what kind of humanism characterizes Flacius and his work most fittingly.

Key words: Renaissance Humanism, Biblical Humanism, Matthias Flacius Illyricus, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Philipp Melanchthon, Venice, Wittenberg, Protestant Reformation

1. Introduction

The Istrian-born Lutheran theologian and historian Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520-1575) or, as he is known in Croatian, Matija Vlačić Ilirik, was influenced by Renaissance humanism from multiple directions.¹ Beginning with his years of study in Venice and throughout the rest of his education in Basel, Tübingen and Wittenberg, Flacius came into contact with various strains of humanism that left an indelible mark on his way of thinking and his scholarly work. This article maps the humanist influence on Flacius by exploring in greater detail the intellectual and academic milieus in the cities where he spent his student years. Even after Flacius completed his studies, the legacy of humanist principles, such as the call *ad fontes*, remained clearly present in his publications, as an examination of one of his major works illustrates.

2. Flacius in Venice

Flacius was born on March 3, 1520 in Albona (today the town of Labin). Labin is located on the east coast of the Istrian peninsula, which at that time was under the control of the Venetian Republic. Flacius most likely began his education at the school ran by the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans) at the monastery of San Francesco in Lower Labin (Podlabin). What can be established with certainty is that young Matthias arrived in Venice at the age of sixteen in order to pursue his studies. This took place in 1536, the year Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam died. By that time, Venetian humanism had already become well-established. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Aldo Manuzio (1449-1515) and his publishing house had attracted a group of clerics and scholars to the so-called Aldine Academy,² among whose founding members was the prominent Renaissance humanist Giovanni Battista Cipelli (Egnazio, 1478-1553).³ Egnazio was a friend of Erasmus, with

¹ For his biography see Wilhelm P r e g e r, *Matthias Flacius Illyricus und seine Zeit*, 2 vols., Theodor Blässing, Erlangen, 1859 and 1861 (reprint Georg Olms and Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, Hildesheim, 1964); Mijo M i r k o v i ć, *Matija Vlačić Ilirik* (Djela JAZU 50), Izdavački zavod Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti, Zagreb, 1960 (reprint, 2 vols., Čakavski sabor–Istarska naklada, Pula / Liburnia, Rijeka, 1980).

² Martin L o w r y, *The World of Aldus Manutius: Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Venice*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1979, 113.

³ Egnazio also used the agnomen »Venetus«, referring to his city of origin. For his biography see Elpidio M i o n i, »Cipelli, Giovanni Battista«, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 25, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, Rome, 1981, 698-792.

whom he kept occasional correspondence until 1534⁴ and he also corresponded with Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560).⁵

Furthermore, Egnazio collaborated on the preparation of many classical texts for publication, including works by Cicero and others, as well as the edition of Erasmus' *Adagiorum Collectanea*, which was first printed by the Aldine *officina* in 1508.⁶ He also published brief biographies of Roman, Byzantine, and medieval Western emperors, and a work on the origins of the Turks.⁷ From 1520 until 1549, Egnazio held the public chair of Greek at the school of San Marco. By the time he came to occupy this position, the school, founded in the mid-fifteenth century, had already developed an emphasis on philology and had appointed an official historiographer as well.

Flacius came to study at the school of San Marco and was taught by Egnazio during his three-year-long stay. Egnazio probably introduced young Flacius to humanistic ideas and to Erasmus' works, including his translation of the New Testament into Latin from Greek.⁸ Flacius became familiar with the humanist call to return to the study of original sources (*ad fontes*), as exemplified both by Manuzio, who focused on collecting the classics and publishing them, and by his own teacher Egnazio. Flacius also probably attended lectures by Paolo Manuzio (1512-1574), the third son of the famous printer. The discipline of studying ancient languages

⁴ See R.A.B. Mynors and Douglas F.S. Thomson (eds.), *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 142–197 (1501–1514)*, vol. 2, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1975, 243. For the relationship between Egnazio and Erasmus see Martin J.C. Lowry, »Giambattista Egnazio of Venice, 1478 – 4 July 1553«, in Peter G. Bietenholz (ed.), *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, vol. 1, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1986, 424–425.

⁵ See *Melanchthons Briefwechsel* (henceforth MBW): *Kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe: Texte* 6, Frommann Holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 2005 (1484: 191–192); *MBW Texte* 12, 2011, (3294: 293–295) for samples of their correspondence from 1534 (Egnazio to Melanchthon) and 1543 (Melanchthon to Egnazio). See also the German translation of Melanchthon's letter to Egnazio from August 1543 in Günther Frank and Martin Schneider (eds.), *Melanchthon deutsch III: Von Wittenberg nach Europa*, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Leipzig, 2011, 249–251.

⁶ James Bruce Ross, »Venetian Schools and Teachers Fourteenth to Early Sixteenth Century: A Survey and a Study of Giovanni Battista Egnazio«, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 29/4 (1976), 521–566, here 538–539.

⁷ A list of Egnazio's major published works (including translations and editions of classical authors) up until 1544 can be found in Andreas Wäschbüsch, *Alter Melanchthon: Muster theologischer Autoritätsstiftung bei Matthias Flacius Illyricus* (Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte 96), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2008, 13–14, n. 57. See also, E. Mioni, *op. cit.* (3).

⁸ For an overview of Erasmus' direct and indirect contacts with individuals from the Croatian lands and a mapping of the dissemination and partially of the reception of his works among Croatians, including Flacius, see Bratislav Lučin, »Erasmus and the Croats in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries«, *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook*, 24 (2004), 89–114.

and collecting and publishing classical sources eventually became Flacius' lifelong pursuit, at which he excelled as an adult.⁹

During his time in Venice, Flacius expressed an interest in studying theology. His relative, Baldo Lupetino (1502-1556),¹⁰ who held the position of provincial at the monastery of San Francesco della Vigna¹¹ in Venice at the time, secretly gave Flacius some of Martin Luther's writings and advised him »to go to Germany, not to a monastery, if [he] wanted to study theology.«¹² Shortly afterwards the young Illyrian was on his way northward across the Alps.

3. Basel, Tübingen, Wittenberg

The influence of humanism on Flacius continued as he began studying at the university in Basel in 1539 and lived in the home of Professor Simon Grynaeus (1493-1541).¹³ Also among Flacius' professors were Oswald Myconius (1488-1552) and Johannes Oporinus (1507-1568), who taught him Greek.¹⁴ All of these teachers had been personally acquainted with Erasmus: Myconius had been his student;

⁹ Martina H a r t m a n n, *Humanismus und Kirchenkritik: Matthias Flacius Illyricus als Erforscher des Mittelalters* (Beiträge zur Geschichte und Quellenkunde des Mittelalters 19), Jan Thorbecke, Ostfildern, 2001, 16.

¹⁰ Oliver K. O l s o n, »Baldo Lupetino, Venetian Martyr«, *Lutheran Quarterly*, 7 (1993), 7–18; for the translation into Croatian by Ksenija Magda, see *Baldo Lupetino*, Grad Labin / Narodni muzej Labin, Labin, 2003 (brochure of 21 pages).

¹¹ The monastery, which stands in the Castello district on the northern edge of the city, supposedly on the spot where the angel spoke the words »Pax tibi Marce Evangelista meus« to Mark the Evangelist, was founded in 1253.

¹² August Detlev T w e s t e n, *Matthias Flacius Illyricus, eine Vorlesung*. Mit autobiographischen Beilagen und einer Abhandlung über Melanchthons Verhalten zum Interim von Hermann Rossel, G. Bethge, Berlin, 1844, 35–63, here 38: »(...) erzählte er mir, wie Luther das Evangelium wieder zu Ehren gebracht habe, wies mir einige Schriften und rieth mir, nach Deutschland, nicht ins Kloster zu gehen, wenn ich Theologie studiren wolle. Auf der Stelle war ich mit Freuden dazu bereit und reiste wenige Wochen darauf nach Deutschland.« See also Thomas K a u f m a n n, »Erfahrungsmuster« in der frühen Reformation«, in Paul Münch (ed.), »Erfahrung« als Kategorie der Frühneuzeitgeschichte (Historische Zeitschrift, Beiheft 31), Oldenbourg, München, 2001, 281–306, here 289.

¹³ For more about Grynaeus, see Peter G. B i e t e n h o l z, »Simon Grynaeus of Veringendorf, c 1494 – 1 August 1541«, in *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, 1: 142–146; Paul L. N y h u s, »Grynaeus, Simon (1493 – 1541)«, *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Reformation* 4, Hans J. Hillerbrand (ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, 1996, 200–201; »Grynaeus, Simon«, *MBW 12: Personen F–K*, 2005, 192–193.

¹⁴ In 1538 Oporinus stopped being a professor of Latin and began teaching Greek Classics in the building of a former Augustinian monastery in Basel, where he also lived. Oporinus later became the most important publisher of Flacius' historical works and remained a loyal friend to Flacius until his death in July 1568. See Martin S t e i n m a n n,

Grynaeus, professor of Greek, who was widely recognized by his contemporaries as a prominent philosopher, philologist and theologian, was Erasmus' friend and succeeded him at the university in Basel. A young student in the city, such as Flacius was at the time, was almost bound to come in contact with the intellectual legacy of the great humanist, who lived and worked in the city during three periods: 1514-1516, 1521-1529, and in the last years of his life, i.e. 1535-1536. Along with his contemporaries, Flacius was influenced by the exegetical methods employed by Erasmus, whom he considered a model to follow.¹⁵ The emphasis on learning Biblical languages, especially Greek in this phase of his education, later proved crucial for Flacius in his work on Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics.

Flacius continued to be impacted by humanism throughout the rest of his studies. From Basel he left for Tübingen, where he studied under Matthias Garbitius Illyricus (Matija Grbac, Grbić, ca. 1515-1559), who was the first known Protestant from present-day Croatia.¹⁶ Garbitius was a professor of Greek and had previously taught Greek literature at the University of Wittenberg,¹⁷ where he interpreted the works of Homer and Sophocles, and Aristotle's ethics. In Tübingen Garbitius became professor of Greek language and Latin literature and poetry and in July 1544 also professor of ethics. Apart from lecturing on the Greek classics, Garbitius himself composed and published poetry in Greek and Latin. Flacius was also taught by the humanist and polymath Joachim Camerarius (1500-1574) in Tübingen.¹⁸ It was Camerarius and Garbitius who advised Flacius to go to Wittenberg in order to continue his studies for a master's degree.

In Wittenberg Flacius encountered another strand of humanism, which was characterized by a fresh emphasis on the teaching of the Hebrew and Greek languages and in adopting methods of humanist research and textual criticism. This new approach was reflected in the curricular reforms of the universities of Northern

Johannes Oporinus. Ein Basler Buchdrucker um die Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts (Basler Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft 105), Helbing & Lichtenhahn, Basel/Stuttgart, 1967.

¹⁵ Rudolf Keller, »Flacius und Erasmus«, in *Der Schlüssel zur Schrift: Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes bei Matthias Flacius Illyricus* (Arbeiten zur Geschichte und Theologie des Luthertums, Neue Folge 5), Lutherisches Verlagshaus, Hannover, 1984, 172-176.

¹⁶ Mate Krizan, »Grbić, Matija (Ματθίας Γαββύκιος' Ιλλυρικός, Matthias Garbitius Illyricus; Garbicius, Grbac, Ilirik),« *Hrvatski biografski leksikon 5: Gn-H, Trpimir Macan* (ed.), Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, Zagreb, 2002, 138-139.

¹⁷ For Garbitius' relationship with Melancthon and Flacius, see Luka Ilić, »*Praeceptor Humanissimus* et duo Illyri: Garbitius et Flacius,« *Philipp Melancthon. Lehrer Deutschlands, Reformator Europas*, Irene Dingel and Armin Kohnle (eds.), (Leucorea-Studien zur Geschichte der Reformation und der Lutherischen Orthodoxie 13), Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, Leipzig, 2011, 65-79.

¹⁸ Joachim Camerarius became Melancthon's first biographer, publishing his work in 1566, just six years after the death of the Wittenberg humanist and reformer, *De Philippi Melancthonis Ortu, Totius Vitae Cvrrievlo et Morte, Implicata Rervm Memorabilium Temporis Illius Hominumque mentione atque indicio, cum expositionis serie cohaerentium: Narratio Diligens et Accvrata Ioachimi Camerarii Pabeperg*, Ernst Vögelin, Leipzig, 1566.

Europe, especially in Germany, and was eventually utilized to serve the methods and goals of the Reformation. For example, the renewed interest in classical studies was used to improve understanding of the roots and systematic theological development of the early Christian church. This German humanism was exemplified for Flacius most notably by his teacher and mentor Philipp Melanchthon.

The association between Flacius and Melanchthon was a complex one and went through sharply opposing phases, of both friendship and enmity. Flacius admired the *Praeceptor Germaniae* (as Melanchthon was often referred to) as a teacher and considered his work *Loci communes theologici* to be one of outstanding scholarship. According to Joachim Camerarius, in the beginning Melanchthon found students that Flacius could tutor in Greek and Hebrew, and earn some money that way. A recommendation letter written by Melanchthon in 1546 praised Flacius' classical knowledge and skills in the ancient languages, stating, »The learned M. Illyricus is coming to you, who surpasses Epiphanius of Salamis who spoke five languages, not only in his knowledge of languages but also in his broader knowledge.«¹⁹ Later, however, their relationship turned sour and they distanced themselves from one another.

As a 24-year-old, Flacius received his appointment as a tutor in Hebrew in 1544; he also privately tutored students on Aristotle,²⁰ by whose philosophy he had been influenced through Grynaeus. To Flacius' teaching schedule in Wittenberg, Greek and lectures on Aristotle were added in early 1547.²¹ In 1550 Flacius published a volume of Aristotle's writings in Greek co-edited by Erasmus and Grynaeus, along with contributions by a few other scholars, including his own notes and emendations, as is made clear from the preface written by the Basel publisher Michael Isengrin (1500-1557).²² A quote by Flacius from this time reflects how he regarded the Greek philosophers:

¹⁹ MBW 4456 (Regesten 4: 446), 1983: »Venit autem istuc M. Illyr. vir doctus, qui Epiphanium illum Salaminium πεντάγλωττον vincit, non solum cognitione linguarum, sed etiam rerum scientia.«

²⁰ For a treatment of Flacius' use of Aristotle see Zoltán R o k a y, »Aristotle in Clavis Scripturae Sacrae by Matthias Flacius Illyricus«, *Matija Vlačić Ilirik II. Zbornik radova s drugog međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa »Matija Vlačić Ilirik« Labin, 27.-29. Travnja 2006*, Marina Miladinov (ed.), Grad Labin, 2008, 39-49.

²¹ At the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna under the signature Cod. 10570 there is a manuscript of 768 pages containing notes taken during the lectures by Georg Tanner (ca. 1520–ca. 1584), who was Flacius' student, under the title *Scholia in Aristotelis librum II Posteriorum deinde, in libros Topicorum, Elenchorum et Rhetoricorum ex Matthiae Illyrici praelectionibus a G. Tannero collecta a 1547*.

²² Αριστοτέλους ἅπαντα. *Aristotelis svmmi semper philosophi...opera quaecunqve hactenus extiterunt omnia... Praetera quam diligentiam, ut omnibus aeditionibus reliquis, omnia haec exirent à nostra officina emendatoria... Per Des. Eras. Roterodamm...*, Johannes Bebel and Michael Isengrin, Basel, 1550, A 1v.

Plato was the greatest philosopher, and Socrates the most holy and most pious, as we read from the ancient Greeks; nevertheless, they praise Aristotle for having stood against Plato (who was his teacher) because of the truth, and he did not approve everything from Socrates, either. Moreover, learned people consider Aristotle's word to be sublime and divine, since he said that one should regard the truth to be higher and greater than even his/her most beloved friends.²³

This statement is important in showing that, concerning Aristotle, Flacius' thinking was more in line with Melancthon's than Luther's. Luther objected to Aristotle's anthropology, which lacked a place for a Creator God; this did not fit with Luther's own definition of humanity as fearing, loving and trusting in God above all things. Therefore Luther opposed the use of Aristotle's philosophy in theology. Melancthon, on the contrary, held that it was precisely Aristotle's philosophy and methodology that were the most fitting for the task of the study of theology. This is certainly an area in which Melancthon's influence upon Flacius was greater than Luther's.

Thus, during his student years, the young Illyricus came into contact with different streams of Renaissance thought and culture: in Venice with Italian, from Basel onward with German humanism. He was influenced by humanist ideas not only through his education but also through interaction with the people in his personal and professional networks, which he was already developing during this time and which would prove to be crucial for his later scholarly engagement. Throughout his life, Flacius followed with interest the political developments within the Venetian Republic, writing letters as well as dedicating several of his works to the Venetian Senate. For example, in 1554 he dedicated his *Historia certaminum inter Romanos Episcopos*, on the third church council of Constantinople in 680-681, to Francesco Venier (1489-1556), the 80th Doge of Venice (**Fig. 1**).²⁴ In 1565 he wrote the Senate a long exhortation (**Fig. 2**), calling them to be tolerant toward Protestants and not to follow the Papacy blindly.²⁵

²³ Matthias Flacius Illyricus, *Entschueldigung Matthiae Flacij Illyrici / geschrieben an die Vniuersitet zu Wittemberg / der Mittelding halben. Item sein brieff an Philip. Melancthonem / sampt etlichen andern schrifftten dieselbige sach belangend. Verdeutschet*, Christian Rödinger d.Ä., Magdeburg, 1549 (section »Dem Christlichen Leser«), A 3v.

²⁴ Flacius, *Historia certaminum inter Romanos Episcopos & sextam Carthaginensem synodum, Africanasque Ecclesias, de primatu seu potestate Papae, bona fide ex authenticis monumentis collecta...* Item *Contra primatum seu tyrannidem Papae*. Johannes Oporinus, Basel, 1554. The dedication was dated on 1 March 1554 in Magdeburg.

²⁵ Flacius, *De sectis, dissensionibus, contradictionibus et confvusionibus doctrinae, religionis, scriptorium & doctorum Pontificiorum liber*, Paul Queck, Basel, 1565. See Hilmar M. Pabell, »Praise and Blame: Peter Canisius's Ambivalent Assessment of Erasmus«, in Karl A. E. Enekel (ed.), *The Reception of Erasmus in the Early Modern Period* (Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture 30), Brill, Leiden, 2013, 129-160, especially 131-132.

3
SERENISSIMO DV-
CIFRANCISCO VENEZIO, &
inclyto senatui Reipublicæ Ven-
etæ, æternam fœlicitatem
precatur Matthias Flaci-
us Illyricus.



S E M P E R profecto
*Singulari quodam
 fœuore ac amore,
 Singulariq; beneuo
 lenitiâ istam uestrâ
 fœlicissimam, opti-*
*mâ constitutam Reipub. præ cunctis
 alijs imperijs potentatibq; profectus
 sum. Cuius mei animi ac uoluntatis ergâ
 uos non tantum conscientiam meam, sed
 & ipsius cordium cognitorem Deum,
 esse me allegare possum. Id uero mihi acci-*
 dit

CHRISTIANA ADHORTA-
TIO M. FL. ILLYRICI, AD SERENISSIMUM
Principem & inclytum Senatuum Veneticarum, ad scriben-
dam inquirendamq; ex celsibus sacrorum literarum oracu-
lis ueris ac em. in presensibus Religionis construet-
isq; Antichristi reuelatione.



O G I T A N T I mihi uestras Amplitudines,
 Princeps serenissime, & Senatus inclyte, de
 Christiana Religione alloqui: & simul expen-
 denti, tum uestram augustam Maiestatem, tum
 meam extremam indignitatem, donorumq; ac
 donum mearum tenuitatē: uariq; omino de hoc toto in-
 futuro deliberanti, tandem incidit illa Spiritus S. sententia,
 per D. Paulum de omnibus sinceris I E S U C H R I S T I do-
 ctoribus pronuntiata: Debitores sunt Gracis & Barbaris,
 sapientibus & insipientibus. Quo coelesti oraculo tandem
 eoram hanc consultationem finiens, concludensq; standi
 omnino me pie ac officio uoluntateq; Dei facturum, si
 uestras (Patres amplissimi) Cellitudines de præsentibus Reli-
 gionis controuersijs reuenter allocutus fuero. Obligor
 enim illis non tantum communi lege charitatis, qua Deus
 omnes homines, quantum uis ignotos, sibi inuicem arctissimè
 de iunxit: sed etiam illo speciali uinculo, quod me maiore
 inde ab aliquot iam ætatibus Aluone (quæ & Albona &
 uetus scriptoribus dicta est) in Histria, inter Arsam flu-
 uenem & sinum Flanaticum, sub ipsarum dominio uixerunt:
 ubi & ego natus educatusq; sum, & adhuc hodierna die co-
 gnato consanguineosq; plurimos habeo. Ideoq; singulari
 quadam animi beneuolentia, ac ueluti deuotione semper
 erga eas affectus fui: motus etiam diuino mandato, quo u-
 nuiquiq; suum magistratum amare & reuenter iubeatur.
 Vestrâ uero summâ Clem. humanitatēq; fuerit, ad bre-
 uem



Fig. 1. Flacius' dedication to Doge Francesco Venier and the Venetian Senate (*Historia certaminum inter Romanos Episcopos*. Basel, 1554)

Fig. 2. Flacius' dedication to the Venetian Doge and Senate, mentioning Istria, Labin and the River Raša (Arsia) (*De sectis, dissensionibus, contradictionibus et confysionibus...* Basel, 1565)

In the main body of the work he supported his arguments partly by appealing to Erasmus' authority, using him, a Catholic, to refute Catholic positions, particularly concerning the Pope or issues surrounding marriage. Furthermore, a letter from 26 June 1570, written in Strasbourg to the Venetian Senate, attests to his continuing attempts at trying to influence the religious direction of La Serenissima Repubblica.²⁶

4. Reflections of Biblical Humanism in Flacius' Work: The Example of *Glossa Compendiaria in Novum Testamentum*

Among Flacius' lasting contributions to Protestantism are his outstanding hermeneutical achievements, demonstrated on the pages of his *Glossa* on the New Testament, first published in 1570.²⁷ The vast undertaking of the *Glossa* clearly reflected the humanist education and influences.²⁸ Flacius' goal was to produce a commentary on the entire Bible. Although he began working on a *Glossa* on the Old Testament as well, his untimely death in 1575 prevented him from completing that project.

The title of the work, *Glossa compendiaria*, already gives a clear indication of what Flacius was trying to accomplish. According to medieval tradition, glossa, the predecessor to present-day commentaries, denoted words of explanation or clarification that were incorporated into a certain text by way of adding notes in between the lines or on the margins. This stood in contrast to the later method based on *loci*, applied for example by Flacius' former teacher Philipp Melancthon, which concentrated on highlighting only certain portions of Scripture and did not address each segment in detail but was rather topically arranged.

Erasmus had made a significant contribution to reviving the study of Greek at universities in his time, partly by publishing critical editions and translations of works by the church fathers and classical authors. The biblical humanism represented by Erasmus utilized the principle of *ad fontes* propagated by Renaissance humanism

²⁶ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Sant' Ufficio, b. 162. Fasc. In cfo. Di carte scritte VI e 25. For a transcription of the letter see Giovanna P a o l i n, »Lettera die Mattia Flacio al Senato di Venezia (1570)«, *Metodi & Ricerche*, Nuova serie, III/2 (1984), 36-42.

²⁷ *Της του Υιου Θεου Καννης Διαθηκης Απαντα. Novvm Testamentvm Iesv Christi Filii Dei, ex versione Erasmi, innvmeris in locis ad Graecam veritatem, genuinumque sensum emendata. Glossa compendiaria M. Matthiae Flacij Illyrici Albonensis in nouum Testamentum. Cum multiplici indice tum ipsius sacri Textus, tum etiam glossae*, Pietro Perna and Theobald Dietrich, Basel, 1570. The second edition of Flacius' *Glossa* was published almost a century later in Frankfurt am Main in 1659.

²⁸ For more about *Glossa*, see Robert K o l b, »Matthias Flacius' *Glossa Compendiaria*: The Wittenberg Way of Exegesis in Its Second Generation«, *Matija Vlačić Ilirik III. Zbornik radova s Trećeg međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa »Matija. Vlačić Ilirik« Labin, 22.-24. travnja 2010 / Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Matthias Flacius Illyricus*, Marina Miladinov with Luka Ilić (eds.), Grad Labin, Labin, 2012, 72-89.

and emphasized the importance of the knowledge of languages and the method of textual criticism in the service of a better understanding the Bible and church history.²⁹ Erasmus' translation of the New Testament into Latin along with the Greek text saw five editions in the sixteenth century, the last one published in 1535. For his first edition of the New Testament, Erasmus seems to have relied on a relatively small number of sources. The later editions were revised, as their author was able to consult more texts (most importantly the Complutensian Polyglot). Even though Flacius, in writing the *Glossa*, had the advantage of having access to Erasmus' later editions of the New Testament, he still felt that there were numerous linguistic corrections that he had to make to Erasmus' text; he was comparing the Greek passages to the Greek original and Erasmus' Latin translation to the Vulgate.

Flacius' work grew to 1,394 folio pages (not counting the dedication, the preface, or the two indexes at the end), making it one of the largest and heaviest books published at the time. On each page there were two columns of approximately 70 lines each: the Greek was on the left, the Latin translation on the right, and then Flacius' commentary followed. His text was so detailed and thorough that it equalled in length the entire New Testament.

According to Pierre Fraenkel, Flacius' *Glossa* of the New Testament has been one of the least studied commentaries of Scripture through history and has received little attention even from those scholars who have dedicated much time to studying Flacius and his works.³⁰ However, the work does deserve attention for several reasons. Firstly, it marks »the beginning, or prehistory, of scientific biblical criticism«. ³¹ Secondly, *Glossa* was one of the first Protestant commentaries on the whole New Testament (both Luther and John Calvin avoided producing commentaries on the Apocalypse of John). Thirdly, in this work Flacius put into practice the hermeneutical principles that he had articulated and systematized in *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae*. Lastly, Flacius was acknowledged by many contemporaries as a good historian, linguist, exegete, theologian and writer. Therefore, closer examination of *Glossa* may yield useful insights for Reformation historians and theologians regarding Biblical interpretation in the sixteenth century.

Flacius began this colossal project after having found refuge in Antwerp at the end of 1566. He completed it in three years. During that period, he was forced to flee the city in the spring of 1567 when Antwerp was taken over by a Roman Catholic army loyal to Margaret (1522-1586), Duchess of Parma, and Governor

²⁹ For more on Erasmus' methodology and biblical humanism see C. A. L. J a r r o t t, »Erasmus' Biblical Humanism«, *Studies in the Renaissance*, 17 (1970), 119-152.

³⁰ Pierre F r a e n k e l, »Matthias Flacius Illyricus and his *Gloss* on Hebrews 9«, *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 14/1 (Spring 1984), 97-111, here 99.

³¹ Kenneth G. H a g e n, »'De Exegetica Methodo': Niels Hemmingsen's *De Methodis*«, *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century* (Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies), David Steinmetz (ed.), Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1996, 181-196, here 195.

of the Habsburg Netherlands. Flacius relocated to Frankfurt am Main for half a year and then came to settle in Strasbourg in mid-November 1567. Flacius wrote the dedication of his monumental work (occupying 18 large folio pages) to the senate of Strasbourg, dated 24 February 1570, which was St. Matthias' feast day. Completing the *Glossa* was of the utmost importance; Flacius kept working on it in the midst of all the upheavals. The reason for keeping it a priority was that he held the Holy Scriptures in the highest esteem, considering them the main source of knowledge, as he states in the Preface to his other major work, *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae*: »the Holy Scriptures are said to be of divine inspiration because in them the Holy Spirit spoke through the mouth of God and they were written by hands that He guided.«³²

From Flacius' commentary it seems that there were various underlying motivations that prompted him to get involved in such an enormous undertaking. First, by offering corrections of Erasmus' translation, Flacius believed that he was providing a better translation and a more accurate understanding of Scripture. In this, he was being true to Erasmus' own goals, namely to return to the original Biblical texts, cherished by humanists of all stripes. However, beyond working closely with the texts, Flacius' abundant annotations also allowed him to present interpretations of Biblical passages reflecting his own theological convictions. Finally, Wilhelm Preger (1827-1896) claims that the Illyrian's aim in the *Glossa* was to show how ideas and books in the New Testament are linked,³³ in other words, to present the inner coherence of Scripture. Even though *Glossa* is first of all a Biblical commentary, in portions of it the dogmatic and polemical interests of Flacius can be detected. At the same time, understanding the theological controversies that had enveloped Flacius in the previous twenty years helps shed light on some of the theological statements he makes in *Glossa*.³⁴

Some hermeneutical material is presented in the dedication and the preface to the reader, as Flacius explains part of his approach to studying and interpreting the Biblical texts. As stated in the title of his preface, he wants to present an uncorrupted text of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.³⁵ This statement refers indirectly to the perceived

³² Flacius, »Praefatio«, in *Clavis Scripturae S., seu de Sermone Sacrarum literarum, Pars Prima*, Johannes Oporinus and Eusebius Episcopus, Basel, 1567 (Preface is dated on 24 February 1567 in Antwerp): »Quae sacra scriptura ideo divinitus inspirata, dicitur: quia Sanctus Spiritus eam, per os sanctorum Dei organorum locutus est, et per eorum manus conscripsit.«

³³ Wilhelm Preger, *op. cit.* (1), 2: 509.

³⁴ For a study of Flacius' theology and its development see Luka Ilić, *Theologian of Sin and Grace. The Process of Radicalization in the Theology of Matthias Flacius Illyricus* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz 225), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2014; Luka Ilić, *Milost, vjera i grijeh: Teologija Matije Vlačića Ilirika* (Edicija portreti 2), Zavičajna naklada »Žakan Juri«, Pula, 2014.

³⁵ Flacius, *Glossa compendiaria*, **5r: »Christiano lectori, gratiam et pacem una cum ardentissimo studio retinendi coelestis depositi incontaminati evangelii Iesu Christi,

imperfection of Erasmus' text. Making use of his expertise in languages, Flacius immediately delves into discussing his views on the use of Hebrew phrases in the New Testament as an important concern. One of the first issues he wants to clarify at the beginning concerns the meaning of the word 'testament'. Examining the uses of both the Hebrew (תּוֹרָה) and the Greek (διαθήκη) words in different Biblical texts and translations to describe covenant or contract, he first comments on the differences in their meanings. Theological reasoning and interpretations also form important sections of Flacius' commentary but the importance he ascribes to language and correct translation is visible throughout the entire work.

5. What Kind of Humanist was Flacius?

Considering his education, the personal and academic influences upon him, and his own interests, can Flacius be considered a humanist? In his 2008 article, »War Flacius Humanist?« Junior Professor from the University of Münster Matthias Pohlig explores various arguments for and against evaluating Flacius within the confines of this term.³⁶ His conclusion (or lack thereof) is that it depends on the definitions of »humanism« and »humanist« that one uses. Along the way Pohlig offers a few helpful considerations and sheds light on the limits of current humanism research. For example, Pohlig refers to the concern expressed by James Kittelson, who questions whether Lutheran theologians and scholars could be labelled humanists »in any meaningful sense of the term«.³⁷ This position is of course contradicted by the widespread description of Melancthon, who is routinely referred to as an outstanding humanist while being a Lutheran theologian at the same time. Although Flacius, together with his contemporaries, used the humanistic techniques of textual criticism for confessional purposes, Pohlig argues that the concept of humanism operational in contemporary research on the topic »is not suitable for explicating the characteristics of Flacius' intellectual profile.«³⁸ Thus Flacius cannot be referred to as a humanist in the classical sense. However, can we call him a biblical humanist (according to Franz Posset's very narrow and technical interpretation of the term, by which biblical humanists are »scholars

optat Matth. Flacius Illyricus.«

³⁶ Matthias P o h l i g, »War Flacius Humanist?«, *Catalogus und Centurien. Interdisziplinäre Studien zu Matthias Flacius und den Magdeburger Centurien*, Arno Mentzel-Reueters and Martina Hartmann (eds.), (Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation 45), Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2008, 19-52.

³⁷ James M. K i t t e l s o n, »Humanism in the Theological Faculties of Lutheran Universities during the Later Reformation«, *The Harvest of Humanism in Central Europe: Essays in Honor of Lewis W. Spitz*, Concordia, St. Louis, 1992, 139-157, here 143.

³⁸ M. P o h l i g, *op. cit.* (36), 22.

concerned with the study of the original biblical languages«³⁹) only because he searched for the Hebrew and Greek truth of the Scriptures?

To provide an answer to this question, one may consider the differing roles and importance biblical languages had within the classical interests expressed by Marcus Marulus (Marko Marulić, 1450-1524) and by Flacius. According to his own definition, Posset rejects categorizing Marulus as a biblical humanist, although elements of Marulus' biblical interests, which at times include linguistic remarks, are evident. For example, Marulus left ample marginalia and annotations in *Biblia Latina* from 1489 with Nicholas of Lyra's commentary. Marulus' annotations are brief and often unconnected and they are obviously working notes taken only for his own use, rather than a planned-out and systematically constructed text for an audience. Flacius, on the other hand, produced a comprehensive commentary stretching over thousands of pages in the *Glossa*, arranged systematically and explicitly targeting a particular readership. One further difference between the two Croats was that Marulus was a lay theologian while for Flacius, the university professor, theology was the main realm on which the majority of his works focused.

In response to the question posed by Pohlig, Flacius can undoubtedly be called a biblical humanist, although his work was far more than a confined focus on the biblical languages. In contrast to Marulus, for whom the inclusion of biblical languages into his general scholarship and creative work lay on the margins of his spectrum of interests, for Flacius it was right in the centre. For him the intersection of language, a precise translation faithful to the original text and the theological message was of great importance. Particularly in the *Glossa*, but also in many of his other works, he attempted to integrate biblical texts and messages with humanistic methods of research, and in that sense Flacius was a Bible scholar and a biblical humanist.

Furthermore, due to his linguistic interest and works, Flacius was also a representative of Christian Hebraism – the study by Christian scholars of the Hebrew language and Jewish texts, especially of the Hebrew Bible. Christian Hebraism was a fundamental part of both the Italian Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation and in that way formed an important connection between humanism and sixteenth-century Protestant thought.⁴⁰

³⁹ Franz Posset, »The Illustrated *Biblia cum commento* from the Library of the Father of Croatian Literature with samples of his Marginalia«, CM XIX (2020), 141-158, here 147.

⁴⁰ Klara Vanek, »Philologie im Dienste der Orthodoxie: Die 'Adhortatio ad studium linguae Hebraeae' des Matthias Flacius Illyricus«, *Hermeneutik, Methodenlehre, Exegese* (Melancthon-Schriften der Stadt Bretten 11), Günter Frank and Stephan Meier-Oeser (eds.), Frommann-Holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 2011, 89-122; Stephen G. Burnett, *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era (1500-1660): Authors, Books, and the Transmission of Jewish Learning* (Library of the Written Word – The Handpress World 13), Brill, Leiden, 2012; Henry R. Cooper, Jr., »Christian Hebraism in the Renaissance and Reformation: Croatia?«, CM XXIII (2014), 185-196.

6. Concluding Remarks

Since Flacius received his initial humanist education in Venice, it can be concluded that his prominent interest in history arose not so much from his later exposure to Luther and Melancthon but from his early training at the school of San Marco and in the shadow of the Aldine Press. His decision to leave the safe confines of Italian Catholicism and Venetian civic life must have been a momentous one, inspired by his relative Baldo Lupetino but also by the message emanating from Wittenberg and other centres of the Reformation. In the German-speaking territories he was exposed to the form of humanism typical of Northern Europe, which had an equal influence on him and his academic work, most notably the deepening of his knowledge of classical languages and his constant interaction with ancient philosophy. Both of these strains enhanced his theological oeuvre and are clearly reflected in his written output throughout his career.

Considering the breadth of Flacius' work – which reveals interests and competences in theology, linguistics, church history and philosophy – it becomes clear that he does not easily fit into any of the categories used for humanism today. Although Renaissance humanism did exert some influence, especially in the early phase of his studies, Flacius' work was characterized much more by biblical humanism, especially by Erasmus' approach to the Scriptures. This was in contrast to Renaissance humanism, which emphatically turned to the ancient pagan, non-Christian sources.⁴¹ At the same time, Flacius does not fit completely into the confines of Christian humanism either; this movement was interested primarily in the ethical aspects of Antiquity and Christianity. Flacius crossed the barriers and combined different strains of humanism: while clearly embracing humanistic methods of the textual interpretation, he also widened their application by including all biblical languages in his textual and historical studies. This was also facilitated by the developments in the first half of the sixteenth century, when a synthesis slowly emerged from the hitherto significant differences between humanist and scholastic approaches to the study of Scripture.⁴²

⁴¹ Nevertheless, in his published works and correspondence Flacius also cited writings of the ancient philosophers Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Porphyry, Hermogenes and Epicurus, as well as works by Greek and Latin authors such as Homer, Sophocles, Xenophon, Euripides, Thucydides, Marcus Antonius, Cicero, Virgil, Gaius Julius Caesar and others.

⁴² See Erika Rummel, »Introduction«, *A Companion to Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus*, Erika Rummel (ed.), (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 9), Brill, Leiden, 2008, 1-14.