CRETAN AND DUBROVNIK-DALMATIAN RENAISSANCE LITERATURE: TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO THE CENTERS OF LITERARY RENAISSANCE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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The aim of this paper is to delineate a potential new field of comparative research on Croatian Renaissance literature by introducing the phenomenon of Cretan Renaissance literature, which has been neglected in the tradition of research on the European context of the Renaissance in Slavic literatures. Like Dalmatia, Crete was ruled by the Republic of Venice, whose cultural influence resulted in the emergence of intriguing vernacular literature. This literature delivered its most important works in the decades preceding the Ottoman conquest of the island in 1669. The rather small but valuable body of texts written in the Cretan dialect of Greek has rarely been compared to the Renaissance literature produced in Croatian, Latin and Italian by authors from Venetian Dalmatia and the sovereign Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik). The paper provides a comparative insight into the contextual, formal and thematic points of contact among these literary traditions. The study is divided into four parts. The first part outlines the historical and cultural context of the Cretan Renaissance. The second and most extensive part focuses on the works and genres of Cretan Renaissance literature. The third part deals with the mutual representations of Crete and Dalmatia in the works of Renaissance poets. Part four discusses Cretan and Dubrovnik-Dalmatian Renaissance literature from a comparative perspective and outlines the similarities and differences between the two most important centers of literary Renaissance in the broadly conceived Eastern Mediterranean.

Keywords: Cretan Renaissance literature, Croatian Renaissance literature, comparative literature, Mediterranean studies

In the Croatian tradition of scholarship on Renaissance literature, Crete is mentioned almost exclusively in connection with Ludovik Paskalić (Ludovico Pasquali, Ludovicus Pascalis, 1500–1551), the poet from Kotor who was a member of the Venetian military mission there in 1537 and 1538. Like Paskalić's Dalmatian homeland, the Greek island was ruled by the Serenissima, which resulted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the creation of a hybrid culture that absorbed numerous influences of the Italian Renaissance through the Venetian mediation. This gave rise, if much later than on the eastern Adriatic coast, to an intriguing vernacular literature that delivered its most important works in the decades preceding the Ottoman conquest of the island in 1669. This rather small but valuable body of texts written in the Cretan dialect of Greek has rarely been compared to the Renaissance literature produced in Croatian, Latin and Italian by authors from Venetian Dalmatia and the sovereign Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik).[1] The aim of this paper is to provide such a comparative insight into the contextual, formal and thematic points of contact between the two most important

[1] To my knowledge, Walter Puchner, an expert on the history of post-classical Greek theater, was the first scholar to compare the two traditions. However, he focused exclusively on the dramatic segment of the Cretan and Dubrovnik-Dalmatian literary Renaissance. At the same time, he discussed it in the broader context of the early modern theater on the Greek islands and in Southeastern Europe. The same applies to Irena Bogdanović, who is the author of the first monograph comparing Greek and Croatian Renaissance and Baroque theater, originally a dissertation supervised by Puchner. The author's main strength is her linguistic ability (knowledge of both Greek and Croatian), which enabled her to delve deeper into the issues outlined by her teacher in his pioneering studies. See Irena Bogdanović, Το θέατρο της Αναγέννησης και του Μπαρόκ στη Βαλκανική χερσόνησο και στα νησιά της [*The Renaissance and Baroque Theater in the Balkan Peninsula and its Islands*], Irodotos, Athens, 2019. Puchner's first significant contribution to the subject is the paper »Το κροατικό θέατρο της Αναγέννησης και του Μπαρόκ. Σύγκριση με το κρητικό και επτανησιακό θέατρο« [»The Croatian Theater of the Renaissance and Baroque. Comparison with the Cretan and Ionian Theater«] published in Walter Puchner [Βάλτερ Πούχνερ], Μελετήματα θεάτρου. Το Κρητικό θέατρο, Buras, Athens, 1991, 467–502. A slightly modified and extended version of the study was republished as »Το θέατρο της Αναγέννησης και του Μπαρόκ στις δαλματικές ακτές. Μια σύγκριση με το Κρητικό και Επτανησιακό θέατρο« [»The Renaissance and Baroque Theater on the Dalmatian Coast. A Comparison with Cretan and Ionian Theater«] in Walter Puchner [Βάλτερ Πούχνερ], Βαλκανική θεατρολογία. Δέκα μελετήματα για το θέατρο στην Ελλάδα και τις γειτονικές της χώρες, Kardamitsa, Athens, 1994, 15–39. See also Walter Puchner, »*Locus amoenus turbatus*. Rezeption und Parodie italienischer Schäferdramatik in Südosteuropa,« in Walter Puchner, *Beiträge zur Theaterwissenschaft Südosteuropas und des mediterranen Raums*, 2. Band, Böhlau, Wien – Köln – Weimar, 2007, 13–26. Rather brief comparative observations related to the subject can also be found in Puchner's book *Die Literaturen Südosteuropas, 15. bis frühes 20. Jahrhundert*, Böhlau, Wien – Köln – Weimar, 2015.

centers of literary Renaissance in the broadly conceived Eastern Mediterranean. However, since the author's field of expertise is South Slavonic Studies, the main ambition is to delineate a potential new field of comparative research on Croatian Renaissance literature by introducing the phenomenon of Cretan Renaissance literature,[2] which has been neglected in the tradition of research on the European context of the Renaissance in Slavic literatures. In line with this, the focus will be on the presentation of the Cretan literary heritage, while its Dubrovnik-Dalmatian counterpart will serve as a reference point for comparison.[3] The body of Cretan literature under consideration will be treated as a Renaissance phenomenon, even though it consists of works written at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and, in some cases, even later. Baroque elements do appear in some texts, but their predominant poetics is derived from the model works of the late Italian Renaissance. It seems justified to designate the given segment of Greek literature as the Cretan Renaissance—in accordance with prevailing scholarly practice, yet with the awareness that the transitional nature of the phenomenon does not preclude future reassessment.

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[2] On the history, forms and context of the Cretan Renaissance literature, see the most extensive work in English to date: *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed. David Holton, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991. For an overview of the history and results of scholarship on the subject, see David Holton, »The Renaissance Literature of Crete and Cyprus: Looking Back over Forty Years,« *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 40, 1 (2016), 82–88; Walter Puchner, *Greek Theatre between Antiquity and Independence: A History of Reinvention from the Third Century BC to 1830*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017, 152–156. Most of the key works of Cretan Renaissance literature have been translated into English. See Georgios Chortatsis, *Plays of the Veneto-Cretan Renaissance, Volume I: Texts and Translations*, ed. and transl. Rosemary E. Bancroft-Marcus, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013; Vintsentzos Kornaros, *Erotokritos*, transl. in prose by Gavin Betts, Stathis Gauntlett and Thanasis Spilia, Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, Melbourne, 2004; Vitzentzos Kornaros, *Erotocritos*, transl. in verse by Theodore Ph. Stephanides, Papazissis Publishers, Athens, 1984; »The Shepherdess,« transl. by Rosemary E. Bancroft-Marcus, *Modern Greek Studies Online*, 2 (2016), 1–16; *Three Cretan Plays: The Sacrifice of Abraham, Erophile and Gyparis. Also the Cretan pastoral poem, The Fair Shepherdess*. Transl. by Frederic Henry Marshall, with an introduction by John Mavrogordato, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1929.

[3] For the European context of the Renaissance literature on the eastern Adriatic coast and other relevant writing on the subject, see a study in which I give a comprehensive overview of this phenomenon in all its linguistic forms (Croatian, Latin, Italian) and literary types (lyric, epic, drama): Petr Stehlík, »Dubrovnicko-dalmatská renesanční literatura: charakteristika a specifika v evropském kontextu« [»Ragusan-Dalmatian Renaissance Literature: Characteristics and Specifics in the European Context«] in Petr Stehlík et al., *Slovanské literatury v evropském kontextu: zvláštnosti vývoje a promýšlení alternativ*, Masarykova univerzita, Brno, 2023, 13–49 (accessible online: Internet, July 16, 2025).

1. Historical and cultural context of the Cretan Renaissance

The Venetian rule over Crete (Candia) lasted more than 450 years, from 1211 until 1669, when the twenty-one-year siege of the island's capital Kastro (also Candia, now Heraklion) ended with the triumph of the Ottomans.[4] It was only in the last hundred years or so of the Serenissima's presence on the island that a syncretic Cretan culture had emerged[5] as the result of Greek-Italian cultural cross-fertilization. There is a globally recognized segment of this mixture of Italian Renaissance, Byzantine, and Greek folk traditions. It is Cretan painting, with El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos, Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος, 1541–1614) as its most prominent representative, whose works are an eloquent example of the blending of the Byzantine and Western artistic styles.[6] To a lesser extent, analogous tendencies can be traced in Cretan architecture and music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[7] The synthesis of Italian and Greek cultural traditions also lies at heart of the Cretan literature of the period.

An important role in spreading the influences of the Italian Renaissance in Crete can be attributed to the three academies that operated in the island's major cities Kastro (»Stravaganti«, founded by Andrea Cornaro in 1591), Rethymno (»Vivi«, founded by Francesco Barozzi in 1562) and Chania (»Sterili«, first documented in 1632).[8] These literary and learned societies based on Italian models brought together members of the Veneto-Cretan elite, often educated at universities in Italy (mostly in Padua), and some prominent visitors to the island.[9] Although educated local men were bilingual and the Cretan dialect of Greek was the island's primary language of communication, the extant works of the academies' members are largely written in Italian.[10] They include treatises on the history and ancient cultural heritage of Crete by the mathematician and translator of classical Greek thinkers into Latin Francesco Barozzi (Franciscus Barocius, 1537–1604) and by the historian and poet Andrea Cornaro (Andreas Kornaros, Ανδρέας

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[4] See Chryssa Maltezou, »The Historical and Social Context,« in *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed. David Holton, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991, 17–47.

[5] David Holton, »The Cretan Renaissance,« in *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed. David Holton, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991, 2.

[6] See Charles Barber, *Eccentric Renaissance: El Greco, Michaēl Damaskēnos, Geōrgios Klontzas*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2024.

[7] For more on the blending of Greek and Italian influences in the Cretan painting, architecture and music of the period, see D. Holton, *op. cit.* (5), 8–10.

[8] See Rosemary E. Bancroft Marcus, »Literary Cryptograms and the Cretan Academies,« *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 8, 1 (1982), 47–76.

[9] W. Puchner, *op. cit* (2), 116–119.

[10] D. Holton, *op. cit.* (5), 7–8, 14.

Κορνάρος, 1547 – ca. 1616), who also »composed hundreds of Italian poems in neo-Petrarchan, mannerist style, most of which are known only from manuscripts and remain unpublished.«[11]

Cornaro's love verses and his moral, religious, celebratory and occasional poetry are among the few examples of artistically relevant Renaissance literature written in Italian by native Cretans or authors living on the island.[12] Apart from these, major Italian-language works include the manuscript poem *The Most Noble Joust of Chania* (*La nobilissima barriera de la Canea*) by Gian Carlo Persio (?–?), consisting of more than 2,000 lines written in *ottava rima* about a tournament held in Chania during the Carnival of 1594,[13] and two verse dramas composed in Padua by Cretan youths studying at the university there. Francesco Bozza's (born ca. 1553–?) tragedy *Fedra*, printed in Venice in 1578, is based on *Orbecche* by Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio.[14] A more intriguing piece is the pastoral tragicomedy *Faithfulness in Love* (*L'amorosa fede*, printed in 1620) by Antonio Pandimo (1602–1647), which is modelled on Guarini's *The Faithful Shepherd* (*Il pastor fido*), but set in the mountainous landscape of the author's native island and with the story of Theseus and the Minotaur creatively incorporated into the plot.[15]

Nevertheless, the Italian-language part of the Cretan literary Renaissance is much less developed than its Greek segment, which surpasses it not only in the number and variety of extant works, but also in the degree of its general reception and scholarly response. Literature written in vernacular Greek in Crete during the Venetian rule is generally divided into two periods. The first lasts from the fourteenth century until about 1580 and its characteristic feature is the penetration of Western influences into the local literary tradition growing out of Byzantine roots.[16] Thus, the founding figure of the Cretan literature in the vernacular, Stefanos Sachlikis (Στέφανος Σαχλίκης, ca. 1331 – after 1391), whose *oeuvre* consists of

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[11] Alfred Vincent, »Myth-history: Venice, Crete and *Erotokritos*,« *Kampos: Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* 20, 2013, 178. See also idem, »Language and Ideology in Two Cretan Historians,« in *Serenissima: In Honour of Chryssa Maltezou* [in Greek], ed. Gogo K. Varzelioti, Kostas G. Tsiknakis, University of Athens, Benaki Museum, Athens, 2013, 809–820.

[12] See the most instructive study on Italian-language Cretan literature: Alfred Vincent, »Scritti italiani di Creta veneziana,« *Sincronie: rivista semestrale di letterature, teatro e sistemi di pensiero* II, 3 (1998), 131–162.

[13] A. Vincent, *op. cit.* (12), 146–152.

[14] See Cristiano Luciani, »Il viaggio di un mito: la «Fedra» nella tradizione italo-greca,« in *Medioevo romanzo e orientale. Il viaggio dei testi*, ed. Antonio Pioletti and Francesca Rizzo Nervo, Rubettino, Soveria Manelli, 1999, 261–272.

[15] A. Vincent, *op. cit.* (11), 179–180; see also idem, *op. cit.* (12), 152–159.

[16] For more on early Cretan literature and the fusion of Byzantine and Western influences within it, see Nikolaos M. Panagiotakes, »The Italian Background of Early Cretan Literature,« *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49, 1995, 281–323; Arnold van Gemert, »Literary

satirical, didactic and autobiographical poems, was »the first to introduce rhymed verse into Greek poetry, about one century after it became firmly established in Italy.«[17] The same principle of blending elements of Greek-Byzantine and Western European literary traditions can be traced in the poems of other representatives of the earlier Cretan literature such as Leonardos Dellaportas (Λεονάρδος Ντελλαπόρτας, ca. 1330–1419/20), Marinos Falieros (Μαρίνος Φαλιέρος, 1397–1474) and Ioannis Pikatoros (Ιωάννης Πικατόρος, 16th century), as well as in its greatest and most influential work, *Apokopos* (Απόκοπος) of Bergadhis (Μπεργαδής, ?–?),[18] first printed as a chapbook in 1509, but probably written already in the fifteenth century.[19] The poem, consisting of 278 pairs of rhyming couplets, thematizes the descent to the Underworld (*katabasis*), a popular subject matter of the time.[20] The author skillfully adapts and combines various sources of the motif, common both in Western and Eastern literary traditions, as well as in Greek folk songs.[21] Considered a masterpiece of the earlier Cretan literature, *Apokopos* was read and reprinted throughout the early modern period,[22] and continues to appeal to readers today with its distinctive blend of the oneiric and

Antecedents,« in *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed. David Holton, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991, 48–78.

[17] N. M. Panagiotakes, *op. cit.* (16), 299.

[18] The poem's »untranslatable title is taken from the first words of the poem and roughly means 'exhausted from toil',« N. M. Panagiotakes, *op. cit.* (16), 306–307. »The title and the name of the author are known only from the laudatory distich at the beginning of the Venetian editions (which, we can be quite sure, was not written by the author himself),« A. van Gemert, *op. cit.* (16), 62.

[19] A. van Gemert, *op. cit.* (16), 62–63.

[20] The motif of *katabasis* also appears in the works of authors from the eastern Adriatic. Its early treatment can be found in the epic poem *On the Abduction of Cerberus* (*De raptu Cerberi*), written in Latin before 1490 by the Ragusean Jakov Bunić (Iacobus Bonus, 1469–1534). The poem, inspired by the famous deed of the Greek divine hero Heracles, was printed twice during the author's lifetime, in 1490 and 1526. See Jakov Bunić, *De raptu Cerberi; De vita et gestis Christi*, ed. Branimir Glavičić, Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Zagreb, 1978. On the history of the literary motif of the transition to the Underworld in the Eastern Mediterranean, see *Round Trip to Hades in the Eastern Mediterranean Tradition: Visits to the Underworld from Antiquity to Byzantium*, ed. Gunnel Ekroth and Ingela Nilsson, Brill, Leiden – Boston, 2018.

[21] For more on *Apokopos* and its sources, see N. M. Panagiotakes, *op. cit.* (16); Margaret Alexiou, »Literature and Popular Tradition,« in *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed. David Holton, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991, 239–274; Eric Cullhed – Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed, »Epilogue: Below the Tree of Life,« in G. Ekroth – I. Nilsson (ed.), *op. cit.* (20), 370–384; A. van Gemert, *op. cit.* (16), 63–65; 71–72; 78.

[22] A. van Gemert, *op. cit.* (16), 71.

the macabre, the lyrical and the dramatic.[23] It stands out in the history of Greek literature not only for its aesthetic qualities, but also as the first literary work in the vernacular to be printed.

The second period of Cretan literature begins around 1580 and lasts to the Ottoman conquest of Kastro in 1669. It is only in this peak period that we can speak of the fundamental influence of the Italian Renaissance on local literary production. The nearly eight decades at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, during which most of the surviving works of Cretan Renaissance literature were written, are symbolically preceded and followed by the publication of two lengthy narrative poems thematizing the existential threat in whose shadow the authors of the time lived and worked. The author of the first of them, Antonios Achelis (Αντώνιος Αχέλης, ?–?) of Rethymno, »inaugurates the spirit of the Cretan Renaissance«[24] with his heroic poem *Siege of Malta* (Μάλτας Πολιορκία), printed in Venice in 1571. Based on an Italian prose chronicle of the unsuccessful Ottoman attempt to capture the strategically important outpost in the Western Mediterranean in 1565, it contains references to classical mythology and draws on the epic tradition from Virgil to Ludovico Ariosto.[25] The second poem, composed by another native of Rethymno a hundred years later, gives a much bleaker picture of the struggle against the Ottoman threat. It contains a historical account of the War of Candia (1645–1669), which effectively ended centuries of Venetian rule over Crete and drove many of its inhabitants into exile. One of them was Marinos Tzanes Bounialis (Μαρίνος Τζάνες Μπουνιαλής, 1620–1685), who took refuge in Venice, where in 1681 the first edition of his extensive verse narrative *The Cretan War* (Ο Κρητικός Πόλεμος) was printed, in which the author chronicles the catastrophe that befell his native island and mourns the lost world of his youth.[26]

In contrast to the poems of Achelis and Bounialis, the Ottoman threat is rarely overtly thematized in the vernacular works of authors written in the mature period of the Cretan literary Renaissance between 1580 and 1669. The language

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[23] See *Apokopos: A Fifteenth Century Greek (Veneto-Cretan) Catabasis in the Vernacular; Synoptic Edition with an Introduction, Commentary and Index Verborum*, ed. Peter Vejleskov, English transl. by Margaret Alexiou, Romiosini, Köln, 2005.

[24] David Holton, »Classical Antiquity and Cretan Renaissance Poetry,« *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 27, 1–2 (2001), 89.

[25] D. Holton, *op. cit.* (24), 89–90; idem, »The Function of Myth in Cretan Renaissance Poetry: The Cases of Achelis and Kornaros,« in *Ancient Greek Myth in Modern Greek Poetry*, ed. Peter Mackridge, Frank Cass, London – Portland, 1996, 1–12.

[26] Another remarkable work by a Cretan exile is the memoirs of Zuanne (Giovanni) Papadopoli (?–?) written in Italian in Padua at the end of the seventeenth century. The manuscript, which was published with an English translation in 2007, is considered an important source on everyday life in Venetian Crete before its conquest by the Ottomans. See Zuanne Papadopoli, *L'Occio (Time of Leisure): Memories of Seventeenth-Century Crete*, ed. and transl. by Alfred Vincent, Hellenic Institute of Byzantine Studies in Venice, Venice, 2007.

of these texts is a cultivated form of the Cretan dialect of Greek, and they are all composed in verse (the surviving contemporary prose is mostly of a religious-didactic nature).[27] The predominant metrical form is fifteen-syllable iambic verse, characteristic of Byzantine vernacular as well as Greek folk poetry. It is called *political verse* (πολιτικός στίχος) in the Greek tradition, and it is also prevalent in the older Cretan vernacular literature from Sachlikis to Bergadhis. The works of Cretan Renaissance authors written in this form are usually framed in rhyming couplets. The number of extant texts is relatively modest. However, it is likely that it is only the torso of a much larger corpus. In this respect, the caesura during much of the sixteenth century is particularly noteworthy, followed by a sudden creative upsurge after 1580.

Most of the works of Cretan Renaissance literature survived in manuscripts or as rare Venetian editions on the Ionian Islands (the Heptanese), to which they were brought by Cretan refugees after the fall of their homeland to the Ottomans. On Corfu (Kerkyra), Zante (Zakynthos) and others of the seven islands, which remained under the Serenissima's rule, these texts were preserved, transcribed, read and, in the case of plays, staged. Some of them also received new editions in Venice, others even became a part of the local oral tradition. Later, the legacy of the Cretan Renaissance contributed significantly to the formation of modern Greek literature, the foundations of which were laid on the Ionian Islands in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The enduring appeal of the classical works of Cretan Renaissance is also evidenced by the fact that they continue to inspire generations of writers, from Dionysios Solomos (Διονύσιος Σολωμός, 1798–1857) to Giorgos Seferis (Γιώργος Σεφέρης, 1900–1971), Pandelis Prevelakis (Παντελής Πρεβελάκης, 1909–1986) and other greats of modern Greek literature.[28]

2. Cretan Renaissance literature: genres and works

Even in brief references to Cretan Renaissance literature, two works are customarily highlighted as its most significant achievements. The first is the extensive poetic romance *Erotokritos* (Ερωτόκριτος) by Vitsentzos Kornaros (Βιτσέντζος Κορνάρος, Vincenzo Cornaro, 1553–1613/1614), brother of the aforementioned Italian-writing historian, poet, and founder of the »Stravaganti«, Andrea Cornaro. The second is the tragedy *Erofili* (Ερωφίλη) by Georgios

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[27] D. Holton, *op. cit.* (5), 13.

[28] On the later reception of the Cretan Renaissance literature, see D. Holton, *op. cit.* (5), 15–16; W. Puchner, *op. cit* (2), 144–145, 149–152; idem, »Early Modern Greek Drama: From Page to Stage,« *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 25, 2 (2007), 243–266; M. Alexiou, *op. cit.* (21), 274.

Chortatsis (Γεώργιος Χορτάτσης, ca. 1545–1610), the most prolific playwright of the Cretan Renaissance. There are only two other authors known by name, and they are both successors of Chortatsis in the field of dramatic writing. They are Ioannis Andreas Troilos (Ιωάννης Ανδρέας Τρωίλος, ca. 1590–1600 – after 1648), the author of tragedy *King Rodholinos* (Βασιλεύς ο Ροδολίνος), and Markos Antonios Foskolos (Μάρκος Αντώνιος Φώσκολος, ca. 1597–1662), a writer from a family of Venetian origin and Catholic faith, whose comedy *Fortounatos* (Φορτουνάτος), written in besieged Kastro in 1655, concludes the mature phase of the Cretan literary Renaissance.

In addition to other texts attributed to Kornaros and Chortatsis, which will be discussed further on, several anonymous works have also survived. These include the immensely popular narrative poem *The Shepherdess* (Η Βοσκοπούλα), written around 1600, first published in Venice in 1627, and reprinted many times until the nineteenth century. Composed in an unconventional eleven-syllable verse, this »charming pastoral idyll«[29] consists of 476 lines in rhymed quatrains. It is narrated in the first person by a young shepherd who experiences a passionate but ultimately tragic love affair with a beautiful shepherdess. Their story is set in the vividly depicted Cretan countryside with its Arcadian scenery and lush Mediterranean vegetation. The poem became so firmly rooted in the oral tradition that it was sometimes considered a folk song. However, »[n]owadays the work is known to be thoroughly literary in character, inspired by Italian pastorella poems and marked by Petrarchistic hyperbole.«[30]

The most prolific segment of Cretan Renaissance literature was drama. In fact, it was in Crete at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that Greek drama was revived for the first time since ancient times. However, this does not mean that authors directly followed their classical predecessors. The plays written and performed during this period were based exclusively on Italian models (which, of course, did not exclude inspiration from classical Greek theater).[31] The greatest formative influence on the works of Cretan playwrights was exerted by Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio, Giambattista Guarini, Torquato Tasso, and Luigi Groto, as well as Italian *commedia erudita*. All extant Cretan plays are written in verse, usually consist of five acts, contain a prologue, and adhere to the unity of

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[29] Rosemary Bancroft-Marcus, »The Pastoral Mode,« in *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed. David Holton, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991, 100.

[30] R. Bancroft-Marcus, *op. cit.* (29).

[31] »The Cretans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had no sense of a biological continuity with the ancient Greeks. That is a nineteenth-century view and it would be inappropriate to attribute it to an earlier period. Most of their knowledge of the ancient Greek world and its culture was derived at second hand from Italian and Latin intermediaries; but then all Europe, at this time, viewed Greece 'through a Roman prism',« D. Holton, *op. cit.* (24), 97–98.

place, time, and action. All scripts are accompanied by interludes (*intermezzi*), short dramatic sketches performed between the acts. The entire preserved corpus consists of seven dramas and eighteen interludes. In terms of genre, there are two tragedies,[32] three comedies, two pastoral plays[33] and one religious drama.

Georgios Chortatsis is the most distinguished playwright of the Cretan Renaissance, and the three plays and two sets of interludes generally attributed to this contemporary of Shakespeare essentially mark the beginning of post-classical Greek theater. The most esteemed of his works is the tragedy *Erofili*, written around 1600 and first printed in 1637. This five-act play with a prologue consists of 3,205 lines in rhymed fifteen-syllable verse interspersed by eleven-syllable verse in *terza rima*, which occurs in choral parts between the individual acts. The Chortatsis drama is modeled on Giraldi's exemplary revenge tragedy *Orbecche*.[34] Other influences include Tasso's tragedy *King Torrismondo* (*Il re Torrismondo*) in the second act, and *Jerusalem Delivered* (*La Gerusalemme liberata*) by the same author, which inspired the four interludes accompanying the play. The Cretan tragedy dealing with the eternal conflict between Eros and Thanatos takes place in the ancient Egyptian metropolis of Memphis, and its heroine Erofili is the daughter of the ruthless and vengeful King Filogonos, who kills her lover Panaretos when he learns of their mutual affection. Then the king presents the severed hands and heart of Panaretos to his daughter as a wedding gift. Grief-stricken Erofili stabs herself and the chorus of maidens avenges her by killing the tyrant.

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[32] In older literature, the third tragedy, the anonymous *Zinon* (Ζήνων), inspired by the intrigues at the Byzantine court in the fifth century, was also classified as a Cretan drama. Although its author was most likely of Cretan origin, it was not written until the second half of the seventeenth century on the island of Zante, where it was staged in 1683. The play is an adaptation of the Latin tragedy *Zeno* (1648) by the English Jesuit Joseph Simons and is now considered a work belonging to the literature of the Ionian Islands. Walter Puchner believes »the question of its heritage is also evidenced by its mixed Cretan–Heptanesian dialect« and that »[i]t is also different in style, approaching the later Jesuit Baroque drama,« W. Puchner, *op. cit* (2), 123.

[33] In addition to Chortatsis's pastoral play *Panoria*, discussed below, an anonymous vernacular version of Guarini's *Il pastor fido* was produced in Crete (Ο πιστικός βοσκός). See R. Bancroft-Marcus, *op. cit*. (29), 89–96. As already mentioned, the same Italian classic inspired *L'amorosa fide* by Antonio Pandimo, a Cretan play written in Italian. Guarini's pastoral tragicomedy also received a vernacular adaptation in Renaissance Dubrovnik, where it was translated in 1592 by Frano Lukarević (c. 1541–1598). See *Djela Frana Lukarevića Burine* (Stari pisci hrvatski, Knjiga X), ed. Franjo Rački, Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Zagreb, 1878.

[34] The vernacular tragedy *Dalida*, written after 1578 by the Ragusean Sabo Gučetić Bendevišević (1531–1603), is also based on Giraldi's *Orbecche* (in combination with Groto's *Adriana*). *Djela Petra Zoranića, Antuna Sasina, Savka Gučetića Bendeviševića* (Stari pisci hrvatski, Knjiga XVI), ed. Pero Budmani, Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Zagreb, 1888.

Chortatsis's play is a representative example of Renaissance classicizing tragedy with Baroque elements. As expressed by Walter Puchner, »[t]he underlying mood of the play is a medieval *memento mori* philosophy, the all-present transitoriness of *vanitas vanitatis*, which Charos, as the personification of death, expresses in the Prologue.«[35] Nevertheless, »[t]he Renaissance philosophy of the absolute power of Eros rises above this medieval-baroque preoccupation with death and vanity as a 'life-loving' concept, already celebrated by the Chorus in the first choric ode.«[36]

No other Cretan drama has enjoyed such widespread reception and popularity. *Erofili* is not only the most frequently reprinted and staged play of the Cretan Renaissance, but also the one that left the deepest mark on the oral literary tradition. For centuries, its echoes resounded in Cretan ballads, laments and popular sayings, as well as in the traditional folk theater of Central Greece.[37]

Chortatsis's masterpiece also significantly influenced the later tradition of early modern Greek drama, including Ioannis Andreas Troilos, the author of *King Rodholinos*. Written around 1640 and printed in Venice seven years later, the second Renaissance tragedy (with much more pronounced Baroque elements) has never attained the popularity of other Cretan classics. It is considered an adaptation of Tasso's *King Torrismondo*, but its 3,230 verses also show many similarities with *Erofili* in terms of setting, characters, plot, and dramaturgical techniques.[38] *King Rodholinos*, however, does not match the dramatic artistry of Chortatsis's trend-setting tragedy.

Another genre represented in Cretan Renaissance drama is comedy. All three extant examples have been preserved in manuscript. They are written in rhyming couplets of political verse in the manner of Italian erudite comedy (*commedia erudita*) and share numerous common features. Once again, Chortatsis's drama plays a pioneering role, as his comedy *Katzarapos* (Κατζάραπος), also known as *Katzourbos* (Κατζούρμπος), was chronologically the first to be written, sometime between 1595 and 1600. The second is the anonymous *Stathis* (Στάθης), which some scholars also attribute to Chortatsis. Unfortunately, it has survived only in an abridged Heptanesian manuscript, whose editor shortened the play from the presumed five acts to three. The last Cretan comedy, *Fortounatos* by Markos Antonios Foskolos has been preserved in the author's autograph from 1655, written in Latin script.

All three comedies are set in the contemporary Cretan metropolis of Kastro and take place over the course of a single day. They share a conventionalized plot

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[35] Walter Puchner, »Tragedy,« in *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed. David Holton, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991, 142.

[36] W. Puchner, *op. cit* (35), 144.

[37] See W. Puchner, *op. cit* (35), 144–148.

[38] W. Puchner, *op. cit* (2), 129.

from the Italian *commedia erudita*, which revolves around a couple of young lovers struggling with the girl's parents' determination to marry her off to a wealthy older man. After many twists and turns, the happy ending is ensured by the revelation that one of the lovers is in fact the long-lost child of a key character in the play, who was kidnapped by Turkish pirates in the past. Such a *dénouement*, based on the abduction and rediscovery of a lost relative, is not unknown in Italian neo-classical comedy of the Renaissance. From it, Cretan playwrights also borrow the five-act structure with a prologue (in the case of *Katzarapos* and *Fortounatos*), and a colorful gallery of stock characters, such as passionate lovers, gluttonous servants, infatuated old men, greedy matchmakers, braggarts, and pedantic teachers. The three comedies do not seem to be based on a single model, and scholars tend to point to their alleged correspondence with the realities of everyday life in the Cretan city at the time.[39] In this sense, the language used in them is closer to the spoken idiom than in other genres of contemporary drama.[40] The exception is to be found in passages in which the pedant, in accordance with the rules of the genre, delivers his pseudo-scholarly discourse in »a macaronic mixture of erratic Latin, Venetianised Italian and Italianate Cretan […] which leads, naturally, to comic misunderstandings.«[41]

The authors of the extant Cretan Renaissance comedies entertained audiences without questioning the social or political order of the day. As Alfred Vincent notes, their plays were performed at Carnival, but they »show little or no sign of the social protest often associated with Carnival celebrations,« and »[t]he attitudes conveyed by the Cretan comedies on social and political issues are not ones which would offend either the more prosperous urban classes or the Venetian administration.«[42] Given the place and time in which they were written, the scarcity of references to the Ottoman threat may come as a surprise, if we disregard the motif of Turkish captivity, which is in fact a literary convention. In *Katzarapos*, the contemporary Ottoman theme resonates in the braggart's expressed determination to kill the Turks, specified by the stock character's intention to join Michael

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[39] See W. Puchner, *op. cit* (2), 130–135; Alfred Vincent, »Comedy,« in *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed. David Holton, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991, 103–128.

[40] D. Holton, *op. cit.* (5), 13.

[41] A. Vincent, *op. cit.* (39), 107. This form of macaronic language used by the local variant of the pedantic schoolmaster is another example of the decisive Italian influence on Cretan Renaissance authors, since »[c]ontrary to what one might expect, the pedagogues' effusions contain hardly any traces of the archaising Greek which post-Byzantine scholars still used in their writings,« idem, *op. cit.* (39), 121. In other words: »The pedants speak Latin, not archaising Greek. The intellectual and cultural connection of the Cretan poets with the ancient world is mediated by the Renaissance, not by the Byzantium,« D. Holton, *op. cit.* (24), 98.

[42] A. Vincent, *op. cit.* (39), 128.

the Brave, now a Romanian national hero, in this activity.[43] However, the most relevant reference to the Ottoman threat is found in the prologue to *Fortounatos*, delivered by Tychi (Fortune), a moral force, who »[a]fter citing examples from ancient history, [...] turns to Kastro for contemporary cases of her bounty« and »embarks on a long digression, praising the inhabitants for their prowess both in letters and in warfare« while »prophesying their speedy deliverance from the Turkish invaders.«[44]

In addition, audiences of Cretan Renaissance dramas at that time could find certain analogies with the threat posed to Crete by the Ottoman conquerors in the interludes that complemented the performances. Some of the surviving scripts are thematically linked to the siege of Troy as well as the Crusades, or more broadly to Christian-Muslim strife throughout history.[45] The latter include intermedia containing the *moresca*, a dance simulation of a sword fight between two teams of warriors, one representing Christians and the other Muslims (Moors).[46] The authorship of most of the interludes (ten out of a total of eighteen) is commonly attributed to Chortatsis, while the four intermezzos accompanying the *Fortounatos* are an autograph by Foskolos based on Virgil's *Aeneid* and Giambattista Marino's *Adone*.[47] The rest are anonymous. All can be divided into two main groups. The first consists of the »*spectacula* with intensive stage action,«[48] most of which are inspired by Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*. The second group of these »small pieces of repertoire,« ranging in length »from 34 to 224 verses,« belong to »a lyrical and rhetorical group without special scenic demands.«[49] Such compositions usually deal with mythological themes taken from the Italian translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* by Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara.[50]

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[43] G. Chortatsis, *op. cit* (2), 342–345.

[44] A. Vincent, *op. cit*. (39), 110.

[45] See Rosemary Bancroft-Marcus, »Interludes,« in *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed. David Holton, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991, 159–178.

[46] This sword dance of Iberian origin, popular throughout the Mediterranean, has also been performed since the sixteenth century as the *moreška* in Dubrovnik, Split, Zadar, and on the island of Hvar. References to it can also be found in contemporary drama, e.g. in the most celebrated Dubrovnik Renaissance pastoral play *Tirena* (staged in 1548, printed in 1551) by Marin Držić (1508–1567). See *Djela Marina Držića* (Stari pisci hrvatski. Knjiga VII), ed. Milan Rešetar, Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Zagreb, 1930. To this day, a locally specific form of *moreška* is performed in Korčula on the Dalmatian island of the same name. See Lada Čale Feldman, »Moreška,« in *Leksikon Marina Držića* (Internet, August 12, 2025).

[47] R. Bancroft-Marcus, *op. cit*. (45), 176–178.

[48] W. Puchner, *op. cit* (2), 143.

[49] W. Puchner, *op. cit* (2), 143.

[50] Some of the mythological themes appearing in Cretan interludes were also taken up by authors from Dubrovnik and Dalmatia. There is a poetic rendition of the story of

Mythological interludes drawing on this source can be found, for example, in a manuscript of the only original Cretan pastoral drama in the vernacular. Formerly known as *Gyparis* (Γύπαρις), it is now called *Panoria* (Πανώρια), and it was written by Chortatsis between 1585 and 1600. The author himself designated his play an eclogue and according to Rosemary Bancroft-Marcus, it is »easily the happiest, most original and most distinctively Cretan production of the Cretan Renaissance.«[51] The five-act play with two prologues delivered by Apollo and Joy is set on the slopes of Mount Ida, which represented a kind of local version of idyllic Arcadia in the works of Cretan writers. It tells the story of Panoria and Athousa, two shepherdesses professing the ethos of the Amazons, who spend their days carefree hunting and resisting the advances of two hopelessly enamored shepherds, Gyparis and Alexis. The suitors eventually ask Aphrodite herself for help. She sends her son Eros to strike both girls with his arrow and thus end the torments of the shepherds.

Although the play contains numerous mythological references and other elements inspired by Italian source texts, which include Groto's *La Calisto* and Tasso's *Aminta*,[52] it is not derived from a single model. *Panoria* can best be described as a pastoral comedy in which a joyful celebration of love combines with the simultaneous lyrical invocation and comical questioning of the conventions of the pastoral genre. Already at the time of its creation, but also in later centuries, it was one of the most popular theatrical works of the Cretan Renaissance.

The last surviving Cretan play, a short religious drama entitled *The Sacrifice of Abraham* (Η θυσία του Αβραάμ),[53] enjoyed a similar enduring popularity. Consisting of 1,144 fifteen-syllable verses in rhyming couplets, it was written in 1635 and first published in 1696. This biblical play is considered a loose adaptation of Groto's *Lo Isach* and is generally attributed to Vitsentzos Kornaros, author of *Erotokritos*, due to similarities in language, style and versification.[54] It is a

Pyramus and Thisbe by Dominko Zlatarić (1558–1613), an original composition on the same love theme by Barne Karnarutić (between 1515 and 1520 – 1572/1573) published in 1586, and a mythological play by Nikola Nalješković (ca. 1505–1587) based on the Judgment of Paris from Greek mythology. See *Djela Dominka Zlatarića* (Stari pisci hrvatski. Knjiga XXI), ed. Pero Budmani, Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Zagreb, 1899; Barne Karnarutić, *Djela*, ed. Franjo Švelec, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb, 2002; Nikola Nalješković, *Književna djela*, ed. Amir Kapetanović, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb, 2005.

[51] R. Bancroft-Marcus, *op. cit.* (29), 86.

[52] R. Bancroft-Marcus, *op. cit.* (29), 87–89.

[53] Mavro Vetranović (1482–1576), a Renaissance classic from Dubrovnik, also dedicated one of his plays to the same biblical story. Vetranović's *Sacrifice of Abraham* (*Posvetilište Abrahamovo*) was first staged in 1546. See Mavro Vetranović, *Pjesnička i dramska djela*, ed. Dubravka Brezak–Stamać, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb, 2016.

[54] See Wim Bakker, »Religious Drama,« in *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed. David Holton, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991, 179–204.

representative example of the intertwining of Western and Greek elements in the approach to the theme of religious sacrifice.[55] At the same time, some passages and stylistic devices are so reminiscent of folk songs that there is debate as to whether the author drew inspiration from folklore or whether, on the contrary, his play influenced the oral tradition.[56]

While the authorship of *The Sacrifice of Abraham* cannot be determined with certainty, in the case of the most famous work of the Cretan literary Renaissance, such doubts would be unfounded. Vitsentzos Kornaros is unanimously recognized as the author of *Erotokritos*,[57] a verse romance of over 10,000 rhyming fifteen-syllable couplets, which was probably written between 1590 and 1610. The only surviving manuscript dates from 1710, and the first printed edition, differing from the manuscript, was published three years later in Venice. The romantic poem tells a story of the tried-and-true love between the virtuous Princess Aretousa, daughter of the Athenian king Heracles, and the gallant Rotokritos (referred to as Erotokritos only in the title), who, although the son of the ruler's advisor, is not of noble birth, which prevents him from marrying his beloved. In order for their love to be fulfilled and receive the blessing of the Aretousa's father, Rotokritos disguises himself as a knight-errant, wins a tournament organized by the king, and later even saves the kingdom from foreign invasion. After the grateful ruler promises him the hand of his daughter and Rotokritos successfully proves that Aretousa has remained faithful to him, he reveals his true identity. The story ends with the wedding of the young lovers and Rotokritos's accession to the throne.

The fairytale plot of *Erotokritos* is based, with slight modifications, on the French chivalric romance *Paris et Vienne* (1487), originally a prose translation from Provençal by Pierre de la Cypède (Cépède) in 1432.[58] This popular medieval work of Catalan origin appeared in a number of European languages, and Kornaros probably knew it from an Italian rendition.[59] Another major influence on Kornaros's *Erotokrito*s was Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516).[60] David Holton also suggests possible inspiration by Greek verse romances of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, arguing that »two separate strands of Greek and Western

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[55] See W. Bakker, *op. cit.* (54).

[56] See W. Bakker, *op. cit.* (54); M. Alexiou, *op. cit.* (21), 263–274.

[57] However, given that the name Vitsentzos or Vikentios Kornaros was quite common in Crete at the time, the question arose as to which of its bearers wrote *Erotokritos*. Based on a number of indications, researchers identified him as the brother of Andreas Kornaros, born near Sitia on March 29, 1553. See David Holton, *Erotokritos*, Bristol Classical Press – Aristide D. Caratzas, Bristol – New Rochelle, 1991, 3–6.

[58] For a detailed elaboration of *Erotokritos*'s antecedents and inspirations, see David Holton, »Romance,« in *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, ed. David Holton, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991, 205–237.

[59] D. Holton, *op. cit.* (58).

[60] D. Holton, *op. cit.* (58).

narrative fiction come together in *Erotokritos*.«[61] In any case, it is a work in which the dominant elements of the chivalric romance, such as courtly love with its rituals, celebration of courage and valor, knightly duels and jousts, combine with features of the Renaissance epic, such as a playful narrative style, references to classical mythology, and the motif of Fortune as the determining force in human life. Thanks to its distinctive dialogical character and division into five parts, which is analogous to the five-act structure of classical plays, the text also contains elements of the dramatic genre.

Erotokritos deals with a wide range of topics from love and friendship, through honor and bravery, to social status and exile. As an attractive blend of romantic and heroic, Western European and Greek, literary and folk influences, it is the most popular work of the Cretan Renaissance. This is particularly due to its extraordinary resonance in the oral tradition. As in the case of *Erofili*, some of the verses from Kornaros's romance even mistakenly found their way into collections of oral poetry.[62] This is hardly surprising, considering that »[t]here is a long-standing tradition in Crete of recitation from memory of extracts from the *Erotokritos*, and in the nineteenth century there were popular performances of dramatised episodes from the poem in various parts of Greece.«[63] However, there is another intriguing aspect to *Erotokritos*, which relates to how its author constructs the fictional world of his poem. This issue will be addressed in the following section.

3. Mutual representations of Crete and Dalmatia in the works of Renaissance poets

In the introductory part of *Erotokritos*, Kornaros sets his »case of true love […] written in the heart, never to fade« in »times past, when the Hellenes held sway but their religion had neither foundation nor root.«[64] Then he further identifies this golden age with the time when Athens »gave nurture to learning and was the throne of nobility and the river of knowledge.«[65] However, the geographical and historical scope of the fictional world of *Erotokritos* does not correspond to ancient Athens. It is much broader, and it could rather be described as a peculiar image of the Eastern Mediterranean, in which various historical periods meet in the celebration of a nostalgically perceived past of the Greek world.

This is most evident in the second part of the poem, which contains a vivid depiction of the tournament organized by the King of Athens, in which Rotokritos

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[61] D. Holton, *op. cit.* (58), 209.
[62] V. Kornaros, *op. cit.* (2), xxvi.
[63] D. Holton, *op. cit.* (5), 16.
[64] V. Kornaros, *op. cit.* (2), 1.
[65] V. Kornaros, *op. cit.* (2), 1.

triumphs over a host of noblemen from various lands linked to Greek history and, in some cases, with the Serenissima's presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus, the Lord of Macedonia and the Prince of Byzantium face off against knights from Cyprus, the Peloponnese, and Crete, which at the time of writing was the last of the three Venetian overseas possessions. The jousting competition begins on the feast day of St Mark, patron saint of the Republic of Venice, and its participants are assigned value connotations based on their place of origin, which is expressed through their appearance, conduct, and audience reactions. While, for example, the knight representing the grandeur of Byzantium garners universal admiration and the favor of the queen herself, another contestant referred to as the Karamanite (the Lord of Karamania), which indicates his Anatolian, possibly Turkish, origin, is depicted as a savage, terrifying, and warlike barbarian who professes »a great enmity towards the island of Crete.«[66] It comes as no surprise that this character, who is generally interpreted as the embodiment of the Ottoman threat to Kornaros's native island,[67] is eliminated by none other than a knight from Crete. The same applies to another unfavorably portrayed combatant, whose country of origin can be identified as Dalmatia.

His name is Tripolemos and he is »the man who ruled and held sway over Sklavounia«,[68] i.e. the land of Slavs. He is described as a bold, harsh, and permanently angry bully, who changed his birth name to Tripolemos (literally: triple war) »to inspire fear.«[69] Since Byzantine sources from the tenth century refer to parts of Dalmatia settled by Slavs with the Greek word *Sklavinia* (here *Sklavounia*),[70] and the Venetians used the related term *Schiavonia* to denote the predominantly Slavic lands on the eastern coast of the Adriatic,[71] it is possible to locate Tripolemos's homeland there with a high degree of certainty.

Immediately after his theatrical arrival at the jousting field, accompanied by artificial thunder and lightning, the Lord of Sklavounia begins to shout and intimidate his Cretan rival, who pretends to be frightened by his appearance,[72] threats,

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[66] V. Kornaros, *op. cit.* (2), 46.

[67] D. Holton, *op. cit.* (58), 225.

[68] V. Kornaros, *op. cit.* (2), 77.

[69] V. Kornaros, *op. cit.* (2), 46.

[70] See Stojko Stojkov, »The Term Sclavinia in Byzantine Sources: Re-examination of the Chronological Framework,« *Monumenta* 4, 2019, 413–433.

[71] See Piotr Chmiel, »How Did Venetian Diplomatic Envoys Define Europe, Its Divisions, Centres and Peripheries (ca. 1570–1645)?« in *Contesting Europe: Comparative Perspectives on Early Modern Discourses on Europe, 1400–1800*, ed. Nicholas Detering, Clementina Marsico and Isabella Walser-Bürgler, Brill, Leiden – Boston, 2020, 211–227.

[72] Tripolemos is described not only as robust, but also as by far the tallest of the warriors. This may be related to his Dalmatian origin, as people in the Dinaric Alps region are on average taller than most of the European population.

and boasts such as »I fight night and day. I am always looking for a fight.«[73] In reality, however, the Cretan knight amuses himself by deliberately provoking the braggart's rage. Then he exclaims: »Forever remain a Sklavounian unversed in chivalry and ignorant in your behavior!«[74] and promises to teach him decorum. In the end, the Cretan defeats and humiliates Tripolemos, knocking him and his horse to the ground.

Thus, the only fully-fledged character originating from Dalmatia in the entire corpus of Cretan Renaissance literature takes the form of a belligerent and conceited brute who strives to instill fear through his threatening and strident demeanor, only to ultimately become the target of ridicule. In this sense, Tripolemos can be considered a variation on the popular character type of the boastful soldier (*miles gloriosus*). At the same time, the author suggests that Tripolemos's participation in the tournament had a wide resonance, when he concludes the passage by stating: »Wherever one went, one heard about the Sklavounian, and this caused people to neglect their labors. One person spoke of it with awe, another in jest. It was the subject of talk for young and old.«[75] This ambivalent prominence of Tripolemos is paralleled by the interpretation that his character could have been inspired by mercenaries from Dalmatia[76] who were well known to Cretans of that time, because the Venetians maintained large garrisons in Crete composed of soldiers from various parts of the Serenissima, and the military presence was an integral part of the daily life of the island's inhabitants.[77]

One of the Dalmatians whom the Cretans could have encountered in the streets of their cities was Ludovik Paskalić, a humanist from Kotor, mentioned at the beginning of this paper. In 1537 and 1538, Paskalić spent several months in Rethymno, where he participated in a Venetian military mission aimed at strengthening the island's defenses against the impending Ottoman invasion. Paskalić reflected on this experience in three compelling Latin elegies *To Eugenio Buccia* (*Ad Eugenium Bucchium*), *To Mariano Bizanti* (*Ad Marianum Bizantium*) and *On the Way Back from Crete* (*In reditu ex Craeta*) included in his posthumously published *Poems* (*Carmina*, 1551).[78] As the titles of the first two poems suggest,

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[73] V. Kornaros, *op. cit.* (2), 78.

[74] V. Kornaros, *op. cit.* (2), 79.

[75] V. Kornaros, *op. cit.* (2), 79.

[76] V. Kornaros, *op. cit.* (2), 196.

[77] A. Vincent, *op. cit.* (39), 107.

[78] *Ludovici Pascalis, Iulii Camilli, Molsae et aliorum poetarum carmina, ad illustriss. et doctiss. Marchionem Auriae Bernardium Bonifatium per Ludouicum Dulcium nunc primum in lucem aedita*, Venetiis, apud Gabrielem Iolitum et fratres De Ferrariis, MDLI. The quotations are taken from the electronic version of the book in the modern Latin transcriptions included in the *Croatiae auctores Latini* collection. See Ludovicus Pascalis, »Carmina, versio electronica,« in *Croatiae auctores Latini* (Internet, April 21, 2026). Translations from Latin are mine.

these are epistles addressed to Paskalić's friends in Kotor. The third poem, which symbolically concludes the poet's stay on the island, has its chronological counterpart in the poem *To Friends* (*Ad amicos*), in which he bids farewell to his loved ones before setting sail for Crete: »I am torn away from you, and though known to me barely by reputation, I willingly go towards the ancient Cretan realms of Jupiter.«[79] There are several other poems associated with Paskalić's stay on the island.[80] However, it is only in the three elegies mentioned that the author presents an image of Crete and its inhabitants based on his own experiences and observations. What does this image convey?

There are three pervasive motifs around which the poems revolve: longing for home and loved ones, anxiety and fear induced by the imminent Ottoman threat, and the contrast between the island's revered ancient past and its bleak present. The poet likens his stay in Crete to captivity: »I am held by the Saturnian fields of a foreign land, here, where Ida keeps the snow eternal.«[81] He desperately hopes to be reunited with his family and friends, and longs to behold »the mountains of Illyria, the shores so dear to my heart« from »our sea« once again.[82] Paskalić's elegies depict Crete as a gloomy place awaiting disaster, around which the Ottomans are tightening the grip, as they conquer one Aegean Island after another: »Yet here I lead my life surrounded by a thousand dangers, and fear various threats by night and day; for here, disregarding the depths of midwinter's biting frost, a barbarian enemy besieges the Aegean waters.«[83] The author's days on the island are mostly spent building fortifications,[84] but he also visits the site of ancient Knossos, where oxen plow the land among ruins overgrown with weeds: »We saw the shady halls that Daedalus built, and the darkness where a half-human bull once dwelled. We saw the walls and the crumbling stones lying there where the city of Knossos once

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[79] »Abstrahor a vobis, et vix mihi cognita fama / Sponte sequor veteris Gnosia regna Iovis,« L. Pascalis, »Ad amicos,« in L. Pascalis, *op. cit.* (78).

[80] Šimun Šonje even speaks of a »Cretan cycle« of Paskalić's poems, which, according to him, the author wrote during his stay in Crete. See Šimun Šonje, »Latinske pjesme Ljudevita Paskovića Kotoranina,« *Mogućnosti* 37, 3–4 (1990), 470–479.

[81] »Me tenent ignotis tellus Saturnia campis / Hic, ubi perpetuas sustinet Ida nives,« L. Pascalis, »Ad Eugenium Bucchium,« in L. Pascalis, *op. cit.* (78).

[82] »Qua tandem e pelago nostro gratissima cordi / Aspiciam montes Illiris ora tuos? / Atque illos, quorum vivos sub pectore vultus, / Conditaque in medio nomina corde fero?« L. Pascalis, »In reditu ex Craeta,« in L. Pascalis, *op. cit.* (78).

[83] »Attamen hic vitam per mille pericula duco, / Et timeo varios nocte dieque metus: / Hic etenim mediae contempto frigore brumae, / Barbarus Aegaeas obsidet hostis aquas.« L. Pascalis, »Ad Marianum Bizantium,« in L. Pascalis, *op. cit.* (78).

[84] L. Pascalis, »Ad Marianum Bizantium,« in L. Pascalis, *op. cit.* (78).

stood; and where Minos administered justice to hundred nations, strong oxen now rake and plow the furrows.«[85]

This illustrates the other side of the image of Crete in Paskalić's poems – it is a place that is in every way distant and painfully alienated from its glorious past, or more precisely, from the idealized notions of the island's ancient history in the minds of Renaissance humanists. Before returning to Kotor, the poet reflects on what he will say to his friends and relatives when they ask him, »[i]f any vestiges of ancient fame still survive« in Crete.[86] He concludes that »only a few monuments of ancient men now remain« and »the wormy decay of time has turned to ashes all that was written about by ancient forefathers.«[87] The Minotaur's labyrinth lies in ruins, and on Mount Ida, the birthplace of Zeus, »nothing remains but inaccessible snows.«[88] People living at the foot of Ida have lost their former splendor and nobility, just like the land itself.[89] Paskalić even describes the inhabitants of Crete as a harsh and warlike: »Now there lives a fierce race of men, noted by their painted quivers, by their hearts filled with the glory of Mars.«[90]

It is evident that both Kornaros and Paskalić primarily perceive each other's homeland through the prism of military affairs and warfare. In this sense, the generally unfavorable mutual representations of Crete and Dalmatia and their inhabitants in the works analyzed can be at least partially attributed to the compelling historical context of Ottoman territorial expansion, which posed an existential threat to both overseas territories of the Venetian Republic. However, contemporary themes were not equally important in the two centers of literary Renaissance

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[85] »Vidimus obscuras, quas struxit Dedalus aedes, / Caecaque semiviro tecta habitata bovi. / Vidimus et muros, ruinosaque saxa iacere / Hic, ubi Gnosiacae iam locus urbis erat. / Et centum populis ubi Minos iura ferebat, / Nunc versant validi rastra, et aratra boves,« L. Pascalis, »Ad Eugenium Bucchium,« in L. Pascalis, *op. cit.* (78).

[86] »O quoties, quae sint gentes, quae nomina quaerent, / Quos veteres ritus Craeta, habeat ve novos. / Si qua etiam priscae superant vestigia famae: / Quid modo quae magnum iam tulit Ida Iovem. / Quid centum vario celebratae carmine gentes, / Caecaque Dedaleo structa labore Domus: / Multa super Craeta querent, super aequore multa, / Quae fuerint nostrae per freta tanta viae,« L. Pascalis, »In reditu ex Craeta,« in L. Pascalis, *op. cit.* (78).

[87] »Ast ego cuncta suo referam memor ordine; pauca / Esse super veterum nunc monumenta virum. / Scilicet in cineres solvit cariosa vetustas / Omnia, quae priscis scripta leguntur avis,« L. Pascalis, »In reditu ex Craeta,« in L. Pascalis, *op. cit.* (78).

[88] »Vidimus antra super scabro pendentia topho, / Caecaque vix rabidis tecta colenda feris; / Intersepta rubis, putrique informia limo, / Semivirum memorant quae tenuisse Bovem. / Vidimus excelsae cunctis in montibus Idae / Praeter inaccessas iam nihil esse nives,« L. Pascalis, »In reditu ex Craeta,« in L. Pascalis, *op. cit.* (78).

[89] »Nec centum populi, nec quae Rhadamantus habebat / Regna, suae quicquam nobilitatis habent,« L. Pascalis, »In reditu ex Craeta,« in L. Pascalis, *op. cit.* (78).

[90] »Nunc genus acre virum, pictisque insigne pharetris, / Plurima cui cordi gloria Martis inest,« L. Pascalis, »In reditu ex Craeta,« in L. Pascalis, *op. cit.* (78).

in the Eastern Mediterranean, which is one of the differences between them that will be discussed in the concluding section.

4. Cretan and Dubrovnik-Dalmatian Renaissance Literatures in Comparative Perspective: Similarities and Differences

Specific thematic parallels between Renaissance literature in Crete and on the eastern Adriatic coast have already been pointed out in the footnotes to the previous parts of the paper. Now, we will look at a more general comparative overview of contextual, formal, and thematic points of contact, as well as differences between these two literary traditions. In both centers, we find a rich vernacular literature, which in the Croatian case is complemented by a similarly diverse body of works written in Latin and Italian.[91]

While in Dalmatia and Dubrovnik it was quite common for writers to compose their works in two and, exceptionally, three languages, there are no documented cases of such multilingual authorship in Crete (although several Italian-language works have also survived).[92] In both centers of Renaissance literature the corpus of surviving texts is incomplete, which is related to the fact that most of the works have been preserved in manuscripts. It can be assumed that the proportion of such losses was higher in Crete due to its fall under Ottoman rule in 1669. Contemporary editions are relatively rare; in the case of Cretan writers, they are even unique and were printed exclusively in Venice, while the works of poets from the eastern Adriatic coast were occasionally published in other Italian cities as well.

The emergence and specific characteristics of the two major centers of Renaissance literature in the Eastern Mediterranean are the result of the direct transmission of Italian artistic and intellectual influences (in the case of Crete, exclusively through Venetian mediation)[93] and their fusion with local literary and oral traditions. There are also certain genealogical similarities between Dubrovnik-Dalmatian and Cretan Renaissance literature. Both include the genres of *commedia erudita*, tragedy, pastoral play, and religious drama. At the same time, they show an almost complete absence of prose, with the remarkable exception of

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[91] All aspects of Dubrovnik-Dalmatian Renaissance literature referred to in this section are discussed in greater detail in my aforementioned study, which may thus serve as a complementary text to this paper. See P. Stehlík, *op. cit.* (3).

[92] While, for example, the founder of the Accademia degli Stravaganti, Andrea Cornaro, wrote in Italian, his brother Vitsentzos, author of *Erotokritos* and a member of the mentioned literary society, wrote in Greek. For the attitude of the Cornaro brothers and other members of Cretan academies towards language, see A. Vincent, *op. cit.* (11), 818–820.

[93] In both cases, the primary agents of Italian Renaissance influences in the local milieu were typically men who had studied in Padua and other Italian universities.

several plays by Marin Držić, and *Mountains* (*Planine*, 1536, printed in 1569) by Petar Zoranić (1508 – between 1543 and 1569), the first novel in Slavic literatures.

There are also similarities in form and style, as there is a prevalent verse form present in both vernacular literatures under comparison (political verse in Greek and double-rhymed 12-syllable verse in Croatian), and some of their authors tend to incorporate references to the local oral tradition into their works. An analogical use of the technique of localization is also evident, particularly in the genres of comedy and pastoral play. The plots of these dramas are set mainly in a local context; in comedies the characters also tend to be local, and they are often characterized through the linguistic idioms they use.

Finally, both Renaissance literatures exerted a significant influence on the formation of the modern literatures (Greek and Croatian) and their languages (although in the Croatian case, the Baroque literature of Dubrovnik played a more important role in this regard). From the nineteenth century to the present day, Greek and Croatian writers have also engaged in a creative dialogue with the legacy of Renaissance literature in their respective cultures.

On the other hand, there are considerable discrepancies between the literatures compared. At first glance, the asynchrony of the Renaissance literature phenomenon on the eastern Adriatic coast and in Crete is evident. While in case of Dubrovnik and Dalmatia we place the peak period in the sixteenth century and the beginnings even in the last third of the previous century, most of the extant works of the Cretan literary Renaissance were written at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or even in the decades of the seventeenth century preceding the Ottoman conquest of the island. This disparity, of course, raises the question of periodization and the transition between Renaissance and Baroque as stylistic formations.[94]

Another significant divergence between the two literary traditions concerns the volume of preserved works, which is incomparably greater and more diverse on the eastern Adriatic coast. This fact stems, among other things, from the significantly greater heterogeneity of this region, which consists of a number of towns and islands that are, to a certain extent, literarily distinct (with the Republic of Ragusa as a political and cultural phenomenon in its own right). Closely related to this issue are the differences (but also similarities) between the Italian models emulated and adapted by authors in the respective literary centers. Albeit not exclusively, Cretans tend to be inspired by the later phases of the Italian Renaissance and early Baroque literature (Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio, Giambattista Guarini, Luigi Groto, Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara, Torquato Tasso, Giambattista

[94] See Walter Puchner, »Zum Barockbegriff in der südosteuropäischen Dramatik,« in Walter Puchner, *Beiträge zur Theaterwissenschaft Südosteuropas und des mediterranen Raums*, 2. Band, Böhlau, Wien – Köln – Weimar, 2007, 27–40; Zoran Kravar, *Das Barock in der kroatischen Literatur*, Böhlau, Wien – Köln – Weimar, 1991.

Marino), which is understandable given the time span of the literary Renaissance on their island.[95] There are also apparent differences in genre structure between the compared corpora of Renaissance literature. While Croatian Renaissance literature lacks a verse romance comparable to *Erotokritos*, in contrast to its Cretan counterpart, it includes the genres of biblical and historical epic, pastoral romance in prose, mythological play, farce, prose drama, and especially diverse lyric poetry, including highly developed Petrarchism in the vernacular.[96] It is also worth noting that in Cretan literature we find no author as versatile as the Split bard Marko Marulić (1450–1524), whose works written in Latin were published, read, and translated across the continent, and who fundamentally influenced literary development on the eastern Adriatic coast with his vernacular epic *Judita* (written in 1501, published in 1521) and other poems written in Croatian.

One of the most distinctive features of Croatian Renaissance literature, especially in Venetian Dalmatia, is its thematic preoccupation with the Ottoman threat. Even though this theme is less common in the contemporary literature of Dubrovnik, which was an Ottoman vassal state, many works critically reflecting the reality of the time were also written there, such as the intellectually provocative and socially subversive plays by Marin Držić and anti-Ottoman poems by Mavro Vetranović. By contrast, Cretan Renaissance literature can be better characterized by a thematic escape from contemporary reality into the glorious ancient past of

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[95] The authors from Dubrovnik and Dalmatia draw inspiration from the works of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Jacopo Sannazaro, Serafino Aquilano, Pietro Bembo, Ludovico Ariosto, Lodovico Dolce, and other representatives of the Italian Renaissance literature, including those whose works were adapted by the Cretans (most notably Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio, Giambattista Guarini, Luigi Groto, and Torquato Tasso).

[96] The fact that love poetry in the vernacular is not represented in the surviving corpus of Cretan texts does not mean that it is completely absent from Greek Renaissance literature as such. The only work of this kind that does not originate from Crete is precisely a collection of love poems. Generally referred to as the Cypriot *Canzoniere*, it is an anonymous manuscript written in Cyprus by one or more authors in the sixteenth century before its conquest by the Ottomans (1571). It contains 156 mainly love poems written largely according to Italian models. Some of them are direct Greek translations of poems by Petrarch and Jacopo Sannazaro. See Elsie Mathiopoulou-Tournaritou, »A Critical Reading of the Cypriot Renaissance Canzoniere of the Venice Marcian Library (Marc. Gr. IX 32). Could this be the Oldest Neo-Hellenic Anthology known?,« *Études helléniques / Hellenic Studies* 15, 2 (2007), 63–77. In Crete, the echoes of Petrarchism, and even parodies of it, are present in other genres than lyrical love poetry. See Marina Rodosthenous-Balafa, »Petrarchism and Anti-Petrarchism: The Manneristic Response of the *Cypriot Canzoniere* and Chortatsis's *Panoria*,« in *Culture and Society in Crete: From Kornaros to Kazantzakis*, ed. Liana Giannakopoulou and E. Kostas Skordyles, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2017, 13–31.

the Greek world, or rather into a certain ideal timelessness,[97] which we encounter in *Erotokritos* and *The Shepherdess*, as well as in plays, with the exception of comedies (which, however, lack the socio-critical edge of Držić's works). Only »[t]he Cretan War and eventually the fall of Crete will put a violent end to the atemporal world the Cretan poets lived in and will wake them up to the real world.«[98] According to Michael Paschalis, it was only then that »[t]he notion of homeland will come to the foreground, attention will shift to the writer and his work, and pride in the Cretan tongue and literary activity will make their appearance.«[99]

It should be noted that all these features are common in the works of many Croatian writers of the sixteenth century (such as Marko Marulić, Petar Zoranić, Barne Karnarutić, Juraj Baraković /1548–1628/), particularly in Dalmatia, which was directly exposed to the Ottoman raids. Unlike Crete, however, the urban communes on the eastern Adriatic coast, which were centers of Renaissance literature, remained under Venetian or Dubrovnik rule until the dissolution of the two republics at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The literary Renaissance there thus had a natural continuation in the Baroque literature of the seventeenth century, especially rich and diverse in Dubrovnik. The Cretan Renaissance literature, presented in this paper, is, on the contrary, the literature of a vanished world, an expression of its creative boom before the catastrophe that brought about its demise. Despite this final difference, the numerous parallels outlined in this study testify to the stimulating nature of comparative research into the Dubrovnik-Dalmatian and Cretan Renaissance literature as two major manifestations of the literary Renaissance in the broadly conceived Eastern Mediterranean.

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[97] See Michael Paschalis, »The Evolution of Authorial Self-Consciousness in Cretan Renaissance Literature,« in *Culture and Society in Crete: From Kornaros to Kazantzakis*, ed. Liana Giannakopoulou and E. Kostas Skordyles, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2017, 67–73.

[98] M. Paschalis, *op. cit.* (97), 70.

[99] M. Paschalis, *op. cit.* (97), 70.

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Petr Stehlík

KRETSKA I DUBROVAČKO-DALMATINSKA RENESANSNA KNJIŽEVNOST: PREMA KOMPARATIVNOM PRISTUPU SREDIŠTIMA KNJIŽEVNE RENESANSE NA ISTOČNOM MEDITERANU

Cilj je ovog rada ocrtati potencijalno novo područje komparativnog istraživanja hrvatske renesansne književnosti uvođenjem fenomena kretske renesansne književnosti, koja je dosad zanemarivana u tradiciji istraživanja europskog konteksta renesanse u slavenskim književnostima. Kao i Dalmacijom, Kretom je vladala Mletačka Republika, što je dovelo do nastanka intrigantne vernakularne književnosti. Ona je najvažnija djela iznjedrila u svega nekoliko desetljeća prije osmanskog osvajanja otoka 1669. Prilično malen, ali vrijedan korpus tekstova napisanih na kretskom dijalektu grčkoga rijetko je uspoređivan s renesansnom književnošću koju su na hrvatskom, latinskom i talijanskom jeziku stvorili autori iz mletačke Dalmacije i suverene Dubrovačke Republike. Rad pruža komparativni uvid u kontekstualne, formalne i tematske dodirne točke između spomenutih književnih tradicija. Studija je podijeljena u četiri dijela. Prvi dio ocrtava povijesni i kulturni kontekst kretske renesanse. Najopsežniji, drugi dio predstavlja djela i žanrove kretske renesansne književnosti. Treći dio bavi se prikazima Krete i Dalmacije u djelima dalmatinskih i kretskih renesansnih pjesnika. Četvrti dio raspravlja o kretskoj i dubrovačko-dalmatinskoj renesansnoj književnosti iz komparativne perspektive te prikazuje sličnosti i razlike između dvaju najvažnijih središta književne renesanse na široko shvaćenom istočnom Mediteranu.

Ključne riječi: kretska renesansna književnost, hrvatska renesansna književnost, komparativna književnost, mediteranski studiji

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