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### The Real Felix: The Archival Lives of Feliks Petančić

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The life of Feliks Petančić has been a matter of dispute for a long time now, with the basic issue arising from the fact that three different, though similar, names have been associated with one and the same person. Recently Dávid and Lakatos have argued that the three names – Felix Ragusinus, Felix Brutus, and Felix Petancius – had been mistakenly attributed to the same person and should rather be viewed as referring to three different people. This conclusion goes against the influential claims made originally by Petar Kolendić, the author of the most extensive study on the subject of Petančić's life in Dubrovnik, first published in 1959. Building upon the information gathered by previous scholars, particularly by Kolendić, this article inconvertibly shows that the three different names found in the primary sources do indeed belong to the same person. By addressing the doubts expressed by Dávid and Lakatos and considering the manner in which they arose, the article argues the importance of original archival research in evaluating older scholarship.

Key words: Felix Brutus, Felix Ragusinus Dalmata, Feliks Petančić, Ragusa (Dubrovnik), Dubrovnik State Archives (DADU)

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After extensive studies by Petar Kolendić (1959) and Dragutin Kniewald (1961), barely any new information was added to the discussion of Feliks Petančić's career for over half a century. He was more recently mentioned either as part of studies that focused on various other aspects of works attributed to him,<sup>2</sup> or as part of encyclopaedic entries.3 However, the claims brought forward by Kolendić, and unanimously accepted by subsequent scholarship, have recently been challenged by Dávid and Lakatos (2020). Their study, as welcome as it is long overdue, questions a series of core assumptions made by Kolendić, the most prominent of which was that a certain Ragusan scribe named Felix Brutus, a diplomat named Feliks Petančić, and a Hungarian court official named Felix Ragusinus Dalmata should all be considered one and the same person. The authors' main claim is that the three names should rather be considered to have belonged to three distinct individuals. They base this claim on the belief that previous researchers of the subject4 were misled by the fact that both Feliks Petančić and a certain Felix Ragusinus Dalmata share the same place of origin (2020, 48). Namely, in the only known contemporary reference to Felix Ragusinus Dalmata, Nicolaus Olahus (1493-1568), a Hungarian humanist and archbishop of Esztergom, writing about the scriptorium of king Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490)<sup>5</sup> says the following:

The older men told me that, while he was alive, King Matthias always employed up to 30 scribes skilled in painting, many of whom I got to meet after he died. It was they that transcribed almost all codices, both Greek and Latin. Their prefect was Felix Ragusinus Dalmata, who was already an old man when I met him. He was well versed not only in Greek and Latin, but also in Chaldean and Arabic. What is more, he was also experienced in painting and would keep a watchful eye lest any mistake should be made in the process of transcription. (1731, 20)<sup>6</sup>

It is Dávid and Lakatos's belief that the claims made in this passage – the one about Felix Dalmata being a Ragusan and the other about him speaking Chaldean and Arabic – subsequently led future scholars to mistakenly equate Felix the prefect with Feliks Petančić from Dubrovnik, a famous royal diplomat at the court of king Vladislaus II (1490–1516) (2020, 48). The two Hungarian authors then proceed to argue

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Rakova (2018), Rakova (2019).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Špoljarić (2015).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Banfi (1947), Berkovits (1941), Matković (1879), Sakcinski (1858), and Sakcinski (1863).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> For monarchs, years of reign, rather than life span, are given in parentheses.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> My translation. The original goes as follows: "Audivi a maioribus, Mathiam regem, dum viveret, aluisse semper ad triginta servos amanuenses, pingendi peritos, quorum ego plerosque, illo mortuo, noveram. Horum erant opera omnes fere et Graeci et Latini codices conscripti. Praefectus his Felix Ragusinus Dalmata, et ipse jam senex, mihi cognitus, qui non modo Graece et Latine, sed Chaldaice et Arabice doctus; praeterea in ipsa quoque pictura exercitatus, sedulo advertebat, ne quis error in describendis libris committeretur."

that the discussion of the life and work of Feliks Petančić was further complicated by Petar Kolendić, who, in a study concerning Petančić's early life in Dubrovnik, apparently conflated the data concerning both Feliks Petančić and a certain Ragusan scribe Felix Brutus, only rarely explicitly saying to whom the archival data from the Dubrovnik State Archives (henceforth DADU) referred (2020, 49).7 Furthermore, they also add, and rightfully so, that even though pieces of data culled by Kolendić from different archival series seem to complement each other,8 he offers no conclusive evidence which would undoubtedly prove that Feliks Petančić and Felix Brutus were one and the same person (ibid.). Dávid and Lakatos then proceed to address a series of claims about the life of Feliks Petančić that they believe to be based on pure assumption (2020, 50–52). By focusing only on the archival sources which Kolendić explicitly cites as mentioning Feliks Petančić, they dispute the supposed year of Petančić's birth (1455),9 his family history, as well as the fact that he is claimed to have been a teacher (1478–1482) and a scribe of the criminal court (1482 –1487) in his native Ragusa, after which he moved to Budapest (1487–1490).<sup>10</sup> Lastly, they present an overview of Petančić's diplomatic activities, primarily relying on information provided by Pietro Pasqualigo (1472–1515), the official emissary of the Republic of Venice to king Vladislaus II (1509–1512). Interestingly enough, they don't find it problematic that Pasqualigo talks merely about "Felice Raguseo", "nor do they question the claim that Petančić left Dubrovnik in 1496, despite the lack of conclusive evidence from Kolendić's study regarding this issue.

Dávid and Lakatos's criticism about the scholarly approach to the life and work of Feliks Petančić primarily stems from the fact that one of the seminal papers on the subject, that published by Petar Kolendić in 1959, provides scant information about the exact names under which the person in question is found in the consulted archival materials. Out of some one hundred documents from DADU that Kolendić cites in his paper, for only six does he provide a citation from which the exact name

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>The first document which Kolendić explicitly lists as mentioning Felix Brutus dates back to January 1487, when he is mentioned alongside his brother Stephanus, regarding a loan they took from a fellow Ragusan (1959, 3). The document can be found at Deb. not. 51, 56v in DADU.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> For instance, it is clear that Felix Brutus was heavily burdened by debt at one point, which Kolendić connects with the fact that Petančić was issued a salvus conductus before his arrival to Dubrovnik in 1490. What this meant in practice is that a person was allowed to enter the city for a certain amount of time without fear of being prosecuted because of their debts (1959, 9).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Although surprisingly exact, the year is proposed by Kolendić as a mere approximation (1959, 3).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that during this period, that is after Brutus' apparent departure from Ragusa and before Petančić's arrival there, the official documents also record Felix's absence from the city. The documents concerning Felix from September 1487 until April 1490 refer to his creditors attempting to collect on his debts, with the person involved in those proceedings being a certain Jakov Franov, whom Felix had authorised to manage his estate in his absence (Kolendić, 1959, 8).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ljubić (1876, 118, 123, 129, 130).

of the person in question can be deduced (either Felix Brutus, or Felix Petancius). Two more documents cited in their entirety merely refer to a "Felix". Lastly, even though Kolendić opens his paper with a statement about "Feliks Brutus Petancius or de Petanciis", he provides no reference as to where these appellations might stem from (1959, 1). Therefore, one ends up with the impression that Kolendić seems to have a priori accepted the fact that Petančić and Brutus were the same person, whence he proceeds to build the rest of his arguments. Bearing this in mind, it is hardly surprising that someone would eventually bring into question the conclusions reached in such a study. In this respect, the Hungarian authors' criticism is not only understandable but also quite welcome, since it has been more than 60 years since Kolendić published his paper, and barely any questions were asked about the arguments made therein, regardless of the paper's noticeable imperfections. Unjustified, however, is their outright dismissal of any piece of information for which Kolendić, although citing the place in the archive where it can be found, doesn't provide a verbatim transcription of the relevant passage which would tell us whether it pertains to Petančić or Brutus. In other words, any such dismissal ought to have been accompanied by a return to the Dubrovnik State Archives and supported by evidence present (or absent) therein, and it is this injustice that this paper seeks to remedy. Lastly, having rejected the possibility of Petančić and Brutus being a single person, Dávid and Lakatos also find it unlikely that Olahus' Felix Ragusinus Dalmata is Petančić as well, despite the fact that the two personas share the same name (a rather rare one in Dubrovnik at the time), 12 the same place of origin, the same profession (skilled scribes), and were both officials at the royal court in Budapest at roughly the same time. What is more, since Felix Ragusinus Dalmata was, according to Olahus, the prefect of the royal scriptorium, the fact that only one contemporary reference to him survives seems unlikely to say the least. However, rather than considering these parallels to be puzzles that if cautiously studied could provide a more detailed picture of the life of Feliks Petančić, the Hungarian authors look at them in terms of false leads that led preceding scholars astray (2020, 48).

Before proceeding to discuss anew the archival evidence regarding Kolendić's claims, two additional issues with Dávid and Lakatos's paper need to be addressed. First, regarding the information about Petančić's familial relations, the authors dismiss the document in which he is mentioned as being the son of Deodatus and a judge in Zagreb in 1511 (2020, 52). They claim to base their dismissal on the lack

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> The Ragusan anthroponomy has been researched mostly in terms of the names appearing among aristocrat families. In this respect, the name Felix appears in only one Ragusan family, which makes it extremely rare (Vekarić, 2018, 50). Vekarić's findings have been cross-referenced with the catalogues of testaments kept at DADU, starting from 1282 until 1602, where only one other Felix has been found. The catalogues are accessible through the following link: dad.hr/a-1-5-dubrovacka-republika-do-1808-godine/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Item in anno Domini milessimo quingentesimo undecimo, feria sexta ante dominicam Reminiscere, hoc quaternum est conscriptum et consignatum tempore judicatus primi prudentis et circumscripti viri Felicis Pettancy filii Deodati, modo et ordine quo supra (Tkalčić 1902, 201).

of evidence that Petančić was a citizen of Zagreb and that he owned property there, which were at the time mandatory for a person to become a city judge. However, such an objection elicits the question of how justified it is to doubt the credibility of a document just because of the lack of evidence which would merely further corroborate the information contained within it. Surely, were such an approach to be accepted, there is barely anything we would be able to say about any issue from the premodern period. What is more, the said document is accepted as valid in a recent study about the urban elite of Gradec, just as Petančić is accepted to have been a legitimate judge (Škreblin, 2018). Second, when referring to Kristofor Stojković (?–1499), a diplomat and bishop of Modruš (Modrussa), Dávid and Lakatos refer to him as Petančić's uncle, which is an outdated interpretation, since Lonza makes a compelling argument that Stojković was in fact Petančić's godfather (2010, 30).

As I have suggested in the previous sections, because of the way it was written, Kolendić's paper warrants revisiting in terms of either corroborating or disproving the claims that it makes. It was necessary therefore to visit the Dubrovnik State Archives and double-check the documents that Kolendić cites. What follows are the results of my visit. In this respect, the most significant have turned out to be the apparently unfounded references to Petančić as "Feliks Brutus Petancius or de Petanciis" with which Kolendić opened his paper. For, as it turns out, even if the author didn't cite exactly the place from which they came, the appellations are not unfounded at all. In other words, by re-examining the documents cited by Kolendić, I was able to locate these exact phrases, which in turn unmistakably show that Felix Brutus and Feliks Petančić were one and the same person. The first document, dated 18 May 1490, belongs to the *Debita notariae* series from DADU and contains the official statement by "Felix Brutus Petantius" about a loan he is taking from

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> In a recent correspondence, Bruno Škreblin has informed me that Felix, although mentioned only by name, is also listed as the judge in a dispute dated to 16 April 1511 (Tkalčić 1896, 95–96). No other references to Felix appear in the documents from Zagreb, which Škreblin interprets as pointing to the fact that he was made a judge on a very short notice (he should have at least been a town councillor beforehand). This was quite uncommon, but not unheard of, especially for those belonging to or closely associated with the contemporary nobility, with other such examples being Gašpar Kušević/Kišević, Ivan Pastor, Ivan Požgaj, and Marko Požgaj. It is Škreblin's belief that Petančić's close ties with the royal court in Buda enabled him to skip the usual *cursus honorum* and become a judge straight away. I hereby thank Bruno Škreblin for his valuable input on the subject.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup>For some time now, it has been suggested by scholars that it was Stojković that first brought Petančić to Budapest. This belief was first expressed by Sakcinski (1858, 76–77), and was later adopted by other scholars as well. Recently, I was informed by Luka Špoljarić that this is not at all unlikely, since Stojković was closely affiliated with the Frankopans of Modruš, who were in turn very close to the queen Beatrice of Naples (1476–1490).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> In hopes of avoiding further confusion and correcting once and for all the flaws present in Kolendić's paper, the cited documents from DADU are accompanied by transcriptions in the footnotes. Additionally, images of the most important documents are provided in the Appendix.

Collantonius de Mazara (Image 1).17 As can be seen in the reproduction, the entry is accompanied by two sidenotes, one dated 27 June 1491 and the other 28 January 1492, the latter of which testifies to the fact that the debt was repaid in its entirety. The second document, also regarding a loan, dates to 17 November 1495 and has Petančić listed as "Felix Brutus seu de Petantiis" (Image 2).18 This document is further significant because it mentions Petančić's marriage contract with a certain Francisca, dated 3 November 1484, as well as his estate on the island of Lopud (a house with a garden and a vineyard). Both of these are important pieces of information regarding the private life of Feliks Petančić, and were both mentioned by Kolendić, but were liable to doubt because he failed to specify the exact name found in the documents. It is clear now that such an approach to the subject matter was probably the result of his confidence in the fact that Brutus and Petančić were a single person: it appeared to Kolendić so obvious that he did not even register it as an issue worth clarifying in his article. What is more, even if it weren't for the examples where the two last names are written along each other, an official statement by Consilium rogatorum, dated 4 April 1494 (Image 3), in which Felix Brutus is sent on a diplomatic mission to Naples,19 further supports the fact that Felix the clerk and Felix the diplomat are one and the same person, especially since Feliks Petančić was appointed to a similar mission in 1493 (Image 4).20

On the other hand, even though it is clear now that Petančić employed different last names throughout his career, it is unclear both why he did so, and where the last name "Petantius" came from, although there have been attempts by previous scholars to answer these questions. However, one thing is worth noting when it comes to the documents cited above. It seems that it is only after his return to Dubrovnik from Budapest in 1490 that Felix Brutus starts to refer to himself as Feliks Petančić.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Deb. not. 53, 103v. The document is referenced by Kolendić on page 9 of his paper. It reads as follows: Ego Felix Brutus Petantius confiteor quod super me et omnia me bona obligo me dare et solvere Collantonio de Mazara ducatos auri ducentos septuaginta usque ad unum annum prixime futurum...

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Deb. not. 57, 134v. The document is referenced by Kolendić on pages 6 and 19. It reads as follows: Ego Felix Brutus seu de Petantiis confiteor quod super me et omnia mea bona pro resto et saldo omnium rationum quas hinc retro usque ad praesentem diem habui agere cum infrascripto ser Theodoro de Prodanello vel cum ser Petro eius filio [...] obligo me dare et solvere dicto ser Theodoro de Prodanello praesente et acceptanti ducatos auri decem et octo [...] nomine pigneris dictorum ducatorum decem et octo do et consigno dicto ser Theodoro creditori praesenti et acceptanti domum meam de muro cum zardino et toto tereno et vinea in ipso zardino in Insula de Medio, quam habui alias a Johanne Blasii de Fulgineo magistro sartiarum mediante morte dicti olim magistri Johannis, ut constat in pacto meo matrimoniali contracto cum Francisca, uxore mea, de quo constat in notaria 1484 die III novembris...

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Cons. rog. 27, 106v. The document is referenced by Kolendić on page 16. It reads as follows: *Prima pars est de firmando Felicem Brutum pro expenditore oratorum iturorum Neapolim*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Cons. rog. 27, 33v. The document is referenced by Kolendić on page 15. It reads as follows: *Prima pars est de acceptando Felicem Petantium pro expenditore oratorum iturorum in Hungariam*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Kolendić (1959, 2); Kniewald (1961, 6–7)

This in turn might point to the fact that his employment by the royal court might have compelled him to endorse a different last name, whatever the reasons behind this may be. Such a course of events is further supported by the fact that he is called Petančić in a document dated immediately before his return to Ragusa, which suggests that he assumed the new last name sometime during his stay in Budapest between 1487 and 1490.<sup>22</sup> Lastly, an entry in the *Procurae notariae* series, wherein "Felix Brutus Petantius" allows a certain creditor of his to sell some of his belongings, also warrants mentioning (Image 5).<sup>23</sup> For in this entry the word "Brutus" is crossed out, which, along with the fact that it was made just before Petančić left for Budapest once again,<sup>24</sup> makes it seem as if he is leaving his old name behind just before his second and apparently final move from Dubrovnik to Budapest. It is not surprising therefore that this seems to be the last time Felix Brutus is mentioned in the official documents from DADU.

#### Conclusion

It has been shown, that a Ragusan clerk Felix Brutus, a royal emissary Feliks Petančić, and a prefect of the royal scriptorium Felix Ragusinus Dalmata are indeed one and the same person, as Kolendić correctly established even if he did not provide the transcriptions from the sources needed to dispel future doubts. As far as the first two names are concerned, this shouldn't be doubted in the slightest, since the evidence from DADU clearly shows that Brutus assumed the last name Petančić, probably sometime during his stay in Budapest (1487–1490).<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, even though there is only one contemporary source which mentions Felix Ragusinus Dalmata as the prefect of the royal scriptorium, we have every reason to believe that this Felix should be considered Petančić as well. The first argument in favour of such an interpretation is the fact that Petančić was an official at the royal court of king Matthias Corvinus at the same time when Nicolaus Olahus had the chance to meet the prefect of the royal scriptorium in Budapest. What is more, there is ample

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Cons. rog. 26, 91r. The document is cited in its entirety by Kolendić on page 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Proc. not. 9, 256r. The document is referenced by Kolendić on page 19. It reads as follows: Foelix Brutus Petantius per vocem datam notario praesens procuratus ante discessum suum ad proceres Ungarie, videlicet quod quando subscripti procuratores sui sive unus ipsorum venient seu veniet, deberet ipse notarius scribere praesentem procuram more infrascripto videndo et non videndo fecit et ordinavit suos veros et legitimos procuratores symul et in solidum ser Theodorum Petri de Prodanello et Petrum, ipsius constituentis socerum, quod vendendum et alienandum quomodolibet ipsis procuratoribus in solidum melius videbitur de bonis stabilibus ipsius constituentis in Insula de Medio, videlicet id quod reperitur ibi pro amontancia tota crediti dicti ser Theodori seu pro quanto vendi possent dicta bona, extractum quorum bonorum omnium prevenire habeat ipsi ser Theodoro in computum satisfactionis et solvendi sui crediti.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> The entry is dated to 3 October 1496. After this, the first known mentioning of Petančić dates to late 1501, when he is described as *cancellarius Segniensis*, which means that he was settled in Senj for some time, perhaps even immediately after he left Dubrovnik.

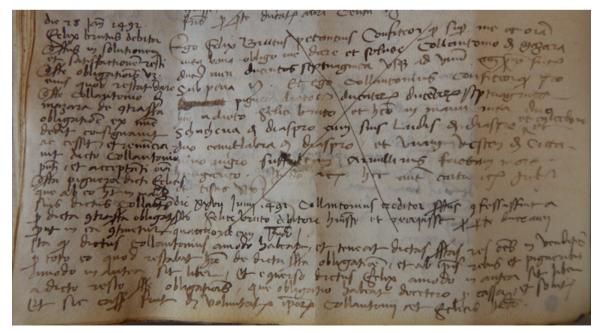
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> It should be noted that some documents from DADU are not referenced correctly by Kolendić, but this is a technical issue. The corrections are provided in Table 1 in the Appendix.

evidence showing that Petančić was a skilled scribe, at times employed by the Ragusan state itself in order to produce important pieces of transcription, which points to the fact that he was indeed qualified to manage the laborious task of transcribing manuscripts for the royal library. Lastly, the fact that he refers to himself as Ragusan, along with the noticeable rarity of the name Felix in Dubrovnik at the time, strongly suggests that it would have been highly unlikely for two persons sharing the same name and origin and employed in the same place at the same time to be two different persons. We therefore have no further reason to doubt that Feliks Petančić, a famous royal diplomat under Vladislaus II, was also the prefect of the royal scriptorium of king Matthias Corvinus, as well as a native Ragusan, whose career took him from being a modest teacher and a scribe, to being a respected diplomat visiting the most esteemed royal courts of the time.

Even though Dávid and Lakatos's criticism of the flaws present in the previous studies on Feliks Petančić was a long-awaited breath of fresh air which will hopefully help revive the study of this important Ragusan humanist, it must also be conceded that their outright dismissal of a whole series of claims made by Kolendić was a step too far. This primarily follows from their failure to double-check the documents that Kolendić referenced in his paper. Therefore, both his and the Hungarian authors' approach can teach us a valuable lesson. The former about the relevance of the proper treatment of archival documents and data, and the latter about the inherent and invaluable importance of the archival materials themselves.

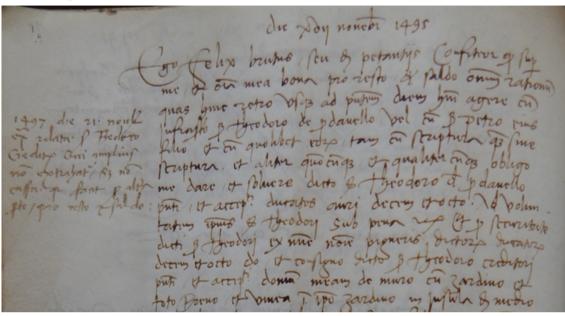
## Appendix

Image 1.



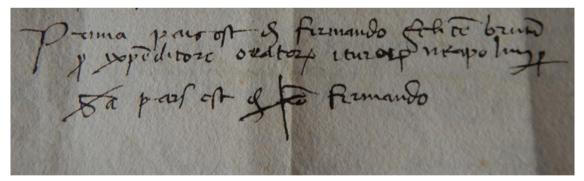
"Felix Brutus Petantius" in Deb. not. 53, 103v, from Dubrovnik State Archives.

### Image 2.



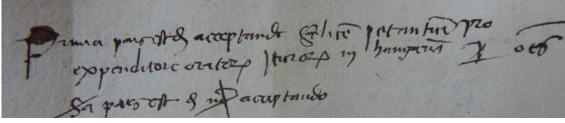
"Felix Brutus seu de Petantiis" in Deb. not. 57, 134v, from Dubrovnik State Archives.

### Image 3.



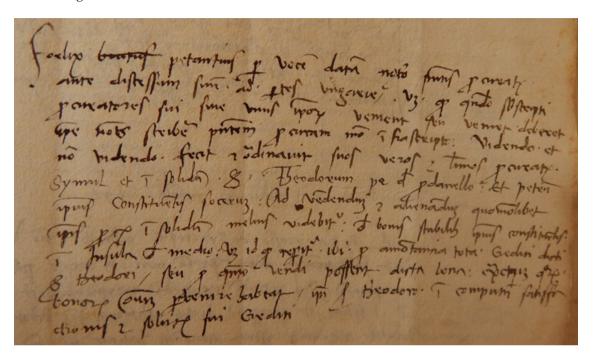
The diplomat Felix Brutus in Cons. rog. 27, 106v, from Dubrovnik State Archives.

# Image 4.



The diplomat Felix Petantius in Cons. rog. 27, 33v, from Dubrovnik State Archives.

Image 5.



Felix Brutus Petantius in Proc. not. 9, 256r, from Dubrovnik State Archives.

Table 1. Corrections of Kolendić's citations (1959)

Kolendić's citation	Correct citation
Cons. maius 14, 41r	Cons. maius 14, 40v
Cons. rog. 26, 281r	Cons. rog. 26, 281v
Cons. rog. 26, 146v	Cons. rog. 26, 145v
Proc. not. 9, 95v	Proc. not. 9, 114r
Deb. not. 56, 134v	Deb. not. 56, 134v-135r

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