The *Hymni naturales* of Michele or Michael Marullus have given rise to much debate. Are they Epicurean, Orphic, Neoplatonist, or none of these? Was he a crypto-pagan – like George Gemistos Pletho a follower of the Olympian gods? Or was he a writer of deeply Christian allegory? Various combinations of influence have been suggested over the years, in a literature that has grown to considerable proportions.¹ I would like to contribute to the debate with a few

clues taken from the *Hymns* themselves, and some observations on the kind of Neoplatonism being revived in Florence during the years they were being written.

Some facts about Marullus’s life may be helpful reminders for the context for his writing. Born in Greece, Marullus lived among Greek exiles in Ragusa, then in Ancona and Calabria. After losing his lands in the Morea, his father Manilius entered the service of the Ragusan state as a doctor and a diplomat, travelling frequently to Ancona and to Rome. He eventually died and was buried in Ancona. When Michele’s mother was appointed as lady-in-waiting to a Serbian princess in Calabria, Michele accompanied her.

He came eventually to Naples as a soldier, probably at the age of seventeen. He learned poetry there with Giovanni Pontano, becoming acquainted also with Lorenzo Bonincontri and Jacopo Sannazaro. These three poets were all

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2 The date of his birth and arrival in Ragusa are uncertain: he tells us he was “a formless seed in my mother’s womb when my country was conquered”, *Epigrams*, 2.32.65. Since he was also known as *Contantinopolitanus*, ‘conquered’ has generally been understood as referring to the fall of Byzantium in May 1453. But his father’s family came from the Morea, and Mistra with its surroundings did not fall until 1460. See McGann, “1453” (see above, n. 1). Through Michele’s mother, a Tarchaniota, the family had been linked with the Byzantine court. For biographical details, see Carol Kidwell, *Marullus, Soldier Poet of the Renaissance* (London, 1989).