Book review

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MEMOARI BARUNA FRANJE TRENCKA [MEMOIRS OF BARON FRANCIS TRENCK]

Alexander Buczynski (ed.), Milan Vrbanus i Mica Orban Kljajić (contr.), Hrvatski institut za povijest - Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje [Croatian Institute of History – Slavonia, Srijem and Baranja Branch], Slavonski Brod, 2015, p. 352.

The name of the head of *pandurs*, Baron Francis Trenck, is still present and alive in the public memory. There are numerous stories and legends attached to his persona, one of the most famous ones being his love affair with Queen Maria Theresa. Accordingly, when visiting the Kutjevo wine cellars one can hear numerous tales of his romantic exploits, whereas Požega is home to the Brass Band "Trenck's Pandurs". In addition to representing "living history", Trenck is often featured in school textbooks, encyclopaedias, lexicons and TV shows. However, as opposed to the frequent mention of him in contemporary culture, unusual of an early Modern Age figure, there is hardly a frequent representation of him in scientific discourse. Indicative of this phenomenon is the fact that over a century the basic secondary source on this legendary officer in Croatia has been the work of Ferdo Šišić, *Franjo barun Trenk i njegovi panduri. Istorička rasprava [Baron Francis Trenck and His Pandurs, a Historical Discussion]* published as early as 1900 in Zagreb. Therefore, the monograph *Memoirs of Baron Francis Trenck,* published by the Croatian Institute of History - Slavonia, Srijem and Baranja Branch, is a truly refreshing and novel contribution to the Croatian early Modern Age historiography. The book represents the first Croatian critical edition of the biography of Baron Francis Trenck, encompassing 352 pages, under the editorship of Alexander Buczynski. Mica Orban Kljajić provided the Croatian translation of the original Trenck biography in the German language from 1745, accompanied by very elaborate and high quality notes by Milan Vrbanus, which makes it easier for a contemporary reader to navigate the world of times long gone. Additionally, Alexander Buczynski provided the detailed introductory study which functions as a supplement to the memoirs and a critical review.

The monograph is divided into **Foreword** (pp. 7-10), **The rise and fall of the pandur officer Francis Baron Trenck** (11-101), the introductory study by Alexander Buczynski, **References** (102-106), **Summary** (107-110)., the Croatian translation of the biography titled **The peculiar life and deeds of the world-famous gentleman Baron Francis Trenck** (111-194), followed by the facsimile of the original **Merckwürdiges Leben und Thaten Des Welt-berühmten Heern Francisci Frey-Herrn von der Trenck** (195 - 336), **Index of personal names** (337-343.), as well as **Index of geographical names** (344-352).

In the foreword the author Alexander Buczynski sets the frame important for a better understanding of the context in which the work was composed, from the presence of Trenck in today's culture, the goals of the research, to the difficulties inevitably accompanying such a project. He is of the opinion that a historian is faced with the toil not unlike that of Sisyphus when directing the intention of the public towards solid historical reconstructions, which is exemplified in the case of Baron Trenck because of the myths and legends that are continuously repeated about him. For the author the primary problem when writing the introductory study was the fact that there are very few secondary sources and he, therefore, finally based his study on research at the Vienna War Archive and Regional Historical Centre Limburg in the Netherlands. Finally, he recommends readers to first read the biography and then the introductory study, because the study is an extension of the time period as a whole.

Influenced by the recommendation of the author I began reading the translation of the biography whose title in its entirety is: *The peculiar life and deeds of the world-famous gentleman Baron Francis Trenck – the rightful chamberlain of His Royal Majesty of Hungary and Czechia etc., etc. and the colonel of a band of pandurs and Slavonian husars etc.* (111. -193.). In the prologue it is noted that the content was literally composed of the writings that this *great hero* personally recorded, and upon which the author (the publisher remained anonymous) happened to accidentally stumble. Therefore, the biography was written in the first person, which gives one the impression of true memoirs written by Francis Baron Trenck himself, although Buczynski states that this is not very likely. Already on the first pages of the translation we find many references that describe and explain almost all geographical terminology, persons and less known terminology, which significantly allows for a better navigation and the fluency of reading without the need for much prior knowledge, while next to the text one can find numeric marks which refer to the exact page in the original. The contents of the biography chronologically track Trenck's life from his birth in 1711 till September of 1743. Certain light motifs, such as avoiding death and confrontation with the ever unjust surroundings, are found in the very first lines. On the pages that follow where he describes his youth there are many events that *almost cost him his life*. Ten years pass from his birth in Italy till his move to Slavonia during which Trenck avoided almost certain death six times, was severely injured, took part in war campaigns and participated in two battles. In the midst of anecdotes and adventures, confrontations and accidents that follow him each step he takes, one slowly perceives the development of his personal story which includes both the positive and negative aspects of his turbulent nature peppered with a dose of arrogance and a predetermination for glory and greatness. Francis Baron Trenck opted for a military career after a sword fight with his brothers, although he still had to attend the Jesuit School in Požega for a while. By accident his brother died in 1725 and soon his mother and grandmother died as well. Finally he joined the army in 1727 as sergeant major in the regiment of the palatine Nikola Palffy. The beginning of his military career was marked by conflicts with other officers. In 1733 he married the daughter of the commander of Petrovaradin with whom during four years of marriage he had four children, all of which quickly passed. In the meantime he was jailed twice to finally enter the Russian service after his proposal to collect 4000 pandurs for a breach into Bosnia. However, he had no better luck in the Russian army either. In three years he experienced confrontations with the whole regiment, took part in several war campaigns, witnessed the Treaty of Belgrade in 1739 and was convicted to a death sentence to be pardoned in the nick of time and sent to serve penal labour sentence. By relying on begging and corruption he eventually attained freedom. He

was released and prohibited to ever return, yet, he complained about the Russians confiscating three female slaves he had acquired while leaving the country. On the other hand he had no problem leaving behind and forgetting all the accumulated debt. After returning to Slavonia he fiercely dealt with bandits and considered the act of heroism illegally crossing the territory of the Ottoman Empire and murdering a runaway bandit. However, for this rude breach of peace treaty he was sent to military court. While running away from justice he managed to reach Vienna and arrange a private audience with the Queen Maria Theresa. To redeem himself he offered his fidelity and the fully equipped 1000 pandurs at his own expense, which the queen heartily accepted. In March 1741 in Slavonia over the period of three weeks he gathered 1000 pandurs and headed for the battlefield. The memoirs witness of the admiration of the title, attire and the beauty of his troops, which is why he thought to have inspired many enviers in the army. The following pages include the descriptions of many sabotaging campaigns undertaken by pandurs headed by Trenck, explicitly celebrating the exaggerated heroism, as well as listing their robberies and other criminal activities. We, therefore, have the opportunity to read of occasions on which as few as 64 pandurs lead by Trenck defeated the enemy which counted more than 1800 men, as well as the description of extorting money under the excuse that "everything that strikes their fancy is justified because they are on enemy soil". The siege of the city of Cham, one of Trenck's more famous undertakings, was equally embellished with the accounts of heroism and pillaging. Trenck, along with 140 pandurs and 300 Croats, conquered Cham by burning the suburbs, after which the fire spread throughout the city. The runaway army crew of more than 700 soldiers was captured by Trenck himself, aided by only one hussar. After boasting about the number of prisoners and the seized trophies, there is the summary of the pillaging of the city stating that the pandurs acquired great booty in there because the people from the entire country had fled to the city with their most treasured belongings. Trenck divided the booty with his soldiers, and personally came in possession of "two agreeable prisoners, the finest girls in the city." After several more or less similar campaigns in Bavaria, he was allowed to return to Slavonia with his pandurs where he participated in the suppression of the 1743 Peasant Revolt. After this he recruited additional 700 pandurs and 100 husars and joined the battlefield again. There were several additional military campaigns followed by the final anecdote on September 23, when, during his journey from Basel his horse grew frightened and threw him off, after which he lost consciousness. Finally, he announces that readers in the future will be able to find out what "heaven and destiny intended for him" if he lived.

Of what destiny intended for this famous baron readers of today can find out from the writings of Alexander Buczynski in the introductory study titled *The rise and fall of the pandur officer Francis Baron Trenck* (11.-101.), divided into four subchapters: *The Acknowledgment of the Viennese Court* (11.- 24.), *World Fame* (24.-37.), *The Legal Charade* (37.-87.) and *Epilogue* (87.-101.). The author begins his study with a literary description of the military campaign for the Silesia town of Kosel, which gives the impression of the biography being continued, merely utilising a different narrator. However, what makes this text impressive is the temperance of the author who develops the story of the key events of Trenck's life based on reliable sources, usually followed by the historical analysis of its key elements. By presenting the characteristics of war and warfare of the 17th and 18th centuries, as well as the particularities that graced the border area between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire, the author set the frame and the foundation for a better understanding of the basic terms and processes that defined Trenck and his pandurs,

such as the dichotomy of the regular versus irregular military, as well as *little* and *great* war. Trenck was the virtuoso of little wars and the Vienna Court recognised this. Pandurs were the epitome of everything unconventional, from their appearance to their manner of fighting, and therefore evoked awe. The author continues the description of the events that preceded and marked the process of rearranging of Trenck's pandur volunteer troops into a regular German regiment of the Austrian army comprised of 3000 soldiers. Considering the fact that such a regiment had great reputation and regular salary issued from the state treasury, Trenck was required to introduce stricter rules and a greater degree of discipline. In addition to the regular regiment, Trenck requested the position of the grand mayor and the commander of the entire Sava Krajina with the rank of general-major. Although this seems at a first glance an absurdly immodest proposal, the author offers a more in-depth analysis and claims that there were grounds for it, albeit Trenck was refused. Trenck was aware of the fact that he was renowned and that he was esteemed in the highest of circles – he had acquired world fame in only four years after all. Additionally, practically overnight he had infiltrated the great Slavonian land-owning families with a property that encompassed one half of the Požega county. Although he was an officer of lower rank, his social status was on the rise. The second subchapter, *World Fame* (24.-37.), concludes that the fame and reputation that Francis Trenck had acquired culminated when his first biography was published in the spring of 1745. The author briefly reflects on the genre of biography in those times, as well as the particularities of Trenck's biography. What follows is the analysis of newspaper articles from the leading papers of Vienna, Germany, the Netherlands, Great Britain and America which provided reports on Trenck, concluding that they regularly wrote about Trenck without cheering him on and did not hesitate to publish incriminating news without embellishing his military campaigns. The third subchapter, *The Legal Charade* (37.-87.), represents the following segment of the life of Francis Baron Trenck marked by indictments, trials, and eventually imprisonment. The author approaches this process chronologically by gradually stating the facts along with the analysis of several key factors, such as death or alienation of his patrons, the end of war with Prussia and his lack of tact in the *malicious* court war. The indictment against Trenck first appeared in the autumn of 1745, charging him with taking hostages, robbery, unjust treatment of officers and random crimes committed by pandurs. Similar charges appeared throughout the trial which spanned across many years, to also include violent rape, the embezzlement of state money and organising the revolt in Slavonia. Trenck denied all the charges or found justification for them, but each time the charges were dropped, additional investigations were initiated and new committees formed. He was finally imprisoned after a physical confrontation with his former officer during a theatre performance in Vienna. The author notes that in the new process against Trenck from the very beginning there was no chance of a fair trial because it was presided over by his old enemy, count Löwenwold. After the additional charges of grand treason, there was a sequestration issued on his property. Maria Theresa believed that Trenck was guilty despite the hearty support that the fallen baron and colonel received from her husband and brother-in-law, the Emperor Franz and Archduke Karl. There was the appeal to the court of audit which was prolonged, while in the meantime the possession of property and imprisonment continued. The final verdict was the establishing of guilt on several charges after which Trenck was released from death penalty only by the mercy of Maria Theresa and sentenced to life in the Spielberg fortress in the vicinity of Brno. He had to recompense and pay many court fines, which completely ruined his honour and reputation. In the *Epilogue* (87.-101.) the

author provides us with the posthumous reception of Baron Trenck, paying special attention to the works that were written about him. Gradually, he claims, the fine line between truth and fiction faded and Trenck as a person soon transgressed into the literary genre. Furthermore, the author dedicated himself in great detail to the analysis of credibility of Trenck's biographies, argumenting the importance of the publication of the translation first published in 1745. The author's conclusion regarding the person that was Baron Trenck can be summed up in his claim that he was not without vice, yet, he was also not an ambitious go-getter and dark savage, and that his pandurs were no worse than other irregular soldiers, Krajina soldiers or the militia, often even the regular brothers in arms, as opposed to the general opinion that prevails. Still, many Trenck's co-fighters made a career out of similar or identical deeds for which Trenck was charged. The final remark suggests that the colonel Francis Baron Trenck deserved more than his beloved sovereign.

After the introductory study one encounters *References* (102.-106.) which contain the list of the main bibliographic units, as well as the summary in the English language, *Summary* (107.-110.). The facsimile of the German source was written in printed Gothic script, and takes up more than one third of the monograph (195.-336.) following the Croatian translation. The final part of the monograph contains the *Index of personal names* (337-343.), and *Index of geographical names* (344.-353.), which makes it easier to search for the desired terms more efficiently.

Finally, we may conclude that this monograph is an exceptional contribution to the revealing of life of Francis Baron Trenck often veiled in myths and legends, especially if we consider that the last study on his life was published over one century ago. Moreover, the monograph is important for the study of eighteenth century military history with a special focus on the so-called *little wars*, the history of Slavonia, War of the Austrian Succession, baroque biography, as well as the human psyche and consciousness of the times. Last, but not least, I hope that it will aid in accomplishing the goal that the author Alexander Buczynski set: guiding the public towards solid historical reconstructions and away from the persistent retelling of legends and myths. Perhaps in this way someday in Croatia there will be an appropriately displayed museum exhibition dedicated to Francis Baron Trenck.