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from the 18th century to the present day*

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SINE NOBIS, DE NOBIS
(WITHOUT US [THEY DECIDED] ABOUT US)
THE KURUC MOVEMENT UNDER FRANCIS
II RÁKÓCZI AND ITS FIGHT AGAINST THE
HABSBURGS FOR THE ‘LIBERATION’ OF
HUNGARY

Claudia REICHL-HAM (Austria)

Abstract

After the reconquest and expulsion of the Ottomans, Hungary was reunited, but at the high price of what Hungarian historiographers call “arbitrary” Habsburg rule. During the War of the Spanish Succession, the young nobleman Francis II Rákóczi took over the lead of a military uprising against the Habsburgs. The aims of the uprising were manifold: the fight against absolutist tendencies and the centralized management of finances, the restoration of the constitution of the estates, the establishment of an independent Kingdom of Hungary, the confirmation of Transylvania’s status as an independent principality, and the abolition of re-Catholicization measures.

The conflict culminated in a coup d’état with the proclamation of an independent Hungary at the Diet of Ónod on 31 May 1707 and the deposition of the House of Habsburg. However, the uprising of the Kuruc movement – for the Hungarians the fight for the “liberation” of Hungary – ultimately failed in 1711. The achievement of complete independence for Hungary and the confirmation of Transylvania’s status as an independent principality had finally turned out to be an illusion considering the prevailing political situation in Europe at the time.

The article outlines the course of the rebellion and deals with the question of whether and to what extent the rebels received support from foreign states. It also addresses the role of the Habsburg army in this conflict and the participation of officers of the Habsburg army in this uprising.

Introduction

After the reconquest and expulsion of the Ottomans, Hungary was reunited, but at the

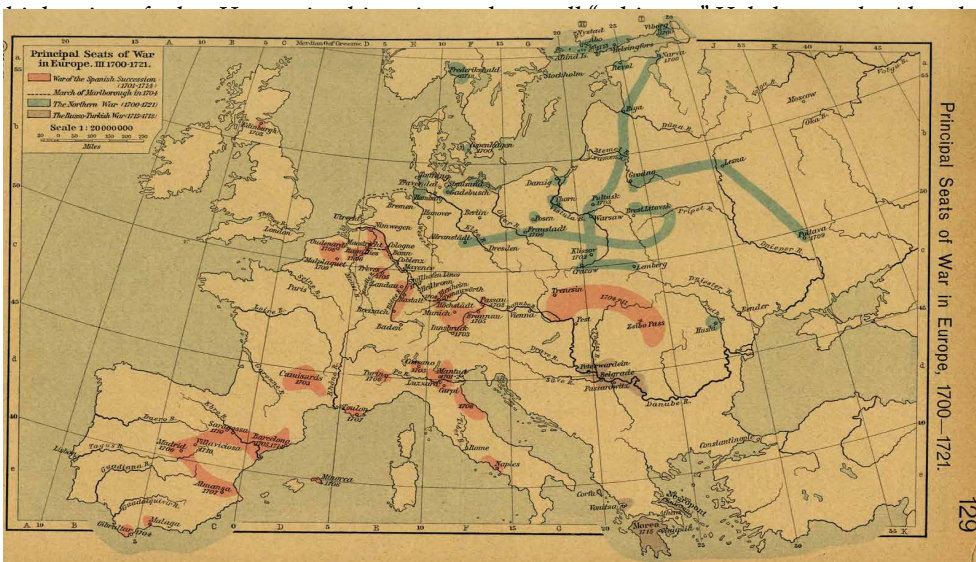


Fig. 1 - The most important theatres of war in the War of the Spanish Succession, the Great Northern War, the Ottoman-Russian War and Rákóczi's uprising in Hungary and Transylvania (wikipedia)

1. For detailed information on the *ius resistendi*, see Claudia Reichl-Ham, "Held oder Rebell? Franz III. Graf Nádasdy und seine Beteiligung an der Magnatenverschwörung," in *Die Familie Nádasdy vom 16. bis ins 20. Jahrhundert. Tagungsband der 29. und 30. Schlaininger Gespräche 2009/2010*, ed. Rudolf Kropf, (Eisenstadt: Amt der Burgenländischen Landesregierung, Abteilung 7 - Landesmuseum, 2015), 371-413, here 388-390.
2. Paul Lendvai, *The Hungarians. A Thousand Years of Victory in Defeat*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, [2021]), 145.
3. István Soós, "Das Königreich Ungarn in der Donaumonarchie (1699-1790)," in *Handbuch zur Geschichte Südosteuropas*, vol. 2: *Herrschaft und Politik in Südosteuropa von 1300 bis 1800*, ed. Oliver Jens Schmitt, (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter-Oldenbourg Verlag, 2021), 695-781, here 710-711; [Joseph] E. Horn, *Franz Rákóczy II. Fürst von Ungarn und Siebenbürgen. Ein historisches Charakterbild*, 2nd ed., (Leipzig: Wigand Verlag, 1861), 14-16; Zoltán Csepregi, "Das königliche Ungarn im Jahrhundert vor der Toleranz (1681-1781)," in *Geheimprotestantismus und evangelische Kirchen in der Habsburgermonarchie und im Erzstift Salzburg (17./18. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Rudolf Leeb et al., (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag/Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 299-330, here 305-306.
4. Thomas von Bogay, *Grundzüge der ungarischen Geschichte*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), 87. See also Lendvai, *The Hungarians*, 145.

Soon after the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1701, the Habsburg army found itself involved in a multi-front war, which was fought in Spain, Italy, Bavaria and the Netherlands and tied up a major part of their military forces. Therefore, most of the troops deployed in Hungary were detached to the various battlefields. At first, this did not seem to matter much, as the eastern theatre of war was of less importance at the time.⁽⁵⁾

However, members of the Hungarian nobility now saw the opportunity for a military uprising against the Habsburgs. The young nobleman Francis II Rákóczi (1676-1735), at the time the richest magnate in Hungary, took over the lead.⁽⁶⁾ The resistance tradition of his ancestors⁽⁷⁾ and the experiences of his first two decades of life undoubtedly had a formative influence on him⁽⁸⁾ and shaped his vision of the struggle for an independent Hungary, but also for reforms and for the modernization of Hungarian feudal society.⁽⁹⁾

5. Soós, "Das Königreich Ungarn," 711.

6. Kálmán Benda, "Rákóczi von Felsővadász, Ferenc II.," in *Biographisches Lexikon zur Geschichte Südosteuropas*, vol. 4, ed. Mathias Bernath and Karl Nehring, (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1981), 22-25, here 23, [accessed 28 July 2024], <https://www.biolex.ios-regensburg.de/BioLexViewview.php?ID=1581>; Soós, "Das Königreich Ungarn," 711-712.

7. His great-grandfather George I, his grandfathers George II and Peter Zrínyi, his father Francis I and his stepfather Imre Thököly were involved in conflicts with the Ottomans and/or the Habsburgs. See Kálmán Benda, "Thököly von Késmárk, Imre Graf," in *Biographisches Lexikon zur Geschichte Südosteuropas*, vol. 4, ed. Mathias Bernath and Karl Nehring, (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1981), 309-310, [accessed 28 July 2024], <https://www.biolex.ios-regensburg.de/BioLexViewview.php?ID=1775>; Claudia Reichl-Ham, "Bella gerant alii ...? Die Habsburger und der Zweifrontenkrieg im 17. Jahrhundert," in *Sintflut und Simplicissimus. Österreich und Polen im 17. Jahrhundert*. Acta Austro-Polonica, vol. V, (Vienna: Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, 2013), 11-42, here 23-24; Claudia Reichl-Ham, "Österreichisch-polnische Militärbündnisse in der 2. Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts," in *Polnisch-österreichische Kontakte sowie Militärbündnisse 1618-1918*, Acta, ed. Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, (Vienna: Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, 2009), 77-120, here 86 and ann. 21; Claudia Ham, "Graf Franz III. Nádasdy, Held oder Rebell?," (diploma thesis, University of Vienna, 1991), passim; Claudia Reichl-Ham, "Held oder Rebell?," 371-413; Katalin Péter, "Die Blütezeit des Fürstentums (1606-1660)," in *Kurze Geschichte Siebenbürgens*, ed. Béla Köpeczi, (Budapest: Akad. Kiadó, 1990), 302-358, here 332-333; [Ladislav von] Hengelmüller, *Franz Rákóczi und sein Kampf für Ungarns Freiheit 1703-1711*, vol. 1, (Stuttgart and Berlin: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 1913), 34-36.

8. Hengelmüller, *Franz Rákóczi und sein Kampf für Ungarns Freiheit*, vol. 1, 1.

9. Kálmán Benda, "Der Rákóczi-Aufstand in Ungarn und die europäischen Mächte (1703-1711)," in *Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur* 22, no. 6 (November/Dezember 1978): 328-337, here 329; Ágnes R. Várkonyi, "Der König und der Fürst. Franz II. Rákóczi, Joseph I. und das Gleichgewicht der europäischen Mächte von 1676 bis 1711," in *Kaiser und König. Eine historische Reise: Österreich und Ungarn 1526-1918. Ausstellung. Katalog*, (Vienna: Collegium Hungaricum, 2001), 55-66, here 55.



Fig. 2 - Adam Manyoki, Francis II Rákóczi, 1712 (wikipedia)

Rákóczi's plans to enter into an alliance with France were, however, uncovered at an early stage. He was arrested at the end of May 1701 and charged with high treason. With the help of a guard, Rákóczi managed to escape from his prison in Wiener Neustadt and flee to Poland,⁽¹⁰⁾ where he once again approached King Louis XIV of France (1643-1715) and offered to start an armed uprising against the Habsburgs, if he received financial and military support from France. However, the French king took a wait-and-see attitude. Moreover, Rákóczi tried to gain the support of the kings of Sweden and Poland-Lithuania. These negotiations were also unsuccessful, as the Great Northern War, in which Sweden and an alliance of Poland-Lithuania, Russia and Denmark-Norway faced each other as opponents, was to tie up their military forces for a long time.⁽¹¹⁾ The Ottomans were not willing to offer military assistance either.⁽¹²⁾ Despite the lack of allies and only vague promises by France, in June 1703 - at the request of representatives of the Hungarian peasants, who called themselves "Kurucs" -, Rákóczi took over the lead in what Hungarian historiographers call the "fight for liberation" or "War of Liberation".⁽¹³⁾

10. Horn, *Franz Rákóczy II.*, 69-74; Lendvai, *The Hungarians*, 150-151.

11. Benda, "Der Rákóczi-Aufstand in Ungarn," 330; Várkonyi, "Der König und der Fürst," 58.

12. Claudia Reichl-Ham, "Die Türkenkriege des 18. Jahrhunderts und die Orientalische Frage," in *Polen-Litauen und die Habsburgermonarchie im Zeitalter Maria Theresias*. Acta Austro-Polonica, vol. X, (Vienna: Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, 2018), 27-75, here 29-32.

13. Ágnes Várkonyi, "Rákóczi's War of Independence and the Peasantry," in *From Hunyadi to Rákóczi: war and society in late medieval and early modern Hungary*, ed. János M. Bak, (Brooklyn: Social Science Monographs, 1982), 369-392; Várkonyi, "Der König und der Fürst," 57; Soós, "Das Königreich Ungarn," 712; Zoltán Györe, "War and Demography: The Case of Hungary 1521-1718," in *The Treaties of Carlowitz (1699). Antecedents, Course and Consequences*, ed. Colin

The uprising or “War of Liberation” of Francis II Rákóczi

In his “Manifesto to the Peoples of the World” of 7 June 1703, Rákóczi called on all inhabitants of Hungary - nobles and non-nobles alike - to defend the freedom of the “nation”, i. e. the “noble nation in the sense of the medieval legal traditions”. He justified his decision with the words: “Sine nobis, de nobis – without us [they decided] about us”, to express the fact that both the Ottomans and the Habsburgs had always decided on the fate of Hungary without the involvement of Hungarian representatives. “Cum Deo pro patria et libertate” was to become the motto on his banners.⁽¹⁴⁾

The aims of the uprising were manifold:

- the fight against absolutist tendencies and the centralized management of finances,
- the restoration of the constitution of the estates,
- the establishment of an independent Kingdom of Hungary,
- the confirmation of Transylvania’s status as an independent principality, and
- the abolition of re-Catholicization measures.⁽¹⁵⁾

Initially, the Kuruc army was regarded as poorly organized and undisciplined. Rakóczi wrote in his “Memoirs” that he was surprised to find at the border “instead of the promised 5,000 foot soldiers and 500 horsemen [...] only a ragged band of 250 and fifty respectively, armed with swords, and Hungarian, Slovak and Ruthenian peasants with pitchforks and scythes.”⁽¹⁶⁾ Within a few days, however, this small group grew to 3,000 men, supported by four regular Polish infantry and two dragoon companies, around 800 men. Barely a third of the officers and men of the Kuruc army had combat experience, and even those were mostly veterans or Hajduks, the latter actually cattle herders or outlaws. Most of the troops were not ready for combat in an open field battle – they could in fact only be used in petty warfare. However, applying this tactics with great success, the ever-growing peasant army soon managed to conquer the complete north-eastern part of Hungary.⁽¹⁷⁾

Heywood and Ivan Parvev. *The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage. Politics, Society and Economy*, vol. 69, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi and Boğaç Ergene, (Leiden: Brill, 2020), chapter 14, 253-272, here 267.

14. Várkonyi, “Der König und der Fürst,” 57.

15. Soós, “Das Königreich Ungarn,” 715; Claudia Reichl-Ham, “Spanischer Erbfolgekrieg,” in *Der österreichische Donaauraum. Eine operative Schlüsselzone Mitteleuropas. Truppendienst-Handbuch*, ed. Jörg Aschenbrenner et al., (Vienna: AMEDIA GmbH, 2020), 245-260, above all chapter 1.7.2 “Kuruzzeneinfälle in Niederösterreich und der Steiermark von 1703 bis 1709,” 251-260, here 253.

16. Lendvai, *The Hungarians*, 151.

17. Peter Broucek, *Die Kuruzzeneinfälle in Niederösterreich und in der Steiermark, 1703-1709*. Militärhistorische Schriftenreihe, ed. Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, vol. 55, (Vienna: Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, 1985), 27.



Fig. 3 - Christoph Weigel after C. Luyken, Hajduk. From: *Neu-eröffnete Welt-Galleria ...*, (Nuremberg, 1703) (wikipedia)

The timing of the advance was well chosen, because, as already mentioned, large parts of the imperial troops in Hungary had been detached to the theatres of war in Italy or on the Rhine River. Only in Transylvania, a larger contingent remained as a precaution against a possible attack by the Ottomans. Therefore, in the spring of 1703, the percentage of imperial troops serving in Hungary and Transylvania only amounted to about one sixth of the whole army – seven infantry regiments, four cuirassier and two dragoon regiments as well as 37 free companies of inadequately equipped troops, who were only suitable for garrison duty – in total around 18,200 men.⁽¹⁸⁾

18. Alphons Danzer, *Spanischer Successions-Krieg. Feldzug 1703. Feldzüge des Prinzen Eugen von Savoyen*, ed. Abteilung für Kriegsgeschichte des k. k. Kriegs-Archives, ser. I, vol. V, (Vienna: Verlag des k. k. Generalstabes, 1878),

As the news from Hungary became increasingly threatening, the Aulic War Council in Vienna began to submit suggestions for a series of countermeasures to Emperor Leopold I (1640-1705). Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736), in his capacity as President of the Council, urged the Emperor to increase the number of troops in Hungary. Among other precautions, the Montecuccoli regiment still deployed in Hungary should be reinforced with 1,500 cavalymen, a Hungarian national militia be established in the counties loyal to the Emperor and another 700 cavalymen be withdrawn from Transylvania. In addition, troops should be transferred from the western theatre of war to Lower Austria. However, the implementation of all these measures was very slow, as these troops were urgently needed in the other areas of operations and the Court Chamber, which was responsible for the finances, simply did not have the money to recruit more troops.⁽¹⁹⁾

Rákóczi financed the war by a general income tax introduced in 1704, state funds and French subsidies; the French also sent army instructors, engineer and artillery officers, later even troops.⁽²⁰⁾ This enabled Rákóczi to raise a better-organized, trained and paid regular army at the end of December 1704. Three regular cavalry regiments were raised, mostly consisting of volunteers recruited on the basis of a free enlisting system.⁽²¹⁾

Although initially supported primarily by peasants and common people, members of the Hungarian Protestant nobility, residents of the mining towns of Upper Hungary, which is present-day Slovakia, among them even German Lutheran burghers, as well as residents of North-Eastern Hungary and former soldiers and officers of the Habsburg army subsequently joined the movement.⁽²²⁾ Hundreds of cavalymen, who had deserted from the imperial hussar regiments, as well as Hajduks, who had previously fought against the Ottomans on the side of the emperor and had been deployed in fortresses then, switched to the insurgents' side. Most of the Catholic magnates and counties of Hungary, however, remained loyal to the emperor.

111; "1703 - Beginning of Rákóczi Uprising in Hungary," [accessed 18 July 2024], https://kronoskaf.com/wss/index.php?title=1703_-_Beginning_of_Rákóczi_Uprising_in_Hungary.

19. Danzer, *Feldzug 1703*, 602-603.

20. Benda, "Der Rákóczi-Aufstand in Ungarn," 330.

21. "Kuruc Army," [accessed 18 July 2024], https://kronoskaf.com/wss/index.php?title=Kuruc_Army.

22. Lothar Höbelt, "The Impact of the Rákóczi Rebellion on Habsburg Strategy: Incentives and Opportunity Costs," *War in History* 13, no. 1 (January 2006): 2-15, here 3-4.

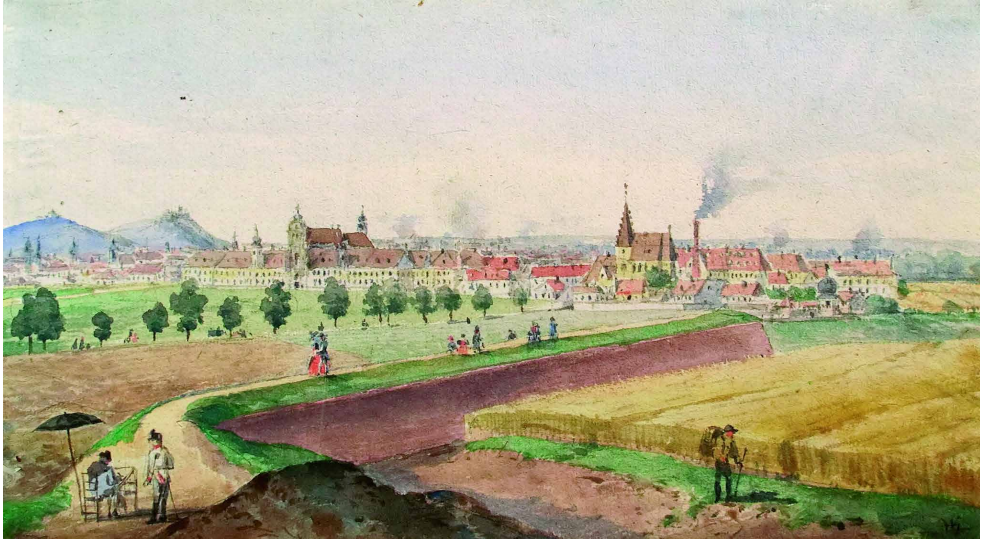


Fig. 4 - Anonymous, Sándor Károlyi de Nagykároly, 18th century (wikipedia)

According to the Hungarian historians Klára Papp and János Barta, those who joined “could expect a position in the movement that corresponded to their place in the hierarchy of feudal society.”⁽²³⁾ Therefore, the renegade members of the Hungarian aristocracy held the highest military ranks, even if they had no or little military experience. Among them, there were, as I have already mentioned, quite a few officers of the Habsburg army, who had fought in the wars against the Ottomans and France. They defected to Rákóczi, either for personal reasons, because they were no longer willing to support the restrictive Habsburg policy, or out of enthusiasm for the Hungarian cause. Field Marshal Sándor Károlyi de Nagykároly (1669-1743)⁽²⁴⁾, for example, who, although having turned down an anti-Habsburg uprising at Tokaj in 1697, lost the favour of the Viennese court and switched sides. He did not only play an important role in the military operations of the insurgent army and became one of the deputies of Rákóczi, but later, in 1711, took over the lead in the negotiations for the Peace of Szatmár. The nephew of Imre Thököly (1657-1705, Prince of Transylvania and stepfather of Rákóczi), Count Antal Esterházy (1676-1722), the former commander of the Pálffy hussars, who joined with 500 men, became general and regimental commander. Rákóczi remarked in his “Memoirs”: “I made him general because of his background.”⁽²⁵⁾ Or Baron Pál Andrassy (1663-1713) and András Vízslay (no data available), who, although already appointed to take over an imperial regiment with promotion to colonel, returned to Hungary and

23. Klára Papp and János Barta Jr., “Rákóczi’s Insurrection and Minorities in Hungary,” *MINORITIES RESEARCH* - 6, s. p. [1], [accessed 9 August 2024], <https://epa.oszk.hu/00400/00463/00006/9.htm>.

24. For the biography of Sándor Károlyi, see “Károlyi, Sándor,” [accessed 9 August 2024], https://kronoskaf.com/wss/index.php?title=Károlyi,_Sándor.

25. Quoted by Papp and Barta Jr., “Rákóczi’s Insurrection and Minorities in Hungary,” s. p. [1].

joined the uprising. But also soldiers of fortune such as László Ocskay (1680-1710)⁽²⁶⁾, who hoped for a quick military career that he had been denied in the Habsburg army, were welcome.⁽²⁷⁾

In the initial stages of the campaign of 1703, the Kuruc troops also marched towards the Transylvanian border in the hope that the Transylvanians, including the Saxons, would join the uprising, but the already mentioned contingent of imperial regular troops under Field Marshal Lieutenant Jean-Louis de Rabutin, comte de Bussy (1642-1717), prevented the rebels from advancing any further.⁽²⁸⁾

In Hungary, the insurgents' operations were more successful, especially due to their superior light cavalry. Thus, towards the end of 1703, the Kurucs had pushed back the remaining imperial troops in northern Hungary and had successfully advanced into the areas between the Danube and the Tisza Rivers. They had marched into western Hungary as far as the Morava River and into northern Hungary up to the border with Moravia. Villages on the border with Lower Austria and eastern Styria were plundered, set on fire and devastated.⁽²⁹⁾



Fig. 5 - The "Linienwall" at St. Marx, then a suburb of Vienna (Wien Museum)

26. For the biography of László Ocskay, see "Ocskay, László," [accessed 13 August 2024], https://kronoskaf.com/wss/index.php?title=Ocskay,_László.

27. Gustav Ratzenhofer, *Spanischer Successions-Krieg. Feldzug 1704. Feldzüge des Prinzen Eugen von Savoyen*, ed. Abteilung für Kriegsgeschichte des k. k. Kriegs-Archives, ser. I, vol. VI, (Vienna: Verlag des k. k. Generalstabes, 1879), 136.

28. Danzer, *Feldzug 1703*, 620.

29. Broucek, "Kuruzzeneinfälle," 18.

Even Vienna was threatened. Therefore, Prince Eugene organized the defence of the capital. A citizen militia of 8,400 men was raised and the so-called “Linienwall”, a fortification between the suburbs and outskirts of Vienna, was built. Nevertheless, it was not possible to prevent some Kuruc units from advancing to the outskirts of Vienna in June 1704.⁽³⁰⁾

After the first attacks, the Austrians hastily erected, repaired and extended defensive structures such as entrenchments, palisades, ramparts and trenches at their provincial borders. Also in June 1704, a patent was issued for the deployment of local militias in the Eastern provinces of the Habsburg Monarchy, according to which 8,000 men gathered along the Morava River and an unknown number along the Leitha River to act as entrenchment workers or to take up positions in the newly erected entrenchments – poorly trained and completely inexperienced.⁽³¹⁾ The most famous of these entrenchments was the so-called “Kuruzzenschanze”, a defensive line that extended from Moravia down to the Međimurje area in Croatia. Most of the fighting there was borne by the local militias. The hard-pressed Styrian, Lower Austrian and Moravian estates and nobles had no choice but to defend their homes from plunder and destruction on their own. The emperor could thus also offload part of the cost of fighting onto his subjects.⁽³²⁾



Fig. 6 - Trench of the “Kuruzzenschanze” at Parndorf (wikipedia)

30. Felix Czeike, *Historisches Lexikon Wien in 5 Bänden*, vol. 4, (Vienna: Kremayr & Scheriau, 1995), 69-70.

31. Walter Blasi and Franz Sauer, *Die Kuruzzenschanze zwischen Petronell und Neusiedl am See*. Fundberichte aus Österreich. Materialhefte, Reihe A, Sonderheft 19, ed. Bundesdenkmalamt, (Horn: Berger, 2012), 29.

32. Broucek, *Kuruzzeneinfälle*, 18. Already in 1697, the imperial engineer and mining captain Lambert Lambion had presented a construction programme that had provided for the repair of the long-neglected defensive fortifications on the Morava and Leitha Rivers. The plan had been to build linear barriers and a palisade fence with entrenched ditches and ramparts behind it to protect the often decrepit walls of castles and towns from enemy mines. However, this programme had not been implemented. Blasi and Sauer, *Kuruzzenschanze*, 26-27, 31.

At Prince Eugene's insistence, an army of around 11,000 men under Field Marshal Count Sigbert Heister (1646-1718) was sent to Hungary in March 1704. Although Heister succeeded in defeating a much larger insurgent army at Raab [Győr] on 13 June, the Imperial forces suffered a heavy defeat against the Kurucs at Mogersdorf on 4 July and had to withdraw.⁽³³⁾

Nevertheless, the insurgents were not able to achieve any lasting success in western Hungary, or in cities with a German majority such as Pest, Ofen, Ödenburg [Sopron] or Pressburg [Pozsony]. Moreover, the Kurucs also encountered great resistance in the south of the country, as they could not win over the soldiers of the Military Frontier. The new Ban of Croatia, Field Marshal Lieutenant Count János Pálffy de Erdöd (1681-1718), raised a Croatian contingent and crossed the Drava River to fight the insurgents. The Croats loyally served on the side of the Emperor; and also the Serbs, recently settled in the newly established villages of the Military-Frontier zone towards the Ottoman Empire, as well as the other inhabitants, who had already been living in that area before and had been resettled, were loyal to the Habsburg Empire, even if disputes over the resettlement of the latter and the authorities' lack of respect for ancient claims had contributed to some kind of discontent.⁽³⁴⁾

On 8 July 1704, Rákóczi achieved an important political success. He was elected Prince of Transylvania at the Diet at Karlsburg [Alba Iulia]. Less than three weeks later, the Kurucs launched a large-scale invasion of Styria with the aim of diverting attention from an advance of a Bavarian-French army that was on its march down the Danube towards Vienna. The advance of the latter was abruptly stopped in the Battle of Blenheim [Höchstädt] on 13 August 1704.⁽³⁵⁾

This success allowed a significant number of Habsburg troops – about half a dozen regular cavalry regiments – that had previously been fighting in the southern German theatre of war to be detached to the east. However, the Viennese government and the Habsburg army failed to capitalize on the momentum created by Blenheim. Thus, by the end of 1704 Rákóczi controlled practically all of northern and eastern Hungary as well as northern Transylvania.

After the death of his father, Emperor Leopold I, in May 1705, Joseph I (1678-1711) took over the government and started negotiations with representatives of the insurgents, which failed due to the excessive demands of both sides, especially Rákóczi's insistence on an independent Transylvania – a request that the new emperor was not willing to

33. Danzer, *Feldzug 1703*, 619-620; Ratzenhofer, *Feldzug 1704*, 132-133; "Gedächtnis des Landes. Chronik 1703-1711," s. p., [accessed 9 August 2024], <https://www.gedaechtnisdeslandes.at/chronik/action/list/controller/Geschichte/chronik/st-poelten-erhaelt-einen-getreidewochenmarkt.html>.

34. Lendvai, *The Hungarians*, 146.

35. For more detailed information on the battle, see James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704. Marlborough's greatest Victory*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2004); James Falkner, *Blenheim 1704*, (Stroud: Spellmount, 2014); Charles Spencer, *Blenheim: Battle for Europe*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004).

accept. Therefore, Joseph ordered the new imperial commander-in-chief in Hungary, Field Marshal Count Louis Herbeville (1635-1709), to advance into Transylvania with an army of 16,500 men to relieve the hard-pressed loyalist forces there.⁽³⁶⁾

Despite military setbacks, Rákóczi continued to be successful on the political stage. At the Diet of Szécsény on 12 September 1705, a confederation was agreed upon between the Kingdom of Hungary and the Principality of Transylvania,⁽³⁷⁾ and Rákóczi was proclaimed “ruling Prince of Hungary”. However, the plan of some of the deputies to offer Rákóczi the Hungarian crown and thus bring about a decisive break with the House of Habsburg failed due to the resistance of the other deputies.⁽³⁸⁾

The number of the combatants of the Kuruc army now ranged from 40,000 to 50,000 men, but the effective strength was only 10,000 to 20,000. Because of the defeats in battles and other heavy losses, 10,000 to 12,000 men had to be recruited each year. This led to the collapse of the free enlisting system around 1706, whereupon the counties were ordered to supply a certain number of recruits. Moreover, an increased number of foreign mercenaries - Swedes, Poles and around 1,300 French soldiers and artillerymen - were recruited. Even a company of “Arnauts” from Albania joined Rákóczi’s army.⁽³⁹⁾

The increasing weakness of France prompted Rákóczi to look for other allies from 1705 onwards. He sent his envoys to Prussia, Denmark-Norway and again to Sweden, but his efforts were in vain everywhere. Denmark-Norway supported the emperor and sent cavalry and infantry regiments to Hungary, which fought the Kuruc army, e. g. in the Battle of Zsibó on 15 November 1705. Sweden, having deployed an army of 40,000 elite troops in occupied Saxony, was in constant negotiations with the Habsburg Monarchy, which finally led to the Convention of Altranstädt on 31 August 1707, settling the rights of Protestants in Silesia, and put an end to a smouldering conflict between the two countries. From the Pope, Venice and the Ottoman Empire the rebels also received negative or evasive responses.⁽⁴⁰⁾

This isolation in foreign policy was probably one of the main reasons why Rákóczi agreed to renewed diplomatic negotiations with the Viennese court in 1706 and accepted mediation from the Protestant naval powers England and the Netherlands. However, the emperor was not willing to accept Rákóczi’s demands, among them once again the request for an independent principality of Transylvania.⁽⁴¹⁾

36. Várkonyi, “Der König und der Fürst,” 61.

37. Karl Vocelka, *Österreichische Geschichte 1699-1815 - Glanz und Untergang der höfischen Welt. Repräsentation, Reform und Reaktion im Habsburgischen Vielvölkerstaat*. Österreichische Geschichte 1699-1815, ed. Herwig Wolfram, (Vienna: Ueberreuter Verlag, 2001), 88.

38. Soós, “Das Königreich Ungarn,” 715.

39. “Kuruc Army,” [accessed 18 July 2024], https://kronoskaf.com/wss/index.php?title=Kuruc_Army.

40. Benda, “Der Rákóczi-Aufstand in Ungarn,” 332.

41. Benda, “Der Rákóczi-Aufstand in Ungarn,” 332-333.

This not only led to an abrupt end of the negotiations, but also resulted in a coup d'état with the proclamation of an independent Hungary at the Diet of Ónod on 31 May 1707 and the deposition of the House of Habsburg. The crown was offered to Maximilian II (Emanuel) of Bavaria (1662-1726), but Maximilian's response was very non-committal and hesitant.⁽⁴²⁾

In his edition of Rákóczi's diplomatic correspondence, Béla Köpeczi writes that after the Elector's refusal, Rákóczi also considered offering the Hungarian crown to King Augustus II of Poland (1670-1733).⁽⁴³⁾ This was apparently as unsuccessful as the project mentioned by István Soós to place the Prussian heir Frederic (II) on the Hungarian throne in order to gain Prussian support.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Unexpectedly, at that time there were attempts of a rapprochement on the part of the Russian Tsar Peter I (1672-1725), whose ally King Augustus II of Poland had been forced to abdicate by the Swedes in order to replace him with Stanislaus Leszczyński (1677-1766). When the Confederation of Sandomierz, an alliance of Polish-Lithuanian nobles in defence of King Augustus, turned to Russia to ask for help against the Swedes, the tsar proposed Rákóczi as an opposing candidate instead. In a secret treaty dated 14 September 1707, Peter I offered Rákóczi the Polish throne in return for military support against the Habsburgs. However, the Russian campaign of Charles XII of Sweden (1682-1718), which began at the same time, and the Confederation's recognition of Leszczyński caused this project to fail as well.⁽⁴⁵⁾

Meanwhile, the attacks on Habsburg territory continued unabated. Only when Field Marshal Heister once again took over supreme command of the Habsburg forces, the military situation turned in favour of the Habsburgs in the spring of 1708. Heister defeated the Kurucs in the Battle of Trencín on 3 August 1708, despite their double numerical superiority. This battle was the decisive turning point. The majority of the insurgent troops fighting in the battle dispersed and their total numbers were reduced to half their original strength. Laszlo Ocskay e. g. defected with his entire regiment a few weeks after Trencín.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Apart from the almost total foreign policy isolation, the situation in Hungary also became increasingly precarious. After almost eight years of war, Hungary was devastated and the inhabitants were tired of warfare. The Kuruc army was further decimated by

42. István György Tóth, "Zwischen Kaiser und Sultan (1604-1711)," in *Geschichte Ungarns*, ed. István György Tóth, (Budapest: Corvina-Verlag et al., 2005), 286; Gábor Bartha, "Prinz Eugen von Savoyen und Graf Imre Thököly. Bedeutung und propagandistisches Nachleben im Vergleich," (diploma thesis, University of Vienna, 2012), 95-96; Benda, "Rákóczi von Felsővadász, Ferenc II.," 25.

43. Béla Köpeczi, *Correspondance diplomatique de François II Rákóczi 1711-1735. Choix de documents*, (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 1999), 38.

44. Soós, "Das Königreich Ungarn," 715.

45. Benda, "Rákóczi von Felsővadász, Ferenc II.," 24; Benda, "Der Rákóczi-Aufstand in Ungarn," 333.

46. Soós, "Das Königreich Ungarn," 716; Reichl-Ham, "Spanischer Erbfolgekrieg (chapter: 1.7.2)," 259.

the plague, which was rampant in large parts of the country, especially in the east, but above all in its camps, leaving barely 20,000 combatants.⁽⁴⁷⁾

The Habsburgs on the other hand continued to send more and more troops to Hungary, especially cavalry units, and they had two Polish light horse regiments drafted in 1710, after the withdrawal of the Danish regiments due to Denmark-Norway's re-entry into the Great Northern War in 1709.⁽⁴⁸⁾ Moreover, Habsburg naval power on the Danube became an important factor, with dozens of chaikas, wooden boats, mostly equipped with mast and sail, built for the river transport of troops, weapons and material such as pontoon bridges.⁽⁴⁹⁾ The aim of the government in Vienna was clear - it wanted to deliver the final blow to the uprising. The insurgents were now massively driven back from the Habsburg lands and Upper Hungary, whereupon part of the rebellious Hungarian nobility switched sides again and joined the Habsburgs with their subordinates.

Despite individual Kuruc raids into Lower Austria in 1709, the rebels were ultimately driven back on a massive scale from the Habsburg hereditary lands and Upper Hungary: In January 1710, Kuruc troops were defeated at Ronhein [Romhány]. In the fall of 1710 and in the spring of 1711, the rebels also lost their larger fortresses: Neuhäusel [Nové Zámky] surrendered in September 1710. Kassa [Košice] fell into the hands of the Habsburgs in April 1711. Finally, the last strongholds on the right bank of the Danube were lost as well.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Total defeat and capitulation now seemed only a matter of time, as no more help could be expected from outside and internal disagreements led to a split of the movement. When Rákóczi travelled to Poland in January 1711 for negotiations with representatives of the Tsarist Empire and a personal encounter with Tsar Peter I, the commanders of the now remaining 12,000 men strong Kuruc army laid down their arms and Rákóczi's deputy Count Károlyi concluded the Peace of Szatmár [Satu Mare] with the Habsburg Monarchy on 29 April 1711.⁽⁵¹⁾

In return for an oath of allegiance and the final recognition of the Habsburgs' hereditary right of succession in Hungary, the Emperor granted the rebels amnesty, the right to local self-government by the estates as well as respect for religious freedom and the constitution of Hungary and Transylvania. The peace also secured the privileges of

47. Soós, "Das Königreich Ungarn," 716.

48. Höbelt, "The Impact of the Rákóczi Rebellion on Habsburg Strategy," 9.

49. Höbelt, "The Impact of the Rákóczi Rebellion on Habsburg Strategy," 13; Ratzenhofer, *Spanischer Successions-Krieg. Feldzug 1704*, 140; Josef Rechberger Ritter von Rechkron, *Spanischer Successions-Krieg. Feldzüge des Prinzen Eugen von Savoyen*, ed. Abteilung für Kriegsgeschichte des k. k. Kriegs-Archives, ser. I, vol. VII, (Vienna: Verlag des k. k. Generalstabes, 1881), 434, 447-448.

50. Broucek, *Die Kuruzzeneinfälle*, 38-43.

51. For Rákóczi's stay in Poland and his meeting with the tsar, see Köpeczi, *Correspondance diplomatique*, 13, 38-39. For Rákóczi's correspondence with Károlyi at that time, see *ibid.*, 14-16, Rákóczi's instruction to Károlyi, 18 February 1711 (Hung.); *ibid.*, 17-20, Rákóczi to Károlyi, 9 April 1711 (Hung.); *ibid.*, 34-35, Rákóczi to Károlyi, 10 May 1711 (Hung.).

the nobles, who regained their confiscated estates as well as tax exemption. In return, the Habsburgs' right of succession in Hungary was finally recognized.

Rákóczi's fight continues

Although Tsar Peter had made it clear after the failed Pruth campaign against the Ottomans in 1711 and the Peace of Pruth resulting thereof that he would not give Rákóczi any support, but would merely act as a mediator between the emperor and the rebels, Rákóczi was not willing to accept the peace, which would have also granted him amnesty, and to renounce his dignity as Prince of Transylvania. He also rejected the tsar's offer to grant him and his entourage exile in what is now Ukraine.⁽⁵²⁾

Rákóczi still cherished the hope that France would support him in regaining the Principality of Transylvania or in preparing a new war in Hungary, and also planned to once again turn to Prussia for assistance.⁽⁵³⁾ In his letters to King Louis XIV of France, he repeatedly demanded the king's support in order to be able to wage a new war with the help of France and the Ottoman Empire and in cooperation with the Elector of Bavaria and the King of Sweden. In his capacity as Prince of Transylvania, Rákóczi also demanded that the Transylvanian cause be taken up at the peace congresses in Utrecht and Rastatt with the mediation of the French king – but his efforts were ultimately in vain. Neither the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 nor the Treaty of Rastatt of 1714 mentioned Hungary, Transylvania or Rákóczi.⁽⁵⁴⁾

Consequently, Rákóczi, who stayed in Paris on the invitation of King Louis XIV, developed new plans for a campaign in Hungary. The war that broke out between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire in 1716 prompted him to submit a proposal to the French court, in which he suggested a coalition of Christian princes and the Ottoman Empire against the Habsburgs.⁽⁵⁵⁾ He even paid a visit to Sultan Ahmed III (1673-1736) to persuade him to take joint action against the Habsburgs.

In the following months, Rákóczi tried to bring about a European anti-Habsburg coalition and appealed to the naval powers England and Holland as well as to France, Prussia, Poland and especially Russia, to intervene, but in vain. The signing of the Peace of Passarowitz [Požarevac] on 21 July 1718 put a definitive end to his plans.⁽⁵⁶⁾

52. Köpeczi, *Correspondance diplomatique*, 38-39, and *ibid.*, 67-69, Rákóczi to Vay, 20 May 1712 (Hung.).

53. Köpeczi, *Correspondance diplomatique*, 52-54, Rákóczi to Vay, 11 December 1711 (Hung.).

54. Köpeczi, *Correspondance diplomatique*, 149; *ibid.*, 150-152, Premier discours de Rákóczi devant Louis XIV, 21 or 27 April 1713; *ibid.*, 159, Second discours de Rákóczi devant Louis XIV, 5 April 1714.

55. Köpeczi, *Correspondance diplomatique*, 164, and *ibid.*, 172-176, Copie du Raisonnement sur l'intérêt (sic!) de la France et l'état de l'Europe, 16 October 1716.

56. Köpeczi, *Correspondance diplomatique*, 183, and *ibid.*, 186-195, various letters.

Conclusion

The achievement of complete independence for Hungary and the confirmation of Transylvania's status as an independent principality proved to be an illusion considering the prevailing political situation in Europe at the time. This was based not only on a lack of support in foreign policy and military affairs or on an incorrect assessment of the international balance of power, but also on Hungary's internal social and political conflicts and its inadequate economic resources. Moreover, we must also keep in mind the fact that the Habsburg army was too strong in the end as the Habsburgs managed to dispatch a growing number of troops from the other theatres of war to Hungary in the course of the rebellion.

Around 85,000 people lost their lives during the conflict, which lasted eight years. According to current estimations of historians between 150,000 and 500,000 people fell victim to the plague epidemic between 1708 and 1711⁽⁵⁷⁾, which was imported from Poland and the Ottoman Empire. Because of the wars, devastations and epidemics, the population of Hungary (excluding the Banat) had diminished to around 3.8 million in 1711.⁽⁵⁸⁾

The reconciliation between the emperor/king and the Hungarian estates led to the economic, social and cultural rapprochement of Hungary with the Habsburg Monarchy and Western Europe, albeit at the cost of the country's complete integration into the ruling structures of the Habsburg Monarchy.

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57. Compare Györe, "War and Demography," 269. Count Miklós Bercsényi, one of the leaders of the Kuruc movement, even claimed that the rebels had in fact been conquered by the plague, not by the Habsburg army.

58. Györe, "War and Demography," 269.

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