

Fiume During The Napoleonic Wars (1797–1813)

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Historical antecedents

First it was Charles III (as a king of Hungary) who discovered the importance of Fiume and declared it a free port in 1717 together with Trieste. It was also him who initiated to build a land-road between Fiume and Károlyváros (Karlstadt). The aim of it was to create commercial relations towards the Carpathian basin.¹ After the peace of Pozsarevác in 1718, made with the Turkish, the king managed to fight out the right of free-trade with Levante for both towns.

The son of Maria Theresa, later Joseph II, came to study the eastern part of the Adriatic in 1775. Maria Theresa annexed Fiume to Hungary on his advice in 1776.² From the Croatian point of view the town's legal status was disputed from then on, although in the same year the town already had a Hungarian royal commissary, *József Majláth* who was later the first governor of Fiume. On Majláth's advice, the queen's new edict created the *Districtus Commercialis* (Commercial District), which includes, besides Fiume, Portoré³, Buccari⁴, Buccarizza and Novi ports as well.⁵ The supervision of the district belonged to the governor and the Hungarian chamber according to the edict and this way distinguishing it from the military borderland. At the same time this district became the part of the newly organized Szörény county with Karlstadt⁶ as the seat. It caused further legal complications as the county was part of Croatia. In 1778 the queen declared the above mentioned three smaller ports free coastal towns. The mentioned territories comprise the so called *Littorale Hungaricum* (Hungarian Littoral).

¹ Fest Aladár: *Fiume Magyarországhoz való kapcsolásának előzményeiről és hatásairól*. [About the background and effects of annexation of Fiume to Hungary] In: *Századok*, 1916. 241. We don't share Fest's views that Charles III would do that Hungary had an own port. The Via Carolina was denominated after Charles. They started to build it in 1728 and completed it in 1771.

² Gonda Béla: *A magyar tengerészet és a fiumei kikötő*. [The Hungarian Marine and the Port of Fiume] Bp., 1906. 10.

³ Recent Kraljevica in Croatia.

⁴ Recent Bakar in Croatia.

⁵ *Ibid.* 11.

⁶ Recent Karlovac in Croatia.

Both the Croatian *sabor* (parliament) and the inhabitants of Fiume objected to the existent unclear legal situation. As a consequence Maria Theresa pulled out Fiume from Szörény county and annexed directly to Hungary as a “separate body annexed to the Hungarian holy crown” (*separatum sacrae regni Hungariae coronae adnexum corpus*) on 23rd of April, 1779. The previously mentioned small ports were annexed to Hungary in 1786, as the edict of Joseph II, belonging under the authority of the governor of Fiume.⁷ According to archives, the ships of the Hungarian Littoral had frequent relations with other ports of the Mediterranean, Levante and “visited both India”, too.⁸

The approaching frontline

Until 1796 people in Fiume thought that the war would not reach them. Things became serious with the Italian campaign of Napoleon, when the French troops occupied the western ports of the Adriatic. In these towns there were consuls from Fiume, so the town could get information directly about the events. The inhabitants (mainly the merchants) were first terror-stricken when they got to know about the fall of part of the Papal State, Ancona. (There has been lively commercial connection between these towns since the Middle Ages.) Sándor Pászthory, the then governor, ordered immediately to strengthen Fiume.⁹ Soon arrived the army from the Croatian borderland and they distributed arms to the inhabitants, too.¹⁰ Until 1797 Fiume had never been attacked from the mainland, so this time too, they expected the offensive from the sea. The walls of the town had been knocked down beforehand therefore the town became vulnerable from the mainland. As the famous quadrilateral in North-Italy (Mantova, Verona, Peschiera, Legnano) was still standing, people calmed down after the first fright.

However, Montana fell in the beginning of 1797 (19th January), so there was an open way to Austria. The Hungarian Parliament ordered recruitment. Fiume, as a free port, had been exempt from giving recruits; however the Hungarian Parliament (which did not even enact by law that Fiume was annexed to Hungary) made the town give thirty recruits. Fiume did not resist, probably because of Pászthory, moreover gave twelve extra recruits.¹¹

After the fall of Mantova, the High Command intended to transport some of the wounded to Fiume. The governor disapproved it due to accommodation problems. Unfortunately there is no information about the arrival of the wounded.

On the 8th of February, 1797, the French occupied Ancona again (this time permanently). Three ships of the papal fleet managed to escape before the occupation and take

⁷ *Ibid.* 17.

⁸ *Ibid.* 19.

⁹ Count Szapáry János was the Hungarian governor when the French Revolution broke out (1788–1791), he was followed by Pászthory Sándor (1791–1801).

¹⁰ Fest Aladár: *Fiume az első napoleoni háború idejében*. [Fiume during the first Napoleonic Wars] Part I. In: A Tenger, 1912. 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 10.

refuge in Fiume where they arrived on 12th of February.¹² The town got into a panic but the measures taken by the leaders of the town and the governor calmed the people down. It was rumored that the French planned to set up brigantines (pirates) so they strengthened the port and the whole Austrian and Hungarian coastline according to the orders of the High Command. It is likely that Fiume then got a naval commander, captain *Sibson*, who was probably British. Many people escaped from the town. The leaders of the town, having been concerned about alimentation, asked the governor to ban grain export as Fiume had always suffered from starvation during wartime. The governor turned to the governor of Trieste for advice, then he rejected the idea.¹³ (The Higher Command may have considered the alimentation of the army more important than that of the civilians.) After all, after March no commercial ships left the port.¹⁴

Meanwhile, the recruits were ordered to Zagreb, which touched the town keenly. They thought that if they had to give recruits even so it was not their duty, moreover they gave more, they could stay in the town for their own defence. It is no wonder that fourteen recruits escaped on the way to the Croatian capital.¹⁵ The governor hoped, due to information received from “higher circles”, that the whole coastline would get help from the English from the sea. He had the information that the English fleet is stationed at the Southern Adriatic. He wrote a letter to Admiral *Tylor*, but received answer only from the consul of Zara¹⁶ who let him know that the English are not in the area.¹⁷

Meanwhile, the French brigantines started their attacks: they occupied ships from Ragusa, Venice, Austria and Denmark. The governor of Trieste, *de Brigido*, called upon the citizens of the littoral to defend themselves the same way. However, everybody could do this on his own responsibility, without compensation. People could apply for a so called “pirate-letter” (*lettre de marque*, *Kapperpatente*), but there is no documentation about any.¹⁸

On the 22nd of March, 1797, the French troops occupied Trieste without firing a shot. The garrison stationed in the town, together with the army and some people from Trieste, receded to Fiume through Istria.¹⁹ Meanwhile, reinforcement arrived in Fiume; the troops of major von *Koetz* from Hessendarmstadt. As a matter of curiosity, he was accommodated in János Balás’s inn which name was “To the three Moor” (*Zu 3 Mohren*).²⁰

On the 21st of March, governor Pászthory relocated the governmental archives and bursaries of different offices to a safe place (Belovar) because of the approaching front-line. Then in a week (probably on the 28th of March) he also left his office.²¹

¹² *Ibid.* 12.

¹³ This time the imperial governor of Triest overlooked Fiume’s maritime affairs.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 11. and 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 17.

¹⁶ Recent Zadar in Croatia

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Part II. 85–89.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 87–88.

¹⁹ Connections between the merchant families of Trieste and Fiume were common.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 96.

²¹ *Ibid.* 102–105.

The first French occupation of Fiume (1797)

It is known that colonel *Dagobert*, who occupied Trieste, and Pittoni, the leader of the escaping "Austrian" troops agreed to a 6-day ceasefire. *Fest* presumes that the ceasefire must have included the condition that Pittoni agreed to hand over Fiume without firing a shot. Otherwise it is incomprehensible why the town was not defended in spite of the preparations. The receding "Austrian" army arrived in Fiume on the 4th of April, where the starved and tired soldiers looted and insulted the citizens. Besides starvation and irritation it could have other reasons too but it will be dealt later. Pittoni's army, mainly Croats, the local garrison and the above mentioned troops from Hessen-Darmstadt crossed the River Fiumara, and stationed on the area of Sušak. Then they pulled down the bridge to build barricades.²²

It has already been mentioned that the citizens of Ancona were continuously fleeing from the town. The magistrate (town-council) and the council, whose members were patricians and the local industry owners were brave enough to stay in the town. The town-council decided on sending a delegation to the French. The ambassadors were captured by the "Austrian" army and took them to the other side of the river and were to be court-martialled later with the charge of high-treason. The citizens tried to reason by shouting across the river but they got only gunshots as answer.²³

The French troops entered the town on the 5th of April, 1797, in the late evening – *de facto* they entered the Hungarian territory for the first time during the war. *Luigi Perretti*, one of the magistrates, volunteered to meet them. *Fest* tells us about this meeting on the base of a later legend, which source was *Perretti's* grandson, who was a congressman of the town during the Reform Era in Hungary. According to the narration, colonel *Dagobert* said the followings to *Ferretti*:

"You are Hungarian: I would like you to know that the French nation does not underestimate the Hungarian nation. You fight for the gallant Hungarian king; we fight for our honour. I give my word of honour and I swear in the name of my general, Bonaparte, that the citizens and their belongings will remain intact."

No other source reinforces this legend, though it is proven that the French troops committed no incidents during the 4-day occupation. Fiume (unlike Trieste!) did not pay war indemnity either. *Fest* assumes that it might have been Napoleon's direct instruction; the French High Command might have dealt with Fiume as a Hungarian town. Comparing this assumption to a later proclamation (from 1809) to the Hungarians, it is thought-provoking. *Fest* adds that many people must have sympathized with the French and it might have been because of the common Latin (Italian/French) origin, "the lower classes' sympathy" for the republican ideas and finally because of the repelling behaviour of the Croatian-Austrian army.²⁴ If we take into consideration that the richest merchant of the

²² *Ibid.* Part III. 170.

²³ *Ibid.* 172–173.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 174–176.

town, *Lodovico Adamich*, (and the member of the town-council at the same time) had good French connections, we can presume that *Fest* was right.

Factories and storehouses (owned by citizens of Fiume) on the other side of the River Fiumara were foraged by the imperial army during the 4-day French occupation. Citizens tried to call upon the commander to regulate his soldier by shouting across the river but he said that he considered the citizens enemy! This foretold the later happened violent events. As *Fest* stated: “*The Croatians, whom the republican slogans could hardly affect because of the language difference and their underdeveloped culture, looked at the Italians in Fiume suspiciously from the very beginning.*”²⁵

On the 10th of April the ceasefire was over. As the imperial army got reinforcement (mainly Croatians again) and the French did not, they decided on retirement. Expecting a potential retorsion from the imperial army, the town-council decided on distributing arms to the citizens. (Though, some of the citizens had been armed before.)

The imperial army returned that day. They looted and robbed the town and assaulted the citizens on the streets and in their homes. People from abroad were not exempt from the assaults. The remained documents prove that the town was dealt as a hostile area so the soldiers could loot freely.²⁶ It lasted for only one day because the imperial forces went after the French. The town could relieve.

Governor *Sándor Pászthory* returned to the town presumably in the middle of May. (*Fest* believes it was between the 9-18th of May.) The governor was loaded with complaints and cases of compensation right away. However, *Pászthory* (possibly under higher order) dealt with the problems simply, as the council made a mistake when it armed the citizens against the imperial army. The “compromise” was the following: “*all that were taken by the imperial royal Army and its officers on the 10th of April and the following days have to be considered as present.*” It was not enough. The council was also dishonoured when they included the following statement in the agreement:

“The Magistracy and the people of Fiume intend this general agreement to be a perennial certificate amongst the documents as an effective example and encouragement to our descendants, and in case of similar incidents – from which save us God– if they can’t overshadow us showing greater loyalty and love to the Dynasty, at least they should follow and imitate us.”²⁷

Due to the peace-treaty of Campoformio in 1797 Venice, Istria and the majority of Dalmatia became part of the Habsburg Empire, which led to the recovery of the navigation of the whole empire. Dalmatia was overtaken “referring to the Hungarian kings’ ancient rights” by the Habsburg monarchs, that is why many people claimed in Hungary that the Hungarian Diet should have authority over the Dalmatian cases. The Court prevented that. The existing “unlawful” situation was discredited by many Hungarians until the

²⁵ *Ibid.* 179.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 180–184.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 187–188.

World War I. It is also known that some Dalmatian towns (e.g. Spalato²⁸ and Makarska) urged to expand the Hungarian rule., The isle of Veglia in Quarnero made a similar application to the governor of Fiume. He forwarded it to the monarch and in his attached letter he called the monarch upon to keep his obligation that is to “annex the lost and recaptured Dalmatia.”²⁹ However, the applications were not dealt with.

The wars – as always – were good for the grain trade of Hungary. In 1790 the traffic of the Hungarian Littoral shows a 21 per cent increase compared to that of the previous year. In 1791 eight-million-Forint worth of grain were transported to the imperial army stationed in Italy.³⁰ In 1800 similar amount of grain and other goods were taken to the Papal State, to the region of Piemont, Livorno and Portugal.³¹

In 1804 “a brigantine (merchant ship) set off from Fiume transporting Hungarian crops and handicraft goods of Hungarians towards west India.”³² The names of the merchants are unknown, the “Hungarian crops” are presumably grains and the contents of “handicraft goods” are unclear. The data listed by Aladár Fest show that the export (wine, wood, hemp) through Fiume went mainly to England, which might have increased the “desire for occupation”.³³ According to Fest the majority of the grain transport was done by the company called *Dellazia & Brighenti* from Venice. Its agents were stationed in Fiume but the ships usually set off from Porto Ré.

Between 1803 and 1809 a road (road Louisa) was built to ease the transportation from the inland to the littoral. Lieutenant-general *Wukassovich* had authority over the project and it was almost ready when he died in action in the battle of Wagram. A Hungarian Commercial Company got the monopoly of the use of the road in 1797 and in 1810 the then French government reinforced it. (The leader of the company was *János Kiss*.)

The Napoleonic wars brought not only advantages but also disadvantages to the town even before the French entered it. The first investment of a port was accepted by Frances I in 1806, by Anton Gnamb’s plans, but the necessary ingredient (the so called porcelain-clay) would have been imported from Tunis or from Italy (already under French occupation). It was impossible due to the existing circumstances. Minor works were started but they did not manage to finish them either.³⁴

Strange but true that Maria Theresa annexed Fiume to Hungary in 1779 and the Hungarian States managed to pass a bill about it only in 1807 despite the fact that both them and the council of Fiume applied for it to the monarch many times. It was due to the Croatian *sabor*’s (diet) fault-finding technique which interpreted even the most apparent royal

²⁸ Recent Split in Croatia

²⁹ *Ibid.* 192.

³⁰ Gonda, *op. cit.* 19.

³¹ Fest (1916) 260–261.

³² Citation of unknown source in Král Miklós: *Magyar tengerészeti igazgatás*. [Hungarian Maritime Administration] Bp., 1905. 19.

³³ Fest, *op. cit.* 260.

³⁴ Jánossy Dénes: *Adatok a fiumei kikötő történetéhez (1776–1848)*. [Details to the history of the port of Fiume] In: *Századok*, 1924. 503.

rescripts to serve their own interests every time.³⁵ The article IV of 1807 ratified Maria Theresa's order to annex Fiume to Hungary, and in the same year article XXI gave the right to Buccari to send deputies to the Hungarian Diet.³⁶

The reason why it happened in 1807 might have been to create a clear and lawful situation before the approaching French occupation. Fiume then had about 9000 inhabitants. In spite of the hustle the peace treaty of Pozsony, in 1809, incorporated the whole Hungarian Littoral to the newly established "Illyrian Province" which leader was the governor of Laibach.³⁷

The second French occupation (1809–1813)

The second French occupation also came from the inland, this time from the south. General Marmont, the commander-in-chief of the Dalmatian French army, arrived in Fiume from Zara. This time Fiume was not defended at all. On the 28th of May, 1809, the French occupied the town and it had to pay Ft 460.000 war indemnity, moreover distribute food and ammunition. The town surrendered 100.000 right away. General Marmont hurried towards Trieste leaving troops in the town and keeping four patricians hostage to secure the payment of the war indemnity. Finally, they were allowed to go home on the 20th of August.³⁸ *Klobusitzky József*, the Hungarian governor³⁹, left the town and in his post a mayor (maire) was placed who was appointed by the French government. According to the data of Aladár Fest, György Mailáth, who was delegating the Hungarian States, went to Fiume to hand over the town.⁴⁰

There is only limited information about the 4-year French occupation. During this time a council having 22 members governed the town (under the close control of the French *maire*). One of the members was *Lodovico Adamich* who visited France, Spain and Turkey before 1809 presumably to do business.⁴¹ The ship-traffic and so the commerce decreased dramatically these years. As the town was directly under French control, the Code de Commerce was introduced which meant the loss of the free port status. Duty had to be paid after the port traffic, moreover other state taxes were loaded on the town.⁴²

³⁵ See Joó Gyula: *A másfél évszázados polémia Fiume birtokáért*. [The one and half century controversy for the possession of the port of Fiume] Budapest, 1942.

³⁶ Gonda, *op. cit.* 22.

³⁷ See Pándi Eszter (ed.): *Napóleon trianoni dekrétuma az Illir Tartományok megszerzéséről*. [Napoleon's decree in Trianon to organize the Illyrian Provinces] Documenta Historica Vol 48., Szeged, 2000.

³⁸ Susmel Ede: *Fiume története*. [A history of Fiume] In: A Tenger, 1915. 303.

³⁹ Klobusitzky was governor of Fiume between 1801 and 1809.

⁴⁰ Fest Aladár (1916) *op. cit.* 264. Count Mailáth György became the governor of Fiume between 1822 and 1823.

⁴¹ Cvijetinović Starac, Margita: *Portreti iz fundusa Muzeja – Portraits from the holdings of the Museum. Pomorski i povijesni muzej Hrvatskog primorja Rijeka*. Rijeka, 1999.

⁴² Susmel *op. cit.* 304.

Béla Gonda states in his book published in 1906 that “Napoleon recognized Fiume’s favourable lay and commercial importance. He planned that if the Illyrian monarchy permanently consolidates, he would develop Fiume, not Trieste, into a commercial emporium.”⁴³ It is not known what the source was of Gonda’s idea. It seems to be an unfounded idea as a port is worth nothing if it is taken apart from the hinterland on which its commerce is based. And Fiume, as part of the Illyrian Province, could not have served its natural commercial district (the southern part of the Carpathian basin). A possible naval port can be taken into account, but it is also unlikely because of the bad lay of the port. It is proven though, that the French built nothing in Fiume during the four-year occupation.

In 1813 the town was liberated from the inland by *Laval Nugent Westmeath* who was the leader of the imperial army and the French receded without fighting. Before that, on the 3rd of July, 1813, the English fleet bombed the port and all the ships embayed in the port were abolished.

Conclusion

As it was demonstrated before, the Napoleonic French troops entered the Hungarian territory (in Fiume) *de facto* in 1797, *de jure* on 28th of May, 1809. The Italian speaking population of the town sympathized with the French, probably because of their Latin affinity and commercial relations.

The Habsburg imperial army could not defend Fiume, later on they were unwilling to do so, moreover the town was considered as a hostile area. The cause of this was not only the inhabitants’ friendly attitude to the French, but the then developed Italian–Croatian collisions, which transformed into a Hungarian–Croatian conflict due to the legal situation. This accelerated the ethnic conflicts which appeared first in Fiume then in the Hungarian motherland.

⁴³ *Gonda op. cit.* 22.