

The life and death of Faust Vrančić – What could his bones tell us? A prelude to paleoradiological analysis

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Abstract

The text was prepared as a response to a collaboration proposal of dr. Mislav Čavka from the University Hospital Centre Zagreb to the Memorial Centre Faust Vrančić, the institution that I work at. The collaboration would concern the potential analysis of the remains of Faust Vrančić that are buried at the church Sv. Marija od Milosti (Church of St. Mary of Grace) in the village of Prvić Luka on the island of Prvić near Šibenik and that would be conducted with the approval of the parish vicar, Božo Škember. The purpose of the text is to clarify the circumstances surrounding the death of Faust Vrančić, details related to the execution of his will, interesting facts related to his burial, opening and robbing of his crypt as well as the facts about his physical appearance. The analysis of the remains of Faust Vrančić could help us gain new insights into his life and death, which would shed a new light to his biography. Therefore, we need these data in order to use them as a background for further investigation. The relevant analysis could reveal facts such as: his height, the diseases that he suffered from, the cause of his death, if he suffered any bone fractures, his nutrition habits and his dwelling places (this part of his life is well documented, but it would be interesting to see if the biographic data match with the results of the paleoradiological analysis). Eventually, the bone analysis would tell us how he looked like and we would be able to compare the results of the forensic facial reconstruction with the only known “official” portrait of Faust Vrančić.

Introduction

I have been thinking for quite some time if the curiosity is my only motivation to pursue this project and if the only purpose of this project would be to satisfy the curiosity, be it my own, as a person who is professionally occupied with Faust Vrančić, be it the scientific curiosity of dr. Čavka and his colleagues. My doubts got even bigger following my first discussion with the local vicar about the topic, when he raised the question that was left hanging in the air and that concerned the purpose of the project. I must admit that reconsideration was a useful tool to filter the actual motivation for this project. However, I found the

answer to the posed question in Faust Vrančić himself, in what he actually was: a family man, a priest, a politician and a diplomat, a patriot, a linguist, a lawyer, a philosopher and, above all, an inventor and scientist driven by curiosity that has never been an end in itself. The efforts he put into preparing a dictionary intended for the European people that jointly fought against the Ottoman Turks resulted in one of the first multilingual dictionaries that was also the first dictionary of the Croatian and Hungarian ever. Therefore, Faust Vrančić is rightfully considered the father of the Croatian and Hungarian lexicography. He was the man who, in his forties, already had patents for specific mills and sawing machines. At the end of his life he published a book

comprising the results of his life-long work on inventions and provided certain solutions that appeared for the first time in the technical literature, e.g. the first idea of the suspension bridge, the metal bridge, the cable car, the carriage shock absorber, the precursor of water turbines and the vertical axle mill. These were all very useful inventions aiming at making the everyday life of people easier. However, what really made Faust Vrančić famous was his *Homo Volans* – the Flying Man, a representation of the first functional parachute ever – an invention that was a product of his restless and curious spirit more than anything else. Faust named his collection of inventions *Machine novae* – the New Machines. At his time, these inventions were literally new, some of them were even too advanced for that time, so that they became reality and widely accepted much later. Thinking in the context of this text and the achievements in the segment of paleoradiology and similar sciences, the questions raise: If Faust could see all the “new machines” available to scientists nowadays and how much it could be found out about him only based on the analysis of his bones, would he be impressed and delighted? Would he still be curious? Would he approve of the method? Knowing him, as much as it is possible to know a person considering the time distance of four centuries, I am sure that he would. A curious boy from Dalmatia from a noble family who first got to know the world in Bratislava where he continued his education with support of his uncle who worked there as a royal governor, then as a student in the cosmopolitan and university city of Padua where the Anatomical Theatre was not built out of curiosity or fun, Faust Vrančić experienced the peak of his carrier as a secretary at the court of Rudolph II Habsburg in Prague where the European scientific elite of that time gathered. I do not think that anything else needs to be added here to describe his greatness and open-mindedness. Knowing this, it is clear that his perspectives were neither narrowed nor burdened by prejudice or unnecessary rules. And then again, he was a very spiritual man, devoted to the Church, which is why we hope that the Church would offer us their help and grant us the permission to exhume his remains and take them to Zagreb for analysis.

How would we benefit from the new insights today? Since Faust Vrančić is one of the most influential Croats of all times that we can be more than proud of and proudly present and popularise his work, adding new interesting facts to his biography would actually help us do it using all available resources in all scientific segments. Honour the scientist with science! On top of this, this would be the first case of a detailed analysis of remains of a known historical figure in Croatia. So far, the objects of this scientific analysis in Croatia were only museum mummies, religious relics and bones of mostly anonymous deceased buried at specific cemeteries and a couple of saints. A collaboration like this could result in a scientific colloquium, a documentary, a new museum exhibit, increased number of museum visitors... the options are numerous. What would the bones tell us – I hope that we will soon find out.

Last wishes comprised in the codicil; death and burial

The location: Venice, sestiere Castello, the home of Jeronim Jubete, the reverend of the Church of San Provolo. The time: 15 January 1617. Faust Vrančić, at his deathbed, aware that his life is coming to an end, wrote a supplement (a codicil) to his will that he left two years earlier in Rome. He requested in his will to be buried in his homeland, on the island of Prvić and a wooden box to be placed in the coffin next to his dead body that would comprise his literal works. Additionally, he decided on his epitaph. Faust Vrančić died five days later on 20 January 1617.

Ivan Tomko Mrnavić, a protégé of Faust Vrančić, a historian and novelist, escorted Faust's remains from Venice to Šibenik. He also held a funeral speech (known today as the *Faust Vrančić Euology*) at the Šibenik Cathedral of St. James and it was published in Venice in that same year. According to the records prepared by the Šibenik bishop Fosco, Mrnavić held the speech on 22 February 1617. Therefore, it is to presume that the burial in Prvić Luka was held close to that date. It seems that the people of Šibenik could not easily let that the greatest son of their city of that time be buried near his birthplace without having a deserved and dignified commemoration. Faust wanted to be taken to Prvić and buried there straight away. He requested to be laid to

rest in a grave in front of the church door. When mentioning this request in his speech, Mrnavić romanticised it saying: "...his last wish was to be laid to rest on the cemetery on the island of Prvić in the bare soil among the dead bodies of the common people, where he thought he would find the peace that he longed for in his life." Still, he was buried in the central part of the church, as it was usual place of burial of dignitaries of that time.

The reason why Faust Vrančić chose the island of Prvić for his last resting place was his close connection with the island that was established during his stays there in his family mansion situated in the village of Prvić Šepurine. It is a Renaissance villa now declared a cultural property. The mansion is still owned by the Draganić-Vrančić family, i.e. the descendants of the Faust's brother Kažimir.

The tombstone comprises the epitaph mentioned in the codicil prepared by Faust Vrančić himself:

FAUSTUS VERANTIUS EPISC. CHANADIENSIS NOVORUM PREDICAMENTORUM ET NOVARUM MACHINARUM AC FRAGMENTORUM HISTORIAE ILLYRICAE AC SARMATIAE COLLECTOR

(Faust Vrančić, the Bishop of Csanád, collector of new facts and devices as well as fragments concerning the history of Illyrians and Sarmatians).

Below is the list of books that were buried together with the remains of Faust Vrančić (the left column includes the list of titles as Vrančić informally described them in the codicil, and the right column lists the known titles of these books i.e. their official titles) named in Table 1.

It is interesting that Alberto Fortis in his work titled *Travels into Dalmatia* was astonished by the Faust's wishes related to the burial with his books, and he was even more astonished that his descendants respected his so unusual wishes.

Circumstances preceding the death of Faust Vrančić

To better understand the circumstances preceding the death of Faust Vrančić, it must be mentioned that after leaving the Prague court of Rudolph II Habsburg for the second time, Faust spent the last years of his life in Rome where he got sick. In 1615, at the doctor's recommendation Faust decided to leave the Eternal City and to return to his homeland. It was because the air in Rome did not suit his health. Taking into consideration his delicate health and the fact that he was to take off on a long journey, Faust left his will on 12 June 1615. In his will, he took care of his family members, his daughter Alba Rosa and his mother Katarina, as well as the male descendants of his brother Kažimir that were to continue the Vrančić lineage. According to the records of Mrnavić who escorted

Table 1: books that were buried together with the remains of Faust Vrančić

un libro delli Machine nove	<i>Machinae novae</i>
un libro delli Nove predicamenti	Most probably <i>Logica Nova</i> printed together with <i>Ethica Cristiana</i> ; so he could refer here to both works
un libretto delle Vergini da me transliterato	<i>Život nekoliko izabranih divic</i> (Life of Few Chosen Virgins)
un libro Dittonario cinque lingue	<i>The dictionary of five most prominent European languages</i>
un'altro de l'istoria di Dalmazia et questo voglio sii stampato con la cura et diligenta de miei essecutori	A manuscript that has never been published; it is possible that he refers to <i>Illyrica Historia</i> that was bought together with some other documents from the Draganić-Vrančić Mansion in Prvić Šepurine in 1948 and are kept today in the Collection of Manuscripts of the National University Library.

Faust, Faust was not able to travel by boat from Ancona to Šibenik because of his health condition, so he opted to travel by carriage through Venice, where he had some unfinished business. While in Venice, despite his many friends who would gladly welcome him at their homes, Faust stayed at a hospice held by priests and eagerly worked on publishing his two books: *Machinae novae* and a joint edition of *Logica nova* and *Ethica cristiana*. Since *Machine novae* does not include the year of publishing it is presumed that it was published in 1616, as Mrnavić mentioned in his *Eulogy*. After the books were published, Vrančić was aware of his health condition and the fact that his return home was not probable. Therefore, he wrote his codicil and died according to Mrnavić: “*twenty days following his sixty sixth birthday*”, which also reveals us the precise date of his birth.

The grave of Faust Vrančić – Chronology of openings

The priest don Krsto Stošić, the founder of the first Šibenik museum, reported for the Šibenik newspapers titled *Narodna straža* that the parish church was closed because of the threat of the ceiling falling in, on 14 April 1926. Later, on 18 September 1926, Stošić wrote again about the church in Prvić Luka (Fig. 1), saying that the church was finally repaired and “*the opportunity was used to examine the tomb of the famous scientist Faust Vrančić*”. According to Stošić, after the tombstone was removed, the gathered people were somewhat disappointed because there was no trace of any bishop’s attributes and the grave only contained “*rotten clothes and a strong skull*”. However, the article reveals that allegedly it had not been the first time that the grave of Faust Vrančić was opened. In that very article, Stošić claims that the tomb was opened once out of pure curiosity some 60 years earlier, at the time of abbot Šarac who established that the tomb was broken into on the side from another grave. The word has it that abbot Šarac only found a broken tin box and several damp papers, none of which he managed to preserve.

In 1941, Krsto Stošić published his work *Sela šibenskog kotara (The Villages of the Šibenik County)*. In the chapter dedicated to Prvić, he mentions again the

breaking into the tomb of Faust Vrančić. This time, he said that no box was left in the grave, since the grave was broken into during the night and the burglars took the box with them thinking that they would find treasure in it. However, the box contained “*only published and unpublished works by Faust Vrančić that scattered later in all directions around the village*”.

Vladimir Bazala in his work titled *Pregled hrvatske znanstvene baštine (Overview of the Croatian Scientific Heritage)* from 1978 says that “*the grave of Faust Vrančić was opened around 1900, and some things found in it were allegedly taken to Budapest, but no one bothered to investigate further what these things actually were*”. However, Bazala did not specify the source of this information.



Figure 1: The resting place of Faust Vrančić, Church of St. Mary of Grace in Prvić Luka

In the article titled *Enigma Vrančićeva rukopisa Storia della Dalmazia* (*The Enigma of the Vrančić's Manuscript Storia della Dalmazia*) published in the *Vijenac* magazine, Milovan Buchberger wrote that the scattered manuscripts were collected by the people of Prvić Luka and handed over to Frane Kazimir Draganić-Vrančić, the successor of the Faust's mansion in Šepurine. Still, Buchberger did not specify any other source of this information, besides the two sources specified by don Krsto Stošić that actually did not mention this, as we found out.

In December of the war year 1993, the old tombstone situated in the floor of the church was replaced by a new one as a part of the event titled *Faust Vrančić, naš suvremenik* (*Faust Vrančić, Our Contemporary*) organised by the Juraj Šižgorić library from Šibenik. Then, the old tombstone was exhibited in a niche in a church wall, and the original text of the epitaph was carved in the new one.

So, in chronological order, first there was the robbery of the grave around 1860 or earlier (but we cannot precisely know when), according to the two records by don Krsto Stošić that do not fully match. Then, at approximately the same time, at the time of abbot Šarac, the grave was opened for the first time out of curiosity. The third opening of the grave, and the second opening out of pure curiosity, was documented in a newspaper article from 1926. Krsto Stošić wrote about it saying that there were no books or manuscripts in the grave. The last opening of the grave was the one in 1993 for the purpose of replacing the tombstone that was also blessed on that occasion. We hope that we will soon have an opportunity to remove the tombstone again. This time, the purpose would be different, and I believe that Faust who was so curious himself and fascinated by the science would approve of it.

The books and the manuscripts about the history of Dalmatia have been lost without doubt. It remains unknown if the disappointed "treasure hunters" really scattered them around the village or if the abbot Šarac might have collected them and if they found the way to Faust's descendants and ended up in the Vrančić mansion and were sold later.

The portrait of Faust Vrančić

So far, this text covered the illness, the death and the grave of Faust Vrančić, which are the topics that the potential bone analysis could shed a new light on. However, this bone analysis also offers another very interesting option – the forensic facial reconstruction of Faust Vrančić. There are several portraits depicting Faust Vrančić, but there are records that he actually posed for only one of them (Fig. 2). This portrait is kept in the family mansion Draganić-Vrančić in Prvić Šepurine. It is a work of an unknown artist painted in oil painting technique in Rome in 1605 (89 x 110 cm). It represents Faust Vrančić at the age of around fifty, sitting, slightly turned to the right. His hair is dark and he has a long black beard, wearing a cross pendant around his neck. There are also another two portraits similar to this original one that can be found in certain publications and on the Internet. They depict Faust Vrančić in the same position and clothes, but his face is somewhat different. The members of Draganić-Vrančić

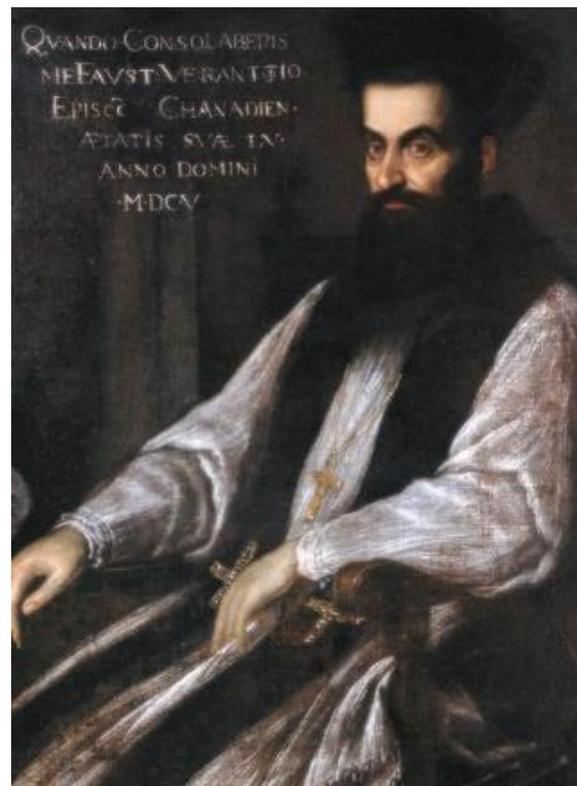


Figure 2: Posed portrait of Faust Vrančić, Rome, 1605

family told us that the portrait was lent earlier quite often for the exhibition purposes, which might explain the origin of these reproductions.

Another known portrait of Faust Vrančić, depicting Faust without the beard (Fig. 3), situated in the hall of the bishop's palace in Timișoara in Romania, served the sculptor Kosta Angeli Radovani as a model for a bust that is now exhibited in the Alley of Sculptures of major figures of Croatian science and technology. Faust Vrančić could never pose for that portrait since it was painted a century after his death on the occasion of expanding the gallery of bishops' portraits. Namely, Faust was appointed the Titular Bishop of Csanád in the period 1598 through 1608. This means that he was not physically there because of the occupation of the territory by Ottoman Turks. Today, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Timișoara is one of the successors of the former historical Diocese of Csanád. We got into contact with the archivist of the Diocese, Dr Claudiu



Figure 3: Portrait of Faust Vrančić, 19th century

Calin, who told us that he believed that the portrait had been painted in the 19th century by an unknown painter.

It is also interesting to add that the ceiling fresco in the Croatian National Theatre in Šibenik also includes a portrait of Faust Vrančić. However, the Faust is painted here in the company of his uncle Antun Vrančić and other influential people of Šibenik: Martin Rota Kolunić, Andrija Medulić Schiavone and Nikola Tommaseo. Apparently, this portrait was painted following the example of the one from Prvić Šepurine. The author of this portrait is the 19th century painter Antonio Zuccaro.

As for the Faust's physical appearance, besides the portraits, there is also a written record – a certificate of the rector of the Faculty of Law of the University of Padua dated 14 April 1569 that confirms the status of Faust Vrančić as a student of law. The rector described Faust as a Dalmatian with a scar on his forehead (Faust Verantius Dalmata habens cicatricem in fronte). We will probably never find out where and how Faust got the scar, but it would be very interesting to see if there are traces of any trauma on his skull.

Future analyses

This text covers mostly the last period of the life of Faust Vrančić, his death and the circumstances after his death in terms of his remains. It also includes all relevant information that could serve as a starting point for a future analyses of the remains of Faust Vrančić that we hope we will be able to carry out in the near future.

We would like to scan the skeletal remains on X-ray and on CT. Digital planar radiographs of the body (in several parts) will be done in two projections. CT slices will be obtained using 64x0.6 collimation with “dual energy” scanning parameters; 80 kV and 140 kV respectively (Somatom AS+, Siemens Healthcare, Erlangen, Germany) with 0.5 reconstruction increment (RI).

3D Multiplanar (MPR), Volume Rendering Technique (VRT), Maximum Intensity Projection (MIP) and Cinematic Rendering will be done on Singo.Via workstation (Siemens Healthcare, Erlangen, Germany)

and with OsiriX MD Imaging software, v 7.0.4. (Pixmeo, Geneva, Switzerland).

Assessment of sex, age at death, pathological conditions and trauma will be done based on standards of bioarchaeological practice. Sex assessment will be based on standard methodology and scoring systems described in Buikstra & Ubelaker (1994). Age at death will be assessed based on cranial suture closure and dental attrition scoring systems described in Meindl & Lovejoy (1985) and Brothwell (1981). If possible samples will be dated by means of radiocarbon dating method.

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