

# August Güntzer: *A Brief Book about My Whole Life – My Travel Book* (17<sup>th</sup> century)

## Abstract

This autobiography by Alsatian pewterer Augustin Güntzer (1596-c.1657) is largely devoted to the author's travels as a wandering journeyman. Over the course of five years, Güntzer traveled as an apprentice to many parts of Europe. In addition to the written narrative, his extensive autobiography contains numerous drawings by Güntzer. One of these drawings shows Güntzer's encounter with robbers in the Hagenau Forest on the Upper Rhine. Encountering such "murderers" was a danger that travelers had to take into account. Güntzer drove off the robbers by pulling out his "busser," i.e., his blunderbuss. This sort of dangerous encounter in forests, besides being a real danger to travelers, was also a narrative fixture in autobiographies of the time.

## Source

[...]

As I set out for my travels on St. Bartholomew's Day in 1615, my father had new leather clothing made for me and gave me the appropriate basic necessities and twelve florins in cash. In addition, I had twelve florins, some of which I had saved, some of which I was given by my friends and some which I had earned by engraving tin. My father wanted me to travel to the north, because it was very unsafe in the Palatinate on account of the soldiers. The soldiers congregated off and on, and after the Battle of Malzheim occasionally stayed in the woods; from there they plundered and murdered travelers. In a short time, several hundred of these highway robbers and murderers had been put on the execution wheel near the Rhine River; I saw some of them lying on wheels. I also fell victim to such scoundrels and murderers and was almost murdered but my God saved me. A man traveled with me from the Upper Rhine; he had worked for a winery for two-and-a-half years, otherwise he lived in the Lower Palatinate in Neustadt near the large linden, and was carrying one hundred fifty florins on his person. When we had traveled one mile west into the Hagenau forest, a murderer came out of a bush, a person said to us in short: How far are you going? I would like to travel with you. I had a blunderbuss with me. I was cautious and thought to myself that this fellow was a highwayman waiting in the woods for prey. He said, fellow countryman, put your busser away, for it is forbidden to carry a loaded gun in this forest, subject to physical punishment, to prevent people from shooting game. If a forester were to run into you, he would take you under arrest to Hagenau. I answered him, I am not carrying my busser and weapon to shoot game during my travels but to protect against highwaymen and murderers, because there are especially many in this forest, as many signs and woodpiles can be seen where travelers have been murdered. I will make the murderers' souls so hot by my speeches that they will eternally suffer agony and misfortune if they do not repent. But this scoundrel did not listen to my speech, for he was a murderer and wanted to kill me. For thirty miles I did not let him walk behind me on the fallen trees on which it was necessary to walk because of standing water and the bad path. Whenever he got behind me, I jumped down from the fallen logs and walked behind him again. When we came to the middle of the forest, he stepped behind me again, pulled a knife from his pants pocket, and stabbed at my throat. But God kept me from such a death; the knife thrust went out above my collar. Then I ran towards him with my rapier, so he jumped away from me, pulled a little whistle from his pocket, and blew three times on it. Then a murderer, the accomplice who had also come along in the bushes, immediately came out of the bushes. But my upright companion who had set out with me from the upper Rhine and I did not see him. These two murderers ran to each other in the middle of the road, but

---

no longer dared to come near us because we were well armed. They continued to walk along with us through the forest thus, with strife and strong words. At the end of the forest, a miller and his son lay on execution wheels next to their mill. The father had committed twenty-four murders in that forest, and his son, who was eighteen years old, fifteen. Right next to that was a village. I shot my busser so that the bullet hit an oak tree, and said to the two murderers, "You see, you murderers, if you had attacked us again, I would have shot you in the body with this bullet." Just as these murderers are lying on the wheels, you will also be put on the wheel; therefore take heed from the example of these murderers, who were broken on the wheel. Then the two murderers went back into the forest. My upright companion and I departed peacefully on our way, thanking God that He had saved us from the murderers' hands; and we complained about them in the village. The peasants were amazed that we got away with our lives because of the great insecurity of the murderers. God be praised for His assistance. Amen.

Thanks be to God,  
My Heavenly Father,  
That he protected me  
From highwaymen  
And murderers,  
So that I was not  
Murdered at  
Their hands.

Almighty God, Heavenly Father, I praise you eternally. Here in time and there in eternal joy I intend to praise and glorify you, because you protected me out of great love and mercy from those highwaymen and murderers, so that they did not bring down and murder my companion and me.

Source: Fabian Brändle and Dominik Sieber, eds., *Kleines Biechlin von meinem gantzen Leben: Die Autobiografie eines Elsässer Kannengießers aus dem 17. Jahrhundert*. Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2012, pp. 125-27.

Translation: Kathleen Dell'Orto

Recommended Citation: August Güntzer: A Brief Book about My Whole Life – My Travel Book (17th century), published in: German History Intersections, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/migration/ghis:document-46>> [July 12, 2025].