

Szombathy Viktor ⁸

Szalánc (Slanec) Castle

This castle from the age of the Hungarian Arpad Kings was built on a high loaf mountain, to the south-east of Kassa (Kaschau, Košice), within the area of the former Abaúj-Torna County, at the northern slope of the Great Milic Mountain. It was built by the ancient Aba clan. At the beginning



of the 13th century Szalánc (Slanec) was owned by Péter Szalánczi, a member of the Aba clan. However, no document mentions it before 1281. At that time Szalánc was the property of Finta palatine, however he also lost the castle as he was involved in a discord with Ladislas IV the Cuman The King from the Anjou House, Charles Robert donated Szalánc to his childhood friend, Miklós Drugeth Lord Chief Justice. Not just the Szalánc Castle was handed over, but other castles as well. By 1390 the property of the castle was transferred to László Losonczy due to marriage and heritage. Jan Jiskra occupied Szalánc for a while and destroyed it partly, but László Losonczy, the Treasurer of the Household rebuilt it in 1490, this time in gothic style. Szalánc was returned from the Losonczy family to the hands of the King and in 1601 – as the beneficiary of the donation from Rudolf II – Zsigmond Forgách became the owner of the castle, including extensive areas and forests. In 1605 István Bocskai held the castle for a short period of time, then it was returned to the Forgách family. In 1644 George II Rákóczi occupied and burned down Szalánc. The ups and downs of such castles follow a pattern where these are built by someone and destroyed by someone else, are confiscated by the king or returned to their previous owner; but they are renovated and burned down several times until the point where the castle is left to its sorrowful fate. Szalánc was also rebuilt



by the Forgách family, but was invaded by Imre Thököly in 1678. The same year the possession of the castle was taken by one of the generals of King Leopold I, the French Lestie count by siege and he destroyed whatever had not been destroyed before. Therefore Szalánc has been a ruin for three hundred years. At the end of the

⁸VIKTOR SZOMBATHY (1902-1987) writer, translator of literary works.

19th century the Forgách family restored one of the towers that survived the fights and stored the precious collections of the family in it. At that time the Forgách family had already been living in their baroque style manor-house near the castle. At the end of World War II both the tower with the valuables and the manor-house were destroyed.

There are several tiny streams running from the Sívári Mountains to the east of Kassa (Kaschau, Košice) and join the Bodrog River. The formerly beautiful Szalánc Castle has been deteriorating for three centuries in the valley shaped by one of the tiny streams, under the Great Milic Mountain, at the top of a lonely loaf mountain. From a distance its remaining tower looks like the tower of a windmill, only the turning sail of the windmill and the miller are missing!

However the person who was ordering to grind the wheat of Szalánc Castle – or that of the lands of the castle – was not a simple miller, but it was from the beginning the head of the prestigious Aba clan, namely the one from the Szalánc branch of the Aba clan. Therefore, the people living at Szalánc were from royal blood – from the blood of King Samuel Aba – and they created a high-wrought coat-of-arms for themselves.

The book of legends says that a head of the Aba family, Csoma was teaching his son, Peter to hunt in the vast trackless forest among the banks of the Olsva stream. He thought him various things: one day the arrow of the child was targeting animals with four legs, the other day animals with two legs, meaning birds. The young Péter was about to be able to hunt down the ones with four legs: he was already capable to hit roe-deer, fox and rabbit with his arrow – though his father saved deer and boar for a lesson to learn later – but hitting the wing of birds like falcon, kestrel, kite or hawk was still difficult for him.

All of a sudden a venerable-looking eagle appeared above the valley. At times it was lying on the pillow of the wind with outspread wings as if relaxing there, then unexpectedly took a flight up and was flying to its prey with lightening speed.

– I will shoot this eagle! – claimed little Péter, the son of Csoma, and stretched his bow, pointing it at the bird. But the bird seemed to know about his intention and at the very last minute it changed its direction.

– Aim and shoot it! – the father went on yelling at his son.

The child set spur into his horse and followed the eagle. The eagle seemed to play with him, sometimes appearing above them then disappearing again.



Péter, the son of Csoma had already shot out two arrows in vain.

– If you shoot it at the third try, you will have rewarded! – promised his father.

They had already left the Olsva, riding up and down between the hills as the eagle was teasing the boy. They reached the narrow valley of a small stream and they hardly had enough space to ride at full speed along the bank. This was the valley of the Ronyva near the Milic.

The eagle did not think any more that the pursuing child might ever shoot him. He stopped in the sky and failed to listen out for its hunter, instead it focused on a careless rabbit at the bank. The little boy placed the third arrow on the bow and shot the eagle.

It fell to a hilltop, but before dying it flew a half round in the air. The hunters rode up to the top of the hill. The hunter of the lord made a wreath of oak leaves, gave it to Péter, and said:

– this is your first eagle, young master, wreath it with this.

– And I shall build a castle for you at this place. – went on his father, the mighty Csoma lord.

This is the story of the foundation of the Szalánc Castle explaining the motifs on the herald of the Abas from Szalánc: an eagle with an oak wreath in its beak on a silver shield.

The time of the Aba clan had passed, and the castle of Szalánc was transferred to King Charles Robert. He was thinking about to donate it to someone. To somebody who deserves it. He had not expected at that time that his best friend, Miklós Drugeth will be the one.

Once in Visegrád, Miklós Drugeth was busy around the table of the King when suddenly the door flew open and Felician Zách rushed in with a naked sword in order to kill the King and his Heir, the little Lajos.

The people sitting at the table drew their swords including the guards of the King and the ones serving at the table. The little prince, Lajos remained safe and sound, but the King was wounded and the sword of Felicián cut four fingers of the queen.

Miklós Drugeth was the first one to jump in front of the King and shielded his the body, then he jumped in front of the princes and saved them at the price of his own blood.

Felician Zach's attack was not successful. A merciless decision destroyed four generations of the Zách clan. The protectors of the King were rewarded.

King Charles asked Miklós Drugeth:

— What shall I give you as a reward, my honest friend, Miklós?

— My King, you know better what I do deserve, but I was not acting for the reward!





– I know – nodded the King –, but someone who is so fast with his sword must be fast in making decisions as well. You shall be the Lord Chief Justice and thou shall have the castle of Szalánc as well! Together will all its surroundings.

It is strange that the Drugeths had a bird in their coat-of-arms as well. But they had a more peaceful bird, not an eagle: two doves connected with a clamp.

It is high time to tell about the real dove of the Szalánc Castle. Let me tell you about the dove, with the lovely feathered bird in the song, about Anna Losonczy and about the one writing the song about her, Bálint Balassi.

They met in the castle of Eger for the first time and Anna Losonczy had already been the wife of Kristóf Ungnád, the captain of the Eger Castle. The poet fell in love with her, and Anna began to love him as well. But Bálint Balassi lived an adventurous life; he was wandering here and there, faced adventures and fights between Hungary, Transylvania and Poland, and when the opportunity to conquer Anna occurred again – as Anna became a widow – the poet married her cousin, Krisztina Dobó.

The marriage with Krisztina Dobó did not last long.

And the poet, the famous fighter, the restless wanderer, the discordant castle owner showed up in the fine castle of Szalánc again and won Anna Losonczy for himself with songs, nice words and attractive poems.

The poet was begging for the mercy of the real dove of Szalánc when proposing her.

– Let's join our lives and stay together when death comes! – asked the poet.

– I had been waiting for thou, master – said Anna Losonczy in the fine castle of Szalánc –, but you have convinced me that you are not a fateful man. Your poems are written to several girls and women. Your poems are addressed to Anna, Judit, Coelia, Julia, and even Fulva.

– But you are the only real dove, my Anna! – the poet tried to convince her.

He would have loved to stay and to settle in Szalánc. The heir of the castle was Anna Losonczy, who had the right to use it.

– I say farewell to the poet and the valiant man, my dear Bálint – said Anna with a said smile, as she still reserved a secret place in her heart for Bálint Balassi – and I shall get married with Zsigmond Forgách.

This was the way the poet lost the real dove and the fine castle of Szalánc became the property of the Forgách family.

Szalánc had three Annas.

Anna Drugeth was the first one.

Then came Anna Telegdy.

Then as the third one, the beautiful Anna Losonczy.

Due to the poems she is the one to live the longest, even though Szalánc was ruined.

⁹Source: VIKTOR SZOMBATHY (1986): *Száll, a rege váról, várra – Szlovákiai vármondák [Legends from castle to castle – Slovakian fabular on castles], Madách Könyvkiadó, Pozsony (Bratislava). (In Hungarian.)*