

History of Castle Bystrica (Authors: M. Turošík, J. Maloney 2011)

Middle ages

The ruins of the castle stands on the cliff above the town, in the district called Považské Podhradie. The main reason for building of the castle was to secure an important trading route stretching along the Váh valley. Its name was derived from Bystrica brook, which is better known nowadays as Domanižanka. According to the historian Fukó the castle was established in 1128.

Another possible explanation for the establishment of the castle stretches back to as far as Belo IV, who, in order to protect his country against the invasion of Batu Khan, gave an order to build a far-reaching chain of castles, one of which might have been Považský hrad. This would date the construction works to 1242.

The first settlement of the castle cliff is dated to [Púchov culture](#), a [celtic coin](#) was found on the hill.¹

The first written reference to the castle named Bistrizza dates to 1316, when it was mentioned as province "Bestruche" on the title deed of Matthew Csak . After the death of the emperor the province became the centre of small comitate (*Hungarian administrative unit*) "Comites Bistrichienses" , which was separated from the rest of the Trencsen county. The castle was already in the possession of county judges at that time. The First such owner was Alexander Köcski, who created a title deed called „ Castellani de Bistricia“ in the year 1325. This is the oldest surviving document that is available.

The historian Fuko again reminds us that we have to be aware of the fact that in 1325 the castle had already been used as a fortress, by Alexander, the county judge, who was also the *Castellanus de Bystricha*. This might serve as proof that the castle was built not later than in the first half of the fourteenth century.

The next owner was Pavol Ugali. After his death ownership passed to Stefan Loszonczi, the son of the Knight, Ladislav.

In 1392 the castle was bought by John Kaplai. Five years later it again was in the possession of the king, who gives it to Sandzivoj from Szubin, whose son in law from Stiboricz, was known as one of the advisors of the king Sigismund, "...these advisors were of modest origin such as the Pole Stibor of Stiboricz..."², Stibor

¹ Považský hrad, In *Wikipedia.org*, [online] [cit. 2010.09.05.] available on internet: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pova%C5%B5sk%C3%BD_hrad.

² PRAJDA K., *Florentines as agents of the Renaissance in the Hungarian Kingdom during the Reign of Sigismund of Luxemburg*, In *Journal of early modern history.*, 2010, vol.14., p. 519.

owned the castle in 1409. From 1419, it returned to the King's possession, who gave it to Duke Ludovit. Thirteen years later in 1432 a great disaster in the form of Husit invasion, resulted in a devastating fire in the castle. The fire burned most of the documents recording the story of the castle. Seven years later Queen Elizabeth passed the castle to Ulrich Celjsky as a reward for his help in protecting of her son Ladislav Pohrobok (*Ladislaus the Posthumous*).

Renaissance

“In the 1400s the central European kingdom of Hungary experienced its own Renaissance. Learning, literature, and art flourished during these years, and Hungary's Renaissance attracted and produced some of Europe's leading scholars”.³

A direct connection with Italy, the centre of The Renaissance, was assured by Florentines, living in the King's court.

*“In the fifteenth century we find the first evidence of smaller provincial courts in Hungarian territory and connected to the Florentine diaspora,...courts... became centres of cultural exchange by providing meeting point for Florentines who had occasion to travel to the kingdom.”*⁴

During this period of great prosperity, the castle was again in the possession of the kings of the Hunady dynasty. The first was King John who was followed by King Matthias „Corvinus.

*“In 1438 the Castle was given by King Antal (Albert of Hungary) to Antol Podmaniczky with all the surrounding lands. This ownership was once more confirmed by King. Matyas (Matthias Corvinus) in 1458. Again in 1471 by King Ulasslo I (Vladislas II)”*⁵

The historian Ferko wrote about the Podmaniczky family in one of his essays, describing them as men who for almost one hundred years, influenced the politics of the kingdom of Hungary at the very highest level. They were involved when the future of the kingdom was to be decided, and they helped many to claim the throne. Powerful and proud, but diplomatic, and skilled tacticians, who always knew when to fight and more importantly, when to retreat.

Their reign is considered to be a time of great prosperity for the region. The magistrates' pages list the description of important regional by-laws called "Articuli Podmanickyani" dated to 2. January 1506, which give insight into the life of the town at that time. The by-law was is exceptional in Slovak context of that time, because it clearly states the relationship between the noble-man and ordinary people. Another important feature of this document is that shortly afterwards it was published in Latin it was also published in Slovak.

³ **Hungary**, In *Novelguide.com*,. [online] [cit. 2002.] available on internet: <http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/rens_02/rens_02_00227.html>.

⁴ PRAJDA K., *Florentines as agents of the Renaissance in the Hungarian Kingdom during the Reign of Sigismund of Luxemburg*, In *Journal of early modern history*., 2010, vol.14., p. 524.

⁵ *Brief Summaries of Family Podmaniczky (Baron von Podmanin and Aszod)*, In *Podmaniczky.org*. [online] [cit. 2004.] available on internet: <<http://www.podmaniczky.org/Bkgnd.htm>>.

Articuli Podmanickyani



Important
regional by-law
was publ

The town had three main craftsmen's guilds: butchers, weavers and boot-makers. It had also a school. Považská Bystrica and Varín, they were the only towns where Slovak was the official language among the guilds.

During their reign a Gothic *Church of the visitation of the Virgin Mary (Kostol našťivenia Panny Márie)* was rebuilt in the town centre. At

first it was under the King's patronage, but later it was fully in the patronage of the Podmaniczky family which meant that the family could select a priest. Now, only the presbytery remains of this medieval church. It contains several interesting architectural features.

"In the Middle Ages there was no uniform custom in regard to the place where the Blessed Sacrament was kept. The Fourth Lateran Council and many provincial and diocesan synods held in the Middle Ages require only that the Host be kept in a secure, well-fastened receptacle. At the most they demand that it be put in a clean, conspicuous place".⁶

That might explain why there are two Tabernaculums, one from 15th century, and a second one dating from the 16th century.

(Ján) John became the advisor of the king, while Stephen became the bishop of Nitra "44. Štefan II. Podmanický (1505-1530)".⁷ During the struggle over the succession to the throne Stephen as the oldest among the bishops crowned two kings, János Szapolyai and Ferdinand I. The third son Michal, was the chief of the King's guard.

After his death in the battle of Mohács control of the county passed to his sons John and Rafael, who became known as 'Robber Barons'.

To stop their robberies, General Katzainer was summoned in 1529, However the 'eagle's nest' above Bystrica withstood his attacks. The peak of the Robber Barons' power was in 1540, when their list of properties contained almost 470 items, including many castles.

In 1543 a disastrous fire gave rise to the legend of *Beautiful Hedviga* which tells the romantic story of what happened in the castle. Since the fire destroyed much of the castle, it was necessary to rebuild the damaged sections. The reconstruction was supervised by one of the brothers, Rafael, while the other

⁶ *Catholic encyclopedia: Tabernacle*, In *New advent*,. [online] [cit. 2002.] available on internet: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14424a.htm>>.

⁷ *Chronológia biskupov (Chronology of bishops)*, In *Biskupstvo-nitra.sk*,. [online] [cit. 2002.] available on internet: <<http://www.biskupstvo-nitra.sk/chronologia-biskupov>>.

two left the area, with John going to Aszod where his family lived until the twentieth century. John died in 1545 in Aszod, Rafael in 1558.

„LETA PANIE TISICEHO PIETISTEHO PADESATEHO OSMEHO PRWNI STRZEDU W PUSTIE UMRZEL GEST UROZENY PAN RAFFAEL PODMANITZKY Z PODMANINA JEHOZ DUSSY PAN BUOH MILOSTIW RACZ BIETI.“⁸

Free translation:

In 1558 on first Wednesday in month died noble man Rafael Podmanitzky of Podmanin, God be merciful towards his soul.

In the old Roman Catholic presbytery in Považská Bystrica, there is a marble tablet which is believed to be a part of his sarcophagus, with an inscription in Latin from his wife Johanna Lomnická, found in 1889. It says:

MARMORE PHIDIACO QVISQVIS MONVMENTO SEPULCHRI

CLARA VIDES DVIBITANS CVIVS ID EXTET OPUS

SISTE GRADUM, FIDI CONGNOSCENS MVNUS AMORIS

DEPETVA DIGNVM POSTERRITATE CANI:

IONNA A LOMNICZ RAPHAELI NUPTA BARONI

MAGNIFICO STATVIT QVOD GENEROSA VIRO.

ILLUD, VT AETERNUM SIT ET INDELEBILE PIGNUS

⁸ Inscription on the epitaph of Rafaela Podmanického
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14424a.htm>

*CINIVGIS
ESIMIII
DVLCIS
AMORIS,
OPUS.*

*INCLYTA
MAVSOLI
CONIVNX
QVO
PECTORE
QVONDA*

*OSSA SVI
DOMINI
DEVENERAT
A FVIT.*

*HANC
QVICVNQ
FIDEM
GENEROSAE
HEROIDOS
ORNAS*

*SIC QVOQ
FIDA TVI SIT
TIBINUPTA
THORI.*

*Free
translation:*

*You who'll
see the
beauty of
this marble,
and are
looking for
an answer
whose
creation it
might be,
stand, and
you'll find
the gift of
the faithful*

and wholehearted love, worth to testify to next generations, which noble wife Johanna Lomnická dedicated to her loved husband, Baron Rafael, so that this marble, in its persistence, is a testament of everlasting love from his wife. For with what sentiment revered famous ancient Maurola to her husband, be that also to you faithful wife, you who praise faithfulness of this heroine.

Another fragment of his sarcophagus can be found in Dolna Suca, where it was placed after the rebuilding of the church in 1828. The translation says:

Here lies Rafael, baron from Podmanin, hero, fame and beauty of the house of Bystrica. He died peacefully after numerous dangers, reaching forty five years, surviving many battles, he went through many hazardous plays of destiny.

When courageous like Achilles, to prevent him from being overtaken by Mars, black death had taken him. Whoever likes strong fearless acts, say: rest peacefully his bones."

On March 13th 1560, two years after Rafael's death, the castle was bought by Gašpar Serédi, who left his mark with the reconstruction he made. Evidence of this reconstruction was still recognizable in the times when Alojz Mednansky wrote his book „*Malebná cesta dolu Váhom*”(The Colourful Journey Along Váh), which gives a clear picture of the region along the Vah river in the 19th century.

*"M*DO*GS*SEREDI*FIERI*FOECIT*ANNO*DI* 1**3."*

(*represents letters and numbers which were, at that time, unrecognizable. The date of the reconstruction can be easily guessed, because of the dating of his possession, the year of Serédi's death 1563)

After Serédi, the castle was held by another important family called Balassa who held the castle until 1860. The period of their reign saw much trouble. It was a time of great difficulty for the population. This resulted in the castle, being left to deteriorate, although it was often used for securing the valuables of the family.

Political and social unrest throughout the area found its mirror in problems among members of the family, which resulted in the building of three manor houses in the surrounding area, with two being built directly below the castle. The first in 1631, the second in 1676, and the third, with a tower, in the nearby village of Orlové in 1676. By 1667 the castle had been already deserted, but in 1671 the king's troops attacked it, because of the Imrich Balassa, who had taken part in the *Wesselényi uprising*. In 1674 all the weapons were transported from the castle to the new fortress in Leopoldov. In 1689 Adam Balassa participated in an uprising against the king, which resulted in all of his possessions being confiscated. This is the last record of the castle before it disintegrated into a complete ruin. The historians Kocis and Chury give us a description as follows: (*continuing by free translation*) According to this description the castle was made up of three parts, upper, middle and lower castle. In the middle castle there was a tank for water and another smaller object in which documents were stored. In the upper castle was a richly furnished room with a mantelpiece, several bedrooms, of one which had an ante-chamber and a second bedroom on the East was decorated with wood carvings. Other chamber had murals and windows with glass panes.

From one of
the rooms
stairs
descend to
the lower

inner courtyard, where there was a Loggia arcaded with wooden pillars. In the upper castle there was also a bakery, a wash-house and four bathrooms. In the northern part there was a drawbridge. In the lower part of the castle there was a place for soldiers. On the right side there was a room with a vault on which the date 1663 had been inscribed. At that time, the castle was in the possession of Valentin Balassa. Next to the room there was a water tank. In the chapel there was a wooden gallery with chairs for nobles. Unfortunately, the lower part

of the altar was already in bad condition. Next to the chapel there was a bigger room. However the most interesting building of the upper castle was a palace with a wooden attic and roundel. (*end of free translation*) .

Even though the castle had been destroyed in 1698 by the troops of Leopold I. to prevent it from being the epicentre of further uprisings, its ruins served as refuge for Gabriel Balassa and his family, who still owned part of it because of his support for the King. The second part of the castle was in the possession of Peter Szaparay. As fire destroyed Orlove manor house it must have been repaired, though the tower was never reconstructed. The house was rebuilt in Baroque style. In 1722 Peter Szaparay built a newer manor house under the castle in Rococo style, to serve him and his wife as a comfortable dwelling. He gives an order to build a baroque chapel of Saint Helena, on the hill, nowadays called Rozkvet.

In 1808 Alojz Mednansky visited the castle, apart from the mentioned inscription he also noted a different one directly above the entrance.

“ SPERA:IN DEO:ET:NOLI:PECCARE:QV:IPSE:ENUTRIET:TE:VIDET:DEVS:IA “

Free translation is as follows: *“Faith in God and avoiding dirty deeds will teach you to see Him.”*

In the nineteenth century Jozsef Konyoky and Gyula Kéry documented landmarks in Považské Podhradie in a register of all historical monuments in the country which was being compiled as a result of the wave of romanticism in the world.

Konyoky left sketches of the castle, while Kéry left photos of the decoration of the rooms of the older manor house. In the middle room, walls were covered with plant decoration and with poetry in the Hungarian language. The verse described the qualities which ‘make a good woman’. In the second room there were twelve coats of arms, among which were caryatids (A supporting column sculptured in the form of a draped female figure.)

At the beginning of the 20th century vibrations from a nearby stone quarry further damaged the castle

In 1919 *Klub slovenských turistov (Slovak tourist organisation)* bought the castle and between 1935 and 1936 some minor repair works were performed on the castle. After that time, the castle was largely ignored, until it was bought in 2006 by the town Považská Bystrica.

From that time a voluntary organisation *Združenie hradu Bystrica (Organisation of castle Bystrica)* was established to preserve and perform essential maintenance works on the castle.