

A historical survey of the Corunca Castle, Romania, based on the military survey maps and present-day measurements

Lóránt KOVÁCS

Sapientia University, Faculty of Technical and Human Sciences,
Department of Horticulture, Târgu-Mureş, Corunca 1/C,
kovacs_lorant@yahoo.com

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Abstract. Corunca is situated at 4.5 km SE from Târgu-Mureş, near the Salt Stream, the Bozeni Stream, and the Vaţman Stream. Its area is inhabited from ancient times. Both prehistoric and Roman findings were reported to have been found within the village boundaries. Its neighbouring medieval village, Sárvári, perished in the 16th century, while Kisernye was devastated by Turkish troops in 1661. The settlement was first recorded in 1332 as *Korunka*. The Reformed Church was built between 1769 and 1778, while its spire dates from 1793. The earlier church was surrounded by high protective walls, which were demolished in 1769.

The extremely ruinous castle with its neoclassical façade and a couple of neighbouring farm buildings appear on the left side of the European route E60 travelling from Târgu-Mureş to Sighişoara. Today, this is a barren place, although once it was surrounded by a grove the size of 120 cadastral acres [2].

During the reign of John Sigismund Zápolya, Prince of Transylvania and ruler of a part of the Kingdom of Hungary, the village belonged to Thomas Mihályfy. The castle was ravaged in 1562 by the revolted Szeklers. After the fall of the Mihályfy family, the Chancellor of Transylvania, Farkas Kovacsóczi owned the estate, which later came down to the Tholdalagi family. The Tholdalagi family belongs to one of the great magnate families of Transylvania, with nicknames deriving from Ercea and Iclod, but originating from Toldal, Mureş County, Romania – their ancient demesne from the 16th century. Mihály I. Tholdalagi (1580–1673), one of the wisest diplomats in the Principality, reshaped the original building to an impressive castle in the 1630s, whose size and adjoining buildings are described in the Inventory dating from 1680. The first members of the Tholdalagi family came to Transylvania from Hungary. According to the family traditions, and also mentioned in their Certificate of Count, their ancestor is the extinguished Alaghi family member, András, who obtained Toldalag settlement together with its neighbouring Ercse in

1453; hence the nickname “Ercsei”. Thus, Mihály Tholdalagi’s parents were Balázs from Gáldtő and Borbála Bessenyei [1].

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1. The history of the castle and its garden

The ancient castle was ravaged by the Szeklers during the reign of John Sigismund Zápolya, Prince of Transylvania, in 1562. More than a century later, Mihály Tholdalagi, the new owner of the estate, had it completely rebuilt. Ferenc Tholdalagi, one of the descendants of the Count, extended it in 1829, based on the plans of Joseph Weixlbraun. The building, having a U-shaped ground plan, was completed with a 50-metre neoclassical façade, with semi-cylindrical, coffering, barrel vault style passage in its median avant-corps of the central axis. The proportional dimensions and subdued decorations place the castle among the most beautiful classicist-style castles (Fig. 1.) [3].



Figure 1. The Corunca Castle from 1930

The demesne in Corunca was much more beautiful and modern than the one in Mănăstirea, Cluj County, Romania. The castle and its outbuildings stand out in the first military survey map (1769–1773), and the park was already taking shape (Fig. 2). A full picture is offered about the castle and its beautiful English park by the second (1806–1869) and third (1869–1874) military survey maps.



Figure 2. The military map of Corunca (Josephinische Aufnahme 1769–1773)

The dwelling-house was designed by an uncle, Colonel Roke-pine Baron, resulting in a very simple outlook, but a highly comfortable interior. Tall rooms with high ceilings, modernly furnished, with parquet, painted walls, even wallpaper in two of the rooms, and the furniture coming from the Vienna of the 1830s. Men-servants in livery adorned with braids formed in the family crests, except for my father's hussar bodyguard dressed in full regalia resembling a general of the cavalry. The English garden was the most beautiful place, larger in size than the one in Schönbrunn, with artistically planted gorgeous bushes and trees. The heydays of Corunca were in the years of 1846–1848. My father's fortune was really huge then... Although the household was smaller than at my grandfather's, it was more refined and elegant. First and second cook, three kitchen boys, a royal servant from my mother, my father's hussar bodyguard, three lackeys, a Viennese chief gardener, four gardeners, a Hungarian vegetable gardener, and Gipsies when needed for pottering in the garden. It was a splendid park! I can see it even now, and feel the warm, stuffy evenings laden with the scent of magnolia and dates. Nowhere else have I seen so many magnolia trees or heard so many nightingales sing as in that garden. My father used to go to Vienna almost each year; though it took as much as 8 to 10 days to get there, he would still set off. These trips refined his taste; he kept bringing something new for the house and the garden... And he did a great job. Due to his office, he had to stay a lot at home managing his demesne in an exemplary way, my good old mother being so happy. Hardly ever

did we have disquiet later, when my father spent time in Vienna more than with us, thus abandoning his wife, family and the estate, which fell into decadence. As a husband and father, he always behaved gallantly [4].

The rooms were decorated with contemporary furniture, mirrors, chandeliers, and carpets. The last of the white porcelain stoves was saved by Gyula Keresztes, a retired architect from Târgu-Mureș, who brought it to the county seat's Registry of Marriages. The library of the Tholdalagi Castle was considered to be one of the largest libraries in Transylvania, visited with pleasure by noblemen from Târgu-Mureș. The shelves were filled with incunabula and book rarities. A part of the collection is stored in the Teleki–Bolyai Library in Târgu-Mureș. Art historian József Bíró writes in his book *Transylvanian Castles (Erdélyi kastélyok)* that the quondam crypt of the Tholdalagi family built in the hill-side was destroyed during a landslide, and it was rebuilt in 1806. The Hungarian and Latin inscriptions of the tombstones, marble tables, and sarcophagus were copied and published in full by historian Mihály Spiellmann. Found accidentally, the family crypt completes the records of the family generations and last but not least it increases the monument value of the Corunca Castle. The last resident of the castle was Count József Tholdalagi, who left the premises in 1944, which was later used as a grain storage facility.

The present state of the castle and its garden

The Corunca Castle will soon enrich the list of perished architectural heritage unless restoration starts – concludes Gyula Keresztes, speaking of the castle rebuilt almost two hundred years ago.

Once the castle was surrounded by a grove of deciduous trees on 120 cadastral acres with a fish pond. Today, these are replaced by mounds, rich soup of mud, and a depressing industrial plant built in the Communist era. The memory of Count Mihály Tholdalagi is only preserved in the history, the local school bearing his name, and by the ruins. New inhabitants with their castles spinning around on a golden duck's leg in this “urbanizing” settlement may not even know that the land once belonged to one of the most talented diplomats at the end of the 17th-century Transylvania. The expert, together with his colleague Dezső Csákány, did anything possible in the last three or four years so that the residence of Count Tholdalagi should have a different fate than the ones in Sânpaul, Boiu, or Cristești. As he said, countless promises had been made by the new French owner of the building and his representative, who mostly stayed in Romania. What is more, Alain Vigneau, who runs the ProMobDecor joiner-shop in the outbuildings, requested expert opinions twice on behalf of Chair Claude Moscovici, and then asked for a price quote for design. However, as time went by, both the art historian and the local mayor came

to the conclusion that the French owner was either frivolous or did not have financial resources.

The park completely disappeared around the castle, and the land was ploughed. The landmark is inexistent, evidenced by the attached geodetic survey (Fig. 3).

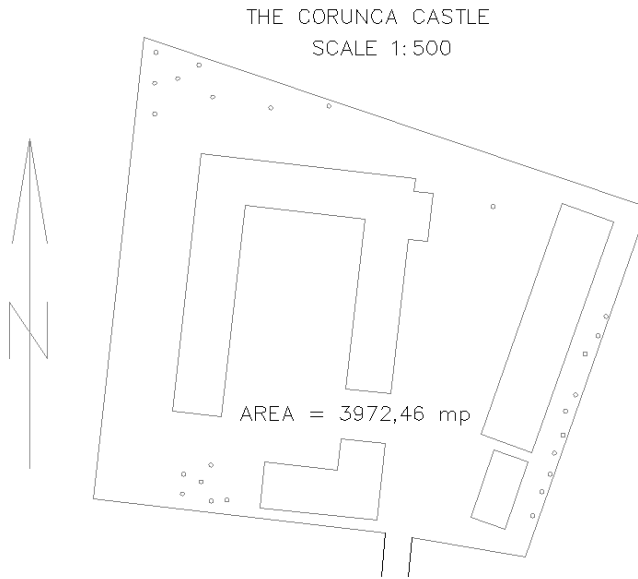


Figure 3. The actual plan of the castle and its garden

According to Géza Keresztes, both the owner and the local government are to be blamed for the present state. A member of the National Committee for Historical Monuments, Sibiu Regional Committee, stated that under the acting laws the owner could have been forced by the mayor's office to conserve the building, and upon infringement a fine could have been imposed. According to the Historical Monuments Act, if nothing happens after several warnings, the municipality can recommend its nationalization. Although the site is in poor condition, having lost its horticultural importance, the historical significance of the place is beyond any doubt. No one would say that medieval castle ruins are not to be protected just because they are in ruins. However, the true value of the Corunca Castle lies in the well-established position of the Tholdalagi family's historical significance. Therefore, it should be considered a monument and it is a public interest to save it.

References

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