

# MATHIAS SANDORF

## PART 1

### CHAPTER 2

#### Count Sandorf

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The Hungarians are the Magyars that settled in Hungary towards the end of the ninth century. They now number more than five million, or one third of the population. Are they of Spanish, Egyptian or Tartar origin? Are they descendants of Attila and the Huns, or of the Finns of the North? This is a controversial question, and of little consequence! What is important, however, is that they are surely neither Slavs nor Germans, and have no desire to become so.

These Hungarians preserved their own religion and they showed themselves fervent Catholics from the eleventh century on, a period during which they accepted the new faith. Furthermore, they still speak their old language, a language soft and musical, that lends itself to all the charm of poetical cadence, less rich than the German, but more concise, more energetic; a language which between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries became the national language, and took the place of Latin in laws and edicts.

On the 21st of January, 1699, the Treaty of Carlowitz gave Hungary and Transylvania to Austria.

Twenty years later, the Pragmatic Sanction solemnly declared that the States of Austria-Hungary were from then on indivisible, and it established that in the absence of sons, daughters were to succeed to the crown according to the rule of primogeniture. And it was because of this new statute that in 1749 Maria Theresa ascended the throne of her father, Charles VI, the last of the male line of the House of Austria.

The Hungarians had to yield to the superior force; but even one hundred and fifty years later, some people, among all ranks of society, refused to acknowledge neither the Pragmatic Sanction nor the Treaty of Carlowitz.

At the time this story opens there was a Hungarian of noble birth whose whole life was ruled by these feelings: the hatred of everything German, and the hope of again giving his country autonomy. While still young, he had known Kossuth, and although because of his social position and education, he differed from him on important political questions, he could not help but admire the patriot's nobility of heart.

Count Mathias Sandorf lived in an old castle of feudal origin in the county of Transylvania in the district of Fagaras. Built on one of the northern spurs of those Eastern Carpathians which form the frontier between Transylvania and Wallachia, the castle in all its savage pride rose above this precipitous chain of mountains, a stronghold of the type that conspirators could defend strongly to the last.

Some neighboring mines, rich in iron and copper ore and conscientiously exploited, accounted for a considerable fortune for the owner of the Castle of Artenak. The estate made up a part of the district of Fagaras, whose population numbers at least 72,000 inhabitants. These people, being town inhabitants and farmers, were obvious in their unbounded devotion and limitless gratitude to Count Sandorf in return for the constant good he was doing to the town. That castle, however, was kept under observation by the

Chancery of Hungary at Vienna, which was an office totally independent from other ministries of the empire. In high quarters the ideas of the master of Artenak were well known, and even if he was not to be feared personally, it was exactly these ideas that provoked concern.

Mathias Sandorf was then thirty-five years old. He was a man whose stature, which was above average height, indicated great muscular strength. Above his broad, powerful shoulders stood a well-shaped, noble-looking head. His tan, square looking face was of the pure Magyar type. The liveliness of his movements, the clearness of his speech, the firm and calm look of his eyes, the imperceptible quivering of his nostrils and lips, due to an active blood circulation, the constant smile, that unmistakable sign of good-nature, a certain playfulness in his gestures and speech, all indicated an open and generous disposition. It has been said that there are many similarities between the French and Magyar character. Count Sandorf was its living proof.

It is worth noting one of the most striking facets of his character: Count Sandorf not concerned with what affected him alone, capable of on occasion of dismissing offenses directed to him personally, up to now had never forgiven, and never would forgive any offense directed towards his friends. He was extremely fair and hated treachery. Because of this, he was somewhat impersonally implacable, and therefore did not leave all punishment in this world to God alone.

It must be said at this point that Mathias Sandorf received a very rigorous education. Instead of allowing himself to live a life of leisure that his riches could offer him, he had energetically followed his ambition, and devoted himself to the study of medicine and the physical sciences. He would have made an excellent doctor, had the necessities of life forced him to do so. He contented himself to be a very reputable chemist among the learned. The University of Pesth, the Academy of Sciences at Presburg, the Royal School of Mines at Chemnitz, and the Normal School at Temesvar, had all in turn counted him among their most assiduous pupils. His studious life had improved and intensified his natural gifts. It made him a man in the fullest meaning of the term. He was very highly regarded by all who knew him, and especially by his professors in the different schools and universities, who became his friends.

In bygone days in the castle of Artenak there was gaiety, noise, and activity. On this rugged ridge of the Carpathians the Transylvanian hunters met gladly. Many and dangerous hunting trips were organized, in which Count Sandorf sought to placate those instincts of confrontation in which he could not indulge in the field of politics. He kept himself out of the political stream, watching closely the course of events. He seemed only to care about a life spent between his studies and the indulgences that his fortune allowed him. In those days the Countess Rena Sandorf was still alive. She was the soul of these parties at Artenak. Fifteen months before this story begins, death had claimed her at the height of her youth and beauty, and no trace remained of her except a small two year old girl.

Count Sandorf felt the cruel blow very deeply. He was inconsolable. The castle became silent and deserted. From that day, under the shadow of profound grief, its master lived as if in a cloister. His whole life centered on his child, who was consigned to the charge of Rosena Lendek, the wife of the count's steward. This excellent woman, who was still young, decided to devote herself to the sole heiress of the Sandorfs, and dedicated herself to her with the attentions of a second mother.

During the first months of his widowhood, Mathias Sandorf never left the castle of Artenak. He hid and lived among the memories of the past. Then the idea that his country was reduced to a subjugated position in Europe started to dominate his thoughts.

The Franco-Italian war of 1859 struck a terrible blow at the power of Austria.

Seven years later, in 1866, the blow was followed by a still more terrible blow at Sadowa. Hungary felt she was bound to an Austria that was not only deprived of her Italian possessions but defeated on two sides, and subordinated to Germany. That is the reason that the Hungarians, having a feeling that cannot be explained reasonably because it is in the blood, felt humiliated. For them the victories at Custozza and Lissa were no compensation for the defeat at Sadowa.

During the following year, Count Sandorf carefully studied the political horizon, and began to believe that a separatist movement might just be successful.

The moment for action had come. On the 3rd of May of this year, 1867, he embraced his little daughter, whom he had left in the tender care of Rosena Lendeck, and, leaving his castle of Artenak, set out for Pesth, where he had put himself in touch with his friends and followers, and made certain preliminary arrangements. Then a few hours later he went to Trieste to wait for developments.

The place had become the main hub of the conspiracy, and from there Count Sandorf could pull all the strings. In this city it was possible for the leaders of the conspiracy to arouse less suspicion, and could act with more security and definitely with more freedom to succeed in their patriotic endeavors.

In Trieste lived two of Mathias Sandorf's most intimate friends. Driven by the same ideas, they were resolved to bring their patriotic act to its conclusion. Count Ladislas Zathmar and Professor Etienne Bathory were also Magyars of prominent birth. Both were a dozen years older than Mathias Sandorf, and were pretty much without any assets. One drew his slender revenues from a small estate in the county of Lipto, an area just beyond the Danube; the other was a professor of Physical Science in Trieste, and his only income was derived from his lecture fees.

Ladislas Zathmar lived in the house discovered on the Acquedotto by Sarcany and Zirone. It was an unpretentious place, which he put at the disposal of Mathias Sandorf during the time he was away from Artenak, that is to say, until the end of the projected movement, whenever that it may be. A Hungarian, Borik, aged about fifty-five, was the sole staff for the house. Borik was as much devoted to his master as Lendeck was to his.

Etienne Bathory occupied a similarly unpretentious dwelling on the Corso Stadion, not far from Count Zathmar's. Here his whole life revolved around his wife and his eight years old son Pierre.

Etienne Bathory was related, distantly but authentically, to the line of those Magyar princes who in the sixteenth century were on the throne of Transylvania. Since then, the family split apart and it was lost in its numberless ramifications, and it may seem strange that one of its last descendants should have become a simple professor of the academy at Presburg. Etienne Bathory, nevertheless, was a scientist of the first rank, one of those who live in retirement, but whose work renders them famous. *Inclusum labor illustrat* (the result of the labor edifies whoever is involved), the motto of the silkworm, might have been his. One day his political ideas, which he did not attempt to conceal, made it necessary for him to resign, and then, accompanied by his wife who courageously supported him during these ordeals, he came to live in Trieste and work as an unattached

professor.

It was in the house of Ladislas Zathmar that the three friends invariably met since the arrival of Count Sandorf, even though he conspicuously showed to occupy an apartment in the Palazzo Modello, presently the Hotel Delorme, on the Piazza Grande. The police had no suspicion that the house on the Acquedotto was the center of a conspiracy which included quite a few partisans in all the principal cities.

Ladislas Zathmar and Etienne Bathory became without a doubt Sandorf's most devoted aides. Like him, they realized that circumstances had become favorable for a movement which might restore Hungary to its former prominent place in Europe. They knew that by dedicating themselves to this project, they risked their lives, but this fact did not deter them from their intentions. The house in the Acquedotto had thus become the meeting place of the leaders of the conspiracy. Numbers of partisans, sent from different points of the kingdom, came there for advice and to receive their orders. A service of carrier pigeons, carriers of messages, established a means of rapid and safe communication between Trieste and the main towns of Hungary and Transylvania. This was used when it was necessary to send communications that could not be entrusted to the mail or telegraph. In short, every precaution had been taken with such care that the conspirators had not yet raised the least bit of suspicion.

Besides, as we know, the correspondence was coded in such a way that without the 'code key' the message was absolutely secure.

Three days after the arrival of the carrier pigeon, whose message had been intercepted by Sarcany, on the 21st of May, about eight o'clock in the evening, Ladislas Zathmar and Etienne Bathory were in the study, waiting for the return of Mathias Sandorf. His private affairs had recently forced the count to return to Transylvania and to Artenak. He also took the opportunity to consult with his friends at Klausenburg, the capital of the province, and he was to get back that very day, after he furnished them with the contents of the dispatch, of which Sarcany had made a copy.

After Count Sandorf's departure, other correspondence had been exchanged between Trieste and Buda, and many letters in code had arrived by pigeon. Ladislas Zathmar was even now busy deciphering of one of these cryptographic notes by means of an apparatus known as a "grating."



By means of a “grating.”

The dispatches were written according to a very simple method, that of the transposition of letters. In this system every letter retained its alphabetical meaning, that is to say, *b* signified *b*, *o* signified *o*, etc. But the letters were successively transposed according to the openings of a grating, which, when placed on the message, hid all the letters except the ones that were to be read.

These gratings have been used in the past, but they have been greatly improved by Colonel Fleissner, and now they seem to offer the best and surest means of generating an indecipherable cryptogram. In all the other systems of inversion, the ones with an invariable base, or with a simple key in which each letter is always represented by the same letter or sign; or the ones variable base, or a double key in which the alphabet varies with each letter; security is not assured. Experienced decipherers are capable of prodigiously decoding these, either with the aid of probability calculations, or merely by trial and error. All that has to be done is to find out the letters in the order of their repetition in the cryptogram, *e* being that most frequently employed in English, German, and French, *o* in Spanish, *a* in Russian, and *e* and *i* in Italian, and the meaning of the text soon becomes clear. There are very few cryptograms based on these methods which defy their clever decoding.

It would appear, therefore, that the best guarantee for indecipherability is offered by these gratings, or by ciphered dictionaries, codes, that is to say, or vocabularies in which certain common words represent fully formed sentences represented by numbers. But

these two systems have one huge drawback; they require absolute secrecy by the users, and the greatest care that the books or decoding apparatus should never get into the wrong hands. In effect, without the grating or code, the message would remain secret; but if the grating or the code is obtained, anyone could easily read the message.



They are all ready.

It was then by means of a grating, that is to say, a piece of cardboard, with cut outs in certain places, that Sandorf and his accomplices corresponded; but as an extra precaution, in case the gratings should be lost or stolen, every dispatch was destroyed immediately after being decoded. Therefore, there should have been no trace left of this conspiracy in which the greatest noblemen and magnates of Hungary were gambling their lives, together with representatives of the middle class and the common people.

Ladislav Zathmar had just burned the last dispatches, when there was a soft knock at the door of the study.

It was Borik introducing Count Mathias Sandorf, who had walked up from the nearest railway station.

Ladislav Zathmar immediately went to greet him.

“Your journey, Mathias?” he asked with the eagerness of a man who wished at the outset to be reassured.

“It was a success, Zathmar,” answered Sandorf. “I trust my Transylvanian friends, and we are assured of their assistance.”

“You gave them the dispatch which came from Pesth three days ago?” added Etienne

Bathory, who enjoyed such a deep friendship with Count Sandorf that he could address him informally.

“Yes Etienne,” answered Mathias Sandorf. “Yes, they have all been warned. They are all ready. They will rise at the first signal. In two hours we shall be masters of Buda and Pesth, in half a day we shall control the main counties on both sides of the Theiss, and before the day is out we shall control Transylvania and the rest of the lands presently under Austrian military control. And then eight millions of Hungarians will have regained their independence!”

“And the Legislative assembly?” asked Bathory.

“Our supporters form the majority,” answered Mathias Sandorf. “They will form the new Government, and control its direction. All will go smoothly and without incident, because the administration of the counties depends very little on the Crown, and the leaders have the police on their side.”

“How about the council of royally privileged deputies that presides over at Buda?” continued Ladislav Zathmar.

“The aristocracy and the council at Buda will immediately be put in such a position as to be powerless to act.”

“And unable to correspond with the Hungarian Chancery at Vienna?”

“Yes, everything is synchronized, and success is inevitable.”

“Success!” said Etienne Bathory.

“Yes, success!” answered Count Sandorf. “All the men in the army are of our blood, of Hungarian blood, and they are all for us and with us! Where is the descendant of the ancient Magyars whose heart will not rejoice at the sight of the banner of the Rodolphs and Corviniuses?”

Mathias Sandorf uttered these words in a tone of the purest patriotism.

“But,” he continued, “Until that time let us not overlook anything that would keep any suspicion away! If we are prudent, we will be stronger! Have you heard of anything suspicious in Trieste?”

“No,” replied Ladislav Zathmar. “Nothing is being discussed except for the projects in Pola, for which a great many workmen have been hired.”

In fact for fifteen years the Austrian Government, concerned with the possible loss of the Veneto region, a loss now realized, was planning of establishing in Pola, at the southern end of the Istrian peninsula, an immense arsenal and dockyard, so as to establish control over that whole end of the Adriatic. In spite of the protests of Trieste, whose maritime importance would then be diminished, the projects were being implemented at a feverish pace. Mathias Sandorf and his friends, therefore, were somewhat justified in their opinion that the people of Trieste would join them, in case the separatist movement spread to the city.

Up to the present the conspiracy for Hungarian autonomy had been well guarded. There was no reason to cause the police to suspect that the leaders of the conspiracy were assembled in the unpretentious house in the Acquadotto.

Everything possible seemed to have been done to ensure success, and all that remained was to wait for the opportune moment. The coded correspondence, at first very frequent, between Trieste and the principal cities of Hungary and Transylvania, had almost ceased. There were now few messages for the pigeons to carry, because the last plans had been completed. As a matter of fact, to ensure greater security, the dismantling of the pigeon

coop in Ladislas Zathmar's house was considered.

On the other hand, it has to be observed that as money is the soul of war, so it is of conspiracies. It is imperative that conspirators have ample funds available when the signal for the uprising is given. The conspirators were confident that they had enough funds available.



Two men were following them.

Although Ladislas Zathmar and Etienne Bathory could sacrifice their lives for their country, they could not sacrifice their fortunes, since their monetary resources were very meager. But Count Sandorf was immensely rich, and, in addition to his life, he had brought his whole fortune to help the cause. With the help of his steward, Lendeck, over many months he mortgaged his estates, and raised more than two millions florins, which is a considerable amount of money.

It was necessary that this money should always be available, and that he could withdraw it at any time. So he deposited it in his own name in one of the banks of Trieste, whose character was above suspicion and seemed very reliable. This bank was Toronthal's, the same bank that Sarcany and Zirone were talking about in the cemetery on the hill.

As will be seen in the course of this story, this fact will eventually have extremely grave consequences.

This money was discussed at the last meeting that Mathias Sandorf had with count Zathmar and Bathory. He told them that he intended to call on Toronthal, and give him notice that the cash should be available for immediate withdrawal.

In fact, recent events would have soon forced Count Sandorf to give the expected signal from Trieste, but even more because this very evening it seemed that Zathmar's house was disturbingly under surveillance.

About eight o'clock, as Count Sandorf and Etienne Bathory left the house, one to return to the Hotel Delorme, and the other to go back home to the Corso Stadion, they noticed two men watching them from the shadows and then following them at a discreet distance in such a way as to attempt to stay hidden.

To find out their motives, Mathias Sandorf and his companion boldly marched straight towards the suspicious characters, but having caught sight of them, the two stalkers disappeared at the farthest end of the Grand Canal around the corner of St. Antonio's Church, before it was possible to catch up to them.