



HAUS HIMMELFAHRT

Tradition: Transience matures into eternity

The hamlet of Himmelfahrt comprises 40 buildings. A church, a private chapel, a cemetery, a forest inn ("Schluff"), 3 farms ("Angler", "Ortner" and "Karler") as well as dozens of summer resort houses, all of which are under strict monument protection. There is even a miniature Art Nouveau railway station. And then there is the shooting range, an example of what Ascension has become known for, over the centuries: The original unique summer resort culture that took off in full swing in the 17th century, shaped the Belle Époque of Europe and which has persisted on this small, "heavenly" patch of earth to this day.

As early as the 16th century, patricians from Bolzano began to build villa-like summer houses on the outermost vantage point of the Ritten plateau to escape the heat in the Bolzano city basin. Because of the inversion in the valley, Bolzano is regularly one of the hottest summer towns in Italy! The "summer freshness" in the high altitude Maria-Himmelfahrt lasted exactly 72 days. On 29 June, St. Peter's and St. Paul's Day, the large families of Bolzano packed all their household goods, including sufficient linen, into chests and hauled them up with "the Penn" - a simple carrying platform pulled by oxen.

There, holidays were dedicated to pure culture: with books, games, afternoon siesta and walks. In short, idleness overlaid with idleness. Family friends from all over Europe were invited. This is how the summer resort culture came into being, which plays an important role in the cultural history of European tourism. Periodically moving from one's quarters in the city to one's country estate was already known among the nobility in antiquity. But the development of the summer resort culture in Maria-Himmelfahrt over 460 years ago shaped the concept of holidays in Europe. In the 19th century in particular, "summer resort" became a common word. The Brothers Grimm defined it in their well-known dictionary as a "recreational stay of the townspeople in the countryside at summer time" or "the need for the countryside shown by the townspeople in summer" ("Landlust").

Even today, the summer residences in Maria Himmelfahrt impress with their unity in diversity. All follow the same structure, all have beautifully painted wooden ceilings. And yet each one is different. One may be somewhat simpler and more rural, while the next more like a refined villa. The most imposing summer residence on the square is probably the (so-called) "Great Toggenburg House" (or "Aunt's House", as we always called it in the family). Today it belongs to my uncles Ulrich and Johannes and their children and is part of a group of 6 large and small buildings that belong to the Toggenburg family estate. Inside, it has magnificent frescoes that recall the heyday of Bolzano as a European trading metropolis. Between the Great Toggenburg House with its memorable, double-vaulted wooden shingle roof and the

House of the Ascension stands the "Little Toggenburg House". Here, too, the Austrian Baroque painter Ulrich Glatschnigg (1661-1722) colourfully painted the ceilings.

The shooting range is an octagonal pavilion dating from 1777, yet it is the "new" shooting range, as shooting previously took place in the neighbouring building. The Oberbozen shooting club is the oldest such club in South Tyrol, which is not surprising, as it saw the light of day as early as 1668. It became the focus for the "summer visitors" - i.e. citizens of Bolzano who had the means and the urge to create a unique refuge for themselves here.

The centre of social activity in "der Sommerfrisch" at that time was target shooting, where on high holidays, weddings, christenings and other special occasions, people shot at elaborately painted targets. Well over 100 such splendid targets still tell of the emperor's birthday, visits by the imperial household and other historical events (a book on the "Oberbozen shooting targets" is available in the fireplace room). In addition to target shooting, there were bocce tournaments (similar to the French "boules" or English "bowles"), bridge and tarot games, and of course the annual shooting gallery ball in honour of the emperor on his birthday. A strangely sophisticated hustle and bustle for what was actually a very lonely place. Contrasts that still make Assumption a fascinating place today. Even at the beginning of the third millennium, the Assumption has two faces: the romantic, quiet one in autumn, winter and spring and the lively one in summer. In August, the old summer resorts continue to fill up with the new generations of owner families, only for the shops to close again at the beginning of September, so that Assumption once again gently sinks back into its most beautiful season: the enchantingly colourful autumn, when peace and strength can best be recharged.

One of the few villa owners of Himmelfahrt who has always lived in Himmelfahrt all year round, like the local farmers, is our mother Assunta. Our 4 holiday flats "Assunta", "Paul", "Friedrich" and "Georg-Otto" are dedicated to her, her father Paul, grandfather Friedrich and great-grandfather Georg-Otto.

The Toggenburg family was first mentioned in 1044, which is why one of our cousin Eberhard's wines in Tuscany also bears the name "1044". The family originally comes from Switzerland, more precisely from the valley of the "Toggenburg", where they lived for centuries in the Toggenburg County. Compared to the neighbouring family, who lived on the "Habsburg" in nearby Aargau and soon made an international career for themselves, the Toggenburgs admittedly never rose above the status of provincial rulers. Nevertheless, they had a formative influence on Swiss local history.

In 1436, with the death of Friedrich VII of Toggenburg, the male line of the family died out. However, the name was carried on through an illegitimate line. Civil servants, lawyers and doctors made careers in Switzerland and in the imperial and royal monarchy. His Excellency Friedrich Count Toggenburg (2 July 1866 – 8 March 1956) stood out as governor of Tyrol and one of the last ministers of the interior of the Danube Monarchy, as he was still politically active in the young Republic of Italy and sat as a representative of South Tyrol in the Italian parliament. Friedrich rendered outstanding services to South Tyrolean autonomy, which today is respected throughout Europe, if not worldwide, as a model for resolving minority conflicts (reading tip: anyone interested in minorities can take a look at the "ABC of European Minority Protection", which can be found in the library).

The Toggenburgs have been at home in South Tyrol for just under 2 centuries. With Georg Otto, they inherited the rich trading family of the von Menz. Their fortune included not only the summer residences in Maria Himmelfahrt, but also the town palace in Bolzano, where the family still lives. Whether the "new" Toggenburgs - documented since the beginning of the 16th century - are actually related in a direct line to the "old" Toggenburgs, who were first mentioned in 1044 and died out 4 centuries later, is not undisputed among historians. We take this genealogical question calmly. After all, the splendour of this old name is not without its stains, for the old Toggenburgs were regarded as pugnacious robber barons who knew how to accumulate possessions quite ruthlessly: "Murder and manslaughter were not uncommon among the Toggenburg dynasty", as one historical treatise puts it. It even went as far as fratricide: Count Diethelm I had his brother Friedrich I beaten to death on 12 December 1226 after hypocritically inviting him to his castle.

However, the reputation of the "new Toggenburgs" lies in completely different disciplines. By virtue of the aforementioned family inheritance in South Tyrol at the beginning of the 19th century, they were also relatively wealthy to begin with. But business seemed to be less in their blood than politics. The quasi "resurrected" family attracted attention by following political careers, civil service careers and their social commitments. In the last half century, this also manifested itself in their involvement with the Malteser Hilfsdienst (Knights of Malta Relief Service Charity). Its Tyrolean branch was co-founded by our uncles Johannes and Ulrich in the seventies, and the following generations were always active in voluntary work for the benefit of people with disabilities. Another example is our cousin Christoph Toggenburg, who as a young man rode no less than 9,300 km by bicycle from India back to his Swiss homeland to raise money for leprosy projects in India (recommended reading: Bike for Help, F. A. Herbig Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2003, available in the fireplace room).

That the family also knew how to accommodate guests is shown by the long list of guests who have inscribed their names on the window-sills of the family home. From princesses to artists to secret agents, guests of all kinds can be found there. Yes, even the most powerful wizard of Middle Earth - Saruman alias Sir Christopher Lee - has immortalised himself here on a summer holiday on the Ritten.

In any case, tradition abounds in Ascension. The ever-present legacy of the past is not oppressive, offering a spectrum of different colours, so that it gives everyone a chance to relate to the past and thus cheat transience. Not for nothing is it written on von Menz's gravestone in the middle of the Himmelfahrt Forest: "Transience matures into eternity"!

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