FORUM HISTORIAE Journal for History and Related Disciplines
ISSN 1337-6861

Forum Historiae, 2025, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 49–65

www.forumhistoriae.sk

The Construction of a New Theatre in Bratislava by George Csáky According to Documents of the Hungarian Royal Governor's Council

Tomáš Janura

Keywords
Bratislava, theatre, George Csáky, Hungarian Royal Governor's Council

DOI
10.31577/forhist.2025.19.2.4

Author
Tomáš Janura
Historický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied, v. v. i.
Klemensova 19
P. O. Box 198
814 99 Bratislava
Slovakia
Email: histjanu@savba.sk
0000-0002-1586-7112

Cite
JANURA, Tomáš. The Construction of a New Theatre in Bratislava by George Csáky According to Documents of the Hungarian Royal Governor's Council. In *Forum Historiae*, 2025, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 49–65, doi: 10.31577/forhist.2025.19.2.4

Abstract

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The creation of a new theatre for performances in Bratislava by George Csáky in 1775–1776 has been the subject of research for several authors, most of them focusing on the building itself, the repertoire and the theatre directors. The present study, however, deals with the process of the establishment of this theatre from the point of view of the official documents of the Hungarian Royal Governor's Council. From the institution's perspective, the most important issues appear to have been the general safety of the new building in terms of fire protection, financial aspects, the location of the theatre, cooperation between the city and George Csáky throughout its construction and finally, the compensation of Franz Krimer, lessee of the old theatre in Grünstübel-Haus. Important new findings here include an analysis of the owners of the loge boxes in Csáky's theatre in relation to their social career and property assets. It is equally important to shed light on the financial background of the theatre performances and carnival entertainment during Krimer's time, as it is clearly evident that the theatre performances accounted for less than a third of his total revenue. Therefore, even in the case of Csáky's theatre, the construction of a Redoute or a ballroom was planned to make the theatre worth opening at all.

At the time of the construction of the new theatre, Bratislava was the capital of Hungary and the seat of the two most important provincial authorities, the Consilium Regium Locumtenentiale Hungaricum (CRLH; Ungarische königliche Statthalterei; Hungarian Royal Governor's Council) and the Hungarian Chamber. Moreover, from 1765 onwards, the castle served as the residence of Governor Albert Casimir of Saxony, Duke of Teschen, and his wife, the Austrian Archduchess Maria Christina, daughter of the Empress Dowager and Queen of Hungary Maria Theresa. The presence of the court made the city even more attractive as a residence for the Hungarian aristocracy from all over the kingdom, which brought an increased interest in culture, including theatre and music. Amongst such a cosmopolitan environment, the old theatre, which was developed under the initiative of Eudemio Castiglioni through a conversion of Grünstübel-Haus (Green House), began to seem small and not emblematic

This work was supported by VEGA, Grant No. 2/0024/22 The Theatre as the Venue and Tool of Social Change and is a partial result of the APVV, Grant No. 22-0319, At the Castle and Underneath.

enough. Therefore, Count George Csáky came up with the idea of building a new theatre in an undeveloped area.

In the literature, George Csáky's personality as well as his intention to build a new theatre has been recognised as an expression of Csáky's nobility and altruism. However, such a virtuous assessment only considers the architectural significance of the theatre building and its musical repertoire. On this basis alone, some authors have turned uncritically on Csáky.[1] Although the accounting books of the construction and operation of the theatre have not survived, records from the CRLH indicate that Csáky did not build the theatre to offer the public a new, emblematic cultural venue, but rather for business reasons. By the second half of the 18th century, most of the European aristocrats had already abandoned the model of ostentatious representation, disregarding any impact on their family's finances. For this reason, Csáky was primarily concerned with the profitability of the project so as not to bring himself and his descendants and relatives to the brink of bankruptcy. As such, he joined forces with other aristocrats to finance the construction of the theatre by selling the loge boxes.

Current State of Research and Context of the Sources

Csáky's new theatre has received well-deserved attention in specialist literature, especially in musicological studies.[2] The present article, however, does not intend to revisit previously published information on the theatre directors and repertoire, but rather to look at the process of the building's creation, which has so far only been treated in detail by Raluca Mureşan.[3]

Milena Cesnaková-Michalcová has studied the history of German theatre in Slovakia with a focus on Bratislava, and has also looked at Csáky's theatre. She claims that the city did not have the financial means to build a performance venue and therefore offered George Csáky the opportunity to carry out the project. She also mentioned a connection between the construction and the removal of moats, ramparts and the city gates.[4] However, as the author did not rely on archival sources, she was unaware of Csáky's role in the new urbanistic concept of the city. The current state of understanding, however, is clear in the fact that Csáky was certainly not asked by the city to undertake the construction.

In his book titled *Terpsichora Istropolitana*, Miklós Vojtek based passages about George Csáky mainly on research literature and the *Preßburger Zeitung*,

1 VOJTEK, Miklós. *Terpsichora Istropolitana. Tanec* v *Prešporku 18. storočia.* Bratislava : Divadelný ústav Bratislava, 2009, pp. 119; CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ, Milena. *Geschichte des deutschsprachigen Theaters in der Slowakei.* Köln : Böhlau Verlag, 1997, pp. 56–57.

2 CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ 1997, pp. 56–57; LASLAVÍKOVÁ, Jana. Hudba v Mestskom divadle. In KALINAYOVÁ-BARTOVÁ, Jana et al. (eds.) *Hudobné dejiny Bratislavy. Od stredoveku po rok 1918.* Bratislava : Ars Musica, 2019, pp. 304–308; LASLAVÍKOVÁ, Jana. Od Streleckej priekopy k prvej kamennej divadelnej budove. Divadelný život v Bratislave v 18. storočí a jeho vývoj do prvej polovice 19. storočia. In FEJTOVÁ, Olga – MAŘÍKOVÁ, Martina – PEŠEK, Jiří (eds.) *Město se baví – od středověku do roku 1848. Praha jako centrum kulturního života.* Praha : Archív hlavního města Prahy, 2021, pp. 131–136.

3 MUREȘAN, Raluca. *Bâtir un « Temple des Muses » : Une histoire social, culturelle et politique de l'architecture des théâtres publics dans la partie orientale de la Monarchie des Habsbourg (vers 1770–1812)* (Ph.D. thesis). Paris : Sorbonne Université, 2020, pp. 233–242, 358–365, 651–668, 861–872.

4 CESNAKOVÁ-MICHALCOVÁ 1997, pp. 56–57.

but did not conduct any additional archival research. Based on information that was not verified by direct sources, he assumed that the building cost 36 thousand Florins. A lot of space was devoted to a description of the interior and exterior appearance of the theatre, comparing it with other theatre buildings of the time. Additionally, he portrayed Csáky's personality rather uncritically, as if he had had the theatre built for purely idealistic reasons.[5]

In her history of music in Bratislava, Jana Laslavíková also dealt with Csáky's theatre in a separate chapter on music in the municipal theatre. Since her text is part of a comprehensive work, she summarised only basic data about the time of its construction and also carried over some inaccurate information from the literature, namely that the building was built by the Municipal Council. In part, she also used written sources from the Bratislava City Archives about the sale of hereditary theatre boxes. Subsequently, however, she focused on the directors and the theatre repertoire.[6]

In a more comprehensive study of theatre life in Bratislava, Laslavíková returned to Csáky's theatre and touched upon the formation process of the new brick-and-mortar theatre. She noted that its creation was closely linked to the gradual filling in of the city's moats, the demolition of ramparts and gates, and the development of the city's new urban concept. Laslavíková also pointed out an important fact in the whole process, namely the compensation of the lessee of the old theatre in Grünstübel-Haus, Franz Krimer, and the transfer of building materials and furnishings from the old theatre to Csáky's project. Based on her own archival research, she was the first to publish a list of box owners, but it was based on records from a later period,[7] so the original purchasers of the boxes at the time the theatre was built were not accurately logged. These discrepancies are mentioned in detail at the end of this study.

In her dissertation, Raluca Mureşan devoted considerable space to the construction of the Csáky theatre in a broader Central-European context. She was the first to emphasise the importance of George Csáky's official career, the choice of location for the new theatre and Csáky's active involvement in the process of connecting the inner city inside the ramparts with the suburbs. During this period, other European theatres also became part of new urbanistic concepts. Mureşan was the first to draw attention to Csáky's conflict of interest in the whole affair. In the form of appendices, she published a basic chronology of the construction of the theatre and the full text of Csáky's proposal, which later became part of the minutes of the meeting of the Joint Economic Committee held on 8 March 1774. She also transcribed a letter from the CRLH to the city, dated 9 September 1774, concerning the construction of the theatre.[8]

5 VOJTEK 2009, pp. 109–119.
6 LASLAVÍKOVÁ 2019, pp. 304–308.
7 LASLAVÍKOVÁ 2021, pp. 131–136. The same author discussed the construction of Csáky's theatre in connection with its replacement by a new building. LASLAVÍKOVÁ, Jana. "Done! The Splendid Work, the New Ornament of Our Beautiful, Ancient Coronation City is Completed!" Identity Construction of the Urban Elite Illustrated on the Example of the Municipal Theatre in Pressburg. In *Historický časopis*, 2020, vol. 68, no. 6, pp. 947–975.
8 MUREŞAN 2020, pp. 233–242, 358–365, 651–668, 861–872.

The above overview of the published literature on the Csáky theatre might suggest that it is pointless to revisit the topic. The initial task was to analyse the process of creation of the theatre on the basis of the surviving records of the Csáky family. The aim of the research was to discover relevant correspondence, writings and accounts, but despite efforts to locate anything in the archival collections in Budapest, Vienna or Levoča, it turns out that these kinds of documents are unlikely to have survived. For these reasons, the text of Raluca Mureşan's dissertation was analysed to take a closer look at the sources she refers to from among the fonds of the CRLH. However, as Mureşan focused on the construction of theatres in a larger area of the Austrian monarchy, she did not go into much detail in the case of Bratislava.

Nevertheless, despite fears of merely summarising Mureşan's conclusions and facts already known from other works, new, hitherto undiscussed information surfaced. A new goal was therefore set, to examine what was important in the official process led by the CRLH. This made it possible to uncover an important issue related to the nerve centre of any enterprise, financing, but also George Csáky's position in society and within the CRLH. An analysis of the property, kinship and social statuses of the owners of the hereditary boxes in the new theatre became an equally important part of the present study.

Since the entire text of this paper is based on official documents of the CRLH, it was difficult to assess their interpretative possibilities. Csáky's accounts and personal correspondence could not be found, and so it was not possible to confront these types of sources with the only known documents on the construction of the new theatre produced during official activities.

For this reason, it is impossible to determine precisely whether the files of the CRLH captured all aspects of the negotiations between the parties in detail. Nor can the question be answered whether any documents were discarded or censored in the filing process so as not to archive any "inappropriate" documents that might reveal corruption or any backroom agreements.

For the chosen topic of study, it may seem unnecessary to highlight the career and property status of the box owners in the new theatre. However, without a detailed knowledge of this clientele, it is difficult to realise how exactly the city found itself in a disadvantageous position due to the box owners position amongst the elite of Hungary in terms of office and property and moreover, they were connected by close family ties. The CRLH, which handled the entire construction process, was in an open conflict of interest, as its councillors had a direct interest in the erection of the new theatre and in favouring the interests of George Csáky.

The text also discusses Franz Krimer's accounts regarding the operation of the theatre and carnival entertainment in detail. This disclosure is of great significance as no specific accounts of an 18th-century theatre operator from the territory of Hungary have been published so far. It was only this revenue and expenditure summary that made it possible to confirm unambiguously that putting on theatrical performances throughout the year never generated as much profit as a few days of ball season in January and February did. In fact,

literature on music history mostly emphasises the repertoire of the theatres but ignores the economic dimension that, without commercial balls, the repertoire would have certainly been reduced to merely a few performances.

Resolutions of the CRLH Joint Economic Committee of 8 March 1774 as the Cornerstone of the Construction Process of the New Theatre

In official documents, the process of founding the new theatre can be traced back to the beginning of March 1774. However, surviving documents also show that the idea of creating a new theatre venue must have arisen earlier in George Csáky's mind. Unfortunately, despite efforts to find relevant details in Csáky's correspondence, it was not possible to clarify when exactly he began efforts to replace the existing theatre in Grünstübel-Haus with a new building in an undeveloped area. The examined documents reveal that a meeting of the Joint Economic Committee of the CRLH was held as early as 8 March 1774 to discuss the plan to build a new theatre and ballroom in Bratislava.[9]

According to the minutes of the meeting,[10] a new theatre building was in the public interest for "greater safety and convenience" in order to prevent "impending multiple dangers" within the premises of the existing theatre. The following deficiencies should have been perfectly clear to every visitor upon entering the existing structure: the theatre was small and unrepresentative, and there was not enough space on the stage for the sets or even for the actors themselves; the cramped conditions did not allow room for stage or fire technicians, lighting technicians, or attendants in the individual boxes; the building had poor fire safety and lacked escape routes. On the basis of these points, the committee concluded that the construction of a new theatre was necessary due to a growing demand in Bratislava.[11]

The CRLH also adopted a position on the issue of building a Redoute, or ballroom.[12] This addition was considered equally important, since the city had leased a privilege to hold carnival balls and did not have a proper venue for them. At the time, balls were held in the Provincial House. It would be more than desirable to have a ballroom in the same building as the theatre, because theatre performances were best attended during carnival season. The owner or tenant of the theatre would suffer great losses if performances that took place on the same days as the balls had to be cancelled leaving only the balls, even though both events were his biggest sources of income throughout the year. Furthermore, if sets, costumes and benches had to be moved from the theatre to the ballroom, this would incur additional costs and could lead to damage during their transportation.[13]

9 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár – Országos Levéltár (MNL – OL), Budapest, Hungary, Fonds (F.) C 42, Magyar Királyi Helytartótanács, Acta miscellanea, File Number (No.) 5506, Doboz (D.) 225, Fasciculus (Fasc.) 66, Numero (No.) 356.

10 In the minutes, the CRLH discussed all the points proposed to them by George Csáky himself on an unspecified day in March. All the points included in the minutes were also published by Raluca Mureşan in her dissertation. MUREŞAN 2020, pp. 861–868.

11 MUREŞAN 2020, pp. 861–868.

12 For more on the interior of the Redoute, see: LASLAVÍKOVÁ, Jana. Theater Decorations in Pressburg in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. In *Music in Art: International Journal for Music Iconography,* 2020, vol. 45, no. 1/2, pp. 155–192.

13 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5506, D. 225.

From a financial point of view, CRLH representatives considered the construction of a ballroom to be essential in order to generate a regular and stable income for the city. However, in view of the city's other expenditures and its tax burden, the CRLH did not recommend the Municipal Council take on the financial burden of the construction. The committee suggested leaving the matter to a selected entrepreneur who would obtain the protection of the imperial court and co-operate with the city on the entire project. At the same time, this businessman was to be exempt from paying taxes for the specified years until construction was completed.[14]

As for the city's income, it received 500 Florins annual rent when the theatre in Grünstübel-Haus was leased to Eudemio Castiglioni and 830 Florins under lessee Franz Krimer. However, the CRLH pointed out that Castiglioni had not paid any rent or royalties from the proceeds of the performances in the first few years of his lease because he had covered the construction costs himself. CRLH representatives believed that the actual annual loss for the city was only 400 Florins, which could be offset by returning two houses to the city[15] worth 40 thousand Florins, at the end of the stipulated period, as they could then be leased for an annual rent of 2 000 Florins.[16]

To ensure that the city would not be additionally affected by the increased costs of building a theatre, the CRLH proposed several clauses as to how the construction of the theatre should be carried out. According to the first, the city would transfer all usable iron, wood, and benches from the existing theatre to the entrepreneur free of charge. Since the city had its own quarries and forests, the Municipal Council would not incur any great expense, as stated in the second clause, by delivering stones and wood for the foundations of the theatre and 30 tree trunks for the boxes. The third clause stipulated that the city would provide the developer with land, free of buildings, at a size corresponding to the proposed floor plan of the new theatre.[17]

According to the fourth clause, the city could still lease the existing theatre to the then lessee for another two years until the new theatre was completed. At the end of the two years, the lease would pass to the entrepreneur, who would not pay anything during the first two years in compensation for covering the construction costs of the new theatre. Since construction would cost about 40 thousand Florins, according to the fifth clause, the entrepreneur would be exempt from taxes for 20 years. After 16 years, however, the city would have the option of taking possession of the theatre building for 16 thousand Florins.[18]

The sixth and seventh clauses were important for the protection of the rights of the entrepreneur. If war broke out during the 20 years in question, or if circumstances arose in which theatre performances and carnival entertainment were prohibited, or if a theatre company from the imperial court performed in the city during the sessions of the imperial diet, the city was to record the exact

14 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5506, D. 225.
15 It is not entirely clear which two houses the CRLH had in mind, but they were apparently those that housed the theatre in Grünstübel-Haus.
16 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5506, D. 225.
17 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5506, D. 225.
18 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5506, D. 225.

length of time they stayed. This was to be done because the freedoms that were granted for the 20-year grace period would be extended by this documented period. The seventh clause guaranteed that the performances and the carnival entertainment would continue to be controlled by the city commissioner as before. At the same time, the city was to ensure that only the theatre lessee himself could organise balls, *Kreuzer* plays and rope climbing in return for money.[19]

The eighth clause dealt with the possibility of the theatre being destroyed by fire or natural disaster. If a fire inside the theatre was caused by the entrepreneur's people, he would be obliged to pay for all repairs out of his own pocket. Similarly, the city itself could build a new theatre at the earliest opportunity at its own expense, and the entrepreneur's rights would not apply at all in this case. If the theatre building were damaged by lightning, an earthquake or a flood, or if a third party started a fire, the city would also be entitled to pay for the repairs from its own funds and would then take over the building. However, if it were the entrepreneur who had renovated the building, the 20-year period would be extended until the repairs were completed.[20]

According to the ninth clause, a separate, safe, comfortable, heated box, with a separate entrance and access staircase should be built in the theatre for the members of the imperial court. The 10th clause set out the rules for the other boxes. The CRLH allowed the entrepreneur to sell 14 or 15 boxes to the hereditary property of noble families.

The 11th clause stipulated that a contract should be concluded between the city and the entrepreneur that clearly defined the obligations of both parties. According to the 12th clause, the entrepreneur would undertake to build a theatre, a Redoute and a small hall, as well as rooms for props according to the plans. After 16 or 20 years, the entrepreneur would be obliged to leave the theatre to the city, but would have the right of first refusal if the city auctioned off the theatre after acquiring it. In accordance with the earlier theatre privileges, the 13th clause required the contract to state that the entrepreneur would contribute five percent of the proceeds from theatre performances and carnival entertainment to the poverty fund. The 14th clause of the contract contained the prohibition of holding performances and balls on days specified in the earlier theatre privileges. According to the 15th clause, the staff of the theatre would continue to be paid by the entrepreneur as before, but in case of disputes or infractions, staff members would be subject to the jurisdiction of the city.[21]

In the 16th clause, the representatives of the CRLH commented on the location of the planned theatre. They considered it best to build the new theatre in front of Fischertor (Fishermen's Gate), either in the moat or in a straight line between the customs house and the shed of the Kreützer Comödie Hüthen (Kreuzer theatre). There would be plenty of space for carriages there, the building would be accessible from all four sides and the public would have no issues.[22]

19 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5506, D. 225.
20 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5506, D. 225.
21 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5506, D. 225.
22 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5506, D. 225.

The First Steps in the Construction Process of the Theatre

A thorough knowledge of the conclusions of the Economic Committee is very important to understand the whole process of the theatre's creation. After further discussions with all parties involved, their protocol served as the basis for the final decision of the sovereign Maria Theresa. On 10 March 1774, the CRLH sent a letter to the city with the minutes of the committee meeting asking for comments on the individual points. The letter no longer referred to an entrepreneur in general terms, as had been the case before, but informed the city that the person in question was George Csáky.[23]

The lessee of the existing theatre, Franz Krimer, also learned of the intention to build a new theatre and appealed to the city on 3 May 1774 to defend his rights, as he had been granted a licence to hold theatre performances and balls for six years, which did not expire until 7 April 1778.[24] The city was already preparing its response to the CRLH and sent it two days later, on 5 May. City representatives agreed to a meeting with George Csáky, but they did not like the fact that the city would lose the annual rent of 830 Florins for the last four years of Krimer's licence. At the same time, they concluded that the city treasury would lose 16 600 Florins if Csáky did not pay rent for the first 20 years of the theatre's operation.[25]

After the city's statement had been sent, the Joint Economic Committee of the CRLH met again on 17 May 1774 to discuss the topics of the previous meeting and to add further items. They amended the first clause to the effect that all the benches and the wooden and iron parts should remain in the existing theatre until the new one was completed, and that an inventory should be made of them to prevent any from being stolen.

The third clause concerning the allocation of land for the building now specified where the city and Csáky thought it should be, although the final decision was to be made later. The city wanted to allocate land in front of Fischertor to the west. Csáky, however, wanted to build on the eastern side of the gate, near the Notre-Dame Convent, because he knew from CRLH meetings that a spacious square was to be built to the west of it. He argued that at the location proposed to him, the theatre would only be eight to ten fathoms from the surrounding buildings, a distance that would not prevent a fire from spreading.[26]

The fourth clause was significantly amended by new conditions. If a new theatre were built within two years, the lessee of the existing theatre would receive compensation from George Csáky for the last few years. Since Csáky was committed to completing the new theatre within six years, he decided to raise funds by selling 15 loge boxes to a variety of magnates for their family legacies. However, if these aristocrats died over the years or changed their minds, the funds they had invested would be transferred to the city's public care, along the lines of the imperial theatre, and could only be disposed of after consultation

23 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 1129, D. 225, Fasc. 66, No. 356.
24 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 2997, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.
25 MNL – OL, F. Magyar Királyi Kancellária regisztratúrája, Acta Generalia A 39, No. 2997, D. 250, Year 1774.
26 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 2179, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.

with the family of the box holder. The Economic Committee also reserved the right to interfere in the negotiation process for compensation of lessee Franz Krimer. When the new theatre was completed, the city could then sell or rent the old building.

The seventh clause was supplemented by a provision guaranteeing the city's inhabitants the sale of tickets for theatre and dance performances and requiring Csáky not to demand rent from the city for the theatre for the stipulated 20-year period.

In the eighth clause, a statement was added that the city should not suffer any damage whatsoever through the fault of Csáky or his people during the operation of the theatre. Finally, the committee recommended the conclusion of a contract in accordance with the provisions of the two meetings of the Economic Committee and the expected resolution of the sovereign.[27]

On 24 May 1774, the CRLH sent a letter to the sovereign with the resolutions of the two meetings of the Joint Committee, along with the letter from the city dated 5 May 1774, asking Maria Theresa to take a stance on the matter.[28] She issued a decree in Vienna on 26 August 1774, in which she agreed with the proposed points and chose the location to the east of Fischertor. She also ordered that the previous lessee, Franz Krimer, should only be compensated for the last few years of his lease. Contrary to the proposals of the CRLH, the city would conduct negotiations with him alone. Since no agreement was reached, the Municipal Council should only pay compensation to Krimer for the last two years. As for the discussions on the seventh point, the city should also send its commissioners to negotiate with George Csáky. Finally, the sovereign Maria Theresa demanded that "good manners" should be followed during the theatre's operation under police supervision.[29]

On 9 September 1774, the CRLH informed George Csáky, the Municipal Council and the Hungarian Chamber, who were also taking part in the negotiations, of Maria Theresa's order.[30] The letter from the CRLH to the city[31] was more detailed and repeated some of the arguments previously mentioned in the resolutions of the meeting of the Economic Committee of 17 May 1774. On the first point, CRLH representatives added that the existing contract with Krimer must not impede the provision of benches and iron and wooden objects from the old theatre. The city must ensure that these items are kept in good condition and not damaged from the time of the last performance in the old theatre until the new theatre was built. They must also not be stolen, which is why a detailed inventory should be made. With respect to the initially unresolved question of the location of the theatre in the third clause, the CRLH announced an agreement with the sovereign that it would be on the east side of the gate. A provision was added to the seventh clause stating that a commissioner or municipal councillor responsible for overseeing police matters and "good manners" would be granted free admission to the theatre. With regard to Franz

27 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 2179, D. 226.
28 MNL – OL, F. A 39, No. 2997, D. 250.
29 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 3989, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.
30 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 3989, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.
31 The letter was published by Raluca Mureşan. MUREŞAN 2020, pp. 868–872.

Krimer, they added to the sovereign's decree that his lease could only be valid for another two years.[32]

Although Maria Theresa ordered the Municipal Council to negotiate with Franz Krimer, city representatives were in no hurry to resolve the matter. For this reason, on 5 October 1774, George Csáky wrote a letter to the CRLH from Beltinci (today in Slovenia), which the council registered on 14 October, demanding that the city respond to Krimer's demands for compensation and for the provision of building materials, as the start of construction depended on the latter. Csáky hoped to place the first orders in autumn.[33]

Regardless of Csáky's message, the CRLH itself wrote to the city on 10 October, asking the municipality to submit a proposal for implementing the sovereign's decree within 15 days of receiving it. On 10 October, the CRLH also informed Maria Theresa that the city had not yet responded and that a deadline had therefore been set for it to do so. Since the Municipal Council failed to meet the deadline, the CRLH again demanded compliance with the sovereign's order in a letter dated 7 November 1774.[34]

The Box Owners and their Social Status

The sale of boxes to finance the construction of the theatre was crucial for Csáky's project. The circle of box owners reveals the theatre builder's important network among the Hungarian nobility elite, both in terms of their official careers and their property status. This essential aspect has been neglected in the specialist literature so far, although it certainly also had a major influence on Maria Theresa's decision to grant permission to build the new theatre. Moreover, the presence of aristocrats increased the prestige of the future theatre performances themselves.

The sale of the loges was stipulated in the 10th point of the meeting of the Joint Economic Committee on 8 March 1774. To settle this question in concrete terms, another meeting of the Joint Economic Committee was held by the CRLH on 15 November 1774. George Csáky guaranteed the members that he would use the money from the sale of the boxes only for construction costs. The magnates were also to receive written confirmation of the specific amount of payment. Csáky declared that he would take full responsibility for the project and would also ensure communication between himself, the nobles and the city. To avoid complaints from the city, Csáky was obliged to hand over all documents relating to the purchase of the boxes shortly before or after completion of the theatre. The committee also instructed the Municipal Council to make copies of these documents and to pass them to Csáky.[35]

Two days later, on 17 November 1774, the CRLH wrote to the Municipal Council asking for confirmation of the sale of 15 boxes to aristocrats as soon as possible.[36] Although 15 boxes were originally advertised, only 12 were sold in the end and on 26 November, Csáky handed over the guarantee contracts of

32 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 3989, D. 226.
33 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 3989, D. 226.
34 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 3989, D. 226.
35 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5116, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.
36 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5116, D. 226.

their sale and the receipts to the city. On the same day, the Municipal Council made copies of all the documents and returned them to Csáky.[37]

George Csáky received a total of 13 thousand Rhenish Florins from the sale of 12 boxes. The price of each one varied, presumably depending on the distance from the stage and their size (see Table 1).[38] If we look at the box owners in terms of their careers, they were mainly members of two institutions that were based directly in Bratislava, but whose activities covered the entire territory of Hungary. One third of the buyers were representatives of the CRLH, which had approved the construction process. Only two aristocrats from the circle of representatives of the Cancellaria Aulica Hungarica (ungarische Hofkanzlei, Hungarian Court Chancellery) in Vienna co-financed the theatre (see Table 2).[39]

These box holders also belonged to the kingdom's elite by virtue of the property they held. According to the results of the *urbarium* regulation, it was evident that nine from the group were among the 100 richest secular aristocrats in all of Hungary (see Table 3).[40]

Apart from belonging to the Hungarian aristocracy and the country's civil service and military elite, George Csáky and the box owners, with the exception of Francis Balassa, were also related to each other to a greater or lesser extent.[41]

Determining the Amount of Compensation for Franz Krimer, Lessee of the Old Theatre

It was only on 27 November, more than a month after the CRLH's first notification on 10 October 1774, that the city fulfilled the request for information regarding the compensation of Franz Krimer. After further negotiations, George Csáky agreed to pay Krimer a fair price for the usable benches and the wood and iron parts from the old theatre. Krimer demanded compensation of 1 500 Florins for each year, while the city proposed only 100 ducats. At the same time, the Municipal Council confirmed that it had received the docu-

37 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5612 and 5298, Fasc. 66, No. 356.

38 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5612, D. 226.

39 EMBER, Győző. *A m. kir. Helytartótanács ügyintézésének története 1724–1848.* Budapest : A M. Kir. Országos Levéltár Kiadványa, 1940, pp. 199, 200; KÖKÉNYESI, Zsolt. *Az udvar vonzásában. A magyar főnemesség bécsi integrációjának színterei (1711–1765).* Budapest : ĽHarmattan, 2021, pp. 483, 485; SIMON, István – KÉSMÁRKY, István. *Pozsony vármegye nemes családjai.* Budapest : Heraldika Kiadó, 2019, pp. 77, 111.

40 FÓNAGY, Zoltán. *A nemesi birtokviszonyok az úrbérrendezés korában.* Budapest : MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, 2013, pp. 90–92.

41 Firstly, there were the Csáky brothers, George and John Nepomuk, whose cousin was Emeric Csáky. The first wife of Anthony Csáky's first wife was George Csáky's first cousin, and she was the sister of John Nepomuk Erdődy, who was the brother of Christoph Erdődy. John Nepomuk Csáky's sister-in-law was a cousin of John Illésházy, whose brother-in-law was John Nepomuk Herberstein. After his second marriage, Emeric Csáky's mother Anne Mary Zichy married her nephew Gabriel Eszterházy, who was the brother-in-law of Anthony (II) Grassalkovich. One of the latter's brothers-in-law was Anthony Eszterházy. Emeric Csáky's sister-in-law Julie Erdődy was a daughter of Leopold Pálffy's cousin. After the theatre was built, the daughter of Grassalkovich married the son of Francis Esterházy and the sister of Francis Zichy married John Nepomuk Csáky. SZLUHA, Márton. *Szepes vármegye nemes családjai.* Budapest : Heraldika Kiadó, 2013, pp. 48–50, 52, 53; KÉSMÁRKY, István – SIMON, István – PÁLMÁNY, Béla. *Bars és Hont vármegyei nemes családok.* Budapest : Heraldika Kiadó, 2020, p. 18; KÉSMÁRKY – SIMON 2019, pp. 77, 82, 83, 88–90, 111, 185–187, 246, 247.

ments relating to the sale of boxes from Csáky the day before, 26 November, and had made copies of them.[42]

Franz Krimer and his partner Joseph Schwartz were not willing to accept this amount. They considered it to be too low and on 3 December 1774, they sent a letter to the CRLH demanding compensation for the previous two years, as they had a lease agreement for six years but were unable to hold theatre performances or carnival entertainment in the last two years due to the opening of the new theatre. They thought that their annual compensation should be 300 ducats.[43] Just two days later, on 5 December 1774, the CRLH wrote to the city about the complaint they had received from Krimer and Schwartz demanding that they should be heard and that an agreement should be reached, to be approved by the representatives of the CRLH. If no agreement could be reached, the CRLH would settle everything. At the end of its letter, the CRLH called on the Municipal Council to speed up the process of concluding the contract for the new theatre with George Csáky.[44]

Seeking to prove that his claims for a higher annual compensation were justified, on 14 or 15 December 1774, Franz Krimer sent a letter to the city with a summary of his bookkeeping from the prior two years, from 1 January 1773 to 31 December 1774. From today's perspective, this is a very significant document, as no other 18th-century accounting books have been discovered to date. The figures reveal a very significant fact: theatre performances never made more money than a mere few days of carnival entertainment. The books show that the income from the theatre performances for the years 1773 and 1774 amounted to 1 747 Rhenish Florins (see Tables 4 and 5).[45]

After Krimer submitted his books to the Municipal Council, the city wrote a response to the CRLH in the matter of Franz Krimer on 17 December 1774. After several rounds of negotiation, the two parties finally agreed that the lessee should receive an annual compensation of 700 Rhenish Florins. The representatives of the city enclosed copies of the documents on the sale of the boxes to the Hungarian magnates and promised to comply with all the clauses of the planned contract with George Csáky for the lease of the theatre under construction. They also mentioned that the Municipal Council had received the designs[46] of the new theatre and the Redoute and would submit them to Maria Theresa for approval. In response, on 22 December 1774, the CRLH informed the sovereign of the agreed 700 Rhenish Florins annual compensation and sent her the relevant documents for the issue of a specific decree.[47]

Developments in 1775

By early 1775, it was obvious that the theatre should be built near the Notre Dame Convent (Convent of Our Lady), despite the mother superior's, Augustina Schrenk, appeal to the CRLH on 12 January 1775 to build the theatre

42 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5298, D. 226.
43 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5355, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.
44 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 8355, D. 226. Fasc. 66, No. 356.
45 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5612, D. 226.
46 Unfortunately, this enclosure has not survived with the file.
47 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5612, D. 226.

elsewhere. She justified her request by saying that the nuns would be disturbed in their prayers, the youth would be corrupted and the night's rest lost.[48] Her complaint went unanswered and in the course of the year, the CRLH was mainly concerned with practical issues related to the construction of the theatre and the compensation of Franz Krimer, since everything took a very long time.

In the first five months of 1775, no progress was made in the official proceedings in the matter of Franz Krimer's compensation or the conclusion of a contract between the city and George Csáky. Csáky then made a verbal proposal to the CRLH that it should appeal to Maria Theresa to make a concrete decision. He justified his insistence by saying that he had already invested thousands of Florins s of his own money, as well as the box money in preparing the theatre and in the necessary building materials. However, the investment had not been paid off, and aside from that, the two-year deadline for building the theatre and settling the matter with the previous lessee of the theatre had already expired. For this reason, on 26 May 1775, the CRLH wrote to Maria Theresa, asking, in the name of Csáky and with the "public welfare" in mind, for a statement on the amount of compensation for Krimer and for approval of the contract between Csáky and the city. The previous documents were also reaffirmed.[49]

On 12 June 1775, Maria Theresa issued a decree to the CRLH, in which she approved both the two-year compensation for Franz Krimer in the amount of 1 400 Rhenish Florins and the contract between the city and George Csáky for construction of the theatre. In its letter of 19 June, the CRLH confirmed the acceptance of the sovereign's order and informed her that it would draw the attention of both the Municipal Council and Csáky to everything and ensure that the city would cooperate more effectively and intensively with Csáky in delivering the building's foundation stones to the construction site and laying them. It would also ensure that the contract between the city and Csáky was approved by the Hungarian Chamber. On the same day that the CRLH wrote to Maria Theresa, the council also sent a letter to Csáky in which it announced that the sovereign would approve the design of the theatre. In a letter to the city, the CRLH added that the Municipal Council should compensate Krimer from its own funds. The city was to support Csáky and not hinder the extraction of the required amount of stones for the foundations of the building, while Csáky was to pay for their transportation.[50]

On 12 July 1775, the city replied to the CRLH letter, objecting to some of its decisions. The Municipal Council pointed out that it had not negotiated with Krimer in its own name, but on behalf of George Csáky, and had regularly informed him of progress. The city representatives continued to be reluctant to pay the lessee's compensation from the city treasury in the amount of two years' rent. They pointed out that the city would also lose its annual income of 830 Rhenish Florins from renting the theatre, while Csáky would not pay the 700 Rhenish Florins rent for two years. Furthermore, the city would also lose

48 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 353, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.
49 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 5612, D. 226.
50 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 2836, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.

3 060 Rhenish Florins during these two years. In their opinion, it was extremely in question whether taking over the theatre after 20 years would actually be beneficial for the city.[51]

Sometime on 21 July 1775, George Csáky apparently sent a note to the CRLH stating that he had decided to build a theatre in 1774 "out of love for the people and also with their safety in mind." He expressed his dissatisfaction with the fact that the city was constantly raising objections, thereby dragging out the construction process and making it more expensive for him due to the rising interest on the loan. Csáky did not like the fact that the Municipal Council refused to terminate the contract with Krimer despite the orders issued. Furthermore, the city wanted to delegate the compensation of the lessee to Csáky, but Krimer continued to refuse to agree to the deal. Due to the constant procrastination in the matter, not only Csáky's "good faith," but even the "public good" was at risk. In conclusion, Csáky recalled that by building a theatre, he was also exposing his heirs to financial risk and he expected the higher circles to intervene for the sake of the "public good."[52]

As a result of procedures that had already been approved by higher circles, and persuaded by Csáky's note, the CRLH sent a rather sharp letter to the city on 27 July 1775 asking the Municipal Council if it knew at all that Csáky was building a new theatre for reasons of public safety and that the building would become the property of the city after 20 years. The council members wondered if the city was aware of the fact that it had to pay Franz Krimer for the last two years. Since the city was dragging out the entire process with constant objections, the CRLH ordered the city to pay Krimer the compensation from the city's treasury within eight days of the delivery of the decision. For the rest, the representatives of the city were supposed to be quick and helpful and mine enough stones for construction of the foundation.[53] However, the city refused to compensate Krimer despite these new orders, and nothing more was discussed in the official proceedings that year.

Developments in 1776

At the beginning of 1776, the city had still not paid Franz Krimer compensation for the last two years of his lease. The situation came to a head as, according to the agreements, Krimer would have to cede the right to theatre performances and carnival entertainment to George Csáky on 6 April 1776. On 8 February 1776, Csáky wrote an indignant note to the city, reminding them that on 9 February he would draw up a contract with the future theatre director for the following winter.[54]

Ten days later, on 16 February 1776, city representatives formulated their response to Csáky. They were aware that Csáky would take over the lease on 7 April 1776 for 20 years, but they wanted to conclude separate bilateral contracts with all three parties, including Krimer, before signing the contract.

51 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 2836, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.
52 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 3540, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.
53 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 3328, D. 226.
54 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 1104, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.

Furthermore, the city wanted to explicitly state in its contract with Csáky that he would pay Krimer and remind him that, according to their verbal agreements, Csáky himself had undertaken to pay the compensation from his own funds.[55]

Since Krimer did not receive any compensation despite the decisions in place, he submitted a complaint to the CRLH on 21 February 1776.[56] The very next day, 22 February 1776, the CRLH wrote to the city asking why it had still not paid Krimer.[57]

Four days later, on 26 February 1776, the city received Csáky's reply in the form of another note in response to the city's earlier reply. Csáky was not at all pleased that his obligation to pay Krimer was included in his contract with the city. Although there would be no theatre performances the following summer, except for the Kreutzer Hütte, the theatre would be in operation during the winter season, in accordance with the contract already concluded with Csáky's theatre director. The old theatre thus became useless, and the city was to transfer its furnishings to Csáky. In conclusion, Csáky reminded them that the city had still not provided the agreed upon 30 whole sturdy oak trunks for the loge boxes free of charge.[58]

In its reply to the CRLH on 29 February 1776, the city again refused to pay Krimer compensation. The Municipal Council did not pay anything even after Krimer and his partner Joseph Schwarz ceded the theatre rights to George Csáky on 6 April 1776. Krimer and Schwarz therefore sent a letter of complaint to the CRLH on 18 August 1776. On 19 August, the CRLH addressed a letter to the city asking it why it had not paid the 700 Rhenish Florins for the first year and whether it would also include interest on the unpaid amount.[59]

Just as the city ignored its obligation to pay compensation, it was also not very cooperative in the construction of the new theatre. According to Csáky's oral report on 2 September 1776, the CRLH wrote another letter to the city. Since most of the new theatre was almost completed, the Municipal Council had to order the final demolition of the side walls of the bridge leading from Fischertor over the moat. The moat on the side of the new theatre had already been filled in and the walls protruded over the square and the street in front of the theatre, blocking carts and carriages. At the same time, they were to use the building material thus obtained to vault the still open channel and to lay it underground for hygienic and aesthetic reasons. The city was also to move the two stone statues on the walls at the bridge entrance to another location. In addition, there were four or five wooden stalls selling fruit, vegetables and ice cream at the bridge entrance. These were to be moved to the right of the gate towards the city wall.[60] On the square in front of the theatre, the Municipal Council should ensure that no water remained there after rainfall, but that it would flow into newly created channels. The guards at Fischertor should be

55 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 4423, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.
56 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 1104, D. 226.
57 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 1104, D. 226.
58 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 4423, D. 226.
59 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 4423, D. 226.
60 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 4726, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.

instructed to pour the soil and cement that had been brought out of the city into the already almost completely filled ditch on the east side, thus raising the road between the rampart and the new theatre. All this work was to be organised by the city so that it would be completed by the Feast of St Michael on 29 September. The "little comedy in the wooden theatre called the summer theatre,"[61] which was located in the moat behind the new theatre in the direction of Lorenzertor (Lawrence Gate), was to be demolished at the end of the season as the existing square was to be enlarged and made more magnificent.[62]

The city replied on 9 September to the letter of the CRLH of 19 August 1776 regarding the non-payment of compensation to Franz Krimer for the first year. The Municipal Council reiterated that it had no intention of paying.[63] Although performances had already begun in the new theatre on 9 November 1776, the city continued to refuse to pay compensation to Krimer and Schwartz.[64] However, it is not clear from the examined materials who ultimately paid the compensation, whether Csáky or the city.

Conclusion

The above account of the negotiations regarding the theatre construction uncovers several important facts. At first glance, it is obvious that there was a conflict of interest in the entire official procedure between the CRLH and the city. This arose from the fact that George Csáky himself was a member of the CRLH from 1772 to 1783. Furthermore, the meetings of the Joint Economic Committee of 8 March, 17 May and 15 November 1774 were chaired by George Csáky's close relative, Emeric Csáky.[65] Although George Csáky did not participate in these negotiations, he certainly knew everything that would be discussed there in advance and could have influenced the final decisions in his favour and against the city. Raluca Mureșan's study also shows that Csáky was actively involved in the negotiations of the CRLH on the new urbanistic concept for connecting the city centre within the ramparts to the suburbs. He also chaired some of the committee meetings that decided on the whole procedure. Since the new theatre was one of the results of this new concept, a further conflict of interest arose in the approval process by the CRLH.[66]

The conflict of interest was perhaps most evident in the matter of compensation for the lessee of the old theatre, Franz Krimer, and his partner Joseph Schwartz. The minutes of the meeting of the Joint Economic Committee on 17 May 1774 initially stipulated that George Csáky should pay compensation to Krimer for the last two years of his lease. However, apparently due to the links between Csáky and the new owners of the boxes, Maria Theresa herself later decided on 26 August 1774 that the compensation should be paid by the

61 "comedia parva in theatro ligneo sic dicta aestivali."
62 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 4726, D. 226.
63 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 4817, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356.
64 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 967, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356; LASLAVÍKOVÁ 2019, p. 304.
65 MNL – OL, F. C 42, File No. 2179, 5116, and 5506, D. 226, Fasc. 66, No. 356; File No. 5506; EMBER 1940, p. 200.
66 MUREȘAN, Raluca. La question de la « ville-résidence », « ville-capitale » et « ville de couronnement » dans la Hongrie de Marie-Thérese et le projet d'extension de la ville de Presbourg des années 1774–1779. In *Cornova,* 2020, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 14–17.

city from its own funds. Although the Municipal Council was ignored in this matter, it refused to pay, repeatedly invoking the original resolution of the Joint Economic Committee. Since no other documents appear to have survived, it is unclear who ultimately paid the 1 400 Rhenish Florins, Csáky or the city.

Jana Laslavíková named 15 aristocrats as loge box owners at the time of the construction of the new theatre, although contemporary documents show that only 12 boxes were sold. This discrepancy could be due to the fact that she worked with archival files that were written in the 1870s. Furthermore, Csáky himself automatically inherited a box, and as the builder, he did not sell a box to himself. When we compare the documents published by Laslavíková with the names mentioned in this study, it turns out that 10 persons are identical, only Louis Csáky, Clara Castiglioni, George Apponyi, Charles Andrássy and Nicholas Forgách were not included in the original list.[67] Since Louis Csáky was the son of George Csáky, the other aristocrats may also have been relatives of the original buyers or may have acquired the boxes from their previous owners through later purchase or inheritance.

Finally, the importance of the hitherto unpublished accounting books of Franz Krimer should also be emphasised. They make it clear that he would have earned significantly less without organising balls during the carnival season. In two years, Krimer's income amounted to 9 066 Rhenish Florins and 51 kreuzer, 77% of which, i.e. 7 015 Rhenish Florins and 51 kreuzer, came from carnival entertainment. In these two years, Krimer's expenses amounted to 6 181 Rhenish Florins and 42 kreuzer, so his net income from organising theatre performances and balls was 2 885 Rhenish Florins and nine kreuzer. It is therefore not surprising that a Redoute—a ballroom—was also to become an important part of the new theatre building.

67 LASLAVÍKOVÁ 2021, pp. 134, 135.