

Károly Pál Pálffy and the Dear “Familia”

Pálffy Family Disputes in the Mid-Eighteenth Century Based on the Family Documents¹

Anna Fundárková 

Institute of History of Slovak Academy of Sciences, 814 99 Bratislava,
Klemensova 19, Slovakia; annafund@gmail.com

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Abstract. The Pálffys were among the wealthiest and most influential families in the Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy. The family owed its arrival in the political, economic, and social elite to Miklós Pálffy (1552–1600), the “hero of Győr.” His descendants obtained the highest offices in Hungary—Pál Pálffy (1592–1653) became chief justice and palatine—and filled important positions in the Imperial Court in Vienna (Pál Pálffy became a member of the Privy Council). In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Pálffys excelled primarily in military service; however, multiple wars led to the near extinction of the male branch of the family as numerous young Pálffy men lost their lives on the battlefield. Despite these serious losses, the family managed to preserve its prominent position in the Kingdom of Hungary and the Viennese court: Palatines Miklós Pálffy and János Pálffy belonged to the innermost circle of advisers to Charles III and Maria Theresa. Maintaining appearances in court, however, was enormously costly for the Pálffy family. Moreover, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the family procured their largest estates; in the eighteenth century, rather than acquiring estates, the family faced a mounting burden of debt. János Pálffy attempted to solve the problem in his will by changing the legal status of the central estate, the castle of Červený Kameň (Vöröskő, Rotenstein), to an entail (mostly referred to as *Fideicommissum* in European legal terminology). The result was decades of strife amongst his descendants, who did not find the entailment of Červený Kameň personally advantageous since the property could not be divided or alienated. The Pálffy family lawsuits were not unique in the eighteenth century; during the same period, the Zichys were also embroiled in family litigation. This study examines the longstanding feud that began in 1749 through the lens of family letters, providing a perspective on family history and contemporary attitudes. This study is part of wider research on the history of lawsuits and makes it possible to place the eighteenth-century legal disputes of the Hungarian nobility in a broader Central European and even European context.

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Keywords: eighteenth century, Hungarian aristocracy, family history, property suits, family feuds, family relations

Introduction

At the end of the sixteenth century, the Pálffy family rose to become one of the most influential and wealthiest aristocratic families in the Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy. The achievements of Miklós Pálffy (1552–1600), the “hero of Győr,” earned the family the offices of Lord Lieutenant (in the sources referred to as *supremus comes*) of Pozsony County and hereditary captain-general of Bratislava (Pozsony, Pressburg) castle. Thanks to their marriage policies, the Pálffys were among Hungarian aristocratic families with extensive kinship ties in the Viennese court in the early seventeenth century, a circumstance that increased the influence and respect they were afforded in both the Kingdom of Hungary and the Empire. Pál Pálffy (1592–1653) acquired the country’s most distinguished offices: he headed the Hungarian Chamber for nearly two decades and served as Lord Chief Justice from 1646 to 1649, with his political career culminating in his appointment as palatine of Hungary. He also carved out an exceptional career in the Viennese Imperial Court: in 1646 he became a member of the Privy Council.² Subsequent generations of Pálffys also enjoyed enormous success as politicians, military leaders, and diplomats. In the first half of the eighteenth century, the career trajectories of Palatines János Pálffy and Miklós Pálffy distinguished them from their contemporaries. From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, however, their many successes, grandeur, and luster were gradually overshadowed by an “expensive and unwise lawsuit.”³

The main player in the family’s protracted feud was Károly Pál Engelbert Pálffy (1697–1774), the second son of János Pálffy (V). From his father, he had inherited the office of lord lieutenant of Pozsony County as well as the title of captain-general of Bratislava Castle. He also obtained the title of Privy Councilor in the Viennese royal court, became a member of the Imperial War Council and was appointed master doorward. Furthermore, he had a distinguished military career and rose to the rank of field marshal. Károly Pál Pálffy was married three times: first to Countess Maria Stubenberg, and after her death to Jozefa Berger. Widowed twice, he married Maria Elizabeth Starhemberg, lady-in-waiting to Maria Theresa.⁴ His three marriages produced four daughters and one son, Pál Pálffy, who died in

2 About Pál Pálffy’s role played in the Viennese Privy Council, see: Fundárková, *Ein ungarischer Aristokrat am Wiener Hof*.

3 Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to Imre Batthyány, January 14, 1761. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy (Depositum), A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 8, record no. 28.

4 Autobiographical details: Jedlicska, *Eredeti részletek*, 603.

1750. His favorite residence was Kráľová pri Senci (Királyfa, Königseiden), where he could have whiled away his final years in peace and comfort had he not directed his time and energy to quarreling with his younger relatives.

The starting point of this paper is the material found in the Pálffy family archive in Vienna.⁵ The first and fundamental challenge in investigating this topic is primarily the lack of modern analyses of the eighteenth-century members of the Pálffy family.⁶ Furthermore, the archive in Vienna does not contain the litigation documentation; therefore, a broad and thorough exploration and analysis of the property dispute from a legal-historical perspective is still needed. At present, legal historian Zsuzsanna Peres, art historian Ingrid Halászová, and I are working on a monograph in which we explore the legal historical and art historical background of the case.⁷ The source material largely contains the family correspondence concerning the property disputes; these letters are thus an excellent place to begin collecting autobiographical information and answering questions about the aristocratic attitudes of the era. What strategies did the Pálffy family employ to resolve the arising disputes and conflicts? What was the nature of their network in the Kingdom of Hungary and the Viennese court—who belonged to their circle of patrons, friends, and supporters and, conversely, who were their “ill-wishers,” their enemies? How did the participants in the family quarrels behave amidst the tensions? How did the contemporary public respond to quarrels within a noble family?⁸

Act One of the Family Feud: Károly Pál Pálffy v. Rudolf Pálffy

In the numerous military conflicts in the first half of the eighteenth century, the male line of the Pálffy family just narrowly avoided extinction. At the end of the seventeenth century, the family split into two branches; the founder of the older

5 The sources are as follows: ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy (Depositum), record nos. 17, 18, 19, and 28.

6 This is why the brief autobiographies in the sources published by Pál Jedlicska served as the starting point, cp.: Jedlicska, *Eredeti részletek*, 603.

7 While the article was being written, the pandemic reached its peak and made archival research at home and abroad almost impossible. In connection with the pandemic situation, some of the questions raised in the article remained unanswered. As soon as the pandemic situation allows the continuation of the research, the members of the research group will continue with their research and place the topic in an interdisciplinary, family-historical, legal-historical and art-historical context.

I would hereby like to express my gratitude to Zsuzsanna Peres for her invaluable assistance and numerous consultations during the writing of the legal historical parts of this study.

8 I have discussed my research results thus far in two studies published in Slovak: Fundárková, “Kto myslí len na svoj osov, tomu nepatrí meno Pálffy...”; Fundárková, “Nežiadam o milosť, ide mi o spravodlivosť,” 120–37.

branch was Károly Pál’s uncle, Palatine Miklós (V) Pálffy (1657–1737). All four of his sons died in battle or from injuries suffered on the battlefield.⁹ The younger branch was founded by Károly Pál’s father, János (V) Pálffy. Besides Károly Pál, János had two other sons, both of whom were killed in battle: Miklós József (1699–1734) and János Pálffy (†1717).¹⁰ Neither had any children. Therefore, the success of Lipót Pálffy, one of Palatine Miklós (V)’s sons, in having three sons of his own—Miklós (VIII),¹¹ Lipót (II)¹² and Rudolf (I)—before his tragic death was crucial to the continued existence of the Pálffy family. These sons ensured the survival of the family in the eighteenth century, but at the same time, they were also the other major players in the property disputes with Károly Pál Pálffy.

The family strife was ignited by János Pálffy’s will of 1751.¹³ The main problem was the Palatine’s establishment of an entail (*fideicommissum*) on the Červený Kameň estate. The Palatine had accumulated tremendous debts over his lifetime, and understandably, wished to ensure that the Červený Kameň estate could not be alienated, divided, or encumbered with more debt, and that parts of it could not

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- 9 Lipót Pálffy (1681–1720) died from injuries sustained on the battlefield in Bavaria. József Pálffy (1685–1716) died in the Battle of Pétervárad. Rudolf Ferenc Pálffy (1686–1735) died in the Battle of Parma. Károly József Pálffy (1687–1720) died of injuries sustained in battles. Jedlicska, *Eredeti részletek*, 601–3.
- 10 Miklós József Pálffy (1699–1734) was a member of the royal chamber and achieved the rank of colonel in the Althan Regiment. His wife, Mária Jozefa Schlick, was a lady-in-waiting of Empress Elizabeth. He died in the Battle of Parma in 1734. The younger János Pálffy (†1717) chose a military career and served as a lieutenant colonel. In 1715 he married Princess Anna Eleonóra Esterházy. In 1717, he died in the Battle of Belgrade. Jedlicska, *Eredeti részletek*, 603–4.
- 11 Miklós (VIII) Pálffy (1710–1773) became a member of the Viennese Court Chamber in 1732 and a member of the Hungarian Royal Chamber in 1734. In 1739, he became a councilor in the Hungarian Royal Chancery, and in 1746, Maria Theresa conferred on him the title of privy councilor. Between 1758 and 1762, he was President of the Hungarian Royal Chancery. In 1765, he assumed the highest office of Lord Chief Justice. He married Countess Mária Anna Szidónia Althan in 1733. Jedlicska, *Eredeti részletek*, 604.
- 12 Lipót (II) Pálffy (1716–1773) was appointed Colonel by Charles III in 1734 and received permission to establish a Hungarian infantry regiment. Maria Theresa appointed him Major General (1741), and later, in 1752, he became Artillery General, and in 1758 Keeper of the Crown. In 1758 he became a Privy Councilor to Maria Theresa. In 1763, he was appointed Commander in Chief of the Kingdom of Hungary’s Army. He was married twice: first to Mária Jozefa Waldstein. After she died, he married Wilhelmine Ogilir in 1765. Jedlicska, *Eredeti részletek*, 604–7.
- 13 ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I., L. II, F. I, N. 6, record no. 19. Report from the year 1760 from the Court Chamber to the Hungarian Chamber. During my research in the Viennese archive, I found two versions of the will: one dated 15 April 1750, and the other 21 March 1751. The source can be found here: ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I., L. II, F. I, N. 8, record no. 19. Details of the will are quoted in: Jedlicska, *Eredeti részletek*, 544–47.

be used as mortgage or pledge for more loans, thus increasing the debt burden. In 1751, Maria Theresa confirmed the Palatine's will.¹⁴ As in modern times, however, no law or decree existed in the eighteenth century either that required the heirs to abide by the stipulations in the will; therefore, legal documents of this sort could, in theory, be challenged, except for the entail or *fideicommissum* being consented by the king that had to be observed under any circumstances. This understanding of the law appears in the agreement concluded between Miklós (VIII) and Lipót (II), the two nephews of Károly Pál Pálffy:

“In this will, the conditions concerning the division of assets, personal property, and debts have been laid out for the direct heirs, and furthermore in a similar manner to that of other inheritance proceedings. Nevertheless, the expressions and words contained in the will are subject to manifold interpretations, and as a consequence, the provisions can be explained in multiple ways. This can lead to misunderstandings and disputes, and in the end the heirs may take the matter to court.”¹⁵

The property disputes essentially involved two estates: Červený Kameň and Svätý Jur (Szentgyörgy, Sankt Georgen) and Pezinok (Bazin, Bösing). The “hero of Győr,” Miklós Pálffy, had purchased the castle and estate of Červený Kameň from the Fuggers. The property was thus acquired through donation and was subsequently confirmed as such by the king. At the end of the sixteenth century, Miklós Pálffy ordered in his will that the castle of Červený Kameň and its appertinences be inherited along the male line according to the principle of *senioratus* (although the word *majoratus* is used in the will), and furthermore that “the oldest male descendants of the family shall always be in possession of it.”¹⁶ Subsequent generations did not abide by the decree; István and János, the two older sons of Miklós Pálffy signed an allocation agreement in 1619. This practice continued for decades until János Pálffy, following the procedure discussed above, changed the order of inheritance.¹⁷

14 ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. I, N. 6, record no. 19. Report from the year 1760 of the Court or Hungarian Chamber (the original in German).

15 Agreement between Miklós (VIII) Pálffy and Lipót (II) Pálffy, Bratislava, 27 December 1751. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. VI, no. I, record no. 17 (the original in German).

16 According to a further provision, the owner of the estate is required to divide up the income generated by the estate, and distribute it to the other descendants. If the male branch expires, then the property is passed on to the female line and all its descendants, regardless of sex. The *major natus*, or male descendent in possession of the property, is obliged to defend the castle of Červený Kameň and carry out all the necessary renovations and maintenance of the military equipment. These expenses are covered by the income from the property of Častá, which belongs to the estate and which shall always, in this respect, be in the possession of the *major natus*. Peres, *A családi hitbizományok*, 78.

17 For details on the order of inheritance pertaining to the Červený Kameň estate, cp. Peres,

From the perspective of the eighteenth-century dispute, the stipulation in Miklós Pálffy’s will that the *major natus* maintain the castle was crucial; this is why the elderly born also owned the town of Častá (Cseszte, Schattmansdorf), as the revenue generated by the town was used for this purpose.¹⁸ The other important agreement significantly impacting the eighteenth-century family feud was concluded in 1682 between János Antal Pálffy and János Károly Pálffy, the sons of Pál Pálffy, and Elenonore Harrach, the widow of Miklós (IV) Pálffy, who represented her sons, Miklós, Ferenc, and János, who were minors at the time. In later periods, the labelling in the text of the property as *bono nostris paterno avitico*, or ancient good, would prove crucial. It was determined that János Antal Pálffy and János Károly Pálffy would receive a quarter of the estate and the rest was allotted to the male descendants of Miklós (IV) Pálffy under the condition that, if the male line expired, the property would pass to János Antal and János Károly. The two together received the entire anterior section of Červený Kameň Castle, from the northern to the western bastion, opposite the main entrance, including the stairs leading to the bastions. The castle’s dungeon and wine cellars remained in joint use. Pál Pálffy’s sons were obliged to cover one quarter of the costs of the military equipment owned by the castle.¹⁹ With the death of Miklós József Pálffy in 1706, the male line of Palatine Pál Pálffy expired, and therefore Miklós Pálffy and János Pálffy became the heirs of Červený Kameň. The estate was divided up as follows: Miklós Pálffy received 3/8 and János Pálffy 5/8. After Miklós died in 1732, János Pálffy inherited his brother’s portion, while his nephew Rudolf received János’s 5/8 portion.²⁰ In 1751, Palatine János’s son, Károly Pál, inherited his portion.

The above make it clear why Károly Pál Pálffy and his nephew Rudolf became the main players in the first phase of the property dispute. Rudolf Pálffy (1719–1768) was one of the most interesting personalities in the Pálffy family; a modern analysis of his autobiography, however, has yet to be undertaken. Thus far he has been a subject of research because of the impressive library he founded. Fortunately, a significant part of the library and the catalogue of books it contains have survived.²¹ Rudolf was one of the best educated aristocrats, exhibiting an interest in the sciences from a young age.²² The contents of his library show that the count was not driven to

A családi hitbizományok, 88–90.

18 Peres, *A családi hitbizományok*, 90.

19 For the specific details of the dividing of the estate, cp. Peres, *A családi hitbizományok*, 88.

20 Jedlicska, *Kiskárpáti emlékek*, 59.

21 On the library of the Pálffy family and Rudolf Pálffy: Frimmová, “Fuggerovsko-pálfiiovská knižnica,” 118–29; Kujovičová, *Knižnica Rudolfa I. Pálfiho*; Sibylová, “Pálffyovci – zberatelia knižných kuriozít,” 106–19.

22 During his years as a student, he had published one of his works: “Imago tricolor quai per speculum

expand his collection by a desire for prestige or a consuming passion for collecting. Eighty-six percent of his collection consisted of contemporary publications and only a fraction were older, valuable volumes and broadsides.²³

Rudolf Pálffy had an esteemed career in the military, earning merits in the Seven Years' War, which resulted in his promotion to the rank of Field Marshall Lieutenant. His wife, Eleonore von Kaunitz, was a countess, and the couple lived primarily in the castle of Červený Kameň, their favorite residence. Rudolf was one of the most ardent art collectors of his time and his wife, Eleonore, shared this passion.²⁴ Because of their increasing financial worries, the couple had to part with some of their valuable coins, art objects, antiques, horse tack, jewelry, etc.; this circumstance, however, is the reason why detailed records of their collection exist.²⁵

Based on the surviving correspondence, it seems that the strife between uncle and nephew began before János Pálffy's death, in other words before 24 March 1751. In late 1750, Rudolf wrote that he was unable to participate in a hunt his uncle had invited him to join because of "eye pain." He then added, "[...] I have kept my distance mainly because my honorable uncle does not appreciate my friendship and my expression of goodwill [...]." Rudolf was "sensitive to" the fact that Károly Pál had not adhered to the rules governing the use of the fishponds on the Červený Kameň estate; therefore, he openly threatened his uncle with litigation if he continued to flout the rules, and "my honorable uncle would certainly come up short."²⁶

In the course of 1751, the two relatives hurled invectives at each other almost daily. In July, Rudolf asserted that Károly Pál's serfs were transporting large quantities of wood to Kráľová pri Senci. Based on their current agreements, however, the wood could only be used for the maintenance of Červený Kameň Castle. Rudolf claimed that the serfs "were transporting twenty to thirty wagons of wood cut from the nicest and youngest trees, and as a result almost the entire forest would be cleared."²⁷

In his letter, Károly Pál refuted Rudolf's statements, claiming no such agreement existed forbidding him from transporting wood to Kráľová pri Senci.

in aenigmatē Dei, veri Deit Unius et Trini" etc. (Vienna, 1732). Jedlicska, *Eredeti részletek*, 607.

23 Based on the surviving letters of Rudolf Pálffy, he obtained the books primarily from the Viennese bookdealer Johann Paul Krauss, and during his lifetime, his library contained about 442 volumes. Sibylová, "Pálffyovci – zberatelia knižných kuriozít," 107.

24 Jedlicska, *Eredeti részletek*, 605–6.

25 In the Pálffy archives in Vienna; the records can be found here: ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. VI, no. I, record no. 17.

26 Letter of Rudolf Pálffy to Károly Pál Pálffy, Bratislava, October 26, 1750, ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 19 (the original in German).

27 Letter of Rudolf Pálffy to Károly Pál Pálffy, n.p., July 1751, ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 19 (the original in German).

He contended that this agreement had probably applied only to the period in which the forests were in joint use. After they had been divided up, however, everyone was responsible for their own part.²⁸ The sources do not reveal how the dispute over the transportation of wood was resolved. In any case, Károly Pál was soon embroiled in another matter: he accused his nephew of hunting on his property without permission: "[...] it has come to my attention that my honorable nephew was hunting not only to supply his own household, but also to sell the meat at the market in Trnava (Nagyszombat, Tyrnau). Moreover, his men hunted the animals during the rutting season, which is harmful to reproduction on the one hand, and is contrary to our agreement on the other [...]"²⁹ Rudolf responded that he had not shot the deer on their common land because "the deer leave their own territory during the rutting season [...]" As for selling the meat, he confessed that two years earlier he had signed a contract with a butcher in Trnava but that he only sent the butcher the surplus meat from the household.³⁰

The tug-of-war over the transport of wood and the hunting of deer finally reached a (temporary) conclusion because of Rudolf Pálffy's serious financial difficulties. "Because of his accumulated debt, Count Pálffy cannot invest in the future prosperity of his estates [...] as he has lost everything. His obligations prevent him from repaying his annual debts, and so he fears that his creditors will sue him, the court will reassess his properties and distribute them amongst his creditors. [...]"³¹ Rudolf tried to win his family's support, but neither his brothers nor his uncles offered any assistance.³² Károly Pál Pálffy was unaffected by his nephew's change in tone; his haughty and presumptuous style was replaced with obsequiousness: "if Your Excellency, my distinguished patron and dear father, knows of any viable path that would guide me from this labyrinth, I promise that I would follow Your Excellency's kindly advice; I would do all that I could [...]"³³

28 Károly Pál Pálffy's letter to Rudolf Pálffy, Kráľová pri Senci, July 1751. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I., L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 19 (the original in German).

29 Károly Pál Pálffy's letter to Rudolf Pálffy, 27 September 1751. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I., L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 19 (the original in German).

30 Rudolf Pálffy's letter to Károly Pál Pálffy, Červený Kameň, 24 December 1751. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I., L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 19 (the original in German).

31 The agreement between Rudolf Pálffy and Károly Pál Pálffy, Bratislava, 1 December 1752. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. I, no. 6, record no.19 (the original in German).

32 The original German: "[...] da aber von der familia keine hulff zu gewartten sein werde [...]" Rudolf Pálffy's letter to Károly Pál Pálffy, Červený Kameň, 26 December 1751. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. I, no. 3, record no. 19.

33 Rudolf Pálffy's letter to Károly Pál Pálffy, Červený Kameň, 26 December 1751. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. I, no. 3, record no. 19.

Rudolf Pálffy's lifestyle greatly surpassed his financial means, and in all likelihood, he did not have an adequate knowledge of estate management. At least, this can be discerned from the letters of Károly Pál Pálffy, who did not hesitate, following his nephew's fawning letter, to reproach him for all his real or supposed shortcomings:

“[...] first of all, you took control of the estates at a very young age, you did not listen to the advice of your elders, and on several occasions you informed us that you were not following the instructions of your brothers or any other person with common sense. [...] my dear nephew, your problems have also been caused by your dismissal of the previous managers of the estate after you took over the property and your hiring of people less suited to the job [...] my dear nephew, you should have paid greater attention to the ratio of income to expenditures. Instead, you repeatedly took out more and more loans, and as a result, the employees of the estate began to manage on their own, pursuing their own personal interests and not the enrichment of the estate.”

Károly Pál Pálffy made it clear to Rudolf that without his goodwill, Rudolf would not be able to settle his affairs. None of this support or advice, however, would be of use if his nephew did not actively take steps to put things in order: “Nothing good will come of racking your brains every evening, arriving at some new diversion the next day and devoting your time to useless activities. You and your wife need to concentrate primarily on managing the estate.”³⁴

In his difficult circumstances, Rudolf decided to mortgage his portion of the Svätý Jur and Pezinok estates to one of his creditors, Lajos Batthyány.³⁵ It is important to note that the legal situation of these two estates was different than that of the Červený Kameň estate, since Svätý Jur and Pezinok had always been held in pledge, with the Hungarian crown the true owner of the land.³⁶ According to the law, Rudolf

34 Károly Pál Pálffy's letter to Rudolf Pálffy, Kráľová pri Senci, 8 April 1752. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I., L. VII, F. IV, no. 3., record no. 17 (the original in German).

35 Rudolf's idea was that his portion would only be mortgaged for a year, so he could acquire the sum needed to pay off his debts. Rudolf Pálffy's letter to Károly Pál Pálffy, Červený Kameň, December 25, 1751. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I., L. II, F. I, no. 3, record no. 19 (the original in German).

36 In the sixteenth century, the estates of Svätý Jur and Pezinok were owned by János Krusich and István Illésházy. It should be noted that Krusich was the first husband of Katalin Pálffy, sister of Miklós Pálffy, the “hero of Győr,” and after Krusich's death, Katalin Pálffy married Illésházy. She thus became a partial owner of the estates of Svätý Jur and Pezinok, and after Illésházy's death, she inherited the estates in their entirety. In Kata Pálffy's will, she stated that she did not have a hereditary right to the property and instead she held a pledge worth up to 326 thousand forints, but she allowed that if the pledge were dissolved, the money received should be put to

could not decide unilaterally to re-mortgage his part but rather had to summon a family council. Károly Pál Pálffy agreed with Rudolf’s brothers, Miklós and Lipót, to buy Rudolf’s portion, stressing to his nephew Miklós that his decision was guided by his “love for the family.”³⁷ On the first day of 1752, an agreement was made between Károly Pál Pálffy and Rudolf Pálffy according to which Rudolf sold his portions of Svätý Jur and Pezinok to his uncle. Consequently, Rudolf lost his part of the property but was relieved of his 300,000-forint debt. Károly Pál promised to pay Rudolf’s creditors. At the end of the contract, the parties agreed that if Rudolf Pálffy or his heirs managed to acquire 300,000 forints within ten years, that is, by St George’s feast day in 1761, and use it to pay the amount Károly Pál had invested in the estate, then he or his heirs could reacquire Rudolf’s portion.³⁸

However, even after the agreement, Károly Pál and Rudolf were incapable of controlling “their baser instincts” and maintaining contact “harmoniously”. In the spring of 1752, Károly Pál found new reason for upsetting his nephew: the upkeep of Červený Kameň Castle. According to Károly Pál, the roof was in such bad condition that rainwater had seeped through and destroyed part of the stucco decoration. He threatened to take Rudolf to court if he did not repair the damage.³⁹ The two clearly quarreled for months over this matter: Rudolf argued in October that the previous summer he had made some necessary repairs around the castle.⁴⁰ These, however, did not prove sufficient, so Rudolf promised his uncle to request a “fair” and “impartial” person to decide whether he had adequately met his responsibilities. He considered, President of the Hungarian Royal Chamber Antal Grassalkovich was best-suited to the task.⁴¹

acquiring property. In 1625, István and János Pálffy, the two older sons of Miklós, designated as the heirs in Kata Pálffy’s will, submitted their claim to the estate. After paying 200,000 forints, they became the pledge holders. According to the will, the property would be passed on as a *majoratus*, with the oldest son always inheriting the undivided property, while the revenue from it would be divided up between the younger brothers. In 1694, Miklós and János Pálffy—both later palatines—divided the estate between them. They agreed that it should be inherited by the male heirs in equal parts. Málnási, *A herceg és gróf Pálffy család levéltára*, 51–52, 79.

37 Draft of Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to Miklós Pálffy, n.d. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 17 (the original in German).

38 Agreement between Károly Pál Pálffy and Rudolf Pálffy, 1 January 1752. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I., L. II, F. I, N. 6, record no. 19 (the original in German).

39 Draft of Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to Rudolf Pálffy, April 1752. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 17 (the original in German).

40 Rudolf Pálffy’s letter to Károly Pál Pálffy, 17 October 1752. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 17 (the original in German).

41 Rudolf Pálffy’s letter to Károly Pál Pálffy, Červený Kameň, 23 September 1753. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. I, no. 3, record no. 19 (the original in German).

The dispute concerning Červený Kameň Castle is also interesting because Rudolf Pálffy was among the heirs who were known to have spent considerable amounts on construction work. He established a riding stable in the northern part of the building, had new residences created in the eastern and southern bastions, and had them roofed. Prior to the era of Rudolf Pálffy, the bastions had been uncovered.⁴²

It is highly likely that the dispute concerning the castle sprang from Rudolf's penchant for building projects that particularly irritated his uncle. For example, he built a wall on the bastion belonging to his part of the castle, which then prevented Károly Pál and his subjects from freely moving around the area of the castle. Naturally, his uncle did not hesitate to express his disapproval: "those insults that are unjustified, that in fact violate the family agreement, are very distressing. After all, we clearly stated that the bastions are for joint use [...] and besides this, nobody should prevent us from freely accessing the forest from there." He repeatedly threatened his nephew: "if you do not immediately put an end to all of this, I will have to file a complicated and unpleasant lawsuit [...]" Once more, Károly Pál discussed the issue of what he considered the illegal hunting practices of Rudolf, who had again entered restricted areas on his hunts.⁴³ Rudolf responded that a part of the bastion had been closed off because he had established residential quarters for his increasingly large family, and in doing so he had not violated any family agreements.⁴⁴

In 1759, a fire broke out in the castle of Červený Kameň, requiring Károly Pál, too, to contribute to the repairs. At the Pozsony County assembly, he managed to come to an agreement with his nephew Rudolf about who would renovate which part of the building. In the midst of the renovations, however, quarrels resumed between the two relatives. Károly Pál's patience had worn thin, causing him to file a lawsuit against Rudolf in which he claimed to have contributed more to the restoration of Červený Kameň than his nephew. Rudolf lost the lawsuit and the court ordered him to pay 2,233 forints and 87.5 denars to his uncle. Furthermore, he had to relinquish half of the town of Častá and the upper sawmill.⁴⁵

Act Two: the "unwise and shameful process"

In 1760, Károly Pál faced new challenges. His creditors, who had lent him money to settle Rudolf's debts, filed suit demanding repayment in the district court of

42 Jedlicska, *Eredeti részletek*, 607–8; Jedlicska, *Kiskárpáti emlékek*, 56.

43 Draft of Károly Pál Pálffy's letter to Rudolf Pálffy, n.d. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 17 (the original in German).

44 Rudolf Pálffy's letter to Károly Pál Pálffy, Červený Kameň, 26 October 1754. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3., record no. 17 (the original in German).

45 Jedlicska, *Kiskárpáti emlékek*, 56; ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. VI, no. I, record no. 19.

Trnava. This marked the beginning of a protracted court battle that affected not only the Pálffy family but also reverberated in the Imperial Court in Vienna and in contemporary public opinion. The creditors wanted Károly Pál to repay his debts from the income of the *senioratus* and *majoratus* estates. Pálffy agreed but stipulated that he did not wish to relinquish his hunting castle in Kráľová pri Senci or his house in Bratislava. He also proposed that, aside from a lawsuit, the case be handled by arbitrators as well, namely Palatine Lajos Batthyány, Chamber President Antal Grassalkovich, and the Hungarian Chancellor Ferenc Esterházy. According to law, the members of the Pálffy family could lodge an appeal with the Hungarian High Courts, the Royal Table and the Table of Seven (the Supreme Court of Justice in Hungary of that time) against the ruling of the Trnava district court.⁴⁶

Because at this point of the research we lack the complete documentation of the lawsuit, we do not know how the case played out in the various courts. Instead, we can attempt to reconstruct the events from Károly Pál Pálffy’s letters addressed to the main figures in Hungarian public and political life between 1757 and 1767.⁴⁷ This means we know of the details of the family strife and the lawsuits mainly from Károly Pál’s subjective point of view.

The lawsuit probably unfolded in the autumn of 1760, as indicated in Károly Pál’s letter to Royal Treasurer Imre Batthyány (1707–1774): “after which the Curia, under Your Excellency’s fair and wise governance and leadership, absolved [me from blame] in this expensive and unwise process [...]” Károly Pál wanted to settle his debts by paying an annual 20,000 forints, but the “familia,” the other members of the family, did not agree to this. They wanted to raise the amount to 25,000 forints, which “treacherously excited” the count’s creditors, leading them to demand that the count should agree to the higher installments or they would seize his estates.⁴⁸

Not only did the lawsuit cost Károly Pál Pálffy a huge sum of money but it also tarnished his reputation. During the process, the family members claimed the count had accumulated further debts and, in addition, that he “had ordered the forests cleared without restraint and destroyed them.” Károly Pál asserted that these statements were untrue. As for the accumulation of further debts, he contended that: “I have surely not increased my debts but rather I spend night and day grappling with how to escape the countless huge costs of the present process [...]” According to Károly Pál, the second claim, that he had cleared the forests, was

46 Report of the (Court or Hungarian) Chamber from 1760. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. I, record no. 19 (the original in German).

47 His correspondence can be found here: ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, record no. 28.

48 Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to Imre Batthyány, 14 January 1761. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 8, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

similarly untrue: “I believe that others in possession of a forest have been legally permitted to exercise their noble prerogative, and therefore I too should not be prohibited from doing with my estate what I please [...]”.⁴⁹

In numerous letters, Pálffy alluded to the fact that his present financial situation was not ideal, as the income from his estates had been adversely affected in the years prior to the lawsuit. The year 1757 had been particularly difficult because “my Jager House⁵⁰ was struck by lightning and completely destroyed in the blink of an eye; this is a great misfortune to me in addition to the calamities that struck my cereal crops in the land outside of Topoľníky (Nyárasd) and my Červený Kameň vineyards, and these have thereby greatly reduced my income.”⁵¹

Károly Pál Pálffy, however, was unwilling to accept defeat and did everything he could to improve his situation. His letters show the influential count had numerous patrons, friends, and “well-wishers” in the Kingdom of Hungary and in the Imperial Court in Vienna. However, he also had “ill-wishers,” who tried to prevent him from successfully settling his case. In addition, he continued to try and reach an agreement with his relatives, especially Miklós (VIII), Lipót (II), and Rudolf.

From the count’s correspondence, it is possible to discern who the “well-wishers” were. Palatine Lajos Batthyány (1696–1765) and Royal Treasurer Imre Batthyány were among his main supporters; unfortunately, few letters have survived from the correspondence he maintained with them. We know much more about the count’s social network from his letters to Antal Grassalkovich (1694–1771), President of the Hungarian Royal Chamber and one of the most successful eighteenth-century politicians. After completing his legal studies, this young scion of a family from the lower nobility had a brilliant career. In 1720, he became a lawyer for the diocese of Vác and royal director of legal matters. Four years later, he became an adviser to the court and in 1727, he was appointed to head the Committee of Newly Acquired Lands (*Neoaquistica Commissio*).⁵² Between 1731 and 1748, he was Chief Justice and afterwards President of the Hungarian Chamber. In 1736, he was given the title of baron, and in 1743 he was elevated to count. In 1751, he became keeper of the crown, and later, through the good graces of Maria Theresa, he was made master of stables and received the title of “*valóságos belső titkos tanácsos*”, or Confidant

49 Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to Imre Batthyány, Kráľová pri Senci, 30 October 1760. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 8, record no. 28 (the original in German).

50 Hunting lodge.

51 Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to an unknown recipient, Kráľová pri Senci, 12 June 1757. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A.VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 3, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

52 This commission, established at the end of the seventeenth century, was authorized to administer the lands reconquered from the Turks after their 150-year sojourn in the central area of the former Hungarian Kingdom.

Privy Councilor to the Empress. He acquired large estates and had magnificent residences built in Bratislava, Gödöllő, and Hatvan. From Károly Pál’s point of view, Grassalkovich’s “good will” was advantageous to his lawsuit for two reasons. First, during the protracted quarrel, Grassalkovich’s legal knowledge was a huge benefit. In one of his letters, Károly Pál called the aristocrat “one of the great legal scholars of his time.” Second, his position as one of Maria Theresa’s favorite and most influential advisers was also very important. Indeed, the Viennese connections of the President of the Hungarian Royal Chamber proved helpful to Pálffy since the number of his “ill-wishers” had increased while his case was being litigated.

One of Károly Pál’s most influential opponents was Ferenc Barkóczy (1710–1765), the archbishop of Esztergom. The count tried in vain to win his support with kind words and compliments: “I appeal in full confidence to Your Grace not only as my kind Lord and Patron but also as our country’s primary Column and Primate. Please do me the kindness of taking to heart the great unfairness that befalls the Pálffy family and the deterioration which clearly follows from this, especially my tribulations.” Károly Pál asked the Archbishop to direct all applications to the Empress to the district court of Trnava, because in his opinion, judgment in the Pálffy case should be made there, “[b]ecause if this Illegal Process continues, when every allegation is sent to Vienna by the Trnava Court, where will be the seats and courts that serve the Laws of Our Country and the Law and Justice established in our country by the ancient kings and confirmed by Our Majesty?”⁵³ Károly Pál’s letter seems to indicate that his relatives wished to appeal to the Empress’s good graces. Károly Pál Pálffy, however, insisted that a judgment be made by a Hungarian court having authority based on rules in accordance with the private law of the Hungarian nobility as stipulated in the *Tripartitum*.

The archbishop of Esztergom, however, did not want to deal with Károly Pál’s case, as is clear in this excerpt from the nobleman’s letter to the archbishop: “I have painfully understood the disaffection Your Grace has shown me, although I cannot imagine even the smallest offense I might have caused Your Grace.” The count thought that intrigue may have caused the archbishop to distance himself: “*In reliquo* I entreat Your Grace to not give immediate credence to the deceitful betrayals of those who envy me but rather to listen to me, as a true well-wisher, and to instead give credence to me over them.”⁵⁴ Károly Pál’s letter, however, did not inspire Ferenc Barkóczy to take a more favorable view: “[...] after representing the status of my affairs to the H(onorable) Primate, the next day I received a negative

53 Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to Ferenc Barkóczy, Bratislava, 10 May 1762. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 25 a, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

54 Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to Ferenc Barkóczy, 25 April 1762. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 25, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

response, [...] I am grateful for his prayer but I need more; I do not know how to answer His Grace.”⁵⁵

Károly Pál Pálffy’s other “ill-wisher,” with whom he clashed several times during the litigation, was Ferenc Esterházy (1715–1785), President of the Hungarian Royal Chancery. He was the brother of Károly Eszterházy (1725–1799), the Archbishop of Eger, and like Grassalkovich, was one of the prominent figures in the Kingdom of Hungary during the reign of Maria Theresa. In 1760, he became Lord Lieutenant of Moson County, in 1762, was appointed to head the Hungarian Royal Chancery, and in 1771, was inducted into the Order of the Golden Fleece.

In one of his letters, Károly Pál wrote: “I do not endeavor to write the Chancellor [Eszterházy], and the above-mentioned *Praeses* sir,⁵⁶ His Excellency, does not even recommend it. I know [the Chancellor] and the malice he bears towards me.” He added that Chancellor Eszterházy supported the confiscation of his estates.⁵⁷ In his letters, Károly Pál frequently refers to the well-educated Chancellor as the “Philosopher of Pest,” whose “argumentation” he believed contributed strongly to the loss of his case in the District Court of Trnava.⁵⁸ Ferenc Esterházy obviously had strong reason not to support Károly Pál Pálffy in his lawsuit. The archival material we have at our disposal suggests there were personal reasons for the antagonism between the two gentlemen. “The Chancellor just recently summoned Tihanyi⁵⁹ to Vienna, and yesterday, upon return, [Tihanyi] did not deny that he was working against me [...]” Pálffy wrote to Grassalkovich. “In a word: the Chancellor was pained that he had no role in the unfair claim against me in the Trnava case and sought some way, once again, to insert himself, whether he won or not, as he wishes to mortify me.”⁶⁰

The main problem, however, was still that the Pálffy family could not agree on how to free themselves from their accumulated debts and divide up their assets. In Károly Pál Pálffy’s words: “[...] the brothers, not knowing how to decide the matter, constantly bicker and fight [...]” Some in the Imperial Court in Vienna, headed by Maria Theresa, felt that the family members needed to reach agreement.⁶¹

55 Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to Antal Grassalkovich, Bratislava, 13 April 1762. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 16/8, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

56 He is referring to Antal Grassalkovich, president of the Hungarian Chamber.

57 Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to an unknown recipient, Kráľová pri Senci, 12 June 1757. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 3, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

58 Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to Boldizsár Nádasdy, 14 January 1761. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 12, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

59 According to our research so far, the person of Tihanyi is not yet known.

60 Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to Antal Grassalkovich, Bratislava, 13 April 1762. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 16/8, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

61 Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to Antal Grassalkovich, Bratislava, 1 January 1762. ÖStA HHStA FA

In 1760, another relative of Károly Pál Pálffy was embittered by some of the more difficult moments in the litigation: his nephew János (VIII) Pálffy,⁶² the son of his brother Miklós (VII), took the position that Károly Pál should not use the income of the *majoratus* to pay the 300,000 forint debt. He was concerned that after the death of his uncle, he would be saddled with the entire debt and he would have to satisfy the creditors.⁶³

János Pálffy had numerous patrons who shared his views, which Károly Pál found infuriating, especially since, in his opinion, János led the same kind of prodigal lifestyle as his uncle Rudolf. “Count János, living extravagantly in Vienna, spends thousands on games, throwing away money like garbage in both Vienna and in (military) camp.”⁶⁴ The three brothers, Lipót, Miklós and Rudolf, formed an alliance with János, and together tried to deprive Károly Pál of his wealth: “[...] but what is really difficult for me, whatever happens with my case, is that I am defamed by my relatives, they attack me in court after court, and everywhere they slander me [...]”⁶⁵

In the end, Károly Pál Pálffy managed to find a way to resolve his debt problems by turning to a new creditor, a certain Baron Weber. The Viennese nobleman appeared ready to take over the 240-thousand-forint pledge on the estates of Svätý Jur and Pezinok. Károly Pál wanted to turn over the Topolníky estate to his creditors in order to clear himself of his 174-thousand-forint debt.⁶⁶ At first, it seemed that János had agreed to a contract with Baron Weber and the tensions between the two relatives had eased: “János Pálffy, who presents his good side to me, converses with me nearly every day in these weeks, given that he lives in Velký Biel (Magyarbél), and would like to negotiate with me before Your Excellency.” However, his nephew’s duplicitousness soon became apparent: “[...] he machinates against me most vigorously in front of Her Highness; I have heard, that he tried to persuade Her Highness that I had deceived her *in Divisione*,⁶⁷ and that before Your Excellency [he claimed] he had promised forty-one thousand forints a year for my subsistence and that I did not want to accept this [...]” Károly Pál was deeply offended by his nephew’s behavior: “[...] in any case, Your

Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 16/1, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

62 János (VIII) Pálffy (1728–1791)—royal advisor, lieutenant general, head of Borsod County. His wife was Mária Gabriella Colloredo-Mansfeld. Jedlicska, *Eredeti részletek*, 608.

63 Report of the (Court or Hungarian) Chamber from 1760. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. I, record no. 19 (the original in German).

64 Letter of Károly Pál Pálffy to János Jeszenák, 20 February 1762. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 19, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

65 Letter of Károly Pál Pálffy to Antal Grassalkovich, n.d. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 16/19, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

66 Letter of Károly Pál Pálffy to Antal Grassalkovich, n.d. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 16/15 c, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

67 The dividing up of the property.

Excellency can imagine how difficult this has been for me, that to my face he has kind words, but behind my back, he reviles me for no reason [...].⁶⁸

Act Three: Károly Pál and the prodigal young counts

When Rudolf Pálffy died in 1768, the longstanding feud took a new turn. In his will, he stipulated that his heirs must aspire above all to keep the family's estate together, but he left it to them to decide how to achieve this.⁶⁹ To his sons not only did he pass on his huge debt but also the family strife. Without question, the most interesting part of Rudolf's legacy was the catalogue of artworks and library books. Unfortunately, his sons had to sell a portion of the art to settle their father's debts.⁷⁰

Károly Pál Pálffy also had to continue the family litigation, and therefore, he participated in the quarrel over Rudolf's estate, since he was the guardian of the two sons, János (IX) Pálffy (1744–1794) and Rudolf Pálffy the younger (1750–1802).⁷¹ The surviving family correspondence makes it clear: the apple did not fall far from the tree. Rudolf Pálffy's sons caused plenty of headaches for their uncle.

The younger Rudolf Pálffy chose a military career, and Károly Pál financed his studies. It seems, however, that the disbursements were occasionally late, as Eleonore Kaunitz repeatedly sent requests to the elderly relative: “[...] I humbly request Your Grace to write a letter to Commander Brüssel to extend a 300-forint advance for my son's journey to Sibiu (Nagyszeben, Hermannstadt); I hope I am still in good enough standing [...].”⁷² Rudolf Pálffy also beseeched him to “show

68 Letter of Károly Pál Pálffy to Antal Grassalkovich, n.d. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 16/19, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

69 The tenth point in the will stated that his heirs were his two sons, who had to prevent the “division” of the properties; in other words, the properties had to be kept together (the term “*in massa*” is used in the original). Once the heirs had come of age, management of the estate should fall to the one “more suited to it.” In the thirteenth point, Rudolf Pálffy forbid his sons from amassing debt. If they should need to acquire a loan, they could only do so with the “family's permission.” Will of Rudolf Pálffy, 4 October 1765. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. VI, no. I, record no. 19 (the original in German).

70 The heirs had to sell a silverware set worth 4531 forints and thirty and a half denars, part of Rudolf's “wardrobe,” horses (including splendid thoroughbreds), and pieces from an invaluable set of horse tack, among other things. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. VI, no. 8, record no. 19 (the original in German).

71 The agreement concluded between János (IX) Pálffy, his brother Rudolf Pálffy, and their mother, Eleonore Kaunitz, can be found here: ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. II, no. 9, no. 10, no. 11, no. 12, no. 13, no. 14, no. 15, no. 16, no. 17, no. 18, no. 19, no. 20, record no. 19.

72 Letter of Eleonore Kaunitz to Károly Pál Pálffy, Bratislava, 7 October 1771. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 17 (the original in German).

mercy” and send the desired amount.⁷³ The elderly aristocrat was clearly exhausted by all the money transfers and strongly castigated his scrounging relatives: “[...] your most recent letter is full of complaints; you fear that your honor and reputation will be tarnished if you fail to settle your 2000-forint debt and the amount you need to pay in exchange for the title of chamberlain. You write that you would pay this amount yourself, but first you would like to wait and see how the estate is divided between you and your brother.” Károly Pál further stated his opinion about the division of the estate and about Eleonore Kaunitz, with whom he had maintained a fraught relationship for years: “I cannot imagine how, in the present circumstances, the division would be beneficial. On the contrary, I think it will produce more harm. Your mother, who has overseen the management of the estate for years, is responsible for the situation that has developed. As your guardian, I am not tasked with paying your debts or obtaining money for you [...] this is all because your mother does not know how to manage the estate.”⁷⁴ Eleonore Kaunitz was angry to learn that Károly Pál refused to transfer the requested amounts of money regularly: “[...] I was surprised to learn from Your Grace’s letter and the words of Commander B. von Purcell, which you attached, that my son has not always received the requested amount. Your Grace should be aware that my son is not going to Sibiu for his amusement [...] I will speak to His Grace, my brother-in-law Lipót Pálffy, about the matter and seek his support.”⁷⁵

The above make it clear that Károly Pál was not willing to be the “sponsor” of his relatives. He was much more willing, however, to summon his Viennese connections to help his nephew. For example, when Rudolf Pálffy the younger aspired to the office of imperial chamberlain,⁷⁶ his uncle readily offered his assistance: “Your desire to obtain the office of imperial chamberlain is not only admirable but is splendid.” As patron, Károly Pál recommended two influential members of the Viennese court: Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz (1711–1794), prince, imperial councilor, diplomat and one of the closest advisors to Maria Theresa, and Johann Adam von Auersperg (1721–1795), prince and Lord Chamberlain.⁷⁷

73 Letter of Rudolf Pálffy the younger to Károly Pál Pálffy, Bratislava, 31 December 1772. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. II, no. 21, record no. 19 (the original in German).

74 Draft of a letter by Károly Pál Pálffy to Rudolf Pálffy the younger, 3 January 1773. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. II, no. 21, record no. 19 (the original in German).

75 Letter of Eleonore Kaunitz to Károly Pál Pálffy, Bratislava, 20 June 1772. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 17 (the original in German).

76 Letter of Rudolf Pálffy the younger to Károly Pál Pálffy, Bratislava, 21 April 1771. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. II, no. 21, record no. 19 (the original in German).

77 Draft of a letter by Károly Pál Pálffy to Rudolf Pálffy the younger, 25 April 1771. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. II, no. 21, record no. 19 (the original in German).

Soon, however, the “harmony” between the uncle and his nephew dissolved. However, it was love rather than finances that had reignited tension. During his residence in Sibiu, Rudolf Pálffy the younger fell in love with a certain Countess Bethlen.⁷⁸ His letter reveals that it was not only her beauty but also her considerable wealth that prompted him to ask for her hand. If the marriage had taken place, the Pálffys would have needed to reach very deeply into their pockets: “[The Bethlens] request a “bride price”⁷⁹ of twenty thousand forints “and a three-thousand-forint bridal gift⁸⁰ [...] furthermore they have asked me to resign from the army and move and remain here while my father-in-law is still alive [...]”⁸¹

Károly Pál could scarcely conceal his anger in his letter to his nephew: “I was indeed surprised by your letter [...] but I was even more shocked that they wish to persuade you to leave the army and that you appear willing to do so. This entire affair will cause you and your descendants a great deal of hardship. It could destroy any prospect of further prosperity, you will become the object of ridicule in the eyes of both your wife and the entire sober-minded world [...]”⁸² The family shared Károly Pál’s views, as is obvious in the following excerpt of a letter by a family member:

78 The persons of Miss Bethlen and her father are not known at this stage of the research. Hopefully, the research will continue after the pandemic is over and the enigma will be solved.

Letter of Rudolf Pálffy the younger to Károly Pál Pálffy, Bratislava, 21 April 1771. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. II, no. 6, record no. 19 (in the original German).

79 Regarding the English equivalent of “hitbér”, I consulted Zsuzsanna Peres, who explains the meaning of this legal institution as follows:

The word *hitbér* has no proper equivalent in English terminology. The institution is to be called *dos* in Latin, which does not have the same meaning as in Western European legal terminology, where it refers to dowry. The *hitbér* can be translated as “bride price” because, according to some Hungarian scholars (e.g., Ervin Roszner), its origins can be traced back to the price paid to the father for the bride in ancient times before the establishment of the Hungarian state. See more: Roszner, *Régi magyar házassági jog*. In some articles the *hitbér* is called a counter-dowry, because it used to be paid by the husband as compensation or consideration for the dowry brought by the future wife as a contribution to the marriage. Finding a suitable translation for Hungarian legal institutions is not easy, it caused some problems even for the nobles of that time, who spoke and wrote in three languages (Latin, German, and Hungarian), so they usually wrote in deeds at least in Hungarian and Latin, or German and Latin, one after the other. See more about this: Peres, *Marriage Contracts of the Hungarian Aristocracy*, 26–48; Peres, *The Marital Property Rights of Hungarian Noble Women*, 125–32.

80 Regarding the question I consulted Zsuzsanna Peres, citation: The institution bears the Latin name *parapherna*, which refers to the “bridal gift” that the husband or the husband’s family gives to the wife right at the conclusion of the marriage.

81 Draft of a letter by Károly Pál Pálffy to Rudolf Pálffy the younger, n.d. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. II, no. 6, record no. 19.

82 Draft of a letter by Károly Pál Pálffy to Rudolf Pálffy the younger, n.d. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. II, no. 6, record no. 19 (the original in German).

"I agree with every word of the letter my brother sent to my nephew. It is clear that the young man views the world through rose-colored glasses. It should be considered that he does not know the ways of the world and his upbringing leaves much to be desired. He is in love for the first time in his life, so of course, he willingly agrees to everything. The point of view of the young lady's father is also understandable. Every father would impose similar conditions if his daughter were entering marriage with an ample dowry." This relative, however, did not oppose the marriage plans as plainly as Károly Pál: "I will send Kornis's⁸³ letter. I leave the final to decision to my brother. I would not like to involve myself in this matter."⁸⁴

In early modern aristocratic circles, marriages were not concerned with love. The wealthy Countess Bethlen, whose dowry would have contributed significantly to relieving the financial burdens of Rudolf Pálffy the younger, was nevertheless not the appropriate spouse for an aristocratic family from Pozsony County. Presumably, the greatest obstacle was the condition imposed by the future father-in-law, requiring Rudolf to move to Transylvania and give up his potentially successful and lucrative career in the military and the Viennese Imperial Court. The marriage to the Transylvanian countess never took place; instead, Rudolf Pálffy the younger married a member of the Viennese imperial aristocracy, Antonia Kolowrat-Krakowsky. His memories of the pretty Transylvanian countess clearly faded, as his union with the Viennese aristocrat produced fifteen children.⁸⁵

The last years of Károly Pál's life did not transpire peacefully or quietly. In 1772, the quarrel over the castle of Červený Kameň erupted again; this time involving the two brothers, Rudolf the younger and János, and their mother Eleonore. The reason was János Pálffy's marriage to Mária Anna Esterházy, which required János to move out of the castle. The young couple, though, had no intention of leaving the comfortable family home, therefore, Eleonore Kaunitz turned to Károly Pál for advice.⁸⁶ János should have entered into an agreement with his brother and mother concerning the division of the castle but was unwilling. If he had moved out of the castle, his carefree lifestyle would have come to an end. He would have needed to support his wife from his own resources, which would obviously have been an expensive undertaking given that his wife was an Esterházy daughter. For understandable reasons,

83 The person of Kornis is not yet known at the stage of our research. As soon as the pandemic is over and research goes on, it will hopefully be revealed who Kornis was and the role he played in the case.

84 Probably the draft of a letter by Lipót Pálffy, n.d. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. II, no. 6, record no. 19.

85 Jedlicska, *Eredeti részletek*, 611.

86 Eleonore Kaunitz's letter to Károly Pál Pálffy, Bratislava, 9 December 1772. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 17 (the original in German).

he did not want to negotiate with his family about dividing up the property: “instead he sent notes and messages.” The situation deteriorated to the point that he wished to avoid spending Christmas with his mother.⁸⁷

This was a familiar story from earlier generations: a young Pálffy disdained his relatives until he ran out of money. Now, János Pálffy and his wife found themselves in similar financial distress, and in January 1773, the young count had no choice but to humble himself and write a begging letter to his elderly uncle. Apparently fed up with supporting his extravagant relations, Károly Pál adamantly refused to help. He scolded János for causing his own problems by neither listening to advice nor taking steps to settle the debts he had inherited from his father. Károly Pál wrote: “dark clouds are forming above you” and never sent any more money to János or his brother.⁸⁸ Károly Pál was saved from further unpleasantness, strife and lawsuits by his death in 1774. As he had no male heirs, his nephew János (VIII) Pálffy inherited his bequest.

Conclusion

The Pálffy lawsuits were not unique in the early modern period. We know of numerous cases in which an aristocratic family turned to the courts to resolve property disputes. At approximately the same time, in the mid-eighteenth century, the Zichy family was also embroiled in litigation concerning István Zichy’s will.⁸⁹ The study of lawsuits involving aristocratic families is complicated by the lack of case studies examining the reasons for the lawsuits, the litigation process, or the circumstances in which judgement was passed.⁹⁰ However, there is an obvious parallel between the Pálffy and Zichy family cases: the era of extensive land acquisitions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had begun to wane in the eighteenth century for those aristocratic families who had risen as *homines novi* following the Battle of Mohács (the Pálffys, Esterházys, Batthyánys, Zichys, etc.). Fewer estates were available for them to acquire, as newly arrived noble families fought for property. Meanwhile art collecting had become fashionable and was seen as a way for noble families to project their grandeur in court.⁹¹ It was therefore a matter of prestige for such families

87 Eleonore Kaunitz’s letter to Károly Pál Pálffy, Bratislava, 16 December 1772. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 17 (the original in German).

88 Károly Pál Pálffy’s letter to János Pálffy, Vienna, 3 January 1773. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 17 (the original in German).

89 János Zichy sued several relatives: Ferenc, Miklós, and István Zichy. The litigation was primarily over the Divény estate. Peres, *A magyar hitbizomány*, 129.

90 Her most recent case study on the Festetics family: Peres, “Az özvegyi jog.”

91 Regarding the intense interests of the Hungarian nobility in art collections, see the example of the Erdődy family: Bubryák, *Családtörténet és reprezentáció*. Regarding the importance of

to acquire a collection, but they did so at enormous costs, and even the wealthiest families amassed increasing amounts of debt. Obtaining even the smallest part of an estate understandably became a question of life and death for the family members. The enormous cost of litigation and lawyer’s fees did not dissuade them from fighting for what they believed was their legal right.

The letters of the Pálffy family, however, make it clear that none of the aristocrats willingly admitted to desiring more money or property at the expense of their relatives, who would incur serious financial losses. In fact, it was quite the contrary: they could not emphasize enough that they were acting in the “interest of the family”; it was their mission to prevent “misunderstandings and disharmony” and their primary goal was to live in “peace and amicable agreement” with their relatives.⁹² They considered the tensions “unpleasantries” that accompanied the property disputes and felt they were beneath a family of such high rank. In Károly Pál’s words: “such things were not permissible amongst cavaliers.”⁹³

Contemporary public opinion was also critical of highly ranked gentlemen who engaged in public disputes, especially for such vulgar reasons as a desire for money or profit. Aristocratic wealth was meant to express primarily the individual’s or the family’s social prestige: “[...] Miklós Pálffy should recall that he owes his wealth to the merits of his ancestors. Gratitude and appreciation, however, require that he do more than reap profit from the estates acquired through the principle of *senioratus*. He should recall that *senioratus* itself increases his respectability in the eyes of the world [...]”⁹⁴ Miklós Forgách expressed this more stridently in a letter to Károly Pál Pálffy: “Those who seek only profit do not deserve the name Pálffy.”⁹⁵

Condemnation of the quarrels between aristocrats, however, was openly expressed. Indeed, as in the modern period, the public took great pleasure in the scandals and spats of the elite: “Plenty would like to see feuds drag on and increase in vitriol.”⁹⁶ The protracted litigation, however, cast a pall on members of the most respectable layer of society, too, as Károly Pál Pálffy expressed: “But I must admit that as a *familia*

representation related to the art collections of the Esterházy family, see: Körner, *Mit königlicher Anspruch*, 219–47.

92 Károly Pálffy’s letter to Rudolf (I) Pálffy, n.d. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 17.

93 The expression “*Kavaliere*” appears in the original.

94 Report from 1752, the document does not contain the name of the author or the recipient. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L.VII, F. III, record no. 17 (the original in German).

95 Miklós Forgách’s letter to Károly Pál Pálffy, Ilok (Újlak), 14 January 1771. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L.VII, F. III, record no. 17 (the original in Hungarian).

96 Report of the Court or Hungarian Chamber from 1760. ÖStA HHStA, FA Pálffy, A. I, L. II, F. I, N. 6, record no. 19 (the original in German).

my *creditum* has been thoroughly tarnished and destroyed [...].”⁹⁷ To his friend Antal Grassalkovich, he frankly admitted that he would prefer not to be present in Viennese court society, because when he was there, he felt “as though I do not exist.”⁹⁸

The most serious outcome of the longstanding family conflicts was the poisoning of interpersonal relationships and the creation of unbridgeable differences among the family members. The damage was inestimable, as the social costs could not be compensated with money, art or property. Antal Grassalkovich warned his friend Károly Pál Pálffy of this danger: “[...] I believe the family will realize too late how much they have lost [...].”⁹⁹

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97 Károly Pálffy’s letter to Imre Batthyány, 30 October 1760. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 8, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

98 Károly Pálffy’s letter to Antal Grassalkovich, n.d. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. VIII, L. IX, F. IX, no. 19, record no. 28 (the original in Hungarian).

99 Antal Grassalkovich’s letter to Károly Pál Pálffy, Gödöllő, 23 March. ÖStA HHStA FA Pálffy, A. I, L. VII, F. IV, no. 3, record no. 17 (the original in Hungarian).

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The Family Tree of the Pálffys

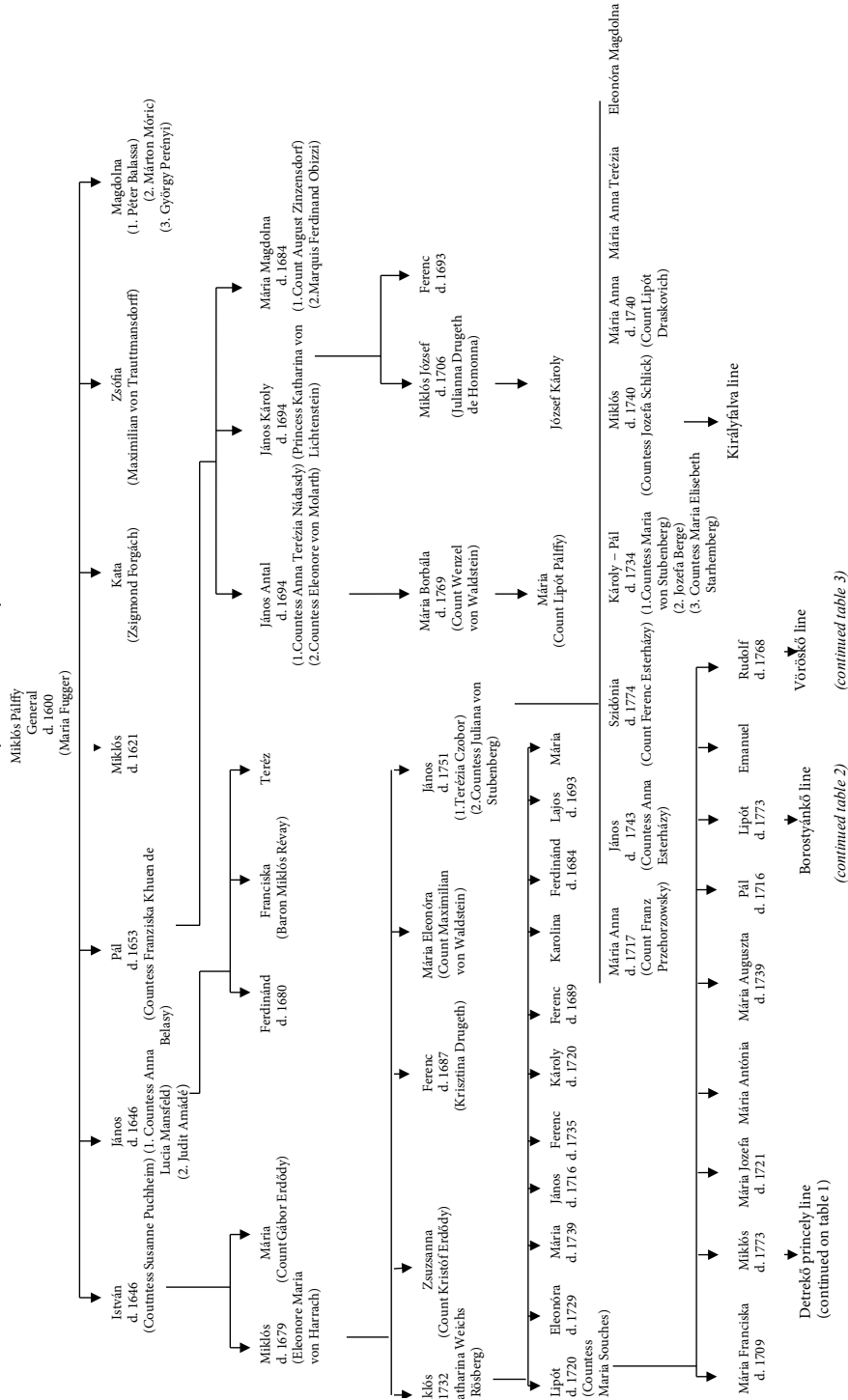


Table I.

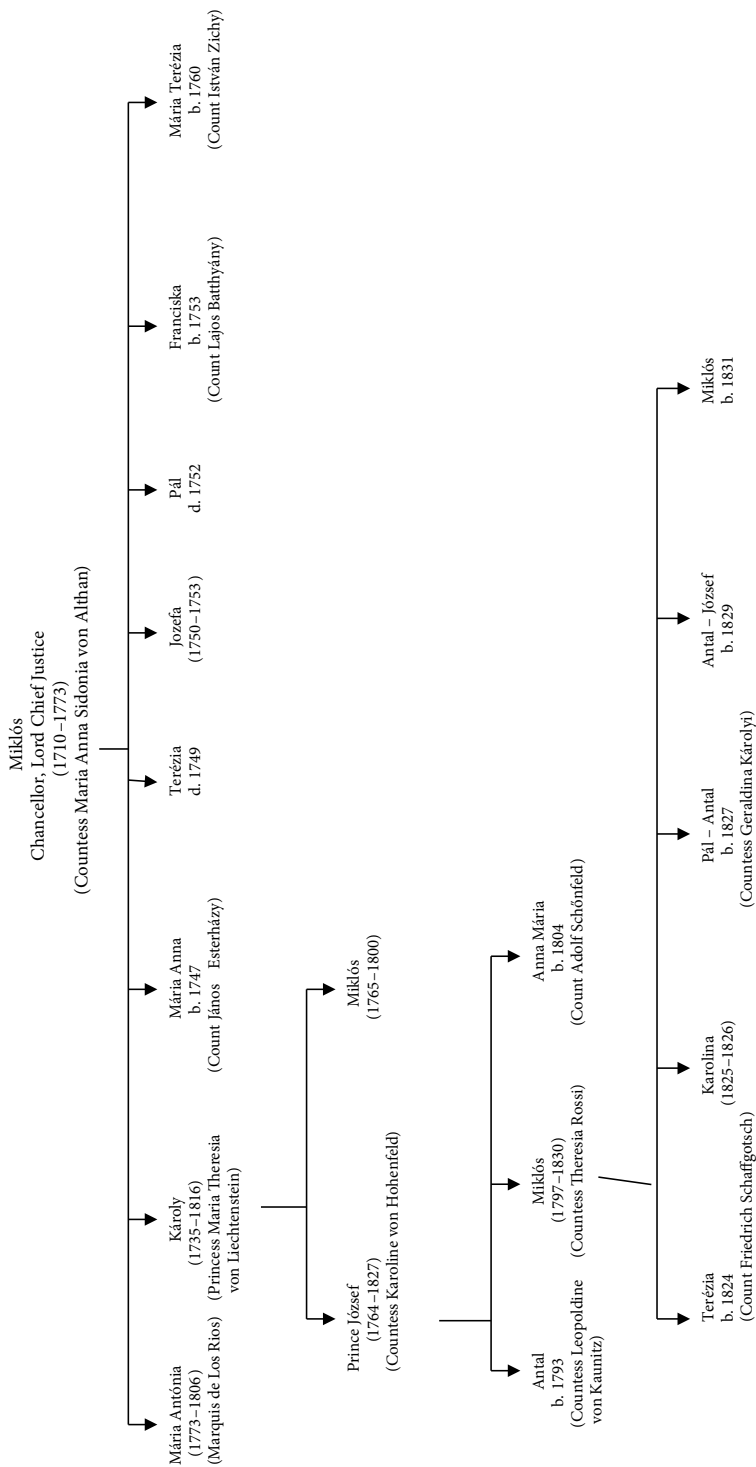


Table 2.

