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## Chapter 6

### **Taste inequalities in the art consumption of Prince Nicolaus I Esterházy ‘the Magnificent’**

Kristóf Fatsar

The appreciation of the flamboyant entertainments and tasteful luxury of Prince Nicolaus I Esterházy (1714–1790),<sup>1</sup> who rightly earned the epithet ‘the Magnificent’ from later generations (Figure 6.1), changed dramatically in certain regards during his own lifetime but also in the light of more recent scholarship. This change has many aspects. On the one hand, they highlight his background interests that, for example, resulted in shifting but informed enthusiasm for different musical genres, yet adapted slowly to changing fashions in landscape design. More significantly, they reveal the revolutionary transformation of ideas about the social responsibility of the higher classes that characterized late eighteenth-century Europe. Luxury was still politically necessary for the monarchical state in the years when Nicolaus became prince – Montesquieu even expected the rich to be lavish in support of the poor.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, there was a growing expectation that the rich would invest rather than waste, but this was only coupled to the long-standing recognition of the moral dangers of luxury for the individual towards the end of the century. Whilst grandeur as an expression of luxurious spending might previously have been thought tasteful, Enlightenment thinkers taught society to distinguish between luxury and taste.<sup>3</sup> As we shall see, Prince Nicolaus became increasingly exposed to such enlightened views during his lifetime.

Prince Nicolaus rose to the princely title only in his late forties and held it for almost three decades. One can wonder if it was reasonable to expect him to adjust his taste to the latest fashions during his ageing years, let alone to modify his attitude towards modes of spending. According to Jan de Vries’s definitions, he mainly was a man of Old Luxury, bent

on pursuing his pleasures;<sup>4</sup> so it is not surprising that his character has been the subject of praise but also disapproval, both in his lifetime and by modern historians. In reality, it is near impossible to do justice to his taste, partly because even the more straightforward aspects of his biography have still to be written.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, pointing out his sensitive approach to certain things and reluctance to engage with others helps to explain his character as a patron of the arts, while the changing tone of the descriptions of his attitude and his creations reflects the age in which he lived. As both his connoisseurship and its perception are dynamic in nature and not necessarily connected, their confrontation offers a fascinating insight into the self-expression of one of the wealthiest magnates of the period.

His contemporaries all agreed that Prince Nicolaus was a captivating character, a friendly and straightforward person with excellent social skills, and an excellent host.<sup>6</sup> The Hungarian equivalent of his epithet could be translated to English as ‘the Shining’ and the German as ‘the Splendour-lover’; both of say much about his lifestyle. One might think that he was extravagant in his spending, but this was not the case. Even though he built up enormous debts during his lifetime, this was not at all unusual among his peers; in fact, Prince Nicolaus’s financial deficit seems to have stayed manageable. On things he liked, he was very lavish in his spending; in others he was content with local masters and petty artistic solutions. The present essay approaches his personality through some of his artistic ideas, particularly his landscaping programmes, set in the context of both contemporary descriptions and more recent scholarship. The rationale behind this is that landscape design can perhaps be seen as the litmus test for progressiveness during the period; after all, this is the time when the truly radical change from the formal styles to a more natural-looking (commonly called English) landscaping came into fashion. Prince Nicolaus’s unwillingness to follow suit in this matter can be traced back to a number of possible motives, as this chapter will demonstrate. In contrast, his obsession with music and theatrical performances offers a most favourable view

of his connoisseurship, never questioned in his lifetime or since; it is thus used here to highlight the uneven nature of his art consumption and his taste.

### **The origins of the Esterházy princes' wealth and the unlikely succession of 'the Magnificent' Nicolaus into its possession**

The Esterházy family were of modest means until the seventeenth century when a few exceptionally talented figures, backed by excellent marriages and a return to Catholicism, made them the wealthiest and most prominent family in the Kingdom of Hungary. The first member of the family elevated to the peerage was the Palatine of Hungary, Miklós Esterházy (1583–1645) who was created baron in 1613 and count in 1626. His brothers were also created barons in 1619 and although all members of the Esterházy family eventually became counts or countesses (Hungarian peerage is usually extended to all descendants of both sexes) in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries, only one line of the family rose to the rank of Princes of the Holy Roman Empire. The first Prince Esterházy was a son of Palatine Miklós and himself a Palatine of Hungary, Pál Esterházy (1635–1713).<sup>7</sup> Until the tenure of Nicolaus 'the Magnificent', only the oldest surviving male member of this line of the family had ascended to the princely title, but Nicolaus obtained the privilege to extend it to all his descendants of both sexes.

Nicolaus was the 5th Prince Esterházy, but an unlikely holder of the title. His grandfather, the Palatine Prince Pál had well over twenty children but his oldest son who survived him and thus became the 2nd Prince only had daughters. The next in line was a younger brother, the Palatine's fifteenth child, but the only other surviving son, Prince József (1688–1721) who held the title for only a few months before he followed his brother to the grave. Besides a daughter he also left two sons, the older becoming the 4th Prince, Paul Anton

(1711–1762), and the younger, Nicolaus, later to become ‘the Magnificent’ but a long time merely a count.

The young Nicolaus was only seven when his father died. His mother, Maria Octavia, née Baroness von Gilleis (1688–1762), together with two Hungarian noblemen formed a Council of Surrogates that took good care of the young boys. They had Nicolaus's country house at Süttör finished and equipped with the necessary outbuildings and furnishings, designed and built by the Viennese and later imperial court architect (*Baumeister*), Anton Erhard Martinelli (1684–1747).<sup>8</sup> Originally the construction was destined for the young boys' father, Count József Esterházy (later the third prince), but it was completed for Count Nicolaus (Figure 6.2). The Surrogates also made sure that Nicolaus received just as good an education as his princely elder brother, both attending the University of Leiden in Holland and also studying in Vienna. Finally, just before Nicolaus took full control of his estates in 1738, they had a fashionable garden created at Süttör, designed by no lesser person than the imperial landscape architect (*Garteningenieur*) Anton Zinner (c. 1676–1751).

Hungarian tradition did not exclude younger brothers from the inheritance; in many cases family estates were equally divided between the surviving sons and even daughters were given a share. In the case of the Princes Esterházy, the vast majority of the family estates were held by the ‘reigning’ prince as a trust fund (*fideicomissum*), but the second-born son also possessed enough to maintain a comfortable lifestyle. The estates of Count Nicolaus included Süttör, where his country house stood and which he decades later transformed into the truly magnificent château of Eszterháza, dubbed by contemporaries as the Hungarian Versailles. Count Nicolaus married a German Countess, Maria Elisabeth Ungnad von Weissenwolff (1718–1790), in 1737 and with her secured the persistence of the princely line by means of sons. His older brother, on the other hand, failed to produce an heir and thus all

the Prince Esterházy estates fell into the hands of Nicolaus in 1762, when he was already forty-eight years old.

When succeeding to the title, he decided not to move to Kismarton (modern Eisenstadt in Austria), the traditional seat of the Princes Esterházy, but to create his own princely court in Süttör where he already had great, and partly implemented, plans to subdue the entire landscape. His choice of that remote village was probably determined by the opportunities of the wider landscape – he could surround his château with a large game park and abundant open land to create great gardens and outbuildings. In contrast, his castle in the royal free town of Eisenstadt, which had plenty of privileges that secured it against his authority,<sup>9</sup> did not offer the same opportunities. This practical choice was probably seconded by an emotional desire to stay at the place that he called home for so long.

### **The art consumption of Prince Nicolaus during the early days of his tenure**

Prince Nicolaus started to extend his château as early as 1762, which suggests that he already had ideas about what he wanted to achieve there. The next year construction accelerated and continued for almost a decade. Around the early days of 1766 he boldly renamed his chateau Eszterháza (Figure 6.3), impertinently suggesting that this was the place from whence the entire family originated.<sup>10</sup> The famed large-scale festivities of Eszterháza started in 1768 and reached their social peak in 1773 when Nicolaus was bestowed the honour of receiving Empress Maria Theresa, Queen of Hungary.<sup>11</sup> However, work did not stop then: Prince Nicolaus altered the château and the grounds several times before the mid-1780s when he stopped construction work, probably due to his advancing years, and lived a quieter life in his remaining days, dying in Vienna at the age of seventy-six.

The elevation of his status had consequences other than just offering the opportunity to fulfil his visions for his château. Besides obvious distinctions like becoming Lord

Lieutenant of Sopron County, which was a hereditary role of the Princes Esterházy, or being ordained a Knight of the Golden Fleece, becoming a traditional conferment on the reigning prince, he was soon to step onto the world stage as one of the most important magnates of the Habsburg Empire, being entrusted to represent his monarch. In 1764, Archduke Joseph of Austria was to be elected as the new King of the Holy Roman Empire to succeed his father, Emperor Francis I of Lorraine, should the latter debase. After careful diplomatic negotiations behind the scenes, all electors agreed to vote for Joseph. One of the electors was the new king's mother, Empress Maria Theresa, as Queen of Bohemia. She was not present at the election (most of the electors were absent), but sent envoys on her behalf, appointing Prince Nicolaus as her first ambassador and proxy for Bohemia.<sup>12</sup> This was a prestigious but costly duty as representatives of this rank had to cover all their costs. Prince Nicolaus was probably flattered by the opportunity and did not spare any expense: the balls, illuminations and other entertainments that he lavishly produced were acknowledged to be the best among those offered to the public during the celebrations. The young Johann Wolfgang von Goethe found that 'Prince Esterházy's arrangements surpassed all the rest' at the final show of illuminations, 'by which each ambassador strove to outshine the others'.<sup>13</sup> Prince Nicolaus stepped on a stage where none of his ancestors had stood. With this action he placed the family on a par with the Schwarzenberg or Liechtenstein: the Esterházy princes became equal to the greatest houses of the German lands.<sup>14</sup>

There are two significant aspects of Prince Nicolaus's mission to Frankfurt, which throw light on his taste. For one thing, it was his first real opportunity abroad to buy luxury items for his country home back in Hungary. Nicolaus was to develop a substantial and respected porcelain collection over the following decades and he purchased many choice pieces while in Frankfurt for the election, in effect founding his collection.<sup>15</sup> His preference for French taste and objects was evident: like the English, Spanish or Swedish nobles

discussed by Stobart, Fernández-de-Pinedo and Thépaut-Cabasset, and Ilmakunnas respectively in this volume, he not only transported cooks but ordered furniture, clocks, firedogs and many other household objects from Paris. Interestingly, his first known pieces of Meissen porcelain were also bought from there and, although there is no record of purchases of French porcelain, he bought a giant set, many statuettes and other objects from the Frankenthal factory whose products show the influence of Sèvres.<sup>16</sup> Most importantly, however, he showed his life-long dedication to French architecture and design: the temporary installations and illuminations at Frankfurt were based on Parisian designs,<sup>17</sup> an act that proved to be decisive in his vision to develop Eszterháza.

The other significant aspect of his Frankfurt stay is that his huge expenditure met with public approval. He spent well over fifty per cent more on his entertainments than the chief representative of the Viennese court at the elections, Prince Liechtenstein, and this does not even include his Parisian purchases.<sup>18</sup> The joy of profusion was very much characteristic of the era and that really suited the prince; but his enthusiasm for ostentatious display had consequences later. It might be questioned whether Prince Nicolaus's smooth alignment with public opinion and taste is a proof of his personal preferences or whether he watched what others of his rank surrounded themselves with and then did the same: buying objects that he felt would enhance his status. This seems unlikely because, despite his occasional purchases of conventional art objects, all his previous and later actions – and particularly his building programme and evolving preferences for various stage performances – indicate that he had a genuinely individual set of ideas about taste and that his opinion on artists and art objects was hardly influenced by others.

It is not without precedent that a person has excellent taste in certain things and less admired gusto in others. Doubts have never been raised concerning the worth and exquisite taste of the Eszterháza collection of china or clocks, for example; but his taste in portraiture



has lately been described as ‘modest’ and the portraits he commissioned both ‘conservative’ (that is, old fashioned) and of ‘middling’ quality.<sup>19</sup> Just a few years after the death of Nicolaus, foreign visitors also reported that the paintings at Eszterháza were mediocre (*mittelmäßig*) or even ‘unusually bad’.<sup>20</sup>

However difficult it might be to capture the discrepancies in Nicolaus’s taste, it is worth noting some tendencies that explain the varying quality of his art consumption. At first sight, analysing expenditure on different pursuits appears to be a good approach as it is likely that more money would be spent on favourite interests. But interest and taste are not identical, and it is difficult to make such comparisons when the required resources are very different, as they would be with architecture or in sculpture, for example. There is another basis for comparison: the esteem in which the artists employed were held by wider society. The careers of the artists, their stations or projects in previous or successive years tell much about their appreciation.

Prince Nicolaus employed superstars in his orchestra and for his stage at Eszterháza. It is enough to mention his Kapellmeister who grew into international fame, Joseph Haydn (1732–1809), one of the greatest composers in musical history. Haydn was originally employed in 1761 as Vice-Kapellmeister by Nicolaus’s predecessor, Prince Paul Anton. When Nicolaus succeeded to the title in 1762, he immediately gave a 50 per cent pay rise to Haydn and to other personnel, though not to the semi-retired Kapellmeister Gregor Joseph Werner, nominal head of the princely musicians until his death in 1766.<sup>21</sup> One of the beneficiaries of this generosity was Nicolas Jacoby (1733–1784), a Lotharingian engineer who was given 400 gulden (a year’s wages) in less than a month after Nicolaus became prince. If nothing else, it was a strong sign of the desire to keep him in service; but he had likely done something more to deserve such early attention from his master. As Jacoby is now widely accepted as having been responsible for most of the planning and design in the

subsequent evolution of Eszterháza including interiors and landscapes (Figure 6.4),<sup>22</sup> he might have provided designs to put Nicolaus's visions on paper during the early days of the new prince's tenure. Certainly, Jacoby was already in charge of upgrading the interiors of Nicolaus's Frankfurt residence in 1764.<sup>23</sup>

It is intriguing that, if the prince was so careful in choosing the best art objects in Frankfurt or hiring cooks and architectural designers from Paris, he did not employ great masters of landscape design or architecture for his country residence. One of the explanations is that he was a faithful and loyal man, not only to his monarch but also to his employees. If he had no particular reason to distrust his men, he kept them in his service. It should not be overlooked that Haydn was a young deputy Kapellmeister for several years, but Nicolaus trusted him and his faith was rewarded as Haydn's later career demonstrated. Was Jacoby just as gifted despite the reluctance to recognize his greatness? Possible, but unlikely. Great architects and landscape designers provided drawings for many houses and grounds and they usually had the liberty to deliver their plans to patrons other than their employer. At the nearby country house of Count Antal Széchenyi in Nagycenk, for example, two professionals supplied plans for the pleasure grounds around 1760, one of them being the gardener of the Prince Primate of Hungary, the other an engineer of the Hungarian Chamber, also a respected garden designer.<sup>24</sup> Haydn's example also shows that Prince Nicolaus was not jealous of his services: Haydn composed music for other patrons and the prince did not even require royalties. There is nothing to suggest that his architect or landscape designer could not do the same, and yet neither Jacoby nor the princely gardeners appear to have been commissioned by any other landholder – or, if they did, they refused the offer, which seems improbable. Their sole achievement is Eszterháza and, despite its grandeur, it stands alone among country houses and gardens of the wider region, making it difficult to see its influence and real significance, apart from its splendour.

### **Change and constancy in Prince Nicolaus's taste**

Changes in taste on the individual and public level do not necessarily go hand in hand. This could be best demonstrated by Nicolaus's shifts in preference for musical and theatrical genres while perhaps too slowly adapting to new fashions in landscape gardening. Prince Nicolaus's musical taste changed quite significantly over the years, even if Haydn remained responsible for pleasing princely desires during this evolution. Haydn's main duty during the early years in Nicolaus's service was to compose symphonies, concertos, divertimentos and vocal pieces for special occasions. Later, for a decade or so until the mid-1770s, he continued to compose symphonies, but he also served his master's own musical performances with writing baryton trios, as Prince Nicolaus was himself a baryton player. He also started to feed Nicolaus's obsession with operas during this period, first abandoning baryton trios and, by the early 1780s, symphonies as well. During this time operas became Haydn's most important output in the service of the prince.

One can argue that these different genres belong to the same oeuvre, namely Haydn's, but this assumption suggests that the composer never disappointed his master, which was not the case. In truth, Nicolaus was nearly always satisfied with the music Haydn offered and knew very well how much the services of his Kapellmeister were worth. The few exceptions of Haydn's failure to please his master, that Haydn himself also realized and recorded, can probably be traced back to Prince Nicolaus's developing depression. However, very occasionally Nicolaus did not like a particular performance or at least did not want to see it more than once, despite the huge cost attached to each opera production. Yet these nuances had no effect on Nicolaus's appreciation of Haydn. On the contrary, recent musicology has speculated that Haydn's innovative power is directly connected to his frequent seclusion from urban life and to his secure position at the Eszterháza court, something that the composer

himself acknowledged in a later interview. Haydn was not isolated from other musical developments, but he did not have to rely on satisfying popular taste, which many of his contemporaries were forced to do. Rather he had to gratify his sole audience and thus had to be resourceful in ideas in order to offer something new yet pleasing. Haydn's composing skills and Nicolaus's musical refinement both benefited from this arrangement. In effect, by the later stages of his career, Haydn became the most influential composer in defining European musical taste.<sup>25</sup>

In sharp contrast to the musical life of Eszterháza, the gardens around the chateau have always lagged behind the times, although the landscaping programme at the first manor of Süttör had started favourably. The Council of Surrogates commissioned a garden for Süttör from the imperial garden designer Anton Zinner.<sup>26</sup> Zinner had already redesigned the gardens of Nicolaus's princely brother at Eisenstadt a few years earlier, between 1728 and 1731, and then it was Count Nicolaus's turn to have fashionable gardens at his residence. In Süttör there was no garden to transform, thus Zinner had a free hand to create the pleasure grounds as he liked, albeit within financial limitations. He produced a well-proportioned garden, square in shape with an exedra at its far end and divided into intricate parterres of flowerbeds. It was probably finished in 1738, the year when Nicolaus came of age and exercised full ownership over his estates.

Despite Zinner's mature design, Nicolaus decided to alter the layout less than ten years after its completion. He added one oblique avenue on each side of the main axis of the entire ensemble to create a *patte d'oie* ('goosefoot'),<sup>27</sup> a powerful tool to organize space with the help of radiating alleyways leading to one focal point. This focal point was the centre of his manor, of course, and the *patte d'oie* undoubtedly gave a majestic appearance to his seat, raising its importance in the surrounding landscape. However, the oblique lines led to the corners of Zinner's original garden and, although the shape of the parterre was successfully

altered to deal with this disadvantageous solution, the new avenues very noticeably and disagreeably cut through parterres on both sides and arrived at the corner points of the most delicate internal parterre. The French canon of baroque garden design had solutions to overcome this situation, but none of those were used at Süttör. Instead, this awkward design existed for about three decades, even during the time of Maria Theresa's visit, when Nicolaus concentrated his efforts on embellishing the groves behind the pleasure grounds. Finally, in the middle of the 1770s, the entire parterre was transformed and the oblique lines of the *patte d'oie* were at last allowed to reach the façade of the château and meet with the main axis. The new garden doubtlessly had a more elegant layout, with large grass areas that might refer to the fashionable English style of design (Figure 5). However, its structure went back to the *Parterre du Nord* in the gardens of Versailles created more than a hundred years earlier. To put this into a broader context, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown had already been a professional landscape designer for a quarter of a century by this time, and the English landscape garden movement was in full swing.

Admittedly, even before this transformation, the garden was admired – and not only by the untrained and uneducated eye. Vicomte de Laval (later Comte de Montmorency, 1748–1809), fell in love with the gardens when he visited in 1773, declaring that they were the most beautiful outside France.<sup>28</sup> His travelling companion, the Scottish physician and writer John Moore (1729–1802), did not offer an opinion on the gardens; being British and used to more naturalistic creations he perhaps looked away than expressing his disapproval. His true impressions can be judged by the description he gave of another landscape in Hungary, in which he preferred the parkland further away from the house because it was less artificial. Similarly, Moore very much admired the groves and game park of Eszterháza, which he found charming. This difference of opinion reveals the rivalry between gardening styles during this period. Moore was slightly teasing Laval when he asked whether the Eszterháza

gardens could be compared to those of Versailles. Laval was outraged by the suggestion and declared that no gardens could be compared to Versailles, although this was perhaps more a political statement than an expression of taste or the aesthetic supremacy of French baroque gardening. In Eszterháza, Vicomte de Laval could admire a garden design tradition that was about to be outmoded even in France, but was found here in its old form.

Nicolaus was clearly not oblivious to changed taste in garden design and attempted to create some less formal parts in his garden. Some of these were already present from much earlier: from the 1760s, many paths twined through the large woodland to facilitate hunting and these were probably reinvented as the curving English walks that were mentioned by visitors in the 1780s. From 1779, when the first of Hirschfeld's highly influential five-volume *Theory of Garden Art* appeared, properly introducing the English style of gardening to the German-speaking realm, there was an increasing pressure on patrons to change the layout of the landscape around their country seats.<sup>29</sup> Making the revolutionary leap from the formal to the informal style must have been difficult for many, both for financial and emotional reasons.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, Prince Nicolaus was not ready to give up his very formal garden layout, particularly because it was based on his own ideas, if contemporary records – that he himself commissioned – can be trusted.<sup>31</sup> He was no doubt emotionally attached to a landscape where he spent most of his life while improving and developing it. Despite having a small 'English garden' hidden somewhere within the wooded area of the groves,<sup>32</sup> and an informally arranged winter garden as well,<sup>33</sup> it would have been a financially daring move to transform the parterre just five or ten years after its creation. In this respect, the prince's readiness to 'waste' opera productions after just one performance should not be confusing: theatrical or musical productions involved very different resources to those required in reconfiguring the landscape.

Perhaps more surprisingly, the prince went on to extend the formal design of the pleasure grounds: developing previously unexecuted designs for two symmetrically arranged viewing terraces at the end of the parterre in 1784. By this time, four volumes out of the five of Hirschfeld's work were already out, the fourth one having been published in 1782, providing plenty of references to the latest fashion of landscape design. One year after finishing the viewing terraces at Eszterháza, Hirschfeld's fifth volume came out; it included a scathing assessment of Hungary's country houses and gardens and, mentioning only Eszterháza by name, claimed that they were executed with great pomp but with little taste.<sup>34</sup> His words suggest that formal layouts were no longer acceptable. Moreover, the view that the prince's landscaping project followed the latest French fashion, and was therefore *comme-il-faut*,<sup>35</sup> disregards Jean-Jacques Rousseau's argument, made in *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (published in 1761), that geometric gardens were forms of artificial luxury and thus to be rejected.<sup>36</sup> Nicolaus, it seems, was not even conforming with current French taste.

### **Eszterháza and the prince's taste falling victim to the tide of social concerns**

Among critics who wrote about the gardens of Eszterháza in the first half of the 1780s, Prince Charles-Joseph Lamoral, 7th Prince de Ligne (1735–1814), deserves special attention because he was an expert author on gardens and his critical essay on European gardens circulated widely on the continent.<sup>37</sup> His uncomplimentary remarks aligned with those by other garden-lovers educated in the latest fashion, but he introduced a new and more devastating line of attack on the prince: he hints at that Nicolaus could have done better with the enormous amount of money he spent on Eszterháza. Although de Ligne would have preferred to see improvements in the landscape – more in the English style, of course – Prince Nicolaus was also criticised in terms of what the money spent on gardens could have done to raise the condition of the poor.<sup>38</sup> Landscape fashions and spending habits: these were the fields where

the prince was deemed to have lost touch with the times or perhaps simply did not want to adapt to them.

Another sort of social responsibility was expected from him when his Hungarian compatriots wanted him to take part in the patriotic awakening of the nation. Instead of compassion with the poor, they demanded partisanship in promoting the national language both in administrative and cultural life.<sup>39</sup> In the year of his death he was even called on to commission Hungarian plays, instead of the Italian operas that dominated the stage at Eszterháza.<sup>40</sup> Prince Nicolaus, being an entirely Germanised and loyal courtier, could not please his countrymen with patriotic behaviour; but he had advocates to defend his excessive expenditure. As early as 1772 the Hungarian poet and noble guard to the queen, György Bessenyei (c. 1746–1811), whose commander as Captain of the Hungarian Noble Guard in Vienna was Prince Nicolaus, claimed that the large expense associated with the construction of and the festivities at Eszterháza did great service to the nation as the prince demonstrated to the world what artistic heights Hungary was able to reach.<sup>41</sup> Other sympathisers pointed out that the building work gave employment to many local people and the dam that the prince built across the nearby marshlands facilitated transport and reclaimed land for cultivation.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, opera performances and the park were open to all and free of charge, whilst the Esterházy princes, at least from Nicolaus's tenure, maintained a rather generous pension system for their former employees.

Despite instances of disapproval, Prince Nicolaus mostly remained a respected figure whose dreamland Eszterháza was generally viewed as a proof of his good taste. The prince's charming character did not begin to fade with his advancing years: a visitor described him as an agile and vivid person at the age of seventy-four, just two years before his death.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, the very fact that the achievements of Hungary's richest and most distinguished magnate were questioned by his peers and by members of lower social ranks show that his



public image was not flawless. This must have been an unprecedented and even unimaginable experience for a Prince Esterházy.

## **Conclusion**

When Nicolaus inherited the princely title, he not only became the owner of the largest landed estate in Hungary, but also a master of many artists among his work force, originally employed by his older brother. Some of them, like Haydn, were excellent choices; but his choice of architect and designer is perhaps more questionable. Entertaining himself and his guests seems to have been Nicolaus's favourite occupation. Eszterháza was the stage set for these entertainments and, although it was important, the performances were much more so. This might be the reason behind his indulgent way of extending and developing his country seat; he had strong ideas of what he wanted to achieve and he was content with his own personnel in implementing them. Yet this led to problems: when the garden statues were sold in 1800, most of them were found to be virtually worthless.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, his good taste in the performing arts prompted him to invite world-class artists to Eszterháza. In other words, he spent money as he thought it fit and he was probably convinced that the architectural setting did the job perfectly well. The grandiosity of Eszterháza impressed its visitors but just a few years after the prince's death, when the meticulous maintenance was given up, the imperfections of its architecture and landscapes became immediately apparent, as a contemporary travel writer observed: 'Rather splendour reigns here than taste.'<sup>45</sup> Despite his somewhat 'do-it-yourself' approach in the evolution of his palace, including its interior and its setting, we rightly remember him as a man of exquisite taste in most things and the generous employer of Haydn. During the prince's lifetime the widespread praise of Haydn's performances (both in Vienna and Eszterháza) and the ever increasing international success of his scores have continuously reassured Nicolaus's sense of luck in having him, and

the musical life of Eszterháza has survived the strongest scrutiny ever since. The prince's ideas about how to display his wealth and rank through his luxurious spending were less successful elsewhere, showing that the taste of a strong-minded individual can very easily go astray. He took this risk in his design decisions by following both his artistic and spending preferences, yet Prince Nicolaus's amiable character still shines through the fading splendour of Eszterháza.

### **Biography**

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Rebecca Gates-Coon, *The Landed Estates of the Esterházy Princes: Hungary during the Reforms of Maria Theresia and Joseph II* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994)

Mátyás Horányi, *The Magnificence of Eszterháza*, translated by András Deák (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1962)

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Stefan Körner, "’Evviva il nostro prence, che il mondo fa stupir!’: Esterházy I. Miklós követsége II. József 1764. évi frankfurti koronázásán: szertartásrend, ünnepek, műtárgyvásárlások,' in *Kő kövön: Dávid Ferenc 73. születésnapjára*, ed. Edit Szentesi, Klára Mentényi and Anna Simon (Budapest: Vince, 2013), Vol. II, 25–52.

Ulrich Pietsch & Claudia Banz eds., *Triumph of the Blue Swords: Meissen Porcelain for Aristocracy and Bourgeoisie, 1710–1815* (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 2010)

Rémy G. Saisselin, *The Enlightenment against the Baroque: Economics and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992)

László Somfai, 'Haydn at the Esterházy Court', in *The Classical Era: From the 1740s to the end of the 18th century*, ed. Neal Zaslaw (Houndmills/Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 268–92.

Edit Szentesi, 'Eszterháza 18. századi leírásai,' in *Kő kövön: Dávid Ferenc 73. születésnapjára*, ed. Edit Szentesi, Klára Mentényi & Anna Simon (Budapest: Vince, 2013), Vol. II, 165–229.

Jan de Vries, 'Luxury and Calvinism / Luxury of Capitalism: Supply and Demand for Luxury Goods in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic', *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 57 (1999), 73–85.

### **List of illustrations (Captions)**

Figure 1. Prince Nicolaus I Esterházy in 1770, engraved by Karl Pechwell after the painting of Lorenz Guttenbrunn © Historical Gallery of the Hungarian National Museum

Figure 2. Süttör Manor, the country seat of Count Nicolaus, around 1761, photograph taken in 1928 of a painting lost during World War II © Esterházy Kastélymúzeum, Fertőd

Figure 3. Ground plan of the Eszterháza chateau in 1784, engraved by Marcus Weinmann after a drawing by Nicolas Jacoby, illustration from *Beschreibung des Hochfürstlichen Schlosses Esterháß im Königreiche Ungern* (Preßburg: Anton Löwe, 1784) © Esterházy Privatstiftung, Schloss Eisenstadt – Bibliothek

Figure 4. Map of Eszterháza in 1784, engraved by Marcus Weinmann after a drawing by Nicolas Jacoby, illustration from *Beschreibung des Hochfürstlichen Schlosses Esterháß im Königreiche Ungern* (Preßburg: Anton Löwe, 1784) © Esterházy Privatstiftung, Schloss Eisenstadt – Bibliothek

Figure 5. Eszterháza from the gardens, engraved by Ferdinand Landerer after a painting by Bartolomeo Gaetano Pesci, illustration from *Beschreibung des Hochfürstlichen Schlosses Esterháß im Königreiche Ungern* (Preßburg: Anton Löwe, 1784) © Esterházy Privatstiftung, Schloss Eisenstadt – Bibliothek

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1 His given name is Miklós in Hungarian, but outside Hungary he is better known by the German form of his name and, since he himself also used it that way, this essay adheres to it, too. This rule applies to his similarly Germanized brother (Paul Anton) and grandson (Nicolaus II), but not to his predecessors who will appear under their Hungarian names. This is justified by the fact that earlier – and in fact, later – family members used Hungarian as their first language of communication, but from the 1720s until the second half of the nineteenth century the Esterházy princes were brought up principally in German.

2 Rémy G. Saisselin, *The Enlightenment against the Baroque: Economics and Aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 34–7.

3 Saisselin, *The Enlightenment against the Baroque*, 105–9.

4 Jan de Vries, 'Luxury and Calvinism / Luxury of Capitalism: Supply and Demand for Luxury Goods in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic', *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 57 (1999), 73–85.

5 Most of the short references to his life are actually from biographies of Joseph Haydn, although more recent research has revealed many inaccuracies in earlier publications. However, a good introduction to his life in English is Rebecca Gates-Coon, *The Landed Estates of the Esterházy Princes: Hungary during the Reforms of Maria Theresa and Joseph II* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), esp. 9–10.

6 Edit Szentesi, 'Eszterháza 18. századi leírásai,' in *Kő kövön: Dávid Ferenc 73. születésnapjára*, ed. Edit Szentesi, Klára Mentényi & Anna Simon (Budapest: Vince, 2013), Vol. II, 165–229, collected all eighteenth-century accounts of Eszterháza including many references to the prince's personality.

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- 7 Horányi's brief introduction to the origins of the family's wealth is still valid – see Mátyás Horányi, *The Magnificence of Eszterháza*, translated by András Deák (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1962), 14–16. Gates-Coon's summary on the same subject adds a few more details – see Gates-Coon, *The Landed Estates*, xv–xvii.
- 8 Kristóf Fatsar, 'Anton Erhard Martinelli 1720. évi tevékenysége Süttörön', *Ars Hungarica* 23 (2000), 191–6.
- 9 On the tensions between town and the princely family see Gates-Coon, *The Landed Estates*, 4.
- 10 Esterházy (or Eszterházy as other lines of the family spelled their name) means 'of Eszterháza'. The territorial designation of all lines of the family is in fact 'of Galántha'. There is no doubt about Nicolaus's intentions because he first renamed his seat Új-Galántha (New Galántha) around the 1730s, see Mátyás Bél, 'Sopron vármegye leírása II: Descriptio Comitatus Sempronensis II', ed. Katalin Mária Kincses, translated by Gergely Tóth (Sopron: Győr–Moson–Sopron Megye Soproni Levéltára, 2006), 130–1.
- 11 Ferenc Dávid & Kristóf Fatsar, 'Esterházy "Fényes" Miklós herceg itineráriuma és az általa rendezett ünnepek hercegi rangra emelkedésétől haláláig (1762–1790)', *Levéltári Közlemények* 75 (2004), 83–103, list the festivities at Eszterháza and the itinerary of the prince. On the visit of Maria Theresa to Eszterháza, see Kálmán Varga, *Mária Terézia Eszterházán*, [Budapest:] Műemlékek Állami Gondnoksága, 2001, including an English translation, too.
- 12 A recent study, focusing on the art consumption of Prince Nicolaus while on his mission, is Stefan Körner, "'Evviva il nostro prence, che il mondo fa stupir!": Esterházy I. Miklós követsége II. József 1764. évi

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frankfurti koronázásán: szertartásrend, ünnepségek, műtárgyvásárlások,’ in *Kő kövön: Dávid Ferenc 73.*

*születésnapjára*, ed. Edit Szentesi, Klára Mentényi and Anna Simon (Budapest: Vince, 2013), Vol. II, 25–52.

13 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Autobiography of Goethe: Truth and Poetry: from my own life*, translated by John Oxenford (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848), 173. Prince Nicolaus was clearly able to fill the role of his absent monarch as was expected of an ambassador. Although writing about an earlier period, Helen Jacobsen’s words are still valid for the middle of the eighteenth century: ‘Luxury consumption was indelibly associated with royal courts, and the visual display of wealth associated with embassies and diplomats was intended to convey a message or set of messages which formed part of diplomatic communication just as much as any formal negotiations or written memorials.’ Helen Jacobsen, *Luxury and Power: The Material World of the Stuart Diplomat, 1660–1714* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

14 Körner, ‘Evviva il nostro prence’, 46–7.

15 Körner, ‘Evviva il nostro prence’, 36–7.

<sup>16</sup> On the collection of Meissen porcelain and also its context as the subject of art consumption, see *Triumph of the Blue Swords: Meissen Porcelain for Aristocracy and Bourgeoisie, 1710–1815*, ed. Ulrich Pietsch & Claudia Banz (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 2010).

17 Körner, ‘Evviva il nostro prence’, 45–6.

18 Körner, ‘Evviva il nostro prence’, 47.

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<sup>19</sup> Enikő Buzási, 'A herceg Esterházyak 18. századi ikonográfiájáról Johann Georg Bauer, Johann Georg Weickert és Ignaz Unterberger műveinek meghatározásával', in *Kő kövön: Dávid Ferenc 73. születésnapjára*, ed. Edit Szentesi, Klára Mentényi & Anna Simon (Budapest: Vince, 2013), Vol. II, 11. The author contrasts Nicholas's taste in portraiture as an exception to his otherwise search for exceptional quality, but this essay argues that things were more nuanced than this allows.

<sup>20</sup> *Reisen und merkwürdige Nachrichten zweier Neufranken durch Deutschland, Rußland, Polen und die Oestreichischen Staaten während des jezigen wichtigen Krieges* (Leipzig: Weigand, 1797), II: 302; Robert Townson, *Travels in Hungary, with a short account of Vienna in the year 1793* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1797), 39. This harsh critique probably applies to the canvases only; some of the most important ceiling frescos were painted by the celebrated Mildorfer – see Elisabeth Leube-Payer, *Josef Ignaz Mildorfer 1719–1775: Akademieprofessor und Savoyisch-Liechtensteinischer Hofmaler* (Wien: Böhlau, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> For a concise history of Haydn's life in the service of the Princes Esterházy see László Somfai, 'Haydn at the Esterházy Court', in *The Classical Era: From the 1740s to the end of the 18th century*, ed. Neal Zaslaw (Houndmills/Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 268–92. Howard Chandler Robbins Landon's exhaustive five-volume Haydn biography contains numerous sources in translation and is a mine of information in many respects. However, his architectural, and – in a broader sense – Hungarian, historiography is less reliable – see H. C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn: Chronicle and Works* (London: Thames & Hudson, Vol. I, 1980): *Haydn: the early years*; and Vol. II (1978): *Haydn at Eszterháza, 1766–1790*.



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22 Mihály Mócsényi, *Eszterháza fehérén-feketén* ([Budapest]: Mócsényi, 1998) was the principal promoter of this notion. For Jacoby's large extra-salary payment in 1762, see Mócsényi, *Eszterháza fehérén-feketén*, notes a169 and a170. The architectural and landscape history of Eszterháza has mostly been written in compendious forms as the enormous wealth of archival materials hitherto proved to be too difficult to elaborate. The last fifteen years have seen a rather substantial revision of the history of Eszterháza based on previously unknown sources still held by the Esterházy trust fund in their Castle Forchtenstein in Austria. The architectural history of Eszterháza has been recently studied by Ferenc Dávid: on the role of the principal designer see Ferenc Dávid, 'Nicolaus Jacoby(?): Eszterháza, Erweiterungsplan des Schlosses Eszterháza, 1774', in *In Arte Venustas: Studies on Drawings in Honour of Teréz Gerszi*, ed. Andrea Czére (Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts, 2007), 215–8. Crucial parts of Eszterháza's eighteenth-century garden history has been revised by the author of this essay in several short publications in recent years, some of which will appear in the notes below; however, the latest summary is Géza Galavics, 'Eszterháza 18. századi kertje,' in *Kő kövön: Dávid Ferenc 73. születésnapjára*, ed. Edit Szentesi, Klára Mentényi & Anna Simon (Budapest: Vince, 2013), Vol. II, 63–84.

23 Körner, 'Evviva il nostro prence', 31–2.

24 Kristóf Fatsar, *Magyarországi barokk kertművészet* (Budapest: Helikon, 2008), 161.

25 László Somfai, 'Joseph Haydn és közönsége', in *Kő kövön: Dávid Ferenc 73. születésnapjára*, ed. Edit Szentesi, Klára Mentényi & Anna Simon (Budapest: Vince, 2013), Vol. II, 151.

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- <sup>26</sup> Kristóf Fatsar, ‘Anton Zinner im Dienste der Esterházys’, *Die Gartenkunst* 19 (2007), 285–94. The date of the creation of the Süttör gardens and some details and circumstances of Zinner’s work were amended by Kristóf Fatsar, ‘Átváltozások: Eszterháza nagy parterjének vázlatos története’, in *MM XC: Tanulmányok és esszék a 90 éves Mőcsényi Mihály tiszteletére*, ed. Kristóf Fatsar (Budapest: BCE Tájépítészeti Kar, 2009), 77–90.
- <sup>27</sup> Kristóf Fatsar, ‘Az eszterházi lúdlábsétány kialakulásának története’, *4D Tájépítészeti és Kertművészeti Folyóirat* 3 (2006), 10–7.
- <sup>28</sup> John Moore, *A View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland and Germany* (London: Strahan – Cadell, 1779), II, 308. Moore’s impressions were analysed by Szentesi, ‘Eszterháza 18. századi leírásai’, 172, 190.
- <sup>29</sup> Christian Cay Lorenz Hirschfeld, *Theorie der Gartenkunst* I–V (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1779–1785).
- <sup>30</sup> On the psychological, social and other difficulties to transform ‘old-style’ geometric gardens in Hungary during this period, see Kristóf Fatsar, ‘European Travelers and the Transformation of Garden Art in Hungary at the Turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century’, *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* 36 (2016), 166–84.
- <sup>31</sup> Most notably the official tour guide of Eszterháza: *Beschreibung des Hochfürstlichen Schlosses Esterháß im Königreiche Ungern* (Preßburg: Anton Löwe, 1784), 42.
- <sup>32</sup> Gottfried von Rotenstein, *Lust-Reisen durch Bayern, Württemberg, Pfalz, Sachsen, Brandenburg, Oesterreich, Mähren, Böhmen und Ungarn, in den Jahren 1784 bis 1791* (Leipzig: Friedrich Schneidern, 1793), III, 177.

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- <sup>33</sup> Gábor Alföldy, 'Eszterháza kamarakertjei: Adatok és megfigyelések,' in *Kő kövön: Dávid Ferenc 73. születésnapjára*, ed. Edit Szentesi, Klára Mentényi & Anna Simon (Budapest: Vince, 2013), Vol. II, 85–106, here 87–8.
- <sup>34</sup> Hirschfeld, *Theorie der Gartenkunst*, Vol. V, 314. Hirschfeld did not see Hungarian country house gardens himself but he relied on a favourable description of them written by a Hungarian nobleman around the year 1780, and published in 1783, see Szentesi, 'Eszterháza 18. századi leírásai', 177–9.
- <sup>35</sup> Géza Galavics, *Magyarországi angolkertek* (Budapest: Balassi: 1999), 10.
- <sup>36</sup> Saisselin, *The Enlightenment against the Baroque*, 102.
- <sup>37</sup> Charles-Joseph de Ligne, *Coup d'œil sur Belœil* (Belœil: Charles de Ligne, 1781), 71–3. This work reached three French editions and was also published in German in 1799.
- <sup>38</sup> *Mindenes Gyűjtemény* 4, no. 15 (1790), 236. Passages from this journal regarding the prince were quoted in Szentesi, 'Eszterháza 18. századi leírásai', 196.
- <sup>39</sup> *Mindenes Gyűjtemény* 4, no. 15 (1790), 236.
- <sup>40</sup> *Mindenes Gyűjtemény* 4, no. 3 (1790), 46.
- <sup>41</sup> György Bessenyei, *Az eszter-házi vígasságok* ([Wien: Esterházy,] 1772), 3–4. Prince Nicolaus himself sponsored the publication of this opinion, but in any case it shows that his expenditure was under attack quite early.
- <sup>42</sup> Szentesi, 'Eszterháza 18. századi leírásai', 174–5, 187.

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43 Rotenstein, *Lust-Reisen* III, 180–1.

44 Fatsar, ‘Átváltozások’, 89–90.

45 [Carl Gottlob Küttner,] *Wanderungen durch die Niederlande, Deutschland, die Schweiz und Italien in den Jahren 1793 und 1794* (Leipzig: Voß, 1796), II, 466, quoted by Szentesi, ‘Eszterháza 18. századi leírásai’, 201.