

*“DONE! THE SPLENDID WORK, THE NEW ORNAMENT OF OUR BEAUTIFUL, ANCIENT CORONATION CITY IS COMPLETED!”*<sup>1</sup>  
IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF THE URBAN ELITE  
ILLUSTRATED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE MUNICIPAL  
THEATRE IN PRESSBURG

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Discussions about the need to build a new Municipal Theatre started in the municipal council of Pressburg in 1879 and lasted for years. They were marked by an ambiguous attitude of the municipal representatives to the modernization of the city. The final decision was reached only in 1884, prompted by a decree of the ministerial president and minister of the interior, Kálmán Tisza, who called on Pressburg to build a home for the national (Hungarian) muse. The designs were made by renowned architects of theatre projects in Central Europe, Ferdinand Fellner jr. and Hermann Helmer, which reveals the long-standing cultural ties between Pressburg and Vienna, and the ambitions of the inhabitants of Pressburg to assert the status of their (former coronation) city in Hungary. The key figure behind the theatre project was Anton Sendlein, the chief engineer of Pressburg, whose testimony in the form of an extensive documentation of the construction of the Municipal Theatre provides scope for reflections on the events and on the main players behind them.

Keywords: Pressburg. Municipal Theatre. Ferdinand Fellner jr. Hermann Helmer. Anton Sendlein. Municipal council.

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Theatres have always been places full of ideas, stories and ideals communicated to the audience. The special relationship between the artists and the audience that had evolved throughout history from a physical and thematic distance between the protagonists of the theatrical art and its recipients up to a close connectedness or even an exchange of the roles, conditioned not only the

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1 *„Vollendet! Das prächtige Werk, die neue Zierde unserer schönen altehrwürdigen Krönungsstadt ist vollendet!“* (Otto von Fabricius, 1886).

theatrical content but, mainly, the theatrical space. Building theatres had been part of the history of European culture and the theatre buildings reflected the cultural, social and technical aspects of their time. They manifested the taste, mission and significance of the theatre in the given era, and became a source of information about the composition of the paying audience and the development of the theatrical art as such.

The “long” nineteenth century, marked with industrialization, new inventions and rapid changes, appears to have ended the continuity by diverting from the tradition and following a double standard. Changes in the layers of the society brought about the emergence of a new elite who, paradoxically, demanded a revival of historical styles in the form of historicism as an artistic style in architecture.<sup>2</sup> This period saw a boom in theatre buildings, prompted by the rise of a social layer that was able to finance the construction of new theatre buildings and showed great interest in arts and education.<sup>3</sup> Theatres became one of the main forms of representation because they bore witness to the culture of the nation and raised the prestige of the city and its inhabitants.

### **Municipal Theatres in the Nineteenth Century as Mediums of Cultural Transmission**

The desire to return to the past, or to turn to historical topics, in arts manifested itself in theatre architecture, too. Historicism as the artistic style of the bourgeoisie meant a combination of various styles and a return to history in the form of Gothic Revival, Renaissance Revival, Baroque Revival, Neoclassicism, or Neoromanticism. In a sense, the destruction of the core of the historical buildings reflected the heterogeneity of the social and cultural awareness of this open social class. With the help of pieces of knowledge from history, people consciously differentiated between the styles and used them to express certain political and ideological messages. Renaissance, as a manifestation of humanism, symbolized education and culture, whereas Baroque emphasized power and seriousness. These two revival styles dominated in nineteenth-century theatre buildings.

Municipal theatres became the modern temples of the cultural religion of the bourgeoisie. They were symbols of prestige, self-representation, modernity

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2 DIENES, Gerhard Michael: Fellner & Helmer. Die Zeit, in der sie wirkten. In DIENES, Gerhard Michael (ed.): Fellner & Helmer – Die Architekten der Illusion. Theaterbau und Bühnenbild in Europa. Anlässlich des Jubiläums „100 Jahre Grazer Oper“. Graz: Stadtmuseum Graz, 1999, p. 21. ISBN 3900764212.

3 TRÜMPI, Fritz – MARSCHALL, Brigitte – ROSENZWEIG, Warren. Between Monarchy and Civil Society. Theatre and Architectural History in Austria. In KOVAČEVIĆ, Igor (ed.). *Beyond Everydayness: Theatre Architecture in Central Europe*. Prague: Národní divadlo, 2010, p. 33. ISBN 978-8-0725-8364-5.

and progress, and visible signs of a right to national equality or hegemony. With political and social development, they became the medium of a collective identity and identification policy. Thanks to national symbolism, present in the speeches and newspaper reports whenever a new theatre was opened in the presence of crowds of people, the theatre was changing to a memorial venue with a strong national significance.<sup>4</sup> This role also permeated the discussions about the cultural and political role of the theatre held during important shows, jubilees, celebrations, or even scandals and conflicts that occurred in the theatre. It was not only a question of the staged plays; the theatre served as a refined representation of the city and became a tool for collective identity in the discussions and debates about its role and status.

The theatre, as an aesthetic institution and a social communication agency, had a major influence on the city and its memory; the growing space of cities was changing into a memory storage with structures that were determined by the concentration of communication, dynamics, and traffic.<sup>5</sup> In this patchwork, theatre buildings appeared as separate categories that engulfed the space with their specific symbolism with concrete significance for the given urban area. Architecture became connected to communication, intensified by technological progress: in the nineteenth century, the equipment of the theatres abounded with technological achievements that transmitted cultural symbolism to their exterior. In this way, the theatre became a medium that made its way to the virtual space of the media and, by this, the theatre itself became a “medium” that reproduced the urban area and symbolically transmitted communication structures.<sup>6</sup>

In the nineteenth century, mediums in urban areas also included global exhibitions which were a public way of presentation for the bourgeoisie, sort of an official visiting card of their time, or staged versions of the global theatre. They demonstrated the latest developments in industry and construction, and revived the people’s long desire for illusion, enabling them to identify themselves with the mission of the theatre in that period. An important “theatrical staging” in Central Europe was the International Exhibition of Music and Drama in Vienna in

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- 4 UHL, Heidemarie. Das Theater als Gedächtnisort. Das Grazer Stadttheater – ein Medium kultureller Identität im sozialen Raum. In DIENES, Gerhard Michael (ed.). *Fellner & Helmer – Die Architekten der Illusion. Theaterbau und Bühnenbild in Europa. Anlässlich des Jubiläums „100 Jahre Grazer Oper“*. Graz: Stadtmuseum Graz, 1999, p. 113. ISBN 3900764212.
  - 5 CSÁKY, Moritz. *Das Gedächtnis der Städte. Kulturelle Verflechtungen – Wien und die urbanen Milieus in Zentraleuropa*. Wien; Köln; Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2010, p. 21. ISBN 978-3-2057-8543-9.
  - 6 BAUER, Marcus. TheaterStadtRaum – Urbane Kommunikationsstrukturen in „Mitteleuropa“. In ZVARA, Vladimír (ed.). *Musiktheater in Raum und Zeit. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Theaterpraxis in Mitteleuropa in 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Bratislava: NM CODE in collaboration with the Corpus Association, 2015, p. 19. ISBN 978-8-0894-8405-8.

1892, which revived the Alt-Wien myth: “*a fantastic image of old Vienna, which never existed, but which would have nevertheless been the truest of truths*”.<sup>7</sup> The exhibition was viewed as a showcase of the culture of the multi-ethnic empire and was visited by thousands of people from far and wide daily. The real face of the city reflected itself in paradoxes: the reproduction of the Upper Market from the seventeenth century (illuminated in the evenings with state-of-the-art electric lighting) was viewed as a synonym for old Vienna which, after the demolition of the city walls, was changing its looks too rapidly. The fast-paced growth of the city, combined with a high population growth rate, led to a conflict in the life of its population between a desire for progress and an idealized notion of withdrawal into peaceful family life. The return to old Vienna became a forced consequence that shaped the image of Vienna at the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries and had an impact on spreading this myth throughout the empire, including Pressburg.<sup>8</sup>

This syndrome of escaping into the past, or into idealized family life, was experienced by the population of several major European cities. At the same time, the bourgeois class, which was getting increasingly strong, looked for ways to present itself and found these in the newly established municipal theatres. These were owned by cities, which either managed them themselves (this applied only to a few cases of wealthier cities) or leased the building to theatre directors who ensured the functioning of the theatre under the supervision of a theatre committee. Cities showed great interest in the smooth functioning of their theatre, since it was the visiting card of their local culture and, along with the church and the city hall, an important pillar of urban culture. At the same time, theatres were one of the most prominent architectural structures in the cities and the architects who designed theatre projects were the most renowned ones of the nineteenth century.

In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the most prominent theatre architects included Ferdinand Fellner jr. (1847–1916) and Hermann Gottfried Helmer (1849–1919). With their buildings, they created Central Europe’s own topography. They designed almost fifty theatres, from Hamburg, through Zürich, up to Odessa. One of their projects was the Municipal Theatre in Pressburg (today’s

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7 WESSELY, Katharina. ... dies „Ragout aus Anderer Schmaus“ Die Neuerfindung des Alt-Wiener Volkstheaters im Rahmen der Internationalen Musik- und Theaterausstellung in Wien 1892. In SOMMER-MATHIS, Andrea – GROSEGGGER, Elisabeth – WESSELY, Katharina (eds.). *Spettacolo barocco – Performanz, Translation, Zirkulation*. Wien: Hollitzer, 2018, p. 191. ISBN 978-3-9901-2506-9.

8 BÉKÉSI, Sándor. Die Erfindung von „Alt-Wien“ oder: Stadterzählungen zwischen Pro- und Retrospektive. In SOMMER, Monika – UHL, Heidemarie (eds.). *Mythos Alt-Wien. Spannungsfelder urbaner Identitäten*. Innsbruck; Wien; Bozen: Studienverlag, 2009, p. 52. ISBN 978-3-7065-4386-6

Historical Building of the Slovak National Theatre on Hviezdoslav Square). Thanks to them, an imaginary world came into being in which the cities could improve their looks by theatre buildings branded “Fellner and Helmer”, with a virtual space that highlighted in the artistic plane – despite all the differences – one common trait: that of being Central European. Their joint architectural atelier did not work only on theatre projects. They designed several shopping centres (many of them for the Thonet company), palaces, hotels, family villas, mausoleums, and factories.<sup>9</sup> Theatre designs, however, stood in the forefront of their activities and, because of their low price, they had no rival.

To start with, the Viennese atelier assessed the urban network in Pressburg and subsequently suggested building the new theatre at the edge of the historical city centre, on the border of the “old” and the “new” city. This solution preserved the original urban architecture but, at the same time, created a new centre at the heart of the extended city area, inhabited by the new social class. The choice of the place reflected the role of municipal theatres: they drew on theatre history but brought something new and, first and foremost, stood at the centre of the (new) society.<sup>10</sup> Similarly to the Pressburg theatre, many of them were later transformed into national theatres and became bearers of the constitutive ideas of newly established states. The work of these Viennese architects may be regarded as a cultural heritage of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and a legacy from the past that reached into the future.

For Pressburg, the Viennese atelier meant a guarantee of prestige and of a promising future based on a wealthy past, since the proximity of Vienna had had a major impact on the social and cultural life of the people of Pressburg for centuries. In the nineteenth century, both Budapest and Vienna viewed Pressburg as a provincial city on the western border of Upper Hungary. With growing Hungarianization, the tone changed and Pressburg was increasingly often mentioned as the western bastion of the Hungarians.<sup>11</sup> The pro-Hungarian

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9 *Sammelwerk der ausgeführten Bauten und Projekte in den Jahren 1870/1914*. Wien: Fellner & Helmer; K. K. Oberbauräte Wien, [ca. 1915], 52 p.

10 MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta. Zrod moderného mesta: zmeny obrazu slovenských miest v druhej polovici 19. a prvej polovici 20. storočia [The Origin of the Modern Cities: the Changes in Slovak Cities in the Second Half of 19th Century and the First Half of 20th Century]. In *Forum historiae: odborný internetový časopis pre históriu a príbuzné spoločenské vedy*, 2016, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 6. ISSN 1337-6861.

11 TANCER, Jozef – MANNOVÁ, Elena. Od uhorského patriotizmu k menšinovému nacionalizmu. Zmeny povedomia Nemcov na Slovensku v 18. až 20. storočí” [From Hungarian Patriotism to Minority Nationalism. Changes in the Awareness of Germans in Slovakia from the 18th to the 20th Century]. In KILIÁNOVÁ, Gabriela – KOWALSKÁ, Eva – KREKOVÍČOVÁ, Eva (eds.). *My a tí druhí v modernej spoločnosti. Konštrukcie a transformácie kolektívnych identít*. Bratislava: Veda – vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 2009, p. 373. ISBN 978-8-0224-1025-0.

circles of Pressburg voiced the need to publicly strengthen the ideas of one (Hungarian) nation with one (Hungarian) language. Constructing public buildings and facilities was a useful tool to demonstrate the cultural refinement of the city and the modernness of its population. At the end of the nineteenth century, the municipal council regularly discussed some new projects in the city, which included a tram line to Vienna, a solid bridge, and the establishment of a university. In the end, the construction of a new theatre superseded all the other plans, and this points to the central position of the theatre as a tool for spreading the national language and a venue for the collective representation of the urban elite.

### **The Project of the Municipal Theatre Against the Background of the Activities of the Municipal Council of Pressburg**

The decision to have a new theatre building erected in Pressburg was made for various reasons, as the documentation of the history of its construction reveals.<sup>12</sup> Its architect, Anton Sendlein (1842–1918), a recipient of the Knight's Cross of the Order of Franz Joseph and a graduate of the Technical College of Vienna, was a renowned professional not only in Pressburg but also beyond the city.<sup>13</sup> In the late nineteenth century, he held the post of the chief engineer of Pressburg (he retired in 1902 after thirty-four years of service to the city), under which the theatre building also fell. Sendlein's interest in theatre did not stem only from professional reasons. His wife, Anna, came from the Laban family, from which several prominent artists emerged, including the actor Adolf Mylius (Adolf Laban by his real name), and the dancer and teacher Rudolf Laban. Sendlein's personal interest in a good background for dramatic arts manifested itself not only in initiating the erection of a theatre but, mainly, in monitoring its functioning from the technical as well as artistic aspect for many years as a member of the theatre committee. As a member also of the management board of the First Savings Bank of Pressburg, he had an influence on several decisions about the theatre, including the funding of the construction of the new theatre building. Sendlein's documentation was created after 1887, i.e. after the theatre operations

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12 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887. Zusammengestellt von Oberingenieur Anton Sendlein. Archiv mesta Bratislavy (AMB) [Bratislava City Archives], Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box no. 2940, inv. no. 15879 (hereinafter referred to as Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887).

13 Kollegentag. *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, 10/ 10/ 1912, 46, no. 278, p. 15. On the personal profile and career growth of Anton Sendlein, see BENYOVSZKY MÁNYA, Ágnes. *Belle Époque. Architekti a staviteľia v Prešporku 1890 – 1914*. [Belle Époque. Architects and Builders in Pressburg 1890–1914]. Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2014, pp. 176–178. ISBN 978-80-8114-325-0.

were launched. By drawing up a detailed overview of the events, and by closely following the developments even after the construction was over, Sendlein left a precious testimony of a person who remained in the shadow of the renowned Viennese architects while being the main protagonist of the developments.

In his documentation, Sendlein refers to two other sources: minutes from the meetings of the construction committee set up to manage the construction of the new theatre,<sup>14</sup> and minutes from the meetings of the theatre committee, mentioned by Sendlein with regard to the lease of the old theatre.<sup>15</sup> He also quotes from the letters written to him by the architects Fellner and Helmer.<sup>16</sup> Sendlein commented on the course of the construction from its beginning, i.e. from 1879, when serious discussions began in the urban circles about the significant wear and tear of the old Municipal Theatre, built in 1776, and the need of extensive repairs. He reported that, in September 1879, the magistrate commissioned a stock-taking in the theatre and the Redoute, the latter being part of the theatre, and the committee noted some serious shortcomings in the condition of the building.<sup>17</sup> No action was taken though, until part of the brickwork fell off the ceiling during a concert of the CMA in the Redoute hall on 12 October 1879. Although nobody got hurt, the incident immediately raised concerns about the safety of the building. Prompted by the editor of the *Preßburger Zeitung* and representative of the city, Carl Koller, the city decided to set up a construction-police committee of twelve and commissioned it to produce a report on the condition of the theatre building. The members of this committee, some of whom became in 1884 members of the construction committee commissioned to manage the construction of the new theatre, included municipal captain Johann Kozsehuba, chief municipal engineer Anton Sendlein, municipal physician Dr. Georg Kováts, commander of the fire brigade Ferdinand Martinengo, master architects Ignatz Feigler jr., Ludwig Eremit, Martin Köszler, master carpenter Moritz Sprinzl, and representatives of the municipal council, Carl Koller, Prince Arthur Rohan, Josef von Jeszenszky, and Josef von Záborszky. While inspecting the building, the committee was accompanied by director and actor Josef Seydl, who was the theatre inspector at that time.<sup>18</sup>

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14 AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box no. 2d 6/3, inv. no. 15862, minutes from the meetings of the construction committee from 1884–1887.

15 AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box no. 2d 6/1, inv. no. 15860, minutes from the meetings of the theatre committee from 1875–1880, and box no. 2d 6/2, inv. no. 15861, minutes from the meetings of the theatre committee from 1881–1885.

16 AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, boxes no. 2938 and no. 2939, inv. no. 15879, letters of Ferdinand Fellner jr. and Herman Hellmer.

17 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, p. 3.

18 Ibidem, pp. 3–4.



The inspection was held on 17 December 1879, and the committee came to the conclusion that the building was not fire safe for several reasons. One of these was the fact that, although the building had separate rooms for storing flats and decorations, these were not large enough in the committee's view, or were not used for the intended purpose, so the flats and the decorations were stored behind the stage and in the attic of the Redoute. Both the flats and the decorations were made of flammable materials and this could cause extensive damages if a fire broke out. In addition, the building had few emergency exits and escape would have been difficult because the corridors were narrow. The committee also pointed out the inadequate ventilation, the absence of a safety curtain made of iron that would have prevented the spreading of a fire from the stage, as well as the lack of suitable hygienic facilities for the visitors and the performers. Consequently, the committee recommended an extensive renovation of the building because minor repairs would not have been sufficient.<sup>19</sup>

After submitting the conclusions to the municipal council, the president of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce and president of the First Savings Bank of Pressburg, representative of the city, and royal counsellor Theodor Edl became engaged in the matter. In his documentation, Sendlein described him as a tireless enthusiast of the theatre, fine arts, and music in the city, by which he briefly summarized the merits of this active pianist, one of the initiators of the Liedertafel and Singverein choirs in Pressburg.<sup>20</sup> Edl aroused a serious discussion in the municipal council, which culminated in Sendlein's proposal to invite the Viennese architect Ferdinand Fellner jr. to assess the condition of the theatre building independently. Sendlein knew Fellner through his close contact with the Viennese circle of architects, namely the Association of Austrian Engineers and Architects (Österreichischer Ingenieur- und Architekten-Verein in German), whose members included Fellner and Helmer. Fellner, a representative of a joint architectural atelier, accepted the invitation and inspected the theatre and the Redoute on 17 and 18 March 1880. He sent his report to the city on 25 March and confirmed the conclusions of the inspection carried out on 17 December 1879, emphasizing that no specialist could vouch for the safe continuation of the operations in the actual technical condition of the building.<sup>21</sup> He enclosed several photographs of the latest projects of the atelier, including the Municipal Theatre in Liberec, the Wiener Stadttheater in Vienna, the Népszínház in Budapest, the Stadttheater in Augsburg, and their upcoming projects of the Municipal Theatre

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19 Ibidem, p. 4; AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box no. 2939, inv. no. 15879, Protokoll über die bau- und feuerpolizeiliche Besichtigung des Preßburger st. Theater- und Redouten-Gebäudes.

20 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, p. 17.

21 Ibidem, p. 5.



and Park Colonnade in Karlovy Vary.<sup>22</sup> Also, he proposed a time frame for the renovation of the old theatre, or for the construction of a new theatre building. He estimated the budget, too: the renovation would cost 260,000 to 290,000 guilders, whereas the construction of a new building would cost 400,000 to 420,000 guilders. Sendlein added that this estimate referred to the safety requirements of the theatre building known at that time, but these increased significantly after the 1881 fire in the Ringtheater in Vienna.<sup>23</sup>

Based on Theodor Edl's recommendation, the city contacted another architect, Otto Hofer, a native of Sopron, Hungary, who later became a member of the prominent architectural atelier Hasenauer and participated in the design of the new Burgtheater in Vienna. Hofer inspected the Municipal Theatre and the Redoute on 24 March 1880 and submitted his report, similar to that of Fellner, already on 25 March. Sendlein emphasized that both architects inspected the building for free, the city reimbursed only their travel and accommodation expenses in Pressburg.<sup>24</sup>

Long discussions about the further course of the theatre began in the municipal council that moment. One of the proposals said that the premises used by the theatre should be exchanged with those in the Redoute. Another suggestion stated that the theatre, along with the Redoute, should shift to a single hall and a new theatre should be built opposite. Funding the renovation, or the construction of a new building, also played a role. Carl Koller presented a proposal in the municipal council to levy tax on each public cultural event in the city, including the shows in the Municipal Theatre, the Redoute, and the Arena, as well as on balls and parties. This would have meant a 10% increase in the ticket price.

Those who, according to Sendlein, were not members of the theatre audience, suggested to wait with the renovation, saying that the building was in an excellent condition (which, of course, they could not know since they were not visiting it). The standpoint of Ignatz Feigler jr., Ferdinand Kittler, and Karl Gratzl, builders in Pressburg, and of some others who were not willing to submit themselves to the view of renowned architects and declared that they themselves would be able to offer a cheaper and better solution is quite surprising.<sup>25</sup> When Fellner inspected the theatre, the city asked him about the amount of his remuneration, and the architect specified it as 5% of the total costs, which would have meant 12,500 guilders out of the total 250,000. Some of the representatives of the city considered this amount to be too high, so they contacted the architect Feigler

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22 AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box no. 2938, inv. no. 15879, letter of Ferdinand Fellner jr. of 25/03/1880.

23 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, p. 5.

24 Ibidem, p. 6.

25 Ibidem.

to produce a plan for the renovation of the theatre. After receiving incomplete sketches, and an incomplete budget, it was evident that this would not be a good solution. In addition, it turned out that the estimated amount of 250,000 guilders would not even be enough.<sup>26</sup>

In March 1880, on the initiative of Dr. Ignaz Deutsch, a representative of the city, the city decided to enter into negotiations with the First Savings Bank of Pressburg to have the interest rate on the city's debt lowered from 6% to 5% to enable it to save up for new projects, such as the construction of barracks, a municipal water distribution system, a solid bridge, an abattoir, and also a new theatre. The negotiations took place in April 1880 and were chaired by Theodor Edl as the president of the financial committee and president of the First Savings Bank of Pressburg. Voting about the proposal to fund the theatre took place at the meeting of the municipal council on 28 and 30 June 1880. With 101 votes for and 7 votes against, the representatives approved an amount of 250,000 guilders for the theatre. The city sent the result of the voting to the Hungarian Royal Ministry of the Interior (Magyar Királyi Belügyminisztérium in Hungarian, hereinafter referred to as the Ministry of the Interior), which rejected the result for unknown reasons and demanded another inspection of the theatre building.<sup>27</sup>

An architect, Béla Ney arrived in Pressburg during the Holy Week of 1881. Accompanied by Anton Sendlein, he inspected the whole building and came to the conclusion that it had to be closed immediately. However, some Hungarian shows were to be performed in the theatre after Easter, and he did not want to cause any damage to the Hungarian company. Dr. Ignaz Deutsch was also present at the inspection and asked Ney if a renovation of the building made any sense or if it was better to build a new theatre. Ney recommended building a new theatre because the difference between the two proposals would have been minor and only a small part of the original building could be utilized. He estimated the cost of the construction at 400,000 guilders. The Ministry of the Interior sent its decision as its Decree 31941 of 2 July 1881, agreeing to the renovation of the building in principle, but making its final decision subject to receiving detailed plans with the budget and its coverage.<sup>28</sup>

The construction-police committee, which had carried out the first inspection of the theatre in the autumn of 1879, had to submit a plan of further action. Its members suggested to the municipal council to commission a renowned company to produce the architectural plans or to issue a request for tenders, either a limited or an unlimited one. On 29 August 1881, the municipal council discussed the submitted design and, as Sendlein put it, the debate had a

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26 Ibidem, p. 9.

27 Ibidem, pp. 9–10.

28 Ibidem, p. 10.

patriotic tone. Several people, including Sándor Vutkovich and Moritz Pisztorý, demanded to commission exclusively architects from Budapest or Hungary. Others did not want to commission any architects, only local builders. Edl and Sendlein were for the Viennese architects Fellner and Helmer, and they argued that they were the authors of the designs of the Népszínház in Budapest and were working on the project of a theatre in Szeged at that time. If the capital, and an important Hungarian city like Szeged, commissioned these architects, Pressburg should not act otherwise, either. Moreover, Sendlein pointed out that arts had an international dimension and, at the same time, projects were subject to the financial resources of the client. Since Pressburg could not rely on any help from the Government of Hungary, he recommended the city to invite Fellner and Helmer, whose project was reasonably priced.<sup>29</sup> The arguments in favour of patriotism ultimately convinced most of the representatives; since they did not want to be put to shame, they authorized the committee to invite the Viennese atelier to produce all the necessary documentation for the construction. Also, they agreed that the theatre building would change places with the building of the Redoute to ensure continuity in theatre operations even during the construction.<sup>30</sup>

The construction work was to begin on 1 April 1882, the theatre was to be completed by 1 August 1883, and the Redoute by 1 December 1883. A house standing at 8, Jägerzeile (today's 6, Palacký street) was to be purchased to store the decorations and to house the painting and carpentry workshop. The representatives also decided that they would exclude the paving of the pavements, the sewer network, and the levelling of the streets from the construction budget, since all this work would have to be carried out in near future anyway, regardless of the new theatre.

In the autumn of 1881, Fellner returned to Pressburg to demonstrate on his specific designs his objections to using the original walls of the old theatre, which prevented a new segmentation of the building. The city accepted Fellner's proposal and commissioned the atelier to produce a completely separate design of a new building. The decision in favour of a new building was partly influenced by the fact that the first phase of the systematic regulation of the Danube according to the plans of Enea Grazioso Lanfranconi had just been completed, and it made it possible to create public areas and construct representative buildings not only directly on the bank of the Danube but also in a wider area, where the theatre was, too.<sup>31</sup>

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29 Die Pläne und Kostenüberschläge-Beschaffung für den Preßburger Theaterbau. Preßburger Zeitung, 30/08/1881, 117, no. 237, p. 1.

30 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, p. 11.

31 MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta – SZALAY, Peter – HABERLANDOVÁ, Katarína – KRIŠTEKOVÁ, Laura – BOČKOVÁ, Monika. *Bratislava (ne)plánované mesto = Bratislava (un)*

An extraordinary meeting of the municipal council was held in the afternoon of 9 December 1881, where the news of a fire that had broken out and caused many casualties in Ringtheater in Vienna the previous evening was discussed. Carl Koller immediately raised the question of the safety of the old theatre and Sendlein replied that, unless emergency staircases were built to the old theatre and to the Redoute, enabling a fast exit of the building, these building should not be used. After a short discussion, the chairman, chief county administrator Count Stephen Eszterházy ordered immediate adjustments to building, so the operations of the theatre were interrupted only for a few days and were resumed already on 13 December.<sup>32</sup>

The plans of the new theatre, with a redoute, drawn by Fellner and Helmer before the disaster, arrived in Pressburg on 16 December 1881. The construction budget was 362,500 guilders, and they were able to reduce this amount to 326,000 guilders. In his letter enclosed to the plans, Fellner expressed his fears that the plans would have to be changed because of the new situation.<sup>33</sup> Fellner and Helmer were members of the professional committee set up by the Association of Austrian Engineers and Architects shortly after the Ringtheater Fire to propose recommendations to increase the safety of theatre buildings, so he was aware that new rules would be issued soon. In his letter, Fellner also mentioned that Ignatz Feigler jr. and partners Kittler and Gratzl visited him in Vienna before sending the plans and they agreed to write financial offers, both companies expressing their interest in participating in the construction. Their visit was not marred even by the campaign led by both companies in Pressburg against the Viennese atelier.

In his letter of 19 December, Sendlein submitted his official request for a modification of the plans. The architects replied by return and confirmed that they would soon send them. At the same time, Fellner congratulated Sendlein on his swift action in the matter of building emergency staircases, since the old theatre was a “matchbox” in his view.<sup>34</sup> In late January 1882, the architects submitted the promised documentation modified according to the recommendations of the professional committee of the Association of Austrian Engineers and Architects. The municipal council received the documentation on 6 February and called on the committee which had inspected the old theatre to check it. Also, it approved the purchase of the house at 8, Jägerzeile for the needs of the new theatre.<sup>35</sup>

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*planned city*. Bratislava: Slovart, 2020, s. 141. ISBN 978-80-556-4696-1.

32 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, pp. 13–14.

33 AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box no. 2939, inv. no. 15879, letter of Ferdinand Fellner jr. of 10/12/1881.

34 Ibidem, letter of Ferdinand Fellner jr. of 24/12/1881.

35 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, pp. 15–16.

At a meeting of the municipal council on 3 April, it was concluded that there was no better place for erecting a new theatre in the city than the one where the old theatre was standing. Furthermore, the committee noted that the construction would cost 400,000 guilders and that the city could gain the annual amount of 24,000 guilders needed for the 5% interest and 1% amortization in the following way: 5,000 guilders from the lease of the Redoute, including the bars, 8,600 guilders from interest on flats in the house at 8, Jägerzeile, 16,000 guilders from the 2% tax on the shows performed in the theatre and the Arena, 1,600 guilders from the 20% tax on shows in the Redoute, 2,000 guilders from the 20% tax on other shows in the city, i.e. 25,200 guilders in total.<sup>36</sup> The committee accepted these proposals and asked the First Savings Bank of Pressburg whether it would be willing to lend money to the city under the above conditions. The savings bank approved a loan in the amount of 400,000 guilders under the condition that it set the interest rate at 5.5% and the amortization rate at 0.75%. Therefore, Johann Ludwig suggested issuing an invitation to tender to secure the loan. The city sent the complete construction documentation of the theatre to the Ministry of the Interior for approval. It also enclosed the objection of Ludwig von Mossóczy, representative of the city, who, along with several other representatives, did not agree to the construction.<sup>37</sup>

On 14 June 1882, Theodor Edl, the central promoter of the theatre project, suddenly died. According to Sendlein, the whole situation took a negative turn against the new theatre from that moment, because Edl had headed the important financial institutions in the city and he had been able to support every good initiative. As head of the municipal financial committee, he was succeeded by a representative of the city and member of the theatre committee, Josef von Jeszenszky, who was characterized by Sendlein as a man with a single motto: to save.<sup>38</sup> In Sendlein's words, he was not publicly against the project of the new theatre, but, nevertheless, he had no understanding of beauty, progress, arts, or science.

The idea of building a new theatre became unpopular in the city, and negotiations came to a standstill on all sides. On 2 July 1882, the Ministry of the Interior sent its Decree of 11 June 1882, in which it rejected the modified plans because they did not appear to be safe enough and were financially underestimated. The ministry noted the modifications that Fellner and Helmer added after the Ringtheater Fire, but these were not enough for it to issue the construction permit. Therefore, it called upon Pressburg to deliver new plans.<sup>39</sup> In their letter

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36 *Ibidem*, p. 16.

37 *Ibidem*, p. 17.

38 *Ibidem*, p. 18.

39 *Ibidem*, pp. 18–19.

of 13 July 1882, Fellner and Helmer expressed “*their disappointment with the situation*”, but were ready to propose even more extensive fire safety measures in accordance with the ministry’s opinion. However, this meant increasing the construction budget and the city did not accept that.<sup>40</sup> Not much time was left till the opening of the new season of 1882/1883, but Sendlein refused to issue the permit. Therefore, the city agreed with municipal engineers Leopold Kiss and Ignaz Linzboth, and with master carpenter Anton Durvay, who vouched for the theatre.

Jeszenszky’s influence on the actions of the construction-police committee, whose members included Jeszenszky himself and which wanted to contact Fellner and Helmer again, became evident soon. It submitted a proposal to the municipal council to commission local builders to create new plans. This was supported also by the financial committee headed by Jeszenszky, which submitted a proposal that, if local builders succeeded, the city would not request new plans from the Viennese atelier. Only Kittler and Gratzl, supported by Jeszenszky, replied to the invitation. According to Sendlein, they were skilful followers of Feigler, but did not have the expertise and the experience needed for complex architectural designs. Jeszenszky’s efforts met with Sendlein’s justified objections, so the city decided to contact the Viennese architects again. The lease agreement of the theatre building was quietly renewed for the subsequent, 1883/1884 season, too.<sup>41</sup>

The Viennese architects sent the new plans to the Ministry of the Interior on 19 April 1883 in compliance with the ministry’s Decree of 11 June 1882. Compared to the previous design, the architects significantly enhanced the safety elements in the theatre, hoping that the ministry would approve the plan this time.<sup>42</sup> By its Decree of 26 April 1883, the ministry returned the plan with the objection that a financial control of the project should be performed. At the meetings of the municipal council on 4 and 5 June 1883, the construction-police committee reported that the new plan would require a coverage of 369,172 guilders, whereas other items had to be added to this amount, such as the purchase of the house at 8, Jägerzeile for 20,000 guilders, adjustments to the house in the amount of 500 guilders, securing a carriage for the transportation of the decorations for 200 guilders, and remuneration to the architects amounting to 12,500 guilders, i.e. 402,372 guilders in total. To gain the necessary amount, the financial committee suggested to the city to borrow 1,100,000 guilders for new projects and allocate

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40 AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box no. 2939, inv. no. 15879, letter of Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer of 13/07/1882.

41 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, p. 20.

42 AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box no. 2939, inv. no. 15879, letter of Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer of 12/04/1883.

402,372 guilders out of this amount for the theatre. The proposal was approved, and the city decided to issue a request for tenders to negotiate a 4.5% interest rate to enable it to pay back the loan in fifty years.<sup>43</sup>

Fierce protests against constructing a new theatre continued in the summer of 1883. One of the arguments of the protesters was that exchanging parts of the theatre would provide an area for a nice restaurant, which would be fully occupied both in the summer and in the winter, and this would cause damages to the nearby hotels and restaurants. Therefore, they suggested building the new theatre without a redoute. The hotelier Jakub Palugyay publicly announced his intention that he was planning to convert one of the rooms in his hotel called *Zum grünen Baum* into a dance hall, by which the city could save some money. Sendlein asked for the opinion of the Viennese architects whether they would recommend this solution. They replied they did, but suggested to lay the wooden flooring in a way that it could be used as a dance floor, too.<sup>44</sup> Logically, theatre shows would not be performed at the time when balls were held in the theatre. They also added that, for safety reasons, this would even be a better solution than to construct a theatre with a redoute. Of course, the costs would also have been lower in this case. Officially, no negotiations were led about this suggestion though.

After a meeting of the municipal council on 18 June 1883, the plans, including the budget and its coverage, were sent again to Budapest. Silence followed, no reply came, so doubts arose again about the viability of the project. In late 1883, the theatre committee insisted on entering into a lease agreement of the old theatre for a longer period. As a member of the committee, Jeszenszky claimed that even if the construction of a new building would be approved by Budapest, it would not be necessary to implement it, as repairs in the old theatre would suffice. This opinion was adopted by several representatives of the city. Consequently, Sendlein requested Kozsehuba, a member of the theatre committee, to ask for two days for making a decision before signing the agreement, and requested him for a report on the technical condition of the building. Kozsehuba agreed. On 13 February 1884, Sendlein announced in writing that the building was dangerous and life-threatening to both the performers and the audience. Therefore, the theatre and the Redoute would have to be closed after the end of the Hungarian shows in May that year.<sup>45</sup>

Sendlein's written statement caused an explosion in the city. Along with Kozsehuba, the mayor Moritz Gottl was worried about the reaction of the

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43 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, pp. 22–23.

44 AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box no. 2939, inv. no. 15879, letter of Ferdinand Fellner jr. and Hermann Helmer of 08/06/1883.

45 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, p. 26.



inhabitants of Pressburg, since the theatre could close down any time. Therefore, Kozsehuba hurried to Budapest and met, among others, Kálmán Tisza, the ministry's president and minister of the interior, who confirmed Sendlein's statements. To avoid the city putting the blame on Kozsehuba, Tisza advised him to send him a written inquiry, along with Sendlein's statement. The Decree of 23 February, in which minister Tisza ordered the immediate closure of the theatre building and the Redoute, arrived from Budapest on 25 February 1884.<sup>46</sup>

After this intervention by the minister, the city could have been expected to immediately submit itself and do its best to build a new theatre. This was not the case though. On 26 February, at a special meeting of the municipal council, the representatives set up a new committee and commissioned it to inspect the old theatre again. Its members included the commander of the fire brigade Ferdinand Martinengo, master carpenters Moritz Sprinzl, Anton Durvay and Franz Hubert, and master builders Ignatz Feigler jr., Carl Feigler and Ludwig Eremit. Sendlein's participation was not permitted. The committee concluded that all the safety requirements were met, so the shows in the theatre and the events in the Redoute could continue. Only minor repairs were required. Similarly, the committee concluded that the theatre was safe from the architectural aspect, too, and that the wood and the brickwork were in a good condition.<sup>47</sup>

At the next meeting of the municipal council, the representatives noted the ministerial decree but interpreted it in the sense that the minister had not ordered an immediate closure of the theatre, but only recommended its renovation, or the erection of a new theatre. The city pretended to be implementing the ministerial decree. It requested the construction-police committee, which had carried out the first inspection of the theatre, to submit a plan to solve the situation. This committee, which was joined also by some members of the committee from the last inspection of the theatre, became almost inoperative because of the large number of its members. It did not propose anything new, only called on local builders to produce new plans since, in its own words, Pressburg did not have the necessary funds for constructing a new theatre, nor for an extensive renovation of the old one. The same mistake was thus repeated for the third time, delaying the construction further.

In the meantime, elections for the leading functions of the municipal magistrate took place on 9 April 1884 and a forceful campaign was being led against Sendlein. Nevertheless, he was reelected as the chief engineer of the city, since no one else from those contacted was willing to take over his function. Karl Mergl became the mayor, Gustav Dröxler the deputy mayor, and Theodor Brolly

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46 Ibidem, p. 27.

47 Ibidem, p. 28.

the chief notary. The theatre committee submitted a proposal for extending the lease agreement of the theatre for the subsequent, 1884/1885 season, too. Due to the conflict between Sendlein's statement about the condition of the theatre and the committee's report from the last inspection of the theatre, the ministry ordered by its Decree of 19 May that it made its decision subject to another inspection of the theatre, this time by Heinrich Wohlfahrt, the building inspector of the building authority of Budapest.<sup>48</sup> The inspection began in early June 1884. The members of the committee which had carried out the inspection of the theatre in the spring of 1884 wanted to be present, but Wohlfahrt did not allow that. He invited only Sendlein and demanded the presence of one technical official and one carpenter. When leaving Pressburg, Wohlfahrt told Sendlein that the theatre had to be closed down immediately. The government decree of 26 June, prohibiting any further performances in the theatre, arrived in Pressburg on 27 June. At the same time, Minister Tisza emphasized that it expected the city to build a theatre which would correspond to its standards in every aspect.<sup>49</sup>

On 28 June, the theatre committee announced that, according to the modified plans, the construction of the new theatre including a redoute would cost 500,000 guilders, whereas the construction of the theatre itself would cost 330,000 guilders. After reading the ministry's decree of 26 June at the meeting of the municipal council on 7 July 1884, the plan for the construction of the new theatre without a redoute was approved after a long debate. Sendlein stated that seven representatives, including himself, voted for a new building with a redoute, whereas, after the theatre opened and it turned out that a redoute would have been really necessary, at least fifty representatives stated that they had voted for it. Sendlein wondered how 7 became 57.<sup>50</sup>

From that moment, things started to move forward. Fellner and Helmer had to be contacted again to produce the financial plan for the coverage of the project and an invitation to tender had to be sent out to local builders and masters. All this took place in the summer months of 1884. At the 19 August meeting of the municipal council, the representatives took a decision about the necessary preparatory work, including emptying the boxes of the aristocratic families containing their own pieces of furniture by 15 September at the latest, as the local dailies reported.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the city commissioned Sendlein to propose adjustments to Pálffy's Hall that was to serve as a provisional theatre (a so-called Interimstheater) for two years. Five thousand guilders were set apart for the adjustments. This ensured that the continuity of the theatre traditions did

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48 Ibidem, p. 34.

49 Ibidem, p. 35.

50 Ibidem, p. 38.

51 [Announcement] *Preßburger Zeitung*, 24/08/1884, 121, no. 234, p. 2.

not have to be interrupted in the city. Thanks to Sendlein's adjustments to the premises, the opening show at the provisional theatre on 1 October 1884 turned out to be a real festivity.<sup>52</sup>

### **The Funding and the Final Form of the New Theatre Building**

Commissioned by the municipal council, the new construction committee started its activities on 21 August 1884, supervising the construction of the new theatre building. Its members were: municipal captain Johann Kozsehuba (president of the committee), chief municipal engineer Anton Sendlein (registrar and construction controller), commander of the fire brigade Ferdinand Martinengo, municipal representatives Johann von Csattogányi, Ludwig Eremit, Josef von Jeszenszky, Anton Pfanzelt, Dr. Moritz Pisztorý, Prince Arthur Rohan, and Josef von Záborszky. After his death, Prince Arthur Rohan was replaced by Felix Pisztorý, but, according to Sendlein, he never showed any interest in the construction.<sup>53</sup>

The major part of the responsibilities connected to the construction fell on Sendlein, who performed these besides his other tasks that arose from his office of chief engineer of the city. He tried to solve all the technical issues directly with the architects, and this reveals his close relationship with the Viennese atelier. Also, he tried to avoid discussions with Jeszenszky, who had a very pragmatic attitude to the construction and rejected, in principle, any expense on theatre decorations. All the major decisions had to be approved by the construction committee and, subsequently, by the municipal council. Sendlein recalled that, as construction manager, he recommended to the architects a skilful young draughtsman (who later became a building master), Anton Keusch from Pressburg, who had no experience, however, so Sendlein had to substitute even him. All the work connected to weighing the materials was performed by a municipal representative and member of the construction committee, Anton Pfanzelt.<sup>54</sup>

The city finally received the architectural plans of the theatre, including its budget, on 13 January 1885, and they were discussed by the municipal council on 3 February 1885. Subsequently, they were sent to the Ministry of the Interior in Budapest for approval, which definitively accepted them only in its Decree of 6 June 1885. This was practically the third version of the architectural plans, and each version was subsequently modified, too. The architects submitted the first plans before the Ringtheater Fire in 1881. They produced the second plan after

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52 -a-: Eröffnungs-Vorstellung. Preßburger Zeitung, 02/10/1884, 121, no. 272, p. 4.

53 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, pp. 41–42.

54 Ibidem, p. 42.

the fire and it included a redoute, too. The third, and final, version was created after the definitive approval of the construction of the theatre without a redoute.

The preparatory work and digging the foundation started in the autumn of 1884. On 24 September 1884, the municipal council accepted the winning bids for the earthworks and the brickwork. The winning bid had been submitted by builders Ignatz Feigler jr. and his nephew Alexander Feigler. The city commissioned Moritz Sprinzl with the carpentry work. On 25 September, the building committee handed over the old theatre to the Feiglers for demolition. A firemen's training exercise still took place in the old building on 28 September, while part of the old shingle roof was being removed. The demolition of the theatre started on 29 September. The building was demolished gradually, the theatre office and the daytime ticket office remained standing in the first weeks.<sup>55</sup> On 25 October, the foundation stone of the new theatre was laid by master mason Michael Kittler in the presence of Anton Sendlein in the southwestern corner of the building. Sendlein added that this master had great expertise and played a major role in the successful course of the construction.<sup>56</sup>

As for funding the project, Sendlein emphasized the skilfulness of the above-mentioned municipal representative, Johann Ludwig, who found a way to finance the whole construction by converting the interest of the city's debt. The city did not have to take any further loan and it did not even have to levy any unpopular taxes on cultural and entertainment events. An advance of 40,000 guilders was borrowed from Royko's fund, with 5% interest, to begin the construction. Further, Ludwig proposed the following strategy:

In 1868, the city had borrowed 600,000 guilders from the First Savings Bank of Pressburg, which it had to repay in 28 years, i.e. by 1896. Interest and amortization represented 7% of the total amount, i.e. 42,000 guilders. The city had also borrowed 165,033.43 guilders from the same bank. It was paying this amount back with a 5.5% interest, which amounted to 9,076.84 guilders. Finally, the city had taken a loan from the orphanage treasury in the amount of 11,862.34 guilders, whose annual interest and amortization were 792 guilders. The city had these three loans, amounting to a total of 776,895.77 guilders, and was paying 51,868.84 guilders of interest and amortization annually. It had already paid back 234,600 guilders from the loan of 600,000 guilders, so it still owed 365,400 guilders. Ludwig calculated that, if lower interest rates could be negotiated and amortization could be extended, the amount needed for the construction of the theatre could be gained without having to increase the annual instalment of the debts in the amount of 51,868.84 guilders.<sup>57</sup>

55 [Announcement] *Preßburger Zeitung*, 25/09/1884, 121, no. 265, p. 3.

56 *Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887*, p. 43.

57 *Ibidem*, pp. 44–45. János Jónás, the chronicler of the history of the savings bank, made a brief

On 14 January 1885, the city issued a request for tenders, but only the First Savings Bank of Pressburg applied, with 5.25% interest and 0.25% amortization, i.e. 5.5% in total for a period of fifty-eight and a half years. This offer was accepted in the end and submitted to the municipal council for approval on 16 February 1885 in the following form:

The first loan, from 1868, had to be paid back in the amount of 365,400 guilders, the second loan in the amount of 165,033.43 guilders, and the third loan in the amount of 11,862.34 guilders. The construction of the theatre required 330,000 guilders; in addition, 17,000 guilders were needed for a new depot for wagons, and 10,704.23 guilders for fees, seals and other expenses. In total, this meant 900,000 guilders. Since interest and amortization were set for this amount at 5.5%, i.e. 49,500 guilders annually, whereas 51,868.84 guilders were being paid annually for the lowest amount (776,895.77 guilders), the city could save 2,368.84 guilders annually despite the two new items (the construction of the new theatre and the new wagon depot, including the connected fees), with additional 850 guilders (interest) and 170 guilders (maintenance costs) added to this amount, since these payments had to be paid to the town for the wagon depot by the military treasury every year. This plan was immediately accepted by the municipal council and approved by the Ministry of the Interior, too.<sup>58</sup>

The final construction budget was made up of 297,000 guilders as construction costs, 9,500 guilders for the architects' remuneration, 7,000 guilders for the procurement of some decorations, and 16,500 guilders for unexpected expenses, i.e. 330,000 guilders in total. Four murals were planned as a decoration of the ceiling of the auditorium, but their cost was not included in the construction budget because Ferdinand Gervay, a municipal representative and the vice president of the First Savings Bank of Pressburg, had promised Sendlein that the savings bank would take care of everything connected to the decoration of the theatre.<sup>59</sup>

Another meeting of the municipal council was held on 16 February 1885, where they had to take a decision about the proposal of the construction committee regarding the lighting in the theatre. Although the committee recommended electric lighting, some of its members were for gas lighting because of the higher operating costs of the electric lighting. Therefore, the representative Ludwig suggested to issue a request for tenders for the electrical devices, with

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mention of the endowment for the theatre. See JÓNÁS, János. *Visszapillantás a Pozsonyi I. Takarékpénztár ötven évi működésére 1842–1891. években*. [Retrospection toward the Fifty Years of the Activities of the First Savings Bank of Pressburg in 1842–1891]. Pozsony: A takarékpénztár kiadása, 1892, p. 36.

58 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, p. 45.

59 Ibidem, p. 46.

the machine room to be placed in the basement of one of the pavilions on Csáky Square, which would also serve as a restaurant. Fellner and Helmer even drew sketches for the installation of electric lighting in the theatre.<sup>60</sup>

Bids for installing and operating the lighting were sent in by Siemens & Halske from Vienna and Berlin, Egger & Co. from Budapest and Vienna, Ganz & Co. from Budapest, Brückner, Ross & Co. from Vienna, Křížík & Pielt from Plzeň, Societé Edison from Paris, and Österreichische Gasbeleuchtungs-Actiengesellschaft from Vienna and Pressburg. Sendlein announced the results of the tender on 18 May 1885. The entire electric lighting in the theatre, including the devices, would have cost 70,500 guilders, with a guaranteed cost of 36.25 guilders per performance. Installing a mixed lighting, consisting of electric lighting for the stage and auditorium and gas lighting for the other rooms, would have cost 72,500 guilders, with a guaranteed cost of 30 guilders per show. Exclusively gas lighting would have cost 14,275.54 guilders, with a guaranteed cost of 22 guilders per performance. At its 1 June meeting, the committee decided to install gas lighting in the new theatre and selected the Österreichische Gasbeleuchtungs-Actiengesellschaft company, which installed the lighting for 5,500 guilders. An advantage gained from the tender procedure was that, in its course, this company reduced the price of the installation and of the daily supply to half because it did not want to risk its competitors winning the tender.<sup>61</sup> From 1904 to 1906, the accounting books of Pressburg contain an item for the installation of electric lighting and ventilation, which suggests that, previously, the lighting had been gas.<sup>62</sup>

The results of the tender for producing the exterior sculptures, announced by the theatre committee, were also discussed at this meeting. Since the committee had repeatedly chosen the cheapest bids, in this case too it recommended the Viennese sculptor Theodor Friedl, who had been collaborating with Fellner and Helmer from 1877. At the meeting, many representatives were for Viktor Tilgner, a prominent sculptor and native of Pressburg, who had donated several precious items to the city. In the end, the choice fell on Friedl, who sculpted an allegorical group of statues depicting Thalia with angels.<sup>63</sup> The author of the stucco decorations of the interior of the theatre, painter and designer Reinhold Völkel, was also from Vienna. Similarly to Friedl, he had participated in several projects of the Fellner and Helmer atelier.

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60 Ibidem, p. 47.

61 Ibidem, p. 48.

62 *Pozsony szabad. királyi város zárszámadása és vagyoneleltára/Schluss-Rechnung und Vermögens-Inventar der königlichen Freistadt Preßburg*. Pozsony: Nyomatott Angermayer Károly nyomdaintézetében, 1904–1906, p. 25.

63 *Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887*, p. 49.

The building committee submitted two additional plans to the representatives of the city regarding the safety of the theatre. The first plan was Fellner's proposal to have a double-walled safety iron curtain instead of a single-walled one, since a fire in the theatre in Szeged had revealed that a single-walled curtain did not prevent the spreading of a fire. The second plan was to implement the same procedure in producing the iron door. The municipal council accepted both these plans on 1 June 1885 and approved an extra sum for them, amounting to 3,146.90 guilders.<sup>64</sup>

The construction committee tried to secure the above-mentioned remuneration for the four murals on the ceiling of the auditorium, amounting approximately to 2,500 guilders, from the First Savings Bank of Pressburg. On 17 June 1885, the members of the construction committee received the statement of the savings bank, which decided not to support the painting of the murals because it intended to finance something more valuable in the theatre and reserved the right to make the choice.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, the construction committee took a decision about the submission of a proposal for the approval of 2,400 guilders for the artist from Pressburg for painting the planned murals. The municipal council approved the proposal on 6 July 1885.<sup>66</sup>

The construction progressed and updates on it appeared regularly in the local dailies. The theatre committee continued to have meetings because it had to take a decision about the lease of the new theatre building. The decision to build a new theatre was linked to the idea of stabilizing Hungarian theatre in the city and one of the proposals suggested to stage plays in the new theatre only in Hungarian. In 1884–1885, the city commissioned the theatre committee to examine the possibility of gaining subvention from the Hungarian Government, since they knew that the theatregoers in Pressburg were German-speaking inhabitants. At the 22 June 1885 meeting of the theatre committee, its members decided to invite the representatives of the important urban associations to comment on the proposal of leasing out the theatre exclusively to a Hungarian director.<sup>67</sup> After receiving a negative reply from Budapest, the committee submitted a proposal to

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64 Ibidem.

65 GAUČÍK, Štefan. *Kultúrne stratégie elit Prešporskej I. sporiteľne (1883 – 1918)*. [Cultural Strategies of the Elite of the First Savings Bank of Pressburg (1883–1918)]. In HUDEK, Adam – ŠOLTÉS, Peter (eds.). *Elity a kontraelity na Slovensku v 19. a 20. storočí. Kontinuity a diskontinuity*. Bratislava: VEDA, Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2019), 2019, p. 204. ISBN 978-80-224-1778-5.

66 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, p. 50.

67 AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box no. 2d 6/2, inv. no. 15861, minutes from the meeting of the theatre committee on 22/06/1885.



the municipal council to alternate German and Hungarian seasons in the theatre in line with the country's dualism.<sup>68</sup>

Several pieces of information have been preserved about the total capacity of the theatre. Otto von Fabricius, the author of the first memorial on the theatre, *Das neue Theater in Preßburg*, written on the occasion of the opening of the new theatre in 1886, listed 1,167 people.<sup>69</sup> Before the opening of the theatre, the *Preßburger Zeitung* reported its capacity at 1,200.<sup>70</sup> A German theatre almanac mentioned 1,170 people.<sup>71</sup>

The Viennese atelier designed the building in a historical Neo-Renaissance style with a Neo-Baroque interior. A motif of a free-standing loggia was used on the façade, symbolizing the dignity of this new hub of education and noble entertainment. The Hungarian inscription Városi Színház, which means Municipal Theatre, was placed in the attic part of the façade of the building, which had not only a technical but also a cultural and social function.<sup>72</sup> Busts were placed into the oval openings above the loggia on the façade, highlighting the national and political function of the theatre.<sup>73</sup>

Based on the suggestion of the Toldy Kör society, the municipal council approved the busts of two prominent literary models of the Hungarian drama tradition, Mihály Vörösmarty and József Katona, besides world playwrights like Johann Wolfgang Goethe and William Shakespeare, and the “national” composer Franz Liszt,<sup>74</sup> all sculpted by Wilhelm Marhenke. The political undertone of the choice is also proven by the fact that, after the birth of the Slovak National Theatre in 1936, the busts were removed from the façade during some renovation work. The city was planning to replace the original busts by other well-known Czech and Slovak personalities, but, in the end, this did not happen. The busts

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68 Ibidem, minutes from the meeting of the theatre committee on 25/08/1885 and 07/11/1885.

69 FABRICIUS, Otto von. *Das neue Theater in Preßburg. Festschrift*. Preßburg: Druckerei des Westungarischer Grenzboten, 1886, p. 14.

70 Das neue Preßburger Stadttheater. In *Preßburger Zeitung*, 18/03/1886, 123, no. 77, pp. 2–3.

71 *Almanach der Genossenschaft Deutscher Bühnen-Angehöriger (Gettke's Bühnen-Almanach)*. Jg. 15. Hrsg. Von Ernst Gettke. Leipzig: Verlag von Karl Reissner, 1887, p. 268.

72 MORAVČÍKOVÁ, Henrieta – DLHÁŇOVÁ, Viera. Universal Values and National Symbolism. Theatre and Architectural History in the Slovak Republic. In KOVAČEVIĆ, Igor (ed.). *Beyond Everydayness: Theatre Architecture in Central Europe*. Prague: Národní divadlo, 2010, p. 65. ISBN 978-8-0725-8364-5.

73 GROSSEGER, Elisabeth. Kulturpolitik und Theater in der Reichshauptstadt Wien. Die frühe und die verspätete kulturpolitische Mission des k.k. Hofburg- und Nationaltheaters. In THER, Philipp (ed.). *Kulturpolitik und Theater. Die kontinentalen Imperien in Europa im Vergleich*. Oldenbourg: Böhlau, 2012, p. 68. ISBN 978-3-2057-8491-3.

74 AMB, Bratislava City, Municipal Establishments, Theatre, box no. 2d 6/3, inv. no. 15862, minutes from the meeting of the construction committee on 18/05/1885.

were returned to their original place only in the new millennium. The destroyed bust of Vörösmarty was replaced by a bust of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.<sup>75</sup>

In accordance with the recommendations issued after the Ringtheater Fire, the theatre bore evident signs of a triple segmentation. The architects designed the entrance hall generously, in the shape of a prolonged square, with white and gold stucco decoration, highlighting the fact that the theatre was a representative venue for the local bourgeois population.<sup>76</sup> The numerous exits from the auditorium, leading to paved arched corridors that protected the people from fire, were an important safety measure.

When designing the staircase, the architects proposed a mixed form, which served a decentralization purpose in the building and prevented the gathering of a large number of people. The auditorium, designed in the shape of a horseshoe in a terraced way on three levels (also called a mezzanine and two floors) and an upper gallery, also appeared spacious. The wide corridors were a suitable place for walks during the intermissions. The theatre had spacious cloakrooms, a cafeteria and a balcony. The performers' comfort and convenience was ensured by well-equipped dressing rooms, rooms for storing decorations and props, and a large, modern stage.

One of the technical novelties after the implementation of the new safety regulations was that the stage was divided from the other parts of the building by fireproof safety walls that ended in a tall rigging loft. Another safety element consisted of a safety iron curtain installed in a way that the stage and the auditorium did not stand under the same roof. The safety curtain was twelve metres wide and nine and a half metres tall, it hung on eight iron ropes, and was able to "fall" within ten seconds thanks to the latest technology. The motif on the curtain, which was a red drape, was designed by Carl Brioschi and Hermann Burghart. In 1911, the painter and designer Gustav Wintersteiner designed a new motif for it, with the veduta of Pressburg in the background.

As for the decoration of the theatre, its key elements reflected local and national patriotism. For painting the murals on the ceiling of the auditorium, the city contacted painters who were natives of Pressburg or active in the city: Gustav Fleischmann, Eduard Majsch, Emil Rózsay, Baron Willibald Leo von Lütgendorff-Leinburg, whose father was a native of Pressburg, and Kornel

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75 BLAHOVÁ, Elena. Busty na priečelí historickej budovy Slovenského národného divadla [The Busts on the Façade of the Historical Building of the Slovak National Theatre]. In *Bratislava. Zborník Múzea mesta Bratislavy*, 2005, vol. 17, pp. 95–104.

76 KOPECKÝ, Jiří – KŘUPKOVÁ, Lenka. Das Olmützer Stadttheater und seine Oper. „Wer in Olmütz gefällt, gefällt der ganzen Welt“. In *Neue Wege – nové cesty: Schriftenreihe des Sudetendeutschen Musikinstituts*, Band 14. Regensburg: ConBrio Verlagsgesellschaft, 2017, pp. 313–315. ISBN 978-3-9407-6872-8.

von Spányik, brother of the mezzo-soprano Irma von Spányik.<sup>77</sup> The offer was accepted only by Lüttendorff-Leinburg, who sent his sketches with the following motifs to the city: Hungarian Rhapsody (folk play), Bánk bán by Melinda's bier (drama), László Hunyady in Prison (opera), Csongor and Tünde (comedy). However, his sketches appeared too dark and serious; therefore, the city called on him to create new sketches which would harmonize with the decorations of the auditorium, and which would be airier and depict merrier scenes. Lüttendorff redesigned only the second motif, by choosing another scene from the opera on Hunyady.<sup>78</sup> He designed a rhapsody in a lighter colour, which matched the overall architecture of the building. He left the other motifs remained unchanged. The paintings were delivered in early February 1886 and, before their installation in the theatre, they were exhibited at the historically first exhibition of the Artists' Society of Pressburg (Preßburger Kunstverein in German, Pozsonyi Képzőművészeti Egyesület in Hungarian) at the Primate's Palace on 14 February.<sup>79</sup>

Lüttendorff's paintings inspired Spányik to participate in the decoration of the new theatre alongside his colleague. Spányik turned directly to Sendlein and offered to paint four murals in the foyer (of the salon) into the narrow areas on the walls and three semicircular arched paintings above the doors that lead to the loggia. Sendlein liked the proposal, but had to inform Spányik that the city was not planning any further expenses on the decoration of the theatre. The artist replied that he would paint the paintings "al fresco" and would only demand payment for the materials, amounting to 300 guilders. The building committee and, subsequently, the municipal council agreed to this proposal.<sup>80</sup> Spányik's paintings, depicting the allegory of the four muses – drama, comedy, music, and dance – have been preserved to this day.<sup>81</sup>

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77 LENGOVÁ, Jana. Pressburg im letzten Drittel des 19. Jahrhunderts – das Musikmilieu der Jugendjahre Franz Schmidts. In OTTNER, Carmen (ed.). *Franz Schmidt und Pressburg*. Wien: Doblinger, 1999, p. 16. ISBN 390069544.

78 ZVARA, Vladimír. Hudba a hudobné divadlo v Bratislave pred prvou svetovou vojnou a po nej. Aspekty a súvislosti. [Music and Musical Theatre in Bratislava Before and After World War I. Aspects and Connections]. In CHALUPKA, Ľubomír (ed.). *Príspevky k vývoju hudobnej kultúry na Slovensku*. Bratislava: Stimul, 2009, p. 75. ISBN 978-8-0892-3666-4.

79 FRANCOVÁ, Zuzana – GRAJCIAROVÁ, Želmíra – HERUCOVÁ, Marta. *Bratislavský umelecký spolok 1885 – 1945*. [The Bratislava Art Society 1885–1945]. Bratislava: Albert Marenčin Vydavateľstvo PT; GMB; MMB, 2006, pp. 21–22. ISBN 80-89218-14-8.

80 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, pp. 52–53.

81 LASLAVÍKOVÁ, Jana – VYSKUPOVÁ, Martina. *Mestské divadlo v Prešporoku: [katalóg výstav: 23. 6. – 11. 9. 2016, Galéria mesta Bratislavy, Pálffyho palác]*. [The Municipal Theatre in Pressburg [Exhibition Catalogue: 23/06 – 11/09/2016 Bratislava City Gallery, Pálffy's Palace]]. Bratislava: GMB, 2016, p. 35. ISBN 978-8-0893-4077-4.

Tough times awaited Sendlein after the completion of the construction. On 19 February 1887, he submitted the final financial report of the new building, amounting to a total of 330,430.77 guilders. Initially, the municipal council approved an amount of 337,580 guilders, so, in the end, 7,149.23 guilders were saved.<sup>82</sup> However, Jeszenszky disputed Sendlein's report, claiming that not all expenses had been included. Sendlein documented all the bills and statements, proving his calculation to be correct. Later, the representatives blamed him for not including the landscaping of the surroundings of the theatre into the costs, which was not Sendlein's fault, however; the municipal council concluded this at its meeting on 29 August 1881 and confirmed its stance again on 6 July 1885.<sup>83</sup> At the 2 May 1887 meeting of the municipal council, the correctness of Sendlein's financial report was finally confirmed, for which the representatives "awarded" him only with silence.

### Conclusion

The ceremonial opening of the new theatre on 22 September 1886 was a great opportunity for the urban elite to represent themselves. The inhabitants of Pressburg were praised for their merits, for being able to erect a representative building for dramatic arts thanks to their unity and rapport.<sup>84</sup> Plaques in Hungarian were placed above the front door of the entrance hall. One of these bore the names of Karl Mergl, the mayor of Pressburg, architects Ferdinand Fellner jr. and Hermann Helmer, and the chief engineer Anton Sendlein, finally awarding some public recognition to him. Another plaque immortalized the name of Emperor Franz Joseph I and the prime minister of the Hungarian Government, Kálmán Tisza.

The events described by Sendlein in connection with the erection of the new theatre provide information about the conduct of the bourgeoisie of Pressburg in public matters. Most of them were German-speaking inhabitants whose behaviour was usually moderate, traditional, even conservative, avoiding extremes and radical decisions.<sup>85</sup> They showed loyalty to the Hungarian Government, since efforts for public manifestations of loyalty were a good means to gain certain

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82 Zur Geschichte des Pressburger Theater-Baues 1879–1887, pp. 54–55.

83 Ibidem, p. 57.

84 Der Eröffnungstag des neuen Theaters. Preßburger Zeitung, 22/09/1886, 123, no. 263, p. 2.

85 TANCER, Jozef. *Obraz nie je odraz. Repräsentácie mesta ako výskumný problém* [An Image is not a Reflection. Representations of the City as a Research Problem]. In DUDEKOVÁ, Gabriela (ed.). *Medzi provinciou a metropolou. Obraz Bratislavy v 19. a 20. storočí*. Bratislava: Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2012, p. 39. ISBN 978-80-89396-21-4.

advantages. More important, however, was their personal relationship to Pressburg and their interest in the modernization of the city, connected with a lively interest in its social and cultural development. At the same time, they appeared to be reluctant to invest into new projects. It is evident that the inhabitants of Pressburg wanted to have the building for their representation, but they were aware of the fact that it was not enough to erect the theatre; it had to be maintained, too. Although, in the end, Pressburg gave preference to the theatre project over other urban projects, five years were needed for the municipal council to reach a final decision, and even then it was influenced by a political one.

The decisive momentum for the birth of the new theatre building was the relationship of Pressburg to Budapest. The actions of the municipal magistrate suggest an effort to proceed in accordance with the decrees of the Ministry of the Interior, but, on the other hand, they interpreted the decrees subjectively and they consciously circumvented the recommendations. Although references to patriotism and deep commitment to Hungary led the German-speaking inhabitants of Pressburg to compromises and to the avoidance of conflicts, they expressed their disagreement in an indirect way whenever their own interests were jeopardized. Tension existed on the other side, too. Although the government tried to develop the provincial cities, it made the management processes difficult by its centralizing procedures and bureaucracy. In the three versions of the theatre project, and in their subsequent modifications, Fellner and Helmer had to repeatedly subordinate themselves to the ministry's decisions despite the absence of logical explanations and justifications of its objections.

The pride to take autonomous decisions about municipal institutions, which included the new theatre, too, was the vision of many sectionalists. However, growing Hungarianization brought increasingly big problems. The Hungarian Government interfered with decision-making by delaying the permit for the German shows, or by not giving approval to certain theatre directors. The aim of the new theatre was to convey classical education to the population of Pressburg and to provide entertainment of a good standard. The government viewed the theatre as a tool to assert its political ideas. On the completion of the new building, the possibility to name the newly erected theatre a national one surfaced, and this would have meant a great honour to Pressburg and would have ranked the city among other prominent cities in Central Europe. However, the inhabitants of Pressburg were interested in the actual support by the Hungarian Government and showed no interest in "changing the name". They named the theatre a municipal one, while giving scope for national (Hungarian) shows in it. Linking entertainment to politics was typical for 19th-century theatres, and Pressburg was no exception, either. However, what appears to be specific to the

city is the attitude of the main players behind the events, which reveals their true identity.<sup>86</sup>

„VOLLENDET! DAS PRÄCHTIGE WERK, DIE NEUE ZIERDE UNSERER  
SCHÖNEN ALTEHRWÜRDIGEN KRÖNUNGSSTADT IST VOLLENDET!“  
IDENTITÄTSKONSTRUKTION DER STÄDTISCHEN ELITE AM BEISPIEL  
DES STADTTHEATERS IN PRESSBURG

JANA LAŠLAVÍKOVÁ

Der Theaterbau war Teil der Geschichte der europäischen Kultur, und die Theatergebäude spiegelten die kulturellen, sozialen und technischen Aspekte ihrer Zeit wider. Sie zeigten den Geschmack, die Mission und die Bedeutung des Theaters in der jeweiligen Zeit und wurden zu einer Informationsquelle über die Zusammensetzung des zahlenden Publikums und die Entwicklung der Theaterkunst als solche. In der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie gehörten zu den bekanntesten Theaterarchitekten Ferdinand Fellner jr. und Hermann Gottfried Helmer. Mit ihren Gebäuden schufen sie eigene Topographie Mitteleuropas. Sie entwarfen fast fünfzig Theater von Hamburg über Zürich bis nach Odessa. Eines ihrer Projekte war das Stadttheater in Pressburg (das heutige historische Gebäude des Slowakischen Nationaltheaters am Hviezdoslav-Platz).

Für Pressburg bedeutete das Wiener Atelier eine Prestigegarantie und eine vielversprechende Zukunft auf der Grundlage einer reichen Vergangenheit, da die Nähe zu Wien jahrhundertlang das soziale und kulturelle Leben der Pressburger stark beeinflusst hatte. Im 19. Jahrhundert betrachteten sowohl Budapest als auch Wien Pressburg als Provinzstadt an der Westgrenze von Oberungarn. Mit zunehmender Ungarisierung änderte sich der Ton und Pressburg wurde immer häufiger als westliche Bastion der Ungarn erwähnt. Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts diskutierte der Gemeinderat regelmäßig einige neue Projekte in der Stadt, darunter eine Straßenbahnlinie nach Wien, eine solide Brücke und die Errichtung einer Universität. Am Ende hat der Bau eines neuen Theaters alle anderen Pläne abgelöst, und dies weist auf die zentrale Position des Theaters als Instrument zur Verbreitung der Landessprache und als Ort für die kollektive Vertretung der städtischen Elite hin.

Die Entscheidung, ein neues Theatergebäude in Pressburg errichten zu lassen, wurde aus verschiedenen Gründen getroffen, wie die Dokumentation der Baugeschichte zeigt. Sein Architekt Anton Sendlein, Absolvent der Technischen Hochschule in Wien, war nicht nur in Pressburg, sondern auch außerhalb der Stadt ein renommierter Fachmann.

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86 This study came into being as part of the following VEGA project no. 2/0040/18: *Musical Theatre in Bratislava from the Second Half of the 19th Century to the First Half of the 20th Century (Personalities, Institutions, Repertoire, Reflections)* carried out at the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts bekleidete er den Posten des Hauptingenieurs von Pressburg, unter den auch das Theatergebäude fiel. Als Mitglied des Vorstands der Ersten Pressburger Sparkasse hatte er Einfluss auf mehrere Entscheidungen über das Theater, einschließlich der Finanzierung des Baus des neuen Theatergebäudes. Sendleins Dokumentation wurde nach 1887 erstellt, d. h. nach dem Beginn des Theaterbetriebs. Sendlein hat einen detaillierten Überblick über die Ereignisse zusammengestellt und nach Abschluss der Bauarbeiten darüber nachgedacht und ein außergewöhnliches Zeugnis hinterlassen, das Raum für Überlegungen zu den Aktivitäten der einflussreichen Bürger von Pressburg im öffentlichen Interesse bietet.

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