

The Anti-Ottoman Defence System in Muraköz and Zrínyi-Újvár

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Muraköz (Croatian: Međimurje), the area between the Mura and Drava Rivers, was one of the most valuable estates of the Zrínyi family. It turned into a border fortress district after the 1566 capture of Szigetvár by the Ottomans. The defence system of the area was set up by György Zrínyi IV (1549–1603) with the support of the Hungarian king and the Styrian Estates. After the Ottomans seized Kanizsa (on 22 October 1600) in the Fifteen Years' War (1593–1606) the Christian defensive line facing Styria was breached and the strategic importance of Muraköz increased significantly. The Christian forces could not recapture Kanizsa, but the Ottomans did not manage to construct a defensive ring of fortifications around the castle, either. As a result of this, the former seat of the Generalate became practically wedged into the Christian border fortress district.

The Treaty of Zsitvatorok (today Zsitvatorok [today Žitava, Slovakia]), which ended the Fifteen Years' War between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy on 11 November 1606, defined the borderline on the basis of properties owned or controlled by fortresses on both sides of the border before 1593. In practice, this meant a zone that could be interpreted very broadly. Consequently, its determination was the subject of much debate for decades, and caused multiple renewals of the peace treaty.¹ The peace treaty tried to regulate double taxation in the border zone of Ottoman Hungary. However, by allowing the collection of taxes on the counterparty's territory by military force as a 'last resort', it created a breeding ground for raids against each other.²

The ownership of fortresses around the Fortress of Kanizsa was so vague that it was already laid down at Zsitvatorok (today Žitava, Slovakia) that the boundaries would be defined there by Ferenc Batthyány II (1573–1625), Captain General of the border fortress district facing Kanizsa (1604–1609), and the Pasha of Kanizsa. Although the settlements were registered by both sides, no agreement was reached, so the committee operated intermittently until the late thirties.³

The reasons were connected to double taxation that affected the largest part of Royal Hungary. The Hungarian state and its landowners had reorganised more or less the institutions of the counties and a part of their estate administration network by the early seventeenth century. Afterwards, they collected taxes from the majority of the population of Ottoman Hungary with the help of soldiers serving the border fortresses and landowners. They regraded the whole of the country as their own, and looked on the Ottomans as incomers, at best.

¹ Vienna, 1615; Komárom, 1618; Köhígyarmat, 1625; Szőny, 1627; Szécsény, 1628; Buda, 1629; Szőny, 1641.

² Czigány 2018. 81–82.

³ *Szvitek* 2008. 134; *Szakály* 1992. 25; *Jászay* 1837. 71.



The Ottomans, on the other hand, wanted to make use of the lands that remained on the hands of Christians as much as possible, even at times of peace. Their taxation system was meant to serve this purpose. They first tried to exploit the economic potential of the other party's territories. After defining the expected incomes, they drew up fictitious tax registers of settlements they wanted to levy taxes on. These, at the same time, determined the directions of their raids. This is how Muraköz, for example, was targeted in the 1570s. Settlements Perlak and Otok found in Muraköz were allocated as anticipated estates to soldiers serving in the Sanjak of Szigetvár.⁴

Miklós Zrínyi VII pointed out with great insight that the reason for the ongoing conflicts along the border lay in uneasy peace and the aggressive taxation practices of the Ottomans.⁵ The Ottomans had been trying to subjugate his estates for decades, but he was able to prevent this by the continuous fortification of the defence system. According to our current knowledge, none of the settlements in Muraköz suffered a serious attack like, for example, the town of Egerszeg [Zalaegerszeg] in 1616, which was defended by royal guards.⁶

The military action taken against the town had a great resonance partly because the new border defence system set up against Kanizsa had already been consolidated by that time. Between 1610 and 1660, generally 2,300 to 2,400 royal guards were garrisoned in each of the eighteen fortresses belonging to the border defence system facing Kanizsa. They were supplemented by a considerable number of soldiers serving landowners, by temporary recruits, and also, from the 1640s onwards, by German troops.⁷ The cornerstones of the defence system were Egerszeg, Kiskomárom, Lenti and Légrád, which were guarded by large garrisons each. The latter stronghold, located at the confluence of the Drava and Mura Rivers, was organisationally under the control of the captain general of the border fortress district facing Kanizsa, but the "perpetual" captain of the castle, like the Captain of Muraköz, came from the Zrínyi family.⁸ The Zrínyis were so closely linked to the ownership and defence of the area that Muraköz was often referred to in official documents and by contemporaries as *Zerinische Grenze* ('Zrínyi borderland'), *Zerenische Insel* ('Zrínyi island'), or simply as *sziget* ('island').

The fortification of Muraköz and the establishment of the Zrínyi border defence district

After the fall of Kanizsa, Archduke Ferdinand, who ruled the provinces of Inner Austria,⁹ invited György Zrínyi IV (1549–1603), among others, to make a proposal for organising the border defence district facing Kanizsa, which was regarded a temporary construction at that time. The magnate, who had been borderland and regional Captain General at Kanizsa twice (1574–1575, 1582–1598), based defence primarily on those fortifications that were still held by

⁴ Sz. Simon 2014. 185–189, 200–202, 254, 256; Sz. Simon 2018. 68–71.

⁵ ZMÖM 2003. 545–546.

⁶ The action caused such uproar that the Ottomans offered compensation for the losses in clause 8 of the Peace Treaty of Komárom in 1618. Salamon 1885. 277.

⁷ Czigány 2013. 76–77.

⁸ Pálffy 2007. 52.

⁹ County of Gorizia, Carinthia, Carniola and the Duchy of Styria.

the Christians. However, he shifted its centre of gravity to the southern part of the borderland by fortifying his estates in Muraköz that were on the frontline.¹⁰ The other proposal was put forward by Count Ferenc Nádasdy II (1555–1604), the current Captain General at Kanizsa (1598–1604), who wanted to shift the centre of defence northwards by involving the strongholds along the Rába River (Körmend, Rábahídvég, Sárvár, Rum) in it. Since Kiskomárom was still on the hands of the Ottoman Turks, his proposal was motivated by blocking the roads leading to the Rába Valley, in addition to defending its own properties. He suggested the establishment of a separate fortress district (Csesztreg, Kányavár, Lövő [Zalalövő], and Szemenye [Muraszemenye]) with Lenti as its centre, in order to block roads along the Mura River.¹¹

In the end, the high command considered the proposals of both magnates. From the proposition put forward by György Zrínyi IV, the plan made for the fortification of Muraköz was put into effect. Nine outposts were to be established along the right bank of the river to watch over crossing points. Additionally, the palisades at Domasinec (Damása, today Domašinec, Croatia), Goricsány (Muracsány, today Goričan, Croatia), and Perko (Perlak, today Prelog, Croatia), as well as the fortress of Csáktornya (today Čakovec, Croatia) were strengthened and manned with an adequate number of guards.¹² Zrínyi died in May 1603, but the new defence system devised by him had already been established. In the military report prepared about the Muraköz at the end of 1603, the dislocation of the guards was basically the same as shown in the sketch drawing made by György Zrínyi IV and attached to his proposal at the end of 1601.¹³ One of the most important elements of the concept was the defence of the river crossings along the Mura. The outposts (*Castell*) erected at Kotor (today Kotoriba, Croatia) and Malikotec, as well as opposite Letenye, Ördöglika and Szemenye had 100 guards each, whereas the ferry port at Kakony was watched over by a 200-strong troop stationed at Légrád. Furthermore, Archduke Ferdinand contributed to the defence of Muraköz by the provision of 300 infantrymen and 200 horsemen, who were probably mainly stationed behind the palisades mentioned in Zrínyi's proposal.¹⁴

The organisation of the border fortress district facing Kanizsa was adapted to the changes of the military situation and then to the needs of the border defence and the current captain general. However, there was no fundamental change in the defence structure of Muraköz. The 200 royal guards stationed at Légrád remained under the command of the captain general of the border fortress district facing Kanizsa. The other part of the military force paid by the monarch (100 horsemen and 200 infantrymen) was garrisoned in the forts of Muraköz, at Kotori (today Kotoriba, Croatia), Goricsány (today Goričan, Croatia), Hodosány (today Hodošan, Croatia) and Damása (today Domašinec, Croatia). This armed force was complemented by the private army of the Zrínyi family, the soldiers of which served along the palisades, at dozens of outposts, as well as at the Csáktornya residence of the family.

The border fortress district administered by the Zrínyis was under the direct control of the monarch after György Zrínyi IV had been appointed the Captain of Muraköz, or,

¹⁰ Simon 1997. 67; Kelenik 2005a. 328–332, 348–349.

¹¹ Simon 1997. 68; Kelenik 2005a. 354–355.

¹² Kelenik 2005a. 328–330, 344.

¹³ Kelenik 2005a. 329, 345–346.

¹⁴ ÖStA KA HKR Akt. 1604/February/51.

more precisely, the king himself entrusted the members of the Zrínyi family to watch over the area.¹⁵ They were supported by the Styrian Estates, and received military assistance from the Slavonian borderland, mainly from the Generalates of Kapronca (today Koprovica, Croatia) and Körös (Kreuz, today Križevci, Croatia), which defended the interfluvial area from the south.¹⁶ Légrád, located in the southern tip of the Muraköz “island” but administratively belonging to the border fortress district facing Kanizsa, for example, received military aid from there most quickly. In view of this, the Inner Austrian Privy and War Council rejected the request submitted by the Zrínyi brothers to keep and pay 200 horsemen.¹⁷

After the death of his father, Miklós Zrínyi VI (158?–1625) took over the Muraköz captaincy, but there is no credible information about what rights he could exercise over the army stationed at Légrád. His younger brother, György Zrínyi V (1599–1626), was granted the rank of Governor (‘Guberno’) of Légrád in May 1620, when he also received the title of Captain General of the border fortress district facing Kanizsa.¹⁸ He held the title for only a short period of time, until his appointment as the Ban of Croatia and Slavonia (in 1622).¹⁹ It is a question why, being such a high-level national dignitary, he was elected Voivode of the Légrád infantry two years later. Finally, after the death of his elder brother, he also inherited the title of the Captain of Muraköz.

Miklós Zrínyi VII as the Captain of Légrád and Muraköz

In May 1640, Miklós Zrínyi VII, the oldest son of György Zrínyi V, was appointed Captain of Légrád by Ferdinand III (1637–1657).²⁰ (However, this did not mean unlimited jurisdiction even over his own soldiers, as he had to share the tasks of command with his brother Péter Zrínyi until 1649.²¹) Still in childhood, Miklós inherited his father’s title as Master of the Royal Mews. In December 1637, the monarch appointed him Royal Chamberlain. This was not only meant to win the loyalty of the Croatian–Hungarian aristocrat, but also to reward his family for their efforts in defence against the Ottomans.

Similarly to his father, Miklós Zrínyi fought in the Thirty Years’ War. In the summer of 1642, when the Swedish troops invaded Moravia and captured the Fortress of Olmütz (today Olomouc, Czech Republic), the young lord organised a 500-strong regiment in support of the ruler.²² He himself fought in the battles, and at the head of his soldiers,

¹⁵ *Végh* 2017. 223.

¹⁶ The fortresses of the Generalates of Kapronca and Körös had over 1,100 royal guards in 1644. ÖStA KA AFA 1644/13/6.

¹⁷ ÖStA HKA HFU RN 157. Konv. March 1638. fol. 127–130.

¹⁸ ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Reg. Bd. 252. 25 June 1624. fol. 309.

¹⁹ The Voivode was also called the Captain General of the infantry. ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Reg. Bd. 244. 8 May 1620. Nr. 19. fol. 237v.

²⁰ ZMVL 8; *Pálffy* 2014. 873; ÖStA KA Bestallung Prot. Reg. Bd. 2. 1630–1663. Nr. 1331. fol. 16.

²¹ There was a disagreement between the two brothers concerning command over Légrád, as Péter Zrínyi also claimed authority over the fortress, and they jointly administered Muraköz until 1649. *Végh* 2017. 223–225. Beginning with 1647, Péter Zrínyi was Captain General of the garrisons of Zsumberák (German: Sichelberg, today Sierpc, Poland), Szluin (today Slunj, Croatia) and Velemérich. In January 1658, he also became the Captain General of Zengg (today Senj, Croatia) and the fortresses along the coastal frontier belonging to it.

²² ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Reg. Bd. 287. July 1642. fol. 218.

he joined the imperial forces that maintained the blockade of Olmütz in early October.²³ At this time, the main army commanded by Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria was already marching towards Saxony. They battled with the Swedish forces at Breitenfeld, near Leipzig, on 23 October 1642. Although approximately 1,400 Croatian and Hungarian light cavalymen fought in the battle that ended with the defeat of the imperial army, there is no evidence to the participation of Miklós Zrínyi in it.

In the following year, the Swedish troops led by Field Marshal Lennar Torstenson returned to Bohemia and Moravia, invaded Lower Austria, and menaced the Hungarian border. The armed forces of the kingdom were mobilised. Under the leadership of Palatine Miklós Esterházy, a significant number of troops gathered in a camp by Szokolca (today Skalica, Slovakia), who were inspected by King Ferdinand III, as well. However, no major military operation took place there.

Miklós Zrínyi VII was much more active during the campaign of György Rákóczi I, Prince of Transylvania, fighting against the king in a Swedish and French alliance (1644–1645). He not only set up another regiment, but he also demonstrated his loyalty to the king with his personal participation in the campaign. Further research is needed in order to determine to what extent should we ascribe Zrínyi's engagement in the campaign to his religious affiliation, loyalty to the ruler, advancement in the political hierarchy, or perhaps to a "remedy" for sabotaging the nobility's uprising in the previous year.²⁴

It is clear that Zrínyi's strategic and military activities on the Western and Hungarian frontlines of the Thirty Years' War, as well as his increasing engagement on the military frontier of the kingdom must have been decisive in his gaining the title of Lord Lieutenant of the Zala and Somogy Counties in April 1646, and his appointment as the Ban of Croatia and Slavonia two years later.²⁵

On 26 January 1646, Zrínyi was appointed Imperial General (*Generalfeldwachtmeister*). Based on this, some scholars considered him to have been the first Hungarian Imperial General of the imperial army.²⁶ However, the registry entry shows that the document was not signed, which means that the appointment did not take effect.²⁷ The reason for this is unknown, but by that time the magnate had already had the title of General. At the beginning of 1643, he was appointed General Commander of Croatia, and in the summer of 1644, he was granted the title of Cavalry General, too. Field Marshal Johann Götz, the Commander-in-Chief of the imperial army in Hungary, was then instructed by the monarch to provide Zrínyi with a carabineer regiment in the event of vacancy. In 1644, the young aristocrat therefore had every right to use the title of the General of Light Field Troops in Croatia.²⁸ The written appointment of the Ban also comprised the title *supremus campi vigiliarium praefectus*, the Latin equivalent of *Generalfeldwachtmeister*. Considering that it was the appointment document of a national high dignitary, the title above probably refers to the rank of the Army

²³ Iványi 1943. 79; Theatrum Europaeum 4. 879; ZMVL 10; Széchy I. 1896. 118–120.

²⁴ ÖStA KA Bestallung Prot. Reg. Bd. 2. 1630–1663. Nr. 1371. fol. 4; Tusor 1996. 712–715.

²⁵ Kincses 2017. 212–216.

²⁶ Pálffy 2007. 53; Pálffy 2014. 874; Kincses 2017. 210.

²⁷ ÖStA KA Bestallung Prot. Reg. Bd. 2. 1639–1685. Nr. 7. The invalidity of the appointment was suggested by Hausner 2017. 114.

²⁸ Tusor 2015. 135; ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Reg. Bd. 291; 9 July 1644. Nr. fol. 305; ZMVL 10.

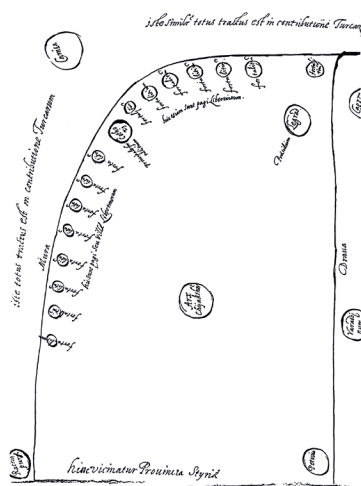


Figure 1.

Outposts defending Muraköz as shown by an ink sketch attached to a letter of Miklós Zrínyi to Ferdinand III in early March 1641

Source: Kovács 1998. 917.

General of Croatia, which was later used by Zrínyi.²⁹ It is uncertain, however, what kind of service was meant when he called himself *főstrázsamester* ('Quartermaster General') in Hungary, the contemporary Hungarian equivalent of *Generalfeldwachtmeister*.³⁰ The document of his appointment did not survive, and this rank was not mentioned, either, when he commanded a major imperial army in the first half of the 1660s.

Real military and political power was obtained by Zrínyi, when he was appointed the Ban of Croatia and Slavonia, the third highest national dignitary in the Kingdom of Hungary. He led the armed forces of Croatia, and he also commanded the 500-strong army stationed near the Kulpa River. His political influence increased not only in the national assemblies of Croatia and Hungary, but also in his relations with Inner Austria. Although he did not succeed in obtaining the rank of Palatine at the 1655 Diet of Hungary, he reached the pinnacle of his political career a few years later. At the end of 1659, Zrínyi was appointed Privy Councillor by the new monarch, Leopold I (1657–1705), and became a member of the Privy Council (*Geheimrat*), the supreme governing body of the Habsburg Empire.³¹ Zrínyi was not accepted into this body through his office, but in recognition of his military and political merits.

As mentioned above, the defence of the "island" of Muraköz was based on royal garrisons, which had plenty of soldiers.³² Due to their *familiares*, *servitores*, *libertines*,

²⁹ Kincses 2017. 217, 219–220; ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Exp. March 1656. Nr. 224.

³⁰ ZMVL 29.

³¹ Pálffy 2014. 874.

³² Czigány 2013. 76–77. At the end of 1634, the garrisons were filled up with soldiers to 97%. ÖStA HKA HFU RN 168. Konv. December 1643. fol. 84, 91. At this time, Zrínyi received 197 Forints and 30 Denars as his three months' pay.

and soldier-peasants, the Zrínyi brothers were able to amass an army of over one thousand soldiers from their estates found in Muraköz. The soldiers of the watchtowers along the Mura and the Drava came from the armed members of the population, and soldiers serving along the palisades were also recruited from them when needed.³³

In addition to the militia defending his estates, Miklós Zrínyi also had military units, made up of mainly professional soldiers, with whom he could launch major military campaigns to the borderland of Transdanubia. The core of these was formed by the royal army made up of *familiares* and *servitores*, and a troop of about one hundred dragoons predominantly made up of German mercenaries. The main body consisted of soldiers stationed in royal strongholds who could be sent to the battlefield, as well as the temporarily hired mercenaries.



Figure 2.

The defence of Muraköz

Note: A Muraköz védelme – En: The defence of Muraköz; A Habsburg Birodalom határa – En: The border of the Habsburg Empire; A Magyar Királyság határa – En: The border of the Hungarian Kingdom; Főkapitányság határa – En: The border of the Generalate; A Muraközi Kapitányság határa – En: The border of the Muraköz Captaincy; Főbb–kisebb magyar várak – En: Main–lesser Hungarian fortresses; Főbb–kisebb török várak – En: Main–lesser Ottoman fortresses; Egyéb települések – En: Other settlements; Górék – En: Watchtowers; Ismeretlen helyű górék – En: Watchtowers at unidentified places; Habsburg Birodalom – En: The Habsburg Empire; Magyar Királyság – En: The Hungarian Kingdom; Győri Főkapitányság – En: The Győr Generalate; Kanizsával szembeni Főkapitányság – En: The Generalate facing Kanizsa; Kanizsai Szandzsák – En: The Sanjak of Kanizsa; Muraközi Kapitányság – En: The Muraköz Captaincy; Kanizsai Pasalik – En: The Pashalik of Kanizsa; Varasdi Főkapitányság – En: Varaždin Generalate; Török Birodalom – En: The Ottoman Empire

Source: Perjés 1965.

³³ Perjés 1965. 87–93; N. Kiss 1983. 346–351; Véghe 2017. 227–236.

In the first half of the 1640s, it dawned on Miklós Zrínyi that he would not be able to repel the raids launched by the Ottomans from Kanizsa effectively, in spite of the fact that he had increased the number of outposts along the Mura and the size of militia forces defending his estates.³⁴ The solution was to increase the number of trained soldiers and to tighten control over the opposite bank of the Mura River. In September 1647, he was granted permission to hire dragoon soldiers, and one month later he requested Captain General Ádám Batthyány I (1644–1669) to transfer to him command over the fortress of Alsó-Lendva (today Lendava, Slovenia), Letenye and Szécsisziget temporarily.³⁵ In 1648, he bought the estate of Szécsisziget presumably partly to reach his goal. Soon afterwards, he became the Captain of Szécsisziget and gained command over a 150-strong garrison. After the Ottomans failed to occupy Kiskomárom (on 15 August 1651), the punitive expedition against Segesd started, and 1,100 soldiers of the 7,500-strong imperial army were commanded to the camp by Miklós Zrínyi. There were soldiers from the fortresses of Szécsisziget, Lenti and Lendva (today Lendava, Slovenia), suggesting that the Ban of Croatia gained some sort of command post in the region of fortresses along the Kerka Stream.³⁶

In addition to the raids launched by the Ottomans from Kanizsa, Zrínyi was also concerned about the war (1644–1669) between the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Venice over the possession of the Island of Kandia (Crete). After the Ottoman fleet suffered a series of defeats and the Venetian ships were under Constantinople, the Ottoman military leaders decided to launch an attack on the Venetian territories through Dalmatia. However, the well-built Venetian fortresses proved to be a tough nut to crack. The other military plan was to reach Venice through the borderland of Croatia and Slavonia. From the beginning, Zrínyi was accused of providing Venice with military support. In 1648, for example, the rumour was spread that he captured Klissza (today Klis, Croatia). His person became a sting in the eyes of Ottoman leaders in the border fortress district when, in early 1646, he turned down the request of the Pasha of Kanizsa to let him pass through Croatia.³⁷ Although the news of raids on the Venetian province of Friuli was occasionally spread, the war plan was never carried out, because the Ottomans had thirteen grand viziers over a period of nine years. Following the accession of Köprülü Mehmed to the post of Grand Vizier (in 1656) and the break of the Venetian blockade on Constantinople, the war plan was renewed. At the beginning of 1657, he requested Ferdinand III through the imperial envoy to allow the Sultan's army march through the estate of Count Zrínyi. He believed they would be able to carry out this without much damage in merely three to four days.³⁸ The Ban of Croatia was among the first to hear this news and he was informed that the Ottomans wanted to cross the Vinodol Valley and Buccari (today Bakar, Croatia), which belonged to his brother. He took into account that in the event of a military action against Venice, the Ottoman forces from Kanizsa would launch an attack against his estates in Muraköz, so he asked the Styrian Estates help him turn Csáktornya into a "real borderland fortress".³⁹

³⁴ The ink sketch attached to the letter written by Miklós Zrínyi to Ferdinand III at the beginning of March 1641 showed fourteen outposts along the Mura River. Kovács 1998. 917.

³⁵ *Végh* 2017. 233; ZMÖM 2003. 521.

³⁶ MNL OL Batthyány család lt. P 1315, Batthyány I. Ádám másolati könyve/b. fol. 337–343.

³⁷ ÖStA HHStA Staatenabteilungen Türkei I. Kt. 119. Konv. 2. 1646 fol. 33–40.

³⁸ ÖStA HHStA Staatenabteilungen Türkei I. Kt. 128. Konv. C. fol. 16–20; Papp 2009. 149–150.

³⁹ ZMÖM 2003. 677–680.

The fortifications planned by Zrínyi complied with the plans of the War Council of Vienna and Graz to strengthen the military frontiers of Slavonia and Croatia. Due to the Ottoman plans to attack Venice by land, a significant number of troops had been deployed to the provinces of Inner Austria in the previous years. At the beginning of 1657, the mapping of the Croatian, Styrian and Slavonian fortresses started. Their condition was surveyed, and – depending on the financial possibilities – the fortification works began.⁴⁰ The mapping was directed by Captain Martin Stier, military engineer, and his subordinate was Guislain Segers d'Ideghem, military engineer.

The Dutch military engineer, whose name comprised the noble surname von Wassenhoffen in the records of the Inner Austrian War Council, was not unknown in the border fortress district facing Kanizsa. In July 1653, Ideghem was hired as a military engineer for the Fortress of Kiskomárom on the recommendation of Count Ferenc Nádasdy III (1623–1671).⁴¹ In February 1654, he was transferred to Styria. However, at the end of the same year, he applied for a military engineer post in Bohemia that became vacant due to Johann Peroni's death.⁴² Decision-making was postponed for years, because there were several candidates for the post, including Martin Stier. Although in early 1658, Ideghem gained the post of military engineer in Bohemia, he eventually accepted the post of military engineer in the province of Inner Austria.⁴³ In this capacity he contributed to the fortification of Csáktornya, and later, in the summer of 1661, he took part in the construction of Zrínyi-Újvár.

The construction of Zrínyi-Újvár

Why was Zrínyi-Újvár built? The answer for this question was offered by the builder himself to the Imperial War Council. His argumentation was unusual for the generals who were accustomed to formal warfare. Nevertheless, it was relevant from the logic and in the context of border wars.⁴⁴ Zrínyi's interpretation that he built the fortress on his own estate fit into the practice employed in the Ottoman borderland. As mentioned above, the border zone was interpreted broadly. Thus, from the aspect of dual ownership and the practice of royal jurisdiction in the Ottoman borderland, the magnate's reasoning was correct. The "inaccuracy" of the ban's argumentation lies in that, in this case, it was not the question of taxation of one or two villages, but the construction of a fortress.⁴⁵

In other words, the construction of the stronghold was forced by *ratio belli*, that is, military tactics. Zrínyi originally built a bridgehead fortress to serve his raids and

⁴⁰ Pálffy 2000. 60–65.

⁴¹ ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Exp. Bd. 307. July 1653. Nr. 38. fol. 168v.; ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Exp. Bd. 307. August 1653. Nr. 20. fol. 184.

⁴² ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Exp. Bd. 307. February 1654. Nr. 27. fol. 24v.; March 1654. Nr. 23. fol. 460; November 1654. fol. 334.

⁴³ ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Exp. Bd. 318. January 1658. fol. 2; ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Reg. Bd. 319. 29 January 1658. Nr. 82. fol. 18. For the activity of Ideghem von Wassenhoven (Wassenhoffen), see also Domokos 2012. 43–52.

⁴⁴ ZMÖM 725–729. Géza Perjés and József Kelenik studied in detail the arguments raised by Miklós Zrínyi for the construction of the fortress. *Perjés* 1989. 39–41; *Kelenik* 2012. 21–28.

⁴⁵ The king and the palatine donated properties throughout the Ottoman period. *Szakály* 1997. 25–36.

the defence of the left bank of the Mura. In the summer of 1661, it probably did not even cross his mind that the fortress would be besieged by the Sultan's army. In his letter addressed to Giovanni Sagredo, the envoy of Venice to Vienna, in spring 1663, he compared the fortress of Kapronca to his own fortress fortified with the help of the ruler nearly two years before.⁴⁶ In the beginning, Zrínyi-Újvár was just one link in the chain of defence that needed to be renewed in the mid-1650s.

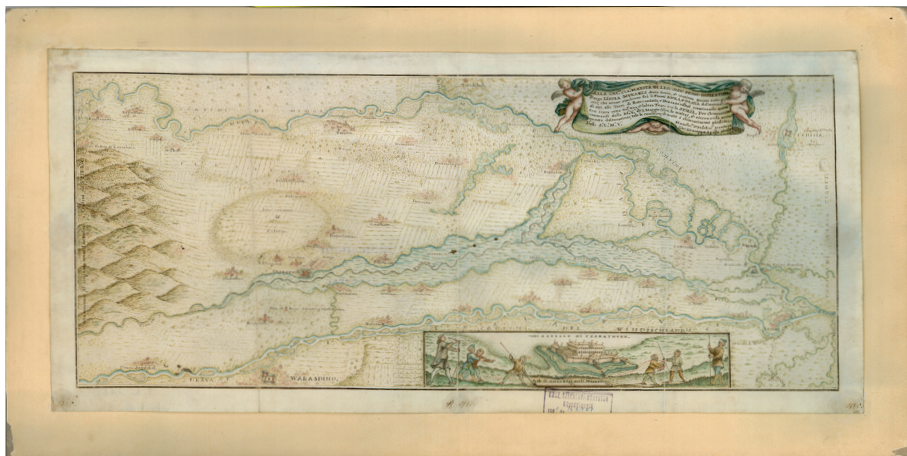


Figure 3.

Muraköz in 1670, on a map by Giuseppe Spalla

Source: OSZK TK 255

The final impetus for this probably came from the Ottoman siege against Radkersburg in the spring of 1655. While Ádám Batthyány and Miklós Zrínyi accompanied by a large military escort attended the diet in Pozsony, two thousand Ottoman soldiers assailed the town of Radkersburg, set fire to the villages of Kaltenbrunn (Vashidegkút, today Cankova, Slovenia) and Zelting, and plundered them.⁴⁷ The defence system and intelligence of the southern fortress district along the Kerka strengthened with newly recruited Hungarian horsemen and German soldiers in 1652 failed, in spite of the fact that the three fortresses (Lenti, Lendva [today Lendava, Slovenia] and Szécsisziget) in the way of the raiders were manned with 750 guards, altogether.⁴⁸

Following the attack, the monarch immediately ordered the reinforcement of Radkersburg and the closure of the Szentmiklós Pass between Lenti and Lendva (today Lendava, Slovenia). Colonel Johann Schaff and Martin Stier, military engineer, were charged with this task. The Zrínyis and Inner Austrian government bodies had to organise the blocking of roads between Muraköz and Radkersburg, as well as the construction and

⁴⁶ In 1644, the garrison of Kapronca had 240 soldiers altogether. ÖStA KA AFA 1644/13/6.

⁴⁷ ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Exp. Bd. 311. March 1655. Nr. 59. fol. 87v–88; ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Reg. Bd. 312. 22 March 1655. Nr. 52 fol. 47v–48.

⁴⁸ 200 German soldiers (100 horsemen and 100 infantrymen) were posted in Lenti. MNL OL Batthyány család lt. P 1315, Batthyány I. Ádám másolati könyve/a. fol. 140.

maintenance of watchtowers along the Drava and Mura. A decree was issued that every village and estate had to support the building of ramparts with free labour twice a year.⁴⁹ The royal garrisons of the Muraköz “island” were strengthened. Fifty horsemen were stationed in Légrád, and further two hundred infantrymen and fifty horsemen were posted in the interfluvial fortifications.⁵⁰

Over the next few years, Zrínyi primarily focused on the modernisation of the defences of Csáktornya, and its supply with appropriate arms and military materials. For this, he received valuable aid from Graz and Vienna. He was given weapons, materiel, workmen for digging the ramparts, a water pump for extinguishing fire, and, last but not least, money – 2,000 forints for the reinforcements, and 3,000 forints for casting new cannons.⁵¹ In the summer of 1657, a rampart was erected on the left bank of the Mura, at a ford “near Kanizsa”, manned with twenty guards to secure the crossing of raiding troops. It was probably a ferry port at Szemenye or Lenti, from where the Ban of Croatia wanted to support Lendva (today Lendava, Slovenia) and Lenti.⁵² In the absence of more data, we can only speculate whether the construction of the bridgehead is connected to the enforcement of Csáktornya or the extension of the defence system built along the Mura. There is no information about the protest of the Ottomans, although the structure still existed in autumn.

Zrínyi was, therefore, considering bringing the opposite bank of the Mura possessed by the Ottomans under his control somehow as early as 1657. The outposts along the Mura were presumably also visited by Ideghem von Wassenhoffen, who participated in the fortification of Csáktornya. He might have drawn attention to securing the hills on the opposite bank. In his letter addressed to the Styrian Estates, the count argued that the movement of the Ottomans could be better watched over from that place, which contributed to the security of the province.⁵³

In June 1661, the construction of Zrínyi-Újvár was carried out in a rather delicate situation in terms of foreign and military policy. The war between the Principality of Transylvania and the Ottoman Empire had been going on for four years, and it was then that the Viennese Court decided to urge the Hungarian Estates to help the principality. The Ottoman troops were already on their way to depose János Kemény (1661–1662), the Prince of Transylvania supported by Leopold I, but the army headed by Raimondo Montecuccoli was also marching towards Transylvania to keep the prince in power.

Although Zrínyi started building his fortress without informing the monarch about his plans, in a situation balancing on the edge of war and peace, this finally turned out to be useful for the Viennese Court in the game of diplomacy. Field Marshal Walter Leslie, Captain General of the Slavonian borderland, visited the fortification under construction in the summer of 1661. He advised the monarch not to respond to the Ottoman protests, but rather pretend as if nothing had happened.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Exp. Bd. 311. March 1655. Nr. 59. fol. 87v–88; ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Reg. Bd. 312. 22 March 1655. Nr. 52. fol. 47v–48; ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Reg. Bd. 312. 4 July 1655. Nr. 20. fol. 133v–134.

⁵⁰ ÖStA HKR Prot. Exp. Bd. 311. July 1655. Nr. 15. fol. 237; ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Reg. Bd. 312. 3 July 1655. fol. 133v.

⁵¹ ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Exp. Bd. 316. March 1657. Nr. 61. fol. 140v.; ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Reg. Bd. 317. 7 March 1657. Nr. 65, Nr. 70. fol. 113–114.

⁵² Zrínyi and Ferenc Nádasdy, who owned the Fortress of Lenti, had a dispute over the construction of the rampart. *Fabó* XV. 1871. 65, 116.

⁵³ ZMÖM 726–727.

⁵⁴ *Domokos* 2012. 46.

There were many examples of such breaks of peace by both sides. These formed the subject of diplomatic disputes for some time, and then either the builders themselves pulled down the stronghold, or the enemy demolished it. This happened to Berkigát, the Ottoman rampart erected at the crossing of the Kapos River in 1655, as well. Zrínyi referred to this case in his letter above.⁵⁵ Berkigát was located far from the border zone, between Kaposvár and Dombóvár controlled by the Ottomans, and its military role cannot be compared to that of Zrínyi-Újvár.

Although Leopold I pointed out that Zrínyi had committed an infringement by the unauthorised construction of the fortress, strangely enough, he entrusted the magnate himself with its demolition. This was not the first time that Zrínyi had violated royal authority. Between March and July 1656, he made a formal truce (or peace, according to other interpretations) with the Pasha of Kanizsa. The case finally ended with the termination of the ceasefire and an apology from Zrínyi.⁵⁶ The same must have happened in the case of Zrínyi-Újvár, and after some political wrangling, the demolition of the fortress was revoked at the end of August.⁵⁷ This option was also raised at the local level with the involvement of German soldiers, but the proposal was abandoned because of its possible political consequences, such as Zrínyi's potential surrender to the Ottomans.⁵⁸

Leslie, who was not only Captain General of Slavonia, but also Vice President of the Imperial War Council and a member of the Privy Council, immediately recognised the strategic importance of Zrínyi-Újvár. In his report sent to Vienna, he did not urge the demolition of the fortress. He asked the Inner Austrian Privy and War Council to support Zrínyi, and the reinforcement of the fortifications in Fürstenfeld and Radkersburg.⁵⁹

The Pasha of Kanizsa protested against the construction of the fortress at the end of June, and there were minor demonstrations of power, as well. The garrison of Kanizsa was reinforced, and the commanders of the surrounding sanjaks were ordered to assist Grand Vizier Mehmed Pasha in preventing Zrínyi's construction of his fortress.⁶⁰ It was not long before a threat came from Constantinople that the Grand Vizier would send an army of fifteen thousand men to destroy the fortress under construction.⁶¹

In Vienna, major political forces supported the maintenance of Zrínyi-Újvár. These involved the leaders of the party urging a proactive stance against the Ottomans: Prince Johann Weikhard Auersperg, Principal Advisor to the Emperor, and György Lippay, Archbishop of Esztergom and High Chancellor. The Ban of Croatia, who was already a member of the Privy Council at that time, persuaded Prince Johann Ferdinand von Porcia,

⁵⁵ In the previous year, the palisade of Berkigát (today Nagyberki) at one of the crossings of the Kapos River was destroyed by the troops led by Kristóf Batthyány, Captain General of the border fortress district facing Kanizsa. *Papp* 2002. 132.

⁵⁶ ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Reg. Bd. 314. 2 March 1656. Nr. 203. fol. 148v–149; 10 July 1656. Nr. 109. 273v.; ÖStA KA HKR Prot. Exp. Bd. 313. August 1656. fol. 444; ZMÖM 2003. 666.

⁵⁷ *Fabó* XV. 1871. 171–172.

⁵⁸ Report by Muster Commissioner Franz Anton Trautmannsdorf, Kreuz, 30 June 1661. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 61.

⁵⁹ Report by Walter Leslie, Varasd, 1 July 1661. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 61.

⁶⁰ *Fekete* 1993. 223.

⁶¹ ÖStA HKR KA Prot. Exp. August 1661. fol. 375. Report by Wolfgang Sigmund Khloss, War Councillor of Graz, Graz, 13 August 1661. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 61.

High Seneschal and the leader of imperial politics who also had properties in Styria, Count Johann Rottal, the emperor's advisor on Hungarian affairs, as well as Chief Justice Ferenc Nádasdy III about that there was a need for the fortress.⁶² Despite their tense relations, the Styrian Estates were also obliged to support him.⁶³ Graz seemed even inclined to use the imperial army in demolishing the fortress, because it was believed that its construction would only bring the Ottomans down on their heads.⁶⁴

At the end of June, Zrínyi called the Croatian and Slavonian Estates in arms under his responsibility, while Field Marshal Walter Leslie instructed the soldiers of the Slavonian border fortress district to defend the territory of Muraköz. The Styrian militia forces (*Landvolk*) was also mobilised in July.⁶⁵ However, the Vice President of the Imperial War Council did not consider the insurgents powerful enough, so he commanded the Testa Piccolomini Cavalry Regiment and the Pachonkay Dragoon Regiment to Fürstenfeld and Radkersburg.⁶⁶ On his recommendation, at the northern part of Muraköz, between Luttenberg (today Ljutomer, Slovenia) and Ráckanizsa (today Razkrižje, Slovenia), a 3000-strong army consisting of two cavalry and one infantry regiments (Pachonkay, Testa Piccolomini and Spick) was deployed for the defence of Muraköz and the fortress under construction.

The Province of Styria provided them with large quantities of military materials and various tools. Among other things, 10 tonnes of gunpowder, 10 tonnes of lead, 20 tonnes of wick, 800 shovels, 800 picks, 300 cramp irons, 100 long picks, 50 axes and 8,000 cannonballs of various sizes were delivered for the regiments.⁶⁷

The Provincial Assembly of Styria held at the end of August decided to supply arms and materiel to Fürstenfeld and Radkersburg and to raise money for military expenditures. 300 muskets and 50 pikes, as well as 2 tonnes of gunpowder, lead and wick were promised to be sent to the armouries of the two towns. There was a heated debate about the acquisition of cannons. Finally, only eight cannons could be acquired for the Fürstenfeld Castle. In addition, further military equipment was planned to be obtained in order to arm the inhabitants of towns and villages. They wanted to raise funds primarily from the extraordinary war tax sent by the Court Chamber and from the levied but still unpaid head tax (*Kopfsteuer*) of 20,000 forints.⁶⁸

The payment of the supplies and pay arrears of the 880-strong Pachonkay Dragoon Regiment was a major problem. The delegates left this issue pending and re-opened talks on the scheduling of funding. According to the statement by Quartermaster Abraham

⁶² *Fabó* XV. 1871. 166–172; ZMÖM 2003. 730.

⁶³ ZMÖM 2003. 735–739.

⁶⁴ Report by Muster Commissioner Franz Anton Trautmannsdorf, Kreuz, 30 June 1661. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 61. Protocol of the Assembly of the Styrian Estates, 29 August 1661. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 131–136.

⁶⁵ Report by Walter Leslie, Varasd, 1 July and 4 July 1661. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 61. One horseman had to be provided from every thirty men, and one infantryman from every twenty men. Decree of the Styrian Provincial Government, 18 July 1661. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 332.

⁶⁶ Report by Walter Leslie, Varasd, 1 July 1661. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 61.

⁶⁷ ÖStA KA Innerösterreichische Hofkriegsrat Prot. Windica, Exp. Bd. 68. 1661–1663 Ind. et Prot. 1661. fol. 114; Report by Councillor Hans Adam Lichtenstein, 27 August 1661. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 119–125; ÖStA KA AFA 1661/3/3; ÖStA KA Prot. Exp. August 1661. Nr. 180. fol. 395.v–396.

⁶⁸ Protocol of the Assembly of the Styrian Estates, 29 August 1661. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 131–136.

Hoffmann, the payment of the unit was 8,778 forints per month, which should have been paid beginning with October. Furthermore, the Styrian Estates were supposed to pay an additional sum of 20,000 forints in order to reduce the pay arrears of the unit, which was altogether 79,002 forints. As a result of the negotiations, the soldiers were finally paid 7,000 forints, and were promised to receive the arrears of 20,000 forints.⁶⁹

Due to the prolonged Transylvanian campaign, as well as the imperial regiments and Hungarian–Croatian borderland units deployed in Slavonia and in the border fortress district facing Kanizsa, the attack promised by Grand Vizier Mehmed Köprülü did not take place in the summer of 1661. Nevertheless, the demand for the demolition of Zrínyi-Újvár was put on the list of peace negotiations. The old Grand Vizier Mehmed did not live to see the siege of Zrínyi-Újvár. The first attempt was made in mid-August 1663, when the main army led by Köprülü Fazıl Ahmed, the son of the deceased Grand Vizier, was preparing for the siege of Érsekújvár (today Nové Zámky, Slovakia). Yakovali Hassan, the Pasha of Kanizsa, assailed Zrínyi-Újvár with his 7,000 men immediately after the younger brother of Miklós Zrínyi had taken over the command of the fortress. However, his action ended in a serious defeat. Contemporary accounts estimated the loss of the Ottomans between 200 and 600 men. Johann Albrecht Herberstein in Radkersburg, similarly to János Patyi, the Infantry Captain of Légrad, reckoned that the death toll was 500.⁷⁰

When Zrínyi-Újvár was besieged by the Pasha of Kanizsa, the Ban of Croatia was engaged in organising the uprising of the Transdanubian troops. His fears were confirmed that the armed forces of the estates would not be of much help. They were supposed to harass the Ottoman main army deployed for the siege of Érsekújvár (today Nové Zámky, Slovakia) and to prevent the raids of the Tartar troops. The more experienced border fortress and field units were suitable for this, as well. However, the army gathered in the camp at Vat (on 17 September 1663) almost three months later than the date proclaimed by the monarch. The disputes over authority also weakened the military morale. Eventually, Miklós Zrínyi, who was the most experienced military leader, became the National Captain General of the 8500-strong Hungarian army in Transdanubia.⁷¹ Less than one week after the large-scale military muster (held on 25 September 1663), all the fortifications of the captaincy fell to enemy attack, except for Érsekújvár (today Nové Zámky, Slovakia) and Fülek (today Filákov, Slovakia).⁷² Thus, only a few victorious surprise attacks could be carried out under the command of the Ban of Croatia, but this did not substantially affect the military situation. Zrínyi bore the title of National Captain General for less than two months. Most of the insurgent army dissolved in November, and Zrínyi returned to Muraköz at the head of his troops. They involved the Pachonkay and Piccolomini Regiments, which came under his command in mid-September.⁷³

⁶⁹ Proposal by Ábrahám Hoffmann to the Inner Austrian Privy and War Council, 8 September 1661. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 155–157. Protocol of discussions between privy councillors and the estates, 10 September 1661. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 149–153.

⁷⁰ Széchy V. 1902. 28–30. Report by Johann Albrecht Herberstein, Radkersburg, 14 August 1663. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1663. Nr. 387.

⁷¹ Pálffy 2016.

⁷² Perjés 1961. 512–514; Perjés 1989. 42–57; Czigány 2004b.

⁷³ Report by War Councillor Thomas Ignaz Maurer?, Graz, 23 September 1663. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1663 Nr. 72–73.



Figure 4.

Site plan of the area of Zrínyi-Újvár with the portrait of Zrínyi from 1663

Source: MNM TKCs T 1041

By the autumn of 1663, Zrínyi-Újvár had been significantly expanded by Zrínyi. In addition to his own soldiers, a considerable number of imperial guards were stationed in the fortress. In the autumn of 1661, 150 soldiers and five artillerymen arrived in the fortress from the recruits of the Wallis Infantry Regiment stationed in Inner Austria.⁷⁴ In September 1663, the imperial garrison increased to 350 men with the 200 soldiers of the Spick Infantry Regiment. A disagreement arose with the Viennese administration over the supply of this latter contingent. On the grounds that they were not obliged to support troops stationed outside the country, the Styrian Estates refused the request for this. However, the administration argued that the province would suffer no harm, as they had to pay their portions to the war-chest anyway. It was reckoned that due to the direct transfer of portions, the soldiers would receive their pay two months earlier.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ ÖStA KA Prot. Exp. November 1661. Nr. 8. fol. 489–490; ÖStA KA Prot. Reg. 6 and 7 November 1661. Nr. 30 fol. 288–289v.; report by Quartermasters Carl Sigmund Freiherr von Boisen and Friedrich von Praag about the transfer of the Wallis recruits to Zrínyi-Újvár. 26 November 1661. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 188; report by Wolfgang Sigmund Khloss, War Councillor in Graz, Graz, 28 November 1661. XIV Militaria 1661. Nr. 189.

⁷⁵ Report by War Councillor Thomas Ignaz Maurer?, Graz, 23 September 1663. StLA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1663. Nr. 72–73; report by Quartermasters Friedrich von Praag and Häzl, 25 September 1663. StLA

By the beginning of 1664, Zrínyi-Újvár had become a strong fortress. Its garrison surpassed the number of soldiers of former “Berkigát” (that had been in the same “league” before its destruction) and the garrison of Kapronca supporting Muraköz.⁷⁶ It must have had considerable artillery, too. Zrínyi had many guns in Csáktornya, and had several cannons cast between 1657 and 1660. In 1690, the army recapturing Kanizsa found there altogether four cannons with the inscription “Zrínyi”. These were probably seized by the Ottoman troops during the siege of Zrínyi-Újvár in 1664.⁷⁷

Zrínyi originally built his fortress to guard the crossing and keep an eye on the area. However, as the two great powers drifted towards war that neither of them wanted, the fortress became increasingly important, and the Ban of Croatia turned into a hero, the “bane of the Ottoman Turks”. He almost awaited and provoked the Ottomans, as if he had wanted to follow in his great grandfather’s footsteps, yet he did not lose his sense of military reality. He was a member of the imperial elite and significant military and political power was concentrated in his hands due to his contacts with members of the Hungarian and Croatian nobility and his clever propaganda. During the apathy for the loss of Érsekújvár (today Nové Zámky, Slovakia), he achieved with a winter diversion and its appropriate domestic and international communication that the valley of the Drava River turned into the main theatre of war in 1664, and the recapture of Kanizsa became the most important military objective. Representing a constant threat, Kanizsa had been a sting in Zrínyi’s eyes for a long time.⁷⁸ All his efforts were directed against that neighbouring Ottoman fortress. He obtained money, soldiers and weapons for defence, and transformed Muraköz into a real stronghold. The construction of Zrínyi-Újvár served the same purpose. If they had managed to take Kanizsa, his properties would have been delivered from direct pressure from the enemy. However, they were not able to recapture Kanizsa before the arrival of the Sultan’s army, and the German imperial and French troops were still on their way to the South Transdanubian battlefield. The reinforced fortress of Zrínyi-Újvár could withstand only the local Ottoman forces, as in the summer of 1663. When retreating from Kanizsa, not many people believed that Zrínyi-Újvár could be held long against the main Ottoman army, as one of the largest fortresses of the country capitulated after thirty-six days in the previous year. Zrínyi-Újvár was not a betrayed fortress. Its defenders gained some time – three weeks – with their heroism, the pledge of later successful military operations.

LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1663. Nr. 25/9 (60); report by Councillor Hans Adam Lichtenstein, 1 October 1663. LA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1663. Nr. (60) – 104–105; Royal Decree issued for the Spick Regiment transferred to Zrínyi-Újvár, 31 October 1663. LA LaA Antiquum XIV Militaria 1663. Nr. 137–138.

⁷⁶ The garrison of Berkigát was made up of 70 infantrymen and 250 Rascian soldiers. *Papp* 2002. 130.

⁷⁷ Three guns were cast in 1646, and one cannon was cast in 1657. *Szita* 1995. 60–61.

⁷⁸ ZMÖM 2003. 545–546.