

**Theses of the Dissertation
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

Demmel József

Slovaks out of Slavs

Ludovít Štúr and the birth of the Slovak national movement
in 19th century Hungary

**Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Humanities**

2011

Statement of the Research Aims and Tasks of the Dissertation

The aim of the Dissertation is the analysis of the life of Ľudovít Štúr from the point of view of social history. Štúr's life and life-work is the subject of a broad literature in Slovak language, nevertheless we can say that these studies are generally unable to step out of the frames of the Slovak national historical canon. Apart from a few exceptions the Hungarian historians did not make serious attempts to reevaluate the aforementioned Slovak interpretation of Štúr either. Albeit his life would indeed be interesting and relevant for Hungarian historiography as well, since he was living in 19th century Hungary, he was the founding chief editor of a Hungarian political daily paper, he was the founder of many Hungarian associations, he was a teacher of the liceum of Hungary's crown-city. The most fundamental element of national identity, the creation of the standard Slovakian language clearly separating those speaking Slovakian as a mother tongue from the non Slovaks, can be connected to his name. It was with his leadership in 1848 that a group of Slovak intellectuals formulated the claim for the first time to separate from Hungary and to the foundation of an independent Slovak state.

The most important aim of the Dissertation is therefore to redraw the static picture of Štúr as derived from the Slovak canon. On the other hand our aim is not deheroization or the deep philological analysis of thousands of pages of the canon, but the replacement of the simplified, schematic, extremist explanations of the past, posing new questions, the incorporation of new contexts by the application of diverse sets of points of view. We narrowed down the subject of research to two sets of questions. With the questions in the first set we tried to move away from the canon describing Štúr as an infallible, omnipotent leader and put him back to the social reality of 19th century Hungary. We were looking for answers to such questions as to what a family he was born into, or what possibilities of mobility he had in the society of his age? What he earned his living with? How did the Evangelist church influence his course of life, what scholar and social framework did it provide, and how did Štúr utilize these for his own benefits? Since it is only through his life conditions, education and family background that we can understand the motives that lead him to create the cultural, social and political frameworks required to unite the Slovak speaking people as one nation.

Štúr himself significantly influenced the micro-society surrounding him and even the broader parts of the society. That is why we need to ask such questions as how the medium, the community around him that provided a suitable background for his ideas and visions was built up. How did the Slovak national society shape in his age and how did Štúr influence this development? How did the Slovak national institutional system come into being?

Research Methods Used

Is it possible to tell the story of a man's life the way that one stays within the premises of today's scientific approach all the time? Giovanni Levi gives the following answer to this question in his article that has already become a classic: „*In numerous cases the most flagrant distortions arise due to us historians envisaging the historical characters as obedient to limited and anachronistic rationalities. With this, following the usual tradition of biography writing and the rhetorics of our science, we persuaded ourselves to use models that connect straight chronology, constant and coherent personalities, actions lacking impotence and doubtless decisions*”. We have to consider Levi's thoughts since the biographers of Štúr interpreted some of his actions, decisions and the changes of his connection to others based on his whole life-work and the unquestionable national historical canon connected to Štúr.

This hagiographical approach needs revision. Therefore instead of filling the frames of the straightforward canon I tried to view the individual in his own contradictory, uncertain and crumbling reality.

The practice of micro-history provided more methodological and source-handling solutions and narrative positions worth considering. By handling the sources in a way reminiscent of the Clifford Geertz type „dense description” such a micro-analysis can get out of the premise of the traditional national-ethical canonizational points of view. Through the „detailed view of the things” the simplifications of the so-far valid canon can be revealed, the premises of the real latitude of the individual’s career come to the front, and we can observe the individual’s position changes, choices of role, decision options in the act.

The Structure of the Dissertation

We emphasize that the statements of the Dissertation are based on the critical reevaluation of the Slovak historical canon, therefore after the introduction dealing with the theory of biography writing, the Dissertation starts with a historiographical summary. The following chapters can be divided into two groups which approximately correspond to the aforementioned two sets of questions (although there are some overlaps). The Reader can find a rich biographical chronology, a few not merely illustrative but explanatory pictures which help the comprehension of the analysis and an abundant collection of documents in the appendix. The latter holds those few publicistical papers and memoirs written about Štúr by contemporary Hungarian authors and the translation of some memoirs originally written in Slovak. After this the Reader can find a rich selection of articles written by Štúr in Hungarian and documents in connection with his Hungarian parliamentary delegation.

The Findings of the Dissertation

By reviewing the Štúr historiography it turns out that his first place in the national pantheon, his role as an infallible leader has not always been so obvious – at the time of his death certainly not all members of the Slovak national movement thought it so. The canon that is still valid today has only been created three decades after his death by his closest friend Jozef Miloslav Hurban. The Slovak historiography has however barely deviated from this strongly preconceptional, polarized canon that is not free of concealed statements and even intentional distortions ever since. The following results may therefore appear as novelties not only for the Hungarian Reader but even for the Slovak literature.

By the social historical analysis of Štúr’s ancestors it turned out for instance that the family strategies of the formerly weaver family got into a crisis after the transformation of the cloth industry. They avoided the social decline and the financial difficulties by establishing a closer connection with the Evangelist church that had so far influenced only the religious life of the family. The father of Ľudovít Štúr already got his position within the church as an elementary school teacher, and three out of his four sons got their qualifications as Evangelist clerks. This is a significant point because the Evangelist church as an organization provided broader premises, a wider horizon and therefore considerable possibilities for self-expression for the new generation, thus for Ľudovít Štúr as well. The role of the Evangelist social connections was also dominant in the Hungarian part of his social network. This is reflected not only by the facts that the national movement called into being by him was mainly Evangelist considering its leading characters, social basis and the nature of its institutions, but by Štúr’s relationship to the nobility as well, which seems to be rather contradictory so far. His relationship to Zay Károly can for example be understood by the tight patron-client type relationship model common within the frames of the Evangelist solidarity. Since we can

consider Zay, who was the most relentless enemy of Štúr according to the Slovak common remembrance, the most significant supporter and patron of Štúr until 1840.

The social historical point of view brought new results considering the financial circumstances of Štúr as well. On the one hand it turned out that in a great part of his life he earned his living as a private tutor and teacher of Slovak, which might correspond to a particularly low status for a man of similar education and social embedding, but only this form of living could be reconciled with the symbolic roles of Štúr (as imagined by himself) and with the everyday full-time organizational tasks of the national movement. On the other hand it turned out that in certain parts of his life he was still unable to earn enough to live on, which raises the question of politically motivated sponsorship (even from abroad), that raises the question of high treason (to be more precise how loyalty towards the Slovak society overwrote loyalty towards the community of the country's citizens).

The social historical approach of Štúr's life is however not useful only to reveal the simplifications of the canon. We could get acquainted with the society first representing the modern Slovak national idea, the relationships within this community and those wider groups of the whole society that were susceptible for their ideas.

We first examined the genesis of the Slovak standard language, and through the careful reading of the sources it turned out the myth that Štúr chose the Liptó-Túróc dialect as the standard language because of its „ancient origin, richness in expressions, widespread use” is not valid. In reality Kossuth György, the uncle of Kossuth Lajos and hundreds of noblemen from Túróc approached Štúr in a letter offering their support in his efforts of founding a newspaper. As an answer for this, Štúr could have decided that way that the mother tongue of this prestigious group be the standard language.

In 1847 Štúr attempted to represent the Slovak pursuits in the Pozsony Diet. Due to the local financial and political conditions he managed to get elected as the delegate of the city of Zólyom. By examining his delegation it turns out that he did not utilize this opportunity for representing the Slovaks: he spoke up for the Slovaks in only one out of his 11 speeches. As a reason for his passivity we can suspect that already at that time he thought that it is not possible to act on behalf of the Slovaks in the Hungarian feudal Parliament.

This way the process of how the Hungarians and the non-Hungarian people turned against each other after March 1848 can barely form the subject of research. The opposition had already been irreconcilable and therefore it had no chance whatever that Kossuth and Štúr unite under one flag. As the Hungarian government considered the leaders of the Slovak national movement as security problems already in April 1848, instead of trying to understand their point, the Slovaks did not try to adjust their demands to the realities either. It is obvious that by precisely understanding the way of thinking of the Hungarian politicians who held the power (and also knowing the power and lobbying possibilities of their own supporting basis) the petition of Liptószentmiklós has not been intended as a friendly gesture and a fair request but a provocation (as well).

Bibliography

„... egész Szlovákia elfért egy tutajon...” A szlovák Tatrín egyesület története 1844 és 1847 között. In: Demmel József: „... egész Szlovákia elfért egy tutajon...” Tanulmányok a szlovák történelemtől a 19. századi Magyarországon. Pozsony, Kalligram, 2009.

„ale i tá láska ostala len platonickou”. Súkromný život Ľudovíta Štúra. In: OS (Občianská spoločnosť), 2011

Ľudovít Štúr „szláv szellemű” tanára? Leopold Petz a magyar és a szlovák történetírás vakfoltjában. In: Soproni Szemle, 2011/1.

A kánon határa. Ľudovít Štúr legújabb életrajzáról. In: Limes, 2010/4. 105 – 107.

A nagy kreátor. Kiss Szemán Róbert könyvei Ján Kollárról. Vigilia, 2009/8.

Mi a szlovák történelem? In: Fejezetek a tegnapi világból. Tanulmányok. Budapest, 2009.

Életpályák, identitások. Szlovák-magyar viszony 1848-ban. Kút, 2009/4.

„... ösmerem ezt az impertinens akasztófárávaló publicumot...”. A prenumeráció forrásértékének vizsgálata Tompa Mihály kapcsolathálóján keresztül. ItK. 2006/6.

Ľudovít Štúr: A szlávok és a jövő világa. Válogatott írások és beszédek. Szerkesztés Rudolf Chmellel közösen. Tervezett megjelenés: Pozsony, Kalligram, 2011 őszi.

Grünwald Béla – Mudrony Mihály: A Felvidék. Pozsony, Kalligram, 2011 őszi