

**József DEMMEL (ed.)**

**A szlovák nemzet születése. Ľudovít Štúr és szlovák társadalom a 19. századi Magyarországon**

**[Birth of the Slovakian Nation. Ľudovít Štúr and the Slovakian Society in Hungary in the 19th Century]**

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**József DEMMEL**

**Ľudovít Štúr: A szlávok és a jövő világa. Szerk. Ford.:**

**F. Kováts Piroska, Földes Zsuzsanna, Görözdi Judit,**

**Németh Ádám, Tóth Gergely. Utószó: Rudolf Chmel.**

**[Ľudovít Štúr: The Slavonians and the World of Future.**

**Ed.: Jozsef Demmel. Translated by: Piroska F. Kováts,**

**Zsuzsanna Földes, Judit Görözdi, Ádám Németh,**

**Gergely Tóth. Prologue: Rudolf Chmel]**

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József Demmel's two books complement each other. No Hungarian historians have dealt with Ľudovít Štúr so deeply, and not too many Slovakian have done so. The topic is actual: the Slovakian society regards Štúr as their most known personality, yet Rudolf Chmel reasonably brought up that what his ideas, actions were, are unanswered questions for the most people. There exists a canonized Štúr-figure, but several layers of ideologies (nationalist, communist) have been crusted on him.

The monography extends the frames of classical biography. Štúr's life is not detailed in chronological order, but the author emphasizes parts and gives priority to some. The book gets together into a loose structured unity, yet provides us with a genuine picture. The choice of this type of biography is justified by the author, who points out that there is an irreconcilable opposition among the canons of Hungarian and Slovakian national narratives (14.). He emphasizes that the greatest mistake of the earlier (Czech) Slovakian Štúr-conceptions was that each element of his life "was interpreted from the point of the attached unquestionable national historical canon." (21.) Yet Štúr's representation as national seer was not formed at his death. Demmel made an attempt to get him out of the Slovakian national historic narrative making him a hero, and out of the Hungarian narrative making him the enemy: "We should emphasize that by questioning the canon of our aim being not exactly myth destroying, mortifying Štúr's personality, but to change his picture

defined by piety and respect (even in strictly meant professional work) into a portrait closer to the reality of sources.” (21.)

Demmel's aim is not to proclaim moral judgement, but realize understanding, Štúr's thoughts and motives of action. We can learn about Štúr's ancestors, family background, and the strategy that served uprising. More than that about the decisive (or at least qualified as decisive) episodes of young Štúr's life: teaching at home, his connections to the Osztro lucky family, finally his possible homosexuality. Demmel took the side of the sources not proving this, but certainly it is really difficult to prove the no-existence of something.

We can meet the politician Štúr in the second large part of the book. The author is not scared of the taboo breaking topics, like examining Lajos Kossuth's uncle, György Kossuth's and the Slovakian noblemen's roles in Túróc. Štúr was the creator of the separate Slovakian literary language, that's why his activity concerning linguistics is really important, which is followed by the decisive stations of his life, for example, his representative status in the Hungarian Parliament, or the half-decade, lasting from 1849 to his death, spent in Modor. The book is finished with a detailed list of sources and an appendix. It's most important part is the chronology, a Slovakian-Hungarian place name list and rich content of pictures. Demmel's second book is a thick documentary book, which provides the selected sources in Hungarian, after an introduction. The book contains two types of text: the relevant sources produced by Štúr and his contemporaries, and documents about Štúr, but made in later years. These confirm how the historic Štúr was different from the Štúr(s) of the Slovakian panteon, and how more complex than the Hungarian Štúr-conception. On the Hungarian side, the case “could be solved” approaching from the operative Hungarian public law and territorial integrity of the historical Hungary, but on the Slovakian side the formation of Czechoslovakia made the “handling” of Štúr's inheritance difficult. The idealized hero's picture impregnated for the 1880s, which was transformed by the formation of Czechoslovakia, where in the interest of the Slovakian independence, against the Czechs, Štúr's ideas were in contrast with the Czechoslovakian idea of national unity. With his last work (*The Slavonians and the World of Future*), where his disappointment can be heard, could not be done anything: Slavonians uniting under Russian leadership were unimaginable. The book contains that work, too: it is not by chance that the text was not published in Slovakian for a long time, yet Štúr wrote it in 1851. It proved to be unacceptable with Slovakian and Czechoslovakian eyes as well, that the politician denying all his earlier views, vision of united Slavs, a state with Pravoslav belief and Russian language. Yet this work exemplifies the differences between the myth of the vigorous hero and the man struggling between doubts. At the end of the book, we can find the list of sources, a biographical and notional collection.

The two books organically complement each other; however, they protect their “independence”. Both are appropriate to open towards a new type two-way Slovakian-Hungarian historical discourse. The author is critical about his sources, nevertheless, we can, or even must argue with his views and tone them. But the virtue of Demmel's work is that he does not preach but gives reasons. And this is the thing that opens the gate to the direction of reconsideration. Reading the monography and the source book three expressive pictures come up. The first two elements are the double refraction of a life: Štúr's looking for the way, then the canonic Štúr's with broken silhouettes, working off and getting further away

from it. In the background of the two figures there is the forming 19<sup>th</sup> then 20<sup>th</sup> Century Slovakian cultural and political nation with stronger outlines. Štúr did not have a long life, but the few active decades, which could form his own and the nation's fate in the heyday of the European nationalism, freed and focused his endless energy on one aim. Through this the Slovakian nation and a myth was born from the Slovakian people. His own myth pressures him as such load that we cannot see him in his own reality. The two books also confess about the failures of the canonization. Quoting the author: "My more important ambition that precedes consistently vindicating selected methods is to place Ľudovít Štúr in the social reality of the age, peeling off the roles subsequently vested on him by the canon." (24.)

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