

COMMENTARY TO VILIAM PAULINY-TÓTH'S ESSAY VIENNA, OR PEST?

Viliam Pauliny-Tóth (1826–77) ranks among the major representatives of the Slovak nineteenth-century elite. However, he has till this day remained in the shadows of the most famous Slovak national activists, cultural animators, and politicians, among whom Ľudovít Štúr (1815–56) is considered to have been the most charismatic and foreground figure. The fact that Slovak historian František Bokes presented Pauliny-Tóth, in the first half of the twentieth century, as Štúr's successor¹ did not change much in this respect. The symbolic authority that Pauliny-Tóth managed to accumulate, measured in terms of respect and recognition expressed in the numerous public functions entrusted to him and his role in the process of consolidation and institutionalisation of the Slovak national movement which made the Slovak elite visible beyond the local level, should have ensured for him a no less dominant position in historiography than those held by Štúr or Jozef Miloslav Hurban (1817–88).

Remembered today mostly as a man-of-letters, Pauliny-Tóth was a teacher, an experienced civil servant, a zealous editor and publisher of Slovak-language press of diverse profiles, a social activist who was highly sensitive to economic development, and a capable politician; the latter is best confirmed by a seat in the Parliament he held in the term-of-office of 1869–72.² After the death of Karol Kuzmány in 1866, he vice-chaired the Matica slovenská [Slovak Association] until closed down by the Hungarian authorities in 1875; he co-founded, in the town of Martin, a Slovak junior high school and the Kníhtlačiar'ský účastinársky spolok, i.e. a joint-stock publishing society. 1871 saw him preside the newly-formed Slovak National Party [Slovenská národná strana]; in parallel, he edited in 1871–4 the newspaper Národné noviny, the party's informal

¹ See František Bokes, 'Viliam Pauliny-Tóth, organizátor národného života slovenského v matičných rokoch', in Viliam Pauliny-Tóth, *Listy ku slovenskému Tomášovi* (Liptovský Sv. Mikuláš, 1942), 12.

² For more on this topic, see František Bokes, *Viliam Pauliny-Tóth. Slovenský poslanec v r. 1869–1872* (Martin, 1942).

press organ which in 1870 succeeded the *Pešťbudínske vedomosti*, published since 1861 in Pest. In the sixties and seventies – especially once he resettled, together with his family, to Martin in the year 1867 – Pauliny-Tóth became a key animator of the Slovak national movement, combining different fields of public involvement in his varied activities.³ He likewise led his children along the path of affirming Slovak things and cultivating Slovak national interests. Given the fact that his children were born out of a marriage with a Hungarian woman, his attitude needs to be perceived as the most literal manifestation of his elite-forming, Slovak-oriented activity.

In a number of respects, he himself became an icon of social advancement, the way for which was paved for the intellectual and economic elites through involvement in the national movement. Frequently, such involvement would turn into a springboard for winning new manifestations of recognition – and, thereby, for broadening the scope of symbolic authority, or reinforcing it amidst the realities of a modernising world. Pauliny-Tóth, who after years of living in Buda (and elsewhere) moved to Martin, can moreover be viewed as a figure of the flow of the elitist culture-forming potential from its Budapest-based centre to the provinces. Let us remark that this flow bore no trait of retreat or yielding to an ethnically stronger element. Pauliny-Tóth visited Pest on a regular basis as a deputy to the Hungarian Diet, and maintained intensive social contacts there. The phenomenon in question was symptomatic of a deliberate centre-forming activity, community advancement, and reinforcement of local structures, as particularly apparent in the course of urbanisation processes in the peripheral areas of the Habsburg monarchy, which were stimulated (apart from the other drivers) by the development of transportation and industrial infrastructure. Last but not least, the author of *Vienna, or Pest?* appears to us as a model exponent of local elites which, getting consolidated within the framework of a small provincial town (whose importance was initially local), strengthen and symbolically appropriate it, thereby becoming visible beyond the local context.

Pauliny-Tóth's position of a mediator in the relations among the Slovak people, ideologically and politically split as they were, is no less noteworthy than the extensive scope of his social, political, economic, as well as artistic/cultural activity. Slovak historiography tends to emphasise that he occupied a middle position in the circle of Slovak national elite. He would cause diverse political strategies and ideological attitudes to converge, all this in the years when the small provincial town of Turčiansky Svätý Martin was proactively

³ See, for instance, Július Botto, *Slováci. Vývin ich národného povedomia* (Bratislava, 1971), 250.

turning (in Bokes's opinion, owing to the decisions and actions taken by Pauliny-Tóth) into a local (from the Habsburg monarchy's perspective) centre of Slovak national movement. It is worth noting that the reasons for which the Slovak elites managed to reinforce their influence just in the region of Turiec, included the favourable attitude of the local gentry and municipal authorities, as recently evidenced by József Demmel.⁴ In the activities of Slovak national activists, the 'old', post-feudal local elite descried the benefits for the development of the town and the region. In 1861, these activists arranged a national assembly in Martin's village green (the choice of the venue was coincidental) which effectively produced one of the nineteenth-century Slovakian political manifestos – the Memorandum of the Slovak Nation.

Looking from today's perspective, Pauliny-Tóth's role as a link between the Slovaks and the Hungarians – the role he fulfilled with his entire life in the public as well as a private dimension – seems even more essential. His biography allows one to trace the overlapping of social circles, which in ethnically heterogeneous areas strengthened the impact on the course of individual identifications and, in parallel, community processes, factors of a local micro-scale. In the context of formation of new post-feudal and pro-national Slovak elites, it has to be noted that the financial security Pauliny-Tóth received when a young man (prematurely orphaned by his father, a Lutheran priest) was of quite an importance to his social advancement as well as on his involvement potential and possibilities to offer capital support to the Slovak initiatives. When his mother, who much cared about keeping up her son's Slovak identification, remarried, Viliam gained a formal protector in his stepfather Michal Dionýz Doležal, who was also a Lutheran priest and historian. On the one hand, apart from the natural familial support that facilitated a start in life, this circumstance can be regarded as a continuum of a religious and social circle-based socialisation that reinforced in Viliam's consciousness certain aspects of the Protestant ethic, translated into a defined vision of social order and preferred forms of involvement in the common welfare. On the other hand, as we learn from Eduard Gombala, Mr. Doležal was a Magyaron (i.e. friend and supporter of Hungary),⁵ which additionally intensified the influence of the linguistic and cultural surrounding in which Viliam was getting educated and took first steps on his career path (as a private tutor or civil servant). However, the social (and financial) position of this son of a Slovak preacher significantly changed only

⁴ For more on this subject, see József Demmel, *Panlávi v kaštieli. Zabudnutý príbeh slovenského národného hnutia* (Bratislava, 2017).

⁵ See Eduard Gombala, *Viliam Pauliny-Tóth. Život a dielo* (Martin, 1976), 8.

during his sojourn in Kecskemét, when, then a twenty-four-year-old, he was adopted by a childless paternal uncle of Vilma Tóth, his Hungarian fiancée. His new familial relationship was epitomised by an element that appeared since 1855 beside his surname as a reference to the family name of his spouse, which was Tóth de Tőre et Tóthmegyer. The experience of a friendly Slovak-Hungarian cultural and familial conjunction (a situation which was by no means unique to the biographies of the 'Upper Hungarian' local elite, but rarely highlighted or problematised by national historiographies) was turned by him into a political programme he propagated, oriented toward Slovak national emancipation (and not targeted against Hungary or the Hungarians). The nation-centric Martin-based circle was a forgery of new Slovak elites, getting intensely institutionalised and building its image on the idea to sever the 'fraternity' with Hungarians. Pauliny-Tóth 'smuggled' into it a civic ethos founded upon a model of cultural familiarity and political cooperation with Hungary. Since the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, the idea was promoted in the Slovak ranks by the New Slovak School, an overtly pro-Hungarian political party that formally operated since 1868, led by Ján Nepomuk Bobula (1844–1903), founder of Pest-based newspaper Slovenské noviny. Albeit Pauliny-Tóth did not join the party (having settled down in Martin), the necessity to develop political cooperation with Hungarians was for him an obvious direction for the Slovak politics. In personal terms, it quite naturally stemmed from his previous professional experience as well as milieu and family connections.

To my mind, it is the peculiar family situation and a conciliatory attitude towards those advocating different views and signs of national identification (including members of old nobility structures) – which means, a somewhat alternative and less populist (in our modern terms) model of national emancipation in which the Hungarian element would not inhibit but *de facto* support the transition – that are the identifiable reasons for why Pauliny-Tóth and Stúr are not mentioned in one breath. Although on the threshold of the 1870s the former did keep a leading position in the circle of Slovak national activists, it was not until the death of the first leader of the Slovak National Party that Hurban, representing the radically pro-national wing and aspiring ideological leader of the Slovaks, brought himself to publicise the proof of recognition of the fact that it was him to have had an important bridging role between the Slovak conservatives and radical liberals summoning to tighten the cooperation and collaboration with the Hungarians.⁶ The care for the integration of

⁶ See Jozef Miloslav Hurban, 'Viliam Pauliny-Tóth a jeho doba. Náčrty životopisné a povahopisné', Nitra, vii (1877), 329–409.

Slovak elites or, at least, the skill of keeping in touch with different milieus and circles, which implied generation of information flows and stabilisation of tensions inside milieus and circles, noticeably strengthened the national movement of the Slovaks at the time the Habsburg monarchy was turning into a dualist country. Pauliny-Tóth was well prepared to fulfil such a role, thanks to his personal experience combined, as Bokes points out, with advantageous features of character.⁷ In retrospect, and given the present state of research in social phenomena appearing in multiethnic empires, the genealogy of Pauliny-Tóth's pro-national activity and the peculiar method he adopted (so that the Slovak national emancipation might proceed under the conditions of strong competitiveness of a multiethnic country that in its Hungarian part was quickly turning into a nation-state), seems particularly interesting. Observation of his actions and texts in this respect leads one to stress the reasons behind this man's worldview choices, political views, and pro-social attitudes resting in his personal, if not intimate, life experience, rather than following from community-based determinants – though the latter is certainly important in terms of efficient reproductive or assimilative mechanisms.

It seems that the case of Pauliny-Tóth well illustrates one of the most important paths to the accumulation of symbolic authority by the Slovaks. The Slovakian elites used their local knowledge and roots in the community to create local projects, which gave them a significant degree of freedom from the extensive administrative and political centres of the imperial state. Paradoxically, such actions that 'hid' the expansion by local leaders of institutional facilities and resources indirectly confirm that they made a symbolic leap toward the centre. Although it took place in a provincial area, the leap became visible to the central authorities and intensified their vigilance with respect to any autonomy-oriented actions. A measure of the strengthened position of the cluster of Slovak elite based in Martin (in fact, a new centre with a local impact) might be the force with which the assimilation policy, exacerbated since the mid-1870s, was striking the Slovaks. Pauliny-Tóth was among the very few who realised that formation of a new elite, well-prepared to encounter the challenges of the future and able to resist the temptation to opportunistically deny their identification with the fledging Slovak national community, was of key importance.

His extensive activities as a journalist and editor, appearing under his own name or using multiple pseudonyms, attests to the course of his political involvement in Slovak national movement, and to how powerful it was. Let

⁷ See Bokes, 'Viliam Pauliny-Tóth, organizátor', 3.

us note that apart from the ordinary universal functions that the press fulfilled in the latter half of the nineteenth century, being then the most important mass-media communication channel, reinforcing the egalitarian tendencies and letting the dominated groups speak, with quite a restricted potential to directly influence political decisions – and such were the conditions the Slovaks encountered – it was the press that was for them the main instrument of political struggle. The press somehow compensated the lack of professional political activity. It functioned as a loudspeaker and an agora on which daily political life went on – and, putting it bluntly, on which politicisation of everyday lives of Slovak-speaking citizens of the Habsburg monarchy, being the process of their national integration, was taking place. Pauliny-Tóth definitely treated his activity as a journalist in such way. It was in the periodicals that the differences between the political positions assumed by Slovaks echoed the most completely, and where any and all tensions inside milieus or circles and regions surfaced. A survey of the press titles and the profile of the newspapers and journals, a list of their editors, contributors, subscribers and places of publication provide, in themselves, rich information as to the dynamism of formation of Slovak elites. The field's micro-scale (understood in problem-specific terms) facilitates observation of the trends shared across the Habsburg monarchy as well as their local aberrations based on local conditions and determinants being a tangle of unique circumstances, always connected with the lives of real people.

Viliam Pauliny-Tóth's journalistic statement, which is published below due to its considerable discursive value for the description of the path followed by the Slovak elite wrestling with the experience of their locality, can be read today in several ways. This short article whose (powerful enough) title points to one of the major narrative nodes that were twined in the period of modernisation of the Habsburg state as part of the discussions going on in the press, was published in the autumn of 1871 in *Národné noviny*, a newspaper issued in Martin. It must have been viewed by the readers, who were its direct recipients, as one of the most distinct and opinion-forming voices in the still-animated discussion (which *de facto* was not up-to-date anymore, due to the indisputable political dependence of the territories inhabited by Slovaks on Hungary, since the 1867 Compromise) the Slovak elites had been involved in for several decades, not unanimous in respect of the instances with which political support and protection of Slovak national interests should have been sought. Pauliny-Tóth's answer to the question, 'Who was the hegemon for the Slovaks?' was resolute and definite (the answer namely was, 'the Slovak nation'), thus testifying to a mental change taking place at the time. A part of the public opinion must have found this conviction awkward, though, as

a clear note of squaring accounts with the previous emancipation policy method resounded in it, while also emphasising the need to perceive the Hungarians as political partners to be matched up with.

A polemical character of this statement is outright apparent in its structure, being a dialogue with the other periodicals; and, in its canvassing-like, or, elsewhere, preaching rhetoric. An outsider would not identify at first glance the key level of the text's polemic quality, which is based on the fact that Pauliny-Tóth places Pest, rather than Vienna, at the centre of the Slovaks' political activity. The Slovaks were closing their ranks in the provincial town of Martin, which was meant to become a centre of national life, as attested by the article's place of publication and the choices its author made in his life. The text's key fragments, expressed in an almost sentimental tone, explicitly remind the 'Upper Hungarian' readers – the new, local, national elites who increasingly comfortably snuggled down in their nation-centrism – that their political empowerment was conditioned upon Slovak-Hungarian conjunction. The fact that he did it as a leader of the *Matica slovenská* and the Slovak National Party, regarded as a national-conservative party, and, moreover, as a long-awaited Slovak deputy in the Hungarian Parliament, makes his opinion highly interesting, when viewed in the context of local elites functioning within the Habsburg monarchy.

Less than two months after Vienna, or Pest? was published, on 7 November 1871 Pauliny-Tóth and Bobula entered in Pest into a 'secret' agreement, endorsing it with their word of honour and signatures, whereby both recently-formed Slovak political parties – the Slovak National Party and the New Slovak School – declared their readiness to cease the dispute between them and enter into better cooperation, thereby supporting the operation of Slovak institutions (in particular, *Matica slovenská*, three Slovak junior high schools, the Živena association, the St Adalbert Society, the publishing houses of Pest-based *Minerva* and the *Kníhtlačiarsky účastinársky spolok* of Martin). Noteworthy is the concern of both contracting parties about an optimum operation of these institutions and an even flow of information to the press organs of both parties, the *Slovenské noviny* of Pest and Martin's *Národné noviny*, along with the importance attached to further development of the Slovak mass media market. The agreement⁸ was to be disseminated among the national activists, rather than published in the press. The editors of both periodicals mentioned above undertook to publish, at the same time, a front-page

⁸ For the agreement's content, see František Bokes (ed.), *Dokumenty k slovenskému národnému hnutiu v r. 1848–1914; ii: 1867–1884* (Bratislava, 1965), 312–14.

article entitled 'K povšimnutiu', signed by Pauliny-Tóth. The appearance of such an agreement and its underlying conditions – mainly, the intention to hide it from outsiders – sheds additional light on the tone of Vienna, or Pest?: the design behind it was to logically and symbolically invalidate the title dilemma. Its author lets the readers notice a gesture of the hand stretched not only towards Hungarians but, primarily, towards the political rivals inside the Slovak national camp which was split into two centres: Budapest and Martin, with the intent to build an invisible bridge between them to strengthen the Slovak elites. This gesture can also be interpreted as a strategy to accumulate power in one's own hands.

The origins of Vienna, or Pest?, its scope of influence, its author, and place of publication – even more so perhaps than the literal reading of the text – allow identifying the meandering paths beaten by local elites who finally recognised themselves as Slovaks, and the meandering paths of formation of Slovak national elites within the realities of the multiethnic Habsburg monarchy – as local elites.

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