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Franko Vít'azoslav Sasinek as the 'historiographer of Slovaks'

Karol Holý

Franko Vít'azoslav Sasinek (1830 - 1914) is up to the present day considered to be 'the greatest Slovak historian of the nineteenth century'.¹ This image was created and maintained by himself, as well as by other significant nationalist activists already during his lifetime. Sasinek's studies appeared as formally sophisticated works, because of his detailed footnote sections, including quotations from primary sources in the original language. His studies also dealt with highly specific and demanding topics, mostly related to the Middle Ages. A closer look at his work reveals, however, that this image did not correspond with the actual attitudes and opinions of the Slovak national and intellectual elite, as expressed in private letters. The elite, however, usually wrote panegyric journal articles about Sasinek. I consider this case quite an attractive topic for a detailed analysis of the differences between the attitudes of national leaders towards Sasinek, meant to inform a broader public (mostly readers of newspapers and papers) and the private opinions of the leaders toward him, which can only be found in their private correspondence. I will argue that it is not legitimate to qualify the meaning of Sasinek's work for the Slovak nation using categories as competence, research level, or objectivity and impartiality. Sasinek's meaning lies in the public image of him as an objective, impartial, but first of all a 'Slovak historian'.

In this paper I shall focus on the following main topics: Sasinek's attitude towards his own writing, his attitude toward the historical writings of Slovak nationalists and the contradictions between the public and private representations of Sasinek by the Slovak nationalists. Given the voluminous

¹ As an example in the more recent literature, see the title of the 2007 proceedings: R. Marsina and P. Mulík ed., *Franko Vít'azoslav Sasinek. Najvýznamnejší slovenský historik 19. storočia 1830-1914* [Franko Vít'azoslav Sasinek. The most important Slovak historian of the nineteenth century 1830-1914](Martin 2007). This is a conference volume celebrating the 175th anniversary of his birth (2005). Compare this with the conference volume commemorating the 50th anniversary of his death (1969): T. Winkler ed., *Matičný dejatelia Michal Chrástek – František V. Sasinek* (Martin 1971) 148. On Sasinek see 87-144.

secondary literature written about Sasinek,² it is obvious that Sasinek is not one of the ‘forgotten’ historians, although we have to bear in mind features of such a historiographical literature. I will not discuss the cited works in detail, but instead I will focus on just a few of their features, those that I find the most controversial. In the majority of works dealing with Sasinek’s concept of history (that is, Sasinek as a historian), a general conclusion has been made on the basis of just a very limited selection of his

2 Regarding research primarily dealing with Sasinek, see: A. Kolísek, *František Vítězoslav Sasinek. Ku 100. narodeninám a uloženíu pozostatkov v Skalici* (Skalica na Slovensku 1930) 108; M. Otčenáš, *František Vítězoslav Sasinek (Príspevok k jeho životu a dielu)* (Košice 1995) 96; M. Potemra, ‘Hlavní představitelia slovenskej buržoáznej historiografie na začiatku 20. storočia’ in: M. Potemra ed., *Slovenská historiografia v rokoch 1901-1918. Tematická bibliografia v rámci Bibliografie zo slovenských novín a časopisov v rokoch 1901-1918* (Košice 1980) 64-102; M. Kučera, ‘Profil historického diela Františka Vítězoslava Sasinka’, *Historický časopis* 29 (1981) 195-207; M. Otčenáš, ‘Franko V. Sasinek – historiofraf Slovákov’, *Literárnomyzejný letopis* 23 (1990) 153-168; M. Otčenáš, ‘Vedecko-organizačná a bádateľská činnosť F. V. Sasinka’ in: R. Marsina, P. Mulík ed., *Franko Vítězoslav Sasinek*, 21-29; M. Kučera, ‘Konceptia slovenských dejín v diele F. V. Sasinka’ in: R. Marsina, P. Mulík ed., *Franko Vítězoslav Sasinek*, 9-20; O. Pekáriková-Hvizdošová, ‘Edičná činnosť Františka Vítězoslava Sasinka’, *Historické štúdie* 4 (1958) 275–292. More papers are to be found in thematic bibliographies dealing with Sasinek’s works. The bibliographies contain both Sasinek’s writings as well as studies on them. A half of the cited monograph by A. Kolísek deals with writings of Sasinek’s contemporaries. The published material is of significance especially when examining the historical memory about Sasinek, see: Kolísek, *František Vítězoslav Sasinek*, 55-106. From the more recent bibliographies see: J. Bartošek ed., *František Vítězoslav Sasinek*, 12-16; Š. Hanakovič, ‘Výberová bibliografia literárneho diela Fraňa Vítězoslava Sasinka’ in: R. Marsina and P. Mulík ed., *Franko Vítězoslav Sasinek*, 141-152. As for studying Sasinek, I consider the edition of Sasinek’s selected correspondence to be of a great merit, see: V. Šarluška, ‘Výber z listov Františka Vítězoslava Sasinka I.’, *Literárny archív* 16/79 (1980) 9–53; Vojtech Šarluška, ‘Výber z listov Františka Vítězoslava Sasinka II.’, *Literárny archív* 17/80 (1981) 11–61; Vojtech Šarluška, ‘Výber z listov Františka Vítězoslava Sasinka III.’, *Literárny archív* 18/81 (1982) 9–29; V. Šarluška, ‘Výber z listov Františka Vítězoslava Sasinka IV.’, *Literárny archív* 20/83 (1984) 93–119; V. Šarluška, ‘Výber z listov Františka Vítězoslava Sasinka V.’, *Literárny archív* 23/86, (1987) 90–106. Besides that, another, shorter, selection of Sasinek’s correspondence was published: P. Horváth, ‘Zo vzájomnej korešpondencie Františka Vítězoslava Sasinka s Františkom Palackým’, *Literárny archív* 19/82 (1983) 145-151.

papers and monographs, which were published during the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century. Due to the fact that the majority of authors did not define the essential change of Sasinek's attitude during the 1880s, these generalizations lose their significance. The authors were aware of that shift only when examining the change in how Sasinek looked at the concept of the very beginning of Slavs' and Slovaks' history by Pavol Jozef Šafárik (1795 – 1861, historian and slavist). I believe this change, however important, was not crucial. It resulted in an affirmation of a, before not quite so articulated, belief in Slovak's autochthony.

I believe there is no doubt that the most important change in Sasinek's historical thinking concerns his concept of the national identity of Árpád's people³, who at the end of the ninth century crossed the Carpathian Mountains. Sasinek denied that they were Magyars and pronounced them to be Slavs, this view becoming a dogma in the end. In an outline of research-literature, I mention this conceptual question mainly because of the fact that in the amount of cited works we would have to literally 'dig out' this, somehow hidden, information. We would not find any clear and definite articulation of this fact, with the exception of the work of M. Potemra.⁴ Moreover, it is not an exclusive fact – it is to be found in, for example, the mentioned selection of Sasinek's correspondence.

Another controversy related to historiography about Sasinek is the continual apotheosis of his person, successfully built at least from the

³ Árpád was the leader of one of the seven Magyar tribes which crossed the Carpathian Mountains at the end of the ninth century. After the battle of Lech (955) the Magyar tribes settled in the Carpathian Basin. Árpád's group had the greatest power amongst them.

⁴ Potemra, 'Hlavní představitelia', 68. This crucial breaking point in Sasinek's thinking is being reflected upon in other studies as well, not only those primarily focused on Sasinek. P. Komora, for instance, pointed to the fact that Sasinek's 'anti-millennial' articles 'hardly could have affected Slovak society in a positive way.' The reason for that was quite natural Sasinek's view on Magyars. See: P. Komora, 'Milenárne oslavy v Uhorsku roku 1896 a ich vnímanie v slovenskom prostredí' in: M. Podrimavský, Dušan, Kováč ed., *Slovensko na začiatku 20. storočia (Spoločnosť, štát a národ v súradniciach doby). Zborník štúdií.* (Bratislava 1999) 104. In that study, another interesting material about Sasinek is to be found, related to millennial celebration of 1896 (102-104 and 106). Sasinek's attitude towards ethnicity of Árpád's people mentions A. Hudek as well. See: A. Hudek, 'Slovak historiography and constructing the Slovak National story up to 1948', *Human Affairs* 16 (2006) 58.

beginning of the twentieth century.⁵ Until then, there has not been written a single solid critical study on Sasínek as a historian. The somehow obligatory apotheosis of his person, which dated back to the beginning of the twentieth century, has persisted. Quite naturally, the more recent works are also critical, but when reading them, one cannot fight the impression that the authors tried to formulate their critique in a most general way, or, that they tried to balance the critique with positive counter-examples.

However, the critique, as well as the appreciation of Sasínek, is a result of an approach dominating in the Slovak history of historiography, which evaluates a historian using today's merits in historical knowledge. This approach I do not consider to be useful when examining the historical thinking in history. My aim is, on the contrary, to locate Sasínek and his historical work in the historical context. It is in the light of this that concepts such as objectivity and impartiality have to be seen. These concepts were used by Sasínek all too often and in studies on him, the categories are primarily read in a positive (or even positivistic!) meaning. I will not evaluate them, only point to the fact that they cannot be identified with their lexical meaning at all. Especially in the last years of his life, Sasínek identified the notion 'objectivity' exclusively with his own attitudes, not with those of any of his more acclaimed contemporary colleagues. Despite the fact that the leaders of the Slovak national movement were aware of this, and did not approve it, Sasínek's image as that of an acknowledged and valued historian has persisted and persists, basically, until today. This point of view I find attractive in terms of scientific research of historical ideologies present in the Slovak national movement at the turn of the century.

Sasínek's attitude towards his own writing and to the historical writings of Slovak nationalists

The imperative context for the analysis of historical concepts of Sasínek is formed by the competition of the dominating official Magyar nationalism in dualistic Hungary (1867 - 1914) and its rival non-Magyar nationalist

⁵ M. Potemra, in his bibliography of historiographical articles from 1901-1918, mentions as many as 82 studies on Sasínek, see [entry Sasínek František Vít'azoslav in the name index]: M. Potemra ed., *Slovenská historiografia*, 641. Needless to say, these articles all represent an apotheosis of Sasínek.

movements (especially Romanian, Serbian and Slovakian). Naturally, they did not represent a comprehensive and consistent ideological movement; on the contrary, multiple fundamentally different concepts existed within individual nationalisms. In the nationalist thought of the Slovak nationalists, Sasinek represented a relatively simple variant which was based on contesting its enemies by negating their arguments. In Sasinek's view, the enemy was primarily represented by the Magyar nation, and his historical writing can be seen as a search for suitable negations against the dominating concepts of Magyar historiography of the time. The characteristic model, through which he redeemed his historical thought, was based on opposing the objective: the true history versus the false, biased history. He understood this opposing relationship primarily as a duel between the Slovak historiography and the Hungarian historiography. However, a less known fact is that this opposition can also be found on the level of relationship between his own historical thought and the concepts of the Slovak nationalists.

Sasinek gave a short but compact description of his understanding of historiography in an outline entitled *Myšlienky dejepisca* [Thoughts of a historiographer]. The introduction as well as the conclusion deals with the crucial problem of historical sources: 'True history is made of reliable historical sources, it does not fantasize. (...) It is not enough to write a history, but to document it.'⁶ The objective history ('the true history') is, thus, identified with 'being of its own', and its function is defined as being the source of national pride. The true history's antipode is the opposite of 'being of its own' – the alienation. Alienation results in conceit:

A nation without a true history is not home in its own fatherland, it is alien. Foreign historians would decorate their nation, but rob ours of its honourable history. The true history gives national pride, the false history gives stupid conceit. Give us back our history which belongs to us and a few things will appear in a different light. (...) He who does not know our history, knows not us.

This opposition is expressed also through the counterparts 'official – reliable', 'literary fiction – reality':

⁶ F.V. Sasinek, 'Myšlienky dejepisca', *Národné noviny* 45, 28.1 (1909) 12.1.

The essential point is not whether history is *official*, but whether it is *reliable*. There is a big difference between a reader of history and a critic of history; the reader blindly accepts what he reads as the truth, the critic examines *strictly* if that what he reads is actually true. True history is not a novel for the sake of having fun reading it, it should inform the reader about a true event. It is easy to write fictitious this and that, but a tough work to read the truth out from historical sources.

Sasinek saw the mission of a historian through the metaphor of *light* that pushes back *darkness*: 'In vain historians complain about the darkness; their mission is to push back the dark so that the light can shine through.'⁷

From the cited text it is obvious that Sasinek had a clearly defined view of history and historiography. It goes without saying that he speaks there mostly about himself. The absolute opposition he takes excluded any form of discussion. This feature of his theoretical reflection affected the practical part as well. His stubborn belief in having the truth was expressed quite accurately in an article in *Katolícke noviny* [The Catholic newspaper] from 1905, where he calls his critics, *blinded*: 'I know that there are many who do not know me and thus misdeem my work, blinded by prejudices...'⁸ Sasinek's self-esteem rises then and takes form of the Christian virtue of forgiveness. Naturally, it is Sasinek himself who forgives and therefore owns the truth: 'I am sure the Lord deems me otherwise than my enemies. By all my work I have slept better than those who had left Slovaks for so to serve Moloch and The Golden Calf for a handful of lentils and a smile of those with power. I have never spoken a course against my enemies [!], but only words of our heavenly Master: "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they are doing"'⁸

There had been made some hints there, pointing out Slovaks as Sasinek's enemies. In 1906, Sasinek quite openly stated that Magyars appreciate his work more than Slovaks do. The consequence of not reading his works is that Slovaks still dwell in darkness: 'It is so unkind to see that so few pay attention to my historical studies and hold on to darkness instead of light; I feel almost pity for large, longtime financial sacrifices,

⁷ F.V. Sasinek, 'Myšlienky dejepisca', *Národné noviny*, 45, 28.1 (1909) 12.1.

⁸ Both citations after: Kolísek, *František Viřázoslav Sasinek*, 106 [Originally in *Katolícke noviny*, 22. 12. 1905].

which I spent clearing out the Slovak and Magyar historiography. I even earn a bigger authority from Magyars than from my countrymen.⁹

Similarly, Sasinek makes a point about the actual state of national historiography: that it does not fulfill its required function but stagnates:

I am glad to see the progress in fiction and the struggle in politics, but I see no progress in historiography. In order to wake the national esteem and provide a basis so that nation can hold unto national rights, it is absolutely necessary to have historiography. The Magyar historians such as Hunfalvy or Karácsonyi use all their lies to make people believe their hoax that Magyars conquered the Kingdom of Hungary by sword and made subordinated Slovaks their slaves, to slaves with no rights. Only a critical historiography is able to fight against such rude un-historical statements.¹⁰

Consequently, Sasinek insisted upon publishing his works despite the unwillingness of Slovak paper-editors. Commenting the disapproval of publishing his study on Huns in *Sborník Museálnej slovenskej spoločnosti* [Proceeding of the Slovak Museum Society] and *Národné noviny* [The national newspaper], Sasinek made a remark that: 'They want a better history, which they do not believe in.'¹¹

The fact that remarks of such a kind were not just a result of a natural self-esteem, but rather of stubborn conviction, follows from the last lines of his manuscript *Hlípstva!* [Rubbish!]: 'To that what I sketched here, I add that it is not only my humble opinion, but also my impartial and objective belief.' Sasinek thus speaks of himself not only as humble, but also as objective and impartial. In the same way he evaluates his articles in

⁹ Letter from F.V. Sasinek to A. Pietor from 3. 1. 1906, in: Šarluška, 'Výber z listov Františka Vít'azoslava Sasinka II.', 42.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ Letter from F.V. Sasinek to Andrej Halaša from 11. 1. 1901, in: Šarluška, 'Výber z listov Františka Vít'azoslava Sasinka II.', 36. Also in 1910 complained Sasinek on refusal of his work in this paper: 'It is a pity that you do not publish my articles in *Sborník*. Without a proper history we are going to perish.' See: Letter from F.V. Sasinek to unknown recipient (A. Halaša), undated (end of 1910, beginning of 1911, in: *ibidem*, 47. About the receiver and date of letter in parenthesis see: *ibidem*, and introductory notes to letter on p. 60. Sasinek thus saw at his works even as at a work of a savior, a refusal of those had been linked with the question of the very existence of a nation.

Slovenské pohľady [Slovak views]: 'If you want to know history and national issues in the Kingdom of Hungary properly, you should read and mark my objective articles in *Slovenské pohľady*'.¹² As I will show further, the editor of *Slovenské pohľady*, Jozef Škultéty, published Sasinek's articles not because of their scientific value. On the contrary, he was not positive about them at all and this fact Sasinek was well aware of.

Sasinek on historical writings of Slovak nationalists: from 'victims of lies' to 'servants of Magyars'

Sasinek considered the refusal of his views by Slovaks to be the main cause of the Slovak historiography's stagnation.¹³ In this context it is thus interesting to look at these views in detail. As an example, I will mention Sasinek's relation to the work *Nápor–Odpor* [Attack - Resistance] by Ambróz Pietor (1863-1906) and to *Krátka historia Slovákov* [A short history of Slovaks] by Július Botto (1848-1926). A critical view on Pietor's book is featured in Sasinek's letter to him. Besides some factual reservations concerning the period of the nineteenth century, the critique's core is linked to the fact that Pietor dates Magyars' arrival to the Carpathian Fold (Sasinek uses the term Hungary) back to the ninth century. Sasinek's belief that Árpád was not a leader of the Magyars, becomes predominant of his thinking of history. The fact that on the academic ground he could hardly find an ally in this question, did not weaken his belief. Quite the contrary, it provoked him to even more stubborn attempts to prove the objective and impartial history, which would mean his actual opinions.

¹² F.V. Sasinek, *Hlípstva!*, Slovenská národná knižnica – Archív literatúry a umenia (hereafter: SNK-ALU), sign. C 952, undated. Given the year 1909 found on the arch's manuscript it is easy to think that the text was written after 1908.

¹³ In the same way he thought of his works – as an instrument for 'clearing the historiography' of Czechs and Moravians: 'Though my sight may be blind and my hand is shivering, I still write when it is morning and there is light; I criticize the false historiography of the Kingdom of Hungary. It is one of a Stale of Aegeas. I wonder whether you read *Slovenské pohľady*? You do? Good! You do not? Too bad! The Czechs and Moravians should as well clear their historiography from the mud of Middle Age.' See: Letter from F.V. Sasinek to B. Dolejškoví from end of the year 1909, in: Šarluška, 'Výber z listov Františka Vít'azoslava Sasinka IV.', 109. On date signature see: *ibidem*, note 1 to letter Nr. 144, 119.

The letter to Pietor begins with an appreciation of great service, which that book would provide for the sake of nation. In case of thinking of a 'bigger and revised edition', he allows himself a few remarks on the book's contents. The bone of contention is quite naturally the presence of Magyars in the area of Hungary in the ninth century. This information should never have appeared in the book. Sasínek can not comprehend how great patriots like Pietor can still dwell in 'darkness and deception'. This he explains, thinking of the large impact that the official education has on all: 'It is strange how a man like you has not left the deception behind yet, being planted there from childhood on, up to a university professor. It is, then, difficult to let the true ideas brighten misled minds.'¹⁴

He uses something more explicit and outright words when reviewing *Krátka historia Slovákov* [A short history of Slovaks]: 'Only Šebesta¹⁵ or another servant of the Magyars could have written such a history, not Julius Botto.' Although this had been published by The Slovak National Party (hereafter: SNP) and the text had been revised by some editors, it was written by Július Botto. The reason for (indirectly) naming him a servant of the Magyars is that the interpretation of the Middle Ages was blurred by Magyars: 'The first half results from the false Magyar mud. The other half can be read well.' Július Botto thus lost his credit in the eyes of Sasínek: 'I am very sorry to know that Mr. Julius Botto thereby made himself an obscure figure, destroying his image of a writer of many good articles in *[S]lovenské pohľady*'. The absurdity of the whole situation arose thanks to Sasínek's photograph in *Krátka historia Slovákov*, printed in a honorable preface. Sasínek's reaction was: 'It was awkward to recognize that my portrait is placed in the preface of that scripture, as if I recommended it to the readers, which, with deepest respect and best will, I cannot.'¹⁶

¹⁴ Letter from F.V. Sasínek to A. Pietor from 3. 1. 1906, in: Šarluška, 'Výber z listov Františka Vít'azoslava Sasínka II.', 42.

¹⁵ At that time there were several writers and bearers of that name. At the moment I do not know who Sasínek was thinking of.

¹⁶ Sasínek, *Krátka historia Slovákov*, SNK-ALU, sign. 33 G 16.



Fig. 1: Franko Vít'azoslav Sasínek.
Photo: www.gymskalica.edu.sk/sasinek

The leaders of the SNP were well aware of Sasínek's status in the Slovak patriotic society. They knew as well that Sasínek's views were in opposition with the text of Botto. The fact that the picture was nevertheless published gives one of the best examples of a connection between contemporary politics and historiography. This was a manifestation of ideological agitation, where contradictions in one's opinions were ignored. For everyone involved it was obvious that the aim of *Krátka história Slovákov* was not a critical evaluation of history (although none of them would declare publicly that it was not). The paradox of the situation is in so much bigger, that the edition of *Krátka história Slovákov* had given rise to criminal prosecution. The contemporary government considered it to be a work of panslavism, but the historiographer of Slovaks or the creator of national history's concept considered it a work of servants of the Magyars.

The contradictions between the public and private representations of Sasinek among the Slovak nationalists

In the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century Sasinek became an acclaimed specialist in the field of Hungarian and Slovak history. He was awarded by eminent authorities in historiography of that time. For instance, he received an award from *Královská česká společnost nauk* [The Royal Czech Collegium of Sciences] in 1870, while he maintained contact with the University of Warsaw.¹⁷ With František Palacký he had correspondence concerning both scientific problems and personal issues.¹⁸ His study *Die Slowaken* is a fine example that Sasinek had been reflected upon not only amongst Slovaks.¹⁹ That this book was read, can be concluded from a two-part article on Slovaks written by Aleksander Świątochowski in *Przegląd Tygodniowy* [Weekly review]. The main inspiration for this article on 'one of the most virtuous and tragic' of the Slavic tribes that had been Sasinek's mentioned work in German.²⁰ Ever since then Sasinek loses his professional credit, due first of all to the aforementioned changes in his historical concepts. This, however, has not damaged his public image as an object of panegyricism in the eyes of the Slovak national movement's society.

The often cited article on Sasinek by Vajanský from 1887 is not a quite standard glorification. It contains for instance information about the weak popularity of Sasinek's writings. Vajanský though in connection with Sasinek's leaving for Prague pointed at the meaning of Sasinek for the nation:

What, however, is of great importance and has to touch the hearts of all Slovaks, is his authentic patriotism, beaten for the time being by hardly someone. (...) May the Lord save him for us in many happy years and may He grant better times to his beloved Slovak nation there in the foreign lands.²¹

¹⁷ Otčenáš, *František Vítězoslav Sasinek*, 71, 73.

¹⁸ Horváth, 'Zo vzájomnej korešpondencie Františka Vítězoslava Sasinka s Františkom Palackým'.

¹⁹ Sasinek, *Die Slowaken. Eine Ethnographische Skizze*, (Turec. Sct. Martin (Turóc Szent Márton); Neusohl (Besztercebánya) 1875) 34.

²⁰ Waclaw Olszewicz, *Słowacja w piśmiennictwie polskim* [Odbitka z pracy zbiorowej Słowacja i Słowacy T. I. (Biblioteka Słowacka Nr 1)], (Kraków 1937) 36.

²¹ Vajanský, 'František V. Sasinek', *Slovenské pohľady* 7 (1887), 165.

In the same year Vajanský publicly expressed respect for Sasinek's historical production as well: 'Sasinek gathers masses of information, as a gratuitous supporter of generations to come. With his great diligence, self-denial, not interested in fame or success, he examines complicated historical issues.'²² One has to add that the discrepancy between public declaration and private attitudes concerns Škultéty, as well as Vajanský. It is enough to cite a few lines of his letter from 1889.²³ Vajanský writes to Jaroslav Vlček (1860 – 1930, historian of literature): 'Sasinek is just one long furious citation, a Capuchin of the worst sort (...)'²⁴

In the beginning of the 1890s Sasinek was acclaimed not only amongst Slovaks, but Hungarians as well. This can be seen from the fact that he was one of the representatives of the Slovak culture, whose short biographical entries should have become a part of a worked-upon lexicon of Hungary, edited by Ignác Acsády (1845-1906) in 1891.²⁵ Since the beginning of the twentieth century, his positive acclaim amongst Hungarian academics

²² S.H. Vajanský, '*Serióznosť v literatúre*', in: C. Kraus ed., [S.H. Vajanský], *State o slovenskej literatúre* (Bratislava 1956), [Originally in *Národné noviny* 1887, 40] 54.

²³ Compare for instance with Vajanský's statement in a letter to J. Vlček: 'Be not afraid, the readers of N. N. [*Národné noviny*] adore me more than I deserve and neither "Sa" [Sasinek] nor someone else will rob me of this power.' See: letter from S.H. Vajanský to J. Vlček from 18. 10. 1889, in: I. Kusý ed., *Korešpondencia Svetozára Hurbana Vajanského I (Výber listov z rokov 1860-1890)* (Bratislava 1967) 408. On identification of abbreviation 'Sa' as 'Sasinek' see: *ibidem*, 563, note Nr. 3 to letter Nr. 350. This fragment is besides pointing at a power-antagonism between the older and younger generation of the Slovak national movement, there Sasinek was considered to be a competitive with no respectable chances to succeed.

²⁴ Letter from S.H. Vajanský to J. Vlček from 18. 10. 1889, in: *ibidem*, 403. In the same letter Vajanský calls Sasinek a 'bušklepar' [a book-producer] (p. 404) (see: *ibidem*, note Nr. 21 to letter Nr. 346, 562). J. Vlček said in 1890, that in the domain of history, Sasinek wrote 'almost a whole library'. See: J. Vlček, *Dejiny literatúry slovenskej* (Turč. Sv. Martin 1890), 239. On that occasion, M. Kučera writes: 'May Jaroslav Vlček have laughed at Sasinek, that he had written a whole library.' See: Kučera, 'Konceptia', 19. It is possible, that M. Kučera knew some other Vlček's statement as well, but the expression 'laughing at' would suit more the afore-cited statements of Vajanský.

²⁵ See the letter from G. Imre (a close collaborator of *Pesti Napló*) to S.H. Vajanský from 28. 9. 1891, in: P. Petrus ed., *Korešpondencia Svetozára Hurbana Vajanského II (Výber listov z rokov 1890-1916)* (Bratislava, 1972), 20-21: information from 21. For translation of the letter and for notes see: *ibidem*, 353-354. In the end, however, Sasinek would not appear in the text.

and historians decreases significantly. A good example for this is the attitude of an acclaimed Hungarian historical paper *Századok* [Centuries], whose editors reacted on Sasinek's complaint that the paper does not reflect the Slovak historical writing, by encouraging Sasinek to write reviews for them. Sasinek, though, was not one of the reviewers. Despite the relative open-minded relation of *Századok* to non-Magyar historical writings, the content of Sasinek's works simply did not meet the standards of proficiency of that time. Commenting on his articles in *Slovenské pohľady* from 1902, *Századok* in a review of his article criticized his 'concept of the Slovak history, following the model of former historians from Matica'.²⁶ The reviewer then made a note that 'for Sasinek it would have been better, had the editors of *Századok* never had to work with his texts.'²⁷

On the other hand, the public appreciation of Sasinek in Slovak society has been gradually developed into a cult around his person.²⁸ It is worth mentioning that the public honour which was paid to Sasinek was not restricted to articles in *Národné noviny*, or other Catholic papers. Hodža's *Slovenský týždenník*, on the occasion of Sasinek's eightieth birthday, expressed respect not only for Sasinek's historical writings, but also more generally for his 'Slovak writing': 'Sasinek's credits to Slovak literature are invaluable. Throughout his long life he has worked only for the nation and the church. He wrote in five languages, that being Slovak, Czech, Latin, German and Hungarian, but mostly Slovak.'. At the same time, his stable position in the Slovak national canon was affirmed: 'All the Slovaks, each and every one of them, the Catholics as well as the Protestants, wish all the best to the old man, and many calm and healthy years of life.'²⁹

In 1910, *Národné noviny* came with an evaluation of Sasinek's historical writings that would fully match his own understanding:

First of all, you have, by means of a profound research and an unbelievable diligence, plunged into deep obscure and half-obscure historical mysteries in order to crystallize an ethnical, cultural and

²⁶ M. slovenská, cultural institution of Slovak patriots (1863 – 1875)

²⁷ M. Mihóková, 'Maďarská historiografia o Slovákoch a o Slovensku do roku 1918', *Historický časopis* 29 (1981) 86.

²⁸ See selection of panegyric articles on the occasion of Sasinek's anniversaries in Kolísek's monograph: Kolísek, *František Vítězoslav Sasinek*, 55-106.

²⁹ —. Osemdesiatročné Jubileum Fr. V. Sasinka. In *Slovenský týždenník*, vol. 8, 16.12.1910, Nr. 50, 2.

historical individuality of the Slovak nation, threatened by the treacherous, pseudo-historical trashes and the evil intent to present our Slovak nation as an amorphous bunch of newcomers and crossbreeds.³⁰

Sasínek's 'cult' in this time had been programmatically built first of all by the Catholic *Slovenské ľudové noviny* [Slovak people's paper].³¹ A year before his death, Sasínek was celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of his coronation, his service as a priest, which was again an opportunity for him to be celebrated publicly. In this context, I will only say that Vajanský was one of the authors of the panegyric articles.³²

Škultéty writes letters criticizing Sasínek's historical writings

As mentioned above, J. Škultéty from the position as editor of *Slovenské pohľady*, made the works of Sasínek publicable. As it entails from his private correspondence, he published Sasínek's work, despite his low opinion of his erudition. In the letters of Škultéty, not one critical remark on Sasínek as historian can be found. For instance, in a letter to Jaroslav Vlček he wrote about an actual problem, which would be the confession of authors in *Slovenské pohľady*, that Sasínek would be good as a Catholic, but not as a professional: 'Ever since I got *Pohľady*, I am looking for Catholic writers, I am knocking on their doors (with the exception of Sasínek)'³³ In a letter to

³⁰ Adresa úcty Dôstojnému Pánu Fr. V. Sasínkovi na pamäť jeho 80. roku narodenia, in: Kolísek, *František Vítězoslav Sasínek*, 80 [originally in *Národné noviny*, 10. 12. 1910].

³¹ 'He adhered namely to the history of Hungary, on which he wrote hundreds of papers, published special works. For his great credits in domain of literature, Matica entrusted him as secretary. Thanks to help of bishop Štefan Moysess he freed himself from monk's pledge in order to devote to work in literature only. The writings grew in amount so that they now exist as a big library. It is even not possible to name the titles in the article, it would take archs and archs of paper. Sasínek is the most productive, the most diligent and the most conscientious Slovak writer. [...] See: Vajanský, 'Šesťdesiatročné jubileum kňazstva', *Národné noviny* 44.7. 10 (1913) Nr. 117, 1.

³² See: Kolísek, *František Vítězoslav Sasínek*, 80.

³³ Letter from Jozef Škultéty to Jaroslav Vlček from 16. 6 (1890) in: J. Ambruš ed., *Vzájomné listy Jaroslava Vlčka a Jozefa Škultétyho* (Bratislava 1963) 51.

Pavol Križko from 1891 he expresses acknowledgment of his work done in *Starodávne slovenské osobné mená* [Ancient Slovak personal names] by comparing it with Sasinek's historical writings: 'Well, if only such work had been done from the beginning! I would give forty volumes of Sasinek's *Dejiny* [The History]³⁴ for 40 manuscript pages of yours.'³⁵ In 1897 he excerpts a proper reaction from František Šujanský (1832 – 1907, Catholic priest and linguist) by György Volf (1843 – 1897, linguist), presenting a well-known thesis of Magyar historiography that there had been no Slovaks in Hungary by the time the Magyars came. The crucial aim of Sasinek as a historical writer was to surmount such a reading of Hungarian history. Škultéty obviously did not consider Sasinek to be competent in this case: 'Historically, as was the method during the period of Matica³⁶ and still is the method of Sasinek, well, historically only little can be done.'³⁷

Škultéty thus succeeded in observing the main defect of Sasinek's works from the point of view of national agitation. His offending his opposition was contra-productive:

I respect Sasinek's diligence, his enthusiasm, but have to condemn first of all the tone of his works. In science in general, as well as in falsification of partial historiography, a quiet, serious tone is needed. Screams and oaths lead to nowhere.³⁸

From more than one actual disagreement between Škultéty and Sasinek, I will name just the question of autochthony of Slavs or Slovaks. While autochthony was one of the main pillars of Sasinek's historical concept,

³⁴ Probably: *Dejiny kráľovstva uhorského*, vol. 1 [The History of Hungarian Kingdom, vol. 1] (1869), vol. 2 (1871) or other monograph from the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century.

³⁵ Letter from J. Škultéty to P. Križko from 24.5 (1891), in: M. Kocák ed., *Listy Jozefa Škultétyho 1. 1871-1910* (Martin 1982) 69. On identification 40-paged manuscript and the possible existence of *Dejiny*, mentioned in the letter, see: *ibidem*, note 1 and 2 to letter Nr. 82, 289.

³⁶ See note 27.

³⁷ Letter from J. Škultéty to F. Šujanský from 15. 5. 1897, in: *ibidem*, 137. Škultéty in this sense expected first of all ethymologization, of course on an accordingly scientific level.

³⁸ Letter from J. Škultéty to S. Medvecký from 16. 5. (1891), in: *ibidem*, 68-69. On letter's date signature see: *ibidem*, note to letter Nr. 80, p. 288.

Škultéty, critically observing the latest foreign research of that time, disagreed with that theory.³⁹

Škultéty publicly declares acknowledgment to Sasinek

On the occasion of Sasinek's anniversary in 1902, Škultéty wrote an article in which one, in vain, would search after critical statements known from the cited letters. When dealing with the fact of publishing Sasinek's first monograph *Dejiny drevnych národov na území terajšieho Uhorska* [The history of autochthonic nations in the area of today's Kingdom of Hungary], Škultéty cites positive responses on that book by Jonáš Záborský.⁴⁰ Škultéty omits the fact that Záborský and Sasinek argued and were involved in a polemic with each other. Besides that, he stresses Sasinek's attitude towards Russian as a good candidate for the universal language of Slavs.⁴¹ Due to Škultéty's extremely positive attitude toward Russians and Russian culture this is a fine example of 'filtering the facts' as the main method when writing anniversary articles.

Sasinek's writing in general (historical writings though being an important part of it) he calls 'a great work', though he is critical of Sasinek's patriotism: 'We say, a great work, and the only thing that mattered to the author was his beloved nation.' In this text, Sasinek is being appreciated because of the use of his own statements, which were certainly alien to Škultéty: 'He dismantled many biases, turned away not just one bad tendency and shed much light into the darkness of those centuries.' Critique

³⁹ For instance, concluding his paper on research work of J. Rostafiński from 1908, Škultéty refuses views of Nestor, which was many times cited by Sasinek: 'The theory based on Nestor, that the primordial homeland had been at Danube, loses sympathizers every day.' See: J. Š. [Jozef Škultéty], 'Prvotné sídla a hospodárstvo Slovanov v predhistorických časiach [Škultéty's paper on works of prof. J. Rostafiński *O pierwotnych siedziabach i gospodarstwie Slonian w przedhistorycznych czasach* based on author's paper in March 1908 at the Akademia Umiejętności [Academy of Arts and Sciences] of the University of Cracow]' *Časopis Museálnej slovenskej spoločnosti* 11 (1908) Nr. 5, 74-78: 78.

⁴⁰ J. Škultéty, 'Fr. V. Sasinek' in: J. Škultéty, *Dielo 6. História*, J. Valach ed. (Martin 1989) 431-434: 432-433 [originally: *Slovenské pohľady* 23, 1902, 53-55].

⁴¹ Referring to Sasinek's *Všeobecný spisovný jazyk Slovanov* [The universal standard language of Slavs], published in *Sokol* in 1867. In revised form published by M. Otčenáš, see: Otčenáš, *František Víťazoslav Sasinek*, 75-78.

appears as well, although it is instantly excused by Sasinek's passionate relation to the nation: 'The love for Slovaks had led his actions, therefore also all his mistakes rooted in this very love.'⁴² The end of the article only affirmed a rupture between the official attitude and the inner belief: 'Fr. V. Sasinek is one of those Slovak men, who (...) deserve honor and gratitude.'⁴³

Škultéty's necrology of Sasinek is quite interesting. Sasinek is being spoken of not primarily as a historian. There are practically only two sentences about him being one:

[Sasinek in Algersdorf in 1901] He could work in peace on the crucial mission of his life, the reading and explication of Slovak history based on collected material. (...) Once he dedicated himself to historical science, he did not stop working on it, with great enthusiasm.⁴⁴

The closing line of the necrology is worth citing as well: 'Phenomena like Sasinek in the Slovak public life are of great merit to society [thus not historiography!], to its progress and they do decorate them. If they pass away in a society weak as our Slovak's is, the loss is twice as big!'⁴⁵ These statements express the genuine function which Sasinek had during the national movement. Since the beginning of the twentieth century he had nothing to do with professional skills or progress of historiography.

There is a semantic contradiction between the content of Škultéty's necrologies on the one hand, and his private letters on the other. Here, I shall mention just one more private evaluation of Sasinek by Škultéty from 1901:

To be aware of his [Sasinek's] writings is a tough work, his thoughts rusted, ignoring the results of science during the last 40 years. And

⁴² Škultéty, 'Fr. V. Sasinek', 433.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 434.

⁴⁴ J. Škultéty, 'Fr. V. Sasinek 1830–1914', in: Škultéty, *Dielo 6. História*, 435–436 :436 [originally: *Slovenský obrázkový kalendár na prístupný rok 1916*, vol. 40 (Martin 1915), 40–42].

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

Parlamentár [Parlamentär]⁴⁶, the paper he is constantly pointing at, is an unacceptable tabloid, although Sasinek's enthusiasm for Slovaks is respectable.⁴⁷

When the political climate changed in Czechoslovakia between the two World Wars (and after Sasinek's death) Škultéty speaks out his opinions publicly. His evaluation of Sasinek in *Slovenské pohľady* in 1933 is quite identical with my conclusions:

‘Those who heard Sasinek speak (...) knew that they listened to a kind, skilled person. But his theories, as a historian, were, by then, not acknowledged even by those who appreciated and honored his personality. (...) For all his life, Sasinek searched, collected materials on the history of Hungary and the history of Slovaks: he himself though (...) accepted no other's view on history or nothing established by others. Instead of complementation and reparation Sasinek condemned everything, declared his opinion and put his interpretation everywhere.’⁴⁸

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued, that contrary to his perception in historiography, Sasinek's role within the Slovak national movement and the history of the Slovak historical writings is not to be evaluated by using categories such as professionalism, the quality of his research (let alone objectivity) and impartiality. His eminence was based on his public image as an erudite ‘historian of the Slovaks’. Sasinek, actually, as one of the few, had already during his lifetime become part of the national elite. His role was perceived by the nationalists as contributory and was adequately used. I consider this path of research about Sasinek particularly worth following. I have put forward interesting results from the research of public

⁴⁶ A paper in German. Sasinek referred to his writings in this paper more often, in a situation of having radically changed his mind in comparison to monographs from the end of 1960s.

⁴⁷ Letter from J. Škultéty to J. Botto from August 1901, in: Kocák, *Listy Jozefa Škultétyho* 1., 186. On date signature see introduction-note to the letter on p. 365.

⁴⁸ J. Škultéty, ‘Pred významnými slávnosťami. Matica slovenská 1863-1933’ in: Škultéty, *Dielo* 6. *História*, 76-81: 79 [originally: *Slovenské pohľady*, 1933, 622-625].

evaluations of Sasinek, for example by Milan Hodža. The result of this research would surely bring a lot of inspiration for the interpretation of the ideological profiles of these individuals.