
In his book *Choosing Slovakia*, American historian Alexander Maxwell ambitiously set out to entirely reframe the birth of Slovak nationalism. Maxwell spent considerable time in research institutions of Hungary, Romania, and Germany, and thus knows the history of the region in depth. This knowledge has enabled him to publish several innovative studies on the history of nationalism, including this, his first monograph. The main question of *Choosing Slovakia* is the process by which the peasants of Upper Hungary, lacking any national identity, became modern Slovaks. However, this issue is reframed by Maxwell, who also asks why these peasants did not become something else: pan-Slavs, Magyars, or Czechoslovaks? The main arguments here are based on the evolution of the concepts in the Slovak language, supported by the author's convincing linguistic analysis.

Maxwell writes that due to the French Revolution and the ideas of the Enlightenment the concept of the Hungarian noble (feudal) nation collapsed and a more modern idea, state patriotism, the so-called *Hungarus* concept, replaced it by the turn of the nineteenth century. This concept began to incorporate the non-nobles without any concern for linguistic questions largely because at this time the heterogeneous linguistic character of the country was regarded as something of which to be proud. The linguistic openness of the concept also meant that the Upper Hungarian Slav intellectuals were loyal to Hungary throughout the entire period. According to Maxwell, the *Hungarus* concept was destroyed by the Magyar elite seeking to spread the Magyar language in the mid-nineteenth century, but its pervasiveness can be shown until WWI (8–33). These intellectuals, who aimed to develop and distribute the Slavonic culture based on the principles of the Enlightenment and romanticism, had in their minds a kind of Hungaro-Slavic concept: on the one hand loyal and proud members of the Hungarian state while at the same time defining themselves as members of a Slavonic community. As this Slavonic community was purely cultural, Hungaro-Slavism at this point did not seek any kind of political or territorial goals.

The decisive point of the study hinges on the question of definitions. Both entities to which the Slavic intellectuals claimed to belong—the Hungarian and the Slavic communities—were called nations by these intellectuals in the nineteenth century. However, the Upper Hungarian Slavs, who were more frequently called Slovaks from the eighteenth century onward, were not defined as a nation but as a part of the greater Slavonic community, and even more often regarded as part of the Czech tribe rather than a separate Slovak nation. However, the evolution and definitive transformation of this concept ultimately led to the idea of a separate and unique Slovak nation in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Maxwell, the idea that the Slovaks were different from Czechs, and as such composed a unique tribe within the greater Slavic nation, emerged surprisingly late in the 1840s. Therefore the intellectuals who are regarded in contemporary Slovakia as the earliest articulators of the concept of modern Slovak nationality did not work in favor of the Slovak nation but rather defined themselves merely as part of the greater Slav nation. For example, the Catholic priest Anton Bernolák (1762–1813), who is regarded as the first linguist to analyze the Slovak language and as an outstanding Slovak nation-builder, was always loyal to Hungary and also convinced that he published the grammar of a Slavic dialect, not a language. In fact, the primary motivation of his work was to offer an alternative to the traditional dialect used by Czech and Slovak Protestants, the *bibličtina*. Similar to Bernolák, Jan Kollár (1793–1852), the most influential romantic poet of his age, also rejected
any kind of Slovak particularism, instead embracing the idea of the Slavic nation. This rejection was likely because as a Protestant, he was devoted to Czech-Slovak unity within the pan-Slavic community.

The position of the Slovak dialect was of particular importance to the debate about Slovak nationhood. Slovak intellectuals had to decide whether the Slovak language belonged to the Czech tribe of the Slavic nation, or to its own tribe. Until the first half of the nineteenth century, all major intellectuals, particularly Protestants, subscribed to the former position. Take for instance Juraj Palkovič (1769–1850), the first professor of Slavic studies at the Lutheran Theological Academy of Bratislava/Pressburg, who insisted on the biblichina and the cultural unity of Czechs and Slovaks on confessional grounds. During the period of overlapping and multiple identities these loyalties did not contradict each other. One could be a good Hungarian patriot, a devoted member of the Slavic nation, and more particularly a Slovak. What caused confusion, and continues to mislead many historians, was the labeling of all these entities as nations.

Ľudovít Štúr (1805–1856), who is still regarded as the father of the modern Slovak nation, was instrumental in initiating changes to the idea of Slovak national identity. Maxwell emphasizes that at no point did Štúr believe in the idea of a Slovak nation. Until 1843 he propagated the traditional Czech-Slovak unity, between 1843 and 1849 he claimed the independence of Slovaks from Czechs as a separate tribe within the Slavic nation, and finally his political and ideological disappointment in 1848/49 turned him towards Russophilia. Thus the argument goes that Štúr was not a Slovak nationalist at all, as he did not aim to develop a Slovak nation. Rather, Maxwell labels Štúr a Slovak tribalist, seeking Slovak independence from the Czech tribe while remaining part of the greater Slavic nation. Štúr therefore intended only to codify the Slovak dialect of the Slavic language, not to write a grammar of the Slovak language. His attempt, the štúrovčina, failed to win adherents. However, the subsequent attempt to create a comprehensive set of rules for a Slovak grammar by Martin Hattala (1821–1903), entitled the hattalovčina, followed the lines of Štúr, defining his work as the grammar of a dialect rather than a language. Paradoxically, when the Czechoslovak government in the interwar period propagated the idea of the Czech-Slovak unity, the public administration and the education used the hattalovčina, a linguistic policy that encouraged the development of Slovak particularism, and therefore the crystallization of a modern Slovak national identity.

Maxwell’s analysis leads to the conclusion that the evolution of Slovak nationalism was the result of a series of historical ironies. Yet perhaps the most ironic part of Maxwell’s analysis is that particularist Slovak intellectuals played only a minor role, whereas pan-Slavists, Hungaro-Slavists, and Czecho-Slovaks were the most important actors. Although the most recent historiographical works in Slovakia have already considered the loyalty of Slovak intellectuals to Hungary during the entire nineteenth century, Maxwell’s interpretation challenges the entire Slovak canon of national history. There are, however, a few points to dispute in Choosing Slovakia.

First, the key to Maxwell’s interpretation, namely the differentiation between nation, tribe, dialect, and language, is highly problematic. The problem is that in the sources themselves the terms ‘nation,’ ‘tribe,’ ‘language,’ and ‘dialect’ are used inconsistently. Thus there is too wide of a space for historians to interpret and categorize them. Although Maxwell cites plenty of sources to support his arguments, the same number of sources could likely be found to build a different argument. For instance, some of the Slovak intellectuals indeed defined the Slovaks as a nation in order to gain supplementary rights similar to that of Croatian autonomy in Hungary. Moreover, Maxwell overemphasizes the definition of Slovaks as a tribe vs. a nation, while in