

**DR. H. C. PROF. PHDR. JÁN PODOLÁK, DRSC.
(1926 - 2017)
– IN RECOGNITION OF HIS LIFE AND WORK**

*“I come from rural people, and I have been studying their culture
and way of life since I was born.”*

On 17 May 2016, Ján Podolák – a significant figure in Slovak ethnology, who for more than half a century has actively formed and influenced the shape of this academic discipline – celebrated his 90th birthday. In terms of its material scope and theoretical universalization, his work is at the core of Slovak ethnology. No less important are his organizational activities in the areas of research and teaching.

Ján Podolák was one of many children from a rural family in Dolná Súča (Trenčín district). In 1946 he completed his secondary education at the Piarist school in Trenčín. He then completed his tertiary education in ethnography and history at the Slovak University (now Comenius University) in Bratislava in 1951 as one of the first graduates in the post-war period to do so. Shortly afterwards he joined the newly-established Institute of Ethnography at the Slovak Academy of Sciences. In 1966 Podolák returned to the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University, where he worked until 1991. He then worked as a researcher at the Matica slovenská national cultural institution and as an adviser on ethnic relations to the Office of the President of the Slovak Republic. In 1997 Podolák contributed to the founding of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, where he was the head of the Department of Ethnology until 2004. From 1999 to 2002 he also served as the university's rector. Since 2014 Podolák had been a professor emeritus. Professor Ján Podolák died on 15 February 2017 in Bratislava.

Podolák was an author, co-author, and compiler of 25 books. In addition, he has written over 100 research-based studies and over 300 other contributions and piece of professional writing in domestic and international journals and volumes. His central and life-long academic focus was rural culture. This is shown in his doctoral thesis, entitled *Pastierstvo na Horehroní* (Pastoral Farming in the Horehronie Region), which he successfully defended in 1961, and in the 1967 publication *Pastierstvo v oblasti Vysokých Tatier* (Pastoral Farming in the High Tatras). His prolific research into pastoral farming in Slovakia, as well as in the Balkans and the Caucasus, was moulded into a large number of research-based studies and other scholarly works. Podolák also wrote the wide-ranging monograph *Tradičné ovčiarstvo na Slovensku* (Traditional Sheep Farming in Slovakia) in 1982, which was the core work leading to him being awarded a Doctor of Sciences degree in 1986. His research in this area was crowned with the expansive and much anticipated work *Tradičné poľnohospodárstvo na Slovensku* (Traditional Agriculture in Slovakia) in 2008. He also looked at other areas of scholarly inquiry, in particular human material culture (transport, food, home-based manufacture, settlement, and farm buildings), and he dedicated much activity to studying the history of ethnology as a discipline. Another of Podolák's major areas of interest was ethnic minorities, interethnic relations in Slovakia, and Slovaks living abroad. He also contributed to the theory and methodology of ethnology as an academic discipline.

Podolák was a member of a generation that had the task of building modern scientific and research institutions, and he launched himself into this task with his own distinct enthusiasm, resilience, and energy. He was the academic secretary, head of department, and the deputy to the director while working at the Institute of Ethnology at the Slovak Academy of Sciences. He co-founded the academic journal *Slovenský národopis* (Slovak Ethnology) in 1953, and until 1960 he was its main editor. In addition, Podolák was one of the co-founders of the Slovak Ethnographic Society in 1958. He also co-founded the International Commission of the Study of Folk Culture in the Carpathians and Balkans, and was its general secretary from 1959 to 1979.

After returning to the Faculty of Arts, where he had already externally habilitated as an associate professor in 1964, Podolák's efforts focused on forming a research-focused Ethnology Section in 1968 and the Department of Ethnography and Folkloristics in 1969. In 1968 he launched the *Seminarium ethnologicum* international student seminar course, which was combined with field research and which was held seven times in Slovakia and three times abroad. In 1969 he founded the international academic yearbook *Ethnologia Slavica* and was its main editor until 1996. In 1991 Podolák was made a full professor. He compiled a number of ethnological monographs (Horehronie I, Zamagurie,

Vajnory, Horná Cirocha, Záhorská Bratislava, Rača, Heľpa, and Dolná Súča), and he actively helped in the creation of a number of referential works on traditional culture, including the Ethnographic Atlas (1990) and the Encyclopaedia of Slovak Folk Culture (1995). In 1992 he renewed the Ethnographic Section of *Matica slovenská*, leading it until 1997. Podolák was also a member of the editorial board of a number of domestic and international journals and edited volumes, including *Ethnologia europaea* (Copenhagen) and *Ethnology* (Pittsburgh).

Podolák was the recipient of the Giuseppe Pitrè International Folklore Prize, the Herder Prize (1974), and a number of domestic awards. In 1989 he was made a full international member of the Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy in Uppsala.

Podolák's tenacity and ambition, as well as his optimism, warmth, and respect for other people, regardless of their background, and his generosity to students and colleagues, all said a lot about his character. Professor, thank you for letting me know you personally and work alongside you!

Juraj Janto