
**THE DEPARTMENT
IS REMEMBERED BY**

During my professional career, more than half a century long, at the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University

I perceived sensitively the atmosphere in this significant institution and also observed the people who formed and represented it. I did so especially to define the position of my study subject in its relation to other study subjects and departments. It was at the time when many significant representatives of science and culture were leaving their university positions. In the period lasting from my study years to my retirement from the university the knowledge I gained from my observations helped me to make decisions in numerous difficult situations.

I had learnt how to get to know people and then differentiate among them and then to focus on the people who were honest and had a firm character, both the students and the people in high positions of this top institution representing the intellectual life of our society.

As far as my professional field is concerned, my professional interests (vernacular folklore, historical themes in folklore and their contemporary situation, history of Slovak ethnology) resulted from the contemporary needs of this science and my knowledge and my view of major events and social changes (such as the year 1948, industrialization, collectivization, etc.). After an extensive research tens of ethnological monographs on villages and towns were produced as an evidence of the changes important not only for the science but also as a picture of traditional culture and its values in the post-war development of Slovakia. To succeed in this task required to prepare as soon as possible a strong group of university educated professionals.

We managed quite quickly to renew the ethnological studies at the Faculty of Philosophy to such extent that it was possible to open it as an independent study program and also in combinations with other subjects (history, Slovak language, archeology, art history and music science). The demand for the ethnology graduates was so high, that some of them started working when still students, some worked on research projects (in the Slovak Ethnological Society, the Ethnological Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Slovak National Museum in Bratislava and Martin, etc.). However, in the first place they participated in the research projects of the department with their diploma theses and their publications. All this had contributed to the publication output of the department, which gained significance and respect and due to its educational and research activities it was becoming one of the major university departments.

The period when it merged with archeology, and arts and history was of special importance for its development. In this period, in my opinion, the foundations for the origin of an independent department of ethnology and folklore studies were created (1970) and subsequently for the department of ethnology and the department of ethnology, cultural and social anthropology.

To conclude, in retrospection, I would like to express my sincere thanks and a compliments to all the staff of the department, faculty and Comenius University,

Ethnological Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Slovak National Museum in Bratislava and Martin and other museums and other professional institutions which, to some extent and in some form, by their activities participated in a successful development of ethnology at the Faculty of Philosophy. There are many of us, who helped in difficult situations that the times had brought. Numerous tasks, their solutions and the achieved results had created, among the active participants, important relations, the atmosphere of mutual understanding, cooperation and friendship. I am glad that I had the privilege to get to know these honest people whom I hold in high esteem and I am paying homage to them.

Ján Michálek

After finishing my studies of ethnology and history at Philosophical Faculty of the Slovak University (in 1951),

I was accepted by Doc. Melicherčík as an assistant-lecturer of ethnography at Ethnographic Seminar of the University. A year later after I had passed my doctoral examination, academician Hrušovský offered me a position in a newly founded Ethnographic Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, where I would help J. Mjartan in developing the Institute. I accepted the position. I was influenced by the argument that after the recovery from a serious illness a "quiet work" in the Academy would be more suitable for me than busy work at the University.

I published the results of my scientific research in a number of articles and besides that I passed on my knowledge through my pedagogical activities at the university, where I was a professor of Slavic ethnography.

My further cooperation with the ethnographic department at the university (in the meantime renamed as Comenius University) was influenced by a sudden death of Professor Melicherčík in 1966.

After the death of this leading authority of Slovak ethnography I was invited by Professor Ludovít Bakoš, the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, who cared very much about the ethnography in Slovakia. He informed me that after the death of professor Melicherčík the situation at the department of ethnography had become serious and must be solved by taking in a new teacher. He asked me to hand in immediately an application for the position at the university and to work out a proposal for the development of ethnography at the faculty. I accepted the offer under four conditions, which after my arrival at the university I managed to put into practice: 1. I founded the Cabinet of ethnology (with 5 positions) – as an independent institution for comparative Slavic ethnography (1968), 2. every year I organized Seminarium ethnologicum – an international seminar oriented to field research (1968), 3. I started publishing an international periodical Ethnologia Slavica (An International Review Of Slavic Ethnology, 1969. 4. I founded the

department ethnography and folklore (with 5 positions) as a first independent department of this branch in Slovakia. (1969). Such wide basis made possible not only a high-quality ethnology teaching but also a widely conceived scientific and research work, regular publication of Ethnologica Slavica, the publication of monographs, organization of international seminars, the conferences of Slovak and European ethnologists, scientific symposiums and the preparation of the European Ethnologic Atlas, etc. I was very pleased to see that my students developed further the contacts with their colleagues from many European universities, from Great Britain in the West and Georgia in the East. Through ethnology our University became known among European ethnologists. Only then I was able to understand the pleasure of pedagogical work, the reason I left the Slovak Academy of Sciences for the Comenius University.

The period of first years at the university (especially the years 1967 – 1974) belonged to the happiest ones in my life. This was thanks to – besides my devoted wife – my colleagues especially: Ján Komorovský, Peter Skalník, Kornélia Jakubíková, Magdaléna Paríková, Marta Sigmundová (Botíková), and others. Without their help we could not have organized any seminars, conferences, scientific symposiums, without their activities we would not have published monographs or distribute Ethnologica Slavica to the whole world.

However, the joy of the development of ethnology at our university did not last long. Shortly after the military occupation of Czechoslovakia (1968) the political screenings started, which influenced people's lives and fates. The first intervention into the concept of the ethnology development was my removal from the position of head of department (1970). Gradually the arguments against the existence of the Cabinet of Ethnology, and especially against Seminarium Ethnologicum, were raised. The major argument against me and my institutions was the fact that I accepted the Herder prize in 1974. While in western countries this prestigious award meant a great honour, in Czechoslovakia at the time it was taken as a political crime. I was removed from the position of the head of department and was prevented from teaching activities. (This ban lasted until 1990. The ban to teach presented to me by the dean of the faculty and the head of department I considered the most brutal punishment. In 1974 – after seven years of its existence – the Seminarium ethnologicum was closed. The research cabinet was dissolved and its staff was allocated to the department. Only the department and Ethnologicum Slavica remained out of all institutions built in the past.

If I have to define my relation to the department, which I helped to found in 1969, in my mind emerge the memories of joyful years but also of sad events, which followed. It is said that the totalitarian regime was responsible for the crimes in the second half of the 20th century. It is forgotten that the regime was made up of people – in my case – the people at the university and the Academy of Sciences. Many of those who had hurt me – I consider it a bitter pain – are not among us any more and only a few of them are still alive... I have forgiven them all, but I cannot forget it, although I am trying hard. I would like to assure

the Slovak ethnological community – especially my former students – that I have the most sincere relation to the present staff of the department and its further successful development matters to me very much.

Ján Podolák

I was honoured to be the first head of department after the so-called velvet revolution.

It was especially at the beginning a very hectic period. As, on the one hand, the new social and political situation made it possible for all scientific and educational institutions to work freely, without the directives of the Communist Party, on the other hand we were facing new and difficult tasks which had to be solved as soon as possible:

1. to revise scientific and research projects together with study programs and reconsider the new concepts of teaching ethnology under new conditions. Fortunately, in our branch of study we were able to build, to a large extent, on the former study programs in which we had always tried to take into consideration the progress of our scientific discipline. It was not necessary to change the basic orientation of the department to the Slovak and Slavic ethnology and to confront them with neighbouring or Slavic ethnics. By excluding politically oriented subjects new possibilities opened for the incorporation of new problems which could not be studied before.

2. These demanding tasks required also partial organizational changes. At the beginning the branch of ethnology was represented at the faculty by two relatively independent department – the Department of Ethnology and Folklore Studies as an educational and research institution and the Cabinet of Ethnology as a scientific and research institution. Together we had decided to establish a common department with two sections according to the original structure, where all workers had roughly the same share in research and teaching.

3. We welcomed the return of professor J. Komorovský, who after the year 1970 during the so-called normalization was forced by the communist authorities to leave the faculty. He returned with one clear goal: to establish religious studies at the faculty – what he succeeded to do, at first within our department which was renamed as the Department of Ethnology and Religious studies, but at present it exists as an independent Department of Comparative Religious Studies.

4. Then our department became a guarantor of a new study branch – Museum Studies. The organizational and professional core of this branch is still concentrated within the department.

We could mention much of that we had achieved in seven years during which I acted as the head of department: an excellent co-operation with a number of

academic and university institutions in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the extension of our links with foreign institutions, successful grant projects, organization of international conferences and seminars. I think we managed to do much. Especially the first three years were really very hard and complicated by moving the department offices into the main faculty building. I would like to express my thanks to my dear colleagues who had repeatedly demonstrated to me their support in my work as head of department. I am grateful for their reliability and willingness to help me with both everyday and occasional activities (e.g. when moving our library we had to pack an extensive library and archives by our own hands). I am grateful to them for creating a pleasant and encouraging working atmosphere which helped us to solve serious problems. I am happy that I can consider myself a member of the department even today.

Eubica Droppová

When I think of my pedagogical career

it reminds of the foundation of the department of folklore and regionalism at the Pedagogical Faculty in Nitra. Then, very enthusiastic about the idea of founding a special department to teach folklore for the needs of secondary schools, artistic hobby groups, training journalists, etc., – in short to connect theory and practice, I committed myself to part-time teaching. It was pleasant experience. The first students were mostly the folklore group enthusiasts who considered this department the Academy of Arts. Later they assumed a more sober view of the profile and needs of such specialization. The cooperation with young people filled me with enthusiasm. I experienced the times of first steps of this department and the period of creation of its profile and stabilization. I did not expect my health getting worse. Besides my diabetes I suffered a brain stroke and commuting to Nitra became difficult. At that time my colleagues from the Department of ethnology at the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University in Bratislava approached me with an offer to become a head of department. After I had reconsidered my future career I accepted the offer. They welcomed me very warmly and friendly. Actually, I was among the friends. The working atmosphere in the department was also very good (the legacy of Professor Droppová). The lectures and seminars ran smoothly. The teachers were fulfilling their teaching duties. There was a good system of the field research and the department meetings were neither too frequent nor dull. The department had several sections. Professor Komorovský established a study branch of religion studies (head of which, after Professor Komorovský had retired, was young M. Kováč) and after some time L. Mlynka announced his arrival, who became a guarantor of bachelor study of museology. Later another strong player, M. Kanovský, a philosopher, appeared who wanted to develop cognitive anthro-

pology. There was a problem with the lack of lecture rooms. It was also necessary to coordinate a new scientific research. I will not mention my lecturing. All colleagues presented me their views of the further development of the department. We managed to find a common solution and put it into practice. I persuaded the faculty dean to establish an independent department of religious studies. We acquired a new department member for the study of museology. I have just learnt that ambitious M. Kanovský established a department of social anthropology. The study program I had dreamt of came true. After I had left the Department of ethnology and cultural anthropology, this was a new name of the department (I had initiated) I started working at the National Culture Center, where I lead a team working on "The Encyclopedia of Scenic Folklorism".

In spite of my medical problems and minor misunderstandings I enjoyed my work at the department of ethnology. It was good professional and personal experience. I am grateful for many impulses for my professional growth especially to my active students, who keep in touch with me even after many years. The years spent at the department were not wasted!

Milan Leščák

At the time of my studies, in the mid 1970s,

it was not unusual, or rather it was not otherwise, to spend the whole period of a university study at one place. In my case, it was my native town. The university building was just a few streets away from my home. Although "the city origin" was considered a negative characteristic in admitting otherwise successful secondary school students to the university (the quota for students to be admitted from Bratislava was 2). Thanks to the foresight of J. Michálek, the head of department at that time, a few students from Bratislava were accepted as external students of ethnography. I was very honoured to have a possibility to study such an "exclusive" subject as ethnography. The contents of study were complex and diverse. I have found out very soon that it was not only about "beautiful costumes", but about life in its varied forms – in the past and in the present. And we "city misses" were interested in revealing the otherness, "originality" At the faculty we were a good team, we shared a lot of experiences from field research, excursions, but also from joyful and serious situations in the seminar which at that time moved to Zelená street. From there it was close to the university library but also to the café "At Michael's" and so the triangle: the department – the university – Michael's Café created the firm coordinates of our happy student life.

I had a chance to continue my studies at first as a grant student and then a doctoral student at our/my department. My supervisor, sensitive and wise E. Horváthová, took care of not only our professional growth, but ordered me and my colleague A. Mann a daily presence at the department. It helped me to acquire work discipline and habits. I had an opportunity, besides my research duties, to

do proofreading of Ethnologia Slavica, I got acquainted with the work in documentation collection of the department. We organized "home English courses", with other young colleagues we used to meet in the circle of interdisciplinary study (known as "KIS") and we took part in sport and free-time activities.

After finishing successfully my doctoral studies I left for a completely different environment – applied research – from where in 1990 I returned to our/my department as an assistant lecturer. In connection with return to the department I would like to mention a generous gesture of L. Droppová, the then head of department whom I informed that very soon I will begin my maternity leave. She accepted my solution of the situation and in 1992 I returned to work in the department, where I have worked ever since. I experienced what it was like to quickly get involved in pedagogical process and if possible as soon as possible to manage time consuming activities such as excursions and field research. For a short period I acted as a vice-dean for social and study affairs.

This position and the first years of my pedagogical practice are connected with déjà vu I experienced standing in front of my students – I saw us, me and my fellow students, sitting there. With our typical gestures, remarks, smiles... maybe this was due to the fact I felt more "at home" in the world of students and sub-consciously I wanted to belong there.

After my arrival at the department I helped with the implementation of computers into teaching, with great enthusiasm I introduced recording of publications, the importance of which I managed to persuade my colleagues. After a significant point of division in my career – one year Fulbright grant stay in the United States – I returned home full of pedagogical inspiration. I told my colleagues about the assessment methods of students and teachers. I had introduced such methods even before the faculty introduced them. I was active in strengthening international relations of the department. We made it possible for our students to travel abroad and accepted foreign students at our department. Together with my colleagues K. Jakubíková, Z. Škovierová, and H. Hlôšková we organized courses on Slovak folk culture and ethnology in English language for foreign students.

With L. Mlynka I organized several international excursions – summer schools. At present they are organized by L. Kačírek. All these activities, now supervised by M. Paríková, helped, I believe, to make the department more visible within the faculty, but also in the international context.

As a guarantor first of bachelor and later of master studies when introducing a credit system I realized, maybe due to the experience from foreign universities, how important it is to understand the credit system and I consulted foreign experts in study administration. As a result, but also thanks to the willingness and professionalism of my colleagues, we managed to prepare a quality and standard study program, which was successfully accredited in 2003 and as amended also in 2008. We took into consideration also the orientation to migration studies supervised by H. Tužinská. In connection with the preparations of study programs I was active in the new system of entrance tests at the Faculty of philosophy to extend the chances for the students and to gain more motivated and well prepared students

also for the study of ethnology and cultural anthropology. For several years we have held Open Days and made use of different ways to introduce ourselves to public through faculty activities, exhibitions, through the radio and other media – the activities supervised by K. Nádaská. In the future these activities must be innovated and implemented consistently.

As head of department I realize, that for our personal and professional development we all need to work in the field of science and research, and demonstrate our achievements in scientific publications. Although in the past I did not like very much big departmental projects, I had to admit they were very productive from the point of organization of scientific activities. Still, in the future I want to support scientific research in smaller teams, which are more flexible to coordinate scientific work.

In pedagogical work the overriding task of the teachers of the department is to maintain the quality of teaching – not by referring to the tradition and reputation of our institution but by strictness and consistency, each of us should be responsible for his/her course and consequently for the performance and the achievements of students. Since the time when other departments of ethnology or cultural anthropology came into existence in Slovakia it is obvious that the time has come for our/my department to define itself clearly by its subject matter and methodological orientation. We are moving from the tradition of quality positivist methodology and in the field of folklore also modern functional-structural methodological approach to the field of interpretative ethnology and anthropology. In the future such will be the orientation of master and doctoral studies while the bachelor study will maintain its survey character. With regard to the staff of the department we will cover the topics of migration, family and gender studies, economic and ecological anthropology, religious beliefs and knowledge, folklore and oral history, especially in Central European historical and geographical context. We will succeed in this plan – as we had done so until today – with our team of people so that each member of this team could say with pride that this is our/my department.

Marta Botiková