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**SEMINARIUM ETHNOLOGICUM  
IS REMEMBERED BY**

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**Seminarium Ethnologicum –  
the first (and only) ethnological European “union” in Slovakia,  
1968 – 1974**

*Alongside all the forms, greater and lesser, of summer school and similar available today, and especially the results of the European Higher Education Area known as the Bologna process, we should not neglect the memory of the excellent European Ethnological Summer School, organised very successfully from 1968 to 1974 by the chair of ethnology and folkloristics at the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University in Bratislava. Behind sound institutions usually stand sound people, planning and realising ambitious tasks, and in the case of this summer school, entitled Seminarium Ethnologicum (SE), that person was Prof Dr Jan Podolák, who together with colleagues and students organised this exceptional international exchange during a period of great political and other problems in the then Czechoslovakia.*

*After over 40 years, the SE meetings still have a historical legacy. The individual details of each memory enable an assessment of the seminar as an exceptional form of integration in a Europe then still divided into east and west. The SE ran for seven years and allowed students and professors from many ethnological schools, with a wide range of methodological approaches, to gather together. It was based on fieldwork that took place each year in a different part of Slovakia, seminar discussion and lectures. The fieldwork took place in smaller groups, which as a rule comprised representatives of different countries. Of particular benefit was the contribution of the many professors, who were able to directly share their knowledge and views on research issues with students. It is understandable, of course, that the fieldwork did not produce profound results, since the research was limited to little more than ten days, with survey or questionnaire work predominating. Language differences never proved a problem, even though English was not yet the global language it is today. The great merit of the field research lay primarily in the direct communication and direct contacts between SE participants and in the ways in which ideas and theoretical knowledge were exchanged. This was the guiding principle of the SE organisers, who were well aware that ethnology students in Europe had not had much opportunity to establish academic contacts and links during their studies unlike older colleagues, professors and others who had completed ethnology studies earlier and had been able to meet and exchange academic and scientific knowledge at congresses and symposiums.*

*The research groups were thematically defined and generally based on an attested ethnological system. For example, at the second SE in Liptovská Teplička students and professors were divided into groups addressing economic issues (specifically pastures and livestock rearing), food and transport. The third SE in the Orava district focused on issues of social relations and spiritual culture, participants were divided into groups to research into family life, social relations in communities, and for all three basic areas of traditions and customs, i.e. seasonal, family and work. The fourth SE in Spiš was dedicated to questions of material culture; the following year, the fifth seminar was held in Levoča and addressed research into relationships and family, life in communities and traditions*

and customs. The special feature of the sixth SE in Rožňava was field research, specifically into seminar discussions on the subject "Material folk culture and its changes after village socialisation," which was the 'logical' consequence and reflection of the general social or political situation in Slovakia at that time. The seventh and last Slovakian SE took place in 1974 in Opatovská dolina in the Trenčín region, where the central seminar theme was "Tradition and the Present". This theme included individual areas of material culture, e.g. architecture, the economy, diet, dress and handicrafts. After seven successful years of organising SE, it was Prof. Ján Podolák's desire that the original model of the summer ethnological school be transferred to other countries. Poland and Hungary were originally enthusiastic about taking on the organisation. The next SE was organised by the Poles, though I did not attend as I was on my military service in the Yugoslav army. The ninth SE was organised in 1976 in Prijepolje, Serbia in the then Yugoslavia. In terms of organisation and content that SE was a disaster, and represented the final demise of the first and only international ethnological summer school.

The SE was a unique and original seminar for the "east and west" of Europe of the day. The participants made great strides in their knowledge of field research. The dynamic talks in the field and the exchange of theoretical and academic views in afternoon and evening seminars expanded the methodological and subject boundaries of our future academic (and pedagogical) efforts. Students, colleagues and professors, we together created personal relations and connections. For all of us who were students and then in the first years after graduating it was exceptional and above all equal and collegiate gathering with the best known ethnological European names of the day.

SE is an excellent example of inter-faculty and inter-university cooperation in the 1960s and 1970s. It is also an example of integration and connections within a discipline that today continues to grow in importance within a union of European regional cultures. All seven years of the Slovakian Seminarium Ethnologicum remain written in the history of European ethnology, not only due to the attempts of the time to open Europe's east and west up and bring people closer together, but also as an exceptional organisational undertaking that no European social and cultural environment can repeat today, despite our current openness and democracy.

*Janez Bogataj*

**My (our) contacts and relations with the ethnologists  
from the Department of Ethnography and Folklore  
Faculty of Philosophy at the Komensky University in Bratislava**

*Those memories I recall somewhat from two points of view, my own personal one and that of an institution where I have worked and which I have led for several years. That is why I specify in the title: my (our) contacts.*

*It all began for me in 1970 when as an assistant of Prof. Mieczysław Gładysz I came with him to Slovakia as a participant of the Slavic Conference and Seminarium Ethnologicum that took place in Oravská priehrada. However, we began our visit in Bratislava where we met Prof. Ján Mjartan, the then retired head of the Bratislava Ethnographic Institute of Slovak Academy of Sciences. He received us very warmly and he was very happy that the contacts between Polish and Slovak scholars were revived. According to him, the contacts should be based upon the tradition of Slavic discussions of Kazimierz Moszyński.*

*The conference itself was highly interesting to me. On behalf of the then USSR science it was supervised by Prof. Julian Bromley, who performed the function of a political officer and communicated to us (the remaining Slavic participants of the conference) a certain neo-Stalinist theory of a nation presented as a concept of "ethnos and etnikos". He did it in a way that did not allow any discussion. He listened to my objections with a poker face and he did not answer any of my inquiries. Whereas I, a young enthusiast, thought that other ways of defining those phenomena were worth considering. That is why when in a coach taking us to a field research he expressed a will to talk to me in private, nobody asked me afterwards what the subject of our conversation was. I can confess it now after all those years. The professor wanted to know where in Kraków it is possible to buy tights and chocolate.*

*Now I am wondering, who of all the people present there knew about such eminent experts on the subject of Slavs as Vjačeslav Ivanov, Vladimír Toporov, Jurij Lotman, Sergej Averincev and Boris Uspenskij. It seems to me that the role of Bromley was to protect us from those names for as long as it was possible.*

*The beginning I mentioned had its second act, Seminarium Ethnologicum, an excellent initiative of Prof. Ján Podolák. His idea was to organize field research for students from different Slavic countries. While together with Polish student and young members of the University faculty we were participating in the annual meetings in Slovakia and later also in Poland, we could get to know ethnographically interesting regions, and, what was equally important, we formed friendships that stood the test of time. When we were young, Slovak wine was very helpful on such occasions, because the seminar days often ended with parties and long discussions and as we all know: in vino veritas. When I think about Slovakia of that time, I recollect wonderful girls who later became members of the university faculty or took up posts in museums. The feminization of ethnological studies was evident, but it goes without saying that I did not mind it at all.*

*For many years our Department of Slavic Ethnology, and later the Institute of Ethnology and the Department of Ethnography and Folklore at Comenius University in Bratislava maintained the student and faculty exchange programs. The person who brought Slovak students and young scholars to Kraków was our dear friend Assoc. Professor Kornélia Jakubíková (whom her friends call Biba). That beautiful and graceful woman, brave and confident in her beliefs was a participant of our field research and conferences, and in Slovakia she was our best guide.*

*I am writing now in the plural form because apart from me she was befriended also with Dr. Małgorzata Maj and with all members of our institute who were interested in the Carpathian culture. On such occasions it is often the case that we focus rather on publications, field research, conferences while the personal aspect of mutual contacts with our Slovak friends tends to disappear. But those elusive matters remain part of our individual memory. It happened very often that with many of the people that we met in Slovakia, right from the very first meeting we felt like old friends. I had that feeling when I met Milan Leščák in Bratislava (If I may speak personally here). Maybe it is one of characteristic features of the Slovak – their straightforwardness.*

*It is good that times changed. Our friendship was at the beginning supervised by a USSR professor who, as a scholar, quickly fell into oblivion. Our cooperation has lasted, and it seems that we did not need Prof. Bromley to achieve this. However, he might have been useful in one thing: he inspired us to speak with one voice, and in his self-righteousness he did not even realize it. Let us stop this “veterans’ ponderings”, the real understanding and friendship exists between people who are free. When I talk about it now, I would like to remind you that our cooperation began in troubled times. The fact that we could somehow set those troubles aside constitutes the greatest value of our cooperation.*

**Czesław Robotycki**

### **The Seminarium Ethnologicum and the Seminarium Ethnologicum Szegediense**

*I was a third-year university student when on 10 – 22 September 1971 my professor, Béla Gunda (1911 – 1994), announced that students who spoke English or German could apply for the summer student seminar, the Seminarium Ethnologicum, to be held by the Department of Ethnology of the Komensky University in Bratislava. He told us that the seminar was being organised by Professor Ján Podolák, and would be attended not only by students from Slovakia but also from Poland, Romania, Ukraine, Hungary and possibly other countries, each accompanied by a teacher. During the seminar students would do fieldwork somewhere in Slovakia, forming thematic groups each under the guidance of a teacher or researcher. These group leaders would be leading researchers from Slovakia and abroad. I liked the idea and applied with the recommendation of Béla Gunda. That year Iván Balassa (1917 – 2002), deputy director of the Museum of Agriculture in Budapest was present from Hungary as a researcher and I represented the Debrecen Department of Ethnology.*

*It was a long trip by bus from Bratislava to the place where we were to stay that year, Vyšné Ružbachy. This is a well known spa in the Spiš region. We were*

lodged here three to a room and I found myself together with Janez Bogataj (Ljubljana, Slovenia) and a Swedish boy. Unfortunately, I have forgotten his name. (Janez Bogataj is now one of the leading representatives of Slovenian ethnology. And although I have visited Ljubljana several times since then, I have not met him.) But I listened with amazement and envy as the Swedish boy told us how he was investigating sheep-herding in Sardinia. In those days we, Hungarian students, did not even dare to dream of doing fieldwork abroad, and not only because of the lack of funds!

The daily activities and programmes followed a precise timetable. At that time I was working on the pastoral culture of the Hortobágy region, so I joined the group examining pastoral culture. Meals provided the rhythm of our days, but there was also time to explore the area around the village. We studied not only the village itself but were taken by bus to several locations and the smaller groups were dropped off at the places they had chosen. I still have the collecting book I kept then, so I know that on the first day we visited Jakubany, the second day Plavnica, the third day Legnava and Starina. On the fourth day we visited the settlement of Šarišské Jastrabie in Šariš county where we were able to visit the shepherds' huts. On September 17 our group visited the village of Kolačkov.

However, the centre was Vyšné Ružbachy where the evenings were spent in conversation, singing and short talks introducing ourselves. In the afternoons the teachers and researchers leading the different groups held seminars. Iván Balassa's seminar, held on September 17, was on the rural economy. I clearly remember that Iván Balassa and I sang Hungarian folksongs. I was able to hear for myself that the new style Hungarian and Slovak folksongs were basically the same, not only in their melodies but often also in their texts.

As someone who came from the Great Hungarian Plain, it was very instructive for me to see a different kind of ecological environment and within it to get to know the high mountain (Carpathian) shepherding, its buildings, the milk processing procedures and implements. The group leaders gave very effective assistance. I learnt a great deal from Ioan Vladuțiu (1920 – 1991), who came from Bucharest, but if I remember correctly his family was from Maros County (Marosludas/Ludas, Transylvania), and he spoke Hungarian fluently. (Since then one of the schools in that settlement has been named after him.) On September 21 he gave a talk about the cultural elements associated with high mountain shepherding that are found in all mountain cultures. I particularly remember his discussion of the *vatra* (fireplace). The members of our small group discussed what they had learned. I still have the text of the paper I wrote at the time about my experiences and research on shepherding. I spoke in Hungarian and it was translated into Slovak. I liked the fact that the teachers and researchers participating found a common language. But not all the Slovak students spoke German or English. A few of them also spoke Hungarian. And perhaps there was also a Hungarian girl among the students from Bratislava. Among the leading researchers was Michal Markuš (1912 – 2004), with whom I later formed a close and good relationship from the

1980s right up until his death. He held a talk on September 18 on the nutrition culture.

*The shepherds and the Slovak villagers received us very kindly. When they learnt that I am Hungarian they tried out the few words of Hungarian they knew. These small gestures reinforced my conviction that the peoples of the Carpathian Basin, and especially the Slovaks and Hungarians, are bound together by strong cultural and emotional ties. We ate a lot of fresh ewe cheese at the shepherds' huts (salaš), which of course had a beneficial effect on our digestion. We were also very impressed by the distinctive architecture of the mountain villages. Not to mention the magnificent landscape. I took many photographs that are now in the photographic archive of the Debrecen Department of Ethnography.*

*On September 18 we transferred to Levoča, travelling via Vyšné Ružbachy – Ždiar – Tatranská Lomnica – Poprad. From here we visited the Greek Catholic villages of Nižné Repáše and Olšavica. It was here that I first saw how far west the Greek Catholic Ruthenians had migrated. For me, of course, one of the highlights was the visit to Levoča (Lőcse in Hungarian), the setting of many works of Hungarian literature. I still remember my delight at seeing Saint Jacob's church and admiring the altars and statues I had previously known only from photographs. And the whole environment of the town, the old houses steeped in the atmosphere of past centuries.*

*Naturally, there was also an excursion to the Spiš/Szepesség region. I particularly remember Podolínec/Podolin and Stará Lubovňa/Ólubló. In Podolin I remember the first school set up in Hungary by the Piarists where many famous people studied, and in Ólubló the memories of Krúdy. The extensive castle ruins that, of course, we climbed up to see, were an unforgettable experience, and the many beautiful Szepesség settlements we saw from the bus with their mediaeval churches and old houses. The Turks never reached this area.*

*As I remember it, the Seminarium Ethnologicum was unparalleled at that time. It was a unique opportunity for ethnology students from the socialist bloc to maintain contacts, get to know each other, learn how to move in the international field and exchange professional views in foreign languages. It was interesting to look at my notes and collecting books 39 years after the event. In the following years Ján Podolák tried to have the Seminarium held at other places in the neighbouring countries. I seem to recall that it was to have been organised in Debrecen too, but for reasons unknown to me this did not happen. And with this the long series of events was interrupted.*

*This is why, when I was appointed to the Department of Ethnology at the University of Szeged in 1993, one of the first things I did, building on my personal experiences in Slovakia, was to relaunch the Seminarium Ethnologicum, now based in Szeged and held every second year under the new name of Seminarium Ethnologicum Szegediense. Its structure partly follows the Slovak pattern, especially as regards the international nature of the event. The language of communication is English. It also reflects the Slovak pattern in focussing on collective field research. However it introduced new features in the way it is organised. Each seminar has a central problem that we approach from different points of view.*

*Participants coming from abroad, students and teachers must all prepare on the chosen problem. We spend two days preparing for the collective field research with lectures on the theoretical background and forming the work groups. After 2-3 days of research we again have 1 – 2 days to present our preliminary results to our fellows and the community concerned in the form of short talks. Then on the basis of these talks within a semester we prepare the studies intended for publication in a bilingual (Hungarian-English) volume. It is a great pleasure for us that we are often able to welcome both students and teachers from Bratislava at the Szeged seminars. In this way the Slovak initiative lives on in Hungary. But the common goal remains the same: to get to know each other's culture and the research methods taught and to cultivate connections between departments through professional friendships. Ján Podolák and his team provided a good foundation for this.*

**Gábor Barna**

**The Brno students  
at the 7<sup>th</sup> Seminarium Ethnologicum  
(Opatová, September 2<sup>nd</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> 1974)**

*When our colleagues from Bratislava asked us to contribute to the jubilee publication with our memories of what the participation in the Seminarium Ethnologicum in Opatová (Trenčín district), joint field research with our the Slovak and foreign students of ethnography and folklore meant to us, at first we found ourselves in the territory of "oral history" due to the time that had passed since then and to the fact that all research material was given to the organizers of the Seminarium a long time ago. However, when we started recollecting our memories and slowly reconstructing our almost two-week stay in the Trenčín district we agreed on one thing: the participation in the 7<sup>th</sup> Seminarium Ethnologicum left a deep and unforgettable memory due to its unusual friendly atmosphere and because it exceeded the routine of university study like e.g. the study trips abroad organized by professor Richard Jeřábek. At the same time it was our first encounter with a foreign world in the area of research.*

*First the memories of our journey to Slovakia emerged. We travelled to Trenčín by bus at the beginning of September accompanied by professor Jeřábek having feelings whether we are not "the chosen ones" that we (Lia Černíková, Jana Tomancová, Miroslav Válka) were selected from among many other students. The perfectly organized event started by the departure from Trenčín bus station accompanied by Milan Chlebana, one of the Seminarium secretaries. And how spontaneously and warmly professor Richard Jeřábek greeted Viera Ábelová, another worker of the Trenčín Museum! We could see that our professors are also people of flesh and blood and spontaneity and warmheartedness affects also them.*



*Dignified and ceremonious was our introduction to the scientists, Béla Gunda, and Robert Wildhaber or professor Ján Podolák, "spiritus agens" of this and previous Seminariums, whom we knew theoretically from lectures and who represented legends to us. Later we learnt that the cultural section of the district council Trenčín, the Trenčín Museum, and District Heritage Board co-organized the event.*

*Due to the research character of the Seminarium the student participants not only the home ones i.e. Czechoslovak, but also those who came from abroad were divided into thematic groups according to their interests and professional orientation which were supervised by senior researchers. The studied research topics covered the branches of traditional folk culture, their recording and analysis in the meetings was the main intention of the organizers and the mission of the whole event. As the students of the University of Jan Ev. Purkyně we focused on recording of folk architectures in collaboration with three students from a university in Bratislava.*

*Their task was to work out the ground measurement plans of selected folk constructions on the basis of the terrain recognition. Our records were based on a questionnaire including questions which aimed at a complex description of individual constructions from the material, structural, disposition and social point of view. The research was carried out both in the mountainous Carpathian Trenčín district on the border with Moravia and in the lowlands of the Považie region. Especially in the remote hilly areas the field research was logistically demanding. On the other hand it was balanced by getting to know traditional cultural phenomena and the world where the time had stopped in a material and social sense. Doctor Ján Kantár from the State Heritage Institute in Bratislava was the leader of our team. His colleagues Mária Medvecká and Viera Kaľavská were two other members of the team.*

*During the Seminarium the father of Lia Ryšavá, the member of our team, had died. I remember her deep sorrow, when she announced "My daddy died". I went with her to Brno. I felt that I could not let Lia travel on her own and after the funeral we returned to Opatová as I thought that I could not leave the research unfinished. I wanted to meet my obligations and to be with my new friends. One of them was Lenka Nováková, our a little older colleague and a fresh ethnographer of the Slovácké Museum in Uherské Hradiště, who also represented the Czech Republic. She concentrated on the research of food under the supervision Dr. V. Ábelová. To her unforgettable research experience belongs the recording of manual washing of laundry in a water stream with the use of wooden laundry bats.*

*Besides working part the Seminarium offered opportunities for socializing and getting to know our colleagues from Slovakia and abroad, for sharing our experience, for the visits of Trenčín. Although songs were never missing in our student events at the Seminarium we were charmed by beautiful and spontaneous singing performances of our Slovak female colleagues and their wide repertory of classical folk songs and the songs performed by a brass band invited to one of our social gatherings.*

*So that we do not remain only in the are of "oral history" a detailed and factual information on the 7th Seminarium Ethnologicum for Národopisné aktuality (12, 1975) was written by Zita Svítková (second Seminarium secretary) and for Vlastivedný časopis (24, 1974) by Milan Chlebana. The report appeared also in Yugoslavian Glasnik Etnografskog Intituta written by Dragomir Antonievič.*

***Jana Pospíšilová  
and Miroslav Válka***