

*BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE TO*  
**prof. PhDr. MILAN LEŠČÁK, CSc.**  
(\*12. 10. 1940)



Prof. PhDr. Milan Leščák, CSc. is one of the outstanding figures in ethnology over the last fifty years in Slovakia. Born in Levoča, he studied Slovak language and ethnology at the beginning of the 1960s revival at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava. Until the beginning of the 1990s, this was the only faculty offering the study of this thematically interesting and humanly attractive field. His teachers were such leading figures in the subject as Rudolf Bednárík and above all the folklorist of the P. G. Bogatyriov tradition: Andrej Melicherčík. This learned and creative spirit with his own particular ironic approach to problems and the people around him also influenced M. Leščák and was his supervisor for his internal academic study at the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. They both shared an interest in the dynamics and processual nature of folklore in the system of traditional culture; they both applied contemporary and progressive methodological approaches to their scientific interpretations. M. Leščák also found inspiration

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in the circle of the Nitra school of communication and semiotics of František Miko.

Following A. Melicherčík's untimely death in 1966, M. Leščák was taken under the academic wing of his colleague from Brno, Oldřich Sirovátka, a folklore scholar of European reputation. Their professional relationship grew into a deep friendship, resulting in an as yet unrivalled publication, the text book "Folklore and Folklore Studies – On Popular Lore". In addition to dozens of studies in Slovak and foreign academic journals, the recipient of this tribute is the author of 51 entries in the synthetic "Encyclopaedia of the Folk Culture of Slovakia". Leščák's much-cited thesis entitled "Humorous narrative in the Spiš region (1962 – 1967) – an attempt to research its frequency and occurrence" paradoxically remained for many years in manuscript form. I am delighted that in 2010 we succeeded in publishing it as a gift from his friends and successors for his seventieth birthday.

Using O. Sirovátka as an example, I can point out that M. Leščák also demonstrated his own personal ethos and that of our discipline by the fact that Bohemian and Moravian colleagues gave papers at academic conferences and published in the journal *Slovenský národopis* [Slovak Ethnology] at a time when they were unable to do so in their own country as a result of so-called political 'normalisation'. The authority he wielded among his colleagues in the Institute of Ethnography of the Slovak Academy of Sciences was confirmed by the election in 1988 in which he was made director of the institute.

A. Melicherčík and M. Leščák differed in their attitude to the so-called second life of folklore – folklorism – which A. Melicherčík experienced in its authentic form in the 1950s, but which M. Leščák worked on from the 1960s in a long-term and theoretically-based manner. In a friendly and professional tandem with Svetozár Švehlák, they set out the fundamentals of the theory and history of folklorism in Slovakia. In this field, M. Leščák developed international cooperation in particular with Polish colleagues and with the leading Hungarian folklore scholar Vilmos Voigt, with whom he founded and prepared the publication of two annual editions of *Folklorismus bulletin*. M. Leščák was aware of the important place of folklore as a source of inspiration in the national culture in Slovakia in the nineteenth century and that of the so-called folklore movement and the relationship to folklore in the system of values of thousands of young people in the period following the Second World War. Therefore he also worked as a member of juries, as an adjudicator for folk festivals and as a lecturer at cultural seminars. His professional career came to an end in the new millennium with his work at the National Edification Centre for the "Encyclopaedia of Scenic Folklorism" which now exists in electronic form. His numerous articles, critiques and reviews provided the wider public with information on the results of his research.

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In 1980, M. Leščák was present at the foundation of Etnofilm, an international competition biennale of films with an ethnological subject-matter. In its first years, he was the president of the jury and participated as an inspirational debater. At the end of the 1960s, M. Leščák took part in the establishment of the academic journal *Národopisné informácie* [Ethnological Bulletin] (now *Etnologické rozpravy* [Ethnological Debates]) published by the Ethnographic Society of Slovakia at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, of which he was the president from 1987 to 1990. M. Leščák is remembered as an erudite, but original and humorous teacher by students of the then Department of Folklore and Regional Studies of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pedagogy in Nitra, the creation of which he significantly contributed to at the beginning of the 1990s, and where he was an external lecturer, as well as by those from the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Art of Comenius University in Bratislava, which he also directed from 1996 to 2003.

I am confident that M. Leščák will be delighted by the publication prepared to mark his birthday, to which numerous colleagues have contributed with academic articles or personal tributes, many of whom are former students.

The personal bibliography which will form part of the publication bears witness to the creative and innovative spirit of Milan Leščák, written large into the history of Slovak folk studies of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the name of his colleagues, I wish Milan Leščák with all my heart the good health which he needs so much for the years to come!

*Hana Hlôšková*

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