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(2020)

MILAN LEŠČÁK – VEDEC, PEDAGÓG, ČLOVEK

[Milan Leščák – Scientist, Pedagogue, Human]

Bratislava: Ethnographic Society of Slovakia, 226 p.

The commemorative publication celebrating the 80-year jubilee of Milan Leščák contains about sixty comments of his professional colleagues and students as well as fellow companions in the field of folk culture heritage, folklorism and media. Many of these personalities are friends of the jubilarian mentioning personal memories in a nice and humorous way. Along with the scientist also the human Milan Leščák was to be praised. Out of many contributions, a selection was made here not in relation to quality but a one that should help us to present the personality of Milan Leščák in his complexity.

The first contributions of the jubilee publication reveal the scientific and pedagogical activities of the jubilarian. Gabriela Kiliánová describes his work at the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Here, the scientific career of Milan Leščák began in 1963, lasting a whole of forty years. From 1976 to 1988 he was vice director and from 1989 to 2003 director of the SAV institute known later as the Institute of Ethnology (today Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology). Among his major scientific works the Ethnographic Atlas of Slovakia, Contributions to the Encyclopedia of Folk Culture in Slovakia and his work in contemporary folklore can be mentioned.

Between 1996 and 2004 Leščák had been working at the Chair of Ethnology (later Chair of Ethnology and cultural Anthropology, today the Chair of Ethnology and Museology) of the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University in Bratislava as teacher and head of chair. Marta Botíková describes him as modern, inventive and reliable colleague. Apart from organizational work he had been encouraging scientific activities of the chair. Besides topics like “*Tradition, ethics and civilising transition*“, back in 1997 he had initiated a

seminar „*Woman and women's principle in folklore*“, long before that issue became topical as a result of the women's movement.

Leščák wrote a number of significant papers on folklore, folkloristics and folklorism in Slovakia. (In Slovakia, folkloristics, which dealt with the immaterial cultural heritage – the folklore, was considered a part of ethnology until 1989 – see Daniel Luther's contribution). Peter Michalovič, as many other authors as well, states that Leščák transformed the Slovak folkloristics from a descriptive to a scientific discipline, having been affected by Claud Lévi-Strauss. The foundation of the Chair of folkloristics and regional studies at the Faculty of Humanities of the Pedagogical College in Nitra was one of his peak efforts at establishing folkloristics as science.

With folklorism, Leščák dealt very intensively on theoretical as well as applied level. According to Ján Blaho „*He (...) understood the folklorism movement in Slovakia in a unique way and became its pragmatic futurologist ...*” Blaho appreciates the creative power of Leščák, who had been actually a source of ideas for the various cultural and national education institutions such as Matica Slovenská, Národné osvetové centrum, Lúčnica, etc., becoming their “*grey eminence*” at the same time.

Peter Maráky emphasizes Leščák's strong commitment to ‚applied ethnology‘ in Slovakia. Leščák was co-founder, long time organizer and jury chairman of the “Etnofilm Čadca” film festival (first founded in 1980). He actively participated in the programme of the Festival of Folklorism in Východná, Detva, Myjava, Strážnice and others, often as a jury member, too. This affinity to, live folklore is not surprising, having heard from Igor Kovačovič that Milan had been a very good dancer and had even won a ‘Verbuňk’ dance competition at a Folklore festival in Strážnice in 1967. (Verbuňk is a traditional dance from Moravian Slovakia).

However, Milan Leščák is also known as a gifted singer, as many congratulators found out, among them Ján Botík. He also remembers their common field research in the years of study, having experienced a lot of funny situations. Also, the many common visits of wine cellars were quite amusing, Botík reports, since Milan had been often singing there. Daniel Luther also has had many humorous memories of field research, often having started in a pub. Luther, the first PhD. student of Leščák and his long term friend, emphasizes his human qualities: „*Witty, a gifter narrator and singer, with scientific intuition and a unconventional pragmatism*“.

Several contributions of former students (Katarina Košťalová, Ivan Murin, Martina Bocánová, Katarina Babčáková and others) reveal an image of an extraordinary teacher and human, who was able to convey his knowledge about European folklore, folklore and folklorism as well as folklorism and literature to the young generation with high competence and excellence. He was appreciated for his friendly and sympathetic humour as well as banter (e.g. *Keď kú-*

zelný pomocník pomáhá aj Iróniou from Zuzana Veselská and Ľubica Voľanská).

Oľga Danglová reminds of Leščáks efforts at international scientific cooperation and contacts, chiefly to Moravian, Hungarian, Polish and also Austrian colleagues after border opening in 1989 (Klaus Beitzl), pointing to the encounter with Austrian colleagues in Kittsee with some good red wine. To Leščák, the search for common research interests and theoretical approaches played a chief role.

In his contribution „*Tatry Alpy. Ein Testimonium Amicitiae für Milan Leščák*“, Klaus Beitzl describes the chronology of a friendship that had begun after the opening of the borders in 1989 with spontaneous meetings of Austrian and Slovak ethnologists. Famous were the carnivals at the Institute of Ethnology in Bratislava. Soon after this wave of friendship reached wider circles, organizing excursions, also with the participation of pedagogues and students of both universities in Vienna and Bratislava. The formation of a scientific circle of friends „*Tatry Alpy*“ in 1992 in Levoča was the ultimate top event: „*Friendship, science, art and culture, humour*“ was the motto of the circle founded. The name indicates to the origin of two friends and important protagonists – Milan Leščák and Klaus Beitzl. Milan Leščák comes from the region of Zips, southeast of the High Tatras in Slovakia. Klaus Beitzl was born in Berlin, his family roots are, however, in Montafon/Voralberg in the Eastern Alps. In 1993, the formation of the circle of friends was completed at Klaus Beitzl's family seat in Schruns/Montafon. Several cooperations in the field of ethnology were initiated, friendships and educational projects were fostered by collective research journeys to Montafon, Šariš, Hoheneich in Waldviertel, Drassburg in Burgenland as well as Mödling in Industrieviertel (2008). The funny accounts of activities of this circle of friends are completed by many, not less amusing pictures. It is a pleasure to read this contribution, the more if you know all the participants.

Eventually also the work of the editor Hana Hlôšková should be acknowledged. The book comprises around sixty contributions with an extensive bibliography of the jubilarian on history of ethnography and folkloristics, the genres of folklore, folklorism and media, reports and reviews, Milan Leščák – teacher, and also contributions about Milan Leščák. This bibliography compiled by Hana Hlôšková was published within the VEGA 2/0107/19 project framework „*Folklore, Folkloristics and Ideology*“.

Vera Kapeller