

**DR. LÁSZLÓ LUKÁCS,  
ETHNOGRAPHER AND MUSEOLOGIST,  
PASSED AWAY**

Bad news doesn't take time. So, we learned at the turn of the year that László Lukács, our colleague, ethnographer, Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Head Museologist of the Saint Stephen's Museum [Szent István Király Múzeum] in Székesfehérvár, passed away on 29 December 2023. The news came from the museum as well as from friends and colleagues.



*Dr. László Lukács*  
*Source: Erika Simon, 2011*

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Dr. László Lukács (29 October 1950 – 29 December 2023) was born in the village of Zámoly. He completed his high school studies in Székesfehérvár. University studies, history and geography combined with ethnography, he graduated at the University of Debrecen. At the Technical University of Budapest, he obtained a degree in engineering in the field of monument conservation. As an outstanding student of prof. Béla Gunda, László Lukács was given the opportunity to study in Vienna in 1978 – 1979 on the basis of the Herder Scholarship, which was awarded to excellent students together with the Herder Prize for Professors. In 1990, he received the degree of Candidate of Ethnography and Cultural Anthropology from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and in 2008 he was awarded a doctorate in the same field. In 1974, he became an ethnographer at the Saint Stephen's Museum, Székesfehérvár, where he started working and became a key figure in the museum in his field. He devoted decades of his career to museum work. From 1984 to 2006 he worked as head of the ethnographic department, from 2007 as a senior consultant and since 2008 he has been the institution's chief museologist. He retired in 2015. He was accompanied and supported in his partnership and professional understanding by his wife, historian, Dr. Zsófia Demeter, in the same institution.

Dr. László Lukács has worked on many ethnographic topics, folk architecture of Central Europe, the economy, viticulture, customs, folklore genres with historical themes, the history of guilds, their structure and the associated craftsmanship traditions. Among the many topics that interested him, the subject of building and housing was an important one. This interest led him to collaborate in the establishment and opening of several monuments of folk architecture, in the villages of Füle, Sárrét, Pusztavám and, last but not least, the Palotavárosi Skanzen in Székesfehérvár. In 1988, Dr. László Lukács created an exhibition entitled 'Palotavárosi emlékek' [Monuments of Palotaváros] in a house at Rác utca 11 (translated as Serbian Street), which presented the history and ethnographic context of the place and the region.

He carried out ethnographic field research not only in the county of Fejér, or the territory of present-day Hungary, but also beyond its borders, in Slovakia, Romania and the former Yugoslavia. He was interested in the cultural characteristics of Hungarians living abroad, but also in the surrounding ethnic communities. Another important stay in his personal development was the Humboldt Fellowship, under which he spent the academic year 1990 – 1991 at the University of Munich.

László Lukács also passed on his knowledge and experience as a teacher. Since 1999 he has been a professor at the János Kodolányi University of Applied Sciences, Székesfehérvár branch. He also worked in Budapest and was instrumental in founding the Doctoral School of Ethnography there.

Dr. László Lukács was a member and active participant of many professional and scientific organizations, forums and associations in Hungary and

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abroad. His forty years of work and outstanding achievements in the field of Hungarian ethnography have been recognized with numerous professional honours and awards.

In 1983 he received the János Jankó Prize of the Hungarian Ethnographic Society, in 1989 the prize that bears the name of his professor, Béla Gunda, in 1995 the Mihály Vörösmarty Prize awarded by the County Government of Fejér County and in 1998 the Matthias Bél Prize awarded by the Hungarian Ethnographic Society. In 2007 he became an honorary citizen of his native village of Zámoly and in 2008 an honorary citizen of the county of Fejér. In 2010 he was awarded one of the most important professional awards, the István Győrffy Memorial Medal. His scientific, pedagogical and museological activities in the field of research on folk culture in Hungary and Europe were honoured with the award of the Council of Merit for Hungary.

The nominations of all these precious awards and the activities of the late colleague were extensive and multidimensional. Therefore, let me recall some of the connections that linked him to Slovakia. As a curious researcher, one rainy day he knocked on the door of the then Department of Ethnography and Folklore Studies of the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University – he wanted to meet and consult with Associate Professor Emília Horváthová. His questions were mainly about the Easter whipping, because in his fieldwork, in the villages of the Transdanubia region, where there was no immediate evidence of the colonisation of the Slovaks in the Lower Lands, he found Slovak rhymes associated with this ceremony.

He probably did not regret this spontaneous decision, and we certainly mutually benefited from our collegial friendship. When my colleague learned of my interest in the life and culture of the mono-ethnic areas, he immediately offered me the opportunity to travel through the villages of the southern part of the Transdanubia region, invited me to museum ethnographic camps, and came as a lecturer and researcher to ethnographic camps of Hungarians in Slovakia as well as of Slovaks in Hungary. He also accepted invitations to the north of Slovakia, together with his wife he came to Orava, where, in addition to mountain hikes, they visited the museum of folk architecture in Zuberec, and later, with his then still small son, Miklós, he was particularly pleased to have the opportunity to visit Liptovský Mikuláš and, of course, the surrounding Low Tatras region.

Lukács László cultivated close collegial relations in Slovakia in the 1980s with the working group of the ethnographic ring of the Csemadok in Nové Zámky, later with the Ethnographic Society of Hungarians in Slovakia and finally with the Forum Institute for Minority Research, with its Research Centre for European Ethnology in Komárno. He was open to many collaborations, inviting to conferences that he organized as a leading ethnographic authority with international contacts in his museum, in his town, accompanying and

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enjoying contacts at other scientific events, conferences, book presentations, excursions...



*Photo of the study group, Lukács László participated in SAS (Studia Academica Slovaca Summer School) in the summer of 1985  
Source: Studia Academica Slovaca (1985, p. 49)*

On his own initiative, in 1985 he studied at the summer school of Slovak language and culture, Studia Academica Slovaca, at the Comenius University in Bratislava. Memorable from that period was also a meeting in Balašské Ďarmoty, where his wife's parents lived. In my memories, professional and family occasions merge, for this characterised Laci's friend-colleague relationship. We were all close to him, family. He was helpful to everyone in the profession; it was his way of collegial communication.

He wrote and published books, the bibliography of his works is extensive and occupies a wide space both thematically and linguistically, listing hundreds of titles, dozens of pages. No one interested in traditional ethnographic and museological topics can bypass it. Let me mention, in connection with his extensive work on Christmas, his pointing out that the earliest record of a Christmas tree from Hungary can be found in the account books of the Trnava orphanage of the founder and patroness Theresa Bruswick, where the orphanage keeper wrote down the expense of the tree in his annual accounts.

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Lukács László knew and respected the work of ethnologists from Slovakia, and he read and quoted local works. He treated the topic of the Easter whipping in the Slovak villages of the Low Lands in Transdanubia in two papers (Lukács, 1986; 1994). In the religious studies journal *Hieron* his study about the wandering church in Modranka, which was actually an analysis of a historical rumour from the time of the Ottoman occupation of the southern border of today's Slovakia, was published in Slovak (Lukács, 2003 – 2004).

Personally, I will remember him as a colleague who was a tremendous reservoir of knowledge, but always listened with interest, was happy to discuss topics, was helpful in research, from the first meeting - a friend in the rain.

*Marta Botiková*

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