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### Congratulations to Ján Botík (\*11 November, 1938)

Ján Botík, an ethnographer, museum worker, university professor and publicist is celebrating his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2008.

His life of a scientist is like a well-designed building, flexibly reacting to changing conditions and challenges brought about by various time periods and their needs. His brief *curriculum vitae* says that he started his professional career at the Department of Ethnography, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, where he worked as a research assistant in 1963 – 1967.

For another long twenty years, Ján Botík associated his life with the Institute of Ethnography, Slovak Academy of Sciences. In 1977 – 1985, he stood at the head of the Department of Ethnography. In 1989 – 1990, he was the managing director of the Slovak National Museum (SNM) – Ethnographic Museum in Martin. From there, he moved to the Historical Museum of the SNM in Bratislava to work there in 1991-2005 as a custodian and the head of the Documentary Centre for Croatian culture which deals with Slovaks living abroad. In 1995, he received the title of *Dozent* (associate professor) for ethnography. At that time he worked for the Department of Ethnology and Social Anthropology, Faculty of Arts Comenius University in Bratislava. In 2002, when he became a university professor, he started teaching students of folkloristics and religious studies at the Faculty of Arts, University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra. In 2003, he obtained the title of Doctor of Historical Sciences.

When meeting common people in rural areas, which served as the only sphere of ethnographic research for quite a long time, Ján Botík showed his communicative skills and employed his “well-tuned ears” and “sharp eyes” to capture characteristic features of a particular territory and record them both in texts and photographs. His idea of the “making of ethnography at home” meant to collect, record, reconstruct and explain the vanishing phenomena of the traditional peasant

culture. At the very beginning, such activities were conducted in accordance with the intellectual tradition and the period interest in singular phenomena of Slovak culture, which, in the 1960s and 1970s, could be literally found immediately “round the corner”. This was still quite typical of several rural regions very little touched by industrialisation and urbanisation. The open-field research actually meant to collect a wide range of empirical data within a certain positivist programme. But, as such, they are now being looked at with a slight disrespect. Although the research conceived in such a way may appear as a too inwardly focused one or little reacting to the theoretical and methodological impulses received from outside, its contribution to the development of the discipline are absolutely undeniable. It is because of the priceless information about elements of the pre-industrial culture and singular regional phenomena the research has provided us with. In Botík’s case, this regards mainly traditions and specific features of folk architecture, housing and the family life. Under the influence of Soňa Švecová, one his colleagues, he embarked on making attempts to join historically remote cultural phenomena with social ones. The result of his efforts is evidenced by a comprehensive ethnographic monograph called *Hont. Tradície ľudovej kultúry* (*Hont: Traditions of Folk Culture*). The book is based on results of extensive team research performed in an ethnically and religiously mixed territory of the former *zhupa* (district) of Hont, in which, even in the 1960s and 1970s, numerous rural settlements exhibited well-preserved features of the pre-industrial world, the end of which was found immediately behind the boundaries of one’s own village. (Were Rogers Brubaker in such surroundings, he would certainly find marvellous examples of “groupism”!) Nevertheless, the research carried out in a positivist framework yielded results representing the mainstream of the-then historical orientation of Slovak ethnography and folkloristics. In such intentions was then produced the *Encyclopaedia of Folk Culture in Slovakia*, which ranks with other monumental synthetic works produced by Slovak ethnography and folkloristics. The idea of this project was originated by Adam Pranda. But when he died, Ján Botík was the one who started work on it. He was always there when the very first designs for the encyclopaedia appeared and again when they received concrete forms to be brought to life.

It is a well-known fact that each generation will make attempts to discover and define the territory for carrying out one’s own research activities. Ján Botík has revealed such a territory in historical ethnography. His professional and research interests have always been embedded in several thematic areas, e.g. folk architecture, housing and the family. Nowadays, he is more interested in various ethnicity-related issues. His research covering the whole territory of Slovakia includes the study of ethnic minorities in Slovakia as well as the study of Slovak minority in foreign countries. Furthermore, he attempts to link the corpus of knowledge in this specific area with the theory of ethnicity. He often turns back to these issues and studies them from various perspectives in order to gain new insight into and understanding of them.

The initial orientation of Botík’s research on the family and family relations is evidenced by his dissertation called *Korelácie medzi formami rodiny a obydlia*

(*Correlations between the Forms of Family and Housing*), which he defended in 1977. As demonstrated by published works dealing with the family and family relations, then the family and housing conditions, Botík was interested in these problems mainly in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, he not only searched for but also found links of these topics with another field of his interests – folk architecture and housing. As a result, various aspects of building culture and housing are contained in a number of Botík's explicatory and analytical contributions. Moreover, they form the core of a number of entries written by him for the *Encyclopaedia of Folk Culture in Slovakia*. They have also occupied a majority of his scientific and organisational activities. The most important ones were associated with his post of the Secretary and then the Head of the Czechoslovak Section of the International Commission for the Study of Folk Culture in the Carpathians and in the Balkans in 1971 – 1988. The huge amount of knowledge he acquired while he was working on an international synthesis treating folk culture in the Carpathian Basin and in the Balkans as well as on the encyclopaedic descriptions of folk architecture was later given a new, socio-ethnic dimension. His enormous creative potential was fully exploited in a synthesis dealing with the development of folk architecture and building art in Slovakia. This publication known as *Ludová architektúra a urbanizmus vidieckych sídiel na Slovensku z pohľadu najnovších poznatkov archeológie a etnografie* (*Folk Architecture and Urbanism of Rural Settlements in Slovakia as Viewed through the Latest Achievements of Archaeology and Ethnography*) was produced in close co-operation with a team of archaeologists. The English version of the book – *Folk architecture in Slovakia* – was written together with a group of heritage conservationists. When set into a wider context established by geographic, economic, social and historical conditions, the ethnographic vision of the folk building culture was inevitably compared with views presented by other sciences and, for this reason, it thus obtained a new dimension.

Botík has become increasingly interested in the research into issues concerning ethnicity, ethnic minorities and interethnic relations since the mid- 1970s. In the 1980s, he participated in the production of a synthesising work called *Slováci vo svete* (*Slovaks in the World*). His markedly growing inclination towards the examination of Slovaks living abroad, at first mainly those living in the “lower land” (i.e. in the south and south-eastern parts of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy), seems to have been inspired by his own past. Botík's family tree shows that he was born at Dolná Mitrovica in Bulgaria to a family of immigrants from Slovakia. His book devoted to Slovaks settled there, simply called *Slováci v Bulharsku* (*Slovaks in Bulgaria*), speaks about Slovak immigrants and their cultural values, all filtered through his personal experience. Slovaks living abroad were brought into focus once more when Botík was working on a catalogue to the exhibition dealing with Slovaks in the “lower land” called *Slováci na Dolnej zemi* (*Slovaks in the “Lower Land”*). He developed the same subject again in a book based on the results of his fieldwork conducted while touring the cemeteries of foreign Slovaks in 1973 – 1996. Issued under the title *Tam zložili svoje kosti* (*There Did*

*They Lay Their Bones*), the book treats tombstones as a distinctive component of the culture of Slovaks living abroad. These noticeable artefacts are characterised from typological, symbolical, textual, artistic and calligraphic aspects. The cultural and historical values embodied in these tombstones are set into a wider context established by the results of research studies conducted at Slovak villages and communities in the "lower land", i.e. Hungary, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, which are linked with an earlier inflow of Slovaks through immigration. It should be noted that the book is also based on studies dealing with a later migration wave of Slovaks who left their country to live in the U.S.A., Canada, Argentina or Australia.

Traditions related with death and burial ceremonies have remained part of Botík's work over an extended period of time. He expressed his deep interest in this subject-matter by organising a symposium called *Obyčajové tradície pri úmrtí a pochovávaní na Slovensku* (*Customs and Traditions Related with Death and Burial Ceremonies in Slovakia*) and by editing a book under the same title. In 2001, he was awarded a *First Prize for Scientific and Organisational Activities* by the Ethnographic Society with the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

Botík got increasingly interested in historical and ethno-cultural development of Slovak communities in central and south-eastern Europe as well as in Overseas when he started working for the SNM. An occasion to manifest his deep interest in this field occurred when he was charged with a task to found special divisions dealing with documentary evidence on life and culture of Slovaks living in diasporas and enclaves abroad and then when he became responsible for other divisions entrusted with research into ethnic minorities in Slovakia. Up to now, fruits of Botík's intensive and enthusiastic work in this field have been presented in a number of various collections, documents, exhibitions and publications. Although they cater for both specialists in this area and a wider readership as well, they make possible for both groups to extend their knowledge base concerning life and culture of Slovaks living abroad. A very special attention should be given to a book issued under the title *Slováci v argentínskom Chacu* (*Slovaks in Argentinean Chaco*), which is a major contribution to the study of Slovak cotton-growers in Argentina.

Another series of Botík's work is anchored in Slovakia. It draws a picture of social, economic, cultural and religious development of ethnic minorities in Slovakia. Among them, the Croatian minority occupied a prominent position because since the 1990s it has very much revived its activities. Working in this area Botík not only fully employs his expertise in a number of projects conceived, designed and conducted by the Documentary Centre for the Croatian Culture, founded as part of the Historical Museum of the SNM in 1996, but he also shows himself as a productive author and a successful editor of a number of books depicting the Croats in Slovakia against historical, linguistic, social and cultural background. The contemporary efforts of the Croats to revitalise their own ethnic group have been highlighted in a book called *Slovenskí Chorváti: Etnokultúrny vývoj z pohľadu spoločenskovedných poznatkov* (*Croats in Slovakia: Ethnic and Cultural Develop-*

ment from a Social Sciences Perspective). The role of Croatian nobility in Slovakia is summed up in a representative publication issued under the title *Chorvátska šľachta na Slovensku* (Croatian Nobility in Slovakia). The book is richly illustrated by heraldic bearings, portraits and photographs of palaces. At present, several Slovak and Croatian specialists have joined together to work on a common monograph on the village of Jarovce (Jandrof) in which the Croats have preserved an overwhelming majority of population and a high level of compactness of their ethnic group. The book is based on carefully selected material from a rich collection of records noted by Juke Treuer, a member of the local upper class and an agile local chronicler and scribe, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In the book on Jandrof Botík presents himself as a discoverer and documentalist of little known cultural and historical facts. In another book *Obrazy spod Vysokých Tatier* (Pictures from below the High Tatras), he brings back to life two forgotten English painters, Adrian and Mariana Stokes. In their paintings from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they captured life at the villages spread at the foothills of the Tatras. Another outstanding work by Botík is devoted to Letanovce. In the SNM in Martin, he managed to find photographs synchronically depicting various areas of material and social life at this village. Now, because of the long time lapse from the moment when these photos were taken, the testimony about that by-gone era is of enormous cultural value for us.

Unlike many ethnographers once immobilised behind the Iron Curtain, Ján Botík managed to make his dreams come true. When a research opportunity to study an ethnic group entirely different from his own presented itself, he, together with his wife Marta, engaged in a joint project focused on cultural traditions of indigenous population of the north-western coast of North America. When the results of the project were presented in an exposition and in a book called *V krajine totemových stĺpov* (In the Country of Totem Poles), they immediately enjoyed an enormous success.

Botík's last book issued as *Etnická história Slovenska. K problematike etnicity, etnickej identity, multietnického Slovenska a zahraničných Slovákov* (Ethnic History of Slovakia: The Issues of Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, Multiethnic Slovakia and Slovaks Living Abroad) is a natural outcome of his long-term interest in ethnic processes. As this book was produced when he was teaching at the university in Nitra, it reflects his need to arrange and give clearer contours to knowledge and personal experience accumulated throughout his life-long study of ethnicity. It explains terms, concepts and theoretical approaches to ethnicity and ethnic identity related issues. Furthermore, it draws a multi-ethnic picture of Slovakia taken from a historical perspective. A separate chapter deals with the problem of emigration from Slovakia.

What should not be omitted when evaluating Botík's work is his contribution to visual anthropology. He has very often worked with photograph because for him, as an author, it has always been a means of how to make information clearer. In the photo archives in the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences it is possible to come across numerous sets of documentary photographs

or just single snapshots bearing his name. For Botík, the photograph as illustrative material possesses a very precious informative value and has an enormous power to enrich or complete the text. For this reason, if he did not have enough pictorial recordings made by him to support the topic, he would borrow these complements from some other author or look them up in the funds. To obtain them may be sometimes quite adventurous as evidenced by the book on Letanovce published as *Letanovce. Dedičstvo Maroša Hadačova (Letanovce. Maroš Madačov's Heritage)*. This one is a collection of technically and artistically accomplished photos taken by Maroš Madačov, who served as a chaplain at the village in the 1930s and 1940s.

If someone can produce in the decade just before his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday nine books and is able to edit and prepare for print four other books and has published tens of scientific studies and articles, given lectures to university students and organised several exhibitions, he certainly is an example of indomitable energy, enviable vitality and admirable professional activity. Ján Botík's activities thus make everyone believe that ethnography is a discipline from which one will never retire. We firmly believe that he has made various plans for the years to come and that there are many challenging tasks waiting for him to work on. We wish him much success on his way to next achievements, contentment and good health, love and happiness for the future.

Ol'ga Danglová

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