
ON THE LIFE ANNIVERSARY OF JÁN RAJTÁR

Ján Rajtár is regarded as one of the leading figures in Slovak Roman Period archaeology. Throughout his long career at the Institute of Archaeology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, he has made fundamental and foundational contributions to the systematic research of several key sites – most notably Iža, which has been his lifelong scholarly passion.



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EDUCATION

Archaeology captured his interest from a young age, initially through his fascination with Egyptology. Between 1973 and 1978, he studied archaeology at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava, where his potential was soon recognized by Mária Novotná and Bohuslav Novotný, who helped shape his academic trajectory. Under the supervision of Prof. Mária Novotná, he prepared his master's thesis "Juhoruské stepné vplyvy v Karpatskej kotline na začiatku doby bronzovej" ("South-Russian Steppe Influences in the Carpathian Basin at the Beginning of the Bronze Age").

As a student, he was known for his communicative nature and ability to explain complex issues clearly – earning him the nickname "Ferdíš Blahuta" among classmates. He studied in a strong "cohort" that included Gertrúda Březinová (born Bahelková), Zdeněk Farkaš, Klára Führyov, Lýdia Gačková, Ivan Cheben, Ján Chovanec, Pavol Jurečko, Lubomíra Kaminská, Ivan Kuzma, Klára Kuzmová (born Buranská), Jozef Labuda, Alžbeta Maárová, Vanja Radeva, Danica Staššíková-Štukovská, Vladimír Turčan, Peter Štefanec and Mária Zacsková. The group was led by Prof. Tatiana Štefanovičová, with Ján Rajtár playing an active supporting role.

During fieldwork in Veľká Lomnica (Burchbrich site) under the supervision of Prof. Bohuslav Novotný, he met his future wife and lifelong companion, Zuzana Stegmann-Rajtárová. In 1982, after completing his rigorous examination at Comenius University, he was awarded the title PhDr. In 1998, his doctoral dissertation, "The Crisis of Roman-Germanic Relations in the Middle Danube Region in the 2nd Century", supervised by Titus Kolník, earned him the degree of Candidate of Sciences (CSc.) (Kuzmová 2019, 377).

A major milestone in his academic career was his Alexander von Humboldt Foundation fellowship, which allowed him to work at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich and the Römisch-Germanische Kommission des DAI in Frankfurt (1989–1991). This experience brought him valuable international contacts and positioned him among Europe's leading specialists in frontier archaeology.

ACADEMIC JOURNEY AT THE INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE SLOVAK ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

After completing his studies in 1978, Ján Rajtár began working at the Institute of Archaeology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Nitra. Together with his colleague Klára Kuzmová, he was appointed as a young research fellow to carry out excavations at Iža within the framework of “Operation Danube”, which was linked to the construction of the Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros Waterworks System (Kuzmová 2019, 377). Under the expert supervision of Titus Kolník, his lifelong scientific journey began, closely associated with the Roman military fort at Iža. This research continues to this day, with Ján Rajtár remaining one of its key participants.

In collaboration with Ivan Kuzma, he also participated in aerial prospection of the surrounding area and other parts of southwestern Slovakia, through which several temporary Roman camps were identified (Hanzelyová/Kuzma/Rajtár 1996). The discovery of these camps sparked his enduring interest in studying the extent of Roman military presence north of the Danube. Over time, he initiated investigations of additional temporary camps and developed international collaborations with numerous leading institutions and scholars abroad.

During his employment at the Institute of Archaeology of the SAS, he held various positions, ranging from specialist to researcher at various levels. From 1992 to 2000, he served as head of the Department of Early History and Collaborating Natural-Scientific Disciplines and was a member and later chairman of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Archaeology (2006–2011).

INTERNATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Ján Rajtár has been a regular participant in both national and international conferences, where his contributions have significantly advanced the study of the Roman Period. His colleagues particularly value his active participation in discussions, which often bring new perspectives, fundamental corrections, and inspiring ideas. He has co-organized numerous scientific conferences and symposia within the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Archaeology of the SAS, and various international projects, including the Grundprobleme der frühgeschichtlichen Entwicklung im mittleren Donauraum, Roman Military Equipment Conference, Limes Congress, and UISPP World Congress. As a member of organizational and program committees of several major European events, he also contributed to the preparation of field excursions and site presentations.

In Slovakia, he organized and coordinated professional and academic events – symposia, conferences, congresses, excursions, and exhibitions – in cooperation with museums and institutions in Komárno, Iža, Levice, Liptovský Mikuláš, and Bratislava (Slovak National Museum – Archaeological Museum).



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He also co-organized several exhibitions, both in Slovakia and abroad (in Germany, Italy, and the Czech Republic) and contributed to the public presentation of the results of archaeological research at the Roman fort in Iža. He has served in numerous professional and academic bodies, including member of the VEGA Commissions for Historical and Social Sciences, editorial boards of *Slovenská archeológia*, *Študijné zvesti AÚ SAV* and *Pamiatky a múzeá*, as well as a corresponding member of the German Archaeological Institute and the Carnuntum Jahrbuch Scientific Council (*Kuzmová 2019*, 378–379).



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GUIDING AND INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ARCHAEOLOGISTS

He has been continuously dedicated to educating new generations of archaeologists, serving as a supervisor, consultant, and reviewer of bachelor's, master's (STU, Faculty of Arts, Trnava University; Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra), and doctoral theses (Institute of Archaeology of the SAS). Additionally, he lectured as an external lecturer at the Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, from 2000 to 2001 and again in 2025. An important part of his teaching activities is the co-organization of the Summer Schools of Archaeology in Iža, in cooperation with the Department of Classical Archaeology in Trnava, through which he actively contributes to developing students' practical field experience and passes his expertise on to the younger generation.

LIMES ROMANUS AND JÁN RAJTÁR

Ján Rajtár is a leading expert on the archaeology of the Roman limes in Slovakia, known for his extensive knowledge and dedication to the field. He has worked to explain the importance of protecting and presenting Slovakia's cultural heritage. The Slovak public is familiar with him from various TV documentaries, radio broadcasts, and numerous press articles.

Due to his expertise and dedication to safeguarding Slovakia's cultural heritage, J. Rajtár played a crucial role in preparing the nomination of the Slovak section of the Limes Romanus for UNESCO World Cultural Heritage status. This effort was successfully completed in 2021, when the German-Austrian-Slovak section was added to the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List under the title "Frontiers of the Roman Empire – Danube Limes (Western Part)".

UNDERWATER TEAM

The jubilarian expressed his interest in innovative methods and his commitment to conducting daring scientific explorations in 1978 when he dived in the Danube River near the Roman military camp in Iža, alongside divers from Komárno. This experience made him one of the first diving archaeologists in Slovakia. However, the conditions and technical equipment available at the time were inadequate for such research in the Danube. His enduring passion for solving scientific challenges, combined with a supportive approach toward younger colleagues, brought Ján Rajtár back to the same location 40 years later as part of a newly formed Slovak team of underwater archaeologists. In 2022, this team successfully identified previously unknown pillars of a Roman bridge in the Danube riverbed near the Roman camp in Iža. Their achievement earned them the Discovery of the Year award from both the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS) and the Slovak Monuments Board.

BEYOND SCHOLARSHIP

Ján Rajtár is distinguished by his ambition, diligence, and deep enthusiasm for the archaeology of the Roman period. Equally remarkable are his generosity, patience, and willingness to share his experience with younger colleagues and students, whom he has guided with genuine care and encouragement. Those who have worked with him value his openness, communicative nature, and sense of humour, as well as his ability to inspire teamwork and mutual respect. His calm authority and personal integrity have made him not only a respected scholar but also a trusted mentor and friend.

He often likes to say, “The years are short!” – and his life’s work stands as the best proof that he has made the most of them.

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Miroslava Daňová, Katarína Hladíková, Branislav Kovár

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