

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2478/se-2020-0011> © Ústav etnológie a sociálnej antropológie SAV © 2020, Peter Maňo, Michal Uhrin, Monika Vrzgulová, Peter Slavkovský.
This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons



VLADIMÍR BAHNA:
**Nadprirodzené skúsenosti a naratív-
na myseľ – Sociálna nákazlivosť spo-
mienok**

[Supernatural experiences and
the narrative mind – The social
contagion of memories]

Bratislava: Institute of Ethnology and Social
Anthropology, VEDA, 2019, 207 p.

“But then it was ever harder for me to walk as if my whole body got stiff and sweaty. I was all wet. That’s when it released the fear on me. That is something terrible; it won’t even allow you to take a breath... So I kept running from there across the field. I got rid of the fear only after I reached the road again”.

Some of us might have gone through a similarly distressing experience at some point in our lives, wondering what exactly had happened. Such intense life situations, especially if mixed with an element of a presupposed supernatural presence, can lead to the creation of deeply personal and unique autobiographical memories. Nevertheless, anthropologists and ethnologists have long since been pointing out that the sort of encounters described above often exhibit remarkable structural, contextual, and contentual similarities. The question that inevitably follows enquires about the possibility of having deeply personal experiences and memories that are, nonetheless, culturally shared. Vladimír Bahna attempts to solve this puzzle in his book titled *Supernatural experiences and the narrative mind – The social contagion of memories*.¹

The book takes us to the mountainous Kysuce region of north-western Slovakia, where the author went to collect personal accounts about encounters with the supernatural (like the one cited in the opening paragraph). The sparse settlements and deep forests of the region would seem to be the right kind of environment to meet various fairies, nixes, or ghosts (which were all repeatedly mentioned by the informants cited throughout the book). However, the anthropologist rightly points out that since his interest lies in universal cognitive and cultural mechanisms, the ethnographic choice shouldn’t matter at all (although his particular choice turned out to have some distinct advantages nevertheless).

Bahna’s approach to the topic is very holistic, analytical, and systematic, which any reader with a scientific mind-set will surely appreciate. He goes step by step through the scientific evidence from various fields to support his claims, and he approaches the subject from multiple angles. I won’t exhaust the reader with an extensive overview of all the particulars (for that, I recommend reading the actual book), but instead, I will restrict myself to discussing those parts I consider the most original and important contributions.

To start, it needs to be highlighted that Bahna is not interested in the actual truthfulness value of his informants’ narratives – in other words, he is not judging whether they are telling the truth as it objectively happened. In fact, he is correct in asserting that this is virtually impossible to do ethnographically. Even though for an audience coming from the cognitive sciences this is axiomatic, for the rest of the readers, it can’t be stressed enough.

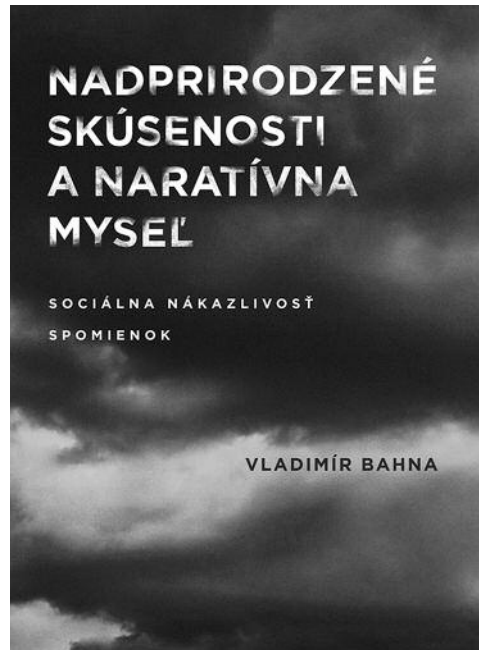
¹ The creation of this paper was supported through project VEGA 2/0102/19 *Kolektívne rituály ako nástroj sociálnej regulácie* (Collective rituals as a tool of social regulation).

What matters to the author is to understand what conditions – psychological, cultural, environmental, or physiological, lead to the emergence and spread of a personal narrative – a memorate, in the first place.

Cognitive science of religion may offer some insights into why certain kinds of beliefs are attractive to human minds. Due to their specific properties such as minimally violating our ontological expectations, supernatural beliefs, in particular, are very attention-grabbing. However, Bahna argues that this is not enough to make them memorable and popular. He adds that for beliefs to be culturally successful, they need to tap into our teleological mind-set and the tendency to constantly look for agency behind things that are happening around us. He further explains that humans think as “intuitive prosecutors”, as they tend to favour causality and intentionality when witnessing events in the environment. In the case of supernatural beliefs, the element of agency (and the derived intentional action) provides a causal denouement to otherwise purely counter-intuitive representations. By doing so, the inferential potential of said beliefs grows substantially – just compare the image of a static ghost with no mental states and a ghost that engages with people and has motivations and desires.

Supernatural beliefs thus reflect our tendency to interpret things that happen to or around us in terms of a narrative, Bahna claims. Moreover, he adds that the narrative mode of thinking dominates our reasoning, at the cost of analytical thinking. This claim has very strong implications for various areas of our lives, such as our legal systems or the judges’ ruling in courts, e.g. The intuitive tendency to see intentional action even in situations where it is not present, which can be evolutionarily advantageous as the author rightly remarks, can increase the risk of mis-attributing intentionality to otherwise truly disengaged agents. To put it simply, innocent people can get convicted in trials for crimes they didn’t commit due to the judges’ cognitive biases. Even though this wasn’t a focal topic for the book, the author could have highlighted some such societal implications (Peer & Gamliel, 2013; Weinstein, 2002).

However, for the narratives to become cul-



turally relevant they need to be communicated. Bahna introduces the epidemiological approach to explain how narratives can spread, as he sees them both as communicative acts (public representations) and personal stories (mental representations). He borrows Sperber’s idea of cultural attractors (Sperber, 1996) to illustrate how certain “ideal forms” of narratives can act as “role models” for various personal accounts. In any particular social group, the peoples’ different memorates oscillate around the ideal forms, deviating from it in one way or another. Importantly, the relationship goes both ways – not only do the cultural attractors affect personal experiences and memories, but the reverse is also true – if I communicate my or someone else’s story, this can affect the associated cultural narrative.

Various interacting factors can result in the feeling of a supernatural presence, such as the environmental conditions (e.g., darkness), the current emotional, physical, and psychological state (e.g., exhaustion), or the adopted cultural models (local cultural narratives about supernatural agents). Once some combination of these conditions occurs and one happens to experience encountering a supernatural agent (or recalls it as such in future remembering),

the happening needs to be shared with others to become a cultural narrative. Successful communication of the said experience depends largely on one being a reliable source. In the author's field site, the most quoted sources were family members, friends or neighbours, and local authorities. Furthermore, the most trusted form of narratives about supernatural encounters in Kysuce have been personal testimonies. Bahna concludes that the need for personal testimony for a story to be believed and shared puts a limitation on its reach. It essentially means that the further from the source the testimony gets, the less likely it is to outlive the transmission – unless it is supported by a new, comparable memorate.

Interestingly, Juraj Franek (2017) looked at different techniques of epistemic justification of supernatural claims and found that in early Christianity these were often warranted via personal prophecies. Similarly to memorates, prophecies were transmitted as personal testimonies which gained their credibility from the source – the prophet, or the messenger (which wasn't always the same person). Both kinds of testimonies thus use per hominem argumentation (evoking the authority of the source) to support the truthfulness of the message, rather than relying on the propositional quality of the message as being true. Moreover, both kinds of testimonies are examples of narratives that mostly run alongside or counter local religious traditions.

Last, but not least, the author discusses the phenomenon of false memories, an integral part of human memory according to the cited scholarship. He continues that even autobiographical memories can include a body of "false" memories that are beyond human reflective capacities. Through the processes of exposure to and communication of narratives, one's own experiences can gradually be infiltrated with changes to memories or with entirely new segments. Very often, these processes are further reinforced when the narratives elicit a strong emotional response. With every recollection and reconstruction of past events, memorates thus contribute to narrative change. Again, moving beyond the scope of the book, one has to wonder how, for example, the police force deals with the issue of false

memories when gaining witness testimonies, or in what way this issue is dealt with in court hearings (Stein, 2003).

Memorates are therefore a place where tradition can run hand in hand with change, and where the personal and idiosyncratic meets the cultural and conformist. Bahna's book offers us a very illustrative and convincing glimpse at these processes, with a little mystical, supernatural element. Hence, if you ever wonder about the accuracy of your memories, or if you'd like to understand how you came to remember encountering a supernatural agent, you better start by reading through this book.

REFERENCES

- Franek, J. (2017). *Naturalismus a protekcionismus ve studiu náboženství* [Naturalism and Protectionism in the Study of Religions]. Brno: Filozofická fakulta, Masarykova univerzita.
- Peer, E., Gamliel, E. (2013). Heuristics and biases in judicial decisions. *Court Review*, 49, 114–118.
- Sperber, D. (1996). *Explaining Culture*, Blackwell.
- Stein, E. (2003). The admissibility of expert testimony about cognitive science research on eyewitness identification. *Law, Probability and Risk*, 2(4), 295–303.
- Weinstein, I. (2002). Don't Believe Everything You Think: Cognitive Bias in Legal Decision Making. *Clinical Law Review*, 9, 783–834.

PETER MAŇO,

Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava
 LEVYNA, *Department for the Study of Religions, Masaryk University, Brno*

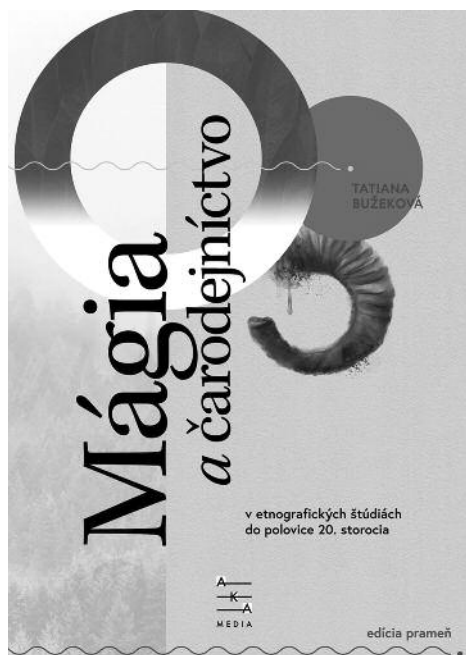
TATIANA BUŽEKOVÁ:

Mágia a čarodejníctvo v etnografických štúdiách do polovice 20. storočia
[*Magic and Witchcraft in the ethnographies until the mid-20th century*]
Bratislava: AKAMedia 2019, 372 p.

INTRODUCTION²

Magic and witchcraft belong to the most frequent topics of anthropological, ethnological and folkloristic research and have been investigated by many scholars who used various methods. Tatiana Bužeková's book *Magic and witchcraft in ethnographies until the mid-20th century* is an inspiring contribution to the field of anthropology / ethnology of religion.

The book offers an overview of the most influential ethnographic studies on magic beliefs and practices in Britain, France, Germany, the United States, Russia and Slovakia from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. The initial point of this time interval corresponds to the establishment of the scientific field of socio-cultural anthropology in Britain; in the political sphere it was marked by the constitution of modern nations in Europe. The author concludes the analysis in the mid-twentieth century, the time of global political transformation which influenced the development of science. In the West, the collapse of the colonial system led to a change of the object of research in anthropology. At the same time, the ideology of Marxism-Leninism became the dominant theoretical framework of the social sciences in several countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Slovakia. Bužeková argues that in a broader sense the selected studies on magic and witchcraft reflect the basic ideas of the first anthropological and ethnological theories as well as the understanding of the object of ethnological, anthropological and folkloristic research in different historical, social and cultural *zeitgeist*. Below I will briefly describe the structure and the content of the book. Then I will consider how the author fulfils her objectives and will give general conclusions on the nature of the book.



CONTENT OF THE BOOK

The first chapter *Magic and Thinking* (pages 29–50) focuses on the first anthropological theory that originated in Britain in the 1870s. The author considers the works of its representatives, the “fathers of modern anthropology” Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) and James George Frazer (1854–1941). Tylor and Frazer provided explanations of magical ideas and practices that are embedded into the theoretical framework called *evolutionism* – which focused on the origins of cultural elements, the gradual historical development of human societies, and the reconstruction of history of cultures. The second chapter *Magic and Society* (pages 51–84) addresses works of the French sociological school which offered the explanation of “primitive mentality” and played an essential role in the development of anthropology and ethnology. The author considers the theory of Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) and the works of Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) and Henri Hubert (1872–1927) who belonged to the Durkheimian school. She also analyses the work of philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939) who contributed to research on

2 This text was created as output within the grant project MŠ SR VEGA č. 2/0102/19 *Kolektívne rituály ako nástroj sociálnej regulácie* (Collective rituals as a mechanism of social regulation).

magic and also played an important role in the debate on “primitive mentality”.

In the third chapter *Magic and Function* (pages 85–128) the author presents the works of British anthropologists who initiated the theoretical direction of *functionalism*. This trend of thought was influenced by Durkheim's works and reflected significant changes in the methodology of anthropological research. In the first half of the twentieth century long-term field research became a standard method of socio-cultural anthropology. Bužeková focuses on the works of William H. R. Rivers (1864 – 1922), Bronislaw K. Malinowski (1884 – 1942) and Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881 – 1955). The chapter concludes with an interpretation of one of the most important and influential anthropological works on magic and sorcery *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (1937) written by Edward E. Evans-Pritchard (1902 – 1973).

The fourth chapter *Magic and Mythology* (pages 129–182) presents the early research on folk culture in German-speaking countries, Russia and Slovakia. The common roots of the mentioned traditions lay in the ideas of German Romanticism (Bužeková, 2019: 25). The object of research in romantic concepts was delimited by specific national cultures. From the outset of the discipline, folkloristics has often been linked to political movements. Therefore, it has become part of Europe's political history. In the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, folkloristics played an important role: it helped to identify the nation – the organic whole, whose members were linked by language and a common historical past. The author focuses on how the same idea – the search for the past of a nation in oral tradition or folklore – was manifested in three scientific traditions. Firstly, she addresses the *German mythological school* and then considers how its ideas were subsequently developed in Russia and Slovakia (Bužeková, 2019: 135).

The fifth chapter *Magic and Psychology* (pages 183–230) analyses anthropological research on magic and witchcraft in the United States of America. The American cultural anthropology also had intellectual roots in the ideas of German Romanticism, but, similarly to anthropology in Britain and France, focused on

“others” – the indigenous inhabitants of both Americas (Bužeková, 2019: 25–26). The chapter begins with analysis of the work and life of Franz Boas (1858 – 1942). Subsequently, the author explores how Boas' ideas were developed in the work of his student Ruth Benedict (1887 – 1948) who brilliantly linked her teacher's ideas to contemporary psychological theories. At the end of the chapter the author addresses the work on witchcraft by Clyde Kluckhohn (1905 – 1960) who also contributed to the field of psychological anthropology but belonged to a different anthropological school with a centre at Harvard University.

In the sixth chapter *Magic and Nation* (pages 231–282) Bužeková presents two lines of development in Russian ethnography which focused on the magic beliefs and practices of the Slavic and non-Slavic nations of the Russian Empire. Early Russian ethnography was influenced by German academic tradition, but later developed in a specific way, influenced by the conditions of the huge empire and its diverse population. The chapter concludes with the description of the ideological change that occurred after the Great October Revolution in 1917 and led to the establishment of the Soviet ethnographic school. One of the strengths of the author's approach is in paying attention to the works and lives of authors who are less known to the western audience than their British, American and French counterparts, for instance, Vladimir Bogoraz (1865 – 1936) who played an important role in the development of ethnography in Russia.

In the last, seventh, chapter *Magic and Folklore* (pages 284–325), the focus lays on the development and history of ethnography in Slovakia. Since the end of the nineteenth century, ethnography in Slovakia has been predominantly a descriptive discipline. Change occurred in 1930s when this field was influenced by structuralist theory originating in linguistics and folkloristics. This development led to a shift in theoretical focus, which unfortunately did not last long. After the socialist party came to power in the late 1940s, the unified theoretical-ideological platform of the Soviet ethnographic school began to dominate in Slovak ethnography. In the academic sphere this meant the ideologization of social sciences and humanities in accordance with the

Soviet model and the ideology of Marxism-Leninism (Bužeková, 2019: 26, 284).

Bužeková argues that research on magic beliefs and practices at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can serve as an example of the overall shift in Slovak ethnology from romanticizing tendencies to a rationalist focus and attempt to connect ethnographic research with natural sciences. Folk culture and folklore remained the *leitmotif* of Slovak ethnography. The main research methodology consisted of precise collection of empirical data and subsequent classification (Bužeková, 2019: 325).

CONCLUSION

Let me first reiterate that the book offers an overview of the most influential ethnographic studies of magic and witchcraft in Britain, France, Germany, United States, Russia and Slovakia from the mid nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century. However, this overview is not encyclopaedic in nature. The book is not structured as a long overview with many names and titles, where each author is given only a *few lines to speak*. Bužeková chooses the path of detailed analysis and focuses on the most important works of each period. Her aim is to illustrate the key moments in the development and history of anthropology, ethnology and folkloristics on the example of theoretical approaches to the analysis of magic and witchcraft. The goal set up in introduction is fulfilled to its full extent.

The author states that the book is in a broad sense intended for two groups of readers (Bužeková, 2019: 12). The first consists of all those, ranging from academics to ordinary people, interested in folklore, witchcraft, supernatural belief and magic. For these readers, the book offers a clear and logically consistent way of getting an overview of these classical topics of anthropological and ethnological research. The second group are students of ethnology and social anthropology, for which this book can serve as a textbook on the subject. As highlighted by the author, anthropological and ethnological explanations of magic reflect not only the development of scientific theories in anthropology and ethnology, but also the development of scientific traditions in concrete socio-cultural and histo-

rical conditions in general (Bužeková, 2019: 2). The author also pays attention to the changes in the methodology of research that have occurred in social and cultural anthropology, ethnology, ethnography and folkloristics. For these reasons *Magic and witchcraft* represents an excellent and well written textbook for all students of ethnology and anthropology.

Another prerogative is that the author pays attention to researchers who are sometimes left behind or not given enough attention in books of a similar nature (e.g. Kanovský, 2004; Malík, 2008; Soukup, 2004, 2011). Among many, we can mention the works of William Rivers *Medicine, Magic and Religion* (1924) and Czech ethnographer Jozef Čižmár's *Folk Medicine in Czechoslovakia* (1946).

Bužeková does not metaphorically leave individual authors sitting alone in their chapters. Through the whole book she goes back and forth and refers to their works and ideas, compares and correlates individual works and arguments. The whole book thus represents a logical, interconnected and meticulously researched entity.

In addition to the main part of the text, the book contains a glossary of basic terms and short medallions of the authors with biographic information. The basic terms, such as ethnology, anthropology, epistemology, agnosticism, enlightenment, or evolutionism, are considered in detail in the broader context of the history of scientific research. They are explained when they first appear in the author's argument. A glossary of terms and information about the authors adds to the depth and clarity of argument.

Bužeková provides the reader with plenty of complex information about the context of historical and political events (e.g. the French revolution, the First and the Second World Wars, the Great October Socialist Revolution) and their influence on the development of ethnography, ethnology, folkloristics and socio-cultural anthropology. The ideas and works of researchers are presented in the light of the social and political context of their time. Such an approach allows the reader to understand more comprehensively different theoretical concepts. The uniqueness of the book is in the way of the author's analysis. By following one theme across several different intellectual tra-

ditions the argument stretches as a logical thread across the entire work. Tatiana Bužeková's book *Magic and witchcraft in ethnographies until the mid-20th century* deserves attention from students of ethnology, anthropology to experts and scholars alike.

REFERENCES

- Bužeková, T. (2019). *Mágia a čarodejníctvo v etnografických štúdiách do polovice 20. storočia*. Bratislava: AKAMedia.
- Čižmář, J. (1946). *Lidové lékařství v Československu*. Brno: Melantrich.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. ([1937] 1976). *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kanovský, M. (2004). *Kultúrna a sociálna antropológia. Osobnosti a teórie*. Bratislava: Chronos.
- Malík, B. (2008). *Úvod do antropológie. Základné antropofémy v dejinách antropologického myslenia*. Bratislava: Iris.
- Rivers, W. ([1915-1916] 1924). *Medicine, Magic, and Religion*. London: Kegan Paul.
- Soukup, V. (2004). *Dejiny Antropologie*. Praha: Karolinum.
- Soukup, V. (2011). *Antropologie: teorie člověka a kultury*. Praha: Portál.

MICHAL UHRIN,

*Department of Ethnology and Museology,
Faculty of Arts,
Comenius University in Bratislava*

JÁN HLAVINKA, PETER SALNER
(Eds.):

**Tábor smrti Sobibor. Dejiny a odkaz.
[Sobibor Death Camp. History and
Legacy]**

*Bratislava: Institute of Ethnology SAS,
DSH, Marenčin PT, 2019, 256 p.*

In Slovakia, the Holocaust became a topic of both expert and public discourse after the fall of Communism in November 1989. Academics (historians and social scientists) have for thirty years attempted to analyse and interpret historical documents, sources created in the state and government institutions, as well as ego-documents – written or spoken (auto)biographies of individuals. The qualitative research, which focused on the communicative memory of the groups that were the actors of this historical phenomenon especially from among victims, rescuers and the audience, offers a “bottom-up” view of this rich mosaic of knowledge. Since the mid-1990s, recorded narratives of Jewish witnesses of the Holocaust have also existed in Slovakia, and have gradually become part of the collective memory of this historical period and phenomenon. Researchers from the ranks of historians and social scientists focus on the reconstruction of processes that took place in the territory of the former Slovak state in the context of the events in Europe.

Even though focused research has already been carried out for almost three decades, several blank spots remain. For example, in connection with the Holocaust, the territory of present-day southern and eastern Slovakia, which fell to Horthy's Hungary after the Vienna Award in 1938, as well as the territories that fell to Nazi Germany (Petržalka, Devín, and the surroundings) or were under its control (protection zone strip on the western border with the former Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia) have been scientifically little explored. Scientific knowledge on the Slovak forms of the Holocaust and the labour and

3 The first scientific monograph on the camp in Nováky, written by Igor Baka, was published almost 20 years ago (Baka, 2001); this was followed by the publishing of the book by Ján Hlavinka and Eduard Nižňanský on the camp in Sereď (Hlavinka, Nižňanský, 2009).

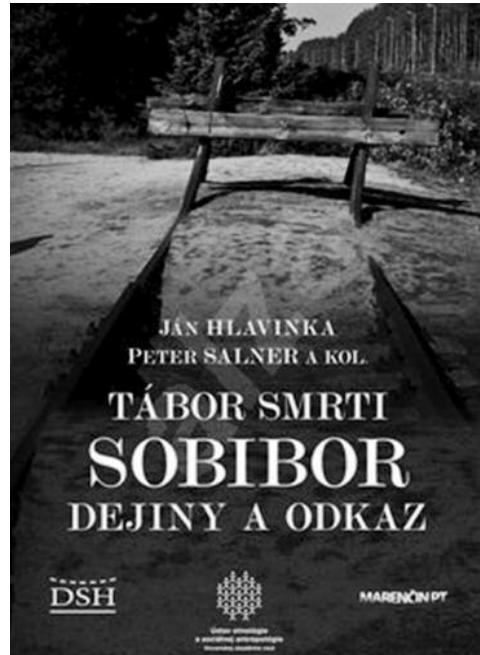
concentration camps³ in the territory of the wartime Slovak state reached the broad audience gradually, also thanks to films produced by documentarists,⁴ or after the opening of the permanent exhibition of the Holocaust Museum at the former camp site in Sereď in 2016.

There are still many unknown or undisclosed facts, events and locations related to the Slovak Holocaust story in public discourse. One such blank spot in the map of knowledge is awareness about the Sobibor Nazi extermination camp.

The Auschwitz – Birkenau Nazi camp became a symbol of the fates of the Jewish population from the wartime Slovak state. Why? Most probably because the Sobibor camp was liquidated by its creators before the end of World War II, because there was a minimum number of survivors from this camp, and because only a fraction of them spread their testimonies. It should be noted, though, that in 1942, two thirds of the transports within the first wave of deportations from Slovakia went to the Lublin area where this Nazi camp was situated.

This was certainly one of the reasons why a book on this Nazi camp was published in collaboration with the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology SAS and the Holocaust Documentation Centre. After over 75 years following the prisoners' rebellion in the Sobibor camp and subsequent liquidation and dismantling of this extermination camp, the first scientific collective monograph about this camp, published in Slovakia, has reached both experts and the general audience.

As noted by the book editors and authors, their objective was to present existing knowledge about the camp and, at the same time, honour the memory of the people who died there. I think they managed to fulfil their aim. The team of international authors consists of historians and ethnologists. They present important findings about the camps from the various aspects of their research. The book is divided into two parts. The first one deals with the history of the camp, while the second is about the memory of the camp and its prisoners, as well as the ways the Holocaust is re-



membered, denied or trivialised by present-day Slovak society. The texts are organised so that the reader learns at the beginning about the wider contemporary context of the events that led to the creation of the Sobibor camp, reads about its functioning and its place in the machinery of the mass murdering of European Jews, up to its role in the Slovak story of the Holocaust.

The historical part consists of articles by excellent, internationally recognised experts in this field. I would like to make a critical remark here: it is a pity that a non-professional reader who has no idea that the texts were written by genuine experts does not get this information in the form of short texts about the authors.

David Silberklang is a world-renowned expert specialised, among other things, in the Holocaust of the Lublin area. He published the monograph *Gates of Tears: The Holocaust in the Lublin District* (Silberklang, 2013). In his chapter in the *Sobibor Death Camp* book, he explains the context of the camp's construction as part of the Operation Reinhard. He uses the sources created both by the Nazi perpetrators and the Jewish victims. The text

4 Tábor tieňov (The Camp of Shadows) (2013); Zachor, Pamätaj (Zachor, Remember) (2018).

thus acquires dynamism and brings little known information about, for example, the ways of communication and dissemination of contemporary messages among the Jewish population in this area, about their strategies and efforts to resist or save themselves. This chapter undoubtedly presents new information to Slovak readers.

Tomasz Oleksy-Zborowski, Head of the Sobibor Museum and Place of Remembrance, a specialist working directly at this authentic place of memory, writes in his text about those who designed and put into operation the Sobibor camp and were responsible for its functioning as part of the mass murdering of Jews. He describes in detail the construction and internal arrangement of the extermination camp, writes about its staff, the transports that ended there, as well as the mechanism of mass murdering that took place there. He notes that, apart from murdering, this place suffered a huge theft of the victims' belonging, and writes about the camp prisoners, their work, attempts to escape and their resistance. He also deals with the rebellion in the camp which eventually led to its closing. Finally, he mentions the post-war complications in creating the place of remembrance in situ. He also provides short information about the archaeological research that has been carried out since 2001. He closes the chapter with a brief presentation of the three main actors of the prisoners' rebellion in Sobibor.

The next chapter was written by *Sara Berger*, author of an exceptional book on people involved in the mass murdering of mentally ill people directly in Nazi Germany under Operation T4 and later in the Nazi camps in Belzec, Treblinka a Sobibor (Berger, 2013). She attempted to provide a collective biography of the perpetrators from the Sobibor extermination camp. She describes their work activities before Sobibor, their origin (geographical, social), age, education, religious beliefs, and political membership. She reflects on the potential motivations for their involvement in the mass murdering. At the end of her chapter, she offers a typology of these perpetrators and

outlines how the post-war judicial processes affected the members of the Sobibor camp staff.

Dieter Pohl focuses in his research on the war crimes and mass murders in Nazi-occupied Poland, Ukraine and Russia. Since 2007, he has been the editor of 16 volumes of documents on the persecution and murdering of European Jews; in 2019, he co-edited the first volume of the European Holocaust Studies entitled Right-Wing Politics and the Rise of Antisemitism in Europe 1935–1941 (Bajohr, Pohl, 2019). In the book chapter, he deals with the judicial processes with the perpetrators from Sobibor, following the course of the trials outside Germany and mainly with the non-German members of the auxiliary guard units – the so-called Trawniki Männer. He critically compares them to the post-war prosecution of the German staff within the then Western Germany.

Based on the research by his foreign colleagues and particularly his recent research, Slovak historian *Ján Hlavinka* reconstructed the fates of the Jews who were deported from the wartime Slovak state to the Lublin area in 1942. He tracked them based on written documents, survivors' testimonies recorded during World War II, records after the war as well as oral history research decades after the end of the war. By means of a comparison and analysis of the sources, he managed to confirm the thesis that, during the Holocaust, the largest number of Jews was murdered in the Sobibor extermination camp.

The author of the next chapter, *Lukáš Příbyl*, a political scientist and philosopher, is also known in Slovakia as the director of the four-part documentary series *Zapomenuté transporty* (Forgotten Transports) (on the little known transports of Jews to Eastern Poland and the Baltic),⁵ for which he won a Czech Lion Award in 2009. In his chapter, he offers his researcher's reflections from his repeated visits to Lublin and its surroundings, where he collected materials for Part 4 of his film document. His research focused on the search and collection of contemporary pictures of the sites pre-

5 *Zapomenuté transporty do Estonska* (Forgotten Transports to Estonia) (2007), *Zapomenuté transporty do Lotyšska* (Forgotten Transports to Latvia) (2007), *Zapomenuté transporty do Běloruska* (Forgotten Transports to Belarus) (2008), *Zapomenuté transporty do Polska* (Forgotten Transports to Poland) (2010).

sented in the film. In his chapter, he offers the memories of Polish inhabitants, eyewitnesses of the Holocaust in this region. They spoke about the fates of Jewish prisoners in the local ghettos, work units and extermination camps near their homes. His text consists of strong testimonies as well as his own reflections and interpretations of his findings.

Based on her long-term internet research (she published a monograph on this topic, entitled *Conspiracy Theories: Themes, Historical Contexts and Argumentation Strategies*, 2017), ethnologist *Zuzana Panczová* reflects on the current forms of Holocaust denial and conspiracy theories related to the Holocaust. She presents conspiracy theories as a genre and through selected fragments from internet discussions she observes the argumentation lines and their relation to various discourses and ideologies.

The author of the last chapter is ethnologist *Peter Salner*, who dealt with the reflections on the Holocaust in present-day Slovak society. In his short excursion to the period before 1989, which he considers a milestone in the context of this topic, he mentions the first attempt to break the silence – The Declarations on Deportations of 1987. He reflects on the motives of intellectuals and representatives of the Catholic dissent who signed it, and outlines the contemporary reaction of the Jewish community representatives. He follows the creation of the Holocaust memory after the fall of the Communist regime, which he split into four categories: reflections of the bystanders – victims – perpetrators and rescuers. He notes that the existing differences in opinions on the Holocaust period reflect the composition of Slovak society in 1939–1945. In his opinion, it is evident that the Holocaust phenomenon still divides Slovakia's society.

The first scientific monograph on the Sobibor extermination Nazi camp brings to the Slovak readers new scientific knowledge on its history, functioning and end, as well as on its place in the collective memory of Slovak society. As noted by one of the editors in the concluding part of the publication, dynamic

research is still carried out, including directly in situ, as well as archaeological and anthropologic research and attempts to adequately transform this authentic site to a place of remembrance. These involve many academics⁶ as well as politicians from the countries concerned (Poland, Germany, Slovakia, The Netherlands, Israel). Last-year's world congress "The Holocaust in Europe. Special Lessons and Legacies" in Munich⁷ provided space to the representatives of several scientific disciplines, who presented their recent research on this former Nazi camp.

Scientists have not yet closed the research of this tragic chapter that constitutes part of the Holocaust history of Europe and, hence, of our country. The reviewed book is a good example of how an interdisciplinary international team can offer readers a qualitatively new, comprehensive text that provides answers and raises new questions.

The monograph on the Sobibor camp demonstrates the importance of interdisciplinary research on the Holocaust. The memory-oriented qualitative research of the Sobibor Nazi camp draws attention also to present-day societies of Slovakia and Poland, and to the mechanisms of remembering and forgetting as instruments of recollection policies, as well as to the construction of a communicative and cultural memory of both countries and of wider Europe. The book is a Slovak contribution to the international discussion not only on the Nazi camp as such and on its place in the memory of the European community, but also on the current attitudes to the Holocaust legacy and European values.

MONIKA VRZGULOVÁ,
*Institute of Ethnology and Social
Anthropology in Bratislava*

REFERENCES

Bajohr, F., Pohl, D. (Eds.) (2019). *Right-Wing Politics and the Rise of Antisemitism in Europe 1935–1941* (European Holocaust Studies Book 1), Wallstein Verlag.

6 For example, Raphael Utz (2019) or Hannah Wilson (2019).

7 The agenda included a panel on Commemorating Sobibór since 1960: Four Transnational Case Studies. For more details see: <https://www.ifz-muenchen.de/zentrum-fuer-holocaust-studien/lessons-legacies/>.

- Baka, I. (2001). *Židovský tábor v Novákoch 1941 – 1944*. Bratislava: Zing Print.
- Berger, S. (2013). *Experten der Vernichtung. Das T4-Reinhardt-Netzwerk in den Lagern Belzec, Sobibor und Treblinka* (Studien zur Gewaltgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts). Hamburger Edition.
- Hlavinka, J., Nižňanský, E. (2009). *Pracovný a koncentračný tábor v Seredi 1941 – 1945*. Bratislava: Holocaust Documentation Centre.
- Panczová, Z. (2017). *Konšpiračné teórie: témy, historické kontexty a argumentačné stratégie*. Bratislava: VEDA.
- Silberklang, D. (2013). *Gates of Tears: the Holocaust in the Lublin District*. Yad Vashem Publications.
- Utz, R. (2019). Sobibór nach den Deutschen: Vom Tatort zum Friedhof? In: S. Lehnstaedt, R. Traba (Eds.). *Die „Aktion Reinhardt“: Geschichte und Gedenken*, Berlin (291–313).
- Wilson, H. (2019). Sobibór death camp: awareness, memorialisation and re-conceptualization. *Holocaust studies*, 25:3, 400–421, DOI: 10.1080/17504902.2019.1567675.

Films:

- Tábor tieňov (The Camp of Shadows) (2013). 45 min.
- Zachor – pamätaj (Zachor – Remember) (2018). Directed by Lubo Stacho, Lubica Stacho, 55 min.
- Zapomenuté transporty do Estonska (Forgotten Transports to Estonia) (2007). Directed by Lukáš Příbyl. 85 min.
- Zapomenuté transporty do Lotyšska (Forgotten Transports to Latvia) (2007). Directed by Lukáš Příbyl. 85 min.
- Zapomenuté transporty do Běloruska (Forgotten Transports to Belarus) (2008). Directed by Lukáš Příbyl. 85 min.
- Zapomenuté transporty do Polska (Forgotten Transports to Poland) (2010). Directed by Lukáš Příbyl. 85 min.

IVETA ZUSKINOVÁ:

Ovčiari na Slovensku

[Shepherds in Slovakia]

Society of Friends of the Liptov Village Museum, supported by the Slovak Arts Council. Liptovský Mikuláš 2020, 221 p.

Since the times of early feudalism, sheep farming has been part of the life of the generations of people living in Slovakia. Autochthonous sheep breeding in lowlands has enriched mountain breeding that has penetrated the territory of today's Slovakia and its mountainous areas since the 14th century. With its organisation, it fits the natural, economic and social conditions of these regions and has acquired specific cultural features throughout the centuries of its existence.

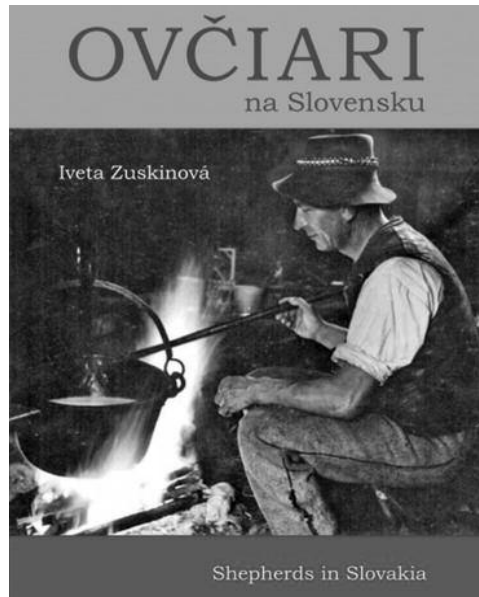
Proportionately to the economic importance of both forms of sheep farming, other manifestations of the traditional culture of many generations of Slovakia's inhabitants have developed as well. The original peasant population adopted several elements of the shepherding culture and enriched with them its way of life and culture. In addition to the economic benefits of sheep breeding, unique pastoral songs and dances were created, as well as musical instruments and objects of shepherds' carving art or shepherds' clothing with characteristic features of the shepherd status – metal ornaments, sticks and shepherd's hatchets. All this constitutes a significant part of the Slovak folk art. Many of them have become important elements of Slovakia's cultural heritage in the field of material, social, spiritual and art culture.

Sheep farming as a cultural phenomenon also raised the interest of ethnographers, historians, and linguists in the past. In the beginning of the 19th century, Ján Čaplovič (1780–1847), the founder of Slovak ethnography, requested in his outline of the ethnographic monographs of Hungary the research and documentation of such manifestations of contemporary material culture that bore attributes of “ethnic specificity”, including sheep-farming (Čaplovič, 1997). Researchers' interest in this phenomenon culminated in the 20th century. The research focused not only on the material manifestations of sheep-farming, but

also on its impacts on social, spiritual and art culture, as well as linguistics. It was specifically the scientific production by J. Podolák, J. Štika, A. Habovštiak, A. Kavuljak, J. Koma, V. Kováč, J. Král, J. Olejník, J. Stanislav, and others (Slavkovský, 2012, 31–45). The author of the monograph was inspired mainly by the scientific works by J. Podolák.⁸

Sheep-farming as the subject of scientific interest became part of extensive collective works published by the Institute of Ethnology SAS: *Slovensko. Lud – druhá časť* [Slovakia. The People – Part II] (1975), *Etnografický atlas Slovenska* [The Ethnographic Atlas of Slovakia] (1990), *Encyklopédia ľudovej kultúry Slovenska* [Encyclopaedia of Slovakia's Folk Culture] (1995), and the monographs *Slovensko. Európske kontexty ľudovej kultúry* [Slovakia. The European Contexts of Folk Culture] (2000). An opportunity for a comparative study of this topic was offered by the Subcommittee for Pastoralism of the International Committee for the Study of Folk Culture in the Carpathians and the Balkans (ICSFCCB).

Certainly, I. Zuskinová also had to describe in her book many phenomena of the shepherding culture which had already been described in the works by other authors, but also in her own studies and books on the Liptov region and its shepherding culture (Zuskinová, 1999; Zuskinová, 2017; Zuskinová, 2018). It was necessary to conduct a comparison in heuristics. The author thus managed to complete and complement data on shepherding in Slovakia, which represents an important factual background of the monograph and can thus be considered a synthesis of the topic and a considerable contribution to the thesaurus of knowledge on Slovakia's cultural heritage in the Central European context (see the works by Hořub-Pacwicowa, 1931, 1933–34, and Štika, 1958, 2007, cited in the book). The reader of the monograph will appreciate the comprehensive perspective and explanation of the importance of this topic for the economic and social history of Slovakia. What can be considered the major benefit is the author's attempt to offer as much information as possible not only about the subject (organisation of



sheep breeding, life in a shepherd's hut (salaš), technology for sheep milk processing, necessary tools, building culture, shepherd's craft, etc.), but also about the topics of shepherding research – individuals as well as entire families have for generations been engaged in this traditional activity. Shepherds, too, represent the subject of interest of I. Zuskinová's long-term scientific work. She perceives them as an important social group of the given period, with its own social and cultural dimension. The book includes contemporary photographs and testimonies by witnesses whose narrations enrich the text and make it authentic.

In her monograph, I. Zuskinová also presents museum objects with shepherding themes. Compared to its functionality in its natural social and cultural environment, a museum object changes its "habitus" in the museum – using the term by P. Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1998). It is no longer a necessary thing or part of daily life, but it begins to tell a story of its creator and user. It can tell our contemporaries a lot about the lives of shepherds, traditional craftsmen – blacksmiths, wheelwrights, potters, weavers, lace makers, as well as rural naturalists. The stories of their lives can be very interesting and instructive also for the present "digital" generation. In addition, it is a

8 For example, *Tradičné ovčiarstvo na Slovensku (Traditional Sheep-Farming in Slovakia)* (Podolák, 1982).

professionally effective way of storing information on this part of the cultural heritage along with adequate linguistic richness, the semantic value of which gradually disappears from our spoken language. It can be said that the monograph will also be an invitation to visit museums.

The monograph presents comprehensive and illustrative information on shepherds' lives and on the historical forms and traditions of this interesting social group, as well as on its contemporary significance for the local and regional community. It is also an example of an economically and culturally positive relationship between man and animal and its position in the way of life of a particular community. The English annotation of the key topics of the book with pictures makes the publication interesting also for appreciative foreign visitors of Slovakia.

I consider the monograph by I. Zuskinová *Ovčiarci na Slovensku* [Shepherds in Slovakia] a great contribution to the knowledge of Slovakia's history – its economic, social and cultural contexts.

PETER SLAVKOVSKÝ,
Bratislava

REFERENCES

Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Teorie jednání*. Karolinum, Prague.
Čaplovič, J. (1997). *Etnografia Slovákov v Uhorsku*. The manuscript was translated and the comments and epilogue were written by

R. Brtáň. Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo, Bratislava.
Encyklopédia ľudovej kultúry Slovenska (1995). VEDA, Bratislava.
Etnografický atlas Slovenska (1990). VEDA, Slovenská kartografia, n.p., Národopisný ústav SAV, Bratislava (Institute of Ethnography SAS).
Hoľub-Pacewiczova, Z. (1931). *Osadnictwo pasterskie i wędrowki w Tatrach i na Podtatrze*, Krakov.
Hoľub-Pacewiczova, Z. (1933–34). Pastierstvo v Nížkych Tatrách. *Zborník MSS*, 27–28, 94–156.
Podolák, J. (1982). *Tradičné ovčiarstvo na Slovensku*. VEDA, Bratislava.
Slavkovský, P. (2020). *Slovenská etnografia – kompendium vedného odboru*. VEDA, Bratislava.
Slovensko. Európske kontexty ľudovej kultúry (2000). VEDA, Bratislava.
Slovensko. Lud-druhá časť (1975). Obzor, Bratislava.
Štika, V. (1958). Salašnické ustájovanie dobytka a košárování na moravskoslovenském pomezí, *Český lid*, 45(2), 64–77.
Štika, V. (2007). *Valaši a Valašsko*. VMP Rožnov pod Radhoštěm.
Zuskinová, I. (1999). *Ovčiarstvo a salašníctvo v Liptove*. Spol. priateľov Múzea liptovskej dediny.
Zuskinová, I. (2017). *Črpký tradičné a súčasné*. Spol. priateľov Múzea liptovskej dediny.
Zuskinová, I. (2018). *Ovčiarstvo v Liptove*. Spoločnosť priateľov Múzea liptovskej dediny, Liptovský Mikuláš.