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ZUZANA PANCZOVÁ, GABRIELA KILIÁNOVÁ, TOMÁŠ KUBISA:  
Národopis na Slovensku v službách Tretej ríše  
[Ethnography in Slovakia in the Service of the Third Reich]  
Volkskunde in den Diensten des Dritten Reiches. Deutsche  
Forscher und Forscherinnen in der Slowakei  
[Ethnography in Slovakia in the Service of the Third Reich.  
German Researchers in Slovakia]  
*Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology SAS, Marenčin PT, Bratislava*  
2021, 195 p. Lit Verlag, Münster, 2023, 196 p.<sup>1</sup>

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Compared to Czech historiography, our Slovak colleagues have produced numerous works, including several monographs, which map the history of domestic ethnography and ethnology. Thanks to the reviewed publication, this now extends to the previously overlooked period of World War II. According to the authors, this book should be seen as a significant Slovak contribution to the discussion on the institutional and personal forms of the ideological use of ethnography and related disciplines by Nazi Germany in the 1940s, particularly in terms of its foreign policy plans. Special attention is given to clarifying the ideological context of ethnographic research on the German minority

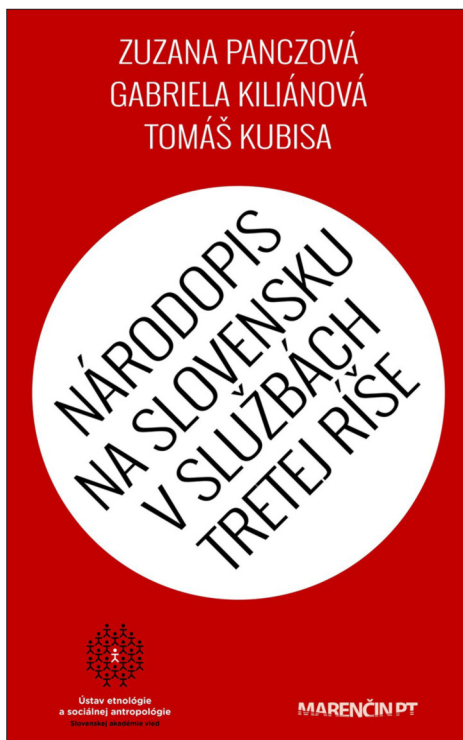
<sup>1</sup> This review was originally published in the Slovak language version of Slovenský národopis 1/2023 (pp. 88–90). Given that the publication has been reissued in German, we are pleased to offer this book review to our international readers. The German edition of the book, titled *Volkskunde in den Diensten des Dritten Reiches: Deutsche Forscher und Forscherinnen in der Slowakei* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2023), was awarded in the category of top scientific monographs by the Slovak Academy of Sciences Board in September 2024 (editor's note).

in Slovakia during the war. Additionally, the authors aim to contribute to a broader and more inspiring discussion on the relationship between political ideologies and scientific work.

Such a research design is undoubtedly welcome, not only from a diachronic research perspective. As the authors themselves explicitly note, critical reflection on the combination of science and ideology should also be applied to more contemporary issues, as “even in a liberal democracy, often seen as the antithesis of totalitarian regimes, science is not entirely free from certain politically promoted ideological visions” (Panczová, Kiliánová, Kubisa, 2021: 13). The source material for the reviewed study includes not only contemporary ethnographic records but also previously underutilised documents archived at the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the SAS.

The study is divided into four chapters, each addressing a specific aspect of the topic. The introductory chapter focuses on the broader subject of nationalism’s influence on ethnography in Central Europe. The second chapter highlights the existence of the Institute of Homeland Studies Research (*Institut für Heimatforschung*) in Kežmarok, where, among others, the Beránek couple worked. The following chapter delves into the specific research activities of Franz Josef Beránek and Hertha Wolf-Beranek in Slovakia. This section (Panczová et al., 2021: 77–88) feels somewhat out of place within the text, as it includes numerous transcriptions of legends from Beránek’s collections. It would have been more fitting to publish these archival materials as an annotated source edition. The final chapter examines the pedagogical and research activities of Sudeten German ethnographer Bruno Schier during the First Slovak Republic.

The authorial team views ethnography practiced by German researchers in Slovakia during the analysed period as an ideologically driven science that served overt political agitation. As the authors of the reviewed work note, “Ethnography in Germany (like in most Central European countries, including Slovakia) was largely a product of 19<sup>th</sup>-century romanticism and national movements” (Panczová et al., 2021: 134). While this statement, likely borrowed from German discourse, holds some truth, it can be relativized to an extent. The so-called *völkische Volkskunde* was not the sole outcome of the German-speaking ethnographic tradition of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, although it did flourish during the period in question, largely due to its ideological foundations. Therefore, nationalism as a sovereign “political impulse at the birth of ethnography” (Panczová et al., 2021: 16) can only be interpreted to a certain extent. Alongside the romantic-





nationalist background of the discipline, a tradition based on Enlightenment principles also emerged in Central Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which sought to establish ethnography as a nationally neutral comparative science (cf. Warneken, 1999; Lozoviuk, 2016; Lozoviuk, 2017; Lozoviuk, 2020).

From an institutional perspective, the chapter on the history of the Kežmarok Institute of Homeland Studies Research offers valuable insights into contemporary ideas about “ethnography as a science with political goals” (p. 62). The evaluation of the two main figures of this wartime institution is more favourable for Hertha Wolf-Beranek, whom the authors describe as “an extremely hard-working, goal-oriented, and knowledgeable researcher”, though they note she was “also politically engaged and supported the official ideological line of the Third Reich” (Panczová et al., 2021: 70). The research activities of her husband, Franz Josef Beranek, are

explored in more detail, particularly his ethnographic focus on two German-origin ethnic groups, the Huncokars and the Habans. Beranek’s engagement in research during his time in Slovakia aimed at highlighting the “penetration of persons of German blood” into the region, seeking to demonstrate “their decisive influence on the formation of Slovak folk culture”. This aligns with his pre-existing focus on the history of settlement in extinct, originally German-speaking enclaves (*untergegangenes deutsches Volkstum*) in Czech-speaking areas. Along with general “language island research” (*Sprachinselforschung*) and an interest in “Jewish ethnography” (*jüdische Volkskunde*), these topics had been Beranek’s specialisation since the interwar period. During this time, Beranek actively sought evidence of the German past in non-German areas, and – what we might describe today as an applied objective – ultimately aimed at their ethnic revitalisation (cf. Lozoviuk, 2008: 322–323).

As previously mentioned, another academician discussed in greater detail in the reviewed publication is Bruno Schier, regarded as the most prominent ethnologist of Sudeten German origin during his time, particularly in terms of the international recognition of his work. The authors acknowledge the ambivalent nature of Schier’s activities in Slovakia. On one hand, “his scientific texts were grounded in the results of field, archival, and museum research and were characterised by rich empirical material”. On the other hand, Schier “based his analysis of empirical data a priori on assumptions about the dominance of German culture in Central and Eastern Europe” (Panczová et al., 2021: 110). It is important to recognise that Schier, like his contemporaries, could not

think in terms of today's perspectives, and as a socially engaged individual, he was not immune to the ideologies of his time. All this undoubtedly left its mark on his scientific work.

However, when evaluating his activities in Slovakia, one can identify certain positives, albeit ideologically tinted, from the perspective of the host country. In my opinion, the primary issue in the critical analysis of Schier's scientific work does not lie in his alleged artificial construction of the idea of "dominance" of Western (meaning "German") cultural forms in Central and Eastern Europe, as the authors of the book suggest, but rather in the ethnicisation of these forms – that is, in presenting them as inherently "German". Schier's ethnographic research aimed to determine the "origin, direction, and purpose" of cultural diffusions that occurred in both time and space, and these "cultural currents" often indeed moved from Western European centres to Eastern and Southern European peripheral areas.

The real ideologisation of such findings lies in their incorporation into the national discourse. However, Schier's work in Slovakia serves as an example of how the outcomes of such thinking could have been surprisingly different. An important aspect of his activities there was his genuine interest in the country and the culture of its inhabitants. His undisguised sympathy for Slovakia and its people was reflected in several studies he dedicated to Slovak realities, some of which were even published in Slovak. One of the central questions in Bruno Schier's Slovak research focused on the characteristics of Slovak "folk culture" and their significance within the Central European context (cf. Lozoviuk, 2008: 331).

The aim of Schier's publications from his Slovak period was, among other things, to demonstrate that the "genius of the Slovak people" achieved "strong self-expression" across all areas of folk culture. Through his ethnographic research, Schier ultimately concluded that it is justified to view Slovaks as a distinct nation with their own autonomous and highly developed folk/national culture. Therefore, they cannot be regarded merely as a branch of the Czechoslovak nation but rather as an equal nation among the other nations of Central and Eastern Europe, possessing not only their own culture but also their own history and literary language.

The Slovak nation, viewed in this light, is considered – using Schier's terminology – as part of the Central European cultural space (cf. Lozoviuk, 2008: 333–334). Without much exaggeration, it can be said that Schier was one of the first professional ethnographers to advocate for this perspective, grounded in his knowledge of Slovak empirical material, not only within the academic sphere. In addition to this positive ideologisation from the Slovak viewpoint, his ethnographic work includes numerous examples comparing cultural phenomena from virtually all of Europe. In this context, he transcended the confines of the strictly German-centric *Volkskunde*, with which the relationship with his German colleagues was only "settled" during the 1960s.

When evaluating the researchers discussed in the reviewed publication, it is important to consider that their activities in Slovakia represented only a relatively short and somewhat marginal period in their scientific careers. Nevertheless, this brief period constitutes a significant stage in the development of ethnographic science in Slovakia. It is commendable that the authorial team recognised this and, through their monograph, introduced the interested public to a wide range of previously suspected or

entirely unknown information. Another noteworthy contribution of the reviewed work is its exploration of the broader question regarding the relationship between science and ideology. Consequently, it can be reasonably expected that *Ethnography in Slovakia in the Service of the Third Reich* will serve as an inspiring stimulus for wider discussion, both due to the knowledge it presents about the history of science and its more general focus.

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WILL M. GERVAIS:

Disbelief. The Origins of Atheism in a Religious Space

Lanham: Prometheus Books, 2024, 432 p.

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*In this book, I'll argue that religion is not an evolutionary puzzle; so much as two evolutionary puzzles that can only be solved together. First is the Puzzle of Faith: the puzzle of how Homo sapiens – and Homo sapiens alone – came to be a religious species. Second, there is the Puzzle of Atheism: how disbelief in gods can exist within our uniquely religious species. (Gervais, 2024: 38)*

*Learning about how atheism works is important business in its own right, but it also helps us understand religion as well. (Gervais, 2024: 55).*