

New Publication on Slovak Family and Folk Customs

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Over the past several decades Slovak ethnographers have worked diligently to collect and publish their research in a number of areas. One such area has been family life from the point of view of traditions, customs, and special celebratory moments. Between the two world wars, the subject of family structure and the elements of everyday life were also treated. Only now, in a recent publication, Tradície slovenskej rodiny [Slovak Family Traditions] (published by the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, 1997; 242 p.), have the two areas been brought together, each enriching the other and providing a bounty of information for folklorists.

"Slovak Family Traditions" was compiled by the Slovak ethnographer Marta Botiková of Comenius University in Bratislava. It consists of twelve chapters contributed by Botiková and two additional scholars, Son'a Svecová, formerly of Charles University in Prague, and Kornelia Jakubíková, also of Comenius University. The volume deals with traditional family structures in Slovakia, the extended family and kinship terms, the relationship of the family to the village, the architecture of the peasant household, the distribution of family property, birth control, and family customs. A 33-page summary (large format pages) in English which follows the narrative chapter by chapter allows a quick perusal of the contents and can help a researcher decide where to place her/his focus, making the book a user-friendly source. The 13-page bibliography is a researcher's dream for its clear presentation of

further reading in any number of individual topics covered in the larger chapters.

The chapter most relevant to the work and interest of many of American folklorists is one of the last and concerns family customs. Here, Jakubíková discusses in detail folklore customs and rituals connected with the significant moments in family life -- birth, betrothal, wedding, and death, among others. We read about the meanings of certain ceremonial clothes and foods, the functions of midwives, the proper way for the young bride to enter her new abode, and so on. Because Jakubíková's research is presented in the context of a treasure trove of information on the interrelationship of families, family structures, and the workings of the patrilinear and matrilinear lines, all presented in several exceptional chapters by Svecová and Botíková, that chapter's own meaning is heightened. We are thus given a well-researched and solidly scholarly background for a revitalized understanding of traditional folk customs.

Most astonishing, perhaps, are the 133 photographs meticulously selected to illustrate material in the chapters. Labeled by date and region, the photos depict a variety of daily activities in Slovak villages. Family members are shown plucking geese, baking bread, washing clothes, slaughtering a pig and processing its parts (the famous zabijacka), plowing and haying, and participating at weddings and funerals. The family poses in a variety of regional folk dress, photos of household utensils, enormous down pillows, grave crosses embellished with ancient sun signs, and the interiors of traditional peasant homes fill almost every page of the book. These photos, along with illustrations of homestead structures, taken together with the informative

texts, result in a volume that presents a holistic picture of the Slovak village, family, and customs.

As American folklore scholars working in the Slavic and East European region seek to expand their horizons, they are invited to become acquainted with the Slovak world through such high quality studies as *Slovak Family Traditions*. For information about procuring the large format volume for personal use or for your library, contact Dr. Marta Botíková. She may be reached in English or Slovak by e-mail at this address: <Marta_Botikova@fphil.uniba.sk>.