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COUPLE IN THE CIRCLE OF SCIENCE: MICHAL POTEMRA AND MÁRIA POTEMROVÁ
KOŠICE, 17 MAY 2022

On 17 May 2022, a scientific conference was held at the State Scientific Library in Košice on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Michal and Mária Potemras. At the conference, entitled “A Couple in the Circle of Science: Michal Potemra and Mária Potemrová”, the active participants, as well as the professional and lay public, recalled the scientific contribution, but also the personal life of these two well-known Košice residents. Michal Potemra (1922–2002) entered the history of historiography as the founder of Slovak retrospective bibliography, and he and his wife Mária, a music teacher and historian, became the authors of numerous (bibliographical) publications on the history of Košice and the wider area. Viera Nagyová, head of the Borrowing Services Department of the State Scientific Library in Košice, took the opening words on the importance of bibliography and its significance for history research, complemented by Angelika Kurucová, one of the organizers of the event. She stated that the Potemras have left a significant trace in the history of science in Slovakia, and their popularity is also evidenced by the large number of speakers and audience present.

The first two blocks of the conference were dedicated to the personality of Michal Potemra. Radoslav Žgrada (Slovak Matica) opened them with his contribution, which, apart from a brief excursus into the life of both spouses, emphasized above all the definition of bibliography as an independent discipline in Slovak conditions. He also gave data on the bibliographical works of the couple, and stressed that the life of M. Potemra has so far been little reflected in Slovak historiography. The next lecturer – Nikola Vályiová (State Archive in Košice) – continued on the issue of bibliography in M. Potemra’s works. She presented the approach to work of Potemra, which paid attention to entering into problems with the understanding of the facts, as well as to criticism and to being demanding towards creative work. At the same time, the author demonstrated this historiographical knowledge through selected historical studies and contributions, especially on the history of law, political parties and education in Košice. Ondrej Ficeri (Centre of Social and Psychological Sciences, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Košice) continued his analysis of the contribution of the bibliographical works of the Potemras. Considering the specific development of Slovak historiography evolving under the conditions of the Marxist approach to history research, he evaluated their work as a Marxist variant of post-structural urban history, which offers a unique and, from the bibliographical point of view, the most comprehensive picture of Košice so far. From the point of view of world Marxist historiography, cities were perceived primarily as sites of revolutionary events, although in Slovakia the predominant orientation was towards the industrialization, Hungarianization and proletarianization of cities, in which local patriotic expressions were not acceptable. For this reason Ficeri considers the works of the Potemras on the history of Košice, together with the works of another important Košice bibliographer, Mária Mihóková, to be a unique, hitherto unsurpassed body. Miriama Filčáková and Katarína Lukáčová (Department of History, Faculty of Arts, UPJŠ in Košice) looked at the works of M. Potemra from a completely different, didactic perspective. In addition to presenting current trends in history teaching and the importance of researching historical sources, which stem from the essence of the research approach, they identified the potential of bibliographical works in teaching regional history. At the same time, the paper was supplemented with a concrete example of a history-teaching figure concerning the view of the First Vienna Award and Košice in 1938 from a multi-perspectival approach. The session devoted primarily to the view of M. Potemra was concluded by Marek Rímský’s (Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice) paper. Rímský, also against the background of the mutual correspondence between Michal Potemra and the Greek-Catholic priest Michal Fedor, pointed not only to the work with egodocuments as an important historical source, but especially to the fickleness of personal relationships in the turbulent period of the turn of the 1960s and 1970s in building power and leadership positions in Slovak institutions.

The afternoon section was in the spirit of contributions dedicated to the personality of Mária Potemrová, musicologist, publicist and pedagogue. The first speaker was Jana Lengová

(Institute of Musicology, Slovak Academy of Sciences), who in her contribution evaluated the contribution and legacy of M. Potemrová's work and emphasized its significant place in Slovak musicology. The contribution to the history of the musical life of Prešov was presented by Renáta Kočíšová (Institute of Music and Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Prešov), who pointed to M. Potemrová as the first ever personality of Košice who was devoted to musical regional studies. The session was closed by Dita Marenčinová (Conservatory of Jozef Adamovič in Košice) with her contribution to the history of operetta in Slovakia. In the next block, the authors presented the potential of the life and work of the Potemras for future generations. Silvia Fecseková (Musical Archive of the Church of St Egidius in Bardejov) presented in her paper how her encounters and contact with the Potemras influenced her professional life as a music scholar, critic and teacher. The contribution of Lýdia Urbančíková (retired at that time) offered a detailed analysis of M. Potemrová's hitherto unsurpassed bibliographical work *Musical Life in Košice 1848–1919*. The author drew attention to the main features of M. Potemrova's approach to the history of music, pointed out the potential of the work in Slovak historiography and its place in international databases. In the last contribution, Kristína Mihóková, daughter of another important bibliographer, Mária Mihóková, very sensitively retold her own memories of the Potemras as close family friends with whom she had the opportunity to grow up. The final session was devoted to the memoirs of the couple František and Melanie Balun, who recounted impressions, memories and encounters with the Potemras both in and out of the workplace. The conference concluded with a short film in memory of M. Potemrová – *Mária Potemrová: Heavenly Actress* – and the opening of an exhibition of the same name dedicated to the life and work of Michal and Mária Potemrová, which is available at the Cultural and Educational Centre of the State Scientific Library in Košice. The papers from the conference will also be published in the forthcoming proceedings.

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