

Piae memoriae Julii Špaňár*

Ivan LÁBAJ – Mária ŠIBALOVÁ

In 2017, we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the birth of the second Slovak professor of classical philology Július Špaňár. He was born on 12 November 1917 in Veľká Maňa in the present-day county of Nové Zámky and hailed from humble beginnings. Following the advice of his elementary school teacher, he attended the secondary school in Zlaté Moravce and in 1937, after graduation, he decided to study classical philology and German at the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University in Bratislava. As a scholarship-holder, he graduated from the University of Leipzig in the academic year 1941/1942, where he attended lectures and seminars of the renowned professors Karl Reinhardt, Friedrich Klingner, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Starting on 1 October 1942, he taught at the Prvé štátne gymnázium (First State High School) in Bratislava, but did not give up his scientific interests; in 1944, he acquired the title of *Philosophiae doctor* at his Alma mater.

Later, Július Špaňár worked at the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University at the Department of Classical Philology as a lecturer and from 10 October 1951 as an assistant professor. In the early 1950s, he joined the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) and it would seem nothing stood in the path of his successful career. After his habilitation in 1961, he was appointed State Associate Professor (1963) and on 1 February 1969 a full Professor of Classical Philology at the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University. Between the years 1965 and 1969, Špaňár held the office of vice-dean of the Faculty of Arts. During the process of the so-called normalization, he was accused of being sympathetic towards the right-wing opportunism. This led not only to his expulsion from the Communist

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party, but also to the loss of the office of vice-dean and head of the department. Since 1975 he was not allowed to teach, in 1979 he was deprived of the position of professor and in 1982 he was retired prematurely. Exclusion from the party resulted in the loss of membership in the editorial board of the faculty journal *Graecolatina et Orientalia* and membership in the committee of the Slovak Union of the Classical Philologists. The most severe punishment, however, was the strict prohibition to publish. In fact, up until 1979, he was only allowed to publish anonymously. Such was the case of his translation of the medieval philosopher Johannes Scotus Eriugena's *On the Division of Nature*, published in the third installment of the *Antológia z diel filozofov* (1975).

Despite all the hardship, the work of Július Špaňár is a tremendous contribution to all Latin students, readers of ancient literature, and to the entire Slovak cultural environment. To students of Latin, Špaňár is particularly known as the author and co-author of several successful, repeatedly published books, e.g. the Latin-Slovak dictionary, the Latin grammar, the textbook of Roman culture, civilization and literature, as well as the Latin textbooks. The wider public knows him as a translator of the works of ancient philosophy, a subject that was closest to his scientific interest and character; the main object of his philosophical interest was the materialist Heraclitus of Ephesus. In 1990, he was awarded the prestigious Ján Hollý Award for his translation of Plato's entire work. Among his other interests were the Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon, the sarcastic Lucian, and he also translated the Latin works of European and Slovak thinkers and educators, both from the Middle Ages and from the modern times.

In the 1990s, Špaňár returned to the Faculty of Arts at the Comenius University as a *professor emeritus*. Younger colleagues appreciated his ability to stay on top of things and to express himself promptly and witty, often a little ironically. The philosophical ataraxia, with which he faced critical situations, and the typical Slavic heartiness, by means of which he overcame the downsides of the individualism of the academic environment, were also among his highly acknowledged strengths.

A satisfaction for the injustice towards Špaňár were public awards: a commemorative medal and a letter of the President of the Slovak Republic, the Great Medal of St. Gorazd (both in 1997) of the Ministry of Education for an extraordinary contribution to the development of education in Slovakia, and the Karol Strmeň Award (1998) for artistically significant translations, which link Slovak culture to the spiritual world of antiquity.

Professor Július Špaňár was a caring father of his two sons and a daughter. He died on 3 February 2007, aged 89, and was buried in the Bratislava crematory on 10 February 2007. The University of Prešov owns the majority of his

vast library, while a smaller part has been donated to the Department of Classical Philology of the Comenius University in Bratislava.

Špaňár's colleagues remember his daily schedule of reading Greek and Roman classical authors in order not to be ashamed, when he meets his teachers in the afterlife. Even today, his perseverance, discipline and inner strength can still be an inspiration for new generations of classical philologists.

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Résumé

Piae memoriae Julii Špaňár

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The biographical portrait presents the second Slovak professor of classical philology, Július Špaňár, on the occasion of the centennial of his birth. A brief biography offers the most important milestones and achievements of Prof. Špaňár's life, such as his oft-used Latin textbooks, grammar and dictionary. At the end of the article, a selected bibliography is presented, which is dominated by ancient philosophical writing, especially the Slovak translation of Plato's works for which he was awarded the prestigious Ján Hollý award.

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Uvedený biografický portrét predstavuje druhého slovenského profesora klasickej filológie Júliusa Špaňára pri príležitosti stého výročia jeho narodenia. Stručný životopis ponúka najdôležitejšie milníky a úspechy jeho života, napr. jeho často využívané učebnice latinčiny, latinská gramatika a slovník. V závere príspevku je uvedená jeho vybraná vedecká produkcia, ktorej dominuje antická filozofická spisba, najmä preklad Platónových diel do slovenského jazyka, za čo mu bola udelená prestížna cena Jána Hollého.