Slovakia

cultural traditions – geography – language – religion



Vydavateľstvo - Editura
Ivan Krasko
Nadlak

Title of publication: Slovakia - cultural traditions, geography, language, religion
Publication type: university textbook
Publication category: P1 (pedagogical output of publishing activity as a whole, textbook for universities), ACA (university textbooks published in foreign publishing houses)
Online: https://slovensko.ucm.sk/en/domov-english/

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Total range: 507 SP, 25 PS
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Cover photo: 'Čilejkárka' from Čajkov (Tekov), Čajkov, 2021 Calendar Photographed by Martin Machaj, photo: Martin Machaj ©
The text has not been proofread.

Publisher: Kultúrna a vedecká spoločnosť Ivana Krasku, ul. Independeței č. 36, 315500 Nădlac, župa Arad, Rumunsko.

The publication is a part of the project APVV 20-0263: Current Culture-Forming, Identification and Revitalization Processes in the Environment of Ethnic Minorities: Slovaks in Argentina and Canada.
More information about the project at: http://ketno. ff. ucm. en/en/apvv-slovaks-in-america/.

ISBN: 978-973-107-220-3

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FOREWORD

Slovakia is a country in the heart of Europe, covering an area of just under 50,000 square kilometers and home to 5.5 million inhabitants. Over more than a quarter of a million years, numerous cultures, tribes, ethnic groups, and state formations have passed through the territory of Slovakia through migrations, conflicts, and alliances.

The current statehood of the Slovak Republic is founded on Slovaks as the state-forming nation, the Slovak language as the official language, and Slovak national culture as the historical, integrative, representative, and identifying phenomenon of Slovakia and its people.

The ethnic history of Slovaks and Slovakia originates from the arrival of Slavic tribes in the Carpathian Basin, including present-day Slovakia, during the Great Migration of Nations in the 5th and 6th centuries.

Slovaks trace their statehood back to the Principality of Nitra and Great Moravia in the 9th century.

The Slovak language is one of the branches of the development of Old Church Slavonic, shaped by its own territorial, political, cultural, ethnic, religious, and economic contexts. Slovak culture is built on the pillars of pagan Slavic traditions, the cultural and religious mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius, ancient philosophy, and Roman law.

Slovakia, as a vital political, economic, and cultural-historical entity, and Slovaks, as an original and distinct nation, are an integral part of Central Europe and European civilization while also remaining a unique entity with inherent and characteristic traits, distinctive features, and temperament.

If you want to get to know Slovakia and its people better,
if you wish to learn more about who they are,
and if you want to understand why they are the way they are,
You are in the right place.

We wish you an enjoyable, enlightening, and, hopefully, entertaining study.

Authors

INTRODUCTION

Cultural traditions, nature and landscape, the Slovak language, and the religion and religiosity of Slovakia and its people are a unique result of cultural and historical development in Central Europe, an ongoing and fascinating story of a nation and a state. The Slovak realities presented in this work not only serve to familiarize readers with Slovakia and Slovaks but also to help them understand the causes and contexts of their development.

This publication is primarily intended for undergraduate students in humanities disciplines focused on historical, ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic, and geographical aspects of cultural and societal development. In a simple, descriptive-enumerative manner and accessible language, the textbook provides fundamental information about Slovakia and its people, with an emphasis on:

- pillars of Slovak culture and Slovak culture itself, including explanations of the reasons for their form and content,
- geographical and cultural-historical landscape attractions and values of the territory of Slovakia, including the impact of human activity on the natural landscape and its transformation into a cultural landscape,
- Slovak language as the primary ethno-identifying factor of Slovakia and Slovaks, including its development, characteristics, and specifics,
- religion and religiosity of Slovaks and Slovakia, including the explanation of their influence on Slovak culture and the current form of the way of life of people in Slovakia.

The authors do not aim to provide exhaustive or overly detailed information. Rather, they seek to create a mosaic of relevant topics and carefully selected elements and examples that will not only help students acquire knowledge of Slovak realities but also understand the reasons and causes behind why Slovakia and its people are the way they are. Students will be able to think about these aspects as historically evolving components within an integrated sociocultural system.

Moreover, the textbook aims to engage students through well-structured academic text, inspiring further, deeper, and more complex study.

The authors, longtime university teachers, have drawn on their experience to help students achieve multiple educational objectives: from memorization to critical analysis and selection, culminating in generalization. Beyond its educational purpose, the textbook also fulfills a formative goal by encouraging argumentation and the development of personal perspectives.

A crucial part of the intellectual and personal development of today‘s young people is the ability to think in a pluralistic way. Tolerance is a fundamental prerequisite for the existence of any society that is diverse—whether culturally, ethnically, religiously, professionally, socially, or otherwise. However, true tolerance is only possible for those who not only acknowledge differences in others but also seek to understand them, even if they do not necessarily agree with them.

I. CULTURAL TRADITIONS

Cultural traditions are the result of the life experiences of previous generations. They offer solutions to different life situations. Cultural traditions carry within them specific answers, but to all the universal questions that a person may have during his lifetime. How far and which of the cultural traditions are effective and relevant in the present is a matter for the judgment of their bearers.

By preserving and implementing cultural traditions, man imitates to some extent the life of his ancestors. It is through cultural traditions that one is connected to one‘s ancestors.

Cultural traditions connect a person not only with anonymous ancestors who lived in a distant and obscured past, but especially with relatives whom he or she knew from birth, were part of his or her life, and have passed away forever.

It is largely through cultural traditions that one is who one is.



Bethlehem Kubo from Detvianska Huta, Christmas Dance House, Bratislava, Martin Kleibl.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/zoznam-nkd/cyklus-tanecny-dom-zdruzenia-draguni/

1.1 Culture, cultural heritage, cultural tradition

Culture

Culture is a set of artifacts (material culture), rules (social culture), and ideas (spiritual culture). Culture determines the way of life and thoughts of each human community. Through learning about culture, one can understand everything that each person and community does, why they do it, and why they do it the way they do.

The culture of humankind

In the broadest (attributive) understanding of culture, culture represents the complex way of life and thoughts of a society. In this sense, culture is an essential attribute, feature, and characteristic of every human being and every human society. Conversely, only that which has culture is human, and only that which functions according to it is society.

The culture of society

In the narrower (distributive) understanding of culture, culture represents the complex way of life and thoughts of the members of a particular type of community. For example, the culture of a nation, an ethnic group, a tribe, women, men, children, senior citizens, citizens of a town, a village, members of associations or professional groups, or even political parties or social classes (e.g., folk culture or high culture/culture of the elites)

Culture is everything created by man as a member of society

The anthropological understanding of culture considers culture as everything that is not innate, natural, or biological but is learned from other people. Culture is thus all such phenomena that occur in a community. Or, conversely, cultural phenomena are considered to be all unnatural, non-innate, and non-biological but learned activities and ideas in society.

Culture is what makes (life) human beings better, more beautiful and more human

The axiological understanding of culture (culture as value) considers as culture only that which is non-innate, unnatural, non-biological, and learned, based on which a community lives and thinks better, more beautiful, more right, more valuable, and more human. Culture, then, is represented only by those phenomena that are considered beautiful, good, right, representative, valuable, and 'cultural' (e.g., art, technology, medical knowledge). Those negative phenomena are not considered culture, they are seen as 'uncultured', primitive, barbaric, unworthy of attention, and inappropriate for presentation (e.g., cannibalism, alcoholism, prostitution, criminality, negligence in child-rearing, etc.).

Cultural heritage

Cultural heritage is that part of the culture that is inherited from ancestors.

If culture is viewed anthropologically (everything created by man as a member of society), then cultural heritage includes all inherited cultural phenomena, even the negative, ugly, uncultured, and embarrassing ones. It is often on such stereotypes that some people and societies are based. It is on such that negative images and negative evaluations of ‚the other' are formed. This sometimes forces members of communities to eliminate cultural phenomena evaluated as so in their culture. However, it is not infrequently the case that these are fundamental pillars of their identity, way of life, and way of thinking (e.g., polygamy, drinking or substance abuse culture, racism, caste system, etc.).

If culture is viewed axiologically (as values), then cultural heritage includes only those inherited cultural phenomena that are considered good, beautiful, right, and representative. They are a tool for creating a positive image of the community. It is the cultural elements and phenomena that members of the community are proud of that they present. They are to be valued by the surrounding environment. It is such cultural phenomena that constitute the content of representative cultural heritage.

When you say cultural heritage

When you say cultural heritage, it usually refers to the axiological understanding of culture and this representative part of cultural heritage (anthropologically understood). This part is the object of protection, care, transmission, and presentation.

Cultural heritage of a nation

The cultural heritage of a nation is usually made up of those elements and phenomena inherited from ancestors that are supposed to portray members of the nation positively in the eyes of members of other nations: as strong, clever, wise, creative, ethical, technically and artistically proficient, entertaining, interesting and different from others.

Cultural tradition

A cultural tradition is something that has been created in the past by members of a society and passed down from generation to generation. It is, for example, knowledge about something, experience with something, skills in doing something, patterns of behavior in different situations, ways of production, and artistic expressions, in short, the most ideal ways of dealing with all the issues and problems that a person may encounter in the course of life.

We can see a cultural tradition when its bearers implement it. It is through its repetition and the learning of the younger from the older that a cultural tradition is passed on between generations. This happens, for example, within the family and kinship (from parents, grandparents, older siblings, uncles, and aunts), or within one's own group (from friends, classmates, colleagues, neighbors, the community, the surrounding population of a village or town, or more broadly, an ethnic group or nation).

Change of a cultural tradition

A cultural tradition acquires its concrete form precisely when people implement it. The form of a cultural tradition can change over time. This is usually due to changes in social, historical, geographical, cultural, ethnic, religious, economic, and political conditions. For example, a change in a traditional food may be caused by a change in the availability of some of the raw materials for its preparation, or a change in marriage customs may be caused by a change in the economic conditions of a family, or a change in the ethnic identity of a people may occur under the influence of a negative perception of that ethnicity by the surrounding environment, even though it has been a tradition in the community for many generations until then.

Cultural tradition in practice

A cultural tradition in practice looks just as and only as its bearers can, want, need, or have to realize it in the actual conditions. People, in implementing a cultural tradition, try to make it as close as possible to their own idea of the ideal form of that tradition. This ideal idea has been formed by their upbringing and education in their family and their own community.

The disappearance of a cultural tradition

Every cultural tradition serves a purpose, it has a function. If a cultural tradition loses its function, or if conditions no longer allow its realization, it ceases to exist. For example, if the institution of marriage is no longer a necessary condition for people to live together legally and to have children, it ceases to exist and people live together and have children without entering into a marriage union. At the same time, all wedding customs cease to exist because they have lost their function, the opportunity for their realization has passed, and they are no longer necessary. Another example is the disappearance of knowledge and collective singing of folk songs. The need to hear music today is fulfilled by music players and the mass media, and the need to create songs today is fulfilled by professional authors and music studios. If a person wants to hear a song, they do not have to sing it, they just listen to it. Consequently, not only is the ability to sing along lost in the community, but also the need to know the song.

Preserving cultural tradition

The response to saving cultural traditions may be to transfer them from their original environment to another and find a new function. An example is folk dancing, which is rarely danced anymore at weekend dances or weddings because it is no longer familiar to community members and has been replaced by modern dances. It is, however, known and taught by members of the folklore group. Choreographed, stabilized, and staged, these people dance it during their performances, at festivals and other events. And so, albeit in a different form, it is preserved.

Reviving a cultural tradition

If necessary, a vanished cultural tradition can be revived. Revitalization is conditional on people deciding to start again to realize what has already disappeared, but which they know existed and was done by their ancestors. The motivation for such a decision

is the existence of the possibility of gaining some kind of profit. This profit does not have to be financial. The benefit of revitalizing cultural traditions can also be self-fulfillment and self-satisfaction of a person, a feeling of excellence, recognition in the community or the society as a whole, an increase in social status, gaining membership in the community, making friends, or even finding a marriage partner. Or just that he simply enjoys it and simply likes it.

The possibility of making a profit is a motivation not only for revitalization but also for maintaining the continuity of cultural tradition. Because the continuity of cultural tradition is not an automatic, spontaneous, or self-evident process. The maintenance of a cultural tradition is conditioned by the constant activity of its bearers, their will, and the pressure of the surrounding community.

Cultural tradition is a pillar of identity. 'Who are we? We are the ones who do this. We/us, are doing it this way. And those who don't do it, or do it differently, those don't belong to us, those are the others. '



Presentation of the Dance House in the TV show STVR Zem spieva, 2017, Milan Krupčík.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/zoznam-nkd/cyklus-tanecny-dom-zdruzenia-draguni/

1.2 Slovak cultural traditions - contexts

The more or less settled way of life of people in the relatively rugged geographical environment of the territory of today's Slovakia over the past millennia has caused cultural traditions to exist here in extremely diverse local and regional variations. Sometimes literally from village to village. According to cultural traditions, Slovakia can be divided into more than 20 regions. At the same time, its area is only 49 thousand km² (for example, Germany is 7 times larger, France 14 times larger, Argentina 56 times larger, Canada 200 times larger and Russia 340 times larger).

Self-sufficiency

The self-sufficiency of individual villages and regions has shaped the relative enclosure of these communities, in which their own versions of culture and traditions have emerged. This diversity is still manifested today, particularly in regional identity, dialects, costumes, and folklore. It is still possible to identify the inhabitants of a region, and sometimes of a particular village, by their dialect and, in the past, by their costume, for example.

Ethnic diversity

The territory of Slovakia has never been ethnically, linguistically, religiously, and culturally completely homogeneous. The predominant ethnicity/ethnicities have always been complemented by non-ethnic minorities with their own, more or less similar culture and language.

The ethnic history of contemporary Slovaks and Slovakia can be traced back to the year 1000. According to it, the Slovaks are descendants of the Slavic tribes of the Sklavins and Ants from the 5th-6th centuries. They are the indigenous and original inhabitants of the territory of Slovakia. In addition to the Slovaks, the indigenous population is also considered to be the long-established Hungarian population (Old Hungarian tribes from the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries), Ukrainian and Ruthenian (from the 11th-12th centuries), Czech (from the 12th century), German (from the 12th century), Jewish (from the 11th-12th centuries), Croatian (from the 16th century), Bulgarian (from the 19th century) and Serbian (from the 15th century) populations. In many cases, the population today is already Slovak with such origins. A numerous ethnic group in Slovakia is the Roma (since the 14th century). New ethnic minorities in Slovakia today, as smaller communities, are the Vietnamese, South Koreans, or Cubans.

Impact regions

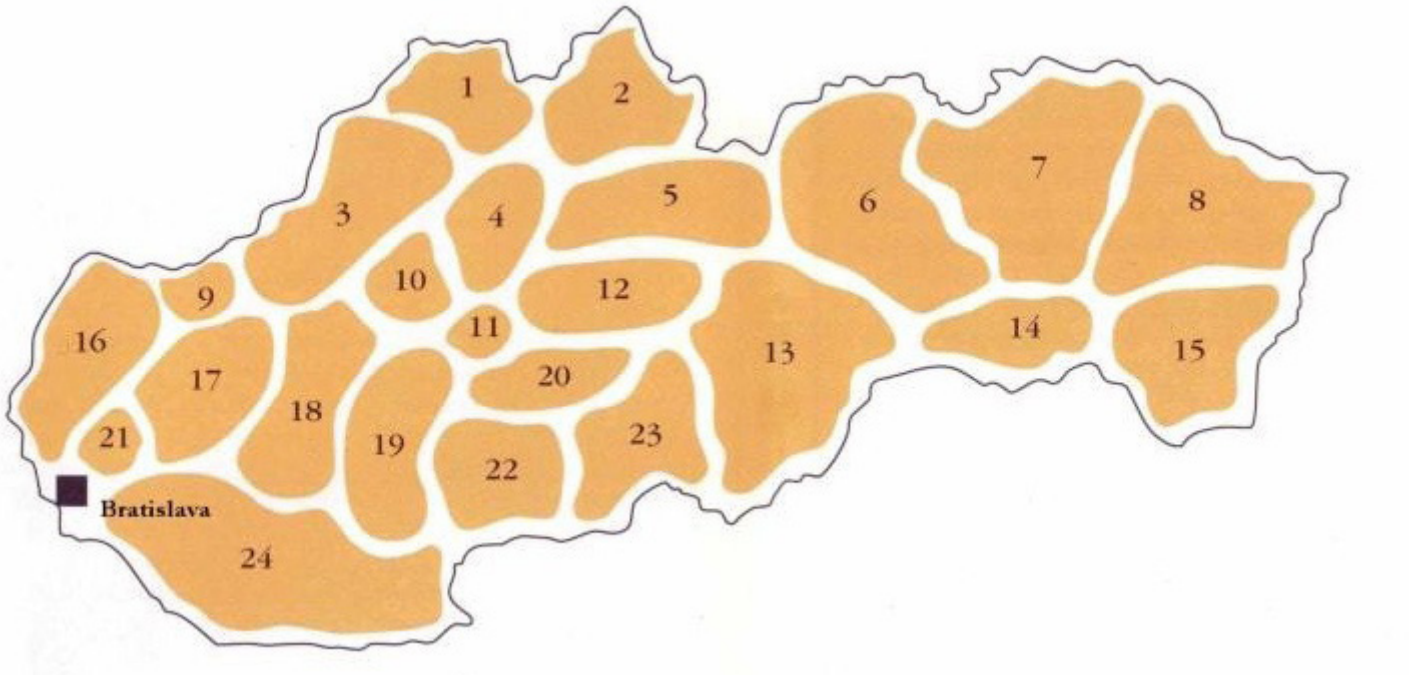
The so-called 'distinctive' regions were formed on the territory of Slovakia, whose inhabitants are the bearers of a still living regional identity, culture, and dialect, such as inhabitants of Zahorie (in western Slovakia), Orava, Liptov, Horehronie, or Kysuce (in central Slovakia), or the Spiš in eastern Slovakia. Not every cultural and historical region of Slovakia has such a vibrant and alive regional identity.

Ethnographic groups

Within the regions, smaller groups of the Slovak population with their own (ethnographic) identity, subculture, and dialect have also emerged. For example, the Gorals on the Slovak-Polish border, the Sotaks in Eastern Slovakia, the Chilejkars in Southwestern Slovakia, or non-Slovak: the Rusyn Lemkos and Boyks (Pujdaks) on the Slovak-Polish and Slovak-Ukrainian border, the German Mantaks, Huncokars, Handrbuls, Handels and Habans, or the Hungarian Palots and Barks.

Areas of Slovakia

The inhabitants of the territory of Slovakia are still divided according to the lowland and mountain character of the area in which they live, or from which they originate - into ‚dolniaci' (lowlanders) and ‚horniaci' (highlanders). In addition, those from central Slovakia are called, and not infrequently refer to themselves, as Central Slovaks, and those from eastern Slovakia are called East Slovaks. This is evident, especially from the dialect and the specific melodicism of the Central and Eastern Slovak dialects.



Traditional areas of Slovakia - 1. Kysuce, 2. Orava, 3. Považie 4. Turiec, 5. Liptov, 6. Spiš, 7. Šariš, 8. Severný Zemplín, 9. Myjavská oblasť, 10. Horné Ponitrie, 11. Stredoslovenská banská oblasť, 12. Pohronie, 13. Gemer and Malohont, 14. Abov, 15. South Zemplín, 16. Záhorie, 17. Trnava region, 18. Ponitrie, 19. Tekov, 20. Podpoľanie, 21. Littlecarpathian region, 22. Hont, 23. Novohrad, 24. Podunajsko, 2010. Drawing by Mojmír Benža.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/polozka-encyklopedie/tradicna-oblast/

Religious diversity

The population of Slovakia has long been Christian, predominantly Roman Catholic, with Reformed churches also represented, especially Evangelicals of the Augsburg Confession and Calvinists, and Orthodox and Greek Catholics in central and eastern Slovakia. The Jewish community, which almost completely disappeared during World War II, has also been partially revitalized, as has the German ethnic group after World War II. The new religious minority in Slovakia today are Muslims, mainly immigrants from Middle Eastern countries.

If there is such a thing as the mentality/mood of the Slovak nation, it manifests itself mainly through cultural traditions. Naturally, the image of Slovaks created in this way is often simplified into stereotypes. Stereotypes about Slovaks are sometimes seen as character traits of the whole nation, for example, hardworkingness and appreciation of authority, but also constant doubt and creativity, on the one hand, closed-mindedness, and traditionalism, on the other hand, tolerance towards others and the ability to join with others in the need to build something, and finally perhaps also a kind of predilection for creating their closed communities anywhere in the world, only based on the same/common roots and cultural traditions.

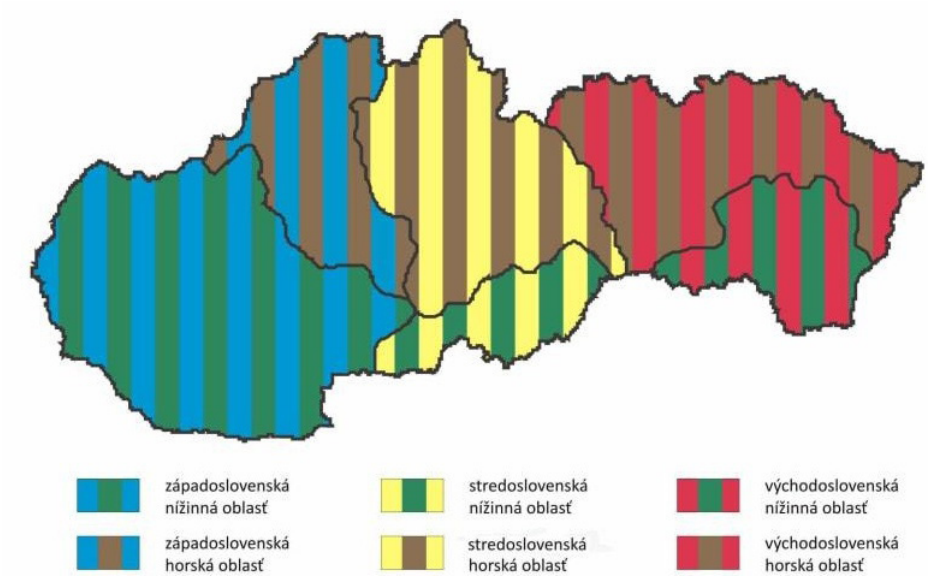
The cultural traditions of Slovakia and Slovaks are part of the cultural traditions of the Euro-American cultural-civilizational circle. The current influences on the cultural traditions of Slovakia are primarily Euro-unionisation (because Slovakia is a member of the EU) and, of course, as everywhere where the mass media and transnational corporations have an impact, globalization. On the one hand, it unifies all cultures and communities of the world, but on the other hand, it also provokes the opposite reaction in people - an interest in their roots, in protecting and preserving their own unique and specific features that distinguish them from all others.

Slovakia between West and East

The territory of Slovakia lies at the intersection of the influence of Western and Eastern European cultures. The entire contemporary European culture and its traditions are based on ancient philosophy, Roman law, and Judeo-Christian culture. Western culture is mainly characterized by Catholicism and Protestantism (the so-called ‚Roman/Western rite') and Eastern culture by the so-called ‚Byzantine/Eastern rite' (Orthodoxy and Greek Catholicism). Thus, in the culture and cultural traditions of Slovakia, the modernity, materialism, and individualism of the West meet the conservatism, traditionalism, spirituality, and collectivity of the East. That is why the cultural traditions of Slovakia are comprehensible to all Europeans and non-European countries with a European cultural basis brought there by immigrants.

Lowland and mountain Slovakia

The cultural traditions of the Slovaks are also determined by another intersection - geographical. The territory of Slovakia consists of lowland areas in the south, where a lowland type of culture developed, and mountain areas in the north, where a mountain type of culture developed. These cultural types are quite different from each other.



Areas of traditional culture of Slovakia.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/polozka-encyklopedie/oblast-tradicnej-kultury/

Lowland type of culture

Lowland culture is characterized by the cultivation of thermophilic crops that require good soil and moisture (especially wheat and corn, grapevines, fruits such as apricot, peach, cherry, pear, vegetables such as tomato and pepper, older hops, newer soybeans), and the raising of cattle and poultry for meat (beef, pork, geese, ducks) because of the abundance of forage crops (especially grains and corn) grown. The lowland culture is characterized by earthen buildings with thatched or cane roofs, linen work clothes, and home wine production. Lowlanders are called ‚dolniaci'. The lowland areas are called ‚dolniaky'. Lowland phenomena are called ‚dolniacke'.

Mountain type of culture

The mountain type of culture is characterized by the cultivation of less demanding crops in less favorable conditions in poorer soil (mainly rye and oats, potatoes and cabbage, plums and apples), the rearing of cattle mainly as draught stock, poultry mainly for eggs, and sheep for meat, wool and dairy products. Typical of the mountain type of culture are buildings (log cabins) made of wooden beams joined together using the woodcutting technique, with shingle roofs, woolen (warmer) clothing, and the domestic production of alcohol. Inhabitants of mountain areas are called ‚horniaci'. Mountain areas are called ‚horniaky'. Mountain phenomena are called ‚horniacke'.

Prehistoric and Ancient Slovakia

The development and even the current picture of the cultural traditions of Slovakia is explained by the historical-anthropological view of the territory of Slovakia, especially through archaeology and history. Of course, this is not always about cultural continuity. Sometimes it is only elements, hints, details, assumptions, threads, or threads of distant history, if at all. Rather, this view points to the fact that the territory of Slovakia has been inhabited by humans for a long and relatively continuous period of time, under alternating human species, civilizations, and cultures, with the present one (including cultural traditions) being only the next/one of them. In any case, the contemporary cultural traditions of the territory of Central Europe, in general, have, to varying degrees, recorded all the influences, turbulences, and events of the old continent, regardless of whether they were directed from east to west, north to south, or vice versa.

Paleolithic

The territory of Slovakia was inhabited by man 250 thousand years ago. One of the most popular human remains is a fossilized skull of a skull of a probably Neanderthal woman (hunter-gatherers), 107 thousand years old, found in a travertine mound in the territory of the submontane village of Ganovce near the town of Poprad. The remains of several of the oldest Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer cultures have been found in Slovakia:

- taubachien (Neanderthals (Homo sapiens neanderthalensis) in the Carpathian Basin 130 thousand - 80 thousand years ago),
- moustérien (Neanderthals in Central Europe 220 thousand - 40 thousand years ago),
- micoquien (Central European Neanderthals 130 thousand - 45 thousand years ago),
- aurignacien (European Homo sapiens 40 thousand - 30 thousand years ago),
- sheletien (European Neanderthals and Homo sapiens 40 thousand - 38 thousand years ago),
- gravetien (Homo sapiens 28 thousand - 21 thousand years ago),
- pavlovien (29 thousand - 24 thousand years ago),
- epigravetien (18 thousand - 15 thousand years ago)
- partly also magdalenien (15 thousand - 10 thousand years ago).

Neolithic and Eneolithic

Neolithic cultures of shepherds and peasants lived on the territory of Slovakia between 8,000 and 4,900 years ago. They lived a settled way of life, for example, the so-called ‚linear pottery' culture, the Bukovohorska, Lengyelska, Malicka, and Potiska cultures. Eneolithic cultures (Copper Age cultures) were present in the period 6,300 – 4,150 years ago (e.g., Baden, the culture with corded pottery, or the Nitra culture).

Bronze Age

This 1,400 years long period of human presence in the territory of today's Slovakia (4,300 – 2,800 years ago) is characterized by the spread of products of non-ferrous metallurgy and the invention of charcoal, which proves/enabled the development of the first industry and crafts (ore mining, foundry, blacksmithing, toolmaking) and the need for/possibility of using these products (weapons, tools, implements, jewelry). Approximately 20 cultures of this period have been identified in Slovakia (e.g., Nitrian, Chakan, Kyjatickan, Unetickan, Luzickan, Magyarn, Hatvan, Bell Jaran, Wieselburan, North Pannonian, Central Danubian Moundan, Carpathian Moundan, Pilinan, Suciu de Sus, Velatickan, Podolskan, Gavskam, Kosztianskan), grouped into or crossing over periods:

- Early Bronze Age (4,200 – 3,550 years ago),
- Middle Bronze Age (3,550 – 3,350 years ago),
- Early Bronze Age (3,350 – 3,000 years ago),
- Late Bronze Age (3,000 – 2,800 years ago).

Old Iron Age and Hallstatt culture

The Old Iron Age in Central Europe is mainly associated with the Hallstatt culture (2,850 - 2,400 years ago), linked to the Celts, and typical ironworking. The Celts are the **first people documented by written sources on the territory of Slovakia**. The Celtic tribes of the Boii, Kotin, and Tauris settled in southwestern Slovakia 2,400 years ago. Iron spread in Slovakia in the 9th to 8th centuries BC. Lead, gold, and salt mining also became part of it. The subcultures of this period are: the Kalendeberk, Kozeprepaspuszt, Vekerzug, Kustanovic, and Luzick cultures. Illyrian, Thracian, and Scythian tribes also lived in the area at that time. The Hallstatt culture marks the end of prehistory in Slovakia.

The Early Iron Age and Latin culture

In the territory of Slovakia, the Young Iron Age is mainly associated with the Latenian culture (2,450 – 2,000 years ago), whose carriers were the Celts. The early historic period (protohistoric period) begins with the Latenian culture on the territory of Slovakia. Around 50 BC, the Dacians penetrated the territory of Slovakia and assimilated the Celtic population, and a few decades after them came the Germanic tribes of the Quadi, the Marcomanni, the Gepids, the Vandals, the Ostrogoths, etc., who in turn displaced the original Celtic-Dacian population. In 21 AD, the Quadian ruler Vannio **establishes the first politically organized formation in Slovakia - the Kingdom of Vannio** (in the territory of western Slovakia between the rivers Morava and Vah). In addition to the Latenian culture, the Lusatian culture, the Puchov culture, the Carpathian mound culture, and the ash-field culture with urn burial were also found in Slovakia in this period.

Roman period

The Roman period (between 6 and 375) in the territory of Slovakia meant the struggles of the Germanic tribes with the Romans to maintain the Kingdom of Vania. The main defensive system of the Roman Empire was the Limes Romanus (Roman frontier) - a

system of fortifications along the Danube River. During this period, the territory of Slovakia was divided into four ethnically and culturally distinct regions:

- south-western Slovakia with a predominantly Germanic population,
- Danube basin with Roman settlement,
- northern and central Slovakia with remnants of the Celtic Cotini mixed with the then Indigenous population (Puchov culture),
- Eastern Slovakia with the original Celtic-Dacific settlement, later assimilated by the Germanic Vandals.

Great Migration

The Great Migration was a major migratory movement in Europe in the 4th and 6th centuries. The Roman Empire disappeared, and the Germanic tribes in the territory of Slovakia migrated westwards from the territory of Slovakia after battles with the nomadic Huns coming to the Carpathian Basin, especially after fighting with each other. The almost depopulated territory without a state system attracted Slavic tribes, which at that time were already a large, ethnically and linguistically profiled unit. Over several decades, the Slavs gradually settled and dominated large areas of eastern, central and southern Europe. Thus, in the 5th century, Slavic tribes of the Sklavins came to the territory of western and eastern Slovakia from the territory of today's Poland and Ukraine, through the passes of the Carpathian mountains, from the Carpathian Arch. Once settled, they were the bearers of the Prague culture. At that time, Slavic tribes of the Ancients penetrated southern and central Slovakia from the south, upstream of the rivers. After settling down, they were the carriers of the Penkov culture. Some of these tribes continued to the Balkans. In the middle of the 6th century, the warlike nomadic tribes of the Avars (the so-called ‚Avar/Nomadic culture') arrived in Central Europe.

Slovakia and the first statehood

The Slovaks are part of a large and important Eurasian ethnic group - the Slavs. The Slavic homeland was in the territory of present-day Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus. It was a tribal system. Approximately 1,500 - 1,600 years ago, as part of the Great Migration, they began to migrate to the territories where Slavic peoples still live today, as well as to the territories of present-day Greece, Germany, Austria, and Hungary, where they eventually ethnically assimilated. After dispersing over much of Europe, the Slavs gradually formed into three branches:

- Western (Czechs, Lusatian Serbs, Poles, Kashubians and Slovaks),
- Southern (Bulgarians, Macedonians, Croats, Slovenes, Bosniaks, Pomaks, Serbs),
- Eastern (Belarusians, Russians, Ukrainians, Ruthenians).

Early Slavic period

The pre-Slavic period (500 - 675) represents the arrival and settlement of Slavic tribes, followed by the arrival of the Avars, the

coexistence of Slavs with the Avars (warfare/conquest/anti-Avar rebellions), and the formation of the Avar Khaganate (tribal union) in 567. Subsequently, in 623, as a result of a successful anti-Avar rebellion led by the Frankish merchant Sam, the **Empire of Sam** was established **as the first known state formation of Slavic tribes in the territory of Slovakia**. However, in 658 it ceased to exist and its territory and inhabitants returned to the rule of the powerful Avar Khaganate. Between 803 and 811 the kaganate ceased to exist with the defeat of Charlemagne (King of the Franks), which marked the end of the Avars‘ dominance in the Carpathian Basin and their extinction as an ethnic group. Charlemagne established two border marzes (administrative units) of the Frankish Empire in the Danube region (today‘s southwestern Slovakia), where the missionary activity of the Church aimed at Christianizing the Slavs was concentrated.

Early medieval period

The early medieval period of the territory of Slovakia represents the emergence of two separate Slavic politico-state formations, which were no longer united exclusively by the tribal (blood) principle (so-called ‚societas‘) but by the territorial principle (so-called ‚civitas‘).

1. **The Principality of Nitra** (between 828 and 833) was established in western Slovakia with its center in the castle town of Nitra. The most important ruler was Prince Pribina, who in 828 consecrated the first Christian church in Slovakia in Nitra. This is the f**irst state formation of the Slovaks**, or their ancestors, since in this period, according to some researchers, we can already speak of the development of the nationality of these people. The inhabitants at that time were probably called Nitravans, similar to the people from the Morava basin Moravians.
2. **Great Moravia** (between 833 and 907) was a West Slavic state in the territory of present-day Moravia, part of Slovakia and northern and central Hungary. It was the first major Slavic state, and both Slovakia and the Czech Republic now consider it an early precursor of their statehood. It was formed by the conquest of the Principality of Nitra by Prince Mojmir I and its **annexation to the already existing territories** in present-day Moravia.

Although the Christianization of the population of Great Moravia had been underway since 800 by Frankish missionaries, in 863 the Great Moravian prince Rastislav summoned the Byzantine scholars Constantine and Methodius, who became the founders of Slavic literature. Constantine created an alphabet for the needs of the Slavic language – Glagolitic, he wrote the first Slavic poem - Proglas. Of particular importance were their translations of the most important texts of the time into Old Church Slavonic, making them accessible to the Slavic peoples. Between 862 and 885 they produced the first translation of the Bible into a Slavic language - Old Church Slavonic (until then it existed only in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin). This translation became the basis of the literature of all Slavic peoples.

In the 10th century, Great Moravia ceased to exist. The reason for this is internal contradictions and subsequent attacks of the Old Magyars. The inhabitants of Great Moravia were called ‚Sclavos‘, ‚Sclavi‘ (Slavs) in Latin records, ‚Moravljene‘ in Slavic sources, or ‚Slovăne‘, ‚Sloviene‘, ‚Slověne‘ (according to some researchers, these were the ancestors of the Slovaks).

The whole Slavic period from a cultural point of view consists of the period:

- the Older Hellenistic or Pre-Great Moravian period (8th/9th century) - the territory of Slovakia was part of the Avar Kaganate (as evidenced by Slavic, nomadic, and Carolingian archaeological artifacts),
- the Middle Burgundian or Great Moravian period (9th century) - an advanced culture of Great Moravia (especially jewelry, metals, artifacts),
- the Younger Fortress Period (10th century) - the decline and disappearance of Great Moravia and the emergence of the Hungarian state (especially the Belobrd culture, which has a mixed Slavic-Hungarian origin).

Slovakia and Hungary (Austro-Hungarian Empire)

Hungary, until the year 1000/1001 called the Principality of Hungary/Geiz, then the Kingdom of Hungary, founded by Stephen I, was a multi-ethnic state formation in the Carpathian Basin between 895/896 and 1918. While before the Battle of Mohács (1526), kings from various dynasties (e.g., from the House of Arpad, the House of Anjou, the House of Jagiello) ruled in Hungary, then, for almost 400 years, until the dissolution of Hungary in 1918, the country was part of the Habsburg (Austrian) Monarchy. Hungary was politically and economically governed by Austrian Vienna. The official language was, due to its multi-ethnic and multilingual nature, Latin.

For the Slovaks, the values of the Hungarian state included: acceptance of Christianity, inclusion in the Western/Latin cultural circle (with its changing artistic periods such as the Romanesque style, Gothic, Renaissance, etc.), the functioning of the legal system, the development of the education system, the emergence of urban communities, the peaceful coexistence of members of several ethnic groups and their economic cooperation, the common defense against external enemies, especially against the Ottomans (when during one and a half centuries the Slovak territory actually became the nucleus of the Kingdom of Hungary and Bratislava became the capital and the coronation city).

In 1867, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Settlement, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was established, laying the foundation for the independence of the Hungarian state with its own government and parliament based in Budapest. Hungarian began to be promoted as early as 1790 and in 1844 it became the official language of Hungary. In 1850, for example, Hungarians in Hungary made up only about 37% of the population of over 13 million. They were: Slovaks 13%, Germans 10%, Ruthenians 3%, Jews 2%, Romanians 17%, Croats 9%, Serbs 7%, others 2%. From the Austro-Hungarian settlement onwards, a harsh Hungarianization and suppression of the rights of other nations, nationalities, and ethnic groups began in Hungary. The purpose was to create one strong, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally homogeneous, state-forming Hungarian nation. Two generations later, in 1910, the ethnic structure of Hungary was already somewhat different: Hungarians 47%, Slovaks 9%, Germans 10%, Ruthenians 2%, Jews 2%, Romanians 14%, Croats 9%, Serbs 5%, others 2%. (The figures are approximate and vary slightly in different censuses and analyses.) The reaction of the non-Hungarian population of Hungary to the Hungarianization pressures was the so-called ‚national revival' - the process of formation of modern nations. It took place from the second half of the 18th century to the middle of the 19th century throughout

Europe, through linguistic, cultural, and political consolidation and the peoples‘ efforts to become independent. In the second half of the 19th century, Slovaks in Hungary demanded the federalization of Hungary and their own territorial autonomy, the so-called ‚Slovak Neighbourhood‘, which they did not achieve.

Slovakia and Czechoslovakia

Czecho-Slovak Republic (CSR, 1918 – 1939)

The First Czechoslovak Republic was established after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was formed on the principles of Czechoslovakism, which was derived from the concept of one Czechoslovak nation. However, it was accepted differently among the Czech and Slovak populations. For the majority of Slovaks, the so-called ‚Greater Bohemia‘, conception of the existence of Slovaks only as a nationality, a kind of undeveloped tribe, that was actually part of the Czech nation and would gradually merge with it, was unacceptable. Equally unacceptable was the notion that the Slovak language was merely a dialect of the Czech language. The nationally sentient part of Slovaks perceived the creation of such a Czechoslovakia as a fraud. In fact, with the inevitability of the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the planning of a common state with the Czechs, the Slovaks had already in the Cleveland Agreement (1915) and the Pittsburgh Agreement (1918) clearly formulated their demands for the recognition of their own linguistic-cultural, national-political and state-legal identity (as a sovereign state/nation and not as a ‘people’). This recognition was promised to them, but in the end, it was not realized to their satisfaction. The administration of Slovakia was the responsibility of the Ministry with full powers for the administration of Slovakia. Bratislava became the capital of Slovakia with the seat of the Slovak government. The Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic was adopted. The nationally sentient part of the Slovak elite at home and abroad (especially the economically and politically very powerful Slovaks living in the USA) was perceived by the then Czechoslovak representation as dangerous, inconvenient, and labeled as separatist and autonomist. The differences in economic and cultural sophistication between the Czech Republic and Slovakia became fully apparent during the Great Depression (1929-1933/35), which resulted in a large wave of emigration overseas (104,000 people, mainly from Slovakia, by 1937). In the perception of the ordinary Slovak population, the demise of Hungary and the creation of Czechoslovakia only meant that the Hungarian/Hungarian-speaking intelligentsia, teachers, notaries, civil servants, and managers were replaced by Czechs. This helped Slovakia in the beginning, but after the gradual increase in the number of Slovak intelligentsia, it hindered its application. In any case, without the establishment of the Czechoslovak state, it is impossible to imagine the future modernization, democratization, and, in a relatively short time, the enormous cultural and socio-economic emancipation of the Slovaks in the 20th century.

Slovak Republic/Slovak State (1939 – 1945)

The Slovak Republic/Slovak State came into being in the context of complex international political and economic conditions in Europe, which resulted in:

- the economic devastation of Germany as a defeated state in World War I

- the subsequent formation of National Socialism as a revitalizing instrument of the new Germany,
- Germany‘s transformation into a Nazi-Fascist regime (which was a major instrument for the start of World War II),
- Great Depression,
- geopolitics of the Western European powers (Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany).

Munich Agreement

Subsequent events happened rather quickly, indicating a pre-prepared plan. Czechoslovakia shrewdly perceived the emerging Hitler‘s Germany as a future enemy and built a system of fortifications on the state border, super-modern for that time and very difficult to conquer. Czechoslovakia was then a new state, but it was one of the most economically and industrially advanced countries in the world. The Czech and Slovak elite then had close relations mainly with France and Great Britain, a part of the Slovak elite (especially the autonomists) with the USA. By the way, the whole ideological, state-political, and economic basis of Czechoslovakia was mainly inspired by France and Great Britain.

There was a large German minority in the Czech-German border area, a Polish minority in the Czech-Polish border area, a German minority in the Slovak-Austrian border area, a Hungarian minority in the Slovak-Hungarian border area, and a Polish minority in the Slovak-Polish border area. Hitler‘s Germany (and the ‘allies’), in its need to weaken Czechoslovakia, supported the surrounding countries in their efforts to wrest these border territories from Czechoslovakia, and equally supported the separatist-minded ‘non-Czechoslovak’ populations of these territories. The Western European powers Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy decided to start this process on 29 September 1938 at a meeting in Munich, the so-called ‚Munich Agreement‘ (in this first stage of the project of the dissolution of Czechoslovakia it was about Bohemia and Moravia). They only announced their decision to Czechoslovakia, which was not even invited to the negotiations, and which handed over these areas without a fight because, obviously, it could not count on the support of the Western European allies.

The reaction of the weakened Prague to the still unceasing pressures of the Slovak autonomists was the agreement to the autonomy of Slovakia and the appointment of Jozef Tiso as the president of the autonomous government of Slovakia (only a week after Munich, on October 6, 1938).

Already on 2 November 1939, by the decision of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy (the so-called ‚First Vienna Arbitration‘ - the second stage of the project of the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, when Slovakia was involved), the border areas of southern Slovakia and part of Subcarpathian Rus, largely populated by the Hungarian-speaking population, were annexed to Hungary. Germany appropriated part of today‘s Bratislava on the right bank of the Danube and Devin, Poland acquired Tesinsko.

Half a year later (13 March 1939) Hitler confronted Jozef Tiso with two alternative futures for Slovakia:
- the division of Slovakia between Hungary and Poland,
- a new independent Slovak state, fully subordinated to Germany.

On 14 March 1939 (the next day) the Slovak Sejm proclaims the Slovak State, under the later constitution of 23 July 1939, under the name of the Slovak Republic. Two weeks later (on 29 March 1939), the Treaty of the Protective Relationship between the German Reich and the Slovak State was signed, signifying Slovakia‘s complete submission to Germany. The Slovak state initially acted as a neutral state, which was sincerely advocated by part of its leadership at the time. The latter insisted on neutrality and sovereignty and did not want to submit to Germany as it had previously to the Czech Republic and before that to Hungary. The next day, on 15 March 1939, Hitler declared the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia (the so-called ‚Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia‘), thereby making them fully subordinate to the German Reich.

Fascism and Anti-Fascist Resistance

The Slovak state prospered economically during this period because it produced weapons, food, timber and minerals, and consumer goods for Germany. The Slovaks finally had their own state. National socialism, as the widespread and popular state ideology in Europe at the time, of course, ethnically homogenized civil society. This included the final solution of the Jewish (and Roma) question following the example of Germany, Hungary, and Italy. The final solution to this issue was built on dehumanization, segregation, marginalization, denial of human rights, aryanization of property, and ultimately the Holocaust.

The Slovak state did not become involved in World War II until June 1941. Of course, on the side of Germany against the USSR by providing two army divisions. From that year onwards, Jewish ghettos were also established in Slovakia, and from March to October 1942, 57,000 Jewish citizens of Slovakia were deported in transports to concentration camps, and from the territory of Slovakia occupied by Hungary, another 30-40,000 were deported.

In general, Nazi oppression in all occupied countries naturally provoked a reaction in part of the population - an anti-fascist national liberation resistance, which was based on partisan detachments (terrorists to the occupiers). This was also happening in Slovakia. Moreover, the failures of the German army on the Eastern Front (USSR) and the tactics of extermination of the local civilian population on the territory of the USSR increased the ranks of deserters of the Slovak army to the Red Army. In 1944, after the defeat of the German army at Stalingrad and Kursk, the direction of the front turned and began to approach the Slovak border.

The activity of partisan units in Slovakia increased. In August 1944, these groups began to wage an open struggle against the regime of the Slovak state and the German patrols, which were still present in Slovakia to a small extent at that time. Naturally, this forced the dispatch of the German army to the territory of Slovakia to suppress the partisan movement.

Slovak National Uprising

On 29 August 1944, a large part of the Slovak army openly opposed the entry of German troops into Slovakia. The Slovak National Uprising began. It lasted until the liberation of Slovakia by the Red Army on 1 May 1945. During the liberation of Czechoslovakia, 170 thousand Red Army soldiers died. More than 60 thousand of them and more than 10 thousand Romanian soldiers are buried on the territory of Slovakia.

With the end of World War II, the Slovak State and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia ceased to exist. For those Slovaks who wanted to have their own independent state, this was a disappointment. For the Czechoslovakists, it was a victory. In order to

suppress the ambitions of the Slovak autonomists in Slovakia completely, the stigmatization of everything connected with the Slovak state as fascist and Nazi was used, of course, the unforgivable was the Holocaust. In the framework of the post-war repressions, all autonomist-minded Slovaks were eliminated, especially the elites with real political and economic potential and good contacts abroad, especially in the USA and Canada. Regardless of whether they were genuine pro-Nazi and pro-Fascist collaborators or nationally sentient and politically active intelligentsia, they were a serious threat to the resurgent Czechoslovakia and, logically, were persecuted, criminalized, or had to emigrate, especially to the USA, Canada, and Argentina.

In addition, a significant factor was the upcoming change of the political-economic system of Czechoslovakia from capitalist to socialist, as a result of the post-war division of Europe by the victorious powers, which brought Czechoslovakia into the zone of influence of the USSR as its liberator. The future communist government had to start eliminating the democratic or people's (autonomist) minded elites, which in Slovakia was effective precisely by stigmatizing them, but also by proving their real collaboration with fascist Germany. The subsequent collaboration between Czechoslovakists and communists was successful for them, even at the cost of the retreat of democracy and the rise of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia.

Czechoslovak Republic (1945 – 1989)

The Czechoslovak Republic in the period 1945-1989 was the republic that succeeded in restoring its sovereignty after the Nazi occupation during the first years after the war and in restoring the territories that had been torn away (except for Subcarpathian Rus, which belonged to the USSR). As part of the ethnic homogenization of the population in the countries of Central Europe, the Sudeten Germans were evicted from Czechoslovakia (3 million by 1946), 90,000 Hungarians from Slovakia were resettled in Hungary and 72,000 Slovaks from Hungary were resettled in Czechoslovakia in 1946-1948 by an interstate agreement between Czechoslovakia and Hungary on the exchange of populations. As Czechoslovakia fell within the zone of influence of the USSR during the post-war division of Europe by the victorious powers and the Communist Party came to power, the original idea of a democratic state modeled on France did not materialize. Czechoslovakia became a totalitarian state of so-called ‚real socialism', first formally as a 'people's democratic republic', like all the countries of the emerging Eastern bloc. Private property, industrial, and agricultural production were transformed into state and collective ownership already during the first years - by so-called ‚nationalization'. The name of the state and its organization changed formally over the following decades, depending on the actual strength of communist ideology and the political need to declare either the unity of the Czechoslovak people or, on the contrary, rather the partnership of Czechs and Slovaks:

- Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR) 1960-1990,
- CSSR (since 1969) formally a federation of the Czech Socialist Republic (CSR) and the Slovak Socialist Republic (SSR),
- Czecho-Slovak Federal Republic/Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (CSFR) 1990-1992, after the collapse of the communist/authoritarian system and the rise of the capitalist/democratic system in 1989.

Slovak Republic (since 1993)

The Slovak Republic is an independent state with a parliamentary democracy or a parliamentary-presidential republic. Slovakia

has been a member of the European Union and NATO since 2004. Since 2007, it has been a member of the Schengen area, which allows the free movement of people, goods, and services within those EU countries that have fulfilled the conditions of the so-called ‚Schengen area' - set out in the agreement concluded in the Luxembourg town of Schengen in 1985. Since 2009, Slovakia has been a member of the euro area (currency Euro). The state-forming people are Slovaks, and the national language is Slovak. According to the 2021 census, Slovaks make up 84% of citizens, Hungarians 8%, Roma 1%, others 2%, undetected 5%. Slovak is the mother tongue of 81% of the population, Hungarian 9%, Roma 2%, other languages 2%, other and undetected languages 6%. In fact, the number of Roma by origin, mother tongue, and culture is estimated to be approximately 10% of the population of Slovakia. Many of them claim to be Slovaks or Hungarians. Almost 70% of Slovak citizens declare themselves Christians (60% are Roman Catholics, 7.6% are Protestants, mainly Evangelicals of the Augsburg Confession, 1% are Orthodox, 0.5% are other Christians), 24% of citizens declare no religion, the rest are 1%, and 6.5% are undetermined (they did not declare any).

The culture of Slovakia and the Slovaks is part of the Euro-American cultural-civilizational circle, to which the Slovaks themselves claim to belong. At the same time, however, they are aware of their uniqueness and difference from others in this circle. This is manifested by an interest in their own cultural heritage and roots, the protection and preservation of their own unique and specific features that distinguish them from all others.

Rural and urban Slovakia

The cultural traditions of Slovakia should be perceived in two levels - worlds. The world of the town (urban) and the world of the countryside (rural).

The world of the town

The world of the town on the territory of Slovakia in relation to contemporary cultural traditions is mainly connected with:

With the development of medieval towns from the 12th - 13th century

In this period many of the most important towns of Slovakia today were granted the status of a free royal town, which, in addition to direct subordination to the king and tax exemption from the nobility and the church, gave them the right to carry out various economic activities (the right of warehouse, market, fair, tap, trade, crafts, etc.) and significant autonomy in criminal law.

With the arrival of colonists from German-speaking territories

German colonists in the cities contributed to the improvement and expansion of crafts, education, and the implementation of more advanced and modern German law, construction, and technology.

With the creation of a specific social stratum of townspeople

The social stratum of the townspeople is represented by landowners, clerks, merchants, craftsmen, intellectuals, students, doc-

tors, notaries, later laborers, etc., whose way of life and thinking - urban culture - was already different from those in the countryside. This applies to all socio-economic strata: from the very rich bourgeoisie, through the most numerous 'middle class' to the urban poor. They were no longer rural serfs (property of the nobility or the church), but inhabitants of the free royal cities.

With the Industrial Revolution in Hungary

The industrial revolution in Hungary from the turn of the 18th - 19th centuries is represented by the transition from handicraft production to large-scale production - the so-called ‚manufactories'. Later, from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, it is the transition from manufactory production to industrial mass production. It is accompanied by the construction of factories and enterprises with many employees - inhabitants of the 'new type' - laborers.

With the industrialization of Slovakia

The industrialization of Slovakia in the 20th century (especially in its second half), triggered further urbanization - the transformation of part of the rural environment into an urban one (suburban parts of growing towns, the transformation of some villages into towns by building factories or other large enterprises in their vicinity).

The result was:

Development of high culture

The high, elite culture is mainly represented by architecture and construction, art, fashion, science and technology, politics, and education.

Introducing innovation

Given the high population density in towns, they have been pilot environments for the introduction of innovations (e.g., modern infrastructure, transport, commerce, telecommunications, institutions, mass media).

Creation and preservation of urban cultural traditions

In the towns, various expressions originating from the urban but also from the rural environment originated and were preserved as cultural traditions (for example, urban legends, or the oldest records of some customs originally from the rural environment, from the student environment of the town, or the Easter customs of whipping or dressing preserved in the towns originally brought by immigrants from the rural environment).

The cultural traditions of the town are linked to:

- socio-professional groups of craftsmen and laborers, such as handicraft songs and customs, mining, vineyard, or laborer customs and traditions,
- wandering musicians, merchants, and comedians who created a market and fair atmosphere and brought 'novelties from the world', such as fair songs or puppet theatre,
- students and the educated classes, such as translations of storytelling genres, proverbs, sayings, riddles, fables, student customs, and songs,
- the bourgeoisie, which preferred to adopt modern cultural forms (new songs or dances such as polka, waltz, or shimmy, many of which became popular),

- religious communities and their public activities, such as those of Catholic churches: pilgrimage hymns, annual festivals, or, conversely, similar activities, but rather closed Protestant and Jewish communities,
- military garrisons and public concerts of military brass music,
- wandering and café musicians, influenced by nearby Vienna, 'gypsy music' by Budapest, others by Prague and Bratislava through the so-called ‚Slovak tango' and other schlagers that became popular,
- Vieches, taverns, travel inns, clubs, and societies, such as social or staff meetings and celebrations, where active singing, storytelling, and dancing linked ethnic and cultural identities.

World of the village

The world of the Slovak village forms the core of Slovak cultural traditions. In the period of national revival, it was necessary to create a concept of national culture - the culture of the Slovak nation. The fact that Slovak culture existed was one of the arguments to prove the existence of the Slovak nation in the process of efforts to recognize it in Hungary and, consequently, to gain international recognition of the state-building ambitions of the Slovaks. In the spirit of the idea: If the Slovaks are a nation like other nations, they have the right to have their own state as other nations have. And Slovaks are a nation also because they have their national culture. The national revivalists started from these premises when they built the concept of Slovak national culture.

They reached for:

High culture

Especially artistic creations and works in Slovak, or whose authors were professional and recognized artists - Slovaks, of Slovak origin, or Slovak sentiment, as well as like-minded intellectuals and important personalities of the political, economic, religious, and cultural life of Hungary.

Folk culture

The culture of the broadest Slovak-speaking strata of the population - the Slovak people. The Slovak population lived mainly in the rural environment. The language of communication in the towns and in the environment of the upper social classes was mainly German and later Hungarian. The Slovak language in the towns of Slovakia was mainly associated with the lower strata of the population as the ‚language of servants'. In the spirit of the ideas of national revival, artistic expressions of the people and folk culture were considered to be as valuable as professional art and high culture.

National revivalists and later researchers collected, recorded, and studied mainly folklore expressions (verbal, musical, and dance folklore - fairy tales, stories, proverbs, sayings, anecdotes, reminiscences, tales, legends, vignettes, songs, dances, etc.), dramatic expressions and folk theatre, calendar (annual) and family customs (life cycle), artistic expressions of material folk culture (fine arts, applied arts, folk, especially ceremonial, clothing, lace, embroidery, textiles, all decorated or stylish objects). The interest in these

elements of folk culture has increased the awareness of their value among their bearers, which has contributed to building the self-esteem and pride of the members of the nation in their own culture.

Moreover, the rural world has always been more conservative and resistant to external influences and fashion trends than the urban world, which is why many traditions have been preserved to a greater extent or in a more authentic form there.

It is the rural culture that has become:
- almost the entire content of the folk culture of Slovakia and Slovaks,
- the major part of the content of cultural traditions of Slovakia and Slovaks,
- and an important part of the cultural heritage of Slovakia and Slovaks.

Agrarian and Industrial Slovakia

The cultural traditions of Slovakia were significantly shaped by whether it was an agrarian (agricultural) or industrial environment.

Agrarian Slovakia

Agriculture and cattle breeding have always been the predominant sources of livelihood for the settled population in Slovakia. Cultural traditions are linked to the life of a person in a three-generation patriarchal large family headed by a householder and a housewife, their sons and daughters-in-law, grandchildren, and unmarried children. The rhythm of their lives was defined by the annual cycle of sowing, ripening, harvesting, and processing, or the seasons of spring (sowing, planting), summer (ripening), autumn (harvesting and processing), and winter (resting). In the case of breeders, it was the life cycle of the animals. Everything in the life of the family was adapted to this.

The territory of Slovakia, apart from mining in central Slovakia, was for a long time an undeveloped industrial and mainly agrarian country. In order for an ordinary farming family to live at least in a standard way and to provide for all the basic necessities of life, supplementary sources of livelihood were essential. They depended mainly on the surrounding geographical conditions. In the mountainous forested areas of Slovakia, these included lumbering, the collection, and sale of forest fruits, charcoal production, lime burning, fishing, rafting (rafting of harvested timber and its sale), and gold panning along the rivers. In the mountain areas, sheep shepherding was also widespread (sheep rearing by hired shepherds year-round in mountain pastures). Men who were not apprenticed, but who knew the trade, earned their living as ‚unauthorized' craftsmen, called ‚fushers'. Women made and sold linen, embroidery, lace, and other home-made products. Some families were more focused on raising cattle for meat or selling them as draught animals. The condition here was to have enough fodder. Every surplus product produced by the family was sold by the women at weekly markets or annual fairs in the nearest and accessible towns (milk, eggs, butter, meat and meat products, fruit, vegetables,

flowers, berries, mushrooms, or poultry, etc.). Men sold and bought cattle and horses at the annual cattle markets in some of the larger towns.

Men also earned a living as day laborers or seasonal agricultural laborers (most often as scythes) for the wealthy. Women worked as maids and housekeepers for the wealthy (also in towns) and also as seasonal agricultural laborers (called seasonal women, especially diggers and reapers). When needed, men went to work, especially as construction laborers in distant towns for weeks or months, or as laborers in factories at home and in other countries for months or years.

Also present in the countryside were apprenticed craftsmen for whom the main source of income was the practice of a trade and agriculture was a supplementary source of income. These were mainly those crafts that were essential to the life of each village community (e.g., blacksmith, wheelwright, carpenter, joiner, tailor, mason, shoemaker). More specialized crafts (e.g., satchel maker, saddler, baker, hatter, cobbler) were rarely present in the village environment. In towns, craftsmen were organized into guilds from the Middle Ages onwards.

Industrial Slovakia

Although the industrialization of the territory of Slovakia took place only from the end of the 19th century, some industries were present much earlier. The oldest industry in Slovakia is mining, which dates back to prehistoric times and is represented by copper mining. The Celts perfected the mining and processing of metals here 2,400 years ago. In the Great Moravian period (1,100 years ago), mining developed in the area of today‘s central Slovakia (the towns of Banská Štiavnica, Banská Bystrica, Kremnica, and the area of the Slovenské Rudohorie mountains). Under the influence of German colonization in the 13th century, underground mining began to develop in this area, and mining settlements were established, which turned into mining towns. The seal of Banská Štiavnica from the year 1275 is the oldest seal with mining emblems (hammer and handcuff) in the world.

Mining in Slovakia

Mining in Slovakia developed most in the period from the 18th century to the mid-19th century. At that time, the territory of Slovakia was one of Europe‘s most important producers:

- precious metals (Banská Štiavnica, Kremnica),
- copper (Smolník, Gelnica, Spišska Nová Ves),
- iron (Hronec and Spiš-Gemer Ore Mountains).

In the 2nd half of the 19th century, coal mining intensified (especially in the region of Upper Nitra and Central Pohronie).

Mining was based on wage labor and was the main occupation of men. It was an extremely demanding and risky, but regular and well-paid job. At its peak in the 18th century, there were about 60 occupations working in mining. From the 13th century onwards, miners enjoyed various privileges and privileges: they were personally free, could move freely, did not have to do menial labor, and were exempt from taxes and military service. They were not subject to the church, the nobility, or the army like everyone else. Their life was regulated by the so-called ‚mining law‘. Mining territories had their own administrative administration - the so-called ‚min-

ing chamber‘. Miners were a special social group with a different material and spiritual culture. The social welfare of mining families was already in the Middle Ages provided by fraternities (fraternal treasury) and the miners‘ erar, providing miners with pensions, sickness support, and also for widows and orphans, which was unprecedented at that time elsewhere. Women were housewives and earned their living by making and selling lace. Mining families lived in so-called ‚miners‘ houses‘, or ‚miners‘ colonies‘ with several housing units. Mining culture and traditions (especially clothing, folklore, customs, sacred culture, and artistic expression) are still present in Slovakia, especially in the mining towns of central Slovakia. It could be said that the mining traditions of Slovakia are mainly medieval, German, Christian, and urban.

Among other industries, the metallurgical, textile, glass, footwear, and woodworking industries (since the first half of the 20th century) have the greatest tradition in Slovakia, followed by the mechanical, electrical, energy, armaments, and chemical industries.

The development of industry in the first half of the 20th century meant:

- The first factories were started, men left the villages to work on ‘week work’, and families moved to laborers‘ colonies built near the factories.
- Agricultural production begins to mechanize. Village farmers join together to form cooperatives, buying tractors and other agricultural machinery together. This frees up human capacity for industry or, conversely, the productive rural population is no longer needed to the same extent and has to look for work outside the village or country, for example, overseas.

The development of industry in the 2nd half of the 20th century meant:

- The tremendous intensification of the mechanization of agriculture in the countryside and the emergence of agricultural cooperatives as the basic instrument of agricultural production. This caused the disintegration of landlord patriarchal large families and the disappearance of many agrarian traditions.
- Intensive industrialization and infrastructure building also in the least developed areas of Slovakia. This means an end to isolation and the preservation of culture.
- Urbanisation and the transfer of part of the population from the countryside to the town. This means a change in the way of life and thinking.
- Rural modernization (especially infrastructure, accessibility, and media).

In the context of cultural traditions, this has, of course, caused the disappearance of many of them, their change, or the emergence of new ones. The second half of the 20th century in Slovakia is perhaps the period of the greatest change in the way of life of its inhabitants in modern history.

At the same time, a mature system of protection of cultural values is being established in Slovakia: the most valuable cultural monuments are declared national cultural monuments, the most valuable historical parts of towns and villages are declared monu-

ment reserves or zones, and the most valuable buildings are transferred to specialized museums - the so-called ‚museums in nature'. Intangible cultural assets are intensively recorded, archived, researched, and presented.

Slovakia - colonization and migration

Due to its location in the center of the continent, various migratory streams have passed through the territory of Slovakia in European history. The territory of Slovakia was interesting for prehistoric hunter-gatherers, Neolithic shepherd-peasants, and modern industrial man. The southern parts of Slovakia are lowland, near the lower reaches of rivers, with fertile soil, a high number of sunny days, and regular rainfall, always settled first and settled relatively continuously. The northern parts of Slovakia are mountainous, and forested, with watercourses, minerals, and game, settled temporarily and more sparsely in the past, permanently only since modern times. In the context of the cultural traditions of Slovakia, the issues of settlement and settlement of the territory of Slovakia are important, especially colonization and migration since the early Middle Ages.

Immigration to the territory of Slovakia

Until the 12th century, the settlement of the territory of Slovakia was based on customary law - according to the customs and traditions then established in the locality. It prevailed during the period of feudalism. It was gradually replaced by legislative law (royal, ecclesiastical, noble, municipal, and colonization laws). The remnants of customary law were only eliminated by the state after World War II.

German colonization

The German colonization was the most significant in terms of the development of the territory of Slovakia. It consisted of the settlement and re-settlement of sparsely populated or depopulated areas of the territory of Slovakia by colonists mainly from German-speaking countries. The first, smaller wave hit Slovakia already before the 12th century, and the second, more powerful wave took place in the 12th-14th centuries when after the Tatar invasion (1241) it was necessary to replenish the depopulated areas. In addition to peasants, miners, craftsmen, merchants, as well as knights, and clergy were called up. Immigrants - the so-called ‚guests' - settled based on the German so-called ‚pledge law', which granted them considerable privileges - acquiring land in hereditary possession, handing over only financial rents, and self-government in the newly founded towns according to the Magdeburg Law. Based on this right they also settled in the countryside. Already in the 13th and 14th centuries, they created several German enclaves, especially in the Spiš region, in the vicinity of the town of Banska Stiavnica, in the Upper Nitra sub-region, and at the southern foot of the Small Carpathian Mountains. In the 16th century, the so-called ‚Habans' (a Protestant sect of New Christians) came to western Slovakia. They lived secluded in their settlements - the so-called ‚Habán courts'. The so-called ‚Haban ceramics' and ‚Haban houses' are still known today. In the 18th century, the Hunzokars/Holzhakers - German-speaking woodcutters and forest managers - came and established woodcutter settlements in the west of Slovakia in the area of the Little Carpathians.

Wallachian colonization

The Wallachian colonization was focused on the settlement of the mountainous areas of northern and central Slovakia by the pastoral population in the 14th to 15th centuries. The first groups of pastoral populations of Romanian and Ruthenian nationality appeared in the eastern Slovakian estates in the 14th century. In the course of the following centuries, as colonization progressed from the east to the west, to the regions of Gemer, Upper Pohronie, Liptov, Orava, and Trenčín County, the native Slovak, and possibly also Polish and Ruthenian, population became its carriers. The villages were founded based on the so-called ‚Wallachian law', which was, in fact, a modified German law adapted to the needs of the new settlers. In return for the free use of the land, the Wallachian serfs handed over to the manor, after the expiry of the time limit set for the establishment of the village, twenty sheep and cattle royalties, cheese, bryndza, forest venison, leather products, and home-made cloth. They also carried out guard duties and, gradually, woodcutting work in the mountains. The Wallachian villages were headed by hereditary richtars, šoltýs (škultéts) or vajds, who also had a lower jurisdiction over the subjects. In the 17th century, the Wallachian serfs merged with the rest of the village population.

Wallachian culture is one of the most representative parts of Slovak folk culture. In the field of material culture it is represented by:

- Housing: the so-called ‚koliba' - a wooden log dwelling of shepherds with a shingled roof, ‚salaš' - a 'farm' for the common breeding of hundreds of sheep in the mountain extravagance of the village, consisting of a hut and a ‚košiar' - a portable sheep pen.
- Wooden containers for sheep's milk products (for cheeses: bryndza, oštiepok, parenica, also the drink žinčica) - especially the so-called ‚črpák' - decorated carved cup, or the so-called ‚geletka' - a container for storing bryndza, also molds for cheese making, etc.
- Folk musical instruments of the shepherds - pipes - the so-called ‚fujara' (shepherd's pipe), rifovka, dvoyanka, six-hole pipe, or trombita.
- Clothing components - a shepherd's belt (wide four-strap richly decorated with thick leather), leather shoes - so-called ‚krpce', a hat with a wide roof, etc.

In the field of social culture, it is the structure and hierarchy of the shepherd's staff - the chief shepherd (bača), assistant shepherds (valasi), and seasonal helpers (wool shearers, honelníci).

In the area of spiritual culture, these are mainly pastoral songs, dances, and customs.

Internal migration within the territory of Slovakia

The geographic ruggedness of the territory of Slovakia meant that the territory was not evenly settled. The population moved from the southern densely populated lowland agricultural areas along the lower reaches of the rivers to the sparsely or uninhabited mountain areas in the north, upstream. The reasons for this were the acquisition of livelihoods, the economic valorization of the previously less, or not at all, populated northern territories, and the population release of the densely populated areas in the south of the territory. Internal migration also included population movements from population centers (towns, villages, and settlements) to more sparsely populated areas. These were relatively sophisticated and controlled movements.

Šoltýs colonization

The Šoltýs colonization was an internal colonization on the territory of Slovakia, mainly by the native population, on German occupation rights in the 13th-15th centuries. The Šoltýs colonization aimed to attract new settlers, cultivate remote uncultivated land, and establish new settlements in sparsely populated areas of the extensive estates of the nobility and monasteries. The aim was to increase the monetary and in-kind income of the owners. Under the law of pledge, settler families were granted hereditary possession of the cultivated land allocated to them, which was exempted from the payment of monetary and in-kind contributions for a period of 10-15 years. The hereditary lease of the land was coupled with the right to sell it (in fact, the sale of the right to rent) and the free movement of the serf. A settlement was entrusted to the so-called ‚locators', who also became hereditary richtars - šoltýs (škultéts). They were given by the lords to use twice as much tax-free land, the right to set up a mill, tavern, and slaughterhouse, and also a lower jurisdiction over the settlers. In Spiš and north-western Slovakia, about 200 villages were established on the pledge, inhabited mainly by Slovak and partly by German, Polish, and Ruthenian populations. The benefits of the right of occupancy ceased after the suppression of the Doge's Revolt in 1514.

Kopanice colonization

The Kopanice colonization took place on the so-called ‚Kopaničiar law'. It was the settlement of remote and inaccessible foothills and mountain areas of Slovakia by the local population between the 16th and 19th centuries. The Kopaničiar colonization was prompted by the population growth in the original settlements and the associated scarcity of land. This forced the search for new sources of livelihood by clearing off the settled areas of forest or other unproductive land and building new settlements. New settlements were initially built as seasonal residential and farm buildings. These became the basis of permanent hill settlements or were developed into independent villages. There were 166 kopaničiar settlements in Slovakia, with a total area of 4,640 km², on which there were around 2,900 kopanice settlements. In western Slovakia, these areas are called kopanice and the inhabitants kopaničiari, in central Slovakia, they are called lazy and the inhabitants lazníci, in mining regions with German settlement they were called stadles (from German stalungen - stables, temporary dwellings).

Emigration from the territory of Slovakia

The territory of Slovakia is one of those where emigration of the population across national borders or migration within the country has been a significant social phenomenon. In the last three centuries, a large proportion of people have left their homes permanently or temporarily. They usually did so for socio-economic, religious, or ideo-political reasons. It is interesting to note that in the multi-ethnic Hungary, it was the Slovaks who formed the most significant group of migrants. As part of internal migration, they moved from the northern to the more fertile southern regions of Hungary, and later, from the second third of the 19th century onwards, from the countryside to the industrializing centers of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (especially Budapest and Vienna). As Hungary had long been more of a less industrialized agrarian country, where the majority of the population lived in the countryside, it logically 'exported' labor to the faster industrializing European colonial (especially Germany, France, and Belgium) and newly emerging overseas economies (especially the USA, Canada, Argentina, Australia).

Revitalization of the Lower Land

The revitalization of the Lower Land is the process of settling the almost depopulated and economically unused areas of central and southern Hungary with subjects from the northern stools (the territory of today's Slovakia), which took place in the 18th - 19th century. The reasons for this (then) internal migration were:

- overpopulation of the Higerland Hungarian Counties and depopulation of the Lowerland Hungarian Counties,
- poor economic and social conditions,
- religious persecution of Protestants (Counter-Reformation), especially the recatholization in the 16th-18th centuries, when the Catholic Church severely eliminated Protestantism (it reached up to 90% of the population in Slovakia) in order to 'bring' the majority of the population back 'under its wing', which it succeeded in doing.

Moreover, almost the whole of Hungary (except for the western and northern parts) was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire between the 16th and 18th centuries. The key here was the scandalous defeat of Hungarian troops at the Battle of Mohács in 1526, which virtually ended Hungary as a state. For almost 150 years it existed only as the so-called ‚Kingdom of Hungary', an unoccupied part of original Hungary by the Ottoman Empire and, moreover, as part of the Habsburg (Austrian) monarchy. The Kingdom of Hungary consisted only of a small territory in the north (today's Slovakia), then Burgenland (today a region in eastern Austria), western Croatia, and a few other smaller territories.

This has caused a decline in economic levels and population. Even the northern territories of Hungary (today's Slovakia), although not officially controlled by the Ottoman Empire, were regularly invaded and plundered. Slovak folklore and historical literature still preserve a reflection of this period as a period of oppression, plunder, and enslavement (so-called ‚anti-Turkish' songs, tales, fairy tales, legends, poems, novels).

The beginning of the turnaround came in 1683 with the spectacular defeat of the Ottomans at the Battle of Vienna when the power of the Ottoman Empire over the territory of Hungary gradually weakened. The large Slovak-speaking population was subsequently moved by the original owners (mainly the nobility, the church, the army, and the king) to the liberated territories to repopulate them and revitalize them economically. This process took place in the form of several colonization waves until the beginning of the 20th century.

The largest number of Slovak emigrants settled in the area of the so-called ‚Lower Land' - the territory around the borders of present-day Hungary, Romania, Serbia, and northeastern Croatia. These Slovak enclaves are still alive today, after almost three hundred years.

In the autonomous region of Vojvodina in northern Serbia, in almost forty localities (towns and villages) there are now around 50,000 descendants of these migrants who claim to be Slovaks and whose mother tongue is Slovak, which they both speak and use. In Croatia there are more than 10 such localities and about 4-5 thousand descendants, in Romania there are 17 thousand descendants in more than 40 localities, in Hungary 17-110 thousand descendants in almost 70 localities. (The large range of estimates of Slovaks in Hungary is due to the different criteria in the various censuses for counting the population as Slovak.

Emigration to Western Europe and overseas

Emigration to Western Europe and overseas began in the last decades of the 19th century and faded and ended between the two world wars. During this period, Slovaks went not only to the developed industrial countries of Western Europe (France, Germany, Belgium, etc.) but especially overseas (the United States of America, Canada, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and Australia). The emigration of Slovaks to the USA was unprecedented in the period before World War I. They settled in the industrial Northeast and Midwest, where they formed an economically and politically strong Slovak community of about half a million in the period before the outbreak of World War I (1914) and the subsequent breakup of Hungary (1918). After the war, the USA restricted the influx of immigrants, which forced emigrants from Slovakia to seek other destination countries (mainly Canada, South American countries, France, and Belgium).



Colonization currents of the Lowland Slovaks.
Source: https://www.sav.sk/journals/uploads/08141148ER_1_2023_studia_Botik.pdf

The reasons why young men in particular, but not infrequently entire extended multi-generational families, left their homes were:

- poor economic and social conditions in Slovakia and to some extent also the national oppression in Hungary,
- the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the establishment and delimitation of the borders of the successor states, as a result of which a large number of Slovaks found themselves outside their 'own' territory. Thus, 'overnight' Slovak minorities were established in Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Austria and partly in Poland.
- individual efforts to improve one's life and prospects, the fulfillment of a dream, and the desire to see the world.

Emigration for work to Western Europe and overseas continued after the establishment of Czechoslovakia (in 1918). In the period 1850-1940, over 1.1 million people left the territory of Slovakia, which was a large part of the total population. In 1848, for example, there were almost 2.5 million inhabitants in Slovakia, and in 1940 there were about 3.3 million inhabitants (today there are 5.5 million). The most accurate picture of the size of the Slovak minority in the USA is provided by two censuses: from 1920 and 1990. In 1920, Americans counted about 619,000 Slovaks. These were both first and second-generation immigrants. In 1990, they already counted about 1,800,000 Slovaks, including the descendants of immigrants who, although they increasingly came from ethnically mixed marriages, registered as Slovaks. Interestingly, although there are far fewer ethnically 'unmixed' Slovaks in the world as a whole, the rest are not only aware of, but also declare their Slovak origin in censuses, thus expressing their relationship to their ancestors, roots, and even to themselves.

Communist government

After 1945, foreign emigration in search of work was interrupted due to the creation and post-war reconstruction of Czechoslovakia, but already as a socialist economic system under the leadership of communist ideology. The then regime eliminated any collective cross-border links and contacts of people with the West. At that time, another, numerically smaller group of Slovaks who went 'to the West' consisted mainly of members of the political emigration from the period 1945-1948. These were mostly the power elites of the former Slovak state who were fleeing the advance of Soviet troops or Czechoslovakists. They found themselves in Austrian and German internment camps and from there eventually made their way to the USA, Canada, Argentina or remained in Germany. After 1948, when the Communist Party gained power and changed the political situation in Czechoslovakia even more radically, individuals from the better-off classes emigrated to the West, along with political elites representing the aspirations for the post-war democratic development of the state. The subsequent closure of the borders and the creation of the so-called ‚Iron Curtain' between East and West practically ended this emigration process.

The 1945 cession of the eastern territory of Czechoslovakia, the so-called ‚Subcarpathian Rus', to the Soviet Union created a Slovak minority in Ukraine, and there was no migration. It is interesting to note that the inhabitants of some parts of Subcarpathian Rus, who were born before 1918 as citizens of Hungary, were citizens of Czechoslovakia between 1918 and 1938, from 11 October to 1 November 1938 they were citizens of an autonomous independent territory with its government under the name of Carpathian Ukraine, then from the Vienna Arbitration 2. November 1938, by which the territory fell to Hungary, they were citizens of Hungary; after 1944, when the territory reverted to Czechoslovakia, they were citizens of Czechoslovakia, but only until 1945, when the ter-

ritory became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic as a federal republic of the Soviet Union and its population citizens of Ukraine; and finally, since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, they became citizens of the independent state of Ukraine. And all this without leaving their native place of residence.

A Moment of Hope

The next wave of emigrants from Slovakia to the West was linked to the invasion/release of the Warsaw Pact armies (the eastern variant of NATO) into Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Part of the elites at that time wanted to 'turn' the direction of the state more to the West. The direction was capitalism, democracy, and economic orientation towards the European Economic Community (the forerunner of the current European Union). The other part wanted to stay in the orientation towards the East (socialism and the USSR). Since the Yalta agreements on the division of the spheres of influence of the victorious powers after World War II were (and currently are) still in force, keeping Czechoslovakia in the sphere of influence of the eastern states led by the USSR was also achieved by the arrival of the Warsaw Pact troops. This provoked the protest departure of several protagonists of the Western orientation of Czechoslovakia, who thus gained the status of political emigrants and support after their arrival in the 'West'. This status was also used (and sometimes abused) by individuals who were lured to the West by its attractions or had criminal problems at home.

The current wave

After the socio-economic and economic-political changes that began after 1989 with the coup d'état (also simplistically referred to as the Velvet Revolution), characterized by the declaration of the transition from totalitarianism to democracy, from oppression to freedom, from socialism to capitalism, waves of emigration from Slovakia to Western European countries and overseas were renewed. The reasons were socio-economic. This emigration continues to this day and its intensity depends on how Slovakia is currently doing economically and how the Western countries and overseas are doing economically.

The division of Czechoslovakia in 1993 created an independent Slovak Republic and thus the largest Slovak minority in Europe - the Slovaks in Bohemia, who according to some estimates number up to 350,000.

According to the results of the census and qualified estimates, there are currently around 2.2 million people living abroad in more than 60 countries who claim to be Slovaks or declare their Slovak origin.

Current number of Slovaks living abroad (as of 31 August 2024)

Landscape	Censzus 2011 - 2012	Cenzus 2021 - 2022	Estimate 2023
Serbia	52,750	41,730	45,000
Romania	13,654	10,232	14,000
Croatia	4,753	3,688	7,000 – 8,000
Bulgaria	Not registered	212	600
Bosnia and Herzegovina	173	Not registered	300
Northern Macedonia		97	100
Montenegro	73	64	70
TOTAL	**71,403**	**56,023**	**68,070**

Number of Slovaks in the countries of South-Eastern Europe as national minorities and ethnic groups.
Source: Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, https://www.uszz.sk/krajania/

Landscape	Cenzus 2011 - 2012	Cenzus 2021 - 2022	Estimate 2023
Czech Republic	148,000	162,578	200,000
Austria	48,500	49,500	55,000

Hungary	29,647	29,881	30,000
Poland	3,240	5,889	8,000 – 10,000
Slovenia		468	500
TOTAL	**229,387**	**248,316**	**295,500**

Number of Slovaks in the countries of Central Europe as national minorities and ethnic groups.
Source: Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, https://www.uszz.sk/krajania/

Landscape	Official data	Year	Expert estimates
Belgium	6,865	2023	10,000
Cyprus	2,408	2021	2,500
Denmark	3,372	2023	4,000
Estonia	399	2023	600
Finland	771	2022	2,500
France	9,768	2017	22,000 – 24,000
Greece	780	2021	1,000
Netherlands	14,400	2023	25,000
Ireland	8,600	2022	15,000

Island	407	2023	600
Israel	8,000	2021	10,000
Kazakhstan	48		300
Kyrgyzstan	31	2023	200
Luxembourg	1,002	2023	1,000
Germany	58,581	2023	80,000
Norway	4,611	2023	5,500
Portugal	491	2022	1,500
Russia	193	2021	200
United Arab Emirates	3,000	2023	3,000
United Kingdom and Northern Ireland	160,270	2022	200,000
Spain	13,130	2023	15,500
Switzerland	22,770	2023	25,000
Sweden	3,434	2023	7,000
Italy	7,918	2023	20,000

Ukraine	6,400	2023	13,000 – 15,000
TOTAL	**337,730**		**469,480**

Number of Slovaks in Western and Eastern Europe and the Middle East.
Source: Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, https://www.uszz.sk/krajania/

Landscape	Official data	Year	Expert estimates
Argentina	Not registered		30,000
Australia	4,781	2016	30,000
Brazil	200	2023	200
Canada	68,210	2021	100,000
Qatar	185	2022	185
Kuwait	107	2022	150
New Zealand	408	2018	450
USA	594,844	2020	790,000
TOTAL	**668,735**		**950,985**

Number of Slovaks overseas.
Source: Office for Slovaks Living Abroad, https://www.uszz.sk/krajania/



Women's dance Karicka, Folklore group Parchovianka z Parchovian, eastern Slovakia, 2019, J. Topolovsky.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/zoznam-nkd/karicka-z-parchovian/

1.3 Folklore

Folklore is an umbrella term for folk songs, music, dances, folklore, games, and dramatic formations that are transmitted between generations through direct contact communication. Folklore is performed in small social groups and exists in several varieties. It is an image of the collective norms of the group. The persistence of folklore is linked to the multiple functions that folklore fulfills in a particular setting: aesthetic, cognitive, ceremonial, educational, entertaining, social, but also economic. Folklore is part of group identity. It has distinctive ethnic features. Today it is considered a valuable part of intangible cultural heritage.

Slovak folklore is predominantly a product of the rural peasant-pastoral environment, but it also contains expressions from the urban handicraft, mining, and student environments. Through who adapted a folklore work and how, and who interpreted it, how and when, we can discern:

Authenticity (folklore), is when the work is in its original wording and interpretation, on the original occasion, in the original setting, fulfilling the original function. The authenticity of folklore is based on tradition in its original setting, in the sense that ‚This is how it is sung/played/danced/talked about in our country.' The essential actors in interpretation here are ordinary people.

Stylization (folklorism), where the work is adapted and interpreted according to current requirements. Folklore material is transformed into repertoire. The degree of stylization can vary:

a) In the environment of folklore groups in the villages, which present their own material, the repertoire is closer to authenticity. The performers are original, lay people and the material is original, ‚home-grown'. The degree of stylization is relatively low. Rather, it is a matter of simply transferring it to the stage and imitating previous generations as faithfully as possible. The essential players are the best local musicians, singers, and dancers who play, sing, and dance to the best of their abilities.

b) A higher form of stylization (with a lower degree of authenticity) is typical of folklore troupe settings, where the performers, the material, and the occasions are usually not original. The material is adapted to the repertoire so that the singing, musicianship, and dancing skills of the performers can be presented on stage in front of the audience, and the audience's expectations to be entertained, to learn something new, to have a (preferably artistic) experience are also taken into account. Authenticity gives way to staginess. The essential actors are the trained musicians, who try as much as possible to approximate the ideal form of the author's musical scores, and the trained dancers, who try as much as possible to approximate the author's choreography.

Recomposing (so-called ‚high culture', ‚auteur art') is the significant reworking of folklore material by composers into musical art, by choreographers into dance art, and by directors into theatre art, with the performers being professional or semi-professional trained musicians, singers, actors, and dancers. These works are either artistic elaborations of the original folklore or are based on its motifs only. The primary result is a work of art; authenticity is not essential.

Folk dance

Folk dancing is a movement-music art, especially for the rural population. In folk dance, we do not know its author, only the performer who dances it. The performer dances it as he/she learned to dance it from elders and peers. Each interpretation of the dance reflects the abilities, possibilities, and ideas of a particular dancer about the ideal form of that dance. Another dancer may dance the same dance slightly differently. Of course, dancing a folk dance always generates discussions about how exactly that folk dance should be danced. Folk dance is, therefore, a relatively ‚living thing', but certain rules must be observed in order to preserve its character, elements, and motifs and to fulfill its function (entertainment, communication, representation, or ceremony). Folk dance has been preserved in its original environment by tradition - transmission from one generation to the next. Folk dance is nowadays preserved less and less in the public space, and the young hardly know it anymore at all. It is most often preserved through folklore groups and ensembles, as a stage work created by a choreographer, rehearsed by members of a dance ensemble, and presented on special occasions (parades, festivals, celebrations, competitions).

The function of folk dance

In the past, folk dancing has been one of the tools for youth dating and relationship building. It was one of the few socially tolerated opportunities for young people to have physical contact, to compete, and to show off their skills. The function of folk dancing can be seen through the occasion when a particular folk dance can/should be danced and when it should not. Most Slovak folk dances are intended to be danced for entertainment. Dance entertainments were held weekly, mainly in taverns, or in the open air during the summer months. Ceremonial dances were not commonly danced, but only at the appropriate ceremony, such as the sung maiden spring dances (the so-called ‚chorovody'), or the dance of the wedding guests with the bride (the so-called ‚čia je mlada', ‚vykrúcanka', ‚tanec s mladou'), or carnival dances (e.g., ‚na konope', ‚na ľan', ‚do výšky', ‚s klátikom', ‚s ražňami', ‚palicový', ‚mečový', or ‚tanec maškár').

By performer status

Some dances are associated with a particular occupation (e.g., carpenter's dance, shepherd's dance, flail dance), or are related to the departure of young men for war or the army (the so-called ‚verbunk dance'/'verbunk', basistovska dance).

According to the meaning of dance

Some folk dances have elements of competitiveness (for example, the so-called ‚cifrovania', ‚shirák dance', ‚odzemky', ‚rozkazovačky'), while others imitate various activities or animals (e.g., the so-called ‚marmot', sack, bear, sheep's breath, hare's dance, sheep shepherd's carriage).

Pair dances

The largest group of folk dances consists of pair dances. A dancing couple consists of a man and a woman. These are the so-called ‚twirling dances' - the twirling of the couple in mutual posture around the axis of the couple. They are derived from the European Renaissance dances of the 15th century. A dancing pair could commonly consist of two women, or rarely, in the case of some dances, a man with two women. All paired Slovak folk dances are based on the superior and leading position of the man, who chooses, summons, sets the tempo, changes the phases of the dance, and ends the dance. The female dancer has to constantly watch and adapt to her partner. In traditional folk dancing, the ability to respond to and adapt to changes in the dance given by the man is an indicator of the quality of the dancer.

The oldest twirling dances

The oldest twirling dances (the so-called ‚old-style dances') begin with the dancer singing and dancing solo and continue with the dancer calling a partner and the pair dancing, twirling, improvisational interjections, and dancing. The pair's twirling dances of the older type are either in a slower tempo (called ‚krucena', ‚starosvecki', ‚starobabská') or in a fast tempo (called ‚do skoku', ‚šikovná', ‚prostá', ‚frišký', ‚sellácka', ‚vyhadzuvaná', or ‚mrvenica').

Newer twisted dances

The newer twisted dances (the so-called ‚new-style dances') are mainly represented by the czardas, since the end of the 19th century. The dance has a slow part (most often a one-step and a two-step) and a fast part (a leaping twist) in the pair's hold around the shank. During the second half of the 20th century, the waltz, polka, and tango also became popular.

Men's folk dances

Men's folk dances are either solo when only one dancer dances at a time (e.g., so called sólomaďar', ‚verbunk', ‚odzemok', ‚cifrovanie', ‚rozkazovačky'), or group when a group of men dances at the same time (e.g., so called ‚šorový/radový tanec', ‚odzemok', ‚mečový', or ‚palicový'). The group is then usually led by a single dancer (called captain, cifrosh) who pre-dances and directs the changes (for example, ‚bašistovska', ‚odzemok', or ‚verbunk').

Women's folk dances

Women's dances are mostly group dances, based on circular or chain formations. The most widespread is the circle dance 'v kolese', 'karička', 'do kolesa', or the chain marching dance 'chorovod'. Other women's dances involve taking a 'serious' men's dance and adapting it to a women's dance in an entertaining way (for example, a man's 'odzemok' to a woman's so-called ‚cindruška'). Solo female dances are minimal in Slovak folk dance. If they do, it is a female dancer who pre-sings, leads a line, or spins a wheel in a group of female dancers. Women's dances were usually danced at dance entertainments during the musicians' break, i.e. only with the dancers singing, exceptionally with the accompaniment of an accordion player if one was available. For this reason, more songs were interspersed during the dance, or these songs had a greater number of strophes.

Territorial variation of folk dance

Slovak folk dance is an example of the diversity and variation of Slovak folk culture. Not only because it consists of many dances, but also because many dances have many regional and local variants. (Guys from a neighboring village may show off a little differently in the same dance.) It should also be pointed out that not all folk dances were danced in all regions of Slovakia. Some were widespread everywhere (e.g., czardáš, carnivals´ dances, wedding dances, girls‘ rounds), others only in some places (e.g., ‚sheep‘s breath‘ in north-eastern Slovakia, or ‚verbunky‘ in eastern and western Slovakia, ‚mužský šorový‘, ‚odzemky‘ or ‚cifrované rozkazovačky‘ in central Slovakia, or ‚vyhadzovaný‘, ‚širákový‘, or ‚starobabská‘ in western Slovakia).

Saving folk dance

As folk dance began to disappear in its natural environment in the mid-20th century (as did all traditional folk culture), the state-sponsored and publicly popular folk movement motivated the establishment of folk groups (in the countryside) and folk ensembles (in towns, at factories, schools and universities) during the second half of the 20th century. Although folk dancing almost disappeared in its natural environment, it became a popular tool for organized leisure time for children, young people, and the elderly. Even if, at the cost of choreographic and scenic stylization, the dances were somewhat ‚prefabricated‘, their survival was ensured through other carriers. Equally important is the fact that there is still a greater number of people who want to watch folk dance as spectators.

Folk dance has thus become a cultural heritage which, although only in an institutionalized stage form, with all the more protection, will hopefully be preserved not only through audiovisual recordings but also through live performers. The role of folklore ensembles, folklore groups, and individuals is irreplaceable in this case.

Folk song

A folk song is a musical and vocal expression whose author is unknown. Originally, folk songs were only disseminated orally because there was no other medium, and, moreover, a large part of the population was illiterate. Folk songs have a simple structure - usually a few stanzas with a refrain. They are subject to a process of variation in their tradition - transmission from generation to generation - as well as in their singing by different performers.

Some folk songs are tightly bound only to a particular singing occasion, setting, or bearer. That is, they are not usually sung at other times, elsewhere, or by other people (e.g., wedding songs by wedding elder women while bonneting the bride, women's songs while raking hay - the so-called ‚lawn songs', or ‚funeral cries'). Other songs, simplistically, can be sung by anyone, anywhere, at any time (e.g., at work, or a dance party).

Folk song in a traditional setting accompanies absolutely all moments of human and community life. Therefore, the diversity of folk songs is as diverse as the life of their bearers. By analyzing folk songs, it is possible to build up a fairly accurate picture of their bearers, their lives, and their thinking, even if they are sometimes unaware of many of the connections.

Slovak folk songs can be divided according to several criteria:

According to function/occasion: according to the function they perform in the life of the person and the community/occasion when they are sung, especially:

- according to the life cycle of a person - at birth (christening songs), wedding (wedding songs), and death (funeral cries),
- according to the calendar cycle - e.g., New Year (New Year songs), Carnival (Carnival songs), Pentecost (Pentecost songs), St. John (St. John songs), Christmas (Christmas songs, especially carols),
- according to the work performed - especially harvesting - e.g., harvesting, harvesting songs (harvest songs), cutting grass and raking hay (mowing songs, songs while raking hay - the so-called ‚grass songs'), herding cattle and sheep (shepherd songs), craft production and other non-peasant occupations (tinker songs, woodcutter songs, robber songs, artisan songs, laborer songs),
- according to the occasions of everyday life (lullabies, invocations, scoldings, love songs), also festive life, or specific events (military and recruiting songs, pilgrimage songs, student songs, fair songs, drinking songs, birthday songs).

According to the theme of the text: what the song is about (about love, about nature, about work, about an experience, about a historical event, about a relationship with relatives, about war).

By genre: For example, carols, ballads, lullabies, grass songs, dance songs.

According to the way of singing: for example, monophonic, polyphonic, sung by one singer, or by several singers.

According to the performer: Masculine, feminine, child, bachelor, bachelorette.

According to the musical and temporal aspect of the emergence of the song style: which is manifested in the tonality, rhythm, and melody of the songs. We divide them into:

- old songs (so-called ‚pre-harmonic songs') - songs that have a very simple, even monotonous melody sometimes consisting of only one note (so-called ‚recitation songs', hymns), sometimes of two, three, four, or five notes, and which have been preserved mainly in the form of ceremonial songs used in magical acts and rituals (divination about a future spouse, love magic), rites of passage (birth, wedding, death), the oldest annual customs, such as the end of winter and the welcoming of spring (when the Morena is brought out, or the so-called ‚letečka'). Usually, these are songs of peasant culture, pastoral Wallachian culture, and bandit songs.
- songs of the transitional layer (so-called ‚modal songs') - songs in old keys connected with new keys, which is manifested especially in medieval melodics influenced by the melodic abilities of aerophones (air-sounding musical instruments), especially pipes and shepherd's pipe (e.g., bandit songs), then pentatonic songs and songs with features of pentatonicism (when the musical scale consists of 5 notes in an octave) and so-called ‚hypotonic songs'.
- new songs (so-called ‚harmonic songs') - these are either older harmonic songs (in major and minor scales), songs of the so-called ‚New Hungarian type' (especially czardas), songs of the Western European type, or contemporary folk work.

In folk songs, besides the melody, the lyrics are equally important. The lyrics reflect not only regional but in many cases also local dialect variations.

Territorial and generational knowledge of folk songs

Some folk songs are known throughout the Slovak environment, even in Slovak communities outside Slovakia, or they are not only related to the older generations but also the environment of the youth (for example, ‚Na Orave dobre, na Orave zdravo... ,, ‚V hlbokej doline srnka vodu pije... ,, or ‚Na Kráľovej holi stojí strom zelený... ,). Others are known only regionally, while elsewhere they are not known or only the oldest generation knows them.

In the course of the 20th century, through the media (radio, television, media carriers, internet) and the folklore movement (folklore ensembles, folklore groups, folk music, singing groups, folklore festivals, shows or competitions), many originally local or regional folk songs have spread and become nationwide.

Song folking

Folk songs sometimes include originally original songs that have become popular, well-known, popular and have become popular only when they have become popular. They became part of the singing repertoire of the broad masses and became part of the musical cultural heritage. These are the so-called ‚evergreens/schlagers' of Slovak popular music, for example, the songs from the interwar period ‚Len bez ženy', ‚Jaj Zuzka, Zuzička', ‚Skôr než odídeš', by F. K. Veselý, or songs from the second half of the 20th century by K. Duchoň (‚Čardáš dvoch sŕdc', ‚Mám ťa rád', ‚Šiel, šiel'), E. Máziková to dozens of other Slovak ‚cult' performers.

Rescue of Slovak folk song

The so-called ‚Treasury of Folk Songs' is made up of arrangements and sound recordings of folk song interpretations by the most prominent folk singers and folk ensembles. These include, for example, the Slovak Radio Folk Instrument Orchestra (OĽUN), the folk music of Samek Dudík, the leader of a renowned band in western Slovakia, or the folk music of Štefan Molota, Jan Berky Mrenica from central Slovakia, the Kandráč family, the Kollár family, and others. Singing groups of folklore ensembles (e.g., the choir of the Lúčnica art ensemble, the singing group of FS Železiar), independent singing groups (e.g., the men's singing group from Šumiac, or the women's group from Telgárt), or soloists (e.g., Ján Ambróz, Darina Laščiaková, Anna Hulejová) have also become popular.

Currently, there are dozens and dozens of folklore ensembles, folklore groups, and singing and musical groups in Slovakia and in the compatriot environment, which interpret and maintain the repertoire of Slovak folk songs. Moreover, members of some of them collect it directly in the field from the oldest monuments. Not infrequently, this is so-called ‚rescue research', when they find unknown and forgotten songs in the memory of the oldest bearers, almost ‚about 5 minutes to 12'.

Collection and research of Slovak folk songs

Some sources state that there are about 50 thousand Slovak folk songs. The most important collectors of Slovak folk songs have often collected thousands of them. For example:

- In 1834 and 1835 J. Kollár (1793 - 1852) published the collection Narodnie zpievanky I. a II., which contains the texts of 2,433 folk songs,
- K. Ruppeldt (1840 - 1909), J. Francisci (1822 - 1905), A. Halaša (1852 - 1913), P. Mudroň (1835 - 1914), J. Kadavý (1810 - 1883) between the years 1880 and 1910 gradually published in 18 volumes (to make the songs easily accessible) complete records of more than 2,000 Slovak folk songs. These were also published in book form as Slovenské spevy I., II., III.,
- B. Bartók (1881-1945) collected 3,400 folk songs in Slovakia between 1906 and 1918, about 60% of which he also recorded on phonograph cylinders (the first technology for recording sound, the precursor of LP records).

Other collectors were, for example, K. Medvecký and K. Plicka. With the advent of radio broadcasting in Slovakia in 1926 and especially after the end of World War II in 1945, the mass recording, collecting, and broadcasting of Slovak folk songs began. A folk music department was established within the state radio in Bratislava, special programs were produced, competitions for singers of folk songs and folk music were held, and later the well-known cycle The Treasury of Folk Music was launched. Professionally, collecting and research activities were carried out by the State Institute for Folk Song, and later by the Department of Musical Folkloristics of the Institute of Musicology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, where ethnomusicologists are still associated today.

If we listen carefully to any folk song and give serious thought to its lyrics by understanding the symbols it contains, then we will discover what knowledge, experience, and truth are in it. The consciousness and history of an entire community, its moral, ethical, and aesthetic norms, its worldview, its life strategies, desires, evaluations, and even its expectations and dreams, are reflected in the folk song.



Commanders at the Folklore Festival under Poľana, 2009, Vladimír Linder.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/zoznam-nkd/podpolianske-rozkazovacky/

Verbal folklore

Verbal folklore, together with musical folklore and dance folklore, forms the core of the intangible cultural heritage (folk songs, folk dances, folk folklore, folk plays, and folk theatre).

Verbal folklore consists of:

a) folk prose, such as fairy tales, stories, memoirs, legends, humorous narratives and anecdotes,

b) so-called ‚paremia' (established sayings), for example, proverbs, sayings, superstitions, riddles, toasts, greetings, wishes, greetings, expressions of thanks and condolences, prayers, threats, curses, cajoling,

c) verbal components of ceremonial folklore, such as dialogues between wedding officiants, incantations, curing, vignettes, weeping,

d) the verbal component of folk theatre and puppet theatre, for example, the plot of a story, dialogues, verses, vignettes,

e) the verbal component of folk songs (folk poetry), e.g., ballads, bandit songs, historical songs,

f) children's verbal folklore, for example, rhymes, nursery rhymes, and dialogues of children's games.

In addition to oral expressions of verbal folklore, there are also written expressions, such as announcements, greeting cards, and inscriptions on houses, tombstones, and walls.

What is important here is not only what is said, but also who says it, how and when they say it (facial expressions, gesticulation, color, pitch, strength of voice, etc.). This is because verbal folklore is tied to relevant occasions (e.g., family gatherings, celebrations, weddings, funerals) or relevant life situations and moments when it is necessary/appropriate to utter it.

Musical folklore

Musical folklore consists of folk songs and folk instrumental music. Musical folklore has been transmitted mainly by oral tradition and thus kept in the consciousness of several generations of singers and musicians. Musical folklore brings together separate song genres (e.g., meadow songs, bandit songs) and instrumental expressions (e.g., dance music, sitting music). Folk songs and folk music form broad thematic groups according to what the songs are about, and what they are used for when they are sung or played.

'What is sung' depends on the singing occasion, and 'how it is sung' depends on the singers' abilities and capabilities. Instrumental folk music, in turn, is tied to the qualities and sonic possibilities of the instruments as well as the abilities of the musicians.

Slovak folk musical instruments by sound production

Slovak musical folklore has an exceptionally extensive and distinctive instrumentarium of folk musical instruments. It is extensive in types and kinds of folk musical instruments (up to 210 types of instruments). It is special in the types of folk musical instruments that do not appear elsewhere in such a form or at all.

Slovak folk musical instruments can be divided into:

Self-sounding (so-called ‚idiophones')

The sound in the idiophone is produced by striking, strumming, rubbing, and shaking the body of the instrument, e.g., drumsticks, spoons, knockers, bells, jingle bells, sticks, rattles, and raps. They are most commonly used as a rhythmic complement to other musical instruments or as a stand-alone sounding instrument, especially in ceremonies and customs and in children's settings and children's play. Idiophones make up 24% of Slovak folk musical instruments.

Blanosounding (so-called ‚membranophones')

The sound in a membranophone is produced by the diaphragm, or the vibration of the body of the instrument, e.g., drum, snare, comb, rattle. These are mostly accompanying instruments, or stand-alone in a child's environment. Membranophones make up 5% of the types of Slovak folk musical instruments.

String-sounding (so-called ‚chordophones')

The sound in a chordophone is produced by the friction of the string and its amplification in the soundboard of an instrument, such as a violin, viola, double bass, baby violin, or hamerred dulcimer. These are group musical instruments; individual playing is extremely rare. Chordophones make up 20% of Slovak folk musical instruments.

Air-sounding (so-called ‚aerophones')

The sound in an aerophone is produced by the air flowing around or within an instrument, e.g., a whip, a blowpipe, a whistle, a leather bag, an ocarina, a flute, a clarinet, a trumpet, or a horn. Aerophones make up 51% of Slovak folk musical instruments.

Typical Slovak folk musical instruments

Jew's harp

An idiophone made of metal, sometimes also tonally tuned. It is played by inserting the instrument between the teeth and covering the lips. The tone is produced by striking the flexible tongue with the finger, and the modification of the tone (simple melody) is produced by variously filling the oral cavity with the tongue. The strength and rhythm of the sound are governed by the intensity and rhythm of the exhalation and inhalation of air. The drum is mentioned in Slovakia as early as the 17th century as an instrument of entertainment and love. It is possible to play melodically simple songs on the Jew's harp (especially love, bandit, and shepherd songs).

Shepherd's pipe

Aerophone made of hazel, elder, or rosewood. The pipe is 150-180 cm long, 2-5 cm thick, and has three holes, which are covered with the fingers to create tones while inhaling the air at the appropriate intensity. The body of the pipe is richly decorated with geometric, vegetal, or figural ornaments by carving and etching with acid (if the shepherd's pipe is pale) or by beating with brass (if it is dark). It is a typical Slovak shepherd's instrument, with the shepherd's pipe player alternately playing and singing the song. The shepherd's pipe is a representative of the pastoral culture whose arrival in Slovakia is related to the Wallachian colonization in the 14th-16th centuries. In 2005, the shepherd's pipe was inscribed on the UNESCO list of intangible World Cultural Heritage masterpieces.

Bagpipes

A multi-voiced type of aerophone consisting of one double melodic pipe (one has 6 holes, the other 'counter' has one, the notes being formed by tapping the holes with the fingers) and one to three non-melodic but tuned sound pipes without holes - the so-called ‚hoots'. The sound is produced by blowing air into the pipes by squeezing the ‚leather bag' (made from the skin of the body of a goat or dog), with which the pipes are connected and which the bagpipe player has inserted in his armpit. The leather bag is filled with air by the bagpipe through an inflatable tube, both at the beginning and during the playing. The supply of air in the leather bag enables the bagpiper to play and sing at the same time. To make bagpipes, it is necessary to master several crafts related to carving (because the pipes are made of hardwood, preferably pear, cherry, plum, and heavily decorated), plumbing (because the ends of the pipes are made of brass plates or animal horns), leatherworking (for processing the leather and making the leather bag). The bagpipes are ornamented by carving or hammering out brass like other wooden aerophones. The melodious pipe is often decorated with a carved head with horns in the form of a goat or devil at the point of its attachment to the leather bag. Due to its penetrating

to aggressive sound and the difficulty of tuning with other instruments, the bagpipe was most often a solo instrument. The tradition of ‚gajdoš' (bagpipes) music in Slovakia is medieval, dating back to the period of the 14th-15th centuries. The bagpipes are not only associated with pastoral culture but were the most widespread musical instrument for dancing in Slovakia.

Whistle

An extended, originally pastoral solo aerophone. The principles of manufacture, material, decoration, and repertoire are the same as for the shepherd's pipe. The melodic pipes, however, are 6-hole, the tone being produced by covering the holes with the fingers of both hands. Pipeless pipes, called end-holes or reeds (depending on the length of the arm - the reed is 60 - 100 cm long) produce individual notes according to the cooperation of the respective intensity of the player's inhalation of air and the uncovering or covering of the end-hole of the pipe with the finger. The so-called ‚double whistle' is a double whistle - a melodic whistle and endpipe connected side by side.

Cither

A stringed instrument that has been widespread in Slovakia since the 17th century. Playing is similar to playing a guitar instrument called Dobro. The cither is placed on the knees or a table in front of the player - the cither player and the sound is made by strumming the strings with a shank or quill. Tones are produced by shortening the strings with the other hand. Melody is produced by the sounding of the melodic strings, and harmony by the sounding of the chordally tuned ostinato strings. It is a solo instrument, nowadays rare, found only in southern Slovakia and among the so-called ‚Lowland Slovaks' (the territory of former Hungary outside the territory of present-day Slovakia).

Hammered dulcimer

Chordophonic instrument of flat trapezoidal shape with tuned strings struck with two-handed mallets. Depending on its size, the hammered dulcimer can have up to 100 strings. It became a fashionable instrument in Europe from the 16th-17th centuries, and flourished in the second half of the 19th century, when it became a concert instrument. In Slovak folk music, it is still an integral part of the finest folk music - the so-called ‚cimbalos and folk orchestras'.

Violins

Also in Slovak folk music the most used stringed musical instrument. Since the 18th century, they have gradually displaced their predecessors, the so-called ‚žlobcoky', the trough violin, whose body was created by hollowing out/molding into the wood (as in the making of a trough). The violin in Slovak folk music has never been a solo instrument, but in the hands of the main musician - the so-called ‚primáš' - it has always led the whole musical ensemble.

Small bass

The folk-made small bass (the so-called ‚bark bass') is a smaller version of the double bass. It is similar in size to a cello. It was widespread in the shepherd-wallachian mountainous regions of northern Slovakia (Orava, Kysuce, Liptov).

Heligonka

A musical instrument similar to the accordion, but with a tone production system like that of the mouth accordion (i.e. the change of tone also happens when the direction of airflow changes - blowing in and out/stretching and squeezing the leather bag). It became widespread in the late 19th century and displaced the bagpipe in the early 20th century. Its high noise level, penetrating sound, playability, and the players' refined picking technique made it a popular musical instrument for dance parties and other dance occasions. It is a solo instrument but can supplement missing rhythm or harmony instruments in a band (e.g., double bass, viola contra, or hammered dulcimer) when needed.

Typical Slovak folk music groups

One player/instrument

In Slovakia, they represent a musical production based on one player/instrument: bagpipe player/bagpipe, cither player/cither, heligonkar/heligonka, and accordionist/accordion.

Two players/instruments

Musical production based on two musicians in Slovakia was rather an improvisation in case of a lack of musicians (e.g., a combination of a violinist and a violist in eastern Slovakia), or an isolated regional specificity (e.g., a bagpipe-violin duo in the north of Slovakia in the Upper Orava sub-region).

Three players/instruments

The most widespread form of Slovak folk music production is the so-called ‚troika' - a musical group ('muzika', folk music) composed of three musicians/instruments. Slovak folk music is dominated by string ensembles. The basic composition consists of the following three components, which must be represented:

- primáš - the first violin, which plays the melody,
- kontráš - most often a violin or viola (called a braccia), which plays a harmonic-rhythmic accompaniment,
- bass - the deepest tuned rhythm instrument, most often a double bass or a small bass.

Since every rule is confirmed by an exception, the sub-regional specificity of the 'troika' in Slovakia was a completely unconventional and unique composition: trumpet, clarinet, and heligonka, which occurred in the area of the Myjava hills in the west of Slovakia.

More players/instruments

Increasing the number of players/instruments in Slovak folk music consists in expanding the basic three-member line-up (melodic component - violin, harmonic-rhythmic component - violin or viola counter, and rhythmic component - double bass or small bass) by adding additional players in the first (melodic) or second (harmonic-rhythmic) component.

This was for two reasons:

- if required by the rules of the traditional composition of regular music according to regional customs and specifics,
- or there were enough musicians to expand the composition of the music. However, if regional rules determined the composition of proper traditional music by a specific number of players, then expansion was non-standard (which in people's traditional thinking meant undesirable). In such cases, there were two or more kinds of music in the village.



Children's folk music from Hladovka, Upper Orava, 1970s.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/zoznam-nkd/goralska-kultura/

The formation of numerous ensembles was often impractical in the village environment. Large music ensembles were more expensive and took up more space in dance spaces. Thus, the regions of Slovakia developed rules for the optimal and desirable composition of traditional folk music, for example:

- one primáš, two kontrášes and a bass in northern Orava (ethnographic group Gorali),
- two violins (first and second), a kontráš, and a two-string bass in the Kysuce region (the most famous musical style of this region is from the village of Terchová),
- two primášes, two kontrášes (violin and viola), double bass (Podpoľanie region, the most famous localities are Detva and Hriňová).

In cities and wealthier villages during the 18th and 19th centuries, traditional three- and four-string bands expanded due to the demand for a bigger and more powerful dance music sound and the adoption of new songs from popular culture, café music, operettas, and schlager. Thus the hammered dulcimer becomes part of folk music. The so-called ‚cimbalovka' (hammered dulcimer music) is the name for a musical group with a hammered dulcimer. Folk music also includes the accordion, clarinet, and, to a lesser extent, the trumpet.

In addition to amateur musicians made up of local men from the village, musical groups made up of local professional or semi-professional Roma musicians, the so-called ‚Gypsy music', have spread in Slovakia. They are also important carriers of Slovak folk music traditions to this day.

Wind music (so-called ‚brass music')

A brass band is a musical association consisting only of brass instruments and a drum or cymbals. It originated in Europe in the 16th century and became established in western Slovakia in the mid-19th century. This musical fashion, together with repertoire models, came from the West - Bohemia, Moravia, and Austria. Brass bands in the villages of western Slovakia were founded mainly by village musicians and retired soldiers, who also incorporated some Slovak folk songs into their repertoire.

Brass bands by the number of musicians:

- The traditional small village brass band had 6 - 8 players (clarinet, trumpets, horn, tuba, big drum) who played folk songs arranged in the harmony of the brass instruments.
- The medium-sized brass band had up to 12 players (doubled small brass instruments and other wind instruments tuned differently). They were usually organized at village fire brigades, mining enterprises, factories, and church choirs. They provided musical production for their organizers and the village and town community.
- The big brass band (the so-called ‚military brass band') has a 20-30 member cast (piccolo, flute, trombones, horns, tubas, percussion instruments, and others are added). Musical occasions are parades, marches, festivals, and dance entertainments.

Electroacoustic musical instruments in folk music production

With the advent of electric instruments (keyboards, guitars, drums) and sound systems (microphones, amplifiers, loudspeakers) in the second half of the 20th century, musical groups gradually replaced folk music in Slovakia. They have the same repertoire and the same playing opportunities.

Contemporary interpretation of folk music

Nowadays, the interpretation of folk songs by traditional music groups is rather an exceptional event at the most important calendar holidays in the village and town, at social events, or in the environment of folklore groups, ensembles, and events (parades, festivals, competitions, workshops), or specific tourism establishments (traditional pub, cottage, spa hotel). The musical production of folk songs has been taken over by electronic production (DJs) or so-called 'entertainment bands' (the most famous was Senzus). Here, folk songs/music and popular music intermingle the most.

In addition to the traditional way of interpreting folk songs through folk music and, most popularly, through popular modern bands, folk music has, of course, penetrated from the public, lay, mass sphere into the artistic sphere as well. As a musical material, motif, or theme, Slovak folk music is present in the works of Slovak classical, jazz, rock, and folk music.



Marmalade biscuits, Závod (Záhorie), 2019, Peter Vrablec.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/medzinarodny-den-nkd-2024/

1.4 Traditional food

Traditional culture is characterized by being largely influenced by the geographical and cultural conditions in which people have lived or to which they have come. In the case of traditional food, it is food and drink that can be prepared from available and familiar ingredients in available and familiar ways and satiated in such a way that the body and soul of the consumer receive all that they need to live and work. Like all areas of human life in the past, food has evolved over time, depending on the unfolding of a community's inner experience and external influences. External influences are primarily:

Geographical conditions

These are climatic conditions (temperature, humidity, wind), hydrological conditions (rainfall, water flows, groundwater), biological conditions (flora and fauna), pedological conditions (soil quality and types), georeferencing/geomorphological conditions (terrain types and ruggedness, plains, mountains) and their changes (earthquakes, fires, storms, floods). Moreover, these conditions have often changed and are changing over time. Many of these changes have been and are caused directly by human presence and action (construction, river regulation, deforestation, soil fertilization and drainage, extinction of certain animal species, pollution, or, conversely, human care and improvement of the area, planting of forests, environmental protection). It is these conditions that have always determined what man can gather, hunt, grow, and preserve in nature.

Cultural imports

These are innovations adopted from other cultures, especially from the surrounding environment, such as the spread of new crops and the breeding of new species of animals, or new methods of cultivation and husbandry, as well as new ways of processing raw materials, preparing, preserving and consuming food and beverages, new ingredients, new food, and beverages, or new forms of dining and gastronomic occasions.

Man has come a long way in Slovakia since prehistoric times, which is also reflected in the traditional food. The most archaic ways of satisfying the Paleolithic hunter-gatherer, consisting mainly of gathering wild fruits, roots, leaves, and mushrooms, and hunting wild animals, were gradually supplemented and almost completely overcome by the products of crop cultivation and animal husbandry of the Neolithic peasant-pastoralist. Somewhere in there are the origins of Slovak traditional gastronomy. Its subsequent development is linked to the improvement of agricultural tools and later machines and the expansion of knowledge about crop cultivation and animal husbandry.

The details, specifics, and diversity of traditional Slovak gastronomy within the territory of Slovakia, as well as in the communities of Slovaks historically living outside of Slovakia, are countless.

They are the result of:

The geographical diversity of the territory in which they lived

At first, the food was determined strictly according to the mountain and lowland nature of the area and the way of life in it. In the 19th and especially the 20th centuries, these distinctions became blurred, and regional differences became more important as a result of better territorial connectivity.

Infrastructure development and regional accessibility

Living near the main thoroughfares and cities, especially in the southwest, provided a better flow of information and news, including innovations in food management, food, and eating. Conversely, life in the isolated and inaccessible mountainous areas of northern and central Slovakia preserved and perpetuated the most archaic forms of culinary culture.

The ethnic and religious characteristics of individual communities and the composition of the regions‘ populations

Traditional gastronomy was determined primarily by the culinary culture of the predominant ethnic or religious group in the region, but also by the presence and size of different ethnic and non-religious minorities (Jewish, Hungarian, German, Czech kitchen, culinary specifics of Orthodox and Greek-Catholic communities, etc.).

Economic conditions of the community or region

In the more developed agricultural regions of south-western Slovakia and the industrial and mining centers of western, central, and north-eastern Slovakia, the population had higher incomes and more means to eat than in the poorer ones, where the inhabitants often had to improvise and persist on archaic, cheaper and simpler food and dining.

Traditional Slovak gastronomy has developed over the last 150 years as a multifaceted. It is the way we want to see it. Everyone can find what they like. It is:

Simple and complex

On the one hand, simple and quickly cooked porridges, soups, gnocchi, or raw or dried fruits, on the other hand, long-baked meats, sourdough bread, and cakes, the preparation of which required the skills and experience of a housewife cultivated by her mother and grandmother since her childhood.

Healthy and unhealthy

On the one hand, vegetables, legumes, grains, poultry meat prepared by cooking, or fermented cabbage, fresh fruit, or nuts, on the other hand, bread and cakes made of leavened dough from white wheat flour, fatty pork in any form, including bacon, consumed

after smoking or baking, or the daily consumption of strong homemade fruit or grain spirits, homemade wine, or later, even purchased beer.

Cheap and expensive

On the one hand, harvested or home-grown produce and home-reared poultry, processed by cooking, on the other hand, game, goose, duck, or beef processed by roasting, smoking, or making meat products, using purchased ingredients.

Old and new

On the one hand archaic, it is mainly porridge made from crops that are no longer grown or are rarely used today, such as buckwheat, buckwheat, or ground corn grains, raw fruits and vegetables, and dried fruits. On the other hand, these are dishes taken from the upper, mainly bourgeois, often different ethnic strata of the population, and later from cookery books for housewives, which also contain innovative cooking, baking, stewing, grilling, canning, sterilizing - ‚dunstovanie', refrigerating, freezing or reheating food. The archaic preservation of meat by smoking and storing it in a cold chamber, or cooling raw meat by hanging it in a well above the water level, has been replaced by technological developments in the form of refrigeration and freezing in a refrigerator or canning.

Original and taken over

On the one hand, these are typical Slovak dishes that are part of ancient Slavic gastronomy (especially soups, porridges, boiled and roasted meats, bread, and sourdough cakes), on the other hand, since the Middle Ages, stewing, sterilizing, grilling of meat and vegetables, or the now traditional Czechoslovak dumplings made of sourdough or steamed buns filled with plum jam, have been imported from the West, especially from German and Czech-speaking countries.

Both extraordinary and unique

On the one hand, a monotonous, simple, and cheap, but sufficiently caloric food prepared and eaten on a weekday, differentiated for example, only on some days (on Thursdays 'green' is cooked, on Fridays fasting), such as fermented cabbage, boiled or baked potatoes, soups or porridges, gnocchi only symbolically/aesthetically supplemented with pieces of roasted bacon or smoked meat. And bread served with all the food to satiate. On the other hand, Sunday and festive meals, especially boiled or baked potatoes with any cooked or baked meat or meat product, or ceremonial meals during family and calendar holidays, where tradition and ritual are decisive. Sometimes these are simple and frugal dishes, especially bread and salt or honey, other times expensive and hearty dishes (for wedding receptions, baptizings, carnivals, and, more recently, Christmas).

How food was obtained

In Slovakia, almost everything that could be gathered, hunted, cultivated, and preserved and was not perceived as sacred, protected, harmful, or poisonous (for example, insects and some animals, plants, and fungi) was eaten as a standard. There were four ways of obtaining food: gathering, hunting, cultivation, and breeding.

Harvesting

Harvesting is a human activity aimed at obtaining products of plant, animal, and mineral origin by extracting them from nature. Until the Neolithic period (in Slovakia 7 - 8 thousand years ago), gathering together with hunting was the only source of subsistence and raw materials. With the development of agriculture, harvesting became a supplementary occupation. Many harvesting practices disappeared, but in times of crisis (crop failures, epidemics, wars) they were reactivated, often despite prohibitions. In the 19th century, for example, people gathered locusts and hazelnuts in times of scarcity, or crushed hawthorn berries to prepare emergency meals. In addition to gathering plant products, the nature of harvesting was also to catch animals by hand and collect their products and supplies (honey, wax, eggs, nuts). The gathering was mainly carried out by women and children, or by men who were tied to nature by their work (shepherds, woodcutters). In addition to harvesting for their use, the products were also goods for sale. Whole plants, fruits, leaves, roots, and mushrooms were eaten. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, almost every plant or part of a plant had several known uses. This diversity conditioned the specialization of harvesting (collection of medicinal plants, mushrooms, collection of roots for apothecaries and innkeepers). The plants obtained by harvesting formed an important component of the food for cultivated crops. For example, the variety of fruits and seeds harvested at the end of summer and in autumn was varied - rosehips, sloes, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, etc. Hazelnuts, walnuts, wild tree fruits, especially apples, pears, plums, and cherries, were also harvested.

Brtnictvo

This is forest beekeeping, the essence of which was the appropriation of wild forest bee colonies and the exploitation of their products. It has been documented in Slovakia since the 5th century. It has never been the main occupation, but only a supplementary source of livelihood. The swarm settled in the trunk of the tree suffocated with smoke and the honeycomb with honey was collected. Brnictvo later gave way to domesticated beekeeping.

Mushroom picking

Mycological sources indicate that people in Slovakia collected about thirty species of edible mushrooms, usually only certain species, proven by tradition, in individual regions. The most popular mushrooms were white birch boletes, slippery jacks, red cracking boletes, charcoal burners, chanterelles, saffron milk-caps, field mushrooms, St. George‘s mushrooms a armillarias. People collected mushrooms for their own use or sale.

Until the 19th century, truffles were collected in the Podjavoriny, Liptov, and Spiš regions with the help of trained dogs, which searched for these precious, underground mushrooms. They were sold to Bratislava, Brno, Budapest, and Vienna, where they were one of the delicacies of the kitchen of the upper social classes. Whole families were devoted to harvesting them. In terms of nutrition, edible mushrooms can be compared to fruit and vegetables.

From inedible and poisonous mushrooms was collected polyporus, which was used to make powder for lighting fires. It was also exported overseas. Poisonous mushrooms (popularly called besniaks, besniare) such as fly agarics were collected, and their hats soaked in milk or sprinkled with sugar, were a means of poisoning insects.

This collection was mainly done by people connected with nature, such as shepherds and woodcutters. The Slovaks still have the idea that most mushrooms grow from 29 June, when ‚Peter and Paul sow mushrooms'. Early morning is generally considered to be the best time to pick mushrooms. The mushroom pickers used to go singly and keep the places of excessive mushroom growth secret. The mushrooms were cut or broken off and placed in baskets, canvas tubes, or skewered on sticks. Mushroom picking as a dietary supplement is still common today. In summer and autumn, mushrooms are used to make soups and sauces and are prepared with eggs as scrambled eggs. Some mushrooms are simply roasted in a frying pan, on a spit, or the stovetop. When mushrooms are abundant, they are dried to make a stock. In the past, people believed that mushrooms picked and dried after St. John's Day (June 24) were immune to worms. Dried mushrooms are still used today as an ingredient to flavor dishes and, as a ‚gift of the forest', are often included in Christmas dishes. Typical Christmas Eve dishes still include a thick cabbage soup - Christmas cabbage soup, with smoked meat, sausage, prunes, and mushrooms.

Mushrooms were also a supplementary source of income for the rural population. They were sold at markets or to merchants. Today, the range of mushrooms harvested has expanded even further based on expert knowledge, and they are still popular among urban dwellers.

Hunting in general

Hunting is the catching and killing of wild animals for subsistence. Traditional forms of hunting were mainly practiced by herders, furmen, woodcutters, and charcoal burners. They hunted a variety of animals or specialized in hunting (beech marteners, birders, ratters, fishermen). The basis of hunting was laying traps and waiting for animals in the places they passed through, where they gathered or hid. The hunter would lure them by baiting them, by setting a live animal (for example, to attract predators), by imitating their voice (and the voice of the animals they fed on) with their mouths, by whistling at grass leaves, and by using tools - decoys. The animals were sought by stalking, chasing, stalking, scaring with noise, smoke (from hiding places), and digging or crawling out of hiding places. Fish, frogs, crayfish, young mallards, magpies, and wild boar were hunted without the use of tools. Catch-and-release trapping was used in birding. To catch snakes, a split stick was used to pinch the snake behind the head. Wolves, hares, foxes, and birds were caught in nets. Once close enough or caught, they were killed with stones, sticks, sticks, clubs, axes, or small decorated axes with a long, thin shaft, which also served as walking sticks - shepherd's axes. Fish, furbearers, and birds were also hunted by poisoning and deafening. Firearms were also used for hunting - the bow and, from the beginning of the 15th century, the rifle. There were customs associated with hunting, especially magical prohibitions to ensure its success.

Hunting

An activity consisting of hunting, rearing, protecting, and utilizing hunted animals. Until the 11th century, hunting was unrestricted due to the large area of forests and the abundance of game on the territory of Slovakia. After that, the right to hunt was linked to the ownership of land that belonged to the feudal lord or monarch (feudal and royal hunting grounds). Villages (e.g., Dravce, Psiare, Lovce, Rybáre, Sokolníky) were established near the hunting grounds, whose inhabitants were the servants of the landlords. The falconers, dogsitters, bear hunters, netters, etc. had the duty to breed and train falcons, hawks, and dogs used for hunting, to make weapons, etc. The first restriction on hunting for the serfs was the decree of King Ladislaus I of 1092 on the prohibition of hunting on Sundays. In the 13th century, landowners began to forbid hunting certain species of animals (deer, wild boar) or using certain hunting methods. Serfs were obliged to hunt martens, squirrels, polecats, wolves, and bears. Their skins were part of the serfs‘ rations. Serfs settling in depopulated areas were also given the right to hunt as an incentive for a certain period of time. In 1504, Vladislav II forbade the inhabitants of serfs‘ villages throughout Hungary to engage in hunting. From 1872, the right to hunt was linked to the ownership of at least 100 jutars (approx. 56 ha) of land. In the communal pastures and forests, the hunting rights belonged to the entire municipality. The foundations of the current form of hunting are laid down in a law of 1947.

Poaching

This is the illegal capture and killing of animals. From the 11th century onwards, hunting began to be restricted in Slovakia and its right was linked to land ownership. Those who hunted without owning land were considered poachers. This activity was always severely punished, even if the subject killed an animal in self-defense or defense of his property. Poachers sometimes disguised themselves before hunting (painting their faces with soot, and clothes changing) so that no one would recognize them. They hunted in remote places, often at night, or if there was no forest guard in the area. When hunting, they used traps and firearms, often of their own manufacture. The killed animal, cut into pieces, was carried away in sacks, pockets, or in the second animal they caught. Animals caught during the day were hidden and taken away at night.

Fishing

It is the trapping of fish in flowing waters and lakes. In Slovakia, it was one of the oldest forms of prey economy. Over the millennia, many fishing techniques and tools were developed, some of which were known almost worldwide, others only locally or historically defined. In Slovakia, these are the following fishing methods and techniques:

- catching with hands, deafening and digesting fish,
- a knitted fishing tool (basket),
- with a rod,
- a fisherman‘s stinging tool,
- fishing net,
- trapping,

- fish water treatment.

There are about 70 species of fish in Slovakia. Their nomenclature contains almost 400 original Slovak names, which testifies to a long and widespread tradition. Fish has gained an important place in traditional food not only because of the biological value of the meat but also as a church-recognised fasting food. The most valuable species were considered to be steelhead, catfish, pike, pikeperch, eel, carp, trout, and grayling in mountain areas. Fishing for chub on the Danube and collecting chinook in muddy areas of rivers and lakes were also well known. Fish were prepared fresh or preserved by drying, smoking, or marinating in vinegar water with onions. In Slovakia, fish in folk art were most often found in paintings on ceramics, and the shape of fish was also used for cake molds.

Catching frogs

Hunting frogs, especially leapfrogs, by hand was a supplementary source of livelihood for the herders, but also for other inhabitants, especially during the fasting season. The skinned legs of frogs, which were traditionally believed to be at their tastiest by Joseph's Day (19 March), were roasted over the stump or cooked in cabbage soup. In the Central Slovak mountain sub-region of Horehronie, they were fried in butter and covered with eggs. For example, frog legs skewered on sticks were brought by women from the surrounding villages to the market in the town of Rožňava. From some villages in the Záhorie lowland region of western Slovakia, they were sold as far away as Vienna in Austria. Frogs were also used to treat snake bites. In Slovakia, frog catching disappeared after World War II.

Crayfish catching

Picking crayfish with their hands from under tree roots or stones in watercourses was a supplementary occupation of the inhabitants of areas with abundant watercourses and lakes. Crayfish were mainly caught by woodcutters, shepherds, and children. As late as the beginning of the 19th century, landowners still issued a ban on crayfish catching. The bait used was a killed sparrow or the meat of a carcass, laid on a net or sieve, which was taken out of the water with the crayfish it had attracted. The meat from the crayfish claws was eaten after being baked on a stove or boiled in water. Crayfish were also used in the treatment of snake bites and diseases such as rosacea and rabies.

Growing

Geographical conditions, cultural specificities, and the agrarian maturity of the community have always determined what has been cultivated.

Grains

Grains are a nationally widespread agricultural crop. They are cultivated species of annual plants. They are divided into winter and spring crops. They serve as food, for the production of malt and starch, and as fodder. The cultivation of grains is the most im-

portant condition in human history for the further development of civilization. In Slovakia, all the basic types of grains have been cultivated: wheat, rye, oats, barley, millet, mohair, buckwheat, and maize. Only rice is lacking. The cultivation of particular grain species was determined primarily by natural conditions.

Wheat

It is one of the oldest cultivated plants and the origins of its cultivation are related to the emergence of the first peasant civilizations in the 10th-8th millennium BC. In Slovakia, archaeological findings attest to the cultivation of single-grain and double-grain wheat as early as the Neolithic period (4500 years BC). In the Middle Ages, wheat was grown on a smaller scale where soil and climate conditions were suitable and manure was abundant. Wheat is the most demanding of the grains to cultivate. As late as the first half of the 18th century, it was still the third or fourth most cultivated grain, behind rye and barley. It was mainly grown to meet the needs of the wealthier classes of society. The serfs grew a mixture of wheat and rye - sour grain and in mountainous areas also a spring variety of wheat and its uncultivated variety - tenkel. Wheat was cultivated on a larger scale only after the introduction of rotational cropping. In the countryside, wheat flour was not used on a daily basis, but mainly for the preparation of cakes and pastries. In the southern parts of Slovakia, it was mixed with rye flour for home baking of bread. White/wheat flour was one of the festive pastries. The term ‚white bread culture' is synonymous with advanced lowland agrarian culture.

Barley

It is one of the world's oldest and most widespread grains. It was already known in Slovakia before the arrival of the Slavs. It was grown as a fodder and technical crop, not only in mountainous areas but also as a bread grain. It was grown as an annual spring grain and, to a lesser extent, as a winter grain. The cultivation of barley in each area was determined by soil and climate conditions, but also by market conditions. Market requirements in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries meant that more barley was grown in Slovakia than wheat. In the southern counties of Slovakia, the large estates in particular grew high-quality malting barley, which was sought after in the markets of Western Europe and formed the raw material base for the malting industry in the production of beer. In traditional kitchen, it was consumed in the form of groats and flour.

Oats

The existence of oats on the territory of Slovakia is proved by archaeological findings from the period before the arrival of the Slavs in the 5th-6th century. It was an important fodder, and in mountain areas, it served as food when there was a shortage of other types of grain. It was cultivated in abundance on large estates where cattle and horses were concentrated. Production increased further in the first half of the 18th century after the introduction of a standing army (increased horse breeding). In the second half of the 19th century, oats accounted for about 40% of the area under grains in the mountainous counties of Slovakia (Liptov, Turiec, Spiš, Gemer), and up to 80% in Orava. In the mountainous areas of northern and north-eastern Slovakia, oat flour was used to cook soups and porridges, bake pancakes, and was also added to bread dough.

Rye

Its cultivation was known in Slovakia before the arrival of the Slavs. It is a winter grain that is not very demanding on rested or fertilized soil. Rye has therefore become the main bread grain. In the 16th - 18th centuries, its cultivation was supported by not only soil and climate conditions but also favorable economic conditions - high rye prices and sales to the army. Rye was sown as a bread grain on the farms of the serfs, as well as the so-called ‚súraž, suržica' - a mixture of rye and wheat. Rye flour was considered the best for making bread dough. Mostly it formed its base and other types of flour or potatoes were only added to it. Bread made from rye flour, or from its predominance, is also called black, dark bread.

Buckwheat

In Slovakia, two species were cultivated: buckwheat and buckwheat tatarka. It came to Eastern Europe from its homeland - the Himalayas - in the Middle Ages via the Mongols (the so-called ‚Tatar invasions'). From the mid-16th century it was also known in Slovakia, where it was used as fodder in its green state and, when ripe, formed an important part of the food. It was made into porridge and groats. In the 18th century, it was widespread throughout the territory. Because of its low maintenance, it was cultivated mainly by serfs in eastern and northern Slovakia in areas with poorer soil and climatic conditions. Since the beginning of the 19th century, its cultivation in Slovakia has gradually declined. In the second half of the 20th century, its cultivation virtually disappeared; only in eastern Slovakia did it survive as a foodstuff for the preparation of the regional specialty, tartare pierogi.

Corn

Also known as kenderica, tengerica, turešina, or Turkish rye, it came to Europe from America in the early 16th century. Along with wheat and rye, it has become the most cultivated agricultural crop. It came to Hungary as an Italian and Turkish import at the end of the 16th century. In Slovakia, it began to be cultivated more intensively at the beginning of the 18th century, at first only in gardens so that the serfs did not have to pay tithes on the harvest. Gradually, it was grown almost exclusively for grain and was mainly used as fodder. In traditional kitchen, it was mainly used as a substitute food.

Potatoes

Potatoes arrived in Europe in the 16th century from South America. They arrived in Slovakia in the 17th century. By the 18th and 19th centuries, they were already widespread, as evidenced by the many regional names from all over Slovakia (bandurka, grula, švápka, krumpla, ertepla, zemák). In the northern mountain areas, it is becoming one of the most important commodities. Not only as food and fodder but also as a product for sale to the starch and distillery industries. As recently as the middle of the 20th century, they were cultivated only by hand hoe cultivation.

Vegetables

Vegetables have been intensively and purposefully cultivated in Slovakia since the early Middle Ages. Feudal estates, in an effort

to achieve economic self-sufficiency, established vegetable gardens in addition to fruit gardens and orchards. The importance of growing vegetables increased with the development of cities and the greater concentration of the population, where they could be sold, as well as any surplus produce from the yard. Moreover, vegetables had the status of a daily and relatively cheap food.

The most common types of vegetables

The most widespread types of vegetables throughout Slovakia were cabbage, root vegetables (carrots, parsley, celery, horseradish), garlic, and onions. In fertile areas close to market centers, vegetables were grown for sale. The Záhorie region was known for growing cabbages, cucumbers, and soup vegetables. Many vegetable-growing centers were established on Rye Island, where carrots, cabbages, onions, and garlic were grown. In the southern regions of Slovakia, with good soil quality and a favorable climate, conditions were created for the cultivation of new crops from overseas, such as peppers, tomatoes, and broad beans. Peppers and watermelons were grown throughout southern Slovakia. The sale and production of vegetables here increased with the development of shipping on the Danube. Two other areas in southwestern Slovakia were also important in terms of the extent of vegetable production: the area around the towns of Levice and Lučenec. Since the beginning of the 20th century, Bulgarian vegetable growers have played an important role in the development of vegetable growing in Slovakia.

Bulgarian vegetable growers

Most of the Bulgarian vegetable growers came to the territory of Slovakia at the end of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century. They settled in areas with favorable climatic and soil conditions in southwestern Slovakia, in the vicinity of towns where they found outlets for their vegetable production. Their ethnocultural, production, and organizational peculiarities distinguished them from the majority population. They operated in so-called ‚kompanijí' - production collectives made up of 10 to 15 members. They usually did not own the land, but rented gardens and fields. During the season they recruited laborers from the local population. The members of the company lived together in simple makeshift houses with the most basic farm equipment and worked and ate together. Business and profit-sharing were carried out in a participatory manner. Some gradually became independent. They were valued as vegetable specialists and applied their knowledge, especially in agricultural organizations. Their contribution also lay in the dissemination of little-known thermophilic crops and new methods of irrigation.

Fruit

Fruits of different kinds of fruit trees or shrubs were grown for their use or sale. The cultivation and consumption of fruit in Slovakia have been documented since prehistoric times. In the Middle Ages, certain types of fruit, especially apples, pears, plums, cherries, peaches, mulberries, nuts, and chestnuts, were cultivated in gardens and orchards. Strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and gooseberries were among the bushes. New species and varieties of fruit trees were introduced to the countryside thanks to monasteries, where they were cultivated experimentally, and also thanks to German colonists and later the Turks during the period of Turkish expansion.

Trade and fruit breeding

Initially, the harvesting of wild and wild-growing fruits (apples, pears, cherries) was quite important. After being transplanted into orchards and gardens, these wild trees were deliberately tended and grafted, thus expanding the range of domestic varieties. Many important fruit-growing centers have developed within Slovakia, for example, Myjava and the adjacent hill area, Hont and Novohrad. Fruit and fruit products were, of course, widely traded. Plums and their products were an important commodity. From the 15th century, for example, prunes were exported to Bohemia and Poland, in the 18th century they were transported down the Danube to the Low Countries, and from the beginning of the 19th century alcohol, mainly made from prunes, was transported on rafts down the Váh River to Budapest. Gradually, new forms and ways of trading fruit developed, through door-to-door traders, merchants, wholesalers, and canneries.

The continuous improvement of fruit cultivation is also evidenced by the activity of professional fruit-growing schools and fruit-growing societies, which established breeding and growing nurseries. Thanks to their activities, new and bred fruit species have proliferated in home gardens and the wild.

Fruits have traditionally complemented and enriched the daily food as well as festive and ceremonial meals. Lesser quality and fallen fruit was fed to cattle and pigs. The fruit was eaten raw during the growing season. It was preserved by drying until it was stored and then added to cakes, stuffings, soups, and refreshing drinks (especially pears, plums, apples, and cherries). Dried and crushed fruit was used as a sugar substitute or as a topping for cakes and pasta. They were cooked to make jam, compotes, or fruit juices. The fruit was distilled to make alcohol. The fruit was eaten during fasting and during some work (spinning, fieldwork, vineyard work). It was part of ceremonial meals and festive feasts. Many fruits were symbols of beauty, fertility, and love.

Grapes

A grape is the fruit of the grapevine. It is a fruit - a berry with a high sugar content, consumed as a table grape or processed into wine and other alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. The grapevine is one of the oldest cultivated plants. It is native to Central Asia, the Caucasus region of the Black Sea, and the Caspian Sea. The vine spread further to Egypt, Syria, Babylonia, and then to China, Palestine, and Greece. From Greece, it spread rapidly to the Roman Empire and to the areas which the Romans occupied or invaded in their raids, including Slovakia. In Central Europe, the occurrence of the vine is confirmed by the discovery of grains at the Mikulčice site (southern Moravia). Slovakia represents the northernmost limit of profitable vine cultivation in Europe.

In the most developed production areas (Lowcarpathian, Skály-Sahorian, Hlohovec-Trnavian, Nitrian, Danube, Blue-Carpathian, East Slovak and Tokaj), noble grape varieties such as Veltlín zelený, Silván zelený, Rizling vlašský, Tramín, Furmint, Dievčie grapes, Lipovina and others are still cultivated today. After the introduction of the diseases grapevine phylloxera and perenospore into Central Europe at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, hybrids that were more resistant to pests began to be cultivated. Non-noble but resistant varieties under the common name of volunteers were popular because of their easy planting, high yields, and resistance to the grapevine aphid, and were therefore also used for grafting.

Spices

A spice is a fresh or dried plant material with a pungent flavor and strong aroma used to flavor and enhance the taste of food. Underground plant parts, tree bark, leaves, flowers and flower parts, fruits, seeds, and whole plants are used as spices. The use of spices was known to all ancient peoples.

The spice trade

In addition to domestic spices, foreign spices were also used. It was an important trade commodity and the reason, or one of the reasons, for the expeditions of empires to acquire it (e.g., the Romans, Alexander the Great, Venetian merchants, Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus, Vasco de Gama). Those who dominated the European spice trade or brought in new species benefited significantly economically. Monasteries have played an important role in the spice trade in Europe since the early Middle Ages, as they were centers of good kitchen.

Spices in Slovak kitchen can be divided into two categories. These are products of domestic origin, collected in nature or grown in gardens, especially cumin, dill, onion, garlic, horseradish, parsley, marjoram, rosemary, mugwort, basil, breckland thyme, common wormwood, mint, rue. Or it can be imported spices, especially black pepper, bay leaf, cloves, cinnamon, vanilla, nutmeg, pepper, and ďumbier (ginger).

Foreign spices were first used in the kitchen of the upper social classes, later by the bourgeoisie, and at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, they began to take hold in the kitchen of the popular classes.

Animal husbandry

Animal husbandry is an integral part of agriculture. It is the ability and opportunity to produce sufficient forage that has been the most important determinant of the types and numbers of animals kept, not only within Slovakia but also in its regions. Horses and cattle were used primarily as draught power in cultivating the land. In addition, cattle and all other domestic animals were kept for meat, milk, and eggs. Of course, man used all other parts of the slaughtered animals, such as skin, feathers, hair, wool, bones, and horns, as material for domestic and craft production. Excrements were also extremely valuable and were used as fertilizer.

Bovine cattle

‚Horned cattle', ‚lichva', and ‚hovädá' is a collective term for livestock of the subfamily tury. Until the 18th century, its grey, light yellow, and fawn breeds were widespread in Slovakia. In the 19th century, in an attempt to improve the quality of breeding, cattle of the Simmental, Bernese, and Pinzgau breeds began to be imported from the Alpine countries and England, especially to large estates. By cross-breeding with domestic breeds, the Slovak spotted breed was bred.

Grazing was the main method of cattle rearing. By the Middle Ages, the predominant year-round grazing was replaced by summer grazing and winter feeding in stables. This method of rearing persisted until the middle of the 20th century. Cattle were reared for meat and the use of draught power. Its importance in dairy farming increased in the 19th century. The extraction of hides, horn, and manure was also important.

The cattle trade was a substantial source of income for the population in some areas. In the 19th century in the southern regions and until the 1920s in the mountainous areas of Slovakia, oxen were raised as draft animals in connection with cartage and woodcutting, while heifers, young bulls, and bulls were fattened for meat production.

Communal bulls were bred in the villages for breeding. They were cared for by the shepherd and the owners of the cattle, or by members of the breeders‘ association. Cattle were often bought at the cattle market, often as a gift (a cow as a dowry to a daughter) and as part of an inheritance (oxen were inherited by a son). Traditional forms of breeding began to disappear in Slovakia in the second half of the 20th century after the collectivization of agriculture. The breeding of oxen, in particular, quickly gave way to horses and then tractors as draught animals. In traditional ideas, the tur, the bull, was a symbol of strength.

Cow

It is a female bovine who has calved at least once. In lactation, it is called a dairy cow. Cow breeding has a long tradition in Slovakia. Unlike pigs, cows were not slaughtered for meat until an earlier age because they were also used for milk and as draught power. The cow retained this status in peasant societies until the mid-20th century.

Ox

The ox is a castrated bull. In the traditional peasant economy, it was used mainly as draught cattle in agricultural and forestry work, but also in carriage driving. In villages where they were kept in abundance, oxen formed a separate herd with their herdsman - the oxen herder. They were mainly driven out to the mountain pastures, where they also spent the night. At the time of their use in a team, the oxen grazed individually when free, often at night. From the 18th century onwards, they began to be replaced by horses. In mountain areas, oxen were kept on peasant farms for much longer because of their versatile utility (draught, meat, leather).

Bull

A bull is an adult male bovine animal, a sire that ensures the reproduction of the bovine herd. Municipal councils were often responsible for the breeding of bulls. In traditional cattle farming, the bull was also bred for the production of useful products - hides and meat. A young bull, or meat from a bull weighing up to 500 kg, was and is an exclusive export commodity.

Pig cattle

The pig (‚brav‘, ‚sviňa‘, ‚prasa‘) is the most widespread animal raised for meat in the traditional Slovak world. Until the 18th century, it was primarily used for meat, and from the 18th century onwards also for meat (type of pig - mangalica). Pork still dominates meat consumption in Slovakia today. In addition, the bones and cartilage were used to make glue, leather, bristles, and manure.

It is one of the first domestic animals. In the 14th-15th centuries, a sow similar to the wild boar (long snout and legs, bristles on the back) was bred in Slovakia. In the 18th century, the so-called ‚hedgehog breed‘ with long white hair, then the so-called ‚Bakoň/ Bakony‘ (Bakon breed - an area in today‘s Hungary), then the so-called ‚floating mangalica‘, then English, German, and Polish breeds

began to be imported, which were freely crossed into various folk forms: strakáče, chlopane, štetináče, manduľáky, moravské, etc. Feudal lords bred whole herds, peasants bred 3 to 5 animals, and farmers bred 1 to 2, according to the availability of fodder. Grazing was the original method of breeding, but more recent breeding in stables (with the increase in the availability of fodder). Pigs were a good commercial commodity - small piglets for own breeding, adult pigs for slaughter, meat and meat products. The pig is a symbol of abundance and prosperity in Slovak folklore. In the past, fatness, including in humans, was not perceived negatively as it is today, on the contrary, it symbolized strength, abundance, plenty, and, in some historical periods, beauty.

Pig slaughter

The pig slaughter is an important work and social occasion in the slaughtering and processing of the pig. The pig slaughter was usually carried out in the winter, before Christmas (after the harvest as part of the preparation of supplies for the winter), and over the carnival period (as part of the preparation of supplies before the 40-day Lenten fast). Butchers were called in to slaughter the pig, or people from the village who had experience in this work.

The animal was killed by a knife stab to the heart or carotid artery. The first action was to catch the oozing blood. The pig‘s body was then rubbed with resin to make it easier to remove the hair. Later, the hairs were scalded. The animal was then led out to a so-called ‚tripod‘, where it was further cleaned using water and scrapers. After cutting, the intestines and guts were removed. The guts were cleaned by pouring water over them and scraping them with a knife. The first meal of the slaughter was usually hastily roasted tripe, such as marrow or liver on onions, possibly with an egg, which was washed down with alcohol. The butcher continued butchering and slicing the meat and tripe, which was boiled in a cauldron of water set up in the courtyard. The offal and muscle meat were used to make ‚liver‘ (a mixture of meat and rice stuffed into the meticulously cleaned intestines), as well as ‚sausage‘ (a meat mixture stuffed into the intestines) and ‚tlačenka‘ (a mixture of meat and aspic stuffed into the stomach). Some of the meat was preserved by smoking, some was made into sausages and some was left fresh for consumption. The fresh meat was placed in the coldest room in the house (usually a pantry) on the floor or hung in a well above the water level. The fat was processed by smoking it with bacon or melting it in a cauldron for cracklings and lard. The skin and the less valuable parts of the pig (head, ears, tail, and knees) were also used for huspenina (meat in aspic).

On the occasion of the slaughter, a feast was held, to which the hosts usually invited relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances. It was served as so-called ‚ovar - soup‘ from the water where meat was previously cooked, then slaughter mash - unseasoned blood sausage mixture, or jaternice, also called krvavničky - jaternice with added pig‘s blood, then roasted meat, or slaughtered cabbage thick soup with meat.

It was customary to present a piece of meat and jaternice to all present and absent relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances. It was the principle of reciprocity (they reciprocated when they slaughtered an animal). Reciprocity was above all practical and rational. Although the slaughters took place in each household at the same period, they took place in succession. So that families would have fresh meat and produce on the menu at home for as long as possible. This custom of ‚gifting‘ has survived to the present day where pigs are still kept on a large scale. Pig slaughters were also held before important festivals where more people were expected to be fed (especially weddings, baptisms, important anniversaries, and festivals).

The pig slaughter is now more of a family, social, or traditional community event, and no longer an economic one. However, as products of the meat industry, slaughter products still form an important part of the meat food of people in Slovakia.

Sheep

Sheep breeding was part of the traditional agriculture of the people living in Slovakia. It was not changed by the nomadic way of sheep farming, which penetrated the area with the arrival of the Hungarians at the end of the 9th century. Breeding was focused on the production of wool, meat, milk, and hides. Basket-making was used, i.e. sheep grazing in a portable sheep pen - ‚košiar'. This was moved to land that was not currently being cultivated, ‚resting', lying fallow. The sheep grazed them and fertilized them at the same time.

The most widespread breed was the peasant sheep (‚birka', ‚birčia', ‚poľná', or Moravian sheep). It was grazed in common flocks, and from spring to autumn the shepherds drove them out daily to graze. Since the 18th century, with the growing interest in fine wool production, breeding has expanded to include a breed of sheep called ‚merino'. Breeding was a matter of economic prestige.

From the 14th century onwards, a new system of sheep breeding - shepherding - began to penetrate from the Carpathian Mountains into the territory of Slovakia. It originated on the Balkan peninsula and spread to all regions of Slovakia where suitable conditions were created for it by Wallachian colonization in the 15th-17th centuries. The breeds of sheep bred at that time were replaced by the Wallachian breed. Mountain pastures that had not been used before were used for grazing. Milk and dairy products were produced not by individual owners at home, but centrally by specialized salaš laborers (shepherds and shepherdesses). The products were distributed to the owners according to the number of sheep. In winter, the sheep were housed in sheepfolds or sheepfold stables. In addition to grazing, the sheep were also fed.

Traditional sheep breeding has influenced not only the way of life and culture of some mountain regions of Slovakia (especially Liptov, Orava, Podpoľanie, Horehronie, Gemer, and Šariš) but also the whole Slovak traditional culture, including culinary culture. In addition to meat, including lamb, this includes both smoked and unsmoked cheeses made in decorated wooden molds, as well as rolled cheeses like parenica, pulled and braided cheeses like korbáčik, or the ‚cult' bryndza. Furthermore, there are fermented dairy drinks such as cmar and zákvas, as well as sweet or salty žinčica. Typical are also carved wooden cups ‚črpáky' used for drinking these beverages.

Goat

The goat was bred for milk, meat, or leather. Until the 18th century, goat breeding was widespread mainly in the north of Slovakia. In some places, sheep breeding also exceeded it. Grazing was the predominant method of breeding. Goats were kept in a stable during the summer nights and winter, usually with other livestock. Small goats were raised by their owners from goats that were mated with a buck around November 1st. Due to the goat's low feed requirements ('the goat is the cow of the poor"), its breeding was particularly common among the poor and increased during times of crisis. From the 1960s onwards, goat farming rapidly declined, although it partially survived in mountainous regions.

Poultry

Such as ‚hyd/hýd', which are domesticated birds raised for meat, eggs, fat, and feathers. In Slovakia, these are the hen (domestic chicken), goose, duck, pigeon and turkey. In traditional breeding, poultry was propagated by laying fertilized eggs, so housewives also kept roosters, ganders, ducks, and, to a lesser extent, turkeys. Fertilized eggs were also obtained by exchange and purchase (especially turkey). They were planted under a squawking hen or goose in a wicker basket. The quantity and quality of the poultry were magically ensured by choosing a convenient time (when people were rushing out of church) or by a certain action (to make the geese goose-headed, the woman wore a tile on her head when planting). After hatching, the chicks were kept for several weeks under supervision in a room, later in the yard under a large basket. The adult poultry was kept in the yards and in pens near the house, where they were also fed (grains, nettles with bran, and leftover food). Geese were also grazed. At night and in winter, they were kept in the coop or in the barn, where there was also a place for the hens to lay their eggs. Geese and ducks used to be hand-fed with corn or scrap husks in the autumn to gain as much weight as possible. An important source of income for the population was the sale of poultry at markets or to dealers.

Hen

The hen (domestic chicken) is an adult female. As late as the 18th century, only smaller species and small numbers were bred in Slovakia. This was due to the lack of grain needed to feed them. Little attention was therefore paid to the breeding itself. It was not until the second half of the 19th century that poultry breeding began to develop by replacing imported breeds. The sale of poultry was one of the few sources of a peasant family's financial income.

The fowl was a symbol of fertility and protection from demonic forces. It was therefore a common food at celebrations associated with the birth of a child, at weddings, and at kar (funeral feast). During the second half of the 20th century, the collectivization of agriculture expanded traditional domestic poultry farming into large-scale forms (poultry houses). The importance of chicken meat in the food of the Slovak population is permanently very high.

Duck and goose

A fattened goose or duck was an extremely profitable sale item. Roasts were especially valued. In southern and western Slovakia, the sale of roast geese or goose quarters was also widespread in the autumn period. Therefore, where they had enough corn, they usually kept a few geese or ducks for sale. The selling price was sometimes so favorable that it was not uncommon to sell them all, even at the expense of one's consumption. In western Slovakia, it is still a tradition to serve roast goose or duck at a feast, with lokša (a type of potato pancake), cabbage, and young wine.

‚Hody/odpust'

‚Hody/odpust' (Feast) is a traditional annual local celebration associated with a feast. The dates of the feast are associated with the day of the patron saint of the church or the date of its consecration. They are usually held in late summer and early autumn when they are associated with a celebration of thanksgiving for the harvest. Traditionally, cakes and pastries (called ‚feasting cakes'), meat, and alcoholic beverages are served.

Pigeon

Pigeon breeding for meat was also present in western Slovakia. It developed in the 2nd half of the 19th century. Pigeons were kept in pigeon coops and fed together with poultry. The purpose of breeding was to diversify the meat food. Pigeon breeding was also an expression of wealth.

Fish

Fish farming has been carried out on rivers and in ponds in Slovakia since the Celtic and Roman periods. The Slavs further developed it as a supplementary source of livelihood. Its importance has varied depending on agricultural production as the main source of nutrition. The development of fishing was facilitated by favorable geographical conditions, Christian beliefs (fast food), and the relatively limited possibilities of agricultural production.

The most important fishing areas in Slovakia were settlements around the Danube River and the lower reaches of the Váh, Nitra, Hron, Ipeľ, Žitava, and Tisa rivers. Pond fish farming has been documented since the 12th century. From the 10th century onwards, fishing and fish farming were organized and rationalized; from the 11th century onwards, they became part of the so-called ‚small-scale regional law' and the subject of monarchical donations, granted mainly to the church, but also to subjects. The right to fish was vested in the owners of the land on which the body of water was situated, but this right could also be leased out. Nowadays, fishing and fish farming are economic activities organized on fishing grounds. It is a favorite hobby of citizens associated with the Slovak Fishermen's Association.

Bees

Beekeeping is based on keeping bees and obtaining their products. It has been present in the traditional way of life of the village population as a supplementary occupation since the 11th-12th centuries. Beekeeping is a continuation of an older useful occupation - beekeeping. Honey and wax were passed on to the landlords by the subjects. Both products were also important trade and export goods. Beekeeping in Slovakia has long retained a predominantly extensive character (outside the village). Bee colonies were originally kept in logs and baskets, from which honey and honeycomb were collected at the cost of their extermination. Later, therefore, they were replaced by hives. The hives were moved to warm places (stable, shed, attic) for the winter and then taken out into the open in the spring. Even with beehives, keepers tried to ensure their economic prosperity and health by magical means - to make them fertile, the hive had to be smeared with clay from the plow after the first plowing, to keep the bees in the hive, to be sprinkled with breast milk, etc. Honey is one of the oldest ingredients for the preparation of sweet dishes and fermented alcoholic beverages - mead. It is also a ceremonial food in its own right. It symbolizes abundance and goodness. Bees in Slovak traditional ideas are to this day a symbol of diligence and dedication (hard-working as a bee, children's magazine Včielka, etc.). Beekeeping in Slovakia is still one of the most noble activities and hobbies. Slovak beekeeping products and the economy in Slovakia are among the world's top.

Rabbit

The rabbit, also popularly called hare, is bred for its meat and fur. Rabbit breeding came to Slovakia at the turn of the 15th-16th century from France via Germany and Bohemia. Until World War II, rabbits were kept in a stable under a rampart, where they ate hay fallen during the feeding of cattle. Rabbit breeding in rabbit hutches/rabbit hutches, widespread in Western Europe, spread to Slovakia only under the influence of the emerging rabbit breeding associations (e.g., in the town of Holíč in 1923, Trnava in 1924). Rabbit breeding was widespread among the poor rural population due to the low cost of feed, and also in towns during the war years. In addition to meat, the animal provided fur for domestic processing or sale. Its hunting variant in Slovak gastronomy is the field hare.

Horse

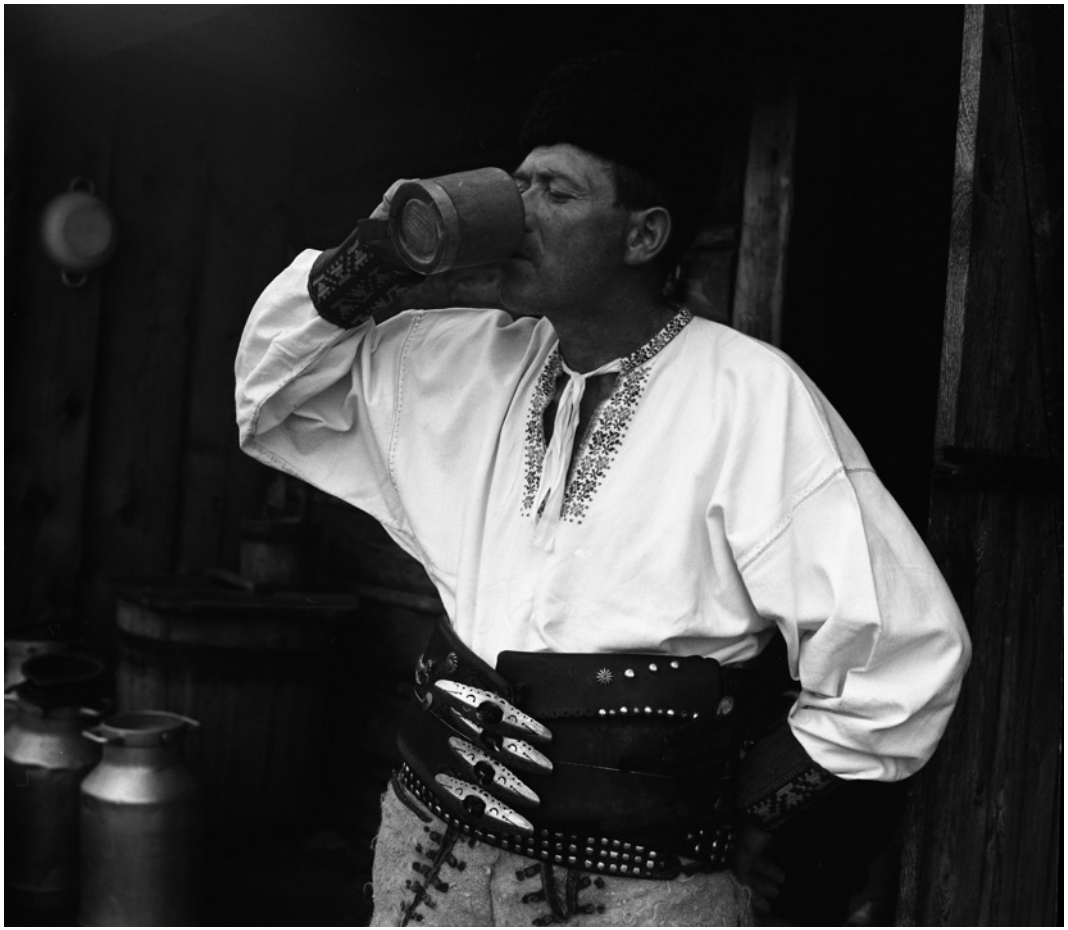
Horses were first bred in the southern regions of Slovakia. In the mountain regions, their breeding became widespread in the early Middle Ages with the development of the carriage industry, and in areas with a shortage of pastures only at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. They gradually replaced oxen as draught animals. Until the first half of the 20th century, grazing was the main way of keeping them. They were kept in stables during the winter and, from the 20th century onwards, all year round. Grooming and feeding were the men‘s jobs. The horse represented its owner and the success of the household. In Slovakia, keeping a horse was a relatively costly affair compared to a cattle-drawn farm. In some areas horse breeding for sale was widespread. The centers of the horse trade were the southern Slovak towns of Rimavská Sobota, Lučenec, Trnava, and Galanta. In traditional rural breeding, horses were named according to their color (grošák), temperament (vraník), origin (hucul), or use (‚štajerák‘ - large draft horse). Of course, there were magical acts associated with horse breeding to ensure their health and prosperity: hanging a red ribbon around the foal‘s neck to prevent it from bewitching, wading horses in running water on Good Friday, and sprinkling oats on St. Stephen‘s Day.

In traditional ideas, the horse was an ambiguous symbol of life and death, wisdom, nobility, beauty, and success. Oracles and magical acts were associated with it: if the horse was shy and stood on its hind legs, it saw death; before spring work, the horse was wiped with bread so that the ears of grain would be as thick as its coat. The wooden horse was a common children‘s toy. The horse‘s mask was found on Christmas and carnival rounds. For Slovaks, the horse was not common, but only an emergency source of food in times of famine. An incurably injured, sick, or old horse was put down or sold to the local Roma, where the consumption of horse meat was common.

Emergency food

During times of food shortages, people prepared emergency meals. These meals were characterized by the use of ingredients that were not typically considered food under normal circumstances. For example, corn grits—coarsely ground corn kernels—were used as a substitute for flour. Bread or flatbreads were also baked from bran if it was available from mills. Tree bark (most commonly from birch), acorns, dried hazel catkins, and even sawdust—such as that from young beech trees, which had a sweet taste—were ground into flour. Other substitutes for flour included ground-dried crops such as peas, beets, potatoes, or fruit. Flour was also obtained from couch grass, whose roots were dug from the ground, dried, and ground during times of hardship. Similarly, bromegrass

seeds were used. Lower-quality foods were widely consumed as well, including moldy grain, rotten or frozen potatoes, wild fruits, and various wild plants such as nettle, coltsfoot, orache, sorrel, and meadow vetchling. The lack of food, its monotony, and poor nutritional value led to the spread of diseases and, in extreme cases, mass starvation and death.



Drinking "žinčica" from "črpák" in Braväcovo (Horehronie), 1978, Ivica Krištofová.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/zoznam-nkd/crpaky/

How the food was prepared

The most archaic Slovak dishes are porridges. The oldest were grain (barley, buckwheat (tatarka), oats, tenkeľ, millet, bar), legume (beans, peas), newer potato, rice, semolina, and corn. Until 150 years ago, these porridges replaced bread and grains. The Slovak saying from the 19th century bears witness to this: ‚With porridge, the week begins - with porridge, the week ends'. After porridge, after honey, Slovaks are known everywhere. These dishes are gradually supplemented by cakes, boiled pasta, halušky, soups, sauces, side dishes, and, of course, meat.

Traditional ways of preparing food

Raw

The oldest and most primitive way of preparing food is to eat it raw. Eating raw is related to subsistence farming. This includes leaves, shoots, fruits, roots, and mushrooms. It has long survived, especially in the mountain and forest areas of Slovakia. It also includes drinking raw milk.

Crushing

Grains, most often groats, were usually crushed with a stone hammer in a hand-made stupa - a wooden vessel made of a hollowed-out log. The foot stupa - in the hollowed-out tree trunk, where the rounded or pointed hammer landed, flaxseed was crushed for later pressing into oil for greasing food during Lent. The water-powered stupa was used for crushing ore in metallurgy and also seeds for oil pressing, as well as for breaking flax and hemp stalks.

Grinding

Various grinding mechanisms powered by man, animals, water, steam, wind, or electricity were used to grind grain into flour or other grains. A water-powered mill in Slovakia was first documented in 1135. In the 13th century, there were already more than 150 of them.

Peeling

The grains were husked, hammered, and ground into groats (by rubbing them between two flat stones). At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, groats were processed in mills by setting millstones for husking, and both larger groats and smaller groats were produced. Groats were mainly made from barley. They also made groats from thin-grained wheat, known as ‚tenkeľ', and in the southern regions also groats from millet and, in northern and eastern Slovakia, groats from buckwheat. The top husks of the grains, which were removed during their production, were used as fodder for livestock. Along with flour, groats have been a staple grain food and a source of energy for people in Slovakia for centuries. In traditional Slovak kitchen, smaller groats were boiled into soups,

and groats were used to make rich porridges. The most famous was the so-called ‚zabijačková' (slaughter´s) or ‚žobrácka' (beggar's) porridge, made from blood and grits during the domestic slaughter of a pig. In some localities, it was customary to serve porridge as a ceremonial dish at a wedding feast or Christmas Eve dinner. During the second half of the 20th century, groats gradually disappeared from the menu of Slovaks and were replaced by rice.

Churning

The milk was churned into butter in a wooden container of conical shape with a wooden lid with a round hole through which the handle of the plunger passed. Some households also used rotary churns, in which the butter was churned by turning the paddles in a closed container. When the butter would not churn, it was often considered to be the influence of the witches. In those cases, the woman was supposed to put the butter churn in a stream, in a swamp, or take it in a sheet on her back and circle the house with it, or say the following words: 'A beggar walks around the village, looking for butter to buy. Help us, O Christ God, to churn this butter. 'In the second half of the 20th century, butter churning in Slovak households gradually disappeared.

Cooking

Most foods were cooked on the hearth by boiling in water or milk. The fireplace was originally on the floor in a corner of the room. It was cooked over an open fire in clay or iron pots, which were placed next to the fire or on metal tripods directly above the fire. The smoke from the fireplace escaped into the room. At the end of the 19th century, stoves with built-in fireplaces, later with cast-iron plates, and finally cast-iron wood-burning stoves (so-called ‚sporhelt, šparhelt', from the German) came into households, with the smoke being discharged first into the attic by a ‚flue' and later by a pipe up a chimney above the roof. Clay pots were replaced by cast-iron and later also enameled pots. By removing the smoke from the living quarters, the food no longer had a smoky flavor.

In Slovak traditional kitchen, porridge, soups, side dishes, and pasta were most often cooked. These dishes were mainly based on flour and groats, vegetables, legumes, potatoes, fruit, and milk. In the villages, most meat (including poultry) was still cooked in the first half of the 20th century.

Baking

Most foods were cooked in the furnace by baking. In the Slovak countryside, until the end of the 19th century, the furnace usually stood in a corner of the room near the partition that separated it from the cold entrance area - the pit. The corner around the furnace was the area of the housekeeper, who kept the fire burning and prepared food for the family members. Ancient forms include baking food wrapped in moist clay in the fire stump. Poultry and other birds with feathers, game with fur, and fish were baked in this way. Crayfish, snails, eggs, cheese, and later potatoes were also baked in the fire. Throughout the Middle Ages, it was baked over an open fire in the house. Rye spits, on which a whole animal could be roasted, or a griddle were used. Flour cakes were also baked in the ashes of the stove. These baking methods disappeared after the introduction of stoves. During the 19th century and

the first half of the 20th century, baking in the villages was mainly done in furnaces. The bread was baked in them, but also smaller pastries, unleavened and leavened pancakes and cakes, and in some places poultry was also baked in them. Baking and cooking in furnaces gradually disappeared as houses were rebuilt and the furnaces were removed, baking was switched to ovens or metal-plate stoves. In the second half of the 20th century, baking was gradually switched to electric or gas ovens for more sophisticated cooking methods. In particular, roasting and braising meat in its juices and frying food in a high layer of oil or lard became widespread. Particularly popular in the villages were fried cutlets, chicken, meatballs, and pastries - doughnuts, buns, fánky, and others, inspired by bourgeois kitchen. The modernization of kitchen equipment and utensils meant that the methods of preparing food in the villages were constantly expanding and becoming closer to the urban methods of preparing food.

Smoking

The most common method of preserving food was smoking. The smoke killed harmful microorganisms and the drying process created a protective layer for the food. Smoking was usually preceded by salting or immersing the food in a salt solution. It was smoked in an attic space near the chimney outlet, and later, freestanding smokehouses were built. Smoking was used not only to preserve all kinds of meat, fish, meat products, bacon, lard, and pig fat but also to preserve oštiepky and other types of cheese.

Salting

The meat and fat were salted in layers and placed in wooden containers for preservation. For dairy products, curd and bryndza were preserved by salting and pressing into wooden containers. Salt was also used to preserve various delicacies, such as chopped dill, garlic, and chives, which were used to flavor dishes in winter.

Drying

Fruits, especially apples, pears, and plums, were dried in the air or kilns using the heat from the fire. Food was also dried in the sun, in the attic, or in a heated bread oven. Fruits and mushrooms were dried sliced, spread on paper, or strung on thread. In some places, it was also customary to dry cabbage leaves on the thread, on which bread or pancakes were then baked. Spices and medicinal herbs were dried hanging. Salted curd was also preserved by drying it in the rising smoke from the fireplace or the sun. Meat, especially sheep, goat, or fish, was also preserved by drying.

Fermentation and boiling

The traditional methods of preserving food included fermenting and boiling the fruit into jam. Fermentation is the process by which microorganisms transform substances in the food, thus preserving it. In traditional Slovak kitchen, cabbage in particular was preserved by fermentation. Shredded salted cabbage was pressed with the feet or hands into wooden barrels, where, after a time, the lactic fermentation of the sugar produced sauerkraut. Preserved in this way, it could be kept in closed barrels for several months. Sauerkraut was a common food in traditional kitchen, especially in winter, when it provided a dietary supply of vitamin C. It was

eaten raw, made into soup or soup stock, and mixed with pasta, cooked legumes, and grits. Sauerkraut juice was drunk and used to acidify dishes. Similarly, chopped beetroot, grated pumpkin, or horseradish leaves were also used. Cucumbers were also preserved by fermentation, the so-called ‚kvasáky', which, like sauerkraut, were sold at markets.

The leavening process must also have taken place in the leavened dough used to bake bread or cakes. The curds that were left to ferment were turned into spicy cheeses. In the Spiš region, it was customary to mix the curd with crushed cherry leaves and yeast or to pour wine or other spirits over it and let it stand until it ripened. In the Šariš region, cheese was made by fermenting the curd, and in the town of Skalica in the Záhorie region, the favorite delicacy of wine-growers was the ‚skalický cheese'. These soft cheeses could be spread or eaten with a spoon. Fermentation was also used to make drinks from grain, flour, bread, or fruit - yeast, beer, and wine.

Distilling

The distillation of alcohol has been recorded historically in Slovakia since the 12th century, but archaeological findings go back much further. Alcohol was originally made from wine, from the 15th century onwards mainly from grains and fruit juices. From the 16th century onwards, the production of alcohol increased and was a profitable commercial commodity. In the 1830s, potatoes were also used for distilling. Gradually, sugar, sugar beet, and molasses were also used to make spirits. A distilling industry began to emerge. From the 19th century onwards, distilled spirits from local distilleries or imported from areas where their production was developed (Spiš towns, the White Carpathians) were mainly consumed in the villages. Historically, the high consumption of alcohol has been one of the most serious traditional social and health problems of the Slovak population.

Condensation, preservation, and sterilization

Newer methods that took hold in Slovak kitchen during the 20th century included preserving fruit with sugar in the form of jams, boiling compotes in bowl jars, and preserving meat and meat products from slaughter and other foods in tins.

Cooling and freezing

For short-term preservation, meat and butter were cooled by immersion in running water or in a well. To enhance the preserving effect of salted meat, it was wrapped in nettle leaves or burdock leaves and stored in a cool place - a pantry or cellar. Larger farmers and butchers stored the meat in pits insulated with straw and lined with natural ice. Ice was also used in taverns to cool drinks. In the winter months, meat hung outside was frozen.

Traditional dishes

Grain dishes

These are cooked dishes based on grains. The oldest known grain dish was pražmo, prepared by roasting grains. However, most

grains were further processed into groats and flour, which formed the basis of grain dishes prepared in two basic ways: cooking (soup, porridge, pasta) and baking (pancake, bread, cake, pastry).

In the first half of the 20th century, some grains (millet, tenkeľ, buckwheat, oats) were in decline in traditional Slovak kitchen. However, the consumption of rice became more widespread, and maize was also quite widely used, often replacing other grains, especially in times of economic crisis and wars. However, the proportion of maize in the food declined in the second half of the 20th century. Of the grains, wheat, rye, and barley in particular retained their place in the food. There were also significant changes in the composition of grain dishes during the 20th century. Gradually, the grain soup sour kyseľ, some types of porridge, baked dishes, especially kalkýš, and some types of traditional cakes and pastries ceased to be prepared. However, there has been an expansion and improvement in the quality of flour dishes, especially pasta and various types of more demanding pastries.

Potato dishes

These are dishes based on potatoes. In Slovakia too, potatoes have played a significant role in shaping the character and content of kitchen. Alongside grains, pulses, cabbage, and milk, they have become an important part of it. The basic methods of preparation included boiling unpeeled potatoes or baking them on a stove. The cooking of peeled potatoes, whole or split, gradually took hold. Cooked in this way, they were the basis for the preparation of potato soup, mash, and boiled potatoes. Other types of potato dishes were prepared by baking. Boiled potatoes were roasted, and raw potatoes were roasted in lard or oil. These methods were used in traditional cooking, especially in lowland areas where there was plenty of fat in the household. These methods of preparation formed the basis of potato dishes in Slovakia. Potatoes were often eaten for dinner, washed down with milk, cmar, sour milk, sauerkraut brine, or eaten with sauerkraut. Gradually, as meat consumption increased, potatoes were eaten as a side dish. They were also used in dishes that were more difficult to prepare, such as roasts with meat. Potatoes were also added to many other types of food. In the case of grains, they were used in the preparation of practically all types: porridges, pasta, pancakes, bread, and cakes. Grated raw or boiled potatoes were originally added to flour to compensate for the frequent lack of it. By combining flour and potatoes, many dishes acquired a new taste and became typical of Slovak traditional kitchen, such as halušky, šúľance, potato pancakes - haruľa, potato baba, bandurniky, gruľovniky, etc., and mashed potatoes. Potatoes were mainly added to vegetable, legume, and cabbage dishes. Different types of soups and stews prepared by combining these ingredients have become widespread and popular.

Corn dishes

These are dishes made from corn flour or corn kernels. They are one of the newer grain dishes, as maize was not introduced to Slovakia until the 18th century. Corn porridge has been the most widely used in the traditional food. It was cooked from corn flour and milk or water. Once cooked, it was usually covered with milk or spread with butter, lard, or cracklings. Porridge was a common everyday food and was also considered a Lenten meal. In most of the territory, it was known as gerheň, maľ - corn porridge baked in a baking pan and cut into pieces to eat as a pastry. In southern Slovakia, it was a common meal, in the central and northern areas it was considered more of an emergency meal and usually made up for the lack of bread. In lowland areas with intensive maize cultiva-

tion, it was customary to prepare boiled maize. The cooked kernels were seasoned with sugar, salt, poppy seeds, or ground nuts. It was an occasional dish often served when women worked together, especially in the páračky (women's group work to extract down from poultry feathers as a filling for pillows and duvets) and in the priadky (women's group work to make thread from hemp or flax yarn, which was used to weave cloth). Corn dishes enriched the composition of traditional Slovak kitchen. However, they gradually disappeared after World War II. In towns and cities, however, the popular roasted corn kernels called pukance (popcorn) and, in autumn, boiled corn in husks are still sold as a delicacy on the streets.

Vegetable dishes

These are dishes based on vegetables. Man has always collected plants in nature, which we class as vegetables. These were the various roots, tubers, leaves, and bulbs of plants, which then were prepared into dishes. Vegetable cultivation penetrated Slovakia in the 8th-9th centuries from the Mediterranean area. Vegetables were first cultivated in monastic and noble gardens. At the end of the Middle Ages, vegetables were also cultivated by the popular classes, especially on small areas of land near dwellings. The importance of vegetables in the food grew in proportion to the knowledge of their quality, especially as a source of vitamins that protected people against certain diseases. Among root vegetables, carrots, parsley, and celery are used in traditional Slovak kitchen as the basis of soup vegetables, salad, and spinach are leafy vegetables, and garlic and onions are onion vegetables, which are mainly used as spices. Traditional vegetable dishes also included dishes made from different types of beetroot. The most consumed vegetable in Slovak kitchen was and is cabbage. Other vegetables such as cauliflower, pumpkin, kohlrabi, kale, leeks, cucumbers, peppers, and tomatoes were also used to a lesser extent. Legume and potato dishes also featured prominently in the vegetable food.

Cabbage dishes

These are dishes based on cabbage. The most important cabbage product in Slovakia was fermented sauerkraut. Folk experience dictated that sufficient quantities of fermented cabbage should be stored for the winter and that it should be preserved in barrels for a long time by lactic fermentation so that it could be used in the food all year round. The best quality cabbage was considered to be the so-called ‚Záhorácka' cabbage (from the western Záhorie region), especially Stupava cabbage (after the town of Stupava), because this region was known not only for its favorable climate but also for its long tradition of growing cabbage. A large quantity of fermented cabbage from Záhorie was sold and is still sold today, especially at markets in the nearby capital. However, cabbage was grown and ‚pickled' everywhere in Slovakia. In many rural households, it is still grated and put into barrels, where it gradually ferments and matures. In some places, whole cabbage heads used to be added to the cabbage in the barrels. These were then used in the kitchen to make stuffed cabbage leaves. Fermented leaves stuffed with a mixture of chopped or minced meat, grits, or rice, known as ‚holubky', was a traditional wedding dish in southern and eastern Slovakia.

Many dishes were cooked from fermented cabbage. The most famous is a thick cabbage soup - ‚kapustnica', with smoked meat or sausages, in fasting seasons with dried mushrooms or prunes. It is still part of the Christmas Eve feast in many families in Slovakia. In some places, kapustnica used to be cooked only from the juice of sauerkraut, often with potatoes or coarse noodles. In north-

eastern Slovakia, the traditional soup was called ‚mačanka', made from sauerkraut juice with mushrooms, thickened with flour. Sauerkraut was stewed in its juice and mixed with other foods: boiled grits, legumes, pasta, and potatoes to make thick, rich dishes that were traditional Slovak dishes and had many regional or local names. One of the favorite dishes was the so-called ‚zabijačková kapusta' (slaughter cabbage soup), which was prepared with fresh meat. Cabbage was also eaten raw, often with boiled potatoes for dinner. In summer, sauerkraut juice was drunk to quench thirst.

Part of the cabbage harvest was kept in heads in cellars, in chambers, or buried in the ground to last as long as possible. The cabbage leaves were used to bake homemade bread or pancakes called ‚nalesníky'. The chopped and smothered cabbage was used to fill pastries and cakes called ‚kapustníky', or mixed with boiled pasta and served sweet and savory. The consumption of cabbage and the variety of cabbage dishes was very high in traditional Slovak kitchen. Cabbage was one of the basic foundations of the food of the Slovak population.

During the 20th century, stewed or fermented cabbage began to be eaten as a side dish with roast pork or poultry and served with dumplings or potatoes. Such a dish was a frequent part of wedding or feast menus and a typical Sunday lunch.

Legume dishes

The basis of these dishes is legumes. In Slovakia, legumes are one of the oldest cultivated crops. In terms of nutrition, they are one of the richest sources of vegetable protein. During feudalism, they were more important than they are today because, in the absence of potatoes and the scarcity of meat, they formed an important part of the daily food. Frequent and prolonged fasts were also a factor in the high consumption of pulses. Until the widespread introduction of potatoes in Slovakia, pea and lentil dishes, in particular, were so common and so essential to people's food that they were called dietary staples. Legumes and their dishes during the holidays symbolize prosperity, abundance, and plenty.

Peas

For centuries, people have eaten peas as a typical legume. They left them in the field to ripen and cooked the hulled dry seeds into porridge or soup. In times of grain shortage, they were also ground into flour. In the Middle Ages, it was common to eat peas sprouted raw or roasted. Traditional dishes included boiled peas mixed with stewed cabbage or boiled barley groats. In the 19th century, peas from the Spiš and Turiec regions were particularly valued. Peas were also a ceremonial dish, served especially at wedding receptions and Christmas Eve dinner.

Slovienka

The pea also resembles the so-called ‚slovienka' - a legume with round fruits with a small protrusion. It used to be cooked with root vegetables or smoked meat for soup. In the 20th century, it was still popular around Nitra, where it is still grown in gardens today.

Lentils

Lentils have a similar history to peas. Because it needs a warmer climate, in Slovakia it was grown in more southern regions. Lentils used to be cooked into porridge or stew. Its appearance was reminiscent of a lot of money, which is why it was cooked at Christmas or New Year as a symbol of desired prosperity.

Broad bean

Broad beans have been eaten by people throughout the Middle Ages, although their seeds are coarser and less tasty than those of other legumes. It was used to make soups and stews, and bean flour from the dried seeds was added to grain flour. Wolf's bean, popularly known as horse bean, was also used for emergency cooking. It had smaller seeds and was commonly used as fodder for animals. Like peas, broad beans were gradually replaced by peas in the Slovak food.

Beans

Beans, which spread in Europe after the discovery of America, gradually displaced beans and peas. In a traditional Slovak kitchen, bean seeds were cooked and mixed with grits, potatoes, or sauerkraut. The most famous and still popular dish is bean soup cooked sweet in water or sour with milk or cream. Festive types of bean soup must not be without sausage or smoked meat. Bean soup used to be part of the Christmas dinner in many families. In the summertime, a cluster bean soup was cooked, usually served with eggs.

Chickpeas

Chickpeas, whose fruits resemble a ram's head and are white, red, and black, are still grown in Slovakia. It was cooked into soup or served ‚thickly', like peas and beans. Roasted chickpea seeds were used as a substitute for coffee. Nowadays, chickpeas are becoming a well-known food again thanks to the promotion of vegetarian diets.

Fruit dishes

It is a dish of fresh or dried fruit. In Slovak traditional kitchen, fruit was not as widely used as grains and vegetables. Fruit dishes were well-known and popular, especially in areas with developed fruit growing. The most commonly prepared fruit soups, porridges, and side dishes were called ‚pamula', ‚pamulanka' or, depending on the basic ingredient, ‚slivčanka' (plum), ‚jablčanka' (apple), ‚hruščanka' (pear). They were eaten with bread or potatoes and were considered a typical Lenten meal. The fruit was eaten on various occasions. Dried pears cooked in clay pots were brought to the field and eaten cold with bread. On hot days they were a refreshing and nutritious meal. The fruit was also used for festive meals. In the Bebrava basin, for example, cooked prunes served with meat were not to be missed at any feast. In the Upper Nitra sub-region, rotten pears, called cat's heads, were considered an Easter delicacy and were eaten from pots with a spoon, as were plums filled with nuts and pears dipped in sugar. A decoction of dried fruit used to be part of the Christmas Eve feast. In addition to fruit dishes, fruit was also eaten fresh or dried and as jam.

Jam

Jam is fruit preserved by cooking without adding sugar. In the Slovak countryside, jam was most often prepared from plums. The pitted plums were cooked in a copper cauldron set in the body of the stove or a makeshift stove built outside the house. They were stirred with a wooden ladle or stirrers. The plums were first boiled down to a liquid mass. After it was liquefied, it was turned into a semi-boiled jam (lízak, brija), which was a delicacy especially for children. When the jam was falling from the boil, it was cooked through. While it was still hot, it was put into clay, wooden, or straw jars, in which it solidified. The hard jam was tipped out and the individual pieces were wrapped in paper and hung on the ceiling castles of the house. Especially in the poor foothills, jam was an almost daily staple. Women had to master its preparation as perfectly as they did the baking of bread. Cooking jam was considered a social event in the folk milieu. The housewives would go to each other‘s houses to taste each other‘s lollipops, and the young men would visit those households where they had maidens. In the Záhorie region of western Slovakia, it was customary for households where jam was brewed to be visited by masked groups of young people, who were also given a saucer of lollipop. The jam was exported from the fruit-growing villages. It was mainly bought by the agricultural seasonal laborers, who took it as cheap food when they went to work. Whole loaves of jam sold well, especially at Christmas time. Most jam was prepared in the regions of western Slovakia and the Turiec region.

Egg dishes

They are prepared from eggs and other ingredients. The most common egg dish in traditional Slovak kitchen is ‚praženica‘. It was most often prepared on roasted smoked bacon with onion, which was covered with eggs mixed with a little milk and flour. It was usually served as a filling meal in the morning before heavy farm work. The roasted eggs were used to flavor gnocchi, noodles, etc.

The egg was considered a symbol of life and fertility in the folk environment. It was therefore eaten especially at moments of importance for a person or his family. At that time, it served as a ceremonial meal. Hard-boiled eggs were eaten at Easter, in mountain areas, and at weddings, and were carried to the ‚šestonedieľke‘ (woman in the postpartum period). At Easter, it was customary to bake a meal of eggs, smoked meat, and buns, known as ‚baba‘, ‚pečka‘, ‚plnina‘, or ‚lost chicken‘. In eastern Slovakia, a ceremonial dish called ‚syrek‘, ‚žolta hrudka‘, was prepared for Easter.

Syrek

Syrek was cooked from milk and eggs - salty or sweet. The stirred mass was left to cook until it curdled. It was then strained through a napkin to drain off the water. The thick mass was molded into a large ball or egg. Sometimes it could also be baked. The cheese was served sliced, cold, as part of a festive breakfast on Easter Sunday. On Easter Monday, it was offered to the young men who came to water the maidens, just as they were offered boiled eggs everywhere else.

Dairy dishes

These are dishes based on milk or another dairy product. One of the most widespread in traditional Slovak kitchen was milk

soups, which were cooked either sweetly: by boiling pasta in boiling milk, or sourly: cooked with whey or diluted cottage cheese. Some of these soups were similar in taste to ‚demikát' (shepherd's soup made from bryndza). The proliferation of milk soups is also evidenced by the enormous number of variants and popular names (zvara, sciranka, čír, papcún, brejka, žufka, zočúrka, cheese soup, whey soup, milk soup).

However, most of the milk was used to make various products - butter, cottage cheese, bryndza, cheese - ‚oštiepok' and ‚parenica'. Cow's and sheep's milk products diversified the food, especially in mountain and foothill areas, where they often replaced meat, i.e. animal protein. Especially special were dishes made from ‚colostrum' - the first milk after the cow had calved. More often than not, milk was used as a stand-alone food to soften the flavor of other types of food, especially as a topping for soups and stews. The milk was used to boil grain porridges and was often poured over them to make dough for cakes, etc.

How and when food was eaten

How the food was eaten

The basic form of food consumption in the traditional rural environment of Slovakia was dining. Mostly, meals were eaten at the table, which was set up in the room where people lived, and later in a separate room - the kitchen. If it was not possible to sit at the table (the table did not reside stably in the room or was used by only one family in the house), meals were eaten on benches placed along the walls or by the stove built in the corner of the room. A chest, a barrel, and a table could serve as a substitute for a table. In summer, meals were often eaten in the yard, while doing fieldwork in the fields, vineyard, meadow, or forest.

The food was served to all family members in one large bowl, from which everyone took a spoonful. Soups, porridges, side dishes, pasta, boiled potatoes, and meat were served in large wooden, clay, and later enamel bowls. The food was eaten with wooden spoons or with the hands. The porridge used to have a hole for the fat or milk, into which the spoon and porridge were dipped. The bread was usually cut and distributed by the housewife. It was dipped into soups or stews, like pancakes or even cakes. Meat and scrambled eggs were eaten on bread or pancakes. Smaller children were fed by their mother, holding them in her arms. Larger children did not sit at the table, they ate from a smaller bowl set on a mat on the floor or a bench. Eating together from one bowl began to gradually disappear in the second half of the 19th century. New kitchen equipment, plates, cutlery, and individualized eating also gradually came into use during this period.

When the food was eaten

In traditional peasant families, the emphasis was on the morning meal, which was considered the main meal, with another hot meal eaten in the evening.

Breakfast

In the morning, before starting work, hearty meals were prepared: thick soups, porridge, pasta, and leftovers from breakfast were eaten for lunch, and hot hearty meals were cooked again for dinner. During heavy agricultural work (harvesting, mowing, vineyard work, etc.), a double breakfast was served: dry food at home and cooked food brought to the place where the work was being done. Before breakfast, men used to drink alcohol on an empty stomach. In the morning they got up before dawn to make the most of the daylight for work.

‚Obid' (Lunch)

The fact that breakfast was originally the main meal of the day is confirmed by its archaic folk name ‚obid' (‚obed' is now the Slovak name for the main meal at noon). The term obid survived in the peripheral mountain areas of north-eastern Slovakia, also inhabited by the Ruthenian population.

‚Fruštik‘

‚Fruštik‘, ‚frištik‘, ‚frištuk‘ is the name of a morning meal derived from the German ‚Frühstück‘ and was used in most of Slovakia. During the transition from the archaic two-person meal (breakfast - dinner) to a three-person meal (breakfast - lunch - dinner), the main meal, originally referred to as lunch (obid), moved from morning to noon. Therefore, a new name for the morning meal, fruštik, and its variants, has been adopted. This name has spread to the peasantry from the urban, predominantly handicraft environment. The townspeople and craftsmen were predominantly of German origin or used German. In fact, Slovak was the language of the lower classes in the medieval towns of Upper Hungary.

‚Snídane‘

In western Slovakia, in the contact regions with Bohemia and Moravia, the name of the morning meal was taken from Czech: ‚snídane‘, ‚snídaní‘, as is the case in neighboring Poland.

Gradually, as the urban elements of life penetrated the countryside, the content of breakfast changed. Soups were replaced by white coffee. Porridge and pasta were replaced by bread with butter or jam, meals that could be prepared more quickly. Older generations, however, continued to prefer a hearty-cooked breakfast in the second half of the 20th century.

For other segments of the population, the number of meals was gradually expanded during the Middle Ages, and the two-person food (breakfast - dinner) changed to a three-person (breakfast - lunch - dinner) or multi-person (breakfast - snack - lunch - lunch – afternoon meal - dinner).

Snack

‚Desiata‘, ‚juzena‘, ‚predobed‘, ‚svačina‘ is a meal served between breakfast and lunch. During the 19th century, the snack gradually took hold, especially in urban environments. Eating between breakfast and lunch was only seasonal in the countryside, during the day‘s work in the fields. During the second half of the 20th century, snacks were mainly taken by children at school and adults at work. It was mostly dry food, such as bread or pastries supplemented by cold meats, cheese, jam, vegetables, and fruit.

The style of life and the rhythm of work of the urban population required different principles of food consumption than that of the peasantry. A three-course meal was typical, with the main meal served at midday. Especially in the second half of the 20th century, the main meal throughout Slovakia became lunch served at midday.

Lunch

‚Obed‘, ‚poledno‘, ‚polodňa‘, ‚pouňe‘, ‚poľudzinek‘, ‚polidenok‘, ‚polidne‘ is a meal served in the middle of the day. The word lunch is of Slavic origin, it used to denote a larger feast, a banquet, but gradually its meaning narrowed down to denoting the main meal of the day. Originally, in peasant settings, cooked food was not served at noon. The main hot meal was breakfast. The shift in dietary

order occurred only with a gradual change in the principles of daily eating during the Middle Ages in towns, and later in villages. The two-person meal order with cooked meals in the morning and early evening changed to a three-person meal order, and hot meals also began to be prepared at midday. The main meal and its name were moved from morning to noon.

In some mountain villages of northern Slovakia, however, in the 20th century, lunch was still referred to by names derived from the time of noon, which indicated the date of the meal rather than the meal itself: ‚poledno', ‚polodňa', ‚pouňe', ‚poľudzinek', ‚polidenok', ‚polidne'. On this basis, it can be assumed that there was also the latest shift of the main meal from morning to noon, and the generic name lunch was not even used.

This change was first enforced in the villages on Sundays when there was enough time for longer meal preparation and the family could dine together. There was no work on Sundays, only church services were held in the morning. Over time, this principle became prevalent on weekdays as well.

‚Olovrant'

‚Olovrant', ‚havránka', ‚juzena', ‚neďpor', ‚svačina', ‚užona' is a meal served between lunch and dinner. The various names of ‚olovrant' were used in those villages where the food was already more developed in the past and where meals were eaten more than three times a day. Eating in the afternoon used to be seasonal, when the day's work in the fields was done. Lunch was served mainly to people who were most burdened by physical work. It was usually dry food accompanied by a drink, such as bread with sour milk or bread with bacon and water.

In connection with these changes, the number of meals during the day has also been expanded and the dates of service have been stabilised. In terms of the time of day at which the food is eaten, the names of the meals are: breakfast, snack, lunch, olovrant, and dinner.

Dinner

Dinner is a meal served in the evening. In the traditional peasant environment of Slovakia, dinner was the second most important meal of the day after breakfast. It was served after work and consisted of hearty cooked dishes. Gradually, as lunch became the main meal of the day, its content changed. Meals were simple to prepare. Often it was boiled or baked potatoes with sauerkraut or milk, or bread with milk, cmar, sour milk, etc. The name dinner is widespread throughout Slovakia, except in areas with a German population, where names derived from the German word ‚Abendsmahl' were used.

What was drunk

Apart from the basic drink - water, many other beverages were created in Slovak culture. They served not only to quench thirst and to receive energy and vitamins but also became an essential part of everyday and festive life. In some cases, established and customary ways of consuming individual drinks developed. For coffee, tea, and alcoholic beverages in particular, fairly clear consumption rules and categories of consumers (for example, by age and occasion) are established.

Soft drinks

Water

Written documents from the 11th century from the territory of Slovakia mention as sources of drinking water wells, from which water flowed naturally, but also dug wells, usually with lined and reinforced walls. Mineral and thermal springs, which Slovakia is very rich in, were also a source of water. The presence of a drinkable water source was a prerequisite for the establishment of every settlement. The maintenance and use of well, river, or stream water was governed by customary law. For example, a farmhouse was always fed and washed only in the stream behind the village, and rubbish was not allowed to be thrown into the wells. Water was also used for food preparation, hygiene, and soil irrigation and was an essential component in many production processes. Therefore, water and its sources have always been held in reverence and considered a sacred element. Slavs worshipped springs, lakes, and rivers and offered various sacrifices to them. The tradition of cleaning wells was also connected with the cult of water. The theme of water is also present in Slovak folklore.

Tea

It is a drink made from the dried leaves and buds of the tea plant. In Slovakia, it became a common drink only in the 18th century. Its consumption followed the older tradition of plant decoctions, which were mainly drunk as medicinal drinks. Gradually, the name tea was adopted for these decoctions as well. Genuine tea was domesticated in Slovakia in the 19th century, mainly thanks to saffron merchants, oilers, tinkers, and peddlers who visited Russia and learned to drink it there. Initially, it was consumed more in towns and cities, but in the first decades of the 20th century, it spread to the countryside as well. Imported Russian or Chinese tea gradually began to displace traditional herbal decoctions. It became particularly popular as a breakfast drink.

Coffee

It is a drink made from ground-roasted coffee seeds. The earliest references to coffee date back to the 14th century in Arabic countries. It began to spread in Europe at the end of the 16th century and the first coffee houses were established in the early 17th century. It came to Slovakia from the spoils after the defeat of the Turks at Vienna (1683). As an expensive commodity, it was initially only a drink of the nobility and the wealthy bourgeoisie. It was also sold in pharmacies as a valuable medicine. In the late 18th and

early 19th centuries, it was domesticated by the bourgeoisie but was still an unaffordable indulgence for the popular classes. Various coffee substitutes were therefore produced (e.g., chicory made from roasted and ground chicory roots, from grains, especially barley and rye, from beetroot and figs). The roasting, grinding, and mixing of dried chicory, sugar beet, and roasted barley produced an extremely popular coffee mixture in Slovakia, still widely used in the 1970s - Melta. Drinks made from coffee beans mixed with milk were drunk as so-called ‚white coffee'. It first took hold in laborers' families, where it was eaten with bread or pastries for breakfast. In peasant families, it was initially a drink served at feasts, but during the 20th century, it became a breakfast drink here too, replacing traditional soups. Drinking real black coffee from coffee beans only became widespread in the Slovak countryside during the second half of the 20th century.

Milk

In Slovak traditional kitchen cow's, sheep's, and goat's milk were used. Sheep's milk used to be drunk in areas with a well-developed sheep breeding tradition, goat's milk in particular in areas of north-western and north-eastern Slovakia. Because of its smell, it was often used only as pig feed. Cow's milk was consumed to the greatest extent. Drinking freshly milked milk was rare, usually chilled or sour milk. In the past, milk consumption was characterized by seasonality, depending on the milk yield of the animals. Consumption always increased in summer and decreased in winter. In some places, milk was hardly drunk at all, being a staple of daily nutrition only in the food of young children. Milk was served with meals in the morning and evening, most often with boiled or baked potatoes or mashed grains, and later as ‚white coffee'. It was also used to prepare various dairy products. Milk was used to cook various types of dairy dishes. In the past, milk consumption depended on the social status of households. Especially in mountain and foothill areas, milk and dairy products replaced the almost non-existent meat, i.e. animal protein, in the food. The association of agriculture in the second half of the 20th century gradually eroded the use of milk from own livestock production, and its daily availability in the commercial network put an end to the seasonality of its consumption.

Cmar

Cmar is the liquid that remains when butter is made from cream. Although Cmar is a waste product, it is a valuable food containing protein and minerals and is low in fat. It was already considered by ancient peoples to be an elixir of health. In Slovakia, this mildly acidic drink was drunk especially on hot summer days, in some places it was added to bread dough and used for healing.

Srvátka

It is the liquid left over when making cottage cheese or sheep's cheese. In traditional kitchen, whey from cow's milk was used to cook milk soup, but mostly in summer, it was drunk to quench thirst. The whey that remained in the cauldron after the lump of sheep's cheese had been removed was used to remove the thicker top layer, which was used to make a drink - ‚žinčica'. The whey was also used to feed pigs and dogs, but also as a drink for sheep. People also drank the cooled sheep whey as a refreshing drink.

Yeast

Yeast is a fermented beverage known since ancient times. Many recipes for its preparation could still be found in rural Slovakia in the 20th century. Particularly in summer, when stocks of sauerkraut juice ran out, it was customary to prepare sour refreshing drinks by fermenting flour or bran, sourdough for bread, or pieces of bread or pastry in water, which were drunk cold. In Slovakia, sourdough was drunk until the end of the 19th century. Its preparation has been preserved the longest in eastern Slovakia. Fermented beverages were also usually made from fresh or dried wild and forest fruits, such as apples, pears, kalines, rowanberries, cranberries, raspberries, strawberries, and blackberries. The fruit was poured over cooled boiled water and left to ferment in a covered wooden vessel. Fruit yeasts made from the juice of pears or apples were known as ‚kvas' or ‚plačanka' and were sold in markets.

Žinčica

It is a drink made from sheep's milk. Production was widespread on shepherd's huts throughout the Slovak Carpathians. Žinčica is produced in the manufacture of cheese. The fatty water - ‚srvátka' that remains in the vat after the curdled cheese has been removed - is heated over a fire. When it begins to bubble, the top, thickest layer of whey is collected, which is stirred and decanted to form fine ‚žinčica'. Mixing fresh and aged whey produces sour curds. The shepherds drank this drink from carved wooden cups, known as ‚črpák', every day. The drink was used as a cure for lung and stomach ailments. Žinčica is considered a traditional Slovak product made from sheep's milk.

Juice

It is a drink obtained from the wood of trees or fruits. Archaic drinks include those made from the sap of trees in spring, especially birch, wild cherry, maple, and sycamore. A tube was inserted into the drilled bark of the tree, through which the sap flowed into a container. It was drunk fresh and, if there was enough, it was fermented and drunk as a low-alcohol drink. Juices were also obtained by fermenting the juices of certain fruits, especially wild raspberries, and blueberries, and preserved with sugar. It was used to flavor water or mineral water. During the 20th century, it began to be replaced by bought syrups.

Alcoholic beverages

Wine

It is an alcoholic beverage made from grapes and the main product of viticulture. Since the 11th century, quality Hungarian wines have been an export commodity. In the 14th century, wine was even more important as an export commodity than grain. Bratislava, Trnava, Košice, Bardejov and Levoča became important centers of wine trade in Slovakia. The main transit of wine passed through the eastern Slovak towns to Poland and Russia.

Since the 18th century, the technology of wine production has been the subject of scientific interest. In 1776, principles were drawn up in Hungary to guarantee good-quality wines. Winemaking became an industry. In the 1880s, promising prospects were dis-

rupted by the emergence of diseases of the vine such as grapevine phylloxera and perenospore. After this catastrophe, new practices were introduced, grafting onto more resistant rootstocks and planting vines in new areas. In the vernacular, winemaking technology retained traditional production methods until the mid-20th century.

Wine production

Viticulture is the activity of growing grapes. Winemaking is the downstream activity for the purpose of producing a product - wine. Sometimes they operate separately (winemakers do not grow grapes but buy them, winegrowers do not make wine but sell the grapes they grow). In traditional Slovak culture, however, both of these activities are usually carried out by one household.

The harvested grapes were collected in large containers. The mash, a mass of crushed grapes, was pushed into the basket of the press. The pressed grape juice from the berries, the must, flowed into a collecting container. The best quality cider was considered to be that obtained by crushing the grapes before pressing. Everyone drank it for its sweet taste, but the more they drank, the less wine they could produce. The pomace from the press basket was agitated and pressed again. After the second pressing, they were covered with water or cider, left to infuse overnight, and pressed a third time.

The cider thus obtained was used to make ‚vodnár' - a weak wine that was drunk in the summer heat, brewed into tea, or used to replace milk in times of scarcity in wine-growing areas. The individual logs of mash were pressed several times, the number depending on the grape variety. If the pomace was used to make alcohol (terkelica, terkel), it was pressed only once so that it would ferment better.

In the production of red wine, the crushed grapes were left to ferment in wooden vats for at least a week to ten days, with occasional stirring. This produced good color and tannin. Only then was it pressed. The pressing had to be carried out smoothly so that the quality of the raw material for the wine was the same. For this reason, it was often necessary to work through the night to get all the must into the barrels.

The first week the fermentation was very turbulent. The non-alcoholic juice - cider - turned into an alcoholic sweet drink - ‚burčiak'. This gradually fermented into a less sweet, bitter icicle. Fermentation was usually completed within 3 to 4 weeks when the so-called ‚young wine' was produced. It was left to mature in barrels and bottled (strained from the yeast) for the first time around Christmas so that young wine would be on the vine growers' table on Christmas Eve. The wine was sometimes sweetened, embellished, or treated. Most often, a little cider was heated with sugar and added to the wine. When the wine spoiled, horseradish was hung in a barrel on a string, if it thickened and curdled, it was rolled up again and whipped with a birch whisk while overflowing. The special treatment produced wines with special characteristics. The most demanding wines were tokajský and svätojurský samotok. Wines from the Tokaj region (a sub-region between Slovakia and Hungary extending into the south of eastern Slovakia) were known for their quality as early as the 15th century. The production of a special dessert wine, ‚samotok', dates back to the 17th century. The folk experience of producing red wine and less common special wines also deserves attention.

Wine played an important role in the everyday life of (not only) wine growers. It was served during strenuous work, it was commonly poured into tea, and it was used diluted with water to quench thirst. Grown men drank wine every day. Liquefied wine was

used in cooking instead of vinegar. In folk medicine, red wine was a well-known remedy for anemia, and a very good aid for sweating and massage. There was a strong belief in the effects of wine consecrated on the day of John the Evangelist, the so-called ‚St. John´s wine'. The wine was used in calendar customs and social life. The wine was also reflected in verbal, musical, and dance folklore.

Mead

It is a fermented drink made from honey and water. Honey, cleaned of wax, may have been used to make the drink in the days when honeycombs were collected from wild bees in the forests. Wild hop extract or liquid yeast was also added to the drink to aid fermentation. Honey mead was known to the ancient Slavs, Germans, and other peoples. It occupied the same place in the food of the people as beer does today. The best mead was produced in Slovakia in the 18th century in the town of Levoča. Mead was sometimes infused with fruit juice (blueberries) or spiced (cinnamon or nutmeg). It was considered a folk remedy for the upper respiratory tract and digestion. The fact that the brewing of mead was a traditional occupation is also evidenced by surnames such as Medovarský. From the region of Gemer comes a reference to the drinking of ‚mjadovka', a sweet water created by pouring honeycomb over honey after the honey has been pressed out.

During the 19th century, mead production began to gradually disappear. Recently, some producers have resumed its production and present it as a traditional Slovak drink. Mead from Slovak producers regularly wins top prizes at world competitions.

Beer

It is a low-alcohol fermented beverage made from malt, hops, and water. A beer-like beverage was already known in antiquity. The preparation of beer was also known to the ancient Slavs. It was brewed from grains of barley, millet, oats, wheat and rye. The grains were germinated in water and dried in the sun or over a fire to produce malt. The dried malt was ground by hand, covered with water, and boiled. The sediment produced during the brewing process - yeast - was used as a fermenting agent. In Slovakia, the addition of hops became widespread in the 11th-12th centuries and the brewing of hopped beer persists to this day. In Slovakia, beer was brewed by serfs, nobility, and monasteries. Later, production was concentrated in towns, work was differentiated, and brewing and malting began to emerge. For a long time, beer consumption in Slovakia was low compared with other beverages. It increased especially during the fasting period when it was often drunk instead of the forbidden milk.

In the 2nd half of the 20th century, the quality of beer improved significantly. Together with the rise in living standards and affordability, this increased its consumption. Close contact between Slovaks and the Czech regions, where beer has been the most popular drink for centuries, has also contributed to its current popularity in both urban and rural areas.

Pálenka

It is a spirit distilled from wine, grains, fruit, sugar beet, potatoes, or other raw materials. Its production was already known in Slovakia in the 12th century. It was made from wine, from the 15th century onwards mainly from grains and fruit juices. It was a profitable trade commodity. In the first half of the 18th century, the first manufactories for the production of alcohol were established. In

the 1830s, potatoes were also used for distilling. Gradually, sugar, sugar beet, and molasses were also used to make spirits. A distilling industry began to emerge.

In the villages, since the 19th century, it was mainly alcohol from local distilleries or imported from areas where alcohol production was well developed that was consumed. Well-known centers were the towns of Spiš or the area of the Myjava Hills.

The popularity of pálenka and Borovička

Especially popular were plum, cherry, pear, and apple, as well as rye and wine. Pálenka was drunk mainly on the occasion of various feasts and holidays. In the mountain regions, warming pálenka, known as ‚hriate', was popular in winter. In some regions of Slovakia, in the 20th century, the burning of moonshine in illegal stills in households persisted. The so-called ‚lavórovice' (from the name of the vessel - ‚lavór') was usually burnt without knowledge of the harmful effects of the distillate prepared in this way, which, if produced in an unprofessional manner, contained harmful methyl alcohol.

Perhaps the most famous and popular Slovak alcohol is the so-called ‚borovička' - a distillate with the taste of juniper berries, popularly called ‚borovec', ‚borovička', ‚jadlovec', ‚jalovec'. Since the beginning of the 19th century, borovička, as well as borievčie for its production - flavoring the spirit, was sold by specialized merchants, the so-called ‚borovička merchants' (the best known were those from Trenčín or the White Carpathians).

The consumption of pálenka in Slovakia has been and still is relatively high. People have their alcohol burnt in rural distilleries and the range is constantly expanding to include purchased spirits. Historically, the high consumption of alcohol has been one of the serious social and health problems of the population. However, its consumption is part of traditional Slovak culinary culture.

‚Hriate' (Warm alcohol)

It is a warm alcoholic drink made from alcohol, honey or sugar, lard, or butter. Hriate was more often prepared and drunk in the mountain and foothill areas of Slovakia during winter. It was mainly drunk at wedding receptions, baptisms, and Christmas Eve dinners. In the folk environment, hriate was considered to be a cure for coughs or colds.

Drink of love

It is a drink made from various ingredients which, according to folk beliefs, could have magical effects: with its help, one can win the favor and love of a particular person of the opposite gender, even to the extent of contracting a marriage with the charming person. The magical means that turned an ordinary drink (beer, wine) into a love potion were urine, menstrual blood, sweat, or some aphrodisiacs.

Ceremonial dishes

Ceremonial dishes are an important part of traditional Slovak food. These are dishes functionally linked to family or calendar ceremonies. Originally, ceremonial dishes were prepared for important events in a person's life - the completion or commencement of agricultural work, the birth of a child, a wedding, or the death of a family member. Festivals were held, the significance of which was enhanced by eating and drinking together. The characteristics, shape, and quantity of the food served symbolized certain ideas or wishes of the people. Their choice was well observed from the natural world. New life and its continuity were symbolized by the egg and the round cake, expected fertility by the cock and the hen, prosperity by the grains of grains, legumes, and poppy seeds, health by garlic, sweet life by honey, etc. The roots of this symbolism go back to the pre-Christian period and persist in Slovak cultural heritage to this day. Newer elements that have been introduced into ceremonial food through Christianity are also considered traditional. Although they had a broader, supra-ethnic character and were based on various church ordinances and Christian symbolism, they were generally accepted in Slovak culture. A typical example is the Christmas Eve fish or wafers or the Easter lamb. The significance of ceremonial dishes was also enhanced by the stable number or order of dishes, eating from a common bowl, and the blessing of dishes in church. Although the belief in their magical effect has now greatly diminished or disappeared altogether, the serving of ceremonial dishes as part of various festivals persists.

Carnival dishes

These are the characteristic dishes of the carnival season. In most of Slovakia, it was customary for young men in masks to go around households on the last Sunday of Carnival. They received various foodstuffs and money as a reward. After the round, the young people would have a feast in a tavern or a house. They made scrambled eggs and bacon, somewhere they rendered the bacon and fried pastries in the fat. With the money they usually bought alcoholic drinks and paid off the musicians.

Various types of sugared fried pastries (doughnuts, pampúšky, fánky, krapne, herouke) are typical for carnival. The consumption of egg meals and fried pastries was supposed to ensure the desired prosperity for the family and the economy, the basis and prerequisites for which were created at the beginning of spring as a new year (the magic of the beginning: as in the beginning...). There was less peasant work at this time, so there was plenty of time and food for various customs, entertainments, and feasts. The nature of carnival food was also influenced by medieval church regulations forbidding the consumption of meat, lard, eggs, milk, and cheese during the following 40-day fast. The consumption of traditional carnival food in Slovakia persists today.

Easter dishes

These are dishes traditionally prepared for the Easter holiday. For Christians, Easter is the biggest holiday, moreover, it follows a period of 40 days of fasting. On Easter Sunday and Resurrection Sunday, baskets of food were brought to church for the priest to consecrate them at the morning Mass. Cakes, bread, ham, sausages, bacon, butter, cottage cheese, cheese, boiled and raw eggs, salt, and horseradish were blessed. Like the Christmas Eve meal, the consecrated food was attributed with magical properties. They were

also given to livestock, some of the crumbs and shells from the eggs were put into seed or plowed into the first furrow when the field was first plowed. They were also used for healing. The variety and abundance of Easter food on the table were meant to ensure the well-being of the whole family throughout the year.

Traditional Easter foods were eggs, which were eaten hard-boiled or in various egg dishes. A specialty of Eastern Slovakia was a dish made of milk and eggs (syrek, žolta hrudka). Families baked various cakes, the largest of which used to be the so-called ‚paska', ‚pascha'.

‚Paska'

It is an Easter white cake widespread in eastern Slovakia. The preparation and consumption of the dish was ceremonial. Its baking and size symbolized a good future harvest. In some places, they would rush home with the consecrated paska from the church so that the harvest would also be out of the field and in the barn quickly. The paska was distributed to all members of the family and eaten with ham, cheese curds, or sausages. The Ruthenians baked several cakes: the largest paska (mama pascha) was eaten on Easter Sunday, smaller paskas were offered to guests, and waterers and small paskas were baked for children.

Among the pastries that spread under the influence of Christianity were the so-called ‚Easter lambs' baked in clay or tin. Meat dishes were a welcome change in food after a long fast and a symbol of festive eating. The roasting of a lamb or a kid was an old tradition. This custom figuratively symbolized the innocent sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. In rural households, however, ham and sausages were mostly eaten from the stocks set aside for this purpose from the autumn slaughter. The Orthodox and Greek Catholic populations also had dairy products, such as cottage cheese or ‚oštiepok', on the Easter table, as they were not allowed to eat them during their strict fast. In the Spiš region, the so-called ‚švencelina' (officially ‚svätenina') was eaten - a dish made of all the consecrated foods: ham, sausage, bread, boiled egg, which was cut into pieces, covered with sour milk or cmar in a bowl and sprinkled with grated horseradish. The mixture was eaten from one bowl as a symbol of family cohesion. The Easter feast always included alcoholic beverages, especially alcohol and wine. The content and order of the food served at the Easter feast in each locality and family was subject to traditional norms, which have often persisted to the present day.

Christmas dishes

These are traditional dishes prepared at Christmas time. Christmas feasting with the serving of ceremonial and festive food has its origins in the pre-Christian period when the winter solstice and the end of agricultural work were celebrated at this time. Christianity established the duration of the Christmas holidays as a celebration of the birth of the Saviour, from 25 December to 6 January - the feast of the Three Kings. The linking of the two traditions gradually established the nature of the Christmas dishes.

After the end of the agricultural year, people harvested crops at home, so meals were prepared from grains, legumes, fruit, and cabbage, often using poppy seeds and garlic. These dishes also complied with church regulations, which stipulated a fasting period of 30 days before Christmas until midnight on 24 December, called ‚Advent'. On Christmas Eve, a complete fast was required until dinner, at which Christmas Eve meals were served.

Christmas Eve dishes

These are traditional dishes prepared and eaten on Christmas Eve. In the spirit of the magic of the beginning, due attention was paid to the preparation of the Christmas Eve feast. The nature of the dishes, their order, and the number of courses symbolized, above all, the desired abundance in the family and the economy. Church regulations introduced its fasting character. This day marked the end of the 30-day Advent fast. Most of the Christmas Eve meals combine both of these principles.

In Slovakia, traditional Christmas Eve meals included soup, most often made from sauerkraut, lentils, peas, beans, sometimes from dried mushrooms or fruit, or sour grain soup - ‚kysel'. Flour dishes - noodles with poppy seeds or stuffed boiled pierogi - were also typical Christmas Eve dishes; in most of the territory, so-called ‚opekance' was known. They were made from baked pieces of dough that were broken or cut into smaller pieces, covered with warm milk or sugar water, sprinkled with poppy seeds, or drizzled with honey. Cakes and pastries were baked for the family, carol singers, shepherds, servants, and cattle. Christmas cakes and pastries had different shapes and names, the most typical being ‚kračun' and ‚štedrák'.

‚Kračun'

It is a Christmas ritual pastry. The term ‚Kračun' is also the archaic pre-Christian name for the Christmas holiday. Breads or cakes of this name were traditionally baked in eastern Slovakia. The dough of kračuns used to be made with spring water. A hole was made in the center of the pastry into which honey was dripped. Various ingredients were added to the dough, mostly grain grains, leguminous grains, flax, and hemp seeds, to ensure that the family would have a good harvest the following year. The magical power of the pastry was multiplied by other crops mixed into the dough. For example, garlic and parsley were symbols of health and protection against evil forces, and rose hips were a symbol of freshness. Sacred herbs, wafers, and holy water were also added to the dough. Sometimes a small bottle of honey was placed in the depression in the center of the dough of kračun. After baking, it was taken out and the honey was used for healing, sprinkling, and other magical acts.

By its presence at the Christmas table, the kračun was to provide daily bread for the family in the coming year. On the Christmas table, kračun was placed on hay, straw, or scattered grains, which were added to the seed in the spring to ensure a good grain harvest.

Somewhere they used to bake four pastries, which were put on the corners of the Christmas table. In some localities, each family member was given one of the cookies before the Christmas Eve feast began, while in others it was left on the table until New Year's Day or the Three Kings' Day.

Since the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the kračun has gradually mellowed in taste. In some villages, white bread began to be baked under this name, in others white cake. However, it has retained its ceremonial character. When making the dough for Christmas cakes, the dough for the kračun was first separated and baked first. Most often, it was baked made of three or four pieces of dough, as they symbolized unity and togetherness in the family. The top of the kračun was brushed with egg and sugar water.

Somewhere they baked kračun for animals or when it broke off before the Christmas dinner. The tradition of baking this pastry and its name are considered to be of Old Slavic heritage.

‚Štedrák‘

It is a ceremonial Christmas cake made of layers of yeasted dough spread with alternating nut, poppy seed, jam, and custard fillings; it may have had a lattice decoration of dough on top. The various fillings expressed the people‘s wish to ensure abundance, fertility, and a good harvest in the coming year. In some places, the smaller pastries given to the carol singers were also called ‚štedrák‘.

Christmas wafers also appeared in the folk environment through the church. They were eaten at Christmas dinner covered with honey and garlic cloves. Christmas dinner used to include fresh, dried, or cooked fruit. Apples and nuts were not to be missed. Fish was widely eaten by Roman Catholics and was considered a Lenten food. Fish was eaten boiled or pickled. In the second half of the 20th century, pieces of fish or fish fillets began to be fried in oil and served with potatoes or potato salad. This persists as the main and typical Christmas Eve dish to this day. Among the Protestants, it was already permissible to eat meat and meat dishes on Christmas Eve.

Alcoholic beverages, especially ‚pálenka‘, hot pálenka, or wine, were also part of the Christmas dinner. For the children, a dried fruit decoction was brewed. Christmas dinner usually consisted of seven or nine courses. In some places, it was customary to eat only three bites of each dish. The leftovers or crumbs of the Christmas Eve meal were considered sacred. After dinner, they were given to livestock, carried to the attic of the house, left on the table for the souls of deceased ancestors, or set aside and used as a healing magical remedy when needed.

Thus, there were differences in the consumption of animal foods conditioned by denomination. Among the Protestants, it was permissible to eat meat and meat dishes even at the Christmas dinner, among the Catholics fish was eaten. On the first and second Christmas Day (25 and 26 December), food was prepared which no longer had to be fasting. Therefore, in Roman Catholic families, meat dishes were sometimes served at night, after coming home from midnight mass, or for breakfast. For lunch, meat soup and meat with various side dishes, grits, legumes, or cabbage were eaten.

Before the Christmas holidays, there were often animal slaughters, so the Christmas tables were also meat products - ‚jaternica‘, ‚huspenina‘, ‚tlačenka‘, and ‚klobása‘. There were plenty of cakes and pastries baked for Christmas, and alcoholic drinks - pálenka, warm pálenka, and wine - were provided and offered to guests and carol singers. The turning of the old and new year was celebrated with analogous practices and ceremonial dishes. New Year‘s Eve dinner was usually served with the same dishes as on Christmas Eve. It was usually soup made of sauerkraut, legumes, or mushrooms. Often poppy seed wafers and Christmas wafers were also served. However, the dinner no longer had a Lenten or ceremonial character. The same was true of New Year‘s Day. However, no poultry or rabbit was to be eaten on New Year‘s Day, lest good fortune ‚fly away‘ or fortunes ‚run away‘. In mountainous areas, mutton was not eaten, otherwise one would not have good luck throughout the year. On the contrary, eating pork was supposed to bring good luck. Lentils were often served, as they were believed to symbolize the abundance of money. For the same reason, dishes with poppy seeds were eaten. On New Year‘s Day, everyone was expected to eat a hearty meal so that they would always have enough to eat in the coming year.

Lenten dishes

They are characteristic of periods or days of fasting. The observance of fasts and fasting foods has influenced Christianity. A primarily plant-based food was considered fasting. The traditional Lenten dishes were therefore various soups - grain, cabbage, legume, garlic, mushroom, fruit, soups made from legumes, cabbage, potatoes, and porridges made from flour or grits. Vegetable oils or melted butter were used to sauté or grease the dishes, which were also considered to be fasting. Flour dishes such as pasta, pancakes, and bread were considered to be Lenten. Of the animal foods, cold-blooded fish was the main fasting food, but frogs and crayfish were also eaten. Of the beverages consumed during Lent, spirits, wine, and beer could be consumed, and of the non-alcoholic beverages, all except milk could be consumed. Even dairy products were not allowed to be eaten during the strict observance of the fast (especially among the Orthodox and Greek Catholic populations). Exceptions were made only in the food of young children, who were given milk and milk products even during the fast. For a long time, from the older generation to the present day, the regular cooking of dairy-free food every Friday persisted.

Wedding dishes

These are dishes prepared and eaten on the occasion of a wedding. The wedding was one of the family festivities that preserved traditional ceremonial acts and dishes for the longest time. Food was prepared for the wedding to ensure prosperity, fertility, and happiness for the newlyweds. Traditional wedding dishes in the folk environment of Slovakia included porridge, which symbolized abundance and prosperity.

Wedding porridge

At the wedding feast, porridge was served according to certain rules, sometimes at the beginning, but mostly at the end. In some places, the whole wedding feast was called porridge. The custom of serving porridge to the wedding couple in a common bowl, or at least to the newlyweds on one plate, survived for a long time. The eating of wedding porridge persisted, especially in the mountainous regions of Slovakia, until the middle of the 20th century.

Poultry and eggs

Other wedding foods to which magical significance was attributed were poultry and eggs. They symbolized the circle of life and were attributed to their fertility. Originally, they were probably only served to the wedding couple. Boiled poultry as an obligatory course of the wedding feast was widespread almost all over Slovakia. Eggs or scrambled eggs were served in eastern Slovakia, mostly to newlyweds.

Dairy products

Magical significance was also attributed to the consumption of dairy products, especially cottage cheese, and bryndza, but also to the milk itself. The serving of these foods was particularly widespread in areas with developed cattle and sheep breeding and

persisted longest in the Kysuce, Trenčín, and north-eastern Slovakia. In folk belief, they were considered to be a means of ensuring that newlyweds would have nice white children, or in the case of milk, a sweet life.

Honey

Honey was one of the ancient magical remedies. Honey was used to sweeten wedding porridge, added to cakes and alcohol, and served to the young couple when they entered the house of the groom‘s parents, traditionally the newlyweds‘ new home. It was to ensure a sweet and therefore happy life.

Apple

Somewhere, at weddings, it was customary to give the newlyweds an apple. In folk belief, eating an apple was considered to bring fertility.

Cakes and pastries

Common wedding dishes included cakes and various pastries, which symbolized the desired grain harvest. Traditional wedding cakes were full round or wreath-shaped, rectangular or horseshoe-shaped. They were usually decorated with braids or other dough ornaments or other decorations. In addition to the main cake, other cakes and pastries were baked. In some places, special pastries were also offered to unmarried young people in an attempt to hasten their marriage. Particularly in economically prosperous areas, the main wedding cake, a large wedding cake called a ‚radostník‘ (joy cake), used to be baked.

Wedding cake

The wedding cake had many folk names in Slovakia, which testifies to its widespread and autochthonous nature: koláč, baba, brány, radostník, mrváň, vrtaň, calta, kuch, bosvan.

It was usually round, full, or ring-shaped and decorated with birds, ribbons, twigs, paper flowers, etc. If it was larger, it was reinforced with rods and wires. It used to be a gift from the godmother to the bride. The bride or the elders carried it in the wedding procession to the groom‘s house, where it lay on the wedding table in front of the young couple. After the wedding, it was shared among all the wedding guests as a token confirming their participation in the wedding.

Somewhere it was customary for the bride to sell the ‚radostník‘ to the wedding guests. According to superstition, she was not allowed to touch this money with her bare hand but was supposed to collect it in her apron, in order to be rich.

In Slovakia, typical regional wedding dishes have gradually crystallized. In northeastern Slovakia, it was called ‚mačanka‘ - a soup made of cabbage or mushrooms thickened with milk or cream, which was usually served in the middle of the wedding feast. In eastern Slovakia, a typical wedding meal was ‚tartarčene pirohy‘ made of buckwheat and barley flour and filled with boiled potatoes, bryndza, or cheese. In southern and eastern Slovakia, ‚holubky‘ were often served - cabbage leaves stuffed with a meat mixture. In the Trenčín area and eastern Slovakia, it was customary to serve ‚huspenina‘ - an edible jelly-like substance made as a cooled broth

from the cured parts of mostly pork, at the wedding feast. Alcoholic beverages, especially pálenka, and wine, were also served at weddings. In the 20th century, beer and other alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages began to be served more frequently.

The ingredients for the wedding dishes were provided by the parents of the newlyweds. The meat was provided by animal slaughter (mainly pork, beef in the case of the richer ones, and sheep in the mountainous areas). They had to procure enough flour for bread and cakes, alcohol or wine. Much of the food was obtained through kinship and neighborly help, based on the principle of reciprocity. When money was scarce, cheaper offal was often bought. When there was no fresh meat, smoked meat or bacon was served. Boiled cabbage and grits were very common wedding dishes. Soups were also cooked to satiate the guests, into which bread was dipped, as well as cakes. The nature of wedding meals has changed considerably, especially since the 1960s. More demanding dishes, often inspired by urban and restaurant food, gradually made their way into the composition of wedding dishes. The prestigious nature of wedding receptions came to the fore more and more strongly, gradually displacing all traditional wedding dishes.

Slovak national kitchen

National kitchen is essentially a metaphorical term for dishes considered typical of a particular nation. The national kitchen of Slovaks is most often identified with the food of the broadest classes. However, it was not the same throughout Slovakia, nor in other territories where Slovaks lived and still live today.

In the southern lowland areas, cooked and baked flour dishes, especially high-quality rye or rye-wheat bread and a wide variety of pasta dishes, were the staple of the food. Vegetables and fruit supplemented the plant-based food. The animal food was dominated by pork and fat, with plenty of poultry, milk, cottage cheese, and eggs. Wine was the main alcoholic beverage.

In mountainous areas, agricultural production, and thus food, was conditioned by poorer soil and climatic conditions (in particular lower soil fertility and lower temperatures). The lack of flour was replaced by other raw materials, especially potatoes from the mid-18th century onwards. Various types of pasta and pancakes were made from flour-potato dough, and bread made from barley or oat flour also had a high proportion of potatoes in the dough. Porridge, legumes, cabbage, and potatoes were more common among the dishes. Sheep‘s milk products, lump cheese, bryndza, and steamed and smoked cheeses made up a significant part of the food from animals. Lamb and mutton were consumed seasonally, while mutton or beef tallow and smoked bacon were used for cooking. Among alcoholic beverages, distilled spirits (such as slivovitz, borovička, and rye alcohol) were more popular.

There were thus marked differences between areas and regions. It is therefore not surprising that opinions on the nature of the Slovak national kitchen vary from region to region. Moreover, the Slovak national kitchen does not consist only of archaic dishes. In the past, whenever a new foodstuff was introduced into the food, it quickly became a representative of the Slovak national kitchen (such as potatoes or beans). The popularity of the Slovak national kitchen is particularly widespread in the gastronomic literature, which mainly mentions thick soups made from sauerkraut or legumes, grain porridges, pasta, and sheep‘s milk products as representatives of the Slovak national kitchen.

The most frequently mentioned representative of the Slovak national kitchen is ‚bryndzové halušky' made of flour-potato dough with bryndza and roasted smoked bacon.

Therefore, what was said at the beginning of this chapter applies:

Traditional Slovak gastronomy has developed over the last 150 years as a multifaceted. It is the way we want to see it. Everyone can find what they like.



A maiden with a festive ‚parta' on her head. Veľký Lom (Hont), undated.
Source: https://www.velkylom.sk/ludovy-odev-velkeho-lomu-foto-kat/mid/298105/.html#fgallery--39475-2

1.5 Folk clothing

The basic function of clothing in the geographical environment inhabited by Slovaks with alternating warm and cold seasons is protection against climatic weather influences. All spheres of human culture - material, social, and spiritual, including artistic - meet in clothing. Clothes do not only serve practical purposes, but they are a statement about oneself, the society to which one belongs, and the times in which one lives and wears them. Clothing encompasses both the group characteristics and the individual preferences of the wearer.

Folk costume/folk dress

Folk costume/folk dress is the name given to the traditional dress of the broadest strata of the village people, who were mainly engaged in peasantry and pastoralism. Later on, the clothing of other social classes of the village population, especially craftsmen, laborers, and the lower nobility - the landowners - also came to be associated with it.

Traditional clothing

Traditional clothing is clothing whose composition and existence are based on tradition - a process of intergenerational transmission. The most significant feature of traditional clothing is a large number of local and regional period forms, variants, decorations, and color variety. Intergenerational local stability of forms and very gradual change are also among the characteristic features.

The origin and development of traditional clothing

The division of labor and the specialization of livelihoods gave rise to different social and occupational classes and groups of people who gradually began to differentiate themselves not only in terms of their main sources of livelihood and social status but also in terms of their clothing. Gradually, the clothing of the peasant and shepherd began to differ from that of the craftsman. The clothing of the rural population began to differ from that of the urban population. The clothing of the privileged classes of society developed in different directions.

Traditional clothing expressed gender differences, generational differences, marital status, and occupation, and indicated the occasion of wearing, as well as social status. The extraordinary variation of clothing even made it possible to identify the local or regional affiliation of the wearer (which region or particular village the wearer was from).

For a long time, clothing was made at home, or sewn by village craftsmen. The materials used were mainly indigenous natural materials - hemp or linen or mixed linen, sheep‘s wool fleece, leather from farmed animals, and fur from farmed or hunted animals. By the late 18th century, manufactured textiles and accessories had begun to be used, and by the mid-19th century, industrially produced textiles and accessories became increasingly common. The basic components of Slovak traditional folk clothing are mainly determined by the division of the wearers according to gender into male and female.

Slovak traditional folk clothing

Contemporary Slovak folk costume (traditional folk dress) as a part of cultural heritage is based primarily on peasant festive dress. Everyday workwear consists of essentially the same basic components but is simpler, cheaper, and less ornate.

Folk clothing consists of basic and outer garments, headgear, footwear, accessories, and jewelry. The outer garments were worn over the basic parts of the garment and served as protection against inclement weather or as part of ceremonial dress.

Basic male clothing components

Shirt

The shirts were sewn and embroidered at home. Those for work and casual occasions were made from home-woven thicker hemp or linen. For festive occasions, they were made of finer homemade linen or of purchased white materials. There were two styles of shirts: without shoulder seams and with shoulder seams. The shirt without shoulder seams, tied around the neck with a pair of laces, was found almost throughout Slovakia. The shirt with shoulder seams tied with 2 pairs of laces was found only in southwestern Slovakia. Shirts reaching below the waist predominated. A short shirt, reaching only to the waist, was worn in central Slovakia, which was connected with the wearing of a wide leather belt.

Detvian shirt

A special type of men‘s shirt was the so-called ‚Detvian shirt‘ (the town of Detva in the central Slovak region of Podpoľanie), with wide sleeves reaching only halfway up the chest, and its length was the same as the width of the sleeves. The folk explanation is the alleged landowner‘s decree to cut off the shirt so that stolen food could not be hidden in it. The alleged reaction of the people was the subsequent sewing up of the sleeves of the outer garment – the ‚kabanica‘, which was not worn but draped over the shoulder, thus creating a new storage space.

Generally, the shirt was worn tucked in, only when working in summer could it be untucked. Shirts were decorated with embroidery or weaving, both often complemented by lace. The decoration was mainly concentrated on the chest and sleeves, as well as on the collar and cuffs. The amount and color of the decoration were related to the age of the wearer and the occasion of wear, as well as to regional customs. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, men began to wear shirts similar to city shirts. They had a straight cut, tapered sleeves with cuffs, and a folded collar and were fastened with glass buttons. At that time, so-called ‚Slovak shirts‘ without a collar or with a low-standing collar with a shoulder fastening also appeared, to which an embroidered breastplate with regional patterns was worn. It was also worn by some men in the urban environment as a sign of national awareness and is still worn by many members of compatriot communities around the world at national events.

Pants

In the 2nd half of the 19th century, pants were made of 3 types of material: coarser home-woven white cloth, finer industrially woven mostly dark cloth, and home-woven white twill. The pants had a simple cut. Two side seams stitched the left and right pants together and these were sewn together with a third seam. The seams formed a characteristic cross at the hip. In the front, the pants had either one side or two symmetrically placed slits around which the decoration was concentrated. The predominant decoration consisted of decorative lacing. In eastern Slovakia, it was replaced in the early 20th century by grafting with black thread on a sewing machine.

Pants made of homespun were worn in the mountainous areas of central Slovakia with intensive sheep herding. Factory-made pants were mainly worn in those regions where men's traditional clothing was on the decline at the beginning of the 20th century. If they had been worn until then, became part of winter festive clothing. In the southwestern region of Slovakia, pants were worn not only in winter but also in summer, but only on festive days. The kipper pants were characteristic of the area of eastern Slovakia. In Záhorie, Honta, and Spiš, pants made of deer or sheep skins were also worn occasionally.

At the beginning of the 20th century, in addition to the traditional pants, pants of the urban and equestrian styles began to be worn. They were either made of homemade coarse, dark-colored canvas or a variety of industrially produced fabrics. Gradually, they completely replaced suede pants.

‚Gate' – type of pants

‚Gate' was sewn at home, from home-made hemp, linen, or even cotton linen. They were wide, straight cut, with a gusset at the crotch, gathered around the waist with a drawstring. In most of Slovakia, the width of a single ‚gate' was the full width of the linen. In southern and central Slovakia the ‚gate' was even wider. The length of the ‚gate' varied from the knee to the ankles. The lower edge could be doubled or frayed. They were decorated with a lattice or embroidery above the embroidery, usually in white. In Honta and Podpoľanie, the embroidery was colored. Throughout Slovakia, ‚gate' was part of summer workwear and also as sleepwear or underwear. In the south of Slovakia, ‚gate' was still part of not only work and festive but also ceremonial clothing at the beginning of the 20th century.

Apron

The men's aprons were made of domestic and factory canvas, mostly blue. In the south of central Slovakia, white linen or black glot and calico aprons were also worn. The basic function of a man's apron was not only to protect his pants or pants from getting too dirty at work but also, from an aesthetic point of view, to cover the unbuttoned crotch of his pants. An older form of the male apron was the waist apron, similar to the female apron. It was mostly narrow, made of one poly of linen, sometimes wide, made of two polys. A younger form of apron had a breastplate and was adopted into traditional clothing from the work clothes of craftsmen. In the southern regions of Slovakia in the 19th century, the apron was worn by all men on weekdays and holidays. At the beginning of the 20th century, the apron gradually began to disappear.

Lajblík

Lajblík was a waistcoat usually reaching up to the waist, in western Slovakia only halfway up the chest. Lajblik were sewn from various monochrome and patterned materials. In western Slovakia, lajblíks were predominantly made of silk and brocade, in central Slovakia, they were made of fine wool, and in eastern Slovakia, they were made of either wool or velvet. They were sewn by village tailors. The decoration of the lajblík consisted of embroidery, lacing, and buttons, which in most cases were not fastened and had only a decorative function. In most regions of Slovakia, lajbíks were part of festive clothing only. In some localities in central Slovakia, they were not worn at all and were replaced by fur coats.

Basic women's clothing components

Shirt

The women's shirt is long with sleeves. The sleeves and the upper part of the shirt were sewn from finer and the lower part from coarser, usually domestic materials. The older form had long and wide sleeves sewn on the side. It was sewn so that the upper edge of the front and back of the shirt, together with the upper edges of both sleeves, were gathered and sewn into a narrow neckline. It was mainly found in the northern regions of central and eastern Slovakia. The younger form had sleeves mostly narrow and short, sewn perpendicular to the body of the shirt. The shortened form of the women's shirt is called sleeveless.

The decoration of the shirt consisted mainly of embroidery of various kinds and weaving, which were complemented by lace. The techniques, colors, quantity, and placement of the decoration were adapted to the occasions of wear and contemporary and regional customs. Even before World War I, long shirts with short and narrow sleeves were widely worn as underwear. A special type of long women's shirt is the shroud.

Rubáš

‚Rubáš', ‚podolok', ‚spodník' is a long-sleeveless female shirt that was worn on the bare body. It was sewn from natural-colored homespun hemp or linen. The rubáš was decorated on those parts that were visible after wearing. The rubáš, complete with sleeves and an apron, was a sufficient summer work garment in 19th-century western Slovakia. At the beginning of the 20th century, it gradually stopped being worn and was replaced by a white linen petticoat or bought linen.

Rukávce

‚Rukávce', ‚oplecko' was made of home-woven hemp or linen cloth. For festive occasions, they were made of finer-bought materials. The rukávce was sewn perpendicularly or sideways. rukávce was either wide or narrow, long or short. Longer rukávce extending to the waist and below the waist predominated. Short rukávce reached slightly below the breasts and occurred mainly in the southern part of central Slovakia and partly in western Slovakia. At that time, they were complemented by a so-called ‚pás' – a woolen 'sleeveless top" or a ‚rubáš' as an undergarment.

The decoration of the rukávce consisted mainly of embroidery of various kinds and weaving, which were complemented by lace. The method of decoration, in particular the technique, the coloring, and the extent of the decoration respected the occasion of wear, the age of the wearer, and regional peculiarities. Older forms of rukávce were retained in festive dress until the mid-20th century, even where a long shirt was worn. They were worn alone or worn over the shirt. A younger form of rukávce became widespread in the early 20th century when they became part of summer and workwear only. On festive days they were replaced by blouses and jackets of urban cuts and forms.

Blouse

Blouses penetrated traditional clothing from the urban environment at the end of the 19th century. They were sewn from thin, washable, industrially produced fabrics. In the semi-decolonial era, in an attempt to adapt to urban clothing, the blouse was made of the same material as the skirt. They were sewn by village seamstresses; the more complex and unusual cut required greater skill. They replaced sleeves and were worn on weekdays and holidays. The wearing of the blouse persisted in the semi-dress into the second half of the 20th century.

‚Živôtik' (Bodice)

‚Živôtik', ‚prucel', ‚kabátik', ‚lajblík', ‚vist' is a woman's little waistcoat. The živôtik was sewn from monochrome and patterned fabrics (drapery, velvet, brocade, damask, cashmere, cartouche), and lined with linen. The cuts were straight or shaped, with a shallower or deeper neckline, and in addition to rounded shapes, they were also square. They were open at the front or fastened with buttons, buckles, or laces. They were decorated with embroidery, lacing, and appliqués. The cuts, material, and decoration of the živôtik varied from time to time and regionally. They were worn over rukávce or a shirt. They began to penetrate traditional clothing in the 18th century. The earliest form of the živôtik can be considered to be a woven fabric živôtik with a pointed neckline, which was sewn to a woven fabric skirt. In some regions of southern and south-western Slovakia, živôtik was not worn or was only part of working clothes.

Skirt

It covers the lower part of a woman's body from the waist. In Slovakia, waist-length skirts and skirts with a bodice were worn. There were top and bottom skirts, work skirts, and holiday skirts. They were sewn from 3 to 6 straight or cut pieces, from white and colored, home-made and bought material. The front part, which was covered by an apron, was always made of cheaper fabric for reasons of economy, with a slit in the middle or at the side. The back parts were gathered, ruffled, or pleated at the waist. At the waist, all the parts were sewn into a so-called ‚obalok' (wrapper), which was tied with a pair of laces. The lower edge of the skirt was reinforced on the inside by a wider strip, which was usually of a different colored material.

Everyday skirts were mainly made of washable materials - dyed linen, blueprint, canvas, cartouche, flannel, or barchette. For festive and ceremonial occasions, skirts were made of various types of wool, silk, or cotton-manufactured fabrics (drapery, cashmere,

velvet, chiffon, damask, or brocade), often with a glossy finish. The material, color, and decoration of the skirt depended on local or regional customs, the occasion of wear, the age of the wearer, and the fashion trends of the time.

In some areas of north-western and northern Slovakia, a živôtik was sewn onto the skirt. Such a živôtik was distinguished from other živôtik by its front and back pointed neckline. Originally, skirts with a živôtik were sewn from cloth and belonged to ceremonial garments.

Bottom skirt

It is an addition to basic women's clothing covering the lower part of the body from the waist. Wearing two skirts on top of each other was originally related to protection from the cold. Initially, a worn or older top skirt served as a petticoat. During the 19th century, petticoats began to be made of white or colored washable material. The bottom edge used to be decorated with lace or white machine embroidery. In eastern Slovakia, a wide frill was sewn on the lower edge. Their wearing became increasingly linked to the contemporary ideal of female beauty, which favored full-figured women with wide hips. The lower skirts were therefore stiffened by starching or lined with paper. The number of bottom skirts worn depended on the occasion and local customs. One or two were worn on weekdays, which also replaced the wearing of the rubáš. On feast days, women wore several bottom shirts, and in some areas of lowland Slovakia, the number of petticoats was considerably high in order to portray the silhouette of the figure with the widest possible hips.

Apron

The apron covers the lower part of the body. There were narrow and wide, working and festive aprons. Apart from homespun linen and blueprint, aprons were mainly made of various types of industrial fabrics (cartouche, glot, silk, luster, cashmere), most often in white, black, and blue. The narrow aprons were made of one poly, the wide ones of two poly fabrics, joined in the middle by a decorative seam or a strip of fabric. Working aprons were of washable materials and almost without decoration. Holiday ones were mostly of shiny industrial fabrics with minimal or even extensive decoration. Aprons were decorated with weaving, embroidery, appliqués, locks and lace. Particularly festive and ceremonial clothing included a wide white apron made of fine materials. In the first half of the 20th century, women in southern Slovakia began to wear rounded aprons with a frill. The form, the type of material, the coloring, the manner and nature of the decoration, and the manner of wearing were related to local or regional customs, as well as the occasion of wearing and the age of the wearer.

Rear apron

A special kind of apron was the back apron. It fulfilled the function of a skirt, although it was not one. It belonged to both work and festive clothing. The most widespread form was the wide apron, the front ends of which were covered by a belted apron in front. The back aprons were made of similar materials as the front ones and were usually unadorned. Exceptionally, they were made of homemade, finely woven hemp linen, with embroidery over the gatherings. The back apron belonged to traditional clothing mainly

in western Slovakia (around the towns of Senica, Myjava, Trnava, and Piešťany), exceptionally also further north (in the Rajec River valley) and further east (in the Horehronie region).

Men's outerwear

‚Kožuštek'

It is a short outerwear made of fur, without sleeves. It was made of white or brown sheepskins. They were mostly of simple cuts, using the shape and size of the skin. They were buttoned in the center front, some on the shoulder and side. They were decorated with colored leather appliqués or embroidery. The edges were usually trimmed with a strip of fur of a different color. The form and decoration of fur coats respected the wearer's gender, age, occasion, and region of wear. They were sewn by both trained and untrained furriers. They were worn on weekdays and holidays. In some areas of northern Slovakia, men wore them all year round, turning the kožuštek inside out during the summer months.

‚Kožuch'

Winter outerwear made of fur, with sleeves. Short fur coat reaching to the waist or below the waist, long fur coat up to the knees. The short ones were the most widespread. They were sewn from sheepskins. In the mid-19th century, in addition to white, brown fur coats began to be made. The fur coats were fastened with leather buttons and loops. The decoration consisted of colored leather appliqué or embroidery. The edges were lined with fur of a different color. The collar was also made of fur. The cut of the fur coat and its decoration were regionally different. They also took into account the gender of the wearer and the occasion of wear. They were sewn by both apprenticed and unskilled furriers. They were either made to order or bought at fairs.

Fur coats were one of the expensive outerwear items, not all families owned them. They were a part of festive and ceremonial clothing in particular, and they used to be borrowed and also inherited. In some areas, they were the compulsory garment of the groom and the bride until the early 20th century. In spiritual culture, fur coats had a magical fertility and prosperity function. In the early 20th century, traditional fur coats ceased to be worn.

‚Bunda'

Men's sleeveless fur outerwear, like a coat. The length varied, usually reaching almost to the ankles. It was sewn from six to twelve sheepskins, white or brown in color. The collar consisted of the untrimmed hide of a black lamb, the hind legs and tail hanging down the back. It was decorated with colored leather appliqués, more rarely with embroidery. Unembellished jackets served as clothing for shepherds and carters; they were decorated with the clothing of wealthy householders. They were worn in the southern regions of central and eastern Slovakia. They ceased to be worn at the beginning of the 20th century.

‚Mentieka‘

‚Mentieka‘ was originally a garment of landowners and nobility. This coat was most often made of fine wool in various shades of blue or black. It reached below the waist, even below the knees. It was lined with white sheepskin. The edges were usually lined with the rarer fur of fox or marten. It was fastened with metal, often silver or silver-plated buttons and cord loops. Decorative silk cords were sewn around the fastening, along the edges, and at the back seams. It was worn mainly in western and northern Slovakia. In some areas, it was a compulsory wedding garment for the groom and especially for the bride until the beginning of the 20th century. Because of their costliness, not all families owned mentieka, and they were borrowed for the wedding if necessary.

‚Kabanica‘

‚Kabanica‘ was sewn from domestic, handicraft, and factory cloth, mostly white in color. In mountainous areas, they were made of dark or black cloth. Kabanica had either a low-standing or folded collar. They came in three lengths: waist-length, below the hips, and knee-length. The type and color of the fabric, the cut, and above all the decoration (lacing, embroidery, piping, and appliqués in different color combinations) created their regional forms. Kabanica was made by specialist tailors or bought at the fair. These coats were part of both work and festive winter clothing. At the end of the 19th century, kabanica was widespread, especially in the northern, mountainous regions of central Slovakia.

‚Halena‘

It is a type of men‘s long outerwear. It was sewn from coarse white cloth. It had a straight cut, almost identical throughout Slovakia. It reached above the ankles and was fastened only below the neck with a belt. A large rectangular collar hung down the back and served as head protection during bad weather. It was usually decorated with embroidery, lacing, or appliqué. They were made by halenars. It was only worn draped over the shoulders, over a fur coat or a cape, and was not worn in sleeves. The sleeves used to be sewn up and served as a pocket in which men carried small items or food. It was an expensive item of clothing, so not every man owned one.

At the beginning of the 20th century, it used to be a part of the groom‘s wedding dress in some regions of Slovakia. The worn halena was worn to work or ‚furmanky‘ (the paid horse-drawn carriage transport) in the cold season. It was then dressed in sleeves and belted with a belt.

‚Huňa‘

Winter outerwear made of wool or white wool. The huňa was of a simple straight cut, usually with a cross seam at the chest, without a collar. The men´s huňa reached below the waist and were worn draped over the shoulders. Huňa was worn in the mountain regions of Slovakia, it was a part of winter everyday and festive clothing.

‚Guba‘

It is a kind of men‘s clothing made of woolen fabric with a long pile on the surface. The guba had a simple straight cut with a cross

seam at the chest, reaching below the waist, sometimes below the knees. It was worn draped over the shoulders. It was tied with a pair of woolen cords below the neck. The neckline was roughly lined with red bitching. It was more common in white, rarer in dark color. It was a compulsory garment for the groom until the beginning of the 20th century.

Among the more recent developments, influenced by the urban fashion of the 19th and 20th centuries, were the coat and the sweater. In some areas of southwestern and southern Slovakia, even the ankle-length cape coat with a hood (the so-called ‚šuba') was bought at fairs and replaced the disappearing blouse in the clothing of shepherds and shepherdesses.

Women's outerwear

Traditional women's outerwear included fabrics of straight shapes and various sizes, which were draped over the body and head and fastened by wrapping or tying (tablecloth, sheet, pôlka (strip of canvas)). A more recent development was the so-called ‚vlniak' - a woolen cloth. Other women's outerwear did not differ at all, or hardly at all, from men's. For example, the fur coat was worn more by women than by men, but the fur coat (without sleeves) and the ‚mentieka' was worn equally by both. Conversely, the guba, kabanica, and huňa were worn less frequently by women, while the women's huňa reached only to the waist and was also worn with sleeves.

In addition to everyday use in the winter months, several outerwear items were an obligatory part of the bridal attire (fur coat, mentielka, guba, pôlka, or sail). These were valuable and expensive items which, if the maid did not have them for her wedding, she borrowed them.

Tablecloth

The tablecloth, like the clothing sheet, served practical purposes (protection against rain and cold, carrying backpacks, children, sowing) and ceremonial occasions (carrying food and cakes at a wedding, or to the house of a fresh mother in her postpartum period).

Sail

The garment sail is an archaic type of women's outerwear. It was most often made of 2-ply hemp or linen, later also of cotton canvas. Women wore it folded under their arms not only on every trip outside the house but also when attending church. Thicker and unadorned, it served to protect them from rain and discomfort. During inclement weather, it was draped over the head and shoulders and held at the chest with the hands or tied in a knot. In some regions of Slovakia, it was part of the bridesmaid's wedding attire. It could also serve as a sheet to separate the bed of the mother and child from the rest of the room. It was worn by a woman during the introduction to society after childbirth (the so-called ‚vádzka' - the introduction of a mother after the postpartum period back into working and social life). It was also used to cover a dead woman in a coffin. Around Trenčín, women from the immediate family used to be wrapped in white sails as a sign of mourning during the funeral. At the beginning of the 20th century, the garment sail was replaced by a ‚vlniak' as an outer garment.

‚Pôlka‘

It is a 200 - 300 cm long strip of canvas. Both ends of the fabric are decorated with embroidery, lace, or colorful weaving. The material and decoration of the pôlka varied from time to time, regionally and according to the occasion. Wrapped or tied, it was used to cover the chest and head. In the 19th century, it was worn by women with work, festive and ceremonial clothing.

The ceremonial pôlkas were of fine white cloth. At the beginning of the 20th century, they formed part of the bridal attire of the brides and bridesmaids or the godmother‘s attire for baptism. They were worn draped over the back or shoulders and wrapped around the forearms. The bride‘s pôlka could also be draped over the left shoulder and tied at the hip under the right arm.

‚Vlniak‘

‚Vlniak‘ is a square woolen fabric measuring about 170×170 cm, machine woven or knitted, with fringes on the edges, usually of dark colors (black, brown, green) and combinations thereof. It entered traditional clothing in the early 20th century. It gradually replaced the dress coat, fur coat, or fur coat, which until then had served to protect against cold weather. It has retained its popularity among the older generation of women in the villages even in the early 21st century.

Grooming and headgear

Women‘s hairstyle

The basis of the woman‘s hairstyle was her hair combed back, and divided into two parts in the middle of her head. The two strands were twisted or braided at the crown and then further shaped. Older hairstyles were shaped using pads. The pads were soft, made of linen, hemp, or sheep‘s wool, or firm, made of wood or metal, of various shapes, and usually wrapped with fabric. Twisted or braided hair was wrapped around the pad, and secured at the nape of the neck with laces (woven cords). The result was a two-horned, or more rarely a one-horned or rounded hairstyle. Women grew their hair long from childhood. The women of the family or those who did this service for the whole village helped themselves to the elaborate hairstyles. From the middle of the 19th century, hairstyles began to be simplified. Pads, if they continued to be used, served only to keep the shape of a cap or scarf. A newer type of hairstyle, the so-called ‚kont‘ was without a pad. It became widespread at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries under the influence of the urban environment. Women braided their hair into one or two braids, which were fastened with laces, needles, hairpins, or a comb. The hairstyle was often common to both maidens and married women. In the middle of the 20th century, there was a shift to urban hairstyles throughout Slovakia.

Male hairstyle

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, men in Slovakia still wore long hair that reached to the back of the neck or up to the shoulders. The basis of the hairstyle was hair combed back and to the sides, divided into two parts in the middle of the head. The hair on both sides of the face was combed behind the ears, where it hung loosely or, exceptionally, was tied back with a comb. For the

haircut, the hair was combed around the head and trimmed with scissors at or below the level of the ears. Usually, a longer parting was left above the forehead. In central Slovakia, it could be knotted or braided into two or four braids. Long hair was worn mainly by the oldest generation. At the end of the 19th century, young men usually kept their hair short after coming home from military service. It was only after World War I, under the influence of urban fashion, that hair was cut even shorter and the ponytail was combed not in the middle of the head but on the side. The hair was rubbed with ointment, butter, hemp oil, soap, and later pomade. There was no difference in the hairstyle of single and married men in the 20th century.

Children‘s hairstyle

The hairstyle of boys and girls was gender-specific. In the past, they only started cutting boys‘ hair when they turned one (somewhere around 3). This was related to the superstition that a child whose hair was cut earlier would be stupid or sickly. Boys had their hair cut at home, mostly round or long, longer hair was rarer. Girls did not have their hair cut; their hairstyle adapted to the gradual growth of their hair and was a transition to the hairstyle of the girls. They parted their hair in the middle, braiding the short hair above the ears on either side in two braids, sometimes with the addition of a weave, or just twisting it. Elsewhere the hair at the nape of the neck was merely tied, or, if long enough, braided into two braids, which were twisted around the head and fastened with a string. Schoolgirls had 3 to 5-strand braids tied with a string or ribbon and lowered to the back. After leaving school, the girls styled their hair like a maiden. By the early 20th century, children‘s hairstyles, along with traditional children‘s clothing, gradually disappeared.

Bonnet

A bonnet is the head covering of married women. In some areas, caps of considerably complex forms were worn. The form of the bonnet was influenced by the form of the hairstyle. In different regions, different materials were used to make bonnets. In the 19th century, bonnets were most often made of homespun linen and bobbin lace. Occasionally, they were made by knitting on a frame (Považie, Hont, Liptov regions) or by netting (Orava, Liptov regions). Especially the type of decoration (embroidery, lace, appliqués made of ribbons, beads) varied locally and regionally. The color of the caps also depended on the age of the woman and the occasion of wearing them. The women usually made the bonnets themselves. In Spiš and Šariš, lace for the bonnets, as well as ready-made bonnets, was bought. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the original materials and techniques began to be replaced by purchased textiles, machine-made lace, or crochet. In eastern Slovakia, the bonnet disappeared at the beginning of the 20th century and was replaced by a scarf tied in the manner of a bonnet. A married woman did not leave the house without a bonnet. She wore it from the day of her marriage throughout her life.

Headscarf

The headscarf was an essential addition to every woman‘s outfit. Older headscarves were rectangular, 20-50 cm wide, and 150-300 cm long, or square (the so-called ‚ručník‘) with dimensions of 120-150×120-150 cm.

The rectangular scarf was made of fine fabrics (linen, chiffon, batiste, vaper, tulle) exclusively of white color. It was decorated with embroidery and lace at the ends. Until the middle of the 19th century, the headscarf covered the heads of both maidens and married women on weekdays and holidays. It was tied directly to the hairstyle or the cap. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, it became part of the festive attire of married women only, the ceremonial attire of a bride, a godmother carrying a child for baptism, or a woman going to a wedding after childbirth. It was worn for the longest time, until the middle of the 20th century, in the area of north-western Slovakia.

The large square scarf was most often made of blue cloth with a bordure and a small pattern or of white fine linen, with embroidery and lace in one corner. Rarer were red or black scarves with oil-printed borders and floral designs. Large blueprint scarves were worn mainly in winter. From the end of the 19th century, they were replaced by slightly smaller scarves made of thicker and warmer woolen fabrics. Large white scarves of fine linen were worn only on major holidays.

A younger kind of headscarf, which women began to wear in the late 19th century, were square headscarves of smaller dimensions - 60-80×60-80 cm. They were mostly made of industrially produced materials and were bought. The type of material, color, and decoration varied depending on the region, the occasion of wearing, and the age of the woman. In winter, scarves were made of thicker and warmer fabrics.

At the betrothal, the scarf was an exchange gift, a sign of the given word. Fixed on a staff or saber in the manner of a flag and accessorized with ribbons, an apple, or a lemon, it was the sign of the wedding procession. It was also the most widespread dance prop in group and couple dances (the so-called ‚šatkový'/'šátečkový').



Women from Myjava at the festivities of the Živena association.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/zoznam-nkd/tylova-palickovana-cipka-myjavskej-pahorkatiny/

Hat

It is a typical traditional male headgear. The hats were rounded with an upwardly curved canopy. In most regions of Slovakia in the 19th century, hats with a wide brim prevailed. In the last quarter of the 19th century, they were gradually replaced by hats with a narrower brim. Archival sources also mention tall homogenous or cylindrical hats. Each region preferred a different form of hat. They were made from felt by the town hatters to order or for sale at fairs. All traditional hats were black. They were coated with grease, wax, or eggs to prevent them from getting wet. Straw hats, which were worn in summer, especially in southern Slovakia, were made at home. The hat was decorated with colorful ribbons or cords, bird feathers and feathers made of artificial or live flowers, metal handmade chains, and traditional brass brooches - ‚blanciare'. The decoration respected the age of the wearer, the occasion of wear, and regional customs.

For example, the Liptov hat was decorated with whipped belts, the Goral hat with a ribbon with sewn sea shells on a red leather belt, and the hat from the Detva area was decorated with metal chains in several rows. In the second quarter of the 20th century, the traditional hats were replaced by industrially produced hats that were shaped differently - they were pressed into a spike above the forehead and with the canopy in the front curved downwards. Black was no longer the exclusive color. No adult male was to be in public with his head uncovered. Men only removed their hats from their heads when greeting, when eating, when entering a house or church, and during family or religious ceremonies. Removing the hat was a sign of respect. The hat was often also a dance prop (e.g., ‚širákový'/hat dance).

‚Baranica'

It is a man's winter headdress, most often made of lamb fur of black, more rarely white color. It has a homosexual shape, more rarely round. It is lined with white fur or cloth. It was sewn by furriers or made at home. From the end of the 19th century, they were also made of imitation fur.

Cap

It is a man's winter headgear. The caps were leather lined with fur, or made of blue cloth. In the center of the leather cap was a fur tassel. The fur cap had a tassel of brightly colored wool. Both were lined with black lambskin. The leather caps were made by furriers and the fur hats by hatters. In winter, the leather cap was worn facing backward. The fur trim, except for the part above the forehead, which was solid, was folded over the forehead and ears. In the first half of the 20th century, bought cloth caps or knitted woolen caps, which were worn by, for example, woodcutters in winter, penetrated from the urban environment into traditional clothing.

Footwear

Footwear is a protection of the feet from the influence of the natural environment and weather. In Slovakia, leather, woolen, and wooden shoes were worn in the past.

Low leather shoes represent:

‚Krpce‘

They were made from pork or cowhide. They were made of a rectangular piece of leather. The two front corners of the leather were put together and sewn together with a thin strip of leather that was cut from the edge of the leather. The sides and heel were bent and tightened with thongs threaded through holes around the edge. They were crafted in two parts - the sole to which the upper was sewn.

In Slovakia, there were sharp-nosed krpce, which had no distinction for the left and right leg, they had to adapt by wearing, and blunt-nosed krpce, which had a distinction for each leg. Krpce were tied to the leg with leather straps that were wrapped above the ankles or, in the case of women, with woolen cords. The krpce were shod with ‚onuce‘ or ‚kopytcia‘. Both men and women wore the loincloths on weekdays and holidays. In the mountainous regions of Slovakia, they remained as working footwear until the beginning of the 20th century, when they were replaced by work shoes ‚baganče‘ for men, and boots for women.

‚Pantofle‘

They were crafted from pork or cowhide. They consisted of a sole to which the headband was sewn. They were a working summer shoe for men and women, especially in western and southern Slovakia. They ceased to be worn in the first half of the 20th century.

‚Janičiarky‘

They were made by craftsmanship. The uppers were usually made of one piece of leather. They reached to the ankles, were fastened by lacing in the front and at the heel or on the inner sides, or just pulled down with straps. They were worn mainly by men. Since the 18th century, they have been the footwear of the nobility, townspeople, and peasants. Until the beginning of the 20th century, they were rarely found, especially in peasant villages. They are a kind of forerunner of boots.

Low woolen shoes are:

‚Kolcúny‘

They were made at home from one piece of dark, occasionally also white homespun cloth. They resembled burlap. They were fastened on the legs with woolen cords or thongs which were wrapped around the ankles. Knitted woolen stockings or stockings were worn over the knee-highs. They were worn on weekdays by both men and women. As late as the beginning of the 20th century, they were still found in Liptov, Spiš, and Gemery.

‚Papuče‘

The low slippers reached below the ankles and were of a two-part design consisting of a sole and an upper. They had a distinction

for the right and left foot. They were made by hand or by craftsmen, most often from natural-colored homespun fabric, occasionally from factory red-purple fabric. Women‘s low slippers were decorated with colored piping or colored wool embroidery. The slippers were worn throughout the year, on weekdays and holidays. From the middle of the 20th century, they were no longer worn.

‚Dreváky‘

Wooden shoes were very rare in Slovakia. Whole-wooden dreváky hollowed out from one piece of wood were found only in western Slovakia. They were worn by both men and women as working shoes in rainy and cold weather. Wooden-soled dreváky with leather uppers were worn mainly in the central Slovak region of Gemer. In the 19th century, they served as work shoes for laborers in the stables and workshops. In the peasantry, they were only a substitute for working shoes in times of crisis. The wearers made the dreváky themselves.

Tall leather shoes are:

‚Boty‘

They were made by shoemakers and cobblers who did not use wooden pegs in their manufacture. Work boty were made of black cowhide and holiday boots of cordovan, sometimes without distinction for the right and left foot. All parts (upper part of the shoes (sára), instep, heel, sole) were stitched together with wire. The sára had two seams on the side. It could be lined or unlined. Usually, they did not have a heel, it was replaced by a nailed wrought iron horseshoe. They were worn by both men and women, especially in western and southwestern Slovakia. Compared to boots, shoes were considered less valuable footwear. They began to disappear at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, gradually being replaced by boots, working shoes, or shoes.

Boots

They are handicrafts. They were sewn by specialized shoemakers – ‚čižmáry‘ (bootsmakers). Men‘s boots were made of black, thicker, cow or horse leather. Women‘s boots were made of colored, red or brown calf or goat leather. They consisted of the sole, upper, heel, heel cap, instep, and sára. The boots were nailed with wooden pegs. The instep was made of soft leather, which was folded into pleats (derivative names: accordion, wound boots). The heels of the boots, especially the women‘s, were higher, cup-shaped, and studded with brass horseshoes. The saris tended to be hard, with two seams on the sides or one seam at the back. The upper edge of the sara was arched or heart-shaped, trimmed with a braided strap complete with a leather button or tassel. On the upper, heel, or sára, the boots could also be decorated with colored grafting or studded with metal ringlets.

In the 19th century, boots were the most festive and costly type of footwear. Young men and women used to get them only in adulthood. Alternatively, they could only afford to buy them once they had earned enough money. They formed part of the wedding outfit, belonging to the groom‘s and the bride‘s equipment. The wearing of boots became widespread in the Slovak countryside in the 19th century, but in some of the more isolated and poorer areas it did not reach them until the end of the 19th century, or not

at all (for example, Kysuce, Podpoľanie, Goral Orava and Spiš, the area around Čičmiany). In the village environment, the wearing of boots generally persisted until the mid-20th century. However, by the beginning of the 20th century, they had already begun to be replaced by industrially produced footwear.

High woolen shoes are:

‚Papuče‘

The high slippers reached above the ankles or below the knees and were of a three-part design consisting of a sole, upper, and sára. The sára could be woven or knitted. They were made by hand or by craftsmen, most often from natural-colored homespun cloth. They had a distinction for the right and left foot. Until the mid-20th century, they were worn every day and all year round.

‚Kapce‘

It is a kind of high-leather shoe. Simple forms of kapce were sewn at home. The cut was multi-part, usually consisting of a sole, an instep, a heel, and a sara. The sára reached to mid-calf or below the knee. They usually did not have a distinction between the right and left foot. The color (the natural colors of the homespun cloth) and form (thickness of the sole, height of the sára, decoration) of the kapce varied by region and depended on the age and gender of the wearer, and also the occasion of wearing. Crafted kapce had a leather sole and, where appropriate, a leather-lined headband. Kapce were mainly winter footwear, worn by men, women, and children. In mountainous areas, they were worn all year round on weekdays. With the decline in the production of homespun textiles in the mid-20th century, the domestic and handicraft production of kapce disappeared and industrial production of kapce began to be worn.

‚Váľanky‘

It is a type of felted woolen footwear of handicraft production. The name comes from the technique of making them called rolling. They were made by hatters in the eastern Slovak towns of Prešov and Bardejov (the earliest mention of production dates from 1724) to order or for sale at fairs. Second-quality sheep‘s wool with a possible admixture of cow‘s hair was used for the váľanky. The soles were reinforced with leather or leather lining. They reached halfway up the calves and were worn into the dry winter. Men wore grey, older women wore black and maidens wore white. Women‘s and children‘s váľanky were decorated with colorful grafting on the saris. They were found in north-eastern Slovakia. With the disappearance of hatmakers‘ workshops (Prešov around 1918, Bardejov 1952), they ceased to be produced and were replaced by kapce.

All types of shoes were worn by both men and women, differentiated only by the manner of decoration. Men‘s shoes were unadorned, and women‘s shoes were decorated in some places. The inner lining of the traditional footwear was:

‚Onuce‘

They were put on into top shoes. They were made of strips of linen or cloth wrapped around the feet. The canvas onuce were worn in summer and the cloth ones in winter. They formed part of both work and holiday footwear. Wearing them in rubber boots persisted well into the 20th century. In winter, the onuce were supplemented with straw, hay, or paper for better insulation against the cold.

‚Kopytcia‘

They were put on into top shoes. Woolen kopytcia of coarsely spun domestic sheep‘s wool of white or natural dark color were usually knitted by men, without distinction for the right and left foot. The decoration varied according to region and wearer. It consisted of monochrome or multicolored patterns. The cloth kopytcia were sewn from domestic white cloth. They consisted of a sole, an upper, and a sára, with a distinction for the right and left foot. The kopytcia reached either above the ankles or below the knees. They were mainly worn in krpce. They formed part of the working and festive footwear of men and women. The cloth kopytcia used to be worn by the deceased in the coffin.

Stockings

They were put on into top shoes. It is a handmade or industrial product made of knitted fabric, cotton, wool, or synthetic fibers. Children and women began wearing industrially knitted stockings in the early 20th century when traditional forms of footwear began to be replaced by cheap, industrially produced shoes. In the Tekov, Hont, Spiš, and Abov regions, women wore stockings of different colors, which they hand-knitted themselves, with their festive clothes. The archaic name still in use today is ‚štrimfle‘ (from German).

Until the middle of the 20th century, it was common for men, women, and children to go barefoot in the summertime. In the early 20th century, traditional footwear was replaced by the mass industrial production of cheap footwear, and men began to wear working shoes (baganče) while women started wearing shoes with traditional clothing.

Shoes

It is a kind of low leather men‘s and women‘s shoes. They were of handicraft or industrial production made of fine leather, usually black, more recently also brown in color. Men‘s shoes had a low heel and a low sára that laced up the front. Women‘s shoes had both heels and sára of different heights. If they were without a sára, they were fastened at the side with a strap with a buckle or a button. If they had a sára, they were laced like men‘s shoes. It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that they began to be worn in traditional clothing as festive footwear instead of boots.

‚Baganče‘

This low leather shoe was of handicraft or industrial production. It was made of thicker cowhide leather, most often black in color. It reached down to the ankles, the low sára laced up the front. Baganče were men‘s footwear for work clothes. From the begin-

ning of the 20th century, they gradually replaced the traditional types of footwear (krpce, boty, boots). Originally, baganče were the footwear of the troops of the Austro-Hungarian army, which was formed in 1868.

Traditional clothing accessories

Traditional clothing accessories are objects made of textiles, leather, metal, and other materials, which in addition to their practical function also had an emblematic and aesthetic-artistic function in men‘s and women‘s clothing. Their existence in clothing was indicative of the occasions for which the garment was intended and also of the individual‘s status and relationships in the village or wider community.

Men‘s clothing accessories

‚Remeň‘

Leather strip for fastening men‘s pants made of smooth leather about 3-4 cm wide with metal buckle for fastening. In some areas of central and eastern Slovakia, it was customary to wear long belts, part of which was pulled into the pants, part of which hung loosely around the hips and under the buttocks. The loosely hanging part was fastened with metal buttons.

Belt

The belt was made of a wide strip of smooth leather, fastened with several straps and metal buckles. The belts were decorated with die-cutting, stamped and embossed motifs, stitched narrow straps, and metal studs. The width of the belt, the number and shape of the buckles, and its decoration varied regionally. There was a pocket at the front of the belt for storing small items. The belt was worn by men only in the mountainous regions of Slovakia. It protected and secured the body in the shank during heavy work. Belts were made to order by harness makers or bought from them at fairs. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the belt has gradually disappeared, for the longest time, it was worn only by sheepherders and became a symbol of their clothing. In traditional artistic culture, the wide belt acts as a magical object that endows the hero with supernatural powers. The motif is well known in songs and tales about bandits, especially Jánošík, whose strength was stored in their belt.

Neck scarf

It is a square scarf of black color folded diagonally, folded and tied around the neck. In some areas of Slovakia (regions of Záhorie, Šariš, and Abov) it was reduced to a waistband, both ends of which were decorated with appliqués and tassels. It has passed into traditional clothing from the urban environment. In the 19th century, the men‘s scarf was worn in almost all regions of Slovakia. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, its wearing disappeared in most areas.

Shawl

The shawls were knitted from brightly colored wool in striped patterns. In the first half of the 20th century, they were part of the everyday and festive clothing of men in winter in eastern Slovakia. They replaced the older men‘s neck scarf.

Gloves

They were one-fingered (palčiaky), protecting the fingers, palm, and wrist. They were made at home by sewing from homemade cloth, knitting from home-spun sheep‘s wool, or weaving. They were mainly used in woodworking and fur farming. They were worn in mountainous areas until the mid-20th century.

‚Zápästky‘

They took the form of a wide closed cuff. They were used to protect and warm the wrists, to tighten the wide sleeve of a man‘s shirt at work, or as a decoration of festive clothing. They were made by women or men themselves by sewing them from homespun cloth, knitting, weaving them from home-spun sheep‘s wool, or, more recently, by crocheting. In addition to home-grown sheep‘s wool, colored wool was also used. The colors were combined to create waist patterns on the wristers. Knitted and crocheted wristers were also bought at fairs in the early 20th century.

‚Vreckovka‘

It is an addition to men‘s festive clothing. It was made of fine linen measuring about 20×20 cm, usually embroidered in one corner, with edges edged with lace or embroidery. Young men in western Slovakia wore a handkerchief of larger dimensions, which was tucked into the slits of their woven pants. It also served as a love or engagement present. The handkerchief penetrated traditional folk dress from the clothing of noblemen and townspeople in the 17th and 18th centuries.

‚Pierko‘

The feather is an addition to men‘s clothing, which had, in addition to its decorative function, also an emblematic function. Feathers were composed of flowers (geranium, carnation, reseda), ears of grain (oats), green halos (fir, rosemary, wintergreen), wild grasses, bird feathers (cock, goose, pheasant, partridge, grouse, jay, eagle, peacock, ostrich, heron) and ribbons. Feathers made of artificial flowers and petals, and glass beads, supplemented with jewelry became widespread at the end of the 19th century.

Feathers were made at home or bought at fairs and shops. The forms and materials of feathers varied according to time, region, and occasion. The feather, usually a gift from a girl, was worn by the young man tucked behind the ribbon of his hat. It was simpler for weekdays, and more ornate for holidays. Feathers were also an addition to the wedding attire of the groom, groomsmen, and wedding guests. In the early 20th century, the wedding feather stopped being worn behind the hat and began to be pinned to the chest. The feather with ribbons was also worn by young men conscripted into the army - recruits. In some places, the number of feathers pinned on a young man‘s coat told the number of friends among his peers who gave him feathers as a sign of friendship. Married men usually did not wear feathers on their hats.

‚Kapsa‘

‚Kapsa‘ is a bag with a longer handle or strap for carrying smaller items, an addition to men‘s clothing. It was made of canvas, cloth, or leather. The canvas pocket was of smaller dimensions, square (about 50×50 cm) or rectangular in shape. The white cloth pocket was larger (about 90×50 cm). Linen and cloth pockets were made at home. They were worn slung over the shoulder, on the back on braces made of hemp or woolen yarn, or sewn from canvas. The leather pocket was rectangular in shape, decorated with stamping and metal buttons, with the top opening covered by a fold. Leather pockets were produced by belt makers, bag makers, and domestic manufacturers. They were mainly used by woodcutters and shepherds to carry food, clothes, and small items.

Women‘s clothing accessories

‚Pás‘

An accessory of women‘s clothing, rarely, only in some regions of Slovakia, also of men‘s clothing. Women‘s belts were used to belt basic clothing, and men‘s belts were used to belt outerwear. They were made at home or by hand by knitting or weaving. The technique of manufacture determined the patterns, and local customs determined the colors. The belts could be patternless, monochrome, most often red, blue, black, or patterned and multicolored. The edges of cloth or various types of bought silk, wool, or cotton fabrics were also used as belts. The wearing of belts died out with the demise of traditional clothing.

Shoulder scarf

It is an addition to women‘s outerwear. They were either square or triangular in shape. They could be made of blueprint, cotton, wool, or silk fabrics. The material, color, and decoration varied according to the region and the occasion of wear. Festive scarves had decorative fringes or sewn lace on the edges. The square scarf was folded diagonally into a triangle when worn. The scarf was draped around the neck, crossed at the chest, and then tied behind the back. It could be tied both on the bodice and underneath. The shoulder scarf in the earlier period replaced the wearing of the bodice. Shoulder scarves were a part of women‘s work and holiday attire. Square scarves were bought at fairs or in shops. Triangular scarves with lace on the edge were made by women themselves.

‚Okružie‘

It‘s a holiday sleeve accessory. It took the form of a frilled ruffle of linen or lace, which was either sewn to the neckline of the sleeves or tied around the throat. It was usually decorated with embroidery and lace. It was worn mainly in western Slovakia.

Glove

Women generally did not wear gloves. They wore them only if they were doing heavy work, which was masculine in nature, in winter.

‚Zápästky‘

Women made and wore them (wristers) in the same way as men. Of course, they differed in size and decoration.

‚Vreckovka‘

It is an addition to a woman‘s festive garment made of fine linen measuring about 20×20 cm usually embroidered in one corner with the edges edged with lace or embroidery. Women and maidens had the handkerchief tucked behind their waist or held it in their hand. It also served as a love or engagement present.

‚Voňačka‘

It is an addition to women‘s and girls‘ festive attire when attending church or dancing. It took the form of a bouquet made of aromatic plants and flowers (rosemary, basil, rose), which had a refreshing effect. It was carried in the hand or tucked into the bodice.

Jewelry

It is an object made of various, usually rarer materials, adorning the body and clothing. It was worn from the 18th to the 20th century in the Slovak folk milieu. The wearing of rings, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets often had a magical, ceremonial, or symbolic meaning. The function of pins, clasps, brooches, appliqués, clasp chains, and buttons was, besides decorative, primarily purposeful. Needles, combs, and headbands, in addition to the practical strengthening of the hairstyle, completed the outward appearance. Jewelry was most often made by self-taught craftsmen from mainly non-ferrous metals or their alloys, especially brass, silver, rhinestones, and pewter, using the techniques of mold casting, hammering, incising, and engraving. In addition to metal, glass, horn, mother-of-pearl, and textiles were also used in the manufacture of jewelry. Silver filigree jewelry, which was made in the workshops of professional jewelry makers, was popular in the folk milieu. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, mass-produced jewelry began to replace the use of traditional jewelry.

‚Filigrán‘

It is a goldsmithing technique consisting of decorative braiding of gold or silver wires. Through Byzantine influences, it was already highly developed in Great Moravian and later historical, especially Renaissance jewelry. In the Slovak folk environment, it appears in goldsmith‘s products such as buttons, two-piece clasps, and chains intended for fastening and decorating festive outerwear. It is typical in the folk clothing of wealthier peasants and wine-growers in the regions of Myjava, Turiec, Hont, or around the southern Slovak town of Nové Zámky. The false filigrán was part of the production of products made of threaded wire. Filigrán buttons were often the most valuable part of the whole garment.

Costume Jewelry

Costume jewelry is a mass-produced imitation of originally genuine jewelry by replacing gold and silver with less valuable met-

als and precious stones with colored glass. The products of factory costume jewelry, widespread in the 19th and 20th centuries especially in Bohemia, imitating bourgeois jewelry, gradually penetrated Slovakia. Because of their sparkling beauty and low price, they gained great popularity among the popular classes. Factory production naturally adapted its repertoire to popular needs and tastes. It was inspired by the shapes of folk jewelry: imitations of filigrán buttons, bodice hooks, clasps, hairpins, beads, sequins, and blown glass ornaments used to decorate bridal wreaths and bonnets. Costume jewelry was bought at fairs, pilgrimages, or obtained in exchange from ragpickers. Gradually, it displaced folk jewelry and became an integral part of folk clothing. Through it, local and regional clothing specifics are also clearly visible.



Folk costumes in Slovakia.
Source: https://www.obnova.sk/ludove-umenie-slovenska-v-parizi/Regions of folk clothing

Regions of folk clothing

Several dozen regions and sub-regions can be defined on the territory of Slovakia according to the variety of folk clothing, details, and ornamentation. Or, conversely, two basic variants can be seen - lowland (mostly thinner and linen clothing) and mountain (mostly thicker and woolen clothing). Regional and local variants of Slovak folk clothing are based, for example, on the predominant color (the area of the Myjava Hills - blue-white or yellow-green women‘s clothing, or the southern Slovak region - black-and-white men‘s clothing), or color variety (Goral, East Slovak or Tekoše women‘s folk costume), the cut of the men‘s shirt (Orava goral with loose, wide sleeves and Spiš goral with narrow sleeves ending in cuffs). Hats are also a good distinguishing feature: for example, the broad hat of a man from Liptov, the small hat with a large feather of a man from Záhorie, the even smaller hat of a man from Horehronie, or the equally small but chained hat of a man from Podpoľanie.

There are many variants of Slovak folk clothing. Some differ at first sight (for example, Detvian or Zemplín), others only in details (for example, from neighboring villages - some have a small embroidery on men‘s pants flower and others ornament, or there is a different color of embroidery on women‘s sleeves). A particularly valuable and interesting phenomenon is the bonnets of married women, which used to be so regionally and locally unique that it was quite significant which village the woman came from.

Winter and summer clothing

Men‘s winter clothing consisted of coarse cloth pants, a linen shirt, and a warm outer garment of cloth or fur, with sleeves (as a coat, or jacket) or without (as a waistcoat/coat). Later, knitted woolen pullovers and sweaters were added. The guba was part of men‘s, and rarely women‘s, winter everyday and festive clothing. Gloves and zápästky (wristers) also complemented men‘s winter clothing. The all-year-round headgear - a hat - was supplemented in winter by fur stoles, woolen berets, and, more recently, woolen caps.

Women‘s winter clothing consisted of thicker skirts and warm tops, similar to men‘s. Then woolen or fur coats with or without sleeves. In addition, women also wore ‚woolen scarves‘ - large square woolen scarves worn in various ways to keep the head, shoulders, and torso warm.

Summer clothing for men consisted of a linen shirt, wide linen pants tied around the waist with a cord, and possibly a linen apron.

Women‘s summer clothing consisted of a skirt, most often white, later blueprint, and a top - a linen braid (short-sleeved blouse). Underneath the skirt, women wore one or more lower linen skirts - underskirts. On top of the waistcoat, a tight waistcoat - the bodice.

Festive, ceremonial, and everyday clothing

Festive clothing

Festive clothing is a set of clothing components and clothing accessories worn by men and women for various social and festive occasions. It consisted of the basic components of men‘s and women‘s clothing. It also included components of outerwear. The composition and material of the basic elements of festive clothing were largely unaffected by the season. The men‘s festive dress included a hat, decorated with a feather for the young men. Married women wore a cap on their heads, which was uncovered, or scarves were tied on in various ways. The festive hairstyles of the maidens were more elaborate, which in some areas included a parka.

‚Parta‘

‚Parta‘ is a decorative headdress - the emblem of a ‚dievka‘ (maiden, an adult unmarried woman). The base of the party consisted of a strip of cardboard twisted into a circle, which was lined with fabric, most often velvet, which was supplemented with sewn beads, ‚bortňa‘ (narrow strip of fabric), and metal lace. The party included several ribbons of different lengths that hung around the face or down the back. In the 19th century, the parta was part of the festive or ceremonial headdress of the maidens. It was worn to church, on major church festivals, and in some places during some of the traditional spring cycle ceremonies performed by the maidens. The parta was made by skilled women in the villages or bought at fairs. The parta, complemented by a wreath of rosemary, myrtle, or wintergreen, was the main feature of the bride‘s attire.. The bridesmaids wore a similar parka as the bridesmaids but without the green wreath.

The most widespread festive footwear for men and women was boots. The aesthetic function of the clothing accessories prevailed considerably.

The evolution of festive clothing

The gradual emergence of separate festive clothing is evidenced by some mountain areas where, as late as the beginning of the 20th century, unworn items of work clothing were still used for this purpose. During the 19th century, in economically prosperous areas, items made of industrial and finer domestic materials were increasingly worn side by side. Urban fashions also contributed to local and regional peculiarities, particularly in women‘s holiday dress. Semi-holiday clothing made of less expensive or already worn parts of holiday clothing or new work clothes was worn for parties, Sunday afternoons, and errands in the town. Until the middle of the 20th century, the festive dress remained a representative garment even in those villages where the costume was no longer commonly worn.

Ceremonial clothing

Ceremonial clothing is a set of clothing components, head coverings, footwear, and clothing accessories worn during family and

calendar ceremonies. The basis of ceremonial clothing could be both everyday and festive clothing. The obligatory use of specific components or objects that determined the individual‘s role in the ceremony and, where appropriate, his or her relationship to the other participants in the ceremony, formed a sign function. In terms of family ceremonies, the most elaborate ceremonial dress was related to baptismal attire, the attire of the bride and groom, wedding officiants, and also grave or mourning attire.

Clothes for baptism

The baptismal garment is the set of clothing items worn by the child who was carried to church for baptism and the garment of the woman who carried the child to baptism - the godmother. The child was dressed in a shirt and bonnet given to him or her by the godmother. The shirt had a frilled ruffle around the neck. The cap always had red paint among the decorations to protect it from being cut off. After World War I, linen or knitted coat used to be worn over the shirt. The blanket in which the child was wrapped was covered with a decorative blanket or a red scarf on the way to church. The godmother usually wore a garment that was worn only on particularly important church festivals. It may have included a bonnet that was not otherwise worn, a long rectangular scarf tied on the bonnet, a cloth skirt, and a wide white apron.

Wedding officiants‘ attire

The basis of the attire of the bridesmaids, groomsmen, the elder man, the wedding officiant, and the elder woman was the festive attire supplemented by some elements that were associated with the wedding by their emblematic function. The hallmark of the bridesmaids‘ attire was the parta and the groomsmen‘s feathers, which differed from the groom‘s parta and the groom‘s feathers. The sign of the groomsman was also a wand, a ‚valaška‘ or a ‚fokoš‘ (shepherd‘s axe), decorated with ribbons and rosemary. In the eastern part of Slovakia, it was also a long rectangular scarf tied crosswise across the chest. The stick could also be a sign of an elder or a marriage officiant. A decorative bonnet could be a sign of a female wedding elder. The wedding officiants‘ attire may have been complemented by other signs in the form of scarves, pieces of homespun, or towels tucked into pockets, tucked behind the belt, or tied with a cross across the chest. By the early 20th century, with the gradual disappearance of some wedding officiants, especially the elder man, the marriage officiant, and the elder woman, their emblems also disappeared.

Clothes of the bride

It is a set of clothing items that a maiden wore during her wedding. The basis was a festive garment supplemented by components that were associated with the wedding by their emblematic function. This was a green, blue, or black cloth skirt, a fur coat, or a ‚mentieka‘ (cloth coat), which was also usually borrowed. The most striking feature of the bride‘s attire was the parta, complete with a green wreath of rosemary, myrtle, and wintergreen. Another distinctive feature of the bride‘s dress was the sail, the so-called ‚pôlka‘.

‚Pôlka‘

It is a 200 - 300 cm long strip of canvas. Both ends of the fabric are decorated with embroidery, lace, or colorful weaving. The material and decoration of the pôlka varied from time to time, regionally and according to the occasion. Wrapped or tied, it was used to cover the chest and head. In the 19th century, it was worn by women with work, festive and ceremonial clothing.

The ceremonial pôlkas were of fine white cloth. At the beginning of the 20th century, they formed part of the bridal attire of the brides and bridesmaids or the godmother‘s attire for baptism. They were worn draped over the back or shoulders and wrapped around the forearms. The bride‘s pôlka could also be draped over the left shoulder and tied at the hip under the right arm.

In most of Slovakia, the bridal dress of the bride included a heavy cloth skirt and a wide white apron. The festive character of the bride‘s attire was given by expensive materials and rich and colorful decorations. In the choice of colors, magical and superstitious ideas about the possibilities and the need to protect the bride or the newlyweds from bad influences (red color) or to ensure their fertility (green color) were usually applied.

The colors and the general character of the bride‘s clothing changed significantly at the end of the 19th century under the influence of urban culture. Colorfulness was replaced by dark colors. Parta and pôlka ceased to be the hallmark of the bride. Instead of a parta, the bride wore a wreath of artificial colored or white flowers and a veil on her head. The fur coat or mentieka, originally worn in wedding attire, was replaced by a coat. During the 20th century, the color white began to predominate in the bride‘s attire and the traditional attire was gradually replaced by urban attire.

Clothes of the groom

It is a set of clothing items that the groom wore during his wedding. The basis of the groom‘s attire was the festive garment, supplemented by components that were associated with the wedding by their emblematic function. Such was the embroidered shirt given to the groom by the bride. The groom‘s attire, depending on the local or regional tradition, included a fur coat, a cloth coat (halena, kabanica, mentieka), or a guba.

‚Guba‘

It is a kind of men‘s clothing made of woolen fabric with a long pile on the surface. The guba had a simple straight cut with a cross seam at the chest, reaching below the waist, sometimes below the knees. It was worn draped over the shoulders. It was tied with a pair of woolen cords below the neck. The neckline was roughly lined with red bitching. It was more common in white, rarer in dark color. It was a compulsory garment for the groom until the beginning of the 20th century.

The groom could have a scarf or pôlka tied around his waist or crossed over his shoulder. The most important feature of the groom‘s attire was a feather made of rosemary, myrtle, and wintergreen, complemented by artificial flowers and ribbons pinned on his hat. The colors and overall character of the groom‘s attire began to change at the end of the 19th century under the influence of urban fashion. Variegated colors were replaced by dark colors. The traditional outerwear components were replaced by the jacket. In

the early 20th century, the wedding feather stopped being worn behind the hat and began to be pinned to the chest. During the 20th century, the traditional groom's attire was gradually replaced by the half-costume or urban ready-to-wear (suit and shirt with tie).

Mourning attire

The mourning garment consists of clothing items worn during the period of mourning for the dead or during Lent. The mourning garment was worn by the survivors at the funeral and, depending on the degree of kinship, it was worn for a certain period of time after the funeral. Mostly archaic components were worn, with little or no decoration; men wore only ordinary work or holiday clothing. The mourning color was white, often the color of unbleached linen. In the 19th century, under the influence of the city, clothing of dark colors, especially black, began to be worn, which became the predominant color of mourning after World War I. Sadness was particularly evident in clothing on festive days, more so for women and less so for men. The longest mourning was worn by women for their husbands and by mothers for their children (1 to 1½ years). If an elderly woman was widowed, she wore mourning until death. After a period of deep mourning, women still walked for some time in semi-mourning, which may have been more varied. Shades of purple, blue, green, brown, and black predominated in the decoration. On the feast day, older women wore a tablecloth or a sheet draped over their shoulders as a sign of mourning, younger women and maidens wore a black head scarf, and young men did not wear feathers. The mourning garment was also worn by women to church during Lent, in Advent before Christmas, and before Easter from Ash Wednesday to the Resurrection, especially on Good Friday, and also on All Saints' Day.

Clothes for the grave

These are the articles of clothing that the deceased was wearing in the coffin. Young children were buried in white, most often wearing only linen clothing. Girls and boys were buried in festive clothing, girls with a wreath on their heads. Girls and bachelors were buried dressed as for marriage. The girl was given a parta in the coffin, the bachelor a feather. The girls had their hair untangled in the coffin. A woman who died in childbirth or pregnancy was given the baby's equipment (a pôlka for wearing, a blanket with a swaddling cloth, and clothes) in the coffin. Even in the 19th century, there was a custom of burying mainly men in linen clothes. It was not until the end of the 19th century that women and men began to be buried in dark, mourning clothes. The older generation, especially the women, prepared their grave clothes while they were still alive.

In terms of calendar ceremonies, the ceremonial dress was related to the customs of the spring and summer cycle (welcoming spring), often associated with church ceremonies and feasts (First Communion, processions for the Ascension of the Lord, Corpus Christi), which were attended by maids in festive dress, in groups or wreaths.

Ordinary clothing

These are clothing items and accessories worn by men and women on weekdays, especially during work. Work clothing consisted of items of basic clothing to which items of outer clothing and some clothing accessories were added as required. The summer clothing mainly used linen components. In the lowland areas, men wore a wide ‚gate' (pants), with a shirt or apron. In mountainous

areas, coarse cloth pants were worn all year round, and ‚gate' were only worn for summer agricultural work. At the end of the 19th century, linen pants of urban cut began to be worn.

For women, a ‚rubáš' (long-sleeveless female shirt) and sleeves, or a long woman's shirt, with one or two aprons, was sufficient work clothing. In the late 19th century, women also commonly wore a skirt and, more rarely, a bodice, both of darker washable fabrics. Older and more worn items of outerwear were often common to both men and women. Women also wore a tablecloth or sheet as protection against the cold and rain, and, more recently, a woolen wrap. In colder weather, it was customary to wear several identical items of clothing at the same time. For everyday wear, men and women wore mainly home-made shoes, but from the beginning of the 20th century also factory-made shoes. Until the early 20th century, it was common to go barefoot in summer. The feet were wrapped with boots and straw or paper was put into the shoes to protect them against the cold and damp. For walking on icy ground, horseshoes were used. Gloves and ‚zápästky' (wristers) were an important part of the men's working clothes. The decoration of the working clothes was very modest. From the beginning of the 20th century, in connection with the transition to urban dress, workwear in the more economically developed areas was mainly semi-folk-costume.

Men's and women's clothing

Men's clothing

Men's clothing is the set of clothing components, headgear, footwear, and clothing accessories that, taken as a whole, make up men's clothing. The composition of the basic components of men's clothing divides Slovakia into three large areas:

‚Gate' type

Western, southern, and part of eastern Slovakia are typical of the ‚gate' type of clothing, the basis of which are linen ‚gate', shirt, and men's apron. In winter, of course, warm pants made of coarse and fine wool were worn here as well.

Pants type

The northern parts of western and central Slovakia are typical of the pant type of clothing, the basis of which is made up of pants and a linen shirt. In summer, the pants may have been replaced by linen gate.

Pants twill type

Eastern Slovakia is typical of the twill pant garment, with twill pants and a linen shirt. In winter, twill pants may have been replaced by suede pants. Twill is a specific weave of threads in the weaving of linen, creating patterns.

Men's basic clothing was subject to seasonal changes depending on the alternation of warm and cold seasons. In terms of the working process, the composition of the basic components of the garment did not change substantially. Variation in composition was more pronounced depending on other occasions and the functions of traditional clothing.

Women‘s clothing

Women‘s clothing is the set of clothing components, fabrics, head coverings, footwear, clothing accessories, and jewelry that as a whole make up a woman‘s clothing. The composition of the components of women‘s clothing divides Slovakia into two large areas with their types of clothing:

The area with the rubáš type of clothing consists of western Slovakia, the southwestern part of central Slovakia, and the eastern part of eastern Slovakia. It is based on the shroud.

‚Rubáš‘

‚Rubáš‘, ‚podolok‘, ‚spodník‘ is a long-sleeveless female shirt that was worn on the bare body. It was sewn from natural-colored homespun hemp or linen. The rubáš was decorated on those parts that were visible after wearing. The rubáš, complete with sleeves and an apron, was a sufficient summer work garment in 19th-century western Slovakia. At the beginning of the 20th century, it gradually stopped being worn and was replaced by a white linen petticoat or bought linen.

The rubáš was completed with sleeves, a waist-length skirt, and a skirt with a bodice and apron. The rubáš is a looser, more relaxed garment. This type corresponded more to the milder climate of the lowlands.

The area with the shirt type of clothing, the basis of which is a long women‘s shirt, includes most of the central and western parts of eastern Slovakia. The long women‘s shirt was complemented by a waist-length skirt as well as a skirt with a bodice and an apron. The shirt dress is more compact and closed. It was more suited to the harsher climate of mountainous areas.

Women‘s clothing, unlike men‘s clothing, doesn‘t change types that much depending on seasonal wear. The variation here is based on changes in cuts and the composition of individual components. The cultural influences of contemporary fashion on women‘s folk costumes, unlike men‘s, have been reflected in the form of almost every component of the garment.

Clothing by generational stratification

Children‘s clothing

Children‘s clothing is a set of clothing components worn by children until they are old enough to wear adult clothing.

Clothing for babies and toddlers

The first clothing of newborns was a diaper. After bathing, the baby was wrapped in several nappies and wrapped with a so-called ‚povojník‘ (swaddling cloth). The tight swaddling was intended to guarantee the child‘s even growth. A more recent method was to

wrap them in a swaddle. After a few weeks, the baby was given a shirt slit in the back. A linen or knitted coat used to be put on over the chemise. Diapers and shirts were sewn from old linen clothes to make them softer. It was made sure that the men‘s uppers went on the boys and the women‘s on the girls. After World War I, traditional clothing was replaced by industrial products. It was only later that the distinction of the genders began to be highlighted in the youngest children, in blue (boys) and pink (girls).

Clothing of preschool children

When a child started walking, the basis of his clothing was an ankle-length shirt, identical in cut to a man‘s or woman‘s shirt. It was either worn on its own, or a skirt with a bodice or a dress with sleeves could be worn over it. By the age of 4-6, children wore almost indistinguishable clothing according to gender. Both boys and girls wore a small bonnet until they went to school.

Clothing for school-age children

Schoolchildren wore simplified clothing like adults, mostly made of homemade materials. Until the end of the 19th century, children‘s clothing was mostly sewn at home, and worn clothes from siblings were also used. The decoration consisted of simple embroidery, sewn ribbons, or machine embroidery. The garment was brightly colored, with the dominant red color having a magical protective function. For girls, the small bonnet was replaced by a scarf, for boys by a cap. Children‘s footwear was mostly made at home until the beginning of the 20th century. Children often went to school barefoot, or several siblings shared shoes, except in the winter.

Youth clothing

Maidens´ clothing consists of the clothing components, head covering, footwear, and clothing accessories that made up the clothing ensemble of unmarried women from the age of sexual maturity until marriage. The difference between the clothing of maidens and married women was in the maiden‘s festive attire, which was dominated by rich and colorful decorations. Part of the festive maiden‘s attire was the parta. The other parts of the garment, footwear, and accessories of the maidens were adapted to the changes that were taking place in the evolution of women‘s clothing in general. It was often the maids who were the first to wear new, unconventional, and modern components of clothing.

Maidens´ hairstyle

The hairstyle and headdress are a distinctive feature of the maiden‘s attire. Maidens´ hairstyle is the hairstyle and head covering of unmarried women from the age of sexual maturity to marriage. The basis of the hairstyle was hair combed back, parted in the middle of the head into two parts, joined and braided at the crown. In the 19th century, the most widespread maiden hairstyle throughout Slovakia was a single braid braided from three strands of hair and lowered down the back. The braid was tied at the end with a shoelace, often supplemented with a tied ribbon. A more recent equivalent of the hairstyle was two braids down. Girls wore a scarf on their heads in winter. Festive and ceremonial occasions required special styling of the girls‘ hair and head. Hairstyles made

of multiple strands of braids, twists, and ribbon-wrapped hair were complemented by parta or ornaments made of intricately arranged ribbons. At the end of the 19th century, under the influence of the urban environment, a new type of hairstyle spread in some areas, the so-called ‚kont' - braids wrapped around the head or on the top of the head, twisted into an oval. The kont was also worn by maidens, but especially by married women.

Youth clothing consists of the clothing components, headgear, footwear, and clothing accessories that together made up the clothing of unmarried men from around the age of 15-16 until they were married. There were no significant differences between the clothing of bachelors and married men. The only difference was in the bachelors' festive clothing, which was dominated by rich and colorful decorations. A bird or cock feather behind the hat was a feature of the bachelor's clothing. The right to wear the feather was only acquired after the bachelors were admitted to bachelorhood, for example, by initiation in the local bachelor's club or at a dance party where they had to prove their strength or dancing agility in a match. The feather, complete with a feather of flowers and ribbons, was usually a gift from a nearby girl. Wearing a feather was not compulsory for a bachelor. In some areas of Slovakia, it was also worn by young married men. The clothing of bachelors was subject to the same changes as that of married men. However, bachelors were often the first to wear new, unusual items of clothing or accessories.

Married men's and married women's clothing

There were no significant differences between the clothing of maidens and married women and between the clothing of bachelors and married men. They wore the same items of clothing. The only difference was in festive clothing. The only distinctive features of a married woman were her hairstyle, most often a kont, and a bonnet. Adult men rarely wore feathers behind their hats. The color and ornamentation of married men's and married women's clothing was also more restrained compared to that of the youth.

Senior citizens' clothing

The clothing of the elderly did not differ from that of other generations in terms of clothing components and accessories, but it was less colorful and less decorated. It was complemented by warmer clothing items, even in summer. More investment was made in the quality of the material than in the decoration.

Peasant and non-peasant traditional clothing

Peasant clothing

As the contemporary Slovak folk costume (traditional folk dress) is based mainly on peasant festive dress, it is presented in the section Slovak traditional folk dress.

Shepherd‘s clothing

It is a set of clothing components, accessories, and utensils that made up the clothing of shepherds. The basis of pastoral clothing, especially that of pig and cattle herders, was the working clothes of a particular region. The wearing of a ‚halena‘ and a jacket was the longest-lasting part of the shepherd‘s dress.

‚Halena‘

It is a type of men‘s long outerwear. It was sewn from coarse white cloth. It had a straight cut, almost identical throughout Slovakia. It reached above the ankles and was fastened only below the neck with a belt. A large rectangular collar hung down the back and served as head protection during bad weather. It was usually decorated with embroidery, lacing, or appliqué. They were made by halenars. It was only worn draped over the shoulders, over a fur coat or a cape, and was not worn in sleeves. The sleeves used to be sewn up and served as a pocket in which men carried small items or food. It was an expensive item of clothing, so not every man owned one. At the beginning of the 20th century, it used to be a part of the groom‘s wedding dress in some regions of Slovakia. The worn helena was worn to work or ‚furmanky‘ (the paid horse-drawn carriage transport) in the cold season. It was then dressed in sleeves and belted with a belt.

‚Bunda‘

Men‘s sleeveless fur outerwear, like a coat. The length varied, usually reaching almost to the ankles. It was sewn from six to twelve sheepskins, white or brown in color. The collar consisted of the untrimmed hide of a black lamb, the hind legs and tail hanging down the back. It was decorated with colored leather appliqués, more rarely with embroidery. Unembellished jackets served as clothing for shepherds and carters; they were decorated with the clothing of wealthy householders. They were worn in the southern regions of central and eastern Slovakia. They ceased to be worn at the beginning of the 20th century.

The ‚tanistra‘ (a leather or canvas shoulder pouch), a whip or long stick, and a trumpet, which they used to announce their departure for grazing in the morning, were additional accessories. In the course of the first half of the 20th century, shepherds‘ clothing lost its traditional character and took on elements of urban clothing made of cheap materials. Only the clothing of sheep herders evolved into a special form in the 20th century. Its basis consisted of suede pants, a fur coat, a wide belt, a wide hat, and a slouch hat, which, together with the leather pocket and the ‚valaška‘ (shepherd‘s axe), became a symbol of shepherd‘s clothing and shepherd‘s occupation.

Craftsmen clothing

It is a set of clothing components forming the clothing of craftsmen. Until the 16th century, craftsmen belonged mostly to the urban population and wore clothing that was influenced by the urban fashion of the time and corresponded to their social status in the city. During the 16th and 17th centuries, in the context of the economic decline caused by the Estates‘ rebellions and the wars with the Turks, some craftsmen moved to serf towns and villages. The difference in their clothing from that of the peasants persisted un-

til the beginning of the 20th century. In addition to everyday and festive clothing, craftsmen wore clothing items at work that were related to the nature of their work. Blacksmiths and tanners wore leather aprons, shoemakers and carpenters wore green aprons, millers wore white aprons, and butchers also wore white linen aprons and woolen peplum jackets. The clothing of rural craftsmen, together with the urban fashions of the time, was a model for the clothing of women and especially men who began to work outside their village environment in the 19th century, especially in industrial enterprises.

Laborers‘ clothing

It is the workwear of the laborers. The traditional garment, with its predominance of white garment components, was difficult to maintain and was not suitable for work in most industries or mines and quarries. Industrial laborers and miners were generally the first in the villages to put aside the components of traditional clothing and began to wear not only to work but also on holidays urban-style clothing made of homespun, dark-dyed linen, or affordable clothing. With the development of industrial production in the first half of the 20th century, overalls - a jacket and pants made of blue twill - gradually became the most common workwear for men. The loom laborer‘s clothing developed only among miners.

Mining clothing

It is the working and ceremonial dress of miners and mining officials. In the 19th century, miners‘ working clothes consisted of a linen shirt, pants, and a jacket made of the so-called ‚cajk‘ - a strong cotton fabric. In the mining districts of central Slovakia, there were two forms of ceremonial dress. Both consisted of a white coat, red pants, a leather apron, and a green cap. The so-called ‚Hungarian form‘ was accompanied by long pants with boots and the so-called ‚German form‘ by pants below the knee, which could also be white, white stockings and boots. Both were accompanied by a leather apron worn at the back, on which the miner originally descended into the mine. In 1838 the ceremonial dress of the miners was unified and became more similar in appearance to military uniforms. It consisted of a black blouse with a large oval collar and black long pants. A black cap with a feather cockade was worn with the miner‘s uniform. The leather apron was gradually replaced by a belt with a metal buckle. The ceremonial dress also included a ‚fokoš‘ - a small decorative axe on a long thin pole.

Overall, traditional forms of clothing have persisted longest in the village environment. In the second half of the 19th century, urban clothing components began to penetrate traditional clothing until they gradually replaced it entirely during the first half of the 20th century. The wearing of traditional clothing in an urban environment became a presentation of national consciousness in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The process of the disappearance of traditional clothing in the 20th century was accelerated not only by the war events of the World Wars but also, above all, by economic and social transformations. Nowadays, traditional clothing is worn in the village environment:

- only as occasional ceremonial clothing, for example, during major festivals for religious services,
- the oldest women in some localities,

- in a stylized form of stage costume during the performance of folklore groups and ensembles.

In the traditional village community, precise and strict rules not only for the production and decoration but also for the wearing of clothing were established and widely known. It was necessary to observe the traditionally established color scheme, the possible combinations of colors, the treatment of the head, and the standardized wearing of clothing. Any deviation was undesirable and, especially in the case of women, sanctioned by other women with warnings, ridicule, or slander. It is precisely the high conformity, social pressure, and traditionalism of the village community that have contributed to the preservation of folk dress as we know it today.



Harvest, Branovo (Podunajsko), 1952, Ondrej Demo archive.
Source: https://fondtlk.sk/sk/detail-sluk_us_cat.2-0012709-zatva-v-Branove-00102/

1.6 Traditional occupations

Earning a living for oneself and one‘s family has been a basic activity and task of people in the past. According to the opportunities provided by the surrounding natural environment, according to the possibilities of connection with the surrounding but also the distant world, and according to their possibilities and abilities, such occupations were formed on the territory of Slovakia, through which people were able not only to feed themselves and satisfy their basic needs but also to accumulate surplus in the form of property, which was then subject to inheritance. Of course, not everyone was equally successful or enabled to do so, which is why the traditional Slovak environment was socially and economically differentiated.

The poorest

The poorest of the poor (beggars, landless peasants, and sharecroppers - those with little property or land) were left to work for the richer people in return for payment with material products, and later money. These were seasonal jobs in agriculture, auxiliary work in craft production, or year-round servants for householders or craftsmen.

Small and medium-sized farmers

The broadest layers of the rural population in Slovakia consisted of the lower middle class - not very rich peasants who lived from cultivating the land. Small-sized farmers peasants cultivated land up to 5 ha, and medium-sized farmers farmers up to 10 ha. The harvest from such an area was able to provide them with the basic necessities of life. This also included the ‚fusher‘ (from German) - non-professional village craftsmen, although they knew how to practice a trade and made a living from it, were untrained and unorganized, and their main source of livelihood was agriculture.

‚Gazda‘ (farmer, landlord) and craftsmen

The upper middle class consisted of peasants and breeders (gazda) who had land of more than 10 ha. They were thus able to produce a surplus product which, once sold, allowed for the permanent accumulation and expansion of property. If they did not have enough labor in their own families, they occasionally employed the local poor or members of poor peasant families who needed to earn extra income. In addition, there were also professional skilled craftsmen, for whom craft was the main source of livelihood, who sold their products outside the village, most often at weekly markets and annual fairs in the surrounding towns.

Village elite

The richest stratum of the rural population consisted of wealthy landlords, who had larger tracts of land at their disposal. These were often the most prominent local families, holders of lower noble titles (yeomen, knights, barons). In addition, they were also merchants or home producers who not only produced these products but also bought them from others and sold them in bulk outside the village, region, or even the state. The village elite also included local officials and educated people, such as the notary, doc-

tor, veterinarian, teacher, landlord, nobleman, or priest, whose way of life (culture) differed significantly from that of the traditional folk.

Since our ancestors were no less resourceful, hard-working, and adaptable than we are today (quite the opposite), they were constantly looking for other ways to earn a living, for example, by taking on additional jobs.

Supplementary employment

In a traditional peasant community, this is employment outside the own economy and a secondary source of income. The relationship between income from peasantry and income from supplementary employment may have varied over time. Sometimes non-peasant employment has taken on the function of the main income and main employment. Supplementary employments were mostly carried out by peasants who owned/possessed up to 5 ha of land.

In supplementary occupations, the predominant occupations were agriculture, lumbering, and jobs in the form of peddling, home production, and small crafts, and later in occupations in industry.

Since people in the past depended only on the results of their labor, diligence, and honesty were considered among the greatest virtues in traditional society. Sometimes they surpassed even a person‘s wealth or higher social status. Any people, as long as they were hardworking and honest, were held in high esteem in the traditional Slovak community, regardless of what exactly they did and whether they were poor or rich.

Peasant

Agriculture is the purposeful cultivation of crops and the raising of livestock. It has always been the main occupation for the population of the Slovak territory. It has developed since the early Middle Ages, when the village and its way of life took on many forms. These forms of the Slovak village are the result of soil, climate, and historical and socio-economic conditions. The material, social, and spiritual manifestations of peasant culture, the relationship of peasants to nature, soil, plants, and animals, the organization of families and the village community, and their values - all this was strongly influenced by agriculture until the middle of the 20th century. Overall, the basis of the Slovak mentality stems from agriculture.

By growing crops and breeding livestock, the peasant obtained the necessary means to support himself and his family. Peasants as a social group with its own culture have been formed in Slovakia since the 9th-12th centuries. The village and its way of life gradually acquired its characteristic material features: typical peasant dwellings and farm buildings, the settlement pattern arranged in streets or scattered farmsteads, the organization of land both in the town residential area (e.g., gardens, vineyards, and orchards in the village) and in the rural area (fields, meadows, pastures, orchards, vineyards, roads, seasonal farm and residential buildings in the ‚chotár‘ (hill district)). The dependence of the peasant and his family on agricultural production also permeated their social life (for

example, the organization of individuals into a patriarchal multi-generational large family by blood and non-blood kinship, headed by a householder and housewife) and their spiritual life, in particular, the rich agrarian cult (omens, divination and rituals to influence the weather and the harvest, to ensure the fertility of women, animals, soil, plants, etc.).

In the middle of the 20th century, under the influence of state socialist policy and communist ideology, people‘s property was nationalized and agriculture was collectivized (cooperatives were established). In each village, the agricultural property was nationalized and given to a local cooperative, where all the original owners worked. This led to social and economic equalization of the population. After the collapse of the socialist system in the early 1990s, the restoration of capitalism, the collapse of the cooperatives, and the return of land to its original owners, there was a partial restoration of private farming in Slovakia. It bears many traditional features and partly follows peasant traditions, the phenomenon of private farming and farming.

The Vineyardis

Viticulture is the oldest specialized branch of agriculture. It deals with the cultivation of vines and the processing of grapes into wine. The geographical conditions of the southern part of Slovakia are the northern limit of profitable European viticulture. Slovak viticulture is linked to the viticultural areas of neighboring Hungary, Austria, and Moravia.

Viticulture has been the widespread main occupation of the inhabitants of the southern regions of Slovakia for more than a thousand years. Until the 18th century, the frontier of viticulture in Slovakia was much higher than it is today. The first wine-growing regions were created from the 12th century onwards. Some of them still exist today. In most of the growing area, viticulture was a supplementary occupation, in the southwest of Slovakia in the Lesser Carpathian region it was the main occupation of the population.

The first evidence of viticulture in Slovakia dates back to the 3rd century (archaeological finds of knives, grapes, and grape grains and containers). The oldest report on viticulture in the Lesser Carpathian region dates from 1249 and refers to Bratislava. Thanks to the German colonists who arrived here from the 13th century onwards, grape production was intensified and improved, and new wine-growing settlements were established or villages and towns were colonized. The leading wine-growing areas today include the Malocarpathian, Nitra, Tokaj, and other wine-growing areas.

The cultivation of vines was a profitable source of landowners‘ income, contributed to the development of towns and trade, and was one of the incentives for the granting of the title of a free royal town and other privileges associated with it.

In the 16th century, the so-called ‚vineyard law‘ was developed, regulating the relations between the landowners and vineyard cultivators and the mutual relations between vineyard owners. The law of wine producers‘ tapping (so-called ‚viecha‘) was formed and guild organizations were created. The Ottoman occupation and the rebellions of the Estates in the 17th and 18th centuries led to the devastation of the vineyards and the depopulation of the wine-growing villages. The reforms of Theresienstadt and Josephine and the urban regulation at the end of the 18th century provided a remedy. These are the foundations of contemporary Slovak viticulture. After the abolition of the guilds in the 19th century, the vineyard guilds were replaced by vineyard societies.

A major blow to viticulture in Slovakia was the appearance of vine diseases, especially grapevine phylloxera and peronospore at the end of the 19th century. It was economically inefficient to rebuild the destroyed original vineyards. New technologies were coming, grafting vines onto new, more resistant rootstocks. Thus, old vine varieties were completely replaced by new ones.

Viticulture had an impact on all components of material, spiritual, and social culture. It is still reflected in the building industry today (presses, cellars, vineyard cottages) and in verbal and musical folklore (songs about wine).

The Fruit Grower

Fruit growing is a branch of agriculture focused on the cultivation of fruit. In several regions of Slovakia, it was a supplementary employment and an important source of family income.

Archaeological findings of fruit remains - fruit kernels and especially the names of the settlements (Jablonica, Hrušov, Višňové, Slivník) attest to the purposeful cultivation of fruit in the territory of Slovakia already in the early Middle Ages. The importance of fruit trees is confirmed by toponymy and is reflected in several municipal seals.

Fruit trees were cultivated as single trees in border places, also as landmarks, gradually in more continuous gardens, in vineyards, in fields, and especially in manor gardens and orchards. In the more southern areas of Slovakia, expanding vineyards created the conditions for the planting of fruit trees, while in the uplands the hillsides were deforested in a hollow-cutting manner for the needs of mining or metallurgy. Sporadically, there is also a secondary use of fruit trees in so-called ‚bee gardens'.

Fruit growing was promoted by the decrees of Maria Theresa and Joseph II (in the second half of the 18th century), which introduced the teaching of fruit growing in schools and the dissemination of education. In Slovakia, priests and teachers in particular contributed to education not only through educational literature but also by their example. They included especially J. Fándly, A. Penzel, Ľ. Orphanides, M. Bazalica and Š. Moyses. The emerging fruit-growers associations also contributed to raising the quality level of Slovak fruit growing.

Fruit-growing associations and regions

The first association in Hungary was founded in 1796 in Jelšava. During the 19th century, many others were founded. Among the important fruit-growing regions were mainly the foothills. The Upper Nitra region was already a well-known fruit-growing region in the 17th century. The Gemer region was, in the words of contemporary intellectuals, one continuous flowering garden and its inhabitants were experts in fruit growing. In Trenčín County, fruit growing became the primary source of income for part of the population during the 19th century. The largest fruit-growing areas were Trenčín, Hontian, Bratislava, and Novohrad counties.

Fruit and trade

Fruit was not only a seasonal delicacy but also an important component of the folk food and a source of family income. It was consumed both fresh and preserved - dried, cooked into jam, and distilled after fermentation into alcohol (alcoholic beverages known according to the type of fruit, such as slivovitz, pear, cherry, apricot, etc.). Both fresh and processed fruit were sold in markets and through door-to-door sales. The villages of Vestenice and Brdárka and the sub-region of Myjavské kopanice were famous for their fruit sales. Fruit was also transported to distant towns and areas where it was not produced, for example, from the fruit-growing villages of the Gemer region to Lower Land or the northern part of the Spiš region.

The fruit trade was a folk occupation until World War I. The journeys for trade lasted several days and were repeated at regular intervals. They thus determined the rhythm of the family and economic life of the fruit growers and traders. Fruit was transported in specially adapted wagons for longer journeys. One form of fruit trading was the sale of fruit to merchants from Bohemia and Moravia.

In the first third of the 20th century, a frost calamity damaged the orchards. Research and breeding institutes and schools have been instrumental in restoring fruit growing. In 1920, the Slovak Fruit Growers‘ Society was founded.

Protecting fruit trees from pests involved rational practices such as fencing the orchards against animals, braiding trunks against winter, painting trunks with lime, shaking off brushwood, spraying caterpillars with a solution, but also magical practices - in particular, hammering money into the bark of a diseased tree, pouring water under the tree after a child‘s first bath, or sprinkling cold water on the trees in the morning.

Cattleman

Livestock farming is an integral part of agriculture. Forage crops have been the most important in crop production. It was their abundance that made livestock farming possible. Cattle were mainly used as draught power in cultivation and transport. Cattle breeding was a higher stage of livestock production. In contrast to conventional pastoralism, in addition to grazing, it also made use of animal husbandry and intensive feeding. In Slovakia, cattle breeding has always been the predominant method of livestock rearing.

In the 15th century, cattle breeding was penetrated by shepherding - extensive farming outside the village on mountain pastures. At that time, it was a new form of livestock organization. It survived as summer farming until the middle of the 20th century.

In mountainous areas, this was made possible by the abundance of grassland created by woodcutting and deforestation. In the lowlands, where arable land predominates, the so-called ‚three-field farming‘ ensured sufficient pastures. In each year, one-third of the land was cultivated with spring crops, one-third with winter crops and one-third was rested and used as pasture. The improvement of agriculture from the 18th century onwards and the use of manure increased forage production. Gradually, areas with developed cattle breeding were formed in Slovakia, which sometimes prevailed over crop production (for example, in the upper part of the central Slovak mountain region of Liptov). The composition of livestock rearing varied from one area to another and from one period to another. For example, the spread of sheep breeding is linked to the rise in wool prices in the 18th century. The replacement of oxen by horses or vice versa in turn favoured the focus of breeding. In mountain areas, cattle breeding in particular became widespread because of its versatile use (cows for milk and meat, oxen as draught animals, bulls for meat, and other breeding). Cattle breeding was a source of animal products (meat, milk, leather), manure, draught power, and horn (for products). It also influenced the development of craftsmen and domestic production (leather, wool processing, breech-making, etc.). It influenced the emergence of carriage-making as an independent occupation. The cattle trade (there were merchant centers in the central Slovak regions of Zvolen and Novohrad county) and sheep trade (markets existed in central and north-eastern Slovakia) extended beyond the borders of today‘s Slovakia. After the collectivization of agriculture (association) at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, traditional forms of cattle breeding disappeared. After the collapse of the socialist system in the early 1990s, the restoration

of capitalism, and the return of land to its original owners, there has been a partial revival of private farming, including cattle breeding, in Slovakia. It bears some traditional features and partly follows traditions that have almost disappeared.

The Carrier

Carriage driving is an occupation carried out by owners of draft animals. The wage-carrying occupation evolved from what was originally a serf's duty under feudalism. Serving for a certain number of days each year with his cart for the needs of the feudal lord was one of the duties of every serf who owned a draught farm animal. The prevalence of this occupation in the past is evidenced by several names of villages in Slovakia (Plavé Vozokany, Horné Vozokany, Vozokany), as well as some streets (Vozárska ulica, etc.).

The development of the carriage industry was influenced by the breeding of suitable animals (especially oxen and horses), the need to carry out agricultural work (plowing, sowing, etc.), the development of trade, the extraction of timber, iron ore, the production of charcoal and its sale. The existence of the carriage industry was due to the poorly developed railway network. Apart from rafting, carriage was the most important mode of transport in Slovakia. It enabled the import of goods that were in demand (especially bread grain, corn, lead, copper, rock salt, and some types of textiles) and, conversely, the export of surplus products that were in demand (dairy products, linen, wool, foodstuffs). In several areas of Slovakia, coachmen formed a special socio-professional group, which existed in smaller organized units (e.g., ‚furman' (coachman) associations in the Central Slovak regions of Gemer, Turiec, Orava, or furman parties in the Horehronie and Spiš regions).

Some parties of furmans were also named after the villages from which they came (for example, in the Horehronie region there were well-known Voľchovjane, Petrikovane, Ročičankare). At the end of the 19th century, carriage driving became a trade. They were called ‚špeditéri' (freight forwarders), who specialized mainly in supplying fuel to the authorities in the towns and in moving the population. The carriers also employed coachmen and stumpers for wages. The carriage trade as a source of income gradually disappeared as a result of the expansion of the railway network and the automobile. The carrier transformed into the contemporary chauffeur and truck driver.

Rafter

Rafting is an occupation through which a rafter earns a livelihood by transporting and selling logs of wood, bundled into a so-called ‚raft', down the river. The oldest written document about rafting in Slovakia is the foundation charter of the abbey in Hronský Beňadik (on the Hron River) from 1075. Until the 1930s it was widespread mainly in the mountain regions of Slovakia (Spiš, Liptov, Orava, Kysuce). It was connected with the boom of woodcutting, mining, and metallurgical industries, which required a lot of wood, and with the navigability of Slovak rivers.

Navigability of the Slovak rivers

Only the Váh River on its middle and lower reaches was navigable all year round. The other rafted rivers Kysuca, Orava, Hron, Poprad, and Dunajec were navigable only seasonally, especially in spring when the snow melted in the mountains. In Slovakia, the longest river, the Váh, and the Hron River in central Slovakia flowed into the Danube and rafting could continue through what is now Hungary, Serbia, Romania (and Bulgaria and Ukraine) to the Black Sea. Timber was transported and sold mainly in the towns and unwooded areas of central Hungary, Serbia, and Bulgaria. The Poprad River rafting trade connected north-eastern Slovakia with Haliča (today an area in south-eastern Poland and western Ukraine). During the Ottoman expansion and occupation of Upper Hungary (today the territory of Slovakia) in the 16th and 17th centuries, rafting was limited to the territory of Slovakia. After that, rafting became increasingly important outside the borders again.

The rafting industry accounted for an important share of the internal and foreign trade in timber, as well as in other goods. It was possible to load other goods on the raft, which could be sold during the voyage or at the destination. These were mainly products of domestic production (wooden and pottery utensils, linen, cloth, blueprints, leather, lace, shingles, forest produce and fruit, chips, sheep's cheese, bryndza, honey, wax, products of saffron and oil producers - herbs, ointments, oils, as well as, for example, millstones, fireplaces, and various iron products).

Rafters

The rafters had a precise internal hierarchy and rules. It was a very dangerous occupation - several days' sailing on tied wooden crossbars on an unregulated and unmaintained river. The main rafter was the so-called ‚faktor', who organized the work of the others. He was also in charge of finances and contracting. The most capable and experienced raftman, the so-called ‚predník' (front raftman), was in charge of the raft (at the front). At the back of the raft was a less experienced rafter, a beginner, called ‚zadník' (a sternman).

‚Plť'

The most primitive type of vessel was the so-called ‚plť' (raft) composed of 6-8 short quivers. One raftman was enough to float it. Among the simple rafts was also the so-called ‚koza' (goat), made of 10-15 tied breastworks, which was led by one or two raftmen. The so-called ‚jedinka' (single) was made of 12-16 pieces of wood. Additional timber, lumber, and other cargo were loaded on it. It was led by two raftmen. More complex types included the so-called ‚dvojka' (double) - a bundle composed of two rafts tied together, and the so-called ‚trojka' (triple) - made of two separate rafts, between which a raft of square or rectangular shape was inserted. Such rafts had to be led by several raftmen. The largest raft was the so-called ‚cúg' composed of two bundles (two or three rafts joined together). Cúgs were sailed only on the lower reaches of the Váh River, which is relatively straight and calm, without meanders and stormy stretches. At the Komárno rafting area (where the Váh and Hron rivers join the European Danube), the rafts were adapted for sailing further down the Danube by further coupling. There were 7 rafters with 2 substitutes.

The rafting industry has developed a distinct culture, characterized by its customs and folklore (especially rafting songs and

legends). The construction of railways, the regulation of rivers, and the building of the first dams gradually made water transport impossible and rafting as a transport occupation disappeared. Nowadays, it is partly preserved as a tourist attraction in mountain regions.

The Woodcutter

Woodcutting is an occupation dealing with the extraction and transport of timber. Slovakia is still one of the most forested countries in the world and forest management was and is therefore at a high level. Of course, Slovak woodcutting was most developed in regions of Slovakia rich in forests and with navigable rivers. It was the rivers that were most used for transporting the harvested timber. Logs tied into rafts were floated down the rivers. Initially, woodcutting took the form of clearing forests to obtain land and extracting timber as building material, fuel, and raw material for tools and instruments. Primarily it was closely linked to peasantry. It became a separate occupation in the Middle Ages in connection with the need for timber for the developing underground mining and metallurgy.

Woodcutters were also a special category of mine and smelter employees who also enjoyed the so-called ‚mining freedoms'. In the Middle Ages, the population of the territory of Slovakia was serfs. It was the property of feudal lords and under feudal law. An exception was the inhabitants of mining areas, which were under the administration of the Chamber of Mines, where mining law was in force. The inhabitants of the free royal towns, on the other hand, were under the administration of the king and municipal law. From the 16th century onwards, so-called ‚handle' - independent woodcutting settlements - were established in the forests. The working duties and rights of the handle inhabitants were regulated by special contracts. Woodcutters' work was also part of the serf's duties. In the 18th century, woodcutting spread especially in areas where agriculture was unprofitable. There, woodcutting became an important supplementary occupation.

The work of woodcutters

The work of the woodcutters consisted of cutting down trees, debarking the trunks, sawing them, splitting them, and bringing the wood closer by human or animal power. It was physically hard work, moreover, carried out mainly in winter and spring. (Normal winter temperatures in the mountainous regions of Slovakia range from 0 to -20 degrees Celsius, sometimes even -30).

When working in the forest, woodcutters used simple tools: axes, wooden and iron wedges, bark peelers, pegs, pinchers, and from the 18th century onwards, the so-called ‚dvojchlapové' (two-men´s) large saws. One party (a large group of woodcutters) consisted of several groups of 4-5 members. In each group, there were two sawyers and two axmen (one helped the sawyers with the sawing), and the fifth member peeled the bark. Young men were taken into the parties, not according to age but physical maturity, i.e., commonly as young as 12 years of age. The work parties were composed mostly of men related by family or neighborhood. The group was led by a foreman (factor) and contracts between the loggers and the forest owners were mediated by the ‚factor' (foreman). The woodcutters either returned home daily (if the ‚šlog' - the place where they were working, was close to where they lived) or went to the forests for a week or the whole season.

They often lived in semi-pits, which they dug themselves and covered with needles of conifer trees, or in improvised seasonal dwellings made of wood (called ‚krám'). The woodcutters worked from sunrise to sunset. Breaks were used for eating. When they were away from home, the women and elderly members of the family took care of the farm and raised the children.

The timber was transported from the place of harvesting in the form of whole logs or by sawing and splitting into meter lengths ‚metrovina' (lengths of meters), ‚siahovina' (lengths of siaha – 1,7m). If the wood was intended for charcoal burning and shingle making, it was left in the forest and the charcoal burners and shingle makers transported it themselves. From the woodcutting sites, they brought the wood to the valleys, streams, and roads by lowering it down the slopes, in wooden chutes for lowering the wood (called ‚šmyk', ‚rizňa'), by pulling it with the help of cattle, horses, and sledges with human pull. The wood was also transported by water, by road, and later by rail.

Huncokars

Huncokars is the name of a German-speaking population in the area of the Little Carpathians in southwestern Slovakia. It is a corruption of the German word ‚Holzhacker' (woodcutter). They were forestry laborers from the southern part of Lower Austria and adjacent Styria who, from the mid-18th century onwards, settled the area of the Little Carpathians according to the needs of the lord's forests. They lived dispersed in the mountain valleys, usually 2-3 families together. An exception was the concentrated settlement in Piesok (today part of the town of Modra). These people called themselves 'mountain people'.

The duties of the huncokars included felling trees, cutting and bringing wood to the roads, and clearing the forest. For transport they used sledges, skids, and the so-called ‚klauzúra' - an artificial water reservoir into which the spring and autumn waters were collected, and by means of which the harvested timber was floated twice a year. The working group consisted of family members. The women worked with the men on the timber and in the wagon. Houses with gardens, in which they grew potatoes and vegetables, were in use during their service. They kept a few cattle and pigs, which were allowed to graze freely in the woods. Hay for the farm and firewood were given to them as a deputation. They were good fruit growers, the women excelling as herbalists. They contracted marriages within their circle (endogamy). Members of the group maintained intensive social contact with each other. They liked to have fun together, often dancing the ‚šotyš' dance accompanied by the accordion. The men were fond of bowling. The Huncokars were Roman Catholic. The biggest holiday for them was January 22, the day of St. Vincent, the patron saint of woodcutters. Bilingualism persisted among them until 1945. Despite their cultural and ethnic differences, they maintained good relations with the local population.

The mountain settlement of Huncokars in the Little Carpathians disappeared after 1945 when some Huncokars were displaced to Germany as part of the German nation defeated in World War II. Their descendants living in Slovakia still have a Huncokar identity, maintain their roots, are associated with Huncokar associations, organize cultural events, and try to preserve the Huncokar language as a specific historical variant of German.

Herder

Pastoralism is an occupation providing communal livestock rearing outside the village on the grasslands in the extravillage. It is a lower form of livestock production than livestock farming. The Slavic population in the territory of Slovakia originally kept livestock in the context of cattle breeding - at home. In the 6th century, they came into contact with the pastoral culture of the nomadic Avars, and in the 9th century with the pastoral culture of the Hungarian tribes, but they did not adopt it significantly. It was not until the so-called ‚Wallachian colonization', during which, from the first half of the 15th century, a population engaged in shepherding - extensive sheep breeding - penetrated the territory of Slovakia from the east.

‚Salašníctvo'

It was the so-called ‚Wallachian way' of sheep and goat breeding, consisting of the use of unused higher pastures on meadows and groves above the village or under the forest. The Wallachians settled permanently in Slovakia until the 17th century. In the shepherding system, flocks of sheep and their shepherds stayed on the pastures all season long, even overnight. Traditionally, this was from Juraj's Day (April 14) until autumn, or, depending on local climatic conditions, until Michael's Day (September 29) or Demetervs Day (October 26), or until Martin's Day (November 11). The long stay on the pastures and the processing of dairy products on such a sheep farm – ‚salaš' (shepherd's farm), required the construction of the necessary shepherd's buildings - a living and production and processing hut and a portable pen - ‚košiar'. Shepherding gave rise to other manifestations of traditional culture (shepherd songs, dances, customs, visual arts, etc.). Along with shepherding, a new breed of sheep - the Wallachian sheep - appeared in Slovakia. In contrast to lowland breeding, shepherding, in addition to the production of wool, meat, and leather, was mainly oriented towards the processing of sheep's milk and the production of dairy products - sheep's cheese (bryndza, later oštiepok, parenica) and a drink - ‚žinčica'. The non-Slovakian origin of this technology of processing sheep's milk and producing dairy products is also indicated by the shepherd's terminology (geleta, putera, podišiar, rincka, urda, etc.).

This occupation influenced the pastoralists' way of life, especially in housing, food, and art. After these shepherds had settled permanently and had moved to a peasant way of life, sheep owners formed shepherd associations to farm together.

The shepherd's association

The shepherd's association, an association of sheep owners in the village, hired a ‚bača' (the chief shepherd) and ‚ovčiarov' (assistant shepherds). Bača was responsible for the flock entrusted to him, the organization of work, and the economic results of the shepherd's sheepfold. The shepherd used part of the dairy produce to pay the shepherds' wages and to cover other expenses of the shepherd's farm. The remainder was distributed to the sheep owners according to a predetermined agreement with the sheep owners, according to the number of sheep they had in their flock. What was left was his wages or the profit from the business.

In addition to sheep and cattle breeding and summer grazing, the settled shepherds, influenced by the local agrarian culture, also began to cultivate crops. Pastoralism linked to crop production became part of cattle breeding and lost the character of an in-

dependent economic system in Slovakia, as it remained in other areas of the Carpathian Mountains. For shepherds, who constituted a small part of the population, shepherding was the main occupation for a long time (for example, in the Central Slovak mountain region of Horehronie until the 1950s). However, it was often supplemented by other activities: in winter, the wallachians tended the cattle in the village, made wooden utensils, and brooms, built rafts, worked as furriers, tinkers, etc. Therefore, pastoralism cannot generally be classified as one of the main occupations of the inhabitants of Slovakia in the past.

Herders by animal species

In any case, until the Wallachian colonization, village shepherds in Slovakia were part of the domestic cattle-peasant culture. The lowest status was held by the pig herder - ‚kanás', ‚sviniar', ‚kondáš'. Similarly low was the status of the sheep shepherd - the ‚ovčiar'. Originally, physically or mentally handicapped persons were hired for this work. The cattle herder - ‚pasák' was usually a child or man from a poor family. Depending on the category of cattle, he was a cowherd, heifer herder, bullherd, or oxherd. The horses were grazed either together or individually. If together, a horse herder - ‚koniar' (a horseman) - was hired, or the owners took turns in herding the horses. If individually, then under the supervision of the owner. Smaller animals, such as goats or poultry, were grazed in the meadows by the children of the owners' family. By agreement, herders guarded the animals, maintained the watering troughs, ensured the first growth of the cattle, etc. Herderds of different types of animals existed in Slovakia until the middle of the 20th century. Then animal husbandry moved back to the owners' stables or large cooperative cowsheds, piggeries, and poultry farms.

Herderds in individual grazing were hired by the owners of the animals. Herders for collective grazing were hired by the village, horse, goat, or herder association. The village herder was one of the village servants and often acted as a herald. If the village was larger, the village herders were divided according to the property (peasant, house herder) or territorial division of the village and its inhabitants.

Rewarding herders

Before the start of the season, an agreement was concluded with the herder, containing his duties, grazing period, forms, and terms of remuneration. The older, in-kind form of remuneration consisted of food. The herder received them weekly or daily (always from a single owner, for example, when driving the herd out in the morning), or occasionally (so-called ‚výhonové' during the spring turnout, ‚sviatočné' on Christmas or Easter, or ‚výrezové' when recording animals on ‚rováš' —a wooden stick with notches marking the count, used due to the general illiteracy of the population—, and ‚fašiangové' during the carnival season). Sometimes the herder only received payment with material products at the end of the grazing season at the total settlement. Depending on the customs in the village, it used to vary: on Michaelmas, St. Gall's, St. Gall's, Demeter's, All Saints, Martin's, Andrew's, Christmas, St. Stephen's, Three Kings', Carnival, St. Joseph's, Easter, St. George's, May 1, or Pentecost. Part of the payment with material products was the so-called ‚zosyp', in which the herder received grain, potatoes, or legumes. Herders also received payment with material product contributions for clothing (wool for shearing sheep, linen), firewood, and hay for feeding, or they rented a meadow or field. Money became the main form of remuneration only at the beginning of the 20th century.

Outside of the grazing season, it was the duty of the shepherds to visit the owners of the cattle at Christmas or New Year, to bring them consecrated rods for the first shoot of the cattle in the church. The importance of shepherds began to fade with the decline of collective forms of grazing in the second half of the 20th century.

Domestic production

In almost every household it was customary to make products for their use or sale. This production could be a main, secondary, or supplementary employment. It has always existed. Customary law allowed household producers to sell their produce at weekly markets. They mainly used the time outside the agricultural season for home production. Some producers focused on specialized services to the manor, and the specialized products were then sold off by their feudal lord. Of greatest importance as a supplementary income was the domestic production of linen, hemp, and woolen cloth. Specialization and increased production were helped by the establishment of manufactories, for which many producers in towns and the countryside worked in a cottage industry in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Most people were employed in domestic textile production (weaving, dressmaking, lace-making, and embroidery).

Other industries were the making of wooden objects in the mountain and foothill areas, the production of shingles, charcoal, kitchen utensils, agricultural implements, wicker and grass baskets, and earthenware. Over time, these producers organized themselves into associations and cooperatives. The largest in Slovakia was the Izabella Association for Household Production, founded in 1895. Others were established, for example, in the towns of Martin (1909), Skalica (1910) and Detva (1919). Today, the most important in the field of traditional home and craft production is the Center for Folk Art Production in Bratislava (ÚĽUV), which keeps registers of producers, sells their products in a network of shops in Slovakia and organizes workshops for those interested in this type of production. It is a unique and high-quality professional and advisory national institution.

Orava linen weavers

Domestic weaving, finishing, and sale of linen were mainly carried out by rural domestic producers, partly by artisan weavers. The production and sale of linen developed due to the increase in demand, especially in the 18th and the first half of the 19th century. In the 1840s, two-thirds of the entire mountain production of linen was produced in Slovakia. The main areas of production were the mountain regions of Spiš, Orava, and Šariš. There were also a significant number of producers in the regions of Liptov, Gemer, Turiec, Zemplín, as well as in the Zvolen and Trenčin counties.

Traders obtained goods by buying them directly from producers in their places of residence and markets. In the Orava region, the linen industry was carried out exclusively by the local population. Small producers were engaged in door-to-door trade. Wealthier peasants, townspeople, and owners of mangles and dyeworks traded on a large scale. Canvas bought in the villages of Upper Orava was transported for processing to warehouses in the Orava villages of Slanica, Námestovo, Ústie nad Oravou, Bobrov, Klin, etc. Local peasants and their helpers were hired to sell it at fairs in return for a share of the profits. From New Year‘s Day until February, they

went out in groups on the roads with wagons loaded with goods. At the end of the 19th century, the sale of linen was regionalized by municipality (for example, linen merchants from Slanica traded in Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Transdanubia, Palestine, and Egypt). Especially in the second half of the 19th century, linen merchants sold industrially produced foreign textiles. Market production and trade in linen in Slovakia from the middle of the 19th century onwards was gradually displaced by the import of textile products from industrial and manufactory enterprises from the Austrian part of the monarchy.

Merchant

The basic prerequisite for the expansion of trade was the emergence of a surplus product in the manufacturing sector. Trade has gone through several developmental stages from simple barter to the emergence of specialized occupations. The rural population participated in the exchange of goods by selling directly to consumers at weekly markets and annual fairs. From the end of the 17th century onwards, door-to-door trade began to spread, especially among the weaker members of the agricultural population as a specialized occupation in its own right.

The peddler (called ‚hauzír', from German) sold his products or those bought from other domestic producers, craftsmen, traders, or directly in manufactories, later in industrial enterprises. The peddler traded independently or as an employee of a door-to-door salesman. The departures of peddlers from the village were usually tied to a specific date or period. Traders left individually or organized in groups. Their trips tended to be short-term (2-3 weeks) but several times a year, or long-term (2-3 years). Sometimes they returned home only to the most important annual festivals and during the main agricultural work periods. They took their own or other people's children on their journeys for schooling, usually after the end of compulsory schooling. Working areas used to be subdivided according to families, individuals, or villages. The peddling trade was often carried out as a lifelong occupation, characterized by intergenerational succession (‚from father to son'). The working rhythm of the peddlers influenced the rhythm of life of their entire family. The merchants´ wives had to be more involved in agricultural work and stand in for their husbands. If the wife left, the men oversaw raising the children. If the husband and wife were involved in trade together, they rented out the farm. The peddlers differed from their surroundings mostly by their higher level of education, discernment, higher culture of living, and different manners of behavior. Contacts with foreign, often non-Slovakian, regions were reflected in their knowledge of foreign languages and the use of some foreign expressions in the domestic environment. In a foreign environment, they used to communicate with each other in a secret language (argot).

Lace-making, embroidery, and the sale of wood products were primarily based on the merchant trade. As a specialized independent activity, merchanting was also manifested in the distribution of agricultural products - butter, eggs, goose roasts, fruit, vegetables, and poultry. Some villages and areas of Slovakia were distinguished by horse and cattle trading. Village and town merchants played an important role in the merchant trade, buying up folk products and agricultural produce. For example, village embroidery merchants not only bought embroideries but also procured patterns for embroiderers.

Cheap Joe

‚Lacný Jožko' (Cheap Joe) was the name of a peddler of haberdashery goods and small daily necessities. In Slovakia, their activities intensified especially after 1918 as a result of the international agreement between the 1st Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Balkan countries. The peddlers, called ‚bosnians' by the Slovak population, came from the countries of the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Macedonia). The name Cheap Joe originated from their advertising invocations, which emphasized the affordability of goods (Joe has everything cheap). In addition to door-to-door sales in the villages, they sold at markets and fairs, in front of churches after services, at feasts, in urban settings along the streets, at railway stations, etc. Razors, grinding belts, pocket and kitchen knives, belts, combs, small haberdashery, ribbons, mirrors, toiletries, creams, purses, etc. were sold for relatively low prices. The goods were offered from a box or basket slung on the shoulders in front of them, or they had an oval basket with an assortment of goods placed on their heads. After World War II, this occupation became illegal and the practice of cheap Jožkas disappeared.

Craftsman

Craft production is specialized non-agricultural small-scale production based on the handwork of the craftsman with his tools, requiring appropriate institutionally acquired professional qualifications and socio-statist organization.

Craftsmen were created by the social division of labor by separating from agriculture. Originally, towns were the centers of crafts, but in the 19th century crafts penetrated the countryside on a larger scale. Craftsmen in towns were organized into guilds.

Guild

A guild is a professional organization of masters of one or more crafts. Guilds monitored the economic and social interests of craftsmen, controlled prices, quality, quantity of products, working hours, wages of journeymen, and the number of masters (i.e. workshops), recruited and ‚dismissed' apprentices after apprenticeship, and assigned journeymen to individual masters. They ensured equality among the masters, collegial and decent behavior of the masters towards each other, and dignified appearance of the guild members in public, especially during fairs, markets, church festivals, and processions. Guild members maintained the principles of guild solidarity, provided burials of members, and supported widows and orphans of masters, sick, and old masters. The guild was headed by a guild master. Joint guild meetings were held quarterly. At the beginning and the end of the meetings, the guild chest was opened and closed, in which guild articles, minutes, and other guild documents were kept.

The guild insignia, used in guild ceremonies, were symbols of the status and professional belonging of the guild members. In Slovakia, the so-called ‚German guild', the most widespread type of guild in Europe, was widespread. The oldest evidence of the existence of a guild is the mention of a furriers' guild in Košice in 1307. By 1525, 60 guilds were documented in Slovakia, and by the beginning of the 18th century there were over 100 guilds in 160 localities. The guilds were abolished by law in 1872.

Craftsmen schools began to be established at the end of the 19th century. Until then, the training of master craftsmen was entirely the responsibility of the master‘s workshop and consisted of the stages ‚učeň‘ (apprentice) – ‚tovariš‘ (journeyman) - ‚majster‘ (master).

‚Učeň‘

A male aged 11-14 years was apprenticed to a master for 2-5 years, depending on the difficulty of the craft. After the probationary period, the master concluded an apprenticeship contract with the apprentice‘s parents, in which the terms of the apprenticeship were agreed (food, clothing, housing, an admission fee, the master‘s salary, and the apprenticeship period). Then the master and the apprentice appeared before the assembly of guild members and the ceremony of admitting the apprentice to the guild took place. It consisted of instructing the apprentice (on the benefits of the craft, the rules of the guild and conduct), writing in the guild protocol (admission book), depositing the documents in the guild chest, payment of the fee, and a treat.

The apprentice had to be tutored by the master with whom he had made an arrangement. The master was responsible for the education of the apprentice, for the proper mastery of the production and sale of products, for his good behavior, and for observance of the principles of religious life. At the end of the apprenticeship period, the master dismissed the apprentice with a certificate and an evaluation of his behavior, called an apprenticeship certificate. This enabled the apprentice to be employed as skilled labor by any master.

‚Tovariš‘

If an apprentice wanted to become a master, he had to be a journeyman. A journeyman acquires further craftsmanship qualifications by working under other masters for 2-4 years. These he seeks out outside his home territory, on what is known as a vagabond journey. The institution of the journeyman developed in areas with German-type guilds. Separate guilds of journeymen existed from the 15th century onwards. For example, the guild of journeymen in Košice was headed by two senior journeymen - one married (elected by the masters) and one unmarried (elected by the journeymen). The companions lived in the so-called ‚herberg‘ (dormitory for the companions), in smaller towns in the master‘s home, where they also ate their meals. They worked 14-18 hours a day, except Sundays, for piece work or weekly wages. Part of their production could be monetized by themselves or through the master at fairs. In this way, the journeymen not only improved professionally but also gained practical experience in the overall operation of a craft workshop, financial independence, and literacy.

The voyages of the Slovak journeymen went to Austria, Bohemia, Poland, Scandinavia, the Baltic countries, other parts of Hungary, and northern Italy. The direction of the journey and its duration were chosen by the journeyman himself, although there were centers preferred for certain crafts. On the voyage, he presented himself with a ‚wandering sheet‘, from 1816 onwards a voyage booklet in which the stops and the length of work with individual masters were recorded. The care of the journeymen was taken over by the master. A journeyman had to work at least 14 days for one master. He could leave after a notice period and could only return to the same town after 3 months of further wandering. If he did not get a job in the town, he would have to leave within 3 days.

Each privateer was entered in the local guild register of journeymen. The General Guild Articles of 1813 required the companions to have at least three years of vagrancy, to work for one master for six months, and to accept the work offered. The companions were commanded to show respect and obedience to their masters. From the 1880s, with the support of the church authorities, so-called ‚tovariš' (journeyman) associations were founded.

‚Majster'

The master is an independent craftsman. He produced and sold handicraft products on his own. He had to be organized in a guild, later in an industrial corporation, or a trade association. He had to be a bourgeois and own real estate in the place where he practiced his trade. He had the right to employ journeymen and to take on apprentices. A master could be admitted to the guild only based on having made a masterpiece and having previously been on a vagabond journey. Masters in the guild were addressed as ‚master brother'. They were obliged to lead an orderly life. They were forbidden to bother and gossip, to swear at each other, to divert customers and comrades, to collect orders, to compete, and to hoard raw materials.

The older masters demanded due respect from the younger ones, had advantages in the distribution of raw materials, could employ a larger number of journeymen, and had better places in the marketplace. Local masters had a higher status than those from across the countryside.

The development of craftsmen was greatly influenced by large-scale production. First manufactures from the 18th century, then industrial from the 19th century. This caused the stagnation and disappearance of some crafts, such as weaving, soap-making, comb-making, and hat-making. But it also stimulated the development of other, new crafts. For example, building and food crafts, craft services, locksmithing, plumbing, watchmaking, bricklaying, tiling, painting and varnishing, confectionery, butchery and smokery, soda-making, barbering, laundry, dry-cleaners, photographers, and new technical crafts such as electricians, welders, and mechanical locksmiths were also established.

Craftsmen usually belonged to the upper social classes. Craftsmen were members of guilds, which determined their social life and ensured the quality of their products. In the territory of Slovakia, craftsmen in the towns were singled out in the 14th century and the villages in the 17th-18th centuries.

The master craftsman in the town was a free burgher. He was not a free citizen in the landlord´s environment, he paid serf dues but did not perform other duties assigned to peasants. Craftsmen who had rented landed buildings (mills, breweries, brickyards, etc.) paid rent. The villages also rented out blacksmiths' forges and, more rarely, brickworks and sawmills. Since 1872, craftsmen have been subject to the trade law.

The most widespread traditional crafts in the Slovak countryside were shoemaking, tailoring, milling, blacksmithing, wheelwrighting, carpentry, joinery, timber framing, and butchery.

Specific traditional crafts included weaving, button-making, sieve-making, locksmithing, wax-making, woodturning, brick-making, cobbling, saddlery, belt-making, roofing, sawmilling, baking, knife-making, copper-smithing, trough-making, chimney sweep-

ing, hat-making, tin-smithing, stove-making, barbering, tanning, coopering, boot-making, lace-making, leatherworking, and bag-making. Rare traditional crafts included, for example, blanket-making, coat-making, honeycomb-making, candle-making, tannery, pouch-making, hammering, fine linen weaving, reed-making, and fustian weaving.

Laborer

Laboring is based on mass production or mining. Among the oldest manual occupations in Slovakia are mining and agricultural labor. From the 19th century onwards, industrial and construction laborers emerged, and from the 20th century onwards all other types of laboring professions.

Laboring emerged in the process of the Industrial Revolution through the industrialization of activities and the creation of new activities (especially manufacturing and services). Industrial production is mass production that replaces manual craftsmanship or manufacturing through its standardization and large batches.

What is new compared to the previously exclusive handicraft production is the relationship between producer and consumer. Until then, the direct, personal relationship between craftsman and consumer, which facilitated mutual communication, adaptation, and, in essence, joint modeling of the product, has been replaced by product standardization, customization, and the possibility of rapid product change according to current fashion influences and technological developments. Moreover, centralized mass production has contributed to the decline of local, regional, and even national particularities and the erosion of the original village, predominantly peasant community. This has also contributed to the disappearance of part of the traditional culture in many of its components and manifestations.

Part of the village population in the 20th century, especially in its second half, left for the vicinity of industrial plants and towns. In the field of agricultural production, industrialization was reflected in the introduction of machinery, fertilizers, and veterinary pharmaceuticals. In craft production, it was the introduction of machine tools and new materials. In the field of trade, it brought about the transformation of market trade, with direct contact between producer and consumer, into stationary trade - shops, with new types of products and the creation of new needs.

The rural population is changing from subsistence farmers to market consumers. Social disparities are widening, changing the traditional structure of the village community and social relations.

A laborer, unlike others, has set hours of work and time off, works for a regular and agreed wage, is protected by a union, and has social, health, pension, or unemployment insurance, as well as savings or employee benefits for him and his family. He specializes in only one activity. He is entitled to a retirement pension after working a specified number of years. The most demanding types of blue-collar occupations have additional benefits and concessions (e.g., company housing, spa treatment, reduced years of retirement service). After working hours, laborers can engage in leisure activities (e.g., sports, especially football). Laborers and their families live in laborers‘ colonies near factories, later in apartments in housing estates in cities. Since their household does not contain

an economic part, they do not farm, they do not cultivate. Their wives are housewives, or they are engaged in domestic production, in the past mainly made and sold lace, later they were also employed.

Agricultural laborer

An agricultural laborer is a laborer in agriculture performing work tasks of a predominantly physical nature. Already medieval feudal estates made use of such laborers during agricultural work in crop production, when ordinary laborers were not sufficient to carry it out as part of their menial duties. The abolition of serfdom in Hungary in 1848 freed up a large number of agricultural laborers for the labor market, coming mainly from the ranks of landless farmers, ironmongers, and small peasants. This agrarian overpopulation and the lack of employment opportunities in non-agrarian sectors created a cheap labor force. It was mainly employed on large estates and large farms.

Within agricultural laborers were distinguished:

Year-round agricultural laborer

The so-called ‚deputátnik', servant, ‚bíreš' worked on an annual contract for an agreed wage, part of which was payment with material products (‚deputáte'). It replaced the hitherto compulsory work of serfs. He and his family members lived in assigned houses, which consisted of several housing units. Usually, each family had its room, and the kitchen was shared by several families.

‚Nádenník'

The so-called ‚napsámoši' were paid a daily wage, which consisted of money or payment with material products, or a combination of the two. They came mostly from the poor local population. They performed whatever work they were able to do and which the householder needed to do.

Seasonal agricultural laborer

The so-called ‚sezonári' usually came to the estates from distant, poorer, mainly mountainous areas. They were often groups of dozens of women and men from one area. In the 1930s, for example, as many as 10,000 seasonal laborers a year left the mountainous and poor northern Slovak district of Žilina. Sometimes seasonal laborers were hired only for individual agricultural work, for the whole season from spring to autumn. These were mainly hoeing, breaking crops in the fields, orchards, and vineyards, cutting hay, harvesting and threshing, cutting and baling fodder, digging potatoes, breaking and cleaning corn, and harvesting sugar beet.

Seasonal laborers with full-season contracts were paid a daily wage, paid at monthly or six-weekly intervals. The contracts also included the provision of meals as payment with material products for communal meals, which were prepared by the cook for the entire group. Seasonal scythes, reapers, and threshers were originally paid by a share of the harvest. The living conditions of the seasonal laborers were very poor. They worked from morning to night, with breaks for meals. They were usually housed in unhygienic

farm buildings (barracks, empty granaries, barns, stables). They slept on multi-story wooden huts or the ground on straw. They washed in a nearby stream or communal baths. They had inadequate food and were not socially or otherwise insured.

Seasonal laborers brought home not only money but also foodstuffs (especially flour) and fodder (so that they could keep their cattle and have meat and meat for the winter), especially grain, maize, and pulses for the pigs.

Every spring, dozens of maidens and men left the poor villages in the mountain regions of Slovakia for the usually pre-arranged estates and farmsteads, which had been in place for years. And not only to the southern regions of Slovakia, but also to nearby foreign countries, especially Hungary, Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, northern Yugoslavia, and even Germany and France.

In this way, they learned foreign languages and introduced new knowledge about tillage, crops, tools, and machines at home, which they became familiar with on the job. Many found spouses there and did not return. Slovak folklore abounds with accounts of the life of the seasoners and seasoner songs.

For example, in 1930, of the total number of economically active persons in agriculture, 287,836 persons (55%) claimed to be independent peasants, 90,900 (17%) were permanent laborers, and as many as 147,773 (28%) persons were considered to be hired laborers. The collectivization and nationalization of agriculture in the early second half of the 20th century created agricultural cooperatives from the land and property of householders and peasants, and so-called ‚state estates' from church and noble estates, transforming the traditional categories of agricultural laborers into permanent employees. Since the 1990s, following the political-economic transformation of Slovakia from a socialist to a capitalist country, the cooperatives and state estates have partly disintegrated. Restitution is the return of property to the original owners or their descendants, who either sell it, rent it out, or start farming it again. Traditional private forms of agriculture are thus partly restored.

Miner

Mining is a complex of works aimed at prospecting, extraction, and treatment of useful minerals. Mining included prospecting, opening and preparation of deposits, construction of mine workings, securing underground spaces, transport, ventilation, establishment of excavated spaces, reclamation and rehabilitation of devastated landscapes, mining surveying, etc.

Mining in Slovakia

The beginnings of mining in Slovakia date back to prehistoric times, when copper was mined here. In the 4th century BC, the Celts perfected the mining and processing of metals here. In the period of Great Moravia (9th century to the beginning of the 10th century), mining production developed in central Slovakia. Gold was mined in rivers and streams. In the 13th century, mining began to develop under the influence of German colonization. Mining settlements were established in central and eastern Slovakia and turned into mining towns. The seal of Banská Štiavnica from 1275 is the oldest seal with mining emblems (hammer and handcuff) in the world. Mining developed most from the 1820s to the mid-19th century. At that time, Slovakia was one of the most important European producers of precious metals (the towns of Banská Štiavnica and Kremnica), copper (the towns of Smolník, Gelnica, and

Spišská Nová Ves), and iron (the town of Hronec and the Spiš-Gemer Ore Mountains). In the second half of the 19th century, coal mining intensified (Obyce, Jedľové Kostoľany, Handlová, Pohronie region). Mining knowledge and experience were originally acquired through apprenticeship. Mining schools were established in Slovakia in the first half of the 18th century. The Mining Academy in Banská Štiavnica (1762-1919), the world's first mining college, played a particularly important role in the development of mining sciences throughout the Habsburg Monarchy.

Mining villages were made up of several traditional homesteads consisting of a few dwelling units and so-called ‚mining colonies' consisting of several dwelling units. There was no agriculture as a source of livelihood in the mining villages. Mining was based on wage labor. Miners carried out activities in prospecting, quarrying, ore, and coal dressing. In the 1860s, for example, there were about 30,000 miners in Slovakia. In the mines of Banská Štiavnica, there were about 60 mining professions. Based on the type of work, these included ‚haviari' (miners), ‚beháči' (runners), ‚pratači' (washers), ‚vrátkári' (winch operators), ‚vyklápači' (unloaders), and both ‚banskí' and ‚povrchoví tesári' (underground and surface carpenters).

Miners as the elite

Since the 13th century, miners had privileges: they were personally free, could move freely, did not have to do menial work, and were exempt from taxes, military service, etc. Their life was regulated not by feudal or royal law, but by the so-called ‚mining law', including jurisdiction. Miners were an elite social and economic group at that time, with a different material and spiritual culture and social life. They had their self-government headed by a ‚krámský'/'komorský' ‚richtar' (‚kramrichter' - mayor) or guild master. Social welfare was provided by the fraternities (the ‚fraternal treasury') and by the miners' erar, who provided the miners with pensions, support in sickness, or for widows and orphans in the event of mining accidents, which were very frequent. This is why the cult of St Barbara, the patron saint of miners, is very strong in the mining environment (numerous churches and chapels of St Barbara, communal prayers before and thanksgivings after the return to the surface, etc.).

Miners, unlike other occupations at the time, regularly brought home wages in money. The miners' wives did not work but were mostly engaged in the production of bobbin lace, which was a desirable trade item. Bobbin lace is an important part of the traditional material culture of Slovakia. In some mining localities, it is still produced today, including the organization of workshops for those interested. Some mining traditions, social events, and genius loci are still preserved in mining towns.

Some specific traditional occupations

Turiec oilmen

Oil craft is the home production and door-to-door trade of medicinal oils, plants, and other medicinal preparations. It is linked to the therapeutic activities of oilers. The oil industry in Slovakia experienced its greatest boom in the period from the first half of the 18th century to the second half of the 20th century. 19th century. It was mainly used by the inhabitants of the Turiec County,

but also by the inhabitants of the Liptov, Orava, Trenčín, and Spiš Counties. In the Turiec region, the serfs were involved in pressing and distilling medicinal oils and selling them as early as the 17th century. In the middle of the 18th century, the Turiec County taxed more than 1,000 oil producers. In this region, the population of around 40 villages (Vrícko, Kláštor pod Znievom, Blatnica, Lazany, and Valča, etc.) was mainly or partly involved in oil production.

The number of types of medicines, especially oils, traded was wide (juniper, rosemary, caraway, fennel, etc.). Many high priestly restrictions were issued against the oil trade, resulting mainly from some dishonest healing and trade practices of the oilers. Nevertheless, the low level of health care in the 18th century provided them with a wide range of opportunities.

Based on discretization according to villages, they visited Hungary, Silesia, Russia, Saxony, Sweden, Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, Transylvania, Poland, Persia, and Turkey. Regulations, measures, and changes in health care caused the gradual disappearance of the oil industry. Some of the oilers turned door-to-door trading in daily necessities (especially haberdashery and agricultural implements), and some adopted saffron cultivation and traded it. In the last decades of the 19th century, they traded in Russia and Poland. After World War I, the oil craft industry disappeared.

Saffron traders of Vestenice

Saffron growing is closely related to oil trading. It is based on the cultivation of saffron and door-to-door trade with its dried stigmas and styles. These parts of the saffron plant were used as a spice in food and beverages, in the preparation of folk medicines, and cosmetic products, and in painting pigments. The earliest records indicate that saffron cultivation dates back to the mid-15th century. The highest quality saffron was considered to be the one grown in the town of Bojnice. The door-to-door trade of local saffron by peasant farmers and middlemen is documented as early as the 16th and 17th centuries. The cultivation of saffron was still considered economically significant in the 18th century. The most well-known traveling saffron traders were the inhabitants of the Vestenická Valley, from the villages of Nitrianske Sučany, Dolné Vestenice, Horné Vestenice, and Dvorníky nad Nitricou in the Upper Nitra subregion. In the 18th century, they sold saffron in Hungary and some non-Hungarian countries. To better organize their trade, the Vestenice saffron traders established a trade association during this period. The cultivation and trade of saffron in Upper Nitra gradually declined. By the early 19th century, the original saffron traders had also begun selling small goods, though the term ‚šafraník' (saffron trader) continued to be used. Over time, the name ‚šafraník' was also transferred to oil traders, as many of them, after gradually abandoning the sale of medicinal products in the late 18th century, started selling saffron before eventually shifting to trading everyday household items.

‚Handrárstvo'

‚Handrárstvo' (Rag collecting) was a supplementary occupation in traditional communities based on door-to-door collection of textiles and other raw materials. It became widespread mainly in villages near paper mills, as textile waste was the primary raw material for papermaking until the second half of the 19th century. Rags were also collected for textile factories in Bohemia and Austria. Typical areas included the Upper Nitra subregion (villages of Dolný Kamenec, Horný Kamenec, Zemianske Kostoľany, Bystričany,

Podhradie, Veľká Lehôtka, and Vestenice). The collected textile waste was supplied to the paper mill in Dolný Kamenec, which operated from 1758 to 1858. Other important rag-collecting centers were in the Liptov region and around the town of Piešťany. If rag collectors did not sell the gathered textiles directly to paper mills, middlemen handled their distribution. Over time, the collection expanded to include other waste materials such as iron, bones, hair, rubber, and paper. Rag collectors often exchanged rags for paper and later for small haberdashery goods, pottery, porcelain, and glass household items. They traveled either on foot with a two-wheeled cart or by horse-drawn wagon, working alone with one or two assistants or in organized groups. Collection areas were divided according to customary law. A defining feature of rag collectors was the use of a distinctive whistle, along with loud, melodic calls such as 'Rags, bones, iron...' to announce their arrival in a village. Traditional rag collecting disappeared after World War II due to the introduction of new raw material collection systems in official collection centers.

Gold panning

Gold panning is the process of extracting gold from the Earth's surface. As a seasonal occupation, gold was primarily obtained from sediment deposits in the river basins of the Danube, Hron, and Ipeľ, as well as from watercourses around the town of Zlaté Moravce. Alongside mining, panning was a significant source of income for the Kingdom of Hungary and was therefore regulated by official decrees. As early as the 13th and 14th centuries, gold was extracted this way in the Bocianska and Ľupčianska Valleys and near the sub-Tatra village of Hybe. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, gold panning was practiced by the inhabitants of Žitný Ostrov (between the Danube River and its branch, the Little Danube) and the Belianska Valley in the Hont region. The panning process involved placing sand onto a sluice table with a slanted, grooved board and pouring water over it. The gold dust was caught in a cloth laid on the board. By rocking the pan in water, iron particles were separated. The gold dust was further refined by dissolving it in mercury. By pressing the sand in a piece of deerskin, the mercury was squeezed out, and the remaining gold was smelted. In Hont, gold was extracted from sieved soil, which was washed in a system of small channels.



Part of the village Pribiš (Orava), undated, archive of Ondrej Demo.
Source: https://fondtlk.sk/sk/detail-sluk_us_cat.2-0018989-Obytne-domy-v-obci-Pribis/?disprec=3&iset=21

1.7 Traditional folk architecture and construction

Folk architecture and construction in Slovakia have many forms.
Such as:
- what architectural features and ornaments the builders used in their constructions,
- what building materials they used,
- how big and how many rooms in the house they had,
- how they arranged these rooms,
- in which rooms who lived,
- what kind of utility rooms they had,
- where they built their homesteads,
- how these homesteads were arranged each other,
- how and with what they arranged and decorated them,
- what they considered beautiful and what they considered necessary in the interior and exterior of the buildings,
- how each household functioned ...

... all this is the logical and practical result of the following factors:

Geographical conditions

Geographical conditions are the most significant factor in shaping people's traditional way of life. Geographical conditions are: climatic (climate/weather/temperature), pedological (soil types and quality), hydrological (water sources, water courses), biological (flora - plants, fauna - animals), and geomorphological (lowlands, mountains, deserts). Geographical conditions determine what building materials are available to traditional man, what techniques he should use to build, and what kind of dwelling he needs for warmth, security, and sources of livelihood.

The territory of Slovakia consists of:

Lowland

On the general geographical map of Slovakia, the lowlands are marked in green. Simplified - it is an area of earthen architecture and construction. The walls of the buildings are made of clay, created either by charging - from mud mixed with grain husks or chopped straw, which is charged in layers to form the formwork or by brickwork made of unfired bricks made from this mud and dried in the sun. The walls are laid directly on the ground, or a stone foundation, or the stones are only in the corners and most

exposed parts of the building. The walls are plastered with clay and whitewashed with lime or colored with pastel paint. ‚Sokel' (the lowest part of the house wall) is usually created with dark paint. The roofing material is straw or thatch. Outbuildings are constructed of wooden planks, or the walls are woven from wicker on a wooden frame and then daubed with clay and whitewashed with lime. Other outbuildings are simple plank buildings.

Transitional areas

Transitional areas (between lowlands and mountains) - marked in yellow on the general geographical map of Slovakia. Simplified - it is an area with the intermingling of elements of earthen and wooden architecture and construction, with stone buildings. The walls of the buildings are clay (unfired brick) or wooden, made of coniferous trees (beams or logs joined by woodcutting), not infrequently they are made of stone. The buildings are built on a stone base, daubed with clay and whitewashed with lime, or painted in pastel colors, with a dark plinth. Roofing is straw or wooden shingles. The outbuildings are of wood plank or stone.

Mountain areas

On the general geographical map of Slovakia, mountain areas are marked in brown. Simplification - this is the area of wooden architecture and construction. The walls of all the buildings are made of wooden beams (logs or district beams of coniferous trees) connected by woodcutting. They stand on a stone base or stones in the corners of the building. The roofing material is wooden shingles. In some mountainous regions, log buildings are plastered with clay and whitewashed with lime. In the case of sloping terrain, the building has a basement and stands on a stone foundation. Until the middle of the 20th century, there were still mountain villages in Slovakia built entirely of wood, where the only stone buildings were the church and the school.

Because the whole territory of Slovakia lies in a climate zone with relatively high precipitation in spring and autumn, with heavy snowfall every year (nowadays only in mountainous areas) and winter temperatures well below freezing (-25□ C), high temperatures (above 35□ C) and storms in summer, the residential buildings are quite massive. The walls are thick for thermal insulation reasons, with quite advanced types of stoves (it is impossible to survive without heating in Slovakia). Roofs are gabled (A-shaped), resting on massive rafters with elaborate construction and relatively good quality roofing due to frequent rain and the need to keep out the mass of heavy snow in winter (in a layer in the past not infrequently over 1 meter thick).

Types of Settlement Development

When building settlements, Slovak people had to adapt to the varied terrain of Slovakia's transitional and mountainous regions, which are filled with mountain ranges, hills, valleys, rivers, and streams. In lowland areas, rivers often formed natural boundaries, and the depth of groundwater was a limiting factor. This not only influenced access to water through wells but also dictated the

need to find elevated areas for settlement construction to avoid waterlogged land and spring flooding caused by melting snow or overflowing rivers and streams.

Roadside Development

Slovak villages are mostly composed of settlements built in an organized manner along roads. This type of settlement pattern is called roadside development and is widespread throughout Slovakia. The village is situated along a main road, which widens into a central square dominated by a church, a pub, and a marketplace.

Chain Development

In mountainous regions, roads tend to wind through valleys, running parallel to rivers and streams. Where more space was available, multiple settlements emerged, clustered together in groups. In areas with less space, fewer or even just a single settlement was built. This irregular pattern is known as chain development—settlements are ‚chained' along the road wherever the terrain allows. Chain development is typical for mountainous and transitional regions.

Streamside Development

Sometimes, the main axis of settlement is not a road but a river or stream, in which case the pattern is known as streamside development. In lowland areas, where space was more abundant, builders did not have to adapt as strictly to the terrain when planning settlements. Even there, if the main axis was a road, it was roadside development; if it was a stream, it was streamside development.

Grid Development

In flat and open areas, the abundance of space allowed for the construction of settlements with multiple parallel streets. This type of structured layout is called grid development. The village consists of settlements arranged in a rectangular matrix, similar to the layout of American cities, where streets and avenues are organized based on intersections. In Slovakia, such settlements have origins dating back to the early medieval period.

Urban Development

The formation of villages, towns, and cities in Slovakia follows a similar medieval pattern (from the 12th–13th centuries). However, in towns and cities, the central element was always a main square with a church, surrounded by townhouses and branching into streets and alleys. These settlements were typically fortified with walls and defensive bastions, featuring several entrance gates.

Dispersed Settlements

Besides villages and towns with organized layouts, some people in Slovakia also lived in so-called dispersed settlements. These include isolated farmsteads, homesteads, and agricultural estates scattered across the landscape.

Mountain and transition areas

In mountainous and transitional areas, such territories, as well as individual settlements, are called lazy (in the pastoral regions of Podpoľanie and Gemer in central Slovakia), or kopanice (in the area of the Myjavská Pahorkatina in western Slovakia), or štále (from German, in the mining areas of central Slovakia). These settlements were established during the Wallachian, Kopaničiar, and German colonization, first as temporary, seasonal settlements for protection from bad weather while working in the forest or the fields if they were at such a distance from the village that it was not worth the daily commute on foot or by cart during seasonal work. Gradually, as the village population became denser, these temporary settlements adapted and became year-round inhabited. Today, they are largely depopulated and are used for recreational purposes as cottages or are being revitalized by enthusiasts of traditional forms of farming and new small farmers.

Lowland Areas

Dispersed settlements in the lowland areas of Slovakia included:

- Large estates and farms, known as ‚majere', were usually owned by the church or nobility, permanently inhabited by year-round employees, and seasonally by dozens of seasonal workers.
- Vineyards with small vineyard houses, typically grouped into vineyard settlements a few kilometers outside villages in the wine-growing regions of southern Slovakia.

Apart from these, other dispersed settlements (outside village boundaries) were rare in Slovakia's lowlands.

However, an interesting case of dispersed settlements in lowland areas is the so-called ‚salaš' farms (shepherds´ farms). These are associated with the population of the so-called ‚Dolná zem' (Lower Land), including Slovaks. They were founded by the ancestors of today's Slovak enclaves in the Lower Land. The Dolná zem refers to the central and southern regions of the former Kingdom of Hungary. After the dissolution of Hungary in 1918, this area became part of central and southern Hungary, western Romania, and northern Serbia (the autonomous region of Vojvodina).

Around 250–300 years ago, Slovak-speaking settlers, among others, arrived in this region, reviving abandoned villages or establishing new ones. This land had been devastated and depopulated by 150 years of Ottoman occupation. The extremely fertile land surrounding these villages was quickly parceled out, and to cultivate fields located up to 25 km away, temporary settlements needed to be built. Over time, these settlements became permanent, developing into full-fledged farmsteads known as shepherds´ farms.

A similar situation occurred 100 years ago among Czechoslovak cotton growers in Argentina's Chaco province, where agricultural settlements called ‚čakry' (chacra) were established. The same pattern can be seen in North America with farmsteads. Many shepherds´ farms in the Lower Land still stand today. Like lazy, kopanice, and štále in Slovakia, or čakry in Argentina, and farms in the USA, they either continue to serve their original agricultural function, are used for recreation and tourism, or have been abandoned and left to decay.

Occupation and sources of livelihood

In the case of a farming family, the settlement includes outbuildings and premises for housing cattle, horses, sheep, pigs, poultry, tools, machine tools, and implements, for processing and storing crops, such as a barn (a large covered space for threshing grain from the ears with flails), a hayloft (for storing straw and hay), a granary (for storing grain), and pits and cellars (for storing grain, potatoes, and vegetables).

In the case of a craftsman family, storage and production areas are included - for example, a blacksmith‘s forge, carpenter‘s, wheelwright‘s, linen maker‘s, tailor‘s workshop, etc. In the case of a mining or working-class family, the economic premises are usually absent or only in a reduced form (poultry house, pig house, feed storage rooms, etc.).

In mining and industrial areas, families of miners and laborers lived in so-called ‚colonies‘ - dormitories consisting of several one- or two-room separate living units with shared sanitary and cooking facilities. Here, utility rooms were completely absent.

Socioeconomic stratification

The social class to which a family belonged determined the location, size, and quality of their dwelling.

The poorest rural population

Landless laborers, day workers, and small farmers lived in two-room dwellings consisting of only a living room (the main inhabited and heated space during winter) and a ‚pitvor‘ (a covered, enclosed, unheated entrance area to the room). This is why the words ‚izba‘ and ‚chyža‘ are archaic synonyms for ‚house‘. Their small, often shared courtyards either lacked farm buildings entirely or had only minimal structures for poultry, one or two pigs, or a single cow.

The middle class of the countryside

Middle-class families lived in three-room houses consisting of a living room, a ‚pitvor‘, and a ‚komora‘ (storage room), or in four-room houses with an additional second living room. The size and variety of farm buildings (stables, horse barns, sheepfolds, pigsties, granaries, and barns) depended on the family‘s wealth and livelihood. Middle-class families typically owned horses or other draft animals (oxen, cows) for plowing, logging, and transportation, as well as livestock and poultry for meat and other animal products.

Wealthy farmers and craftsmen

Prosperous rural families lived in multi-room houses with basements, higher ceilings, larger courtyards, and extensive farm buildings. The wealthiest classes were the first to adopt modern housing innovations, such as replacing ground-level hearths with built-in multifunctional stoves (for heating, cooking, and baking), directing smoke out through chimneys instead of into the attic,

replacing dirt floors with wooden planks, and furnishing interiors with modern furniture (wardrobes, tall cabinets, beds) and household textiles.

When imagining traditional rural housing from the past, it is crucial to consider the family's social class—whether they were among the poorest, the middle class, or the wealthiest—because the differences were significant. Not to mention those who formed the rural elite. For example, the lower nobility (‚zemania' - landlords) lived in smaller manor houses called ‚kúrie', while the higher nobility, such as barons and counts, resided in grand manors (‚kaštiele') set in landscaped gardens. The homes of wealthy craftsmen and merchants were nearly indistinguishable from noble kúrie. Likewise, the residences of doctors, notaries, estate managers, and church property tenants were of a higher standard, often including manor houses and kúrie as part of the leased estates.

Administrative and regulatory conditions of settlement

Settlement rules and regulations influenced traditional Slovak folk architecture, housing, construction, and settlements, particularly depending on the phase of settlement, the owner or administrator of the land, and the owner of the serfs or colonists. In Slovakia, landowners included the nobility, the church, the king, and the mining chamber. Decisions regarding settlement regulations, land or forest allocation to families for management and care, tax rates or exemptions, and the provision of free building materials for homes were under the jurisdiction of the landowner or administrator. Settlement and resettlement in Slovakia always followed specific regulations, including customary law, Hungarian law, German law, šoltýs law, kopaničiarske law, and valachian law. The poorest settlements and villages were those under the control of the church and nobility. In contrast, the greatest prosperity was recorded in free royal towns and mining regions, which had their legal systems and were directly subordinate to the king. Settlements developed wherever there was mining activity—during the medieval period, this included precious metals such as copper, tin, gold, and silver, as well as iron ore—or where there was production, including crafts and manufactories in the Middle Ages and industrial enterprises in the modern era. Additionally, settlements, especially towns, flourished if they were granted specific rights, such as the right to operate taverns, distilleries (alcohol production), warehouses (trade), weekly markets, annual fairs, or if their church possessed a significant relic, attracting pilgrimage events.

Cultural traditions of the locality/region

Cultural traditions were reflected in traditional folk architecture and construction mainly through local or regional rules regarding the spatial arrangement of houses, facade ornamentation, plaster color, decoration of entrances to houses and courtyards, door lintels, window frames, and similar elements.

‚Gánok', ‚Gang'

‚Gang' (from German), also called ‚podstenie' or ‚podstienka', is an open covered corridor along the courtyard side of the house, connecting all the rooms in sequence. It is either completely open, consisting only of wooden or masonry columns, or partially enclosed by a low wall or wooden railing. In more recent times, it has sometimes been fully enclosed with glass, forming a veranda. A similar feature in multi-story houses is the so-called ‚pavlač' (open gallery). Poorer families had a gánok made only of wooden columns, while wealthier families had masonry columns with decorative elements and a low wall.

‚Podlomenica'

A small roof overhang at the lower front part of the ‚štít' (gable), protecting the front wall from rain. The podlomenica functions similarly to a cornice.

‚Valba', ‚Polvalba'

A sloped section of the roof at the front or back of the house, designed to improve aerodynamics against wind, distribute roof load in snow, and enhance water drainage. Modifying a standard gable roof (A-shaped) by adding a valba or polvalba eliminates the gable and creates a three-sided roof. Adding a valba at the back as well results in a four-sided roof. A polvalba (half-hipped roof) leaves a vertical gable in the lower section. Another way to address the same issue is combining a gable with a podlomenica or cornice.

‚Štít'

The vertical front and rear sections of the house's roof, enclosing the attic. It is usually made of wooden planks, but in masonry houses, it was traditionally woven from wicker on a wooden framework or built from brick and plastered. The front gable, facing the street, was the most decorative part of the house, often adorned with paintings, inscriptions, and symbols of the homeowner (construction date, initials, surname, or craft symbols). Ornamental motifs included sun rosettes, crosses, and chalices. In some areas of western Slovakia, the gable and the entire house facade featured folk Baroque or folk Classicist relief elements.

‚Hálka'

A decorative conical roof structure at the top of the gable, sometimes ending with a ‚nástrešník' (small pillar). This feature is common in wooden architecture in mountainous areas.

‚Žuder'

The so-called ‚výpustok' - a folk architectural element of the earthen architecture of western Slovakia, highlighting the entrance to the house and providing protection from the weather, decorated in the style of folk baroque and folk classicism.

Interior Layout of Houses

In Slovak folk houses, the predominant arrangement of rooms is one behind the other, with the room always facing the street, in the order room ‚izba' – ‚pitvor' – ‚komora' (room – entrance hall – pantry). The least significant and least decorative rooms were at the back of the house. The houses were long and oriented perpendicular to the street. There were regional exceptions to this layout. For example, in northeastern Slovakia, both the room and pantry were street-facing (side by side), while some homes had rooms arranged around a central pitvor. The so-called ‚German houses' featured covered gateways leading to the courtyard, similar to urban houses.

Enclosed courtyards

Farmsteads built like small fortresses were found in remote villages of northern Slovakia. Both residential and agricultural buildings were arranged in a square around a small courtyard, which was enclosed by a gate. These can still be seen today, for example, in the mountain village of Ždiar.

Communal houses

They were built in the mountainous regions of central Slovakia (e.g., Liptov, Považie, Horná Nitra, Turiec), or the mountainous northern parts of the so-called ‚transitional regions' (e.g., Tekov, Hont, Novohrad, Gemer). These consisted of multiple housing units arranged side by side, in a row, or multi-story configurations. Each unit had a separate entrance, but they shared a common roof and courtyard (most commonly seen in duplexes or four-family houses).

Color schemes

Color played an important artistic and aesthetic role in folk architecture. Throughout Slovakia, houses plastered with clay were predominantly white (lime-washed) with dark-colored bases (black, gray, or dark blue), regardless of whether the house was made of clay, stone, wood (log construction), or, later, fired bricks. In some regions, pastel shades of blue, orange, yellow, green, red, or ochre replaced the standard white. A well-preserved example is the mountain village of Vlkolínec (near Ružomberok, in the Liptov region).

In mountain villages east and west of the High Tatras in northern Slovakia (e.g., Ždiar), log houses that were not plastered had their chinking (the space between logs, filled with moss and straw braids) painted white or another color. Traditional Slovak houses in former Hungarian territories still maintain their distinct colors. For example, in the Bihor region of Romania, the homes of Slovak settlers are green, while in the lowland Banat region, they are blue. In Slovakia's diaspora communities in Hungary and Serbia, Slovak houses were traditionally light blue or white with a dark blue base. In contrast, Hungarian houses were usually pale green, and Serbian houses ochre or light brown.

Ornamental decoration

Ornamental decoration is present on the exterior walls of houses. A well-known example is the village of Čičmany (Žilina District, Horné Považie region), where a 200-year-old tradition of lime-painted geometric patterns adorns the wooden beams of local log

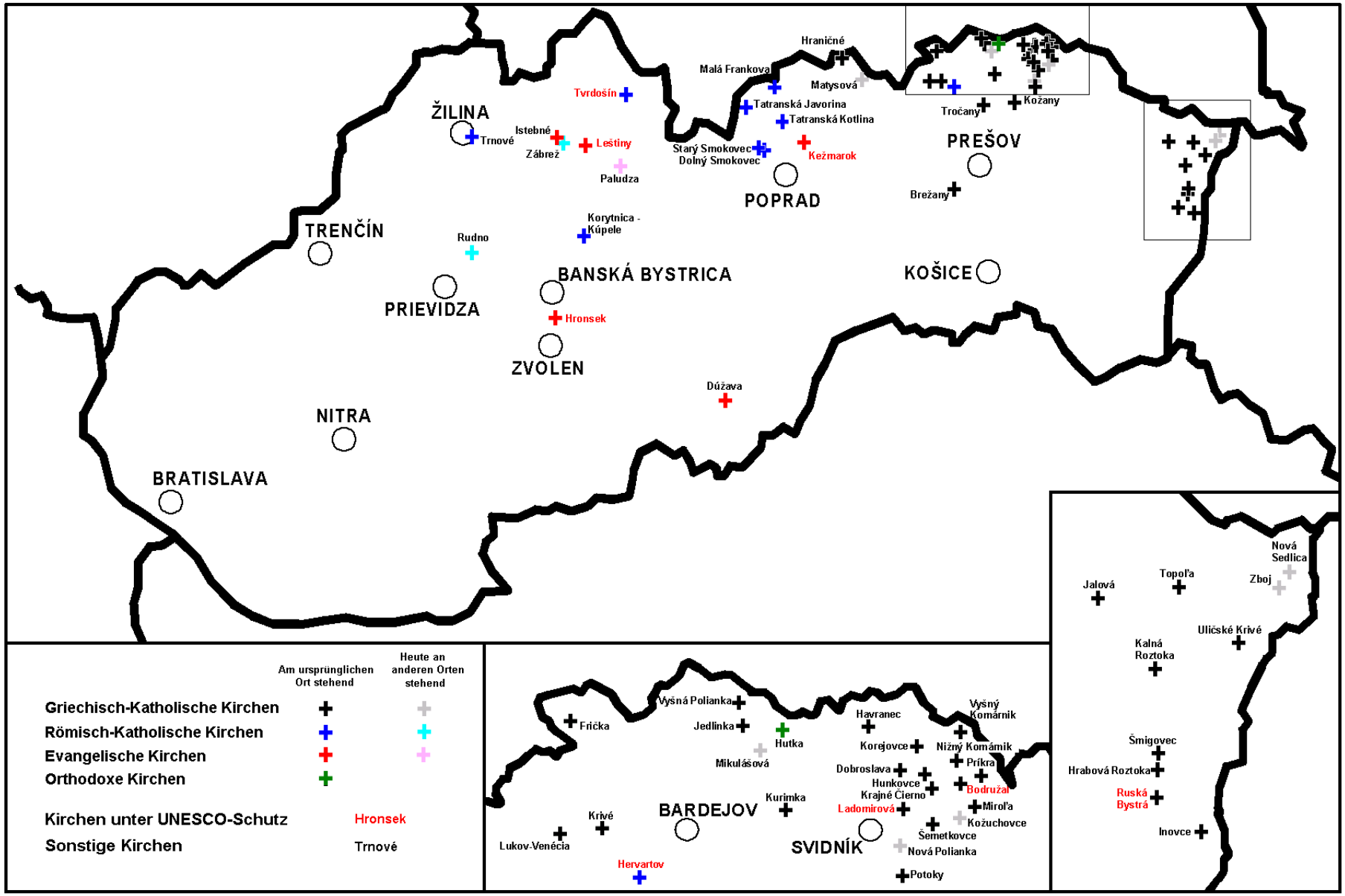
houses. Another example is the so-called ‚Ždiar-style' house (named after the village of Ždiar in the Spiš region, on the eastern side of the High Tatras, Slovakia's highest mountain range). This style features geometric patterns painted with lime on the exposed ends of wooden beams in log houses. Ornamental decoration was also common in vineyard regions in southern and western Slovakia, where floral motifs—mainly grapevine patterns—were painted around windows and entrances of residential houses and vineyard cottages.

Architectural decoration

Architectural decoration in folk houses is most prominently displayed on the facade. The facade served as a reflection of the homeowner's social standing and was used by the surrounding community to judge the status of the family. Key indicators included: The number of street-facing windows; The design of the entrance to both the house and courtyard; The decorative quality of the front and courtyard-facing walls; The appearance of the gable; and The maintenance of the front garden. In western Slovakia, elements of folk baroque and folk classicism became widespread, especially in the decoration of window frames, door lintels, and ‚výpustky' (entrance structures). Often, relief elements inspired by baroque and classical styles, particularly columns, adorned the entire house facade. In wooden architecture, achieving three-dimensional relief was more challenging than in earthen construction, so decoration relied on woodcarving and joinery, particularly in the ornamentation of column capitals, beams, window frames, and door lintels, and enhanced use of color. If any architectural elements were used in folk construction, they were primarily focused on the facade of the residential house.

Wooden Churches

Wooden churches represent the pinnacle of folk architecture in Slovakia, primarily built in mountainous areas. From the 17th to the 20th century, approximately 300 were constructed, often without the use of iron nails. Today, 59 remain, with 27 designated as National Cultural Monuments and 8 listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Their distribution by denomination is as follows: Roman Catholic – 11 churches; Evangelical (Lutheran, so-called ‚Articular Churches') – 6 churches; Greek Catholic – 38 churches; Orthodox – 4 churches. Most of these churches are still in use for regular religious services today.



Map of wooden churches in Slovakia.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wooden_churches_in_Slovakia.png



Easter eggs, ornament from the village of Vajnory (Bratislava), 2016, Michal Veselský.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/zoznam-nkd/vajnorsky-ornament/

1.8 Calendar customs

The customs of the annual cycle (calendar customs) are primarily determined by nature. In European geographical conditions, they have always been conditioned by the annually recurring weather cycle from spring, through summer and autumn to winter. The key periods are the solstice (summer - the longest day, around June 21, winter - the longest night, around December 21) and the equinoxes (spring - around March 20 and autumn - around September 22). In the spirit of folk ideas of light as good and darkness as bad, the time of year when day lengthens relative to night is a positive period and vice versa. From this point of view, the period preceding the winter solstice is unfavorable for man, the power of negative forces increases and more protective actions need to be taken than at other times. That is why the annual customs are concentrated in the winter period and the summer period consists more of work customs related to harvesting and processing.

Work customs as part of the annual customs

Although labor customs form a separate category of customs, in Slovakia they are mainly oriented to agricultural activities. Although they are often not given a specific day, but rather a season and the suitability of the weather, they are repeated annually. Therefore, in this case, labor customs can be classified as annual customs. They are mainly concentrated in the spring period, when farmers and breeders, by performing the appropriate magical acts, sought to ensure the harvest in the field, the health of livestock and poultry, and thus the prosperity of the household.

For traditional agricultural Slovakia, the cycle of sowing, ripening, harvesting, processing and selling crops, and preparing for the next agricultural year, was the most important in terms of annual customs. This is what the dates/periods of the annual customs were originally adapted to. Since the Middle Ages, Christianity has stabilized many of the former annual customs with an annual calendar of exact days and shifted some to other times, regardless of the original peasant calendar. An example is the New Year, which for the Slovak peasant is defined as the beginning of the agrarian cycle and has nothing to do with 1 January, when there is snow on the territory of Slovakia and nature is 'asleep'). The so-called ‚perpetual Gregorian calendar' was adopted in Hungary in 1587.

All traditional Slovak customs contain magic, oracles, prophecies, or omens.

Magic

Magic consists of magical-ritual acts performed with the belief that they will ensure desired outcomes in the future. People believe that magic can influence events, helping to achieve health, beauty, love, prosperity, fertility, abundance, and protection from evil forces.

Sympathetic magic is based on the belief that creating a resemblance between things in one aspect will establish a connection between them, leading to similarity in other aspects as well. For this reason, magical rituals often incorporate symbols of health, beauty, love, prosperity, fertility, abundance, and protection from negative forces.

Contagious magic is based on the belief that things can transfer their properties to other things through direct contact. Therefore, magical rituals often involve physical contact with objects or beings perceived as healthy, beautiful, kind, prosperous, fertile, abundant, or protective against evil forces.

Divination, Weather Lore, and Omens

Divination, weather lore, and omens are not meant to influence or ensure the future (this is done through magic). Instead, they serve as ways to learn about the future, based on the belief that the future can be predicted or revealed. Divination involves performing specific rituals or acts to uncover the future. Weather lore is based on predicting weather patterns by observing established, traditionally verified connections between meteorological phenomena. Omens rely on a person's ability to „read" signs—interpreting unusual or seemingly unrelated events and connecting them to future outcomes.

Summer annual customs

Juraj (George)

George (April 24), a saint martyred in 303, is the patron of peasants, miners, saddlers, blacksmiths, coopers, horses and cattle, travelers, inmates, captives, soldiers, and riders. The legend of his martyrdom spread in Slovakia from the 12th century. In traditional culture, his day marks the transition between winter and summer and is associated with weather lore (for example, thunder before George's Day was considered a bad omen for the year). „On George's Day, the earth opens"—snakes and other animals that hibernated underground emerge. A four-leaf clover, marsh marigold, coltsfoot, snake, lizard, or frog found before George's Day was believed to have protective or magical powers, especially in love magic. On this day, cattle were driven to pasture for the first time after winter, and magical rituals were performed to protect against harmful forces and enhance milk yield and quality. The day was one of the so-called ‚Witches´ Days', requiring the protection of the village from witches. Bonfires known as George's fires were lit for this purpose, around which young people celebrated by jumping over the flames, singing ritual and love songs, making flower wreaths, and throwing them onto trees—believing that if a girl's wreath caught on a branch on the first try, she would marry within a year. They also threw oats mixed with ash into windows, wishing, ‚May you get married!' The tallest girls would roll in the winter crops to ensure a good harvest. Children played spring games like ‚Na mosty' (on bridges), ‚Brány' (Gates), ‚Na kráľovničky' (Little Queens), and chain games such as ‚Helička' or ‚Hoja, ďunďa, hoja'. George's customs were more common in the lowland regions of southern and western Slovakia and are related to John's customs.

May 1st

May 1st was a youth festival. On the evening before or during the night, young men secretly erected ‚maypoles' in front of the houses of girls. These were tall trees with peeled trunks and a crown decorated with colorful ribbons, scarves, or a bottle of alcohol. This tradition was widespread across Slovakia and developed into several variations:

a) A young man secretly set up a maypole for his sweetheart or a girl he was seriously interested in, in front of her house.

b) A group of young men secretly erected maypoles for all the girls in the village who had reached adulthood, according to local customs.

c) Young men erected maypoles for all girls, but if a girl had a suitor, her maypole was distinct in decoration, type, and height, or she might receive two maypoles.

d) Young men erected a communal maypole for the entire village or multiple maypoles in public spaces such as the football stadium, town square, or busy intersections. These events were public celebrations.

In the afternoon, young men, accompanied by singing and music, visited the houses where maypoles stood, danced with the families, and were hosted with food and drink. In some places, they collected food items (especially eggs, bacon, and sausages) for the evening youth dance party (known as ‚majáles'). If a house had multiple girls, multiple maypoles were erected. Not receiving a maypole was considered humiliating for a girl. Maypoles were not erected for unsociable girls or those who refused to dance with young men at village dances.

In some villages, maypole raising remains a communal celebration, while elsewhere it is still done secretly at night, with the main celebration happening when the maypoles are taken down—called ‚maypole felling', usually on ‚Turice' (Pentecost - Holy Ghost). Originally, the girl's father would remove the maypole without ceremony, cutting it up and burning it for firewood in winter. In some places, the old tradition of erecting maypoles for girls continues, with young men being paid for their efforts.

‚Turíce' Pentecost

Pentecost (also called Whitsun, Green Holidays, or ‚Rusadlá') is a movable Christian holiday celebrated seven weeks after Easter. The Old Slavic name „Turíce" is derived from the animal mask of the ‚tura/turoňa' (a type of wild ox), which played a dominant role in spring protective and sacrificial rituals. The name ‚Rusadlá', used in eastern Slovakia, is likely related to the ancient Roman festival Pascha Rosarum. With the spread of Christianity, the church overlaid the original festival with the Feast of the Holy Spirit, whose symbols include flames and a dove. However, the pagan symbolism and meaning of the holiday persisted in mask parades, lively celebrations with singing and dancing, feasts, gunfire, and processions around the village with torches and noise-making. According to old Slavic beliefs, the souls of deceased ancestors returned to Earth during Pentecost week to help and protect the living. In northern Slovakia, memorial masses were held for the deceased since the previous Pentecost, and green branches and eggs were placed on graves. A remnant of old traditions is the election of the ‚Pentecost King', chosen by young men, who held secular authority in the village for three days—a practice that was banned in the 18th century but left behind the tradition of electing youth village leaders. The figure of the ‚Queen' also appears in girls' games and processions. In towns, shooting competitions were held, with the

winner earning the title of ‚Bird King'. Popular activities included processions of girls carrying rose garlands and wreaths, rides on flower-adorned boats, outings in nature, and May and June celebrations.

Christianity adopted the Pentecost greenery. Green branches blessed in church on this day were used year-round to protect homes, farms, and livestock. Pentecost customs gradually disappeared in Slovakia, but traditions like village celebrations, maypole raising, placing green branches in house windows, and cleaning village wells have survived in some regions.

Ján (John)

John (June 24) was a prophet, saint, the baptizer of Christ in the Jordan River, the last Old Testament prophet, and the first saint of the Christian Church. He lived as a hermit, spreading humility, symbolized by baptism. For criticizing the immoral life of Herod Agrippa, he was beheaded. His symbols include a plate with a severed head, a pouch of honey, a pool with the image of a naked Christ, and the Lamb of God with a cross. He is the patron saint of tailors, furriers, tanners, innkeepers, knife makers, sharpeners, singers, winemakers, architects, shepherds, those sentenced to death, and a protector against fear and many diseases.

In traditional pre-Christian Slavic culture, this day is associated with midsummer solstice celebrations, where fire, water (especially dew), and greenery played a central role. The roots of these rituals are connected to the cult of the Sun as a symbol of fire, which has a magical purifying function, especially on the day of the solstice (June 21). The Christian calendar shifted these celebrations to St. John's Day. The most significant was the so-called ‚St. John's fires', also known as ‚vajano' or ‚sobotky'. Tall bonfires were lit on the eve of John's Day (John's Night), sometimes even for several days before and on the day itself. Shepherds also lit fires at their sheepfolds, where they feasted together. In the past, the purpose of these bonfires was to invoke rain. A cleansing meaning was attributed to jumping over the fire. It was believed that whoever jumped over a St. John's fire would not have to fear death that year. On this day, the sacred nature of fire was emphasized: it was forbidden to lend fire, throw garbage into it, pour water on it, or spit into it. According to folklore beliefs, this transitional period of the summer solstice and the beginning of summer was associated with increased activity of supernatural forces, blurring the boundaries between the real and supernatural worlds. People believed that witches danced at crossroads at night, fairies danced in forest clearings, and that blooming plants spoke in human language before sunrise, revealing what illnesses they could cure. The collection of John's herbs (medicinal plants) on this day, especially before sunrise, was widespread throughout Slovakia until the mid-20th century. Water, particularly dew collected from meadows, was believed to have purifying and healing power. Those who washed in this dew ensured their beauty and freshness. A person who caught a St. John's firefly (Lampyris noctiluca (L.)) and carried it with them was thought to be blessed with good fortune. Church prohibitions from as early as the 16th century indicate the unruly nature of festivities at St. John's bonfires. Secular authorities also issued bans against lighting them for safety reasons. Due to the perceived heightened activity of evil forces, green twigs were placed in fields and homes for protection against storms and hail. Fire's protective and purifying function was emphasized by walking around fields with burning logs or embers. Fear of witches led people to feed livestock garlic and bread, and it was forbidden for a strange woman to enter the yard or house. St. John's Night and Day were also considered suitable for marriage divinations and, conversely, negative spells. The heart of a mole caught on that day was believed to cure epilepsy, and its skin, kept in a stable, was thought to protect

livestock. There was a ban on disturbing the earth (such as planting or digging) and even on doing laundry. This day was also linked to harvest predictions: ‚Do not praise the spring crops before John's Day,' and ‚On John's Day, cherries and flies are ripe.' It was believed that on John's Day, buried treasures could be found using precise methods. Today, the lighting of St. John's bonfires remains one of the ways to celebrate national holidays and anniversaries.

Peter a Pavol (Peter and Paul)

Peter and Paul (June 29) – From a church perspective, Peter is primarily seen as a saint and apostle (originally named Simon), according to legend, the head of the Christian Church, a martyr, and the patron saint of locksmiths and clockmakers. He spread Christianity in Asia Minor and died in Rome during Emperor Nero's reign, crucified upside down on the same day as Paul.

Paul was a saint and apostle (originally named Šavel), initially a persecutor of Christians and a witness to the stoning of Saint Stephen. According to legend, he was struck blind by a flash from heaven, later regained his sight through a miracle, and converted to Christianity, adopting his new name. He spread Christianity and was also called the Apostle of the Nations. Together with Saint Peter, he is considered a true founder of the Christian Church.

In agrarian culture, this day was seen as a turning point in summer, one of the transitional days. It was associated with observing the harvest and featured many predictions and omens regarding various crops and weather folklore:

- ‚Peter and Paul break the roots of the grain' (it stops growing, and the grain ripens).
- ‚By Peter's Day, a loaf of bread in the field.'
- ‚If it rains on Peter's Day, the farmers will have less bread in the oven.'
- ‚Peter and Paul sow mushrooms.'
- If the sun shines on Paul's Day, roofs will leak, and there will be plenty of wine.
- If Paul's day is freezing, the harvest will be rich; if it rains, there will be little fodder.

There were also weather-related sayings, such as: ‚Before Peter, it's never really warm, and after Peter, the heat is gone.'

A widely known superstition connected to the legend was that one should not swim on this day, as it could lead to drowning or angering the ‚vodník' (water spirit). Hunting and going into the forest were forbidden in the Liptov region under the Tatra Mountains. In southern Slovakia, small cakes (‚pavlovníky') were baked for all family members. Before baking, a feather or straw was stuck into each one—if it burned in the oven, it was seen as a sign of an imminent death in the family.

Jakub (Jacob)

Jacob (July 25) was an apostle, beheaded in 44 AD in Jerusalem. Since this period coincided with the grain harvest, he was also colloquially called Harvest Jacob. Together with the following day, dedicated to Saint Anne, it was a traditional time for ensuring the growth of cabbage. Women, after hoeing the cabbage, would say: ‚Saint Jacob, press the little heads together, and Saint Anne, make sure every bush has a head!'. While saying this, they held a basket or a cabbage leaf over their heads or mimicked beating cabbage with a headscarf or bonnet. In some regions, this was also the best day to harvest garlic. It was believed that after this day, garlic

would ‚run into the ground'. For those who wanted to attract more buyers for their cattle, it was customary to rub the animals' ears with ant eggs on this day. People also said that ‚true summer ends on Jacob's Day'. The arrival of early autumn and cooler weather was reflected in the saying: ‚Bees fly to the mountains only until Jacob's day'. This day was also significant for weather predictions: ‚A clear sky on Jacob's Day means a cold Christmas.'. ‚Jacob blesses the fruit—what he leaves behind will ripen. ,

Anna (Anne)

Anne (July 26) was a saint, the patroness of mothers, marriage, pregnant and childless women, miners in silver mines, and rope makers. According to Christian legend, she was the mother of the Virgin Mary, whom she conceived after an angel appeared to her. In traditional culture, agricultural rituals related to the growth of cabbage and potatoes were associated with her day. Women would circle around cabbage plants and beat their heads with bonnets while chanting: ‚Yesterday was Jacob's Day, today is Anne's—twist, my dear little heads!'. In the mountainous region of Spiš, women would ‚wake up the potatoes'—digging around them and rolling on the ground. In Horehronie, people jokingly greeted women named Anne by bringing them bouquets of nettles or empty bundles. Across villages and towns, Anne's entertainments and balls were common, and in wine-growing regions, the completion of ‚green works' in the vineyards was celebrated with festive gatherings. A well-known weather proverb associated with this day was: ‚Saint Anne, cold in the morning.'

Bartolomej (Bartholomew)

Bartholomew (August 24) was a saint and apostle, the patron of butchers and tanners. According to legend, he spread Christianity in India and Armenia. He was martyred by pagans, who flayed him alive and crucified him.

In traditional culture, this day marked the end of summer:

- ‚Bartholomew urinates into the water' (meaning it is no longer warm enough for swimming).
- ‚Bartholomew urinates on cucumbers' (meaning they become bitter).
- If it rains on Bartholomew's day, snakes retreat into their holes while still wet, meaning they will come out again to dry off—signifying a beautiful autumn ahead.
- ‚On Bartholomew's day, every good farmer sows rye.'
- ‚Saint Bartholomew shortens the afternoon.'

All creatures that emerged from the ground on Saint George's Day (April 24) were believed to return underground on Bartholomew's Day. A saying reflected this:

- 'After Bartholomew's day, the snakes go back into their holes.'

This was significant because of the belief that if a person died from a snakebite, the earth would not accept their body.

It was also believed that butter churned on this day would never spoil, so people saved it for treating wounds and burns.

September 1st

On September 1st, in western Slovakia, vine growers walked around their vineyards with their mouths (beaks) closed to prevent birds from destroying their grapes.

Winter annual customs

Martin

Martin (November 11) was a saint, the patron of soldiers, horse shepherds, and cloth makers. He was born in Pannonia, served in the Roman army in Gaul, and spread Christianity. In 371, he was elected bishop. He did not want to accept the office and hid in a barn, but the geese's cackling revealed him. According to legend, Christ appeared to him after he gave half of his cloak to a beggar in winter. His cult was widespread in Slovakia between the 13th and 16th centuries.

On this day, rent payments were settled, and serfs gave geese to their landlords. For example, the so-called ‚Martin's geese' were paid as a tax to the king by the Jewish community in Bratislava. In the traditional lowland culture of towns and villages in western and southern Slovakia, the custom of roasting a goose is still preserved. In cities, large poppy seed cakes shaped like horseshoes (‚Martin's horseshoes', ‚rolls') or a ‚roháče' (shepherd's horn) were baked, and shepherds often received them as gifts.

In western and southern Slovakia, Martin's Day marked the end of the service year, which is why the term ‚martinkovať' (to be without work, to idle) was used. Servants were paid on this day. In some places, a shepherd would bring ‚marcina' (a birch rod) to every house and offer well wishes. This rod was later used by the farmer to whip the cattle during the first spring drive and on newly purchased livestock before entering the stable. The green twig symbolized health, continuity of life, and fertility, which were common themes in Slavic traditions.

In many towns and villages, markets and annual fairs were held on this day. Martin's Day is associated with weather folklore predicting the arrival of winter:

- ‚On Martin's Day, the bear lies down to sleep.'
- ‚If Martin arrives on a white horse, one snowstorm will chase another.'
- ‚Saint Martin and Candlemas (February 2) spin from the same distaff.' (This means that the weather should be the same on both days.)

Katarína (Catherine)

Catherine (November 25) was a Christian saint from Alexandria, of royal lineage, known for her beauty, wisdom, and eloquence. According to legend, she was sentenced to death on four spiked wheels, but a heavenly fire destroyed them. In the end, she was beheaded in 307. She is the patron saint of miners, students, wheelwrights, printers, waggoners, and young women.

In folk beliefs, her day marks the beginning of winter, as reflected in the saying: ‚On Saint Catherine's Day, we hide under the duvet.' It is also the first of the so-called ‚Stridžie dni' (Witches´ Days).

‚Stridžie dni‘

‚Stridžie dni‘ (Witches´ Days) is the name given to certain winter days when an increased activity of malevolent forces, particularly witches, was believed to occur. These days were perceived through the idea that the lengthening of nights and the shortening of days symbolized a temporary victory of darkness (evil) over light (good). That is why Witches´ Days are clustered around the winter solstice. The Witches´ Days include Catherine, Andrew, Barbara, Nicholas, Lucia, and Thomas.

The risk of harmful forces was also believed to be heightened during major life transitions for individuals and communities:

- During Easter (especially Good Friday), as well as on Saint George's Day, May 1st, Saint John's Day, and the summer solstice.
- On days when significant rites of passage took place (especially baptism, wedding, and funeral) and days crucial for the family's economic activities (such as the day of buying or selling livestock, the first release of cattle to pasture, and the first plowing).

‚Striga‘

‚Striga‘, ‚bosorka‘, ‚ježibaba‘, ‚čarodejnica‘ (Slovak names for Witch) is in Slovak folk imagination a semi-demonic being in the form of a living person, most often an old woman, or any woman or maiden, who has supernatural qualities and abilities to harm her surroundings. The ideas about the abilities of the striga in the territory of Slovakia have been preserved in the records of witchcraft (inquisition) trials from the Middle Ages and in folk folklore. Such a maiden or woman could have supernatural abilities innate or acquired from the devil, or even not have them at all, but used means with harmful magical power. Witches were believed to summon storms and hail, destroy crops and property, bring illness and death to people and animals, summon spirits, tell fortunes, and—worst of all—affect the future. They could steal or spoil cows' milk and cause ‚porobenie‘ (a form of curse leading to misfortune, death, bad relationships, or infertility). Witches were said to transform into animals—most commonly cats, toads, or owls—to sneak into places where they intended to cause harm. By anointing themselves with magical ointments and juices, they supposedly gained the ability to fly, especially on dark nights during the winter and summer solstices and at the beginning of spring, when they held their gatherings (sabbaths). They did not sink in water, and their bodies did not decompose in the grave. Beliefs about witches were closely related to ideas about goddesses, wise women, and healers, who, unlike witches, used their abilities for the benefit of others.

Magical plants (especially garlic, poppy seeds, willow, hawthorn, and dog rose branches), protective symbols and objects (such as crosses, circles, and sharp iron items), symbolic rituals (such as encircling a house), disguises (to deceive witches), and noise (to scare them away) were all used as protection against witches.

In Slovakia, it was generally believed that the witch could be recognized through objects made in a prescribed way and used at a specific time (the so-called ‚luciový stolček‘ – Lucia´s day stool or colander).

Until the second half of the 20th century, customs to ward off witches were still practiced in Slovakia on certain days. These included banning the entry of any unfamiliar woman into a house or yard as the first visitor of the day (as she might be a witch), eating garlic, rubbing doorways with garlic, walking around the house with holy water and embers, and fumigating people and livestock. Breaking the ban on women's work (especially spinning and sewing) and allowing early-morning visits from women on St. Catherine's Day was believed to cause dishes to break throughout the year. To prevent this, boys would visit homes early in the morning, reciting

short well-wishes, so that afterward, women could visit without risk. A popular tradition was ‚púčkovanie', in which girls predicted an early marriage and married women foretold the fruit harvest by placing twigs in water—if they blossomed by Christmas Eve (December 24), it was a good omen.

On St. Catherine's Day, the last dance parties were held before Advent, including formal balls in urban and mining communities. Elsewhere, bachelors in masks (in reversed fur coats, dressed as gypsies) would go around the houses where they had a maiden, and dance with all the women in the household in return for gifts. At night, they would secretly remove farm tools or household items (such as gates, wagons, and toilets) and place them in hard-to-reach places—on rooftops, in trees, or behind the barn. This chaos symbolized an expected change in life or the natural cycle. On this day, shepherds would blow horns and crack whips to drive witches out of the village toward crossroads, as witches were blamed for nearly all livestock ailments.

Ondrej (Andrew)

Andrew (November 30) was one of Jesus Christ's apostles and the brother of the apostle Peter. Along with Peter, John, and Jacob, he was one of the four most beloved disciples of Christ. He was a fisherman and the first to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, bringing his brother Peter to him. His story has multiple versions, but they all end the same way—his condemnation to death by crucifixion at the hands of King Aegeas in the Greek city of Patras.

In traditional culture, Andrew's Day marks the beginning of Advent and is considered an ideal day for love magic and fortune-telling:

- A girl will see her future husband in a dream if she washes her hair before bed using water heated with wood stolen from five households where young men live.
- She will marry within a year if the number of firewood logs, she randomly steals from a house with a young man is even when counted.
- Her future husband will resemble the ninth fence post in front of the house—whether crooked, straight, old, or young.
- By shaking a fence while reciting: ‚Fence, fence, I shake you, dear Andrew, I beg you, let me know with whom I will stand at my wedding.'

or in another region: ‚Fence, fence, I shake you, Saint Andrew, I beg you, let me know tonight whom I shall marry.'

- The girl's future husband would then appear to her in a dream.
- Pouring molten lead into cold water to reveal the shape of a future husband.
- Placing small, cooked dough pieces in water, each with the name of a potential husband—the first one to float revealed the chosen one.

Barbora (Barbara)

Barbara (December 4) is a saint and patron of miners, artillerymen, prisoners, powder-makers, firefighters, metallurgists, stone-

masons, gravediggers, and bellringers, a protector against storms, plagues, and fever. According to Christian legend, she was from Nicomedia, secretly converted to Christianity, and was ultimately killed by her father in the 3rd century. In her honor, since medieval times, ceremonial processions and masses were held in the mining regions of central Slovakia. Miners paid her homage before descending into the mines and expressed gratitude upon their safe return, as their work was extremely unsafe.

In traditional rural culture, Barbara's Day was considered one of the witches' days (marked by bans on morning visits by women, spinning, sewing, and feather plucking). In some regions, masked figures known as Barbaras, dressed in white with covered or floured faces, visited homes, symbolically sweeping the house with a goose feather, a brush, or a broom. Elsewhere, Barbara's masks ran through the streets, whipping random passersby with twigs or smearing them with soot. Along the Váh River, where Barbara was also considered a protector of women's work and girls, young women playfully beat young men with wooden spoons at spinning gatherings and danced. Girls placed twigs from fruit trees in the water, so-called ‚barborky'—if they blossomed by Christmas Eve, it foretold love and marriage. In the mountainous Horehronie region, young boys went from house to house offering blessings while carrying steel objects, symbolizing protection and strength. A well-known weather proverb states: ‚Saint Barbara brings the sleigh to the yard.'

Mikuláš (Nicholas)

Nicholas (December 6) was a saint and the patron of fishermen, sailors, shepherds, goldsmiths, maidens, children, students, and merchants. He was a bishop in Myra (Asia Minor) in the 4th century.

In traditional culture, this day was one of the witches' days. The Nicholas masks, which penetrated the countryside from urban areas at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and replaced the older forms of masks, are still typical today. In some places in the early 20th century, a group of three masks (a goat, a man wrapped in straw, and a man carrying a female mannequin on his back) visited homes; elsewhere it was a group of young men dressed in bishop's robes, or just a mask made of an upturned fur coat with a mask on his face, leading the devil on a chain. In the southern Slovak cross-border region of Hont (with Hungary), masks of a householder and a bear went to the yarns, where the maidens were given sweets in return for humorous prayers to Nicholas. In the mountainous northern region of Orava, Nicholas walked accompanied by a straw mask and several devils. Originally an urban pattern of gift-giving to children by Nicholas, it spread in Slovakia during the interwar period. The visit typically involved an entrance ritual with an introductory speech by Nicholas, testing children's knowledge of prayers, symbolic scolding if they failed, and rewarding them if they succeeded. In places where visits did not occur or had disappeared, children received small gifts (sweets, a coin, or a small toy) left overnight in a prepared and polished shoe or boot placed in the window—a tradition still practiced today. In the 1980s, masked Nicholas processions were revived in cities and villages as an entertaining and slightly fear-inducing event for children. The tradition of children reciting themed poems to Nicholas in exchange for gifts remains widely practiced among Slovaks, both in Slovakia and abroad. On this day, marriage predictions were also performed in eastern Slovakia, such as throwing corn into windows or calling into wells. Pots filled with ashes were thrown at doors to protect the household, while those filled with stones were used to frighten and expel evil forces through noise. Weather-related proverbs for Nicholas predict the harvest: ‚If it snows on

St. Nicholas, the year will be blessed.‘ People avoided going into the forest on this day, as it was believed that misfortune could befall them there. A common superstition held that no old woman should be allowed into the house, as she might be a witch who would bring misfortune—both literal and symbolic—by causing things in the home to break.

Lucia

Lucia (December 13) was a saint and martyr who lived in the 3rd century in Syracuse, Sicily. According to legend, she was deeply devout and virtuous. A young man was enchanted by her beautiful eyes, so to prevent him from falling into temptation, she plucked them out and sent them to him on a plate.

In older beliefs, Lucia was the protector of spinning and spinning gatherings, which is why spinning and sewing were forbidden on this day. Before the adoption of the Gregorian calendar in 1582, this day was the shortest of the year. According to superstitions, this was the peak of evil forces residing in the dark. December 13 was considered the most significant witches' day, and Lucia was the greatest witch. No strange woman was allowed to enter the yard first that day. Therefore, early in the morning, groups of young boys were sent to households with a chain or another iron object to ‚steel‘ the household: to offer wishes for abundance, protection, and prosperity.

Nothing could be borrowed or returned on Lucia's Day. Any attempt to take something from another house (especially fire) was seen as suspicious. No stranger should approach the oven. If the prohibition on spinning and sewing was broken, a witch could steal the spindle, the spinner would suffer from headaches all year, hens would stop laying eggs, livestock would become lame, and the flax harvest would fail. Anyone wearing a garment with thread spun on this day would be bitten by a snake. To ensure good egg-laying in the spring, the housewife had to pluck feathers early in the morning and drive the hens down from their roosts with a wooden spoon.

It was believed that on this night, witches gathered at midnight under bridges, waiting for passersby and churning butter from stolen milk. Young men, especially village shepherds, drove them away by whistling, blowing horns, ringing bells, cracking whips, and shouting in the village and at crossroads outside the village. Until the early 20th century, people would mark doors and walls of homes and farm buildings with tar or later with garlic, drawing ‚Lucia's crosses.‘ Garlic was also given to livestock with bread.

Lucia processions

In western and central Slovakia, evening processions of masked figures called ‚Luciek‘ were common. Women dressed in white robes or sheets, their faces covered in flour, entered homes in pairs, threes, or fours, sweeping the walls and corners with a goose wing or a broom, usually in silence. On the table, there was garlic, water, and bread. In some areas, they put garlic in family members‘ mouths, swept the corners, and chanted: ‚Let all misery leave you, let all poverty go away, away, away!‘ These Lucias were seen as harmful beings but had the power to drive out other evil forces from the house—if they were not disturbed and were offered hospitality. Over time, the ritual became more of a youth tradition, replacing its magical function with entertainment.

The connection between Lucia's Day and the winter solstice is evident in rituals, divinations, and predictions concerning the harvest, weather, and personal life performed between December 13 and 24. Lucia processions and marriage divinations (such as

cooking dumplings or pouring molten lead into water) are still practiced today as entertainment in girls‘ groups, such as in student dormitories.

Overall, rules and prohibitions applied throughout the entire witches’ days period. Washing, especially with a beater, was forbidden, as it was believed that hail would destroy the crops. People were not supposed to harness horses or take them outside, nor were they allowed to muck out manure. Nothing should be broken or damaged, especially iron objects. Eating legumes was believed to cause ulcers and sores. Poultry had to be fed in one place so that the household would stay united. A basket woven during this time would ensure good egg-laying and a whip made in this period would make horses obedient.

The weather on each of the witches’ days supposedly predicted the weather for each month of the coming year. If salt placed in a walnut shell on one of these days became moist or stayed dry, this would indicate a rainy or dry month in the following year. The number of buds that sprouted on fruit tree branches placed in water during this time was believed to predict the next year’s fruit harvest.

Those who wanted to identify the village witches had to drive a nail into a tree each day from Lucia’s Day onward, collect wood chips, braid a whip, make a wooden stool, scrape a door handle, and so on. On Christmas Eve at midnight mass, they would see witches behind the altar, at crossroads, or in places where they had burned the wood chips. Alternatively, they could recognize them by their scratched faces. To avoid being torn apart by them, the person had to carry poppy seeds (used in Christmas pastries), a hazel twig, Epiphany chalk, or holy water.

A girl who took a bite from an apple each day during this period would supposedly marry a man whose name matched the first man who spoke to her on her way home from Christmas Eve mass. If she wrapped the rest of the apple in a pair of men’s trousers and placed it under her pillow, her future husband would appear in her dream. She could also write different men’s names on ten slips of paper, add an eleventh slip with ‚old maid‘ and a twelfth with ‚death‘, then destroy one each day without looking. The last remaining slip revealed her fate.

Thomas (Thomas)

Thomas (December 21) was an apostle, saint, and patron of carters, masons, and foresters, one of the first disciples of Christ. He was called Doubting Thomas because he did not believe in Christ‘s resurrection until he saw it with his own eyes.

In traditional Slovak culture, his day was considered a holiday for forests, and there was a ban on going into the woods (‚On Thomas, stay at home‘). This day was suitable for pig slaughtering because it was believed that the meat would last longer. As the shortest day of the year, it was associated with the concept of the magic of beginnings. The first visitor of the day was used to predict the future. The first person to enter a household and offer well-wishes—called ‚polazovanie‘—was treated with hospitality. If the family prospered that year, they considered him a good ‚polazník‘, but if not, he was seen as a bad omen.

In the morning, boys would go from house to house bringing ‚polazníky‘—sprigs of evergreen with oat stalks from the harvest wreath (a wreath woven after the summer harvest from the most beautiful grain stalks), tied with a ribbon. They recited a verse: ‚I bring you the polazníky, joyful tidings of Christ the Lord.‘ Neighbors and relatives would send young boys, or generally healthy

children, to polazovať early in the morning so that the family they visited would remain healthy throughout the year. On Thomas, the house had to be cleaned and freshly whitewashed (with lime) to prevent diseases from entering during the year. In some places, shepherds secretly delivered Christmas trees, revealing themselves only on Christmas Eve when they visited homes to offer blessings and scattered a handful of oats on the floor. In return, they received money.

There were also prohibitions: women were not allowed to visit homes or work, no one was allowed to walk around the village in ragged clothes or wear a fur coat inside, and nothing was to be lent out, as it was believed to bring poverty. In some places, people also went ‚s oceľou' (with steel), though this practice was less common.

Christmas Eve

Christmas Eve (December 24)—also called ‚Vilija', ‚Dohviezdny deň', ‚Pôstny deň', or ‚Kračun'—is the central day of Christmas.

Christmas

The Christmas cycle includes Christmas Eve (December 24), Christmas Day (December 25), St. Stephen's Day (December 26), and the Feast of St. John the Evangelist (December 27). Slovak Christmas is primarily a Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Christ. The Church overlaid the original Slavic winter solstice celebrations with Christmas. December 25 was originally celebrated as the day of the rebirth of the Sun but was established by the Christian Church in the 4th century as the day of Christ's birth. Following the ancient Roman tradition, Christmas begins on the eve of the birth, during the vigil, and lasts until December 27. In the Western (Roman) Christian calendar, the Christmas season extends from December 24 to January 6.

In traditional Slovak culture, Christmas and New Year customs merged. The older layer of traditions involved magical acts and prohibitions aimed at ensuring prosperity, influencing nature, health, and life positively, as well as fortune-telling about harvests, marriages, births, and deaths. This was the basis for processions with masks, dances, carols, and blessings. Rituals included whipping with twigs, washing in running water and fasting. Greenery, especially the Christmas tree, played an important role, gradually developing into a ritual of gift-giving. Christmas plays were inspired by Christian legends.

Christmas Eve was a day dedicated to ensuring success in the coming year by concentrating on all essential elements of a prosperous and happy life. For Christians, it was a day of fasting before the birth of Jesus Christ.

The magic of the beginning

Many customs of Christmas Eve focused on the magic of beginnings or the first day: a person's mood and behavior on this day were believed to determine their fate for the rest of the year. If children were disobedient and punished, they would remain so throughout the next period. Men had to prepare new baking tools and tend to the livestock before sunrise. Cattle were believed to prosper if driven with a whip made on this day. The stable was lined with fresh straw to ensure the livestock had enough feed throughout the year, stayed healthy, and was protected from lightning. The first piece of Christmas bread had special power—the housewife gave it to the master of the house, who had to eat it in the stable to ensure the animals stayed well-fed all year. Anyone

who managed to grab this piece could graze cattle on someone else‘s land without fear of being stolen. The eldest unmarried daughter tried to snatch the first pancake from the master’s spoon. If she succeeded, she placed it on the outer corner of the house. If it was gone by morning, she would marry within the year.

Lent

Christian churches mandated fasting on this day. According to folk belief, children who fasted would see a golden pig, carriage, or horse on the wall or roof on Christmas Eve, and girls would find good husbands. Ritual feasting was also a part of the celebration.

Christmas tree

The cleaned home was decorated with greenery. A fir tree was hung from the ceiling beam above the table, adorned with nuts, apples, and homemade ‚jezule‘ (straw ornaments). During the first half of the 20th century, the Christmas tree (fir, spruce, or pine) was placed in a stand on a chair or the floor. By the second half of the 20th century, decorations included homemade ‚salonky‘ and ‚kolekcie‘ (chocolate sweets), with straw ornaments replaced by store-bought baubles. Traditional candle lighting was gradually replaced by electric lights.

The pre-Christian name for Christmas Eve - ‚Kračun‘ relates to the increasing daylight following the winter solstice. Sneezing on an empty stomach in the morning was believed to ensure a long life. As on other significant days, a woman‘s first visit to a household was considered unlucky. The direction from which the first visitor came, whether from the lower or upper end of the village, was believed to predict whether the household’s wealth would decrease or increase. Borrowed items had to be returned before this day, and nothing should be lent out to avoid financial loss. Broken dishes foretold misfortune or a death in the family. Clothes were not to be left outside overnight, as this could mean that animal hides would be hung out during the year. Women had to finish baking cakes and cooking Christmas meals by noon. Among Rusyns in eastern Slovakia, cooking was done over a ‚living fire‘ ritualistically ignited using flint and steel until the mid-20th century. Many activities were accompanied by commands, prohibitions, and word magic. For example, when placing Christmas bread in the oven, the housewife would jump and say: ‚Hokres, pokres, big cakes!‘. In central Slovakia, people brought a mistletoe-covered branch from the forest and buried it under the stable threshold to protect the cattle from witches. Pitchforks had to be hidden to prevent cows from harming each other. The farmer locked the sheep to ensure none were lost while grazing.

When kneading dough, the housewife wiped her hands on fruit trees to ensure a good harvest and threw some to the hens to encourage egg-laying. If the dough rose well, it meant the household‘s wealth would grow.

One of the Christmas cakes, ‚štedrák‘, contained baked parsley and garlic and was meant for the cattle, with pieces also thrown into the well and fire. Before Christmas dinner, the animals were fed better than usual, and great care was taken in setting the festive table and the ritual process of the meal. The entire day was spent preparing for the Christmas feast.

Christmas Eve

Christmas Eve (‚Badňak', ‚Dohviezdny večer', ‚Kračun', ‚Posviat hvizdy', ‚Pôstny večer', ‚Svätý večer') began with the appearance of the first star, announced throughout the village by gunfire or the ringing of bells and the lighting of a candle on the table. The room's light could not be turned on before everything was ready. A large iron object (axe, plow-piece) was placed under the table. Whoever stepped on it during dinner would be healthy all year. The table legs were wrapped with a chain to keep the family united. A container was placed on the table with as many spoons of water as there were people present. After dinner, the water was measured again, and if there were fewer spoons, it meant someone would die within the year. A layer of straw was placed on the table and covered with a white tablecloth, with two loaves of bread on top, one of which had to remain whole throughout the holidays. The second one was eaten by tearing off pieces, not cutting them, as a knife was not supposed to be on the table.

Christmas dinner

The head of the household sat at the head of the table. Christmas dinner began with his prayer, a wish for the family, and gratitude to God. The housewife made a cross on her daughters' foreheads with her thumb dipped in honey so that everyone would like them. Traditional Christmas dishes were consumed, and magical rituals were performed. Since it was a fasting period, they ate garlic, wafers, honey, nuts, boiled broad beans or peas, and boiled or dried fruit, the main dish was cabbage soup with mushrooms and sweet dumplings with poppy seeds and honey. Baked goods included potato flatbread, fritters, poppy seed rolls, and walnut rolls. They drank alcohol. The table was not cleared after dinner.

The future harvest was predicted by throwing cooked peas against the wall, the number of peas that stuck indicated the number of piles of rye or oats for the coming year. When they started eating the peas, they threw a handful into the corners of the room for the deceased. Health predictions were made using the candle flame on the table: whoever the flame leaned towards was expected to die within the year. Apple slices and cracked walnuts were also used, if their cores were healthy, it meant good health. The number of sweet dumplings that fell to the ground during dinner indicated how many livestock animals would perish.

On Christmas Eve, young women predicted marriage by shaking thatched roofs: the type of grain that fell determined whether they would marry a rich (wheat) or poor (oats) man. The weather for the coming year was foretold using twelve salted onion layers (the so-called ‚onion calendar').

The Christian significance of the holiday was expressed through the singing of the Christmas carols after dinner, either at home with family or in groups under the windows of neighbors' houses.

Christmas Carol

A Christmas carol is a ritual song associated with the period from Advent (the four Sundays before Christmas Eve) to Epiphany (January 6). During house-to-house rounds, they were sung in groups by older boys, young people, and later mainly children from poor families. Priests or groups of adult women with good singing voices also participated in caroling. The dominant theme of these songs is the birth of baby Jesus in a stable, the angelic proclamation, and the shepherds who were the first to worship the Savior.

Many carols also include a request for a reward. Caroling often included a rhyme, a blessing, the performance of a Christmas play, or the giving of a gift.

Caroling

Caroling (walking with carols, Christmas caroling) has its roots in pre-Christian New Year rituals. Based on the magic of words (the belief that what is spoken will come true), the caroler reciting blessings and wishes was believed to bring happiness, prosperity, and success to the household in the coming year. Under Christian influence, these wishes became linked to the birth of Jesus and were reinforced with God's blessing. For their singing, blessings, performances, and dances, carolers were rewarded with cakes, drinks, and money.

It was believed that the positive qualities of carolers (youth, health, fertility), as well as objects (steel, rods, straw, nativity scenes), live animals (sheep, calf), or masked figures (a hen-woman, goat, or bull-like figure) had a favorable influence. For poorer social classes, rewarding carolers provided an opportunity for occasional earnings. Even village servants (such as the town shepherd, bellringer, teacher, and priest) participated in caroling, as it was a way for them to receive part of their agreed wages. Shepherds also brought green rods with which they gently whipped the household members, leaving the rods behind so they could be used in the spring to drive the cattle out to pasture for the first time. The first-morning caroler on St. Andrew's Day (November 30), St. Lucia´s Day (December 13), Christmas Eve (December 24), Christmas Day (December 25), and New Year's Day (January 1) was called a ‚polazník' (or ‚polazeň'). A welcome visitor was a boy or young man—youthful, healthy, and well-dressed. He had to come from the lower part of the village, against the stream, so that luck would not flow away like water. A female polazník was undesirable. Special types of caroling included the priest's carol on Epiphany (January 6) and the teacher's carol on St. Gregory's Day (February 3) or St. Blaise's Day (March 12).

From Christmas Eve until midnight, apart from singing carols, house-to-house performances of Christmas plays were also common in Slovak villages.

Folk Christmas theatre

Traditional folk Christmas theater consisted of house-to-house performances of certain Christmas plays by groups of local young men and boys. These groups visited individual households, performing a play lasting 5 to 10 minutes in each home, for which they were rewarded before moving on to the next house. In one evening, they visited dozens of homes, and if they didn't manage to cover all the expected households, they continued the next evening. Performances were held until the Epiphany (January 6). The plays were thematically based on biblical scripts from the 11th century, with the oldest records of performances in Slovakia dating back to the 15th century. They depicted the birth of Jesus, mixed with older winter solstice rituals (caroling, blessing, giving gifts), enriched with local folklore traditions (songs, dances).

In the Slovak environment it is mainly:

Bethlehem play

The Bethlehem play (‚Betlehemci', Walking with the Bethlehem, ‚Jasličkare', Walking with the Manger) is a play about the birth of baby Jesus. The key element is the cult of the manger. It is based on the Gospel of St. Luke, according to which an angel announced the birth of the Savior to shepherds watching over their flock at night. In Slovakia, the theme is enriched with elements of shepherd life, blending pastoral motifs with outlaw themes. The play consists of the introduction of shepherds (assistant shepherds - Fedor, Stacho, and old shepherds – ‚Bača' (chief shepherd), Old Kubo and Guba), the angel's announcement of the Lord's birth, the journey to Bethlehem, and the offering of gifts to baby Jesus. The play concludes with the singing of carols and the performance of the traditional ‚odzemok' dance (solo male dance). The number of characters varies between three and seven. In some villages, the tradition of walking with the Bethlehem is still alive today.

The Play of Saint Dorothy

The Play of St. Dorothy (‚Dorotáši', ‚Chodenie s Dorotou', ‚Chodenie po Dorote') is a folk martyr play about the pious virgin Dorothy, who was tortured and beheaded for her Christian faith. In the folk adaptation, a pagan king courts the Christian girl, but she chooses a heavenly marriage over a pagan one, and the executioner beheads her. A central feature is the legendary song ‚Bola svätá Dorota počestného života' (‚Saint Dorothy Lived a Virtuous Life'). The play could take a sung, spoken, or mixed form. The number of characters varied (from two to six), most commonly including Dorothy, the King, the Executioner, Theophilus, the Devil, and an Angel. It was performed from Christmas Eve until Candlemas (February 2), either in households or in the local inn or school for a wider audience. The tradition was most common in western and central Slovakia. Walking with Dorothy disappeared in Slovakia some time ago but remains alive among Catholic Slovaks in the mountainous Bihor region of Romania.

The Play of Adam and Eve

The Play of Adam and Eve (‚Chodenie s hadom' – walking with the snake) tells the story of original sin and the expulsion from paradise. It is based on the song ‚Milý Pánboh šiel do raja stvoriť Evu aj Adama' (‚Dear God Went to Eden to Create Eve and Adam'). The play was performed in households by young boys using a serpent prop, which they stretched and contracted during the song. At the end, they recited a blessing. The serpent had a crown with a burning candle on its head and either a real or wooden apple on its tongue. This play was primarily found in western and central Slovakia. In northeastern Slovakia, this song sometimes served as the opening part of the Bethlehem Play. The tradition of walking with the serpent disappeared in Slovakia in the first half of the 20th century.

Epiphany Play

The Epiphany Play (Walking with the Star, The Three Kings) is a folk play depicting the biblical Magi who came to worship baby Jesus. It was performed on Epiphany (January 6) in households by boys portraying Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, with a fourth

character as the Star-Bearer or an Angel. They sang, recited blessings, and thanked the household for their gifts. The songs overlapped with other Christmas and New Year's carols as well as religious hymns. Over time, the play was reduced to one or two songs. The most commonly known song is ‚My tria králi prišli sme/ideme k vám' (‚We Three Kings Have Come to You').

The Play of Joseph and Mary

The Play of Joseph and Mary (Walking with the Cradle, Walking with Baby Jesus) is based on the Annunciation, the biblical parents, and the Magi presenting gifts to Jesus. Characters included an Angel with a paper star on a pole, shepherds Kubo and Lauro, Joseph, and Mary, and the Magi—Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. Over time, the play was shortened to a brief scene in which Joseph, dressed as a carpenter with an ax or hatchet, Mary in a white cap with a shawl over her shoulders, and two festively dressed companions performed. It began with a blessing song with an Epiphany theme, during which Mary rocked a cradle. This was followed by a humorous dialogue between Mary and Joseph, which ended with Joseph overturning the cradle. The play was performed from Epiphany to Candlemas and was known in central Slovakia before disappearing in the early 20th century.

Other, less common plays performed mainly in urban settings included The Play of Herod, The Birth of Christ, and The Fall into Sin.

Midnight Mass

Midnight Mass was the culmination of the evening for Roman Catholics (the majority of Slovakia) and marked the end of the Lent. Groups of Bethlehem players, sometimes Dorothy performers or other play characters, would gather at the church, depending on the traditions of the village. Whether the play was performed inside the church depended on the priest and local customs—some considered it inappropriate, while others encouraged it. If the play was not performed in church, the masks of devils remained outside.

It was believed that at midnight, water in streams turned into wine, livestock spoke in human language, the heavens opened, and souls and angels descended to earth. Special cakes—'souls' were baked for them, and crumbs or loaves of bread were left on the table.

Upon returning from Mass, everyone washed in cold water to stay healthy for the entire year. To attract wealth, a coin was thrown into the water, or people washed with water used to cook Christmas dumplings. This water was poured onto the barn to ensure a good harvest. Leftover food from dinner was fed to the livestock, crumbs were saved and later mixed with seeds or used for healing, or they were thrown into the well to ensure good water throughout the year. People either slept or, in some regions, symbolically rolled on straw brought inside by the master of the house before dinner.

Christmas gift

A Christmas gift in today's understanding refers to material presents placed under the Christmas tree by Baby Jesus after dinner or during the night. In traditional Slovak culture, material gifts were unknown and only became widespread alongside the Christmas tree in the 20th century. Originally, gifts took an immaterial form, such as well-wishes, songs, or carols.

With the collectivization and nationalization of agriculture in Slovakia between 1947 and 1952, the traditional farming system disappeared, leading to the disappearance of almost all agrarian-prosperity rituals. However, Christmas customs that emphasize family unity, predict health, or involve small entertaining fortune-telling practices, well-wishing, carols, religious rituals, and occasionally Christmas plays have been preserved.

Christmas Day

Christmas Day (December 25) is a Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, also known as the First Christmas Holiday. It intertwines pre-Christian beliefs about the rebirth of the sun with the medieval church calendar, in which December 25 was also considered the New Year.

Magic of the Beginning

In traditional culture, various practices of the magic of the beginning were associated with Christmas Day. Water played a significant role. When water was fetched, either at midnight or early in the morning, the person bringing it greeted others with: ‚May God grant a good day, water before fire!'. This water was sprinkled around the house, and people washed themselves with it, placing an apple, a coin, or horseradish in it to ensure health, wealth, and strength. In every household, a new fire was kindled (symbolizing the rebirth of the sun), and fire was not to be lent out of the house. The head of the household had to go to the stable already well-fed in the morning so that the cattle would not suffer from hunger and thirst.

On this day, it was customary to prohibit women (as well as Roma and beggars) from entering someone else's house. There was a belief that the household should remain silent, with everyone staying home and avoiding visits, even to relatives. The only exception was the early morning well-wishing by young, healthy boys or adult men (known as ‚polazovanie'). No household chores were performed, and no cooking took place. Instead, the food prepared the previous day was eaten, mainly pork dishes. Until the mid-20th century, in the northern Kysuce region and eastern Slovakia, the head of the household would bring a young calf or sheep into the house as a ‚polazník'. He would lead the animal around the table, recite a Christmas well-wish, and feed it from the Christmas meal. It was believed that how quickly one returned home from church on Christmas Day determined how efficiently summer work would be completed. Those whose livestock had been dying were not supposed to eat meat that day. Sunny weather on Christmas Day was thought to predict fires. Fog in the valleys was seen as a sign of increased deaths among the elderly, fog at the mid-mountain level indicated more deaths among middle-aged people, and fog on mountain peaks foretold the deaths of children.

The theme of Christmas Day was frequently depicted in folk art. In paintings on glass and nativity scenes, Jesus was often shown in a manger with a donkey and an ox breathing on him.

Stephen's Day

Stephen's Day (December 26) honors St. Stephen, a Christian deacon in Jerusalem who was martyred by stoning in the year 33 and is also the patron saint of horses. The Church adopted agricultural customs, such as sprinkling grains and well-wishing, and interpreted them as a commemoration of the saint's stoning.

On this day, people and horses would wade through snow or water or pour cold water on each other to ensure health throughout the year. Straw from Christmas Eve decorations were used to make bindings, which were then wrapped around fruit trees. In the southern central Slovak region, godmothers brought baked goods (called ‚kačky') to their godchildren. Well-wishing and singing to people named Stephen were common in central Slovakia. In some places, the celebrant would be tied up until the well-wishers were given a treat. Young men would whip young women with birch twigs, sometimes dousing them with water, to ensure they remained healthy and beautiful. Elsewhere, masked young men (e.g., in a ‚tur' costume) went house to house well-wishing in traditions known as ‚walking for nuts', ‚with horseradish', or ‚po bursíkoch'. In return, they received food items such as bacon and eggs, which were used to organize a Stephen's feast. The Stephen's feast was widespread across Slovakia, as it was the first permitted dance event after the Advent ban on dancing. In western Slovakia, this day marked the end of the labor year, and agricultural workers received their wages and a large ceremonial cake ‚mrváň' decorated with an apple and rosemary, symbolizing the successful completion of their service and the opportunity to negotiate new employment. In the Záhorie region (on the Slovak-Moravian border), this led to a procession called ‚Chodzení s kouáčem' (Walking with the cake) - a wreath made of straw decorated with ribbons. In some places, young men elected a new leader for their bachelor's guild and admitted new members. Today, traditions such as family visits, well-wishing, and caroling under windows are still maintained. In some areas, shortened versions of Christmas plays are performed.

Day of the Holy Innocents

Day of the Holy Innocents (December 28) commemorates the children of Bethlehem, aged two years and younger, who were ordered to be killed by King Herod in hopes of eliminating the newborn Jesus. In folk tradition, this event was symbolically recalled through the whipping of young boys. According to folk explanations, this act represented the suffering of the children of Bethlehem. Church records from the 16th century show that the Church not only accepted this whipping custom but also blessed the twigs used. Christmastime whipping of girls and young women by boys and young men (known as ‚mládenkovanie') was common in central and, to some extent, western Slovakia until the mid-20th century. In some places, a custom called ‚Walking with Horseradish' was practiced, where a birch twig with horseradish attached to the end was brought into girls' homes. The young men would say: ‚We have brought you horseradish so that you may be healthy all year.' In return, they received food or, later, money. Birch twigs were also distributed by village criers.

Around this day, villagers would often perform the Christmas play ‚About Herod'.

About Herod

The play About Herod was performed either with live actors or puppets. It depicted themes of guilt and punishment. In puppet versions from the northern Zamagurie region, known as ‚Džafkuline', characters included an Angel, shepherds Fedor, Stacho, Junák, and Kubo, the Three Kings, Herod, and Death. In comedic endings, additional characters such as a Housewife, a Jew, a Shepherd, and in some variations, a Roma character, Jacek, and a dog appeared. In live-action versions, the play focused on King Herod, a Jewish rabbi, and a soldier, representing the biblical ruler, high priests, and executioners. Other versions combined live actors and puppets, where Herod, two Marshals, a Jew, and a Girl were played by actors.

In some areas, it was forbidden to sweep the corners of a room on this day to avoid sweeping away family spirits, ancestral souls believed to dwell in the home during the Christmas holidays. The Day of the Holy Innocents was also associated with weather and prosperity-related proverbs, such as ‚If there are many stars in the sky, there will be many chickens' and ‚If it rains all day, the year will be dry'. Predictions included ‚If it rains in the morning, children will die; if it rains in the afternoon, adults will die'.

Silvester

Silvester (December 31) was a saint and a Roman pope in the 4th century.

In traditional culture (such as Old Year's Day or Granny's Day), it was not given special significance. Festive expressions included making noise, young people having fun at spinning gatherings, and adults celebrating in taverns, along with mutual visits and well-wishing. However, the main focus was on ensuring good poultry breeding. Based on the principle of sympathetic magic, men performed rituals by sitting on a straw while giving wishes, reciting: ‚Hen with eggs, me with eggs, let it be like this all year.' On this day, straw-costumed figures called ‚kurine baby' (hen girls) - two men dressed as women - went from house to house. One wore a straw wreath and a bell, while the other wore a fur coat with a straw skirt tied with a rope. Sometimes they were accompanied by a musician. Kurine baby danced with the housewife, who would pull straw from their costume and place it under the hens' nests to ensure good egg-laying. In other regions, young men, led by a bachelor's mayor, visited girls' homes to ‚babenovat'' - offering well-wishes, dancing, and singing. In some areas, young men sang at midnight from the church tower, while children sang outside windows in the evening. Today, New Year's Eve is typically celebrated among friends, at parties, or in public squares. It includes collective well-wishing after midnight, loud celebrations, and expressions of uninhibited joy.

New Year's Day

New Year's Day (January 1) marks the first day of the calendar year. From a traditional customs perspective, it does not introduce new elements. Traditions related to it are based on the magic of beginnings. People's behavior, animals' actions, and the weather on this day were seen as omens for the coming year. Even the first visitor of the year could influence the future, so it was important that it was not a woman, a sick person, or an elderly individual. People were advised to avoid anger, crying, arguments, or laziness on New Year's Day. Nothing should be damaged, broken, or taken out of the house. The housewife had to keep money with her. Great care was given to cleanliness, houses, people, and animals had to be tidy, and household items organized. Nothing should be missing or borrowed, as this would symbolize shortages throughout the year. People were encouraged to wake up early, be in a good mood, and remain fresh and peaceful. Food played a significant role: some regions still follow the custom of avoiding poultry or rabbit meat to prevent luck and wealth from ‚flying away' or ‚running off'.. The pork was favored as a symbol of abundance, lentils symbolized wealth, and pasta and cakes were desirable foods. Everyone was supposed to eat well to ensure they would not go hungry throughout the year.

New Year's wishes followed the same structure as Christmas wishes, differing only in their opening line. The same applied to New Year's songs, which were variations of Christmas carols and relatively few in number. In some places, well-wishers scattered grain

at the entrance to bring prosperity. Roma people were considered lucky visitors on this day. People believed that meeting a Roma person first thing in the morning would bring good fortune. For young women, encountering either a Roma man or a Jewish man was seen as a sign of imminent marriage (‚someone will buy her').

Priestly New Year's caroling was common, involving the priest, cantor, teacher, altar boys, or sacristan. They would bless the house and write G + M + B along with the year above the door in chalk. In return, they received food, goods, or money. However, after their departure, the household would quickly erase the letters to encourage hens to start laying eggs soon. The housewife would sit where the priest had sat to ensure the hens brooded well. If a young woman or widow sat in that spot, it was believed she would soon marry.

Taking out the trash symbolized losing wealth or even death in the family. Sewing, washing, or hanging clothes was forbidden. Neglecting personal hygiene was believed to cause crop disease or illness. Washing in cold, clean water with a coin or an apple added to it was practiced for health, wealth, and beauty. The water was then poured onto fruit trees.

Nowadays, New Year's well-wishing continues through personal visits, greeting cards, or text messages.

Epiphany (Three Kings' Day)

Epiphany or Three Kings' Day (January 6) is a Christian holiday celebrating the revelation of Christ and the visit of the wise men from the East to Bethlehem, where they worshipped the newborn Jesus and presented him with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The star guided the kings. The Bible does not specify their number or names, but in the 14th century, they were identified as Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. This marks the final liturgical day of the Christmas cycle.

In traditional culture, motifs related to the Three Kings appear in nativity scenes, Christmas plays, and house-to-house processions. Until the mid-20th century, items blessed on this day (especially water, chalk, candles, salt, and garlic) were used for magical protection against demons, natural disasters, illnesses, and death, as well as during sowing. On this day, the farmer would draw three crosses on each door with garlic and holy water to keep witches away. Holy water was sprinkled around the house and stables to protect them from Perun (the Slavic god of thunder and lightning). In the afternoon, people rode sleighs through the village to ensure long flax and hemp fibers.

Priestly caroling continues in many villages. The priest visits houses, blesses homes, sprinkles them with holy water, burns incense, and marks the door with the initials G + M + B and the year. In the past, the priest was accompanied by a teacher, sacristan, singers, or altar boys.

In this period, the following plays used to be performed:

Three Kings Play

The Three Kings Game (Walking with the Star, Three Kings) is a folk game depicting the biblical wise men going to worship Jesus. It was performed in various forms around the house by boys who portrayed Gaspar, Melichar, and Balthazar, the fourth being the

Star-Bearer, or Angel. They sang to the household, offered good wishes, and thanked them for their gifts. The songs intertwined with other Christmas and New Year carols as well as spiritual hymns. Over time, the play was reduced to one or two songs. The most well-known song is ‚We Three Kings Have Come to You.'

The Play of Joseph and Mary

The Play of Joseph and Mary (Walking with the Cradle, Baby Jesus) is based on the Annunciation, the biblical parents, and the gift-giving of the wise men to Jesus. The characters included an Angel with a paper star on a pole, shepherds Kubo and Lauro, Joseph and Mary, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. Over time, the play was reduced to a short scene featuring Joseph dressed as a carpenter with an axe or hatchet, Mary in a white bonnet with a shawl over her shoulders, and two festively dressed companions. It began with a carol featuring the theme of the Three Kings, during which Mary rocked a cradle. A humorous dialogue between Mary and Joseph followed, ending with Joseph overturning the cradle. This play was performed from Epiphany until Candlemas. It was known in central Slovakia and disappeared in the early 20th century.

Epiphany (The Three Kings' Day) was also associated with weather-related proverbs (‚On Three Kings Day, winter remains') and harvest predictions (‚If Epiphany is clear, the wheat will thrive,' ‚If there are many stars, there will be many potatoes'). On this day, dumplings were cooked—the longer they were, the larger the grain stalks were expected to be.

‚Hromnice'

‚Hromnice' (Candlemas, February 2) is a Christian holiday commemorating the Presentation of the Lord. This day marks the end of the Christmas season. During the ritual, the figures of the old man Simeon and the prophetess Anna appeared, proclaiming Jesus as the ‚light to enlighten the Gentiles.' In 494, this day was established as a holiday, during which people walked around the church with burning candles. The use of these candles as protection against lightning and thunderstorms gave rise to the name Candlemas.

In traditional Slovak culture, this day was associated with prohibitions on sewing and working in the forest. To ensure a good flax and hemp harvest, housewives would slide on ice, go sledding, and cook long noodles. Candlemas sledding was also popular in towns. From a weather and harvest prediction perspective, Candlemas was considered the most significant day of the year. In churches, each family had salt, grain, and a candle blessed, which was then lit during storms as protection against lightning.

Blažej (Blaise)

Blaise (February 3) was a saint and martyr considered a healer and protector of wild animals. According to one legend, as a bishop of Sebaste in Armenia, he hid in a cave during Christian persecutions but was eventually discovered and tortured (torn with iron hooks and beheaded). Another legend credits him with saving a child from choking on a fishbone. As a result, on this day, blessed burning candles are placed on believers' throats as protection against throat ailments.

On Blaise's Day, similar to Gregory's Day (March 12) in other places, a tradition called ‚blažejácie' was practiced from the Middle Ages until the late 19th century. Teachers and students (later only students) visited homes to collect food supplies for the teacher, as

agreed with parents. The collected goods (bacon, smoked meat, flour, legumes) and sometimes money were placed in a cloth tied to a stick. Students recited verses or sang songs, often humorous, encouraging homeowners to give to the students and teacher (rector). In the end, they wished the household health and happiness. Although this tradition disappeared in the mid-20th century, its songs survived in children‘s folklore until the end of the 20th century.

Gregor (Gregory)

Gregory (March 12) was a saint and pope known as Gregory I the Great. He lived in the 6th century and was responsible for establishing the law of celibacy and reviving the so-called ‚Gregorian chant‘.

On Gregory‘s Day, traditional ‚gregorácie‘ processions took place until the first half of the 20th century. These were similar to Blaise‘s Day (February 3), during which students collected food supplies for the local teacher. The gregorácie likely originated from ancient Roman festive processions of teachers and students in honor of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, celebrated from March 9 to 13. From the 9th century, these processions were dedicated to Saint Gregory I the Great. In Slovakia, groups of students, sometimes carrying wooden swords with ribbons, visited homes collecting mainly eggs. They recited verses and sang songs urging parents to send their children to school. Although the procession tradition faded, the songs and well-wishes remained part of children‘s folklore.

Carnival

Carnival is a movable secular festival occurring between Epiphany (the end of Christmas as a spiritual season) and Ash Wednesday (40 days before Easter, marking the beginning of Lent). During this period, people gathered for communal spinning, feasts, butchering, and weddings, accompanied by games, masked parades, and music in the village. These customs carry remnants of ancient Slavic pre-spring agricultural rituals as well as European carnival traditions. Magical prosperity rituals were meant to ensure a good harvest, particularly of flax, hemp, and potatoes. Women gathered in houses where they had spun during winter, drinking wine or spirits ‚for tall flax.‘ To encourage flax growth, they pulled the hair of the woman with the longest hair, jumped from benches, and danced a special dance. In the final days of the carnival season, a carnival parade took place throughout the village.

Carnival parade

The carnival parade (‚posledný fašank‘, ‚bláznivé dni‘, ‚šalone dni‘, ‚ostatky‘, ‚mjesopust‘, ‚mjasnica‘) consisted of young men visiting homes. The hosts offered drinks and traditional pastries to the carnival participants. In return for wishing them a good harvest, health, and happiness, they received eggs and money in a basket, as well as bacon and sausages skewered on a spit. The collected ingredients were typically used to prepare a feast for the participants of the evening dance party.

These parades were strictly regulated by local traditions. Groups of people, in folk costumes, costumes, or masks, paraded through the village, offering customary well-wishes and performing specific carnival dances.

Carnival dances included:

- Harvest dances (‚for hemp' or ‚for flax') with high jumps and lifting dancers (western and central Slovakia),
- ‚Log dance' – with a wooden log tied to the leg or neck of the female dancer while performing a regular couple dance (western Slovakia),
- ‚Spit dance' – young men twirling and jumping around a spit stuck into the ceiling or holding spits, fencing with them, and striking the ground (southern central Slovakia),
- Chain-stick dances (‚under sticks,' ‚under sabers'),
- Hoop dance (‚boxer´s dance'),
- Recruit the dance of Turks in the form of a dance dialogue between a commander and the Turks (western Slovakia),
- Masked dances – spontaneous dance improvisations or adaptations of couple dances,
- Thematic and mimic dances (‚drake dance,' ‚bandit dance,' ‚scarf dance,' ‚shovel dance'),
- Everyday couple dances – carnival-goers dancing with women in visited homes and on the streets (whirls, polkas, waltzes).

Carnival masks

A distinctive feature of the carnival season is masks. The cultic carnival mask is the ‚turoň' (‚turôň', ‚chriapa'), an animal mask rarely used outside of this period. The name derives from „tur" (aurochs), an animal extinct in Slovakia since the 17th century, symbolizing strength and fertility. The mask represents an ox head mounted on a pole, with a movable jaw (chriapa) and bells on its horns. The man playing the turoň is covered with burlap or an inverted fur coat. Sometimes, the character was portrayed by a pair of people, with one holding the head and the other resting their hands on the first person's shoulders, covering themselves to depict the animal's body. The turoň was accompanied by a group of carnival-goers, called „turôni," usually consisting of masks such as a shooter, gamekeeper, hunter, butcher (castrator), beggar, chimney sweep, prostitute, an old woman with a bastard child (a doll representing a child). They were accompanied by musicians. The turoň would roll around in the manure heap of each yard, where he was ceremonially ‚killed' and his throat slit with a wooden saber (knife), imbuing the manure with magical fertility power (‚Where the turoň rolls, the crops will thrive'). A stick was then driven into the manure heap, which was later used to whip the livestock when they were first let out to pasture. However, the turoň was not allowed to pass through the fields, as it would destroy the crops. Other animal masks included goat, bear, and horse. The devil mask combined both animal and human features. Human masks included an old man, an old woman, a woman carrying a man in a basket on her back, a man dressed as a woman, a woman dressed as a man, pregnant women, loose women, a wedding couple, Bacchus (a stout gentleman with a large belly), a straw man, groups of ‚klátnici' (people playing logs as if they were horses), bellmen, and wedding guests. Carnival parades also commonly featured masks depicting and mocking respected professions in rural Slovak communities, such as a judge, notary, priest, Jewish merchant, forester, soldier, butcher, and blacksmith, as well as unusual characters like a prostitute, beggar, gypsy fortune teller, or „Cheap Joe." Exaggerated depictions of foreign ethnicities and races, such as a Turk, Arab, Indian, or black man, were also part of the festivities.

The purpose of these masks was to bring prosperity, ensure good harvests, and promote fertility among livestock and people. Magical rituals were performed, such as jumping, rolling, and making erotic gestures, or their magical effect was achieved through

contact (dancing with them or giving them gifts). The charm of the carnival parade for participants lay in the fact that the masks could engage in behavior normally forbidden or unethical, but during the carnival season, such actions were not only allowed but encouraged and celebrated. Carnival parades were customary even in places where other processions did not take place.

For food during casual carnival visits among neighbors and friends, traditional fried pastries such as doughnuts, ‚fánky', ‚pampúchy', ‚kreple', and ‚grapne' were prepared. The carnival period ended with a dance party on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, marking the beginning of Lent. The highlight of the festivities was the symbolic midnight burial of the bass (double bass), a ritualistic and humorous conclusion to the entertainment season, and the beginning of Lent.

In towns, carnival celebrations took on a specific form, with processions organized by craft guilds. These included competitive games, ceremonial acceptance of apprentices as journeymen, and the election of new guild masters. After the dissolution of the guilds (1872), masquerade balls and dances became more common. Today, carnival traditions persist in a reduced form (feasting, dancing, masquerade balls, hospitality) across much of Slovakia, with masked processions still held in many villages.

‚Popolcová streda'

Ash Wednesday (‚Popolec', ‚Škaredá streda', ‚Krivá streda') marks the beginning of Lent. It is a movable feast, occurring forty days before Easter, which is determined annually based on the lunar calendar. The church established it in the late 7th century as a day of fasting and penance. The day is symbolized by the cross that the priest makes on the foreheads of believers with ash during the church service, reciting the formula: ‚Repent and believe in the Gospel', or ‚Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.'

In traditional Slovak culture, food, clothing, and rituals began to conform to fasting practices on this day. Early in the morning, all dishes were thoroughly washed to remove grease from carnival meals. Fasting primarily involved plant-based foods, such as various soups (sour milk, grain, cabbage, legume, garlic, mushroom, or fruit soups), vegetable and legume stews, and porridges. Lard was replaced with plant oils or melted butter, considered fasting-friendly. Flour-based foods, such as pasta, pancakes, and bread, were also consumed. Cold-blooded fish, as well as frogs and crayfish, were considered fasting-appropriate. Alcoholic beverages like spirits, wine, and beer were permitted, but milk was avoided. It was believed that those who ate meat on Ash Wednesday would suffer misfortunes with their livestock. Folklore also dictated that eating long noodles or dumplings would result in long wheat stalks, large dumplings would bring fat pigs, and millet would bring wealth. Women were forbidden to spin yarn, as flax and hemp would not grow, and thread spun on this day would bring bad luck to anyone wearing it. Horses were neither harnessed nor shod, as it was believed they would go lame. Eggs laid on this day were said to hatch deformed chicks.

Throughout Lent, particularly on Sundays, pasta dishes were commonly prepared. In towns, fish feasts were held. Exceptions to fasting were made for young children, who were still given milk and dairy products. By the 20th century, the 40-day pre-Easter fast was reduced to being observed only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. During Lent, clothing became simpler and more modest, in dark mourning colors. Dancing, feasting, and weddings were prohibited. Social restraint was expected, and cheerful or humorous songs were not publicly sung.

Passion Sunday

Passion Sunday is the Sunday two weeks before Easter Sunday. It is one of the two dates for the laying of the so-called ‚Morena' (Muriena, Death, ‚Marmuriena', ‚Hejhana', ‚Kyselica', ‚Kysel', ‚Baba'). In central and eastern Slovakia, the Morena was carried out of the village by older girls and maidens with singing, where it was thrown into the water, torn, burned, or stoned. They then returned to the village screaming. Morena symbolized winter and death. The girls made it as a female figurine from a straw-wrapped wooden cross, dressed in local clothing. By carrying and destroying the Morena, spring was to be magically summoned. In its original form, it was probably a human sacrifice to winter and spring waters. In some regions of Slovakia, one of the maidens (the queen) was then dressed in Morena's dress, and eggs, bacon, or other natural products were collected from houses for a feast with the young men. Elsewhere, men carried a male dummy (called a grandfather) around the village, often stopping and beating it with sticks. It is possible that in this case, too, it is a reinterpretation of the original ceremonial spring beating of the old men after a long winter.

The songs at the Morena are among the oldest preserved Slovak ceremonial songs. The first written records of the Morena in Slovakia date back to the 16th century, when adult inhabitants were supposedly the actors. From the 1930s onwards, the Morena began to disappear, but it was still quite widespread in the middle of the 20th century. It still occurs in some distinctive locations today. It is carried out by local interest associations or folklore groups.

Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday (‚Letečko') is the last Sunday before Easter. On this day, during Mass, the priest blessed the unfurling willow rods (‚baburence', ‚jabrátka', ‚cícky', ‚bahniatka', ‚maňas', ‚búziky', ‚barky') brought to the church by the faithful with prayers, incense, and holy water. The consecrated rods, which were then carried around the houses by smaller children or girls, were considered magical protective objects throughout Slovakia. They were placed in the sky or thrown into the fire during a storm as protection against lightning striking the house. They were also used in magical healing practices (e.g., for scalding sore throats, for scalding the sick) or for whipping cattle when they were first on the range to keep them healthy.

With the idea that everything opens up with the earth in the spring, the custom of bringing young children to church on this day so that they would start talking early was related. By the time the Passion was read in church on Palm Sunday, the seekers were supposed to have discovered the treasures buried in the earth. On this day, boiled pasta and legumes were most often eaten to ensure a bountiful harvest. Somewhere on this day, a dummy called the ‚Kyselicu', ‚Kyseľa', was made of straw and carried out of the village and drowned in the river, as was the Morena elsewhere. A widespread custom on this day was the so-called ‚Walking with the Letečko', ‚Walking with the Maypole'.

Walking with ‚Letečko'

Girls, other children, or young people visited households carrying a green blouse or a tree decorated with ribbons, straw chains, and blown eggs (letečko, summer, may, ‚hájik' (grove)) as a symbol of spring, awakening life, the summer brought, the counterpart of winter (Morena), for which they received money, eggs, bacon or other goods as a payment with material products. The maidens

and youth used them for a common feast. As part of the rounds, songs were sung under the windows, emphasizing the themes of bringing out winter and bringing in summer (for example, ‚We bring you May under the green grove', or ‚Dear Summer, dear, where' it's been so long?'). Nowadays, the bringing of summer has shifted to an entertaining position in the repertoire of children's folklore ensembles in particular.

Somewhere on this day, as a Lenten meal, they cooked long, shucked pasta, the consumption of which was supposed to ensure that the grain would grow long and large ears.

As these spring customs took place during the 40-day Lenten pre-Easter period, they were one of the few opportunities for youth to come together, sing together, and play spring games in nature.

Easter

Easter (Pascha) is a multi-day Christian holiday commemorating the events of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Since the 4th century, it has been a movable feast, determined by the date on which Easter Sunday falls, according to the lunar calendar the first Sunday after the first full moon, which occurs after the day of the vernal equinox. Along with Christmas, it is one of the most important holidays of the year. Easter week is the period of preparation for Easter Monday. Only Lenten dishes of fermented cabbage, fresh sorrel, spinach leaves, and various types of pasta were eaten in homes. Sowing vegetables, including pumpkins and cucumbers, was recommended during this week, as it was believed that just as church bells are tied, their fruits would also bind (form) well.

Many religious ceremonies, and traditional customs related to the arrival of spring and the new stage of the peasant year, were associated with the Easter holidays. They refer to pre-Christian rites, practices, and prohibitions.

They played an important role in:

Water - most often providing a new life, health, cleanliness, and beauty: from Maundy Thursday to Holy Saturday, it was customary to wash in streams and wells in the morning to cure or prevent skin diseases, to wade horses, or to comb hair under willows. Water-related customs culminated on Easter Monday in the form of watering.

Fire - provided protection and purification: on Holy Saturday, a new fire was built in homes, which was then used to prepare the Easter meal.

Greenery - symbolizes life: it is a part of Easter in the form of willow branches, which priests blessed on Palm Sunday, and Easter whip knitted from fresh willow twigs, which were used to transfer the power of nature to man during the whipping on Easter Monday.

Egg - symbolizes fertility and ensures the continuity of life: part of Easter is therefore eating eggs, cooking dishes with eggs, and gifting eggs. In superstition, Easter was associated with the activity of unclean forces, which is why in many areas of Slovakia eggs and food were brought to graves to honor dead ancestors.

Maundy Thursday

According to the Christian Easter liturgy, Maundy Thursday is the day of Christ's Last Supper with the apostles. In anticipation of the events of the following Good Friday, the day of Christ's crucifixion, church bells stopped ringing, and their ropes were tied.

In traditional customs in Slovakia, older traditions were also present, based on the belief in the need for magical protection of people and livestock against supernatural forces (such as making noise with rattles), which were thought to become active at the beginning of the spring season. Other superstitions and rituals were associated with the last ringing of the bells, for example:

- In the Nitra region, the housewife walked around the farm shaking a bunch of keys to drive away rodents.
- In the Bratislava region, the farmer walked around the field and drove away pests by banging flails on the ground.
- In northwestern Slovakia, people shook trees during the last ringing to ensure a good fruit harvest.
- children ran through the village with rattles to make noise.

On Maundy Thursday, strenuous work was to be avoided. The day was also associated with washing in fresh running water, believed to cleanse a person of eczema, ulcers, warts, scabies, freckles, and rashes. Maundy Thursday was the traditional time for the first release of cattle to pasture. Therefore, customs aimed at magically protecting livestock from evil forces and diseases and ensuring prosperity were widespread:

- Cattle crossed over glowing embers when leaving the stable or yard.
- Livestock were whipped with willow twigs blessed in church.
- Red ribbons were tied into horses' manes and on cows' horns to ward off the evil eye.
- The farmer smeared crosses with tar above the stable doors.

To ensure a good harvest, people prepared and consumed vegetable dishes, preferably green ones, as well as pasta. Soups and stews made from young spinach leaves, sorrel, and nettles were cooked to purify the blood. Young men went around houses and scattered ants in entryways or on doorsteps, as ants symbolized abundance and brought good fortune to the household.

Good Friday

Good Friday is a Christian holiday commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In traditional beliefs in Slovakia, this day was associated with a ban on disturbing the soil (such as plowing or planting) and with the idea of heightened pre-spring activity of malevolent forces, particularly harmful to livestock. On the night from Maundy Thursday to Good Friday, witches were believed to gather in certain places in the fields, dance, bathe in streams, and churn butter under bridges (to make cows stop producing milk). Early in the morning, they were said to perform magic, stealing manure from stables, taking cows' milk, or breaking branches off fruit trees. To prevent this, stable doorframes were smeared with garlic, and cattle were fumigated with blessed willow twigs. On this day, treasures were believed to open up.

Good Friday was also the traditional day for marking cattle, as it was believed they would feel less pain and their wounds would heal faster. The belief in quick wound healing also led to the practice of grafting trees on this day. Across Slovakia, various practices were performed to prevent damage caused by moles and rodents in fields or by insects and snakes in homes. For example, people

stuck poles into meadows that had previously held meat during smoking, believing this would repel moles. Morning bathing and washing were believed to cure old illnesses. Girls, in particular, bathed in a stream before sunrise to prevent ulcers, scabs, and skin diseases and to ensure beauty and health for the entire year. The time before sunrise was also used for tidying the house (removing trash to prevent insect infestations) and for love divinations. In some places, people brought eggs or other food to graves, linking this custom to ancient celebrations and ancestor worship.

Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday is a Christian holiday commemorating the resurrection of Christ, marked by evening ceremonies. Traditionally, this day was dedicated to cleaning, cooking, and baking ritual foods (especially smoked pork, sausages, and aspic). However, the food was not eaten until Easter Sunday. Fat from the ham was kept for treating wounds, greasing oxen's necks chafed by the yoke, or rubbing on feet to prevent cracking and protect against snake bites during fieldwork. People ate sour soup made from smoked meat broth thickened with eggs or cabbage soup with mushrooms, garlic, and roux. In Protestant villages, people ate meat in the evening. Eggs and egg dishes were the oldest Easter foods. At the beginning of the 20th century, under Christian influence, baking lamb-shaped bread became a new ritual element. In central and western Slovakia, people baked a so-called ‚lamb in a tin mold' using a mixture of rolls, eggs, and sausage. Sometimes, smoked meat and rice were added, and the mixture was baked into a dish called ‚stratené kurča' or ‚baba' (lost chicken or grandma). On this day they also baked a sweet yeast dough cake called ‚paska' (in the east of Slovakia), baba (in the north of Slovakia), ‚osúch', ‚mrváň', ‚calta' (in the south of Slovakia).

The original ritual of starting a new clean spring fire, the embers of which were used for magical acts, took the form of a candle lit with the old technique of using a ‚prachna' (a highly flammable substance). People carried the firebrands around their homes and stored them in attics for protection. Christianity replaced this fire ritual in the 8th century with the Easter blessing of fire by priests, during which remnants of oil from church lamps were burned, known as the burning of Judas.

The first sounding of the bells (after they were untied during the singing of the ‚Gloria') was associated with washing and bathing in streams and wells, going around dwellings with water to protect against fire, sweeping to protect against insects and rodents, shaking fruit trees to make them bear well, greasing plows so that weeds did not grow in the fields. In some places, householders rolled a white round cake across the field to ensure a good harvest. Holy Saturday was a happy day for sowing and planting. In some places, they used to plow during the forenoon.

Easter Sunday

Easter Sunday is the day of the Christian celebration of the resurrection of the crucified Christ. It was customary to bless food brought to church. The food was eaten together as ceremoniously as on Christmas Eve. The table was covered with a white tablecloth and the housewife prepared everything in advance so she would not have to get up during the meal. The first course was an egg, which the head of the household divided among all present. Then meat was eaten, or poultry instead of ham. It was necessary to eat a full meal to ensure satiety and plenty of food throughout the year. Leftover food was not discarded. Bones from the ham and

eggshells were placed in fields planted with winter crops to protect them from hail. Crumbs from the table were saved for healing purposes, mixed into seeds, or fed to hens to ensure good egg-laying. In some places, teenage girls were allowed to style their hair for the first time on this very day and put on a ‚parta' on their heads, like grown-up maidens, and wear it to church every Sunday until they were married. Women and maidens used to prepare decorated boiled eggs in the afternoon, called ‚kraslice', ‚písanky' (easter eggs), for the water pourers or whippers for the following day. In western Slovakia, young men and women knitted ‚korbáče' (easter whips) out of willow twigs.

Easter Monday

Easter Monday is the final day of the Easter holidays in Slovakia and is associated with the traditional customs of water pouring and whipping. Pouring water on girls was believed to bring health and beauty. Young boys, sometimes accompanied by older brothers or adult men, went to douse women in the neighborhood or among relatives. They poured water from a bucket or cup or sprinkled them with scented water or perfume. Young men visited homes with girls, sometimes accompanied by musicians or an accordion player. They either poured water from a bucket (‚oblievačka') or dunked the girl in a stream or well (‚kúpačka'). Pouring and dunking were common in central and eastern Slovakia, while in western Slovakia, whipping women with woven willow rods (‚šibačka') was the norm. In some places, both customs were performed.

Boys, young men, and adult men began these traditions at dawn. In some places, the young men started as early as Sunday afternoon, or from midnight after the Sunday dance. They started so early because watering or whipping was only done in the morning, or until the start of services. Boys were rewarded with an egg, cake, small money, and later sweets; adult men were given a drink and a treat; young men were rewarded with a treat, alcohol, and ‚kraslice' (decorated easter eggs) by the maidens. In some villages, the girls repeated the whipping and dressing of the young men the next day, taking advantage of chance encounters in the street. However, they did not receive any reward.

Throughout Slovakia, Easter concluded with festive dances (the first after the Lenten season), organized by adult youth on Monday or Tuesday evening.

Work customs

First spring plowing and sowing

The first spring plowing and sowing were accompanied by rituals to ensure fertility and protection against field damage:

- The farmer placed a fresh egg in the first furrow as a symbol of fertility, along with crops or crumbs saved from the Christmas Eve dinner and willow catkin branches blessed on Palm Sunday.
- Before sowing, the farmer sprinkled the seeds with holy water from the Feast of the Epiphany.
- He placed a heavy clod of soil on the seed sack so that the ears of grain would also be heavy.
- He attached a coin to the cloth from which the seeds were sown and later gave it to a beggar.

- The first handfuls of grain were thrown broadly and imprecisely to prevent birds from damaging the ripened crops.
- When taking the first handfuls of grain, they would say: ‚This for the birds, this for the beetles, this for the beggars, and this for me.'

First pasture release of cattle

The first release of cattle to pasture involved ritual acts to protect the animals from witches and ensure their health, strength, and fertility:

- The day before, the farmer drew water from the ford the cattle would cross and placed an egg in it. In the morning, he rubbed the cattle with this water and gave the egg to a beggar.
- The day before, he placed thorny twigs, a lock, a knife, a chain, and an egg under the stable threshold to prevent demons from entering.
- As the cattle crossed the stable threshold, he sprinkled them with holy water for protection against witches, whipped them with thistles to keep them strong and healthy, and rubbed an egg along their backs so they would be round and fertile. Only then did the herder drive them to the herd.
- The head herder lit two bonfires on either side of the road leading out of the village. Between them, he placed a chain, twigs from blessed willow catkin branches, a lock, and further away, glowing embers. He then led the cattle through them (fire and iron symbolized purification and strength, and the lock symbolized herd unity and protection against predators).
- At the sheepfold, before the arrival of the sheep, the chief shepherd wove two long thorny branches and laid them at the entrance to the enclosure. The sheep passed over them. He sprinkled the interior of the shepherd's hut with holy water. He carved a wooden trough and placed in its glowing embers, church incense, remnants of the Easter altar candle, and a piece of chalk blessed nine times. The assistant shepherds, who had driven the sheep from the village, were given twigs to whip the sheep as they entered the enclosure. The chief shepherd fumigated the sheep while praying, circled the enclosure three times, and then buried the trough in the ground. He hammered a wooden stake with thyme and other sacred herbs into the spot and moved it as the enclosure was relocated.
- Before the sheep arrived, the chief shepherd buried nine blind kittens at nine-meter intervals along the path leading to the sheepfold, believing this would blind any witches who came to harm the sheep (the numbers 3, 7, 9, and 12 were generally considered magical).

Poultry keeping

Keeping poultry was standard practice in every household.

- The housewife chose ‚lucky' days for setting eggs – Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, or Sunday. Friday was ‚unlucky,' while Monday and Wednesday were considered ‚empty.'
- Eggs set on ‚female' days (Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday) hatched hens, ducks, geese, and turkeys, while those set on ‚male' days (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday) hatched roosters, drakes, male geese, and tom turkeys.

- When setting a goose, oats were sprinkled in the nest to ensure many gooselings were hatched.
- If the first foal in the village was born in spring before the first goslings hatched, it was believed geese would die that year.
- To ensure hens laid well, the farmer's wife poured the water used to boil eggs onto the yard.
- If a young hen laid a small egg, she threw it over the fence to ensure future eggs would be larger.

‚Dožinky'

‚Dožinky' (The harvest festival) marked the end of the grain harvest, celebrating the crop and giving thanks to deities. It included an element of sacrifice.

- The last small sheaf or the finest stalks were left in the field, as they concentrated on the vegetative strength that was to remain in the soil.
- A wreath (called the harvest wreath) was woven from the stalks and hung on the corner table in the house, which had ritual significance until spring. Later, it crumbled into the seed grain.
- The completion of the harvest was celebrated with a feast, including hosting neighbors.

‚Oberačka'

‚Oberačka' (The grape harvest) was primarily observed in the vineyard regions of southern Slovakia. Before offering their thanks to Saint Urban, the patron saint of vineyards, or earlier deities, winemakers placed the most beautiful grape clusters before his statue.

Offering of first fruits

The offering of first fruits was based on the belief that the rightful owner should not consume them.

- If a farmer kept the calf from a first-time calving cow, he would not have good cows, so he had to sell or gift it.
- The first butter from a cow should be given to beggars to ensure good milk production.
- The first egg from a young hen should not be consumed.
- Before drinking the first glass of wine from a new harvest, the winemaker had to pour some onto the ground.
- A beggar was given alms before leaving for the market with homegrown produce.

The magic of similarity:

- Whoever wants to have bees, shall smear the hive entrance with bear fat.
- A dog given honey would not attack anyone.
- A guard dog became fiercer if fed a bread roll baked with a wasp nest on Christmas Eve.
- The milking stool should never be placed upside down to prevent cattle from lying that way.
- Nothing should be chopped or split near the stable threshold to avoid causing the cattle to limp.

- To attract many buyers for livestock at the market, the animal was sprinkled with water or urine while saying: ‚As many drops, as many buyers.' Alternatively, poppy seed noodles were eaten that day (to ensure buyers as numerous as poppy seeds), or sweeping was avoided in the house (so buyers would not be ‚swept away').
- Conjoined fruit was fed to cows and sheep to encourage them to bear twin offspring.
- Root vegetables were planted in the afternoon, preferably at one o'clock, to develop a strong single root, whereas cucumbers were planted in the morning (11 a.m. – 12 p.m.) to maximize fruit production.

The magic of contact:
- Milk should not be touched with a knife, as it would cause pain to the cow and make her udder crack.
- Nothing should be taken out of the house after a cow has a calve.
- Milk should not be taken out after sunset, as it could be bewitched; if necessary, a pinch of salt should be added.
- Poultry nests were made from straw that had been slept on by a man.



Multigenerational family, Jabloňovce (Hont), 1923, ÚE SAV.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/velkorodina.jpg

1.9 Family customs

Family customs (life cycle customs) are centered around the most significant moments in the life of a person, their family, and community. They arise from the biological stages and life cycle of an individual from birth, through sexual, physical, and mental maturation, marriage, and the establishment of one‘s own family, to death. In the meantime, other moments take place, consisting of other customs, such as first communion, confirmation, maturity exam, graduation, military service, retirement, a promotion at work, or the periodic recurrence of birthdays, name days, and life anniversaries.

Customs at birth

Customs at birth ensure the non-biological settlement of the family with the arrival of its new member. They are tied to stages:

Before conception

According to folk ideas, it is possible to influence the physical and mental characteristics of the child even before his conception. Yet unmarried maidens had to respect certain prohibitions and commands to ensure fertility, easy childbirth, and healthy offspring in the future. These acts are especially presented in wedding ceremonies and rituals.

Pregnancy

The entire pregnancy, but especially its first months, was considered crucial to the health, appearance, features, and character of the child.

Birth of a child

The birth of a child (from birth to the first bath) is an opportunity for magical acts and divinations with the intention of influencing the desirable qualities and future of the child, and at the same time to find out what fate awaits him. Births were performed by experienced women who were present in every village, the so-called ‚babice‘ (midwives). They usually mastered all the necessary magical and other acts. They passed this knowledge, usually secretly, from generation to generation, because the Church disapproved of and forbade many of these acts.

Newborn admissions

These are primarily ceremonies of welcoming the newborn into the family, the church community and the community.

Birth customs concern not only the baby but also the mother. Their task is to ensure:

Achieving pregnancy by protecting and enhancing a woman‘s fertility

For example, by showering a woman with grain when she is getting married, or by believing in the power of certain nights to beget a child, especially the wedding night, or placing a small child in a woman‘s arms when she is getting married.

Male gender of the child

It is desirable, at least for the first child, which was secured, for example, by a man‘s pants, or a shirt under the pillow, or an axe, or an anvil under the bed during sexual intercourse, or by placing the little boy in the arms of the woman when she is married, or by putting a hat and cock in the water from the child‘s first bath, so that the next child is a boy.

The health of the pregnant woman and the future health of the baby

They were secured by increasing care for the pregnant woman and observing prohibitions during pregnancy, for example, she cannot ‘zabažať’ - when a pregnant woman arrives at home, she must be offered all the food she sees around her, and she must be allowed to eat what she wants and when she wants, otherwise she risks miscarriage, or the child will have a stain on her body in the form of denied food. A pregnant woman is not to be around animals, not to ride in a cart, not to go to a well for water and carry heavy objects, not to do strenuous physical work, not to associate with or look at ugly, crippled, or handicapped people, or exotic animals, because their likeness may be transferred to the baby. A pregnant woman is not to be outdoors unnecessarily, for her presence does not bring happiness. If she comes to dance, the young men will fight; if she sits on a chariot, she should only sit facing her back to the horses, lest the chariot be spoiled or the horses injured.

Survival and protection of the newborn

Protection of the child, especially from evil demonic forces (e.g., from being snatched, stolen, exchanged, bewitched), especially after dark, in the first days of life, and before baptism, was ensured by eliminating the child‘s contact with strangers, especially the child‘s eye contact with persons with prominent eyes and knitted eyebrows. Further, it was not advisable to leave the child‘s belongings outside after dark or to leave the child alone anywhere until after the child had been baptized. The belief in the existence of the risk of the child being switched by the witch (the switched child was called ‚premieň‘, ‚podvršťa‘) explained especially the cases when, during the first years of the child‘s life, the child turned out to be handicapped, mentally retarded, did not learn to speak, walk, was different in appearance or behavior. Then the mother, and the whole family, was to treat such a child gently and as her own because her own would be treated in the same way by the witch. This notion ensured such a child (if allowed to survive, which was rare) some protection and care.

Baby‘s first bath

The most significant magical moment was the baby‘s first bath. It had not only a cleansing but also a protective function. Holy water was added to the water to protect the child against evil forces, a pinch of salt to make the child needed everywhere, a drop

of honey to make him popular, a piece of bread to make him good, and money to make him rich. The water from the first bath was considered the best medicine. It was poured under a young healthy tree so that the child would grow up healthy too.

Desired characteristics and appearance of the child

These were especially diligence, wisdom, cleverness, gracefulness, and beauty, the attainment of which was ensured already during pregnancy: if the mother wanted the child to be pretty, she tried to associate with and look only at pretty people during pregnancy. If, during pregnancy, she saw a fire, the dawn, or a sunset, and at the same time touched her body with her hand, the child would have a red spot in the same place. In the same way, if foreign blood splashed on her body, a raspberry or a strawberry fell on her body. If a pregnant woman breathed in the smell, the child might have bad breath; if she breathed in the hot air while baking bread, the child might have asthma. The pregnant woman was not to steal anything, for the baby would steal too. She was not to be sad, because the child would cry. The foods she liked during pregnancy, the baby will like too. She is not to eat congealed fruit unless twins are desired. If she beats the animals, her baby will be beaten too. If she kicks a cat or a dog, the baby will have hair on its navel. If she drowns a kitten, the child will be blind. If she hurts a frog, the child will have bulging eyes. If a pregnant woman washes herself in running water at the last full moon of the month before giving birth, the child will be beautiful. If she sews a scarf into her wedding dress, she will have a daughter, if a cap, a son. After birth, the child was smeared with butter to make it strong, wrapped in a fur coat so it would have curly hair, and laid on the stove so it would get used to the house. To make his cheeks red, the grandmother rubbed them with placenta and made dimples on the cheeks of the girls and the chin of the boys. They believed that whatever tool they put in the child‘s hand was the kind of activity he would excel at (e.g., spindle to a girl, whip to a boy). The lucky children were supposed to be those whose shirts and bonnets were carefully cared for at home.

Good and easy childbirth

In the family, the selection of the future mother was ensured in advance (as parents usually chose wives for their sons), primarily based on physical attributes. According to folk beliefs, wide hips/pelvis were seen as a sign of easy childbirth, while large breasts indicated trouble-free breastfeeding. If a pregnant woman stepped over a yoke, or a fence, sat on a threshold or a log with an axe embedded in it, or if she sewed, her placenta could become attached. If she drank water outside after sunset, the water would remain in her body until childbirth. During childbirth, everything tied had to be untied, and everything closed had to be opened, as these could hinder the child‘s arrival. For example, the woman’s hair was loosened, knots on her clothing were untied, her wedding ring was removed, and the chest in the room was unlocked. Lifting heavy objects, drinking decoctions with abortive effects, fumigating the woman with herbs or embers, or placing her wedding dress on her body (as these were considered sacred and were kept for life, just like baby caps and shirts) were believed to speed up labor. It was commonly believed that the presence of the child‘s father could ease the mother‘s suffering, as the pain would be shared. If he could not be present, a piece of his clothing, worn directly on his body, was placed on the woman. The belief that the mother attracted evil forces while being defenseless against them led to the idea that childbirth should take place in darkness. This was ensured through the so-called ‚corner cloth‘ which separated the woman‘s

bed from the rest of the house. The corner cloth was a precious household item, believed to possess strong protective power. To ward off witches and other evil demonic beings during childbirth, poppy seeds were scattered around the bed, sharp metal objects (usually needles or scissors) were stuck into the bed linen and garlic or parsley was placed in the bed's corner.

Recovery of the mother

This was ensured by a special period called ‚šestonedelie' (postpartum). This postpartum period typically lasted around six weeks, during which the mother (called ‚šestonedieľka', ‚posteľkyňa', or ‚kútnica') was considered impure according to folk beliefs. It was believed that she could endanger her surroundings and herself with unclean forces (fairies, goddesses, ‚mamunas', ‚osúdenice', ‚sudičky'), which would try to visit her and her child. Therefore, she was isolated and protected: she slept behind a ‚kútna plachta' (corner cloth) and was not allowed to leave the house, yard, or village. It was believed that any household she visited or any field she stepped onto would be destroyed by a natural disaster. She was allowed to step outside only wearing a headscarf and carrying magical plants (such as a bellflower) or dressed in a man's coat. She was forbidden to sew, wash, or dig, as all the results of her work would be in vain. Cows milked by her would lose their milk, and a well from which she drew water would become infested with worms. The household chores were done for her by female relatives, the midwife, the godmother, or sometimes her husband. If she died, her family sometimes performed magical rituals to ensure the child would die too (rolling the infant over the dead mother's body or placing the child under her armpit). A widespread belief held that a deceased mother could return at night to rock and nurse her living child and that she would become a ‚poludnica' (noon witch) or a ‚white lady'. The six-week period ended with a ritual purification known as ‚vádzka' – a church blessing performed by a priest, during which the mother circled the altar with a candle in hand. This marked her return to everyday life. In reality, the length of this period depended on the mother's recovery and how much she was needed for the family's labor. In some cases, especially in large, poor, single-parent, or abusive families, this period was completely absent.

Acceptance of the child into the family

This was ensured by the father taking the child into his arms and kissing it, marking the final step of childbirth rituals. The existence of this ceremony confirms that not all newborns were accepted into the family and allowed to live. Newborns that were not fully developed were often abandoned. Physically weaker infants perished during the first bath (which was in cold water). This kind of selection was also practiced in times of hardship. Sometimes daughters were considered unnecessary, and unfavorable prophecies could also play a role. Illegitimate and premarital children also faced difficulties. The high birth rate was significantly reduced by high infant mortality due to a lack of healthcare, poor hygiene, living conditions, and low cultural and educational standards of families. However, in general, the birth of a child was considered a desired, welcomed, and joyful event for the whole family.

Baptism

Baptism is a ritual of accepting the newborn into the Christian church and giving them a name. Due to the belief that an unbap-

tized child would have large eyes and the church‘s efforts to replace pagan newborn acceptance rituals with baptism, infants were typically baptized within one to two weeks of birth, ideally on the first Sunday after birth. The future godparents would pick up the baby from home before the church service. The godmother placed a coin or protective herbs (garlic, blessed thistle, wormwood) or salt into the infant‘s pillow. At the threshold of the house, where they exited, a chain, flails, or an axe was placed for a boy (so he would be strong and healthy), and a distaff or book for a girl (so she would be diligent and wise).

In cases where the child‘s life was at risk, anyone could perform the baptism (for example, the midwife during a difficult birth). If a child died unbaptized, meaning they were not part of the church community, they were not given a Christian burial. Their body was simply buried at the edge of the cemetery, near the wall.

A priest usually performed the baptism in the church by sprinkling the baby with water (a symbolic and magical cleansing from sin) while reciting the required formula. The godparents would make the baptismal vow on behalf of the child. The baptismal name was the child‘s lifelong name. In villages, typically only five or six male names (such as Michal, Juraj, Ján, Peter, Pavol) and five or six female names (such as Mária, Zuzana, Katarína, Alžbeta, Anna) were used. In large families, this sometimes caused issues, as unusual names were rarely given and often led to mockery.

Upon returning home, the godmother would say, ‚We took away a pagan, we brought back a Christian‘. The father would then take the baby and hand it to the mother, who was still behind the ‚corner cloth‘. If children in the family frequently died at a young age, supernatural forces were blamed. To deceive these forces, the baptized baby was sometimes passed into the house through a window, and its baptismal name was kept secret from others for several weeks.

Godparenthood

Through baptism, a specific spiritual kinship known as ‚kmotrovstvo‘ (godparenthood) was established between the child, the parents, and the godparents. Godparents confirmed the baptism by signing a document and took on patronal and witness roles. Church law allowed for one or two godparents of different genders. Children in one family could have the same or different godparents. Godparents could be young men, unmarried women, married men and women, or a married couple. Parents typically chose their best and most respected friends as godparents. The choice of godparents was influenced by the parents‘ desire to secure economic benefits for their child, ensure protection and care in case of family misfortune, gain social prestige, or strengthen ties with another family. Godparenthood was often arranged ‚crosswise‘ – ‚you for ours, we for yours‘. Originally, godparents were never chosen from close relatives to expand the child‘s ‚protective circle‘ or even that of the entire family.

Godparenthood was considered an extremely valuable form of kinship because it was established in the church, in the presence of a priest, directly before (and through) God. It was regarded as equal to the closest blood ties (such as those between a person and their parents, siblings, or children), which is why it was also a marriage impediment. Conflicts or sins between godparents and their spiritual kin were considered more serious than those between biological siblings. Special etiquette applied to the relationship, requiring formal speech (addressing each other respectfully), even if they had previously used informal speech. Godparents were expected to attend all significant life events of the godchild, hold the most honorable place at these occasions, and give the most

valuable gifts among all relatives. The godchild, in turn, was expected to show their godparents respect at least equal to that given to their parents.

After baptism, a feast called ‚krstiny' was held in the child's home to celebrate the baby's acceptance into the family and community. Guests gave gifts to the baptized child (such as cloth, baby clothes, toys, money, earrings for a girl, or a chain for a boy from the godparents) and brought food (cooked meals, liquor, baked goods). In the mountainous regions of northern Slovakia (Orava, Kysuce, Liptov, Gemer), ‚krstiny' was still, in the mid-20th century, characterized by uninhibited women's celebrations. Guests were invited by the midwife or a family member, who brought cake and liquor (called ‚radostník'). In poor families, the celebration was modest, with simple refreshments only for close relatives and godparents. In wealthy families, it involved dozens of guests, music, and a feast similar to a wedding.

In the second half of the 20th century, religious baptism in Slovakia was increasingly replaced by a secular alternative – the so-called ‚welcoming of the child into life', formal registration of birth at the municipal office. The term ‚baptism' was also used for other rites of passage, such as ‚bachelor baptism', ‚professional initiation', ‚student baptism', ‚baptism by fire' in extreme situations, or the ‚baptism of a book' upon its release.

A highly effective way of ensuring protection for menstruating women, pregnant women, or mothers—especially in families that were not kind to women—was the widespread belief that such women were ‚unclean', a magical threat to other family members, animals, and crops. This belief led to their isolation and restrictions on certain activities, ultimately granting them rest and relief from labor. This reflects a universal truth: even the most selfish person will respect the needs of others when they feel personally threatened.

The purpose of divinations related to pregnancy and childbirth is to determine:

The gender of a child

It was believed that if a pregnant woman dropped the heddle stick (a crossbar on a loom) while weaving and ran out of the house with it in her mouth, the child's gender would be the same as the first person she encountered on the street.

The appearance and characteristics of the child

It was believed that a child born with a tooth would be gifted with prophetic abilities, while a child with fused eyebrows would easily fall victim to the ‚evil eye'. The seventh son was believed to have exceptional abilities to heal people and cultivate trees.

The future, lifespan, and success of the child

It was believed that a child born on a Friday would be unlucky, while those born on a Saturday or Sunday would be happy and wealthy. If a tree under which the water from a baby's first bath was poured dried up, the child would not live long. A newborn with

hair on its limbs would be rich, while one with long hair would die soon. If a baby clenched its fists, it would be stingy. A child born at twelve o'clock (noon or midnight) would be unfortunate. The most unfavorable day of the year for birth was considered to be Good Friday (the saddest day for Christians—the crucifixion of Jesus Christ), while the most fortunate and auspicious was Christmas Eve (the birth of Jesus Christ). A child born in April would be foolish and fickle, while one born in May, when trees are in full bloom, would turn gray early.

The number of children and birth intervals

These were predicted by examining the number and spacing of bumps on the placenta.

The issue of the number of children and their upbringing in a traditional Slovak family largely depended on the cultural development of the region. Southern regions were generally wealthier and more developed, while northern regions were poorer and less advanced. Social class and religion also played a role. Traditional and conservative religions in Slovakia (such as Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy) encouraged having as many children as possible, considering each child a gift. These religions promoted childbirth, motherhood, marriage, and family, attributing them with the highest importance and value.

The one-child system

Some religions encouraged a more calculated approach (such as Reformed Christian churches, e.g., Evangelical Lutheran and Calvinist churches). This was reflected in Slovakia through the so-called ‚one-child system', practiced in some southern parts of central Slovakia where followers of these faiths lived. The system was based on the effort of married couples to have only one child. The reason was to prevent the division of inheritance among multiple offspring and instead increase family wealth by arranging marriages between children from one-child families. A natural consequence was the higher occurrence of abortions or attempts to induce them. Given the medical and hygienic conditions of the time, pregnant women often died as a result. This practice ended with the rise of education, health awareness, and the overall cultural development of Slovak rural areas in the second half of the 20th century.

Abortions

According to the Christian faith and, consequently, traditional Slovak morality, abortion is unacceptable and considered a sin. Nevertheless, abortions were performed, especially in cases of premarital or illegitimate pregnancies. They were carried out secretly by certain village women, who were often midwives. The term for a woman performing abortions ‚anjeličkárka' (literally ‚angel-maker') originates from the belief that she turned the souls of unborn children into little angels.

Traditional birth customs were based on superstitious and magical beliefs and were practiced at home, as women gave birth at home. With the rise of hospital births from the mid-20th century onward, many birth-related customs disappeared. The question remains whether they vanished simply because they could not be performed in hospitals or because people stopped believing in them.



Wedding, undated (Záhorie), an archive of the Záhorie Museum in Skalica.
Source: https://www.zahorskemuzeum.sk/tradicna-svadba-na-zahori-prednaska-v-malackach/

Wedding customs

The purpose of wedding rituals, customs, and legal acts is to ensure the conclusion of a valid and indisputable marital union to conceive children and establish kinship with the spouse‘s family. It also involves the regulation of property relations and lineage to ensure a clear and undeniable lineage for inheritance. The need to know an individual‘s ancestry arose in human societies whose culture (as a way of life and thinking) had reached a level that enabled the creation of surplus—something lasting, accumulated, or exceeding a person‘s lifetime, which brought about the issue of ownership after death. This included products, tools, livestock, dwellings, raw materials, land, social status, or other rights and privileges. Inheritance by descendants resolved these issues and ensured the intergenerational sustainability of complex activities requiring time beyond a single human lifespan. This facilitated the continuous enhancement of values created by society, contributing to cultural development.

Moreover, in the traditional Slovak world, marriage between a man and a woman is the only legitimate and legal means of forming a family, the most important environment for raising new community members.

The traditional understanding of marriage, still embraced by a large part of the (not only Slovak) public, clearly defines what marriage is and what it is not and cannot be. This traditionalist view is often labeled as conservative. The functional essence of traditionally understood marriage is logically incompatible with the modern or liberal view of marriage held by some parts of today‘s society. According to this modern perspective, marriage is primarily conditioned on the persistence of sexual attraction and love. These attributes are, of course, welcomed in traditional marriages as well, and various magical practices were used to invoke, strengthen, or maintain them. However, from the perspective of traditional communities and family survival, these individualistic aspects of marriage are secondary.

Youthhood

The premarital phase of life in Slovakia is best characterized by the period of youthhood. The transition from childhood to youthhood is marked by reaching sexual, physical, and psychological maturity, though no specific age is set.

Girls (female children) typically become young women (single adult women) between the ages of 11 and 13, while boys (male children) become young men (single adult men) between 12 and 15. In the traditional world, young women and men were categorized as younger or older. The younger ones were those who had entered puberty and begun separating from childhood groups. The older ones were those who had matured enough for marriage. Youthhood ended with marriage, ideally at 18 for young men, while young women could marry a few years earlier if they were deemed ready. An exception for young men delaying marriage was compulsory military service or wartime enlistment. In such cases, they typically got married soon after returning or during leave. Sometimes, engagements were arranged before departure as a precaution.

Youthhood was a time of getting to know one another and engaging in romantic and sometimes sexual relationships. Dating and visits from young men under a girl‘s window were tolerated unless she had been promised to someone by her parents (a practice known as ‚pytačky‘ (courtship)).

Premarital sex was discouraged due to the risk of pregnancy. Illegitimate children were undesirable and considered symbols of sin by the community. In central Slovakia, such children were sometimes given unusual names as a warning to others, particularly potential mothers. In a traditional society where anything different was viewed negatively, this stigmatization was significant. Additionally, these children were often called pejorative names.

The primary purpose of youthhood was to acquire knowledge, skills, and experience for work within the family, integration into the village‘s economic and social life, and preparation for marriage, which aimed to establish a new family through childbirth.

Choosing a Spouse and Love Magic

Youth groups in Slovak villages consisted of local young people who had known each other since birth. Marriage within the community (endogamy) was preferred, with direct blood relatives excluded, often up to the third degree in the medieval period. Young men generally knew which girls their parents would consider as potential wives, and vice versa.

When selecting a spouse, compatibility in terms of culture, ethnicity, language, religion, and social class was prioritized to ensure clarity in married life and child-rearing. While wealthier families had an advantage, it was not an absolute requirement. If no suitable partner was available within the village, a spouse could be sought from a neighboring village (exogamy), though this was seen as unusual and sometimes suspicious. Often, such individuals were considered different in some way—mentally, physically, or socially—which had prevented their parents from finding a spouse within their own community. However, the wealthier the family, the less significant these disadvantages became as obstacles to marriage.

Every man and woman deemed capable of marriage and family life was provided with a suitable spouse.

Marriage was a concern for the family and community, making individual preferences secondary. In traditional Slovak society, survival was only possible as part of a family and village community. This is why collectivism, traditionalism, and conformity still often prevail over individualism, modernity, and personal ambition in Slovak culture.

To secure a desired spouse, young people also turned to magical practices - love magic. Predictions were used to determine a future spouse‘s identity, the timing of the wedding, and its outcome. These magical acts and divinations were primarily performed by women, as men were generally less concerned with these matters. The question was not if a woman or man would marry, but who they would marry and when. The folk belief was that every person had a predestined spouse (referred to as ‚osúdenec‘/‘osúdenica‘), whom they only needed to find.

The maximum effect of magical acts was achieved by performing the following acts:

In the most effective magical days

For example, on the day of the summer and winter solstices, the day of the spring and autumn equinoxes, the so-called ‚Witches´ Days‘, Good Friday, St. John‘s Day, or Christmas Eve.

At specific moments

Especially at midnight, after dark, at the rising of the first star, before dawn, when the bride exits the church or during the bouquet toss.

In special locations

For example, by a forest spring, at a crossroads outside the village, or near a fence.

Using specific materials

For example, magical plants, hair, nails, or body hair of the desired person, the water they had washed with, water from springs believed to have magical or healing properties or a mixture of water from several sources.

Love magic was primarily used to enhance a girl‘s beauty and skills and to attract a particular young man emotionally and physically.

Magical acts for beauty and skillfulness:

- Getting caught in the first spring rainstorm.
- Washing in rainwater after spotting the first swallow in spring.
- Washing with water from a newborn’s bath (boys with water from a baby girl, and vice versa).
- Washing with the last snow of March for a fair complexion.
- Drinking a brew made from the first rosebuds of spring for rosy cheeks.

Magical acts to secure a young man‘s affection and love:

- Preparing scrambled eggs using eggs that had been rolled over the girl‘s body before cooking.
- Serving food mixed with ashes from her burned nails or hair, or a drop of her menstrual blood.
- Offering a drink sweetened with a sugar cube she had kept under her armpit.
- Giving him water in which she had previously bathed.

Divinations and superstitions focused on the identity of the future husband, the timing of the wedding, or its course.

To reveal the future husband:

- He will appear in a girl‘s dream if she sleeps with a small bread wrapped in men’s trousers under her pillow, baked from flour collected from seven village households.
- He will appear in her dream if she washes her hair with water heated using wood stolen from five houses where young men live.
- The ninth fence post outside her house, counted from a specific point, will resemble her future husband (old, new, crooked, straight).

To predict the timing of the wedding:

- If grains of wheat float in a mixture of water from nine brooks and nine wells collected on St. Andrew’s Day, she will marry soon.

- If the number of firewood logs she carries from a young man‘s house is even, she will marry within a year.

Wedding superstitions:
- A girl who frequently washes dishes will have a sunny wedding day.
- A girl with a sweet tooth will have rain on her wedding day.

Wedding

A traditional Slovak wedding was held with the participation of a large group of people. Wedding guests were, first and foremost, witnesses to the customary legal acts, ensuring the validity of the marriage. Since written and visual evidence of the necessary procedures for a legally binding marriage is a relatively new phenomenon among ordinary people, the testimonies of the participants were the only proof in the past. Therefore, the more witnesses, the better.

Wedding as a social structure

A wedding is essentially a grand theatrical performance where every participant plays their role according to a well-established traditional script. Everyone is familiar with this script because, over their lifetime, they have attended dozens of weddings in various roles. As a result, each person knows quite precisely what character they are expected to ‚play‘ in a particular wedding.

Social roles and statuses of wedding participants:
- Groom/Bride – the main characters,
- Wedding elder/Marriage officiant– the highest wedding official, ‚moderator and director‘,
- Wedding parents – supporting characters, ‚assistant director and producer‘,
- Godparents – the most esteemed guests, ‚supervisors‘,
- Head groomsmen/Head bridesmaid – supporting characters, ‚assistant directors‘,
- Groomsmen/Bridesmaids – additional characters, ‚assistant producers and minor extras‘,
- Other wedding guests – categorized by age (child, unmarried, adult, senior), by type and degree of kinship (parent, sibling, cousin, grandparent, uncle, aunt, etc.), by neighborhood (from next door, across the street, from the village), by friendship (closest friends – witnesses, youth group companions), ‚general extras‘,
- Staff – cooks, innkeepers, waiters – traditionally groomsmen and bridesmaids, neighbors, acquaintances from the village,
- Musicians – a local or out-of-town hired band or an accordionist,
- Village community – onlookers ‚behind the fence,‘ ‚the audience‘.

Wedding as a cultural system

A traditional Slovak wedding lasted several days. It incorporated a vast array of diverse cultural elements, interconnected into a functioning cultural system that ultimately fulfilled its purpose: establishing marriage as the foundation for creating a family and forming new (non-blood) kinship ties between the relatives of the married couple.

Material cultural elements (artifacts):

- Attire (especially the ceremonial wedding attire of the bride, festive clothing of the guests, clothing accessories identifying wedding participants – wedding boutonnieres, brides men's aprons, fabric sashes worn by some wedding officials, etc.),
- Food (especially the ceremonial wedding cake – ‚radostník', festive lunch/dinner),
- Props (e.g., the matchmaker's stick, plate/bowl for collecting money, plate to be broken after the bride's farewell, candles used in the ‚guiding of the bride'),
- Gifts (especially the bride's dowry and trousseau, gifts from wedding guests, take-home packages for guests, compensation for helpers and musicians).

Socio-normative cultural elements (norms and rules):

- Arrangement and hierarchy of wedding guests based on significance, status, and role in the wedding (the young couple, parents, godparents, wedding officials, guests ranked by kinship, etc.),
- Order of arrival and manner of welcoming guests based on their importance in the wedding (ceremonial introduction of the best man by the wedding parents as the first guest, announcement of arrivals and farewells of the most significant guests, such as godparents and newlyweds),
- The value of gifts for the newlyweds and the amount of financial contributions collected during the wedding, depending on kinship ties, wedding status, and the donor's wealth,
- Standardized expressions of mutual respect based on wedding status (towards the newlyweds, best man/matchmaker, priest, godparents, grandparents, etc.),
- Standardized seating arrangements at the feast, order of dancing with the bride, and wedding procession sequence, all based on wedding status,
- Obligation to perform specific ritual acts in a strictly prescribed manner (highest level of normativity), presence of prohibitions and obligations (e.g., the bride's farewell from her parents, acceptance of the bride into the groom's family, wedding ceremony, dance with the bride, ‚čepčenie' (bonneting - ritual removal of the bride's veil and putting on the bonnet), placing newlyweds in bed, the consummation of marriage on the wedding night),
- Execution of customary traditions (lower level of normativity – failure to perform them does not result in severe consequences but is undesirable), such as the transportation of the dowry, recitation of traditional toasts during food and drink service, lower quality and quantity of food in poorer families.

Spiritual cultural elements:

- Verbal folklore (e.g., humorous toasts during food and drink service, dialogues between wedding officials during farewells and greetings, ritual and magical formulas, speeches, congratulations, announcements of financial collections, humorous storytelling by cooks and innkeepers, welcoming speeches, wedding moderation),
- Dance folklore (e.g., the ceremonial dance of the guests with the bride, humorous, mimicking, and competitive dances, the dance of the newlyweds),
- Musical folklore (e.g., ceremonial songs during the bride's farewell, upon her arrival at the groom's home, songs during the removal of the bridal wreath and ‚čepčenie' (bonneting - ritual removal of the bride's veil and putting on the bonnet), humorous wedding songs, entertaining and dance songs),
- Religious rituals (prayers during various rites and acts, church wedding ceremony),
- Free entertainment (conversations, jokes, wedding games).

From the perspective of Slovak regions and sometimes even individual villages, Slovak weddings are highly diverse and variable. Moreover, like other customary traditions, weddings constantly absorb new trends and fashionable elements, while some older traditions disappear. The wedding of a wealthy farmer or craftsman differed from that of a poor laborer or worker. A wedding was different in times of abundance and good harvests than during war or economic crisis. Therefore, every wedding is original, unique, and unrepeatable—not only from the perspective of its participants but also of researchers. Nevertheless, based on widely spread and established elements and their functions, it is possible to create a general model and discern the functional structure embedded in every Slovak wedding.

Pre-wedding period

The pre-wedding period begins with the consent of the parents of the bride and groom to their marriage and ends before the day of the marriage. It is the period of preparation for the wedding.

Established stages of the pre-wedding period:

Determining consent for marriage in the bride's parents' home

- **‚Priezvedy'** is a visit to the bride's parents by an older female representative from the groom's family (most commonly the godmother, mother, or aunt) to informally determine a possible agreement on marriage.
- ‚**Pytačky'** (courtship, suitors' visit) is a visit to the bride's parents by the groom, accompanied by an older male representative of his family (most commonly the godfather, father, uncle) to seek consent for marriage. The groom's representative communicates with the bride's father using established symbolic-poetic phrases ('We have heard that you have a heifer for sale in your house...', 'A

beautiful flower has grown in your garden…'). The agreement is confirmed by a handshake, a toast, a meal, and the exchange of gifts between the bride and groom (such as an embroidered handkerchief, a boutonniere, a ribbon, or flowers). Once the bride was officially asked for, the groom was allowed to spend time with her at her home during the day, just the two of them.

Engagement

Engagement (handkerchiefs, ring-giving, vera, betrothal) is a visit to the bride's parents by the groom, accompanied by his adult relatives, to ceremonially confirm the marriage agreement. Sometimes, the bride's parents' neighbors were also present. The ceremony is led on behalf of the bride by her father or a so-called ‚odavač' (wedding officiant), and on behalf of the groom by his father, godfather, or a ‚starejší' (wedding elder). These were always older men with a dignified demeanor, a representative manner of speaking, and knowledge of the customary wedding wishes and standardized dialogues. The agreement was confirmed by the couple joining or binding hands, a toast, a kiss, and the exchange of gifts between families (such as a scarf, handkerchief, ring, cake, wedding shoes/boots, wedding attire, shirt, dress, or in the past, fabric; more recently, alcohol and flowers). In poor families, the engagement involved only the groom and his godfather or parents, with a simple refreshment. In wealthier families, it involved dozens of guests and a grand feast with music.

The next day, the engaged couple officially announced their intention to marry at the parish office (if they desired a church wedding) or, more recently, at the municipal office (if they opted for a civil wedding), setting the exact date. Engagements were considered a highly binding agreement and breaking them was a serious offense. After the engagement, it was tolerated for the groom to stay overnight at the bride's home.

Banns of marriage

The banns of marriage were the repeated public announcement of the marriage by the priest in church during three consecutive Sunday services before the wedding day. The purpose was to invite the congregation to report any potential marital impediments. During this period, the engaged couple attended premarital counseling sessions with the priest. They were also publicly identified with wedding symbols: the bride wore a wedding wreath or ribbons in her hair or on her chest, while the groom had a boutonniere or ribbon on his jacket or hat. Brides 'in the banns' stood directly before the altar during the service. The banns period was also the time for preparing the bride's dowry and intensively organizing the wedding.

Inviting guests to the wedding

Traditional wedding invitations were formal, poetic, and done in person. Invitations (sometimes repeated) were extended during the banns period by ‚zváči' (wedding messengers/inviters), typically two groomsmen from each side. The zváči from the bride's side invited guests to the reception at her parent's home (‚odávky', led by the ‚odavač' (wedding officiant)), while the zváči from the groom's side invited guests to the reception at his parent's home (‚svadba', led by the ‚starejší' (wedding elder)). They were identified

by wedding boutonnieres and carried a decorated cane, to which each household that accepted the invitation tied a ribbon. They also carried wine in a flask for a toast confirming the acceptance of the invitation. Declining an invitation was only acceptable in cases of serious illness or mourning in the family. If a family was invited by both sides, they chose based on the closeness of kinship. The most important wedding functionaries, such as the starejší and odavač, were invited separately.

The number of invited guests depended on the wealth of the families and the size of their relatives and neighbors. A typical wedding had over 100 guests, while the largest ones had 250–400 guests in each wedding household. Invitations were a major event, sometimes taking several days. Later, printed invitations replaced personal invitations.

Bridal and Groom's Bachelor Party

The bride's farewell to single life (‚vienok', ‚na kašu', ‚oplakávanie panenstva', ‚pierkoviny') took place at her home, usually on the evening before the wedding. It included making boutonnieres, which were pinned on all wedding guests upon arrival. The main purpose was the ceremonial exclusion of the bride from the group of unmarried girls through gatherings, singing farewell songs about leaving singlehood, virginity, youth, and beauty. The event included refreshments (porridge, cakes, fruit) and gifts for friends (ribbons, scarves, money).

The groom's farewell to single life (‚svieca', ‚na kohúta', ‚parobský tanec', ‚prepíjanie slobody') had the same function, excluding the groom from the group of bachelors. It took place at his home or in a pub, with music and dancing. It was either exclusive to men or open to all young people in the village. A special dance (‚družbovský', ‚parobský') was performed.

During this time, frequent visits between wedding families were common, officially framed as social customs but actually serving to monitor whether the situation 'on the other side' remained unchanged and if all preparations were on track.

In some regions, engaged couples had Sunday ceremonial lunches at their parents' homes during the banns period.

Transporting the Bride's Dowry

Known as ‚prevážačka' (transporting carting duvets/carting quilts), this was the transport of the bride's dowry and other belongings to the groom's home, her future household. It was done openly, noisily, on decorated horse-drawn carts (later trucks or tractors with trailers), with music, through the entire village, so everyone could see what the bride was bringing to her new home. This served both as a demonstration of her possessions and as public confirmation that she had everything a bride was expected to have.

Inspection of the Dowry

Inspection of carting duvets/carting quilts was a visit by the groom's female relatives to his home to inspect the delivered dowry.

Arranging the Dowry

Arranging of carting duvets/carting quilts was a visit by the bride's female relatives to the groom's home, officially to help arrange the dowry but in reality, to check if wedding preparations were proceeding properly.

Pinning the Wedding Boutonniere

With garland/pinning the wedding boutonniere was a visit by the bride's bridesmaids to the groom's parents' home to pin the wedding boutonniere on his wedding attire. This was done publicly, ceremoniously, and with singing through the village—another check on whether the groom was truly prepared for marriage.

It sometimes happened that a bride who did not want to marry the chosen groom would run away to her lover's family during this period. Similarly, a groom who opposed the arranged marriage might publicly drag the gift he received from the bride through the village, tied to a horse's tail. Such risks, if underestimated by the families, could lead to a canceled wedding, which was a great disgrace to both families.

In winter, weddings took place indoors with fewer guests. In spring and autumn, they were held outside in tents. Summer weddings were rare due to food spoilage risks. Weddings were most common in autumn before Advent (after the harvest, when livestock was well-fed) or in spring during the carnival season (before Lent) and after Easter.

The week before the wedding was the most intense preparation period. It was necessary to secure:

Meat and meat products

They were provided with their own resources, through the so-called ‚zabíjačka' (animal slaughter), where the wedding father, with the help of men from the family and friends, slaughtered a piece of cattle, but most often a few pigs or sheep (depending on the number of guests who accepted the invitation and the wealth of the wedding family). The animal was butchered into meat, which was baked or fried. The rest was made into meat products (sausages, blood sausages, lard) and other traditional products.

Hens

Hens or roosters for the wedding soup were provided through the tradition that each family invited to the wedding sent or brought a hen or a rooster. This way, the wedding family could confirm which guests would actually attend and how many there would be.

Noodles for the soup

They were made by the wedding mother with the help of women from the family and neighborhood.

Wedding cake

Traditionally round, made from leavened dough, flavored with jam, poppy seeds, or walnuts, as well as rolls, and more recently, pastries and cakes. They were prepared by the women of the wedding household with the help of neighbors, and each family arriving at the wedding would bring a cake. All necessary ingredients were provided by the neighbors as part of the customary neighborhood assistance and the principle of reciprocity.

Drinks

Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages were traditionally homemade (wine, fruit or grain distillates, fruit juices, and syrups). They were provided by the wedding parents. More recently, they were purchased from local producers.

Reception Venue and Decorations

The renting, construction, and decoration of the wedding tent were the responsibility of the groomsmen and bridesmaids, as well as friends who did not attend the wedding as guests. The inventory for the feast was gathered through the so-called ‚collection system' – groomsmen, bridesmaids, and friends borrowed and transported benches, chairs, tables, plates, bowls, cutlery, glasses, and carafes on wagons from neighbors and relatives. Everything was labeled to ensure proper return after the wedding. Again, this was based on neighborhood assistance and the principle of reciprocity.

Music production

It was arranged by the wedding parents. Usually, local or nearby musical groups familiar with local wedding customs and the wedding guests' song repertoire were hired. In the case of a poor family, they would hire only an accordion player or rely on a skilled musician from the family.

The most archaic form of a Slovak wedding is characterized by being held separately at the groom's parents' house (the so-called ‚wedding') and the bride's parent's house (the so-called ‚odávky'), with each side inviting their own guests. This model (called 'osve') was still practiced in some conservative regions of Slovakia until the mid-20th century. In Slovak expatriate communities in Serbia's Vojvodina and Romania's Bihor region, it was sometimes practiced even in the last quarter of the 20th century.

Wedding day

The wedding day is the most packed with customs, traditions, and rituals. These customs primarily aim to ensure the health, happiness, love, and offspring of the newlyweds (preferably a son) and to protect the bride during her transition from her family (which she ceases to be a part of after the farewell ritual) to the groom's family (where she becomes a member upon completion of the acceptance ritual in the groom's house). In the spirit of magical and superstitious beliefs, the bride is particularly vulnerable in this transitional period, making her highly susceptible to threats from witches and other demonic beings that could harm her fertility, health, or even the happiness of her marriage.

Rules for choosing a wedding day

The wedding traditionally took place on a weekday, especially on Monday morning, Tuesday, or Thursday. Even-numbered days were generally considered lucky, while odd-numbered days were seen as unlucky. However, Monday was regarded as somewhat

positive due to the magic of beginnings, ‚as at the beginning, so at the end'. The entire week's success was believed to be threatened if the first person encountered on Monday was a woman. Wednesday was thought to be dangerous because witches could hear everything (which was particularly threatening for the bride). On Fridays, nothing new was supposed to begin, and it was also a fasting day. If the wedding was on a Thursday, the feast and celebration were expected to end by midnight due to the start of the fasting day, a practice favored by poorer families. Saturday preceded Sunday, a day of religious observance and mandatory church attendance. It was only in the mid-20th century, with the structure of the workweek and the introduction of free weekends, that Saturday became the ideal wedding day.

The established stages of the wedding day are:

Arrival of the wedding guests

On the wedding day, guests start arriving at the wedding homes in the morning, bringing gifts. The first to arrive is the wedding elder/officiant, who, as the main wedding functionary, is often brought by the wedding parents themselves. He directs and moderates the entire wedding or ‚odávky'. The most important guests (godparents and close relatives) are always welcomed separately.

Arrival of the groom after the bride at the wedding

When the groom and his entourage arrive to take the bride to the wedding, the bride's side typically makes things difficult by imposing obstacles. These could include breaking a chain on the gate, sawing through a log placed across the entrance, hiding the bride in the house and revealing her only for a ransom, or offering the groom another girl from the family or a so-called ‚fake bride' (often an old man or woman dressed in a veil or skirt, or even a hairy foot poking out from behind the door, presented as his 'bride-to-be'). More obstacles were created, especially by young men, if the groom was from another village.

Farewell of the bride from her parents

The bride's farewell from her parents is the first of three essential rituals that had to be performed for a marriage to be valid before the introduction of Christianity and church weddings. This ritual confirms the parents' consent for their daughter to leave for marriage and join the groom's family. It is led by the wedding elder (representing the groom) and the officiant (representing the bride). It is a solemn, formal, and highly emotional moment, culminating in the parents' blessing of the young couple and their departure for the wedding ceremony at the church. The ritual often includes breaking a plate upon departure, symbolizing the bride's departure from her family. Mournful wedding songs (so-called ‚farewell songs' or ‚laments') were sung.

Procession for the wedding ceremony

The wedding procession consists of the groom's and bride's entourage traveling to and from the church. The wedding ceremony was usually held in the church, which the bride attended. The procession traditionally moved on foot, sometimes using wagons or

sleighs. An archaic formation had men in the front, women in the back, and the bride in the center, surrounded by bridesmaids. The procession carried a flag, a decorated tree, or a large wedding cake. In addition to the arrangement of girls around the bride to confuse evil spirits, noise played a protective and deterrent role against negative forces – music, singing, shouting, whip-cracking, and gunfire were common. Onlookers from the village were offered cakes and alcohol. When the bride was marrying outside the village, local young men would stop the procession and demand a symbolic ransom from the groom (money or alcohol). From the 20th century onwards, the practice of walking in pairs became widespread, with the bride led by her first groomsman and the groom led by his first bridesmaid. The latest adopted custom is for the bride to be led by her father and the groom by his mother. Today, the walking procession has been replaced by decorated cars adorned with white ribbons, a doll, or imitation wedding rings on the hood of the car carrying the newlyweds.

Marriage ceremony

Marriage in the church is a relatively new ceremonial act of entering into matrimony in Slovakia, which was established as the only legally valid form by the Christian church in 1563. It is performed by a priest in the presence of the bride and groom and two lay witnesses. The essence of the ceremony includes mutual consent, the binding of hands with a stole, the exchange of rings, and a blessing. The obligation of civil marriage before a state notary was introduced in Hungary in 1894. Since 1992, it has been up to the couple to choose between a religious or secular marriage, both of which are legally valid. The wedding parents did not attend the marriage ceremony, as they had to tend to the wedding guests, most of whom did not attend the ceremony either. Their main role was participation in traditional pre-Christian rituals, which took place in wedding houses.

Wedding feast and celebration

The wedding feast and celebration took place after the marriage ceremony. If the wedding was ‚separate‘ each member of the wedding party returned to their own home from the church. In such cases, the groom and his party would come for the bride after nightfall. In other cases, the bride left with her husband and his party, while her party returned to the wedding gathering without her. Over time, as ‚separate‘ weddings disappeared, a new tradition emerged where wedding guests would gather in the morning at the homes of the wedding parents, depending on which side had invited them, meet in front of the church, and after the ceremony, proceed together to a shared wedding feast and celebration held in a tavern, a tent, and from the second half of the 20th century, in a cultural or municipal hall, or another larger prepared venue.

Regardless of the specific wedding model, the feast and celebration followed established rules and formats. At some point, the newlyweds would take their place at the head table. Since the bride had left her home, her role at the wedding gathering was often humorously played by a disguised wedding guest to create amusing situations and entertainment.

Seating arrangement

The newlyweds sat at the head table, with various wedding symbols placed in front of them, such as an apple, a candle, a ceremonial cake, and a small tree, later replaced by a bouquet and a cake with figurines of the bride and groom. Beside the young couple

sat the wedding leader with his wife, the best man, the maid of honor, and the godparents. The wedding parents did not sit at the table, as they were responsible for the smooth running of the feast. Other wedding guests sat at separate tables, originally divided by youth, adults, men, and women. Married couples did not sit together. The wedding leader or the first best man/wedding announcer oversaw the feast.

The feast began with a prayer, the singing of a religious hymn, and a toast.

Food and drinks

Food and drinks were served in a fixed order. They were brought out in large serving dishes, from which the guests originally ate together. The serving was done by best men, maids of honor, or young women and cooks. The wedding leader/wedding announcer recited humorous toasts for each dish (for soup, roasted meat, cakes, wine, porridge, etc.). Alcoholic beverages were distributed by a designated person known as the ‚tavern keeper.' An archaic sign of the feast's conclusion was the serving of porridge, cabbage, and especially the distribution of the ceremonial wedding cake, called ‚radostník,' by the bride to all attendees. The most widespread custom among newlyweds was eating from the same plate with one spoon and drinking from the same glass as a symbol of unity. After dinner, the wedding celebration followed.

Wedding Celebration

The wedding celebration was traditionally an opportunity for singing, dancing, music, drama, games, and storytelling (including wedding and humorous songs and dances, toasts, riddles, jokes, skits, games, and performances by masked participants). During the wedding feast, three monetary collections were usually held (for the newlyweds/the bride, the cooks, and the church). The wedding elder/wedding officiant declared the collections, and money was gathered into a circulating plate, with the total amount announced. Another way to collect money for the bride was through a dance called ‚Dance with the bride' or ‚Whose bride is she', where participants paid in advance to dance with the bride. The wedding elder would announce the total amount collected, and sometimes even the individual contributions.

A humorous performance often involved a cook pretending to have burned her hand or apron, demanding financial compensation from the groom, or an old woman with a baby claiming the groom's paternity, chastising his moral failings and broken promises of love, while requesting his support - of course, in the form of financial compensation. The erotic and lascivious nature of the entertainment was meant to ensure fertility and favor for the young couple. Traditionally, all villagers had the right to attend the wedding celebration, including receiving refreshments.

From the mid-20th century, with the development of infrastructure and transportation, weddings moved from family homes and courtyards to public venues such as cultural centers, dining halls, restaurants, and hotels. Under the influence of urban trends, wedding food, table settings, and locations were modernized. Pre-wedding preparations gradually disappeared as they became irrelevant. What remained was shortened and condensed into a single day or evening. Local and regional wedding customs declined, leading to their unification and the adoption of global influences.

Departure of the bride from her parental home

This was a ceremonial act marking the bride's farewell to her family and the loss of her place within it. In cases where the bride left with her husband immediately after the church wedding, this farewell took place at the same time as the departure for the ceremony. The bride did not return home after the wedding, and if necessary, a masked stand-in represented her at the celebration. In such cases, the main element of the wedding gathering was the lunch. While the real bride was still at home, financial contributions (‚into the plate') were collected.

However, in cases where the bride returned home after the wedding and the groom came for her only after nightfall, before the wedding feast (dinner) at his home, a separate farewell ceremony was held. The rites and customs of the bride's departure in this case were similar to those conducted during her farewell from the wedding. The entire process followed a structured format, led by the wedding leader and announcer, with corresponding toasts and dialogues.

The bride's party, known as ‚svatvicas' - older, experienced women accompanied her from the wedding gathering to the wedding feast. They played an essential role in carrying out further rituals, witnessing their execution, and reporting back to the wedding gathering about them.

Arrival and acceptance of the bride into the groom's home

The arrival and acceptance of the bride into the groom's home was the second indispensable ceremonial act confirming the validity of marriage according to pre-Christian traditions. These rituals integrated the bride into the groom's family. A common practice involved welcoming the newlyweds at the courtyard entrance by the groom's parents and offering honey or honey cake (to ensure the bride would be good). The bride was showered with grain at the gate (symbolizing fertility) and given bread by her mother-in-law, which she placed on the table inside the house (as an offering to the family's protective spirits). Other customs included circling the hearth, oven, or table, sitting on a fur rug or near the oven (to help her settle into her new home), and overturning a prepared basket of nuts and apples with her foot (to ensure household prosperity). Depending on village and regional customs, additional fertility, prosperity, protection, and acceptance rituals were performed for the bride.

Removing the bride's wreath

The removal of the wreath, garland, or crown symbolizes the bride's loss of virginity. The bride's wedding wreath, or more recently, the veil, signifies her unmarried status, purity, and chastity. It is a part of the bride's head adornment, originally made from fresh evergreen plants (periwinkle, rosemary, boxwood, myrtle, asparagus) and flowers. In the 20th century, artificial flowers and various decorations were also used, complemented by a veil. By the late 19th century, the wreath had been replaced by the so-called ‚parta' (wedding headdress). The preparation of the wreath before the wedding had a ceremonial character, accompanied by wedding songs sung by the bridesmaids. The removal of the wreath, along with the subsequent capping ceremony, was the ritual highlight of the entire wedding. Before the removal, the bride would dance a farewell dance, symbolizing her departure from maidenhood. The wreath was usually removed with a sharp metal object by the best man, a bridesmaid, or the wedding elder. The removed wreath

was pinned to the beam of the house, where it remained until the end of the wedding. In some places, the best men would steal the wreath, and the groom had to buy it back. Often, money was placed directly into the wreath for the bride.

The bride's wreath also served as a magical means to ensure the marriage of the bridesmaids, who would place it on their heads for luck. The family guarded it against unauthorized individuals, fearing that someone could use it to cast a spell on the newlyweds. The couple usually kept the wreath along with the groom's boutonnière as a cherished keepsake until death, though in some places, it was customary to burn them. The ceremony of removing the wreath originally took place in an intimate setting, away from the wedding festivities, in a back room or pantry, attended only by ‚svatvíc' (older women) and the best man, who performed the removal. A part of this ritual was the ‚guiding' of the bride—leading her by the best man while holding lit candles, which were gradually extinguished. The performance of the wreath removal by the best man or wedding elder is likely a remnant of the ancient Slavic custom of the right of the first night. By undergoing this ritual, the bride loses her status as a maiden (young virgin, bride).

Laying the newlyweds to bed

Laying the newlywed couple to bed (also known as laying down, placing) is a ritual act ensuring the fulfillment of the third pre-Christian requirement for the validity of marriage—the ‚fulfilled' wedding night (the so-called ‚golden night'), involving the consummation of the marriage with the purpose of procreation. This act was considered the fulfillment of the primary and sacred purpose of marriage. It was followed by the confirmation of the bride's defloration as proof of her prior virginity. Since the wedding night was a legal act, it required the presence of witnesses during the laying-down of the couple, or (according to some indications) even during the act itself in ancient Slavic times.

In traditional Slovak weddings, the couple was ceremoniously laid to bed at the end of the wedding day, accompanied by music, the singing of erotic songs, burning candles, and the presence of the wedding party. Older records even mention the best man being laid in bed with the bride. The wedding night was accompanied by magical rituals for protection (thorns, an axe under the bed, burning candles), fertility (bread, sprinkling with water), and ensuring a happy marriage (sharing an apple). The custom of removing the groom's shoes (by the bride or vice versa) symbolized (mutual) submission. In some places, after the wedding night, there was a custom of waking the newlyweds, and in others, a symbolic public confirmation of the bride's loss of virginity by drinking red-colored alcohol. With the shortening of wedding celebrations and the softening of customs, this ritual gradually disappeared. Modern pre-marital sexual freedom has led to the loss of both the ritualistic and practical significance of the wedding night.

‚Čepčenie'

The bonneting ceremony (‚zavíjanie', ‚kičkanie', ‚povjazuvaňia') is the ritual act of placing a bonnet on the head of a newlywed woman. The bonnet was a lifelong head covering for every married woman in public. The bonneting symbolizes the transition of the bride into a married woman. Traditionally, it took place the morning after the wedding night. However, in the 20th century, due to shorter weddings, it was combined with the wreath removal ceremony, typically at midnight. The bonneting originally occurred in an intimate setting away from the wedding festivities, such as in a pantry, attic, or barn, attended only by married women. The bride's godmother would place the bonnet on her head. The transformation of the woman's status was also symbolized by a change in attire,

from the ceremonial bridal dress to the festive dress of a married woman. Initially, the bride was expected to resist (hide, throw off the bonnet). Accompanying magical acts were performed to ensure her fertility (a boy placed in her lap), prosperity (bread, cake, and money placed in her lap), and easy childbirth (sitting on a bucket of water). The bonneting was accompanied by ritual wedding songs with farewell motifs as well as erotic songs about married life (the so-called ‚bonneting songs'). The women present were rewarded with refreshments and money from the groom.

The removal of the wreath, the bonneting ceremony, and the changing of the newlyweds' attire remain among the few preserved wedding customs today. Although bonnets have long disappeared from everyday wear, in traditional and rural areas of Slovakia, elderly women can still be seen wearing them or at least headscarves and folk costumes.



The bonneting ceremony, Podpoľanie, 2023, Romana Fekiačová.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/fotosutaz-2025/

Bride's dance

The bride's dance (dance with the young, dance with the bride, ‚Whose bride is she?') remains a preserved wedding tradition. The bride dances with every wedding guest who pays beforehand. The most common dances are waltz, polka, or čardáš. In ‚osve' (the archaic form of the wedding), the bride danced at the send-off ceremony in her parents' home (with ‚her people') while still unmarried, and later at the wedding in her new home with her in-laws (‚new family'), after the ceremony, as a married woman. The money from the send-off was considered a gift to the bride and was therefore her personal property when she entered her husband's family.

In both traditional and modern weddings, where all guests celebrate together, the bride dances only once. In places where this dance takes place after midnight, following the removal of the wreath and the capping ceremony, it is technically no longer a dance with the bride but a dance with a married woman. The dance is announced and moderated by the wedding elder. Money is collected on a plate, and payments are either announced individually or in total at the end. The groom dances last and pays the most. A significant amount can ‚sit the bride down," and only a higher payment can ‚stand her up' again. The dance continues until everyone has danced, and those who wish can dance multiple times if they pay. Aside from providing financial support to the bride or couple, the dance also serves to introduce the bride to the new family and facilitate her acceptance.

Dividing the wedding cake

The division of the wedding cake among all wedding guests is the final act of the bride or the couple. It is often accompanied by a serving of honey alcohol. Through this act, the newlyweds thank the guests for their participation and bear witness to ensure that everything happened as it should. The couple usually departs for their bed afterward, sometimes quietly or with a ceremonial wedding march.

The wedding celebration continues, typically until the early morning hours. The longer and more enjoyable the celebration, the more successful the wedding is considered. In such cases, a second dinner (around 2-3 AM) or an early but hearty breakfast follows. Guests receive a parting gift—a piece of cake, a wedding pastry, and a bottle of wine.

Church bells had a very important communication function in the organization of the wedding. After the first ringing, the bride and groom begin to get married in their houses and leave with their retinue in front of the church. At the second ring, they go inside for the wedding. As they leave, the bells ring for a third time, letting everyone in the village, at the wedding or the reception, know about the marriage and await their arrival.

The most archaic form of the Slovak wedding ‚osve' perceives the church/civil marriage only as an official duty and therefore only the presence of the newlyweds and two witnesses was customary. It was not rare that the marriage took place on a different day of the pre-wedding week. The customs, ceremonies, and established folkloric forms are inflated by other moments that were perceived by the actors as truly essential:

1. taking the bride away from her parents and going to her husband's house,
2. the integration of the bride into the family of the husband,
3. wreath taking, wedding night, and bonneting.

The traditional Slovak wedding gives the same important ceremonial and representative meaning to archaic rituals as to a marriage in a church.

Contemporary Slovak weddings already consider the main and supreme act to be a marriage in a church or civil office, while everything else may or may not be present. And if it is, it is no longer a legitimizing ceremony, in the magic of which is believed, but as a representative, emotional, or entertaining moment of the program for the wedding guests.

Post-wedding period

The post-wedding period lasts approximately one week. It consists of customs that serve to conclude wedding-related matters (returning borrowed items, settling obligations with those involved, expressing gratitude for the help, paying off necessary expenses) and to continue and develop new relationships formed through marriage.

The main event is the post-wedding feast (known as ‚hejna', ‚hajnal', ‚omlady', ‚opáčky', ‚otrusky', ‚poprávka'). This is a meal served at the home of the bride, the groom, or, by agreement, in the homes of both wedding families. It usually takes place within a week after the wedding day. It provides an opportunity for visits between newly related families, for the parents of both spouses to meet, and for the young woman to visit her parental home. The feast also serves as a way to offer hospitality and gratitude to those who helped at the wedding feast or contributed to its preparation and execution (such as cooks, ‚attendants' – bridesmaids and groomsmen, innkeepers, musicians) but could not attend as guests, either due to their duties or due to space constraints (such as neighbors, colleagues, or extended relatives).

During this period, additional visits between newly related families also took place:

Transport of the bridal dowry

This is a ceremonial transfer of the bride's dowry and trousseau to the husband's home if it was not done in the pre-wedding week. Wedding gifts from the bride's side are also transported if they were given at her parents' home. Relatives visit the newlyweds to view these gifts.

Wedding gifts, trousseau, and dowry

Wedding gifts are based on principles:

- Form and degree of kinship: The closer the kinship, the more valuable the gift. The most valuable gifts were expected from godparents and close relatives in their productive years. The donor's economic circumstances were also considered.

- Reciprocity: Ordinary wedding guests gave gifts to the newlyweds of approximately the same value as they had received when their own weddings took place. ‚What you gave us, we give you.' The gifts given were usually recorded at each wedding so that the recipients would ‚know what to return'. In some places, gifts and donors were announced immediately by the wedding host in front of all the guests.

Traditionally, gifts were practical household items (kitchen and interior essentials, home textiles), while more modern gifts include kitchen appliances, electronics, decorations, and money.

The trousseau (‚štafír', ‚štafirung') is personal property that every woman must prepare if she wants to get married. With the help of female relatives, she starts gathering it from her girlhood years. The contents of a proper bride's trousseau were strictly defined in each community, specifying not only the type but also the minimum quantity. Typically, it included large pillows (2–4), small pillows (4–8), duvets (2), bedsheets (10), bed linen (10), towels (20), dishcloths (20), tablecloths (5), and other home and clothing textiles, often even furniture (such as a chest or a tall wardrobe for clothes or linens). The trousseau was prepared by the female members of each family for each daughter. Feathers for pillows and duvets were plucked from their poultry (a collective feather-plucking event called ‚páračky'). Fabric for all textiles was woven at home on looms, usually by the eldest women, who mastered the craft best. The threads were spun by other female household members (‚priadky' – collective thread spinning) from flax or hemp fibers that they grew and processed themselves. The fabric was then used to sew everything needed, which was often decorated with embroidery following precise local technological and aesthetic rules.

Girls from poorer families (which were always more numerous) began working around the age of 12 in wealthier households in the village or nearby towns as maids or seasonal workers. With their earnings, they could acquire a better trousseau and thus marry better, or proudly demonstrate their ability to secure the community-required contribution to marriage, even if they came from a poor background.

‚Veno' (dowry) is a gift from the bride's parents. In its archaic form, it was a real payment; traditionally, it symbolized the daughter's compensation from the family inheritance. Naturally, the size of the dowry influenced the number and quality of suitors. The content and amount of the dowry depended on the family's wealth and occupation. In typical Slovak rural families, it usually consisted of livestock (such as a cow, calf, or heifer), furniture, land, or money. The dowry was not considered the property of the new family but rather the bride's contribution to the marriage and her personal assets.

‚Vádzka'

The vádzka was an important archaic ritual. It was a magical purification of the young woman by older married women and her initiation into marital status. Later, as a Christian ceremony, it took place after the church wedding in the presence of a priest and the godmother before a statue of the Virgin Mary, where the bride prayed with a candle in her hand. It included moral admonitions from the priest and instructions on marital norms. Between 1962 and 1965, vádzka rituals were abolished.

Today's weddings have been shortened from at least one week, where key ceremonies were spread over three days, to a single day. This has led to a reduction, selection, and simplification of wedding customs. Marriages between individuals from different communities have contributed to the standardization of wedding practices to align expectations between families. As a result, traditional wedding norms have weakened, and new customs have been widely accepted. The modern wedding is dominated by the ceremony, the wedding reception and entertainment, aesthetic elements, and visual documentation.



Gravestone cross, Detva cemetery, archive of the Podpolian Museum.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/zoznam-nkd/drevene-vyrezavane-krize-na-podpolani/

Customs related to death

Anthropologically, this refers to a complex set of rituals, customs, and acts performed in connection with death and the burial of the deceased. They relate to the period from dying to the conclusion of the funeral feast. Customs related to death are present in every culture and every human community. According to some researchers, it is precisely funeral rituals and burials that distinguish humans from animals. They demonstrate the existence of an awareness of life and death within a community and the need to deal with the permanent departure of a member in some way. They also prove the existence of a belief in the body and soul of a person, where death marks the departure of the soul from the body.

Slovak customs related to death originate from Slavic traditions. Until the 6th century, the bodies of the deceased were cremated, their remains placed in urns, and these urns were stored in one place—a burial ground—known as the Urnfield culture or the Barrow culture (a barrow being a raised mound for human remains). Later, bodies began to be buried in the ground (skeleton graves). In line with their belief in the afterlife, the Slavs placed weapons in the graves of warriors, tools in the graves of farmers and craftsmen, etc.

According to the oldest reports from Slovakia, concerning the Slavs of the Great Moravian period (9th century), it was written that: ‚... if one of them dies, they burn him, and their women, if a family member dies, cut their hands and face with a knife. The day after the burning of the deceased, they come to the site of the burning, take the ashes from that place, and place them in a clay vessel, which they then store in an elevated location. One year after the death, relatives bring with them about 20 or more beehives, gather on an elevated place, eat and drink there, and then return home. If the deceased had three wives and one of them believed that her husband loved her the most, she would take two pieces of wood, place them near the deceased, then lay a third piece of wood across them, pass a strong rope through the middle, tie the other end of the rope around her neck while standing on a chair. Once she had done all this, they would pull the chair away from under her, and she would be left hanging until she suffocated and died. Her body was then thrown into the fire and burned.‘

Foreseeing, invoking, and preventing death

Based on the belief in death as a supernatural being, its arrival could be foreseen (through divination), inferred (through omens or signs), or either invoked or delayed (through magic). A person could call death upon themselves, for example, by being the first to light a fire in a new stove or by cutting down a healthy fruit tree. On the other hand, death could be deceived or prevented. It had no power over a person who drank the blood from a hen's comb, could not see the sick if their bed was placed crosswise under the ceiling beams, and could not enter a house if the keyhole was plugged with hemp. However, actions to prevent death were rarely performed.

In connection with the widespread belief that a person's life (fate) and even the exact day and hour of their death were predetermined, death was foretold by:

- observing magical plants during solstice periods (on John the Baptist's day),
- cutting an apple in half,

- the direction of a candle's flame (on Christmas Eve).

Death could also be foreshadowed by signs such as:
- dreams (for example, about bread, dough, murky water, or a wedding),
- unusual animal behavior (for example, birds leaving a nest on a house or an owl appearing),
- death revealing itself, most commonly as a thin woman shrouded in a white sheet, a goose, or another animal,
- cracking walls, knocking on the attic or windows,
- the clanging of a gravedigger's tools,
- the appearance of a deceased relative to the one who was about to follow them.

Preparation for death

In traditional Slovak society, especially members of the oldest generation, as their physical strength declined, gradually came to terms with the thought of death and prepared for it so that their final journey would be dignified and the last impression they left behind would be as good as possible (gathering fine clothing for their coffin, setting aside money for the funeral).

Death customs ensure:

Easing Death If It Is Inevitable

The goal of correctly performing death customs was to ensure the soul of the deceased was at peace, accepting their departure from the living to a new place, the afterlife, where they were to continue their existence. Therefore, in the moments of death, a person was cared for by their closest family members. The community struggled most with the loss of healthy individuals in their youth or prime, whereas in the case of the terminally ill or the frail, death, regardless of age, was considered natural and the most optimal resolution.

To ease death, the dying person was fumigated with certain plants, sprinkled or given holy water to drink (combining Christian and pagan beliefs in the cleansing and protective power of water), laid from their bed onto straw or a sheet spread on the floor/ground (following the concept of Earth as Mother), a candle was lit (combining Christian and pagan beliefs in the purifying and protective power of fire), they were washed or given herbal decoctions to drink, their bed was placed where the table had been (the table originally had an altar and ritual function in the home) and turned parallel to the ceiling beams, or a piece of their wedding attire was placed on their body.

It was important to achieve reconciliation between the dying person and their survivors, to reveal secrets, and to forgive wrongdoings by performing confession and receiving the sacrament of the last anointing. The Slovak people‘s attitude toward death is captured in expressions like: ‚We will all go there someday.‘ or ‚The young may, but the old must.‘

Announcement of death to relatives and neighbors

The bereaved immediately informed the deceased‘s relatives and acquaintances of the death. Church bells (so-called ‚umieráčik‘ - death knells) played an important communicative role. The type of bell and ringing sometimes indicated whether the deceased was an adult or a child, a man or a woman. In ethnically/religiously mixed communities with their churches, it was possible to determine the ethnic or religious affiliation of the deceased. Work in the house and surroundings stopped momentarily throughout the village. Close relatives or the nearest neighbors ceased work entirely if possible.

Facilitating the departure of the soul

The windows in the room had to be opened immediately to allow the soul to fly away, and all the vessels in the room were turned upside down so that the soul could not hide in them. Mirrors were either covered or turned to the wall, not only to prevent death from seeing itself, since it could return shortly but also to prevent the deceased‘s soul from repeatedly returning. Candles were lit next to the deceased.

Preparation and placement of the body into the coffin

The preparation of the body involved washing, combing, shaving (for men), dressing, and arranging the body so that the deceased appeared dignified and at peace. Neighboring women helped the grieving family with washing and dressing. The body was laid out on boards covered with a sheet, positioned flat on its back. If the eyelids were not fully closed, they were weighed down with a coin, as an open eye was considered a sign that the deceased was looking for a close person to take along. For this reason, people avoided looking into the deceased‘s eyes. An exception was an infant, if the mother had died and the child was seen as a burden to the family, it was placed at her breast in hopes that she would come for it. If the deceased‘s mouth was open, the jaw had to be tied shut. The hands and fingers were arranged in the desired position as soon as possible after death.

If the body did not stiffen or pale by the next day, it was believed to have two hearts or two souls and could return from the afterlife to harm people‘s health, livestock, and crops. In such cases, thorny branches were placed at the feet, a thorn was driven into the heel, the toes were tied together, a garlic wreath was wrapped around the legs, or the heart was pierced.

It was the responsibility of the bereaved to procure a coffin. The most common method was purchase, but having one made by a local carpenter was also widespread, sometimes using planks that people prepared in advance and stored in their attic. Naturally, the decoration, quality of wood, and craftsmanship of the coffin depended on the family‘s wealth, social status, or the deceased‘s wishes. Before placing the body inside, the coffin was purified of potential evil demons by fumigating it with blessed herbs and sprinkling it with holy water. The coffin was not to be lined with fur, such a practice was believed to cause the family‘s sheep to die off. For the same reason, feathers were also avoided; only wood shavings were used.

Burial of children

Children were buried in white, most often in simple linen garments. Girls and boys were dressed in festive clothing, with girls wearing wreaths on their heads.

Burial of youth

Young unmarried men and women were buried dressed for a wedding, young women with a bridal wreath, and young men with a groom‘s boutonniere. Girls‘ hair was left unbraided. The inclusion of wedding elements stemmed from the perception of marriage as a crucial positive milestone in a young person‘s life and the belief that the dead continued to have bodily needs even after death.

Burial of adults

The master of the house was given a coin in the coffin as a symbolic release from his estate. Each deceased person received their favorite objects (such as a book, pen, or scissors) or personal items needed in daily life (such as a prayer book, rosary, glasses, dentures, or walking stick). A woman who died in childbirth or during pregnancy was given baby supplies in the coffin, a carrying cloth, a swaddling blanket, and baby clothes. In the past, especially male bodies were dressed only in linen garments until the late 19th century, when dark mourning clothes became standard. Often, the deceased was buried in slippers or shoes, but with thin soles to ensure that, in case of return, their steps would not be heard.

Clothing that had been in contact with the deceased was usually burned or given to beggars. Water, combs, towels, and all other items used in preparing the body were considered harmful and destructive and were therefore buried in a remote location or burned.

Mourning and watching over the deceased

In the evening hours, relatives and neighbors visited the deceased’s home. They sat around the body, which was placed in a room, vestibule, or barn, and expressed their condolences. It was crucial to ensure the constant presence of the dead. This was driven by fear (superstition) that neglecting the deceased could lead to their transformation into a vampire or revenant. Those afraid of being haunted would discreetly press the deceased‘s toe.

Throughout the night, young men and newly married men kept vigil with the deceased in the presence of relatives and neighbors. They conversed, played cards, and engaged in so-called ‚funeral games‘. These games often involved pretending to kill someone, dramatizing the struggle of the soul on its journey to heaven or hell, or engaging in erotic behavior (kissing, touching, mimicking movements). Beating with ropes, twisted towels, or wooden paddles was common, as well as dousing with water.

Sealing and carrying out the coffin, farewell, and funeral lament

The coffin was usually carried out open, always feet first, following the belief that otherwise, the deceased might return. A symbolic farewell to the home involved three taps of the coffin against the doorstep. In the courtyard, a public farewell was held with all those who had known the deceased, even briefly. It was led by a priest and accompanied by mourners.

The funeral lament was a ritual farewell by the bereaved to honor the dead. It was based on the belief that wailing soothed the deceased’s soul, ensuring their peaceful departure to the afterlife and preventing the influence of evil forces. Additionally, an unwept soul was believed to be at risk of becoming a revenant or vampire. The lament was performed by the grieving wife, mother, daughter, sister, or hired mourner. It was repeated at various stages—when death was confirmed, when people arrived at the deceased‘s home when the coffin was carried out when it was closed, when leaving the courtyard, on the way to church (if the custom involved taking

the coffin there), on the way to the cemetery, and when lowering the coffin into the grave. The texts of funeral approvals were also tied to weeping. Ceremonial lament was used especially for unnatural deaths.

The funeral lament takes the form of a sung or recited lamentation by a woman over the deceased. It recalls the personality and life of the deceased, his/her positive qualities, abilities, life events or difficulties, the causes of death, and the feelings that the survivors had for him and their difficult future. The lament included poetic farewell verses that described the deceased's character, life events, challenges, cause of death, and the emotions of those left behind. It was physically and emotionally demanding, either performed as an improvised outpouring or using fixed verses and formulas in song form. Labeled as pagan, it was forbidden as early as the 16th century, but in some Slovak regions, it persisted until the late 20th century.

Additionally, the cantor bid farewell to the bereaved on behalf of the deceased, singing pre-prepared verses mentioning relatives, neighbors, and acquaintances by name.

Digging the grave and preparing the burial site

These tasks were carried out by the gravedigger, a person responsible for cemetery maintenance and burials, for an agreed-upon fee. The gravedigger was usually appointed by the village church administration. In some places, graves were dug by the deceased's relatives or through a rotational system, but most often by the gravedigger with his sons. This physically demanding job earned him money, bread, and liquor from the bereaved. However, due to superstitions surrounding death, gravediggers and their families held a low social status in the village.

The dead were placed in the grave with their feet facing east, an old Slavic tradition that prevailed in most cemeteries in Slovakia until the 20th century. The regulation to establish cemeteries and to bury exclusively there has been in force since the 11th century, but since the Slavs believed that the soul of the dead after death incarnates into a bird that resides in the trees, in some areas of Slovakia, until the 17th century, the dead were buried without the presence of a priest in nearby forests and groves, which became sacred in this way.

Journey to the cemetery - funeral procession

The funeral procession passed through the village, led by a cross or a flag. The coffin was carried on the shoulders of distant relatives; for longer distances, it was transported by cart, sometimes even on sleds in summer. Behind it followed the mourning family and other attendees. Only for a young, unmarried adult, the youth walked behind the coffin carrying a feather and a wreath, or an apple, a wedding cake, a bridal bouquet, or other wedding symbols. The deceased's peers dressed as wedding groomsmen and bridesmaids. This practice is a remnant and evidence of posthumous marriages once practiced by the Slavs. The connection between funerals and weddings was also expressed in the content of funeral laments, where death was likened to a bride. The funeral of a young person with wedding elements was meant to ensure that their soul would not become a revenant, to reconcile with death, and to prevent disturbing the living. According to superstition, the funeral procession should not be overtaken, as anyone who overtakes it might metaphorically 'overtake' the deceased on their journey to the grave.

Church ceremony – Funeral

This takes place at the cemetery and is conducted by a priest. It concludes with the burial of the coffin and covering it with earth. A church funeral was denied to those who had excluded themselves from the church community through their own fault, such as suicides, non-believers, heretics, duelists (who died in a duel), if they had not expressed repentance through confession before death and had not received the last rites.

‚Kar‘

This is a meal or gathering after the funeral, held in the home of the deceased. It is prepared by the mourning family for funeral guests. The mourning family invites guests to the kar while offering condolences at the cemetery after the burial. Initially, the refreshments were mostly symbolic (bread and alcohol). The bread was not cut but broken. In wealthier families, or the case of out-of-town or significant mourners, smoked meat, sausages, or bacon were served alongside bread, sometimes cakes or other pastries, as well as dairy products (such as cottage cheese or bryndza), but not cooked meals. More elaborate wakes were held when a young person died, with meals resembling a wedding feast, and alcoholic beverages like alcohol (known as ‘grave alcohol’ or ‘kar alcohol’) and wine were served in memory of the deceased. In eastern Slovakia, among the Orthodox population, the kar was held directly at the cemetery, at the grave, and was repeated weeks or months after death and during Easter holidays. In the second half of the 20th century, the traditional character of kar changed: they began to be held in various restaurants and included more elaborate meals.

Post-funeral rituals and remembrance of the dead

These rituals are associated with honoring the memory of the deceased:

- After guests leave the kar, a piece of bread and a glass of alcohol are placed on the table, as it is believed that the deceased will come at night to thank them for the funeral if they are satisfied, showing that they are not forgotten.

- Remembrances, ceremonies, and feasts in honor of the dead were originally held at graves on individual memorial days (on the 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 9th, 20th, 40th, or other day), later half a year or a year after death.

- All Saints‘ Day, All Souls‘ Day, Easter, and Pentecost are days associated with the annual remembrance of the deceased. Under the influence of the Church, increased attention was paid to cemetery cleaning, grave decoration, placing fir wreaths, and covering graves with moss and fir branches for All Saints‘ Day (November 1) and All Souls‘ Day (November 2). On these days, candles burn on graves as a symbol of eternal light shining for the souls of the faithful. Decorating graves with pussy willows blessed during Holy Week was common. Placing flowers on graves is a more recent tradition in Slovakia from the late 19th century. Nowadays it is rare to carry a Christmas tree to the graves of young people or children, which was widespread even after World War II. On All Souls’ Day, memorial masses and collective prayers for the dead were considered especially effective and were held in churches or cemeteries. In Slovakia, it was customary on All Souls’ Day to give food or money to the poor and beggars so that they would pray for the souls of the deceased.

- Mourning (humility) is a way of expressing grief after the death of close relatives. Tradition dictates a specific mourning period (usually a year). It was observed through reserved public behavior, mourning attire (dark or old clothes), abstaining from festivities

with music and dancing, and in mourning families, weddings were not held. The mourning period was associated with prayers for the dead and fasting.

The Revenant is a mythical being in a human form related to beliefs about the ‚unclean dead'. It is the soul of a deceased person who has not found peace after death and returns to the world of the living. The most common causes were unnatural, violent, or premature deaths (suicides, accident victims, murder victims, drowning victims, young people before marriage, women who died in childbirth, parents of young children, unbaptized children), which led to their attempts to settle unfinished business: for example, dead mothers were believed to return to nurse and comb their orphaned children, unbaptized souls sought baptism, young people tried to satisfy their sexual desires, murder victims wanted to expose their killers, debtors sought to fulfill obligations. A revenant could also return due to sins committed during life (such as land theft, stealing, unjust inheritance, leaving the family in debt, or abusing parents) or due to mistakes made by the living (such as not fulfilling the deceased's last wishes, improper funeral rites, burial in inappropriate clothing, or excessive mourning). To prevent revenants from returning, various practices were performed: pulling the coffin under the doorway, throwing a burning straw bundle on the coffin, or sprinkling it with holy water. The dead could also be summoned from the afterlife using magical means. Like other night demons, revenants were believed to be repelled by a rooster's crow.

In eastern Slovakia, Orthodox communities held kar directly at the grave, even weeks or months after death and during Easter, believing this prevented the soul's unwanted return. Some traditions dictated that no cooking was done in the deceased's home until after the funeral, and food for the kar was prepared by neighbors, with each dish intentionally made imperfect so that the soul of the deceased would not crave returning the food.

Until the 20th century, Slovaks preserved customs of offering food or drink to the deceased during the kar, a glass of alcohol was placed by the window for three days so the deceased could sip from it, or a piece of bread and a glass of alcohol were left on the table on the day of the funeral, as people believed the deceased would return to express gratitude.

The funeral of a young community member who died before marriage had to include wedding elements, as marriage was a key life milestone. This was done to address the belief that such individuals might still need to satisfy physical desires even after death. The funeral procession carried a wreath, a feather, an apple, a wedding cake, a bridal bouquet, and other wedding symbols. The deceased, as well as their unmarried peers, wore wedding attire. Funeral laments compared death to a bride. This ritual ensured that the soul of the young, unmarried deceased would not become a revenant, allowing them to accept death peacefully and not disturb the living.

In a traditional Slovak family (the so-called ‚patriarchal big family'), three generations lived together under one roof: parents (the head of the household and his wife), their sons with their wives (daughters-in-law), and their shared children (grandchildren), as well as unmarried daughters until they married. This often meant dozens of people living together. Birth and death usually occurred in front of all family members. Death was present at home and, therefore, an integral part of life.

Answer the following questions:

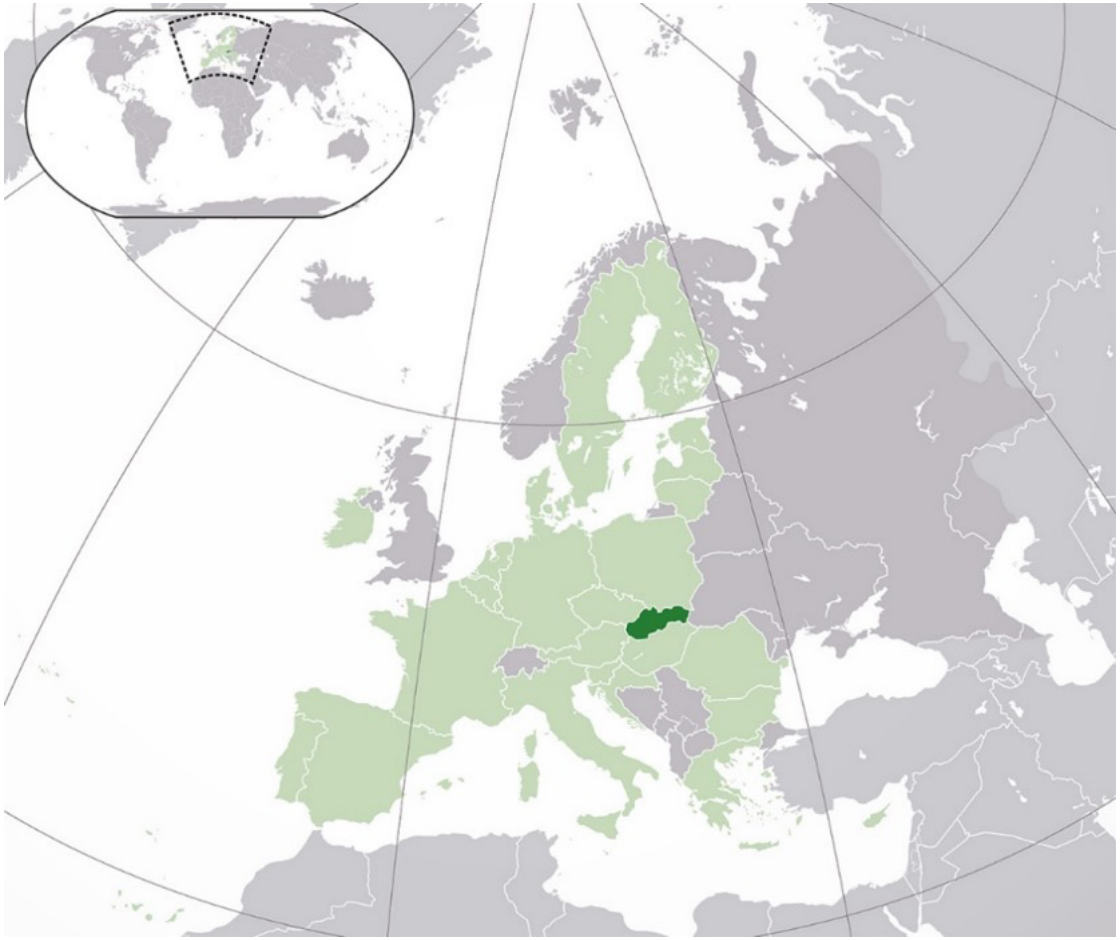
- What are Slovak cultural traditions and why?
- What are typical Slovak dishes, and how and when are they prepared?
- What are typical Slovak folk dances, and how and when are they performed?
- What are typical Slovak folk songs, and how and when are they sung?
- What are typical Slovak folk costumes, how are they made and when are they worn?
- What are typical Slovak well-wishes, rhymes, proverbs, sayings, and fairy tales, and when were they told?
- What are typical Slovak folk musical instruments?
- What are typical Slovak traditional occupations?
- What are typical Slovak traditional houses and ways of living?
- What are typical Slovak calendar and family customs?
- Why is it important to understand Slovak cultural traditions, and what should be considered?
- What is missing, needs to be added, or can be supplemented in the above texts to make the answers more precise and comprehensive?



Muránska Lehota, Matúš Lašan.
Source: https://www.pokladyslovenska.sk/images/slider/slide001.jpg

II. GEOGRAPHY

The Slovak Republic is located in Central Europe, covering an area of approximately 49,000 km². In terms of area, it ranks 127th in the world. Within Europe, it is one of the smaller states (25th place). As of March 31, 2024, approximately 5,422,000 inhabitants lived in Slovakia (population density is about 110.6 inhabitants/km²). The capital city is Bratislava.



Slovakia's location (dark green) in the European Union (light green).
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/1/1d/20130701094653%21EU-Slovakia.svg

Development of state territory and borders

The term ‚Slovakia' appears in the language at the beginning of the 19th century. However, the territory inhabited by Slovaks has been referred to as Slovak since the beginning of the 16th century. The term ‚slowakisches' Land, later ‚Slowakei', appears in German sources at this time. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Slovak territory was also referred to as ‚Tót ország' (Hungarian), ‚Tót vilájet' (Turkish), or ‚Slovaks' (documents written in the Moravian environment).

The territory of today's Slovakia, the Slovak Republic, was part of the Kingdom of Hungary (until 1526), or the Habsburg monarchy, which after 1867 was called Austria-Hungary, from the end of Great Moravia (ca. 906 - 907) for almost a thousand years until 1918.

In 1918 (October 28) Slovakia became part of the Czechoslovak Republic (Czechoslovakia). The western and northern borders were defined by the historical border of Hungary with Austria and Poland. The southern border with Hungary was determined by the Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920) and the Treaty of Trianon (June 4, 1920). It was established as a democratic republic, later a federative state, in which the Slovak lands existed (autonomy in 1938-1939). After the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the Slovak Republic (unofficially the Slovak State), an ally of Nazi Germany, was established on March 14, 1939, on a truncated territory (its southern and eastern areas were ceded to Hungary in 1938). During World War II, the government of the Czechoslovak Republic was in exile (London, 1940-1945).

After the end of the war, the Czechoslovak Republic was restored to its original borders between 1945 and 1948. It was a democratic centralized state with authoritarian features (so-called ‚people's democracy'). The Czechoslovak Republic (CSR) existed until July 10, 1960. Between 1948 and 1968 it was a communist state (officially a people's democracy until July 1960, then a socialist republic). On July 11, 1960, the republic changed its name to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR), which was used until 1990. It was a communist state (since 1968 a federation of the Czech and Slovak Socialist Republics), which used the more semantically ‚acceptable' term ‚socialist' in its official name. After the fall of communism (the Velvet Revolution of November 17, 1989), the Czechoslovak Federal Republic existed for several weeks in 1990. On April 23, 1990, the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic (CSFR) was proclaimed as a democratic federation of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.

Based on the law on the dissolution of the federation, the adoption of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, and the declaration of independence, Slovakia became an independent sovereign state with the official name of the Slovak Republic on January 1, 1993.

Location, boundaries, and shape of the territory

Slovakia is a landlocked country located in the heart of Europe. Its position can be characterized from several perspectives: mathematical-geographical, in relation to oceans and seas, in terms of altitude and relief, and from a human-geographical, or geopolitical standpoint.

The mathematical-geographical position is advantageous, as Slovakia lies in the center of the temperate zone. The northernmost point is near Oravská Polhora (49° 37' 52" N) in the Námestovo district, while the southernmost point is on the Danube near Patince (47° 43' 54" N) in the Komárno district. The latitudinal difference (1° 53') is too small to differentiate Slovakia's climate into distinct climatic regions. The westernmost point is on the Morava River in Záhorská Ves (16° 50' 05" E) in the Malacky district, while the easternmost point is in Nová Sedlica in the Snina district (22° 34' 04" E); the longitudinal range is 5° 44', with a time difference of 22 minutes. The entire territory of Slovakia falls within the Central European Time zone (CET).

The position relative to oceans and seas is less favorable. The disadvantages of Slovakia's landlocked position are partially mitigated by access via the Danube to the Black Sea and through the Danube–Main–Rhine Canal to the North Sea. However, seas and oceans significantly influence the climate. From this perspective, Slovakia is situated at the transition between an oceanic and a continental climate of the temperate zone.

Sea	Shortest distance from the state border (km)
Baltic	520
North	791
Adriatic	350
Black	678

Distance of Slovakia from the seas.
Source: Kramáreková – Dubcová – Farkaš (2024), p. 272.

Position in terms of altitude and relief. The highest point in Slovakia is the summit of Gerlachovský štít (2,655 m above sea level) in the Tatra Mountains (Poprad district). In comparison, the lowest point is the outflow of the Bodrog River (94 m above sea level) in the village of Klin nad Bodrogom in the Trebišov district. The average altitude of Slovakia is 392 m above sea level. Large altitude differences and rugged terrain cause climate variations (altitudinal zonation) and, as a result, influence soil types, vegetation, settlement, and human activities. The main European watershed passes through Slovakia, making it the ‚roof of Europe'. Most rivers in Slovakia originate within its borders; except for the Danube (which flows through Slovakia), the Váh, and the Hron, rivers are short and do not provide sufficient water for industry and other activities.

The human-geographical position is advantageous, particularly in relation to European economic groupings and major European transport routes. Historically, Slovakia's territory was an important crossroads of trade routes from the Baltic Sea (in the north) to the Adriatic Sea (south of Slovakia). These routes intersected with the Danube route, which connected Central Europe with the Black

and Mediterranean Seas. Today, the importance of this geographic space is increasing in river, road, rail, air, and pipeline transport.

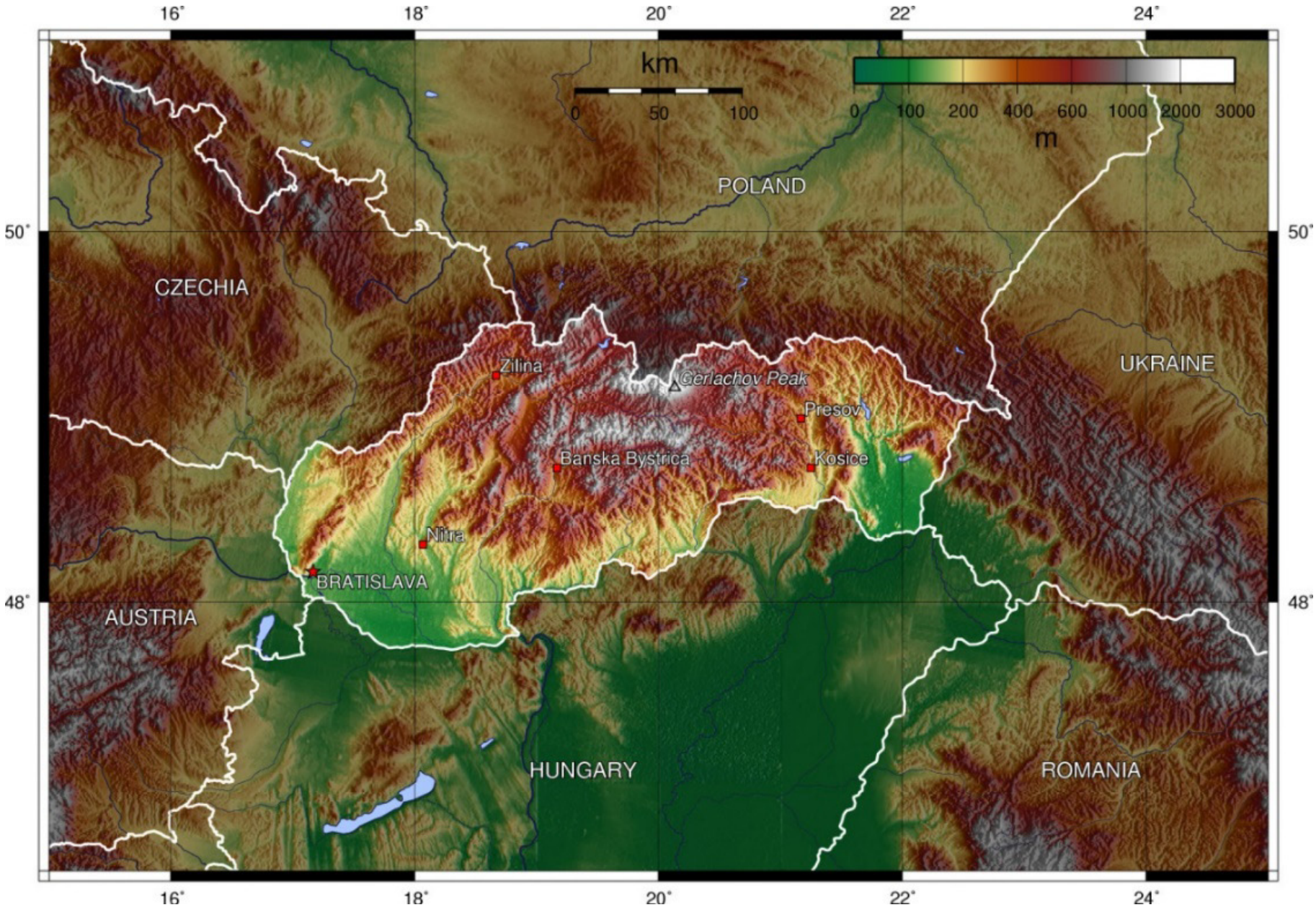
The geopolitical position is determined by Slovakia's location in Central Europe, which historically shaped its involvement (as part of Hungary in the Middle Ages, later the Habsburg Monarchy, Austria-Hungary, and Czechoslovakia) in key European political issues. Today, Slovakia occupies an important position along the east-west axis, between Austria and Germany on one side and Ukraine and Russia on the other. Slovakia's eastern border also serves as the border of the Schengen Area, of which Slovakia has been a member since December 2007.

The total length of Slovakia's borders is 1,652.2 km, mostly natural (75%), following rivers (Morava, Danube, Ipeľ) and mountain ridges (White Carpathians, Tatras, Orava Beskids, Bukovské Hills, etc.). Artificial borders exist in the east with Hungary and Ukraine.

The shape of the territory of Slovakia is elongated in a parallelogram direction. It has the greatest length (429 km) between Záhorská Vsa (Malacky district) and Nová Sedlica (Snina district), the greatest width (197 km) between Skalitý (Čadca district) in Kysuce and Štúrovo (Nové Zámky district) on the Danube, and the smallest width (76 km) between Orlov (Stará Ľubovňa district) and Turnianske Podhradie (Košice district - surroundings).

State	Length (km)	Length (%)
Poland	541.1	32.8
Czech Republic	251.8	15.2
Austria	107.1	6.5
Hungary	654.9	39.6
Ukraine	97.9	5.9
Total	**1,652.2**	**100.0**

Basic data on the state borders of the Slovak Republic.
Source. Kramáreková – Dubcová – Farkaš (2024), ps. 273; Dubcová et al. (2008), p. 31.



Slovakia and neighboring countries.
Source: https://sk.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%BAbor:Slovakia_topo.jpg

2.1 Physical geography

Rock environment

Slovakia belongs to the Alpine-Himalayan system. Most of the country's territory is occupied by the Carpathians, which are bordered to the south by the lowlands of the Pannonian Basin.

Geological development of the Carpathians

The geological development of the Carpathians took place in multiple stages. As early as the Precambrian and Paleozoic eras, rocks were deposited in geosynclinal seas, undergoing multiple folding events and transforming into crystalline schists (gneisses, paragneisses, and phyllites). This folding was accompanied by magmatic activity. During the Variscan orogeny at the end of the Paleozoic, magmatic bodies composed of granodiorites and granites formed. These crystalline schists, granodiorites, and granites created the Slovak Block, which forms the foundation of the Western Carpathians and emerges at the surface of the core mountain ranges.

At the end of the Paleozoic, the territory of the Slovak Carpathians subsided and was flooded by the sea. In this sea, during the Mesozoic era, thick layers of sedimentary rocks, primarily limestones, dolomites, and marls, were deposited. By the end of the Mesozoic, these rocks were folded through Alpine orogeny and were displaced as nappes from the south to the north, forming the cover of the Central Carpathians.

At the end of the Mesozoic and the beginning of the Tertiary, a marine depression (geosyncline) formed on the northern edge of the Central Carpathians, where gravel, sand, and clay from the adjacent mainland were deposited. These materials formed alternating layers of conglomerates, sandstones, and claystones - known as flysch. At the boundary between the Paleogene and Neogene, these rocks were folded, creating the flysch belt. During this folding, marlstones and resistant limestones were torn from the bedrock and uplifted. The softer marlstones were eroded, while the more resistant limestones remained prominent in the landscape. This process led to the formation of a narrow klippen belt on the northern edge of the Central Carpathians, where the scenic ruins of castles enhance the landscape of this geological ‚wonder of the world'.

On the periphery of the flysch Carpathians, **at the beginning of the late Tertiary** (Neogene), another geosyncline formed, where gravel, sand, and clay accumulated - this is known as the Carpathian Foredeep. During the next phase of Alpine folding, the flysch Carpathians were displaced over this foredeep. This folding process also led to the formation of volcanic mountain ranges along the inner margin of the Carpathians. Deep faults developed, allowing lava to reach the surface, and volcanoes erupted, expelling loose materials such as tuffs and tuffites. By the end of the Neogene, deep faults fragmented the once-leveled surface into blocks. Some of these blocks were uplifted, forming the mountain ranges of the Central Carpathians. On the southern side of the Carpathians and between the individual mountain ranges, where blocks had subsided, Neogene basins formed. In these basins, sediments such as gravel, sand, and clay accumulated in marine and later lacustrine environments.

During the Quaternary period, the activity of rivers, glaciers, and wind led to the formation of Quaternary sediments, which cover older rocks. The present-day river network was established, with gravel, sand, and clay deposits accumulating in valleys and basins. Mountain glaciers shaped the Earth's surface and deposited glacial sediments. Strong winds transported sand and dust, forming layers of wind-blown sands and loess.



The ruins of Lednica Castle in Vršatské bradlá.
Source: https://www.fotoma.sk/galeria/45774/hrad-lednica/ (© J. Sádecký)

Geological structure and mineral resources

The Carpathians have a zonal geological structure, with each zone differing in development, properties, and the age of rocks. We distinguish the following geological zones:

1. The Fore-Carpathian Depression does not occur in Slovakia; it borders the arc of the Carpathian mountains from the outer side.

2. The Flysch Zone consists of extensive mountain ranges in the north and northwest of Slovakia. It begins with the Myjava Uplands and the White Carpathians and continues through the Kysuce and Orava regions into Poland, where it borders the Tatra Mountains from the north. In the Spiš region, it extends into eastern Slovakia. Flysch mountains are poor in mineral resources, with only sandstone being mined for construction purposes. Landslides also occur in these areas.

3. The Klippen Belt starts at Podbranč in the Myjava Uplands, passes through the White Carpathians, where the Vršatec Klippen stand out, follows the Váh River to Žilina, then extends into Orava and Poland. It re-enters Slovakia near the Dunajec River (Pieniny) and continues through Hanušovce and Humenné into Ukraine. Limestones form prominent rocky hills, while less resistant marls have been eroded into depressions. The marls and limestones of the Klippen Belt are used for cement production.

4. Core Mountains and the Slovak Ore Mountains – The central Carpathians have a core composed of deep-seated igneous rocks (granite, granodiorite) and crystalline schists (gneiss, phyllite, and mica schist). These resistant rocks form the highest peaks of the Tatras and other mountain ranges. Overlying them are variously deposited limestones, dolomites, sandstones, shales, and marls from the Paleozoic to the Tertiary period. In the crystalline rocks, especially in the Slovak Ore Mountains, deposits of iron ore, copper, antimony, asbestos, and magnesite were found. The mining of these minerals ended in the second half of the last century.

5. Volcanic Mountains are located in the southern Carpathians. They are composed mainly of andesites and their tuffs, with some basalt occurrences. In the Štiavnica Mountains, lead-zinc-silver and copper ores are found, while in the Kremnica Mountains, gold and antimony deposits occur. Precious metals have been mined here since the Middle Ages. Today, only the Rozália Mine in Hodruša-Hámre (Štiavnica Mountains) remains operational, having extracted over 5,000 kg of gold.

6. Neogene Basins began forming in the Tertiary period within the Pannonian Basin and some intra-mountain basins of the Western Carpathians after their uplift. These basins contain layers of sand, gravel, and clay. In the Záhorie Lowland, oil is found near Gbely and natural gas near Láb. Lake sediments in Upper Nitra (Handlová, Cígeľ, Nováky) and near Veľký Krtíš contain brown coal and lignite deposits (mining has now ceased). Salt deposits are found in Solivar near Prešov and in Zbudza in the Eastern Slovak Lowland; in 2009, after 439 years, salt mining ended at the Solivar deposit. Neogene clays are used as raw materials for brick and ceramic production.

Geo-Relief

The surface of Slovakia is shaped by folding, faulting (creating mountains and basins), and the influence of internal and external forces. According to the dominant geomorphological agent, the following types of geo-relief can be distinguished:

1. **Glacial geo-relief** developed best in the Tatras, but is also present in the Low Tatras and the summit areas of the Lesser Fatra. It formed during the older Quaternary period at altitudes above 1,700 m. Mountain glaciers created cirques (e.g., under Gerlachovský Peak), U-shaped valleys (e.g., Veľká and Malá Studená dolina), glacial basins, and lakes (called ‚plesá' in Slovakia, e.g., Veľké Hincovo pleso, Popradské pleso, Zelené pleso, Ťatliakovo pleso, Vrbické pleso). Rock steps with waterfalls and rugged ridges are also characteristic. At lower elevations, as glaciers retreated, they deposited material forming moraines. Some moraines blocked streams, creating additional glacial lakes (e.g., Štrbské pleso, Zamrznuté pleso).



‚Veľké Hincovo pleso' (Mengusovská valley, High Tatras).

Source: https://sk.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%BAbor:Ve%C4%BEk%C3%A9_Hincovo_pleso,_vysok%C3%A9_Tatry.JPG (© M. Klajban)

2. **Aeolian (Wind-Shaped) geo-relief** includes wind-blown sand deposits forming sand sheets and dunes, mainly in the Záhorie Lowland, as well as some areas of the Danubian and Eastern Slovak Lowlands. Wind-deposited dust formed loess covers, which are extensive in the Danubian and Eastern Slovak Lowlands, with smaller occurrences in the Košice and Southern Slovak Basins.

3. **Fluvial (River) geo-relief** is the most widespread in Slovakia. Rivers gradually incised into uplifted terrains, forming terraces and floodplains. For example, the Danube created four terraces and a floodplain in the Little Carpathians (Devínska brána) near Bratislava. In resistant rocks, rivers carved narrow gorges and canyons (e.g., the Váh through the Lesser Fatra, the Hornád through Slovak Paradise, the Dunajec through the Pieniny), while in softer rocks, they formed erosion basins (e.g., Súčanská Basin in the White Carpathians, Kysucká Basin in the Javorníky).



Natural monument Domašínsky meander in the Strečniansky pass.
Source: https://www.fotoma.sk/galeria/46964/domasinsky-meander-na-vahu/ (© D. Chorvát)

4. **Karst geo-relief** is best developed in the Mesozoic limestones of the Slovak Karst, Slovak Paradise, and Muráň Plateau. Karst landforms include karren, sinkholes, caves (some of which are UNESCO World Heritage sites, e.g., Domica, Gombasecká Cave, Dobšinská Ice Cave), abysses – such as Čertova diera (186 m deep) and Brázda (181 m) – as well as the Zádiel Gorge and Manín Gorge.
5. **Anthropogenic geo-relief** in Slovakia has formed due to the mining and processing of mineral resources, such as coal and metal ores (Upper Nitra Basin, Veľký Krtíš region). Waste dumps from aluminum, nickel, and magnesite production are found in Žiar

nad Hronom, Sereď, Dobšiná, Jelšava, and Lubeník. Anthropogenic landforms also result from limestone, sand, and other rock extraction, agricultural terracing, and infrastructure construction (road embankments and dam structures).

Based on vertical dissection, the morphological types of relief are classified as: Plains (vertical dissection 0–30 m, covering 11% of Slovakia) found mainly along lower river courses; Hilly lands (31–100 m, 39%) forming basin floors and rugged lowland areas; Highlands (101–310 m, 26%) occurring in the lower parts of the Carpathians; Mountainous areas (311–640 m, 22%); High mountain terrain (above 641 m, 2%), forming the highest parts of the Carpathian arch in Slovakia.



Natural monument Manínska gorge in the Strážovské vrchy mountains.
Source: https://www.najmiesta.sk/images/kraje/trenciansky-kraj/maninska-tiesnava/maninska-tiesnava-210808-18-02-P3350027-HDR.jpg (© V. Sulek)

Geomorphological division

All of Slovakia belongs to the vast Alpine-Himalayan System. The entire mountainous and basin terrain of Slovakia forms the Carpathians, which are divided into the Western and Eastern Carpathians. The boundary between them is the eastern foothills of the Slanské Mountains and the Čergov range. They are further divided into zones that developed sequentially through geological evolution.

Outer Western Carpathians are composed of flysch (sandstone, clay, shale) and begin with the Myjava Upland and the White Carpathians. Where more resistant sandstones prevail, they form massive mountain ranges (White Carpathians, Javorníky, Turzovská Highlands, Kysucké Beskydy, Oravské Beskydy, Podbeskydská Highlands, Skorušinské Hills, Spišská Magura, Ľubovnianska Highlands, Čergov, and the klippen Pieniny). Further from the borders are the massifs of the Kysucká Highlands, Oravská Highlands, Oravská Magura, Levočské Hills, Šarišská Highlands, and Bachureň. In the softer clay flysch, erosion has created furrows and valleys that separate individual mountain ranges. The most significant lower areas are: Považské Podolie, Jablunkovská Furrow, Podbeskydská Furrow, Podtatranská Furrow, Oravská Basin, and the foothills of the Myjava Upland and Spiš-Šariš Intermontane Region.

Inner Western Carpathians consist of mountain ranges and basins interconnected by the Váh, Hron, Hornád, and Ipeľ rivers. The core mountain ranges stretch in two bands. The first consists of the Little Carpathians, Považský Inovec, Strážovské Hills, Súľovské Hills, Malá Fatra, Chočské Hills, and the Tatras. The more southern band includes Tribeč, Žiar, Veľká Fatra, Starohorské Hills, Low Tatras, Kozie Chrbty, and Branisko. Among these mountain ranges are basins: Hornonitrianska Basin, Turčianska Basin, Žilinská Basin, Podtatranská Basin, Hornádska Basin, and Horehronské Podolie.

In central Slovakia lies the massive Slovak Ore Mountains, an ancient block of the Carpathians composed of Paleozoic and older rocks. The Slovak Karst, Slovak Paradise, and Muránska Plateau are built from limestones.

On both sides of the central Hron River rise the volcanic mountains of the Slovak Central Mountains: Pohronský Inovec, Vtáčnik, Kremnické Hills, Štiavnické Hills, Ostrôžky, Poľana, and Javorie (stratovolcanoes). South of Javorie lies the Krupinská Plateau. Among the volcanic mountains are basins: Zvolenská Basin, Pliešovská Basin, and Žiarska Basin. The volcanic mountains also include Burda, Cerová Highlands, Slanské Hills, and Vihorlat. Between the volcanic belt in southern Slovakia and the Slovak Ore Mountains lies the lower Southern Slovak Basin, which is divided into the Ipeľ Basin, Lučenec Basin, and Rimava Basin.

The outer Eastern Carpathians are represented by the lowest part of the flysch arc in Slovakia – the Low Beskids. These include the Ondavská Highlands, Laborecká Highlands, Busov, and the Beskid Foothills. The Bukovské Hills, part of the Poloniny, form the easternmost flysch belt in Slovakia.

The inner Eastern Carpathians extend into Slovakia only with the volcanic Vihorlatské Hills. To the south, the Slovak Carpathians are bordered by the Pannonian Basin, which includes all Slovak lowlands. The Pannonian Basin consists of extensive subsided basins within the Carpathian arc:

1st part of the Vienna Basin that extends into Slovakia is called the Záhorská Lowland (including the Borská Lowland and Chvojnická Upland);

2nd part of the Small Hungarian Plain – the Danubian Lowland (including the Danubian Plain and Danubian Upland – Trnava Upland, Nitra Upland, Žitava Upland, Hron Upland, and Ipeľ Upland);

3rd part of the Great Hungarian Plain reaches Slovakia – the Eastern Slovak Lowland (including the Eastern Slovak Plain and Eastern Slovak Upland).

System	Subsystem	Province	Subprovince	Area
ALPINE-HIMALAYAN	CARPATHIANS	Western Carpathians	Internal Western Carpathians	Slovak Ore Mountains
				Fatra-Tatra region
				Slovak Central Highlands
				Lučensko-Košická lowland
				Matranos-Slansko region
			Outdoor Western Carpathians	Slovakia-Moravian Carpathians
				Western Beskydy
				Eastern Beskydy
				Podhôlno-Magura region
		Eastern Carpathians	Internal Eastern Carpathians	Vihorlat-Gutina region
			Outdoor Eastern Carpathians	Poloniny
				Low Beskydy
	PANIONIC PAN	West Pannonian Basin	Vienna Basin	Zagorje lowland
			Small Danube Basin	Danube Plain
		East Pannonian Basin	Great Danube Basin	Eastern Slovak Lowland

Geomorphological division of Slovakia.
Source: Kramáreková – Dubcová – Farkaš (2024), s. 279.

Climate and weather

Slovakia is located in the temperate zone with a regular alternation of seasons. The distance from the sea gives its climate a transitional character between oceanic and continental climates. In western Slovakia, oceanic air masses have a greater influence, while in the east, continental air masses prevail. The climate of Slovakia is mostly influenced by altitude (climatic regions: warm, moderately warm, and cold), and to a lesser extent by the orientation of slopes relative to cardinal directions, prevailing winds (windward, leeward positions), and surface ruggedness (basin floors, slopes, etc.).

Weather variability

The weather in Slovakia is highly variable. Along the polar front, cyclones and anticyclones travel from west to east across Slovakia, causing different weather conditions.

During a cyclonic situation, cloudy weather with heavy precipitation occurs. A cyclonic weather pattern prevails in winter and spring. Its typical manifestation in June is known as ‚Medard's Drop'.

During an anticyclonic situation, the weather is clear and sunny, with high temperatures in summer and severe frosts in winter. A typical warm and dry weather period occurs in autumn during ‚Indian summer' (late September, October).

‚Medard's Drop' and ‚Indian Summer' are examples of climatic singularities. In addition to moving cyclones and anticyclones, Slovakia's weather is influenced by stationary or seasonal cyclones (Icelandic and Iranian) and anticyclones (Azores, Siberian). Altitude is a significant factor affecting temperature, precipitation, sunshine duration, and wind conditions. The rugged terrain of Slovakia causes substantial weather differences even between geographically close regions (e.g., the High Tatras versus the Poprad Basin).

Air temperature

The warmest areas in Slovakia are the lowlands. Based on long-term averages, the warmest place is in the Danubian Lowland near Štúrovo (approx. 110 m.a.s.l.), with an average annual temperature of 10.4°C. The coldest areas are the peaks of the highest mountains; for example, Lomnický štít (2,634 m.a.s.l.) has an average annual temperature of -3.7°C.

The warmest month in Slovakia is July (rarely August or June). The average July temperature reaches 20°C, while in the Tatras, it is around 4°C. The highest recorded temperature (+40.3°C) was measured in Hurbanovo on July 20, 2007.

The coldest month is January. The average January temperature in the Danubian Lowland is between -1°C and -2°C, decreasing with altitude, reaching -11°C at the highest peaks of the Tatras. The lowest recorded temperature (-41°C) was measured during a temperature inversion in the Zvolen Basin near Vígľaš (station Vígľaš-Pstruša) on February 11, 1929.

The number of frost days, when the temperature drops below 0°C, is approximately 90 in Bratislava, 110 in Košice, 160 in Poprad, and 280 on Lomnický štít. The number of summer days (when the air temperature exceeds 25°C) is about 70 in the Danubian Lowland.

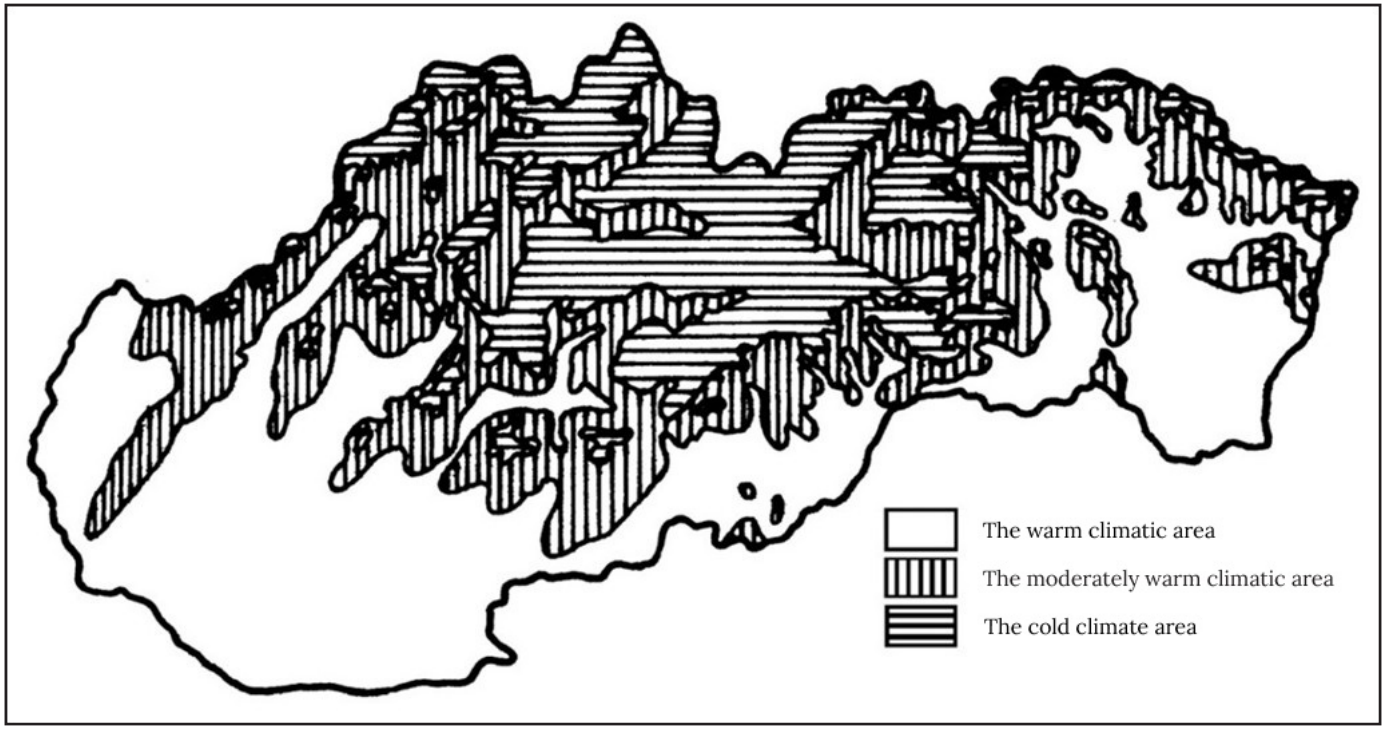
Precipitation

The rugged terrain of Slovakia causes variations in precipitation even over small areas. The amount of precipitation increases with altitude. The lowest recorded annual precipitation was in Malé Kosihy in 2011 (262 mm), while the highest was in high mountains (Zbojnícka chata in the High Tatras in 1958: 3,229 mm). The highest daily precipitation (231.9 mm) was recorded in Salka near the Ipeľ River on July 12–13, 1957.

Snowfall accounts for approximately 20% of the total annual precipitation. The average duration of snow cover is less than 30 days in southern Slovakia, 80 days in the mountains, and more than 120 days in the highest elevations of the Tatras. Precipitation distribution throughout the year is uneven (summer 40%, spring 25%, autumn 20%, winter 15%). The predominance of precipitation in summer and spring is beneficial for vegetation and agriculture.

Climatic areas

Based on altitude, temperature, and precipitation conditions, Slovakia is divided into three climatic areas.



Climatic areas of Slovakia.
Source: Kramáreková – Dubcová – Farkaš (2024), s. 281.

The warm climatic area extends up to 400 m.a.s.l. It includes lowlands and low-lying basins with average temperatures of 8–10°C and annual precipitation of 520–750 mm. It receives the most sunshine (more than 1,500 hours per year), has 50 summer days, and mild winters. Due to the length of the growing season, it is suitable for cultivating heat-loving crops. About half of the warm region's area is artificially irrigated.

The moderately warm climatic area extends from 400 to 800 m.a.s.l. It includes high-lying basins, highlands, and lower mountains up to 700–800 m. The average annual temperature is around 8°C, and the average July temperature does not drop below 16°C. Annual precipitation is 600–800 mm. This region is suitable for growing grains and potatoes.

The cold climate area occurs in the highest mountains above 800 m.a.s.l. It is characterized by low average July temperatures (below 10°C) and high annual precipitation (800–2,000 mm). Due to the low temperatures throughout the year, agricultural crops cannot be cultivated in this region. Large areas are covered by forests and pastures. In the highest elevations, only alpine meadows and rocks are found.

Water bodies

The watershed between the Black and Baltic Seas runs through Slovakia. The Dunajec and Poprad rivers drain an area of 1,593 km² into the Baltic Sea, which accounts for only 4% of Slovakia's territory. Therefore, 96% of Slovakia's territory belongs to the Black Sea drainage basin.

Rivers

The altitude zonation of Slovakia significantly affects its rivers, which are classified into three main types based on precipitation:

1. High mountain type – The highest monthly flows occur from May to July, and the lowest in January or February (e.g., the Danube, Belá, and Poprad in the Tatras);
2. Mid-mountain type – The highest flows occur in April, and the lowest in winter (e.g., Váh, Hron, Hornád);
3. Highland-lowland type – The highest flows occur in March, and the lowest in September (e.g., Bodva, Nitra, Žitava, Slaná, Ipeľ).

The Danube is Central Europe's largest river, flowing to us from Germany (it rises in the Black Forest) and Austria. In Bratislava, it has an average annual flow of 2,000 m3/s. Most of its water comes from the Alps. With a length of 149.9 km, the Danube forms Slovakia's border with Austria and Hungary. Together with its branch, the Little Danube, and the lower reaches of the Váh, it flows around the island of Žitný ostrov (Rye Island). The Danube is important for Slovakia as a navigable waterway linking the country with the Black and North Seas, as a source of water for one-third of Slovakia's irrigated area, and as a permanent source of drinking water production. **The Morava** flows into the Danube below Devín near Bratislava. It forms part of Slovakia's border with the Czech

Republic and Austria (larger tributaries: Myjava, Chvojnica, Rudava). **The Váh**, the longest Slovak river (403 km), has two source rivers - the White Váh (rising below Kriváň – 2,494 m above sea level in the Tatra Mountains) and the Black Váh (rising below Kráľová hoľa – 1,946.1 m above sea level in the Low Tatras), which merge at Kráľová Lehota. The tributaries are Turiec, Orava (the most watery tributary), Kysuca, Vlára, and Nitra. **The Nitra** rises in Mala Fatra under the Reváň mountain (1 204,6 m above sea level); (a tributary of the Žitava). **Hron** rises at the foot of Kráľová Hora (tributaries: Slatina and Sikenica). **Ipeľ** rises in the Slovak Ore Mountains (tributaries: Krtíš, Krupinica). **The Tisa** flows through the territory of Slovakia for 7 km; it joins the rivers of eastern Slovakia, which flow into it in Hungary (tributaries: the Slaná with the Rimava, Muráň and Bodva, the Hornád with the Hnilc and Torysa). **The Bodrog** is formed by the confluence of the Ondava with the Topľa and the Latorica.

The highest incidence of floods is in northeastern Slovakia (Torysa, Svinka) and in Kysuce (Kysuca River). The Váž flood of August 1813 is considered to be the most devastating natural disaster to hit the territory of present-day Slovakia in the historical period (it claimed at least 243 lives and caused considerable material damage).



Váh near Horná Streda (Nové Mesto nad Váhom district). (© P. Chrastina)

Lakes

Most lakes in Slovakia are of glacial origin (Hincove Plesá in the High Tatras, Štrbské Pleso, Skalnaté P., Popradské P., or Vrbické Pleso in the Low Tatras). Morské Oko was formed by a valley blockage caused by a landslide in the volcanic Vihorlat mountain range. The largest karst lake is Jašteričie Jazierko on the Silická Plain in the Slovak Karst. Smaller lakes have formed in wind-blown sands in the Záhorská Lowland (Lakšárske Lake).

Artificial water reservoirs

These include fishponds (around Stupava and Levice), water reservoirs built for mining purposes (so-called ‚tajchy' around Banská Štiavnica), reservoirs designed to increase the flow of smaller watercourses during the rafting of timber from mountainous regions (so-called ‚klauzy' or ‚klauzúry' in the Veporské Hills and Low Tatras), and reservoirs for industrial water accumulation (Dubník, Môťová). In the 20th century, waterworks were built in Slovakia that still serve hydro-energy, industry, water supply, irrigation, tourism, sports, and navigation. The most significant include the waterworks on the Danube (Hrušovská Zdrž, Gabčíkovo). On the Váh River, there are 19 reservoirs: Liptovská Mara, Nosice, Madunice, Sĺňava, and others. Additional reservoirs can be found on the Orava River (Orava Reservoir), the Hornád River (Ružín), the Laborec River (Zemplínska Šírava), and the Cirocha River (Starina).

Groundwater

Groundwater is present throughout Slovakia, but its reserves are unevenly distributed. Large groundwater reserves are located in the gravel-sand deposits of the Žitný Ostrov region. The most important sources suitable for mass supply to the population and economic facilities are concentrated in the protected water management area of Žitný Ostrov. Due to its wealth of mineral and thermal waters, Slovakia ranks among the leading countries in Europe.

Shallow-circulation groundwater

Groundwater that does not penetrate deep and is not mineralized is called shallow-circulation groundwater. It is classified into six types:

1. Groundwater in the crystalline rocks of the Carpathians. It accumulates in cracks and debris, with low-yielding springs.
2. Groundwater in Neogene volcanic rocks.
3. Groundwater in limestones and dolomites. In karst areas, it becomes saturated with calcium carbonate (CaCO3) and is referred to as ‚hard water'. Karst springs (resurgences) have high yields.
4. Groundwater in flysch – springs have low yields.
5. Groundwater in Neogene sedimentary rocks of basins. It often appears as artesian water.
6. Groundwater in Quaternary sediments. The largest groundwater reserves in Slovakia (10 billion m^3) are concentrated in the gravel-sand deposits of the Danube in the Žitný Ostrov (Rye Island) region.

Deep-circulation groundwater

Deep-circulation groundwater emerges as mineral water, thermal water, or water with a pressurized surface (artesian water).

Natural mineral water is defined as water containing at least 1 gram of dissolved solids per liter. If the concentration is lower, it is classified as natural table water. Only part of the capacity of mineral springs is used for food purposes (drinking). The most well-known table mineral waters are: Fatra, Budišská, Baldovská, Ľubovnianka, Mitická, and Sulínka.

Many underground waters are thermal (with a temperature above 20 °C). Notable hot springs include those in Piešťany (67 – 69 °C), Sklené Teplice, as well as thermal spas in Rajecké, Turčianske, and Trenčianske Teplice, Dudince, Bojnice, Kováčová, Lúčky, and Vyšné Ružbachy. These springs (including cold-water springs in Smrdáky and Bardejov) form the foundation of Slovak spa culture, which enjoys worldwide recognition. Several thermal springs in the Danubian Lowland are associated with swimming pools or water parks, such as Patince, Podhájska, Štúrovo, Dunajská Streda, Veľký Meder, and others.

The first artesian wells for obtaining drinking water in Slovakia began to be drilled at the end of the 19th century. Artesian water forms when a permeable layer containing groundwater is sealed from above by relatively impermeable layers, placing it under hydrostatic pressure. These waters are found in the Danubian Lowland and various Slovak basins, with varying yields. The national natural monument Herliansky Geyser (actually a borehole built in 1872) in Herľany (Košice district - surroundings) erupts cold water up to 22 meters high with a cycle of 34 to 36 hours, and the eruption lasts approximately 25 minutes.

Soils

Soil is one of the most important components of the natural environment. It is influenced by all natural elements of the landscape and human activity, making Slovakia‘s soil cover highly diverse.

Soil species

The different soil species are evaluated according to their grain size, which depends on the parent rock. All three soil species are represented in Slovakia:

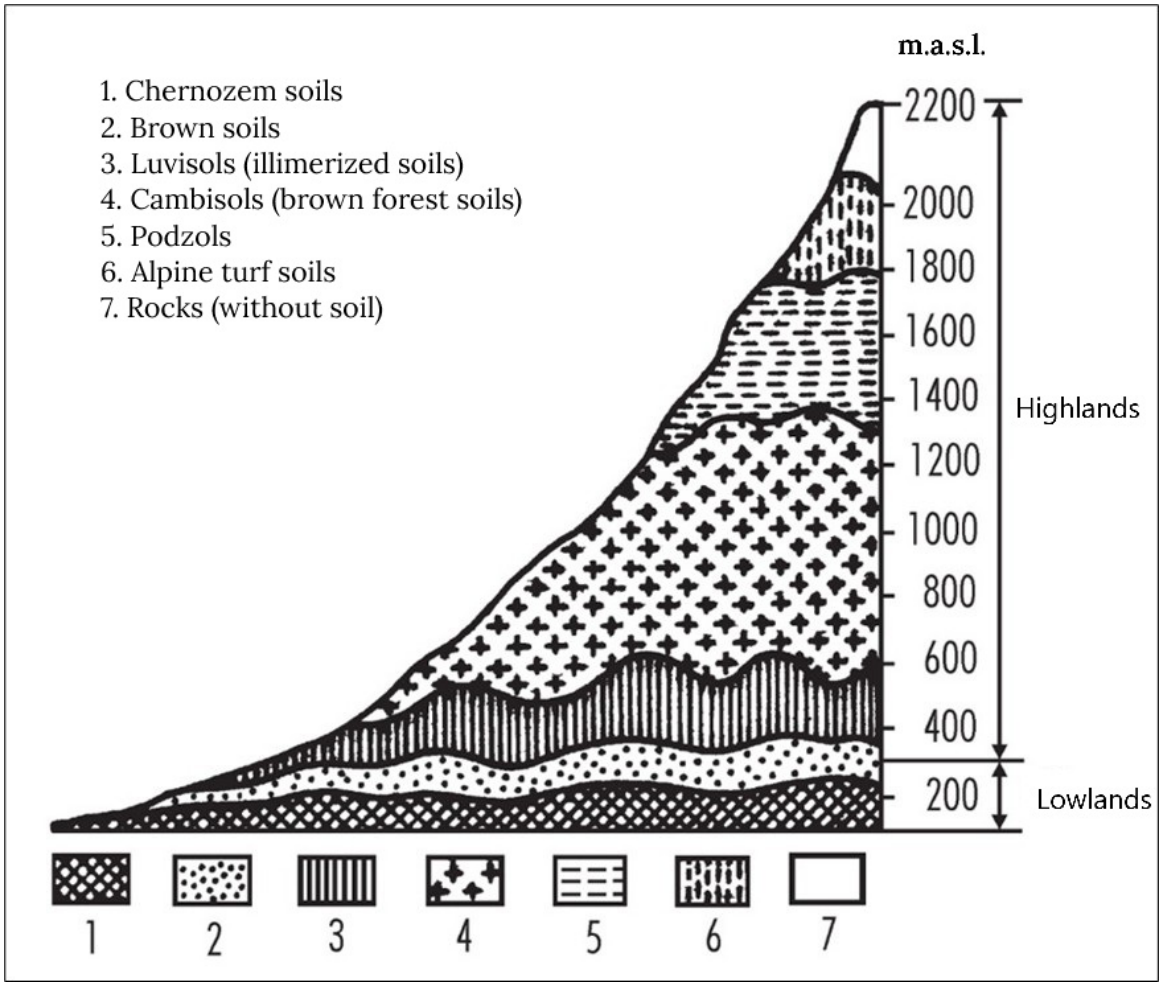
1. Light soils: sandy, sandy-loam, and loamy-sand soils.
2. Medium-heavy soils: loamy and clay-loam soils.
3. Heavy soils: clayey soils and clays.

Sandy soils are found in wind-blown sands, sandstones, and quartzites (Záhorská Lowland, Danubian, and Eastern Slovak Lowlands).

Loamy soils developed on loess sediments (hilly areas such as Chvojnická, Danubian, Eastern Slovak, and basins like Juhoslovenská and Košická), in volcanic mountain regions, and limestone-built areas. These soils are the most fertile, easy to cultivate, and

are used for growing most crops, especially sugar beet, wheat, barley, and corn. Clay-loam soils are typical of flysch mountain areas (White Carpathians, Javorníky, Orava Basin).

Clayey soils and clays are linked to rocks formed by sedimentation of mud in low-lying Neogene basins, such as the Juhoslovenská Basin. These soils are sticky when wet, harden when dry, and develop cracks. They are infertile and difficult to cultivate. In resistant, hard-to-weather rocks, soils are stony and mostly covered by forests.



Vertical subdivision of soil types in Slovakia.
Source: Kramáreková – Dubcová – Farkaš (2024), p. 287.

Soil types

The distribution of soil types is primarily determined by altitudinal zonation and, to a lesser extent, by geological and hydrological conditions.

Fluvisols (floodplain soils) occur in river floodplains. Their properties vary depending on river sediments and groundwater levels. Slightly further from watercourses, **black soils** (alluvial soils) developed on river plains with a rich humus horizon. Thanks to groundwater moisture, they are more fertile than **chernozems**, which formed on dry loess hilly areas in the Danubian, Chvojnická, and Eastern Slovak Lowlands. At the edge of chernozems on loess and loess-clay, closer to mountains where rainfall is higher and temperatures are slightly lower, **brown soils** developed.



Peat-bog - National Nature Reserve Sosnina (Suchá hora, Tvrdošín district).
Source: https://dennikn.sk/2932824/na-orave-sa-zachovalo-vzacne-raselinisko-vacsinu-takych-sme-znicili-teraz-mohli-zadrziavat-vodu-v-krajine-reportaz/ (© S. Mäkká)

Foot slopes of mountains and some basins, where the climate is more humid and cooler, are covered by **luvisols** (illimerized soils) and **pseudogleys** (gleyed soils). These are found on the outskirts and extensions of the Danubian and Eastern Slovak Lowlands, in the Juhoslovenská Basin, and other basins.

Mountain slopes with crystalline rocks up to 1,000 – 1,200 m.a.s.l. are covered by **cambisols** (brown forest soils), the most widespread soil type in Slovakia, mostly covered by deciduous forests. Above these, up to 1,800 m.a.s.l., **podzols** occur, covered by coniferous forests and dwarf pine. The highest elevations beyond the tree line are occupied by **alpine turf** soils.

On limestones and dolomites, altitudinal zonation is disrupted. **Rendzinas** form a continuous cover in limestone areas of Slovakia regardless of altitude. In waterlogged depressions where peat has accumulated for a long time, **peat soils** have formed, primarily found in Orava (peatlands in areas like Suchá Hora, Klin, Oravice), as well as in the Záhorská and Danubian Lowlands. These two soil types, along with fluvisols, are classified as azonal.

Flora

The territory of Slovakia belongs to the vegetation zone of deciduous and mixed forests of the temperate zone. Slovakia is a mountainous country where, with increasing altitude, temperature decreases, precipitation increases, soil types change, the growing season shortens, and plant communities change, creating altitude zones. In the mountain areas, six vegetation zones are distinguished based on altitude:

1. Oak zone (up to 550 m.a.s.l.), where, in addition to the predominant oak (Quercus), hornbeam (Carpinus) forests also occur. This zone covers the warmest and driest parts of lowlands, lower mountain areas, and basins. In the sandy soils of the Záhorská Lowland, pine (Pinus) is widespread. Black locust (Robinia pseudoaccacia) was artificially introduced. In the light-filled oak forests, an herbaceous and shrub understory developed. Most of these forests in Slovakia have been gradually converted into arable land since the Bronze Age. Remnants of floodplain forests occur along riverbanks and floodplains, where willows (Salix), poplars (Populus), and alders grow (so-called ‚soft floodplain forests'). In drier locations, representatives of the so-called ‚hard floodplain forests', such as oaks, elms (Ulmus), and ashes (Fraxinus), can be found.

2. Beech zone occurs at altitudes of 550 – 1,300 m, which are richer in moisture and precipitation. In beech forests, in addition to the dominant beech (Fagus), fir (Abies) also appears, especially around mining towns (Banská Štiavnica, Kremnica, Gelnica, etc.), where it was once planted. In the shady beech forests, only an herbaceous layer with shade-loving and moisture-demanding species has developed. There are few deforested and agriculturally used areas in this zone.

3. Spruce zone follows the beech zone, extending up to the upper forest line at around 1,600 m.a.s.l. (up to 1,400 m.a.s.l. in Malá Fatra, up to 1,700 m.a.s.l. in the High Tatras). Spruce (Picea) thrives in areas with more precipitation, shorter growing seasons,

and cooler temperatures. In this zone, shrubs such as blueberries (Vaccinium myrtillus), lingonberries (Vaccinium vitis-idaea), and heather (Calluna vulgaris) grow, along with meadows and pastures.

4. The dwarf pine zone begins above the upper forest line and extends to an altitude of 1,800 m. It is home to one of the symbols of the Tatras, the Swiss pine (Pinus cembra), rowan (Sorbus aucuparia), and, in open areas, blueberries and lingonberries. This zone contains poor pastures.

5. Alpine herbaceous vegetation zone (alpine meadows) is found only in the High and Low Tatras at altitudes of 1,800 – 2,300 m. Cold-adapted grasses and herbs alternate with patches of blueberry and lingonberry shrubs.

6. The snow zone is located only in the highest parts of the Tatras above 2,300 m.a.s.l., where rocks are covered with lichens.

Fauna

The occurrence of animal species is linked to specific types of plant communities. Therefore, we distinguish:

- Animal communities of waters, shores, and marshes (e.g., trout – Salmo, carp – Cyprinus carpio, common toad – Bufo bufo, frog – Rana, grey heron – Ardea cinerea, mallard – Anas platyrhynchos, white stork – Ciconia ciconia, or the non-native muskrat – Ondatra zibethicus).

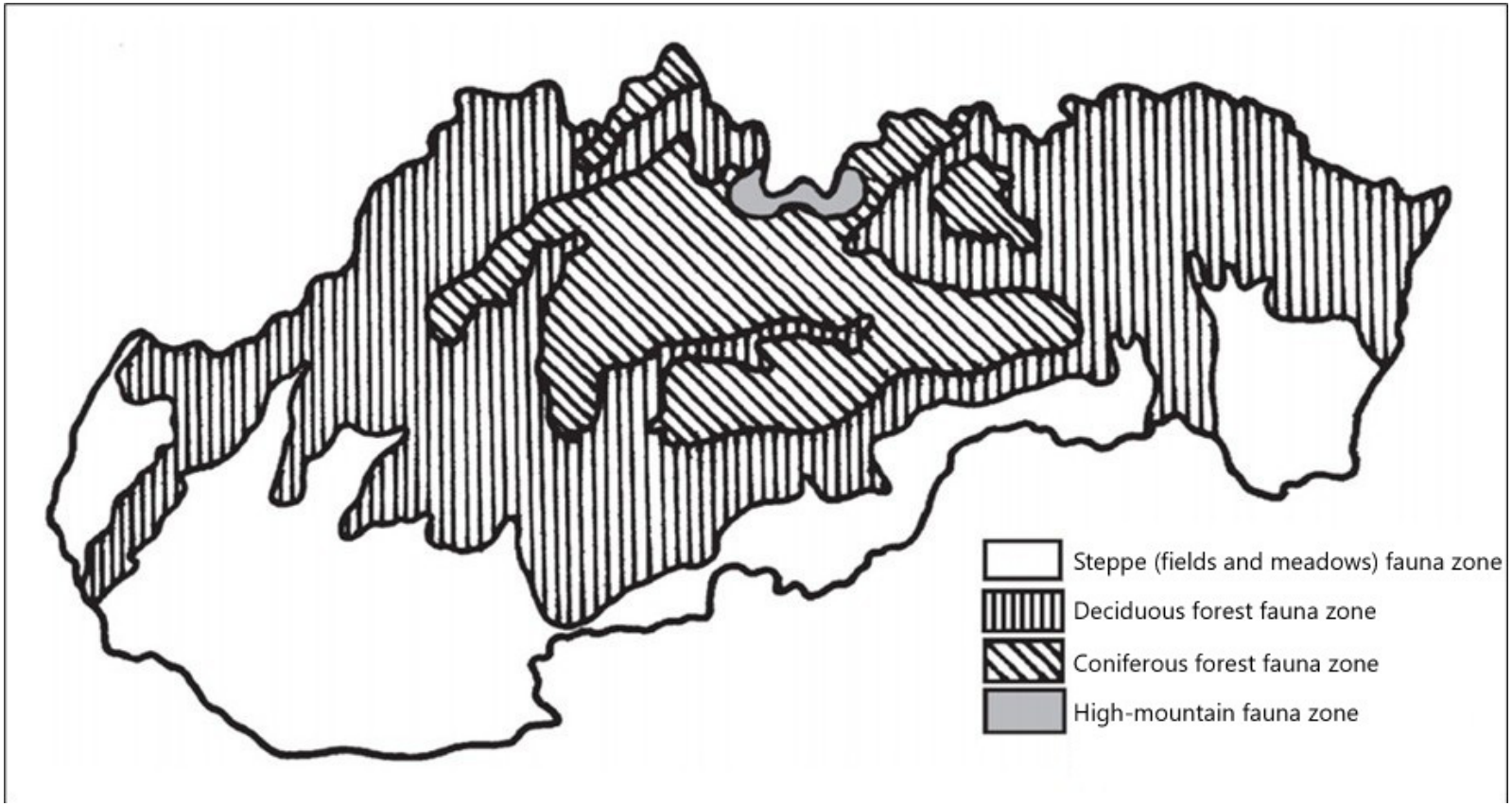
- Animal communities of specific habitats (salt-loving, sand-loving, rock and cliff dwellers, e.g., viviparous lizard – Zootoca vivipara, common viper – Vipera berus).

- Animal communities of forests – deciduous (e.g., wild boar – Sus scrofa, roe deer – Capreolus capreolus, red fox – Vulpes vulpes, cuckoo – Cuculus canorus, tawny owl – Strix aluco, carrion crow – Corvus corone, great crested newt – Triturus cristatus) and coniferous (e.g., brown bear – Ursus arctos, golden eagle – Aquila chrysaetos, red squirrel – Sciurus vulgaris, wolf – Canis lupus, Eurasian lynx – Lynx lynx, black grouse – Lyrurus tetrix, western capercaillie – Tetrao urogallus, grass snake – Natrix natrix).

- Animal communities of alpine regions (dwarf pine forests, alpine meadows, and high-altitude areas, e.g., Tatra chamois – Rupicapra rupicapra, marmot – Marmota marmota, Tatra vole – Microtus tatricus, snow vole – Chionomys nivalis).

- Secondary animal communities (fields, meadows, and human settlements: hare – Lepus europaeus, common vole – Microtus arvalis, grey partridge – Perdix perdix, common pheasant – Phasianus colchicus, skylark – Alauda arvensis, house sparrow – Passer domesticus, great tit – Parus major, house mouse – Mus musculus).

Many plant and animal species have become extinct or critically endangered due to human activities. As a result, many species, as well as entire ecosystems, are now legally protected in Slovakia (e.g., chamois, marmot, golden eagle, bear, lynx, wolf, etc.).



Distribution of animal communities in Slovakia.
Source: Kramáreková – Dubcová – Farkaš (2024), p. 289.

Protected areas

Protected areas have been established to safeguard rare plant and animal species, unique natural formations, and entire natural complexes from the negative effects of human economic activities.

According to Act No. 543/2002 Coll. on Nature and Landscape Protection, comprehensive nature and landscape protection is implemented at different levels within the following categories of protected areas (PA).

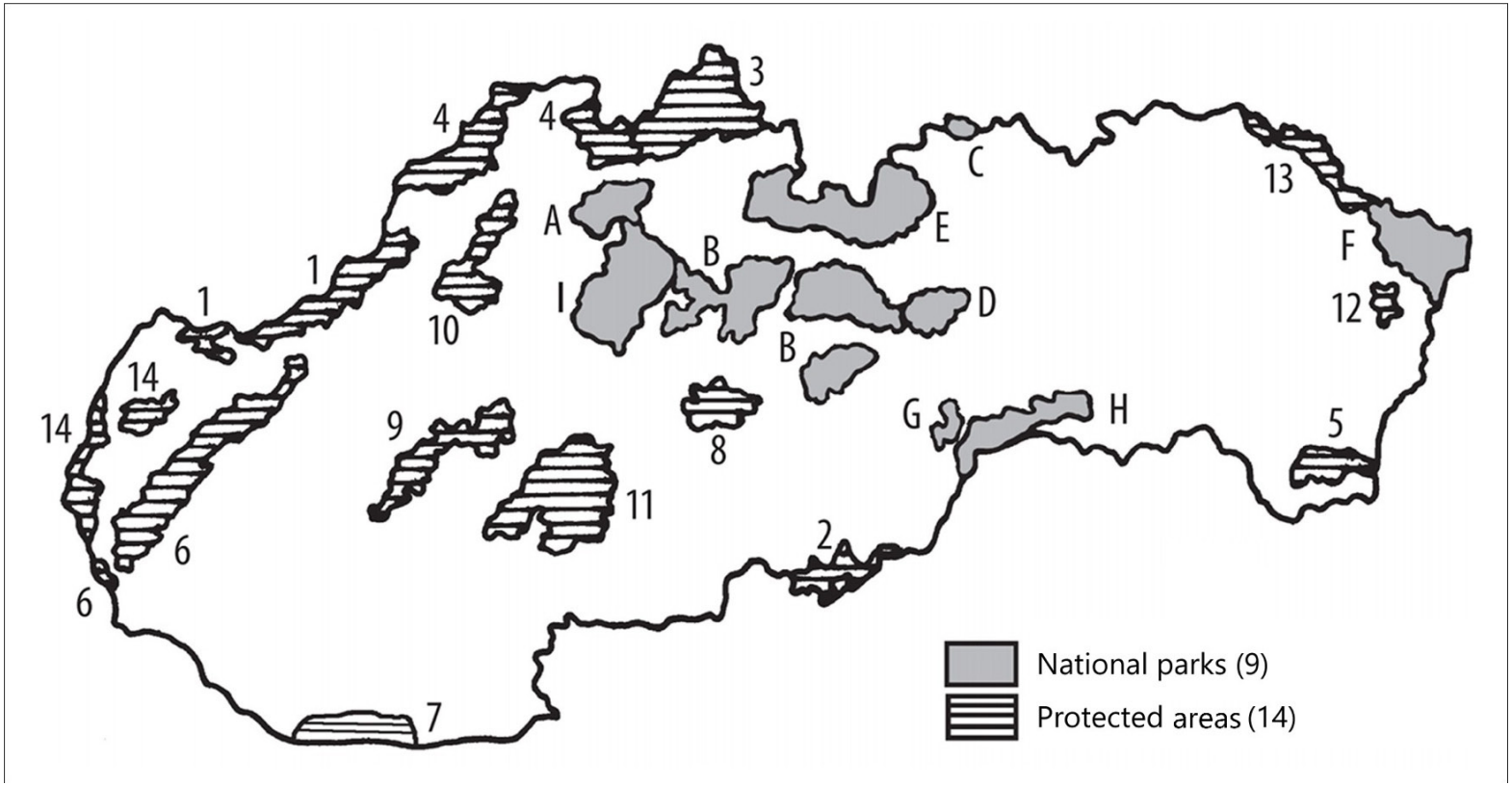
1st level of protection – areas of Slovakia not included in a higher protection level.

2nd level of protection – protected landscape area (PLA), protected landscape element (PLE), zone D of a protected area, designated buffer zone of a PA with 3rd level protection.

3rd level of protection – national park (NP), protected site (PS), protected landscape element, zone C of a protected area, designated buffer zone of a PA with 4th level protection.

4th level of protection – protected site, nature reserve (NR), national nature reserve (NNR), natural monument (NM), national natural monument (NNM), protected landscape element, zone B of a protected area, designated buffer zone of a PA with 5th level protection.

5th level of protection – protected site, nature reserve, national nature reserve, natural monument, national natural monument, protected landscape element, zone A of a protected area, cave and its protective zone, natural waterfall and its protective zone, protected bird area.



National parks and protected areas.
Source: Kramáreková – Dubcová – Farkaš (2024), p. 291.

Name		Area (km²)	% of the area of the SR
	Mala Fatra National Park	226.3	0.5
	Low Tatras National Park	728.4	1.5
	Pieniny National Park	37.5	0.1
	Slovak Paradise National Park	194.1	0.4
	Tatra National Park	738.0	1.5
	Poloniny National Park	298.1	0.6
	Muránska Planina National Park	185.2	0.4
	Slovak Karst National Park	346.1	0.7
	Veľká Fatra National Park	403.7	0.8
Total		**3,157.4**	**6.5**

National Parks.
Source: Kramáreková – Dubcová – Farkaš (2024), p. 291.

Name		Area (km²)	% of the area of the SR
1	White Carpathians	445.7	0.9
2	Cerová vrchovina	167.7	0.3
3	Upper Orava	587.4	1.2
4	Kysuce	654.6	1.3
5	Latorica	232.0	0.5
6	Small Carpathians	646.1	1.3
7	Danube meadows	122.8	0.3
8	Polana	203.6	0.4
9	Ponitria	376.7	0.8
10	Strážov Hills	309.8	0.6
11	Štiavnické vrchy	776.3	1.6
12	Vihorlat	174.9	0.4
13	Eastern Carpathians	253.1	0.5
14	Záhorie	275.2	0.6
Total		**5,222.9**	**10.7**

Protected landscape areas.
Source: Kramáreková – Dubcová – Farkaš (2024), p. 292.

In 2024, Slovakia had a total of 1,132 protected areas classified under protection levels 2 – 5, covering 1,138,922 hectares (excluding overlaps), which represents 23% of the country's total area. This includes 23 large-scale protected areas and 1,109 small-scale protected areas. Based on the proportion of protected areas, Slovakia ranks among the top countries worldwide.

Caves

As of 2024, Slovakia had 7,189 recorded caves, all classified as natural monuments. Among them, 44 of the most significant were designated as national natural monuments. Eighteen caves were open to the public, with a total of 45 accessible caves. Thirteen publicly accessible caves were operated by the Slovak Cave Administration under the State Nature Protection Authority, while other entities managed five. In 2022, caves attracted 454,232 visitors, with the highest numbers at Belianska Cave (107,321 visitors), Demänovská Cave of Liberty (81,383 visitors), and Dobšinská Ice Cave (53,987 visitors). Six caves are listed as UNESCO World Natural Heritage sites: Domica, Ochtinská Aragonite Cave, Jasovská Cave, Krásnohorská Cave, Gombasecká Cave, and Dobšinská Ice Cave.



Underground of the National Natural Monument Dobšinská Ice Cave (Dobšiná, Rožňava district).
Source: https://vedanadosah.cvtisr.sk/priroda/zem/bude-dobsinska-ladova-jaskyna-aj-v-buducnosti-ladova/ (© M. Regnevič)

Protected trees

The system of protected trees (CHS) consisted of a total of 437 protected trees and their groups, including tree-lined avenues – designated protected objects. Physically, this represented 1,251 individual trees comprising 65 species, of which 32 were native and 33 non-native.

NATURA 2000

Slovakia also includes protected areas within the network of protected sites of the European Union member states under NATURA 2000, which aims to preserve biodiversity across the entire European Union.

The NATURA 2000 network consists of two types of areas:

1. Protected Bird Areas. The 2022 list includes 41 protected bird areas. The total area of these sites covers 12,828.1 km², which is 25.3% of the territory of the Slovak Republic.

2. Sites of European Importance. The 2022 list includes 642 sites with a total area of 6,160.1 km², representing 12.6% of the country‘s territory. NATURA 2000 is designed to ensure a favorable conservation status of selected animal and plant species and habitats, but it does not prohibit economic activities in these areas as long as they do not disrupt this favorable status.

As of 2022, Slovakia had declared and registered 14 wetlands as ‚Ramsar Sites‘ on the List of Wetlands of International Importance, covering approximately 407 km² (0.8% of the Slovak Republic‘s territory).

Regarding one of UNESCO‘s most significant scientific programs for education, science, and culture, ‚Man and the Biosphere (MaB)‘, Slovakia has four protected areas designated as biosphere reserves (BR): BR Poľana, BR Slovenský Kras, BR Tatry, and BR Východné Karpaty.

2.2 Human geography

Population

Natural population growth

In 2022, Slovakia had a population of 5,428,792, including 2,773,698 women (51.1%) and 2,655,094 men (48.9%) (Table 6). The key factor influencing population development is natural increase. The highest natural increase occurred in the mid-20th century (16–17 ‰), but it has been declining since then, reaching zero in 2001. In 2022, it stood at -1.3 ‰ (average birth rate of 9.7 ‰, mortality rate of approximately 11.0 ‰). Male mortality remains higher than female mortality. The leading causes of death (45% of all deaths) are cardiovascular diseases, followed by cancer (22%), together accounting for 68.7% of all deaths. High natural population growth is observed in northern and eastern districts of Slovakia, such as Sabinov (9.8 ‰), Kežmarok (8.4 ‰), Námestovo (7.9 ‰), Stará Ľubovňa (6.1 ‰), and Košice-surroundings (3.0 ‰), where birth rates are also high. A specific case is the high natural increase in the districts of Senec (4.4 ‰) and Pezinok (0.2 ‰), which reflects the suburbanization of Bratislava, Slovakia's capital. More than half of Slovakia's districts have a negative natural growth rate, including Myjava (-7.2 ‰), Medzilaborce (-6.7 ‰), Komárno (-6.6 ‰), Nové Zámky (-6.1 ‰), Poltár (-5.0 ‰), Turčianske Teplice (-4.4 ‰), Žarnovica (-3.1 ‰), and Banská Štiavnica (-2.5 ‰).

Migration is a significant factor influencing a society's economic and social development. In the past, emigration had a strong impact on Slovakia's demographic trends. Migration flows historically led to Budapest and Vienna (19th century), the USA, Canada, and Argentina (late 19th to early 20th century). Between 1945 and 1946, the expulsion of Carpathian Germans and a population exchange with Hungary took place. Additional emigration waves followed in 1948 (settlement of the Czech borderlands – Sudetenland) and 1968 (emigration abroad). After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, conditions for free migration were established.

Year	Population
2000	5,402,547
2005	5,389,180
2010	5,435,273
2015	5,426,652
2020	5,457,873
2022	5,428,792
2024	5,422,620

Population development in Slovakia.
Source: Kramáreková – Dubcová – Farkaš (2024), p. 294; https://slovak.statistics.sk/

A wave of migration also occurred in 1993 following the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Federation and the establishment of Slovakia. In that year, 7,355 people emigrated from Slovakia (7,276 of them to the Czech Republic, accounting for 98.9%), while 9,106 people immigrated to Slovakia (including 7,232 from the Czech Republic). The total volume of foreign migration in 1993 reached 16,461 people (of which 14,508 moved between the Czech Republic and Slovakia). Over time, migration flows between the two countries stabilized. In 2022, 1,467 people immigrated from the Czech Republic to Slovakia, while 1,631 emigrated to the Czech Republic.

Slovakia remains a net immigration country. In 2022, 5,436 people immigrated, and 4,468 emigrated, resulting in a net migration gain of 968 people (equivalent to approximately 1.0 ‰). The emigration rate per 1,000 inhabitants was around 1.1 ‰, while the immigration rate was 0.8 ‰.

Internal migration is characterized by movement from eastern Slovakia to the west and short-distance relocations between cities and their surrounding areas, mainly due to employment opportunities. The current housing shortage in cities, high property prices, lower land costs, and cleaner environments drive people from cities to rural areas, especially in the vicinity of large cities (e.g., Bratislava, Trnava, Banská Bystrica, Prešov, Košice) within reasonable commuting distances. This population movement indicates suburbanization processes.

The overall movement of the population is the result of both natural population growth and migration. In 2022, Slovakia experienced a total population decline of 5,920 people (-1.1 ‰), reflecting both natural population loss (-6,915 people, -1.3 ‰) and net migration gain (995 people, 0.2 ‰).

Age structure of the population

The age structure of the population indicates an aging trend. The child population is decreasing, while the post-productive age group is increasing. Children aged 0–14 make up 16.1% of the population, people in working age (15–64) account for 66.1%, and those in post-productive age (65+) represent 17.8%. Life expectancy (i.e., expected lifespan at birth in 2022) in Slovakia is lower than the European average. Women in Slovakia have a life expectancy of 80.3 years (EU average: 83.6 years), while men have a life expectancy of 73.6 years (EU average: 78.2 years).

Age group		abs.	%
Pre-productive age	0 - 14	873,452	16,1
Productive age	15 - 64	3,586,272	66,1
Post-productive age	65 and over	969,068	17,9
Total		**5,428,792**	**100,0**

The age structure of the population of Slovakia in 2022.
Source: Kramáreková - Dubcová - Farkaš (2024), p. 295.

Population density

Compared to other European countries, Slovakia has an average population density. In 2022, the population density was 110.8 inhabitants per km². Settlement distribution across the country is uneven, with the highest concentrations in cities, basins, and lowlands. The highest densities are recorded in Svit (1,718 inhabitants/km²), Prešov (1,184), Humenné (1,072), Prievidza (1,022), Partizánske (943), Žilina (1,019), and Nová Dubnica (938). The lowest population densities are found in Vysoké Tatry (11 inhabitants/km²), Tisovec (30), Hriňová (56), Dobšiná (62), Jelšava (68), and Modrý Kameň (84). Among the most densely populated districts (excluding urban districts of Bratislava and Košice) are Senec (281 inhabitants/km²), Žilina (197), and Kysucké Nové Mesto (188). The least densely populated districts include Medzilaborce (25 inhabitants/km²), Krupina (37), and Turčianske Teplice (40).

Ethnic composition

Slovakia has a diverse ethnic composition. Ethnic Slovaks make up 83.8% of the total population. The largest ethnic minority is Hungarians (approximately 7.8%), who form a majority in districts such as Dunajská Streda (68.7%) and Komárno (61.6%). Ruthenians and Ukrainians (0.6%) live mainly in eastern Slovakia. The Roma population (1.2%) is dispersed throughout the country, with a significant presence in eastern and southern Slovakia. Many Roma identify as either Hungarian or Slovak. Czechs constitute about 0.5% of the population and mainly reside in urban areas. According to 2021 data, Germans (0.06%) and Poles (0.07%) have the lowest representation. Other or unspecified nationalities account for 6.6% of the population.

Religious composition

Slovakia has a long-standing Christian tradition. In 2021, 76.2% of the population identified as religious. The dominant faith is Roman Catholicism (55.8%), followed by Protestantism (5.3%) and Greek Catholicism (4.0%). The Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic oversees the legal framework for churches and religious organizations. In 2022, Slovakia had 18 officially registered churches and religious communities.

Employment

Employment levels reflect the country's economic status. A total of 2.2 million people were employed in the Slovak Republic in 2021, which represents 85.8% of the economically active population. Most of the employed worked in manufacturing (17.8% in industry, 2.3% in agriculture, forestry, and hunting, 6.5% in construction), followed by non-manufacturing (13.1% in wholesale and retail trade, 4.9% in transport and storage, 5.9% in education, 5.9% in health care) and 28.3% of the employed worked in other sectors. 15.3% were undetected.

In line with the global trend, the share of people employed in agriculture and industry is declining, while the share of people employed in non-manufacturing sectors, such as trade, health care and other services, is rising.

After the global economic crisis of 2008-2010, there was a period of growth, underpinned by the streamlining of the productive sectors of the economy, as well as the arrival of more foreign investors. This was reflected in a reduction in unemployment. Slovakia's registered unemployment rate has reached 5.9% (2022), up from 13.5% in 2013. In some districts, it remains high, for example,

Rimavská Sobota (19.4%), Rožňava (14.1%), Kežmarok (16.7%), Revúca (16.7%), Trebišov (12.2%), while in the districts of western Slovakia, the unemployment rate is low, e.g., the districts of Bratislava, Dunajská Streda district (3.9%), Galanta (3.4%), Hlohovec (3.0%), Trnava (3.0%), Piešťany (2.8%).

Settlements

The settlement structure of Slovakia is the result of historical and economic development. Slovakia has a relatively dense settlement network, consisting of more than 7,000 settlements, which have been merged into 2,927 municipalities (data from 2022).

Rural settlements

Most municipalities are rural (2,786, i.e., 95.2%). In 2022, 2,603,351 inhabitants (47.9%) lived in them, with an average density of 60.3 inhabitants/km².

From a geographical perspective, rural municipalities are classified as compact or dispersed. They are located at different altitudes, have various origins and layouts, and serve different economic functions (residential, agricultural, industrial, and recreational).

Compact rural settlements in the lowlands, where the best conditions for economic activity were found, are the largest in terms of area and population. Most settlements have between 1,000 and 2,000 inhabitants. Settlements with 2,000 to 5,000 inhabitants form a transition to urban settlements and have a predominance of non-agricultural populations.

Mountainous areas are characterized by small settlements. Due to a lack of agricultural land, they focused on other activities. Logging settlements (in the Čierny Hron valley), mining settlements (Staré Hory, Špania Dolina), and charcoal-producing settlements (Donovaly) emerged, later transforming their original functions (e.g., Donovaly into a recreational area).

Dispersed rural settlements developed in the mountainous regions of northern and central Slovakia between the 16th and 18th centuries. They have various local names, such as ‚kopanice' (Myjava Uplands, White Carpathians, Javorníky), ‚lazy' (Krupina Plateau, Poľana, Slovak Ore Mountains), ‚rale' (Orava), and ‚štále' (near Nová Baňa). Many of these solitary homesteads have lost their original residential-production function and have shifted to recreation.

Today, rural settlements primarily serve a residential function. Most inhabitants commute to towns and smaller economic centers for work. Rural settlements with industrial facilities (e.g., Gbeľany, Mobis Slovakia – auto parts manufacturing; Teplička nad Váhom, Kia Motors Slovakia – car manufacturing; Kočovce, Hella – automotive headlights manufacturing; Vojany – power plant) have an industrial function. Rural settlements near attractive tourist areas are gaining new recreational and tourist functions (e.g., Ždiar).

Urban settlements

There are only 141 towns in Slovakia, yet they are home to more than half of the population (2,899,011, i.e., 53.2% in 2022), with an average density of 399.84 inhabitants/km². The newest town in Slovakia is Nesvady (Komárno District), which gained town status in 2020.

Urban settlements are divided into four categories:

1. Small towns – up to 4,999 inhabitants – there are 26, including Dudince, Bojnice, Modrý Kameň, Spišská Stará Ves, Spišské Vlachy, Tlmače, Leopoldov, etc.; – 5,000 to 19,999 inhabitants – there are 78, including Poltár, Rajec, Šurany, Dudince, Zlaté Moravce, Skalica, Vráble, Púchov. Small towns serve as centers of economic activity for their surrounding areas.

2. Medium-sized towns – 20,000 to 49,999 inhabitants – there are 28, including Poprad, Levice, Nové Zámky, Ružomberok, and Šaľa; these towns are significant primarily as industrial centers.

3. Large towns – 50,000 to 99,999 inhabitants – there are seven: Prešov, Žilina, Banská Bystrica, Nitra, Trnava, Martin, and Trenčín; they serve as industrial and cultural centers, and house universities, administrative offices, etc.

4. Metropolitan cities – over 100,000 inhabitants – there are two: Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, and Košice, the metropolis of eastern Slovakia.



Banská Štiavnica Urban Monument Reserve (Banská Štiavnica district).
Source: https://www.bystricoviny.sk/bystricoviny-tv/jozef-duriancik-mestska-pamiatkova-rezervacia-banska-bystrica-ma-65-rokov/

All major towns in Slovakia are multifunctional, while some smaller towns are monofunctional, dominated by a single function, such as medical (Trenčianske Teplice, Vysoké Tatry), transport (Čierna nad Tisou), or manufacturing (Stará Turá). Towns with preserved historical cores featuring numerous monuments have been declared urban heritage reserves, including Banská Štiavnica, Kremnica, Levoča, Spišská Sobota, Spišská Kapitula, Kežmarok, Bardejov, Bratislava, Prešov, and Trnava.

Agriculture

Agriculture provides food for the population, raw materials for industry, and fodder for livestock production. In the past, the majority of Slovakia‘s population worked in this sector. From 1949 onward, the socialization of agriculture was gradually implemented, often forcibly, following the Soviet model (so-called ‚collectivization‘). A positive outcome was mechanization and intensification, which freed a significant number of workers for the growing industrial sector. In the 1970s, the final phase of socialization took place - the formation of large cooperatives with centralized management and shared machinery. Despite many shortcomings, agricultural yields increased, ensuring self-sufficiency in most food production. After 1989, major economic changes also affected agriculture. The system of state and cooperative farms collapsed. Agricultural cooperatives transformed into shareholding cooperatives, which later evolved into joint-stock companies, limited liability companies, business enterprises, or independent farmer-run farms. Despite various challenges, 1.9% of Slovakia’s workforce was employed in the primary sector (2021). In 2022, agriculture managed 2,372,341 ha of agricultural land (48.4% of Slovakia‘s area), of which 1,403,864 ha was arable land, representing approximately 59.2% of the total agricultural land (arable land ratio).

Crop Production

The market production of crop and livestock farming is approximately balanced. The most important component of crop production is the cultivation of cereals, primarily wheat (Triticum), rye (Secale), and barley (Hordeum). Their total production in Slovakia in 2022 was 3,382,795 tons. The production of potatoes (Solanum tuberosum) reached 130,632 tons. Among industrial crops, oilseeds are the most significant (716,882 tons), primarily sunflower (Helianthus annuus) and rapeseed (Brassica napus subsp. napus). The cultivation of sugar beet (Beta vulgaris var. altissima) is declining. For the needs of two sugar factories (Sereď, Trenčianska Teplá), 1,096,749 tons of sugar beet were grown. Slovak viticulture has a long tradition; well-known wine-growing regions include Malokarpatská, Nitrianska, Modrokamenská, and Tokajská. The main vegetable- and fruit-growing area is southern Slovakia.

Agricultural land	ha	%
of which: arable land	1,403,864	59,2
vineyards	26,060	1,1
gardens	75,518	3,2
hops	501	0,0
orchards	17,510	0,7
permanent grassland	848,888	35,8
Total	**2,372,341**	**100,0**

Structure of agricultural land in the Slovak Republic (2022).
Source: Kramáreková – Dubcová – Farkaš (2024), p. 300.

Livestock production

The decline in livestock numbers continues. Cattle farming is the most important. The main cattle farming regions are in south-western Slovakia, where there is a strong fodder base. In 2022, the cattle population was approximately 433,000. Most pigs are raised in the corn-growing agricultural production area, with a 2022 population of nearly 381,000. Thoroughbred horse breeding (Topoľčianky) is growing, primarily for export. The traditional sheep farming method in deforested mountain areas or foothills is declining, with about 301,000 sheep in 2022. Poultry farming is concentrated in large, specialized farms near major consumption centers (Kežmarok, Ivanka pri Dunaji, Topoľčany, Dvory nad Žitavou). In 2022, approximately 9,000,000 poultry of various species were raised in Slovakia.

Although fish farming in Slovakia is increasing, with 4,715 tons caught in 2022, 17,790 tons were imported, mainly from the Czech Republic. Deteriorating environmental conditions in some regions negatively affect beekeeping, which is crucial for fruit production and high-quality honey.

Agricultural production areas

Under the influence of various physical-geographical factors, the territory of Slovakia is divided into five agricultural production areas:

1. The corn production Area has the most favorable conditions for agricultural development. It covers lowlands and basins up to an altitude of 200 m (the Danubian and Eastern Slovak Lowlands, parts of the Southern Slovak and Košice Basins). The average annual temperatures range from 9.5 to 10 °C, with precipitation totaling 550 – 600 mm. The lack of atmospheric precipitation is managed through irrigation. On chernozems, crops demanding heat and soil are grown: corn (Zea mays), wheat, sugar beet, oilseeds, tobacco (formerly peasant tobacco – Nicotiana rustica, later Virginia tobacco – Nicotiana tabbacum), grapevine (Vitis vinifera), and fruit.

2. The sugar beet production area follows the corn area in the higher parts of the Danubian Hills and the edges of the Southern Slovak and Košice Basins. It extends at an altitude of 200 – 300 m, with favorable climatic conditions, an average annual temperature of 8 – 9 °C, and precipitation of 600 – 700 mm. Brown soils are typical, where sugar beet, wheat, corn, malting barley, and fodder cereals are cultivated. Viticulture is also developed.

3. The potato production area includes the lower and middle parts of the highlands in central and northern Slovakia. At altitudes of 400 – 600 m, with average annual temperatures of 7 – 8 °C and precipitation around 700 mm. Cambisols (brown forest soils) prevail on which potatoes, rye, and oats (Avena) are grown. Meadows and pastures form the fodder base for livestock production. It is found in Orava, Kysuce, the Sub-Tatra and Hornád Basins, and the Low Beskids.

4. The potato-oat production area occupies lower foothill areas and high-altitude basins at an elevation of 500 – 600 m, with average temperatures of 6.5 – 7.5 °C and precipitation of 700 – 800 mm. Potatoes, fodder crops, and less demanding cereals (oats) are grown. It serves as a transition to the mountain agricultural production area.

5. The mountain production area covers regions with a cold and humid climate and a shorter growing season at altitudes above 600 m. It consists mainly of foothill and mountain regions in western, central, and eastern Slovakia, with average annual temperatures of 6.5 – 7 °C and precipitation exceeding 800 mm. On podzolic soils, rye, oats, potatoes, flax (Linum usitatissimum), and fodder root crops (rutabaga – Brassica napus var. napobrassica, fodder beet – Beta vulgaris var. Rapacea) are grown. Agricultural land in the mountain production area is also used as meadows and pastures.

Forest and water management

Forests are a significant component of the natural environment and a source of raw materials for the national economy. The main goal of rational forest management is their appropriate use in accordance with ensuring their reproduction and preserving all their functions.

Forests have multiple functions in the landscape. The water management and climatic functions are dominant (forests accumulate and retain moisture). They also serve soil protection and recreational functions. They are a source of timber.

As of 2022, forest land covered 2,029,035 ha, accounting for 41.4% of Slovakia‘s total area. The annual timber harvest reached 7,641,000 m3. State forestry enterprises own and manage almost 54% of Slovakia‘s forest land. Other public forestry enterprises (forests belonging to cities and municipalities) own 9%, while private forestry enterprises own 37% of the forested land. Forestry is the primary supplier of raw materials for the wood-processing and paper industries, with the most sought-after tree species being spruce, oak, and beech.

Water is one of the most fundamental resources of the national economy. Water surfaces in Slovakia cover 95,349 ha, or 1.9% (2022). Water management ensures industrial water sources, and drinking water for the population, and manages reservoirs and river flows. This sector of the economy in Slovakia has traditions dating back to the construction of mining water conduits and artificial reservoirs (‚tajchy') in the 16th to 18th centuries near Banská Štiavnica. In the last century, several reservoirs were built for energy purposes (the Váh Cascade). In 1993, the Gabčíkovo multipurpose waterworks (220 MW) was put into operation. The lower course of the Váh River is navigable up to Sereď. Small hydropower plants are also being built (on the Váh and Hron Rivers).

Due to limited underground water sources, several reservoirs provide drinking water for the population: Starina, Bukovec, Tichý Potok (supplies Košice and Humenné), Málinec (Lučenec), Hriňová (Zvolen), Nová Bystrica (Cadca and Žilina), Turček (Žiar nad Hronom and Prievidza), Hronček (Banská Bystrica).

Current tasks of Slovakia's water management involve protecting water sources from industrial and economic activities, addressing emergencies (floods, and droughts causing water shortages), monitoring, and information systems.

Industry

Industry was the largest and most important sector of the national economy of the Slovak Republic in 2022. It employed about 20% of the economically active population, accounted for about 20% of the gross domestic product, and held a leading position in foreign trade.

The current position of industry and its spatial distribution is the result of historical development. Industrial production in Slovakia began to develop at the beginning of the 19th century (in 1832, the first steam engine was introduced in a woolen mill in Halič near Lučenec). Traditional industrial sectors developed: mining, ironworks, woodworking, textile, glass, tanning, and paper industries; in agricultural areas, the food industry: mills, sugar refineries, malt houses, and breweries. At the end of the 19th century, the chemical industry emerged in Bratislava (Apollo oil refinery, Dynamit Nobel chemical plant).

After the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic (1918), industry in Slovakia developed slowly, mainly producing machinery, weapons, and ammunition (Považská Bystrica, Dubnica nad Váhom), chemical products (Nováky), artificial fibers (Svit), footwear (Baťovany, today Partizánske), and more.

The most significant changes occurred after World War II (1945) with the industrialization of Slovakia, which focused on building the metallurgical, energy, machinery (especially heavy industry), and chemical industries, as well as the production of building materials. These developments came at the expense of the consumer industry. Industrial production was concentrated in large plants, and the quantity and type of products were predetermined by planning (so-called ‚five-year plans'), which took into account production in other states of the so-called ‚Eastern Bloc'.

The transition to a market economy in 1989 had a significant impact on industry. Ownership changed (privatization), with industrial enterprises transitioning from state ownership to private ownership and being held by joint-stock companies (a. s.) and limited

liability companies (s.r.o.); production programs changed (restructuring of production), as did the size of enterprises and the number of employees. In 2022, employment in industry accounted for 19.8% of total employment in Slovakia. Currently, industrial production is based on the automotive, electrical, and metallurgical industries.

Production of machinery, instruments, and equipment

The production of machinery and instruments, electrical and optical devices, and transport equipment is present in all regions of Slovakia.

Machinery and instrument production is concentrated in central Považie, where military technology is produced and serviced (Trenčín, Bytča, Dubnica nad Váhom). Bearing production has a tradition in Považská Bystrica, Žilina, Kysucké Nové Mesto, and Skalica. In central Slovakia, engineering plants are located in Detva and Brezno. The production of medical technology in Stará Turá and Nové Mesto nad Váhom is significant. Well-known are also repair facilities and railway wagon manufacturing in Poprad, Trnava, Vrútky, and Zvolen, as well as the production of automatic washing machines in Poprad-Matejovce.

Electrotechnical production is found in Trenčín, Topoľčany, Vráble, and Nové Zámky. Electrotechnical plants are in Liptovský Hrádok, Nitra, Galanta, etc. In western Slovakia, transport equipment manufacturing is well-developed. Passenger cars are produced in Bratislava (Volkswagen Slovakia), Trnava (Stellantis Slovakia), Teplička near Žilina (Kia Motors), Nitra (Jaguar Land Rover); in the village of Valaliky near Košice, a plant for the production of Volvo electric vehicles is being built. The company SAM a. s. in Komárno manufactures riverboats and heavy steel structures.

Metal production and metallurgy

The production of metals and metal products forms the foundation for machinery manufacturing. Iron metallurgy is concentrated in U. S. Steel in Košice (trademark USS), producing iron, steel, sheet metal, and other metallurgical products. Another metallurgical plant (production of seamless steel pipes) is the ironworks in Podbrezová (ŽP). The largest aluminum processing plant was Slovalco in Žiar nad Hronom (at the beginning of 2023, production ceased, and its restart is not currently planned).

Energy and mining

The extraction of energy raw materials, and the production, and distribution of electricity, gas, and water play a significant role in Slovakia‘s industrial production. It supplies the energy needed by all economic sectors, transport, and households. Slovakia has small fuel reserves. The mining of brown coal and lignite, primarily extracted in Handlová and Nováky, ended in 2023, as did the operation of the Nováky Power Plant in Zemianske Kostoľany. This year (2024), the operation of the Vojany thermal power plant was also terminated. Oil and natural gas are imported via pipelines from Russia; from 2025, Slovakia will also be supplied with raw materials from Asia and North America, or from deposits in the North Sea, which will be transported via pipelines through Turkey or selected EU countries. Hydropower plants are of great importance to Slovakia, with most built on the Váh River.

In 1993, a large hydropower plant near Gabčíkovo on the Danube began operating. The largest share of electricity production is held by nuclear power plants in Mochovce and Jaslovské Bohunice.

Chemical production

The production of chemicals, chemical products, and synthetic fibers also holds an important position among industrial sectors. It is concentrated mainly in Bratislava (Slovnaft) and western Slovakia (Duslo Šaľa); Slovnaft processes crude oil into fuels (gasoline, diesel) and oils, while Duslo Šaľa produces nitrogen fertilizers from natural gas. Other chemical plants are in Nováky (Fortischem), Nitra (Giesecke & Devrient Slovakia), Žilina (Považské chemické závody), and Smolenice (Chemolak). Pharmaceutical production is located in Hlohovec (G. V. Pharma), Nitra (PharmaGal), Slovenská Ľupča (Biotika), and Šarišské Michaľany (IMUNA PHARM). The rubber industry is developed in Púchov (Continental Matador) and Dolné Vestenice (ContiTech Vibration Control Slovakia).

Food production

The production of food, beverages, and tobacco processing has a long tradition in Slovakia. Sugar refineries are now operating only in Sereď (Slovenské cukrovary) and Považská Teplá (Považský cukor). Food industry plants are distributed throughout Slovakia.

Textile and leather industry

Traditional textile and apparel manufacturing is changing its character. Corporations focusing on textile production and sewing upholstery for the automotive industry are becoming more prominent (e.g., in Liptovský Mikuláš, Levice, Púchov, Prešov, Humenné, Čadca). Leather and leather product manufacturing also has a rich history in Slovakia. Raw hides are processed in Liptovský Mikuláš (NICOLAUS LEATHER). Footwear is currently produced in Komárno (Rieker), Bánovce nad Bebravou (Gabor), Bardejov (BOSP), and Martin (ECCO).

Glass and ceramics industry

The production of glass and ceramics has a long tradition in Slovakia. Utility glass is produced in glassworks in Lednické Rovne (RONA). Packaging glass is manufactured in Nemšová (Vetropack), technical glass in Bratislava, and glass fibers in Trnava (Johns Manville Slovakia). The production of thermal, sound, and fireproof insulation based on mineral fibers is concentrated in Nová Baňa (Knauf Insulation).

Wood and wood-processing industry

Wood processing and production of wooden products. Slovak forests' timber is first processed by sawmills located in all forested areas. The wood-processing industry also includes large woodworking plants—Bučina DDD in Zvolen processes hardwoods, and other plants are in Banská Bystrica, Žarnovica, and Vranov nad Topľou.

The production of pulp and paper is concentrated in major plants such as Mondi SCP in Ružomberok, Metsä Tissue Slovakia in Žilina, SHP Harmanec in Harmanec, and SHP Slavošovce in Slavošovce.

Publishing houses and printing houses ensure the publication of newspapers, magazines, books, and other printed materials, with the largest ones in Bratislava, Martin, Skalica, Komárno, and Košice.

Transport

Due to its geographical location in the center of Europe, the territory of the Slovak Republic lies at a natural crossroads of European trade routes (road, rail, and river). It plays a significant role in European transit.

The demand for transport is increasing. Despite the modernization of the transport network (electrification of railway lines, construction of highways, oil pipelines, gas pipelines, reconstruction of airports, regulation of watercourses), the overall level of transport in Slovakia lags behind the standards of transport networks in developed EU countries and the world (road surface quality, capacity).

Natural conditions in Slovakia are less favorable for transport development (mountainous terrain). Therefore, road and rail routes must adapt to geographical relief. Major corridors, where transport routes are concentrated, run through the valleys of the Váh, Hron, Hornád, and Hnilec rivers. Geographical relief affects the density of the transport network. The transport network is denser in the Danubian Lowland and the Eastern Slovak Lowland compared to the transport network in the mountainous regions of western, central, and eastern Slovakia. There are only a few transport connections across mountain barriers (through the passes of Donovaly, Šturec, Kľak, Čertovica), which are difficult to traverse for freight transport during winter.

Road transport

In 2022, the total length of roads in Slovakia was 59,013 km, of which highways accounted for 545 km, and first-class roads and expressways reached 3,654 km. Roads with a solid surface lead to all settlements in Slovakia.

Road transport handles nearly two-thirds of passenger transport over shorter distances (commuting to work). In 2022, nearly 1,667,000 people were transported by public road transport.

In domestic freight transport, the transportation of building materials, food, and agricultural products prevails. In 2022, road freight transport carried nearly 161,000 tons of goods. Internationally, truck transport, including transit, is significant. It is closely linked to rail, river, and maritime transport, utilizing container transport methods.

Due to the low quality of road surfaces, road transport is the most dangerous mode of transport and one of the biggest polluters of the environment. A relatively dense road network, with a lower proportion of highways, expressways, and first-class roads, causes traffic congestion, especially in the hinterlands of large cities. Accelerating the construction of higher-order transport infrastructure would benefit the economic development of Slovakia.

Rail transport

Rail transport is an important sector within the national transport system. It mainly serves long-distance freight transport (over 200 km), while in passenger transport, shorter distances dominate (commuting by train to work).

Slovakia's total railway length is 3,626 km, of which 1,585 km is electrified. In 2022, the railways transported approximately 49,400,000 tons of goods (33% imports, 22% exports) and over 68,000,000 passengers (91% domestic).

Rail transport in Slovakia has a relatively long tradition. The Bratislava–Trnava horse railway from 1846 was followed by the first steam railway Bratislava–Vienna (via Austrian Marchegg) in 1848. The railway network within the Kingdom of Hungary was built radially toward the main railway hub—Budapest. During the pre-war Czechoslovak period, east-west connections were expanded (Leopoldov–Zlaté Moravce–Kozárovce–Zvolen–B. Bystrica–Červená Skala–Margecany, connecting to the Bohumín–Košice line). In the post-war period, the southern main railway line Zvolen–Lučenec–Rožňava–Košice was completed, along with the broad-gauge railway from Košice to Čierna nad Tisou (leading to Ukraine). The railway line from the Czech Republic (Prague) through Kúty–Bratislava–Štúrovo to Hungary (Budapest) is important for transit to southeastern European countries.

The main railway lines in Slovakia are:

1. Bratislava - Žilina - Košice - Čierna nad Tisou (continuing to Ukraine);
2. Bratislava - Banská Bystrica - Košice;
3. Bratislava - Zvolen - Lučenec - Košice;
4. Czech Republic (Prague) - Bratislava - Štúrovo or Komárno - Hungary (Budapest);
5. Žilina - Čadca.

A drawback of this type of transport is the outdated railway fleet (locomotives and wagons) and the technical condition of selected railway sections.

Water transport

Water transport in Slovakia is represented by river transport, which takes place on the Danube and partly on the Váh River (occasionally also on the Bodrog River). The length of navigable waterways in Slovakia is 172 km. Water transport is the cheapest and most environmentally friendly mode of transport, but its disadvantages are slowness and dependence on river water levels.

Passenger water transport is mainly used for recreation and excursions (79,000 passengers in 2022), while freight transport is significant for foreign trade (transport of petroleum products, ores, building materials, and agricultural products). In 2022, water transport carried 2,017,000 tons of goods. The largest ports in Slovakia are Komárno and Bratislava. Under the Slovak flag, around 60 ships operate overseas, though Slovakia does not own any of them. In 2022, there were 151 different vessels in Slovak river transport (e.g., tugboats, cargo motor ships, dry cargo barges, passenger ships).

Pipeline transport

Slovakia is crossed by pipelines of European importance. These include the Bratstvo gas pipeline and the Družba oil pipeline, which connects to the Adria oil pipeline in Šahy. There are long-term plans to connect the Družba oil pipeline in Bratislava with Schwechat near Vienna (Bratislava–Schwechat Pipeline). This cheap and environmentally friendly mode of transport also ensures product transportation in Slovakia's largest chemical plants. The transit gas pipeline is also important for Slovakia's economy, carrying 30–40 million cubic meters of natural gas daily from Russia (via Ukraine) through the station in Veľké Kapušany.

Water supply pipelines are also significant, providing drinking water from reservoirs (e.g., the Starina reservoir on the Cirocha River in the Bukovské Hills supplies drinking water to Košice, 145 km away). In 2021, Slovakia had 2,443 municipalities with public water supply, representing 83.5% of the total 2,927 municipalities.

Air transport

Air transport is mainly used for international connections and tourism. Cargo air transport plays a minor role in Slovakia. Air transport operates through M. R. Štefánik International Airport in Bratislava and airports in Košice, Poprad, and Sliač. The highest passenger numbers are achieved by foreign low-cost carriers (such as easyJet, Ryanair, Eurowings, Wizz Air). In 2022, air transport carried 18,217 tons of goods and 2,018,604 passengers.

Telecommunications

The telecommunications network ensures the transmission of information for the needs of Slovakia's economy and population. In addition to landlines, mobile communication is widespread. The number of mobile network customers operated by multinational providers (Telekom, Orange, O2, etc.) was 7,445,151 in 2022, with an average of 507 SMS and 27 MMS sent per person.

Internet availability is also good. In 2022, the number of fixed network connections reached 1,890,764.

Radio and television broadcasting covers the entire territory of Slovakia. It is provided by the public (Slovak Television and Radio) and private media (TV Markíza, TV JOJ, TA3, as well as Rádio Vlna, Rádio Expres, Europa 2, Rádio ROCK, etc.).

Tourism

Slovakia is an attractive country for tourism. Natural beauty and historical monuments attract tourists from all around the world. In 2022, a total of 4,831,628 people visited tourism accommodation facilities, of which 1,594,148 were foreigners. In the structure of visitors to Slovakia (2022) by country, the top three places remain stable – Czechia (562,744 visitors), followed by Poland (189,764) and Germany (125,709).

Significant visitors also include tourists from Hungary (85,270), Austria (73,461), Ukraine (65,971), the United Kingdom (45,851), the USA (40,268), and Italy (36,199). Each foreign visitor spent an average of 2.4 days in Slovakia.

However, the material and technical base of tourism in Slovakia lags behind countries where tourism plays a significant role in the national economy. Given its geographical location, Slovakia fulfills and will continue to fulfill in the future the function of a transit country between Northern and Southern, or Southeastern Europe, in terms of tourism.

Touristically important areas in Slovakia:

Mountain and karst areas

In terms of natural beauty and quality of infrastructure, these are the most sought-after areas for tourism in our country. The mountain ranges with attractive scenery (Tatras, Low Tatras, Mala Fatra, etc.) are important. They are used in winter (winter sports) or summer (hiking and recreation). The caves in the Slovak region (e.g., Gombasecká jaskyňa, Jasovská jaskyňa, Domica) and the Lesser Carpathian Karst (Driny jaskyňa) and interesting rock formations (Vršatské bradlá - see Figure 3, Súľovské skaly, Slovenský raj) are also popular.



Thomasovce view in the Slovak Paradise National Park (Spišské Tomášovce, Spišská Nová Ves district).
Source: https://www.npsr.sk/turistika/35/tomasovsky-vyhlad (© M. Sluk)

Spa places

The wealth of mineral and thermal springs with healing effects is utilized by spas. World-famous spas include Piešťany, Trenčianske Teplice, and Bardejov. Slovakia has 22 spa towns. Several mineral and thermal springs that do not have official spa status are also used, especially in southern Slovakia (Patince, Podhájska, Štúrovo, Veľký Meder).



Napoleonic baths in Piešťany (Piešťany district).
Source: https://www.pic-piestany.sk/o-meste/pamiatky/detaily/

Lakes and water reservoirs, and aquaparks

Popular destinations for summer tourism by the water include Liptovská Mara, Zemplínska Šírava, Senecké Lakes, and the Gabčíkovo Waterworks. Visitors frequently enjoy aquaparks such as Aquacity Poprad, Aquathermal Senec, Tatralandia Liptovský Mikuláš, Vodný Raj Vyhne, Holidaypark Kováčová, Vadaš Štúrovo, Termal Corvinus Veľký Meder, Meander Park Oravice, and Thermal Park Bešeňová.

Cultural and historical centers, UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Slovakia

Slovakia is rich in cultural and historical monuments (urban heritage reserves, folk culture heritage reserves, castles, chateaus, etc.) that attract attention with their architecture and cultural events. The most significant cultural and historical centers include Bratislava, Nitra, Trenčín, Trnava, Košice, Prešov, Banská Bystrica, Kežmarok, Bardejov, Banská Štiavnica, Kremnica, and Levoča.



Monument reserve of folk architecture Vlkolínec (Ružmoberok, Ružomberok district).
Source: https://www.npvelkafatra.sk/navstevnici/tipy-na-vylet/vlkolinec-unesco/

Seven sites from Slovakia are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List:
a) World Cultural Heritage Sites (5 locations)
- Banská Štiavnica with technical monuments of the surroundings (entry in 1993);
- Levoča, Spiš Castle, and cultural monuments of the surrounding area (1993, 2009);
- Monument reservation of folk architecture Vlkolínec (1993);
- Historical core of Bardejov (2000);
- Wooden churches of the Slovak part of the Carpathian Arc (2008).
b) UNESCO Natural Heritage Sites (2 locations)
- Caves of the Slovak Karst and Aggtelek Karst with extension to Dobšinská Ice Cave and Stratenská Cave, and gorges of the Slovak Paradise (inscribed in 1995, 1997, 2000);
- Carpathian Beech Forests (2007).

Agritourism regions

Agrotourism regions are situated in healthy environments with opportunities to participate in certain agricultural and recreational activities (grape harvesting, fruit picking, horseback riding). They also offer local gourmet specialties, ensuring the sale of domestic agricultural products (Malé Karpaty, the Tokaj wine-growing region, etc.).

Services

The level of services is the best measure of the economic development of any country. They provide for the daily needs of the population and are also closely linked to tourism (accommodation, catering, trade). Services are one of the least developed sectors of the Slovak economy.

Healthcare

State-provided services include healthcare and education. In the healthcare sector, institutional medical care is provided by hospitals, sanatoriums, hospices, treatment centers, etc. The number of hospital beds in medical facilities is 5.8 per 1,000 inhabitants (2022).

Education

In the Slovak education system, there are public, private, church, and foreign schools. The network of primary, secondary, and higher education institutions is spread across the entire territory of Slovakia. In 2022, a total of 109,794 full-time students were studying at 34 universities (20 public – 71,936 full-time students, 10 private – 11,854, 3 state – 2,778, and one foreign university). Universities are located

in the cities of Bratislava, Trnava, Nitra, Banská Bystrica, Zvolen, Žilina, Martin, Trenčín, Košice, Prešov, Ružomberok, and Komárno.

The most well-known (and highest-ranked) Slovak universities include Comenius University, Slovak University of Technology, and the University of Economics (all based in Bratislava), as well as Constantine the Philosopher University and the Slovak University of Agriculture (Nitra), Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Prešov University, Trnava University, and the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius (Trnava), among others. Universities are also located in Sládkovičovo and Dubnica nad Váhom.

State universities include the Slovak Medical University in Bratislava, the Armed Forces Academy of General M. R. Štefánik in Liptovský Mikuláš, and the Academy of the Police Force in Bratislava.

Foreign trade

Foreign trade is a crucial component of the economy of the Slovak Republic and the main intermediary of economic cooperation with other countries. The Slovak economy relies heavily on foreign trade, which is developing and changing dynamically. These changes and fluctuations depend on the situation in foreign markets (customs measures, export limits on certain products, import incentives, etc.) and measures in the Slovak market (domestic production protection, customs tariffs, etc.). The Slovak Republic is a contracting party to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Import

Due to the insufficient domestic raw material base, industrial raw materials dominate the import structure, particularly oil, natural gas, sulfur, potash and phosphate salts, iron and manganese ore, cotton, and raw leather. New technological equipment is imported to modernize industrial production.

Export

The export structure is mainly composed of iron and steel products, machinery, automobiles, chemical, textile, and footwear products, glass, furniture, paper, cement, and food industry products. Among raw materials, magnesite and wood form a significant part of exports. Exports are mainly directed to Germany, Italy, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary.

For foreign trade purposes, Slovakia utilizes ports such as Szczecin and Gdańsk on the Baltic Sea (Poland), Constanța (Black Sea, Romania), Rijeka (Adriatic Sea, Croatia), Rotterdam and Antwerp (the mouths of the Meuse and Scheldt rivers into the North Sea, the Netherlands and Belgium).

In Slovakia's foreign trade structure in 2022, imports reached approximately €107,310,000, while exports amounted to about €102,786,000. Imports from EU countries accounted for 63.2% (€67,903,000), while exports to this region reached as much as 83.1% (€85,378,000) of the total exports of the Slovak Republic.

Most important trade partners

The most significant trade partners of the Slovak Republic are Germany, the Czech Republic, China, Hungary, Poland, Austria, France, Italy, and until recently (before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022) also Russia. In 2022, Slovakia's trade with the Czech Republic accounted for 10.5% of the total turnover of Slovakia's foreign trade (exports 12.1%, imports 9%).

Foreign trade with Russia and Ukraine is currently stagnating. The reason is the sanctions imposed by the international community on the Russian economy. Ukraine, in turn, is focusing its attention on defending its territory. These were key suppliers of basic industrial raw materials (oil, natural gas, iron ore). Imports of oil and natural gas from Russia in 2023 amounted to €1,665,000,000 (€1.665 billion), making Russia Slovakia's fourth-largest supplier after China, India, and Turkey. Before the war, these markets offered broad opportunities for Slovak consumer industry products.

Traditional trade relations exist with Poland (imports of coke, sulfur, and electricity) and Hungary. Foreign trade with Austria is also experiencing growth.

Germany holds a special position in Slovakia's foreign trade (in 2022, its share was 13.9% of total imports and 20.9% of total exports). This is a result of the effectiveness of German investments, such as Volkswagen, Siemens, and others.

Trade exchange is also growing with China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Egypt, Morocco, and other countries worldwide. These countries mainly export raw materials to Slovakia (phosphates, cotton, raw leather, natural rubber, coffee, textiles, and leather products). Trade relations are also being established with Japan (electronics imports). So far, foreign trade with the USA, Canada, and Mexico remains relatively underdeveloped.

2.3 Political and regional geography

Regional division of Slovakia

Territorial-Administrative Organization

The territory of Slovakia, as part of historical Hungary, was divided into comitats in the Middle Ages. In the 13th century, these were replaced by ‚stolice' (old name for counties), and later (in 1848) by ‚župy' (new name for counties). After World War II, regions and districts existed until 1990. During the transitional period (1990–1996), there were 3 regions, 38 districts, and 121 territorial units. Although a certain tradition of administrative division persists, the designated territorial units are subject to change.

The new territorial and administrative organization is the result of years of efforts to restructure the spatial arrangement of state administration in the Slovak Republic. This is regulated by Act No. 221/1996 Coll. on territorial and administrative organization, which was approved by the National Council on July 3, 1996, establishing the seats of regions and districts (8 regions and 79 districts were created). Another key law is Act No. 302/2001 Coll. on the self-government of higher territorial units (Act on Self-Governing Regions). The adoption of this law and the issuance of subsequent regulations marked the beginning of the first stage of public administration reform in Slovakia.

The self-governing territorial units of Slovakia are municipalities and higher territorial units (self-governing regions). The number of municipalities is not stable and changes due to territorial modifications. In recent years, the number of municipalities has increased due to ongoing disintegration. Successful referendums in municipalities have often decided on territorial changes and name modifications. The administrative units in Slovakia are regions and districts.

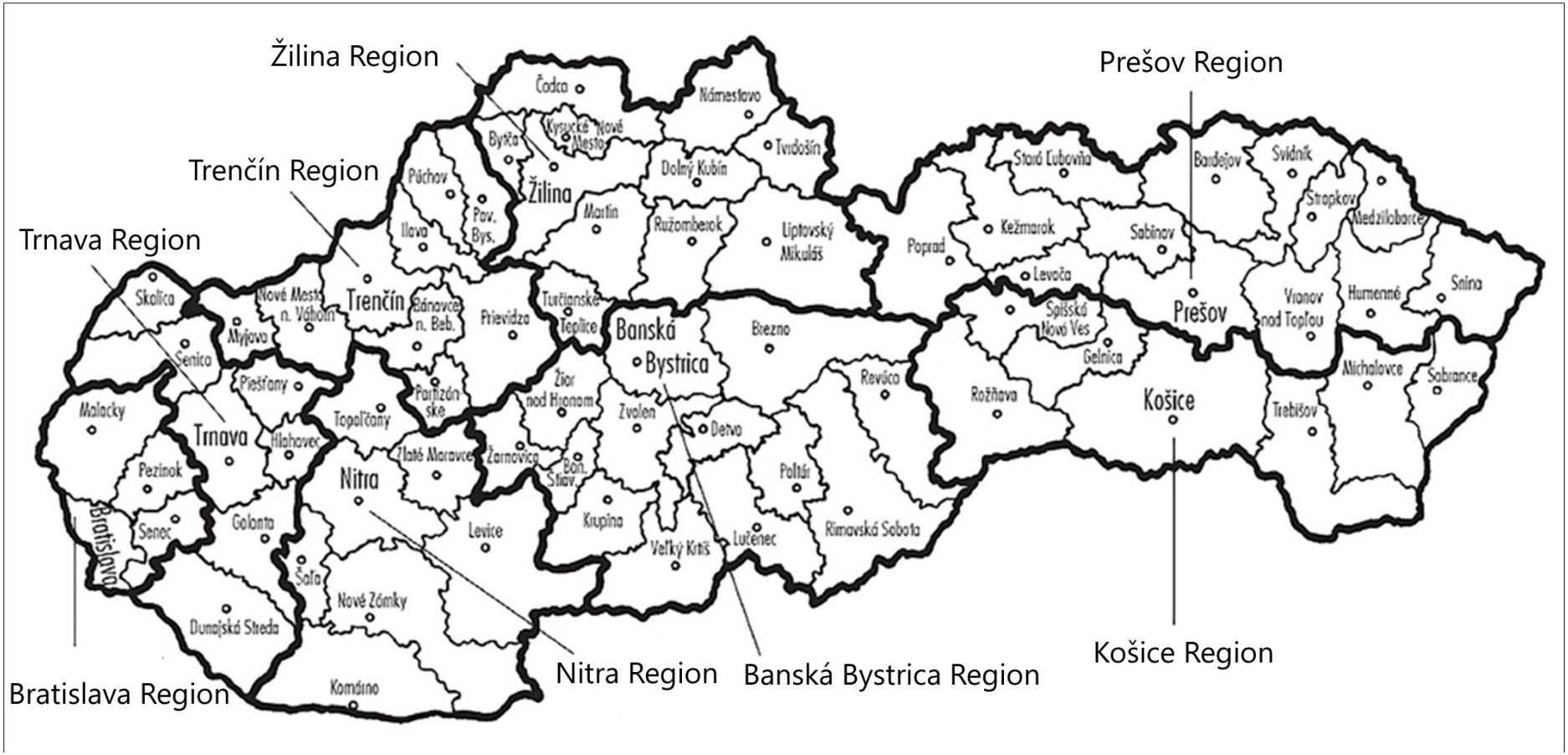
Countries

Regions are named after their administrative centers. The eight largest cities were chosen as regional capitals: Bratislava, Košice, Prešov, Nitra, Banská Bystrica, Žilina, Trnava, and Trenčín. Regions in western Slovakia are significantly smaller in terms of the number of districts and area (except for the Nitra Region). In terms of population, the regions are relatively similar, except for the Trnava Region, which has the lowest population. The largest regions by population are the Prešov and Košice Regions.

Districts

With the establishment of 79 districts, Slovakia returned to the system of so-called ‚small districts', which had been in use throughout its historical public administration development. District data show significant differences in area, population, and number of municipalities. The largest districts by area (over 1,000 km²) are those in southern Slovakia (several remained in their original form) and the districts in the mountainous areas of central Slovakia (Brezno, Liptovský Mikuláš). The smallest districts are Bytča, Banská Štiavnica, Hlohovec, and Kysucké Nové Mesto (each covering less than 300 km²). The districts with the highest population are Nitra, Prešov, and Žilina. Some of the new district capitals have fewer than 10,000 inhabitants; the smallest district capitals,

with populations under 6,000, are Ilava and Poltár. There are also significant differences in the number of municipalities within districts—9 districts have fewer than 20 municipalities, with the fewest in the Bytča district (12). Several districts have more than 50 municipalities, and in the Rimavská Sobota and Košice surrounding districts, there are over 100.



Administrative organization of the Slovak Republic (8 self-governing regions and 79 districts).
Source: Kramáreková – Dubcová – Farkaš (2024), p. 319.

NUTS

Further steps in Slovakia's public administration reform are being carried out following the principles of integrating Europe. In cooperation with the Statistical Office of the European Union, the national statistical institutions of the member states, and the European Commission, NUTS regions (abbreviation derived from the French ‚NUTS' - Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistique - Nomenclature of Statistical Territorial Units) were established. These were defined for regional statistics and socio-economic analysis purposes.

The NUTS system in Slovakia is structured as follows:

- NUTS 1 - Slovak Republic (1);
- NUTS 2 - Bratislava Region, Western Slovakia, Central Slovakia, Eastern Slovakia (4);
- NUTS 3 - Bratislava, Trnava, Nitra, Trenčín, Banská Bystrica, Žilina, Košice, Prešov Regions (8);
- NUTS 4 - Districts (79);
- NUTS 5 - Municipalities (2,927).

Regions of Slovakia

Based on geographic location, natural conditions, and socio-economic relationships, Slovakia can be divided into four regions: Western, Eastern, Northern Central, and Southern Central Slovakia.

Slovakia has an elongated shape from west to east. Its natural landscape is defined by the arc of the Carpathian Mountains and the Pannonian Basin. The lowlands, with a relatively flat surface, warm climate, and fertile soil, have given rise to two densely populated and economically significant regions—Western and Eastern Slovakia. Their centers are the two largest Slovak cities, Bratislava and Košice.

Settlements, transportation, and economic activities are concentrated in valleys and basins along rivers between mountain ranges. The sparsely populated and forested mountain ranges create transportation barriers in the north-south direction. The most significant barrier is the central ridge (1,000–2,000m), running along the Strážov Mountains, Žiar, Kremnica Mountains, Veľká Fatra, Staré Hory Mountains, Low Tatras, and Slovak Ore Mountains, dividing the Northern and Southern Central Slovak regions.

Western Region

The Western Region consists of the Bratislava, Trnava, Nitra, and Trenčín Regions. It includes the Danubian Lowland, Záhorie Lowland, Little Carpathians, White Carpathians, parts of Považský Inovec and Tribeč, and the Považské Podolie. It has a strategic location along the Danube River, bordering the Czech Republic, Austria, and Hungary. The core of the region is the Danubian Lowland. The most important centers are Bratislava, Trnava, Nitra, Trenčín, and Prievidza.

Northern Central Region

The Northern Central Region consists of the Žilina Region. It encompasses rugged terrain in the highest parts of the Carpathians, including the Tatras, Low Tatras, Malá Fatra, Veľká Fatra, Choč Mountains, Pieniny, and other inner Carpathian mountain ranges such as the Strážov and Súľov Mountains. The northern and western sections include flysch mountain ranges: Javorníky and Turzovská Highlands, rising above the Považské Podolie. The border with Poland is marked by the Orava and Kysuce Beskids, and east of the Tatras, the Spiš Magura and Levoča Mountains. The landscape is mostly mountainous, with hilly terrain in some basins. The economic core consists of the Žilina, Turiec, Orava, and Liptov basins. The most significant centers are Žilina, Martin, and Liptovský Mikuláš.

Southern Central Region

The Southern Central Region consists of the Banská Bystrica Region. It covers part of central Slovakia, bordering Hungary in the south, with the Low Tatras forming the natural northern boundary, separating the Horehronie Basin from the Slovak Ore Mountains. The western part includes volcanic mountains of central Slovakia (Poľana, Vtáčnik, Kremnica, and Štiavnica Mountains), interspersed with basins such as Žiar, Zvolen, and Pliešovská. The core of the region consists of the Southern Slovak Basin and the Pohronie area. The key centers are Banská Bystrica, Zvolen, Žiar nad Hronom, and Lučenec.

Eastern Region

The Eastern Region consists of the Prešov and Košice Regions. It covers the easternmost part of Slovakia. The core area includes the Košice Basin and the Eastern Slovak Lowland, separated by the Slanské Mountains. The northern part features flysch Low Beskids, bordered in the south by volcanic Vihorlat Mountains. The Zemplín Hills near the Hungarian border are also volcanic. To the west of the Košice Basin lies the Slovak Ore Mountains. The main centers are Košice, Prešov, Michalovce, and Poprad.

Region	Area		Population		Density per km²
	km²	% of SR	number	% of SR	
West	17,044	34.7	2,535,314	46.7	149
North Central Slovakia	6,808	13.9	688,106	12.7	101
South Central Slovakia	9,454	19.3	617,777	11.4	65
Eastern	15,728	32.1	1,587,595	29.2	101
Slovak Republic	**43,043**	**100,0**	**5,428,792**	**100.0**	**111**

Area and population of regions of the Slovak Republic in 2022.
Source: Kramáreková - Dubcová - Farkaš (2024), p. 320.

Regional development of Slovakia

The regional development of Slovakia has its legislative, institutional, and programmatic framework and is implemented in so-called ‚programming periods'. The current programming period is from 2021 to 2027.

Legislative framework

The legislative framework at the national level is contained in Act No. 539/2008 Coll. on the Support of Regional Development and its subsequent amendments.

Institutional framework

The institutional framework is primarily managed by the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development, and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Slovak Republic, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, in close cooperation with other ministries (as of 2024, Slovakia had 15 ministries and 10 central state administration bodies). At the regional level, the offices of individual self-governing regions with relevant departments and regional development agencies are responsible. At the local level, municipal and city offices oversee regional development.

In rural areas, development activities are carried out by micro-regions (associations of municipalities) or local action groups. In Slovakia, local action groups can be civic associations selected by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic based on the evaluation of development strategies. These associations are granted the status of a Local Action Group (LAG) and receive financial support for implementing their strategy. A LAG is a partnership of representatives from the public, private, and civil sectors, operating within a coherent and unified territory. A LAG, composed of a sufficient number of experienced individuals and institutions, prepares and implements a development strategy based on the principles of the LEADER approach. This is one of the most successful EU programs, mobilizing and implementing rural development within local rural communities. The implementation of a LAG strategy primarily involves decision-making on supporting local projects, carrying out joint development projects and programs, and monitoring their progress.

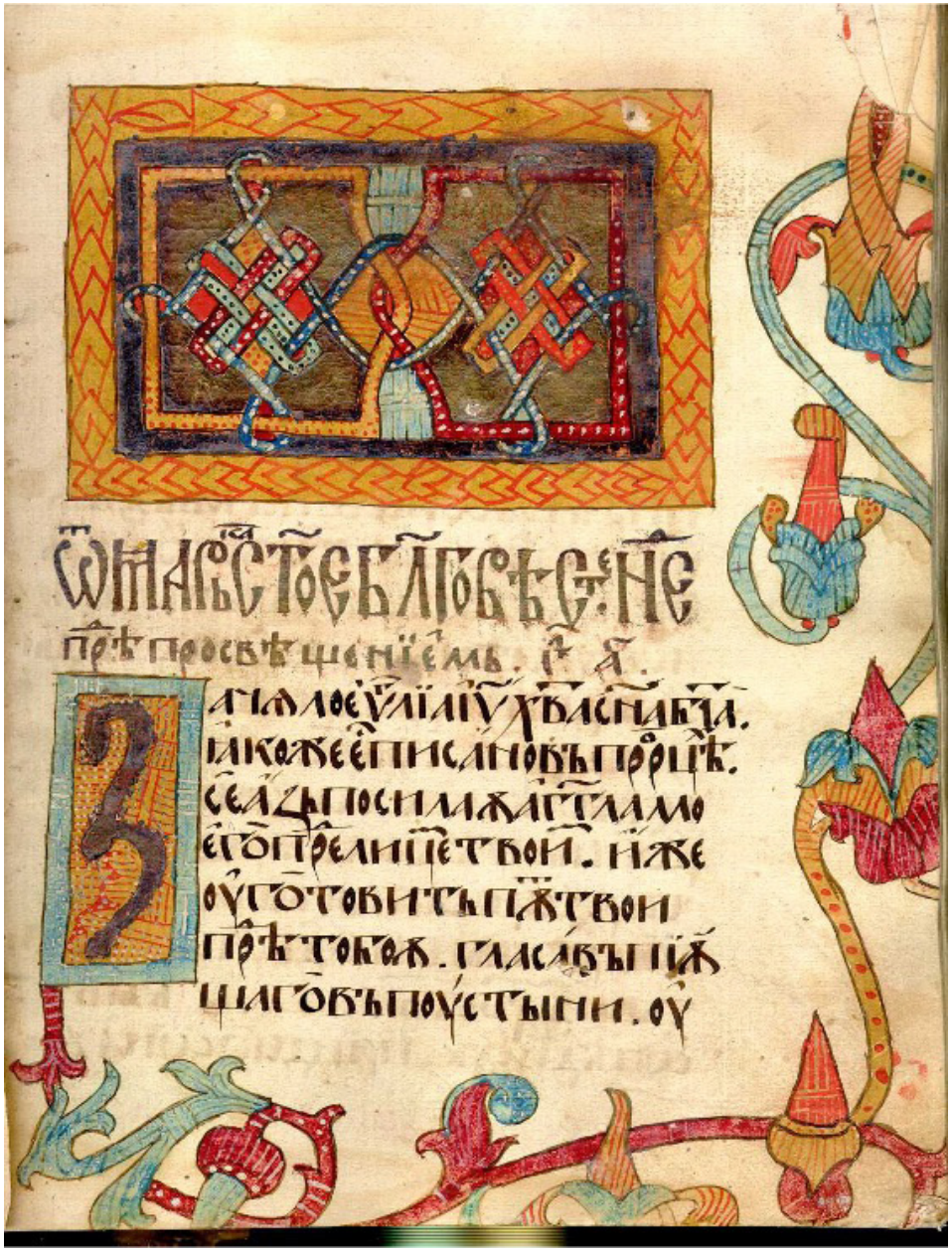
Programmatic framework

The programmatic framework of regional development consists mainly of strategic development documents. In relation to the EU, this includes the Partnership Agreement of Slovakia for 2021–2027, which ensures development implementation through EU funds. At the national level, it includes the Vision and Development Strategy of Slovakia until 2030. At the regional level, there is the economic and social development program of the respective region, while at the local level, it consists of the economic and social development program of a city or municipality.

Answer the following questions:

- Where does the territory of Slovakia belong in terms of geographical (natural) conditions?

- What are the basic features of Slovakia‘s natural characteristics, and how have they influenced the lives of people in its territory?
- How have geographical conditions changed under human influence?
- What are the most geographically ‚unique‘ and valuable elements of Slovakia, and where can they be found?
- How did people in the past utilize Slovakia‘s geographical conditions, including their specific features?
- Why is it important to know the geography and nature of Slovakia to understand Slovak culture, and what should be recognized?
- What is missing, needs to be added, or can be supplemented in the above texts to make the answers more precise and comprehensive?



Tetraevangelium from the village of Baškovce, 15th century, in Church Slavonic, Sobrance district.
Source: archive of P. Ženuch.

III. ABOUT THE SLOVAK LANGUAGE

The human ability to speak (to express feelings and thoughts) is a conscious process; therefore, human thinking is closely related to the needs of both spoken and literary (written) communication. Every member of a language community learns the system and rules of their language for the purpose of this communication.

Language embodies the rules chosen by the community, which naturally reflect the needs of communication within the family, community, and society. Language represents the community at every stage of its cultural development. The collective thinking of its users (sensus communis) is reflected in the language, making it evidence of a society's cultural maturity and historical memory. The national language, and through it, preserves the image of the life, development, and progress of a nation and its culture.

3.1 Slovak language

The Slovak language is the natural, living, and commonly used communication tool of Slovaks. It is ethnically defined, internally differentiated, and socially stratified. The internal structure of the Slovak language is linked to its dialectal and social forms. Like any language, Slovak evolves over time, with structural changes being applied in practice and reflected in the rules of its standard form.

The codification of the Slovak language is an inseparable part of the cultivated development of Slovaks as a nation. The standard form of Slovak is its highest form.

Standard Slovak fulfills the following functions:

- integrative function - unites Slovaks,
- representative function - represents Slovaks externally,
- communicative function - enables communication among Slovaks,
- identification function - serves as an expression and a symbol of Slovaks, who identify with the language as their own.

Standard Slovak is used for communication in all areas within Slovakia. The codified standard Slovak is the official state language in Slovakia. Therefore, state administration, the judiciary, and the issuance of laws and regulations are conducted in the Slovak language.

Standard Slovak has a binding, normative form that distinguishes it from other forms and varieties of the Slovak language used within the Slovak linguistic territory. These may be found, for example, in dialectal areas or specific communication spheres or situations among certain social classes and professional groups (slang, argot, jargon, etc.).

The validity of codified Slovak is established in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, and its mandatory use in the public sphere is defined by the law of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on the state language of the Slovak Republic. The normative form of standard Slovak is described in linguistic codification manuals. The principles of Slovak orthography are made accessible through the ‚Rules of Slovak Orthography', the principles of correct Slovak pronunciation are outlined in the ‚Rules of Slovak Pronunciation', the main lexical base of standard Slovak is represented by the ‚Short Dictionary of the Slovak Language,' and the system of word formation is described in ‚Morphology of the Slovak Language'.

The Slovak language is the result of centuries of speech development among Slovaks. Standard Slovak includes linguistic phenomena that are the result of linguistic harmonization and the unifying development of Slovak. Even the rules for writing Slovak have been formed and evolved over several centuries and are therefore subject to continuous linguistic research. Any changes to the rules of Slovak, its grammar, and orthography occur only in necessary and justifiable cases. They relate to both the dynamics and stability of the language system as such and to the linguistic development of Slovak itself. The dynamics of the language system are, in fact, a manifestation of the language's vitality. Therefore, changes in Slovak are a natural result of its evolution, reflected in written tradition, linguistic culture, and both spoken and written expression.

3.2 Orthographic principles in Standard Slovak

The orthographic norm of the Slovak language is conventional. It is an agreed-upon system of signs with rules for recording linguistic expression using the Latin graphic system. It consists of rules for writing lowercase and uppercase letters, rules for writing diacritical and punctuation marks. Diacritical marks serve to distinguish the meaning of identical words or to change their pronunciation; for example, the acute accent above a vowel lengthens its pronunciation, while the caron softens it. The acute accent [´] is used to indicate a long vowel, and the caron [ˇ] is used to mark the soft pronunciation of consonants. Punctuation marks serve to structure the text, such as a period to end a sentence or a comma to separate clauses.

Vowels and consonants

The Slovak orthography follows a functional principle. According to this principle, individual signs – graphemes (such as letters) and their combinations – signal pronunciation, meaning the realization of individual sounds – phonemes (such as vowels and consonants) in the flow of speech. This orthographic system also considers older developmental phenomena that emerged within the various stages of the evolution of standard Slovak and its orthography.

Slovak vowels

The inventory of Slovak vowels includes the following short and long vowels: a/á, e/é, i/í, o/ó, u/ú. In addition to the short vowel o, there is also the diphthong ô (for example, stolík – stôl (table), koník – kôň (horse), etc.). Besides the diphthong ô [uo], the Slovak language contains three additional diphthongs: ia, ie, iu. These diphthongs are written as combined graphemes i+a, i+e, i+u, for example, sviatok (holiday), bocian (stork), čiara (line), siahať (reach), piatok (Friday), viazať (bind), čiapka (cap), Vianoce (Christmas); vietor (wind), svietiť (shine), biely (white), cieľ (goal), dievča (girl).

Diphthong *ia*

The diphthong ia appears in suffixes -iar, -iak, for example, mäsiar (butcher), kraviar (cowman), držiak (holder), sopliak (little boy), as well as in certain nouns and adjectives: uliciam (streets), kostiam (bones), paniam (madams), vysvedčeniam (certificates), cudzia (strange), pávia (peacock), husia (goose). It also occurs in the third person of present-tense verbs, for example, chytia (to catch), vonia (to smell), kúpia (to buy), vložia (to put), robia (to do), vedia (to know), kričia (to scream), spia (to sleep), učia (to learn), in verbs expressing repeated action, for example, zdržiavať (to hold up), ovoniavať (to smell), and in adverbial pronouns such as kadiaľ (which way), odtiaľ (from there), odkiaľ (from where), dokiaľ (until where), dosiaľ (until now), doposiaľ (until now).

Diphthong *ie*

The diphthong ie occurs mainly in word roots, for example, like (cure), biely (white), vidiek (countryside), niesť (carry), trieť (rub), spievať (sing), in nouns derived from verbs, for example, priechod (a passage, from prechádzať - pass), priehrada (dam, from prehradiť

– to dam), poviedka (short story, from povedať – to tell), etc. It also appears in suffixes -iec, -ier, for example, koniec (end), dievčeniec (girls), veniec (wreath), netopier (bat), in suffixes of naturalized foreign words, for example, papier (paper), žoldnier (soldier), inžinier (engineer), mušketier (musketeer), and in neuter nouns following the declension pattern of vysvedčenie (certificate). The diphthong ie also appears as an inserted diphthong in the genitive plural of nouns such as žena (woman), ulica (street), mesto (town), dievča, (girl) for example, žien (women), učiteliek (teachers), čerešieň (cherries), ďasien (gums), dievčeniec (girls). It also occurs in present-tense indicative verbs, for example, rozumieť (to understand), trieť (to rub), vedieť (to know), niesť (to carry), viesť (to lead), etc.

Diphthong *iu*

The diphthong iu appears in the dative case endings of nouns that end in -ie in the nominative, for example, vysvedčeniu (certificate), svitaniu (dawn), písaniu (write), in the accusative singular of pani – paniu (madam), and in the accusative adjective endings for feminine gender, for example, cudziu (strange), orliu (eagle), krajšiu (prettier), etc. Slovak orthography does not differentiate between native Slovak diphthongs and vowel sequences ia, ie, iu in borrowed words, for example, séria (series), Xénia (Xenia), batéria (battery), rekviem (requiem), dioptria (dioptre), viola (viola), tiara (tiara), diecéza (diocese), etc., although in pronunciation, there is a distinction, especially in the softening of the preceding consonant compared to naturalized words, for example, diera [ďiera] (hole), tiahnuť [ťiahnuť] (to go), etc.

Diphthong *uo*

The diphthong [uo] is written with the single grapheme ô, for example, pôda (land), kôň (horse), pôvab (grace), stôl (table), ôsmy (eighth), vôľa (will), vôbec (at all), vôkol (all around), pôrod (birth), etc. It also appears in certain suffixes of diminutive forms, for example, žilôčka (vein), jamôčka (hole), and in some genitive plural forms, for example, nôh (legs), jamôk (holes), ôk (eyes), etc.

Vowel *ä*

Slovak includes the vowel ä in its sound inventory, although it does not have a long equivalent. It is pronounced as a ‚broad e' and occurs only after bilabial consonants p, b, m, and the labiodental consonant v, for example, päta (heel), bábätko (baby), mäso (meat), väzenie (prison). Standard Slovak allows the pronunciation of ä as a short e.

Slovak consonants

The inventory of Slovak consonants naturally includes consonants that, due to their voiced or voiceless nature, mostly form pairs. The paired voiced consonants are b, d, ď, dz, dž, z, ž, g, h, v, and the paired voiceless consonants are p, t, ť, c, č, s, š, k, ch, f. Additionally, the inventory of Slovak consonants includes unpaired voiced consonants: m, n, ň, l, ľ, r, j.

Two consonants, r, and l, also function as vowels, which is why they have long variants ŕ and Ĺ, for example, vĺča (wolf cub), žĺtok (yolk), vŕba (willow), vŕtať (drill), hŕba (pile), etc. These four consonants (r, ŕ, l, Ĺ) can serve as syllabic nuclei, similar to vowels, for example, vlk (wolf), vlčí (wolf-like), žltý (yellow), žĺtok (yolk), vrt (bore), vŕtať (drill), hrsť (handful), hŕba (dove), etc.

Orthographic principles of Slovak

The orthographic norm of standard Slovak is expressed through the following four orthographic principles, which, while being hierarchical, are also interconnected, thus influencing and complementing each other.

Phonematic principle

The phonematic principle (‚write as you hear') is the main orthographic principle of standard Slovak. It is based on the rule that each sound (phoneme) is represented by a unique graphic symbol (letter). One grapheme (letter) thus represents a specific sound. However, Slovak orthography also includes three so-called ‚composite graphemes': dz, dž, and ch, which are used to record the sounds (phonemes) [ʒ], [ǯ], and [ɒ], for example, medza [meʒa] (boundary), džbán [ǯbán] (jug), chlap [ɒlap] (man). In native words, the distinction between soft and hard consonants is indicated using a diacritical mark (the caron): d – ď, t – ť, n – ň, l – ľ, for example, dar – ďakujem (gift – thank you), tlačiť – ťahať (push – pull), ňufák – nos (snout – nose), lavica – ľavica (bench – left). In native words, before the vowels e and i, as well as before diphthongs ia, ie, and iu, consonants are pronounced as soft, but their softness is not indicated by a diacritical mark (the rule that letters i and e always soften the preceding consonant and therefore do not require an additional caron), for example, hľadieť [hľaďieť] (stare), niesť [ňiesť] (carry), dieťa [ďieťa] (child), tiahnuť [ťiahnuť] (to go), liaheň [ľiaheň] (hatchery), vysvedčenie, vysvedčeniu [vysvedčeňie, vysvedčeňiu] (certificate), etc. However, in rare cases, such as demonstrative pronouns like ten, tento (that one, this one), in adverbs like teraz (now), vtedy (back then), in personal names, for example, Peter, Pozdišovce, and in numerals like jeden (one), jedenásť (eleven), stojeden (one hundred and one), etc., the preceding consonant does not soften. In loanwords of Latin and Greek origin, consonant clusters k+s or k+z are written using a single grapheme x, for example, Xénia (Xenia), prax (practice), exemplár (copy of), exhumácia (exhumation), xerox (xerox). In place names, for example, Quebec, Quioto, the grapheme q is used to represent the sound k (Quioto [kíto]) or the combination k+v (Quebec [kvibek]). When writing words with the prefixes s-, z-, zo-, the phonematic spelling principle applies, for example, spísať [spísať] (write down), zbiť [zbiť] (beat up), zostať [zostať] (stay). From this perspective, the Slovak phonematic orthographic principle is relatively simple when transcribing spoken language into written form.

Morphematic principle

The morphematic principle (‚according to the meaning of the root of the word') is reflected in the preservation of the consistent spelling of voiced and voiceless consonants, despite their pronunciation differences. At the boundary of morphemes (the smallest separable part of a word carrying meaning/function) and in fluent speech, so-called ‚assimilation' (voicing assimilation/merging) occurs. For example, the word holub (pigeon) must be pronounced as [holup], even though we write the consonant b at the end of the word before a pause or another word beginning with a voiceless consonant, for example, holub sedí [holup sedí] (pigeon sits). However, other forms, such as holubie pierko (pigeon´s feather), holuby (pigeons), are pronounced with the consonant b. In the word chlap (man), the consonant p is written and pronounced at the end of the word if followed by a pause or another word with a

voiceless consonant, for example, chlap šoféruje (man drives), stĺp spadol (the pillar fell). If the following word begins with a voiced consonant or a vowel, then b is pronounced instead, for example, chlap zabrzdil [chlab zabrzdil] (man slam on the breaks), chlap osamel [chlab osamel] (man became lonely), snop zmokol [snob zmokol] (smug shut up). According to the morphological spelling principle, we write the grapheme (letter) that corresponds to the sound pronounced before a vowel or in derived word forms, for example, holub-a (pigeon), chlap-a (man), dub-a (oak), zub-ný (tooth), chlieb – chlebový (bread), chlap-isko (big man), snop-y (smug), vstup-ný (entrance), chrup-avka (cartilage), etc. The consistent spelling of consonants in all word forms and derivatives is also maintained in words with prefixes nad-/nado- (over), pod-/podo- (under), od-/odo- (from), cez-/cezo-v (over), v-/vo- (in), pred-/predo- (before), vz-/vzo- (up-), roz-/rozo- (dis-), even though assimilation occurs at morpheme boundaries, for example, podpis [potpis] (signature), predpis [pretpis] (prescription), odpis [otpis] (write-off), bezcieľne [bescieľňe] (pointlessly), vzpínať [vspínať] (buckle up), rozpínať [rospínať] (epand), etc. Additionally, all word-forming, case, and stem-forming suffixes are spelled consistently, for example, the suffix -ik/-ík: fúz-ik (mustache), chlap-ík (guy); suffix -in: matk-in (mother´s), susedk-in (neighbour´s); suffix -yňa: otrok-yňa (slave), boh-yňa (goddess), svät-yňa (sanctuary), etc. In the nominative case of animate masculine nouns, in the genitive, dative, and locative singular, and the nominative plural of feminine nouns ending in a consonant, the unified suffix -i is used according to the rules of Slovak orthography, for example, chlap – chlapi (man – men), kosť – kosti (bone – bones), krv – krv-I (blood – bloods). The stem-forming suffix -i, -í is also written uniformly in verb forms such as hodí (throw), kŕmi (feed), varí (cook), svieti (shines), leží (lays). The case suffix -y is written in the nominative and accusative plural of inanimate masculine nouns, for example, hrad-y (castle-s), dub-y (oak-s), holub-y (pigeon-s), zub-y (tooth-teeth), kruh-y (cyrcle-s), and also in the genitive singular and the nominative and accusative plural of feminine nouns, for example, žena – ženy (woman – women), matka – matky (mother - mothers), idea – idey (idea – ideas).

Grammatical principle

The grammatical principle (‚as codified/agreed upon') is applied to distinguish grammatical meanings, especially in written language, to differentiate between the singular and plural nominative forms of adjectives following the pattern of ‚pekný' (pretty), for example, dobrý muž – dobrí muži (good man – good men), veľký chlap – veľkí chlapi (big man – big men), múdry pán – múdri páni (wise mister – wise misters), etc. This principle does not apply to adjectives following the pattern of ‚cudzí' (strange), so the nominative singular and plural forms are written the same, for example, cudzí chlapec – cudzí chlapci (strange boy – strange boys), súci pomocník – súci pomocníci (essential helper - essential helpers), najtichší žiak – najtichší žiaci (quietest pupil – quietest pupils), etc. The grammatical principle can also be observed in the pronunciation and spelling of prepositions s (with), and so (with), which combine with the instrumental case, for example, so sestrou [zo sestrou] (with sister), so sebou [zo sebou] (with myself), s dieťaťom [z dieťaťom] (with a child), s deťmi [z ďeťmi] (with children), so študentmi [zo študentmi] (with students), in contrast to the preposition z (from), and zo (from), which combines with the genitive case, for example, z domu (from home), z domov (from homes), zo stoličky (from chair), zo stoličiek (from chairs), z mesta (from town), z miest (from towns), etc. The grammatical orthographic principle reflects the complex grammatical structure of the Slovak language. It is manifested, for example, in the pronunciation of the bilabial

(both-lip) [□] at the end of words after a syllabic consonant r or l, for example, krv [kr□] (blood), prv [pr□] (firstly), or after a vowel, for example, spev [spe□] (singing), hnev [hňe□] (anger), slivka [sľi□ka] (plum), polievka [poľie□ka] (soup). Incorrect but dialectally used pronunciations include [krf] (blood), [prf] (firstly), [spef] (singing), [hnef/hňef] (anger), [slifka, sľifka] (plum), [poliefka, poľiefka] (soup), etc. The grammatical orthographic principle is also related to the rule of writing the suffixes -ou and -ov, even though they are pronounced the same [-o□]. The suffix -ou is used in the instrumental case of feminine nouns and adjectives, for example, s dobrou ženou [z dobro□ ženo□] (with a good woman), s peknou paňou [s pekno□ paňo□] (with a nice lady), s pevnou oporou [s pevno□ oporo□] (with solid support), etc. The suffix -ov is written in the nominative singular masculine forms, for example, domov [domo□] (home), in the genitive and accusative plural, for example, z pohárov [s poháro□] (from cups), vidím chlapov [viďím chlapo□] (I see men), as well as in possessive adjective forms of the masculine gender, for example, bratov dom [brato□ dom] (brother´s house), Jurajov spev [Jurajo□ spe□] (Juraj´s singing), otcov kôň [oco□ k□oň] (father´s horse), otcov remeň [oco□ remeň] (father´s belt), etc. In all these cases, the codified pronunciation of the bilabial [□] should be realized.

Etymological principle

The etymological principle (‚according to origin, history, and development of words') takes into account the fact that the spelling system of standard Slovak reflects older linguistic developments related to historical evolution. This principle concerns the spelling of words of both domestic and foreign origin and defines the use of the letters i, í, and y, ý, in accordance with the historical state of the Slovak language in earlier periods. In Old Slovak, there were also distinct sounds (phonemes) representing front i/í [и] and back y/ý [ы]. The unification of the pronunciation of the front and back sounds into a single front [i] occurred in the 14th century. In Slovak orthography, the etymological principle is evident in the use of y in words of domestic origin after so-called ‚hard consonants', for example, mlyn (windmill), kyvadlo (pendulm), kuchyňa (kitchen), motyka (hoe), motýľ (butterfly), lyže (ski), plyn (gas), dym (smoke), kývať (swing), chyba (mistake), chyža (cradle), etc. The use of i and y in the root of words follows the etymological principle, for example, in the words biť/byť (beat/to be), bitka/bytie (battle/being), vír/výr (vortex/eve), sipot/sykot (wheeze/whistle), etc., even though only one sound [i] is pronounced. After the consonants b, p, m, r, s, v, z, y is written in the root of selected words and their derived forms, for example, bylina (herb), byť (to be), bystrý (bright), obyčaj (custom), kobyla (mare), pýtať (ask), kopyto (hoof), pysk (mouth), pyšný (proud), myslieť (to think), omyl (mistake), mydlo (soap), hrýzť (bite), skrýša (hideout), ryba (fish), richly (quick), rydlo (spear), rýľ (spade), syr (cheese), výška (hight), výskať (shout), vydra (otter), výr (eve), jazyk (tongue), nazývať (call), and others. In Slovak, y is always written in words with the prefix vy- for example, vyletieť (fly out), vynález (invention), vyložiť (unload), výklad (interpretation), výročie (anniversary), význam (meaning), etc. On the other hand, in words like visieť (hang), vidiek (countryside), vidlička (fork), vidno (visible), this is not a prefix but part of the root of these words. According to the etymological principle, y or i is also used in loanwords as they are written in the foreign language from which they were borrowed, for example, fyzika (phisics), lýra (lyre), história (history), hysteria (hysteria), hipoterapia (hippotherapy), hypertenzia (hypertension), hypofýza (pituitary gland), politika (politics), policajt (policeman), etc.

3.3 Language, value, identity

Language is also perceived as a national identifying attribute and a national integrating factor. It fulfills a function that is permanently linked to the cultural and value principles of the society that uses it. Language also participates in the formation of historical and national value-based thinking, as well as in the development and maintenance of the linguistic-cultural identity of the community. The development of the linguistic consciousness of society is primarily reflected in the history of the language. Language contains a set of designations that emerged in the context of the historical development of society and is therefore also a source for historical research in the field of linguistics. Thus, linguistics strives to provide the most accurate possible picture of the cultural development of a nation.

Ethno-identifying function

Language fulfills an ethno-identifying function when it visibly distinguishes one linguistic community from both linguistically related and distant neighbors. Language thus becomes a sign and symbol of a nation. The memory and culture of the Slovak nation have been shaped alongside the cultivation of language, which is particularly evident in written (literary) texts. These texts vividly reflect the cultural, economic, political, social, and administrative-legal context of societal life. Language incorporates linguistic means that are naturally linked to cultural development. Linguistic means provide evidence of linguistic-cultural contacts and point to cultural-historical events and processes that the community has encountered and dealt with. Language thus represents an important cultural value, which not only develops the communicative competence of the nation but also maintains and shapes the historical consciousness of its members.

Translation of the Bible into Old Church Slavonic

In the European linguistic-historical context, the creation and use of a translation of the Holy Scriptures (the Bible) into the national language is considered the most significant expression of a nation‘s culture. Translations of biblical texts into a language comprehensible to the common people have been known to all Slavs (including Slovaks) since the 9th century. In the final phase of the Proto-Slavic development of the Slavic language, linguistic conditions were created for the translation of the Holy Scriptures and liturgical books into the Old Church Slavonic language. These translations became equivalent to their Greek (Septuagint) and Latin (Vulgate) originals. Through the first translation of the Bible into Old Church Slavonic, the language of Slavic written culture, the Slavs and Slovaks secured a firm place in European civilizational development.

Old Church Slavonic language, as the oldest Slavic language, also became the oldest language of Slavic literary culture and the Bible. The diversity of European linguistic-cultural development is the result of communication between European nations and their languages. European culture and civilization trace their origins to Christian thought and the principles of the Decalogue, which reflect both the relationship of God to the world and the relationship of man to man. For this reason, the most significant manifestation of the advancement and civilization of European nations is considered to be thinking about God as the source and goal of human and societal existence. It was the Bible that conveyed this message as the foundation of European value-based and spiritual thought.

A nation's value-based thinking is reflected not only in various types and genres of high literature but also in education. Even the texts of Bible translations into national languages did not emerge to portray the frailty of everyday life or to moralize. Rather, they were created to demonstrate, step by step, through explanations and argumentation, the truth and justice of cultural and spiritual human existence. Most importantly, this argumentation is based on judgments inherent to Christianity and not on the opinions of those to whom the argumentation is addressed.

This reality was expressed not only in the Old Church Slavonic language translation of the Bible but continues to be expressed in modern translations of biblical texts into all European standard languages. These translations are evidence of the advancement of European culture and civilization. European Christianity, despite being divided into Eastern and Western branches, emphasizes the performance of good deeds. It is only through the performance of good deeds that a person contributes to enriching the culture of the community. In doing so, the transience of language and culture is overcome. The fundamental characteristic of a nation is, therefore, its language. It serves as evidence of the historical and empirical existence of this ethnic community. It functions as a representative of identity and as proof of the continuity and vitality of its members.

3.4 Stratification and integration of Slovak

Modern linguistics emphasizes the idea of dialectal and social stratification of language. This means that language, as a means of communication among people, emerges and develops only within society and only under the influence of speech activity among groups of people. Therefore, language contains a set of elements and signs that are characteristic of a given community.

Slovak is conventional

Language as a system within its linguistic community is the result of a convention (agreement) among its users. This agreement stems from the arbitrary nature of language, meaning that the form of a language is a result of a decision made by its users, albeit a voluntary one. Therefore, the linguistic sign is ultimately immutable within the system of a specific language. Participants in communication must respect individual linguistic signs to understand what ‚the others' are saying and writing. All users of a particular language must acquire the linguistic system in the same way to reliably understand it. It is precisely from the communicative essence of language that its primary function as a means of mutual understanding arises. Closely related to the communicative function is the cognitive function of language, as human speech reflects human thought. In human speech, rational cognition, as well as emotional and volitional (attitudinal) aspects of human thinking, materialize. However, paradoxically, these aspects do not necessarily have to be an immediate reaction to sensory-perceived reality. The national language is thus also an expression of a nation's thinking—of people connected to their own national culture and nation.

Standard Slovak

The literary form of language serves as a medium for artistic and professional literature. Language also develops human aesthetic perception and enables individuals to understand the beauty of both linguistic and extralinguistic reality. The aesthetic function of language aims to evoke aesthetic sensitivity in its users. Language fulfills its full range of functions when it is not limited merely to the communicative sphere but contributes to the overall development and cultivation of society.

The standard language represents the most prestigious form of the national language, as the esteemed status of the standard language also reflects the educational standing of its users. Therefore, Standard Slovak fulfills not only a general communicative function but, as a codified form of the national language, also serves as the state, official, artistic, and educational language in the Slovak Republic.

Standard and substandard colloquial Slovak

The standard form of language, which functions as an informal means of communication, is used in everyday speech (especially in oral expression). In this form, the rules of codified Slovak are more or less followed. However, deviations occur, for example, in the use of colloquial words (e.g., cestovka [formal: cestovná kancelária, travel agency], diplomovka [formal: diplomová práca, diploma thesis], bytovka [formal: obytný dom, residential building]) and in the inconsistent adherence to Slovak pronunciation rules (e.g., omission of the soft sounds ľ or ň).

The substandard form of the language is enriched with various slang words, argotisms (specific words used only by a certain social group), jargon words, and other non-standard expressions, which may penetrate the standard language either from Slovak dialects or from other languages.

Slovak dialects

Slovak dialects represent territorially and functionally limited linguistic varieties that are not codified; thus, Slovak dialects constitute a non-standard form of the Slovak national language. Even today, Slovak dialects are used in specific dialectal regions, primarily in everyday, spontaneous, and private communication. Although Slovak dialects are not codified, they do follow a fixed and stable expressive (phonetic) and semantic structure. This structure is reflected in vocabulary, grammatical construction, and word-formation systems. Slovak dialects are territorially differentiated linguistic varieties that have historically developed in specific Slovak regions, inhabited by members of the Slovak nation.

The diversity of Slovak dialects in Slovakia was influenced primarily by:

Geomorphological division of Slovakia

The geomorphological division of Slovakia is delineated by natural boundaries such as mountain ranges (e.g., Little Carpathians, Malá Fatra, Veľká Fatra, Low and High Tatras, Slovak Ore Mountains, Vihorlat Hills), watercourses (e.g., Váh, Hron, Ipeľ, Bodrog, Laborec, Topľa, Ondava), forests, and lowlands. These natural barriers historically influenced the separation of populations.

Administrative and Territorial division of Slovakia

The natural and geomorphological diversity of Slovak territory was reflected in the ancient comitatus or ‚župa' (county) administrative division of Slovakia. Individual Slovak counties had unique economic activities and cultural characteristics, and within these administrative units, distinct Slovak dialects emerged and developed, such as the dialects of Trnava, Orava, Liptov, Turiec, Hont, Gemer, Spiš, Šariš, and Zemplín.

Economic division of Slovakia

The blurring of boundaries between smaller dialectal areas is connected to the internal economic migration of the Slovak population across regions and districts. A significant role was played by migration to urban settlements, which increased due to the formation of medieval mining and guild communities. The intensification of agricultural organization and shepherd colonization in the 14th–16th centuries also influenced the rural Slovak population. Slovak dialects thus developed with the needs of everyday economic and social communication and with the development of written records. These written records continue to serve as historical evidence of the natural linguistic development of Slovak.

At that time, Latin dominated the Slovak linguistic and cultural environment. Latin, as the language of the Catholic Church and the Hungarian state administration in the past, represented the standardized language of administrative-legal documents, scientific

and artistic literature, and the language of the upper and middle-educated class. Due to the preference for Latin over the native and commonly understood language in written traditions in Slovakia, very few continuous written records in the vernacular existed before the end of the 15th century, making it difficult to document the phonological and morphological development of Slovak.

Development of Slovak dialects

The development of Slovak dialects began after the breakup of the Slavic linguistic unity in the 10th century and lasted until the end of the 15th century. However, from the 16th century onward, historical linguistics identifies a natural tendency toward linguistic integration within the Slovak dialectal space, occurring in the western, southern, and eastern Slovak regions. The integration of Slovak dialects was also influenced by the penetration of Central Slovak linguistic features into Western and Eastern Slovak dialects.

According to the migration-integration theory of Proto-Slavic origins, both younger and older developmental stages of Slovak formation can be described based on existing dialects. The foundation of dialectal development is primarily the West Slavic linguistic changes, which are also typical of the Slovak linguistic area. The West Slavic linguistic sphere includes not only Slovak but also Czech, Polish, Upper and Lower Sorbian (a Sorbian enclave in present-day Germany), the extinct Polabian and Pomeranian Slovincian, and Kashubian (which today is considered a dialect of Polish).

Based on the migration-integration theory, the Proto-Slavic foundation of Slovak was formed by gradually unifying old distinctive features of Proto-Slavic present in different Slovak dialects, thus laying the groundwork for the independent development of the Slovak national language. Through shared systemic linguistic phenomena, Slovak distinguishes itself from other Slavic languages—not only within the West Slavic linguistic environment but also in South Slavic and East Slavic contexts. Strong integrative and convergent tendencies in the development of Slovak contributed to the gradual elimination of differences, which eventually became the norm in the usage of literary and later standard Slovak.

Proto-Slavic basis

Proto-Slavic consonant clusters

In Slovak, the original non-palatalized Proto-Slavic consonant clusters *kv-, *gv- at the beginning of words before jať (ѣ) have been preserved, for example, the Slovak words kvet (flower), hviezda (star). The original Proto-Slavic consonant clusters *tl, *dl, *dn have also been preserved, for example, mydlo (soap), šidlo (awl), vädnúť (drop). The Proto-Slavic sound clusters *dj, *tj, *ktj, *kti in words like *svetja, *nokti, *medja correspond to the Slovak sounds dz, z, c, for example, svieca (candle), medza (boundary), noc (night). In the standard form of Slovak, residual forms with an inserted ľ also appear, for example, hrable (rake), hrobľa (potatoe bank), or Zemplín (Zemplin), which particularly indicate the existence of an ancient-paired softness of consonants b - b‘, p - p‘, m - m‘, v - v‘ in Old Slovak. The paired softness of these consonants can be assumed to have persisted even in a later stage of the development of the Slovak language, as evidenced by their specific records preserved, for example, in the text of the translation of the Camaldolese Bible from the mid-18th century.

Fixed stress

Slovak is also characterized by fixed stress. Except for Eastern Slovak dialects, where stress is fixed on the penultimate syllable, in standard Slovak, the stress is on the first syllable.

Reflex *dz*

A common element in the Slovak dialectal area is the reflex dz for the original Proto-Slavic cluster *dj, in words such as medza (boundary), priadza (yarn), sadza (soot). For the Proto-Slavic consonant clusters *tj and *kt(j), the sound c developed, for example, noc (night), pec (furnace), svieca (candle), and for the Proto-Slavic sound ch, the sound š emerged, which has been preserved in forms like všetko (everything), všetci (everybody). However, in the nominative plural of the masculine gender, a sharp sibilant s appears instead of ch, for example, Čech – Česi (Czech – Czechs), mních – mnísi (monk – monks), and analogically in forms like vlci (wolves, from vlk - wolf) and vtáci (birds, from vták - bird), where the old k is replaced by the sound c. In the dative and locative singular endings of the feminine gender, the old sounds ch, g, and k are used, for example, mucha – muche (fly - fly), ruka – ruke (hand -hand), liga – lige (league – league); thus, the change known from Czech does not occur: moucha – mouse (fly - fly), ruke – ruce (hand -hand), liga – lize (league – league), etc.

Newer specific features of Slovak

A characteristic feature of Slovak is the universal suffix -om in the instrumental singular of masculine and neuter nouns, for example, had – hadom (snake - snake), chlap – chlapom (man – man), hrdina – hrdinom (hero – hero), jahňa – jahňaťom (lamb – lamb), dieťa – dieťaťom (child – child), mesto – mestom (town – town), etc.

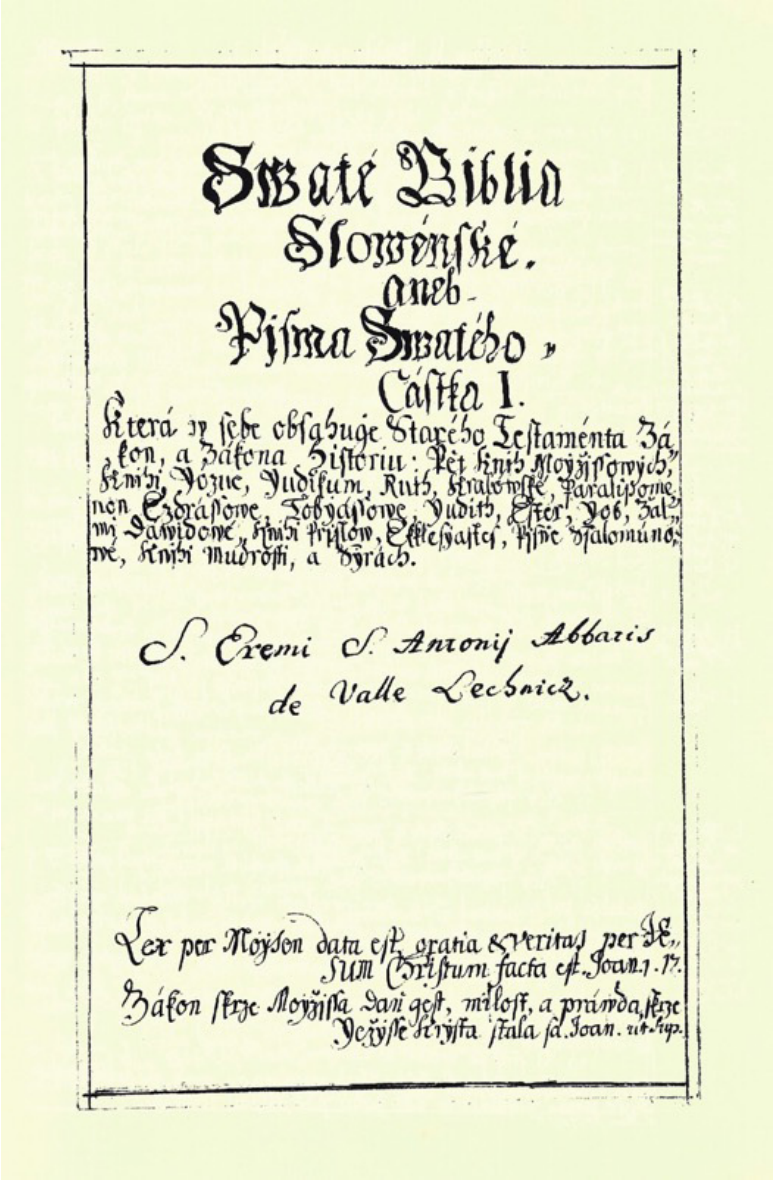
In contemporary Slovak, the disappearance of the vocative and its replacement by the nominative form is typical. However, in some cases, especially in biblical, liturgical, and dialectal texts, old vocative forms have been preserved, for example, človek – človeče, Pán – Pane, otec – otče (father – father), matka – matko (mother – mother), priateľ – priateľu (friend - friend), etc. Slovak is also characterized by the interrogative pronoun ‚čo', for example, Čo robíš? (What are you doing?), Kde čo leží? (Where what lies?), Čo je na stole? (What is on the table?).

A specifically Slovak phenomenon is the generalized use of the suffix -m in the first-person singular of all verbs, which applies almost systematically to all dialects, for example, sedím (I sit), píšem (I write), pracujem (I work), jem (I eat), čítam (I read), vidím (I see), počujem (I hear), chválim (I praise) (unlike Czech: čtu (I read), píši (I write), vidím I see)). Another characteristic feature of Slovak is the infinitive form of verbs ending in -ť, for example, vidieť (to see), písať (to write), sedieť (to sit), pliesť (to knit).

In standard Slovak, there is a rule that two long syllables do not occur consecutively. A general rule applies in standard Slovak, stating that inflectional suffixes (in declension and conjugation) and derivational suffixes with originally long syllables are shortened when the root of the word ends in a long syllable. Long syllables are those that contain a long vowel, a diphthong, or long Ĺ and ŕ. A

typical feature of Slovak is also the polite form of address, known as vykanie (addressing a person in the second plural form). In Slovak, when using vykanie, the verb referring to the addressed person is in the second-person plural, for example, Boli ste v Tatrách? (Have you been to the Tatras?), Prišli ste na výlet na Slovensko? (Have you come on a trip to Slovakia?), Mohli by ste mi pomôcť s orientáciou v meste? (Could you help me find my way around the city?). The plural verb form is obligatory in vykanie. A man is addressed individually as follows: Boli by ste taký láskavý? (Would you be so kind?). When addressing a woman, the corresponding form is: Boli by ste taká láskavá? (Would you be so kind?). A distinction between male and female addressees is also necessary in expressions like: Sám zvážte! (Consider yourself!), Sama zvážte! (Consider yourself!), Rád súťažíte? (Do you like to compete?), Máte rada sladkosti? (Do you like sweets?).

The current orthographic system is codified in the Pravidlá slovenského pravopisu (Rules of Slovak Orthography), and the spelling and meaning of individual words can be looked up and verified in the Krátky slovník slovenského jazyka (Short Dictionary of the Slovak Language).



Swaté Biblia
Slowenské,
aneb
Pisma Swatého,
Částka I.
Která w sebe obsahuge Starého Testaménta Zá-
kon, a Zákona Historii: Pět knih Mojžíšowých,
knihi Jozue, Judikum, Ruth, Králowské, Paralipsome-
non, Ezdrášowe, Tobiášowe, Judith, Ester, Job, Žal-
mi Dawidowé, knihi Přísloví, Ekklesiastes, Písně Salomú-
nowé, knihi Mudrosti, a Syrách.

S. Eremi S. Antonij Abbatis
de Valle Lechnicz.

Lex per Mojsen data est, gratia & veritas per JE-
SUM Christum facta est. Joan. 1. 17.
Zákon skrze Mojžíssa dan gest, milost, a prawda, skrze
Ježyse Krystá stala sa. Joan. 1. 17.

Title page of the first volume of the Camaldolese Bible from the middle of the 18th century.
Source: archive of P. Žeňuch.

3.5 Slovak in contact with the foreign-language environment

The migration-integration theory of the origin of Slovak is based on historical facts that point to the formation of a common linguistic system of Slovaks. It also relies on linguistic findings and knowledge from toponymy (on local and geographical names), hydronymy (on the names of watercourses), and designations related to the system of law, justice, and economic activities. These indicate the constitution of Slovak as a continuous language of Slovaks. The very constitution of the language is related to the integrative development of Slovak from Old Slovak. This is evidenced by the establishment of the state-political entity of Great Moravia in the 9th century and linguistic phenomena representing its continuity. All linguistic elements are fully represented in Slovak dialects as well.

When comparing the vocabulary of contemporary standard Slovak with its dialectal variants and historical texts in Old Slovak, we see that the national Slovak language contains a significant number of Proto-Slavic words in the vocabulary related to the formation of various developmental stages of the Slovak language. The oldest vocabulary of Slovak is related to thematic areas concerning:

- natural realities (slnko (sun), mesiac (moon), hora (mountain), zem (earth), oheň (fire), deň (day), noc (night), svetlo (light), tma (dark), dub (oak), lipa (linden), buk (beech), breza (birch), skala (rock), debra [užlabina] (ravine)),
- family life (otec (father), matka (mother), syn (son), dcéra (daughter), brat (brother), sestra (sister), rod (house of), Rodina (family), človek (human), strýc (uncle), ujec (uncle)),
- body part (ruka (hand), hlava (head), noha (leg), srdce (heart), pľúca (lungs), krv (blood), kosť (bone)),
- agricultural life (dvor (yard), koleso (wheel), radlo (plow), brázda (furrow), kosa (scythe), orať (to plow), zrno (grain), žito (rye), roľa (field)),
- terms related to craftsmanship (tesár (carpenter), klada (clade), sekera (axe), vreteno (spindle), priadza (yarn), krosná (loom), koža (leather), píla (saw), drevo (wood), zlato (gold), luk (bow), lov (hunt), tríbiť [with the meaning čistiť, Old Church Slavonic трѣбити] (to clean)),
- areas of social life (pán (master), sluha (servant), otrok (slave), hrad (castle), dedina či ves (village or hamlet), strážnik (watchman), tovarník [this is the occupation of a person who is responsible for stored goods], boženík [meaning deputy, member of the municipal council]),
- the area of law (ponosa (complaint), Pravda (truth), krivda (injustice), súd (court), osud (fate), posudok (report), puto (bond), modliť sa (to pray), vladyka i kňaz [with the meaning princeps, Old Church Slavonic. кънꙁь] (meaning one that is first, ruler, priest), kmeť, špán [with meaning úradník] (official)),
- religious life (obeta (sacrifice), služba (service), hriech (sin), duch (spirit), dvorník [meaning a member of the ruler's court], kňaz [meaning sacerdos, spiritual], charm (temple), nedeľa (Sunday), peklo (hell), nepriaznik (adversary), etc.).

New words appeared in the Slovak vocabulary mainly under the influence of Czech, German, and Wallachian economic activities.

Czech in the Slovak linguistic context

Czech in the Slovak linguistic context served as a practical means of communication and a developed language tool that penetrated Slovakia, especially in towns, as evidenced by the Žilina Legal Book from the 14th century, which contains a translation of the Magdeburg mining law. This translation from German was made in Slovakia, but the translation reflects Slovak linguistic influence on Czech. Czech was well understandable for Slovaks, unlike Latin or German. Slovaks primarily used Czech in the pre-literary stage of Slovak language development for practical reasons and only in written communication (especially in official correspondence, legal text translations, economic records in municipal and guild protocol books, etc.). Czech was not the spoken language of Slovaks. Slovaks did not regard Czech as a literary language, which is why they naturally Slovakized it without the set boundaries. The practice of Slovakizing Czech depended on the scribe's level of education and was related to linguistic differences and similarities between Slovak and Czech. In the Evangelical Church, Slovaks used Czech as a replacement for Latin in liturgy. In oral transmission, Czech as a liturgical language was also significantly Slovakized. Although Slovaks had not yet developed their literary language, if a scribe attempted to write in Czech, he referred to it as Czech, even if it contained Slovakisms, as he had not fully mastered the Czech linguistic norm. For Slovaks, the Slovak linguistic system was natural, and even in written Czech, their Slovak linguistic consciousness manifested itself through natural Slovakization. This is why we speak of Slovakized Czech.

Some words borrowed from Czech, which are used in the spoken language of Slovaks, remain non-standard and colloquial in today's standard Slovak, for example, zbytok (the rest of, standard Slovak: zvyšok), vadiť (to bother, standard Slovak: prekážať), kartáč (brush, standard Slovak: kefa), dotaz (question, standard Slovak: otázka), zástava (in the sense of a pledge, standard Slovak: záloh), vodítko (leash, standard Slovak: vôdzka), krmítko (feeder, standard Slovak: kšmidlo), lehátko (lounger, standard Slovak: ležadlo), závadný (defective, standard Slovak: chybný), rohlík (roll, standard Slovak: rožok), nevadí (it does not matter, standard Slovak: neprekáža), razítko (stamp, standard Slovak: pečiatka), salám (salami, standard Slovak: saláma), moc (very, for example, Czech ‚mám moc práce' – Slovak ‚mám veľa práce' – English ‚I have a lot of work'), dopis (letter, standard Slovak: list), kapesník (handkerchief, standard Slovak: vreckovka), kapesné (pocket money, standard Slovak: vreckové), húpačka (swing, standard Slovak: hojdačka), ľadvina (kidney, standard Slovak: oblička), krabica (box, standard Slovak: škatuľa), poštová prepážka (postal counter, standard Slovak: poštový priečinok), nekľudný (restless, standard Slovak: nepokojný), kľud (calm, standard Slovak: pokoj, ticho), kecať (to babble, standard Slovak: tárať), doporučiť (to recommend, standard Slovak: odporučiť), krb (fireplace, standard Slovak: kozub), kojiť (to breastfeed, standard Slovak: dojčiť), držka (mouth, standard Slovak: ústa), námatkový (random, standard Slovak: občasný, náhodný), jeptiška (nun, standard Slovak: mniška), and others.

German in the Slovak linguistic context

From German, words entered the Slovak vocabulary mainly from the fields of craftsmanship, local administration, market, trade, judiciary, and mining, as well as other areas of economic and urban life, for example, rytier (knight), richtár (mayor), hajtman (commander), majster (master), cech (guild), haviar (miner), fárať (to descend into a mine), halier (haler), cvok (rivet), pracka (buckle), pančucha (stocking). Other words have also made their way into Slovak, some of which still exist in the vocabulary of contemporary

standard Slovak. Although they are often on the periphery of the vocabulary, they remain alive in Slovak dialects, for example, hámor (hammer, standard Slovak: kladivo, German: Hammer), hobeľ (plane, standard Slovak: hoblík, German: Hobel), drišľak (colander, standard Slovak: cedník, German: Durchschlag), bretvanka (baking tray, standard Slovak: plech na pečenie, German: Bratwanne), šurc (apron, standard Slovak: zástera, German: Schurz), ancug (suit, standard Slovak: oblek, German: Anzug), rašpľa (rasp, standard Slovak: pilník, German: Raspel), taľovať (to divide, standard Slovak: deliť, German: teilen), šuster (shoemaker, standard Slovak: obuvník, German: Schuster), firhang (curtain, standard Slovak: záclona, German: Vorhang), fojtovať (to smother, standard Slovak: dusiť, German: feuchten), dekeľ, dekľovať (cover, to cover, standard Slovak: kryt, prikrývať, German: deckeln), gvint (thread, standard Slovak: závit, German: Gewinde), šuflata/šuplata (drawer, standard Slovak: zásuvka, German: Schublade), rajbať (to scrub, to grate, standard Slovak: prať, strúhať, German: reiben), pakovať (to pack, standard Slovak: baliť, German: packen), pľac (place, square, standard Slovak: miesto, námestie, German: Platz), varta (guard, standard Slovak: stráž, German: Warte), grata (dishes, standard Slovak: riad, German: Geräte), varštak (workshop, workstation, workbench, standard Slovak: dielňa, pracovné miesto, pracovný stôl v dielni, German: Werkstatt), borg (credit, standard Slovak: úver, German: Borg), tringelt (tip, standard Slovak: prepitné, German: Trinkgeld), špajza (pantry, German: Speisekammer), šparhet (stove, standard Slovak: sporák, German: Sparherd), and many others.

Hungarian in the Slovak linguistic context

From linguistic and cultural contacts with the Hungarian environment, dialects contain, for example, ďugou (stopper, standard Slovak: zátka, Hungarian: dugó), hordou (barrel, standard Slovak: sud, Hungarian: hordó), hurka (blood sausage, standard Slovak: jaternica, Hungarian: hurka), šajt (meat roll, standard Slovak: tlačenka, Hungarian: sajt), kapčac (to fasten, standard Slovak: zapínať, Hungarian: kapcsol), garadiče (stairs, standard Slovak: schody, Hungarian: garádics), bečeľovať/bečaľovať (to appreciate, standard Slovak: ceniť si, vážiť si, Hungarian: becsül), varoš (town, standard Slovak: mesto, Hungarian: város), bizovať sa (to rely on, standard Slovak: spoliehať sa, Hungarian: bizalom), keruľa (curve, standard Slovak: zákruta, Hungarian: kerülő), segiň (pauper, standard Slovak: úbožiak, Hungarian: szegény), živáň (bandit, standard Slovak: zbojník, Hungarian: zsivány), etc.

Romanian in the Slovak linguistic context

From the Wallachian environment, Romanian words entered the Slovak vocabulary, mainly related to shepherding and pastoral life, for example, bača (chief shepherd, Romanian: baciu), fujara (shepherd´s pipe, Romanian: fluer), bryndza (brittle cheese, Romanian: brinză), kľag (calf stomach used for milk coagulation, Romanian: cliag), strunga (sheep pen at a shepherd's hut, Romanian: strunga), žinčica (sheep´s whey drink, Romanian: jintiţa), meridzať (rumination of sheep after grazing, Romanian: meridzire), grúň (hillside suitable for sheep grazing, Romanian: gruiu), etc.

Latin in the Slovak linguistic context

A large number of words entered the Slovak vocabulary from Latin, which served not only as a liturgical language but also as the language of high literary culture and administrative-legal documents. Latin was the administrative-legal language in Hungary

until the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. As a liturgical language, it was used in Roman Catholic churches until the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Words from Latin entered the lexical inventory of Old Slovak as well as dialects, such as diabol (devil, Latin: diabolus), škola (school, Latin: schola), omša (mass, Latin: missa), apatieka (pharmacy, Latin: apotheke), kantor (teacher, singer, Latin: cantor), pleban (priest, Latin: plebanus), sakristia (sacristy, Latin: sacristia), cintorín (cemetery, Latin: coemeterium), kontrakt (contract, Latin: contractus), fúria (fury, Latin: furialis), móres (manners, Latin: mores), honor (honor, Latin: honor), testament (will, Latin: testamentum), beštia (beast, Latin: bestia), fiškáľ (lawyer, advocate, Latin: fiscalis), komora (storeroom, Latin: camera), etc.

Church Slavonic language in the Slovak linguistic context

In the oldest Slovak vocabulary, some borrowings from the liturgical Church Slavonic language have also been preserved, dating back to the Great Moravian period. These words are still used in dialects, particularly in religious contexts, in areas where Church Slavonic is used as a liturgical language, such as in the Greek Catholic or Orthodox Church in Slovakia. It is important to note that there are no fundamental differences between liturgical Old Church Slavonic and Church Slavonic. Both contain borrowings from Greek and Latin, reflecting the intermingling of linguistic and cultural influences that shaped Great Moravia. Examples include the parallel use of terms such as omša (mass) alongside služba (service), pop and kňaz (priest), and the use of oltár (altar) both for the sacrificial table and for the entire altar space. Great Moravian Old Church Slavonic and Church Slavonic provide valuable insights into the development of the earliest Slavic language. This terminology consists primarily of concepts influenced by Christianity, such as mních, mníška (monk, nun, мнихъ, мънишица), služba (service, слѫжба) alongside omša (mass, мьша), večerňa (vespers, вєчєрнꙋ), povečerňa (compline, повєчєрнꙋ), masopust (carnival, мꙗсопѫстъ), ceta (small coin, цꙋта), čeľaď (servants, чєлꙋдь), komkanie (kneading, комканїе), ocot (vinegar, ꙋцътъ), igumen (abbot, игѫмєнъ), imanie (property, иманїе), archijerej (archbishop, архиєрєй), prosfora (prosphora, просфѫра), and others. Such terminology provides unique evidence of the connection between the earliest Slovak and Great Moravian spiritual culture.



Tetraevangelium from the village of Baškovce, 15th century, in Church Slavonic, Sobrance district.
Source: archive of P. Ženuch.

3.6 Slovak dialects

An inseparable part of the Slovak national language is dialects. They are not standard forms and do not have nationwide validity, but they can provide various evidence of the development and evolution of Slovak and also allow for the observation of its literary cultivation. Slovak as a national language developed in three dialectal macro-areas, on the basis of which pre-standard cultivated forms of Slovak were formed from the 16th century. It was precisely on their foundation that the first form of a nationwide standard language began to be constituted from the mid-18th century.

There are no sharp boundaries between Slovak dialects and individual dialectal areas. Some features characterizing one group of Slovak dialects extend into another, which is why dialectal phenomena overlap and complement each other. This intermixing of dialects, even in the pre-standard period of Slovak, made it possible to create a diverse mosaic of mutually specific yet, from the linguistic system's perspective, cohesive dialectal units.

Slovak dialects are grouped into three dialectal groups:

Central Slovak dialects

Central Slovak Dialects Central Slovak dialects occupy a central place in the development of Slovak. Due to their central position in the Slovak dialectal system, they represent the largest dialectal group. They consist of dialects spoken in the upper reaches of the Váh river and its tributaries, on the tributary of the Orava river, in the Turiec region from the Western Tatras to the Malá Fatra, further in the Pohronie region, and from the Tribeč Mountains to the Slanec river in eastern Gemer. Central Slovak dialects are divided into a northern group (Liptov, Orava, Turiec, Upper Nitra, and Zvolen dialects) and a southern group (southern Zvolen dialects, Tekov, Hont, Novohrad, Ipeľ, and Gemer dialects, including dialectal areas of central and eastern Gemer, further the area of Gemer Horehronie and dialects in the upper reaches of the Rimavica river). The region of Central Slovak dialects is mainly characterized by the following old Slovak linguistic features, which distinguish words beginning with ra-, la-, for example, razeň (skewer), lakeť (elbow), rakyta (willow), rázvora (crossbeam), raľa [standard Slovak: roľa] (field), rázporok (slit), lani (doe), further words such as daska [standard Slovak: doska] (board), dážď (rain), raž (rye), chrbát (back), as well as words like mäso (meat), päť (five), holúbä (squab), deväť (nine), piatok (Friday), pamiatka (memory), robia (they do). Instead of the nasal sound ▫ [ę], the variants ä or ia occur. Central Slovak dialects also consistently observe rhythmic shortening. Frequent diphthongs include ia, ie, uo, for example, sedia (they sit), smietka (speck), vuol [standard Slovak: vôl] (ox). Soft consonants ď, ť, ň, ľ are commonly found, even in foreign but naturalized words, for example, saňitka [standard Slovak: sanitka] (ambulance), vaňilka [standard Slovak: vanilka] (vanilla), paňika [standard Slovak: panika] (panic), ďiktát [standard Slovak: diktát] (dictation), pľin [standard Slovak: plyn] (gas). Instead of the consonant l, in the basic form of the past tense, the bilabial ▫ is pronounced, for example, robi▫ [standard Slovak: robil] (he did), písa▫ [standard Slovak: písal] (he wrote), bo▫ [standard Slovak: bol] (he was), ma▫ [standard Slovak: mal] (he had), pado▫ [standard Slovak: padol] (he fell), kce▫ [standard Slovak chcel] (he wanted), etc. In some dialectal areas of central Slovak, the consonant clusters -dl- and -tl- have been simplified to -l-, for example, milo [standard Slovak: mydlo] (soap), šilo [standard Slovak: šidlo] (awl), omelo [standard Slovak:

ometlo] (broom), pala [standard Slovak: padla] (she fell). In the nominative case of adjectives, the suffix -uo appears, for example, mladuo [standard Slovak: mladé] (young), peknou [standard Slovak: pekné] (beautiful), dobruo [standard Slovak: dobré] (good). The third-person plural form of the verb byť (to be) is sa, for example, oňi sa [standard Slovak: oni sú] (they are). Central Slovak is also characterized by words such as hábi [standard Slovak: šaty] (clothes), the negative prefix and particle ňi, for example, ňi [standard Slovak: nie] (no), ňimam [standard Slovak: nemám] (I do not have), etc.

Western Slovak dialects

Western Slovak dialects played an important role in the development of the standard Slovak language. They are still spoken by the inhabitants of the historical Slovak counties in the western part of Slovakia, especially in the Trnava, Bratislava, and Trenčín counties, in part of the Nitra county, further in the basin of the middle and lower course of the Nitra river, in the lower part of the Žitava river basin, and by the inhabitants of Záhorie and Kysuce. As a whole, Western Slovak dialects are characterized by words beginning with ro-, lo-, for example, rožeň [standard Slovak: ražeň] (skewer), loket [standard Slovak: laket'] (elbow), rokita [standard Slovak: rakyta] (willow), rozvora [standard Slovak: rázvora] (crossbar), rosporek [standard Slovak: rázporok] (slit), loňi [standard Slovak: lani] (last year), although especially in the eastern part of the Western Slovak dialect area, there are overlaps from the Central Slovak area, for example, rásporek, rakita, laket, etc. In words like deska [standard Slovak: doska] (board), švager [standard Slovak: švagor] (brother-in-law), ven [standard Slovak: von] (out), oves [standard Slovak: ovos] (oats), mech [standard Slovak: mach] (moss), kotel [standard Slovak: kotol] (boiler), the sound e regularly appears in place of the Proto-Slavic jer sounds [ь] and [ъ]. In the genitive plural, Western Slovak dialects typically use é, for example, ihél [standard Slovak: ihiel] (needles), jedél [standard Slovak: jediel] (trees), ťehél [standard Slovak: tehál] (bricks), etc. Instead of the Proto-Slavic nasal sound ǫ [ę], a or á is used, for example, maso [standard Slovak: mäso] (meat), pata [standard Slovak: päta] (heel), makki [standard Slovak: mäkký] (soft), pátek [standard Slovak: piatok] (Friday), hráďel [standard Slovak: hriadeľ] (shaft), svátek [standard Slovak: sviatok] (holiday). In the Záhorie dialects, however, instead of ǫ [ę], -ja- or -je- appears, for example, mjaki [standard Slovak: mäkký] (soft), hovjazí [standard Slovak: hovädzí] (beef). In the northern part of the Western Slovak dialects, the change of the consonant ď to dz and the consonant ť to c occurred, for example, cicho [standard Slovak: ticho] (quiet), dzeci [standard Slovak: deti] (children), dzedzina [standard Slovak: dedina] (village). In the Kysuce area, instead of the consonants dz and dž, z and ž are pronounced, for example, házat [standard Slovak: hádzať] (to throw), házeme [standard Slovak: hádžeme] (we throw). Double consonant clusters also emerged, for example, precca [standard Slovak: predsa] (after all), vaččí [standard Slovak: väčší] (bigger), mlaččí [standard Slovak: mladší] (younger), srcco [standard Slovak: srdce] (heart), and the double consonant -ll- in place of the Proto-Slavic consonant clusters -dl- and -dn-, for example, palla [standard Slovak: padla] (fell), sallo [standard Slovak: sadlo] (lard), ceďilo [standard Slovak: cedidlo] (strainer), jenna [standard Slovak: jedna] (one), stuňňa [standard Slovak: studňa] (well), etc. In some Western Slovak dialects, especially in Záhorie, the syllabic consonant l changed to the sound u after all consonants (with exceptions), for example, duhí [standard Slovak: dlhý] (long), tustí [standard Slovak: tlstý] (fat), kupko [standard Slovak: kĺbko] (ball), sunko [standard Slovak: slnko] (sun), jabuko [standard Slovak: jabko] (apple), suza [standard Slovak: slza] (tear), žuti [standard Slovak: žltý] (yellow), but also huava [standard Slovak: hlava] (head), vidzeua [standard Slovak:

videla] (saw), etc. Almost throughout the entire Western Slovak dialect area, the old consonant cluster -šč- has been preserved in places where the standard Slovak has the consonant cluster -šť-, -sk-, for example, húščava [standard Slovak: húšťava] (thicket), púščat [standard Slovak: púšťať] (to let go), ohňiščo [standard Slovak: ohnisko] (fireplace), ščedro [standard Slovak: štedro] (generously), ešče [standard Slovak: ešte] (still), Píščany [standard Slovak: Piešťany]. The law of rhythmic shortening does not apply to the Western Slovak dialect area, therefore, for example, dávám [standard Slovak: dávam] (I give), plúcá [standard Slovak: pľúca] (lungs), hlúpí [standard Slovak: hlúpy] (stupid), etc. For the Western Slovak dialect context, names, for example, kamna [standard Slovak: kachľová pec] (tiled stove), zelé [standard Slovak: kapusta] (cabbage), turecké žito [standard Slovak: kukurica] (corn), trúlek [standard Slovak: netopier] (bat), síň [standard Slovak: pivnica] (cellar), viprávjat [standard Slovak: hovoriť] (speak), etc. are characteristic of the Western Slovak dialect context.

Eastern Slovak dialects

The Eastern Slovak dialects form a compact area that extends across the vast region of eastern Slovakia. Geographically, this dialectal area stretches from the High Tatras and the source of the Poprad River to the watershed of the Váh and Hornád Rivers, continuing along the watershed of the Hnilec and Hron Rivers, where the historical border between the Spiš and Abov counties once lay. The names of the individual Eastern Slovak dialects are derived from the historical counties: Spiš, Abov, Šariš, Zemplín, and Už dialects, which, together with the Sotácke dialects (Sotáci – an ethnographic group), create an image of the geographical division of the Eastern Slovak dialectal area. The Eastern Slovak dialects have specific linguistic features, including the absence of long vowels. For example, volam [standard Slovak: volám] (I call), pišem [standard Slovak: píšem] (I write), špivac [standard Slovak: spievať] (to sing), krasni [standard Slovak: krásny] (beautiful), trava [standard Slovak: tráva] (grass), etc. A distinctive feature of this dialectal area is the accent, which is fixed on the penultimate syllable of the word. The Eastern Slovak dialects include words that begin similarly to those in the Western Slovak linguistic area with ro- and lo-for example, rožeň [standard Slovak: ražeň] (skewer), lokec [standard Slovak: lakeť] (elbow), rokita [standard Slovak: rakyta] (willow), rozvora [standard Slovak: rázvora] (crossbeam), rosporok [standard Slovak: rázporok] (slit), loňi [standard Slovak: lani] (last year), etc. The Old Slavic nasal ǫ (ę) is replaced by the letter e, for example, meso [standard Slovak: mäso] (meat), pametac [standard Slovak: pamätať] (to remember), šednuc [standard Slovak: sadnúť] (to sit down), peta [standard Slovak: päta] (heel), dzevec [standard Slovak: deväť] (nine), hreda [standard Slovak: hrada] (beam), šveto [standard Slovak: lani] (last year). In some cases, it is also replaced by a or ia, for example, svati [standard Slovak: svätý] (holy), viazac [standard Slovak: viazať] (to tie), častka [standard Slovak: čiastka] (portion), zajac [standard Slovak: zajac] (hare), šaha [standard Slovak: siaha] (fathom), etc. The Old Slavic jer vowels are usually replaced by e, for example, blazen [standard Slovak: blázon] (fool), deska [standard Slovak: doska] (board), viter [standard Slovak: vietor] (wind), chribet or cherbet [standard Slovak: chrbát] (back), ocec [standard Slovak: otec] (father). The Old Slavic vowel ѣ and the Old Slavic long é are typically replaced by e, for example, chľeb [standard Slovak: chlieb] (bread), mľeko [standard Slovak: mlieko] (milk), špevac [standard Slovak: spievať] (to sing), pesek [standard Slovak: piesok] (sand), beli [standard Slovak: biely] (white). In the eastern part of the Eastern Slovak dialectal area, ѣ is sometimes replaced by i, for example, chľib [standard Slovak: chlieb] (bread), viter/vitor [standard Slovak: vietor] (wind), hňizdo [standard Slovak: hniezdo]

(nest), mľiko [standard Slovak: mlieko] (milk), drimac [standard Slovak: driemať] (to doze), švička [standard Slovak: sviečka] (candle), pisok [standard Slovak: piesok] (sand), bili [standard Slovak: biely] (white), mišac [standard Slovak: miešať] (to mix). The consonants ď and ť change, similarly to some Western Slovak dialects, into dz and c, for example, dzeci [standard Slovak: deti] (children), dzešec [standard Slovak: desať] (ten), šedzec [standard Slovak: sedieť] (to sit), dzedzina [standard Slovak: dedina] (village), sudzic [standard Slovak: súdiť] (to judge), cicho [standard Slovak: ticho] (quiet), po vodze chodzic [standard Slovak: po vode chodiť] (to walk on water), etc. Forms of the auxiliary verb byť are often replaced by personal pronouns, for example, ja lačni [standard Slovak: ja som hladný] (I am hungry), vona hola [standard Slovak: ona je nahá] (she is naked), ti ešči neznal [standard Slovak: ty si ešte nevedel] (you did not yet know). The vocabulary includes words such as: hače [standard Slovak: žriebä] (foal), chustka [standard Slovak: šatka] (scarf), jarec [standard Slovak: jačmeň] (barley), kuropka [standard Slovak: jarabica] (partridge), ľenča [standard Slovak: šošovica] (lentil), rucic [standard Slovak: hodiť] (to throw), studzeňina [standard Slovak: huspenina] (aspic), etc.

Slovak dialects were and still are a means of everyday family and social, but especially private and unofficial communication. The users of Slovak dialects still show their living relationship to the common national and linguistic consciousness by knowing and using their dialects. All three components of the national language (phonetical, grammatical, and verbal) are common to dialects and the written language. The Slovak population and its dialects form one compact and at the same time territorially differentiated space.

Slovak language in the compatriot environment

Slovaks, of course, do not live only in the territory of Slovakia. (Likewise, not only Slovaks live in the territory of Slovakia.) As individuals, but also as members of ethnic enclaves, Slovaks live in other areas of the world. In many cases, these are relatively closed linguistic islands, for example:

- in south-eastern Hungary, especially in Békéscsaba, in towns such as Čaba (Békéscsaba), Slovenský Komlóš (Tótkomlós), or Sarvaš (Szarvas), in some villages of Čanád county, and all northern regions of Hungary in many villages throughout the Slovak-Hungarian border area.
- in northern Serbia in the autonomous region of Vojvodina, where there are 34 villages with Slovak settlements in the three historical (now cross-border) regions of Báčka, Banat, and Sriem,
- in western Romania - in the southern part of the former Banat County and the northern part of Bihor County,
- in the Croatian part of Slavonia.

In addition, many Slovaks left for Western Europe and overseas (especially the United States, Canada, Argentina and Australia). Slovaks moved from their native territory for many reasons, be they economic, religious, political or national-emancipation reasons. They sought opportunities for their prosperity there. They left their homeland mainly under the pressure of recatholization, Hungarianization, and Czechoslovakization and also in the period of political oppression and unfreedom after the events of 1948 and 1968. The current Slovak emigration is mainly to Western Europe and North America and is related to the socio-political and economic changes in Slovakia after 1989 (‚from totalitarianism to democracy'/from socialism to capitalism).

From this developmental point of view, Slovak dialects form a continuous environment only in the historical Slovak territory. The dialects in the diasporas and enclaves have remained at their developmental stage. Compared to the dialects in the historical environment, they received different stimuli for their development. The emigrant communities from Slovakia initially used and passed on their mother tongue, for example, the dialect they had brought from their homeland, from generation to generation in family and social settings. The family, church, and association environment represented a cultural sub-field for the preservation of Slovak cultural identity. Across the Atlantic, this Slovak population adapted easily and purposefully to the linguistic environment of their new homeland. This linguistic adaptation is related to the work and school environment into which these Slovaks entered after their resettlement. Gradually, especially intergenerationally, they have mostly lost many links with their native territory and language. Today, their Slovak awareness is not primarily linguistic, but rather cultural, and is mainly linked to non-linguistic elements of folk culture, traditional Slovak food, costume, etc. In the Lower Land, Slovaks, unlike the emigrants across the Atlantic, formed economically and culturally stronger and more settled agrarian communities, which gave them a greater and more immediate opportunity of contact with each other and with the Slovak homeland, which also enabled them to maintain their linguistic-ethnic identity.

3.7 Cultural variants of the Slovak language in the pre-literary period

The development of pre-literary cultural Slovak is linked to the needs of Slovak users who belonged to the middle and lower strata of the then Slovak educated society. These included priests, notaries, teachers, scribes at noble courts, and various authors of translations and interpretations of biblical excerpts from the Gospels.

Occurrence of Slovak in medieval Latin texts

Slovak's pre-literary period coincides with the language's development from the 11th century, when conditions were formed for the emergence of cultivated oral and written expressions. Although written communication in the 12th–15th centuries was dominated by Latin texts, these also contain references to the prohibition of religious songs in the vernacular language in churches. This testifies to efforts to use and develop vernacular Slovak within official church settings. Many Slovak local and geographical names, personal names, and various words referring to the historical and cultural realities of Slovak life appear in official Latin texts. It is also well documented that Slovak formulas were used in baptismal, matrimonial, and funeral rites. Records of confessions of faith and basic Catholic prayers in Slovak indicate that the language was cultivated in pastoral practice.

Use of Slovak from the 15th century

From the 15th century onwards, cultural Slovak was used as an administrative language in Slovak county, municipal, and rural offices. It was also used by a significant group of the Slovak educated class, including authors of various didactic and educational works, recorders and collectors of folklore, and creators of artistic literary genres. Written cultural Slovak appeared not only in texts of a documentary and administrative-legal nature, in correspondence, court protocols, registers, and urbarium records, but also in the intellectual and urban environment. Among the lower Hungarian nobility, Slovak was an essential part of everyday cultural communication. In schools, it was a fundamental means of education for the general population.

Cultural Slovak reflects extensive contacts with Latin, Czech, Church Slavonic, German, and Hungarian. These interactions extended into literary activities, as they were connected to the cultural life of the Slovak community. Efforts to standardize the pre-literary Slovak language were also related to the confessional development of Slovak culture within the Catholic and Evangelical churches, as well as the linguistic and national awareness of Slovak Calvinists and believers of the Byzantine-Slavic rite in the Eastern Slovak linguistic context.

The influence of Czech and German in Slovakia is perceived as the result of cultural, commercial, and religious interactions (through the Evangelical Church's liturgical language). Similarly, long-term contacts between Slovaks and Hungarian-speaking inhabitants within the common Hungarian state entity are evident. Foreign linguistic and cultural influences that entered Slovak underwent linguistic adaptation within the various dialectally differentiated environments.

Supra-dialectal variants of Slovak

In the Slovak linguistic-historical context, cultivated forms of the pre-literary language developed as supra-dialectal variants of Slovak. These were particularly used in academic, administrative, and religious centers. The dialectally differentiated old Slovak served as an integrative factor of Slovak ethnicity, as it was cultivated in supra-dialectal literary forms in Western Slovak, Central Slovak, and Eastern Slovak variants.

The national Slovak language developed even before its codification in line with its dialectal evolution. Cultivated supra-dialectal forms of literary Slovak were vital and naturally incorporated new words into their lexical system. Changes affected not only vocabulary but also grammar. The continuity of interlinguistic and intercultural contacts in dialectally stratified Slovak is undeniable.

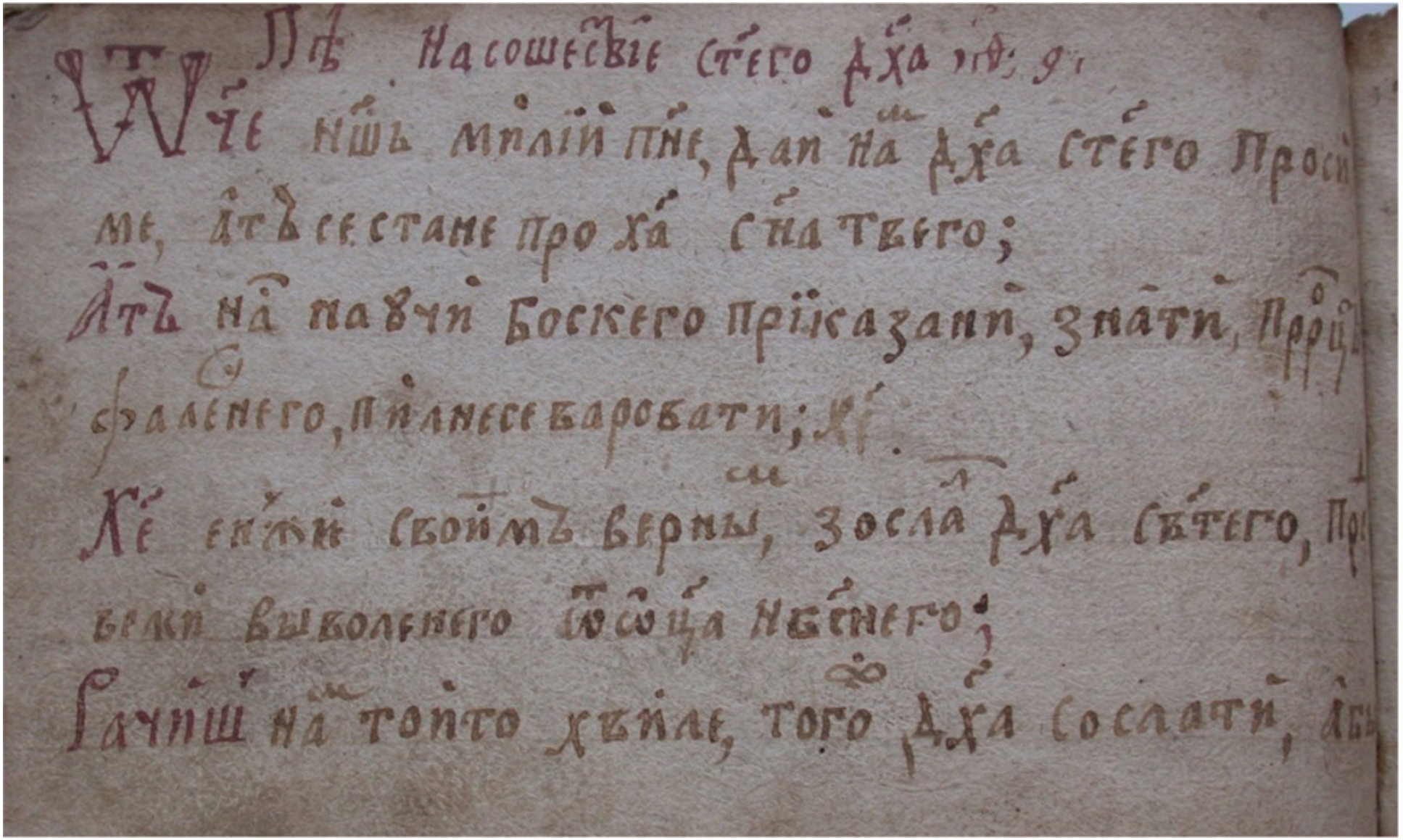
The cultivation of pre-literary Slovak was based on Slovak dialects, leading to the emergence of Western Slovak, Central Slovak, and Eastern Slovak cultural variants of literary Slovak. These cultural variants had a relatively stable form. Individual supra-dialectal cultivated variants of pre-literary Slovak were used in court protocols, various oath charters, guild articles, correspondence, and literary works related to the spiritual life of Slovaks, such as sermons, catechisms, exegetical (interpretative) texts for the common people, and religious hymns. However, the form of Slovak pre-literary literary language largely depended on the education level of its users and contemporary scribal practices.

Cultural language

A cultural language is a supra-dialectal, socially non-binding form of Slovak, which, while orthographically inconsistent, was stylistically and functionally structured. It developed within various dialectal areas in oral tradition and gradually in written literary form. Some forms of cultural Slovak were particularly used in confessional contexts, as well as in the urban and intellectual environment, allowing Slovaks to participate in Slovak cultural development.

These layers of Slovak linguistic and literary development influenced the language of contemporary Slovak culture. The primary sources for understanding this development are written records in the old pre-literary form of Slovak, cultivated in refined dialectal variants. It is also essential to consider the domestic form of Church Slavonic, used in the Byzantine-Slavic rite in Slovakia, as well as Czech, which was the language of written and liturgical tradition for Slovak Protestants. Slovak coexisted closely with Latin and Church Slavonic (especially in Eastern Slovak dialects), as well as with German, Hungarian, Czech, and Polish. Therefore, the development of Slovak cannot be considered an isolated process.

For centuries, from the fall of Great Moravia (in 907) until the codification of Slovak by Anton Bernolák (in 1787) and Ľudovít Štúr (in 1844), the Slovak ethnic group developed as a distinct linguistic community within its dialectal evolution.



Šariš hymnal from the beginning of the 18th century, cyrillic record of the hymn for the feast of the Sending of the Holy Spirit, in the West Slovak variant of the cultural Slovak language.
Source: archive of P. Žeňuch.

3.8 Slovak language in a confessional environment

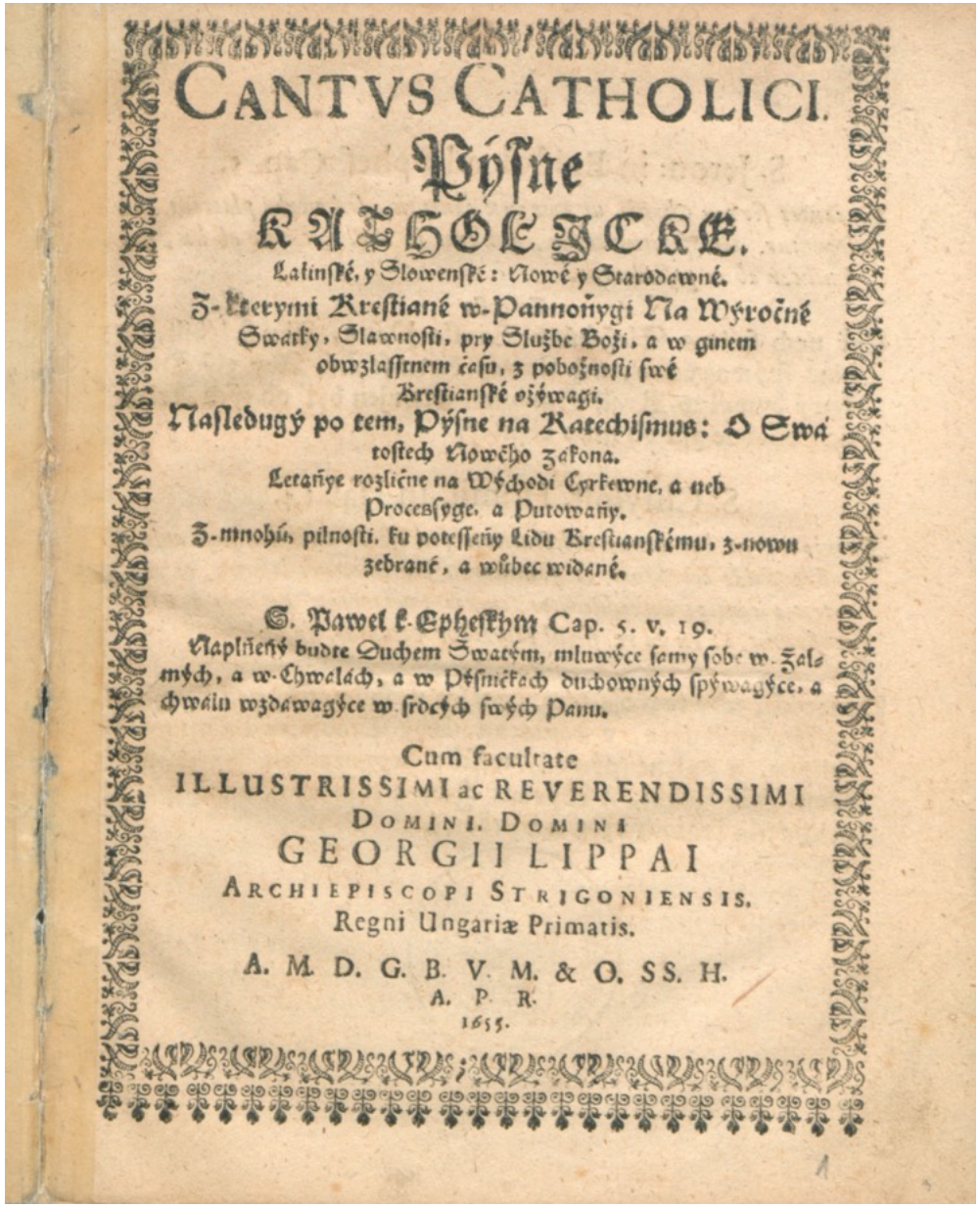
Some forms of cultural Slovak were also used in the confessional environment. Through various spiritual texts and folk piety, Slovaks developed their respective church traditions. This linguistic context is documented by translations of excerpts and entire biblical texts into a language understandable to the people, which can also be found in sermon and interpretative texts, as well as in other genres of artistic literature in Slovak. The cultural variants of pre-literary Slovak reflect not only the Slovak linguistic foundation but also various interactions with confessionally determined environments, which influenced the graphic representation of the cultural language.

Roman Catholic environment

For the pre-literary development of Slovak, it is essential to understand the linguistic efforts of Roman Catholic Slovaks. A significant milestone from the mid-18th century is the Slovak Catholic translation of the entire Holy Scripture, known as the Camaldolese Bible. The Camaldolese monks avoided literal translations of typical Latin forms and constructions, instead replacing them with Slovak forms and syntactic structures commonly used in contemporary Slovak. The cultural Western Slovak dialect manifests in this first Slovak Bible translation in phonology, grammar, and vocabulary. The cultural Western Slovak variant, as seen in the Camaldolese Bible and other printed texts, tended to become the spoken cultural language of Slovaks. Although this Bible translation remained in manuscript form, along with the Camaldolese Dictionary, it provides insight into the application and development of the Slovak literary language within the Catholic Church. This included not only translations of gospel texts but also their interpretations and the entire body of religious and sermon literature for Slovak Catholics. The Catholic translation of the entire Bible is evidence of efforts to cultivate a national language for Slovaks precisely through biblical translation. The language of the Camaldolese Bible further demonstrates the strengthening importance of the Western Slovak cultural variant within the Slovak Catholic Church. Camaldolese Slovak represents a highly cultivated supra-dialectal form of Slovak that was linguistically closest to the first codified national form of Slovak - Bernolák's Slovak (bernolákovčina).

Universitas Tyrnaviensis (1635 - 1777)

The Western Slovak cultural variant, like other cultivated supra-dialectal forms of Slovak, developed from scribal and literary usage. The scholarly university center in Trnava played a crucial role in its cultivation and dissemination. Trnava University was attended not only by representatives of the Roman Catholic confessional tradition in Slovakia but also by members of the Greek Catholic Church, whose core community was in eastern Slovakia and the Carpathian region. Many intellectuals of the time were thus familiar with both Latin and the cultural Western Slovak variant. However, the linguistic-literary development in Western Slovak did not significantly influence Greek Catholic literary production. Nevertheless, many ordinary Slovak Greek Catholic believers sang spiritual hymns in the Western Slovak cultural variant during their church services, adopting them from the Catholic hymnal Cantus Catholici (published in 1655 in Levoča and in 1700 in Trnava). These hymns were transcribed into their Greek Catholic handwritten hymnals using Cyrillic script.



CANTVS CATHOLICI.

Pýsne
KATHOLICKE.

Latinské, y Slowenské: Nowé y Starodawné.

S-kterymi Kreſtiané w-Pannoňygi Na Wýročné Swátky, Slawnoſti, prý Služby Boži, a w ginem obwzlaſſtnem čaſu, z pobožnoſti ſwé Kreſtianſké ožźwagi.

Naſledugý po tem, Pýsne na Katechiſmus: O Swá toſtech Nowého Zakona.

Letaňye rozlične na Wſchodi Cyrkewne, a neb Proceſsyge, a Putowaňy.

S-mnohú, pilnoſti, ku poteſſeňy Lidu Kreſtianſkému, z-nowu zebrané, a wſſdec widané.

S. Pawel k-Epheſkym Cap. 5. v. 19.

Naplňeňý budte Duchem Swatým, mluwŕce ſamy ſobe w-Žalmých, a w-Chwelách, a w Pýſnickach duchowných ſpźwagŕce, a chwalu wzdawagŕce w-ſrdcých ſwých Panu.

Cum facultate
ILLUSTRISSIMI ac REVERENDISSIMI
DOMINI. DOMINI
GEORGII LIPPAI
ARCHIEPISCOPI STRIGONIENSIS.
Regni Ungariæ Primatis.

A. M. D. G. B. V. M. & O. SS. H.
A. P. R.
1655.

SVETOHO
DÁVIDA
KRÁLYA
A
PROROKA
SZTO I PEDZESÁTZ
'SOLTÁRI.

Chtoré:
Vedlya Nót Frantzúzkich
z Uharſzkoho na SZLOVENSZKI jazik
ſzú prelosené, a vernim Bosim ſzlu-
sebnýkom k duchovnomu úsit-
ku zhotovené.

A teraz;
Pervi ráz vidané.

V DEBRETZINYE,
Vitlatsil MARGITAI JÁNOS.
V Roku 1752.

Cantus Catholici, Levoča 1655 and the Calvinist Psalter in the East Slovak variant of the cultural Slovak language from 1752.
Source: archive of P. Žeňuch.

The Trnava university environment and the spiritual works of Catholic scholars provided opportunities for the spread of the Western Slovak cultural variant into various aspects of social life in Slovakia. Its influence extended beyond the confessional environment, appearing in documents related to Maria Theresa's urbarial reform, educational reforms, and administrative-legal documents, where the impact of the Western Slovak variant was predominant. In any case, the cultural Western Slovak variant, as seen in the Camaldolese Bible and other printed texts, tended to become the spoken cultural language of Slovaks.

Catholic priest Anton Bernolák (1762 – 1813) chose the Western Slovak form as the basis for the first codified national version of Slovak. This was due to its widespread use in literary and scholarly contexts, administrative practice, and the academic environment of Trnava University and the Bratislava Lyceum, where Slovak Catholic scholars were active. The first codified Slovak language was used in literary works by authors such as Ján Hollý and Juraj Fándly. In Bernolák's Slovak, the first printed Slovak translation of the Bible was also published by Juraj Palkovič. Juraj Palkovič (1769 – 1850), an Esztergom canonical, prepared and published his translation of the Holy Scripture in Bernolák's Slovak based on the Vulgate. The same Latin source had been used earlier by the Camaldolese monks, reinforcing the importance of Slovak linguistic and cultural traditions. Palkovič's Bible translation was published in two volumes in 1829 and 1832, marking the first printed Catholic edition of the entire Bible in Slovak. At that time, Juraj Palkovič was unaware of the Camaldolese Bible translation, which was only discovered in 1946 in the parish house of the village of Cífer.

Evangelical (Lutheran) environment

In the Evangelical environment in Slovakia, with the arrival of the Reformation in the 16th century, Biblical Czech (the language of the Czech Kralice Bible) was widely used alongside German. Slovak Evangelical patriots chose it as the foundation of their literary communication. During the pre-literary period, it was considered not only the language of liturgical and confessional identity but also a tool for the deliberate linguistic cultivation of Slovaks.

Evangelical priest and Slovak scholar Daniel Krman (1663 – 1740) attempted to cultivate Slovak through the Czech language. He was influenced by the traditional belief among Slovak scholars that the ancient language of the Slovaks - believed to be the original language of all Slavic peoples - had stagnated in its literary development due to negligence and lack of care. Therefore, Krman sought to revive Slovak through Czech, which he viewed as a ‚daughter language'. Biblical Czech was also used in the Evangelical hymnal Cithara Sanctorum (1636) by Juraj Tranovský, which played a significant role in fostering the spiritual culture and piety of Slovak Evangelicals. Among Slovak Evangelicals, Biblical Czech served as a sacred language and became a symbol of faith in the Slovak Evangelical tradition. Slovak linguist and Evangelical priest Ľudovít Štúr compared the role of Biblical Czech in the Slovak Evangelical Church to that of Church Slavonic in the Byzantine-Slavic tradition.

Calvinist environment

Regarding the translation of biblical texts into Slovak, it is worth noting that in the mid-18th century, a Calvinist translation of the Psalter (Book of Psalms) was created for the Eastern Slovak Calvinist Church as a liturgical text. This translation of David's psalms was based on the Eastern Slovak cultural linguistic form. Besides the Psalter, other Slovak Calvinist church books were produced.

The Calvinist Psalter in Eastern Slovak was intended for religious and liturgical needs, rather than as a universally applicable biblical translation like the Camaldolese Bible or Palkovič's translation in Bernolák's Slovak. The main reason for creating the Psalter translation was the worship needs of the Reformed Church, which typically held services in the mother tongue. Slovak Calvinists sought a religious text that aligned with their religious practices and poetically expressed their spiritual thinking in Eastern Slovak. Unlike Slovak Evangelicals, who adopted Biblical Czech as their liturgical and literary language, Eastern Slovak Calvinists did not accept the Western Slovak cultural variant as their liturgical language. Instead, they adhered to the general Reformed principle of using a cultivated form of Eastern Slovak.

Greek Catholic environment

Greek Catholics, in addition to using Church Slavonic in their liturgy, consider Cyrillic script a symbol of their church tradition. Church Slavonic and Cyrillic serve as outward markers distinguishing them from Roman Catholic Slovaks. However, Slovak Greek Catholics also see Church Slavonic as a link to other Greek Catholics in the Carpathian region, including Rusyns, Ukrainians, Romanians, and Hungarians. The Eastern Slovak cultural variant functioned as a literary language only among Slovak Greek Catholics. However, since it was also used in written administrative communication, particularly with county officials, it served as an integrative linguistic factor for all Eastern Slovaks, regardless of their confessional affiliation.

Written texts were also produced in the Central Slovak variant, as evidenced by the Esztergom Ritual from the early 17th century, containing prayers and liturgical formulas for baptisms and weddings in Central Slovak. The Central Slovak cultural variant was also used in documentary genres, such as court records, financial accounts, and inventory protocols.



14 Rituale Strigonienſe,

ciantur & patrocinijs protegantur.

Hic tegitur expediti, Infantem ſuper brachium dextrum illius, qui eum defert, poſito, Parochus ad Baptiſmum procedat, in hunc, qui ſequitur, modum interrogando.

ORDO BAPTISMI PARVULORUM

QUis vocaris?	*Kinevezed?*	Wie heiſtu?	*Jakoty meno?*
Reſp: Patrin: Ioannes, vel Catharina, &c.	*Iánoſnak, vagy Katalin, &c.*	Johañes, oder Katarina, &c.	*Ján, lebo Katharina, &c.*
Sacerdos pergit interrogã: N. Abrenuntias Satanæ?	*N. Ellene mondaſz-e az ördögnek?*	N. Widerſageſt du dem Teuffel?	*N. Odrickaſſiſa ſe Satanaſiowi?*
Reſp. Patrin: Abrenuntio.	*Ellene mondok.*	Ich Widerſag	*Odriekam.*
Sacerd. Et omnibus operibus ejus?	*Es minden eſelekedetinek?*	Vnd allen ſeinen Werckẽ?	*Y wſſetkym skutkom geho?*
Patrin. Abrenuntio	*Ellene mondok.*	Ich Widerſag	*Odriekam*
Sac. Et omnibus pompis ejus?	*Es minden pompáinak?*	Vnd aller ſeiner Hoffart?	*Y wſſeckeiſpýchu geho?*
Patrin. Abrenuntio.	*Ellene mondok.*	Ich Widerſag	*Odriekam.*

Sac.

De Sacramento Baptiſmi. 15

Sac. N. Credis in DEUM Patrẽ omnipotentem, creatorem cæli & terræ?	*N. Hiſz-e a mindenhato Atyáſtenben, menynek és földnek teremtőjében?*	N. Glaubſtu in Gott Vatter Allmechtigen, Schöpffer Himmels vnd der Erdẽ?	*N. Weryſſ w Boha Otce wſſemohuczieho, Stworzitele nebe y Zeme.*
Patri. Credo.	*Hiſzek.*	Ich glaub.	*Werym.*
Sac. N. Credis in IESUM Chriſtum, filium ejus unicũ, Dominũ noſtrũ, natum, & paſſum?	*N. Hiſz-e IEsus Kriſtusbã, ẽgy fiában, mi Urunkbã, kit született, és kínt halált ſzenvedett?*	N. Glaubſtu in Ieſum Chriſtum, ſeinen einigen Sohn vnſern Herrn, der gebornn iſt vñ gelitn hat?	*N. Weryſſ w Gezu Kriſta, Syna geho gedinecho, Pana naſſeho, narozeneho y umuczeneho?*
Patr. Credo.	*Hiſzek.*	Ich glaub.	*Werym.*
Sac. N. Credis in Spiritũſanctum, Sanctã Eccleſiã Catholicã, Sanctorum communionem, remiſſionem peccatorum, carnis reſurrectionem, vitam æternã?	*N. Hiſz-e Szentlélekben, közönségesKeresztyén Anyaſzentegyházat, ſzentekneck egyeſéget, bűnöknek bocsánattyát, teſtnek fel-támadáſát, örök életet?*	N. Glaubſtu in den Heiligen Geiſt, die allgemeine Chriſtliche Kirchen, Gemeinſchafft der Heiligen, Vergebung der Sünden, Auferſtehung des Fleiſches, ein ewigs Leben?	*N. Weryſſ y w Ducha Swatebo, Swatu Cyrkew wſſeobecnu, Swatych obcowanij, odpuſſtenij hrziechow, wzkrzeſſenij tela ſkrzeſſenij, y zywot wecznij?*
Patr. Credo.	*Hiſzek.*	Ich glaubs.	*Werym.*

Deinde

The Ostrihom Ritual of 1625 by Petr Pázmaň with tests in the Central Slovak variant of cultural Slovak.
Source: archive of P. Žeňuch.

The cultural variants of Slovak also developed in various texts related to the everyday life of Slovaks. These include not only diverse hymnals of spiritual songs but also a wide range of other continuous texts, such as medical handbooks, various guides on managing households, different explanations, and narrative texts. Along with historical songs, they represent an important part of Slovak written culture and serve as evidence of the development and refinement of Central Slovak in the pre-literary period of the Slovak language.

It was not until Ľudovít Štúr (1815–1856) and his idea of codifying literary Slovak as a secular means of communication that a pivotal point in the linguistic and non-religiously motivated emancipation of all Slovaks was reached. Štúr did not intervene in the language of traditional liturgical celebrations among Slovak Evangelicals, Catholics, or even Eastern believers. Using the example of the Cyril-Methodian Old Church Slavonic, he pointed out the natural evolution of Slavic languages, including Slovak.

By emphasizing that all Slavic languages develop their literature in a standardized rather than a liturgical language, Štúr's codified form of literary Slovak enabled the unification of Slovak confessional streams—Catholic and Evangelical. It brought together both perspectives on the literary language of Slovaks, which is why Štúr's literary Slovak is seen as a synthesis of previous efforts to establish a standardized language for Slovaks, laying the foundation for the development of modern literary Slovak.

3.9 Codification of the Slovak language

Codification represents a set of rules and norms that are binding for users of the standard language. It applies to the standard language and aims to influence its correctness, consistency, and general applicability as the fundamental communication tool of a community in both written and spoken (oral) forms. Codification thus constitutes an essential component and instrument for maintaining and developing linguistic culture. Codification is connected to the development and evolution of the language. It reflects the needs of its users. It does not hinder the evolution of linguistic norms, as these norms are historically changeable and develop naturally, but codification establishes the rules for language use.

Codification provides a description of linguistic tools and rules in the standard language, which are publicly and widely available in valid codification manuals:

The short dictionary of the Slovak language contains codified word forms and presents the basic grammatical properties of individual words along with their stylistic and functional classification. The dictionary differentiates between standard and non-standard words.

The rules of Slovak orthography are the fundamental codification manual, published in an updated form since 1931. They explain and describe linguistic means that reflect the spoken form of standard Slovak and help shape written expression. The Rules of Slovak Orthography are divided into a textual and a lexical section. The textual section includes an overview of graphic symbols used to record spoken Slovak, principles for capitalization in Slovak, guidelines for writing foreign names in Slovak, punctuation rules, an overview of Slovak declension and conjugation, principles of rhythmic shortening in Slovak, guidelines for forming female surnames, and a list of Slovak town names. The latest, fourth edition of the Rules of Slovak Orthography has been in effect since 2013.

The rules of Slovak pronunciation have been published since 1984 and serve as the primary guide for Slovak pronunciation. Its practical part consists of an orthoepic dictionary. The first handbook on correct Slovak pronunciation was published in 1944.

Morphology of the Slovak language is an academic and codification manual first published in 1966. It captures most of the morphological structures of standard Slovak and describes the structure of the Slovak morphological system. Through codification, linguistic norms become accessible to users of the standard language, primarily serving the needs of language education

Codification manuals do not, by their nature, reflect changes in vocabulary; however, the codification of the standard language respects the current system and linguistic principles of Slovak. It is based on the nationwide foundation of Slovak, providing insight into the continuous development of the nationally recognized language and emphasizing its prestige.

The codification of standard Slovak arose as a response to the needs of its users. The first period of codification includes the Bernolák and Štúr codifications, which described the system of the standard language and laid the foundations for its usage rules.

Bernolák's codification of Slovak

Bernolák's codification of Slovak was based on the western Slovak variant of cultural Slovak, which developed in the intellectual environment of Trnava University and was supplemented by some central Slovak linguistic features. The codification was introduced by the Catholic priest Anton Bernolák in 1787, when his codification work Dissertatio philologico-critica de literis Slavorum, including the appendix on correct writing Orthographia, was published.

The foundation of Bernolák's codification was the idea that the standard language should be based on the spoken language of the educated and that writing rules should follow phonetic and phonological principles, incorporating the diacritical spelling system. The codification also considered functional principles, significantly applying capitalization for common nouns.

Bernolák's codification was complemented by a six-volume multilingual dictionary (Slovak-Czech-Latin-German-Hungarian Dictionary), published between 1825 and 1827. Additionally, the Bible was published in Bernolák's Slovak in Esztergom between 1829 and 1832, edited by Juraj Palkovič. Notable figures in literature who wrote in Bernolák's Slovak include Ján Hollý (author of Cyrilometodiáda, Svätopluk, Selanky, Sláv, and translator of Latin works by Virgil, Homer, and Ovid) and Juraj Fándly (author of Dôverná zmluva medzi mníchom a diablom (A Confidential Agreement Between a Monk and the Devil), Zelinkár (Herbalist), Usilovný hospodár v domácnosti i na poli (The Diligent Farmer at Home and in the Field), Bylinkár (Botanist)).

Štúr's codification of Slovak

Štúr's codification of Slovak was the second codification of the language. It reflects the Central Slovak form of cultural Slovak, which developed not only in the economic and cultural centers of the northwestern part of central Slovakia but also formed an integral part of folk oral traditions and folklore. The repertoire of Slovak folk songs was collected and published by Pavol Jozef Šafárik (1795–1861) in 1823 and 1827, as well as by Ján Kollár (1793–1852) in 1834 and 1835. The choice of the Central Slovak variant as the basis for codification was intentional. It was linked to the main idea of the Štúrovci (followers of Štúr) to codify a language for Slovaks that would be distinct from other Slavic languages and, at the same time, not closely associated with either the Catholic (Western Slovak variant) or the Evangelical (Biblical Czech) confessional environments. This non-confessional character of the codification became the foundation for the modern emancipation of Slovaks, comparable to the struggles for independence among other European nations of the time.

The codification of Štúr's Slovak was officially adopted in 1844 at the founding session of the Tatrín association in Liptovský Mikuláš. Shortly after, Ľudovít Štúr described the codified form in the handbook Nárečja slovenskuo alebo potreba písaňja v tomto nárečí (The Study of the Slovak Language), which, unlike Bernolák's Latin codification work, was published in Slovak in 1846.

The reasoning for codifying the Central Slovak variant was further explained in Štúr's work Nárečja slovenskuo alebo potreba písaňja v tomto nárečí (Slovak dialect or the need to write in this dialect, 1846). In this work, Štúr highlights the geographical spread

and richness of folk folklore in cultural Central Slovak. The orthographic principle of Štúr's codification was based on phonetic-phonological and partially morphological principles.

Unlike Bernolák's system, Štúr abandoned the use of capital letters for common nouns, though he recommended using them as a sign of respect and dignity. Similarly to Bernolák's codification, Štúr's Slovak did not use the letter y (ypsilon), and the softness of consonants was expressed using diacritical marks. The spread of Štúr's codification was significantly supported by the publication of Slovenské národné noviny (Slovak National Newspapers) with its literary supplement Orol tatranský (Tatra Eagle), as well as the journal Slovenské pohľady (Slovak Views), which continues to be published today.

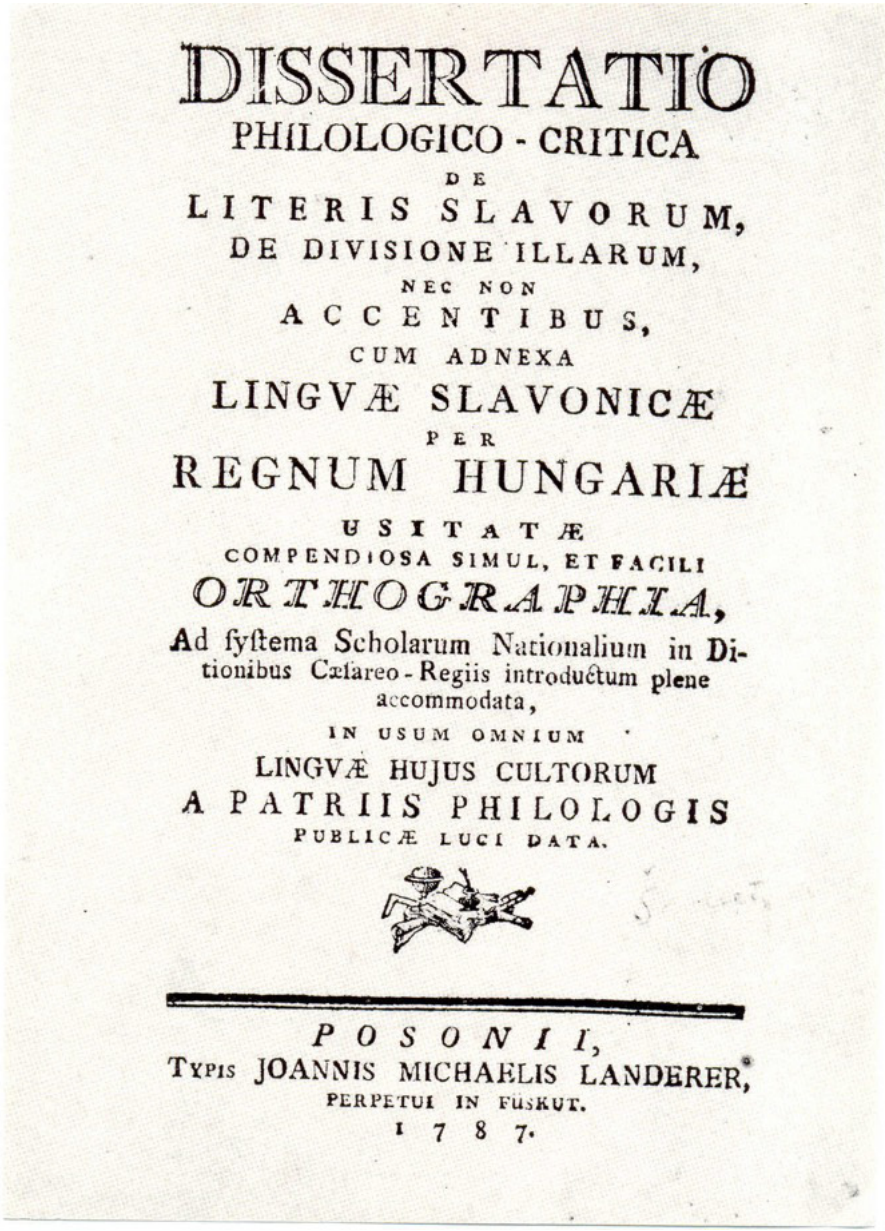
The first reform of Štúr's codified Slovak took place in 1851, when advocates of the historical (etymological) orthographic principle pushed for adjustments in Slovak spelling to align with other Slavic languages. This reform introduced several changes. For example, the reintroduction of the letter y (ypsilon), the inclusion of the vowel ä, the introduction of diphthongs ia, ie, iu, the use of ô instead of the diphthong uo, a rule stating that soft consonants ď, ť, ň, ľ before e and i as well as before diphthongs ia, ie, iu would not be marked with a caron (ˇ). In 1852, a reform handbook of the new orthography was published. It was created as a result of an agreement between the Štúrovci and supporters of the reformed orthography. The handbook, titled Krátka mluvnica slovenská (A Short Slovak Grammar), was compiled by Martin Hattala (1821–1903).

In the following period, the codified Slovak language developed in connection with existing and publicly active Slovak institutions, which, despite the pressures of Magyarization and the banning of the central Slovak national institution – Matica slovenská in 1875, continued to operate in three centers: Martin, Bratislava, and Pest.

During this complex and unfavorable period for Slovak cultural and linguistic development within the increasingly Magyarizing Hungary, another important reform of the codified Slovak language took place. This reform was carried out by Samuel Cambel (1853–1935).

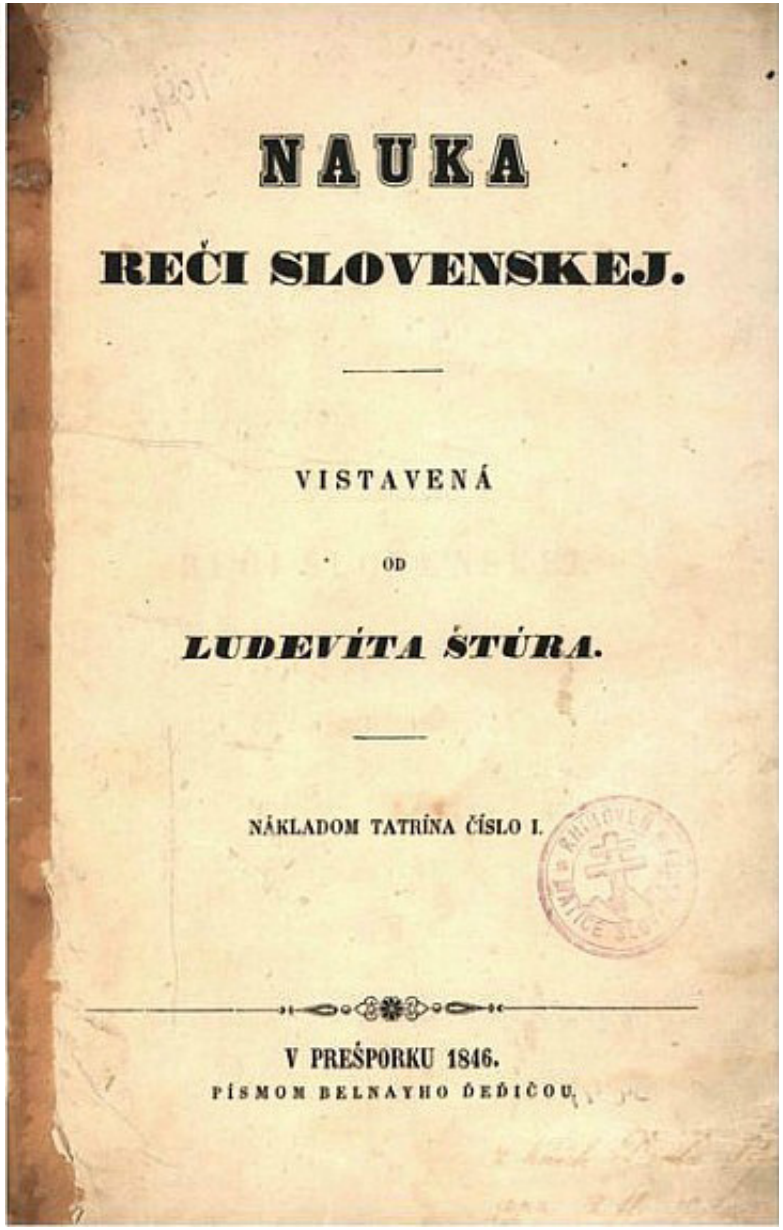
Cambel's reform of codified Slovak

Cambel focused on eliminating foreign linguistic elements that were not natural to Slovak, particularly Bohemisms (Czechisms) and Russisms, which had entered the codified language due to Hattala's archaizing reform. Cambel's Rukoväť spisovnej reči slovenskej (A Handbook of Standard Slovak), published in 1902, refined the rules of spelling, removed archaisms, and replaced them with living Slovak forms. From a lexical perspective, Cambel's reform further strengthened the use of native Slovak linguistic resources in standard Slovak vocabulary.



DISSERTATIO
PHILOLOGICO - CRITICA
DE
LITERIS SLAVORUM,
DE DIVISIONE ILLARUM,
NEC NON
ACCENTIBUS,
CUM ADNEXA
LINGVÆ SLAVONICÆ
PER
REGNUM HUNGARIÆ
USITATÆ
COMPENDIOSA SIMUL, ET FACILI
ORTHOGRAPHIA,
Ad syſtema Scholarum Nationalium in Ditionibus Cæſareo-Regiis introductum plene accommodata,
IN USUM OMNIUM
LINGVÆ HUJUS CULTORUM
A PATRIIS PHILOLOGIS
PUBLICÆ LUCI DATA.

POSONII,
Typis JOANNIS MICHAELIS LANDERER,
PERPETUI IN FÜSKUT.
1787.



NAUKA
REČI SLOVENSKEJ.

VISTAVENÁ
OD
LUDEVÍTA ŠTÚRA.

NÁKLADOM TATRÍNA ČÍSLO I.

V PREŠPORKU 1846.
PÍSMOM BELNAYHO ĎEĎIČOU.

Anton Bernolák: Dissertatio philologico-critica de literis Slavorum from 1787, a codifying work on the Slovak language and Ľudovít Štúr: Náuka reči slovenskej from 1846, a codifying work on the Slovak language.
Source: archive of P. Žeňuch.

Even after the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918 and throughout the interwar period (1918–1939), the codification of the standard Slovak language continued to develop. This was due to the newly created conditions in the fields of science, education, the establishment of scientific journals and institutions, all of which influenced the expansion and application of the standard Slovak. A particularly important role was still played by artistic literature, translated works, and scientific research, which focused on exploring the linguistic and cultural identity of Slovaks and the development of standard Slovak speech. In 1931, the first Pravidlá slovenského pravopisu (Slovak Orthographic Rules) were published, thanks to Václav Vážný. However, these rules introduced numerous Bohemian (Czech-like) elements into codified Slovak, primarily due to the prevailing political ideology of the time, which promoted the idea of a unified Czechoslovak nation and its language. During this period, the first Slovak scientific journal, Slovenská reč (Slovak Speech), was established. It published research findings by Slovak linguists, who studied the history, development, dialectal system, and identity of Slovak as an independent language. These efforts resulted in books and journal articles that, based on linguistic-historical evidence, demonstrated the distinctiveness of Slovak as a separate Slavic language, especially in comparison to Czech and Polish. The journal Slovenská reč also published articles on gradual modifications and codification adjustments of standard Slovak, presented by linguists such as Henrich Bartek (1907–1986). A key figure in the codification process was Anton Augustín Baník (1900–1978), a versatile linguist and cultural scholar, who strongly criticized Václav Vážný's Czechoslovakist rules.

The modern phase of codified Slovak is linked to Pravidlá slovenského pravopisu (the Slovak Orthographic Rules) of 1953, developed under the leadership of Štefan Peciar (1912–1989), and the academic work Morfológia slovenského jazyka (Morphology of the Slovak Language, 1966) by Jozef Ružička (1916–1989). Current codification manuals, particularly, Pravidlá slovenskej výslovnosti (Slovak Pronunciation Rules, 1984) by Ábel Kráľ (1932–2023), Krátky slovník slovenského jazyka (Short Dictionary of the Slovak Language, 1987), conceived and published by a team led by Ján Kačala (1937) in 1987, and Pravidlá slovenského pravopisu (Slovak Orthographic Rules, 1991), also compiled under Ján Kačala's leadership, fully meet the needs of Slovak speakers. They address fundamental issues concerning the existence of a nationally codified form of Slovak and its cultural-historical development.

Answer the following questions:

- What type of language is Slovak?

- How difficult is Slovak compared to other languages?

- What kind of linguistic system does Slovak have?

- How did the current form of the Slovak language develop?

- What are the main works that document Slovak spelling, grammar, and pronunciation rules?

- What are the main Slovak dialects?

- What influence do other languages have on Slovak?

- Why is it beneficial to know/understand Slovak, and what should be recognized about it?

- What is missing, needs to be added, or can be supplemented in the above texts to make the answers more precise and comprehensive?



Romanesque Church of St. Michael the Archangel, 11th century, Dražovce (Nitra).
Source: https://storage.googleapis.com/wp-turisticky-sk/2019/04/drazovsky-kostolik_ss_01.jpg

IV. RELIGION AND FAITH

Religion in Slovakia has deep roots dating back to the early Middle Ages when Christianity began spreading across the territory of present-day Slovakia. Christianity was introduced gradually, primarily through missionary activities from Western Europe. The Christian faith among the Slavs was spread mainly by Irish-Scottish monks, as well as Western missionaries from Italian and German regions. A significant milestone was the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius in the 9th century, who came to Great Moravia at the invitation of Prince Rastislav. They brought with them the Glagolitic script, which had a tremendous impact on the cultural and religious development of the region.

After the collapse of Great Moravia and the subsequent incorporation of present-day Slovakia into the Kingdom of Hungary, the spread of Christianity continued under the patronage of the Roman Catholic, Latin-speaking Church. This development was supported by the establishment of several important ecclesiastical centers, such as the bishoprics in the cities of Nitra and Esztergom, as well as monasteries, including the Zobor Monastery, the monastery in Hronský Beňadik, and the monastery in Jasov. Monasteries were not only centers of religious life but also places of judicial authority (so-called ‚God's judgments').

In the medieval European context, there was no religious plurality. Religion was singular – Latin Christianity. It was represented by a single religious organization – the divine-human community of the Church.

It was only with the Reformation in the 16th century (the arrival of Protestant/Reformed churches and the conversion of a large part of the population to these churches) and the subsequent Counter-Reformation (recatholization) efforts that the population became divided between Roman Catholics and Protestants. This had a long-term impact on the religious and cultural life in Slovakia. The 18th and 19th centuries brought further significant changes, as the Enlightenment and the national revival contributed to shaping modern Slovak national consciousness and identity. These efforts were conditioned and supported by members of both the largest churches in Slovakia at the time - the Roman Catholic and the Evangelical churches. During this period, the first attempts to establish an independent Slovak church also emerged, although this was only realized in the 20th century.

The 20th century brought dramatic changes: the creation of Czechoslovakia, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the struggle against Nazi ideology, and the communist regime. The communist regime deliberately and systematically suppressed Christian churches and any religious life. After the fall of communism in 1989, religious life was revived, and greater religious freedom was restored.

Today, Slovakia is considered a country with predominantly conservative values and a dominant Roman Catholic majority, but it is also home to many other Christian churches and denominations, such as Evangelicals, Reformed Christians, Greek Catholics, and Orthodox Christians, as well as minorities of other world religions.

4.1 Slovakia as a country of religion and faith

Slovakia is a country with a rich religious history and diversity, which is reflected in the current religious composition of the population. The majority of the population identifies as Roman Catholic, which is a consequence of the long-standing history of Catholicism in the region. Catholicism in Slovakia has often been closely linked to national identity and cultural heritage.

Religious composition of Slovakia

The dominance of the Roman Catholic Church, alongside the presence of other Christian denominations and a growing number of secular inhabitants, reflects broader social changes and the country´s cultural evolution. Religion plays an important role in defining the cultural and national identity of Slovaks, while society seeks to find a balance between tradition and modern secular trends. According to the latest census (2021), the majority of Slovakia‘s population (55.76%) identifies with the Roman Catholic Church. The second-largest group consists of people without religious affiliation, making up 23.79% of the population. This high percentage may indicate the growing secularization of society, a trend characteristic of many modern European states. Alternatively, it may reflect the way religious identification is influenced by religious practice (many individuals do not identify with any religion because they do not practice one).

Evangelicals of the Augsburg Confession represent 5.27% of the population, reflecting the historical presence of Protestantism in Slovakia, which took root mainly during the Reformation period. Greek Catholics, who follow the Eastern rite while being in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, make up 4% of the population. This group is primarily concentrated in eastern Slovakia, where it has a long tradition. The Reformed Christian Church and the Orthodox Church have less followers, with Reformed Christians accounting for 1.56% and Orthodox Christians 0.93% of the population. The remaining 8.39% of the population either adhere to other religions or declined to answer the question about their religious affiliation.

The importance of religion in Slovak society

Religion in Slovakia has a spiritual meaning and a cultural and social dimension. Churches and religious institutions play an essential role in community life, they provide education, and social services, and serve as centers of cultural activities. The most significant religious holidays and traditions, such as Christmas and Easter, are important cultural and social events that strengthen societal bonds and contribute to shaping cultural identity.

Secularization and religious plurality

Like many other European countries, Slovakia faces trends of secularization. An increasing number of people identify as religiously unaffiliated or are indifferent to religious matters. This trend is evident in the growing number of people without religious affiliation. Religious plurality remains an important part of social life. Religious tolerance is supported by constitutional freedom of religion.

4.2 Religiosity of Slovaks

Slovakia, as a country with deep Christian roots, represents an interesting example of religious identity in contemporary Europe. Religion in Slovakia has a significant influence not only on personal spirituality but also on public and cultural life. For example, Christmas and Easter, originally and primarily religious holidays, are also important cultural events, celebrated not only in a religious but also in a broader cultural and social context. These holidays provide an opportunity to preserve cultural traditions (traditional foods, folk songs, and customs, such as the blessing of food, caroling, visiting churches, or family gatherings).

Religious practice in Slovakia primarily includes regular participation in religious services, observance of religious holidays, and the performance of personal religious rituals (such as regular prayers or fasting). These practices are often intertwined with family and community traditions, strengthening social bonds and cultural cohesion.

Comparison with neighbouring countries

Compared to some of its neighbors, Slovaks maintain a relatively high level of religiosity and religious engagement. This is due to their cultural traditions. The relatively high degree of religiosity is also a reflection of their historical development. Furthermore, it explains the relatively high representation of sacred monuments and elements in Slovakia's tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Religious beliefs and practices thus remain a fundamental pillar of Slovak society, shaping its values and identity. A comparison of the religiosity of Slovaks with that of neighboring countries shows that Slovakia and Poland share similarly high levels of religious devotion and practice, whereas the Czech Republic and, to some extent, Austria exhibit much higher levels of secularization. These differences reflect historical developments, cultural traditions, and socio-political factors that shape religious life in these countries. Slovakia and Poland are both countries with a dominant Roman Catholic affiliation.

Poland

In Poland, not only church affiliation (Roman Catholic Church) but also personal religiosity is very strong, with mass participation in religious services, especially during major Christian holidays. The Roman Catholic Church has a significant influence on social and political affairs in the country, and religious traditions are an important part of everyday life.

Austria

Although Austria shares a strong Roman Catholic tradition with Poland and Slovakia, modern trends indicate a growing secularization. Nevertheless, Austria still maintains a relatively high level of religious practice, particularly in rural areas and among the older generation.

Hungary

Hungary, like Slovakia, has a strong religious tradition, particularly in the Roman Catholic and Reformed Churches. Despite a certain degree of secularization, many Hungarians still practice their religious rituals and observe religious holidays, reflecting the deep cultural and historical roots of religion in the country.

Czech Republic

The situation in the Czech Republic is different. A large part of the population identifies as atheists or religiously unaffiliated. The Czech Republic is one of the most secularized countries in Europe. Religious practices and participation in religious services are significantly lower, and religious holidays tend to have a cultural rather than a spiritual significance. This trend is a result of historical developments, particularly the influence of communist ideology and its anti-clerical policies.



From the church, Polomka (Horehronie), 1st half of the 20th century, Karol Plicka, archive of the Ethnographic Museum of the Slovak National Museum.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/polozka-encyklopedie/kostol/

4.3 Christian churches and religious communities in Slovakia

The Christian tradition in Slovakia is a rich and diverse spectrum of traditions that together create a complex religious landscape of the country. Each of these traditions contributes its unique elements to the spiritual and cultural wealth of Slovakia.

Roman Catholic Church (Catholics)

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest religious group in Slovakia. Historically, until shortly after the Reformation (the 1520s), the majority of the population in the territory of present-day Slovakia belonged to the Roman Catholic Church tradition, except for the Jewish community. During the Reformation movement, almost 90% of the original Roman Catholic nobility joined Protestantism. However, after active recatholicization at the end of the 16th and throughout the 17th century, the Roman Catholic Church once again became the dominant church in Slovakia. From the mid-19th century until the beginning of the 21st century, it has consistently maintained a share of 60-70% of believers from the entire population.

Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (Lutherans)

The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession is also referred to in Slovakia as the Lutheran Church (Lutherans). It established itself and persisted as a historically significant religious group, though today it is less numerous. Its origins date back to the period following Luther's Reformation (1517). At the height of the Reformation movement, 95% of the population in Slovakia adhered to the reformed churches, mainly Lutheranism. The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession is originally a conservative church, firmly rooted in biblical tradition, focusing on the study and emphasis of Martin Luther's teachings. It prioritizes an active life in the Christian community and highlights a personal relationship with God through faith.

Greek Catholic Church (Greek Catholics)

The Greek Catholic Church is the third largest church in Slovakia. It practices the Byzantine rite while remaining in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church and the Bishop of Rome – the Pope. The Byzantine rite was introduced to the territory of present-day Slovakia in the 9th century by Saints Cyril and Methodius, who brought the tradition of Eastern churches of the Byzantine rite to Great Moravia in 863. This rite has been preserved in Slovakia to this day, especially in its eastern regions.

Orthodox Church (Orthodox)

The Orthodox Church in Slovakia represents a minority yet natural and indigenous part of the religious spectrum. It is concentrated mainly in areas with Orthodox communities, particularly among the Rusyn population in northeastern Slovakia. The theology and faith of the Orthodox Church are based on the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381 AD). In Slovakia, the history of the Orthodox Church is linked to the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

Reformed Church (Calvinists, Reformed Christians)

The Reformed Church follows the Calvinist tradition and is a Protestant denomination. The first synod in Debrecen in 1567 is considered the founding moment of the Reformed Church in Slovakia. This synod officially aligned itself with the Reformation movement represented by John Calvin. The Reformed Church is predominantly found in the southern regions of Slovakia. The majority of Calvinists in Slovakia are of Hungarian nationality.

Baptist Union in the Slovak Republic (Baptists)

The Baptist Union in Slovakia represents a minority Protestant group that emphasizes personal decisions for faith and subsequent immersion baptism. Their presence is part of a broader spectrum of evangelical churches in Slovakia. The Baptist movement arrived in Slovakia in the late 19th century through missionaries from Germany and the USA. Baptists in Slovakia identify with the historical legacy of the Unity of the Brethren (a Czech Reformation church) and, to some extent, the Anabaptists (a Reformation Christian branch from the 16th century). The Baptist Union in Slovakia is an association of independent church congregations.

Apostolic Church in Slovakia (Pentecostals)

The Apostolic Church in Slovakia is part of the Protestant churches, specifically of an evangelical Pentecostal-charismatic orientation. It is part of the worldwide church community of the Assemblies of God. Within Europe, the Apostolic Church in Slovakia belongs to the Pentecostal European Fellowship (PEF). It was introduced to Slovakia in the early 20th century by missionaries from the USA. Until the 1970s, it was considered a sect. In 1977, when the Constitution of the Apostolic Church in Slovakia was adopted, it became a state-recognized church. The church focuses primarily on spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, emphasizing the moral and ethical values of the Bible in practical life and social service. It highlights the active gift of the Holy Spirit and its manifestations, such as speaking in tongues or healing.

Jewish religious community in Slovakia

Judaism in Slovakia has a long history and is characterized by various religious and social expressions (rituals, customs, social and community activities). Jewish religious communities in Slovakia are united under the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic.

Jews formed a significant part of Slovakia's intellectual, educational, social-professional, and especially economic elite from the late Middle Ages until the Holocaust. Today, the Jewish community in Slovakia once again plays an important role in economic, cultural-social, and community life. These activities also include ideas of ecumenism and combating anti-Semitism. Slovakia is home to numerous cultural monuments, memorial sites, and memorials commemorating the history and culture of the Jewish community, most notably the tragedy of the Holocaust. These places are important not only for the Jewish community but serve as a reminder for all people.

4.4 Religious expressions in Slovakia

The most widespread religious expressions in Slovakia are primarily associated with Christianity. The majority of the population still identifies with the Roman Catholic Church. This historical influence is reflected in various forms of religious life, particularly in the observance of religious holidays and rituals.

Religious holidays and rituals

Easter and Christmas are the two most significant holidays in both the civic and religious calendars in Slovakia. These are accompanied by various rituals and traditions. Christmas is characterized by traditional customs such as setting up a nativity scene, preparing special meals, and attending church services, especially on Christmas Eve (December 24) and Christmas Day (December 25). During the Easter holidays (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and Easter Monday), various ceremonies take place. People typically focus on confession and attending church services. Special ceremonies include the Way of the Cross (Good Friday), visiting the Holy Sepulcher, the Easter Vigil, as well as the blessing of Easter foods and Easter processions.

Regular attendance at worship services

Believers consider it important to attend Sunday services regularly, but the average attendance at Sunday worship services is relatively low (ranging from 10 to 20%). Higher religious activity and participation in worship services can be observed particularly during major Christian holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, when even those who do not actively practice their faith attend church, seeing it as an important part of cultural and religious tradition.

Pilgrimages and religious festivals

Pilgrimages to holy sites, such as the National Shrine of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows in Šaštín or the Basilica of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Mariánska Hora in Levoča during the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, are also significant religious expressions that attract thousands of believers from across Slovakia. These events are not only religious ceremonies but also opportunities for community gatherings and cultural celebrations.

Family and community religious practices

In many Slovak households, it is still customary to say prayers together before meals or have evening prayers before bedtime. Family gatherings for birthdays or name days, baptisms, weddings, and funerals, as well as the blessing of homes on the Feast of the Epiphany, are also common. These practices strengthen family and community bonds and form an essential part of religious life in Slovakia.

The influence of religion on public and cultural life

Religion also has a significant impact on public and cultural life in Slovakia. The influence of the Church on the education system and its participation in charitable and social programs is an example of this. Religious institutions often organize or support cultural events such as spiritual music concerts, exhibitions, and lectures, which enrich the cultural life of communities. These expressions of religion in Slovakia demonstrate how religious life is intertwined with the daily lives of its inhabitants and how significantly it contributes to preserving the country's cultural and social traditions.



The Bethlehemites from Hriňová, 2021, Anton Trebuľa Kečkár.
Source: https://www.ludovakultura.sk/medzinarodny-den-nkd-2024/

4.5 Religion and cultural traditions of Slovakia

In Slovakia, a country with deeply rooted Christian traditions, many religious holidays are still actively celebrated today. These holidays are significant not only from a spiritual perspective but also as part of the country‘s cultural heritage. Among the most important and still actively observed religious holidays are:

Easter

Easter is the oldest Christian holiday, reminding believers of the final events of Jesus‘ earthly mission (the last moments before his crucifixion) and celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches, this holiday is known as Easter, while the Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches refer to it as ‚Pasche‘. Although the length of Easter celebrations varies among different Christian traditions, the celebrations are primarily concentrated in what is known as Holy Week, with the most important days being Friday, Saturday, and Sunday (the Easter Triduum). Easter celebrations are associated with many symbols, traditions, and customs.

The most common symbols of Easter include the lamb (representing Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God, sacrificed for the salvation of humanity and the world), the cross (on which Jesus Christ died), the candle (symbolizing the risen Christ, decorated with the sign of the cross and the symbols of the beginning and the end of time, which Christ represents), and the egg (symbolizing the birth of new life). The Greek Catholic Church has a special tradition of blessing Easter foods in baskets, which takes place either outside around the church or inside, depending on the weather.

On Easter Monday, an ancient tradition in Slovakia involves feasting, water splashing, and ‚šibačka‘ (whipping with a willow whip). From the morning, men and boys visit the homes of their acquaintances to sprinkle water or gently whip women and girls with a handmade willow whip. This custom is more of a symbolic gesture of male interest in women. Unvisited girls may even feel offended. In return, the whipped or sprinkled woman gives the man a decorated Easter egg as a token of her gratitude.

Christmas

Christmas is generally considered the most beautiful holiday of the year. It is a holiday celebrating the birth of the Lord, peace, and joy among people. The word ‚Vianoce‘ (Christmas) likely originates from the German ‚Weihnachten‘, with a literal translation of the second part of the word and an adaptation of the first part. In German, the term ‚wîhe naht‘ was first recorded in 1170.

The oldest Slavic name for Christmas was ‚Kračún‘, which is still used in some regions: ‚Kračún/Kračun/Kračuň‘ in southern central Slovakia and Zemplín, and Hungarian (Karácsony). In Slovakia, Christmas is also referred to as ‚Hody‘ (eastern and northern Slovakia), ‚Narodenie‘ (the Birth of the Lord/Jesus Christ), and in some areas as ‚Koleda‘.

The Roman Catholic Church and some Protestant churches (such as the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia) celebrate Christmas primarily as the birth of Jesus Christ. The holiday lasts from the Feast of the Nativity (December 25) until the Sunday following the Feast of the Epiphany (Three Kings – January 6). Christmas includes the element of mutual gift-giving, a

tradition documented in Protestant environments since the 16th century. In Catholic families, gifts were originally distributed on St. Nicholas Day. Christmas is associated with many traditions, such as preparing the Christmas Eve meal, decorating the Christmas tree, and attending church services.

Other Christmas customs and symbols include folk dramatization of the nativity story (since the 11th century), nativity scene displays (since the 13th century, introduced by St. Francis of Assisi), the Advent wreath (from the mid-19th century), and the decorated Christmas tree (from the late 19th century). The Christmas tree was originally placed in a stand, but in central Slovakia, it was traditionally hung from the ceiling. The tree was always decorated on Christmas Eve.

The Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches view Christmas primarily as the ‚Birth according to the Flesh of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ,' as the holiday is officially named. It is celebrated on December 25, and believers prepare for it with a 40-day fast. The Orthodox Church celebrates Christmas according to the Julian calendar, with a two-week delay, meaning the Nativity of the Lord falls on January 7.

Epiphany (Three Kings)

The Feast of the Epiphany of Christ to the Wise Men falls on January 6. This holiday is also known as Three Kings Day. It is the day when Christians commemorate the visit of the Magi from the East, who came to pay homage to the infant Jesus. In Slovakia, this day is associated with the tradition of blessing homes.

Feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius

This holiday is celebrated on July 5 and commemorates the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius to Great Moravia in 863. These Byzantine missionaries primarily brought the foundations of the Christian faith in the Slavic language, which were later codified in the Glagolitic script, laying the foundation for the Old Church Slavonic language. Their arrival holds great significance for Slovak culture, particularly through the establishment of the Slavic religious tradition and liturgy.

All Saints' Day

This holiday is celebrated on November 1 and is dedicated to the remembrance of all saints and martyrs. Along with All Souls' Day (November 2), it is associated with visiting churches and cemeteries and decorating the graves of loved ones.

Our Lady of Sorrows

This feast celebrated on September 15, is dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows, who holds a special place of reverence in Slovakia. It is a day for believers to reflect on the sorrows that the Virgin Mary endured throughout her life.

These holidays are not only significant religious and spiritual events but also opportunities to strengthen community and family bonds and to preserve cultural heritage. They testify to the religious sentiment of Slovaks and are traditions that continue to be actively celebrated and passed down from generation to generation in Slovakia.

4.6 The most significant religious specifics of Slovakia

In Slovakia, several specific cultural-religious elements remain alive and visible, reflecting both its historical development and cultural influences in the region. The most significant include:

Preservation of the Cyrillo-Methodian Tradition

Slovakia's religious and cultural roots are deeply connected to the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius, who in the 9th century introduced the written form of the Slavic language (Glagolitic script, which later evolved into Cyrillic). This allowed for a much deeper and more authentic understanding and experience of the Christian tradition. This tradition is still commemorated and celebrated, particularly on Saint Cyril and Methodius Day (July 5), which is a national holiday.

Christian traditions associated with folk religion

Although Slovakia is a modern Central European country oriented toward Western European cultural and religious values, various elements of folk religiosity persist, often linked to pre-Christian religious beliefs. People frequently observe various superstitions and rituals subconsciously, without active knowledge of their origins or meanings. Examples include the belief that crossing paths with a black cat bring bad luck, tying a red thread or ribbon on a newborn's wrist or stroller to ward off the evil eye, knocking on wood to ensure a statement comes true, placing money in a bread basket on the Christmas table for prosperity, carrying a deceased person out of the house feet-first so they do not return, burying the dead with personal belongings for use in the afterlife, and celebrating Saint John's feast day with bonfires and revelry. Many of these customs remain intertwined with Christian holiday celebrations.

Roman Catholic cultural-religious heritage

As Roman Catholicism is the most widespread Christian denomination in Slovakia, it significantly influences many aspects of social and cultural life. It provides and upholds an ethical and moral foundation for societal behavior, clearly defining conservative values and orientations for its followers. This influence is also evident in public cultural and social life, as well as in the integration of traditional religious and social customs during major annual celebrations such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.

Marian feasts, processions, pilgrimages, and shrines

Slovakia has a strong tradition of pilgrimages to various sacred sites, primarily those dedicated to honoring the Virgin Mary. The most famous Marian site in Slovakia is the Basilica of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Šaštín, which hosts major national celebrations, particularly during Marian feasts in September. The oldest Marian pilgrimage site in Slovakia is the town of Levoča, with a history dating back to the 12th century.

Church feasts dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, are associated with events from her life as formulated and upheld by church tradition: Mary as the Mother of God (Theotokos – January 1); Assumption of the Virgin Mary (August 15); Candlemas – Purification of the Virgin Mary (February 2); Annunciation to the Virgin Mary (March 25); Visitation of the Virgin Mary (July 2); Our Lady of the Snows (August 5); Nativity of the Virgin Mary (September 8); Feast of the Holy Name of Mary (September 12); Our Lady of Sorrows (September 15). Marian devotion was traditionally expressed daily through the recitation of the Angelus at noon.

Greek Catholic and Orthodox communities

In eastern Slovakia, communities of Greek Catholics and Orthodox Christians reflect historical migration and cultural influences from the territory of the so-called ‚Carpathian Ruthenia'. These communities maintain their distinct liturgical traditions and holidays. The Orthodox Church still follows the Julian calendar.

Slovakia's religious specifics are significantly shaped by its historical, cultural, and social development. They form the spiritual image of Slovakia and remain essential elements of national identity and cultural heritage. These characteristics manifest in various ways, from local religious practices and traditions to major religious institutions and holidays. Christian religious traditions, therefore, have a profound impact not only on personal spirituality but also on public and cultural life in Slovakia. Religious holidays and traditions, in this sense, are also important cultural events that strengthen social bonds and cultural identity.

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of country is Slovakia from a religious perspective?

- What are Slovaks like in terms of religion?

- How does the religiosity of Slovaks compare to other nations?

- What are the most widespread religious expressions in Slovakia?

- What are the most significant religious holidays in Slovakia?

- Why is it important to understand the religion and religiosity of Slovaks, and what should be taken into account?

- What is missing, needs to be added, or can be supplemented in the above texts to make the answers more precise and comprehensive?

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ISBN 978-973-107-220-3