

LAUDATION

PhDr. Karol Pieta, DrSc.

On November 17, 2021, PhDr. Karol Pieta, DrSc. – one of the most distinguished Slovak archaeologists – celebrated his 80th birthday. He was born in Nitra, where he still lives. Already as a child, he showed deep interest in archaeology when he tirelessly searched the fields around Nitra and Nové Sady for shreds and other finds later delivered to archaeologists at the Nitra Castle. Those meetings were later often mentioned by another renowned archaeologist, T. Kolník, who already in 1955 noticed, perhaps for the first time, that the young boy has his heart set on archaeology (*Kolník 2001, 370*). Mysterious ramparts on Zobor or Žibrica, caves on the castle hill, nooks and crannies of half-ruined cellars opened their spaces to be filled by the young Karol's imagination. In his mind, the spaces were filled with secret lives of our ancestors, shreds revealed fates of former inhabitants. Before long, he started to work on archaeological research. After school for one year, he practised at the Institute of Archaeology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (IA SAS). The institute documentation from those years includes numerous, meticulously elaborated notifications and reports about surface surveys. After that, in 1959, he was admitted to study archaeology at the J. E. Purkyně University in Brno (today Masaryk University in Brno). It was Brno – either through the university, the professors, particularly F. Kalousek or the city itself – that left its lasting mark on his future. It could be said that the experience also programmed his future beliefs. It also positively affected his ties with Moravia. This stage in his life, he fondly recollects. Here, his long-term scientific and personal relations were established with his classmates (V. Goš, E. Grepl and V. Furmánek) and other colleagues. That is why the Jubilarian had and continues to have close professional and friendly ties with the Moravians and Czechs (J. Tejral, R. Pleiner, I. Pleinerová, N. Venclová, M. Čížmář, P. Kouřil, L. Galuška and many others).

After his graduation, the then director, A. Točík employed him at IA SAS where he still works. Soon afterwards, in 1965, he was sent to perform rescue research before the construction of the Liptovská Mara reservoir in northern Slovakia. The Havránok hillfort together with the Celts formed the first of five pillars of his archaeological life. In the recent twenty years, further pillars

emerged – Bojná (a Great Moravian agglomeration), Failaka (Kuwait, a Bronze Age and 7th–9th c. settlement), Poprad (a princely grave from the end of the 4th c.) and archaeological parks in Liptovská Mara and Bojná. The pillars reflect key topics: the Celts – the Romans/the Germans – the Slavs. This inspired us to issue a special number of *Slovenská archeológia – Supplementum* presenting the most recent archaeological findings in those three areas in Central Europe. We do so out of respect for a unique researcher and an exceptional person. It is a tribute to an archaeologist who sets trends for archaeological research in those fields and whose knowledge and expertise arouse our admiration.

The first research area, covering virtually 40 years of the Jubilarian research – the Celts, the Púchov culture and Liptovská Mara – dominated his work until 2005. Those works culminated in 2008, in a comprehensive publication about the Celtic settlement in Slovakia published in both Slovak and German (*Pieta 2008; 2010*) which is one of the most frequently quoted works of the entire Slovak archaeology.

An example of his unwavering energy and determination is shown by his research in the Bojná agglomeration. In the 1990s, traces of the treasure hunting started to appear more frequently on the site. Often, there were piles of iron artefacts abandoned on the ground. Those events were documented by archaeologists from numerous institutions but with the same result: items were collected and that was the end of it. At least, it was so, until Karol Pieta entered the stage. He knew the mountainous region, was acquainted with the area and soon realised that something peculiar was going on. Through a network of his lay associates, he had spread the word and immediately started surveys on the hillfort. Soon, he made exceptional discoveries revealing the existence of a significant power centre in the 9th c.: the plaques with Christian motifs, the bronze bell, numerous hoards of iron finds. Immediately, the first finds aroused an unprecedented interest of the professional and lay public. The discovery of further fortifications from various historic periods, mines, early medieval burial mounds or decayed roots consolidated his position. Karol Pieta gathered around himself a group of collaborators who worked on both land and aerial surveys, LIDAR scanning, radiocarbon

dating, excavations as well as the analysis and publication of finds (Z. Borzová, M. Jakubčinová, M. Cheben, Z. Robak, M. Ruttkay, T. Vangľová and many others). The results have been embodied in dozens of research papers and four monographs.

In 2004, during a friendly chat with a director of the Monuments Board of the Slovak Republic, K. Kosova, M. Ruttkay found out that they have a visitor, an archaeologist from distant Kuwait. One thing led to another and they soon agreed to introduce the guest to Slovak archaeology. The guest turned out to be Sh. Shehab, director of the Kuwait National Museum who in Europe was looking for partners for the exploration of Failaka Island destroyed by Iraqi troops. L. Benedikova from the Karol Pieta's department – then responsible for international relations – guided the guest. Karol's engagement led to signing a preliminary cooperation agreement. As soon as the winter season of 2005/2006, a Slovak team, led by the Jubilarian, was already working on the island. Since 2016, he works as a field director of the research on the Early Islamic, Nestorian settlement achieving unique results concerning the Dilmun settlement and contributing to the knowledge about the settlement development between the 7th and 9th c.

Another proof that Karol Pieta is a man of action is the discovery of a remarkable grave with wooden furniture from the end of the 4th c. in Poprad-Matejovce. In the autumn of 2005, M. Sojak led to the suspension of construction works in the industrial area. Immediately after expert commissions, Karol Pieta initiated and organised thorough research in 2006 that lasted four months. Using his contacts, he invited a renowned partner with experience in archaeological organic material – the Schleswig Museum headed by C. von Carnap. As a consequence, he created a research team that comprehensively investigated the feature but also preserved and assessed the finds. Remarkable findings of the interdisciplinary project involving researchers from eight countries were published in numerous papers in renowned journals (e.g. *Nature*) and will be comprehensively published in a forthcoming four-volume monograph. At the same time, the preparation of the exposition of the grave in the Museum in Poprad is coming to an end (*Pieta/Štolcova 2021*).

Karol Pieta also contributed to the development of the first and, so far, the largest archaeological open-air museum in Slovakia: the decayed settlement Liptovska Mara on Havranok hill. Here, influenced by R. Pleiner and I. Pleinerova, the first Slovak experimental archaeology lab was established. This inspired his research in Bojna, where, in cooperation with local authorities, he

reconstructed several features on the Valy hillfort and intensely works on the establishment of the archaeological park on the village outskirts. He applies his experiences with archaeological expositions on other sites – for instance in Hainburg, Austria. All of the reconstructions arouse the considerable interest of the public.

To sketch Karol Pieta's image, we allow ourselves to mention how our own lives were influenced by meeting and working with the Jubilarian. In 1985, during field surveys in Nitra-Parovske Haje, M. Ruttkay, as a young employee of the Regional Nitra Museum, discovered two violated features and two damaged pottery kilns. The shreds resembled early medieval pottery. There were, however, some distinct differences. During an expert inspection, he received various tips concerning pottery dating but only Karol Pieta correctly attributed it to the Migration Period. This confirmed that Karol Pieta is an excellent expert in material culture and led to the first joint research and a long-term partnership that gradually grew into a friendship. As a student, Z. Robak began working on the research in Bojna. Gradually, he became a true student of Karol Pieta and then a permanent employee of IA SAS. These events contributed to the development of a research team (K. Pieta, M. Ruttkay, P. Bednar, Z. Robak, supplemented also by other researchers) that successfully investigates numerous local and international research projects aimed at the Early Middle Ages.

Of course, Karol Pieta is active also other areas influencing national and international archaeological research and the lay public. Here, his merits are visible particularly in the popularisation of archaeological findings to which his expertise, attitude and communication skills considerably contribute. He intensely cooperated with numerous artists, particularly an academic sculptor E. Cvensgrošova, who transformed archaeological motifs into dozens of works of art – statues, medals, paintings and plaques. Finally, the Jubilarian belongs to the most active researchers in all types of media cooperating also on the preparation of documentary movies or presentations.

He has held several positions at the Institute starting from a specialist to a senior researcher. Between 1991 and 1992 he became one of the deputy directors and continues performing this function successfully today. In the last two decades, he lectured at several universities at home and abroad. More or less continuously, he lectures at the Masaryk University in Brno where he shares his knowledge about the Late Iron Age with younger generations. Slovak and international students – particularly from Poland, the Czech Republic and

Ukraine – come to Bojná for student field practice. All these left a mark on dozens of young researchers he raised.

Through his everyday research work, he shows the energy we all envy. He is an excellent field archaeologist and still heads excavations in the Bojná agglomeration. He belongs to the most active Slovak researcher in field surveys – particularly in areas of Liptov, Turiec, Považský Inovec and Strážovské vrchy. He led APVV projects and today he is a member of an APVV team investigating early medieval power centres. He also leads a new VEGA project. He actively participates in the organisation of international scientific conferences, particularly ‘International Symposium Grundprobleme and International Conference the La Tène in Middle Europe. The Celts.’ Equally important is his systematic contact and cooperation with lay collaborators throughout Slovakia.

The Jubilarian published 409 papers and 12 monographs. His research is well received not only at home but also abroad. Apart from abundant citations, the reception of his works is documented by his membership in international institutions and associations. He is a corresponding member of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), member of the European Association for the advancement of archaeology by experiment (EXAR), European Association of Archaeologists, National Committee ICOMOS, North European Symposium for Archaeological Textiles (NESAT), full member of the Austrian Archaeological Institute in Vienna (ÖAW) and member of the Board of the Institute for Archaeological Heritage in Brno. Regularly, he is invited to the Accreditation Committee of the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (IA CAS) and he is a member of the Committee for PhD. defences in the archaeology of the IA CAS. Another confirmation of the Jubilarian’s position is his membership in editorial boards of international journals: *Acta Archaeologica Austriaca* (Austria), *Acta Archaeologica Carpathica* (Poland), *Carnuntum Jahrbuch* (Austria), *Živá archeologie. (Re)konstrukce a experiment v archeologii* (Czech Republic).

He is also a member of the Learned Society of Slovakia and the Scientific Board of the Liptov Museum in Ružomberok. In the last term of office, he served as a deputy of the Scientific Grant Agency (VEGA) Committee for Historic and Social Sciences. Finally, he is a chairman of the Archaeo-

logical Board at the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic.

Karol Pieta has received numerous awards. Among the most prestigious, we could mention the Gold Medal of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Cristal Wing in the category medicine and sciences for the year 2008 (2009), Award of the Nitra Self-Government Region (2011), Award of the City of Nitra (2011), Scientist of the Year 2011 (2012), the Pribina Cross 2nd class (2012), Award for the lifelong contributions for the Slovak science development, Slovak Literary Fund (2014), Award for Science and Technique of the Minister of Education, Science, Research and Sport (2016) and numerous awards of the Presidium of the Slovak Academy of Sciences for his contributions in science and popularization. Finally, he is an honorary citizen of Bojná.

Karol is well known for his openness, insightfulness and ability to find solutions instead of obstacles. Archaeology is his life and his motto is ‘Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today’. It is remarkable that besides all his research activities, he still finds time for sport (skiing, tourism), theatre, art, good books, work in Rotary Club and meetings with friends.

Unfortunately, due to pandemic measures, the celebrations of Karol Pieta’s jubilee were limited to a close family circle. Therefore, keeping the social distance, we raise glasses to wish him health and a continuous stream of positive energy. We wish the Jubilarian long years of health, wellbeing, joy of grandchildren and many more scientific successes!

Ad multos annos!

Zbigniew Robak and Matej Ruttkay

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