

a technical description of the road of Jews returning home (but only fewer than one-fifth of the prewar 15,000 Bratislava Jews returned).

Salner's book can be read in one sitting. Despite its undoubtedly enriching our knowledge of Jewish Bratislava, I would have a few suggestions. In view of the fact that photographs of the time create one half of the picture of Jewish Bratislava, the author could have paid more attention to their sequencing in the text and their captions (along with new names of squares and streets, we should also consistently find the old names and dates, etc.). Too much intense quotation of memories can also present a certain problem. The reader might welcome more general comments. And finally: I would welcome the application of the method of model analysis to the memories.

*Blanka Soukupová*

**Žo Langerová: V TĚDY  
V BRATISLAVE: MŮJ ŽIVOT  
S OSKAROM L. (At that  
Time in Bratislava: My life  
with Oskar L.)**

Bratislava. Albert Marenčin  
Vydavateľstvo PT, SNM – Muzeum  
židovskej kultúry, 2007, 223 pp.,  
photographs. ISBN 978-80-89218-50-9.

A memoir of extraordinarily high literary quality by Žo Langerová (1912 Budapest–1990 Uppsala, Sweden), born to a well-off assimilated Hungarian Jewish family and married in 1932 to Communist intellectual Oskar Langer (1907–1966

Bratislava), can be read for many reasons and in many ways. Thus, in Žo's fate are reflected all of the hopes, disappointments and paradoxes of the stormy 20<sup>th</sup> century experienced in traditionally nationalistically and politically exposed Central Europe. Žo Langerová was emancipated, educated, talented in sports and, above all, an immensely politically naïve girl from a middle-class Budapest family. She became an enthusiastic pupil and, later, also the wife of a young Slovak clerk inclined toward the left. Along with him, she experienced the atmosphere of multiethnic, trilingual Bratislava in the mid-1930s. She was not very conscious of her Jewishness, and she took the numerus clausus (restricted number) in interwar Hungary to be just some sort of data. Her Jewish identity came out only after World War II from negative experiences: the Shoah, political trials with anti-Semitic sub-texts although, in 1938, she had already become a Jewish refugee and had had to start a new home and new work in the United States of America. There she changed as a mother, as the assistant to the manager of a bookstore, and as the main bread-winner in her family. However, before that, she worked as a door-to-door sales representative and a waitress, while her linguistically untalented husband turned to political activity among the Slovak Communists. In 1946, on an invitation from the Communist Party of Slovakia, the family returned home and Oskar made a career as a member of the Central Committee of the Party. Žo worked in a branch of an export firm, where, for the first time, after the February Revolution, she encountered the absurdity of Socialist planning and the

all-mighty “personnel officer.” During that period, Oskar was arrested (1951). From a relatively privileged business representative of the Ligna commercial society, Žo and her two daughters became unwanted persons practically overnight. They were evacuated to a worse apartment and Žo had to step in as a production worker. Only later was she employed as an editor and clerk. In November 1952, after the news that her husband had been convicted, she was let go at work. Destalinization, during which her husband was rehabilitated (he was freed in May 1960 and rehabilitated in 1962) brought relatively better times to the family. Even before Oskar's return, the family, at that time already extensive, bought a beautiful apartment and later Žo obtained a practically unobtainable automobile. Oskar and other comrades, including those who had his imprisonment on their consciences, began to work on political change.

As I have already said, Žo Langerová's honest confession and perceptive observations regarding the political situation, interlarded humor and self-irony can be read in many ways. A historian mainly appreciates their painful attempts at rehabilitation of her husband, repeated meetings with Party officials, attempts at intercession with an influential left-oriented cousin — the French actress Simone Signoret — as well as portrayals of conditions in Communist prison and the mechanism of interrogations and confessions. A political scientist will read the book as a very precise analysis of the mechanisms of power in a totalitarian system. For a psychologist, paramount will be Žo Langerová's psyche as a lonely woman who vacillates between uncondi-

tional loyalty to an unjustly imprisoned husband and the longing for happiness at the side of a sensitive man who would devote himself to his family and not to Party work. Very absorbing will be the description of her childhood with an authoritative mother and a loving, but passive father. Similarly interesting, of course, will be Oskar's psyche. A convinced Communist never admits that the foundation of the totalitarian system capitalized; he feels that the Party only made certain errors. Using the example of her older daughter, Žo also analyzed relatively precisely the brainwashing of children's minds by the new regime. Also very stimulating is her portrayal of the way of thinking of the working class, which she calls small-town mentality (p. 86).

In the pages of *Urban People*, however, we mention the book for two main reasons: it captures very well the atmosphere of Bratislava from 1946 until August 1968, when Žo, along with her daughters, one of whom was a successful singer, decided to emigrate after the Soviet invasion. Postwar Bratislava is, in Langerová's memory, connected with apartment shortages, insufficient food, furniture, endless lines and a wave of dangerous nationalization. In view of the fact that Žo herself did not know enough Slovak at that time, she completely felt like a foreigner. After February 1948, a privileged layer came into being in the city. The Communist Party prepared Action B, the regime's eviction from Bratislava of members of the opposition (1952-1953). The displacement of Žo and her daughters to a Hungarian village, however, preceded her being let go from her job, the necessity of buying on the black market

(only working people received food tickets), and, finally, the fear that reigned over Bratislava. In Tvrdošovce, the monetary reform (1953) also caught her. Another Langerová picture of Bratislava caught the city in the mid-1950s, when she returned to the Bratislava suburbs. Bratislava offered the possibility of employment (translations, typing and, later, work as a clerk and editor). Žo also painted well her new environment of continual housing shortages, as many inhabitants of the city gladly exchanged their small apartments for spacious and heated coffee houses. (The favorite retreat of Žo and her younger daughter was the Savoy.) First and foremost, however, was the lessening of fear in society. The hopeful period around the Prague Spring, which, however, Žo, as a consequence of her experiences in life, perceived with skepticism, ended with the Soviet invasion.

After 1989, literature devoted to political trials of the Communist era began to accumulate. Works by K. Kaplan and P. Paleček, O. Liška, and M. Pučil, memoirs of H. Kovályová, A. G. London, J. Slánská and others were published. Still, however, Langerová's memoirs are unique, and their way to Slovak readers was indirect, as the epilog shows: Žo Langerová, a great fighter against a hostile fate created by the regime, became capable of making a very precise analysis of totalitarianism in postwar Czechoslovakia.

*Blanka Soukupová*

**Jolana Darulová:  
MESTO PRIESTOR  
ETNOLOGICKÝCH  
VÝSKUMOV.  
NA PRÍKLADE BANSKEJ  
BYSTRICE (A City, Space  
for Ethnological Research.  
On the Example of Banská  
Bystrica).**

Banská Bystrica: Matej Bel  
University in Banská Bystrica, 2002,  
159 pages, photographs, maps,  
ISBN 80-8055-725-X.

Cities constitute worlds in relation to other cities, but, at the same time, each city is a multitude of worlds. Jolana Darulová, assistant professor at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (Slovakia) decided, in her long-awaited synthesis, to present the most transparent worlds of a city that is regarded as the most beautiful urban center in Slovakia. Banská Bystrica (founded in 1255) was a medieval mining center that was transformed (17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries) into a trade and craft center. Then, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it belonged mainly to businessmen, craftsmen and white-collar workers.

In 1930, Banská Bystrica had 11,347 inhabitants; in 1950, 13,045 (p. 42). In 1991, the number of inhabitants increased to 85,007 (p. 43). Until the Second World War, the city was multiethnic, multiconfessional (Catholic-Protestant-Jewish) and multicultural (bilingual and trilingual): alongside Slovaks, who became the majority in the interwar period (in 1919, they represented 77% of the more than 10,000 inhabitants), lived Jews – Neologs (from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century),

Germans, Hungarians (in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Banská Bystrica was pro-Hungary oriented), Bulgarian vegetable growers (from 1890), Czechs – representatives of the pro-Czechoslovak intelligentsia (from 1919) – and Roma. The uniqueness of the city, however, also came from its position between two distinctive Slovak ethnographic regions.

Darulová, an author of many micro-probes, decided this time to present Banská Bystrica as a whole organism. She bases her data on oral-history interviews, personal observations, excerpts from the local press, memoirs, biographies, diaries, archives, and collections of local folklore. In view of the quality of the sources and with regard to the methodic approaches of contemporary Slovak anthropology, however, she focused primarily on the middle class as a city-creating class during the period between the two world wars (understandably with time lapses).

The author's highlighting the delayed urban processes in Slovakia and, connected with them, the development of urban anthropology (ethnology) in Slovakia, must be called stimulating. Attempts at grasping the development of tradition of urban research in Slovak ethnology, like attempts at periodization of their development, are among the most interesting parts of the text. Along with Darulová, I advocate a wider comparative view of the "western" and "eastern" European city. However, comparative research of the so-called post-Socialistic cities seems to me to be very meaningful.

The presentation of the Banská Bystrica material itself is thematic, while the author connected the micro- and macro-space of the population of the city.

She followed the historical development of the city and its social stratification. The author accentuated the fact that industrialization began in Banská Bystrica in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and markedly influenced the spatial structuring of the city. Further, she focused on the relation of the majority population to the minority (including their views), on the function language and folklore, etc.

She devotes a separate chapter to the typology of the Banská Bystrica family and, generally, to the functioning and importance of the middle-class patriarchal family in the city. The researcher studied its everydayness, festivities, child-rearing, values and morals as related to the needs of the city. As with family space, she wrote about public city space (streets, squares, places of traditional enjoyment, the corso [promenade], magic places, water sources) – in the words of the French ethnologist Gérard Althab, *communication spaces*, and traditional urban activities (markets and fairs, club membership, but also excursions and walks) or *communication events*.

Jolana Darulová's book is interesting and, in many aspects, inspirational. I would see a certain problem only in chronological imbalance (time leaps) of the work, in the lack of connection of the development of the city with the development of the entire Slovak society and in the interpretation of the city on the basis of the lifestyle of only one (even if determining) social level: the Slovak middle class. At the same time, however, it is necessary to emphasize the difficulty of writing a monograph of a city and open methodic search of a new field – urban anthropology.

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