

# Life and work of Vojtěch Jarník

---

Tibor Šalát

My recollections of Professor V. Jarník

In: Břetislav Novák (editor): Life and work of Vojtěch Jarník. (English). Praha: Society of Czech Mathematicians and Physicists, 1999. pp. 111--112.

Persistent URL: <http://dml.cz/dmlcz/402251>

## Terms of use:

© Society of Czech Mathematicians and Physicists

Institute of Mathematics of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use. Each copy of any part of this document must contain these *Terms of use*.



This paper has been digitized, optimized for electronic delivery and stamped with digital signature within the project *DML-CZ: The Czech Digital Mathematics Library* <http://project.dml.cz>

## MY RECOLLECTIONS OF PROFESSOR V. JARNÍK

TIBOR ŠALÁT

I met my esteemed teacher Prof. Vojtěch Jarník for the first time in autumn 1946 as a freshman at the Faculty of Science of Charles University (my subjects having been Mathematics and Physics). I remember that Prof. Jarník started to lecture a little later since he had participated in a conference abroad.

His looks were the first thing that impressed me. He reminded me more of an elegant Frenchman than a Czech teacher, and many my colleagues did agree with me. But it was his lectures, well thought out and adapted for beginning mathematicians, which let in me unforgettable impression. Their influence accompanied me all my life as a University teacher. His famous tactfulness manifested itself at seminars (which he led himself) among other by his reluctance to force students to go to the blackboard to solve examples, even if it was our duty to do so. Those who willingly volunteered were rewarded by having to answer only theoretical questions at the exam, not also to solve numerical examples. Let me note that at that time only students on scholarship had to pass these so called “partial” examinations. Nonetheless, all students preparing for teacher’s career had to pass the so called state colloquia preceding the state examinations.

At the beginning of the 3rd year after the first state examination in the school year 1948/49 Prof. Jarník opened a seminar on number theory (the topic was the book of Chudakov on Dirichlet  $L$ -functions) which was attended by three students (colleagues Apfelbeck, Jiřina and myself). His understanding for students (namely, for me) was once demonstrated in the following way: before some short holidays (I believe it was Easter) a question was considered when to start seminar again. The colleagues from Prague readily suggested some date and hour. Prof. Jarník immediately remarked that it was necessary to agree the time with me since my return from holidays was connected with more difficulties than for the colleagues from Prague. It was then nothing extraordinary for the so called morning express to come to my home town in Slovakia at 5 or 6 in the afternoon!

It once happened that I was the only one who came to the seminar. Instead of the mathematical seminar we just had a small talk, among other about the situation in Slovakia. I was very much—and favourably—surprised by the thoroughness of Jarník’s knowledge of cultural history of Slovakia. For example he knew very well about the abolition of the last Slovak secondary schools during the strong “hungarization” connected with the name of the minister Earl Aponyi. As a beginning mathematician I asked Prof. Jarník a curious question what is the basis for promotion of University teachers. His answer was clear: on the basis of their performance. I never forgot this truthful answer. Indeed, it should be so.

Prof. Jarník was in fact also my “remote supervisor” when I was preparing for my candidate of science degree. He advised me how to include the Hausdorff measure in my investigation of perfect symmetric sets defined by infinite series of a certain kind. Even when he was deeply engaged in writing textbooks which still represent the very foundation for the study of mathematical analysis in our country, under the burden of a number of offices, he never lost his interest in further professional development of his students. Every time during incidental encounters on conferences and meetings of various committees organized by the Ministry of Education or by the Czechoslovak or Slovak Academies of Sciences, he showed lively interest in what I was doing and what my working conditions were. He was a solicitous spiritual father of his students, and this image of his has remained in my mind as well as in the minds of all who had the good luck of having grown under his professional and human influence.