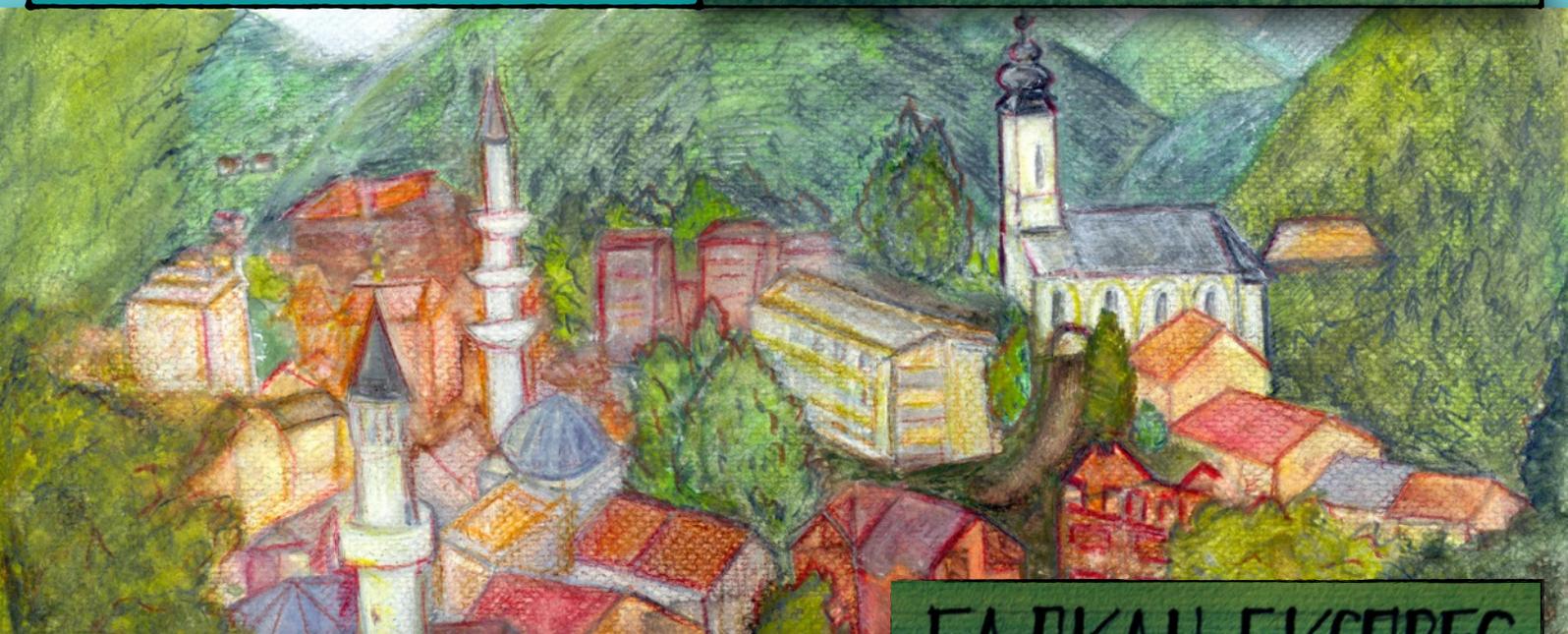


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3rd Balkan Studies Conference
Faculty of Humanities Charles University in Prague



БАЛКАН ЕКСПРЕС

BALKAN EXPRESS

THE HEROES, TRICKSTERS AND ANTAGONISTS OF THE BALKANS

LANGUAGE

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FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

CHARLES UNIVERSITY

PRAGUE

Under the auspices of the Dean
Ing. arch. Mgr. Marie Pětová, Ph.D.

CONFERENCE VENUE

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THE HEROES, TRICKSTERS AND ANTAGONISTS OF THE BALKANS

The three notions in the conference title symbolically express our paramount intention: to think of the actors who have left their traces on the social and cultural development of the Balkan nations and ethnic groups and who have become—either in a basic way or in a certain sphere—creators of the present, future, or past. In our concept, actors are defined broadly as not only individuals and social groups, but also situations, events, and artefacts. At the same time, we want to highlight the personalities for whom the Balkans and its population have been an inspiration and challenge.

We have borrowed the notions of the hero, the trickster, and the antagonist from folklore. In folk literature, these figures convey the action of a story. A cultural hero embodies all that is good and his life is full of model acts that shore up the order of the world. On the other hand, the antagonist is evil, a foe, a traitor who opposes the cultural hero, who harms people, and against whom the hero fights. The figure of the trickster is ambivalent. S/he often accompanies the cultural hero, but his/her character allows him to do both bad and good things. S/he is not prevented from cheating, harming the established order by a ruse, or overcoming an oppressive system from within. A trickster brings change; his acts are eventually a contribution to mankind.



Any society creates its own stories from which it derives its identity. Both in the myths (constitutive grand narratives) and in shared social memory, one can see all three of our figures.

Within the conference, we would like to usefully exaggerate by trying to look for heroes, tricksters, and antagonists who define the Balkans and its people. Anthropology, ethnography, history, political science, and psychology all deal with stories, and all the disciplines are based on interpretations of stories. The causality of actions and plots is present not only in interpretations of historical events or in analyses and prognoses of political development, but also in cultural norms (and their practice) or in individual lives. In all of these discourses, we always find: 1) moments, which are identified as exemplary or untouchable 2) moments, which are worth to be eliminated and 3) moments, which can't be evaluated as positive or negative, even though we know that they have fundamentally influenced social reality.

Within the conference, we want to discuss:

- 1. Heroes.** People, events, and objects that the Balkans perceive as a model on which it builds its identity. We wonder what characteristics are emphasised and in which way cultural models are brought to mind and to which values they refer.
- 2. Antagonists.** People, groups, and situations/facts that are identified as hostile. We wonder how unacceptable evil is defined, how evil has threatened the space of the Balkans and its people, and what are the ways in which evil can be defused both virtually and symbolically.
- 3. Tricksters.** People, institutions, and events that are perceived by the Balkan population as ambivalent. Although they may disrupt the normal course of life, they are also a benefit.
- 4. Individuals and groups who have been influenced and inspired by the Balkans: the region that has shaped their work, social attitudes, and opinions** (irrespective of whether we place them among heroes, tricksters, or antagonists).