

STUDIA BALCANICA BOHEMO-SLOVACA VII.

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The Tradition of Balkan Studies Symposia in Brno

Balkan studies have a long history at the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University and were present from its very founding in 1919. It was not, however, until the 1960s that this field underwent a major boom, thanks to the efforts of Professor Josef Macůrek (1901–1992) and his peer, Josef Kabrda (1906–1968), a renowned Turkish and Balkan studies specialist in Europe. In 1966 these two founded, at what was then known as the Department of History and Ethnography of Central, South-Eastern, and Eastern Europe of the Faculty of Arts in Brno, the Institute of Balkan Studies and Hungarian Studies, which until 1995 coordinated Balkan studies research at the faculty. This institute, although it was part of a department focused on history and ethnography, also provided instruction in south Slavic languages and produced scholarship focused on the literature of the Balkans. It is also closely linked to the history of Balkan studies symposia. At first these meetings were conceived of as nationwide, that is, Czechoslovak-wide, events, and therefore the published proceedings from these symposia bear the name of *Studia Balkanica Bohemoslovaca*. Their initial objective, and in fact a goal that has not changed, was above all to summarize Czech and Slovak Balkan studies scholarship and to outline possible research focuses and activities in the future for different Balkan studies institutes in Czechoslovakia.

The first symposium was held on 11–12 December 1969 and established the groundwork and structure of all future symposia. The symposium was opened by linguist Bohuslav Havránek (1893–1978), member of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and renaissance man, who maintained a network of scholarly contacts and friendships throughout the entire Balkans. At the time, Havránek warned that Czechoslovak Balkan studies could not fence itself in by becoming embedded in Slavic studies; it needed to be open to Romanian, Albanian, and Modern Greek matters as well. At subsequent symposia, and within Czech and Slovak Balkan studies in general, this demand has been met with only intermittent success. At the symposium leading figures in Czech and Slovak Slavic and Balkan studies spoke about successes in the field of Balkan studies research (Josef Macůrek presented the findings of Czech historians dealing with the Balkans, while Valerián Bystrický presented those of their Slovak counterparts, Karel Horálek spoke about Balkan linguistics in Czechoslovakia, Julius Dolanský about the successes of Balkan literary studies, and Václav Frolec about ethnology). In total, nineteen linguistic papers, sixteen historical papers, twelve literary studies papers, and two ethnological papers were given at the symposium. This composition of papers was maintained in subsequent symposia.¹

In May 1974 the Institute of Balkan Studies and Hungarian Studies organized the second nationwide symposium, which was now international. The most significant guest at that Balkan studies meeting was member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and

¹ DOROVSKÝ, Ivan – PRAŽÁK, Richard (eds.): *Studia Balkanica bohemoslovaca I*. Brno 1970.

founder of its Institute of Balkan Studies, historian Vaso Čubrilović (1897–1990), who was, among other things, involved in the conspiracy to assassinate Franz Ferdinand, successor to the Habsburg throne. The symposium followed the same structure – that is, it featured reports summarizing the findings of Czechoslovak Balkan studies as well as papers from different Balkan studies disciplines. It was attended by thirty-three scholars from four countries (besides Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, there were researchers from the USSR and Bulgaria).²

The third nationwide Balkan studies symposium was held by the Institute of Balkan Studies and Hungarian Studies in June 1986 on the occasion of the eightieth birthday of the founder of the institute, Professor Josefa Kabrda, which he did not live to see. In what had already become a tradition, four reports were given that assessed the results of Czechoslovak Balkan studies since the last symposium had been held. No international scholars attended; the proceedings contain a total of forty-five papers from all four of the basic fields of Balkan studies research.³

The Fourth Balkan Studies Symposium, which was held in May 1994, was marked by the recent dissolution of Czechoslovakia – the only Slovak to attend was the notable literary theorist Dionýz Ďurišin, but the introductory reports did cover both Czech and Slovak advances in Balkan studies. This symposium was held in an era of dramatic changes in the Balkans. The disintegration of Yugoslavia was reflected in particular in historian Miroslav Šesták's summary report, in which he considered how Czech historians of the Balkans had been analyzing the current situation not only from a scholarly point of view, but also from a journalistic point of view, as historians had a significant impact on Czech public opinion.⁴

The Fifth Balkan Studies Symposium, held in May 2001, differed from its predecessors in many respects. The Institute of Balkan Studies and Hungarian Studies no longer existed; it had been incorporated, under a different name, into the Department of Slavonic Studies, where Balkan studies have since continued to evolve. Therefore, for many reasons the symposium was not held under the auspices of the Faculty of Arts, but was organized by a civic association, *Společnost přátel jižních Slovanů v České republice* (The Society of the Friends of the South Slavs in the Czech Republic). Mainly young scholars were invited—mostly doctoral students specialized in Balkan studies and Slavic studies, but also master's students in their final years of study, from universities in Prague, Brno, Bratislava, Belgrade, Ljubljana, Skopje, Sofia, and Zagreb. It was thus at this symposium that many of today's respected scholars and teachers won their first “conference spurs.”⁵

All five of the Balkan studies symposia were organized or co-organized by Professor Ivan Dorovský, and all five proceedings bear his editorial stamp. All reflect his great erudition in Balkan studies and his Balkan-wide scope; the proceedings from the third, fourth, and fifth symposia also reveal his rich network of scholarly friendships. It was also Ivan Dorovský, who, after the untimely death of Josef Kabrda, led and organized the Institute of Balkan Studies and Hungarian Studies, and later the beginnings of Balkan studies under the Department of Slavonic Studies. For these and other reasons, an entire section of the Sixth Balkan Studies Symposium was dedicated to his scholarly activities in the field of Balkan studies. This symposium was held in April 2005 and was the largest, in terms of both attendees and costs, to date and will likely not be outdone in the near future. The symposium was held in the historical halls of the Moravian Museum, and papers were given by 115 scholars from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bulgaria. The objective was to present

² DOROVSKÝ, Ivan (ed.): *Studia balkanica boemoslovaca II*. Brno 1976.

³ DOROVSKÝ, Ivan (ed.): *Studia balkanica boemoslovaca III*. Brno 1987.

⁴ DOROVSKÝ, Ivan (ed.): *Studia balkanica bohemo-slovaca IV*. Brno 1995. ISBN 80-210-1158-0.

⁵ DOROVSKÝ, Ivan (ed.): *Studia balkanica bohemo-slovaca V*. Brno 2002. ISBN 80-210-2771-1.

the academic and methodological shifts that had occurred in all four pillars of Balkan studies since the demise of the bipolar world, during which the Balkans underwent tumultuous changes. The proceedings of the symposium were published in a two-volume monograph containing approximately 1,200 pages.⁶

The Seventh Balkans Studies Symposium followed in this tradition. It was held on 28 and 29 November 2016, once again in the dignified halls of the oldest Moravian research and museum institute, which celebrated its 200th birthday in 2017. It was attended by 65 scholars from eight countries – besides the Czech Republic and Slovakia, there were researchers from Bulgaria, Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia, and Serbia. Three sections were held: a section on history, ethnology, and political science; a section on linguistics; and a section on literature and cultural studies. The first named section was further broken down into subsections focusing on the history of the Balkans until the end of the nineteenth century, the Balkans in the twentieth century, and Czech-Slovak-Balkan relations. In the plenary session, attendees had the opportunity to hear reports on the development and outcomes of each Balkan studies discipline in the Czech Republic and Slovakia since 2005, that is, since the Sixth Balkan Studies Symposium. Most of the papers given have been included in this publication.

We believe that both the Seventh Balkan Studies Symposium and this publication have contributed and will contribute to further advances in all Balkan studies disciplines, to improving contacts between Czech and Slovak Balkan studies specialists and their colleagues from the countries of south-eastern Europe, and to ensuring that the symposium tradition will endure. In the words of Academician Bohuslav Havránek from 1969, the Balkans, with their unity on one hand and their diversity on the other, offer up broad research opportunities, not only for studying facts, but also, and mainly, for studying this region's complicated history, which, with its antimony, will repeatedly draw scholars to contemplating the questions that are posed by this situation.⁷ And what better place is there to thoroughly think over these questions than at symposia such as these?

⁶ BOČEK, Pavel – HLADKÝ Ladislav – KREJČÍ, Pavel – STEHLÍK Petr – ŠTĚPÁNEK, Václav (eds.); ŠTĚPÁNEK Václav (red.): *Studia balcanica bohemo-slovaca VI., 1–2*, Brno 2006. ISBN 80-86488-32-2.

⁷ HAVRÁNEK, Bohuslav: “Úvodní projev.” In: Ivan Dorovský – Richard Pražák (eds.): *Studia balkanica bohemoslovaca I.* Brno 1970, p. 9.