

Editorial

Ballads and Memory



This special issue of the *Studia Ethnologica Pragensia*, academic journal published by the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University in Prague since 2010 (but with tradition going back to the early 1970s) is truly *special*. It brings together 13 of the 33 excellent papers presented by international scholars during *Ballad and Memory Conference. 48th International Ballad Conference of the Kommission für Volksdichtung* which was organized in Prague from 31 August to September 3, 2018.

The international learned society *Kommission für Volksdichtung* (Ballad Commission, *Commission internationale pour l'étude de la chanson populaire*) belongs to the most important international ethnological and folklore professional associations, founded during boom of international cooperation in ethnological disciplines that occurred in the late 1950s and the 1960s. Founded in 1966 in Freiburg, Germany, the Society is currently based at the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland.¹

Its 2018 annual 48th conference was held in Prague, thanks to the cooperation of the Elphinstone Institute and the Institute of Ethnology of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University. In addition to the *Kommission für Volksdichtung* and Faculty of Arts, the Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and the National Museum, more specifically the Ethnographic Museum, the seat of the Ethnographic Department of the Historical Museum, took part in the organization of the Prague conference. The conference was attended by a large number of 43 participants from a total of 25 countries all over the world (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Scotland, Serbia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the USA, and Wales), who gave a total of 33 presentations divided into 7 thematic panels (History and the Historical; How Ballad Work; (Re)Living the Past; Family Matters; Disaster, Violence, Poverty and War; Using Song; Ballad Scholarship — see Janeček — McKean 2018). After the opening greetings from Michal Pullmann, dean of the Faculty of Arts, Jiří Woitsch, director of the Institute of Ethnology, and head of the Ethnographic Department of the National Museum, Jan Pohunek, the conference was opened by the introductory

1 For more information about the *Kommission*, please see <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/public-engagement/kfv/index.php> (Accessed 31 May 2023).



papers of the main organizer of the conference, Petr Janeček (Institute of Ethnology of the Faculty of Arts) and Adam Votruba (Regional Museum in Kolín).

The disciplinary affiliations of the presenters were very broad; in addition to papers presented by ethnologists, folklorists, ethnomusicologists and musical anthropologists, there were also contributions from musicologists, literary historians, historians, Slavists and media experts. An interesting and for many also pleasant reminder of the European academic conference discourse before 1989 was the fact that the conference languages were also (in addition to today's completely dominant English) German and French.

The conference was complemented by the annual meeting of the Kommission für Volksdichtung and rich accompanying program, including an excursion to the Open Air Museum Kouřim, made possible mainly by financial support from the Faculty of Arts.

The Prague conference clearly showed that such a “traditional” folkloristic topic as the research of ballads and epic songs (which, thanks to the works of James MacPherson and Francis James Child, represented to a large extent the founding impulse for the emergence of folkloristics as a separate academic discipline in Anglo-Saxon countries, including the USA) is vibrant, vital and intellectually stimulating discourse, the main characteristics of which are lively international discussion, transdisciplinarity and the effort to develop research beyond narrow disciplinary specializations.

Due to effects of the Covid-19 global pandemics and related administrative issues, it took several years for this collection of selected papers to materialize. However, the editors think it was well worth the wait.

Petr Janeček

WORKS CITED

Janeček, P. — McKean, T. A. (eds.): *Ballads and Memory. International Ballad Conference of the Kommission für Volksdichtung. August 31 — September 3, 2018. Ethnographic Museum. National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic.*

Conference Abstract, Prague: Kommission für Volksdichtung — Charles University, Faculty of Arts — National Museum — Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, v. v. i., 2018.