

# Overlapping of Stereotypes: Jews, Muslims, Roma in Czechia: Ethnological approach



**Prof. Petr Janeček**  
Faculty of Arts  
Charles University, Prague



Co-funded by  
the European Union

# Overlapping of Stereotypes

- The lecture is part of the course
  - *European Minorities:  
Interactions, Community Building, and Sense of Belonging*
  - and output of the project:
- *Jews, Muslims and Roma in the 21st Century Metropolises:  
Reflecting on Polyphonic Ideal and Social Exclusion  
as Challenges for European Cohesion*



Co-funded by  
the European Union



**Univerzita  
Karlova**

## Structure of the presentation

- 1) *Vernacular everyday culture and contemporary folklore as dynamic cultural vehicle for transmitting mainstream (ethnic) stereotypes*
- 2) *Rumours, hoaxes and conspiracy theories*
- 3) *Contemporary legends*
- 4) *Jokes, anecdotes and memes*





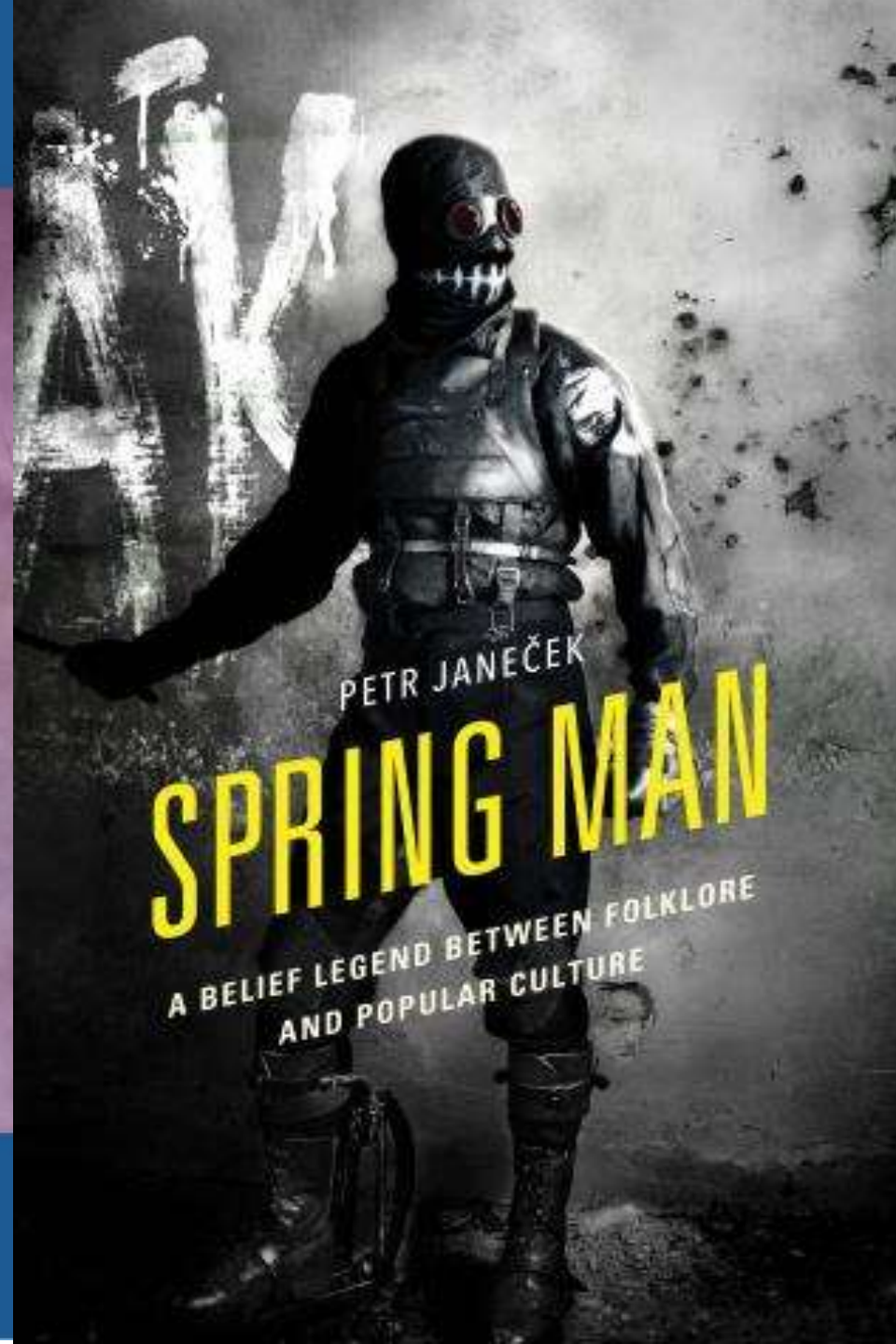
PALGRAVE HISTORICAL STUDIES IN WITCHCRAFT AND MAGIC

# Werewolf Legends

*Edited by*  
Willem de Blécourt · Mirjam Mencej



palgrave  
macmillan





# ČERNÁ SANITKA A JINÉ DĚSIVÉ PŘÍBĚHY

SOUČASNÉ POVĚSTI A FÁMY V ČESKÉ REPUBLICE

PETR JANEČEK  
ILUSTRACE TOY\_BOX



# ČERNÁ SANITKA: ZNOVU V AKCI

HOAXY, FÁMY, KONSPIRACE

PETR JANEČEK

ILUSTRACE NIKKARIN



# ČERNÁ SANITKA: TO NEJLEPŠÍ

ZE SOUČASNÝCH POVĚSTÍ A FÁM

PETR JANEČEK



# ČERNÁ SANITKA: TŘIKRÁT A DOST

MYTOLOGIE PRO 21. STOLETÍ



# ČERNÁ SANITKA: DRUHÁ ŽEN

PÉRÁK, UKRADENÁ LEDVINA  
A JINÉ POVĚSTI



# ČERNÁ SANITKA

Petr Janeček



# 1. vernacular culture and folklore

- since the 1960s, *vernacular narratives* such as *rumours* and *contemporary (urban) legends* understood as:
- one of the most important *vehicles for dissemination of negative (ethnic) collective stereotypes*
- but also:
- *triggering mechanisms for liminal social practices and dangerous collective behaviour* such as:
- *ethnic slurs, gossip*
- *ethnic discrimination, riots, pogroms, violence* in general
- (Gary Alan Fine 2005; 2010)

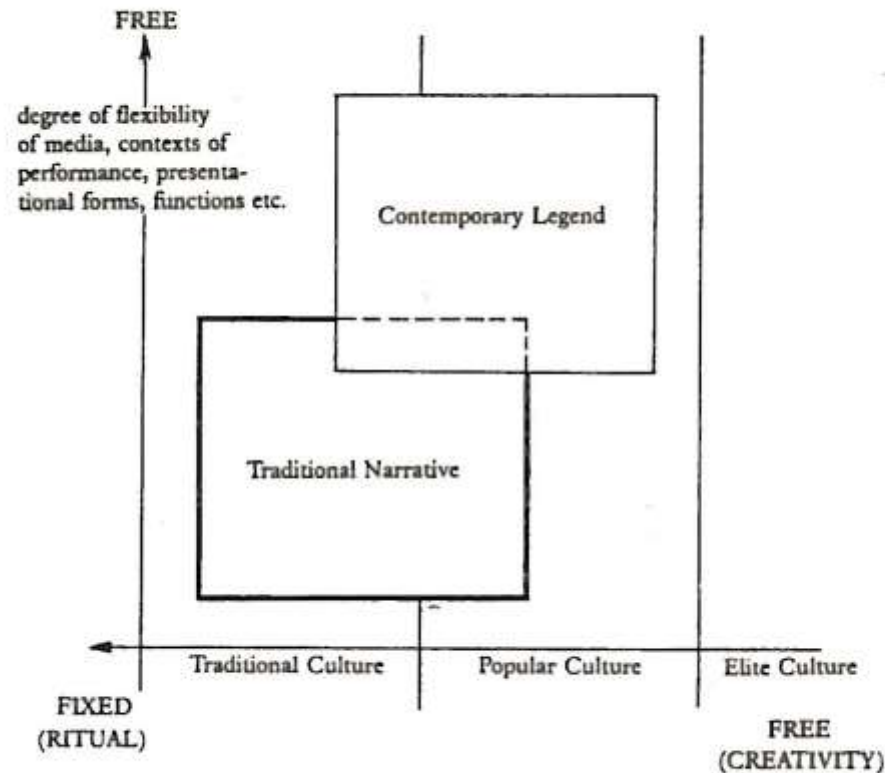
# Vernacular narratives („verbal folklore“)

- **informally transmitted** (in time and space, traditionally by word-of-mouth, i. e. orally), today e. g. graffiti, internet, electronic social media)
- **variable** (variants, versions of the basic texts, often international)
- **reflection of collective ideology**
- **strong community-based**
- **today relatively marginal part of expressive culture**
- **„safety valve“** addressing taboo and forbidden themes
- **anonymous** – no personal responsibility for the narrator!

*Contemporary Legend: A Legendary Genre?*

109

Figure 1: Relationship of Contemporary Legend and Traditional Narrative



# Rumour as triggering mechanism

- first applied study:
- **report of special governmental commission investigating the so-called „Red/Bloody Summer“ – 27. 7. 1919**
- racial riots starting on segregated beach in Chicago triggered 38 large riots with many Afro-American victims
- most attacks from White majority (often young soldiers who returned from WWI)
- the most common trigger mechanism: rumour about alleged rape of white woman or similar crime
- **Kerner Commission 1968**
- „civil disobedience“ after assassination of Martin Luther King:
- 65% cases of violence:
- trigger mechanism which escalated the violence: xenophobic rumour or legend



# Projective Inversion Mechanism

- **imagined violence from minorities**
- in narratives such as rumours
- very often triggering
- **physical „defensive“ violence from majority**

Alan Dundes, 2007

*The Ritual Murder or Blood Libel Legend: A Study of Anti Semitic Victimization through Projective Inversion.*



## 3 main themes of folklore

- **1) penetration of intimate sphere**
- (contamination of human body, food, home, culture, nation by foreign elements)
- **2) fear of new and unknown phenomena**
- (not only xenophobia and racism, but also new technologies such as 5G)
- **3) distrust of big institutions**
- (government, mainstream media, transnational corporations)
- *very often combined in xenophobic narratives such as rumours, hoaxes and conspiracy theories*

# Typology of Rumour

- Robert H. Knapp:  
*A Psychology of Rumor* 1944
  - *pipe dreams* – 2%
  - *bogies* – 25%
  - *wedge-drivers* – 65%
- 
- USA 1941-1944: most rumours targeted Jews, Italians and European immigrants in general
  - (NOT the enemy: Nazi Germany or Japan)

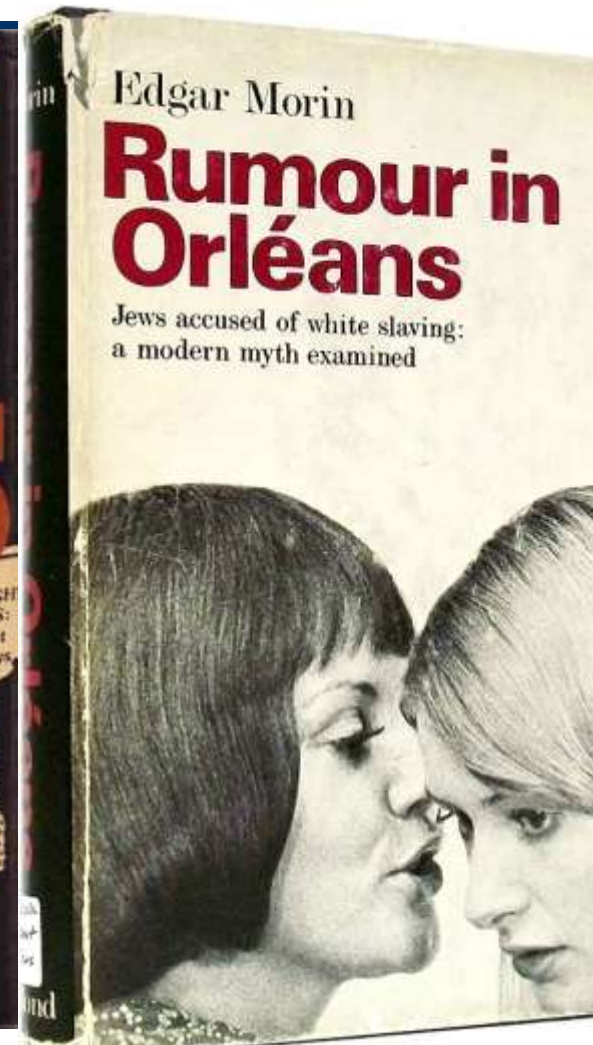
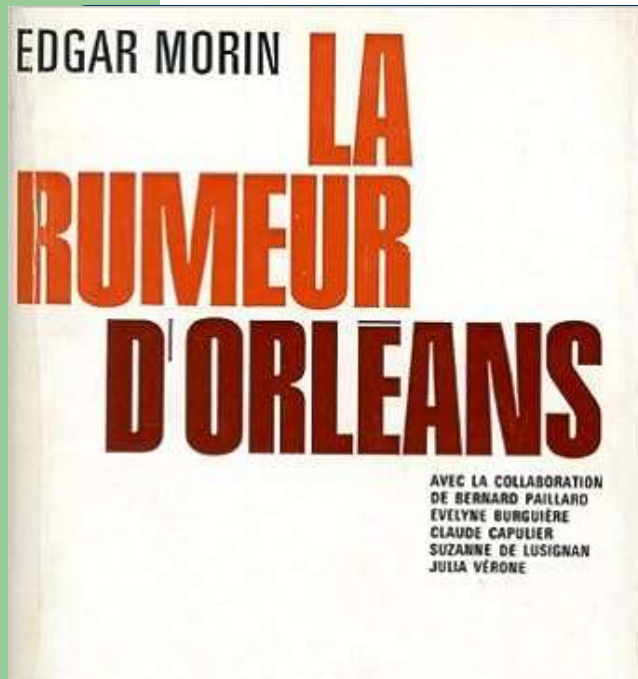


# Rumours and Hoaxes

- **9: 1 – noir : rose**
- negative information are paradoxically better for in-group social bonding of majority – such as gossip (Jean-Bruno Renard 2005)
- **The Rumpelstiltskin Principle** (Brothers Grimm Tale) („naming the demon means taming the demon“)
- 3 levels of meaning of these narratives:
  - 1) *News*
  - 2) *Emergency*
  - 3) *Solution*
- (Bill Ellis, 2005)



# Rumour in Orleans (1969)



# History of Vernacular Hate of The Other in Czechia

- Middle Ages – Early Modern Period – Jews (as religious minority), Muslims (as Ottomanic Empire: main enemy of Holy Roman and later Habsburg Empire) – Sultan (common dog name), Paša, Pašík (common pig name)
- The Enlightenment (the 18th century) – first modern conspiracy theories (secret societies such as Illuminati, more often the Jesuits), more direct persecution of Roma because of rising power of Foucaltian state
- 19th century (especially the second half) – economic and later political antisemitism
- 1990s- anti-Roma sentiments
- 2012 – riots against Roma
- 2015-2016 – anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiments
- 2022- anti-Ukrainian sentiments

# Jews, Muslims, Roma

- common negative stereotypes which were historically attributed by the majority to all of these groups:
- **parasites on the „body“ of nation or mainstream society**  
(economically, culturally, etc...)
- **symbolic or literal uncleanness**  
(M. Douglas – „out of accepted categories“ – dirt = symbol of Otherness)
- **abnormal sexuality**
- **Chip Heath (1999) – strongest emotion in hoaxes: disgust**
- **not participating on national movement or national culture, too alien or too cosmopolitan**
- **connected with or protected by elites and academics**

## Reposted chain e-mail 18. 10. 2012

- Šok v lékárně, INFORMUJ VŠECHNY!!!!!!
- Do minulého týdne jsem to netušil, ale romové nemusí platit za léky.
- Byl jsem v lékárně koupit dětem kapky na kašel a do nosu atd. Předemnou byla menšina, vybrali si léky a pak vytáhli papír ze sociálky, ... lékárnice ho potvrdila a odešli.
- Ptal jsem se, co to bylo a ona mi sdělila, že jsou sociálně slabí, tak jim stát platí léky.
- Málem to se mnou seklo, zaplatil jsem 500,- Kč a naštvaní šel domů. Pracuji, platím SP, ZP, daně - a to všechno na ně a jim podobným.
- PROSÍM,SDÍLEJTE TO DÁL, S TÍM UŽ SE MUSÍ NĚCO UDĚLAT!!!!!!



# Moral Panic

- **Stanley Cohen (1972)**
- A **moral panic** is a widespread feeling of fear, often an irrational one, that some evil person or thing threatens the values, interests, or well-being of community or society. It is „the process of arousing social concern over an issue”, usually perpetuated by moral entrepreneurs and mass media coverage, and exacerbated by politicians and lawmakers.
- immigration
- ethnic, religious or social minorities
- strain on welfare system



Marian Jurečka

18 h ·

Zdravý člověk by měl pracovat, nikoli sedět doma a čekat na dávky. Tohle není normální.

... Zobrazit další



**Z čeho mám žít? Muž s plechovkou piva obvinil z vážnoucích dávek Ukrajince**

## Razorblades on the Waterslide

And people also say that now you have to be cautious at that new aquapark in Čestlice. It happened, several times actually, there that some „Brownie Czechs“ (*ethnic slur*) hid sharp razorblades on waterslides. Down there, where you have no chance to stop when you slide down. One little girl was hurt quite severely.

Some people say that „UKs“ (*ethnic slur*) are doing that, but friend of mine knows a guy who works there and he confirmed that this was the work of those stupid Gypsies.

Narrator:

M.B., 1971, marketing director, Všechnomy, Czechia.



## International xenophobic rumour

- told about almost every single swimming pool and/or aquapark in Czechia and Slovakia and mostly believed as true story
  - never proven by true
- also part of occupational folklore of swimming pool attendants
  - oldest record – 1971 town of Kladno
    - usually told about the Roma
    - after 2000s more generic
  - in Germany, Turks, „Kanacken“ and refugees
    - in France, Algerians and Moroccans
    - in GB Pakistani people
  - in the U.S. African Americans, now Hispanics

# The Lost Wallet (2016)

*"Kamarádka mi teď vyprávěla hroznou věc: Prý nakupovala v Palladiu, když našla na zemi cizí peněženku. Bylo v ní opravdu hodně peněz v EUR a protože ji chtěla vrátit, hledala v ní nějaký kontakt na majitele. Našla občanku, na které bylo nějaké arabské jméno a našla i kontakt na majitele. Spojila se s ním a dohodla na schůzce. Sešli se a peněženku mu vrátila i s veškerým finančním obsahem.*

*Týpek prý strašně moc děkoval a nabízel jí nálezný jako odměnu za takovou poctivost. Kamarádka to odmítla s tím, že to je přece samozřejmost, tak jí nabízel alespoň, aby si koupila něco v tom Palladiu, že jí to zaplatí. Odmítla i to. Týpek jí tedy řekl: Tak víš co? Když nic nechceš, tak já ti dám alespoň dobrou radu. - - Okolo vánoc nechod' do Palladia.,,*

*Vážení přátelé. Napsala mi jedna vyděšená paní. Byla v nákupním centru Letňany, kde viděla na zemi peněženku. Chvilí kolem ní chodila, potom jí to nedalo a šla jí dát na informace, tam již čekala skupina muslimů z které jeden uměl dobře česky, ten jí chtěl dát peníze za to že peněženku vrátila. Paní odmítla rozloučila se a pomalu odcházela. Muslim který uměl česky běžel za paní a řekl jí, že je moc hodná, tak jí dá alespoň dobrou radu. "Nechod'te kolem Vánoc do nákupních center" Paní se klepala ještě doma. To proč nezavolala policii je diskutabilní.....ovšem kdo by na to měl setkat se s nimi někde u soudu. DÁVEJTE MAXIMÁLNÍ POZOR A NIKAM NECHOĎTE. HLAVNĚ NE KOLEM VÁNOC. TOTO NENÍ HOAX !!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Opatrujte se. Angela#*





# The Lost Wallet (2016)

*Dnes mi můj bratr (20 let) převyprávěl neobvyklý příběh. Jeho spolužačka v hospodě vyprávěla příběh, který se údajně stal její matce. Ta měla udělat laskavost pro nějakou muslimku. Když ji pak říkala, jestli by ji ta muslimka laskavost nějak neoplatila, muslimka řekla, že ji nedá peníze, ale radu. Tou radou bylo, ať teď půl roku nechodí do Palladia. Máma té spolužačky to prý hned zavolala na policii, kde ji řekli, že už o tom vědí.*

- **beginning – Pilsen, May 2016 (náměstí Republiky, shopping mall Plaza)**
- **Prague - August 2016 (various malls, especially Palladium, but also the metro)**
- **Brno – September 2016 (Galerie Vaňkovka)**
- **repeatedly officially debunked by the Czech Police (HateFree.cz)**
- **contemporary legend, international type *The Grateful Terrorist***
- **USA after 9/11, Czech version influenced by the UK and Polish ones**

originally about Rome (Marie Bonaparte, *Mythes de l'enfer*, 1916)

# Jokes and Targets (1996)

## Christie Davies

In every culturally and linguistically defined society, there is a group which is main **target of jokes**:  
*people living on geographical and/or social periphery, villagers, unqualified, working manually, but very close to majority*

### 3 main themes of ethnic joking:

1) stupidity

2) uncleanness

3) strange sexual behaviour

(1996)



# Jokes and Targets (1996)

## 3 main types of ethnic jokes:

- 1) **stupid people living on (rural) periphery**  
(Frisians in Germany, Chukcha in Russia, hillbillies/rednecks in the USA)
- 2) **well-integrated and assimilated people**  
(Jews, Armenians, Scots)
- 3) **culturally-specific jokes**  
(militarism, alcoholism, sexuality)



# Anti-Roma jokes

- radical increase of number and aggressivity of these jokes and synergic making of negative heterostereotype of Roma after 1989
- Roma people suddenly very negative characters:
- *stupid, lazy, violent, sexually liminilal, very dehumanized*
- partly took place of Jew of older anti-semitic jokes, including motifs of the Holocaust and suffering
- partly influence of mass media and *Zeitgeist* (similar to Somali disaster jokes during the mid-1990s)





# Anti-Roma jokes

- **before, the Roma was usually the main and very active actor of the narrative**
- **now, more passive „victim“ of:**
- racist skinheads, but also police, justice and very often „common law-abiding citizens“ taking justice into their own hands
- „normalization of violence“
- anti-Roma jokes repressed other thematic joke cycles connected with The Other (until European Migration Crisis of 2015 when Muslim people started to appear more frequently)
- still very vital thematic cycle of Czech jokelore

# Anti-Roma Jokes

- „traditional“ folklore
- folktales, legends
- Roma more sympathetic trickster
- clever, witty and funny Roma make fun of and win over the Devil, parish priest or wealthy farmer
- vernacular sympathies were often on side of the poor and oppressed
- „otherness“ of Roma was not problem: source of funny motifs and plot sequences
- overlapping: same stories before the 19th century usually about (retired) soldier or peasant



# Selected Literature

- Allport, Gordon – Postman, Leo: *The Psychology of Rumor*. New York, 1947.
- Fine, Gary A. – Champion-Vincent, Véronique – Heath, Chip (eds.): *Rumor Mills. Social Impact of Rumor and Legend*. New Brunswick, 2005.
- Cohen, Stanley: *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. London, 1972.
- Davies, Peter: *Jokes and Targets*. Bloomington, 2011.
- Dundes, Alan: *The Ritual Murder or Blood Libel Legend: A Study of Anti-Semitic Victimization through Projective Inversion*. Logan, 2007.

# Selected Literature

- Ellis, Bill: *Aliens, Ghost, and Cults. Legends We Live*. Jacksonville, 2001.
- Ellis, Bill – Fine, Gary A.: *The Global Grapevine: Why Rumors of Terrorism, Immigration and Trade Matter*. New York, 2010.
- Fine, Gary A.: *Manufacturing Tales. Sex and Money in Contemporary Legends*. Knoxville, 1992.
- Janeček, Petr: *Spring Man. A Belief Legend between Folklore and Popular Culture*. Lanham, 2022.
- Morin, Edgar: *Rumor in Orléans*. London, 1971.
- Rosnow, Ralph R. – Fine, Gary A.: *Rumor and Gossip. A Social Psychology of Hearsay*. New York, 1976.

# Selected Literature

- Panczová, Zuzana – Janeček, Petr:  
Popular Conspiracy Theories in Slovakia  
and the Czech Republic.  
*Diogenes* 62, 3-4, 2020, pp. 101-113.

## Online sources

*Snopes.com* (fact-checking, debunking hoaxes)

*Contemporarylegend.org* (legend and rumour research)

*Konspiritalita.ff.cuni.cz* (conspiracy theories research)



# Thank you for your attention!



Co-funded by  
the European Union

[petr.janecek@ff.cuni.cz](mailto:petr.janecek@ff.cuni.cz)



**Univerzita  
Karlova**