



Obituary

In Remembrance of Slavomil Vencl, a Great Personality with a Modest Mind

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Slavomil Vencl (18th October 1936, Dlouhá Třebová – 23rd June 2019, Prague). Source of the photograph: Archive of the Archaeological Institute in Prague, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, inheritance of Slavomil Vencl.

Slavomil Vencl was born on 18th October 1936 in Dlouhá Třebová in eastern Bohemia (Czech Republic). He was an important Czech archaeologist, but he also devoted part of his career to the study of graphics. In between 1954 and 1959 he studied prehistory in the class of Professor Jan Filip at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague. In 1959 he worked for a short time in the National Museum in Prague, but since that year until the very end of his life he was closely linked to the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague. He was also an external teacher at his *alma mater*, Charles University in Prague (1979–2002) and at the University of Western Bohemia in Pilsen (1998–2001).

The most important part of his work is connected with the archaeology of foragers, especially of the Upper

Palaeolithic, Late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic. There are several different issues that can be mentioned here. First of all it was his systematic work on the Late Palaeolithic period in central Europe, which was pioneering (Vencl, 1970a). Also important was his research on the Upper Palaeolithic, especially concerning settlement features preserved in loess. Some of these sites were the result of salvage archaeology, such as the case of the Gravettian settlement in Stadice (Vencl, 1991a), but others were systematic long-term excavations, such as the Magdalenian settlement in Hostim excavated between 1963 and 1969 (Vencl, 1995a), or the Gravettian site in Lubná (Vencl, 1966). Apart from stratified sites, he put a lot of effort into the exploration of surface finds, especially from the Mesolithic in different regions of Bohemia – as was the analysis of material from the Sopotnice sites (Vencl, 1992) or the comprehensive publication on South Bohemian hunter-gatherer occupation, which is mostly dated to the Late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods (Vencl, ed., 2006). However, his work was not only focused on archaeological finds: he also often tackled theoretical and methodological issues. Most important are his reflections on war craft and violence (Vencl 1991b; Vencl, 2016), while he also devoted his attention to theoretical problems connected with surface surveys (Vencl, 1968; Vencl, 1995b). His scope of interests and considerable knowledge were extremely broad. The total number of studies and monographs written by Slavomil Vencl exceeds 300 titles, focused on a whole range of issues, including the publication of his salvage excavations dated to different periods from the Palaeolithic up to the Middle Ages (e.g. Vencl, 1960; Vencl, 1973; Vencl, 2011; Vencl, 2012).

So far I have attempted to summarize the professional career of this exceptional archaeologist. But clearly that is not enough to describe him, since I also knew him on a daily basis, as a colleague from the next door office. I used to greet him every time he arrived at his office and together we discussed not just archaeology but also several diverse topics of the day. I am therefore in no doubt that I will miss the true personality he had.

Slavomil Vencl was however a very complex and rather complicated personality. These characteristics were present

in all spheres of his life; they were like the many facets of a gem and they gave brilliance to his work, which was very diverse.

A common characteristic throughout his work and life was that of duty. Duty was often his main motivation when choosing subjects of interest. His topics were invariably not the fanciful or easy, but rather the complicated problems or questions which required answers. This was not only the case just in his publication priorities, but also regarding his general priorities, including his scientific specialization, which he changed according to the requests of his superiors, even though his original interests had been different. And even in those new issues he achieved much detailed knowledge and a precise view of the topic. In a similar way, his sense of duty was connected with his extreme accuracy and carefulness. All his work shows the strong effort he made to achieve perfectness and not to forget a single detail. So it is possible to claim that his work is accurate regarding the published data and that all the details were all carefully verified, which is something that cannot be said about all researchers' work nowadays.

Another important feature of his life was his deep relationship to the truth and righteousness. In all his publications, anything that was guessed, surmised or in any way formulated ambivalently could be clearly seen. He always tried to make things as clear as possible, in order to make it visible how the author works and thinks. This resulted in extremely coherent style of work. His desire for truth led him to be ever cautious, a principle always important in such topics as deep prehistory. Thanks to these characteristics he never found himself on the slippery slope of speculation. His style was clear, the argumentation always easy to follow and his conclusions always logical.

Finally, one must mention his humanism, which was linked to his politeness and courteousness, something which in today's society is disappearing step by step. Slavomil Vencl gave everyone a chance, to all who was interested; he made no differences when it came to age, education or position. The interested person was always welcomed, no matter how trivial their questions might be. The consequence of which was the enormous number of non-professional archaeologists, amateurs and collectors, with which he collaborated during his long career. This cooperation was never one sided: he was not just the researcher who kindly consulted some amateur's finds, for he also discussed with all such interested people and often collaborated with them for a long time afterwards, some of them also becoming co-authors of his publications.

This valuable person was active until the very end of his life. He is an example worth following. Even when he knew that the end of his days was drawing near, he gave his utmost effort to put all his things in order, to make it possible for other researches to continue his work.

However, the above-mentioned characteristics are just fragments in a description of this complex personality. Even so, they remain fundamental for understanding the basic

elements of his approach to life, people and work. Just as it is impossible, in only a few paragraphs, to describe the breadth of his entire personality, it is also not possible to mention all the topics to which he devoted his attention during the sixty years of his professional career. His professional contribution in the fields of archaeology and graphic studies can be partially seen within the selected bibliography below. His complete bibliography was published in the *Archeologické rozhledy* journal in 1997, 2007 and 2017.

Selected publications

- 1960: Kamenné nástroje prvních zemědělců ve střední Evropě – Les instruments lithiques des premiers agriculteurs en Europe centrale. *Sborník Národního muzea v Praze. A-Historie*, 14, 1–91.
- 1966: La station paléolithique de Lubná, près de Rakovník (Bohème). In: *Investigations archéologiques en Tchécoslovaquie*. Prague, 25–26.
- 1968: Povrchový sběr jako technika archeologického průzkumu. *Muzejní a vlastivědná práce*, 76(6), 96–99.
- 1970a: Das Spätpaläolithikum in Böhmen. *Anthropologie* 8, 3–68.
- 1970b: Mesolitické osídlení Českého krasu – Peuplement mésolithique du Karst de Bohème. *Archeologické rozhledy*, 22, 643–657, 739.
- 1971: Topografická poloha mezolitických sídlišť v Čechách – The Topography of Mesolithic sites in Bohemia. *Archeologické rozhledy*, 23, 169–187.
- 1973: Časně slovanské osídlení v Běchovicích, o. Praha – východ – Die Frühslawische Siedlung von Běchovice. *Památky archeologické*, 64, 340–392.
- 1978: *Stopy nejstarší lidské práce ve východních Čechách*. Hradec Králové.
- 1979: Nádoby z látek živočišného původu – Gefäße aus Stoffen tierischen Ursprungs. *Archeologické rozhledy*, 31, 530–570.
- 1989: Mezolitické osídlení na Šumavě – Die Mesolithische Besiedlung des Böhmerwaldes. *Archeologické rozhledy*, 41, 481–501, 593.
- 1991a: The rescue excavations of a Gravettian site at Stadice, district of Ústí nad Labem. In: *Archaeology in Bohemia 1986–1990*. Praha, 191–193.
- 1991b: Interprétation des blessures causées par les armes au Mésolithique. *L'Anthropologie*, 95, 219–228.
- 1991c: On the importance of spatio-temporal differences in the intensity of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic settlement in Central Europe. *Antiquity*, 65, 308–317.
- 1992: Mesolithic settlement on cadastral territory of Sopotnice, district of Ústí nad Orlicí – Mezolitická osídlení v katastru obce Sopotnice, okr. Ústí nad Orlicí. *Památky archeologické*, 83(1), 7–39.
- 1995a: *Hostim – Magdalenian in Bohemia*. Prague.
- 1995b: K otázce věrohodnosti svědectví povrchových průzkumů – Surface survey and the reliability of its results. *Archeologické rozhledy*, 47, 11–57.
- 1999: Stone Age Warfare. In: *Ancient Warfare*, Stroud, 57–72.
- 2003: *České exlibris: Czech Bookplate – Tschechisches Exlibris*. Praha.
- ed. 2006: *Nejstarší osídlení jižních Čech. Paleolit a mesolit – The earliest settlement of South Bohemia. Palaeolithic and Mesolithic*. Praha. (S. Vencl, ed., et J. Fröhlich, I. Horáček, J. Michálek, P. Pokorný, A. Přichystal).
- 2011: K osídlení kultury řivnáčské na východním okraji Prahy. *Archeologické rozhledy*, 63, 90–135 (et M. Dobeš, J. Zadák, J. Řídký).
- 2012: Ötzi: muž z tyrolského ledovce optikou archeologie nenalezaného. *Archeologie západních Čech*, 4, 90–102.
- 2012: *České grafické novoročenky*. Pelhřimov. Ed. 2013: *The Prehistory of Bohemia I. The Palaeolithic and Mesolithic*. Praha (S. Vencl, ed., et J. Fridrich, K. Valoch).
- 2015: *Česká příležitostná grafika*. Pelhřimov
- 2016: Antropofagie jako jedna z forem pravěkého násilí. *Archeologie ve středních Čechách*, 20, 555–572.
- 2018: *Moderní exlibris v českých zemích*. Pelhřimov.
- 2019: Herxheim as evidence of the existence of long-distance wars in prehistory. *Archeologie ve středních Čechách* 23(1), 387–401.