



OBITUARY

Professor RNDr. Jan Beneš, D.Sc.
(May 6, 1935 – November 2, 1998)

On November 2, 1998, Professor Jan Beneš died. He was the Head of the Department of Anthropology and Assistant Dean at Masaryk University's Natural Sciences Faculty in Brno and a member of both the faculty and university's Scientific Board. Other recognitions and titles included: Deputy Chairperson of the university's Foundation Universitas Masarykiana, the Foundation Universitas Masarykiana Prize for scientific and artistic work, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the University Newspaper, member of the editorial board of the international magazine Anthropology, Deputy Chairperson of the Czech Anthropological Society and member of the European Anthropological Association, and long-time coordinator of the Tempus and Socrates programs at the Natural Sciences Faculty.

Professor Jan Beneš was born in Hradečná na Moravě. He completed high school in Znojmo, studied Biology from 1956–1961 at the Natural Sciences Faculty of what was at that time the University of Jan Evangelista Purkyně in Brno, and received a masters and Ph.D of Science at Charles University in Prague in 1968. From 1961 to 1990 he worked as a lecturer, later becoming a senior lecturer at the Department of Zoology and Anthropology's branch of Anthropology at the Natural Sciences Faculty of the University of Jan Evangelista Purkyně, later becoming Masaryk University. In 1991 after years of persecution it was finally possible for him to work towards a second doctorate and in 1992 he was named Professor of Anthropology at Masaryk University's Faculty of Natural Sciences.

His greatest endeavour was the re-establishment of an independent Department of Anthropology at Masaryk University's Faculty of Natural Sciences in which he succeeded in 1994. With this activity he revived anthropology at Masaryk University, a discipline which since the 1970s had been systematically wiped out and looked certain to extinguish. After founding the department in 1994, he was named its head. He accredited study at the masters and doctorate levels and established an independent branch of anthropology, based on the Anglo-Saxon model of biological and socio-cultural anthropology. Such an approach was inspired by his stays in 1990 and 1992 at Harvard University in the USA and at Cambridge University in Great Britain. Under his leadership the Department of Anthropology saw rapid development and currently has 56 masters students and 4 students at the post-graduate level. In 1998 thanks to his efforts the department received an extensive space of its own, which he unfortunately could not take advantage of.

Jan Beneš was a biological anthropologist focusing on the study of living populations. His greatest contribution was his study of the variability and adaptability of national minorities in Europe, especially the Lusatian Serbs and Gypsies as well as Vietnamese students. In the sphere of the International Biological Program he took part in extensive research on industrial populations in Czechoslovakia. He also conducted research on twins. He was an expert on dermatoglyphics. In later years he concentrated on the study of human ecology and bioecological and cultural questions linked with the evolution of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. He wrote a large amount of scientific publications and textbooks. Perhaps the most significant of these was the monograph "Humans" published by Mladá Fronta Publishing House in 1994, for which he received the Josef Hlávka Prize.



He lectured students on specialized anthropology, biologists on the evolution and ecology of man as well as on theories of evolution and taught methodology on the study of variability in current populations. Students from other subjects also took part in his classes. He also supervised post-graduate study.

In addition to scientific activities and lecturing he wrote fiction while his greatest sporting passion was golf.

In losing Jan Beneš, the anthropological public, both Czech and worldwide, is losing a great scientist and teacher.

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