



MARTIN OLIVA

KAREL VALOCH (1920–2013) – MEMORIES OF A PUPIL, COLLEAGUE AND SUCCESSOR

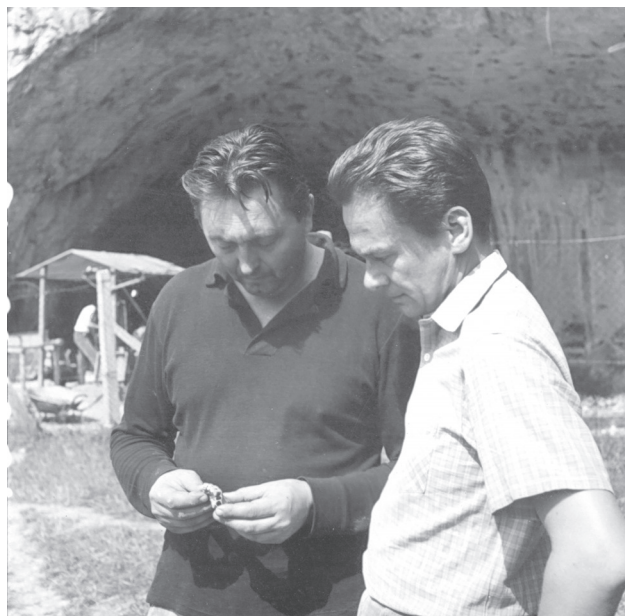
If I am going to write about my memories of Karel Valoch, I will have to go back about half a century. At that time, as a young lad I started to collect prehistoric shards and flints in the fields and to visit archaeological sites. I started visiting the excavations of the Moravian Museum at Kůlna Cave immediately after Dr. Valoch first found a fragment of the upper jaw of a Neanderthal woman. That was in 1965, 60 years since the previous discovery of skeletal remains of this human species on our territory, moreover, immediately before a trip to the International Congress of anthropologists in Brno, so the archaeology and Kůlna Cave were revelations. I did not dare speak to the leader of the excavation, because I barely knew him and before the trip he had his hands full. We got to talking in the following years, when I helped him in the laboratories of the Anthropos Institute and gained experience from his technician and life-long friend Mr. Gebauer. Dr. Valoch was a man bursting with knowledge, from whom I wanted to learn, but he was extremely hard working and never had enough time, so it was never easy to interrupt him. That said, he never refused to talk and after a time he started to warm to me. My enthusiasm for archaeology and the tortuous road to its realisation – I was only a trade apprentice then – reminded him of his own difficult journey into the subject

25 years earlier, when prior to starting his studies he had to complete his school leaving certificate. In this way he gave me strength and endurance even when my own family didn't support my plans, even more so when I wasn't at first accepted onto the course and had to do military service. During my two year service he kept me provided with long letters containing all kinds of news. I always received them like a redemption and repayed them with tales of my own woe, which he later confessed made him feel sad. I can't fully comprehend the extent of this moral support, especially since I know how hard it is to tear a hardworking researcher away from his dedicated investigations. He was always working on several things at once, yet he seemed to always complete them promptly. After military service, things started to improve and we started cooperating on some aspects of his research and some common outcomes. During this period I became aware of how irreplaceable his knowledge of the literature was and the universality of his views. Until into the 1980s, he managed to read practically every important paper on the European Palaeolithic and he reviewed much of this work in the journals. He was especially at home with German texts, since his family background was partly German, but he was also self-taught in French and Russian and could



Karel Valoch during the archaeological excursion SPF on the site Chez-Pinaud near Jonzac (France), June 2nd, 2010. Photo P. Neruda.

manage the basics in Ukrainian, Spanish and Italian. It's unusual too, that with time he became proficient in reading and glossarising books in English, although he wasn't really willing to speak English, despite it becoming a *lingua franca* without which it's hard to get around in our world. He always preferred a general point of view over too much specialisation, which could cause misinterpretation in authors with a narrower perspective. I tried to follow his example in this, even though we are swamped with new literature, new journals and collected proceedings from ever growing numbers of conferences. Even though he was actively interested in prehistoric art, palaeoanthropology and so on, he remained primarily a typologist. If there is one aspect of his theoretical approach that I'm neglecting, it was his lack of projection of a behavioural dimension into the characteristics of lithic industries. The roughness of their exterior was traditionally considered to be a sign of their age, which led to the thesis of the existence of an old Aurignacian culture in Moravian sites, located close to outcrops of



Karel Valoch and Vilém Gebauer at the entrance of the Kůlna Cave with a fragment of the upper jaw of a female Neanderthal (1965). Photo Archive of the Anthropos Institute.

raw materials. This opinion influenced this author for a certain time. We both rejected Binford's position in his dispute with F. Bordes, but we hadn't noticed that many contradictory phenomena could be explained by the so-called dynamic classification of the Polish school, and that one of the sources of variability – and a very observable one at that – was the location of the site in the process of distributing and consuming raw materials. In this, I started to drift away from my teacher, but even he started to move away from this position. Other than a few minor topics we never stopped understanding each other and discussing varied issues and not just the most useful and most pleasant ones of our discipline, right up until the last days of his life.

Our friendly discussions and the work of Karel Valoch are now closed. And now it is up to us to evaluate that work. Of course, this will take some time. The first thing will be to evaluate in detail the research at Kůlna Cave, which has certainly contributed to our understanding of the Middle Palaeolithic, and then the discovery of the first stratified Szeletian location in Vedrovice V and the research of our, so far, biggest Mesolithic settlement in Smolín near Pohořelice. From the several sets of publications, probably the most important are the monographs on the Moravian Magdalenian (1960), on Kůlna Cave (1988) and the



From the left: Jan Jelínek, P. I. Boriskovskij and Karel Valoch in the Bishop's Courtyard in 1957. Photo Archive of the Anthropos Institute.



The opening ceremony of the "Treasures of Moravia" exhibition in 2009. Karel Valoch and the Prime Minister Vladimír Špidla. Photo J. Cága, Moravian Museum.

whole overview of Czech Palaeolithic in the *Primeval History of Moravia* (1993) and the volume from the series *Préhistoire d'Europe* (1996).

Karel Valoch spent his whole professional life in the Moravian Museum, which he joined in 1952. In 1986, after reaching 65, his working pattern become more relaxed, but he continued to be at his desk every day until the end of his life at 93 (!) Throughout that time he continued to study the literature, wrote opinions, participated in meetings and international conferences, and visited important European localities. As is the custom in our lands, I never addressed him by his first name, but always by his pedagogical title, in contrast to foreigners, to whom he was always simply "Karel (Charles)". But we are glad to keep at least the basics of our formal traditions, and we looked forward to celebrating his hundredth birthday with him. Unfortunately, this was not to be. It is said that man takes to his grave only that which he gave away. Let this be our solace: that in the case of Karel Valoch, this saying was amply fulfilled.

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