



**Martin Oliva: Těžební krajinou předků. O tajemném podzemí Krumlovského lesa. Mining landscape of Our ancestors. On the mysterious underground of "Krumlovský les".** Brno: Moravian Museum, 2022. 171 Pp. ISBN 9788070285688 (paperback).

The subject of this review is the last of three monographs dedicated to the mining site in the Krumlov Forest (Krumlovský les). After his first work (Oliva 2010), outlining the whole concept of research of the South Moravian locality, there followed a book about local mining activities in a specific period of the Bronze Age (Oliva 2019). The author's latest book on the topic presented here is intended for the wider public, unlike the two previous ones. This intention is evident both from the layout of the content and the chosen publishing format. And some of the presented interpretations are a touch more engaging, perhaps even more bold.

First, I will briefly summarize the basic outlines of long-term research into prehistoric mining in the Krumlov Forest. It began in 1994 and ended after twenty-seven research seasons. The area was gradually divided into nine separate mining districts (I–IX). As I said, the author is targeting a wider readership this time. This corresponds to the structuring of the book, which proceeds in a wide scope from the tradition of archaeological research in the Krumlov Forest region, through the development of knowledge and terminology of the mined raw material to its geology and geomorphology. Only then does the perspective narrow to the mining areas themselves and proceed in detail through individual chronological sections. Of the first five general chapters, I will mention only the basic facts.

From the geomorphological point of view, the Krumlov Forest does not represent a significant dominant feature. The collection of knowledge on the general history of archaeological research in the region focuses primarily on two places. The first is the surroundings of Vedrovice with a long

tradition of research up to the immediate present, the second is the now irretrievably destroyed fortified settlement in Leskoun. The Krumlov Forest itself permanently attracted the attention of archaeology only in the second half of the twentieth century. The mined raw material (chert) is now divided into four varieties (KL I–IV) when classifying archaeological finds. Transitions between some varieties are generally smooth. Directly in the mining districts KL I predominates, in the wider area then KL II. The dynamics of raw material distribution across prehistory represents one of the pillars of Martin Oliva's conception of the sacral landscape and I will return to it. The local chert served mainly prehistoric communities in the wider region, but they are also identified in collections that are spatially very remote. Examples include the Mesolithic settlement in Šumava (Kapustka *et al.* 2020), or the unique occurrence in East Bohemian Middle Neolithic ensembles (Burgert 2019: 87–88). As a rule, these are details, but it is also worth mentioning the exceptional situation from Kolin-Štítary (Central Bohemia), where a workshop with a dominant representation of KL II (57% of the 604 analyzed pieces) from the late phase of the Stroked Pottery culture was examined (Stolz *et al.* 2018). A table summarizing radiocarbon data obtained from mining districts documenting local activities throughout prehistoric times is also generally useful.

The merit of the book is the chapter *Mining Landscape in the Flow of Time*, which occupies approximately two-thirds of the content. It chronologically presents the individual periods and the findings associated with them. The descriptive passages are directly followed by interpretations and reflections, so that the following *A few words at the end* only accentuate the basic ideas and illuminate them in a broader European context. Several motifs are worth introducing from this key chapter.

An important part of activities in mining fields is the so-called *obliteration* in

the sense of refilling mining objects. This phenomenon, which we also encounter in other localities of the Old World, is interpreted by Oliva on a symbolic level in accordance with his previous works. In the Krumlov Forest, it was simultaneously accompanied by splitting and re-deposition of excavated chert.

A natural part of the mining landscape of the Krumlov Forest are solitary boulders and rockeries. Oliva also incorporates them into the interpretive scheme of the sacral landscape. Their reflection by prehistoric miners is likely, and the fact that they are found only in Bronze Age mining districts is remarkable to say the least. It correlates with the previously published finding that mining activities there peaked in the Bronze Age.

The starting point of Oliva's concept, as I have already indicated, is the discrepancy between mining and distribution. When asked where the tons of mined chert are, if not in contemporary settlements, he surprisingly answers: mostly at the site of mining. Of course, such behavior is outwith our current economic understanding of mining. The term "sacred work" is thus appropriate. In the view of archaic human communities, it is undoubtedly possible to think in this way, for which the book provides enough more or less suitable analogies. Can Oliva's concept be transferred to other mining sites? To this end, let's look at the results of recent research into the extraction and distribution of Central European marble (Burgert *et al.* 2020, Burgert, Přichystal 2022).

The original assumption was the Bílý Kámen near Sázava (Central Bohemia) represents the main source of raw material for marble bracelets of Stroked Pottery culture and contemporary Rössen culture. The hypothesis has not only confirmed, but it has even turned out that there is only a negligible part of bracelets made of local calcitic marble in the entire discovery corpus. Hence, the considerable mining activity evident to this day, as well as older

finds in the locality, point to an obvious discrepancy between mining and distribution. Of course, one could counter the traditional archaeological formula that we know too little about the local mining site. But would we know so much more in twenty years of focused research? The unanswered questions would just mount up.

Grand theories are no longer in vogue and that is probably what provokes the readers of Oliva's books the most. Suddenly, the disconnect between massive extraction and the subsequent hesitant distribution of raw material makes sense. In fact, we should be concerned about this knowledge, or at least encouraged to seek further reflection. Do we see the same model of behavior in other locations because Oliva finally correctly grasped and described it, or because we are no longer able to formulate an interpretation other than this one? And can the model of the sacral mining landscape be generalized to such an extent? It often takes decades to step out of the shadow of a great explorer and his robust work. Everyone who's ever tried knows all about it. Even Oliva suspects this when he writes at the beginning of the reviewed book that "*with the exception of the author himself, no one has thought through the findings and integrated them into the social context. However, no one criticized the interpretations made [...] Rather than a touchstone for further investigation, they are a boulder, behind which a lot of the unspoken accumulates.*" This is an understandable appeal to the reader and the book offers enough material to think about.

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