

Obituary: Karel Valoch
(April 16, 1920 Brno – February 16, 2013 Brno)

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Doc. PhDr. Karel Valoch, DrSc., the doyen of Moravian archaeology, died at the beginning of 2013 at the age of 92 (Fig. 1). In his long and productive life as a scholar, he influenced a pleiad of European researchers. He was, up until his final days, full of strength and enthusiasm, leaving us ever the more shaken by his sudden parting.



Fig. 1: Karel Valoch on the Třesín Hill (Mladeč Caves) in November 1961.

Owing to his assiduous and industrious nature and personal erudition, and despite the considerable limitations posed by the socialist regime in the then Czechoslovakian Republic, Karel Valoch worked his way up to becoming a leading specialist in Paleolithic and Mesolithic archaeology. It is not only his universally appreciated work as an archaeologist, but also his vast knowledge and activities in the field of interdisciplinary cooperation that belong to the incontestable legacy of this unique scientist and person.

Karel Valoch's career, marked by various strengths, began in a remarkable way. He was born on April 16, 1920 in Brno as Karel Walloch. His father was German and his mother Czech. Unlike his mother, who never learned to speak German, Karel Valoch mastered both languages from his youth, and according to the traditions of the First Republic, he soon added the knowledge of French. In the course of time he learned both Russian and eventually English, as the latter became increasingly more common in the scientific community, and Karel Valoch wished to follow this trend. Owing to his language abilities he was able to study the specialist literature from the whole of Europe, and his publications were often able to convey information from the Slavonic language area to researchers in Western Europe.

Already as a small child he became acquainted with archaeology and the Paleolithic period through his brother-in-law Franz Čupík, an amateur archaeologist. With him, Valoch went for the first "flintstone" expeditions in the surrounding areas of Brno and participated in washing and sorting of artifacts. *"As a child (4 to 5 years old) I frequently came into contact with stone tools, and the family often talked about the activity of my brother-in-law. On New Year's Eve in 1935 my brother [i.e., half-brother Hugo Walloch] took me collecting at the Borky II site, discovered only recently by H. Stika. This was when my collecting activity started, and I continued to apply myself to it intensely [...] roughly until the half of the war years"*. Together they also engaged in secret excavations later on in some of the caves of the Moravian Karst. *"After the New Year in 1936 my brother, together with Stika and me, started to excavate in the Býčí skála Cave; for me this was an initiation into the research of the Paleolithic. We went there almost every Saturday for the night [...]. In one place close to the right-hand wall of the southern hall we undoubtedly captured an intact Magdalenian layer [...]. In the summer of 1937, on my brother's incentive, we started the digs in the Žitného Cave [...] in the summer of 1938 Hugo showed to us (to Vilém Gebauer and myself) the area in front of the Ochozská Cave [...]. When we removed leaves and also moss in places, we collected a handful of artifacts on the surface. Later on we devoted our work to the excavations here [...] nearly all our Sundays until the end of autumn and most of the Sundays of 1939"* (cited and translated from Karel Valoch's personal memoirs, see also Oliva 2013).

In 1937-38 Karel Valoch began visiting the University Library in Brno, where he endeavoured to study all the literature on prehistory then available. But as he himself said, he was eager to *"acquire some material, learn something about it, and contextualise it all"*.

Before long, his persistent amateur interest in archaeology and the Paleolithic led the young Karel Valoch to the foremost researcher on the Moravian Paleolithic, Prof. Karel Absolon, with whom he became acquainted in 1942. Absolon was not only more

1 TV document "Vzkaz Karla Valocha" (R. Špalek, Česká televize 2, 02.11.2011).
<http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10160488386-vzkaz/311294340020005-vzkaz-karla-valocha/>.

than willing to lend specialist literature to the ardent, yet still amateur, student; he also encouraged Valoch to pursue the study of prehistory (Fig. 2). Owing to these contacts, Valoch was able to publish his first accounts and articles in the *Příroda* (*Nature*) magazine published by Absolon. Before his coming of age he created a large collection of lithic artifacts from surface surveys, and later from the assemblages collected by his brothers Karel and Hugo (at that time still Walloch) and Franz Čupík, all becoming a significant part of the collections at the Anthropos Institute, where they remain housed to this day.



Fig. 2: Karel Valoch in October 1943, at the age of 23.

His father retired in 1933, leaving the prospect of studying for the young Valoch out of the question. In 1936 he completed a two-year program at the Academy of Commerce and became a clerk, at first in an insurance company; he later joined a furniture manufacturer, the United Company for Applied Arts (UCAA), where he stayed during the war.

After the war he joined the magazine *Rovnost* (Equality) as an accountant². He spent the *Totaleinsatz* (in the last 2 and a half years of the war) as a clerk at the UCAA. He was not sent to Germany, but was posted in Velké Karlovice in the Beskydy Mountains, where he counted trees in relative peace³. During the war, when he was obliged to report to the German authorities, he opted for the Czech version of his surname, i.e., Valoch. The end of the war left quite a mark on his family: his brother-in-law was interned; his niece and his sister were sent to Vienna. One of the brothers lived in Slovakia, and another was held in captivity in the north of Europe. The family virtually came apart after the war. His father was a registered German, but due to an illness he was not forced to resettle. He died one year after the war, reportedly from missing his scattered children⁴.

In 1945 Karel Valoch married, dividing his time from then on between family and work. In a radio report he once gave, he spoke fondly of his wife, explaining how grateful he was that she made it possible for him to devote himself entirely to his hobby as a profession, although it was not always easy, let alone well paid.

Valoch's entire professional career was closely connected with the Moravian Museum and the Anthropos Institute that he joined on December 1, 1952 (Oliva 2012), and to which he remained faithful to his last days. When Karel Valoch began working in the Museum, he first had to pass school examinations and graduate from the university, since up until that time he had only worked as a clerk (1936-1952). He successfully completed both and was able to apply himself wholly to the study of the Pleistocene. Valoch carried out the first completely professional interdisciplinary research in the surrounding areas of Brno and in the caves of the Moravian Karst, most often together with his colleague R. Musil (currently the Emeritus Professor at the Faculty of Science MU in Brno). Starting in 1953 they systematically documented loess profiles in the Brno and Vyškov regions (1953-1954), thereby participating in the codification of the chronostratigraphic development of the Pleistocene in Central Europe (Musil et al. 1956). Among their notable achievements during this period were test pits and excavations carried out at the Paleolithic station in Rozdrojovice (1954) and in the Pod hradem Cave in the Pustý žleb Valley (1956-1958), where they managed to uncover a unique stratigraphic situation including a large quantity of cave bear bones and lithic artifacts in three different horizons (Valoch 1965a).

Valoch independently explored the Žitného Cave near Křtiny in the Moravian Karst (1955), conducted test pits at the Paleolithic station in Neslovice (1957), and systematically explored the Mesolithic settlement near Smolín from 1959 to 1960 (Valoch 1978). The latter has for some time been considered the most significant site of the Mesolithic period in Moravia. In the urban landscapes of Brno, Karel Valoch directed priceless rescue excavations on important sites in Brno-Bohunice, in Kejbaly (1969-1972), and on Vídeňská Street (then Koněvova Str.; 1973). Later, he focused on the area of the Krumlovský les. In 1974-1976 he dug reconnaissance geological and stratigraphic trenches at the Kupařovice I and Vedrovice II sites.

2 Radio programme of memoir series of "Osudy" (R. Venclová), ČRo 3 Vltava, 3 chapters (04.03.-06.03.2013) http://hledani.rozhlas.cz/iradio/?defaultNavigation=&query=Karel+Valoch&from=&to=&porad=839x_Osudy.

3 *ibid.*; see also Oliva 2013.

4 *ibid.*

One of his most notable accomplishments, however, was the broadly conceived interdisciplinary research project carried out at Kůlna Cave near Sloup in the Moravian Karst from 1961 to 1976 (Valoch 1988), the results of which becoming a major influence on both his thinking and his publications for the rest of his life (Valoch et al. 2011). As he himself reminisced, Kůlna was a matter of the heart (Fig. 3). There he succeeded in discovering a unique sequence of Pleistocene layers that capture the development of the Paleolithic industries from the end of the Saalian to the beginning of the Holocene. Rich assemblages of Middle, Upper and Late Paleolithic industries and animal skeletal remains still present key material for the study of the behavior of primeval populations in Europe. On the grounds of these finds Valoch used the term Taubachian for the small-shaped industries of the last interglacial (Valoch 1984), and was the first to define the term Epi-Magdalenian for the Czech lands based on the Late Paleolithic industries from layers 3 and 4 (Valoch et al. 1969). He was perhaps most scientifically thrilled by the discovery of Neandertal remains (occipital bone, maxilla and milk teeth) in the Micoquian layer 7a.



Fig. 3: Karel Valoch sitting in Kůlna cave, signing his most recent monograph on that site (Valoch et al. 2011), March 2012. Photo: I. Mrázková.

The material collected during the excavations in Kůlna Cave would suffice to fill most professional careers, but his thirst for knowledge led Karel Valoch to other projects. In 1980 he carried out test pits (jointly with L. Seitl) at the Paleolithic station in Jarošov,

and in 1982 he explored a part of an outstanding Bohunician site, Stránská skála III-1 (Valoch et al. 2000, 2009). In 1982-1983 he unearthed the area of the Szeletian station in Vedrovice V that has for a long time been the only large stratified Szeletian locality in Moravia (Valoch 1993a), belonging still to the most important places of discovery from the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic. He attempted another such project together with L. Seitl in Maršovice II in 1985.

Although retiring in 1986, he continued both his field research and theoretical endeavors with the same zeal as ever. His excavations at the Lower Paleolithic site Stránská skála I in 1996-1998 were funded by a National Geographic Society grant as one of the first in the Czech Republic (Valoch 2003, 2006). Together with Petr Neruda and Zdeňka Nerudová, he actively participated in researching the small cave Puklinová in Říčky in 2001-2002, in the rescue excavations in the Balcarka cave complex in 2002 and 2007, and in test digs in front of the entrance into Výпустek Cave in 2010.

K. Valoch's professional career is associated with the Anthropos Institute as his academic work is with the Department of Archaeology of the Faculty of Arts of the Masaryk University in Brno. In 1961 he defended his dissertation entitled "The Šipka and the Čertova díra Caves in Moravia" (Valoch 1965b). In 1991 he obtained the title of Doctor of the Historic Sciences (DrSc.) for his monograph on the research at Kůlna Cave (Valoch 1988). In 1999 he was appointed senior lecturer (doc.) in prehistoric archaeology; his study "In the Glow of the Fires of the Ancient Hunters" on the Paleolithic settlement in Moravia was published in the *Prehistory of Moravia* (Valoch 1993b) and accepted as his higher doctorate thesis. At the Department of Archaeology in Brno he delivered lectures in the Paleolithic for many years (1965-1986); one of his students, doc. Martin Oliva, is now the current head of the Anthropos Institute.

His area of study was so dear to him that he kept up with the most current of modern trends. He soon appreciated the benefits of computer technology, and was one of the first to send articles in electronic form. Email messaging became so common in his work that he would become slightly indignant when he found out some of his colleagues were not using electronic mail. He also adapted to the modern method of financing excavations, and between 1996 and 2010 gradually obtained and successfully completed six grant projects.

One of his significant achievements was presenting the work from Kůlna Cave, for which he and L. Seitl received financial support from the Henry Ford European Conservation Awards. A high point of his exhibition activities was his presentation on art from the European Paleolithic successfully carried out due to his foreign contacts in the Anthropos Pavilion of the Moravian Museum in 2009.

Karel Valoch's list of publications comes close to 400 titles as of 2013. One of the goals of his life has been: "... to publish everything to this day straight away [...], so that the scope of our knowledge becomes improved and enhanced"⁵. From the point of view of general impact, his publication on the Paleolithic in the former Czechoslovakia entitled *Le Paléolithique en Tchèque et en Slovaquie* (Valoch 1996), his synthesis of the European Middle Paleolithic published in the comprehensive *History of Humanity* by UNESCO (Valoch 1994) or his synthesis of the Moravian Magdalenian (Valoch 1960, 2001) are

⁵ see footnote 1.

considered some of his most important work. Only one thing is missing in his bibliography, namely his autobiography. Some endearing stories, both from his professional and private life, were unfortunately never captured in a more enduring manner than what we maintain in our memories. About two years ago I (Z. N.) asked him whether he was preparing to write his memoirs. The reply came indignantly: “*Now, Zdeňka, you’re not trying to inter me, are you?*” Regretfully we are left without his valuable personal insights into momentous events in the political development of pre-war Europe, of various details from his excavations, and to a less serious degree, of some of the happier recollections of a productive scholar. Recently we found a thin notebook in his papers; as a student he used to paste interesting clippings in it on prehistory that he would find in magazines. At that moment I remembered K. Valoch once telling us that he “*lent it to the old man Absolon, who denied having it and never gave it back*”. Valoch found the notebook years later among Absolon’s papers in the 1990s. And who could be a more competent person to describe the old photographs from the past! In our digital age his memory was unbelievable. He recognized almost everyone, and scarcely any field situation was unknown to him.

His unceasing work was publicly appreciated up until the end of his life. He obtained the 2011 South Moravian Region Award for his achievements in archaeology, and the City of Brno Award in the sphere of historic sciences (archaeology). He was always modest and never had a special liking for glory or fame, since it only diverted him from his work. On the day following the celebration of his 90th birthday, he invited all the



Fig. 4: Visit to the Biśnik Cave in Poland in 2008. From left to right: Krzysztof Cyrek, Zdeňka Nerudová, Petr Neruda, Karel Valoch, Jan M. Burdukiewicz, Martin Oliva. Photo: P. Neruda.

women of the Anthropos Institute to his study and handed out to them the flowers he was given the day before. And yet he knew how to appreciate even such a specific gift as his personal website⁶, a present from his colleagues on the occasion of his 90th birthday.

A side of history is lost to us with the passing of Karel Valoch: he was a living memory of many excavations, an authority not only on numerous Paleolithic sites but all of the important Pleistocene profiles in Europe as well (Fig. 4). He almost never missed an opportunity to visit sites, even repeatedly, especially when new excavations were under way (Fig. 5). With nearly utmost regularity he paid visits to archaeological excavations in neighbouring Austria, never hesitating to fly even to distant countries when the opportunity presented itself. It was always interesting to listen to him describe the situation in Les Eyzies at the time of his first visit to France in 1964, when François Bordes himself acquainted him with the local sites. The number of publications he managed to study in depth when he was building a new library in the Anthropos Institute was fascinating. His notes can be found in every older publication.



Fig. 5: Karel Valoch and Dietrich Mania at the site of Bilzingsleben in Thuringia (Germany) in 2007. Photo: P. Neruda.

⁶ <http://puvodni.mzm.cz/valoch/index.html> (10.09.2013).

He was also a person who could show great sympathy for people. As S. Vencl, his friend, remembers: “*In case a conflict broke out near him, Karel Valoch would try to keep communication open, never abandoning attempts at reaching an agreement, since he believed that any endeavour to attain knowledge takes precedence over personal animosities that are detrimental to the future of the field ...*” (Vencl 2013). He was always encouraging his younger colleagues. He willingly accepted new and even modern stimuli that motivated him for further work. Moreover, he occasionally liked to sit with his colleagues or friends over a glass of good wine and reminisce or discuss new theories.

In 2011 he was finally persuaded to participate in a documentary for Czech Television. Although the documentary is not long, it captured the foundations of his ideas on human evolution within the context of the development of landscapes. He was most sincere in his closing remarks to future generations: “*Let us behave to one another like Neandertals*”.⁷ Those of us who knew him would agree that these words were in some ways his life’s credo.

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⁷ see footnote 1.

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