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## News and Views

# Some parting words for Jan Jelínek (February 6, 1926–October 3, 2004)

# David W. Frayer

Department of Anthropology, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045, USA Received 27 March 2005; accepted 21 April 2005

Jan Jelinek was built in the mold of a Renaissance scholar (Fig. 1). He spoke and wrote in multiple languages, was well-versed in various aspects of contemporary and prehistoric anthropology, contributed important descriptions and analyses of Central European Neandertal and Upper Paleolithic fossils, made documentaries of his ethnographic research in Australia, collected images of rock art in Australia and North Africa, was an accomplished wood carver and painter, a gifted museum designer, an avid bird watcher and rock climber, and a talented baritone singer of Moravian folk songs. He was full of energy and enthusiasm about life and accomplished so many things in one lifetime, it is hard to imagine that only one person was responsible. Even in his final days, racked with pain from the complications of multiple myeloma, he was happy to be alive and worked daily on his last book.

His first publication in 1949 focused on decorative art from New Guinea and his forthcoming book is a massive compendium on living structures, titled *A House to Live in*. In between he published descriptions and analyses on Czech

Middle and Upper Paleolithic fossils (Dolní Věstonice, Kůlna, Mladeč, Ochoz, Šipka), on the relationship between Neandertals and later *Homo sapiens*, on rock and painted art in the Sahara, North America, and Australia, on portable art in the Upper Paleolithic, on Moravian and Slovakian Neolithic skeletal material, on Bronze Age corpse processing and cannibalism, on trephinations in Czech prehistory, on stone tool variation in the Moravian Gravettian, and on museums, museology, and ways of effectively demonstrating anthropology and prehistory to the public.

His theoretical contributions focused especially on morphological variation in fossil populations and its relevance to questions of evolutionary relationships and issues involving speciation and species identification in *Homo*. Overall, he has more than 250 mostly single-authored publications, not counting the 150+ article and book reviews he contributed to *Anthropologie*. He published or edited ten monographs in the *Anthropos* series and his *Great Pictorial Atlas of Prehistoric Man*, first issued in German in 1972, has been translated into 14 languages. From these publications one gets the full sense of Jelínek's eclectic interests and sophisticated competence. (An abbreviated list of his publications is included

E-mail address: frayer@ku.edu

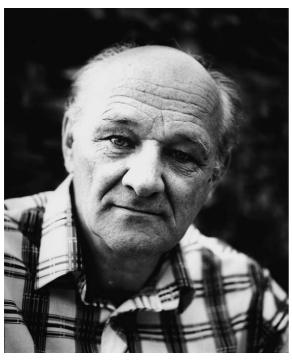


Fig. 1. Jan Jelínek ca. 2002.

here; for a full account, other photographs and information about his life, contact frayer@ku.edu).

Jelínek studied with K. Absolon and V. Suk in Brno and joined the Moravian Museum as a researcher in 1947; by 1958 he was the director. Recognizing the need for scholarly breadth in prehistoric research, in the anthropology division (Anthropos), he hired Karel Valoch, who at the time was an enthusiastic amateur Paleolithic archaeologist working in a bank, then Rudolf Musil, a zooarchaeologist. With this multidisciplinary team, a life-long cooperation and friendship was set in place among these scholars. The three conducted excavations at various Paleolithic sites including Mladeč, Předmostí, Stranska Skalá and, most extensively, Kůlna. Given the time and place, this was a new, broad-scale approach for conducting Paleolithic research and the Moravian Museum was recognized as one of the premier research institutions in Europe. Musil eventually moved to the university, but always maintained a close relationship with Jelinek, Valoch and Anthropos. Shortly after becoming the director of the Moravian Museum, Jelinek re-started *Anthropologie*, which had been published in Prague before WWII and initiated a new monographic series (*Anthropos*). Besides their scholarly contributions, these series were used to acquire foreign journals and books in the cash-strapped socialist economy of Czechoslovakia. Both journals continue today and, especially, *Anthropologie* is under-appreciated with its many quality articles.

In the early 1960s, Jelinek instituted a museology degree at Masaryk University in Brno, one of the first in Europe. He also was involved in the formation and enhancement of other university departments and, like the divisions in the Moravian Museum, many people at Masaryk claim Jelinek as a major influence on their development and success. In the early 1970s, he became involved with UNESCO's International Council of Museums (ICOM), serving on various committees and then as president from 1971–1977. His creative ability in this area was reflected in museum design and his skill resulted in the prescient Anthropos Pavilion in Brno. Opened in 1962 this exposition set the standard for innovative ways of presenting prehistoric and ethnographic topics to the public. Eschewing the usual stolid glass case, textual presentation, Jelínek designed an exhibit with flair and dynamism. At the entrance he presented two cave bear skeletons from Kůlna in an upright fighting pose, a huge full-size mammoth trumpeting at the visitors, walk-around models of Paleolithic living structures, numerous original oil paintings by Z. Burian, and other open exhibits. The Anthropos Pavilion was the first new government building constructed after WWII in Brno and, although the Czech economy was not strong, Jelínek was able to convince the state to commit funds for the project. Jelínek translated his passion for prehistory into a vibrant, informative exposition that breathed life into the past. Special exhibits allowed him to display some of the treasures he and others in the Moravian Museum collected during fieldwork around the world. Museologists today can still learn from his style of presentation, which persists in an ever-dynamic Anthropos Pavilion.

Things changed for Jelinek in 1968. After the Prague Spring, he was falsely accused as a conspirator in the failed revolution. The previous year he purchased two shotguns in Brno to hunt bush meat on his 1967 Australian rock art expedition (Fig. 2). Because he was running low on fuel and food, he sold the guns in Australia to complete the expedition. While he had records of the sale, in Brno these were not "acceptable" receipts. A "colleague" charged him with corruption and suspicious politocrats arrested him on the assumption he had passed the weapons on to the resistance. After days of interrogation, his inquisitors produced a "confession" of his complicity in the Prague revolution and overthrow of the government. Telling the story years later, he laughed at the stupidity of those people thinking shotguns would be effective against the Soviet tanks. Jelinek refused to sign any confession and was eventually released, in part due to the strong lobbying by his wife, Květa. Yet, he was dismissed from his position as director of the Moravian Museum, a position he never reassumed.

Despite these troubles, Jelínek's spirit was never broken; he was never idle. For a time he re-located to a mill he owned in the Moravian karst country and worked on manuscripts and wood-carving projects. Anticipating the eventual house he and Květa would build overlooking a lake west of Brno, he constructed tables, cabinets, bookshelves, wall decor and even complete staircases. Much of this was done in a NW coast, Native American theme,



Fig. 2. Jan Jelínek and George Chaloupka in Arnhem Land 1967.

reflecting his love and respect of North American cultures. After nearly two years, he returned to the Moravian Museum as head of Anthropos and resumed with vigor and enthusiasm his research activities. He was not condemnatory of his inquisitors nor of those who turned him out of his job. He mostly felt betrayed by the Party, which he had helped form as a member of the resistance in WWII.

I first met Jan in 1974 during a trip to Brno, gathering data for my dissertation. I had been greatly influenced by his 1969 Current Anthropology article ("Neanderthal man and Homo sapiens in Central and Eastern Europe") and could hardly wait to talk to him. I was not disappointed. Jelínek had crystal blue eyes and I remember how they twinkled as we discussed our mutual interests in the Moravian fossils. Neandertals and evolutionary questions of their relationships. I visited Jan many times and it was never without some event. Those were the days when socialism ruled Czechoslovakia and it was always an ordeal getting there and getting back out. On my first visit I had purchased a one-way bus ticket from Vienna. When my work was done, he volunteered to help me buy a return ticket. I remember him arguing with the person on the small-windowed ticket office, shaking his head, making another point, laughing, going back to try a second time, then telling me that even if it was a Czech bus and even if I was in Czechoslovakia, I could not pay with Czech crowns, only Austrian shillings or some other Western currency. He just shook his head and laughed and muttered "Incredible. What a country." On another trip he rushed down to see me in the bone room and informed me that there was "this woman author from America" who wanted to talk to him about the Moravian Gravettian sites. Did I know her? It was Jean Auel. He wondered what to do, but accepted the call. After some time (he was worried about her cost for the call), he said to Auel in a point of frustration over trying to describe the Dolní Věstonice material, "Well, to understand all this, you should come to see the sites for yourself." To his utter amazement, she called his bluff and said she could be there in a couple of weeks. Jelinek told me the story and, reflecting on the US, said, "Incredible.

What a country." This trip forged an important relationship with Auel. Jelínek's passion for the Moravian Aurignacian and Gravettian sites and his ability to weave together paleoanthropological information greatly influenced her fourth book, *Plains of Passage*. Later, in gratitude, she funded a trip to the US for the Jelíneks, following an itinerary of their choice (Fig. 3).

From earliest publications Jelínek stressed the importance of variation in human populations, whether recent or fossil, and how this impacted evolutionary questions. In his description of the late Neandertal maxillary fragment from Kůlna, Jelínek noted

[From] the find from Kůlna ... it is scarcely possible to consider populations older than Upper Paleolithic as morphologically homogeneous, represented by one or several morphologically exact and definable types. On the contrary ... the facts would agree more closely with the opinion that these populations had a considerable morphological variability and that, at least outside Western Europe, they provided, in a broad base, the possibility for a gradual transformation to a later primitive types of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. (1966, 702)

This quote reflects several constant themes in Jelinek's publications and perspectives on the human fossil record — the importance of variation, the perils of a narrow typological approach, and the likelihood of a Neandertal contribution to the formation of Upper Paleolithic Europeans. He re-iterated these points in his 1969 paper about the Central European Upper Paleolithic describing within and between group morphological variation at Moravian sites like Předmostí, Mladeč and Dolní Věstonice.

A fourth theme was expressed in several publications, like "Homo erectus or Homo sapiens?" Here, Jelinek argued that common morphological and cultural patterns across the Old World suggested that early migration out of Africa was by Homo sapiens, not Homo erectus. In 1980 he queried

Why, when all anthropologists unanimously consider all living populations of man as one



Fig. 3. Jan Jelínek and his wife Květa in Lawrence, Kansas 1992.

species, the existing morphological differences that we can see in the Middle Pleistocene hominids should be evolutionarily and biologically important enough to be regarded as indicating a different species? Have we any solid scientific grounds on which to consider Middle Pleistocene European finds, with earlier morphological cranial changes as *Homo sapiens* and the extra-European finds evolving in the same direction ... as Homo erectus? The whole mode and results of the hominid evolutionary process show that there are not, and in the past could not have been differences at the species level, but only at the subspecies level. ... The logical consequence ... lead[s] us to consider the different African, European and Asian finds of Homo erectus type as Homo sapiens erectus. (427-428).

Today, these are not popular assessments with paleoanthropological consensus tending toward particularizing small details of anatomy into species-marking designators, dissecting *Homo* into multiple species and rejecting Neandertals from European ancestry. Like another famous Brno scientist, maybe Jelínek's "time will come" too.

Jan Jelinek was full of intellect, curiosity, energy, and passion for science, art and life. His life's maxim was *Per aspera ad astra* — "over obstacles to the stars" and, despite the many barriers that confronted him, he always reached ahead, even beyond the stars. He was an extraordinary person, enriching the world and people around him and will always have a place in the history of anthropology, paleoanthropology and museology.

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