

Doc. RNDr. PAVEL BLÁHA, CSc.

20 November 1943 – 24 September 2019

The run of the south bohemian Sinuhe is over

Lucie Stříbrná

On 24 November 2019 our friend, colleague and important anthropologist RNDr. Pavel Bláha CSc. passed away.

He used to say: *“Beware of the relativity of time that is given to you...”* Towards the end of his life he tried to live this wisdom intensely. He would compare his life to a film reel, where some pictures are black and white, some are coloured, some are blank. The film of his fate started to unwind on 20 November 1943 when he was born in Červený Újezdec in South Bohemia. Sometimes the pace of the film was steady, sometimes furious, sometimes sauntering. One of his favourite metaphors referred to the royal skull opener, the main character of the 15-book novel about the life of a doctor called Sinuhe the Egyptian written by Mika Waltari. He identified with the main hero and often cited from the novel. When you open the book, after reading a few lines you will understand how Pavel Bláha felt, what he thought about the world, what he saw, and why he tried with frank openness to straighten distorted views and point to untruth, injustice, ignorance, and incompetence. He was not always understood by his environment. He had many friends but there were also people who envied him his organizational talent, his abilities, tenacity, and directness.

At this point, we should make an astrological-poetic reference to his multi-layered personality. Pavel Bláha was born under the sign of Scorpio. Because he loved poetry and art, in 2015 he published a collection of poems at its own expense entitled *“The Run of Life”*.

Although it was not always obvious at first glance, his personality showed strong and deep emotions. On the inside he was an amiable and sympathetic boy, who never lost curiosity and sense of adventure. He liked very much to get to the bottom of things, his rich experience and wealth of knowledge helped him decipher the most difficult organizational or scientific problems. He has able to quickly distinguish the important from the unimportant. He loved travelling. He visited a number of countries and often thought back to some of his trips, for example Bilbao became his favourite after several visits. He never forgot to bring small gifts or souvenirs for those he loved. He had excellent observation skills and noted down what he experienced on his journeys. In 2016, at his own expense he published his observations as a retrospective curriculum entitled *“The Run of the Life of South Bohemian Sinuhe”*.

Some of his foreign destinations included the following: Vancouver, Aschauhof (several visits to Dr. M. Hermanussen), Verona, Dublin, Sao Paulo, Manchester, Jena, Lisbon, Paris or Budapest and more. In his native country he visited countless towns and villages on business trips with his work teams. His group of young anthropologists was specially established for data collection purposes and mostly included students working on their diploma theses or dissertations. As far as measurement methodology is concerned, he required a systematic approach, discipline and diligence. Those who had accepted his attitudes and listened to his instructions learned a lot. He was a strict but excellent teacher. The same applied to his anthropometry seminars and lectures. He required silence in the lecture hall.

He hated unpunctuality and students talking back. Everything had a purpose leading towards mastery of the learning content and measurement methodology. Despite the fact that Pavel Bláha was a demanding student, he was a good advisor, a helper and in a way a friend.

Using his enormous organizational talent he became the organizer of the National Anthropological Research after he had taken over the baton from his predecessor and mentor Professor V. Fetter. This event was held every ten years. In 1991, the 5th National Anthropological Research took place followed by the 6th National Anthropological Research in 2001. It is also necessary to recall the anthropological research conducted by Pavel Bláha in the Czechoslovak Spartakiads in 1980 and 1985. The carrying out of these extensive anthropological researches on a large population sample was and still is of great importance for anthropologists because the results of anthropometric measurements construction of reference standards of our population. Unfortunately, this was the last research on this scale despite repeated efforts and grant applications. These as well as many other studies involved a large number of institutions and faculties from the Czech Republic with many teachers-anthropologists and their students. Throughout his life, he supervised 15 grants that supported research studies like these.

Pavel Bláha was a long-term chairman of the *“Czech Anthropological Society”*, member of the editorial board of *“Pohybové ústrojí”* magazine, member of the organising committee of 5th Czechoslovak anthropological congresses and on three occasions the president of these congresses with an international reach: IVth International Congress of Aleš Hrdlička *“World Anthropology at the Turn of the Centuries”* August 31 – September 4, 1999 Prague and Humpolec, *“International Anthropological Congress „Anthropology and Society“*, May 22–24, 2003 Prague – Humpolec and Vth International Anthropological Congress of Aleš Hrdlička *„Quo vadis homo...societas humana?“*, 2nd – 5th September 2009 Prague – Humpolec.

He published numerous papers and 19 monographs, which should be on the bookshelf of every modern anthropologist. Doc. Bláha was the architect of an anthropological programme called ANTROPO (1978), which was specially designed for anthropometric purposes. Over the decades, the programme has processed a vast amount of measured data. These data have been used in publications, papers, diploma theses, dissertations, or habilitations. This programme with clear statistical features and simple graphic managed to process the large data measured during the 1980 and 1985 Czechoslovak Spartakiad.

Fiddly work, checking data at night, preparation of documents, compiling of tables resulted in a loss of many relationships and numerous health problems. Even so Pavel Bláha continued to work, organise and plan for the future. His relentless commitment and infectious ability to excite the young people around him and to persuade them that physical anthropology makes sense and that it affects many other domains resulted in a large body of measurement results that has been for decades used as a reference for comparison with later research studies of a similar focus. The extensiveness and depth of his research was unprecedented at that time. He followed anthropological giants such as Prof. J. Matiegka, Dr. A. Hrdlička, Dr. J. Malý or Prof. V. Fetter, who he used to mention very often. He was honoured to sit behind Fetter’s spacious wooden table, use his cabinets with reverence, or place boxes with measurement results on Fetter’s sofa. There was always a model of human skeleton in his office. He used to call it “darling”.

After he graduated from a grammar school in Písek, he moved to Prague and enrolled in the Faculty of Science at Charles University. He studies biology and chemistry, but chemistry never became the love of his life. He liked to remember his study years in Na Slupí university residence in semi-wooden houses.

At that time, friendships for life were formed. His close friends were the botanist Stanislav Kučera or Josef Pelikán.

Pavel Bláha was fascinated by biology and especially anthropology. Sometimes he talked about his Master's diploma thesis, which was based on work in Nížkov u Přibyslavi Ossuary. He used to tell a funny story about preschool children from the village asking him about the ears of the skulls that he had measured. It was not easy, he had to remove dust from the skulls, handle them with respect and carefully return them to their original place. He was born with the Sun in Scorpio, which entails the theme of death, bones, regeneration, and transformation. This mystical sign is also associated with detective activity, investigation, and inquiry.

Pavel Bláha worked as an anthropologist at the Institute of Forensic Science of the Ministry of the Interior in 1968–1974 and then since 1976 at the Regional Sports Center, later under the name of the Institute of Sports Medicine in the field of top sports in Prague. After the dissolution of the Institute of Sports Medicine in 1998 he started to work at the Department of Anthropology and Human Genetics, Faculty of Science, Prague. At the end of his professional career he worked at the Palstra College of Physical Education and Sport in Prague.

Despite this lifelong professional focus, he was an artistic and creative personality and was able to express himself authentically in any group of people. He was an excellent host. At the Department of Anthropology he held meetings for colleagues and friends and always prepared something delicious to eat. Despite his liking for meat, he never forgot a large portion of fresh vegetables. He liked beer and called it the physiological drink. He appreciated its quality and enjoyed it. He was able to appreciate quality in general, acknowledged outstanding personalities, was selfless, provided care and attention to people who deserved it.

He played sports all his life. His favourite sport was tennis and he played regularly. Not only sport but also women had an important role in his life. Just like Sinuhe the Egyptian, in every woman who caught his attention he searched for "Minea", his soul mate and inspiration. But as he says in his memoirs aptly entitled "*The life of the South Bohemian Sinhue*" there were only few women that truly understood his spiritual and philosophical values. Mutual misunderstanding was present in many of his relationships. Maybe for this reason he very much appreciated warm-hearted and helpful conduct in his profession which he considered a mission. He liked to go to Uterus, his favourite pub at the corner of Lípová street in Prague, which was the meeting place of students from various faculties. There they used to have somewhat less formal and rather friendly relations. He had a true desire for a meaningful and fulfilled life. Although it was not visible on the outside, he was a great idealist and somewhere deep inside his soul believed in happy endings. His life was eventful, sometimes dramatic, imbued with authentic experiencing of reality, desire for understanding, acknowledgement, sharing in joy and humour, but also failure, disappointment, and injustice.

Pavel Bláha will be missed forever. His thoughts, wisdom and ideas will only remain in his Memoirs and Collection of poems that he left. His scientific legacy will forever be immortalized in the form of tables and graphs of his unique anthropological research.

In conclusion, let me quote from his collection of poems "*Run of Life*" (2015) of thoughts entitled "*Chess and the theory of life, especially circles*":

"Don't be afraid, the same journey awaits you, and others will follow you.

Thorny, full of pain and dying, an urgent appeal delivered, don't hesitate and go!

The heavenly carriage to the Universe is waiting – they say death is not evil, it is the dying that is hard, perhaps you will be lucky to part without waving but with a warm feeling of remembrances of the previously departed in your heart.

Please do not hurry with the unreturnable journey to keep the warm memories of them for long.

High in the Universe, their gravitational force is vain.

There they transformed in a respected but unsubstantial essence..."

Honour his memory!

October 20, 2019

Lucie Stříbrná
with deep respect
his Ph.D. student and colleague

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