

## MAREK ZVELEBIL 1952-2011

Professor Marek Zvelebil was born in Prague, where he lived until his family fled the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. After a couple of years in the United States, he returned Europe to do a BA in Sheffield. He continued his studies in Cambridge, doing a PhD with Graham Clark. Having finished his PhD in 1981, Marek returned and remained in Sheffield for the rest of his career, but there were also numerous visiting episodes to European and North American universities. Marek Zvelebil was an internationally known scholar, and we will be reading about his achievements in archaeological journals in the coming months. For this reason, here I will try to bring out some details of Marek's career that had to do with Finland. Something that is not likely to be covered in other journals.

Marek was assigned Finland as his PhD study area by his supervisor, Professor Graham Clark. On a visit to Finland in 1972, Clark had become interested and intrigued by the long-lived existence of pot-making foragers in Finland –our Comb ware culture. Since this culture formed part of a vast technocomplex extending from Finland to the Urals, Clark felt that Marek's ability to read Russian made him ideal for the task. What he forgot, however, was that Marek had not a clue about Finnish and that he could never visit the USSR. Finland was in fact uncomfortably close to the Soviet Union for Marek. He accepted nevertheless the task given to him the Master of Peterhouse, but he always made sure not to travel to Finland by air lest the flight be diverted to an East Bloc country in bad weather.

I do not remember exactly when we met. It must have been some time in 1975 or in the spring of 1976. I do recall seen him around at the National Board of Antiquities a few days before we were formally introduced by the late Professor Meinander. With the introduction went also a suggestion that I should help Marek with his PhD quest in Finland, and indeed I did my best to familiarize him with the intricacies of Finnish Quaternary Geology and Archaeology.



Photo: Marketa Zvelebil

Marek was a likable fellow and we soon discovered we had some things in common: exile in the US at the age of 16 and a weakness for good food and wine. It was easy to become friends. I suggested he would come with us to Retulansaari, where the Helsinki University Archaeology department would be conducting fieldwork in the summer of 1976. Marek wanted to conduct site catchment analysis at some sites nearby and he could conveniently use our excavation headquarters as base for his own work. I used to drive him to a site early in the morning and Marek would return to Retulansaari at the end of the day, rather exhausted from having walked 20–30 km. He would usually bring back a few “artefacts” surface-collected during the day, but these always turned to be natural stones. We would laugh as I tried to explain to him why they were not human-made.

It was a beautiful summer and we had a nice group of archaeology students at Retulansaari. There were some fun parties, which Marek would remember fondly whenever we met at congresses in later years. There was a particular episode he used to enjoy. A summer dance was taking place in nearby Hämeenlinna and most of the crew had gone there. Only three lady students and Marek and I had stayed behind. We had bought good food and planned to stay “home” and enjoy a nice quiet exotic supper by Marek and me. We had just begun cooking when two young men that knew one of the students showed up. After a brief introduction Marek and I retreated back to the kitchen, leaving them in the living room. The visitors, who were staying at a summer cabin some 50 km away, had driven up to see if the girl(s) would accompany them to the dance. They were told that thanks, but that they had already made plans to stay home for our grand supper. They boys were hurt and annoyed, and as they left I heard one say: “So you prefer to stay here with those dark guys from the south?” We all had a good laugh about this remark that evening, and every time Marek and I met at a congress he would say “The old darkies from the south meet again” and burst in his loud familiar laugh.

Marek paid us a brief visit at Retulansaari in the summer of 1977. This time he proudly arrived in the red Skoda he would use in the rest of his fieldwork in Finland. He also had in the back seat the famous Cambridge froth flotation machine, which at the time seemed like something out of Star Wars. We did not meet much for several years after that. In 1978 I was working in western Finland and Marek was doing his catchment analyses at sites in the eastern part of the country with the help of our common friend Heikki Matiskainen. Then I left to Canada and did not hear much from Marek until winter 1981. He wrote me to Canada asking if I would be interested in participating in a research project he and David Rindos were planning to do in Finland. After my positive answer, Marek sent me a draft of the proposal. It was an interesting project dealing with human-animal relationship and the adoption of farming and herding in boreal Finland. I did not hear about it anymore, but I later learnt that the project proposal had collapsed due to the opposition of Finland’s National Board of Antiquity. On my return to Finland in the fall of 1982, I heard that some Finnish archaeologists had been very irritated by the prospect of foreign

researchers coming to Finland and “showing them how to do archaeology”. Those were the days.

During the 1970s Marek Zvelebil spent much time and effort doing fieldwork and trying to understand Finnish Prehistory. The result was a 471-page PhD thesis, *From forager to farmer in the boreal zone. Reconstructing economic patterns through catchment analysis in prehistoric Finland* (published in Bar International Series 115 in 1981). The work is typically a product of the processual archaeology of the 1970s: economy, productivity, carrying capacity and, especially, site catchment analysis, a child of the Cambridge Paleoeconomy School. This method had been developed for the more easily walked dry open Mediterranean/Near East environments, not the boggy and wooded terrain of the boreal zone. Neither this nor the difficult Finnish language did deter Marek, however. The thesis, despite the heavy processual approach and a few language-induced misunderstandings, is rich in information/ideas about Finland’s prehistoric settlement and environments. It is unfortunate that it is seldom consulted by Finnish archaeologists. As far as I know, Marek never sought to work in Finland again after the aborted attempt of the early 1980s. He nevertheless followed Finland’s archaeological research and often mentioned Finland in his writings. He was particularly interested when I gave a lecture on the Jätinkirkko enclosures in Sheffield a few years ago.

Marek was a good friend. We had not only shared field situations in the early days of our careers, we had also experienced somewhat similar pasts. After 16 years of learning to live within our own respective cultures, we were suddenly thrown into a very different cultural environment. The old cultural programming stopped and we were forced to adapt to a new one. The event was traumatic, even if at the time it did not feel so. We adapted to the new exiting new culture around us thanks to our youth. However, as we grew older the old truncated program, returned to haunt us now and then. I believe that Marek had more difficulties than I in coping with the old ghosts.

Marek Zvelebil’s untimely death leaves a vacuum in European Archaeology. He will be missed by his family and friends. I certainly will when attending future congresses.

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