

REVIEWS AND SHORT REVIEW NOTES

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(Review) Martin Oliva, *Těžba a rituál, paměť a transformace. Uzavírky šachet a obětiny z doby bronzové v Krumlovském lese. Mining and Ritual, Memory and Transformation. Offerings in shafts and the obliteration of mining areas from the Early Bronze Age in “Krumlovský les”* (= *Anthropos Studies in Anthropology, Paleontology and Quaternary Geology* 40/N.S. 32). Brno 2019: Moravské zemské muzeum, 225 pp.

In 2010, the archaeological literature on flint artefacts was supplemented with the exhaustive final report on an important multifaceted investigation of Jurassic chert mining in the region of Krumlovský les (Krumlov Forest) in southern Moravia (Oliva 2010). Its author Martin Oliva is an experienced researcher, an expert on prehistoric flint mining in Moravia, the Czech Republic and elsewhere, an active member of the Anthropos Institute at the Moravian Museum and an editor of the *Acta Musei Moraviae*.

Last year, the Moravské Zemské Muzeum published Martin Oliva's monograph *Těžba a rituál, paměť a transformace: Uzavírky šachet a obětiny z doby bronzové v Krumlovském lese/Mining and Ritual, Memory and Transformation: Offerings in shafts and the obliteration of mining areas from the Early Bronze Age in “Krumlovský les”*, within the „Anthropos Studies in Anthropology, Paleontology and Quaternary Geology” series (vol. 40/N.S. 32/2019). The publication covers selected topics related to the long human habitation of the Krumlovský les region in the Early Bronze. The monograph, like the report in 2010, is not limited to the technology and economy of chert mining in that area; it also considers the Early Bronze Age exploitation of siliceous rocks in its ritualistic and symbolic aspects.

The publication concerns Fields I and II, the least investigated eastern part of the mining area. It consists of six chapters, an extensive summary in English and a comprehensive bibliography. A short geographic description and a recapitulation of the archaeological excavation carried out earlier at the site are given in Chapter II (pp. 13-16).

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Chapter III, the most substantial part of the monograph (pp. 17-156), centres on Fields I and II, excavated in 2005-2012 and 2012-2016 respectively. It presents the results of the fieldwork, illustrated with many photos and drawings. The author discusses the variants of the raw material, technology of core exploitation and typology of items recovered from individual excavation units. Fifteen tables contain metric, weight and percentage data, and the finds are presented in numerous figures.

Chapter IV (pp. 157-170) describes the geological structure of Fields I and II, which has been shown to differ from the structure of the mining fields explored before. Some differences have been noted in the fills of mineshafts and in earthworks (diagrams 1-4) as well. The author focuses on the methods of filling the mineshafts intentionally and on changes in the lie of the fields (pp. 161-168). He discusses in detail two recovered pots of the Únětice culture (p. 167): one deposited in the fill of a mineshaft in sector I-13-1, excavation unit 13-14/AB, the other found in sector II, excavation unit II-27, metre 6/F. In the latter case, the immediate vicinity of the vessel has yielded more than 22 kg of “initial cores” and cortical or semi-cortical flakes (p. 170). In Martin Oliva’s opinion, that deposit had a ritualistic function.

Chapter V (pp. 171-196) interprets the results of the research in the Krumlovský les region in a broader context of raw material procurement in Europe in the Neolithic and the Bronze Ages. The author develops the idea of a ritualistic function of mining activities, which had already been mentioned in the report from 2010 (Chapter VIII). He discusses, for example, “the phenomenon of chipping for chipping’s sake”, noticeable not only in the items from the Krumlovský les region, but also in those from other mining sites (Lech *et al.* 2015, 225). He refers to numerous examples of ritualistic and magical activities identified in the explored Neolithic mines of copper ore in Bulgaria and Serbia (pp. 171-173). The chapter also provides data (as given in Topping 2011; 2017) to correlate findings of ethnographic research with the putative strategies of prehistoric communities (Table XIX).

Oliva also discusses actions that are supposed to have accompanied “closure rituals” and to have been linked to “veneration of the sacred landscape (including ancestors and the related consecrated work)”. He perceives elements of the creation of a cultural landscape in burial mounds located in the western part of Field II in the Krumlovský les region (p. 106 f.). Restoring the area of the mining fields to its original state is interpreted as an expression of “respect of the living for the underground realm of the ancestors”. In this section of Chapter V (pp. 186-188), the author quotes many ethnographic and historical examples of symbolic behaviour accompanying the extraction of raw materials.

According to Martin Oliva, prehistoric mining should be viewed in social and ritualistic terms. During the development of the Únětice and the Věteřov cultures, when the chert extraction in the Krumlovský les region, particularly in Fields I and II, increased, the symbolic dimension of the mining seems to have predominated over the practical dimension, contributing to social balance.

The “anthropological” perspective on the mining site in the Krumlovský les region, as Prof. Jacek Lech writes in his introduction to the monograph (p. 9), has been present in Martin Oliva’s studies for over twenty years (Oliva 1999; 2002; 2015). This insightful researcher is consistent in drawing attention to the non-utilitarian and non-economic sides of flint mining that were important to many prehistoric miners, craftsmen and members of the elite. His latest publication centres precisely on this aspect of the subject, but without neglecting comprehensive information about the excavation and the recovered artefacts. And it is this combination of archaeological expertise and multifaceted interpretation of phenomena accompanying prehistoric mining or raw material processing that makes the monograph by Martin Oliva so interesting and valuable.

References

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