BOHEMIAN TRILOBITES

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Prague 1990

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Published by the Geological Survey, Prague

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ISBN 80-7075-001-4

FOREWORD

More than 200 years have passed since F. Zeno, Professor of Mathematics, Charles University, Praha, published in 1770 his report on the fossils of the Praha region. The pygidium figured by ZENO is the first historically dated illustration of a Bohemian trilobite (ZENO 1770, pl.1, fig.1 – Concha triloba, Cacadu Muschel). This specimen is now lost. It was made identical by BARRANDE (1852) with the species *Dalmania Hausmanni* BRONGNIART, which I believe was correct, so that it represents the first Bohemian trilobite species quoted in literature. But trilobites had been known still earlier, as may be evidenced by BORN's (1772) remarks on some Bohemian trilobites of Cambrian age. A few years later Count KINSKÝ (1775) drew attention to the trilobites found at the village of Jince in the Příbram area and called them, as was common practice at that time, *Entomolithus paradoxus.* BARRANDE (1852) regarded them as being identical with *Paradoxides Bohemicus* BARRANDE [= *Paradoxides gracilis* (BOECK)].

The early 19th century was marked by a quickening of interest in Bohemian trilobites. Not only were they intensively sampled from both the then existing and newly discovered localities but some were transferred to several European collections. Most naturalists did not pass Bohemian trilobites unnoticed and some described new species from Bohemia. This period reached its scientific peak when BARRANDE (1852) published his monograph on trilobites, a work which for a century was generally recognized as the highest scientific standard of descriptive palaeontology, with respectable illustrations, and which remained unparalleled in this field till the first half of the 20th century.

The purpose of this paper is to show the beauty of selected Bohemian trilobites, with special emphasis on their scientific value and aesthetic impression, and to draw attention to distinctions and specific features observed on their exoskeletons. The proportional occurrence of trilobite species based on zoological classification or stratigraphic range is, therefore, omitted from consideration here (e.g. Tremadoc species are not figured). Nor has this publication been intended as a textbook description of trilobites in terms of zoological units. Finally, it has been written to pay tribute to those generations fo collectors of fossils who gathered and studied Bohemian trilobites at both professional and amateur levels.

I am particularly indebted to Dr. I. Chlupáč for reading the manuscript and valuable suggestions.

Milan Šnajdr

INTRODUCTION

Trilobites .... Bohemia is one of those few regions in which the use of the name 'trilobite' or 'brontosaur' at once conjures up in one's mind a mental picture of fossilized remain of animal life, for example, a lobster or something else known to have originated in the remote past of life evolution on Earth. This can be explained by the educational efforts made in the past century by generations of enlightened personalities and Bohemian patriots, including naturalists, whose intellectual traditions and scholarship were subsequently handed on through further generations. A special word of gratitude goes also to J. BARRANDE (1799–1883), a distinguished French scientist, who spent more than half of his life in Bohemia and whose work made a vital contribution to the development of both palaeontology and geology. Barrande's activities were so wide-ranging and attained such a high scientific standard that he had a considerable impact on several generations of palaeontologists. There is of course more than one reason for the popularity of trilobites, but the dominant one is indoubtedly the aesthetic impression made by their well preserved exoskeletons on anybody who admires natural beauty – for example – an unusual life have long and traditionally been collected, as are also today. The varied geology of Bohemia allows nice fossils to be collected within a broad spectrum of Lower Palaeozoic to Quaternary deposits. In the Barrandian area, however, collecting has its own tradition in regard to the history and scope of work involved; moreover, a nice trilobite has always been and undoubtedly will be an adornment of any collection.

If all these historical circumstances are taken into account, it is not surprising that among animal groups in the Barrandian Palaeozoic trilobites have hitherto been best examined and revised on modern grounds. So far, more than 1300 species and subspecies have been described from this area. Although at least two hundred of these specimens do not retain their validity because of homonyma, synonymy or other formal reasons, the Barrandian area is quite unique because of its diverse trilobite assemblages. But this is not the last word on their numbers, for further complete palaeontological exhaustion of insufficiently known niches, particularly those of Silurian and Devonian age, will inevitably lead to the discovery of additional new species.