

# DOLNÍ VĚSTONICE II



Chronostratigraphy, Paleoethnology, Paleoanthropology



Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Institute of Archeology, Brno 2016

THE DOLNÍ VĚSTONICE STUDIES, VOL.21  
DOLNOVĚSTONICKÉ STUDIE, SVAZEK 21

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## THE DOLNÍ VĚSTONICE STUDIES, VOL.21

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# **DOLNÍ VĚSTONICE II**

**CHRONOSTRATIGRAPHY,  
PALEOETHNOLOGY,  
PALEOANTHROPOLOGY**

**Edited by Jiří Svoboda**

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## I. HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Jiří Svoboda

### Previous research in the Dolní Věstonice – Pavlov – Milovice area

Research around the Pavlov Hills in South Moravia first began at the site of Dolní Věstonice I. Although references have been made to the “Ante-diluvial” or “giant” bones recovered in the Mikulov area since 1659, the Paleolithic sites below the fields and vineyards on the hillslopes were relatively unknown before the 20<sup>th</sup> century and giving up only individual finds of bones, “flints”, and “knives”. This was at a time when there were already major excavation projects underway elsewhere in Moravia including Předmostí and in some Moravian caves. Therefore, the future excavation had a chance to profit from experience gathered elsewhere and to avoid mistakes that came with too-rapid excavation, inexact documentation, and the dispersal of finds among private collections.

The 1924 excavations at Dolní Věstonice I were led by Karel Absolon who conducted systematic research each year on behalf of the Moravian Museum. The excavations from 1924-1938 produced unique finds which amazed the whole world. It was not only the figurine of the Věstonice Venus itself (found in 1925) that excited interest, but the technology of its production and the knowledge of clay firing it indicated, so deep in human history. Associated with this find were numerous other ceramics representing humans and animals, as well as other symbolic miniatures carved from mammoth ivory. Absolon published his discoveries in both the local and foreign press, and presented them fully to the public at the Brno fairgrounds as part of a special exhibition called *Anthropos* – today the modern exhibition pavilion in the Pisárky park. Absolon’s entire concept was innovative: this was not just a collection of flints or figurines, but a reconstruction of life within the settlement and of its inhabitants. These excavations were cut short in 1938 when Absolon retired and Dolní Věstonice became part of Germany.

During World War 2, Assien Bohmers continued the research until 1942. In 1945 however, a tragic consequence of the war was the deliberate destruction of a major part of the collection stored in the nearby Mikulov castle.

After the end of the war, leading Czechoslovakian archaeologists began to plan an optimal strategy for future research in Dolní Věstonice I. The lead was gradually taken by the Institute of Archaeology, which became part of the structure of the Academy of Sciences in 1953, and this institution continues the research up to the present day. In addition, more systematic cooperation was established between various institutions and individual disciplines, especially in the natural sciences. For several decades, Absolon’s role as leading researcher was taken up by Bohuslav Klíma. In 1952 the field research expanded to the nearby site of Pavlov I and in 1966 to Pavlov II. These excavations revealed a new collection of miniature clay plastics, carvings, and items of decoration, and the first ritual burials, a male (Pa 1) and a female (DV 3).

The site around the brickyard loess pit at the eastern end of Dolní Věstonice village was first labeled “Dolní Věstonice II” by Klíma et al. (1962, 117). Large-scale excavation began in 1984, as the artificial lakes were being constructed on the Dyje river below and the loess to build dams was taken from the hillslopes above. As the terrain work moved rapidly forward, the excavation of such a large area created significant pressures on time, which required archaeologists to join forces. At that time I joined Bohuslav Klíma’s research at Dolní Věstonice II, while the salvage research at another exploited site, Milovice I, was led by Martin Oliva of the Moravian Museum.

Afterwards, Gravettian layers have continued to be uncovered across the whole area up to the present day, due to agricultural cultivation in shallow positions (Dolní Věstonice IIa in 1999 and 2012), new constructions in the villages (Pavlov VI in 2007 and Pavlov II in 2010) and chance situations such as



when a road collapsed into some forgotten cellars beneath the settlement of Milovice IV in 2009. Finally in 2013-2015, in relation to the prepared *Archeopark* project, we concentrated on another large-scale salvage excavation at Pavlov I.

## Course of excavation at Dolní Věstonice II

**Before the World War 2:** orientation survey in the area resulted in the first geological and stratigraphical description of the Dolní Věstonice brickyard section at the lowermost (northern) part of the site (Absolon et al. 1933) and initial trenching at the Pod lesem - IIa site at the uppermost (southern) part. An archaeological summary of these actions was provided in Klíma et al. (1962). The central parts of the site remained buried deep below the loess coverage.

**1956, 1958-1960:** Klíma, Kukla and Ložek succeeded in producing a more systematic stratigraphic description of the Dolní Věstonice brickyard section, including its paleontological context and descriptions of associated lithics. DeVries provided a first series of C14 datings from the charcoal (Klíma et al. 1962).

**1984:** industrial loess exploitation related to construction of artificial lakes evoked large-scale salvage excavations. During the first year, a road constructed in the eastern side gully towards the site opened new geological sections (Klíma 1987d).

**1985:** the loess exploitation, planned in four floors, started from the lower one, above the brickyard and at the foot of the northern slope. In this area, three separate settlement units were uncovered ("A-C", now K10, K11, and S6). Two of them were excavated by Klíma (K10, K11, Klíma 1987d; 1995) and one by Svoboda (S6).

**1986:** the loess exploitation proceeded towards the large settlement agglomerations at the site-top (numbered K7-9). Excavation was directed by Klíma, with Svoboda as an assistant (Klíma 1995). We followed a 1m grid and materials were sorted according to this system, until the unification (a mixing, in fact) of the lithic archaeological material at the end of the excavation. Fortunately, the osteological material remained as was, sorted according to the squares. - Simultaneously, the mammoth bone deposit in a side gorge below the site was excavated (Svoboda 1989b).



Figures 1-2. 1986, excavating the triple burial DV 13-15. Photos by J. Svoboda

A special discovery occurred on the evening of the 13th of August as the complete skeletons of three young people DV 13-15 were discovered at the top of the site. The central individual, of unknown sex using anthropological methods (Chapter XX) but male genetically (Chapter XXIV), was lying on its back, the right male on his belly, and the left male also on his back, but slightly inclined towards the central person, with both arms directed to his or her pelvis. Given the good state of preservation for the whole situation, it was clear from the first moment that the strange position had a meaning, and a number of explanations were suggested. One of the questions was about whether deliberate violence



Figure 11. Dolní Věstonice II – southern edge. Retouched artefacts: 1-5 burins; 6, 7 endscrapers; 8-10 retouched blades.