

Jiří Frel †

One of the editors of this periodical, Professor Jiří Frel, died in Paris on April 29, 2006 in the age of 82 years, on a cancer in his bronchae and throat. His life was very exceptional and full of dramatic events. Born on November 13, 1923. in a larger village in Moravia as son of a local teacher and master of the primary school (Dolní Újezd u Veselíčka), he spent most of the time during the war— after finishing the gymnasium —as an agricultural worker, in order not to be sent to Germany to forced work there, but he prepared himself intensely for his later career by learning privately classical and modern languages. After the Czech universities reopened in 1945, he started to study — as one of very few students — Classical archaeology and art history on the Charles University in Prague. As an excellent student he gained a French scholarship and was sent to Ecole Normale Superieure, at that time also in the field of archaeology and Classics one of the leading places of the world, together with another great name of Czech archaeology, Bohumil Soudský. After this experience he still was able in 1948 to take a scholarship in Italy, so he returned into the Communist country only one year after the Communist take-of-power.

He was a passionate lover of Classical, especially Greek art. Like many others of his generation, he entered the Communist party after 1948, but was soon expelled from it. When in early fifties both professors of Classical Archaeology in Prague, Jindřich Čadík and Růžena Vacková, were imprisoned and the second assistant Milada Vilímková had to leave the university for political reasons, he was the only person who cared for the continuity; as both professors stressed to me several times, he was in no way responsible for what happened to them. The Institute for Classical Archaeology was commissionally led by Prof. Antonín Salač, an epigraphist and philologist with some archaeological experience from his young years, and later it merged with the Ancient History, Classical Philology and Modern Greek studies into a Department of Studies of Classical Antiquity, first lead by Prof. Salač, later by Prof. Ladislav Varcl and Prof. Eva Kamínková. I became one of the very few students in 1953, with slightly more advanced Josef Bartoš, who specialized in terracottas and in Archaic Greek art, and with Roman Haken, who died very young, just one year after having finished his study in 1957, but who managed to compile several interesting papers and a large catalogue of Roman lamps in Czechoslovak collections, with interesting ideas about workshops and schools. With three girls who did not try hard and later left their subject for art history or something else, we had to prepare a lot of papers for Prof. Salač's seminar. I learned from him in the field of Latin and Greek epigraphy, but Jiří Frel was my real teacher and excellent master in stylistic studies of ancient art. His bright eye contributed to ascriptions of Greek vases, he much corresponded with John Beazley. His precise visual memory enabled him to establish many joins and to compose several Attic stelae from fragments kept in different museums. For what I understand in the field of style I owe him as teacher in this field in the first place. His first marriage with a dancer collapsed in early fifties (she was ardent Catholic and he still stylized himself as Marxist, even if not a party-member) and he lived then fairly modestly, running in sandals even in wintertime, with one pair of trousers and a few shirts only the whole year. But he was in many ways fascinating person and excellent teacher; he opened eyes for stylistic classification of works of art even to many students of art history. He wrote at that time several Czech books on Greek art, which are still useful as texts for the students.

He tried to go anywhere where there was at least some Classical art, what was very difficult at a time when the country was nearly completely closed. He participated for some year in excavations in Nesebar in Bulgaria and studied sculpture from other Greek sites in Bulgaria, while also compiling a catalogue of Attic pottery in Czechoslovakia, published in 1959. He tried to go at least to his beloved Paris as far as it would be possible through very

small holes; he earned there some modest money to survive as a guide in the Louvre. When the frontiers opened a little bit more around 1960, he started going to Greece, where he also lived very modestly and helped me to follow him there a few years later, as he also helped me to come to Paris in 1963 for the first time. His main interest at that time were Attic stelae and Roman portraits, on both subjects he produced several papers and a booklet on the ateliers of the former, which is until nowadays in some aspects finer in attributions and classifications than the corpus by Christoph Clairmont. In the improved air of later sixties he travelled much, was able to get scholarship and lived more abroad than in our country, while helping also me in these projects which also formed the base for all what I could do later. He got fame by his reconstructions of reliefs of fragments from different museums, by attributions in sculpture and Attic pottery as well.

In 1969 he got a guest professorship at Princeton and after a long hesitation he decided to stay in the US, fearing — as he told me on many occasions before — that the impossibility to be in direct contact with original Classical art again would kill him. He left his second wife, who did not speak any language, in Prague, and started a new life again. One year he spent in the Metropolitan Museum. Dietrich von Bothmer admired much his bright eyes, but as he explained me in detail, he was annoyed that J. F. left him for Getty soon. Jean-Paul Getty and Jiri Frel understood each other apparently very well. The latter admired great men as he did also before and the former needed a man to create from his Classical collection a real Classical museum. Jiří Frel fulfilled this task in a splendid way. He acquired what was on the market carefully, making only few mistakes (but these were recommended as acquisitions by many others, too). Nowadays, as a compensation outlet for the exploitation by big international companies and almighty financial markets, the nationalistic circles notably in Greece claim property of everything what might have come from their countries into public collections and the market rules do not exist any more, but in those years his policy was generally legitimated. Besides Ernst Berger, he was the only man to create a real great museum of Classical Art after the World War II. He started a new periodical Getty Museum Journal, compiled catalogues and lists of the Getty collections. As against most other museums in the world his department left freely work and publish not only his friends, whom he supported by Getty scholarships, but also anyone who asked him to get some items for publication.

After the death of Getty the approval of his acquisitions by the trustees of the foundation became more difficult, and he enlarged the collection by gifts, which he sometimes estimated too high. It could have been an act against taxation rules of the US, and one of the American mud slingers Howie, who lost for more serious reasons the directorship of the Metropolitan museum, attacked him and tried to persuade some authorities to sue him for this. Though never proven as a fact and never reaching the stage of official accusation, Jiří Frel did not defend himself. He retired from Getty, his third marriage was broken, he left his house and other Californian property to his third wife Faya and escaped to Paris and Rome, living again modestly and hiding himself against the reporters and paparazzi, from his Getty pension. In the eighties he improved his living by expertises for the Swiss market with antiquities as did many Classical archaeologists at this time; it enabled him to buy a flat in the centre of Rome. He worked as one of the foremost scholars in his field on various projects in Italy and Greece, publishing results of his study in many small contributions to various periodicals and conference volumes. He also in early nineties returned on several occasions to his country. As a guest professor he led several courses at the Brno University and also lectured to Prague students; in Athens he tried to finish his study of Panathenaic amphorae in the Kerameikos and also prolonged his studies on sculpture and vases in Italy, Switzerland and other countries, being supported by and supporting in her studies his fourth wife, Françoise Duthoy, with whose he had his fifth child Clara. After a serious brain attack in

Greece in 1997 he did not recover completely. Françoise left him later for Paris with their daughter and he then lived in late nineties and in the first years of this millennium in Rome alone, helped by a black nurse. He mainly stayed in home, making only short walks and stopped to give public lectures. But shortly before he published a brilliant volume of his small studies in *Studia varia* with Giorgio Brettschneider in Rome and prepared a second similar volume, which we hope to publish soon. Sometimes his head was not quite clear, but sometimes we had nice conversations still at the end of 2003, when we met personally the last time.

Two years later, when his cancer appeared, his wife took her husband to Paris, where he spent the last two years of his life, being visited also by his Czech children and grandchildren, who often stayed with him in Rome in the previous years, too. Perhaps being afraid that some further investigations in his purchasing for Getty might raise claim to the property, Françoise divorced him shortly before his death, when his successor in Getty Marion True was much attacked. He died as a quite poor man, and as such he was buried at the famous Père Lachaise cemetery at Paris.

He had many friends, but also enemies. With his death one of the last great connoisseurs of Classical art left us, whose interest was mainly concentrated in discovering the exact style of the works of art and their exact classification and restoration of the original state. He often acted by sudden impulses, he loved much but could also break his former relations easily to follow the new ideal. But his love for Greek and Roman art persisted during his whole lifetime, and he tried very hard during his whole lifetime to follow this love. *Wer ernstlich sich bemüht, den kann man erlösen*

For „Eirene“
JAN BOUZEK