

Obituary: A Personal Tribute to Jakov Radovčić

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OBITUARY



Jakov Radovčić with flowers marking the 10th anniversary of the Krapina Neandertal Museum (2020).

Jakov Radovčić, who died July 21, 2021, was curator of the Krapina Neandertal remains in the Croatian Natural History Museum in Zagreb. Anyone studying European Neandertals surely met him over his 40+ years in the field, given the importance of the Krapina Neandertal collection and his common attendance at scientific meetings. After completing his B.A. at the University of Zagreb in 1970, he went to the University of Illinois, Chicago to complete his Masters thesis, entitled: *Some New Upper Cretaceous Teleosts from Yugoslavia with Special Reference to Localities, Geology and Palaeoenvironment*, in 1974. He returned to Zagreb and worked at the Institute for Quaternary Paleontology and Geology of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts under Mirko Malez. During this period, he spent time excavating at Vindija, among other projects. When Ivan Crnolatac retired in 1980, Jakov became the curator of the Krapina collection. This was a sea change for studying the material as the collections became much more open to outsiders. Consequently, 15 Masters theses and 40 Ph.D. dissertations included Krapina in their descriptions and datasets (Frayer, 2006). Before Jakov, access to the collection was much more restricted. Besides the Neandertal material, Jakov curated the other more recent human skeletal material and designed numerous exhibits in the museum.

Jakov published 133 articles of which he was the single author on 56. He also published four books. The first in 1988 was

The Krapina Hominids: An Illustrated Catalog of the Skeletal Collection with Fred Smith, Erik Trinkaus, and Milford Wolpoff, which remains the definitive inventory and brief description of the human material. In the same year, he published *Dragutin Gorjanović-Kramberger and Krapina Early Man. The Foundations of Modern Paleoanthropology* in Croatian and English, also an important documentation of Krapina and accolade to the man who excavated the site between 1899 and 1905. Ironically, both Gorjanović-Kramberger and Jakov started out studying fossil fish, but are best known for their contributions to paleoanthropology. In 1999, Jakov published *The Krapina Hominids. A Radiographic Atlas of the Skeletal Collection* with Morrie Kricun, Janet Monge, Alan Mann, Gerald Finkel, and Michelle Lampl. And, in 2008 with Janet Monge, Alan Mann, and David Frayer, he published *New Insights on the Krapina Neandertals: 100 Years since Gorjanović-Kramberger*, a collection of 33 papers honoring the birthday of Gorjanović-Kramberger.

Starting in 2003, he began the construction and organization of the Krapina Neandertal Museum, a project co-designed with Željko Kovačić, an accomplished Zagrebian architect. Opened in 2010, it is a tribute to Gorjanović-Kramberger's work at Krapina. After 10 years, it had more than a million visitors, which is remarkable given Croatia's population. The museum covers more than just Neandertals, starting with the



Figure 1. Jakov in the Krapina room (~2006).

origin of life, then vertebrate evolution, and ending with human evolution. It was constructed as an up-branching spiral and, as one walks up the incline, numerous statues representing the major stages of human evolution appear, ending with the Krapina Neandertals and the appearance of *Homo sapiens*. Nineteen reconstructions by Élisabeth Daynès document the Krapina Neandertals. Exiting the museum one can walk to what remains of the actual Krapina sandstone shelter. It is a complex, magnificent museum and definitely worth a visit to Croatia.

Anyone who met Jakov instantly liked him with his pleasant demeanor. He was especially helpful and open to those studying the Krapina remains. Jakov was proud and protective of the Krapina Neandertal collection, which consists of human remains, extensive mammalian fossils, and stone tools. Once

he became curator, he completely re-organized the Neandertal fossils, preserving them in boxes lined with foam and secured inside locked vaults. His attention paid off with many publications in scientific journals and mentions in the literature by scholars studying the collection (Frayer, 2006). These covered everything from crania to postcrania to teeth to tools, along with the major faunal collection. It is hard to imagine another site with such an extensive documentation—over 1628 authors in 3058 publications in 20 different languages from 1899 to 2006 (Frayer, 2006). The collection continues to be preserved under the direction of Davorka Radovčić, Jakov's daughter.

Beyond all this, Jakov was a personal friend offering his apartment as a 'hotel, bar, and restaurant'—and serving some of the best Dalmatian food washed down by wine and starting with homemade cherry or walnut brandy (or



Figure 2. Morrie Kricun, Janet Monge, Alan Mann, and Jakov (1998).



Figure 3. Jakov, Élisabeth Daynès, Maria Teschler-Nicola, and Željko Kovačić showing a model of the planned Krapina Neandertal Museum (2003).

both). He specialized in baked fish and always said ‘a fish swims three times, once in the water, once in the oil, once in the wine.’ I miss him every day.

REFERENCES

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Figure 4. Opening day at the Krapina Museum (2010).



Figure 5. Jakov and Milford Wolpoff at the Croatian Natural History Museum (2006).



Figure 6. Jakov at the Natural History Museum, Vienna with a tooth wand (2010).