

Jiří Čatský

27 February 1932 – 21 November 2008



In front of me is an old photograph of us, several students of plant physiology at Charles University, Prague, in Czechoslovak army uniforms during our compulsory military training in July 1955. Amongst us is also the always keen and skilful photographer of this picture, Jiří Čatský, with his typical broad smile which accompanied him for most of his life. This smile started to appear in his face less frequently only when his chronic disease began to put severe limits on his various activities. His fruitful life came to its end on 21 November 2008, only one week after the death of his whole-life colleague and close friend Zdeněk Šesták. While Zdeněk was the Editor-in Chief of "Photosynthetica", Jiří provided the same service to the sister journal "Biologia Plantarum". And he also served devotedly on the editorial board of "Photosynthetica". Until the end of his life Jiří was making both of these contributions to the benefit of the world community of plant physiologists.

Born on 27 February 1932, Jiří Čatský attended a prestigious grammar school in Prague, the city of his birth and home. As he was greatly interested in biology, he decided to study botany, specializing in plant physiology and anatomy, at the Faculty of Biological Sciences of Charles University, Prague, in 1951-56. Here, he was supervised by Dr. J. Vávra and Professor S. Prát; his M.Sc. thesis dealt with the effects of oxyhumolites on plant growth. In 1956, he started to work at the Czechoslovak Academy's of Sciences Institute of Biology in Prague, the plant physiology department of which later (1962) became the Institute of Experimental Botany. Jiří was to work there for 53 years in total. During the first five years of his employment, he received his postgraduate training and successfully defended his Ph.D. thesis on "Problems of Water Relations of Plants" in 1961. Jiří thereby made several valuable contributions to the solution of these problems. In 1967, Charles University awarded the RNDr. (Rerum naturalium doctor) title to him. Dr. B. Slavík was Jiří's supervisor and head of the laboratory in which he worked, gradually moving from the study of plant water relations to photosynthesis research. This occurred also under the influence of Jiří's several months' stay, in 1958, in the laboratories of the outstanding Russian photosynthesis researchers, Professors A. A. Nichiporovich and O. V. Zolenskii in Moscow and

St. Petersburg, respectively. In the 1960s, Jiří and B. Slavík constructed a colorimetric apparatus for measuring photosynthesis, which was then widely used in many countries. For this achievement, they were awarded golden and silver medals at exhibitions of scientific instruments in Kiev, Budapest and Prague. In 1963, Jiří took part in the construction of one of the first gas-exchange systems using infrared gas analyzers in differential mode. His two-year co-operation, in 1968-70, with Dr. P. Chartier at the Station de Bioclimatologie, INRA, Versailles, France, further stimulated his deep interest in photosynthesis research and its methodology. After having edited, together with Z. Šesták, and co-authored the Czech manual of methods used in photosynthesis studies (Academia, Praha, 1966), he also co-edited, with Z. Šesták and P.G. Jarvis, and co-authored the completely revised and enlarged English version of this manual (Dr. W. Junk, Publ., The Hague, 1971). This world's first manual of its type, or its individual chapters, has been widely cited until now.

During the 1960s, B. Slavík's laboratory expanded its research field to the study of the interactions between leaf and plant developmental stages and photosynthesis. Jiří contributed substantially to the understanding of the gas-exchange aspects of this complicated relationship, whose importance has now been generally acknowledged. His further research topics included the assessment of acclimation and adaptation in plants grown in vitro, photosynthesis of transgenic plants, and influence of phytohormone application on plant photosynthetic production. The total crop of publications by Jiří Čatský represents a rich heritage of over 140 original scientific papers, reviews and book chapters.

Jiří also played an important role in co-ordinating scientific research both nationally and internationally. In 1961-68, he was active as Secretary of the Czechoslovak Academy's of Sciences Scientific Council of Theoretical Foundations of Agriculture; by this activity, he significantly promoted the Czechoslovak research in plant physiology and genetics. In the 1960s to 1980s, he took an active part in the co-operation in photosynthesis research among the European countries of the Communist block, thus helping them partly to compensate the drawbacks of their ideologically dictated lack of true scientific co-operation with western science. The same positive consequences had the launching of "Biologia Plantarum" (1959) and "Photosynthetica" (1967). For the latter journal, Jiří accomplished a lot of useful work as member of the editorial board from the journal's start to the end of his life. The authors of papers published in "Photosynthetica" and their readers are grateful to Jiří for this service. Together with Zdeněk Šesták, he published in Photosynthetica the section "Bibliography of Reviews and Methods of Photosynthesis", which has had 90 parts by now. For "Biologia Plantarum", Jiří served as Executive Editor in 1970-90 and as Editor-in-Chief afterwards, until his death. In 1983-97, he was member of the editorial boards of "Agronomy" and "European Journal of Agronomy".

As a person, Jiří was always modest, completely reliable, open-minded and fully devoted to science and his family. His hobbies were, above all, photography, amateur film- and video-making, and also theatre, music and travelling as long as his health enabled it. His mourning wife and former school-mate Vlasta was his whole-life partner as well as colleague – she is an experienced mycologist and microbiologist – and Jiří shared the interest in mushrooms with her. Jiří will also be missed by their daughter Jana with her family, a medical doctor who alleviated the troubles of her father's long-lasting illness which eventually was fatal to him. I am sure that Jiří Čatský will stay in the memories of his family members, friends and colleagues as a greatly honoured personality that has enriched their lives. Thank you, Jiří!

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