

### Kamil Zvelebil (17.11. 1927 – 17.1. 2009)

Kamil Zvelebil studied the English language, Indology, philosophy and literature at the Charles University in Prague from 1946 to 1952. After obtaining the Ph.Dr. degree in 1952 he was employed as a senior research fellow in Tamil and Dravidian linguistics and literature at the Oriental Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences till 1970. In 1965 he successfully defended his habilitation thesis and became a docent of Dravidian philology. From 1960 to 1965 he was a teacher of the Tamil language and literature at the Charles University in Prague. In the mid of 1960s he was a temporary professor in Dravidian studies at the University of Chicago (1965–66), later he became an ordinary professor here (1968–70). In 1970 he was shortly a visiting professor at the Collège de France in Paris, in 1970–71 he worked at the Leiden University. At the same time he taught his courses at the Institute of South Asia of the University of Heidelberg (1967–73). In the meantime he had lost his homeland after the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Finally he had found his firm point at the University of Utrecht and his second homeland in the Netherlands (1971). He remained there till his retirement in 1991, when he moved to Languedoc in France (Occitanian was one of his loves). But as a visiting professor he returned again at the Charles University in Prague in 1997.

Kamil Zvelebil began his study of Tamil as an autodidact around 1950. And already in 1950s thanks to him Tamil and Dravidian studies became an integral part of the offer first at the Charles University in Prague, later at various other renown universities. In the late 1960s he visited for the first time so called Blue Mountains (*Nilgiri*) in southern India, where he described the languages and folklore of their inhabitants. It is difficult to evaluate his work, if his bibliography exceeds 500 titles. Among most important should be included his excellent description of the *Iruḷa* language (1971b, 1973c, 1979c, 1982e, 1988f, 1992f) and in wider sense his studies devoted to the *Nilgiri* language area (1980c, 1981b, 1985g, 1988d, 1990d, 2001). His Dravidian comparative phonology (1970b; cf. also 1965j, 1968b, 1972c) and morphology (1976–77g; cf. also 1972b), crowned by his excellent synthesis *Dravidian Linguistics – An Introduction* (1990b), became already classical. Without any prejudice he seriously discussed the attempts to find the external relatives of Dravidian in Elamite (1974e, 1985k, 1990b) and Altaic (1990b, 1991b, 1991c). Till the present time valuable are his comments about the Indus script (1965g, 1967i, 1973i, 1976–77c, 1983c, 1985c, 1990b). He was also an excellent specialist in Dravidian mythology (1982c, 1990f). His numerous translations especially from Tamil or Old Tamil illustrate his enormous diligence. But the sphere of his interests was wider. In the last decades he was seriously interested in Zen Buddhism (cf. 2000, 2003b, 2005). He was also the author of a historical novel *Hippalos* about a navigator of Alexander the Great, who first crossed the Indian Ocean directly from the Red Sea to South India.

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**Abbreviations:** ArO Archiv orientální; BSOAS Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies; IJ Indo-Iranian Journal; IJDL International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics; JAOS Journal of American Oriental Society; JRAS Journal of Royal Asiatic Society; JTS Journal of Tamil Studies; NO Nový orient; NOB New Orient Bimonthly, PICL Pondicherry Institute of Linguistics and Culture, TC Tamil Culture.

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