

BOOK REVIEW

**Three Forest Engineers:
Josef Opletal, Karel Šiman and Gustav Artner**

G. NOVOTNÝ

The Institute of History, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, 2015

552 pages, ISBN 978-80-7286-246-7.

In 2015, a scientific monograph was published, written by the renowned author and historian PhDr. Gustav Novotný, CSc., the title of which “Three Forest Engineers. Josef Opletal, Karel Šiman and Gustav Artner” clearly points to its contents being directed to the history of forestry. The monograph is an impressive work both in its size of 552 text pages and mainly in its scope and quality of workmanship. In the monograph, the author deals with three personalities of Czech forestry when two of them were also respected professors at the University of Agriculture and Forestry in Brno. General knowledge of the life and work of these personalities by the contemporary Czech community of foresters varies. As one of the so-called founding fathers of the Brno University of Agriculture and Forestry (today’s Mendel University in Brno), its Training Forest Enterprise in Křtiny, and a distinguished professor in forest harvesting and forest industry, Josef Opletal was doubtlessly the most popular one. Several years ago, some special events were organized to commemorate his round anniversary and anniversaries of Mendel University in Brno, including the publication of his memoirs.

Far less known to our contemporaries is Professor Gustav Artner. Foresters remember him mostly as a successor to professor Opletal at the Brno Faculty of Forestry, Department of Forest Harvesting. However, the only term recollected in their minds in connection with his name is that of the felling axe improved by him (arbrovka in Czech). The third personality dealt with in the monograph – Karel Šiman is practically unknown to the contemporary foresters – perhaps with the exception of experts in the history of forestry. Yet, these three personalities contributed to forestry in all its forms, their legacy being valued by generations of foresters until these days. Therefore, one cannot but agree with the author declaring in the Introduction to the monograph “Josef Opletal, Gustav Artner and Karel Šiman should be given a place they truly belong to. They have been forgotten – and this publication is to rectify the wrong”.

There can be no doubt that the author filled up a full measure of his intention in the monograph because his work brings a comprehensive quota of new valuable information on the individual personalities, which becomes even more valuable being embedded in the context of the time. The monograph consists of three extensive sections devoted to the respective personalities. Pages 15–181 belong to J. Opletal (in fact together with the Introduction, nearly whole of which is already devoted to him). K. Šiman is discussed in the following part, beginning on page 182 and ending on page 250, and G. Artner is the theme of the third part of the monograph on pages 251–299. In addition to these three main sections, the monograph brings many other interesting data in appendices on the next approximately 250 pages. Thus, it follows from the above that the author characterizes the respective personalities in detail with devoting apparently the largest part of the text to the most popular one of the three – professor Opletal. One can be convinced that he used all currently available documents and information in this monograph. Thoroughness, diligence, accuracy, comprehensiveness of the monograph as well as the author’s high professionalism are documented by the list of expert sources from which he drew in preparing this work; most of them are original sources sought in archives, birth, marriage and death registers as well as in other reliable sources. Processing such a comprehensive publication in its scope, composition and detailed data certainly required Herculean ef-

forts and painstaking systematic work of the author. This is why we can see in the monograph written by Gustav Novotný a highly valuable historical work that is likely to become a coveted source of knowledge not only in the community of experts in the history of forestry but also among teachers, students and graduates from Mendel University in Brno. This year, the University commemorates the already 96th anniversary of its foundation. The three personalities characterized in this monograph played an important role in its history at their time, influencing it directly (J. Opletal and G. Artner) or indirectly (K. Šiman) by their work in forestry circles. Pictures presented on 40 pages further increase the high standard of the monograph.

Creating this publication, the author drew from all available sources, which he processed objectively and used properly in the text. The monograph works both with the individual pieces of information and with the links between them. In the text, we can find a huge amount of information from historical data, technical forest data or data concerning forest policies at various levels – national, regional or local (university, authorities) – up to purely personal affairs of the individual personalities. Strengths of the monograph lie also in this concept of processing.

The monograph is elaborated strictly in the form and structure usual in scientific works of this kind. The Czech language used in it is correct, high styled, phrases are straightforward and understandable, technical terms are correct. At the same time, the text reads well, which is a great strength of this publication for the public (not only expert) at large can read it without problems. The text of the monograph is of high quality not only professionally but also formally; there are no uncorrected typos neither grammatical or stylistic errors; the quality of stylistic editing as well as the quality of print are also at a very high standard.

The publishing of the monograph is a uniquely rewarding and praiseworthy achievement because the work provides to its readers many valuable and singular data, among other things a look into the past having however many a parallel with the present. Once again, readers will learn in this monograph that our ancestors often had to strive for their truth, sometimes even to fight; not always they reached the target at the first attempt and sometimes, they had not been allowed to reach the target at all. Yet they did not give up. In short, even in the case of this monograph the saying holds true that *"historia magistra"* – history is a teacher; however, not a teacher for the teaching itself but rather a teacher having a lot to tell both to us and to our offspring. Captivating are also some quotations of personalities discoursed in the monograph, for example the quotation of Professor Opletal concerning the state of the society on page 19 is highly relevant even today.

It can be concluded that such a comprehensive and in-depth conceived monographic work of high professional standard, devoted to these three distinguished forest experts, was missing in our country, and this is why it will certainly become a coveted object of interest both for foresters and broad public. One can only hope that similar publications will be issued dealing with other eminent personalities of Czech forestry and higher forestry education.

*Jindřich Neruda, Department of Forest and Forest Products,
Mendel University in Brno, Brno, Czech Republic*