



RECENT DEVELOPMENT OF BIOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN EGYPT

Biological anthropology has been a well established scientific discipline in Egypt since the second half of the 1960s, when the lack of professionals after death of the eminent Egyptian anthropologist professor Ahmad Mahmoud el-Batrawi in 1963 was overcome by establishment of a one-semester anthropological course for a group of young medical doctors in the Department of Anatomy, Medical Faculty Kasr el-Aini of the Cairo University in Giza in 1965. They were preparing to collaborate in the Egyptian – Czechoslovak expeditions to Nubia in 1965 and 1967 under the guidance of Professor J. A. Valšík of Bratislava and Dr. Eugen Strouhal of Prague. Some of them later graduated in anthropology and started teaching the discipline at various Egyptian scientific institutions, as e.g. the Anatomical Institute of the Medical Faculty Kasr el-Aini in Cairo (Prof. Mohammad Fawzi Gaballah), Institute for African Studies in Cairo or in Alexandria University (both Prof. Fawzia Helmi Hussien).

Anthropology became, however, firmly rooted also in the National Research Centre, the largest multidisciplinary scientific body in basic and applied research in Egypt, which represented then the partnership organization of the mentioned expeditions. Nowadays with its 12 divisions divided in 70 departments, some of them consisting of specialized units, it represents the biggest of all institutions affiliated to the Ministry of Scientific Research, employing 70% of their researchers.

Recently, in July 2002, two of its original units (for human genetics and anthropology) merged together to constitute a new Department of Biological Anthropology, belonging to the Medical Research Division. It consists of about 10 researchers with PhD. and higher grades (among which are the well known Professors Ali el-Nofeli and Fawzia Helmi Hussien, or Dr. Azza Mohammad Sarry el-Din), and further 10 assistant researchers, mostly postgraduates, working either for their Master's degree, or for their PhD. degree.

Among the research projects to be solved are the analysis of body composition of Egyptian child, bone density of the recent and ancient Egyptian populations or study of the skeletal remains from the Supreme Council of Antiquities excavations in the workmen cemetery at Giza.

The new department organized, on February 25–28, 2003, a Workshop on Anthropology in scope of the U. S. – Egypt Partnership Program of the Science and Technology Joint Fund. Its Egyptian coordinator was Prof. Fawzia Hussien and U. S. coordinator Prof. Fred Wendorf, Southern Methodist University Dallas. Very broad spectrum of topics ranged from geology and paleoclimates, through prehistoric archaeology of Western and Eastern Desert and Sinai, paleoprimatology, paleoethnobotany, paleodiets etc. to studies on nutrition, urban environment, disease profiles and secular changes in growth of newborns and infants of the 20th century Egyptian population. Among the specialized biological anthropological themes, genetic diversity of Egyptian populations, dental morphological data from Late Pleistocene through Proto-Historic Egyptians, stable isotopes analyses, summary on biological studies on historical Egyptian population, effect of social class on ancient bones and question of the death of king Tutankhamoun, were discussed.

Worth mentioning is also The Egyptian Society of Biological Anthropology, which has been active in Egypt since 15 years under Presidency of Prof. Zaghoul Mahran and General Secretary Prof. Ali el-Nofeli. On April 3, 2003 it hold its 13th annual conference on "Anthropology and Environment" in the National Research Centre. Started by a mere of 10 founding members it represents today a body of 250 professionals and amateurs interested in anthropology.

Today students and interested persons can consult "An Introduction to Biological Anthropology" by Ali Abd el-Aziz El-Nofely, edited recently by Arab Centre for Medical Literature (ACML) Kuwait City, in Arabic.

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