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CZECH ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXHIBITIONS DEDICATED TO ANCIENT EGYPT AND NUBIA BETWEEN 1949 AND 2010 – A CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

PERMANENT DISPLAY

In early February 2011, a permanent display entitled *Art of the Old World* was opened in the Kinsky Palace in Prague. The display includes a separate section dedicated to ancient Egypt and Nubia.¹ This exhibition represents the outcome of longterm efforts to present ancient Egyptian and Nubian antiquities to the general public in the Czech Republic (formerly Czechoslovakia).

The idea of creating a permanent display dedicated to ancient Egyptian civilization goes back as far as 1949 when an exhibition called *Old and New Egypt (Starý a nový Egypt)* was organized in the Náprstek Museum. At present the Náprstek Museum hosts the only comprehensive collection of Egyptian and Nubian antiquities in the Czech Lands. The exhibition was organized with the aim to "*become a basis for bringing together the people of Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Egypt*".² A new museum building was

planned to be built and artifacts included in the exhibition were to be scientifically examined.³

Another attempt to open a permanent exhibition was undertaken by the newly-founded Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, in early 1960s. However, this plan never materialized. A third attempt to permanently exhibit Egyptian antiquities was a part of the planned foundation of the Museum of Oriental Civilizations in Prague.⁴

¹ Besides the ancient culture of the Nile Valley, the display also presents ancient civilizations of the Near East, the Mediterranean and the Far East.

² Archives of the National Museum, Registry Office of the National Museum – Náprstek Museum (further Archives NM, RNM–NpM), box 4, 1949. Letter of July 1st, 1949.

³ Archives NM, RNM–NpM, box 4, 1949. Letter of July 1st, 1949.

⁴ Information about the planned foundation of the Museum of the Oriental Civilizations and scientific examination of Ancient Egyptian artifacts was contained in a undated letter of Zbyněk Žába: "... include classification of all Czechoslovak collections of ancient Egyptian artifacts, publication of a catalogue and publication of notable objects with proper scientific description – in detail and precisely. To do this with the best result, it would be necessary to gather all the artifacts in Prague, possibly in the future Museum of Oriental Civilizations." Archives NM, RNM–NpM, box 50, 1969–1978. A letter of Zbyněk Žába concerning the collecting of ancient Egyptian artifacts in former Czechoslovakia in the Museum of Oriental Civilizations.

Further initiatives were associated with the work of archaeologist and anthropologist Eugen Strouhal, the founder and longtime head of the Ancient Near East and Africa Department of the National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures (1969–1992).

The Czech Institute of Egyptology of the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, and the Ancient Near East and Africa Department represent the only Czech institutions specialized in ancient Egyptian civilization. Strouhal's attempts to create a permanent Egyptian exhibitions almost came to fruition in the 1980s. However, a permanent display dedicated to the Pacific gained preference over ancient Egypt in the Náprstek Museum.

Even suggestions to locate the exhibition outside the chateau of Dolní Lukavice, near Pilsen, or the Klement Gottwald Museum in Rytířská Street, Prague, were rejected.⁵ The preparatory work on such a permanent display only resulted in a touring exhibition *The Art of Ancient Egypt (Umění starého Egypta)*.⁶

The last temporary exhibition conceptualized as a draft for a permanent display was created by Strouhal's successor, Sylva Pavlasová. The exhibition entitled *The Land of Pyramids and Pharaohs (Země pyramid a faraonů)* had its premiere in Prague and went around venues in several other Czech museums.⁷

The present curator of Egyptian and Nubian antiquities, Pavel Onderka, has focused on the detailed description of antiquities kept in the Ancient Near East and Africa Department's collections and organized a number of thematic exhibitions to lay the groundwork for the long awaited permanent display. As early as 2006, the curators of the Náprstek Museum and the Classical Archaeology Department of the National Museum – Historical Museum under the leadership of Jana Součková and Marie Dufková prepared the conception of a joint permanent display of ancient Mediterranean and non-European cultures seeing the cultures of the ancient Nile valley as a source of cultural heritage of Africa, Europe as well as Asia. The concept, before being put into life in the National Museum was taken over by the National Gallery in Prague. Within the recently opened joint display of the National Gallery in Prague and the National Museum in the Kinsky Palace, the National Museum is responsible for one half entitled *The Art of Ancient Mediterranean (Umění starověkého Středomoří)*, while the National Gallery in Prague curates *The Art of Asia (Umění Asie)* (Dufková, Součková 2006).

The present display is perhaps not to be understood or accepted as the final result of efforts that have lasted for more than four decades to permanently exhibit Egyptian antiquities. In 2011, another exhibition entitled *Egypt and Nubia. Treasures of Ancient Civilizations (Egypt a Nubie. Poklady starověkých civilizací)*

conceptualized similarly that the permanent display is to be organized from the collections of the Náprstek Museum in the Museum of Moravian Slovakia.

TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

The section below presents a chronological overview of all archaeological⁸ exhibitions dedicated to ancient Egypt and Nubia organized between 1949 and 2010. It is a period of more than six decades of continuous struggle for displays that would present the Czech interest in ancient Egypt and results of the archaeological field work of both Egyptological institutions in Egypt as well as in the Sudan.

At the end of World War II, Czech Egyptology which had been fully established during the First Republic (1918–1938), found itself endangered. Although František Lexa soon restored activities of the Egyptological seminar at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague in spring of 1945, he was retired a year later (Verner *et al.* 1989: 33). However, in 1948, he was fully working at the University. Egyptology has been taught at the University ever since – at first under the professorship of František Lexa, who became a respected authority abroad and was also supported by the Czech Government of that time (Bareš 1989, 2007). Both the respect and the support resulted into the organization of the International Congress of Orientalists that took place in Prague in 1949.⁹

On the occasion of this prestigious international event, the very first archaeological exhibition presenting ancient Egyptian culture to the Czech public was opened. It was titled *Old and New Egypt (Starý a nový Egypt)* and its ambition was not only to present Egypt's glorious past but also to depict the modern country awaiting much political and economical transformation. The exhibition project was supported by the Egyptian embassy and the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education, Arts and Science and the Ministry of Information and Enlightenment.¹⁰ It was in the building of the Náprstek Museum and presented Egypt's history from prehistory to modern times.

⁸ Under the term "archaeological exhibition" an exhibition consisting of archaeological objects is understood. I deliberately omit photographic exhibitions, haptic exhibitions and short-termed exhibitions in the Náprstek Museum and exhibitions of visual arts with focus on Ancient Egypt.

⁹ The congress took place at the turn of June and July and was attended by Orientalists from Austria, France, the United Kingdom, Norway and many other countries. Archives of NM, RNM-NpM, box 4, 1949. A letter to the Embassy of the Egyptian Kingdom, July 1st, 1949.

¹⁰ The first ministry was headed by Zdeněk Nejedlý, the latter was by Václav Kopecký. In 1948, these government departments supervised cultural affairs.

⁵ Personal communication with Eugen Strouhal, 2006–2008.

⁶ For more information on the exhibition, see below.

⁷ For more information on the exhibition, see below.

Objects displayed at the *Old and New Egypt* exhibition were loaned from the museums in Olomouc (Podhorný 2009), Moravská Třebová (Martínková 2008, Podhorný 2007) and several other places (Lexa, Žába 1949: 4, Podhorný 2010, Růžová 2010: 41–43, 177–180). The exhibition achieved a wide response from the public so that its run in Prague was even extended.¹¹ The second venue of the exhibition was Brno.

In early 1951, a new exhibition called *Deir el-Medina. A Settlement of Royal Workmen from the Times of Slavery in Egypt (Deir el-Medina. Sídliště královských dělníků z období otrokářského řádu v Egyptě)* was opened for the public. It was mostly composed of artifacts the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology in Cairo presented to the Czechoslovak National Museum through the mediation of the famous Czechoslovak Egyptologist Jaroslav Černý as a token of appreciation for his contribution to the institute's research at Deir el-Medina, the village of workmen responsible for the construction of royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings (Onderka 2008). It is noteworthy that communist regime's censorship and political manipulation of historical truth largely affected the exhibition's preparations as documented by a letter by František Lexa:

*"Having prepared the exhibition about the workmen's village at Deir el-Medina in the National Museum and having printed the 500 copies of my paper Life of the Workers in Ancient Egypt (Život dělnictva v starověkém Egyptě) through the mediation of Dr. Neustupný with the permission of the Ministry of Information, in order to make the public acquainted with life of ancient Egyptian workmen, I was confronted with objections that: "The word "workman" is used wrongly, as workman works solely with his hands and only in a modern feudal system (in contrast to slaves in Egypt); there is also no possibility to use word "strike" in connection with 13th century BCE or word "revolution" when talking about the events taking place at the end of the Old Kingdom, as these words can be used only in context of the Age of Capitalism."*¹²

As a reaction, a meeting took place at the Egyptological seminar. Václav Vaněček,¹³ who also attended the meeting, was responsible for correcting some of the terms on the exhibition panels: "...thanks to the correction of posters and change of the terms from "workmen" to "royal workmen",

from "strike" to "work interruption" and from "revolt" to "uprising", it was possible to open the exhibition with a little delay and sell the exhibition guides."¹⁴ Besides these corrections, term "slavery" was added by Vaněček into the name of the exhibition on posters.¹⁵

On the other hand, the word "strike" was freely used in the exhibition guide authored by Zbyněk Žába (Neústupný, Žába 1950).¹⁶ It appears that both Lexa's (Lexa 1950) and Žába's papers had already been printed and it was impossible to make any further corrections at the given point of time.¹⁷

The opening of the exhibition was delayed until 6 January 1951,¹⁸ although it had been originally planned for 1950, as suggested by the original version of Lexa's opening speech: "...last spring, the Egyptological seminar of the Charles University participated on preparation of the exhibition Old and New Egypt¹⁹ in the Náprstek Museum..."²⁰

The general situation in Czech museums in the early 1950s is illustrated by several problems Lexa had to solve. The National Museum hesitated to put the catalogue on sale due to the "wrong terminology". Two copies were therefore sent to the Ministry of Information and Enlightenment and the result of another examination was awaited.²¹ It is still doubtful, whether the catalogue *Life of the Workers in Ancient Egypt (Život dělnictva v starověkém Egyptě)* was eventually sold in the museum.²²

Several pieces of information that are now available point to strong government involvement in ideological control over the exhibition the topic of which was workers.

The exhibition itself consisted merely of objects that once formed parts of funerary equipment or were used in

¹¹ The exhibition ran from June 17th 1949 to October 2nd 1949. Archives of NM, RNM-NpM, box 4, 1949 A letter to the Oriental Institute.

¹² Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (further MÚ and AAV ČR), fund František Lexa, box 21, inv. no. 516, sign III. B. Undated draft letter.

¹³ The present author believes that the person in question was Václav Vaněček. Vaněček lectured on history of state and law at the Law Faculty, Charles University in Prague, and since 1948 worked at the Ministry of Education, Arts and Science and as a member of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.

¹⁴ MÚ and AAV ČR, fund František Lexa, box 21, inv. no. 516, sign. III. B. Undated draft letter.

¹⁵ MÚ and AAV ČR, fund František Lexa, box 21, inv. no. 516, sign. III. B. Undated draft letter.

¹⁶ J. Neustupný, then the head of the Prehistory Department of the National Museum, was author of an introduction only.

¹⁷ However, a catalogue title includes the terms "royal workmen" and "slavery", as requested by V. Vaněček.

¹⁸ The date is confirmed by a dating in Lexa's handwriting on a copy of his speech on the occasion of the opening ceremony.

¹⁹ This exhibition was opened in June 1949.

²⁰ MÚ and AAV ČR, fund František Lexa, box 21, inv. no. 516, sign. III. B. Opening ceremony speech.

²¹ MÚ and AAV ČR, fund František Lexa, box 21, inv. no. 516, sign. III. B. Undated letter concept.

²² New information could be gained through a detailed examination of the Archives of the Ancient Near East and Africa Department, Archives of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences, the Ministry of Information and Enlightenment, Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and also of inheritance of J. Neustupný in Archives of the National Museum or V. Vaněček in MÚ and AAV ČR.



FIGURE 1. Preparing of exhibition Ancient Egyptian Mummies, Prague 1971. From the Collections of the National Museum-Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures.

the daily life, e.g. beer jars, wine jars, parts of furniture, basketry, combs and others (Neustupný, Žába 1950: 2). The exhibition thus was not aimed only at presentation of the collections connected with Jaroslav Černý, but at showing conditions of lives and fortunes of workmen living more than three millennia ago.

In 1956, another Egyptological exhibition took place in Olomouc. It was named *Egypt of Yesterday and Today* (*Egypt včera a dnes*). The most notable artifacts of Egyptian collection of the museum in Olomouc were presented through the exhibition – most of these were permanently exhibited in the Museum of the City of Olomouc in the past. The exhibition was prepared with scholarly contribution of Zbyněk Žába.²³ František Lexa, the founder of Czech Egyptology, gave a lecture on life in Ancient Egypt.

Not many additional details are known about the exhibition. Files kept in the Department of Archaeology of the museum in Olomouc revealed little information. It presented about 60 objects, including shabtis, coffins and their fragments, statuettes of gods and others.²⁴ Besides the history of Ancient Egypt, the contemporary geopolitical situation (the Suez Crisis and the Arab-Israeli conflict) were probably commented on.

Five years later, the Egyptian collection in Olomouc was exhibited once again within the show titled *Ancient Egypt in the Collections of the Country Institute in Olomouc* (*Starověký Egypt ve sbírkách Vlastivědného ústavu v Olomouci*). The exhibition lasted from 1961 to 1962 (Burian 1963, Burian et al. 1972, Dohnal 1982). The main theme of the exhibition was the afterlife of ancient Egyptians demonstrated by key objects of the collection including several coffins, a statue of Anubis, canopic jars and a mummy of a child.²⁵ The latter was actually the very first ancient Egyptian acquisition of the museum. The child mummy was originally donated by Emanuel the Knight Proskowetz to the Franz Josef Gewerbe Museum in 1882 (Burian et al. 1972: 1). It should be also mentioned, that a granite royal head dated to the New Kingdom originally included in the collection was exhibition for the very last time before it was lost. The beginning of Czechoslovak involvement in the archaeological field work in Egypt was presented through photographs. Czechoslovak-Egyptian relations were described within the exhibition, too.

In 1964, a very attractive and much bigger exhibition called, briefly *Egypt* took place in the Náprstek Museum. The exhibition included pieces from the collections of the National Museums in Berlin and came to Prague after

²³ Personal communication with Ladislav Bareš, July 27th, 2007.

²⁴ The file contains a list of objects on display, translations by Z. Žába (for coffins, statues of Ptah-Sokar-Osiris or a scarab of Amenhotep III. and his wife Tiye).

²⁵ For more information see design concept of the exhibition, deposited in the Department of Archaeology of the Country Museum in Olomouc (Trňáčková 1961).

FIGURE 2. Ancient Egyptian Mummies, Prague 1971. From the Collections of the National Museum-Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures.



being shown in Budapest.²⁶ The exhibition presented some 200 splendid pieces of Ancient Egyptian art demonstrating its development through the entirety of the pharaonic history. The objects on display included Neolithic tools, faience tiles from the Djoser pyramid complex, finds from Borchardt's excavations at Abusir, a bust of one of daughters of Akhenaten and Coptic lamps from 4th century CE (1964 Egypt). Great publicity and high attendance corresponded to the unique character of this outstanding exhibition. Hundreds of posters were posted all over Prague, with almost 1,500 in trams.²⁷ Thanks to the prolonged duration of the exhibition, the final number of visitors exceeded 25,000.

The following exhibition, *Nubia (Núbie)*, took place in 1967 to 1968²⁸ in Olomouc.²⁹ It presented ethnographic

material depicting the daily life of modern Nubians collected by Evžen Hnátek, Milan Stuchlík and Eugen Strouhal for the Náprstek Museum in the course of the UNESCO Nubian campaign in the abandoned villages in the vicinity of Kalabsha.³⁰ In addition, the exhibition was enriched by objects from private collections of Zbyněk Žába, Jaromír Málek, Ján Midžiak, Eugen Strouhal and other members of the expedition (Strouhal, Stuchlík 1967). In the year 1970 was the exhibition installed in the Náprstek Museum too.

In the following year, all Egyptian mummies from Czech and Slovak collections were gathered in the Náprstek Museum for the purpose of a unique project aimed at interdisciplinary research (Strouhal, Vyhnánek 1980). In order to make the best of this situation, an exhibition titled *Ancient Egyptian Mummies (Staroegyptské mumie)* was prepared. The visitors of the Náprstek Museum had the possibility to see most of the mummies kept in the collections of the former Czechoslovak federation. Several objects connected with the ancient Egyptian afterlife and mummification were also included (Strouhal 1971). As witnesses and guest books full of positive comments³¹ confirm, the exhibition resonated positively among the public.

In a slightly limited size, the exhibition was reopened in the Olomouc museum in 1971 to 1972 and later in 1972, it became a substantial part of another exhibition *Ancient*

²⁶ The exhibition was opened on 5 March 1964 and lasted longer than originally intended, till 30 August 1964. According to the agreements, the exhibition should have been closed in May, as the insurance terminated on 31 May 1964. Actual insurance value for all 187 objects was 2,310,826 Czechoslovak Crowns (713,315 East German Marks). Archives of NM, RNM-NpM, box 32, 1964. Insurance contract of the Státní pojišťovna company, December 2nd, 1963.

²⁷ Archives of the NM, RNM-NpM, box 32, 1964. A letter of February 4th, 1964. J. Šubrt requests posting by a posting company.

²⁸ Archives of the NM, RNM-NpM, box 39, 1966–72 and 1976–79. A letter of 23 November 1967 addressed to the Náprstek Museum with the stated date of opening. Personal communication with Eugen Strouhal, 10 December 2007.

²⁹ This ethnographic exhibition is mentioned in the overview as it presented material gathered within the UNESCO campaign in Nubia.

³⁰ Personal communication with Eugen Strouhal, December 12th, 2007.

³¹ Archives of NM, RNM-NpM, box 50, 1969–1978. Guest books of exhibition *Staroegyptské mumie (Ancient Egyptian Mummies)*.



FIGURE 3. Double coffin and cartonnage for Hereret. Ancient Egyptian Mummies, Prague 1971. From the Collections of the National Museum-Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures.

Egyptian Antiquities (Staroeegyptské pamiatky) (Benža 1972) in Martin, now Slovakia.³²

In 1975, the Náprstek Museum organized an exhibition commemorating the biggest archaeological project in history – the UNESCO Rescue Campaign to Save the Monuments of Lower Nubia. The exhibition named *Mysterious Nubia (Tajemná Núbie)* (Strouhal 1975) portrayed Czechoslovak contribution to the salvation of monuments, some of which were permanently lost under waters of Lake Nassir. The visitors were provided with the possibility of acquainting themselves with objects that the Czechoslovak mission received from the Egyptian authorities as a reward for the collaboration on the campaign.

In 1976, a centennial of Franišek Lexa's birth was celebrated. On this occasion, an exhibition, titled *Lexa, the Academic (Akademik Lexa)* was prepared. The exhibition depicted Lexa's professional life from the very beginnings in the field of Egyptology up to his efforts leading to the foundation of the Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology. One may say that the exhibition make a recapitulation of the very history of Czechoslovak Egyptology. Lexa's publications (*La magie dans l'Égypte antique de l'ancien empire jusqu'à l'époque copte* and voluminous *Grammaire démothique*), but also some materials from his private archives, e.g. souvenirs from journeys to Slovakia and the Balkans, were included in it. Lexa's contribution to the foundation of the Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology was documented by photographs recording a journey of the Czechoslovak culture delegation to Egypt in 1956 and a copy of an institutive decree of the Institute.³³ Besides

this, several photographs of archaeologists in the process of excavation and their finds from Nubia and Abusir were shown.³⁴

The next exhibition, *In the Tomb of an Egyptian Princess (V hrobce egyptské princezny)* (Strouhal *et al.* 1980), took place in Prague from 1980 to 1981.³⁵ It presented the research carried out by the Institute in the new archaeological concession at South Abusir since 1976. An interesting group of tombs, the so-called Djedkare Family Cemetery (with the burial sites of several of Djedkare Isesi's closest relatives and his high officials) was discovered here. The exhibition consisted mainly of the burial equipment of Princess Khokeretnebt.³⁶

In the early 1980s, an exhibition of considerable size, *The Art of Ancient Egypt (Umění starého Egypta)* (Strouhal 1980) was organized. In autumn 1980 the exhibition went to a venue in the Gallery of Visual Arts in Cheb; in 1981 it was moved to Olomouc and in the following year, it went

Archives of NM, RNM–NpM, box 50, 1969–78.

³⁴ Archives of NM, RNM–NpM, box 50, 1969–78. A list of objects provided to the Czech Institute of Egyptology for exhibition *Lexa the Academicist*.

³⁵ Originally, the exhibition should have taken place two years earlier. However, its opening was delayed several times due to insufficient funding. Moreover, the exhibition has never been reopened in Olomouc, as originally planned. Archives of NM, RNM–NpM, box 50, 1969–78. Correspondence of E. Strouhal and V. Dohnal concerning the exhibition "In the tomb of an Egyptian princess".

³⁶ Besides the objects from Chekheretnebt's tomb, the exhibition presented also a model of her tomb, photographs taken during the excavations and other objects deposited in the Ancient Near East and Africa Department. Archives of NM, RNM–NpM, box 50, 1969–78. A letter of March 23rd, 1978.

³² Personal communication with Eugen Strouhal, March 25th, 2008.

³³ For more information on the exhibition see exhibition scenario by Miroslav Verner, deposited in Archives of the National Museum.

FIGURE 4. The Art of Ancient Egypt, Olomouc 1981. From the Collections of the National Museum-Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures.



for the last venue to the Náprstek Museum. This exposition did not focus on the Czechoslovak archaeological research in Egypt, but rather aimed at showing visitors the heterogeneity and richness of the ancient Egyptian collections in Bohemia and Moravia. Objects from Prague (Náprstek Museum), Olomouc,³⁷ Moravská Třebová or Metternich's collection from the Kynžvart Chateau were included in the exhibition. The exhibits were divided into several thematic sections.³⁸ The exhibition was supposed to become the basis for establishing a permanent display of ancient Egyptian antiquities in Czechoslovakia.

One more exhibition was intended to be presented to the public in the first half of 1980s. It was supposed to follow up the monothematic exhibition *In the Tomb of an Egyptian Princess* and to present the further development of archaeological exploration of Abusir, namely the funerary complex of Queen Khentkaus II. Unfortunately, an exhibition with a proposed name *The Pyramid of Queen Khentkaus (Pyramida královny Chenkaus)*, was opened neither in 1984, as planned,³⁹ nor later.⁴⁰ It is hard to say why the exhibition did not materialize. The possible reason was the fact that it would have been already the third large-scale exhibition on Ancient Egypt in a short period of time.

The next exhibition was organized only in 1992. Its aim was to commemorate and present to the life and work of one of the most respected Egyptologists – Jaroslav Černý (Bareš, Strouhal 1992, Onderka 2007, Růžová 2010). The title of the exhibition *The Builders of the Tombs of Egyptian Kings (Tvůrci hrobů egyptských králů)* (Bareš, Strouhal 1992) clearly recounts the topic of the village at Deir el-Medina and its ancient inhabitants. As already noted above, Jaroslav Černý participated in excavations with the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology in Cairo; excavations of the village and surrounding cemeteries.⁴¹ The exhibition combined the topics of Deir el-Medina studies with the description of Jaroslav Černý's scientific contributions to the field of Egyptology. Thanks to the generosity of the institutions with whom Jaroslav Černý had been affiliated during his lifetime (above all the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology in Cairo and the University of Oxford), the exhibition was enriched with two-dimensional material.⁴²

During the following two years, the public was granted the opportunity to visit this exhibition in Olomouc, Liberec and Brno. Generally speaking, the exhibition met with a great reception. A report concerning the Náprstek Museum's exhibition plan of 1992 confirms that "following

³⁷ After the exhibition was closed, the artifacts originally deposited in Olomouc became part of the collections of the Náprstek Museum.

³⁸ E.g. coffins and their parts, wooden statues, stone statues, pottery, ostraca, etc.

³⁹ Archives of NM, RNM-NpM, box 39, 1966–1972 and 1976–1979. Exhibitions program for 1981–85, dated October 5th, 1979.

⁴⁰ Personal communication with Eugen Strouhal, December 10th, 2007.

⁴¹ Archives of MÚ and AAV ČR still contain letters of Jaroslav Černý to František Lexa. In these, Lexa is informed about Černý's stay at Deir el-Medina. MÚ and AAV ČR, Fund František Lexa, box 2, inv. no. 69. New information were gained from a recently found and published lecture of Jaroslav Černý, see (Černý† 2007).

⁴² Archives of Czech News Agency, *Výstava dokladů staroegyptské civilizace v Náprstkově muzeu (The exhibition of records of Ancient Egyptian civilization in the Náprstek Museum)*, October 8th, 1992.

the opening of the exhibition, visitors to the museum have significantly increased".⁴³

With this exhibition, Eugen Strouhal, the founder of the Ancient Near East and Africa Department, the author or co-author of almost all major archaeological exhibitions about Ancient Egypt in Czechoslovakia since 1969, parted from the Náprstek Museum, as he was appointed head of the Institute of Medical History of the First Medical Faculty, Charles University in Prague, where he had been working since 1988 along side his employment at the Náprstek Museum.⁴⁴

The position of the curator of ancient Egyptian and Nubian antiquities was handed over to Sylva Pavlasová. During the rather short period of her employment at the Náprstek Museum, she was able to organize several well-prepared exhibitions.

The first one took place in Písek and later in Vodňany in 1996 and was titled *Unearthing Ancient Egypt (Objevování starého Egypta)*. It aimed at commemorating the life and fortunes of Jan Kmínek-Szedlo, the very first Czech to show scientific interest in ancient Egypt (the second half of 19th century in Italy).⁴⁵ Two years later, an exhibition called *Unearthing the Past – Czech Egyptologists in Egypt (Odkrývání minulosti – čeští egyptologové v Egyptě)* was put on in Trutnov.

The biggest exhibition of the last decade of the 20th century was undoubtedly the exhibition entitled *The Land of Pyramids and Pharaohs (Země pyramid a faraonů)* (Pavlasová 1997), which had its first venue in Prague in 1997. It consisted of the finest pieces from the Náprstek Museum's Egyptian collection. Among these were objects of funeral and religious character, e.g. coffins, statuettes of gods, animal mummies, and also objects of daily life, such as storage jars, ostraca or gaming pieces.⁴⁶ The history of Czech Egyptology was presented in one of its parts. The concept of the exhibition could have been used for the establishment of a permanent exhibition of Ancient Egyptian culture in the Czech Republic.

Only in Prague, the number of visitors exceeded 30,000 visitors,⁴⁷ however, in following two years, people interested in Ancient Egypt had the opportunity to visit

the exhibition also in Vyškov – Dědice,⁴⁸ Liberec⁴⁹ and Olomouc.⁵⁰

In 2000, the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague prepared an exhibition called *The Treasures of Egypt (Poklady z Egypta)* in Prague Castle's Imperial Stables under the auspices of UNESCO. The exhibition presented Coptic textiles from Czech collections (excluding those kept in the Náprstek Museum) together with the mummy of so-called Hereret from Moravská Třebová (Bažantová 2000, Martínková 2000:11). Additionally, the Coptic textiles were set into the context of ancient cultures represented by archaeological finds from Italy, Greece and Syria. Several replicas of Ancient Egyptian clothes were prepared for exhibition.

In the following year of 2001, an exhibition *Egyptian Art in Moravian Collections (Egyptské umění v moravských sbírkách)* took place in Kroměříž and presented a rather small number of objects from the museums in Kroměříž, Moravská Třebová and Valašské Meziříčí.⁵¹

Two years later, a unique exhibition called *Egypt under the Pharaohs (Egypt za vlády faraonů)* was organized in the Museum of Moravian Slovakia in Uherské Hradiště (Onderka 2003). For the first time, almost all ancient Egyptian antiquities kept in public collections outside of Prague were gathered for the purpose of the exhibition. The exhibition was divided into two halls. In the first one, styled upon an ancient Egyptian tomb, three coffins with mummies and pieces of funerary equipment were displayed, while in the other, history of Egypt and Nubia was briefly described by the means of text panels and above all, through objects organized in chronological order.

For the time being, the last large scale archaeological exhibition dedicated to the excavations at Abusir was opened in 2004. The exhibition took place in Prague and was named *Abusir. Secrets of the Desert and the Pyramids (Abúsír. Tajemství pouště a pyramid)*.⁵² Next to the finds originating from the Czechoslovak excavations at Abusir a number of loaned objects from the Egyptian Museum of the University of Leipzig were shown within the exhibition. The exhibition presented the history of exploration of the

⁴³ Archives of NM, RNM–NpM, box 54, 1991–1995, sign. D. Plan accomplishments report of NpM for year 1992.

⁴⁴ Personal communication with Eugen Strouhal, September 15th, 2010.

⁴⁵ Personal communication with employees of the museum in Písek and the gallery in Vodňany, May 14th–15th, 2007 and January 7th and 17th, 2008.

⁴⁶ Altogether, almost 600 objects were presented in four halls. For a list of objects see the exhibition scenario by Sylva Pavlasová. The document is deposited in Archives of the Ancient Near East and Africa Department.

⁴⁷ Documents concerning the exhibition from Archives of the Ancient Near East and Africa Department.

⁴⁸ The venue took place in the Vyškovsko Museum in 1998.

⁴⁹ The venue took place in the Museum of Northern Bohemia in 1998–1999.

⁵⁰ The venue took place in the Country Museum of Olomouc in 1999.

⁵¹ Fragments of cartonnages from the Kroměříž museum, shabtis, scarabs and pottery from the Moravská Třebová museum and animal mummies from Valašské Meziříčí were included in the exhibition.

⁵² The exhibition was one of outputs of grant project České národní egyptologické centrum (the Czech National Centre of Egyptology), 2000–2004. Besides the Czech Institute for Egyptology, also the Náprstek Museum and the Faculty of Civil Engineering of the Czech Technical University in Prague participated on the project. For more information on the project see <http://pes.ff.cuni.cz/pdf/PES1-CNEC.pdf>.

FIGURE 5. Nubia in the Times of the Pharaohs, Kroměříž 2007. Archives of the Museum of Kroměříž district.



site and scientific outcomes of the work carried out there (Benešová, Vlčková, 2006, Verner 2004).

In June of the following year, the exhibition *Voyage through the Egyptian Tomb and the Underworld (Cesta egyptskou hrobkou a podsvětím)* was prepared within the second Prague Museum Night. A one-day show was prolonged for several months in response to the positive reaction of the public.⁵³ The artifacts were presented in an unusual fashion in the basement of the house U Halánků, the Old Building of the Náprstek Museum, allowing the visitors to enjoy the illusion of an Egyptian tomb. This exhibition was the first exhibition organized by Pavel Onderka, present-day curator of the Egyptian and Nubian collections of the Náprstek Museum who had already authored exhibitions *Egyptian Art in Moravian Collections* and *Egypt under the Pharaohs*.

At the turn of 2005 and 2006, several objects from the Náprstek Museum's collection were loaned abroad for the first time. The planned venue of the exhibition *Abusir. Secrets of the Desert and the Pyramids in the Egyptian Museum of the University in Leipzig* did not materialize. Only a smaller exhibition consisting of parts of the funerary equipment of Princess Khekeretnebtj was shown in Leipzig. It was named *Khekeretnebtj – A Princess from Abusir (Chekeretnebtj – eine Prinzessin aus Abusir)*.⁵⁴

On the occasion of 130th anniversary of František Lexa's birth, an exhibition commemorating him was prepared for mid-2006 in the Náprstek Museum. Its topic was *František Lexa and the National Museum (František Lexa a Národní*

muzeum).⁵⁵ The exhibition showed objects from Lexa's private collection (now in the possession of the Náprstek Museum) and archival documents from the Masaryk Institute and the Archives of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, including itineraries written during his first journey to Egypt in 1930/1931. The author of the exhibition was Lenka Suková, a short-lived curator of Egyptian and Nubian collections in the Náprstek Museum.⁵⁶

Ever since 2004, exhibitions dedicated to ancient Egyptian and Nubian cultures have been presented on an annual basis. The first venue of the exhibition *Nubia in the Times of the Pharaohs (Núbie v dobách faraonů)* (Onderka 2006) took place in the Náprstek Museum as a part of the third Prague Museum Night of 2006. After Prague, the exhibition was shown in modified versions in several museums in the Czech and Slovak Republics.⁵⁷ The exhibition consisted of about forty objects and text panels presenting the history of Nubia from prehistory to post-Meroitic times.

The next large-scale exhibition project was the display *Thebes. City of Gods and Pharaohs (Théby. Město bohů a faraonů)*, which took place from 2007 to 2008. The exhibition presented the history of this exceptional ancient

⁵³ The exhibition was reopened in 18 July 2005 in the presence of the Egyptian Ambassador to the Czech Republic and lasted till 18 September 2005.

⁵⁴ http://www.nm.cz/download/Annual05_www.pdf.

⁵⁵ The exhibition was one of outcomes of the research plan "Osobnosti české vědy a kultury" (Personalities of Czech Science and Culture) of the National Museum. The project was focused on the documentation of collaboration of many prominent personalities with the National Museum. The task given to the Ancient Near East and Africa Department within this project was to publish the collections connected with František Lexa, Jaroslav Černý and Zbyněk Žába. (Suková 2006).

⁵⁶ At present member of staff of the Czech Institute of Egyptology.

⁵⁷ Kroměříž, Mikulov, Havlíčkův Brod in the Czech Republic and Nové Zámky Topolčany, Komárno and Levice in Slovakia.



FIGURE 6. Coffin of Qenamun. Thebes. City of Gods and Pharaohs, Prague 2007. From the Collections of the National Museum-Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures.

Egyptian site from the earliest times to the Roman occupation of Egypt. It also commemorates the significant contribution made by Jaroslav Černý to the field of Egyptology. The exhibition included objects from six Czech, Slovak and German museums.⁵⁸ In 2008, the exhibition was opened in the Slovak National Museum in Bratislava. In 2009, it was once more shown in Finland on the occasion of 40th anniversary of the Finnish Egyptological Society.⁵⁹

An exhibition presenting the life of an Egyptian official living in the late Old Kingdom, named Unisankh, was opened in the museum in Moravská Třebová in early 2008. The tomb of Unisankh was the subject of a thesis by the exhibition's author, Pavel Onderka. Moravská Třebová was chosen for the exhibition based on the long-term collaboration of the Náprstek Museum and the Municipal Museum of Moravská Třebová. The exhibition was entitled *In the Tomb of an Egyptian Prince (V hrobce egyptského prince)* (Onderka, Maříková-Vlčková 2008). Besides the photographic documentation of the tomb (the chapel of which is now kept in the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, IL, inv. no. A 24448), objects typical for funerary equipment of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties, the times of Unisankh's life, were displayed.

⁵⁸ A comprehensive exhibition catalogue was published authored by Czech and foreign Egyptologists participated. Besides an entries to individual objects, the publication contained chapters dedicated to the history of the site from the earliest times to the Roman Period (Mynářová, Onderka 2007).

⁵⁹ The exhibition took place in the Loviisa Town Museum between 15 May and 13 September 2009. It consisted of objects from the Náprstek Museum and some additional objects from Finnish collections. See exhibition catalogues (Mynářová, Onderka 2007, Toivari-Viitala 2009).

Two other exhibitions following were related to the celebrations of 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology.⁶⁰ The first one, *Unearthing Ancient Egypt (Objevování starého Egypta)* took place in the Liechtenstein Palace in Kampa, Prague in April 2008. The exhibition commemorated the founders of Czech Egyptology and excavations of the Institute of Egyptology beginning with the Nubian campaign up to the most recent project, taking place in the Western Desert of Egypt. The last 20 years of archaeological research were represented solely by the photographs of Martin Frouz (Bareš *et al.* 2008).

This short-term exhibition⁶¹ was followed by another one, which opened on the exact day of the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Czechoslovak (present-day Czech) Institute of Egyptology, i.e. 1st October, 2008, in the Náprstek Museum. The exhibition named *Discovering the Land on the Nile (Objevování země na Nilu)* (Onderka *et al.* 2008), presented the development of Czech interests in ancient Egyptian culture since the Napoleonic era. The earlier interests were represented by souvenirs brought back by 19th century visitors to Egypt. It also included originally private collections of Egyptologists and finds from Czechoslovak excavations in the present-day Arab Republic of Egypt.

In October 2008, an exhibition presenting the greatest discovery in the history of Egyptology – the treasure of Tutankhamun – was opened in Brno. The exhibition

⁶⁰ Two exhibitions celebrating this anniversary were prepared also in Egypt. See below.

⁶¹ The exhibition was opened to public from 18 to 28 April 2008. Originally, it was supposed to be terminated on 27 April but the closing was delayed due to the high attendance.

FIGURE 7. Saving the Monuments of Nubia, Aswan 2007. © Martin Frouz, Archives of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague.



Tutankhamun – His Tomb and Treasures (Tutanchamon – jeho hrob a poklady) (Weiss 2008) consisted of copies of funerary equipment from the tomb of Tutankhamun in the Valley of Kings. The exhibition was organized by a private company and the exhibition has already been to several venues in Europe.

For the time being, the last archeological exhibition about Ancient Egypt took place in the Museum of North Bohemia in Liberec during spring 2010. It was named *Queens of the Nile (Královny na Nilu)*. Its ambition was to present social rank of ancient Egyptian and Nubian queens. Among the queens introduced in detail were Cleopatra VII and Kandake Amanishakheto.⁶² While Cleopatra is possibly the most familiar queen of ancient Egypt, evoking concerns of Egyptologists and artists for centuries, the latter is linked to the scientific research carried out by the National Museum's Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga.⁶³ As part of the exhibition, the first preliminary results of CT-examinations of mummies in the Czech collections were presented.⁶⁴

Lastly, I would like to mention exhibitions that have taken place in Egypt and presented the finds from the

Czech(oslovak) excavations at present deposited in Egypt.⁶⁵

In 1985, finds from the Czech excavations in Egypt were displayed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. There, the exhibition *Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology, 1959–84* took place. It highlighted the work of the Institute during the first 25 years of its existence (1985 Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology, Prague–Cairo 1959–1984).

At the turn of 1994 and 1995, an international exhibition *Europe and Egypt – Cooperation in Archaeology (Evropa a Egypt – Spolupráce v archeologii)* took place in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The Czech Republic was represented by a separate showcase, where four artifacts from the tomb of vizier Ptahshepses and the pyramid complex of king Raneferef were displayed (Vachala 1995).

In 2000, another exhibition presenting Czech Egyptology was installed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Artifacts coming from Czech excavations became a part of an exhibition *The Egyptian Museum at the Millenium* prepared on the occasion of Eighth International Congress of Egyptologists (Sheikholeslami 2000).

Three years later, in autumn 2003, the exhibition *Memories of 4500 Years Ago* was opened on the occasion of a diplomatic visit of the former Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Vladimír Špidla to Egypt. It presented the work of Czech Egyptologists in Abusir South between 1991 and 2003. Besides the exhibited artifacts, e.g. a statuette of the scribe Nefer or a relief block with bound statues of Meryherishef, satellite images of the Pyramid fields were shown for the very first time. The most recent excavations

⁶² Reports on the first two excavation seasons are to be published in the *Annals of the Náprstek Museum* 32 (2011).

⁶³ The Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga (Republic of Sudan) was established in 2009 with Pavel Onderka as the field director.

⁶⁴ This project concurs the first interdisciplinary research of mummies carried in 1970s under the leadership of Eugen Strouhal. See comments on the exhibition "Ancient Egyptian Mummies" above. Within the first phase, nine mummies from the collection in the Náprstek Museum and one from Moravská Třebová were investigated by means of computed tomography.

⁶⁵ The Czech Institute of Egyptology has a branch in Cairo since 1959. Finds from its excavations are no longer divided between Czech and Egyptian sides.

were documented by photographs taken by Kamil Voděra (Vlčková 2003).

From 2007, an exhibition *Saving the Monuments of Nubia. The Czech Participation in the International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia*⁶⁶ can be visited in the Nubia Museum in Aswan. As the title already suggests, it commemorates the 1960s international salvage campaign and the Czech participation in it.

The celebration of the anniversary of the foundation of the Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology culminated in the last exhibition in spring 2008. It took place in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo under the title *Discovering Ancient Egypt: Fifty Years of the Egyptian-Czech Collaboration in Archaeology* (Benešová, Verner 2008) and presented the finest pieces found by Czech archaeologists during their excavations at Abusir. The prestige of Czech Egyptology was underlined not only by the exhibited artifacts, but also by the fact that opening was attended by the President of the Czech Republic, Václav Klaus.

The past six decades of archaeological exhibitions concerned with ancient Egypt and prepared by Czech Egyptologists are presented above. The summary of these exhibitions can also serve as a guide through the history of Czech Egyptology, as many were devoted to the discoveries done by the teams of Egyptologists in Egypt and Lower Nubia.⁶⁷ They also presented biographies of the key Czech Egyptologist.⁶⁸ Besides the general public, the exhibitions were also addressed to a scholarly audience, as many objects on display had not been scientifically studied and described.⁶⁹ Only, the most recent exhibitions were accompanied by proper catalogues containing comprehensive information on the exhibited artifacts.⁷⁰ This recent positive development is the result of enlargement of the number of Czech Egyptologists who are exploring ancient Egyptian civilization. The foreign interest in Czech Egyptian and Nubian collections was renewed in the last

decade. The proper scientific description of Egyptian and Nubian collections is currently presented within the dissertation of Pavel Onderka at the Institute of Egyptology at the University in Leipzig.

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⁶⁶ The exhibition was opened on November 27th, 2007. Two days earlier, a lecture was given by Miroslav Verner at the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Cairo. Personal communication with Ladislav Bareš, November 4th, 2007. This long-term exhibition was a first stage of project commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Czech Institute of Egyptology in Egypt.

⁶⁷ Till 1980's, the finds chosen by the Egyptian commissaries could have been taken abroad to become part of foreign collections. These finds became a basis for many exhibitions, e.g. *V hrobce egyptské princezny* (In the tomb of an Egyptian princess) and *Núbie v dobách faraonů* (Nubia in the Times of Pharaohs).

⁶⁸ In the first place, the exhibitions reminding of František Lexa and Jaroslav Černý fall into this group.

⁶⁹ To the present day, scientific examination was carried out on coffins only and published by Miroslav Verner in *Corpus Antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum*. (Verner 1982)

⁷⁰ Above all the catalogues *Abúsir. Tajemství pouště a pyramid/ Abusir. Secrets of the Desert and the Pyramids* and *Théby. Město bohů a faraonů / Thebes. City of Gods and Pharaohs*. See above.

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