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## ***READING THE BONES*** **IN MEMORY OF EUGEN STROUHAL**

Memorial volumes tend to be a frequent, yet perhaps somewhat disparaged, genre. Although the history of science came out of its phase of distrust to biography mostly in the 1990s (Shortland, Yeo 1996), Egyptology is cautious about biographies (Gertzen 2017: 189-192, Bednarski 2015), and therefore perhaps still more about memoirs and memories, and memorial volumes. Memoirs and memories may be far too personal, and biographies may turn into a mythologization of the subject, and memorial volumes stand out as a category of their own.

Perhaps the difficulty is in the eye of the beholder – a memorial volume is a tribute, not a complex review of a career, and a biography may be written from a number of angles, from critical to commemorative (Gertzen 2017: 190, Raue 2013). If too much admiration makes for a hagiography, then too little of a human and individual perspective (which, after all includes voices of admirers as well as of detractors) possibly makes for a censored history of a discipline.

Memorial volumes have a place – they show a share of impact a scholar has made, for better or worse. They are places of memory of sorts, and historiography may decide to see them as such. There are complex recollections (often relegated into anecdotes or described with obliqueness that subsequent generations of historiographers are bound to view critically) as well as fond memories, there may be an identification with a teacher and there is grief. Whilst applying the usual irony that came to be perceived as a sign of intellectual superiority, scholars seldom allow themselves the admission that a passing of one's teacher or mentor is actually simply sad.

If papers in a memorial volume were musical compositions, the sentence "I knew ..." or "I met ..." would probably be translated into music as nostalgic tones. Repetitive, yet inevitable. For Eugen Strouhal, these tones ring not only in this volume, but across the Egyptological community. His interests seemed unlimited – although he was always and foremost a palaeopathologist interested in ancient Egypt, and an anthropologist interested in Egypt both ancient and modern. Nonetheless, his interest in objects in museum collections, be it objects of

anthropological interest or artefacts, led to him to consider collections history and indeed history of science as an inherent and important part of his work. This has been reinforced also by his own family history, his grandfather being Vincenc Strouhal (1850–1922), an excellent physicist and professor at the Czech University in Prague, and a promoter of experimental studies in physics. Eugen wrote his grandfather's biography (Strouhal 2012) and published extensively on V. Strouhal's efforts concerned with the making of a respected faculty of mathematics and physics in Prague.

Eugen also believed in popularising the ancient world for the general public – and doing so he effortlessly stepped out of the highly specialised language of palaeopathologists and into the shoes of a lecturer or writer of popular history, but always underpinned by a solid portion of hands-on scholarship and knowledge ranging from his own field experience to in-depth studies of relevant published materials. In doing so, he conveyed a vivid picture of the daily life in ancient Egypt, mingling archaeology, results of language studies, and his own expertise. In Prague, fair few colleagues recalled being "hooked" to the subject after reading Eugen's *Life of Ancient Egyptians*.

There have already been biographical notes published with a number of interesting recollections on Eugen, and many more are appearing simultaneously (e.g. Bietak 2016, Bareš 2017, Podhorný, Onderka 2017, Verner 2016). The following paragraphs are a medley introducing to Eugen as a dedicated scholar, but with a very diverse portfolio, before we embark on introducing the papers in the present volume, covering fittingly also a rather diversified portfolio of subjects.

Eugen came to Egyptology in the 1960s in a country on the more complicated side of the Iron Curtain. Like many scholars in the socialist bloc, he had to assess dilemmas of political allegiance versus personal attitudes, and scientific aims (cf. Klir 2010). Eugen never became a member of the Communist party, and this also meant he had to accept a politically less exposed museum position, rather than a major university chair, which usually came with a significantly greater pressure, and more difficult decisions were required in university positions.

He succeeded in overcoming several disadvantages, found a desirable research niche, and – crucially – was "allowed" to work with international teams in Egypt. International networking has been crucial for an informed and well-rounded career of most scholars. The penetrability of the Iron Curtain, when it came to scholarship, is, however, a research topic in its own right. Let it be said here that trying to go through it on a regular basis was not an easy task. Egyptologists had the advantage of meeting in Egypt, as a third country, and Czechoslovak Egyptology built a good standing there. Eugen was present at the onset of Czechoslovak participation in Egyptian fieldwork.

The Czechoslovak break-through in Egypt was a result of a concerted effort of several Egyptologists over a number of years. The key role in the process on the Czechoslovak side was that of Zbyněk Žába and has been discussed elsewhere; Eugen Strouhal participated at the expeditions of the newly minted Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology (1958) from early on.

Among some of his first duties was a rather complex job description he received on the trips to Nubia that were part of the Aswan dam rescue operation under the aegis of UNESCO. The Czechoslovak team operated on a tight budget and Z. Žába was keen to have Eugen as an archaeologist, anthropologist as well as the expedition's physician, not to mention teaching duties when the expedition "crew" was back in Prague and run off their feet during the academic year.

This complex job description was taxing but allowed Eugen to follow up on his interests in palaeopathology. He was also in close contact with Egyptian researchers and as an anthropologist was drawn toward the other important aspect of the complex Nubian research. It was not only ancient monuments that were disappearing. Large local communities of varied ethnicity and social structure were about to be resettled and this was putting at risk their habitations as well as habits. Anthropologists tried to map a vanishing life, as well as to understand the impact of resettlement on populations in their new homes. Eugen was part of an expedition that was a commemorative project in its own right – remembering the Egyptian anatomist and physician Ahmed Mahmoud el-Batrawi (1902–1964), who, among other tasks of interest, participated at the second archaeological survey of Nubia in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and was involved in the Nubia salvage operations in the early 1960s up until his premature death. Eugen esteemed Batrawi and instigated the Arab-Czechoslovak mission as a memorial to the Egyptian scholar.

The amount of material and records Eugen brought from Nubia was very large and some works have been published only recently or are still in the course of publication. However, what Eugen managed to deliver on time was a presentation to the general public in Czechoslovakia shown in several exhibitions in the 1960s and the 1970s.

In the seventies, Eugen initiated a research of mummies in Czechoslovak collections, promoting a non-invasive study of human remains. He had a tradition to develop – continuing the work of Jindřich Matiegka and Aleš Hrdlička. At that time, he had to abandon his teaching at the Charles University and focused on his museum work.

Throughout the 1970s to the 2000s Eugen was a regular at a number of international excavation missions, from Saqqara near Cairo, to Sayala in Nubia. His contribution enriched a number of excavation volumes, not to mention that he was impossible to overlook at the excavation, whenever he chose to stand up from his tasks, because of his tall figure that was literally towering. Equally systematically as he tackled his research goals, he continued in popularising ancient Egypt, and later in his teaching duties, to which he had an opportunity to return after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. In the 1990s, Eugen grasped the opportunity to promote an internationalization of scholarship in history of medicine, that eventually had one barrier less to navigate, after the Berlin Wall – and Iron Curtain with it – went down. "In 1996 Strouhal held a conference on the history of medicine and in 1998 he organized the XII<sup>th</sup> European Meeting of the Paleopathology Association in Prague and Pilsen" (Zink 2012: 126). My bias of an Egyptologist should not prevent from emphasizing a large area of palaeopathological studies which he promoted steadily – he was among initiators of the Paleopathology Club, later Paleopathology Association, rooted in international meetings already in the 1970s.

This was exactly along the lines of cooperation and exchange of scholarship and knowledge Eugen promoted by his work. He also kept his interest in history of Egyptology and had a hand in a tribute to a first fully professional Czechoslovak Egyptologist, Jaroslav Černý (Strouhal 1992b), which took format of an exhibition that toured Czech museums in the early 1990s. Engaging the public and building an outreach was a lifelong task and interest, and in these later years, Eugen taught not only regular university classes at the Institute of the History of Medicine, but also in continuing education classes.

The serious reader who is keen to unpick this text and has since the beginning expected more in the line of personal notes is not to be disappointed. I was also a Strouhal student, attending classes in the neoclassical building of the Institute of the History of Medicine a number of years ago. And Eugen was good at delivering a lecture, irrespective of whether it was a talk to the general public or a class for archaeologists and historians.

In what was to be his last years he still published, and occasionally also travelled. His Nubian research was still very much on his mind with ongoing work on Wadi Kitna and Sayala records. He also saw his works on the life and medicine of ancient Egyptians translated and republished – his *Life of the Ancient Egyptians* was published in altogether almost twenty editions in several languages. In this book, Eugen was at his best when joining his skill of a palaeopathologist and his experience of a physician to provide a lively description of details of everyday life that might have been easily overlooked. Only more recently have such observation commenced to be a standard part of an Egyptological historical narrative.

Reading some aspects of Egyptian art, however, was not quite his forte ... and he, otherwise a very realistic writer, for instance preserved the mysterious idea of an Egyptian tight-fitting sheath dress, imagining "it allowed ample freedom of movement" (Strouhal 1992a: 81), which would have been impossible, given the absence of Lycra in ancient Egypt. Despite few such features, however, the book still reads well, and it made a breakthrough – these were ancient Egyptians in a close-up.

Eugen's bibliography is a large and varied collection. The *Online Egyptological Bibliography* lists 180 Egyptology-related titles at the moment and the number is bound to rise, as less known publication may be added. *Global history of palaeopathology* gave over fifteen authored and co-authored books and around 400 papers, Egyptological, anthropological and medical, in 2012. Eugen's own list compiled shortly before his death included almost 400 scientific papers and books, 199 popularising papers, 390 reviews, and 275 news articles (compare Strouhal 2010, Strouhal 2016a, 2016b).

In the tribute, archaeologists, anthropologists, Egyptologists and palaeopathologists joined forces. The *tabula gratulatoria* and list of contents lists international contributors from a large number of institutions. An interesting collection of case studies as well as corpora and comparative approaches was included.

Chronologically speaking, the most distant period in human history was addressed by Jiří Svoboda, who compared archaeological and anthropological material in studies of Central European Acheulean technology and human remains record.

Physical anthropology and palaeopathology are in focus of contributions by Václav Smrčka and his two teams, Eva Drozdová and team, and Doris Schamall with colleagues. Smrčka and his Vedrovice site team (Tomáš

Berkovec and Vojtěch Erban) addressed the potential of isotope archaeology in identifying local and migrant populations on Neolithic burial sites, and consequently in assessing a possibility of human sacrifice of "outsiders" in an agricultural fecundity ritual.

Eva Drozdová and her colleagues, Kristýna Brzobohatá, Dana Fialová and Kateřina Boberová reported on the archaeological prospection of a much later, but no less interesting corpus from the St. James Ossuary in Brno. The shrine and its churchyard served as a burial place from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the ossuary dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is a unique corpus of human remains of inhabitants of Brno, and a helpful case study for European urban archaeology.

Another ossuary collection with a unique *longue durée* sample of a local population is situated in Hallstatt, and a case study from the collection was offered by Doris Schamall, Hanns Plenck, and Maria Teschler-Nicola. The cranium under investigation confirms presence of a carcinoma, adding thus to the growing corpus of historical oncological material, which was a cherished area of study of Eugen Strouhal. A comparative case study bridging Egyptian and European material was offered by Lenka Vargová, Ladislava Horáčková and Kateřina Vymazalová, interested in post-traumatic changes in the facial skeleton, including socio-cultural considerations relating on possible causes of the traumata.

The Egyptian material is in the core of the volume, including both case studies and larger corpora again. Eugen's most often analysed site, after Nubia, was in Memphis. Michael Habicht, Patrick E. Eppenberger, Francesco Maria Galassi, Frank J. Rühli and Macej Henneberg presented a study on a rare clinical condition – the silent sinus syndrome, believed to be recognized on human remains identified as Queen Meresankh III. It might well be the oldest recorded evidence of the condition.

Miroslav Verner's contribution straddles the realms of physical and cultural anthropology and offers complementary evidence on physical appearance, as suggested by surviving human remains, and artistic record of the king Raneferef, a ruler of the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty buried at Abusir. Verner offers an intimate view of the king, followed by details of the royal self-fashioning in art.

Human remains in an archaeological setting were presented by Hana Vymazalová and Petra Havelková, offering evidence from the tomb of Duaptah at Abusir South. The tomb is part of an intriguing necropolis of Abusir South with its remarkable clusters of elite tombs. The site of Abusir is a large archaeological area, whose excavation records have so far concentrated on the Old Kingdom and Late Period tombs. The Late Period is represented by a range of burial sites, including remarkable shaft tombs from the Saite-Persian period. The shaft tombs contained a wealth of material of written culture and human remains, and Eugen was deeply interested in their study. Ladislav Bareš presented aspects of the Saite-Persian burial site at Abusir, outlining the history of anthropological examinations. Egyptological contributions include also a cultural anthropological approach – Filip Coppens addressed key concepts of the Egyptian mentality, related to time and space of the Nile inundation, and their manifestation in monumental written record. The Nile was, as F. Coppens noted, a home to Eugen during the Nubian campaign.

The following contributions are concerned with disciplinary history of Egyptology and anthropological studies. Correspondence related to the Champollion-Rossellini expedition to Egypt and to further cooperation of scholars is in focus of Eva Gregorovičová. Letters by Rossellini and Champollion were included in the Tuscan family archive of the Tuscan branch of the Hapsburg dynasty, and as such were transported to the Tuscan palace in Prague. The history of the letters is interesting *per se*, and their evaluation in the history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Egyptology will come as a welcome contribution. Radek Podhorný focused on history of museums and collections – the Archduke Josef Ferdinand of Tuscany was a keen collector and his Egyptian addition to the museum of Olomouc was both valuable and intriguing, as larger collections of this kind were not a Central European norm. Olomouc thus contributed to the Czech interaction with ancient Egyptian artefacts.

A social constructionist approach, one of methodologies available to cultural anthropology, was applied in the paper of Barbora Půtová, interested in the otherness as a category in conceptualization and presentation of the human body. The exoticisms of exhibitions and freak shows is viewed as controversial today, yet it was part of a complex interest in everything that lay beyond the boundaries of the Western world throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is indeed an apt selection of themes that shows developments in palaeopathology, and news from anthropology of Memphis, as well as cultural anthropology and disciplinary history subjects. All of the above concerns our reading of the bones that contributes to the knowledge of an ancient civilization as well as to an understanding of our own paradigms.

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