

Smith, Harry: 2022 *Nubian Memoirs*. With a foreword by Sue Davies, Reading: Paolo Scremin, 80 pages including 48 b/w and colour pictures.

Reviewed by Ladislav Bareš

Anybody who has archaeologically worked in the vast ancient Egyptian necropolis of Saqqara (including its dependencies like Abusir) during the last fifty or so years must have met Henry Sidney Smith, generally known as “Harry Smith”. They must have met him either in person – and in that case they would have appreciated and forever remembered his kind and friendly manners and his readiness to share his immense knowledge of the Saqqara cemetery and its history – or, at least, through his numerous publications dealing with this site. Anyway, Smith is deeply connected with archaeological investigation of quite another part of Egypt as well, namely ancient Nubia. As such, he belongs to a handful of still living participants of the large campaign to salvage the monuments of ancient Nubia organized by the UNESCO in early 1960’s. His recollections concerning that time in Nubia – rather remote for the majority of nowadays Egyptologists – are summarized in the present booklet.

The Latin words *habent sua fata libelli* (“books have their destiny”) are perhaps the most apt description of how this book came into existence. As Sue Davies, a former student of Harry Smith and now his long-time co-worker, writes in her foreword, several years ago she suggested to him to write down his memories of the time when he had taken part in the UNESCO campaign mentioned above. Later on, this wonderful set of reminiscences and recollections that he had written got put away inside a cupboard, to be brought to the light of the day only in 2018, on the occasion of Smith’s 90th birthday.

The recollections consist of altogether fourteen chapters (or, perhaps, better to say stories) of various length, that deal with different moments of working in Nubia as well as with its sites. Remembered are not only Egyptologists and archaeologists that had participated in the Nubian action, but homage is paid also to the local colleagues and friends of Smith whom he had met at that time, be it the inspectors of Ministry of Antiquities or the skilful workmen and their foremen (mostly coming from Quft). In those pages, those people – the great names of our discipline that especially our younger colleagues know from only the title pages of their numerous publications – appear as living personalities together with their joys and, sometimes, also troubles. Many great moments are described in detail, such as the work in the area of the fortress at Buhen or discovery of the so-called “painted shelter at Korosko” – a huge painted scene of cattle, human figures and a boat. Later on, the area where this shelter had been found became part of one on the Czechoslovak concessions in Nubia, and – in this connection – Smith highly appreciates its publication by our colleague Lenka Suková (today Varadzinová) (Suková 2011).

The vivid recollections of Harry Smith – to whom we wholeheartedly wish many happy and good years to come – can be read with some use by both the laymen and specialists. The Egyptologists and archaeologists working in Egypt may use this opportunity to remember,

and perhaps also reconsider, the glorious moments of the history of our discipline. And to the general public, these pages might perhaps unveil at least some of the hidden or less spectacular facets of the life and work in doing archaeological activities in the lower Nile valley.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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