

An outdoor exhibition and the Day of Czech Egyptology in Cairo

Jiří Janák – Petr Košárek – Tereza Svášková

At the very beginning of November 2022, an academic event called *The Day of Czech Egyptology* and the opening of the photographic exhibition *The Path of Czech Egyptology* took place at the premises of the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Cairo. Both events were co-organized and curated by the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, the Czech Embassy in Cairo and the worldwide network of Czech Centres. At first, the exhibition was officially made open by H. E. Mr. Ivan Jukl, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Egypt, together with high representatives of the Charles University, Prof. Jan Kuklík (a vice-rector of the university) and Eva Lehečková, Ph.D. (the dean of the Faculty of Arts).

The exhibition called *The Path of the Czech Egyptology* communicated with the visitors on two different levels. First, it presented the history of Egyptology and the Czech (formerly Czechoslovak) Institute of Egyptology in 10 photographic panels with only brief captions. It started with the very beginnings that date back to 1919, when František Lexa offered first classes on ancient Egyptian language and religion at Charles University. Then a talented pupil of Lexa, Jaroslav Černý, found an academic home in the Great Britain, where he lectured in London and Oxford, mainly on Egyptian language and demotic. The founding of the Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology is closely connected with another student of Lexa, Zbyněk Žába, as well as with the Czechoslovak scholarly participation in the UNESCO International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia. After establishing the Institute in Prague (1958) and Cairo (1959), its members and students participated in the UNESCO campaign documenting ancient monuments and rock inscriptions in Lower Nubia. At the beginning of the 1960's, Egyptian authorities granted the Institute with the permission to excavate the mastaba of Ptahshepses in Abusir. In the 70's and 80's, the archaeological concession of the Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology covered a great part of the Abusir necropolis under the leadership of Miroslav Verner. Then, the archaeological team of the institute discovered, uncovered and documented (among other monuments and artefacts) pyramid complexes of King Raneferef (with its famous papyrus archive) and Queen Khentkaus II, or a shaft tomb of an important person of the Saite-Persian Period, Udjahorresnet. From the 1990's, both the academic and the archaeological activities of the Czech Institute of Egyptology have broadened and deepened under the leadership of Miroslav Verner, Břetislav Vachala, Ladislav Bareš, Miroslav Bárta, Jiří Janák and Renata Landgráfová. The institute's archaeological team has announced and presented many very interesting and scholarly important discoveries, as were the intact burial of the priest Iufaa, the statue assemblage of Princess Sheretnebty and high-official Nefer, the remnants of a buried ship from the third millennium BC, exquisitely decorated tomb of Khuy, the tomb of the "legendary" sage Kairsu or the largest embalming deposit ever found in Egypt. But the discovery itself is only the beginning of the Egyptological work. Hence, the academic team of the Czech Institute of Egyptology encompasses specialists from many different scientific



Fig. 1 Official opening of the exhibition *The Path of the Czech Egyptology* by the then director of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Assis. Prof. Jiří Janák, the vice-rector of Charles University, Prof. Jan Kuklík, and H. E. Mr. Ivan Jukl, the Ambassador of the Czech Republic in Egypt (from the left) (photo M. Dubnová)



Fig. 2 Visitors of the exhibition *The Path of the Czech Egyptology* (photo M. Dubnová)

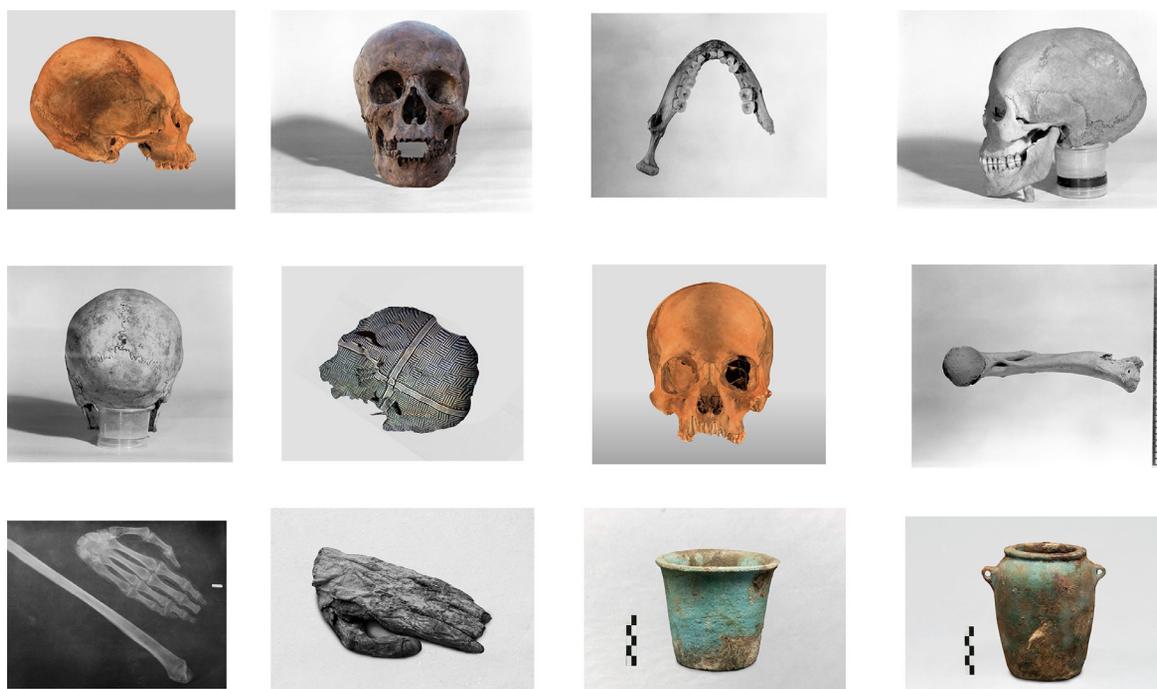


Fig. 3 One of the panels with anthropological finds from the exhibition *The Path of the Czech Egyptology* (photo M. Dubnová)

fields. And it is precisely this multidisciplinary cooperation that represents the second information level of the photographic exhibition. All panels were lined up chronologically, from the beginnings of Czech Egyptology in 1919 to the present day, but every panel focused on a different aspect of Egyptological work. It started with epigraphy, photographic documentation, archaeology or anthropology to conclude with zoology, cyber-Egyptology and climatology.

This path of the Czech Egyptology through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and across many different scientific disciplines is presented in the exhibition, which was opened on 1st November 2022. The exhibition was prepared by Petr Košárek, the photographer of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, who carefully selected photographs, both historic and current, and adjusted them for presentation on 10 large panels. Introductory text and captions to all panels were prepared by Jiří Janák. All texts are presented in Arabic, Czech and English. The main novelty of the exhibition called *The Path of Czech Egyptology* lies in the fact that it was not presented in a gallery, museum or any cultural institution as is usually the case. On the contrary, the exhibition was fixed to the wall that surrounds the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Cairo, so that all the passers-by on the busy Doqqi Street can enjoy it. In fact, from the very moment of the exhibition installation and opening, the panels have been attracting hundreds people per day. Young children of the nearby schools and their parents, students and teachers of the Cairo University that resides across the street, workers, businessmen, policemen, military, young and old. They all did stop for a while admiring the photos and sparing some of their time to read the brief captions. In fact, the exhibition was meant to end on 28th February 2023, and it is still in its place on the Embassy's wall. And it is very likely to be replaced with yet another exhibition later this year.



Fig. 4 Introductory word by Prof. Miroslav Bárta, the director of the Czech Mission at Abusir, at the lecture event *The Day of the Czech Egyptology* (photo M. Dubnová)



Fig. 5 Attendees of the lecture event *The Day of the Czech Egyptology* (photo M. Dubnová)

Immediately after the opening of the exhibition, a lecture event called *The Day of the Czech Egyptology* was held in the representative halls of the Czech embassy, which was again opened by H. E. Mr. Ivan Jukl, and Tereza Svášková, the representative of the network of Czech Centres. In a series of four lectures, scholars of the Czech Institute of Egyptology presented the audience with the latest discoveries and findings in the central part of the Abusir necropolis, on its border-line with North Saqqara, at the Abusir shaft tomb necropolis of the Saite-Persian period, as well as in South Saqqara. After each talk, there was a vivid discussion with the audience that encompassed representatives of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Supreme Council of Antiquities, heads of several foreign missions in Egypt, Egyptian students of different universities, as well as general public. We very much hope that this successful event, or maybe both events, will become a nice tradition and can be repeated every year.