

SBORNÍK NÁRODNÍHO MUZEA V PRAZE

ACTA MUSEI NATIONALIS PRAGAE

Volumen XXX B (1974), No. 3

REDAKTOR JIŘÍ ČEJKA

EUGEN STROUHAL

Náprstek Museum, Prague

ETHNIC ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE NUBIAN EXHIBITION OF THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM

ETNICKÁ ANTROPOLOGIE A NÚBIJSKÁ VÝSTAVA NÁPRSTKOVA MUZEA

Autor stručně charakterizuje rozvoj bádání v oboru etnické antropologie u nás v uplynulém desetiletí, který vedl ke svolání speciálního symposia, věnovaného aktuální výzkumné tématice. Vhodnou příležitostí se stalo otevření výstavy „Núbie — lidé a lidová kultura“ dne 25. října 1970 v Náprstkově muzeu v Praze, které se ujalo úlohy hostitele. Dále je podán přehled členění výstavy, jejíž exponáty charakterizují antropologický ráz a lidovou kulturu Núbijských, jednak v jejich staré vlasti, jednak v Nové Núbii, kam byli přestěhováni v důsledku výstavby Vysoké přehrady u Asuánu.

In the last ten years we may observe in Czechoslovakia quick development and progress in the field of ethnic anthropology which, in contrast to other branches of anthropology, was given little attention in the post-war period.

After the very promising start — the expedition of the Archaeological Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences to Mongolia in 1958 (the expedition's staff included an anthropologist) — there came a number of other expeditions of the Czechoslovak Egyptological Institute of the Charles University in Prague to Egypt and Nubia in the years 1961 to 1968, two special Czechoslovak-Arab Anthropological Expeditions to New Nubia in the years 1965 and 1967, and the expedition of the Moravian Museum to North Australia in 1969. A number of Czechoslovak anthropologists collected valuable material in the course of their trips abroad, to Cuba, India, Norway, Tunisia, Algeria, Sudan and Jordan. The interest of some scholars has been given recently to a more detailed research into the regional groups of Czechoslovak population.

In 1965 a specialized symposium was held in Prague, which was devoted to the problems of races and the fight against racism. Subjects concerned with ethnic anthropology appear ever more frequently at conferences of Czechoslovak anthropologists and in the papers read by Czechoslovak scholars before anthropological congresses abroad.

Ethnic anthropology in Czechoslovakia is a permanent part of university education and study of anthropology and some selected sections are also taught to students of ethnography, African studies and Egyptology.

The progress registered in ethnic anthropology has made it possible to organize a specialized symposium devoted exclusively to the problems of this discipline.

The host institution is the Náprstek Museum in Prague, not only because the collections of this museum and its research program have a number of meeting points common to Czechoslovak ethnic anthropology as well, but also because the Náprstek Museum prepared and opened on October 25, 1970 the exhibition "Nubia — the people and the folk culture".

The conception and design of the exhibition, as well as the catalogue, are the work of Eugen Strouhal and his collaborators. At this exhibition new knowledge from the field of ethnic anthropology gained in the course of both Czechoslovak-Arab Expeditions to New Nubia occupies a prominent place.

The exhibition informs the visitor about the original extent of Nubian settlements in the Nile Valley in the Egyptian part of Nubia, which had to be removed as a result of the construction of the Assuan Dam and the artificial lake. These settlements are contrasted with the arrangement of the settlement units in New Nubia, in a region about 60 to 120 km to the north of Old Nubia, which are found in the desert east of the Upper Egyptian town of Kom Ombo. From this arrangement we may see that the division into the basic settlement units — the communities — has been maintained.

By means of photos, casts of the faces and some graphs the exhibition documents some characteristic anthropological morphological features which set apart the three settled Nubian groups from one another and which at the same time differentiate them as a whole from the desert nomads of the Bedja tribes. Other photos and graphs inform the visitor about the growth and development of Nubian children, they give some fundamental knowledge about the demography of Nubia, the seasonal periodicity of the date of birth, the high degree of endogamy in Nubian communities, etc.

The central features of the exhibition are some unique objects of Nubian folk culture, which were collected shortly after the resettlement of the Egyptian Nubians in the deserted houses by the members of the expedition of the Czechoslovak Egyptological Institute of the Charles University to Nubia in 1964 (Dr. E. Hnátek, J. Midžiak and Dr. E. Strouhal, CSc.), and by an ethnologist of the Náprstek Museum, in 1965. The exhibition also includes some specimens supplied by other collectors (Dr. V. Chvojková, Prof. Dr. Ing. arch. M. Korecký, Ing. A. Parlesák, Ing. arch J. Procházka and others).

These exhibits, together with copious photos, inform about the detailed construction of Nubian houses and their interior arrangement, various kinds of economic activities of the Nubian population, the arrangement and equipment of their households, domestic manufacture of pottery and objects made of intertwined palm leaves, Nubian objects made of wood (some of them Sudanese imports), parts of apparel and trinkets, symbolic weapons of Nubian males, characteristic musical instruments, objects of Islamic cult, evidence of some survivals of magic, and also about the charming world of the toys of Nubian children.

Despite the marked material poverty and the sterile and monotonous character of the Nubian land, which consists mostly of rock, we have before our eyes a very characteristic and interesting collection of objects, in many respects of high aesthetic standards, which reflect the psychological and physical characteristics of the Nubian population, contrasting with the cultures of the Arabized populations of Egypt and the Sudan. Of great interest are the objects which point to the acculturation of some recent inventions (battery-powered radio sets or ink-stands) in traditional Nubian material (Nile mud, sandstone) with the whole range of typical Nubian colours.

In contrast to the high-level standards of the culture of the old settlements we may observe a certain cultural decline on the objects and photos from New Nubia. This is, however, offset by the fact that the Nubians received the benefits of a number of amenities of the modern times, first of all schools, health centers and potable water.

In the course of the gradual accommodation to the life in new settlements, the Nubians started to adapt the standardized and uniform houses in their traditional spirit, through various reconstructions and architectural decoration. This proves that the people have ceased to consider their resettlement as a temporary measure and are convinced of the necessity and lasting character of these changes and solutions in the future life of all Egypt. To this future they have brought the greatest sacrifice they were capable of; they left their old and beloved fatherland on the banks of the Nile and shifted their settlements deep into the desert.

The Nubian problems displayed at the exhibition are closely linked up with and followed by the papers of the first section of the Symposium, which were devoted to the results of the Czechoslovak-Arab Anthropological Expeditions to Nubia in 1965 and 1967. In the second part of the Symposium, the participants were informed about the results of Czechoslovak anthropological research in other parts of the world where Czechoslovak anthropologists are or have been active.