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Eugen Strouhal (24 January 1931 – 20 October 2016)

On 20 October 2016 we lost Prof. MUDr. et PhDr. Eugen Strouhal, DrSc. et Dr. habil, the founder and long-time head of the Ancient Near East and Africa Department (now Collection) in the National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures.

Eugen Strouhal was born on 24 January 1931, into the family of medical doctor Eugen Strouhal and his wife Antonie Strouhalová. His paternal grand-father was Vincent Strouhal, who served as a dean of the Faculty of Arts, and later as the Rector of the Czech Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague, and is considered the founder of experimental physics in the Czech Lands.

After graduating from high school, Eugen Strouhal started studying at the Faculty of General Medicine at Charles University, where he completed his studies of medicine in 1956. During the following three years he studied prehistoric archaeology at the Faculty of Arts and History of the same university.

He started his professional career as a physician working for the State Spa Resort of Františkovy Lázně. Between the years of 1957–1960, he taught at the Faculty of Medicine at Charles University in Pilsen. In 1961, he became a member of the Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology at the Charles University in Prague, where he worked for the following eight years.

As an archaeologist and expedition doctor, he took part on three field seasons of the Czechoslovak expeditions to Lower Nubia, within the framework of the UNESCO rescue campaign. He also co-organised the joint Czechoslovak-Egyptian anthropological expedition to Nubia in 1965 to 1966 and in 1967. The task of these expeditions was to document the physical state of the populace to be resettled from the territory submerged by the rising water of the Aswan High Dam. Besides the rescue exploration in Lower Nubia, he also participated on the archaeological works at Abusir, Egypt, namely within the Old Kingdom mastaba of the vizier Ptahshepses.

In 1968 Strouhal decided to leave the Faculty of Arts and accepted an offer from Erich Herold (1928–1988), the then director of the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures. In 1969, Strouhal became the first head of the newly created Ancient Near East and African Department – a post that he occupied until 1992. During his time in office, Strouhal organized the only comprehensive collection of Egyptian (as well as Nubian) antiquities in Czechoslovakia. At the very beginning, all Egyptian items then kept in various departments of the National Museum were concentrated in the new department. Later on, sets of Egyptian and Near Eastern antiquities as well as

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collections of African prehistory were transferred from various museum institutions throughout the Czech part of the former Czechoslovak federation to the Náprstek Museum, where they received professional care from both scholars as well as conservators. Excavations of the Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology proved to be crucial for the extending of the collection.

From the beginning of Strouhal's career at the Náprstek Museum, the collection had numbered some 600 pieces. By the time he had left the museum in 1992, it numbered around 12,000. Strouhal and his closest collaborators – the Hittitologist Jana Siegllová-Součková (responsible for the Ancient Near East collection) and the conservator Jitka Barochová – documented and scientifically described most of these objects. Strouhal published or participated on the publication of many sets of objects kept in the museum collection.

The first scientific project in which he got engaged shortly after his assignment in the Náprstek Museum, was the scientific study of ancient Egyptian mummies – both human and animal – kept not only in the collections of the Náprstek Museum, but in all collections of former Czechoslovakia. Preliminary results of the research were published in a series of articles in *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*. Strouhal published the final report in collaboration with his friend and colleague, radiologist Luboš Vyhnánek (1928–1999). Strouhal published a ground-breaking monograph *Egyptian Mummies in Czechoslovak Collections* (1979).

Strouhal also published a number of sets of antiquities or archaeological finds from the Czechoslovak excavations in Nubia and Abusir. To name only the most important, one has to mention the monograph *Wadi Qitna and Kalabsha South: Archaeology* (1984), which presented the Czechoslovak share of the discoveries from the above-mentioned X-group sites. Together with Ladislav Bareš of the Czech (former Czechoslovak) Institute of Egyptology, Strouhal published a monograph on the *Secondary Cemetery in the Mastaba of Ptahshepses* (1993).

An important part of Strouhal's work in the Náprstek Museum was the presentation of ancient Egyptian and Nubian cultures to the general public in Czechoslovakia. He authored and organized a number of Egypt-themed exhibitions not only in the Náprstek Museum, but also in other towns in Czechoslovakia. The choice of topics was always influenced by Strouhal's scientific interests or accessions to the collection (usually connected with progress of works of the Czech Institute of Egyptology at Abusir). Strouhal's first and the most attended exhibition *Ancient Egyptian Mummies* was opened in the Náprstek Museum in 1971. Four years later it was followed by another exhibition *Mysterious Nubia* (Náprstek Museum, 1975), which presented discoveries from the Czechoslovak participation on the UNESCO Campaign. The next exhibition, titled *In the Tomb of an Egyptian Princess*, was dedicated to the tomb of Princess Khekeretneby from Abusir (Náprstek Museum, 1980). In 1982, Strouhal presented his proposal for a permanent display in the form of an exhibition *Arts of Ancient Egypt* (Náprstek Museum, 1982). Strouhal's last exhibition in the Náprstek Museum was *Builders of Tombs for Egyptian Kings* (Náprstek Museum, 1992) which focused on the Náprstek Museum's extensive Deir el-Medina (and Eastern Cemetery) collection and was dedicated to the memory of the late professor Jaroslav Černý (1898–1970). Most of these exhibitions had more than one venue, touring different parts of Czechoslovakia.

At the end of 1992, Strouhal decided to leave the Náprstek Museum. At the beginning of 1993, he was appointed as the head of the Institute for History of Medicine at the First



Eugen Strouhal and Jitka Barochová in 1971 (Archive of the Náprstek Museum).

Medical Faculty of the Charles University, Prague. He continued to be the Institute's head until 1998. Meanwhile, he was appointed Professor and after pensioning Professor Emeritus. He remained associated with the institute until his very last day.

Despite his departure from the Museum, Strouhal continued to actively cooperate with it, especially after 2009 when a revising research project *Atlas of Egyptian Mummies in the Czech Collections* was launched *inter alia* thanks to his personal initiative. Strouhal co-authored a catalogue published on the occasion of the exhibition *Egyptian Mummies* (Náprstek Museum, 2011).

Still during his time in the Náprstek Museum, Strouhal authored his best-selling book *Life of Ancient Egyptians* [Život starých Egyptanů] The book was translated into a number of languages and achieved a number of reprints.

For more than half a century, Eugen Strouhal was a leading personality of several disciplines both in his motherland and abroad. His working width spread from

Egyptology and Nubian studies to palaeopathology. Besides his involvement in the works of the Czechoslovak, later Czech, Institute of Egyptology, he cooperated with several archaeological expeditions from Austria, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Thanks to his pedagogical activities at the University of Alexandria in 1979, a number of Egyptian physical anthropologists consider themselves his students.

May he walk on the beautiful paths of the West!

Radek Podhorný – Pavel Onderka