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## THE CZECHOSLOVAK-ARAB ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXPEDITIONS TO THE NUBIANS

### ČESKOSLOVENSKO-ARABSKÉ ANTROPOLOGICKÉ EXPEDÍCIE K NÚBIJCOM

Antropologické expedície vznikli na základe návrhu podaného československou stranou (dr. Strouhal, prof. Valšík, a prof. Žába). Uskutočnili se však až po dlhšom jednaní, takže sme nemohli navštíviť Núbijcov v ich pôvodných sídliskách, ale až po presídlení. Presídlení bývajú v kamenných domoch. Majú k dispozícii pitnú vodu a v každej osade je škola, mešita a zdravotné stredisko. V novovytvorenom Násirovom mestečku (Medinet Nasr) je dokonca malá, ale pekná nemocnica, vyššia stredná škola s internátom a učiteľský ústav.

Majú zaujímavé svadobné zvyky. Mladí muži si berú svoje prvé sesternice; keď ich nemajú, potom ďalšie príbuzné, prípadne dievčatá z vlastného kmeňa a len celkom výnimočne cudzie dievčatá. Skúsenosť ukazuje, že práve manželstvo z najbližšími príbuznými sú najmenej postihnuté rozvodmi, za to častejšie z týchto manželstiev umierajú deti.

Hovorí sa, že sa v Núbii manželky kupujú. Je to pravda len potiaľ, že ženich za nevestu zaplatí určitý obnos, ktorý však jej rodičia doplnia a použijú k nákupu výbavy.

By way of introduction I would like to say several words which may help to understand much better the purpose and the tasks of our expeditions to Egyptian Nubia. When the protection and rescue of the Egyptian monuments threatened by disappearance in the Nile waters after the construction of the new Assuan Dam were discussed, Dr. Eugen Strouhal followed by the present author came up with a suggestion that the international public should pay much more attention not only to architectural monuments, but also to the descendants of the people who had built these monuments in the past. Through the late Professor Žába, Director of the

Czechoslovak Egyptological Institute of the Charles University in Prague, this proposal was submitted first to Czechoslovak and Egyptian authorities and later to UNESCO. Originally it was our intention to carry out anthropological investigation on Egyptian Nubians in their original settlements. However, the discussions dragged on and therefore we could proceed to our work after a pause of several years.

In the meantime, however, the Egyptian government constructed in the Eastern Desert whole villages and small towns for the resettled people. I have used the word "the Eastern Desert". This is a real desert with endless sand dunes, but in this desert we find at comparatively small depth below the sand fertile land which needs only industrious people and water to give the inhabitants good crop. For the first time we visited these resettled people in 1965, the second visit was realized in 1967. We saw with our own eyes that the land was fertile. There has been constructed a whole system of canals distributing Nile water and it was indeed a pleasure to see the green corn fields or stretches of sugarcane. The small houses of the resettled people are built of stone, each has a small garden and in the garden there is a stable for domestic animals. Mostly, these people keep sheep and goats. I do not know if these animals are of some special breed, but in comparison with sheep and goats in Czechoslovakia and Central Europe they are of strikingly small growth. This may be caused by short supply of bad-quality fodder. When the soil gives the crop to the people the quantity of fodder for domestic animals may be greater.

At the time of our visit, however, not only the animals but also the people did not get sufficient quantities of food from the soil. Therefore, each inhabitant of Nubia received from the Egyptian government rations of flour, oil and sugar which, together with the money of those members of families working in big cities, at the constructions of dams, canals, and roads, were sufficient for livelihood. Speaking about the roads — these are really excellent and most of them much better than roads in Czechoslovakia!

In each newly constructed village we find a school, a mosque, in every other village there is a health center with a doctor, obstetrician, laboratory worker and several beds for patients. The mosques represent under the local conditions not only places of worship, but at the same time they offer a place — in the adjacent courtyards — for meetings and rallies. Very often the members of our expedition examined there the male members of the population.

The women were examined by Dr. Hussien and Dr. Drobná in the local health centers, while the children (plate I) were examined, with the cooperation of Dr. El-Nofely and Dr. Ferák, directly in the class-rooms. It may be of interest to say here several words about the schools in Nubia. These are for the most part one-storeyed buildings, with an open courtyard in the centre used usually for the cultivation of some plants, sometimes for vegetables. It is necessary, however, to give these plants very good care and plenty of water to keep them alive in the hot sun. In Czechoslovakia we try to build school-rooms with as large windows as possible. In Nubia the situation is different. The school corridors are

replaced with archways along the inner courtyard. From these archways the pupils enter the relatively small class-rooms which, judged by our standards, are very dark. The windows in the outer walls of the building are relatively small and open the whole year around to produce a mild draught which cools off the atmosphere.

In addition to the Nile water each village has a source of potable water. We were glad to hear that this is filtered and disinfected water and that the filtering stations were supplied by Czechoslovakia.

We never met with any difficulty. On the contrary, the head-masters, teachers and mayors of all communities we visited all tried to help us in every possible way. The group examining school children had the easiest task. These children were taken to the examination by their teachers, who even assisted in filling in the necessary examination papers.

Mrs. Hussien also had a relatively easy task. She examined women: in the course of the first expedition alone, during the second expedition in cooperation with Dr. Drobná. Similar to perhaps all countries of the world we met at these examinations for the most part old women with all their diseases and troubles. It was sometimes not easy to pick up women in adult age. At this point I would like to explain that not all women in Nubia cover up their face. Nevertheless, a stranger or foreigner, and especially a male of different religion, cannot touch them. The only exception are doctors, who in this respect enjoy great esteem and trust on the part of the female population. For this reason they are able to assist at the delivery and on other similar occasions.

The centre of all these settlements or villages is Medinet Nasr. Medinet Nasr has a secondary school, a pedagogical institute for the education of teachers, and a small but very good hospital.

The diet of the Nubian population is very simple. It is represented mainly by the "ful", that is cooked beans with some oil and salt. More prosperous groups of the population eat also cheese and bread. The bread, however, differs from that we know in Central Europe. These are, in fact, baked cakes.

The Nubians are healthy and strong people, and they show no traces of degeneration. This is true despite the fact that the males marry their first cousin. The deal is usually arranged by the bridegroom's mother. If the man cannot find a suitable partner he seeks his future wife among the second cousins and in extreme cases among the female members of his own tribe. There are, of course, also some cases of divorce. The lowest number of divorces has been registered in the families where the husband and the wife are close relatives. The reason is that the bride must be on good terms with her mother-in-law. The lot of children from divorced marriages is very hard. These children — for the most part girls — live with the mother, while the boys live with the father.

I have already mentioned the fact that the Nubians are healthy people without any traces of degeneration, but despite this fact marriage between relatives does have some adverse effects. This is shown mainly in higher death-rate of children, as proved by Mrs. Hussien in the analy-

sis of our material. Children of closely related parents die much more frequently than those from families where the parents are not relatives.

It is still necessary to draw attention to the fact that in Nubia there exists polygamy. A Nubian marries at home, in his own village, but after some time he may leave his community and go to big cities, where he gets a job as a house-keeper, porter, or waiter in restaurants and coffeehouses. These people are very cleanly and honest and therefore much sought after. They send the greater part of their wages to their wives. Because the distance between his home and the place where he is employed is great and the transportation is connected with much difficulty and loss of time he marries another wife. This second wife, of course, does not wish to go to Nubia (imagine a big-city woman who must go to a small and god-forsaken village in East Slovakia) and therefore the two people live together until the moment when the man returns to his first wife. Then, he gets a divorce from his second wife.

This situation existed several years ago. The husband could say to his wife three times "go away, I do not want you", and if he did not tell her inside a year to come back, the divorce was legally valid. But if he changed his mind and wanted his wife back, she was obliged to comply with his wish and return to him. If a husband got three divorces from the same woman, the third divorce was legally valid and he could re-marry the woman only after she had in the meantime married and divorced another man. Today, however, the situation is different and is very much like conditions in European countries. The divorce must be approved of by a court.

It is often said that in Egypt and Nubia woman may be purchased. This is, however, not true. The bridegroom must give to the father of the girl a certain sum of money, which had already been settled with the family, but the father buys for this money the trousseau for the girl and usually adds some money from his own pocket. This purchase is therefore only symbolic and has today the same meaning as the abduction in the past. (Even today, in some small and remote villages, the boy comes to the house of his girl with a group of his friends and they "abduct" the girl from the house of her parents. All this is, of course, arranged in advance.)

The Nubian bride, however, may refuse to marry a man she does not like and is in this respect in a much better position than a number of girls in this country at the end of the last century.