



AN EGYPTIAN TOMB INSCRIPTION FROM KLAPÝ

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ABSTRACT: Jiří Jan Zeman (1886-1934), a landowner from Sedlec (now Ústí nad Labem region), was buried in an Egyptianizing grave at the cemetery in Klapý. The gravestone was inscribed by an ancient Egyptian inscription containing the tomb owner's biographical data which was with certainty composed by František Lexa.

KEY WORDS: Egyptianizing architecture – Egyptomania – Egyptian hieroglyphs

Introduction

In October 2018, Mr Jaromír Tlustý drew my attention to an Egyptianizing grave of Jiří Jan Zeman (1886–1934) located in the municipal cemetery in Klapý in the Ústí nad Labem Region of the Czech Republic. During my visit to the cemetery in late October 2018, I copied the hieroglyphic text with the kind assistance of Mrs Thuria Tesfay Mohamed Adam. The edition of the text was collated and prepared for the present publication in August 2019.

Besides being Egyptianizing in its architectural style, the head stone of Jiří Zeman's grave bears an inscription written in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. The text inscribed on the tombstone does not represent a copy of an ancient Egyptian original, but an entirely modern composition.

The author of the assumed master of the hieroglyphic text executed by a stonemason onto a central panel of the composite head stone is not difficult to determine. During the period in question (i.e. in the years 1934 to 1935), there were only two Czech speakers in Czechoslovakia who mastered the ancient Egyptian language and script to the degree that they would be able to compose the text, namely the founding father of the

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Fig. 1 Grave of Jiří Jan Zeman (Photo: Pavel Onderka).

Czechoslovak Egyptology, František Lexa (1876–1960), and his student, Jaroslav Černý (1898–1970).

In the Klapý text, it is very easy to recognize the hieroglyphic handwriting of František Lexa, which is known from his various publications and numerous original manuscripts kept *inter alia* in the National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures. The Klapý text is not the only modern composition in Egyptian hieroglyphs authorship of which may be attributed to František Lexa. For example, the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts of the Charles University,



Fig. 2 The bust of Jiří Zeman with the hieroglyphic text on his grave (Photo: Pavel Onderka).

Prague, keeps a portrait of František Lexa by the painter Jan Václav Mrkvička (later known as Ivan Mrkvička; 1856–1938). The wooden frame of the portrait is inscribed with two columns of a hieroglyphic text, supplemented by the dating of the painting written in Egyptian hieroglyphs. More modern Egyptian hieroglyphic texts composed by Lexa are known.²

A Biography of Jiří Zeman

Mr Tlustý compiled a biographical study on Jiří Zeman with special attention about his relation to Egypt intended for a separate study.³ The following paragraph represents

² Personal communication with Ladislav Bareš.

³ The preliminary data gathered by Jaromír Tlustý were presented by means of a preliminary report: Tlustý, Jaromír: *Hrobka s egyptskými motivy na hřbitově v Klapý pod Házmburkem*. Unpublished, 2018, 2 pages.

a summary of his research on this extraordinary person, with the focus on facts needed for the interpretation of the texts from the head stone. All credits for the gathered information belong to Mr Tlustý, while the present author is fully responsible for all potential mistakes contained in the following paragraph.

Jiří Zeman was born in the village of Sedlec on 21 December 1886. He was a son of Ferdinand Zeman and his wife Anežka, née Blahoutová, both natives of Sedlec. Jiří attended the High School for Agriculture in Roudnice nad Labem and later followed his father in looking after the family homestead in Sedlec. Since an early age, Jiří was active in both the political as well as the civic life of the region. He was a member of the Agrarian Party, local agricultural associations and funds, the Sokol movement and many other institutions. In 1912, Jiří married Blažena, née Landová. At first, the newly wedded couple lived with Jiří's parents, but five years later they purchased their own homestead in the nearby village of Slatina. Because of Jiří's health condition (Jiří suffered from urological diseases), the Zemans moved once again, this time to Rožtoky u Prahy in 1926. Later, physicians recommended a long-term convalescence sojourn in Egypt to Jiří Zeman. He followed their advice and in 1929 set out for Egypt. He went all the way south to Aswan, which became his new domicile. Instead of staying for a couple of months, the Zemans decided to stay for a number of years. They returned to Czechoslovakia only in 1933; however, after a couple of weeks they travelled back to their beloved Aswan. Several Czech visitors to Egypt met with the Zemans in Aswan. Zeman could have also met with Lexa when he was visiting the Aswan region between 13 and 23 February 1931. Jiří Zeman died in Aswan on 25 February 1934. He was first buried for a year at the British cemetery in Aswan; only then was his body transferred to Czechoslovakia. The body of Jiří Zeman reached Czechoslovakia in September 1935. Subsequently, the body was laid to rest at his homestead in Slatina. On 15 September 1935 the body was moved from Slatina via his native home in Sedlec to the municipal cemetery at Klapý, as Sedlec has never possessed a cemetery of its own. His funeral was attended by an immense amount of people.



Fig 3. The hieroglyphic handwriting of František Lexa (Náprstek Museum, Ancient Near East and Africa Collection).

A Description of Jiří Zeman's Grave

The tomb of Jiří Zeman is rather extraordinary in the Czech context, as only a handful of similar Egyptianizing monuments are known to be located in Czech cemeteries. The

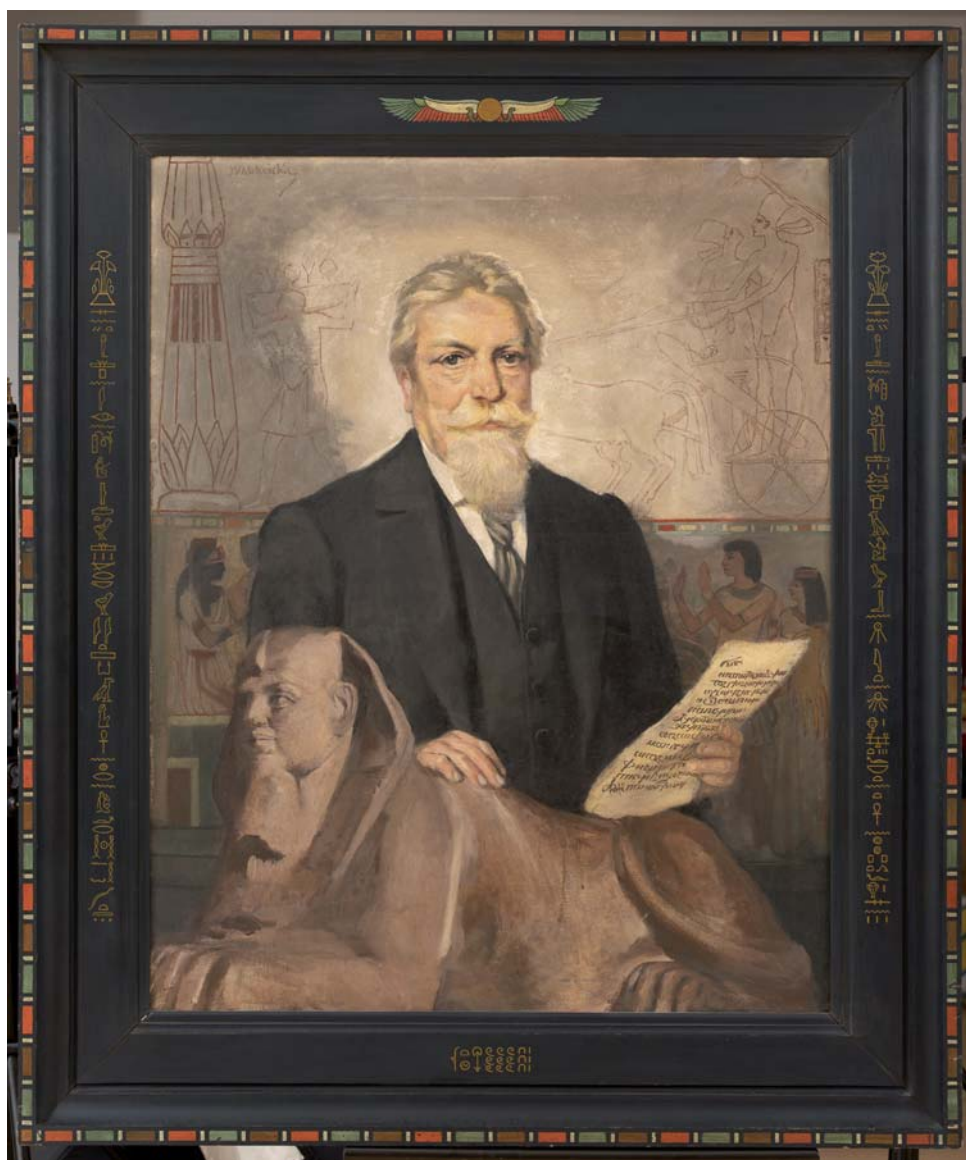


Fig 4. A portrait of František Lexa by the painter J. V. Mrkvička, Czech Institute of Egyptology (Photo: Petr Košárek).

grave of Adolf Lípa Bey (1866–1953)⁴ at the Vinohrady cemetery in Prague (which had originally been decorated with a statue of a sphinx) may serve as another exquisite example.⁵

Typologically, the grave of Jiří Zeman represents a single funeral plot, even though sized as a family plot (the size of the grave clearly reflects the social standing of Jiří

⁴ Adolf Lípa played a crucial role in combating the cholera epidemic which broke out in Egypt in 1902. As a result, the Khedive of Egypt elevated him to the rank of a bey.

⁵ For the topic of Egyptian revival in Bohemia cf. Navrátilová 2003.

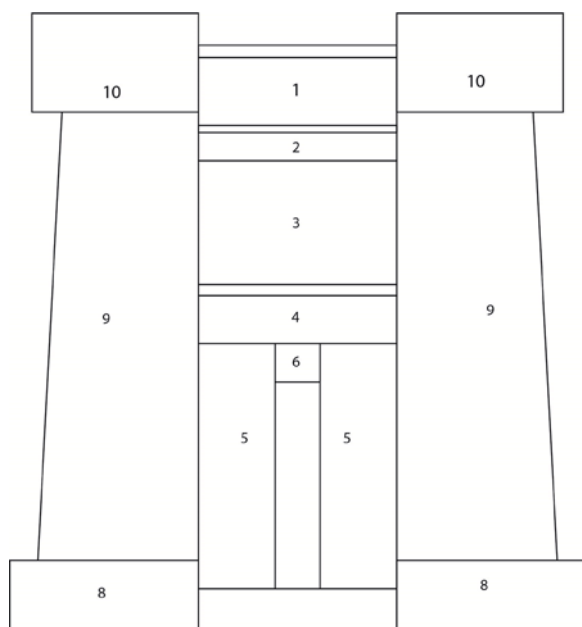


Fig. 5 A composition of the grave.

Zeman), as no other member of Jiří Zeman's family is mentioned in the inscriptions on the grave's composite headstone.

Similarly to typical graves used in Czechoslovakia, the tomb belonging to Jiří Zeman consists of horizontally laid grave slabs covering the burial and a composite head stone. The grave slabs are made of red granite. Although of a local origin, the material chosen for the funerary monument likely referred to the red granite (syenite) of Aswan – the valued ancient Egyptian material which was quarried in the vicinity of the Zeman's Egyptian home.

The composite headstone represents a combined imitation of an ancient Egyptian false door stela and a pylon of an ancient Egyptian temple. Apart from the vertical red granite slabs at the sides ("pylon towers"), the head stone is composed of grey granite slabs placed in the centre ("false door"). A bust representing the tomb owner is placed in front of the upper part of the "false door".

The false door was an architectural element employed in ancient Egyptian tomb chapels and funerary temples. It served as a link between the living and the dead, while the pylon was a monumental gateway at the front of ancient Egyptian temples.

The "false door"⁶ in grey granite consists of (1) a stylized cornice, (2) an architrave, (3) a central panel, (4) a bipartite lintel, (5) a pair of jambs, (6) a drum between the jambs and (7) a central niche. The "pylon towers" consist of three parts: (8) bases, (9) towers and (10) mouldings. The bust is superimposed in front of the panel of the "false door".

The stylized cornice is decorated with an imitation of the winged sun disc. The modern composition falls short of its ancient Egyptian pattern. As a rule, the original consists of the sun disk, two cobras with their bodies embracing the sun disk and a pair of wings. The two cobras are missing on the Klapý monument. The winged sun disc is a symbol of solar religion *par excellence*. Another solar symbol connected with resurrection – the scarab beetle – is carved on the drum between the door jambs. The jambs are decorated with Egyptianizing figures. The left figure represents most likely a deified king wearing a *nemes*-headdress and a kilt. In his left hand he is carrying a stick resembling the *renpet*-sign, and in his right an *ankh*-symbol. The gender of the figure on the right is not exactly easy to determine, especially with respect to a failed rendering of face and breast-like curves in the chest area. The arms of the figure are in

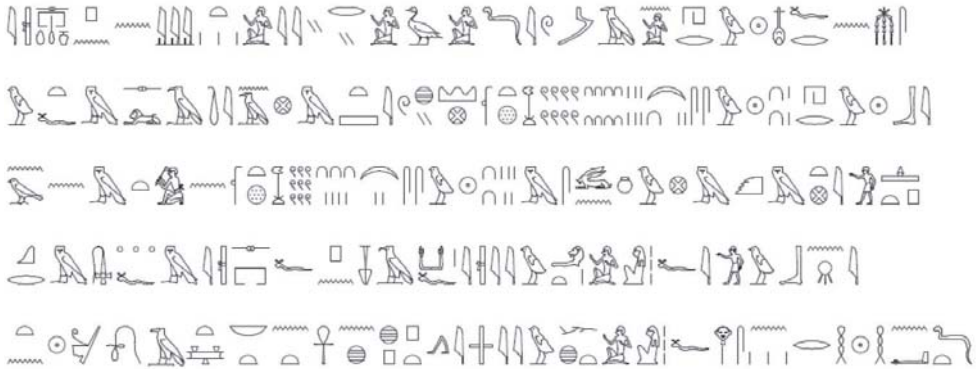
⁶ The terminology used in the present article is based on Strudwick 1985: 11.

a gesture of adoration. The figure is dressed in a long coat. The other decorated parts of the head stone are the bases of the pylon towers which bear inscriptions in Czech.

Hieroglyphic Inscription

The bipartite lintel of the “false door” is inscribed with five lines of text in Egyptian hieroglyphs oriented from left to right:

Transcription:



Transliteration:

¹ *jz pn n šj.ty yyry z3 dem3n hrw nfr n msw.t=f*

² *m z3tjn3 m tšehy rnp.t-zp 1886 3bd 12 sw 22 hrw bjn*

³ *n mwt=f n rnp.t-zp 1934 3bd 2 sw 25 m swnw m km.t j.ħtp*

⁴ *ħrm.(t)=f m jz=f pn sm3 k3=f jzw.tjw=f j.wbn jtn*

⁵ *n w3[.w]t nb.t n.t nħ hpp.t(j) jzjw-ħt=f ħr=sn r nħħ ħn^c d.t*

Translation:

- ¹ This tomb (is) of the peasant Jiří, son of Zeman. The beautiful day of his birth
- ² in Slatina in Bohemia (was) the (regnal) year 1886, month 12, day 22; the bad day
- ³ of his death (was) the (regnal) year 1934, month 2, day 25, in Aswan in Egypt. May
- ⁴ his ashes rest in this his tomb and his spirit unite with his predecessors. May the sun disk shine
- ⁵ on all the paths of life, on which his survivors would walk forever and ever!

Commentary




František Lexa must have composed the text in the months following the death of Jiří Zeman, or more likely after his body had been transported from Egypt to Czechoslovakia. At that time, Lexa was amid writing his *Grammaire démotique*.⁷ As a result, Demotic grammar and

⁷ Actually, *Grammaire démotique* began to be published before (issue 1–1938) and during (issue 2–1940) World War II; nevertheless, both issues have been republished after the war.



writing conventions influenced the rendering of the hieroglyphic text.⁸ The translated text contained several originally Czech nouns, namely personal and local names, for which alphabetical writing was used. The Czech “e” was written using hieroglyphic derivation *jw* for the demotic *e*, the Czech “z” was written by means of the hieroglyphic *d*, and the Czech “č” [tʃ] through a combination of *t* and *š*. For Egypt and Aswan, the original ancient Egyptian names were used – *km.t* and *swnw*, respectively.

The name of the deceased was written in an Egyptian/Arabic fashion: “Jiří, son of Zeman” (*yyry z3 dem3n*) with the analogy in Arabic “Girgis ibn Zeman”.




Hieroglyfy2

	<i>yyry z3 dem3n</i>	Jiří, son of Zeman
	<i>z3tjn3</i>	Slatina
	<i>tšehy</i>	Čechy/Bohemia

The months of the year were not divided into seasons, they were simply counted *3bd 1* to *3bd 12*.

	<i>rnpt-zp 1886 3bd 12 sw 22</i>	22 December 1886
	<i>rnpt-zp 1932 3bd 2 sw 25</i>	25 February 1934

Lexa had to find several analogies for words with modern notions which are listed below:

	<i>krm.t</i>	ashes ⁹
	<i>jzw.tjw</i>	those of ancient times ¹¹
	<i>jm.jw-ht</i>	follower, successor ¹²

The last sentence of the text (Lines 4–5) has direct analogies in the texts inscribed on the frame of above-mentioned portrait of František Lexa.

Klapý text: ⁴... *j.wbn jtn 5 n w3[.w]t nb.t n.t ʿnh hpp.t(j) jzw.tjw=f hr=sn r nhh hnʿ d.t*

Lexa text: Left ... *wbn jtn n w3.wt nb.t n.t ʿnh hpp.t(j)=f(j) hr=sn*

Right ... *r nhh hnʿ d.t*

Within the context of this comparison, one may observe the differing writing of the word “sun (disk)” (*jtn*), which in the Lexa portrait text is determined by a sun disk with

⁸ Bareš *et al.* 1989.

⁹ Wb. 5, 60.12; TLA Lemma No. 161740.

¹⁰ The reasons for inclusion of the Gardiner List sign F4 (*h3t*) has not been detected.

¹¹ Wb. 1, 128.14; TLA Lemma No. 850288.

¹² Wb. 1, 75.3–4; TLA Lemma No. 25750.

radiating rays. In the case of the Klapý text, the word is determined by a corrupted sign representing a royal bust with the Red Crown (?), i.e. Gardiner's List sign S3.

The Czech Version of the Text

The Czech version of the funerary text is inscribed on both bases of the pylon towers. The translation of the Czech version into English is not provided, as it is identical with the hieroglyphic text. Special modern terms with their ancient counterparts are listed above.

The Czech and ancient Egyptian versions do differ in one substantial detail, namely the given place of birth of the deceased. The Czech version of the text gives Sedlec (*Line 2: "v Sedlci"*) as a place of birth, while the Egyptian texts gives Slatiny instead. According to the research carried out by Mr Tlustý, Jiří Zeman was indeed born in Sedlec.

It seems very likely that the Czech text which was given to František Lexa for translation contained Slatina as the place of birth. Lexa translated the text accordingly. However, at some point the survivors realized the mistake and corrected it only in the Czech version.



Fig. 7 The Czech version of the funerary text, left base (Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Fig. 8 The Czech version of the funerary text, right base (Photo: Pavel Onderka).

Left base:

Line 1: TATO HROBKA PATŘÍ ROLNÍKU JIŘÍMU, SYNU ZEMANOVU

Line 2: DOBRÝ DEN JEHO NAROZENÍ V SEDLCI BYL ROK 1886

Line 3: DVANÁCTÝ MĚSÍC DEN DVACÁTÝ DRUHÝ

Line 4: ZLÝ DEN JEHO SMRTI BYL ROK 1934 DRUHÝ MĚSÍC

Line 5: DEN DVACÁTÝPÁTÝ V ASUANU V EGYPTĚ.

Right base:

Line 6: KÉŽ POPEL ODPOČÍVÁ V TÉTO HROBCE

Line 7: JEHO DUCH PŘIDRUŽÍ SE K JEHO PŘEDKŮM,

Line 8: KÉŽ SLUNCE SVÍTÍ NA VŠECHNY CESTY ŽIVOTA

Line 9: PO NICHŽ CHODITI BUDOU JEHO POZŮSTALÍ

Line 10: NA VĚKY VĚKŮV.

Conclusion

The modern hieroglyphic inscription on the head stone of Jiří Jan Zeman represents a unique monument in which laic interests and a fascination of the pharaonic civilization of ancient Egypt blend with scholarly Egyptological research. It also gives glimpses into how Egyptology and its protagonists were perceived in the inter-war Czechoslovakia and the social networking of František Lexa, the founding father of Czechoslovak Egyptology.

Abbreviations:

TLA = Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae (<http://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/>)

Wb. = Erman, Adolf: *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*

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