

EGYPTOLOGY ... ALSO IN LATVIA

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Egyptology could not have had a beginning in Latvia were it not for a talented professor, namely, Francis Balodis, who was able both to inspire student audiences, and also establish the Cabinet of Egyptology and Oriental Philology gathering a collection of high-quality valuable ancient artefacts. Subsequently, these became the object of his study and research, building on a thesis presented in 1912 at the University of Munich, “Prolegomena zur Geschichte der bärtigen zwerghaften Gottheiten in Ägypten (Prolegomena on the History of Bearded Dwarfs in Egypt)”.

In 2000/2001, combining astute use of high-technology capabilities and an aptitude for cooperation in inter-disciplinary research, and taking advantage of the development of unconventional research techniques, the Museum of Foreign Art (Rīga), together with the Department of Egyptian Antiquities of the Louvre Museum (Paris), Polish Egyptologists, and specialists of the Naval Medical Centre (Rīga), were able, for the first time in the Baltic region, to study a mummy based on state-of-the-art computer tomography and radiography, and, also for the first time ever, to image via computed tomography, a



Calibration of ground-penetrating radar device. Adobe wall, New Kingdom tombs Saqqara

mummy in its sarcophagus, and these data in digital form could be then studied in many countries. Implementation of this project and the excellent results obtained thereby ranked Latvia among countries engaged in the scholarly investigation of Egyptology.

Notwithstanding this, the first *in-situ* studies by scholars from Latvia in Egypt began much later, only in 2006, when for the first time ever, a photogrammetry survey was carried out of certain large ancient monuments and, furthermore laser scanning of exposed surfaces was performed. At that time, such technical methods had only been applied to artefacts stored indoors, but their determination and trust in the new approach permitted PhD, *Dr. arch.* Bruno Deslandes and *Dr. sc. ing., h.c.* Jānis Klētnieks, for the very first time ever, *in situ* to characterise in detail pylons of the Great Temple located at Thebes (*Dr. sc. ing.* Māris Kaļinka). Already in the following year, a group of researchers from Latvia, led by B. Deslandes, carried out detailed laser imaging of the Pyramid of Djoser. Technology develops unremittingly and the methods employed by this group as novel became customary during the succeeding decade, to obtain *in-situ* detailed characterisation of valuable cultural historical monuments. This also applies to making 3-D measurements of objects under study (*ing.* Klaus Kiep), and includes processing of the 3-D data (Baiba Ziemele and Oto Lukss). Analogous investigations using ground-penetrating radar led to the discovery of a number of previously unknown passages beneath the Pyramid of Djoser, in addition to enclosed rooms, and also previously undiscovered structural features (*Dr. geol.* Prof. Valdis Segliņš and *ing.* Georgijs Sičovs).

A novel aspect of these investigations was the characterisation and documentation (using GIS tools) of artefacts and underground wall decorations located beneath the central part of the Pyramid of Djoser (*Dr. geol.* Agnese Kukela). These investigations resulted in methodological guidelines that induced the Supreme Council of Antiquities (Egypt) to upgrade significantly the requirements of the quality of research, in addition to training many Egyptian specialists in implementation of these new research techniques.



Mery-Neith tomb floor tests for unknown substructures nearby the King Djoser Pyramid complex

The results of processing empirical data collected during these expeditions were an essential feature of this work – tens of publications, among which are those by A. Kukela on the subject of the weathering of construction materials employed in the Pyramid of Djoser, including the nature of binders that were used, and the development of geospatial models. Measurements of the deformation of pyramids sited on the Giza Plateau and indications of previously unknown hidden spaces in these are also of lasting significance.

Although, in the following years, our researchers were able to participate in archaeological excavation missions in Egypt organised by other countries, as of 2011 these investigations have been paused; subsequently, they have only participated in a number of French missions, Red Bubasteion (in 2013 and 2014). These have been the final missions to extensive excavations carried out in recent years; hence, the most significant discoveries in recent years relate to studies of how pigments were prepared for paintings found in the tombs of the rulers of ancient Egypt. Thus, when collapsed underground passages were found covered with a thick layer of



The First Dynasty tombs field at North Saqqara

ochre covering the walls, such visual evidence was used to corroborate what had been described in written texts.

In addition, scholars have focused attention on investigation of artefacts that had previously come into the possession of the Museum of Foreign Art (presently, the Art Museum Rīga Bourse). It was thanks to the work of museum staff over several decades that the collection created by F. Balodis was scrupulously maintained in a good state. Moreover, a comprehensive descriptive text was compiled over many years until it was published in Latvian and English, in 2014, as *Ancient Egypt. A Collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art*. The underlying scholarly research and quality of the catalogue allow it to stand alongside similar catalogues from world-renowned museums. Scientific papers including discussion about the identity of the stat-

ue of Merire on public display in Rīga, which has been the subject of scholarly debate for many decades, are an important part of this publication.

A number of popular publications about Ancient Egypt have appeared recently in Latvian, about its cultural diversity and its role in the Ancient World (J. Klētnieks); in addition, Romualds Pipars produced, in 2010, a full-length documentary film about the Latvian scientific missions to Egypt, “Džosera piramīdas noslēpumi” (Secrets of the Pyramid of Djoser). These activities signalled the start of publication in Latvian of a number of scholarly monographs. Thus, the publication, *Senās Ēģiptes rakstu dārgumi. No Piramīdu tekstiem līdz Mirušo grāmatai* (Written Treasures of Ancient Egypt. From Texts Found in Pyramids to the Book of the Dead), in 2011, chiefly presents the key elements of the written cultural heritage of Ancient Egypt – notably including

raw translations into Latvian of texts found in the Mortuary Complex of the Pyramid of Unas, supplemented by basic texts from the Papyrus of Ani, as well as some inscriptions found on sarcophagi. The pyramid texts are translated in full, and provide ample material for further scholarly study of these conversations between gods, in addition to spells, thereby eschewing the need to rely on intermediate language texts, which could create insurmountable barriers for future study. A chronological framework has been established of the development periods of the Ancient Egyptian State, along with a detailed list of the ruling dynasties and rulers of Ancient Egypt, giving their names and representative written forms thereof. This information is now available for the first time in Latvian, which is an important result, because they are not available in the languages of our immediate neighbourhood. The main scientific finding of this work is largely to be found in the content of texts from the Pyramid of Unas, as providing evidence for the fragmentary nature of these texts, and contradiction of the previously held assertion that these form a single cohesive work. They are most likely to have been parts of a ritual invocation of deities by high priests, the surviving text covering only a part of the ritual, since the fragments of speech are unevenly sited on different walls of the tomb, abandoning any organisation in rows and columns.

The role played by deities in ancient civilizations is most often exaggerated, ranging from devastating to romantic, most often combining and simplifying the different ways how the ancient gods impacted society. The opportunity is lost thereby to appreciate how the image of deities gives insight into society of the period. In this sense, the publication in Latvian, *Hors. Valdnieku dievs* (Horus. God of Kings), in 2017, following a novel methodological approach, presents a comprehensive evaluation and analysis of artefacts and known texts of one of the principal deities of Ancient Egypt. Taking into account the geographical mapping of ancient evidence in its historical context the approach allows the image of a deity to be evaluated in terms of its variability and adaptation to the needs of the local community at any given period, and, furthermore, assessing texts as to the diversity of images of the deity provides an

insight into the changes in Egyptian society in terms of its need for spiritual values, belief in improving daily life, security, and anticipation of the afterlife. A similar approach was followed consistently in studying other ancient cultures, finding expression in a work (in Latvian), in 2018, dedicated to one of the main goddesses of Mesopotamia, Inanna/Ishtar, highlighting transformations of representations of this deity, *Ištare un desmitiem tās dažādo seju* (Ishtar and Dozens of Her Various Faces).

Many stories and myths have been known for centuries about mathematics and medicine in Ancient Egypt and what this civilisation achieved, including various facets of knowledge hidden from society. These accounts are widespread in media circles; however, all known sources dating from Ancient Egypt have been translated over the past century, and, in addition to fragments available in Latvian, complete translations are available in languages currently used in the Baltic region. A rather different situation obtains in regard to ancient texts on medicine. These have so far been translated into several languages over the past century, with no single overview to-date of these documents. For this reason, all of the various available translations, made over the course of many years, have been re-assessed taking into account the modern state of knowledge about Ancient Egypt. In all, information has been collected systematically from more than 50 different sources concerning medical treatment techniques, as well as, approximately 1500 prescriptions. In general, these comprise not only a modern-day body of texts (*Senās Ēģiptes medicīnas papyri*, The Medical Papyri of Ancient Egypt, 2018), but also high-quality cognitive material on the use of medical plants and other natural products in healing and health care. The scientific novelty of this work stems from the availability of these ancient documents, accessible, in general, by means of modern translations of ancient texts, which allows for reliably tracking how medicine and pharmacology developed over nearly two thousand years, as empirical sciences in Ancient Egypt.

However, there are numerous texts dealing with magic and the casting of spells that constitute an important part of the Medical Papyri, which contrast strongly with traditional views on these issues.

Thus, a monograph was published in 2018, in Latvian, based on primary sources, reflecting the presently available knowledge on these subjects, *Maģija un burvestības Senajā Ēģiptē* (Magic and Spells in Ancient Egypt). This text differs substantially from similar publications in other languages, wherein the presentations of magic and casting spells in ancient Egypt are often superficial. This work is the first one clearly to separate the traditional view of these issues as were current in Ancient Egypt, from those following the Assyrian conquest, which latter were typical of the Greco-Roman period. It should be noted that the oldest Egyptian texts on magic and spells display features in common with the rich oral folklore tradition in Latvia, as studied by Janīna Kursīte-Pakule. In this sense, some basic materials exist for future research on Ancient Egypt.

Working with ancient sources is always very time consuming, particularly if there are many such sources and they have been published over several centuries relying on different translation methods and a changing vocabulary. This makes it possible to look at many issues from the outside, including ignoring traditions of the different schools of scholars, linguistic boundaries and those of Egyptology specialist sub-sectors. The latter was particularly significant in the detailed appreciation of how restoration was going on in the major temples and tombs of rulers within the necropolis at Thebes and the tombs of the Valley of the Kings. This allowed recovery of many lost details of mouldings and images. They showed not only the high craftsmanship of visual art, but also the high degree of organisation of the events depicted, in particular, detailed

scenarios for ceremonies and festive events, dance choreography, and scenarios for other staged performances. It is unusual that many such mouldings and images include scrupulous and amplified signatures, and detailed descriptions of the events depicted; however, these have only been presented in studies of epigraphy. It is not exactly the case that up to now no one has paid attention to these features: several ornate large-sized mouldings with accompanying descriptions have been well known from the end of the 19th century onwards. Their publication and interpretation once provided an important source of inspiration for artists of the Art Nouveau period, as well as for the Art Deco period. In addition to visual depictions, they have also been transformed into dramatic performances and other public shows set in an imagined environment of the Ancient Egypt. The information now available permits a trustworthy guide of theatrical ceremonies for religious purposes and other performances, in terms of their scale, scenography, assignation of roles, props, layout and staging of productions (*Ritual Drama and Theatrical Productions in Ancient Egypt*, 2020). Certainly, fully developed theatre did not exist in Ancient Egypt, as it was to be two thousand years later that, in ancient Greece, a completely different synthesis would emerge of worldly and religious ideas, which nonetheless also has played an important role in Ancient Egypt.

Translated by **Eduards Bruno Deksnis**