



THE SYMPOSIUM “EGYPT AND AUSTRIA, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL RELATIONS”

CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE  
CZECH INSTITUTE OF EGYPTOLOGY  
GREEN HALL, CELETNA 20  
31/8 –2/9 2004

THE SYMPOSIUM has been realised according to the planned schedule with participation of four Austrian and four Czech students of Egyptology and four Austrian and three Czech researchers. All participants presented a paper. The audience included their colleagues of Institute of Egyptology in Prague and other members of the Prague academic community.

THEMES, AS CAN BE SEEN IN THE ENCLOSED PROGRAMME, COVERED A LARGE FIELD OF POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL HISTORY. The material from the whole former Hapsburg monarchy presented converging tendencies and proved the scholarly relevance of study of Austrian relationship to the Orient in general and especially Egypt, in a broader historical perspective. Political and economic relations fostered cultural interest, which, however, grew independently as well, and presented a specific branch of the so-called phenomenon of Orientalism and Egyptomania.

The interests of the Austrian monarchy in the Orient were quite substantial. How about Austrian interests in Egypt herself? Rudolf Agstner, who worked with large amounts of archive materials concerning Austrian embassies in Egypt and above all their consular agenda, characterizes Austrian diplomacy as follows: *”The history of the official Austrian presence in Egypt offers an interesting view at how in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, the Ballhausplatz lost the influence they had gained during the reign of Muhammad Ali. Neither the fact that the plans for the Suez Canal were made by an Austrian, nor the existence of the largest Austro-Hungarian community in this part of the Ottoman Empire, some members of which reached an influential position at the Khedive’s court, and not even the fact that the last Khedive Abbas II Hilmi attended the*

*Viennese Theresianum, were exploited politically. The monarchy nonetheless had a certain influence on some areas of economy and controlled the beer and textile trade.”* This quote briefly characterizes the main aspects of the Austrian (and Austro-Hungarian) presence in Egypt, both in terms of politics and general existence of the Austrian community.

Starting at this point, some researchers analysed various stages of Austrian politics and economic interests. A large group, however, opted for a no less interesting topic – the cultural relations, and importance of Oriental inspiration in Austrian art and cultural life.

The symposium proved to be a useful meeting of Czech and Austrian colleagues following complementary research interest, and if the appropriate funding will be secured, the presented papers will be published as a proceedings volume. In addition, both Austrian and Czech part expressed a wish to find a way to continue collaboration in the respect of this field of study, i.e. history of Austrian interests in the Orient in historical perspective. The tradition has been systematically kept since 2001.

Prague, September 2004

Organising committee