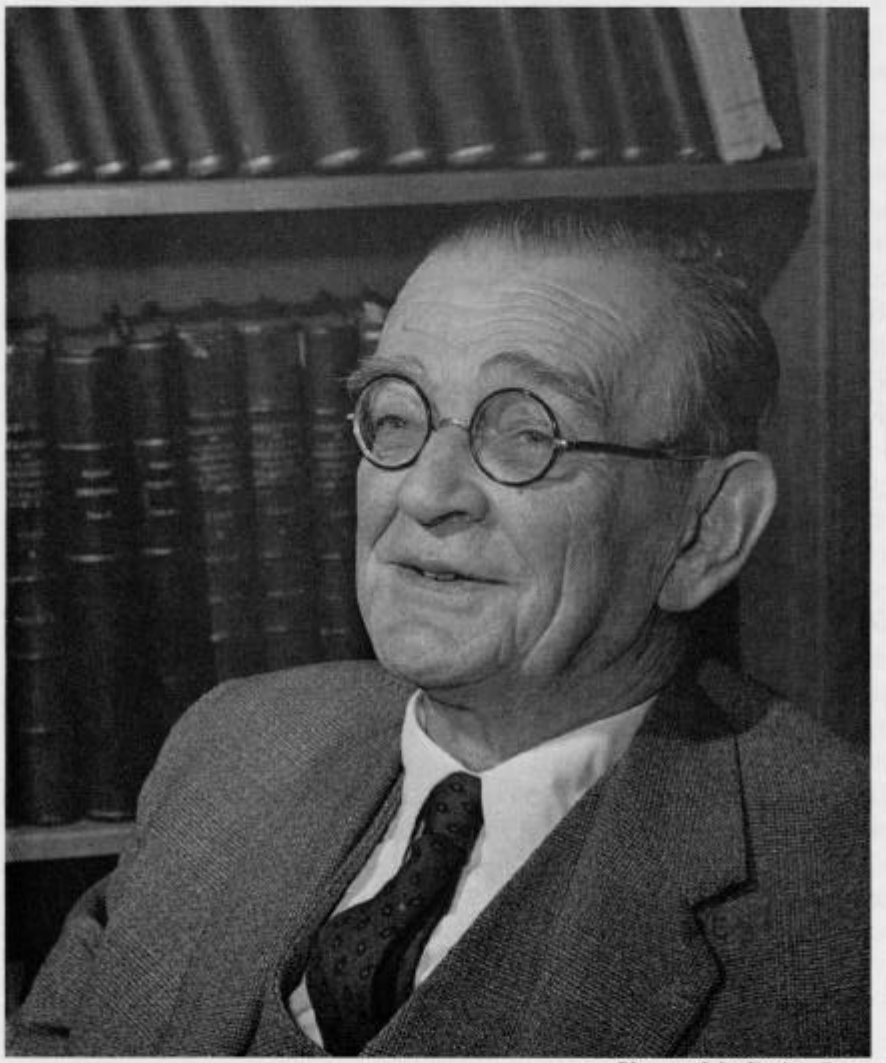
PLATE XXIII



Photograph by Zemina, Prague

JAROSLAV ČERNÝ

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1898–1970

TO write about Jaroslav Černý is to write about a scholar who achieved perfect contentment from his chosen field of study, who enriched it for others and who brought the past to life through the depth of his understanding of the way in which the ordinary person in ancient Egypt conducted his affairs. Dedication was something which came naturally to him; it was not a conscious effort involving rigorous self-discipline, but a simple result of his affection for his subject. He could enjoy the society of his fellow men and other kinds of relaxation all the more freely because he knew that nothing could distract him for long from what he liked best to do and what he conceived to be his main purpose in life. It was the advancement of his science which he thought important and whether it was achieved directly through his own researches or through helping other scholars by placing his knowledge and his unpublished studies at their disposal was not a matter of serious concern to him.

Černý was born on 22 August 1898 at Pilsen, where his father held a post in the Civil Service. At heart he belonged to Czechoslovakia for the whole of his life, although he lost his native nationality for technical reasons soon after settling in England in 1946. He could have obtained British citizenship, but he preferred to remain without formal attachment to any country. His sudden death occurred at Oxford on 29 May 1970. There were few European languages which he could not read and, apart from Czech and English, he was able to converse in French, German, Italian, and Serbo-Croat. With such an exceptional command of languages he was able to associate with most of the Egyptologists of his day without the hindrances to communication which so commonly impose restrictions on scholars in their discussions with colleagues in other countries.

Even as a schoolboy Černý spent much of his leisure time studying Egyptology and by the age of seventeen he had already marshalled the conflicting evidence of the classical historians in their descriptions of Lake Moeris and the neighbouring Labyrinth. His notes, which occupy some eighty closely written pages, consist of copies of the relevant passages in the classical authors, together with translations into either Czech or German, quotations from the writings of Egyptologists on Lake Moeris

and the Labyrinth and Petrie's description of the temple of Ammenemes III, based on his excavations at El-Lahun in 1888–9. A few pages are devoted to his own assessment of the reliability of the accounts in the classical writers, but he must have felt that the results were not very rewarding, to judge from the fact that he did not return to the subject later in his life. Much of the work was done during his summer holiday in Berlin; it shows the same exhaustive study of the available evidence and of its treatment by other scholars which was typical of everything he undertook in later life. He had an almost uncanny knack of tracking down details of information in monographs and early publications whose existence was scarcely recorded outside the catalogues of libraries. Few Egyptologists have acquired such a comprehensive knowledge of the literature of their subject or have possessed finer private libraries.

In Prague University, which he entered in 1915, he was a pupil of František Lexa, who held the Chair of Egyptology, and Alois Musil, the Arabian explorer and geographer. While reading for his doctorate he earned his livelihood at the Zivnostenska Banka, where he quickly gained a reputation as a decipherer of difficult handwriting—a talent which was eventually to play an important part in his Egyptological work. The subject of his thesis was the history and constitution of the community of scribes, artists, and craftsmen responsible for the construction of the New Kingdom tombs at Thebes. In contrast with most of the other branches of Egyptology, it is a richly documented subject. Apart from the tombs of kings and nobles, there are the workmen's own tombs and their houses at Deir el-Medineh, near the Valley of the Queens. Still more numerous are their written records, consisting of countless inscriptions on objects, papyri, ostraka, and rock graffiti, mostly written in hieratic, a cursive form of the hieroglyphic script, in the interpretation of which Černý was certainly the leading authority. By far the largest collection of these records, outside Egypt, is preserved in the Turin Museum, and Černý used to go there for his summer holiday to study and to copy them; he always called it his Mecca. Such was his zeal that he would catch the night train from Prague after a day's work at the bank and repeat the process in the reverse direction on his return, thereby adding two working days to his stay in Turin. These visits brought him into touch with foreign Egyptologists, notably Ernesto Schiaparelli, the Curator of the Egyptian Department in the Turin Museum, and T. E. Peet, whose studies at that time were very

closely related to those of Černý. Perhaps of even greater importance, at any rate for its consequences, was his chance meeting in 1922 with Ludlow Bull of the Metropolitan Museum Černý used to relate that Bull happened to visit the museum when he was standing on a ladder copying the papyrus which records the harem conspiracy under Ramesses III, and Bull, impressed by Černý's obvious skill in the transcription of hieratic, obtained an introduction to him through Schiaparelli. When James Henry Breasted arrived at Turin a few days later, Bull was able to tell him about the young scholar's prowess and also about the difficulties under which he was working. In those days there were no posts for an Egyptologist in Czechoslovakia apart from the Chair in Prague University, which was not likely to become vacant for many years. Breasted soon saw that Bull's high opinion of Černý was well justified, but he could do nothing directly to help him, so he wrote a letter of recommendation on his behalf to Alan Gardiner. Three years later, in 1925, Černý came to London to spend his summer holiday working on hieratic papyri at the British Museum. The visit gave him an opportunity to meet Gardiner and a close friendship between the two scholars quickly developed; it continued until the end of Gardiner's life in 1963. Their personal circumstances could hardly have been more different: Gardiner, a man of very considerable wealth who had never found it necessary to seek remunerative employment, had spent his whole time since his second year at Oxford satisfying his passion for Egyptology, much to the benefit of his science, while Černý had been compelled to earn his living even before completing his studies at the university, and Egyptology was something which had to be done out of hours. That very difference was, however, probably a contributory factor to their friendship, for each felt an admiration for the way in which the other had responded to his circumstances and a common interest provided the bond which cemented the relationship. Both scholars gained from the association, but for Černý its value was inestimable: directly or indirectly it provided him with the opportunities which determined to no small extent the course of his life.

The year 1925 marked the beginning of yet another important association for Černý and that was his association with the French Institute of Archaeology in Cairo and, in particular, with its excavations at Deir el-Medineh under Bernard Bruyère, an archaeologist for whom he had a great admiration and with whom he quickly established a lasting friendship. Bruyère, who

had already been digging at Deir el-Medineh for three seasons, needed an epigraphist to deal with the enormous number of hieratic ostraka which the site was yielding and Černý was the obvious person to invite. His bank gave him leave of absence for three months both in 1925 and in 1926 to enable him to go to Egypt and he was able to obtain some financial assistance from his university towards his expenses. In the following year he was able to leave the service of the bank and devote his entire energies to Egyptology as a result of a fortunate chance. In order to mark the seventieth birthday of President Masaryk, a fund had been raised by public subscription for the purpose of founding two Institutes in Prague University, one for Egyptological Studies (to which Černý eventually bequeathed his library) and the other for Slavonic Studies. Work on the former could not begin immediately, so the President decreed that part of the income from the fund should be given to Černý to provide him with financial support for two years. Černý was thus able to continue his work at Deir el-Medineh and to establish himself as an expert in the hieratic ostraka written by the scribes of the community of workmen in the Theban necropolis. Hundreds of these documents had already been acquired by the Cairo Museum and some had been published by Daressy in the Catalogue Général of the Museum. When Černý's grant from the Masaryk fund expired in 1928, Professor Pierre Lacau, Director-General of the Antiquities Service, arranged a contract for him to work on a further volume of the ostraka for three months annually. Černý had expected to be appointed to a teaching post in the new Institute in Prague, but, instead, he was given a part-time administrative post. It had the advantage of requiring him to reside in Prague for only six months in the year and thus fitted in very well with his commitments in Egypt. On the completion of his work on the Cairo Museum ostraka in 1933, Gardiner engaged him, also for three months annually, to assist him in preparing a publication of his private collection of ostraka in London. This arrangement continued until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Gardiner himself was working on some of his most important publications, the Chester Beatty Papyri in the British Museum, the Wilbour Papyrus, Late Egyptian Miscellanies, and Ramesside Administrative Documents, and Černý, during his annual visits to London, combined his work on the ostraka with many hours of fruitful collaboration with Gardiner on the problems which arose in the course of his studies on these papyri.

When the Second World War broke out in 1939 Černý was visiting Paris and he immediately volunteered for service in the French army, but he was rejected on account of defective eyesight. He could not return to Prague, for Czechoslovakia had already been occupied by the German forces, and he was virtually an exile with no means of earning a livelihood and no valid passport. He did, however, succeed in making his way to Egypt, largely through the assistance of Mlle Christiane Desroches (Madame Noblecourt), and he spent the winter of 1939–40 working at Deir el-Medineh on what proved to be the last season of the French Institute's excavations at the site until the war ended. Černý stayed on in Egypt, living at the French Institute and eventually obtaining a post at the Czech Legation in Cairo. His official duties were not very onerous, so that he was able to devote much of his time to Egyptological studies. For the previous fifteen years nearly all his work had been confined to hieratic documents of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties and particularly to the documents written by the Theban necropolis workmen. He had published hieroglyphic transcriptions of some 330 ostraka for the Cairo Museum and a further 350 for the French Institute. In addition he had published hieroglyphic transcriptions of a group of fifty-one letters written in hieratic on papyrus, all probably originating from the workmen's village at Deir el-Medineh and now preserved in European museums. About half of the journal articles which he wrote in the years 1928–40 dealt directly with problems concerning the workmen and some of the remainder touched upon them. War conditions, however, caused a suspension of work both on Gardiner's ostraka and on the Deir el-Medineh ostraka, with the result that Černý was free to extend his activities over a wider field. He began to copy texts of the Old Kingdom on monuments at Saqqara and to assemble on cards a corpus of inscriptions of the Early Dynastic Period. It was at this time too that he turned seriously to Coptic studies, chiefly for lexicographical purposes.

Outwardly the war appeared to have little effect on Černý, but in reality he was an anxious man, deeply concerned about the fate of his friends and members of his family in Czechoslovakia and particularly of his mother, to whom he was deeply attached. The present writer remembers clearly one evening at Cairo in the summer of 1942 when he realized the struggle which Černý was making to overcome the state of despondency to which he had been reduced by worry. He could see no

prospect of obtaining an Egyptological appointment in post-war Czechoslovakia and no thought of settling elsewhere seemed at that time to have crossed his mind. It required only the threat of military defeat in Egypt to bring about a nervous breakdown. In order to receive the care and attention which he needed he was moved to a nursing-home at Helwan, where he remained for the next eighteen months until he was able to go to England. At an early stage in his convalescence he began to collect material for a grammar of Late Egyptian non-literary texts based mainly on the tomb-robbery papyri, his own Late Ramesside Letters, and the Deir el-Medineh ostraka. It was a subject in which he soon became deeply absorbed and his interest in it certainly aided him in his restoration to health. With typical generosity Černý later allowed many Egyptologists to make copies of his grammatical notes, but he was never able to find the necessary time to complete his work for publication.

Černý's move from Egypt to England at the end of 1943 marked the beginning of an important change in the whole course of his life. Officially he was transferred from the Czech Legation in Cairo to the Czech Legation in London, where he held a post for the next eighteen months, until the end of the war in Europe. Gardiner had left his London house and was living in the country, but the two scholars were again in touch and, with Gardiner's encouragement, Černý was able to prepare for publication in the 1945 volume of the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* a very valuable article on four related legal documents, two of which belonged to Gardiner and two, both found at Deir el-Medineh in 1928, belonged to the French Institute in Cairo. In spite of wartime conditions, Černý found life in London agreeable and the experience certainly contributed to his readiness to return in 1946, after a year in Prague, when he was invited to accept the Chair of Egyptology at University College, which had been vacated by Stephen Glanville on his appointment to the newly created Sir Herbert Thompson Professorship of Egyptology at Cambridge.

For the first time in his life, at the age of 48, Černý could look forward to a secure future in Egyptology. Certainly he would have preferred a post in his native land, but there was nothing available and he had every reason to expect that he would be able to make frequent visits to Prague during his vacations. The conditions laid down for the occupant of the Chair, moreover, required his presence at the college for only two terms in the

academic year; he would thus be free to continue his work with the French Institute in Cairo. Everything seemed to promise well for him, and his new colleagues in other branches of science received him with genuine friendliness. Černý's enthusiasm for Egyptology, coupled with his vast knowledge, could not fail to attract pupils and in a very short time he was engaged in a heavy programme of teaching, which covered the needs of a wide range of pupils from beginners to graduates. In addition, he undertook to prepare a new edition, with translations and commentaries, of the *Inscriptions of Sinai*, which Gardiner and Peet had published from Petrie's squeezes in 1917, and to write a popular book on Egyptian religion. Černý was well qualified to do the former, because he had spent many weeks in Sinai before the war collating the published inscriptions and copying others which were not known when the previous edition appeared. He was far less well equipped to write about Egyptian religion, but he applied himself to the task with such determination that he produced a book which Gardiner himself described as a *tour de force*. Černý was incapable of doing anything without examining his sources at first hand and forming his own conclusions. It was a laborious method, particularly in so complicated a subject as Egyptian religion, but it resulted in a book which went far beyond the aim of the series in which it appeared. Both books entailed an immense amount of research, which he enjoyed, but neither of them dealt with a subject to which he really wished to devote his time. That he succeeded in completing his work on them without lowering his standard of scholarship was a tribute to his determination, but, combined with his heavy teaching duties, the strain began to have its effect on his constitution and a physical ailment, which was never properly diagnosed, necessitated a prolonged spell in hospital without a complete cure being effected. In the meantime political changes in Czechoslovakia had resulted in the deprivation of his Czech citizenship and his membership of the Czech Academy, so that he felt unable to visit his homeland to see his family and friends.

In the autumn of 1950 Černý suffered another nervous breakdown, more severe than the first, and he had to remain in hospital until the following spring. By that time steps were being taken to fill the Chair of Egyptology at Oxford University, which had become vacant through the death of Battiscombe Gunn. Černý was faced with a difficult decision when he was invited to accept it. University College had treated him well and he had been happy there, but the prospect of working at Oxford,

where Gardiner had recently settled and where he would have the library resources of the Griffith Institute at his disposal, attracted him. When he announced his acceptance, some of his friends felt misgivings about his wisdom in doing so, fearing that the sudden change of environment and also the domestic upheaval involved in the move might impose too much of a strain on his nervous system. That they did not do so was due in no small measure to the support given to him by his wife, Maña, whom he had married soon after leaving hospital. With a happy domestic background he occupied the Chair with distinction until his retirement under the age-limit fourteen years later, in 1965. Throughout that time, besides giving instruction to a number of British and foreign students, who are now making their own contributions to the advancement of Egyptology, he pursued his own researches tirelessly and with results which can partly be seen in the many penetrating articles which he wrote for scientific journals and, not least, his important contribution to the new edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History*. Some of the most valuable results of his work are, however, not yet evident, and in particular his *Coptic Etymological Dictionary*, the publication of which was delayed for reasons beyond his control. It is now in proof and will be published by the Cambridge University Press in the near future. Also in proof is the first volume of his *Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside Period*, in which he intended to assemble the fruits of his life's work on the organization and activities of the inhabitants of Deir el-Medineh. About a quarter of the second volume is in typescript, but the remainder lies buried in the thousands of slips which he bequeathed with all his other scientific papers to the Griffith Institute.

Apart from his two university appointments in this country, Černý held visiting professorships at Brown University, Providence (1954–5), the University of Pennsylvania (1965–9), and the University of Tübingen (1967). He also gave a course of lectures at the Collège de France (1968). He was elected to a Fellowship of the British Academy in 1953. Before his retirement from the Oxford Chair, he had visited Egypt six times on behalf of Unesco to assist in the epigraphical record of the temples of Nubia and to prepare a publication of the rock-graffiti at El-Lessiya. After retirement in 1965 he regularly spent the months of February and March each year working with the mission of the Centre of Documentation of the Egyptian Government on a publication of the hundreds of graffiti in the Theban necropolis.

It was a task which held a special appeal to him because many of the graffiti had been written by necropolis workmen and even the most simple graffito might fill some genealogical gap, furnish a precise date for a known workman, or provide a title to show that its bearer had held a particular office which was otherwise not recorded. As an example of their value, he used to cite the discovery of a graffito which mentioned the names of three well-known men and indicated that they were a father, son, and grandson. From other evidence he already knew that each of them had held the office of Chief Scribe of the community, but it was the graffito which established their relationship and enabled him to infer that the office was at that time hereditary.

No Egyptologist was held in higher regard by his colleagues than Černý. His early reputation was based on his remarkable ability to read hieratic documents of the Ramesside Period, the Nineteenth and Twentieth Egyptian dynasties. The hundreds of ostraka which he published in hieroglyphic transcriptions, very many of them with corresponding hand-facsimiles of the hieratic texts, were executed with such skill and accuracy that they possess a stamp of finality, and the same quality of permanence attaches to the many hieratic papyri which he edited. Abnormal hieratic held no terrors for him, as his publication of a very difficult text in that script belonging to the Leiden Museum proves. As a grammarian he was methodical and meticulous. Very little work had been done on the grammar of the Late Egyptian non-literary texts before he began his comprehensive study, the results of which, it is hoped, will be published by one of his students; they are certainly a contribution of fundamental importance to our knowledge of the language of the official and business documents of the Ramesside age. Lexicography too engaged his attention just as much as grammar, and in particular the search for Coptic equivalents of words which existed in ancient Egyptian. Nothing gave him greater pleasure in his later years than the discovery of a previously undetected etymology for a Coptic word. The extent of his contribution in this respect will be apparent when his *Coptic Etymological Dictionary* is published.

Having been a pupil of Lexa, perhaps it was not surprising that Černý should have taken an interest in magic. The aspect which appealed to him most was the process by which oracles were obtained. His chapter on this subject in R. A. Parker's *A Saite Oracle Papyrus from Thebes* gives a most comprehensive

account of all the evidence and his own conclusions on the mechanics of oracular consultations. He was able to show that the technique remained largely unchanged for some two thousand years, from the Eighteenth Dynasty until far into Christian times. Very many short oracular texts written on ostraka were found at Deir el-Medineh, thirty-seven of which he published himself in two articles which appeared in the *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale*, vols. 35 (1935) and 41 (1942). In the same journal (vol. 41, pp. 105–18) he published, with full commentary, a very different type of oracular text written in hieratic on two wooden boards and giving instructions to the Shawabti figures of Neskhons, the wife of the High Priest Pinudjem, who lived in the tenth century B.C. One of the many valuable conclusions which he was able to draw from it was that Shawabti figures at that period were regarded as slaves of the deceased person, rather than as his deputies. They were purchased from their manufacturers in the temple workshops in the same way as slaves were bought from their owners. The text is far from easy to translate, but Černý's rendering illustrates not only his deep knowledge of the structure of the language, but also his almost instinctive ability for sensing the exact force of idiomatic expressions. It is something which is apparent in all his work and it is the more impressive when it is realized that he was not writing in his native language.

Even a complete list of his many publications would give a very inadequate idea of both his total contribution to Egyptological studies and the amount of original work which he did. Scholars from every country turned to him for help, which he invariably gave, ungrudgingly, often at the cost of hours spent in investigation. Throughout his time in England he was a regular visitor to the Department of Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum, where he combined work on his own researches with giving help in resolving countless scientific problems as they arose. He regarded every problem as a challenge to be met and overcome. At Oxford he constantly placed his knowledge at the disposal of the editors of the *Topographical Bibliography*, one of the most indispensable sources of information in any Egyptological library. The dozens of notebooks which he bequeathed to the Griffith Institute contain innumerable copies of unpublished documents, all written in his clear, neat hieroglyphs; they were never intended for publication, but simply for reference. Other scholars will benefit from his industry for many years to come, but it is particularly to be regretted that he

himself was unable to finish the synthesis of the most important part of all the material which he had collected for his history of the workmen of the Theban necropolis. That he did not succeed in doing so was largely a result of failing sight in the last years of his life. It was greatly to his credit that he never gave up the struggle to make the best use of his very limited vision, a struggle in which he received every possible support from his devoted wife.

Černý's place among the outstanding Egyptologists of this century is assured. He was the most human of scholars, endowed with a touch of genius in his own particular field, a man of deep understanding who never allowed his preoccupation with his studies to blunt his sympathy with friends in need, generous in an unostentatious way and absolutely dependable. The high regard in which he was held by his colleagues in many countries was shown by the large number who contributed to a volume of studies presented to him by the Egypt Exploration Society on his seventieth birthday; it was a tribute both to his scholarship and to his personal qualities. At the Queen's College, Oxford, he quickly endeared himself to the Fellows, none of whom shared his particular academic interests, by his sense of humour and his friendly disposition; it was a happy association which helped greatly in the enjoyment of his life at the university. In the spring of 1967 he was invited to visit Prague University, where he was given a reception which did much to repair the sense of remoteness brought about by an absence of nearly twenty years. In an unexpected way the visit, far from unsettling him, seemed to make him more content with his life in this country. It was certainly a comfort to his many English friends to learn that only a few days before his death he had declared that he looked back with happiness on the years which he had spent in London and in Oxford.

I. E. S. Edwards

A list of Professor Černý's publications, compiled by Mr. C. H. S. Spaull, will be found in the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, volume 54 (1968), pp. 3–8.