

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SALVAGE IN EGYPT

An Example of International Cooperation

By FROELICH RAINEY

At a recent meeting in the University Museum, Mrs. Nicholas Roosevelt told us that she remembered with nostalgia Sir Leonard Woolley's camp at Abu Simble near the base of the colossal figures of Rameses II. That was fifty years ago and Sir Leonard was then representing the University Museum in an earlier "crash program" for archaeological salvage in Nubia prior to the raising of the present Aswan dam.

Last month, our party from Philadelphia and New Haven was camped at the same spot, nearly two hundred miles above Aswan and just north of the Sudan border, plotting a campaign for the combined efforts of Peabody Museum of Yale and the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania in the salvage work which must be done before the new High dam is completed. Russians and Egyptians are now very busy a few miles above Aswan on the new earth dam which will flood three hundred miles of the Nile Valley and submerge more than twenty ancient Egyptian temples as well as many unexcavated archaeological sites. The most spectacular, and the most difficult to protect, is Abu Simble, a fantastic temple cut into a rock cliff about 1275 B.C. by Rameses II to the god Amon. We landed our diesel powered patrol boat, the "Amada" (a loan from the German Archaeological Mission) at Abu Simble just at sunset and, like everyone who has seen the vast stone-cut figures of Rameses in the red glow of the desert sun, we shall remember them the rest of our lives.

There is another beautiful temple on the Island of Philae, built in Greek and Roman times, which stands just north of the present Aswan dam. In late summer when the flood gates are opened, it emerges from the waters for a brief period, but in the spring only the pylons are visible and seem to float upon the reservoir. When the High dam is finished, it will remain permanently submerged in the reservoir between the two dams. This temple could be saved by relatively small coffer dams which would isolate from the waters the Island of Philae and six hundred acres of rich land.

The Governments of the United Arab Republic and the Sudan have asked the rest of the world to assist them in preserving such world-famed monuments in Nubia and in excavating ancient sites which, with the building of the dam, will be lost for all time. UNESCO has organized an international campaign for recording, preservation, and excavation, and now several nations have moved in with survey parties, engineers, and archaeologists to do what they can in the next few years before Nubia becomes a vast lake.

There is a clause in the Mutual Security Act of the United States for 1960 which makes it possible for the President of the United States to allocate some of the so-called counterpart funds now in Egypt for the international archaeological salvage program. There is also a U. S. Committee for the Preservation of the Nubian Monu-

ments. Three American institutions, the Oriental Institute in Chicago, Peabody Museum at Yale, and the University Museum, have announced their intentions to carry on excavations in the threatened area. Thus Americans have expressed their concern, with other nations, at the possible loss of cultural monuments and historical data that are irreplaceable.

Why should there be at this time a great international effort in archaeological rescue work in a desolate desert region of Africa? It is obvious that the United Nations, through its division of UNESCO, has created an organized international conscience where matters of culture and civilization are at issue. But I think that even without the official organization of UNESCO many nations would make an effort, as they did many years ago when the Aswan dam was built, believing that the history and culture of Egypt is a heritage of the whole civilized world.

In hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, we were asked why, if the Russians were financing a dam for the Egyptians, those two nations should not also take the responsibility for rescuing historical remains. We replied that Western civilization began in Egypt and the Near East and that it is our heritage as well as that of the Egyptians and the Russians. Perhaps we should have added that the Western Europeans and the Americans, more than other people, have been able to reconstruct much of the history of civilized living from their studies in Egypt; there is much that we do not know and very much yet to be learned; and it is Western diggers who are still the most able to reconstruct history on a world-wide scale. The Egyptians and the Russians are certainly doing their part in the salvage program, but it will take the combined efforts of many nations if the remaining archaeological sites are to be excavated and such great monuments as Abu Simble are to be preserved.

There is another and perhaps even more important aspect to the UNESCO plan for Nubia. In their desire to save everything possible before the inundation, both the Governments of the Sudan and of Egypt have offered to compensate all institutions and governments for their work in Nubia with art objects excavated or now in the museums of those countries, and to permit large-scale excavations in Lower Egypt with foreign nations sharing the art objects unearthed. Archaeology in Egypt has been in the doldrums for many years because of the rather inhospitable policy of the Egyptian Government. Many of us

believe that the new Egyptian Government has now reached the kind of intellectual sophistication which recognizes the need for international archaeological research in Egypt. The Nubian program is quite probably the first step toward a new era of research in the Nile Valley, both in the Sudan and in Egypt. Egyptology, which was once almost synonymous with archaeology, may well be re-born with greater vitality than ever before. Those of us who are diggers know that many surprises remain in the earth of the Nile Valley and that the history of the world's most durable ancient civilization is still to be written.

Next January, Prof. W. Kelly Simpson of Yale University will return to Nubia in charge of the combined University Museum-Peabody Museum expedition to begin excavations at one of the sites between Aswan and the Sudan border. He will be expending funds left to the University Museum by Eckley Brinton Coxe, Jr., the man who also gave the Museum its entire Egyptian wing, and he will be continuing the tradition of Museum research in Egypt established by Eckley Coxe at the beginning of the century. In our recent survey of Upper Egypt, cruising up the vast reservoir between the first and second cataracts already created by the Aswan dam, or walking across the desert in the blazing sun of May in Nubia, we often thought of our earlier expeditions there. At Buhen, Anibeh, Areika, and Karanog, from which we now have large collections, expeditions were led by Leonard Woolley, D. Randall-MacIver, F. Ll. Griffith, and Geoffrey Mileham. We would very much like to know what they would do in 1961.

In Egypt we met the new generation of British, French, German, and Italian diggers who were also thinking of their predecessors—several generations of them in the century and a half since Napoleon included archaeologists with his Army of the Nile—and like them, we were reminded that there is one great difference between this and earlier campaigns in Egypt. Today, independent Egyptian and Sudanese Governments have organized, through the United Nations, an international enterprise in archaeology which has no precedent. A recent International Geophysical Year successfully cut across national conflicts and rivalries to demonstrate that scientists and scholars can rise above the political conflicts of our generation. All of us hope and believe that this current campaign in Nubia will reinforce the new principle of international scientific and cultural cooperation—a principle which should have an important influence upon our future.