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## **Rescue Archaeology and Spanish Journalism: The Abu Simbel Operation**

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"The formula of journalism is: going, seeing,  
listening, recording and recounting."

— Enrique Meneses

### **Abstract**

*Building Aswan Dam brought an unprecedented campaign to rescue all the affected archaeological sites in the region. Among them, Abu Simbel, one of the Egyptian icons, whose relocation was minutely followed by the Spanish press. This paper analyzes this coverage and its impact in Spain, one of the participant countries.*

### **Keywords**

*Abu Simbel, Journalism, Spain, Rescue Archaeology, Egypt*

### **The origin of the relocation and ethical-technical problems**

Since the formation of UNESCO in 1945, the organisation had never received a request such as the one they did in 1959, when the decision to build the Aswan High Dam (Saad el Aali)—first planned five years prior—was passed, creating the artificial Lake Nasser in Upper Egypt. This would lead to the spectacular International Monuments Rescue Campaign of Nubia that was completed on 10 March 1980. It was through the interest of a Frenchwoman named Christiane Desroches Noblecourt and UNESCO—with the international institution asking her for a complete listing of the temples and monuments that were to be submerged—as well as the establishment of the Documentation Centre in Cairo that the transfer was made possible.

In those 20 long years, the monuments, temples, churches, rock art, and archaeological sites that were likely to be flooded were

studied in situ. Some of these monuments were declared impossible to dismantle, like the temples of Abu Oda and Gerf Hussein, or the chapel of Qasr Ibrim. Others were reassembled out of their natural, cultural and archaeological contexts, such as the temples of Taffa in Italy, Ellesiya in the Netherlands, Debod in Spain, and Dendur in the United States. For the temples of Abu Simbel, three options were considered: protect them in situ, which was the idea that most archaeologists were happiest with, but also the most difficult, since the ground water level impinged directly on the voluminous mass of sculpted sandstone; cut and move them entirely; or cut them into blocks and rebuild them in a higher and dryer location. The third option was chosen in the end.

If we take the Spanish RAE Dictionary definition of the word *rescue*—recovering for use an object that has been forgotten, broken or lost—then we can consider this project a joint Nubian Rescue operation, which was a first in terms of international cooperation, development aid and competence. This rescue operation prevented the Archaeological Complex from being submerged in Nile water, to ensure that it can be studied, used, and enjoyed by future generations. Additionally, the rescue operation also prevented this particular aspect of African cultural heritage from going the way of many Nubian artefacts—i.e., disappearing into oblivion.

It needs to be noted that cooperation in this sense did not involve bilateral aid; rather, the rescue operation was built upon the multilateral support of hundreds of countries—in terms of financial, technical and human capital—that responded to the call of UNESCO to safeguard the cultural heritage of Egypt and Sudan. Needless to say, these artefacts had been submerged in sand for millennia, and were gradually being destroyed by wind erosion, trapped particles due to wind storms (*hamzin* or *haboob*), abrasion, temperature differentials (+30 °C in some seasons), as well as acts of plundering and vandalism.

It was almost as if a non-governmental organisation was set up in Nubia—in essence, a veritable Archaeologists without Frontiers—that comprised prehistorians, anthropologists, Egyptologists, Coptologists, Arabists, ethnographers, folklorists, architects, and engineers, as well as the local workers, managers, translators, administrators, etc. Due to their involvement in this rescue operation, all of these personnel were then transformed into Nubiologists, i.e., specialists in Nubia. Of course, the contribution of each constituent member (as well as constituent countries) were not homogenous; there were countries that were more involved than others, mostly due to budgetary reasons. And accounts shows that the 'happy face' of the cooperative effort belied extensive

and heated discussions and differences of opinions (Almagro 1967: 280), which is not surprising, given the political clout of some of the stakeholders involved.

The narrative of the transfer of the Abu Simbel temples of Ramses II and Nefertari's temple occupied many pages of the Spanish press in the 1960s. This stands in stark contrast to the treatment of the fiftieth anniversary of the entire Nubian Rescue operation—which was held in March 2009 by UNESCO in Aswan—which was virtually ignored in the Spanish press. A search in 2009 for news on the engineering of the operation yielded almost no results, save for a number of interviews conducted by Anton Jacinto for *El País*, with the headlines "I wish I lifted a mummy" (April 23, 2009), or "120 years of the Spanish mummies" (December 14, 2009). Even the anniversary celebration held that year at the Cairo Museum—with a dedicated exhibition summarising Spanish archaeology in Egypt—seemed insufficient.

This is particularly grating as modern Spanish archaeology is a direct descendant of the Nubian Rescue, with the archaeological work carried out in the 1960s opening the way for current archaeological concessions—such as the excavation carried out on Heracleópolis Magna. But as much as the coverage of the fiftieth anniversary of the Nubian Rescue was weak, it nevertheless eclipses the attention paid to other archaeologists working in other geographical regions, such as the Near East—so much so that Juan Luis Montero Fenollós declared that he was sick of the media attention being paid to discoveries of new mummies, especially when they reveal no new data (*El País*, 11 November).

We have been stressing the lack of attention paid by the Spanish media to archaeologists not working in Egypt for a number of years now, which is possibly due to them being the most noticeable group of archaeologists working out of the country. Nevertheless, attention still needs to be paid to the significance of Abu Simbel.

### **Curious, travellers, dilettantes and tourists**

The travellers who were seduced by the charm of Abu Simbel are too extensive to name in full in this article, so only a brief summary of their names and related works will be listed here. The site, which is located on the Western bank of Lake Nasser, and which was declared to be a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979, and an Open Air Museum

(UNESCO, s.a.), has for centuries been a focus of Western artists, travellers, scholars, and writers, much in the same way as Petra, the pyramids of Giza, or Isfahan were—leaving behind numerous artistic, historical, archaeological, epigraphic and philological works.

In truth, the Nile Valley as a whole has long captivated Western tourists, with documents dating back to the 18th century reporting visits to Egypt and Sudan. The Danish naval officer Frederik Ludvig Norden, for instance, engraved Nubian monuments and towns in his travel *Voyage d'Égypte et de Nubie* (1755), which was produced on the request of King Christian VI of Denmark. The fascination of the West increased in the next century, which was a veritable Golden Age for the documentation of Nubia—with hundreds of images, watercolours, drawings, engravings, lithographs, paintings, pictures, and photographs being produced. Among the most notable historiographical works of the 19th century were produced by Jean Louis Burckhardt, who reported in 1813 that he had discovered Abu Simbel. Giovanni Battista Belzoni visited the region in 1815, and in 1817 partially cleaned the entrance to the interior. Both reached the bottom of the temples, and would remove some of the sand that covered one of the heads of the king and the entrance respectively.

Other travellers include the eminent Egyptologist Jean François Champollion, who visited the complex along with his pupil, the Italian Egyptologist called Ippolito Rossellini, as well as Alexander Keith Johnston, whose *I monumenti dell'Égitto e della Nubia disegnati dalla spedizione scientifico-letteraria toscana in Egitto* (1828) features drawings and coloured lithographs of Ramses II hunting on his chariot, which were extracted from the walls of Abu Simbel. Another notable series of lithographs—248 in total, in six volumes (see Roberts 2000)—was produced by the Orientalist David Roberts. The first three of these publications were dedicated to the temples and monuments of Egyptian and Sudanese Nubia, which have been reproduced by watercolour artists and printmakers. The French architect Hector Horeau also produced a series of watercolours of Abu Simbel. In the same century, an official mission was sponsored by the Kaiser, and was led by Karl Richard Lepsius. In his *Denkmaeler Aegypten aus und nach den Zeichnungen Aethiopiens von der Koenige Seiner Majestät dem von Preussen* (1849), written on behalf of His Majesty Frederick William IV, Lepsius related what he saw and painted what he observed.

Two notable female writers who wrote on their travels to Egypt and Sudan include Isabella F. Romer, who wrote *A Pilgrimage to*

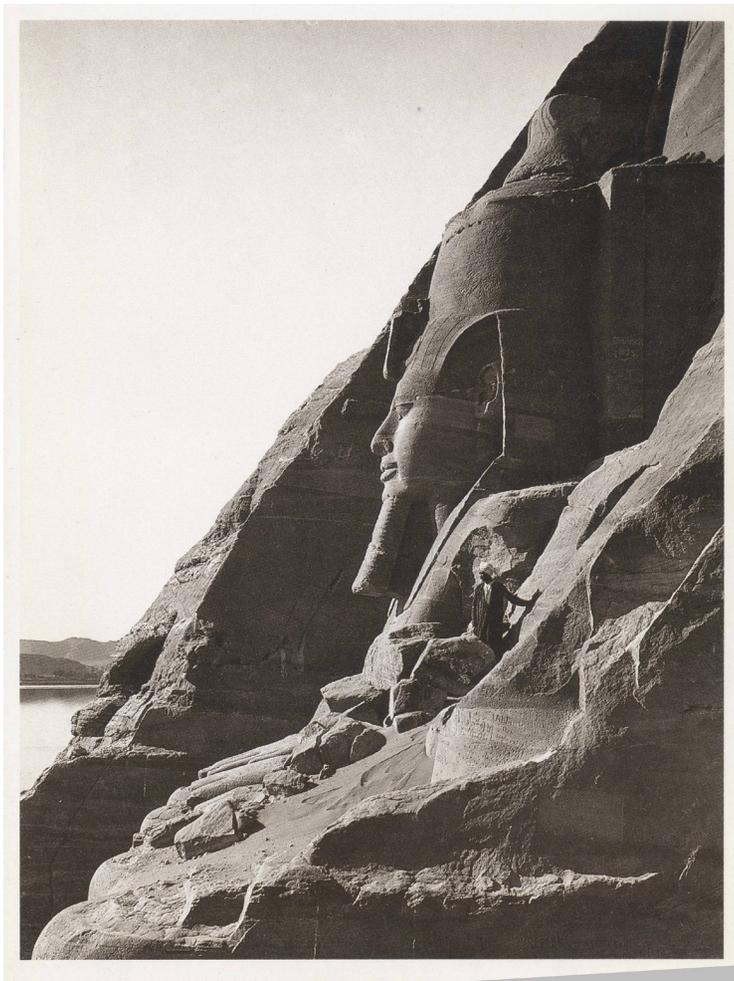
*the Temples and Tombs of Egypt, Nubia, and Palestine* (1846), and Amelia Edwards. Edwards was also the first writer and journalist to document the architectural features of the temples and its surrounding environment:

*Every morning I waked in time to witness that daily miracle. Every morning I saw those awful brethren pass from death to life, from life to sculptured stone. I brought myself almost to believe at last that there must sooner or later come some one sunrise when the ancient charm would snap asunder, and the giants must arise and speak.*

*...It is fine to see the sunrise on the front of the Great Temple; but something still finer takes place on certain mornings of the year, in the very heart of the mountain. As the sun comes up above the eastern hill-tops, one long, level beam strikes through the doorway, pierces the inner darkness like an arrow, penetrates to the sanctuary, and falls like fire from heaven upon the altar at the feet of the Gods. (qtd. in Precourt 2004).*

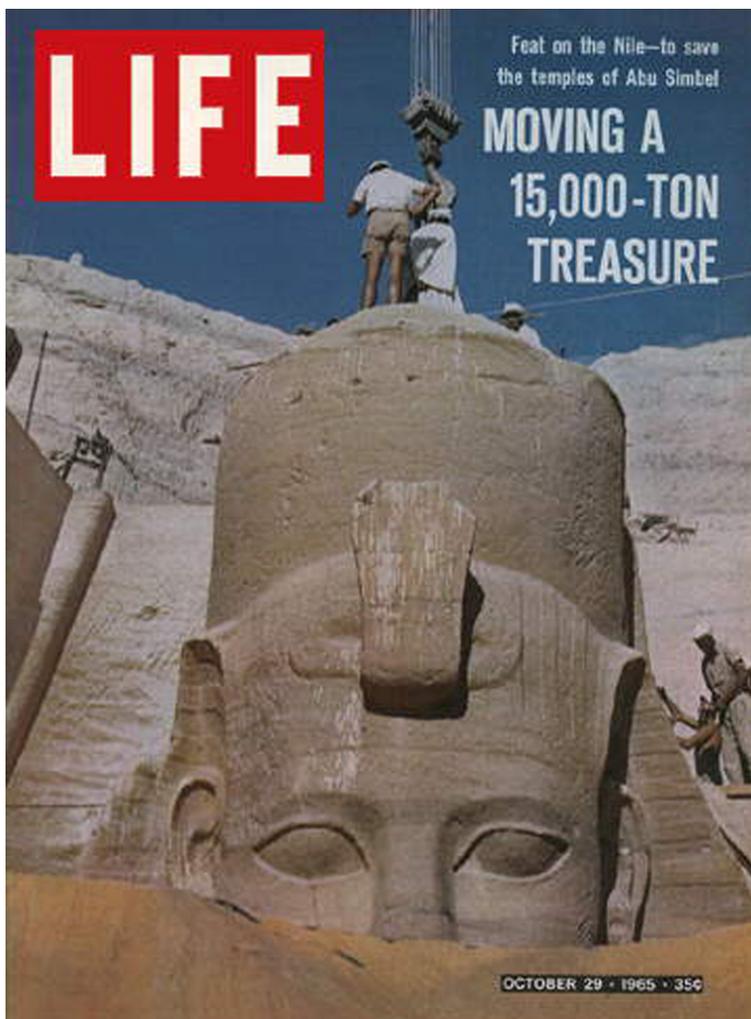
The reason why the 'grandeur' of Egyptian monuments made Egypt a favoured travel destination in the 19th century was because of "rich tourists" who could afford to pay the high fares to the exotic Orient, and visit Abu Simbel (Anderson 2012). This was made even more apparent with the aid of modern transport, as well as series of photographs—produced by photographers who were influenced by artists and engravers such as Roberts—contributing to its popularity (Golia 2010: 28-9). For instance, Abu Simbel was photographed in 1850 by the French writer Maxime du Camp, whose calotypes were published in *Égypte, Nubie, Syrie: Paysages et Monuments* (1952), and are collected at the Metropolitan Museum (<http://metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/190014945>). Du Camp was able to capture memorable images from Abu Simbel, such as the iconic sand spit which covers most of the main temple, that L. A. Christophe believes occurred 2,500 years ago (1965: 26). Although another French photographer, Felix Teynard, also used calotypes to capture Abu Simbel, which was published in *Egypt and Nubia* (1858), nevertheless his work is often overlooked by the better-publicised Du Camp (Golia 2010:17). Ending the 19th century, the geographer Alexander Keith Johnston left behind intricate cartographic material of the region in his *Map of Egypt, Arabia, Petraea, and Lower Nubia* (1893).

The beginning of the 20th century saw the emergence of modern photographic reports on Abu Simbel, produced by James Henry Breasted. Between November 1905 and April 1906, Breasted participated in the First Epigraphic Campaign of the Oriental Exploration Fund (see Figure1), having passed 40 days graphically recording and documenting the Egyptian complex. At present, the whole set of historic photographs are kept at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, which was founded by Breasted. Other photographs during this period were taken by the Italian photographer Felice Antonio Beato. No less important were the efforts of the Italian engineer Barsanti, who cleaned the entire facade of the great temple, and the watercolours of Abu Simbel by Robert Talbot-Kelly, an English Orientalist landscape painter.



**Fig. 1.** Side view of the huge head of Ramses II. Abu Simbel still in its original location photographed by Henry Breasted on the name of Oriental Expedition Fund. 1905-1906 © OEF

Possibly one of the most important works that appeared on Abu Simbel during the first half of the 20th century was Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge's *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia & Abyssinia* (1926). It was only decades later that the temples and its relocation attracted the full attention of the media. The relocation was the focus of numerous newspaper and magazine articles, such as in the "Moving a 15.000 ton treasure" *Life* magazine cover article dated 23 October 1965 (see Figure 2). *National Geographic* followed suit on 5 May 1969, when it published the now-famous image of what Golia describes as the "gigantic face of Ramses II at Abu Simbel [that] was severed and captured hovering above its monolithic body, its nose alone as big as a man."(2010:126).



**Fig. 2.** Cover of *LIFE* magazine reporting about Abu Simbel and its new location. Taken of: © LIFE.

## **Removing the earth: Abu Simbel temples raised higher**

The construction of the temples dates back to the 19th dynasty, at the beginning of the reign of Ramses II. Construction began around 1284 BC, and finished 20 years later. The well-planned and calibrated architectural programme would remain half-hidden in the sand until the intricate civil engineering operation that took place between late 1963 and early 1964, to its re-opening in September 1968. The project ended with the movement of the monuments some 200 metres downstream and 70 metres higher in altitude, so as to avoid the floodwaters that would engulf anything below 180 metres above sea level.

The stunning 30 metre-high and 35 metre-wide façade hints at Ramses II's intentions to illustrate the extent of his power—it would have reminded anyone coming down the Nile from Kush, Yam, Elam, or Iret, exactly who rules over the united Egyptian empire. The dominance of Abu Simbel is hieratic, as the religious power inscribed in its sculptures are inextricably tied to the power of the Pharaoh. The purpose of the temple was to impress Egypt's neighbours to the South, and strengthen the influence of Egyptian religion in the region, in as much as the fear of God is synonymous with the fear of the Pharaoh (Fitzgerald 2008). As Desiree (2006) notes, Ramses II used all the skills at his disposal to oversee the construction of these monuments. The facades, the Hypostyle Hall with Osirian pillars, the side rooms, the lobby, and even the shrine were excavated in sandstone in a studied and deliberate direction—the East-West axis, so the sun would twice a year illuminate the statues of Amon, Ramses II and Ra-Horakhty. It is often erroneously assumed that this phenomenon relates to the birth or coronation of Ramses II; rather, as Timothy Kendall (1997a, 1997b) notes, it relates to the Heb Sed festival, that had great prestige among the Meroitic kings and Nubian pharaohs, who came from as far as the fourth cataract of Napata (Sudan) and the sacred mountains of Jebel Barkal.

Prior to the dismantling process of the relocation programme, an exhaustive and controlled documentation and registration task with geological reports was carried out (UNESCO, 1959), which encompassed conservation damage reports, architectural consequence reports, and many others. Numerous measurements, calculations, drawings and photographs were produced, so that they could be consulted in case of any problems arising during the re-erection (Berg 1968: 28). The relocation and reconstruction project was carried out through an international tender at the suggestion of Egypt. It was advertised in the

press (see Figure 3) as early as 1962, to allow for sufficient dissemination among partner states in the Nubian Rescue Campaign. Experts visited the site and considered different hypotheses, possibilities, and of course, budgets. They presented their proposals at the beginning of August the same year, to allow work to begin in February 1963 and end in late 1967 as planned. The chronogram was delayed, however, which caused the 'Abu Simbel Operation' to commence a few months behind schedule.

**CONCURSO PARA EL SALVAMENTO DE LOS TEMPLOS DE ABU SIMBEL**

**MINISTERIO DE CULTURA Y ORIENTACION NACIONAL DE LA REPUBLICA ARABE UNIDA**

De conformidad con la campaña iniciada por la UNESCO, el Gobierno de la República Árabe Unida se complace en anunciar por la presente nota la convocatoria de un concurso para la ejecución del Proyecto de Salvamento de los dos Templos de Abu Simbel, al objeto de evitar que queden inundados al llenarse el embalse de la gran presa actualmente en construcción cerca de Assuán.

Los templos poseen fachadas ornamentales de gran valor histórico y artístico y encierran grandes naves y salas, excavados en su totalidad en la roca arenosa. El proyecto comprende la separación de la roca de dos grandes bloques de piedra arenosa, conteniendo cada uno de ellos los templos ahudidos, así como su subsiguiente elevación, por medio de ascensores o elevadores hidráulicos, hasta un nivel superior al futuro nivel del agua en el embalse.

Las obras que habrán de efectuarse, con arreglo a la contrata, serán las siguientes:

- 1.—Construcción y desecación, en el interior, de un dique de mampostería, de unos 400 metros de longitud y 34 de altura.
- 2.—Excavación, sin utilizar explosivos, de unos 350.000 metros cúbicos de roca, situada encima, alrededor y debajo de los bloques de los templos.
- 3.—Reforzamiento de la roca, mediante barras de apeo o tirantes de anclaje y cables de acero pretensado, en orificios perforados, de unos 30.000 metros de longitud.
- 4.—Encajonamiento de los bloques de los templos, mediante unos 50.000 metros cúbicos de estructura de hormigón, en parte pretensado.
- 5.—Elevación vertical, en unos 65 metros, de los bloques de los templos, utilizando elevadores o «gatos» hidráulicos, de una capacidad total de unas 450.000 toneladas.
- 6.—Construcción, simultáneamente con la elevación antedicha, de unos 250.000 metros cúbicos de estructura de apoyo, en hormigón.
- 7.—Reposición, en torno de los templos, una vez ya en su posición elevada, de una colina de piedra arenosa, similar a la existente, y conteniendo unos 6.000.000 de metros cúbicos de relleno de roca, recubierta con unos 300.000 metros cúbicos de hormigón o mampostería.

Se prevé que las obras de construcción empezarán en el mes de marzo de 1963. Los preparativos para la elevación habrán de estar terminados en marzo de 1966, y la elevación hasta el nivel definitivo deberá quedar realizada a finales de 1967.

Los contratistas interesados en concurrir a esta licitación deberán dirigirse, presentando sus documentos acreditativos, con referencias sobre su experiencia y competencia, a los Ingenieros Asesores del Ministerio,

Sres. Vattenbyggnadsbyran (VEB),  
29, Humlegardsgatan. Estocolmo (Suecia),  
no más tardé del 5 de marzo de 1962.

En el mes de marzo de 1962, estos contratistas o grupos de contratistas recibirán información y datos adicionales, que les permitirán estudiar el proyecto y visitar su emplazamiento. Si en abril de 1962 hubiera aún algunos contratistas interesados, se invitará a un determinado número de ellos a presentar sus propuestas, antes del 1.º de agosto de 1962, como máximo. La documentación final y definitiva sobre este concurso estará disponible a partir del 1.º de mayo de 1962.

**Fig. 3.** Advertisement of the tender. Abu Simbel was about to be transferred. Inserted Announcement February 28th, 1962. © Arriba.

On the whole, the relocation of Abu Simbel involved more than just a removal of the grounds; it required moving a mass of stone that had to be preserved with the utmost care. Initially, the French engineers André Coyne and Jean Bellier proposed to build a large stone dam coated in river silt to waterproof the temples, which were to be high enough to withstand the rising of the Nile. The advantage of this would be to have the temples remain in their original place, but this would have also required water to be filtered through the dyke, and pumped to the rocks. The Italian architect Piero Gazzola proposed instead a complete block-by-block detachment and placement in a cement box on a mobile platform. Given the enormous tonnage, however, this cement box would have to be raised 60 metres above ground using hydraulic jacks, and would have also required the construction of two rock hills. The third option was proposed by the Polish architect, Certowitz who planned the construction of a concave concrete structure that would surround the temples as a barrier. This option is based on the electro-osmosis method that manages the moisture of rising water by reversing the upward humidity through capillary action. Although this option seemed the least expensive and would have allowed the temple to remain as is, the concrete structure was deemed to be too disruptive to the aesthetic harmony of the site. Furthermore, it would only work on the level of Nile water rise before the construction of the Aswan High Dam, and not after.

As such, different options using both hydraulic and mechanical strength were considered. The most worthwhile alternative to Coyne and Bellier's proposal—which seemed from the very beginning to be the most feasible—was the Gazzola project (Figure 5), that would raise temples cut from a single block. Although the Gazzola project was approved in 1961, subsequent costing exercises put the value of the project at 80 million, which sent experts back to the drawing block to consider a less expensive method. New proposals subsequently rolled in, with the Polish engineers Dabrowski and Poniz suggesting the construction of a mini dam with concrete, or covering the block stones with a kind of glass screen. And in 1962, another proposal was put forth by the British engineer William MacQuitty, who suggested the complete immersion of the temple in water, which would have made it similar to modern day aquarium displays. In 1963, the tables were once again turned with more French proposals. The engineer Albert Caquot daringly suggested the elevation of the temple using the Archimedes Principle, while Hermés suggested elevation by way of a mechanical system—similar to Gazzola, but without the use of hydraulics. And

finally, in the year 1963, the German architect Voight sought to utilise the vertical pressure of water with the temples moored, and emerging on the surface, which would make transport to another location very easy. In short, numerous engineers and architects attempted to come up with the most imaginative ways to relocate the temples, that would require the least expenditure of time and money.

In the end, the solution came by way of a proposal that could be executed with the 40 million dollars channelled through different banks to the 'Nubian account' in London. It required a formal rethinking exercise of a proposed concept, and was conducted by an Egyptian Committee and Swedish specialists of the Vattenbyggnads Viran Company (VVB). The solution can be seen as the middle ground between the Gazzola draft and the cutting of the monuments into large blocks. Once a new place was chosen, an artificial hill would be created, and coated with a texture similar to sandstone. The hill was cut according to the natural cracks on the rock, so as to prevent further damage and to have less impact on the monumental heritage work. The blocks were cut about 80 centimetres each, and were strongly anchored to cranes during the elevation.

Among the documentation kept at the National Archaeological Museum (Zurinaga 2010) in Madrid there are some photographs of the works in Abu Simbel—copies, not the original—showing the retaining of the wall that was to be built to could work without water, transfer of earth and scaffolding, sheds, pawns and tools.

#### **IV. Coverage of the Transfer of Abu Simbel<sup>1</sup>**

"Archaeology plus journalism is bad enough, but if you add politics, it becomes a little too much."

- Arthur Mace, curator of the tomb of Tutankhamun

In Chafik Chamass's article "Sixty Years of Beauty" (2005), he notes that the relocation of Abu Simbel in the 1960s brought Egypt "advantageously on the front page: books, magazines and memoirs related this story of an emerging conflict between culture and human

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1 We have already studied the Journalism done in Spain in late Francoist regime in the research "*Treatment of information Nubian Salvage Campaign in the Spanish press. 1959-1975*" in 2009. In the first subsection of IV Chapter entitled "*The Mass-Media. 1959-1975*" p.: 116-123 we explaining the characteristics of this news journalism that began in the 50s and would be consolidated in the 60s with the so-called journalism of explanation, or journalism of interpretation.

development.” Before analysing media coverage on Abu Simbel in the 1960s, it is worthwhile to note the Spanish journalist Tomas Alcoverro’s (2012) vision of the foreign correspondent:

*The foreign correspondent enjoyed a certain social aura. During the Francoist regime, there were few who could travel abroad, or speak any other language like French or English. A crippling inferiority complex crushed the little Spanish who dared walk the world. Correspondents were privileged citizens... What was most attractive about this trade was the ability to write freely and travel away from the country, especially in a place that many Europeans felt was the beginning of Africa (Alcoverro, 2012).*

These foreign correspondents are largely responsible for bringing Abu Simbel to the forefront of public consciousness. These correspondents represented news agencies such as Europa Press, AP-Europe, EFE, and photography companies such as CIFRA, Contreras and others. During the course of writing this article, we learned of the death of the Spanish photojournalist Enrique Meneses on 6 January 2013. In an interview with Victor Amela, Meneses was asked to describe the most beautiful thing he had ever photographed. He replied: “The temple of Abu Simbel. I lived for a week at his [statue of Ramses II] feet, which were buried in the sand. The solitude of the night was breathtakingly beautiful. He was later moved” (Amela 2009). Meneses’ contribution to the popularity of Abu Simbel cannot be underplayed: “His reporting on the Paris Match helped safeguard Abu Simbel, one of the most impressive temples in southern Egypt” (Castro 2013). As Meneses noted,

*With revenue from Canal traffic and help from Moscow to make his controversial Nasser Aswan High Dam, Saad al Aali, who created the giant Lake Nasser, was forced to raise the temple of Abu Simbel to save it.” (Meneses, 1964: 68)*

In this respect, it is safe to say that the early chronicles relating to the archaeology of Nubia formed the basis of what would later become archaeological journalism in Spain. This sort of journalism is necessary to translate the more technical aspects of archaeology to the general public, and raise awareness of the conservation of ancient artefacts. In this respect, Villarrubia Mauso (2005) finds this journalism to be a subgenre of science journalism, and contextualises its generalisation and development in the 1980s and 1990s, and its consolidation in the 2000s.

Based on our analysis, news reports on Abu Simbel can be grouped into three categories: (1) the archaeological and the artistic; (2) the technical and management-related; and (3) the chronicles. The first category, the archaeological and the artistic, encompasses writings on the aesthetics of Abu Simbel, and the meaning of its iconography (i.e., its relation to the life of a king). The second deals with purely technical or administrative actions, engineering, official data on the announcement of the tender, course of the work, earthwork, and the economic cost of work. The third which encompasses that which deals with religious and folk significance, and which can sometimes be considered lax journalism. Using another set of criteria, we were able to group articles into six categories: (1) news from the early 1960s, which highlight the proposed engineering projects; (2) news related to techniques and methods used in the project; (3) general information on the temple and its historical context; (4) news that is a mixture of fictionalised chronicle and serious news; (5) news from the mid-1960s on excavation campaigns that involved Spanish archaeologists; and (6) news from the late 1960s regarding the completion of the relocation, and the resulting dam with its hundreds of cubic meters of water.

Generally, the monitoring of news reports on Abu Simbel was uneven, in terms of some reports being over 2,000 words long (e.g., international news reports), others (e.g., teletypes) being only 30 words long, and others still a mixture of text and photography (e.g., the reports of Meneses). It needs to be noted however, that similar studies utilised slightly different content. For instance, the conclusions reached by Zurinaga (2009a) pointed to a homogeneity in terms of content, but this is likely due to the study material either being press releases or direct issues from UNESCO through its correspondents—which would make the material being studied less strewn with errors in terms of archaeological interpretation. The material used in this study ranged between news on the transfer, and the news about the difficulty of the operation, making it impossible to get a full picture—such as that published in *Arriba*, with Abu Simbel in its original location (Figure 4).

Our analysis of the first category of the news, the archaeological and the artistic, shows that the chronicles studied consisted of pieces detailing admiration for ancient Pharaonic culture. Paraphrasing Almansa and del Mazo (2012: 420), a sense of 'Egyptapeal' was evident in contemporary Spanish press as a whole—a situation which had never before been seen, save for the coverage on the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen in 1922. In short, archaeological news reached its high



*Arriba*<sup>2</sup> and *El Alcazar* (both of which are now defunct), as well as the conservative newspaper *ABC*, ran numerous and lengthy stories on the Gazzola project. Gazzola had lectured everywhere on the project, and it clearly seemed like the 'winning horse'. The Spanish press came to highlight the construction of the dam, that would place the Egyptian government within 15 kilometres of the first dam built by the British, and which would raise the lake and its waters from 122 to 180 meters in elevation.

**EL PROFESOR PIERO GAZZOLA, EN EL CONSEJO SUPERIOR DE INVESTIGACIONES CIENTÍFICAS**

En el salón de actos del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas y en sesión organizada por el Colegio de Arquitectos, disertó el ilustre arquitecto italiano Piero Gazzola, encargado por la U.N.E.S.C.O. del rescate y conservación de los monumentos egipcios de Nubia. Presidió el acto don Manuel de Solá-Morales, presidente del Colegio, acompañado de los cónsules de Italia y de la R.A.U., miembros de la Junta del Colegio y otras personalidades.

El prestigioso conferenciante expresó que después de una larga labor sobre el terreno y del análisis en el laboratorio de las muestras de roca tomadas en la expedición, en noviembre de 1960, el profesor Gazzola presentó a la U.N.E.S.C.O. y a los Gobiernos de la R.A.U. y del Sudán, los proyectos correspondientes.

Para el proyecto de Abu Simbel, no obstante que la U.N.E.S.C.O. y la R.A.U. hubiesen ya dispuesto el proyecto de un dique para aislar como dentro de un pozo los dos templos para separarlos de las aguas del lago circundante, Gazzola ideó la solución de sobreelevarlos.

Por razones de ambiente, de su carácter sagrado y de asegurar su conservación en el tiempo, la solución del dique no podía tranquilizar al profesor Gazzola, que, llevado por su profundo amor por los monumentos tomó con el mayor em-

**ABC, VIERNES 25 DE ABRIL DE 1961. EDICIÓN DE LA MAÑANA. PAG. 61**

**AERONAUTICA**

**ven de la ciencia más en el siglo XVI por el padre Acosta**

«...trescientos setenta años la describió por primera vez sobria y magistralmente, el "mal de la Puna", elogia de alta cota, fun- parte de la medicina ial.

ir el padre Acosta, cuan- na andina, sufría y des- la Puna, que su recuer- para nosotros en esta do vive pendiente de las del hombre en las al-

ha fundado la Sociedad . El 24, de este mes de "escenario de la reunión civilistas en esta materia: , filósofos, físicos, to- ra a esta hora histórica era: de una nueva era, era presente. Quizá sea- o estamos seguros de que castellano ha de darnos dignamente en las filas res que están empeñados científica especial. ta años han pasado des- giganterca e inaudito de

modesto avión de transporte. El doctor No- telius, piloto alemán de la Gran Guerra, cayó en el campo de Adlerhof en plena experi- mentación de medicina geronáutica. Ni ejemplos ni muertes lo Italian a esta joven rama de la medicina para ser perdurable.— Luis DE LA SERNA Y ESPINA. "Ae- rospace Medical Association".



**VIDA CULTURAL**

**Proyecto del profesor Piero Gazzo- la para salvar los monumentos de Nubia**

Formando parte del ciclo organizado por el Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Madrid, el arquitecto Piero Gazzola ha pronunciado una conferencia en el auditorio del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas sobre el tema "Un Problema de Civiliza. Il Salvataggio dei Monumenti Nubiani".

«El Gobierno de la R. A. U.—dijo—ha previsto la construcción de un gran dique de quince kilómetros al Sur del actual, para elevar el nivel del lago ya existente desde una cota de 122 metros sobre el mar hasta una nueva cota de 180 metros. A consecuencia de ello se prevé la inmersión de todo el territorio de la antigua Nubia, rico en testimonios de antiguas y lejanas civiliza- ciones.

El profesor Piero Gazzola fue llamado por la U. N. E. S. C. O. en 1959 para expresar una primera idea sobre el problema de los monumentos de Nubia, amenazados de inmersión a consecuencia de la construcción del gran dique de Assuan. Presentó su informe en octubre de 1959, y su plan obtuvo la aprobación unánime.

La Vanguardia Española, 1961

ABC, 1961

**Fig. 5.** Two cuts. On the left, chronicle of a lecture by Professor Gazzola. © LVG April 26th, 1961: 25. On the right, Piero Gazzola talk at the conference entitled "Un problema di Civiltá. Il salvataggio dei Monumenti Nubiani". ABC. April 28th, 1961: 61 © ABC.

As for the second category, the news related to techniques and methods used in the project typically used terse journalistic language in their coverage of the agencies involved, and other technical issues. Beyond this were news reports that emphasised a more 'Christian' fictional take on the temple and its historical context. A number of chronicles in this vein were collected for analysis. Possibly the best example of this mystic journalism can be found in the chronicles of

2 From here I want to express my gratitude to the librarian of INSALUD, Mrs. Paloma Casanovas who during the years 2010 and 2011 and over several months gave me access to view the full background of the pre-constitutional daily paper *Arriba*. To consult direct the paper save time and streamlined the gathering of information allowing me further to its photographed.

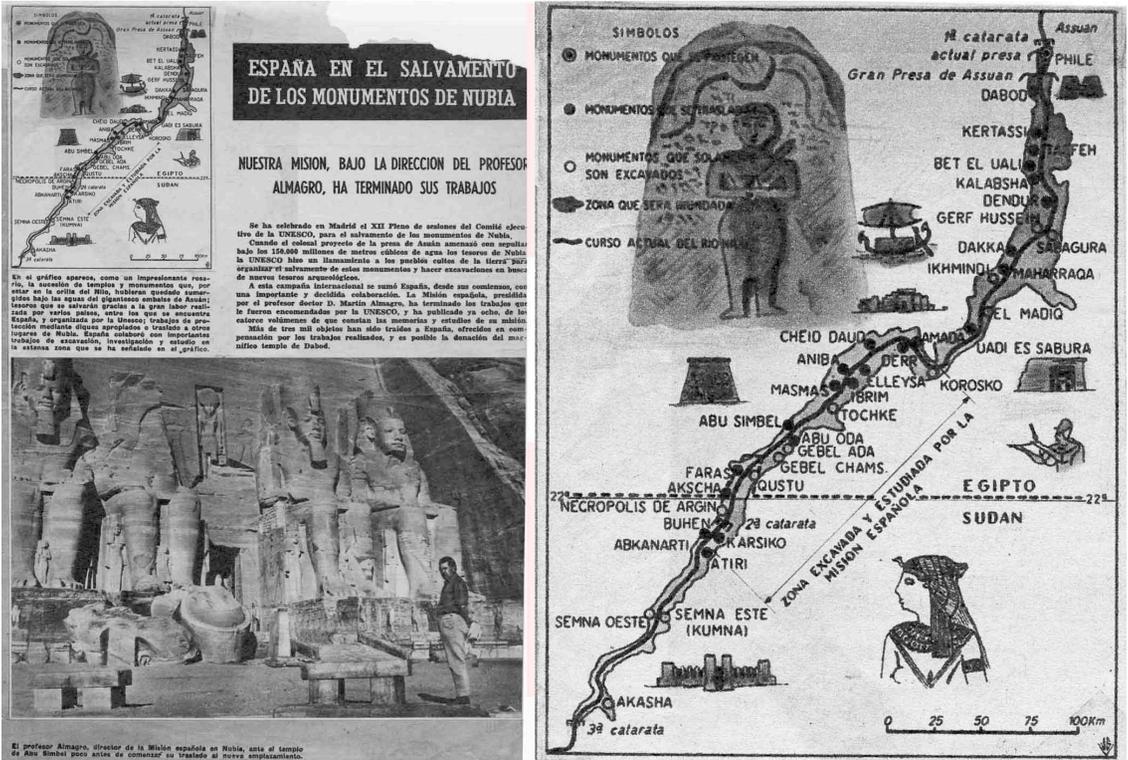
Cristóbal Tamayo, working under the pseudonym Joaquín Navarro Cristóbal, who was a correspondent for *La Vanguardia Española*. Tamayo accompanied Martín Almagro Basch in Nubia (as well as the Middle East and Greece) to cover the news as a correspondent. Tamayo had a baroque lexicon, in that his descriptions were often flowery.

*The eyes, full of beautiful images with millennial patina, are dazzling in the grandeur of Abu Simbel. These statues, which stand twenty feet high, are the meeting of megalomania and mysticism, and represent the zenith of human religion—the three major gods of Egypt and Ramses the Great, who ruled over humankind for forty centuries by the banks of the Nile...The later pyramids of Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure, also represent the ascent of man to divinity, but also its irradiation from a vertex above, like a foreshadowing of monotheism. Abu Simbel is another achievement in human religion.* (LVG 1962).

When asked about the Nubian population in a later interview, Basch noted, somewhat paternalistically, that they should be converted to Christianity: “[The Nubians] are very good. They have the sweetest character. We can only think how much sweeter it would be if they were introduced to Christianity” (LVG 1963).

The fourth type of news report mixed ‘Christian’ chronicles with serious news. The inherent Catholicism of the Spanish newsrooms of the time, as Zurinaga (2009, 2010, 2011) claims, was adapted to the sociocultural context of the time and was manifested in Francoist discourses of power. What this means is that instead of speaking of Christianity per se, the sense of religiosity was transposed onto Nubian archaeology by journalists under the watchful eye of the dictatorship, and resulted in sanctimonious news reports.

The fifth type of report encompassed news from the mid-1960s on excavation campaigns that involved Spanish archaeologists. This includes a report that was published in the monarchist and conservative *ABC*, who termed the XII Session of the Executive Committee of UNESCO as a “call to the civilised nations of the Earth.” Needless to say, such a brazenly colonial statement could not be made today. This was accompanied by a graphic map (Figure 6), which was probably included due to the presumed naiveté of the reading public on the scope of work in both African countries.



**Fig. 6.** Cut of newspaper and zoom of the map showing the dispersion of the Nubian temples intervened in the work of Nubia. Of course Abu Sibel is marked. © ABC.

The sixth and final group includes news reports that concerned the completion of the relocation works. As noted in a 1966 report published in ABC:

*Technicians and workers from four countries—Italy, Germany, France and Egypt—in harsh working conditions and temperatures, sawed the monument in 1,200 blocks of 20 to 30 tonnes each, and using powerful cranes, moved these blocks to a height over 60 meters so as to allow water to fill the Aswan Dam... the materials used are made of sandstone, which has greatly facilitated the tares of the Italian operators specialising in sawing and cutting stone blocks...once completed, the reconstruction of the temple will cost over 2,000 million pesetas. The enormous sum is graciously devoted to the archaeological conservation of a piece of 'live' ancient history" (ABC, 14 May,1966: 104).*

Descriptions of the transfer and restoration of the temples were accompanied by a sense of the dramatic—newspaper articles were littered with terms such as “drama,” “rescue,” and “relief,” and phrases

such as “the temples of Abu Simbel have caused much concern...”the drama in Nubia stems from other previous more painful dramas...”. There were even very exaggerated sentences that most objective reporters would avoid, such as de Meneses’ phrase “The temple of Abu Simbel is one of those marked for death” (ABC, 20 August 1960: 32), which constitutes a clear example of yellow journalism. Another example of this is the reportage on Spanish archaeological teams being involved in the reconstruction of the Temple of Daka—despite no Spanish archaeologists nor members of the Spanish mission being present at the site. Just as erroneously, the relocation of Abu Simbel made the cover of the Catalan daily *La Vanguardia Española* (or *LVG*, see Figure 7), although there was no news of any relocation activity in the same period in the centralist press.



**Fig 7.** Cover where on the tail appears the headline “The relocation of the temple of Abu Simbel”. © LVG. September 22, 1966.

The iconic image of the face of Ramses being suspended by a crane was heavily popularised, in both black and white and colour (Figure 8); for many, the image aptly summarised the entire project of reconstructing the religious complex. As a UNESCO report of the tense moment states:

*At nine o'clock on the morning of September 21, 1965, this huge stone face of Rameses II (weighing 20 tons) was lifted from the façade of the Great Temple of Abu Simbel. Dismantled and reassembled entirely on a plateau high above the new water level of the Nile (raised by the construction of the Aswan High Dam), the temples of Abu Simbel were inaugurated in their new setting on September 22, 1968. The UNESCO International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia was launched in March, 1960 (Nevadovic 1969:38).*

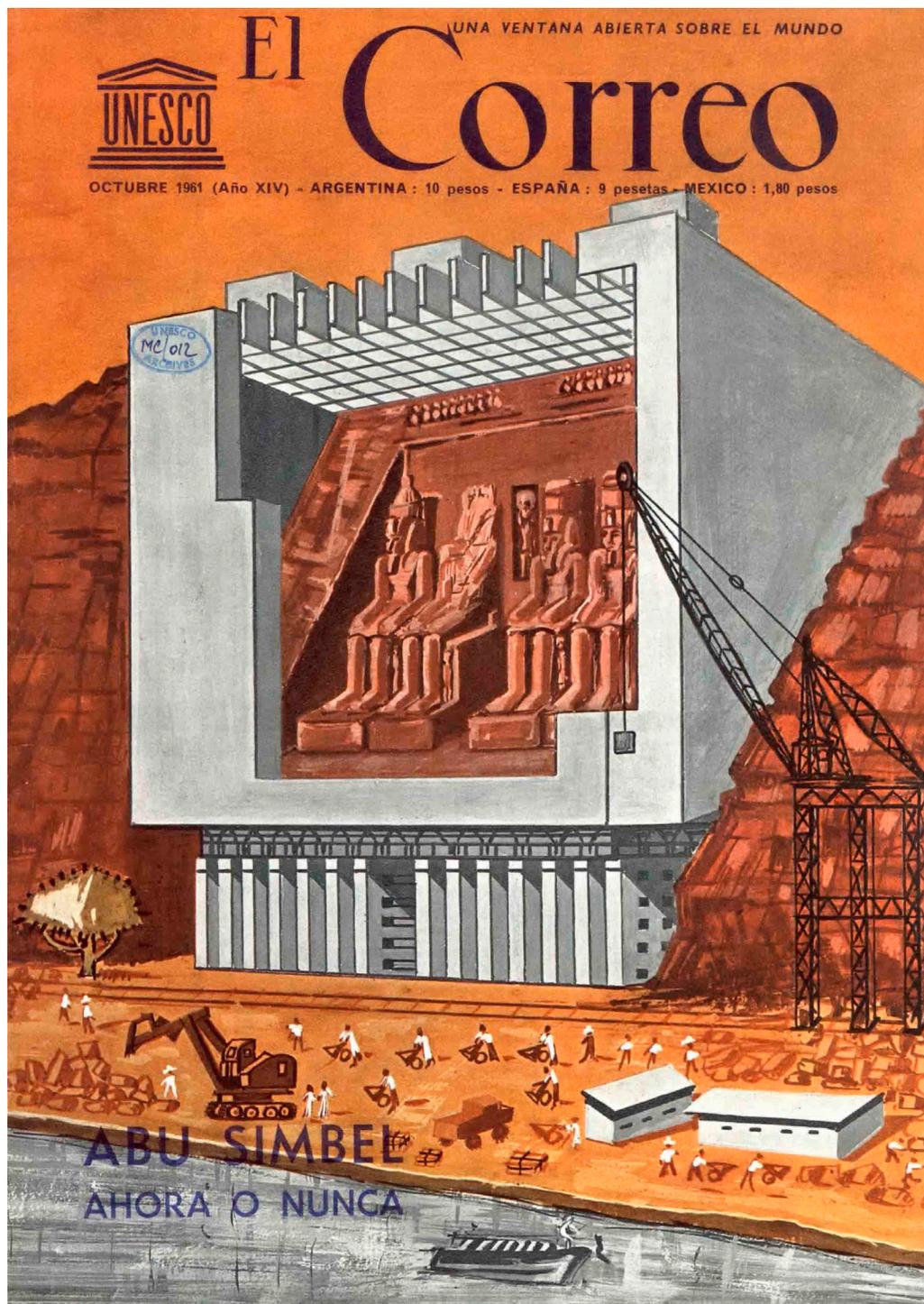


**Fig. 8.** Different moments and sequences of different stages of current work. Operators are fitting the face of Ramses II. 1963 © Arriba.

It was on that day that the world was furnished with the details of the reconstruction, specifically the number of blocks that were cut—which as Arriba (1968) notes, was “nothing less than 1035”—the tonnage of the blocks, and the height of the new site. The façade was supported by a large dome, which fits inside the hypostyle hall and other aisles, and which is in turn embedded in the artificial hill. The end result of the project is, of course, well-known. Although the Spanish press ran numerous reports on the powerful and iconic architectural structures of the temples, almost nothing was published about the rich interior of the nave and sides, as if the relocation project was just a ‘front’. Nor was any reference made to the very serious conservation problems the project presented. All published images at press showed the façades, none exhibited the decorative paintings within (Shank 2009), not the sculpted interiors, such as those contained in the Temple of Ramses II. Instead, the propaganda told stories of the Battle of Kadesh (Pérez Largacha, 2009: 54), of the marriage of Princess Maathorneferure, daughter of Hittite King Hattusili III, to the Pharaoh, which sealed an Egyptian-Hittite peace treaty, or even of the dedication of the Temple of Nefertari to the goddess Hathor.

### **The conservation of the temples of Abu Simbel**

There were three major issues affecting the architecture of the monuments, which were not reflected in the Spanish press. The first was the reconstruction itself that constituted a special case of anastilosis (Japelli 2012: 40); the second, the obvious problem of water; and the third, wind erosion. Where the first issue is concerned, the conservation of the temple was only touched upon lightly by the Spanish press, although the ‘official’ specialised publications of UNESCO (such as *The UNESCO Courier*) addressed the issue at length. In 1961, the first paper concerning the reconstruction was published, “Abu Simbel Now or Never” which also contained a graphic map of all Nubian temples and their proposed relocation (Figure 9). This was followed by a number of reports which only tangentially dealt with the conservation of monuments. And where the water issue was concerned, there appeared in 1965 an article by Harold Pleinderleith, who suggested the application of electro-osmosis methods to avoid the problem of capillary rise on the walls of the temple, such as was carried out by Cebertowicz in Warsaw to prevent the Santa Ana Church from being consumed by a similar problem (Pleinderleith 1965: 10).



**Fig. 9.** Special number completely devoted to Abu Simbel published in the early year of 1961 by UNESCO. The title, "Abu Simbel: now or never" does not need explanation. AÑO XIV. N° 10.

Of course, the other issue that affected Abu Simbel then (and now) is the erosion caused by aggressive wind action and sand particles crashing into the façades. As Fielden (1982) notes, "After the reconstruction of the Temple of Abu Simbel in Egypt, a violent windstorm driving little stones lifted from the ground in front of the temple severely damaged the face of one of the figures on the façade." (111). In connection to this, Fielden also states that the reconstruction itself is only justified in terms of global interest. Other than that, the reconstruction could potentially heighten the degradation process. To Fielden, the transfer of entire buildings entails a total loss of essential culture value, since it generates new environmental risks. What this means is that the resolution of the problem—i.e., the water—increases the average exposure to wind erosion. He concludes on a sad note, noting that the very process of saving these monuments deprives them of their original meaning: "...they lose their poetry and artistic value" (269).

But despite these critical voices, general opinion still considered conservation problems arising due to relocation and reconstruction as less of a worry than just allowing Abu Simbel to succumb to the restful waters forever. This is evident in an article by Lennart Bergen titled "The Salvage of the Abu Simbel Temples" (1978), wherein he describes the step-by-step process of the operation, and contextualises engineering, architectural, archaeological and financial issues related to the reconstruction. Nevertheless, only minimal technical information such as that provided by Berg trickled down to newspaper reports. Spanish news reports at the time almost completely overlooked the complexity of the process, favouring it less than the undeniable beauty of the monuments—much like an archaeological oasis making them forget everything else.

Another conservation issue that is pertinent to be mentioned here is that of biodeterioration—specifically, the exhalation of carbon dioxide by visitors to the temple, which causes fungal outbreak. Given that 12 percent of Egypt's gross domestic product comes from archaeological tourism to the Nile (Villarubia Mauso 2005: 62), it is somewhat ironic that there even are tourists who travel to Abu Simbel to see the degradation that occurs—which, of course, further exacerbates the problem. It is also worth noting that more news reports emerged after 1968, which was related to US rapprochement with Egypt after the 1967 war. Most of these occurred during the inauguration of the two reconstructed temples (*LVG*, 20 September 1968: 12, *ABC*, 19 September 1968: 39) and the successful completion of the works (*ABC* 4 October 1968:

15). Possibly the last mention of Abu Simbel in the press during the period occurred in 1969, when the Czech professor Federico Prockl of Brno deliver a public lecture, which was reported by *ABC* (9 May 1969: 9). A somewhat more offbeat reference to Abu Simbel even occurred of late in advertising for residential blocks in Madrid. The advertisement shows picture of the colossi of Ramses II at Abu Simbel, with a tagline that reads: "3,000 years have passed. Same quality, different tools." (Figure 10).

han pasado 3000 años...

la calidad es la misma  
aunque los medios son distintos

EL PARQUE DE LAS AVENIDAS

ES UN NUCLEO URBANO DOTADO DE LOS MAS MODERNOS SERVICIOS EN SU ULTIMA FASE  
C.I.O.H.S.A. CONTRATACION E INFORMACION: ELOY GONZALO, 27  
VIVIENDAS DE FERIA (GRUPO) S.P.A. CALIFICACION P.D. TELEFONO: 224 64 20 + 224 64 26 + 224 86 43 + 224 86 88  
VIVIENDA ESPECIALIZADA DE 1ª y 2ª HABITACIONES DE 10 a 14 AUTOPROTECCION  
PARA PERSONAS CAPACITADAS A COBERTURA DE 10 a 14 ESTAD VIVIENDA INFORMACION EN EL PARQUE DE LAS AVENIDAS  
CALLE DE BILBAO y AVENIDA DE TOLEDO, DEL TRIANGULO - BARRIO  
REDACCION UEL, P.O. BOX 8.187 28

AVENIDA BRUSELAS, 53 TELEFONO: 256 96 16 \*\*\*\*\*

**Fig. 10.** Building company benefits of fame of Abu Simbel for advertised themselves as the best builders in a new extension of a quartier in Madrid. Wenesday, February, 9th 1966. Back cover © Arriba.

To summarise, the transfer of the Abu Simbel complex was reported in the Spanish press, but in largely diffusive manner. The specialised and technical information was left to dedicated archaeological magazines and journals, while news reports largely consisted of aesthetic appreciation, sometimes laced with mysticism. In a way, this 1960s reporting style lay the foundation of 'archaeological journalism' in Spain—which due to a lack of knowledge of the field, is still presented as more of an adventure, and less of a science. This is not to say, however, that the reportage was negative; the drawings, photographs and engravings were shared with the world through the democratisation of knowledge offered by the press, and made the relocation of Abu Simbel a popular issue.

The journalism of 60's in Spain start the way to the nowadays consolidate "archaeological journalism" despite this long career we still think that journalist who works with chronicles on Archaeology should have much knowledge about our discipline because they still continues projecting it as an adventure not a Science. Whether drawings, photographs and engravings opened Abu Simbel to knowledge, the Press democratized it access, popularizing his image.

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