

PACKING AND SHIPPING A WHOLE NUBIAN TEMPLE

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"Habashi" is a nickname meaning the "Ethiopian". It has become an institution, almost a legend in Egypt; for the man who bears it — his real name is Mohammed Said Hamani — has been for nearly 40 years a key figure in the Egyptian Antiquities Service.

Not that he has been one of the top men in the service whose names, after their career is over, live on in the annals of Egyptology as successors to a host of brilliant scholars, like Champollion or Maspero.

But Habashi has probably seen more of Egyptian archaeology during his lifetime than many well-known foreign Egyptologists. Today he is a man in his early sixties, still vigorous, stocky in build, with kindly eyes and an almost classical, Greek nose such as one sometimes finds on the Upper Nile, going south towards the Sudan.

The eminence of Habashi's position lies in the fact that he has been employed by the Antiquities Service at prac-

tically every important excavation in Egypt during the last generation. His job is to supervise the work of the labourers and teams of diggers. He was the privileged foreman who raised the funeral barge of Cheops in front of the Great Pyramid at Giza after its discovery a quarter of a century ago.

Today, once again, he is at the helm of a strategic operation: that of saving the Nubian art treasures, under the international campaign launched by Unesco. He is now in the field, in Nubia, engaged in the delicate work that will save two temples and a kiosk of the Ptolemeic period — Debod, Taffa and Kertassi — the first to be threatened by the rising waters of the Nile after completion of the new High Dam at Aswan.

A Successful Experiment

In view of the rapidly approaching time-limit — this is a critical period for these temples — a visit to the Anti-

quities Service workshop near Aswan, now in full activity, is a heartening experience. It is here that an important stage in the rescue campaign has been enacted. The three temples have recently been dismantled and transported to safety, preparatory to their re-erection elsewhere. The component parts now lie on protected ground on the island of Elephantine.

The success of the operation means that it can be repeated elsewhere, if need be on an even larger scale. For instance, there are plans, under the Unesco programme, for the transfer of Kalabsha, known as the "Luxor of Nubia", which is, after Philae, the largest Graeco-Roman foundation in Egyptian Nubia. Debod, Taffa and Ker-tassi served as a first and successful experiment in the art of removal in Nubia. Moreover, the Egyptian Antiquities Service can boast of having accomplished the task in less time than was originally planned, and with greater safety.

It was here that the personality of the leader of the team, Habashi, proved itself again, as it has done so often in the past

The largest of the three monuments, Debod, has a monumental doorway, adorned

with the ancient symbol of the winged sun, still in good condition. On the facade, Augustus and Tiberius are represented alongside the ancient Egyptian gods. All this had to be taken down, stone by stone, each stone being first numbered and then packed.

Ropes And Muscle

The temple of Taffa, of the late Ptolemeic period, stood on the river bank some 30 miles further up the Nile. It too was doomed to disappear. Now it is in safety. Smaller than Debod, it filled, when dismantled, only two barges (Debod needed three). All the work was done in the traditional Pharaonic manner, by the use of human muscle, with no devices other than ropes for pulling the stones over the ground. The stones were dragged down a slight slope to the bank where the barges were waiting. There the men gave a final push, and a crane, erected over the deck of the barge, lifted each stone, which was then lowered into the boat. This crane, equipped with a single hook, was the only mechanical contraption used. The barges, one after the other, were hauled down the Nile, through the locks of the present Aswan Dam, to the island of

Elephantine where they were unloaded by equally simple means. Another barge, the El Sebua, carried the stones of the temple kiosk of Ker-tassi, consisting of 120 component pieces. The precious load included a number of beautifully shaped columns, their capitals intact, each packed separately into crates to protect them from scratching.

The whole operation took scarcely more than three months, July to September 1960. During this time some 400 workers were engaged and six boats chartered. The area where the temples were deposited was fenced off and is not accessible to the ordinary visitor. Here, in quiet seclusion, a small team of men, under the experienced eye of Habashi, have made a thorough inventory of this archaeological hoard and are preparing the temples for re-erection. The temple of Debod is one which the United Arab Republic might be prepared to offer to a country which renders outstanding services to the campaign to save the Nubian monuments. Altogether the government is ready to offer five of its temples in return for foreign assistance, the cost of transfer to be borne by the receiving countries.

The experts sent to Nubia to undertake a preliminary survey of the monuments, have recommended the removal of about 20 temples and churches. The plan is to transfer them to sites in Nubia above the new water level.

Working to a Time-Table

As far as the priority of the removal operations is concerned, a list published by Unesco gives tentative dates for the beginning of each task, together with an estimate of its duration. The range of these operations differs according to the size of the monument and local conditions, such as soil, accessibility and the rate of advance of the water. In the case of some of the more elaborate temples, like Dakka, Derr and the rock-hewn tomb of Aniba, the work will take up to three years and should be completed by 1963. The Temple of Kalabsha, which is the largest, will require four years for removal and re-erection. Other, however, such as Wadi es Sebua, once used as a Christian church of which some features, such as a fresco of St. Peter, are still discernible, will take only two years to move.

The work is likely to be carried out by a number of

teams from various countries, so that the burden may be shared. The Egyptian Antiquities Service has given an example of speed and efficiency by being the first to move three monuments to safety. This news will give comfort

and encouragement to the many who, in all parts of the world, follow Unesco's campaign on behalf of the Nubian art treasures with interest and anxiety, earnestly hoping for its successful completion. (UNESCO)

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British Divers to Measure Rise of the Mediterranean

A team of eleven divers, who are also archaeologists, geologists, anthropologists and zoologists, left England recently to explore underwater sites around the coasts of the Mediterranean. Members of the Cambridge University Underwater Exploration Group, they will attempt to trace changes in the sea level which have occurred since the beginning of the Ice Age, about a million years ago.

The expedition will visit the Balearic Islands, the Costa Brava in Spain, the French and Italian Riviera, Elba, Naples, Stromboli, Syracuse, Carthage and Algeria. They will explore numerous subma-

rine caves in search of evidence of human habitation and also some twenty submerged Roman and Phoenician cities.

The team has taken along all kinds of scientific equipment, including a portable decompression chamber, a zoological laboratory, echometers for charting the caves, intercommunication radio sets for use by the divers and underwater scooters.

The expedition includes several cameramen who hope to make a series of documentary films for television. Underwater floodlighting will be used for shots in the caves. (UNESCO)