



Trabajos de Egiptología

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Alfonso MARTÍN FLORES

**Napatan Tomb Decorations. Loans from Private Theban Burials
in the Royal Kushite Necropolises**
Simone PETACCHI



 **Centros de Estudios Africanos**
Universidad de La Laguna



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Papers on Ancient Egypt

**Preliminary Report on the Third and Fourth Seasons
of the New Kingdom Scribes Project (2021–2022)**

Lucía DÍAZ-IGLESIAS LLANOS, Ángeles JIMÉNEZ-HIGUERAS,
Daniel Miguel MÉNDEZ-RODRÍGUEZ, Ignacio BERMEJA GIGORRO,
Sagrario MARTÍNEZ RAMÍREZ, Santiago SÁNCHEZ-CORTÉS, Antonio GÓMEZ LAGUNA

**Songs and Hymns for Hathor as Gold from the Old Kingdom
to the Late Period. Part I. Corpora of Texts and Complementary Documents**
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Cultural Similarities between Ancient Egypt and Byzantium
Lloyd D. GRAHAM

A Female Egyptian Statuette in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid
Miguel JARAMAGO



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Artículos | Articles

The Fate of Expatriate Temples: Ellesiya, Taffa, Dendur and Debod

Alfonso MARTÍN FLORES

The Nubia Salvage Campaign involved the movement and relocation of temples and other archaeological remains on an unprecedented scale. Criteria and recommendations were established to ensure the integrity of the temples and their preservation, and to maintain as far as possible some link with the environment to which they belonged. Four temples were also selected for transfer to other countries. For the latter, conservation in museums was emphasised. This article examines how these criteria evolved and how the various countries that received Nubian temples responded to these criteria and recommendations, and proceeded to reconstruct the monuments.

El destino de los templos expatriados: Ellesiya, Taffa, Dendur y Debod

La campaña de Salvamento de Nubia supuso el movimiento y traslado de templos y otros monumentos arqueológicos a una escala hasta entonces inédita. Para llevarla a cabo se establecieron criterios y recomendaciones con los que se quería asegurar la integridad de los templos y su conservación y mantener, en lo posible, cierta conexión con el ambiente al que pertenecían. Cuatro templos fueron seleccionados, además, para ser regalados a otros tantos países. Los criterios insistían en su conservación en el interior de museos. En el presente artículo se analiza la gestación de esos criterios y la forma en la que los distintos países que recibieron un templo egipcio respondieron a esos criterios y recomendaciones y llevaron a cabo la reconstrucción de sus respectivos monumentos.

Keywords: Ancient Egypt, displaced Heritage, museums, Nubia.

Palabras clave: Egipto antiguo, museos, Nubia, Patrimonio Cultural desplazado.

In 2022, along with the other two great anniversaries of Egyptology – the decipherment of hieroglyphs by Champollion and the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun – the 50th anniversary of the inauguration of the temple of Debod was also commemorated in Spain. Its opening marked the end of an intense period of work and negotiation for the scientific and technical teams and the governments responsible for its concession, transport and installation in Madrid. The temple of Debod faced a new future, far away from Nubia, but also far away from its eventful history of the last hundred years, during which it was plundered, submerged and threatened to disappear under the perennial waters of Lake Nasser.

However, this prospect was thrown into doubt as soon as the plans for its installation became known. Unlike the other temples that have left the banks of the Nile to find a new home in the museums of Europe and America, the reconstruction of Debod in the open air in Madrid immediately aroused the concerns of Egyptologists and conservation specialists. Soon, these misgivings also reached public opinion through the press. Since then, the protection of Debod, or rather the lack of it, has been a recurring theme in the media, but also in more specialised articles and even in denunciations at Egyptological congresses and meetings of Egyptological associations. This situation has forced the administration in charge of its conservation and management, the City Council of Madrid,

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to hold several meetings to provide a definitive solution to the queries concerning the state of conservation and the preservation of the temple.¹

The comparison with the final placement of the temples of Ellesiya, Taffa or Dendur has been one of the most common arguments in the criticism of the Debod installation. In general, emphasising the unsuitability of its open-air location and, in some cases, defending it. The reconstruction of the other temples in museums, in controlled environments and protected by the rest of the institution's functions, contrasts with the unprotected situation of Debod. This article presents the history of the transfer and reconstruction of these four temples, which reveals different sensitivities in the receiving countries towards this incorporated heritage, disparities in the conceptualisation of these buildings, as well as distinctive emphasis on their conservation and preservation. All of this is set in the context of conservation theory and practice at the time of the transfer and the criteria that were established for adjudication.

1 | The Nubian Campaign and the Question of Relocating Monuments

The terrible and widespread destruction of the historical heritage during the Second World War necessitated rapid restoration work to prevent further damage caused by the elements, looting, and post-war urban speculation and, above all, to alleviate the European population's anguish at losing signs of identity. These measures soon surpassed the conservative practice of the first third of the 20th century, as set out in the Athens Charter

of 1931. The principles of “scientific restoration” – in particular, the limitation of restoration interventions to the benefit of conservation and the primacy of the documentary and historical value of monuments – were sacrificed to the need for rapid decision-making, the large volume of heritage affected, and the desire to repair the historical memory of European peoples as quickly as possible.²

In this context of theoretical adaptation and the adoption of new practices in heritage conservation, the most important and ambitious international operation for the protection of cultural heritage ever undertaken was launched in 1959: The Nubian Salvage Campaign.

The construction of a new dam of enormous dimensions at the first cataract of the Nile condemned this region, located in southern Egypt and northern Sudan, to physical disappearance under the waters of a gigantic reservoir, and with it its rich cultural heritage. This included important archaeological remains from prehistoric to medieval times, and some of the most important and best-preserved pharaonic monuments that reached the 20th century.

The technicians were confronted with one of the most problematic and controversial aspects of the theory of restoration: the concept of moving a monument to preserve it. This relocation was considered at the time to be synonymous with destruction, because it “interrupts the formal continuity between the monument and its environment [...] and is in itself a serious conceptual error”³ that invalidates it as a work of art, turning it into a “fake” of itself.⁴ The Athens Charter did not even consider this type of intervention, and only in the General Conclusion V, with reference to monumental

1 Di Nobile 2005; Varagnoli 2021: 46–49 and note 25.

2 González-Varas 1999: 265–6.

3 Crespi 1955. Taken from Aveta 2005: 136.

4 Brandi 1963: 78.

sculpture, did it state that “the removal of works of art from the surroundings for which they were designed is, in principle, to be discouraged.”⁵

However, while rejecting its legitimacy at a theoretical level, some architects accepted that, in practice and exceptionally, the removal of a monument could be considered in cases where this action was inevitable, for lack of any other alternative, and necessary, because of the obligation to preserve it.⁶

Inevitable and necessary were two terms that fit the Nubian case perfectly. The construction of the dam was an indisputable decision; the Nubian monuments had to be saved, and the only way to do this was to move them to higher ground, away from the water.

Indeed, relocating architectural monuments, whether for economic or preserving reasons, was not an unknown practice. The growth and development of cities and the construction of major engineering works forced the movement of historic buildings in Europe and the United States during the 19th and early 20th centuries.⁷ The acquisition of architectural heritage by private collectors or museums also involved the dismantling and relocation of structures or significant parts of them, even outside the countries in which they were located. In the latter case, Egypt had some experience.⁸

However, unlike these cases, the Nubian operation was a qualitative and quantitative leap since it affected an entire region and its monumental and archaeological heritage. It went beyond the one-off actions that had characterised previous occasions to address the issue of salvage by displacement on a global scale. The scope of this enterprise, which was not free of economic and political interests, forced those responsible for designing the conservation framework of the campaign to rethink some of the concepts of conservation theory and to make decisions accordingly to achieve the preservation of as many monuments as possible.

In the autumn of 1959, before launching the international appeal to save the Nubian monuments, UNESCO, through its Consultative Committee, commissioned a series of reports aimed at establishing the technical and economic feasibility of the project. One of these, by Piero Gazzola, Professor of Restoration at the University of Milan and Superintendent of Monuments for the Western Veneto, dealt with the architectural and archaeological aspects of moving the monuments.⁹ Gazzola was also a member of the Commission of International Experts that travelled to Nubia from 2 to 11 October 1959 to learn first-hand about the problems of the campaign and

5 ICOMOS 2004: 32. In the Spanish version of the Charter the cited text appears in Conclusion No. VI ICOMOS 2004: 36.

6 Aveta 2005: 136.

7 In Spain, since the end of the 19th century there had been sporadic relocations of monuments for preservation reasons, such as the Romanesque hermitage of *San Isidoro de Ávila*, in 1894, to be installed in the National Archaeological Museum, although it finally ended up in the *Parque del Retiro*, Madrid (Teijeira Pablos 2014) or the Visigothic church of *San Pedro de la Nave*, in 1930, motivated by the construction of a dam. At the beginning of the 60s, while the Nubian campaign was developing, the construction of the Belasar dam in Lugo, forced the transfer of the Portomarín monumental complex (López Menchero-Bendicho 2011: 14–15).

8 In the 19th century, in addition to the three obelisks that adorned the cities of Paris, New York and London, entire parts of buildings had left Egypt as gifts to European institutions. Between 1902 and 1914, the Antiquities Service sold, in a rather debatable attempt to stop the looting of reliefs and inscriptions in the necropolises of Saqqara and Giza, but also to finance its archaeological activities, several complete mastaba chapels to European and American museums (Bruffaerts 2005: 7–8).

9 Gazzola 1959.

the monuments concerned, and to draw up the final report¹⁰ that was approved by the Executive Committee and then by the General Conference of UNESCO in January 1960.¹¹

Both in his report and in his subsequent interventions at the Commission's meetings, Gazzola set out his position on monument relocation.

As far as the principle of relocation is concerned, I cannot fail to express my scientifically negative opinion on any relocation of a monument: firstly, for historical reasons, and secondly for reasons of architectural authenticity. In exceptional cases, however, it is unavoidable and can be accepted.

In this respect, the possibilities offered by the most advanced modern techniques have not contributed anything to the solution of this problem, which remains fundamental. A transfer, however perfect it may be thanks to current techniques, is always an imperfect solution. However, in the light of recent experience in this field, and in particular the experience gained as a result of the destruction caused by the war, it can be said that it is technically possible to achieve the desired objective in a satisfactory manner. If the need for this intervention is accepted, it is necessary to find ways of reducing the disadvantages as far as possible.¹²

The general aspects of the relocation of the temples were discussed at the second and eleventh

meetings of the Commission of Experts.¹³ Gazzola's position on the exceptional nature of such an operation was accepted and the discussions focused on the new site to be given to the temples. Most of the participants were in favour of keeping them in their environment, as close as possible to the original site where they were erected, so as not to deprive the Nubian people of the testimony of their history. Walter Emery, Egyptologist and Professor at University College London, suggested that some of the temples should be moved to more established tourist areas such as Luxor, arguing that travelling to Nubia would be unattractive. In the end, the Egyptian government's proposal to group them together in two enclaves as open-air museums, near Kalabsha and Abu Simbel, prevailed. This would make them more accessible to tourists in the future and ensure that they were preserved, if not in their original setting, then at least in Nubia. The open-air museums would ultimately be three: New Kalabsha, New Amada and New Seba.¹⁴ In this way, elements of Egyptian territorial and development policy were introduced into the technical debate on the relocation of the temples in the context of their future use. This ultimately

¹⁰ UNESCO 55 EX/7.

¹¹ Säve-Söderbergh (ed.) 1987: 70–71; Desroches Noblecourt 1992: 145–159.

¹² Gazzola 1959: 2–3. Gazzola expresses the need to accept the dismantling and removal of monuments when referring to the temples of Abu Simbel: “In no case can the disappearance of such a monument be accepted. Because of its capital importance, a limited salvage could not be accepted under any historical or artistic concept. It would be a renunciation of the principles on which our civilisation is based if all the means of our time were not used to save, as far as possible, such a spectacular testimony to a great civilisation as that of Ancient Egypt” (Gazzola 1959: 9–10).

¹³ UNESCO/SN/R EXP/SR.

¹⁴ “In the relocation of temples in the Nile Valley, a reasonable distribution of the new sites is recommended. It is not advisable to go to the extreme of isolating each temple in the immediate vicinity of its present location, nor to the extreme of grouping many temples on a new site. The Committee considers that no more than three temples should be erected on any new site” (UNESCO CUA/106 Annexe II.A, Recommendation 2.6 d: 24). The final concentration sites and new recommendations on their location therein were established in 1962 (UNESCO CUA/118 Annexe II: 23–24).

reshaped the region into what has been called the Nubian “desert design”.¹⁵

Gazzola, together with Harold Plenderleith, Director of the International Study Centre for the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) in Rome and also a member of the Commission, considered it necessary to draw up a declaration on the removal of monuments, which they appended to the report of the 11th session.¹⁶ The document elaborated on the principles that should govern the operations of removal and subsequent reconstruction, underlined their exceptional nature, justified by the need to preserve this heritage, called for a global and non-selective action of removal (“Every stone, even if not decorated, has an absolute value in itself, and must be preserved at all costs”) and rejected possible subsequent alterations to the original moved (“It is well understood that the removal of monuments must not involve additions or reconstitutions”). The content of the statement was not taken up in the Commission's final report.

The importance and scope of the salvage operations in Nubia, with a massive relocation of monuments and archaeological structures, had an impact on the international documents on cultural heritage protection of the following two decades, addressing the issue for the first time. In the 1964 Venice Charter, in which Gazzola

played a leading role, Article 7 seems to echo the discussions of the Committee of Experts during their trip to Nubia: “A monument is inseparable from the history to which it bears witness and from the setting in which it occurs. The moving of all or part of a monument cannot be allowed except where the safeguarding of that monument demands it or where it is justified by national or international interest of paramount importance.”¹⁷

2 | Criteria for the Transfer of Temples to Foreign Countries

From the first discussions between UNESCO members and the governments of Egypt and Sudan, it was suggested that, while the member state requesting international cooperation should be under no obligation, part of the Nubian and Egyptian cultural heritage would be offered in return for assistance to countries cooperating in the rescue. This *quid pro quo* would consist of archaeological concessions in Egypt, fifty per cent of the finds from excavations in Nubia, the donation of artefacts from Egyptian stores and reserves, and the gift of five Nubian temples.¹⁸ These compensations were considered necessary to ensure the economic and technical success of the campaign, although they

¹⁵ Allais 2012: 183. Allais points to the Commission of Experts as responsible for this “design” of the region. Carruthers (2022: 6–17), for his part, argues that “UNESCO's Nubia” was the result of different processes, the “genealogies” of the Campaign, affected by a colonialist vision of Nubia and Nubian archaeology and coupled with a water policy that repeatedly sacrificed the region and its inhabitants.

¹⁶ UNESCO SN/R EXP/SR Annexe VII (11ème séance). *Recommandations concernant le transfert des temples. Déclaration de MM. Gazzola et Plenderleith*: 10.

¹⁷ ICOMOS 2004: 37. In addition to the Venice Charter, the recommendation not to transfer monuments except when indispensable is also contained in the Burra Charter for Sites of Cultural Significance, 1979, art. 9 (ICOMOS 2004: 65).

¹⁸ Desroches Noblecourt 1992: 142; Säve-Söderbergh (ed.) 1987: 69. A more critical view of the UNESCO-sponsored counterpart system can be found in Allais, 2012: 192–194.

represented a return to colonial practices that had taken the Egyptian authorities decades to overcome.¹⁹

On 1 October 1959, at the first meeting of the International Commission of Experts that was to report on the salvage operation, the Egyptian Minister of Culture, Sarwat Okasha, confirmed his government's promise of compensation for foreign aid. This included the donation of several temples previously selected by a committee made up of members of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities and professors from Cairo University: Debod, Taffa, Dendur, Ellesiya and Derr. The temple of Derr, whose salvage was considered very difficult due to the poor state of the rock, was subsequently removed from the list. It was finally saved in extremis by Egypt in 1965 and is now reconstructed in New Amada. Okasha referred to these monuments as "extraordinary ambassadors".

One of the most striking aspects is the lack of a thorough discussion of the relevance of the transfer of temples outside Egypt and their alienation from the Nubian and Egyptian cultural heritage. This debate should have taken place at least during the second session of the Commission, when a request was made to replace the term "counterpart", which recalled colonial Egyptological practices as the regulations that split recovered objects fifty-fifty, with the

term "gift".²⁰ The comments made on the subject forced the chairman of the meeting to clarify that "the donation of certain monuments or objects from Egypt should not be interpreted as a dissociation from the Egyptian cultural heritage, but rather as a new extension of its influence". In general, the references to these transfers were characterised by a certain "frivolous" tone. Mohammed Anwar Shoukry, Director of Pharaonic Antiquities of the Antiquities Service, pointed out that the collection of Nubian temples at the sites of Kalabsha and Abu Simbel "would be so numerous that the Egyptian Government would be willing to give up some of them",²¹ and Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt, curator of Egyptian Antiquities at the Louvre Museum and UNESCO's advisor to the Center of Studies and Documentation of Egyptian Antiquities, (CE-DAE), spoke of small Nubian chapels that the Egyptian state wanted "to get rid of".²² Gazzola was against this use of heritage and its removal from the country: "The times for moving monuments out of their national borders have thankfully passed." and he hoped that no government would support such use.²³ In vain: the measure appealed directly to the West's desire for antiquities and undoubtedly worked, proving highly beneficial to the success of the campaign.

The removal of temples from the country was discussed again at the eleventh session of the

Commission in the context of the general problem of moving Nubian monuments to safe areas. Although the gift of these temples had the additional purpose of encouraging financial support for the Campaign, their preservation and conservation were in any case part of the general purpose of the operation. Their relocation was guided by the same criteria of inevitability and necessity as the other monuments that would remain in Nubia; only their place of rebuilding would be different. Therefore, "the guarantees of preservation and conservation that must govern the rebuilding of certain monuments both in Nubia and abroad"²⁴ should be identical.

Participants agreed that donated temples should not be installed in the open air but in museums, and that the principles of protection and display should be ensured before they were granted, so that they were not given to a recipient who would not meet the appropriate conditions of protection and conservation. As in the case of the other monuments to remain in Nubia, it was recommended that they be reconstructed in a context as similar as possible to the original site, incorporating recent developments in museology and the capacity to exhibit temples in environmental reconstructions within the building.

With regard to the latter, it is noteworthy that the only establishment mentioned by the experts in their discussions as possible recipients of these temples were museums. Much of the 11th session was devoted to the role that these institutions

could play in the development and success of the campaign, and the impetus that the Egyptian counterparts would provide in this regard.²⁵ The speech given by Okasha, the Egyptian Minister of Culture, to the experts at the first session of the Commission also mentioned museums or scientific centres open to the public as the only acceptable recipients of these goods. Finally, in the recommendations contained in the last report of the Commission, the role of museums as recipients of temples was more ambiguous, although the reference to institutions open to the public that protect and present the temples was a clear allusion to the International Council of Museums' definition:²⁶

59. The experts have learned with great interest of the arrangements made by the Government of the United Arab Republic for the transfer of certain temples in Nubia and objects from storage and reserves in recognition of international assistance. They welcome the position of the Government of the United Arab Republic regarding their exclusive use for institutions open to the public.
60. In this regard, the experts recall the obligation of the recipient institutions to protect them from dangerous exposure and to ensure that they are presented in a manner appropriate to their use. They insist that in no case should the aim be to complete their decoration.²⁷

The donation of its cultural heritage was therefore entirely an Egyptian affair. The Egyptian authorities did not lose their sovereignty and full

¹⁹ Carruthers 2022: 12. The practice of dividing finds from excavations began to decline with the British declaration of Egypt's independence in 1922 and the rise of Egyptian nationalist parties, which made control of antiquities a touchstone of their political aspirations, but it did not disappear. Although it has been applied less and less since the 1950s, it remained in force until 2010. In that year, Law No. 3 on the Protection of Antiquities abolished the cession of 10% of finds to foreign missions (Stevenson 2019, 217–223).

²⁰ Allais 2012: 194 and note 25. Allais highlights the choice of a specific vocabulary in the official discourse of the Campaign, the origin of which is to be found in the Commission of Experts itself.

²¹ UNESCO SN/R.EXP/SR: 5.

²² Desroches Noblecourt 1992: 142.

²³ Allais 2012: 203.

²⁴ UNESCO SN/R.EXP/SR: 39.

²⁵ UNESCO SN/R.EXP/SR: 40–43.

²⁶ "Permanent establishment, administered in the general interest, for the purpose of preserving, studying, enhancing by various means and, in particular, of exhibiting to the public for its delectation and instruction groups of objects and specimens of cultural value: artistic, historical, scientific and technological collections, botanical and zoological gardens and aquariums." (ICOM International Council of Museums, *Statutes*, 1951, art. II. Taken from Rivière 1989: 82).

²⁷ UNESCO SN/R.EXP/SR Annexe I: 10.

decision-making power in this regard. Nevertheless, UNESCO was represented on the Advisory Committee and the Sub-Committee for the Safeguarding of Nubian Sites and Monuments, established by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture in 1960. These bodies were responsible not only for advising on the offers made by various countries to carry out surveys, excavations and archaeological documentation, and to dismantle the temples, but also for recommending the requests for goods to be awarded in recognition of the assistance provided, including the selected temples.²⁸ In the years that followed, both defined the requirements and criteria that would govern the handing over of these monuments to other countries.

The general standard-setting instrument within which donations of cultural property were framed was the 1956 “Recommendation on International Principles Applicable to Archaeological Excavations”, and in particular Article 23(a), (c) and (e) thereof:

- (a) Each Member State should clearly define the principles which hold good on its territory in regard to the disposal of finds from excavations.
- (c) With the main object of promoting archaeological studies through the distribution of original material, the conceding authority, after scientific publication, might consider allocating to the approved excavator a number of finds from his excavation, consisting of duplicates or, in a more general sense, of objects or groups of objects which can be released in view of their similarity to other objects from the same excavation. The return to the excavator of objects resulting from excavations should always be subject to the condition that they be allocated within a specified period of time to scientific centers open to the public, with the proviso

that if these conditions are not put into effect, or cease to be carried out, the released objects will be returned to the conceding authority.

- (e) Each Member State should consider ceding to, exchanging with, or depositing in foreign museums objects, which are not required in the national collections.

At the Consultative Sub-Committee meeting in Cairo in March 1966, members were informed of the criteria for the allocation of temples:

- Express request by a member country of the Organisation to receive a particular monument.
- Fulfilment of the agreed payments for the salvage of Abu Simbel. The recommendation to donate a temple could only be considered if the requesting country had made a substantial contribution to the salvage of monuments other than the one requested.
- Underwrite the costs of dismantling the temple in Nubia and transporting it to the country of destination.
- Determine the final location of the monument. This had to be “a public place or a building in accordance with the conditions required for its best preservation and its cultural message.”²⁹

Only the last criterion referred to the place and conditions for the installation of the granted temples, although in a very summarised, even ambiguous way. In 1967, at its meeting of 4 and 5 March, the Sub-Committee formulated this criterion more specifically, with a clear reference to the final location and nature of the installation:³⁰

- a) The monument offered by the RAU must be displayed in a public place where it can be seen and studied by the greatest number of visitors.
- b) Under no circumstances should the monument be exhibited in the open air; it should be housed in a

building specially constructed or adapted for this purpose.

- c) To prevent the stone blocks of the monument from disintegrating, they should be chemically treated *in situ* before being moved.

In 1965, the Committee had already accepted the request of the United States for Dendur and, in 1966, that of Italy for the *speos* of Ellesiya. With the favourable recommendation for the donation of the Taffa and Debod temples to the Netherlands and Spain in 1967, the work of this agency in selecting proposals for the donation of Nubian temples to third countries was virtually complete. However, their oversight role included the approval of the installation and display projects for the temples before they were allowed to leave the country, which enabled them to retain some decision power even after the temple had been officially donated.

3 | Temples Transferred out of Egypt

3.1 | The Speos of Ellesiya Museo Egizio, Turin, Italy

Of the four temples that left Egypt, the temple of Ellesiya is the oldest. It was consecrated in 1429 BC by Thutmose III and dedicated to the god Horus of Myam and the goddess Satis or the god Amun.³¹

It was a *speos* excavated inside a high sandstone cliff on the eastern bank of the Nile, 225 km south of Aswan and 45 km north of Abu Simbel. The entrance gate, opened in the escarpment, led to a transverse vestibule and a sanctuary

with the seated statues of the main gods of the temple and Thutmose III himself carved into the rock. The walls of the vestibule and sanctuary were decorated with scenes of offerings in relief, forming a single register on a plain plinth. Outside, two stelae of Thutmose III and one of Ramesses II were incised into the rock, as well as numerous graffiti from the New Kingdom. The reliefs and statues inside were severely damaged in antiquity, first during the Amarnian episode, when the images and inscriptions of Amun were erased, and then during the Christian period, when the temple was converted into a church.

The temple was not affected by the raising of the first Aswan Dam in 1906, but it was affected by its subsequent heightening. From 1930 the entrance was submerged by the water of the lake, which damaged the stelae and the graffiti engraved on the façade. Inside, the reliefs and inscriptions and the three statues in the rear niche lost the traces of colour that once covered them.

In 1962, UNESCO asked the *Soprintendenza e Museo per le Antichità Egizie* (Egyptian Museum in Turin) to undertake the salvage of one of the “small temples” of Nubia. In exchange for their cooperation, the Egyptian Government would be willing to donate that temple to Italy. The *Soprintendenza*, with the financial support of the City of Turin, assumed the task and the temple chosen was that of Ellesiya. The project was approved by the UNESCO Advisory Committee for the Safeguarding of Nubian Sites and Monuments at its meeting on 4 and 5 December 1963. However, it was the Egyptian technicians and workers, under Italian supervision, who finally carried out the operation in July 1965, near the deadline set by the

²⁸ UNESCO CUA/103 Annexe IIA: 9; UNESCO NUBIA 9/ Annexe 5: 17; Säve-Söderbergh (ed.) 1987: 96.

²⁹ UNESCO NUBIA/11 Appendix 4. The second criterion had already been expressed in the 1960 Advisory Committee recommendations, UNESCO CUA/103 Annexe IIA: 14.

³⁰ UNESCO NUBIA/13 Annexe IX: 37.

³¹ The seated statue in the niche of the sanctuary corresponds to the god Amun. However, indications that it may have been carved, as well as the inscription that accompanies it, and the presence of the goddess Satet on the “dedication stele” of the temple have supported the hypothesis of an initial dedication to this goddess by Thutmose III, and a later dedication, in the time of Ramesses II, to Amun of Thebes (Curto 1970: 33; 2010: 52).

end of the construction of the dam, taking advantage of the last drop in the level of the river. After twenty days of hard work in difficult conditions, the stelae and inscriptions on the façade and the upper half of the inner walls, with the reliefs and sculptures of the chapel, were removed, leaving *in situ* the plain parts of the façade, an undecorated part of the inner base, the floor, and the ceiling of the *speos*. The presence of the Italian team during the extraction work provided complete planimetric and photographic documentation, as well as the precise identification and original location of each of the blocks, which would be crucial for their subsequent installation. The 66 blocks obtained were first taken to Wadi es-Seboua and, in 1966, to the head of the dam, where they were prepared for transport out of Egypt. On 3 December of the same year, the Egyptian Republic formally donated the temple of Ellesiya to Italy in gratitude for the assistance provided.³²

Given the technical and economic role played by the institutions of the Piedmontese capital in rescuing the temple,³³ there was no doubt as to which Italian city would be chosen to house the *speos*. Although there was a proposal from the city council to place it in one of the city's parks,³⁴ which was rejected, the logical destination for the temple of Ellesiya had always been the *Museo Egizio* in Turin, the oldest museum dedicated to Egyptian antiquities and home to Italy's most important collection of Egyptian antiquities.

The way it was to be conserved and displayed was more controversial. The *Direzione Generale*

alle Antichità proposed an extremely minimalist and decontextualised display: the reliefs and the inscriptions would simply be displayed in the room, like paintings, without any reference to the space in which they were created, together with photographs, plans and other documentation relating to their recovery and transfer. For its part, the *Museo Egizio* defended the reconstruction of the interior of the *speos*, with all the original pieces preserved, because of the good condition of the blocks, the way in which they had been cut into complete scenes with a view to their subsequent reassembly, and the better understanding that visitors would have of the whole. Once this had been decided, it was necessary to determine the extent of the reconstruction: should only the walls be reconstructed with the original elements, or would it be more appropriate to reconstruct the entire interior, including the chapel roof? In the end, didactic arguments led to the adoption of the latter proposal to the detriment of the former, more purist option.³⁵

A room next to the Museum's famous Statuary Hall was reserved for installing the ensemble, which was intended to be dedicated to Nubia. The installation of the blocks and the reconstruction of the temple took place between 1968 and 1969. Prior to this, the blocks were examined and analysed by technicians from the Faculty of Architecture in Turin to check their composition, consistency and condition. To avoid the risk of breakage, the blocks were not placed in contact

³² Curto 1970: 35–42; 2010: 58–62; Säve-Södebergh (ed.) 1987: 142–3.

³³ As already mentioned, the project to recover the *speos* was carried out by the *Soprintendenza del Piemonte* and the *Museo Egizio*, with the financial support of the City Council. Silvio Curto, inspector and later director of the museum, was in charge of the recovery and removal operations. In addition, the funds necessary for the removal and the financial support for the campaign were provided mainly by public institutions in Turin, as well as by companies and individuals in the city (Curto 2010: 59).

³⁴ Curto 2010: 64.

³⁵ Curto 1970: 42–44; 2010: 64.



Figure 1. The Nubian Room with the speos of Ellesiya, Museo Egizio, Turin, 2018. Photography: Carmen Herrero.

with each other. Instead, a structure of metal profiles was designed to relieve the vertical pressure. The missing base inside the *speos* was reconstructed, on which the blocks that had been extracted were placed. The integrated area was slightly lowered to further distinguish it from the originals. The joints between the blocks were covered with plaster and small losses affecting the hieroglyphs or figures were restored. To complete the assemblage, the original vaulted ceiling of the *speos* was recreated by means of a metal structure that was also used to house the

lighting system. On the outside, to evoke the appearance of the cliff on which the temple was originally carved, a neutral, smooth, sloping wall was constructed as a façade.³⁶ The three stelae were placed on the side walls, as were some of the recovered graffiti. The rest of the Nubia Room was used to display various objects from the museum's collections. The room and the temple were opened to the public in September 1970.

However, subsequent alterations and extensions to the museum have affected the temple and its installation. In the second half of the

³⁶ Volpiano 1970; 2010.



Figure 2. The temple of Taffa in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden Hall, Leiden, 2016. Photography: Hnapel (CC Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License).

1980s, when two underground levels were built, it became necessary to strengthen the floor slab under the *speos*. The option of dismantling it and reassembly it at the end of the work was rejected. Instead, it was decided to build a modular support structure under its floor. This would allow the temple to be lifted using a series of jacks and kept suspended while work was being carried out underground. Once the lower space was finished and a new and strong floor slab was in place, it was put back in place. This operation was also used to remove the neutral wall that acted as a façade for the *speos* and to recreate the natural one, in which the three stelae and the fragments of ancient graffiti that had been pre-

served were integrated in a position analogous to the original one, thus improving the interpretation and understanding of the whole. However, the Nubian Room had to be sacrificed: the space in front of the temple was transformed into a communication area with the lower floor. The new presentation was opened to the public in 1991.³⁷

The recent remodelling of the museum (2010-2015), with a new museographic project that has reorganised the discourse and the exhibition circuit, has also made it possible to recover the Nubian Room and to better contextualise the ensemble. The reform has led to improvements in the lighting, information and protection of the reliefs.

³⁷ Curto 2010: 66.

3.2 | The Temple of Taffa Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden. Leiden, The Netherlands

Of the two small temples that stood in the village of Taffa, ancient Taphis, 50 km from Aswan, only the smaller one, known as the North Temple, survived into the 20th century. Both temples were built within a stone-walled enclosure. The South Temple, the main one, may have been dedicated to Isis of Philae. It consisted of a small chapel preceded by a square pronaos with four columns. It was destroyed between 1860 and 1880.³⁸ Both structures, without inscriptions, date from the Roman period, under the Emperor Octavian Augustus. The northern building, with a single room supported by columns and a carved niche in the back wall, may have been a *mammisi* attached to the main sanctuary.³⁹

In 1900, the temple was still exceptionally well preserved. Apart from the foundations, which had been exposed, and the fall of some of the roof slabs, no major damage was observed. Seven years later, however, the structure began to show signs of instability. There were moved and broken ashlar in the upper parts of the southern façade and in the lintel of the entrance door, as well as a large crack in the eastern wall. The threat of collapse, coupled with the future risk of flooding due to the raising of the old Aswan Dam, suggested that preventive restoration work should be carried out by Alexandre Barsanti in 1907-8. Extensive use was made

of iron and concrete to consolidate the structure. Blocks were joined, lintels reinforced, and missing parts filled in.⁴⁰ However, these works were not enough to ensure its stability and, after fifty years of successive submersions and the impact of a ship's keel against its walls, the temple finally collapsed, reduced to a "quadrilateral filled with a chaos of disjointed blocks".⁴¹

The Taffa temple was the first to be dismantled when the Nubian salvage campaign began. The work was carried out by an Egyptian-Polish team in July 1960. As with other temples, the foundations of the walls, columns and pavements were left in place. The 657 blocks collected and dismantled were transported to Elephantine Island, where they remained for the next ten years.⁴² The temple was formally requested as a gift by the Netherlands in 1966, and in 1967 the Consultative Sub-Committee of the United Arab Republic agreed to recommend its acceptance.⁴³ In 1969, Egypt formally donated the Taffa temple to the Netherlands.

The blocks were packed during the summer of 1970. In October, the boxes left for Alexandria to be shipped to Rotterdam, where they docked on 18 January 1971, and on the same day they were transferred to Leiden, where they were installed in a warehouse attached to the National Museum of Antiquities. The Egyptian authorities themselves had expressed their wish for the temple to be installed in that institution, as a natural complement to one of the most important Egyptian collections in Europe.⁴⁴

³⁸ The remains of the southern temple were rediscovered during Czechoslovak Mission work in Taffa and Kertassi in 1961-62 (Žába 1967).

³⁹ Arnold 1999: 240.

⁴⁰ Maspero 1911: 37; Barsanti 1911b.

⁴¹ Fouchet 1965: 88.

⁴² Schneider 1979: 111.

⁴³ UNESCO/Nubia/13. Anexo IX: 37.

⁴⁴ Schneider 1987: 140.



Figure 3. The temple of Dendur in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2018. Photography: Courtesy of Javier Martín Florez.

When it arrived in Leiden, the museum already had a project planned for the reconstruction and exhibition of the temple. However, financial difficulties brought the project to a halt, and it was not to be resumed until 1974. At that time, the institution embarked on a period of reorganisation and architectural renovation, in which the newly acquired temple was to become the focus of the exhibition discourse. An earlier project was abandoned, and a new study was commissioned from the Delft architects A. J.H.M. Haak. The 'Haak Plan' proposed the renovation of the courtyard of the building, which was to be covered and provided with a

technical roof. The roof was supported by four thin pillars at the corners and was 1.50 metres away from the walls to allow natural light to enter through a glazed perimeter strip. In addition, the original brick walls were hidden behind limestone curtain walls. Together with the dark technical ceiling, the platform on which the temple stands, barely raised by three steps, and the simplicity of the openings, this gave the entire assemblage a neutral tone which suited the museum's new guest. Haak's project development, which lasted from 1977 to 1979, has transformed the old courtyard of the museum into a majestic hall of greater volume than any

other building of its kind in the Netherlands at the time.⁴⁵

In 1978, when work on the courtyard was well advanced, the temple blocks, which had been in storage, were moved to the site. A concrete platform had been constructed for their installation, which raised the building slightly above the floor of the hall. The museum team was technically assisted in the removal of the blocks by the architect and Egyptologist Hassan el-Achiery, who had been responsible for their dismantling in Nubia and had drawn up a planimetry for their reconstruction. Except for the southern façade, whose foundations were moved to the Netherlands, the lowest level that could not be salvaged was rebuilt in brick and covered with artificial stone. The same procedure was used to fill in the gaps left by the ashlar lost in the walls. A kaolin-based restoration mortar was used to join the courses and ashlar, while a layer of synthetic resin was applied to the interfaces with the brick or concrete to isolate these materials from the original blocks. The original dovetail boxes carved into the upper faces to join the ashlar were filled with lead. The lintels and architraves were reinforced with stainless steel laths. After the reconstruction, the temple was restored, replacing the cement additions from Barsanti's restoration of 1908. Some of the volumes and the gaps and missing parts were filled with mortar and artificial stone to level the exposed surfaces. The anastylosis and restoration of the temple took a total of four months.⁴⁶

Finally, on 4 April 1979, the museum and the temple were inaugurated and opened to the public.⁴⁷

3.3 | The Temple of Dendur Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, United States of America

The temple of Dendur was a small sanctuary located 80 km from Aswan in the ancient city of Tutzis. It was dedicated to the goddess Isis of Phyle and to two deified figures, Peteisis and Pahor, perhaps because of their deaths by drowning in the Nile. A chamber dug into the rock a few metres behind the temple may have been their tomb. The temple had a wide, high cultic terrace overlooking the river and a gateway to the temple precinct. The building consists of a vestibule, an offering room and the sanctuary, where a scene of offering is depicted on the rear wall in the form of a naos. No king's name is mentioned in the inscription cartouches, but its construction, like that of Taffa, is dated to the 1st century BC, during the reign of Augustus.⁴⁸

The temple of Dendur was in a relatively good state of preservation in 1906, and although it would remain a few metres above the water level after the imminent raising of the old Aswan Dam, it was preventively consolidated in 1908 to avoid the water affecting the lower parts of the building.⁴⁹ As with the temples of Taffa and Debod, the consolidation was carried out by the architect Alexandre Barsanti. The elements in the worst condition were the platform in front of the doorway and the doorway itself, which were reinforced and reintegrated with cement and stone, while the broken lintels and architraves of the pylon were joined together with iron beams. The façades and interior walls of the temple were also reinforced with cement, and the lintels and

45 Schneider 1979: 109–119; 1987: 140.

46 Schneider 1979: 119–120.

47 Anon. 1979: 66.

48 Aldred 1978: 37; Arnold 1999: 244.

49 Maspero 1911: 26–29.

roof slabs were supported by iron beams. The floors were rebuilt with cement and concrete, and the gaps in the walls and the row joints were repaired with cement.⁵⁰ In 1933, when the dam was raised again, the temple was submerged under the waters of the reservoir. The building withstood the next thirty years of submersion exceptionally well, and was still standing when the salvage campaign began in 1960. However, the traces of paint that illuminated the reliefs had been washed away forever.

The temple and gate were documented⁵¹ and dismantled by the Egyptian Antiquities Service in 1963 and transferred to the open-air storerooms at Elephantine, alongside those at Debod and Taffa which had been deposited there three years earlier. The outer platform and the lower row of ash-lars of the building were not recovered.

The financial weight of the United States in the salvage campaign, as well as in the technical work of excavation and restoration, was fundamental to its development and far exceeded that of any other country, mainly owing to the strong commitment of its then President, John F. Kennedy.⁵² Thus, there was no great hesitation or delay when the United States asked for the temple of Dendur as a gift in return. In 1965, at the first meeting of the Consultative Sub-Committee, the request was accepted, and in the same year the Egyptian government formalised the donation.

However, the gift was not immediately accepted. Before responding to the Egyptian offer, the new American president, Lyndon B. Johnson, decided to set up a special commission to examine the more than twenty proposals for the installation submitted by various museums and cities in the United States. This enthusiasm for the temple

was ironically dubbed the “Dendur Derby” in the American media at the time. Unlike Ellesiya and Taffa, the destination of the temple at Dendur was open and the most important criterion to be assessed by the Johnson Commission was the best preservation of the monument.

Some of the proposals, such as those from the cities of Memphis (Tennessee) and Cairo (Illinois), used their names as the main argument. But most of them proposed open-air solutions, based on the climatic conditions of the proposed site or the recreation of a riverside setting reminiscent of the Nile. The city of Albuquerque (New Mexico), for example, cited the advantages of its desert climate as the most suitable location for the building. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston wanted to install it on the Charles River, while the Smithsonian Institution, whose project was supported by former First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, proposed replicating Dendur’s original location on the banks of the Potomac River in a memorial to the late President Kennedy. Other institutions, however, proposed “insider” solutions. Southern Illinois University offered to reconstruct it inside a geodesic dome or similar structure. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York proposed the construction of a giant climate-controlled “showcase” to house it.⁵³

One by one, the various proposals were discarded until only two remained in the running: the Smithsonian’s and the Metropolitan’s. The Commission asked them to explain how their proposals would affect the reliefs and conservation of the temple in the long term, how the ash-lars would be affected by atmospheric pollution, ice or wind abrasion, and what steps would be taken to

50 Barsanti 1911c. In 1933, after the dam was raised again, the temple was submerged under the waters of the reservoir.

51 El-Achirie 1972.

52 For economic data, American involvement and the campaign’s place in the context of the “Cold War”, see Allais 2012.

53 Gissen 2009: 63.

protect and preserve them in perpetuity. To this end, samples of the stone from the building were made available to both institutions so that possible solutions could be experimented with. The Smithsonian’s solution was primarily chemical: to impregnate the blocks with a newly developed water repellent that would “embalm” the monument, giving it a “force field” to protect it from Washington’s environment. The Metropolitan, on the other hand, took an ecological approach to its proposal. Not only would the temple be protected by being placed in an enclosed space, but that space would be provided with a controlled atmosphere – a complete environmental setting – that would ensure the best possible conservation.⁵⁴

In contrast to the Washington proposal, which did not hesitate to alter the chemical structure of the sandstone blocks by impregnation, the Metropolitan emphasised the fragile, porous and soft nature of the sandstone, its inevitable deterioration if exposed to a climate other than that of Nubia, and the need to preserve its condition by eliminating all risk factors. The Smithsonian’s architectural and landscape approach, which served purposes other than conservation,⁵⁵ was confronted by a technological and museological approach focused on the preservation of the precious blocks.⁵⁶ In fact, the Metropolitan’s proposal coincided with the recommendations of the main museum associations, especially ICOM, which adopted the assumptions of the incipient concept

of preventive conservation, which focused almost exclusively on environmental control.

In order to support its position, the New York museum analysed, on the basis of the samples provided, not only the most appropriate environmental conditions for their display, but also the physical properties of the stone blocks and the possibilities and consequences of mechanical and chemical intervention, concluding that the impregnation of the stone proposed by the Smithsonian would not ensure its conservation in the open air, and could even aggravate its deterioration by threatening its internal structure.⁵⁷

Finally, after both institutions had defended their proposals, the Commission delivered its final opinion. The efforts, reports and arguments of Henry G. Fischer, the museum’s curator of Egyptian art, and Thomas Hoving, its director, had convinced them of the merits of the Metropolitan’s plan: “There is no way to guarantee the preservation of the temple in the open air, and the museum obviously has the means to maintain it adequately”.⁵⁸ In a letter signed on 28 April 1967, President Johnson informed Hoving of the temple’s concession.⁵⁹ Sixteen months later, on 21 August 1968, the freighter *Concordia Star* docked in Brooklyn with more than 640 cases of Dendur on board.

The great “showcase” that was to house the temple was actually part of an architectural project to expand and modernise the museum, sponsored by Hoving and Arthur Rosenblatt, the museum’s

54 Gissen 2009: 64; Allais 2012: 208 and note 54.

55 “I don’t care if the temple crumbles into sand, but I want it to be built in the center of Washington as a memorial to Jack”. Jacqueline Kennedy to Thomas Hoving. Hoving 1993: 60.

56 In the words of Kevin Roche, the architect who designed the room that would house the monument: “we wanted to do the temple justice, always remembering that our responsibility is to preserve a work of art and let as many people as possible see it.” (Rockett 1980).

57 Serotta 2017; Allais 2012: 208 and note 54.

58 Gissen 2009: 66. The decision must also have been influenced by Senator Robert Kennedy’s decision not to continue supporting his sister-in-law’s project, as well as the high cost of the operation that the chosen centre or city would have to bear. The final cost of the entire Metropolitan operation was nine and a half million dollars.

59 Craig Patch 2017.

vice president for architecture and planning, and designed by Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo and Associates. The Dendur wing⁶⁰ was to be built first. It would be followed by galleries of American art, Pacific Islands art and masterpieces of European art. The newly designed spaces would be a mixture of complex architectural structures and environmental engineering, incorporating ponds and vegetation. The steel and glass structure would allow the temple to be seen from outside the museum, thus creating a strong link between the space and its immediate surroundings in Central Park.⁶¹

Since their arrival in New York, the blocks had been stored in a huge inflatable tent erected in the Museum's south car park. Inside, work continued on cataloguing, documenting and conserving the blocks (cleaning, removing salts, removing deposits, etc.) and new mechanical tests were commissioned to assess the strength of the blocks and the stability of the reconstructed monument. Hardness, crushing, compression, bending and fracture tests were commissioned from laboratories at New York University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Brookhaven National Laboratory. Except for the large roof slabs and corner blocks, most of the other blocks passed the tests and were strong enough to withstand the reconstruction. The possibility of additional chemical hardening was raised, but ultimately rejected.⁶²

The blocks remained in the tent until late 1974 when, after the first phase of the hall was completed, they were moved to an assembly area just

below the hall where they would be rebuilt.⁶³ This area, almost 3,000 square metres in size, not only allowed the restoration work to continue before the reconstruction, but also allowed the assembly of large sections of the temple to be tested.

During this phase, the elements introduced by Barsanti in the restoration carried out in 1908 were removed: the iron elements were replaced by more stable steel ones, and much of the concrete used to volumetrically complete the ashlars was removed, the losses being filled in with specially designed restoring mortar. Finally, the broken stones were joined together with steel rods or, in the case of the large lintels, with rolled steel.⁶⁴

As they were being restored, the blocks were taken to the upper floor platform for final assembly. However, as the work in the hall was not yet complete, it was necessary to erect a steel structure for the protection of the reconstruction of the temple inside. As with the other temples that had been dismantled, the lower parts of the walls that remained in Nubia were replaced by a brick wall, which was then covered. Row by row the monument was raised, with thin layers of mortar placed between the rows to distribute the load evenly.

The temple and portal were rebuilt facing east, as in their original position. In front of the portal, a wide platform recalls the original terrace, and a pond with plants surrounds it on three sides, recalling the proximity of the Nile and the layout of the temple of Debod in Madrid, which had been rebuilt and inaugurated a few years earlier.

⁶⁰ Its official name, The Sackler Wing, honoured the significant financial gift made to the museum by the brothers Arthur M., Mortimer and Raymond R. Sackler. In 2021, the museum decided to remove the name from this gallery after the Sacklers' pharmaceutical company, Purdue Pharma, was found guilty of marketing a highly addictive opioid.

⁶¹ Gissen 2009: 67–8.

⁶² Ronseblatt 1978: 69; Serotta 2017.

⁶³ This area was designed as an acclimatisation chamber for climate-sensitive objects, providing an intermediate atmosphere between the environmental conditions of origin and those of the exhibition galleries. It was the first such chamber built in an American museum (Gissen 2009: 74).

⁶⁴ Ronseblatt 1978: 75; Serotta 2017.



Figure 4. The temple of Debod in its original location in Nubia, 1960. Photography: CEDAE. Debod Temple Archive TDBM FD2011-1-119.

At the back, the original topography of the temple, which was built on the side of a sandstone cliff, is schematically reproduced with a granite-clad structure. A large glass wall enclosing the room from the north is the main source of natural light and the temple's visual link to the outside.

After work on the new wing of the museum was completed, the temple was inaugurated on 18 September 1978.

During the first years of the museum, the interior of the temple was not accessible to visitors, who could only enter through the space between the monumental door and the façade. In 1994, this situation was slightly changed and access was allowed to the first hall of the temple, while the other two interior rooms were closed to visitors.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the platform on which the temple stands and the entire Dendur Gallery are often used as a venue for all kinds of events.

⁶⁵ Collins 1994.

⁶⁶ Lepsius 1913; Marciniak 1963: 7–8.

3.4 | The Temple of Debod Parque del Oeste. Madrid, Spain

The fourth temple donated by Egypt was that of Debod. It was originally located 20 km south of Aswan, in a village called *Tá Hut*, which has sometimes been identified with the *Parembolē* of the Antonine Itinerary.

During the Egyptian rebellion against the Ptolemies (206-186 BC), Adikhalamani, King of Meroe, built a chapel there dedicated to Amun of Debod and the goddess Isis. However, discoveries made in the 19th century and during excavations in 1961 suggest the possible existence of an earlier sanctuary dating from the Ramesside period, perhaps dedicated to Amun or Amun-Ra.⁶⁶

Once the rebellion had been crushed and control of the area restored, Ptolemy VI Philopator added rooms to the Meroitic chapel to form a

temple with sanctuaries, chapels, vestibules, a terrace and a pylon. A causeway connected the enclosure to a cultic terrace overlooking the Nile. The chapel of Adikhalamani, with decorated walls and ceilings, was enclosed in the heart of the new building, probably as a vestibule for offerings. Ptolemy VIII Evergetes II and Ptolemy XII Neos Dionisos dedicated monolithic naoi to Isis and Amun of Debod respectively, which were installed in the temple sanctuary. In the first decades of Roman rule, during the reign of Augustus, the pronaos was decorated, two more pylons were built, the entrance to the temenos was reformed and the causeway was adapted to the new portal. After Augustus, only an offering scene with cartouches of Tiberius and a side chapel attached to the building and connected to the pronaos by a door are documented. This structure, without decoration, has been interpreted as a *mammisi*⁶⁷ and must have been built later than the Augustan work whose decoration it was cutting into. We do not know when the temple was abandoned, but it must have been before the closure of the sanctuaries at Philae in 536 AD.⁶⁸

The temple survived in relatively good condition until the 19th century. The engravings and drawings made by some of the early travellers to Nubia show that not only had the main structure and the three original gateways been preserved, but also that important sections of the high sandstone

ashlar wall enclosing the temple. However, some details show that some of the deterioration processes that would lead to the ruin of the temple had already begun. The most important of these was undoubtedly the exposure of the foundations and the progressive loss of ashlar on the main façade, which led to its structural weakening and final collapse between 1850 and 1860, followed by detachments on the outer walls of the south and north façades. The looting of ashlar, together with the practice of *sabbakh* extraction by the local population⁶⁹ and the excavation of the ground in search of “treasure”, were probably the causes of the serious loss of stability of the structure and the collapse of the external walls.⁷⁰ The theft of ashlar for construction also seems to have been responsible for the enclosure wall deterioration, which was reduced to its lower courses, and the disappearance of the third gateway, the one closest to the temple.⁷¹ The construction of the old Aswan Dam and the creation of a reservoir after 1898 left the temple surrounded by water which infiltrated the subsoil and weakened the structure. Photographs taken by the Antiquities Service in 1906 show the extent of its ruin, with the loss of three of its facades, the weakening of its structures and the exposure of its internal chambers. In the words of the then head of the Antiquities Service, Gaston Maspero, Debod was “the most endangered and the most difficult to protect of all the temples in Nubia”.⁷²

67 Jaramago Canora 1991.

68 Priego and Martín Flores 1992: 13–17; Martín Flores 1994: 117–118; 2003.

69 Nitrogenous soil made from organic remains and mud bricks, traditionally extracted from Egyptian archaeological sites and used by farmers to fertilise their fields.

70 Maspero 1911: 40. Barsanti (1911a: 52) attributes the destruction of the *pronaos* façade to an 1860–1870 earthquake. According to the Baedeker guide (taken from Roeder 1911: 13), the exact date of the earthquake was 1868. However, photographs by Francis Frith in the late 1850s show that the temple’s façade was already in ruins (Bonomi, Frith and Sharpe 1862: lam. LXIII).

71 The third gateway collapsed around 1903, according to Maspero, who echoed the testimony of the locals. Between 1905 and 1906 its fallen ashlar were looted and used in buildings in the surrounding area (Maspero 1911: 42; Barsanti 1911a: 51).

72 Maspero 1911: 41.

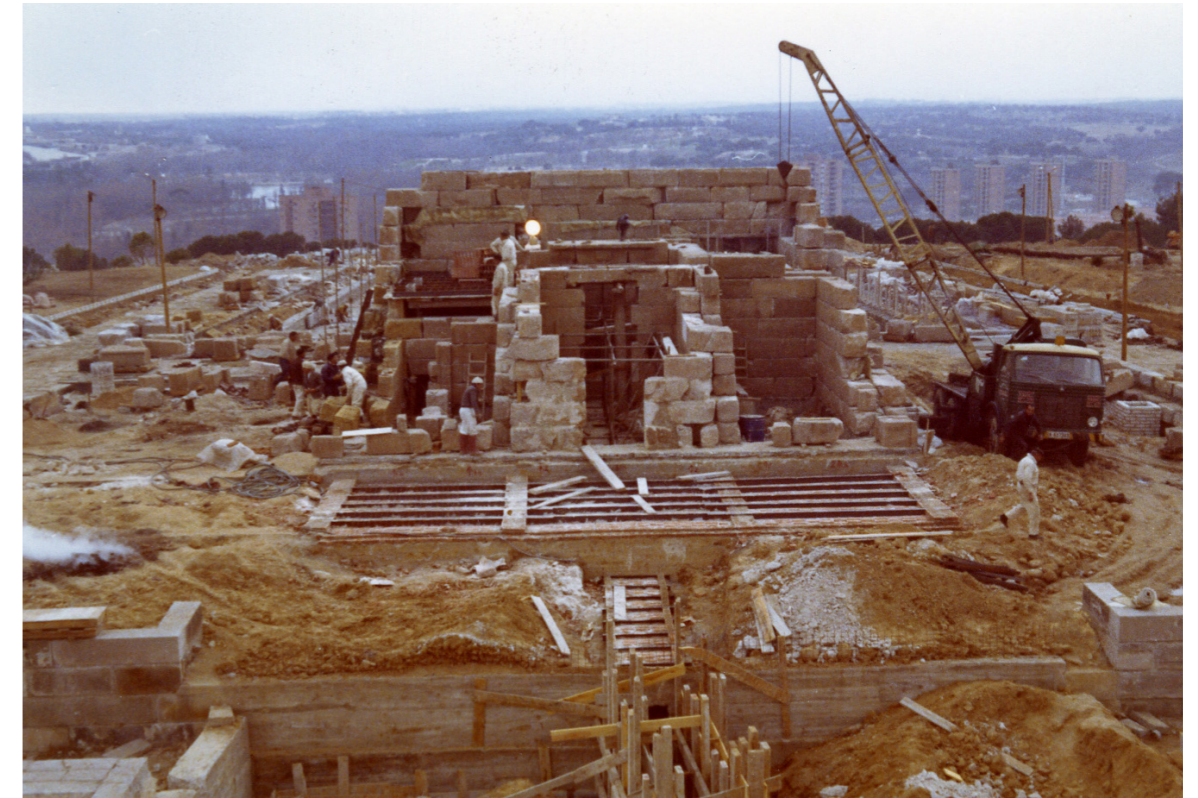


Figure 5. Anastylosis of the original blocks of the temple of Debod in Madrid, 1970. Photography: Debod Temple Archive TDBM FD2011-1-20.

With the raising of the dam in 1905, Debod, like the temples of Taffa and Dendur, underwent restoration and consolidation works to prepare it for its imminent submersion. The tasks were carried out between October 1907 and January 1908 under the direction of Alexander Barsanti, the architect and restorer of the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo.

The intervention was necessarily strong, even more so than at Dendur and Taffa, given the precarious state of the temple’s ruins, the time pressure, and the restoration materials available. Both the foundations of the gateways and of the temple were reinforced. To improve the settlement and give greater stability to these three structures, concrete platforms were built, which in the case of

the temple were completed on the east, north and south sides with heavily mortared pebble slopes. The north and south facades and the west wall of the vestibule were dismantled, their foundations rebuilt, and the ashlar repaired and repositioned. The jambs of the three doors leading to the vestibule were restored, especially the central one. The Adikhalamani Chapel was partially dismantled. The foundations were reinforced with cement and the subsoil was filled with mortar and cement to the original ground level. After replacing the ashlar, the gaps were filled with cement and its entrance door was rebuilt. The Southwest Chapel and the Osirian Chapel above were dismantled and rebuilt, their ashlar cemented and some of their roof slabs consolidated. It was necessary to

build a small wall to support the staircase leading to the latter and the terrace. The rest of the chambers did not have to be dismantled, but the gaps were filled and ashlar blocks that had lost a great deal of volume were completed with cement, the ceiling slabs were replaced, and the floors were raised to their original level. The joints of the broken slabs and ashlars and the large cracks were sewn with iron staples, the lintels were also joined and supported by iron beams held in place with cement, which sometimes required the blocks to be carved, and iron rods were used to join some elements between courses.⁷³

The consolidation of the temple was followed by its complete documentation, both textual and photographic, especially the scenes that decorated the vestibule and the Adikhalamani chapel, which were described, and their inscriptions copied.⁷⁴

Between 1908 and 1960, the temple remained under Nile water for ten months of the year. It could only be visited during the brief weeks when, due to the annual flooding of the valley, the floodgates of the dam were opened and the water was allowed to flow. The inspection carried out by Barsanti himself in 1910 reported no serious incidents, except for a crack in the platform surrounding the temple.⁷⁵ The report of 1913 mentions minor damage caused by the water, which was repaired during the same visit. It also mentions the displacement of some ashlars, saline efflorescence, and the detachment of mortar, but the structures remained stable and there had been no settlement of the ground.⁷⁶

In the following decades, there were no reports of further visits to assess the condition of the

restored and submerged temples. In December 1954, after the decision to build the new dam, technicians from a committee of the newly formed Supreme Council of Antiquities travelled to Nubia to assess the salvage work and document the monuments and archaeological sites involved. In the case of the temple of Debod, which was submerged at the time of the visit and had not been examined by the committee, the only recommendations for its preservation were photographic documentation and filming, as well as obtaining latex or paper casts of its inscriptions.⁷⁷ Subsequently, in 1956 and 1958, technicians of the newly created Centre for Documentation and Studies on Ancient Egypt (CEDAE) carried out photographic surveys of the temple, which were neither systematic nor accompanied by a report on its state of preservation. Debod seemed destined to become “underwater ruins”.⁷⁸

The construction of the Aswan High Dam began in January 1960. Because of its location, just 9 km south of the head of the dam, the temple of Debod was one of the first monuments to be dismantled, along with those at Taffa and Kertassi. It was archaeologically documented in August 1960, its inscriptions copied, and an extensive photographic report made.⁷⁹ Although there is no report on the state of conservation at the time, the photographs show that Barsanti’s consolidation was generally effective. Except for the first gateway, which had collapsed, and the fall of some of the crowning blocks on the northern and southern façades, the structure had withstood the fifty immersions to which it had been subjected. However,

⁷³ Barsanti 1911a.

⁷⁴ Roeder 1911.

⁷⁵ Barsanti 1911d: 173.

⁷⁶ Barsanti 1919: 14–16 y 25.

⁷⁷ Zurinaga 2020: 110; Carruthers 2022: 60.

⁷⁸ Carruthers 2022: 60.

⁷⁹ Anon [1960]; Daumas and Derchain [1960].



Figure 6. The remains of the temple of Debod in the *Jardines de la Montaña* [Gardens of the Mountain], 1970. Photography: Debod Temple Archive TDBM FD2000-1-56.

the action of the water had significant and irreparable consequences for the decorated blocks of the Adikhalamani Chapel, with losses of material affecting scenes and inscriptions, the disappearance of any remains of paint still visible in 1907, and several dipinti documented in the *naos* hall.

At the end of August, the Department of Antiquities and the Polish mission led by Kazimierz

Michalowski began to remove the temple blocks. The stones were transported to Elephantine, where they were stored until their destination was determined. The remains of the Nile terrace, the causeway connecting it to the temple precinct, and the foundations of all the walls were left *in situ*. No written record was made of the dismantling process, although it was documented photographically.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ The lack of documentation of the dismantling was pointed out by those responsible for the reconstruction of the temple in Madrid, whose work was made more difficult by this absence. The only documentation provided by the Egyptian cultural authorities was a plan of the temple and elevations with the numbering of the ashlar blocks, together with a selection of photographs of the dismantling (Almagro Basch 1971: 31; Almagro Gorbea 1971: 269–270).

With the blocks already at Elephantine, a further archaeological excavation was carried out in 1961.⁸¹

In 1964, Spain officially submitted the request for the temple of Debod. It was considered at the first meeting of the Advisory Sub-Committee for the Safeguarding of the Sites and Temples of Nubia in 1965, but no decision was taken. No resolution was taken the following year either.⁸² It was not until March 1967, at the third meeting, that the sub-committee finally agreed to recommend that the temple be given to Spain.⁸³

In the minutes of the latter meeting, however, the emphasis placed on the conditions that should govern the installation and conservation projects of the temples granted to third countries is striking. The Subcommittee expanded on these criteria, explicitly stating in its Recommendation No. 1 that “under no circumstances should the monument be exhibited in the open”. The Subcommittee also welcomed the information on the measures taken by the United States and Italy regarding the temples of Dendur and Ellesiya and approved the plan for the reconstruction of the latter at the *Museo Egizio* in Turin. Finally, in its fifth recommendation, the Subcommittee agreed to the assignment of the temple of Debod to Spain, but “on the understanding that the

previously-stipulated conditions are observed”.⁸⁴ The Subcommittee must have been aware of Spain’s plans to build the temple in the open air, with which it could not agree, and the insistence on compliance with the conservation clauses as a requirement for its transfer was a way of expressing its opposition.

The final decision was left in the hands of Egypt, which officially granted the temple to Spain on 30 April 1968 in return for Spain’s efforts to save Abu Simbel.⁸⁵ However, the Egyptian authorities insisted on protection of the temple and, in a letter dated 12 January 1969, addressed to the director of the Spanish archaeological mission in Nubia, Martín Almagro Basch, the undersecretary of state of the Ministry of Culture and president of the Consultative Committee, Abdel Monein el Sawi, asked him “to send, before 15 March 1969, a letter specifying the site where the temple of Debod is to be reconstructed and, if possible, to attach a drawing of this site and a plan of the building in which the temple will be located. This letter should also indicate the various measures that will be taken to protect the temple from adverse effects, meteorological or otherwise. Finally, the letter will mention that the temple will be on display to the public.”⁸⁶

81 Marciniak 1963.

82 UNESCO/NUBIA/9, Annexe 5, 1965: 18; UNESCO/NUBIA/11, Annexe 4: 2.

83 Concerning the negotiations for the cession the Temple to Spain, see Zurinaga 2020: 530–534.

84 UNESCO/NUBIA/13, Annexe 9, 1967: 37.

85 Debod Temple Archive TDBM FD2007/1/06: Decree 589 of 30 April 1968 by the President of the United Arab Republic.

86 Debod Temple Archive TDBM FD2007/1/07. In a letter dated 17 April 1969, Martín Almagro wrote to Antonio Aparisi, the Madrid City Council’s delegate for Educational Services, informing him: “...regarding the report to be presented on the definitive location of the temple and its conservation, I have already prepared it in an appropriate form...”. However, it should not have been sent, because in June 1969 the Spanish Ambassador in Cairo, Ángel Sagaz, asked him to communicate the location of the temple, as well as the systems used to protect and preserve it (*Gabinete de Antigüedades de la Real Academia de la Historia* Archive: FMAB-NUB-1-178, taken from Zurinaga 2020: 731.

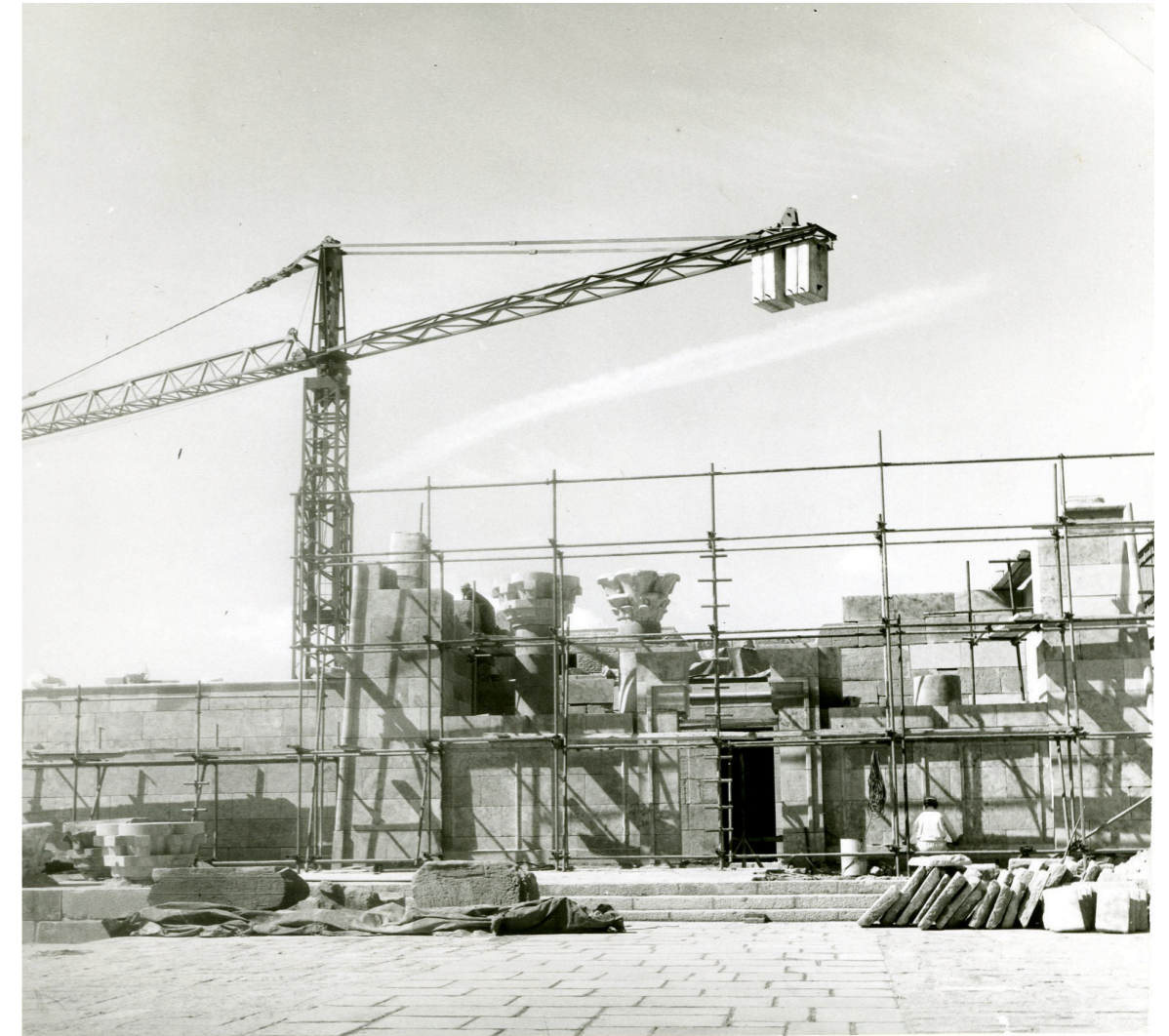


Figure 7. Reconstruction of the new *pronaos* façade, 1971. Photography: Debod Temple Archive TDBM FD2011-1-09.

The arrangements for bringing the temple to Spain were entrusted to Almagro Basch, who had already played a very important role in the process that led to the granting of the temple and who would continue to play a very important role in the subsequent stages of reconstruction until its inauguration.

The packing of the stone lasted from November 1969 to April 1970 and was not without

problems and complications due to difficulties in the supply of materials, (especially wood), restrictions caused by the war with Israel, and changes in the criteria used by the inspectors of the Antiquities Service in the construction of the boxes and bureaucratic delays. Finally, in May of that year, the blocks were shipped downriver on four boats to Alexandria, from where they were to be shipped to Spain on



Figure 8. General view of the reconstructed temple of Debod and the gardens, 1971. Photography: Debod Temple Archive TDBM FD2018-3-15.

6 June 1970.⁸⁷ Throughout this period, the Egyptian authorities continued to demand, as a precondition for authorising the departure of the blocks, a formal commitment from Spain that the temple would be erected under cover

and with the approval of the installation project by the Consultative Sub-Committee, as had been done for the temples of Ellesiya and Dendur. There is no record of a reply in the documents available to date, but Egypt must have received

⁸⁷ On the work of packing the ashlar and the circumstances in which it was carried out, see Zurinaga 2020: 537–542.

some sort of satisfaction in this respect, because it finally authorised the removal of the blocks without having to wait for the meeting of the sub-committee which, moreover, did not return to the subject in its subsequent meetings.

The destination chosen for the blocks shipped from Alexandria was Madrid. On the 6th of April 1968, when it became known that the temple was about to be ceded to Spain, the City Council sent a letter to the *Dirección General de Bellas Artes* (General Directorate of Fine Arts) offering to house and install the temple, which was accepted on the 30th of November.⁸⁸ Years earlier, on 22nd February 1966, Elche City Council had approved a request for the temple, which it reiterated in March 1968.⁸⁹ Still, in December 1968, when the news of the award to Madrid was known, it asked for the decision to be reconsidered. Another city in the south-east, Almería, also asked to be awarded the temple.

In neither case was the choice of location based on an installation project or on a scientific and independent assessment of the best conditions for the conservation of the temple. All three candidates proposed an open-air site. Elche offered a site on the banks of the river Vinalopó, next to the municipal park, arguing that the landscape and the environmental conditions were closer to the place of origin. Almería proposed

a similar site somewhere in the province. Madrid proposed one of its parks and its status as the national capital.

Madrid was chosen. Given the logic of a highly centralised state, the capital was a natural choice. In addition to political power, it was home to some of the most important scientific and academic institutions, including those responsible for reconstruction. This was the logic behind the explanations given to defend the decision, and it was understood as such by the media of the time. There was also the question of the funds that the chosen city would have to contribute to the cost of packing and transporting the blocks to Spain, which, according to the budget estimated by the *Comisaría General del Patrimonio Artístico Nacional* (General Commissariat of National Artistic Heritage), would amount to 3,940,000 pesetas⁹⁰ (at the exchange rate of 1 January 1970, 56,366 US dollars). However, this argument is not entirely valid, as Elche City Council was never consulted about its willingness to take on this payment.⁹¹

If Madrid did not have a project for the temple, it did have a plan for a new park. In March 1968, the Head of State was informed of the need to landscape the site of the former *Cuartel de la Montaña*,⁹² which at the time was officially assigned to the services of various ministries and

⁸⁸ Debod Temple Archive TDBM FD2007/1/05: 1. Letter from the Mayor of Madrid to the Director General of Fine Arts of the Ministry of Education and Science requesting the installation of the temple of Debod in Madrid (Madrid, 6/4/1968); 2. Letter from the Director General of Fine Arts of the Ministry of Education and Science to the Mayor of Madrid, responding in the affirmative to the installation of the Temple of Debod in Madrid (Madrid, 30/9/1968).

⁸⁹ AHME (Municipal Historical Archive of Elche). Sig. 837–6. Available at: <https://www.elche.es/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/templo.pdf> [Accessed 23 March 2023]; IPHE (Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute) archive, PI 1552/18: [2–4].

⁹⁰ IPHE (Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute) archive, PI 1552/18: “Budget for the transfer of the Egyptian Temple of Debod to the Port of Alicante”, 10 May 1968: [5–6].

⁹¹ IPHE (Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute) archive, PI 1552/18: Certification of the Agreement of the Extraordinary Plenary Session of the Elche City Council, 3 December 1968: [2–3].

⁹² Suevos 1968: 4–5; Babé y Delgado 1968: 9.

was occupied by a sport field and running track. In December of the same year, the City Council, without consulting the bodies concerned, modified the General Urban Development Plan, reclassifying the area as a green zone, and drew up a project for the landscaping and traffic reorganisation of the area.⁹³ The project was part of an ambitious urban reform plan promoted by the mayor's office, which was urgently required and for which some measures were taken to force the final decision.

In this context, it was soon suggested that the temple should be located in the future garden. In March 1969, Antonio Aparisi, the Madrid City Council's delegate for education, informed Martín Almagro that the two possible sites for rebuilding the temple were the *Cuartel de la Montaña* or the *Casa de Campo*,⁹⁴ and in July the mayor himself expressed his preference for the former.⁹⁵ However, there was opposition from some circles in the national government to the idea of ceding this plot, and it was proposed that the government headquarters be built instead.⁹⁶ Finally, in May 1970, the City Council formally requested the parcel for landscaping and the installation of the Debod temple. On the 9th of July, with the stone blocks already deposited in the *Cuartel de la Montaña*, a decree from the Presidency of the Government officially accepted the donation and at the same time satisfied the Council by ordering the reconstruction of the temple on that site, the creation of the

proposed garden and entrusting it with the management and conservation of the complex.⁹⁷

The decree also stipulated that the reconstruction of the temple would be carried out under the supervision of the *Dirección General de Bellas Artes*. The Central Institute for the Restoration and Conservation of Works of Art, which was dependent on it, was called in to analyse the stones and their possible treatment. In their preliminary report,⁹⁸ after three weeks of examining the blocks, Gratiniano Nieto, director of the Institute, and José María Cabrera, the Institute's restorer, pointed out the bad condition of the stone, with a poor degree of cementation that had turned the sandstone into sand, and with widespread and serious flaking and cracking. They recommended immediate protection and consolidation of the blocks exposed to the weather, and the fixing of detached fragments and exfoliated layers. In view of the scale and complexity of the scientific and technical work to be carried out, they considered it necessary to draw up a "Conservation Plan for the Temple of Debod" and to carry out the work with facilities, specialised staff, sufficient technical and financial resources and the collaboration of the various departments of the Central Institute for Restoration and the *Juan de la Cierva* Institute of the *Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas* (CSIC). In addition, the proposals for action should be studied by other Spanish organisations, such as the *Comisión para el Estudio de Materiales Pétreos*, or by specialists from other

93 *Archivo de Villa* (General Archive of the City of Madrid): AVM PLA 089- 45- 2.

94 *Gabinete de Antigüedades de la Real Academia de la Historia* Archive: FMAB-NUB-1-142. Take from Zurinaga 2020: 730.

95 ABC Madrid 12/07/1969: 52.

96 Debod Temple Archive: TDBM FD2022/05/280.

97 BOE (Official Spanish State Gazette) 29/07/1970, no. 180: 11944: "Decree 2233/1970, of 9 July 1970, agreeing on the location of the Temple of Debod..."

98 IPHE (Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute) archive, BM 140/20: "Temple of Debod. Preliminary report on the study and treatment for the conservation of its constituent stone materials, 20 October 1970".



Figure 9. Temple of Debod in 1971. Photography: M. Santos Yubero. Archivo Regional de la Comunidad de Madrid [Autonomous Region of Madrid Archive] ES 28079 ARCM 201.001.27897.006.

scientific institutes, universities or European museums. Nieto and Cabrera were aware of the great responsibility that this task entailed and of the inconvenience of undertaking it without carrying out extensive studies or verifying the conditions of the materials and the procedures to be used. They cited in their report the actions of the Metropolitan Museum and the *Rijksmuseum van Oudheden*, which were still studying the conservation problems of their respective temples. None of these recommendations were accepted, however, and

the Institute's work was limited to answering some minor questions and treating the capitals and drums of the columns, as well as the pieces now on display on the temple's terrace,⁹⁹ while the consolidation of the stones was entrusted to the restorer of the National Archaeological Museum, Miguel Peinado.¹⁰⁰ Martín Almagro also consulted some private companies specialising in the treatment of stone, the Spanish *Real Academia de Ciencias* and the Metropolitan Museum of New York.¹⁰¹

99 IPHE (Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute) archive: *Templo de Debod*, 1970: "Receipt of pieces delivered to the Central Institute of Restoration from the temple of Debod."

100 Almagro Gorbea 2021: 178.

101 Almagro Gorbea 1971: 270; Zurinaga 2020: 561.

The reconstruction, as has been pointed out, had insufficient documentation on the building and its dismantling, especially planimetric documentation. On arrival in Madrid, only a little more than 700 of the 1,358 stones that made up the building could be located with certainty. The rest had to be identified by analysing the existing photographic documentation. In addition, the planimetries available for Debod in publications were too old and contained important errors and contradictions between them. The plans provided by the Egyptian Antiquities Service – some elevations with the numbering of the ashlar – did not indicate basic data such as the starting heights of the different walls.¹⁰²

Work on the anastylosis of the temple began in October 1970, at the same time as the construction and planting of the gardens, which caused numerous problems of organisation and interference between those activities. Both the assembly of the ashlar and the garden had to be completed in a very short time, in order to present the finished work as soon as possible and thus consolidate the use of the site.¹⁰³ Sixty days after work began, on the 23rd of December of that year, the gardens were officially inaugurated with the two gateways and the Nubian blocks reconstructed on a platform, partially surrounded by two ponds.

The original remains from Nubia were re-erected on top of a concrete box that served as a foundation. The interior of the box was also designed to be used as a technical room for pond and fountain machinery. Small brick walls were built on top of the upper slab of the box to replace

the ashlar that formed the base of the walls and were not saved. The blocks were dry laid, although lead plates were inserted in the horizontal joints to improve the fit. In some cases, where the volume losses were higher and the surface very unstable, a lime mortar was applied. Waterproofing was employed at the base of the first layer of the walls, lead was used where they came into contact with the exterior paving and roofing felt was applied to the top of the brick walls. The iron staples introduced by Barsanti were replaced by brass staples, which were also used to join the blocks, and the lintels were reinforced with metal strips.¹⁰⁴ The missing blocks were replaced with stones from Nubia brought for this purpose, and sandstone blocks from Villamayor quarries (Salamanca, Spain), and the damage to the original ones was repaired with mortar. The two portals were also raised on concrete foundations and their roofs were made of fibreglass and fitted with a drain for rainwater, the pipes of which were housed inside the walls. The gaps were filled with Nubian and Spanish sandstone blocks and slabs. The cornice of the second doorway, decorated with a representation of the god Behedeti, was replaced by a polyester replica, while the original was later housed inside the temple.¹⁰⁵

After the inauguration of the gardens, work on the temple resumed in January 1971 with the reconstruction of the lost walls and volume, turning the archaeological remains handed over by Egypt into a “complete building, with all its elements, as it was known in the 19th century”. This “historical” reconstruction, like the decision

102 Almagro Gorbea 1971: 270; 1994: 112; 2021: 179–181.

103 Almagro Gorbea 2021: 161.

104 Almagro Basch 1971: 86; Almagro Gorbea 2021: 166.

105 Almagro Gorbea 2021: 164–170.

to set it up in the open air, was contrary to the criteria expressed by the Committee of Experts in 1959 and to the general theory of restoration and international documents of the time, which rejected such treatment of archaeological remains.¹⁰⁶ Those responsible for the reconstruction justified this decision on the grounds of preserving the original structure, which was thus largely protected from the direct action of atmospheric agents. Also, for educational reasons, since the reconstruction of the external volume would allow the visitor to better understand and appreciate an Egyptian temple whose most characteristic forms and external elements (e.g. the inclined walls, cornices and mouldings) had been lost, disfiguring it.¹⁰⁷

The missing parts of the northern and southern external walls were completed, while the main façade of the temple was completely reconstructed based on graphic documentation from the 19th century, as was the eastern wall of the so-called *mammisi*. Villamayor sandstone, lighter than Nubian sandstone, was used in the reconstruction of these walls. It was also used to fill in the gaps in the interior chapels. The capitals of the pronaos were reproduced, although it was finally decided to keep one of the three original ones on the façade. The ceilings of the rooms were covered with concrete blocks, faced on the visible side with polyester and fibreglass panels imitating the original surface, while the floors were rebuilt in lime-

stone. The upper terrace of the temple, originally in the open air, was covered to protect the interior from rainwater. The current roof, which is built on a metal structure, is made up of a wooden framework covered with lead sheeting. The rainwater is collected in two small skylights and was channelled through two pipes that cross the terrace to a well located in the basement of the temple.¹⁰⁸

The building was equipped with an air-conditioning system with grilles in the floor of the chapels on the ground floor and a powerful air curtain behind the main façade. It was also equipped with a lighting system for the walls of the chapels, located in grooves in the floor, which was reinforced in the sanctuary with several spotlights.

Several pieces were treated by the Central Institute for the Restoration and housed inside the temple: the capitals in the vestibule, the cornice of the second portal in the *mammisi* and ten others on the terrace (including an ashlar with the large title of Adijalamani, a stele and several blocks with decorations or inscriptions). A small exhibition was also installed there, showing the history of the temple and its transfer to Madrid.

At the end of 1971, the work was completed and the new temple of Debod awaited its official inauguration. This was to take place the following year, on 20 July 1972,¹⁰⁹ followed by its opening to the public a week later.

106 “All reconstruction work should however be ruled out *a priori*. Only anastylosis, that is to say, the reassembling of existing but dismembered parts can be permitted. The material used for integration should always be recognizable and its use should be the least that will ensure the conservation of a monument and the reinstatement of its form.” (The Venice Chart, art. 15, ICOMOS 2004: 38).

107 Almagro Basch 1971: 87–89; Almagro Gorbea 1971: 270; 2021: 170–172.

108 Martín Flores 1994: 119; Almagro Gorbea 2021: 172–5.

109 ABC Madrid 21/07/1972: 38.

Epilogue

In its formal request for the Temple of Debod, the Madrid City Council clearly stated the intended use of the monument: to respond to “...the need for our green areas, parks, gardens, etc. to offer the people of Madrid incentives and attractions of such high quality as those offered by this temple”.¹¹⁰

For the institution that was to take care of it, the temple was seen as an urban ornament, an adornment that would complement and enliven one of the city’s green zones, very close to the exotic *folies* or *caprichos* of Romantic landscaping. In neither case did the petition mention the desire to preserve the threatened monument or the will to preserve it for future generations. The temple was a resource in an urban planning project, not the important heritage object on which all action should be focused. This subordination of the ancient building to a project other than its conservation was even more evident during the delicate phase of reassembling its blocks, which was conditioned and altered by the urgency of creating and opening the garden.

From an urban planning point of view, the result has received widespread public support and is defended by architects and urban planners against the “aberration of enclosing it in a museum”¹¹¹ or protecting it with some kind of cover. Even the former president of the

International Association of Egyptologists, Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, justified its open-air location on the grounds of its size and praised the landscaping “despite the risks to its long-term safety”.¹¹²

The design of the garden focuses on and enhances the structure of the temple by surrounding it with ponds and palm trees that are reminiscent of the Nilotic environment. A similar device would be in use years later in the design of the Dendur Hall at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The masonry reconstruction of the lost external walls and roofing of the terrace was an appropriate conservation measure, as the exposure of the internal structures to the open air would have had even more serious consequences. From the educational point of view, it also allowed the shape and volumes of the original building to be recognised and appreciated. The declaration in 2008 of the Temple of Debod as an Asset of Cultural Value –the highest level of protection in Spanish heritage legislation– confirmed the resulting installation and the new social values acquired by the monument, which also needed to be safeguarded. Debod was consecrated as “a piece of architecture integrated into the landscape of Madrid and the collective memory of its inhabitants”.¹¹³ Certainly, the image of the reconstructed temple, reflected in a water surface and surrounded by palm trees, has become a popular icon, widely exploited as a tourist

110 Debod Temple Archive TDBM FD2007/1/05: 1. Letter from the Mayor of Madrid to the Director General of Fine Arts of the Ministry of Education and Science requesting the installation of the temple of Debod in Madrid (Madrid, 6/4/1968).

111 Di Nobile 2005: 21.

112 Säve-Söderbergh (ed.) 1987: 142.

113 DECREE 39/2008, of 17 April, of the Governing Council of the Autonomous Community of Madrid, declaring the Temple of Debod to be an Asset of Cultural Value, in the category of monument.

attraction, and an additional difficulty for the preservation of the original structure.

Debod was not the only temple for which an installation in the open air in a landscape setting has been contemplated. The city of Turin, for Ellesiya, and the Smithsonian Institute, for Dendur, also considered the possibility. However, the greater emphasis on better conservation of these monuments meant that these plans had to be rejected, and ultimately the Advisory Committee and the Egyptian government’s requirements were followed and the monuments reconstructed inside museums. The selected institutions were already among the most important centres in Europe and America in terms of the quality of their facilities and the importance of their Egyptian collections, reinforced by the arrival of new guests who immediately became prominent features of their exhibitions.

The need to install them in these museums was used by their administrators to promote plans for the extension and renovation of their centres, making them the pioneers of a new museum model that would become established in the following years. The new architectural approaches, the renovation and adaptation of their interiors to improve the presentation and conservation of the collections on display, but also to accommodate the growing phenomenon of mass tourism and the greater attention demanded by visitors, put them more than a decade ahead in the evolution of museums in the second half of the 20th century. In terms of conservation, and in particular the preventive conservation, the use of sophisticated environmental control systems would make them powerful instruments of heritage protection. In

a sense, the installation of the Nubian temples in their new homes gave continuity to the technological spectacle of the Nubian Salvage Campaign¹¹⁴ and marked the future of these museums. The case of the Metropolitan in New York is perhaps better known and more publicised. Its master plan, which began in 1970 with the installation of Dendur, would develop over the rest of the century, doubling in size to become the museum we know today. But the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden also underwent a major restructuring and expansion, whose central core – the great entrance hall – was conceived and designed for the installation of the temple of Taffa.

When the temples were incorporated into museum collections, they were equated with other museum objects. Their tectonic quality became objectuality by the mere fact of being placed in galleries, partly because of the scale of these galleries and partly because of the new way in which they were perceived by curators and visitors. Undoubtedly, this conceptualisation was already sought by the members of the Commission of Experts or the UNESCO Advisory Committee, who pointed to museums as natural destinations for the archaeological material handed over, be it objects or buildings. Dendur in New York is perhaps its most prominent example. Until January 1994, the public was not allowed inside the temple. The original exhibit plan was to treat it sculpturally, so that, in the words of its curator, Dorothea Arnold, “the temple could be seen as an object, almost like a statue on a pedestal”.¹¹⁵

Debod was treated differently. Its remains were placed on the site of the *Cuartel de la Montaña*

114 Meskell 2018: 36.

115 Collins 1994.

as an element of urban decoration, and the parts that had disappeared were later rebuilt on top of it. The ruin became a building, a fully functional “piece of architecture”. Paradoxically, some of the elements installed to isolate it from the pedestrian areas of the garden –the high base or the pond in front– had an effect on it very similar to that expressed by Arnold in respect of the Dendur: the temple of Debod was seen by passers-by in the area as a gigantic sculpture, perceived and appreciated for its external surfaces and elements, without considering the existence of an internal structure. Even today, many visitors to the gardens ignore the interior of the building, while appreciating the scenic qualities of the site. This view of the monument is very close to the “view from the boat” alluded to by William Carruthers.¹¹⁶

It is precisely this character of isolated and decontextualized structures that has been one of the main criticisms of the movement and relocation of these temples. Like their objectification, this was foreseen by the members of the Committee of Experts, who entrusted the solution of the problem to museographical techniques. But this is only a partial solution. The temples have not only been separated from their original physical environment, but also from the people to whom they belonged. And the truth is that museums, which are used to dealing exclusively with objects, have a great deal of difficulty in making present the people who existed, or still exist, behind these material testimonies.

However, placing them alongside other collections of the same cultural and geographical provenance allows a certain contextualisation of the temples. Even if it can be argued that their presentation in the three museums is mainly Egyptological, in which the Nubian character and origin is very much obscured,¹¹⁷ they can at least establish dialectical relationships with the rest of the exhibits, enriching the multiple possible readings and contributing to their understanding and appreciation. Nevertheless, there are some differences between the museums. The *speos* of Ellesiya shares space with other materials from the Nubian collections of the *Museo Egizio*. The temple of Dendur is located in the middle of the galleries dedicated to Egyptian culture in the Metropolitan Museum. Taffa, on the other hand, is in the large entrance hall of the museum, welcoming visitors, but separate from the Egyptian and Nubian antiquities galleries. Once again, the temple of Debod, isolated on its mountain, makes the difference. The rest of the archaeological material given to Spain by Egypt and Sudan in gratitude for its help, along with other collections of Egyptian antiquities, is exhibited and stored in the National Archaeological Museum of Madrid, several kilometres away from the temple.

However, it is in the field of conservation that their installation in museums becomes clearer. After fifty years, the state of conservation of the temples of Ellesiya, Taffa and Dendur is quite good, with no alteration or damage to the blocks and their surfaces,¹¹⁸ and no restoration

116 Carruthers 2022: 275.

117 De Simone 2014: 81; Carruthers 2022: 276.

118 Information on the state of conservation of the *speos* of Ellesiya was provided by Dr Alessia Fassone, curator of the temple, and by Sara Aicardi, assistant registrar of the *Museo Egizio*. Information on the condition of the Taffa was provided by Dr Lara Weis, curator of Egyptian antiquities at the *Rijksmuseum van Oudheden* in Leiden at the time of the interview, and by Alejandra Mamonde, a restorer at the museum. I would like to thank them all, as well as Professor Hans Schneider, who so kindly accompanied us on our visit to the temple of Taffa.

required, apart from the routine cleaning of dust deposits on their surfaces or the cleaning of grease films left on the temple’s door jambs by the constant physical contact with visitors.¹¹⁹

Debod, on the other hand, has required continuous interventions. Most of them are related to the repair, replacement or improvement of the roof, the plinths, the drainage systems, or the installation of air conditioning. Restoration work has also been carried out on the deteriorated ashlar of the exterior walls and the removal or stabilisation of metal elements from old interventions. In recent years, the cleaning of graffiti has been particularly frequent, especially on the exterior walls of the monument and on the platform. It has also been necessary to install new protective elements, such as a glass curtain that closes the large opening in the main façade and prevents the entry of moist air or rainwater into the interior of the building, a new perimeter

drainage system at the base of the exterior walls, and the extension of the air-conditioning system to the terrace.¹²⁰

Unlike the other three temples, whose conservation issues were solved by their installation in museums, in the fifty years since the reconstruction of Debod in Madrid, the question of its condition and future protection has not diminished. On the contrary, it has grown in importance, both in public opinion and among the various professionals involved. Meetings of experts on its conservation have provided neither satisfactory answers nor convincing plans to ensure its preservation. UNESCO representatives and even media personalities such as the Egyptian former Minister of Antiquities, Zahi Hawass, have called for its return unless definitive measures are taken. The debate on the state of conservation of Debod and its installation is open, and the fate of the last of the foreign temples may not yet have been written.

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119 Serotta 2017.

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