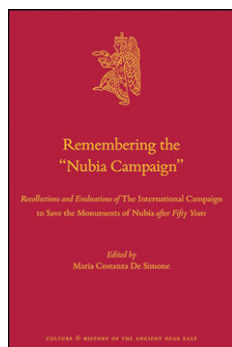




## Book Review

MARIA CONSTANZA DE SIMONE (ed.). 2025. *Remembering the “Nubia Campaign”: recollections and evaluations of the international campaign to save the monuments of Nubia after fifty years*. Leiden: Brill; 978-90-04-71393-2 hardback \$130.



This edited volume, presented by M. Constanza De Simone, unfolds a belated ‘bildungsroman’ reverie stemming from a conference in March 2009 entitled ‘Lower Nubia: revisiting memories of the past, envisioning perspectives for the future’ at the Nubian Museum in Aswan, Egypt. The conference was held to mark the 50th anniversary of the appeal launched in 1959 by Egypt and Sudan to UNESCO in advance of flooding associated with the raising of the Aswan High Dam, which resulted in the ‘International campaign to save the monuments’ of Nubia conducted between 1960 and 1980. It was one of the four sessions held at this event, entitled ‘Revisiting the Nubia campaign, envisioning perspectives

for the future’, that gave rise to the present volume.

The 29 chapters of this volume are organised in alphabetical order and comprise varied personal accounts by individuals who were involved with the Nubian Campaign. An index is provided to help identify accounts of the same events spread across the discussions of numerous authors. The ultimate realisation of this volume in 2025 is all the more powerful given that 19 of the 31 contributing authors have since passed away, thus placing the chapters within this volume among the final first-hand accounts of the Nubian Campaign.

While not intended as a dedicated research volume—which is to say the accounts within this publication are mainly autobiographical and to varying extents autoethnographic, effectively forming a ‘living historiography’ of the Nubian Campaign—some contributions lend themselves to further integration within the varied research discourses of Nubiology and Egyptology. Nettie Adams provides a brief commentary on several aspects of textile production, Peter Grossmann critically assesses aspects of medieval Nubian church architecture and Giuseppe Fanfoni supplies several unpublished images of rock art graffiti, while Antonio Giammarusti delivers numerous architectural renderings associated with the processes of deconstructing and relocating monuments from the island of Philae in Egypt and Bray Basi Lal numerous artefact photographs, among other such instances.

Contributors to this volume reflect a veritable ‘who’s who’ of prominent Nubiologists and Egyptologists. Many of the authors were young and comparatively inexperienced at the time of their participation in the Nubian Campaign and all were influenced by the work, as Sergio Donadoni notes “[i]n a certain way, I may say that Nubia has been the variegated ambience in which I have ripened my archaeological personality and experience” (p.87). Discussions around various difficulties and uncertainties at the start of the project about how best to approach the Brobdingnagian tasks ahead are recounted by many of the authors,

which is one of the most illuminating and endearing aspects of this volume. Beyond the immensity of the challenges and the work to meet them, the authors tacitly espouse an attitude of getting out and trying, of working to improve one's skills and one's resolve, to saying 'yes', figuring out a strategy and working towards success. As William Adams points out, the Nubian Campaign was not in reality a unified campaign, but rather a mosaic of accomplishments by different global teams united under four broader agendas including monument relocation and archaeological campaigns in Egypt and Sudan.

The account provided by W. Adams is perhaps the most transparent in this manner. Having directed an archaeological salvage campaign in the American Southwest during the late 1950s before the flooding of the Glen Canyon Dam, Adams, after two others turned the position down, was approached to review aerial photographs taken by Sudanese authorities for insights to possible archaeological sites that might be of interest for projects to excavate in advance of the Aswan Dam flooding. Adams notes that he had no experience at all with aerial photographs and was not even sure where Nubia was. Yet he took on the task with great aplomb and ultimately played a pivotal role in the orchestration and success of the Nubian Campaign within Sudan.

This volume is sumptuously illustrated. Almost every chapter includes numerous images of a wide variety of materials, ranging from group photographs and the temple Abu Simbel being cut into blocks with a handsaw, through to the lush poolside of the community constructed in the desert by the Joint Venture Abu Simbel (JVAS) and Luisa Bongrani inexplicably holding a stork aboard a Nile boat. Such images immerse the reader in the ambience and environment of the era and serve as a great complement to the lively and rich textual accounts provided by the respective authors.

In addition to direct accounts of archaeological and monument salvage triumphs, the reader will see the impacts of the flood-zone establishment on local populations. It is perhaps the account of Herman Bell, though concentrating on language, that most clearly conveys the sense of loss and longing. Beginning in 1962, Bell and his wife Ann focused extensively on intangible cultural heritage and elucidating, documenting and preserving Nubian placenames as part of the 'Survey of Nubian Place Names'. Through this process, Bell engages not only with aspects of linguistic Arabisation but also the relocation of populations; while many communities on the Egyptian side of the border were resettled near their original areas of inhabitation, on the Sudanese side of the border, the inhabitants of the Wadi Halfa area were resettled some 300km to the south-east at Khasim al-Qirba along the Atbarah river in Kassala State.

In a less obvious way, the sense of loss of locality and, to varying extents, livelihood and community can also be seen in the temporary occupation of abandoned houses by foreign missions working on nearby contexts that would eventually be inundated. The chapter by Fanfoni not only mentions that situation but provides a photo of an evacuated Nubian house in Sonqi and an evocative account of the flooded areas of Wadi Halfa, of which it is noted, "... submerged by the large lake formed by the growth of the Nile ... the minaret of the most important mosque of the city still emerges" (p.97). This sentiment of loss is perhaps best crystallised by Edda Bresciani (p.73) who notes that "Tamit was a medieval village that had eight very interesting churches. Unfortunately, we saw them collapse one after another, swallowed up by the hungry Nile which had now become an enemy."

Being published in the shadow of the ongoing conflict in Sudan and recent examples of extensive looting of the National Museum of Sudan in Khartoum, the volume's critical consideration of cultural heritage and its loss remain as relevant and pertinent today as it was during the Nubian Campaign. While the orchestration and implementation of wide-reaching, complex and dynamic projects such as the Nubian Campaign seem in many ways like something that will be unlikely to happen again, more recent efforts, through programmes like the Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project (QSAP) demonstrate that there is the drive for widescale 'campaigns' undertaken by a diverse array of global research teams. The unified purpose to learn more about the past and to preserve cultural knowledge through survey, documentation, intangible cultural heritage, community engagement, site excavation and analyses continues to be a vibrant area of archaeological heritage inquiry within the Nile Valley today.

In terms of audience, Brill as publisher directly recommends this volume for: "Tangible and Intangible Heritage Institutions; libraries; specialists; (post-graduated) students; practitioners; passionates; Nubian communities; co-operation development institutions; general public: all people, regardless of their status, affinity or belonging because cultural heritage is a tangible and intangible asset belonging to everyone." This author agrees.

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