

## A Winter in Egypt

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On July 1, 1968, I became professor emeritus at the University of Chicago. That might mean “out of merit,” without further value to the University. I prefer the Spanish term *jubilato*, for the monk or priest who has reached the year of jubilee, of release, because it sounds like jubilation. At any rate, a winter season spent in Egypt showed that there was still a demand for the services of an Oriental Institute professor, even in retirement.

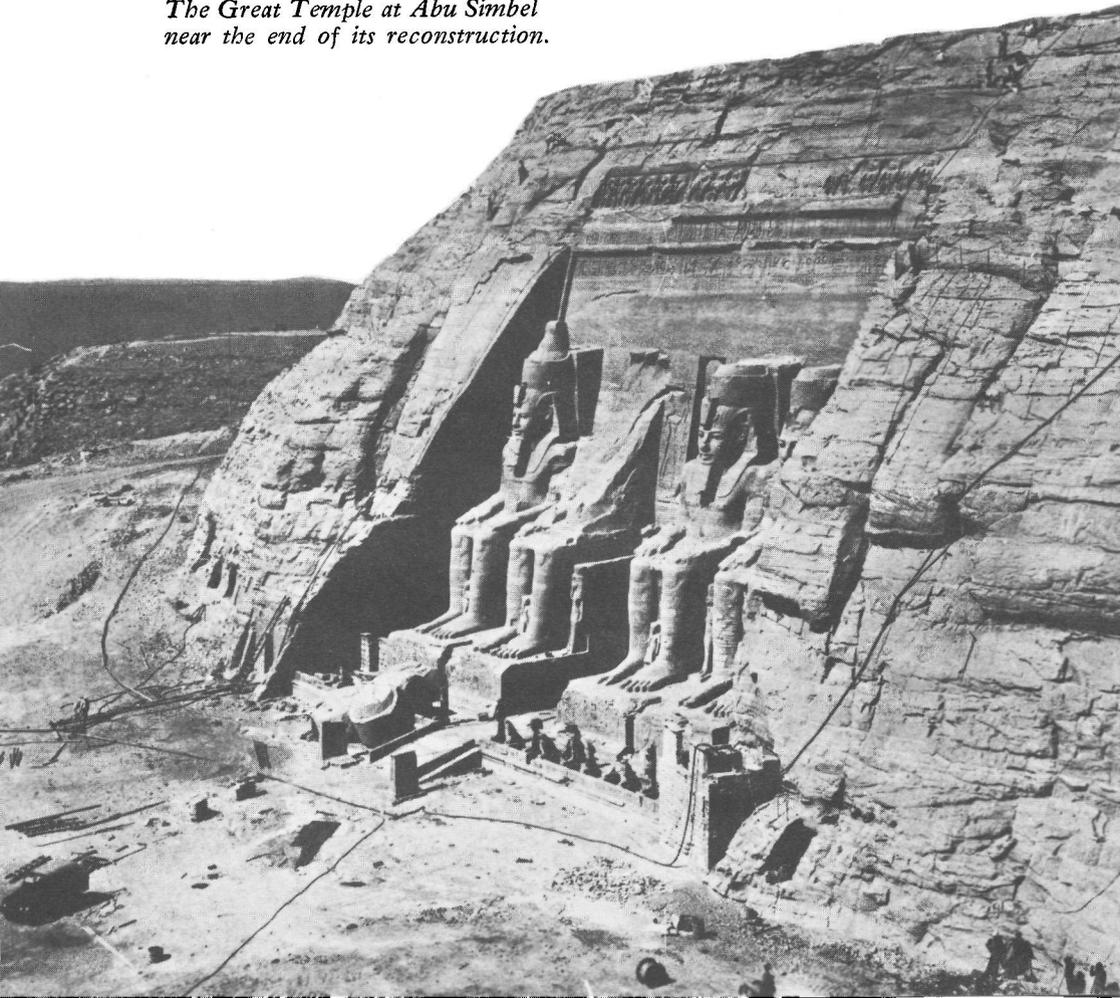
The specific role which took me to Egypt was as consultant to an excavation. That was a dig by the American Research Center in Egypt at Hierakonpolis, which is on the west bank of the Nile about sixty miles south of Luxor. Professor Klaus Baer and a student, Miss Janet Johnson, were other Chicago members of the expedition. My function as consultant gave me the pleasure of visiting the excavation for two brief stretches of time, without the wear and tear of fifty or sixty rugged fourteen-hour days. Field archeology is a young man's game. The dig provided new and exciting material on the first four dynasties of Egypt in a place which was very important in pre-historic times and which continued to be a religious center in later times. Some years ago I published an article arguing that the location of Hierakonpolis was such that it could never have been economically important or large in population. I am happy to say that the emphasis of the article was mistaken and that this must have been a significant early city. Future seasons should illustrate that focal importance.

The international committee of archeologists and landscape architects which supervises the reconstruction of Abu Simbel met in February, 1969, and we visited the site of the newly rebuilt temples in Nubia. The work is stunningly successful. The amount of damage in moving tens of thousands of blocks to higher ground is almost invisible, and the monuments look nearly the same as they did ten

years ago—one of the majestic sights of antiquity. The problem now is to reconstitute the site so that future visitors will see the glory with some measure of comfort and convenience. It is both an honor and a pleasure to have been instrumental in this brilliant operation for nearly ten years.

Another function in Egypt was to advise on a project of the University of Pennsylvania. Somewhere around 1365 B.C. the reforming pharaoh Akh-en-Aton built a temple (or two temples) at Karnak near Luxor. The reliefs were carved in that exciting new art which he unleashed upon the Egypt of his day. After his death his new religion became heresy, and his temples were taken down to serve as the stuffing blocks for the insides of later structures, such as the Second and Ninth Pylons at Karnak. Now more than 30,000 of these carved stone blocks have been extracted from those later locations.

*The Great Temple at Abu Simbel  
near the end of its reconstruction.*



Can they be put together again into scenes and walls which will show what his temple(s) looked like in his day? A group of workers is coding the repetitive elements carved on these blocks, such as the figure of the king or queen, the rays of the sun, or the offering tables, then feeding these elements into a computer, and then matching up blocks on the basis of the computer's advice. This is a brilliant illustration of the possible use of modern machines directed toward ancient questions. The answers should be most interesting.

Back about A.D. 1800 Napoleon Bonaparte was in Egypt and founded a scholarly agency, the Institut d'Égypte, which serves as the national academy for the country. The Institut d'Égypte had had only four American members, among them my colleague, Professor Keith Seele. In February I lectured at the Institut in Cairo, on "Some Modern Trends in Archeology." Thereafter I was elected a corresponding member, another recognition for the Oriental Institute.

For the rest Mrs. Wilson and I enjoyed the warm cordiality of the Egyptian antiquities officials and the pleasures of living and working at Chicago House, Luxor.