

Images of the past

7.- Going underwater: Restoration works by the Antiquities Service

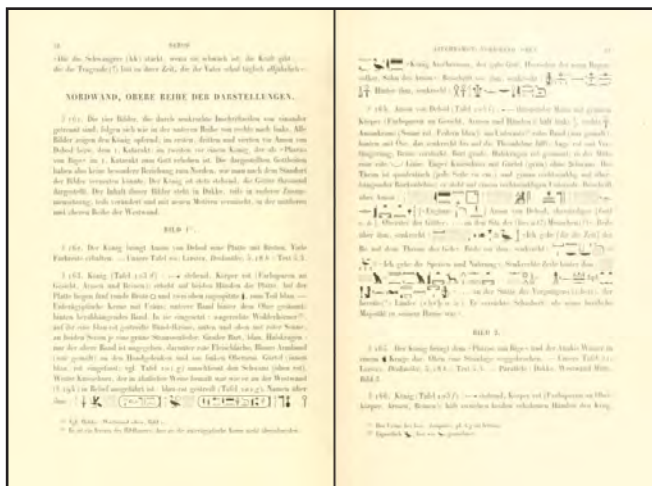
In 1907 it was decided to raise the height of the Aswan Dam, whose construction had finished a few years before. The need to determine the effects on the historic heritage led to the launching of the first archaeological rescue project in Nubia in 1907-1908. The project was managed by G. Reisner, who explored the valley from Philae to Wadi El-Sebua. Two graveyards dated back to the Predynastic Period and the Christian Era were excavated in the vicinity of Debod.

At the same time, the Antiquities Service followed Weigal's recommendations and undertook the restoration of several temples, including Debod. The works were supervised in 1907-08 by the Italian architect Alexandre Barsanti, who was a restorer for the Cairo Museum. The process had to be very aggressive, since the temple was submerged for about nine



Alexandre Barsanti

months every year. Cement and iron were used to join the ashlar blocks, many of which had to be rebuilt or completed. The west wall of the vestibule had to be left with the reliefs exposed, since it was impossible to reconstruct the lost parts. Once the restoration works were completed, the German egyptologist G. Roeder compiled the most exhaustive documentation so far about the monument.



G. Roeder documents

For the next 50 years the temple could only be visited in the summer, when the gates of the dam were opened to deplete the lake. The reliefs lost their colours, while the stones were seriously eroded by water.