



SOCIÉTÉ DES CULTURES NUBIENNES

POUR EN SAVOIR PLUS ...

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The works on the great dam of Aswan have begun. Within five years, the middle valley of the Nile will be transformed into an immense lake. Remarkable buildings, among the most impressive on the planet, are at risk of being flooded by the waters, the damming of which will give fertility to vast expanses of desert. But what frightening a price do we risk paying for the new fields ready for the tractors, the sources of energy promised to the future factories?

Certainly, when it is a matter of the survival of living and suffering men, this cannot be compared with the sacrifice of effigies of granite or porphyry. But no one can be faced with such a choice without being desperate at having to make it.

Between the legacy of the past and the immediate care of a disinherited population in the shadow of one of the most sumptuous heritages of History, between the harvests and the temples, it certainly is not easy to decide. For myself, in any case, I would feel sorry for he who, having to make the decision, could choose without anguish, and who, having made the decision, whatever it was, could carry the responsibility for it without remorse.

Therefore it is not surprising that the governments of the United Arab Republic and of the Sudan should have turned to an international organisation, to Unesco, to ask it to try to save the riches in danger. In fact, these riches, which it is painful to have to say that the loss of may be close, do not belong only to the nations that today harbour them. The whole world has a right to their survival. They are part of a common patrimony that also comprises the message of Socrates, the frescoes of Ajanta, the walls of Uxmal as well as the symphonies of Beethoven. Universal protection is due to the monuments of universal importance. Each time that even one of these riches, which, according to the poet, do not diminish, but increase through sharing is lost, all men are equally frustrated.

Furthermore, it is not simply the case of saving that which may disappear: we need to expand and multiply an opulence that is still secret. As a counterpart for the help that the world gives them, the governments of Cairo and Khartoum open the whole of their territories to the excavations of the archaeologists and agree that half of the works of art that see the light through science and chance, should go to enrich foreign museums. They accept the transport, stone by stone, of some buildings from Nubia.

A new era, a superb development is thus offered to Egyptology, so that instead of a world impoverished through the loss of its masterpieces, there is suddenly for mankind the hope of the revelation of its unknown splendours.

Such a beautiful cause deserves a commensurate effort. This is why I am inviting with confidence the governments, the institutions and the public or private foundations, and all individuals of good will, to contribute to the success of an enterprise without parallel in History: services, machines, money will equally be necessary. All can contribute, and in a thousand ways. It is fitting that a land that was, many times in the course of the centuries, the theatre or the motive for conflict based on greed should now be a convincing proof of international brotherhood.

'Egypt is the gift of the Nile'. This is the first Greek phrase that innumerable school children have learnt to translate. May the peoples unite to avoid that the Nile, source of fertility and energy, become the liquid grave of part of the marvels that the men of today have received from the men of the past.'