

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT ON THE
DOCUMENTATION AND STUDY CENTRE FOR THE HISTORY
OF ART AND CIVILIZATION OF ANCIENT EGYPT

by

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NOTE

As a partial response to the desire for a digest of the report^{1/} on "the Documentation and Study Centre for the History of Art and Civilization of Ancient Egypt" expressed by member States at the UNESCO Executive Board^{2/} and in reply to a specific request by the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt, the following summary has been prepared with assistance from UNESCO, for the general readers. Most of the technical details have been omitted.

Reviewed in this summary is a successful story of a joint venture of co-operation between the Egyptian Government, UNESCO and the international community in creating a national research institute related mainly to archaeological studies and documentation of ancient Egyptian monuments and sites. Recommendation 3 of the report states: "As this pioneering experiment has been so successful and useful, UNESCO should consider the possibility of making such an experience available to other member States". To which the Director-General's reply was: "Experience gained from the Centre will be made available to other member States when other such centres are planned or created on a national basis".

The above report was subsequently adopted through a Resolution of the Executive Board^{3/} and I should like to add to this note my deep appreciation of the co-operation that I received from UNESCO in preparing the main report as well as this summary.

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- ^{1/} JIU/REP/72/8 which appeared as UNESCO document 92 EX/4
^{2/} UNESCO document 92 EX/3
Report of the Special Committee, page 9, para.34
^{3/} 92 EX/Decisions/3.2.2, page 4

THE DOCUMENTATION AND STUDY CENTRE FOR THE HISTORY OF
ART AND CIVILIZATION OF ANCIENT EGYPT: CAIRO

A. The origins of the Centre

1. The history of exploration and the study of ancient Egyptian monuments can be said to have started in modern times with Napoleon's expedition to Egypt at the turn of the 18th century, when he took with him not only soldiers but also scholars and artists to record whatever they could of the flora, fauna and ancient monuments. The real breakthrough, however, came in 1822 when Jean François Champollion succeeded in deciphering the Egyptian hieroglyphs, thus opening the door to knowledge of the deeds of ancient Egypt. In the early fifties, this knowledge was still confined to scholars in Europe and USA, mainly in the centres of learning and museums, and the Egyptian Government was keen to have a similar scientific institution in its own country, while benefiting from the experience which in Europe goes back to 1822.
2. The Egyptian Government's decision to build the Aswan High Dam, and the need to preserve for posterity the famous monuments in Nubia, which were in danger of being submerged by the water of the dam, and this, among other things, prompted the Government to seek urgent assistance from UNESCO in establishing a Documentation Centre which would work with its Department of Antiquities in protecting the monuments, in inspecting them, on excavations being carried out, and in advising on the agreements to be concluded between the Government and foreign scientific missions excavating in Egypt. The Centre was also to carry out its own scientific surveys on ancient monuments, to establish national archives in Egyptology, and to publish its findings.
3. This request, made in 1954 for UNESCO assistance, was not only timely, but was also in keeping with the spirit of the day as regards UNESCO's role in the international, intellectual and cultural co-operation that figured prominently in its Constitution, where it states: "The Organization will maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge by assuring the conservation and protection of the world's inheritance of books, works of art and monuments of history and science."
4. Following the Agreement signed by UNESCO and the Egyptian Government on May 13th, 1955, the Centre was established in Cairo, initially under the Ministry of Education and later under the newly created Ministry of Culture.

B. The Accommodation and Facilities

5. In accordance with the Agreement, the Government was to be responsible for the necessary accommodation, for the salaries of local staff, and the costs for building and maintaining the Centre. It provided a specially constructed building next door to the great Museum of Ancient Egyptian Arts and also near the Department of Antiquities, a location of which proved to be most suitable in the co-ordination of the programmes of the three sister institutions. The building included a sales room, a hall for exhibitions and meetings, a printing room, offices, laboratories and workshops, housing all the technical and scientific equipment.

6. For field scientific survey work, the Government provided the Centre with temporary field premises on the Upper Nile at Luxor. These consisted of four boats (three bearing the names of ancient Egyptian gods, "Hathor", "Horus" and "Horemheb") fitted for work and sleeping accommodation, and for storage of the scientific equipment and materials collected in the field for detailed study and record. The largest boat was equipped as a floating laboratory, with running water and air-conditioned rooms for photographic laboratories and architectural drawings. Two of the other craft enable the survey teams to cross the Nile, and to keep in contact with various archaeological sites along the river banks. The fourth craft is specially constructed to house and transport technical equipment such as cameras and generators.

7. These additional facilities on the Upper Nile made an enormous contribution to the success of the field survey missions, providing pleasant and cool accommodation, and making it possible for work to continue without having to wait for months to reach the Centre in Cairo.

8. In addition to the accommodation in Cairo and Luxor, all the large local staff working for the Centre were appointed and paid for by the Government, which also met the costs of all the supporting services in the field and at the Centre for transport and local materials used by the Centre and provided the support of a large Department of Antiquities which was the mainstay of the field operations - surveying, excavation, restoration, etc.

9. UNESCO was responsible for the services of a Counsellor and other experts; the training of Egyptian counterparts; and the provision of scientific and technical equipment and materials needed for research and training.

10. At the request of the Egyptian Government, UNESCO appointed Mrs. Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt, Chief Curator of the French National Museum, Department of Egyptian Antiquities of the Louvre Museum and a Professor of Egyptian archaeology at the Ecole du Louvre, as special Counsellor to the Centre. It was her task to prepare plans to set up the Centre and arrange for its administration and its training programmes.

11. Spending part of her time every year at the Centre in Cairo and in the field with the scientific survey mission, she has been accompanied every year since 1955 by other experts in various fields of archaeological activities, who join forces with Egyptian counterparts.

12. The Counsellor was able to carry out her normal duties in Paris as well as those of the Centre (most of them planned and completed in Paris) which has thus benefited from close association with one of the original Institutes in the study of Ancient Egypt.

13. Training programmes have consisted of two types: informal, on-the-spot training, and more formal training overseas; the Centre today has a large number of Egyptian specialists in the different fields relevant to its work.

C. Financial Support

14. UNESCO's direct financial contribution to the Centre has been very modest, mainly annual grants-in-aid paid through the UNESCO Counsellor amounting to US \$10,000 a year, shared between UNESCO expert services (\$8,000) and equipment (\$2,000). But to these contributions must be added the indirect extra-budgetary contributions to the Centre in the form of costs of expert services, equipment and fellowships made by the international community through UNESCO's appeal, and particularly the vast sums of money involved in the campaigns to save the Nubian monuments.

The forms of assistance given vary enormously from simple technical services to aerial photographic surveys which were very costly. It was quite obvious that the small amount paid out by UNESCO to this programme has had an enormous catalytic effect on the total international contribution made to the Documentation Centre.

15. The Egyptian Government, throughout the life of the Centre, has given very generous support. Its direct contribution to the Centre includes the costs of construction and maintenance of the premises in Cairo and the satellite stations in Nubia and later at Luxor, the purchase and fitting of the four boats, the cost of salaries of all local staff and the basic equipment. A rough idea of the total contribution by the Government is given by the costs of salaries contained in the budget for 1970/71 for the Ministry of Culture; this provided 762,000 Egyptian pounds for the Department of Antiquities and 47,815 Egyptian pounds for the Documentation Centre. Government support is again reflected in the number of staff employed in this period, when the personnel of the Department totalled 2,821 and that of the Centre, 182.

D. Administrative set-up

16. The Centre's administrative set-up follows closely the general pattern prevailing among most of the institutions established with UNESCO assistance, with a Board of Trustees as the governing body, composed of the Minister for Culture, as its chairman, twelve members appointed from the intellectual and cultural elite in Egypt, the Administrator-General, the Director and the UNESCO Counsellor, the last three being ex-officio members.

17. The post of Administrator-General, filled by selection from very senior Government officials, has so far been occupied by three very able men; Dr. Moustapha Amer, who was Director-General of the Department of Antiquities at the time the Centre was founded, Dr. Ahmed Badawi, a former Rector of the University of Cairo, and Dr. Gamal El-Din Mokhtar, former Director-General of the Department of Antiquities. The fact that the Administrator-General is also the Under-Secretary of State for Archaeology at the Ministry of Culture has enabled the Government to have a more co-ordinated effort in the field of Antiquities.

18. The UNESCO Counsellor has always occupied a special position of 'honour' in the administration of the Centre. Her duties include assistance to the Administrator-General in organizing and running the Centre, as well as making and controlling the records in the field, preparing the publication of the scientific work, and co-operating with UNESCO and foreign scientific missions excavating in Egypt.

19. The internal activities of the Centre are organized in three main units:

- (a) The Administrative Unit which deals with all the internal administration, matters of relations with the other Ministries' archives, the sale of publications and general public relations.
- (b) The Technical Unit has several functional sections for archaeologists, architects, specialized photographers, and specialized archaeological draughtsmen. There is also a section of archaeological models and casts, and a printing section.
- (c) The Scientific Unit includes a philological team, an archaeological team, a team of documentalists in charge of scientific archives, a bureau of scientific consultation (Card Index) and a Scientific Library.

E. The Programme

20. As the annual programme of work revolves around the scientific surveys of the Pharaonic Egyptian Monuments as yet unrecorded or unpublished, the work carried out during the year falls into three main phases: FIRST, preliminary preparations for the survey missions to be sent to the field are made in Cairo. These involve detailed planning if the surveys are to be successful. Surveys often take place over 500 miles from Cairo; then, IN THE FIELD, follows the most important part of the whole programme. Detailed observations and recording is necessary, accompanied by the highest skill in each discipline. Different kinds of surveys take place simultaneously, and very often at different sites. The co-ordination of field work is a major effort, necessitated by the presence of different departments and experts; THE FINAL TASK, on return to Cairo, is the detailed scientific classification and recording of all the new materials brought back from the field by each specialist - in philology, archaeology, architecture, geology, prehistory, photography, etc. When this basic work is accomplished, there follows the preparation of scientific documents and card index, which is very useful in providing the specialists in Egyptology with the information on the new material for reference.

F. The Nubian Campaigns and Theban Monuments

22. The activities of the Documentation Centre and UNESCO assistance early came to be linked with what has been described as "one of UNESCO's most spectacular projects" in the field of protection of ancient monuments: the campaign to save the monuments of Nubia.

23. While many people have heard of the magnificent achievements in international co-operation that went to save the Nubian monuments from the waters of the Aswan High Dam, few have heard of the sustained efforts and success of the Documentation Centre in the task of recording and documenting all the monuments. This work continued up to 1968 when the Centre completed recording and storing all the records of the monuments that could not be saved from the areas that have now gone under water. The Centre has also accomplished another feat with the publication of two volumes in French giving details of one of the most interesting of the Temples, entitled "Le Petit Temple d'Abou Simbel".

24. During the rescue work the Centre and the UNESCO Counsellor played leading roles as hosts to the teams of experts in the important task of co-ordinating the various efforts, in addition to their own basic tasks of documentation. This was a task well done, and deserves all credit. Only after 1968 could activities of the Centre turn to other areas and their operational base has recently been in the western part of Thebes on work largely related to the monuments connected with Ramses II surveyed in Nubia.

25. An important recent development in the Centre's programmes is the inclusion of Prehistory research on the Theban Mountain, aiming to plot systematically on the map the Stone Age sites in the area and to classify them in chronological order. The project is of some great importance for the history of Thebes and its Pre-Pharaonic origins, for almost nothing had been done about it until recently.

26. The Centre is very anxious to see this survey completed quickly, as the pre-historic remains in the area were in danger of disappearing. Since these sites were discovered in 1868 they have suffered shameless pillage at the hands of collectors, and this vandalism was still going on, and would shortly deprive us of the scientific documents of great value for the study of Theban pre-history.

27. It is to be hoped that the Egyptian Authorities, with assistance from UNESCO, will seek to promote this work, which could link up the Nile Valley pre-history with the rest of Africa, particularly with the recent East African archaeological discoveries, a field so far left entirely in the hands of expatriate experts often poorly supported by outside private financial resources.

G. International Co-operation

28. One of the most outstanding features of this programme has been the enormous good will and co-operation between the various international groups which have given support to the Centre's operations during and after the Nubian Campaigns. The support has been beneficial to the country in both the physical surveys made of various monuments, and in the process of training counterpart Egyptian scientists. All these experts and their counterparts were required to participate in the combined operations in the field, and at the Centre in Cairo.

29. The UNESCO experts among the international teams that have served with the Centre from 1955, in the different scientific and technical fields, represent many nationalities with different social and economic backgrounds. They have come from universities in Germany, the United Kingdom, Austria, France, the United States, Italy, Poland, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia and Belgium. Missions of experts sent to the Centre by governments have included those from Belgium, Italy and the United Kingdom, Poland and France - which tops the list with over 40 French experts and has also provided a large number of items such as aerial surveys, equipments, paper, maps and a car.

30. In the specialized training fields, Egyptian scientists have been able to study for periods varying from one to eight years in institutions abroad, principally in the UK, Germany, France, Belgium and Czechoslovakia. Many returned with higher degrees in Egyptology and most of them have stayed on at the Centre.

31. In appreciation of the importance of UNESCO and international co-operation, the Egyptian Authorities were able to allow the operations of the Centre to proceed uninterrupted, even during the difficult days of Middle East conflict, and in turn this international effort has resulted in the general expansion and diffusion of knowledge.

Furthermore, the Egyptian Government has requested and obtained assistance for architects from Poland to study and restore the temple of Deir-el-Bahari, and similar assistance has been obtained from France for the Karnak Centre.

32. The work of the Centre itself has now become a great factor of international co-operation by providing inspiration needed in the field of Egyptology. Several archaeological institutions that had closed down in Egypt have now re-opened their doors and modernized their structures along the lines of that of the Centre, while new schools of archaeology have been opened in countries that have no centres in Egypt, for example, in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Sweden and the Netherlands.

33. At the moment, it is quite clear that this programme of international co-operation is no longer a one-way process. Apart from the fact that the structure and organization of the Centre is now serving as a model in many countries, the Centre's publications, and particularly its scientific collections, are regularly distributed free to some 40 institutions.

34. By the end of 1971, the Centre had published over 30 volumes on the various studies made in the past on several ancient monuments, while over ten additional volumes were under preparation and a bulletin was being planned to include a summary of the scientific activities of the Centre, an analysis of its publications, and a series of scientific articles.

35. To sum up, the Documentation Centre was a good choice for an internationally-assisted project, and Egypt's twin needs of protecting and recording its ancient monuments have been fully answered, directly and indirectly, through UNESCO's support. The results obtained lie mainly in the successful building of the Documentation Centre itself and the expansion of its programmes; in the field of healthy dynamic international and cultural co-operation; and in the co-ordination of scientific research in Egyptology, and the publication and dissemination of this information.

36. While these achievements have been important at the intellectual level, the project is basic to Egyptian economic development as it provides a major part of its infrastructure for the tourist industry, which until 1967 occupied third place as

foreign exchange earner for the country. Not only scholars, but many tourists are now able to visit the ancient monuments that have already been explored and recorded.

37. At UNESCO Headquarters, this project is held in high esteem and some of the senior officials feel that it is the most outstanding success of all the UNESCO regional centres and institutes. I should like to share that belief too, if only by comparison with the centres that have been inspected by JIU.

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