Abstract—William Carruthers

This paper explores the relationship between post-Second World War multilateralism, decolonization, and practices of preservation relating not only to ancient material culture, but also what would become world heritage. Concentrating on Nasserist Egypt and utilizing methodological tools from science and technology studies, the paper demonstrates that scholars need to move beyond a focus on multilateral organizations like UNESCO as simply embodying a neo-colonialist approach to the world.

As Egypt decolonized, the use of multilateral practices by archaeologists, Egyptologists, and other practitioners concerned with ancient antiquities and architecture often produced attempts to instantiate the continuation of a colonial set of power relations relating to the investigation and preservation of those remains. Multilateralism enabled non-Egyptian practitioners to conduct boundary work emphasizing their continued right to operate in the country by letting them utilize the post-war modernization rhetoric of collaboration and technical skill transfer. But, focusing on the aftermath of one collaborative excavation, this paper shows that multilateralism’s growth in importance also allowed the Egyptian government to assert its own wishes by making the preservation of particular types of ancient material culture a boundary object around which foreign practitioners were forced to interact.

In particular, the Egyptian government used this strategy in an attempt to make foreign archaeological institutions take part in a move to preserve the ancient material culture of the region of Nubia, which was due to be submerged by the floodwaters of the Aswan High Dam. This situation contradicts accounts of eventual work in the region, which suggest that UNESCO’s International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia emerged *sui generis*. This paper therefore suggests that scholars need both to re-examine the Nubian campaign as it took place in Egypt and Sudan and also to re-examine the foundation myth of world heritage attached to the work.