

Centerpiece to Empire

Understanding the New York Obelisk

Grant Simmons

Advised By: Michelle McClellan

History Department:
The University of Michigan

Table of Contents

Special Thanks...2

Introduction...3

Chapter 1 – In the Beginning...7

Chapter 2 – On the Move...13

Chapter 3 – Coming to America...29

Chapter 4 – American Reception...52

Epilogue...60

Bibliography...63

Special Thanks

It has taken the better part of a year in order to complete this work. Of course there will always be something that could have been added or altered within the text itself, but I leave the work as it is. In beginning this process it has always been my greatest hope that at some point in either the near or distant future, a student will stumble upon this transcript and discover an exciting topic that will inspire them to pursue either their own interest or to keep digging for more information on my silly rocks. Through this project I have gained a great appreciation for those who have come before me in the study of obelisks. I feel that that I have joined a brotherhood of sorts, a club of fellows with a peculiar interest in one of history's great mysteries, and I am very proud to be a part of this fellowship.

First and foremost I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Michelle McClellan, for her patience as my work developed and for her genuine interest in my topic. Second, I would like to thank Professors Hussein Fancy and Raymond Van Dam who together inspired me to pursue a degree in history, and who have both been an inspiration to my personal studies. Next, the University of Michigan History Department for its wonderful staff and dedication to its students. Also, Professor Brian Porter-Szucs for his guidance over my project, as well as that of my fellow honors students. To the Thomas J. Watson Library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, thank you for your help and assistance during my research trip over this past summer. To my thesis partners Sarah, Benji, and Jamie, thank you for all of your help and encouragement. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, whose constant support and love has seen me through the most difficult times, I love you.

Grant Simmons

4/1/15

Introduction

Originally raised in the 15th century B.C., an obelisk dedicated to the pharaoh Thutmose III now resides in New York City's Central Park. This monument spent the majority of its life in Egypt, where it stood as witness to 3000 years of history. It has seen the demise of the kingdoms of Egypt and it existed when Rome reached its imperial zenith. It saw Roman majesty crumble and lived to welcome Egypt's new rulers from the East. This obelisk made its journey across the Atlantic near the end of the 19th century and has since stood as a silent bystander witnessing the growth of the modern city that surrounds it.

A true obelisk is a single piece of quarried rock that consists of a square base that gradually rises to a pyramid like shape at the top, known as a pyramidion. Often these monuments stand over 40 feet tall and can weigh over 2 tons. The original function of the obelisk has been debated, but today it is believed that the American monolith first acted as a decoration to the entrance of a temple at Heliopolis. More important than what its intended purpose happened to be, is how this obelisk, as well as others like it, have come to be perceived over the centuries. Traces of colossal obelisks are found during the reign of Egypt's Middle Kingdom (2065 BCE – 1650 BCE), but the practice became much more common under the prosperity of the New Kingdom (1550 BCE – 1077 BCE). Often times serving as more than decoration, these monuments are most often established as a tribute to Egypt's solar deities. Most often times found in pairs, they could also represent a gateway into the Egyptian "otherworld".

After Augustus' victory over Cleopatra at Actium in 31 BCE, the image of the tall stones would be changed forever. For reasons that can only be speculated upon, Augustus decided that he would like to move a pair of obelisks located outside the ancient city of

Heliopolis to the city of Alexandria. The scope of this endeavor was incredible as each obelisk weighed as much as 224 tons and stood about 70 feet tall. This is the first example of any person, other than the Pharaohs of Egypt, to commence relocating an obelisk. After this initial undertaking, Augustus and other Roman emperors accomplished the movement of many obelisks across the Mediterranean and into Rome itself.

The Roman obelisks would not be moved again until the 16th century, when Pope Sixtus V began to use them as focal points in the urbanization of a new Rome. Situated in key areas of the city, the newly re-erected obelisks helped visitors navigate the city. In the life of the obelisks, it would be a relatively short 200 years until another movement was seen by man. The French spent a large sum of money in the transport and erection of their own obelisk in 1833, and the British would follow suit four decades later when they erected their obelisk in 1877. Not to be outdone, the United States acquired its own obelisk in 1877 and erected it in Central Park in 1881. Thus was the most recent movement of any Egyptian obelisk.

Why has there been a continual interest and effort to move these objects? For the Romans it took months, sometimes years, of planning and countless hours of manual labor in order to move a single monolith. The Popes had an even more difficult time. Living in a more developed and urbanized Rome, buildings would at times have to be demolished in order for an obelisk to be moved into a new position. Movements accomplished by the nations of the 19th century were equally as costly, and remained just as difficult. Erected as a testimony to Pharaoh's might and moved for its nature as a powerful symbol as a conquering trophy, there must have been a feature or meaning, beyond the monoliths' existence, that shows why these powers have wanted them throughout time.

My thesis will explore the meaning behind the American acquisition of its obelisk by first attempting to establish what these monuments have meant to populations throughout time and then analyzing how that meaning has been altered in the American context. In doing this I hope to open a small window into how the United States developed and how it wanted the rest of the world to perceive it.

Common themes that are found throughout the paper stand as a testament to the uncanny similarities between the movement of our own obelisk and those of other nations. National growth and themes of empire are most dominant and are most easily visible. Given that Rome, Paris, and London, which have all developed an established history of elite culture and great leaders, are home to obelisks, the arrival of an obelisk in New York City could have not carried with it no trace of this theme. Those who moved it sought to demonstrate their achievement in engineering. From the slave hands that pulled and erected the obelisks in ancient times, to the steam vessels and hydraulic lifts used in the American endeavor, the task of moving such an awkward burden from point A to point B has always been a tribute to the nation capable of succeeding in the completion of an obelisk movement.

The obelisk in Central Park now awaits its future patiently. Like its brethren in Europe, it is infused with symbolism, some of which has been altered over time. Why did the people of the Republic of the United States, who espoused anti-imperial politics, desire a monument that held such a vast amount of imperial meaning within itself? Was it a conscious decision made by elites to showcase how America was beginning to view itself? Or perhaps it was meant as a demonstration to European powers that America was more than capable of achieving a technological marvel? Finally, perhaps the American movement was no more than an opportunity for the country to acquire a monument that would entertain and awe its

Grant Simmons

citizens? In order to answer these questions and more, this thesis will move through the history of the obelisks and finish with an analysis of the events surrounding the arrival of an obelisk on American shores.

Chapter 1 – In the Beginning...

Before discussing the context of the American obelisk, it is important to first understand the origin of these monumental beings, their history, and the technical knowledge required to create them. Rising above the desert sands, the obelisks of Ancient Egypt would have been dwarfed by very few other structures. The earliest examples of these monuments date to the 28th century BCE when those ancients, living along the Nile, seem to have made a drastic shift in their abilities to work with stone. However, Egypt would have to wait until the New Kingdom (c. 1550 BCE) in order to gain the knowledge necessary to make its first obelisk of the size that we are familiar with today.

A true obelisk is a single piece of quarried rock that consists of a square base that gradually rises to a pyramid like shape at the top, known as a pyramidion. Traditionally, Egyptian obelisks were quarried from the very hard granite found at Aswan. How exactly ancient sculptors were able to work with the dense rock is still up for debate with a number of theories put forward. Most of what we know about how these monuments were cut, moved and consequently erected comes from archeological evidence. Particularly important to the study of obelisks is an unfished stone discovered in the ancient Aswan quarries in the 1920s. This ancient failure, abandoned 3 eons ago, answered some longstanding questions while at the same time leaving many others unanswered. Tools found at this location have allowed researches to piece together a possible worksite and reimagine the techniques that were used. It is hypothesized that in order to ensure symmetry, rods attached with long bits of string were used as a level.¹ In order to separate rock from rock the Egyptians are presumed to have

¹ Brain A. Curran et al., *Obelisk: A History* (Cambridge: Burundy Library, 2009), 25

lit fires to heat the area around the would-be monument. Pouring water on this heated surface would cause cracking down the length of the stone. The shallow crags would then have to be dug out by hand in order to prevent further cracking. The Egyptians did not possess the tools hard enough to affect the rock, so they are believed to have instead used balls of dolerite. Dolerite, or diabase, is an extremely hard (harder than the Aswan granite), dark stone present in Egypt. Using these balls as a pounding instrument, the pharaoh's servants would have spent countless hours smashing the surface of the unquarried rock until eventually the obelisk began to take shape.²

When workers finally reached an adequate depth in the rock, the daunting task of working beneath the stone could begin. Crews of workmen would have to slide under the monolith in order to pound its underside in much the same way as before. Working on both sides the workmen could more quickly reach a point where the monolith could finally be detached from the rest of the quarry.³

Once the obelisk was free, the operation of transporting a solid piece of granite, possibly weighing up to 100 tons, from the quarry to its erecting point, which could be miles away, awaited the ancients. Once again, how the Egyptians moved these monstrosities over land is unclear, but it is likely that they used rolling logs, sledges, and ropes, along with massive amounts of manpower. It may be that the dolerite balls were also used to help move the obelisk around the quarry, and to perhaps move it even greater distances. In addition to relocating the obelisks over land, we also have evidence of ships being used when near to the Nile. These instances required that a barge be weighted down so that its hull sunk deep into the water. Work crews would then slowly and carefully drag the obelisk over the

² Curran, 29

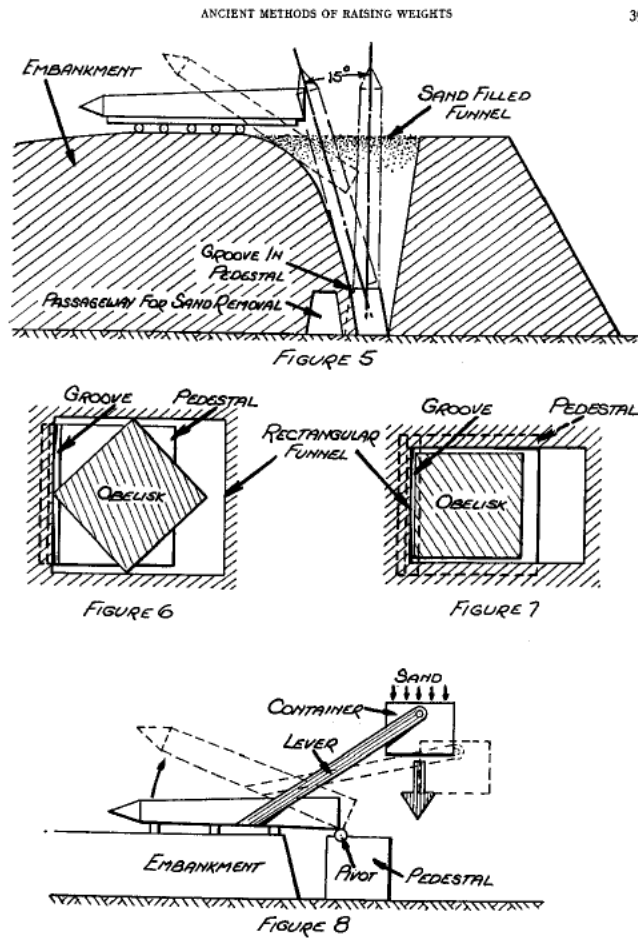
³ Curran, 29

embankment and center it above the vessel. Weight would then be removed from the barge and it would rise to greet its new companion. The obelisk's ship would then be pulled by other ships toward its destination.

Hauling the obelisk off the barge and dragging it toward its pedestal would have caused difficulties, but paled in comparison to the next step. Erecting an obelisk was (and has always been) the most difficult and time consuming portion of any movement. One slip in this stage of the undertaking and the obelisk could break, ruining months (most often years) of planning and work. Unfortunately, time has also destroyed evidence of how the Egyptians were able to accomplish this mighty feat. Many theories and suggestions exist, some more probable than others.⁴ Regardless of feasibility, one fact remains, this movement involved extreme danger. Many theories suggest that the obelisk would have been dragged up a ramp, to a point above its pedestal, and then slowly, carefully, and precisely lowered onto its resting place. A second theory suggests that the obelisk may have indeed been dragged up a ramp, but instead of being lowered was instead slid down the side of an embankment onto its pedestal where it would then be pulled from an opposite ramp into its upright position. This theory stresses the importance of grooves and lips found on varying pedestals. There is a third idea that suggests a complicated mechanism may have been used for erection. This device is proposed to have been made out of wood, and would have employed a pulley and rope system, along with a counterweight to raise the obelisk to its full height. What could possibly be heavy enough to counterbalance the weight of a 100 ton obelisk? Something the Egyptians had in excess, sand! Filling a large bucket with enough sand to raise an obelisk, along with the strength of rope needed to accomplish such a feat may seem improbable, but

⁴ Martin Isler, "Ancient Egyptian Methods of Raising Weights," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 13, (1976), 31-42

should not be seen as impossible. Due to the varying sizes of obelisks, and a history of over 2000 years in their erection, it is safe to assume that there may have existed more than one way to raise an obelisk. It will be left to the reader to decide upon which system they find most plausible. (Plate 1)



*Two possible ways Egyptians would have erected an obelisk. (Plate 1)

What was the point of erecting these demanding monuments? Many scholars believe that they represent a link between our mortal world and the “otherworld” of the Egyptians.

The authors of *Obelisk: A History* believe that placing the obelisks before a temple would have created portal that marked the passage into the kingdom of the gods.⁵ These authors use ancient references that lead us to believe that the obelisks would have been positioned in a way that corresponded to the movement of the sun across the sky. Furthermore, due to the needle like shape of the obelisks, it is believed that the obelisks represented a relationship to the sun god Ra. This shape literally pierces the sky, holding it up in the process, and while it does so, provides a physical manifestation of the rays emitted by the sun. In a way, an obelisk represented a relationship similar to that which was embodied in the pharaoh himself, a god on earth.

In addition to the shape of the obelisk being important, the hieroglyphs found on the monument are also endowed with special meaning. Hieroglyphs, Greek for ‘sacred writing’, were a mystical way in which a pharaoh could infuse within the stone of his (or a predecessors) obelisk. For the greater part of modern history, the ability to translate this language has been lost. In previous centuries, both specialists and laymen alike believed that the ancient picture writing of the Egyptians contained great secrets of science, math, and the divine, that would change the world once discovered. How disappointed we were when in the early 19th century the discovery of the Rosetta Stone led to the final unveiling of what the Egyptians had left us. The text found on the obelisks contain no great secret, no world shattering discovery, but is instead a dedication to the ruler who ordered the construction of the obelisk. Take for example the translation of the hieroglyphs found on one side of the obelisk that resides in Central Park.⁶

⁵ Curran, 18

⁶ “Central Park, Egyptian Obelisk,” *NYC Parks*, <http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/central-park/monuments/1129> (accessed March 8, 2015)

The crowned Horus, bull of victory, son of Kheper-ra. . . . The king of Upper and Lower Egypt User-ma-ra (Ramses II). The chosen of Ra, the golden Horus, rich in years, great in victory, son of the Sun, Ramses II, who came forth from the womb to receive the crowns of Ra; fashioned was he to the sole ruler, the lord of the Two Lands User-ma-ra, the chosen of Ra, son of the Sun Ramessu Meiamun (Ramses II), glorified of Osiris, like the sun life-giving forever.

So while no great wisdom was imparted, we were better able to date the obelisks by the name of the ruler who could be found upon it. Also, we learned that inscribing an obelisk could be performed by any pharaoh, not necessarily the original owner of the monolith. This pattern is demonstrated by the New York obelisk and its carvings from two different pharaohs, Thutmose III and Ramses II.

Whatever the obelisks meant to the Egyptians has in many ways been eclipsed by the ways in which they illustrate the power relationships required to construct and move them. Its relationship to the Egyptian otherworld has been replaced by a closer relation to the men capable of commanding the amount of power needed in order to construct and move such a monument. Due to two eons worth of foreign invasions, the image of the obelisk has changed dramatically. No longer a symbol of Pharaoh's divine connection to the gods, it is most apparent that the obelisk has now developed recognition as a trophy. In chapter 2 we will explore how this role has evolved by examining the undertakings of both classic and modern factions.

Chapter 2 – On the Move

Augustus' victory over Cleopatra and Marcus Antonius in 31 BCE saw the demise of the last of the Ptolemy's, who had been the Greek rulers of Egypt since the death of Alexander the Great. After this initial transfer, the province of Egypt would change hands many times. However, the first of these was to the Romans, who in their own time moved over 50 obelisks from Egypt to Rome, and even shifted a few within Egypt itself.

As the first Roman ruler of Egypt, Augustus was the first non-Egyptian to relocate an obelisk. His first attempt was to move a pair of obelisks located in Heliopolis, originally raised by Thutmose III, to a site outside the Caesarium in Alexandria in 13 B.C. His next movement would come three years later when he succeeded in moving another pair of obelisks into Rome proper. Years later both Caligula and Claudius followed suit by removing more obelisks from their resting places. The pattern continued and Rome's collection of obelisks grew over many centuries. In 390 A.D. Theodosius I settled an obelisk on the spina within the Hippodrome in Constantinople, thus ensuring that the Eastern Empire matched the imperial majesty of the Western Empire.

Roman engineers arriving in Egypt shortly after its capture must have held some respect for the monuments they found resting there. Their own accomplishments relied

heavily upon the technology that they had access to including the ability to work with timber in order to complete monumental works, a resource that the Egyptians lacked. Very little material remains regarding Roman attempts to move obelisks, just as with Egyptian sources.⁷ What is known is that the Romans used their mechanical knowledge and ability to build great barges in order to move the ancient giants. In fact, the Romans themselves were so impressed with their accomplishments that one of the ships used under Caligula's reign was preserved for some years in order that it be admired. Sadly, Claudius destroyed the ship by using it as a foundation for one of the docks at the to be port of Ostia.⁸

The knowledge needed in order to read hieroglyphs would have most likely been held by a special few, if by any at all. Pliny the Elder speaks with authority that some of the obelisks contain "interpretations of the operations of nature according to the philosophy of the Egyptians" a fact that we know now to be untrue.⁹ In addition to the inaccuracy of ancient sources, the official language of Egypt had been Greek for nearly 4 centuries before the arrival of Augustus. Therefore only a loose connection to what the original purpose of the obelisks remained, and without holding any significant idea about why the monoliths had been erected, Roman emperors would have needed a reason for wanting to undertake the difficult task of transporting such a monument. I believe the easiest answer to be that the obelisks were taken as trophies, *praeda* intended to impress not only the citizens of Rome, but also those visiting from afar.¹⁰ Upon the two obelisks Augustus brought to Rome he had this inscription placed, "When Imperator for the twelfth, consul for the eleventh, and tribune

⁷ Essentially limited to Pliny the Elder and Marcellinus

⁸ Pliny the Elder. *Natural History*. Book 36, Chapter 14 Trans. John Bostock London. Taylor and Francis, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street. 1855.

⁹ Pliny the Elder, Book 36, Chapter 14

¹⁰ Lat. "Spoil of war".

of the people for the fourteenth time, Emperor Augustus, son of divine Caesar, dedicated this obelisk to the sun, when Egypt had been brought under the sway of the Roman people”.¹¹ This inscription denotes the idea that perhaps there may have remained some association to the sun, but perhaps Augustus used this phrase in order to better incorporate Egyptian ideals of solar deities into the a more Roman tradition.

Procuring an obelisk from its pedestal and transporting it would have been just as an impressive as an accomplishment in Roman times as it is today. Great engineering feats accomplished by the Romans such as aqueducts, triumphal arches, forums and road networks, would have paled in comparison to the arrival of an obelisk within the city. The movement would have (literally) stood as a testament to the prestige and ingenuity of Roman planners and architects. Moreover, the displacement of an object that is as long and heavy as an obelisk would have proven that there was no task too great for the Empire (or the Emperor) to overcome. This combination of conquering trophy and symbol of control and supremacy is what should be believed as the most plausible reason for going through the trouble of collecting the ancient beings.

Regardless of motivation, of further interest to this thesis are the uses to which the Romans assigned their obelisks. Most famous is the use for which Augustus found for one of his prizes. Originally set up on the Campus Martius, this obelisk was placed in such a way that it became a sun dial, although Pliny records that it stopped working correctly after a short time.¹² Other than this example, it seems that obelisks were used as more of a decorative feature. As many as 50 obelisks may have graced the early city of Rome at one time, some of more antiquated origins than others. It seems that the structures increased in

¹¹ Curran, 37

¹² Pliny the Elder, Book 36, Chapter 15

popularity and relation to the image of the Emperor to such a degree that Romans began imitating their construction and hieroglyphic forms. Pseudo-obelisks were erected within the city and were even constructed in Egypt itself.¹³ This obelisk trend would continue all the way up until the sack of Rome in 410 A.D. After the destruction caused by Alaric and his Visigoths, no new obelisks would ever again travel to Rome.

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, an age of ‘darkness’ fell over Western Europe. During these Middle Ages, patronage of the arts and grand schemes of monumental architecture waited for a time when there would once again be leaders capable of spending great amounts of resources on such projects. Over this extended period, the obelisks at Rome fell into neglect and many were knocked down, used for construction, or simply buried in the literal sands of time. Such was the case of the obelisk that now stands in the front of St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City.

The growth of the Catholic Church caused a renewed interest in the city of Rome. Money was coming in from taxes as well as from the patronage of pilgrims willing to make the journey in order to pay their respects to the Holy See. This newfound wealth allowed the church to begin the construction of ambitious new projects, such as St. Peter’s. After his election to Pope in 1585, Sixtus V proved to be a determined man.¹⁴ He set about finishing the construction of the now famed Basilica and arrived at the idea that the obelisk that was at that time sitting behind the unfinished church, should instead be moved to the front of the building. The completion of the Basilica and the moving of the obelisk were to be the first steps in Sixtus’ rebuilding of Rome. The man called upon in order to complete the nearly 300

¹³ Curran, 46-48

¹⁴ Bern Dibner, *Moving the Obelisks*, (Burundy Library, 1991), 22-23

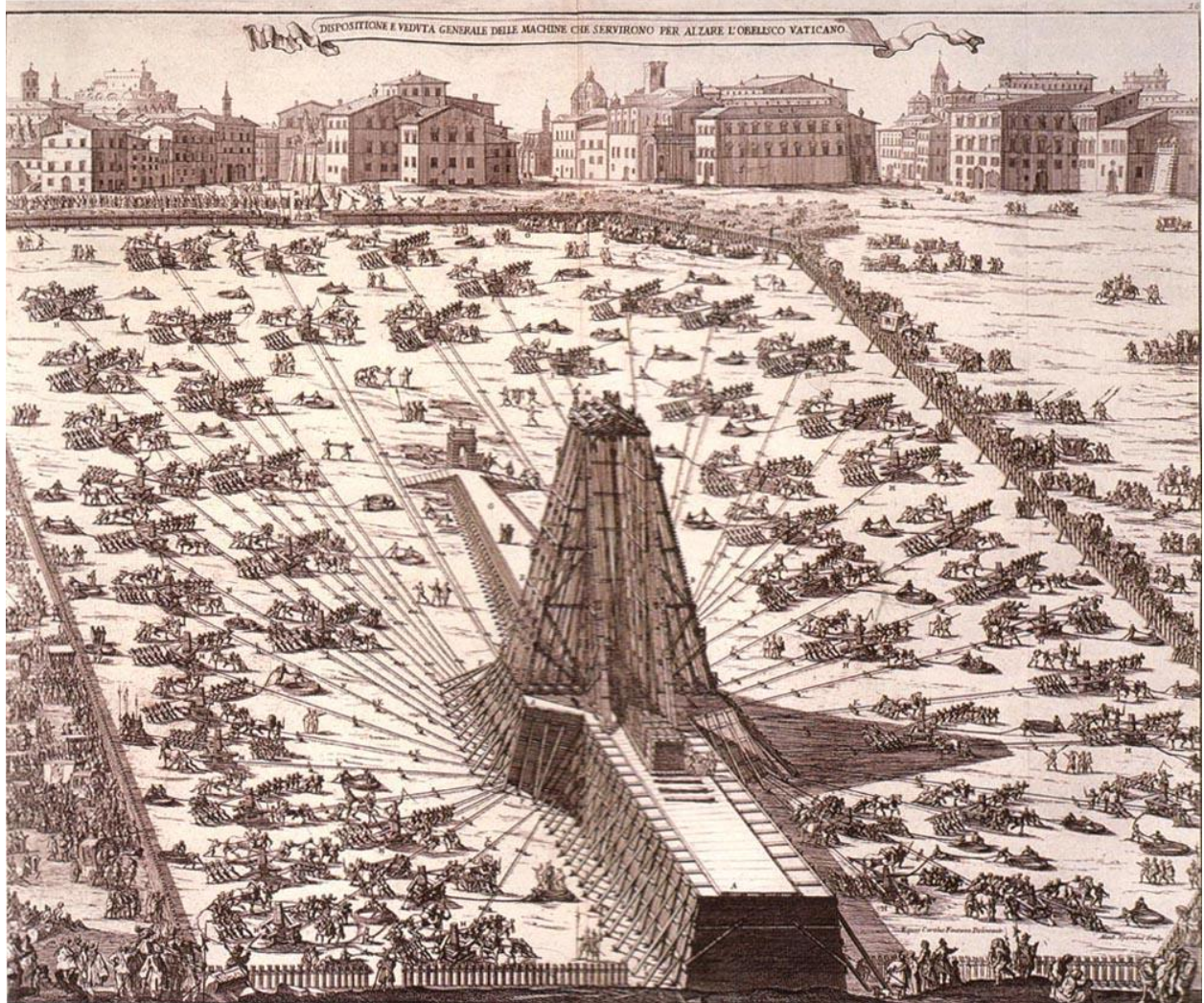
yard undertaking was Domenico Fontana, a successful engineer and architect. Similar to the way in which his American counterpart would be chosen from a multitude of would be movers, Fontana was successful in winning the bid, partially due to a family history, as well as a familiarity with Sixtus.¹⁵

After 11 centuries, an obelisk would once again be moved in Rome. Unfortunately for Fontana (and us), no material on how the Romans moved their obelisk had survived and he was forced to devise his own scheme in order to successfully complete the movement. After nearly 3500 years of history, anyone wishing to move an obelisk has suffered the same fears. The tremendous weight, the odd shape, and the fragile natures of an obelisk have always been the most difficult encounters for any engineer, modern or ancient. Fontana's plan involved the use of tall wooden towers that would be responsible for raising and lowering the obelisk, while a makeshift track system was used to drag the stone along its predetermined route. The work was completed using only the strength of man and beast.¹⁶ (Plate 2)

Ultimately Fontana proved to be a wise choice as the project was completed almost a year later. After the Vatican obelisk had been placed on its pedestal Sixtus purified the stone of any remaining pagan association. Sixtus also commissioned a bronze casting of a cross to be placed on top of the pyramidion, thereby firmly placing the obelisk within a neo-Rome context.

¹⁵ Dibner, 25

¹⁶ For a more complete description see Fontana's own work. *Della trasportatione dell'obelisco vaticano et delle fabriche di nostro signore Papa Sisto V, fatte dal cavalier Domenico Fontana, architettodi Sua Santita*



*Moving the Lateran Obelisk into place using man and beast. (Plate 2)

In his work, *Moving the Obelisks*, Bern Dibner states that the reason Sixtus wanted to place the obelisk, very much a pagan artefact, in front of St. Peter's was in order to demonstrate that a Christian Rome was now dominant over a pagan Rome.¹⁷ This statement is reasonably easy to believe as it is believed that the apostle Peter was martyred under this very monolith, but is perhaps slightly more ironic as the emperor Constantine had also participated in moving obelisks. If we believe that Dibner's reasoning is correct then once

¹⁷ Dibner, 21

again we find the symbolic meaning fused within the obelisk to be that of a conquering manner. In this instance, the conqueror is the Christian religion and the empire represented is not physical, but instead institutional as the church's power spread across the globe. Perhaps best representative of this image is the *Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi* located in the Piazza Navona. Finished in 1651 this Bernini sculpture of four river gods acts as a pedestal to another of the Egyptian obelisks. The four gods are supposed to depict the four continents that the authority of the Popes presided over; the Ganges, the Nile, the Rio de la Plata, and the Danube, representing Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Europe respectively. However, a critical difference is to be found in this example. Instead of placing a cross on the obelisk's point, Innocent X had the image of a dove holding an olive branch set upon the obelisk's pyramidion. While this may have doubled as a sign of the Holy Spirit, the dove was also the symbol of the Pamphili family.¹⁸ This symbolism holds a double meaning as it signals a change in the papal mind. While Innocent's predecessor had designed for the obelisk to be a symbol of Christian dominance over paganism, Innocent's use now served as an example of papal dominance over the world, and he furthered his own prestige (as well as his family's) by personalizing the imagery represented on the monument. (Plate 3)

¹⁸ Aberto Manodori Sagredo, "The Fountain of the Four Rivers in Rome", *Italian Ways*, <http://www.italianways.com/the-fountain-of-the-four-rivers-in-rome/> (accessed March 8, 2015)



*Pamphilli dove with olive branch. (Plate 3)

It would be a century after Innocent's *Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi* before an obelisk was afforded the opportunity to leave its ancient home. Napoleon's expedition into Egypt reawakened the West's imagination for "the Orient" once again. Before the soon-to-be Emperor departed for his 1798 conquest of the east, he rounded up a few hundred specialists from a multitude of fields. These 'savants' were some of the best and brightest France had to offer. Specialists with fields as wide ranging as engineering, mineralogy, medicine, astronomy, zoology, and botany all the way to art and draftsmanship were called upon in order to create an account of the discoveries to be made while this mission was in progress. The group's official position was to help advise Bonaparte about how the country's resources

could be best put to use. However, after the defeat of the French navy and the flight of the Emperor in 1801, the group was left behind, and in having been left, created a founding work that would inspire generations of future Egyptologists, the *Description de l’Egypte*.¹⁹

Besides the *Description*, the expedition also unearthed the Rosetta Stone, the key that would unlock the secrets of Ancient Egypt. However, it would be some years later until those secrets were finally revealed by the diligent work of Jean-Francois Champollion in 1822. The young Frenchman’s discovery would prove to both unveil the mysteries of Egypt, as well as to mitigate the truth of those same mysteries. For some time it had been believed by most that the sacred writings of the ancients held some great secret, some hidden magical power, and while we did not uncover secret Egyptian teachings, we did gain knowledge about a culture that had been lost for 3000 years.

Originally the standing obelisk at Alexandria was gifted to the French as part of a diplomatic ploy set up by Mehmed Ali. However, after Champollion’s own recommendation, the French scholars decided to instead take what they believed to be a more desirable example of Egyptian construction, choosing a much larger obelisk near Luxor.²⁰ The original gift of the Alexandrian obelisk was given in 1819, Champollion’s suggestion to take the Luxor obelisk was given in 1828, but it wouldn’t be until the end of 1833 that Paris finally received its prize. Of the 3 movements that took place within the 19th century the operation conducted by the French was by far the most costly, approaching the sum of 500,000 US dollars.²¹ Cost aside, the French were able to both successfully transport and

¹⁹ For more on French expedition and the advent of Egyptology. Donald Malcolm Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, (University of California Press, 2002)

²⁰ Donald Malcolm Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I*, (University of California Press, 2002), 57

²¹ Gorringer, 52

raise their obelisk without damaging the fragile giant. Once the Luxor obelisk arrived in Paris, King Louis Philippe decided that it should be placed at the Place de la Concorde, where it stands today. Knowledge of engineering had progressed greatly since Fontana had made his movement, however due the lack of steam power and hydraulics (which would be used half a century later) the French used a system that Fontana would have been familiar with. Looking back on Fontana's work, the French needed only to improve upon his calculations, and using the same materials Fontana had used almost 2 centuries earlier (chiefly wood, rope, manpower, and iron) the Luxor obelisk was settled into its new home.²²

After the invasion of 1798 it is understandable as to why Napoleon would have desired to return to France with treasures. Capturing the ancient nation allowed him to join the ranks of previous elite Europeans who came before him, namely Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Augustus²³. Certainly knowing that there had been a history of powerful emperors appropriating these stones meant that he would have liked one of his own. In the French Emperor's mind it would have only made sense that in order to follow in these men's footsteps (especially those of Roman's like Augustus and Theodosius). Unfortunately, Napoleon did not live to see the majesty of an obelisk grace the city of Paris. Instead the obelisk came at a time when France's imperial might across the world was on the decline. Recently the French had lost their territories in North America, and their power in India had been taken over by the British many years before. No, for France the obelisk would have been an opportunity to show the world that, although the French empire had waned (increasingly a result of growing British influence), Paris was still a seat of Imperial Grace. What is interesting in the French (and future) movement was that by this time they had

²² Dibner, 50

²³ Conquered Egypt, did not remove an Obelisk.

known at least some portion of the history of these monoliths. After the secrets of hieroglyphs were unlocked a decade earlier, other than their relation to kings, popes, and emperors, the obelisks would have held no significant meaning as an item unto themselves. Thus we must believe that it is because of the relation to the greatness of previous Empires that France undertook the project and spent the tremendous sum that it did in order to retrieve its prize.

At this point it is important to understand the West's growing fascination with all things Egyptian. The discovery of the Rosetta Stone, and the distribution of the *Description* throughout Europe allowed Egyptology to explode during the mid-19th century. An ever increasing influx of Europeans filled Egypt's ancient cities with eager tourists who were hungry to take home a piece of history. Egypt, having a weak central government and no practical way in which to regulate antiquities, lost many objects which were taken across the Mediterranean and funneled into private collections or into museum records. At first it was only wealthy individuals who could afford to risk the time and funding into returning to Europe with large quantities of relics.²⁴ Later, the Pax Britannica allowed easier access into the "East" for those with lesser means, resulting in the raiding of even more treasures. Of course no single person could return with any trinket the size of an obelisk, but it was not necessarily the larger objects of antiquity that were being taken. Priceless statues, pottery, jewelry and other miscellaneous items made their way out of Egypt, most never to return and some to never be seen again. What worsened the situation is that the local Egyptians felt no qualms about assisting tourists in their pursuit to acquire artefacts. It was not only the influx of European's in the 19th and 20th centuries that resulted in the destruction of Egyptian relics.

²⁴ For a more in depth account of this process. Brian M. Fagan, *The Rape of the Nile: Tomb Robbers, Tourists, and Archaeologists in Egypt*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975)

There existed a precedent set by Islamic conquerors centuries before as evidenced by the destruction of the city of Memphis, most of the stone from which was used to build the city of Cairo. At this time, the majority of the Egyptian population would have been of Mamluk, or Arabic decent, they would have been unsympathetic towards allowing Egypt's pre-Islamic heritage to leave the country, especially from sites that were from outside of their daily routines (ex. Giza). In fact, the antiquities trade became so profitable that many men changed their occupations and became treasure hunters overnight, further hindering an already struggling Egyptian economy. Luckily, after enough time had passed, laws were enacted that allowed only certain parties access to begin digging at sites, and eventually the mass flow of rarities into Europe began to recede.²⁵

Some Europeans did however express a desire to preserve the artefacts that they were receiving. Champollion's response to a piece of criticism expresses this well, "[Bringing an artefact back to France] That will be the only way of saving them from imminent destruction and in carrying out this project I shall be acting as a real lover of antiquity, since I shall be taking them away only to preserve and not to sell".²⁶ Brian Fagan puts forward an excellent point to counter this statement. In the 1970s, the Metropolitan Museum of Art sold off a collection of relics in order to clear space for its famed Temple of Dendur.²⁷ Indeed, the collections contained within the museums of the world are only as safe as long as there remains an interest in the material.

During this rush for pieces of Egypt, the British finally acquired the obelisk that they had been gifted in 1819. Unlike the French, the English took their time acquiring their

²⁵ Brian M. Fagan, *The Rape of the Nile: Tomb Robbers, Tourists, and Archaeologists in Egypt*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 46-47

²⁶ Reid, 43

²⁷ Fagan, 370

obelisk. Pasha Mehmed Ali had originally offered them the fallen obelisk at Alexandria in 1819. In fact, due to the Pasha's inability to use international diplomacy in any great way (his position at that time was only as a provincial governor) he made a deal with both the French and British in order to appease both parties. The French received the standing obelisk at Alexandria as well as two more from a site at a Luxor, and the British received the fallen (although still intact) obelisk at Alexandria, as well as one from a site at Karnak.²⁸ As noted previously, France acted first, it wouldn't be until 1877 that due to the threat of it being cut apart by an Egyptian stone mason, that the London would make its effort to claim its prize. It is worth considering why the British waited so long to claim their obelisk. First and foremost, the cost of the operation would be great. Additionally, it would be a stain upon the Empire if something disastrous were to befall the artefact during its movement. After all, Paris had received its monument without injury. Finally, perhaps during the period leading up to the obelisk's immediate danger the British government had decided that its capital wasn't in need of this ancient visitor. What did the British need to prove? For the majority of this period the sun never set on the British Empire.

The twin to our own obelisk began its journey to London in the fall of 1877. Only one previous attempt had been made to remove this obelisk from its prone position near the shores of Alexandria, and that was in 1801 after the British victory over Napoleon's army. It seems that there were a few British soldiers who intended to use a damaged French frigate in order to bring back the monolith as a prize. Unfortunately for those men (but perhaps fortunately for the obelisk) the weakened French ship was washed away during a storm.²⁹ The British government made no effort on its own to retrieve its gift, instead it would be left

²⁸ Curran, 243

²⁹ Dibner, 50

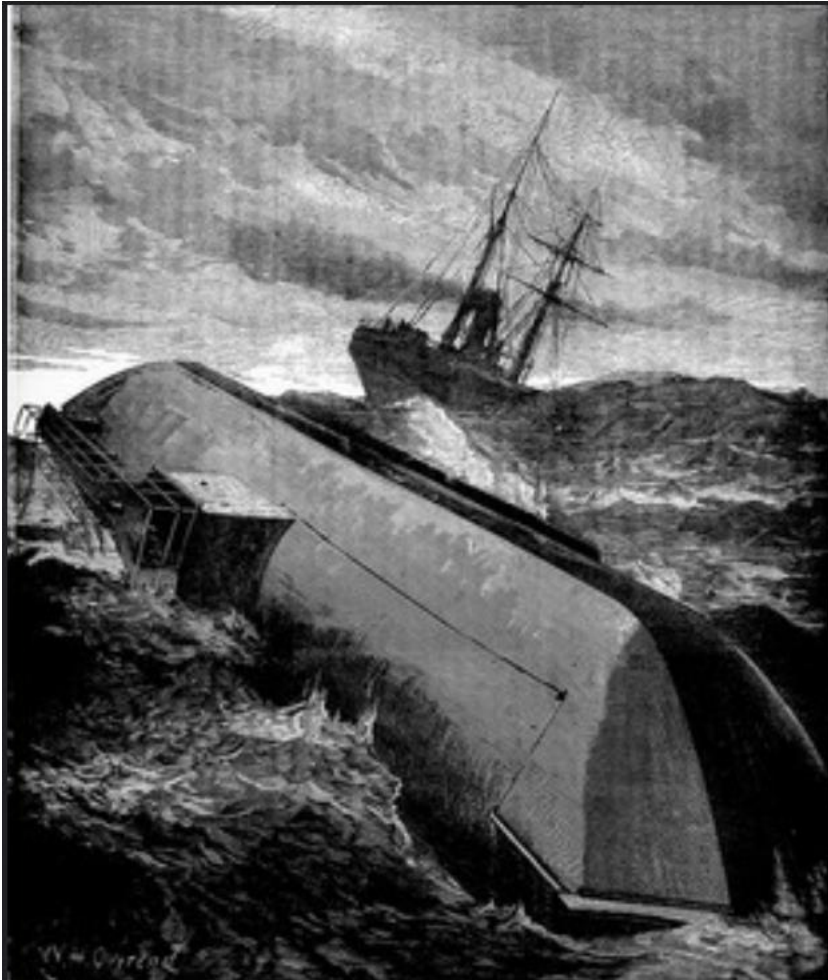
to the indomitable spirit of a certain Sir James Alexander to set out and retrieve the giant that slept along the Alexandrian shore. Alexander had visited Paris and in doing so could not help but notice the obelisk which resided in the Palace de la Concord. It was from that moment that Alexander spent the next 10 years working toward bringing London its very own obelisk. Here another difference is to be seen between the French and British operations. Unlike the French, whose transportation was sponsored by the state, the British procedure involved backing from personal financiers, predominantly Sir Erasmus Wilson. Wilson had made his fortune in dermatology, and once involved, became obsessed with bringing the obelisk home.³⁰

Also unlike the French, the British maneuver came at a time of new technology. The use of steam engines and hydraulic jacks lessened both the burden and the total cost of the transportation. A first for the removal of an obelisk, the British example would have to sail along the waters of the Atlantic, a much more frightening place than the waters of a sea like the Mediterranean. To counter the hardships of ocean travel, the operation's chief engineer, John Dixon, designed a steel caisson in which the obelisk would be placed and then towed (yes towed!) toward London. This caisson, known affectionately as the *Cleopatra*, was pulled out of Alexandria in September by the steamer *Olga*. Here again the British venture differed from both its French and American counterparts, in October, near the Bay of Biscay, a tremendous storm tossed both the *Olga* and the *Cleopatra* about in such a frightening manner that the captain of the *Olga* found it necessary to cut the obelisk away from the ship, risking the complete loss of the valuable cargo. Luckily the obelisk was safe inside of its steel casing and was found a short time later and claimed as salvage.³¹ (Plate 4) The obelisk

³⁰ Curran, 259

³¹ Dibner, 53-54

was sold back to the British admiralty and the matter settled. The Thames Embankment was chosen as the final resting spot for the well-traveled ancient, mostly due to the ease with which it could be retrieved from the water.



*Steel caisson lost at sea. (Plate 4)

The London obelisk is a bit of an oddball when it comes to analyzing its reception in the West. Unlike its twin in New York, and its cousin in Paris, the arrival of this obelisk was not met with the sizeable crowds that the other obelisks drew. In fact, the obelisk was almost completely ignored by the government of Britain. Its site along the Embankment kept it far away from Imperial centers such as Parliament or Buckingham Palace, and away from

leaders whose opinion in state would have affected day to day regulation of the Empire.³²

There may be two reasons as to why the British government did not immediately embrace the arrival of the obelisk, both having to do with timing. The first of these reasons involves the unstable government that existed in Egypt. The British eventually took power in the country in 1882, the arrival of the obelisk in 1877-78 would have come at a time when the reception of a “gift” from the Khedive may have undermined the British attempt to destabilize the authority of the then sitting Khedive. The second reason for which those in command may not have found the obelisks arrival noteworthy was that it arrived at a time when Britain held a global hegemony. The loss of some of its North American colonies a century earlier notwithstanding, the British Empire crossed the globe and had grown to heights no previous Empire had. At that time the obelisks would have held connections to Ancient Egypt, Imperial Rome, the Papacy, and most recently the French, examples of defeated power centers and Empires all. Yes, the obelisk was a symbol of a conquered Egypt, and because the obelisk was technically a gift it may not have received as much attention as other movements. However, it isn't a stretch to believe that with all the power that the British Empire carried at that time, the obelisk's arrival may have been seen as the just another piece of the puzzle.

³² Curran, 264

Chapter 3 – Coming to America

The last obelisk to depart from Egypt was removed not by an empire, but by the Republic of the United States. Reports vary about how the idea was planted in the American mind to obtain and retrieve its own obelisk. An article written by William Henry Hurlbert, contemporary editor of the *New York World*, seems to be the most likely seed. In his article, Hurlbert explains that during the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 the current Khedive of Egypt, Ismail Pasha, suggested to him that the United States should have its own obelisk.³³ Whether or not this suggestion actually occurred is unclear. What is known is that the idea gained traction, and soon the American consul to the Khedive, Elbert Farman, began to habitually discuss the matter with the Egyptian leader. Farman's memoirs relate that his European counterparts were very opposed to an acquisition made by the United States.

Had this opposition come from Egyptians of position, who had a right to be heard, I should, through delicacy, have desisted at once from all further efforts in the matter. It however came wholly from Europeans, temporarily residing in Egypt... (who) had, as against the United States, no rights to protect, and consequently were not entitled to be heard."³⁴ Clearly, Farman firmly believed that Europeans should not have been meddling in American affairs. He continues his attack, "...it was not for Europeans, whose capitals are enriched with the treasures of Ancient Egypt, to say that not a single monument should be taken to the United States."³⁵

³³ E.E. Farman, "The Negotiations for the Obelisk", *The Century Magazine*, (October 1882), 879-888

³⁴ Farman, 882

³⁵ Farman, 882

Weeks passed and no decision had been made about an obelisk. After having been granted a leave of absence in order to visit the United States, Farman returned to Egypt in November of 1878, and found, to his surprise, a change in the Egyptian government. A new “Anglo-French” government had been instated which effectively controlled all matters Egyptian. In February 1879 this provisional government was overthrown and once again Ismail Pasha was in control. Farman took this chance to press the matter of the obelisk, and at last the Khedive consented to give the standing obelisk at Alexandria as a gift. The deal was struck (Farman relates the dismay of those Europeans who resisted the gift) in writing and Henry Gorringe arrived in Egypt in October of 1879. A Lieutenant Commander in the service of the United States Navy, Gorringe had earlier submitted his plan for the removal of the monolith and, winning the bid, he received a leave of absence from the Navy in order to retrieve the gift. It had previously been detailed that William Vanderbilt would pay for the expenses of the operation once the artefact had arrived in New York. Until that point, Gorringe was responsible for raising the funds required by his own means.

Here we must pause to reflect upon who owned the obelisk at the point that it was given. Supposedly, Khedive Ismail had suggested that New York City should have its own obelisk, and as such “offered” the gift. Offered stands out as strange because when Farman approached the Khedive, the ruler professed that he had not agreed to bequeath such a gift.³⁶ Farman then told the ruler that it was the expressed desire of the people of the United States that they, like their French and English counterparts, should have an obelisk residing in their metropolis. Furthermore, in the letter that finally saw the obelisk gifted to New York,

³⁶ Farman, 881

Khedive Ismail states that the obelisk is to be a gift to the city of New York, which he hopes will be recognized as a “pledge of friendship” to the United States.³⁷ It seems that in acquiring its own obelisk the United States travelled the same road that the British had, it wished to separate itself from the removal of the object. However, in the case of the United States this separation would come under an entirely different context, a context that will be examined in chapter 4.

Upon his arrival at Alexandria, Commander Gorringe remarked of the obelisk that it had not been receiving the amount of care that such a subject should. “It would be impossible for anything to be more neglected and less appreciated than was the Alexandrian obelisk by the residents of Alexandria and tourists who passed through the city.”³⁸

The needle stood on the outskirts of the city, near a rail station. Everyday workers would pass by the artefact on their way to work, and are reported to have grown accustomed to ignoring its presence. Local neglect for the obelisk was so great that Gorringe reports on two men who had taken up a business of chipping away pieces of the stone and selling them to relic hunters. Furthering this theme of under appreciation, Gorringe assures us that if the obelisk had not been removed from where it currently stood, the Mediterranean would have eventually destroyed the foundations of where the obelisk was residing, resulting in a tumble that would most probably have broken the shaft. However, it appears that once the residents of the city learned that their obelisk was destined to be shipped to New York City, they suddenly became much more aware of its presence. Gorringe reports crowds approaching the worksite, as well as his trips into town, often resulting in boos and hisses from those who did

³⁷ Farman, 886

³⁸ Henry H. Gorringe, *Egyptian Obelisks*, (New York: Published by the Author, 1882), 1

not wish their artefact to be removed.³⁹ In addition to these uproars, abusive newspaper articles were written, expressions were made claiming that anyone who dared to commence with the operation would be assaulted (issued both vocally and with letters), and a petition to the Khedive had been drawn up.

Regardless of how the citizenry felt, the Lieutenant Commander was determined to accomplish his mission. According to Gorringe, his plan was chosen due to the safety that he promised whilst performing the operation. Should the obelisk have been damaged or destroyed, the United States would have felt the loss of an invaluable piece of history. The only example of how to lower a standing obelisk safely was the design used by the French a half century earlier. Building off the French experience, Gorringe made many alterations of his own. Firstly, he believed that the system used to lower and raise the monument should be one in the same. Gorringe also believed that the French plan had been too reckless in that it required that too many men be in charge of overseeing the entirety of the project. Instead, he wished to be able to oversee all aspects of the project, from the moment it was raised off its pedestal in Egypt, to the instant it was settled in at its new home in Central Park. Gorringe's final result ended up being a masterwork of engineering and manpower, a feat that deserves applause to this day. It would be unfair to attempt to begin describing the achievement that Gorringe accomplished in this movement. As such, I suggest that those with a greater curiosity consult Gorringe's work on their own accord.

Work began on the unearthing of the base of the obelisk on October 29, 1880. Whilst this operation was underway, many discoveries were made as crews dug nearer to where the ancient pedestal was seated. Antiquated coins, statuary, scarabee (ancient scarab shaped

³⁹ Gorringe, 13

amulets) and work tools were unearthed and Gorringe paid the finders of these objects in order to bring them along with the obelisk itself. Concerning the digging of the site, it seems that this too proved more difficult than what had previously been believed. Gorringe's account details several attempts at stopping (or at least delaying) the effort to remove the obelisk. One of these episodes involved the claims of an Italian man who had apparently bought the land surrounding the obelisk some years previously. The Italian consul present in Alexandria (another European vying to keep the obelisk out of America) pushed for this matter to be settled before further work could be continued. However, while it is true that at one time a certain Italian did own some property around the worksite, it was discovered that this man had been dead for several years!⁴⁰ Another instance involved a creditor to the Egyptian government. However, due to a prompt response from the International Court the creditor's plan was deemed senseless and obelisk operations continued. To make clear that he would not be stopped, Gorringe took certain precautions against anyone else who may have believed they could delay further work.

The United States flag was conspicuously displayed on the obelisk to indicate ownership; and the means of defending it was provided and arranged in a manner that carried conviction to anyone that had been in doubt about our sincerity and our determination to defend it and to remove it.⁴¹

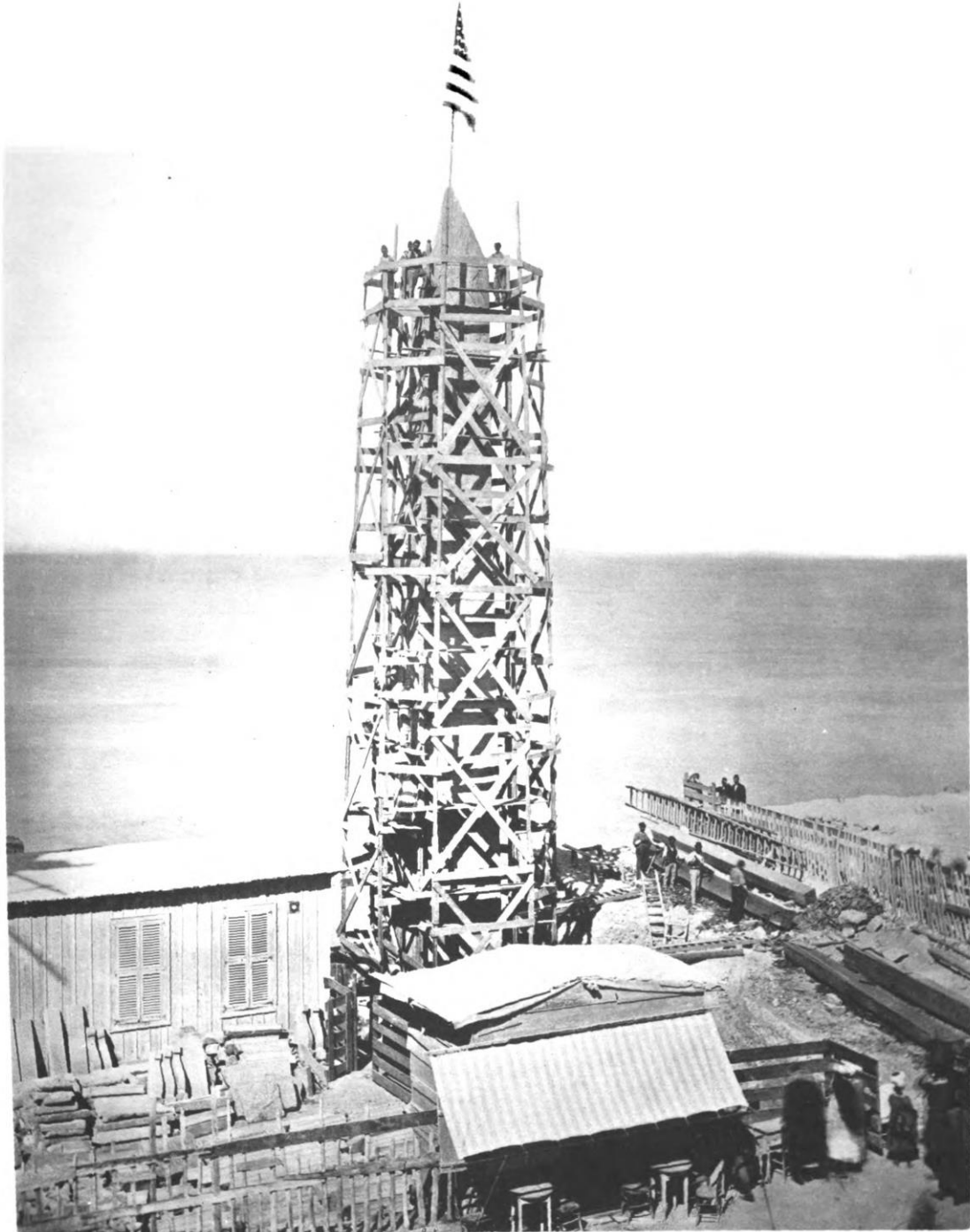
Clearly Gorringe knew that the obelisk held a deep importance for the future of the United States and he was prepared to defend the U.S. claim to the artefact. (Plate 5) The pace of the

⁴⁰ Gorringe, 11

⁴¹ Gorringe, 12

Grant Simmons

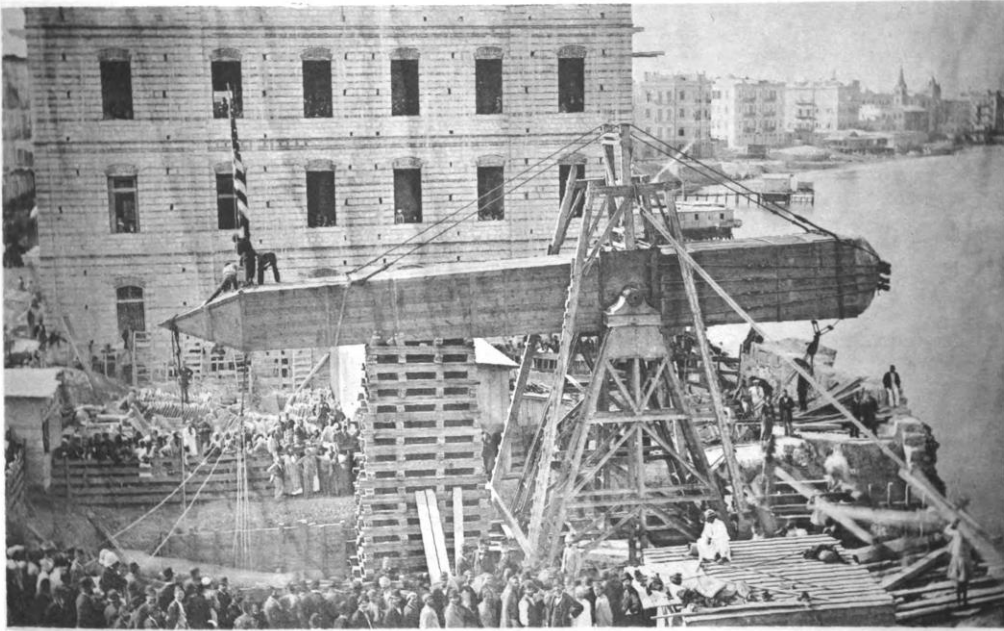
operation was increased in order to further dismay any future incidents that may have prevented Gorringe from accomplishing his task.



*Gorringe plants flag to signal American ownership. (Plate 5)

The persistence with which foreign parties attempted to prevent the removal of the Alexandrian obelisk to the United States raises cause for some alarm. There had not been such an uproar over either the British or French removals, perhaps due to the amount of archaeological work that those countries had been undertaking within Egypt up to that point. The U.S. was late to the Egyptology party, not being home to any founder of the Egyptian Museum at Cairo, and only really arriving on the scene at the very beginning of the 20th century.⁴² This lack of presence surely accounted for some misgivings toward the U.S., but there exists a second issue to consider. At this point the United States was experiencing a period of tremendous economic and societal growth, due mostly to private industry. From a European perspective, a reach for an obelisk would seem to indicate that U.S. had become conscious of its growing power, and may have indicated a desire to grow on a more global scale. This will be discussed further in chapter 4.

⁴² Reid, 198



*The dangers of turning an obelisk. Obelisk in horizontal position, encased in caisson. (Plate 6)

Work continued successfully and soon Gorringe was ready to transport the obelisk to the port. Having settled the matter of lowering the obelisk from its pedestal, the unavoidable matter of transporting the behemoth across dry land to the nearest shipyard still remained. (Plate 6) Gorringe had an answer to this problem as well. He planned to use an already proven method that had been executed years earlier by a certain Count Carburi. This plot was not nearly as complicated as the mechanism used in lowering and raising the obelisk. Instead of elaborate systems of machinery, Gorringe used a simple groove track (similar to a railroad) and a large number of cannonballs in order to transport the 224 ton obelisk. Using this method, the obelisk would have never have been in danger of being damaged. However, European merchants living within the city petitioned the governor of Alexandria to prevent the obelisk from being towed through the town stating “fear of crushing the sewer

systems”.⁴³ The petition was heard and Gorringe was forced to resort to a desperate and dangerous method of towing the obelisk within a caisson to the port proper. The most hazardous moment of this entire proposal was the moment when the caisson (filled with the obelisk) was partially in the water and yet still on land. Rough seas caused a constant smacking of the wooden box against the surface of the shore. Luckily no part of the obelisk was damaged in this process and the box was pushed safely into the water.

Once the obelisk reached the port just outside of Alexandria other issues arose. Unlike previous extractions of the monoliths (both ancient and modern), the New York obelisk needed to travel across the Atlantic, where should something go awry an easy fix could not be found. The English and French had pulled their prizes behind them with tug boats, the Romans are believed to have placed the stones on the deck of massive ships, Gorringe had the novel idea of transporting the monument in the hull of a ship. This new plan ensured that the obelisk could not be separated from the boat in any way, nor could it somehow fall overboard if the seas became too rough. However, during this time no ship would have been able to load such an awkward cargo or fit the entirety of the obelisk into its hold. Knowing this, Gorringe purchased the *Dessoug*, a cargo ship in the possession of the Khedive, and gutted its hull in order to make room for the uncomfortable length of the obelisk. Oddly, Gorringe found the *Dessoug* lying unused and dismantled and was only attracted to her due to the “fullness of her form”. Although abandoned, the measurements of the *Dessoug* proved to be perfect for allowing the ship to both hold its incredible cargo, as well as stay afloat due to this load. Also unlike other sea extractions from Egypt, Commander Gorringe did not have permission to christen the boat as a United States ship, in fact, the ship

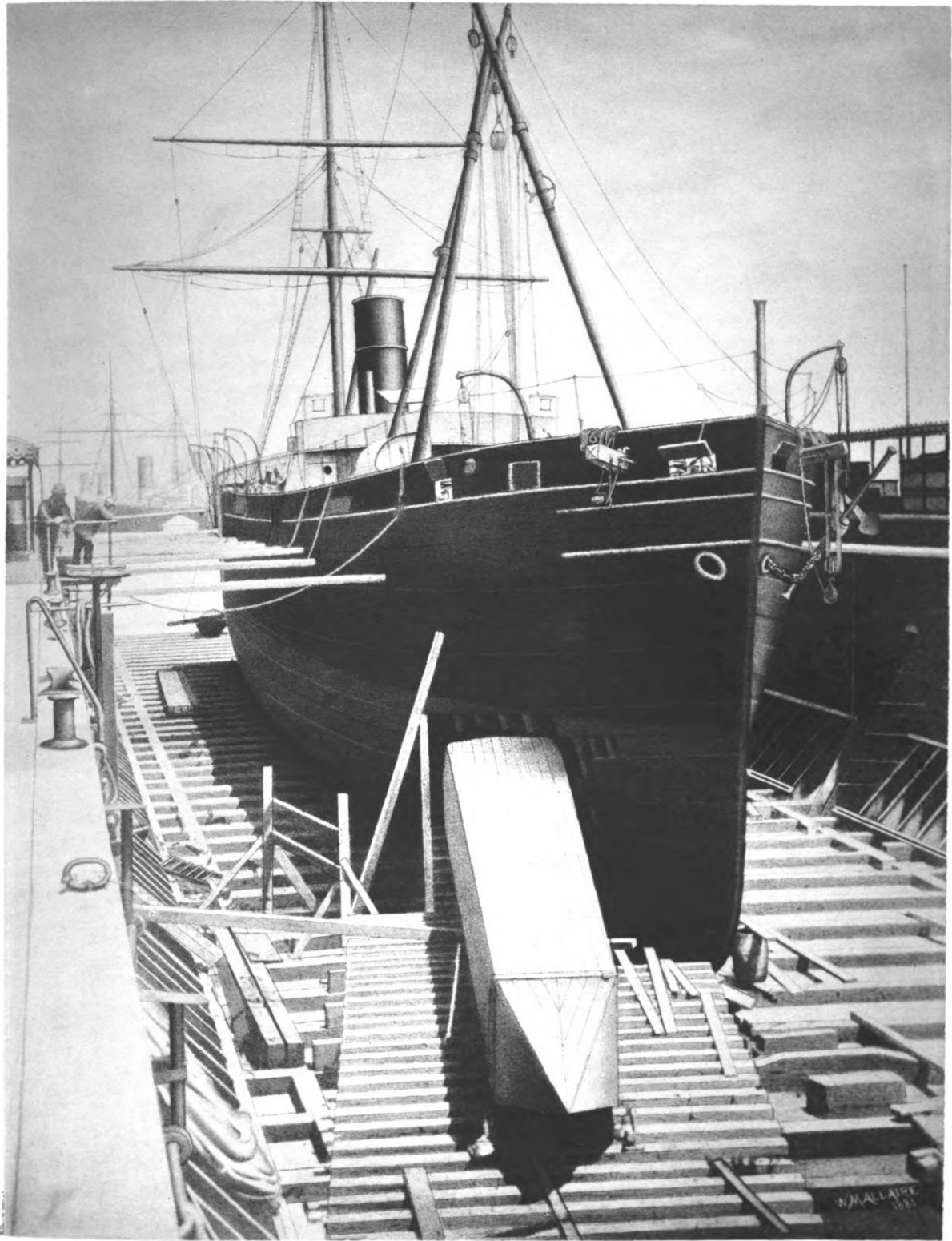
⁴³ Gorringe, 16

belonged to him and to him alone. This could have disastrous effects on the open sea, leaving the ship legally defenseless against any ship of war, or any port authority who might wish to take control of the vessel. Gorringe was forced to take this risk, and bet the outcome of the mission on his belief that a friend at a port near the Strait of Gibraltar would be able to allow the *Dessoug* to fill its hull with coal and allow it to depart without a thorough inspection of the ship's papers.⁴⁴

The time had now arrived to embark the obelisk into the *Dessoug*. After the ship had sailed into port, the only conceivable way in which the obelisk could be loaded into the steamer was to cut a hole in her keel. Prior to this operation, every precaution had been taken in order to assure that the obelisk's great weight would not endanger the internal structures or the buoyancy of the *Dessoug*. The hull was packed with heavy timber in order to prevent leaks, as well as to provide a stable holding place for the ship's strange cargo. Gorringe comments that the skill required in order to "fit" the wood to the internal structure of the *Dessoug* was incredibly difficult and that the feat should be remembered as a testament to those local workers who were able to overcome that meticulous work.⁴⁵ Furthermore, this work had been accomplished to such a quality that no water ever entered the hull during the entirety of the trip, a danger that Gorringe had taken precautions against by installing a system of water pumps into the innards of the ship. With the ship prepared, the obelisk was then raised and moved by a series of hydraulic pumps and loaded into the steamer. In all, it took 10 days in order to complete the preparations for embarking the obelisk, and a total of 8 hours in order to complete the embarkation itself. The total amount of force required to maneuver the monument was around 20 tons. (Plate 7&8)

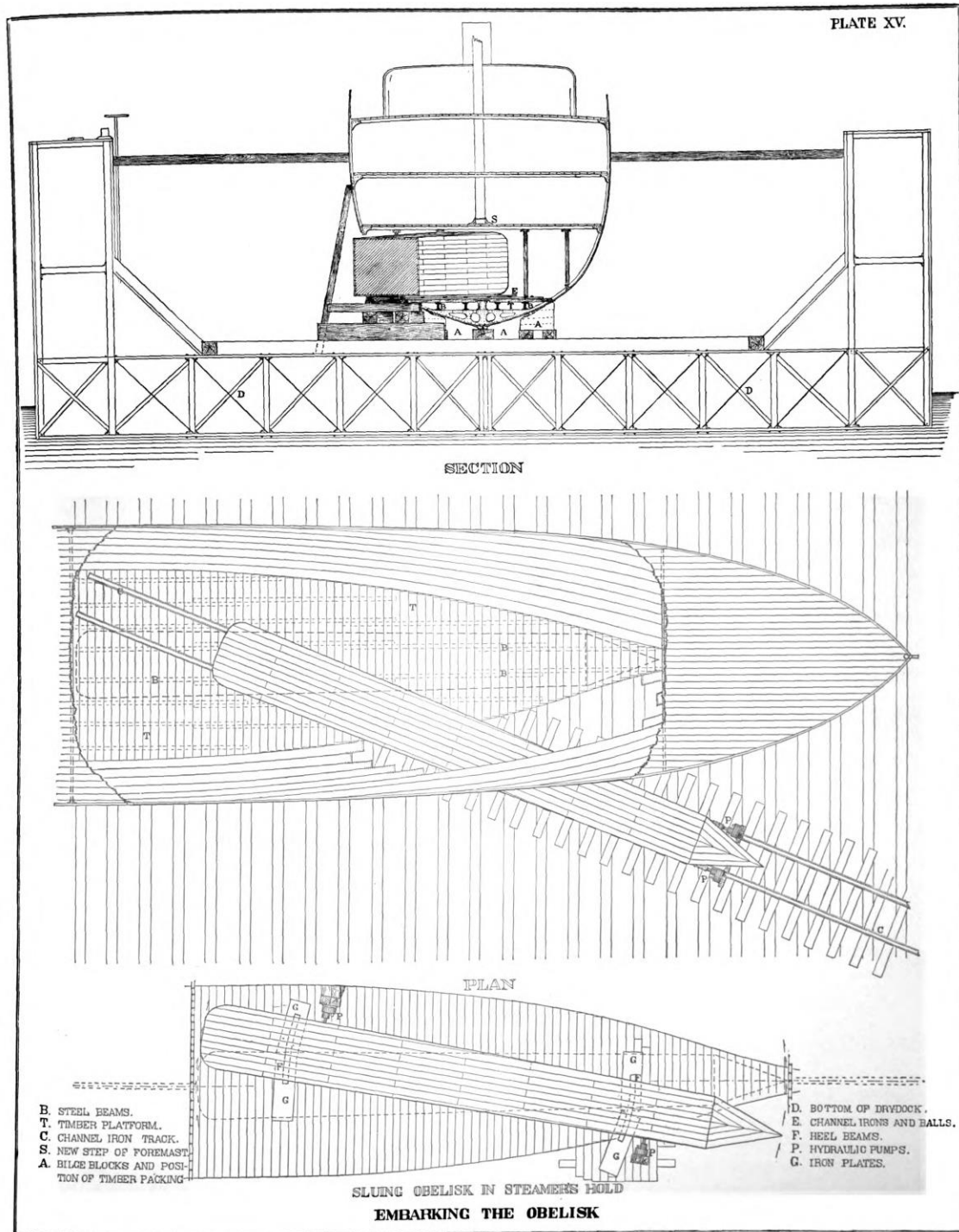
⁴⁴ Gorringe, 23

⁴⁵ Gorringe, 27



RTOTYPE

MAROUN & BILSTADT N. Y.



*Pictures above show embarkation of the obelisk into the hull of the Dessoug. (Plate 7 & 8)

It had been previously decided by Gorringe that he would prefer an English speaking crew, and as such he sent word to England in order to discover any soul who wished to undertake the journey. What came out of England was a series of fellows who provided a humorous series of events. Gorringe reports that the First and Second Officers that he received had been confirmed drunkards, the latter happened to be to such an extent that he nearly killed himself on four separate occasions. Twice he fell into the ship's hull, and twice more he fell overboard, all four times he was confirmed to have been drinking. This man was dismissed. It seems that the officers were not the only members of the English crew to be found fond of having a drink on the job. Gorringe reports that, "The engineers were useful hard-working, hard-drinking men. the quartermasters would do credit to a pirate's crew."⁴⁶

In all, 48 men who had given their oath to see the journey through deserted Gorringe before the voyage began. Unfortunately for Gorringe, he was forced to make the decision to send word to Trieste in order to contract more sailors. All but 3 of these men abandoned the expedition once they arrived in Alexandria. The 3 that remained only did so in order to join a fellow countryman, a Delmatian, who had dedicated himself to the voyage. In all, only the four of the crew, excluding the quartermasters, could speak or understand the slightest amount of English. Furthermore, because the *Dessoug* carried no nationality, deserters could not be arrested and any bad behavior observed while on the sea could not be legally punished. Gorringe laments that, "It must be evident that, considering the circumstances, commanding the *Dessoug* was not the most desirable and comfortable of occupations."⁴⁷

Once again we find an awkward portion of the story. Had the *Dessoug* been confirmed as a United States ship, there would have been no problem in acquiring a crew

⁴⁶ Gorringe, 28

⁴⁷ Gorringe, 28

suited to the task at hand. But due to the abnormality of who the ship belonged to, and more importantly who the obelisk belonged to, Gorringe was unable to put together a decent and proper crew. But perhaps this “pirate crew” is another pattern seen by the likes of the obelisk. It had been slaves who were responsible for inscribing and dragging the obelisk in Egyptian and Roman times. Uneducated laborers were used during Fontana’s movement, and lowly salvagers proved to be the salvation of the British obelisk. Due to this long standing history of the involvement of lower classes in moving obelisks, it only seems fitting that Gorringe had to deal with such a rag tag group of men in order to complete his movement. In fact, of all the men who were responsible for ever moving an obelisk, Gorringe is perhaps the man who held the least power of those he supervised.

With the situation of the crew sorted out, Gorringe set sail on June 12th, 1880. Before doing so he had returned to Alexandria one final time in order to thank the Khedive and his ministry in their support and to praise them for not giving way under the pressure of foreigners to revoke the gift. The Khedive in turn congratulated Gorringe for his efforts and thanked him for seeing the obelisk unharmed during the operation, which if would have happened, would have resulted in a great embarrassment for himself.

The journey succeeded without any great difficulty. The *Dessoug* reached Gibraltar in order to reload, and as Gorringe had hoped, he was met with very little resistance. The stop also allowed the ships boilers to be repaired, they had begun to leak due to the ineptness of the lead engineer who had been charged back in Alexandria to ensure that they would be ready for the entirety of the voyage. However, once this event had passed, the ship headed into the open sea. The ship is said to have sailed wonderfully, and the crew eventually settled into a daily monotonous routine, which pleased Gorringe. The obelisks fittings were checked

constantly in order to prevent any small mishap that may have popped up due to the rolling and pitching of the vessel.

As with previous movements, it seems that the U.S. version was not destined to be a complete stranger to disaster. Two voyage instances of peculiarity are worth noting. The first involves the breaking of the steamer's after-crank shaft. On July 6th, 1,500 miles from New York, the *Dessoug's* engines abruptly stopped churning. Examination of the shaft showed an old flaw in the metalwork that could have snapped at any moment. Luckily, Gorringe had been persistent in making sure that he received everything that had belonged to the *Dessoug* while it was detained in the shipping yard, this included a section of replacement shaft. After 6 days of sailing using only the wind, the shaft was eventually repaired, the engines were matched, and the steamer could power forward at full speed.⁴⁸ The second incident occurred during this period of repair. On July 10th reports of water spouts seen in the distance reached Gorringe. Due to the ship's incapacitated state, if one of those spouts were to near the vessel, serious damage may have occurred. Gorringe ordered all of the necessary precautions to be taken, and soon enough a massive 50' column of water was headed for the windward side of the ship. The craft had no means of breaking the spout (cannon fire would have done the job) and Gorringe could only await calmly for the deluge to hit the decks. Luck was again on Gorringe's side, as the spout changed direction and broke some 1000 yards safely away from the *Dessoug*. The rest of the trip concluded without note and the *Dessoug* pulled into port on July 20th. The crew was discharged, and the ship was opened to visitors for a 10 day period. Gorringe remarks that on one day 1,711 visitors boarded the vessel in order to view its cargo

⁴⁸ Gorringe, 29

(still inside the caisson). Curiously, one of the ships cabin boys, an Arab named Hassan, seemed to have attracted attention similar to that seen by the obelisk.⁴⁹

Now that the obelisk had arrived in New York its journey was by no means complete, nor was it yet safe from harm. Still ahead of the ancient being lay its disembarkation from the *Dessoug*, its journey through the streets of the city, and the operation needed to raise it into an upright position. Before Gorringe had set out on his journey, the decision had been made that the obelisk would be set up in Central Park, within the vicinity of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET). This position was chosen for several reasons, of which were, the proximity to the MET for which the obelisk would be associated, the nearness to favored drives and walkways, and access to Graywacke Knoll which provided a strong flat granite foundation. In addition to these reasons, the Knoll is one of the highest natural positions on Manhattan Island. Furthermore, this position would allow the obelisk to stand out prominently, as opposed to being dwarfed by tall buildings. The position was also chosen with the hope that Central Park would continue to maintain its position of “centrality” well into the future in order that the monument would be easily accessible to all. These reasons held up, and a meeting held on July 27th saw the decision finalized that Graywacke Knoll was to be the site onto which the obelisk would be settled.⁵⁰

Before the obelisk could be removed, arrangements were made to have its pedestal loaded off the *Dessoug* and positioned at the sight well before the obelisk’s arrival. The pedestal was lifted out of the *Dessoug* by means of a derrick (a lifting device similar to a crane) in an operation that Gorringe remarks as “strangely contrasting” his similar experience in loading the pedestal into the vessel back in Alexandria. In order to move the pedestal from

⁴⁹ Gorringe, 29

⁵⁰ Gorringe, 31

the wharf at the end of 51st street, a truck pulled by a team of 32 horses was required to pull the great burden. In addition to this team of horses, one of the hydraulic pumps was used to give the truck a push in order to more easily get it rolling. Eventually the truck could no longer be used due to the impossibility of traversing Central Park, and a system of greased wooden skids was used to propel the pedestal into a position near its final resting place.

Before the pedestal could be moved into position, a ceremony was held and a number of objects were placed into the foundation at the Knoll. Applications for space came in from all over the country, and eventually were narrowed down to a few private individuals and government agencies. Those that donated were the Departments of State, Treasury, War, Interior, and the Navy, The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Anglo-Saxon Lodge, William Henry Hurlbert, and Commander Gorringe himself. Items donated included, copies of the New Testament translated into many languages, copies of the United States Constitution and Declaration of Independence, full sets of coinage from 1880, census data from 1870, naval maps, emblems of the Order of Freemasons, a dictionary, the works of William Shakespeare, an 1880 almanac, and photographs of the entire obelisk operation to that point. Among these items, many others were also donated, however by far the most curious is the small box that William Hurlbert contributed. The box's contents were known only to him and was sealed with a gold plate detailing the removal of the obelisk. After the addition of several more items that could fill the entirety of the space (a hydraulic pump included) the chamber was sealed and the pedestal was finally moved into position.⁵¹ To this day these donations lay buried where there were placed all those years ago. A testament to the hope that these people had concerning the longevity of the obelisk.

⁵¹ Gorringe, 32-34

The exact location of where Gorringe could disembark the obelisk caused some issue for him. There was only one dock within the New York harbor that could handle the specific method of disembarking the monument. The owners of this dock somehow discovered this fact and decided to charge Gorringe a greatly increased amount for permission to use their dock. This amount was deemed outrageous and Gorringe decided to seek another, more cost efficient route. His second idea involved steaming the *Dessoug* toward either Baltimore or Philadelphia and then using a system of canals to bring the obelisk back to New York City. However, due to the fact that the vessel did not have a nationality, the impending bureaucratic nightmare dissuaded Gorringe from deciding upon this plan. Finally, Gorringe found a way around the high cost of the dock owners, he would use a marine railway along with the force of the rising tide to remove the treasure that his vessel held. Preparations were made, and after 2 weeks of working building the appropriate staging areas, the obelisk was disembarked from the *Dessoug* and on to Staten Island in 50 minutes.⁵²

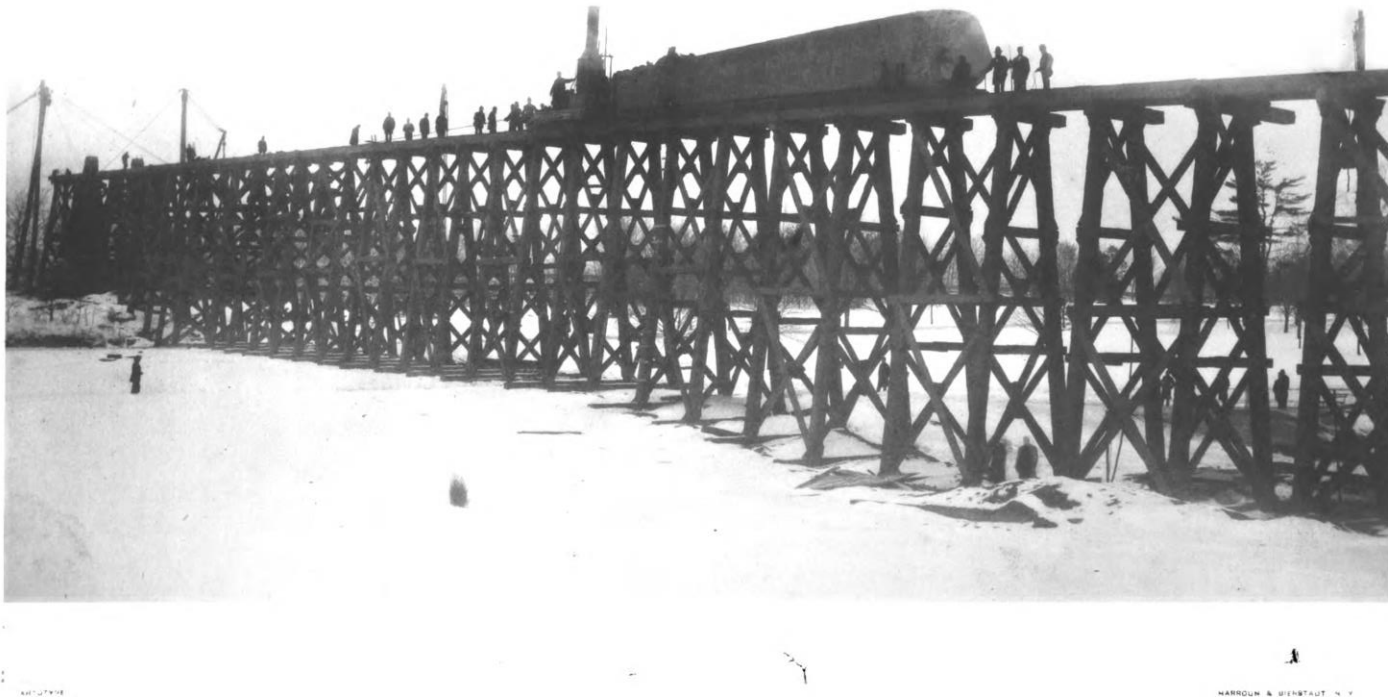
Now that the caisson containing the obelisk had finally been landed, the attempt to move the mass from Staten Island to Manhattan could now be made. The plan was for the power of the tide to raise up 2 pontoons on which the obelisk could be towed across the bay. These pontoons would at that point be lowered by the recessing tide onto the shore of Manhattan near 96th street. With all the necessary safety precautions having been established, the steamer *Manhattan* pulled the flotilla across the bay safely and without error. The obelisk had finally made ground on Manhattan. However, before the obelisk could actually reach 96th street, one small inconvenience was found in a busy stretch of train track located on the bank near the landed obelisk. In order to move the obelisk into the city proper, the track would

⁵² Gorringe, 40

have to be crossed. Keeping pedestrians in mind, Gorringe proposed a temporary bridge that could be thrown across the track for a short period of time and then removed just as quickly. This time too, the plan went off without a hitch. It took only an hour and 20 minutes to move the obelisk across the track. Only one train was delayed by 25 minutes, and this carried only freight.

Only 10,905 feet remained between the obelisk and its new position in Central Park. Due to its many turns, the path chosen for the obelisk was perhaps not the easiest route possible, but it did provide the highest quality streets as well as a more uniform grade. The method of movement that best balanced cost and efficiency was a matter of creating a system of rollers, a cradle, and a ways for the obelisk to travel on. (Plate 9) This resulted in a form of transportation that allowed the obelisk to be moved by a pile driving engine, greatly reducing the amount of man power needed to propel the heavy burden. However, due to the awkwardness of the obelisk, as well as the intense care needed to move such a precious piece, work on this portion of the journey was slow. In fact, it took 112 days to move the entire distance, which comes to equal about 97 feet per day. January 5th, 1881 saw the arrival of the obelisk at its new home.⁵³

⁵³ Gorringe, 45



*Obelisk making its way into Central Park. (Plate 9)

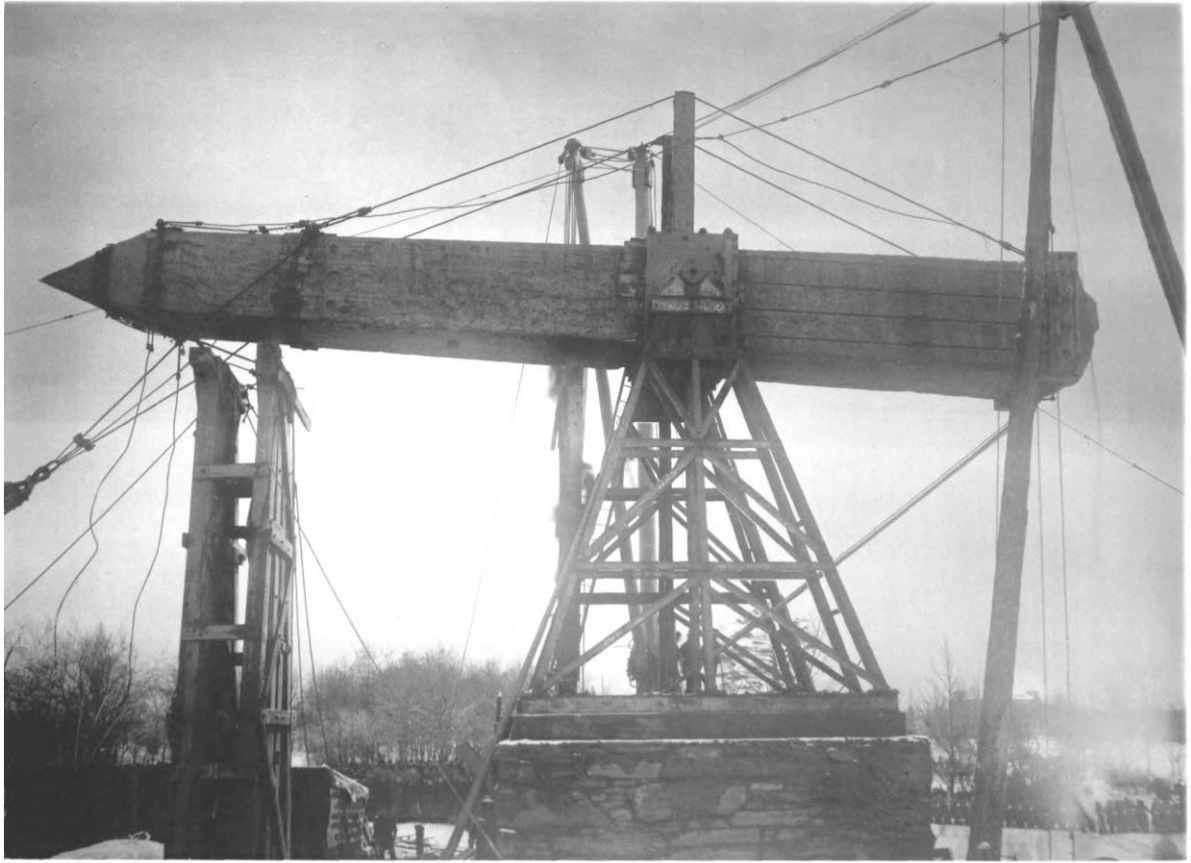
Gorringe employed a similar method of raising and turning the obelisk that he had used in Alexandria. However, he now had access to derricks and more hydraulic pumps which eased the operation slightly. Gorringe knew that the Egyptians had rested their obelisks on the pedestal itself, while it appeared that the Romans raised them off the surface of the pedestal by some means (in the case of Cleopatra's Needle bronze crabs were used). Gorringe decided to use the Egyptian method and ordered that the obelisk should be placed in contact with the pedestal. The Lieutenant Commander wished to keep the obelisk in as similar a condition as he could when he found it in Alexandria. As such, he commissioned the creation of 4 crabs similar to those found supporting the obelisk in Alexandria. These crabs were replicas made from a plaster cast of the originals, each weighing around 922

pounds. The crabs were destined to be used in order to further secure the obelisk to the pedestal.

January 22, 1881 was a cold and windy day, however, a crowd still gathered around the Graywacke Knoll in order to witness the effort of moving the obelisk into its final vertical position. Gorringe had reset the obelisk to a horizontal level previously in order to demonstrate how the turning structure worked to the crowd. At his command, the mechanism swung the obelisk into a 45 degree angle, a photo was snapped, and then a second command was given to swing the obelisk into its full 90 degree angle. At this moment a loud cheer erupted from the estimated 10,000 people watching in the crowd. In order to lower the obelisk the crowd needed to be dispersed that that the hydraulic pumps could lower the mass onto the pedestal. At 8 P.M. the obelisk was finally rested on its pedestal and released from the turning structure. (Plate 10)

It had taken 15 months for the obelisk to travel 5,380 miles by water and 11,520 feet by land. In all it had been lowered 39 feet and lifted 230 feet. The obelisk now had a permanent home where the odds of it being toppled over, by man or nature, were very slim. Gorringe reports that it would take a force of 78 tons directed at the obelisks center of gravity in order to topple it without first raising it from the pedestal. He also notes that the maximum pressure that a strong hurricane could produce, 15 tons, would not be able to knock the monument over. Finally, Gorringe reckoned that, “It would require an exceptionally severe earthquake, one that would leave very few buildings in New York standing, to render the obelisk unstable.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Gorringe, 48



*Obelisk suspended in mid-turn. Note use of derricks while in America. (Plate 10)



*Obelisk as it stood in 1881. (Plate 11)

Chapter 4 – American Reception

Chapter 2 was a short discussion on European feelings concerning the obelisks they acquired. Egypt, Rome, the Vatican, France, and England, for centuries, for these culturally and politically dominant powers, the obelisks illustrate connections across empires over the previous 3000 years. The next major player in the obelisk saga was the Republic of the United States of America. The U.S., having only existed as an independent nation at this point for little more than 100 years, was experiencing a time of tremendous economic growth. The great entrepreneurs of the 19th century were bringing a new level of prosperity to the nation, prosperity that allowed these men to envision their young nation rising to a level of global importance that could rival the countries of Europe.

A not-so-pleasant New York day in January saw the city's oldest man made structure finally being propped into place. A few weeks later in February a celebration was had in which prominent guests appeared to recognize the arrival of the obelisk, as well as the achievement on the part of Lieutenant Commander Gorringe. It is at this ceremony that we can catch a glimpse of the feelings that those in attendance felt about their new acquisition. Mr. Henry G. Stebbins, formerly a U.S. Congressman, was supposed to have given an introductory speech but was unfortunately unable to make an appearance due to a cold that would ultimately be the end of him. However, he did send a short letter containing his apology for this hindrance. Within this letter Stebbins remarks upon his particular interest in the obelisk, calling it an “artistic monument of an ancient civilization” which, “fitly looks on the beginning of what I trust will become a great museum.”⁵⁵ He continues by saying, “the museum is destined to supply a permanent home for trophies of all countries and all periods

⁵⁵ Gorringe, 50

in which art has flourished and left its memorials.”⁵⁶ Stebbins ends his letter with a final comment, “I hope that...[this monument]...will encourage our wealthy citizens to enlarge the Art Museum and to fill it with all those treasures which so greatly increase the attraction of the Metropolis.”⁵⁷

Next a speech was given by then Secretary of State William Evarts. In his speech, Evarts praises the success that Goringe achieved during his mission, and on many occasions refers to the obelisk as a “prize” as well as a “gift”. Evarts also nods to the trouble that Goringe and Farman had concerning the interference of European powers while the obelisk was in Alexandria, “[efforts crowned with success]...notwithstanding some obstacles on the part of jealous governments which thought it a shame that their capital should not hold all the obelisks.”⁵⁸ Evarts continues his speech by making some interesting remarks concerning the prior movements of obelisks. “This is not the first obelisk that has left its home in Egypt to seek new scenes; but never before perhaps has the transfer been as voluntary on the part of the Egyptian government as now.” He remarks that “every conqueror has seemed to think that the final trophy of Egypt’s subjection and the proud pre-eminence of his own nation could be shown only by taking an obelisk-the chief mark of Egyptian pomp and pride-to grace the capital of the conquering nation.”⁵⁹ He reminds his audience of Rome as emperors, who took from Egypt its treasures while it was “subject and abject.” Evarts next moves into the timeframe of his own lifetime, describing the French-British conflict as having made Egypt a battlefield. He claims that Egypt only gave England its obelisk because the Khedive felt obligated to offer the gift (he also makes a short aside as England at that moment in time

⁵⁶ Goringe, 50

⁵⁷ Goringe, 50

⁵⁸ Goringe, 50

⁵⁹ Goringe, 51

was “then the great power of the earth”). He even goes as far as insulting the British operation due to its deadly accident and inefficiencies. As for the French movement, Evarts only makes note that it cost around the sum of 500,000 dollars, “or about five times as much as our enterprise.”⁶⁰ Evarts ends his speech with a powerful evocation of exactly how much the obelisks have seen in their time on Earth. He describes them as witnesses to the rise of Moses, the fall of Rome, Byzantium, and even France. He describes Britain’s monolith as not having been in that country long enough to have seen what will come of it. Finally, Evarts turns to the newly arrived obelisk in New York, “...and yet this obelisk may ask us, ‘Can you expect to flourish forever? Can you expect wealth to accumulate and man not decay? Can you think that the soft folds of luxury are to wrap themselves closer and closer around this nation and the pith and vigor of its manhood know no decay? Can it creep over you and yet the nation know no decrepitude?’ These are questions that may be answered in the time of the obelisk, but not in ours.”⁶¹

These two men, albeit not your average American, clearly put quite a bit of thought into how they wanted to present their new possession to the public. Stebbins believes that the monument will be a testament to a bright future of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a future that we can believe he would be happy with today. Stebbins also expresses a desire for the “wealthier” members of society to ensure that the museum will forever be able to grow and accumulate more “trophy” in order to further beautify the city. While not expressly referring to empire in any clear way, Stebbins is conveying a message of affluence and culture, which at this time was undergoing a rapid number of changes. American “high” culture in the 19th century had been undergoing a system of changes, forced down upon

⁶⁰ Gorringer, 52

⁶¹ Gorringer, 52

society by the elites, in order that the country as a whole would seem better behaved.⁶² One need only look at the reforms made by Frederick Olmstead in Central Park itself to get a hint of what this exactly meant. Before this culture shift, Central Park had been a much livelier place, and it would be under Olmstead's plan that the Park became a place of unhurried leisure.⁶³ Thus excluding members of the general public from those who Stebbins wanted to donate to the museum, the obelisk, for this man, was the chance to show the wealthy that America too could bring home "trophies" from any corner of the globe.

The Secretary of State's address carried with it, a similar, yet slightly more refined tone. Secretary Evarts was well aware of who had previously removed obelisk from Egypt, and what exactly those movements had meant. As the Secretary of State he could never claim that a link existed between the United States and the "conquerors" of previous obelisks. So instead he criticizes those who had come before the U.S. and attempts to distance the country from those earlier powers. And it is precisely this distancing that allows Evarts to show how a new empire has been formed. No, the United States had not directly invaded nor harmed Egypt, but due to the new-found strength of the United States in politics, the Americans could acquire an obelisk from Egypt anyway. Bringing the obelisk to the U.S. thus marked an important moment in American expansion overseas, expansion that was mostly founded on purchasing power, and the ability to successfully negotiate itself to a powerful position.

The 19th century certainly was a productive period for the United States. A self-proclaimed Republic, American's expressed expansionist ideology: one only need delve into

⁶² For more information. Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988)

⁶³ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 202

the concept of Manifest Destiny to understand the general feeling of the nation. In addition to this feeling, one need only look at the events surrounding the arrival of the obelisk. Within a century of its existence, the United States had already more than tripled its territorial holdings. Years before the obelisks arrival the U.S. had already begun amassing territory, the Louisiana Purchase was made in 1803, California became a state in 1850, and Alaska was purchased in 1867. In addition to these early acquisitions, President James Monroe issued his now famous doctrine, effectively asserting the U.S.'s desire to have sole control of the Western hemisphere. After the obelisk's arrival the Spanish American War projected American interests around the world. Not only defeating a European nation (and a once powerful empire in its own right) the United States gained the territories of Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam and the Philippines in 1898. Finally, Hawaii was annexed in that same year. Later additions would be Wake Island, American Samoa, the Panama Canal Zone, and the Virgin Islands, effectively giving us the territory that United States continues to hold or at least influence until this day.

What is to be said of these acquisitions? Officially a Republic, the United States could never admit to having an imperialist ideology. However, it cannot be said that there was no harm done in amassing this territory, for much like the Romans 2000 years before them, the Americans of the 19th century displaced many peoples from their ancestral homes in order to advance the interests of their nation. However, unlike the Romans, the United States gained most of its new territory through purchasing power, creating a new kind of "empire". In addition to the act of expanding, the ideology behind the expansion was much like that of the Popes, in that Manifest Destiny gave Americans the divine right to conquer every piece of land from sea to shining sea.

In addition to expansion, other imperial processes can be seen popping up at this time. The revolution of Neo-Classical architecture, or the modeling of modern buildings in the form of classic Roman or Greek edifices, began appearing within the nation's capital. Examples abound as seen in the Capitol Building, the tomb of Ulysses S. Grant, and the U.S. Treasury Building.⁶⁴ Indeed, it is not difficult to see the signs of leaders in Washington wanting to recall the grandeur that was once classical Greece and Rome. Other building projects occurring at this time were also unexpected of anything that considered itself a formal Republic. It is also during this time that some of the country's more famous national monuments were completed. Construction on the Statue of Liberty was completed in 1886, the Lincoln Memorial, and perhaps most importantly the Washington Monument.⁶⁵ One look at this impressive structure and the average American will instantly recognize its powerful shape.

Although not a true obelisk, the Monument is nonetheless likened in many ways to its ancient predecessor. What is perhaps most interesting about this American icon is the time period over which it was built. Construction began in 1848, postponed from a lack of funding until 1877, and finally completed in 1885. Besides age, differencing this structure from its distant relative in New York are a few items which need addressing. Unlike the obelisk in New York, the Washington Monument received funding from congress in order to complete its construction. Also unlike the monolith in New York, the Washington monument is set to a much greater scale. It stands at a colossal 554 feet, eclipsing its ancestor by 8 times. The Washington Monument became the world tallest structure at the time of its completion, and

⁶⁴ These are examples directly from this time. There would be others completed after 1900 such as the Jefferson Memorial in 1943.

⁶⁵ To further relate the theme of Manifest Destiny, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial was designated in 1935. Today the Gateway Arch in St. Louis is the most famous item from this Memorial.

still holds the record for the being the world's tallest stone structure. Due to the size and government backing of the Monument, there is thus some inherent difference between the two objects.⁶⁶ In funding the completion of the Monument, perhaps the U.S. government was making a statement to the rest of the world, not only did America have its own authentic Egyptian obelisk, it also demonstrated that it could build the tallest obelisk like structure in the world, something that the Romans also took part in.

Setting aside politics and the views of elite men, what were the feelings of the average American? Prior to the obelisk's arrival in the city, the *New York Times* published quite a number of snippets pertaining to just this question. For those that submitted their opinion to the paper, the years 1877-1879 held the opinion that the obelisk should not come to America, and by one account was considered meaningless, so much so that the author of this particular passage compares the acquiring of the stones to "painting one's name on the pyramids or scratching it on the pillars of the Parthenon".⁶⁷ Other accounts are more humorous. One example of these claims that the entire affair was a mere publicity stunt put on by the editors of the *New York World* in order for that paper to draw more readers. This author remarks that the obelisk contained a prophecy that in 3000 years that the *World* would attempt to use its increase its readership, in doing so he relates features of the obelisk to the paper in order to degrade it. For example, "the obelisk is seventy feet in height...In this instance, the height of the obelisk obviously prefigures the seventy subscribers to the *World*. It may also refer to the seven different capitalists who at different times have subscribed ten dollars each to keep the *World* in existence."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Originally the Monument was being paid for through private funding. Funds ran out in 1854 and work only resumed in 1877, after the government agreed to finish construction.

⁶⁷ "Obelisks", *New York Times*, 29 Oct. 1879

⁶⁸ "Our Inheritance in the Obelisk", *New York Times*, 13 Nov. 1879

Other than these letters, the *Times* does not appear to report much on the happenings in Alexandria, only an occasional minor update. Once the monolith arrived in the city however, stories concerning its affairs became more frequent. Of particular interest is the reaction of the public. It seems that the obelisk and its pedestal received a great amount of attention as they passed through the streets of New York (understandably so!), but it also seems that not all of this attention was positive. Members of the audience would scour any area that the relics passed over in search of any fragments that had fallen from the stones. The hunt for souvenirs became so serious that a protective layer of steel had to be placed around it in order to protect it from would be chiselers.⁶⁹ Despite its initial criticisms, the obelisk received a great number of visitors during its first few weeks. So many so that doubt was cast upon whether its current resting place was chosen wisely as pedestrians were placing themselves in harm's way in their attempt to get a view of the stone. Alas, the great monument's fame was fleeting, the years following the obelisk's arrival saw a sharp decline in stories concerning its presence. Luckily for the obelisk, that moment of fame was but the smallest of blips on its ever progressing march through history.

⁶⁹ "Curiosity Seekers at Work", *New York Times*, 26 Dec. 1880

Epilogue

After little more than a century the obelisk continues to stand where it was placed on that cold January day in 1881. Once one of the tallest features of the city, the obelisk now finds itself completely dwarfed by its surroundings. It has seen Stebbin's vision for the MET come true, it has played witness to disease, fire, and the rise of its city into the commercial capital of the world. Yet the obelisk itself has changed very little. How has the last century affected how we perceive our ancient visitor?

It seems that a short time after the obelisk's arrival in the city it found problems with its new environment. The New York spring was especially harsh on the desert dweller, as moisture and freezing began to severely damage the monument. In 1885, after 2 barrels full of debris had fallen from the monolith, the obelisk went through a water proofing process.⁷⁰ In 2011, Zahi Hawass, the minister of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities threatened to take back the obelisk due to neglect.⁷¹ It is highly doubtful that Hawass would have been successful in having the artefact removed, but his words did ensure that the obelisk would receive a touch up. That touch up came in the summer of 2014 when the Central Park Conservancy joined with the MET in order to privately raise the 500,000 dollars necessary

⁷⁰ "A Coating for the Obelisk", *New York Times*, 3 Nov. 1885

⁷¹ Lisa W. Foderaro, "For Cleopatras' Needle, A Cleaning to Last 500 Years", *New York Times*, 7 May 2014

for a proper retouching. In addition, the museum put on a special exhibit highlighting the history of the monument. (Plate 12)

Today obelisks are ever present in many ways. For those cities fortunate enough to be home to even one of the artefacts, they are now landmarks that mark the city for exploration. When one thinks of St. Peters if the obelisk that stands in its courtyard is not envisioned then that thought is not wholly complete. The same is true the obelisk residing in Paris, it remains a symbol of that city, much like the Eiffel Tower, or the Arc De Triomphe. In addition, the obelisks have gained a few other symbolic meanings, specifically one that has been noticed throughout history, a relation to the male phallus. If Sigmund Freud is to be believed it is perhaps this relationship that allowed the obelisk to become the powerful symbol that it has.⁷²

The authors of *Obelisk: A History* claim that the 20th century has provided the opportunity for the obelisks to acquire more meanings than ever before, and perhaps they are correct in that assertion.⁷³ No matter how they are seen the obelisks will continue to stand as witnesses to history, and it is perhaps fitting to end this discussion with a thought from Bern Dibner (a prominent obelisk scholar), for it can be believed that the obelisk that now resides in Central Park can truly say, “I have witnessed this great change in only one-fiftieth of my existence, for in my youth in Egypt I have had Moses look upon my face, and Joseph has paused within my shadow. I have seen a great city, as great as yours, burn and disappear and I have stood near the sea for 20000 years to witness another great city blossom and die. Be not proud, for I shall exist when all this brick and steel about me has crumbled into dust!”⁷⁴

⁷² If this is true, the completion of the Washington Monument may contain further connotations of “Obelisk Envy”.

⁷³ Refer to Chapter 12 in *Obelisk: A History* for further information.

⁷⁴ Dibner, 7



*Obelisk during retouching with author in foreground. Summer 2014. (Plate 12)

Bibliography

Ammianus Marcellinus. *Rerum gestarum libri*. Trans. John C. Rolfe. 3 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1950-1952

“Central Park, Egyptian Obelisk,” *NYC Parks*, <http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/central-park/monuments/1129> (accessed March 8, 2015)

Curran, Brian A. *Obelisk: A History*, Cambridge, The Burndy Library, 2009

D’Alton, Martina, *The New York Obelisk or How Cleopatra’s Needle Came to New York and What Happened When It Got Here*, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, New Series*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Spring, 1993), pp 1,3-72

Dibner, Bern, *Moving the Obelisks*, Burundy Library, 1991

Fagan, Brian. *The Rape of the Nile*, New York, Scribner, 1975

Fontana, Domenico. *Della transportatione dell’obelisco vaticano et delle fabbriche di nostro signore Papa Sisto V, fatte dal cavalier Domenico Fontana, architetto di Sua Santita*. Rome: Domenico Basa, 1590

Fodero, Lisa “For Cleopatras’ Needle, A Cleaning to Last 500 Years”, *New York Times*, 7 May 2014

Isler, Martin, *Ancient Egyptian Methods of Raising Weights*, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, Vol. 13, (1976), pp. 31-42

Iversen Erik, *The Myth of Egypt and its Hieroglyphs in European Tradition*, Copenhagen, 1961

Iversen, Erik, *Obelisks in Exile*, Copenhagen, 1968

Julien, Alexis Anastai. *Notes of Research on the New York Obelisk*, New York, 1893

Julien, Claude. *America’s Empire*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1971

Levine, Lawrence. *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988

New York Times Archive 1877-1890, Accessed Electronically

A Coating for the Obelisk”, *New York Times*, 3 Nov. 1885

Curiosity Seekers at Work”, *New York Times*, 26 Dec. 1880

Obelisks, *New York Times*, 29 Oct. 1879

Grant Simmons

Our Inheritance in the Obelisk, *New York Times*, 13 Nov. 1879

Olmsted, Frederick. *Forty Years of Landscape Architecture*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1973

Pliny the Elder. *Natural History*. Book 36, Chapter 14 Trans. John Bostock London. Taylor and Francis, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street. 1855.

Reid, Donald. *Whose Pharaohs? : Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to WWI*, University of California Press, 2002

Sagredo, Aberto Manodori, "The Fountain of the Four Rivers in Rome", *Italian Ways*, <http://www.italianways.com/the-fountain-of-the-four-rivers-in-rome/> (accessed March 8, 2015)

Sorek, Susan, *The Emperors' Needles: Egyptian Obelisks and Rome*, Bristol Pheoenix Press, 2010

Tompkins, Peter. *The Magic of Obelisks*, New York, Harper & Row, 1981