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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

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Archaeology

Volume 1 of 1

**The Past as Property – Cleopatra’s Needles and the reception of Ancient Egypt**

by

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

## **ABSTRACT**

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Archaeology

Thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

### **THE PAST AS PROPERTY – CLEOPATRA’S NEEDLES AND THE RECEPTION OF ANCIENT EGYPT**

Christopher Niall Elliott

This thesis uses the two Egyptian obelisks known as Cleopatra's Needles, and particularly that one now in London, to examine the ways in which Ancient Egypt has been understood and valued through its material culture. It analyses the use of the term 'reception' in an archaeological context; how the material culture of the past acts as a mechanism of cultural transmission between societies, and how understanding of it can differ between groups within the receiving society. In particular it examines reception as a continuing and dynamic process, where the material culture of one society can be encountered by a succession of other cultures, directly or indirectly, and how understanding of such material culture can vary within a society both at a certain time, and over time. To do this it draws on the fact that it took nearly eighty years to bring one of the Needles to London. It argues that differences over time and between different groups in the way that the obelisks were received in London and New York can be usefully understood by applying concepts of property, ownership, and value, both monetary and non-monetary. Finally, it examines how far this approach can be more widely applied in archaeology, particularly to the reception of material culture.



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## Academic Thesis: Declaration Of Authorship

I, Christopher Niall Elliott, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

The Past as Property - Cleopatra's Needles and the Reception of Ancient Egypt

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signed:

Date: 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019



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The Past as Property – Chris Elliott

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## Abbreviations, Transliteration, and Prices

### Abbreviations

CBD	Cambridge Biographical Dictionary
DNB	Dictionary of National Biography.
JARCE	Journal of the American Research Centre in Egypt.
JEA	Journal of Egyptian Archaeology
LÄ	Lexikon der Ägyptologie, I-VI
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives.
MAAR	Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome.
MDAIK	Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo (DAIK) (Mainz/Cairo/Berlin/Wiesbaden)
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
	ADM [Admiralty]
	BT [Board of Trade]
	Copy [Copyright Registration]
	DSIR [Department of Scientific and Industrial Research]
	HCA [High Court Admiralty Division]
	HO [Home Office]
	IR [Inland Revenue]
	MT [Ministries of Transport and related bodies]
	TI [Treasury]
	Work [Department of Works]
TNA/FO	National Archives Foreign Office files.

## Transliteration

I have followed the generally accepted practice in Egyptology and not added glottal stops for names like Ali, Ismail, and Said. Where more correct names would be less familiar, and potentially cause confusion, as in the case of the Prime Minister Muhammad Sharif, better known as Cherif or Sherif Pasha, I have used the better known European forms of names, and anglicised versions, in this case Sherif Pasha.

## Prices

It is notoriously difficult to compare prices and values over time, but in order to provide some sort of consistent basis for comparison, I have used the online Bank of England Inflation Calculator to translate from historical monetary values to modern equivalents.

<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>



## Introduction

In 1468 BC, two inscribed Aswan granite obelisks were erected in front of the Temple of Re at Heliopolis in Egypt<sup>1</sup> to celebrate the third Jubilee of Thutmose III.<sup>2</sup> Around 10 BC, the obelisks were moved to Alexandria on the orders of the Emperor Augustus, to stand in front of a temple known as the Caesareum. Inscriptions on bronze crabs used to support one of the obelisks at its corners give the date of its re-erection, and presumably of the other as well, as 13-12 BC.<sup>3</sup> Later one of the two obelisks, which its inscriptions show to have originally been the left hand of the pair when at Heliopolis,<sup>4</sup> fell, probably as the result of an earthquake in 1301.<sup>5</sup> From at least the mid-eighteenth century, the two obelisks became known as Cleopatra's Needles.<sup>6</sup>

In 1798, a French expeditionary force, initially under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte, landed in Egypt, then a province of the Ottoman Empire, and rapidly defeated the forces of its Mameluke rulers.<sup>7</sup> Its initial success was rapidly followed by the destruction of the French fleet at Abukir Bay by a British squadron under the command of Horatio Nelson (1758-1805),<sup>8</sup> and in 1801 by the landing of a British expeditionary force under the command of General Sir Ralph Abercromby (1734-1801),<sup>9</sup> and the eventual defeat and capitulation of French forces at Alexandria and Cairo.<sup>10</sup>

Abercromby died from a wound sustained during the Battle of Alexandria,<sup>11</sup> and following the capitulation of the French, a subscription was raised from officers and men of the British forces remaining in Egypt, to transport the fallen Needle to England as a memorial to the victories of the Egyptian campaign.<sup>12</sup> The attempt to do this was unsuccessful for a variety of reasons, including the destruction by storms of the jetty built to embark the obelisk, opposition on political grounds by senior military commanders in the Mediterranean theatre, and the withdrawal of British troops from Egypt.<sup>13</sup>

In 1820, at the instigation of the British Consul in Alexandria, the *de facto* ruler of Egypt, Muhammad Ali (1769-1849), although technically only its *wali*, or Governor, on behalf of the Ottoman Sultan, offered the fallen Needle to the Prince Regent (1762-1830) on his accession to the throne as George IV.<sup>14</sup> Despite a British naval survey of Alexandria harbour, and several costed plans for the transport of the obelisk over a number of years, this offer was not taken up. In 1830 interest in the Needle was revived by reports that the French government intended to acquire one or both of the Alexandrian obelisks.<sup>15</sup> In 1831 Muhammad Ali renewed his offer on the succession of William IV (1765-1837)<sup>16</sup>, with an alternative of one of the obelisks at Karnak, but cost seems to have deterred the British Government from accepting the offer.<sup>17</sup>

In 1849, veterans of the 1801 Egyptian campaign wrote to Prince Albert, the Prince Consort (1819-1861)<sup>18</sup> urging him to support the transport of the Needle to England as a memorial to commemorate British victories in Egypt. The Prince suggested that the Duke of Cambridge (1774-1850),<sup>19</sup> a Field Marshal and Trustee of the British Museum, should raise the matter with the other Trustees, but again nothing came of this initiative, perhaps because of the Duke's death in 1850.<sup>20</sup> Following the end of the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park, work began in 1852 to re-erect the pre-fabricated iron and glass building used to house it in a modified form as the Crystal Palace at Sydenham in south London. When rebuilt, the Palace contained a series of Fine Arts Courts, one of which contained reproductions of parts of Ancient Egyptian temples from throughout Egypt. An application was made by the directors of the Crystal Palace Company to the Prime Minister, Lord Derby (1799-1869),<sup>21</sup> to bring the fallen Cleopatra's Needle to London, so that it could be placed in the nave of the Crystal Palace in front of the Egyptian Court. Lord Derby replied that the Government would not consent to part with the obelisk, which had been given to the Crown by Muhammad Ali, but would allow the company to remove it at their own expense and bring it to the Crystal Palace. However, it could be reclaimed by the government without compensation if the Palace ceased to be used for the functions set out in its charter of 'the illustration of the arts sciences and manufactures and the cultivation of a refined taste amongst all the classes of the community',<sup>22</sup> and also claimed, but with payment of the costs of transport, if it was deemed to be in the public interest. A director of the company travelled to Alexandria to inspect the obelisk, but it was buried, and believed to be partially built into the harbour fortifications of the city. In addition to the cost of demolishing and rebuilding these as necessary, the current *wali* of Egypt, Abbas I Pasha (1812-1854),<sup>23</sup> was unwilling to allow this to be done because of political instability in the region at the time, and these difficulties, together with doubts over the condition of the Needle, and pressure for the new Crystal Palace building to be completed, led to the plan being abandoned.<sup>24</sup>

In 1862, the fallen Needle was uncovered so that it could be seen by the Prince of Wales (1841-1910)<sup>25</sup> on his visit to Egypt *en route* to India, and there was renewed discussion of it being brought to England as a memorial to the Prince Consort. In 1867, the ground on which both obelisks stood had been sold by the Egyptian government, but could not be built on as it was obstructed by the obelisks. The British Consul was therefore asked by the Egyptian government if it intended to take up Muhammad Ali's gift. Faced with the options of buying the land, probably at an inflated price, removing the obelisk, or running the risk that it would be destroyed to clear the land for building, the British Government renounced their claim to the Needle, and left it to the Egyptian Government to decide what to do with it.<sup>26</sup> The decision of the Treasury not to recommend to Parliament that it should vote funds for the transport of the obelisk was

influenced by adverse reports on its condition, particularly from the Egyptologist Samuel Birch (1813-1885)<sup>27</sup> at the British Museum. Around the same time, when visiting Paris for the *Exposition universelle* (Universal Exhibition) of 1867, General Sir James Alexander (1803-1885),<sup>28</sup> then a Colonel, saw the obelisk from Luxor which had been given to France in 1832 and set up in the Place de la Concorde and learned from an unidentified source that the owner of the ground on which the obelisks at Alexandria stood had threatened to break up the fallen Needle.<sup>29</sup>

Between 1868 and 1877, General Alexander campaigned to have the Needle brought back to Britain, speaking on it and how it could be moved to the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and corresponding with the Foreign Secretary and Treasury. He published a revised plan for its transport in *The Engineer* magazine, and was granted permission by the Metropolitan Board of Works to re-erect the Needle on the Victoria Embankment in London. During this period, the civil engineer John Dixon (1835-1891)<sup>30</sup> examined the Needle, and was in contact with Sir John Thwaites (1815-1870),<sup>31</sup> then Chairman of the Metropolitan Board of Works, about bringing it to England, although it is not yet established whether Dixon knew at this time of Alexander's proposals. Dixon's younger brother Waynman (1844-1930),<sup>32</sup> also a civil engineer, suggested a plan to move the obelisk by building a cylindrical iron pontoon vessel around it, which could then be rolled into the sea and towed to England.

In 1875, General Alexander travelled to Egypt, and was granted a private audience with the Khedive Ismail (1830-1895),<sup>33</sup> during which Alexander discussed his plans to remove the Needle, and confirmed that the Khedive had no objections to this. Alexander examined the Needle with Waynman Dixon, who photographed it, and surveyed the harbour in the immediate vicinity. Dixon also suggested to Alexander his plan for transporting the Needle. Alexander wrote to the Foreign Office and the Prime Minister to inform them that the Khedive would be likely to respond favourably to a request to remove the Needle, and to outline possible arrangements for its transport. The view of the Treasury, however, remained unchanged, and he was informed accordingly.<sup>34</sup>

In 1876, with the support of Alexander, John Dixon began canvassing support to re-erect the Needle on a riverside site at the end of Northumberland Avenue, offering to personally donate £500<sup>35</sup> to any fund set up for this purpose. After his original sponsor, the politician and submarine cable entrepreneur Sir John Pender (1816-1896),<sup>36</sup> had withdrawn, Dixon approached the prominent surgeon and dermatologist Erasmus Wilson (1809-1884),<sup>37</sup> noted for his philanthropy, whose father had been a naval surgeon with Nelson during the Napoleonic Wars. Wilson asked his friend the civil engineer Henry Palfrey Stephenson (1826-1890)<sup>38</sup> to evaluate the various proposals to transport the Needle to London, and Stephenson selected that of Dixon and his

brother. After a meeting between Dixon and Wilson, an agreement was reached that Dixon should transport the Needle from Alexandria to London and re-erect it on a site provided by the Board of Works on or near the Thames Embankment in the City of Westminster. On satisfactory completion of the contract, Wilson would pay £10,000,<sup>39</sup> but if it was not carried out in full Dixon would bear the entire cost personally.

In early 1877, Dixon met with Lord Tenterden (1834-1882),<sup>40</sup> Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, and asked if the Government would object if the Khedive gave the Needle to the Metropolitan Board of Works, a London wide non-governmental public body set up in 1855 primarily to manage the development of the city's infrastructure, including the Thames Embankment. Tenterden subsequently wrote to the Prime Minister suggesting that since a decision on the disposal of the Needle had been left to the Egyptian government, the Khedive was at liberty to give it to whoever he chose, whether that be Pender or Wilson, and that they could presumably then place it wherever they could find a place for it, as long as no financial or other assistance was expected from the British Government, and Derby indicated his agreement. Subsequently the Board of Works officially confirmed its offer of an Embankment site, and the Khedive confirmed his offer, but insisted that the British Government confirm that it was willing to accept custody of the obelisk. Lord Derby eventually replied to a letter from Dixon asking him to give this confirmation by saying that the Government would come to an understanding with the Board of Works for it to take custody of the Needle once it had been re-erected on the Embankment.<sup>41</sup>

From this point onwards, events moved rapidly. The contract between Dixon and Wilson was signed, and a prefabricated obelisk barge designed and manufactured in London and shipped to Alexandria, where it was constructed around the Needle.

EXTRA SUPPLEMENT TO THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, JAN. 26, 1878



CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE IN ITS PROPOSED POSITION AT WESTMINSTER.

Figure 1 - Model of Cleopatra's Needle in the favoured site of Parliament Square. *Illustrated London News* Extra supplement 26 January 1878. (Author's Collection.)

In early August 1877 a full sized model of the Needle was set up on its intended site in Parliament Square, and in late September the obelisk barge *Cleopatra* and her towing vessel, the merchant

steamer *Olga*, left Alexandria. On the voyage to England, both vessels were struck by an exceptional storm in the Bay of Biscay, and the *Cleopatra* was cut loose when it was thought that she might sink. The *Olga* was unable to subsequently locate her, but she was spotted and salved by another merchant ship, the *Fitzmaurice*, and brought into the port of Ferrol in Spain. A subsequent dispute over the amount payable in salvage eventually had to be decided in court, but once this had been resolved, and repairs carried out to the *Cleopatra*, she was towed to London by the ocean-going steam tug *Anglia*, arriving by the beginning of February 1878.

In London, the proposed Parliament Square site, which was above an Underground line, had been abandoned after directors of the Metropolitan Railway demanded a perpetual indemnity against the Needle collapsing into its tunnel. The Adelphi Steps, a passenger-steamer landing on the Embankment, was then adopted as the Needle's site. By the beginning of June 1878, preparation of the site was complete, and work began to move the obelisk up to the level of the Embankment, and then raise and turn it before lowering it onto its pedestal.<sup>42</sup> While this was being done, plaster casts of the obelisk were taken for the South Kensington Museum, now the Victoria & Albert Museum.<sup>43</sup> On September 12 the Needle was turned to the vertical, and the next day finally lowered the last few inches onto the pedestal.

Once the Needle had been re-erected, it was given a protective coating of a sort of varnish, and by the end of 1881 decorative bronze wings were added to its base to conceal damage to its corners, other decorative bronze-work and commemorative inscriptions to its pedestal, and two large bronze sphinxes placed on pedestals to flank it. These were based on a small stone sphinx of Thutmose IV,<sup>44</sup> in the collection of the Duke of Northumberland (1792-1865)<sup>45</sup> at Alnwick, but with the cartouche changed to that of Thutmose III. From then onwards, apart from periodic cleaning and the application of a number of preservative treatments, minor bomb damage to one of the sphinxes and its pedestal during the First World War, and an apparent lightning strike in 1928, it has remained undisturbed as an iconic London landmark.

## Chapter 1 Valuing the Past

‘...why should we take all this trouble about it? As if every national monument of such a people as the Ancient Egyptians were not of priceless worth, especially a grand, historical, and even chronological landmark like this colossal monolith!'

### **John Dixon, lecture to the United Services Institute, January 1 1878**

‘The Needle was valued, at the weight of the stone, at 250l., and the ship at the same amount, its breaking-up value. The salvors, being dissatisfied, filed a motion praying the Marshal of the Admiralty, Mr R G Browne, to appraise and sell the Needle and case by public auction.’

### **The Builder, March 9 1878, 253**

‘The very high estimate, £25,000, put upon the Cleopatra and her unique cargo by the Judge of the Admiralty Court, to whom the parties in the pending salvage suit had agreed to refer the appraisement, has excited a good deal of surprise. None have been more astonished than those who might be expected to set the greatest store by the monolith – viz., the Egyptologists themselves, who think that £2,500 would have been a fair estimate in appraising a monument, which, however interesting on account of its venerable inscriptions and history, is not a work of high art, like the Venus of Milo or the Apollo Belvedere.’

### ***The Times*, March 12 1878, 4.**

The genesis of this thesis lay in an attempt to find an answer to the question of why it took so long for Cleopatra’s Needle to come to London. The first attempt to bring it to England was made in 1801, but it took until 1878, the best part of eighty years, before it finally arrived. As is so often the case, the question turned out to be far simpler than the answer.

Obelisks had been taken out of Egypt before. In ancient times, Roman emperors had transported them to Rome and Constantinople.<sup>1</sup> Since then, however, although European contact with Egypt had continued through trade, pilgrimage, and a small number of travellers,<sup>2</sup> no other obelisks were moved until after the French expeditionary force led to Egypt by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798 was defeated by British and Ottoman forces, when two medium sized schist obelisks of Nectanebo I were among the antiquities surrendered to the British.<sup>3</sup> The fallen Needle at Alexandria would have been the first large obelisk to leave Egypt for around 1,400 years, had the initial attempt to move it in 1801 been successful. As it was, that distinction went to an obelisk of Ptolemy IX from the Temple of Isis at Philae, now known as the Banks Obelisk, transported to

Kingston Lacy in Dorset by the wealthy traveller and pioneer Egyptologist William Banks (1786-1855).<sup>4</sup> It was not the only one transported abroad in the long interval between the first and final attempts to bring Cleopatra's Needle to England. Between 1831 and 1833, one of the two obelisks in front of the Temple of Luxor was removed to France, to the Place de la Concorde in Paris.<sup>5</sup>

Neither was the London obelisk the last to be relocated. Two years after it had been moved, its companion at Alexandria was shipped across the Atlantic to New York (See Appendix A). A number of conditions needed to be satisfied before the Needle could come to London. It had to be physically possible to transport it, the willingness to acquire it had to be there, as well as sufficient resources to enable this, there should not be legal obstacles or sufficient active opposition to prevent its removal, and there had to be agreement over who should be responsible for the process. All these conditions had previously been satisfied for the other obelisks mentioned above, but clearly this had not been the case with the Needle until the final attempt.

To explain why, and why the process took so long, required more than simply detailing the process of its acquisition, although that provided the body of evidence on which the broader conclusions of the thesis rely. It also involved considering the nature of the obelisk as an item of material culture, and especially how its role as an object and understanding of it changed over time and varied between groups in society within different eras.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The three main aims of this thesis were to establish the factors which led to such an extended delay in the acquisition of the London Needle, to assess their relative importance, and then to relate these factors to the views of it held over time and across various social groups. While there is an extensive and growing literature on the role played by Egyptian obelisks in Classical Rome, and on their rediscovery and re-erection in the Renaissance and Enlightenment, previous publications on the London Needle had been essentially popular narrative histories or, as in the case of Budge's work on obelisks, general works on Egyptian obelisks, lacking detail on specific examples, and not addressing the issues of reception and the role of Egyptian historical material culture in various societies over time.

It was therefore felt important to address this lack of detailed information, and the objective of the thesis was to then see how far this information could be used not only to draw conclusions about the reception of Ancient Egypt in nineteenth century Britain, but also more general conclusions both in terms of what it can suggest about the reception of Ancient Egypt generally, and of how we understand and value the past. Although a full consideration of the second, standing Alexandrian obelisk, now in New York, is beyond the scope of this thesis, an appendix to

it will briefly consider the similarities and differences between the two obelisks in the processes of acquisition and reception.

### **Research Questions**

A number of specific research questions were established in the early stages of research. These were how far the cost of transport, the perceived condition of the Needle, and political factors influenced the process of acquiring the obelisk. Related to these was the question of how far the perceived reluctance of the British Government to take action to transport the obelisk, mentioned in numerous contemporary sources, was actually supported by documentary evidence. Once sufficient research had been carried out to allow a preliminary assessment of its findings, further research questions could be posed. How far were attitudes towards the Needle by the government and society generally related to its identity as an item of Ancient Egyptian material culture? How far could attitudes towards the Needle and Ancient Egypt more generally, held by various groups in society, be understood and clarified through using concepts of property and value? In addition, how far did these attitudes differ between various groups, and how had they changed over time?

### **Methodology**

These questions were approached through two main avenues of research. Examination of a range of official documents relating to the acquisition of the Needle aimed at clarifying reasons for the extended delay between the first and final attempts to bring the Needle to England. Research in a range of commercial publications was intended to assess what information on the obelisk and attempts to bring it to London were generally available, and what attitudes were held regarding these attempts, the Needle itself, and Ancient Egypt generally. Internet research, particularly targeted searches on eBay, allowed discovery and identification of items of ephemera, souvenirs, and other obeliskiana related to the Needle. All of these allowed new material, not previously drawn on by accounts of the acquisition of the London Needle, to inform the conclusions of the thesis. The approach chosen was chronological, and no predetermined theoretical perspective was adopted, other than an acknowledgement of the importance of material culture studies, as this was felt likely to narrow the range of possible interpretations of the evidence.

## **1.1 Cleopatra's Needle**

The obelisk known as Cleopatra's Needle is a monolith of Aswan granite, 20.87m (64.4 feet) high, and weighing around 187 tons.<sup>6</sup> As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, it was originally the left hand one of a pair set up in front of the temple of Re-Horakhty at Heliopolis to celebrate the

third Jubilee of the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty Pharaoh Thutmose III.<sup>7</sup> Each of its faces has three columns of inscriptions. The original, central, column was made by Thutmose III, and the two flanking columns on each side by the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty Pharaoh Ramses II. Small inscriptions around the base of the obelisk were made by the later, 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty Pharaoh Siamun. (For more details on Egyptian obelisks and the inscriptions of the London Needle, see Chapter 2.1.1.) Although there have been modern transcriptions of the inscriptions on the Needle, particularly Iversen (1968) and Jansen-Winkel (2007), there is no modern translation. Budge (1926) gave transcriptions, transliterations and translations of the inscriptions of Thutmose III, on the London obelisk, and a transcription and translation of those on the New York obelisk, but for neither of them of the inscriptions of Ramses II, and none of Budge's versions are regarded as satisfactory by modern Egyptological standards.

Around 12 BC both obelisks were moved from Heliopolis to Alexandria by Augustus, to stand at the entrance to the Caesareum. (See Chapter 2.1.2.) Although these marked the site for centuries, its exact extent and layout is difficult to determine, due to extensive development of the area in modern times, especially the construction of the Corniche, and the absence of any systematic archaeological excavations to locate it, but the Needles, especially that one now in New York, were prominent landmarks, and their location can be approximated to the south-east side of Saad Zaghloul Square, near the current Metropole Hotel.

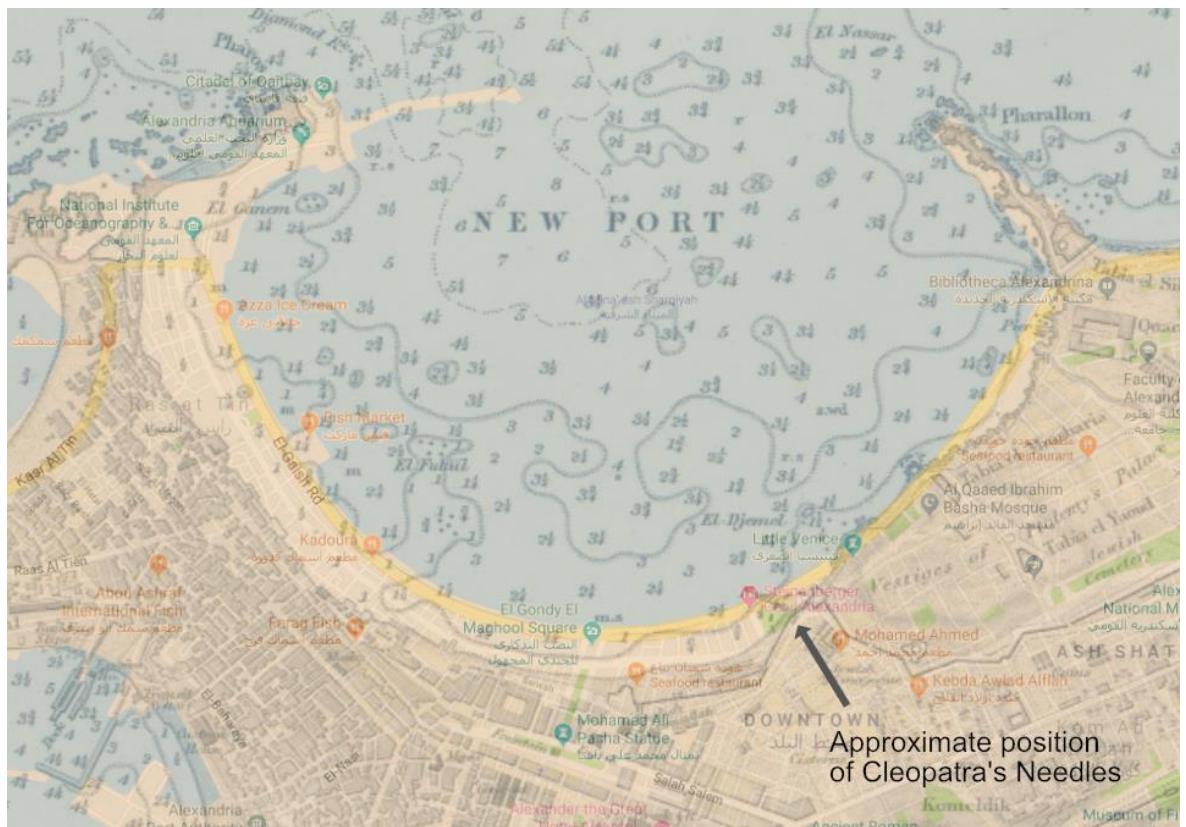


Figure 2 - Composite image of part of Alexandria, from 1857 British Admiralty chart (British Library 004787928) showing the Needles, and Google Maps modern map of Alexandria, with the approximate former location of the Needles indicated. (Author.)

After its transport to London, Cleopatra's Needle was re-erected at the Adelphi Steps on the Victoria Embankment, on a tapered pedestal set on three steps. The edges of the pedestal were decorated with bronzework, with a cornice decorated with winged solar disks around the top of the pedestal, and bronze plaques with inscriptions were mounted on each side of it. The inscriptions are as follows:

North Face

THROUGH THE PATRIOTIC ZEAL OF  
ERASMUS WILSON F.R.S.  
THIS OBELISK  
WAS BROUGHT FROM ALEXANDRIA  
ENCASED IN AN IRON CYLINDER  
IT WAS ABANDONED DURING A STORM  
IN THE BAY OF BISCAY  
RECOVERED AND ERECTED  
ON THIS SPOT BY  
JOHN DIXON CE  
IN THE 42<sup>ND</sup> YEAR OF THE REIGN OF  
QUEEN VICTORIA  
1878

East Face

THIS OBELISK QUARRIED AT SYENE  
WAS ERECTED AT ON (HELIOPOLIS)  
BY THE PHARAOH  
THOTMES III ABOUT 1500 B.C.  
LATERAL INSCRIPTIONS WERE ADDED  
NEARLY TWO CENTURIES LATER  
BY RAMESES THE GREAT  
REMOVED DURING THE GREEK DYNASTY  
TO ALEXANDRIA  
THE ROYAL CITY OF CLEOPATRA  
IT WAS THERE ERECTED IN THE  
18<sup>TH</sup> YEAR OF AUGUSTUS CAESAR B.C. 12

West Face

THIS OBELISK  
PROSTRATE FOR CENTURIES  
ON THE SANDS OF ALEXANDRIA  
WAS PRESENTED TO THE  
BRITISH NATION A.D. 1819 BY  
MAHOMMED ALI VICEROY OF EGYPT  
A WORTH MEMORIAL OF  
OUR DISTINGUISHED COUNTRYMEN  
NELSON AND ABERCROMBY

South Face

WILLIAM ASKIN | MICHAEL BURNS  
JAMES GARDINER | WILLIAM DONALD  
JOSEPH BENBOW | WILLIAM PATAN  
PERISHED IN A BOLD ATTEMPT  
TO SUCCOUR THE CREW OF THE  
OBELISK SHIP "CLEOPATRA" DURING  
THE STORM OCTOBER 14<sup>TH</sup> 1877

To conceal damage to the base of the obelisk, particularly to its corners, decorative bronzework was added above the pedestal, in the form of decorative wings on the corners, with between them a cartouche with the throne name of Thutmose III (Men-Kheper-Re) surmounted by plumes



Figure 3 - Cleopatra's Needle on the Victoria Embankment in London, showing the three columns of hieroglyphs on its best preserved side, its decorative bronzework and inscribed plaques, and flanking modern bronze sphinxes. (Author's photo.)

and a solar disk, and flanked by uraei wearing the crowns of Lower Egypt on the left and Upper Egypt on the right, and supporting below them *shen* hieroglyphs, a symbol of protection.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 4 - Cleopatra's Needle showing decorative bronzework and one of its inscriptions. (Author's photo.)

## 1.2 Materials and Culture

The growth of Material Culture Studies has proved especially fruitful in encouraging an interdisciplinary approach which can examine human societies without the limitations which can be introduced by the traditional subject boundaries of disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology, and history.<sup>9</sup> A focus on objects, and the idea of them having not just a lifetime but a relationship to society, encourages a biographical approach, and the use of a biographical metaphor can help to bypass or overcome areas of continuing debate within the social sciences.<sup>10</sup> Recent developments in Egyptology have seen an increasing interest in areas beyond excavation and the original context and use of artefacts, and particularly in the history of texts and artefacts after their discovery, a development which will be considered in more detail in section 1.5 below.

As an object whose history can be traced across thousands of years, which is still exerting an influence today, and one whose acquisition and transport in the nineteenth century can be examined in detail, the London Needle is particularly suited to treatment through an object biography which considers it as an embodiment of or signifier for cultural values.<sup>11</sup> The anthropologist Daniel Miller has observed that

The possibility of material culture studies lies not in method, but rather in an acknowledgement of the nature of culture, as understood by theorists such as Simmel...

As Simmel argued, human values do not exist other than through their objectification in cultural forms.<sup>12</sup>

Introducing any concept as broad as Culture, let alone others associated with it like cultural capital and cultural heritage, raises the risk of disappearing into what has been termed a definitional quagmire.<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, however, material culture can be considered as the physical expressions of cultural practices within human societies, while immaterial or intangible culture can be understood as the concepts and attitudes which inform and motivate those practices, but which do not themselves create tangible remains.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, the two are intimately linked, but when dealing with past societies, including past phases of our own, it is largely their material culture with which we are concerned, and through which we try to recover their beliefs and values. Even primary sources, unless oral, are examples of material culture. Indeed, Archaeology itself can be defined as the recovery of immaterial culture through the examination of material remains, as objects are used to reconstruct ancient social systems.

Along with the idea of objects as embodiments of ideas or concepts which can circulate in different contexts and social networks, and the use of a biographical approach as a metaphor highlighting analogies between human and object life cycles, the concepts of agency and materiality are important to material culture studies. The concept of agency needs to be used with caution, remembering that it is a metaphor, but a key aspect of it is the ability of objects to carry meaning. Even in contemporary societies, a variety of meanings can be associated with a single object or class of objects, and for objects with an extended history this becomes the norm, particularly as they pass between countries and cultures.

The Egyptian obelisks known as Cleopatra's Needles are material remains of the culture of Ancient Egypt, created in response to the beliefs and values of that society, and expressing them, which have then been responded to by subsequent cultures and societies, including an earlier phase of our own. However, material culture is often far more robust than immaterial culture, and if the practices through which cultural beliefs and values are transmitted and maintained are abandoned or destroyed, then much, if not most of those beliefs and values are lost, and any

attempt at recovering them must be uncertain. Ancient Egypt was a literate culture, with extensive written records, including those that form part of its obelisks, but there is much that we do not know of the cultural practices which must surely have been associated with obelisks, and have been highly significant within that culture.<sup>15</sup> As the Egyptologist Erik Iversen observed

Unfortunately the same is true of obelisks as of most other archaeological remains of ancient Egypt that although we are able to trace their evolution as material objects with reasonable accuracy, any effort to account for their true nature and cultic meaning involves us in complicated controversies concerning the conception of Egyptian mentality, thought and religion, problems of which our knowledge is certainly fragmentary and our understanding doubtful.<sup>16</sup>

The archaeologist Christopher Tilley, in discussing the concept of ‘material culture texts’ has distinguished between material culture, speech and writing, and observed that

‘Material culture does not communicate meaning content in the same way as speech or the phonetic script – that would constitute needless duplication. It rather makes different types of communicative statements, but structured in a way that may be, in part, analogous.’<sup>17</sup>

Ancient Egyptian obelisks were usually, if not exclusively, objects designed to bear texts, and thus fall into the class of what have been described as *semiophores* or *nouophores*, or ‘bearers of meaning’.<sup>18</sup> Such objects may be, as with obelisks, literal bearers of texts, but their meaning can also be associated with historical events. Obelisks are objects with material, visual, and linguistic elements, all of which have a bearing on the meanings which they transmitted and transmit. When employing the concept of agency with obelisks, the explicit communication of meaning is therefore obviously a key element, but we also need to recognise that this function ceased to operate in its original form when the ability to read hieroglyphs was lost, and although restored to a degree when they were deciphered and translated, could not reflect the fluency of understanding within the culture that produced them. As Tilley has also observed, ‘Material culture [is] fundamentally to do with communication between persons and the creation of meaning’.<sup>19</sup>

The materiality of objects (or, depending on the context their ephemerality) is of critical importance. In the case of the Needle and other obelisks, it is what enables them to exercise agency over thousands of years. Over time, however, the functionality of objects can change, and their materiality affects how they can be used and re-used. When considering the agency of obelisks, it is interesting to speculate how metaphorical this concept was in their original culture.

Despite their inanimate and non-organic material, obelisks acted as active transmitters of meaning through their symbolic shape and the texts on them, and were at certain periods considered if not animate themselves, as being occupied by a deity, and offerings were made to them.<sup>20</sup>

Just as an individual defines themselves in relationship to their own past, and the material culture associated with it, so an important element of the way in which modern societies define themselves is their relationship to past societies, often ancient ones. In the course of this, new cultural practices can develop in relationship to the remains of material culture from these past societies. Material culture, it can be argued, is essentially neutral: it is how it is approached and interacted with subsequent to its creation that differs and changes. Similarly, the way in which the past is accessed depends on a number of factors, such as formal and informal education, and the type of sources that are used, written or oral.

This thesis aims to examine a range of perspectives on and responses to the material remains of Ancient Egypt within modern British culture from the nineteenth century to the present. As a case study, the London obelisk involves many of the same elements and processes as the acquisition of other material culture from Ancient Egypt, and indeed other ancient societies, but because it involves a single object, over a relatively long period of time, it is easier to analyse both synchronic elements; how these elements and processes related to different groups within the acquiring society at a point in time, and diachronic elements; how they changed over time.<sup>21</sup> Distinguishing the category of material culture, and the ways in which it is created, accumulated and transmitted, also introduces the concepts of value, property, ownership, and reception, which will be discussed further below.

### **1.3 Value**

For cultural objects to be created, and for that matter for non-material cultural practices to develop and be maintained, they must be perceived as having value. (To use Miller's term, they must matter.) This may seem self-evident, but the interest lies in what sort of value is attached to them, and how this can change over time. The values associated with objects and practices can also vary between different groups within society at any one time. In the same way, when individuals and groups wish to acquire objects from other societies, they do so because they value them, but the values they associate with the object or group of objects may not be those of their original creators. The values associated with these objects may differ between individuals and groups, and within groups, but also sometimes overlap. Where objects are exchanged they are frequently assigned to one of four modes of transfer, of sale, exchange or barter, gift exchange,

and theft,<sup>22</sup> and their perceived value can affect the mode or modes of transfer. Whilst it is debatable whether it counts as a transaction, the transfer of objects by theft is particularly relevant when the acquisition of cultural antiquities is being discussed. In the case of the Needle, the distinction between objects as commodities and as gifts, associated with the work of the French sociologist Marcel Mauss,<sup>23</sup> is important and will be discussed in more detail in the following section on Property.

As indicated in the previous section, the length of time taken to bring the London obelisk from Egypt to England means that it offers the opportunity to examine the values associated with it by various groups and individuals, and if and how these changed over time. Here, it is useful to draw on a definition of civil society to characterise these groups and the society of which they are a part.

usually defined as the complex web of interlocking private and commercial associations standing between the individual and the state, civil society encompasses organizational nodes defined by shared religious, fraternal, occupational, political, and mercantile interests.<sup>24</sup>

As well as civil society, the state, as will be seen, played a crucial part in the process of bringing the Needle to London.

When considering items of material culture, there is often a change in the original and subsequent values attached to them, and arguably the more distant from their original culture in distance or time, the greater that change. An important element in reception, which is discussed in more detail later, is how far the original values associated with an object persist, and how far they are replaced or overlaid with acquired values. One way in which this can happen is, as in the case of Cleopatra's Needles, for objects to be closely associated with historical events or persons, as mentioned earlier. The value attached to objects also has a crucial effect on their survival. For individuals or groups to wish to acquire objects, or to preserve them, they must be valued by them, and '... various values can be placed upon ancient material – including, but not limited to, the financial, the historical and archaeological, and the aesthetic'.<sup>25</sup> However, just as cultural output can be divided into material and non-material, so a basic distinction can be made between monetary and non-monetary values attached to these outputs. It is arguable whether items can have prestige and status without being assigned a corresponding level of economic value. Iconic historical items such as the Rosetta Stone can be described as priceless, but as will be seen, even though the same description was applied to the London obelisk, it was also assigned a financial value.

The way in which objects are valued depends on how they are defined and understood, and here the relationship between objects and the materials that they are made of is often crucial. Objects can be more valuable than the material that they are made of, because they are primarily valued in non-monetary ways, again for example as with the Rosetta Stone. But if the object is understood in a different way, the material can become more valuable than the object. In nineteenth century Egypt, there were numerous examples of surviving Ancient Egyptian temples being demolished to provide stones for new factories, or so that the limestone of which they were made could be used to make cement or mortar to build them.<sup>26</sup> As important as the value which is assigned to objects is the way in which this value is decided. Typically, it can be argued, this is a role which is more often assigned to expert groups in modern societies, and in past societies to political and religious ones. As will be seen, despite claims that assessments of value are based on objective criteria, these criteria and the resulting valuations can often differ not only between groups, but within them.

The next section will discuss various concepts of property which can be applied to objects of material culture from the past, including cultural capital and cultural heritage. Here, it is worth noting that just as property, in the sense of real estate, can be regarded as an accumulation of capital, so objects can be regarded as representing or embodying accumulated cultural capital. The concept of objects as *nouophores*, 'bearers of meaning' means that although they may have both monetary and non-monetary value, the latter can be seen as outweighing the former. Finally, there is the question of how far values associated with objects are perceived to transfer with them from one society to another, which will be considered along with other aspects of reception.

## 1.4 Property

Property, like Culture, is a term whose use is potentially fraught with problems. Although the idea that both material and immaterial culture can be assigned value, have an ownership status, and be transferred and inherited is not in itself controversial, and legal systems deal with both physical and intellectual property, as well as intangible rights, the extension of these concepts through terms such as 'cultural property', and 'cultural heritage' is not straightforward. The difficulties start with attempts to distinguish cultural property from any other kind, or as we might put it, cultural material from material culture. Article 1a of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict defines 'cultural property' as

movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular;

archaeological sites; groups of buildings which, as a whole, are of historical or artistic interest; works of art; manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections and important collections of books or archives or of reproductions of the property defined above.<sup>27</sup>

This can be seen as a ‘universalist’ perspective, and its preamble said that ‘damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind’. It did not address the origin or location of such property, and the coverage of the definition was ‘irrespective of origin or ownership’. By contrast, the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property defined it as ‘property which, on religious or secular grounds, is specifically designated by each State as being of importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science’.<sup>28</sup> Whilst also recognising that ‘the interchange of cultural property among nations for scientific, cultural and educational purposes increases the knowledge of the civilization of Man, enriches the cultural life of all peoples and inspires mutual respect and appreciation among nations’, this tends to identify cultural property with nation states. This view is made even clearer by the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Return of Cultural Property, which defines cultural property as ‘property which is particularly representative of the cultural identity of a given nation’.<sup>29</sup> The UNESCO convention was intended to deal with a contemporary problem of illicit traffic in cultural property, but concern about the removal of antiquities from their countries of origin was already a factor during the period when attempts were being made to transport the fallen obelisk at Alexandria to London.<sup>30</sup>

These definitions remind us that the use of the term ‘property’ implies ownership, and raises questions about whether such property is alienable, capable of being sold or otherwise transferred from one party to another, or inalienable. Modern law and economics employ the concept of four types of property: private, state, communal, and open access. Of these, the first two are the most common.<sup>31</sup> There are also the legal concepts of *res nullius* (belonging to no-one), or *res communis* (property belonging to the whole world).<sup>32</sup> It can be argued that the London obelisk has fallen into all the categories of ownership mentioned above at one time or another, but alongside these concepts we need to consider the related ones of different forms of exchange relationships and those of gifts and commodities.

An important element in the history of the acquisition of the Needle is the basis on which it was acquired, and particularly its gift by Muhammad Ali and his successor the Khedive Ismail. In academic circles, particularly anthropology, the work of Mauss on gifts was highly influential, but has subsequently undergone considerable revision.<sup>33</sup> A key element of this revision has been an

elaboration of the perceived binary distinction in Mauss's work between the gift as inalienable, with use value, and the commodity, alienable and with exchange value, and the emphasis on gifts in non-western cultures and commodities in western ones. Particularly influential in this debate were Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff.<sup>34</sup> The latter observed that

In every society, there are things that are publicly precluded from being commoditised...

In state societies, many of these prohibitions are the handwork of the state, with the usual intertwining between what serves the society at large, what serves the state, and what serves the specific groups in control. This applies to much of what one thinks of as the symbolic inventory of a society: public lands, monuments, state art collections... and so on.<sup>35</sup>

Importantly, he considered that objects could move in and out of commodity status, through what he termed a process of 'singularisation', or being set apart as special.<sup>36</sup> Viewed in this way, objects could pass through a 'commodity phase' in their metaphorical social lives, rather than being defined either as commodities or gifts. As Appadurai put it

The commodity situation in the social life of any "thing" [can] be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature.<sup>37</sup>

These ideas were further developed by the anthropologist and historian Nicholas Thomas, who wrote that 'objects are not [just] what they were made to be but what they have become', and of 'a pervasive identification in museum research and Material Culture Studies which stabilises the identity of a thing in its fixed and founded material form'.<sup>38</sup> He went on to note how objects could change from gift to commodity, and back again (to which we might add 'or vice versa') and observed that 'what we are confronted with is thus never more or less than a succession of uses and recontextualisations'.<sup>39</sup>

In practical terms, the definition of ownership considered to apply to cultural objects can affect the way in which they are understood and treated. The post of Inspector of Ancient Monuments was not created in Britain until 1882,<sup>40</sup> and since many of these monuments stood on what at that time was privately owned land, it has been suggested that the reason for the post not having been created sooner was the level of concern for individual property rights.<sup>41</sup> Before that, an attack on the Portland Vase, loaned to the British Museum in 1810 by the Duke of Portland,<sup>42</sup> had highlighted a problem related to the ownership of portable antiquities rather than sites. The attacker was charged with causing wilful damage, but his successful defence argued that the Act under which he had been charged only applied to objects worth less than five pounds. As a result,

he was convicted instead of destroying the case and fined five pounds. The only alternative would have been a civil action for damages by the Duke. This incident was largely responsible for the Protection of Works of Art and Scientific and Literary Collections Act 1845, which made it an offence to damage, among other things, a statue or monument exposed in a public place. Following an outbreak of vandalism directed at royal statues in London, the Public Statues (Metropolis) Act 1854 gave the Commissioners of the Office of Works, a department of central government, custody of publicly displayed statues in London, and authority to approve the erection of new ones. These developments represented a growing role for the state in the custody of antiquities and other cultural objects.<sup>43</sup>

Acquisition of the Needle was also affected by the broader context of legislation in other countries to protect, collect, and regulate the export of antiquities, the creation of national museums, and the basis on which all these operated. The foundation of the original British Museum in 1753 had seen the creation of the first truly national, secular and public museum.<sup>44</sup> An antiquities museum was opened in Istanbul in 1845, but it was not public, and following a short lived Imperial Ottoman Museum in 1869 it was not until 1874 that effective Ottoman legislation on antiquities was promulgated, and 1875 that a public antiquities museum opened in Istanbul.<sup>45</sup> Although this legislation, and an amended version in 1884, applied to Ottoman territories outside Turkey, its application to Egypt was moot given the drive towards independence by Muhammad Ali and his successors. A decree by Ali in 1835 encouraged the foundation of an antiquities museum in Cairo, later expanded into the Bulaq museum which opened in 1863, and which was finally replaced with the Egyptian Museum in 1902.<sup>46</sup> In practice, however, Muhammad Ali regarded Egyptian antiquities as 'primarily bargaining chips to be exchanged for European diplomatic and technical support',<sup>47</sup> and little was done to prevent the wholesale collection of antiquities for export to European museums until after the removal of the Alexandrian obelisks.<sup>48</sup>

Ownership and value are linked but separate concepts. Problems typically occur when different values are placed on cultural objects by different groups, especially when these pit monetary against non-monetary values, or where there is dispute over the type of property that an object represents, or its ownership. A landowner may see an ancient monument as a valueless obstruction preventing financial gain from the use of the land it occupies for other purposes, while groups representing the wider community see it as of major historical and cultural importance. Similar situations occur where the sale of cultural objects would result in them being exported from one country to another. A good example is the recent case of the sale of the Fifth Dynasty statue of Sekhemka by Northampton Borough Council and its subsequent export. This not only involved the transfer of an object from a publicly funded museum collection to a private buyer, but also the division of the proceeds of the sale with the descendants of the original donor,

indicating a lack of clarity in legal title to the statue.<sup>49</sup> Nowadays, much archaeological material is under the control of the state, or quasi-state bodies, who are effectively assigned property rights, and assume associated rights and duties. Their role is essentially one of stewardship and custodianship, and they are considered effectively owners but without the right of disposal.<sup>50</sup> The value of the object, or archaeological site, is primarily non-monetary, and usually expressed as historical, educational, or aesthetic.<sup>51</sup> While an important element in such arrangements is access to the public, this is normally limited and controlled. One of the unusual aspects of Cleopatra's Needles and other obelisks outside Egypt is that they are usually in public spaces.

An important aspect of state involvement with historical artefacts, particularly where they are acquired during the process of conquest or colonisation, is the assumption of non-monetary values associated with, or considered to be embodied in them. Such cultural capital, which can also be described as social value, and the symbolic associations of such objects can be used to support claims to cultural continuity.<sup>52</sup> The conditions under which such objects are acquired are often the basis for claims for them to be returned to their place of origin. However, the greater the length of time that has elapsed, the more complex the question of ownership tends to become. Not only do the borders of states change, so can their languages, their dominant religions, cultural traditions, legal systems, and systems of government. In the case of ancient polities, which no longer exist in a recognisable form, arguments about retention or return of objects from them, particularly high profile ones, are largely about possession in the present, and which modern state is to be their custodian.

## 1.5 Reception

Although it is routinely used in the discussion of the influence and understanding of ancient cultures, it is worth considering what is meant by the term 'reception'. It is generally understood to have originated in literary studies, where reception theory is defined as

A branch of modern literary studies concerned with the ways in which literary works are received by readers. The term has sometimes been used to refer to reader-response criticism in general, but it is associated more particularly with the 'reception-aesthetics' (German, Rezeptionsästhetik) outlined in 1970 by the German literary historian Hans Robert Jauss. Drawing on philosophical hermeneutics, Jauss argued that literary works are received against an existing horizon of expectations consisting of readers' current knowledge and presuppositions about literature, and that the meanings of works change as such horizons shift. Unlike most varieties of reader-response theory, then,

reception theory is interested more in historical changes affecting the reading public than in the solitary reader.<sup>53</sup>

Although the term ‘reception’ implies receipt, which is essentially a passive process, as the definition above shows, the emphasis is on the active response of readers, and not merely the original intentions of the author. Implied in this is that if readers create their own understanding of works, this may not conform to, or may go beyond, the original intentions of the author. Within reception theory, a distinction has been made, drawing on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Jauss between *Rezeptionsgeschichte*, the history of reception of texts themselves or reader response criticism, and *Wirkungsgeschichte*, the history of the effects of reception or the broader impact of traditions on cultural history.<sup>54</sup>

When applied outside literary theory, it can be argued that the concept of reception is not only fundamental to archaeology, which is concerned with the recovery and understanding of the past, but generally as a way of understanding cultural transfer in general, and in particular its transfer from the past and other societies. Dealing with the concept of social or cultural memory, Jan Assmann, considering the importance of Egypt in the Graeco-Roman-Judeao-Christian cultural heritage of Europe, used the term ‘mnemohistorical’ to refer to memory of the past other than through records of historical events, and referred to the way in which ‘shared histories’ are often based on canonised written texts which inform understanding of the past.<sup>55</sup> Lynn Parramore has written of ‘the notion that cultural memory shapes perception of origin, identity, and inheritance’.<sup>56</sup> Cultural transmission can be viewed as both intra-cultural, within the same society, and inter-cultural, between societies. The aspect with which this thesis primarily deals is that of material culture in this process, of objects as *nouophores* or bearers of meaning, either between societies, or within a society over time.

The distinction between material and immaterial culture is to some extent an artificial one. Objects are intimately associated with cultural practices and beliefs, and vice versa. A good example is the relationship between the architecture of religious buildings and the beliefs of those religions, the use of ritual objects in religious ceremonies, and the design and decoration of those objects. An interesting question is how far, when the material culture of one society transfers to another, the associated functions and practices associated with it transfer as well. Even when the cultures in question are contemporaneous with each other, the transfer of immaterial cultural beliefs and practices with material objects is rarely anywhere near complete. Objects transfer far more readily than the cultural practices associated with them. More often, there is a process of adaptation to and interpretation by the receiving culture. When the material culture is from a society distant both in time and geography, the disconnection between the

original function of objects and the practices associated with them and those in the receiving society can be extreme.

Objects are now recognised as having their own complex “histories”, their original creation and function constituting only one chapter in a trajectory of existence that includes subsequent reuse, discovery, presentation and interpretation.<sup>57</sup>

Added to this is the complication that reception can be either direct, *in situ*, through travel to the originating society or its historical location, or indirect, *ex situ*, through contact elsewhere with artefacts or copies, representations, and accounts of them and their society of origin.

As mentioned earlier, the importance of material culture studies and reception studies within Egyptology is increasing, and it is also being increasingly applied to Roman Egyptana. An object biographical approach has also been employed to examine Egyptian obelisks in Rome, and Roman copies of them.<sup>58</sup> Much of this work has tended to focus on the area of Egyptomania, despite the definitional problems which beset this field, but the history of the acquisition of objects, their transfers of ownership and their treatment, particularly within museum collections, are also increasingly seen as worthy of study. To some extent, issues of reception occur even when studying Egyptian artefacts within their originating culture, as for example with the re-use of architectural elements and the adoption of archaising designs.<sup>59</sup> Beyond this, the study of the post-excavation history of objects can help with the reconstruction of dispersed burial assemblies and the study of texts.<sup>60</sup> Texts, as well as having an existence independent of the artefacts that bear them, and being able to appear in multiple examples, are associated with these artefacts, such as papyri, ostraca, architecture, shabti, and other objects. In considering texts from Ancient Egypt, much more attention is now being paid to their histories of ownership, conservation, custody, and study, publication in translation, and as inspiration for other texts.<sup>61</sup> Such factors, which have played such a significant part in our understanding of them, and how this has changed, are now being studied in addition to the nature and role of such texts in Ancient Egypt, but are linked by the materiality of the texts through their association with objects.<sup>62</sup> In addition to this, the history of works on Egyptology, such as the *Description de L’Égypte*, and of the working papers of Egyptologists, are themselves being studied.<sup>63</sup>

Considering objects as ‘bearers of meaning’ should not be taken to imply that there is a single privileged meaning which they bring with them. Even in their originating society and culture their meanings would be multiple, and when encountered by another society, they will be assigned new meanings which are in addition to these, or different interpretations of their original meanings. With objects that have existed for any significant length of time, reception involves not only their original associations, but those which they acquire over time. Their involvement with

events can lead to them being perceived as witnesses to history, both secular and religious, and add functions and connotations which they did not possess in their originating culture. Tangible objects can also be seen as transmitting intangible influences, as when objects of material culture take on new roles by becoming religious relics. The relocation of objects and changes in their category of ownership can also be taken as indications of changes in the role of the objects.

The definition of Reception Theory quoted above reminds us that reception is a heuristic process, and takes place 'against an existing horizon of expectations consisting of... current knowledge and presuppositions'.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, we can see reception as both an active and passive process, particularly where material culture is concerned. Certain groups, and individuals within them, will actively seek to acquire objects, others will essentially respond to them, both when they are acquired, and during the process of acquisition. When considering the reception of material culture from ancient societies which no longer exist in a recognisable form, it is important to bear in mind a crucial difference between this process, and that which happens within and between contemporary societies. The reception of ancient cultures may be active, but it is one way. We cannot communicate with the past, and it can only address us in limited ways. (Even this, however, is not always taken for granted. Ancient Egyptian funerary inscriptions could contain 'appeals to the living', seeking to maintain the indefinite supply of offerings to the *ka* of the deceased, and the living could address written appeals to deceased ancestors seeking their intervention in the present.)<sup>65</sup> What can, and does happen, is that existing constructs, the 'horizon of expectations' and 'current knowledge and presuppositions' can shape interpretations of the past rather than being changed by new information, and actively introduce current social concerns. Related to this is what can be described as 'emulation by association', the desire to take on the perceived values of a society with its material culture. Here, it can be argued, the veracity of ideas is less important than their cultural relevance.<sup>66</sup> Allied to this is the tendency of individuals to avoid cognitive dissonance,<sup>67</sup> the psychological discomfort arising from holding mutually conflicting or contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values. It is debatable whether the same concept can be applied to groups, but individuals belonging to groups will tend to hold similar views and values, which are part of the definition of those groups. Where information about past societies seems to conflict with previously held beliefs, it is likely to be interpreted in such a way as to minimise such conflicts, and to promote cognitive consonance. It can be argued that we tend to seek confirmation of our views in the past, rather than challenge to them.

The Needle did not arrive in a cultural vacuum, but into a society which reflected a process of reception of Ancient Egypt by Europe going back to Pharaonic times, and as a part of that process. An important question is how far what might be called the cultural memory of Egypt in the West has retained core concepts and values from that culture, and how far it has been constructed and

reconstructed for each generation, with interpretations that change to reflect current cultural priorities. In particular, positive or negative attitudes towards Egypt could be influenced by factors such as the perceived importance to European society of the cultural legacy of the Classical world. Until the late eighteenth century this tended to concentrate on Rome, but from then on included more emphasis on Greece. This perception was institutionalised through the university systems in European countries, and even when the importance of Ancient Egypt was acknowledged, this could be tempered by the view that it had ultimately been a sterile culture which needed the invigorating influence of Greece to be transformed.<sup>68</sup>

This thesis seeks to examine and clarify the complex process of reception in the case of the Alexandrian obelisks, over time and across different groups within society, by using concepts of property, ownership, and value. Chapter 2 deals with the history of the obelisks from their creation to the first attempt to remove one of them to London, trying to establish Jauss's 'horizon of expectations', the knowledge of them and beliefs about them which were held before widespread encounters with them by Europeans. This covers their reception by later phases of Pharaonic Egypt, post-Pharaonic or Ptolemaic Egypt, the Roman Empire and its successor, the Byzantine, Arab Egypt, Medieval, Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe, and, finally, Georgian and early Victorian England. Chapter 3 examines in more detail the reception of the Needles over the period between 1801 and 1878, including the differences between *in situ* encounters in Egypt, and *ex situ* ones by indirect means, and the views held on the obelisks and Ancient Egypt in general by various groups. It examines these through the mechanisms associated with reception, particularly written sources and items of material culture. Chapter 4 looks at the ways in which the Needle has been responded to since its arrival in London, and whether these indicate a significant change in the way it is understood.

Overall, the focus of the thesis is on how, and how far, the material culture of the past acts as a mechanism of cultural transmission between societies, and how understanding of it and the values attached to it can differ between groups within the receiving society. It also examines the role of ownership and property in relation to historical material culture, and in particular it examines reception as a continuing and dynamic process, where the material culture of one society can be encountered over time by a succession of other cultures, directly or indirectly.

## Chapter 2 The Obelisks in Egypt

It is easy to focus on the history of the Alexandrian obelisks in the nineteenth century, and to forget that before coming to England and America, both obelisks had undergone several phases of reception. Even in the society that created them, Pharaonic Egypt, their history spanned around eleven hundred years, including foreign invasion and conquest. Following the last native Pharaoh, there were the Macedonian Greek Ptolemies, Roman emperors, the introduction of Christianity and the decline of the polytheistic Egyptian religion, and finally the end of Byzantine rule with the Arab conquest of the eighth century AD. During this period, which represents the majority of the existence of the obelisks, two factors can be seen as especially significant. These are the loss, apart from isolated survivals,<sup>1</sup> of an active cultural tradition linked to Ancient Egypt once its religion had been replaced, and the consequent loss of understanding of its written records. This in turn led not only to changes in the value and ownership status of the obelisks, but over time to a mutation, rather than a straightforward transmission, of the way in which they were understood.

### 2.1 The Ancient World

#### 2.1.1 Pharaonic Egypt & the Ptolemies

In the society that created them, inscribed obelisks were high status objects, produced in very limited quantities. How limited is difficult to put a figure on, as it depends on the number of those which were only partially completed, have been lost, or survive only as fragments,<sup>2</sup> but the creation of the largest ones involved the commitment of a level of resources only possible with a state sponsored project. One obelisk begun by Thutmose III was not completed at the time of his death, or by his successor, and was only finished and erected thirty-five years later by his grandson, Thutmose IV.<sup>3</sup> Although there were variations throughout the history of Pharaonic Egypt in size, materials, and decoration, in their iconic form, such as the obelisks which are the subject of this thesis, they were monoliths of Aswan granite, with a four sided gently tapering shaft topped by a more steeply angled pyramid shaped top, or pyramidion, usually covered with gold, electrum or bronze.<sup>4</sup> Hieroglyphic inscriptions and reliefs were added to the sides and pyramidion. They were almost exclusively erected in pairs, often flanked by over life sized statues, at the pylon entrances to temples, on processional ways. Single obelisks seem to have always been solar cult objects, even in later dynasties.<sup>5</sup>

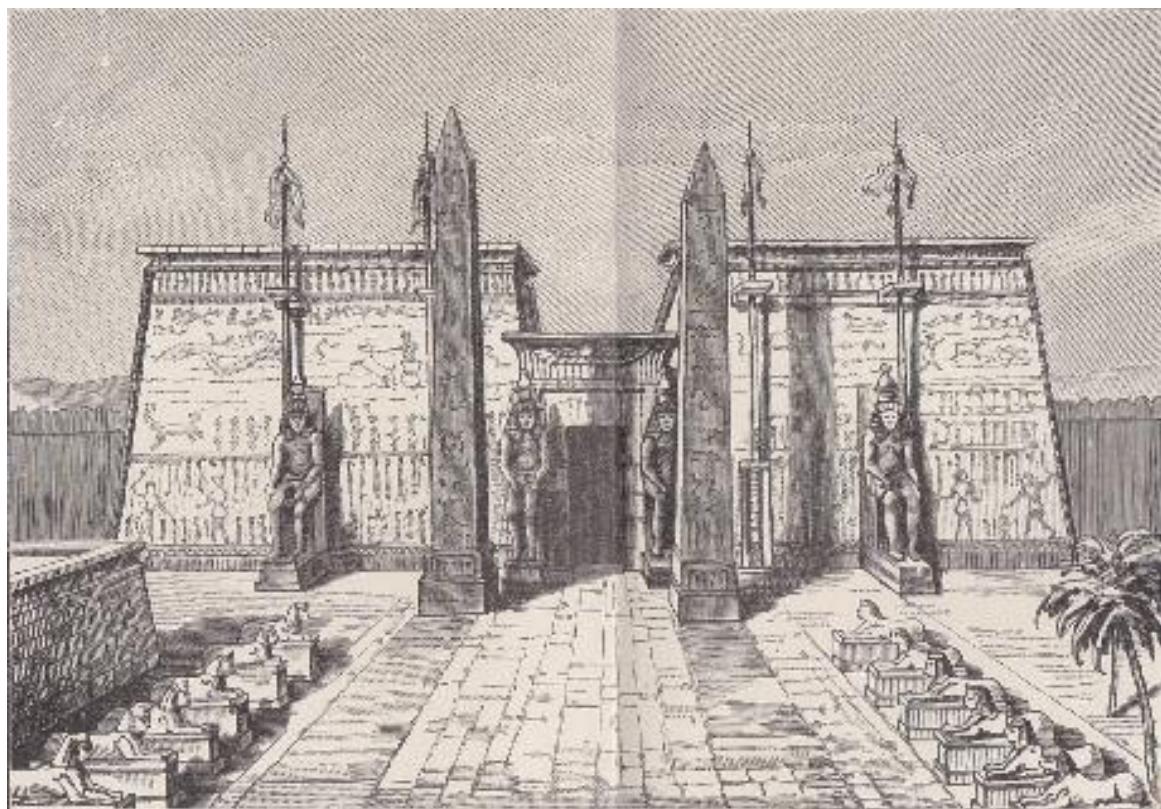


Figure 5 - An artist's recreation of the entrance to Luxor Temple, showing its flanking obelisks.

From a montage on Architecture in a 19<sup>th</sup> Century German encyclopaedia. (Author's Collection.)

Reflecting the nature of the Ancient Egyptian state, with its divine ruler and their relationship with the gods,<sup>6</sup> their function was both religious and political, although neither term really corresponds with the contemporary use of these terms.<sup>7</sup> It is also debatable how far the types of property identified by Carman, and the values attached to them, or Brown's definition of civil society, can be applied to this era. The earliest obelisks appeared at the beginning of the Old Kingdom, and were associated with the Heliopolitan creation theology. A key feature of this was a conical or pyramidal stone known as the *benben*.<sup>8</sup> This was placed on a base symbolically representing the primal mound of creation which emerged from *nun*, the dark and formless ocean of chaos, and on which the sun god Re was believed to have manifested as creator in his form of Atum. The original temple of Heliopolis and its *benben* is believed to have inspired the design of a number of sun temples in the Old Kingdom, and the classic form of the obelisk seems to have emerged as a stylised monumental representation of the *benben* stone on the creation mound. From around the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, small obelisks less than 1m high were placed in pairs outside private tombs, and this practice continued into the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> dynasties, with small single or double inscribed obelisks made of sandstone or limestone rather than granite placed outside tomb chapels.<sup>9</sup> The large royal obelisks with which we are familiar occur from the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty onwards, although their heyday was in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasties. They continued to have strong solar associations, and were linked with various aspects

of the solar deity.<sup>10</sup> The texts on them typically recorded their creation and dedication to solar deities by the Pharaoh, their devotion to the god or gods, blessings granted to them by the god or gods, and the achievements of the Pharaoh. These achievements are probably better understood for the most part as examples of the role of Pharaoh being carried out, rather than as references to specific events.

The extent to which Egyptians other than the priesthood were admitted to temples is still the subject of ongoing research and academic debate. However, the nature of the priesthood meant that in all but the largest state temples there was what is known as the *phyle* system, where there were four rotating groups of priests. Most priests served for a month before returning to their normal occupations, and served in the temple for only three months of the year.<sup>11</sup> As well as those in society, mostly male, but also including women, who were involved in the operation and administration of temples, it is probable that the wider population in general would have been familiar with obelisks from viewing processions to and from the temples. We know from inscriptions that the pyramidia of obelisks were coated with gold or similar materials, and an inscription on an obelisk of Hatshepsut speaks of it being visible outside the temple, on ‘both sides of the river’.<sup>12</sup> These metal caps would have been the first part of the obelisk to be struck by the rays of the rising sun, emphasising their solar connections. With reservations, as noted above, obelisks in Ancient Egypt can therefore be thought of as being the property of the state, in the sense that the Pharaoh could have anticipated Louis XIV’s probably apocryphal remark ‘L’état, c’est moi’,<sup>13</sup> but viewable by society in general. Another question is how far the inscriptions would have been understood by a largely illiterate population, but it seems likely that at least the general sense of them would have been communicated by the literate priesthood.

Although they would later come to be seen as icons of enduring and unchanging stability, even within Ancient Egypt, obelisks were subject to alteration. The obelisk of Thutmose III mentioned above originally had a single column of inscriptions on three sides,<sup>14</sup> completed and with additional side columns added by Thutmose IV. Subsequently, additional scenes were added by Ramses II, who also completed the fourth side of an obelisk begun by his father, Sety I.<sup>15</sup> Ramses II also added inscriptions to other obelisks, including Cleopatra’s Needles. The motivation for later Pharaohs to add their own inscriptions to the obelisks of earlier rulers is debatable. One possibility is that, especially by completing the unfinished work of their predecessors, it showed the piety of a subsequent ruler, but another more mundane explanation is that it enabled them to get the benefits of erecting an obelisk without the time consuming and expensive work of excavation.<sup>16</sup>

During the second half of the fifteenth century BC, two obelisks were erected for Thutmose III on the occasion of his Third Jubilee (*hb-sd*), in Year 37 of his reign, by Yamunedjeh, First Herald of the

King,<sup>17</sup> in front of the Temple of the Sun in Heliopolis,<sup>18</sup> the site of which is now to the northeast of modern Cairo. These were the obelisks which nearly 1,500 years later were to be moved to Alexandria, and which became known as Cleopatra's Needles. Around 150 years after they were first erected, the original central columns of inscriptions by Thutmose III were supplemented with side columns by Ramses II, and a small additional inscription was subsequently added over a hundred years after that by Siamun.<sup>19</sup>

In 525 BC, Persian forces under the command of Cambyses II invaded Egypt, and defeated the reigning Pharaoh, Psamtek III. Although Cambyses and his successor, Darius I, ruled as Pharaohs, took Egyptian throne names which were written in cartouches, and undertook some temple building,<sup>20</sup> unsuccessful revolts led to Persian rule becoming more oppressive, and Cambyses in particular was depicted by Herodotus as destructive to indigenous Egyptian culture through actions such as the killing of the sacred Apis Bull.<sup>21</sup> However, in Pliny the Elder's *The Natural History*, he recounts how one of two obelisks of Ramses II in Heliopolis was spared by Cambyses during his sack of that city<sup>22</sup>

It was in his admiration of this work, that, when King Cambyses took the city by storm, and the conflagration had already reached the very foot of the obelisk, he ordered the fire to be extinguished; he entertaining a respect for this stupendous erection which he had not entertained for the city itself.<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, a conservation survey of the New York obelisk,<sup>24</sup> which along with that now in London originally stood in Heliopolis, suggests that deterioration of its surface, rather than being the result of modern air pollution, may in fact be the result of fire damage in ancient times.

Using thermoluminescence, the same procedure used to date ancient pottery, they found that the stone had in fact been in a fire at exactly the time of Cambyses, when the Persians pillaged and burned ancient Heliopolis. Because the obelisk had been toppled first, part of it had been protected from the flames by the sand of the desert. The south and west faces were badly damaged, however, and are unreadable in places. Most of the loss of stone over the centuries was from this exposed area.<sup>25</sup>

Although this assessment cannot be relied upon as conclusive, as the error limits of thermoluminescence dating are in the region of 5-10%,<sup>26</sup> it suggests that there may be a degree of historical accuracy in ancient accounts such as that by Pliny, who was writing over five hundred years later. It also indicates, even if the factual accuracy of the accounts can be questioned, that the perception had survived of the respect that foreign conquerors could hold for the monuments of past Egyptian rulers.

Following a successful revolt against Persian occupation in 404 BC, a second Persian conquest took place in 343 BC, and lasted until the defeat of Darius III by Alexander the Great in 333 BC at the Battle of Issus. Following the death of Alexander in 323 BC, his half-brother Philip III Arrhidaeus and his son Alexander IV (killed as a baby with his mother in 311 BC) ruled Egypt as part of the Macedonian empire until being supplanted by one of Alexander the Great's generals, Ptolemy, who proclaimed himself king of Egypt in 305 BC.<sup>27</sup> Alexander and his successors took on the titles of Pharaohs in Egypt, and undertook repairs and additions to temples, as did Ptolemy and the dynasty that he founded. The works undertaken by the Ptolemies included the creation of new obelisks, of which the best known are those at the temple of Isis at Philae in Upper Egypt, one of which was successfully transported to England between 1818 and 1821 by the traveller and collector William Bankes, and is now at Kingston Lacy in Dorset.<sup>28</sup> As well as continuing to build temples and erect new obelisks, Ptolemaic rulers also moved architectural elements of existing temples such as those at Heliopolis to other sites, especially their capital city of Alexandria. These included obelisks, as fragments of an obelisk of Sety I have been found in the harbour there, and a block which it has been suggested formed part of the base for one of Sety I was later used in Alexandria in the foundations of Pompey's Pillar.<sup>29</sup> Ptolemy II Philadelphus<sup>30</sup> is said to have erected an uninscribed obelisk of Nectanebo<sup>31</sup> in the Arsinoeion at Alexandria, a temple to his deified wife Arsinoe.<sup>32</sup>

During the final period of indigenous Pharaonic rule, and the immediate post-Pharaonic period, the role and status of obelisks still seems to have been that of politico-religious state sponsored objects, but with control of the country passing to foreign rulers, to have taken on additional elements. Although they were still valued and prestigious objects, their possession, and particularly their re-use in other architectural contexts, was a reminder of the decline of the society which had produced them, and indicated a new role for them as imperial trophies.

## 2.1.2 The Roman Empire

In 30 BC, the forces of Cleopatra VII, the last of the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt,<sup>33</sup> and Marc Antony were defeated by Octavian, who became the Emperor Augustus, and they committed suicide. Before her death, Cleopatra began construction of the Caesareum, which is described in a number of ways by different sources, but was probably initially a temple to the deified Julius Caesar, and later to Marc Antony as well. After her death, Augustus completed the temple, by around 26-20 BC, rededicating it to himself and the Imperial cult, and around 12 BC he moved from Heliopolis the two obelisks which became known as Cleopatra's Needles, setting them up in Egyptian style either side of the entrance to the Caesareum.<sup>34</sup> He would also have wanted to venerate Caesar as his maternal great-uncle, who named him as his adopted son and heir in his will. The obelisks

were mentioned by Pliny in his *Natural History*, but he only says that ‘There are two other obelisks at Alexandria in the precinct of the temple of Caesar near the harbour. They were cut by King Mesphres [i.e. Thutmose III] and measure 42 cubits’.<sup>35</sup>

Augustus was the first Roman emperor, and although after the defeat of Marc Antony and Cleopatra Egypt was added to the Roman Empire, it acquired a unique status, being governed by a Prefect directly responsible to the Emperor. This effectively made the country a personal fief or domain of the Emperor, and senators and members of the equestrian order were not allowed to enter the country without his permission.<sup>36</sup> Augustus, and emperors after him until Diocletian, continued the Ptolemaic practice of building, rebuilding, and extending temples to the Egyptian gods, and important local deities in the area of the Cataracts and Nubia, and of having their names inscribed on them in hieroglyphs.<sup>37</sup> Not only this, but they continued to commission obelisks, at least six in total.<sup>38</sup> These, however, were not for erection in Egypt. Augustus began a process of transporting obelisks, existing and commissioned, from Egypt to Rome, the capital of the Empire. Subsequent emperors also had obelisks quarried in Egypt and inscribed, either in Egypt or Rome, with inscriptions copied from existing obelisks or newly composed.<sup>39</sup> This process went on until the late fourth century AD, when Theodosius moved one to the new capital of the Eastern Empire, Constantinople, now Istanbul.<sup>40</sup> Around 13-10 BC, at the same time as he was having two obelisks from Heliopolis moved to the Caesareum in Alexandria, Augustus also had two more obelisks from Heliopolis, originally erected by the Nineteenth Dynasty Pharaoh Sety I and the Twenty-Sixth dynasty Pharaoh Psamtek II<sup>41</sup> moved to Rome.<sup>42</sup> In total, Augustus had at least four obelisks transported from Egypt.<sup>43</sup> Classical writers such as Pliny associated obelisks with named rulers, but it is not clear how far Augustus and future emperors were aware that the obelisks they were moving had in a number of cases been created by one Pharaoh and later co-opted or usurped by another.

The first two obelisks moved to Rome by Augustus were placed in the Circus Maximus and the Campus Martius. They were mentioned by Pliny in his *Natural History*, where he notes that the latter obelisk (now in Monte Citorio) was adapted for use as part of a giant solar calendar by placing a gilt ball on its summit.<sup>44</sup> He also mentions a third obelisk, now standing in front of St Peter’s, which was erected in the Vatican Circus, built by Caligula and Nero.<sup>45</sup> Later Ammianus Marcellinus also mentioned the obelisks in the Circus Maximus and Campus Martius, as well as another brought from Karnak to Alexandria by Constantine, which remained there after his death until transported to Rome by his son Constantius. This obelisk was capped by a gilt bronze globe, but it was very soon struck by lightning (‘this was immediately struck by a bolt of the divine fire’) and replaced with a gilt bronze flaming torch. Ammianus also mentions the Vatican obelisk, as

well as the one originally in the Gardens of Sallust, and now at Trinita dei Monte, and two at the mausoleum of Augustus and now at Santa Maria Maggiore and the Quirinale.<sup>46</sup>

To some extent, the obelisks brought to the city by Augustus and later emperors retained a number of aspects related to their original role in Egyptian culture. The first two obelisks brought by Augustus were dedicated to the solar deity Sol, and the one in the Campus Martius formed part of a meridian which tracked the length of the sun's noon shadow throughout the calendar year.<sup>47</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus also says that the obelisk later brought to Alexandria by Constantine, and by Constantius to the Circus Maximus, had been left at Karnak by Augustus 'because it was consecrated as a special gift to the sun god, and... [was] placed in the sacred part of his sumptuous temple, which might not be profaned...'.<sup>48</sup> This indicates an understanding of their solar symbolism in Egypt, and a continuing use of it in their new context. Pliny referred to the solar associations of obelisks, as well as their inscriptions being 'Egyptian letters'.<sup>49</sup> The Egyptian identity of the obelisks, their solar associations, and the textual, rather than decorative nature of their inscriptions were not only understood at the time of Augustus, but remained so until at least the fourth century AD, when Ammianus Marcellinus published a partial Greek translation of the hieroglyphic text on the Circus Maximus obelisk.<sup>50</sup>

Some associations of the obelisks can therefore be seen to have transferred from Egypt, and it could be argued that moving and commissioning obelisks continued to be a confirmation and validation of the power and wealth of the ruler, just as it had been for Egyptian pharaohs, but obelisks were now associated with the performance of the role of Roman emperor, rather than that of Egyptian pharaoh. The first two obelisks brought to Rome by Augustus had an important role as imperial trophies, symbols of the conquest of Egypt, as can be seen by dedicatory inscriptions on their pedestals. Both had identical inscriptions, repeated on two faces of their pedestals.

IMP.CAESAR.DIVI.FIL

AVGVSTVS

PONTIFEX.MAXIMVS

IMP.XII.COS.XI.TRIB.POT.POT.XIV

AEGVPTO.IN.POTESTATEM

POPVLRI.ROMANI.REDACTA

SOLI.DONVM.DEDIT<sup>51</sup>

(‘Caesar Augustus, imperator, son of a divus, pontifex maximus, imperator 12 times, consul 11 times, with tribunician power 14 times. With Egypt having been brought into the domain of the Roman people, Augustus gave this gift to the sun.’)<sup>52</sup>

In bringing other obelisks to Rome, or by commissioning new ones, later emperors were not only providing continuing reminders of Roman control of Egypt and its riches as part of the wider empire, but also emulating Augustus. As the first emperor to bring obelisks to Rome, Augustus introduced a number of changes to the way in which they had been sited, supported, and decorated in Egypt, which were continued by his successors, and by those from the Renaissance onwards who moved and re-erected obelisks.

In Egypt, obelisks had been intimately associated with temples. To some degree this religious significance can be seen as continuing, since Augustus used them in an Egyptian style to flank the Caesareum in Alexandria and his own mausoleum in Rome, and it has been suggested that the introduction of obelisks to Rome reflected or was linked to the rise in popularity of the worship of Egyptian deities throughout the empire.<sup>53</sup> This growing popularity preceded the conquest of Egypt, but a number of emperors after Augustus were associated with the worship of Egyptian gods. In 28 BC, Octavian had banned the Egyptian cults from the *pomerium*, the symbolic and religiously sanctified city limits, but also supported the restoration of their temples.<sup>54</sup> As this suggests, the nature of the worship of Egyptian deities in Imperial Rome is a complex topic, but it was likely to have involved elements of both personal piety and politics.<sup>55</sup> Domitian commissioned a new obelisk, with hieroglyphic inscriptions honouring him and depicting him as a pharaoh,<sup>56</sup> and was associated with contributions to the great temple of Isis, the Iseum Campense, where this and several other obelisks were sited. His works there, however, can be seen as part of a general emulation of Augustus, rather than as a particular expression of Domitian’s devotion to the Egyptian cults.<sup>57</sup> In Rome, obelisks became associated with public spaces, and particularly with circuses. The Campus Martius had numerous temples, and was used for religious functions, but it was also an area with extensive civil and political functions, and the Circus Maximus, on whose *spina* or central barrier one obelisk was erected, was a public entertainment area. The Vatican obelisk was, as mentioned above, also located in the Vatican circus, probably by Caligula, Elagabulus relocated the obelisk first brought to Rome by Hadrian to the Circus Varianus,<sup>58</sup> and Maxentius moved the obelisk commissioned by Domitian from its initial location in the Iseum Campense to the circus he built to commemorate his deceased son Romulus.<sup>59</sup> When Constantius brought what is now the Lateran obelisk to Rome, it joined the obelisk of Augustus in the Circus Maximus.



Figure 6 - A recreation of the Circus Maximus in Rome, showing a single obelisk surmounted by a flaming torch. Probably based on a plate in a late seventeenth or eighteenth century edition of Suetonius's *The Twelve Caesars*. Author's Collection.

Another change introduced by the emperors was the siting of obelisks singly. Although some obelisks in Rome were erected or re-erected in pairs, as with the mausoleum of Augustus and in the Iseum Campense, and obelisks were not universally erected in pairs in Egypt (the obelisk of Thutmose III now known as the Lateran obelisk in Rome being an exception), Roman emperors normally re-erected them singly. In another significant development, they also placed them on higher pedestals than the Egyptians, which had Latin rather than hieroglyphic inscriptions, and with four point bronze supports at the corners of the obelisk base usually known as astragals, creating a gap between the obelisk and its pedestal.<sup>60</sup> The pyramidia and sometimes parts of the shafts of obelisks had been coated with gold or electrum by the Egyptians, but these enhanced rather than added to the obelisk form. The Romans introduced additional decorative elements to the summits of obelisks in the form of gilt bronze balls or the flaming torch of the Circus Maximus obelisk. The astragals now used to support obelisks came in a variety of forms, including cubes and knuckle bone shapes, and some at least are likely to have had symbolic associations, particularly the crab shaped ones used to support the obelisks of the Caesareum at Alexandria. The crab was associated with Apollo, a solar deity, and were also the zodiacal birth sign of Augustus.<sup>61</sup>



Figure 7 - Examples of Egyptian and Roman obelisk pedestals. Clockwise, from top left, Luxor, Karnak, Montecitorio, Popolo. Author's photos.

The obelisks were to remain in Rome, but over the centuries dramatic changes took place in the empire which were to profoundly affect the way that obelisks were perceived and understood, both in Europe and in Egypt.

## 2.2 From the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment

### 2.2.1 Christian Egypt

The rise to dominance of the Christian religion in the Roman Empire was not as sudden or dramatic as it is often perceived.<sup>62</sup> One indication of this may be that Constantine, whose Edict of Milan allowed freedom of worship, including Christianity, within the Empire, and his successors, continued to transport obelisks from Egypt, both to Rome and to the new capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, Constantinople. An obelisk from Karnak originally intended by Constantine to go to the new eastern capital, and taken on his orders to Alexandria, was instead transported to Rome by his successor Constantius II, and re-erected in the Circus Maximus to complement, and perhaps emulate, the one already placed there by Augustus. Another obelisk, of Thutmose III, from Karnak, probably also transported to Alexandria by Constantine, was subsequently moved to the Hippodrome in Constantinople by Theodosius.<sup>63</sup> It is possible that moving both of these obelisks to their new sites was intended to symbolise the triumph of Christianity over paganism, but the choice to site the both on the *spina* of circuses, and to decorate the pedestal of the Constantinople obelisk with reliefs of its transportation and re-erection suggest that the primary motivation was the performance of the traditional imperial role, including the emulation of Augustus's achievements.

With the disintegration of the western Roman Empire, and the foundation of Constantinople in 330 AD as the capital of the eastern empire, Egypt became part of the Byzantine Empire. Christianity had a significant presence in Egypt by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, but it was not until the 4<sup>th</sup> century that it began to spread widely in the countryside, and by the 5<sup>th</sup> century the country was Christianised. During this period, the indigenous pagan religion of Egypt was increasingly persecuted, although its decline was gradual.<sup>64</sup> Alexandria continued to be an important port city in the empire, and much of the Classical city still survived, including the Caesareum, which was not finally destroyed until 912 AD, and its obelisks.<sup>65</sup> This period saw the development of Christian pilgrimage, with recognised itineraries,<sup>66</sup> and apart from its role as gateway to the rest of Egypt and the Holy Land, Alexandria was associated with a number of important saints, especially Saint Mark and Saint Catherine. The Caesareum was adapted as a Christian church or cathedral of Saint Michael,<sup>67</sup> and at this point both obelisks would have been standing outside. It is likely that, as will be shown later, they, like other sites in the city, took on Christian associations in addition to their Pharaonic ones. Obelisks are mentioned in Christian sources from the fourth century AD onwards, as for example in Saint Ephrem's commentary on Isaiah, which mentions those of Heliopolis.<sup>68</sup>

The establishment of Christianity as the dominant religion in Egypt brought with it a radical change in the understanding and treatment of the culture of Pharaonic Egypt. Other polytheistic societies, such as the Persian, Macedonian Greek, and Roman, maintained the traditions of the society that they conquered, using it to consolidate their political control of the country. The monotheistic religion of Christianity re-used the temples of Egyptian gods as churches, but did not build new ones or restore and extend existing ones, or excavate and erect new obelisks. The scripts and languages of Pharaonic Egypt were replaced by the Greek or Latin alphabets and languages, or evolved into Coptic, but hieroglyphs, so intimately associated with its religious culture, were becoming extinct by the late fourth century AD.<sup>69</sup> This had important implications for the role of the obelisks as *semiophores*. While they still had a role in transmitting meaning, if we use Assmann's concept of mnemohistory and shared histories based around canonical texts, the texts through which their meaning came to be understood were those of Christianity, and not of the religion within which they had been created. This created a cultural discontinuity which would persist until the decipherment of hieroglyphs in the nineteenth century allowed Pharaonic texts to be read again and interpreted.

### **2.2.2 Arab and Ottoman Egypt**

If the spread of Christianity, and the decline and then suppression of the worship of the Egyptian gods had marked a major change in the way in which the surviving remains of Pharaonic Egypt were perceived and understood, an equally major one took place in 639-642 AD, when Egypt was conquered by Islamic Arab forces, leading eventually to a change in language and, for most of the population, in religion.

Relatively few Arabic primary sources are available in an English translation,<sup>70</sup> but there are a number which mention obelisks in general, including two surviving at Heliopolis,<sup>71</sup> and Cleopatra's Needles. One difficulty with these, and with other older references to the obelisks, is the terminology used, and this is the case until the beginning of the nineteenth century. One Arabic source is the writer 'Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi,<sup>72</sup> who mentioned in his account of the antiquities of Egypt, published around 1203, an obelisk at Alexandria which he referred to as '*Amûd il Babri*' - The Column of the Sea. As Joseph White noted in his *Aegyptiaca*,<sup>73</sup> the Arabic term *Amûd* can be used to refer to both Graeco-Roman columns and obelisks. Given the extent of the remains of Classical Alexandria which survived until the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is therefore difficult to decide whether he is referring to a pillar or an obelisk, and if the latter, to one of the Needles or the obelisk of the former Arsionoeion. Until the nineteenth century, European sources refer to what we would now call obelisks as both 'pyramids' and 'obelisks'.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, given that granite is the most typical material for obelisks, confusion is also caused by the use of the

term ‘marble’. Historically, this has not only been used to describe a form of limestone, but any stone capable of taking a polish.<sup>75</sup>

Another reference from the Islamic period to an obelisk or obelisks appears in a work on cosmography, written by the Persian traveller and geographer Ahmad Ibn Rustah c. 900 AD, which appears to describe one or more obelisks being toppled when their bronze supports were melted out with fires. It refers to two obelisks [each?] placed on a pedestal “having the likeness of a scorpion of copper or brass, covered with an inscription”.<sup>76</sup> This would correspond to the bronze crabs used to support the obelisks when they were re-erected in Roman times, which partially survived under the standing obelisk now in New York.<sup>77</sup> It suggests that in contrast to earlier eras when obelisks were accorded high non-monetary value, they had become less valuable than the metal used to support them. Writing in the fifteenth century, the Damascene scholar Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim Jazari, who visited both Alexandria and Cairo, wrote of one of the obelisks at Heliopolis, which had fallen, that 200 quintals of copper were taken from it,<sup>78</sup> and that the copper cap (which would have been on the pyramidion at the summit) was worth 10,000 dinars.<sup>79</sup> As the obelisk probably fell around 1160 AD, these amounts may well have been traditional and exaggerated, but still demonstrate the relative lack of value attributed to the obelisk itself.<sup>80</sup> The Arab historian and geographer Ibn al-Wardi visited Alexandria in 1340, and mentions the Needles, giving an imaginary translation of the inscription on one, probably the New York obelisk, but without saying whether the other was fallen or not.<sup>81</sup>

It is in this period that the name given to the obelisks of the Caesareum at Alexandria becomes significant. The general term in Arabic for obelisks became *mislah* or *missala*, from a term for a packing needle used for sewing up bales or sacks, and in medieval and later sources this became *messalat far'un* or Pharaoh's Needles.<sup>82</sup> When and why the two obelisks at Alexandria became associated with Cleopatra is unknown, but in the late twelfth century AD the scholar and traveller Abd al-Latif al-Baghdadi, who taught medicine and philosophy at Cairo, saw the obelisks at Alexandria and referred to them as ‘Cleopatra's Big Needles’.<sup>83</sup> The link may be due not only to the historical association between the queen and the city, but to a generally positive view of her in Arab sources, including her construction projects. According to Okasha el Daly, she

was depicted by Arab writers as an able monarch and scholar who was comfortable among philosophers and scientists; she was regarded as an accomplished mathematician, alchemist, and medical doctor as well as a great builder<sup>84</sup>

While the association between the obelisks and Cleopatra would persist, a number of later commentators would also emphasise that there was no indication that she had anything to do with moving them from Heliopolis.

After the Arab conquest of Egypt, Christianity became the minority religion in the country, but Alexandria was not only the port of entry to the country for many Muslim pilgrims undertaking the Hajj, but also for Christian pilgrims. The ultimate destination of most Christian pilgrims was the Holy Land and Jerusalem, but Egypt itself had many sites of pilgrimage linked to the biblical narrative of the Exodus and the flight to Egypt of the Holy Family, as well as to Christian saints and martyrs. Christian pilgrimage to Egypt seems to go back to at least the late fourth century AD, when a woman named Egeria, possibly from Spain, visited sites including Alexandria, Memphis, and Heliopolis. In her account of her journey, which only survives in part, and some only in summary, there are references to what seem to be remains of Pharaonic architecture, including the Pyramids, but which are interpreted as sites associated with Christian figures. (For example, her account contains an early example of the description of the Pyramids as the Granaries of Joseph.)<sup>85</sup>

Accounts by pilgrims to Egypt are scarce until Renaissance times, when the late fifteenth century German knight Arnold von Harff (1471-1505)<sup>86</sup> visited Alexandria as part of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land during 1496-7. He describes being shown 'two high red marble pillars, twelve paces from each other, on which stood the wheel with the knives with which St Catherine is said to have been martyred... outside the town are also two red marble pillars, one of which has now fallen down. On this place they struck off St Catherine's holy head...'.<sup>87</sup> The latter 'pillars' are almost certainly a reference to Cleopatra's Needles. Frere Nicole Lestuen, who visited Egypt in 1517, describes only one obelisk, comparing it to the Vatican obelisk, implying that the other Alexandrian obelisk was not only fallen, but also buried in sand and rubbish.<sup>88</sup> His mention of the Vatican obelisk is a reminder that a significant number of pilgrims travelled to Egypt by way of Rome, where there were a multitude of sites where they could earn indulgences. Most of these were churches, but the Vatican obelisk, the only one still standing since antiquity, seems to have been associated with a practice where pilgrims believed that by crawling under it they could be absolved of mortal sin. (Like Cleopatra's Needles it was supported on four metal astragals in the Roman fashion rather than placed directly onto its base as the Egyptians originally did.)<sup>89</sup> This practice, although not officially sanctioned, must have been common enough for it to be mentioned by the late thirteenth century English Benedictine chronicler Ranulf Higden, assuming that his account is accurate.<sup>90</sup> A desire to distance the Church from such practices may also have been a factor in the ceremony of exorcism performed when the Vatican obelisk was consecrated after it was moved. While there is no direct evidence that similar practices were associated with other obelisks, it illustrates the way in which objects of material culture from Pharaonic Egypt could become associated with other cultural traditions, and valued for these, rather than their original function.



Figure 8 - Alexandria in the 17th Century, showing the upright and fallen obelisks by the Arab era city walls at lower left hand, and what may be another obelisk. Pompey's Pillar is at the upper right hand, labelled 'I'. From an edition of Alain Manesson Mallet's *Description de l'Univers*, c. 1683. (Author's Collection.)

A detailed consideration of the excavation and re-erection of Egyptian and Roman obelisks by a succession of Popes during the Renaissance and Enlightenment is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is important to consider briefly some of the ways in which they maintained or changed the practices of Roman emperors, as these were to be powerful influences on siting, support, and decoration, or lack of it, when obelisks next began to be moved. There was no return to siting obelisks in pairs, but they were once again associated with religious buildings, or as in the case of the Vatican obelisk moved to a more prominent position in relation to them. However, they were also part of public spaces such as plazas, and became elements of constructed vistas. The Roman pattern of pedestal was maintained, and they were re-used in a number of instances. Newly composed inscriptions in Latin were added to pedestals, but with the exception of the Vatican obelisk, which had highly decorative lion shaped bronze supports above the pedestal, the Roman practice of using astragals and creating a gap between the obelisk and its pedestal was not continued. In some cases, such as the Piazza Minerva and Navona obelisks, elaborate bases were constructed for the obelisks and their pedestals. It became normal to add decorations in bronze to the pyramidia of the obelisks, and while these could incorporate Christian symbolism in the form of crosses, the Montecitorio obelisk had a bronze ball in an allusion to its role in the solar calendar of Augustus, and the decorations often included elements linked to the crests of papal families. The enthusiasm of popes for re-erecting obelisks reflected the secular, as well as religious power of the papacy, and can be seen as an emulation of Roman emperors.

There are sporadic references to the Needles in Alexandria in texts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and by the mid eighteenth century indications that there was renewed interest in them as specifically Egyptian antiquities. For example, in the first half of the eighteenth century the London merchant Edward Brown wrote about

the obelisk, or as the Franks call it the Aiguilla,<sup>91</sup> and our sailors the Needle of Cleopatra. There is one standing, and another lying on the ground...I have seen in other parts of Egypt, several of these needles, and I think there is a correspondence between the hieroglyphick figures on the faces of them all.<sup>92</sup>

Eyles Irwin(1751-1817)<sup>93</sup>, an East India Company official, and later poet and writer, visited Alexandria in the late eighteenth century, and in his account of his travels he referred to three needles, which may either indicate that another obelisk had survived from antiquity, or be a reference to Pompey's Pillar. He expressed his view that

it is a wonder that no attempt has been made to transport the fallen needle to Europe...  
What a beautiful termination would it make to one of the vistos [sic] at Chatsworth!  
What a noble addition would it prove to the collection at Stowe!<sup>94</sup>

A review of a translation of the French naturalist Charles-Nicolas-Sigisbert Sonnini de Manoncourt's *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt* mentions the erosion of inscriptions on the standing obelisk, speculating that this was due to the effect of the sea wind, and the fact that Sonnini had been unable to see a Greek inscription which others had claimed to have seen on the opposite (west) face.<sup>95</sup> Taken together, these later accounts indicate that perception of the Needles was beginning to change from one which was primarily based in religion to one which considered their original role in Pharaonic Egypt, and gave them an aesthetic aspect. In Jauss's terminology, the horizon of expectations in Europe, which would affect views of them before and after their arrival, was changing.

### 2.2.3 The Intervention of Europe

The French military expedition to Egypt in 1798, and the British response to it, was an event which constituted a seismic change in the relationship between Europe and Egypt. It took place against the geopolitical background of the conflicts following the French Revolution, and the decline of the Ottoman Empire. As well as posing a potential threat to British control of India, and allowing domination of the Mediterranean, the French invasion of Egypt may initially have been largely tactical, an attempt to destabilise the Ottoman Empire or to divert British and Russian attention from French conquests in Germany and northern Italy, and one which also allowed them to use Egypt as a bargaining asset in future peace negotiations.<sup>96</sup> Egypt had been a province of the Ottoman Empire since 1517 AD, but effective government at this time was in the hands of the Mamluk military aristocracy, with the governor appointed by the Turkish Sultan effectively under the control of whichever Mamluk house currently dominated the others.<sup>97</sup> French diplomatic relations with the Sublime Porte, as the Ottoman Government was generally known, went back as far as the first half of the sixteenth century, but as the control of the Porte over its empire became steadily more theoretical than actual, French desire to maintain diplomatic relationships and the advantages that these brought, especially in trade, was countered by the perceived opportunity to acquire direct control over Egypt.<sup>98</sup> This, of course, was the essence of what became known in the nineteenth century as the Eastern Question, where European powers were mutually suspicious that one of them would intervene in the slow disintegration of the Ottoman Empire to secure control of as much of its territory as they could. From the outset of attempts to remove an Alexandrian obelisk from Egypt, these geopolitical factors were to form a major, but largely unexpressed factor in the reluctance of the British Government to actively support the acquisition of the fallen obelisk.

The French expeditionary force quickly secured effective control of Egypt, but a British naval squadron commanded by Horatio Nelson (1758-1805),<sup>99</sup> although it had failed to intercept the

French force on its way there, subsequently located the French fleet and decisively defeated it at the Battle of the Nile, fought at Abu Qir Bay near Alexandria in 1798, effectively stranding French forces in Egypt unless reinforcements could reach them. Despite this, a further British military response was by no means certain. The Egyptian campaign of 1801 came against the background of a Cabinet crisis in September 1800, over the strategic issue of whether to attempt to weaken France in the European war, or to protect British territories in India:

Henry Dundas, who headed the War Department and the Board of Control for India, saw the French army of occupation in Egypt as a threat to the stability of the British Empire. Lord Grenville at the Foreign Department saw it as weakening France, because unable to affect the outcome of the fighting on the continent. One's threat was the other's victory.<sup>100</sup>

As long as the French expeditionary force remained safely isolated in Egypt, many in the British Cabinet felt that it could do little damage. With the defeat of Austria by France, and the collapse of the Second Coalition of allied powers against France, however, the prospect emerged that since France was in possession of Egypt, it would make every effort to retain it in any subsequent peace negotiations, and if it did, would then be able to use it as a base to attack India when hostilities almost inevitably recommenced. Powerful elements within the Cabinet opposed the use of the only available British expeditionary force, including the Secretary at War, William Windham (1750-1810),<sup>101</sup> who wished to use it to support Royalist opposition in France, and the Foreign Secretary, William Grenville (1759-1834),<sup>102</sup> who wished to use it for strategic support of allies elsewhere in Europe. The Secretary of State for War,<sup>103</sup> Henry Dundas (1742-1811),<sup>104</sup> however, was able with the support of the Prime Minister, William Pitt, to secure agreement for military action against the French in Egypt, even though this meant Dundas having to take personal responsibility for the decision, in order to persuade his Cabinet colleagues, and a reluctant George III (1738-1820),<sup>105</sup> to withdraw their opposition.<sup>106</sup>

An expeditionary force was assembled, and the army was placed under the command of Sir Ralph Abercromby, with Lord Keith (1746-1823)<sup>107</sup> as naval commander.<sup>108</sup> Following an amphibious landing at Abukir Bay, and a series of engagements over several days, the remaining French forces at Alexandria withdrew to the city, which was besieged. During the Battle of Alexandria, Abercromby was wounded by a musket ball in the thigh, and died from the resulting infection eight days after the battle. He was replaced as Commander-in-Chief of the army by Major-General the Honourable John Hely-Hutchinson (1757-1852).<sup>109</sup> British troops were detached to Cairo, where French forces capitulated on 22 June 1801. Under the terms of the capitulation the French were allowed to withdraw with arms, equipment, and baggage, which may have included

antiquities which had been acquired and not transferred to Alexandria.<sup>110</sup> Any antiquities should have been surrendered, but had the agreement broken down the remaining French troops still posed a very significant military threat, and ensuring their peaceful withdrawal from the country was a higher priority. Some of the French returned to Alexandria, while most were returned to France by sea. Strengthened by reinforcements from Britain and elsewhere in Europe, and later by a force of British and Indian troops under the command of General Baird (1757-1859),<sup>111</sup> the siege of Alexandria continued, and after further attacks by the British, a three-day armistice was requested by the French on 26 August. Initially, General Jacques-François Menou, who commanded the French, proposed negotiating a convention, which would have seen the repatriation of his troops, the return of all warships and other vessels and most of his artillery to France, and the retention of 'all Egyptian public property in French hands'.<sup>112</sup> Menou also wanted an extension of the armistice until 17 September, allowing him to resume hostilities if reinforcements reached him. These proposed terms were angrily rejected by Hutchinson,<sup>113</sup> and on 30 August Menou accepted the terms of capitulation offered by the British. Among the main ones were repatriation to France 'with personal arms, private property, and ten pieces of artillery, but the surrender of the shipping and public property'.<sup>114</sup>

Napoleon's expedition had famously been accompanied by the 167 strong Commission on the Sciences and Arts,<sup>115</sup> often simply referred to as the *savants*, whose work formed the basis of the monumental *Description de l'Égypte*, published between 1809 and 1822.<sup>116</sup> In addition to their notes, measurements and drawings, they had also accumulated a mass of Pharaonic antiquities, including the Rosetta Stone.<sup>117</sup> An initial agreement on the cessation of hostilities, known as the Convention or Treaty of El-Arish, had in fact been agreed in January 1800, between French and Turkish commanders, with the support of Sir Sidney Smith (1764-1840),<sup>118</sup> the British naval commander in the Eastern Mediterranean. This would have allowed the French to take the antiquities with them, but on instructions from London it was repudiated by Smith's superior, Lord Keith, who insisted that the French surrender and be treated as prisoners of war.<sup>119</sup> The Convention which was agreed for the evacuation of Cairo,<sup>120</sup> signed on 17 June 1801 by French, British, and Turkish commanders, stipulated that its terms applied to 'All the administrations, the members of the commission of arts and sciences, and in short every person attached to the French army'. Article 11 of the Convention went on to say that members of the administration and the commission 'shall also carry with them not only all the papers relative to their mission, but also their private papers, as well as all other articles which have reference thereto'. However, Article 15 stipulated that when the towns and forts named were surrendered, 'commissaries shall be named for receiving the ordnance, ammunition, magazines, papers, archives, plans, and other public effects which the French will leave in possession of the allied powers'. It was not clear

whether any antiquities were considered to be ‘articles’ relative to the mission of the Commission, and the personal property of its members, or ‘public effects’ which would be left in possession of either the British or the Turks.

This ambiguity was compounded by the terms of the Convention agreed for the surrender of French forces in Alexandria on 2 September 1801, signed by the British commanders Keith and Hutchinson, the French general Menou, and the ‘Capitan Pacha’ on behalf of the Ottoman Sultan.<sup>121</sup> Article 4, as proposed by Menou, stated that ‘All individuals, constituting a part of the French army, or attached to it by any relations, civil or military ... shall preserve their property of every description, their effects, papers, &c. &c. which shall not be subject to any examination’. This was granted ‘provided that nothing be carried away belonging to the Government of the French Republic’. Article 16 referred specifically to the members of the Commission, and the antiquities that had been assembled. As drafted by Menou, it stated that ‘The individuals composing the Institute of Egypt, and the Commission of Arts, shall carry with them all the papers, plans, memoirs, collections of natural history, and all the monuments of art and antiquity, collected by them in Egypt’. The British response to this was that the members of the Institute (which was presumably understood to include the members of the Commission) could take with them ‘all the instruments of arts and science, which they have brought with them from France’, but that ‘the Arabian manuscripts, the statues, and other collections which have been made for the French Republic, shall be considered as public property, and subject to the disposal of the generals of the combined army’. That this was a sensitive area is clear from a note added which stated that ‘General Hope having declared, in consequence of some observations of the Commander in Chief of the French Army, that he could make no alteration in this article, it has been agreed that a reference thereupon should be made to the Commander in Chief of the combined army’. An exchange of letters between Menou and Hutchinson followed, during which Menou assured Hutchinson that ‘as regards collections, none of the small number that exists here belongs to the French Republic; all of them were made at the expense and through the efforts of individuals. I know of no other objects that could be considered property of the Republic apart from two sarcophagi...’. This, to borrow a well-known phrase, was being ‘economical with the *actualité*’, as Menou, referring to various collections, including those of antiquities, had written to Joseph Fourier, the secretary of the Institut d’Égypte, that ‘it is clear that they belong to the government and that they must be deposited’. The exchange of letters between Menou and Hutchinson continued, with Menou claiming that the Rosetta Stone was his personal property, and Hutchinson demanding the surrender of all collections. Eventually, following a threat by at least two of the French scholars to destroy them, a threat which seems to have applied mainly to the natural history collections and the notes, maps and drawings accompanying them, but which

could have included their copies of hieroglyphic inscriptions, a compromise was reached. The *savants* could keep their natural history collections and the notes and drawings that supplemented them, but the British would keep the major monumental antiquities including the Rosetta Stone.<sup>122</sup> These were listed by Joseph Fourier, the Secretary of the Institut d'Égypte, some as the property of the (French) Government, others as the property of generals of the French Army, with the Rosetta Stone recorded as Menou's property.<sup>123</sup>

The French had intended, or at least considered, taking one or both of the obelisks at Alexandria to France. Vivant Denon (1747-1825),<sup>124</sup> one of the *savants* who travelled with the expedition, and whose highly influential account of it preceded the first volume of the official *Description de l'Égypte* by six years, inspected the Needles, and measured and drew in outline the standing one. He suggested that

[t]hey might be conveyed to France without difficulty, and would there become a trophy of conquest, and a very characteristic one, as they are in themselves a monument, and as the hieroglyphics with which they are covered render them preferable to Pompey's Pillar, which is merely a column, somewhat larger indeed than is every-where to be found.<sup>125</sup>

In mentioning Pompey's Pillar, Denon may have been alluding to the account of Charles-Nicolas-Sigisbert Sonnini de Manoncourt, who visited Egypt between 1777 and 1780, accompanying François, Baron de Tott, on an expedition sponsored by Louis XVI, and who had proposed the transport of Pompey's Pillar to France. In his account, Sonnini described in some detail the remains of ancient Alexandria, including Cleopatra's Needles and Pompey's Pillar, but his interest in them was not simply antiquarian. In Alexandria he had been told of the Pillar that 'a plan once existed for the conveyance of this much admired column to France', but that it had been abandoned as impractical. He noted, however, that it had originally been brought a considerable distance from the quarries of Syene, or Aswan, how Julius Caesar, Augustus, and Constantine had transported obelisks from Egypt to Rome,<sup>126</sup> and he went on to suggest that

[i]t would be worthy of that people, [i.e. the French] who, in a few years, have surpassed all the heroic achievements of the Romans, to appropriate to themselves the column of Alexandria... In the midst of one of the squares of Paris, in that of the *Revolution* for instance, the column could not fail to produce the most majestic effect.



Figure 9 Cleopatra's Needle and Pompey's Pillar. They were actually nearly 3km apart. The caption notes that French dead were interred around both. From an English edition of C S Sonnini [de Manoncourt's] *Voyage dans la haute et basse Égypte*. 1799 or after. (Author's Collection.)

In 1799 a French ship carrying correspondence from the army in Egypt was intercepted by Nelson's squadron. Copies of the letters were subsequently published, and referred to in the press.<sup>127</sup> One letter was by a certain Girez<sup>128</sup>, who seems to have been a civil engineer, and one of the *savants* accompanying the expedition. Writing of Alexandria, he says that

[i]n returning towards the city [from Pompey's Pillar] you also see two Pyramids, called Cleopatra's Needles!!! They are both situate on the coast, are between fifty and sixty feet in height, and about seven feet square. One of them is still standing, the other lying on the ground. The hieroglyphics with which the four sides are covered, indicate that they are the works of the ancient Egyptians; they indicate also that they are not entire. Both of these pyramids have evidently been broken; and yet each of them was formed of a single piece of red granite. We are endeavouring to raise them, for the purpose of conveying them to France!<sup>129</sup>

This intention was known to British forces in Egypt. Captain Thomas Walsh, of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of Foot, wrote that

round the summit of that [obelisk] which is erect, we perceived the remains of a rope, most probably put there for the purpose of pulling it to the ground, preparatory to the transporting of both of them to France.<sup>130</sup>

It seems clear from what Denon wrote that although the antiquities may have been intended for what is now the Louvre Museum in Paris, their primary function was that of imperial trophies. Also, their sheer size would make any claim that they had been acquired as personal property implausible, although not inconceivable.<sup>131</sup> The antiquities collected by the French were shipped back to England in two vessels, the appropriately named *L'Égyptienne*, a captured French frigate, and the *Madras*, accompanied by Colonel, later Major-General, Sir Tompkins Hilgrove Turner (1764-1843).<sup>132</sup> The confiscated material, although classified in the Capitulation as public property, was not simply turned over to the civil or military authorities, but effectively treated as spoils of war, and presented to George III, who in turn presented it to the British Museum.

From the beginning, the British force in Egypt was intended as expeditionary, and not occupying, and its redeployment elsewhere had been planned for some time. Naval forces in the Mediterranean were still under the command of Lord Keith. General Hutchinson lost his local command when the force was dispersed, and General Henry Fox (1755-1811),<sup>133</sup> at Minorca, became Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean.<sup>134</sup> The garrison remaining at Alexandria was commanded by Richard Lambert, 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Cavan and 8<sup>th</sup> Lord Lambert (1763-1807).<sup>135</sup> It was at this point that a first, unsuccessful, attempt was made to transport the fallen obelisk to England. Subsequent accounts of this are often vague or confused about the nature of the attempt, and the reasons why it was abandoned, but it is possible to establish the main details with some confidence.

On 12 January 1802, Lord Cavan wrote to Lord Keith, who was based at Malta, informing him that a meeting of ‘the principal officers in Alexandria’ had been held on 8 January, and had resolved to remove one of Cleopatra’s Needles ‘[t]o perpetuate on British ground the memory of the late events on this country’, and in the name of the Army and Navy to request the King’s acceptance of it, forming a committee to superintend this project.<sup>136</sup> Cavan’s letter spoke of the need to procure materials for the project from abroad (Egypt was particularly short of supplies of good quality timber), and said that he was unsure whether this could be done unless ‘the period for evacuation of Egypt was sufficiently protracted’. He said that the principal problem was the lack of a suitable ship, and asked if Keith could make HMS *Strombolo* or a similar ship available, as well as materials from Malta.<sup>137</sup> Cavan indicated that the officers in Egypt had already raised a subscription, but that for the project to be successful additional subscriptions would need to be raised from ‘brother officers who had left the country’. He stressed that the strictest economy would be observed, and that the attempt would be abandoned if success seemed ‘dubious’. He asked Keith to sanction and patronise the project, and to inform other officers who had served in Egypt. Cavan enclosed a copy of the subscription list, and asked if Keith could suggest how the subscriptions could be collected and forwarded to Cavan. He added that one third of the funds were required immediately.<sup>138</sup> Although Cavan’s letter does not mention it, the subscription was not confined to officers. Writing in 1830 to the Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen (1784-1860),<sup>139</sup> Lord Howden (1762-1839),<sup>140</sup> who had served on Abercromby’s staff in the Egyptian campaign as Major-General John Cradock, and been present at the surrenders of Cairo and Alexandria, said that general officers subscribed £200,<sup>141</sup> and other ranks two days pay.<sup>142</sup> How voluntary the subscription of other ranks was may be questioned, but it seems that working parties were paid. Varying figures for the amount raised by subscription have been quoted in various sources, ranging from £2,000 to £7,000.<sup>143</sup> The autobiography of Andrew Pearson, who served with the contingents from the Indian Army commanded by General Baird, says that the working, or fatigue parties, consisted of 1000 men.<sup>144</sup>

Cleopatra’s Needles stood at the approximate middle of the semi-circular eastern, or New Harbour in Alexandria. The main, or Old Harbour, was on the other side of the peninsula of Ras al-Tin. Although the site of Alexandria was chosen in ancient times as the best anchorage for a long way on coast with few of them, the New Harbour in particular is very shallow, and with numerous shoals close offshore. Robert Richardson (1779-1847),<sup>145</sup> who travelled to Egypt in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, wrote of the harbour at Alexandria that it ‘had a mouth like a mad dog’.<sup>146</sup> Being on the Mediterranean coast it can also be affected by severe storms. The shallowness of the harbour meant that any vessel of sufficient size to carry the obelisk would be unable to approach close to the shore because of its draught. Sir Alexander Bryce (1766-1832),<sup>147</sup>

who as a Major had been commanding engineer with the British forces at Alexandria,<sup>148</sup> estimated that the water in the New Harbour was only about six foot deep fifty yards from the shore.<sup>149</sup> The plan devised was therefore to use a technique invented at the end of the seventeenth century where a vessel is floated on buoyancy aids (appropriately known as camels), in this case made from casks, to reduce its draught and allow it to approach closer to the shore, where a wharf or jetty would be built out into the harbour.<sup>150</sup> The obelisk could then be rolled down a gentle slope and along the jetty, and introduced into the vessel through a specially cut stern port. This plan was at least partially put into effect. The fallen obelisk had been partly cleared by the French, and was completely cleared by the British, who then constructed a roadway to the harbour from the site of the Needles and began building a jetty about ninety yards long out into the harbour. Although Cavan had asked Keith to provide a suitable ship, in its absence arrangements had been made with the naval Prize Agents to purchase the French frigate *Léoben*, which had been sunk in the Old Harbour, and to raise it and use it to transport the obelisk. Captain Joseph Larcom, who commanded the frigate HMS *Hind*, wrote to Keith on January 13 1802, giving further details of the project and again requesting his assistance with the provision of a suitable vessel.<sup>151</sup> Around this time, the lack of timber to reinforce the jetty became a problem when, in Bryce's words, the 'operation having been begun in the boisterous season, the materials thrown into the water were frequently displaced'. In his autobiography, Andrew Pearson, who served on the working parties moving the Needle, says that after the first jetty was washed away another was built, and that the Needle was moved to it on wooden rollers, but that a suitable method of loading it onto the ship intended to take it could not be agreed, and the obelisk was returned not to its original position, but to one about a hundred yards from the jetty.<sup>152</sup> Whether or not the attempt could have succeeded with sufficient suitable materials and a suitable vessel became immaterial when Keith replied to Larcom's letter on 1 February. His reply was brief and blunt

‘Sir, Respecting the determination of the Committee mentioned, and with whose appointment I am entirely unacquainted, I must observe that I cannot consider the obelisk or any other column or public building as capture or booty. Consequently I cannot consent to dilapidate or remove anything belonging to the Turkish Dominions, nor suffer His Majesty to be put to any expense without an express order from the Admiralty, or communication from some of the King’s confidential servants. I am &c.  
Keith.’<sup>153</sup>

As Cavan's letter to Keith had indicated, the viability of the project was questionable without additional financial support from officers who had already been transferred from Egypt and the provision of materials from the dockyards at Malta, and the damage to the quay by storms may already have put its continuation in doubt. Sir Robert Wilson (1777-1849),<sup>154</sup> who served as a

Major in the Egyptian campaign, and later wrote a history of it, said that ‘the swell of the sea destroyed the quay he [Lord Cavan] had constructed to embark it from, and the funds are so exhausted, as not to admit the formation of others’.<sup>155</sup> However, not only had Keith made it clear that he opposed the project, his opposition made it certain that the departure of British forces would not be delayed to allow its completion. The withdrawal took place in March 1803, in accordance with the terms of the Treaty of Amiens, signed in March 1802, which returned control of Egypt to the Ottoman Empire.

This first attempt to bring the Needle from Egypt to London introduced a number of elements which were to remain significant for the next nearly eighty years, until the final and successful attempt. Perhaps the most important of these was the role of the obelisks at Alexandria (and, it can be argued, of other Egyptian obelisks) as tokens in the geopolitics of the age. In the wars fought between European powers to acquire or preserve empires, and the political and diplomatic struggles between them to profit from the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the obelisks became symbolic objects. For the French, they were imperial trophies, and the transport of them would be one of many ways in which the Republic in particular could show itself as the heir to Ancient Rome. For the British, who had flirted with republicanism under the Commonwealth following the Civil War but returned to constitutional monarchy, the obelisk would be a record of victories against the French, and a memorial to those who had achieved them, as well as confirming its emerging status as an imperial power.

The monumental role of obelisks was well established, both as imperial trophies and as individual memorials. Classical sources such as Pliny recorded the transport of obelisks to Rome by Augustus and other emperors,<sup>156</sup> and the obelisk now in the Piazza di Monte Citorio, whose pedestal bears a Latin inscription linking it to the conquest of Egypt,<sup>157</sup> had been unearthed at the beginning of the sixteenth century. A misreading of the original inscription had led to a belief that the Vatican obelisk was a memorial to Julius Caesar, and bore his ashes in the bronze globe on its pyramidion. The obelisk, the only one to remain standing from Roman times, was mentioned in pilgrim itineraries for Rome from the twelfth century onwards, and the tradition of its memorial function from at least the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>158</sup> In England, obelisks had been erected as memorials in the eighteenth century. For example, the poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744) erected one in memory of his mother, and Sir Richard Worsley (1751-1805),<sup>159</sup> who had seen the re-erection of the Montecitorio obelisk in 1765, erected an obelisk in memory of his father Sir Robert Worsley in 1774 overlooking his house at Appuldurcombe on the Isle of Wight.

Other elements which were to remain significant were the ambiguous ownership status of the obelisks, and responsibility for the allocation of resources for their transport. Although it was

clear, despite Menou's protestations and evasions, that important Egyptian antiquities had been acquired by a state funded expedition for display by the state, the British attempt to remove the obelisk had been privately funded, but with the intention of presenting the obelisk to the state, in the person of the king. Even this was by no means assumed, however. Several contemporary press reports suggest that it was believed in some quarters that Cavan was acquiring, or intended to acquire, such antiquities.

General Fox, who commands in the Mediterranean, having heard that His Lordship [Cavan] was every day sending home pieces of granite, porphyry, &c., gave orders that no more stones should be put on board any vessel sailing from Egypt.<sup>160</sup>

The Earl of Cavan, who is lately arrived in England with his regiment from Egypt, has brought with him a most valuable piece of antiquity, part of one of those fine columns known by the name of Cleopatra's Needle, standing on the sand not far from Alexandria, which is composed of granite. It is supposed His Lordship means to erect these in some part of his grounds.<sup>161</sup>

Although it is uncertain whether it has survived, one of the officers in the expeditionary force drew a cartoon of Cavan carrying off Cleopatra's Needle, Pompey's Pillar, and two pyramids, which was accompanied by a two verse poem.<sup>162</sup>

When assessing the different values placed upon the Needles, it is important to remember that at this time their hieroglyphic inscriptions were still unreadable, and would remain so until after 1822, when Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832)<sup>163</sup> established the principles of the script. Although the obelisks were recognised as Egyptian, understanding of them was still almost exclusively through Classical and Biblical sources.

More than thirty-two centuries passed between the original creation of the obelisks, and the first proposals (that we know of) to transport them from Egypt. During this time, although the Pharaonic culture that produced them was changed radically by successive conquests, at least some of their original functions were preserved, along with the assumption of the role of Pharaoh by Graeco-Roman rulers. Under these new rulers obelisks, along with other elements of what could be described as cultural infrastructure, can be seen as having a role in bestowing legitimacy on the new regimes, as well as marking their seizure of power. By contrast, the radical cultural changes brought about by the adoption of first Christianity and Islam meant a schism with the old cultural structures and values. The surviving architecture of Pharaonic Egypt was often repurposed, especially as Christian churches, or used for building materials. This rift was enhanced by the loss of hieroglyphic and related scripts as a living cultural tradition, and the loss

of understanding of Pharaonic culture which resulted from it. Egypt remained a province of various Islamic empires until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the decline of the Ottoman Empire encouraged European powers to attempt to influence, effectively control, or directly acquire Egypt. The economic advantages from control of Egypt's resources were a primary motivation for all the regimes which took power there after the final decline of indigenous Pharaonic rule, but a critical difference in the later period was the renewed interest in, and understanding of, the culture of Ancient Egypt in Europe. This, and crucially the successful interpretation of the ancient scripts and language, focussed renewed attention on obelisks, and facilitated their use as cultural signifiers within European states.

## 2.3 Empires and Obelisks – The Needles in the Nineteenth Century

### 2.3.1 Fear of Offending the Turks

When the first attempt to transport the fallen Needle to England was abandoned, one explanation subsequently given for this was that it had been forbidden by the military authorities because it might upset Britain's ally, the Ottoman Empire. Sir Alexander Bryce's memo of 1820 alluded to this when he wrote that

the object would have been attained, could we have procured from Malta the necessary stores & purchases which were withheld, and the undertaking discouraged, from a fear of disobliging the Turks and Natives, who however had not the smallest objection to the measures<sup>164</sup>

Lord Howden, in his letter of 1830 to the Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen, said that work was halted on the orders of the Army Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, General Henry Fox, 'to our inexplicable surprise and mortification... on the plea that the removal of Cleopatra's Needle might give offence to the Turks'.<sup>165</sup> Captain Joseph Larcom, of the frigate HMS *Hind*, said that he himself had carried orders from the Commanders-in-Chief of the Army and Navy (Keith and Fox) from Malta to Egypt to forbid further work on removal of the Needle.<sup>166</sup> Larcom later wrote that

The only public reason given for it was a supposition that it might give offence to the Turks, but this was not the case, as it had been previously guarded against, by a formal permission being asked, which was most readily granted by the Aga who commanded in Egypt, observing at the same time that the Turks cared not if we took every stone in the country; but he very sarcastically asked us if we had no stone-quarries in England, that

we were taking so much trouble to carry such a useless mass there as the obelisk appeared to him to be<sup>167</sup>

Political sensitivities were to be a continuing theme in subsequent attempts to bring the Needle to England, but the political situation to which they related became dramatically different.

Sir Ralph Abercromby, writing of the British expedition, recognised the need for Turkish support to show that the British were not simply 'adventurers come to decide upon the plains of Egypt a European quarrel'.<sup>168</sup> Egypt itself was under the control of the Mamluk Beys, and, in general, outlying provinces of the Ottoman Empire tended to support in a conflict whichever side whose success would result in a weakening of the power of the Sultan. However, Britain was in a triple alliance with Russia and the Ottoman Empire against the French, and one of the underlying aims of the British expedition was a restoration of the *status quo ante* in Egypt.

The strategy for the Egyptian Expedition proceeded from the correct assumption: if the British wished to remove the French from the Middle East without stepping in themselves, the Mameluke Beys would have to be reconciled with Selim III. Egypt must remain part of the Ottoman Empire<sup>169</sup>

During the 1801 campaign, General Hutchinson had given the Mameluke leader Uthman Bey al-Bardisi a guarantee of protection and reinstatement to secure his aid during the advance along the Nile from Alexandria to Cairo, a move which alarmed the British government.<sup>170</sup> After the defeat of Mamluk forces by the French at the Battle of the Pyramids in 1798, the two Mamluk leaders who had shared power in Egypt fled, Murad Bey to Upper Egypt, and Ibrahim Bey, with the Ottoman viceroy, to Syria. Murad made peace with the French, but died in 1801. Ibrahim returned to Egypt with Ottoman forces and the Viceroy, but Mamluk leadership had passed to the factions of Uthman Bey al-Bardisi and Muhammad Bey al-Alfi. In May 1803, Albanian forces in the Ottoman army mutinied, and installed their leader, Tahir Pasha, as acting Viceroy. When he was assassinated trying to quell a mutiny over delayed pay, command passed to his lieutenant, Muhammad Ali,<sup>171</sup> who formed a coalition between his own Albanian troops and the Mamluks, and after three *wali* (Governors) appointed by the Sultan had been killed or replaced, seized power with the backing of mercantile and religious leaders in Cairo. The Sultan eventually acquiesced and appointed Muhammad Ali *wali* in July 1805. Shortly thereafter, Ali lured Mamluk forces into Cairo before ambushing and killing many of them, but failed to secure his control of Egypt. Bardisi Bey died in 1806, and in March 1807 British forces under General Alexander Mackenzie-Fraser (1758-1809)<sup>172</sup> landed at Alexandria. The intention was to support the restoration to power of the Mamluk Beys, but Alfi Bey, on whose support they had counted, had died in January 1807, and Muhammad Ali negotiated an alliance with the remaining Beys. British

forces, already having encountered fierce resistance around Rosetta, withdrew from Egypt when it became clear that they could not count on the majority of the Mamluk Beys to support them. Despite a degree of accommodation between Muhammad Ali and the Mamluks, the relationship was unsustainable in the longer term, and in 1811 he again lured the remaining Beys in Cairo to a state event where they were ambushed and virtually wiped out, while at the same time coordinated attacks were launched against Mamluk forces in other parts of Egypt. From this point on, Muhammad Ali's power in Egypt was unchallenged.<sup>173</sup> He was still, however, technically only its *wali*, or Governor, and the vassal of the Ottoman Sultan. Muhammad Ali's goal, and that of his successors, was therefore to achieve the status of an independent ruler.<sup>174</sup>



Figure 10 - Muhammad Ali. *Illustrated London News*, 17 August 1844, 97. (Author's Collection.)

In August 1832, the Sultan appealed to European powers for help against Muhammad Ali, who had invaded Syria, and was thought likely to threaten Constantinople. In the context of British politics, it has been argued that Lord Palmerston (1784-1865),<sup>175</sup> as Foreign Secretary, had wanted to act against Muhammad Ali from the outset, but was constrained by the fact that British vessels were already committed to support policy in Belgium and Portugal, and that there were therefore no ships available to reinforce the Mediterranean fleet. He also faced opposition from his Cabinet colleagues. An increase in British naval forces in 1833 was intended to counter a perceived Russian naval threat, including the movement of a Russian fleet to Constantinople in February 1833. There was concern that if Muhammad Ali was allowed to continue expanding his territory, that Russia would use this as an excuse to intervene, claiming to be supporting the Turkish sultan. Muhammad Ali agreed settlement terms in April.<sup>176</sup> In May 1833 the Convention of Kütahya ceded the Ottoman provinces of Syria and Adana to Muhammad Ali, but this compromise was satisfactory neither to the Porte nor Muhammad Ali, and before long conflict erupted again.

‘By 1838, he [Muhammad Ali] had started to voice to European consuls his desire to be recognised as an independent ruler, something he knew must lead to a new military confrontation with the Sultan. This alarmed the European powers: if Muhammad Ali were declared independent by Mahmud, then the Sultan’s empire itself would be gravely endangered. If the Sick Man of Europe were to be declared dead, an inter-European scramble would ensue for his possessions.’<sup>177</sup>

In 1839, the Turks lost the Battle of Nezib (or Nizip) now in south-eastern Turkey, against Egyptian forces under Ibrahim Pasha, the eldest son of Muhammad Ali. In the same year, the entire Turkish fleet defected to the Egyptians, and at the beginning of July 1839 the Sultan, Mahmud II, died. Palmerston looked to naval power, with French support, to deter the Egyptians from further advances. However, Britain actually moved closer to Russia, and away from France, whose interests were served by a strong Egypt, and the possibility of combining French and Egyptian naval forces as a counter to British naval power in the Mediterranean. Palmerston used Russia to isolate France, in part by the Four Power Convention, or Convention of London, of 15 July 1840, from which France was excluded (apart from Britain the other powers were Austria, Prussia, and Russia). This gave Muhammad Ali control over southern Syria in his lifetime, and his family hereditary succession in Egypt.<sup>178</sup> The Convention also required him to return the Ottoman fleet, and give up other territories. With French support, Muhammad Ali initially resisted these terms, but after a joint Austro-British attack on Acre, was forced to agree to them.

Muhammad Ali became increasingly affected by dementia towards the end of his life, and his eldest son Ismail took over the business of government, but succeeded for only forty days when

his father died in 1849 before dying himself. He in turn was succeeded by Abbas, a grandson of Muhammad Ali, who ruled until 1854, Said, who ruled until 1863, and Ismail, who ruled until 26 June 1879. From early in his reign, rather than using his official title of *wali*, Muhammad Ali had styled himself as Khedive, approximately equivalent to Viceroy, but this title was not formally recognised by the Porte until 1867, when it was officially assumed by Ismail.<sup>179</sup> It was against this political background that a series of proposals were made to bring the Needle to England over the decades after 1802.

### 2.3.2 The Gift of the Pasha

When the first attempt to move the Needle was made, Muhammad Ali was no more than an ambitious Ottoman military commander, but by 1811 he was firmly in charge of Egypt. In that year, an Egyptian corvette, the *Africa*, returned to Egypt after having been extensively refitted at a British naval dockyard, carrying gifts to Muhammad Ali from the Prince Regent on behalf of his incapacitated father George III. The Viceroy, as Muhammad Ali was already being referred to, wished to reciprocate these gifts, and expressed this wish to Samuel Briggs (1767-1853),<sup>180</sup> the senior British merchant and banker in Alexandria, who had been active in the city since 1803, was formerly Consul there, and whose firm also acted as Muhammad Ali's sole agent in England. Briggs 'was encouraged to submit to His Highness my opinion that one of the obelisks at Alexandria, known in Europe under the appellation of Cleopatra's Needles, might possibly be acceptable to his Majesty'.<sup>181</sup>

Behind this exchange of diplomatic gifts lay a complex political situation. Although British troops had withdrawn from Egypt in 1803 under the terms of the Treaty of Amiens, war between Britain and France soon broke out again, and the Ottoman Empire allied itself with France against Russia. In 1807 a British expedition landed in Egypt, with the aim of capturing Alexandria to prevent it being used by the French to re-establish a presence in the country, and in the belief that British forces could support a rising by the Mamluks which would result in loss of Ottoman control and the installation of a government friendly to Britain. After initial success in taking Alexandria, this plan backfired badly when Muhammad Ali persuaded the Mamluks to cooperate with him, and an attempt to capture Rosetta (Rasheed) failed, but rather than following this up by besieging Alexandria, Muhammad Ali offered to negotiate the release of British prisoners in return for British withdrawal. Over the next few years he then destroyed the Mamluks as a political force, and consolidated his hold on power.

In 1810, according to a dispatch from the French Consul-General in Egypt Bernardino Drovetti (1776-1852),<sup>182</sup> only three years after the abortive British military intervention, the *Africa* was

sent to Malta, where it was fitted with a copper bottom to protect it against marine worms and fouling by weeds and barnacles. Malta was not yet a Crown Colony, but it was a British protectorate, and the work is therefore likely to have been carried out at a naval dockyard with official sanction. From Malta, the corvette travelled to England, from where the intention was that she would sail round Africa to return to Egypt via the Red Sea. However, Drovetti's despatch said that the British government had refused the help that its agents had previously promised Md. Ali in connection with this voyage, and that the *Africa* had to return via the Mediterranean to Alexandria.<sup>183</sup> He does not say why the British now opposed the voyage, but the implication is that they were concerned that it might be the first step in establishing an Egyptian fleet in the Red Sea, which could potentially interfere with British communications with India and lucrative trade in the Red Sea, especially in coffee. Despite an apparent change in policy, it seems clear that the British Government did not want to alienate Muhammad Ali because of it, and therefore softened the blow by re-equipping the *Africa* and sending it back with gifts for him. Muhammad Ali, for his part, indicated by his wish to reciprocate the gifts that he was still anxious to maintain and develop relations with Britain.

Nothing seems to have come of this until 1819, when in September of that year Boghus Yusufian, Governor of Alexandria, a confidant of Muhammad Ali, and advisor to him on foreign and commercial affairs,<sup>184</sup> wrote to Briggs in London. Yusufian had been directed by Muhammad Ali to request that Briggs

would offer to His Royal Highness the Prince Regent of England, in the way you might deem the most proper, and in the name of Mehemet Ali Pacha of Egypt, one of the obelisks known by the name of Cleopatra, and more especially that which is already laid down on the shores of Alexandria. From this moment it is at the disposal of the exalted government of England ...<sup>185</sup>

In April 1820 Briggs wrote to Sir Benjamin Bloomfield (1768-1846),<sup>186</sup> Private Secretary to the Prince Regent, to tell him that Briggs had been authorised to offer the fallen obelisk at Alexandria to the King on behalf of Muhammad Ali, and enclosing a copy of Yusufian's original letter in Italian and a translation of its key sections. In his letter to Bloomfield, Briggs attributed the failure of the original attempt in 1802 to a lack of funds, and went on to say that 'it was generally understood to have been a subject of regret with the administration of that period, that government had been apprised of it too late to afford the necessary means towards its accomplishment'.<sup>187</sup> This may have been true, as Admiral Keith's letter to Captain Larcom gives no indication that he even considered consulting the Admiralty on the matter, but it may also indicate that Briggs was trying to avoid raising the political concerns that had affected the earlier attempt. Briggs referred to the

obelisk as a ‘monument of art’, and its inscriptions, which at this point could still not be read, as being ‘in a superior style’. He went on to acknowledge the likely difficulty and expense of the undertaking, but optimistically expressed the view that ‘it may reasonably be presumed no obstacle can exist but what the munificence of the sovereign can readily surmount’. He noted that Rome and Constantinople were the only European cities with obelisks, which ‘still attest the power and grandeur of the ancient masters of the world’, and suggested that if the bronze clad column recently erected in Paris (in the Place Vendôme) would ‘perpetuate the trophies of the French arms’, that the obelisk, re-erected in London, would ‘equally remain a permanent memorial of British [military] achievements’. He ended by describing Muhammad Ali’s offer as ‘being in its nature more personal than official, and, therefore, more complimentary to his Majesty’.<sup>188</sup> George III had died at the end of January 1820, and although the offer of the obelisk by Muhammad Ali has been seen as related to the accession of the Prince Regent as George IV, Yusufian’s letter to Briggs was written in September of the year before, and it is unlikely that an offer would be made in anticipation of the death of George III, as this would have appeared insensitive.

This correspondence, as well as the earlier offer, illustrates the complexity of the ways in which the Needle was defined and valued, as well as the different ways in which it could be considered as property. It was offered by Muhammad Ali as a reciprocal and personal diplomatic gift to another ruler, the acceptance of which would tend to imply recognition of his own status, but also placed at the disposal of the government of England. The nature of the gift, in this context, would not have been particularly important, but Briggs took the opportunity of being consulted to suggest the obelisk. He had not served in the Egyptian campaign of 1801-1803, although there is an unconfirmed claim that he landed with British forces in 1801, but he had been active in Alexandria from the end of the campaign, and shared the desire of those who had served in it for the obelisk to act as a memorial to military victories against the French. Although at this point France had yet to acquire an obelisk, Briggs acknowledged the way in which monuments in Paris drew on the imagery of Imperial Rome to support claims that the French Republic was its cultural heir, and recognised that possession of the obelisk could perform the same function for Britain. As a banker, Briggs also understood that the cost of transporting the obelisk was a significant issue, although what he tactfully described as ‘the munificence of the sovereign’ could more accurately have been described as the profligate spending for which the Prince Regent had been notorious.<sup>189</sup> It would not have been inconceivable for George IV to have paid personally for the transport of the obelisk as a personal gift to him, although his taste was not generally for the Egyptian, despite having commissioned a number of items in the Egyptian style.<sup>190</sup> When steps were taken to arrange transport of Muhammad Ali’s gift, however, it was by the use of

governmental, rather than royal resources, emphasising its role as a diplomatic gift in signalling political relationships.

At the beginning of May 1820 Briggs wrote to Joseph Planta (1787-1847),<sup>191</sup> Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, copying the letter from Yusufian which he had already sent to Bloomfield.<sup>192</sup> Following this, Col. William Leake (1777-1860),<sup>193</sup> who had served in the Egyptian campaign, and been present at the Siege of Alexandria in 1801, must have been asked to provide background on the Needle, as he contacted Sir Alexander Bryce, who had been commanding engineer in the British forces during the Egyptian campaign.<sup>194</sup> Bryce replied to Leake with a memo giving his recollections of the 1802 transport attempt. Briggs had suggested as a suitable person to oversee the transport of the Alexandria obelisk Giovanni Belzoni (1778-1823),<sup>195</sup> the Italian-born explorer, excavator and adventurer who three years before had organised the transport to England of the colossal head and torso of Ramses II known as the Younger Memnon,<sup>196</sup> and then that of an obelisk from Philae in Upper Egypt for William Banks.

Besides the involvement of Belzoni and Banks, who also considered its removal when he was in Egypt,<sup>197</sup> the acquisition, transport, and display of the Younger Memnon have a number of other parallels with the London Needle. Like the Needle, there was concern that if Britain did not remove the Younger Memnon that it would be acquired by another European power.<sup>198</sup> Private individuals like Belzoni, Banks, and the Swiss traveller Johann Burckhardt (1784-1817)<sup>199</sup> were involved, but the intention was to acquire the head and torso for the national collection, rather than as the private property of an individual.<sup>200</sup> The British Consul-General Henry Salt provided financial backing for Belzoni, but in a private capacity, although the Admiralty was approached about the use of a Royal Navy transport to bring the Younger Memnon to England.<sup>201</sup> In London it joined the other Egyptian antiquities in the British Museum, also suggested as a site for the Needle.

In 1820 Belzoni was living in London, and in late June submitted a plan to the Foreign Office for moving the fallen obelisk at Alexandria.<sup>202</sup> Colonel Leake, in an undated note summarising the history of the obelisk, probably written around this time, recommended Belzoni to assist any officer charged with the operation, and said that Belzoni 'might be rewarded on its successful termination in such a manner as his services might seem to deserve'.<sup>203</sup> It may have been this that prompted Belzoni to submit a second report, based on more recent information from Egypt, in which he said that he would 'humbly offer my servises [sic] to that effect without the smallest views of any interest or remuneration whatsoever, as I would dedicate my efforts to His Majesty and to the nation'. An element of non-monetary reward through the acquisition of social status had been implied in the initial attempt to move the obelisk, undertaken at the personal expense

of the officers and men involved. Here both Leake and Belzoni seem to be implying that although expenses would be covered by the government, Belzoni's reward might be more about social recognition and status than money. Later, the erroneous view would be widely held that Erasmus Wilson's knighthood was awarded for his contribution to the costs of transport of the obelisk (it was actually for his long standing philanthropy, particularly in the field of medicine), and General Sir James Alexander would unsuccessfully petition for an honour of some sort for his role in bringing it to England. In all these cases, and in its use as a diplomatic gift, the focus was not on the Needle as an antiquity, but as a political and social token which could be used in transactions conferring status or privileged relationships.

Two officers, Captain J N Boswell RN and Major Wright RE were sent to Alexandria to carry out a feasibility study and estimate costs for the transport of the Needle. They prepared plans illustrating how this could be done,<sup>204</sup> and around the same time calculations were made by the Navy Board on the relative costs of using a naval transport or the sheer hulk HMS *Chatham* to bring the Needle to England, and sent by Sir George Cockburn (1772-1853)<sup>205</sup> at the Admiralty to Joseph Planta.<sup>206</sup> Planta also received, via Colonel Leake, the memo Leake had received from Sir Alexander Bryce on the original attempt to transport the fallen Needle. While discussions continued on the method and costs of transporting the Needle, Briggs wrote again to Bloomfield on 11 July 1820, reminding him that he had yet to receive a reply to his letter of 11 April of that year, and noting that an Egyptian frigate was shortly to return to Alexandria. Briggs suggested that it might take a reply to Muhammad Ali on his offer, and enquired whether, as the offer had been a personal one to the King, he should expect a reply from Bloomfield or the Foreign Office. The next day Bloomfield wrote to Planta, copying Briggs's letter and Belzoni's offer, and, whether by coincidence or not, three days later Belzoni submitted a revised, and cheaper estimate of the cost of his plan. An undated note from Leake, probably sent to Planta around this time, recommended that as opinions differed as to the best means of transporting the obelisk, Muhammad Ali should be notified of the acceptance of his offer while a full investigation and a report were made. On 21 July, Admiral Cockburn informed Planta that there was currently no suitable Navy vessel in the Mediterranean. On 24 July Briggs wrote to Planta saying that he had been told by Bloomfield that Briggs's letter had been forwarded to the Foreign Office. Noting that the Egyptian frigate was due to sail on the 26<sup>th</sup> or 27<sup>th</sup>, he asked Planta for a response to Briggs's letter of 11 April. On 25 July, Planta wrote to Briggs, enclosing at the request of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh (1769-1822),<sup>207</sup> a letter in which Planta confirmed that the King had accepted the gift of the obelisk.

I am directed by Lord Castlereagh to acquaint you that his Majesty has been graciously pleased to accept this testimony of good will on the part of His Highness and to direct an officer to proceed without delay to Alexandria in order to enquire into and report upon

the practicability and the most proper means of transporting this valuable relic of antiquity to this country.<sup>208</sup>

Muhammad Ali's offer was known about outside Government and Court circles, and over the next two years, there was continuing public speculation that the Needle would be brought to London and placed outside Carlton House, the King's residence as Prince Regent.<sup>209</sup> In 1823, Samuel Briggs, about to return to Egypt again, wrote to the current Foreign Secretary, Lord Canning (1770-1827),<sup>210</sup> noting that a report by Boswell and Wright had been sent to the Colonial Department more than a year previously, and that Muhammad Ali was likely to ask for an update on the situation. He went on to acknowledge that the cost of transporting the obelisk might be an obstacle, and suggested the use of private funding.

though the expense in these times of retrenchment still be considered an insuperable obstacle, possibly with the aid of a ship & stores from the dockyard, the necessary sum might be raised by voluntary subscription from individuals, & particularly from the relatives of the officers, military and naval, engaged in the expedition to Egypt in 1801  
...

Briggs went on to mention 'the object however of more immediate interest', the celebrated Pigot Diamond,<sup>212</sup> and its delivery to Muhammad Ali

for whom it has been purchased by his special order, for the sum of thirty thousand pounds.<sup>213</sup> It is understood to be intended by him as a present to the Grand Seigneur – who has for some time been in expectation of it. I should beg to submit whether in compliment to His Highness the Viceroy – as well as to the Sultan – it might not be good policy to let the diamond proceed with despatches for Mr Salt, His Majesty's Consul General in Egypt free of all expense by the first ship of war that may be going to the Mediterranean, and [indecipherable] leaving the remuneration entirely to the Viceroy.

Although the diamond has no direct connection to the Needle, the fact that Briggs's letter dealt with both the obelisk and the diamond is an important reminder of the Needle's role in the system of mutual diplomatic gifts and favours that were such an important part of diplomacy. Indeed, later in the letter Briggs mentions 'marks of distinguished favour' paid to British and French ships of war, and suggests that 'this reciprocity would no doubt be appreciated and tend to increase British influence ...'. It is not clear if Muhammad Ali had provided funds for the purchase of the diamond in advance, and the letter can be read as implying that this had not been the case, and that repayment of the diamond's purchase price by Muhammad Ali was discretionary. In this case, given the cost involved, it is hard to imagine who would meet it other

than the British government. Even if this were not so, Briggs was still suggesting waiving any costs for transporting and possibly insuring the diamond. Briggs's comment on the 'times of retrenchment' also highlights that this was a time when the economy was feeling the effects of the end of the Napoleonic Wars. These included the burden of servicing the high levels of public debt incurred to pay for the wars, as well as the general deflation that succeeded wartime inflation. Agricultural prices, particularly of corn, fell, producing an agricultural depression, and this fall continued as a general trend until at least 1837. Although the war against Napoleon had been won, the enlarged civil and military establishments which had been built up to fight it did not return to their pre-war levels, and successive governments continued to wage a series of wars throughout the nineteenth century, as well as maintaining British naval dominance.<sup>214</sup>

Until the actual transport of the Needle to London took place, estimates of what this would cost varied widely. Later, Wright was reported to have told a friend that he and Boswell had estimated it at around £5,000 in round terms.<sup>215</sup> This would probably have reflected the savings from using a Royal Navy vessel, but was still around £566,000 in modern terms. Briggs's letter also returns to the idea of raising this money by public subscription, a sort of nineteenth century crowdfunding, and again shows the importance of the link between the obelisk and the Egyptian campaign.

In 1825 the Government finally took action. The Treasury agreed to accept a tender of £9,000 (around £800,000 at modern prices) from the Yorkshire firm of civil engineers Joliffe and Banks to transport the Needle from Egypt to England.<sup>216</sup> Crucially, however, this assumed that a significant element of the costs of transport would be met by Muhammad Ali. This assumption was based on the belief that the Viceroy had offered to meet the cost of necessary works in Alexandria, particularly building the pier that would be necessary to load the obelisk into a ship.<sup>217</sup> On 31 January 1826 Henry Salt (1780-1827),<sup>218</sup> the British Consul-General in Egypt, replied to Planta at the Foreign Office. Salt had held the post since early 1816, and was to die in Egypt in late 1827. With an air of what comes across as resigned cynicism, he referred to a letter he had written when Boswell and Wright had been sent to carry out their survey. At that time, the Viceroy had offered to furnish materials and 'to bear the expense of the labourers employed, but he never had it in view to execute or complete any works to facilitate its embarkation as appears to be contemplated...' He went on to warn that despite the Viceroy's promises, the engineers could not 'avoid disbursements given the established custom of giving presents on all similar occasions, without which no cordial cooperation can ever be expected, [the cost of which] is likely to amount to nearly the same expense as if they were themselves to undertake to pay the workmen... There rests in the hands of his subaltern officers a thousand means of thwarting his good intentions.' Also, the Viceroy was unlikely to have the necessary timber. Salt enclosed a plan of the obelisk 'in

which all the fractures are accurately marked for the purpose of giving His Majesty's Minister for Foreign Affairs an idea of its imperfect and mutilated state ...'.<sup>219</sup>

This letter raised two issues which were to remain important in the continuing history of attempts to bring the Needle to London. It implied that the cost of transporting it would be significantly, and probably considerably higher than had been anticipated, and that the obelisk was 'imperfect and mutilated'. Over the decades, numerous commentators were to criticise what they saw as the parsimony of the British Government, but the values they attached to the Needle were primarily non-monetary, whereas the government, and particularly the Treasury, can be seen to be focussed not so much on its value, as the costs of acquiring it. If the Needle was believed to be in poor condition, acquiring it would become a much less attractive proposition. However, where comments on the condition of the London obelisk are concerned, it is often difficult to be sure either which obelisk is being referred to, or whether those commenting were clear about the differences between the two. The fallen obelisk was at times completely buried, making it easy to focus on the standing one and overlook the second, and politicians, who were not familiar with them, or their location, may not even have been aware of, or appreciated, the differences between them. The inscriptions on the Needle now in New York had been extensively damaged, and it is this obelisk that would have been most apparent to travellers and tourists, rather than the fallen and oft-buried one. There was also an enduring belief, going back at least as far as the eighteenth century English traveller and Church of Ireland cleric Richard Pococke (1704-1765)<sup>220</sup> and the Danish naval officer Frederik Norden (1708-1742)<sup>221</sup> that the prostrate obelisk had been broken when it fell, which was not dispelled by subsequent reports that it was unbroken and in relatively good condition. During the first attempt to move it, in 1802, British forces had cleared the pedestals of both Needles, and 'raised it [the fallen obelisk] horizontally on a block of granite, so that a man can walk upright under it',<sup>222</sup> which would have established that it was not broken, and the true condition of its inscriptions. A history of the Egyptian expedition published in 1803 referred to the inscriptions on the obelisks 'which on the eastern front of the one that is upright, are much effaced by the wind ...', implying that those on the other obelisk were not.<sup>223</sup>

A few years later, the concept of obelisk as imperial trophy came into play again. In 1800 Jean-Marie-Joseph Coutelle, an engineer accompanying the French expedition to Egypt had come up with a plan to transport at least one of the obelisks at the Temple of Karnak at Luxor to France.<sup>224</sup> In 1828-29 Champollion and Ippolito Rosellini (1800-1843)<sup>225</sup> led a joint Franco-Tuscan archaeological expedition to Egypt, during which Champollion saw the obelisks at both Alexandria and Luxor. On his return to France he recommended to the government that it should acquire the obelisks at the entrance to the Temple of Luxor. Muhammad Ali was agreeable to this, but did not wish to offend the British by granting the French request. To him, 'antiquities were primarily

bargaining chips to be exchanged for European diplomatic and technical support',<sup>226</sup> but precisely because of this they needed to be used selectively. What resulted was a compromise whereby the British kept the fallen obelisk which they had already been given, the standing obelisk at Alexandria was assumed to belong to France, as did the Luxor obelisks, and the British would additionally be granted one at the Temple of Karnak.<sup>227</sup>

In 1830 reports began to circulate in the British press that Baron Isidore Taylor, the French traveller and author, was proceeding to Egypt to organise the transport of obelisks to France, although reports differed as to whether this was to be both of those at Alexandria or one at Alexandria and both at Luxor.<sup>228</sup> On 26 April 1830, John Barker (1771-1849),<sup>229</sup> the British Consul-general, wrote to Rear-Admiral Sir Pulteney Malcolm (1768-1838),<sup>230</sup> Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean at that time, copying the letter to the Foreign Secretary Lord Aberdeen, saying that Taylor was 'charged with the commission of carrying of one or two of the well-known obelisks in Egypt', and that the City of Paris had provided funds. Barker enclosed a list of the presents brought by Taylor for presentation to Ibrahim Pasha, including a crystal table and vase, decorated pistols and fowling pieces, and stated that Cleopatra's Needle 'belongs to the British Government'.<sup>231</sup> On 24 May Lord Howden, who as a Major-General had served on Abercromby's staff in the Egyptian campaign, wrote to Lord Aberdeen summarising the 1802 attempt to transport the Needle, which Howden believed the French were now preparing to take to France. In June 1830 William IV ascended to the throne, and Muhammad Ali renewed his offer of the Alexandrian obelisk.<sup>232</sup> Howden wrote to Aberdeen again on 14 June, with a list of the principal officers in the Egyptian campaign, and urged him to protest about the French plans.<sup>233</sup> On the 26<sup>th</sup> June, Barker wrote to Sir Robert Gordon (1791-1847),<sup>234</sup> British Ambassador to the Porte, copying the letter for the information of Lord Aberdeen and Admiral Malcolm. In it, Barker reported the arrival at Alexandria of the appropriately named French vessel *Le Dromedaire* (The Camel), 'having orders to carry to France the upright obelisk, one of the two commonly called Cleopatra's Needles'. Worryingly, he added that its hieroglyphs were worn, but could be 'polished and engraved anew', indicating a lack of awareness of its status as an antiquity. As well as outlining what were believed to be the plans for moving the obelisk, and possible difficulties, he added that the Viceroy had given the French the two Luxor obelisks, 'professing to have reserved the one at Karnac as a present to His Majesty, should His Highness receive an application to that effect from the British government'.<sup>235</sup>

On 11 September Aberdeen wrote to Barker saying that representations had been made to Aberdeen that the Needle the French proposed to take was the one given to Britain, but that Aberdeen believed they proposed to take the upright one. He asked Barker to report, and referred him to the relevant correspondence between Planta and Salt in the consular archives. On

6 November, Barker wrote to John Backhouse (1784-1845),<sup>236</sup> Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, to assure him that previous to the receipt of a letter on 11 September, presumably that from Lord Aberdeen, Barker had already 'asserted the right of His Majesty's Government in the property of the recumbent obelisk in question, and that I shall resist any attempt, which may be made on the part of the French to carry off that obelisk instead of the one which is erect, and which is not in so good preservation as the fallen one'.<sup>237</sup>

By December 1830, matters had been complicated by the destruction of the pedestal of the fallen obelisk. An Italian engineer in the service of the Viceroy had blown it up to use in the construction of fortifications. This was a sensitive issue, but not, as might be expected, because of the destruction of part of an ancient monument: before leaving Egypt without the obelisk, the British forces had placed under the pedestal, in an excavated cavity, a deposit consisting of an inscribed marble slab with an account of their victories against the French, and a number of gold, silver, and bronze 'medals'.<sup>238</sup> At the beginning of December, Barker had written to Boghus Yusufian, Secretary to the Viceroy complaining about the destruction of the pedestal. Eventually, the inscription and the medals were returned, but the correspondence about them prompted Lord Aberdeen to pen a note on 21 March 1831 asking '[w]hat has prevented this obelisk from being brought home, & how did we acquire a property in it?'.<sup>239</sup>

To complicate matters even further, construction of the *Louxor*, a vessel specially built in Toulon to transport both Luxor obelisks was due to be completed at the end of January 1831. In the end, on the advice of Champollion, it only took the better preserved western obelisk.<sup>240</sup> On 7 May 1831 Barker wrote to Admiral Malcolm, noting the arrival of the *Louxor* and speculation that the French would later build a second improved vessel to take the other obelisk at Luxor. He continued to send detailed reports on the voyage of the *Louxor* and her cargo until she left Egypt, although it was not until October 1833 that the obelisk was finally re-erected in Paris. During this period, although the French had based their decision on which obelisk to initially acquire on the advice of Champollion, the foremost Egyptologist of his day, and since 1831 the first Professor of Egyptology in the world, at the Collège de France, there was relatively little concern from the British about obelisks as Egyptian antiquities. Indeed, British interest in Ancient Egypt, so strong during the 1820s as a result of Belzoni's discoveries and exhibition of reliefs from the tomb of Sety I, was now in the doldrums, as reflected in a remark in a letter in 1832 by the British traveller Orlando Felix (1790-1860)<sup>241</sup> to the Egyptological artist Joseph Bonomi (1796-1878)<sup>242</sup> that "[h]ieroglyphs are at a discount", and that he avoided talking about Egypt for fear that it could result in him "being blackballed in the clubs".<sup>243</sup>

Thus, the emphasis was on competition with the French over status symbols, and with the protection of what was perceived as British government property. During this period, there was enough public awareness of the situation in Egypt for the matter to be raised in Parliament. During a Supply debate on the National Gallery on 23 July 1832, Ridley Colborne (1779-1854)<sup>244</sup> said that he understood there might be difficulties in bringing Cleopatra's Needle to England, 'but Ali Pacha had offered for the same sum of money an obelisk equally beautiful, which was now at Grand Cairo' and he wished to know the intentions of Ministers. In reply the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Althorpe (1782-1845)<sup>245</sup> 'had to say, that the obelisk referred to was in such a state of decay, that it would not be worth the expense of removing it to England; nor did he think that, if a suitable place for its erection could be found, it would be any great ornament to the metropolis'. The 'ultra-tory' Colonel Charles Sibthorpe (1783-1855)<sup>246</sup> 'hoped, that he should hear no more of such nonsense, as the paying of 10,000*l.* for Cleopatra's Needle', and another tory, George Bankes (1787-1856),<sup>247</sup> the brother of William Bankes, who had brought an obelisk from Philae to England in the 1820s, remarked that he 'condemned the idea of removing Cleopatra's Needle, and other ancient relics'.<sup>248</sup> These interventions do not suggest any deep interest in, or knowledge of the situation regarding the various obelisks in Egypt, but do indicate the persistent perception that the fallen obelisk, rather than the standing one, was in poor condition, and also shows that the desire to possess the Needle and display it as a military memorial was not universally shared.

Around this time, a number of major sales of Egyptian antiquities had taken place in London, attracting international attention, including collections assembled by Giovani Belzoni (in 1822 and 1826), the former British Consul-general John Barker (1833), and his successor Henry Salt (1835).<sup>249</sup> However, while collections continued to be accumulated, and sold, there were indications that attitudes to the acquisition of Egyptian antiquities were changing, both in Britain and Egypt. In 1835 Muhammad Ali issued a decree noting that 'Foreigners are destroying ancient edifices, extracting stones and other worked objects and exporting them to foreign countries. If this continues, it is clear that soon no more ancient monuments will remain in Egypt...' It referred to European museums for the care and display of such antiquities, and went on to conclude that the Egyptian government would not only set up such a museum in Cairo, albeit 'to display them for travellers who visit the country', forbid the destruction of 'ancient edifices' in Upper Egypt, and 'spend the greatest possible care on their safekeeping', but that 'Having considered these facts, the government has judged it appropriate to forbid the export abroad of antiquities found in the ancient edifices of Egypt'.<sup>250</sup> The commitment and resources put into carrying out this decree can be questioned, particularly in view of the tendency by Muhammad Ali and his

successors to give away antiquities when it suited them (and see 3.1.4 later), but the decree was known about in Britain and commented on.

A catalogue for the sale of a collection assembled by Giovanni d'Athanasi (1798-1854), which took place on 5 March 1836 and 13-20 March 1837,<sup>251</sup> noted that a number of objects had been found 'in two Terra-cotta vases in a tomb at Thebes', but that although the vases were currently in D'Athanasi's house there 'owing to the strict prohibition of exporting antiquities from Egypt, he has been unable to remove them'.<sup>252</sup> Whether the catalogue was produced for the 1836 or 1837 sale, a newspaper report in the latter year also mentioned Muhammad Ali's decree.

'The Pasha of Egypt was engaged in actively circulating his proclamation prohibiting the demolition of Ancient monuments, and the exportation of antiquities from Upper Egypt; and he had given directions for the formation of a museum in the country, where such objects were to be preserved.'<sup>253</sup>

Whatever the change in attitudes, it could be argued that Muhammad Ali's gifts of obelisks predated his decree, and certainly Anglo-French rivalry over them did not end with the arrival of the Luxor obelisk in Paris. In September 1837 Le Comte Molé, President du Conseil, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères (Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs), wrote to Ferdinand de Lesseps (1805-1894),<sup>254</sup> of Suez Canal fame, the French Consul-General in Alexandria, saying that he believed that the British were planning to take the other Luxor obelisk, which was the property of France, and that it was the obelisk at Karnak which belonged to England, as well as one of the obelisks at Alexandria. A few weeks later an extract from this despatch was sent to Lord Palmerston by Colonel Patrick Campbell, the British Consul at Alexandria. Campbell believed the letter from Count Molé to De Lesseps might have been a mistake based on reports of 'the intention of sending the statue of Sesostris to the British Museum'.

This was a reference to a fallen colossal limestone statue of Ramses II at Mit Rahina, the modern Egyptian village which stood on the site of ancient Memphis. Although it eventually remained in Egypt, the history of the statue in the nineteenth century has a number of features in common with the London Needle. In 1835, Sir John Gardiner Wilkinson (1797-1875)<sup>255</sup> wrote to the British Museum offering the statue as a gift from Charles Sloan, the chancellor of the British Consulate in Egypt.<sup>256</sup> Asked for an estimate of the cost of transporting the statue to Alexandria, Wilkinson quoted £5,000, which was considered excessive, although this did not prevent the Museum accepting Sloan's offer, and the Museum's Keeper Edward Hawkins (1780-1867)<sup>257</sup> was asked to assess the value of the statue and the cost of its transport to England. To put the estimate in context, it was the same as that arrived at by Boswell and Wright for the transport of the Needle from Alexandria in 1820, and in 1825 a tender for £9,000 for the same task had been accepted by

the British Government. (See above.) Like the Needle, however, more than one proposal was put forward for moving the statue, and estimates for the cost of transporting it to England varied widely. Giovanni d'Athanasi quoted £1,500 to transport it to Alexandria (from where the assumption may have been that a Royal Navy vessel would bring it to London), but the practical difficulties of moving a monolithic statue weighing around sixty tons led to the Trustees suggesting that it should be sawn into sections. An estimate given for this, however, was £20,000. Asked to report further on the historical, archaeological and artistic value of the statue, the cost of its transport, and the practicalities of displaying it in the Museum, Hawkins concluded that its effect would be diminished if it were sawn into sections, but that existing Museum buildings were not high enough to display it, and that additional funds would be needed to create a suitable space. (Proposals to re-erect the Needle at the British Museum faced similar problems, unless it was placed in the courtyard.) Hawkins gave his opinion that the only 'really valuable' part of the statue was its head, which was worth bringing to England 'If the proprietor would consent to such a mutilation'.<sup>258</sup> The 'proprietor' referred to here was probably the Duke of Northumberland, a Trustee of the Museum who had, as Lord Prudhoe, travelled in Egypt, and who was believed to have been given the statue by Muhammad Ali. (See below, 3.1.1.) Further estimates for transport and shipping were received in 1838, of £600 to transport to Alexandria, and £600 or £1300 to bring from there to England on a merchant vessel. The Admiralty were also approached about shipping the statue, but were reluctant to allow the modifications to a vessel which this would have entailed. Hawkins again suggested that cutting the legs of the statue would facilitate both transport and eventual display in the museum, but the Trustees opted to delay a final decision until the Treasury approved funds for a new building to receive it, and it had been constructed.

In December 1837 the Treasury confirmed to the Foreign Office that there was no intention of taking the Luxor obelisk, and on Boxing Day 1837 the Foreign Office wrote, presumably to Colonel Campbell, copying the letter from the Treasury 'by which you will perceive that Her Majesty's Government have not at present any intention to bring to England the obelisk of Luxor'.<sup>259</sup> This exchange, though it was of little practical consequence, demonstrates that matters to do with obelisks involved the highest levels of government in both England and France, and also that the main area of concern was that what each country regarded as its rights in certain property were not infringed.

In 1843, Sir J G Wilkinson, the figure who can be regarded as the founder of Egyptology in Britain, wrote of the 'well-known obelisks' in Alexandria, and went on to say that 'One is still standing, the other has been thrown down' he continues:

The height of the fallen obelisk, in its mutilated state, is about 66 feet, and of the same diameter as the other. It has been given by Mohamed Ali to the English, who were desirous of removing it to England as a record of their successes in Egypt, and of the glorious termination of the campaign of 1801. The Pacha even offered to transport it free of expense to the shore, and to put it on board any vessel or raft which might be sent to remove it; but the project has been wisely abandoned, and cooler deliberation has pronounced, that, from its mutilated state, and the obliteration of many of the hieroglyphics by exposure to the sea air, it is unworthy the expense of removal.<sup>260</sup>

These remarks were to be of critical significance in subsequent proposals to bring the Needle to London. On the surface, they are puzzling. Only four years previously, the surgeon, traveller, and antiquarian William Wilde (1815-1876)<sup>261</sup> had noted of the obelisk ‘the sharpness of the hieroglyphics on *all* its sides’, and in a footnote added that it was ‘excavations or tunnels under it in two places to obtain building materials, that enabled me to decide upon this point’.<sup>262</sup> From the footnote it is clear that he must be referring to the fallen obelisk, as excavations under the standing one, particularly two tunnels, would probably have led to its collapse. How much of the fallen obelisk was covered when Wilkinson saw it is uncertain, but if it was covered he would not have been able to refer to the conditions of its inscriptions, and if they were exposed he would be expected to recognise that they were generally in much better condition than those on the standing one. A possible explanation may be found in another of his works, where he refers to the ‘feelings of veneration’ with which the Ancient Egyptians regarded obelisks, but went on to observe that ‘the same feelings cannot influence others, and few motives can be assigned for their removal to Europe, beyond the desire of possessing what requires great difficulty to obtain’.<sup>263</sup> This suggests that he opposed the removal of the obelisk, and may have taken the opportunity when writing about the Alexandrian obelisks to pour cold water on the idea.

As the years went past, there were occasional proposals by individuals suggesting the transport of the fallen obelisk, and methods for accomplishing this, such as the proposal in 1839 by William Wilde that it be erected in Trafalgar Square as a monument not only to Lord Nelson, but to the victories of the British Army in Egypt. He suggested that the obelisk should be flanked by four sphinxes, because they had been adopted for the ‘colours and ornaments’ of British regiments, and would be around ‘an obelisk that looked on Aboukir, that echoed the shouts of Alexandria, heard the cannon of the Nile, and the dying tones of Abercrombie...’.<sup>264</sup> This came to nothing, but in 1847 the Prince Consort, Prince Albert, wrote to Lord John Russell (1792-1878),<sup>265</sup> the Prime Minister, to express his concern that the French were trying to ship the fallen obelisk at Alexandria to France. The Prince considered that this would be ‘a real disgrace’ to the Government. He attributed the failure of the original attempt to a ‘want of machinery’ but felt

that this could hardly be the case currently, and asked Russell if he could undertake to bring the obelisk to London.<sup>266</sup>

Not long after, in 1849, sixteen General Officers, Admirals, and Naval Captains, all of whom earlier in their careers had served in the Egyptian Campaign, sent a joint letter, or ‘memorial’ to the Prince. A letter<sup>267</sup> from his Private Secretary, Lt Col. Sir Charles Beaumont Phipps (1801-1866),<sup>268</sup> to the Prussian aristocrat Alfred von dem Knesebeck described the ‘original object’ of the memorialists to ‘have brought to England and placed in some conspicuous part of London’ the Needle, ‘given formerly by Mehemet Ali to the Prince Regent as a trophy of the gallant deeds of the British Army of Egypt’. The memo sought the support and assistance of the Prince Consort in doing this. According to Phipps’s letter, the Prince was enthusiastic, and discussed it with, among others, Spencer Compton (1790-1851),<sup>269</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Marquess of Northampton and a leading patron of science and the arts. Lord Northampton

suggested that many [objects] of antiquity of less value both in themselves, and in the remembrances to which they were attached, were constantly imported by the Trustees of the British Museum at the National Expense, and Lord N further stated that he had no doubt that the Trustees would willingly apply to Parliament to be allowed to import this valuable obelisk, and that no place could be more fitted for its reception than the centre of the court in front of the British Museum, [where] there are already some Egyptian antiquities.<sup>270</sup>

The Prince considered that the ideal person to do this, because of ‘his rank, his military position, and as being the Queen’s Trustee for the British Museum’ would be the Duke of Cambridge (1774-1850),<sup>271</sup> Queen Victoria’s uncle, who served as Trustee from 1847 until his death. The Duke, unfortunately, was prevented from attending the next Trustees’ meeting by an attack of gout, but said that the Prince had thought it ‘very desirable’ that the obelisk be brought to London, and asked Lord Northampton, also a Trustee, to lay before them a copy of the memo from the Egyptian Campaign veterans, Phipps’s letter to Knesebeck, and the Duke’s letter to Lord Northampton. This was duly done, and it was resolved, at their meeting on 21 April 1849 that ‘the Trustees consider that the possession of the Egyptian obelisk would be an important and desirable addition to the National Collection of the Antiquities of Egypt, and that they recommend the consideration of the subject to HM’s Government’.<sup>272</sup>

The Principal Librarian (director of the Museum), Sir Henry Ellis (1777-1869),<sup>273</sup> was directed to send a copy of the resolution and the relevant documents to the First Lord of the Treasury. Although the antiquities assembled by and confiscated from the French in Egypt had found their way to the national museum as a royal donation, it had been both expected and stated in the past

that the Needle would be erected in a public place such as Waterloo Place or Trafalgar Square, in the same way as the obelisks of Rome. Now the Needle was seen as both a memorial to military victories and an important Egyptian antiquity, but also as an antiquity which belonged in the national museum, and which should be acquired with government funds. The forecourt of the British Museum was a public space, but not in the same way as Trafalgar Square. Despite the enthusiastic backing of the Prince Consort and the Trustees, however, there was apparently no response from the Treasury, but the next two years saw a renewal of interest in the obelisk.

At the beginning of June 1851, the Marquess of Westmeath (1785-1871),<sup>274</sup> who had served as an Ensign in the Coldstream Guards in the Egyptian Campaign of 1801, asked in the House of Lords what steps had been taken 'for obtaining possession of, or for removing' the obelisk. He said that he had called attention to this 'solely at the request of several military and naval officers'. He commented that '[s]ome obloquy had been thrown on the condition of this monument, under the impression that it was not of adequate value to compensate for the trouble and expense of removal. Perhaps its intrinsic value might not be much; but, as a monument, and as a trophy, it had a value peculiarly its own. The sculptures, he understood, were in comparatively good preservation'. In reply, the Earl of Carlisle (1802-1864)<sup>275</sup> 'acknowledged the importance which attached to the obelisk, not merely as a memorial of the ancient art of Egypt, but also as a monument of British heroism'. He referred to some unspecified 'mechanical difficulties' and said that the matter was still under consideration.<sup>276</sup>

Within a fortnight, the Scottish Radical MP Joseph Hume (1777-1855)<sup>277</sup> took the opportunity of a debate on the Navy Estimates, at nearly 1 am, to draw attention to the fact that no steps had yet been taken to bring the Needle to England. He claimed that after one of the Needles had been presented to France, '[a] month did not elapse' before it was taken there. In contrast, after an offer by one Captain Donnelly to bring the other Needle to Britain during one of the premierships of Sir Robert Peel had been refused 'on the ground that the money could not be spared', the other Needle given to Britain still remained in Egypt 'an insult to the man who presented it to us, and no badge of honour to ourselves. He was grieved to find so much extravagance in some respects, and so much parsimony in others'. The unwillingness of the Government to spend money bringing the Needle to England was a recurring theme over the years, but in this case can be put in context by correspondence in January 1851 between Lord Palmerston and Sir Charles Murray (1806-1895),<sup>278</sup> the British Consul-General in Egypt, in which the Foreign Secretary regretted being unable to raise the consular salary 'under the necessity which exists for the strictest economy in every branch of the public expenditure..'.<sup>279</sup>

Even before the Great Exhibition of 1851 finished in October of that year, there had been proposals to bring the Needle to London and to re-erect it in Hyde Park as a memorial to the exhibition, and particularly to Prince Albert's work promoting it. In June, Lieutenant-Colonel J A Lloyd (1800-1854),<sup>280</sup> an engineer appointed as one of the two Special Commissioners for the exhibition, suggested this to Earl Granville (1815-1891), Vice-President of the Board of Trade, and one of the exhibition's Commissioners.<sup>281</sup> In August, an article by Nathaniel Gould,<sup>282</sup> which contained four costed proposals for the transport of the obelisk, expressed the opinion that 'the feeling manifested with respect to the Great Exhibition shows, that the public would now appreciate the erection in London of the ancient obelisk belonging to them, and that the pecuniary success of the exhibition offers the means of indulging the public taste, without calling on the Chancellor of the Exchequer'.<sup>283</sup> In the same month, one W G Beck wrote to Lord Palmerston, and later to Sir Charles Wood (1800-1885),<sup>284</sup> the Chancellor of the Exchequer, offering to transport the Needle to London at his own expense, and estimating the cost at £7,170.<sup>285</sup> The offer was taken seriously enough for his letter to be forwarded to the Treasury, and for enquiries to be made in connection with it.<sup>286</sup> Around the same time, the traveller and Egyptologist James Burton (1788-1862),<sup>287</sup> who had illustrated the inscriptions of the fallen Needle in his *Excerpta Hieroglyphica* wrote to *The Times* suggesting the colossus of Ramses II at Memphis as a cheaper alternative to the obelisk, and noting that the Trustees of the British Museum had been considering acquiring the statue for a number of years.<sup>288</sup> A few weeks later an anonymous writer in *The Athenaeum* suggested that because of the condition of the obelisk the statue would be a 'more worthy' alternative to the Needle for the Crystal Palace.<sup>289</sup>

In mid-September, John Scott Tucker (1814-1882),<sup>290</sup> Clerk of Works to the Navy at Malta, was instructed by the Treasury to inspect and report on the Needle and the eastern harbour at Alexandria. He carried out the survey in the latter part of November 1851, and by 9 December his report had been sent to the Treasury. It was thorough and detailed, with drawings and sketches of the standing obelisk, as well as an assessment of the condition of the fallen one and a copy of the most recent survey of the harbour, carried out in 1833, most probably by Thomas Galloway, a British civil engineer who was Chief Engineer to Muhammad Ali from 1824. Tucker himself made additional soundings, and also included detailed costs of materials and workers. He had excavated around the fallen obelisk 'as it was more than  $\frac{2}{3}$  buried in the lines of defence', and said that 'the underside in point of preservation is very similar to the 3 shown'. Captain the Rt. Hon Lord Edward Russell (1805-1887),<sup>291</sup> captain of the 2nd rate ship-of-the-line HMS *Vengeance*, in which Tucker had travelled to Alexandria, submitted a joint report in which he referred to reports by Boswell and Wright and Lt. Symonds in 1821, another in 1825, and one by Lieutenant-Colonel Lloyd in August of 1851, as well as making detailed proposals for the method of transporting the

obelisk.<sup>292</sup> At the end of September 1851, Samuel Briggs, who had visited Egypt the previous year, asked the Foreign Office for a copy of his letter to Sir Benjamin Bloomfield in 1820, due to the renewed interest in bringing the Needle to England.<sup>293</sup>

At the beginning of November 1851, K H Galloway wrote from Alexandria to either the Foreign Office or the Treasury (which is not clear from the document), referring to a plan he had submitted for readying the Needle to leave Alexandria, with the British government providing a vessel to tow it. He also mentioned that his brother, whose name he does not give, had been approached by the Highland Society in 1850, the implication being from the context that this was in connection with the obelisk.<sup>294</sup> Mention of the London-based Highland Society is a reminder of the importance of the Needle as a military memorial, as a large part of the 1801 expeditionary force had come from Highland regiments. On 12 November Samuel Briggs wrote to Lord Palmerston, saying that he intended to publish Briggs's letter to Bloomfield. He referred to the obelisk as a 'special present' from Muhammad Ali 'as a mark of his gratitude for favours received', but noted that British delay meant that the French had now beaten Britain by erecting the Luxor obelisk in Paris. He referred to Boswell and Wright's report, and to the fact that '[t]he delay which has intervened originated in the financial and agricultural distress of that period, which prevented any application to Parliament to accomplish its removal'. Five days later the Foreign Office replied that Lord Palmerston had no objection to publication of Briggs's letter.

February, 1852, saw the Needle raised again in Parliament by Joseph Hume, who reminded the government that it had been accepted as a gift by George IV, and asked what progress had been made on bringing it from Egypt. In reply, the Chancellor alluded to the enquiries made in 1851 as to 'whether it was worth while to remove it to this country', but went on to add that '[t]he answer received to that question, from the parties best qualified to give it, was, that they did not think it was worth while incurring the expense and trouble of bringing the obelisk to England. But upon this point the Government had not yet come to a decision'.<sup>295</sup> Although the 'parties' referred to were not specified, in May J Scott Tucker wrote to *The Times*,<sup>296</sup> asking it to correct a report attributed to him that having examined the Alexandrian obelisk he had concluded that 'it was neither worth the trouble nor expense of moving'. He says that in his official report to the Admiralty with Captain the Lord Edward Russell, he declared it a 'most interesting and valuable relic of antiquity', was convinced that the nation would be proud to possess it, and believed that it would be 'a rich ornament' to any of the possible sites in London. In the same year, Tucker donated a fragment of one of the Needles to the British Museum.<sup>297</sup>

The activity around the Needle at this time reflects the various ways in which it was defined and valued. There was its role as a military memorial, the rivalry with France over its possession as an

imperial trophy, and its use as a diplomatic gift, but despite discussion of its acquisition by the British Museum, still relatively little emphasis on it as an Egyptian antiquity. In contrast to the first attempt to transport it, the role of government was now explicit, and becoming expected, but the role of individuals, particularly Samuel Briggs, was still important, and private organisations, companies and individuals continued to involve themselves in proposals for its transport. The questions of its condition and the cost of acquiring it were also beginning to become important themes in the continuing discussions - and would become increasingly so.

Following the end of the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park in October 1851, the decision had been taken to relocate the exhibition building to Sydenham in south London, where it would become the Crystal Palace. From the outset, it was intended to have an improving and uplifting influence on public taste. This was reflected both in the government charter which it was granted, where it was described as a 'national institution', and the Fine Arts Courts which were at its heart. One of these was the Egyptian Court, and close to this in the nave of the building were two huge reproductions of the colossal statues of Ramses II at Abu Simbel. Initially, there were plans to include a cast of one of the obelisks in Rome, but this was opposed by the Papal government. On 3 November 1852, the Directors of the Crystal Palace Company wrote, probably to the Prime Minister, Lord Derby, requesting the government's permission to bring the Needle to London for exhibition in the Crystal Palace. On 9 November Lord Derby replied to the company's Chairman, Samuel Laing (1812-1897),<sup>298</sup> that the government 'cannot grant consent to part with the property of the obelisk in question which was presented by Mehemet Ali to the Crown while their predecessors were in office'. He went on, however, to say that it was willing to grant the company permission to transport it at their own expense, subject to the condition that if at any point in the future the Crystal Palace ceased to be used for the purposes set out in its charter, the government could reclaim possession of the obelisk without being liable for payment in compensation, and that it could also reclaim the Needle if it became desirable for unspecified 'public objects' - but in this case on payment of all costs incurred in its removal and re-erection.<sup>299</sup> A number of years later, in 1865, Anthony Panizzi (1797-1879),<sup>300</sup> the Principal Librarian of the British Museum, wrote to Henry Cole (1808-1882),<sup>301</sup> Superintendent of the Science and Art Department, saying that the British Museum trustees had been asked if they had any objection to the Crystal Palace Company's request. In response, the Trustees had indicated that they believed that

'if this Obelisk were brought to this country and erected at the Museum, it would prove an object of great public interest; but they left it to the Government to decide whether the circumstances, which had up to that time prevented the removal of the Obelisk at the public expense, still continued to operate so far as to induce a compliance with the request preferred on behalf of the Crystal Palace Company.'<sup>302</sup>

No reply seems to have been given to the Museum trustees, but within two days of Derby's letter, the contents of it had become public knowledge, and claims made in the press that steps were already being taken to remove the obelisk.<sup>303</sup> Not long after, on 6 December, Joseph Hume again raised the matter in Parliament with the Chancellor, referring to the obelisk being 'presented' to the 'proprietors' of the Crystal Palace. The Chancellor summarised the conditions under which it had been agreed that the company could acquire it. Hume's response was to request that 'as a public monument had been taken away from the public, it would be advisable to have some public document containing the terms and the manner of its cession'. The Chancellor had no objection, and said that its terms (presumably those set out in Lord Derby's letter, were 'that the country should have the obelisk whenever they paid the expenses of bringing it over'. This episode illustrates the complexity of attitudes towards the Needle. Here it was seen as an object of antiquity and art, suited for a museum or other institution dedicated to education, as the Crystal Palace was, but also as Crown property which could not be permanently ceded to a private company aiming to make a profit, and as the property of the public. Once again, a reluctance to spend public money on transporting the obelisk is evident.

The Crystal Palace Company invited tenders from interested parties for the transport of the Needle,<sup>304</sup> and in early 1853 Arthur Anderson (1792-1868),<sup>305</sup> a Director and later Chairman of the Crystal Palace Company, visited Alexandria to inspect the Needle.<sup>306</sup> A press report in April of that year referred to him visiting Egypt to inspect 'the two British possessions in that country – Cleopatra's Needle and the Luxor Obelisk – with a view to a contingent resolution to remove one of them, if not both, to London'.<sup>307</sup> As well as Alexandria, Anderson is known to have visited Memphis, where he inspected the fallen colossus of Ramses II, and Saqqara.<sup>308</sup>

Press reports quoted from a letter from Anderson in which he said that the Khedive had promised that 'every facility should be given to any person commissioned by the company to collect works of art in Egypt', but despite this the proposed transport of the Needle was not carried out. Anderson's letter also revealed that the Needle was now partially built into a sea wall and the fortifications at Alexandria, and that the Viceroy 'has a very strong objection to a breach of such a nature being made or left open for any time in the present state of European politics'.<sup>309</sup> This remark is an indication of the complex political background at this time, and it was not just European politics that concerned the Viceroy.

In August 1849 Muhammad Ali had died, having been removed from office in September 1848 because of mental incapacity. His son Ismail had been appointed Regent, but had predeceased him, and on Ibrahim's death he was replaced as Regent by his nephew Abbas (I), who became Viceroy on the death of Muhammad Ali, and reigned until his own death in 1854. Abbas was

portrayed in Western media as a reactionary who did his best to undo all the achievements of Muhammad Ali's reign, as well as being a cruel, morose and taciturn voluptuary, and a recluse allegedly murdered by two of his own slaves. As late as 1933 a biographer of Khedive Ismail could refer to Abbas as 'a combination of intellectual nonentity, coward and fanatic. He was capricious and reactionary. He despised European procedure and progress.'<sup>310</sup> A more balanced view of Abbas's abandonment of economic and administrative reforms, and curtailment of construction projects, however, recognises the role of financial factors in these decisions, and of political and family feuds as motivations for attacks on him. Wishing to resist European influence, he initially sought closer relationships with the Ottoman Porte, but at a time when the Porte was trying to re-establish its authority over Egypt. To resist the Porte, Abbas relied upon support from the British Government, which also helped to counter the strength of French influence in Egypt. By 1854, however, better relationships between Britain and France around the time of the Crimean War, together with their alliance with the Ottoman Empire in that war, led to increasing pressure on Abbas to amend his policies, which was only ended by his sudden death.<sup>311</sup>

In February 1851 Lord Palmerston wrote to Sir Charles Murray, the British Consul-General in Egypt, telling him that Stratford Canning (1786-1880),<sup>312</sup> the British Ambassador to the Porte, would be instructed to support Abbas's opposition to 'his enemies at Constantinople', but not to the application of the *Tanzimat* [Western inspired reforms of the Ottoman Empire] to Egypt'.<sup>313</sup> In March and April of that year, Canning spoke to the Ottoman Grand Vizier about 'the various causes of dissatisfaction which the Sultan had against Abbas Pasha', and Murray was asked to ascertain whether Abbas was building up his armed forces in contravention of an Ottoman Firman, or decree, of 1841. In June Palmerston replied to a letter from Murray after a conversation with Abbas reported Abbas's fear that the Porte might be planning to send an army across the desert against Egypt, or an expedition by sea, and confirmed that Murray was correct to have told Abbas that encroachments on his authority could only be made through Orders and Firmans, and that if any attempt at doing this by force was attempted, the preparations would give time for intervention by the powers who were signatories to the agreement of 1841 which had ended the armed conflict between Muhammad Ali and the Porte.

In July of 1851, it became clear that there was active opposition from the Porte to Abbas's plans to construct a railway in Egypt from Alexandria to Cairo. This was a project promoted by the British, who opposed construction of a Suez Canal; conversely, the railway was opposed by other European powers, especially France. Palmerston wrote to Canning fulminating that

[a]fter all that has passed, and after the generous and effective manner in which the British Government has stepped forward to assist and support the Sultan upon every

occasion on which the integrity of his empire and the dignity and independence of his crown were threatened with danger, the Turkish Government should make such an ungrateful return on the very first occasion on which an opportunity was afforded them of doing an ill service to Great Britain....<sup>314</sup>

Palmerston also referred to the 'gigantic system of fortifications' carried out from French designs with French engineers under Ibrahim and Abbas, which would have included those at Alexandria. In early August, Palmerston wrote to Murray copying a letter he had sent to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. In it, he had noted that Abbas had decided to go ahead with the proposed railway, but suggested that

there is reason to suppose that intrigues are being actively carried on at Constantinople to thwart the Pasha's designs in this respect... Under these circumstances H M Government conceive that it would be useful with a view to give encouragement and moral support to Abbas Pasha in going on with this railway that Admiral Sir William Parker's squadron, or some of the line of battle ships under his orders should as early as may be consistent with the other arrangements of the service, visit Alexandria and communicate with Mr Murray, HM Agent and Consul General. Such a visit of compliment, as an indication of the interest which HM Government takes in the affair of the railway, and of their friendly feeling toward the Pasha would, in the present state of things be very useful<sup>315</sup>

In due course, two Royal Navy ships arrived at Alexandria, one of which was the second-rate ship-of-the-line HMS *Vengeance*, commanded by Captain the Rt. Hon. Lord Edward Russell, accompanied by John Scott Tucker. The pretext for their visit was to report

upon the condition of the obelisk near Cleopatra's Needle which was given by Mehemet Ali to the British nation and which there has lately arisen a desire to remove to England. This was the ostensible purpose of the visit of these ships, but its real object was to assure the Viceroy of the friendly disposition of Her Majesty's Government towards him, and to afford him moral support in case the commencement of the railway should be impeded by any interference from without<sup>316</sup>

The ships remained in Alexandria until a firman authorising the construction of the railway had been received from the Sultan.<sup>317</sup> The fact that the survey carried out by Tucker and Russell was of secondary importance does not mean that their subsequent reports and plans, which were detailed and practical, were never going to be acted upon, or that the Government had no serious intention of bringing the Needle to England. It does, however, emphasise how much of an

influence the political context as well financial considerations had on the acquisition of the Needle. In July 1851 Palmerston wrote to Murray, enclosing a copy of a letter from Palmerston to Canning, largely about a quarrel over whether the Sultan or the Pasha had the power to finally decide on capital sentences relating to Egypt. Pointing out that this matter was not covered in the arrangement of 1841, he said that 'nor was it then, nor is it now, the wish or interest of the British Government that the Pasha of Egypt should slide into independence. Egypt is an integral part of the Turkish Empire, and such it is the interest of Great Britain that it should remain'.<sup>318</sup>

### 2.3.3 The Obstructing Obelisk

The ambiguous status of the obelisk, a gift that had been accepted but never collected, had endured now for half a century, but events in Egypt were soon to force a resolution of its situation. In 1799, the French naturalist Charles-Nicolas-Sigisbert Sonnini de Manoncourt had estimated the population of Alexandria at around 5,000 people,<sup>319</sup> but by the end of Muhammad Ali's reign in 1848 it had grown to 104,000,<sup>320</sup> and by 1879 it was estimated at 220,000.<sup>321</sup> As the city expanded, its population also became more European, with this group forming only 5% of the population in 1848, but 25% by 1882. Of these, the largest part were Greek, followed by Italians.<sup>322</sup> The British and French were the next most numerous groups, but many of these were citizens from the Mediterranean territories of these powers, such as Malta and Tunisia.<sup>323</sup> A system of treaties, known as Capitulations, had long existed between the Ottoman Empire and European powers, conveying various immunities and privileges to such foreigners. Under Muhammad Ali these were extended, in practice if not through formal agreement.

These arrangements included the conduct of civil cases between Europeans through their own Consular Courts, but during the course of the nineteenth century there was an increasing number of cases between Europeans and Ottoman subjects. Although a Mixed Tribunal system with both Egyptian and European judges was set up, it was widely regarded by Europeans as ineffective, particularly in cases involving influential Ottoman citizens and the Egyptian government, cases tending to be settled by diplomatic pressure from consuls. After the accession of Said as Viceroy in 1854, there was a large increase in the award of concessions and contracts to Europeans, but the system was widely abused, and a virtual industry arose of bringing claims against the Egyptian government for alleged breach of contract, or the gaining of concessions simply to bring claims against the government for renouncing them. In many cases, there was little if any merit in these, and while some consuls and consul-generals acted to moderate the often-exorbitant claims, others did little if anything. From around 1830, it became possible for Europeans to own land in Egypt, but in practice most were able to avoid paying taxes because of the unwillingness of foreign consuls to act effectively on behalf of the Egyptian government.<sup>324</sup> As the number of

Europeans in Egypt increased, the problem of these abuses also grew. In 1861 one British Consul-General wrote of the support by other consuls of claims against the Egyptian government which would not have succeeded in a properly constituted tribunal, and of the 'sums paid in satisfaction of such claims [which] would have paid off about a quarter of the Government's indebtedness'.<sup>325</sup> To deal with the problem, a new system of Mixed Courts or International Tribunals was introduced, which greatly reduced exaggerated and unjustified claims, and settled justified claims more quickly, but these did not begin operation until February 1876.<sup>326</sup>

Although information is scanty, around 1862 or 1863 the land on which both Needles stood was sold, leased, or given to a foreign resident of Alexandria. A traveller's account from 1862 refers to them standing in 'a builder's yard',<sup>327</sup> and its huts and paving slabs are a familiar feature of later illustrations and photos of the Needles. One press report referred to the land being

made the subject of a free gift from a member of the Government of the last Viceroy [Said] to an Italian resident of Alexandria. The recipient at once sold the plot, which having passed through several hands, is now in the possession of a Greek, who proposed to build on the land a row of villas overlooking the sea.<sup>328</sup>

In June 1865, the British Consul-General, Robert Colquhoun (1803-1870), wrote to Earl Russell, having received a copy of an enquiry about the fallen obelisk, sent from the Science and Art Department to A H Layard (1817-1894),<sup>329</sup> Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.<sup>330</sup> Interestingly, he distinguishes between the standing obelisk, which he refers to as Cleopatra's Needle, and the fallen one, which he said had 'suffered considerably from the action of the wind and weather, as well as from the mischievous depredations of travellers who chipped and carried away such portions as they could break off'. He adds that as the gift of Muhammad Ali to the British Government it was covered with sand to protect it on the initiative of English residents of Alexandria, cleared in 1862 so that it could be inspected by the Prince of Wales during his visit to Egypt, but re-covered immediately afterward. He goes on to say that

The ground on which it reposes has been recklessly given by the late Viceroy to some Greek or Frenchman who, intending to build thereon, sent a request to Mr Consul Saunders to remove the monolith or it would be broken up. Mr Saunders very properly called upon the Governor to protect British Government property, and said if the persons claiming the ground required it for building purposes, they were at liberty to remove the obelisk, provided care was taken not to injure it; Mr Saunders placed it under the safeguard of the Local Government, and there the matter rests.<sup>331</sup>

And there it rested for nearly two years, until the Egyptian Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ragheb Pasha, wrote in January 1867 to the British Consul-General, now Colonel Edward Stanton (1827-1907).<sup>332</sup> Ragheb informed him that he had been contacted by the Greek Consul-General on behalf of the owner of the land with a claim relating to the obelisk, which would be an obstacle to construction work that the owner planned to carry out.<sup>333</sup> Ragheb noted that the obelisk had been given to the British Government by Muhammad Ali, and that it had been cleared by them for the Prince of Wales's visit. He wished to know if the government still intended to take up the gift, and requested that if they did, they should take prompt measures to remove the obelisk, or to inform him as soon as possible of their intentions in regard to it.<sup>334</sup> It took nearly a month for Stanton to contact Lord Stanley (1826-1893),<sup>335</sup> the Foreign Secretary, forwarding Ragheb's despatch. He noted that there had been numerous proposals to bring the Needle to England, but that 'the estimated expense of the operation has been such as to prevent any attempt being made to carry it into effect, the lowest estimate of the work amounting, I believe, to £10,000'.<sup>336</sup> He went on to note that

It is an unquestionable fact that the ground occupied by this obelisk is valuable as a building site, and having been disposed of by the Egyptian Government is now, and has been for some time past, private property, and unless Her Majesty's Government are prepared either to purchase the land, for which an exorbitant price will, in all probability, be asked, or remove the obelisk to England, I fear much difficulty will be experienced in preserving this interesting relic of antiquity from destruction, and under these circumstances I venture to solicit Your Lordship's instructions as to the manner in which I should reply to Ragheb Pasha's despatch.<sup>337</sup>

A month later, a letter was sent on behalf of Lord Stanley to the Treasury, referring to correspondence between the two departments on the obelisk in 1826, 1831, 1837 and 1857. It referred to the Needle as 'a specimen of one of the most ancient Monuments of Egyptian Art, and enclosed relevant papers dating back to 1819, including Stanton's despatch. It noted that 'the question resolves itself into a matter of expense', and asked the Treasury for their opinion on the answer that should be sent to the Egyptian government.<sup>338</sup> The response of the Treasury was to write on 20 April to ask for the opinion of the British Museum, which in effect meant asking Samuel Birch what he thought.

Birch was Keeper of the recently created Department of Oriental Antiquities, and the leading (and only professional) British Egyptologist of his day.<sup>339</sup> He never visited Egypt, and knew nothing of the obelisks personally, but approached the task with his customary thoroughness, and consulted sources going back as far as Frederik Norden in the late eighteenth century and the *Déscription de*

*l'Égypte* produced after the French expedition to Egypt, as well as a number of visitors to Egypt over the past few years, or those who had written on the obelisk recently. It is clear from Birch's notes, particularly in the passages that he quotes from various works, that his enquiries were focussed on allowing him to make an informed assessment of the fallen obelisk's condition.<sup>340</sup> The impression created by his sources, however, may have led him towards an unduly negative conclusion. For example, a letter from the great Egyptologist Carl Richard Lepsius (1810-1884)<sup>341</sup> in June 1867 said that he had not taken impressions (presumably squeezes) from its inscriptions on his expedition to Egypt, as their size and poor preservation meant that they were not suitable for this, and he also suggested, although it is not explicit which obelisk is being referred to, that the inscriptions on one of the obelisks may have suffered because it had been buried in earth at Heliopolis even before coming to Alexandria. Birch's notes also include the passage from Wilkinson's *Modern Egypt and Thebes* which described the attempt to bring the obelisk to England as 'wisely abandoned'.<sup>342</sup> The notes quoted the German artist Luigi Mayer (1755-1803),<sup>343</sup> who had produced a series of watercolours of Alexandria and Cairo, published in 1804, which described inscriptions on the standing obelisk as 'greatly defaced', with 'large scales falling from the stone'. Another note has a passage from an 1856 work on obelisks by the French Egyptologist and artist Nestor L'Hôte (1804-1842),<sup>344</sup> which also noted the poor condition of the inscriptions on the standing obelisk, and suggested that those on the fallen one might be even worse ('l'obelisque renversé est peut-être plus usé que l'autre'). Birch also spoke to two men who had lived or worked in Egypt. One, a Mr Nash 'considers the fallen one much mutilated', the other, Mr H J Rouse, who had worked as a civil engineer in Egypt, '[k]nows the obelisks well has examined the condition of the fallen one. Much injured, proposes that photographs should be taken and sent to England to enable an opinion to be formed of its condition. Thinks it ought to be removed independent of all consideration as to its condition.'<sup>345</sup>

In his draft report, Birch quoted J S Tucker, who had surveyed the fallen obelisk in 1851, as saying that he had 'found the three faces much injured by time and their edges chipped', but 'the hieroglyphs capable of being made out'. He does not seem to have been aware, as noted previously, that Tucker subsequently wrote to *The Times* denying reports that he had concluded that the obelisk was not worth the trouble or expense of moving. The report also referred to a letter that Birch had received from Thomas Leverton Donaldson (1795-1885),<sup>346</sup> Professor and then Emeritus Professor of Architecture at University College London, who had visited Egypt in 1861-62 and seen the Needles.<sup>347</sup> Birch quoted Donaldson as saying that 'the surface had been rubbed materially and the hieroglyphics almost indistinguishable ....' It is significant, however, that Donaldson confessed in a later letter to Birch, in 1867, 'I am afraid that these impressions of a treacherous memory may not convey the full information you may desire; but I tell you all that I

can recall'. The report mentioned engravings of the obelisk as indicating its condition, but said that the inscriptions were of little historical importance. Its conclusion was that '[i]t appears from the testimonies cited that the obelisk does not any longer possess any claim to removal as a work of Egyptian fine art and that its main features are its shape, colossal size, and historic interest attached to it.'

Birch's assessment of the Needle's condition is puzzling in some respects. The inscriptions on it, while not being in as fine a condition of those on the Luxor obelisk taken to Paris were in much better state than those of its sister obelisk now in New York, and a number of reports, some of which have already been cited earlier, commented positively on their state of preservation. Photographs could also have confirmed this, but we have to assume that Birch used the best sources available to him, and that there was insufficient time for photographs to be taken and sent to London. Also, while he clearly distinguishes between the standing and fallen Needles, the same may not be the case for the sources he used. Because the fallen obelisk was completely or partially buried for many years, and the standing one was a landmark, the latter came to be referred to as Cleopatra's Needle, and local sources being asked about the condition of 'Cleopatra's Needle' may have commented on it instead of the prostrate obelisk. For example, in an account of a visit to Egypt in one magazine the writer says that '[w]e went in the evening to see Cleopatra's Needle... Some distance from this another similar one lies prostrate. Some people insist that the fallen one is the true Cleopatra's Needle.'<sup>348</sup> Another potentially significant factor is that the base of the fallen obelisk, which was the most exposed part, had indeed been quite extensively damaged over the years by tourists, or donkey boys and dragomen (guides) on their behalf, smashing off chunks of it for souvenirs. The damage was such that approximately three inches had to be trimmed off the base in London to level it before the obelisk could be re-erected. When asked about the condition of the obelisk, sources in Alexandria may have been referring to those parts of it that were visible, but have been understood as referring to the whole obelisk.

Birch's report, along with a copy of extracts from the letters to him from Donaldson and Rouse was considered by the Museum Trustees at their meeting of 4 May 1867, and it was resolved that copies of Birch's report and Rouse's letter, together with extracts from Donaldson's letter, should be sent to the Lords of the Treasury, and that the Principal Librarian, John Winter Jones (1805-1881),<sup>349</sup> should acquaint their Lordships with the opinion of the Trustees 'that owing to the nearly obliterated state of the hieroglyphics, the removal of the Obelisk to England would not afford an adequate requital for the large expense that such removal would render necessary'.<sup>350</sup> Jones duly wrote to the Treasury on 6 May 1867, and on 13 May, the Treasury wrote to the Foreign Office enclosing the letter from the British Museum, saying that on the basis of its opinion they did not feel justified in asking Parliament for the necessary funds. On 18 May Lord Stanley

wrote to Colonel Stanton saying that the Government was ‘not prepared to undertake the removal of the obelisk from its present site, and accordingly leave it to be dealt with by the Egyptian Government as they may think best.’ Muhammad Ali’s gift had finally been declined. That should have been the end of the story, at least in terms of the Needle coming to England; that it was not was largely due to the efforts of one man, General Sir James Alexander, but his achievement invites the question of why his campaign was the one that succeeded when so many proposals in the past had not.



GEN. SIR JAMES EDWARD ALEXANDER, C.B., F.R.S.E.

Figure 11 - General Alexander. *The Graphic*, 2 February 1878, 114. Engraving from a photo (York Army Museum PHO2592) taken in 1873, showing Alexander as a Major General. (Author's Collection.)

In his own account of the obelisk and its transport to London, Alexander describes the inspiration for his efforts as coming during a visit to Paris in September 1867. Here he saw the obelisk from Luxor in the Place de la Concorde, and was later told by an unnamed acquaintance that another

like it, the property of the British nation, was lying neglected at Alexandria in Egypt, and was threatened with destruction by the owner of the land on which it stood. In his own words,

I now determined to endeavour to save the national disgrace of the loss and destruction of the trophy – the prostrate obelisk, and I resolved to do my utmost to have it transported to London, to grace the metropolis with a monument similar to those in Rome, Paris, and Constantinople.<sup>351</sup>

Here we can see two views of the Needle which had already been important; as an imperial trophy, and also as the property of the British nation. The idea that its destruction would be a national disgrace reflects a difference between the idea of governmental or state property, and the much more nebulous concept of the property of the 'nation'. The government could decline a diplomatic gift on the grounds that the monetary and political costs of acquiring it were not reflected in the benefits, but the value of a military trophy commemorating British victories in Egypt was seen as essentially non-monetary, and accepting or rejecting it a moral issue and not just a matter of cash. While patriotism is an abstract virtue, its motivations are often personal, and in Alexander's case had a lot to do not just with Alexander's own long and distinguished military career, but also with the fact that his great-uncle was Major, later Sir, Alexander Bryce, who had been commanding engineer at Alexandria during the Egyptian campaign, and who had been consulted by the Foreign Office in 1820. Family connections, and the more specific patriotism of Scottish citizens of the United Kingdom, were to be continuing and important factors in the final attempt to bring the obelisk from Egypt. Also important were the social and professional connections which those involved with the final attempt could draw on.

Alexander contacted Birch at the British Museum, but for obvious reasons the latter was unable to lend his support. Alexander read a paper on the obelisk to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1868, and in January of the following year sent a copy of it to Lord Clarendon (1800-1870),<sup>352</sup> the Foreign Secretary. In his covering letter Alexander included an estimate from Colonel Clark RE, Director of Works for the Admiralty, of £1,500<sup>353</sup> for the cost of a vessel to transport it to England, and added that the Queen had asked in June 1868 for relevant plans and documents to be sent to Lord Stanley.<sup>354</sup> A letter in the Foreign Office files dated 17 January 1869, whose author is uncertain, but who obviously had detailed knowledge of the situation, reveals that he had made Alexander's acquaintance in Scotland the previous year, and that while staying with him for a few days 'he unbosomed himself about his pet project'. While professing to know nothing about his previous communications with the Foreign Office, the writer went on to express the view that Lord Clarendon was unlikely 'to give him more encouragement than he appears to have derived from the British Museum, though the matter is certainly one more within their province'.<sup>355</sup> A

note added to the letter on 22 February reads 'Sir J A now wants an answer. I think his letter had better be made official'. A flurry of memos ensued within the Foreign Office. One noted that the transport of the Needle had been under discussion for nearly forty years, but that the expense had always been the obstacle, and that estimates had ranged from £10-15,000. It also noted that since 1851 the matter had been considered one for the Treasury rather than the Foreign Office. It went on to suggest that the obelisk had been 'presented' to the proprietors of the Crystal Palace Company. Another memo, which appears to be from Lord Clarendon, suggests that before the Treasury are consulted, A H Layard's private opinion should be sought.<sup>356</sup> It appears that Layard replied on 26 February, and although the letter itself does not seem to have survived a note summarises the opinion of the British Museum in 1867 and their estimate of the cost of transport, and the decision communicated to Stanton to renounce any claim on the obelisk and to leave its fate to the Egyptian government. An annotation suggests that 'it would not be advisable to endeavour to reopen the question of removing the obelisk', and another, apparently from Lord Clarendon, says 'I suppose not after the comments made to the Egyptian Government. Inform Sir J Alexander'.<sup>357</sup> Accordingly, on 3 March 1869, the Foreign Office returned Alexander's original documents and advised him to refer his proposal to the Treasury. Alexander, through the offices of his 'friend and neighbour', the politician and art historian Sir William Stirling Maxwell (1818-1878),<sup>358</sup> duly arranged an appointment with Robert Lowe (1811-1892),<sup>359</sup> the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who asked him to produce plans and estimates. This he did, with the aid of 'Mr Gamgee, of the City of London, Mr Hill, and Mr Eassie, C.E', about whom little seems to be known, but the estimated cost of £15,000<sup>360</sup> 'induced Mr Lowe to postpone the undertaking to a more fitting season'.<sup>361</sup> Undeterred, Alexander continued his campaign outside Westminster. He read papers at meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Glasgow and Belfast, and in 1872 he read a paper on the transport of the Needle to the Mechanical Section of the British Association, and his revised scheme was subsequently published in *The Engineer*.<sup>362</sup> In 1874, he seems to have been granted by the Metropolitan Board of Works, at least in principle, a site on the Victoria Embankment.<sup>363</sup>

In February 1875 Alexander wrote to Lord Tenterden, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, notifying him of his intention to travel to Egypt and Palestine 'in the first instance to inspect the present condition of the prostrate obelisk'. His letter must have been passed to Lord Derby, as he acknowledged it and said that a copy would be sent to Stanton in Egypt.<sup>364</sup> Alexander left London on 2 March, and two days later Stanton replied to Derby's letter. He reminded Derby that in 1867, in response to Ragheb Pasha's letter, Stanton was directed to reply saying that the British government were not prepared to remove the obelisk, and leaving it to the Egyptian government to deal with it as they thought best. He asked Derby if the monolith

should still be considered British property, and if he should support any proposal by Alexander to remove it to England.<sup>365</sup> Once again, a summary was prepared on the modern history of the obelisk, enclosing previous memoranda and correspondence, including that with the British Museum and the Science and Art Department.<sup>366</sup> Tellingly, the first reference was to the gift of the Needle to George IV in 1820, with no mention of the original attempt to transport it in 1802. The memo referred to 'constant discussions' since 1820 on bringing it to England, but also referred to the 'heavy expense' and the view that 'of late years the hieroglyphics have become so obliterated that it has been considered by competent authorities to be not worth the expense of removal'. An unsigned note asked Derby whether the correspondence should be copied to the Treasury, or whether Derby would say that a copy of General Alexander's letter was merely sent to Colonel Stanton for his information, and not with any intention of instructing him to take any steps in the matter. Derby noted below this: 'The latter. It is clear that we have given up all claim to the obelisk'.<sup>367</sup>

On 25 March Alexander wrote to Tenterden from Cairo to inform him that he had inspected both obelisks at Alexandria, and that Stanton had arranged an audience for him with Ismail Pasha, who had been formally appointed Khedive in 1867. In his book on the obelisk, Alexander adds the detail that he wore 'general officer's undress uniform' to show respect, but that Stanton 'was in plain clothes, as it was to be a private audience'. Alexander's letter to Tenterden simply noted that the Khedive 'had no objection whatever to the removal of his ancestor's gift to the British nation ....', but in his book he gives his recollection of the conversation, which was actually conducted in French, more fully. When Stanton introduced Alexander, as a 'zealous antiquary', and said that he had come to examine the obelisk and ask permission for its removal, the Khedive replied: "This obelisk was presented to the British nation by my ancestor, Mahomed Ali Pasha for services rendered to Egypt; it belongs to Britain, I give it up freely". As they prepared to leave, Stanton asked the Khedive "Is this your Highness's last word? We can take the obelisk?" The Khedive's reply was unambiguous. "You can take it certainly" .<sup>368</sup>



Figure 12 - Khedive Ismail. *Carte de Visite* by Cremière & Cie, Paris. Unknown date. (Author's Collection.)

While we do not currently know the details of Derby's reply to Stanton's letter of 4 March, asking if he should support Alexander's proposal, and although a subsequent memo from Stanton to Derby noted, as Derby had intended, that the copy of Alexander's letter was 'merely sent to me for my information, and with no intention of instructing me to take any steps in the matter of its removal', it also noted that the Khedive had no objections to removal. The fact that Stanton arranged an audience with Ismail, and accompanied Alexander to it, although not in uniform, indicates at least unofficial cooperation.<sup>369</sup> It seems likely that while the official position remained unchanged, the Foreign Secretary was not averse to Britain acquiring the obelisk through the offices of a private citizen. However, Alexander had no access to funds for the transport of the Needle, and so on 12 April the Foreign Office wrote to the Treasury informing them that Alexander had gone to Egypt to assess the condition of the Needle, and the issues involved in its removal, enclosing a copy of his letter, summarising the events of 1867 and the background to the Treasury's decision at that time, asking if they still took the same view, and suggesting that if this was the case, that General Alexander should be informed of it. Interestingly, the draft copy of this letter mentions that Ismail has no objections to the removal of the Needle, but this point has then been crossed out.<sup>370</sup> The Treasury replied on 27 April that Tenterden's letter and the enclosures summarising Alexander's plan had been put before the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury, but that they had no intention of departing from the decision of the department set out in their letter of 13 May 1867. On 6 May a letter was drafted for Derby's signature notifying Alexander that '[h]aving duly considered the matter HM's Government must abide by the decision which was arrived at in 1867'.<sup>371</sup> Despite encouraging progress in Alexandria by Alexander, who had been introduced by Chamberlain Bey, a government official, to the civil engineer Waynman Dixon,<sup>372</sup> who along with his brother John, also a civil engineer, were to design and implement the final and successful plan to transport the obelisk to England, this remained the official position, and in fairness to the Foreign Office their hands had been tied by the Treasury's attitude.

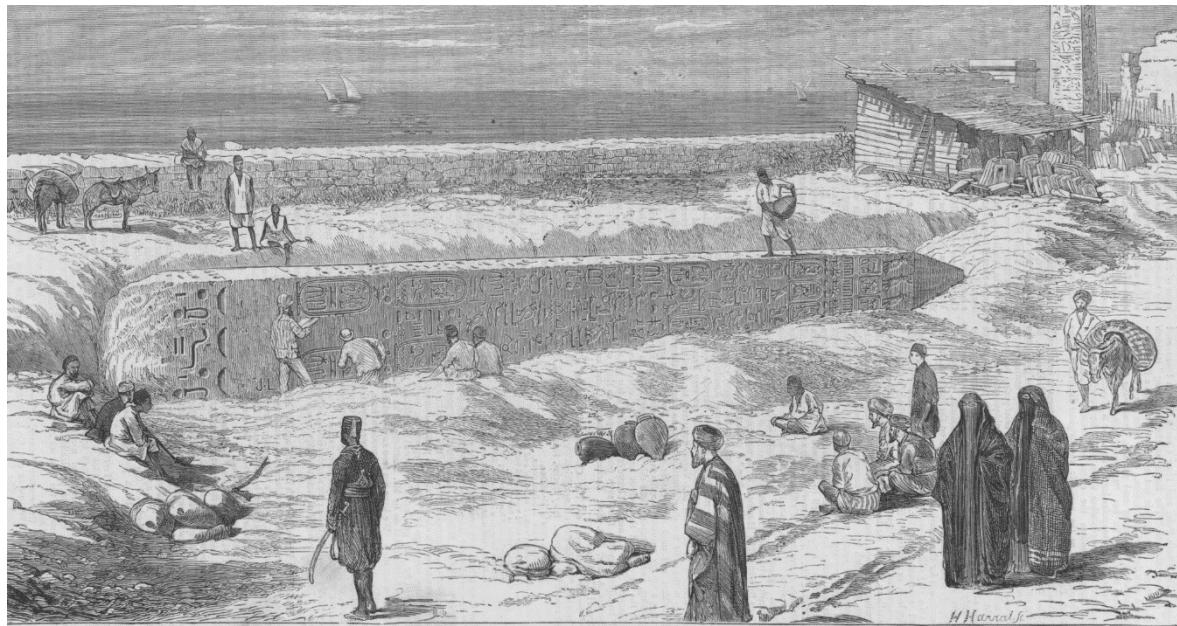


Figure 13 - General Alexander and Waynman Dixon examining the prostrate obelisk in 1875. *The Graphic* 20 November 1875, 501. (Author's Collection.)

Back in Alexandria, Waynman Dixon drew up a detailed plan for Alexander, costed at £10,000,<sup>373</sup> which was copied to his brother John Dixon in London, and discussed with him by Alexander on his return from Egypt. Then, the following year, 1876, John Dixon wrote to the newspapers offering to subscribe £500<sup>374</sup> towards the transport of the obelisk as a memorial of the Prince of Wales's visit to India.<sup>375</sup> With the support of General Alexander, he also proposed a site for the obelisk on the Embankment at the end of Northumberland Avenue. At some point in 1876, Dixon was in discussion with a 'Mr Pender', very probably Sir John Pender (1816-1896),<sup>376</sup> the Scottish-born pioneer of submarine telegraph cables, about funding the transport of the Needle, but this seems to have fallen through when Pender became involved in a protracted legal dispute.<sup>377</sup>

A breakthrough came later in 1876 when Alexander wrote to the surgeon, dermatologist, and philanthropist Erasmus Wilson on what Wilson later described as 'professional matters', and mentioned his involvement with Cleopatra's Needle and its removal to London.<sup>378</sup>

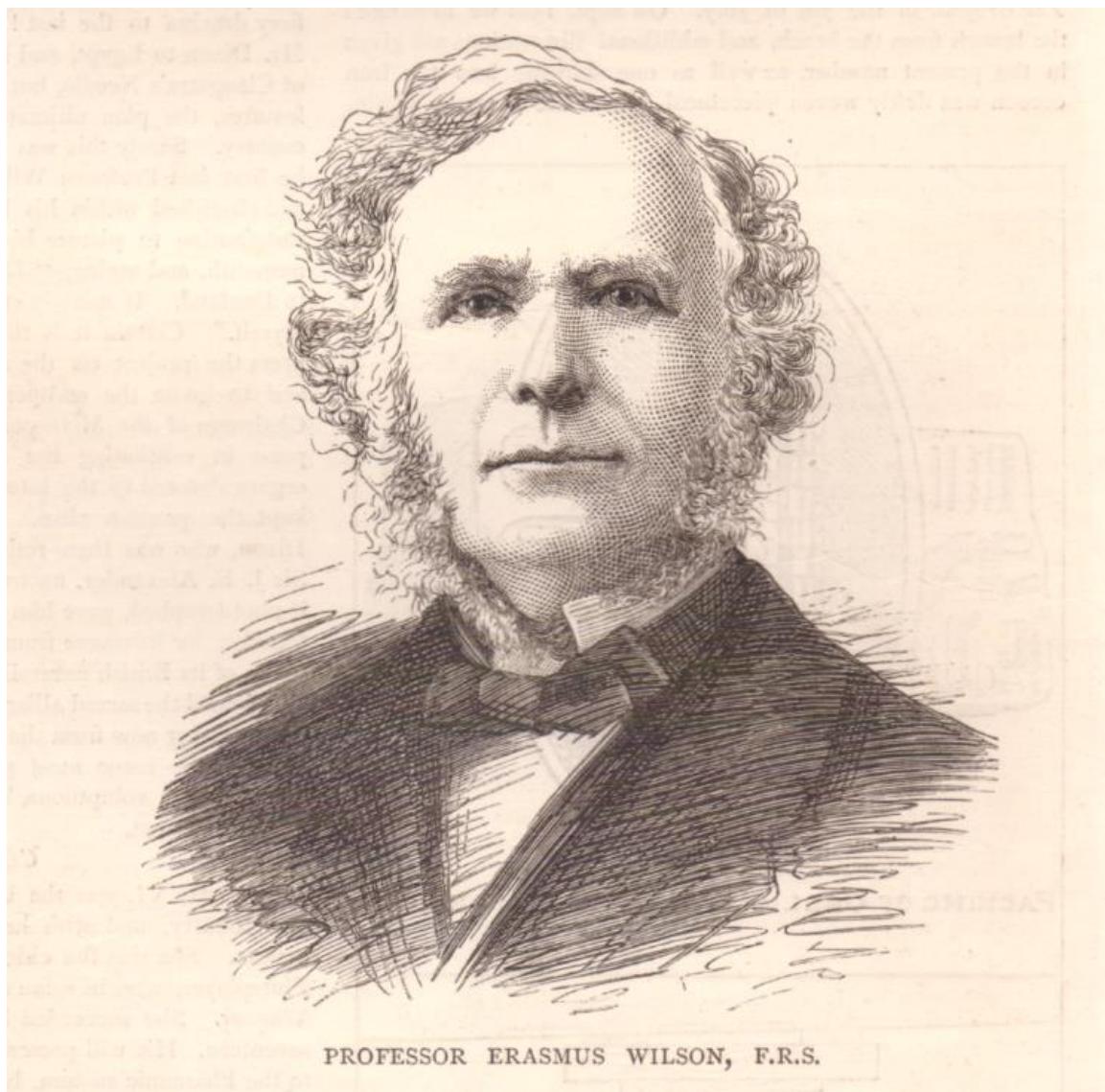


Figure 14 - Erasmus Wilson. *The Graphic* 2 February 1878, 116. (Author's Collection.)

Wilson's father was Scottish, and a former naval surgeon, who is said to have served with Nelson's squadron during its action against the French expeditionary force to Egypt.<sup>379</sup> Wilson later met with Alexander, who told him that a site had been granted by the Metropolitan Board of Works, and outlined Dixon's plan. Shortly after this meeting, Wilson met with John Dixon, and following that a conference was held which also included Charles Swinburne, Wilson's solicitor, and Henry Stephenson, a civil engineer, both friends of Wilson. Wilson asked Stephenson to evaluate a number of plans for the transport of the obelisk, and Dixon's was the one selected. Wilson and Dixon met again in November, and on December 20 Dixon wrote to Wilson estimating the cost of transporting the obelisk as £8,000.<sup>380</sup> Wilson, after consultation with Swinburne and Stephenson, offered to increase the sum to £10,000<sup>381</sup> to cover unforeseen contingencies, on the basis, to use the term employed by doctors at the time, of 'no cure no fee'.<sup>382</sup> Dixon would assume responsibility for transporting the Needle to London and re-erecting it there, when payment

would be made. Failure to complete the process would mean Dixon bearing all costs, and any costs over £10,000 would also be his responsibility.

On 9 January 1877, Dixon met with Lord Tenterden at the Foreign Office. A subsequent memo from Tenterden to Lord Derby reveals that 'Mr Pender, Professor Owen [?] and others are anxious that it should be brought to England. Previously everyone had been deterred by the expense, including the British Government.' Dixon estimated the cost at between £5,000 and £10,000. Pender had originally intended to pay this out of his own pocket but 'for various reasons which Mr Dixon stated at some length which are of no public interest' had decided not to. Erasmus Wilson had now come forward, and the Khedive was ready to hand over the obelisk to the Board of Works. 'The question was, would the British Government agree to this being done?' No government assistance would be required, but Dixon suggested that perhaps a Royal Navy vessel might help. Tenterden said that the obelisk had been given to Britain by Muhammad Ali, but that ten years ago the Government had said that they would not bring it to Britain and that the Khedive might do as he liked with it. 'Consequently it no longer belonged to the British Government, but to the Khedive, who could give it to anyone he liked so far as I knew.' If 'the Govt.' [presumably Egyptian] gave it to Mr Pender or Wilson, they could 'I supposed' take it and put it anywhere they could find for it. The best way to raise the question would be for them to write 'stating precisely what it was they proposed and to state positively (as I understand was the case) that they wanted no pecuniary or other assistance from Government'. A manuscript note on the memo by Derby added 'I see no reason why we should not have it if we can get it over gratis'.<sup>383</sup>

On 30 January 1877, a contract was signed between Dixon and Wilson. It stated that the obelisk would be '...erected on some suitable site in a thoroughly workmanlike and artistic manner...', and excluded Wilson from liability for damages in the event of Dixon failing to fulfil it. Dixon would '... at his own expense and risk transport the said monolith to London and erect the same in a vertical position in one piece...'. It was to be erected '... on or before the first day of January one thousand eight hundred and seventy nine and for the purposes of this clause [Clause 2] it is expressly declared that time shall be of the essence of the contract.' The location was specified as '... a suitable site to be provided by the Metropolitan Board of Works on or near to the Thames Embankment in the City of Westminster.' The site was to be approved by Henry Palfrey Stephenson 'or such other Civil Engineer as the said Erasmus Wilson shall nominate.' Stephenson was also to certify successful erection, and rule on any and all questions relating to the condition of the Needle, and adjuncts such as foundations, base, pedestal, railings etc. There was to be no part payment.<sup>384</sup>

This agreement broke the financial deadlock which had for so long prevented the Needle coming to London, and marked a change in the ways that it was viewed and valued. From this point on, not only did private individuals take leading roles in the transport of the obelisk, but its status was affected by the application of civil law. The government was not out of the picture, however. The Metropolitan Board of Works, what we would now describe as a quango - a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation, was involved in the grant of a site, and John Dixon was careful to ensure that even if the Government would not actively assist, equally it would not interfere in the process of acquiring the obelisk. And before the Needle reached London, there was to be yet another twist in the political ramifications of its status.

On 24 January the Metropolitan Board of Works had written to Alexander confirming the grant of a site on the Embankment,<sup>385</sup> and around the same time John Dixon had contacted his fellow civil engineer, John Fowler (1817-1898),<sup>386</sup> who acted for a number of years as engineering advisor to the Khedive Ismail. Although details are scanty, it seems that Dixon and Fowler had at one point planned to bring the Needle to England themselves, but that the project had been abandoned for unspecified political reasons.<sup>387</sup> On 26 January Fowler wrote to Dixon from Cairo, marking it 'Private'. He had received a telegram from Dixon, but did not feel that he could usefully reply in the same way. He described it as 'absolutely essential' that some form of official confirmation should be sent that the British Government would accept custody of the obelisk if Dixon delivered it to them in England, and that the Khedive would not deal with any request if this was not the case. Fowler was confident, however, that Dixon would be able to obtain this confirmation through Lord Tenterden.<sup>388</sup> On 6 February Dixon wrote to Lord Derby, confirming that funds for the removal of the Needle had been provided 'by private munificence',<sup>389</sup> that Dixon had undertaken liability for the task, and that John Fowler 'has promised his cordial cooperation'. The Metropolitan Board of Works had officially promised a site, and the Khedive 'will accord his assent with pleasure provided it be understood that the Government of her Majesty will accept the custody of the relic upon its erection here. I have therefore to ask your Lordship for the gracious assent of Her Majesty's Government to become the custodian of the obelisk as soon as it shall be erected'.<sup>390</sup> Once again, the Foreign Office wrote to the Treasury, copying Fowler's letter to Dixon. Derby was not aware of any objection to Dixon's request, but asked the Treasury's opinion on what reply should be sent. On 16 February 1877, the Treasury wrote to Lord Tenterden, for the information of Lord Derby, with their opinion. 'My Lords will recommend HM's Government to come to an understanding with the Metropolitan Board of Works for the custody of the monolith'.<sup>391</sup> On 21 February, Derby replied to Dixon quoting the Treasury's phrasing. The following day, Dixon wrote to Tenterden, thanking him personally for his interest and assistance in the matter, and 'for the gracious assent of the Government to accept the custody of the

obelisk'. The day after that, the Foreign Office wrote to Hussey Crespiigny Vivian (1834-1893),<sup>392</sup> now the British Consul-General in Egypt, copying the relevant correspondence, and informing him that 'you will perceive from this correspondence that HM's Government have consented to make arrangements for the safe custody of the monolith ... and should you be referred to, you are at liberty to inform the Egyptian Government of the understanding which has been arrived at by HM's Govt. with Mr Dixon on this subject'.<sup>393</sup> Despite the relaxed tone of Derby's letter to the Treasury, it seems clear that he wanted to pass the responsibility for a decision onto them, and the forms of words used, with talk of understandings, and the government consenting to make arrangements, seem carefully calculated to satisfy Ismail, while not actually agreeing to his request. It is not difficult to find reasons for this. The Egyptian economy had suffered from a fall in the price of its staple export, cotton, after the end of the American Civil War, as well as bad Nile floods and serious outbreaks of cattle disease. Not only this but both Ismail and his predecessor Said had, with the enthusiastic connivance of European banks, used massive loans at huge commissions and with crippling rates of interest to support ambitious infrastructure projects, attempts to expand the territory controlled by Egypt deep into Africa, and in the case of Ismail lavish 'presents' to secure judicial reforms and greater autonomy from the Ottoman Sultan.<sup>394</sup> By 1877, Egypt's debt was completely unsustainable, and less than two years later Ismail would be deposed by the Sultan as the result of pressure from Britain and France with German support.<sup>395</sup> While Ismail desperately needed to feel that he would be supported by the British government, they in turn were doing their best to distance themselves from him.<sup>396</sup>

Dixon had already written to the Khedive on 23 February 1877 asking for permission to remove the obelisk, and for protection for him and his workmen while they were involved in this work. On 8 March, Sherif Pasha, the Egyptian Prime Minister, wrote to Vivian, noting the earlier decision by the British government to decline the offer of the obelisk and to leave a decision on its disposition to the Egyptian government. He went on to say that the Khedive had learnt that some English people, appreciating the archaeological value of the monument, wished to transport it to their country, and had formed a 'société par souscription' [approximately 'syndicate'] to obtain permission to do this. Wishing to respond to this thought, the Khedive had asked Sherif Pasha to make Vivian aware that Ismail was happy to make a gift of the monument to the English nation, in the person of Vivian, and that the municipal authorities in Alexandria had been made aware and asked to give their assistance to the work.<sup>397</sup> Once again, differing views of the obelisk are evident. The British government seem more concerned with the political significance of the obelisk as a gift, while the Egyptian government chose to highlight its current archaeological value, rather than its original gift to commemorate British help against Napoleon's forces. Ismail had wanted his gift to be seen as one to the British government, Sherif Pasha used the more

general concept of a gift to the English nation. Dixon had requested permission to remove the obelisk, but Ismail chose to present it to Vivian as the representative of the government. On 9 March, Fowler sent a telegram from Cairo to Dixon, notifying him that 'Khedive presents obelisk to English nation through Mr Vivian its representative here, and authorises him to arrange with you for its transport to England'. The same day Dixon wrote to Tenterden to notify him that the Khedive's consent had been obtained.<sup>398</sup> On 10 March, Vivian sent Derby a copy of a telegram sent 'en clair' earlier the same day. (Reminding us that not all communications were made in this way.) It confirmed presentation of the Needle by the Khedive, and the request that arrangements for its removal be made through Vivian, who noted 'My reply protects Her Majesty's Government for all responsibility for removal or transport to England'.<sup>399</sup> The Foreign Office continued to push responsibility onto the Treasury. On 26 March 1877 it copied the correspondence from Vivian on the decision of the Khedive and asked the Lords of the Treasury to confirm whether the arrangement might be accepted, 'and whether Mr Vivian should now be instructed to convey to the Khedive the formal thanks of HM's Government for the gift of the monument in question'. If they were 'of the opinion that the Khedive's offer should be accepted', would they make the necessary arrangements with the Metropolitan Board of Works and Dixon.<sup>400</sup> On 11 April 1877, the Treasury volleyed the ball back, writing to Tenterden to inform him that The Lords Commissioners of the Treasury 'presume that the offer made by His Highness the Khedive of Egypt of the monolith in question has been accepted and has been suitably acknowledged on behalf of Her Majesty's Government by W Vivian .... My Lords have informed the Metropolitan Board of Works that HM's Government have accepted the offer and the conditions attached to it by the Khedive'.<sup>401</sup> A week later Derby wrote to Vivian. 'I have to instruct you to inform His Highness the Khedive that his offer of the obelisk known as Cleopatra's Needle is accepted by HM's Government on the conditions mentioned in your despatch: - and I should wish you at the same time to express to His Highness the thanks of HM's Govt. for ~~the gift of this interesting monument~~ having thus courteously offered the monument to the British nation'.<sup>402</sup> The deletion in his draft is significant. It seems that although the Government had accepted the obelisk, it could still not publicly acknowledge that it had been Ismail's gift.

Since 1867, the land on which the obelisks stood appears to have been owned or leased by Giovanni di Demetrio, a Greek merchant. The prostrate obelisk in particular was obstructing development of the land, and through the Greek Consul-General Demetrio pressed the Egyptian government for its removal. They, as we have seen, approached the British Government, effectively treating the Needle as its property, but once the British government had renounced its claim on the obelisk, it became the responsibility of the Egyptian government. This resulted in a situation where its status and ownership were uncertain. The land was considered private

property, but the obelisks which stood and lay on it do not seem to have been viewed by Demetrio as his property. To develop the land, there were three options: removal of one or both obelisks, destruction of the fallen one to free the land for building, or burial of the fallen obelisk under any new construction. Until 1867, the fallen obelisk had been viewed as British property, and steps taken to protect it by the British consuls or consuls-general. After 1867, it may have been protected by Demetrio's unwillingness to destroy Egyptian government property, but equally it may have made more sense for him to have the expensive work of removing the obelisk carried out by the government, or to use its presence to demand compensation.

In 1875, General Alexander had been asked by the Governor of Alexandria to seek the permission of the owner of the land in order to examine the obelisk, and Demetrio had said that 'he would be glad if the obelisk were removed to enable him to build there without covering in the obelisk'.<sup>403</sup> Before February 1876, claims by foreign citizens against the Egyptian government had tended to be settled by negotiation through the appropriate nation's consul, although this was satisfactory neither to the government, who were frequently forced to pay indemnities on claims of little merit as a result of diplomatic pressure, or for those claimants who, lacking influence, had little chance of success against it.<sup>404</sup> Against fierce international opposition, particularly from the French government, a revised system of Mixed Courts had eventually been introduced,<sup>405</sup> and Demetrio pursued his claim against the Egyptian Government in these. On 23 March 1877, Vivian wrote to Derby, informing him that Demetrio had lost his case in the Mixed Courts, 'says that it has rendered his land unsaleable' and is demanding a large indemnity from anyone taking it away for losses, legal expenses and damages it has put him to. 'It is hardly necessary for me to say that I shall not interfere in this difficulty'.<sup>406</sup> Vivian wrote again on 29 March 1877. Demetrio 'persists in his intention to demand a large sum of money (he talks of £30,000) before he will permit the obelisk to be removed from his ground'.<sup>407</sup> Vivian also said that on a recent visit from Cairo to Alexandria that he had inspected the obelisk as best as he could, since it was largely covered with dirt, and that 'I saw and heard enough to make me suspect that the hieroglyphs are seriously effaced and injured, and that the obelisk is by no means in a good state of preservation; and many people say that it is not worth the transport to England.' He went on to suggest that before proceeding further the monolith should be cleaned and examined by 'some competent person'.<sup>408</sup> Once again, questions had been raised over the condition of the obelisk, and whether it represented value for money, despite the fact that nearly two years earlier, General Alexander and Waynman Dixon had cleared, washed, inspected and photographed the Needle.

Demetrio's intransigence placed Dixon in a difficult position. In January he had already signed a time sensitive contract with Erasmus Wilson, and in mid-March contracts had been signed with the Thames Iron Works for the construction of the iron vessel in which the Needle would be

towed back to England.<sup>409</sup> The obelisk may have been treated by Ismail as his property, which could be given to the British government, but Demetrio owned the land on which it stood, and refused to allow access to it. Even though he may have been looking for any way of recovering some of his legal costs, there was a lack of logic in his demanding money to remove the obelisk, when the basis of his previous claim was that the Egyptian government owed him compensation for failing to do this. Some way to resolve the deadlock had to be found, and Dixon sent Captain Henry Carter, who was to skipper the obelisk barge, to negotiate with Demetrio.<sup>410</sup> The root cause of Demetrio's actions, however, seem to have been less to do with money than a wounded pride. He objected to the government giving away the obelisk without consulting him, and felt that as the owner of the land it was his property, and that it should be recognised as his gift. Eventually, the Khedive was persuaded to write a suitably diplomatic letter to Demetrio, who withdrew his objections and waived any claim against the Egyptian government. On 2 June 1877 Vivian wrote to Derby notifying him of this, and at Dixon's request a letter of thanks to Demetrio on behalf of the British Government was also sent in October 1877.<sup>411</sup> While the way was now clear for the actual removal of the Needle to begin, it left its status even vaguer, as it had now been accepted as the gift both of a head of state and a private individual.

Easily overlooked in these ongoing disputes is the growing awareness of the Needle as an Egyptian antiquity. Demetrio was an amateur antiquarian,<sup>412</sup> and when Captain Carter visited him he took along a number of letters from not only John Dixon and others, but from Professor Richard Owen (1804-1892),<sup>413</sup> Keeper of Natural History at the British Museum, and Samuel Birch, its Keeper of Oriental Antiquities. John and Waynman Dixon were both civil engineers, but also keen amateur archaeologists. In 1870 John had made an extended visit to Egypt on business, and returned in 1871 and 1872. During this time, he 'filled up [his] leisure by explorations at the Pyramids (where my brother and I discovered the passages where we found the bronze hook and weights) and examination amongst other things of the Alexandrian obelisks. It seemed to us a pity to see the prostrate one going to ruin and thought some effort ought to be made to remove it to England.'<sup>414</sup> In May 1877, Waynman Dixon dug around the base of the standing obelisk, and found the remaining two of the four bronze crab supports used when it had been re-erected in Roman times. The local physician, friend of Demetrio, and amateur antiquarian, Tassos Neroutsos Bey (1826-1892)<sup>415</sup> noted and subsequently translated Latin and Greek inscriptions on the crabs recording the re-erection of the obelisks in 13 BC, the eighteenth year of the reign of Augustus. On 25 June, Vivian wrote to Derby enclosing copies of Dixon's translation of the inscriptions, and noted that workmen were searching for the pedestal of the fallen obelisk, obviously unaware that it had been destroyed in 1830.



Figure 15 - John Dixon in 1878. *The Graphic* 2 February 1878, 116. (Author's Collection.)

Once Demetrio's objections had been overcome, the obelisk could be moved parallel to the sea, the prefabricated obelisk barge built round it, and both then rolled into the harbour. After an incident where it was holed by a block of stone on the harbour bed, and flooded as the doors in its watertight compartments had not been closed, it was patched, re-floated, and towed round to the main harbour where fitting it out for sea was completed. On 19 September 1877, a launch ceremony was held, conducted by Consul-General Vivian in the presence of Egyptian officials, foreign representatives 'and all the English community in Alexandria', where a bottle of champagne was smashed on the stern of the vessel by the daughter of Admiral McKillop, Ismail's Chief of Harbours, and the barge was christened as *Cleopatra*.<sup>416</sup> On 21 September 1877, in tow

by the freighter *Olga*, she set out for England, a voyage which was expected to take about three weeks.<sup>417</sup>

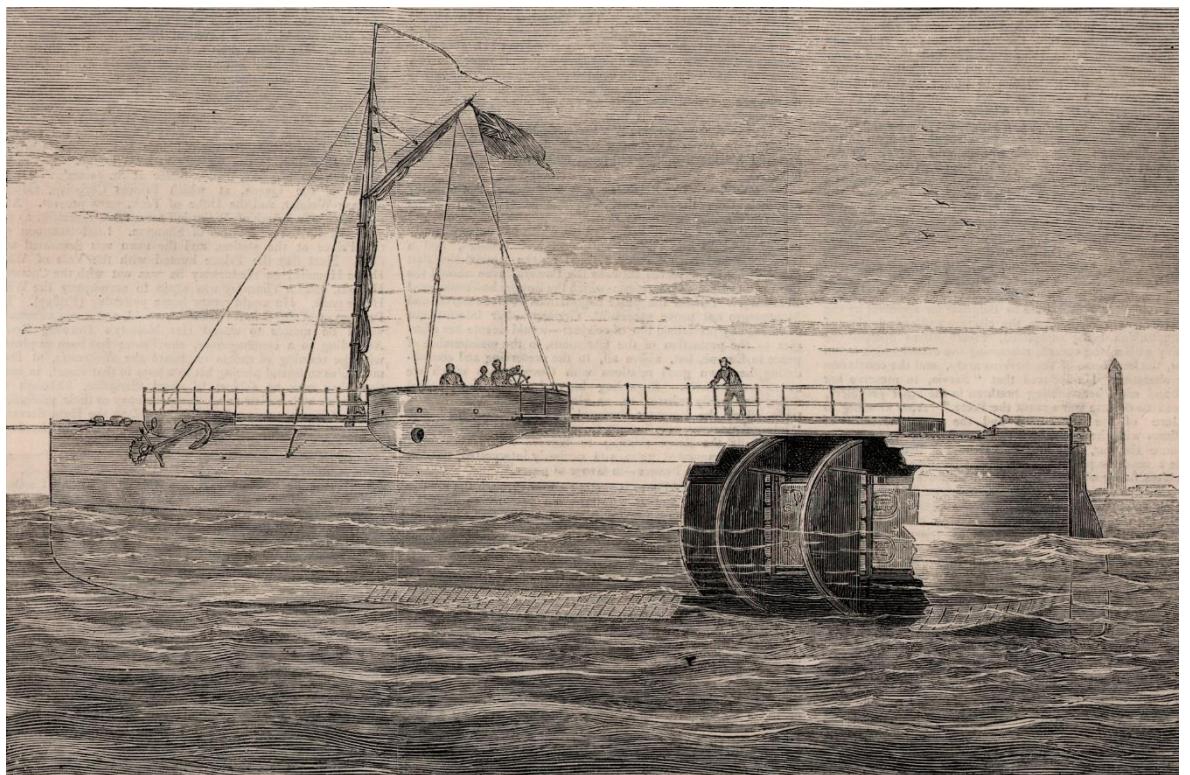


Figure 16 - Artist's impression of the *Cleopatra* leaving Alexandria, showing her construction and the storage of the Needle. It does not show the superstructure accurately. *The Graphic* 3 March 1877, 209. (Author's Collection.)

Although the nineteenth century represented only a small part of the Needles' history, it brought a radical change in their significance. For the first time since the Roman emperors, obelisks were taken out of Egypt to European sites. The development of knowledge about Ancient Egypt resulting from the decipherment of its scripts and language undoubtedly played a crucial part in this, but understanding the obelisks did not require removing them. What removal did was to allow them to mark shifts in political power. Thus, the initial desire for the London Needle to act as a war memorial would commemorate a crucial victory over a political rival, and subsequent efforts to transport it can be linked to an additional role in marking and validating Britain's still emerging status as an imperial power.



## Chapter 3 Our Egyptian Obelisk

Wherein lies the mysterious attraction which is peculiar to the land of the Pharaohs?

Why is it that its name, its history, its natural peculiarities, and its monuments, affect and interest us in a quite different manner from those of the other nations of Antiquity?

... Not only the learned and cultivated among the inhabitants of the Western world, but every one, high and low, has heard of Egypt and its primeval wonders.<sup>1</sup>

Up to this point, the Needle and its sister obelisk had been perceived in an Egyptian context. Over the centuries, merchants and pilgrims had seen them and viewed them as landmarks, memorials to the stories of saints, or incomprehensible survivals from an almost legendary past, but with the arrival of French and British troops at the beginning of the nineteenth century awareness of them in Europe began to grow. After the end of the Napoleonic expedition, the resurrection of Alexandria as Egypt embraced modern Europe brought a stream of travellers heading to and returning from the east, and merchants, bankers, diplomats, engineers and others who lived and worked in Egypt. Now, the Needle had left Egypt on its way to England, and engagement with it was to become not only much more widespread, but also increasingly complex. Although the actual ownership and value of the obelisk were still important, the clearest indication of this being the action over salvage fought in the courts after the obelisk barge *Cleopatra* was abandoned and recovered in the Bay of Biscay, literal ownership became increasingly metaphorical, and the value of the Needle started to be expressed more in terms of cultural capital.

### 3.1 England's Obelisk

The obelisk was certainly seen as an imperial trophy, but the army sent to Egypt in 1801 was an expeditionary force, not an occupying one, and its mission was not, to use the modern term, one of regime change, but of returning control of the country to the Ottoman Empire, and maintaining it as part of that empire. Possession of the obelisk did not therefore represent the conquest of territory and its addition to the British Empire, and British occupation of Egypt did not take place until after the arrival of the Needle in London.

The first attempt to bring the Needle to England failed, but if it had succeeded, it is interesting to consider on what basis it would have been acquired. As Captain Joseph Larcom's account quoted earlier indicates, formal permission to take it had been sought from 'the Aga who commanded in Egypt'. While this person is not named, Ottoman troops sent to Egypt were commanded by the Grand Vizier, Kör Yusuf Ziya Pasha, second only to the Ottoman Sultan.<sup>2</sup> However, the forces of

the Vizier approached Egypt by land through the Sinai, whereas 7,000 Ottoman troops under the command of Kapudan Admiral Küçük Hüseyin Pasha landed by ship at Alexandria shortly after the British. Küçük Hüseyin Pasha was described as having ‘a marked predilection for every thing European’<sup>3</sup> and given his role in negotiating the Capitulation of Alexandria (see 2.2.3 above) it seems more probable that it was him, rather than Kör Yusuf Ziya Pasha, who was asked for permission to take the Needle.

The request by the British suggests a perceived distinction between the obelisk and the antiquities acquired by French forces during their occupation of Egypt, which subsequently passed to the British, and were then presented to George III as the spoils of war, for which Turkish permission does not seem to have been sought. The transfer of these antiquities was not only the subject of acrimonious disputes between British and French commanders, but in the course of these arguments General Menou is recorded as exclaiming “Jamais on n'a pillé le monde” (“Never has the world been so looted.”).<sup>4</sup> He was referring to the actions of the British, but Bonaparte’s claim to have landed in Egypt in support of the Sultan was given the lie by the Ottoman army sent to expel the French, and the acquisition of the antiquities by the French seems to fall into the category of looting rather than legal seizure. Their transfer to the British was specifically addressed in the Treaty, or more correctly Capitulation, of Alexandria.<sup>5</sup> This process in itself, however, is not without problems, as the French had previously used treaties such as the Treaty of Tolentino to legitimise seized artworks by classifying them as payments or reparations for a war.<sup>6</sup> Lord Keith had made clear that he could not ‘consider the obelisk or any other column or public building as capture or booty’ or ‘consent to dilapidate or remove anything belonging to the Turkish Dominions’.<sup>7</sup> While he did not directly address the question of the antiquities collected by the French during their occupation, this suggests that they would have been regarded as the property of the Ottoman Sultan, and that they should have remained in Egypt. However, there is no indication that this was an issue of concern to the Ottoman authorities. Had the British offered to return the antiquities, it is unclear what would have been done with them, and following the defeat of the French and withdrawal of British forces and the main Ottoman army, Egypt descended into political anarchy. In the event, however, although the antiquities confiscated from the French came to England, the Needle was not acquired at this time.

There is a lack of references to the 1802 attempt to transport the obelisk in later correspondence and articles, which may be significant. It had been privately funded, and been unsuccessful, whereas the request made by Samuel Briggs, although from a private citizen, was to the Sultan’s Viceroy for the Needle to be made a gift to the British monarch, and was (again) formally granted. Had the first attempt succeeded, it seems most probable that the obelisk would have been presented to the Crown, but it took place in the context of a military campaign, and it may have

been felt that Brigg's request and Muhammad Ali's granting of it provided a more solid basis for subsequent claims to ownership of the Needle. Again, the basis on which the obelisk would have been acquired can be criticised in the light of the relationship between Britain, and indeed the European powers in general, and Egypt. The willingness of Muhammad Ali, and successive Khedives, to give away the antiquities of Egypt, particularly its Pharaonic ones, was largely driven by their desire to cultivate political and economic relations with Western powers. 'To Muhammad Ali, antiquities were primarily bargaining chips to be exchanged for European diplomatic and technical support'.<sup>8</sup> The exchanges did not reflect an equal relationship of power between the states, but in reality this is seldom the case.

No-one at the time, least of all Muhammad Ali, seems to have questioned his right to dispose of the obelisk. Technically, as Egypt was then a province of the Ottoman Empire, that right may ultimately have rested with the Sultan, and as we have seen successive British governments were wary of seeming to recognise Muhammad Ali as an independent head of state because of the implications of this on the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Whatever the legal niceties, once given, the Needle was repeatedly described over the coming years as the property of the British Nation. This, however, is a very nebulous concept, and raises the question of who reflects, and exercises, the will of the nation. In principle this might be the Government of the day, but in practice when it failed to act as commentators believed it should do, they had little hesitation in assuming the role of voice of the people. This tended to mean that as the obelisk approached England, it was primarily understood and valued not as an Egyptian antiquity, but as a metaphor for various abstract ideas.

### 3.1.1 The New Rome

It has been observed that 'When power shifts, treasures of the past follow',<sup>9</sup> and one of the earliest examples of this is the Egyptian obelisks, the youngest already more than five hundred years old, taken to Rome by Augustus and later emperors. For later European empires, it was almost as if, to paraphrase Jane Austen, a nation in possession of an empire must be in want of an obelisk. The British clergyman, Freemason and Rosicrucian Hargrave Jennings (1850-1890)<sup>10</sup> wrote in 1877 that

... all the capital cities of Europe, with whom the idea of Empire is annexed, have One. It seems a necessary, if not an indispensable possession, for every great city of civilised Europe (as proof of its highest art-cultivation) to boast One of these regal uprights – these consummate "index-marks" pointing to heaven – these mysterious heirlooms of

the ages as a Talisman consecrated to the mysterious Gods – one, at least of these Obelisks.<sup>11</sup>

It seemed clear that this was the intention of the French, and in 1821 the *Journal de Marseilles* reporting the arrival in France of the Dendera Zodiac and other Egyptian antiquities, commented that ‘It is notorious that, after the example of the Romans, that enterprising people ornament their capital with the magnificent remains of Egyptian civilisation’.<sup>12</sup> Capt. C F Head (1796-1849),<sup>13</sup> who travelled from India to England via Egypt in 1829-30, wrote of one of the Karnak obelisks that it was ‘destined to ornament the French capital, like the twelve that were transported from Egypt to Rome by the Caesars for similar purposes’.<sup>14</sup> In the end it was one of the obelisks from Luxor which ended up in the Place de la Concorde, but once it was there it was not lost on commentators that Britain had fallen behind its long-time rival. The British should not, observed one in 1851, be ‘behind the French either in power, in ability, or in zeal, to adorn our cities’.<sup>15</sup> Another, in 1869, noted ‘[t]he neglected state in which the fallen pillar is left, being as we were told, the gift of the Pacha to the British people, contrasts unfavourably with the care taken of its sister, the third of this trio, now set up in the Place de la Concorde in Paris’.<sup>16</sup> Not everyone felt like this. One magazine in 1878 described the obelisks taken to Rome as ‘trophies of victory, and as such intelligible to every citizen’, but then went on to wonder ‘what cause a modern nation had for following, after a huge lapse of time and under totally different circumstances, the example of the Romans’.<sup>17</sup> Once the Needle had been re-erected in London, however, a journalist could write that ‘Rome is rich in obelisks, and Paris has long been proud of its spoil from Luxor, but London is now not behindhand, and by the Thames as by the Tiber and the Seine, there stands a trophy from the Nile’.<sup>18</sup>

This game of imperial one-man-upmanship can be seen as part of a wider drive since the French expedition to Egypt, spurred on by the publication between 1809 and 1829 of the *Description de l’Égypte*, to secure large Ancient Egyptian sculptural antiquities. Of these, probably the largest was the fallen colossal statue of Ramses II at Memphis.<sup>19</sup> In 1851, after speculating on the condition of the fallen Needle, one writer wondered ‘whether there may not be other monuments in Egypt equally attainable, and which it is more desirable to remove’ and went on to say that

According to local tradition, this monument is the property of either the Duke of Northumberland or the British nation. To whomsoever it belongs, it would certainly be more worthy of transport than the obelisk, - especially if the latter has sustained injury; and we know that a project for its removal... has been in the hands of the Trustees of the British Museum for several years<sup>20</sup>

As with obelisks, there was rivalry with the French. One magazine observed that ‘As regards the statue of Sesostris [Ramses], the French may probably step in between us and our property, and thus relieve us from the trouble of removing it’.<sup>21</sup> Both the statue and the obelisk also had in common the fact that their size made them unsuitable for display in museums.<sup>22</sup> However, not only did the size of all but the smallest obelisks mean that they needed to be displayed outdoors, but also doing so followed the precedent set by the Romans in using them as imperial trophies.

### 3.1.2 The Noblest Monument

The prime motivation for bringing the Needle from Egypt was originally for it to act as a memorial to the victories of Nelson and Abercromby, and to the officers and men who had fallen in their famous victories, and in 1877, writing of the proposed Parliament Square site, John Dixon suggested that there it ‘will form the noblest monument of her arms and men that England can possess’.<sup>23</sup> There had been suggestions that the obelisk would form a suitable monument to Nelson in Trafalgar Square, and the architect and designer Owen Jones (1809-1874)<sup>24</sup> submitted a proposal for this.<sup>25</sup> In 1851, when there was a serious chance that the Needle would be brought to England, even though by this time Nelson’s Column was in place, a magazine noted that ‘Captain Smyth [who had produced a plan to bring the Needle from Egypt in 1822] most nationally and correctly asked whether this famous pillar, in Trafalgar-square, would not most appropriately consort with Nelson’s column; and whether, on one side of the base of the latter, “Nelson and the Nile”, and “Abercrombie and Alexandria,” on the other, might not most fitly and appropriately be inscribed?’.<sup>26</sup> The surgeon William Wilde, father of Oscar, expressed his opinion that when the obelisk was re-erected in London, it should have four sphinxes at the corners of its base, because they had been adopted for the ‘colours and ornaments’ of British regiments, and would be around ‘an obelisk that looked on Aboukir, that echoed the shouts of Alexandria, heard the cannon of the Nile, and the dying tones of Abercrombie...’.<sup>27</sup> Its use as a memorial was certainly a prime motivation for Sir James Alexander. In a letter to the architect Charles Barry (1823-1900)<sup>28</sup> in 1878, he wrote that

The Obelisk was presented to the British nation by Mahomed Ali Pasha, in recognition of the valuable services of the Fleet and Army to Egypt in 1801, under the heroic leaders Nelson and Abercromby, and thus should be appropriately placed in view of the Admiralty and Horse Guards. This was the chief reason why I did my best to save this precious monolith from threatened destruction in 1867.<sup>29</sup>

The politician Lord Harrowby (1798-1882)<sup>30</sup> referred to it as ‘the monument of gratitude to England from liberated Egypt’.<sup>31</sup> Less convincingly, it was also proposed as a memorial of the 1868

British expedition to Ethiopia.<sup>32</sup> Not everyone saw it primarily as a military monument, however, and perhaps surprisingly one of these was Erasmus Wilson, who in a letter to the Metropolitan Board of Works expressed his view that '[a]s the Obelisk was presented to George IV for civilities of which that monarch was so fully capable, the remembrance of Nelson and Abercromby took no share in the gift'.<sup>33</sup>

One way in which those agitating for the Needle to be brought from Egypt sought to attract support was to suggest it as a memorial or monument to other events as well. During a tour to India in 1862-3, the Prince of Wales visited Egypt, and while he was in Alexandria the fallen obelisk was cleared for his inspection. There was also a suggestion that it might be offered to him, but if this was ever raised, it seems to have been quickly discouraged by the British Government.

Once more we learn the Viceroy of Egypt will offer to this nation, when the Prince of Wales passes through the Suez Canal, one of the two great obelisks of Alexandria, vulgarly called "Cleopatra's Needles". But the offer will be refused. Those priceless granite monuments are "too heavy" for the wealthiest city of the wealthiest country in the world to accept as a gift!<sup>34</sup>

In 1875, John Dixon suggested that in contrast to the amount spent on banquets and illuminations to celebrate the Prince's tour, that the erection of the Needle would form 'a more substantial and enduring memorial' of the event.<sup>35</sup> In 1849 the Prince Consort had supported bringing the Needle to England, and so it was not surprising that following his death there was a proposal for it to be used as a memorial to him.<sup>36</sup> On a more general level, one magazine suggested that as well as showing that we were not 'behind the French either in power, in ability, or in zeal, to adorn our cities' the Needle would also be 'a trophy – it would be an abiding memorial of the extraordinary country from which civilisation spread to the whole world'.<sup>37</sup>

### **3.1.3      Which Nation's Needle?**

It was easy enough to describe the Needle as the property of the British nation, but there was more than one way in which this could be interpreted when it came to the choice of where it would be sited. The British expeditionary force sent to Egypt had been commanded by a Scot, Sir Ralph Abercromby, and had included the 42<sup>nd</sup>, 79<sup>th</sup> and 92<sup>nd</sup> Regiments of Foot, now respectively known as the Black Watch, the Cameron Highlanders, and the Gordon Highlanders. Both Alexander and Wilson had family connections to officers who had served with the expedition. The obelisk shaped Nelson Monument on Glasgow Green was intended to resemble Cleopatra's Needle,<sup>38</sup> as was the larger Martyr's Memorial in Edinburgh.<sup>39</sup> The Radical MP and Scot Joseph Hume, who had raised the subject of the Needle in Parliament on a number of occasions, was one

of those who initiated plans for the Memorial in 1837. In 1851, the civil engineer K H Galloway submitted plans to bring the Needle from Egypt, and mentioned that his brother had been approached about this by the Highland Society of London.<sup>40</sup> Biographical details on both men are lacking, but they seem to have been members of a family which produced a number of civil engineers who worked in Egypt, particularly on railway projects, from 1824 when Thomas Galloway was appointed Chief Engineer to Muhammad Ali. General Alexander was a member of the Highland Society,<sup>41</sup> and in March 1877 Erasmus Wilson addressed a General Court of the Society about bringing the Needle to London. A report noted that 'it was hinted that the experiment might fail, but the Professor thought Scotland would be equal to it'.<sup>42</sup> From at least the late thirteenth century, the legendary founder of Scotland, Scota, was claimed to be the daughter of an Egyptian Pharaoh, and the Stone of Destiny, also known as the Stone of Scone, to have come from Egypt,<sup>43</sup> and Hargrave Jennings, the author of a number of works on occultism and esotericism, made a specific link between this and the Needle.

This MONSTER MONOLITH is own true brother to its no-less royal "chip" - the CORONATION STONE – very probably, originally, a fellow-Obelisk – derived from we know not where – but both grand genuine OBELISKS.<sup>44</sup>

A Scottish site had been hinted at in 1868, when Alexander read a paper on the obelisk to the Royal Society of Edinburgh, of which he was a Fellow, during which he remarked that it was 'a reflection on our nation ... that the prostrate obelisk ... was not occupying a place of honour in England or Scotland'.<sup>45</sup> He was introduced by Angus Turner (1801-1876),<sup>46</sup> the Town Clerk of Glasgow, to a Mr Duncan, the engineer of the Clyde Navigation, whose plan seems to have been the basis for Alexander's 1872 article in *The Engineer* magazine.<sup>47</sup> In Egypt, Alexander was introduced by 'Mr Robert Fleming, Chairman of the Ramleh Railroad' to John Walker, its Chief Engineer, and observed that 'Mr Walker was anxious to get the obelisk to Glasgow'.<sup>48</sup> Following this, in 1876, a deputation from the Fifth Ward Committee visited the Lord Provost of Glasgow to ask him to support a campaign to bring Cleopatra's Needle to Glasgow 'with a view to placing the obelisk on the open space in front of the High Church' (Glasgow Cathedral). He declined to do this, but suggested that the Town Council could be sent a memo on the subject.<sup>49</sup> These are indications that when the Needle was viewed as the property of the nation, individuals could have different nations in mind, and perhaps the clearest indication of this came from the voyage to England of the *Cleopatra*.

By October 14 1877, the *Olga* and the obelisk barge had reached the Bay of Biscay, when a tremendous storm, reaching hurricane force, broke on them. During the evening, a huge wave hit the *Cleopatra*, and the iron rails used as ballast broke loose, causing her to heel over at an angle

of around 45°. Despite repeated attempts to replace the ballast, further huge waves kept causing it to break loose again, and eventually Captain Carter, believing that the vessel would founder, signalled the *Olga* for assistance. A boat manned by six volunteers was sent, but could not keep hold of a line thrown to it, and was swept away, with all six men being lost. Early the next morning, the *Olga* managed to get a line across to *Cleopatra*, and to evacuate her crew. *Olga* then searched unsuccessfully for the missing boat crew, and when she returned to where the *Cleopatra* had been left, there was no sign of her, and she was assumed to have foundered. In fact, she had not, and was spotted late in the afternoon of October 15 by a lookout on the steamer *Fitzmaurice*, which with great difficulty secured her and towed her to the Spanish port and naval base of Ferrol.

Under maritime law, salvage was payable for the recovery of the *Cleopatra*, and the master of the *Fitzmaurice* accordingly cabled its owner, William Burrell (1832-1885), in Glasgow.<sup>50</sup> The resulting salvage action is interesting for a number of reasons. Despite the fact that Dixon and Wilson may have been motivated by a patriotic desire to see the Needle, as the property of the nation, come to England, the fact that it was being funded by private individuals meant that Dixon had had to insure the obelisk for the voyage. This did not necessarily put a value on it, only on what the insurance company would have to pay out, but for the amount payable in salvage to be calculated, it *did* have to be valued. Dixon had insured the *Cleopatra* and its contents for £4,000,<sup>51</sup> and he wrote to Burrell on or around 20 October, informing him of this and of his estimate that costs for transporting the obelisk would be around thirteen to fifteen thousand pounds. He wrote again on 26 October, saying 'I hope that upon consideration you may be able to wire some means of solution that does not entail on me a greater liability than £500 as I will give any such plan my cordial cooperation' (Burrell's salvage claim was for £5,000).<sup>52</sup>

On 30 October, Burrell wrote to Lord Derby. In his letter Burrell outlined the salvage of the *Cleopatra*, and revealed that 'a few days ago' he had been visited by John Dixon, who had explained that he had the government's permission to bring the obelisk to London, and said that he had insured the obelisk and *Cleopatra* 'to a small extent', and was willing to pay 'any claim for salvage competent against his underwriters, for what it was worth, but that he personally would undertake no responsibility'. According to Burrell, he had said that he did not want to become involved in litigation, 'and I thereupon asked him to whom the obelisk belonged, saying that I understood it to be the property of the British Nation; but from that view he dissented, indicating that he rather thought it belonged to His Excellency the Khedive of Egypt'. He went on to say that he had been annoyed by reports in the English and Scottish press that since he had made exorbitant demands for salvage, and rejected Dixon's offers, *Cleopatra* would remain at Ferrol over the winter, and the salvage claim have to be decided in the Admiralty Courts. Although

Burrell claimed that Dixon admitted that his views on salvage were reasonable, and that his proposal to pay a small sum which his underwriters would meet was 'totally inadequate', since Dixon was not prepared to undertake any personal responsibility, no settlement was possible. Burrell then asked Derby

[i]n these circumstances we beg most respectfully to enquire whether the obelisk is the property of the British Nation? and if so, how Her Majesty's Government desire to deal with it? and with the matter of salvage? I am most anxious to act in a fair and liberal spirit, and I venture to think that the meritorious services rendered by my ship and crew, and which averted a great national loss, will in the opinion of Her Majesty's Government call for suitable compensation.<sup>53</sup>

Lord Derby added a note that the Needle 'would appear to be now the property of the British Nation. (See No. 49 to Mr Vivian.) I suppose the other questions raised by Mr Burrell will be decided by the Treasury', and referred the matter to the Treasury. A note was also added by Lord Tenterden, that 'Custody was accepted on condition that Government had no responsibility for its removal'.<sup>54</sup> Tenterden advised Burrell that his letter had been passed on, and that all further correspondence should be addressed to the Treasury.

In another letter to Burrell of 5 November Dixon wrote that

'You need not trouble about the ownership, I accept such. Certainly the Khedive has nothing to do with it, he gives it away and hands it to me, the English government having previously agreed to accept it and take its custody on its arrival in England.'

[Punctuation restored.]<sup>55</sup>

However, negotiations between Dixon and Burrell seem to have broken down, with Burrell refusing to reduce the amount of his claim, despite pressure from a number of quarters, including a personal plea from General Alexander, a fellow Scot.<sup>56</sup> The action to determine the level of remuneration for salvage, *Dixon v Burrell and others*, was heard before Sir R Phillimore, Judge, and Captains Drew and Webb of Trinity House as Nautical Assessors. In line with his offer to settle the salvage claim for £500, Dixon filed a paper to the court on 25 February 1878 valuing the Needle itself at £250 "or thereabouts", and the *Cleopatra* at its scrap value of £250.<sup>57</sup> Burrell and his lawyers responded by submitting an application to have the Needle sold at public auction. Eventually, the court assessed the joint value of the vessel and its cargo, on which the salvage payment would be based, at £25,000.<sup>58</sup> (The eventual award was for £2,000 plus costs.) On the face of it, this might seem to have been a dispute over money, with Burrell anxious to capitalise on the celebrity cargo that his crew had salved, and Dixon, who was working within the budget of

his contract with Wilson, aiming to keep any additional costs as low as possible. The dispute about the ownership of the Needle would therefore be primarily about who was liable for any salvage award. In a separate legal case, the court verdict was in favour of his insurers, who had refused to pay out on the policy, as it had been for total loss only. Documents from the salvage case, and contemporary press reports, however, show that the situation was more complex than this.

In an affidavit submitted to the Court by Burrell, he summarised the history of the obelisk, and said that it was 'of the greatest antiquarian interest and is considered by the Civilised world to be of great value'. He quoted Dixon, who when he had written to Burrell itemising the cost so far of transporting the Needle, had said that '[s]o far as I am concerned the undertaking is anything but a matter of business'. Burrell continued by saying that 'the said obelisk is one of the most important of existing relics of antiquity and as such is of the greatest value', before mentioning those previously moved from Egypt, the cost of transporting the Luxor obelisk to Paris, and the subscription raised by British troops in 1802 'although the Needle was then believed to be little more than half the age it is since been proved to have been'. His real motivation may be revealed by what he wrote next.

I was so anxious that the said obelisk "Cleopatra's Needle" should be erected in my own city of Glasgow that I offered to give up all claim as owner for salvage and tow it from Ferrol to Glasgow at my own expense if it might be erected there.<sup>59</sup>

Although he went on to say that 'I am sure a good sum would be paid by the inhabitants of Glasgow to secure its erection in that place', and later that 'I am sure that there would be great competition among the towns of the United Kingdom to purchase the same' and that 'the people of the United States of America are very anxious to obtain a similar obelisk and I have no doubt they would be willing to pay a large sum for this one if they knew it was in the market', his remarks should be seen in the context of the legal case. Having offered to waive his salvage rights if Dixon would allow the Needle to come to Glasgow (and thereby become in breach of his contract with Wilson), once Dixon had refused, Burrell's only hope of acquiring it was to persuade the court to put it up for auction, and it was therefore in his interest to stress how unrealistic the value placed on it by Dixon was. In the event, the Needle was valued by the Senior Brethren from Trinity House acting as technical advisors to the judge. *The Times* noted that the sum they arrived at of £25,000 'has excited a good deal of surprise' and suggested that even Egyptologists would think a fairer estimate to be £2,500 as the obelisk 'however interesting on account of its venerable inscriptions and history, is not a work of high art, like the Venus of Milo or the Apollo Belvedere'.<sup>60</sup> The previous year, reporting on the salvage of *Cleopatra*, the paper had suggested

that the salvage claim raised 'a knotty question as to the money-value of one of the dozen or so Egyptian obelisks of the first class now existing'.<sup>61</sup>

This episode illustrates the complexity of the way in which the Needle was perceived and valued. It was seen as the property of the nation, but not necessarily destined for England, in the eventual custody of the Government, but in private hands while it was being transported, and with the Government disowning all responsibility for it during this time, as a historic antiquity, but one to which a monetary value needed to be assigned, and for which that value might be seen as excessive because it was not a work of great Art.

### 3.1.4      **Spoiling the Egyptians**

It is easy to assume that the desire to acquire the fallen obelisk at Alexandria was a straightforward reflection of Imperialist and Orientalist attitudes in Britain, and these attitudes can be clearly seen in *Cleopatra's Needle; its wonderful history, and instructive lessons*, one of the penny pamphlets produced to capitalise on the arrival of the obelisk. The anonymous author of this considered that the successive conquests of Egypt by 'The Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Saracens [&] the Mamelukes' were a fulfilment of the biblical prophecies of Ezekiel, and concluded that

'There seems no probability of any national rule being ever again established in that country. Far more likely is it to come eventually into the possession and under the rule of England.'<sup>62</sup>

By implication, the acquisition of the remains of Ancient Egypt could be seen as simply part of one more in a series of divinely ordained conquests. These views were not universally held, though, and from the time of the first attempt, there was an awareness, at least in some quarters, that the acquisition needed to be justified by more than just the assertion of such religious opinions, or that the obelisk was the property of the British nation, and that by taking the Needle the British could be accused of 'spoiling the Egyptians', to use the biblical phrase.<sup>63</sup> However, a certain ambiguity seems to be present in the original biblical text, which says that the Children of Israel 'borrowed' silver, gold, and raiment from the Egyptians, and that the Lord gave them favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they 'lent unto them such things as they required', but also that 'they spoiled [i.e. despoiled] the Egyptians'. As early as the late fourth century AD, in the writings of Saint Augustine,<sup>64</sup> the doctrine had been put forward that Christians could not only adopt from pagan cultures, especially their philosophers, whatever was in harmony with Christian beliefs, but that they had a moral duty to do so, just as the Israelites had 'appropriated to

themselves, designing them for a better use' the riches of Egypt.<sup>65</sup> Seen in this way, it was not only permissible to acquire the obelisk, but almost required.

Another way of justifying the acquisition of the Needle was to compare the actions of the British to those of the French. In his 1803 history of the British expedition to Egypt, Sir Robert Wilson had written that

This obelisk would worthily record an illustrious campaign, and animate with emulous pride the rising generation. Nor could the possession be regarded by other nations with those sentiments of regret and aversion which the pillaged treasures in the museums at Paris, notwithstanding their excellence, inspire. This trophy could not be deemed, like those, an emblem of national shame, perpetuating the memory of nefarious crimes and horrible devastation. Humanity would rather exult on seeing a monument erected which might convey instruction and example to future British armies, whilst the arts and sciences would have no cause to mourn the removal<sup>66</sup>

A variation on this was the justification expressed by Captain C F Head, who travelled through Egypt in 1829-30, that everyone else was doing it anyway, and that if we didn't as well all the best pieces would have been taken.

This subject [the transport of Cleopatra's Needle] has recently been discussed in the House of Commons, and it appears a final arrangement was opposed, from the idea that robbing Egypt of its architectural memorials would be sacrilege; but this argument will not avail against the fact that other nations are aggrandising and embellishing their capitals with similar ornaments to those so liberally bestowed on this country<sup>67</sup>

Previously, referring to the gift by Muhammad Ali of an obelisk at Karnak as an alternative to the Alexandrian one, he commented that 'It remains for the British Government to obtain the Carnac obelisk already adverted to ... but unless steps are taken to secure it, other European nations may be expected to possess themselves of so desirable an object'.<sup>68</sup>

Two other justifications often cited for taking the obelisk, and other antiquities, were that the Egyptians were indifferent to them, or could not be trusted to take care of them. The Scottish traveller and antiquarian William Rae Wilson (1772-1849)<sup>69</sup> remarked of Muhammad Ali that 'I heard him say to the British consul, he was welcome "to send all the antiquities of Egypt to his Majesty, provided only a few were left to himself that he might occasionally look at"'.<sup>70</sup> Whilst he was in Egypt, Champollion called on Muhammed Ali to protect endangered antiquities, pointing out that thirteen temples had been lost in the thirty years since Napoleon's invasion, and putting the blame on fellahin (peasants), dealers, and European collectors (although he and Rosellini had

sawed reliefs out of the walls of the tomb of Sety I in 1829 to take to Florence and Paris).<sup>71</sup> In 1835, Muhammad Ali's decree of 15 August gave some degree of protection to antiquities, but when the French Consul General Jean François Mimaut warned Ali 'that the temple of Dendera was being quarried for a cotton cloth factory at Qena', the latter put the blame on Europeans, who he claimed were beyond his reach, because of the Capitulations.<sup>72</sup> While there was certainly justification for this, the factories being built and operated by Europeans were part of Muhammad Ali's drive to industrialise Egypt. The destruction of the base of the fallen obelisk as part of the construction of military facilities in Alexandria caused one writer to express the view that

the withdrawal of valuable specimens of art from Egypt is the only way of preserving them from the assaults of barbarian violence. The base of the obelisk under consideration [i.e. the fallen one at Alexandria] has recently been broken up to form building materials<sup>73</sup>

A number of writers suggested that it would be better to preserve antiquities, including the obelisks at Alexandria, in Egypt. William Wilde, noting that the first attempt to transport the Needle had been 'abandoned on the objection of its robbing the country of its relics', went on to observe that 'many persons might think it a pity to remove [the standing obelisk at Alexandria], as, owing to the increase of civilisation in that country, a hope may be entertained of its preservation where it stands ...'.<sup>74</sup>

Later, the prospect that the Needle would be brought to the Crystal Palace prompted debate in the press about whether or not this was desirable. In 1851, the pseudonymous 'Ægyptus' asked

would it not be better to obtain the leave of the Pasha to improve and beautify the locality of the standing obelisk at Alexandria, and by that means record our victories in a distant land, and at the same time shew that we consider, that, when practicable, the preservation of objects of antiquity in their own country is much more desirable than their removal to distant lands, when in this case they are of little interest to any but antiquaries, and their display in the public streets would not tend to improve the already low standard of national taste<sup>75</sup>

Although Muhammad Ali's successor, Abbas I, was generally seen in Europe as reversing his policies, there was still a perception that modern Muslim Egyptians did not value Pharaonic relics:

Another monument to which we would call attention is, the obelisk at Mataria [Heliopolis]... The chief difficulty in the way of the removal of this obelisk is, that it does not belong to ourselves; but might not His Highness Abbas Pasha be induced to

exchange the obelisk of Alexandria for that of Mataria? To him, as to any good Moslem, it must be a matter of perfect indifference which of the inscribed blocks of the unbelievers we take the trouble to remove, - so that his consent would scarcely be withheld<sup>76</sup>

The Anglo-Irish Liberal politician and amateur archaeologist Talbot de Malahide (1805-1883)<sup>77</sup> wrote to *The Times* from the Athenaeum Club strongly criticising what he saw as European responsibility for the loss of Egypt's archaeological heritage, describing the acquisition of the Needle as

a repetition of those acts of Vandalism and desecration which, within the last few years, have done more to destroy the remnants of Egyptian architecture and art than 14 centuries of Arab, Mameluke, and Turkish rule. I need hardly mention the robbery of one of the obelisks of Luxor by the French, and the mutilation of the tombs of the Kings by Champollion, Lepsius, and others<sup>78</sup>

However, he also suggested that the statue of Ramses II at Memphis could 'very easily be brought over'. Shortly afterwards the traveller and author Bayle St John (1822-1859)<sup>79</sup> wrote a long letter to the *Athenaeum* magazine in which he argued that the Needle would be meaningless and out of context in London, and that

had any request to that effect been made to the Viceroy of Egypt, he would, on being supplied with proper engineering advice, have at once set the obelisk on end and restored it to the position which it formerly occupied by the side of its companion<sup>80</sup>

Referring to the Luxor obelisk which had been taken to Paris, he wrote of the 'sneer and a shrug of contempt' which English tourists could 'bestow on the Vandalism and conceit of our neighbours', but gave his opinion that we were about to follow their example. The suggestion that other antiquities, rather than just casts, could be added to the displays at the Crystal Palace was for him the thin end of the wedge, which would result in Egypt being stripped of all antiquities of any significance. Worse,

[w]hen the Turks and Arabs shall discover that our faint intercessions for the preservation of the monuments of the Infidels of days gone by are mere shams, - they will go to work with hammer and chisel and gunpowder, and every temple will soon be converted into a lime-quarry<sup>81</sup>

In reply, a writer for the magazine agreed that the context of monuments was of crucial importance, but also asked whether

the facility with which the Egyptian rulers give away these documents of the past, and the impunity with which the removals take place, are not sufficient expressions of that want of interest in them which... threatens their certain final destruction. Fancy Lord John Russell or the Earl of Derby giving away Stonehenge, and the men of Salisbury assisting in its removal!<sup>82</sup>

Not long afterwards, another issue of the magazine printed letters from both Bayle St John and the sculptor and Egyptologist Joseph Bonomi. The latter saw the removal of antiquities as the only sure way of protecting them from destruction, and justified this by referring to the now discredited claim that the Library of Alexandria was destroyed by the invading Arab armies who conquered Egypt.

as... the Egyptian Government and the Egyptian people still adhere most pertinaciously to the principles of their great leader who burned the Alexandrian Library, we regard every fragment of antiquity brought to Europe as so much saved from utter destruction<sup>83</sup>

He gave the example from his own experience of 'a Greek quarryman', one of the many European agents brought in as part of Muhammad Ali's efforts to industrialise Egypt, demolishing part of the temple of Ashmunein with gunpowder to provide raw material for quicklime, and went on to claim that

there has been no time since the Mohammedan occupation of the country in which the ancient monuments have not served as quarries for whatever building, private or public, was erected in their neighbourhood<sup>84</sup>

In the same issue of the magazine, Bayle St John responded to the argument that the monuments of Egypt were safer out of the country. He recognised that the Egyptian government would not be particularly motivated to protect them, but believed that it would be happy to do so 'out of compliment to the European Powers', and suggested the establishment and funding of an international committee which could then pay local people to guard the monuments. In doing this, he distinguished between the rulers and the ruled in Egypt 'the Turks have destroyed a great deal, and the fellahs a little'.

What is striking about all this is that much was said by Europeans about the Egyptian attitude towards their inherited antiquities, but the views of Egyptians on the subject are conspicuous by their absence in English language sources. Occasionally, there are indications that although the Khedives may have been happy to give away obelisks and other antiquities, their ministers did not always share this view. Dr W H Russell (1820-1907),<sup>85</sup> the British journalist famous as a war

correspondent during the Crimean War, who had accompanied the Prince and Princess of Wales on their visit to Egypt, wrote of the Luxor obelisk given by Muhammad Ali decades before as ‘belonging to Britain’, but went on to write that:

The non-user of our right has led to doubts of its existence; and Colonel Stanton had a sharp controversy with Mourad Pacha, who denied that the obelisk belonged to us at all! Many of us here in England are quite ignorant of the fact that any of the Egyptian obelisks belong to us...<sup>86</sup>

Later in the same article, he observed of the Alexandrian obelisk that

[n]ow this Cleopatra's Needle is ours... Some persons say that it was ours by right of war... The English officers ranked it among the trophies gained from the French, without much regard to the disputed rights of the Pacha against the Sultan, or of the French against both.

With the imminent arrival of the Needle in London, while many celebrated it, there was also a significant body of comment opposed to it, and which compared it to the still sensitive issue of the Elgin Marbles. One writer criticised both the British and Muhammad Ali by observing that

[s]entimental objections have sometimes been raised against robbing Egypt of her Cleopatra's Needle. A nation which has made it necessary for Greece to erect wooden Caryatides ... in place of the genuine marble now in our museums, need not have much delicacy about an unconsidered obelisk. Egypt is so rich in these and similar monuments, her soil is so opulent in the wealth of a buried world, that Mehemet Ali could afford to give us the stone “as rich men give, that care not for their gifts”.<sup>87</sup>

However, they also went on, perhaps sarcastically, to suggest that ‘[a] flat monument is not an important feature in the Egyptian landscape, nor a feature that will be missed.’ Almost exactly a year later, after the Needle had arrived, the same magazine once again addressed the issue of whether its transportation was justified. It professed to be puzzled by the reasons this had been done, both in the present case and in the past with other obelisks, but suggested that this would be the last occasion on which it happened.

It may be thought by many, however, that the indifference which the English Government has always shown in this matter has been due to good sense; and whatever view may be taken on this point, it is to be hoped that, unless there be an irresistible American demand, neither thoughtful Governments nor zealous and liberal citizens will for the future think it necessary to transport to the capitals of their countries Egyptian

obelisks, as there are, after all, but few of them left in the land where alone they have real meaning, and it would be difficult to imagine a worse act of barbarism than taking one of these monuments from Heliopolis, Karnak, or Luxor.<sup>88</sup>

However, it then went on to make the Needle an exception, by pointing out that ‘It must be remembered that these [other obelisks] are still in the places where the Egyptians originally erected them, unlike the so-called Cleopatra’s Needle, which, in the time of Augustus, was moved from Heliopolis to Alexandria’. Reviewing Erasmus Wilson’s book on the Needle, *The Examiner* would be more directly critical, and responded to Wilson’s view that it was the ‘delicate beauty’ of obelisks which made nations ‘desire to possess them’ by responding that ‘[c]ertainly the four European powers whose position has enabled them to steal from Egypt with impunity within the last two thousand years have shown a covetousness for these objects.’<sup>89</sup> In the tone of such discussions, when the arrival of the obelisk was not just potential, but imminent, we may perhaps see less of a concern with the legal basis on which it had been acquired, and more emphasis on moral and aesthetic issues. Whatever the political reluctance of the British Government to become officially involved, or to directly fund the effort, it is hard to justify describing as theft the transport of the fallen obelisk, with the explicit consent and active assistance of the Egyptian government, despite the shortcomings of Khedival rule and the singularly unequal economic relations between the two countries. However, as the quotes above demonstrate, once the practical question of whether the obelisk was coming to England had been settled, the debate became more abstract, and more about different groups arguing their case.

### 3.2 The Nature of the Needle

The abstract ownership of an obelisk in Egypt was one thing. Its location and significance in London, however, were topics that were vigorously debated as the Needle approached England, and which continued to be discussed after it had landed. The nature of the Needle, the way in which its identity was defined, was crucial here, as was the question of who decided it, because that also decided who could claim to speak with authority on it. Not only was this debate largely conducted by the socio-economic elite, but it was dominated by a small number of professional groups, and the resulting distinction between experts and amateurs tended to rank and restrict discourse. The debate was not about actual ownership of the obelisk, but can be seen as being a competition for status among various professional groups, and the so-called ‘Battle of the Sites’, in particular, as a contest by proxy between these groups. Realistically, because of the terms of the contract between Wilson and Dixon, only three sites were ever serious contenders. These were the end of Northumberland Avenue, St Stephen’s Green in Parliament Square, and the Adelphi Steps.<sup>90</sup> This, however, did not prevent alternatives across London being championed,

usually without apparent consideration of the practicalities of transporting the Needle to them and erecting it there.



Figure 17 - *Punch* cartoon of the 'Battle of the Sites', including at upper left and right the British Museum and the Crystal Palace. *Punch*, 3 November 1877, 194. (Author's Collection.)

### 3.2.1 Antiquity or Art Object?

A key element in this debate was whether the Needle was viewed as an antiquity or an art object. Nowadays, it is considered important, even essential, to situate items of historic material culture within the context of the societies which produced them. An important part of doing this, however, is to have detailed knowledge of those cultures, and when the first attempts were made to bring the Needle to England, this was not the case with Ancient Egypt. Even after the translation of hieroglyphs was possible, it was some time before a body of knowledge based on texts from Ancient Egypt, rather than Classical and Biblical accounts, was available to provide cultural context. This lack of context meant that Egyptian antiquities, particularly larger sculptural objects, were often classified and valued using largely aesthetic criteria. In 1852, the traveller and author Bayle St John described the architectural antiquities of Egypt as 'a group of works of Art which are the property of all time',<sup>91</sup> emphasising their universal, rather than culturally specific nature. In the 1870s, the Needle was described as an 'Art Treasure' and a 'fine-art treasure', and it was said of Wilson that his 'gift' of the Needle 'deserves aesthetic approval, as well as gratitude'.<sup>92</sup>

The ethics of how the Needle had been acquired, and whether it should have been, were affected by its status as art object or antiquity. *The Art Journal* distinguished between what it called 'Art collection and Art plunder'.<sup>93</sup> It saw the acquisition of the Elgin Marbles as collection, because they were preserved from destruction (a claim which as we have seen was also made about the Needle), and compared this with the 'wanton and insatiable rapacity' of French armies in Revolutionary and Napoleonic times, seeing the Luxor obelisk as '[a]mong the objects of unrestored military plunder left to Paris...'. This confused the Place de la Concorde obelisk, and the way in which it had been acquired, with the artworks seized from Italy by Napoleon, many of which were subsequently restored. It went on to call the London obelisk 'a white elephant for which we have neither site, convenience, picturesque setting, historic association, nor any other single reason for welcoming so incongruous an addition to our monuments...'. This ignored, or showed an ignorance of the Needle's history over the course of the nineteenth century, but also emphasised the importance of aesthetic criteria, particularly as regards siting. The perceived importance of associations in the choice of site made it easy to take the view that the best site was the one that the Needle had been taken from, and *The Examiner* suggested that

on abstract grounds, the original site at Alexandria might fairly be described as the very best of them all. It would be a delicate task to indicate at what point the collection of curiosities degenerates into a system of archaeological plundering; and, under certain conditions, the British Museum authorities might even feel morally, as well as aesthetically bound to restore its hoarded "loot," even to its last Elgin Marble<sup>94</sup>

Again, referring to the obelisk as a curiosity implies that it had been acquired in the same way that collectors would add items to their collections, and implies that the primary motivation for the British Museum to return antiquities would be aesthetic rather than moral or legal. The aesthetic view of possible sites was put in stark terms by Frederic Leighton (1830-1896),<sup>95</sup> at that time President-elect of the Royal Academy, and an Honorary Associate of the RIBA, who spoke to a meeting of the latter in 1878. In his view, the choice of site for the obelisk showed

how a monument may be placed in such a manner as to defy and set aside all the eternal fitnesses of things aesthetic, - adorning nothing, emphasising nothing, and by nothing emphasised ....<sup>96</sup>

When the Needle left Alexandria, the site it had occupied was still not fully developed, but in London it would be a public monument, and this inevitably drew comparisons with the obelisks in Rome and the ways in which they had been incorporated into the public spaces of the city. Linked to this was the question of whether, and if so how, the obelisk would be embellished. The decision to add bronze wings to the base of the obelisk was purely aesthetic. Although the stability of the Needle was, in engineering terms, perfectly satisfactory, it was recognised that its rounded corners gave it the appearance of instability and so, unlike the New York obelisk, elements were added to create a more stable appearance. As *The Times* put it, 'with the view of relieving the unpleasant appearance of the rounded corners of the butt'.<sup>97</sup> The inscribed bronze plaques on its pedestal were the subject of controversy regarding the content of the inscriptions, but greater attention was paid to the nature of the pedestal itself. A paper on 'Obelisks and their Pedestals' was delivered to a meeting of the RIBA by its past President, Professor Thomas Donaldson, on 15 April 1878. During discussion of the paper, John Dixon commented that the decision had been made to set the Needle up 'on a plain and suitable pedestal, adapted to its purpose, without any ornate pretensions'.<sup>98</sup> *The Saturday Review* differed, considering that 'The question of pedestal is hardly less important than that of position. Some people take it for granted that because the obelisk is Egyptian and sternly plain in design, the pedestal must correspond. We are unable to bow to this dictum ...'. It went on to suggest that 'A good artistic pedestal will be best of all; a square mass big enough to tilt the obelisk up to its right height will be second best; a bad artistic pedestal worst of all'.<sup>99</sup>



Figure 18 - A rare image showing the Needle at some time between September 1878 and December 1881, without its sphinxes and bronze wings. Stereoview card, no maker or date details. (Author's Collection.)

As well as the bronze wings and inscribed plaques and some sort of pedestal which everyone, even though they might debate its form, accepted as a practical necessity, the decision was taken at a fairly early stage to flank the Needle with two sphinxes. It might seem obvious to model these on examples from Ancient Egypt, and this was what was done, with a small sphinx dating to the reign of Thutmose III in the collection of the Duke of Northumberland (now in the Oriental Museum, Durham)<sup>100</sup> being used.<sup>101</sup> The decision to use an archaeologically inspired design was not uncontroversial, however. Writing to *The Builder*, the pseudonymous 'Antony' anticipated

the supreme vulgarity promised in a programme which threatens to encumber the base of the obelisk with sham sphinxes of London manufacture.

The pedestal and all modern work pertaining thereto should, in the utmost degree, be thoroughly frank and modern, so that antiquity may be left to speak for itself, and history may not be mocked by spurious sphinxes and cheap affectations of an art whose extinction,- as in all cases of by-gone art,- is beyond recall<sup>102</sup>

In another letter to the same publication William Ricketts Cooper (1843-1878),<sup>103</sup> almost certainly the author of *A Short History of the Egyptian Obelisks*, described it as being 'almost absurd to decorate the base of the London Obelisk with modern strange sphinxes'. The architect Charles Barry thought that modern sphinxes might be incongruous, but that 'If ancient sphinxes could be procured, the case might be different'. He thought that 'in the present case' simplicity and grandeur would be best served by omitting the sphinxes altogether.<sup>104</sup> The facing of the sphinxes was also a matter for debate. The original intention may have been for them to flank the Needle at right angles to it, facing toward or away from the river. The *Daily Telegraph* noted that 'Whether these mythological forms will have their heads turned towards the river or towards the Embankment is not yet decided...',<sup>105</sup> while a letter to *The Builder*,<sup>106</sup> signed anonymously by 'ARIBA' objected to either of these orientations, on the grounds that 'it may be doubted whether the effect of the pair, either looking out from, or looking in upon, the Embankment, would be quite happy'.<sup>107</sup>

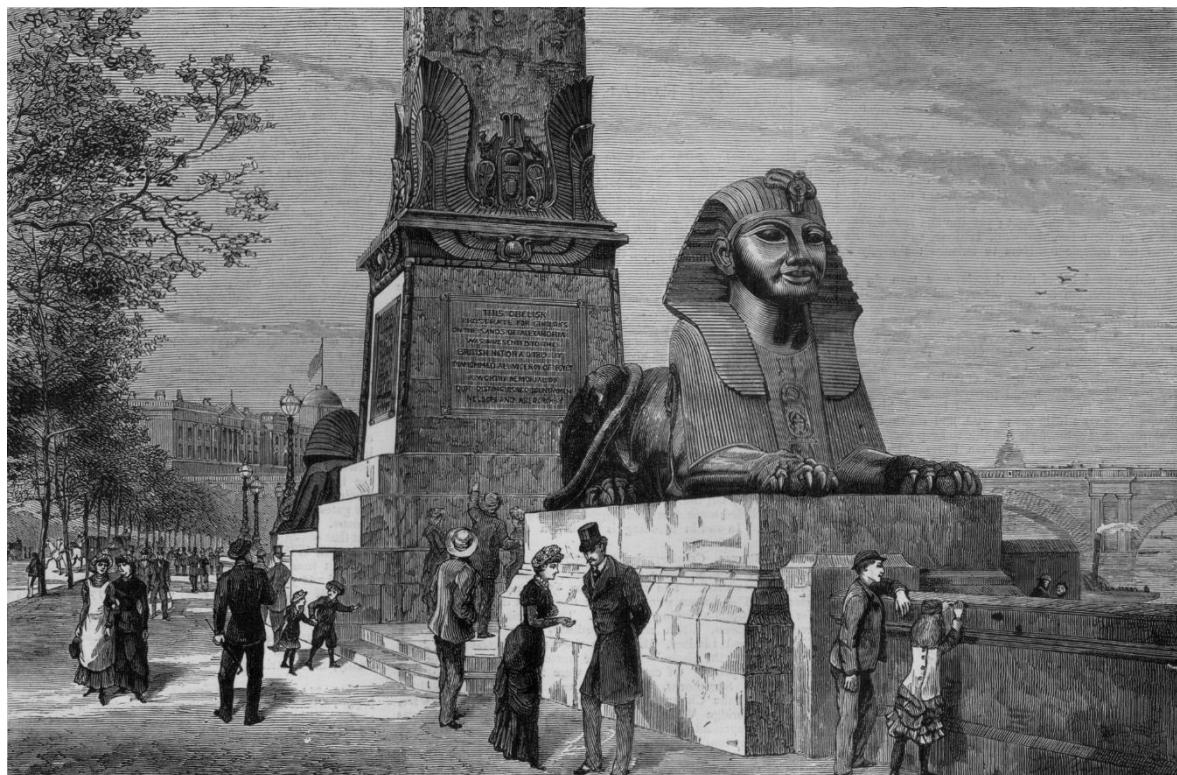


Figure 19 - An artist's impression of the Needle with sphinxes and other bronze-work. Probably based on the single full sized plaster model installed on the site, and showing them in the originally intended orientation facing away from the obelisk. *The Graphic* 2 July 1881, 12. (Author's Collection.)

Another letter to *The Builder* from the architect and journalist Henry Heathcote Statham (1839-1924)<sup>108</sup>, who was to become its editor in 1883, was blunter, offering his opinion that '[a]s to the proposed modern sphinxes, with their posteriors turned to the public road, they are too ridiculous to be worth a word of serious comment'.<sup>109</sup> At some point the decision was taken for the sphinxes to face up and down river, but their final orientation was facing the obelisk. This was contrary to Ancient Egyptian practice, in which paired sphinxes faced away from each other, forming a rebus of the *3ḥt* hieroglyph of the horizon.<sup>110</sup> The decision to reverse this orientation was very probably made by George Vulliamy (1817-1886),<sup>111</sup> Superintending Architect to the Metropolitan Board of Works, who had designed the bronze-work for the obelisk, including the sphinxes. The decision had been taken by 13 June 1879, when the Board of the Metropolitan Board of Works considered a report from its Works and General Purposes Committee,<sup>112</sup> which had consulted with Vulliamy and the Board's Chief Engineer, Joseph Bazalgette (1819-1891).<sup>113</sup> Although a report to the Committee was signed by both men, it seems to be largely the work of Vulliamy, and in 1953 the son of one of the master founders who cast the sphinxes wrote to *The Daily Telegraph* saying that the 'architect' advised that they should face inward, towards the Needle, to form a catenary curve.<sup>114</sup> Two such imaginary curves now run from the tip of the Needle to the haunches of the sphinxes, and the decision on their facing seems to have been decided on aesthetic grounds by an architect, rather than archaeological ones by an Egyptologist.

### 3.2.2 The Power of Professions

The London Obelisk is interesting to the architect as a specimen of the masonry of a people accounted as the great builders of the Ancient World. It is interesting to the antiquary as setting forth the workmanship of artists who lived in the dim twilight of antiquity. It is interesting to the Christian because this same venerable monument was known to Moses and the Children of Israel during their sojourn in the land of Goshen<sup>115</sup>

While the Needle was an object of general and popular interest, as evidenced by the crowds which watched it travel up the Thames, and visited it at its initial moorings and during its re-erection, the debate about its significance, and particularly the best site for it, was largely dominated by a number of professional groups. Like all professionals, they had grounds for believing that their opinions were better informed than those of amateurs or the general public, but there was also competition between them to establish which of them could speak most authoritatively on the obelisk. It might be thought that Egyptologists were best placed to do this, but the Needle was no longer in its Egyptian context, and even this had not been its original site in Egypt. As a public monument in a European city, it was now fair game for other professions.

By the 1870s, the study of Ancient Egypt was becoming increasingly professionalised, although it would not be until 1892 that the first Chair of Egyptology was created in the UK, at University College London (UCL).<sup>116</sup> The foundation of modern Egyptology, through the establishment of the principles of hieroglyphs, was less than sixty years old, and it was still regarded by many as a branch of Oriental Studies, or Archaeology – which of course it remains, but with its own identity. Although the term ‘Egyptologist’ was being used, it had not become standardised; newspapers could refer to ‘hieroglyphists’, and Erasmus Wilson could write of ‘hieroglyphography’.<sup>117</sup> A number of early pioneers of Egyptology, such as Sir John Gardner Wilkinson, long the UK’s premier researcher in the subject, were dead by the time that the Needle arrived, and Joseph Bonomi, who had extensive experience in Egypt, was to die the same year. The leading contemporary figure in British Egyptology was Samuel Birch, since 1866 Keeper of the Department of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum. This department, as its name suggests, covered a much wider area than just Egypt. Others in the field included Peter le Page Renouf (1822-1897),<sup>118</sup> who was to succeed Birch, but was working as H M Inspector of Schools at the time the Needle came to London, Reginald Stuart Poole (1832-1895),<sup>119</sup> a nephew of the Arabist and early Egyptologist Edward Lane (1801-1876),<sup>120</sup> who frequently wrote and lectured on Egyptological topics and was Keeper of Coins and Medals at the British Museum, and Samuel Sharpe (1799-1881),<sup>121</sup> a banker by career, who had collaborated frequently with Bonomi and published important collections of hieroglyphic texts, but was also active in ancient history and Biblical studies.

More generally, the cultural influence of Rome and Greece through the British university system meant that the influence of Classical writers on Egypt persisted. As late as 1836, the anonymous author (probably Leigh Sotheby himself) of a catalogue for the auction at Sotheby’s of a large collection of Egyptian antiquities assembled by Giovanni d’Athanasius could write of

‘the difficulty – nay, almost impossibility – of discovering in Memphis a mummy in anything like a perfect state, owing to the general destruction occasioned by the search for gold that took place in the tombs during the period when Cambyses invaded Egypt’<sup>122</sup>

In writing this, they not only expressed it as a matter of fact, but would have assumed that their client audience would recognise the allusion to Classical accounts of this period, especially those of Herodotus and Strabo.

As the study of Ancient Egypt became established as a distinct scholarly discipline, it began to distance itself from amateurs of the subject. The journalist and author Amelia Edwards (1831-1892),<sup>123</sup> who did so much to help establish the Egypt Exploration Fund, and by her legacy created

the Edwards Chair of Egyptology at UCL, although not an Egyptologist herself, was at pains to distinguish amateurs from experts. A few years after the Needle's arrival, in a review of 'Some Minor Books About Egypt' which included *Cleopatra's Needle* by the Reverend James King (1839–1913)<sup>124</sup>, and George Paterson Yeats's *The London Obelisk*, she observed that '[t]here are some subjects upon which it is perfectly orthodox to write without any kind of preparatory training ... Art is notoriously one of these favoured topics, and Egyptology is another'.<sup>125</sup> In a review in 1878 of Erasmus Wilson's book on the Needle, she corrected a number of errors, and commented that "these minor slips may well be condoned in the work of one who does not claim to be a professed Egyptologist".<sup>126</sup>

Birch, of course, had been consulted about the Needle in 1867, and was also used as an authority for parts of the inscriptions on the bronze plaques on the Needle's pedestal. A copy of his translation of the hieroglyphic inscriptions on the obelisk was among the objects in the foundation deposit placed in the pedestal. With Richard Owen, at that time Keeper of Natural History at the British Museum, he recommended a preservative solution for coating the Needle once it had been re-erected. He wrote two articles on it for *The Athenaeum*, but both dealt almost entirely with 'philological and historical points of interest' in the Needle and its inscriptions, and did not cover contemporary events.<sup>127</sup> He lectured to the British Archaeological Association,<sup>128</sup> where he expressed his preference for a site for the Needle in the centre of Regent's Park, 'where it would have a fine sky-line, surrounded with trees, and be accessible' but otherwise confined his observations to the history and archaeology of the obelisk. John Dixon was also present, and there was a lively debate among members about the relative merits of the Parliament Square and British Museum sites.<sup>129</sup> Bonomi, as we have seen, had been in favour of removing the Needle from Egypt, and also of modelling the bronze sphinxes at the Needle on a contemporary original. He had suggested the specific example in the collection of the Duke of Northumberland that was eventually used as a model, and recorded his suggestion in the Visitors' Book at the Adelphi Steps site.<sup>130</sup> He also supported a site on the Embankment at the river end of Northumberland Avenue, also favoured at one time by John Dixon and Sir James Alexander, because of the link this would create with the Duke, a Trustee of the British Museum and noted collector of Egyptian antiquities. In September 1877, on the day that the *Cleopatra* was being launched in Alexandria, Bonomi wrote a long letter to *The Times*, in which he commented on five sites, including two which he favoured, in front of Buckingham Palace or on Northumberland Avenue, the obelisk pedestals originally used by the Egyptians, and Owen Jones's proposal from a number of years before for a pedestal for the Needle had it been re-erected in Trafalgar Square.<sup>131</sup>

The debate on sites for the Needle, both their location and the principles on which one should be selected, were dominated by architects, however. Typically, Egyptian obelisks had been erected in

pairs flanking the entrances to temples, and this was noted by *The Saturday Review*, which observed that ‘we find them [obelisks in temples], not in a wide, open space, nor among buildings which they overtop, but in narrow courts ... To see it aright you must, said its designers, see it near ...’.<sup>132</sup> John Dixon himself noted that the Egyptians ‘always erected obelisks in close proximity to the giant masses of the buildings of their temples’.<sup>133</sup> The Needle would be coming to London, however, and architects, who could claim a pedigree for their profession stretching back through the Renaissance to Vitruvius, had firm opinions on how it should be treated. In his address to the RIBA on 10 April 1878, Professor Donaldson, a Past President, spoke of ‘how intimately obelisks are connected with our pursuit’.<sup>134</sup>

Edward William Godwin, FSA (1833-1886),<sup>135</sup> an architect and antiquary who favoured putting the Needle indoors at the British Museum, noted that views on a suitable site for the obelisk seemed to fall into two contradictory camps; that the obelisk was a large object which needed vistas to be seen to advantage, and that it was so small that it would be dwarfed into insignificance by the buildings around it. His view seems clear from the fact that he went on to say that ‘[i]t is small as compared with the structures of London. The monumental columns of modern days, the monster hotels and twelve-storied dwelling-houses are not the things to compare with an isolated obelisk like this so that it shall look imposing, lofty, or grand’.<sup>136</sup> Other architects who expressed opinions included John Thomas Micklethwaite (1843-1906), James Knowles (1806-1884),<sup>137</sup> Richard Phené Spiers (1838-1916),<sup>138</sup> Charles Barry, who was President of the RIBA in 1878, Thomas Hayter Lewis (1818-1898),<sup>139</sup> a Professor of Architecture at UCL, and Thomas Donaldson, Emeritus Professor at UCL.

Although they differed on their choice of site, and often on the principles on which one should be chosen, as a profession they shared the view that they were authorities on these as a question of aesthetic and artistic taste. At a meeting of the RIBA, Charles Barry congratulated John Dixon on ‘having survived the heaps of correspondence and suggestions which had poured in from all quarters from those who, rightly or wrongly, thought themselves competent to volunteer opinions on matters of taste’.<sup>140</sup> Writing to *The Builder* to agree with its objection to a Parliament Square site for the Needle, the architect Samuel Huggins (1811-1885),<sup>141</sup> who was influential in the formation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, asked its editor to ‘Allow me to add my earnest protest to your own, and that of others most capable of giving an opinion in the matter,- a matter, let me say, which only architects or artists can properly adjust’.<sup>142</sup> In the light of this, it may seem natural for Samuel Birch to be cautious about expressing his preference for a site in London, but surprising for Bonomi to intervene so confidently. Bonomi, however, could claim professional privilege. He was Keeper of Sir John Soane’s Museum, a post which was

reserved for an architect, and Bonomi had been able to secure it largely on the strength of his work on the Egyptian style offices of Marshall's Mill in Leeds.<sup>143</sup>

The authority claimed by architects was acknowledged, albeit apologetically, by John Dixon when he addressed a meeting of the RIBA. He said that

it was his special desire some months ago to have this subject [the proposed base for the obelisk] discussed by the members of the Institute. The form of the pedestal for "Cleopatra's Needle" had been all but finally decided on; still, if any obvious improvement could be suggested it might not be too late, even now, to give effect to it.<sup>144</sup>

He noted that the proposed base 'had met with the approval of all architects and Egyptologists that had seen it, the late Sir Gilbert Scott having given it his most unqualified approval' and that Professor Donaldson had been consulted on it. This consultation had not prevented a letter from Henry Heathcote Statham (1839-1924),<sup>145</sup> a future editor of *The Builder*, published in the same issue, which not only criticised the proposed base on archaeological and aesthetic grounds, but complained indignantly that the views of the architectural community had not been sought on the base and decorations of the obelisk, and that 'so far from coming to consult the opinions of the architects, the "promoters" of the obelisk were only going to tell us what they had decided to do, and the time for criticism was past'. His views were echoed after the arrival of the Needle, with a nod in the direction of the general public, by Charles Barry, when he asked rhetorically at the first Ordinary General Meeting of RIBA in November 1878

Am I to congratulate you that the "illustrious stranger", the Egyptian (now British) obelisk, has at length quietly settled among us? On the whole, I suppose I may, but it is with no unmixed feeling. A public, professional and lay, tired out with giving "unheeded" suggestions, - at last left to those immediately interested the decision of the question as to site and treatment in which the public would, if more permitted, have taken even a deeper interest. The result is before us, and the weary wanderer is at rest. But how? Quietly buried (I mean erected) in this great Babylon among houses and buildings that overtop it: squeezed into an unpretending nook obtained with difficulty from our corporate *AEdiles*<sup>146</sup>

Although architects could claim special authority when it came to the site for the Needle, other professional groups also felt entitled to voice opinions on its significance. Members of the armed forces, serving and retiring, emphasised its role as a memorial, and called for its site to reflect this. Sir James Alexander, for example, favoured a site in St James's Park, where the Needle would be

in view of both Horse Guards Parade and the Admiralty.<sup>147</sup> Politicians were not slow to comment, positively and negatively, when Parliament Square was the favoured site, clerics invoked the obelisk's supposed scriptural connections, and engineers celebrated the achievements of modern technology, and commented on the engineering skills of the Ancient Egyptians. These views were part of the larger response to the arrival of the Needle within society as a whole, but a number of mechanisms allowed elite socio-economic groups to dominate and largely define this response.

Discussion of the Needle, as against news reports on its progress from Egypt to England, often took place in publications which were aimed at professional groups. Examples include *The British Architect*, *The Engineer* and *The Builder*, as well as professional journals such as the *Journal of the Society of Arts* and the *United Services Institute Journal*. The topic of the obelisk was also covered in magazines whose readership would not only have included higher status socio-economic groups, but would have linked many different professions and occupations. These included titles such as *The Athenaeum*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *The Academy*, and *The Saturday Review*.

An interest in antiquarianism could also link professionals through learned societies like the Society of Antiquaries and the Society of Biblical Archaeology. Vulliamy, for example, was a member and at one time Secretary of the Royal Archaeological Institute.<sup>148</sup> Public events like lectures particularly lent themselves to such links. John Dixon attended two meetings of the RIBA, and also of the Society of Arts, lecturing to it at one of them, as well as lecturing to the Civil and Mechanical Engineers Society and the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI),<sup>149</sup> of which he was awarded honorary membership. The painters Lawrence Alma Tadema (1836-1912),<sup>150</sup> who painted Ancient Egyptian subjects, and Frederic Leighton (1830-1896),<sup>151</sup> who had visited Egypt, were both Honorary Associates of the RIBA, and in 1878 Leighton was President-elect of the Royal Academy, where architectural designs were often displayed. Bonomi contributed articles to the journal of the Royal Society of Literature. Although, as will be seen later, the London obelisk was not perceived to have great Masonic significance, Freemasonry was above all others the organisation which allowed networking between the private sector, the public sector, the armed forces and the political sector, although by its nature it excluded women.

Beyond the questions of who claimed to speak with authority on the subject of the obelisk, and why, was what they had to say about it; what it meant to them, and what they thought they were getting in the shape of the Needle.

### 3.3 The Monolith as Metaphor

#### 3.3.1 Moral Messenger

Now that, as many saw it, the British people were about to take possession of their property, they also began to focus on its associations. Acquiring the Needle allowed it to be used as a contemporary, if unofficial, imperial trophy as well as allowing parallels to be drawn with the Roman Empire, but as the product of another great empire, it invited comparisons between Ancient Egypt and modern England. In many cases, this meant implicitly or explicitly contrasting the achievements of an oppressive absolute monarch with those of the constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy of Britain. In a speech at the Mansion House in November 1877, Robert Lowe, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, a past leader writer for *The Times* who had been approached by Sir James Alexander during his campaign, referred to the Needle as

the toy, the plaything of a tyrant, who, not caring so much for beauty or elegance, took this opportunity of showing his power... [it] being transported to the place where it was found at the cost he did not know of how many hundreds of lives<sup>152</sup>

It was taken for granted that obelisks were created, moved, and erected by slave labour. In a speech to the RIBA in 1878 its President, Charles Barry, referred to 'a labour and probable sacrifice of human life at [the obelisk's] birth which must be left to the imagination ...'.<sup>153</sup> On the same day that the Needle was finally lowered onto its pedestal, the *Daily Telegraph* contrasted the use of modern machinery with what it saw as the original use of slave labour to erect obelisks:

it is curious to contrast this nice economy of forces with the reckless enslavement of human power employed to move a dead weight of stone in those primeval days when the thong was the wage distributed among a crowd of labourers<sup>154</sup>

The proposed site in Parliament Square divided opinion as well as inviting comparisons. Writing to *The Times*, Lord Harrowby argued for it on the grounds of 'moral fitness', as there it would be

brought into relation with all that we are proudest of in our national history ... The place would lend honour to the obelisk, the obelisk would lend honour to the place. Anywhere else ... it would be a mere tall stone, a mere monolith only remarkable for its dimensions ... but having no significance, telling no story, awakening no associations.<sup>155</sup>

Three days later, the anonymous 'Peer in Reply' strongly disagreed.

Assuredly to thrust this ancient obelisk, brought hither from a distant part of the world, and bearing with it no connexion whatever with the great events, deeds, or characters

of British history, on to a site and in the midst of buildings sanctified by those associations would be a strange anomaly, partly ludicrous, partly painful. “*Non bene junctarum discordia semina rerum.*” [Ovid; ‘The discordant seeds of things ill-joined.’] It would be the violation, not the fulfilment, of all “moral fitness”<sup>156</sup>

The point was made again by *The Times* on the day the obelisk was set on its pedestal:

Pyramids and obelisks are an impersonation of the despotism of one man before whose will other men’s wills are passive and dumb; and Parliament-square has witnessed the growth of a Constitution of which the one object has been to make the Chief of the State into the minister and representative of the many.<sup>157</sup>

These negative views of Ancient Egypt were reflected in *Cleopatra’s Needle: its wonderful history, and instructive lessons*, one of two penny pamphlets published or sold by the Book Society, which concluded that from the Needle ‘we see very clearly the little that was done by the ancient idolatry of Egypt to elevate the character, either of her kings or her people’.<sup>158</sup> It expressed the opinion that the surviving monuments of Egypt ‘teach us nothing that can tend either to enlighten the mind or improve the heart’. It invited the reader to compare the inscriptions on them with the writings of Moses, described as ‘contemporary, at least with some of them’, where ‘we are taught the sublimest truths regarding God, and instructed on those common duties devolving on ourselves which, when discharged, promote the true welfare of our race’. It went on to state that the value of these writings ‘has been acknowledged throughout the world’, that they had been translated into every language and were known in every nation, and that they had influenced everyone from legislators to small children. It then went on to state that

‘These evident and unquestionable facts can be accounted for only by the further fact, that Moses was a worshiper and servant of the true and living God, while the Pharaohs of Egypt were ignorant and deluded idolators.’<sup>159</sup>

### 3.3.2 The Dreaming Spires of Egypt

The obelisks could be seen as symbols of Pharaonic tyranny, and of a pagan and idolatrous culture supplanted by true religion, and as mute witnesses to Biblical history, but aspects of Egyptian religion were also seen by some as a prefiguring of Christianity, and hence deserving of respect. An anonymous penny pamphlet on the Needle, probably written by the clergyman and Freemason Hargrave Jennings, saw the titles in the inscriptions themselves as prefiguring Christian principles. He wrote that ‘Herodotus calls an OBELISK dedicated to the SUN – a

MEMORIAL to the SAVIOUR'.<sup>160</sup> The Reverend James King, in his book on Cleopatra's Needle, wrote of their role as historical witnesses:

Possibly Jacob and Joseph, certainly Moses and Aaron, Pythagoras and Plato, have gazed upon these two obelisks; and therefore the English nation should look at the hoary monolith on the Thames Embankment with feelings of profound veneration<sup>161</sup>

In 1853 *The London Journal and Weekly Record* had spoken of how the obelisk would provide

mute evidence of the rise of Christianity, the fall of Rome, the growth of purer mental and moral systems, the discovery of a new world, of greater mechanical powers, of the true relations between riches and poverty – and last, but not least, that MAN has caught some faint glimmering of the MIGHTY END for which he was designed in the very dawn of his beginning<sup>162</sup>

While Alexandria, although associated with St Mark and other Christian saints, was a Classical city, Heliopolis, where the Needles had originally stood before the temple of Re, was closely identified with incidents in the Biblical narratives of Jacob and Joseph, the Exodus, the Flight to Egypt of the Holy Family, and the tradition deriving from Classical authors and early Church Fathers like Clement of Alexandria that Pythagoras had studied in Egyptian temples.<sup>163</sup> These had associated institutions known as the *per ankh*, or 'House of Life', which seem to have carried out the copying of religious and other texts, acted as libraries, and trained scribes,<sup>164</sup> and it is entirely plausible that this role would have continued into Classical times and that they would have been accessible to some extent to visiting scholars.

However, assuming this was a long way from establishing definite links with specific personalities, some of whom may not be wholly or even partly historical. This did not prevent Victorian commentators on the Needle treating these links as established facts. In his lecture to the RUSI, John Dixon stated that 'Heliopolis, or On, was the only university of the world', and in another lecture to the Civil and Mechanical Engineers Society spoke of it as the 'ancient city of Heliopolis ... that city, once the Oxford and Cambridge of the world ...'.<sup>165</sup> The architect E W Godwin, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, described 'Thotmes' as the 'Pharaoh' Joseph knew, and Ramses II as the Pharaoh that Moses spoke with.<sup>166</sup> Despite the extent to which religion featured in Victorian society, however, not everyone felt this way. In a review of Erasmus Wilson's book on the Needle, *The Builder* wrote of him making 'Englishmen familiar with the half-legendary stories bound up in his magnificent present to them',<sup>167</sup> and an earlier review of Wilson's pamphlet in the same publication, possibly by the same writer, referred to the need

to suggest that mere speculation, which is too often permitted to undermine archaeological research, should be carefully expunged from his coming book; and that

though Moses may have handled his staff under the shadow of upright monoliths at the Egyptian Heliopolis, it is not at all likely that the “ancient sycamore-tree,” now to be seen close by at Matarieh, is the identical sycamore-fig under which the Holy Family lay 1,900 years ago! An event like the arrival of the obelisk ... is sure to call forth masses of verbiage in which errors repeated from book to book will be further mis-stated; and it is the duty of men who, like Mr Erasmus Wilson, understand their subject, not to mar it with any recital of impossible probabilities<sup>168</sup>

Occasionally there were oblique references to another aspect of the Needles which could clash with Victorian religious sensibilities. *Chambers's Journal* described Cleopatra's Needles as being set up in front of the Temple of the Sun at Heliopolis and of how

in however mistaken a way, [they] must be viewed as a pious tribute to the Almighty, personified in the Sun as the author of Light and Heat,, the fructifier and sustainer of animal and vegetable existence<sup>169</sup>

In his book on the obelisk, however, William Ricketts Cooper, Secretary of the Society of Biblical Archaeology, went further and wrote that

[t]here was also a further reason why the obelisk was dedicated to the sun as the creator, but that reason is one which can only be here alluded to, as affording one of the earliest indications of a form of nature worship which has led to the most painful and objectionable excesses<sup>170</sup>

*The Builder* warned its readers that

[m]any well-meaning and spotless people, who will probably inquire of better informed friends about the origin and early use of the obelisk will be sadly shocked when, from some out-spoken reply, they learn the truth ... What Siva is to Indian theology Osiris was to that of Egypt; and what the *linga* was and still is to Hindús, the obelisk form was to the Egyptians<sup>171</sup>

Despite these disturbing associations, another writer suggested of the Needle that

[a]lthough more or less associated with idolatrous emblems, it may not be held necessary to perform for our London visitor a ceremony deemed essential for a fellow-obelisk removed to Rome. This one was solemnly exorcised by Pope Sixtus V., that no malignant god of Egypt retain supernatural hold upon the stone, or blight the Christian beholder<sup>172</sup>

### 3.3.3 Epitaph for Empires

As the possession of an imperial power, an Egyptian obelisk brought with it not only the reflected glory of the Roman Empire, which had been so devoted to acquiring them, but also more sobering connotations. Obelisks, because of their age, were witnesses to the empires of the Ancient Egyptians, the Ptolemies and the Ottomans. One paper wrote of '[t]he hieroglyphs that have kept their clean contour while three Empires rose and fell, while Egypt, Macedon, and Rome played their parts'.<sup>173</sup> Obelisks could symbolise an almost legendary endurance, but were also a reminder that all the empires they had been witness to had declined and fallen, or in the case of the Ottoman Empire, were in the process of doing so. John Dixon, during correspondence in *The Times* over whether the Needle was in danger of being toppled by high winds, gave his opinion that

[n]o obelisk has ever been overturned by the wind – ours never will be. Revolution, communism, or natural convulsion can alone upset it. From such calamities, for the sake of my country, I trust it will ever be spared, long to remain on that pedestal upon which we have placed it in peace and with honour<sup>174</sup>

A foundation deposit was placed in the pedestal under the Needle, although *The Saturday Review* felt that the 'mere list of the objects buried in two jars under the pedestal must provoke a smile. Nothing typical of the civilisation of our day seems to have been omitted, except a betting-book and a willow-pattern plate' and it went on to suggest that the articles had been 'chiefly put in by way of advertisement, not to the men of the future, but to those of our own generation'.<sup>175</sup> The deposit was simultaneously an expression of confidence that it would remain there for centuries to come, and an acknowledgement that for it to be uncovered again the obelisk would have to be moved or have been toppled. *The Times of India* asked rhetorically of the objects in the deposit

Who shall say what strange eyes shall be the next to gaze upon them, or how long shall be the interval before they are again grasped by human hands. London may then be in ruins, the Thames a morass, Britain itself a forsaken isle, and her coast-line changed by an invading sea. Or it may be that all the change will be to a higher grade of civilisation<sup>176</sup>

Both John and Waynman Dixon foresaw the Needle surviving the British Empire, just as it had survived others before. John wrote of the single surviving obelisk at Heliopolis that it was 'the only relic of a great bygone city. It was not so originally, and when our obelisk has, like it, occupied its new position for 3,000 years, possibly it, too, may form the centre of a similar desolation'.<sup>177</sup> Waynman wrote of how it would be 'a monument which we trust will stand not only for hundreds

of years, but which may indicate the site of where London once stood, when England shall have been submerged and rise again from the waves ...'.<sup>178</sup> They were not alone in invoking such apocalyptic visions. A popular penny pamphlet produced to coincide with the arrival of the obelisk, even though it hoped that the Needle was now on its last resting place, foresaw 'the advent of the yet unborn, but surely approaching time, when it and the land whereon it stands, and the ancient life-teeming, wealth-laden Thames shall sink out of sight, and the British Empire be no more'.<sup>179</sup> One review, without explicitly referring to occult forces, still managed to suggest that the arrival of the obelisk might even precipitate the fall of the British Empire.

Perhaps, after all, Dr. Wilson ought to have considered that there may have been a special Providence in the callousness with which the English Government allowed Cleopatra's Needle to lie buried in the sand at Alexandria. There may be something uncanny in bringing to our shores a scornful indestructible object which has seen so many "strange mutations." While there is yet time, he should bethink himself whether it is not the hand of Fate that is guiding the mysterious "silent spectator" to the Thames Embankment, so convenient a station from which to see the contemplative New Zealander perched on the ruins of London Bridge.<sup>180</sup>

The 'New Zealander' was a reference to a vigorous trope which originated in an 1840 review by the Whig politician and historian Lord Macaulay, in which he noted the longevity of the Catholic Church as an institution, and suggested that it 'may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's'.<sup>181</sup> The invocation of Macaulay's New Zealander, and on at least one occasion Shelley's Ozymandias,<sup>182</sup> is another demonstration of how reactions to the arrival of an Egyptian antiquity could be expressed in ways which linked them to contemporary concerns rather than a historical culture.

### 3.4 Class, Culture, and Cleopatra

'[A]ll who are interested in the all-engaging subject of the "Needle" - and who is not?'<sup>183</sup>

While there may have been widespread and general interest in the approach of the Needle to London and its re-erection, there was not equal access to the obelisk. On one hand it was described as the property of the British Nation, and exhibited on a public site, but on the other certain groups laid claim to it on a cultural level, and some sections of society were all but excluded from discussions about it, or had to claim a connection to it informally.

### 3.4.1 Networks and the Needle

From the first attempt to move the fallen Needle in 1802, social class played an important part. Although the effort was funded by contributions from all ranks, private soldiers (and as far as we know non-commissioned officers) seem to have had a significant portion of theirs returned in the form of pay for working parties. Commissioned officers, including those who had already left Egypt, were invited to subscribe without any immediate prospect of financial reward. Years later, it was to be a group of these officers, now promoted to senior ranks, who petitioned Prince Albert for his support in bringing the Needle to England, and titled Trustees of the British Museum who considered the project. Pressure on the government in the years to come was exerted by Members of Parliament and members of the Establishment, in practice often the same people. The transport of the Needle involved Prime Ministers, Foreign Secretaries, Chancellors of the Exchequer, and senior Civil Servants. In the end, however, the driving forces behind the final and successful attempt were more typical of the upwardly mobile Victorian professional class than the hereditarily wealthy aristocracy.

Sir James Alexander had been knighted for his services to exploration, and was a professional soldier. John and Waynman Dixon were successful civil engineers. Erasmus Wilson was the son of a naval surgeon, highly successful in his chosen profession, but wealthy because of shrewd share investments, and eventually knighted for his services to medical philanthropy.<sup>184</sup> By themselves, however, it is unlikely that they would have been able to succeed. What allowed them to do so was a combination of access and finance. Alexander and the Dixon brothers had at least the tacit support of government, in the form of consular introductions to the Egyptian ruler and senior officials, and the financial contributions of Wilson and John Dixon overcame the long-standing reluctance of successive governments to commit public money to the project. Professional networking counted for a lot. Ismail's Chief of Harbours, McKillop Pasha, who provided the facilities of the government dockyard at Alexandria for the fitting out of the *Cleopatra* was a former Royal Navy officer, who would have had a natural bond with Alexander. Dixon was able to call on the assistance of John Fowler, engineering advisor to the Khedive, and a professional colleague, who provided the services of his junior partner Benjamin Baker (1840-1907)<sup>185</sup> in the design of the *Cleopatra*.<sup>186</sup> What may have been just as important, and arguably more so outside immediate professional circles was, in the words of Robert Burns, the 'mystic tie' of Freemasonry.<sup>187</sup>

British Freemasonry was relatively inclusive, in contrast to continental Europe, where it tended to be more concentrated in aristocratic and professional circles.<sup>188</sup> Because of this, it offered a means to overcome or bypass social barriers, and for members of different professions to make

connections. We know that both Erasmus Wilson and John Dixon were Freemasons,<sup>189</sup> as was Sir James Alexander,<sup>190</sup> and, for that matter, Sir Ralph Abercromby.<sup>191</sup> It is tempting to speculate that a significant number of other people involved in the modern history of the Alexandrian obelisks were as well. During the nineteenth century, the Craft was ubiquitous in British society, in large part due to its support since the eighteenth century by the Royal Family, but establishing whether specific individuals were Freemasons is not straightforward, and requires establishing a link to a specific lodge or lodges. Even once this has been achieved, the degree to which individuals were involved with the Craft could differ greatly as, it seems reasonable to assume, would their tendency to make use of its links in their professional lives. Although both John Dixon and Erasmus Wilson were Freemasons, Dixon does not seem to have been particularly active, being raised as a Freemason in 1861 in the Palatine Lodge No. 114 in Sunderland, but ceasing payments to it in the same year, and is not currently known to have been associated with any other lodges.<sup>192</sup> This is in contrast to Wilson, who was not only raised in the prestigious Lodge of Antiquity No. 2 in 1870, but went on to be exalted into the additional degree of the Royal Arch in 1871, and to hold a number of offices in both degrees, becoming a Senior Grand Deacon in Craft masonry, and a Grand Scribe N[ehemiah] in the Royal Arch.<sup>193</sup>

That Masonic affiliations were not always obvious can be seen from the fact that in 1878 the weekly journal *The Freemason* initially congratulated 'our esteemed Bro. Erasmus Wilson as well as Mr John Dixon CE' on the safe arrival of the Needle, but in a later report on the final lowering of the obelisk wrote that 'Bro. Dixon, CE, was in charge throughout', having obviously been made aware that he was a Freemason.<sup>194</sup> Reports on the transport and re-erection of the Needle in the Masonic press appear to be fairly sparse, and are generally simple reports on progress, with little reference to Masonic matters. Interest in the supposed Masonic significance of the obelisks seems to have been largely inspired by claims made when the second obelisk was excavated in Alexandria prior to being shipped to New York, and which later featured in his book on the transport of the New York obelisk by Henry Gorringe (1841-1885),<sup>195</sup> who supervised it, and was a Freemason.<sup>196</sup> They were also promoted by the American author John Weisse (1810-1888)<sup>197</sup> in a book which drew on the theories of Giovanni Belzoni's widow Sarah that Freemasonry had its origins in Ancient Egypt.<sup>198</sup> More relevant to the reception of the Needle in England was the fact that established or Regular Freemasonry was a fraternal organisation which did not admit women.

### **3.4.2 Portraits in the Pedestal**

Despite the Needle being named after a female ruler of Egypt, and the obelisk coming to an England reigned over by a Queen, the missing voices in the discussions of its ownership and

significance are those of women. This was not only a reflection of the fact that journalism in general, and the professions whose members commented on the arrival of the obelisk were overwhelmingly male. There were exceptions, notably Amelia Edwards, who was successful as an author of fiction, journalism, travel writing, and writing on Egyptology, but she tends to stand out because she was so untypical for the time.

The traditional connection between the Needles and Cleopatra not only led to confusion about which of the Alexandrian obelisks was 'Cleopatra's Needle', but also encouraged the personification of obelisks in general as female. The Luxor obelisk, for example, which had no connection to Cleopatra, could be referred to in 1869 as 'its [the fallen obelisk's] sister, the third of this trio',<sup>199</sup> and in 1878 as 'the sister to our Cleopatra's Needle'.<sup>200</sup> This feminisation preceded the arrival of the Needle in London. In 1869, at the time of the Prince of Wales's visit to Egypt, the humorous magazine *Judy* published a verse which saw the Needle as jealous of the Princess of Wales:

That CLEOPATRA'S Needle grudged her  
Her charms, "Our Own Reporters" tell us;  
"The Prince" they say, "in rapture nudged her,  
And laugh'd to see the granite jealous!"<sup>201</sup>

It may also have drawn on a much older tradition of feminising Egypt, which has been traced back to Greek traditions which passed into canonical European texts,<sup>202</sup> and linked to what Jan Assmann has described as the concept of a 'Mosaic distinction' between the revealed monotheistic Judaeo/Christian/Islamic religions, and earlier polytheistic religions, which were regarded by followers of monotheistic religions as false, and those who followed them as ignorant at best, and heretical and superstitious at worst. Lynn Parramore has suggested that

Hebews and Greeks used the *idea* of Egypt as a feminine realm to distinguish themselves from the older culture. In the realm of cultural memory, historical facts are obscured by myths that bolster and perpetuate group identity... [Egypt's] association with women helped both Hebrews and Greeks carve out their own male-centered identities through contrast<sup>203</sup>

Linking the Needle to Cleopatra inevitably brought with it the history of her relationships with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, and the characterisations of her by Roman authors as dangerously corrupting to the essentially masculine Roman virtue of both. In 1877 *Punch* featured a piece entitled 'From Nile to Thames', in which Mr Punch dreamed that he was visited by Cleopatra. In the course of her visit, she remarks that

such women as I care no more for the pen [to write an article for *Punch*] than for the needle... we work with other weapons.<sup>204</sup>

Later in the same piece, it made Cleopatra a metonym of Egypt, suggesting that European investors had been beguiled and misled.

Egyptian Bonds are now suggestive of something other than the imprisoning arms of CLEOPATRA, though to many a modern ANTONY they may have proved almost as fatal.<sup>205</sup>

The name given to the obelisk inevitably produced seemingly innumerable puns on needles, sewing and sewing equipment. They date back to at least 1802, when one paper suggested that

[s]ome of our most intelligent antiquarians infer from the *enormous* size of Cleopatra's *Needle* that she must have been a *great sempstress*<sup>206</sup>

and *The Times*, in an 1804 piece on 'the rage for Egyptian ornaments of every description' went on to suggest that 'our dames of *ton* will sit down in their morning apartments to execute their fanciful needle-work with *Cleopatra's Needles*'.<sup>207</sup>

They continued, and intensified as the Needle's arrival approached. The humorous magazine *Judy* suggested '[t]he right piece of mechanism for removing Cleopatra's Needle – a sewing machine, of course', adding that it would 'be handy for clever people to take that stitch in Time they are always talking about'. Also, commenting on the near loss of the Needle, it observed that 'when it reaches England it will be an easy task – for a needle – to thread its way through the shipping on the river', and to '[a] suitable site for Cleopatra's Needle – Threadneedle Street, opposite the Royal Exchange'.<sup>208</sup> *Punch* had already made this suggestion in February of that year, and in more than one cartoon personified the Needle as Cleopatra.

A variety of commemorative items were produced to tie in with the arrival of the obelisk, many of which were aimed at women.<sup>209</sup> They included personal items designed to be worn and displayed, such as earrings, brooches, lockets, charm bracelet charms, perfume cases, umbrella handles, skirt lifters or dress suspenders, and thimbles. Although not specifically commemorative, there were also Cleopatra branded needles and pin cushions. Other commemorative items would have been used or displayed in dining or drawing rooms, the former the most public room in a middle-class Victorian house, 'where formal displays of hospitality were made on which the status of the family were judged'.<sup>210</sup> The dining room was both for eating and used as a family sitting room in middle-class homes. Women sewed in them. They often contained a writing table or desk, functioning both as a sort of home office and for display,<sup>211</sup> Although ladies congregated in

the drawing room, and dining rooms were considered masculine spaces, women spent most time in them. Commemorative items for these areas included salt and pepper cellars, cruet sets, and knife rests.

As well as the more informative and educational titles on the history of obelisks and Cleopatra's Needles, there were two contrasting humorous titles. One of these, *Mrs Brown on Cleopatra's Needle*, was part of a series by Arthur Sketchley, the pseudonym of George Rose (1817-1882),<sup>212</sup> featuring the garrulous Cockney character Mrs Brown's commentary on contemporary social and political issues.

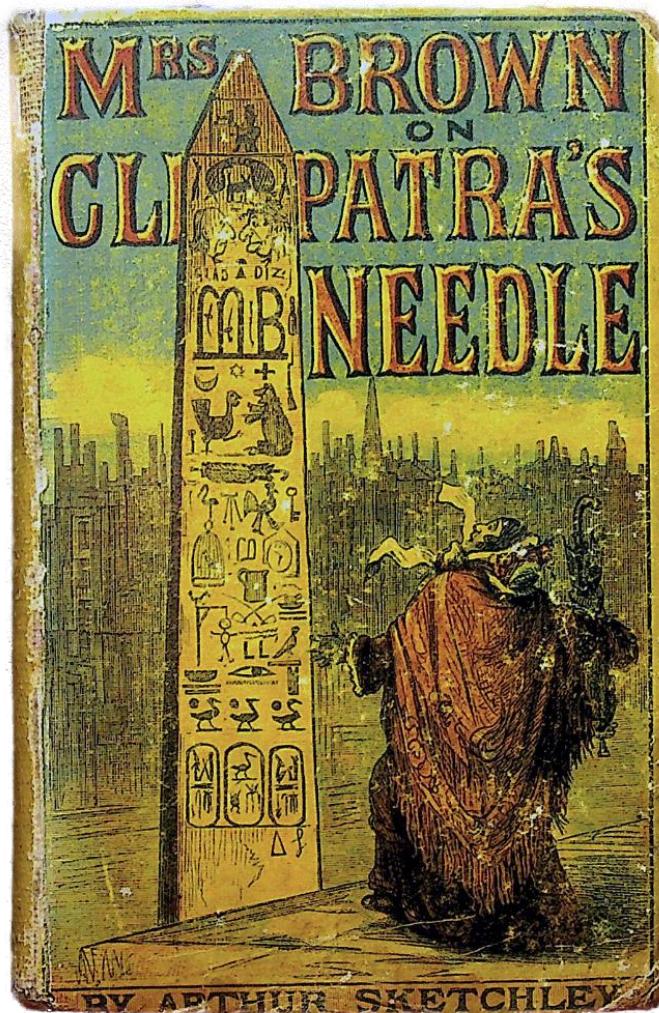


Figure 20 - The cover of Arthur Sketchley's *Mrs Brown on Cleopatra's Needle*. 1878. (Author's Collection.)

The other, *Betty Podkins' Letter to the Queen on Cleopatra's Needle*, was one of several titles in Weardale dialect written by the local author and historian William Morley Egglestone (1838-1921),<sup>213</sup> and probably appeared in 1878. Supposed to have been written by 'Peter Podkins Jr.', it recorded a dialogue between Betty and her husband Peter, at the end of which she writes a letter

to Queen Victoria suggesting that as the Needle had been recovered by a Weardale man (presumably the captain of the *Fitzmaurice*) it should be set up on Killhope Law in Weardale in County Durham. In the course of this, when Peter senior says that she would do well in Parliament, she points out that men have excluded women from politics but questions why, if the Head of State is a woman, women's opinions are not listened to.

Ye men twoak doesnet let wumen ha mickle say about a deal o' things. B'd Ah'd like to know whee hez a betther reet te speak about a needle er a woman. What's t'Queen? Ah pray. Is she nut a woman? 'N' iv t'verra heed ov England 's a woman we sud hev a reet to talk about owght we liked, 'n' abeaine a' things a needle.<sup>214</sup>

[You men folk don't let women have much say about a deal of things. But I'd like to know who has a better right to speak about a needle than a woman. What's the Queen ? I pray. Is she not a woman ? And if the very head of England's a woman we should have a right to talk about anything we like, and above all things a needle.]<sup>215</sup>

Perhaps more typical of attitudes at the time was the inclusion in the foundation deposit placed in the pedestal of the Needle of photographs of a dozen pretty Englishwomen, supposed to have been at the instigation of Captain Carter, skipper of the *Cleopatra*.<sup>216</sup> The *Saturday Review* commented when 'perhaps thirty generations hence', the archaeologists of the future uncovered the deposit

[s]hould the photographs of a dozen pretty Englishwomen survive till then, learned treatises may be composed on the strange costumes of the præ-historic lady, her semi-nudity, her woad or rouge, as the case may be, her pinched waist, her brass-coloured hair, and her brazen expression<sup>217</sup>

In November 1877 the Lord Mayor's Show for that year featured a full-sized model of the Needle, displayed horizontally rather than vertically because of the need to pass under Temple Bar, drawn by six horses, surrounded by a group of people representing Egypt, preceded by two dromedaries and followed by a pair of elephants, all from Sanger's Circus. It was 'the first time, perhaps, ladies took part in the Lord Mayor's Show',<sup>218</sup> but the ladies in this case seem to have been restricted to the 'several imitation Egyptian beauties gracefully posed on each side' of the model.<sup>219</sup>

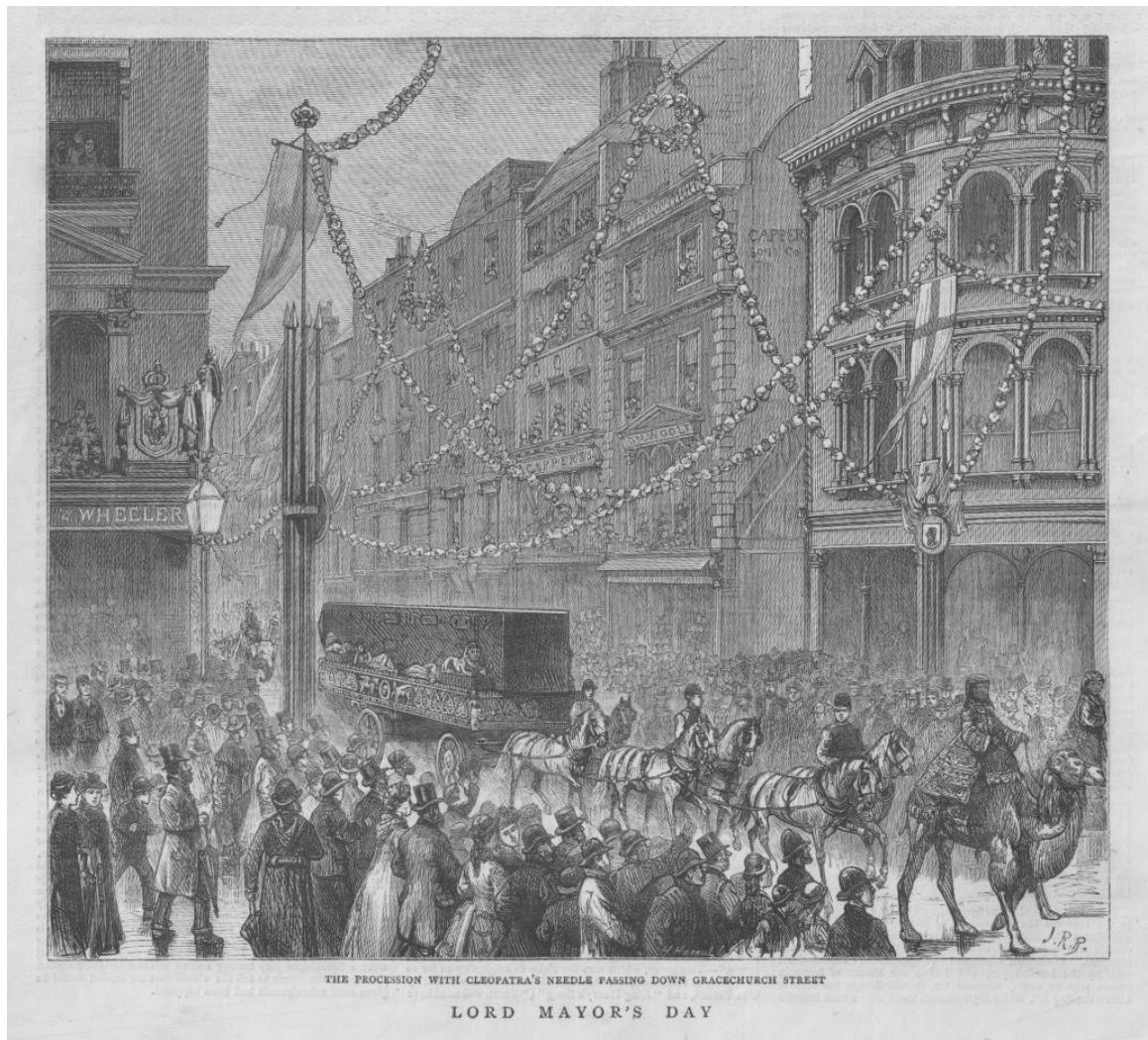


Figure 21 - Cleopatra's Needle float in the 1877 Lord Mayor's Show. *The Graphic*, 17 November 1877 468. (Author's Collection.) The 'Egyptian beauties' can just be made out posing gracefully between the supporting sphinxes

### 3.4.3 The Monolith and the Masses

The Needle might have been paraded in replica before the crowds at the Lord Mayor's Show, but if it was the property of the British Nation, some sections of society felt that they had a better claim to it, and to speak on it. In the *Punch* article quoted above, Cleopatra complains to Mr Punch that

I object to that obelisk, which I hear you are about to have transferred hither, being called by so inappropriate a name. 'Cleopatra's Needle,' indeed! Fancy *my* name being associated with the housewife's humble implement!

“A Cockneyism, doubtless,” replied the Sage. “But nicknames are the Nemesis of greatness; and slang, like a sapper, respects nothing and nobody.”

“Precisely,” replied the Serpent of Old Nile. “Yet I look to you to discountenance, as much as may be, the Cockneyising of this relic of my rule”.<sup>220</sup>

Later, she asks him to not let ‘Cockney Edilism wholly vulgarise my obelisk’.<sup>221</sup> In 1875, when the Prince of Wales had visited Egypt on his way to India, *The Athenaeum* had referred to ‘the two great obelisks of Alexandria, vulgarly called “Cleopatra’s Needles”’.<sup>222</sup> In 1877 *The British Architect* also referred to ‘the vulgarly called, Cleopatra’s Needle’,<sup>223</sup> and speaking to a meeting of the British Archaeological Association Samuel Birch also noted that ‘he had heard people sneer at the title [Cleopatra’s Needle] as a vulgarism’.<sup>224</sup> Although the Needle was coming to London to be publicly displayed, and would therefore be accessible to the whole population of the city, as well as visitors of all sorts, comments such as these reflect efforts by social and cultural elites to claim a greater right to define the obelisk’s identity and significance.

The link between Cleopatra and the Needle, however dubious it might be on historical grounds, had been firmly established since at least the first half of the eighteenth century,<sup>225</sup> and was probably unshakeable. Identifying the Needle in this way brought with it all that was associated with Cleopatra. One writer has observed that ‘as Europeans we have the habit of making use almost unconsciously of the lens that was bequeathed to us by Rome’,<sup>226</sup> and the Roman view of Cleopatra passed down to the modern era through Classical texts, was largely, although not entirely, hostile. She was seen as a ‘feminising oriental threat to... the disciplined and militarised masculine west’.<sup>227</sup> Her relationships with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, and anecdotes such as those of her being smuggled into Julius Caesar’s presence wrapped in a carpet, and dissolving a huge pearl in her wine at a banquet with Antony in an act of breath-taking and literally conspicuous consumption created an image of lustfulness and indulgence. Her beauty, or at least her erotic charisma, was stressed, and also her cruelty, as when she was alleged to have tested various poisons on slaves when preparing for her own suicide. Sources such as Plutarch and Pliny were influences on writers such as Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Shakespeare whose works dealt with Cleopatra, and helped to create the image of her in Renaissance Europe.<sup>228</sup> Although Roman propaganda against Cleopatra could depict Antony as weak and ensnared by her wiles, once defeated she could be, in fact perhaps needed to be shown, as a worthy opponent. While her supposed indulgence could be used to attack her, the wealth that made it possible also emphasised that she was a powerful and successful ruler. The image of a powerful female ruler was one that must have had a particular resonance in Shakespeare’s time as well as in the reign of Victoria. After a performance of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, one of Victoria’s ladies-in-

waiting is meant to have observed 'How different, how very different, from the home life of our own dear queen'. That the quote is very probably apocryphal is immaterial. What mattered is that it was repeated, and in so doing the perception of one queen was used to define the image of another. We know that on the first Sunday after it had been set up, William Sinclair, the Resident Chaplain to the Lord Bishop of London, preached a sermon in the Queen's Chapel of the Savoy, subsequently "published by request", in which he spoke of the Needle being set up

...in the heart of the greatest city of the greatest empire of these days...at the zenith of the reign of Her who for more than forty years has been – noble contrast to Cleopatra! - the type of every virtue, constitutional, domestic, and personal...<sup>229</sup>

While only a minority of Victoria's subjects would have been directly familiar with Classical sources on Cleopatra, general awareness of her was widespread, as the use of her image in *Punch* cartoons, for example, demonstrates. The associations of Cleopatra with the general public might be stereotyped, but they were common currency.

While a knowledge of Latin and Greek might be considered one of the signs of the properly educated, and a basic knowledge of Egyptian history would allow them to assign the Needles to 'Thotmes' and 'Ramses', the inscriptions which were such a prominent feature of the London obelisk, and which would be incomprehensible to the masses, were not considered especially important. Even Samuel Birch, in his report on the Needle in 1867 had written that

[t]here is nothing of very great importance in the inscriptions; the principal interest being the fact of the monument belonging to the flourishing period of the Egyptian empire. In this respect the obelisk and its inscriptions resemble others the inscriptions of which rarely offer matters of historical value beyond the names and titles of the monarchs by whom they were erected<sup>230</sup>

In his 1877 lecture to the Civil and Mechanical Engineers' Society, John Dixon said of the Needle that 'It was first erected at Thebes by Thotmes, who caused all his virtues and conquests to be engraven upon it, while he discreetly omitted all mention of his vices'.<sup>231</sup> *The Saturday Review* rather disappointedly wrote that 'the inscriptions on an obelisk, though full of meaning to the few who have studied the difficult mythology of Egypt, seem to the ordinary reader when he gets a translation of them not a little ridiculous, however deep may be his reverence for the past'.<sup>232</sup> Once again, architects felt able to comment on the obelisk. A paper read to the RIBA in 1878 by its Past President, Professor Donaldson, dismissed the hieroglyphs on obelisks.

These inscriptions are generally trivial and meaningless, recording little more than the names and patronymics of the king, his relationship to the gods, and list of his virtues

and of the peoples he may have subdued in battle; sometimes with maxims and blessings of the gods<sup>233</sup>

*The Times* was probably being ironic when, not long after the re-erection of the Needle, it commented that

[i]mpatient hieroglyphists, in particular worried with hopeless endeavours to decipher very faulty copies of the inscriptions (as all the published texts are), were tantalized at finding the whole central zone of the written record, together with the most important columns of the lower end on the east and west sides, hidden as yet from their inquisitive gaze. Fortunately for this limited but not unimportant class, the ironwork encumbering Cleopatra's Needle was the first to disappear, leaving nothing save the timber staging to take down.<sup>234</sup>

*The British Architect* perhaps gave a more accurate idea of attitudes towards the general public and the obelisk when it observed that 'Cleopatra's Needle moves but slowly; it is not more than about 8 feet from the pavement at the time we write. One advantage of this is that it gives the roughs round the hoarding time to learn the minutest detail of the upper hieroglyphs'.<sup>235</sup>

References to Cleopatra's Needle, often multiple, have been found in over 160 magazines, newspapers, and journals, and it is certain that more could be found. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider in any detail the readership of these titles, and how they relate to the development of the press during the period under consideration, some suggestions can be made as to the role that the press in general played in helping to define understanding of the London obelisk, and attitudes towards it. Many of the references constitute simple reports on the progress of constructing the obelisk barge and transporting the Needle to London, and of re-erecting it once it had arrived, with relatively little expression of opinion. As noted above (3.2.2), magazines and journals aimed at a professional readership, such as *The British Architect*, *The Engineer*, and *The Builder*, offered more analysis and opinion on the obelisk and its acquisition. Then there were titles of more general scope, such as *The Athenaeum*, *Blackwood's*, and *The Saturday Review*, which discussed the Needle in the context of more general considerations of social, religious, and aesthetic values, and which also reviewed books on it and related topics. Then there were those like *The Illustrated London News* and *The Graphic*, which combined news, comment, and background on historical, archaeological, and technical aspects, written for a non-specialist audience. There was *The Times*, which stands from other daily newspapers not just because of the volume of coverage of the Needle, over many years, but because of its role in forming public opinion through its leader columns and debates in its correspondence section.

Finally, there is the intriguing area of the publications such as cheap pamphlets designed to cash in on public interest around the time of the Needle's arrival.

Again, it must be emphasised that the role of publications in general in forming and influencing understanding of and attitudes towards the Needle is a highly complex topic. The sheer range of titles which mention the Needle illustrates the vigour of the nineteenth century press, and also the turnover of titles within this period. In general, however, access to them required sufficient education, particularly in the case of titles which discussed and analysed issues, sufficient income to afford them, even given the extent to which papers and journals could be, and were passed on, and sufficient leisure to read them. To this extent, our knowledge of how the Needle, and Ancient Egypt more generally were understood and regarded, tends to focus on the middle and upper socio-economic groups in British society. As indicated above (3.4.2), the views of women are poorly represented, even though we may assume that many family magazines were partly aimed at a female readership, and if the views of those in lower income manual jobs are reported at all, due allowance has to be made for bias by those reporting them.

Access to the obelisk varied after its arrival in London. When it was moored at the East India Docks, a few of the hull plates in the *Cleopatra* were removed to allow inspection of her construction, the obelisk, and how it was packed in, but this was not an easy location to reach, and because of her draught she could not be boarded by gangplank. John Dixon wrote to *The Times* to announce that before work started to dismantle her at the Adelphi Steps, she would be moored opposite the Houses of Parliament just above Westminster Bridge, and 'open during the forenoon to the free inspection of those who may deem her worth a visit – after 2 o'clock by card'.<sup>236</sup> This would have been obvious once she was moored there, even to those who were not regular readers of *The Times*, and 'the South Thames Embankment ... was thronged from early morning as long as there was daylight enough left to allow of the strange craft's being seen, and the watermen made a harvest by rowing passengers round her at 3d per head'.<sup>237</sup> While the cost of transport to *Cleopatra* may seem relatively modest, the requirement to produce cards for afternoon visits would have effectively limited access.

During the process of dismantling the *Cleopatra* and re-erecting the Needle, the Embankment side was closed by a hoarding, although it would have been easily visible from the river, which carried a lot more passenger traffic in Victorian times. A Visitor's Book was open between 11 June and 4 October 1878, and gives some indication of who was admitted to view the obelisk and the apparatus for re-erecting it, although the identity of some of the visitors is uncertain, or difficult to make out. The first to sign seems to be a Robert Foster from Newcastle on Tyne, the last, and only visitor on that day, Charles Childers. However, as well as Erasmus Wilson, John Dixon's sisters

and two of his daughters,<sup>238</sup> they included Professor Donaldson, Samuel Birch, The Dean of Westminster Arthur Penrhyn Stanley (1815-1881),<sup>239</sup> Joseph Bonomi, the Prince and Princess of Wales, and Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881).<sup>240</sup> Other visitors came from Canada, Australia, the USA, India and Egypt, and there were a number of titled visitors, including 'Lady Cochrane and party'.

<sup>241</sup> Professional groups were also admitted, such as when 'a large number' of members of the Civil and Mechanical Engineers' Society, to which Dixon had previously lectured, visited the site and were received by Captain Carter and George Double, who acted as site manager for Dixon. All this indicates a level of restricted access, and on the day when the Needle was finally swung round to the vertical, selected guests viewed the process from a steamer on the river chartered by John Dixon,<sup>242</sup> before joining a smaller party inside the hoarding, whilst the general public, who had earlier been dispersed by a heavy rain squall, watched from the Embankment.

The arrangement which had been made to allow the Needle to come to London had been that Dixon, under the terms of his contract with Wilson, would be responsible for the transport of the obelisk from Egypt, and for setting it up on the Victoria Embankment site granted by the Metropolitan Board of Works. In practice, as soon as the Needle reached England, the Board of Works began to assert ownership of it, which led to tensions with a number of those who had been instrumental in acquiring it. In February 1878, John Wyke Smith, the Board's solicitor, had given them a legal opinion that the Victoria Embankment was vested in the Board 'for the benefit of the public', but that a short Parliamentary Bill should be introduced to allow it to take charge of and maintain the Needle and other public monuments.<sup>243</sup> By March, Treasury approval had been granted and the Bill drafted. In February, John Dixon had written to Joseph Bazalgette, the Board's Engineer, asking permission to dredge and level the foreshore in front of the Adelphi Steps, to allow work for preparing the foundations for the Needle, and also suggesting that the existing pedestals should be reduced to allow for sphinxes to be mounted on them. Bazalgette recommended that the works should be put in the hands of the Board's jobbing contractor, as long as Dixon undertook to pay the cost of the works on completion, and asked for the design and production of the sphinxes to be assigned to George Vulliamy, the Board's Architect, and Bazalgette.<sup>244</sup>

In August 1878, an article in *The Builder* noted a resolution passed by the Metropolitan Board of Works at its most recent meeting that any inscription placed on the pedestal should first be submitted to the Board for its approval, and commented that '[w]e understand that the power of the Board to interfere in this matter will be disputed'.<sup>245</sup> At its meeting of 9 October, the Board considered letters previously submitted from Dixon and Alexander about the proposed inscriptions for the pedestal, Dixon's request to cut '1878' into the granite of the pedestal, and a report on these by its Works and General Purposes Committee.<sup>246</sup> Dixon attended part of the

meeting, and copies of the proposed inscriptions were displayed in the Board Room. Dixon had proposed inscribed bronze plaques on the road and river sides of the pedestal, and two sets of names inscribed on the first step of the pedestal. The remaining two sides would have representations of the transport of the Needle, presumably similar to those on the pedestal of the Paris obelisk. The Board's sub-committee only wanted inscriptions on the four sides of the pedestal, not on its steps. They were prepared to accept the inscriptions relating to the ancient history of the obelisk and its presentation to Britain, but

considered it necessary to somewhat modify the remaining portion, more particularly by the omission of the names of persons who have aided in the work, with the exception of those of Mr Erasmus Wilson and Mr John Dixon<sup>247</sup>

In practice this meant acknowledging the original gift of the obelisk by Muhammad Ali, but not by Ismail Pasha, and omitting the names of Vivian, Demetrio, Swinburne, Fowler, Baker, Stephenson, Waynman Dixon, and Birch, all of whom had been of material assistance, but most crucially that of Sir James Alexander.<sup>248</sup> This was not the only dispute over the inscriptions. Erasmus Wilson wrote to the Board in November, and in his letter objected to the proposed wording of the main inscription, which referred to the obelisk being brought to London 'through the munificence of Erasmus Wilson', and asked for acknowledgement of his Fellowship of the Royal Society:

I have ventured to disapprove of the word "munificence" which implies wealth, a privilege I cannot claim; I much prefer patriotism which I do lay claim to. The addition of FRS is especially intended to represent the Scientific element as opposed to the wealthy element. It would be as difficult for a man of mere wealth to get into the Royal Society as it would be for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle.<sup>249</sup>

Somewhat surprisingly, he also objected in his letter to the recording of the names of the six seamen who had died during the voyage, on the grounds that '[i]n recording our victories we are not in a habit of giving a prominent place to the slain. Neither is the Egyptian obelisk intended as a mausoleum'. However, Dixon had intimated to the Board that the Queen had expressed a desire for the names to be recorded, and they stayed.<sup>250</sup> The increasingly strained relationship between Dixon and the Board is reflected in a letter written by Bazalgette to the Board in December 1878. It seems that Dixon had placed a temporary plaster cornice and wings around the base of the obelisk, to simulate the effect of the bronze ones which would eventually be placed there. Bazalgette had communicated with Dixon on the instructions of the Board, and informed him that 'as the obelisk was in the charge of the B<sup>d</sup> Mr Dixon must do nothing whatever to it and that he must remove the wings, &c. which he had placed upon it'.<sup>251</sup>

Of all the omissions, that of Alexander's name is the most puzzling. His role in the campaign to bring the Needle to England was crucial, but in December 1878 the Board had written to him 'informing me it having been thought desirable that the inscriptions on the pedestal of the obelisk of Alexandria should be as brief as possible my name, with those of those of others who might otherwise have some title to be recorded, had been excluded'.<sup>252</sup> Despite an appeal from Alexander, and later from a number of senior military officers, the Board refused to reconsider its decision, and further appeals from Alexander in 1881 and 1883 failed to change its stance.<sup>253</sup> In 1880, a letter and printed statement from Alexander, written from the Athenaeum Club, had been forwarded to W E Gladstone (1809-1898)<sup>254</sup> by Lord Aberdeen (who may also have been a member of the Athenaeum) without Aberdeen expressing any opinion 'on the validity of his somewhat vague ambitions'. Gladstone passed the documents to the Treasury, who referred Alexander to their letter of 19 February 1878. He had applied for £350 travel expenses,<sup>255</sup> but was told that no public funds were available for the transport of the obelisk. Alexander enclosed a revised version of his previous printed statement, and urged at least some 'honorary recognition' for Wilson, Dixon and himself. A manuscript note on the cover of the file containing the documents says that Alexander wrote to Gladstone again on 3 June 1883, 'and was informed semi-officially that it was not intended to confer any honours in connection with it'.<sup>256</sup> Erasmus Wilson was knighted in 1881, but although it was widely assumed that this was for his role in the transport of the Needle, with one paper writing that '[h]e brought it from Egypt to the Thames at his own expense, for which disinterested liberality he was knighted a few months ago',<sup>257</sup> it was in fact 'in consideration of his munificent gifts for the support of hospitals and the encouragement of medical study'.<sup>258</sup>

The lack of formal recognition for the efforts of those who had brought the Needle to London, and its transfer to the semi-autonomous Metropolitan Board of Works can be seen as a reflection of the continuing political sensitivity of the obelisk around the time of its arrival, and the varying policy of the British government towards the Ottoman Empire.<sup>259</sup> The passing of an Act of Parliament formalised the status of the Needle as a monument which was publicly displayed, and controlled by a public body, and marked the end of the era when its fate could be determined by individuals. Before this happened, however, it was still possible to establish a personal link to the obelisk. Over the decades since the first attempt to bring it to England, there had been continuing concern over the practice of taking souvenirs from the Needle in Alexandria in the form of chunks hammered off it,<sup>260</sup> and much of this reflected a wider distaste for the increased accessibility of travel to Egypt for the middle classes. It was one thing to be a traveller, quite another to be a tourist. So bad was the damage to the exposed butt end of the obelisk that approximately three

inches had to be planed from its base to level it. When this happened, the fragments of granite became relics which had both monetary and non-monetary value.

They were ‘distributed among a few of the company invited by Mr Erasmus Wilson and Mr John Dixon’ at the turning and lowering of the obelisk,<sup>261</sup> and Wilson donated a fragment to a Masonic lodge.<sup>262</sup> At least some of the fragments were made into personal items. A heart shaped locket made of granite from the Needle has survived,<sup>263</sup> and the niece of Captain Carter had ‘a small obelisk shaped ornament made from chippings of the Needle’.<sup>264</sup> For those not privileged by their connections to the key actors in the transport of the obelisk, it was still possible to acquire their own piece of Ancient Egypt. A geologist and FRGS named Bryce-Wright, with a shop in Great Russell Street two doors down from the British Museum advertised ‘[p]ortions of this historical monument, at 2s. 3s, 4s, 5s, or 10s each...’.<sup>265</sup> The size purchased at each price point was not specified. They were sold mail order, paid for by postal order, and also presumably for cash from the shop. Some material was made into professionally prepared microscope slides.<sup>266</sup> There were also claims that ‘an extensive trade has been carried on by peripatetic salesmen who have disposed of slices of granite at a penny a piece, almost enough in gross bulk to equal the cubic contents of the entire monolith’.<sup>267</sup> Even though the estimated amount of granite seems exaggerated for comic effect, and the actual amount taken off the Needle can be estimated as about 1.2 tons, the cost for which it was being sold, and the reference to “peripatetic salesmen”, who presumably hawked their wares around the streets, suggests that most of this material was not genuine.



Figure 22 - A professionally prepared microscope slide of granite from Cleopatra's Needle.

Illustrated as Plate 51n in Bracegirdle (1998). (Author's Collection.)

On 13 September 1878, the Needle was finally lowered the last few inches onto its base, having been checked to ensure that it was absolutely vertical. It would not be until 1882 that both sphinxes, all bronze-work and the four inscription plaques were in place, but this marked the end

of the Needle's voyage to London, and the beginning of its long-term relationship with the city and its citizens.

A number of factors, especially those of cost, value, significance and ownership, remained constant in the history of the Needle during the nineteenth century, but the emphasis on them and the ways in which they were expressed and understood changed. Each of them also had a literal and metaphorical aspect. For a long time, the cost of bringing the obelisk from Egypt to England was a significant barrier, but it was not only the financial cost, but the political cost of accepting it as a gift, and what this acceptance might be seen as signalling. The other side of this coin, so to speak, was the perceived value of the obelisk. The concern over its state of preservation, and the consideration of other alternatives, such as the remaining Luxor obelisk or the Ramses II colossus at Memphis, focussed on its value as an Egyptian antiquity. Once private funding allowed the British government to accept it at arm's length, the focus on its value became more metaphorical. It became part of a broader debate within society about the relative merits of different historical cultures, and the aesthetic traditions derived from them. The Needle was considered increasingly as a representative of Ancient Egyptian culture in general rather than as a particular Egyptian antiquity, the value of which culture was compared with those of Greece and Rome. The positive and negative assessments of its value by various individuals and groups were linked to their assessment of its significance, which ranged from that of a historical cultural artefact, to a metaphorical witness of civil, military, and religious history, to that of a symbol of empire, or signifier for abstract moral values, and concepts such as the decline of empires and cultures. The ownership of the Needle could also be a matter concrete enough to be decided by contracts and courts of law, but also considered in terms of abstract entities such as the British people, or questions of the rights and wrongs of acquiring the historical artefacts of other cultures. Associated with the question of ownership was that of access, and the compromise by which custody of it was eventually assumed by a semi-autonomous public body also led to a public site which permitted an unusual freedom of access to such an object. A key factor in all of these areas was the role of the print media, as they became mass media, in communicating information and facilitating discussion and debate, and of how far this was accessible to a range of groups in British society as a whole.



## Chapter 4 From Antiquity to Icon

The Needle has now been in London for over one hundred and forty years. That is only about 4% of the time that it has been in existence, but still long enough to examine changes and continuities in the ways that it has been understood and engaged with.

### 4.1 The Corrosive Capital

The condition of the Needle had been a key concern during the long series of abortive attempts to bring it to London, but as soon as it had arrived doubts were being voiced as to how long it would survive in its new home. Victorian London was a city which had undergone dramatic growth during the nineteenth century, a city powered and heated by coal, where industry and housing still rubbed shoulders, and where toxic smog was an increasing problem until the first Clean Air Act was passed in 1956. Apart from the considerable practical problems which this created, and its adverse effects on the health of the city's inhabitants, it meant that while the city could be celebrated for its size and success, it was also seen as a threatening entity. Perhaps the most dramatic expression of this was a novella by William DeLisle Hay, *The Doom of the Great City*, which was published in 1880, only two years after the arrival of the obelisk. Hay's dystopian fantasy, supposed to have been written in New Zealand in 1942 by a survivor, described a killer fog which wiped out the inhabitants of the city centre. This was very likely inspired by the real smogs, or 'coal fogs' of late January and early February 1880, in which over a thousand extra deaths occurred compared to the normal average.<sup>1</sup> Tellingly, however, in Hay's fantasy the destruction of the city's inhabitants was seen as being brought on by the corruption and vice of the capital.

‘O London! surely, great and manifold as were thy wickednesses, thy crimes, thy faults, who stayed to think of these in the hour of thy awful doom, who dared at that terrible moment to say thy sentence was deserved?’<sup>2</sup>

Many believed that the combination of acid rain, soot, and extremes of temperature (the Great Blizzard of 1881 brought three foot snowdrifts to London) would rapidly erode the Needle and destroy its inscriptions. The passage of time has shown these concerns to have been exaggerated, and the most recent assessment of the condition of the obelisk, from when it was cleaned in 2005 concluded that although there was no reason for complacency, the Needle ‘is in surprisingly good condition for its age’. It acknowledged that the hornblendes and micas of the granite were vulnerable to acid rain, and that any flaking and wetting would allow further damage by the

freeze/thaw cycle, but described contour decay on the obelisk as ‘part of the natural life cycle of granite’.<sup>3</sup>

In August 1878, almost as soon as the Needle had been removed from the *Cleopatra* and raised to the level of the Embankment, steps were taken to protect it from the atmosphere of London. Part of the pyramidion and part of one side were washed and coated with a solution of paraffin wax dissolved in benzol,<sup>4</sup> and in April 1879 it was cleaned and coated with three coats of the proprietary formula Browning’s Invisible Preservative, essentially a varnish made of Dammar gum and wax dissolved in a spirit base.<sup>5</sup> Over the years that followed, it was cleaned and recoated a number of times, first with Browning’s solution, and then with paraffin wax, although since 1966 no coating has been applied.

Although conservation practice changed over the decades, in practical terms this maintenance coped with the polluted atmosphere of the city, the deposits of soot and tar that built up because of this, and after the move away from coal fires more general dirt and grime, as well as allowing an assessment of the condition of its surface and inscriptions. However, this did not prevent a widespread perception that the new site of the Needle was not only hostile to it, but so hostile that it would inevitably be destroyed. Before its arrival, in 1877 the architect and designer E W Godwin FSA, who favoured putting the Needle in the British Museum, and believed that obelisks in Ancient Egypt were fitted with metal caps to protect them, accepted that adding a cap was unlikely to happen, but asked ‘Unprotected then, under London skies and all their impurities, how long would the incisions be readable? Would they last a hundred years? Would they endure for fifty?’.<sup>6</sup> In 1878 *The Art Journal* stated that

‘Nothing stands the London atmosphere but very pure bronze, and even as to the durability of that there is a limit. As to marble, granite, or stones of any kind yet submitted to the test, the chemical process of disintegration is more or less rapid, but certain, swift, and fatal’<sup>7</sup>

In 1893 *The Nineteenth Century* deplored the removal of either obelisk from Alexandria, and described them as having been ‘taken... to lands where they must rapidly crumble to dust... That at New York is now almost smooth, its inscriptions obliterated, as that on the Thames bank will be in another twenty years’.<sup>8</sup>

Related to the perception that London was inimical to the obelisk was a trope, and variations on it, of the Needle having suffered more damage in X years in England than X centuries in Egypt. It dates back to at least 1878, and seems to have begun with observations on the Place de la Concorde obelisk by a German visitor to Paris, a Dr Mohr.

‘In 1844 the red color of the felspar in the granite was distinctly visible, showing that the stone had not suffered by its exposure for 3,400 years to an Egyptian climate. On each subsequent visit the doctor found the surface duller and lighter; and in 1872 it was covered with a thin white film of kaoline, the last product of the decay of granite. Thirty-six years, therefore, of exposure to the atmosphere of Paris has affected the stone more than the same number of centuries’ exposure to the purer air of Egypt’<sup>9</sup>

He foresaw an even more rapid deterioration of the Alexandrian obelisk in London, where most stoves were coal burning, rather than the wood burning ones mainly used in Paris. His views were referred to in a number of British magazines,<sup>10</sup> and the trope continued to be invoked over the decades to come. In 1911 *The Academy* remarked of the Needle that ‘the poor thing has wasted away more in our acid-laden atmosphere in thirty years than it would have done in thirty centuries among its native sands’,<sup>11</sup> and in 1932 *The Daily Mail*, in a piece accompanied by a photo with a caption referring to ‘the rotting stonework’s pitted surface’, said that ‘Three thousand years of the sun and sand and rain of Egypt left it undamaged, but 50 years of the London atmosphere have been too much for it’.<sup>12</sup> The trope was still being used in the 1960s. In 1961 *The Financial Times* referred to the obelisk suffering ‘more damage in 80 years on London’s Embankment than when it stood in Ancient Egypt for a reputed 3,000 years’.<sup>13</sup> The same publication, reporting on the conference of the National Clean Air Society in 1967, quoted a Government chemist as saying that the Needle ‘had suffered more deterioration from exposure to London air for 70 or 80 years than it did from nearly 3,000 years in Egypt’.<sup>14</sup> As late as 1990, an article in the art and archaeology magazine *Minerva* could describe the Needle as ‘London’s Disintegrating Obelisk’, and say that ‘only a decade ago the hieroglyphic inscriptions... were still clearly legible. Now the western and northern faces of the obelisk have become badly eroded and the inscriptions are being gradually wiped away by traffic fumes’.<sup>15</sup> These pessimistic views of the obelisk’s condition were not universal, and the point was made as early as 1878 that if the granite of the obelisk was crumbling so soon after its arrival because of the London atmosphere, then the same should be the case for the granite of the Embankment itself, which was patently not the case.<sup>16</sup> Reports indicating that the condition of the Needle was satisfactory did appear from time to time, but much less frequently than those raising the spectre of the obelisk crumbling away to dust, suggesting that once again the monolith was being used metaphorically. The toxic atmosphere of the capital embodied its negative aspects, and the threatened Needle the ambiguous relationship of many Londoners with a city that must have often seemed as if it was devouring rather than nurturing them.

## 4.2 Stolen out of Egypt

It was but a short step from accepting that the pollution of London threatened the Needle to arguing that it should never have come there. In a lecture to the Royal Society of Arts in 1924 Sir Frank Baines (1877-1933),<sup>17</sup> Director of Works, H M Office of Works, compared bringing the Needle to London to Lord Elgin's removal of the Elgin Marbles

'Even when archaeology was studied scientifically, Lord Elgin would seem to have had no compunction in removing the treasures of Greece to this country, while as late as 1877 Cleopatra's Needle was brought to this country and set up by the Thames to decay under the acid-laden atmosphere of modern London'<sup>18</sup>

This view had begun to emerge by the end of the nineteenth century. A cartoon montage in *The Pall Mall Magazine* on 'The Humours of the Month' in 1894 had one element showing from the back a man in uniform wearing a tarboush and looking up at Cleopatra's Needle. The accompanying text on the next page identified the figure as the Khedive Abbas II Hilmi, and was captioned "Abbas, as he gazes at Cleopatra's Needle on the Embankment will, as Byron says, "In silent indignation mixed with grief, admire the plunder but abhor the thief."'" The Khedive had visited England as a boy, and would do again, but this seems to be a reference to his sympathy at that time for the Nationalist cause in Egypt.<sup>19</sup>

In 1920 the novelist E M Forster articulated a similar view of the ethics of national collecting habits in *For the Museum's Sake*, an essay on Wallis Budge's autobiographical work *By Nile and Tigris*. Budge's book dealt with his trips to Egypt and the Middle East between 1886 and 1913 to acquire objects for the British Museum, but Forster saw the role of state museums in a negative light. He saw the motivation of modern European nations in acquiring archaeological items as being driven by mutual competition

'After the Treaty of Vienna every progressive government felt it a duty to amass old objects, and to exhibit a fraction of them in a building called a Museum, which was occasionally open free. "National possessions" they were now called, and it was important that they should outnumber the objects possessed by other nations, and should be genuine old objects...'<sup>20</sup>

For him, these items, apart from 'such fractions as are accessible' are kept in 'locked cellars', and 'our pride in them is merely competitive'. He saw the material culture of the past as irrelevant to a modern age whose 'interest in the past is merely faked', and rhetorically asked 'After all, what is the use of old objects?'<sup>21</sup> When the great national collections of Egyptian antiquities had first been assembled in the nineteenth century, the emphasis had been on large sculptural or

architectural elements, and objects such as the Younger Memnon had often been judged on their aesthetic value rather than their archaeological, and seen as inferior artistically to the material culture of ancient Greece and Rome. To Forster, however, although he conceded that 'It was different in the Renaissance, which did get some stimulus' from the discovery of the remains of the Classical world, he saw such material as 'meaningless to the modern world'.<sup>22</sup> Although Forster's comments were focussed on national collections in museums, and are open to dispute, they can still be seen as relevant to the Needle because of its role as an imperial trophy.

In a 1921 short story collection '*The Pilgrim of a Smile*', the stories were linked by a wish granted by one of the sphinxes at the Needle, and the obelisk was referred to as 'a sacred pillar of stone stolen out of Egypt and floated hither over the wide seas more than forty years ago'.<sup>23</sup> Over time, the idea that the Needle had been seized from Egypt seems to have been increasingly assumed and taken as read. In a 1957 review by the novelist Howard Spring (1889-1965)<sup>24</sup> of a biography of the pioneer Egyptologist Giovanni Belzoni, he characterised all early Egyptology as looting, and implied that this included the Needle.

'Looting the tombs and temples of the Egyptians, in the early days when "Egyptology" was not unlike a burglarious exploit, caused a good deal of damage to irreplaceable things. A pompadour chair back is easier to handle than a colossal statue or a Cleopatra's Needle, and, what is more, can be at home again in an appropriate setting. What never struck the early "Archaeologists" was the importance of leaving things where they were. The great idea was to take things home and sell them.'<sup>25</sup>

The author of a 1977 article in *The Guardian*, commenting on the fact that the original Golden Hind may have been made into furniture, suggested that 'When it comes to desecration the British record is second to none.' They mentioned the Elgin Marbles and the alleged double standards of British institutions such as the British and Bodleian Libraries, and concluded. 'Let us all think twice before we besmirch the Vandals. They, after all, did not remove the Koh-I-Noor or Cleopatra's Needle.'<sup>26</sup> In 1986 an article in *Technology and Culture* described Benjamin Baker as 'responsible for a notable piece of colonial annexation, since he was the engineer who shipped Cleopatra's Needle to London'.<sup>27</sup> In 1997 a letter in *The Financial Times* responded to an article about the return to Ethiopia of the Axum obelisk, taken by Italy in the 1930s, and subsequently repatriated, by noting its mention of 'imperial raiders of obelisks', but commenting on its 'blatant' failure to mention the British and Cleopatra's Needle.<sup>28</sup>

In the nineteenth century, one justification for acquiring Ancient Egyptian antiquities had been that the Egyptians could not be trusted to care for them. Now this began to be turned on its head, with claims that the obelisks of Alexandria, in their new sites, were being neglected. In 1979, the

Needle was cleaned, and there were newspaper reports of an anonymous Arab prince funding half of the cost.<sup>29</sup> Although there was no suggestion that the donor was specifically Egyptian, or details of what had motivated their gift, the implication seemed to be that intervention from the Orient was now needed for the Needle to be properly maintained. Documents confirm that cleaning was jointly funded by the Greater London Council and an anonymous Arab prince, who made his gift ‘for historical reasons’.<sup>30</sup> More recently, in 2018, the former Egyptian Minister of State for Antiquities Zahi Hawass, after a visit to London, ‘expressed his dismay at the state of the Cleopatra’s Needle of London’, and claimed that it ‘now suffers from a lack of restoration’.<sup>31</sup> This led to online headlines such as ‘Zahi Hawass Calls Out UK Government on Desecration of Iconic Ancient Egyptian Obelisk’.<sup>32</sup> The accompanying article acknowledged that the obelisk had been ‘restored’ in 2005, and quoted him as saying that the British people ‘deserve’ to have it, but also that ‘If they don’t care they should return it’.

### 4.3 The Obelisk as Icon

The Needle was to become a London icon, and it also retained its association with the iconic figure of Cleopatra. It has been suggested that

Each age, one might say, has its own Cleopatra, to the point that one can study the thoughts and discourses of an epoch through its Cleopatra fantasies.<sup>33</sup>

A metonym for Egypt, Cleopatra had been the inspiration for artists and writers since the Renaissance, but the development of printing technology in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in graphics, together with the increasing affordability of printed materials, and later the emergence of film and television, meant that she became what has been described as ‘a mass-mediated figure’.<sup>34</sup> The association between her and the obelisk might be no more accurate, but it was as persistent.

As far back as the late eighteenth century, the Needle had been seen as architectural as well as antique. Eyles Irwin had suggested it as an addition to the landscape architecture at Stowe (see 2.2.2 above), which had Egyptian elements including a pyramid and obelisk, and an Egyptian style carriage entrance in the house itself.<sup>35</sup> In the nineteenth century, when Egyptology and scientific understanding of Ancient Egypt were still developing, Egyptian antiquities were often evaluated on aesthetic grounds. (See 3.2.1 above.) In most cases, the focus was on larger objects such as the Younger Memnon, their display in museums, and the relative artistic merits of material culture from pharaonic Egypt and ancient Greece and Rome.<sup>36</sup> Although the British Museum was suggested as a site for the Needle, and the Museum showed interest in acquiring it, practical issues related to its display meant that even had it come there, the museum forecourt was a more

likely site than the galleries, and only the Crystal Palace would have offered a real alternative indoor site. The plethora of other suggestions for sites were outdoors, and although aesthetic elements in museum display gave an opportunity for comment by architects, outdoor sites for the Needle were seen as clearly valid for evaluation by them.

The strong aesthetic element in architecture as a profession was emphasised by comments such as those on the proposed site of the Needle in an address to the RIBA by the artist Lord Leighton, who was an Honorary Associate of that body as well as President of the Royal Academy. (See 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 above.) While the greater understanding of Egyptian antiquities in general brought about by the development of Egyptology may have given them increased cultural status in relation to Graeco-Roman artefacts, placing the obelisk in an outdoor site immediately invited comparison with the obelisks of Rome, and placed it firmly in the professional sphere of architects as arbiters of taste.

From time to time, even though the Needle was now on its riverside site, architects still revisited the Battle of the Sites, and this had more to do with the architectural rather than archaeological context of the obelisk, although in 1887 an editorial by Francis Ford in *The Magazine of Art* described the Needle as

‘nothing less than an anachronism in its present position. Far more eloquent was it as it lay prostrate on the sands at Alexandria than it can ever be on the Thames Embankment; but having been brought to London, the only suitable place for its erection was the ground in front of the British Museum, where it might be regarded as part of the collection of the great national storehouse.’<sup>37</sup>

In 1904 Thomas Graham Jackson RA (1835-1924)<sup>38</sup> described the Needle as being

‘now so absurdly perched on the parapet of the Embankment, quite as one might say accidentally, without any relation to the architecture behind it, and certainly none to the river in front. It is not so that the obelisks have been treated at Rome and Paris, where they are made the focus or pivot of “Place” or Piazza.’<sup>39</sup>

Shortly afterwards another magazine revealed that he had an alternative site in mind for it as part of his proposals for a remodelling of Piccadilly Circus.<sup>40</sup> In 1911 *The British Architect* agreed with a correspondent who had criticised the Embankment site, and suggested moving the Needle to the centre of Oxford Circus.<sup>41</sup> As late as 1986, it featured in proposals by the architect Richard Rogers for a major redevelopment of the Charing Cross area which could have seen the Needle relocated to a new focal point space which once again opened up a view from the Strand to the river, ‘approached by a grand staircase, Spanish Steps-style’.<sup>42</sup> These proposals all drew on the

treatment of obelisks in Rome, and to a lesser extent in Paris, rather than in the original sites of the Needles in Egypt, and raise the question of how far the understanding of an obelisk is affected by its site. In the case of the London obelisk, the choice of site had been made on practical and economic grounds, rather than architectural, and unlike the obelisk in Paris, or many of those in Rome, which were sited to take advantage of public squares and vistas. The Embankment site chosen for the Needle was one where it could be seen by pedestrians and passengers on major thoroughfares on both sides of the river, but increasingly mentions of it focussed on its role as an iconic landmark rather than an Ancient Egyptian artefact.

The Needle still retained its biblical connotations. In 1884 *The London Obelisk*, by the author, artist and teacher of drawing and painting George Paterson Yeats, provided an alternative translation for the inscriptions on the Needle.<sup>43</sup> This was based on his belief that the inscriptions on the Needle were in Hebrew, and recorded the feats of the biblical David, who he believed had originally erected the obelisk, and was identified by Yeats with Ramses II. Interviewed in *The Quiver*, a weekly and monthly 'Illustrated Magazine of Social, Intellectual, and Religious Progress', the painter Ernest Normand, talking about his picture 'The Death of Pharaoh's First Born', commented:

'The shrine, as you may observe, closely resembles the Ark of the Covenant, for there is no doubt that Moses got all the Law during the time that he officiated in the identical temple in front of which stood Cleopatra's Needle. Many a day he must have looked at that needle, which now stands between Waterloo and Blackfriars bridges ...'<sup>44</sup>

In 1923, the same magazine carried an article on the discovery and excavation of Tutankhamun's tomb in which the author, referring to Thutmose III, wrote that

'[h]e caused to be erected the obelisk at Heliopolis, now known as Cleopatra's Needle, and which can be seen today on the Thames Embankment. It was to Heliopolis, referred to in Genesis as On, that Joseph and Mary fled with the infant Saviour, and as a child Christ may have played around the feet of this very monument.'<sup>45</sup>

In 1928 the *Daily Telegraph*, in a piece commemorating the jubilee of the Needle's arrival in London wrote of Heliopolis being 'where Joseph's father-in-law was a priest and Moses studied',<sup>46</sup> and in 2018 an online article on the treatment of Cleopatra's Needle in London referred to its original location in Heliopolis.

'From that city came... the first university in history: the University of "On", which carries Heliopolis's old name, before it adopted its Greek name, meaning "Sun City". The University of On is where Prophet Joseph received his education, before marrying the

daughter of On's minister, and having children with her. Aristotle and Plato received education at the same university.<sup>47</sup>

The 1883 account of the history of Needle and exposition of its inscriptions by the Reverend James King was published as the first in a series 'By-Paths of Bible Knowledge' by the Religious Tract Society. An indication of how significant the religious connections of the obelisk remained can be seen in the fact that when in 1926 Sir Wallis Budge's *Cleopatra's Needles and other Egyptian Obelisks* was published, it was not only also published by the Society, but as Budge's Preface makes clear, was 'intended to replace' King's work. Budge went on to note that

As far back as 1848 the Committee of the Society took note of the excavations which were being made by Bankes, Belzoni, Burton, Wilkinson and others in Egypt... and they realized their great importance for the study and right understanding of the historical and other books of the Bible.<sup>48</sup>

King, whilst not directly invoking the trope of slave labour, did refer to the inscriptions on the Needle being 'carved by workmen who were contemporaries of Moses and the Israelites during the time of the Egyptian Bondage', and wrote that 'the toiling, suffering Israelites looked upon it'.<sup>49</sup> (See also 3.3.1 above.) In his work, however, Budge drew for his account of the quarrying and transport of obelisks by the Egyptians on archaeological sources.<sup>50</sup>

It might be expected that attitudes towards the Needle in the first half of the Twentieth century would have reflected the popularity at the time of the extreme diffusionist views of Grafton Elliot Smith (1871-1937)<sup>51</sup> and William Perry (1887-1949)<sup>52</sup> at University College London, which saw Ancient Egypt as the well-spring of human civilisation, but there seems to be no evidence of this.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the trope of the 'Curse of the Pharaohs', the Needle seems to have acquired virtually no occult associations. This was even commented on by *The Observer* in 1928, which wrote that it 'seems to have accepted its change of address without protest... the most timid and the most imaginative have equally failed to trace our misfortunes to any curse implicit in its hieroglyphics. Its twin sister in New York... has been equally well behaved'.<sup>53</sup> The only notable exception was when the notorious occultist Aleister Crowley (1875-1947),<sup>54</sup> who claimed to have experienced an epiphany triggered by the stela of Ankhefenkhonsu in the Cairo Museum, issued a fourth edition of his book *The Equinox of the Gods* at 6am on 22 December 1937 at Cleopatra's Needle. Five copies were presented to 'An Englishman, a Jew, an Indian, a Negro, a Malayan' chosen as representatives of the 'white, red, brown, black [and] yellow' races. A prospectus for the book linked previous editions with the outbreak of the Balkan, First World War, and Sino-Japanese wars.<sup>55</sup>

Given the popularity of Ancient Egyptian themes in fantasy and occult fiction, it also seems surprising that the London Needle, and obelisks in general, have not been used much as a subject or plot element. Typically, such fiction deals with survivals from Ancient Egypt in the form of revivified mummies and other examples of reincarnation and transmigration, or curses and revenge, magical artefacts, and cults preserving occult knowledge, often in combination with each other.<sup>56</sup> Examples include Jane Loudon Webb's *The Mummy*, Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Ring of Thoth* and *Lot No. 249*, Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, and Algernon Blackwood's *The Nemesis of Fire*. One title which might have been expected to include the Needle was Enid Nesbit's 1906 children's story *The Story of the Amulet*. The amulet in question, by means of which a group of children can travel to other times and places, is Egyptian, one of the places in the past to which they travel is Ancient Egypt, and the story is dedicated to Wallis Budge for his help with it. When a character from the past is brought to contemporary London, however, it is the Queen of Babylon, and when her wish is magically granted when she visits the British Museum, it is Babylonian objects, including a large stone bull, which are transported out of the museum. Also, the Queen is taken through London in a cab, on a route along the Thames which includes the Houses of Parliament and Tower Bridge, but the Needle is not mentioned. The 1898 'revenge of the mummy' novel *Pharos the Egyptian*,<sup>57</sup> by Guy Boothby (1867-1905)<sup>58</sup> does feature Cleopatra's Needle in London, but as a location for the artist narrator's first encounter with the eponymous Pharos and not as a significant plot element in itself, or an object of occult power.

I... made my way along the Embankment towards Cleopatra's Needle... I suppose I must have been thinking of my picture, and of the land and period which had given me the idea. At any rate, I know that on this occasion the ancient monument, in front of which I soon found myself, affected me as it had never done before. I thought of the centuries that had passed since those hieroglyphics were carved upon the stone, of the changes the world had seen since that giant monolith first saw the light of day.<sup>59</sup>

A few stories of the fantastic did feature the Needle, for example the 1892 novel *The Soul of Lilith*, by Marie Corelli (1855-1924)<sup>60</sup> where one of the characters, Zaroba, dies at the foot of the obelisk.<sup>61</sup> In 1911 *The Needlewoman*, a short novel by the popular writer Matilda Graham, saw the Needle struck by lightning, producing a mysterious fissure, and shortly afterwards the appearance in London of the mysterious 'Mrs Romme', a reincarnation of Cleopatra. Ten years later *The Pilgrim of a Smile*, already mentioned, used the granting of wishes by one of the Needle sphinxes to link a collection of short stories. In the 2006 children's novel *Stoneheart*, by Charlie Fletcher, the sphinxes by the Needle, along with other London statues, come to life. The title with the clearest link between the Needles, in this case the New York Needle, and Ancient Egypt and the occult, seems to be *Obelisk*, written under the *nom de plume* of Ehren M Ehly by the Egyptian

born Moreen le Fleming Ehly (1929-2012).<sup>62</sup> An occult horror story involving tomb robbery and possession by the spirit of an Ancient Egyptian prince, its climax is set at Cleopatra's Needle in Central Park, New York City.

The Embankment location of the Needle became associated, especially during the Great Depression between the two World Wars, with political marches and demonstrations and rough sleepers, and so many mentions of it in the press are simply as an iconic London landmark. In 1911 it had been used by a group of Suffragists who spent the night there to avoid the Census, and were photographed sitting or standing on its right hand sphinx.<sup>63</sup> On a more macabre note, the Needle is frequently associated with press reports of suicides by drowning (suicide remained illegal until 1961), which were often described as occurring 'near Cleopatra's Needle'. Again, this might simply reflect the use of the obelisk as an iconic landmark, but the connection was well enough established to feature in plays and stories. A production of 'Hoodman Blind' at the Princess Theatre, London included an attempted suicide 'which takes place on the Thames Embankment under the shadow of Cleopatra's Needle...'.<sup>64</sup> A short story or novella, 'The Mystery of M. Felix', serialised in *London Society* in 1890, began with a female character apparently trying to commit suicide at the Needle, but actually throwing in a bundle, originally thought to be her baby, but really containing objects which allow the journalist hero to unravel the mysterious murder of the titular M. Felix. The woman is subsequently charged with attempted suicide, but the journalist is able to get the charge dismissed.<sup>65</sup> In another short story, *The Thousand Pound Note*, a central character, tricked into guaranteeing a debt which will ruin him and his old nurse, tries to commit suicide in the Thames near Cleopatra's Needle, but in doing so finds a £1,000 note which has blown into the river, which solves his financial problems.<sup>66</sup>

Such fiction was enough of a cliché to be satirised in 1898 in 'Our Condensed Serial', a feature in the comic magazine *Judy*, February 2 1898, which began with the heroine standing on the Thames Embankment with 'nothing to live for'. Later, 'Lord Dudesley lay there, stark, still, and motionless on the grey steps of Cleopatra's Needle. He was dead – dead drunk!!!'.<sup>67</sup> The Needle also featured in a number of short stories which did not involve suicide, but did reflect the connection of the Embankment with other forms of social distress, such as 'The Finger of God',<sup>68</sup> in which a wealthy widow dispensing charity to down and outs on the Embankment by Cleopatra's Needle meets a poet and novelist in distressed circumstances and falls in love. Another, about the redemption of a fallen woman, pregnant by a senior civil servant, which began on a winter night by Cleopatra's Needle, was unusual in making reference to the Needle's inscriptions.

'She was standing at the foot of Cleopatra's Needle, and her face was upturned to its cruel surface, whereon could be read – picked out now with tracing of white, as if the

finger that once wrote upon the wall had been busy with them – the savage hieroglyphics that speak of the remorseless despotism of man’<sup>69</sup>

In 1927 *The Cleopatra Needle Mystery* was one of the Sexton Blake Library mystery series, but despite the title, and a cover illustration which shows a body in evening dress sprawled at the base of the Needle, its only appearance is as the location where three friends vow to meet again thirty years later, and where they do. One of them, however, is an imposter disguised as one of the original three, who swindles the other two out of money and has imprisoned their friend. In the same year the popular novelist J M Walsh (1897-1952)<sup>70</sup> published *The Crimes of Cleopatra’s Needle*, but although the heroine witnesses a fatal stabbing at the Needle at the beginning of the book, and photos of the obelisk pasted onto visiting cards are sent by a mysterious secret society to their victims, the plot revolves around a conspiracy to gain control of oil wells in an imaginary Middle Eastern state.

Given nineteenth century concerns with the phallic symbolism of obelisks (see 3.3.2 above, especially the works of Hargrave Jennings), it would seem almost inevitable that this aspect of the Needles would be even more remarked on in the twentieth century, when the theories of Sigmund Freud were so influential. Although Freud was influenced by Ancient Egypt, and had a collection of Egyptian antiquities, a number of which were displayed on his desk,<sup>71</sup> he does not seem to have highlighted this aspect of obelisks, although it was remarked on by Carl Jung.<sup>72</sup> In fiction, it was used by E M Forster in his short story *The Obelisk*, which is set around a memorial obelisk in an unnamed seaside town, where one of the characters not only uses innuendo to refer to the phallic symbolism of that obelisk, rhetorically asking whether anyone has ever seen a bigger one, but supplies the answer to his own question by saying that he has seen Cleopatra’s Needle.<sup>73</sup>

The Needle gave its name to a few pieces of music, from the second of four sections in the 1922 piano suite *The Silent Highway*, by composer of light music Percy Elliott (1870-1932)<sup>74</sup> to a 1963 surf rock track by Ahab and the Wailers and a 1968 track and album by the jazz saxophonist Ronnie Ross; however, all of these alluded to its new role as an iconic London landmark. Only in poetry was there still a focus on its Egyptian identity. The 1881 sonnet ‘Tiber, Nile and Thames’, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)<sup>75</sup> was originally titled ‘Cleopatra’s Needle’.<sup>76</sup>

And thou, Cleopatra’s Needle, that hadst thrid  
Great skirts of Time ere she and Antony hid  
Dead hope!—hast thou too reached, surviving death,  
A city of sweet speech scorned,—on whose chill stone

Keats withered, Coleridge pined, and Chatterton,  
Breadless, with poison froze the God-fired breath?

The 1886 collection *A Heart's Obsession. Sonnets of the City and other poems* by Robert Steggall had forty-four *Sonnets of the City*, one of which was on Cleopatra's Needle. Although it evoked the Egyptian past of the obelisk, one reviewer felt that the poems were '[c]haracterised by much of the empty grandiloquence of the post-Rossettian poet. There is one on Cleopatra's Needle commencing with this tremendous verse - "Petrified past! Concrete Antiquity!"'.<sup>77</sup> Another reviewer in *The Athenaeum* described Steggall as "dreadfully in earnest".<sup>78</sup> The following year, a reviewer writing about 'Songs of Britain', a collection by the poet and educationist Lewis Morris (1833-1907)<sup>79</sup> described one of them as 'A long and limp poem on Cleopatra's Needle'.<sup>80</sup> In its twenty-two quatrains, Morris alluded to three key tropes linked to the Needle; the fact that London would fall into ruin, as had On/Heliopolis, the possibility that the monolith would be taken away to another city sometime in the future, and the risk that it would crumble away under the influence of the northern climate. In 1888 *XXXII Ballades in Blue China* by the poet, anthropologist, Classicist and historian Andrew Lang (1844-1912)<sup>81</sup> had a 'Ballade on Cleopatra's Needle'.<sup>82</sup> *New Poems*, a collection by Saint John Welles Lucas (1879-1934)<sup>83</sup> published in 1908, had a thirty-two stanza poem entitled 'Cleopatra's Needle', which evoked the Needle as a seemingly eternal witness to the transient lives of men and women, and called it a 'captive from the silent East'. *The Manchester Guardian*, referring to rumours that the Needle was to be moved to the South Kensington Museum to protect it from pollution, noted that 'It would be a particular loss to poets, although it has ceased to be the thing for every self-respecting poet to try his verse on it'.<sup>84</sup> It then went on to quote lines composed by Alfred Tennyson (1809-1882)<sup>85</sup> for the pedestal, but allegedly rejected by Erasmus Wilson as they referred to the Needle being brought to England by its citizens 'for their own renown', and a traditional rhyme probably inspired by an 1848 advertisement in verse for E Moses & Son, a leading clothing manufacturer and retailer. The rhyme, which appears in several variants, summarises the history of the Needle.

'This obelisk, as some supposes,  
Was gazed on by the prophet Moses.  
It passed in turn to the Greeks and Turks,  
And was stuck up here by the Board of Works.'

The Needle narrowly escaped damage in the First World War, when a German bomb hit the pavement near the right-hand sphinx, killing the driver and two passengers on a passing tram, and in 1969 a plaque was added to the sphinx's pedestal to commemorate this. It survived the Second World War without incident.

There had been little interest in its inscriptions in the past, and the only attention paid to them after its arrival seems to have been in 1966, when John Harris of University College Oxford, later Professor of Egyptology at Copenhagen and Durham Universities, took advantage of scaffolding set up when the Needle was being cleaned to examine them. Even he remarked that '[t]he errors and omissions [in previous translations] have little significance to the outside world, but it is just as well to get them right'.<sup>86</sup> He failed to subsequently publish his epigraphy, although it was drawn on by Erik Iversen (1909-2001)<sup>87</sup> in the version of the Needle's inscriptions published in *Obelisks in Exile*.

What *The Times* called 'our distinguished visitor' at the time of its arrival now seems to have settled into a new role as an iconic monument. Like many inhabitants of the city, it has become a Londoner by residence, if not by origin. As it has done so, there have been changes and continuities in the way it has been perceived since its re-erection. Concern over its condition has continued, even if time has proved the most pessimistic assessments of its survival to be overstated, and much of the concern seems to depict it as a metaphorical victim of a hostile urban environment, like the inhabitants of the capital. Views of it which were important in the past, such as its role as a military monument, imperial trophy, or religious witness are now far less important, and it is primarily recognised as an Ancient Egyptian artefact. Along with this, however, has come an increasing lack of awareness of its history, and a tendency to assume that it was acquired by unacceptable means and should not have been. Despite this emphasis on its Egyptian identity, however, because of its location in a public site in the city centre, the Needle has assumed a new role as an iconic landmark of London. Visiting celebrities have been photographed by one of its sphinxes, it has made a cameo appearance in various films, fiction, and music, and been included in landscape art, but its most common appearance was on postcards. Taken together, these changes in the way it is perceived can be seen as emphasising the dynamic nature of the process of reception of Ancient Egypt through its artefacts.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion – Property and Perception

[T]he history of Egyptology is composed of many histories: of discoveries, ideas, sites, institutions, politics, and more. Individual artefacts often have extensive stories of their own.<sup>1</sup>

Because obelisks are so old, we tend to think of them as staying the same while everything around them changed. But even in ancient times what we now know as Cleopatra's Needles were moved, and had inscriptions added. Their story is the story of the engagement of Greece and Rome with Egypt, the disengagement of Byzantium and Islam, the preservation of the memory of Ancient Egypt through the Biblical narrative, the rediscovery of Classical accounts of it in the Renaissance, the beginnings of scientific study of it in the Enlightenment, the seismic change in Europe's engagement with Egypt at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the first global war spilled out of Europe, and the subsequent struggles between empires and by nations to acquire empires, the effects of which are still playing out today.

### 5.1 Whose is the past, and what is it worth?

One of the main premises of this thesis was that the process by which the Alexandrian obelisk now in London was acquired could best be understood through concepts of property and value. It has asked why it was thought worthwhile to acquire it, who was considered to be responsible for the costs of this, and the status of the obelisk. Historically, obelisks had been transported from Egypt by the order of heads of state like Roman emperors, and the three French monarchs involved in the removal of the Luxor obelisk to Paris, using state funds. The first attempt to bring the fallen obelisk at Alexandria to England can be seen as something of a departure from this, and in the nature of what we would now call a public-private partnership. It would have used privately subscribed funds to pay for the transport of the obelisk, but the Needle would have been presented to the reigning monarch.

This reflects an era when the 79<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot which took part in the Egyptian Campaign of 1801 could be privately raised by Sir Alan Cameron (1750-1828),<sup>2</sup> and where prize money from the capture or sinking of enemy ships was as significant a motivator as patriotism in warfare, and where the vessel for intended for the transport of the Needle in 1802 had been purchased from prize agents acting on behalf of the captors.<sup>3</sup> In such a context, the distinction between private and state property is not always clear. The sculptural Egyptian antiquities acquired by French forces and surrendered to British forces, including two small 30<sup>th</sup> dynasty obelisks,<sup>4</sup> were deemed

to be spoils of war and presented to the sovereign, and by him to the nascent national museum, originally founded in 1759.<sup>5</sup> The first large obelisk to leave Egypt in modern times, however, now at Kingston Lacy in Dorset, was acquired as private property by the wealthy collector and traveller William Bankes, who paid Giovanni Belzoni to arrange its transport, although it was shipped to London in H M Naval Transport *Dispatch*.<sup>6</sup>

Initially the motivation to bring the Needle to England was for it to act as a military memorial, and in this role its Egyptian identity can be seen as more of a link to the sites of naval and military victories, and a more general use of obelisks as memorials, than an acknowledgement of the culture which created it and the obelisk's role within that culture. Subsequently, having been presented to Britain by the *de facto* ruler of Egypt, it was considered to be the property of the British nation, and agitation for it to be brought to London focussed on this aspect rather than its desirability as an Egyptian antiquity.

The costs of acquisition were definitely an issue which prevented the Needle being brought to London earlier than it was, but perhaps the real question is why the political will was never there to find the necessary money. There were certainly pressures on government finance at various points throughout the nineteenth century, but governments generally find money for things that they want to do. The poor state of preservation of the Needle was given as a reason for not bringing it to England on a number of occasions, but there were enough realistic assessments available to believe that invoking this concern may have been a useful excuse to not declare the more significant reason, that the political costs of acquiring it would outweigh the benefits. In this sense the debate was not over the monetary value of the obelisk, and the cost of acquiring it, but the non-monetary costs and values.

Ultimately the obelisk was acquired through private philanthropy (including the substantial contribution made by John Dixon), but with the tacit support of Government. (In the case of the New York obelisk government support was more overt.) Here, the network of social and professional connections within civil society, and between it and government, played a crucial part. Wilson himself was to say, in a letter to W R Cooper, who wrote a book on Egyptian obelisks including the London Needle

The game then lies between Dixon and Wilson; the Government is out of the game altogether; but we can't plant our baby on British ground without Government permission; and, moreover, we expect Government to take care of it when it is so planted.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, there was to be no official ceremony when the Needle was re-erected, or official recognition for those involved, apart from the minimal acknowledgement of the pedestal inscriptions, but in the same letter Wilson went on to observe

touching the obelisk, by-gones should be by-gones, and all recrimination wiped away. If you or I had been in the Government we should doubtless have acted as the Government has done, that is I hope so; but not being in the Government we needn't dictate to them what they ought to have done and didn't do.<sup>8</sup>

Because of the ambiguous attitude of various British Governments, the Needle has, at one time or another, been treated as private and state property in legal courts, claimed on behalf of the ill-defined 'British Nation' or 'British People', accepted by the quasi-governmental Metropolitan Board of Works, and then passed by succession to other local governmental and non-governmental bodies. This raises the question of its current ownership status, which like other archaeological material is probably that of being held in the stewardship of the state for the benefit of the public. Most such material is in museums, but the Needle is unusual in being displayed in a public site without controlled access, giving it elements of communal or open access property.

Any archaeological material can be viewed as an embodiment of cultural property or heritage, but large, high status objects such as obelisks, which are often associated with historical personalities, are particularly likely to be associated with calls for their return or repatriation to their country of origin. The publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 popularised a view of European dominance of, and victimisation of, cultures in the Near and Middle East, tending to lead to the assumption that any material from these cultures was therefore illicitly acquired and should be returned. However, Said's views have subsequently been challenged by scholars presenting a more nuanced picture of European interaction with the region, and with Egypt.<sup>9</sup>

The vexed issue of retention or return also raises the question of the role of states in defining cultural property. At the time of the French expedition to Egypt and its defeat, there seems little evidence that either the Mamluk rulers of Egypt or the central Ottoman government were concerned about the removal of Ancient Egyptian antiquities. During the reigns of Muhammad Ali and his successors, although some steps were taken to prevent this, they were seldom enforced with any rigour, and Muhammad Ali in particular treated antiquities as useful currency to obtain diplomatic and economic benefits. In 1855, the contents of a nascent Egyptian national museum were given away by his successor Said to the Austrian Archduke Maximilian (later to become the ill-fated Emperor of Mexico).<sup>10</sup> Only with the development of an indigenous nationalism in the later nineteenth century does there begin to be evidence of widespread and growing opposition

to the export of antiquities, as evidenced by reactions to the gift by the Khedives Ismail and Tewfik of the obelisk now in New York. In the case of the London and New York obelisks, it can be argued that although the Khedives, as holders of executive and legislative power, had, or acted as if they had, the legal right of disposal of them, and that the process of acquisition was legally formalised, there was not an equality of relations between the states involved, particularly in view of the catastrophic indebtedness of the Egyptian economy, which had been enthusiastically facilitated by European banks. It is perhaps worth remembering though, that however long it took to accept Muhammad Ali's gift, the London obelisk could still be viewed as a gesture of gratitude for British assistance in defeating Napoleon's forces, and that much more recently the Egyptian government gave temples to The Netherlands, Italy, USA, and Spain as recognition of their support for rescue archaeology during construction of the Aswan Dam.<sup>11</sup>

## 5.2 What have the Egyptians ever done for us?

Too close a focus on how the Needle was acquired, and on what basis, can cause us to lose sight of what we acquired, and why we acquired it. On one level, what we acquired is simple: if the obelisk was in a museum, its salient details such as culture, date, material, find spot, inscriptions, etc. would be listed in a catalogue, perhaps with brief curator's notes on its context. The Needle, however, although consistently recognised as an Egyptian obelisk, has been understood and valued in many other different ways, and by different groups, over time. It has been described as priceless, but assigned a value. It has been viewed as raw material for building, an archaeological antiquity, a witness to secular and religious history, and an artistic object.

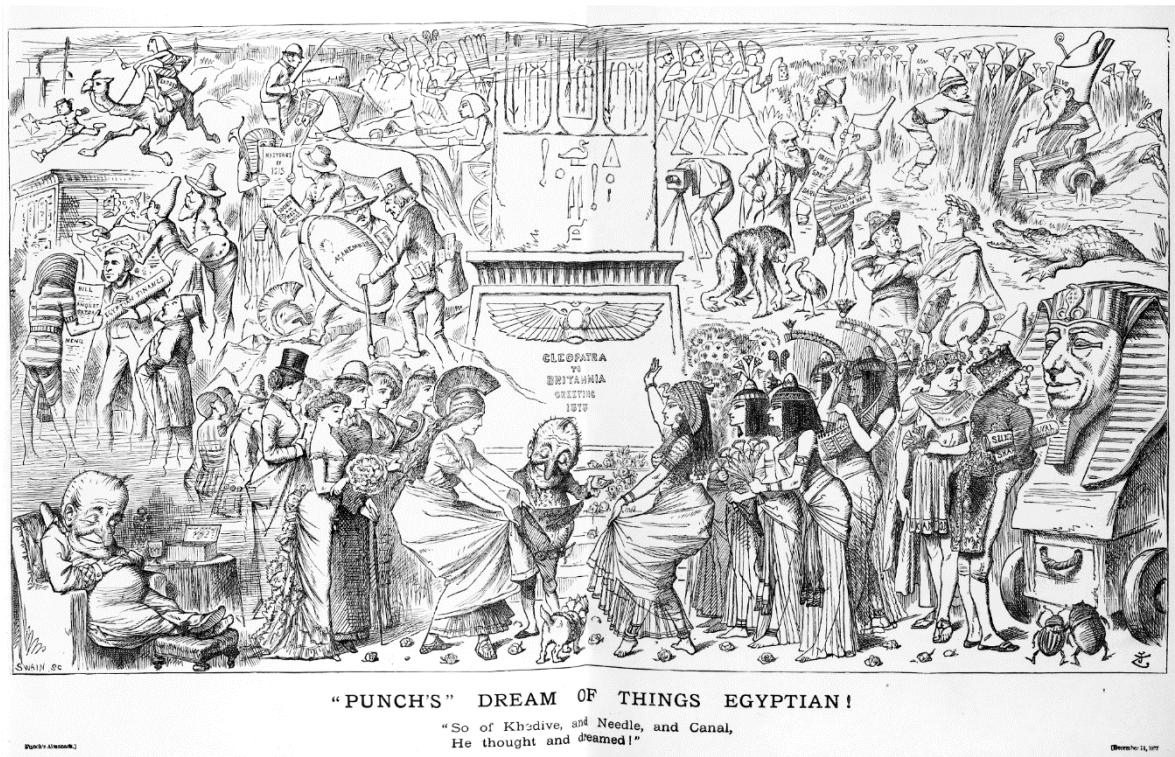


Figure 23 - Cartoon from *Punch* illustrating the variety of associations of Cleopatra's Needle around the time of its arrival in London. *Punch* 14 December 1877. (Author's Collection.)

During their existence so far, their metaphorical lives, the Needles have moved within and between cultures on a number of occasions. It is easy to treat past societies as static and unchanging, but Thutmoside and Ramesside Egypt were not the same, and it is worth remembering that there is approximately as much time between Thutmose III and Ramses II as between ourselves and the Victorian Britain to which the Needle came. Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, while preserving much of the existing culture, were also very different from the Egypt of these two Pharaohs. Likewise, our modern responses to past societies are neither uniform nor unchanging.

The initial reception of the Needle was complex, and has been dealt with in some detail, but was essentially the reception of an Egyptian antiquity directly from Egypt. However, because it was not the first obelisk to be relocated in Europe, or even the first in modern times, the way in which it was received was influenced by previous examples, especially the obelisks brought to Rome Augustus and his successors, and the way in which these in turn were subsequently re-erected by a series of popes. The three obelisks brought to Europe in the nineteenth century, the two Cleopatra's Needles now in London and New York, and the obelisk from Luxor now in Paris, have all been treated differently, maintaining some previous practices and changing others. All have been placed in secular public spaces, and if the London Needle had been placed in the preferred

site of Parliament Square, two of the three would have been in sites with historical and political associations, the Paris obelisk being in the Place de la Concorde. This choice of sites was clearly different from the original Egyptian practice, but also to that of popes, who normally sited obelisks in public spaces which were in close proximity to religious buildings. The London and Paris obelisks were placed on taller pedestals, with inscriptions on these, echoing the Roman practice. As the example of the Luxor obelisk still in Egypt and on its original pedestal goes to show, Egyptian pedestals were not only lower, but could be carved with reliefs or, as other examples such as the base fragments of obelisk pedestals in Alexandria suggest, with inscriptions. Like the Constantinople obelisk, the Paris one has reliefs illustrating its transport as well as other inscriptions, and, if John Dixon had not been overruled by the Board of Works, so would the London Needle. In the event, it was given a combination of inscribed bronze plaques referring to its ancient and modern history. The New York Needle was re-erected on its Roman pedestal from Alexandria, and secured with reproductions of the Roman bronze astragal clamps used there. Apart from a small inscribed plaque with historical information, its pedestal has been left unaltered. The Paris obelisk has a gilded cap on its pyramidion, copying the Egyptian practice, the New York obelisk is undecorated, and the London obelisk has decorative bronzework in an Egyptian style on its pedestal and around its base. None of the obelisks moved in modern times has had decorations in the style of the obelisks re-erected by the popes in Rome. These different treatments go to emphasise the complexity of a process of reception which has extended over thousands of years.

Perhaps as important, however, is the way that such objects metaphorically take root in their new locations, and acquire new associations unrelated to their original culture and use, or indeed to the associations they had when they first arrived. The inscription plaques added to the pedestal of the London obelisk made it a memorial to the victories of Nelson and Abercromby, but also to the six seamen who died during its voyage to England. They commemorated its origins in Egypt, but also a partial history of its acquisition. Since then, it has been a part of the cityscape, an icon of London as well as Egypt. If new cultural practices are emerging around it, they may have more to do with modern tourism to England or the routes of demonstrations through the political heart of Britain than with Ancient Egypt. The belief that the obelisk was a metaphorical witness to literal biblical history is much less widely held now, but still exists, and belief in the occult wisdom of Ancient Egypt, sometimes referred to as Egyptosophy, is a persistent phenomenon. Better access to Egyptian antiquities and information about Ancient Egypt does not necessarily lead to a better informed understanding of it and its material culture.

Cleopatra's Needle is the only major Egyptian antiquity in London on public display outside a museum, and because of this raises interesting questions in relation to the role of museums and

their displays in actively creating knowledge and understanding, rather than as they tended to be viewed, as passively transmitting knowledge.<sup>12</sup> As an object, it lacks the star status of the Rosetta Stone, with its crowds of visitors thronged around it like pilgrims at the shrine of a saint, but it is interesting to speculate how people would react to the obelisk if it were in a museum rather than a public space. If the obelisk were a person, it would have spent the equivalent of a few years of its life in London. Very little, but still long enough to start becoming part of our heritage as well as that of Egypt's.

### 5.3 The Exceptional Egyptian Obelisk?

Even within their own culture obelisks were extraordinary objects, and have subsequently been the largest Egyptian antiquities which can be transported in a single piece. So it is worth asking how far obelisks outside Egypt are exceptional items of historical material culture, and how far conclusions reached about them can be applied more generally.

Are they are untypical of historical material culture in general, which is nowadays associated with museums and to a lesser extent with private collections? Perhaps only in the way that they are displayed, apart from a few smaller examples which are in museums, and the ease of public engagement with them. Evidence cited in this thesis does not suggest that they are understood in a fundamentally different way to other Egyptian antiquities.

When studying historical material culture the focus can often be on the role of objects or structures within the society which produced them, and not on their subsequent history. In their originating culture, obelisks can be seen as examples of the performance of identity through the objectification of social relations and value systems in artefacts. While they can still be seen as fulfilling this function in other cultures, or later phases of their own, the social relations and value systems, as well as the identities involved, are likely to be substantially different, especially over the time spans associated with archaeological artefacts. The objects don't change, but the way they are perceived does, and material culture is more than just what things are made of, or what they were originally made for. Most Egyptian obelisks are now located outside Egypt, and a full consideration of them must therefore involve aspects outside their 'Egyptian' identity.

The meanings, associations, and values that objects acquire, and lose, are as much part of their story as their original function. As Thomas put it, 'objects are not [just] what they were made to be, but what they have become'.<sup>13</sup> As societies change, and objects are transferred between societies, the objects undergo changes in context and understanding.

How far the original values associated with objects are maintained depends on their effectiveness as carriers of meaning, or to put it another way their degree of agency. If agency rests solely with the object, this implies that it should remain stable over time. However, as we have seen with obelisks, the loss of the cultural practices associated with them, and of understanding of the language and script of their inscriptions, meant that their original meaning was largely lost until modern times. Although they continued to have meanings attached to them, which they could communicate, these changed as the cultural context surrounding them and understanding of them altered in a process which was both active and creative. They can still be seen as having agency, but the nature of this agency was changed.

All material culture can be seen as undergoing a process of transfer within cultures and between them. Even when a culture remains relatively stable, as was the case with Pharaonic Egypt, objects are still perceived in different contexts by later phases of that culture, and even when material culture remains in the area in which it was created it is difficult to think of a society which has not eventually been subject to tectonic shifts in culture. Egypt underwent a series of invasions, associated with the establishment of new cultural forms and values, particularly due to the rise of Christianity and the arrival of Islam, which affected the ways in which the material culture of earlier eras was perceived and valued. Objects can also be transferred between cultures and geographical areas, as happened when Ancient Egyptian material culture was acquired by ancient Rome and Byzantium and modern European states.

There are a number of ways, or modes of transfer, by which material culture can pass to cultures other than succeeding versions of the originating culture, and three of the most significant all involve issues of ownership. They can be defined as looting, purchase, and gift. Looting is a problematic term, as it is often loosely applied to any historical transfer of material culture, regardless of the circumstances in which it took place. As a working definition, it could be considered to apply to objects taken without consent with the direct or implied threat of force. At its simplest this would cover spoils of war acquired by foreign armies and taken from a country, but the picture becomes more complicated when considering situations like the removal of obelisks from Egypt by the Romans, or the acquisition by British forces of antiquities already taken by the French. Here, the issue becomes one of how far the consent of an indigenous population is applicable when a territory is ruled by an outside power. In Roman times Egypt was a province of the Roman Empire, and until the twentieth century one of the Ottoman Empire. In both cases the ruling powers would have assumed the right to dispose of historic material culture as they chose. Transfer by purchase may seem more straightforward, but even here the issues can be complicated. The acquisition of Egyptian antiquities in the early nineteenth century, which included the transport by Giovanni Belzoni of the obelisk from Philae for William Bankes, required

both the permission of Ottoman authorities through the grant of firmans, and also payments, particularly to local populations for their labour. Again, there are complex questions of how far this reflected the value placed on such items by the ruling powers and the indigenous population, and the general context of an economy large sections of which constituted a state monopoly. Transfer by gift may seem even simpler, but even here the question arises of whether the donating party had the right to dispose of the items concerned. Despite any laws they might have passed against the export of antiquities, Muhammad Ali and his successors gave away both single objects, like the Luxor and Alexandrian obelisks, and collections of antiquities assembled for a nascent national collection, implying that they considered themselves to hold both legislative and executive power.<sup>14</sup>

The distinction between commodities and gifts is especially relevant in the case of the Alexandrian obelisks. The fallen obelisk was initially requested by senior officers in the British forces, and would in all probability have been given to the British monarch. There does not seem to be any evidence that this request was opposed by the Ottoman authorities at the time, but it was vetoed by the British high command. The Needle was then offered by Muhammad Ali as a gift to British monarchs, and again by his successor Ismail to the British nation or people. However, while this may seem to establish its status as a gift, as we have seen its transport was funded on a commercial basis, and it was during the legal action for salvage treated as a cargo, effectively giving it the status of a commodity. The apparent contradiction between these two statuses can perhaps be explained by looking more closely at the nature of gift exchanges, particularly in the context of relations between different states and cultures. While both Britain, as a European power, and Egypt, as part of the Ottoman Empire, had gift cultures which extended to the political sphere, this does not necessarily mean that exchanges between them operated on a straightforward reciprocal basis. Discussing various perspectives on gifts and commodities in various societies, Nicholas Thomas quotes the view of the anthropologist Christopher Gregory that a gift creates a relationship of indebtedness, one in which gifts are inalienable, and move between parties who are reciprocally dependent.<sup>15</sup> He also notes Gregory's analysis that while commodities have prices, gifts have rank.

When viewed in the context of the relationship between Muhammad Ali and his successors, particularly Ismail, and European powers, the Alexandrian and Luxor obelisks, as well as being diplomatic gifts, can be seen as an attempt by the Khedives to establish a reciprocal relationship. Ismail's insistence that the Needle should be accepted by the British government is especially relevant here. While the status of the obelisk as both antiquity and imperial trophy may have made it something which the British desired, their unwillingness to support or recognise the independence of Egypt meant that they had to reject any implication that acceptance of the gift

formed part of a reciprocal relationship. While the cost of acquiring the Needle was a factor, it seems clear that the continuing reluctance of the British government to complete the transfer of the gift was due to its wider implications for the relationship between the two countries.

Eventually, the deadlock was broken by the action of private individuals, albeit with tacit establishment support, meaning that the process was contractual, and that when the *Cleopatra* was salved, its status was that of a commodity cargo. It is interesting to note, however, that Burrell's attempt to force the sale by auction of the Needle would in all probability have led to its purchase by him and subsequent gift to the City of Glasgow. In contrast to the failed attempts by the Khedives to establish a gift relationship, there is every likelihood that Burrell's gift, just like that of Wilson and Dixon, would have been considered an appropriate one. Once given to the state, via the quasi-state Metropolitan Board of Works, the Needle acquired the status of an object which it would be improper to again give away, or to sell.

Because of the length of time over which the process of acquisition of the Needle took place, and how long it has now been in London, summarising it is difficult. It is perhaps possible, though, to suggest that broadly speaking we are looking at a political focus before its transport, and a broadly cultural one afterwards. At the beginning of the process, the original function of obelisks, and understanding of it, had both been lost. Eventually, understanding was partially recovered, but in place of the original functions were new political ones using Cleopatra's Needle as part of a gift relationship between state administrations, and for the legitimisation of imperial power. As knowledge of and understanding about Ancient Egypt developed during the nineteenth century, it was combined with existing information and concepts, particularly those from Classical and Biblical sources. Rather than replacing them, the new understanding overlaid them, but the emphasis was on supporting current social and political values rather than adopting earlier ones. To this extent, although the Needle is an example of material culture acting as a mechanism for transmission of values, these were not to any significant extent those of its originating culture. Rather, it tends to emphasise how much in a dynamic and continuing process of reception, the cultural content being transmitted is weighted towards that which has been most recently acquired, and how far it is received differently or selectively by different groups in the receiving culture.

Moving from consideration of the Needle as a specific example of the process of reception to the nature of this process in general, we can draw on the obelisk and the ways in which it has been understood to suggest how the reception of material culture from the past operates. Far from being passive, it needs to be seen as interactive. Objects reflect and embody abstract human values, and once created can exercise agency as prompts or catalysts for beliefs and actions. Some of these, in turn, may affect the form, function, or presentation of the objects, which in turn

can prompt fresh responses to them. Seen in this way, the enduring afterlife of Ancient Egypt can be viewed as a combination of ideas and objects. The ideas imbue the objects with significance, and the materiality of the objects helps the ideas to endure. Reception is not just the initial impact of material culture from the past, but its continuing influence, and changing understandings of it. If, to borrow Miller's phrase, 'things matter',<sup>16</sup> reception can be thought of as being about what mattered, and what matters, to whom, and why.

One of the most important ways in which we define ourselves is in relation to past societies, our own and others. An important reason for acquiring or copying the material culture of the past is to seek emulation by association. When we look at the past, however, we tend to see ourselves, and often seek confirmation, rather than challenge, of our current views in the past. Veracity of beliefs can be less important than their cultural relevance, and existing or new constructs shape perception of the past. We will only want to preserve the past if we value it and wish to possess it, and this should involve not only understanding the complexity of the past, our common property, but also the complexity of our past understandings of it.

## Appendix A The New York Needle

A detailed examination of the reception in America of the standing obelisk at Alexandria, now in Central Park New York, is beyond the scope of this thesis. It must be considered though, however briefly, in order to ask how far the ways in which the London obelisk were understood and valued were peculiar to the circumstances in which it was acquired, and how far they can be applied to the New York obelisk and in wider contexts.

### A.1 An Obelisk for Jonathan

In the absence of further archival research, our current understanding of the acquisition of the second obelisk at Alexandria relies heavily on two accounts; one by Henry Gorringe, the man who was eventually entrusted with its removal, transport to New York, and re-erection, and the other by Elbert Farman (1831-1911),<sup>1</sup> United States Consul-General in Egypt between 1876 and 1881,<sup>2</sup> who was instrumental in the negotiations for its acquisition.<sup>3</sup> Gorringe claimed that it was first offered by the Khedive Ismail to William Henry Hurlbert (1827-1895),<sup>4</sup> then writing for the *New York World* newspaper, and later to become its Editor-in-Chief, at the opening ceremonies for the Suez Canal in 1869. Nothing came of this at the time, but according to Gorringe and Farman, the mechanical engineer Louis Sterne (1835-1924), American-born but British-resident from 1865, and a friend of John Dixon,<sup>5</sup> told Hurlbert while on a visit to New York in 1877 that Dixon could secure the second Alexandrian obelisk for the USA, and undertake to transport it to New York. Farman said that a New York newspaper, presumably the *New York World*, published an erroneous report that the Khedive Ismail had expressed to Dixon his willingness if asked to present the remaining Alexandrian obelisk to the City of New York, and that Dixon had agreed to transport it for £15,000.<sup>6</sup> Either Hurlbert or the Commissioner of the Department of Public Parks in New York, Henry G Stebbins (1811-1881),<sup>7</sup> then contacted the railway magnate William H Vanderbilt (1821-1885), who agreed to provide all the funding,<sup>8</sup> but according to Gorringe after it became clear that Dixon was not prepared to negotiate with the Khedive for the gift of the obelisk, and expected this to be done by the US Government, a letter was written by Stebbins to the then Secretary of State, William M Evarts (1818-1901),<sup>9</sup> asking for official support.

Evarts then instructed Farman, the US Consul-General, to open negotiations with the Khedive. In a letter to Evarts,<sup>10</sup> Farman expressed his concern that 'there will be serious opposition to the removal of the obelisk' from Alexandria, and indicated that although Ismail was disposed to grant an obelisk, potential opposition in Alexandria led him to favour the remaining obelisk at Luxor instead. Farman felt that this would be preferable, and may well have encouraged Ismail in this

direction.<sup>11</sup> In due course, however, Farman secured the agreement of the Khedive, confirmed by his Minister of Foreign Affairs Chérif Pasha in May 1879, to the gift of the remaining Alexandrian obelisk. Both Farman and Chérif agreed that it would be 'a souvenir and a pledge' of friendship between the Government of the United States and that of the Khedive. According to Gorringe, Evarts passed this news to Hurlbert, who then contacted Dixon. By this time, however, the London obelisk had been re-erected, and in the light of his experience with this Dixon raised his fee to £20,000.<sup>12</sup> Hurlbert then broke off negotiations, and Stebbins began to forward other proposals to him.

In June 1879 Gorringe, a Lieutenant-Commander in the U S Navy, had become aware through the *New York World* of the gift of the obelisk and Vanderbilt's funding of its transport. He had seen the obelisk in Alexandria, and after developing proposals for its transport with a U S Naval colleague, Lieutenant Seaton Schroeder (1849-1922),<sup>13</sup> submitted them to Hurlbert. The proposal was accepted by Vanderbilt, who was prepared to pay \$75,000 on a similar basis to Erasmus Wilson's contract with Dixon. No payment would be made until the obelisk was transported undamaged and re-erected in New York, within a year. Supported with working capital by a friend, Louis F Whitin, on whom biographical information is scant, and granted leave of absence from the Navy Department, Gorringe, with Schroeder as his assistant, made their way to Egypt.

After a meeting with the Khedive Tewfik, who had succeeded his father Ismail after the latter had been deposed by the Sultan, Gorringe secured the formal transfer of the obelisk from the Governor of Alexandria. The accounts of Gorringe and Farman both detail opposition to the removal of the obelisk from foreign residents of Alexandria, including legal challenges similar to Demetrio's on the basis of claims against the Egyptian government, as well as from Heinrich Brugsch (1827-1894)<sup>14</sup> and from Auguste Mariette (1821-1881),<sup>15</sup> who had established the Egyptian Antiquities Service, and who formally objected to the Council of Ministers. Maintenance of the city streets and associated infrastructure such as sewers had been privatised by the Egyptian government, and land transport of the obelisk to the main harbour was blocked by European residents of the city,<sup>16</sup> meaning that it had to be towed by sea in a wooden caisson. A steamer formerly of the Khedivial Mail Line, the *Dessoug*, was purchased and the obelisk embarked on her through an opening made in her bow.

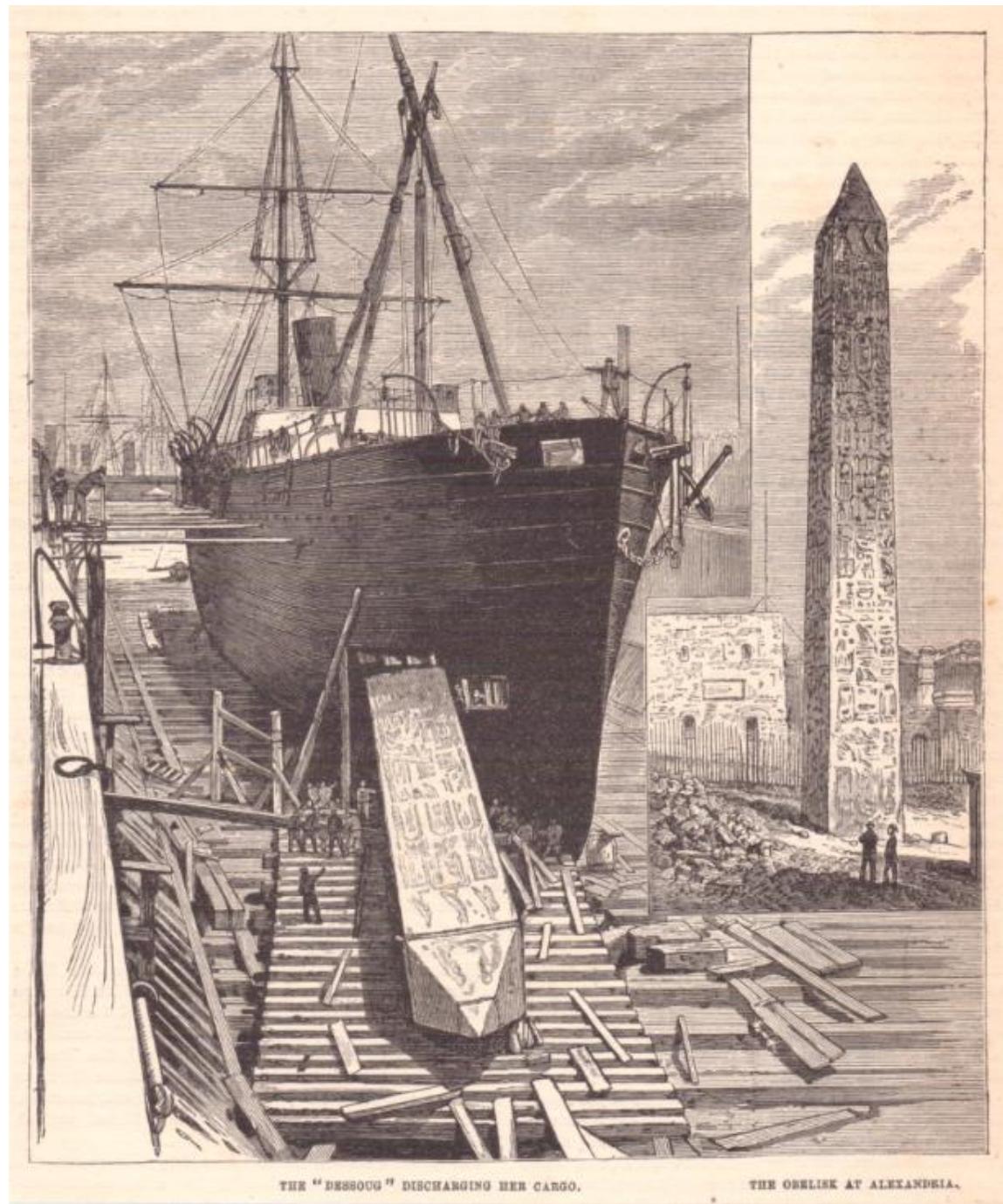


Figure 24 - The New York obelisk *in situ* in Alexandria, and being loaded into the *Dessoug*.

Newspaper clipping, source and date unknown, presumed American. (Author's Collection.)

Registration of the vessel under maritime law was fraught with problems, and Gorringe eventually opted for the risky course of sailing without registry or nationality.<sup>17</sup> After a voyage which was not as catastrophic as that of the *Cleopatra*, but not without incident, including gales and squalls and the failure of a crankshaft, the *Dessoug* and her cargo reached New York. Transport overland to

the selected site in Central Park was again fraught with problems, but eventually the Needle was re-erected in Central Park with the same machinery that had been used to take it down in Egypt.

Outside the United States, it seems to have been assumed that the Americans wanted an obelisk because the Europeans had theirs. *The Graphic*, which had extensively covered the acquisition of the London Needle, expressed its opinion that

Jonathan likes to be in all respects abreast of his cousin, John Bull, and so when Mr. Bull brought over one of these Old-World Children of the Sun – the so-called Cleopatra's Needles – and stuck it up amid the fog and smoke of the Thames Embankment, Jonathan determined to have his Needle too, for the City of New York<sup>18</sup>

This was not necessarily viewed as reasonable. One writer referred to the second Needle in Alexandria as 'the obelisk which our questionable example has tempted the Americans to take down',<sup>19</sup> and another wrote that '[t]here can be no possible excuse made with that gone to New York; the only palliative with regard to ours on the Embankment is the forgotten fact that it was presented by the Egyptian Government to commemorate our triumphs over France'.<sup>20</sup> Nor was this view restricted to Europe. In 1880 a petition was signed by the Governor and a number of citizens of Rhode Island, urging that the second obelisk at Alexandria be left in its current position and not brought to the USA. It argued this on the grounds that 'no site could be more significant' for a monument that had witnessed so many significant events, such as 'the end of the Egyptian Empire... the establishment of the Roman Empire, the extinction of the Jewish nationality, the completion of the Old Testament, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and the beginning of the Christian era...'. Further, that 'the removal and setting up elsewhere of a part of this monument cannot compensate for the destruction of it as a whole...' and would 'misrepresent the American people, and be an act of vandalism...'.<sup>21</sup> Gorringe cited numerous examples of active opposition to removal of the New York obelisk, and implied that these were motivated by European jealousy of America. He also noted that the foundations of the standing obelisk had been affected by subsidence, and that without intervention it would probably have fallen within a few years. He claimed that 'no-one deemed it worthy of protection or care', echoing those who justified removing Egyptian antiquities on the grounds that the Egyptians could not be trusted to look after them.

What is striking, however, is how far attitudes within Egypt had changed since the removal of the London obelisk. The British could at least claim a gift dating back to 1819, for services rendered to Egypt, but while the Khedive Ismail may have given the Americans an obelisk fifty years later, when he held both legislative and executive power, by the time Gorringe came to remove the second obelisk the catastrophic state of Egyptian national finances had resulted in direct

intervention in its government by Britain and France, and the deposition of Ismail, largely at their behest. Nationalist sentiments in Egypt were rising, and would culminate in an army revolt in 1879 led by Colonel Ahmed Urabi, and the naval bombardment of Alexandria and landings by British troops in 1882 to defeat it. Unlike Dixon, however, Gorringe had the overt support of his government, even if the Needle had been given to the City of New York rather than the United States as a whole.

## A.2 Old scars or new crumbling?

Just as with the London obelisk, there was concern that the New York obelisk would be damaged by its new location, the implication that its antiquity and endurance were linked to Egypt, and that it would inevitably be destroyed in strange surroundings. The same trope of ‘more damage in X years...’ used in England was repeated in America. The writer of a travel piece in 1882 described seeing the obelisk at Alexandria, and speaking to Gorringe, who was supervising the work. Later in the article the writer commented

The same [American] friend in whose company I first saw it being dug up for shipment to America wrote me lately that a few months of the variable Western clime, with its rains and frosts, had done more to “age” the monument than all the centuries which had passed over its granite head beneath the sun of Egypt. Already the surface had begun to scale and crack, and the hieroglyphics on one side had become almost undistinguishable.<sup>22</sup>

The trope was still being used as late as 1970, when the *Daily Telegraph* stated that ‘[e]ighty-eight years in New York have done more damage to Cleopatra’s Needle than 3,500 years in Egypt’.<sup>23</sup> Recent assessments suggest that the poor condition of large areas of the granite may be the result of fire damage in ancient times,<sup>24</sup> and the company which treated it in 1885 referred to journalists mistaking ‘the old scars for new crumbling’ and attributing the better preservation of some sections to coverage by sand at some point.<sup>25</sup> However, a large amount of loose material, estimated at 780 pounds, was removed soon after the arrival of the obelisk in New York in an attempt to stabilise its surface, when it was first treated with a paraffin wax solution applied to the previously heated stone in 1881 (the patented Caffall Process).<sup>26</sup> It was treated again by the pressurised application of paraffin wax in 1885,<sup>27</sup> and again in 1914 with a proprietary formula.

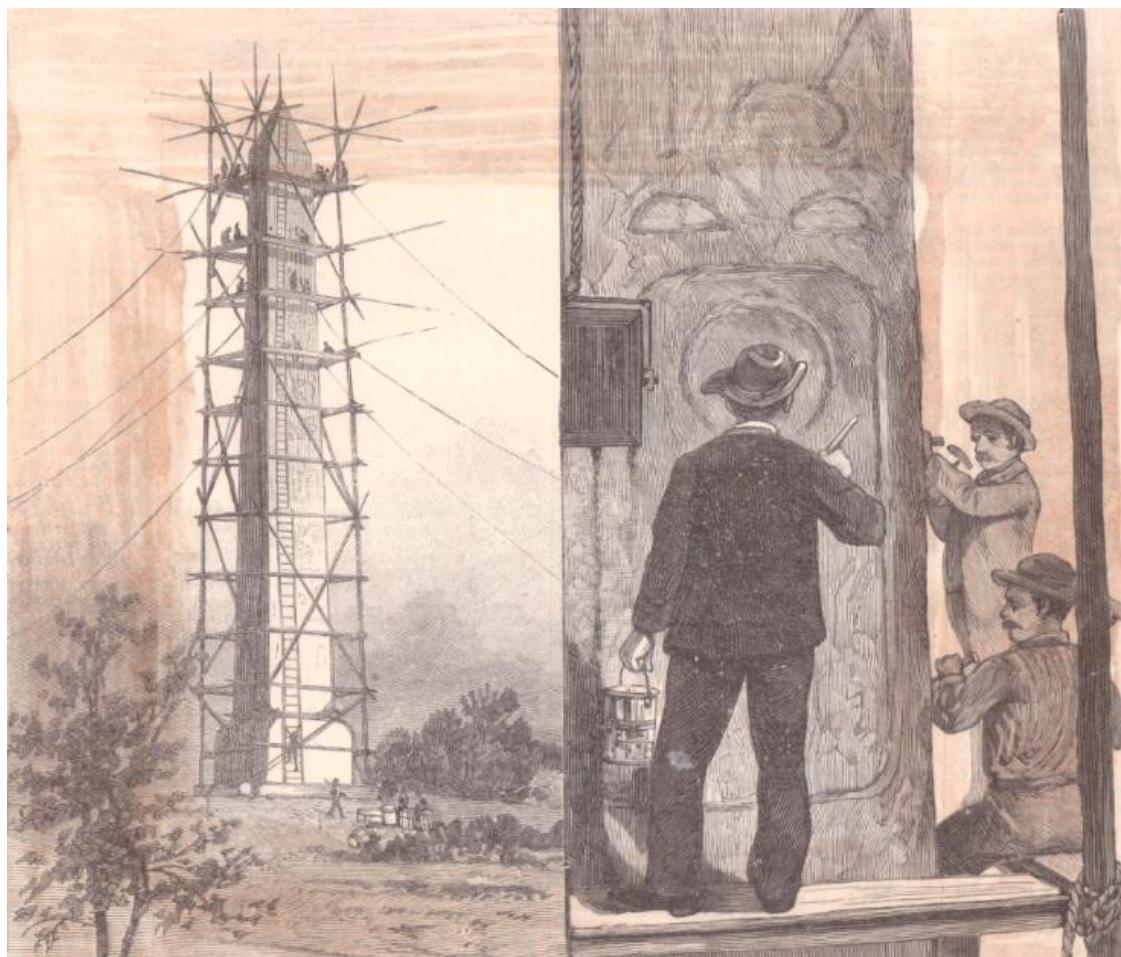


Figure 25 - Applying paraffin wax to the New York obelisk. Note the charcoal stove used to heat the stone to the left of one workman, and workmen on right chipping loose granite off. Newspaper clipping, title and date unknown, presumed American. Caption gives page number as 219. (Author's Collection.)

A letter in 1930 from the company involved in the latter process, when it was tendering for the treatment of the London obelisk stated that 'during the period of time our company treated this Obelisk, seven and one-half barrels of chips were gathered from around the base and the fine carvings of the Egyptians were entirely obliterated. After first cleaning and recutting the markings, we treated the entire obelisk with TEXACO EL GLYKOL...'.<sup>28</sup> Paradoxically, while some claimed that the obelisk was doomed to crumble away in the hostile climate of New York others saw it, like the London obelisk, as a symbol of endurance. Although the trope of Macaulay's New Zealander was inappropriate to New York, the idea of the obelisk as a *memento mori* for empire was still evoked. One speaker at the dedication ceremony is recorded as asking rhetorically 'whether our system of religion and our system of government would outlast the obelisk?'.<sup>29</sup> Another wondered:

"If it remains there for as many years as it stood in Egypt, New York will by that time probably have fallen to ruins, like the proud city from which this same monument has

come. When that time arrives perhaps Egypt will have recovered her ancient glory and will seek to carry the wondrous block home again.<sup>30</sup>

### A.3 Witness, Wisdom, and Warnings

Like the London obelisk, the New York Needle was seen by some as a symbol of the Pharaonic tyranny recorded in the Bible. The German-born American Egyptologist Charles Moldenke (1860-1935),<sup>31</sup> who would be ordained as a Lutheran pastor in 1885, wrote that '[i]t tells the story of serfs, and teems with cringing words and the praise of despots', contrasting this with America, where 'the people are not under the lash and miserable; they are... a happy and contented people'.<sup>32</sup> Once again, its association with Biblical figures was accepted. In Gorringe's book, he wrote of it 'forming an essential feature of one of the most famous temples ever erected by man, in which Moses was educated and of which he became a high-priest'. In an article aimed at children, however, the writer only suggested that '[i]t is quite likely that this very obelisk stood before his [Potiphar's] door on the day that Joseph married his daughter Asenath'.<sup>33</sup>

Unlike the London obelisk, the New York Needle was seen to have clear Masonic connections. Much of this was due to Gorringe, an enthusiastic Freemason, who saw significance in the form and arrangement of blocks in the pedestal and steps of the obelisk, and in the fact that an iron trowel and lead plumb weight were found in the pedestal. His conclusions were supported by a committee of Freemasons from the Grand Lodge of Egypt.<sup>34</sup> One fragment, illustrated in Plate XI of Gorringe's book, has clear traces of hieroglyphs on it, but when Gorringe sought the opinion of the French Egyptologist Félix Féuillard (1819-1907),<sup>35</sup> his view was that the stone was a fragment used as filler, 'placed there entirely by accident' and that the hieroglyphs were part of a writing of the word for 'temple'.<sup>36</sup> While grudgingly admitting that '[t]he conclusions of Mr Féuillard are entitled to the greatest weight', Gorringe still thought that 'it is a remarkable coincidence that figures of these particular forms should have been used to designate the word "Temple"', but accepted that 'there are some Freemasons who regard the arrangement and forms of the pieces of the base of the obelisk as having no Masonic significance'. In his view, '[t]hose who do not belong to the Order are hardly capable of judging'.<sup>37</sup>

One reviewer of Gorringe's book was cutting in their assessment, writing that

we cannot agree with Mr. Gorringe, but we may at least thank him for saying so little about the matter. Ignorance of the history and language of ancient Egypt is the most necessary qualification of the modern Egyptian theorizer; and when we found that in

this respect Mr. Gorringe was fully up to the level of the age, we made sure of at least a chapter on his famous Masonic discovery<sup>38</sup>

Another reviewer was equally scathing, writing that

[t]he deductions about Masonic mysteries made from the stones forming the pedestal appear too slight to be adopted, as it is more than doubtful if modern Freemasonry is as old as the Romans. The fragment with hieroglyphics is a mere loose block from some monument with a single word in it placed upside down, and had been inserted merely to sustain the obelisk.<sup>39</sup>

Views such as these did not prevent the cornerstone for the pedestal being relaid in New York with full Masonic ceremonies, including an estimated 9,000 Freemasons who were addressed by the Grand Master for the State of New York, Jesse B Anthony (1838-1905).<sup>40</sup>

A foundation deposit was incorporated into the reconstructed base for the Needle, sealed in a number of lead boxes. They included New Testaments in a variety of languages, official documents from the Departments of State, the Treasury, Interior, War and Navy, documents relating to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Webster's Dictionary, the works of Shakespeare and other reference texts. Also included were a complete set of Masonic emblems and jewels,<sup>41</sup> engineering articles including wire ropes and the sort of hydraulic pump used to move the obelisk, and a gold plate with an account of the obelisk's transport and a mysterious box, its contents 'known only to himself', both placed there by William Hurlbert. All these, Gorringe hoped, would 'perpetuate some examples of our civilisation' for future ages. A number of poets addressed the current inhabitants of the United States, from the anonymous writer of a quatrain in the *New York Sun* to longer offerings by General Charles Darling of the Oneida Historical Society in Utica, NY, and the unforgettably named Bloodgood Haviland Cutter (1817-1906),<sup>42</sup> who had visited Egypt with Mark Twain and featured in the latter's *Innocents Abroad* as the 'Poet Lariat'. For Darling, the obelisk was eternal and unchanging, and now in its final site.

Hereafter no attraction, nor of mortal man the fear.

Shall make me fall or falter in my firm foundation here;

I'll stand until the end of time, when all things earthly rust.

And then, oh children now unborn, I'll mingle with your dust.<sup>43</sup>

Cutter saw the downfall of Egypt 'once the most favoured land' as a result of divine displeasure at its corruption. Although he described it as now having 'a resting place / among the most favoured modern race' he warned that

As long as we God's laws obey

This likely in our land will stay  
But if we, like them, corrupt do grow,  
Then on our nation come like woe.  
And away this Obelisk may take,  
Just for its age, and historic sake;  
And drag it to some other land,  
Where they will obey the Lord's command.<sup>44</sup>

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## Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Heliopolis: Porter and Moss (1974-) 4:59-63, Iversen (1968): II, 90, Lexikon der Ägyptologie: II, 1111-3.

<sup>2</sup> Lexikon der Ägyptologie: V, 782-80, Kees (1958) 194-213. See also Shaw and Nicholson (1995) 'Sed Festival', 256.

<sup>3</sup> Porter and Moss (1974-) (4): 4, McKenzie (2007): 78 and 232, and Iversen (1968): II 91.

<sup>4</sup> Iversen (1968): II, 90.

<sup>5</sup> Lane-Poole (1925): 301.

<sup>6</sup> Iversen (1968): II, 95 and Anon (1743): 16-35.

<sup>7</sup> Herold (1963) [2005]: 6-9, 66-68, and 96-99.

<sup>8</sup> Herold (1963) [2005]: 112-121.

<sup>9</sup> DNB: Abercromby, Sir Ralph, of Tullibody. This spelling is now generally accepted, but earlier sources also spell it as Abercrombie.

<sup>10</sup> Mackesy (1995) [2010].

<sup>11</sup> March 21 1801.

<sup>12</sup> Wilde, W. (1839): 628.

<sup>13</sup> Wilson (1803): 218-219.

<sup>14</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/36-37, & *The Times* June 1 1831, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/82-83.

<sup>16</sup> William IV. DNB.

<sup>17</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/163-174.

<sup>18</sup> Albert [Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha]. DNB

<sup>19</sup> Adolphus Frederick, Prince, first Duke of Cambridge. DNB.

<sup>20</sup> V&A MA/2/C

<sup>21</sup> Stanley, Edward George Geoffrey Smith, fourteenth Earl of Derby. DNB

<sup>22</sup> [www.crystalpalacefoundation.org.uk/history/crystal-palace-royal-charters](http://www.crystalpalacefoundation.org.uk/history/crystal-palace-royal-charters) Accessed 28/5/2018.

<sup>23</sup> Abbas Hilmi Pasha. CBD.

<sup>24</sup> Elliott (2012): 144-146, and *Literary Gazette*, 2 April 1853, p. 334.

<sup>25</sup> Edward VII. DNB.

<sup>26</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/219-232

<sup>27</sup> Bierbrier (2012): 59-60.

<sup>28</sup> Alexander, Sir James Edward. DNB.

<sup>29</sup> Alexander (1879): 14.

<sup>30</sup> Cross-Rudkin (2008) and Pearce (2018)

<sup>31</sup> Thwaites, Sir John. DNB.

<sup>32</sup> Bierbrier (2012): 155-156.

<sup>33</sup> Officially awarded the title in 1867. See Hunter (1998): 193.

<sup>34</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/12-32

<sup>35</sup> About £55,000 in 2017 prices, based on a Bank of England inflation calculator.

<sup>36</sup> Pender, Sir John. DNB.

<sup>37</sup> Wilson, Sir (William James) Erasmus. DNB.

<sup>38</sup> Stephenson, Henry Palfrey. DNB.

<sup>39</sup> Around £1,097,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>40</sup> Abbott, Charles Stuart Aubrey, third Baron Tenterden. DNB.

<sup>41</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/38-53.

<sup>42</sup> Technically, this should probably be described as a plinth, but as the base onto which the London obelisk was re-erected was described at the time as a pedestal, I have standardised on the latter term.

<sup>43</sup> These casts now seem to have been destroyed, and museum records for their accession are scanty. V&A MA2C has some information on these, and another set of casts sent to the National Museum in Dublin, and

see also <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/caring-for-our-collections/cleopatras-needle> Accessed 5 December 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Now in the Oriental Museum, University of Durham, N.379.

<sup>45</sup> Percy, Algernon, fourth Duke of Northumberland. DNB.

### Chapter 1 – Valuing the Past

<sup>1</sup> Iversen (1968): I and II. See also Sorek (2010).

<sup>2</sup> Dannenfeldt (1959).

<sup>3</sup> Iversen (1968): II, 51-61. Porter and Moss 4, 72-73.

<sup>4</sup> Bankes, William John. Bierbrier (2012): 38-39 and DNB. See also Iversen (1968): II, 62-86, Elliott, pp. 239-242, and Usick (2002).

<sup>5</sup> Habachi (1978): 153-164.

<sup>6</sup> For obvious practical reasons this is an estimate. Habachi (1978): 165 gives 187 tons, Budge (1926): 72 gives 180 tons.

<sup>7</sup> Iversen (1968): 90.

<sup>8</sup> C Müller-Winkler 'Schen-ring' LÄ V 577-579, and Wilkinson (1992): 193.

<sup>9</sup> See Miller (1998): Introduction.

<sup>10</sup> See Tilley (1991): Introduction.

<sup>11</sup> See Appadurai (1986): 13, and Myers (2001): 18.

<sup>12</sup> Miller (1998): 19.

<sup>13</sup> Brown (2004): 50.

<sup>14</sup> Strictly speaking, material culture on this definition would include areas such as theatre, music, and dance, even when they do not leave material remains. However, while 'material remains' may be a more accurate description, the term 'material culture' has been used because it is already well established.

<sup>15</sup> Lexikon der Ägyptologie: IV, 547.

<sup>16</sup> Iversen (1968): I, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Tilley (1991): 17.

<sup>18</sup> Díaz Hernández (2017): 4.

<sup>19</sup> Tilley (1991): 16.

<sup>20</sup> Habachi (1978): 10. See also Geary 'Sacred commodities: the circulation of medieval relics' in Appadurai 1986, 169-191 for his description of relics as 'objects that are both persons and things'.

<sup>21</sup> For the use of these concepts in connection with reception, see the section on this below, and Bohrer (2003) 12-13

<sup>22</sup> Geary, in Appadurai (1986): 169.

<sup>23</sup> Mauss [1925] (2016).

<sup>24</sup> Brown (2004): 60.

<sup>25</sup> Carman (2005): 20.

<sup>26</sup> For example the Temple of Hathor at Dendera. See Reid (2002): 54-55. Joseph Bonomi also witnessed the demolition by explosives of a temple at Ashmunein; *The Athenaeum*: 4 December 1852, 1330-1331.

<sup>27</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=13637&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13637&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/illicit-trafficking-of-cultural-property/1970-convention/text-of-the-convention/>

<sup>29</sup> Greenfield (1989): 253.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Reid (2002): 134-136 on Mariette's role in the Antiquities Service in Egypt, and the proposed foundation of a new museum in Cairo in 1873.

<sup>31</sup> Carman (2005): 10.

<sup>32</sup> Greenfield (1989): 254.

<sup>33</sup> Miller (2001): 92-93.

<sup>34</sup> See Appadurai (1986): 3-94.

<sup>35</sup> Appadurai (1986): 73.

<sup>36</sup> Appadurai (1986): 72-73.

<sup>37</sup> Appadurai (1986): 13.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas (1991): 4.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas (1991): 29.

<sup>40</sup> Its first holder was General Augustus Pitt-Rivers. See <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/rpr/index.php/17-ancient-monuments/articles1/849-inspector-of-ancient-monuments.html> Accessed November 20 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Reid (2002): 56.

<sup>42</sup> British Museum: The Portland Vase 1945,0927.1

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<sup>43</sup> I am indebted to Professor Timothy Champion for his comments on this area, and for drawing my attention to these Acts.

<sup>44</sup> Caygill (1981): 3-4.

<sup>45</sup> Reid (2002): 103.

<sup>46</sup> Reid (2002): 103-105.

<sup>47</sup> Reid (2002): 54.

<sup>48</sup> Reid (2002): 54-58 and 99-103.

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/ancient-egyptian-sekhemka-statue-sold-by-northampton-museum-to-leave-the-country-after-no-a6968621.html> Accessed June 24 2018.

<sup>50</sup> See Carman (2005): 55.

<sup>51</sup> See Jones and Leech (2015) for an extensive discussion of issues of social value in the context of the historic environment.

<sup>52</sup> Carman (2005): 73-77.

<sup>53</sup> Baldick (2015): 'Reception Theory'.

<sup>54</sup> See Assmann and Ebeling, 'The Mnemohistory of Egypt: approaches towards the understanding of Egypt in intellectual history' in Versluys, M (Ed.) *Beyond Egyptomania: objects, style, and agency*. Forthcoming.

<sup>55</sup> Assmann (2011).

<sup>56</sup> Parramore (2008): 45.

<sup>57</sup> Moser (2006): 6.

<sup>58</sup> Barrett (2017): 11-14.

<sup>59</sup> See for example Yasuoka (2011).

<sup>60</sup> A good example is the Totenbuch-Projekt based in Bonn. For an example of post-excavation context related to non-text artefacts, see Reeves (1993).

<sup>61</sup> See for example Hagen (2012): 4-21.

<sup>62</sup> See Parkinson (2009): 221-225, and Hagen (2012): 216-217, also Coenen (1995), Leach (2006), who uses the term 'material philology', and Behlmer (2003).

<sup>63</sup> See Bednarski (2005) and Hamernik (2010).

<sup>64</sup> Baldick (2015): 'Reception Theory'.

<sup>65</sup> See Gardiner (1928)[1975] 'Egyptian Letters to the Dead'.

<sup>66</sup> See Kreuger (2017): 51.

<sup>67</sup> See Festinger (1962).

<sup>68</sup> Gosden (1999): 24-25.

## Chapter 2 – The Obelisks in Egypt

<sup>1</sup> See Sattin (1999).

<sup>2</sup> One web site lists 31 inscribed obelisks inside and outside Egypt, including some smaller ones in museums. <https://pharaoh.se/obelisks> accessed 3 July 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Now the Lateran obelisk in Rome. Iversen (1968): I, 55-65, and Curran, et al (2009): 23.

<sup>4</sup> Lexikon der Ägyptologie: IV, 542-5.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. the obelisk of Thutmose III erected by Thutmose IV, which became the focus for a temple to Re-Horakhty. (Aidan Dodson, personal communication.)

<sup>6</sup> Lexikon der Ägyptologie: III, 461-4, 485-95, 526-31, and 533-4. Also see Sauneron (1960)[2000]: 30-31.

<sup>7</sup> For example, when referring to Queen Elizabeth II, we can say that she has a religious role as head of the established church, and a political one as a constitutional monarch.

<sup>8</sup> Lexikon der Ägyptologie: I, 694-5.

<sup>9</sup> Iversen (1968): 11-18, Malek (1990), and Galán (2017)

<sup>10</sup> Habachi (1978): 5-12.

<sup>11</sup> Lexikon der Ägyptologie: IV 1084-1100, Sauneron (1969) [2000]: 36-37 and Shaw and Nicholson (1995): 228-9.

<sup>12</sup> Curran, et al (2009): 15 and Habachi (1978): 63.

<sup>13</sup> Approximately, 'The state is me', or 'I am the state'.

<sup>14</sup> Indicating that these were begun when it was still horizontal. See Iversen (1968): I, 55-65 and Habachi (1978): 32.

<sup>15</sup> Now in the Piazza del Popolo, Rome. Iversen (1968): I, 65-76 and Habachi (1978): 117-19. Sety I c. 1291-1278 BC.

<sup>16</sup> See Brand (1997) on the completion of unfinished obelisks of Sety I by Ramses II.

<sup>17</sup> Iversen (1968): II, 90-148 and Habachi (1978): 165.

<sup>18</sup> Porter and Moss (1974-) (2):4; 59-63, and also see Habachi (1978): 38-50.

<sup>19</sup> For transcriptions of texts, see Sethe 592–94[189] (Thutmose III), Kitchen 1979: 478–79[183A] (Ramses II), Iversen (1968): II, 144–145 (Thutmose III, Ramses II and Siamun), and Jansen-Winkel 2007: 114[12] (Siamun). Wilkinson (1843): 149, attributes the inscriptions of Siamun to ‘Osirei II., the third successor of the Great Remeses’, although it is unclear whether by this he means Amenmesse or Siptah.

<sup>20</sup> See Quirke (1990): 72–73.

<sup>21</sup> Herodotus (1920–24): 3.27–29 (Vol II, 37–39) and 3.37 (Vol II, 49–51).

<sup>22</sup> Iversen (1968): 55, considers that this is a reference to the single obelisk of Thutmose III at Karnak, now the Lateran obelisk in Rome.

<sup>23</sup> Pliny (1938–1962): 36.14.66–67. (53).

<sup>24</sup> D’Alton (1993)

<sup>25</sup> D’Alton (1993): 70.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/luminescence.html> Accessed July 4 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Quirke (1990): 73–75.

<sup>28</sup> Iversen (1968): II, 62–86 and Elliott (2012): 239–242.

<sup>29</sup> Brand (1997): 101 and Note 9, and especially Addendum, 114. Brand (2000): 134–136, 142, 145, 298 and 353–355. See also Head (1833): 5; Porter and Moss (1974–) 4; 3.

<sup>30</sup> 285–246 BC.

<sup>31</sup> 380–362 BC.

<sup>32</sup> McKenzie (2007): 51.

<sup>33</sup> Roller (2010): 149. Cleopatra was briefly survived as nominal ruler by her son Caesarion, who ruled for 18 days as Ptolemy XV.

<sup>34</sup> Grimm (2003): 47–48, McKenzie (2007): 78, 149, 177, and Breccia (1922): 93.

<sup>35</sup> Pliny (1938–1962): 36.14.69. (55.)

<sup>36</sup> Cassius Dio. (1917)[1960]: 51.17, 1–3 and 53.13.1–2.

<sup>37</sup> For examples see Quirke (1990): 77, and also Wilkinson (2000): 217–18.

<sup>38</sup> Iversen (1968): I and Sorek, XIII.

<sup>39</sup> For example see Iversen (1968): I, 128–141 on the obelisk now at Trinita dei Monti, quarried in Egypt but with inscriptions that were copied from one of the obelisks brought to Rome by Augustus, and now in the Piazza del Popolo. See also Iversen (1968): I, 76–92 on the obelisk now in the Piazza Navona, carved in Egypt but with a text translated from an original in Greek commissioned by Domitian, and Iversen (1968): I, 161–173 on the obelisk now at Monte Pincio, with inscriptions ‘undoubtedly composed in Rome itself’. Iversen (1968): I, 161, and for a modern translation of the inscriptions Meyer (1994).

<sup>40</sup> Iversen (1968): II, 9–51, and Porter and Moss (1974–): vii, 400.

<sup>41</sup> Quirke (1990): 62 and 72.

<sup>42</sup> Iversen (1968): I, 65–76 and 142–161.

<sup>43</sup> Iversen (1968): I and Sorek, 45–58.

<sup>44</sup> Pliny (1938–1962): 36.14–15.71–74. (55–59)

<sup>45</sup> Pliny (1938–1962): 36.15.74. (59.)

<sup>46</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus (1935) [1950] [1964]: XVII.4.1 (319) and XVII.4.12–16. (323–327)

<sup>47</sup> Swetnam-Burland (2010): 135.

<sup>48</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus (1935) [1950] [1964]: XVII, 4, 12. (323).

<sup>49</sup> Pliny (1938–1962): 36.14.64. (51).

<sup>50</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus (1935) [1950] [1964]: XVII, 4, 17–23.

<sup>51</sup> *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*: Vol. VI, Part 1, 701–702.

<sup>52</sup> Swetnam-Burland (2010): 135.

<sup>53</sup> Habachi (1978): 112.

<sup>54</sup> See Cassius Dio (1917) [1960]: 53.2 4–5. (197) and 54.6.6. (297)

<sup>55</sup> Versluys (2002): 23–24.

<sup>56</sup> Iversen (1968): I, 80–81.

<sup>57</sup> See Moormann, 2018: 170–173.

<sup>58</sup> The original placement of this obelisk is still a matter of controversy. For discussions of this see Meyer (1994), 14–20, 102–105; Renberg (2010), 186–190; Häuber (2017), 422–452.

<sup>59</sup> Iversen (1968): 81–82.

<sup>60</sup> Favro (2018): 11–26.

<sup>61</sup> Favro (2018): 16–17.

<sup>62</sup> Brown (2003): 60–61.

<sup>63</sup> Iversen (1968): 9–33.

<sup>64</sup> Bowman (1986): 192.

<sup>65</sup> McKenzie (2007): 232, and Breccia (1922): 93.

<sup>66</sup> Bagnall and Rathbone (2004): 107.

<sup>67</sup> Breccia (1922): 93 says in 366 AD.

<sup>68</sup> Budge (1926): 84. He cites De Sacy, probably *Relation de l'Égypte*, but does not give a specific reference.

<sup>69</sup> Davis (1987). 11.

<sup>70</sup> For Arab engagement with Ancient Egypt, see Haarmann (1996) and El Daly 2016.

<sup>71</sup> Haarmann (1996): 611.

<sup>72</sup> Muwaffaq al-Din Muhammad 'Abd al-Latif ibn Yusuf al-Baghdadi. 1162-1231. Taught medicine and philosophy at Cairo.

<sup>73</sup> White (1801): 287.

<sup>74</sup> See Elliott (2016).

<sup>75</sup> For example, Norden (1757): 5-8. 'As to the obelisk itself, it is of a single piece of granite marble.'

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in *The Athenaeum*, 23 July 1887: 123.

<sup>77</sup> See Gorringe (1882) Plates IV and V, facing pages 4 and 6.

<sup>78</sup> Around 100 kilos, assuming that De Sacy, who was quoted, used metric measurements.

<sup>79</sup> See Budge (1926): 84-87.

<sup>80</sup> See Reid (2002): 28-31, for an assessment of positive and negative views of Pharaonic Egypt in medieval Egypt.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Moldenke (1891): 79-80.

<sup>82</sup> Haarmann (1996): 611 and Curran, et al (2009): 61.

<sup>83</sup> Budge (1926): 166.

<sup>84</sup> El Daly (2005) [2016]: 121-122.

<sup>85</sup> Wilkinson (1999).

<sup>86</sup> Letts (1946) [2017]: xiii-xiv.

<sup>87</sup> Letts (1946) [2017]: 94-95.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Wilde (1839): 629.

<sup>89</sup> Favro, D. (2018): 13.

<sup>90</sup> Letts (1926) [2004]: Chapter 3 note 3. See also D'Onofrio (1967): 21-23.

<sup>91</sup> I.E. 'aiguille', or needle.

<sup>92</sup> Anon (1743): 33-34.

<sup>93</sup> Irwin. Eyles. DNB.

<sup>94</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, November 1780: 530

<sup>95</sup> *The Monthly Epitome*, September 1799; and *The Monthly Visitor and Pocket Companion*, October 1799: 200.

<sup>96</sup> Ingram (1994-1995): 440.

<sup>97</sup> Winter (1992): 64-77.

<sup>98</sup> For background on this, see Herold (1963)[2005]: 6-14.

<sup>99</sup> Nelson, Horatio. DNB.

<sup>100</sup> Ingram (1994-1995): 436.

<sup>101</sup> Windham, William. DNB.

<sup>102</sup> Grenville, William Wyndham, Baron Grenville. DNB.

<sup>103</sup> Secretary at War and Secretary of State for War were at this time two separate, but confusingly similarly named government posts.

<sup>104</sup> Dundas, Henry, First Viscount Melville. DNB.

<sup>105</sup> George III. DNB.

<sup>106</sup> Mackesy (1995) [2010]: 4-6, and Fry, DNB.

<sup>107</sup> Elphinstone, George Keith, Viscount Keith. DNB.

<sup>108</sup> A detailed account of the Egyptian campaign can be found in Mackesy (1995)[2010].

<sup>109</sup> Hutchinson, John Hely-, Second Earl of Donoughmore. DNB.

<sup>110</sup> Mackesy (1995) [2010]: 202, says that the baggage contained 'a mass of loot and public property'.

<sup>111</sup> Baird, Sir David. DNB.

<sup>112</sup> Mackesy (1995) [2010]: 222.

<sup>113</sup> Described by a contemporary as 'with ungracious manners and a violent temper'. Mackesy (1995) [2010]: 146 and Footnote 1.

<sup>114</sup> Mackesy (1995) [2010]: 224.

<sup>115</sup> Two of whose number remained in Malta. Herold (1963)[2005]: 30.

<sup>116</sup> Or to give it its full title: *Description de l'Égypte, or Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'Expédition de l'armée Française*

<sup>117</sup> Porter and Moss (1974-): (4), 1.

<sup>118</sup> Smith, Sir (William) Sidney. DNB.

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<sup>119</sup> See Smith, Sir (William) Sidney.

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in full in Wilson (1803): 330-334.

<sup>121</sup> Kapudan Admiral Küçük Hüseyin Pasha. See Aksan (2014): 236.

<sup>122</sup> A more detailed account of this episode can be found in Solé R and Valbelle D (1999)[2002]: 30-36.

<sup>123</sup> Bierbrier (1999): 111 and Plate 26.

<sup>124</sup> Denon, (Baron) Dominique Vivant. Bierbrier (2012): 150-151.

<sup>125</sup> Denon (1803): 105-106 and Plate 4 Fig. 4.

<sup>126</sup> Sonnini (1815): 84-85. It is not clear which obelisk he claims that Julius Caesar transported to Rome, other than that it was one hundred cubits high, but he may have been referring in error to the Vatican obelisk, which was believed to hold Caesar's ashes in the metal globe at its apex. Constantine had the obelisk now outside St John Lateran moved to Alexandria, with the intention of shipping it to Constantinople, but it was subsequently transported to Rome by Constantius. Iversen (1968): I, 55-65; Sorek, 64; and Habachi (1978): 150.

<sup>127</sup> E.G. *The Chester Chronicle*, April 12 1799, 4, 'Egyptian Expedition'.

<sup>128</sup> Probably an error. There were two members of the Commission of the Sciences and Arts called Girard. The most likely is the Civil Engineer rather than the mathematician. See Norry: 47.

<sup>129</sup> Anon (1799): 41.

<sup>130</sup> Walsh (1803): 225.

<sup>131</sup> The traveller, collector and antiquarian William Banks had an obelisk from Philae transported from Egypt to England in 1821. See Iversen (1968): II, 62-86 and Elliott (2012): 239-242.

<sup>132</sup> Turner, Sir (Tomkyns) Hilgrove. DNB and Bierbrier (2012): 546-547.

<sup>133</sup> Fox, Henry Edward. DNB.

<sup>134</sup> Mackesy (1995) [2010]: 226.

<sup>135</sup> Lambart, Richard Ford William, seventh Earl of Cavan. DNB. See also Mackesy (1995) [2010]: 226.

<sup>136</sup> In a memo to Lord Aberdeen in 1830 Lord Howden, who as Major-General Cradock had served in the Egyptian Campaign, referred to the intention of the British officers as being to present the Needle 'to their Government', but, like the antiquities confiscated from the French, etiquette would have dictated that this be done in the form of a gift to the monarch. See TNA FO/78/2116/167.

<sup>137</sup> This was a reference to HMS *Strombolo*, originally built in 1797 as the civilian vessel *Leander*, purchased in the same year and converted into a bomb vessel, and broken up in 1809. These bomb vessels were purpose built or converted for coastal bombardment operations, and had especially strong hulls to withstand the recoil of the mortars with which they were equipped. See Winfield (2010): 372-374, who gives details.

<sup>138</sup> Perrin W and Lloyd C (1927-1955): II, 407-408.

<sup>139</sup> Gordon, George Hamilton-, fourth earl of Aberdeen. DNB.

<sup>140</sup> Caradoc [formerly Cradock] John Francis, First Baron Howden. DNB.

<sup>141</sup> About £18,500 at 2017 prices.

<sup>142</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/63-64.

<sup>143</sup> *Morning Post and Gazetteer*, 11 May 1802, *The Times*, 11 May 1802, 3, (£2,000), Hampshire *Chronicle*, 31 January 1803 p.3 (£4,000), Head (1833): 54 (£7,000). The upper and lower figures are equivalent to around £185,000 and £649,000 in 2008 prices.

<sup>144</sup> See Pearson (1865): 24-25.

<sup>145</sup> Richardson, Robert. DNB.

<sup>146</sup> *The Quarterly Review*, October 1822, 71.

<sup>147</sup> Bryce, Sir Alexander. DNB.

<sup>148</sup> Bryce's grand-nephew, General Sir James Alexander, was later to be instrumental in the final and successful campaign to bring the Needle to London.

<sup>149</sup> TNA FO 78/2216/10-11.

<sup>150</sup> The technique was actually used during the transport of the Luxor obelisk to Paris. A plan by Lebas showing the use of camels on the obelisk barge *Louqsor* is in the Musée national de la Marine, Paris, Accession No. MnM B36 Pl. 6.

<sup>151</sup> Perrin W and Lloyd C (1927-1955): II, 408-409.

<sup>152</sup> Pearson (1865): 24-25.

<sup>153</sup> Perrin W and Lloyd C (1927-1955): II, 409.

<sup>154</sup> Wilson, Sir Robert Thomas. DNB.

<sup>155</sup> Wilson (1803): 218-219.

<sup>156</sup> Pliny (1938-1962): 36.14.69-74. (55-59.)

<sup>157</sup> Sorek (2010): 46-47.

<sup>158</sup> Letts (1946): 29 and Footnote 1.

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<sup>159</sup> Worsley, Sir Richard, seventh baronet. DNB.

<sup>160</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, quoted in *Notes and Queries*, 18 October 1902, 304.

<sup>161</sup> *Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 1 November 1802, 4. Similar items occur in several other papers.

<sup>162</sup> *London Society*, April 1870, 351.

<sup>163</sup> Bierbrier (2012): 114-115.

<sup>164</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/10-11.

<sup>165</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/63-64

<sup>166</sup> Although Keith's position is clear from his letter to Larcom, which has already been quoted, it has not been possible to locate records to confirm that Fox also opposed further work on removing the Needle.

<sup>167</sup> Quoted by Wilde (1839): 628.

<sup>168</sup> Mackesy (1995) [2010]: 47.

<sup>169</sup> Ingram (1994-1995): 702-703.

<sup>170</sup> Mackesy (1995) [2010]: 232.

<sup>171</sup> His name is spelt in a variety of different ways in source material. I have used Muhammad Ali as a transliteration throughout, which was his preferred form.

<sup>172</sup> Fraser, Alexander Mackenzie. DNB.

<sup>173</sup> Fahmy (1998): 144-145.

<sup>174</sup> Reflecting this, he assumed the title of Khedive even though he was not officially entitled to it, and it was never officially granted to him, only being conferred on his grandson Ismail in 1867. This did not prevent Europeans routinely referring to him as Viceroy, equivalent to Khedive.

<sup>175</sup> Temple, Henry John, third Viscount Palmerston. DNB.

<sup>176</sup> Bartlett (1963): 89.

<sup>177</sup> Fahmy (1998): 172.

<sup>178</sup> Bartlett (1963): 129.

<sup>179</sup> Hunter (1998): 193. The award of the title was part of two Ottoman imperial edicts, of 1866 and 1867, ratified in 1872 and 1873.

<sup>180</sup> Briggs, Samuel. Bierbrier (2012): 80.

<sup>181</sup> Quoted in Wilson (1803): 186-190.

<sup>182</sup> Drovetti, Bernardino Michele Maria. Bierbrier (2012): 161-162.

<sup>183</sup> Driault (1925): 137-138.

<sup>184</sup> Daly (1998): Vol 2, 146.

<sup>185</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/5 [Translation into English of the original, in Italian.]

<sup>186</sup> Bloomfield, Benjamin, first Baron Bloomfield. DNB.

<sup>187</sup> Wilson (1803): 187.

<sup>188</sup> Wilson (1803): 190.

<sup>189</sup> Dictionary of National Biography. *George IV*.

<sup>190</sup> Pearce (2000).

<sup>191</sup> Planta, Joseph. DNB.

<sup>192</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/1-2

<sup>193</sup> Leake, William Martin. DNB.

<sup>194</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/10-11.

<sup>195</sup> Belzoni, Giovanni. Bierbrier (2012): 52-53.

<sup>196</sup> EA19:

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=117633&partId=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=117633&partId=1)

<sup>197</sup> Usick (2002): 51.

<sup>198</sup> Moser (2006): 101-102.

<sup>199</sup> Burckhardt, Johann Ludwig. Bierbrier (2012): 94.

<sup>200</sup> Mayes [1959] (2006): 115-118.

<sup>201</sup> Moser (2006): 102 and 261, fn. 37.

<sup>202</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/44. He was actually lodging at 4 Downing Street.

<sup>203</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/27-30.

<sup>204</sup> Wilson (1803): 193.

<sup>205</sup> Cockburn, Sir George, eighth baronet. DNB.

<sup>206</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/14-18. A sheer hulk was a vessel, usually adapted but sometimes, as in the case of HMS Chatham, purpose built, equipped with booms which acted like cranes to assist the placing or removing of masts of ships under construction or repair.

<sup>207</sup> Stewart, Robert, Viscount Castlereagh and second Marquess of Londonderry. DNB.

<sup>208</sup> TNA FO 78/216/36-37

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<sup>209</sup> E.G. *The Literary Gazette*, 8 December 1821, 776-777.

<sup>210</sup> Canning, George. DNB.

<sup>211</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/45-46.

<sup>212</sup> See Ogden (2009).

<sup>213</sup> Although historical financial values are notoriously difficult to estimate, based on a Bank of England inflation calculator this is likely to have been the equivalent in contemporary terms of around £3,395,000.

<sup>214</sup> See O'Brien (1989) and Fussell and Compton (1939).

<sup>215</sup> Wilde (1839): 620.

<sup>216</sup> <http://www.howdenshirehistory.co.uk/goole/jolliffe-banks-engineers.html> Accessed 25 August 2018.

<sup>217</sup> Wilson (1877): 191 and Hayward (1978): 21.

<sup>218</sup> Salt, Henry. DNB. See also Bierbrier (2012): 484-485, and Manley and Rée (2001).

<sup>219</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/59-60.

<sup>220</sup> Pococke, Richard. DNB and Bierbrier (2012): 438. For his description of the obelisks, see Pococke (1743-1745): 1, 7.

<sup>221</sup> Norden, Frederik. Bierbrier (2012): 405-406. In Norden (1792) the caption to Plate VII describes the prostrate obelisk as 'obélisque cassé, et couché par terre, a moitié enseveli' [broken obelisk, lying on the ground and half buried].

<sup>222</sup> Wilson (1877): 219, footnote.

<sup>223</sup> Wilson (1803): 218-219.

<sup>224</sup> Bret (1999): 134-137.

<sup>225</sup> Rosellini, (Niccolo Francesco) Ippolito Baldessare. Bierbrier (2012): 473.

<sup>226</sup> Reid (2002): 54.

<sup>227</sup> NA FO 78/2116/84-87 and 159/160.

<sup>228</sup> *The Foreign Quarterly Review*, June 1830, 264, and *The Literary Gazette*, 31 July 1830.

<sup>229</sup> Barker, John. DNB.

<sup>230</sup> Malcolm, Sir Pulteney. DNB.

<sup>231</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/65-70.

<sup>232</sup> Noakes (1962): 12, Hayward (1978): 21.

<sup>233</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/63-64 and 77-78.

<sup>234</sup> Gordon, Sir Robert. DNB.

<sup>235</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/82-89. Habachi (1978): 157 specifies this as the standing obelisk of Hatshepsut.

<sup>236</sup> Backhouse, John. DNB.

<sup>237</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/100-101.

<sup>238</sup> See Wilson (1877), quoting the *Bombay Courier*, June 9 1802. The slab, sometimes incorrectly described as bronze, was finally relocated at the Mandora Barracks Officers Mess at Aldershot. The 'medals' may have comprised, or included, a selection of contemporary British and Turkish coins.

<sup>239</sup> TNA FO 78/2116/105.

<sup>240</sup> Habachi (1978): 156-158

<sup>241</sup> Bierbrier (2012): 189.

<sup>242</sup> Bierbrier (2012): 68.

<sup>243</sup> Joseph Bonomi to Robert Hay, 3 March 1832. BL Add MSS 38094: 31. Quoted in Thompson (1992): 118.

<sup>244</sup> MP for Horsham in 1832. <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/ridley-colborne-nicholas-1779-1854> Accessed 11 December 2018.

<sup>245</sup> Spencer, John Charles, Viscount Althorp and third Earl Spencer. DNB.

<sup>246</sup> Sibthorp, Charles de Laet Waldo. DNB.

<sup>247</sup> Bankes, George. DNB.

<sup>248</sup> *Hansard*, 23 July 1832, Volume 14.

<sup>249</sup> Lugt (1938-87): 10241, 11167, 13237 or 13310, 14046. See also Parkinson (2009): 222-224.

<sup>250</sup> Quoted in Reid (2002): 21, and see also 54-58.

<sup>251</sup> Lugt (1938-87): 14240 and 14611.

<sup>252</sup> Sotheby [1836?]: 12.'Miscellaneous Objects'.

<sup>253</sup> *The Times*, 7 February 1837, 5. 'Money-market and City Intelligence'.

<sup>254</sup> Ferdinand de Lesseps. *Institution of Civil Engineers*, obituary 1895.  
[https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Ferdinand\\_de\\_Lesseps](https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Ferdinand_de_Lesseps). Accessed 17 July 2019.

<sup>255</sup> Bierbrier (2012): 579-580.

<sup>256</sup> See Moser (2006): 143-147.

<sup>257</sup> Hawkins, Edward. DNB.

<sup>258</sup> Moser (2006): 145-146 and 270, fn. 91.

<sup>259</sup> TNA FO/78/2116/155-162.

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<sup>260</sup> Wilkinson (1843): 150.

<sup>261</sup> Wilde, Sir William Robert Wills. DNB.

<sup>262</sup> Wilde (1877): 629.

<sup>263</sup> Wilkinson (1847): Vol 2, 311.

<sup>264</sup> Wilde (1839): 631.

<sup>265</sup> Russell, John [formerly Lord John Russell] first Earl Russell. DNB.

<sup>266</sup> Noakes (1962): 12-13.

<sup>267</sup> V&A MA/2/C.

<sup>268</sup> Phipps, Sir Charles Beaumont. DNB.

<sup>269</sup> Compton, Spencer Joshua Alwyne, second marquess of Northampton. DNB.

<sup>270</sup> V&A MA/2/C.

<sup>271</sup> Adolphus Frederick, Prince, first duke of Cambridge. DNB.

<sup>272</sup> V&A MA/2/C.

<sup>273</sup> Ellis, Sir Henry. DNB.

<sup>274</sup> Nugent, George Thomas John, Eighth Earl of Westmeath and later First Marquess of Westmeath. <http://www.cracroftspeerage.co.uk/online/content/westmeath1621.htm>. Accessed 17 July 2019.

<sup>275</sup> Howard, George William Frederick, seventh earl of Carlisle. DNB.

<sup>276</sup> *Hansard*. 2 June 1851, Volume 117.

<sup>277</sup> Hume, Joseph. DNB.

<sup>278</sup> Murray, Sir Charles Augustus. DNB. Known, from his involvement in the transport of Obaysch, the first hippopotamus in London Zoo, and his subsequent fondness for the animal, as 'Hippopotamus Murray'. *ASTENE Bulletin* 21, Autumn 2004, 22.

<sup>279</sup> TNA FO/141/17/Consular No. 1, 31 January 1851.

<sup>280</sup> Lloyd, John Augustus. DNB.

<sup>281</sup> V&A MA/2/C. The document in this file refers to an air raft constructed of gutta-percha tubing and planks, but Noakes (1962): 14-15, gives details of a plan involving a Royal Navy brig, which he also attributes to Lloyd.

<sup>282</sup> Biographical details uncertain, but he may have been a Manchester tea merchant, and the father of a novelist of the same name.

<sup>283</sup> *The Builder*, 2 August 1851, 478-480.

<sup>284</sup> Wood, Charles, first Viscount Halifax. DNB.

<sup>285</sup> About £952,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>286</sup> TNA FO/78/2116/175-183 and V&A MA/2/C.

<sup>287</sup> Burton, James. *Bierbrier* (2012): 96-97.

<sup>288</sup> *The Times*, 1 October 1851, 5.

<sup>289</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 25 October 1851, 1122-1123.

<sup>290</sup> John Scott Tucker. Grace's Guide to British Industrial History. [https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/John\\_Scott\\_Tucker](https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/John_Scott_Tucker). Accessed 17 July 2019.

<sup>291</sup> Russell, Lord Edward. DNB. Half-brother to Earl Russell, Prime Minister 1846-1852 and 1865-66.

<sup>292</sup> V&A MA/2/C.

<sup>293</sup> TNA FO/78/2116/184-187.

<sup>294</sup> In addition to Thomas Galloway Bey, who died in Alexandria in 1836, and his brother John Alexander Galloway, there seem to have been at least two other brothers, all of whom were involved in civil engineering in Egypt.

<sup>295</sup> *Hansard*, 23 February 1852.

<sup>296</sup> *The Times* 17 May 1852, 8.

<sup>297</sup> Accession number EA943. Iversen (1968): II, Plate 69a and b, 112 and note 7.

<sup>298</sup> Laing, Samuel. DNB.

<sup>299</sup> V&A MA/2/C, 9 November 1852.

<sup>300</sup> Panizzi, Sir Anthony [formerly Antonio Genesio Maria]. DNB.

<sup>301</sup> Cole, Sir Henry. DNB.

<sup>302</sup> V&A MA/2/C, 3 November 1865.

<sup>303</sup> *The Times*, 11 November 1852, 3, which quotes from Derby's letter, and *The Athenaeum*, 13 November 1852, 1249.

<sup>304</sup> Moser (2012): 67.

<sup>305</sup> Anderson, Arthur. DNB.

<sup>306</sup> Anderson was also co-founder of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O), the Oriental element of which began with a service to and from Alexandria as part of the route to India.

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<sup>307</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 9 April 1853, 449. The remaining Luxor obelisk seems to have been confused with the one at Karnak given to Britain by Muhammad Ali.

<sup>308</sup> *The Observer*, 3 April 1853, 7.

<sup>309</sup> *The Leisure Hour*, 26 May 1853, 351.

<sup>310</sup> *Crabitès* (1933):1.

<sup>311</sup> Daly (1998): 183-185.

<sup>312</sup> Canning, Stratford, Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe. DNB.

<sup>313</sup> TNA FO/141/17. 20 February 1851.

<sup>314</sup> TNA FO/141/17. Consular 12, 9 July 1851.

<sup>315</sup> TNA FO/141/17. Consular 14, August 4 1851.

<sup>316</sup> TNA FO/142/16. 2 November 1851.

<sup>317</sup> Rivlin (1961): 371 and 375, and Footnote 32.

<sup>318</sup> TNA FO/141/17. Consular 13. 24 July 1851.

<sup>319</sup> *The Monthly Epitome*, September 1799. Review of a translation of Sonnini's *Travels in Upper and Lower Egypt*.

<sup>320</sup> Reid (2002): 149.

<sup>321</sup> *The Art-Journal*, January 1879, 1-4.

<sup>322</sup> Reid (2002): 149-152.

<sup>323</sup> Reid (2002): 152.

<sup>324</sup> Marlowe (1974): 68-74.

<sup>325</sup> Marlowe (1974): 192.

<sup>326</sup> Marlowe (1974): 187-205.

<sup>327</sup> *The National Magazine*, June 1862, 89.

<sup>328</sup> Egyptian correspondent of *The Times*, quoted in *The West African Reporter*, 28 February 1877, 6.

<sup>329</sup> Layard, Austen Henry. DNB.

<sup>330</sup> Better known nowadays for his contributions to Assyriology.

<sup>331</sup> TNA FO/78/2116/212-215.

<sup>332</sup> Stanton, Sir Edward. Bierbrier (2012): 523.

<sup>333</sup> Although the name of the land's owner is given as 'Sr. Jean di Wemetre', this is probably a misspelling of Giovanni Demetrio.

<sup>334</sup> TNA FO/78/2116/223-224.

<sup>335</sup> Stanley, Edward Henry. DNB. Lord Stanley from 1851, and later the fifteenth Earl of Derby.

<sup>336</sup> About £1,064,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>337</sup> TNA FO/78/2116/219-220

<sup>338</sup> TNA FO/78/2116/225-226.

<sup>339</sup> Bierbrier (2012): 59-60.

<sup>340</sup> British Museum, Accession number AES Av700.

<sup>341</sup> Lepsius (Karl) Richard. Bierbrier (2012): 324-326.

<sup>342</sup> Wilkinson (1843): 50.

<sup>343</sup> Mayer, Luigi. Bierbrier (2012): 364.

<sup>344</sup> L'Hôte (Hippolyte Antoine) Nestor. Bierbrier (2012): 330-331. See also L'Hôte (1856): 39.

<sup>345</sup> British Museum. 'Papers relating to Cleopatra's Needle 1867 (Department of Antiquities) AES Av700'.

14-15

<sup>346</sup> Donaldson, Thomas Leverton. DNB.

<sup>347</sup> British Museum, Accession number AES Av700.

<sup>348</sup> *Sharpe's London Magazine*, January 1869, 244-245.

<sup>349</sup> Jones, John Winter. DNB.

<sup>350</sup> TNA FO/78/2116/229-231.

<sup>351</sup> Alexander (1879): 14.

<sup>352</sup> Villiers, George William Frederick 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Clarendon. DNB.

<sup>353</sup> About £170,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>354</sup> TNA FO/78/2116/233.

<sup>355</sup> TNA FO/78/2116/238.

<sup>356</sup> TNA FO/78/2116/237.

<sup>357</sup> TNA FO/78/2116/240-241.

<sup>358</sup> Maxwell, Sir William Stirling, ninth Baronet. DNB.

<sup>359</sup> Lowe, Robert, Viscount Sherbrooke. DNB.

<sup>360</sup> About £1,697,000 in 2017 prices.

<sup>361</sup> Alexander (1879): 15.

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<sup>362</sup> Alexander (1879): and Hayward (1978): 28.

<sup>363</sup> Hayward (1978): 28.

<sup>364</sup> TNA FO/78/2927/1-4. Alexander (1879): 16, says that Sir William Stirling Maxwell introduced him to the Earl of Derby.

<sup>365</sup> TNA FO/78/2927/7-8.

<sup>366</sup> TNA FO/78/2927/10-11. The enclosures referred to have been separated or lost.

<sup>367</sup> TNA FO/78/2927/11 verso.

<sup>368</sup> Alexander (1879): 30-31.

<sup>369</sup> TNA FO/78/2927/18-19.

<sup>370</sup> TNA FO/78/2927/16-17.

<sup>371</sup> TNA FO/78/2927/22-23.

<sup>372</sup> Alexander (1879): 53.

<sup>373</sup> About £1,097,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>374</sup> About £55,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>375</sup> Wayman Dixon, letter to *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 1 February 1878.

<sup>376</sup> Pender, Sir John. DNB.

<sup>377</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/38-41. If correct, the case would be that of Pender vs Lushington (1877).

<sup>378</sup> Cooper (1877): 140.

<sup>379</sup> Leyland (1888): Vol 1. 205 says that 'A filial respect for his father, who was engaged in Nelson's Egyptian expedition, was one cause of Erasmus Wilson's desire to acquire the obelisk for his country'.

<sup>380</sup> About £878,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>381</sup> About £1,097,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>382</sup> LMA MBW/1302.

<sup>383</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/38-41.

<sup>384</sup> TNA HCA 20/600364.

<sup>385</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/44-45.

<sup>386</sup> Fowler, Sir John, first baronet. DNB.

<sup>387</sup> *The Freemason*, 1878. Vol XI, 77.

<sup>388</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/46.

<sup>389</sup> At this point, Erasmus Wilson had not publicly been identified as the donor.

<sup>390</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/42-43.

<sup>391</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/58.

<sup>392</sup> Vivian, Hussey Crespiigny, third Baron Vivian. DNB.

<sup>393</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/47-57.

<sup>394</sup> For the bribes paid to secure concessions from the Sultan, see Crabitès (1933): Chapter X.

<sup>395</sup> Daly (1998): 221.

<sup>396</sup> See Marlowe (1974):

<sup>397</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/54-55 and 61-62.

<sup>398</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/59 and 60.

<sup>399</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/63-64.

<sup>400</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/70.

<sup>401</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/78.

<sup>402</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/79-80.

<sup>403</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/25.

<sup>404</sup> Marlowe (1974): 188.

<sup>405</sup> See Marlowe (1974): 187-205.

<sup>406</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/67-68.

<sup>407</sup> £30,000 sterling would be equivalent to about £3,325,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>408</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/74-75.

<sup>409</sup> For the Thames Iron Works contract, see LMA Q/CN/015, offprint of a lecture by Benjamin Baker to the Institution of Civil Engineers.

<sup>410</sup> *The Times*, 24 May 1877.

<sup>411</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/81-82, 94-95, and 100-109.

<sup>412</sup> A catalogue of his Ancient Egyptian coins, by Félix Feuardent, had been published in Paris in 1869. See Demetrio (1869).

<sup>413</sup> Owen, Sir Richard. DNB.

<sup>414</sup> British Museum, Accession number AES Av700.

<sup>415</sup> Neroutsos, Tassos (Bey). Bierbrier (2012): 401.

<sup>416</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/87-90.

<sup>417</sup> *The Graphic*, 22 September 1877, 270 and other periodicals.

### Chapter 3 – Our Egyptian Obelisk

<sup>1</sup> Ebers (1880): Preface.

<sup>2</sup> See Mackesy (1995) [2010]: 21, Walsh (1803): 148-149, and Aksan (2014): 238.

<sup>3</sup> Aksan (2014): 238. No source given.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Solé and Valbelle (1999)[2002]: 29-36, and for the quote from Menou Ray (2007): 34-36, although he does not give its source.

<sup>5</sup> Printed in full in Wilson (1803): 351 and following.

<sup>6</sup> Jenkins (2018): 129.

<sup>7</sup> Perrin W. and Lloyd C. (1927-1955): 409.

<sup>8</sup> Reid (2002): 54.

<sup>9</sup> Jenkins (2018): 126.

<sup>10</sup> Jennings (John) Hargrave. DNB.

<sup>11</sup> Jennings (1877): 39.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in *The Times*, 12 November 1821, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Head, Charles Franklin, Captain in the Queen's Royal Regiment. Life dates and other biographical information in V&A collections database. (SD.496)

<sup>14</sup> Head (1833): 54.

<sup>15</sup> *Blackwood's Magazine*, September 1851, 313-314.

<sup>16</sup> *Sharpe's London Magazine*, January 1869, 319.

<sup>17</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 16 February 1878, 204.

<sup>18</sup> *Westminster Review*, July 1879, 281.

<sup>19</sup> Porter and Moss (1974-): III-2, 836-837.

<sup>20</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 25 October 1851, 1122-1123. This belief may be related to the presentation to the Duke by Muhammad Ali in 1838 of a small obelisk of Amenophis II, mentioned by Birch in Parker (1879): 44.

<sup>21</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 25 October 1851, 1123.

<sup>22</sup> See Moser (2006): 145-146.

<sup>23</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 15 December 1877, 781.

<sup>24</sup> Jones, Owen. DNB.

<sup>25</sup> See *The British Architect*, 2 November 1877, 219, for the donation by his sister to the London Architectural Association of Jones's designs.

<sup>26</sup> *The Builder*, 2 August 1851, 479.

<sup>27</sup> Wilde (1839): 631.

<sup>28</sup> Barry, Charles. In Barry, Sir Charles. DNB.

<sup>29</sup> *The Times*, 11 February 1878, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Ryder, Dudley, second Earl of Harrowby. DNB.

<sup>31</sup> *The Examiner*, 20 October 1877, 1322.

<sup>32</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 11 July 1868, 56.

<sup>33</sup> LMA MBW/1303/81b.

<sup>34</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 9 October 1875, 473-474.

<sup>35</sup> *The Globe*, 26 August 1876, 560.

<sup>36</sup> *Illustrated London News*; 1 February 1862 131-132, 5 April 1862 330-331, 26 April 1862 429.

<sup>37</sup> *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1851, 313-314.

<sup>38</sup> *The Kaleidoscope*, 1 June 1819, 178.

<sup>39</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 22 November 1845, 331.

<sup>40</sup> V&A MA/2/C.

<sup>41</sup> Alex Ogilvie, Joint Hon. Treasurer Highland Society, email 11 September 2018.

<sup>42</sup> *The West African Reporter*, 21 March 1877, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Matthews (1970): 291-292 and 294-296.

<sup>44</sup> Jennings (1877): 43-44.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Wilson (1877): 191.

<sup>46</sup> Life dates from Glasgow Museums via portrait details on ArtUK web site.

<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/angus-turner-18001876-town-clerk-of-glasgow-18571873-86711>.

Accessed 18 July 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Alexander (1879): 16.

<sup>48</sup> Alexander (1879): 62.

<sup>49</sup> *The British Architect*, June 2 1876, p. viii and Alexander (1879): 62.

<sup>50</sup> Life dates for William Burrell are quoted, but have not yet been confirmed from authoritative sources.

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<sup>51</sup> About £443,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>52</sup> Dixon's £500 would be equivalent to about £55,000, and Burrell's £5,000 to about £554,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>53</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/110-113.

<sup>54</sup> TNA FO 78/2927/114.

<sup>55</sup> TNA HCA 20-600-364.

<sup>56</sup> Alexander (1879): 90.

<sup>57</sup> TNA HCA 20-600-364. £250 would be equivalent to about £28,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>58</sup> About £277,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>59</sup> TNA HCA 20-600-364.

<sup>60</sup> *The Times*, 12 March 1878, 4.

<sup>61</sup> *The Times*, 22 October 1877, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Anon (c. 1878) *Wonderful History*: 27-28.

<sup>63</sup> Exodus 12, 35-36. King James Version.

<sup>64</sup> 'On Christian Doctrine', Book 2, Chapter 40. <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/ddc2.html> Accessed 9/12/2018.

<sup>65</sup> 'On Christian Doctrine', Book 2, Chapter 40. <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/ddc2.html> Accessed 9/12/2018.

<sup>66</sup> Wilson (1803): 219.

<sup>67</sup> Head (1833): 54.

<sup>68</sup> Head (1833): 54.

<sup>69</sup> Wilson, William Rae. DNB.

<sup>70</sup> *The Times*, 1 June 1831, 6.

<sup>71</sup> Dodson 2019: 142–43.

<sup>72</sup> Reid (2002): 54-58.

<sup>73</sup> Head (1833): 54.

<sup>74</sup> Wilde (1840): 622.

<sup>75</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 9 August 1851, 204.

<sup>76</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 25 October 1851, 1122-1123.

<sup>77</sup> Talbot, James, fourth Baron Talbot of Malahide in the peerage of Ireland, and first Baron Talbot de Malahide in the peerage of the United Kingdom. DNB.

<sup>78</sup> *The Times*, 12 November 1852, 8.

<sup>79</sup> St John, Bayle Frederick. DNB.

<sup>80</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 20 November 1852, 1271.

<sup>81</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 20 November 1852, 1271.

<sup>82</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 20 November 1852, 1271.

<sup>83</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 4 December 1852, 1330-1331.

<sup>84</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 4 December 1852, 1330-1331.

<sup>85</sup> Russell, Sir William Howard. DNB.

<sup>86</sup> *London Society*, 1870, 347.

<sup>87</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 17 February 1877, 191.

<sup>88</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 16 February 1878, 204.

<sup>89</sup> *The Examiner*, 23 February 1878, 246.

<sup>90</sup> See Iversen (1968): II, 128-129.

<sup>91</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 20 November 1852, 1271.

<sup>92</sup> *London Reader*, 27 March 1875, 508, *Bow Bells*, 10 October 1878, 348, *The Saturday Review*, 17 February 1877, 191.

<sup>93</sup> *The Art Journal*, 1878, 67-68.

<sup>94</sup> *The Examiner*, 27 October 1877, 1346.

<sup>95</sup> Leighton, Frederic, Baron Leighton. DNB.

<sup>96</sup> *The Builder*, 23 November 1878, 1230.

<sup>97</sup> *The Times*, 5 October 1878, 3.

<sup>98</sup> *The British Architect and Northern Engineer*, 12 April 1878, 171-173.

<sup>99</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 25 August 1877, 239.

<sup>100</sup> N.379 (Malek 1999: 50[800-624-800]).

<sup>101</sup> LMA. Minutes of Proceedings, Metropolitan Board of Works, 13 June 1879.

<sup>102</sup> *The Builder*, 29 June 1878, 683.

<sup>103</sup> Cooper, William Ricketts. DNB.

<sup>104</sup> *The Builder*, 20 April 1878, 411.

<sup>105</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 1878, 3.

<sup>106</sup> *The Builder* 23 February 1878, 198

<sup>107</sup> *The Builder*, 23 February 1878, 198.

<sup>108</sup> Statham, Henry Heathcote. DNB.

<sup>109</sup> *The Builder* 20 April 1878, 415.

<sup>110</sup> Gardiner (1957): 489. Hieroglyph N27. See also Wilkinson (1994): 152 and Figure 106.

<sup>111</sup> George John Vulliamy, in Vulliamy Family. DNB.

<sup>112</sup> LMA. Minutes of Proceedings, Metropolitan Board of Works, 13 June 1879.

<sup>113</sup> Bazalgette, Sir William Joseph. DNB.

<sup>114</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 June 1953, 6. A catenary curve is that formed by an idealised chain or cable supported only at its ends, and is commonly used in architecture.

<sup>115</sup> King (1883): 6.

<sup>116</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/digitalegypt/archaeology/edwards.html>

<sup>117</sup> *The Times*, 8 October 1878, 3, and Wilson (1877): 213.

<sup>118</sup> Renouf, Sir Peter le Page. DNB and Bierbrier (2012): 461.

<sup>119</sup> Poole, (Reginald) Stuart. DNB and Bierbrier (2012): 441.

<sup>120</sup> Lane, Edward William. DNB and Bierbrier (2012): 307-308.

<sup>121</sup> Sharpe, Samuel. DNB and Bierbrier (2012): 505-506.

<sup>122</sup> Sotheby [1836?]: 46, 623.

<sup>123</sup> Edwards, Amelia Ann Blandford. DNB and Bierbrier (2012): 172-173.

<sup>124</sup> Life dates and other biographical information on Rev. King are provided by Budge (1926) viii-ix, and seem to be drawn from an obituary in *The Berwick Journal*, 1 January 1914.

<sup>125</sup> *The Academy*, 11 April 1885, 265-266.

<sup>126</sup> *The Academy*, 2 February 1878, 89.

<sup>127</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 27 October 1877, 532-534, and 3 November 1877, 565.

<sup>128</sup> 21 November 1877.

<sup>129</sup> *The Builder*, 24 November 1877, 1180-1181 and *The British Architect and Northern Engineer*, 23 November 1877, 250-252.

<sup>130</sup> LMA Q/CN/010.

<sup>131</sup> *The Times*, 19 September 1877, 6.

<sup>132</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 29 September 1877, 383.

<sup>133</sup> *The Times*, 27 September 1877, 6.

<sup>134</sup> *The British Architect and Northern Engineer*, 12 April 1878, 171-173.

<sup>135</sup> Godwin, Edward William. DNB.

<sup>136</sup> *The British Architect*, 9 November 1877, 225-226.

<sup>137</sup> Knowles, James Thomas. DNB.

<sup>138</sup> Spiers, Richard Phené. DNB.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas Hayter Lewis. *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*.

<sup>140</sup> 15 April 1878.

<sup>141</sup> Huggins, Samuel. DNB.

<sup>142</sup> *The Builder*, 15 December 1878, 1254.

<sup>143</sup> Elliott (2012): 265-277.

<sup>144</sup> *The Builder*, 20 April 1878, 410-411.

<sup>145</sup> Statham, Henry Heathcote. DNB.

<sup>146</sup> *The Builder*, 23 November 1878, 1220-1221. The *Aediles* were officials of the Roman state charged with the care and repair of temples, other city buildings, and infrastructure including sewers. The use of the term here is a sarcastic reference to the Metropolitan Board of Works.

<sup>147</sup> *The Times* 11 February 1878, 8.

<sup>148</sup> DNB – Vulliamy family.

<sup>149</sup> RUSI Journal 1877, No. 21, 1100.

<sup>150</sup> Tadema, Sir Lawrence Alma-. DNB.

<sup>151</sup> Leighton, Frederic Baron Leighton. DNB.

<sup>152</sup> *The Examiner*, 27 October 1877, 1347.

<sup>153</sup> *The Builder*, 23 November 1878, 1222.

<sup>154</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 September 1878, 3.

<sup>155</sup> *The Times*, 3 October 1877, 5.

<sup>156</sup> *The Times*, 6 October 1877, 11.

<sup>157</sup> *The Times*, 13 September 1878, 7.

<sup>158</sup> Anon (c. 1878) *Wonderful History*: 23.

<sup>159</sup> Anon (c. 1878) *Wonderful History*: 25.

<sup>160</sup> Anon (ND): 29.

<sup>161</sup> King (1883): 37.

<sup>162</sup> *The London Journal and Weekly Record*, 22 January 1853, 317-318.

<sup>163</sup> See for example Ghalioungui (1963): 47 and footnotes for Classical and Arabic sources.

<sup>164</sup> Lexikon der Ägyptologie: IV, 929, Ghalioungui (1973): 28.

<sup>165</sup> *RUSI Journal* 1878; *The Builder*, 31 March 1877, 326.

<sup>166</sup> *The British Architect*, 9 November 1877, 225-226.

<sup>167</sup> *The Builder*, 19 January 1878, 55.

<sup>168</sup> *The Builder* 27 October 1877, 1075.

<sup>169</sup> *Chambers's Journal*, 14 April 1877, 225.

<sup>170</sup> Cooper (1877): 8 and Footnote 1.

<sup>171</sup> *The Builder*, 27 October 1877, 1081.

<sup>172</sup> Bonwick (1877): 102.

<sup>173</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 17 February 1877, 191.

<sup>174</sup> *The Times*, 31 October 1878, 5.

<sup>175</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 21 September 1878, 366.

<sup>176</sup> *The Times of India*, 28 October 1878, 3.

<sup>177</sup> *The Times*, 27 September 1877, 6.

<sup>178</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 15 December 1877, 781.

<sup>179</sup> Anon (1878): 4-5.

<sup>180</sup> *The Examiner*, 23 February 1878, 246.

<sup>181</sup> *Edinburgh Review* 72. October 1840, 227-258.

<sup>182</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 17 February 1877, 191-192.

<sup>183</sup> *The Reliquary*, 18 January 1878, 181.

<sup>184</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 26 November 1881, 520.

<sup>185</sup> Baker, Benjamin. DNB.

<sup>186</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 10 March 1877, 222.

<sup>187</sup> From his song *The Farewell to the Brethren of St. James's Lodge, Tarbolton*. 'Adieu! A heart-warm fond adieu; dear brothers of the mystic tie...'

<sup>188</sup> Elliott (2012): 65-72.

<sup>189</sup> Cooper (1877): 140.

<sup>190</sup> Stirling Royal Arch No. 76, initiated December 27 1832. Stewart Donaldson, SRA 76, pers. com.

<sup>191</sup> Canongate Kilwinning Lodge No. 2, Edinburgh. Denslow (1957): A-D.

<sup>192</sup> Pearce, 2018, 220.

<sup>193</sup> Wilson, Erasmus. Biographical file, Library and Museum of Freemasonry.

<sup>194</sup> *The Freemason* Vol XI, 1878. 49 & 453.

<sup>195</sup> Gorringe, Henry Honeychurch. Bierbrier (2012):218.

<sup>196</sup> Anglo-Saxon Lodge No. 137, New York City, New York.

[https://www.masonrytoday.com/index.php?new\\_month=07&new\\_day=7&new\\_year=2017](https://www.masonrytoday.com/index.php?new_month=07&new_day=7&new_year=2017) accessed October 25 2018. See Gorringe (1882): 18-20.

<sup>197</sup> Weiss, John Adam. Life dates from *Appleton's Cyclopedie of American Biography*, New York: D Appleton and Company 1887-1889.

<sup>198</sup> Weisse (1880).

<sup>199</sup> *Sharpe's London Magazine*, January 1869, 244-245.

<sup>200</sup> *The Graphic*, 26 October 1878, 431.

<sup>201</sup> *Judy*, 24 February 1869, 179.

<sup>202</sup> See Parramore (2008): 61.

<sup>203</sup> Parramore (2008): 61.

<sup>204</sup> *Punch*, 3 March 1877, 88.

<sup>205</sup> *Punch*, 3 March 1877, 88.

<sup>206</sup> *Morning Post and Gazetteer*, 27 May 1802.

<sup>207</sup> *The Times*, 27 December 1804, 2.

<sup>208</sup> *Judy*, 1877; 25 April, 17; 30 May, 63; 5 September, 211; 19 September, 233.

<sup>209</sup> National Archives Registered Design files: BT 43/43, 45/29, 47/2.

<sup>210</sup> Flanders (2003): 255. See also Chapters 5 and 7, The Drawing Room and The Dining Room.

<sup>211</sup> Flanders (2003): 261.

<sup>212</sup> See National Portrait Gallery: NPG x22601 and NPG x132279.

<sup>213</sup> Life dates and other biographical information by courtesy of The Weardale Museum.

## Works Cited

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<sup>214</sup> Podkins (1877): 7.

<sup>215</sup> Translation from Weardale dialect courtesy of the Weardale Museum.

<sup>216</sup> *The Illustrated London News*, 21 September 1878, 286.

<sup>217</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 21 September 1878, 366.

<sup>218</sup> *The Times*, 10 November 1877, 9.

<sup>219</sup> *The Graphic*, 17 November 1877, 459.

<sup>220</sup> *Punch*, 3 March 1877, 88.

<sup>221</sup> The Aediles were officials in the Roman Republic responsible among other things for the maintenance of public works and buildings. This would therefore be a satirical reference to the Metropolitan Board of Works, who would assume responsibility for the Needle on its arrival in London.

<sup>222</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 9 October 1875, 473-474.

<sup>223</sup> *The British Architect*, 2 November 1877, 219.

<sup>224</sup> *The Builder*, 24 November 1877, 1181.

<sup>225</sup> See Anon (1743): 33-34 for its use by Edward Brown, a London merchant.

<sup>226</sup> Hamer, M. 'Disowning Cleopatra' in Walker and Ashton (2003): 119.

<sup>227</sup> Walker and Ashton (2003): v.

<sup>228</sup> Miles (2011): 3.

<sup>229</sup> Sinclair (1878):11.

<sup>230</sup> British Museum. Accession Number AES Av700.

<sup>231</sup> *The British Architect*, 23 March 1877, 174.

<sup>232</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 16 February 1878, 203-205.

<sup>233</sup> *The British Architect and Northern Engineer*, 12 April 1878, 171-173.

<sup>234</sup> *The Times*, 8 October 1878, 3.

<sup>235</sup> *The British Architect*, 9 August 1878, 62.

<sup>236</sup> *The Times*, 31 January 1878, 5.

<sup>237</sup> *The Times*, 4 February 1878, 10.

<sup>238</sup> Names in the book confirmed with Ian Pearce, biographer of John Dixon. Personal communication.

<sup>239</sup> Stanley, Arthur Penrhyn. DNB.

<sup>240</sup> Disraeli, Benjamin, earl of Beaconsfield. DNB. After being ennobled as Earl of Beaconsfield in 1876, Disraeli led his administration from the House of Lords.

<sup>241</sup> LMA Q/CN

<sup>242</sup> Alexander (1879): 100.

<sup>243</sup> Metropolitan Board of Works Minutes, 15 February 1878. The bill was passed as the Monuments Metropolis Act 1878.

<sup>244</sup> LMA MBW/1296, 28 February 1878.

<sup>245</sup> *The Builder*, 3 August 1878, 802.

<sup>246</sup> LMA MBW/1301, 30 September 1878.

<sup>247</sup> LMA MBW/1302 28 October 1878, Supplemental Papers.

<sup>248</sup> *The Builder*, 12 October 1878, 1074.

<sup>249</sup> LMA MBW/1303 18 November 1878.

<sup>250</sup> LMA MBW/1304 2 December 1878.

<sup>251</sup> LMA MBW/1304 9 December 1878.

<sup>252</sup> LMA MBW/1305 27 January 1879.

<sup>253</sup> LMA Metropolitan Board of Works Minutes, 7 and 21 February 1879, 29 April 1881, and 1 June 1883.

<sup>254</sup> Gladstone, William Ewart. DNB.

<sup>255</sup> About £40,000 at 2107 prices.

<sup>256</sup> TNA T1/12803.

<sup>257</sup> *Bow Bells*, 1 February 1882, 132.

<sup>258</sup> *The Times*, 7 December 1881.

<sup>259</sup> For more background on events like the Balkan crisis and Russo-Turkish War, and British policy at this time, see Millman (1979).

<sup>260</sup> E.G. Wilde (1840): 178.

<sup>261</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 September 1878, 3.

<sup>262</sup> Lodge of Antiquity, No 2, London.

<sup>263</sup> <https://ancientegyptheritage.wordpress.com/2015/02/22/a-victorian-memento-of-cleopatras-needle/>  
Accessed November 1 2018.

<sup>264</sup> *Express and Echo*, 13 August 1923. Page unknown, clipping in National Maritime Museum collection.

<sup>265</sup> *The Academy*, 17 August 1878, 155, and following two issues.

<sup>266</sup> Example in the author's collection. See Bracegirdle (1998) 206 and Plate 51.

<sup>267</sup> *The British Architect*, 26 July 1878, 38.

## Chapter 4 – The Corrosive Capital

<sup>1</sup> See Russell (1880).

<sup>2</sup> Hay (1880): 44.

<sup>3</sup> Antique Bronze Ltd (2005): 34.

<sup>4</sup> LMA MBW/1303 18 November 1878. Letter from John Dixon to Bazalgette dated 29 October 1878.

<sup>5</sup> *The Times*, 12 May 1879, 8. Details of the composition of Browning's solution are given in Patent 1691, issued to Browning on 1 June 1869. (British Library.)

<sup>6</sup> *The British Architect*, 9 November 1877, 225-226.

<sup>7</sup> *The Art Journal*, 1878, 68.

<sup>8</sup> *The Nineteenth Century*, May 1893, 827-828.

<sup>9</sup> *The Builder*, 16 February 1878, 158-159.

<sup>10</sup> E.G. *the Art Journal* 1878, 111 and *The Graphic*, 2 February 1878, 119.

<sup>11</sup> *The Academy*, 7 October 1911, 449.

<sup>12</sup> *The Daily Mail*, 3 February 1932. Clipping in file, no page number.

<sup>13</sup> *The Financial Times*, 4 October 1961, 14.

<sup>14</sup> *The Financial Times*, 19 October 1967, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Shaw and Nicholson (1990): 10-11.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Henry Travis in *The Builder*, 9 October 1878, 1103.

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<sup>18</sup> *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 11 January 1924, 122.

<sup>19</sup> *The Pall Mall Magazine*, August 1894.

<sup>20</sup> Forster (1996) [1920]: 280.

<sup>21</sup> Forster (1996) [1920]: 283.

<sup>22</sup> Forster (1996) [1920]: 283.

<sup>23</sup> Davey (1921): 15.

<sup>24</sup> Spring, Howard. DNB.

<sup>25</sup> *Country Life*, 11 April 1957, 733 and 735.

<sup>26</sup> *The Guardian*, 8 October 1977, 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Technology and Culture* 1 July 1986, 513-514.

<sup>28</sup> *Financial Times*, 9 April 1997, 30.

<sup>29</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 November 1979, 1.

<sup>30</sup> LMA ACC/3499/EH/07/01/105, 85-97.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.drhawass.com/wp/hawass-calls-for-saving-the-cleopatras-needle-of-london/> Accessed 8 November 2018.

<sup>32</sup> <http://cairoscene.com/Buzz/Zahi-Hawass-Calls-Out-UK-Government-on-Desecration-of-Egyptian-National-Treasure> Accessed 8 November 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Shohat, in Walker and Ashton (2003): 127.

<sup>34</sup> Shohat, in Walker and Ashton (2003): 127.

<sup>35</sup> See Elliott (2012): 211-215.

<sup>36</sup> See Moser (2006).

<sup>37</sup> *The Magazine of Art*, January 1887, 172.

<sup>38</sup> Jackson, Sir Thomas Graham, first baronet. DNB.

<sup>39</sup> 'Street Architecture'. *Journal of the Society of Arts*, 23 December 1904, 109.

<sup>40</sup> *The Academy and Literature*, 31 December 1904, 664.

<sup>41</sup> *The British Architect*, 15 September 1911, 181.

<sup>42</sup> 'The Rogers Plan'. *Illustrated London News*, 25 October 1986, 52-53.

<sup>43</sup> Some biographical information is available online: [http://www.the-malvern-hills.uk/other\\_history\\_malvern\\_artists\\_yeats.htm#Yeats, George Paterson](http://www.the-malvern-hills.uk/other_history_malvern_artists_yeats.htm#Yeats, George Paterson) accessed 25 July 2019. The preface to *The London Obelisk* is dated from Kildare, Malvern, in March 1884, confirming that its author was the same person.

<sup>44</sup> 'Religion in Art'. *The Quiver*, January 1906, 241-247.

<sup>45</sup> *The Quiver*, March 1923, 491.

<sup>46</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 September 1928, 8.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.egyptindependent.com/will-the-london-obelisk-return-to-egypt/> Accessed 8 November 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Budge (1926): V.

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<sup>49</sup> King (1883): 5 and 7.

<sup>50</sup> Budge (1926): 25-38.

<sup>51</sup> Smith (Sir) Grafton Elliot. Bierbrier (2012): 515-516.

<sup>52</sup> Perry, William James. Bierbrier (2012): 425-426.

<sup>53</sup> *The Observer*, 9 September 1928, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Crowley, Aleister [formerly Edward Alexander]. DNB.

<sup>55</sup> *Daily Express* 23 December 1937, 6. See also Symonds (1951): 293, who says that the event took place at dawn on Christmas Day, and that four individuals had been chosen during an 'extensive pub crawl' the previous night as representatives of their races.

<sup>56</sup> See Fleischhack (2015), Day (2006), Luckhurst (2012), Frost (2008), and Huckvale (2012).

<sup>57</sup> Serialized in *The Windsor Magazine*, June, July, August, and October 1898.

<sup>58</sup> Boothby, Guy Newell. DNB.

<sup>59</sup> Boothby (1899): 25.

<sup>60</sup> Mackay, Mary [pseud. Marie Corelli]. DNB.

<sup>61</sup> Corelli (1892): Vol III, 182-183.

<sup>62</sup> Biographical information from obituary on O'Connor Mortuary web site:  
<https://oconnormortuary.com/obits/moreen-lefleming-ehly/> Accessed. 18 August 2019.

<sup>63</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 4 April 1911, 7.

<sup>64</sup> Review in *The Manchester Guardian*, 19 August 1885, 8.

<sup>65</sup> *London Society*, March 1890, 237.

<sup>66</sup> *Every Week*, 5 June 1891, 407-408. £1,000 would be equivalent to about £121,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>67</sup> Judy, 2 February 1898, 56.

<sup>68</sup> *The English Illustrated Magazine*, October 1912, 80-87.

<sup>69</sup> *The Theatre*, January 1890. 'Round the Fire Stories – La Belle Etoile'.

<sup>70</sup> Walsh, James Morgan. Australian Dictionary of Biography.

<sup>71</sup> See Gamwell and Wells (1989).

<sup>72</sup> Jung, C. (1916). *Psychology of the Unconscious*, and see Curran (2009): 283-286.

<sup>73</sup> Forster (1972): 158-159.

<sup>74</sup> Scowcroft, Philip. *British Light Music* (2013): 115.

<sup>75</sup> Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. DNB.

<sup>76</sup> Rossetti Archive web site: <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/6-1881.raw.html> Accessed 11 November 2018.

<sup>77</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 20 February 1886, 280.

<sup>78</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 27 March 1886, 422.

<sup>79</sup> Morris, Sir Lewis. DNB.

<sup>80</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 4 June 1887, 811.

<sup>81</sup> Lang, Andrew. DNB.

<sup>82</sup> Lang (1885): 17-18.

<sup>83</sup> Life dates from The National Archives catalogue.

<sup>84</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 16 September 1910, 6.

<sup>85</sup> Tennyson, Alfred, first baron Tennyson. DNB.

<sup>86</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 April 1966, 21. 'Fresh Eye on Cleopatra's Needle'.

<sup>87</sup> Iversen, Erik Frode Bülow. Bierbrier (2012): 275.

## Chapter 5 – Conclusion: Property and Perception

<sup>1</sup> Thompson (2018): Preface XIV.

<sup>2</sup> Cameron, Sir Alan of Erracht. DNB.

<sup>3</sup> See Benjamin (2009): 5.

<sup>4</sup> Iversen (1968): II, 51-61. Accession numbers EA 523 and 524. Currently on display either side of the entrance to the Great Court in the British Museum.

<sup>5</sup> The British Museum was originally housed in Montagu House, on its current site. Construction of the current British Museum did not begin until 1823, and there seem to have been no plans for the Needle to be sited at Montagu House.

<sup>6</sup> Elliott (2012): 239. It is unclear whether Bankes was charged for this, but the interest of the Duke of Wellington in the obelisk, and the use of a converted gun carriage to transport it overland in England suggest that there may have been an agreement for the use of military resources to some extent.

<sup>7</sup> 3 October 1877, quoted in Cooper (1877): 142.

<sup>8</sup> Cooper (1877): 143.

<sup>9</sup> See for example Mostyn (1989) and Reid (2002).

<sup>10</sup> Reid (2002): 58 and 100.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/curatorial-departments/egyptian-art/temple-of-dendur-50/gift-to-the-met> Accessed 21 November 2018. <https://letstalkmadrid.com/mesmerizing-madrid-monuments-temple-of-debod/> Accessed 21 November 2018.

<sup>12</sup> See Moser (2006): 2.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas (1991):4.

<sup>14</sup> See Reid (2002): 58 and 100.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas (1991): 14.

<sup>16</sup> Miller (1998): 3-24.

## Appendix A – The New York Needle

<sup>1</sup> US Department of State, Office of the Historian. <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/farman-elbert-eli> Accessed 27 July 2019.

<sup>2</sup> <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/farman-elbert-eli> Accessed 13 November 2018. See also Farman (1908): Chapters XIV-XVII, 142-192.

<sup>3</sup> See also Brier (2016), 156-220; Curran, et al (2009): 268-281; Hayward (1978): 92-109; Noakes (1962): 95-116.

<sup>4</sup> Obituary, *New York World*, 7 September 1895, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Gorringe (1882): 2, and Grace's Guide to British Industrial History: Louis Sterne for biographical information and several obituaries.

<sup>6</sup> About £1,662,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>7</sup> Stebbins, Henry George. *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, and New York Times*, 11 December 1881, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Gorringe says it was Hurlbert, Farman that it was Stebbins.

<sup>9</sup> Evarts, William Maxwell. *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*.

<sup>10</sup> 24 November 1877, quoted by Gorringe (1882): 2.

<sup>11</sup> Gorringe (1882): 3.

<sup>12</sup> About £2,363,000 at 2017 prices.

<sup>13</sup> Rear-Admiral Seaton Schroeder. Obituary, *Army-Navy-Air Force Register and Defence Times*, Vol. 72, 398, 31 October 1922.

<sup>14</sup> The challenge was probably by Heinrich rather than his younger brother Émile Brugsch. Both were Bey and later Pasha. Brugsch was created Bey by the Khedive in 1870, and made Pasha in 1881. Heinrich Brugsch. Bierbrier (2012): 84-85.

<sup>15</sup> Mariette was awarded the rank of Pasha in 1879. Bierbrier (2012): 355-356.

<sup>16</sup> Gorringe (1882): 16.

<sup>17</sup> Gorringe (1882): 23.

<sup>18</sup> *The Graphic*, 20 December 1879, 612. 'Jonathan' was the metaphorical personification of America until replaced by the figure of Uncle Sam.

<sup>19</sup> *The Leisure Hour*, January 1881, 39-43.

<sup>20</sup> *The Nineteenth Century*, May 1893, 827-828.

<sup>21</sup> Text of the petition published in *The Antiquary*, March 1880, 130-131.

<sup>22</sup> 'A Short Flight into Egypt'. *All The Year Round*, 9 September 1882, 159.

<sup>23</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 May 1970, 4.

<sup>24</sup> See material on accounts by Pliny in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>25</sup> LMA ACC/3499/EH/07/01/103. Letter from the Obelisk Waterproofing Company of New York, dated March 2 1932.

<sup>26</sup> *Scientific American Supplement*. 30 January 1886: 8391-8393.

<sup>27</sup> *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 2 November 1885, 56-71.

<sup>28</sup> LMA ACC/3499/EH/07/01/103. 15 March 1930. Letter from The Structure Preservative Company, Youngstown Ohio, signed William W Tracy.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in *The North American Review*, 1 July 1886, 410-414.

<sup>30</sup> *Scientific American Supplement*, 12 February 1881, 4247.

<sup>31</sup> Moldenke, Charles Edward. Bierbrier (2012): 378.

<sup>32</sup> Moldenke (1891): Preface.

<sup>33</sup> *Harper's Young People*, reprinted in *Rocky Mountain Christian Advocate*, November 1881, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Gorringe (1882): 18-20.

<sup>35</sup> Feuardent, Felix Bienaimé. Bierbrier (2012): 190.

<sup>36</sup> See Faulkner (1962)[1986]: 165 for writings of 'temple' and 'palace'.

<sup>37</sup> Gorringe (1882): 20.

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<sup>39</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 26 December 1885, 847.

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Accessed 27 July 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Masonic 'Jewels' are items of regalia similar to badges or medals, often associated with ranks or offices held.

<sup>42</sup> Cutter, Bloodgood H(aviland). *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. Second Edition. Yale University Press.

<sup>43</sup> Darling (1882): 6.

<sup>44</sup> Cutter (1881): 8.