

THE OBELISKS OF EGYPT

SKYSCRAPERS OF THE PAST

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PLATE 38. The obelisk of the Piazza Navona, Rome

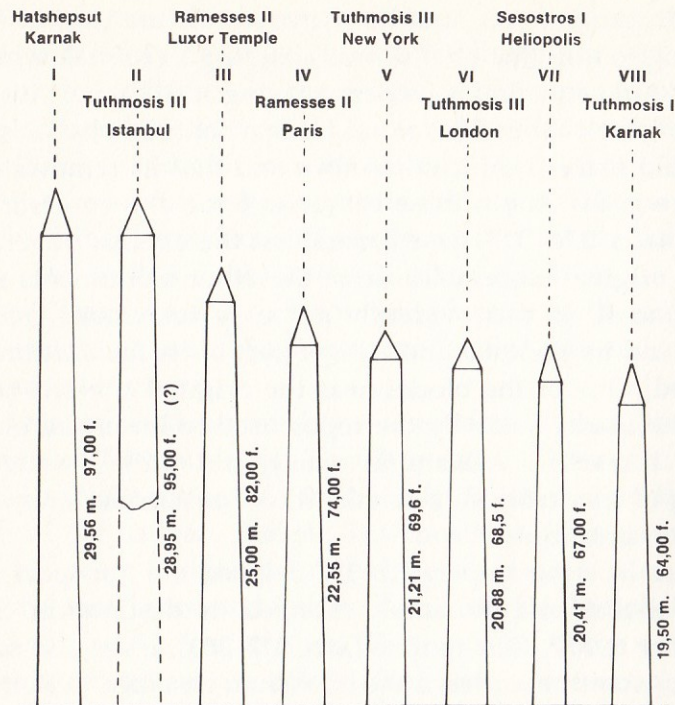


FIGURE 33. The standing obelisks outside of Rome compared

this was done by intent or happened through neglect is unknown, although the former alternative seems more probable. So huge a monument could not easily fall of its own accord.

The story of the re-erection of the Lateran obelisk comes from a sixteenth-century account by Monsignor Michele Mercati. He directed the attention of Pope Sixtus V to the existence of the obelisk and suggested that it be re-erected. Orders were given to search for the obelisk, and after several probings on the probable site, it was located some 7 meters below the surface in the marshy remains of the Circus Maximus. It was no easy task to remove the three fragments into which it had broken and to drag them through the narrow roads leading to its new site. This work and the subsequent erection took more than a year.

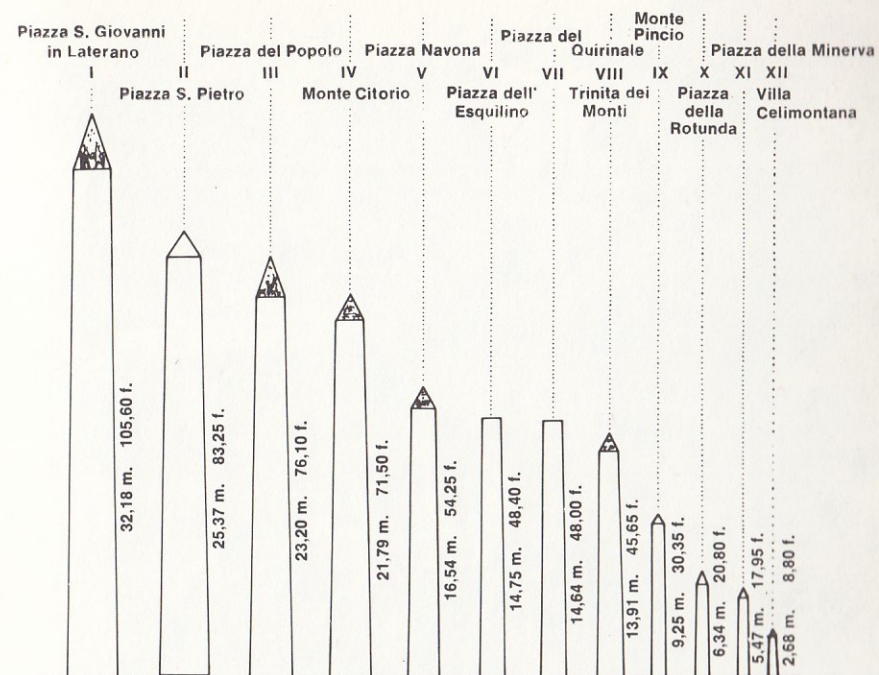


FIGURE 34. Twelve of Rome's thirteen obelisks compared

On August 3, 1588, the obelisk was finally in place in the Piazza San Giovanni in Laterano, resting on a new pedestal with four lions and scenes recounting its history. A cross was placed on its top. On August 10 of that same year, the consecration of the monument took place.

The obelisk in the Piazza del Popolo (plate 29) is the second most important obelisk in Rome. It is 32.77 meters high and weighs 235 tons. Three sides were decorated by Sethos I, but it was left to his son Ramesses II to decorate the fourth side. Ramesses also added two columns of text to each of the other sides already decorated by his father. Below scenes showing the kings making offerings to various solar deities there are numerous standardized inscriptions (plate 30). On one side Sethos I is

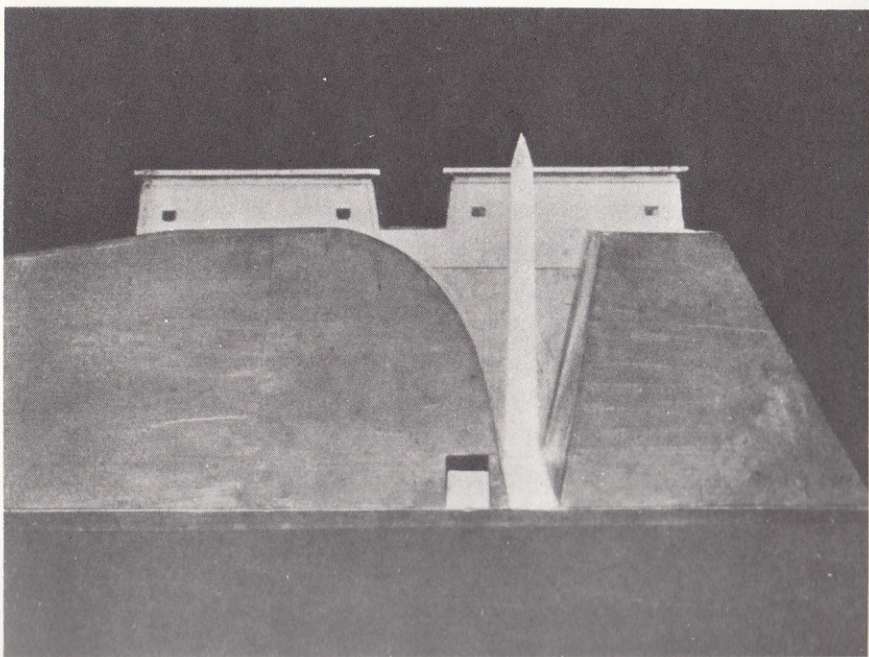
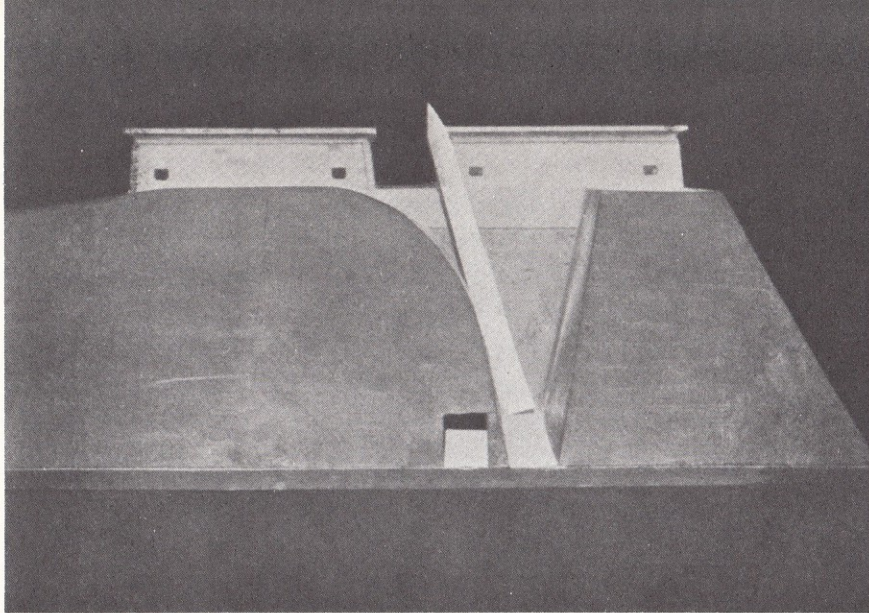
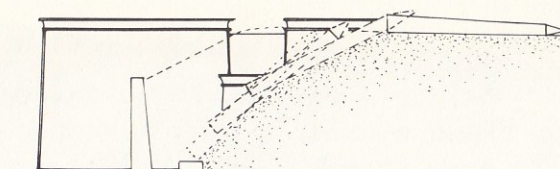
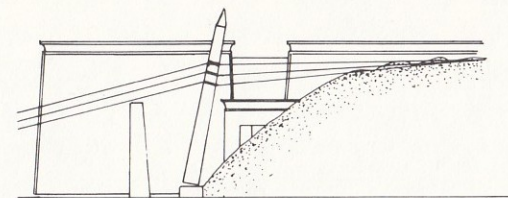


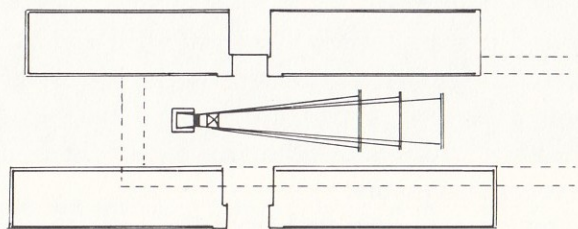
PLATE 5. Possible reconstruction of the erection of one of Hatshepsut's obelisks as suggested by Engelbach, cf. fig. 13



a — Lowering the obelisk into the funnel



b — Obelisk about to be set up



c — Raising the obelisks of Hatshepsut

FIGURE 13. Setting up an obelisk (Chevrier)

had been accustomed to dealing with the problems of setting up large stone monuments during his many years of work in the temples of Karnak.

The successful erection of monuments of such great weight and slender form is not so easy in practice as in theory. The obelisk of Tuthmosis I in Karnak, the smallest still standing in Egypt, can be observed to be leaning slightly, but no engineer at Karnak is as yet prepared to correct this fault. I remember that it took two whole seasons to dismantle and re-erect a column about 19.8 meters high, one of ten raised by the Ethiopian king Taharka (689–664 B.C.) in the first court of the Temple of Amun-Re at Karnak. When the job was completed, Chevrier stood on top of the column surrounded by flags, while the workmen on the ground applauded the achievement.¹²

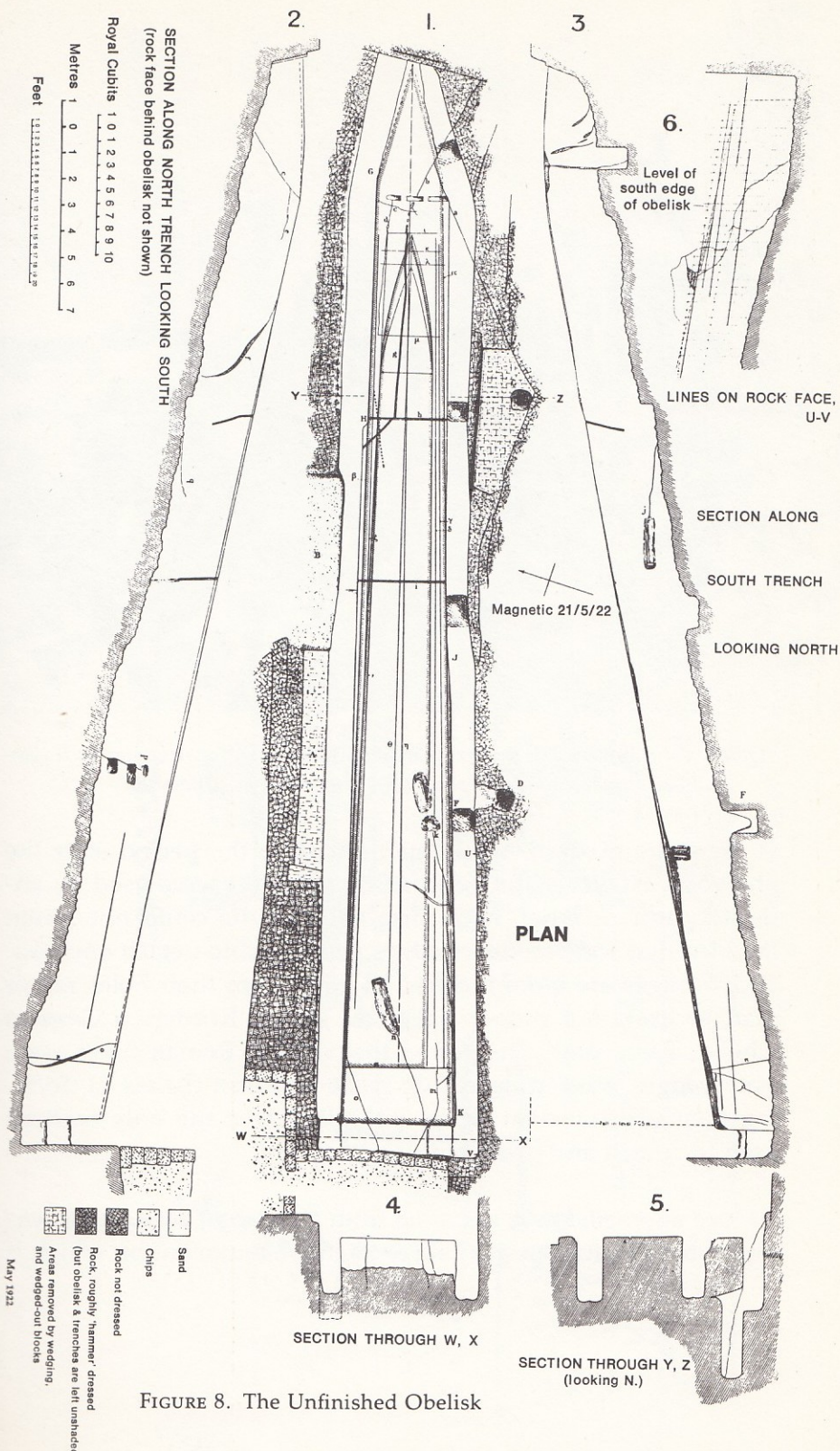


FIGURE 8. The Unfinished Obelisk



PLATE 45. "Cleopatra's Needle" on the Thames Embankment, London