

The Luxor Obelisk

AND ITS VOYAGE TO PARIS

APOLLINAIRE LEBAS

Introduced and translated by Bob Brier and Colette Fossez Sumner

The American University in Cairo Press
Cairo New York



Contents

Translators' Introduction	xv
Translators' Acknowledgments	xix
Introduction	1
PART 1	
Departure — Crossing of the Vessel <i>Luxor</i> — Lowering of the Monument	
Chapter 1	
First negotiations about one of the Egyptian obelisks — The opinion of Mr. Champollion the Younger on the obelisks of Luxor — The mission of Mr. Taylor in Egypt — The giving to France of one of the obelisks of Luxor by the viceroy — Construction of the vessel <i>Luxor</i> — Preparations for departure	11

Chapter 2

Departure from Toulon and arrival at Alexandria — Interview with Muhammad Ali — Departure from Alexandria — Rosetta — Aspects of the Nile and its banks — Arrival at Cairo — Krali Effendi — Departure from Bulaq for Upper Egypt — The Pyramids, Memphis — Sherif Bey — Dendara — The flotilla arrives in sight of Thebes	25
--	----

Chapter 3

Arrival in Thebes — First examination of the obelisk; the stone is cracked — Demolition of the homes encircling the monolith on the right — General aspect of Luxor — A description of all the monuments — Reconnoitering the localities — Some historical details	39
--	----

Chapter 4

Preparatory work for lowering the obelisk — Description of equipment — Outbreak of cholera — Continuation of the work — Uncovering the base of the obelisk — History of the obelisks of Luxor; text of the inscription on the Paris one	53
---	----

Chapter 5

Lowering the obelisk and loading it onto the <i>Luxor</i>	79
---	----

PART 2

Excursion in Nubia

Chapter 1

Esna — Funerary rites — Ancient tombs of al-Ka'b — Merriment and thoughtlessness of the Arab — Temple of Edfu — Night thieves

— Gebel Silsila — Kom Ombo — Aswan — The Arab Baraka — Cleverness of the Arab — Mosque of the holy man — The cataract — Philae — Temple of Girga — Sebuia — Amada — Derr — Ibrahim — Whirling sandstorms — Caravans in the desert — Abu Simbel — Colossal statues of Ramesses — Maharraqa — Dakka — Dendur — Kalabsha — Qertasi — Debod — Return to Philae, to Luxor	95
---	----

Chapter 2

On the formation of the land of Lower Egypt — The Nile in ancient times did not water the Valley of Egypt — Opinion of Herodotus on the subject — Geographical and political divisions of Egypt — Taxes levied with the whip — Army conscription — Tendency of the Arabs to steal — Nile floods — Fertility of the land — Happiness and skill of the Arabs — Their sobriety — Muhammad Ali — His preoccupation with war keeps him from organizing the country — Habits, character, and clothing of Arab women — Marriage ceremonies — Almees — Dance of the Bee — Maghribis and snake charmers — Courtesans — Unchanging climate and atmospheric phenomena in Egypt — Its influence on man and animals — The <i>khamasin</i> — Imposing grandeur of the monuments — Voyage to Rosetta — New meeting with Muhammad Ali — Rising of the Nile and launching of the <i>Luxor</i> — Its departure for Alexandria; return to France — Arrival at Toulon	117
---	-----

PART 3

Work in Paris

Departure of Mr. Lebas for Paris — He is charged by Mr. Thiers
with the erection of the obelisk — Construction of the docking
cradle — Putting the apparatus in place and hauling over land —

First moving of the obelisk: passage on the bridge ramp — Second moving: hauling to the Place de la Concorde — Third moving: hauling up to the viaduct — Fourth moving: the obelisk arrives at the level of its pedestal — Setting up the erection equipment — Erection of the obelisk	143
--	-----

PART 4

Fontana

“Water on the ropes!” Evaluation of the tradition of this phrase — Examination of Fontana’s work — Details of the erection of the obelisk of Rome, and a description of Fontana’s Castle	173
--	-----

Appendix

Overview of the mechanical arts of ancient and modern people — Calculations relative to lowering and erecting the Luxor obelisk	191
---	-----

Illustrations

Plates

I:	Plan of the obelisks and part of the village of Luxor	46
II:	Apparatus to lower the western obelisk	52
III:	Hieroglyphs decorating the obelisk	69
IV:	The crack in the base of the obelisk; hieroglyphs on the base	70
V:	Apparatus used to embark the obelisk	88
VI:	Plan of the apparatus to lift the <i>Luxor</i>	141
VII:	The path of the obelisk in Paris	146–47
VIII:	Stages of disembarking the obelisk	148–49
IX:	Horizontal projection of the path of the obelisk	150
X:	Detail of the route of the obelisk	151
XI:	Plate of details	159
XII:	Vertical projection of the erecting apparatus	160
XIII:	Horizontal projection of the erecting apparatus	161
XIV:	Apparatuses to lower, transport, and erect the Vatican obelisk	181
XV:	Cross-section of Saint Peter Square	182

Figures

Lebas's tomb in the Cimetière du Père-Lachaise, Paris	xvii
Lebas's map of Egypt	xx
Detail from Pl. I: Plan of Luxor Temple	48
Detail from Pl. I: The <i>Luxor</i> run aground and aligning with the two obelisks	54
Detail from Pl. I: The housing built at Luxor Temple for the workers	57
Detail from Pl. II: The hinge around which the obelisk turned	60
Detail from Pl. II: Rubble was excavated to secure the lowering apparatus	61
Detail from Pl. II: The platform built to stabilize the lowering apparatus	64
Luxor Temple	67
Detail from Pl. II: The crack running through the pedestal	81
The lowering of the obelisk	84
Detail from Pl. II: Sand was removed to stabilize the foundation	86
The <i>Sphinx</i> towing the <i>Luxor</i> to France in high seas	142
Detail from Pl. VIII: The launching cradle	152
Detail from Pl. VIII: Five pulleys attached to five capstans	153
Detail from Pl. IX: Derricks at a weak point, strengthened by carpenters	156
The obelisk being raised on October 25, 1836	165
The medal struck to commemorate the raising of the obelisk	166
Detail from Pl. XIV: The path on which the Vatican obelisk was transported	187
Detail from Pl. XIV: Cross-section of the path constructed by Fontana	188
Detail from Pl. XV: Pulleys with pulley wheels	197
Detail from Pl. XV: Parallelogram illustrating the forces exerted on the ropes	202
Detail from Pl. XV: Friction and tension created by the weight of the obelisk	209
A rare portrait of Apollinaire Lebas	215