

The Modern History of the Twin Obelisks of Benevento

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History (*Sara E. Cole*)

Introduction

In 88/89 AD (year eight of the reign of emperor Domitian) two obelisks carved from red Aswan granite were set up, flanking the entrance of a newly constructed temple to the Egyptian goddess Isis, in Benevento (ancient Beneventum), Italy. One complete obelisk (Obelisk A) currently stands in the Piazza Papiniano in Benevento while its fragmentary twin (Obelisk B) is in the collection of Benevento's Museo del Sannio (inv. 1916). The two obelisks bear nearly identical hieroglyphic Egyptian inscriptions, naming "Rutilius Lupus", who dedicated the monuments to Isis, the "lady of Benevento", in honor of Domitian, perhaps commemorating the emperor's return from his Germanic and Dacian military campaigns.¹

Obelisk B left Italy for the first time in 2017 and traveled to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles where it underwent conservation treatment by Getty antiquities conservators. Conservation at the Getty stabilized the obelisk, recreated its missing upper portion, and implemented a system that allows for easier

¹ The exact identity of the dedicant remains uncertain, but it was likely a man from Benevento named Marcus Rutilius Lupus, who was a *legatus Augusti*; see Moritz Gotthilf Schwartze, *Das alte Aegypten oder Sprache, Geschichte, Religion und Verfassung des alten Aegyptens nach den alt-ägyptischen Original-Schriften und den Mittheilungen der nicht-ägyptischen alten Schriftsteller*, I (Leipzig: Barth, 1843), 251; Rosanna Pirelli and Italo M. Iasiello, "L'Isco di Benevento", in *Iside: il mito, il mistero, la magia*, ed. Ermanno A. Arslan, 376–80 (Milan: Electa, 1997), 379; Stefan Pfeiffer, "Ägypten in der Selbstdarstellung der Flavier", in *Tradition und Erneuerung. Mediale Strategien in der Zeit der Flavier*, ed. Norbert Kramer and Christiane Reitz, 273–88 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2010), 283; Luigi Prada, "To Isis the Great, Lady of Benevento: Privately Dedicated Egyptian Obelisks in Imperial Rome and the Twin Obelisks of Benevento Re-edited", in *Egypt-Greece-Rome: Cross-Cultural Encounters in Antiquity*, ed. Jeffrey Spier and Sara E. Cole (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, forthcoming), *passim*.

assembly and disassembly of the fragmented monument.² The obelisk was featured in the 2018 Getty exhibition, *Beyond the Nile: Egypt and the Classical World*.³ The Getty's collaboration with the Museo del Sannio and the Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di Caserta e Benevento prompted curatorial research into the obelisks' modern history, which informed – and was further informed by – the conservation work that took place in Los Angeles. Reports of the obelisks are recorded piecemeal from the sixteenth century onward, and published records unfortunately provide very little detail about where, when, and how their discovery and restoration campaigns took place. Nevertheless, by piecing together publications, photographs, and archival documents, a fairly thorough picture emerges.

In antiquity, the obelisks likely stood before the entrance of the Iseum that was constructed in Benevento during the reign of Domitian, and indeed, their inscriptions record this event. Egyptologist Adolf Erman postulated, based on the direction of the inscriptions on Side I of the two obelisks, that Obelisk A stood to the left of the temple entrance and Obelisk B stood to the right.⁴ The hieroglyphic signs on Side I of Obelisk A face right, while those on Side I of Obelisk B face left – thus, if Obelisk A were to the left of the entrance and Obelisk B to the right, the signs on Side I of both monuments would face each other and would face toward the temple entrance. Although we can hypothesize about how the obelisks were displayed, the exact location of the Iseum within the city is unknown. Fragments of Egyptian and Egyptianizing sculpture, as well as architectural elements thought to have come from the Iseum, have been found in secondary contexts. No excavated structure in Benevento has been

² A more detailed discussion of the conservation process will be published separately. A series of posts on the Getty Museum blog, The Iris, documented the project: <http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/egyptian-obelisks-and-their-afterlife-in-ancient-rome/> <http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/obelisks-on-the-move/> <http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/conserving-an-ancient-obelisk/>.

³ Jeffrey Spier, Timothy Potts, and Sara E. Cole, eds., *Beyond the Nile: Egypt and the Classical World* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2018). The obelisk had previously been displayed in exhibitions in Naples: R. Pirelli in Arslan, ed., *Iside*, 503, cat. V.187; I. Incordino in Stefano De Caro, ed., *Egittomania: Iside e il mistero* (Milan: Electa, 2006), 140, cat. II.97.

⁴ Adolf Erman, “Obelisken roemischer Zeit: Taf VII, VIII”, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Rom* 8 (1893): 210–8, esp. 211.

identified as the temple of Isis.⁵ The two obelisks likely fell and broke into fragments in antiquity. There are numerous possibilities for how the obelisk fragments might have been originally re-discovered (perhaps by the Lombards), potentially re-used as spolia, and then discovered yet again in a later period. Their story between the first and sixteenth centuries forms a lacuna. What we can say with certainty is that a fully reconstructed obelisk appeared in Benevento in 1597.

Obelisk A: sixteenth-nineteenth century history

The earliest modern written reference to an obelisk in Benevento comes from Giovanni De Nicastro's 1683 manuscripts, which mention Obelisk A.⁶ At the time, only one obelisk was known to exist. De Nicastro reports the presence of an obelisk in the square before the town basilica – the cathedral of Santa Maria de Episcopio (referred to in this essay as the Duomo), originally constructed under the Lombards in the eighth century and rebuilt in the 1960s after it was damaged by bombings in World War II – where it was set up in 1597 under Pope Clement VIII. The obelisk was composed of multiple fragments, which may have been found in the vicinity of the Duomo, perhaps when the Lombards were building the original cathedral. In the twelfth century, a new façade was built onto the Duomo, replacing an atrium that had housed Lombard tombs,

⁵ For a hypothetical reconstruction of the temple layout, see Rosanna Pirelli, “Il culto di Iside a Benevento”, in De Caro, ed., *Egittomania*, 129–36, esp. 136, fig. 8; Rosanna Pirelli, “Il tempio di Iside a Benevento”, in *Il Nilo a Pompei: visioni d'Egitto nel mondo romano*, ed. Federico Poole, 89–95 (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 2016), 94. On the temple's possible location and the sculpture that may have decorated it, see e.g. Pirelli, “Il culto di Iside”; Pirelli and Iasiello, “L'Iseo di Benevento”, 376–9; Kristine Bülow Clausen, *The Flavian Isea in Beneventum and Rome: The appropriation of Egyptian and Egyptianising Art in Imperial Beneventum and Rome* (PhD diss., University of Copenhagen, 2015), 82–117; Irene Bragantini, “A note on the temple of Isis at Beneventum”, in *The Iseum Campense from the Roman Empire to the Modern Age*, ed. Miguel John Versluys, Kristine Bülow Clausen, and Giuseppina Capriotti Vittozzi, 243–59 (Rome: Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome, 2018).

⁶ Giovanni De Nicastro, *Benevento sacro*, ed. Gaetana Intorcia (Benevento: Stab. lito-tip. editoriale De Martini, 1976 [1683]), ms., p. 89. This manuscript is located in the Biblioteca Arcivescovile, Benevento.

and a garden area enclosed by a low wall was added in front of the structure;⁷ the fragments could also have been found during the construction of this space. Alternatively, the Lombards could have used obelisk fragments within the original church walls in the eighth century, just as they used ancient spolia elsewhere, and these fragments may have been recovered during later renovations. Yet another possibility is that the Lombards used obelisk fragments as spolia in a completely different structure (like the city wall), which could have been recovered in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. The Duomo is located in the area that may have served as the town forum under the Romans,⁸ in which case the temple to Isis might have stood in or near the forum (if the obelisk fragments did indeed come from this spot), though this is by no means certain.⁹

At the time of its sixteenth-century dedication, the obelisk was placed on a modern pedestal. An illustration of the Duomo from 1599 shows the obelisk standing atop this pedestal, with what appear to be a bronze pyramidion, sphere, and cross (Fig.1).¹⁰

⁷ Monica Aceto, “Le piazze storiche di Benevento attraverso la cartografia illustrata e catastale della città”, in *Storia dell’Urbanistica Campania/IV. Benevento: catasti storici, mura e piazza*, ed. Teresa Colletta, Monica Aceto, and Flavia Belardelli, 35–66 (Rome: Kappa, 1997), 51.

⁸ Aceto, “Le piazza storiche di Benevento”, 51; Pirelli and Iasiello, “L’Iseo di Benevento”, 376.

⁹ Hans Wolfgang Müller, *Der Isiskult im antiken Benevent und Katalog der Skulpturen aus den ägyptischen Heiligtümern im Museo del Sannio zu Benevent* (Berlin: B. Hessling, 1969), 26, believed that the temple probably stood near the Duomo’s location.

¹⁰ This illustration is available at <http://db.histantartsi.eu/web/rest/Disegno/113>. Other illustrations from the same manuscript are published in Almerico Meomartini, *I monumenti e le opere d’arte della città di Benevento: lavoro storico, artistico, critico* (Benevento: Tip. Di Luigi de Martini e figlio, 1889); and Marcello Rotili, “Considerazioni su Benevento nella tarda antichità”, in *Aristocrazie e società fra transizione romano-germanica e alto Medioevo*, ed. Carlo Ebanista and Marcello Rotili, 317–51 (Naples: Tavolario, 2015).

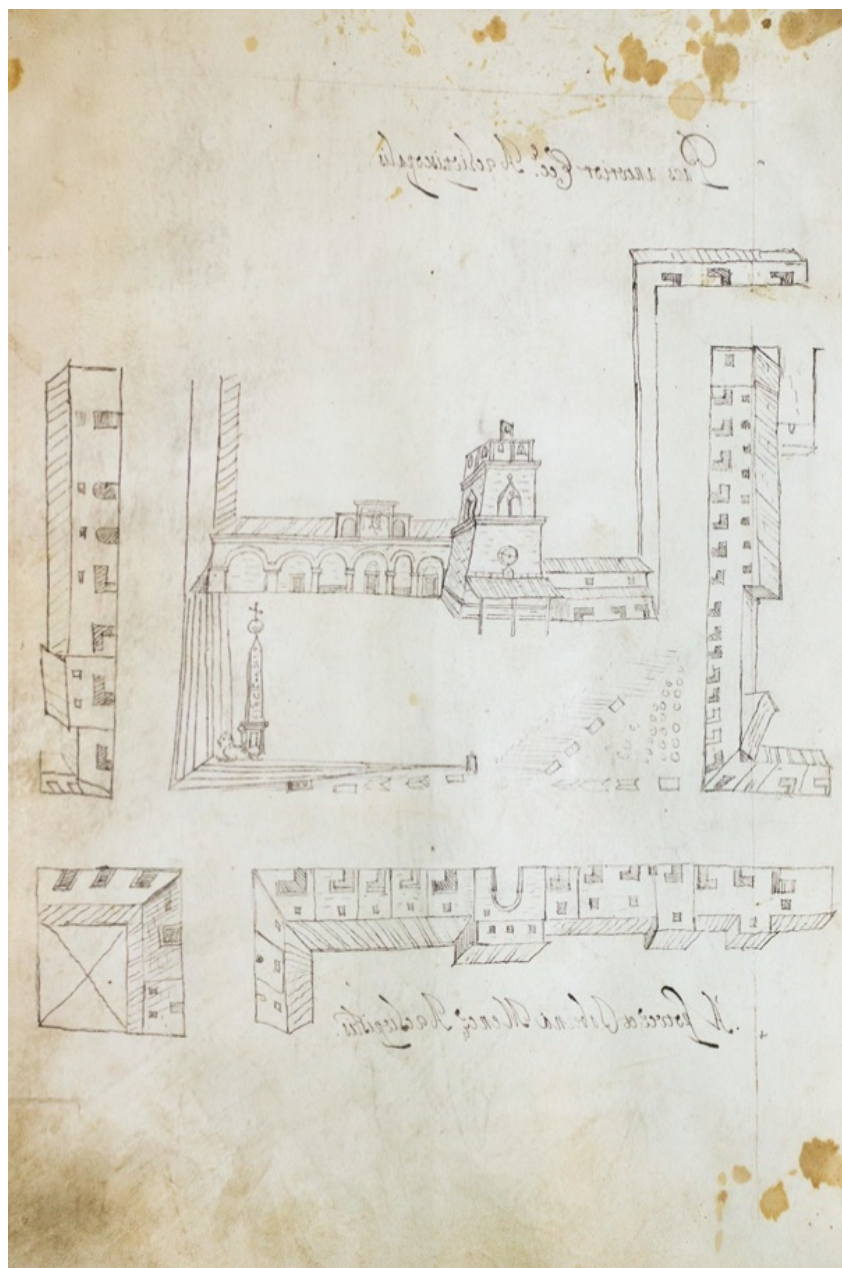


Figure 1: The Duomo of Benevento. Inventarium bonorum R. Mensae Archiepiscopalis Beneventanae, 1599. Biblioteca Arcivescovile Francesco Pacca. Image reproduced with the permission of the Ufficio per la Cultura e i Beni culturali dell'Arcidiocesi di Benevento.

In front of the obelisk is an Egyptian sphinx, and indeed several fragmentary granite sphinxes from Benevento have ended up in the collection of the Museo del Sannio.¹¹ Obelisk A was positioned inside the low Lombard wall, to the right of the entrance to the courtyard. A 1764 map of the city of Benevento published by Stefano Borgia shows the Duomo, just left of center, with the obelisk standing in front (circled in red) (Fig.2).¹²

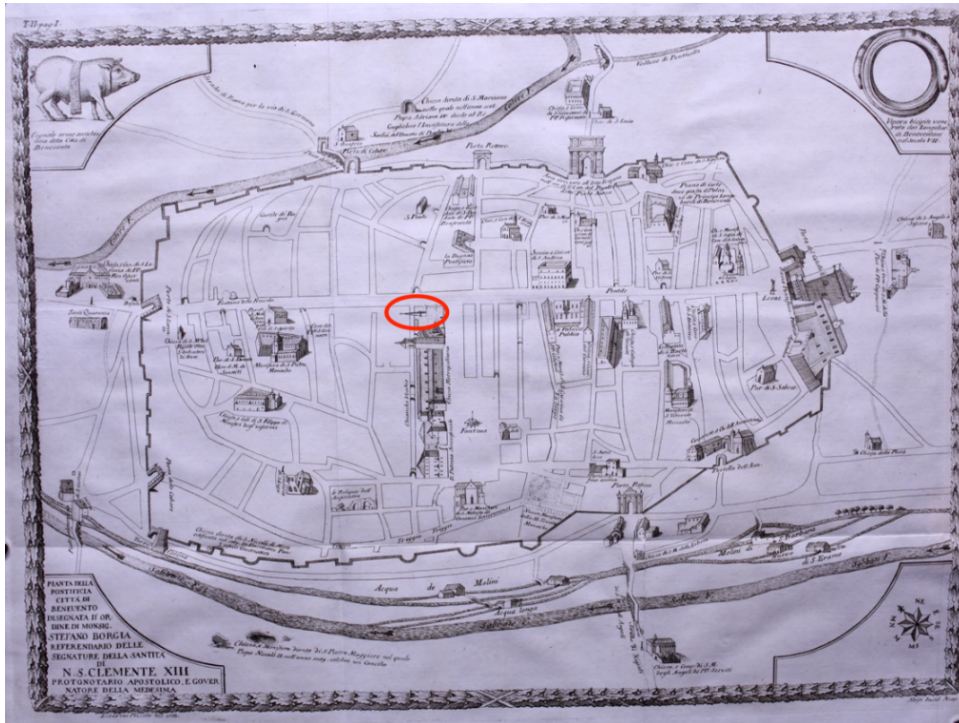


Figure 2: The city of Benevento. Obelisk A circled in red. Borgia 1764.

¹¹ Hans Wolfgang Müller, *Il culto di Iside nell'antica Benevento: catalogo delle sculture provenienti dai santuari Egiziani dell'antica Benevento nel Museo del Sannio* (Benevento: Museo del Sannio, 1971), no. 272 and pl. XXIII, no. 275, p.75 and pl. XXV, no. 277, p.75–6 and pl. XXV, no. 283, 87–8 and pl. XXIX; Federico Poole, ed., *Il Nilo a Pompei. Visioni d'Egitto nel mondo romano* (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 2016), 102, cat. 77.

¹² Stefano Borgia, *Memorie storiche della pontificia città di Benevento dal secolo VIII. al secolo XVIII. divise in tre parti. Parte seconda: Dal secolo XI. al secolo XVIII* (Rome: Dalle stampe del Salomoni, 1764).

The British travel writer Henry Swinburne commented on the obelisk in the courtyard of the Duomo in 1783, but only said of it: “In the court stands a small Egyptian obelisk, of red granite, crowded with hieroglyphs”.¹³ In 1797, Obelisk A appears in Egyptologist Georg Zoëga’s *De origine et usu obeliscorum*, in which all four sides are illustrated (Fig.3).¹⁴ This appears to be the first time that a full illustration of the monument, including a detailed rendering of the hieroglyphic signs, is published. In his brief discussion of the obelisk, Zoëga states that it was dedicated by the Senate and people of Benevento in 1698.¹⁵ However, in his caption to the illustration (see below) he gives MDXCVIII (1598) as the date of its dedication, which is consistent with the date given by De Nicastro (1597). 1698 must have been simply a typographical error. Some later scholars, including Adolf Erman, erroneously quoted 1698 as the date of the obelisk’s movement to the Piazza Papiniano, which did not take place until the nineteenth century (see below).¹⁶ But Zoëga does not mention the piazza, and Enrico Isernia noted in 1895 that the obelisk had only been in the piazza “da pochi anni” (“for a few years”).¹⁷ Additionally, during an 1815 visit to Benevento, Mariano Vasi (son of the Sicilian engraver Giuseppi Vasi) had recorded that a small Egyptian obelisk stood in front of the Duomo, confirming that it had not yet moved.¹⁸

¹³ Henry Swinburne, *Travels in the Two Sicilies in the years 1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780*, Vol. II (London: P. Elmsly, 1790), 339. See also Aniello Gentile, *Benevento nei ricordi dei viaggiatori italiani e stranieri* (Naples: Società editrice napoletana, 1982), 56.

¹⁴ Georg Zoëga, *De origine et usu obeliscorum* (Rome: Typis Lazzarini, 1797), 84, 644 (ill.).

¹⁵ Zoëga, *De origine*, 84.

¹⁶ Erman, “Obelisk roemischer Zeit”, 210; Bertha Porter and Rosalind L.B. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings. Volume VII: Nubia, the Deserts, and Outside Egypt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995 [1951]), 418.

¹⁷ Enrico Isernia, *Istoria della Città di Benevento dalla sua origine fino al 1894* (Benevento: A. d’Alessandro, 1895), 110.

¹⁸ Mariano Vasi, *Itinéraire instructif de Rome à Naples et à ses environs tiré de celui de feu M. Vasi; et de la Sicile tiré de celui de M. deKaraczay* (Rome: Imp. Poggioli chez Louis Nicoletti, 1826), 299. See also Gentile, *Benevento nei ricordi*, 102.

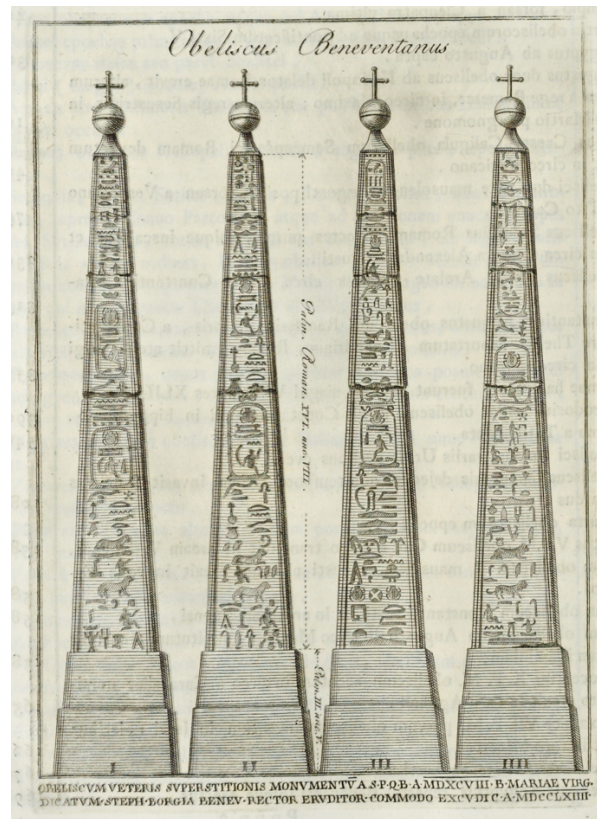


Figure 3: “Obeliscus Beneventanus”. Zoëga 1797, 644.

Zoëga records that the obelisk was originally erected “cuspidē et basi destituitur” (“without pyramidion and base”) and that in 1764 Stefano Borgia repaired the bronze elements on the obelisk.¹⁹ Borgia, a member of a prominent family in Velletri, was made governor of Benevento in 1759 by Pope Benedict XIV. He was an avid collector of antiquities and may have been drawn to the obelisk for this reason. Zoëga’s illustration shows that, by the late eighteenth century, the obelisk had been reattached to its stepped, ancient base. If we compare this illustration with the one from 1599 (Fig.1), the earlier illustration shows the obelisk on a modern, rectangular pedestal without the stepped base attached. It is unclear whether the base was a recent discovery or had been known of previously and simply had not been reunited with the obelisk until this time.

¹⁹ Zoëga, *De origine*, 84.

As we can see from Zoëga's illustration, in 1797 Obelisk A comprised four broken segments – the uppermost two sections were treated by some authors as a single fragment,²⁰ but there is clearly a full break between them – and bore the repaired bronze pyramidion, sphere, and cross. The Latin caption beneath Zoëga's illustration reads:

OBELISCVM VETERIS SVPERSTITIONIS MONVMENTV[M] A S.P.Q.B.
 A. MDXCVIII. B MARIAE VIRG.
 DICATUM. STEPH. BORGIA BENEV. RECTOR ERVDITOR.
 COMMODO EXCVDIC. A. MDCCLXIII

The obelisk, a monument of the ancient religion, was dedicated to Our Lady (the Blessed Virgin Mary) by the senate and the people of Benevento in 1598. Stefano Borgia, governor and historian of Benevento, conveniently published it in 1764.

The caption repeats the original dedication of the obelisk in 1598 (close to De Nicatros's 1597) and its publication in 1764 by Borgia (Fig.2). Zoëga very perceptively notes that the hieroglyphs on the Benevento obelisk bear a similarity to those on the Pamphili obelisk, which would later be used in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi* in Rome's Piazza Navona. Though Zoëga did not know it, both obelisks were carved under the reign of Domitian.²¹

In the late eighteenth century, artist Carlo Labruzzi created a watercolor of the Benevento Duomo's façade in which Obelisk A is visible (right of center) (Fig.4).²² Just as in the 1599 illustration, the obelisk stands inside the low wall that encloses the Duomo's courtyard, to the right of the entrance, which is marked by two Egyptian sphinxes. Also noteworthy is that the pedestal on which the obelisk stands appears essentially identical to the 1599 illustration: tall and rectangular, without the ancient, stepped base. Zoëga's illustration, with the

²⁰ E.g. Adolf Erman, "Die Obelisken der Kaiserzeit", *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Alterthumskunde* 34 (1896): 149–58, esp. 149.

²¹ See also Alfred Grimm, "Die Inschriften des Antinoosobelisken. Übersetzung und Kommentar", in *Der Obelisk des Antinoos: eine kommentierte Edition, mit Beiträgen von Alfred Grimm, Dieter Kessler, Hugo Meyer, und einer Einführung, Antinous and the Greek Renaissance*, ed. Hugo Meyer, 25–88 (Munich: Fink, 1994), for a comparison between the epigraphy of the Benevento obelisks and the Antinous obelisk commissioned by Hadrian.

²² Pier Andrea De Rosa and Barbara Jatta, *La via Appia: nei disegni di Carlo Labruzzi alla Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, 2013), 453, no. 215. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat.Lat.14933 (215).

ancient base included, dates to 1797, while Labruzzi's watercolor was produced sometime between 1789 and 1794.



Figure 4: Carlo Labruzzi, “La facciata del Duomo di Benevento”, 1789–1794.
Image © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

If the illustrations from 1599 and by Labruzzi are accurate, we can narrow the date for the addition of the ancient base to Obelisk A between approximately 1789 and 1797. It is also possible, however, that the ancient base was always part of the monument and artists prior to Zoëga simply did not illustrate that detail, making it appear as though it was not present.

Obelisk A stood in front of the Duomo until the 1860s when it was removed and then re-erected in the Piazza Papiniano in 1872.²³ Almerico Meomartini, a native of Benevento, was an architect and archaeologist who excavated ancient sites in the area. In 1889 he published a volume of monuments and works of art from Benevento, in which he repeated De Nicastro's statement that Obelisk A

²³ Müller, *Der Isiskult*, 10; *Il culto di Iside*, 77; Salvatore De Lucia, *Passeggiate Beneventane*. 3rd ed. (Benevento: G. Ricolò editore, 1983 [1925]), 70.

was set up in front of the Duomo in 1597.²⁴ He observed that when Obelisk A was moved to the Piazza Papiniano it was placed on a new pedestal inscribed in Greek and Latin, which it still stands atop today (Fig.5). The inscription appears to have originally been written in applied bronze letters, which were later removed.²⁵

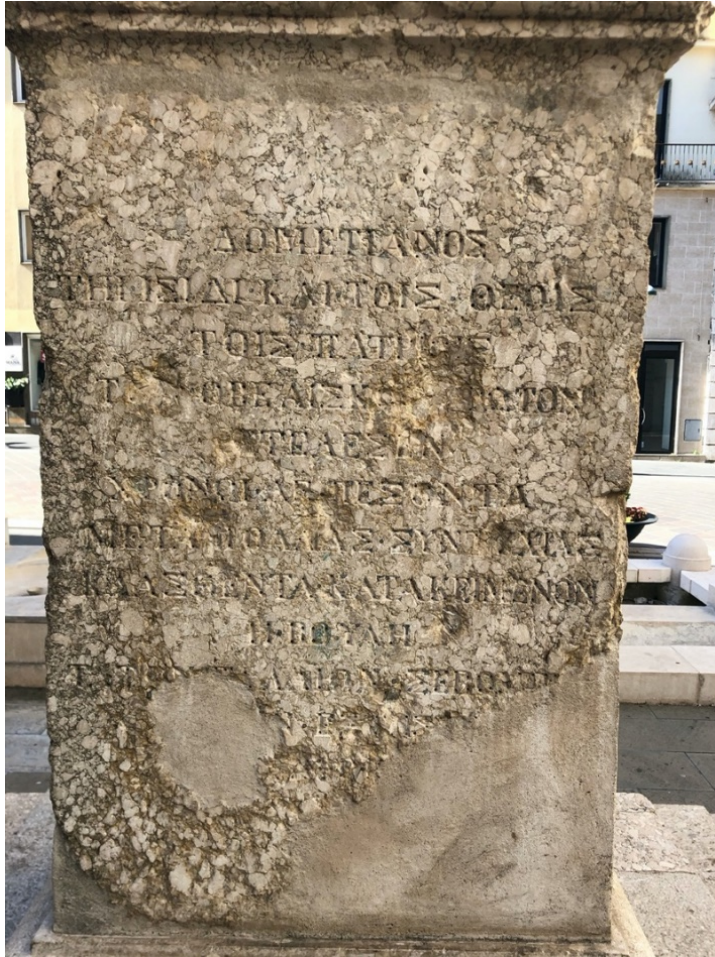


Figure 5: The pedestal for Obelisk A in the Piazza Papiniano, July 2020.
Photograph: Paul D. Wordsworth & Luigi Prada.

²⁴ Almerico Meomartini, *I monumenti e le opere d'arte*, 485–8.

²⁵ Noted by Luigi Prada during a visit to Benevento; he suggests that perhaps the removal of the letters was related to the short supply of metal during World War II. Personal communication, August 2020.

Correspondence stored in Benevento's archives elaborates the circumstances under which Obelisk A was relocated in 1872. Beginning in 1865 the atrium area in front of the Duomo was dismantled and renovated, and the obelisk was taken down; this coincided with the development of the Corso Vittorio Emanuele through the central city.²⁶ The initial plan, as recorded in a letter from one of the city architects dated 6 December 1865, was to keep the obelisk in front of the Duomo and re-erect it closer to the church façade.²⁷ Letters exchanged on 10 and 13 October 1866 reveal ongoing debate about where precisely the obelisk should be placed, with tensions clearly mounting between the ecclesiastical authorities (who firmly believed it should remain with the church) and the city (who wished to move it to a new location).²⁸ During this time, the dismantled obelisk was being stored in the courtyard of a local school, the Liceo Giannone, along with other antiquities.²⁹ A letter dated 14 December 1865 and addressed to the school's principal, Romualdo Bobba, expresses concern that the obelisk may be vulnerable to damage if it is left outside and requests that it be moved indoors.³⁰ This concern is reflected in physical evidence of damage from projectiles on the lower portion of Obelisk B (originally assembled as the lower portion of Obelisk A), documented by Getty conservators (see below, "Conservation").

²⁶ Italo M. Iasiello, "La città dei miti. Uso e abuso dell'antico a Benevento", *Samnium* 79 (2006): 39–74, esp. 52 and note 56; Claudio Ferone and Italo M. Iasiello, *Garrucci a Benevento: temi e modi di uno scontro intellettuale alle origini della riscoperta archeologica di Benevento* (Rome: Bardi, 2008), 110 and note 341, citing later disapproval of the destruction of the churchyard by the Commissione Permanente di Belle Arti, for which see Luigi Guerriero, "L'Arco di Traiano di Benevento nel XIX secolo: un restauro archeologico tra ripristino e conservazione", *Tutela e restauro dei monumenti in Campania 1860–1900*, ed. Giuseppe Fiengo, 338–54 (Naples: Electa, 1993), esp. 60–79 and note 116.

²⁷ Iasiello, "La città dei miti", 52; Ferone and Iasiello, *Garrucci a Benevento*, 110–1: citing Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio Comunale di Benevento*, ivi, fascicle 4b, c. 23r.

²⁸ Iasiello, "La città dei miti", 53 and note 59–60; Ferone and Iasiello, *Garrucci a Benevento*, 111: citing Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio Comunale di Benevento*, ivi, fascicle 4a, c. 6r and ivi, fascicle 4a, c. 9r e v.

²⁹ Iasiello, "La città dei miti", 53 and note 62; Ferone and Iasiello, *Garrucci a Benevento*, 113–5: citing Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio Comunale di Benevento*, ivi, c. 17r–v; ivi c. 19r; and ivi, c. 24r.

³⁰ Ferone and Iasiello, *Garrucci a Benevento*, 112: citing Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio Comunale di Benevento*, ivi, c. 24r.

The administration of Pasquale Capilongo made the official decision to move the obelisk to the Piazza Papiniano in 1872,³¹ under the direction of architect Pasquale Zoppoli.³² This move was in opposition to the Curia, who wished the obelisk to remain with the Duomo, as expressed in letters of protest sent from Archdeacon Capasso to Mayor Capilongo on 10 and 18 June 1872.³³ This was likely an intentionally symbolic move: when the obelisk was originally erected in front of the Duomo and topped with a bronze cross it represented the triumph of Christianity over “pagan” religion. The local government’s choice to transfer it from the Duomo to a secular location in front of the Palazzo Pubblico, and to remove the cross, represented the end of papal supremacy over the city at a significant historical moment when the unification of Italy as a kingdom had just been completed in the previous year.³⁴

The bronze elements that had topped Obelisk A were removed when the monument was transferred to the Piazza Papiniano and were replaced with a granite pyramidion, the origins of which are somewhat vague. In 1885, Henry Gorringe (the United States naval officer who moved Cleopatra’s Needle from Alexandria to New York City) stated that the fragments of Obelisk A had been found with “the pyramidion and lower part gone”,³⁵ implying that the stepped base may have been discovered and added later. The original pyramidion was never recovered. Archives at the Museo del Sannio contain two itemized lists that detail the costs associated with relocating Obelisk A to the Piazza Papiniano.³⁶ According to these documents, a newly carved pyramidion was ordered to complete the obelisk at the time of the move. A list of expenses

³¹ Iasiello, “La città dei miti”, 53 and note 63–4; Ferone and Iasiello, *Garrucci a Benevento*, 111 and note 348–9.

³² Iasiello, “La città dei miti”, 53 and note 65; Ferone and Iasiello, *Garrucci a Benevento*: citing documents in Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio Comunale di Benevento*, fascicle 4a, cc. 10–22, which record the timeline and costs of the operation.

³³ Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio storico del Comune di Benevento*, fascicle 4a, cit., cc. 16, 18–9.

³⁴ Iasiello, “La città dei miti”, 54; Ferone and Iasiello, *Garrucci a Benevento*, 112–3.

³⁵ Henry H. Gorringe, *Egyptian Obelisks* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1885), 136.

³⁶ Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio storico del Comune di Benevento*, fascicle 4a, cc. 11–2, 20–1.

approved by the local Commissione Edilizia (Building Council), dated 21 March 1872, includes an entry that reads:

Per la piccolo piramide che deve terminar l'obelisco che potrà ricavarsi da ruderi dell'intera pietra di granito rosso che facilmente puo rinvenirsi nel paese si assegna la somma di Lire 50.00

For the small pyramid that must complete the obelisk, which can be obtained from the ruins of the intact red granite stone that can easily be found in the country, the sum of 50 Lire is assigned.³⁷

A second list from 2 October 1872, which appears to show updated estimates, includes the following:

Per terminare l'obelisco si è lavorato uno piccolo piramide ricavato da un trombo di colonna dello stesso granito di cui formato l'obelisco per la quale si dà atteso la durezza della pietra e la difficoltà di lavorarlo Lire 30.00

To finish the obelisk, a small pyramid is made from a column of the same granite from which the obelisk is formed, for which the hardness of the stone and the difficulty of working it are expected. 30 Lire.³⁸

Both lists are signed by Pasquale Zoppoli and they confirm that the pyramidion now on Obelisk A was not original to the monument but was carved down from another piece of red granite in 1872. The specification that the stone came from a “column of the same granite” leaves open the possibility that the pyramidion was formed from a fragment that belonged to Obelisk B (the upper third of which has not been found), though it is more likely that it was made from another fragment of Egyptian red granite found among Benevento's ancient ruins.³⁹

³⁷ Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio storico del Comune di Benevento*, fascicle 4a, c.12.

³⁸ Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio storico del Comune di Benevento*, fascicle 4a, c. 20.

³⁹ There appears to have been a large quantity of Aswan granite used in ancient Benevento's architecture. See e.g. Giovanni Vergineo, “Il tempio di Iside a Benevento: l'architettura e gli arredi, l'architettura attraverso gli arredi”, *Estrat Critic* 5 (Vol. 2, 2011): 62–75, who documents the re-use of ancient Aswan granite column drums in medieval and modern buildings in Benevento.

These expense lists provide other information about interventions undertaken on Obelisk A as part of its relocation. The list from March 1872 includes the cost of wooden scaffolding needed to re-erect the obelisk, which is described as being in three pieces, confirming that the obelisk was not moved as a single unit but was broken down: “Per elevare l’obelisco che é diviso in tre pezzi vi occorre un castello di legname [...]” (“To raise the obelisk, which is divided into three pieces, you need a scaffold of timber [...]).⁴⁰ When the obelisk was reassembled, it was held together by iron pins. These pins may have been reused from the original assembly in the sixteenth century, but the holes for the pins needed to be deepened, and the surfaces were adjusted:

Per impiombatura dei pezzi che compongono l’obelisco a fondamento dei buchi per i ferri di sostegno ed aggiustamento delle focce a contatto Lire 25.00

For securing the pieces that make up the obelisk, deepening the holes for the support irons, and regularization of the join surfaces 25 Lire.⁴¹

This statement might refer to smoothing down and regularizing the top horizontal surfaces of the obelisk fragments, which was evident in the disassembled fragments of Obelisk B during its treatment at the Getty. New lead had to be poured into the joins to stabilize and hold in place the iron pins that had been inserted to connect the fragments:

Per piccoli restauri a farsi nelle unioni dell’obelisco per impiombarci le tenute di ferro si dà la somma approssimativa di Lire 30.00

For small restorations to be done in the joins of the obelisk to affix/secure the iron pins, the approximate sum of 30 Lire is given;⁴²

and, in the later of the two lists,

Per piombo occorso per impiombare i vari pezzi chilogrammi 140 á ragione di Lire 0.60 chilo Lire 84.00

For lead needed to affix/secure the various pieces, 140 kilograms at 0.6 Lire per kilogram. 84 Lire.⁴³

⁴⁰ Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio storico del Comune di Benevento*, fascicle 4a, c. 12.

⁴¹ Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio storico del Comune di Benevento*, fascicle 4a, c. 21.

⁴² Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio storico del Comune di Benevento*, fascicle 4a, c. 12.

⁴³ Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio storico del Comune di Benevento*, fascicle 4a, c. 21.

The lead would have been poured into hand-carved channels on the top horizontal surface of the lower fragment of each join; during treatment at the Getty, such channels were visible on the top surface of the base and the lower fragment of Obelisk B (originally assembled as the lower fragment of Obelisk A). Both lists also include fill material, which refers to the externally-visible substance that fills the gaps between fragments: “Per piombo e mastice occorrente nelle commessure si dà Lire 50.00” (“For lead and fill material needed in the joins it is 50 Lire”);⁴⁴ and

Per mastice formato con pece e polvere di marmo occorso nelle commessure dei pezzi dell’obelisco rotto in vari punti, compositura dello stesso si dà Lire 20.00

For fill material formed from natural resins and marble dust required in the joins of the parts of the obelisk broken at various points, it comes to 20 Lire.⁴⁵

There was therefore an extensive amount of work done to Obelisk A when it was moved to the Piazza Papiniano – it was not simply lifted and transported in its existing condition. An elevation of Obelisk A dated 24 February 1872 shows the obelisk as it appeared then (Fig.6).⁴⁶ According to the elevation, the obelisk stood approximately 3.7 meters high (minus the base and new pyramidion).

⁴⁴ Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio storico del Comune di Benevento*, fascicle 4a, c. 12.

⁴⁵ Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio storico del Comune di Benevento*, fascicle 4a, c. 12.

⁴⁶ Also illustrated in Iasiello, “La città dei miti”, 74.

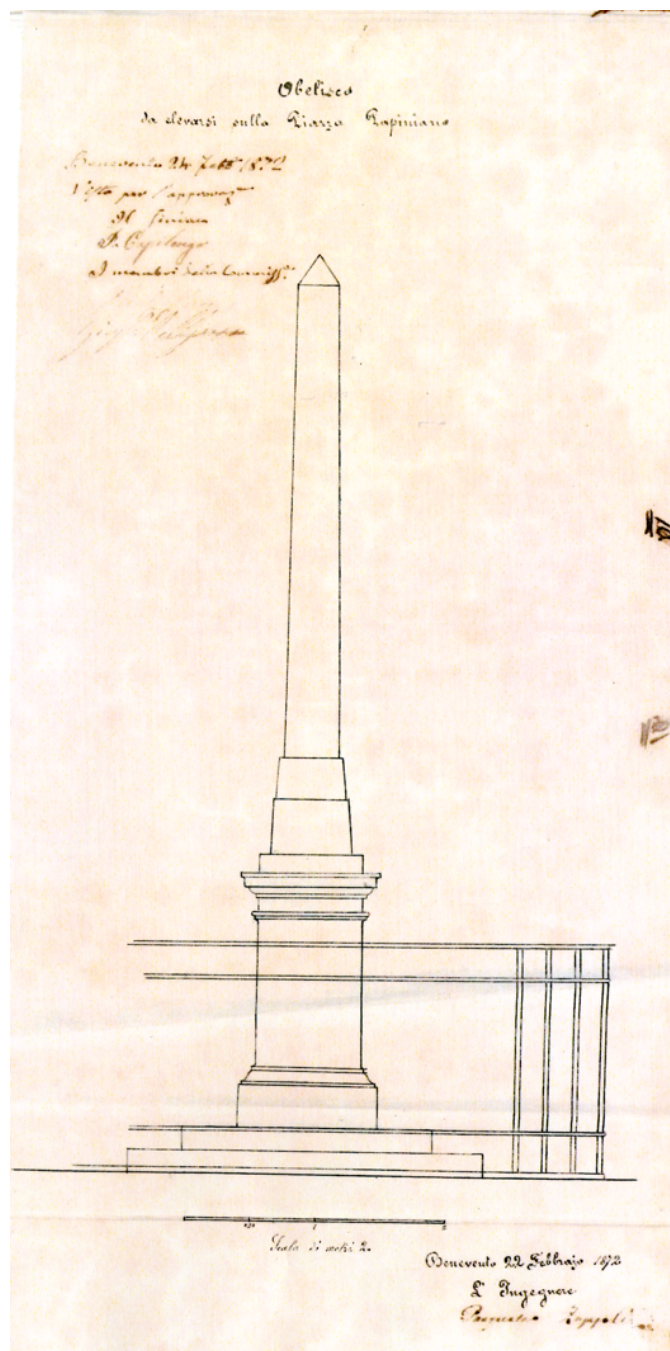


Figure 6: Elevation of Obelisk A dated 24 February 1872, by Pasquale Zoppoli. Benevento, Museo del Sannio, Archivio storico, fascicle 4a, c.10. Image courtesy of the Museo del Sannio.

The rediscovery of Obelisk B: nineteenth century

It was not until the nineteenth century that the existence of a second obelisk was recorded and Obelisk B began appearing in publications, though it may have been known of locally for quite some time before that. In 1827, Domenico Bartolini had visited the courtyard of the Palazzo Arcivescovile (Archbishop's Palace) – located behind the Duomo – in Benevento and saw two parts belonging to a small obelisk being kept there.⁴⁷ Ippolito Rossellini published a mention of these same fragments in 1832, stating that fragments of an obelisk were lying in the courtyard of the Archbishop's Palace at the time: “uno dei quali è in pezzi nel cortile dell'episcopio a Benevento” (“one of which is in pieces in the courtyard of the Archbishop's Palace in Benevento”).⁴⁸ Ferdinand Gregorovius recorded the same information in 1874/5.⁴⁹ The circumstances under which these two fragments were first discovered is undocumented, but Enrico Isernia mentions a piece of an obelisk that was found when the church of San Bartolomeo collapsed in an earthquake: “Un altro pezzo di obelisco fu scoperto allorchè crollò gran parte della chiesa di S. Bartolomeo” (“Another piece of obelisk was discovered when much of the church of San Bartolomeo collapsed”).⁵⁰ Construction on the original church of San Bartolomeo was begun in 1122. It was located adjacent to the Duomo and Archbishop's Palace and was eventually joined to these structures on the southeastern side, with its entrance off the Piazza Orsini.⁵¹ The church was badly damaged in earthquakes in 1688 and 1702, to the extent that a new church was constructed in a different location about 400 meters east of the Duomo. What remained of the original church was

⁴⁷ Ferone and Iasiello, *Garrucci a Benevento*, 153, note 593: citing Gentile, *Benevento nei ricordi*, 116.

⁴⁸ Ippolito Rosellini, *I Monumenti dell'Egitto e della Nubia*, Vol. I, part 2 (Pisa: Presso N. Capurro ec., 1832), 442–3, pl. XXVI, 9e.

⁴⁹ Ferdinand Gregorovius, *Wanderjahre in Italien* (Dresden: W. Jess, 1928), 764. See also Gentile, *Benevento nei ricordi*, 152.

⁵⁰ Isernia, *Istoria*, 110. In personal communication with Dr. Marco Franzese at the basilica di San Bartolomeo (March 14, 2017), he stated “Solo confermiamo che l'obelisco mutilo conservato nel Museo Arcos è stato ritrovato nel sito dell'antica chiesa di San Bartolomeo, che sorgeva addossata all'abside del duomo, distante dal sito dell'attuale basilica.”

⁵¹ Meomartini, *I monumenti e le opere d'arte*, 432–3, pls. LIX, LX; Aceto, “Le piazze storiche di Benevento”, 51–2, figs. 17, 18.

demolished. Presumably Isernia is referring to either the 1688 or 1702 earthquake, and it is conceivable that an obelisk fragment was uncovered at that time, but we have not been able to verify this.⁵² The tradition of using ancient spolia in Benevento in the Lombard and Medieval periods, however, means that we should not dismiss this statement out of hand. According to the staff of the Biblioteca arcivescovile Francesco Pacca in Benevento, if any archival documents did exist recording the events of 1702, they would have been housed in the city's Archivio metropolitano, which contained the records of the diocese of Benevento.⁵³ Unfortunately this archive was destroyed during bombings in September of 1943. Perhaps a fragment of an obelisk was used in the original construction of the church of San Bartolomeo in the twelfth century, and this fragment could have been revealed when the 1702 earthquake destroyed the building. Alternatively, if the Duomo marks the general area where the obelisks were first erected in antiquity, the earthquake may have unearthed a buried fragment. In either case, the fragment could then have been kept at the Archbishop's Palace from the time of its discovery, which would explain how parts of the obelisk came to be left lying in the courtyard of that building for many years.

An illustration of the Duomo from 1763 shows a view of the Archbishop's Palace and the Duomo from the east (from Piazza Orsini), with the church of San Bartolomeo now gone (Fig.7).⁵⁴ Note that the 1763 illustration still shows Obelisk A on a modern pedestal without its ancient, stepped base, consistent with the 1599 illustration, Labruzzi's eighteenth-century watercolor, and the statement made by Henry Gorringer in 1885.

In his 1889 publication, Meomartini mentioned the two fragments from the courtyard of the Archbishop's Palace, which he had taken himself from the Palace to the Museo del Sannio in the previous year. Erman wrote in 1893 that the two fragments had been kept in the courtyard of the Archbishop's Palace "von Alters her" ("for a long time"), implying that they had long been known

⁵² From personal communication with Dr. Marco Franzese at the church of San Bartolomeo, it seems possible that there are relevant records about the fragments' discovery stored in the Bibliotheca Capitolare in Benevento, but we have been unsuccessful in attempts to contact anyone there.

⁵³ Personal communication, July 2019.

⁵⁴ Also illustrated in Aceto, "Le piazze storiche di Benevento", 53, fig. 19.

of, but he does not give any further information.⁵⁵ Hans Wolfgang Müller simply says of these same two fragments that they were “conservato da molto tempo” (“preserved for a long time”) in the Archbishop’s Palace and then moved to the museum.⁵⁶ Antiquities had certainly been kept and displayed in the courtyard at the Archbishop’s Palace since the time of Cardinal Francesco Banditi, who became Archbishop of Benevento in 1775/6.⁵⁷ According to Isernia, the fragments were held at the palace for so long because the Curia did not wish to gift them to the city.⁵⁸ At the time of Meomartini’s 1889 publication, Obelisk A stood in the Piazza Papiniano with its new pyramidion, while the two additional fragments from the courtyard of the Archbishop’s Palace (which may have been found during the 1688 or 1702 earthquakes) were in the Museo del Sannio.

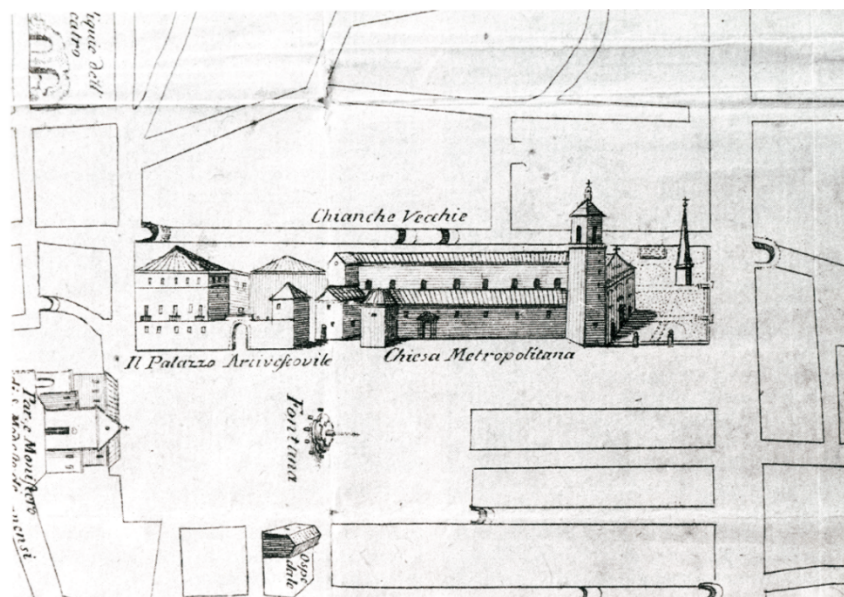


Figure 7: Illustration of the Piazza Orsini and the Duomo, by Aloia, 1763. Benevento, Museo del Sannio, Archivio storico. Image courtesy of the Museo del Sannio.

⁵⁵ Erman, “Obeliskender roemischer Zeit”, 210.

⁵⁶ Müller, *Il culto di Iside*, 76.

⁵⁷ Ferone and Iasiello, *Garrucci a Benevento*, 153.

⁵⁸ Isernia, *Istoria*, 110.

Deciphering the inscriptions

By the nineteenth century, hieroglyphic Egyptian had been deciphered and scholars began studying the inscriptions on Obelisk A and the two additional fragments (which, at that time, were still at the Archbishop's Palace). It was through their attempts to translate the hieroglyphs that philologists realized that Obelisk A had been incorrectly assembled and that two nearly identical obelisks existed. Jean-François Champollion, famous for his work in deciphering hieroglyphic Egyptian,⁵⁹ studied the obelisks in person. In a letter to his brother Jean-Joseph Champollion-Figeac dated 20 August 1826, he communicates that, having recorded the obelisks in Rome, his intention is to travel to Benevento and prepare an illustration of “the obelisk” (singular) himself, as only a small engraving existed at the time (referring to Zoëga's 1797 illustration):

J'y joindrai l'obélisque de Bénévènt, et comme il n'en existe qu'une mauvaise gravure de six pouces, je vais faire exprès le voyage pour le dessiner moi-même. J'aurai des ordres du légat, déjà demandés par M. le duc de Blacas

I will add the obelisk from Benevento, and since only one bad six-inch engraving exists, I will make a trip with the express purpose of drawing it myself. I will have orders from the legate, already requested by the Duke of Blacas.⁶⁰

From this letter, it is clear that Champollion was only aware of the existence of one obelisk before arriving in Benevento. In a second letter to his brother on 5 September 1826, Champollion had arrived in Benevento and examined Obelisk A, upon which he realized that the obelisk was made of fragments belonging to two separate monuments: “J'ai dessiné moi-même l'obélisque sur les lieux et vérifié ce que je soupçonnais, c'est-à-dire que l'obélisque existant était fait des morceaux de deux obélisques” (“I drew the obelisk myself on the spot and verified what I suspected, that is, that the existing obelisk was made of pieces from two obelisks”). He was able to see the two other obelisk fragments in the

⁵⁹ Jean-François Champollion, *Précis du système hiéroglyphique des anciens égyptiens, ou, Recherches sur les élémens premiers de cette écriture sacrée, sur leurs diverses combinaisons, et sur les rapports de ce système avec les autres méthodes graphiques égyptiennes*, 2 vols. 2nd ed. (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1827–8), Vol. 1, 95–100 (for Obelisk A).

⁶⁰ Jacques Joseph Champollion-Figeac, *Notice sur un ouvrage intitulé: Interpretatio Obeliscorum Urbis ad Gregorium XVI Pont. Max. digesta per Aloisium Mariam Ungarellium: Romae, 1842, frl. (Extr. de la Revue de Bibliographie analytique, Juillet 1842)* (Paris, 1842), 9.

courtyard of the Archbishop's Palace, which allowed him to reconstruct one obelisk almost in its entirety and about two-thirds of the other:

J'ai été assez heureux pour trouver dans la cour de l'archevêché deux autres grands fragmens d'obélisques, et le Bonheur veut aussi qu'en combinant ces fragmens avec ceux qui composent l'obélisque actuel, j'en aie recomposé sans le moindre doute l'un des obélisques anciens à très-peu près tout entier, et plus des deux tiers de l'autre. Parti pour aller chercher un obélisque, je revicus avec deux

I was quite happy to find in the courtyard of the archbishopric [i.e. the Archbishop's Palace] two other large fragments of obelisks, and as good fortune would have it, by combining these fragments with those that make up the current obelisk [i.e. Obelisk A], I have reconstructed without any doubt one of the ancient obelisks almost entirely, and more than two-thirds of the other. Having gone to search for one obelisk, I return with two.⁶¹

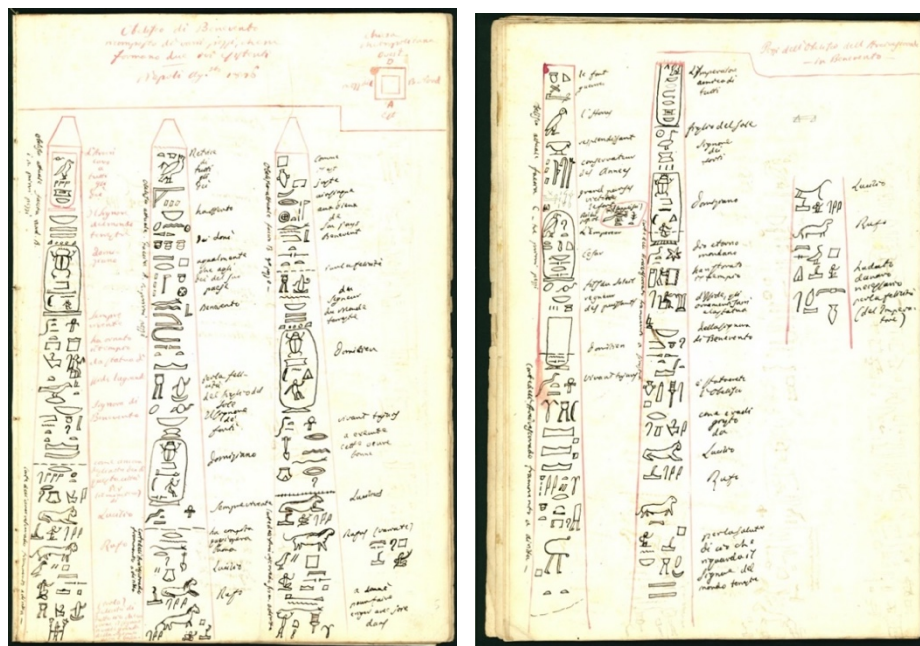


Figure 8: Fascimile of Obelisk A. Francesco Salvolini, August 1826. Torino, Archivio di Stato. Soprintendenza Speciale al Museo delle Antichità Egizie. Busta 11, fascicle 2.

⁶¹ Champollion-Figeac, *Notice sur un ouvrage intitulé*, 15–6.

An August 1826 facsimile of Obelisk A by Francesco Salvolini, who worked with Champollion, is in the Archivio di Stato in Turin (Fig.8).⁶² In this illustration, Obelisk A has been correctly assembled by switching out its original lower section with one of the fragments from the Archbishop's Palace. From left to right, sides III, IV, II, and I of Obelisk A are depicted. This is followed by a correctly assembled Side III of Obelisk B, made up of two sections: the one taken from Obelisk A and one of the two fragments from the Archbishop's Palace. On the far right, the name of the patron is copied, which Champollion read as "Lucilius Rufus", from Side IV of Obelisk B. Unfortunately, Champollion does not say in his letter how he became aware of the two additional fragments located at the Archbishop's Palace or where they may originally have been discovered. Presumably a local who knew about Champollion's visit alerted him to the other fragments. What we can glean from this event is that in the first quarter of the nineteenth century the presence of the obelisk fragments in the courtyard of the Archbishop's Palace was known of locally, but this information had evidently not yet been disseminated through the scholarly community.

In 1842, Luigi Ungarelli, the first director of the Vatican's Museo Gregoriano Egizio, published a translation of the inscriptions on both obelisks in which he illustrated a full reassembly of the two monuments (Fig.9).⁶³ Obelisk A is still shown made up of four sections but, following Champollion, Ungarelli replaced the lowermost section of Obelisk A with one of the fragments from the Archbishop's Palace. Ungarelli's illustrations do not reflect the actual appearance of the obelisks in 1842, but are instead an exercise in properly rearranging the six obelisk fragments on paper. The error had been recognized but no measures had yet been taken to correct it; Ungarelli was demonstrating how the obelisks *should* look.

⁶² Pirelli, "Il tempio di Iside", 90.

⁶³ Luigi Ungarelli, *Interpretatio obeliscorum Urbis* (Rome: Ex typographia reverendae camerae apostolicae, 1842).

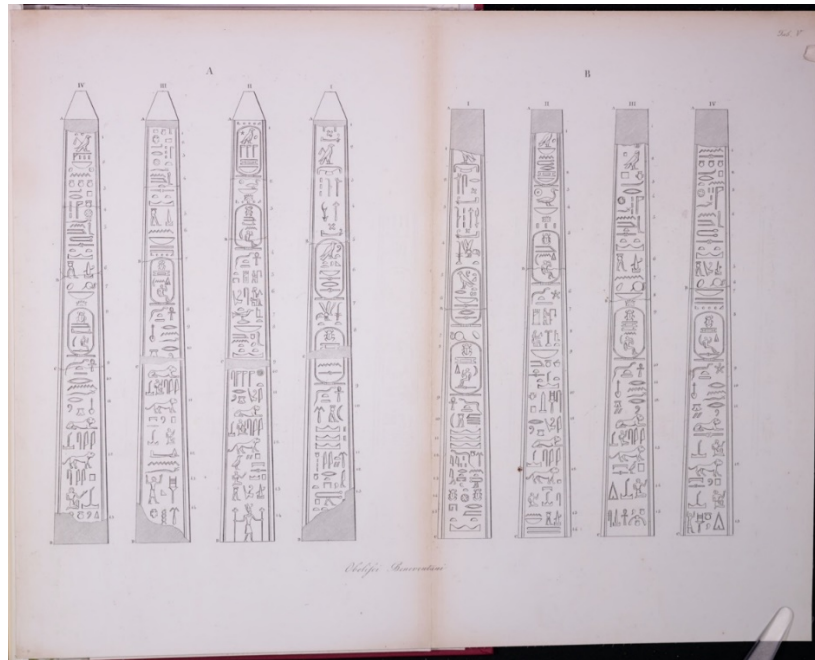


Figure 9: Ungarelli 1842, vol. 2, pl. V. Obelisk A (left). Obelisk B (right).

Ungarelli correctly assembled the order of the fragments on Obelisk A, but he misread the order of the obelisk's sides. He began reading the inscription at the correct spot on Side I, but the side which he recorded as Side II is in fact Side III. Were Ungarelli working from the physical object, it would be impossible for him to jump from Side I to III because those sides would be located opposite one another; he could only logically move from Side I to an adjacent side. He also switched Sides II and III of Obelisk B in his illustration.

He was in fact working from squeezes made for him by someone else and never examined the inscriptions in person.⁶⁴ A letter dated 23 May 1840, signed by the Delegato Apostolico, records a request for payment to a man named Perito Chiariotti, who was commissioned to create squeezes of the inscription on Obelisk A for a major forthcoming publication of obelisks in Italy.⁶⁵ Though Ungarelli is not mentioned by name in the letter, these are presumably the very same squeezes he used in preparing his publication. The letter refers only to the

⁶⁴ Ungarelli, *Interpretatio obeliscorum Urbis*, I: x.

⁶⁵ Benevento, Museo del Sannio, *Archivio storico del Comune di Benevento*, fascicle 4a, c. 1.

obelisk standing in front of the church, Obelisk A, and does not discuss squeezes of the additional fragments; it is unclear from whom Ungarelli obtained those. Thanks to Ungarelli's publication, the existence of additional fragments and the fact that Obelisk A was assembled from pieces belonging to two separate monuments became widely known for the first time. Ungarelli, however, deserves little credit for these discoveries, as his publication was largely derived from the by then deceased Champollion's unpublished work on the obelisks, which was based on his in-person examination of them in 1826.⁶⁶

Erman published a new illustration and translation of the inscriptions on the two obelisks in 1893 (Fig.10).⁶⁷ In the previous year, Meomartini had excavated another obelisk fragment, which Erman and fellow Egyptologist Ernesto Schiaparelli realized belonged to Obelisk A. This fragment was found under the east wall of the gardens of the palace of marchese Onofrio De Simone (now the location of the Piazza Arechi II, about 800 meters east of the Duomo) in April of 1892. It may have been taken there and used as fill in construction in an earlier period. Meomartini gave the fragment to the nearby Museo del Sannio.⁶⁸ In 1892, the museum now possessed three obelisk fragments that did not fit together. Erman included the new fragment discovered by Meomartini in his illustrations, in which he corrected Ungarelli's mistaken order of Sides II and III of both obelisks and showed Obelisk A in a completed state (minus the pyramidion).

⁶⁶ Champollion-Figeac (*Notice sur un ouvrage intitulé*, 662–4) reacted angrily to the use of his brother's work by Ungarelli, something which is also acknowledged by Erman ("Die Obelisken der Kaiserzeit", 150). See also Prada, "To Isis the Great", for a brief summary of this episode of plagiarism in the early days of Egyptology. Schwartz (*Das alte Aegypten*, 249–251) briefly discusses the obelisk inscriptions and references the work of Champollion.

⁶⁷ Erman, "Obelisken roemischer Zeit".

⁶⁸ Meomartini, *I monumenti e le opera d'arte*, 485; Erman, "Obelisken roemischer Zeit", 210–1; Ernesto Schiaparelli, "Antichità egizie scoperte entro l'abitato di Benevento", *Notizie degli scavi di antichità* (1893): 267–74, esp. 269.



Figure 10: Erman 1893, Tav. VII and VIII. Obelisk A (left). Obelisk B (right).

At the time of Erman's publication, Obelisk A had not been correctly reassembled, for he had the following to say about it:

Heute nach dem Hinzukommen des Fragmentes in der Prefettura ergibt sich, dass der eine dieser beiden Obelisken sogar vollständig vorhanden ist – er würde richtig zusammengesetzt über 4 m. messen – zum zweiten fehlt noch die Spitze, wie dies unsere Abbildung auf Taf. VII. VIII zeigt

Today, with the addition of the fragment from the Prefettura [i.e. the Archbishop's Palace], it turns out that one of these obelisks [i.e. Obelisk A] is, in fact, completely preserved— assembled correctly, it would stand at over four meters. For the second [i.e. Obelisk B], the top is still missing, as shown in our illustration on plates VII and VIII.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Erman, “Obelisken roemischer Zeit”, 211.

He notes that if Obelisk A were properly assembled it would measure over four meters in height. Like Ungarelli's illustration, Erman's is also an exercise on paper showing how the monuments should appear.

In a footnote, Erman thanks a Dr. Preger and a Dr. Hula, who were assisted by Meomartini, for providing him with "Abklatsche" ("squeezes") of all fragments and related information:

Abklatsche aller Fragmente und die hier gegebenen Mittheilungen verdanke ich den Herren Dr. Preger und Dr. Hula denen der R. Ispettore degli scavi Herr Ingenieur A. Meomartini in Benevent freundliche Hilfe gewährte

I owe squeezes of all fragments and the information presented here to Dr. Preger and Dr. Hula, who were kindly assisted by the Royal Inspector of Excavations, engineer A. Meomartini in Benevento.⁷⁰

Like Ungarelli before him, Erman was not working from a physical examination of the obelisks in person, which may call into question the accuracy of his transcription of the hieroglyphs. This is potentially significant because subsequent scholars have largely relied on Erman's transcription in preparing their own translations.⁷¹ A re-edition of the inscriptions on both obelisks, which will be published by Luigi Prada in the proceedings of a symposium held in conjunction with the Getty's *Beyond the Nile* exhibition, will remedy any errors by previous scholars.⁷²

⁷⁰ Erman, "Obelisken roemischer Zeit", 211, note 1.

⁷¹ E.g. Müller, *Der Isiskult*, 10; Erik Iversen, "The Inscriptions from the Obelisks of Benevento", *Acta Orientalia* 35 (1973): 15–28; Ethelbert Stauffer, "Antike Madonnenreligionen", in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, II: *Principat*, Bd.17: *Religion*, 3. Teilband, ed. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, 1425–1499 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1984), esp. 1481–6; Frédéric Colin, "Domitien, Julie et Isis au pays des Hirpins (*CIL IX*, 1153 et l'obelisque de Bénévent)", *Chronique d'Égypte* 68 (1993): 247–60; Pirelli, "Il culto di Iside", 132; R. Pirelli in Arslan, ed., *Iside*, 503. For an updated translation see L. Prada in Spier, Potts, and Cole, *Beyond the Nile*, 262–4, cat. 164.

⁷² Prada, "To Isis the Great."

Reassembly: twentieth century

In 1889, Meomartini noted that Obelisk A was still not composed entirely of its own parts, and that one part did not belong:

Però è a notare che l'obelisco di piazza Papiniano non si compone di pezzi tutti propri, ma bensì possiede un pezzo che non gli appartiene

However, it should be noted that the obelisk in Piazza Papiniano does not consist of all its own pieces, but rather includes a piece that does not belong to it.⁷³

Erman republished his illustrations with a more detailed commentary on the inscription in 1896. He said of Obelisk A that it still contained fragments belonging to Obelisk B, and even called it a “monster”:

Im Jahre 1698 wurden Theile von beiden zu einem Obeliskten zusammengefügt, und dieses Monstrum ist es, das heute auf der Piazza Papiniana in Benevent steht

In 1698 parts of the two were put together to form an obelisk, and it is this monster that stands today in Piazza Papiniano in Benevento.⁷⁴

Note that, as mentioned above, Erman erroneously cites 1698 as the original date of Obelisk A's assembly following Zoëga; the date was in fact 1597/8.

By the early twentieth century, Obelisk A remained in its incorrect configuration. In 1904 archaeologist Orazio Marucchi published a group of finds related to the temple of Isis at Benevento that were discovered during excavations in 1903, including an Egyptianizing statue of the emperor Domitian that was found in the northeast part of the city under a wall at the convent of Sant'Agostino.⁷⁵ The wall dated to the Lombard period (sixth-eighth century) and the statue was used as fill in the construction. Marucchi concluded his report with a brief statement about the obelisk fragment Meomartini had found in 1892, saying that he wished for it to be properly placed on Obelisk A where it belonged, based on the scholarly consensus:

Prendo intanto questa occasione per manifestare anche il desiderio degli studiosi che si rimetta al suo posto il frammento di obelisco scoperto nel 1892, il quale

⁷³ Meomartini, *I monumenti e le opera d'arte*, 485.

⁷⁴ Erman, “Die Obeliskten der Kaiserzeit”, 149.

⁷⁵ Domitian: Orazio Marucchi, “Nota sulle sculture di stile egizio scoperte in Benevento”, *Notizie degli scavi di antichità* (1904): 118–27, esp. 118, 121.

completa la parte superiore dell'obelisco tuttora in piedi presso il Corso moderno, come suppose già il cav. Meomartini e confermò lo Schiaparelli nella dotta sua relazione

In the meantime, I am taking this opportunity to also express the desire among scholars to put in place the fragment of an obelisk discovered in 1892, which completes the upper part of the obelisk still standing on the modern corso, per Meomartini and confirmed by Schiaparelli in his learned report.⁷⁶

Additionally, Meomartini published photographs of Obelisk A in 1909 (Fig.11–12).⁷⁷



Figure 11: Obelisk A (at far right) in the Piazza Papiniano, Benevento. Meomartini 1909, 122.

⁷⁶ Marucchi, “Nota sulle sculture”, 127.

⁷⁷ Almerico Meomartini, *Benevento* (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d’arti grafiche, 1909), 122, 131.

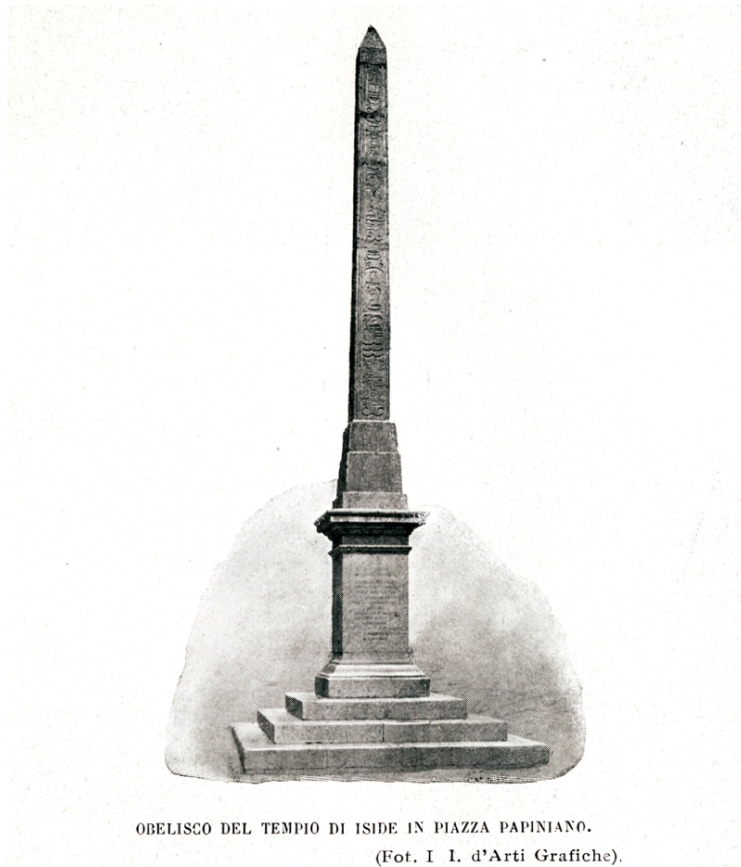


Figure 12: Obelisk A in the Piazza Papiniano, Benevento. Meomartini 1909, 131.

It seems that the three fragments taken to the Museo del Sannio were left untouched for some 25 years. The inventory number assigned to Obelisk B – 1916 – suggests that this was the year the fragments were assembled together and entered into the museum’s inventory as a single object. Several twentieth-century photographs showing Obelisk B displayed in the cloisters of the church of Santa Sofia are kept in the archives of the Museo del Sannio (Fig.13–16). The two lower fragments were those which had come from the courtyard of the Archbishop’s Palace. The third, uppermost portion was presumably the fragment excavated in 1892 from the De Simone gardens, which should complete Obelisk A. The lowermost fragment of Obelisk B, as it was assembled in 1916, also belonged to Obelisk A. Given that Champollion had recognized approximately a century earlier that the two fragments from the Archbishop’s Palace did

not belong together, it is unclear why these and the additional fragment found by Meomartini were joined together to form a sort of Frankenstein obelisk. At some time in the mid-twentieth century, this situation was remedied and the two obelisks were disassembled and reassembled properly, but we have been unable to discover any documentation of the project.



Figure 13: Obelisk B at the Museo del Sannio, early 20th century. Image courtesy of the Archivio storico, Museo del Sannio, Benevento.



Figure 14: Obelisk B (at far right) at the Museo del Sannio, early 20th century. Image courtesy of the Archivio storico, Museo del Sannio, Benevento.



Figure 15: Obelisk B at the Museo del Sannio, 1930s.
Image courtesy of the Archivio storico, Museo del Sannio, Benevento.



Figure 16: Obelisk B at the Museo del Sannio, early 20th century, with ancient base.
Image courtesy of the Archivio storico, Museo del Sannio, Benevento.



Figure 17: Obelisk B at the Museo Arcos, September 2016. Photograph: Erik Risser.

Obelisk B was first displayed without its ancient base, as seen in Fig.15. This image dates to the 1930s, so the base (seen in Fig. 16) must have been added during or after that decade.⁷⁸ Conservation of Obelisk B at the Getty revealed that the missing section of the base was recreated using various forms of fired brick, from hand-formed molded to wire-cut extrusion with perforations, indi-

⁷⁸ According to the date provided on the Museo del Sannio's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/584688914912969/photos/a.592427070805820.1073741829.584688914912969/602502726464921/?type=3&theater>.

cating an intervention with materials common to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries. Today, the correctly assembled Obelisk B is composed of two fragments and the base (Fig.17). Obelisk B had thus been through a minimum of three phases of restoration before arriving at the Getty: in Phase I in 1916 it was assembled from the three aforementioned fragments (two from the courtyard of the Archbishop's Palace and one excavated by Meomartini) without its base; in Phase II the ancient base was attached; and in Phase III it was fully disassembled and reassembled properly out of two fragments (one of which was taken from Obelisk A) and its base. There were additional interventions after Phase III – when Obelisk B was disassembled at the Getty, conservators discovered that varying densities of polyethylene foam had later been added as a bulk filler in larger areas of fill between the fragments.

By comparing the 1797 illustration of Obelisk A by Zoëga, the 1930s photograph of Obelisk B from the Museo del Sannio, and recent photographs of both obelisks, one can see how the fragments were re-arranged (Fig.18–21). The fragments have been numbered Sections 1–7.

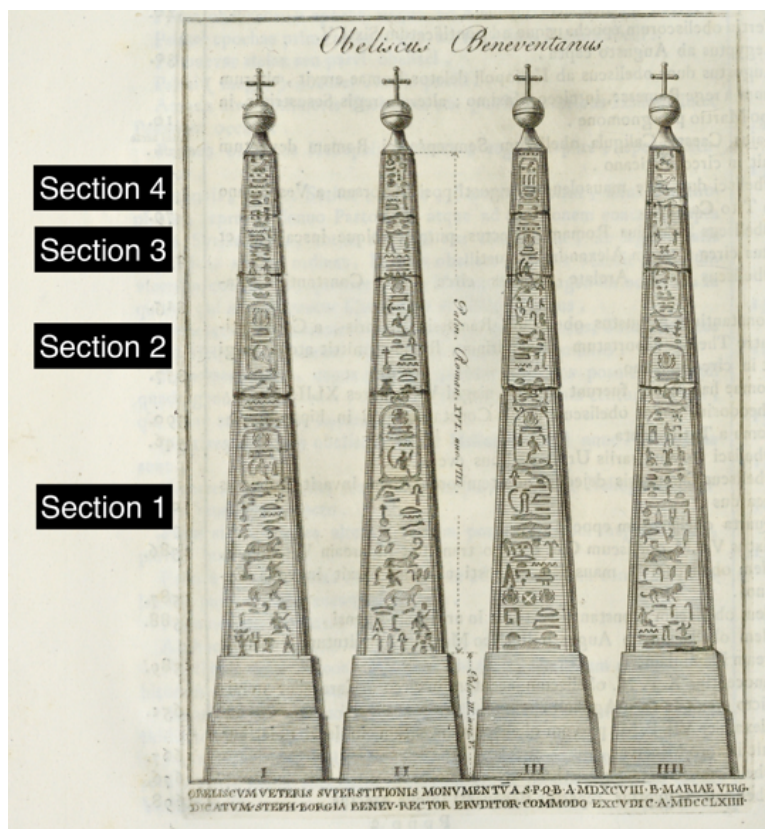


Figure 18: Obelisk A as originally assembled from Sections 1–4.



Figure 19: Obelisk B as originally assembled from Sections 5–7.



Figure 20: Obelisk A in the Piazza Papiniano, 2017. Photograph: Hans Goette.



Figure 21: Obelisk B reassembled and in its pre-preservation state at the Getty Villa, June 2017. Photograph: © 2017 J. Paul Getty Trust.

Section 1: Originally placed as the lowermost portion of Obelisk A, this section forms the lowermost portion of Obelisk B. A roughly square-sectioned hole was carved into the top surface of this fragment, where it had been connected to Section 2 by means of a forged square pin leaded in place, which is consistent with the description of the use of iron pins and lead to reassemble Obelisk A in 1872. This same pin appears to have been later re-used to connect Section 1 to Section 6.

Section 2: This section was always correctly placed second-from-bottom on Obelisk A.

Section 3–4: Like Section 2, these sections were also correctly positioned on Obelisk A since the sixteenth century. In counting the number of sections, some authors treated these as one.

Section 5: This is one of the two sections from the Archbishop's Palace, moved to the museum in the late 1800s by Meomartini. It was originally placed as the lowermost section of Obelisk B but is actually the lowermost section of Obelisk A.

Section 6: This section, one of the two from the Archbishop's Palace, was originally made the middle section of Obelisk B and forms its uppermost surviving portion today. A roughly square-sectioned hole was carved into the top surface of this fragment, where it had been connected to Section 7 by means of a forged square pin leaded in place. This type of connection is seemingly consistent with the 1916 assembly of Sections 5, 6, and 7, undertaken at the Museo del Sannio, and reflects the same technique used on Obelisk A in 1872.

Section 7: This fragment was excavated by Almerico Meomartini in 1892. Originally assembled as the top section of Obelisk B, it belongs as the top section of Obelisk A.

When the obelisks were assembled correctly, the lowermost sections of A and B were switched. What had originally been positioned as the third, uppermost section of Obelisk B was made the uppermost section of Obelisk A. Obelisk A now consists of five sections, its ancient base, and the nineteenth-century pyramidion, while Obelisk B consists of two sections and its ancient base.

When did the disassembly and reassembly of the two obelisks occur? In addition to the photographs of Obelisk A published by Meomartini in 1909 (Fig.11–12), a number of Italian postcards bear pictures of Obelisk A in the Piazza Papiniano prior to its reassembly (Fig.22). Though none of these images is inscribed with a date, they appear to have been taken in the first decades of the twentieth century. Fig.15 and Fig.16 also show that the obelisks had not been reassembled by at least the 1930s. In 1958, Mario Rotili, the director of the Museo del Sannio, published a volume on Benevento and the surrounding area in which he included photographs of both obelisks in their pre-reassembly state (Fig.23–24).⁷⁹



Figure 22: Obelisk A in the Piazza Papiniano, early 20th century. Image courtesy of the Archivio storico, Museo del Sannio, Benevento.

⁷⁹ Mario Rotili, *Benevento e la provincia Sannitica* (Rome: A.B.E.T.E., 1958), 120 fig. 86, 138 fig. 108.



Figure 23: Obelisk A. Rotili 1958, 120, fig. 86.



Figure 24: Obelisk B (at far right). Rotili 1958, 138, fig. 108.

Though Rotili does not provide dates for either image, he is presumably (though not certainly) showing them as they appeared at the time of publication. This would mean that the reassembly did not take place until the late 1950s at the earliest.

In 1963 and 1967, Rotili published descriptions of the Museo del Sannio and its collections. In the 1967 volume, he notes that the museum had recently been enlarged and undergone a full renovation.⁸⁰ Was the reassembly of the two obelisks scheduled to coincide with these renovations? Though the volumes include photograph of the collection, and both briefly discuss Obelisk B, neither contains an image of it.⁸¹ Perhaps photographs of the obelisk were unavailable during these years because it was undergoing restoration.

A photograph of Obelisk B after its reassembly, published in 1965, provides a terminus (Fig.25).⁸²

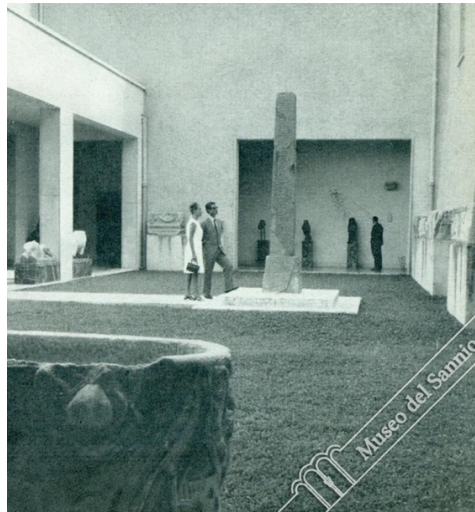


Figure 25: Obelisk A at the Museo del Sannio, 1965. Image courtesy of the Archivio storico, Museo del Sannio, Benevento.

⁸⁰ Mario Rotili, *Il Museo del Sannio nell'abbazia di Santa Sofia e nella Rocca dei rettori di Benevento* (Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, Libreria, 1967), 3.

⁸¹ Discussion of Obelisk B: Mario Rotili, *Il Museo del Sannio* (Benevento: Amministrazione provincial di Benevento, 1963), 30; Rotili, *Il Museo del Sannio nell'abbazia di Santa Sofia*, 7–8.

⁸² Also illustrated in Mario Rotili, “Di sala in sala nel museo del Sannio”, *Le vie d'Italia* no. 1 (June 1965): 61–71, esp. 61.

Photographs of Obelisks A and B catalogued in 1968 by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Rome confirm that they had both been properly reassembled by that date (Fig.26–28).⁸³ A similar photo of the reassembled Obelisk B in the 1960s is held in the Museo del Sannio archives (Fig.29). Complete and accurate measurements of the fully assembled Obelisk A have never been published. In June 2017, the art handling company Arteria agreed to take measurements in order to assist the Getty with its conservation plans for Obelisk B. They provided an image with detailed dimensions, showing that the full Obelisk A (without the base and pyramidion) measures 4.12 meters in height (Fig.30).



Figure 26: Obelisk A reassembled in the Piazza Papiniano, 1968. Image courtesy of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Abteilung Rom, 68.473.

⁸³ German Archaeological Institute in Rome, ed., *Index der antiken Kunst und Architektur: Denkmäler des griechisch-römischen Altertums in der Photosammlung des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Rom: Begleitband, Register und Kommentar* (Munich and New York: K.G. Saur, 1991).



Figure 27: Obelisk A in the Piazza Papiniano, Benevento, 1968. Image courtesy of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Abteilung Rom, 68.474.



Figure 28: Obelisk B reassembled at the Museo del Sannio, Benevento. Image courtesy of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Abteilung Rom, 68.458.



Figure 29: Obelisk B at the Museo del Sannio, Benevento, 1960s. Image courtesy of the Archivio storico, Museo del Sannio, Benevento.

Obelisco – Piazza Paolo Emilio Papiniano, Benevento

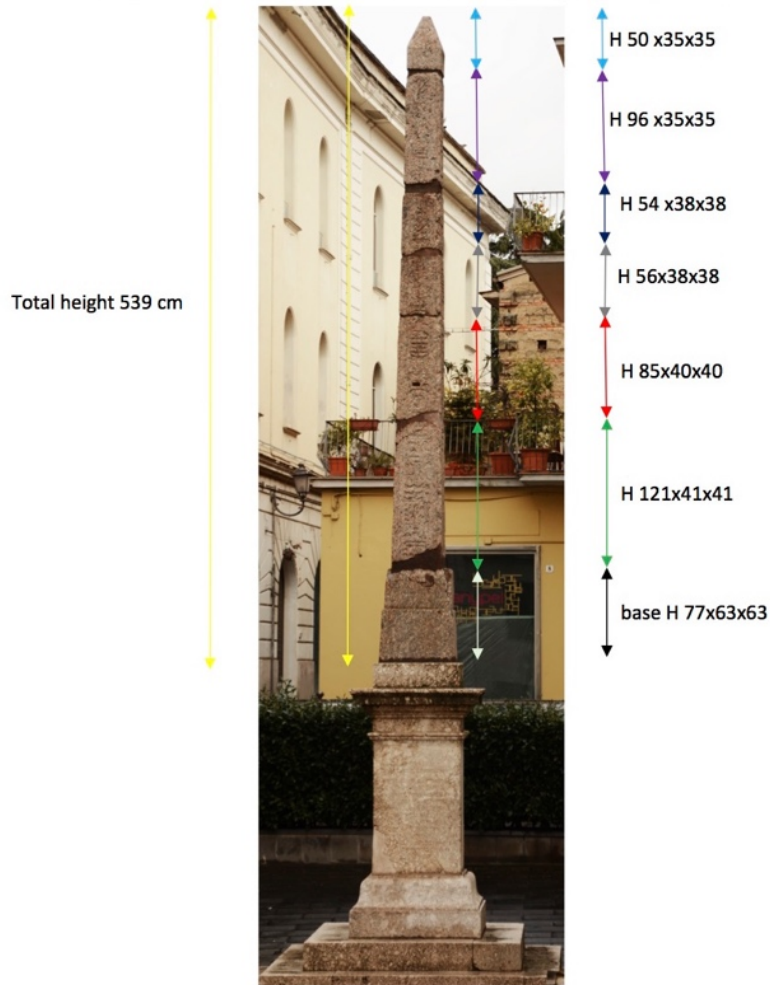


Figure 30: Height and width dimensions of Obelisk A, June 2017. © Arterìa srl.

Today, the original pyramidion of Obelisk A and the pyramidion and uppermost fragment of Obelisk B are still missing. As discussed above, in 1895 Isernia reported a piece of an obelisk found when the church of San Bartolomeo collapsed in an earthquake. This may be the origin of the two fragments that were kept in the courtyard of the Archbishop's Palace. Had they been used as spolia in the twelfth-century church of San Bartolomeo and recovered after the earthquakes of 1688 or 1702? Or perhaps they had remained buried underground and the earthquake unearthed them. Isernia goes on to mention

yet another fragment, which according to him was built into the wall of the new church of San Bartolomeo as a lintel over one of the large windows in the dome:

Infine un terzo pezzo lavorato ad uso di architrave di finestra stava infisso in uno dei grandi finestroni della cupola della stessa chiesa, e si argomentò da qualche d'una della lettere geroglifiche in esso superstiti, che doveva far parte dell'obelisco; e tuttavia venne nella nuova chiesa murato

Finally, a third piece worked for use as a window lintel was placed in one of the large windows of the dome of the same church, and it was confirmed by some of the surviving hieroglyphic letters that this must have been part of the obelisk; yet it was used in the wall of the new church.⁸⁴

Isernia and Müller (who later cites him) do not provide a source for this information,⁸⁵ and Isernia does not say when or where this third piece was found. Construction on the new church of San Bartolomeo in its new location began in 1726 and was completed in 1729. Isernia records the episode over 150 years after the fact, and it certainly seems possible that he was simply repeating a local rumor.⁸⁶ A similar account is provided by Gorringer, according to whom the additional fragment is embedded in the wall of the Archbishop's Palace.⁸⁷ Isernia does not explain why this particular fragment, unlike the one(s) uncovered in the earthquake, was reused in a new construction rather than preserved, but if his statement is true then the missing upper fragment of Obelisk B may survive, built into a window lintel in Benevento.

⁸⁴ Isernia, *Istoria*, 110.

⁸⁵ Müller, *Der Isiskult*, 10, 82; *Il culto di Iside*, 14.

⁸⁶ In personal communication with d. Marco Franzese at the church of San Bartolomeo (March 2017), he was not able to verify Isernia's statement.

⁸⁷ Gorringer, *Egyptian Obelisks*, 137.

Conservation: 2017–2018 (*Erik Risser and William Shelley*)

Obelisk B arrived at the Getty Villa in Los Angeles in June 2017 to undergo study and treatment. The condition of the obelisk upon arrival can be seen in figure 31. Treatment addressed the inherent structural issues caused by the obelisk's heavy fragmentation and incomplete nature. The stone was consolidated and mended, and numerous missing areas and sections were recreated in modern materials. In order to allow for both temporary display in Los Angeles and permanent exhibition in Benevento, the obelisk needed to be assembled and disassembled repeatedly and transported in manageable pieces. Accordingly, any techniques used to unify the various fragments into a single assemblage needed to provide maximum structural stability together with full reversibility. Aesthetically, the desire was to restore the obelisk to an approximation of its original appearance by recreating missing areas, including approximately half of the base and the upper third and pyramidion, making it comprehensible as a monolith while also distinguishing modern sections from ancient material so as not to be misleading.



Figure 31: Obelisk B at the J. Paul Getty Museum, prior to conservation. June 2017;
Photograph: © 2017 J. Paul Getty Trust.

As discussed above, photographic and physical evidence suggested that the obelisk had undergone a minimum of three previous interventions. Roughly half of the base and nearly a third of the original height of the obelisk were missing. An internal system of ferrous (iron-based) pins connected the surviving fragments. A length of hollow iron tubing connected Section 1 to the base – the pin extruded from the bottom of Section 1 and was received loosely into the square cut hole in the top surface of the base. This pin appeared to coincide with the reassembly of the obelisk sections in the second half of the twentieth century, while the square hole in the base is more consistent with the earlier use of forged, square-sectioned pins attested elsewhere in the assemblage. Such a pin connected Section 1 to Section 6 – the presence of polyethylene foam at the join line indicated that this square-sectioned pin was reused in a later intervention. A similar pin was still encased in its original lead in the top surface of Section 6 and presumably was received in the hole in the bottom of Section 7 when they were originally assembled together in 1916.

The missing portions of break edges and corners along the join lines between fragments, and the joins themselves, had been filled with a lime-based mortar that had a brightly colored paint applied to its exterior surface. Nearly half of the base had been completed with bricks (mentioned above), which were covered with a similar mortar and paint. Some of the edges and portions of the hieroglyphic signs on the surface of Section 1 were missing and displayed deep irregular depressions with radial cracks. Casts taken of these surface depressions revealed that each appeared to be the result of high impact with spherical projectiles of different sizes. This surprising find suggests that at some point in the obelisk's history it was used as target practice with fire arms and field artillery. Section 1 had originally been assembled as the lowermost section of Obelisk A, and so was among the fragments stored in the courtyard of the Liceo Giannone in 1865; perhaps it was during this time that the obelisk suffered this damage, prompting the above-mentioned letter asking that it be moved indoors.

Conservators mended all radial cracks by injecting soluble acrylic resins, applied under pressure, dissolved in low volatility solvents to increase penetration into the stone matrix in order to create a united, resonant mass able to withstand the static weight of the granite fragment alone and of any superior sections. To this end, the missing half of the two-tiered trapezoidal base was recreated in struc-

tural aluminium shapes embedded in a highly viscous epoxy paste that could sustain the load of the monument above. This section was cast in relation to the surface morphology of the extant portion of the base to create an intimate join between both halves. A reversible acrylic resin attaches the new section to the ancient stone.

The previous pinning systems were updated to allow the obelisk to stand freely without external support. A stainless-steel pinning system meant to recreate a mortice and tenon joint was incorporated into the existing square holes. This type of connection establishes a reversible physical bridge in line with gravity, holding the various sections in position with their inherent collective weight. Sleeves (tubes) were potted into the extant holes on either side of each break join. The sleeves' interior diameter corresponded to the exterior diameter of the pin, which was fully covered by the two sleeve sections. As such, each pin was not adhered or keyed in place, but simply placed into the sleeves, providing resistance and strength against any lateral, sheer, or tensile forces.

The horizontal surface joins between the base and the bottom of the obelisk and between Sections 1 and 6 were given reinforced resin interfaces that provided proper orientation and alignment of each fragment, replicating the original volume of the lost ancient material. These interfaces were cast in two sections, each corresponding to the upper or lower side of the adjacent stone and terminating in a flat surface where the two interfaces meet. Each interface was adhered in place to the corresponding stone.

The fills recreating the large missing portions between joins or at corners were made in an epoxy matrix, cast against the irregular granite break surface and sculpted on the exterior to replicate the original stone in height, surface texture and, where necessary, in carving to create a unifying aesthetic. Magnets hold each of these exterior fills in place, making them fully reversible and easily removable if necessary.

The missing upper third of the obelisk was recreated as a light-weight aluminium frame, sheathed with aluminium honeycomb panels. A resin skin cast on top of the panels replicates the surface height and texture of the granite, as well as the sculpted vertical lines that frame the hieroglyphic inscription. The mass of this upper section is largely air, with the aluminium honeycomb frame encompassing

a hollow center. Consequently, the upper register does not add additional weight to the completed assemblage, minimizing stress on the ancient stone below. The pyramidion was created separately, allowing access through the top of the aluminium obelisk section to a bolt threaded through its bottom and received into a threaded anchor embedded in the square hole in the top of Section 6. The mechanical joint that holds the section in place prevents movement or toppling. The pyramidion was made with a similar aluminium frame, honey-comb, and resin skin, and is held to the aluminium obelisk section by magnets.

The original height of Obelisk B was confirmed by comparison with its twin, Obelisk A in the Piazza Papiniano in Benevento (Fig.30). The proportions of the pyramidion to the obelisk itself (the height and angle of taper) were approximated and determined by comparison to the other surviving Domitian-era obelisk, the so-called Pamphili obelisk that sits atop Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi in the Piazza Navona in Rome. Through discussions with the Museo del Sannio and the Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le Province di Caserta e Benevento, it was determined that all new sections and fills should be painted a monochrome color based on the color values of the granite. This approach renders the modern material discernible from the ancient stone without being distracting and still allows the obelisk to be appreciated as a complete form. The interfaces, updated pinning, and manual attachments of the upper aluminium section and pyramidion allow Obelisk B to easily disassemble into five components: base, Section 1, Section 6, upper third, and pyramidion. The obelisk can now stand independently without structural issue and has returned to its original function as a grand monument.

Summary

Obelisk A was erected in front of Benevento's Duomo in 1597/8 with a bronze pyramidion, sphere, and cross, and a modern pedestal. Its history between antiquity and this date is, as far as we can tell, unrecorded. It is unclear where the obelisk fragments were originally uncovered but given the placement of Obelisk A in front of the Duomo, the presence of two additional fragments held in the courtyard of the adjacent Archbishop's Palace, and Isernia's statement that a piece of an obelisk was uncovered when the church of San Bartolomeo

(originally located next to both of these buildings) was destroyed by an earthquake, it seems likeliest to us that the obelisks – and therefore also the temple of Isis – were located in this area in antiquity and that this is where the fragments were first found.

In 1764, Stefano Borgia repaired the bronze elements that had been added to Obelisk A. By 1797, the obelisk had been reunited with its ancient base. In 1865 Obelisk A was taken down when the Duomo's churchyard was renovated. It was moved to the Piazza Papiniano in 1872 and was placed on a new marble pedestal. At this time, its bronze sphere and cross were removed and new pyramidion, carved from an ancient piece of red granite, was added.

Two other obelisk fragments kept in courtyard of the Archbishop's Palace for an undetermined number of years were taken to the Museo del Sannio in 1888 by archaeologist Almerico Meomartini – we have found no documentation of how and when they were originally discovered or how long they had been at the Palace before moving to the museum. They may have been unearthed during the 1702 earthquake that destroyed the original church of San Bartolomeo. In 1892 Meomartini excavated an obelisk fragment from the gardens of the De Simone palace. These three fragments were assembled together, without the ancient base, into Obelisk B in 1916 and displayed at the Museo del Sannio. Sometime after ca. 1930 the ancient base was added to these three fragments.

At some point between the 1930s and 1965, the two obelisks were disassembled and reassembled properly. Obelisk A is now complete (minus its original pyramidion) while Obelisk B consists of two sections and is missing its upper third. This final, missing fragment may have been used as a window lintel in a building in Benevento or may await discovery through excavation. The exact date of the reassembly of the two obelisks and the circumstances under which the work was done remain unknown to us. Because Obelisk A is the property of the Italian state and Obelisk B belongs to the Museo del Sannio, this project would have required negotiation and cooperation between the local government and the museum. Such negotiations would have involved written plans, contracts, price lists, receipts, and the like. It is our hope that perhaps such documents exist in government records in Benevento and can one day be

incorporated into this narrative to fill in some of the remaining gaps in the obelisks' biographies.



Figure 32: Obelisk B on display in the entrance hall of the J. Paul Getty Museum after conservation. Photograph: © 2018 J. Paul Getty Trust.

Obelisk B underwent conservation at the Getty in 2017–2018 and was displayed in the rotunda of the Getty Museum's entrance hall during the 2018 exhibition *Beyond the Nile: Egypt and the Classical World* (Fig.32). Upon its return to Benevento in October of 2018, the obelisk was placed in a new location at the Braccio

Nuovo del Museo del Sannio, Convento di Santa Sofia, which allows the fully reconstructed monument to be prominently displayed in full view, beginning a new chapter in its history (Fig.33, 34).



Figure 33, 34: Obelisk B at the Museo del Sannio, July 2020. Photographs: Paul D. Wordsworth & Luigi Prada.

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