

*Tullio Scovazzi*

*The return of the Axum Obelisk*

***THE RECENT STORY OF THE AXUM OBELISK***

The obelisk of Axum, Ethiopia, was removed by Italy in 1937 after the illegal aggression and annexation of Ethiopia (1936). The obelisk was on the ground broken into five fragments. It was erected in Rome in front of the building of the Ministry of Colonies (now the FAO building).

By the 1947 Peace Treaty, Italy bound itself to “restore” within 18 months all works of art removed from Ethiopia. This obligation was not complied with, as far as the Axum obelisk was concerned.

By a bilateral treaty concluded in 1956 Italy undertook within 6 months to dismount, remove and transport to Ethiopia the obelisk, recognising that it was subject to restitution to Ethiopia. This obligation was not complied with.

In 1980 the property “Aksum” was inscribed in the World Heritage List under the 1972 UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, as a site where massive ruins (monolithic obelisks, giant stelae, royal tombs and castles), dating from between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D., are located.

By a joint statement made in 1997 “on the basis of existing treaties”, Ethiopia and Italy, appreciating the inestimable value of the Axum obelisk for Ethiopia and fully cognizant of the positive impact of the obelisk restitution on the friendship between the two countries, defined the procedures for its restitution.

By a 2004 bilateral memorandum Italy undertook to transport the obelisk to Axum airport and to finance its re-erection and restoration to be executed by UNESCO. The works for the re-erection are expected to be completed by September 2008.

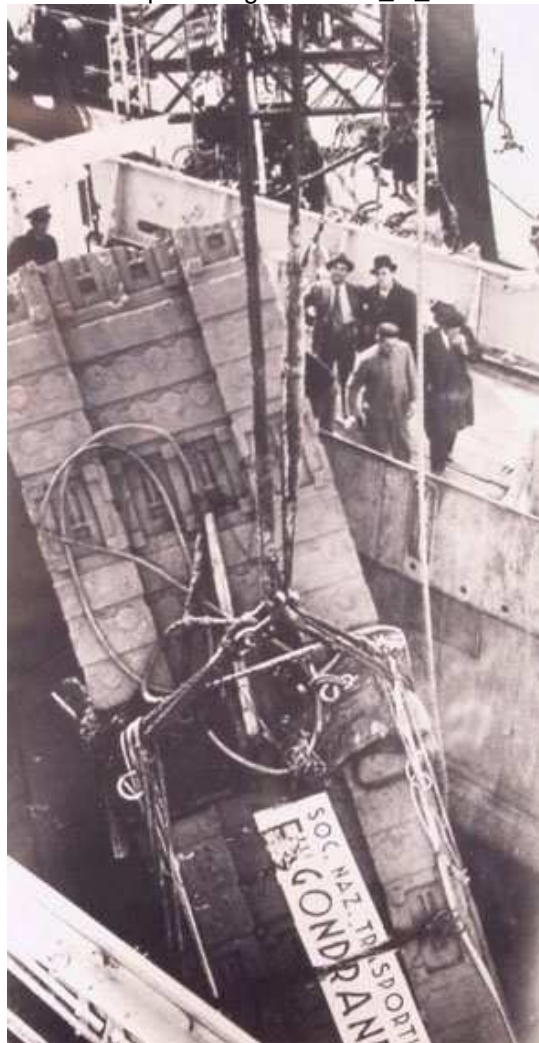
The story of the belated restitution of the Axum obelisk is an outstanding example of the progressive development of principles of international law relating to the non-impoverishment of the cultural heritage of other countries, to the integrity of cultural sites and to the non-exploitation of the situation of countries subject to colonial rule.

Tullio Scovazzi

Professor of International Law at the University of Milano- Bicocca



Images relating to the removal of the obelisk from Axum to Rome  
© [it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stele\\_di\\_Axum](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stele_di_Axum)



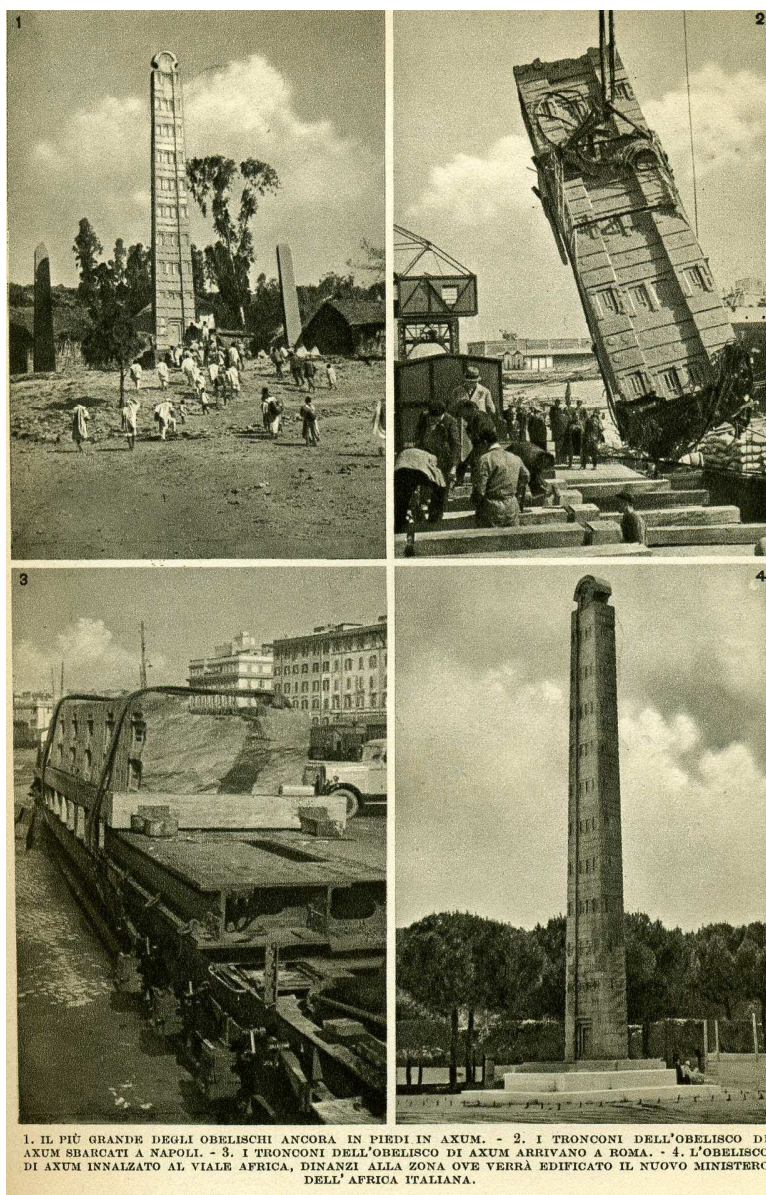
Images relating to the removal of the obelisk from Axum to Rome  
© [it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stele\\_di\\_Axum](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stele_di_Axum)



Images relating to the removal of the obelisk from Axum to Rome  
© it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stele\_di\_Axum



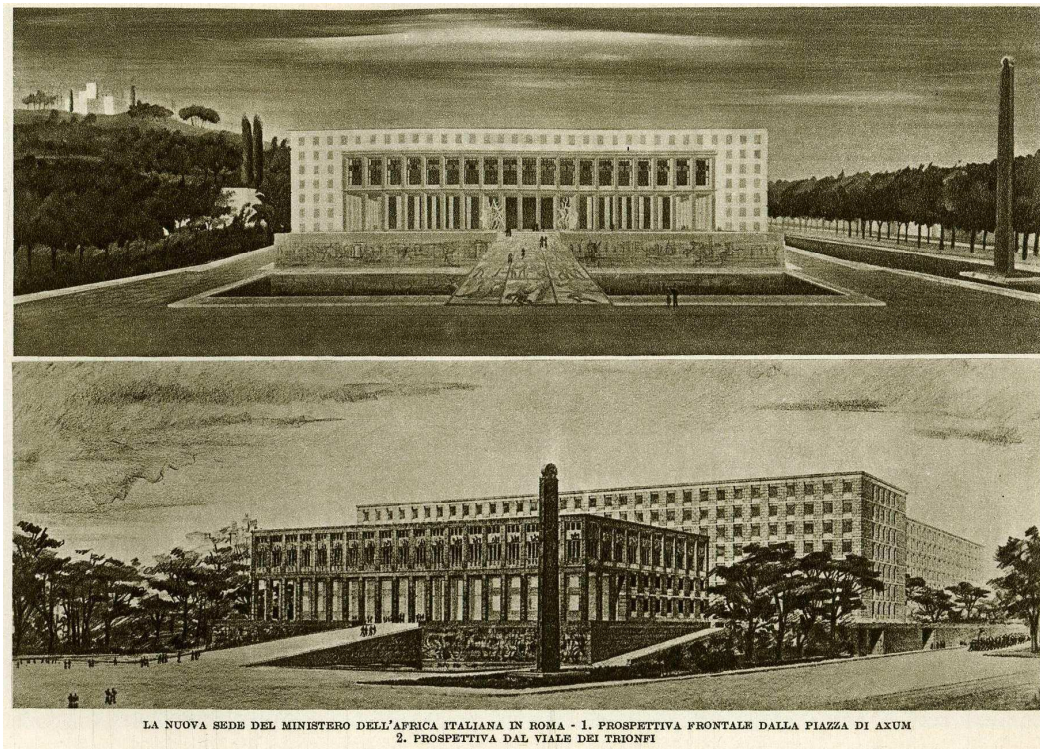
Images relating to the removal of the obelisk from Axum to Rome  
© it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stele\_di\_Axum



Images relating to the removal of the obelisk from Axum to Rome  
 © Annali dell'Africa Italiana, No. 3-4 (1938) and No. 1 (1940)



Images relating to the removal of the obelisk from Axum to Rome  
© Annali dell'Africa Italiana, No. 3-4 (1938) and No. 1 (1940)



Images relating to the removal of the obelisk from Axum to Rome  
© Annali dell'Africa Italiana, No. 3-4 (1938) and No. 1 (1940)



Images relating to the return of the obelisk from Rome to Axum  
© <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/122/>



Images relating to the return of the obelisk from Rome to Axum  
© <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/122/>



Images relating to the return of the obelisk from Rome to Axum  
© <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/122/>



Images relating to the return of the obelisk from Rome to Axum  
© <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/122/>



Images relating to the return of the obelisk from Rome to Axum  
© <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/122/>