

*H-France Review* Vol. 11 (July 2011), No. 166

Yasmin Sabina Khan, *Enlightening the World: The Creation of the Statue of Liberty*. Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 2010. viii + 186 pp. Illustrations and author notes. \$24.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8014-4851-5.

Review by Heidi A. Strobel, University of Evansville.

In *Enlightening the World: The Creation of the Statue of Liberty*, Yasmin Sabina Khan presents the compelling story of the 151-foot colossus that dominates Liberty Island in New York City. While the general story of the statue's creation is well-known, the details of its construction are not. Khan's analysis focuses on the most significant events of the period and how they affected the twenty-one-year building process, as well as the five men who brought the statue to fruition: Édouard-René Lefebvre de Laboulaye, Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, Gustave Eiffel, Richard Morris Hunt, and Joseph Pulitzer.

As Khan indicates, the effectiveness of the Statue of Liberty lies in its dual appeal. It delivers a national message to American immigrants by using a universal visual language. Similarly, her multi-faceted approach provides the reader with an outline of American events against the backdrop of European developments. The book opens with a section of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address that cast the Civil War in global terms rather than regional ones. At stake was equality, an abstract and universal republican ideal. While it was imperative to eradicate slavery, it was also the United States' duty to help republics in other countries, in particular, Italy and France. The international anxiety about whether this type of government could last was only heightened by Lincoln's 1865 assassination.

Into this framework, Khan introduces Laboulaye, a French legal scholar, who was a key international advocate of both the Union cause and the friendship between the United States and France. Khan excels at providing these French contributors with a voice that has not been heard often enough in previous accounts of the Statue of Liberty. Laboulaye viewed the evolution of the American republic as a prototype for the type of change that was needed in France. Between 1855 and 1866, he wrote a three-volume *History of the United States (Histoire des États-Unis)*, which provided a thorough account of America's early years and the establishment of her political institutions. During this period, he also produced "The United States and France ("Les États-Unis et la France"), a pamphlet that described the historical relationship between the two countries that began with the first French advocate of American liberty, the Marquis de Lafayette.

Khan demonstrates that Laboulaye used his position as a professor at the prestigious Collège de France to spread the gospel of American republicanism and to argue for an alternative to the repression of civil rights under Emperor Napoleon III. In 1865, he met Bartholdi at a dinner party in his own home in Glatigny (near Versailles). Bartholdi was a sculptor who shared Laboulaye's views on both Lincoln and the universal significance of the Civil War. These men were not alone in their beliefs, for following Lincoln's death, more than forty thousand French citizens contributed to the creation of a commemorative gold medal that was given to Mary Todd Lincoln in 1866 from the people of France. It was in this political and artistic milieu that Laboulaye suggested a monument that would celebrate liberty and become a symbol of the republican sisterhood between the two countries.

Khan's chapter about Bartholdi's involvement with the Statue of Liberty is fascinating, for she convincingly demonstrates the importance of his role and how the Franco-Prussian War strengthened his commitment to the American project. In 1834, Bartholdi was born in the French city of Colmar, in Alsace-Lorraine, a region that had been passed back and forth between the French and the Germans several times in the last two centuries. He moved to Paris at the age of nine following the death of his father. As a young man, Bartholdi studied with the Dutch painter and sculptor Ary Scheffer, who had been part of the artistic circle around the Marquis de Lafayette in the 1820s. He also worked with Antoine Étex, a sculptor who (along with François Rude) contributed to the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile monument that was begun under Napoleon Bonaparte.

Khan methodically outlines the progressive stages of Bartholdi's career and analyzes how they influenced the design of the Statue. After his training in Paris, he arrived in Egypt in November 1855, where he travelled with a small group of artists, including the well-known history and genre painter Jean-Léon Gérôme. Inspired by the monumental architecture and sculpture that he saw there, he began to design a monument featuring a large female figure for the entrance of the Suez Canal. Thus, by the time that Bartholdi met Laboulaye in 1865, the sculptor had received an international artistic education that emphasized the republican allegiance to liberty and equality as well as large-scale monuments that embodied less progressive ideals. At the time of their meeting, however, the repressive political environment in France precluded the possibility of celebrating liberty, so Bartholdi dedicated himself to reading Laboulaye's publications and studying the iconography of liberty figures. Napoleon III declared war on Prussia in July of 1870, and Bartholdi began to prepare himself for military action after he witnessed the Prussians in his hometown. The French were quickly defeated, the emperor surrendered, and Colmar, along with the rest of Alsace and most of Lorraine, became part of the German empire following Otto von Bismarck's negotiations at Versailles. In the first years of the Third Republic, Bartholdi was commissioned to create several Alsatian war memorials. According to Khan, these projects honed his ability to endow familiar images with new meaning and expression, which he would do with the concurrent Statue of Liberty commission. And the absorption of Bartholdi's fiercely independent homeland into the German empire strengthened his commitment to the ideals of liberty and self-governance.

Following the end of the Franco-Prussian War, Bartholdi made his first trip to the United States.

In chapter five, Khan explains how his tour influenced the Statue's design. While in Philadelphia, Bartholdi visited Independence Hall, whose solar decoration was associated with the founding of the nation. The sculptor eventually used this design for the Statue of Liberty's crown. The massive scale of both natural and manmade monuments that Bartholdi saw during his trip through the Midwest and West inspired Bartholdi to design a colossal monument. His friendship with Laboulaye opened many doors for him. He met current president Ulysses S. Grant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and artist John La Farge. La Farge introduced Bartholdi to two important figures: his future wife, Jeanne-Émilie Baheux de Puyieux and the architect, Richard Morris Hunt, a Francophile who eventually designed the Statue of Liberty's pedestal. At the conclusion of his trip, Bartholdi wrote Laboulaye that he was somewhat frustrated by the "long and laborious process" of both building this statue and garnering American support for the project. Despite his accurate assessment the statue would not "take root immediately," he remained confident of his eventual success, telling Laboulaye that the statue "may end up not just a monument but a work of greater moral value" (p. 81).

Chapter seven, which focuses on Bartholdi's design, is particularly useful for its thoughtful iconographic analysis. Both Bartholdi and Laboulaye only spoke about the statue's design in general terms and thus, there is no record that comprehensively explains the various design choices that they made. Khan provides a well-argued and much needed account that connects the Statue of Liberty to the Seven Wonders of the World, particularly the now lost Colossus of Rhodes. This 110-foot-tall (33 m) bronze statue welcomed ships into its harbor, was dedicated to the sun god Helios, and became a symbol of the

“lovely light of unfettered freedom” (p. 101). When Bartholdi was planning the Statue monument, he also likely incorporated elements of the earlier Suez Canal monument that featured a woman with a lantern. The light in both of these statues was understood to be both practical and metaphorical, symbolizing enlightenment, justice, and victory.

Khan explains how Bartholdi’s use of a trampled chain underneath the Statue’s feet was a subtle reference to contemporary images of the Great Emancipator. She also comprehensively describes how and why the sculptor incorporated various pre-existing symbols of liberty, such as the crown of sun rays and the tablet of laws. The liberty cap was eventually rejected because of its association with chaos, as seen in Delacroix’s *28 July, Liberty Guiding the People*. Yet classicizing symbols were used because they referred to both Neoclassical monuments in the nation’s capital and New York City, where George Washington gave his first inaugural address. Ultimately, both Bartholdi and Laboulaye wanted a statue that would present an image of order and gravitas. Khan concludes that the Statue’s success was due to its collective visual language, which stemmed from both realistic and idealized details, ancient and contemporary sources, and American and global ideals.

According to Khan, by the mid-1870s, the Statue’s construction was sped along by several factors: political stability in France, the use of new building materials, as well as the employment of modern marketing techniques and public relations practices. In 1875, Laboulaye introduced his plans for the liberty statue to the public by forming and leading the Franco-American Union, which began its work in September of 1875 with a public fundraising campaign that literally got the statue’s construction off the ground. In Paris, Bartholdi collaborated with Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc and the metalwork foundry of Gaget, Gauthier & Co., who specialized in copper statuary. With their assistance, the sculptor began to build successively larger plaster versions of his initial terracotta model. This measured technique allowed Bartholdi to make necessary spatial adjustments. In 1876 and 1878, parts of the statue were exhibited at the world’s fairs in Philadelphia and Paris. Viewing tickets to the copper foundry and reproductions of the statue were sold and the fundraising stage was concluded by a national lottery in France. By this point, the momentum was so great that even Viollet-le-Duc’s sudden death in September of 1879 did not cause a delay. He was replaced in early 1880 with the engineer-builder Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel, who designed the statue’s modern metal support structure. His assistant, Maurice Koechlin who, like Bartholdi, was also from Alsace, utilized a method of static analysis to protect the statue from wind damage. Khan convincingly demonstrates how the statue influenced the subsequent construction of the 976-foot-tall (300 m) Eiffel Tower.

As Khan points out, the United States centennial increased American enthusiasm for the Statue of Liberty, although it still lagged behind the French efforts. In collaboration with Bartholdi, Richard Morris Hunt designed a pedestal on Liberty (formerly Bedloe) Island that recalled both the iconography of the Colossus of Rhodes and classicizing imagery that was associated with the founding of the American nation, such as the Federal Hall in New York. As part of the American fundraising efforts, Emma Lazarus, a wealthy young woman who was descended from Jewish immigrants, wrote her now famous sonnet “The New Colossus” in the fall of 1883. On July 4, 1884, a lengthy ceremony was held in Paris to mark the completion of the statue while in America, Hunt was hard at work on the pedestal. In March 1885, a final financial crisis occurred when the American fundraising committee ran out of funds. Khan catalogues the many reasons that this occurred, including American skepticism about a supposedly free artistic gift from France, the belief that American art should be independent from European art, and a hearty anti-New York sentiment, especially in the Midwest. Joseph Pulitzer, a Hungarian immigrant who had lived in both New York City and St. Louis, acted as a liaison at this stage of the project. As the fairly new owner of the *New York World*, he raised over \$100,000 by offering to print the contributors’ names in his newspaper, a savvy promotional technique that saved the day.

Khan's final chapter deals with the unveiling of the statue, christened *Liberty Enlightening the World*, which occurred on October 28, 1886. A celebratory parade, which featured participants from France and the United States, as well as George Washington's carriage, wound past the offices of Pulitzer's newspaper, in order to recognize his special contribution. In the afternoon, various speeches were given by French and American dignitaries, the statue was introduced as "the united work of the two republics," and Bartholdi unveiled his creation (p. 179). The statue itself was well-received, but as Khan rightfully points out, there were several groups who did not wish to celebrate the project because of their alienation from her promises of liberty and equality—women, African Americans, and Native Americans. It was not until late in the following century that they began to enjoy some of these privileges.

Khan argues that despite the exclusion of these groups, the statue was eventually popular, primarily because its planners celebrated ideals rather than an individual and used both classicizing and contemporary visual language to do so. Despite the political upheaval in late nineteenth-century France and the United States, the Statue became a steadfast symbol of republican ideals. Khan's examination of the political and economic circumstances in both countries and how they affected the creation of this statue are valuable contributions to the existing scholarship on this statue. The Franco-Prussian war and the Alsace-Lorraine region are of particular interest in her account, which also underscores the French involvement with this project, an aspect that is often neglected in American accounts of the statue's creation. The short, yet comprehensive, chapters are best targeted to an upper-level undergraduate and graduate student audience. Khan's thorough explanation of the artistic evolution of the statue, which is rooted in archival research, should also appeal to specialists in the fields of history, art history, and architecture. While there is no doubt that Khan's book provides a much-needed account of the statue's creation, a literature review, which is not included in her account, would be helpful to the specialist audience.

After Victor Hugo, who exiled himself during Napoleon's reign, returned to France, he had a chance to see the Statue in Paris in 1884. He enthused that "this beautiful work of art...will constitute a lasting pledge of peace between France and America...it is good that this has been done" (p. 155). Khan's book definitively establishes that while the Statue of Liberty originated as a gift of goodwill between two sister republics, it also became a symbol of the global role of France and the United States as guardians of republican ideals.

Heidi A. Strobel  
University of Evansville  
[hs40@evansville.edu](mailto:hs40@evansville.edu)

Copyright © 2011 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.