

Black Siltstone Obelisks of Nectanebo II **The British Museum**

Found in Cairo but originally from Hermopolis (modern Al-Ashmunayn), Middle Egypt
30th Dynasty, around 350 BC



The Thirtieth Dynasty (380-343 BC) saw a revival of Egyptian art and architecture which had lain relatively dormant since the end of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty in 525 BC. Many temples were expanded and new ones built, particularly under the first king, Nectanebo I. These fragments were part of a pair of obelisks, probably originally about 5.5 m high. Obelisks were solar symbols placed in temples. Many are massive, such as 'Cleopatra's Needles' now in London and New York, but smaller examples such as these may have been placed at the entrance to a ramp into part of a temple.

The inscriptions records the dedication to the Egyptian god Thoth, 'Lord of Hermopolis', one of Thoth's major cult centres. Most of the extant remains of the site date to the Graeco-Roman period, but a British Museum expedition (1980-90) found many remains of older temples.

One of the obelisks (EA 523) was seen reused in a window-sill in the citadel in Cairo by Richard Pococke, one of the first British travellers to Egypt, in 1737. The other was seen in 1762 in the same area by the Danish mathematician Carsten Niebuhr. Both fragments were recorded for the *Description de l'Egypte* by Napoleon's 1798 expedition and taken to Alexandria in preparation for transport to France in 1801. Following their surrender to the British and the Treaty of Alexandria in the same year, the two fragments, along with other material such as the Rosetta Stone, came to Britain. Another fragment of the upper part of EA 524 has been located in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo.

L. Habachi, *The obelisks of Egypt: skyscra* (New York, Scribner, 1977)

E. Iversen, *Obelisks in exile*, (2 vols). (Copenhagen, G.E.C. Gad, 1968-1972)

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