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What's An Obelisk?

In the honor of Ra

Their origins are traced in ancient Egypt, but they "traveled" around the world, reaching cities like Istanbul, London, Paris, Rome and New York. The obelisk is a stone column with four sides thinning towards the upper part and ending with a pointed, pyramidal top. The oldest obelisks are 4,000 years old, while the "youngest" about 2,000. Most obelisks are made of red granite carved by ancient Egyptians. They were usually placed at the entrance of temples and tombs. The largest obelisk that can still be seen in Rome is 32 m (107 ft) tall and weighs about 455 tons. Most obelisks are engraved with hieroglyphs. These monuments were raised in the honor of the Sun god Ra, as a gratification sign for his protection, victories given to the Egyptian pharaohs, but also for asking favors. Obelisks look like Egyptian pyramids and symbolize the sunrays descending on Earth to warm and light it. They also glorify the pharaohs as the carved hieroglyphs say about the Egyptian kings as "loved by Ra" and "handsome like Atum (the oldest Egyptian god personifying the sunset sun)". On an obelisk the warfare bravery of a pharaoh is described in this way "His power is like that of Montu (the god of war), the bull that smashes populations and destroy the rebelled ones". The first obelisks were constructed in the Egyptian city of Iun (Biblical On) "The City of the Pillar", probably referring to obelisks. Greeks called it Heliopolis (The City of the Sun) because it was the main Egyptian center of the sun cult. The largest still existing obelisk is found in the quarry where it was carved, near the Egyptian city of Assuan. After finding a quality stone bed, the workers leveled it and caved small galleries below for introducing beams till the block detached from the stone bed. The monolith, weighing 1,170 tons, was heavier than any other stone block extracted by the ancient Egyptians and was to be dragged to the Nile and sent to its destination by barge. [img=2]The Assuan obelisk was abandoned when workers realized it was cracked and could not be recovered. If finished, it would have been 42 m (140 ft) tall with a base of 4x4 m (13x13 ft). The way obelisks were raised is still a puzzle. In 30 BC Egypt turned into a Roman province and many Roman emperors wanted to adorn their capital with the famous monuments (18 centuries later, Napoleon did not escape this microbe). About 50 obelisks reached Rome. Their translation meant the building of enormous ships, especially developed for this operation. In Rome, obelisks kept on being used in the Cult of the Sun. With the fall of the Roman Empire, Rome was devastated. Most obelisks were destroyed. Some popes built again the obelisks found in the ruins of the ancient city. Exorcism, blessing, holly water and incense smoke accompanied the creation of the first obelisk by pope Sixtus the Fifth (1585-1590).