

## **The Shabako Stone The British Museum**

From Memphis, Egypt  
25th Dynasty, around 700 BC

### **Copy of a 'worm-eaten' papyrus**



During the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties (about 747-525 BC) the Egyptians often used models and styles from earlier periods to enhance their arts and literature. Texts were given an air of authority by the suggestion that they were copied from an earlier source. According to this text, King Shabako (about 716-702 BC) inspected the Temple of Ptah and was horrified to discover that a papyrus scroll was being devoured by worms. He immediately ordered that the remaining undamaged text be incised in stone. The compiler of the text has reproduced the layout of early documents and introduced a number of archaisms, giving the piece an air of antiquity. However, the text is clearly much later than it claims. The slab was later re-used as a millstone, damaging the hieroglyphs.

The text on the stone, sometimes called the Memphite theology, places Ptah, the principal god of Memphis, and the patron deity of craftsmen, at the centre of existence. It even places him as a creator god, describing how he brings the world into being by giving names, thereby dividing land from water, light from darkness, heaven from earth etc.

There was no one single creation myth in ancient Egypt. The most widespread was that of creation by the sun god Atum, but versions often developed for each local deity, and a whole host of temples would consider themselves as the place where creation began. Shabako was a king of the expansionist Nubian dynasty, whose capital was in the Sudan. His intention may have been to secure the allegiance of the priesthood of

Source URL: [http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_objects/aes/t/the\\_shabako\\_stone.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/aes/t/the_shabako_stone.aspx)  
Saylor URL: <http://www.saylor.org/courses/arth201>

Memphis, an influential section of the recently conquered Egyptian populace, by giving new prestige to the city's patron deity.

M. Jones (ed.), *Fake?: the art of deception*, exh. cat. (London, The British Museum Press, 1990)

S. Quirke, *Ancient Egyptian religion* (London, The British Museum Press, 1992)

M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian literature: a*, 3 vols. (University of California Press, 1973-1980)