

Professor Aidan Dodson - The Nubian Pharaohs of Egypt

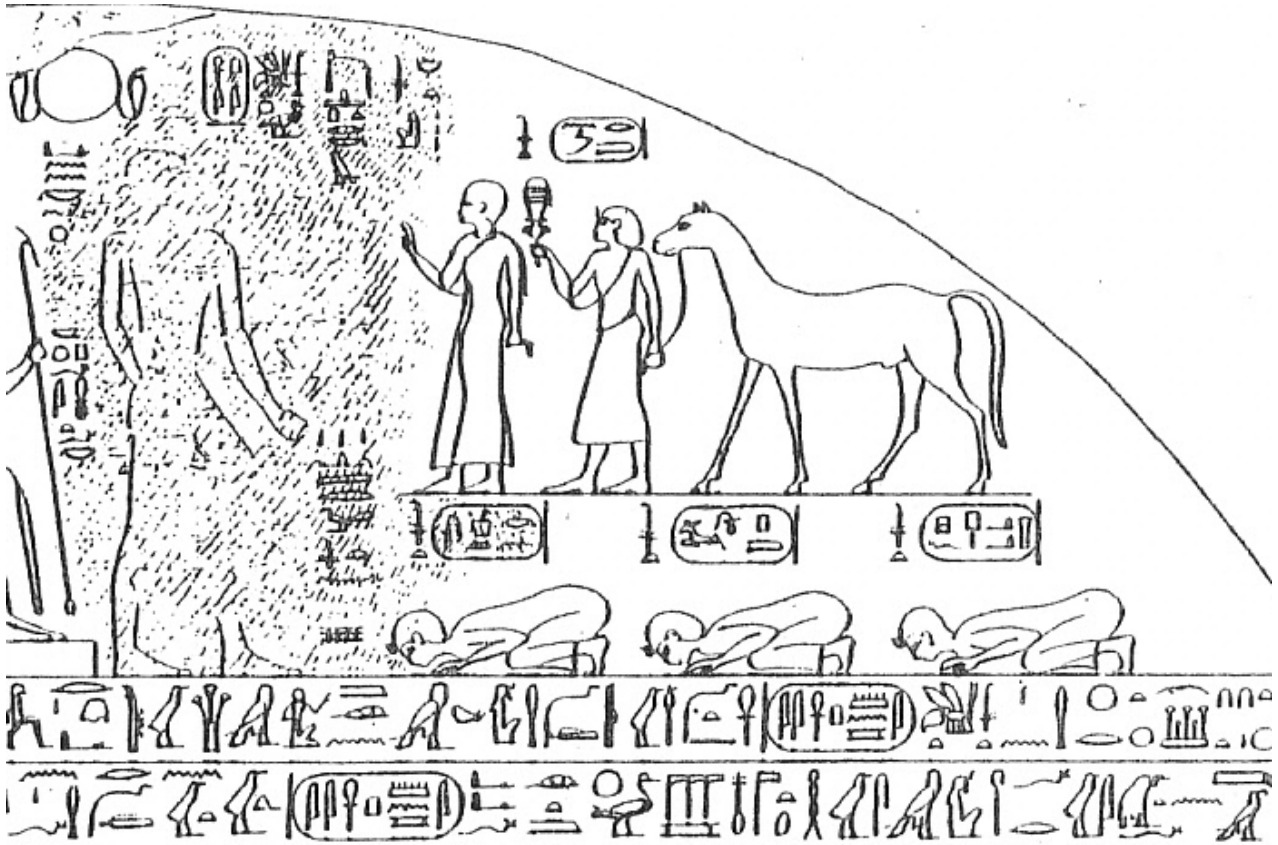
At the beginning of September, we welcomed Professor Aidan Dodson who talked to us about the complex period in Egyptian history in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE when the dominant pharaohs came from Nubia.

He introduced the topic by pointing out that links between Nubia (the area now known as southern Egypt and Sudan) and Egypt were evident from late pre-dynastic times. Egypt wanted what Sudan could provide: minerals such as gold or exotic stones and access to trade routes going further south into Africa. In the Middle Kingdom the second cataract was fortified and by the New Kingdom, Nubia had become a vice-royalty of Egypt with the land of Kush being seen as a semi-detached part of Egypt. For example, during the reign of Tutankhamun the Viceroy of Nubia was Huy. A composite culture emerged with elements from Nubia and Egypt

The end of the New Kingdom and the beginning of the Third Intermediate Period saw the collapse of centralised Egyptian power and the emergence of competing small 'kingdoms'. By about 1050 BCE Egypt and Nubia went their separate ways. Trade and mineral extraction ceased. For the next 100 years there are only brief glimpses of the interaction of Egyptian and Nubian culture: New Kingdom style decoration on Temples A and B at Kawa; a scene and inscription at Semna referring to the Nubian queen, Katimala; neo-Ramesside remains at Gebel-Barkal and tombs at El Kurru.

The Theban region had been stable under Osorkon III of the twenty-third dynasty but there were competing rulers in Lower Egypt which meant that Egypt was really in a state of civil war. Kashta is the first Nubian king to have extensive control of Upper Egypt. His daughter, Amenirdis I was named as successor to Shepenwepet I, the God's Wife of Amun and daughter of Osorkon III. Shepenwepet and Amenirdis are shown together at Karnak suggesting they worked together or co-operated. Inscriptions about Kashta at Elephantine and Karnak attest to his power in the area.

Kashta's son Piye (745-713 - also known by the name Piankhy) can be identified as the first king of the twenty-fifth dynasty who extended his power further into Egypt. He took advantage of Egypt's squabbling rulers and formed alliances which extended his power. The other kings became his vassals. The Nubians showed a special concern for horses and their tombs contained horse skeletons.



A. Mariette (1821-1881), Public domain, Wikimedia Commons

Piye's victory stele shows a horse, evidence of the co-existence of Egyptian and Nubian

The Kushite kings of the twenty-fifth dynasty were buried at El-Kurru. Earlier burials had been in the form of a tumulus but the twenty-fifth dynasty kings were buried in pyramids. Professor Dodson pointed out that there are more pyramids in modern day Sudan than in Egypt.

Although, based on an error by Champollion, it used to be thought that Piye's successor was Shabaka, it is now recognised that his successor was actually Shabataka, who exerted control over the entire Nile valley and became involved in foreign expeditions. He sent an army to aid the Israelites against the Assyrians and may well appear in the bible as the 'angel of the lord' who kills Assyrians. There is evidence from an inscription of the Assyrian king Sargon that Shabataka was king of all Egypt and that he returned Assyrian rebels to Assyria.



Head of Shabataka in the Nubian museum

By Aidan McRae Thomson, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=91195638>

Shabataka's successor, Shabaka, appears on a seal from Ninevah which suggests continued interaction between Egyptians and Assyrians. The 'Shabaka stone' in the British Museum shows the Nubian pharaohs' respect for Egyptian traditions as it states that the text on the stone was copied from an Old Kingdom document. Shabaka added to many existing structures in Thebes and built an altar at Philae.



The Shabaka stone in the British Museum

"[The Shabaka Stone](#)" by [Kevan](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

Shabaka was followed by Taharka who left even more evidence of extensive building at Karnak, Kawa (close to the third cataract) and Gebel Barkal. The only intact Egyptian structure in the UK is Taharka's shrine from Kawa, which now rests in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

Assyrian aggression towards Egypt increased during Taharka's reign. In 674 BCE his army repulsed an Assyrian invasion but in the following years there were further invasions and many changes of allegiance amongst the various rulers of lower Egypt. After Taharka's death in 664 BCE the Assyrians were in control of Egypt and eventually sacked Thebes. The Nubian 25th Dynasty had come to an end.

Professor Dodson's new book about the Nubian pharaohs of Egypt will be published on the 25th of November

