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# The Development of Royal Funerary Cult at Abydos

## Two Funerary Enclosures from the Reign of Aha

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# Chapter One: Introduction

Excavations at the site of Abydos in 2004–5 revealed the remains of two rectangular, open-air, mud brick monuments of a type commonly called a funerary enclosure. Funerary enclosures are known exclusively from the Abydos North Cemetery, where they were built by rulers of the Early Dynastic period who were buried at Umm el-Qaab, also at Abydos.[1] The two new examples can be dated to the reign of Aha, at the beginning of the First Dynasty, on the basis of inscriptions found in the subsidiary graves that are adjacent to the enclosures. As a previously known enclosure can also be dated to the reign of Aha, it is now evident that this king was responsible for the construction of at least three funerary enclosures. The two enclosures excavated in 2004–5 are important additions to our knowledge of a somewhat enigmatic type of building that played a key role in the mortuary establishments of Egypt's early kings. The detailed presentation of the data recovered from these two funerary enclosures and their analysis in the context of early royal mortuary monuments are the purpose of this work.

Abydos lies approximately 430 kilometers south of Cairo, on the west side of the Nile, about ten kilometers from the modern course of the river (Figure 1). The river in this area shifts from flowing south to north to flowing southeast to northwest. The line between the cultivated land and the low desert at the site runs southeast to northwest, and the monuments of Abydos are predominantly oriented parallel to this line. The axes of most buildings at the site are thus either northeast-southwest, or northwest-southeast. This is equivalent to buildings with east-west or north-south orientations at sites where the Nile and the demarcation between cultivated land and the desert run from south to north. This orienting of buildings to the river has resulted in a somewhat confusing situation at Abydos whereby locations and orientations are sometimes given by cardinal directions and sometimes by "local" directions. All directions and orientations given in this study refer to cardinal directions unless otherwise noted.

The site of Abydos includes many different elements spread out over an area that is roughly five kilometers long and 2.4 kilometers broad at its greatest extent (Figure 2). The main town site lies on the border between the cultivation and the low desert; the location of a town here dates back at least to the Early Dynastic period. This town had a major temple, first dedicated to Khentiamentiu and later to Osiris. Other settlement sites at Abydos in-

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1 The location of the First Dynasty royal tombs was the subject of debate for many years following the discovery of large, well equipped mastaba tombs at Saqqara (Emery 1954, 1–4; 1958, 3). That the tombs of the kings of this Dynasty are to be found at Abydos has been convincingly argued by Kemp (1966; 1967), Kaiser (1969), and Kaiser and Dreyer (1982, 241–260), and is now generally accepted (see for example O'Connor 2002). The attribution of the Saqqara mastabas is still a matter of debate (see Wengrow 2006, 227–8 and n.10 for a brief synopsis of the debate and references), but it can no longer be seriously argued that the Abydos tombs are not the tombs of the kings (and queen mother) of the First Dynasty.

clude some Predynastic areas that were not occupied for very long as well as later towns that are associated with temples built by kings.

In addition to settlement areas, principally at the edge of the cultivation, Abydos has many cemeteries that are located in the low desert. The cemetery where the Early Dynastic kings were buried lies approximately 2.25 kilometers from the cultivation, near the base of the cliffs that mark the edge of the high desert. This area is not far from the mouth of a major wadi that leads up to the high desert plateau. The earliest burials in this area date back to the Naqada I period, and lie in an area now named Cemetery U, at part of the site now called Umm el-Qaab (Figures 2, 3). Over time Cemetery U became an exclusively elite burial ground, eventually home to tombs that belonged to apparent rulers in the Naqada III period. These were followed by tombs in the adjacent Cemetery B that were built for late predynastic rulers. The area at the southern edge of Cemetery B and further to the south was utilized by the rulers of the First Dynasty and the end of the Second Dynasty for their tombs. The remains of all of these tombs consist of subterranean chambers, with no preserved superstructures.

The tombs of the Early Dynastic rulers are larger and more complex than the tombs of their predecessors. While these tombs preserved the basic location and form – subterranean chambers lined with mud brick walls – of the Predynastic tombs, they also incorporate notable variations and innovations. Perhaps the most striking of the innovations is the inclusion of discrete subsidiary graves, smaller chambers that are grouped in association with the royal burials, chambers that contained grave goods and what are almost certainly sacrificial burials. The first clear inclusion of subsidiary graves is in the tomb complex of Aha at the beginning of the First Dynasty.

The area of the low desert in which the Early Dynastic kings built their tombs is now called Umm el-Qaab, "mother of pots", after the innumerable offerings given here in later times in veneration of Osiris. The area of Umm el-Qaab and the associated Cemeteries U and B have been extensively excavated. Early excavations were undertaken in the late 19$^{th}$ and early 20$^{th}$ centuries by Amélineau and Petrie, both of whom concentrated on the Early Dynastic royal tombs. More recently, considerable work has been undertaken by the German Archaeological Institute. This project has been excavating and documenting previously unknown tombs in Cemeteries U and B as well as re-clearing and studying previously excavated tombs in Cemetery B and Umm el-Qaab. This work is ongoing.

There is enough continuity from the tombs of Cemetery U through those of Cemetery B and finally to those of the First Dynasty kings to speak of a continuous development of early royal burial at Abydos. The variation and innovation represented in this sequence indicate the dynamic nature of this development, but there is no fundamental break in the sequence until the early Second Dynasty, when kings for a time ceased to be buried at Abydos. The early tombs at Abydos form one of the chief sources of available information for the late predynastic period, the development of Egyptian kingship, and the First Dynasty.

An overview of the development of royal tombs at Abydos from Cemetery U through the middle of the First Dynasty is presented in Chapter Two of this book. The purpose of this discussion is to lay groundwork for the presentation of data recovered during the excavation of the two recently discovered funerary enclosures from Aha's reign. As the specific period under consideration here is the reign of Aha, both the preceding and suc-

ceeding tombs are described and discussed with a view towards examining the tomb of Aha in context.

In addition to monumental tombs, the rulers of the Early Dynastic period who are buried at Umm el-Qaab built funerary enclosures. These are located in the Abydos North Cemetery in the low desert approximately 1.6 kilometers north of Umm el-Qaab, near the main town site of Abydos (Figure 2). Our knowledge of funerary enclosures is incomplete. In part this is due to destruction; only one enclosure still stands, the so-called Shunet ez-Zebib. Unlike the royal tombs, the enclosures themselves did not have subterranean components, although several of the First Dynasty enclosures were provided with subsidiary graves which are subterranean.

No enclosures have yet been found that predate Aha, and it is not clear if the tradition of building this type of monument underwent a development parallel to that of the royal tombs. The enclosures that can be securely assigned to particular reigns date to the first half of the First Dynasty and to the end of the Second Dynasty. There are two known enclosures that cannot be securely assigned to a reign. It thus seems probable that there are missing enclosures, and there is currently a gap in our knowledge about the way this type of monument was used in the later First Dynasty.

The development of scholarly understanding of funerary enclosures has largely paralleled their excavation history. Excavations in the 19th and early 20th centuries documented the presence of the two Second Dynasty enclosures built by the kings of that dynasty who were buried at Umm el-Qaab, Peribsen and Khasekhemwy. Like the tombs of those kings, these enclosures did not have subsidiary graves. Early excavations also uncovered one enclosure that could not be attributed to a specific king (the so-called Western Mastaba), next to which no subsidiary graves have yet been found. Three rectangles of subsidiary graves were found that dated to the reigns of Djer, Djet and Meretneith in the first half of the First Dynasty. Only Meretneith's subsidiary graves were at that time associated with a surviving section of enclosure wall.

Modern excavations in the area of the enclosures in the Abydos North Cemetery have been undertaken by the University of Pennsylvania Museum-Yale University-Institute of Fine Arts, New York University Expedition to Abydos. Work of the expedition documented the presence of an enclosure inside the subsidiary graves of Djer, implying that one exists for his successor, Djet, and discovered 14 boat graves built between the Western Mastaba and the enclosure of Khasekhemwy. In seasons from 2001–3 the expedition found and uncovered remains of two previously unknown enclosures. One of these was built by Aha. This pushed back the date of the earliest known enclosure, which previously had been the enclosure of Djer. The second funerary enclosure uncovered by this work was provided with subsidiary graves containing donkeys. This enclosure could not be assigned to a specific ruler, but seems to date early in the First Dynasty. In addition to adding extremely important data for any discussion of funerary enclosures and establishing an earlier date for the beginning of that tradition of enclosure construction, the recent work of the expedition demonstrated that the North Cemetery was still a productive area for exploration.

A history of excavations relating to funerary enclosures in the North Cemetery forms the subject of Chapter Three of this book. Because our understanding of this type of monument has changed dramatically and is still evolving, the monuments themselves are presented in the order that they were found as opposed to the order in which they were con-

structed. This chapter discusses issues surrounding the use of enclosures and their relationships to the royal tombs as those issues were understood in 2004. Work to that point suggested areas of productive excavations that might uncover further enclosures. One such area was selected for excavation in 2004–5.

The excavations of 2004–5 in the North Cemetery revealed the remains of two previously unknown funerary enclosures and five related subsidiary graves. Inscribed grave goods from the subsidiary graves securely dated both enclosures to the reign of Aha. These enclosures are approximately the same size as one another but are notably smaller than the previously discovered enclosure of Aha. Although both of the enclosures discovered in 2004–5 had been destroyed to their bottom courses and further disturbed by later burial activity in the area, substantial remains of one were present. This enclosure preserved the lower section of a freestanding interior building of a type known from some other enclosures. The remains of offering pottery and organic offerings inside this building indicate that the enclosure was actively used. The open area in this enclosure had the remains of wooden poles which may have formed part of a light structure erected in this area. All five subsidiary graves associated with the two enclosures retained part or all of their original burials, including skeletal material, coffins, and ceramics. One grave was minimally disturbed and seems to have had all of its original contents intact. The methodology of the excavations and the recovered data from the 2004–5 season are presented in Chapter Four.

The discovery of two small funerary enclosures dated to the reign of Aha was both significant and surprising. The addition of two new examples added important material to the corpus of known enclosures. It was, however, surprising that both enclosures were dated to the same reign, and that this was a reign from which a larger enclosure was already known. All previous work in the North Cemetery had suggested that only one enclosure was built per reign.

Chapter Five examines both potential interpretations and possible implications of these two funerary enclosures. This examination is both specific and general. It discusses details of the enclosures and looks at them in relation to the larger Aha enclosure as well as other enclosures. It then moots possible reasons behind the construction of three enclosures in Aha's reign, in particular noting parallels between aspects of Aha's tomb complex and the enclosures. It is suggested that the large enclosure was built for the king himself while the two smaller enclosures were built to accommodate offering rituals for two other people. These individuals may have been those two people buried in close proximity to the king in the largest of the two subsidiary graves at his tomb complex. Although Aha's mortuary monuments at both Umm el-Qaab and the North Cemetery thus included provision for people other than the king, the relationships between his tomb and its subsidiary graves and his enclosure and the smaller two enclosures show that both complexes were primarily for the needs of the king. That is, the two major subsidiary burials were intended to provide services for the king in the afterlife, and their status and/or functionality in that afterlife required that they receive a cult provided by funerary enclosures with offering chapels. The recognition that Aha built three funerary enclosures opens the possibility that other kings might have built multiple enclosures, a potential that is also discussed here.