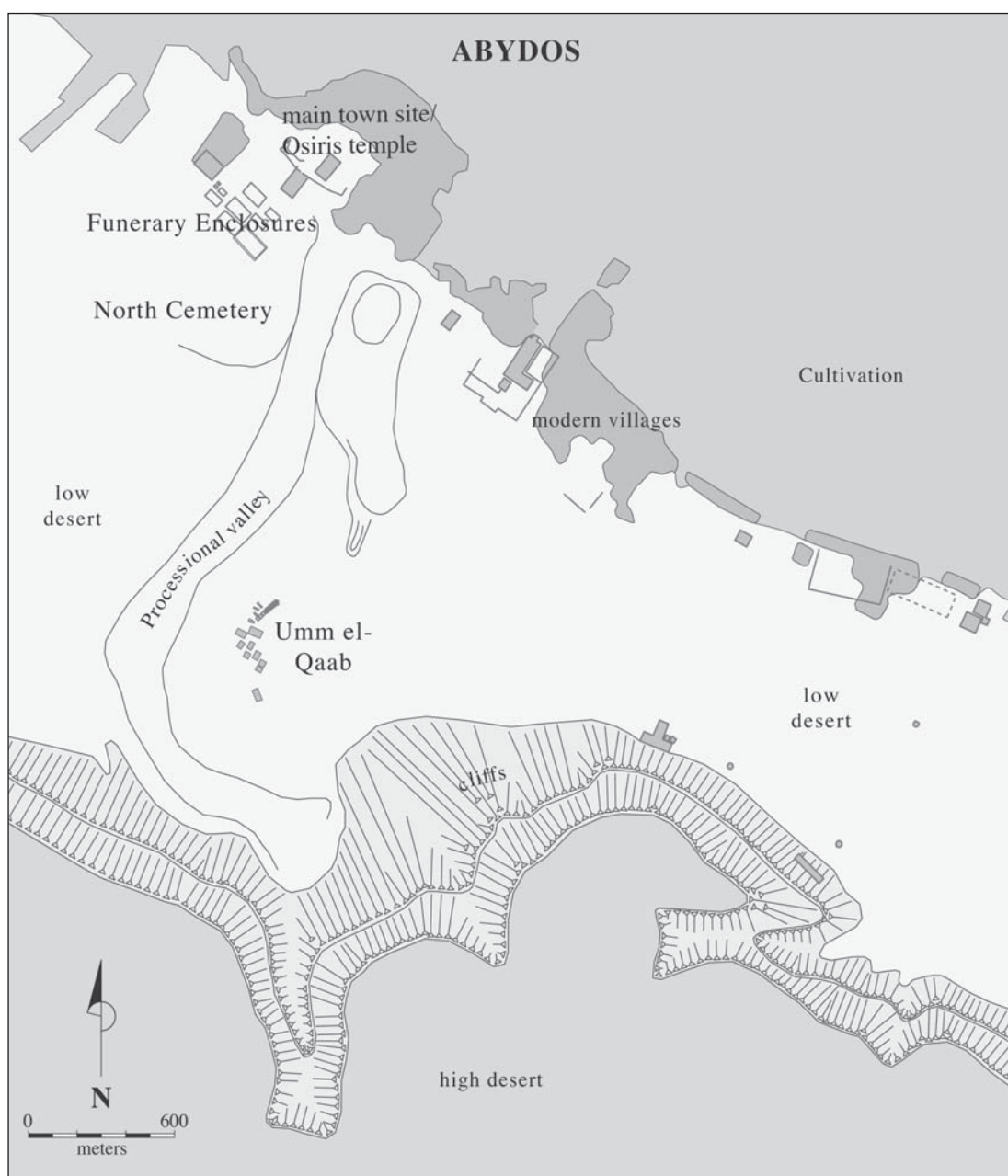


**Fig. 1**  
 Map of Early  
 Dynastic Abydos  
 showing the  
 location of the  
 royal tombs at  
 Umm el-Qaab  
 and the funerary  
 enclosures in the  
 North Cemetery.

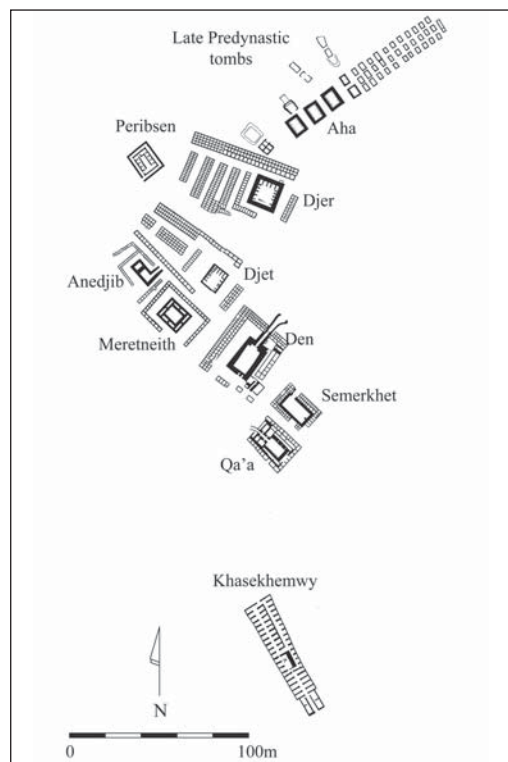


# The Early Dynastic Funerary Enclosures of Abydos<sup>1</sup>

Laurel D. Bestock

## Introduction

The site of Abydos in Middle Egypt has long been recognized as one of the most significant for the study of the Early Dynastic period. All of the kings of the First Dynasty and the last two kings of the Second Dynasty were buried in the low desert at Abydos in an area called Umm el-Qaab (**fig. 1**). The extant portions of their tombs consist of subterranean mud-brick chambers, lined with massive wooden interior chambers and, in some cases, with stone. These tombs had storage chambers for grave goods, and the First Dynasty tombs were flanked by numerous small subsidiary graves for sacrificed retainers (**fig. 2**). Abydos had been an important regional center even before the First Dynasty, and the royal cemetery is situated at a part of the site that already had a long tradition of elite burials. The latest Predynastic burials here belonged to people who had many trappings of later



**Fig. 2**  
Map of Umm el-Qaab, royal tombs and their associated subsidiary graves from the Early Dynastic period.

1. The material presented in this article is based on published or publicized materials documenting the work of the North Abydos Project (David O'Connor, Director; Matthew D. Adams, Associate Director; Laurel Bestock, Assistant Director). This project operates under the aegis of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology-Peabody Museum, Yale University-Institute of Fine Arts, New York University Expedition to Abydos (henceforth PYIFA), which is co-directed by William Kelly Simpson and David O'Connor.

kingship, including the writing of their names in serekhs, although the geographic extent of their rule is not certain. This tradition of kingship as manifest in the late Predynastic tombs at Abydos led directly to Early Dynastic Egyptian kingship. Although the tombs of the First Dynasty kings introduced important innovations of scale and were the first to employ discrete subsidiary graves, in their location and basic form they reflect a degree of continuity from the late Predynastic into the Early Dynastic periods.

In addition to their tombs, the First and Second Dynasty kings buried at Abydos built large cult structures that are commonly called funerary enclosures. These structures were built more than a kilometer from the royal tombs in what is now known as the Abydos North Cemetery (**fig. 1**). The enclosures are considerably more enigmatic than the tombs, in large part because they are mostly poorly preserved. Many elements of the development of this type of structure and its use remain unknown; however ongoing research has added substantially to our understanding of the enclosures themselves and their relationship to the royal tombs. Excavations here date back to the 1860s when Mariette explored the area, were conducted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by multiple projects, and have been undertaken since the 1980s under the PYIFA. This article seeks to give an overview of the major features and functions of funerary enclosures followed by a chronological discussion of those enclosures currently known. As work in the Abydos North Cemetery is ongoing, this discussion is necessarily part of a process rather than an attempt at definitive conclusions, and it is to be hoped and expected that further work will enhance and change the perspectives presented here.

## The number and features of funerary enclosures

Ten funerary enclosures are currently known (**fig. 3**). Eight of these can be attributed to specific rulers, four from the First Dynasty and two from the Second. There are thus four kings of the First Dynasty, all from the second half of the dynasty, for whom no enclosure can yet be identified. Two known enclosures are currently anonymous, including the so-called Western Mastaba which is likely to have been built in the later First Dynasty. It is extremely probable that every Early Dynastic king buried at Umm el-Qaab would have built an enclosure. This is demonstrated by the fact that both the beginning and the end of the sequence are represented, with the missing monuments falling chronologically in the middle. There are large under-explored areas in the North Cemetery that could have housed the missing enclosures, and it is hoped that future excavations will continue to bring new monuments of this type to light.

The most basic, defining, features of all known enclosures are their walls. These mud-brick walls invariably enclose rectangular spaces oriented southeast by northwest. The proportions of the enclosures are not entirely consistent; however this orientation is maintained in all known examples.<sup>2</sup> The walls of the enclosures are in all cases thick, although some are more massive than others. The original height of the walls cannot be determined except in the case of the last enclosure, that of Khasekhemwy, where the walls are extant over 10 m high. This suggests that the walls of all enclosures would have been of substantial height. Every known enclosure has niching on the exterior of all four walls, a simple pattern

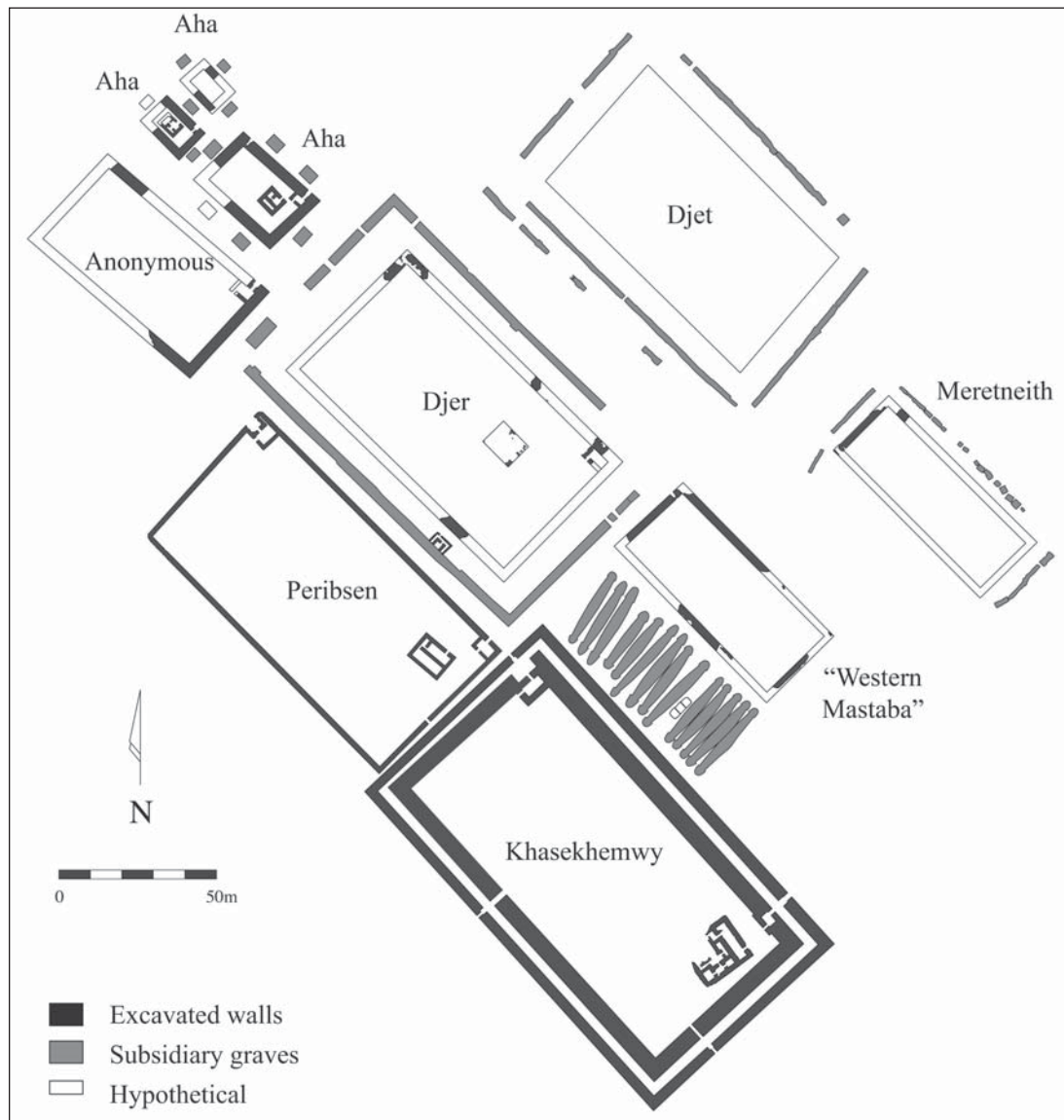
2. The mud-brick walls enclosing the village of Deir Sitt Damiana (Deir Nassarah on older maps), which lies inside the North Cemetery, were long thought to include remains of an Early Dynastic enclosure. This hypothesis, accepted as fact by both Ayrton (Ayrton, Currelly & Weigall 1904: 3) and Petrie (1925: 1), was discussed as possible also by Kemp (1966: 15) and by O'Connor (1989). The orientation of the village is perpendicular to that of all known enclosures, and its proportions are notably closer to square than any known enclosure. Extensive exploration of the visible portions of the wall by Matthew Adams and myself failed to find any traces of Early Dynastic brickwork. The brick size and construction techniques of the village wall are, however, very similar to the remains of a nearby structure that was excavated in 2002-3 that was associated with Ptolemaic pottery and coins. It no longer seems likely that the village wall preserves the outline of a funerary enclosure; a Ptolemaic date is more probable.

on the northwest, southwest and southeast walls and a more complicated pattern of deep niches between multiple shallow niches on the northeast wall. The brick walls were finished with plain mud plaster. At the base of the First Dynasty enclosures was a low bench that ran around all four sides of the enclosure. This feature is absent from the Second Dynasty enclosure walls.

All known enclosures have a major entrance at the east corner. In most cases this is elaborated by the addition of a small room defined by brick walls inside the eastern corner of the enclosure. Another gateway, which is smaller in scale than the east gateway in the First Dynasty enclosures, but larger in

scale than the east gateway in the Second Dynasty enclosures, is located near the north corner of the enclosures. In the known First Dynasty examples this gateway was deliberately blocked up with bricks at some point in the life-cycle of the enclosure. The Second Dynasty enclosure of Peribsen has a third entrance in the southeastern wall, and the Second Dynasty enclosure of Khasekhemwy has entrances in all four walls. In both of these Second Dynasty enclosures the additional entrances are small, simple openings rather than elaborate gateways.

The interiors of the enclosures seem to have been left largely as open space. Each enclosure that has been well-preserved and sub-



**Fig. 3**  
Map of the Abydos North Cemetery showing the known enclosures and their subsidiary graves.

stantially excavated has had remains of a single, free-standing, mud-brick building in the interior. The location of this building is not perfectly regular; however it most often seems to be located not far from the eastern gateway. In most cases the interior building is offset so that its axes do not run perfectly parallel to the axes of the enclosure within which it stands. Those interior buildings that are reasonably well preserved retain remains of offerings; it seems likely that such buildings were always intended as offering chapels and that they played an integral role in the function of the enclosures. The offerings found have been largely decayed organic substances, with ceramics that perhaps served to carry the offerings. The deposits left by this activity have, in the better preserved cases, been extensive enough to suggest that offerings were given over a span of time rather than on a single occasion.

Subsidiary graves are another important feature of funerary enclosures, but one that was not used consistently over the course of the Early Dynastic period. The known First Dynasty enclosures all have subsidiary graves of some sort adjacent to them. Next to six enclosures these graves contained human burials. The subsidiary graves around the enclosures from the reign of Aha were built in discrete pits, unconnected to one another. Subsequent subsidiary graves were usually built in long rows and shared walls with one another. These types of construction mirror the forms of subsidiary graves at the royal tombs at Umm el-Qaab. The two anonymous enclosures had more unusual subsidiary graves: in one case these contained donkeys, and in the other, boats. Aside from their presence at the enclosures, subsidiary graves are known only in relation to tombs, and their use in the North Cemetery underscores the relationship between the enclosures and royal tombs and the mortuary nature of the former.

The above-mentioned features of funerary enclosures, with the exception of the subsidiary graves, are so consistent that they can be assumed to have been present in those cases where enclosures are either too poorly preserved, inaccessible to excavation, or not yet excavated, for their details to be seen.

## The functions of funerary enclosures

The royal tombs and funerary enclosures cannot be understood without reference to one another, and together they worked to accommodate the mortuary needs of the king. Their relationship appears to be exclusive: every king who was buried at Abydos is likely to have built an enclosure, and no enclosures are known to have been built here by kings who were not buried at Umm el-Qaab. This exclusive relationship demonstrates the functional inseparability of these two types of monuments<sup>3</sup>. The importance of viewing tombs and enclosures as separate parts of an integrated whole was first suggested by Kaiser (1964; 1969) and Kemp (1966). It has been made clearer by more recent work of the PYIFA, which has found more enclosures and clarified aspects of this type of monument. In particular the relationship between tombs and enclosures is highlighted by the parallels in the use of subsidiary graves at these monuments, both in terms of their construction type and their numbers (Kemp 1966; O'Connor 2003: 47).

The specific ceremonies that would have taken place inside funerary enclosures are difficult to reconstruct. As noted above, their relationship to the royal tombs indicates their essentially mortuary nature. It thus seems clear that these enclosures were designed to accommodate ritual functions related to the death and afterlife of the king. One part of this function must have been fulfilled by

3. The enclosure built by Khasekhemwy at Hierakonpolis fits uneasily in our current understanding of funerary enclosures. It has important differences as well as similarities to the funerary enclosures at Abydos, and its function and potential intended use for mortuary purposes are still debated (Friedman 2007). See Friedman in this volume for a complete discussion of the archaeology and current understanding of this monument. Neither the Hierakonpolis enclosure nor the monuments of the earlier Second Dynasty kings at Saqqara negate the apparent exclusive correspondence between royal tombs and enclosures at Abydos.

the cult chapels. Every well preserved chapel retains some evidence of the presentation of offerings, making their function as places for such offerings unambiguous. This may have been directed at an image of the dead king housed in the chapel (O'Connor & Adams 2003b: 84). At the cult chapel of Khasekhemwy there is inscribed evidence that the giving of these offerings took place over a span of time that lasted into the reign of his probable successor, Djoser (Adams 2002). The physical relationship between the cult chapels and the major eastern gateway is clear from the plans of the enclosures, and presumably has a functional underpinning. The importance of the ritual giving of offerings in a ceremony that proceeded through the eastern gateway to the cult chapel is also suggested by the arrangement of the subsidiary graves. Every First Dynasty enclosure with human subsidiary graves has a gap in these subsidiary graves at the eastern corner. This gap is often flanked by the largest and most richly endowed subsidiary graves (O'Connor 1989: 79-81). Although it is not clear that the subsidiary graves in the North Cemetery had superstructures (Bestock 2007b; 2008), and hence not clear that a space in graves here would have been necessary to leave a physical passage clear to the east gate, this gap may still correspond to a notionally clear passage on the surface. This was originally suggested by Kaiser and more recently argued by O'Connor (Kaiser 1969: 4, n. 4; O'Connor 1989: 80-1). The correspondence between the east gate and this gap in subsidiary graves seems too consistent to be other than intentional and meaningful.

The large amount of open space present in most enclosures suggests that other ceremonial mortuary activities may have taken place on a large scale (Kemp 1966; O'Connor & Adams 2003b: 84). It is not certain what, precisely, these activities would have been, but the use of large-scale royal ceremonial at this time is well documented (Jiménez Serrano 2002). The relatively small area inside the Aha enclosure compared to later enclosures may simply indicate that the scope of this use increased in the reign of Djer, not that a new use was introduced in that reign. The connection

between the open space and the northern doorway is as clear as the connection between the cult chapel and the east gateway. The fact that the north doorways of the known First Dynasty enclosures were deliberately bricked up probably indicates that whatever activity took place in the open space was either a one-time occurrence or at least more limited in time than the offerings given at the cult chapel (O'Connor 1989: 76-8; O'Connor & Adams 2003b: 84). The closure of this entrance may indicate that the ritual activity inside enclosures progressed in pre-defined stages, possibly related to the lifecycle of the king.

The apparent intentional destruction of the enclosures is a further indication of part of their function. As noted above, this destruction shows that the enclosures were considered to have a finite life, and that their 'burial' was part of their functional use. Perhaps this indicates that, like the people in the subsidiary graves, these monuments were to be 'sent' to the afterlife with the kings who were responsible for their construction (O'Connor 1995: 328-9; O'Connor & Adams 2003b: 84). That this was part of their intended life-cycle, and was part of their function, is demonstrated by the ritualistic way in which parts of the enclosure of Aha were laid with clean sand prior to the destruction of the monument (Adams 2002). It is notable that, while knocked down and rendered unusable, the enclosures were never completely eradicated. Their footprints were deliberately left, strengthening the argument that this was a type of burial rather than an obliteration.

A final point of note about the way in which funerary enclosures were utilized is that they were built by individual rulers in connection with their tombs; these monuments are thus related to the aspects of rulership that were manifest in specific kings, not the unchanging and overarching institutional aspects of rulership. In this sense, funerary enclosures are related to later royal mortuary temples. This analogy is imperfect, however, given the strong probability that the enclosures were deliberately destroyed. The 'burial' of the enclosures again highlights the specific connection between each enclosure and the king who built it and took it with him.

## The chronological development of funerary enclosures

The discovery in recent years of previously unknown enclosures at Abydos allows for the first time a real approach to the development of this type of building over the course of the Early Dynastic period. It is nearly certain that further funerary enclosures were built that have not yet been found and thus the picture is incomplete; however, we now have examples from the beginning of the First Dynasty as well as the end of the Second Dynasty, and can thus reasonably discuss their evolution.

In looking at the known enclosures, the most immediately obvious feature of their development is that their basic form and major features are quite static through the Early Dynastic period; it is this continuity that allows them to be defined as a group. There are, however, variations of form, particularly between the First and Second Dynasty enclosures, that will be highlighted in the chronological discussion below.

In contrast to the form of the enclosures, some patterns of their use seem to vary notably. For instance, Aha is known to have built three enclosures while most kings appear to have built only one. A further change is evident in the use of subsidiary graves. As noted above, two enclosures from the First Dynasty have subsidiary graves for things that are not people. The Second Dynasty enclosures do not have subsidiary graves at all (although subsidiary graves elsewhere are also limited to the First Dynasty so this represents a broader pattern in the development of mortuary practice and not a change specific to the enclosures). Finally all the enclosures save one seem to have been ritually destroyed, while the last was left standing. These differences, too, will be brought out in the following discussion.

The very earliest use of funerary enclosures is not entirely clear. The first known enclosures that can be positively attributed to a specific reign were built by Aha at the beginning of the First Dynasty. It is not known if there would have been funerary enclosures

prior to his reign, and in the absence of evidence reasonable arguments can be made either that the Predynastic kings buried at Umm el-Qaab also would have built enclosures or that Aha would have built the first enclosure. The first hypothesis has been expounded by Günter Dreyer, who has explained the relative simplicity of tombs at Umm el-Qaab after U-j but before Aha as possibly due to the existence of substantial surface buildings, namely enclosures (Dreyer, Hartung & Pumpenmeir 1993: note 4; Dreyer 1998: 19). On the other hand, at Umm el-Qaab Aha is the first to have a truly monumental burial complex, and the first to use subsidiary graves, which also indicates a new ritual and ideological element to the provisions for the king's afterlife. Given that Aha's reign thus sees a major difference and increase in royal mortuary architecture, it is reasonable to suppose he was the first to build funerary enclosures. It is to be hoped that future excavations in the Abydos North Cemetery will clarify this issue.

## The First Dynasty enclosures

### Aha

Three enclosures have been found from Aha's reign, all since 2001 (**fig. 4**). They are notably smaller than any other known enclosure and are themselves of unequal size, one being more than twice the size of the other two. All three were provided with subsidiary graves, and together they seem to form something of a complex of enclosures.

The largest of the enclosures lies to the south-east of the smaller two. Its lowest courses are reasonably well preserved, allowing a good understanding of its plan. It measures 33 by 22 m and its architectural details are in keeping with those known at other First Dynasty enclosures. A simple niching pattern is present along the northwest, southwest and southeast walls, and a complex niching pattern in the southeast. The eastern gateway was formed by a complex niche that extended through the wall; two small walls inside the enclosure formed a gateway chamber. There is a smaller gateway in the

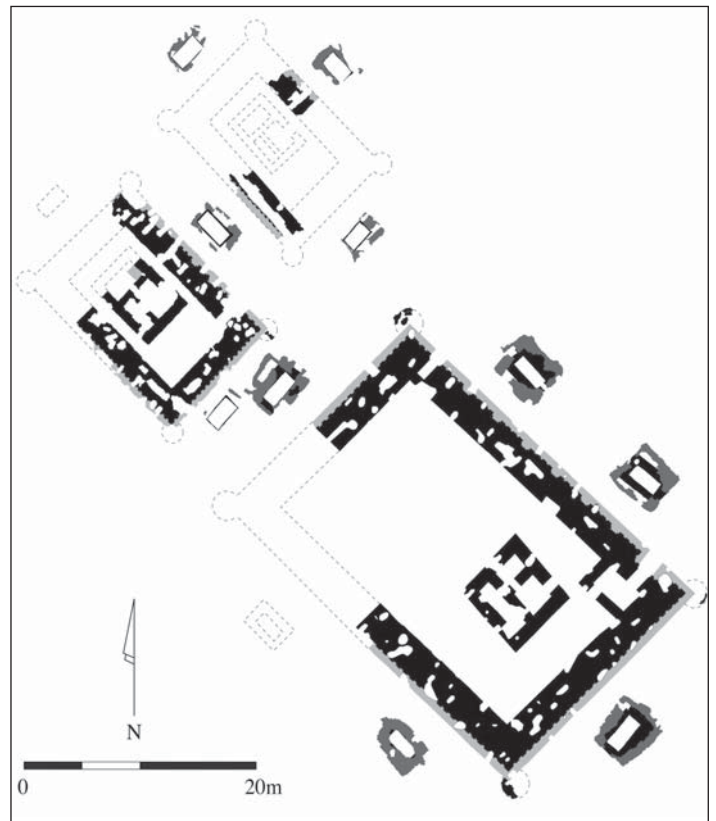
north corner of the enclosure through the northeast wall. This gateway had been deliberately blocked with brickwork.

A low bench runs around all sides of the enclosure; this had been built after the plastering of the walls. The three accessible exterior corners of the enclosure were surrounded by low, circular features built of unshaped large limestone rocks covered with mud. The purpose of these features is obscure (Adams 2002).

Inside the enclosure were the bases of the walls of a cult chapel. This had three chambers: a white plastered antechamber, leading by a narrow doorway into a white plastered cult chamber with a bench along its northeast wall, and next to both, an oblong room that seems to have been inaccessible from either of the other rooms. The bench in the cult chamber had originally been plastered white but was extremely stained with brown organic material that may be the remnants of offerings placed there. Some broken offering pottery was also recovered in this room. There was good evidence of the intentional, ritual, destruction of this cult building and the enclosure as a whole (Adams 2002).

Five subsidiary graves were excavated around the large Aha enclosure. A sixth was almost certainly built, but it and the west corner of the enclosure were inaccessible as they lie underneath a modern Coptic cemetery (O'Connor & Adams 2003b: 81). These subsidiary graves were individual tombs, not continuous lines of chambers, and as such are more similar to the subsidiary graves at Aha's tomb complex at Umm el-Qaab than to other known subsidiary graves in the North Cemetery. Ink inscriptions on cylinder jars and seal impressions on fragments of wine jar stoppers contained the serekh of Aha. Other grave goods included stone vessels, galena for grinding into eye paint, a ceramic palette, carnelian beads from jewelry, and a set of ivory bangle bracelets and small lapis lazuli amulets. One of the graves contained the remains of a young child (Adams 2002; Wilford 2004).

The smaller two enclosures from Aha's reign lie to the northwest. The western of the two was preserved approximately as well as the



**Fig. 4**  
Plan of the excavated remains of the three enclosures dated to the reign of Aha and their subsidiary graves.

large Aha enclosure; the eastern one was largely destroyed by a large vaulted tomb of a later period. The western small enclosure had most but not all of the familiar features of other enclosures. It measured 17 by 12 m and its walls had the conventional niching pattern like the large Aha enclosure. Like that enclosure, a bench ran around the exterior and there were low circular features made of limestone and mud at the corners. The only entrance found to this enclosure was in the east. Unlike other known enclosures, this door was not elaborated with a gateway chamber inside the enclosure. It is unclear if there would have been a northern entrance to the enclosure as the northwest wall was inaccessible beneath the modern cemetery. There was no such doorway in the northeastern wall and hence no doorway in a position specifically analogous to that of the large Aha enclosure's north door.

Remains of a three-chambered cult chapel inside the enclosure closely paralleled those found in the large Aha enclosure. The arrangement of the rooms is similar and the bench and floor in the northern room had



likewise been stained with organic deposits. Small bowls were found in association with this deposit. They had presumably held offerings dedicated here.

There is very little interior space in the small, western, Aha enclosure, much of which is covered by the cult chapel. There is no open space in the northwest of the enclosure as is the case in all later enclosures. This, and the potential absence of a northern gateway, suggest that this enclosure may not have been used for the full scope of ritual activities that took place in larger enclosures, including the large Aha enclosure. The only open space within the small Aha enclosure was to the southeast of the cult chapel. In this area were found the remains of a gathering of twenty-two wooden poles which measured 3.5-5 cm in diameter. These appear to be original to the enclosure and may be the remains of a light wooden structure that stood here. The poles were gathered and laid parallel to one another, suggesting that any such structure was deliberately taken down and "buried" with the enclosure when it was destroyed. No analogous remains have been definitively found in other enclosures, but this may be due to preservation and the larger scale of most enclosures, none of which aside from the large Aha enclosure have been entirely excavated.

Two subsidiary graves were excavated adjacent to this enclosure, one to the northeast and one to the southeast. A third probably lay to the northwest but that area was inaccessible. The northeastern grave is approximately centered on the northeast wall of the enclosure. The southeastern grave is both closer to the enclosure and farther southwest than would be expected; this location appears to have been determined by the close-by northwest grave of the large Aha enclosure. Excavations showed that no subsidiary grave ever existed to the southwest. Both excavated graves from the western Aha enclosure were brick lined pits with roofs constructed of wooden beams topped with reed matting. Over the matting were concave brick skins that were plastered in place. Both graves had been plundered but both contained some articulated skeletal material

belonging to adult women. The burials were in wooden coffins. Ceramic vessels with ink inscriptions and fragments of seal impressions retained the serekh of Aha. No goods aside from ceramics were found in association with these graves.

The northeastern Aha enclosure is roughly parallel to the other small Aha enclosure. Only small sections of the northeast and southwest walls of this enclosure, and no corners, survive. The length of the enclosure cannot, thus, be determined, although its exterior width was approximately 10.5 m, or about 1.5 m narrower than the other small Aha enclosure. The expected niching and bench were found. No gateways were preserved, nor any of the interior features of the enclosure.

Three subsidiary graves were found in association with this enclosure. They were on all sides save the southwest (the grave to the southwest of this enclosure is probably to be associated principally with the other small Aha enclosure). The construction of the graves was the same as those adjacent to the other small Aha enclosure. Parts of the roofs of two of these graves were still intact, and over these the exterior floor of the enclosure was still present. No indication of superstructures was found, and given the preserved floor here it seems probable that there never were superstructures.

Two of the subsidiary graves were badly plundered but retained some articulated skeletal material of adult women, wooden coffins, and broken ceramics including fragments inscribed with the serekh of Aha. The third grave, that to the northeast, was unplundered. This contained one wine jar, leaning upright against the east corner of the grave, and a wooden coffin containing an adult woman and three ovoid jars. Two of these jars were inscribed; one inscription contained the serekh of Aha. The stopper of the wine jar was intact and had been rolled with multiple cylinder seals, again including one with the serekh of Aha. There was no jewelry on the body and no grave goods save the ceramics. The absence of such objects from graves of the small Aha enclosures—including this unplundered one—strongly sug-

gests that all of these burials were relatively poor in comparison to those of the large Aha enclosure.

The anomalous existence of three enclosures from Aha's reign requires explanation. It seems most likely that the enclosures were built for three different people (Bestock 2007b: 232-41). By analogy with other enclosures, all of these people were probably buried at Umm el-Qaab. As there are no graves here from the reign of Aha except those contained within his tomb complex, the smaller enclosures should belong to two people buried in Aha's subsidiary graves. These people are probably those buried in the two largest subsidiary graves, which share their immediate proximity to the king's chambers (see fig. 2). The situation of these graves relative to the king's chambers is closely parallel to the situation of the smaller enclosures to the king's enclosure, lending further weight to this argument. This hypothesis could also account for the relatively poor nature of the subsidiary graves around the small enclosures when compared to those of the larger enclosure.

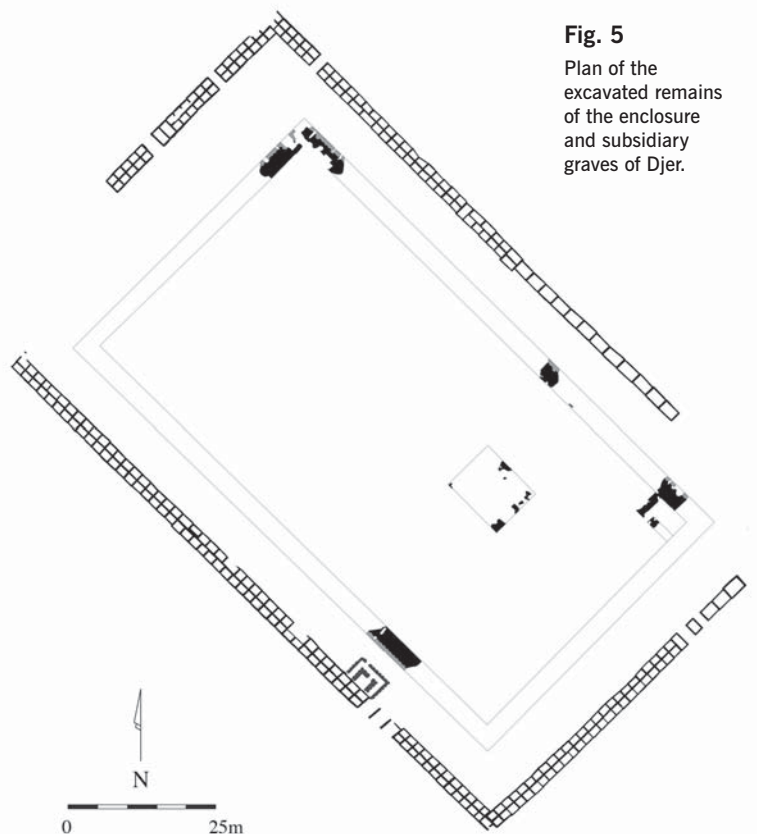
## Djer

Aha's successor, Djer, built an enclosure that was larger than the total area covered by the enclosures of Aha and is ringed by many more subsidiary graves (fig. 5). Djer's tomb at Umm el-Qaab is likewise substantially larger than Aha's and was provided with many times the number of subsidiary graves (see fig. 2). The subsidiary graves around Djer's enclosure were found and excavated by Petrie in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Petrie 1925). He expected a tomb rather than an enclosure within this rectangle, and hence failed to look for and find the remaining traces of the enclosure walls. These walls were found in the 1980s by the PYIFA (O'Connor 1989: 61-81). As Djer's enclosure is very large it has not yet been completely excavated.

The exposed parts of these walls show that Djer's enclosure was extremely similar to other known examples. The northwest and southwest walls exhibit a pattern of simple niching. No parts of the southeast wall were found, although its location can be

accurately inferred from the location of the eastern gateway. The northeast wall, facing the cultivation, had the expected pattern of deep niches between regular numbers of shallow niches (O'Connor 1989: 66). A reconstruction of the overall measurement of the building shows it to have been approximately 96.2 by 53.8 m (O'Connor 1989: 58). At the exterior base of the walls of the Djer enclosure was a continuous bench similar to that of the Aha enclosures (O'Connor 1989: 74). The walls and bench together measured about 3.25 m wide.

Two gateways were discovered at Djer's enclosure, one in the east and one in the north. The eastern gate was similar to that of the large Aha enclosure, consisting of both a passageway through the wall of the enclosure and a chamber in the interior of the enclosure, which was defined by two smaller mud brick walls (O'Connor 1989: 66-7). The simpler northern doorway did not have an associated chamber. This door had been intentionally blocked with bricks sometime subsequent to its construction (O'Connor



**Fig. 5**  
Plan of the excavated remains of the enclosure and subsidiary graves of Djer.

1989: 67). Stratigraphic deposits adjacent to the remains of the walls of Djer's enclosure indicated that it had been intentionally destroyed. In 2001 in the interior of the enclosure of Djer were found minimal but unmistakable traces of what had been walls of a cult building (O'Connor 2003, 47; O'Connor & Adams 2003b: 84). This was insufficiently preserved to determine the plan of the building, but an estimate of its size can be given as 11.5 by 9.3 m. The location of the cult chapel is similar to that of the large Aha enclosure. It is relatively near the east gateway, slightly northeast of the central long axis of the enclosure. Traces of white plaster on some of the remaining elements of the cult building indicate that the interior walls of at least part of this structure were white-washed. The chapel was insufficiently preserved to see traces of cultic activity. The vast majority of the interior area of the enclosure appears to be open space, but this cannot be stated definitively as the entire area has not been excavated and was badly denuded.

There are 269 graves arranged in a rectangle on all four sides of Djer's enclosure. Rather than individually constructed brick-lined pits such as Aha's subsidiary graves, these were mass-produced by digging trenches, lining them with brick walls, and subdividing them into small, contiguous, chambers. There are two major gaps in the line of graves, one at the western corner and one at the eastern corner. Most of the graves are in trenches that are two graves wide; the exception is on the east where the tombs flanking the gap are larger and occur in a single row. As noted above, this gap, with its adjacent large subsidiary graves, may be functionally related to the complex eastern gateway (Kaiser 1969: 4, n.4; O'Connor 1989: 80-1).

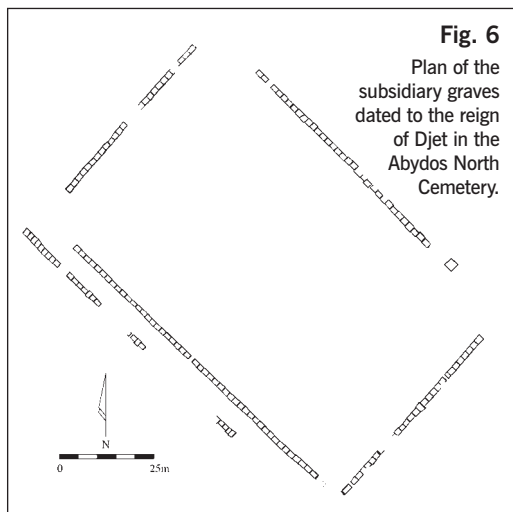
These subsidiary graves were heavily disturbed but yielded important finds. Four inscriptions containing Djer's name were found, including on a weight and on ivory labels (Petrie 1925: pl. XX-XXI). These inscriptions were the basis of Petrie's attribution of these graves to Djer. This attribution is further supported now by the proximity of this enclosure to those of Aha, paralleling the proximity of those kings' tombs at Umm el-Qaab. This enclosure also has the

most subsidiary graves of any in the North Cemetery, which is again similar to the case of Djer's tomb and supports the attribution. The subsidiary graves yielded many high status objects such as copper tools, ivory gaming pieces (often delicately carved in the shape of lions), cylinder seals, and stone stelae bearing the names and sometimes what appear to be titles of those interred (Petrie 1925: 3). The majority of burials had traces of wooden coffins, and it was around these that most of the grave goods were placed (Petrie 1925: pl. XIII-XIV).

Partly over the southwestern line of Djer's subsidiary graves Petrie found and planned a small building, although his workmen had partially destroyed it before he recognized its significance (Petrie 1925: 4). This feature was re-excavated in the 1980s (O'Connor 1989: 71-3). This was built of two concentric square or rectangular mud brick walls; as it was partly destroyed before being planned, its proportions cannot be precisely reconstructed. In effect, these walls formed a small, interior, freestanding structure with a corridor on all sides. Both rectangles had a simple niching pattern on the exterior of all their walls. There were small doorways in the northeast walls of each rectangle; these were not aligned with one another and the outer door had been intentionally blocked with bricks sometime after its original construction. This is analogous to the north gateways of the enclosures themselves, and perhaps suggests a functional connection between the two. This chapel clearly postdates the subsidiary graves of the enclosure of Djer, but appears likely to be a First Dynasty feature (O'Connor 1989: 72-3). As this feature is so far unique, it is difficult to evaluate its significance and relationship to the enclosure of Djer.

## Djet

No enclosure has yet been found for Djet, but the existence of one can be surmised on the basis of a rectangle of subsidiary graves dated to his reign in the Abydos North Cemetery (fig. 6). These graves were found and excavated by Petrie (1925). It has been suggested by some scholars that there was not a mud-brick enclosure within this rectangle of subsidiary graves (most recently Wengrow 2006:



246-7). This does not take into account the facts that Petrie did not know what he was looking for and so was unlikely to have found the remains, as happened at Djer's enclosure, and that the PYIFA has not yet excavated in this area. Given the existence of brick enclosures of Djet's predecessor and successor, it is overwhelmingly likely that Djet's subsidiary graves enclosed a mud-brick enclosure (O'Connor 1989: 57). Djet's enclosure lay to the northeast of Djer's, and judging by the subsidiary graves was on roughly the same scale. A tentative reconstruction of the monument has put it at approximately 90 by 47.5 m (O'Connor 1989: 58).

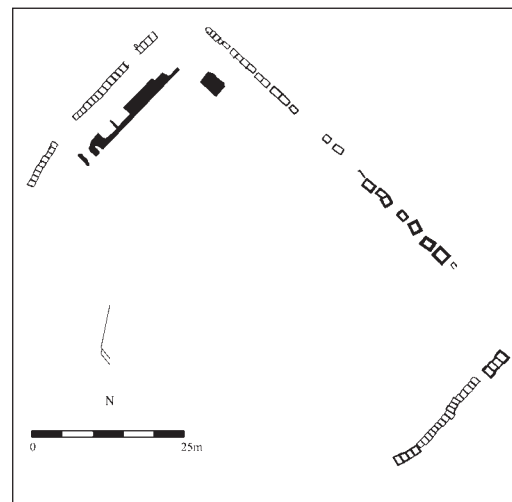
There are 154 subsidiary graves in this rectangle. While still a very substantial number, this is a notable reduction from the number of graves in Djer's reign; Djet's tomb likewise had fewer subsidiary graves than Djer's tomb. The rectangle is defined by lines of graves on all four sides. The chambers were built in lined trenches, much as Djer's subsidiary graves had been, but in this case they are in single rather than double rows. There is a second row in places on the southwest side; however here the rows are physically separate rather than sharing a center wall. There are numerous gaps in the rows of subsidiary graves including at all four corners. A number of inscribed objects were recovered from these graves, which were evidently quite rich although they had suffered from plundering. Several of the inscriptions recorded private names, presumably of the individuals

interred. However three artifacts—a copper adze, a copper axe and an ivory comb—were inscribed with the serekh of Djet. Two further inscriptions, on ivory labels from the same subsidiary grave, named Djer (Petrie 1925: pl. XXI). This rectangle of subsidiary graves and its presumed accompanying enclosure have been attributed to Djet on the basis of the inscribed evidence. This attribution is supported by the proximity of this group of graves to Djer's enclosure and the number of subsidiary graves, which, in being less than Djer's but more than any other enclosure, again follows the pattern of subsidiary graves at the royal tombs at Umm el-Qaab.

### Meretneith

Djet was succeeded by Meretneith, a queen mother who built both a tomb and an enclosure at Abydos, likely because she ruled as regent for her son and successor. Her enclosure is smaller than those of her predecessors and both her tomb and enclosure were surrounded by many fewer subsidiary graves than Djer or Djet. It is unclear if this is due primarily to her status as a non-king or to a general trend that is evident towards smaller enclosures and fewer subsidiary graves; probably both were contributing factors.

Much of the northeast wall and a small section of the northeast wall have been found (fig. 7). The northeast wall was found by Peet and measures 1.80 m thick; it had a regular, simple niching pattern. Kemp noted that a squared end show in the plan of this wall



**Fig. 7**  
Plan of the excavated remains of the enclosure and subsidiary graves of Meretneith.

may indicate an entrance at the west corner, although such an entrance is not paralleled elsewhere (Kemp 1966: 14; O'Connor 1989: 78). On the exterior of this wall was a low bench 45 cm deep, preserved only to a height of one brick course. A mud floor extended off both faces of the wall, although it was some 30 cm lower in the interior than the exterior (Peet 1914: 31). Meretneith's enclosure has not yet been reexcavated by the PYIFA, and no gateways or details of the interior are currently known. The precise dimensions of the enclosure are unknown but has been approximated at around 66.5 by 25.5 m. These proportions are notably longer than the earlier enclosures (O'Connor 1989: 58-9).

The subsidiary graves which define three sides of this rectangle were built in trenches which had been divided into small graves by the construction of cross walls. This was done less systematically than around the enclosures of Djer or Djet. It is unclear if there would originally have been subsidiary graves on the southwest side or if, as was the case at the two small Aha enclosures, this side was always left open. The graves to the northwest were relatively poor, with no artifacts other than ceramics recovered. All of the bodies recovered here were identified as male (Peet 1914: 31). In many of these tombs traces of wooden coffins were evident. The subsidiary graves to the northeast and southeast yielded more objects, many in ivory or stone, which Peet considered to be of the quality of those recovered from the royal cemetery at Umm el-Qaab (Peet 1914: 32). Further subsidiary graves in this group were excavated by Petrie. Between Peet and Petrie a total of 79 graves were found, although given heavy disturbance of this area it is likely that others have been destroyed. The largest and most massively built of these graves were located at the eastern corner of this rectangle. It was in one of these large graves that Petrie found a ceramic jar inscribed with the name of queen Meretneith (Petrie 1925: 1).

The attribution of Meretneith's enclosure, based principally on the single inscribed jar found by Petrie, has been a matter of discussion. Kaiser questioned whether Meretneith,

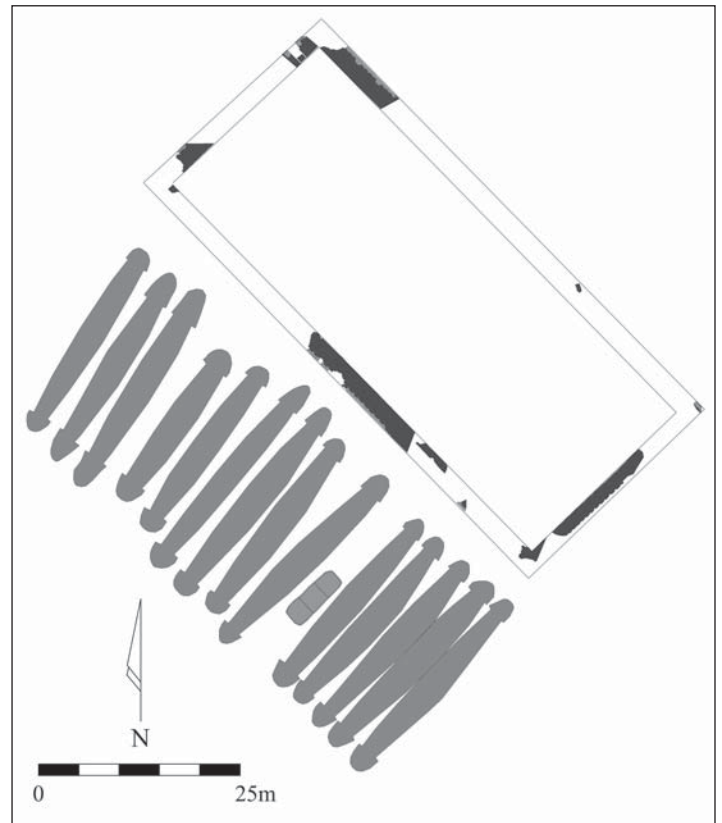
being a queen mother rather than a king, would have had an enclosure at all, and preferred to attribute this monument to Den (Kaiser 1969: 1-3). This seems unnecessary given that Meretneith was accorded the otherwise kingly prerogative of a tomb at Umm el-Qaab (O'Connor 1989: 57 and n. 16). The circumstantial evidence supports the attribution of this enclosure to Meretneith. It is adjacent to the area of the enclosure of Djet, who preceded Meretneith, and their tombs are likewise adjacent. Additionally, it has the fewest known subsidiary graves of any enclosure later than Aha, which is in keeping with the decline in number at Umm el-Qaab. Although the evidence is not as strong as might be wished, there is no real reason to doubt that this enclosure was built by Meretneith.

#### **Unidentified enclosures probably dated to the First Dynasty**

Two enclosures are known that are not associated with inscriptions bearing royal names; they are probably to be dated to the First Dynasty. The first of these lies to the northwest of Djer's enclosure and southwest of Aha's enclosures. It was discovered by magnetometry survey in 2001. Most of this enclosure was not accessible, lying under a modern cemetery, however, the southeast wall and small adjacent sections of the northeast and southwest walls were free to excavation (O'Connor & Adams 2003b: 81). The southeast wall measured 37 m long. It had a bench running along the exterior. The wall had the expected simple niching pattern, and it and the bench together were 3.2 m thick. There was an elaborated east gateway with an interior chamber defined by mud brick walls. There were indications of deliberate destruction in the east gateway and the enclosure as a whole. A further substantial part of the northeastern wall and a small section of the interior face of the northwestern wall of this enclosure were uncovered, allowing the dimensions of the monument to be measured as approximately 67 by 37.5 m. The northeast wall had the typical pattern of deep niches between sets of shallow niches.

Parallel to the southeast wall of this enclosure was a short line of subsidiary graves. These were built in a shallow trench lined with thin mud brick walls, and divided into three separate chambers, two of which were much longer than the third. Inside the graves were the bodies of ten donkeys, neatly arranged so that each lay with its back just overlapping the feet of the next. There were four donkeys in each of the larger graves, and two in the smaller. They had been laid on and under reed matting, but there were no grave goods whatsoever with them (Adams 2002; Wilford 2004). The donkey burials are situated roughly within the gap in subsidiary graves at the western corner of Djer's enclosure, but are closer to the unidentified enclosure than to Djer's. This situation, the apparent early First Dynasty date of seal impressions found in the gateway, and the fact that Aha's enclosures indicate that a single king might build multiple enclosures may suggest that this enclosure dates to Djer's reign (Bestock 2007a). This is, however, speculative. No other subsidiary graves were found here, including adjacent to the reasonably considerable exposure of the northeast wall. It is not possible to determine whether or not there would originally have been more subsidiary graves and what they would have held.

The second of the unattributed First Dynasty enclosures has long been known as the Western Mastaba (fig. 8). It was so named by Petrie, who discovered it and mistook it for a tomb. Petrie's treatment of this building in publication is extremely minimal (Petrie 1925: 3); even his location of the enclosure on his plan of the North Cemetery was proved to be inaccurate by later reexcavation of the monument under the PYIFA (O'Connor & Adams 2003b: 81). The niching pattern of the walls, all four of which were at least partially preserved, is similar to other known enclosures. In size and proportions it is more similar to Meretneith's enclosure than to the other known First Dynasty enclosures (O'Connor 1989: 59). The eastern corner of the enclosure does not survive, but there is a small gateway in the north that had been intentionally bricked



**Fig. 8**

Plan of the excavated remains of the so-called Western Mastaba, a funerary enclosure likely dated to the late First Dynasty. The adjacent boat graves are probably subsidiary graves for this enclosure.

up. A bench ran around the walls. No interior features of the Western Mastaba have been found.

In between the Western Mastaba and the enclosure of Khasekhemwy the PYIFA found fourteen boat graves (O'Connor 1991; O'Connor & Adams 2003a). These appear to be associated with the Western Mastaba, for which they serve as subsidiary graves (O'Connor & Adams 2003a: 40; 2003b: 82-3). The boat graves were not subterranean, but rather each boat was encased in a low mud brick superstructure. The boats are arranged roughly parallel to one another and perpendicular to the long axes of the Shuneh and the Western Mastaba. They were built of long beams that had holes cut in them through which rope was passed, effectively "sewing" the planks together. The longest measures some 25 meters, and analysis has indicated that they would have been water-worthy although it is uncertain if they were ever actually used in life (O'Connor & Adams 2003b: 83). No other subsidiary graves have been found in association with the Western Mastaba.

The Western Mastaba seems likely to belong to the second half of the First Dynasty (O'Connor 1989: 58 and citations). Kaiser suggested that it belonged to the reign of Anedjib or Semerkhet (Kaiser 1969: 2). Given an absence of other identified late First Dynasty enclosures it is not possible to definitively date the Western Mastaba or discuss the development of enclosures. The remaining enclosures of the First Dynasty, which can reasonably be supposed to have been built, have not yet been located.

## The Second Dynasty enclosures

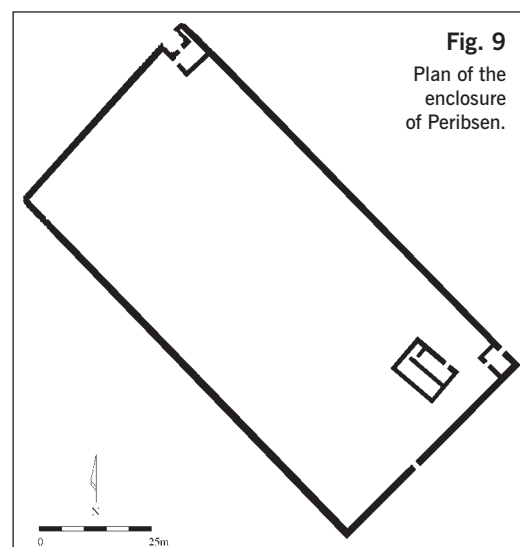
Only the last two kings of the Second Dynasty, Peribsen and Khasekhemwy, were buried at Umm el-Qaab. It is thus unsurprising that only two Second Dynasty enclosures are known from the North Cemetery. Although these monuments are in most ways similar to their First Dynasty predecessors, there are some important differences. The walls of the Second Dynasty enclosures had neither benches nor the low circular features known from the corners of some of the First Dynasty examples. There are more than two gateways, although it is not clear how much of a difference this represents given the incomplete preservation and/or excavation of most of the First Dynasty enclosures. The north gateways of Peribsen and Khasekhemwy's enclosures are more elaborate than those of the First Dynasty, and are not bricked up. There are no subsidiary graves associated with the Second Dynasty enclosures. There are also differences between the two Second Dynasty enclosures.

### Peribsen

The enclosure of Peribsen was first found in 1903 by Ayrton and Currelly, who termed it the "Middle Fort" (Ayrton, Currelly & Weigall 1904: 2). This enclosure measures 108 by 55 m and has the thinnest walls of any known enclosure, measuring only 1.5 m thick (fig. 9). Three gateways to this enclosure are known: a small door in the south-

west, a large gate in the east corner, and an elaborate two-chambered gateway in the north corner, which was discovered much later by the PYIFA, along with the north-west wall itself (although it had probably been excavated previously, it had not been published, O'Connor 1989: 77-8). That the north gate had not been bricked up suggests a difference in ritual use between this enclosure and its known First Dynasty predecessors, although the presence of a cult chapel also indicates a major continuity in use.

This chapel lies in the interior eastern corner of Peribsen's enclosure and is in many ways similar to those known from the Aha enclosures and presumed in later First Dynasty examples. It is close to the eastern gateway and is entered through a small door in the eastern part of the northeast wall. The chapel measures 12.3 by 9.5 m. It has three rooms, and they are arranged roughly as the rooms in the Aha chapels. In this case, however, the northern room is quite small and has a doorway into the southwestern room. It may be that here the southwestern room rather than the northern room was the cult room. A substantial deposit of ceramics and seal impressions in front of the cult building is presumably related to the dedication of offerings here; a seal impression in this area allowed Ayrton to identify the enclosure with Peribsen (Ayrton, Currelly & Weigall 1904: 4). Further seal impressions have been found by the PYIFA in this area, and another



**Fig. 9**  
Plan of the enclosure of Peribsen.

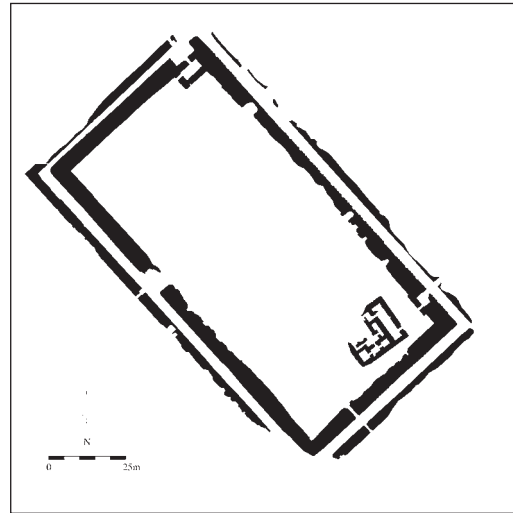
mound of offering jars was excavated by the PYIFA just outside the east gateway of the enclosure (O'Connor 1989: 54).

### Khasekhemwy

The final enclosure built at Abydos was constructed by Khasekhemwy, last king of the Second Dynasty (**fig. 10**). His enclosure, colloquially known as the Shunet ez-Zebib, is the only one to remain standing. It is an impressive monument despite the collapse of some sections. At their highest, the walls currently remain nearly 11 m tall, which is likely close to their original height. The walls are about 5.5 m thick at the base, and taper gently towards the top. The enclosure measures approximately 126 by 65 m. The exteriors of the walls are decorated with the regular pattern of vertical niches; here, where the niches can be seen over large portions of the height of the walls rather than simply in plan, their visual effect is stunning. The walls of the Shuneh were coated with a layer of mud plaster which was then finished with white plaster and a white wash. This has eroded on all of the above-ground parts of the building, remaining only on the lower portions of walls which have been protected by an accumulation of windblown sand.

Outside the main wall runs a lower, perimeter wall which creates a corridor all around the enclosure. This is generally a passage 3.2 m wide, however the perimeter wall is closer to the main wall near the west corner, where the northwest corridor narrows to 1.4 m. The perimeter wall is 2.6 m thick at its base, 137 m long on the long sides, and 78 m long on the short sides. No other enclosure has such a perimeter wall, which seems to have been a secondary addition here. Nor does any other enclosure cover so large an area or have such thick walls.

There are two main and two smaller gateways into the Shuneh. The largest gateway is at the north corner, in the northwest wall. Here a very large recess in the face of the main wall effectively creates a chamber between the main and perimeter walls; this is similar to the north gateway of the Peribsen enclosure (O'Connor 1989: 78). The other main gateway is located at the east corner, in the



**Fig. 10**  
Plan of the enclosure of Khasekhemwy, known locally as the Shunet ez-Zebib or the Shuneh, for short.

northeastern wall. This consists of a chamber left hollow mostly within the thickness of the enclosure wall. This is largely analogous to the eastern gateway in other known enclosures, although elsewhere, where the walls are thinner, the chamber was created by the addition of small walls inside the corner of the enclosure. The two smaller doorways, in the southeast and southwest walls, are narrow passages through the perimeter and main walls. The southeastern door is paralleled at the enclosure of Peribsen.

The most important interior feature of Khasekhemwy's enclosure is the expected cult chapel. It lies in the eastern corner, close to the eastern gateway, and is set askew to the orientation of the enclosure. This building is notably more elaborate than any earlier such chapel, having at least nine chambers. Recent clearance by the PYFA provided substantial evidence of organic material, some of it likely incense, in the southernmost room (Adams 2002). Ritual activity in the chapel is also represented by deposits of offering pottery and seal impressions outside the door to the building (O'Connor 1989: 54). Numerous seal impressions of Khasekhemwy were found here, as well as some of Netjerket (Djoser) (Ayrton, Curdell & Weigall 1904: 3; Adams 2002).

Most of the area of the interior thus far excavated appears to have been left as open space. Excavations first suggested and then disproved the notion that there had been a substantial, mud brick built feature, recon-



constructed as a brick-topped mound or 'proto-pyramid', in the northwestern part of the enclosure (O'Connor 1991: 7-10; O'Connor 2002: 181-82). Interestingly, the PYIFA excavations in the Shuneh have shown that a large part of the interior was not only left open, but was apparently left as a working site and not cleaned up at the conclusion of construction.

The Shunet ez-Zebib was not destroyed as previous enclosures were. This may be because Abydos was abandoned as a royal burial ground following the Second Dynasty, after which the kings built their tombs and temples near Memphis. We are fortunate that this last enclosure was left standing as testament to the size and grandeur of these monuments from the beginning of pharaonic history.

## Conclusion

The funerary enclosures of Abydos are an important source of information about early kingship and the development of royal mortuary cult. Although enclosures of this type

were built only during the Early Dynastic period, they sit at the beginning of the development of royal mortuary temples and should be viewed in this context. Their exact relationship to later buildings and practices is still a matter of debate, but that there is such a relationship seems clear. Most obviously, the enclosing wall of the Step Pyramid complex built by Djoser in the Third Dynasty is similar in proportions, architectural details, and location of the major entrance to the enclosure of Khasekhemwy. Thus although the Step Pyramid is in many ways innovative, with its bringing together of tomb and cult places, its pyramid, its use of stone, and many other features, important aspects of it also clearly derived from an older tradition represented at Abydos (O'Connor 2002; 2003; O'Connor & Adams 2003b: 85). As such the Early Dynastic funerary enclosures at Abydos are key not only for the information they give us about the early development of royal mortuary practice but also because they enhance our understanding of that period as a formative and connected part of the longer march of Egyptian history.

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