

Famous Ancient Egypt Cities - Part I

Abydos

Abydos, or Abjdu, lies in the eight nome of Upper Egypt, about 300 miles south of Cairo, on the western side of the Nile and about 9.5 miles from the river.

It spreads over 5 square miles Map of Abydos, Egypt and contains archaeological remains from all periods of ancient Egyptian history.

It was significant in historical times as the main cult center of Osiris, the lord of the netherworld. At the mouth of the canyon at Abydos, which the Egyptians believed to be the entrance to the underworld, one of the tombs of the 1st dynasty kings was mistaken for the tomb of Osiris, a thousand years later, and pilgrims would leave offerings to the god for another thousand years. The area is thus now called Umm el Qa'ab, "Mother of Pots."

Abydos was the burial place for the first kings of a unified Egypt. But it contains remains from earlier, in the Predynastic period. In 1900 the Predynastic cemetery of el-Amra was excavated with hundreds of graves from all Predynastic phases.

Other important cemeteries were found at Naga ed-Deir, el-Mahasna, Mesheikh, Beit Allam and the various cemeteries at Abydos itself. In addition, settlements have been found, most representing small farming villages. El-Mahasna had beer-brewing facilities.

The Predynasty/Early Dynastic cemetery is located in the low desert. It consists of three parts: predynastic Cemetery U in the north, Cemetery B in the middle with royal tombs from Dynasty Tomb at Abydos 0 and the early 1st Dynasty, and in the south the tomb complexes of six kings and one queen from the 1st dynasty and two kings from the 2nd dynasty. Most of the 1st dynasty tombs show traces of immense fires. Many had also been plundered many times.

1977 a tiny ivory label was discovered bearing the "nar" name of Narmer, and the king is seen smiting an enemy in the Delta.

Cemetery

U contains several hundred graves and offering pits. Ceramics are from the Naqada culture. Of particular importance is the tomb named U-j, uncovered in 1988. It is dated to 150 years before Aha and the beginning of the 1st dynasty.

The

tomb is elaborate, brick-lined, with doors and windows. It has twelve chambers and measures about 27 feet x 24 feet. It still contained much funerary equipment. There were large Clay seals from Abydos, Egypt amounts of different kinds of Egyptian pottery, and more than 200 wine jars imported probably from Palestine. There were also about 150 labels of ivory or bone, many of which were apparently attached to linen bolts.

Many

of the inscriptions on the labels are readable with clear glyphs and signs. The most frequent sign was a scorpion, sometimes together with a plant. It is speculated that either King Scorpion was buried here or that he was a known figure. Hundreds of wine jars imported from Canaan were also unearthed in one of the tomb's store-rooms.

There

were traces of a wooden shrine on the floor in the burial chamber, and in the northeastern corner a complete crook-shaped scepter of ivory.

An

ancient enclosure wall at Abydos Many of the earliest tombs are in the location known as Umm el Ga'ab. Ten royal enclosures in total must have been built; but only eight have been located. Some of the royal owners have been identified: Djer, Djet (Tomb), Queen-mother Merneith (Tomb), of the 1st Dynasty, Den (tomb) and Peribsen (Tomb) and Khasekhemwy (Tomb) of the 2nd Dynasty. At least some of these burials were surrounded by subsidiary graves for attendants killed and buried along with the royal funeral.

Cemetery

B contains three double-chamber tombs, currently attributed to King Aha (Tomb), and his Dynasty 0 predecessors of Narmer (tomb), Ka (tomb) and possibly another King named Iry-Hor (tomb). Pottery shards have been found here which are inscribed with the name-signs of these kings.

Royal

graves at Abydos

became more elaborate, until the last and largest royal tomb built there for Khasekhemwy, last king of the 2nd Dynasty. His tomb, called Shunet es-Zebib, the Storehouse of the Flies, measures about 230 feet long and varying between 56 and 33 feet in Tombs at Umm el Ga'ab at Abydos

Egypt
width.

Near Khentyamentiu's temple, a mile north of the Umm el Ga'ab (Qa'ab) cemetery and nested among the enclosures were fourteen (found to-date) large boat graves. The remains of the ancient ships, dating to the 1st Dynasty, were uncovered in the desert. Each averages 75 feet in length and had been encased in a structure two-feet thick with whitewashed mud-brick walls.

Whether they

were meant to represent solar barques, anticipating the ship built by Khufu and found within his Pyramid at Giza, is not yet known.

North

Abydos contains an ancient settlement and also the remains of a large stone temple from the 30th Dynasty, along with a portal structure of Ramesses II, and a fairly recently discovered temple built by Tuthmosis III. Most of the early town lies beneath modern groundwater and the remains of later settlements.

Another temple, that of Khentyamentiu which was later identified with Osiris as his temple, dates from the later third millennium BCE. Royal cult buildings or ka chapels were built here by kings from the Old Kingdom through the New Kingdom. Buildings to the west and southwest of the cult buildings proved to be houses spanning the period from late Predynastic to the 2nd Dynasty.

A

residential and industrial section have also been found to the southeast of

those excavations, dating to the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period. A number of mudbrick houses, consisting of between 7 and 10 small rooms, courtyards and a narrow street have been found. A workshop, the earliest and most complete faience workshop in Egypt, was also uncovered, complete with kilns.

The Northern cemetery was the principal burial ground for non-royal individuals at Abydos during the Middle Kingdom, and continued to be so used through the Graeco-Roman period.

The tombs of the first kings of unified Egypt were deep brick-lined structures topped with mounds of sand, later called mastabas, the Arabic word for bench, since their square or rectangular shapes resembled benches. Later in the 1st Dynasty, one structure was placed underground, supported by a retaining wall, and the second mastaba was placed above ground directly over the first, to protect the lower one.

The most striking standing buildings are the enclosure of King Khasekhemwy from the 2nd Dynasty, the well-preserved New Kingdom temples of Seti I (temple) and Ramesses II (temple) from the 19th Dynasty, and the walled enclosure now called the Kom es-Sultan, the location of the early town and main temple dedicated to Osiris.

The 19th Dynasty Seti temple contains seven sanctuaries set in a row, each dedicated to a different deity, Ptah, Ra-Harakhty, Amun-Ra, Osiris, Isis and Horus. Seti I himself was included with his funerary shrine. The unusual L-shaped plan of the temple is caused by a southeast wing appended to the main rectangular-shaped temple. This wing contains rooms dedicated to Sokar and Nefertum and other funerary deities. There is also a King list to the south of the sanctuaries. Since the temple was unfinished when Seti died, his son and successor Ramesses II finished the work.

Immediately

behind the chambers dedicated to the Osiris cult is another structure, subterranean, called the Osireion. It contains offering scenes and other scenes from the Book of Gates and the Book of the Dead.

South Abydos was developed as a zone for royal cult complexes, two well-preserved ones so far identified as belonging to Senusret II of the 12th Dynasty and Ahmose of the 18th Dynasty, who built a small pyramid here. .

Relief

fragments at the complex of King Ahmose, the founder of the New Kingdom and conqueror of the Hyksos invaders, have been found near his pyramid and funerary complex at Abydos.

One fragment represents a group of three archers, teams of bridled chariot horses, ships with oars, and fallen warriors recognizable as Asiatics. Other fragments bear the names of Apophis, the leader of the Hyksos, and that of Avaris, the capital city of the Hyksos.

As

work proceeds at ancient Abydos, a home of the dead for so many millennia, more and more of the history and religious beliefs of the ancient Egyptians is returning to life.
ldfu

ldfu was the Greek city of Apollinopolis Magna, and is a religious and commercial center. Located about 33 miles south of Isna and 65 miles north of Aswan, this is a friendly town which produces surgar and pottery. It is also a hub of a road network. It was the capital of the second nome (Horus) of Upper Egypt.

The main attraction here is the Temple of Horus, which is considered by most to be the best preserved cult temple in Egypt, but there is a mound of rubble to the west of the Temple which is probably the original old city of Djeba.

The town was known as Tbot by the early Egyptians, by the Greeks as Apollinopolis Magna and by Atbo during Coptic times. It was the capital of the second nome (Horus) of Upper Egypt. French and Polish teams have excavated some of the ancient city, finding Old Kingdom mastabas and Byzantine house.