

Laurel Bestock, *The Development of Royal Funerary Cult at Abydos: Two Funerary Enclosures from the Reign of Aha*, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2009. ISBN: 978-3-447-05838-4

**Reviewed by Lisa Mawdsley
(Monash University)**

This study discusses the extraordinary discovery of two mud brick funerary enclosures excavated by the author in 2004-2005 in the North Cemetery, Abydos. The work was undertaken as a dissertation project and formed part of the larger University of Pennsylvania Museum-Yale University-Institute of Fine Arts, New York University Expedition to Abydos (or PYIFA).

Previous work by the PYIFA during the 2001-2003 seasons had revealed two enclosures, one built by Aha (known as Aha I), the other of uncertain attribution. As the earliest known enclosure at the North Cemetery had been attributed to Djer, this discovery demonstrated that funerary enclosure construction extended back to the very early First Dynasty. The work of the author in the 2004-2005 season was intended to enhance the understanding of how the North cemetery was used and developed during the Early Dynastic period. Previous work in North Cemetery had suggested that each ruler built only one enclosure, so the results of the 2004-2005 were to say the least, unexpected.

The author's excavation revealed the remains of two previously unknown funerary enclosures along with five subsidiary graves associated with these enclosures. These new enclosures can be assigned securely to the reign of Aha on the basis of inscribed material found within the subsidiary tombs, most notably ink *serekhs* naming this early ruler. Both enclosures are smaller than Aha I but similar in design. The southwestern enclosure (Aha II) contained a cult building, while the northeastern enclosure (Aha III) is smaller and substantially more disturbed due to the later construction of a vaulted subterranean tomb which cut through an enclosure wall and across two of the subsidiary graves.

This book is divided into six chapters and is well-presented with 79 black and white figures and 16 coloured plates. The chapters are well-organised and the author's writing style is both clear and concise while still providing the reader with an interesting and informative narrative. Chapter one provides an outline and overview of the work. Chapter two discusses the development of the cemetery at Umm el-Qaab, Abydos from the early tombs in Cemetery U and the dynasty O tombs in Cemetery B to the royal tombs of the First Dynasty. In addition, this chapter provides an excellent overview of the cemeteries of Umm el-Qaab for readers unable to consult the original reports written by the German Archaeological Institute.

It is in chapter two that the author discusses the interpretive problems associated with the tombs in Cemetery B in some detail. The three chambers located in the southern part of Cemetery B, known as B10, B15 and B19 have been attributed to Aha. Each chamber is physically separate from each other and the author points out that the connection between each of these chambers is still unclear. However, following the work of the German Archaeological Institute, it is argued that the three chambers form part of a single complex rather than three separate tombs. This complex also included the subsidiary tombs numbered B13 and B14, along with the multiple tombs numbered B16. This background discussion is crucial in providing the evidence used to substantiate the author's innovative interpretation of the three enclosures of Aha presented in chapter 5

Chapter three provides an overview of previous excavations at the North Cemetery and includes a discussion of the basic form of funerary enclosures, along with an examination of the function of these constructions. The basic function of the enclosure was mortuary, and the author suggests that there is a functional inseparability between the enclosure and the royal tomb. It is further argued that the enclosures were built by rulers as expressions of aspects of their individual rulership, rather than as official manifestations of the institution of kingship. Chapter four provides an in-depth description and discussion of the actual excavation of the two new enclosures and the five subsidiary graves.

Chapter five presents the author's interpretation of the two new enclosures, including a discussion of the relationship of the Aha II and III enclosures to other funerary enclosures and to the royal tombs at Umm el-Qaab. The author then presents her interpretation of the reasons why three enclosures were built during the reign of Aha. The first hypothesis presented is that all three enclosures were built for the king himself and were intended to replicate the three burial chambers (B10, B15 and B19) of this ruler's tomb at Umm el-Qaab. This hypothesis is discussed but considered unlikely given the size difference between the three enclosures. The author then proposes that given the differential size and the layout of the three enclosures that Aha II and III were constructed for individuals of less importance than the owner of Aha I. It is suggested that Aha I belonged to the king while Aha II and III were built for the same individuals buried in the smaller tombs B13 and B14 of the Aha complex at Umm el-Qaab. These individuals were perhaps close female relatives of the king. This well-argued interpretation is innovative and provides a plausible explanation to account for the unusual construction of three enclosures relating to this king.

Clearly, this research has demonstrated the connectivity between the royal tombs of Umm el-Qaab and the funerary enclosures of the North Cemetery, as well as confirming that the enclosures served as the place where offerings were given in ritual association with the royal tombs. This book makes a significant contribution to understanding the function of these early First Dynasty enclosures. It should be considered essential reading for both scholars and students of early Egypt.