

ABYDOS

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This year marks the initiation of the Oriental Institute's Ahmose and Tetisheri Project at Abydos, providing an important new opportunity for Institute students and researchers to be involved in archaeological fieldwork in Egypt. Operating under the aegis of the joint University of Pennsylvania-Yale-Institute of Fine Arts New York University Expedition to Abydos, our program of research also encourages a close link with a number of institutions and colleagues engaged in work at the site. Although this project marks the first time that the University of Chicago has actively supported excavation at Abydos, the Oriental Institute did play an early and important role in the publication of a landmark series of watercolor paintings that record the extraordinarily fine relief sculpture in the Abydos temple of King Seti I (ca. 1301–1287 B.C.). During a visit to that extraordinary temple in 1929, John D. Rockefeller was sufficiently impressed with the watercolor facsimile paintings and ink drawings then being produced by English artists Amice Calverley and Myrtle Broome to support their publication on a grand scale. Lavishly printed in deluxe folio volumes under the auspices of the Oriental Institute in collaboration with the Egypt Exploration Society, the highly accurate and colorful facsimiles produced by Calverley and Broome are themselves works of art, as well as essential resources for scholars studying Egyptian relief sculpture, painting, and religious iconography.

In antiquity, Abydos was revered as the center of the cult of the important god Osiris, who together with his sister/wife Isis and son Horus, formed a divine triad that was closely associated with the divine aspects of Egyptian kingship. Abydos is best known as the burial place of Egypt's first pharaohs, those rulers responsible for the political unification of the country ca. 3100 B.C. For millennia, Egypt's pharaohs built temples at Abydos to commemorate their link to these royal forbears, and to strengthen their identification with the sacred cults of Osiris and



Figure 1. View of the Ahmose pyramid mound at South Abydos

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Horus. Over time, the broad popular appeal of the cult of Osiris and his growing significance in funerary ritual led Egyptians at all levels of society to leave behind monuments enabling their eternal communication with the god. One of the boldest and most extensive of these architectural statements was the memorial complex built at Abydos by King Ahmose (ca. 1550–1525 B.C.), the founder of Egypt's famed Eighteenth Dynasty of rulers.

Ahmose's great historical importance derives from his defeat of the Hyksos, a Canaanite ruling elite who established the capital of

Avaris (modern Tell ed-Dab'a) in the eastern Delta. Following a century of Hyksos control of northern Egypt, a period during which the traditional dynasties of pharaohs ruled from their southern capital at Thebes (modern Luxor), Ahmose's army took Avaris, rapidly leading to the reunification of Egypt. Ahmose's subsequent military conquests in Palestine and Nubia resulted in the consolidation and expansion of a newly powerful Egyptian empire, the New Kingdom (Eighteenth to Twentieth Dynasties, ca. 1525–1085 B.C.). Despite Ahmose's place in history, no tomb or temple of this king has ever been discovered at Thebes, and thus his Abydos monuments, discovered by British archaeologists at the turn of the last century, take on a particular importance. Incorporating Egypt's last royal pyramid and pyramid temple, the Abydos complex of Ahmose also consisted of a variety of other structures dedicated in honor of the warrior king and his family, including a memorial pyramid built for his grandmother Queen Tetisheri. The nearby settlement and cemetery of workers and priests attached to Ahmose's posthumous cult provide a rare opportunity to examine an ancient cult place in its broader social context. Since 1993, I have directed a program of excavation and survey centered on understanding the rise of Ahmose's cult at Abydos and its decline three centuries later. The discussion below outlines some of our main research questions, as well as the intriguing results from our most recent season in 2002.

Project Background

My interest in Ahmose's monuments at Abydos was spurred while I was completing doctoral study at the University of Pennsylvania under the supervision of David O'Connor (now of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University), who since 1967 has directed research at Abydos together with William Kelly Simpson of Yale University. O'Connor and Simpson's work at Abydos has introduced a high standard of archaeological research to a site that, in the early days

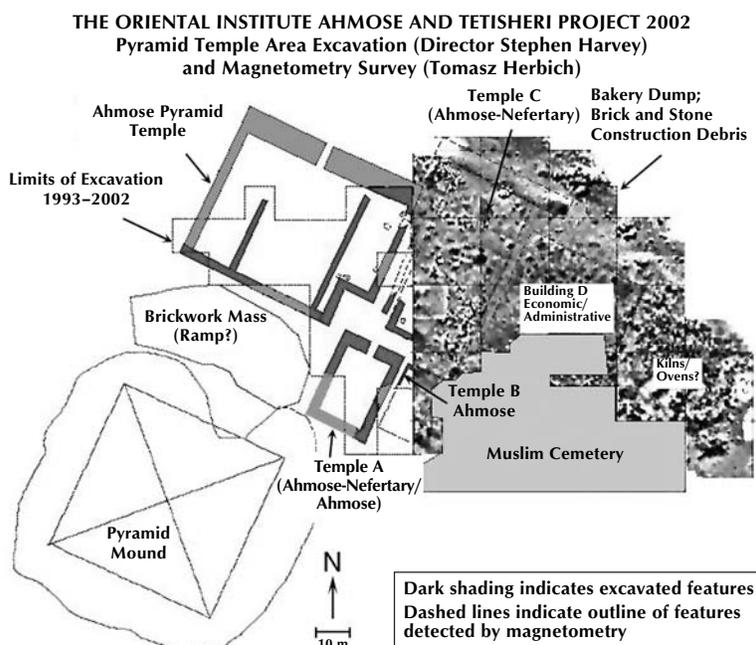


Figure 2. Plan of Ahmose Pyramid Complex, showing features and structures revealed through excavation and magnetometry survey in 2002. Credits: Stephen Harvey/Tomasz Herbich

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of exploration, had fallen victim to much unscientific plundering. Their work, and that of a second generation of researchers trained by them, has resulted in a series of surprising discoveries that have fundamentally altered scholarly perceptions of the site. Similarly, the discoveries made at the Predynastic and Early Dynastic cemetery of Abydos known as 'Umm el-Qa'ab by the German Archaeological Institute under Werner Kaiser and Günter Dreyer have transformed our views on the origins and date of the earliest hieroglyphic writing, the development of early kingship and administration, and Egypt's relations with contemporary cultures in the Near East. In searching for the subject of a long-term field project at Abydos, I was hoping to identify a site with considerable archaeological potential, and one that raised a series of compelling research questions.

Starting in 1988, I would use my days off while working on other projects at Abydos to wander south to examine the sandy 10 meter high ruin of Ahmose's pyramid (fig. 1). The vista from the top of Ahmose's pyramid is a commanding one, as it surveys the nearby cultivated fields at the edge of the Nile floodplain, as well as the limestone cliffs a kilometer away that mark the start of the plateau of the Sahara desert. Ahmose's architects conceived a grand series of royal monuments linking already ancient traditions of pyramid building to newer concepts developed at Thebes, all with reference to local alignments and processional routes at Abydos. Ahmose's pyramid, discovered in 1899 by the young British archaeologist Arthur C. Mace together with the ruins of a pyramid temple at its base, had received almost no scholarly attention since its discovery and seemed like a good candidate for re-examination. Mace had published photographs of only a few artifacts from the site, including some carved reliefs depicting the king. One discovery, a stela depicting a pharaoh of the Amarna period (some two centuries after Ahmose's death) standing next to the deified King Ahmose and his sister-wife Queen Ahmose-Nefertary, demonstrated the long survival of Ahmose's cult at Abydos.

After Mace's initial, brief exploration of the site, further exploration by Charles T. Currelly in 1902/1903 revealed a unique series of royal monuments that could be associated with the reign of Ahmose on the basis of stamped mudbricks bearing his name. These included the broad

fieldstone and brick terraces of a temple built high against the limestone cliffs; a massive rock-cut tomb of a type better known from the Valley of the Kings at Thebes; and a second, smaller pyramid made of brick. In this last structure, Currelly found a 2 meter tall, elegantly carved dedicatory stela, the text of which detailed how Ahmose and his wife Ahmose-Nefertary chose to establish a pyramid at Abydos in memory of their grandmother Tetisheru. Somewhat reminiscent of a legal contract, the text lays out the establishment of an economic foundation to be staffed with people, endowed with animals and supported by the produce of agricultural fields and groves. Currelly discovered



*Figure 3. Limestone pyramid casing block from Temple A.
Photograph by Shawn Smejkal*

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Figure 4. View of Temple A (foreground) and Temple B (top right) at end of season. Photograph by Shawn Smejkal

traces of this support population in the form of a cemetery near the Ahmose pyramid, including the grave of a priest of Ahmose's temple cult named Païry. He also located New Kingdom domestic remains in a nearby town, which he took to be a village purposefully built for the workers and priests of Ahmose's cult (although subsequent research does not support this view). Surprisingly, despite the importance and seeming promise of these finds, no further work was done after 1903. In all likelihood, this was due to the fragmentary nature of the finds, consisting of mere foundations of buildings, and the limited number of "important" artifacts discovered. Also, Mace and Currelly's brief reports (in *El Amrah and Abydos* and *Abydos III*) had long been assumed to be authoritative summaries reflecting the exhaustion of the site's archaeological potential. More recently, however, archaeologists have discovered the great value in returning for careful restudy of earlier excavations, especially employing modern technology and fresh research questions.

Reviewing the facts then known about Ahmose's constructions at Abydos, a number of mysteries remained. Why had Ahmose built so extensively at Abydos? In the absence of a known tomb or mortuary temple of Ahmose at Thebes, could either the stone-clad pyramid or the subterranean tomb at Abydos have been intended for Ahmose's burial? We also knew that the cult had survived for nearly three centuries after its founding; a stela from the time of Ramesses II (ca. 1287–1220 B.C.) demonstrated that a processional boat had served for local villagers as an oracle of the deified god-king Ahmose. The text of the stela described an appeal to Ahmose's sacred bark to provide an oracular judgment on a local dispute, demonstrating the posthumous role that Ahmose played in the local community. What processes were involved in the transformation of a royal, state-sponsored temple into an essentially local cult? The Ahmose complex at Abydos offered the chance to examine these processes in stratified contexts, and not just royal monuments, but support buildings, town, cemetery, kilns, and bakeries — all the features of an

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ancient Egyptian specialized settlement. Too often in the past, Egyptian temples were viewed in isolation from their archaeological and social contexts; in the worst cases, invaluable organic-rich strata documenting the life history of such institutions were summarily removed to expose stone walls and pavements. The Ahmose site provided a rare opportunity to study a temple and its varied and changing meanings alongside the community that supported it, all with reference to textual as well as archaeological evidence. In addition, the renewed excavation of the Ahmose monuments offered a chance to learn more about an extremely important transitional period in Egyptian history, one that is poorly documented at the key sites of Thebes and Memphis.

Initial Results of Excavation and Survey

Our first season of intensive work began in the spring of 1993, when we decided to focus our attention on re-excavating the pyramid temple of Ahmose discovered a century ago. Our primary duty was the creation of the first-ever detailed map of the area, a task expertly accomplished by seasoned surveyor David Goodman, also allowing us to establish a grid for surface collection and excavation. Already within the first days of carrying out surface collection, it became clear

that all parts of the concession held promise for renewed attention. In the area of the pyramid temple, a particular surprise was the high volume of fragments of carved and painted limestone that had once formed its walls and ceilings; only a handful of pieces had been mentioned in the original report. In addition, inscriptions and ceramic indicated that there was abundant material ranging over the entire period of use of site.

Within a few short weeks of excavation, we were overwhelmed with the volume of material deriving from contexts that had ostensibly been exhausted by Mace's excavations. In particular, we encountered more than 3,000 fragments of the limestone blocks that had once formed Ahmose's pyramid temple, some providing the potential to imagine the appearance of the temple's octagonal pillars, elaborate doorways, and starry ceiling. These fragments represented only a small percentage (less than 5 percent) of the temple's walls; most were only the edges or corners of blocks that had been carted away in antiquity for reuse in other buildings at Abydos, or (a more dispiriting thought) had perhaps been burned to make the essential ingredient of lime plaster. In many cases, however, even the remaining pieces of

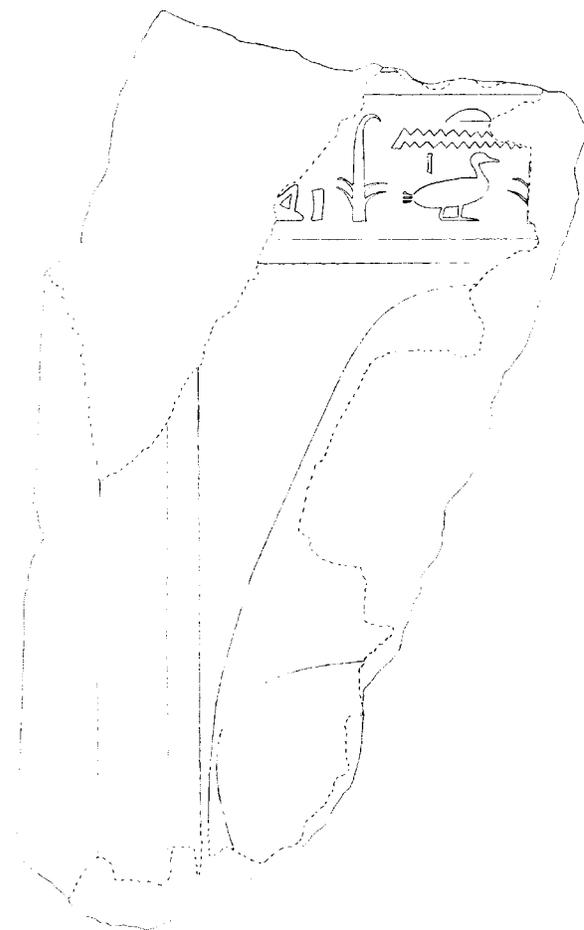


Figure 5. Fragment of a large limestone stela depicting a queen or goddess, with the title of "prince" in the text above. Drawing by Krisztian Vertes

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temple architecture were of extraordinary informational value. One large fragment depicting the falcon-headed deity Re-Horakhty even provided a direct join to the corner of a pillar illustrated in Mace's old report and now in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum, New York. Another piece provided the cartouche of King Amenhotep I, the son and successor of Ahmose, demonstrating that he had carried on with the decoration of his father's temple. Beyond the limestone evidence, we found that the walls enclosing the stone core of the temple had been constructed of a variety of types of bricks, most stamped with a range of inscriptions giving forms of the name of Ahmose, often followed by the epithet "beloved of Osiris." The varying thickness in walls, each built with a distinct type of inscribed brick, implied alterations in the temple plan and signaled more complexity than we had been led to expect from Mace's published plan.

Although the early excavators had certainly disturbed many stratified contexts in order to make their plan, perhaps by employing the outmoded practice of "following" walls in narrow trenches, it was also becoming increasingly clear that their excavation had not been exhaustive. Unfortunately, the fine desert sand at this site does not preserve the outlines of old excavation pits or trenches, and in many cases we could only reconstruct where and how deep Mace had worked on the basis of what features he had recorded. One clue of great value was our discovery of a number of oval foundation deposit pits made of brick, located at the base of walls that had been charted on Mace's plan. These features (though unfortunately plundered of their original dedicatory offerings) had never been seen by Mace, who would certainly have made note of them, as he did of other similar pits or caches.

The greatest discovery of the 1993 season was also the factor that demonstrated conclusively that Mace's work at the site, while seminal, had not been thorough. In an area on the eastern side of the temple, we began to encounter fragments of a small-scale battle narrative, including representations of horses and chariots (the earliest yet known in Egyptian art), archers, fallen enemies, and royal transport ships, all carved and painted in a lively style. The weapons, clothing, and beards of the enemies were those typical of Egyptian representations of Canaanites, and in all likelihood represent warriors fighting on behalf of Ahmose's Hyksos adversary. Conventional Egyptological wisdom up to that date held that complex battle depictions were not a feature of temple decoration until the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, yet here we had what seemed to be vignettes carved at the very beginning of the dynasty. Scraps of hieroglyphic texts seemed to confirm our identification of these as scenes of Ahmose's Hyksos battles, including a mention of the Hyksos capital of Avaris, as well as a probable occurrence of the name of Apophis (Ipep),



Figure 6. Fragment of limestone relief showing the face of a pharaoh (Ahmose?)

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one of the last Hyksos kings. Longer portions of text, as well as additional parts of these battle scenes, could provide important information on Egyptian perceptions of contemporary events, as well as important insight into artistic strategies for depicting complex narratives. All evidence from the site points to the construction of Ahmose's Abydos monuments very late in the reign, possibly after year 22, and thus well after the conclusion of the Hyksos struggles.

In all, we opened a total of twenty excavation units (each 10×10 square meters) in 1993; the majority of these were located in the vicinity of Ahmose's pyramid temple. The analysis and recording of the high volume of finds from these units was a goal of our study season in 1996, funded in large part by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Together with a thorough study of the earlier excavations, these results were presented in my 1998 doctoral dissertation entitled "The Cults of King Ahmose at Abydos." Due to other professional obligations, however, we were only able to return for a field season in the (extremely hot!) summer of 2002.

The 2002 Season

Apart from the main area of the pyramid temple, our attention in 1993 had shifted to the area southeast of the structure discovered by Mace. Excavating there in the oddly asymmetrical southeastern corner of the pyramid temple, we had encountered the brick enclosure wall of a previously unknown building (Temple A; see fig. 2). Inscriptions on bricks once again proved extremely valuable here because the enclosure wall bore the stamp of Ahmose's Chief Treasurer Neferperet, a figure known from other sources to have been entrusted with quarrying and building activities late in Ahmose's reign. The interior walls were formed in part of bricks stamped with Ahmose-Nefertary's name and titles, while other bricks provided Ahmose's cartouche. Due to time limitations, we were only able to excavate a portion of the outer room and doorway of

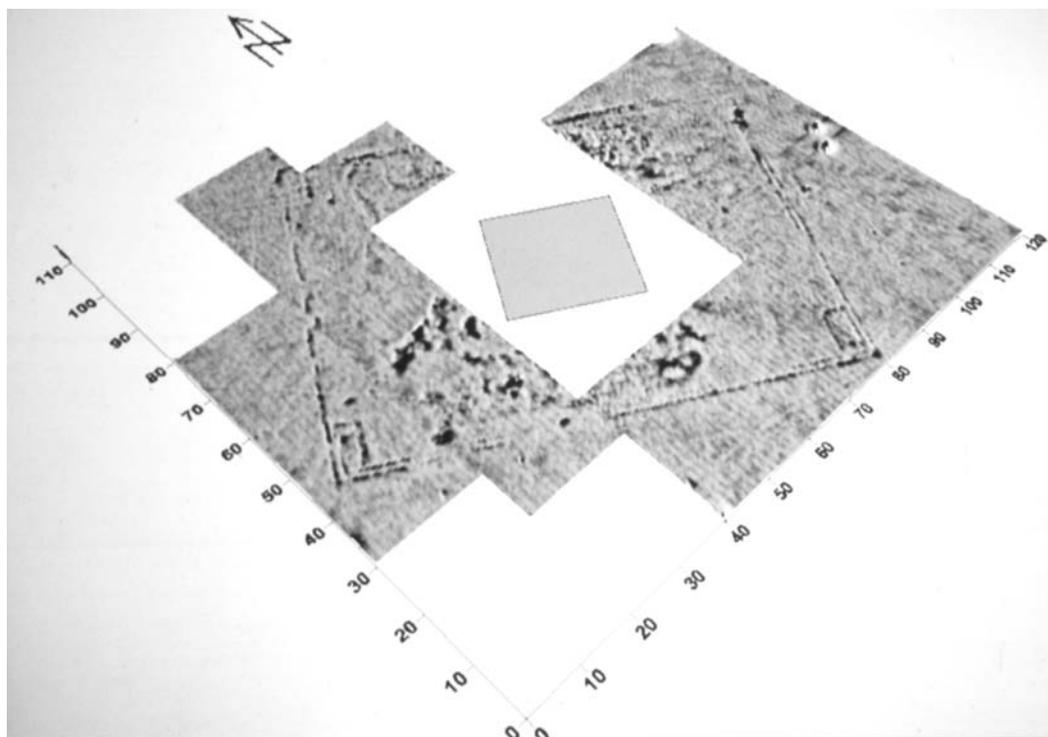


Figure 7. Tetisheri pyramid enclosure walls, as revealed by magnetometry. Credit: Tomasz Herbich

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this structure, and we were unsure of its function. Considering the presence of bricks stamped with the Ahmose-Nefertary's name, and the discovery of several fragments of private stelae depicting a queen in a vulture headdress, I had postulated that it perhaps was a shrine dedicated to Ahmose-Nefertary. The suggestion that the enclosure might prove to contain a subsidiary pyramid was based purely on the proximity of this new building to the immense, stone-clad pyramid ascribed to Ahmose.

Accordingly, a major goal of work in 2002 was the continued excavation of this structure, which required the removal of more than 5 meters of sandy overburden in most areas. We opened up an area of 350 square meters in this area, revealing the foundations of a building approximately 28 meters long and 19 meters wide (fig. 2). Underneath vol-

umes of sand and limestone boulders, some with quarry marks, we encountered mud surfaces across the interior of the enclosure, covered with a massive volume of New Kingdom offering pottery. No stone foundations were found *in situ* in the rear portion of the structure, though several massive blocks found in the lowest levels of the excavation were clearly pyramid casing blocks with an outer face at a steep angle of about 65 degrees (fig. 3). Since this finding corresponds closely to Mace's written descriptions of the casing of the main Ahmose pyramid, these blocks may derive from the Ahmose pyramid itself, though alternatively they might come from an additional, as yet undiscovered smaller pyramid in the vicinity. Based on its advanced state of destruction, the function of this structure could unfortunately not be clearly determined, although its location alongside the main Ahmose pyramid may yet prove to be meaningful.

The discovery of a previously unsuspected royal structure in 1993 implied that further exploration beyond the pyramid temple was warranted. A large area (about 0.6 hectare) to the east of Ahmose's temple had intrigued me since my first visits to the site, as it was covered with New Kingdom ceramic and other small finds. In 2002, we decided to explore the eastern periphery of the main pyramid temple using two methods: traditional excavation and magnetometric subsurface survey, carried out by Dr. Tomasz Herbich of the Polish Institute, with the assistance of Piotr Kolodziejczyk. Excavation provided the first surprise in the form of a corner of yet another mudbrick enclosure no more than 7 meters to the east of the main pyramid temple, and 5 meters to the north of Temple A (fig. 4). Like this last building, the new structure (now dubbed Temple B) also was constructed of bricks naming "The God's Wife, Daughter of a King, Wife and Mother of a King, Ahmose Nefertary." Magnetometry carried out adjacent to Temple B indicates that it had dimensions of 25 × 40 meters, with what seems to be a massive, 40 meter wide pylon located to its north. Over 1,000 fragments of decorated limestone temple relief, votive stelae, and parts of statues found in 2002 point to the existence of a decorated structure within this brick enclosure. Evidence for cultic activity into at least the reign of Ramesses II could be dem-



Figure 8. Limestone relief fragment, possibly depicting a heap of severed hands. Drawing by Krisztian Vertes

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onstrated through inscriptions of that ruler, as well as from abundant evidence for votive pottery and other cult objects of Ramesside date. Especially intriguing was the discovery of the fragment of a large limestone stela in sunk relief, bearing the image of a woman, and above it the phrase “king’s son” (fig. 5). Originally the scale of this stela would have been very large (over 1.5 meters), and it is likely that it dates to the early Eighteenth Dynasty on stylistic and paleographic grounds. Fragments of small votive stela found within this building indicate the presence of a cult of the royal family of Ahmose down to the Ramesside era. Additionally, hundreds of fragments of decorated limestone found within this structure probably derive from the decoration of its now-vanished stone building, including parts of a carved and painted doorway that may have carried the titles of Ahmose-Nefertary, and the representation of a pharaoh’s face (fig. 6).

The discovery since 1993 of two structures clearly associated with Queen Ahmose-Nefertary strengthens the already powerful impression of South Abydos as a center for royal attention in this period that would have rivaled (and might possibly have eclipsed) building projects of these rulers at Thebes. It is interesting to consider the prominent role that Ahmose-Nefertary seems to have played in royal projects, as evidenced by her mention on the Tetisheri stela from Abydos and the presence of her name and titles alongside those of Ahmose on two inscriptions announcing the reopening in Ahmose’s regnal year 22 of limestone quarries at el-Ma’asara (near Cairo). This last text is particularly fascinating, as it details the construction of temples throughout Egypt entrusted to the Chief Treasurer Neferperet, the same individual whose name occurs repeatedly on the bricks forming the exterior wall of Temple A. Only rarely do archaeologists have such satisfying textual confirmation of agency at both the royal and private levels.

Two additional buildings were located in 2002 in the area to the east of Ahmose’s pyramid temple, both sharing the alignment of the other early Eighteenth Dynasty structures, bringing the total count of known structures in this area to five. To the east of Temple A, the narrow corner of a small building was excavated, associated with King Ahmose on the basis of brick stamps. Only



Figure 9. Fragments of relief showing the figure of a pharaoh standing before the rudder stanchion of a ship or processional bark. (Abydos fragments placed against outline of a later king for comparison)

a small portion of this structure (Temple C) was excavated, and its form and function will remain unclear until it is excavated further in the coming season of work. However, its location alongside Temple A and its position near the pyramid of Ahmose may imply that it has a funerary or commemorative function. The other structure (Building D) was far more massive, at least 35 × 40 meters in size, and located just beyond Temple C. Based on debris from temple bakeries encountered nearby in 1993, Building D might represent an administrative or production center for the Ahmose cult. The area to its east may contain kilns or ovens, to judge from the strong magnetic response of remains buried below the surface. Excavation is planned in coming seasons for these areas, which may be among the most informative in terms of the economy and daily functioning of the Ahmose temple.

The Pyramid of Queen Tetisheri

In addition to our work last summer in the area of the Ahmose pyramid, we ventured farther into the desert to investigate the environs of the pyramid shrine of Queen Tetisheri. Although Charles Currelly discovered the actual pyramid shrine in 1902, there encountering the famous Tetisheri stela now in the Cairo Museum, no earlier researcher

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had found any trace of brick enclosures or additional structures in this area. While attempting to build a perimeter fence to protect the site from encroachment in 1996, our worker's tools hit some ancient mudbricks. Suspecting that we may have located an enclosure wall of some sort, we asked Dr. Herbich and his assistant to conduct magnetometry survey, and the results were extremely satisfying (fig. 7). A massive 90 × 70 meter enclosure wall of brick was detected very clearly, with small structures of unknown function in three corners, each building measuring about 5 × 8 meters. The text of the Tetisheri stela mentions the construction of both a pyramid (Egyptian *mer*) and an enclosure (Egyptian *hut*), providing textual confirmation of both features. We intend to investigate the enclosure's corner structures in the coming seasons in hopes of determining the function of this unique ritual complex.

In addition to excavation, analysis was conducted on ceramic deriving from 1993 work on the Ahmose Pyramid Temple and Temple A of Ahmose-Nefertary. Julia Budka of the University of Vienna, a specialist in New Kingdom ceramic with extensive experience at Elephantine and Tell el-Dab'a, was responsible for the analysis of material also from last season and was able to document a large number of imported wares, in addition to Egyptian ceramic types of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties. A large number of diagnostic sherds were drawn and photographed for future study. In addition to ceramic study, all major finds from the 2002 season were recorded in a database, drawn, and photographed in color and black and white. Fragments of relief sculpture were carefully studied in terms of style, color, and relation to finds from the 1993 season. Interestingly, a number of pieces of limestone were discovered that might belong to the "Hyksos" battle narrative. These include what may prove to be the earliest known representation of a heap of severed enemies' hands on the battlefield (fig. 8), an image well known in Ramesside temple battle scenes. Of great interest was a small piece showing triangular battlements, perhaps from a fortress, above which appears the head of a soldier wearing a helmet. This fragment may well relate to a scene of the siege of a fortress, the presence of which was indicated in 1993 by a fragment depicting archers firing arrows at a steep angle. Also, a number of fragments were recorded from scenes of large and small-scale boats. One of these (fig. 9), depicting a pharaoh (possibly Ahmose) wearing a *shendyet*-kilt and standing directly in front the rudder stanchion of a ship, may represent a royal or divine processional bark, rather than a scene from the battle narrative. Ahmose's processional bark was most likely housed at South Abydos, and received public veneration during its journeys to stations in the precinct of Osiris and in other royal temples.

The exciting discoveries of last summer, discussed above, have exponentially expanded the size and significance of the Ahmose complex at Abydos, meaning that the project that we are bringing to the Oriental Institute has tremendous future potential. We anticipate a productive season of excavation during Winter Quarter 2004 (January to March). Our first job will be selective excavation of monuments recovered by magnetometry, while in coming seasons we plan on partial excavation of the Ahmose pyramid, as well as the investigation of the nearby New Kingdom settlement. Further down the road, we intend to re-excavate and conserve Ahmose's subterranean tomb, and to tackle the excavation of the massive foundations of Ahmose's Terrace Temple, as well as the investigation of an oval structure of unknown function identified by Currelly only as a "Roman Farm." Based on our experience thus far, the temple and tomb complex of Ahmose, together with the economic and settlement components that surround it, will continue to yield many surprises in the years to come.

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