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Arthur Weigall

Excerpt

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A GUIDE TO THE ANTIQUITIES OF UPPER EGYPT

CHAPTER I

ABYDOS

THE temple of Sety I at Abydos is of such beauty and interest that it should be visited by all those who are able to undertake the somewhat tiring excursion. Most of the tourist-steamers stop at Balianeh, the nearest town on the river, sufficient time to allow of a visit being made to Abydos, which lies some six or seven miles west of the Nile. Good donkeys are to be obtained at Balianeh, and there are also one or two carriages for hire. The excursion may be made by train from Luxor with comparative ease. One leaves Luxor early, reaching Balianeh at about mid-morning, and one returns by the train which passes Balianeh about 8 P.M., arriving at Luxor just before midnight.

Methods of
visiting
Abydos.

THE HISTORY OF ABYDOS

Near the site of the later Abydos there stood at the dawn of history a city named This or Thinis,¹ in which resided the powerful chieftains who ruled the land for many miles to the north and south. Several of these chieftains having reigned in succession, there arose a ruler named *Se/k*, "the Scorpion," who conquered all the country as far south as Edfu, or Gebel Silsileh, and perhaps as far north as Assiut. He built for himself a southern capital at Kôm el Ahmar (p. 307), where he was

¹ The city of Thinis is sometimes thought to be situated farther to the north and not on the site of Abydos; but this is highly improbable.

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acknowledged by the local title of "Hawk-Chieftain," and assumed the name of Ka. He continued to reside at Thinis also, and when he died he was buried in the western desert behind Abydos. His successor, Narmer, extended his conquests towards the north, and presently came into collision with the kings of Lower Egypt, who reigned at Buto, not far from the sea. Narmer seems to have forced a marriage between the heiress of that kingdom and himself; and in the person of the son of this union, Mena, Upper and Lower Egypt were united. King Mena for political reasons was obliged to found for himself another capital, which he named Memphis, and placed at the point where the Nile valley opens into the wide plain of the Delta. He was, however, crowned at Kôm el Ahmar, and he still resided for part of the year at Thinis, where it is probable that he was buried. The fragment of a vase bearing his name was found amongst the ruins of the latter city.

These ruins are situated in that part of the site known as the Temenos or Enclosure of Osiris—an open space at the north-west of the modern village of El Arâbah el Madfûneh. Here there was a small mud-brick temple, dedicated to the jackal god Wepwat, "the Opener of the Ways," who was the primitive deity of the district. The royal residence was probably situated in the desert, a short distance back from the town; and still farther westward there was the royal burying-ground. The objects found in the town show that already a high state of civilisation had been arrived at, and an ivory statuette of a king of this period found here is executed with a degree of artistic skill never surpassed at any time in Egyptian history.

The 1st
and 11th
dynasties.

As each of the kings of the 1st dynasty died he was buried here at Thinis, which was now a city of some size. Of King Zet, the third Pharaoh¹ of the dynasty, part of a slate-stone bowl has been found in the town; while many other objects undoubtedly dating from this period have come to light. Two large fortresses were now erected in the desert, and here the troops of the province were quartered. In the 11th dynasty, Kings Khasekhemui and Perabsen resided at Thinis, and clay sealings bearing their names have been found in the fortress, known as the Shunet es Zebib, and in the town. The Pharaohs of this dynasty were still buried here with their ancestors, although they had now come to regard Memphis as their home.

¹ The word *Pharaoh* was the title of the Egyptian kings, just as *Mikado* is the title of the Japanese emperors, or *Khedive* that of the modern rulers of Egypt.

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In the IIIrd dynasty the custom of burying the Pharaohs here ceased, though the place had now gained such fame as a royal necropolis that it had become the chief seat of the priesthood of the dead. With the primitive god Wepwat, the god Khentamenta, "the Chieftain¹ of the Underworld," was now worshipped; and in the IVth dynasty a temple of some size was erected in their honour. Here King Khufu left a small ivory statuette of himself, which was recently found; while of King Menkaura a sealing has been unearthed.

The IIIrd
and IVth
dynasties.

In Lower Egypt, and especially at Memphis at this time, the god Osiris was held in high honour, and traditions seem to have been already in circulation, relating how this deity once ruled as king of Egypt, and taught the arts of civilisation to his subjects. The first king of Egypt was naturally the greatest of the inhabitants of the Underworld, and thus he came to be identified with Khentamenta of Thinis. Tradition stated that Osiris had been murdered, and that his body had been torn into many fragments; and since at Thinis the early and now half-forgotten kings of Egypt had been buried, and the city had become famous for its necropolis, it is not surprising that gradually there grew up the belief that the mutilated body of Osiris himself had been interred here. This god now took his place beside Wepwat and Khentamenta in the affections of the people of Thinis. Great honour was paid, in consequence, to the tombs of the archaic kings, for one of them sheltered the body of Osiris; and soon the tomb of King Zer of the Ist dynasty came to be regarded as the actual divine sepulchre, for what reason we do not know. Meanwhile, however, other cities were also making claim to the possession of the body of Osiris; and although this fact never wholly banished the belief of the Thinites that the corpse of their god lay here, it became more generally acknowledged that the *head* only of Osiris was buried in this necropolis. One now begins to hear of another deity also, Anhur, who seems to have been one of the early gods of Thinis; but as yet his power does not seem to have been great.

The god
Osiris.

In the Vth dynasty the head of Osiris came to be the recognised emblem of the district, and while the site of the old city retained its name of Thinis, the neighbourhood was now known as *Abdu*, "The Mound of the Osiris-head Emblem." This word *Abdu*, or per-

The Vth
and VIth
dynasties.

¹ Literally, "First of the West," the Underworld being in the western hills.

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haps *Abidu*, was altered in Greek times to Abydos, in memory of the Abydos in Greece. The province, however, was still named after Thinis. The name of King Userkaf of the Vth dynasty was found on a sealing in the town : of Neferarkara, another king of this dynasty, a decree has been found allowing the priests to be exempt from forced labour ; there is a sealing inscribed with the name of King Shepseskaf ; an alabaster vase bearing the name of Userenra was also discovered ; while of about this date there is an inscription referring to a " Prince of Abdu," which is the earliest instance of the use of this name. A decree dating from the reign of Teta of the VIth dynasty was found here ; King Pepy Ist seems to have built a temple on the site of the early shrine of Wepwat ; King Merenra restored or added to this temple ; and of Pepy IInd an inscribed vase has been unearthed, and a statue is referred to in an inscription. Nothing is heard of Thinis or Abydos during the obscure period of the VIIth–Xth dynasties ; but in the XIth dynasty we find the kings carrying on extensive building operations here. A king of Thebes, named Nubkheperra Antef, states that he extended his dominions as far north as the northern frontier of the Thinite nome, conquering the troops of a Lower Egyptian king with whom he was contesting the Egyptian throne. This King Antef undertook large building works here, dedicating them to Anhur, Lord of Thinis, and also left a stele in the temple. King Sankhkara Mentuhotep built or repaired a temple ; and King Nebharpetra Mentuhotep also built here. Senusert Ist of the XIIth dynasty swept away a large part of the early temple, and erected a much larger edifice in its place. The work was carried out by a certain Mentuhotep, who says, " I conducted the work in the temple, I built the god's house, dug the sacred lake, and built the well." He also built the sacred barge of the god, erected altars adorned with lapis lazuli, bronze, electrum, silver, and copper, and made ornaments of malachite and costly stone. This temple seems to have been dedicated either to Osiris of Abydos or to Anhur, who had now become a deity of much importance in Thinis ; for elsewhere one reads that Senusert Ist erected temples to these two gods, and placed therein costly gold, silver, copper, and bronze utensils. During this reign also we read of an official who visited Abydos on his way to collect recruits for the army in the oasis of El Khârgah, to which a good road runs from Abydos.

The XIth
and XIIth
dynasties.

Senusert
IIIrd.

Under the great King Senusert IIIrd extensive works were carried on at Abydos. This king, desiring to be buried beside the

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archaic kings of Egypt and their chief Osiris, and yet feeling it incumbent upon him to erect a pyramid at Memphis, resolved to be interred at both places. He therefore constructed a huge rock-cut tomb for himself at Abydos, and here it is probable that he was buried for a short space of time, his body afterwards being removed to his northern pyramid. The officials whom he sent to superintend the temple works have left some records of themselves. We read of one who erected a statue of the king. Another tells us how he was sent to adorn the secret place of Osiris with gold obtained in the king's Nubian wars. A portable shrine of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, *carob*-wood, *meru*-wood, and other costly materials was made; and the official in charge states that he also decked the statue of Osiris with electrum, malachite, lapis lazuli, and every precious stone.

At this time the god Osiris had become the chief deity of Abydos, and the ceremonies in connection with his worship were of an elaborate nature. In the reign of Senusert IIIrd we read of a kind of religious drama which was here enacted, and which purposed to relate the story of the conflict between Osiris and his enemies. The first ceremony was "The Going Forth of Wepwat when he proceeds to Champion his Father"; and the priests then repelled the attacks of the enemies upon the sacred barque. Then came the feast called "The Great Going Forth," when the sacred barque was carried to the supposed tomb of Osiris in the western desert. Here a mimic battle was fought, and very possibly "the slaying of the enemies" was represented by actual human sacrifices. The sacred barque was then carried around the upper desert, was conveyed to the east bank of the river, and finally was brought back to the temple. The official in charge of this ceremony then tells us how he followed the statue of the god into his house, "to tend him when he resumed his seat." In this drama we catch a glimpse of the prehistoric history of Egypt, for in the partisans of Osiris one must see an early conquering tribe who defeated the aboriginal races. In the temples of Hieraconpolis (Kôm el Ahmar) and Edfu one again meets with traces of this tradition, which will be discussed in their correct place.

King Amenemhat IIIrd of the XIIth dynasty sent an official to Abydos to assist at some such festival as the above, and this personage also conducted work on the sacred barge, "fashioning its colours"; and, by virtue of his office as Master of Secret Things, he clothed the statue of the god with its ceremonial robes. In the XIIIth dynasty Sebekhotep IIIrd built onto the temple of

The wor-
ship of
Osiris.

The XIIth
and XIIIth
dynasties.

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Osiris, and also restored the tomb of Senusert IIIrd. In the second year of Neferhotep the king states that, finding Abydos in ruins, he searched in the library of Heliopolis, and there found documents relating to the Osiris temple, from which he was able to reconstruct the ceremonies and re-establish the priesthood of Abydos. When his orders had been carried out he visited Abydos in state, sailing up the canal which connected the town with the Nile. In his fourth year he issued a decree regulating the boundaries of the necropolis, and ordering all trespassers to be branded. The name Abdu or Abydos seems now to have become the general name for the double city of Thinis and Abydos, though in speaking particularly of one or the other part of the city their individual names were used. King Sebekemsaf built onto the temple; an otherwise unknown sovereign named Penthen left his name here; and under King Khenzer¹ a certain Amenysenb cleansed the temple of Senusert Ist, renewed the painting of the reliefs and inscriptions, and rebuilt the altars of the god with cedar-wood.

The XVIIIth dynasty.

Aahmes Ist, the first king of the XVIIIth dynasty, restored the ruined temples of Abydos, and also erected a pyramid here for himself, in order that he might be buried temporarily beside his ancestors before being interred in Thebes. He also constructed a mortuary chapel near this pyramid for his grandmother Tetashera. The next king, Amenhotep Ist, built a temple in honour of his father Aahmes. Thothmes Ist, the succeeding Pharaoh, ordered a barque to be built for Osiris, made of cedar, the bow and stern being of electrum. A portable barque was also made, being decorated with gold, silver, black copper, lapis lazuli, and other precious stones; and he ordered statues to be erected, their standards being of electrum. He further presented the temple with offering tables, sistrums, necklaces, censers, and dishes. The name of Thothmes IInd is found in the temple together with that of Thothmes IIIrd.

Thothmes IIIrd.

This latter king took much interest in Abydos, and built largely onto the ancient temples, setting up also the statues of Senusert IIIrd, his ancestor. The high priest of Osiris at this time, named Nebuana, states that he conducted many works in the temple of Osiris, using gold, silver, malachite, lapis lazuli, and "every splendid and costly stone" in the decorations. "I was summoned," he writes, speaking of himself, "to the god's golden house, and my place was amongst his princes. My feet strode in

¹ Sometimes called Nezerra.

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the splendid place ; I was anointed with the finest ointment ; and a wreath was around my throat." The yearly tax which had to be paid into the treasury at this time by the four chief officials of Abydos consisted of three *debens*¹ of gold, a quantity of linen, honey, and grain, and some oxen. The tax of Thinis was six debens of gold and half a deben of silver, together with bread, grain, honey, and cattle in vastly larger quantities than those demanded from Abydos. For example, 62 sacks of grain were asked of Thinis and only 3 sacks of Abydos ; 17 head of cattle were asked of Thinis and about 4 or 5 of Abydos ; while 20 sacks of unknown contents were demanded from Thinis and none from Abydos. Thus it is seen that still in the XVIIIth dynasty the city of Thinis was very wealthy, and was the actual, as well as the nominal, capital of the province. In this reign we read of a prince of this Thinite province, named Antef, who controlled the entire oasis region of the western desert ; and the products of these oases must have been a source of considerable wealth. At this period, then, we are to imagine the administration of the province as being conducted from within the walls of the enclosed city of Thinis, at the north-west end of the modern village ; and here we may picture the rich temples rising amidst the houses, their altars blazing with gold, and their halls ringing with the noise of sistrums and the sound of the chants of Osiris. To the south of this enclosure, and possessing the tombs of the archaic kings in the desert, was the city of Abdu or Abydos, and perhaps it already was enriched with temples dedicated to Osiris and Khentamenta, besides those dedicated to these gods within the enclosure of Thinis. Another deity had now been joined to the company of gods worshipped in Thinis and Abydos. This was Unnefer, who was identified with Osiris, and who afterwards came to be one of the greatest gods of Egypt.

King Thothmes IVth appears to have taken great interest in Abydos. He presented 1200 *stat* of land to the temple, and regulated the supply of cattle, poultry, &c., for its altars. He also made endowments for the tomb of Aahmes Ist. Amenhotep IIIrd erected a large temple in Thinis ; but this was abandoned during the heretical period which followed on the death of this king. Of Akhnaton a scarab was found in the town.

The end
of the
XVIIIth
dynasty.

King Rameses Ist of the XIXth dynasty, and King Sety Ist restored some of the buildings within the Thinis enclosure ; but the energies of the latter were mainly given to the erection of his

The XIXth
dynasty.

¹ A *deben* of gold weighed about 100 grammes.

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splendid temple in Abydos proper, dedicated to Osiris, Isis, and Horus, and also to other gods not closely connected with the district. It is this temple which forms the main objective of the modern visits to Abydos, and it may be said to be perhaps the most beautiful temple in Egypt. Here the mysteries of Osiris were performed, and the souls of the dead kings were worshipped. Rameses IInd built another temple near that of Sety Ist, and he also restored some of the ancient buildings. His activity here was due to the fact that when he visited Abydos in his first year, he had found the funds of his father's temple misappropriated, and parts of it still unfinished. With the assistance of his vizir, Parahotep, and the high priest of Osiris, named Unnefer, he soon placed matters here upon a sound basis; and during his reign Abydos may be said to have reached the height of its power and wealth. The high priest Unnefer was a personage of great importance at Abydos, and came of a family of high sacerdotal dignitaries. His father was high priest of Osiris before him; his step-father and half-brother were in turn high priest of Anhur, at Thinis; while his grandfather seems to have been a high priest of Amen. Numerous statues and steles inscribed with his name have been found at Abydos, where he seems to have ruled in undisputed power. A certain interest attaches to his half-brother, who was named Minmes; for, besides the office of high priest of Anhur here, he held the position of chief ritual-priest, or in other words chief magician, of the king. As Rameses IInd is generally regarded as the Pharaoh of the oppression, this chief magician will be a personage of some interest to Biblical students.

The wor-
ship of
Osiris.

At the back of the temple of Sety Ist, King Merenptah constructed some underground chambers, in the darkness of which the mysteries of Osiris were performed; and perhaps human sacrifices were here made. By this time Osiris had become one of the most important deities of Egypt, and Abydos was regarded as the chief seat of his worship. We now hear little more of the primitive god Wepwat; and the other deities, Khentamenta and Unnefer, are at this time merely names of Osiris. The traditions relating to him have so far developed that his enemies are now designated as the worshippers of the god Set; his wife is the goddess Isis; and his son, who avenged his murder, is the god Horus. The power of Osiris covered a wide province in the religion of Egypt. He was a sun-god, a moon-god, a god of vegetation, a god of the Nile, and, above all, the great god of the Dead and of the Underworld. Every person who died in the

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faith, so to speak, was identified with Osiris; and one spoke of "Osiris" So-and-so in the same way that nowadays we would use the words "the late."

The Chancellor Bey, on behalf of King Septab of the XXth dynasty, left his name at Abydos. King Rameses IIIrd built a temple in Thinis for the god Anhur, and seems to have erected a palace for himself in or near it. He speaks of having built a large enclosing wall also, with ramps and towers, and with doors of cedar fitted onto doorways of stone. This is perhaps the great wall which still rises to a great height around the ruins of Thinis. Rameses IVth added to this temple; and he also erected a stele on which is inscribed a prayer to Osiris that he may grant a long reign to the king. Another Pharaoh of the name of Rameses, sometimes called Rameses VIIth, also erected a stele here, praying in very humble terms, and in beautiful language, that his life may be spared—a prayer, however, which was of no avail. King Paynezem IInd of the XXIst dynasty is stated to have sent a statue of a great Libyan chieftain named Namlot to be erected at Abydos.

The XXth and XXIst dynasties.

Inscriptions of Kings Takeloth Ist and IInd have been found in the Thinite enclosure. During the reign of Taharka the vizir Menthuembat visited the royal tombs at Abydos, and inscribed his name on the rocks near by. King Haabra of the XXVth dynasty undertook some building works here, as did his successor Aahmes IInd. The latter king sent an official named Pefnefdeneit to superintend the work, and this personage records that he restored the ruins of earlier temples, re-established the priestly revenues, planted arbours of date palms, and made vineyards. These vineyards he supplied with foreign slaves, and they then yielded 30 *hin* of wine per day. He confiscated the property of the local prince, who apparently had been held responsible for the disorder which obtained; and he applied this income to meet the burial dues of the necropolis, in order that all persons might be freely interred in the holy ground. He also states that he arranged and conducted a performance of the Osiris drama, which has been mentioned above. Kings Nectanebo Ist and IInd also turned their attention to Abydos, and the former Pharaoh erected a temple of some size.

The XXIInd to XXXth dynasties.

The Ptolemies do not seem to have given much attention to Abydos, and the Romans also omitted to build here. This must have been due to the decline of the power of Osiris at Abydos, or rather to the change of the seat of his worship to Philæ. Very

The later period.

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little more is heard of the once wealthy city. The temples fell into ruins, and the unchecked town rose over them. The graves in the necropolis were looted for the gold which they contained, and the once holy tombs of the archaic kings were given over to the thieves. Even the god Osiris, who in Ptolemaic times had become the hero of many complicated legends, gradually lost favour in late Roman days, and finally became a demon of minor but hostile power.

THE TEMPLE OF SETY IST

When Sety Ist, the second king of a new dynasty, came to the throne, he must have realised that he could offer no better proof of the legitimacy of his descent from the ancient Pharaohs of Egypt than by displaying an active regard for their souls' welfare. In building this temple at Abydos, dedicated to the main gods of Egypt, and especially to Osiris, he caused the worship and ceremonies to centre around the paramount fact of his descent from the archaic kings, and of these kings' collective identity with Osiris. Sety Ist selected a stretch of desert land behind the town of Abydos for the site of his temple, about a mile east of the city of Thinis. If the reader will look at the plan of the building he will see that, unlike all other Egyptian temples, this building has a wing or annex on its east side; and all those who have studied the building have come to the conclusion that the chambers forming this wing were originally intended to be built onto the south end of the axial line, but that for some unknown reason they were finally placed at the side. Mariette stated that the builders had struck rock at this point, and had had to extend their work eastward to avoid it; but recent excavations behind the temple have shown that there is no such rock here, and indeed there is none within a mile of the spot. These recent excavations have disclosed a number of subterranean chambers and passages built at a later date in more or less the axial line, and these are evidently the buildings referred to by Strabo, who states that they led down to a spring which, rising here in the sand, discharged itself into a small channel, and so finally joined the Nile. The reason, then, for the turning aside of the back rooms of the temple is surely obvious: the builders found that they were approaching moist, unstable sand, upon which the