



Conservation of the Funerary Enclosure of Khasekhemwy, Abydos, a USAID Grant to ARCE

SITE LOCATION: The site of Abydos is located beside the village of al-Araba al-Madfunah, 10 kilometers west of Baliana (half way between Sohag and Nag Hammadi). A paved road leads to the huge temple of Seti I, which is the site's main tourist attraction, from Seti I, a one kilometer dirt track leads to the project site in Shonat al-Zibib (the track is well paved).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: Abydos is one of the most important archaeological sites in Egypt. It was a royal necropolis in the early Egyptian kingdom, and other periods of Ancient Egyptian history, and as a result, the vast site includes many important monuments from different periods. The Egyptian Antiquities Program (EAP), a USAID grant to the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE), has funded the conservation of one of the site monuments, the funerary enclosure of Khasekhemwy, the last king of the 2nd dynasty, who died ca. 2686 BC. The enclosure is known as Shonat al-Zibib "Raisin Store". It is the world's earliest surviving free-standing masonry building, its massive mud brick walls are still standing more than ten meters high. The importance of this funerary enclosure lies partially in the fact that it has many features in common with the funerary complex of Saqqara.

THE EAP CONSERVATION PROJECT IN ABYDOS: The EAP Conservation project in Abydos was conducted by the Pennsylvania – Yale – Institute of Fine Arts, NYU expedition to Abydos lead by Prof. David O'Connor, and Matthew Adams. The EAP intervention lasted from 1999 to 2006 with a budget of LE 1.33 million. The purpose of the project was basically to address some of the structural issues of the monument. Before the EAP project, the monument was damaged by wind erosion occasional rains, animal activity, some sections of the walls had collapsed, and there was a very serious danger that further substantial sections of walls will collapse.

After emergency stabilization with sandbag buttresses, damaged areas in the walls were filled in with newly produced mud bricks with the same properties as the ancient ones. A minimum amount of new mud bricks were used to restore the building's structural stability (without jeopardizing its historical integrity). The work was backed by extensive studies and documentary recording. As a result of this work, a unique monument has been protected and preserved for the next generations. The conservation work has also resulted in closing the breaches in the walls of the temple and restored the enclosed space inside the temple, which greatly enhanced the experience of the visitors.

CURRENT STATUS OF RESTORATION ACTIVITIES: The ARCE/EAP's USAID-funded project has been completed. The final report is being prepared. The Expedition continues excavations on site and intends to continue conservation of the Shonat al-Zibib with other funding. In its early seasons, the project also included work on the world's oldest built boats excavated next to the enclosure. The project directors then decided to focus all efforts on the Shonat, because of its vulnerability and the urgency of structural stabilization. The excavation and conservation of the boats will occur at some time in the future.