The origins of sacredness at Abydos
Matthew D Adams, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University
Fieldwork in recent years has shed substantial new light on how Egypt’s early kings used the dramatic desert landscape of north Abydos as an arena for royal display and performance. The same kings of Dynasties 1 and 2 who built tombs for themselves at Umm el-Qa’ab built corresponding highly visible monumental walled ritual precincts on the northern desert terrace overlooking the ancient town. Although the later reinterpretation of the area of the royal tombs has received considerable scholarly attention, I would argue that the singular use of the desert landscape of north Abydos by these early kings and the material remains left embedded in it also represent fundamental aspects of the phenomena that imbued the site with a unique significance in Egyptian culture, one that came to be expressed through both applied mythic meaning and later ritual practice.

Visibility and invisibility in the landscape of Abydos: a case study in the effect of Early Dynastic monuments on the later use of sacred space
Laurel Bestock, Brown University
It is well accepted that the ritual and built landscape of Abydos was conditioned by the presence and reinterpretation of Early Dynastic royal monuments, both the tombs at Umm el-Qa’ab and the funerary enclosures in the North Cemetery. An important factor in determining how later people interacted with these structures, from immediately after their construction to millennia on, must be the degree to which they were visible features of the landscape. Points for consideration in this regard include the apparent deliberate destruction of the funerary enclosures very early in their history, and the distance from the settlement site of the tombs. A recently discovered funerary enclosure, probably the earliest yet known, has been uncovered in an area of the North Cemetery that also includes extensive evidence of use from the First Intermediate Period through the Late Roman Period. Destroyed to its lowest courses, as all the First Dynasty funerary enclosures were, there is nonetheless reason to ask if and how the memory of this effectively invisible monument affected later decisions about sacred space in the North Cemetery. This talk will examine the dense palimpsest of usage over a 4,000-year span in a very small area from the perspectives of visibility, invisibility, and the selective reverence for earlier monuments shown by later users of the site.

Umm el-Qa’ab and the sacred landscape of Abydos: new perspectives based on the votive pottery for Osiris
Julia Budka, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
The landscape of Abydos took active part in forming the importance of the site as burial place of the god Osiris. Material evidence for the sacredness of the landscape can be found in numerous pottery vessels deposited at Umm el-Qa’ab and other places connected with rituals and festive processions. Since 2007, the large corpus of ceramics associated with the cult of Osiris at Umm el-Qa’ab is being studied within a research project of the German Archaeological Institute Cairo. The pottery attests to cultic activities from the late Old Kingdom throughout all ages until Ptolemaic, Roman and Coptic times. According to the ceramics, one of the heydays of the cult for Osiris at Umm el-Qa’ab is clearly the 25th Dynasty. Recent fieldwork resulted in a considerable increase in understanding the nature, date, size and variability of in situ pottery deposits in the surroundings of the tomb of Djer/Osiris dateable to the 25th Dynasty. The large deposit O-NNO allows for the first time to specify the contemporaneous use of large votive vessels and the well-known offering cups, the so-called qaabs. The ritual framework for the cult of Osiris will be discussed, including references to textual sources,
architectural remains and the sacred landscape of Abydos.

Burial and commemoration at South Abydos in the Middle and New Kingdoms
Kevin M Cahail, University of Pennsylvania
The site of South Abydos was a bustling hub of activity from the late Middle Kingdom, until the New Kingdom. Housing the mortuary complex of Senwosret III, two tombs possibly belonging to the mid-13th Dynasty kings Neferhotep I and Sobekhotep IV, the necropolis of the so-called Abydos Dynasty, and the sprawling funerary establishment of Ahmose, South Abydos represents an important nexus of royal activity. Yet a number of questions still remain. How did non-royal citizens interact with the royal monuments at South Abydos? How and where did these people bury their dead? How did the non-royal citizens of South Abydos memorialise their loved ones after they were gone? As part of ongoing excavations at South Abydos, we have begun to examine these and other questions. Recent fieldwork and study have uncovered indications of domestic funerary cult practices of the late Middle Kingdom within the town of Wah-sut, yet the tombs of these individuals still remain unidentified. What connections are there, if any, between South and North Abydos during the late Middle Kingdom? For the New Kingdom, we have uncovered a previously unexplored cemetery, dating to the early to mid-19th Dynasty. Though most of the tombs have been heavily robbed in antiquity, there is an amazing wealth of evidence for a thriving population centred at South Abydos during the New Kingdom. One of the tombs in this cemetery, TC20, may belong to relatives of the High Priest of Osiris Wenennefer, who was also active in the continuing mortuary cult of Ahmose. This paper will outline the problems and questions surrounding non-royal mortuary and commemorative practices at South Abydos during the late Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom. It will examine new discoveries in greater detail, and attempt to view the landscape of South Abydos from the point of view of its non-royal inhabitants.

First look at a new temple: the Mahat of Nebhepetre at Abydos
Ayman Mohamed Damarany, Ministry of Antiquities, Abydos inspectorate
Today the site of Abydos is visually dominated by the temples of Seti I and Ramesses II, which stand on the desert edge, one km local south of the temple precinct of Osiris at Kom el-Sultan. Archaeologists have long recognised that these two 19th Dynasty temples belong to a once-densely developed area of royal commemorative buildings that extended along the desert margin southwards from the main Osiris temple. However, the presence of the modern towns of el-Arabah al-Madfuna and Beni Mansour has prevented systematic work to investigate these largely unexplored temple ruins. During the summer of 2014 a unique opportunity arose for investigation of a select area beneath the town of el-Arabah. As part of investigating looting attempts in the town, I ask the Ministry of State for Antiquities to give permission for a salvage excavation in an area of the town midway between the Seti and Ramesses II temples. The talk will discuss the surprising discovery of well-preserved standing ruins of a limestone cult building of the 11th Dynasty king Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II.

The Tell-Tale Heart: a Ramesside ritual book from Umm el-Qa‘ab
Andreas Effland, Academy of Sciences and Humanities Göttingen
Excavations at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, as well as recent more scientific investigations by the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), have yielded dozens of fragments of very specific, inscribed pottery sherds. They belong to a small corpus of characteristic heart-shaped vessels. A number of such fragments, often joining recently found material, and even some complete vessels are nowadays to be found in museums and private collections in Egypt, Belgium, Britain, the USA, France and Germany. The vessels were dedicated by the Thinite high priest and the vizier and used during regenerative rituals in the direct vicinity of Osiris’ resting place. They finally came to rest as votive objects in the god’s tomb. A total of 14 vessels yielded a long hieroglyphic text as part for a ritual book. The text was composed during the reign of Ramesses II, when the interest in Umm el-Qa‘ab and the Osiris-tomb flourished. It is outlined as a speech by the king himself, as he entered upon his rule, probably to announce his accession to the throne to the oldest royal ancestors at Abydos. In spite of the fragmentary state of preservation of the text, it contains precious information on the ceremonies conducted at the Osirian sacred site during the regenerative rituals of the Khoiak Festival.
Offering cults in the Abydos Middle Cemetery
Christian Knoblauch, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna

The University of Michigan Abydos Middle Cemetery Project has excavated a wealth of data that sheds light on private offering cults from the late Old Kingdom to the end of the Middle Kingdom. The paper will present preliminary insights into the study of pottery assemblages resulting from the performance of such cults and examine how the data may be used to reconstruct rituals which are otherwise principally known from their architectural setting and textual sources. Key questions that the paper will address are whether the performance of offering cults changed over time, and if so, in what ways? The paper also considers how we might understand these changes in the light of social and religious processes at a local and supra-regional level.

Abydos in the 26th Dynasty: local elite and royal court
Leahy Anthony, University of Birmingham

In the early 7th century BC, Abydos lay firmly within the area of Egypt controlled by the Kushite 25th Dynasty. Its continuing prestige as the Upper Egyptian cult centre of Osiris was recognised by the interment there of members of the royal family and other elite individuals. In 671 BC, a local ruler, Nesparedu, was recognised as vassal by the Assyrian Esarhaddon, a vigorous opponent of the Kushite line. In 664 BC, Psammetichus I began the process of reunification under the 26th Dynasty that led to the expulsion of the Kushite kings and the accession of his daughter Nitocris as God’s Wife of Amun by 638 BC at latest. This paper examines the impact on Abydos of that process and of the challenges and opportunities offered by the advent of a new, Delta-based dynasty. It does so through the history of leading families as reconstructed from their monuments and the traces of the kings in the archaeological record of Abydos.

Royal builders and craftsmen at Abydos: on travelling artists of Dynasty 12
Marcel Marée, British Museum

Today almost nothing remains of the great Osiris temple in Abydos, save for its vast mud-brick enclosure. Isolated finds, yielded by early excavations and now scattered among museums around the world, offer the sparsest glimpses of many centuries of construction work. This is certainly true for the Middle Kingdom, on which this paper focuses. Yet rather than concentrating on the scant archaeology of the precinct itself, we do well in broadening our enquiry. Important clues about the temple’s development are contained in countless private monuments from the nearby necropolis – most notably those erected on the ‘Terrace of the Great God’, a section that bordered directly on the temple. Great numbers of stelae, statues and offering tables hold unsuspected clues on who contributed to the temple’s splendour, as well as when, how and why. These clues are teased out by a holistic approach, not only concerned with autobiographical references and prosopographical data but, most importantly, with artistic data linked to specific artists and workshops. Indeed a good number of private monuments document officials and craftsmen who were directly involved in the temple’s development and maintenance – many more than has been recognised thus far. The majority of these people were temporary visitors sent south by the central government, where they worked for the king but also benefited from the same craft resources. The line of research that yields these data will be detailed and illustrated with a choice of striking results.

Patterns of material assemblage in the Late Middle Kingdom: the burial equipment from the tomb G62 at Abydos
Gianluca Miniacci, École Pratique des Hautes Études – Paris and UCL

An astonishing ensemble of objects, including several pairs of ivory wands, a bronze mirror, a wooden fish, a silver torque, gold and silver rings, alabaster vessels, a copper bowl, various amulets, and many stone and faience beads (31 objects in all) were discovered in tomb G62 at Abydos. The funerary equipment also contained six unusual faience figurines (a pregnant female dwarf, an antelope, two hybrid creatures representing Aha and Ipy, two vessel models). The tomb, now unknown to scholars, was excavated by Petrie in 1902. Unfortunately, the available information on its discovery is scarce and all that is known is that its objects were assigned to the British Museum (EA 37286–37320), and noted as coming from a single burial assemblage. The grave goods seem to be confined to a narrow time lapse; the late Middle Kingdom, according to a similar discovery made in 1906–1909 by Garstang in tomb 416 at Abydos. The paper aims to present the assemblage of tomb G62 as an example of late Middle Kingdom burial practices.
A history of millennia: the configuration of a cultic landscape around the tomb of King Den
Vera Müller, OREA-Institute, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna
It is a well-known fact that Umm el-Qa’ab was one of the focal points of the Osiris cult at Abydos. But why have the tombs of the first historical known kings been arranged in this specific way in the first place? When looking at the arrangement of the royal chambers together with their subsidiary tombs, the proximity of these structures to each other is somewhat puzzling. Have there been obvious reasons for this setting or are they still hidden for us? Were parts of the tombs used for cultic activities after the burials and if so, where could these have taken place? Is it a matter of sheer coincidence that the huge area to the south of Djer’s tomb and to the east of Den’s burial ground delivered so many and diverse depositions from the Osiris cult or was there a certain reason for it? These and some other questions shall be addressed in this paper.

At the gate of the ancestors: saint cults and the politics of the past at Abydos
Janet Richards, University of Michigan, USA
The assignment of enhanced status and supernatural power to certain individuals as mediators between other humans and the divine was, and is, a practice spanning the globe. Made more powerful by context, saints are touchstones of place-bound memory for local populations; they and their shrines can also be powerfully mobilised as sources of legitimation for national rulers, often through a rhetoric of ruins and restoration. In the Egyptian Nile Valley the genesis of such cults lay in the late third millennium BC, in the climate of political crisis, social transformation, and religious change that characterised the end of the Old Kingdom. Fieldwork in the Middle Cemetery at Abydos and collection research in the British Museum has led to the discovery of a previously unsuspected saint cult at Abydos honouring the 6th Dynasty official Idy. Initiated at Idy’s tomb before the First Intermediate Period, the complex attracted royal support during Intef III’s reign, materialised in the construction of a large adjacent cult hall. Dedications here persisted throughout the 12th and 13th Dynasties, and evidence indicates that memory of the ancestor Idy still resonated with local residents, centuries later in the 18th Dynasty. This lecture will explore the dimensions of the saint cult phenomenon as it played out at Abydos, contextualising Idy within the broader scope of activities and beliefs around Osiris in town, temple, and necropolis, within Senwosret III’s reconfiguration of the ceremonial map, and among the living people who actively inhabited these landscapes.

A view from the ridge: news from 1908
Steven Snape, University of Liverpool
This paper examines aspects of the form and function of m’h’t-chapels at Middle Kingdom Abydos, particularly concentrating on the evidence from John Garstang’s excavations in the North Cemetery.

Objects from Abydos in early 19th-century British collections: rediscovering ‘lost’ provenance and context
John Taylor, British Museum
The uncontrolled digging at Abydos in the years 1815–1835, driven mainly by the collecting activities of European diplomats, brought to light thousands of antiquities but caused immense damage to crucial parts of the site. The lack of accurate recording of the discoveries and the rapid dispersal of the objects to collections throughout the world has made it still harder to understand what was originally found. Museological studies, notably W K Simpson’s pioneering work on the offering chapels of the Middle Kingdom, have recovered important contextual information, and the scope of this type of research is now being extended, as archival material becomes more accessible and modern excavations rediscover the findspots of some significant object-groups. This paper focuses on objects which were discovered in the 1820s and which passed into the collections of the British consuls Henry Salt and John Barker, and their agent the dealer/entrepreneur Giovanni d’Athanasi. The collation of museum records, sale catalogues and the letters and journals of travellers has enabled objects from Abydos to be identified and associations between some of them to be re-established.

The Tomb of Osiris in Asyut
Zsuzsanna Végh, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
Apart from Abydos, there was another site where local inscriptions mention a tomb (maHa.t) of Osiris during the Middle Kingdom. In the city of Asyut, references to a tomb of Osiris dating to the early 12th Dynasty have been found. While the so-called Mysteries of Abydos are a well-researched topic, the rites relating to the Assyrian tomb of Osiris
have not attracted much attention. The aim of this paper is to analyse the written sources of the Osiris cult in Asyut in order to examine its nature and determine whether or not it is related to the Abydene cult. Furthermore, a possible reconstruction of its origins will be proposed which may contribute to a better understanding of the source of the Abydene Osiris festivals.

Monastic landscapes in Late Antique Abydos: the Temple of Seti I
Jennifer Westerfeld, University of Louisville
After its original construction in the 13th century BC, the mortuary temple of Seti I at Abydos went through multiple phases of reuse, many of which can be documented through the extensive corpus of epigraphic material from the site. The Coptic graffiti found in the temple were first brought to scholarly attention by Margaret Murray and Walter Crum in 1904; these inscriptions, the majority of which were written by or in the name of Christian monastic women, have frequently been used to argue for the existence of a women's monastery, or ‘nunnery’, at the site in Late Antiquity. However, closer examination of both the content and the archaeological context of the inscriptions suggests that the nuns did not, in fact, reside in the temple; rather, this paper will argue that they left their graffiti during the course of periodic visits to the site, perhaps carried out in conjunction with specific religious observances. The Coptic graffiti from the Seti Temple thus offer the opportunity to consider not only the role of the temple within the broader monastic landscapes of late antique Abydos, but also the potential value – and limitations – of epigraphic material in determining the monastic nature of a given site.

The slaughterhouse of the temple of Seti I at Abydos
Mohamed Abu el-Yazid, Ministry of Antiquities, Abydos inspectorate
Just as the temple of Seti I is regarded as one of the masterpieces of Egyptian art and architecture, so is its slaughterhouse typical for any other known pharaonic example. Scholars have identified it as a real slaughterhouse, mainly on the basis of the texts and scenes, but also its architecture and location can confirm this interpretation. The slaughterhouse is a rectangular complex consisting of a partially open-air court, with a columned portico, and one large and three smaller rooms leading into this court. The complex can be entered from outside by an entrance in its east wall whereas the connection with the main temple is created by a doorway in its north wall giving access to the corridor with the kings list. Seti’s architects located the slaughterhouse in the southeastern end of the south wing of the temple to form a semi-separate complex. Despite this complex being a slaughterhouse, this position and design is convenient to the sacred focus of the temple. A closer look at the architectural plan and elements reveal how ritual and practical considerations regarding hygienic slaughtering affected the design of the structure.

SCA activities in the Falcon Cemetery (Wadi Cemetery) at North Abydos
Mohamed Abu el-Yazid, Ministry of Antiquities, Abydos inspectorate
The so-called Wadi Cemetery is located in the depression or valley running from the cultivation or the first Osiris temple at Kom es Sultan to Umm el-Qa’ab thereby separating the Northern and Middle Cemeteries. The wadi was known as the route for religious processions and considered sacred to Upuaut. During excavations undertaken at the site in 2000/2001 and 2008, the SCA partially unearthed a Roman cemetery consisting of falcon mummies and human burials. About 60 large plain cylindrical pottery jars were discovered filled with neatly stacked mummies of falcons, covered with a lid made of ceramic or stone and sealed with mud. In a few cases, mummies of vultures were interred separately or among the falcons, and one jar was found to contain 14 small coffins with mummies of shrew mice accompanying the falcon mummies. In addition, stelae, coffins, amulets, small statue, faience and several kinds of ceramics were collected during the excavation.