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REPORT


BY

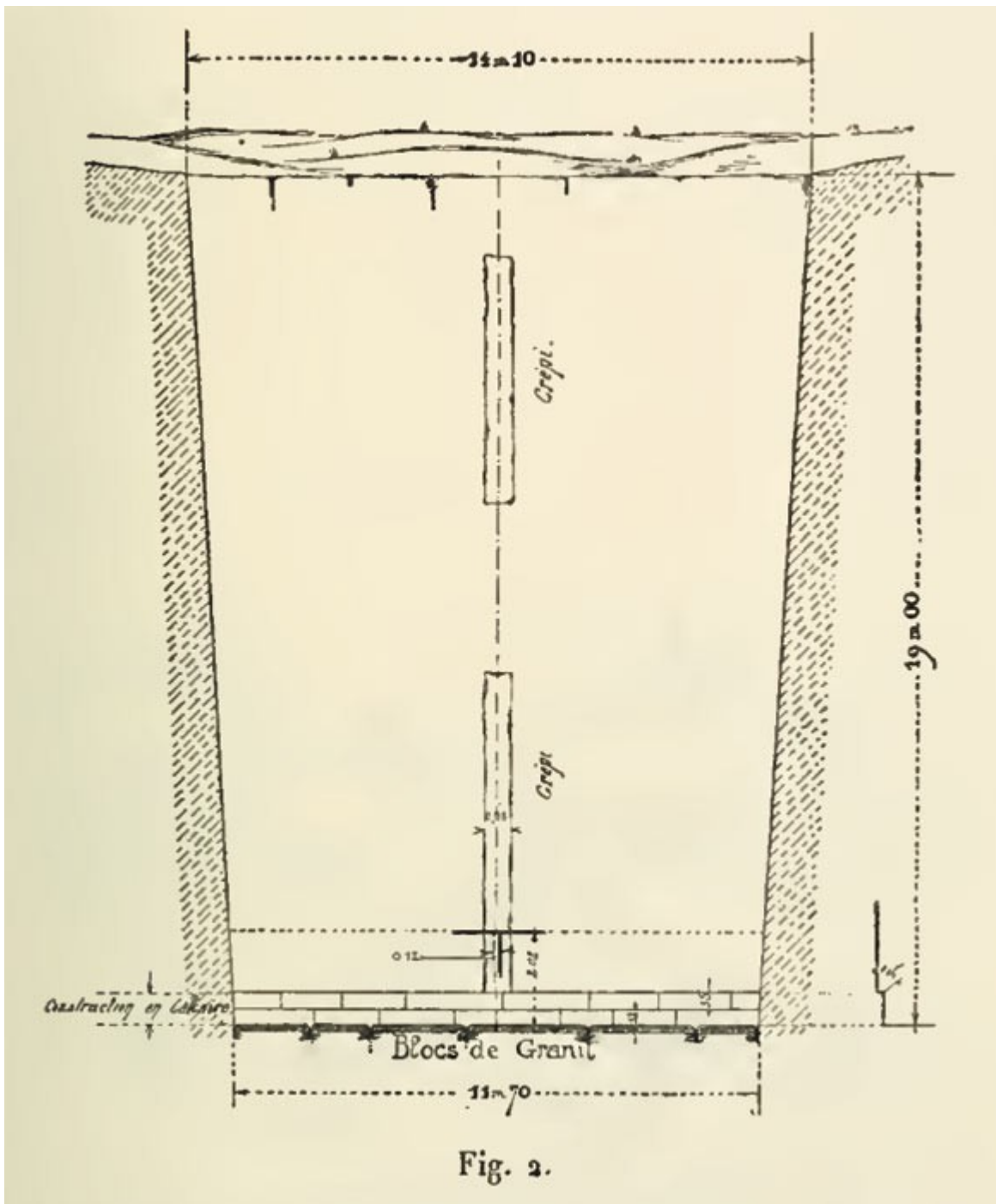
Mr. ALEXANDRE BARSANTI

On the 15th of May, 1900, discouraged by the negative results of the excavations I had just carried out in the pyramid of Zaouiet el-Aryan [See the report of these excavations, in the Annales du Service, 1901, part II, p. 92-94.], I returned to the pyramids of Ghizeh in the company of Ibrahim Fayed, but instead of following the road that runs at the edge of the desert, we went to the upper plateau, and at about a mile and a half to the north of the pyramid of Zaouiet, the foreman pointed out to me that the ground was sown everywhere with granite fragments. I immediately thought that they pointed to the site of a field where they had worked the blocks and movable objects destined for some great tomb, and that this tomb was to be hidden in the neighborhood. When I examined the place more carefully, I noticed that nearby was a large deposit of granite powder, such as was used to polish the hard stones used in the construction. Loede with these clues, I climbed up a hill next to look over the whole of the site, and suddenly I recognized, to the south of the hill, the remains of an immense rectangular building whose walls barely stuck out of the surrounding land. Large limestone blocks still remained in place, but most of the others lay scattered here and there amid clumps of limestone. It seemed that there were hundreds of pits not yet excavated, nevertheless, the idea came to me that the whole formed a unique monument, probably a great mastaba. So I carefully studied the layout of the grounds, and soon I perceived, in the center of the plateau, a small depression forming a basin, and a sort of trench running from north to south on the main axis of this pretended mastaba. I ended up convincing myself that I was in the presence of an unknown monument, large enough to make the ordinary excavators hesitate. As soon as I returned to the Museum, I submitted my discovery to you: you immediately appreciated its importance, and you promised me to begin work as soon as the resources of the budget permit. For the moment, you were only recommending me to conduct surveys in the field, to see if my conjecture was correct. On the following day, May 16, I took some fifty workmen under the supervision of the foreman Ibrahim

Fayed, and in two days time we found that the construction dated back to the ancient empire. Other superficial surveys gave us the precise location of the southeast corner of the great courtyard. Finally, to the north of the plateau, I discovered enormous heaps of marl stone, which came from galleries dug in the rock. Things remained for the time being, but attributing to Mr. Reisner the grounds which he demanded for excavations on behalf of the University of California, you took care to exclude this site.

It was only in the early days of March 1904 that you were able to follow up your plans for excavations. The foreman Ibrahim Fayed began by clearing under my supervision the area of the great court. By the beginning of May, the four corners were clear, and we could already form an exact idea of the immensity of our task: the southern wall of the enclosure is 28 meters long, and those of the east and the west, 14 meters each. Towards the north, at the foot of the hill, I found the remains of the huts inhabited by the ancient workmen; there are scarcely two or three rows of stones roughly mounted on each other. The foreman Ibrahim found inside one of the rooms a greenish

schist plate bearing the cartouche of King Didoufrâ , bronze scissors, a small cylinder loaded with unreadable characters, flint tools, fragments of earthenware jugs. In the northern wall of the enclosure, and closer to the east wall than to the west wall, a large corridor was opened, 8 meters and 50 centimeters wide, and 110 meters long (fig. 1), this is the channel itself, which I had noticed when I was up the hill four years ago. The excavation continued till the 20th of June, without giving any results other than those which I have just indicated: the foreman Ibrahim began the clearing of the central depression, but the mass of sand and debris which filled it, allowed us to go down only 10 meters deep.



Finally, six weeks after this discovery, on the 8th of December, a survey at the south-west angle revealed, at a depth of twenty-one meters, the existence of a pink granite block. The wall forms at this depth a sort of rocky outcropping overlaid with a layer of marl: the layer of marl had been allowed to remain, which would protect the hard rock in the event of a compaction of the soil, and the granite unit, of which we had uncovered the first stone, had been placed there. I immediately increased the work on this side, and in a few days we removed several other blocks of granite, which was connected to to the

first one, and one to another, with a very solid mortar. Their presence increased my ardor. The clearing became very difficult and sometimes even perilous. The Egyptians had filled up the pit by throwing down a number of limestone blocks, which were piled up to the height of 15 meters from the ceiling, and which together constitute about 4200 cubic meters of stone. (fig. 3)

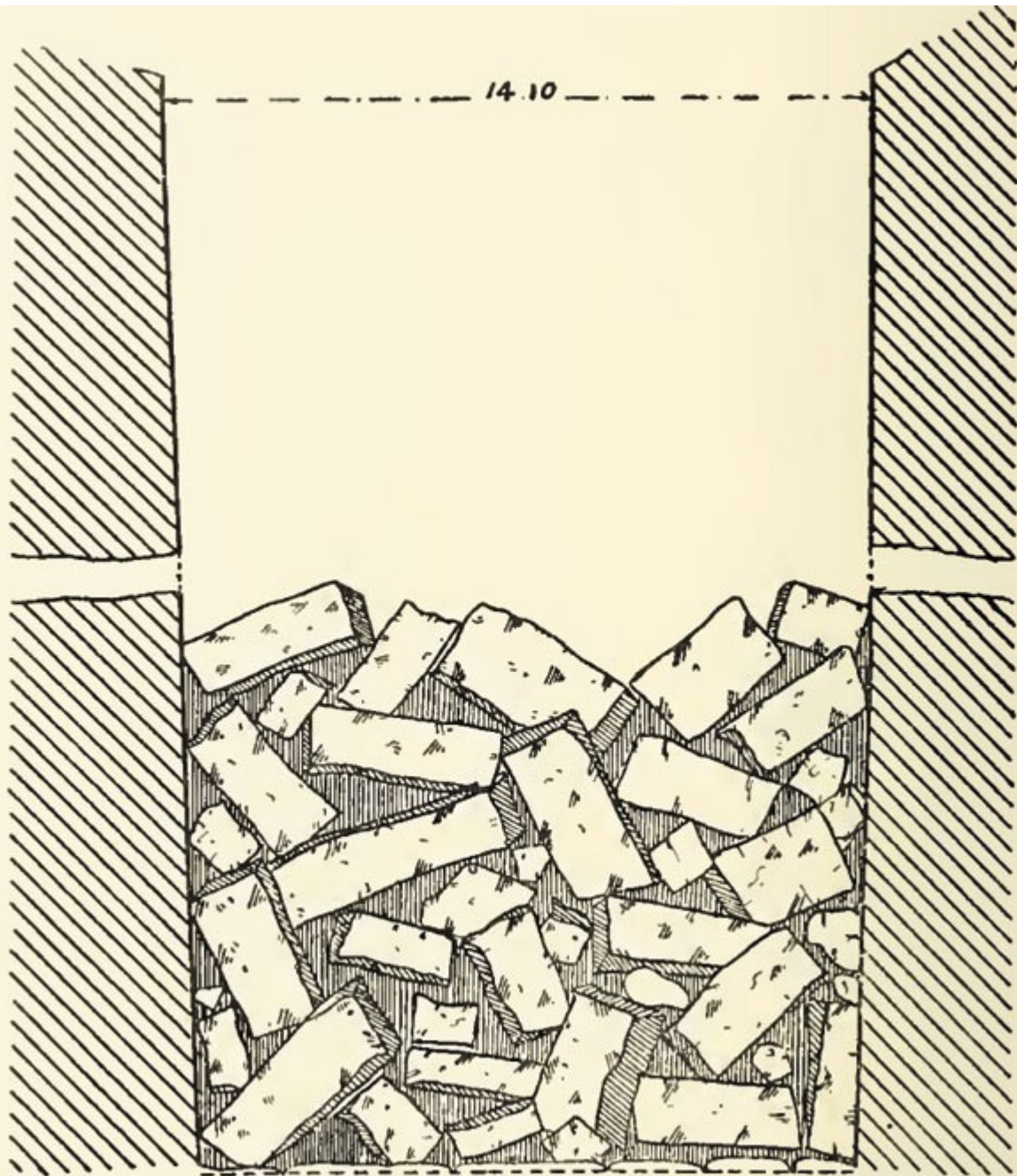


Fig. 3.

I had a strong crane (plate 1) built to remove them, but our workmen could

scarcely disengage them because they were stacked on top of each other.

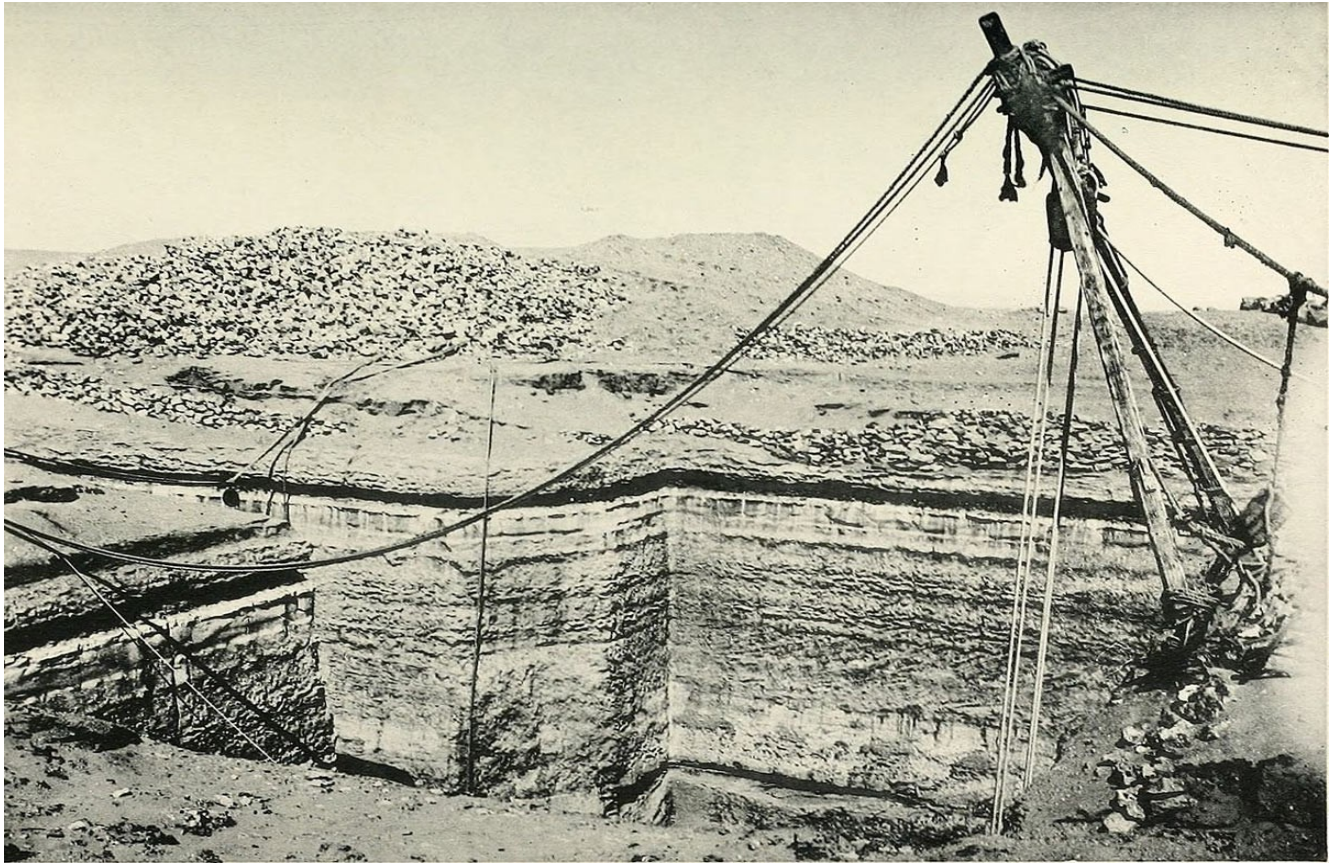
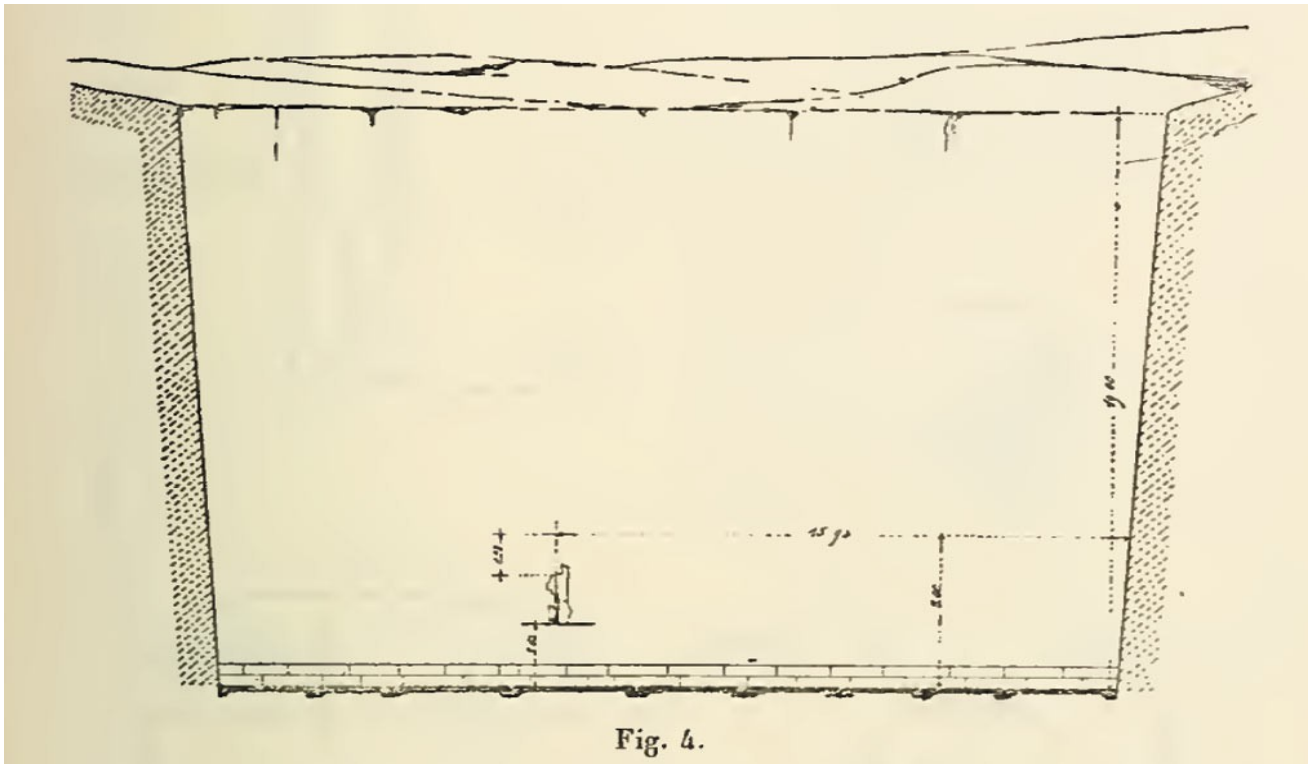


Plate I

Sometimes, they were of considerable dimensions, and some of them weighed three and four tons. As soon as they were level with the ground they were loaded on a Decauville truck, which carried them some distance to the south, in an improvised worksite where I had them arranged in file. I examined them minutely to see if they had a few inscriptions, and after a long perseverance my effort was rewarded. On the 15th of December, I read on two pieces of limestone, which were put together, a cartouche of a king painted in large characters, with a red color (see page 266, n° 1). [Perhaps, as I said in the introduction (page 257), it is the cartouche of King Nofirkari of the II dynasty, and the Ranabou of the documents previously discovered at Abydos and Sakkarah. - G. M.] Other inscriptions followed that I stored next to it and I reproduced them on the sixteen consecutive pages (see pp. 266-281). Descending below, I brought to light on the south wall, just opposite the median axis of the great north corridor, a vertical strip in white plaster, similar to that which was in the middle of the west wall and having a red line in the middle, like this one (Figure 4).



I continued with the removal of the blocks and embankments which filled the pit and the descending corridor, while at the same time causing the remains of the outer enclosure to be disengaged. I noticed that the wall was 2 meters and 10 centimeters wide, on average, and that it was built of stone along its entire length. The western part is built up against the top of the pit, on the summit of a slope, probably to prevent the rain falling on the neighboring mountains from invading the tomb. The distance from the wall to the pit is everywhere 120 meters. Apart from the geometrical data, nothing of

importance emerged from this accessory work.

At the beginning of February, 1905, we reached the bottom of the pit, and the clearing of the descending corridor (Plate II) was sufficiently advanced for us to reach the point where it leads to the bottom of the pit.

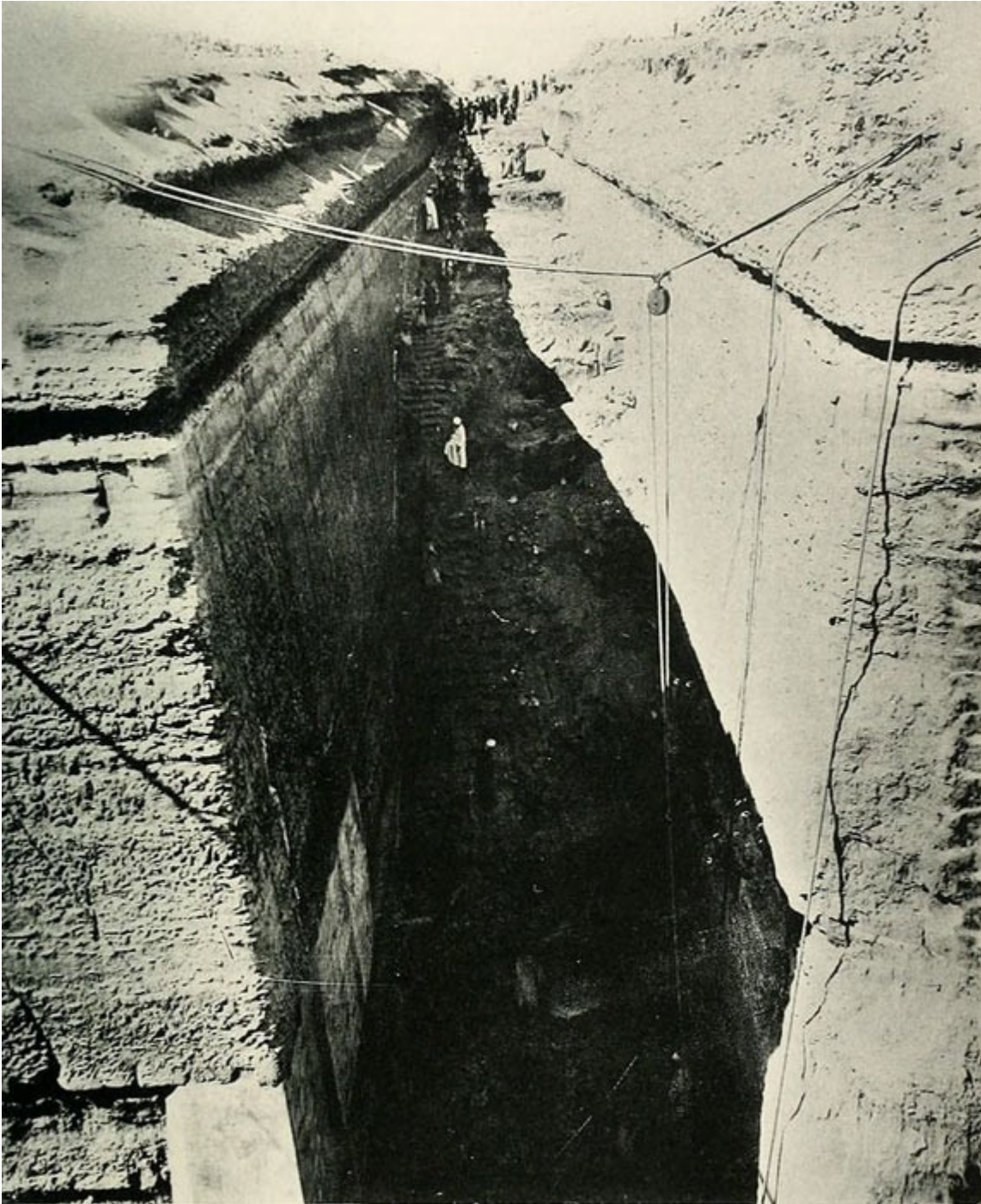


Plate II

Right at this point we encountered a large block of granite weighing about

thirty tons, which was placed horizontally on the surface of other blocks which seemed to form the pavement of the pit. At first I imagined that I was standing in front of the gate of the monument, but descending still lower, I met two other blocks of the same or similar size, which were placed side by side (fig. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9), then below two blocks, also of granite, and 1 meter 6 centimeters thick, but placed on the same rock.

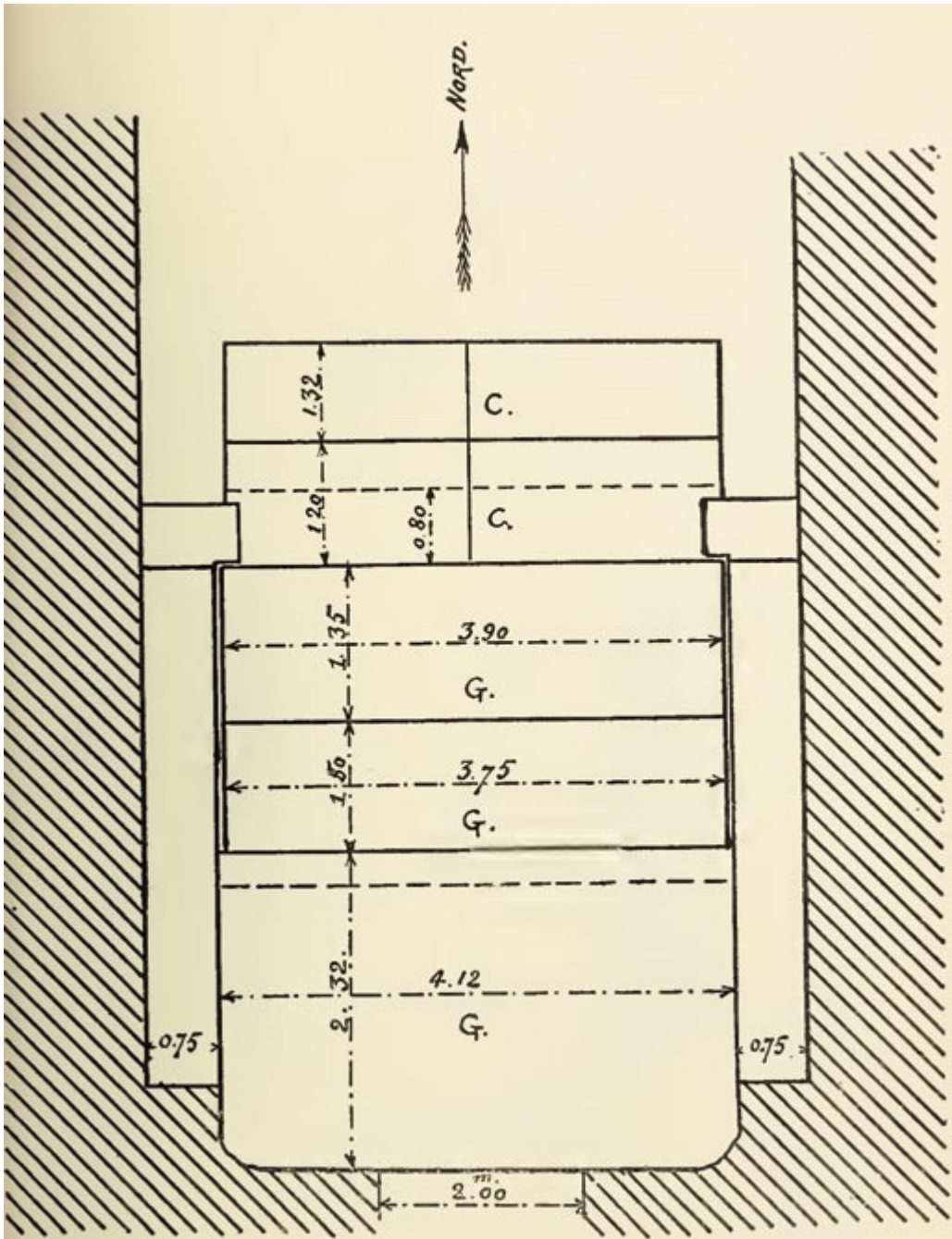


Fig. 5.

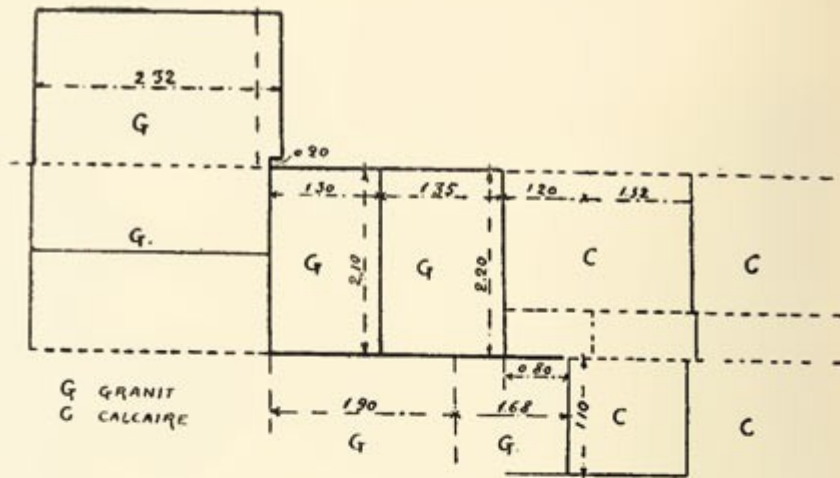


Fig. 6.

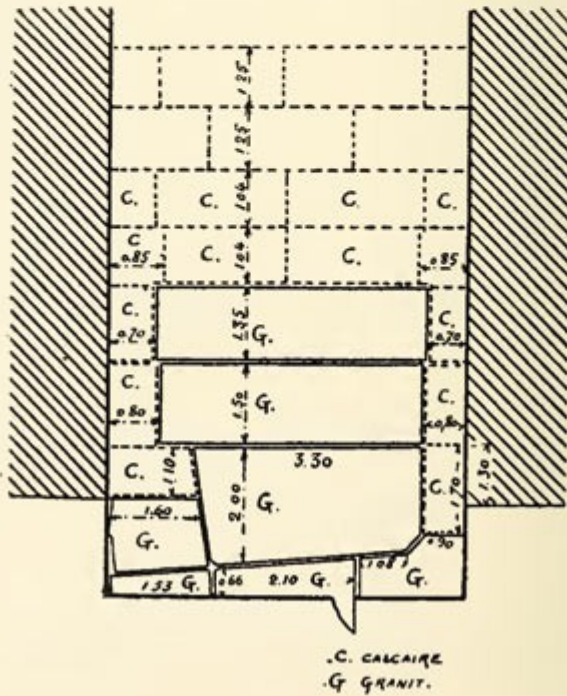


Fig. 7.

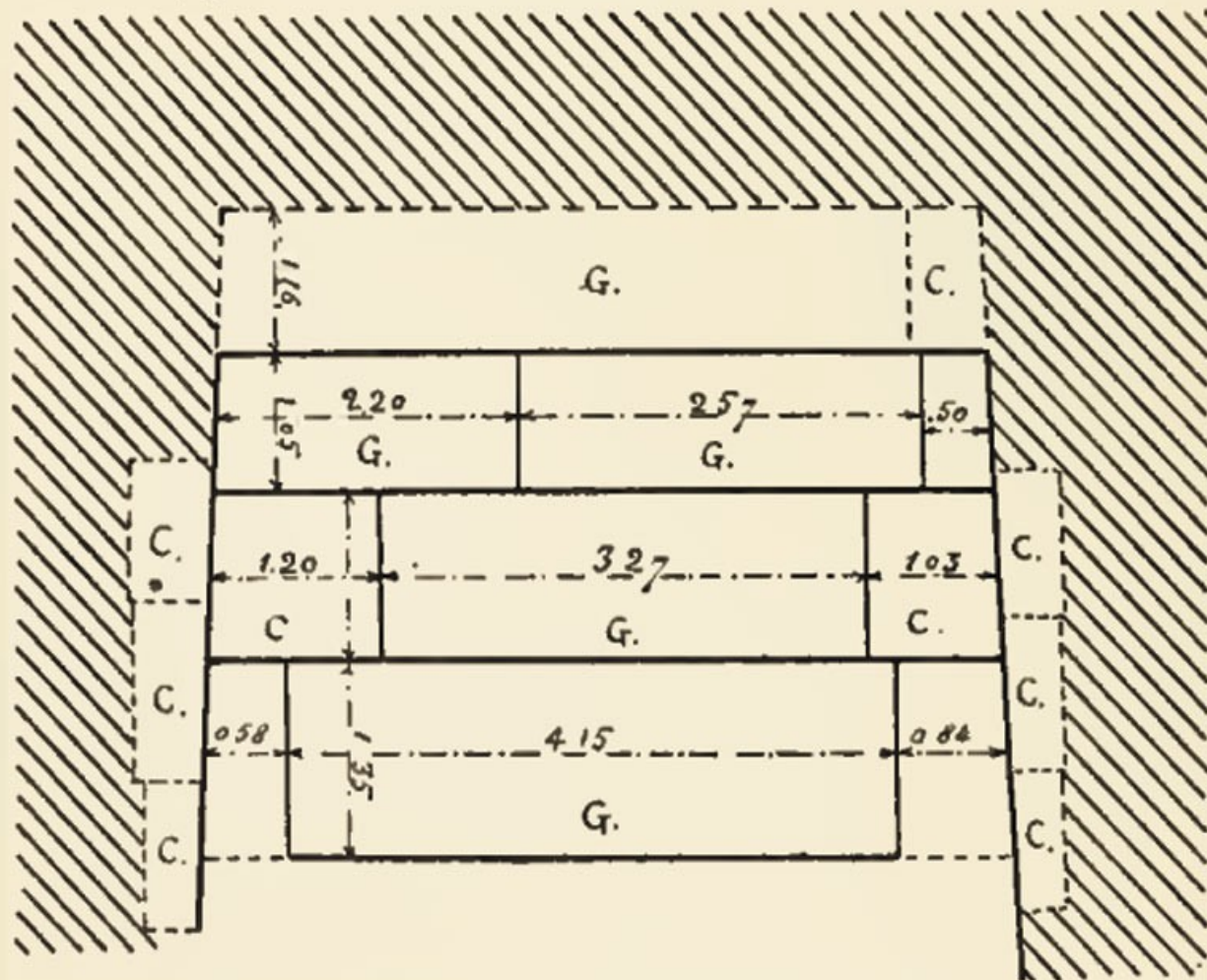


Fig. 8 (1).

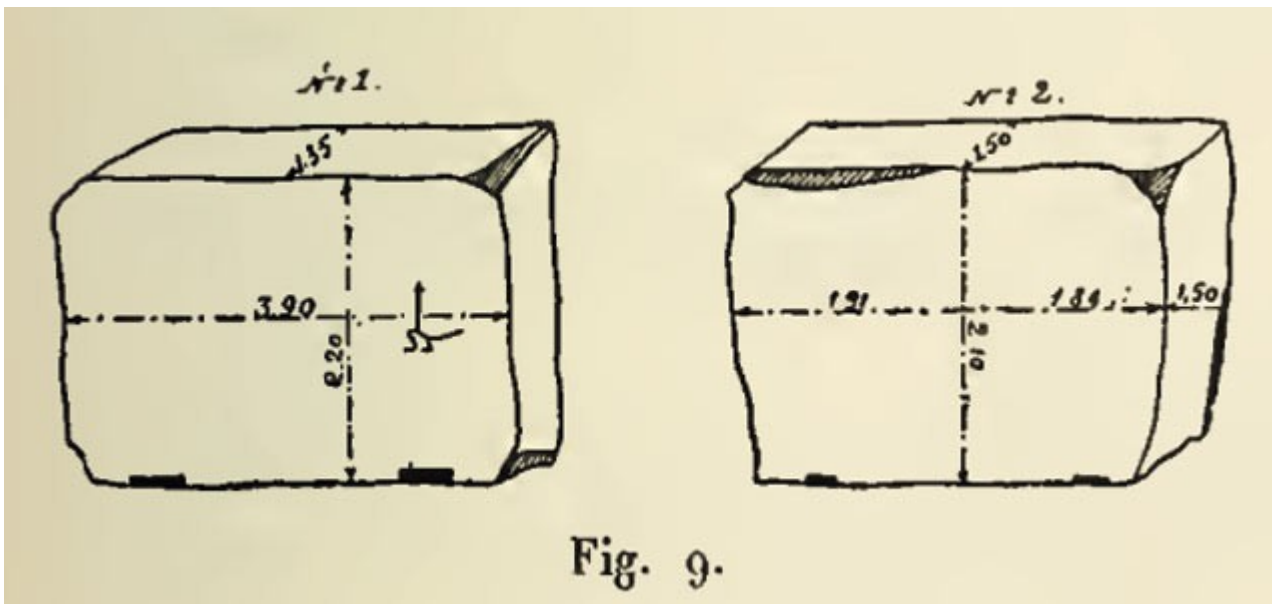


Fig. 9.

The whole was caught between enormous blocks of limestone which filled the space left free along the rock face. In order to better understand the depth of this strange construction, I had the blocks of limestone cut to a width of three meters, and I recognized that the granite construction continued on to the north side. So I caused the granite blocks to be pushed northwards, with jacks, to the place that the limestone had occupied, but I experienced a first disappointment: no opening appeared. I then thought that perhaps the door was hiding behind the 30-ton granite block, which was placed horizontally at the level of the pavement of the pit, but again I could find nothing but a second block of granite placed on the floor, which measured 1 meter 020 millimeters in height, which was locked at the bottom with the block of thirty tons by a groove, so that it would not have been possible to move it had it not previously been removed. This did not discourage me, and I began to hope that if I removed all the blocks that were against the faces of the block of thirty tons, I would at last find the entrance so much sought after: I was disappointed that once again, when the blocks were moved, no door was revealed to us.

While this search was continuing on the north side, almost in the center of the west side, on March 12, I discovered an object of an entirely new form. It is a large oval vat (Plate III), made of pink granite, polished like a mirror, and with a depth of 1 meter and 5 centimeters.



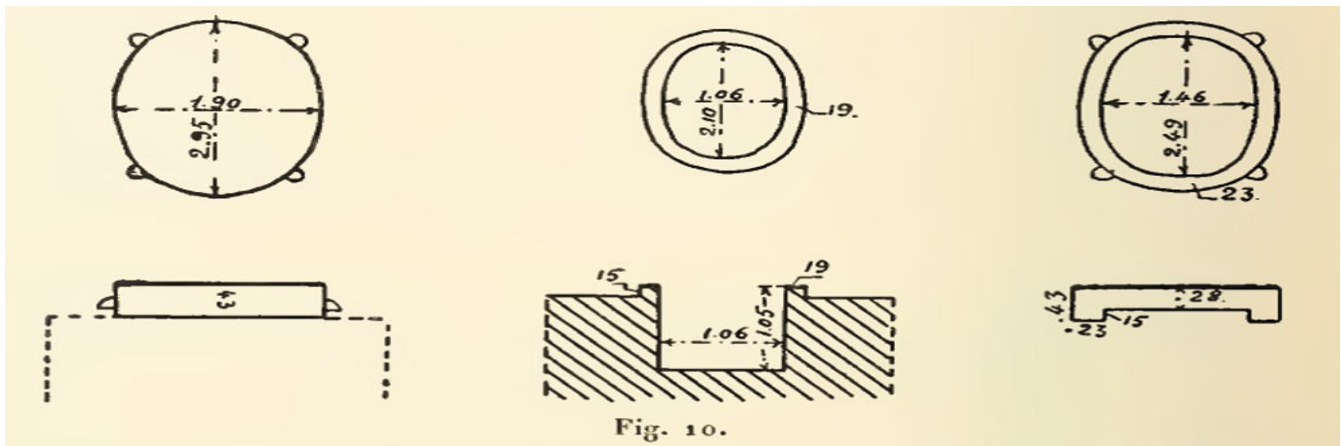
Plate III

It is carved out of one of the blocks of the pavement which occupies the bottom of the pit, and the Egyptian architects had taken their measures carefully to protect it. They had spread over the lid a layer of lime, and over the lime a thick bed of well-spread clay, which entirely prevented it from contact with the limestone blocks stacked over it. These had, moreover, been placed regularly on the clay side by side, so as to enclose the precious form with a kind of insulating protection. The lid was luted in the vat with plaster, and it was with real emotion that I put myself in a position to lift it. All precautions taken made me hope that the contents would be most precious, but I was once more deceived: when the inside of the tank appeared, I found it completely empty. I only noticed that the side walls were lined with a black band

that was 0 meter and 10 centimeters in height. It is probably the very light deposit of some liquid enclosed in the vat as an offering or libation, and which would have evaporated over the years. It has been hypothesized that this tank was an unused sarcophagus, but I do not think so. The care with which it was

protected, proves that it contained something, and the blackish deposit indicates the nature of this content. One would not have taken the precaution of concealing it under an enormous mass of blocks if it had been empty at

that time. (fig. 10)



After this work I returned to the descending corridor and I hired several of the granite tailors who had worked at the Aswan reservoirs in order to force my way through the blocks which I thought were barring access to the burial chamber. After removing about 22 cubic meters of stone, they discovered, right in the center of the pit, a block that seemed to be placed there like a kind of cork. It was embedded between the east wall, which is built with enormous blocks of granite, and a beautiful block which formed part of the west wall; as it lay directly on the rock in the fourth row of masonry, I had reason to believe that it marked the entrance of the inner apartments. It was, moreover, of the same granite as the vat and its lid, which proves that it was attributed a particular importance. So I was going to push the excavation further, when, on the 31st of March, when the work was about to end, a terrible storm surprised us. A veritable whirlwind descended upon the mountain of Zaouiet el-Aryan, and the pit was flooded to the height of three meters. Towards midnight the water dropped abruptly by about one meter. I can only explain this phenomenon by supposing it to be engulfed in some

subterranean tunnel, large enough to contain 380 cubic meters of water, and in fact I found traces of moisture in the joints of the blocks for a long time. (Will be continued.) A. Barsanti.