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SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE 1955-1958 EXCAVATIONS IN THE *CACHETTE* COURT OF KARNAK

Sébastien Biston-Moulin (CNRS, USR 3172 – CFEETK), Mansour Boraik (MoA)*

THE ARCHIVE OF THE CENTRE FRANCO-ÉGYPTIEN D'ÉTUDE DES TEMPLES DE KARNAK (MoA – CNRS, USR 3172) contains a large number of precious documents concerning the recent history of the temple of Amun-Re (19th-20th c.). Part of this documentation is of particular interest for the poorly published excavation carried out in the *Cachette* Court from 1955 to 1958.¹ The only known report describes the excavation as follows:

*“After the removal of all the blocks and other objects from the cour de la cachette it was decided to clear the whole court down to virgin soil. This task has been pursued during the 1956-57 season up to the time of writing this report. The results obtained by these soundings will be issued in the next report. We can now say that since several huge limestone blocks belonging to a temple of Thutmosis II were found reused in the foundations of the walls of the eastern half of the court, Thutmosis II must have erected a temple of considerable size somewhere in Karnak.”*²

The lack of details and the never published “next report” announced by S. Adam and F. el-Shaboury have led some scholars to question the accuracy of the discovery of blocks of Thutmosis II inside the foundations of the walls of the eastern part of the court.³ The exact location of the blocks, and even their identity are unknown,⁴ as is the real extent of the area explored and the depth of the “*virgin soil*” claimed to have been reached.

* We would like to thank our colleagues Elizabeth Frood and Chiara Salvador for checking the English of this paper. All remaining errors are our own.

References to the monuments of Karnak are given with their KIU numbers (Karnak Identifiant Unique) which allow to access the full entrees (hieroglyphic texts, photographs, bibliographical references, etc.) from the Karnak project at the address: <http://sith.huma-num.fr/karnak>.

1. S. ADAM, F. EL-SHABOURY, “Report on the Work of Karnak during the Seasons 1954-55 and 1955-56,” *ASAE* 56, 1959, pp. 35-52; also J. LECLANT, “Fouilles et travaux en Égypte 1957-1960,” *Orientalia N.S.* 30, 1961, p. 180 b.
2. S. ADAM, F. EL-SHABOURY, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
3. For example L. GABOLDE, *Monuments décorés en bas-relief aux noms de Thoutmosis II et Hatchepsout à Karnak*, *MIFAO* 123, 2005, pp. 6-7 and n. 6.
4. For the probable location of the discovery of numerous limestone blocks belonging to various monuments of Senusret I, Amenhotep I, Thutmosis III and Hatshepsut in the *Cachette* Court, see G. LEGRAIN, “Second rapport sur les travaux exécutés à Karnak du 31 octobre 1901 au 15 mai 1902,” *ASAE* 4, 1903, pp. 14-21; *id.*, “Les nouvelles découvertes de Karnak,” *BIE* 3/4e série, année 1902, 1903,

Even if it does not completely resolve these problems, new information can be added from a set of glass negatives kept in the CFEETK archives.⁵ Photographs of the foundation of the northern wall (the eastern part of the so-called “Gateway” of Ramesses IX,⁶ **Fig. 5**), the eastern wall (**Fig. 6, Figs. 8-9**) and the southern wall of the *Cachette* Court (**Fig. 2, Fig. 7**) show that the excavation extended at least to the entirety of the eastern part of the court.⁷

Regarding the depth of the excavation, the scales that can be seen on the photographs confirm that the foundations of the eastern walls were cleared to a depth of at least 2.50m.⁸ A deep sounding requiring a water pump was also dug in the eastern part of the court as the photograph (**Fig. 10**) shows.⁹

Concerning the identification and the findspot of the blocks, L. Gabolde has already pointed out that some reused blocks are visible in the foundation of the eastern wall on photograph CFEETK 97518 (**Fig. 1**).¹⁰ A new high-resolution scan of this glass negative allows to be seen – in addition to the two reused blocks previously identified (marked as **A** on **Fig. 1**) – iron beams that had been introduced at different points in the foundations of this part of the *Cachette* Court. To the north of the eastern wall (**B**), comparison between photographs CFEETK 97518 and 94496 (**Fig. 2**) shows that the blocks were removed by using an iron beam and the gap in the foundations was filled in with bricks and concrete. To the south (**C**), comparison with photograph CFEETK 94495 shows that one or more blocks were also removed from this part of the foundations since a gap that was not yet filled is visible. At the third point to the south (**D**), that is the eastern wing of the 7th pylon, an iron beam can also be seen inside the foundations. An additional photograph of this area (**Fig. 2**) shows a close-up of the foundations of the 7th pylon at point **D**. The photograph allows the identification of the hieroglyphic inscription on the two large limestone blocks about to be removed.

pp. 161-163; *id.*, “Rapport sur les travaux exécutés à Karnak du 28 septembre 1903 au 6 juillet 1904,” *ASAE* 5, 1904, pp. 271-272; *id.*, “Les récentes découvertes de Karnak,” *BIE* 5/4e série, année 1904, 1905, pp. 109-110; *id.*, “Renseignements sur les dernières découvertes faites à Karnak,” *RecTrav* 27, 1905, p. 63; P. BARGUET, *Le temple d'Amon-Rê à Karnak. Essai d'exégèse*, *RAPH* 21, 1962, p. 276; L. GABOLDE, *Le “grand château d'Amon” de Sésostris I^{er} à Karnak*, *MAIBL* 17, 1998, pp. 15-16, §2; M. AZIM, G. RÉVEILLAC, *Karnak dans l'objectif de Georges Legrain. Catalogue raisonné des archives photographiques du premier directeur des travaux de Karnak de 1895 à 1917*, Paris, 2004, pp. 255-256, fig. 14; L. GABOLDE, *Monuments*, pp. 5-8, §9.

The distinction between the blocks unearthed by G. Legrain and the ones uncovered during the 1955-1958 exploration of the court is extremely difficult because of the loss of both inventories, unless hieroglyphic inscriptions were published by G. Legrain or photographic archives allow blocks from his excavation to be identified (see M. AZIM, G. RÉVEILLAC, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 188-195).

5. Glass photographs CFEETK 94495-94498, 94500-94501, 94507-94508, 94525-94526, 97504, 97506-97507, 97509, 97518-97519, 97523, 98862. Photograph CFEETK 97518 was already published by L. GABOLDE, *op. cit.*, photo. 1, p. 197.

6. PM II², pp. 75-76; A.A.M.A. AMER, *The Gateway of Ramesses IX in the Temple of Amun at Karnak*, Warminster, 1999; KIU 3251.

7. Photograph CFEETK 97509, **Fig. 11** also shows a more limited excavation ongoing to the southwestern part of the *Cachette* Court.

8. But this does not necessarily mean that the soundings stopped there.

9. Also visible on CFEETK 97507. Since G. Legrain excavated more than 8m in some area of the *Cachette* Court (M. AZIM, G. RÉVEILLAC, *op. cit.*, pp. 275-291), it seems unlikely that the “*virgin soil*” was reached during the 1955-1958 excavation.

10. L. GABOLDE, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

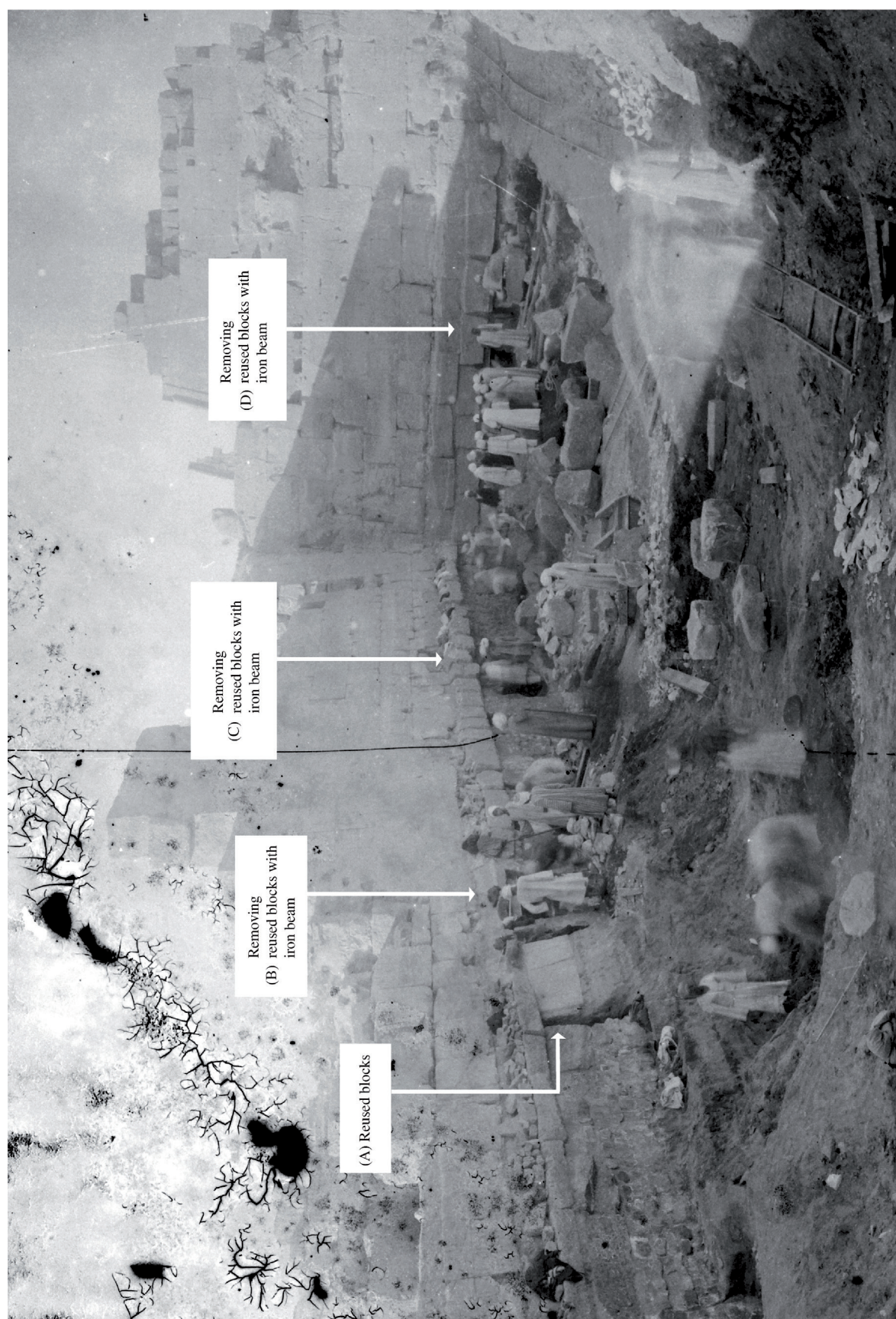


Fig. 1. Foundations of the eastern wall of the *Cachette* Court. © CNRS-CFEETK 97518.



Fig. 2. Two reused limestone blocks in the foundations of the eastern wing of the 7th pylon. © CNRS-CFEETK 94526.

The first block on the left is an architrave belonging to the portico of Senusret I,¹¹ now on display in the Karnak Open Air Museum (MPA 9).¹²



Fig. 3. Close-up on the left block (upside-down) inside the foundations of the 7th pylon from CFEETK 94526 and the architrave (MPA 9) in the Open Air Museum. © CNRS-CFEETK 43085*4/A. Chéné.

11. L. Gabolde informed us that he was able to identify this block of Senusret I from this photograph, but only in 2004 after the publication of *Le "grand château d'Amon" de Sésostris I^{er} à Karnak*, *MAIBL* 17, 1998. The photo will also appear in his forthcoming study, *La genèse d'un temple, la naissance d'un dieu*. See also Chr. WALLET-LEBRUN, *Le grand livre de pierre*, *MAIBL* 41, 2009, p. 30 (she, however, does not see the link between this block and the other remains of the portico). For the original location of this monument, see L. GABOLDE, *Le "grand château d'Amon"*, pp. 24-29, §22-44 (with previous bibliography); J.-Fr. CARLOTTI, "Modifications architecturales du grand château d'Amon de Sésostris I^{er} à Karnak," *Égypte Afrique & Orient* 16, 2000, pp. 37-46 challenged in Fr. LARCHÉ, "Nouvelles observations sur les monuments du Moyen et du Nouvel Empire dans la zone centrale du temple d'Amon," *Karnak* 12, 2007, pp. 409-411; *id.*, "A Reconstruction of Senusret I's Portico and Some Structures of Amenhotep I at Karnak," *CHANE* 37, 2009, pp. 137-174; and response in: J.-Fr. CARLOTTI, E. CZERNY, L. GABOLDE, "Sondage autour de la plate-forme en grès de la Cour du Moyen Empire," *Karnak* 13, 2010, pp. 143-155. An English summary of both theories is presented by E. SULLIVAN, "Karnak: Development of the Temple of Amun-Ra," in: W. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, 2010, pp. 3-4 (<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1f28q08h>).

12. L. GABOLDE, *op. cit.*, §82-81, pp. 58-59.

The second block (MPA 77) visible in the foundation of the 7th pylon to the right of the architrave of Senusert belongs to the *Netjery-Menu* whose reconstruction has recently been completed by the CFFETK in the Open Air Museum.¹³ The block is one of the doorjambs of the gates of wall 8 of this monument.¹⁴ In fact the “*temple of Thutmosis II*” of S. Adam’s and F. el-Shaboury’s report is not contemporaneous with this king: it must be identified with this monument built during the reign of Thutmosis III under the regency of queen Hatshepsut and partially decorated in the name of the dead king Thutmosis II.¹⁵



Fig. 4a. Close-up (turn right) of the block reused inside the foundations of the eastern part of the 7th pylon. © CNRS-CFEETK 94526.

Fig. 4b. Block MPA 77 in the Open Air Museum. © CNRS-CFEETK 62606.

Our knowledge of the original findspot of most of the blocks unearthed during the exploration of the *Cachette* Court in 1955-1958 remains precarious at best. The different areas with iron beams inserted in the foundations of the eastern wall and the eastern wing of the 7th pylon, along with the other glass photographs showing this wall, confirm that several blocks were indeed found inside these foundations. Until now no chronological link between the numerous blocks alleged to have been discovered in the *Cachette* Court and the walls of the court has been established with certainty. The identity of the blocks in the eastern wall remains unknown as the insufficient resolution of the photographs does not allow them to be seen clearly enough to ensure an identification. However, we can safely conclude that photographs CFEETK 94495 to 94498 (**Fig. 6**) show the foundations of the eastern wall *after* removal of the reused blocks.

13. L. GABOLDE, *Monuments*, p. 66, §69 and pl. XVI-XVI*, wall 8 v°; the other blocks of this doorjamb are MPA 31, 87CL406, MPA 345. The anastylosis of this monument in the Open Air Museum at Karnak started in 2008 and was completed in June 2013: reports at <http://www.cfeetk.cnrs.fr>.

14. L. GABOLDE, *op. cit.*, pl. XVI-XVI*.

15. For a long time the blocks of the *Netjery-Menu* bearing the name of Thutmose II were thought to be contemporaneous with this king but several pieces of evidence (L. GABOLDE, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-17, §17-26) show that they can only be posthumous.

The identification of these two blocks in the foundation of the 7th pylon ensures that the dismantling of the monuments to which they belonged took place before the construction of the pylon. We already knew that Hatshepsut herself dismantled the *Netjery-Menu*, or at least a great part of it, when she assumed kingship.¹⁶ Even though the decoration of the 7th pylon must have been completed after Hatshepsut's death, the date of its building remains much discussed.¹⁷ Contrary to the 8th pylon, this pylon was probably not part of the original coregency project of remodelling the southern entrance of Karnak. The eastern and western walls of the court between the two pylons are independent walls resting against the southern facade of the 7th pylon. The northern face of the 8th pylon was not planned to receive these walls either since the eastern wall masks some of the decoration of the pylon and a gate resting against the western tower was added to enclose this side of the court. Another chronological element to consider is the eastern wall of the 7th pylon court that is structurally linked to the northern face of the 7th pylon itself. Against this wall lies the enclosure wall of the *Akh-menu*. As the *Akh-menu* was built from year 24 on¹⁸ and its enclosure wall must be chronologically linked to it,¹⁹ the eastern wall of the 7th pylon court, and therefore the 7th pylon itself, must have been built before the enclosure wall of the *Akh-menu*.²⁰ Yet, recent architectural observations of the western wall seem to imply that the wall structurally linked to the pylon was built in two distinct phase as differences can be observed in its structure close to the pylon.²¹ Consequently, the building of the enclosure wall of the *Akh-menu* may have occurred after that of the northern part of the wall against which it lies, but before the construction of the 7th pylon itself.²² Our current inability to ascertain these dates²³ unfortunately means that the reign of Thutmose III can only be considered a *terminus ad quem* for the dismantling of the portico of Senusert I and the *Netjery-Menu*.²⁴ Nevertheless, identification of a block of a monument in the name of the dead king Thutmose II inside the foundations of the eastern wing of the 7th pylon provides a new, crucial piece of evidence to finally confirm that “*several huge limestone blocks belonging to a temple of Thutmose II (i.e. the Netjery-Menu) were found reused in the foundations of the walls of the eastern half of the court*”²⁵ and that they were subsequently removed.

16. L. GABOLDE (*Monuments*, p. 17, §27) concluded that at least the largest part of the monument, as we know it today, was dismantled at the end of the regency or the beginning of the coregency.

17. P. BARGUET, *Temple*, p. 260; D. LABOURY, *La statue de Thoutmosis III, AegLeod* 5, 1998, pp. 37-39; P. LASKOWSKI, “Monumental Architecture and the Royal Building Program of Thutmose III,” in: E.H. Cline, D. O’Connor (eds.), *Thutmose III. A New Biography*, Ann Arbor, 2006, p. 196.

18. CG 34012; *Urk.* IV, 835, 17-836, 3; J. VON BECKERATH, “Ein Wunder des Amun bei der Tempelgründung in Karnak,” *MDAIK* 37, 1981, pp. 41-49; S. BISTON-MOULIN, “L’épithète *ḥqꜣ mꜣ’(t)* et l’activité architecturale du début du règne autonome de Thoutmosis III,” in: A. Gasse, Fr. Servajean, Chr. Thiers (eds.), *Et in Ægypto et ad Ægyptum, Recueil d’études dédiées à Jean-Claude Grenier, CENiM* 5, 2012, p. 89.

19. D. LABOURY, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

21. B. LETELLIER, Fr. LARCHÉ, *La cour à portique de Thoutmosis IV, ÉtudÉg* 12, 2013, pl. 6.

22. The western wall of the 7th pylon court is, for at least a part of its northern section, an addition linked to the Hypostyl hall itself (J.-Fr. CARLOTTI, Ph. MARTINEZ, “Nouvelles observations architecturales et épigraphiques sur la grande salle hypostyle du temple d’Amon-Rê à Karnak,” *Karnak* 14, 2013, pp. 249-250 and p. 256, fig. 2). What happened to the western wall of the court linked to the pylon is difficult to ascertain when the ceremonial court of Thutmose II in front of the 4th pylon was dismantled by Amenhotep III to reorganize the western entrance of Karnak with the building of his 3rd pylon. For the difficulty to include the preservation of this wall to reconstruct the termination of the north-western corner of the court and its relation to the 3rd pylon prior to the building of the Hypostyl hall, see *ibid.*, pp. 270-272, figs. 16-18.

23. A new study of the pylon decoration was undertaken in 2017 by Charlie Labarta within the CFFETK epigraphic projects.

24. For the date of the dismantling of the portico of Senusert I, see L. GABOLDE, “*Grand Château d’Amon*,” pp. 25-26, §25-29 and p. 30, §45-46; challenged in Fr. LARCHÉ, *Karnak* 12, 2007, pp. 415-416; *id.*, *CHANE* 37, 2009, pp. 143-145; response in J.-Fr. CARLOTTI, L. GABOLDE, *Karnak* 13, 2010, pp. 143-156.

25. S. ADAM, F. EL-SHABOURY, *ASAE* 56, 1959, p. 43.



Fig. 5. Foundations of the north eastern wall of the *Cachette* Court. © CNRS-CFEETK 94507.



Fig. 6. Foundations of the eastern wall of the *Cachette* Court showing points **A**, **B** and **C** of **Fig. 1** after removal of the reused blocks. © CNRS-CFEETK 94495-94498 (assembly).



Fig. 7. Foundations of the south eastern wall of the *Cachette* Court, that is the eastern wing of the 7th pylon, point D of Fig. 1. © CNRS-CFEETK 94525.



Fig. 8. Photographs CFEETK 97518 and 94496: before and after the removal of reused blocks with iron beams on the eastern wall of the *Cachette* Court at points **A** and **B** of **Fig. 1**.



Fig. 9. Close-up of the unfilled gap of the point **C** of **Fig. 1** in the foundations of the eastern wall of the *Cachette* Court. © CNRS-CFEETK 94495.

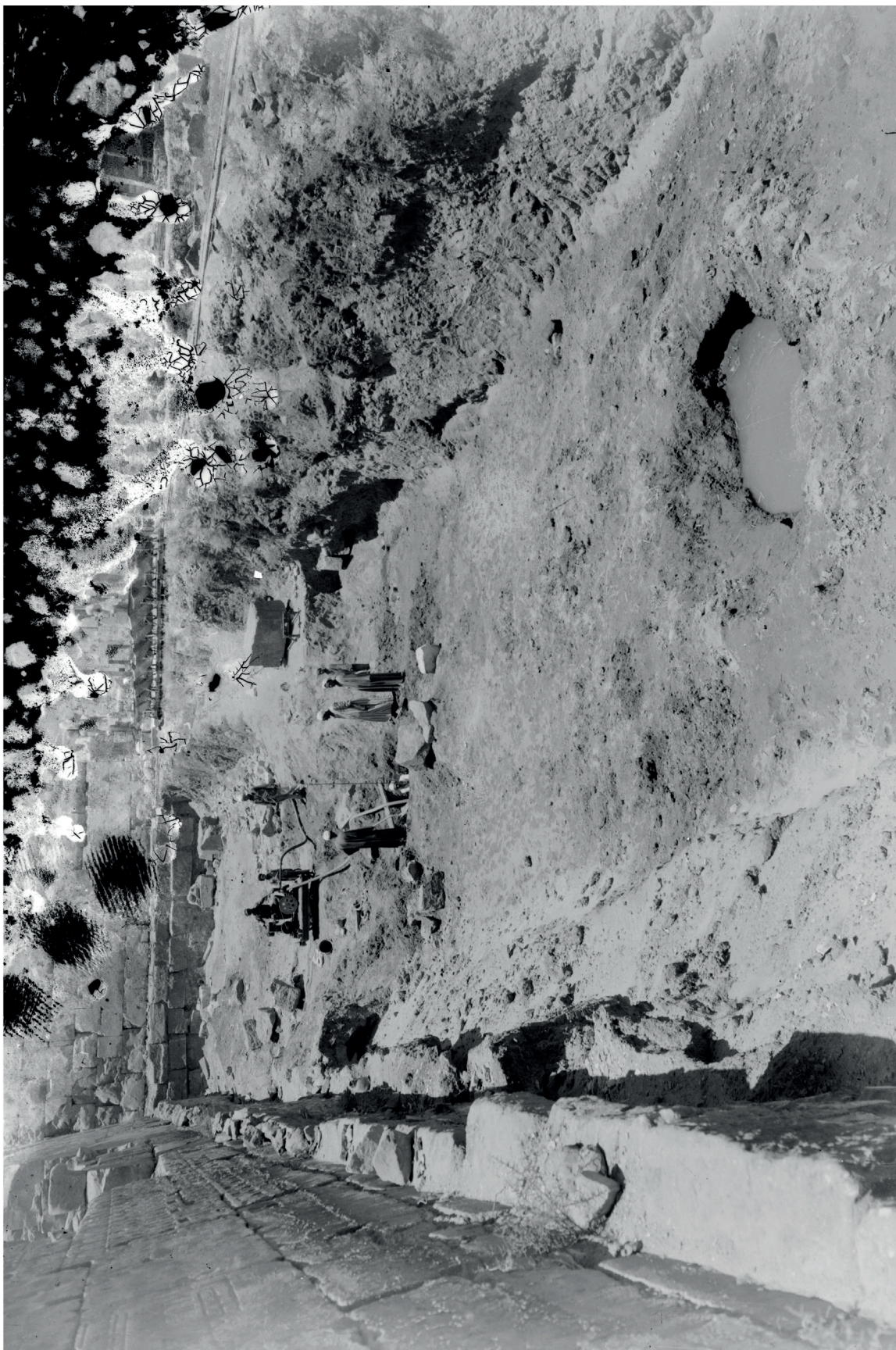


Fig. 10. View of the eastern part of the *Cachette* Court with the deep sounding. © CNRS-CFEETK 97506.



Fig. 11. The excavation in progress to the western half of the court. © CNRS-CFEETK 97509.