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978-1-108-07566-4 - Operations Carried On at the Pyramids of Gizeh in 1837: With an Account of a Voyage into Upper Egypt, and an Appendix: Volume 1

Howard Vyse

Excerpt

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## OPERATIONS CARRIED ON AT GIZEH,

*&c. &c.*

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BEFORE I describe the Operations carried on at the Pyramids in the spring and summer of 1837, it is necessary to state the condition, in which I found them on my first arrival in Egypt, and some other particulars, which may tend to make the Operations in question better understood.

I arrived in Alexandria on the 29th of December, 1835, with the intention of visiting Upper and Lower Egypt; but finding that an opportunity would present itself, towards the end of February, of visiting Syria with peculiar advantage, I determined to postpone till my return from that country my voyage into Upper Egypt, and to spend the time, that remained at my disposal, in Cairo.

Among the many objects of interest, which the neighbourhood of that curious and picturesque city afforded, the Pyramids, particularly those of Gizeh, attracted my attention; from the grandeur and simple majesty of their forms, from the remote antiquity and uncertainty of their origin, and also from the peculiarity of their mysterious construction; since, after the investigation of many ages, doubts were still entertained, not only as to the purpose for which the passages and chambers already discovered

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## 2 OPERATIONS CARRIED ON AT GIZEH.

were originally intended, but in a much greater degree respecting any other passages or apartments, which might reasonably be supposed to exist in these enormous structures.

An additional interest arose from the great probability that they were the mighty works of the Shepherd Kings, whose descendants, according to Manetho, after their expulsion from Egypt, under the denomination of Philistines built in Syria Jerusalem, and also many defensive towns, which had the same names as those they had quitted in Egypt.<sup>2</sup> This extraordinary people appear to have been of the same race with the Cyclopes and heroic adventurers, whose enormous structures and architectural skill, and whose wanderings and misfortunes, have been celebrated by the antient poets.

As it had been suggested, that the inclined passages

<sup>2</sup> See Bryant's "Antient History," p. 231. And here let me pay a tribute to departed excellence and learning, which appear from various causes to have been much undervalued, notwithstanding the unacknowledged advantages that have been frequently derived from them, particularly as regards the Antient Chronology and Dynasties of Egypt. Etymological researches, it must be confessed, are uncertain, and may give rise to many fanciful conjectures; but no person can examine the works of the author to whom I have referred, without being convinced of the great extent of his learning, of the soundness of his conclusions, and, above all, of his profound conviction of the truth of Revelation, and of the unerring justice of the Almighty. The candour and simplicity of his character, and the benevolence of his disposition, are apparent in his writings; and it may with justice be observed, that the chief object of his learned inquiries, through a long and laborious life, was a zealous and humble endeavour to "assert eternal Providence, and justify the ways of God to men." It is, therefore, much to be lamented that his posthumous works have been unaccountably suppressed.

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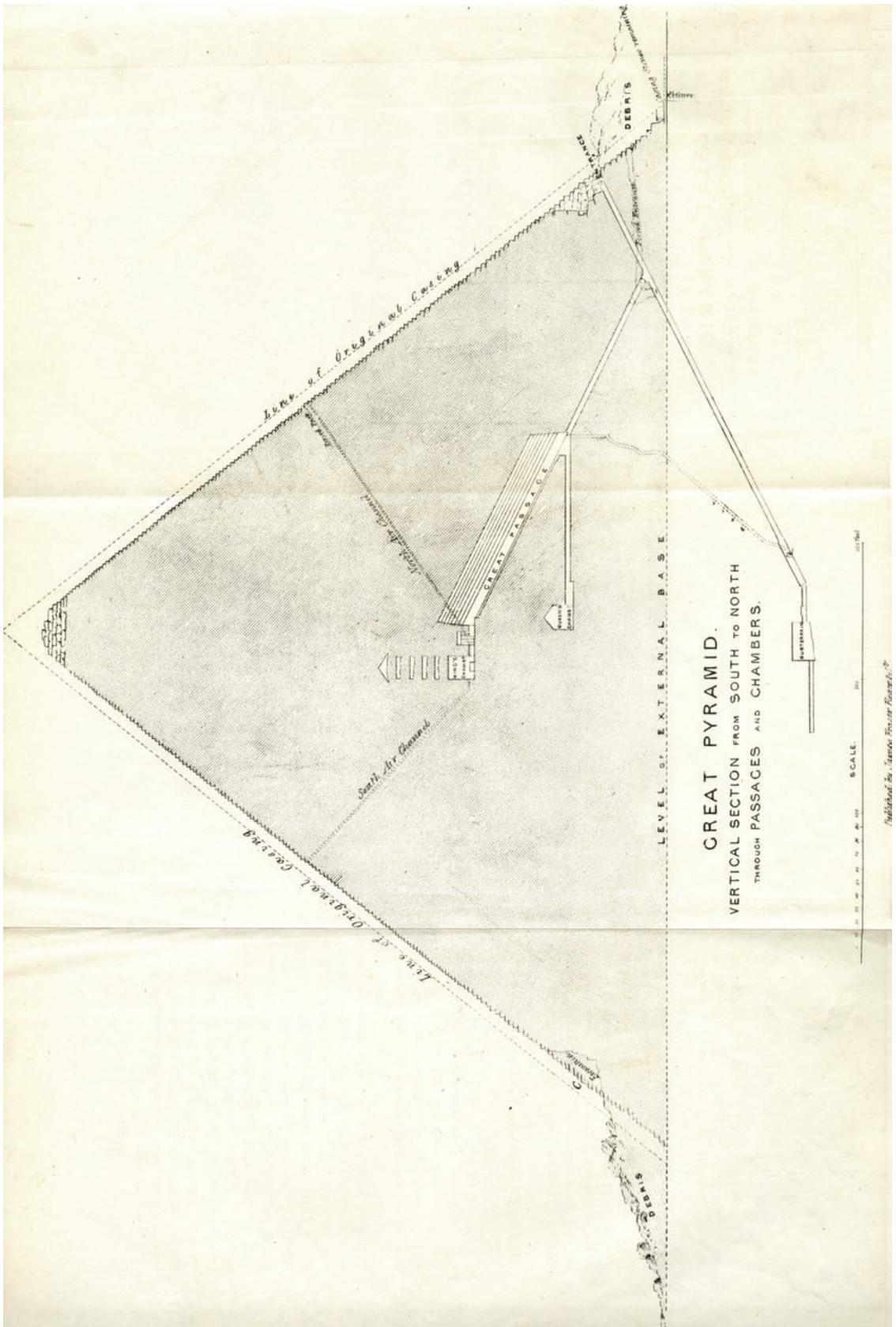
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## THE GREAT PYRAMID.

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were intended for astronomical observations, I endeavoured to ascertain, whether the angles of inclination were the same in the Great and Second Pyramids of Gizeh and in that of Dashoor. I was anxious, likewise, to examine more particularly the Channels<sup>2</sup> proceeding from the King's Chamber in the Great Pyramid, which appeared likely to conduct to other apartments: for this purpose I revisited the Pyramids of Gizeh on the 13th February, 1836, and took with me Mr. Hill, a very intelligent person, who now keeps the hotel at Cairo, but who was then employed in the Pacha's service, as superintendant of some copper mills worked by steam in the citadel.

The following is an account of the condition in which we then found the Pyramids, and, I may add, in which they remained when operations were commenced upon them in the following November.

## STATE OF THE GREAT PYRAMID AT GIZEH.

The inclined passage from the entrance to the subterraneous apartment, that apartment itself, and the unfinished passage proceeding to the southward from it, were open, although much encumbered with stones and rubbish; as were the forced and upper passages leading to the King's and Queen's Chambers.<sup>3</sup> These two

<sup>2</sup> As these channels were subsequently found to have been made for the ventilation of the King's Chamber, they are called Air Channels.

<sup>3</sup> A reference to Mr. Perring's Plans (Fraser, Regent Street, London) will fully explain the passages and chambers here alluded to.

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chambers, together with Davison's, and the communication, or well, descending from the great upper passage to that of the subterraneous apartment, were also open. In the floor of the subterraneous apartment, an excavation had been made to the depth of a few feet; some stones had also been removed from behind the wall at the south-eastern corner of Davison's Chamber: one of the blocks composing the pavement had been taken up near the north-western corner of the King's Chamber, and an excavation had been carried on beneath the Sarcophagus: this last, however, was almost entirely filled up with rubbish. The mouth of the southern Air Channel had been partially enlarged, and an excavation of a few feet had been made near the portcullis, along the course of the northern Air Channel. In the Queen's Chamber a considerable passage had been forced into the solid masonry, from the niche on the eastern side. There was also a large hollow near the granite blocks at the commencement of the ascending passage, which was supposed to have been the forced entrance made by the Caliphs. These were the only excavations of any consequence. On the exterior of the Pyramid a vast heap of stones and rubbish, 50 feet in height, extended from the base to the entrance of the inclined passage.

#### STATE OF THE SECOND PYRAMID.

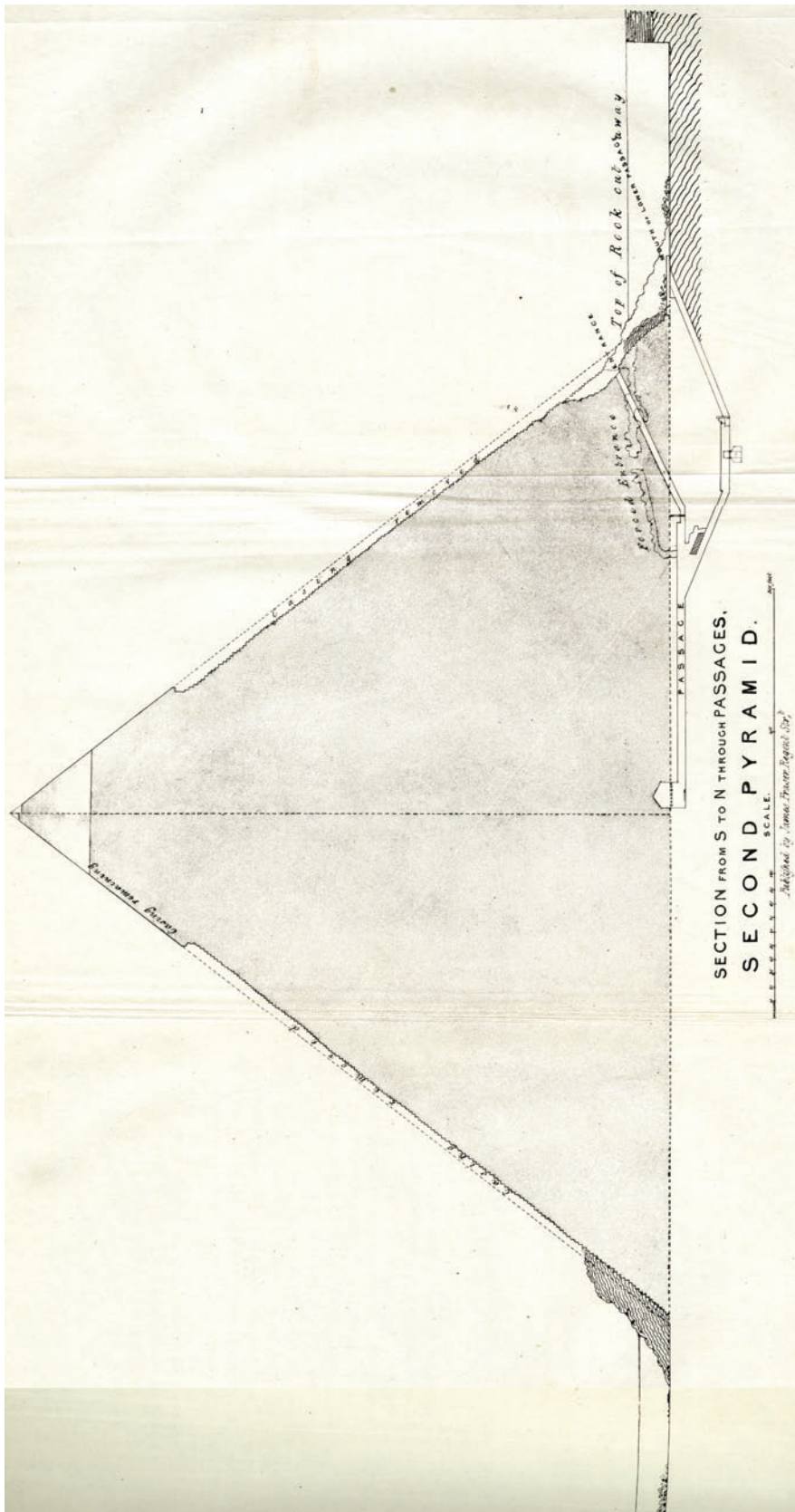
The upper entrance, conducting to Belzoni's Chamber, and the chamber itself, with the descending passage returning to the north, were open; as were also the

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## THE THIRD PYRAMID.

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horizontal passage to the forced portcullis, and a considerable part of the re-ascending passage leading to the lower entrance. The inclined passage from the horizontal part of this communication, together with the small chamber to which it conducted, were likewise accessible. Several stones had been removed from the pavement near the Sarcophagus in Belzoni's Chamber, and a large excavation had been carried on across the upper horizontal passage to a considerable extent. A mound, similar to that on the exterior of the Great Pyramid, extended from the base to the upper entrance. The chasm in the centre of the northern front, by which the Caliphs are supposed to have entered, and in which Belzoni commenced his operations, was apparent; and there is no doubt that, before the stones had collapsed, it communicated with the excavation, already mentioned, across the horizontal passage.

STATE OF THE THIRD PYRAMID, AND OF  
THE OTHERS.

In the northern front of the third Pyramid a considerable chasm had been made,<sup>4</sup> said, by Denon, to have been the work of the Mamelukes; while below it another smaller chasm had been carried on upon the level of the upper line of granite, which forms the front of the lower part of the Pyramid. A great deal of rubbish, and many large blocks of calcareous stone

<sup>4</sup> The eastern side of this excavation was in the centre of the northern front.

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## 6 OPERATIONS CARRIED ON AT GIZEH.

and of granite, were lying around it ; particularly on the northern side, in which the above-mentioned excavations had been made. Some of these had been taken away at the centre ; but the difficulty of removing the heavy masses without the assistance of machinery, had put a stop to the operation. Opposite the centre, and at some little distance from the base of the Pyramid, a pit about 20 or 30 feet square had been excavated in the rubbish, the sides of which had been supported by a revetment of large stones. Several blocks had been forced from a pavement at the bottom of this pit, it would seem in search of an entrance into the Pyramid, and many others yet remained there, similar to those afterwards uncovered to the eastward ; but there was no appearance that the Pyramid had ever been opened.

The three smaller Pyramids south of the third, and the three east of the Great Pyramid, were more or less dilapidated, but were closed up.

We took the angles of the entrance of the Great, and of the Second, Pyramids ; but, having no other instruments than a fine edge and level, and the surface of the stone being rough and uneven, notwithstanding the exquisite regularity and perfection of the masonry, our mensurations, probably, were wrong, as we afterwards found that they did not accord with those taken subsequently with a theodolite, by Mr. Perring. We carefully examined Davison's Chamber in the Great Pyramid ; and the result of this examination was a conjecture, that it formed a sort of *entre-sol* between the King's Chamber and some large sepulchral apartment over it, to which the inclined ceiling of the Great Passage was, probably, an entrance. I also thought that the channels proceed-