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New Discoveries at Knossos

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IT might have been thought that after eight campaigns—extending back to 1900 and supplemented by minor investigations—the Palace site of Knossos would have been pretty well exhausted. The work indeed on my first volume about the House of Minos had brought out certain lacunas in the evidence which it was of the first importance to fill in, and the probings that it had been possible to carry out in the period immediately preceding the Great War led me to the conclusion that the site, if seriously attacked, might still be productive of archaeological surprises.

Certainly the circumstances of the times made it a serious burden for the excavator to take on his own shoulders. The price of labour, owing to the exceptional drain of men from Crete for service abroad, had gone up to above five times its pre-war level, even allowing for the fall of the drachma. But it was possible to secure many of my old Moslem workmen (these being unaffected by the levy), and some of these had attained great skill in former excavations. Operations began in the middle of February, with developments that took quite a dramatic turn, and necessitated the continuation of work till the first of July last.

I was able to secure, as before, the valuable assistance of Dr. Mackenzie, and architectural and artistic help from Mr. F. G. Newton, fresh from his work at Tell-el-Amarna, and Mr. Piet de Jong, later on engaged with the British excavators at Mycenae.

Early in the campaign the operations were somewhat distracted by an interesting discovery in the large neighbouring village of Arkhanes, which lies about an hour's ride above Knossos in a beautiful upland glen. The central part of this village was found

actually to rest on the base-slabs and orthostats of a considerable building, the 'Summer Palace', we may suppose, of Minoan Knossos. The site is immediately overlooked by the peak of Juktas with its votive sanctuary, and flanked by a knoll already known to be the seat of an identical cult. As the village itself, which is the second as regards population in the island, could hardly be removed, I had to content myself with exploring the interior of a ring of great hewn blocks brought to light by recent house-building on its outskirts, which when cleared out



FIG. 1. Circular Minoan Reservoir.

proved to be a circular reservoir or well-house of massive construction with descending steps and a stone conduit for its surplus waters (figs. 1-3). It belonged, as its ceramic contents showed, to the beginning of the Late Minoan Age. Minoan remains indeed abounded on every side. But it was high time to recall our 'flying column' for the main onslaught on the Palace site of Knossos itself.

The chief objectives of this new attack had been clearly marked out. By means of indications, followed with singular flair by my foreman, Ali Baritakis, it was possible to trace out the broad foundations of an outer bastion by the Northern Entrance, enclosing the great Pillar Hall on that side, while an early magazine for

huge oil jars that also came out within this area threw a new light on its use as a depot for stores brought into the building by the Sea Gate here from the Harbour Town of Knossos. The neighbouring North-East House, also rich in evidences of storage and containing important remains of M. M. III–L. M. I jars, produced an inscribed seal impression of an official who had charge of vessels in precious metals. It may be mentioned in this connexion that a minute examination of literally thousands of fragments of clay seal impressions from the 'Treasury'

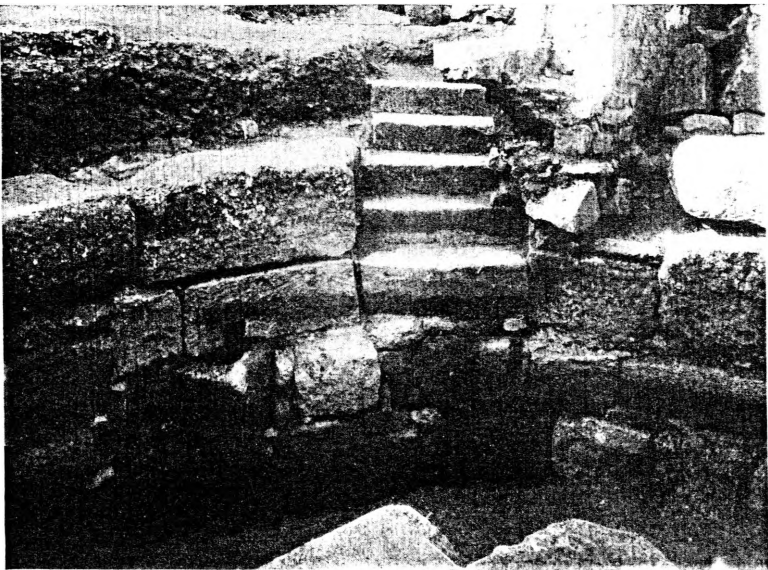


FIG. 2. Reservoir, showing steps and opening of conduit.

area of the Palace itself enabled me to restore a series of types affording new illustrations of the religion, sports, and daily life of its closing period. To these sphragistic records must be added, moreover, two three-sided clay sealings from the site of the Harbour Town which, though of a different clay, present fantastic types identical with those of Zakro,¹ affording curious evidence of Custom-House connexions with East Crete, and pointing to itinerant methods on the part of the fiscal officers.

¹ Hogarth, *J. H. S.*, xxii (1902), p. 76 *seqq.*, nos. 21, 23, and 61 similarly grouped, and nos. 80 and 134, also similarly grouped. This clay, with its coppery grains, resembles that of the early pottery of Vasiliki and points to a neighbouring port on the north Coast as the place of fabric.

Below the Minoan paved way that led to the North Palace region from the west the 'Magazine of the Arsenal' was further excavated by means of a deep cutting and an abundance of bronze

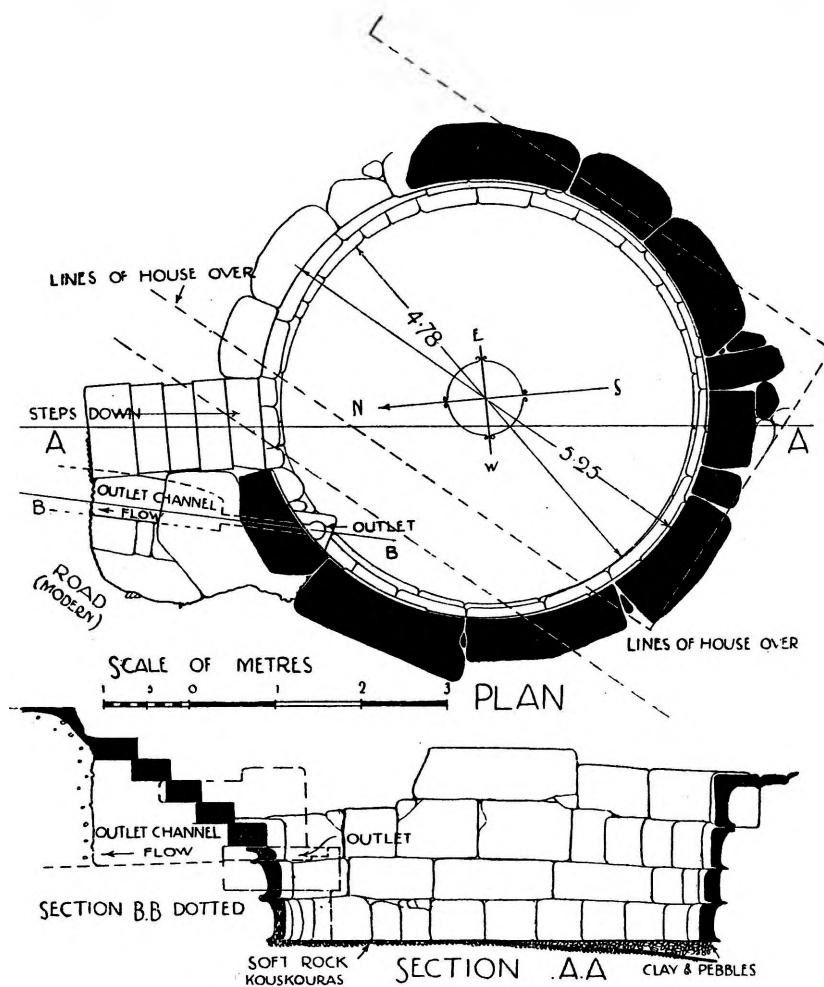


FIG. 3. Plan and Section of Circular Reservoir.

arrow-heads, and some more inscribed clay tablets brought to light. This extensive store-house was found to overlie an earlier building of the same kind with cist-like repositories in its basement floors analogous to those of the M. M. III Palace.

Fresh developments of great interest took place in the West Porch, unquestionably the State Entrance of the Palace. The

removal of the large fallen blocks with which it had been hitherto encumbered brought out for the first time its true inner lines. Opening out of what was clearly a reception area, where the Priest-Kings sat in state, there proved to have been a separate lodge for a warder—a recurring feature in the Minoan Palaces. Evidence, moreover, accumulated that the Porch itself had been preceded by a more ancient entrance running due east.

The Corridor, running south, with the remains of processional frescoes, to which this State Entrance, as it existed in later times, gave access, had originally taken a turn East to a Propylaeum on the South Terrace, from which again a broad flight of steps led to the great columnar Hall of this section of the Palace. Many new evidences of this approach were brought to light by the present investigations, but it was on the north borders of the columnar Hall that the most surprising new developments took place. Here the *piano nobile* consisted of an elongated space, approached from the Central Court by a stepped Portico, of which the remains of a second column base (fallen into a basement below) now came to light belonging to its uppermost steps. Blocks and slabs, either lodged on the wall-tops or sunk into the basements, showed that this Portico, which led on the left to a corridor giving on the Great Hall, was faced on the right by the rising steps of what had been the main staircase of the West Palace wing—slightly broader than that of the 'Domestic Quarter' on the east. The elements of reconstruction were indeed so full that I have been able to restore twelve steps of the first flight, so that, with the upper steps of the Portico also completed, the whole has become a monumental feature of the site. For the first time we have direct evidence of a second story to the west wing, and so full are the materials that Mr. Newton has been able to draw a detailed elevation of this section of the façade, overlooking the Central Court and bordering the Room of the Throne.

The most dramatic revelations, however, came out in the course of further excavation within and about the South-East Palace angle. Interest on this side was whetted by the results of the further exploration of a house on the east border of this angle, belonging to the beginning of the Late Minoan Age. The west end of its principal room was shut off by a balustrade with a central opening—forming a real 'chancel' screen—enclosing a stepped recess, within which, against the further wall, was a stone base for a seat of honour—perhaps of some priestly dignitary—recalling the apse and basilican arrangement of the Megaron of the 'Royal Villa'.

It had long been observed with regard to the neighbouring

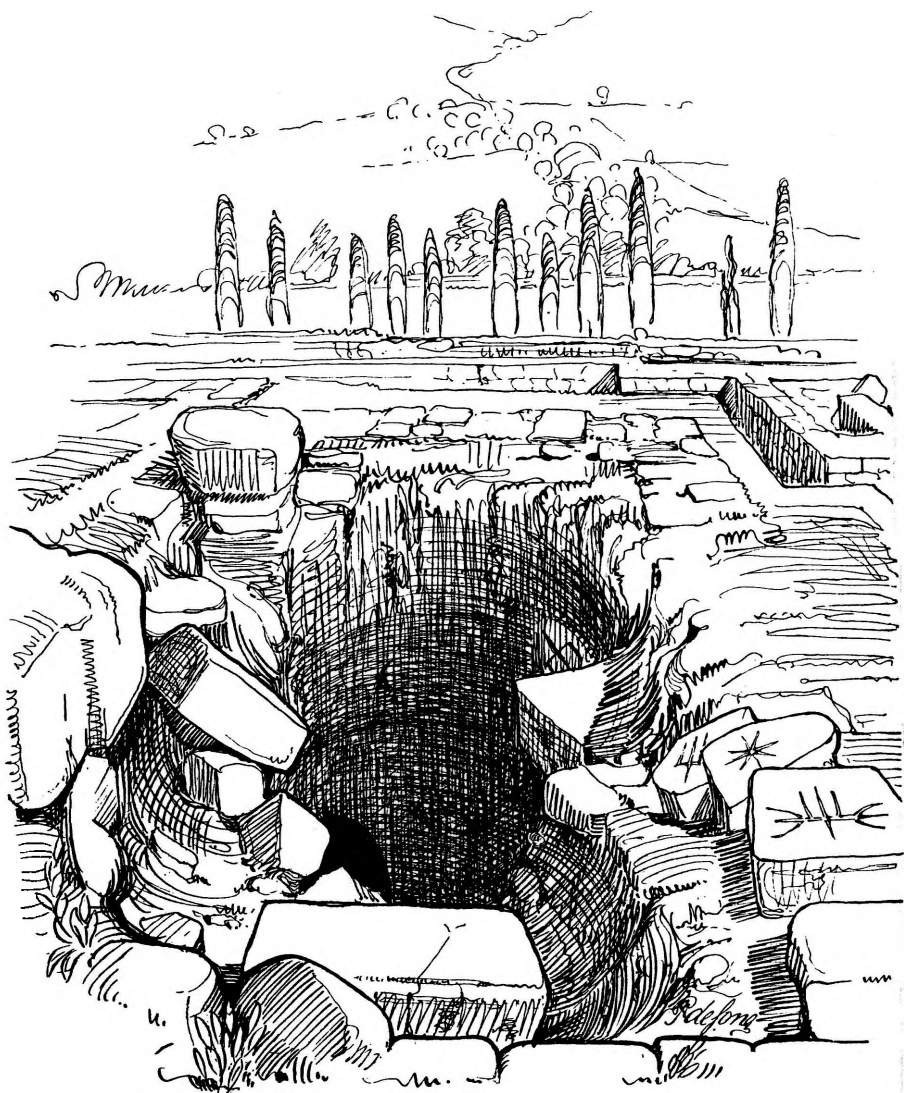


FIG. 4. Excavated Vault beneath SE. Palace Angle showing sunken base-blocks and artificial Cave.

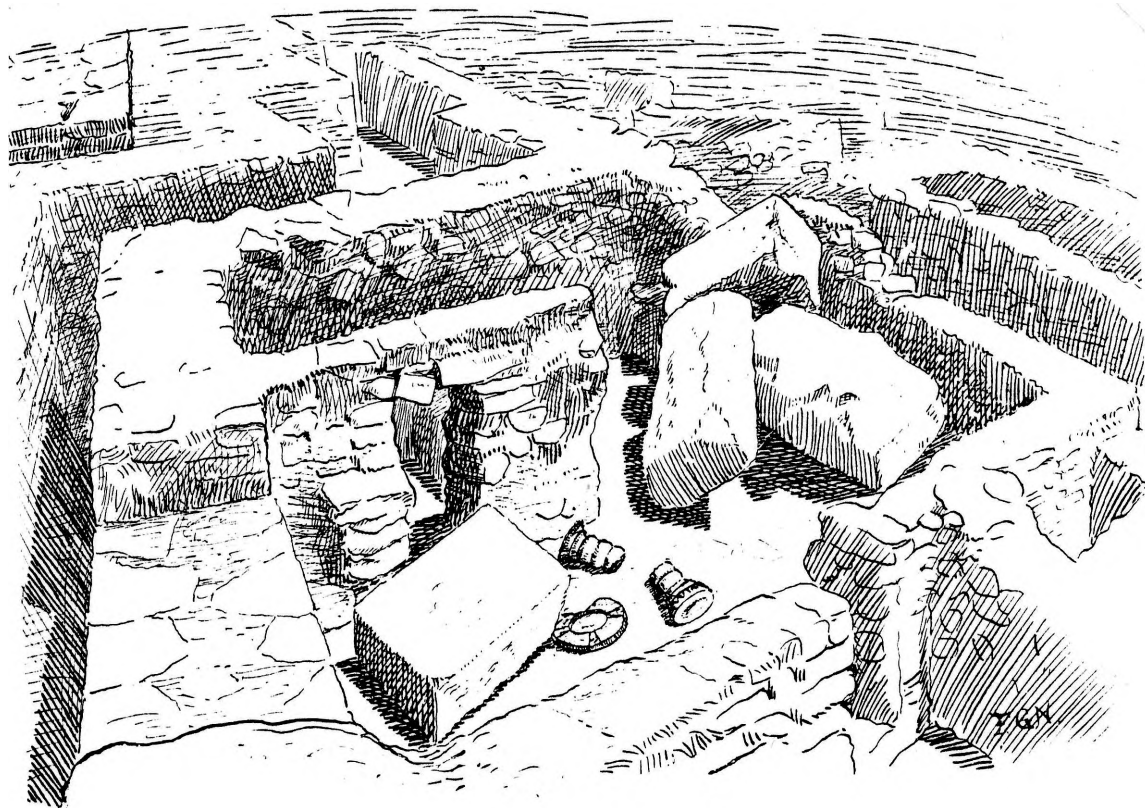


FIG. 5. House of the Third Middle Minoan Period overwhelmed by Palace blocks:

Palace angle that the great base blocks of its walls—some exhibiting the largest incised signs found in the building—had sunk down in a manner suggesting that here, as in the case of the South Porch, there had been some earlier vault of circular form below. Such indeed was found to exist; but, since in this case there was no trace either of filling in or of deep foundations, we must suppose that it had remained intact till the moment when the superincumbent structures collapsed. Within the cavity were tumbled blocks accompanied by sherds belonging to the close of the last Middle Minoan Period, marking the date of this collapse (fig. 4). But a further series of discoveries in the area abutting this Palace angle to the South threw an unexpected light on the character of the catastrophe that had produced its collapse. In the eastern section of this area were uncovered the basement rooms of a small house, the existence of which had been cut short by huge blocks, some about a ton in weight, hurled some twenty feet from the Palace wall by what could only have been a great earthquake shock. Here, too, the sherds uniformly belonged to the latest phase of M. M. III, while beneath were remains of stone lamps, some of them uncompleted, showing what had been the householder's craft. One of these lamps of black steatite, made for four wicks, was of quite exceptional size, an object for Palace use.

The neighbouring house to the west—though here were no fallen Palace blocks—had clearly shared the same contemporary fate. Pottery and other relics of the same date were here found in masses, largely the result of a methodical filling in. A noteworthy feature, moreover, here presented itself. In opposite corners of the South Room lay two large skulls of oxen of the urus breed, the horn cores of one of them over a foot in girth at the base. In front of these were remains of portable terra-cotta altars with painted designs and tripod bases (fig. 6). In other words, previous to the filling in there had been a solemn expiatory sacrifice to the Powers below—recalling the words of the *Iliad*, 'in bulls doth the Earth-shaker delight'.¹ There can be little doubt that the great deposits throughout a large part of the Palace area, all illustrating an identical cultural phase and indicative of a widespread contemporary ruin, about 1600 B.C., were due to the same physical cause. The great earthquake of Knossos, in fact, sets a term to the Third Middle Minoan Period.

The Earth-Shaker does not seem to have been well pleased with our clearance work, for just as the evidences of his former havoc were beginning to come out, a sharp shock, accompanied by a deep rumbling sound, was felt on the site. It did no material

¹ *Il.* xx. 405, γάννται δέ τε τοῖς ἐνοστήχων.

damage, however, though it nearly threw over our cook. This shock occurred at 12.15 on 20th April last, and the disturbance, starting, it appears, from the seismic centre between Santorin and Crete, was also noted at the Observatory at Athens at 12.22 m. 50s. on that date, coming from a epicentre 280 kilometres distant.

As a matter of fact slight earthquakes are frequent in the Candia district and there is indeed an earlier record, supplied by Dictys Cretensis, of a somewhat serious shock at Knossos in Nero's time, to which the first emergence of the inscribed Minoan tablets seems to have been due.¹

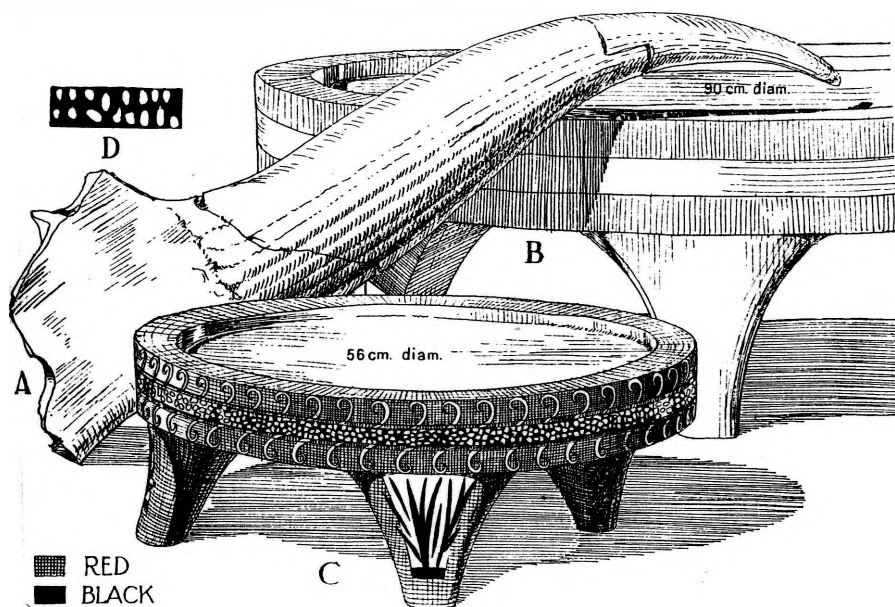


FIG. 6. Horn and part of skull of Sacrificed Ox and tripod altars of painted terra-cotta. From M. M. III house. (D, enlarged illustration of black and white grained band of C.)

The far earlier earthquake of which such convincing evidence is now forthcoming corroborates suspicions that I had already entertained, and accounts for many phenomena on the site. Among these may be noted the definite abandonment at this epoch of the Southern Corridor or Verandah of the Palace, and the burial of so many pottery stores along the East Slope, though the Domestic Quarter, supported on three sides by cuttings into the hill-side, clearly suffered much less. The earthquake seems to have been

¹ See my *Scripta Minoa*, i, p. 108 *seqq.*

confined to this part of the northern coast. There is no evidence of any such contemporary catastrophe at Phaestos or Hagia Triada, and the continuity between M. M. III and L. M. I is there unbroken.

It seemed at first a tempting supposition that the seismic disturbance of which we have the evidence at Knossos might have been connected with the great eruption that overwhelmed the early settlements in Santorin and Therasia. But a careful re-examination of the Santorin pottery preserved in the French School at Athens has made it clear to me that the native wares there found were executed under a strong Cretan influence of the early part of the First Late Minoan Period—indeed, an imported Minoan sherd of that date seems to have been actually found. They connect themselves, therefore, with a later ceramic phase than that represented by the filling in of the Knossian houses.

The ceramic and other relics supplied by the filling of the overwhelmed houses were among the richest and most abundant found on the site and were partly, no doubt, derived from the Palace itself. The houses themselves, moreover, rested on the lower walls of earlier dwellings cut short by an earlier catastrophe, namely, the great destruction, so general in Crete, at the close of the Second Middle Minoan Period. In and about these earlier structures there came to light a brilliant series of polychrome vessels. These included bowls of 'egg-shell' fabric, a remarkable ewer of 'pilgrim' shape, and a magnificent jar, three-quarters of a metre in height, with bold and elaborate decoration in which the hatched bladder motive played a conspicuous part. Among the remains in the upper deposit of special artistic value was a terra-cotta figurine consisting of the torso of a youth, made to be applied to a flat surface. It was exquisitely modelled in very high relief, and is shown bending back as if in the act of supporting some heavy vessel of offering, like the 'Cup-bearer' of the Palace fresco. The pottery of the time of the catastrophe presented various new types. Certain vases, looped above for suspension, and with wide-open mouths on their sides, may have been devised to tempt nesting swallows. Another utensil, curiously constructed as if for the winding or unwinding of skeins of wool through a slot, was dubbed 'Ariadne's clew-box'.

Fables certainly seemed to be coming true. The excavation of the neighbouring vault within the Palace angle—dangerous work, which had to be conducted slowly—had brought us to a floor-level about thirty feet down. Here were no signs of earlier human occupation, but on the south-east side appeared the opening of an artificial cave with three roughly-cut steps leading down to what can only be described as a lair adapted for some great beast.

The larger vault itself does not seem to have been open above, and we must therefore infer some access to it from the slope of the hill.

Is it possible that lions—already, as we know, frequent subjects of Minoan engravers before the date of the foundation of the Palace—were kept for show in the precincts of the more ancient Residency that seems to have existed on the hill of Knossos? The traditions of such an usage—doubtless with other accretions—may well have contributed to the origin of the later tales of the



FIG. 7. Minotaurs on Minoan (*b* and *c*) gems and a seal-impression from Zakro (*a*).

Minotaur that haunted the site in historic times. Among the monstrous forms already current in Minoan art man-lions occur as well as other semi-human monsters. At the same time it is clear that from the first the man-bull was the prevailing form, and is that which is most constantly repeated on the gems and seal-impressions (fig. 7).¹ It survived, indeed, to form the principal type on the coins of Hellenic Knossos, a thousand years later. The bovine part in the monster's composition in fact connected itself with Minoan religious ritual.

¹ From *Palace of Minos*, i. fig. 260. *c*, *d*, *e*.