

**QAL'EH-I YAZDIGIRD:
THE QUESTION OF ITS DATE**

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The 1976 R.O.M. Expedition to Qal'eh-i Yazdigird began its work this past summer with the legacy of a number of assumptions made the previous season about the site's date and significance in historical terms. The relevance of those assumptions for this short article is that the old traditional Sasanian date has now been rejected in favour of a late Parthian one.¹ While that date itself still remains inconclusively proven and the interpretations dependent upon it are still tentative in the extreme, it is probably appropriate to present right now such evidence as does exist to justify even the vague late Parthian date.

It is admittedly entirely premature at the moment to undertake any complete iconographical study of the Qal'eh-i Yazdigird stuccoes as a means of dating and identifying the nature of the function of the building they decorate. We have uncovered so far only a portion of the ground plan, and very little of that down to floor level. The stuccoes are often of a repetitive nature, which means that one can expect to recover better examples as time goes on, or at least reconstruct better versions of the originals. Many potential clues as to the original position of the ornament on the walls remain to be discovered as more pieces are unearthed.

It is also quite dangerous to throw around suggestions of centuries when we have as yet to uncover any neatly stratified deposit of artifacts other than the stuccoes themselves. The entire dating process, too, remains at this point a game of juggling by a process of elimination. There is, here, the inherent danger of tautologous argument. This involves the temptation to suggest a Parthian date for the stuccoes on the basis of style and, having thereby dated the structures, to use the stuccoes as a sound canon to advance a definition of Parthian art. Nevertheless, the stuccoes that have been extracted up until now are sufficiently striking in their own right, and, with their important implications besides for the study of late antique Classical and Islamic art, it probably behoves me to present a basic outline of the discoveries so far to explain the way in which the tentative date has been derived.

Let us recapitulate briefly on the nature of the site. Technically speaking, the name of Qal'eh-i Yazdigird only applies to the hill-fort located on one of the pinnacles behind the cliffs which flank the Zardeh basin on its east side (see sketch map, Fig. 1). But for practical purposes the name has been taken to apply to the entire area of the basin that has been fortified with an elaborate network of defences, of which the hill-fort (Upper Castle) forms just a part. Within the defences, the ruined walls of two major monuments are still visible above ground—an inner stronghold (Jā-i Dār), and a rectangular enclosure (Maydān) with the Gach Gumbad block of masonry standing at its upper end. The enclosure has been interpreted tentatively as representing a former "garden of paradise", with a pavilion adjacent to the Gach Gumbad block at the top end of the gardens.² (The pavilion has been the source of the rich finds of decorative stuccoes first encountered in 1965 and now further uncovered in the 1976 campaign.)

The rubble and mortar masonry of the walls of the entire network of fortifications, including the Upper Castle, as well as that of the Jā-i Dār structure and the Maydān enclosure, can all be seen to conform to a common standard of construction technique encountered almost ubiquitously on the

¹ For a general description of the site and the fifth century attribution see E. J. Keall, "Qal'eh-i Yazdigird. A Sasanian Palace Stronghold in Persian Kurdistan", *Iran V* (1967), pp. 99-121. The Parthian date has been advanced in E. J. Keall, "Qal'eh-i Yazdigird" (Survey of Excavations in

Iran 1974-75), *Iran XIV* (1976), pp. 161-4; and "Qal'eh-i Yazdigird: First Season of Excavations, 1975", *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Symposium on Archaeological Research in Iran*, November, 1975 (Muzeh Iran Bastan 1976, forthcoming).

² Keall, *Iran V*, p. 108.

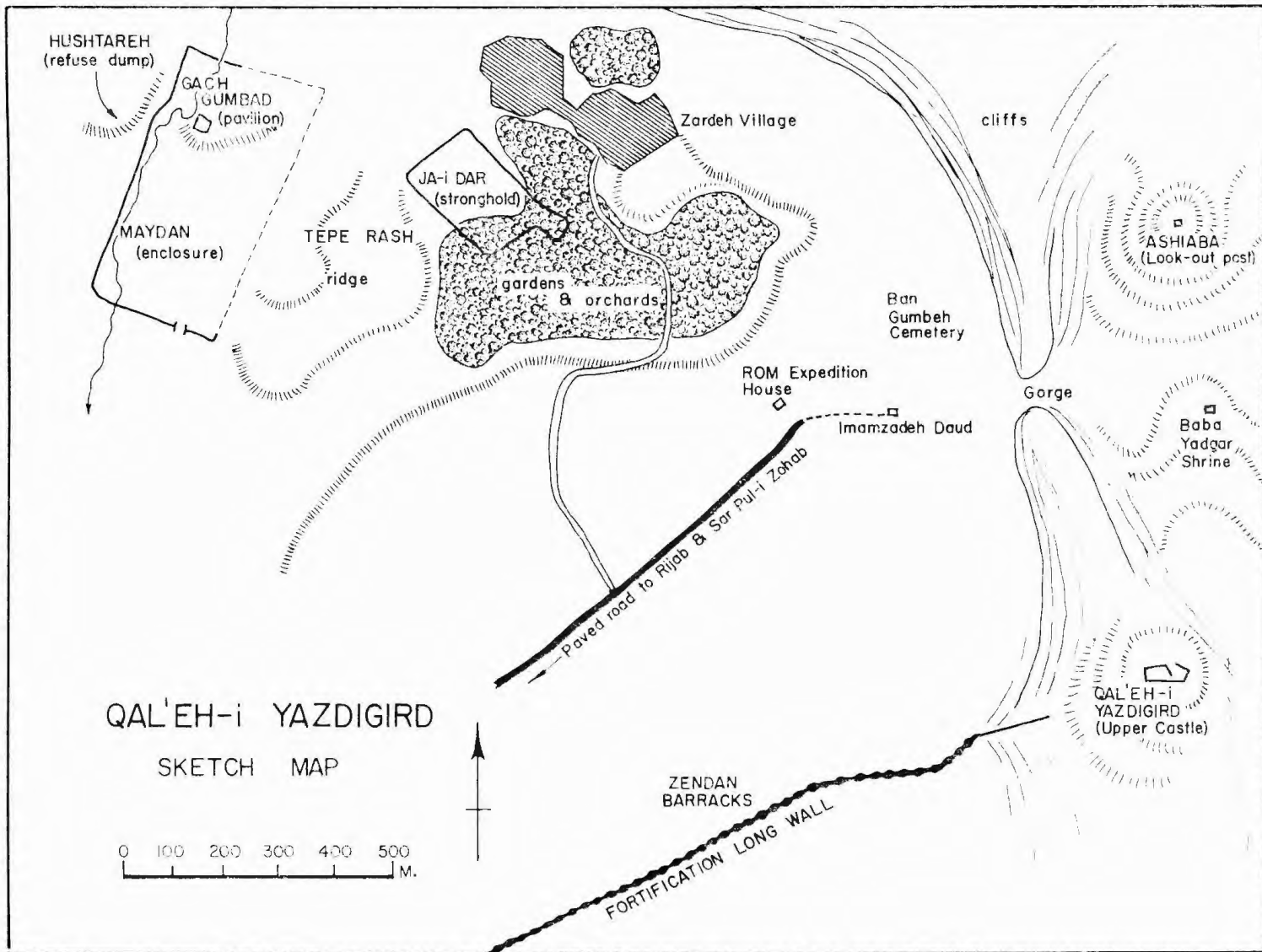


Fig. 1. *Qal'eh-i Yazdigird: site sketch map.*

Iranian plateau and normally associated with the Sasanians.³ There are almost no indications in the visible extant features (apart from in the Upper Castle) of major alterations being made to the original masonry. This would seem to indicate that the site experienced a relatively short history of occupation on a grand scale. In addition, the pottery that is abundant on the surface in the centre of the site can be said to consist mostly of the coarse type of red ware characterized by a dense red fabric and a large variety of scorings and hatched designs that one would normally associate with the Sasanian period in this part of the country.⁴ In 1965, the rubble and mortar masonry technique of the visible structures,

³ The technique was obviously known to the Parthians, if only in modest domestic architecture. Without that experience, builders could not have managed to construct, for instance, the Qal'eh-i Dukhtar at Firuzabad. Though few in number, there are rubble and mortar structures that can be dated as Parthian, such as the group of buildings that lie not far from the rock relief at Hung-i Noruzi, Izeh. There are, however, no other Parthian rubble and mortar monuments known to me on the scale of Qal'eh-i Yazdigird. This may reflect the relatively limited survey work that has been accomplished in Iran for Parthian sites. As a justification for the automatic labelling of masonry of this sort as Sasanian, it might be fair to point out

that twelve years ago one never conceived that, outside of the major city centres, the Parthians could have sponsored the amount of building activity for which it can now be demonstrated they were responsible. See Robert McC. Adams and Hans J. Nissen, *The Uruk Countryside* (Chicago 1972), pp. 57-8.

⁴ Based mostly on personal observations from surface collections gathered at recognized Sasanian sites, such as Taq-i Bustan, during my time as a Fellow at the British Institute of Persian Studies. See also the Sasanian pottery illustrated in Kam-bakhsh Fard, "Fouilles archéologiques à Kangavar. Le temple d'Anahita", *Bastanshenasi va Honar-i Iran* 9/10 (Winter, 1351), p. 5 (French text) and p. 20 (Persian text).

the seemingly rounded towers of those structures,⁵ the pottery, as well as the strong local legends identifying the ruins as a refuge of King Yazdigird,⁶ were all taken as indications that the site was a single period site of Sasanian date, possibly of the fifth century A.D. The distinctive vertical brick-lay construction technique of the pavilion, of which parallel examples can be found ranging from late Parthian to early Islamic times,⁷ was also deemed to be appropriately Sasanian by a process of elimination. Those features of the stuccoes which appeared distinctly Parthian in style were judged to represent an "archaising" element.⁸ But in the end it has to be admitted that the traditional Sasanian date (à la Rawlinson) could only be justified simply because it did not seem possible that the sum of the parts could really be anything else.⁹

The 1975 expedition concentrated mainly on defining the limits of the entire site, as well as locating features that were not free-standing above ground but whose presence was indicated by scatters of masonry, potsherds or other traces of occupation. An intensive ground survey was begun, with the careful collection and recording of all artifacts found. Sondages were undertaken to determine the nature and the depth of deposit of selected features. Part of the objective of the sondage operation, apart from the practical need to determine the lateral extent of the ancient deposit, was to judge whether the occupation represented that of a single Sasanian site as had been suggested by the 1965 campaign.

It should be noted that the original objective of the 1965 expedition had been to test the site for stratified deposits of pottery in order to help establish a Sasanian ceramic typology. The Sasanian-looking pottery was encountered in the largest quantities on the slopes of Tepe Rash.¹⁰ The attempt to locate stratified deposits of pottery here was totally unsuccessful. The terracing of the hillside for farming, along with the annual ploughing and irrigation, had destroyed to all intents and purposes most traces of occupation. The dense sherd scatter was merely a surface phenomenon, with the pottery drawn to the surface by the shallow action of wooden ploughs. These ploughs act more like deep harrows, and the solid nature of the potsherds prevents their getting turned under as they would be by a tractor-drawn ploughshare. Very little pottery was found below the surface, and none in a stratified context. Nevertheless, the predominant features of the pottery appeared to be Sasanian. The relatively large quantities of it in the centre of the site seemed to be a reasonable justification for associating it, and the accompanying Sasanian date, with the occupation of the structures as a whole.

Immediately on beginning the 1975 season it became apparent that the justification for the Sasanian date for the site as a whole was fading fast. The first clue came from the survey. This survey undertook to pick up and record all sherds found, using the present field boundaries as a practical way to divide up the uneven terrain of the Zardah basin. It became apparent in surveying the areas associated with the defensive Long Wall that a limited but consistent range of pottery was being encountered. By far the largest proportion of sherds belonged to coarse storage vessels with distinctive "grog" inclusions. The greatest concentration came in a flatish area (Zendān) where wall stubs and pit depressions were visible on the surface.

A test trench was sunk in the Zendān area in an attempt to gather stratified material. This was disappointingly unproductive since the archaeological debris was so shallow. It was possible to confirm, however, that there had been some fairly extensive occupation of the flat area behind the defences.

⁵ In all cases but that of the Upper Castle, the schematized tower shapes illustrated in *Iran V* (1967), fig. 3, were reconstructions based on observations of the eroded lines of extant features at surface level. Excavation of two of the towers along the defensive Long Wall in 1975 revealed that these reconstructions were inaccurate, cf. *Iran XIV* (1976), p. 164. The rounded towers of the Upper Castle, whose masonry has also been applied in a different fashion, belong to a major restoration of the building, probably around the thirteenth century.

⁶ Major Rawlinson, "Notes on a march from Zohab, at the foot of the Zagros, along the mountains to Khuzistan, and thence through the province of Luristan to Kermanshah", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society IX* (1839), pp. 32-3.

⁷ See W. Andrae and H. Lenzen, *Die Partherstadt Assur* (W.V.D.O.G. 57, 1933), pp. 27-8; O. Reuther, "Parthian Architecture", *Survey I*, p. 422; Klaus Schippmann, *Die*

iranischen Feuerheiligtümer (Berlin 1971), figs. 51-2; and Muhammad 'Ali Mustafa, "Preliminary Report on the Excavations in Kufa During the Third Season", *Sumer XIX* (1963), p. 45.

⁸ *Iran V* (1967), p. 117.

⁹ This point was acknowledged in the catalogue of the exhibition at the Sixth International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology, Oxford. See E. J. Keall, "Reflections on Qal'eh-i Yazdigird", *Excavations in Iran. The British Contribution* (Ashmolean Museum 1972), p. 47.

¹⁰ Tepe Rash is part of a largely natural ridge which separates the Maydān enclosure from the Jā-i Dār stronghold. There are three hillocks along the ridge, each of them carrying a specific name locally. For convenience's sake, the name of the hillock of Tepe Rash has been taken to label the whole ridge.

The suggestion that this represents barracks-type occupation has been made.¹¹ The guard chambers of two of the towers in the adjacent defensive wall, as well as the fill of the "ramp" on its inner side produced a modest selection of sherds, all of which bore decidedly Parthian characteristics in their shapes and wares. A porous, cream-coloured ware, evenly fired throughout and with fine grits, bears a close resemblance to Parthian fabrics found in Iraq.¹² The examples found at Qal'eh-i Yazdigird are likely to have been made locally. Bands of clay, suitable for the manufacture of such wares, occur in several locations in the vicinity. There is no question also that a "clinky ware" juglet, found in one of the tower chambers, should be dated as Parthian. (Where, within that range, is another matter.) Clinky ware sherds were also found with reasonable frequency throughout the entire area of the defensive Long Wall. Sherds from the type of large storage jars with grog inclusions found throughout this same area were also found closely associated with the guard chambers. Very few of the strongly Sasanian characteristics encountered in the sherds from Tepe Rash were discovered in any of the areas adjacent to the fortifications. The implications of these findings are that the defensive Long Wall was built and garrisoned during Parthian times.

The same cream-coloured wares were picked up on the surface of Gach Gumbad West, the rubble filled area to the west of the stuccoed pavilion site, where surface configurations suggested the presence of the service and residential quarters associated with the pavilion. Here the deposit was deep—three metres in the case of the soundings made—but it was largely sterile fill mostly accumulated after the building had fallen into disrepair. Nevertheless, no obvious Sasanian material was recovered either from the surface or from the deep soundings.

The Sasanian ceramic material appears to be restricted to the Tepe Rash slopes. It would appear that this ridge was the site of a Sasanian village that must have survived after the demise of the original estate. It is noticeable that not a single piece of recognisable Islamic glazed ware has been recovered so far in this area, although a sherd of probable Abbasid date has been found in the Jā-i Dār compound, and thirteenth century material is relatively common in the Bān Gumbeh area, between the R.O.M. Expedition house and the Imāmzādeh Dāūd at the base of the gorge. It is tempting to suggest that the occupation of the Tepe Rash ridge came to an end when the original Parthian irrigation canal fell into decay and ceased to function. It would have been logical for subsequent villages to have been located nearer to the natural source of water, that is nearer to Bān Gumbeh, where the stream of Bābā Yādgār makes its entry through the gorge into the Zardeh basin.

It would appear from the ground survey that the Bān Gumbeh area was the site of a village that was occupied from Seljuq through Safavid times.¹³ A relatively large proportion of thirteenth century Sultānābād type black-under-turquoise wares has been collected from the surface. These were noticeably lacking in any other part of the basin. It is quite likely that the manufacture of these types of wares continued long after their production in the original centres had ceased. A Safavid terminal date might be suggested. A large flaring-sided bowl, of coarse red fabric with straw temper, also seems to be diagnostic for this period of occupation. It has not been encountered so far in other parts of the site. The only other areas in the basin where late material has been recovered are at the lower end of the defensive Long Wall, adjacent to where the present road cuts through the wall; and in the Upper Castle, where it is apparent that modifications to the plan have been made, in the form of rounded towers and other repairs. The thirteen through sixteenth centuries would have been a suitable time for this to have happened. It is worth noting, too, that the tomb of the reputed founder of the Ahl-i Haqq faith (Bābā Yādgār) lies in the gorge at the foot of the crag on which the Upper Castle is located. The presence of this religious sect here, after the sixteenth century, may be a possible explanation for the "late-styled" masonry which has been applied in the cave of Bibi Shahr-bānou to render that

¹¹ *Iran XIV* (1976), p. 164.

¹² The Iraqi versions are to be associated with the type of globular water-jars which bear distinctive designs of "forked" or "comb-tooth" impressions on the shoulder. They can be dated as late Parthian in Babylonia and the Diyala region. For the pottery type, see Robert McC. Adams, *Land Behind Baghdad* (Chicago 1965), fig. 13 nos. G and H; Neilson C. Debevoise, *Parthian Pottery from Seleucia on the Tigris* (Univer-

sity of Michigan, 1934), fig. 183; and Antonio Invernizzi, "The Excavations at Tell 'Umayr", *Mesopotamia I* (1966), fig. 14.

¹³ A cemetery now in current use occupies the upper portion of this mediaeval village site. The cyclopean wall stubs of the abandoned structures also served as the emplacements for the tents of a transhumant summer camp for the Zardeh villagers of two generations ago.

fissure in the walls of the gorge into a fortified retreat. Modern occupation of the basin is limited to the permanent village of Zardeh, with its seven hundred inhabitants, whose ancestors have always lived there within living memory. There is also a transhumant winter village, Sayyid Muhammad, at the far end of the basin. The results of the ground survey seem to be justifying the effort involved, in view of the fact that we are able to hypothesize the location of these various settlements that have occurred since the construction of the original fortress.

At the conclusion of the 1975 season it could be demonstrated that the military fortifications were probably conceived and executed as a single operation, and that all subsequent occupation after the demise of the settlement was on a much lower scale. Because of the widely scattered location of the various parts of the site, however, the dating was still being deduced on the basis of often only vague associations of surface material with adjacent features. It was of crucial importance, therefore, to establish the relationship between the stuccoed pavilion and the walled enclosure in which it lay. Although of different dimensions and shape, the rubble and mortar walls of the enclosure are distinctly built of the same broad layers that are a standard feature of the rest of the site. By contrast, the walls of the pavilion within the enclosure itself are composed of baked bricks, using a technique of vertical lay construction that is known in other buildings ranging in date, as has been said earlier, from Parthian to early Islamic times in Mesopotamia and Iran (Pl. Ia).

It can now be demonstrated that there is a strong likelihood that the pavilion walls of baked brick are contemporary with the surrounding enclosure. This is supported by the fact that during the 1976 campaign it was revealed that the eastern exterior wall of the pavilion, and the footings of the pavilion walls themselves, are composed of rubble and mortar masonry. It is possible that the baked brick provides a more precise medium for the execution of architectural details and that this explains its use by the architects.¹⁴ Of course, a Parthian date for the construction of such walling has already been shown to be quite feasible. Of further value is the fact that a clinky ware sherd was found in the floor deposit of one of the corridors (no. 2) surrounding the main halls. It is a slim thread to hang a Parthian date upon, but it seems to provide at the moment evidence that is consistent with information found independently in other parts of the site. It is obvious that the absence of a sound, tangible date is most frustrating. But, in view of the diverse peripheral information pointing to a Parthian date for the site as a whole, it is satisfying to be able to point out, too, as will be demonstrated below, the growing number of recognizable Parthian characteristics of style as more stuccoes are unearthed.

Let us now proceed to the subject of the stuccoes themselves. The 1976 campaign has revealed, so far, three separate rooms (nos. 1, 5, and 11) as the source of the decorative stuccoes. Although the ground plan is far from complete, it appears to be emerging very closely along the lines of known Parthian complexes, and in particular of the north *eyvan* unit of the Parthian palace at Ashur. The Ashur unit breaks down into three rooms consisting of an outer *eyvan*, an inner hall, and a large pillared room to one side.¹⁵ Each of the rooms is surrounded by a circumambulatory corridor. In the case of the Qal'eh-i Yazdigird version, the front room (the hypothetical *eyvan*) faces the gardened enclosure, and not a courtyard as at Ashur. A double corridor separates the front and inner rooms (nos. 11 and 5) from the side room (no. 1).¹⁶ The iconography of the stuccoes from the three rooms is distinctly different in each of them.

¹⁴ Perhaps it was easier to lay out in vertical brick-lays the precise dimensions needed for the articulation of the "gallery" façade. But if this had been done in the conventional horizontal lays it would have provided a much more stable structure. Bonding across the joints would have been more effective, for gypsum mortar provides only a mechanical bond, and not a chemical one. When the mortar disintegrates there is a danger that the outermost brick will quickly "flake off". There seems to be no obvious reason why this particular technique was employed unless it relates in some way to the earlier techniques of "stacking" mud brick in ancient Sumer. See Reuther, *Survey I*, p. 422.

¹⁵ Andrae and Lenzen, *Die Partherstadt Assur*, pl. 10.

¹⁶ Although these corridors may have assumed a practical function, it is likely that the original purpose of their construction was to fulfill a structural need by the way of providing support for the thrusts of vaults of adjacent rooms. Their presence may be taken as being practically proof that such vaults did exist.

One of the sondage trenches in 1965 uncovered the tops of parallel walls which will probably turn out to be the corridor surrounding room 5 on its western side. cf. *Iran V* (1967), pl. IVd.

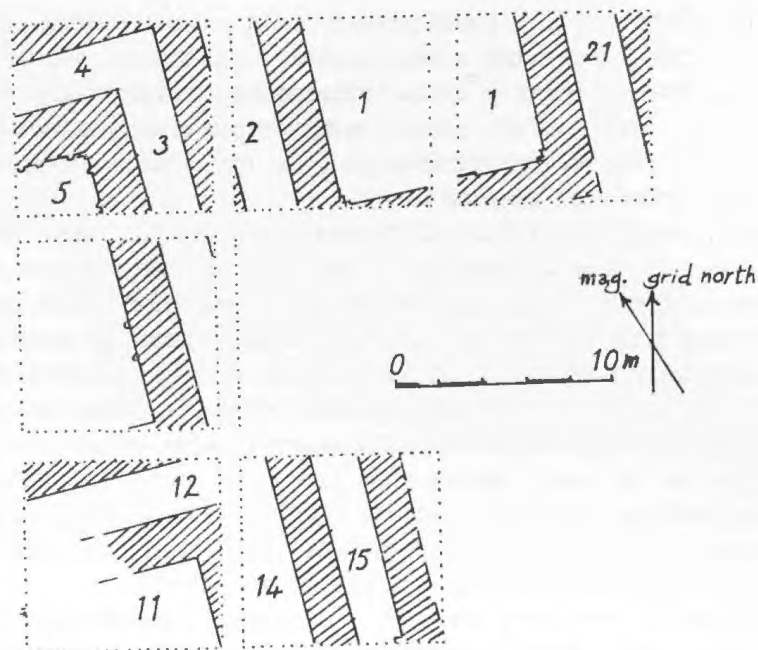


Fig. 2.

Expansion of the 1965 sondage trench, in which the stuccoes were first encountered, revealed that they belonged to a large, square room (no. 1) measuring approximately ten metres a side. The lower parts of the walls appear to be plain. A decorative frieze of interlocking swastika and rosette designs runs below the set-back at the top of the wall, four metres above the floor.¹⁷ This set-back marks the beginning of the zone from which most of the decorative ornament has fallen. It is noticeable that the majority of the finds discovered so far in this room are of a continuous or repetitive nature, and that they have all generally been found in a position very close to the wall. Capitals of engaged columns and a cornice amongst the finds seem to point to the existence of an indented "gallery" below the springing of the ceiling vault, with architectonic devices separating the repetitive figural elements (Pl. Ib).

Perhaps one of the most important elements of the ornament of room 1 is the composite scene consisting of a reclining figure who reaches for a bunch of grapes from a vine, flanked by winged youths who sport with the tail and head of a feline creature (Pl. Ic and d). Another youth also reaches for grapes from the vine. The origin of this particular scene may well be Dionysus, his cupid companions and a panther.¹⁸ Although the style is obviously western in origin, it is worth noting that the head of one of the winged youths protrudes into the actual border of the picture. Rather than being purely a clumsy rendition, it appears to be related to the curious device adopted by artists in some of the Parthian and Sasanian rock reliefs, and is typically Iranian.

The cupid association may also not be out of place in the case of the standing figures which were originally described in 1967 as hermaphrodites.¹⁹ The cupid identification is supported by the presence of wings, discernable in at least one of the examples (Pl. IIb and c). The nude figure leans on a pedestal, a curious artistic device presumably derived from the tradition of Roman stone sculpture. An unidentifiable "drapery" is shown over the top of the pedestal. The precise pose of this figure can be found paralleled in Roman art. The western Classical or Hellenistic source of the iconography of these two scenes just described is obvious, but an unanswered question remains whether that source was the western Classical world of Rome or the "indigenous" traditions of Near Eastern Hellenism.

¹⁷ cf. *Iran V* (1967), Pl. IVa-c. See also Pl. Ia of this text for the set-back above the frieze.

¹⁸ This frieze was first encountered in the 1965 sondage, see

Iran V (1967), p. 114.

¹⁹ *Iran V* (1967), pp. 113-15. See also Keall, *Excavations in Iran, The British Contribution*, p. 47 and fig. 62.

Of the remaining human and animal figural subject matter from room 1 there is no obviously easily defined canon of style other than something that can be loosely called the eclectic art of the Parthians. Recovered from room 1 is a complete, but badly defaced example of the bust of the "Parthian noble" in a circular plaque, of which a composite reconstruction was published in 1967 (Pl. IIIa).²⁰ It is sufficient to repeat here the fact that the frontal pose and distinctively bunched hairstyle is a classic for Parthian portraits in western Iran. Equally distinctive, but more so as a forerunner of a future style, is the winged beast—a griffon—whose flying pose can be recognized as that of the standard Sasanian version of a *senmuru* or *simurgh* (Pl. IIa).²¹ The fact that the griffon head is retained in an otherwise *senmuru*-like stance perhaps argues well for an early, i.e. Parthian, date. The intertwined dragon motif on an engaged column capital (for which there are now three examples uncovered) clearly owes much to the ancient traditions of Near Eastern art, which abounds with scenes of crossed and rampant beasts. Curiously, the closest examples to the Qal'eh-i Yazdigird intertwined dragons (Pl. IIIb) must be the pair of "fighting dragons" from 7th/8th century Penziken.²² In view of the suggested significance of the twisted knot or "node" in Islamic iconography, an astrological association in the case of the Qal'eh-i Yazdigird piece should not be discounted.²³ A matching engaged capital, but bearing a different design and painted an overall red shows a diminutive nude female (Aphrodite?) holding a pair of dolphins by the tails (Pl. VI). It is interesting to note, too, that the tails of the dolphins are twisted like those of Classical *hippocamps*. One is reminded, in fact, most of all of the sort of thing one might encounter in second century Nabatea.

Room 5, which corresponds to the inner hall of the Ashur-type complex, appears to be a large room approximately thirteen metres long, whose sides are punctuated by a regular series of arched niches (Pl. IVa, and Va and b). Plain half-columns flank the niches. The jambs carry stylized floral and geometric designs in continuous bands or separate, repetitive blocks.²⁴ The simplicity of the designs, whether running swastika or honeysuckle bud-and-tendrils, marks them apart from the "baroque" versions of much of Sasanian stucco overall ornament (Pl. IVb and c).²⁵ One notices, however, a sophistication in the representation of the stylized floral ornament, in the sense that artists are anticipating already some of the most fundamental concepts of the stylized natural designs of Islamic art. It could be argued that the use of the bud-and-tendrils motif, when it is split in half and placed back to back in a half circle, is really the forerunner of the arabesque (Pl. XIIId). Pilasters in the east corner of the room, decorated with similar bands of ornament, appear to have once carried the Corinthian capitals that were found in the debris nearby (Pls. VIIIc and IXb). This type of capital, with a human head amongst the palmette foliage, is known from Warka and Seleucia on the Tigris.²⁶

The scenes of processions of griffons, coming from both curved and straight architectural members, most likely belong to the architraves or archivols that were above the niches. The processions include both addorsed and confronted griffons, as well as an example of a griffon attacking a deer (Pls. VIIIA and b and Pl. IXa). It is noticeable that the form of these griffons, particularly the wing shape, differs markedly from that of the "*senmuru*-griffon" from room 1. There is no evidence that this represents in any way a different period for their execution.²⁷ It is true that room 5 has witnessed some alterations to the original plan, in the way of a buttress appended on the west side of niche 1. It is also true that the

²⁰ *Iran V* (1967), pp. 116-17 and fig. 7.

²¹ It would appear that a wing fragment of another beast of the same kind was uncovered in 1965. See *Iran V* (1967), p. 120 and fig. 9a.

²² See *Iran V* (1967), pp. 115-16 and fig. 6; and Aleksander Belenitsky, *Central Asia* (Archaeologi Mundi 1968), pl. 105.

²³ On the question of dragons and some of their astrological associations in Islamic art, see Willy Hartner, "The Vaso Vescovali in the British Museum", *Kunst des Orients IX*, 1/2 (1973/74), pp. 99-130.

²⁴ The concept is very close to the niche with stucco decoration from Bishapur. See Roman Ghirshman, *Iran Parthians and Sasanians* (Arts of Mankind 1962), fig. 179.

²⁵ See especially the ornate columns from the Sasanian palace at Damghan. Erich Schmidt, *Excavations at Tepe Hissar, Damghan*

(Philadelphia 1937), pl. 72.

²⁶ See Bernard Goldman, "The Architectural Decoration", in Clark Hopkins (ed.), *Topography and Architecture of Seleucia on the Tigris* (Ann Arbor 1972) figs. 34-6. The Warka examples were described by Deborah Thompson in her paper delivered at the Seventh International Congress for Iranian Art and Archaeology, Munich, September 7-11th, 1976.

²⁷ The form of the griffons in the processions can readily be paralleled with Parthian examples. See Goldman, *Architectural Decoration*, figs. 72-4. The tightly scrolled wing tips of the *senmuru*-griffon, however, are more difficult. See *Iran V* (1967), p. 115 and Deborah Thompson, *Stucco from Chal Tarkhan-Eshqabad near Rayy* (Colt Archaeological Institute, 1976), pl. IV, nos. 1, 3 and 4.

1975 Expedition located outside of the gardened enclosure a refuse dump of architectural debris that appears to have been cleared from the Gach Gumbad pavilion.²⁸ Several of the stucco pieces recovered this year from within the pavilion also show traces of more than one coat of paint. But whether the stucco decorations were ever subjected to more than repairs and face lifts remains in doubt. Whatever the case turns out to be, it is apparent that both the griffon procession and the *senmuro*-griffon were adhering to the walls of adjacent rooms in a single building at the same time. The more probable explanation for the different styles of the griffon creatures is that the scene being illustrated was different. It often seems to be the case that the style follows the subject matter.

A coffered design decorates the soffit of the griffon niches in room 5, and the whole feature is painted an overall blue. It is interesting to note that the fallen fragments mostly have paint preserved on them, as do the lower sections of the wall decorations. The paint seems to have been preserved by the accumulation of debris around it. There has been severe erosion of the wall faces in the niched room, high up in the fill, as though this was a surface which stood exposed for a considerable time (see Pl. IVb). The features that stood exposed above this point have lost all traces of their paint. The possibility of the building standing as an empty ruin at the time of the Islamic conquest is an attractive theory, since it would be the easiest explanation for the apparent deliberate defacement of the human heads that were probably still adorning the walls at that time.²⁹

From the debris within the niched room comes an engaged half-column, painted an overall green, and decorated with scenes of a series of nude heroes confronting wild animals (Pl. VII). Man and beast are portrayed in flanking panels, separated from one another by a muntin that divides the panels. The hero can be seen thrusting a spear into the opposing quarry through the muntin. It is a curious artistic device. The simple but bold and forceful depiction of the musculature and stance of the figures is a most noticeable feature. It is quite unlike the treatment of the nude figure in the western Classical world, but quite similar to that of figures in Gandharan art.

The use of polychrome colours occurs on the triple faceted columns that come from room 11, the front hall or *eyvan* according to the Ashur concept of a plan. These columns bear a series of repetitive figures that are placed one above the other, in panels that are separated by bands of Vitruvian scroll design. The use of the panels is similar to that employed on the "animal-combat column". The figures are limited to four subjects, namely a nude female dancer, a Pan figure with pipes, an *himation*-robed female, and a trousered male with three-pointed hat (Pls. X and XIa and b). The colours applied to these stuccoes appear to conform to no particular recognizable scheme, and the use is limited to overall colours against single tone backgrounds. The effects of lines and shadow are produced by the depth of the carving, and not by the paint itself. The source of the iconography is mixed. The *himation* is a true Hellenistic derivative, and Pan equally belongs to the western world. The clumsy rendition of the nude dancer is remarkably close in spirit to that of Anahita figures on Sasanian silver vases, and the treatment of the trousered male is reminiscent of the stone sculptures of Hatra.

There are, in addition, from the site an enormous number of painted fragments of geometric, stylized floral and architectonic design (Pls. XIc and XIIa-c). A complete cleaning and study of these pieces has yet to be made. Suffice it to say that it represents an enormous wealth of decoration of great importance.

It can be seen from the casual remarks made about the style that the Parthian element is reasonably dominant. Although the greater number of parallels are known from Mesopotamia, the stuccoes of Kūh-i Khwāja represent an important parallel from eastern Iran.³⁰ The absence of relevant material from central Iran may stem either from an accident of preservation or the fact that this area was not richly developed during late Parthian times. It is equally apparent that the western Classical element is also very strong. For the moment, it is impossible to answer the question of whether this influence entered the vocabulary of artists as a result of direct contact with the eastern Roman provinces or even whether Roman artisans came to Parthia as free agents or prisoners. There is, too, the possibility that

²⁸ *Iran XIV* (1976), p. 164.

²⁹ See, for example, the damage caused to the face of the "Parthian head", fig. 9.

³⁰ See, for instance, Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthians and Sasanians*, fig. 54.

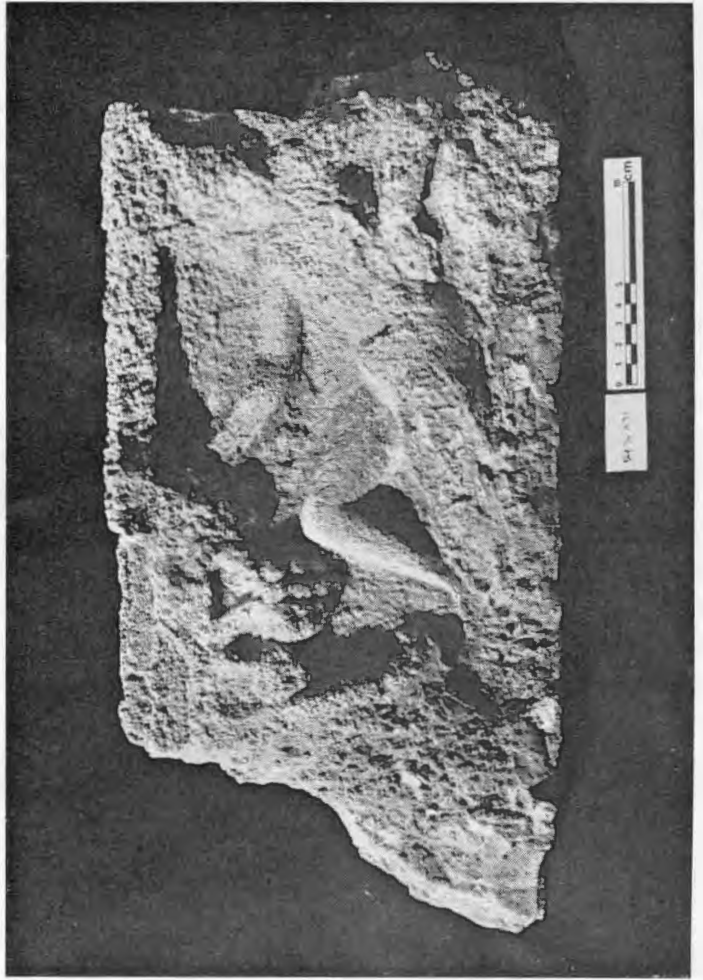
the Classical form is merely the result of a development from an unexpectedly strong survival of Hellenistic traditions in one of the great Hellenized areas of the world. There need not be a simple answer. It is more likely that the minds of artists, familiar with Hellenistic traditions, were particularly receptive to the strong expressions of Classical culture as it had developed in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire. What is apparent is that there is an enormous variety in the iconography of the Qal'eh-i Yazdigird stuccoes, and that artists chose to depict their subjects in the style of the artistic tradition from which the iconography was derived. It remains to be seen how long the ornament survived on the walls of the Gach Gumbad pavilion, and how many minor repairs and face-lifts it underwent. Given the apparent influences in the artwork from eastern Rome and the very definite parallels from late Parthian Mesopotamia, it may not be unreasonable to propose a second century A.D. date for the site as a whole and the stuccoes. Even with this unsatisfactory date, this tantalizing glimpse is enough to reveal that the traditional dating of Parthian objects in museums on the basis of style alone—even within the broad range of a couple of centuries—leaves very much to be desired. It is to be hoped that further excavations will greatly clarify the picture.



Pl. Ia. Gach Gumbad, Rooms 1 and 21: indented "gallery" above frieze (foreground) and vertical brick lays (top of picture).



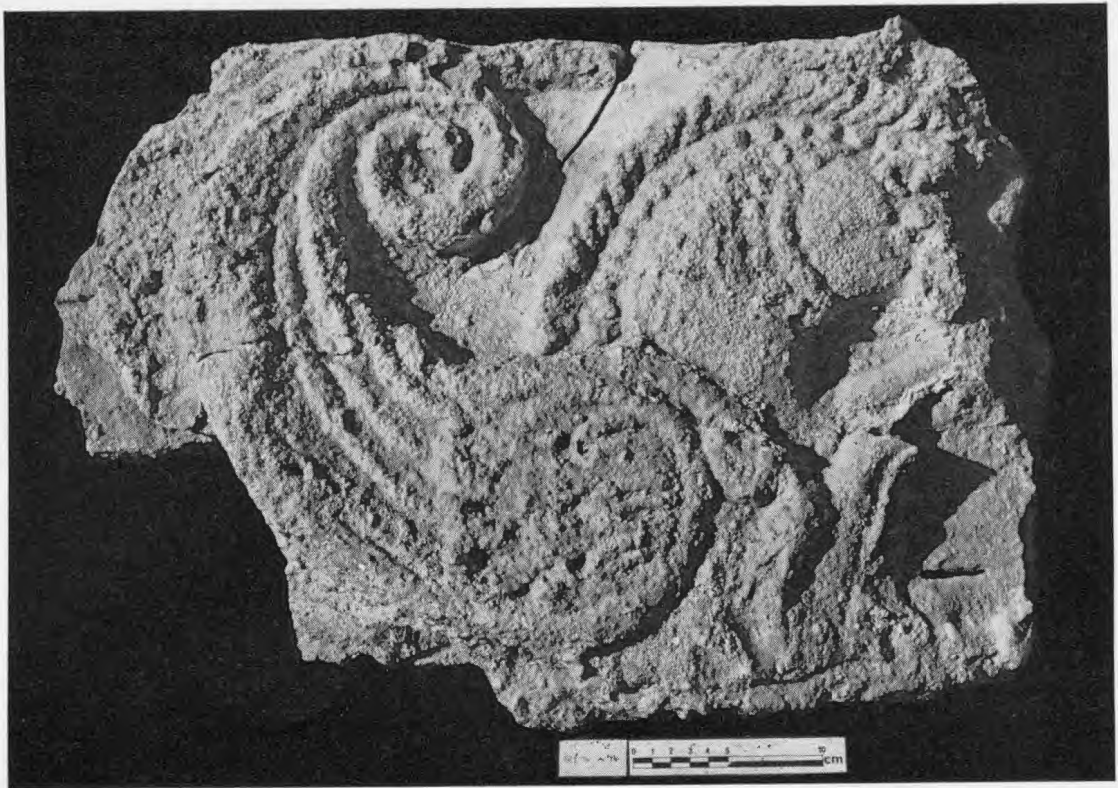
Pl. Ib. Gach Gumbad, Room 1: indented gallery above frieze with miniature, fluted half-columns. A section of fallen cornice lies beside the scale.



Pl. Ic. Reclining male figure, QY 76.A71.



Pl. Id. Winged youths sporting with feline, QY 76.A49.



Pl. IIa. Senmuru-griffon, QY 76.A76.



Pl. IIb. Standing nude figure (winged), leaning on pedestal, QY 65.



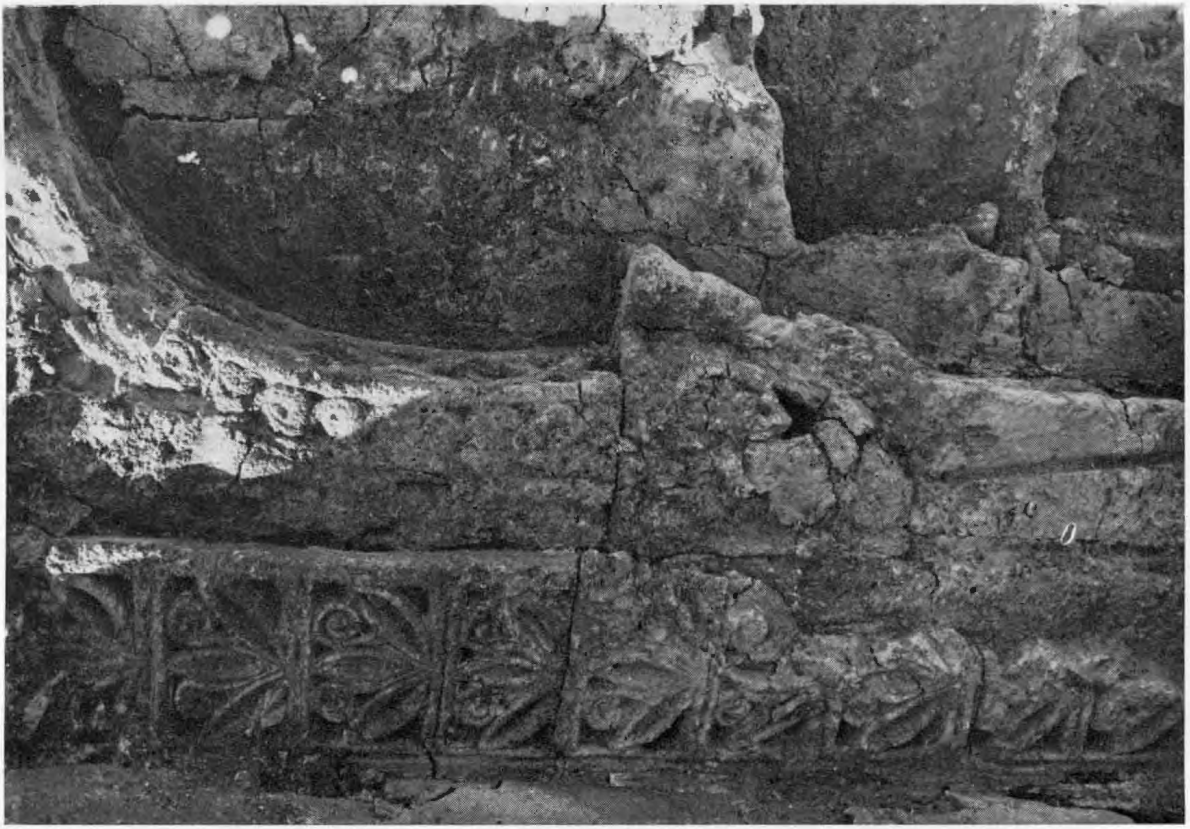
Pl. IIc. Standing nude figure, leaning on pedestal, QY 76.A48.



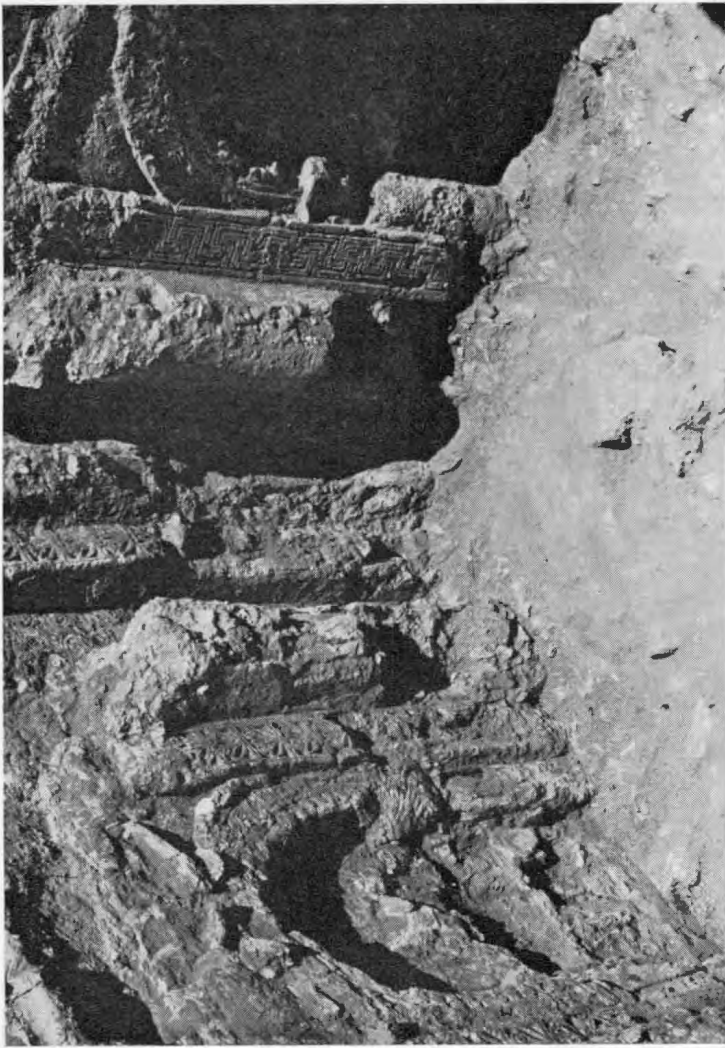
Pl. IIIa. Male bust in circular plaque, QY 76.A95.



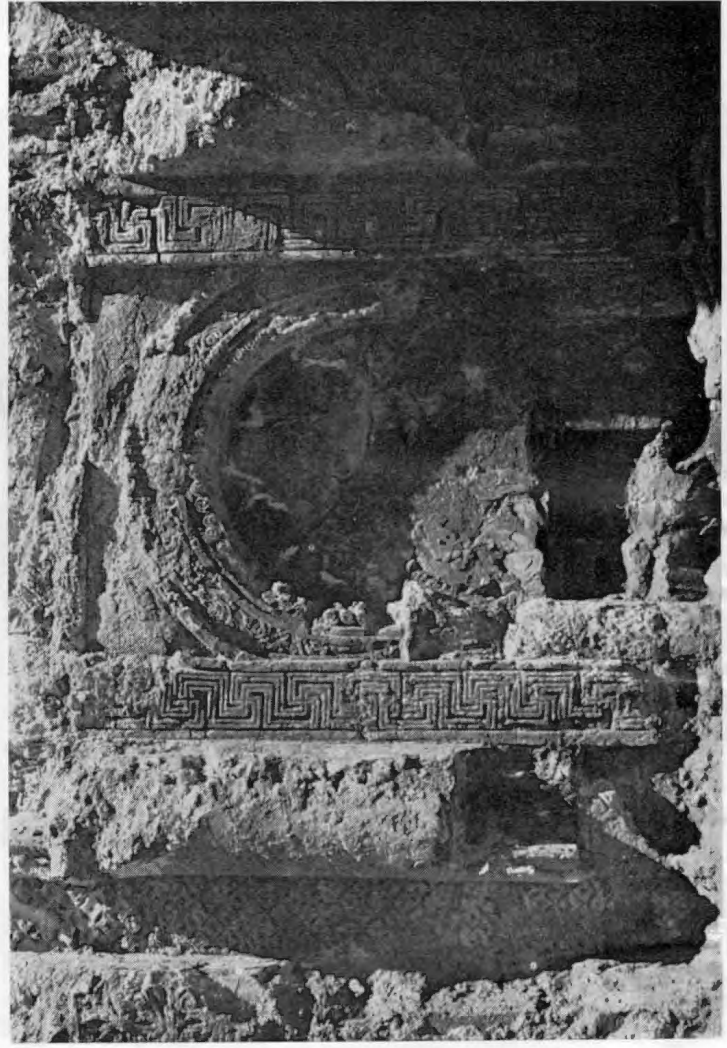
Pl. IIIb. Intertwined dragon beasts, QY 76.A96.



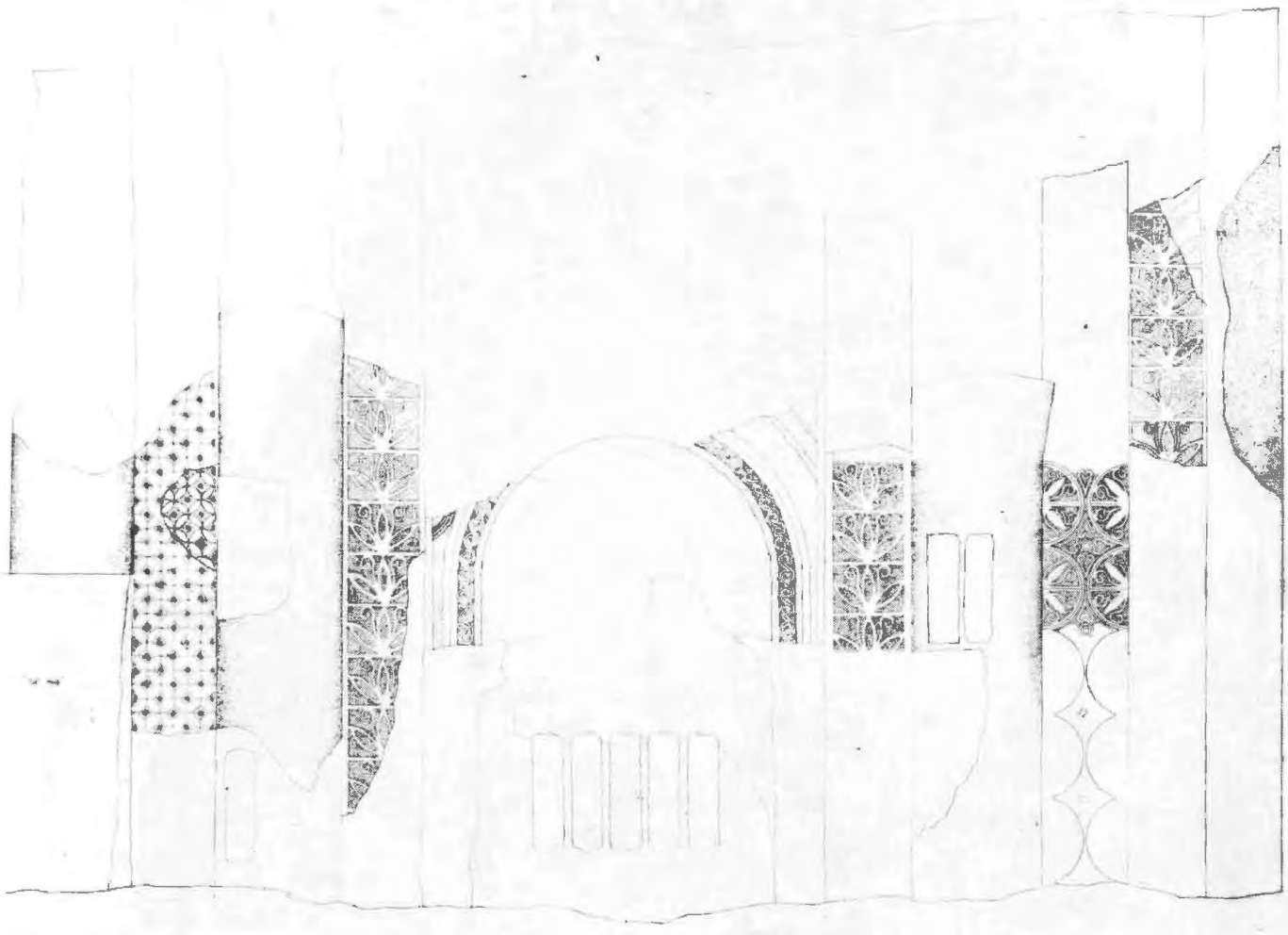
Pl. IVc. Gach Gumbad, detail from Room 5, Niche 1.



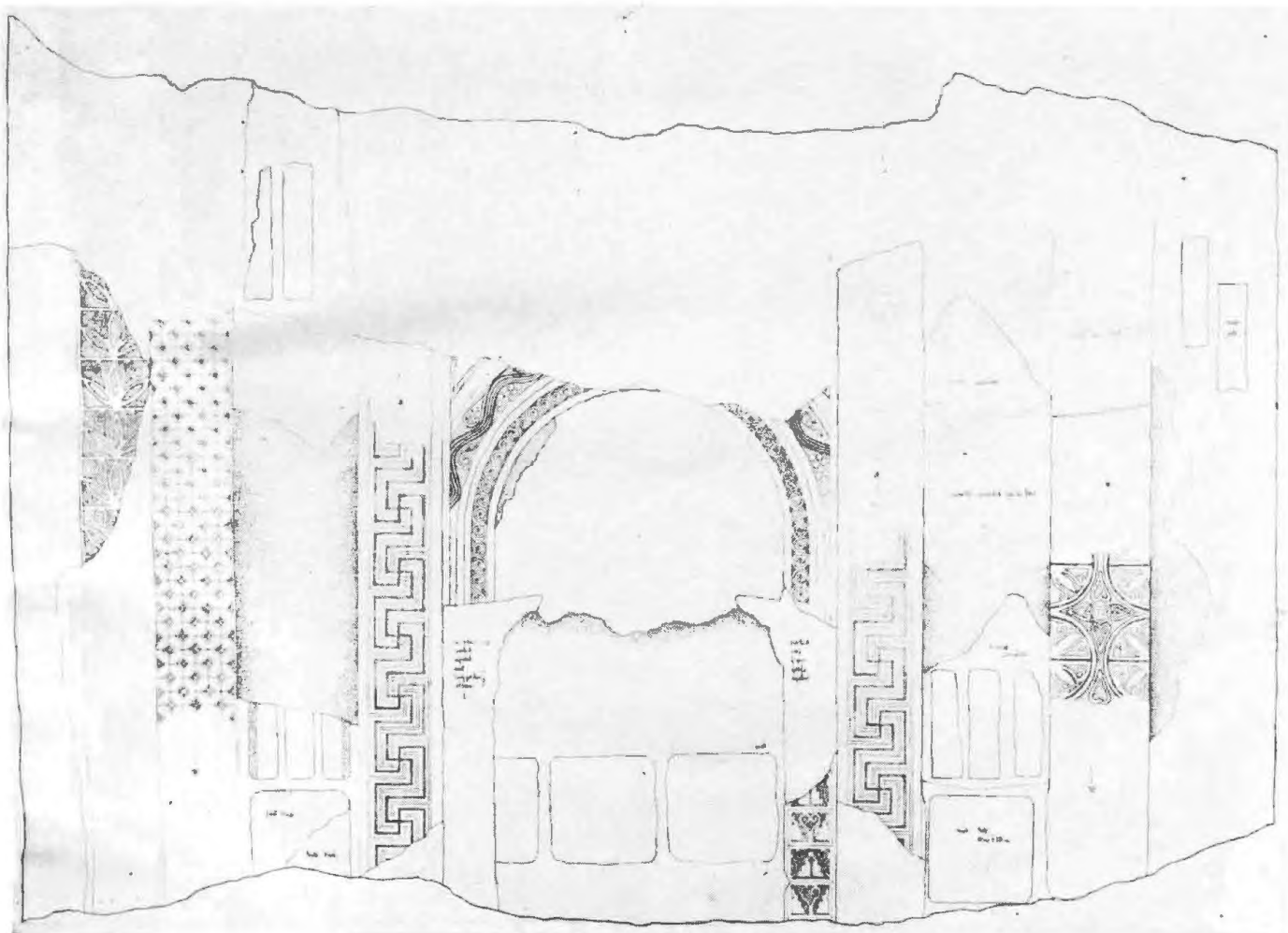
Pl. IVa. Gach Gumbad, Room 5, Niches 1 and 2 (north-east corner of room).



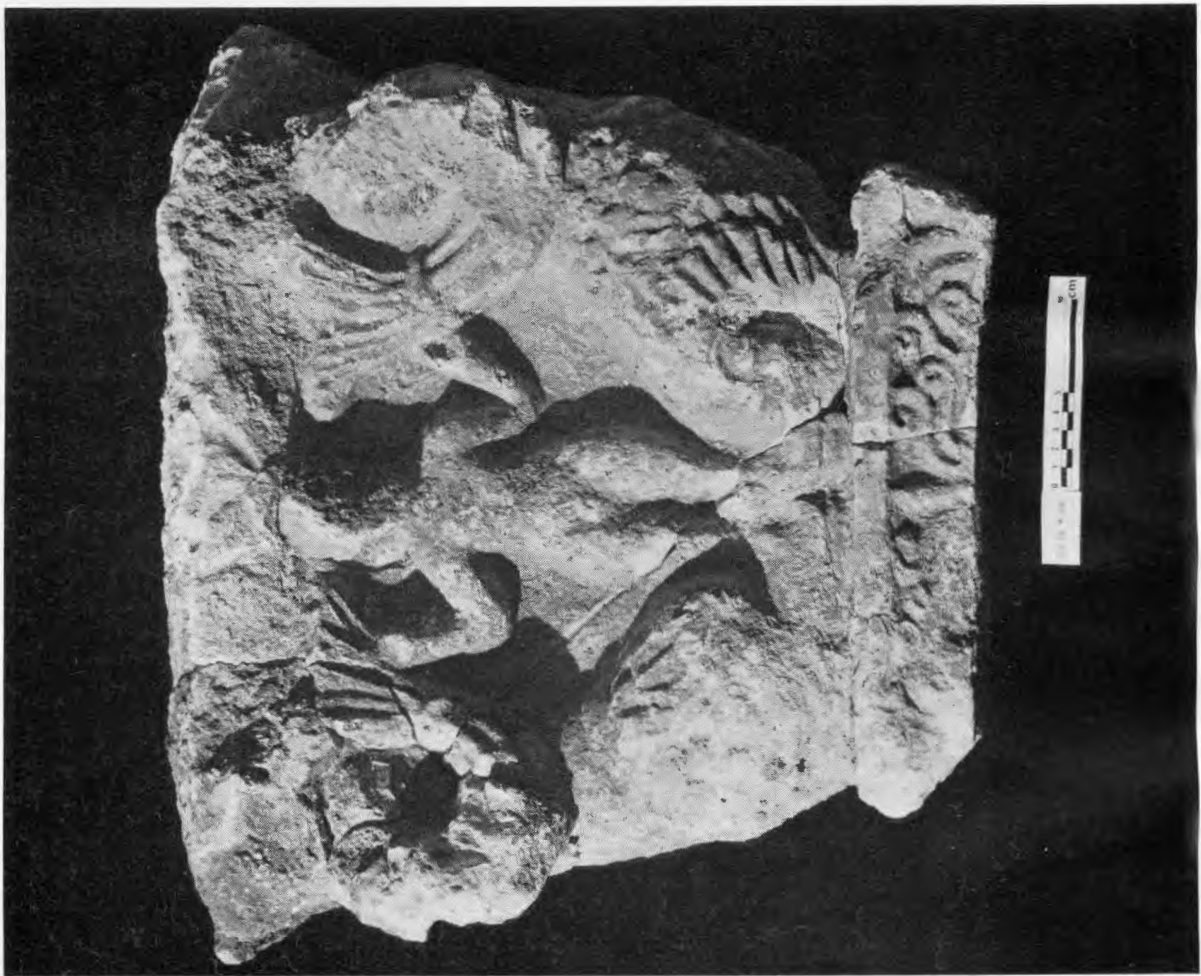
Pl. IVb. Gach Gumbad, Room 5, Niche 2.



Pl. Va. Gach Gumbad, Room 5, Niche 1 (north side).



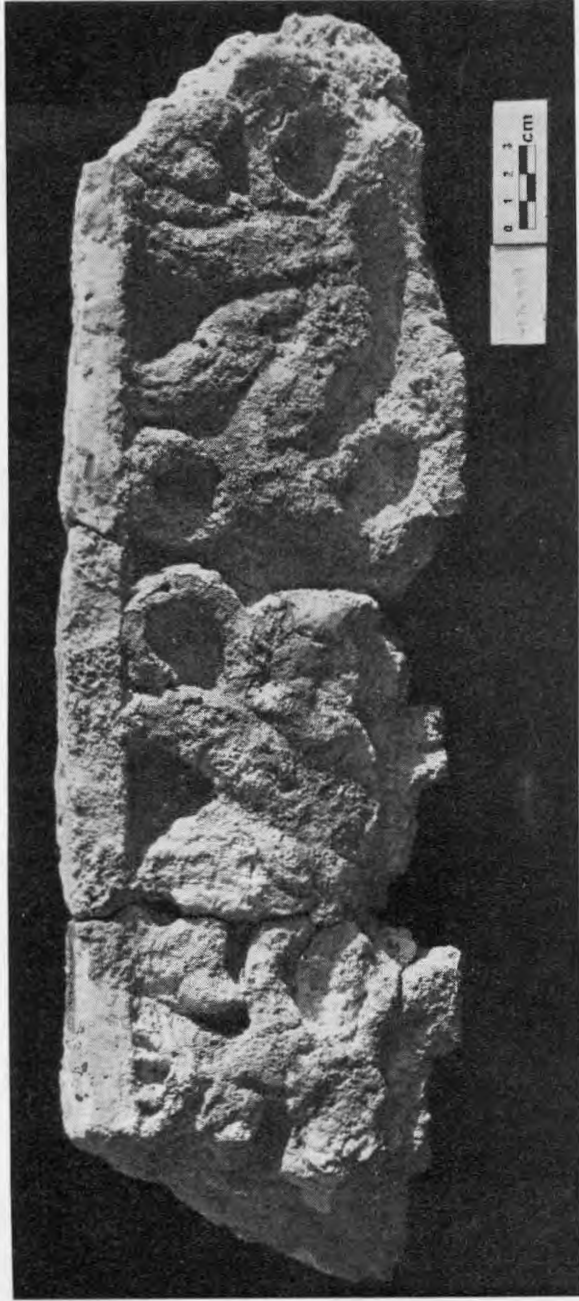
Pl. Vb. Gach Gumbad, Room 5, Niche 2 (east side).



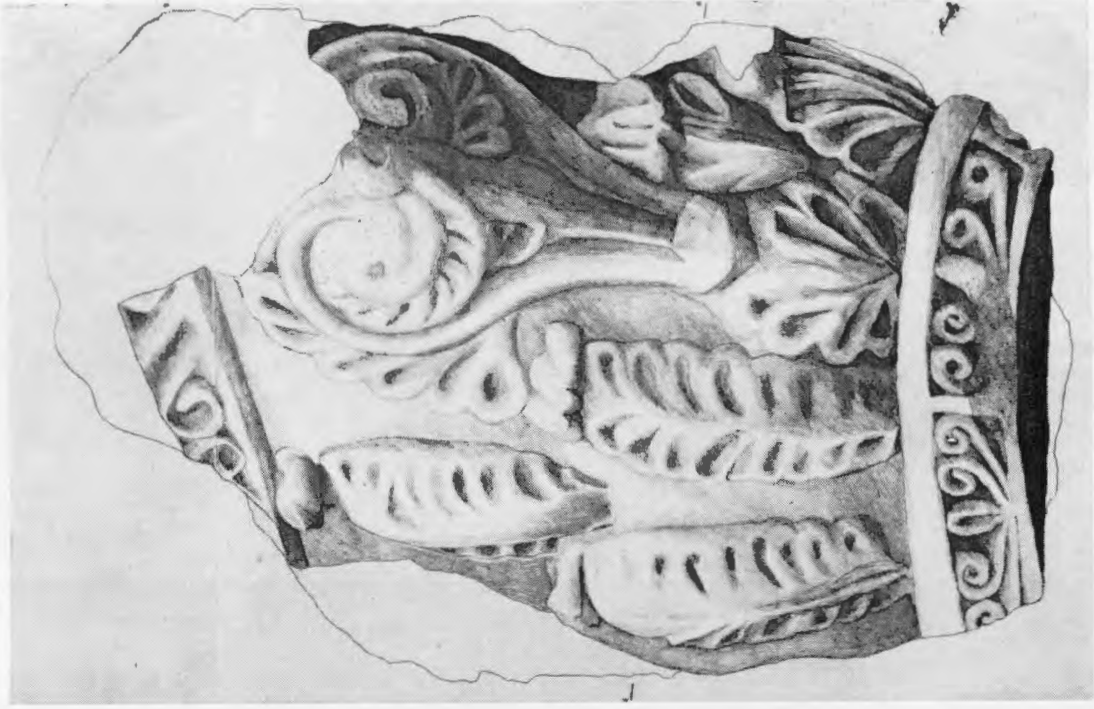
Pl. VI. Nude female holding pair of dolphins, QY 76.A1 r6.



Pl. VII. Animal combat column, QY 76.A.117.



Pl. VIIIa. Pair of adorsed griffons: left one attacks neck of deer, QY 76.A119.



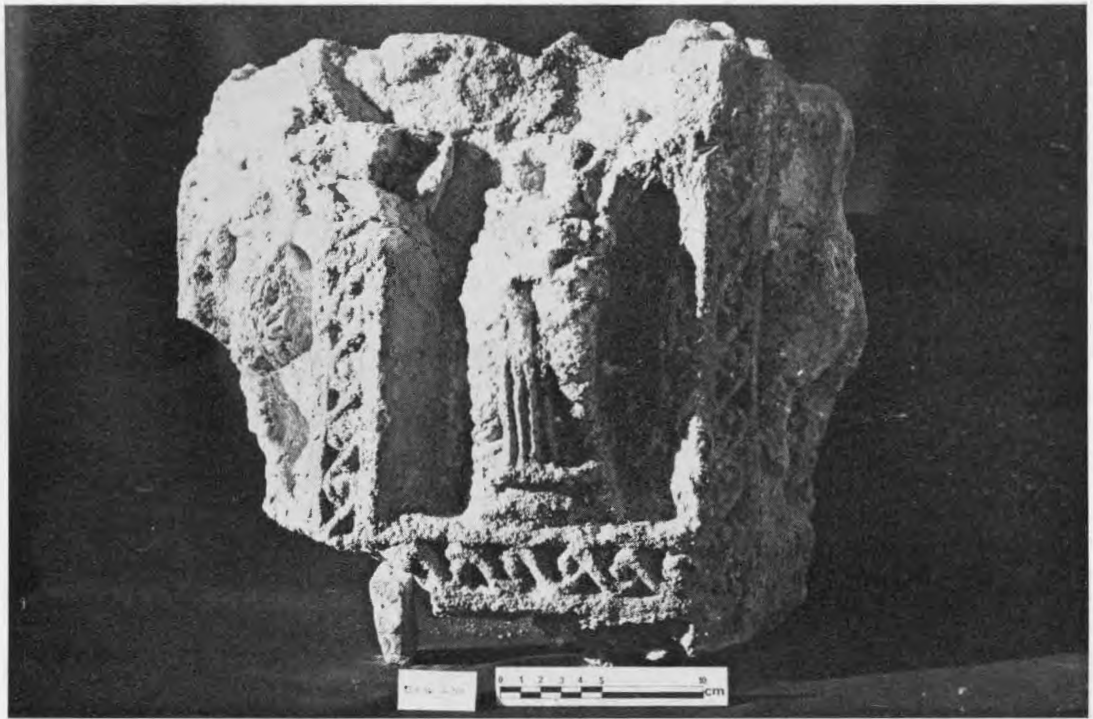
Pl. VIIIc. Corinthian capital, QY 76.A75.



Pl. IXa. Griffon, QY 76.A18.



Pl. IXb. Corinthian capital with human head, QY 76.A67.



Pl. Xa. Column of dancing figures: robed female, Pan and hatted male at sides, QY 76.A38.



Pl. Xb. Column of dancing figures, nude female, QY 76.A18.



Pl. Xc. Column of dancing figures, nude female and hatted male, QY 76.A41.



Pl. XIa. Column of dancing figures, Pan, QF 76.A88.



Pl. XIb. Column of dancing figures, composite drawing of hatted male.



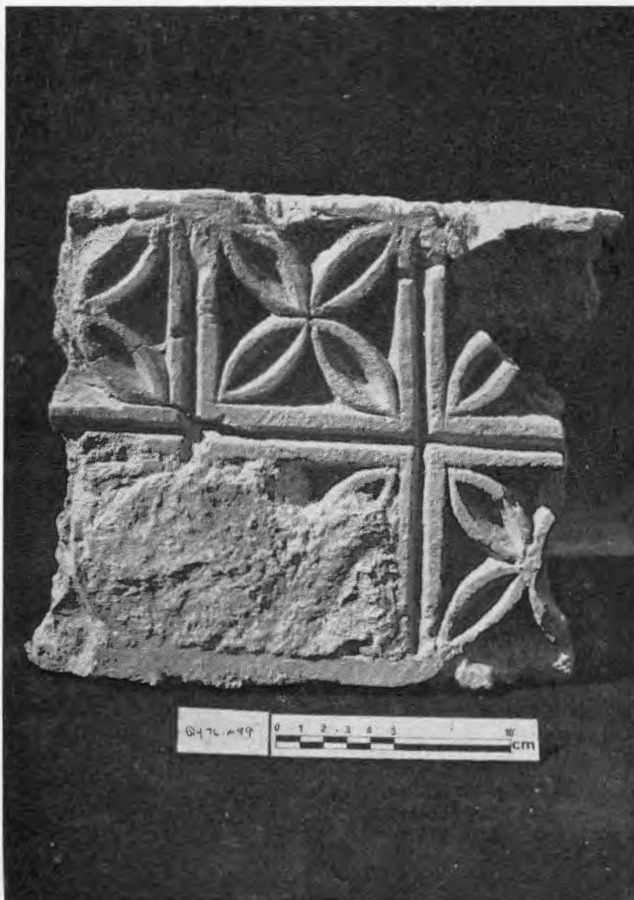
Pl. XIc. Band of rosettes, QF 76.A32.



Pl. XIIa. Vase and merlon panel, QY 76.A46.



Pl. XIIb. Diagonal swastika and rosette frieze, QY 76.A30.



Pl. XIIc. Panel of quatrefoils, plastered over in pristine state, QY 76.A89.



Pl. XIId. Gach Gumbad, detail from Room 5.