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## A CIRCULAR SYMBOL ON THE TOMB OF CYRUS

By David Stronach

The spare, precise use of ornament on the tomb of Cyrus gives each decorative device a prominent role. Those mouldings that are most obvious, namely those that mark the base of the plinth, the base of the cella, the outline of the doorway, the transition to the roof and the line of the raking cornice, each serve to articulate the different parts of the building as a whole. But just because of this—because each of these elements has a clear architectural value—none of these motifs can be said to lead us very much closer to Cyrus himself; that is, towards any more explicit, personal statement. In one sense, of course, this remains one of the virtues of the monument, for solely as it stands the existing fabric succeeds in communicating a rare sense of dignity and integrity.

At the same time, however, such stark anonymity presents its own drawbacks. At a guess, this last aspect of the monument may have driven some frustrated early Greek visitor to compose the suitably laconic but still highly unlikely lines that are frequently reported to have been “ inscribed ”

<sup>13</sup> Calmeyer, *op. cit.* pp. 44–6.

<sup>14</sup> G. A. Pugatschenkowa, *Geschichte der Künste Usbekistans* (Moskau 1965 [russ.]), Abb. 5, S. 24.

<sup>15</sup> J. L. Huot, *Persien I* (München 1965), Nr. 77.

<sup>16</sup> H. Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient* (1954), fig. 9, pl. XI u.a.

D. P. Hansen, G. F. Dales, “ The Temple of Inanna, Queen

of Heaven at Nippur ”, *Archaeology* XV, 2 (New York 1962), T. VII.

<sup>17</sup> H. Mode, *L'Antica India* (Rome 1960), Abb. 6 und 7.

<sup>18</sup> E. Porada, *Alt-Iran* (Baden-Baden 1962), S. 30.

<sup>19</sup> Vorderasiatische Abteilung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Nr. 5298.

on the tomb.<sup>20</sup> And most more modern visitors, in something of the same spirit, have, no doubt, regretted the absence of some more manifest, personal label. Yet as I hope to show, the survival of still another moulding, which appears to have escaped all previous notice, may provide a more direct link with Cyrus—as well as a potential new insight into his beliefs.

In March 1969 a brief return to Pasargadae allowed me to embark on a fresh examination of the tomb of Cyrus. Certain of the upper mouldings were not then fully recorded and after measuring various parts of the cornice I decided to take a second look at the mouldings immediately over the door from the unusual vantage point of the top of the building. As I lay down on top of the roof to obtain as close a view as possible, I became aware of an unexplained protuberance on the gable end directly below me. Further examination revealed clear traces of carving round the edges of the raised area so that, without yet knowing precisely what sort of design we might be dealing with, I and my companion, Mr. Audran Labrousse, were able to complete an immediate record of some of the better preserved features.<sup>21</sup>

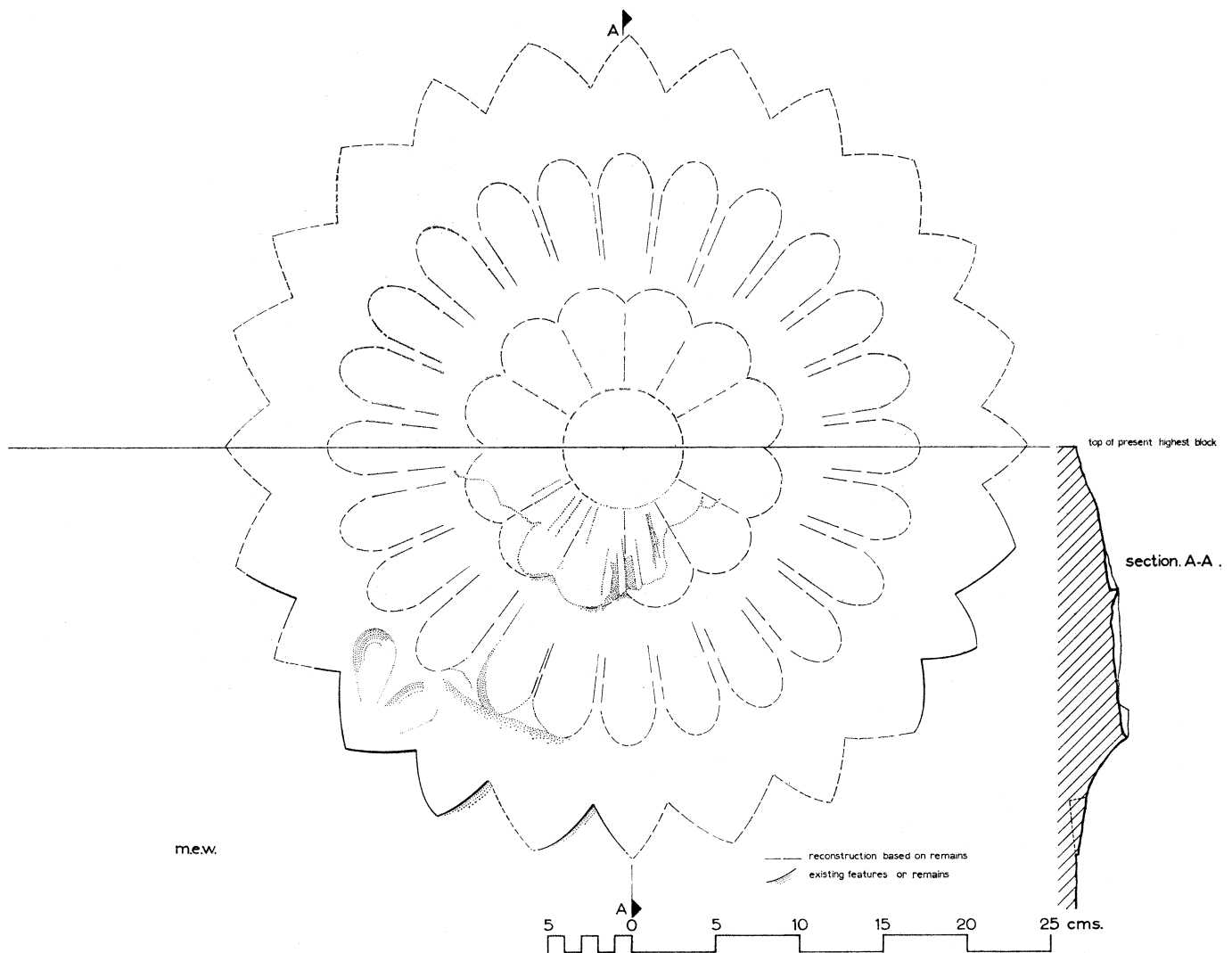


Fig. 2. Extant and restored elements of the disc found on the north-west pediment of the tomb of Cyrus. Diameter of disc, c. 49 cm.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Strabo, *Geography* XV, 3, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Mr. M. E. Weaver's present drawing, fig. 2, depends on the

testimony of a squeeze that was taken last June, as also on various detailed photographs taken by the writer.

The newly discovered moulding consists of a raised disc, some 49 cm. across. Since the entire upper half of the disc was carved on the missing capstone of the pediment (Pl. II), we now have only the much-damaged lower half of the device (Pl. III) on which to base any reconstruction. From the presence of several sharply modelled, almost triangular "rays" along the lower edge of the raised design it can be calculated that 24 alternately large and small rays once marched round the circumference of the disc (Fig. 2). The large rays at least may have been provided with double scalloped indentations and the sides of both the large and small examples all show a distinct convex curve. The internal parts of the design are unfortunately very much more severely damaged and with regard to the larger of the two concentric rosettes that appears to have occupied the centre of the disc only the traces of two adjoining petals can be used to reconstruct the probable size and appearance of the whole. As far as the evidence allows us any certainty—and allowing for the surprising irregularities that appear in the composition—this large rosette possessed 24 petals, each of which appears to have been aligned with the 24 points of the rays in the outer register. And finally, despite the unexpected provision—or perhaps it would be better to say the secondary addition—of a vertical "stem" at the base of the small central rosette, the projected 12 petals of this last motif again appear to have been disposed in line, or almost in line, with the points of the outer rays.<sup>22</sup>

As the above discussion indicates, the disc possesses a disconcerting number of irregularities. The geometry of the figure is sadly askew in places, and the varied outlines of the outer rays look oddly at variance with the rigorous standards of design and execution that obtain elsewhere in the tomb. There is no question, however, about the early date of the disc. It is carved from a boss that protrudes for anything up to almost 4 cm. from the otherwise smoothly dressed surface of one of the main stones in the north-west face of the monument. In such a crucial position, directly above the door of the tomb, it could never have been left uncarved for any length of time and it is safe to assume that the actual cutting of the design must have been completed during the last decade of Cyrus' reign.

A close study of the stone surfaces located immediately below and to the right of the disc also reveals a point of technical interest. Almost invisible to the eye at first sight, but fully evident on the squeeze that was taken from this same area, are a number of fine, toothed chisel marks. In keeping with later practice these appear to have been applied at a late stage in the dressing of the block, some showing quite clearly and others having suffered during the final process of polishing the surface. These few chisel marks represent the best evidence in fact for the still very sparing use of the toothed chisel at Pasargadae before 530 B.C.

As far as the present damaged state of the disc is concerned, it is evident that the whole centre of the inner rosette was chiselled away with a narrow pointed tool. Such drastic measures would seem to suggest that the poor repair of the rest of the symbol is also due to human agency—whether inspired by a hunt for gold or by some other less material motive.

With reference to the original purpose of the disc, I think there can be little doubt that this was religious. There is no corresponding disc on the opposite gable which is preserved to the same height and, as we know from the slightly later royal tombs at Naqsh-i Rostam, it was the custom of Darius and his successors to place a dominant scene of worship, including a representation of the supreme God, Ahuramazda, above the entrance. The major problem, of course, is the fact that the composite symbol used by Cyrus does not recur anywhere in later Zoroastrian iconography, just as it does not appear to have any exact parallel among earlier religious symbols.

The single rosette is known in one other monumental, but nevertheless ambiguous context from Pasargadae itself: namely from a carved slab of white limestone that appears to have been part of one of the stone doorleaves of the Zendan and which bears three 12 petalled rosettes on one of its

<sup>22</sup> The estimated maximum diameter of the outer rosette is 35.3 cm., that of the inner rosette 19.4 cm. and that of the centre of the latter rosette 7.1 cm. If the diameters of the separate elements of the whole design were once calculated on the multiples of any single figure (say close to the modern

measurement of 7 cm.) the inner rosette would have been slightly larger than our present fragmentary evidence suggests—that is to say c. 21 cm. rather than only 19.4 cm. in diameter.

raised, horizontal panels.<sup>23</sup> The broadly religious and vaguely apotropaic value of the rosette in Assyria and Babylonia needs no emphasis; and in Assyria at least the double or concentric rosette is a common feature on, for example, royal or religious headdresses.<sup>24</sup> The single rosette is also omnipresent at Persepolis, even if no parallel use of the double variety is known.

But it is clearly wrong not to look beyond the "single rosette" design in the present context. One older motif, for example, that undoubtedly demands attention is the type of winged sun disc that illustrates a rosette at the centre of the disc.<sup>25</sup> For just as the winged disc without any anthropomorphic addition was sometimes used as a symbol of Ahuramazda in later Achaemenian times, our purely circular disc could have represented a still more abbreviated symbol for the same God. Certainly the ever earlier dates attributed to Zoroaster<sup>26</sup> make it more and more likely that the Persians of Cyrus' time were acquainted with (or had even embraced) the prophet's reforms and therefore the latter's new loftier concept of Ahuramazda.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, we already have impressive material evidence for what appears to be a substantial measure of religious continuity between Cyrus on the one hand and Darius and his successors on the other.<sup>27</sup> The already long-standing acceptance of Zoroaster's message may represent one reason, in fact, why Darius fails to mention Zoroaster by name in any of his inscriptions.

In a very general way, therefore, it would seem most reasonable to suggest that the new symbol on Cyrus' tomb bespeaks his belief in Ahuramazda.<sup>28</sup> The only other ready solution is perhaps to link the new symbol with Mithra, the god of light, who also fulfilled the role of protector.<sup>29</sup> But while Mithra is commonly identified by the rays of the sun, it should be remembered that the sun itself is often referred to in the early context of the *Gāthās* as "the eye of Ahuramazda"<sup>30</sup> and that the earliest anthropomorphic representation of Ahuramazda (that completed at Bisitun just over ten years later) still shows this last God rising out of a curl-fringed, or rather flame-ringed, sun disc.

## THE OCTOBER EXHIBITION AT THE IRĀN BĀSTĀN MUSEUM: NOTES ON OBJECTS FOUND AT SHAHABAD, TULARUD AND TEPE PARI DURING 1970.

### *Shahabad*

A number of clay cuneiform tablets have been recovered from the tall mound situated at the centre of the town of Shahabad, some 50 km. west of Kermanshah. The tablets are said to be written in Akkadian.

### *Tularud*

The recent excavations of the Iranian Archaeological Service at Tularud in the Talish region have yielded a large number of metal objects from graves that date back to the first millennium B.C. These include silver quadruple spiral beads (c. 7th century B.C.); bronze and iron pointed helmets and bronze and iron horse bits labelled 600–200 B.C.

<sup>23</sup> See D. Stronach, *J.N.E.S.* XXVI (1967), pl. XXVa and b. Rosettes in this position might be said to count as a skeuomorphic representation of the large metal plaques that could have decorated an original wooden door of this type—not least since each rosette possesses a rivet-hole for a central, presumably gold-headed nail.

<sup>24</sup> T. A. Madhloom, *The Chronology of Neo-Assyrian Art* (1970), pp. 74 ff.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. M. E. L. Mallowan, *Nimrud and its Remains II* (1966), fig. 395, and G. R. Meyer, *Altorientalische Denkmäler im Vorderasiatischen Museum zu Berlin* (1965), pl. 84.

<sup>26</sup> The most recent suggestion places the date of his birth in 665 B.C. See Mary Boyce, "On the Calendar of Zoroastrian Feasts", *B.S.O.A.S.* XXXIII (1970), p. 538.

<sup>27</sup> D. Stronach, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

<sup>28</sup> Above all we have to remember that the iconography of the Persians was still far from developed at the time of Cyrus and that Darius and his successors found it necessary to approve the introduction of various new religious motifs.

These range from either winged or non-winged representations of Ahuramazda to the strictly Persian-looking genies that stand locked in combat with bird-footed demons. In each case a major debt to one or other of the religious symbols of Mesopotamia can be recognised and, while the Cyrus disc may not seem to be so closely related to the rayed disc of Babylonia and Assyria, Cyrus may have sought to borrow and transform this powerful motif. The fact that the probably post-Achaemenian, Zoroastrian tomb of Qiz Qapan exhibits a rayed disc of an almost canonical Mesopotamian type (C. J. Edmonds, *Iraq I* (1934), pl. XXVIb) alongside two other borrowed and adapted Mesopotamian motifs (*ibid.*, fig. 2) is a point of particular interest—even if the precise significance of the Qiz Qapan disc again remains obscure.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. E. F. Schmidt, *Persepolis III* (1970), p. 85, where the circular "moon symbol" on the tomb of Darius the Great is tentatively linked with Mithra.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. *Yasna* 1.11, 3.13, 4.16, 7.13, 22.13.

*Tepe Pari*

The chance discovery of a hoard of objects from Tepe Pari, some 20 km. to the east of Malayer, throws further light on local Median art of the 8th/7th centuries B.C. The objects include a gold bracelet with crude, flattened lion-headed terminals; a number of gold lion-headed pins with fine granulation on their associated sheaths; a circular gold pendant, still complete with inlays of paste; and a series of bronze horse bits.

## PYRAMIDAL STAMP SEALS—A NOTE

By John Boardman

I was not able to give a full reference to Dr. R. D. Barnett's prior publication of the seal, London WA 115591, which appeared as no. 1 in my article in *Iran* VIII (1970). He has published this in *Athenaeum* XLVII (1969) 21 f., a volume of studies presented to Professor P. Meriggi. The provenience which I recorded for the seal—Sardis—is not supported by the Museum records.

RECENT DISCOVERIES IN IRAN, 1969-70:  
A MAJOR ISLAMIC MONUMENT

By Antony Hutt

The most interesting discovery made during a series of surveys in Iran and Afghanistan during the year 1969-70 was that of the Minaret and Maṣjid-i Jāmi' at Varzaneh. Varzaneh is situated 100 km. east-south-east of Iṣfahān on the Zayandeh Rud, at the junction of two caravan routes, one between Nayīn and Shīrāz, the other between Iṣfahān and Yazd; the bridge at Varzaneh being the last crossing point before the river drains into the Gavkhaneh Salt Lake. The mosque, which is of the two-aiwān type, is dated by an inscription on the Portal (Pl. IVa) to 848/1444, the last years of the reign of Shāhrukh, while the Mihrāb (Pl. IVb) is dated to the previous year. The Portal, Mihrāb and Minbar are covered with superb mosaic faience, as is the soffit of the arch connecting the domed Mihrāb chamber with the Qibla aiwān.

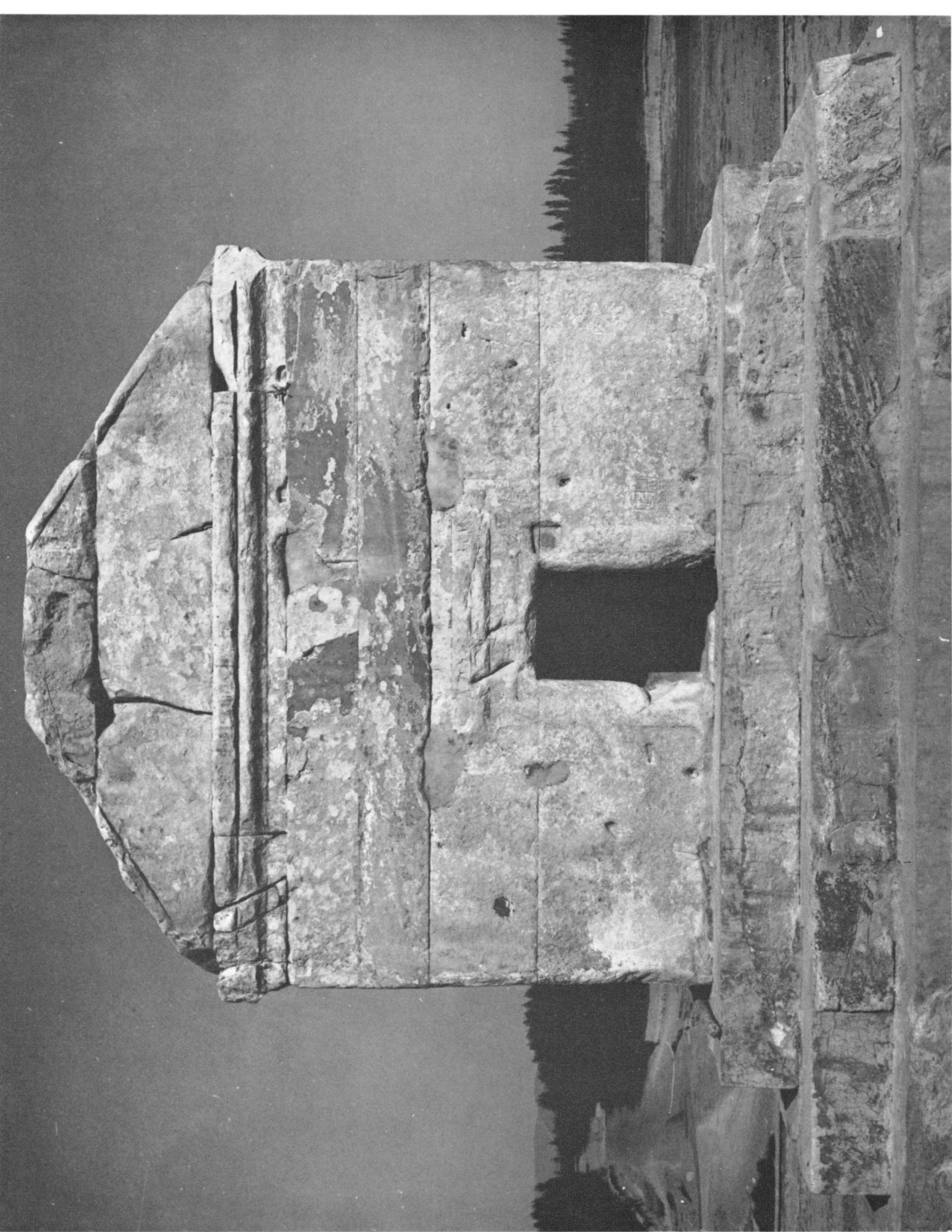
The main dedicatory inscription on the Portal, in addition to giving the name of Shāhrukh Bahādur Khān, also gives the name of the donor, Maḥmūd b. Muḥaffar, entitled 'Imād; the scribe, Sayyid Maḥmūd-i Naqqāsh; the architect, Ḥaidar b. Pīr Ḥusain Iṣfahānī; and the superintendent of works, 'Alī b. Ṣadrallāh Iṣfahānī. Interestingly enough three years later in 851/1447, in the reign of Sultān Muḥammad Bahādur, grandson of Shāhrukh, 'Imād b. Muḥaffar of Varzaneh was the donor of the Winter Prayer Hall of the Maṣjid-i Jāmi' at Iṣfahān, using the same scribe for the inscription on the Portal, the mosaic faience of which utilises many of the patterns on the Portal and Mihrāb at Varzaneh.

Above the main inscription is a later Waqf dedication recording that Muḥammad Shafī' Varzana'i, Vazir of Yazd, made a Waqf for the repair of the Maṣjid-i Jāmi' in 1099/1688.

The Minbar is an extremely fine and important example of work in mosaic faience, and would appear to be one of only two extant in Iran from this period, the other being in the Maṣjid-i Maidān, Kāshān, built some twenty years later. However M. Siroux has kindly drawn my attention to an earlier Mongol mosaic faience Minbar, dated 735/1334, in the Maṣjid-i Jāmi', Kouh-Payeh, a town immediately to the north of Varzaneh on the main Iṣfahān-Nayīn road. The Kouh-Payeh Minbar would appear to have served as a model for that of Varzaneh, although the latter shows considerable stylistic development and much greater mastery of material.<sup>31</sup>

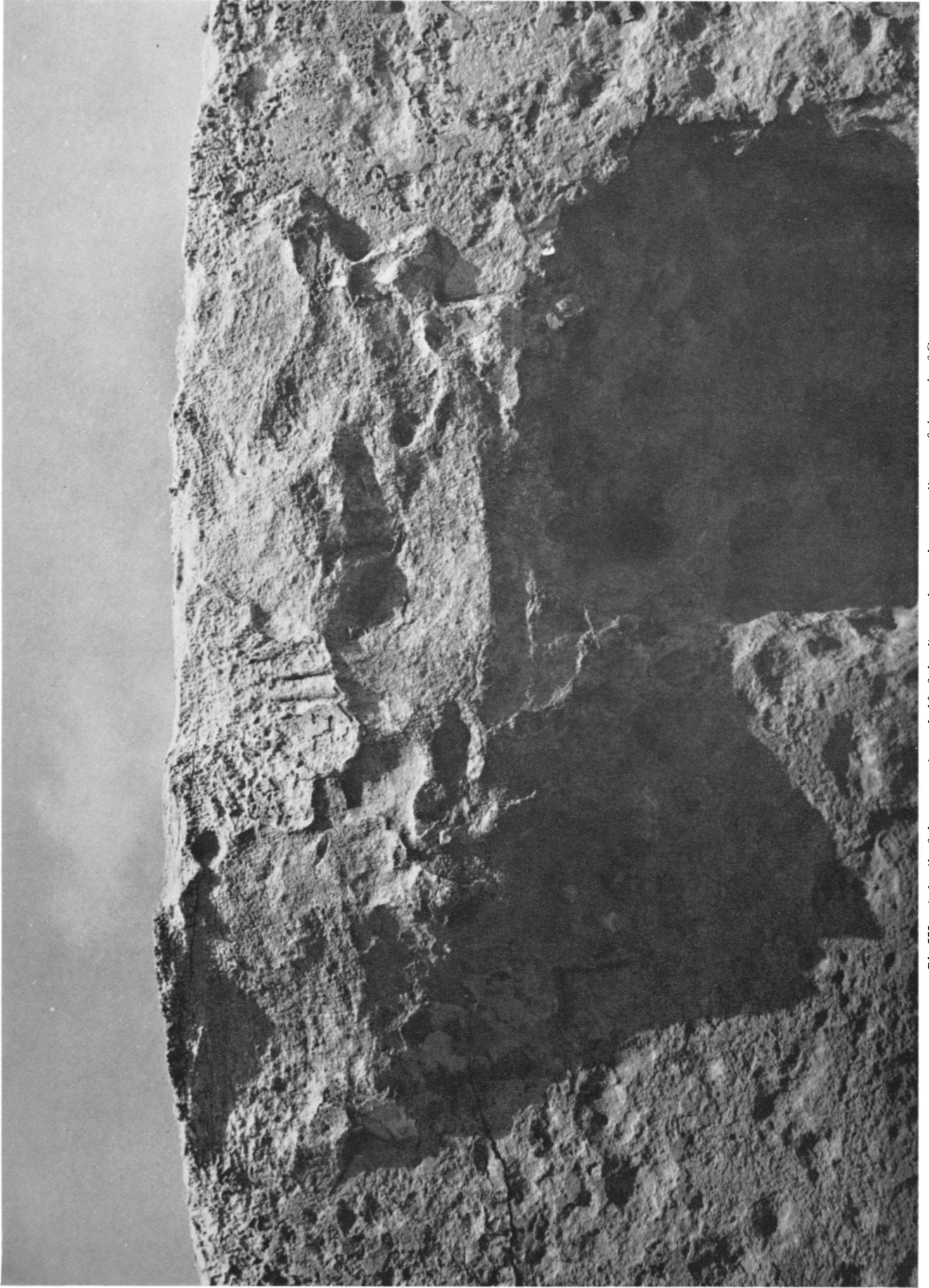
<sup>31</sup> M. Siroux, "Kouh-Payeh, La Mosquée Djum'a et Quelques Monuments du Bourg et de ses Environs", *Annales Islamolo-*

*giques*, t. VI, Cairo, 1966.



Pl. II. The upper part of the north-west facade of the tomb of Cyrus. The lower half of the disc appears at the top of the truncated pediment.





*Pl. III. A detail of the extant, lower half of the disc on the north-west pediment of the tomb of Cyrus.*