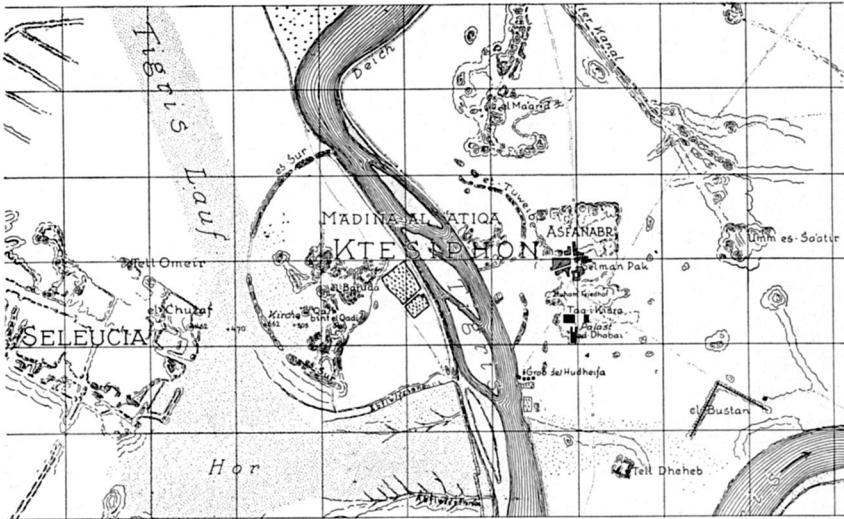


THE EXPEDITION TO CTESIPHON, 1931-1932

As noted in the BULLETIN for October, 1931, the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum approved a joint expedition with the Islamic Art Department of the German State Museums to Ctesiphon, near Baghdad. The first expedition there was conducted in the winter of 1928-1929 under a concession granted to the Deutsche Orientgesellschaft. The following notes deal with

the supervision of the digging; the writer was responsible for the treating, classifying, and registering of the objects as they were brought in. The work began November 4, shortly after we moved into a native house in Selman Pak, and ended February 15.

It will be impossible to judge properly the results of the second Ctesiphon Expedition until the architects' drawings are finished and the work of cleaning and preparing the objects excavated has been completed. For



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FIG. 1. MAP OF THE RUINS OF CTESIPHON AND SELEUCIA

the second season's work, in which this Museum participated.

The director of the expedition was Professor Ernst Kühnel, Director of the Islamic Art Department of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin. In addition to acting as field director, Professor Kühnel kept the accounts of the expedition, managed the household, and performed the difficult and trying task of hiring and organizing the Arab workmen, who numbered five hundred during most of the season. The responsibility for the architectural work and for the conduct of the dig on most of the sites was divided between Professor Friedrich Wachsmuth of the University of Marburg and Walter Hauser of the Museum's Egyptian Expedition. The photographic work was done by O. Puttrich-Reignard, who also helped with

instance, there are many fragments of stucco wall decoration which must be pieced together before the pattern is complete. It may be of interest, however, to describe briefly what was undertaken and the significance of some of the results, which will be published more fully in Professor Kühnel's official preliminary report.

The ruins of Ctesiphon lie on the banks of the Tigris River about twenty-five miles south of Baghdad. For a general description of the territory comprised in the ruins (19 square miles) and of the finds of the first expedition, the reader is referred to the report of that campaign,¹ from which the map

¹ Oscar Reuther, *Die Ausgrabungen der deutschen Ktesiphon-Expedition im Winter 1928/29*. For an account in English see O. Reuther, *Antiquity*, December, 1929, vol. III, pp. 434 ff.

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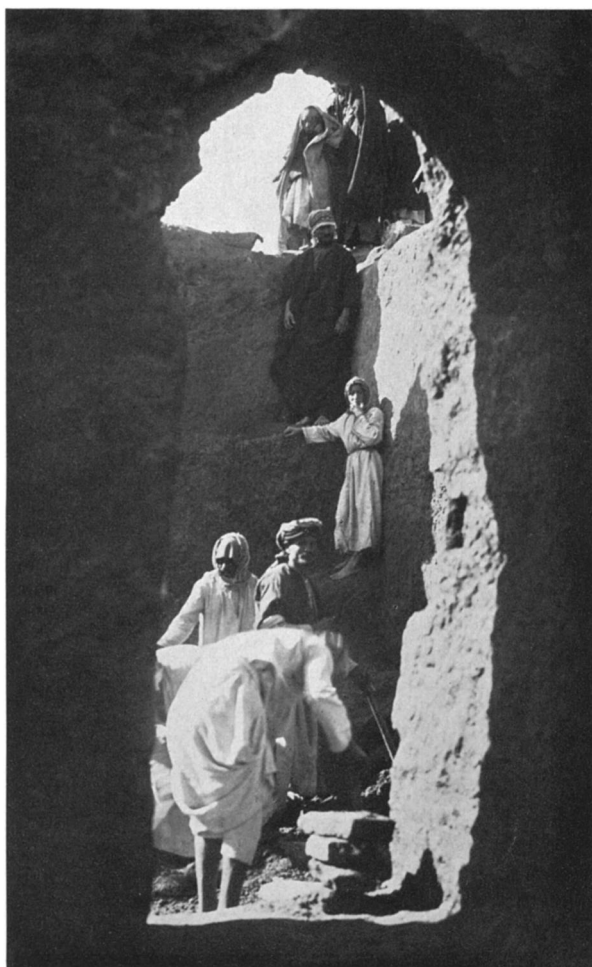
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THE EXPEDITION TO CTESIPHON, 1931-1932
WORKMEN CLEARING A TRENCH



FIG. 2. WORKMEN CLEARING A TRENCH BEHIND THE PALACE AT CTESIPHON



FIG. 3. THE RUINS OF A SASANIAN HOUSE IN EL-MA'ARIDH

illustrated in figure 1 has been taken. But it may not be out of place here, since most of our finds belong to the Sasanian period, to refresh our memories as to just who the Sasanians were and what they were doing in Ctesiphon. And we might first glance at their immediate predecessors there, the Seleucids and the Parthians.

During the struggle between the generals of Alexander the Great which followed his



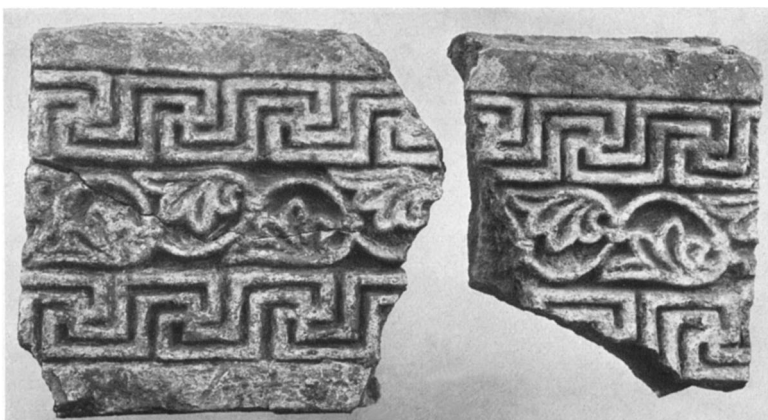
FIG. 4. PLASTER FLOORS AND THE NEGATIVE OF WALLS AT UMM EZ-ZA'TIR

death in 323 B.C., one province of Persia after another broke away until finally about 312 B.C. Seleucus succeeded in adding what was left to the territory he already ruled in Mesopotamia and Syria. From his first capital in Babylon he moved to Seleucia, founded about 300 B.C. on the west bank of the Tigris on the east to west trade route, and made it one of the great centers from which Hellenistic culture flowed out into the older Orient. But the hold of the Seleucids on eastern Persia never became very firm, and in 250 B.C. the Parthians under Arsakes established their independence and ruled from the city of Hecatompylos, near the southern shore of the Cas-

pian Sea, where they tended to ape the fashions of their former overlords. Pressure from restless tribes from the east caused them to expand to the west until they finally captured Seleucia about 130 B.C. and added Mesopotamia to their Persian domains. We find them by 53 B.C. settled in Ctesiphon, on the opposite side of the river, where their rule was disputed by the Romans, who had succeeded the Seleucids as their traditional enemies. Trajan in A.D. 116 partially destroyed Seleucia and captured Ctesiphon, carrying off the golden throne to Rome, and Avidius Cassius in A.D. 164 completed the destruction of Seleucia and burned the palace of Volagases III in Ctesiphon. By A.D. 200 Seleucia was a deserted spot and Ctesiphon its flourishing heir.

But during all this period of foreign domination in Persia there were those who turned with longing to the days of the nation's greatness under Cyrus and Darius and dreamed of a people once more united and happy in the teachings of Zoroaster. The proper time for a break arrived and with it the man of the hour in the person of Ardashir, a great-grandson of Sasan, a priest in the temple of Anahit at Persepolis. In A.D. 224 he brushed the Parthians from his path and two years later made Ctesiphon one of his capitals, keeping Istakhr in the province of Fars for another. There the Sasanian dynasty which he founded remained for over four hundred years, carrying on an almost incessant struggle, first with the Romans and then with the Byzantines, for the control of the borderlands. The country was prosperous, the arts flourished, a considerable literature developed, and the religion of Zoroaster, mixed, it is true, with various Hellenistic elements, was revived and gradually dominated the nation.

The fate of Ctesiphon was, however, sealed when in 636 the rude desert Arabs, quivering with religious zeal—and with one eye on the fabulous riches of the Sasanian capital—met and routed the supercilious veterans of the last ruler, Yezdegird. The next year Ctesiphon was thoroughly plundered, and if half of the tales of the Arab historians are true the loot must have been



FIGS. 5, 6, 7. STUCCO PANELS FROM WALL FRIEZES

tremendous. The new Arab cities of Kufah, Basrah, and Wasit drained it of its trade and the founding of Baghdad in 762 completed its ruin. Today only the remains of a great palace, the *Taq-i-Kisra*, and a small village around the tombs of Muhammad's barber, named Selman Pak, and the Imam Hudhaifah mark the site of the once great city.

It is clear from this historical sketch that



FIG. 8. STUCCO MOLDING FROM THE SIDE OF AN ARCH
KAISER FRIEDRICH MUSEUM

excavations in Ctesiphon must produce some objects purely Parthian, Sasanian, or early Muhammadan in character and others in which the styles are mixed. Much light will be thrown on the stylistic influence that Seleucia inevitably exerted when the results of the careful excavations carried on there for the last six seasons by Professor Waterman for the University of Michigan are published. In the region of Ctesiphon itself the investigations of the first campaign (on both sides of the Tigris, which now runs through the middle of the ruins) showed certain mounds which, from the character

of the pottery or stucco fragments on the surface, were considered Parthian or Sasanian. This season our work was confined to mounds outside the ruins of the old city wall (called *et-Tuweibe* on the map; fig. 1), on the east side of the river.

The most obvious task presenting itself to an expedition in Ctesiphon was to try to discover the date and original plan of the great Sasanian palace, the *Taq-i-Kisra*, the back of which is shown in figure 2. The date is still a matter of discussion, since equally reliable Arab historians place the building in the respective reigns of Shapur I (241-272), Khusrau I (531-579), and Khusrau II (590-628). In the absence of any inscriptions on the building the dating is a matter of comparing the plan and construction with those of known buildings, which, however, are so few that no indisputable dating has been possible, although there is a tendency to regard the palace as late Sasanian. Skillful digging by Professor Reuther on the first expedition had revealed considerable parts of the ground plan and it was hoped that more could be discovered this season, but the trenches dug on what would have been the south side of the great court showed only remains so fragmentary and at such a depth that it was thought inadvisable to continue. In the course of the digging pieces of mother-of-pearl and various colored marbles cut in shapes intended to make geometric patterns for wall decoration were found in large quantities, as well as fragments of decorated stucco used for the same purpose. It is doubtful whether the whole plan of the palace can be obtained for many years, since the precarious condition of the façade now standing makes digging near it impracticable and since the whole northern section of the building is covered by a Muhammadan cemetery still in use.

Our curiosity was, however, piqued by a fairly high mound behind the *Taq-i-Kisra* and exactly on its axis. This we decided to investigate; a wide trench was dug across it and gradually deepened, as shown in figure 2 and in the photograph on the cover. Figure 2 shows our workers digging on three different levels in the great trench and carrying out the dirt in baskets. The photo-

graph on the cover shows them working at a still deeper level, from which the baskets were passed up by the men in the corner. Fragments of typical early Muhammadan pottery and glass appeared near the surface, but of the buildings nothing remained except a layer of ashes. As we went deeper, however, fragments of Sasanian pottery appeared, together with small plates, about $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch thick, of plain-colored or variegated opaque glass used for wall covering. There also turned up mosaics, single and in groups, parts of painted stucco figures, fragments of carved marble, silver coins of Khusrau II and Bahram IV, and fresco paintings fallen from the walls and smashed into thousands of pieces impossible to save, and at a depth of about thirty feet we came upon a floor. As this was cleared we uncovered drains of unglazed baked clay, channels for hot air, and an oven, and we found ourselves in possession of a Sasanian bath at the same level as the floor of the *Taq-i-Kisra* and clearly belonging to the original palace inclosure.

Of the five Sasanian houses which we excavated I have selected that at *Umm ez-Za'tir*, "the Mother of Thyme," to describe, since there the plan came out with the greatest clearness. It is in a low-lying

mound off in the flat fields, cultivated in the spring, to the east of the *Taq-i-Kisra* (see fig. 4). Here, as on all but the Muhammadan sites, digging was difficult because of the fact that the walls were almost entirely

of unbaked mud bricks of the same character as the surrounding soil, and only great skill and care on the part of the men with picks and constant attention from those in charge could prevent the carrying away of a wall or an important brick. After a certain amount of experimental digging, Mr. Hauser, who was in charge of the work, found that there was a thin plaster floor on a foundation of mud bricks one unit thick, a foot or two below the soil on top of the mound. By following the plaster we tried to find the walls, but we discovered that they had entirely disappeared and that only from the blanks left in the floor could they be traced (see fig. 4).

For weeks the rooms seemed to us to be arranged without reason, but gradually one point after another was painstakingly cleared up and the plan of the building became intelligible except in the northwest corner, which had been washed away, and in a few other places where all traces had been destroyed. There seem to have been two buildings side by side, the plan of neither of which was

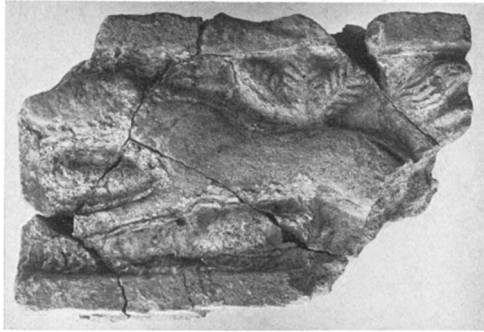


FIG. 9. RUNNING DOG, WALL FRIEZE, WIDTH ONE FOOT. KAISER FRIEDRICH MUSEUM



FIG. 10. STUCCO WHEEL, DIAMETER ABOUT THREE FEET

symmetrical. In the more important of the two was a large *liwan* (a vaulted hall open at one end, a feature characteristic of Persian architecture for centuries) which seemed to open onto a terrace. A doorway in the center of the back wall led to a room connected with smaller rooms.

The walls on the terrace each side of the



FIG. 11. TALL BLUE-GLAZED
SASANIAN JAR

arch were originally decorated with friezes and panels of ornamental stucco, but these had fallen off in pieces and been buried under the débris of the building. The fragments from the west wall were found and removed by the first expedition. Of those from the east wall found this season the largest is a part of the border which once decorated the edge of the arch (fig. 8) with ornamental surfaces placed at right angles and separated by a rounded molding with a braided three-cord motive. The outer surface has a pattern of rosettes inclosed by

palmettes and the inner what may have been an all-over pattern of animals against foliage. That the fragment is from the bottom of the arch is shown by the curved projection at the base and the slightly increasing width of the molding as it rises. This separation of decorated fields by a rounded molding, often imitating the trunk of a palm tree, is common; it occurs, for instance, in stucco ornament from Kish, in Mesopotamia, and Damghan, just south of the Caspian Sea in Persia. Also among the patterns found at *Umm eṣ-Za'tir* are wild boars, gazelles, a combination of Greek meanders, rosettes, and leaves, and a variety of oblong panels such as those shown in figures 5 and 6. The stucco is in low relief and apparently was made in molds and then applied to the walls. Owing to the dampness of the soil, much of the stucco had disintegrated and all the pieces taken up by us were coated with moist dirt which after days of drying-out in the hot sun had to be carefully picked and brushed off. It is possible that this stucco was painted, although these pieces show no traces of color.

Among the pottery finds at *Umm eṣ-Za'tir* is a splendid jar $12\frac{1}{8}$ inches high with a characteristic Sasanian blue-green glaze (fig. 11). The form is graceful and dignified and recalls that found in several fine examples of Sasanian silverware. Another piece interesting for its form, which is characteristic of Sasanian metalwork, is an unglazed ewer $9\frac{7}{16}$ inches high. The small finds include several bronze pins, plain glass bottles, fragments of glass with pressed decoration, small terracotta figures, and silver and copper coins.

In the other houses in the row of mounds marked on the map *el-Ma'arid* were found parts of brick columns (originally covered with decorated stucco) which seem to have formed porches (fig. 3). There was also a large quantity of stucco decoration, some with traces of color, adding a great variety of new Sasanian patterns to those known from the famous rock reliefs in Persia and from metalwork, textiles, seals, and gems. There are pieces from the decoration of archways and door jambs, with geometric ornament and stylized palm-tree and floral

motives. Particularly interesting is a panel (fig. 9) with a running dog against a foliate background. But the most imposing piece found there is part of a large winged horse in high relief (fig. 12). The powerful swing of the outlines, the harmony of the linear pattern, and the simplicity of the form

stucco are those from a group which demonstrates the strong influence which artistic traditions under the Seleucids and Parthians had upon the Sasanian designers in Ctesiphon. This group includes several female dancers, some clothed and some nude and carrying mirrors. There is also a



FIG. 12. PART OF LARGE WINGED HORSE IN STUCCO
HEIGHT ABOUT THIRTY-THREE INCHES

combine to express admirably the throbbing vitality of this mythological Oriental creation. Around the neck is a typical Sasanian necklace of large pearls and square stones from which a very lovely palmette pendant hangs on the breast. What a magnificent sight the whole creature must have been! And how our faces fell when the piece inevitably took its place in the row of finds selected as the share of the Iraq Government and destined for the Museum at Baghdad!

Among the most interesting pieces of

nude male figure with an animal's skin thrown over one shoulder and a small harp in his hands. But most curious of all is a hydrocephalic figure of a nude male half-reclining on a couch. He rests on one elbow and holds a wine bowl in his left hand. Such a conception seems possible only in a community familiar with the creations of Hellenistic culture.

During the first season a great many fragments of large double-faced stucco wheels were found on a large mound to the south of the *Taq-i-Kisra*. These were used

between square posts to form a balustrade along the top of a wall. Figure 10 shows a reconstructed wheel in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum. This season enough more fragments were found to make possible the reconstruction of several additional wheels. Similar to these but smaller and more delicately modeled and with only one decorated surface are wheels of which fragments were found in one of the buildings in *el-Ma'aridh*. The spaces between the palmettes are left open, a fact which suggests that the wheels served as windows. In fact they were found near the remains of a *tarma* (open porch), where they might have been used above the arches but beneath the roof. In addition to the stucco decoration, there turned up in one of the buildings in *el-Ma'aridh* great quantities of badly damaged fresco paintings of which we succeeded in saving a few pieces showing heads, hands, and a bit of drapery.

The small finds at *el-Ma'aridh* were of the same general character as those from *Umm ez-Za'tir*, with the exception of a fine carved ivory figure, that of a kneeling warrior in helmet and armor (about 1½ in. high), which seems to be surely pre-Sasanian.

The attention of the first expedition had been attracted by a mound called *Tell Dheheb* and located about twenty minutes to the south of the *Taq-i-Kisra*. The outline was roughly square, measuring 165 yards on a side. We resolved at the first opportunity to make an investigation under the supervision of Professor Wachtsmuth. The first week's work revealed a rough square inclosed by mud-brick walls of great thickness with curious tongues, alternately large and small, projecting regularly into the interior of the mound. On the outside in the center of the east wall was a double staircase. A trench across the mound showed various walls preserved to a height of ten or more feet. It was hoped that the symmetrical character of the inclosing wall reflected a similar arrangement of the building or buildings within, and so while several groups followed the walls to the southeast of the trench, others cleared the rooms in the center of the mound. There the walls were standing to a height of about twenty

feet, and the presence of very narrow windows high up, together with the relatively small size of the rooms, suggested that practically the whole height of the walls remained. But the finds were disappointingly small; some fragments of stucco decoration, the best of which, a cross and a pomegranate motive (fig. 7), were found on the wall, fragments of glazed and unglazed pottery, a small gold brooch, and a paper-thin piece of plain gold 1½ inches square, together with a mass of copper coins, were our reward. The extremely interesting architecture also grew more and more complicated as we proceeded, and it soon became apparent that the complex of rooms was not symmetrical, so that, although much valuable and difficult work on the problem has been done, the final solution must remain for further excavating.

In addition to these sites several early Muhammadan mounds were investigated but, aside from valuable study material in glass and pottery and a few fine specimens of glazed pottery, the results were disappointing. The quality of the building materials and of the stucco decoration was poor, and the inhabitants of Selman Pak have caused great destruction by digging to recover the burnt bricks for use in their own houses.

The dating of the finds made during the season presents some problems. There are in general two groups of dated monuments which at present form the basis of the study of Sasanian ornament. One consists of the imposing rock sculptures in relief at Shapur between Bushire and Shiraz and at *Naqsh-i-Rustem* and *Naqsh-i-Rajab* near Persepolis, all from the third century. The other consists of the largest sculptured grotto at *Taq-i-Bustan* near Kirmanshah, the capitals in front of it, together with related pieces from *Kale-i-Kubna* near-by, and the silver and the rock-crystal plates of Khusrau II in the Bibliothèque nationale, all dating from the end of the sixth century. For the fourth and fifth centuries we had nothing until the discovery during the last two seasons at Kish of a large amount of stucco decoration from a group of Sasanian houses. Evidence has been presented to show that this belongs to the reign of Bahram V

(420-438), although it seems to me not entirely convincing.

If we study the patterns and style of the stucco pieces from Ctesiphon only one conclusion can be drawn, and that is that they represent fashions prevalent at different times during the Sasanian occupation (226-637). It is reasonable to conclude that the pieces, such as the hydrocephalic man, which show pure Parthian traditions were made early, perhaps in the third or fourth century. On the other hand there are pieces so close to the ornament in the grotto at *Taq-i-Bustan* in style and handling that they must be nearly contemporary—that is, about 600. There are other patterns,

such as those in figure 8, almost identical with the pieces from Kish, which may provisionally be placed in the fifth and sixth centuries. A definite chronology must await more material and a more thorough study and comparison of the pieces from Ctesiphon with those from Kish and from Damghan, where splendid examples of Sasanian decorated stucco probably of an early date were uncovered this season. Some were in situ.

In general, the results of the second Ctesiphon Expedition in finds of museum objects and study material more than repaid the efforts and funds expended.

JOSEPH M. UFTON.

NOTES

NEW TASTE IN OLD PRINTS. On August 13 there will be opened in the Print Galleries (K37-40) an exhibition of prints and drawings supplementary to the special exhibition, *The Taste of Today in Masterpieces of Painting before 1900*, now being held in Gallery D 6. With but one or two exceptions the prints and drawings shown are the property of the Museum. They have been selected so far as possible to reflect a certain modern taste in older black and white. It is believed that the exhibition will be not uninteresting.

W. M. I., JR.

A CRETAN REPRODUCTION. A reproduction of a gold pendant found by the French at Mallia in 1930 has been placed on exhibition in Case G in the First Classical Room.¹ It is assigned to the first Middle Minoan period (about 2200-2000 B.C.) and suggests the high degree of refinement which the goldsmith's art had already reached at this time. The pendant is composed of two insects, presumably bees, each with a spread wing, their curved bodies forming a hoop. Three pendent disks and a top ornament with a loop for suspension are added. The joins in the original are adeptly made without the addition of solder. The presence of

¹ Demargne, *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, vol. LIV (1930), pp. 404 ff., pl. XIX.

granular work round the bees' eyes and on a disk held in their feet shows that this technique flourished in Crete at the beginning of the second millennium. C. A.

SOME PLASTER RELIEFS FROM ALEXANDRIA. The classical collection has hitherto not included any objects of plaster, although antiquities in this material are familiar from Egyptian, North African, and South Russian sites. A plaster relief and fragments of two others, said to be from Alexandria,¹ have now supplied this lack in an interesting way. They belong to a class of reliefs found in Egypt² which were made from metal originals—dishes, mirror covers, pieces of armor or harness, and ornaments of various kinds. They were presumably made from the completed metal originals in order to serve as a record of them and show sometimes a scene, sometimes a portion of a decorative pattern.

Our two fragments are beautifully executed in fourth-century style. One³ is a segment of what was perhaps a shallow dish about eight inches in diameter, showing the upper part of a reclining woman. The other fragment, which does not indicate the

¹ Shown in Case G, Room VII.

² Cf. the monograph by O. Rubensohn, *HelLENistische Silbergerät in antiken Gipsabgüssen*.

³ H. 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (9.8 cm.).