

are decorated with figure and ornamental sculpture. Through its characteristics, building material, structure and sculptures this monument is inseparable from the church. Similar figure and ornamental sculptures appear on our most ancient churches, such as Kassakh, Digor, Budghavank, Acrag of Kars and others (which we have indicated in chapter V, p. 25), and also on ancient sepulchral steles. The latter are the oldest remains of Armenian iconography and are related to eastern Christian art.³¹

On the church of Otsoun, on either side of the upper window of the south façade, we see the same flying angels, clothed similarly and with bare arms, as on the south wall of Budghavank, except that here the angels are flying in opposite directions and the carvings are in higher relief; the left angel is quite effaced, the right one only partly; but the entire composition is recognizable. Above the window, on a separate stone, there was a standing figure, now effaced, perhaps the Pantocrator. It should be noted that here the sculpture is of a higher artistic quality than that of Budghavank. The lilies on the monument of Otsoun are also finer than those of the western window of Budghavank.

There were figure sculpture also on the north, east and west façades. The sculpture of the crowning arch of the east window is partly preserved. The arch itself is formed of pearls framed by a protruding thin line (wulst). On the horizontal bands at the sides of the arch can be seen the busts of two winged angels, one on each side, who with one hand seem to be holding the neck of a snake and with the other hand its body. The bodies of the snakes extend left and right following the curve of the arch, then, rising up, are entwined with each other, forming a knot above the crown of the arch, then, continuing left and right, rise up again and terminate in a palmette, with a ring at its base.

Between these palmettes and their

31. We shall discuss in greater detail the iconal sculptures on the monument in the second part of our work, dealing with sepulchral monuments.

stems, exactly above the crown of the window, there is the bust of Jesus holding in His left hand an open Gospel from the bottom. On the pages of the Gospel are written in middle uncials the first words of John's gospel: «ԻՍԿ ՉԲԱՆ Է ԷՐԲ ԱՆՆ ԵԻ — on the other page — ԲԱՆ ԷՐ ԱՌ ԱՅ ԵԻ ԱՅ ԷՐ ԲԱՆ :» (From the beginning was the Word and — the Word was with God and the Word was God).³² On Jesus' breast, right under His neck there appears the square opening of His tunic, bordered with a double-lined ornament. Over His undergarment He wears a pleated mantle dropped over His left shoulder and slightly visible over His right shoulder blade. The sleeves of the undergarment also have folds and near the wrists they have circular ornaments like a maniple. The right hand is broken, and also the head, but the two tresses hanging down on the shoulders have remained.

The crown of the window at the top of the northern wall consists of a vine, but only one large leaf has remained, the rest is broken off. At the top of the crown there was human figure, perhaps the Virgin sitting on a throne.

Of the ornamental sculpture at the head of the western wall nothing has remained and in general that part of the building has been greatly restored. Perhaps this was the original location of an important sculpture of the Virgin with the Child Jesus in her arms, which is now inside the church placed in the recess of the arch above the baptismal font (fig. 28); at least that is what the aged villagers said. At any rate this sculpture was con-

32. Unfortunately we do not have on hand our own photograph; therefore we shall refer the reader to Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst*, pict. 205. The picture of the snakes here we consider doubtful and foreign, as the reader also will agree. But the late Khachig Vartabed has told us about another foreign feature connected with a sculpture of the Cross (see our *Havoutz Tarri Amenu-purguichu*, p. 47, note).—If our conclusion is correct that the church of Otsoun was built at the end of the Vth century or the beginning of the VIth, we have here then the oldest relic of Armenian writing.