

nected with some part of the church, and it gives us an idea of its Syrian affinity. Its size is 92x60 centimeters. Unfortunately the photograph, done by natural light, did not bring out the upper part of Mary's head as clearly as the other parts. This figure of the Virgin and the extant sculptures on ancient sepulchral steles are the oldest remains of their kind in the east, and we shall have occasion to speak of them later.

One would have expected to see sculptures on the large lintels of the three entrances of the church, but they have been obliterated, and in places inscriptions have been substituted. At the head of the southern entrance there has remained a simple cross with little balls at its extremities, which is the evidence for its antiquity; from its base rise up palmettes.

From the inscription engraved there, only the word *ԹՈՄԱ* (Thomas) has remained; it is in large letters but in very low relief, like the remains of another inscription to be mentioned later. The epigraphic remains on the sides of the entrance belong to the XIIIth century. The sculpture on the lintel of the western entrance is also obliterated, an inscription of the year *ՊՂ* = 1241 having been written instead. As for the piece of stone which has been placed over the lintel and on which there is a fine group-sculpture it does not belong to the church, but has been placed there during an earlier renovation. This and the Sassanian-Hellenistic ornaments fitted in the pillar in the left chancel remind us of the sculptures of Khozhorrni (see fig. 51). It is possible that they have been brought there from the church of the fort, which would strengthen our opinion concerning the chronology of the three edifices of Otsoun.

The frame of the doorway is ornamented with a very well preserved row of alternating grape bunches and grape leaves; each bunch of grapes consists of three large clusters; and the leaves have three, four, and five lobes, which is unusual.

On the eastern wall there are the re-

maines of an inscription in large letters which, like a belt, extended across the southern and eastern walls. We have a similar instance on the south wall of the great basilica of Yeghvard and on the north wall of the basilica of Nakhjavan.

On the basis of all these observations it is our opinion that the building of the greater church and of the stele of Otsoun should be assigned to the end of the Vth century or the beginning of the VIth.

VIII

In the last chapter we saw that many features of the church of Otsoun show it to be a connecting link between the basilicas, particularly the three-aisled basilicas, on the one hand, and churches of the type of Gaianè and Mren on the other hand. It resembles the former in its building material, its sculptures, its pilastered halls resting on buttresses, and its rectangular shape; it is similar to the latter through its longitudinal vaults resting on piers and its internal disposition. But to a certain extent it is also related to Budghavank, whose time we have already ascertained. There remains one more important question to settle in order to determine its place in the history of our architecture—the question of its dome.

Toramanian was the first to devote attention to this important question in his work on the church of Digor. He considered the dome of the church of Digor to be the oldest of all the domes of existing Armenian Churches. At the same time he maintained that the dome of Digor is not as old as the church itself but was added to it later. According to Toramanian (p. 60), in the Vth century the Armenians possessed the taste for constructing domes, "but not knowing how to build domes, they built wooden domes". The church of Digor, built in the Vth century by Sahag Gamsaragan, is one of our most ancient churches, possessing characteristic features of the basilicas and also inscriptions in Syriac. The Gamsaragans have played an important part as art patrons; besides this