

X.

TWO PAINTED CEILINGS FROM MARY SOMERVILLE'S
HOUSE, BURNTISLAND.

BY M. R. APTED, M.A., F.S.A.Scot.

Mary Somerville's House, Burntisland, stands on the south side of the Midgait, now Somerville Square. As originally built it was an oblong, stone-walled, pantiled tenement with crow-stepped gables, containing three floors inter-connected by stairways in the thickness of the north wall. Subsequent alterations included the enlargement of the windows overlooking the garden, the insertion of a garret, and the extension of the original block further to the east.

In 1957 the removal of partitions dividing a large room on the second floor of the original block revealed that the boards to which the flat plaster ceiling was keyed had once been painted. The chamber in which this discovery was made measured 37 ft. from E. to W. and 16 ft. transversely. The walls were 2 ft. 6 ins. thick, with the exception of the east gable which was 6 ins. thicker and which accommodated a vertical shaft (either a flue or a garderobe) in the thickness of the wall near the doorway to the eastern extension. The outer north wall (*i.e.* the street façade) was 1 ft. thick.

The only surviving original entrance to this second storey chamber was the doorway with chamfered jambs and lintel, measuring 6 ft. by 2 ft. 10 ins., which opened from the stair in the thickness of the wall at the north-east corner. There may have been another entry from a newel stair, for which there is some evidence, in the south-west corner. The doorway in the east gable and the projecting fireplace nearby (now removed) were contemporary with the eastern extension. The modern doorway in the west gable was slapped through the back of a small fireplace with simple moulded lintel and jambs.¹ Two original windows survived, both in the north wall, one (blocked), at the head of the stair and another to the west of it. The latter measured 1 ft. 8 ins. by 1 ft. daylight, was checked for shutters and grooved in the upper part for glass.

The roof of the original block had been renewed when the building was enlarged and the garret inserted. The joists were sawn, not adzed, measured 6 ins. by 3 ins. and were centred 1 ft. 8 ins. apart; some were incised with Roman numerals, but these were not in sequence. The rafters were adzed, measured 6 ins. by 2½ ins. and rested on adzed wall plates (surviving examples of the original rafters) measuring 5 ins. by 4 ins. The sarking boards were sawn and were 1 ft. 1 in. wide.

¹ The photograph of this end of the room (pl. XVII (a)) was taken before the new doorway had been formed.

The removal of the plaster ceiling and painted boards from this chamber revealed the "shadows" of a barrel-vaulted ceiling on the gables at either end of the room formed by plaster applied to the wall-face after the ceiling had been erected. The width of the vault round the circumference of the barrel was 18 ft. 6 ins. and it varied in height from 7 ft. 3 ins. at the sides of the room to 11 ft. in the middle. On the west gable there was a small area of painted plaster representing flowers and berries painted red, black and perhaps



Fragments of painting on the west gable.

yellow. A black dado line 4 ins. thick was painted across both gables at a height of about 8 ft. 6 ins. above floor level.

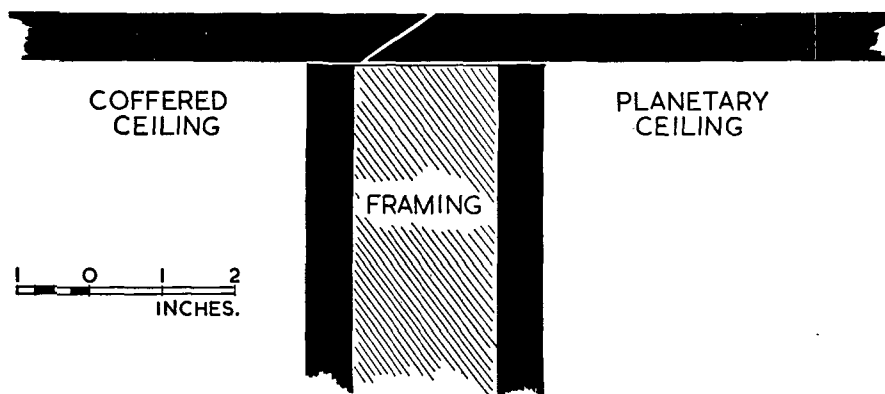
Two fragments of painted plaster survived on the north wall of the chamber, one in the ingo of the east window, the other on the wall to the right of it. In both cases the surviving traces consisted of a horizontal grey line about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. across and 5 ft. 6 ins. above floor level with the suggestion of a continuous frieze painted in red above it.

The chamber has been repartitioned and modernised and the traces of decoration concealed. The painted boards were removed from the house in 1957 for examination and are now stored by the Ministry of Works at Edinburgh Castle.

The Reconstruction of the Ceilings.

About eighty boards of Scots pine (*Pinus silvestris*), representing about half the original painted surface, were recovered from the plaster ceiling. These were laid out in groups on the floor according to subject matter and, when reassembled, proved to have formed two ceilings and an associated double-sided partition.

The boards were $\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick. The ceiling boards were about 11 ins. across the partition boards some 3 ins. wider. The length of the boards as found varied greatly but originally the ceiling boards were between 10 ft. and 12 ft. long, apart from the series of short boards referred to below, while the partition boards varied in length according to their position in relation to the vault. The boards were sawn, planed on one side, and usually either tongued and grooved on both edges, although a few were tongued on one edge and grooved on the other. The "shadows" on the back of some of the boards showed that the ceiling boards were originally nailed to joists 6 ins. wide and



Construction of partition of timber vault.

the partition boards to straps $1\frac{1}{4}$ ins. wide both centred 19 ins. apart. The "shadow" of the partition on the vault revealed that it was mounted on a 2 ins. framing.

The boards were nailed up in sections from W. to E., and the ends bevelled so that each section keyed to the next. The two ceilings combined took four sections, measuring 11 ft. 3 ins., 10 ft. 6 ins., 11 ft. 6 ins. and, by inference, 4 ft. respectively, of which the first two sections formed the larger coffered ceiling and the remainder the smaller astral ceiling.

The reconstruction of the coffered ceiling was the most accurate part of the work since the position of a board could be precisely fixed in the symmetrical pattern even when the sequence of boards was incomplete. Since boards in the two sections were not fitted end to end, it could be said with certainty to which section a board belonged.

The reconstruction of the astral ceiling was less precise since the lateral relationship of the various features could only be established where the sequence of boards was complete.¹ The east end of the ceiling could not be reconstructed as no boards from this end of the ceiling were identified.

¹ *i.e.* the transverse distances between the sun and the figures at the sides of the ceiling could not be proved nor could the orientation of the figures, although the longitudinal distances between the figures and their relationship to the geometric ceiling was known.

The orientation of the ceilings was determined by the fact that the west gable and one side of the partition were both painted with a floral pattern suggesting that they formed the two end-walls of a single room.

The Astral Ceiling (see figs. 4-6 and Pls. XVIII-XXI).

The smaller ceiling was painted with an astral scene depicting the signs of the zodiac, planetary deities and amorini encircling the sun against a background of sky, stars and cloud. Reconstruction was incomplete and the precise relationship between certain of the features is unknown.

The sun at the centre of the ceiling was a resplendent orb with human features facing NW. encircled by the signs of the zodiac, each painted in red on a yellow elliptical cartouche framed in red and named within the cartouche in black capital letters. The surviving signs read from the NW. in clockwise direction as follows:

Gemini	Named. Two embracing figures.
Aries	Named. Ram with forefoot uplifted.
Scorpio	Named Cancer. Scorpion.
Three signs missing	
Capricorn	Named. Surviving as hindquarters of goat.
Pisces	Surviving as part of two fish head to tail.
Aquarius (?)	Traces of lettering and a draped figure.
Three signs missing	

A number of fragments of the sign Taurus were found which for structural reasons must have followed either Scorpio or Aquarius.¹

West of the sun on the soffit of the ceiling was Jupiter, his drapery flying, seated on an eagle. He was shown full face with flowing moustache and perhaps a beard, his head surrounded by a halo. In his right hand, upraised, he held poised a flaming thunderbolt and in his left a sceptre. His name IVPEITAR appeared above and to the left of his head.²

None of the boards belonging to the east end of the ceiling have survived so that the identity of the figure balancing Jupiter on the other side of the sun is unknown.

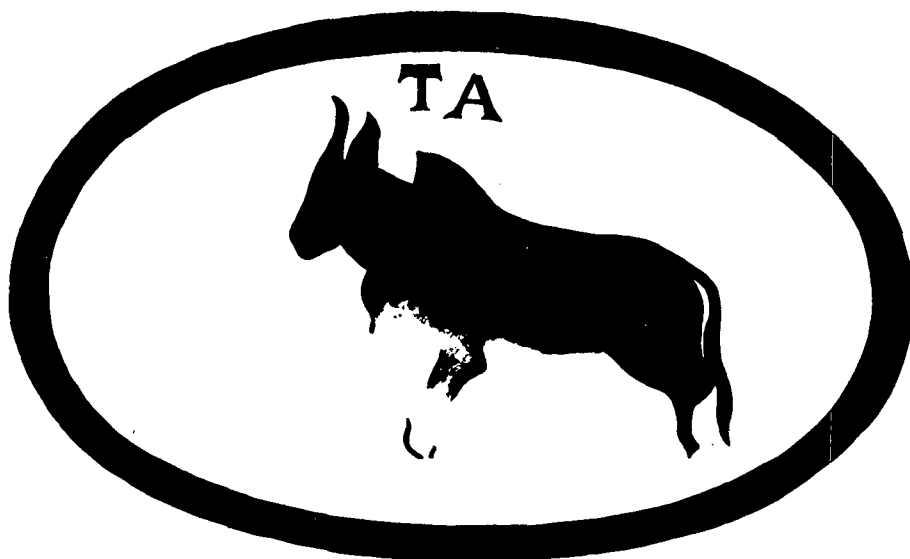
There were two figures on the south side of the ceiling. Of these the best preserved was that of Apollo, here called SOL, a young man with light brown hair and solar nimbus playing a lyre. He was flanked by another figure (presumably Mercury or Mars) of whom nothing remained but floating drapery.

¹ The signs of the zodiac represent the zone of the heavens within which lie the paths of the sun, moon and principal planets. The Burntisland artist was unfamiliar with them since he painted them out of sequence and confused Scorpio and Cancer.

² Jupiter was the supreme deity and controller of the future; his weapon was the thunderbolt and the eagle was specially consecrated to him.

These two deities were balanced on the north side of the ceiling by two figures of whom only traces survived, the western identified as Saturn, god of agriculture, by his scythe, and the eastern as Luna by the name LOVNA and the crescent moon on her forehead. In both cases the outline of the features was dimly visible and in each a certain amount of drapery was preserved.

West of Jupiter the astral scene was painted over onto the upper part of the associated partition, the central feature being another figure, identified



Taurus.

by the name VENVS to the left of and above her head. Apart from her name all that survived was a small part of her draperies, the tip of her flying hair ribbon and what may possibly have been the flames of a burning heart.¹

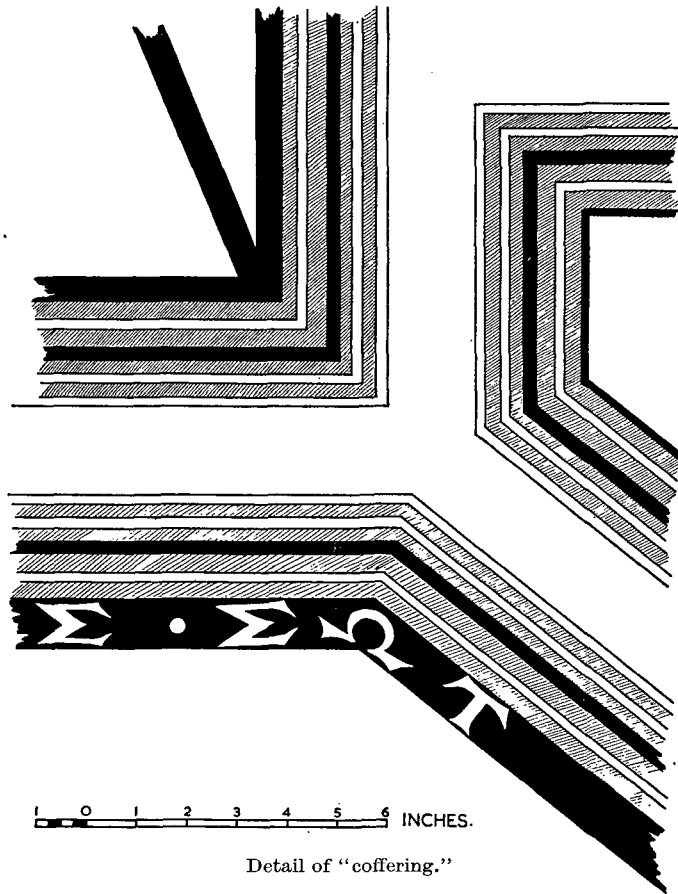
The lower half of the partition was in part painted to simulate wainscoting and in part in a way which indicated that it was covered by some structural feature such as a bed. The wainscot pattern extended across the right hand side of the partition and upwards to a height of 5 ft. 8 ins. above the floor. The undecorated area extended laterally across the left hand side to a width estimated at about 4 ft. 6 ins. and vertically to a height of 6 ft. 4 ins. where it terminated at the shadow of a horizontal structural feature ending at the right hand side with an inverted triangular area perhaps representing the outline of a tester cornice.

No painting survived on the east gable of the room with the exception of a short length of dado line at the north end.

¹ The fragment of board painted with the name Venus is shown *in situ* in the line illustration (fig. 7a) but is omitted from the photograph (pl. XXII (a)).

The Coffered Ceiling (figs. 8-11 and Pls. XXIII-XXVI).

The ceiling of the larger room was painted in imitation of a coffered ceiling of wood with a geometrical pattern of alternating crosses and octagons, infilled with small hexagonal panels of decoration, the whole painted on a white ground representing the soffit. Octagons, crosses and hexagons were



framed with 2 ins. brown borders, the latter overpainted with alternating bands of yellow and black or yellow and red to simulate the play of light and shade on the coffering. All the decoration was outlined in black applied with deft, facile strokes of the brush.

The crosses measured about 32 ins. in either direction and with one exception the central area was occupied by an enwreathed cherub's head. The wreaths were green and tied with two narrow bands at top and bottom. The leaves pointed in opposite directions in alternating quadrants, and where the tips met the gaps were infilled with red berries. The cherubs were shown

full face with brown curly hair, pink cheeks and brown green wings tinged with pink. The cross between the portrait of Christ and the Agnus Dei did not contain a cherub's head but what may perhaps have been a draped shield. The arms of the crosses were filled with red triangles, apexes to the centre, against a yellow background.

The infilling hexagons were decorated with arabesques painted in yellow on a red background.

The octagons contained portraits of Christian figures and sibyls. The internal area in each case was outlined with a black band 1 in. across upon which was written the name of the subject and a description or other appropriate text painted in white capital letters with a spot between each word. The language where identifiable was Latin except in the case of the Christ portrait where it was Greek.

With four exceptions the vertical axis of the heads contained within the octagons was at right angles to the line of the boards. The exceptions, three of which were the principal Christian figures, are assumed to have occupied the soffit of the ceiling with the remainder of the portraits disposed symmetrically heads to the centre on either side.

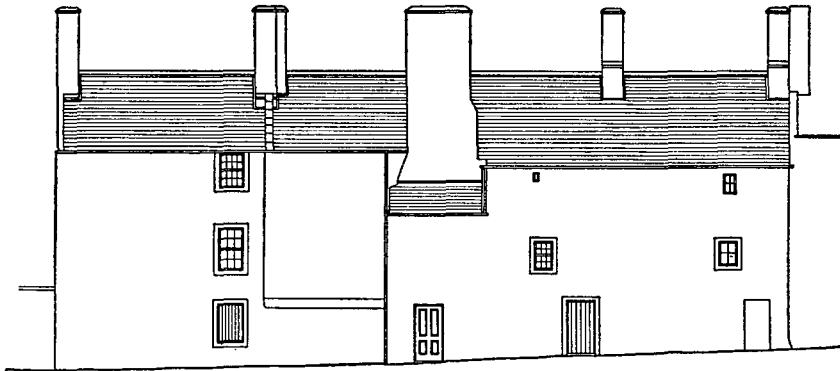
The octagon in the south-west corner of the ceiling was painted out after the background had been prepared but before the portrait was added. The shadow of some structural feature supported by a 6 ins. square post preserved on the boards shows that this octagon was subsequently concealed by either a small cupboard or a screen, which suggests that the geometrical pattern was set out, perhaps by an assistant, before the lay-out of this corner of the room was finally determined.

The upper part of the partition was painted with a curvilinear design of fruit and flowers of which the central feature may have been a floral wreath.

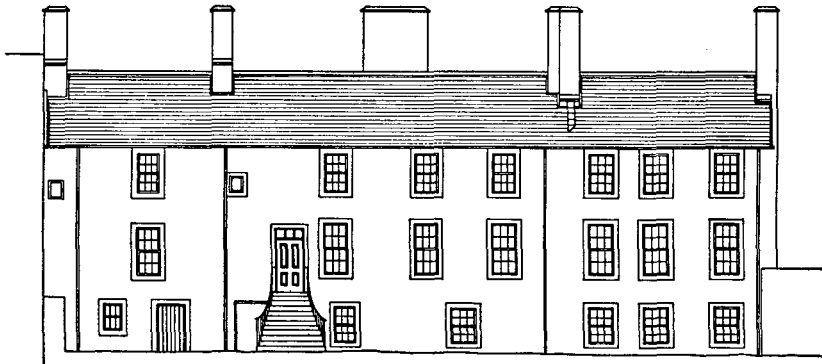
The lower part of the partition as in the case of the smaller room was painted with a formal diaper pattern enclosed in wainscotting, but there was a different feature in the centre formed by a number, probably four, small wainscot panels bordered by a running floral pattern painted in red between black borders and filled by a different version of the diaper pattern (grey on white) over-painted with arabesques. Only the side styles of this feature survived, but it appeared to have been about 5 ft. 6 ins. across and 5 ft. 10 ins. high.

The wainscot pattern extended upwards to the same height as the top of this feature for a distance of 2 ft. 11 ins. to right and left on either side. It then extended further upwards, on the left to a height of 6 ft. 9½ ins. and on the right to a height of 6 ft. 5 ins.

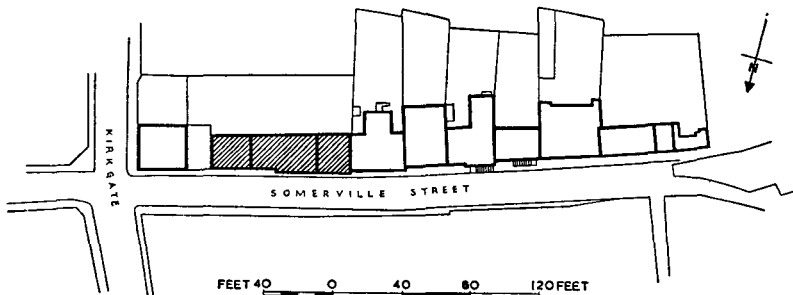
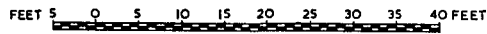
To the right of the central feature was the "shadow" of some structural feature such as a table which stood against the partition. It showed as a horizontal line about 2¼ ins. wide, extending across the partition a distance of some 4 ft. 7 ins. What may be supports were defined on the left by a "shadow" extending vertically to the full height of the central feature, and on the right by two parallel lines which stopped at the transverse "shadow."



NORTH ELEVATION

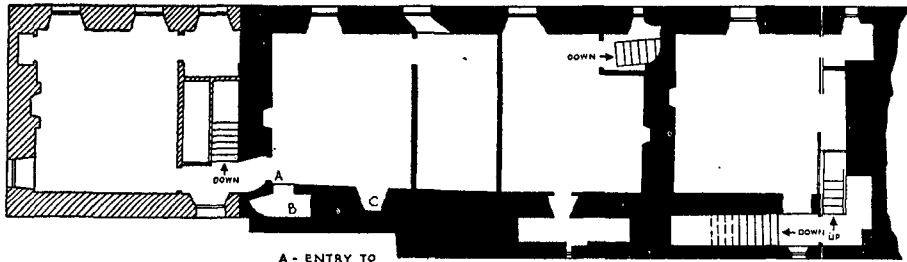


SOUTH ELEVATION



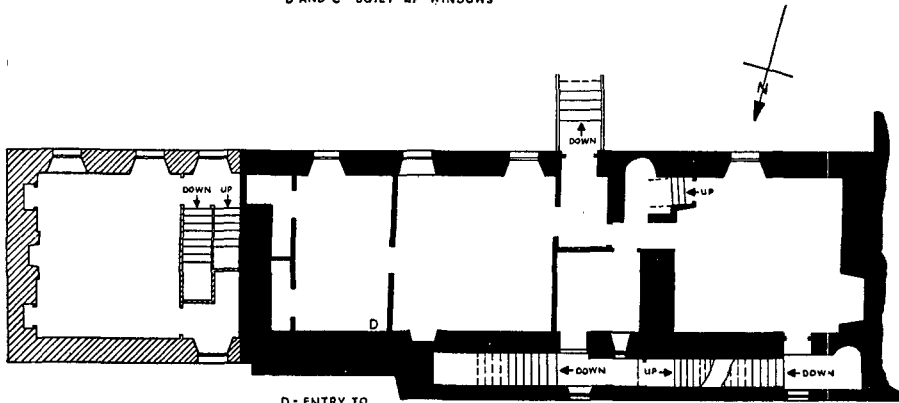
SITE PLAN

Fig. 1. Mary Somerville's House before renovation.



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

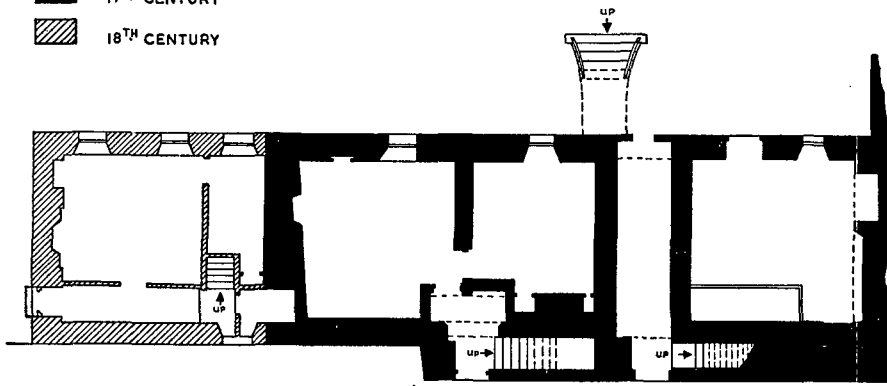
A - ENTRY TO
BUILT-UP STAIR
B AND C - BUILT-UP WINDOWS



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

D - ENTRY TO
BUILT-UP STAIR

■ 17TH CENTURY
▨ 18TH CENTURY



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

E - BUILT-UP DOOR

FEET 5 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 FEET

Fig. 2. Mary Somerville's House before renovation.

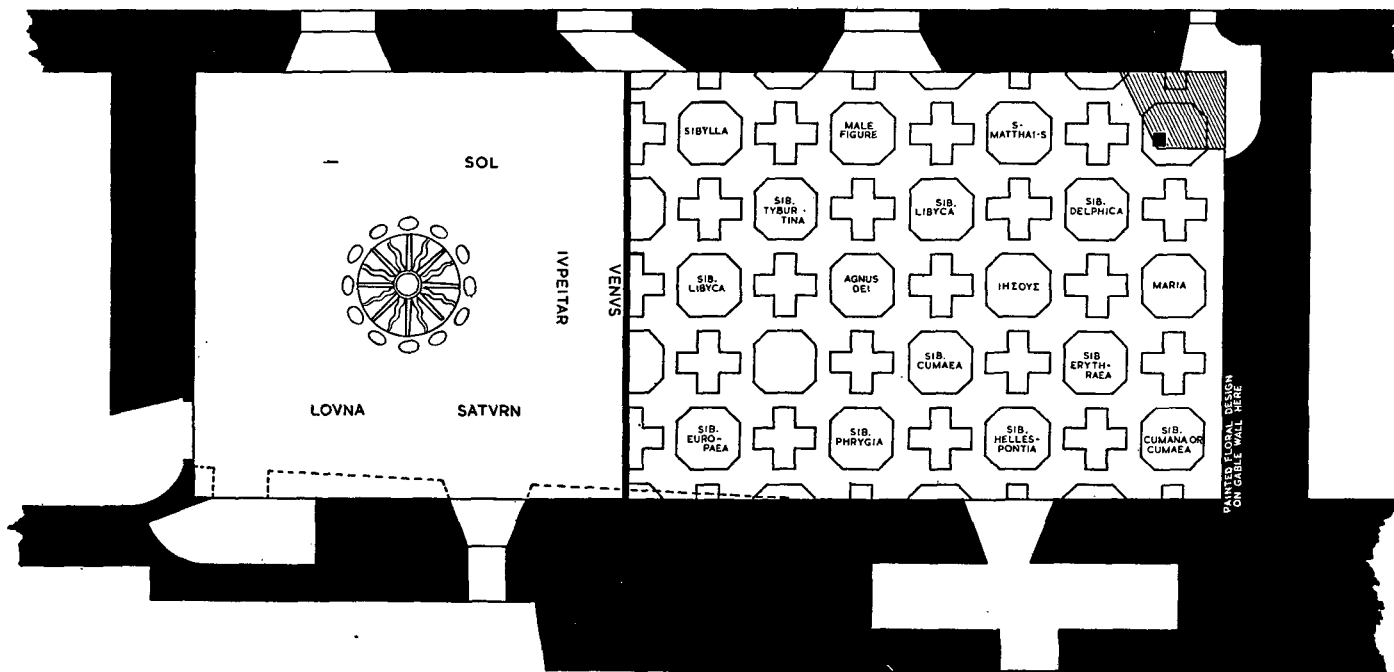


Fig. 3. Plan of painted ceilings.

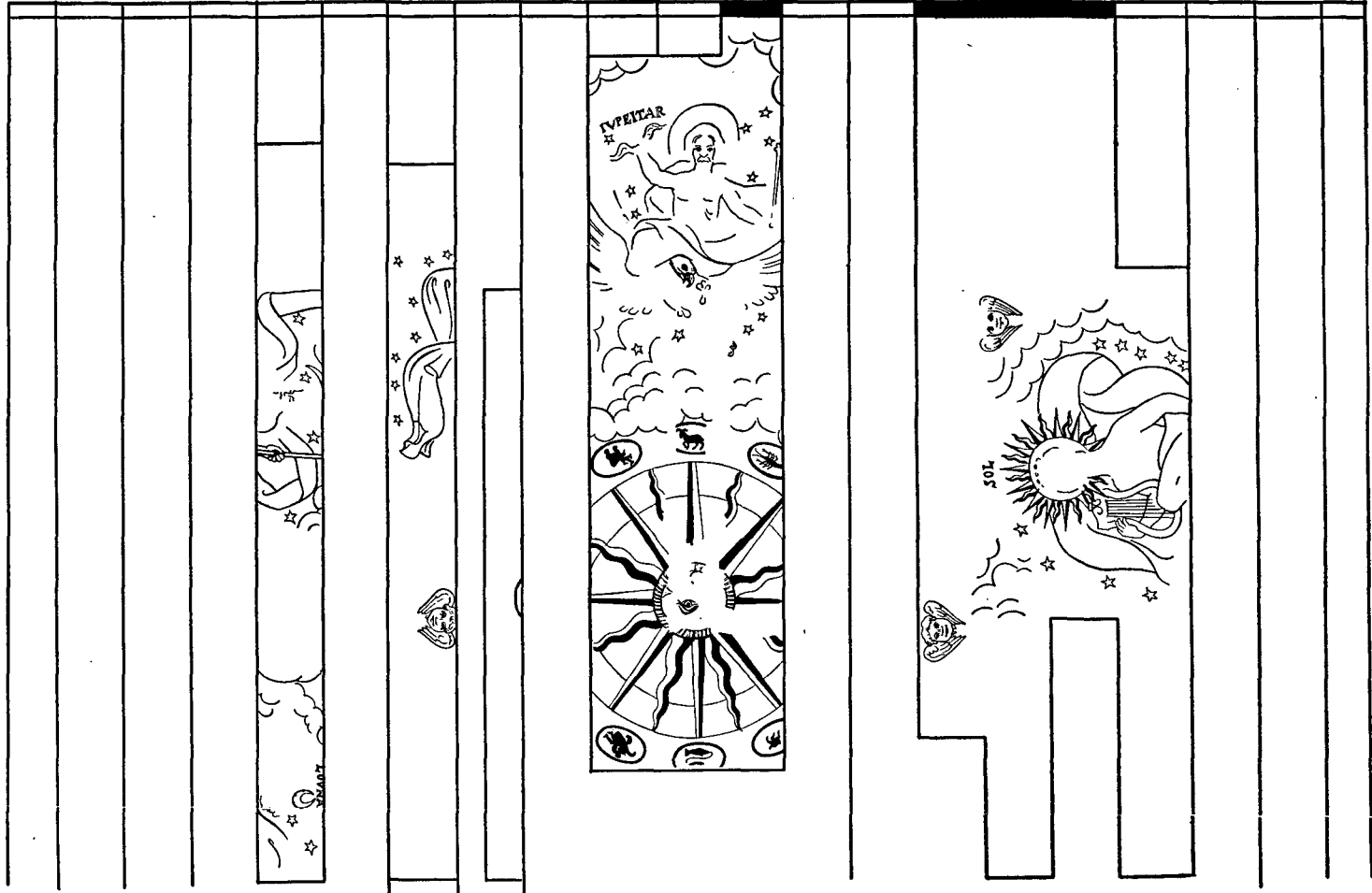
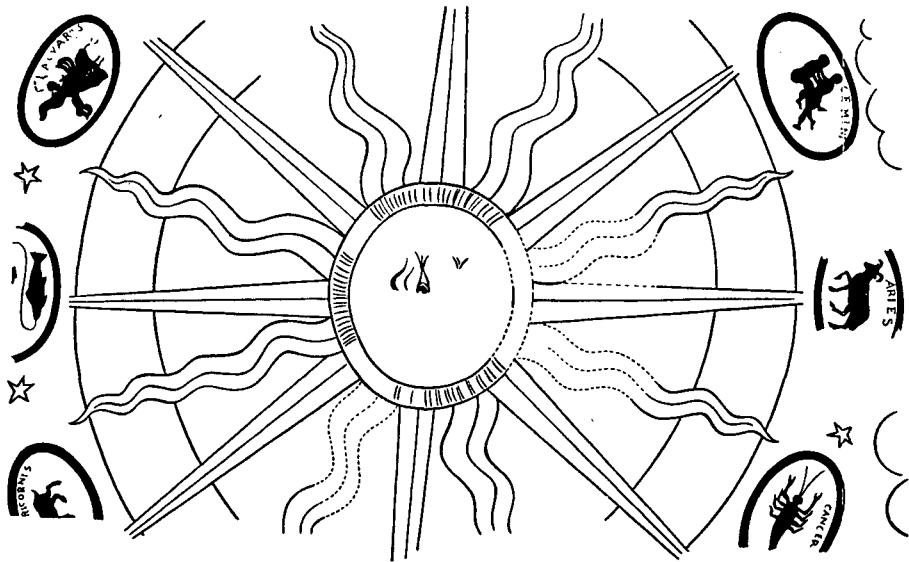


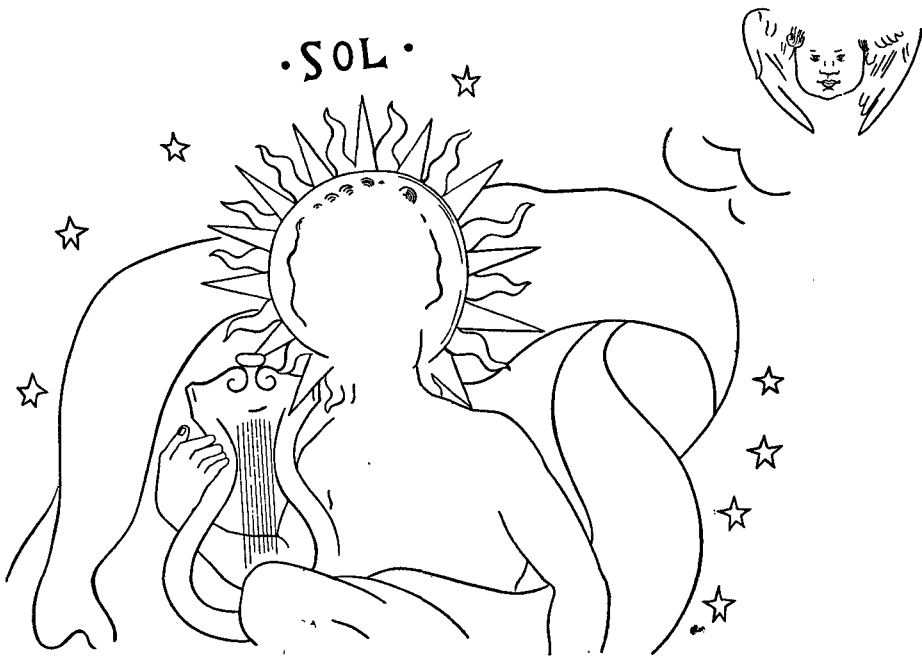
Fig. 4. The astral ceiling.



Fig. 5. The astral ceiling. (a) Jupiter.

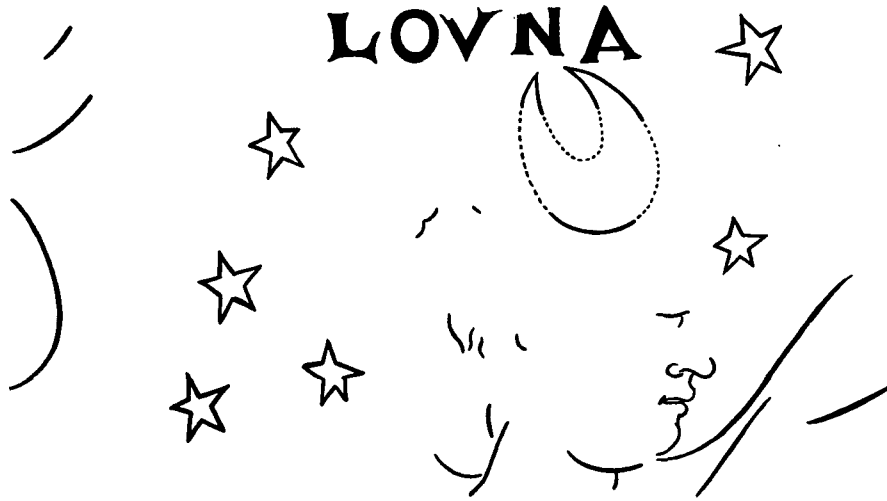


(a) The sun and signs of zodiac.

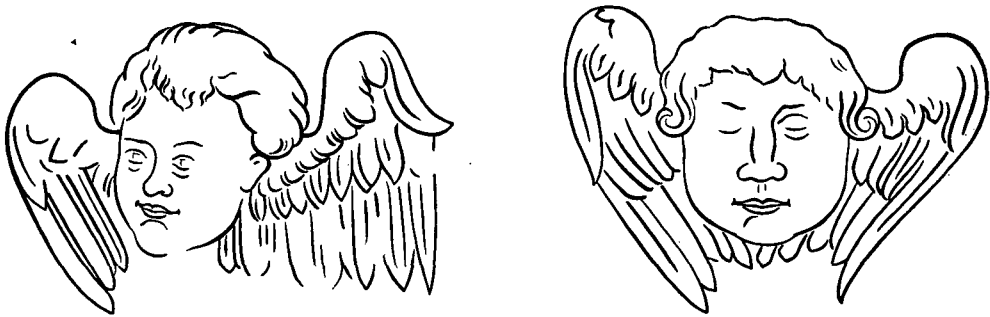


(b) Sol.

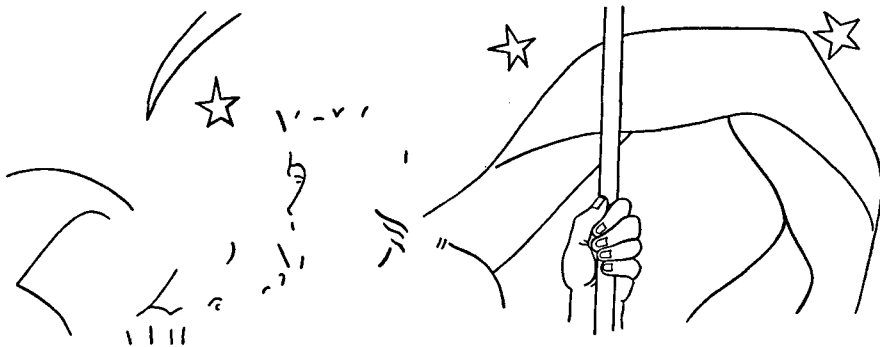
Fig. 6. The astral ceiling.



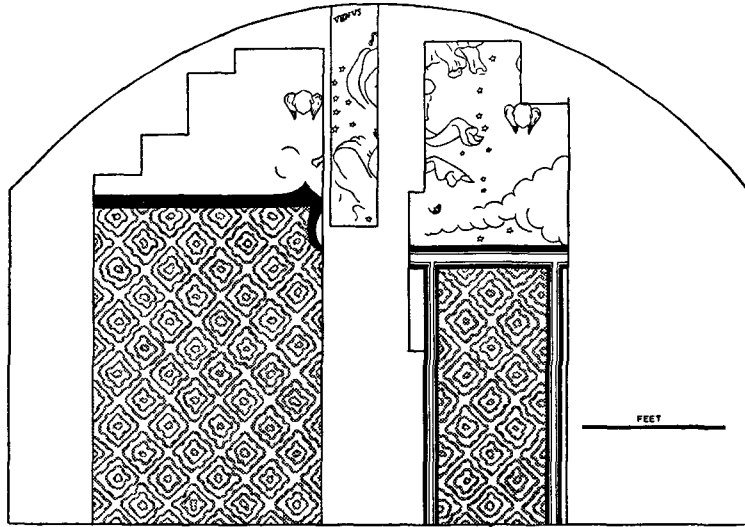
(c) Luna.



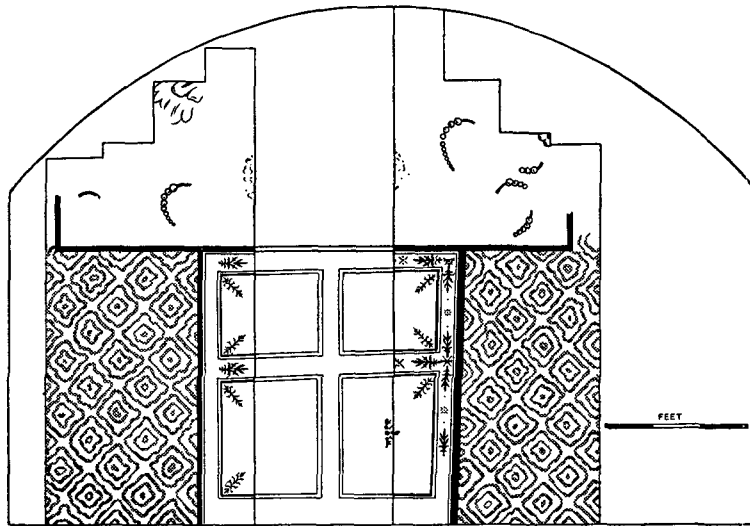
(d) Amorini.



(e) Saturn.



(a) The astral partition.



(b) The floral patterned partition.

Fig. 7.

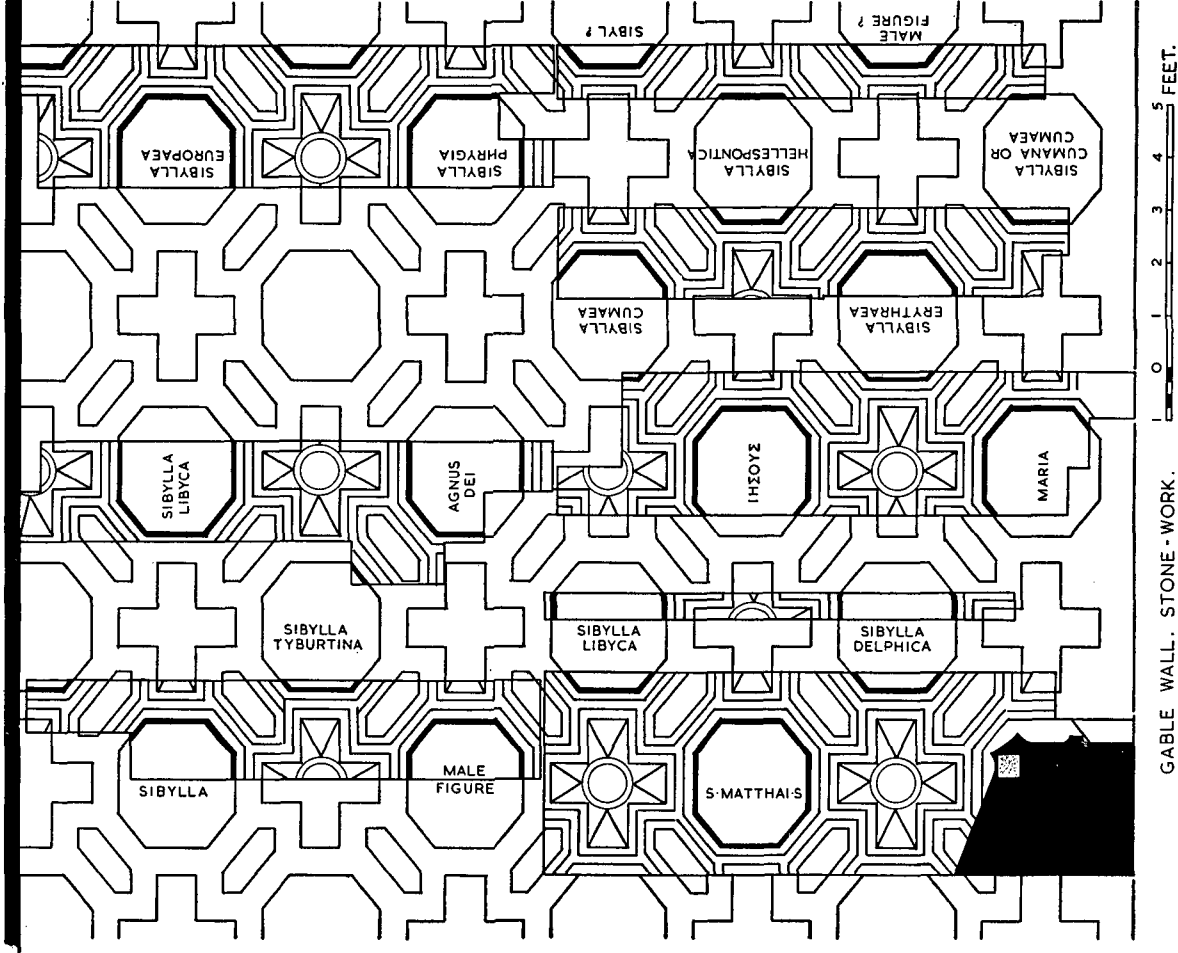


Fig. 8. The coffered ceiling.



(a) Christ as Salvator Mundi.



(b) Mary.

Fig. 9. The coffered ceiling.



(c) Agnus Dei.



(d) St Matthaius.

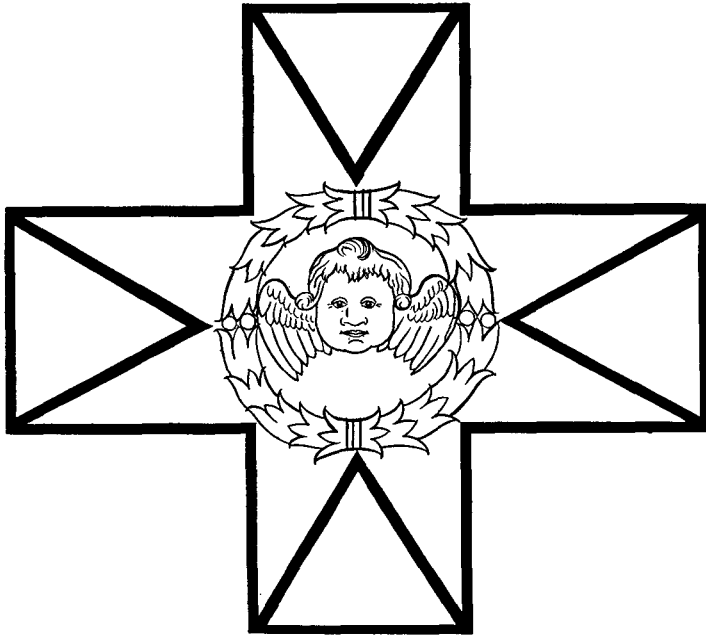


(a) Sibylla Europaea.



(b) Sibylla Phrygia.

Fig. 10. The coffered ceiling.



(c) Cofferred ceiling (detail).



(d) Sibylla Lybica.

• I H Σ O Y

M A R I A •



Fig. 11. Coffered ceiling (details).

The Identification of the Portraits.

The number of portraits painted on the coffered ceilings is not exactly known, but there were probably twenty-three. Of these four were identified as Christian figures by name. In five cases the title SIBYLLA survived in whole or in part. A further six portraits were identified as sibyls by comparison between the fragmentary Burntisland texts and those engraved on the set of trenchers formerly belonging to Mr C. F. Cooksey.¹ The results of this comparison are tabulated below where words or letters engraved on the trenchers and identified at Burntisland are underlined. The correspondence is supported by the fact that in the three instances where symbols can be identified at Burntisland they are the same as those portrayed on the trenchers.

Burntisland sybils.	Trenchers.
Row 1. Three octagons of which only the top of the framing survives.	
Row 2. <i>Fig. 1.</i> —Overpainted. <i>Fig. 2.</i> —S. MATTHAIVS. <i>Fig. 3.</i> —Bearded figure. <i>Fig. 4.</i> —..BYLLA.	
Row 3. <i>Fig. 1.</i> —Fragment of text.	SIBYLLA DELPHICA QUAE ET DAPHNE TYRESIAE FILIA.
<i>Fig. 2.</i> —Fragment of text.	SIBYLLA LIBYCA QUAE PHOE- MONOE APOLLINIS <u>FILIA</u> NON- NULLIS.
<i>Fig. 3.</i> —Fragment of text.	SIBYLLA TYBURTINA QUAE <u>ET</u> <u>ALBUNEA</u> ET ITALICA ALIAS DICTA.
Row 4. <i>Fig. 1.</i> —MARIA. . . . <i>Fig. 2.</i> —Christ as Salvator Mundi. The text is defective but is recon- structed as IESOUS CHREISTOS. THEOI. UIOS. EOTER. STAURUS.	

¹ These are published *P.S.A.Lond.*, 2nd series, XII, 219.

Burntisland sybils.

Fig. 3.—Agnus Dei. Text reads DMINVS ES . . . GVI. This is taken as corrupt form of DIGNUS EST AGNUS QUI, etc. (Revelations V, v. 12.)

Fig. 4.—Well preserved portrait. Fragments of text.

Row 5.

Fig. 1.—Portraits and fragment of text.

Fig. 2.—Fragments.

Fig. 3.—Missing.

Row 6.

Fig. 1.—Fragments only.

Fig. 2.—Fragments only.

Row 6.

Fig. 3.—Portrait and fragments of text.

Fig. 4.—Portrait and fragments of text.

Row 7.

Fig. 1.—Fragments only. Possibly male.

Fig. 2.—Fragments only. Possibly female.

Fig. 3.—Fragments only.

Fig. 4.—Missing.

Trenchers.

SIBYLLA LIBYCA QUAE PHOEMONOE APOLLINIS FILIA NONNULLIS.

SIBYLLA ERYTHRAEA EX ASSYRIORUM BABYLONE ORIUNDA BEROSI FIL.

SIBYLLA CUMAEA QUAE ET CIMMERIA APOLLINIS IN CUMIS SACERDOS. (Or could be Sibylla Lybica—see Row 4, fig. 4).

SIBYLLA CUMANA QUAE ET AMALTHAEA NUNCUPATUR. (Or could be Sybilla Cumaea, cf. Row 5, fig. 2.)

SIBYLLA HELLESPONTICA MARI- NESSENSIS EX AGRO THIRANO.

SIBYLLA PHRYGIA ANCYRAE VATES CASSANDRA NONNULLIS CREDITA.

SIBYLLA EUROPEA INCERTAE ADHUC PATRIAE EXISTENS.

Historical Note.

Mary Fairfax or Somerville, the daughter of Vice-Admiral Sir William Fairfax, was born at Jedburgh, 26 December 1780, and brought up in Burntisland from about 1783. In her autobiographical notes,¹ written in old age and published posthumously she described her Burntisland home in the following terms:

“Our house, which lay to the south of the town, was very long, with a southern exposure, and its length was increased by a wall covered with fruit-trees, which concealed a courtyard, cow-house, and other offices. From this the garden extended southwards, and ended in a plot of short grass covering a ledge of low black rocks washed by the sea. It was divided into three parts by narrow, almost unfrequented lanes. . . . The garden next to the house was bounded on the south by an ivy-covered wall hid by a row of old elm trees, from whence a steep mossy bank descended to a flat plot of grass with a gravel walk and flower borders on each side, and a broad gravel walk ran along the front of the house.”²

The property thus described was registered at Sasines in the name of Mary's father, then Captain Fairfax, 24 February 1789, on resignation by her grandfather, Samuel Charters, formerly town clerk and subsequently solicitor of customs at Burntisland, who had retired to Edinburgh.³

The sasine registration reveals that this property with its long house and three gardens⁴ was made up of eleven yards and tenements which had been acquired by her grandfather during the period 1754–76, beginning with the tenement now known as Mary Somerville's House. This house had belonged to William Grey, a shipmaster in Burntisland, and sasine was affected 20 December 1754 “by deliverance of earth and stone of the ground of the foresaid tenement, and hasp and staple of the principal doors thereof as use is.”

The property is described as “all and whole that tenement of land high and laigh, back and fore, under and above, with houses, biggings yard and pertinents, lying within the burgh of Burntisland, bounded betwixt the lands sometime of Robert Beatson, now of Andrew Stanhouse on the E., the lands sometime of George Robertson of Newbigging, now of Thomas Frazer on the W., and the common streets to the north and south parts, with the little house high and laigh adjoining to the south of the yard.”

Although this property was bought in 1754, the corner site to the E. of it was not added until 1766. In the entry of 1789 these two tenements are

¹ “Personal recollections, from early life to old age, of Mary Somerville, with selections from her correspondence by her daughter Martha Somerville.” London: John Murray, Albemarle Street. 1873.

² See also Appendix C.

³ References to the Burntisland burgh records are listed in Appendix B.

⁴ By 1824 when the map reproduced at pl. XIII was prepared the middle and south gardens had been merged.

said to have been "lately repaired, inclosed and united into one large house or tenement and garden by the said Samuel Charters." The remodelling and extension of the house, and the incidental destruction of the painted ceilings must, therefore, have taken place shortly before 1789.

Four tenements were united to form the middle garden, and five the south garden sloping down to the shore.

The Burntisland burgh records survive almost intact from 1581 onwards, and the history of Mary Somerville's tenement can be traced with only one minor omission from the beginning. For the first hundred years of its recorded history it belonged to a family of Burntisland shipmasters called Watson—first to Andrew Watson senior (d. 1590),¹ then in succession to his elder son John (d. c. 1626),² his younger son Andrew (d. 1650)³ and his grandsons, John Watson of Dunnikeir and John Watson of Leith, later of Dunnikeir.

The Watsons owned a second tenement in the Midgait (now 25-27 Somerville Square) to the W. of that so far described. Sasine of this property was registered in the names of Robert Clerk and Catherine Watson 23 May 1605 and passed to Andrew Watson in 1616. Thus from 1628 both the tenements in the Midgait belonged to Captain Andrew, and both were inherited by his son John Watson of Dunnikeir,⁴ who died childless c. 1789. His east tenement (Mary Somerville's House) he resigned to his cousin, John Watson of Leith, the west he gave to Burntisland as a mortification "for the use of Thrie widow women in the burgh of Burntisland of the Surnames of Watsone, Boswell and Orrock."⁵ The significance of this provision is indicated by the double marriage lintel on the street front of the house which is inscribed with the monograms C. A. W. & I. B. for Captain Andrew Watson and Isobelle Boswell his wife, and I. W. & E. O. for John Watson of Dunnikeir and his wife Euphame Orrock, together with the date, 1688. The same initials appear on the family monument in Burntisland churchyard. The monograms of John Watson and his wife also appear on the dormer windows at Dunnikeir House (1692).

The Watsons were burgesses of Burntisland and their activities are frequently recorded in the minutes of the council. They were also men of substance *i.e.* the list of twenty-four indwellers of Burntisland who in 1602 possessed £500 of free gear was headed by John Watson, who was appointed commissioner of the council to deal with the matter in hand.⁶ In 1627 Captain Andrew Watson's ship, the *Blessing of Burntisland*, served for 21 days

¹ Testament of Andro Watson, mariner, burges of Burntisland. (Commissariat of Edinburgh 31 October 1592.)

² John was served heir to his father 6 June 1628 (Appendix B, 3).

³ Testament of Captain Andro Watson, burges of Burntisland. (Commissariat of St Andrews 11 June and 8 July 1651 and 16 July 1656.)

⁴ *Reg. Mag. Sig.* 1660-68, item 375, dated 16 Feb. 1663.

⁵ Copy in possession of town clerk of Burntisland.

⁶ Burntisland burgh council minutes 15, 19 and 21 May 1602 (Vol. I, f. 9 r. and v.)

with the navy in a period of emergency and expenses were subsequently claimed for a 110 men, indicating a vessel of considerable size.¹ In 1639 when the Duke of Hamilton entered the Forth with a royal fleet during the conflicts following the signing of the covenant he "communicated with Burntisland through Captain Watson, one of the local mariners."² At the time of his death the Captain owned a sixteenth part of four ships of which three were called the *Blessing of Burntisland* and one the *Gift of God*, and in his own right a large ferry also called the *Blessing of Burntisland* and a small ferry, the *Learie of Burntisland*.³ It is worth noting that in 1766 Mary Somerville's tenement was still referred to as the lands of Captain Andrew Watson.

The ownership of Watson's east tenement (Mary Somerville's House) is thus recorded continuously throughout the 17th century. It is also possible on a limited number of occasions to say who was living in it during the same period. At the time of Andrew Watson senior's death his tenement had been occupied by his widow Grissal Russel⁴ who traded in ales and wines.⁵ She may well have continued to reside there until her death in 1617.⁶ John Watson of Dunnikeir in his deed of mortification of 1689 for the west tenement mentions that his other tenement was occupied by his sister Janet. A sasine registration of 1694 for the east tenement reserves to Robert Innes skipper in Burntisland and Marion Mcbaith his spouse their liferent of the laigh dwelling house possessed by them, and in 1704 the laigh house was reserved in the same terms to Marion Mcbaith, relict of Robert Innes, and to John Cleghorn minister in Burntisland.

CONCLUSION.

Mary Somerville's House was probably built during the first 30 years of the 17th century. Contemporary records show that throughout this period the property belonged to a succession of merchant shipowners called Watson, of whom Captain Andrew is most likely to have been responsible for the new house. The records confirm its association with Mary Somerville and reveal that its alteration and extension were the work of her grandfather, Samuel Charters. There is no evidence to show that it was ever used for any purpose other than as a dwelling.

The discovery of painted ceilings in the home of a wealthy Burntisland merchant illustrates that such decoration was not the monopoly of the

¹ *Reg. Privy Council of Scotland* (2nd series), 1627-28, pp. 269-70.

² Blyth, John J., *Burntisland—Early History and People*, 132.

³ *Op. cit.*

⁴ Appendix B, items 1 and 2.

⁵ *Cf.* for example Burntisland burgh council minutes 4 April 1605. (Vol. I, f. 68 v.) when she was fined by the Council for overcharging.

⁶ Testament of Grissall Russel, widow in Burntisland (Commissariat of St Andrews, 11 June 1619).

aristocracy and agrees with the distribution pattern suggested by the examples already known at Culross, Aberdour and Kirkcaldy, all Fife coastal towns where suitable imported timber was freely available. The Burntisland records contain frequent references to this trade, since the timber had first to be offered to the civic authorities before it could be sold on the open market.

Painted ceilings belong structurally to two main classes, those which most commonly survive being flat and supported by exposed joists, while others, like those discovered in Mary Somerville's House, were vaulted and suspended from a wooden framing. The decoration of the vaulted ceilings was the more difficult because greater skill was required to deal with the larger areas involved.¹ In Mary Somerville's House this problem was effectively dealt with in two quite different ways. The ceiling of the smaller room was handled as a unit, and the planetary deities disposed symmetrically round the central solar feature in such a way as to produce an almost three-dimensional effect of depth and to disguise the true shape of the ceiling. In the larger room an architectural treatment was adopted, dividing up the area to be decorated and imitating a coffered ceiling such as is to be seen at the Palace of Holyroodhouse. The mimicry of more costly materials in this way, including the "panelling" on the partitions, is common in painted decoration of the period.

The subject matter of the ceilings was unusual, but not unique. Part of a planetary ceiling (*ante* 1616) survives at Cullen House, Banffshire. A partition with sibylline portraits (1629) was recovered from a house near Stirling, a half-length figure of Christ was the central feature of a ceiling in the Edinburgh tenement known as Mary of Guise's Palace, and the apostles appear on the ceiling at St Mary's Church, Grandtully.² There is no direct relationship between any of these, but the portrait of Sibylla Europaea at Burntisland and the corresponding portrait from the series by Jamieson now in King's College Library, Aberdeen, may derive from a common origin. The closest parallel between the new ceilings and those already known is between the arabesques on the coffered ceiling and those at Gladstone's Land, Edinburgh (1620). It may be significant that the decoration at Aberdour Castle (*c.* 1632) is closely related to the same ceiling.

The ceilings were painted with skill and fluency, but with a certain crudeness, the work of competent tradesmen rather than of artists. Contemporary documents reveal that the decoration of ceilings was in fact a

¹ Pattern books may well have been used for this purpose as well as for decorative detail. Cf. M. Jourdain, *Decorative plasterwork of the Renaissance*, which illustrates the coffered design used at Mary Somerville's House as given in *A book of Sundry Draughts, principally serving for glaziers*, 1615 (fig. 13), and as formed in plaster early in the 17th century at Little Strickland Hall, Shap (fig. 63).

² See *P.S.A.S.*, XXXIII, 387 ff. where the panels from Wester Livilands are described, and the representations of sibyls in England and Scotland discussed at length. Fragments of the ceiling from Mary of Guise's Palace are preserved in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh.

branch of the painters' trade. The effect of foreign influence on Scottish painted decoration is often stressed, and in so far as the latter was a product of the Renaissance, introduced into Scotland perhaps by continental craftsmen, this is justified. But there is ample evidence that painting was a trade widely practised in Scotland in the 16th century, and included domestic decoration. Craftsmen accustomed to such work must have assimilated without difficulty the whole range of Renaissance decoration once the appropriate pattern books were available in Scotland, as indeed they were in the second half of the century.

The craftsmen who worked at Mary Somerville's House have not been identified, but there was a painter associated with Burntisland at the beginning of the 17th century. There is a sasine dated 17 October 1604 in the name of James Workman, painter, for a tenement below the burgh of Burntisland on the south hill.¹ James was granted a licence in 1606 "to haive his reseideanc wt. his familie in his awin house wtin yir Burgh" and still owned property there in 1608.²

James Workman belonged to a family of painters whose activities are recorded for at least three generations during the period 1580-1640. His father, David, was painting the roof and walls of Edinburgh Inner Tolbooth in 1585. His two brothers, both painters, died of the pest in Edinburgh 1604-05, and one, John, is described in his testament as Painter to His Majesty.³ James himself was appointed herald painter to the Lyon Court in 1592,⁴ was working in the Palace Block at Edinburgh Castle in 1617⁵ and was still alive in 1623.⁶ Another James, presumably a son or grandson, appeared on the burghess roll as a painter in 1641.⁷ James Workman might well have painted the Somerville Street ceilings, and was known to John Watson senior who was present at both the council meetings at which the painter's affairs were discussed.

The ceilings from Mary Somerville's House possessed the three characteristics common to the majority of Scottish painted ceilings, *i.e.* they were painted in a comparatively limited period of time about the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, they were products of the Renaissance and they were the work of decorators rather than of artists. Within this framework they illustrate the tastes and ideas of the people by whom, and for whom, they were painted—Christian iconography, for example, was still used for domestic

¹ Burntisland burgh records (Vol. III. f. 31. v.).

² Burntisland burgh council minutes 22 July 1606 (Vol. I, f. 80 v.) and 22 March and 29 March 1608 (Vol. VII, f. 21 r.).

³ Testament John Workman painter to His Majesty, indweller in Edinburgh (Commissariat of Edinburgh, 8 March 1606).

⁴ Scottish Record Society *Court of Lord Lyon*.

⁵ *Master of Works Accounts*, II, 18 June 1617.

⁶ Testament Elspeth Workman, daughter of Charles Workman painter in Edinburgh (Commissariat of Edinburgh, 13 February 1627).

⁷ Edinburgh burghess roll.

decoration in a Protestant centre such as Burntisland more than 50 years after the Reformation.

The discovery of the ceilings makes it possible to visualise the original appearance and even the furnishing, of rooms of which only the structural skeleton otherwise remains and establishes a direct link with a family, important in Burntisland 350 years ago, to which the inhabitants have cause to be grateful to the present day. It is only to be regretted that Mary Somerville, as she studied the stars from her bedroom window, was unaware of those other planetary deities concealed by the plaster above her head.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

The ceilings from Mary Somerville's House were reconstructed and recorded by the Ancient Monuments branch of the Ministry of Works at the request of Burntisland burgh council. The plans are by Miss Macdonald, the photographs by Mr Pugh and Mr Stout and the line drawings by Mr Robertson who also assisted in the preparation of this report. They are reproduced by permission of the Ministry.

Thanks are due to the Burntisland burgh authorities, especially Mr McLachlan, town clerk, Mr Campbell, clerk of works and Miss McBride, the burgh librarian.

Thanks are also due to Mr P. S. Green (timber analysis), to Mr Stuart Maxwell and the Rev. David McRoberts for comments on the iconography, to Mr Robin Hutchinson for information about the Workman family and to Mr John Imrie for advice on the Burntisland burgh records.

The report is published with the assistance of a grant from the Ministry of Works.

APPENDIX A.

PIGMENT ANALYSIS.

Samples of paint from the ceilings were submitted to the National Gallery, London, for analysis.¹ The paint was found to have been thinly applied in one—sometimes two—layers, on a ground consisting of calcium carbonate and glue. The medium used was glue.

The following pigments were identified:—

Sample	Location	Colour	Nature	Pigment
A	Cherub's hair	Yellow	Iron Oxide	Raw Sienna
B	Several, including star	Pale yellow	Arsenic (Sulphide)	Orpiment (?)
C	Generally—frequently as under-paint (e.g. under brown of coffering)	Orange red	Red lead	Red lead
D	As above	Dirty orange red	Carbon black, red lead	Carbon black over "C"
E	Background to cherub's head	Dark blue-black	Carbon black, ground potassium cobalt glass	Carbon black and smalt
F	Cherub's eyebrow	White	Calcium carbonate	Whiting
G	Coffer border	Slaty blue-black	Lead. Cobalt absent ²	White lead with carbon black (?)

¹ Kindly undertaken by Miss Hey and Miss Plesters at the request of Mr Beik of the Ministry's Ancient Monuments Laboratory, London. For the method used see

Museums Journal, LIV (1954), No. 4, 97-101.

Studies in Conservation, II (1956), No. 3, 110-157.

Studies in Conservation, III (1958), No. 4, 183-193.

² The lead in this sample was identified by Mr P. Ainsley in an experimental investigation using the X-ray fluorescent spectrometer at the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art, Oxford. Mr Ainsley also confirmed the presence of arsenic in sample B and of lead in sample C.

APPENDIX B.

THE DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF MARY SOMERVILLE'S HOUSE.

Mary Somerville's House stands on a tenement of land which formed part of the property resigned by Samuel Charters to her father on 24 February 1789.

The history of this tenement is recorded in the protocol books of the town clerks of Burntisland and subsequently in the burgh registers of sasines. The property was bounded to N. and S. by the common streets and is therefore identified by the names of the adjacent owners to E. and W.

Owners of tenement of land resigned to Capt. George Fairfax 24 Feb. 1789.	Owners of adjacent properties to east to west	
1. <i>28 Jan. 1596.</i> —Sasine John Watson as heir to umql. Andrew Watson, once burghess in Burntisland. (Vol. I, f. 184v.)	Umql. John Clepane of Monthagar.	William Boswell.
2. <i>Same date.</i> —Sasine John Watson & Katherine Wallace his spouse in accordance with marriage contract.	Same.	Same.
3. <i>6 June 1628.</i> —Sasine John Watson jnr. shipmaster in Leith, eldest son of John Watson shipmaster, burghess in Burntisland. (Vol. VII, f. 101r.)	Umql. John Clepane & Alison Orrock, now John Cairns alias Walker.	Umql. William Boswell now Robert Angus.
4. <i>Same date.</i> —Sasine Captain Andrew Watson & Isobelle Boswell his spouse on resignation by John Watson jnr. heir of John Watson burghess in Burntisland.	Same.	Same.
5. <i>16 Aug. 1653.</i> —Sasine John Watson as heir to his father Captain Andrew Watson. (Vol. VII, f. 258v.)	Umql. John Clepane now Robert Betsone.	Robert Angus.
6. <i>8 April 1675.</i> —Sasine John Watson now of Dunikeir burghess of Burntisland & Euphame Orrock his spouse. (Vol. IX, p. 341.)	Umql. John Clepane & Alison Orrock, then umql. John Cairns now Robert Betsone.	Umql. Robert Angus.
7. <i>7 June 1679.</i> —Sasine Euphame Orrock spouse to John Watson of Dunikeir. (Vol. X, p. 53.)	Umql. John Cairns now Robert Beatson.	Umql. Robert Angus now James Robertson of Newbigging.
8. <i>15 Dec. 1689.</i> —Resignation by John Watson of Dunikeir in favour of his nephew, John Watson, eldest son of Captain John Watson in Leith. (Quoted in sasine of <i>9 Jan. 1694 infra.</i>)		
9. <i>9 Jan. 1694.</i> —Confirmation of the above in favour of John Watson of Leith, now in Dunikeir and his wife Euphame Orrock (<i>sic</i>), daughter of umquhile Alexr. Orrock of that ilk. (Vol. X, p. 274.)	Robert Beatson.	James Robertson.

PAINTED CEILINGS FROM MARY SOMERVILLE'S HOUSE. 175

	Owners of tenement of land resigned to Capt. George Fairfax 24 Feb. 1789.	Owners of adjacent properties to east	to west
10.	<i>24 Nov. 1704.</i> —Sasine John Leslie of East Quarter & Alison Spittle his spouse upon resignation by John Watson late of Dunnikeer, now of Leith. (Vol. X, p. 440.) Sasine reserves to Marion Macbaith relict of the deceast Robert Innes skipper in Burntisland her liferent of the laigh dwelling house presently possessed by Mr John Cleghorn minister in Burntisland and Marion Mcbaith.	Robert Beatson.	James Robertson.
11.	<i>3 April 1727.</i> —Resignation in life rent by Alexr. Leslie of East Quarter to Robert Orrock brother german to umql. Alexr. Orrock of that ilk & Christian Boswell his spouse, and to Alexr. Orrock their son. (Referred to in saisin of 16 June 1736 <i>infra</i> .)	Not given.	Not given.
12.	<i>16 June 1736.</i> —Sasine Alexr. Orrock on resignation without reversion by Lord Lindores (formerly Alexr. Leslie) and of Helen Rutherford his spouse in liferent on resignation by her husband. (Vol. XI, p. 106.)	Robert Beatson	George Robertson of Newbigging.
13.	<i>22 Feb. 1739.</i> —Decret of adjudication obtained at instance of Helen Rutherford relict of umql. Alexr. Orrock merchant in Burntisland after renunciation by his sisters Jean, Anne & Christian. (Recorded in sasine of 20 March 1739 <i>infra</i> .)	Robert Beatson.	George Robertson.
14.	<i>20 March 1739.</i> —Sasine William Greig shipmaster in Burntisland & Janet Russel his spouse of Alexr. Orrocks tenement on resignation by Helen Rutherford following decree of adjudication recorded above. (Vol. XI, p. 191.)		
15.	<i>20 Dec. 1754.</i> —Sasine George Greig as heir to his brother and resignation by him in favour of Samuel Charters & Christian Murray his spouse. (Vol. XII, p. 113.)	Umql. Robert Beatson now Andrew Stanhouse.	Umql. George Robertson of Newbigging now Thomas Frazer.
16.	<i>24 Feb. 1789.</i> —Sasine Capt. George Fairfax on resignation by Saml. Charters. (Vol. XIV, p. 74.)	Umql. Robert Beatson.	Umql. George Robertson.

NOTES.

1. In the 17th century the Watsons held the tenement of land next but one to the E. of that referred to above. Their association with this tenement is first recorded 23 May 1605 (Vol. III, f. 77 r.) with the sasine of Robert Clerk & Catherine Watson his spouse. The tenement passed to Andrew Watson 17 June 1616 (Vol. IV, f. 185 v.).
2. A John Watson had a tenement of land in the High Street in 1604. (Cognition of 10 Jan. 1604—Vol. III, f. 86 v. and of 20 May 1607, Vol. IV, f. 1 r.). This John Watson belonged to a different family of the same name.

APPENDIX C.

MARY SOMERVILLE'S DESCRIPTION OF HER BURNTISLAND HOME.

Mary Somerville was one of those remarkable women who in the 19th century overcame by personality and natural ability the lack of formal education and achieved an international reputation as a scholar, in her case in the field of astronomy. Her life is recorded in the Dictionary of National Biography and her name perpetuated at Somerville College, Oxford.

The description of her home from her autobiographical notes¹ not only contained information about the house, but serves as an introduction to the work of a very able and entertaining old lady.

"Our house, which lay to the south of the town, was very long, with a southern exposure, and its length was increased by a wall covered with fruit-trees, which concealed a courtyard, cow-house and other offices. From this the garden extended southwards and ended in a plot of short grass covering a ledge of low black rocks washed by the sea. It was divided into three parts by narrow, almost unfrequented lanes. These gardens yielded abundance of common fruit and vegetables, but the warmest and best exposures were always devoted to flowers. The garden next to the house was bounded by an ivy covered wall hid by a row of old elm trees, from whence a steep mossy bank descended to a flat plot of grass with a gravel walk and flower borders on each side, and a broad gravel walk ran along the front of the house. My mother was fond of flowers and prided herself on her moss-roses which flourished luxuriantly on the front of the house, but my father, though a sailor, was an excellent florist. He procured the finest bulbs and flower seeds from Holland and kept each kind in a separate bed (pp. 10 ff.).

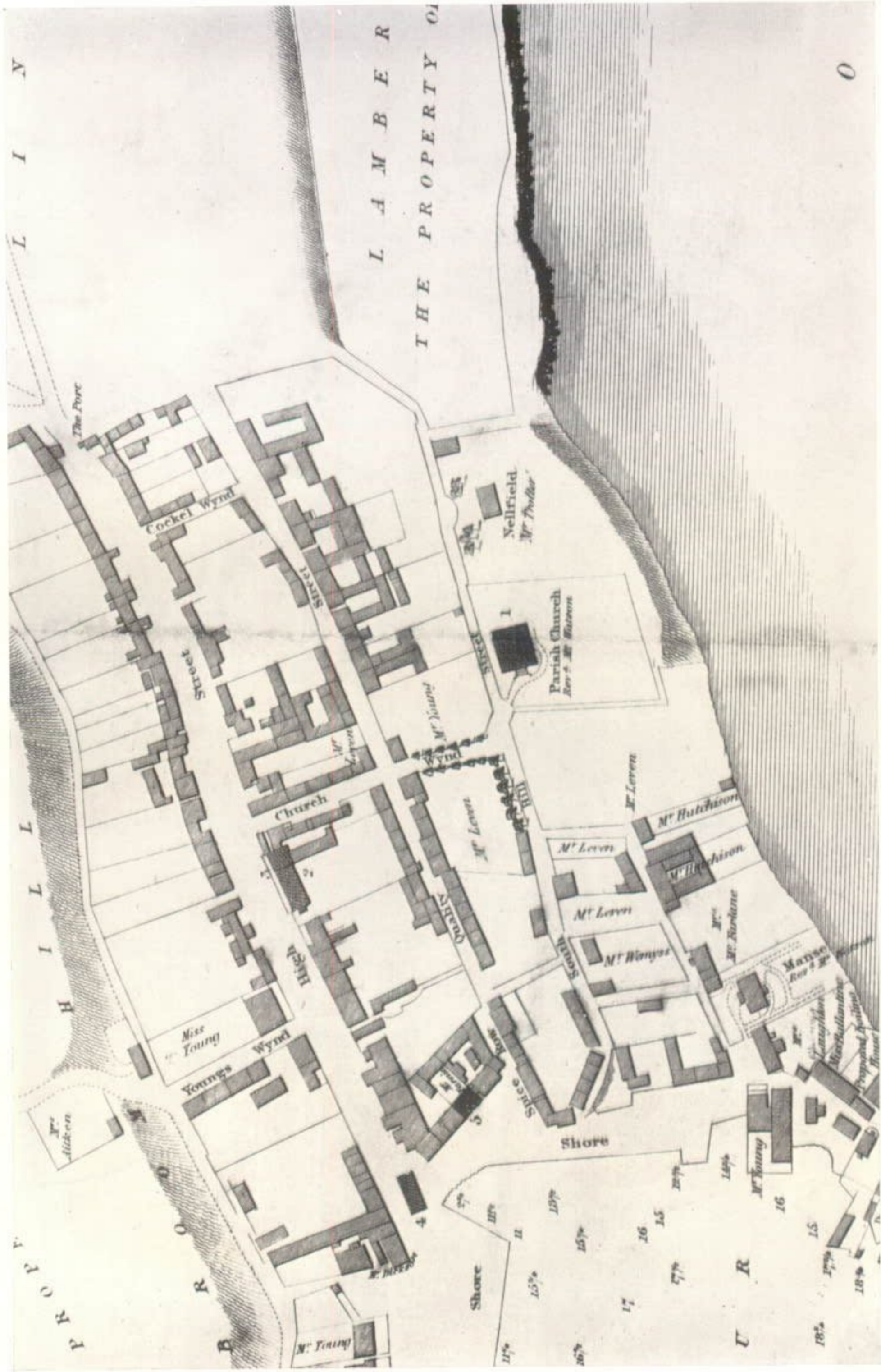
My mother was very much afraid of thunder and lightning. She knew when a storm was near from the appearance of the clouds, and prepared for it by taking out the steel pins which fastened her cap on. She then sat on a sofa at a distance from the fireplace which had a very high chimney, and read different parts of the Bible, especially the sublime descriptions of storms in the Psalms which made me, who sat close by her, still more afraid. We had an excellent and beautiful pointer, called Hero, a great favourite, who generally lived in the garden, but at the first clap of thunder he used to rush howling indoors, and place his face on my knee. Then my father, who laughed not a little at our fear, would bring a glass of wine to my mother and say, "Drink that, Peg; it will give you courage, for we are going to have a rat-tat-too." My mother would beg him to shut the window-shutters and, though she could no longer see to read, she kept the Bible on her knee for protection (pp. 16 ff.).

My bedroom had a window to the south and a small closet near had one to the north. At these I spent many hours studying the stars by the aid of the celestial globe. . .

Our house on one occasion being full, I was sent to sleep in a room quite detached from the rest and with a different staircase. There was a closet in the room in which my father kept his fowling pieces, fishing tackle, and golf clubs, and a long garret overhead was filled with presses and stores of all kinds, among other things a number of large cheeses were on a board slung by ropes to the rafters. One night I had put out my candle and was fast asleep when I was awakened by a violent crash, and then a rolling noise over my head. Now the room was said to be haunted, so that the servants would not sleep in it. I was desperate, for there was no bell. I groped my way to the closet—lucifer matches were unknown in those days—I seized one of the golf clubs, which are shod with iron and thundered on the bedroom door till I brought my father, followed by the whole household, to my aid. It was found that the rats had gnawed through the ropes by which the cheeses were suspended, so that the crash and rolling were accounted for, and I was scolded for making such an uproar." (p. 30.)

These extracts confirm that the alterations to the upper part of the house must have been carried out before Mary Somerville's day.

¹ *Op. cit.*



Burntisland in 1824 when the Somerville property on the south side of Quality Street (formerly the Midgait) belonged to a Mr Leven.



(a) The Watson's east tenement (Mary Somerville's House), north front, after renovation.



(b) South front.

M. R. APTED.



(a) The Watson's west tenement (25-27 Somerville Square).



(b) The house of John Watson of Dunnikeir (1692) at Kirkcaldy.

M. R. APTED.



The Watson Memorial in Burntisland Churchyard.

M. R. APTED.

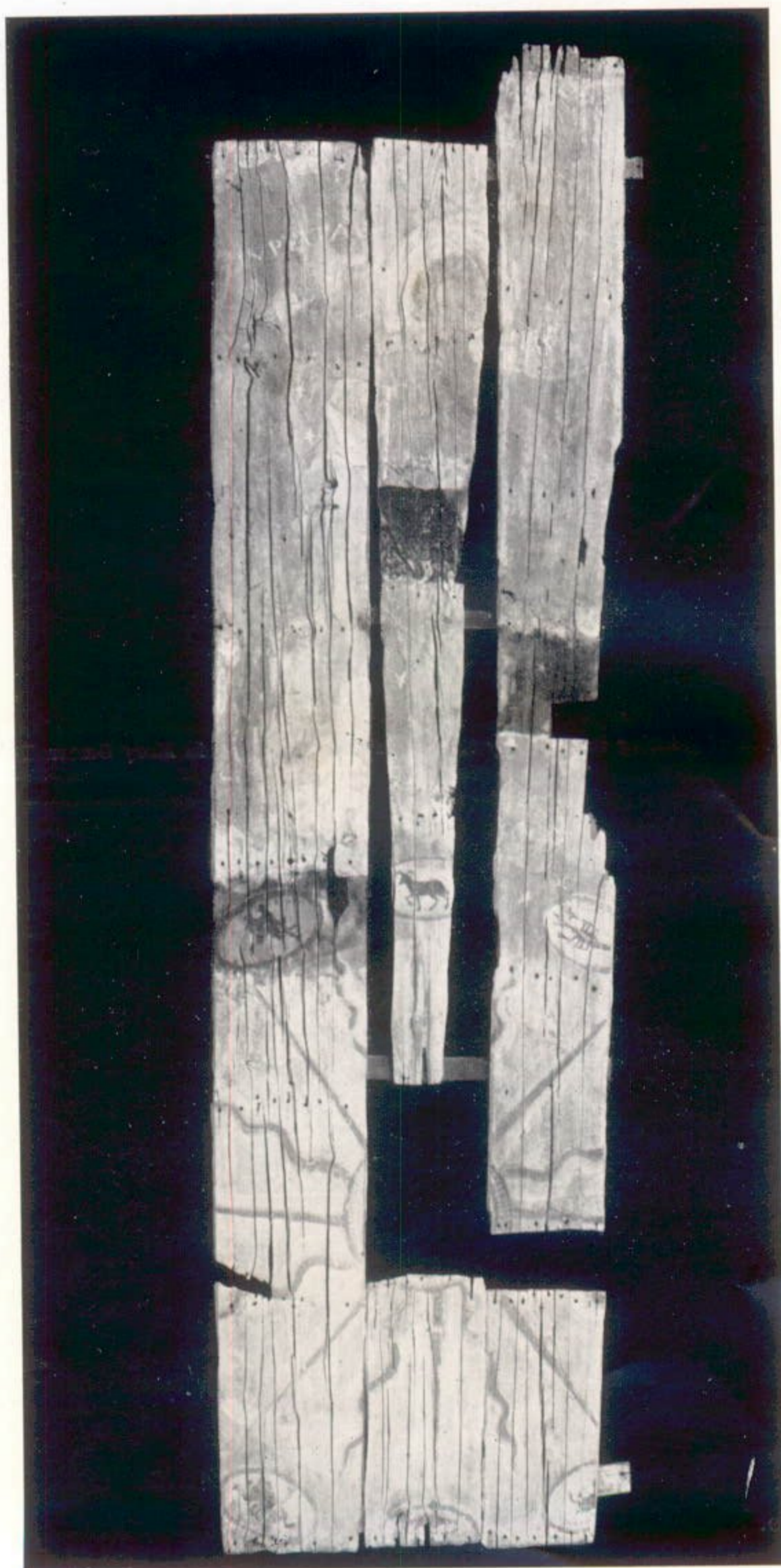


(a) Fragments of painting revealed by the removal of partitions in Mary Somerville's House.



(b) The painted boards exposed.

M. R. APTED.



Part of the astral ceiling.

M. R. APTED.



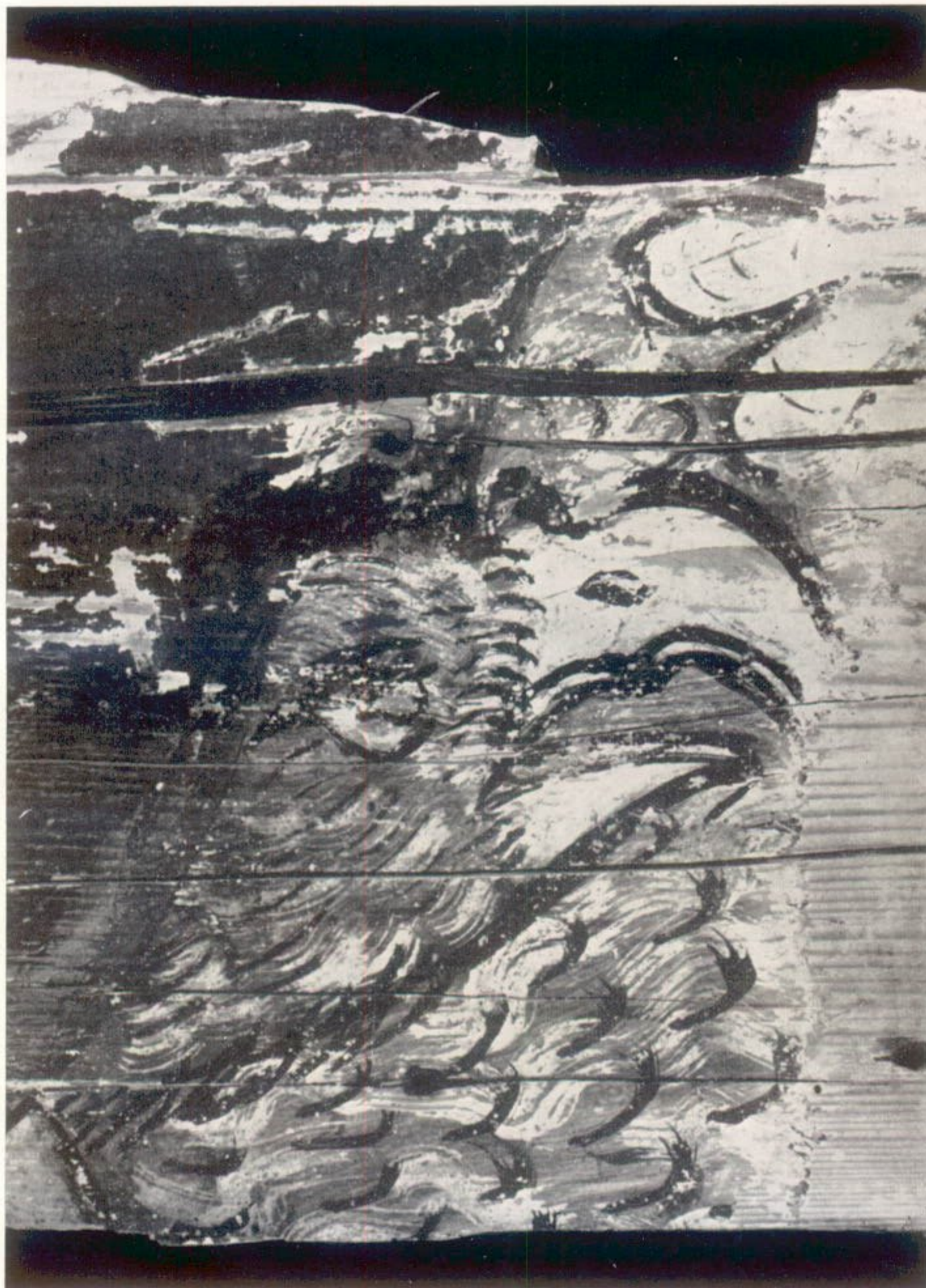
(b) The sun and signs of the zodiac.



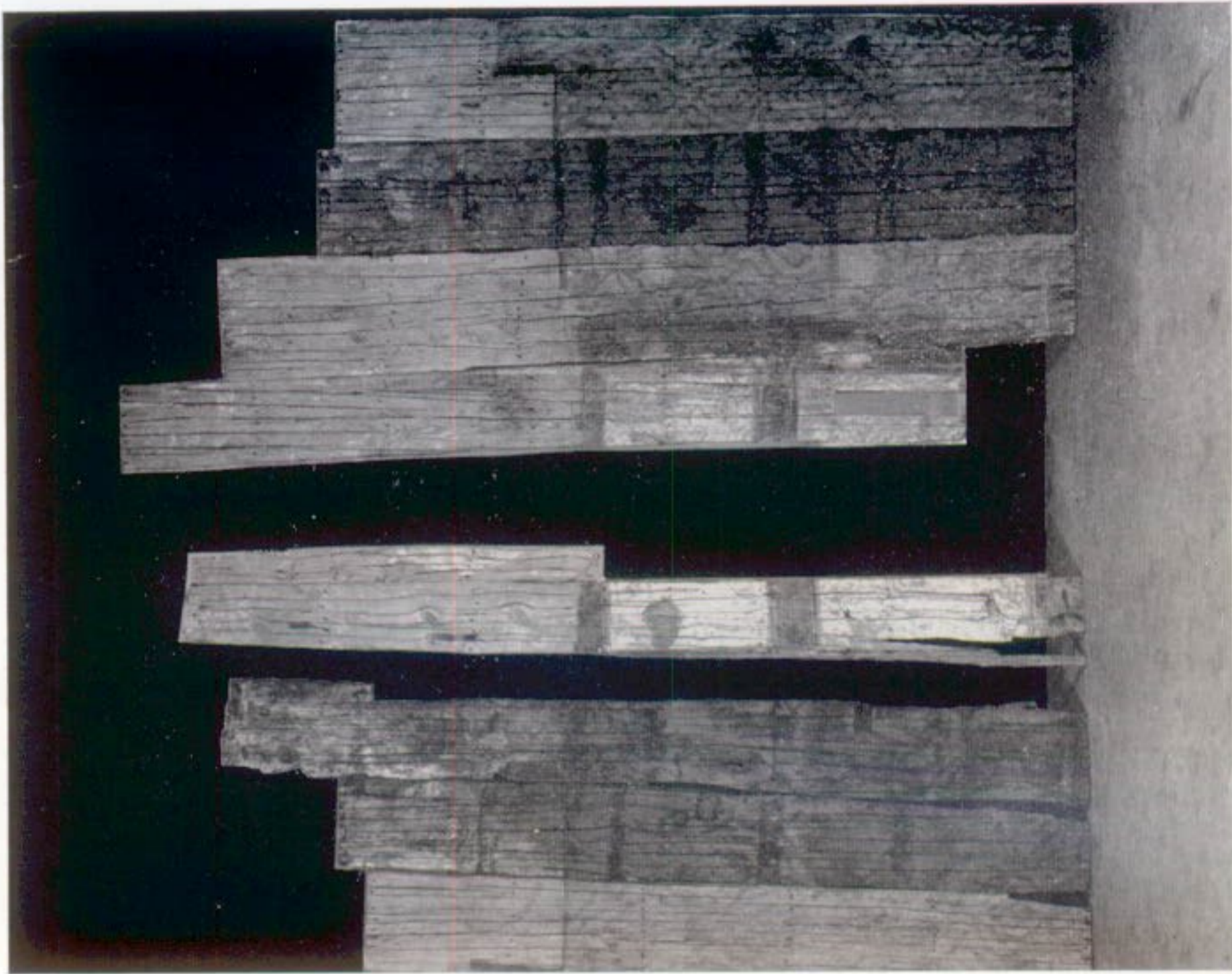
(a) Jupiter.



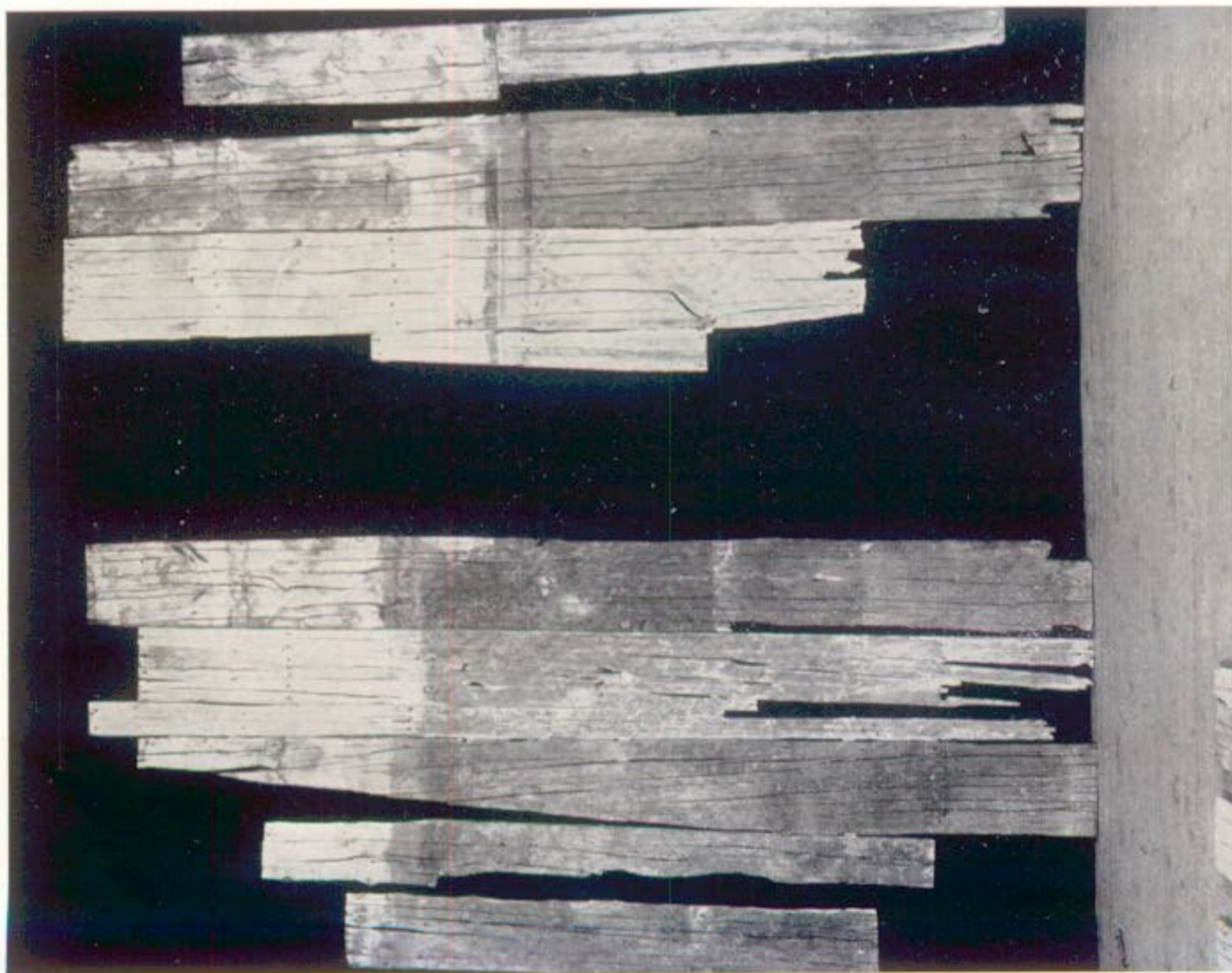
Sol.



Jupiter's eagle (detail).



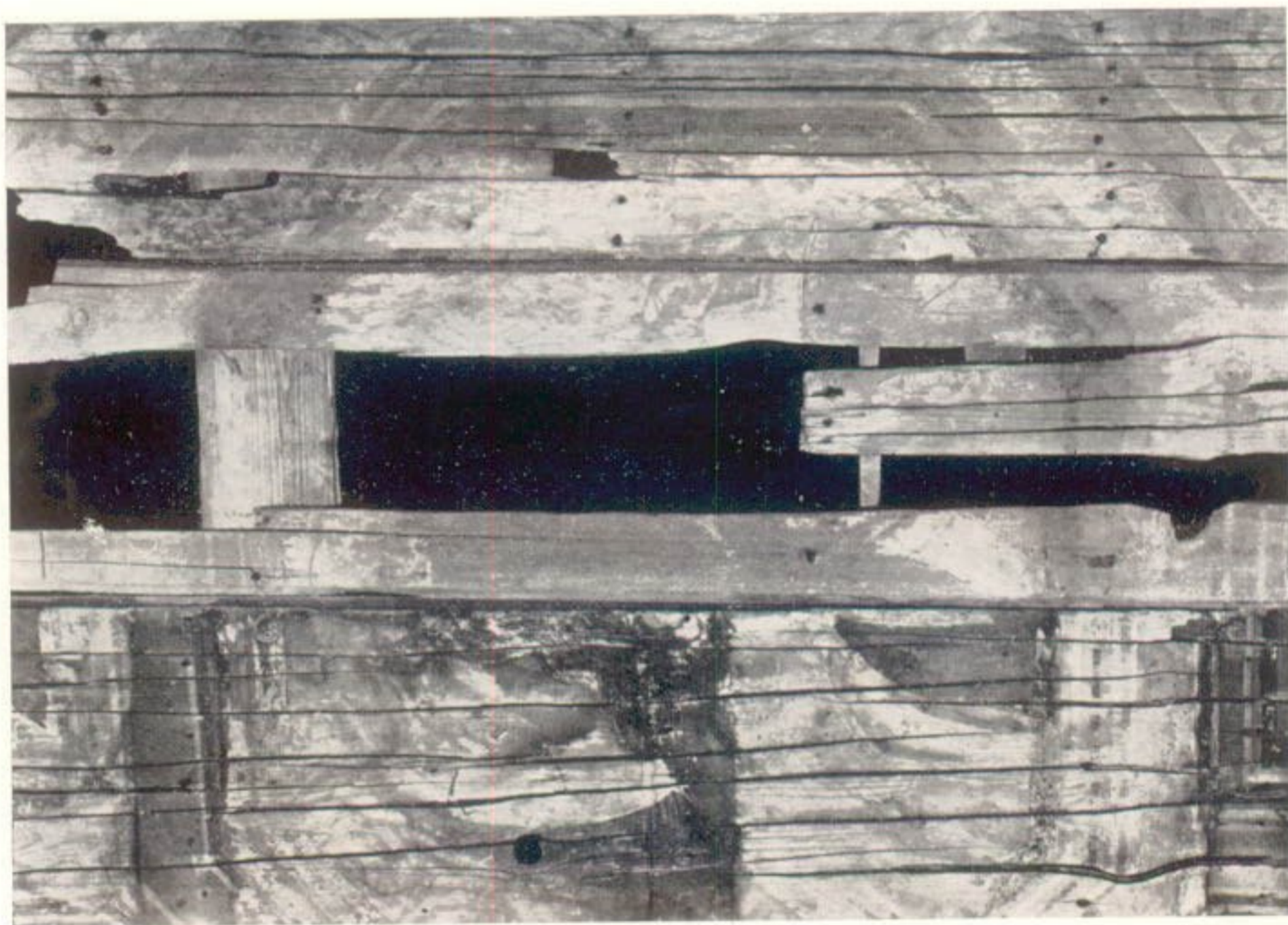
(b) The coffered side of the partition.



(a) The astral side of the partition.



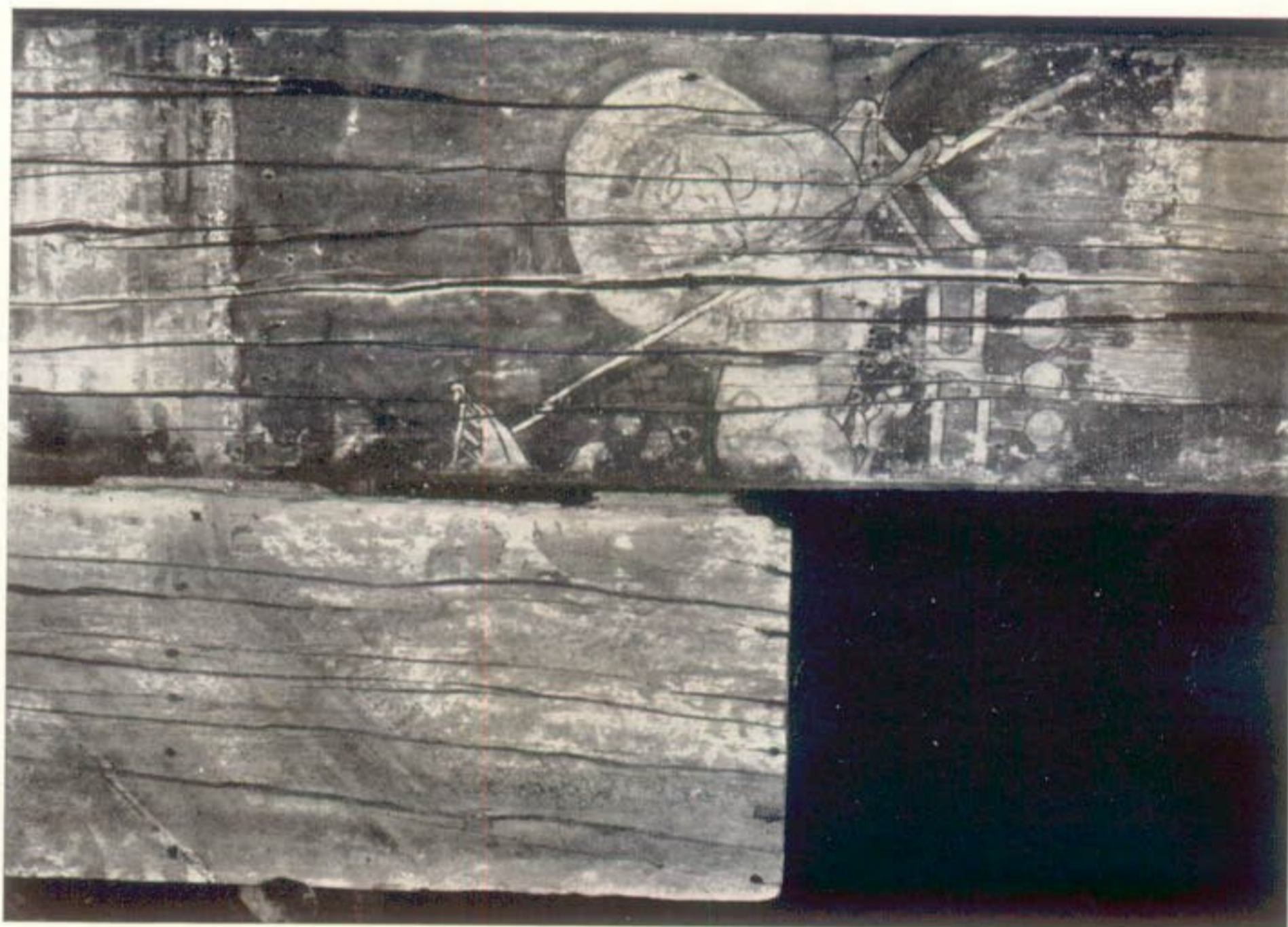
(b) The head of Mary. (Row 4, Fig. 1.)



(a) Christ as Salvator Mundi. (Row 4, Fig. 2.)



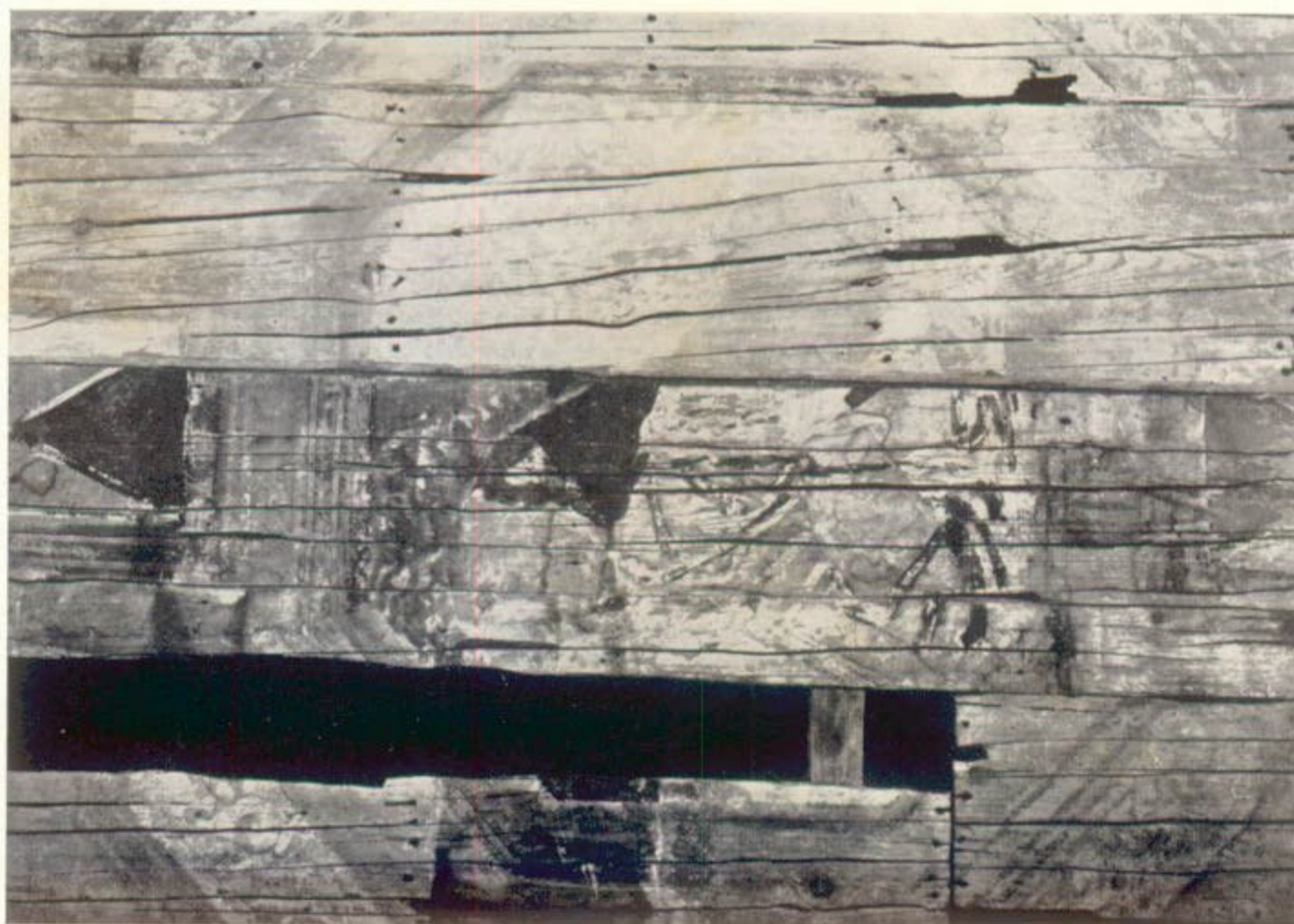
(b) Sibylla Lybical. (Row 4, Fig. 4.)



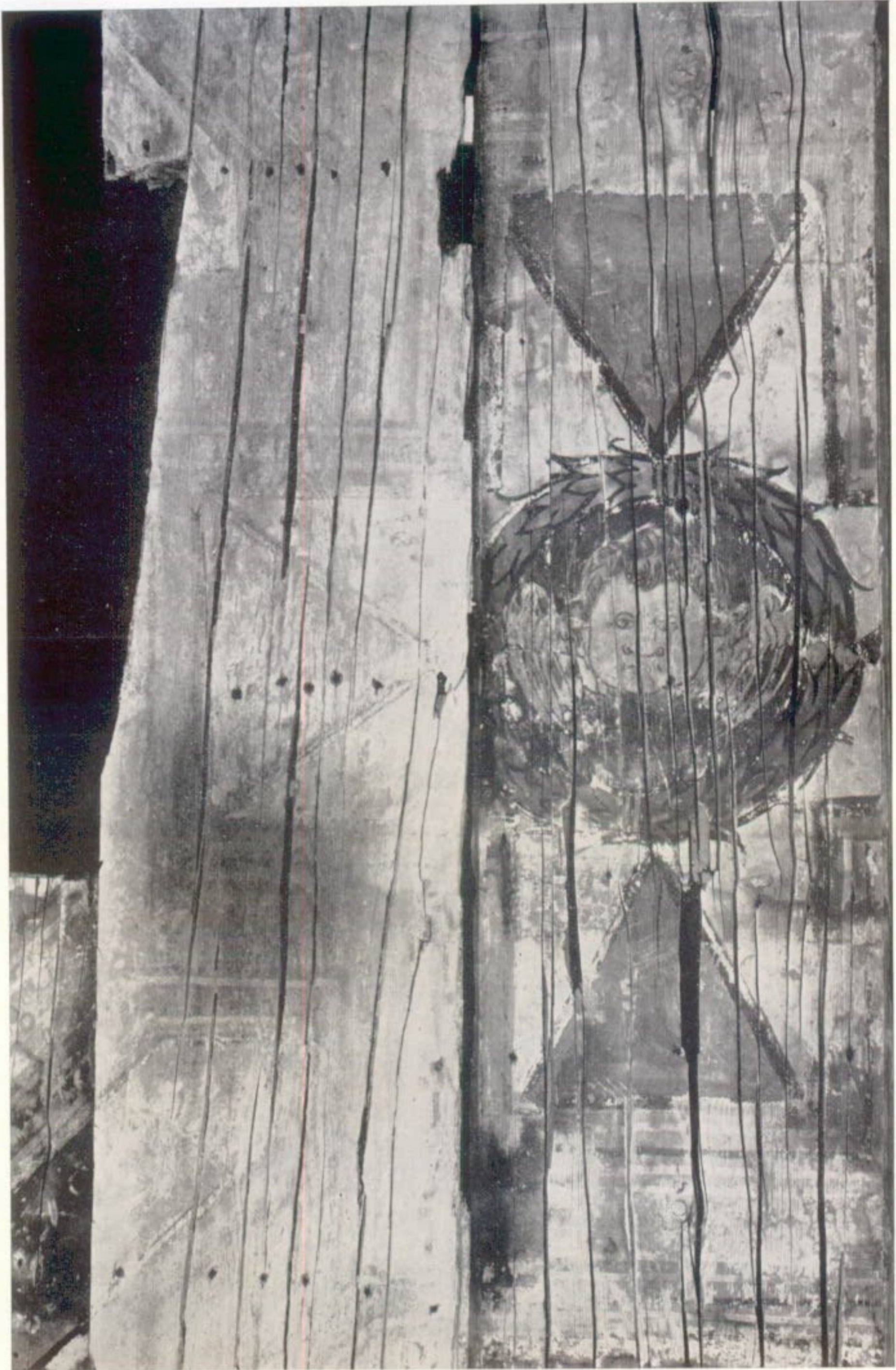
(a) Agnus Dei. (Row 4, Fig. 3.)



(a) Sibylla Europaea (Row 6, Fig. 4.)



(b) S. Mathaius. (Row 2, Fig. 2.)



Coffered ceiling (detail).

M. R. APTED.