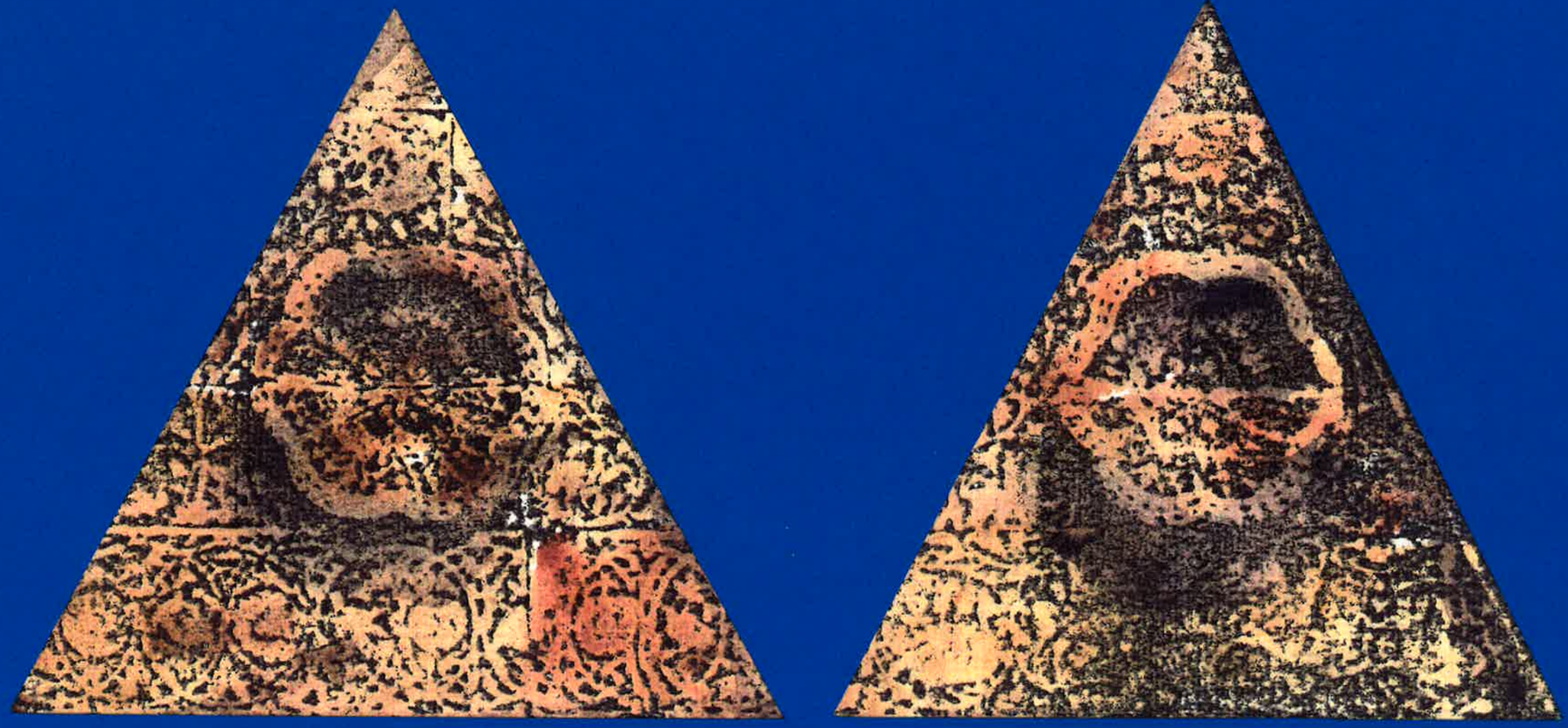
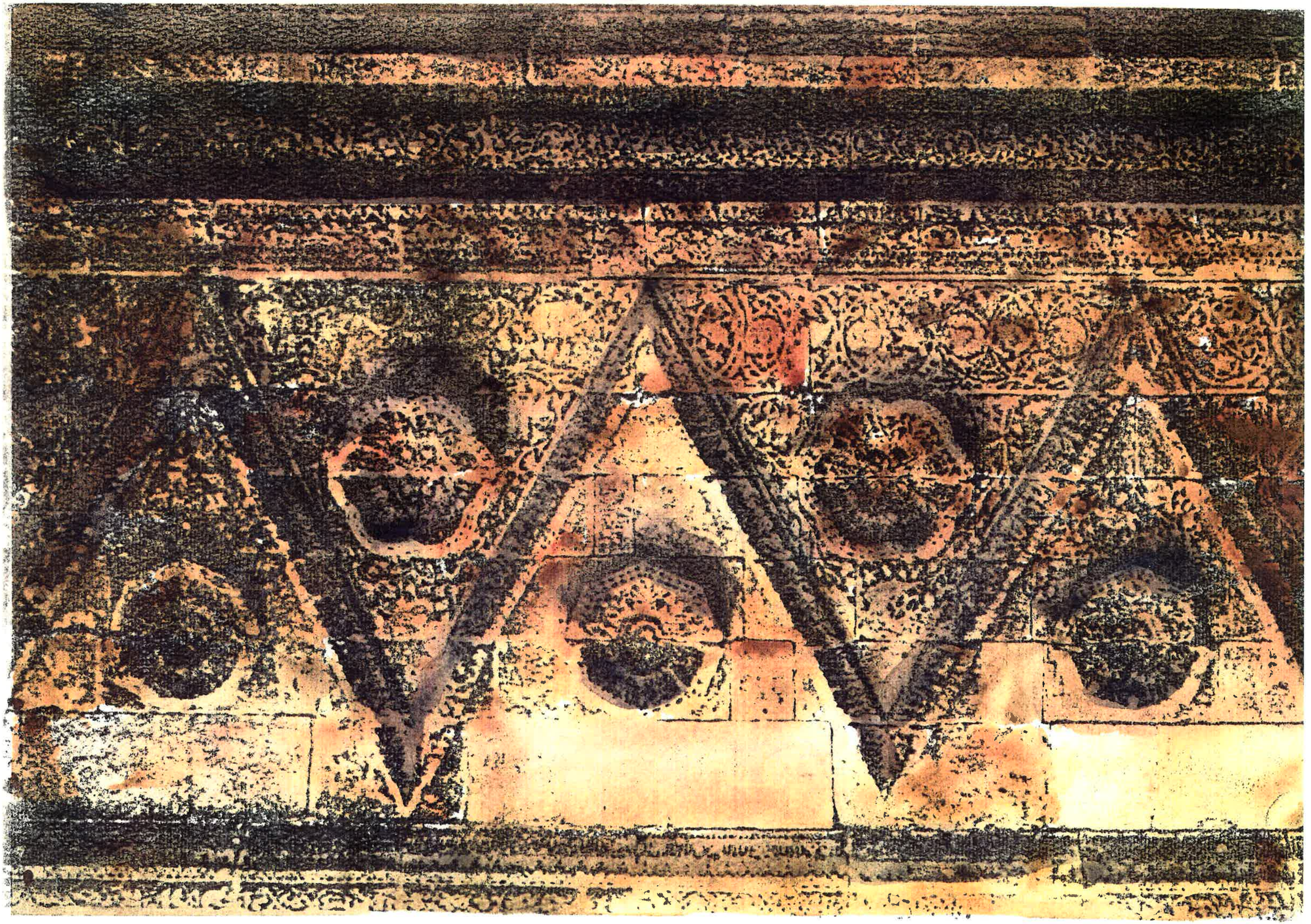


MSHATTA



Proposal for a new set up of the Mshatta Facade in the Islamic section at the Pergamon Museum, Berlin.

Introduction:

1. The proposal for a new set up of the Mshatta Facade within the Pergamon Museum, as presented in this report is carried out at the request of 'Stiftung Preussische Kulturbesitz' and effected through the Director General of the Staatliche Museen in Berlin.

2. The commission is part of the preparatory work carried out for the reorganization of the Pergamon Museums. The terms of reference were to give a graphic presentation of the projected new location at the main floor of the museum's northern wing as a means to reaching a decision on the most suitable future presentation of this unique Islamic monument.

3. The sketch out proposal show the new set up in plan, section and elevation. Additionally a number of perspective drawings help to appreciate the museum environment in a spatial context from the view of the visitors.

4. The overall museum concept and justification for the possible transfer of the Mshatta facade to a new location within the Pergamon Museum is outlined in the paper 'Islamisches Museum: Konzeption' (Enderlein/Meinecke, August 1991). The technical implications and the conservation aspects involved by the resettlement are assessed in the report 'Zur versetzbarkeit der Mschatta-Facade' (Nohlen, Mai 1991).

5. The architectural presentation in this report is neither dealing with the history of the monuments, nor are the structural and technical implications treated with much detail. Centering on the spatial context and proportions, the drawings are made to give a possibility for evaluating the potentials of the proposed new siting. With this end in view lighting, texture and colour scheme of flooring, walling and ceiling are suggested as an intermediate presentation of the monument in the new museum environment.

6. As a consultant to the Staatliche Museen in Berlin I would like to acknowledge the generous assistance received from dr. Michael Meinecke and dr. Volkmar Enderlein as well as the help and kind support offered by the staff of the Islamic department at the Pergamon Museum.

Description of the proposed museum environment

The space and exhibition concept

6. Generally, as a matter of gravity, one have the feeling that heavy load should be positioned near the ground. In the view of the consultant, the proposed location at the main floor in the northern wing of the Pergamon Museum will give more justice to the monumental appearance of the building facade as compared to the present position at the upper floor of the museum that is more suitable for the exhibition of minor movable museum objects. The new environment matches the size and grandeur of the Mshatta Facade and not least, the spatial relationship to the other historic monuments at display in the same floor of the Pergamon Museum, will provide a comparable context of the architectural exhibitions.

7. The possibility of exhibiting the decorated facade in the original length symmetrical about the portal in its original size, 3.46 metres in width, speaks in favour of the transfer. The right part of the facade, of which only three stones are in the possession of the Berlin Museums, can be presented in a mock-up of a suitable stone facing that shows the main features of the original facade, perhaps showing the actual situation as recorded by Bruno Schulz in 1904. These details of presentation still need thorough considerations.

8. The relatively narrow space in front of the entrance towers may not be an disanvantage. On the contrary, the lateral approach to the facade and the gradual experience of the monumental building (cf. the perspective drawings) may possibly be more rewarding than an axial approach by which the whole of the facade immediately comes in view. This might largely depend on a subjective assessment.

9. Provided that the secondary rooms in the middle of the northern wing can be included in the Islamic exhibition area access is arranged through the main portal of the Mshatta Facade to an exhibition space where the history of the Umayyad architecture can be put on display. The relatively smaller space is well suited for a graphic documentation and presentation of the history and background for the transfer of the monument from the Jordanian desert to the museum environment in Berlin.

The flooring

10. The black granit slabs presently used at the main floor of the northern wing will not be appropriate for the presentation, creating a much too 'heavy' and 'polished' contast to the mellow and richly textured limestone surface of the Mshatta Facade.

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11. The original floor of travertine (?) existing in the neighbouring Priene Hall of Hellenistic architecture, however, whould provide a very suitable flooring with regard to color and texture.

12. The suggested floor pattern is intended to give a spatial concept without emphasizing any particular direction in the room. A border frieze along the walls is suggested as a finish to the floor.

13. All along the Msatta Facade runs a 60-70 centimetres wide 'buffer zone' filled with pebbles and stones of varying size that will serve two functions: (i) to create a natural barrier preventing the visitors to come close up to the monument and (ii) to imitate the natural environment of desert and steppe at the original site. In my opinion, this last issue is especialy important creating the perception of a building that stands firmly on the ground rather than a museum object placed on the floor.

14. The use of the secondary rooms in the middle of the northern wing for the purpose of the Islamic exhibition is important, allowing access through the original entrance way of the Mshatta monument. The floor level in this area is 110 centimetres above the equivalent level of the proposed 'Mshatta room'. However, it should be of minor consequence to discontinue the installation channel situated below the floor in order to obtain a level surface throughout the exhibition area.

Ceiling and lighting

15. The high windows oriented towards south in combination with the deep recesses provide excellent natural light conditions in the room. Daylight intensity is constantly changing. The visual stimuli thus created by the ever changing light have considerable aestetic and psycological influnce on the visitors appreciation of the objects on display, and in the case of the architectural monuments no damage is caused by ultraviolet radiation.

16. The relatively narrow space with a very heigh ceiling and windows evenly spaced all along the one side produce a strong light in the room that may even be drenched with light during summer. 'Front light' creates only minimum shadows and therefore of plastic effects to the objects. Textural effect will also be poor, because perception of texture depends on the minute differences in relief. For this reason the application of casement frames with translucent screens that can be regulated by will, covering the lower parts of windows, could be tried out (cf. lighting condition in Dutch houses and paintings of house interiors) in order to achieve the best possible lighting conditions.

17. Artificial lighting is needed in addition to the natural light. Downlights positioned in a suspended ceiling is proposed as the most suitable solution. Correctly spaced and installed the incident light will meet with the Mshatta facade at an angle of about 45-60 degrees from above enhancing the deep relief of the facade by the intricate play of light and shadow.

A sligtly curved and suspended ceiling may provide a pleasing finish to large rectangular space and the system adopted can be designed to regulate the acoustics of the hall.

Color scheme and texture

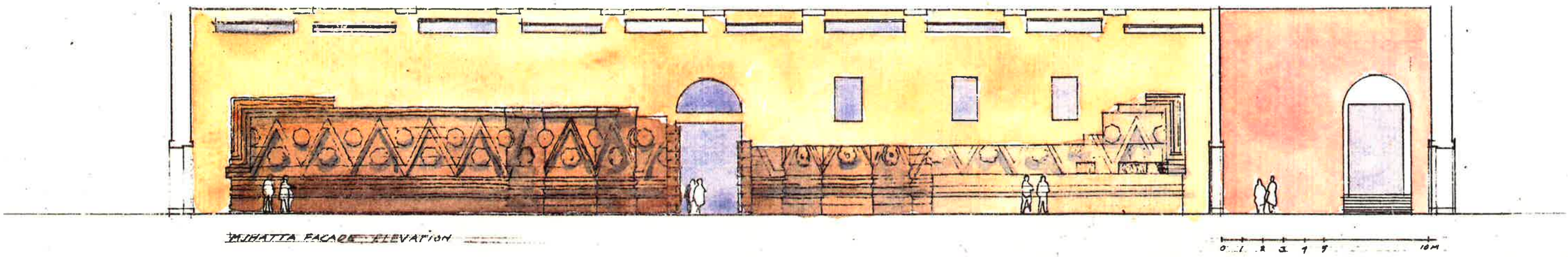
18. Colors may be used to characterize the exhibition rooms and articulate inter-relations between a series of rooms. The original environment of the Mshatta is characterized by the strong sunlight and the bright colors of the Levant. In the steppe and desert environment especially the ochre and the blue colours enhance one another. This colour scheme, used for the presentation drawings, is suggested as a suitable choise associating to the original location of the monument. In my opinion the ochre colors will bring about the best association of the warm climate of the Levant, as well as relate to the south orientation of the exhibition space.

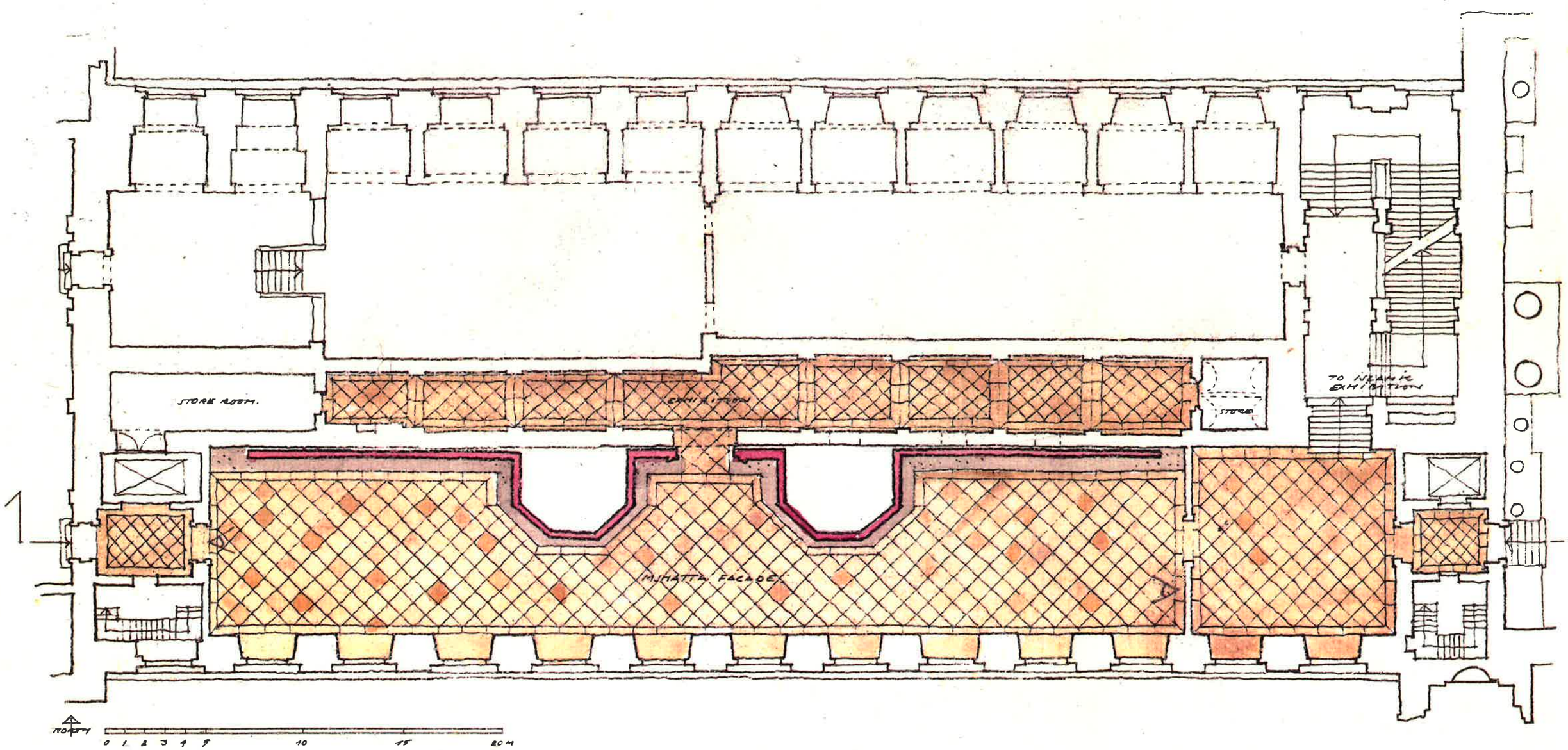
19. The elaborate and intricate carvings of the limestone facade would likewise be enhanced by a suitable texture and character of the wall surface. It is suggested that several methods and types be tried in full scale before the final solution is adopted. For example, plastered, frescoed to the desired hue, limewashed or painted with a silicat mineral color product, the desired 'lively' and transparent appearance of the wall surfaces may be achieved, rich and saturated.

Hoping that the analysis and visual presentation of the new set up included in this report may help to reach to the most satisfying future presentation of the Mshatta Facade.

Copenhagen, 8 February 1992.

Flemming Aalund
architect M.A.A.

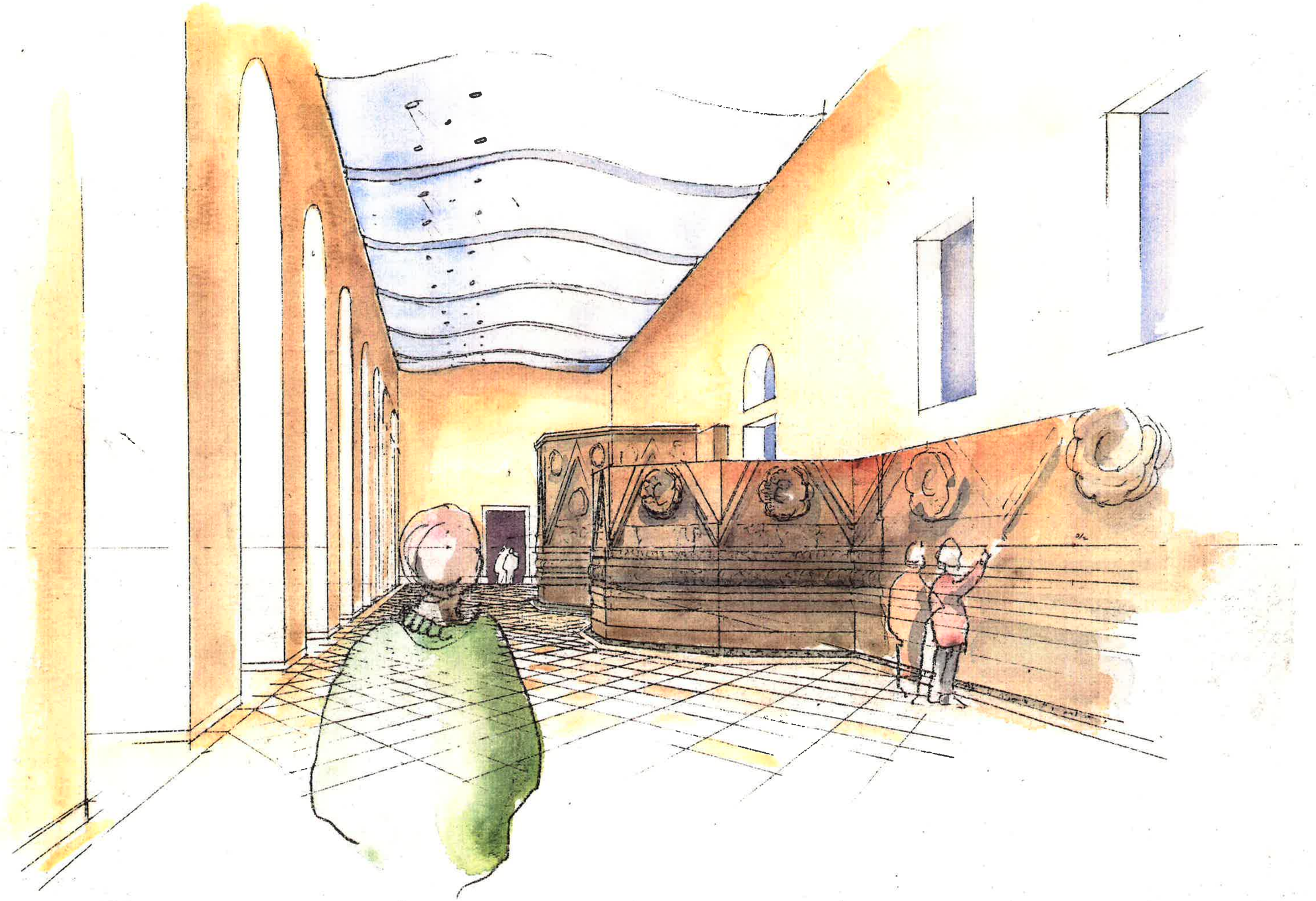




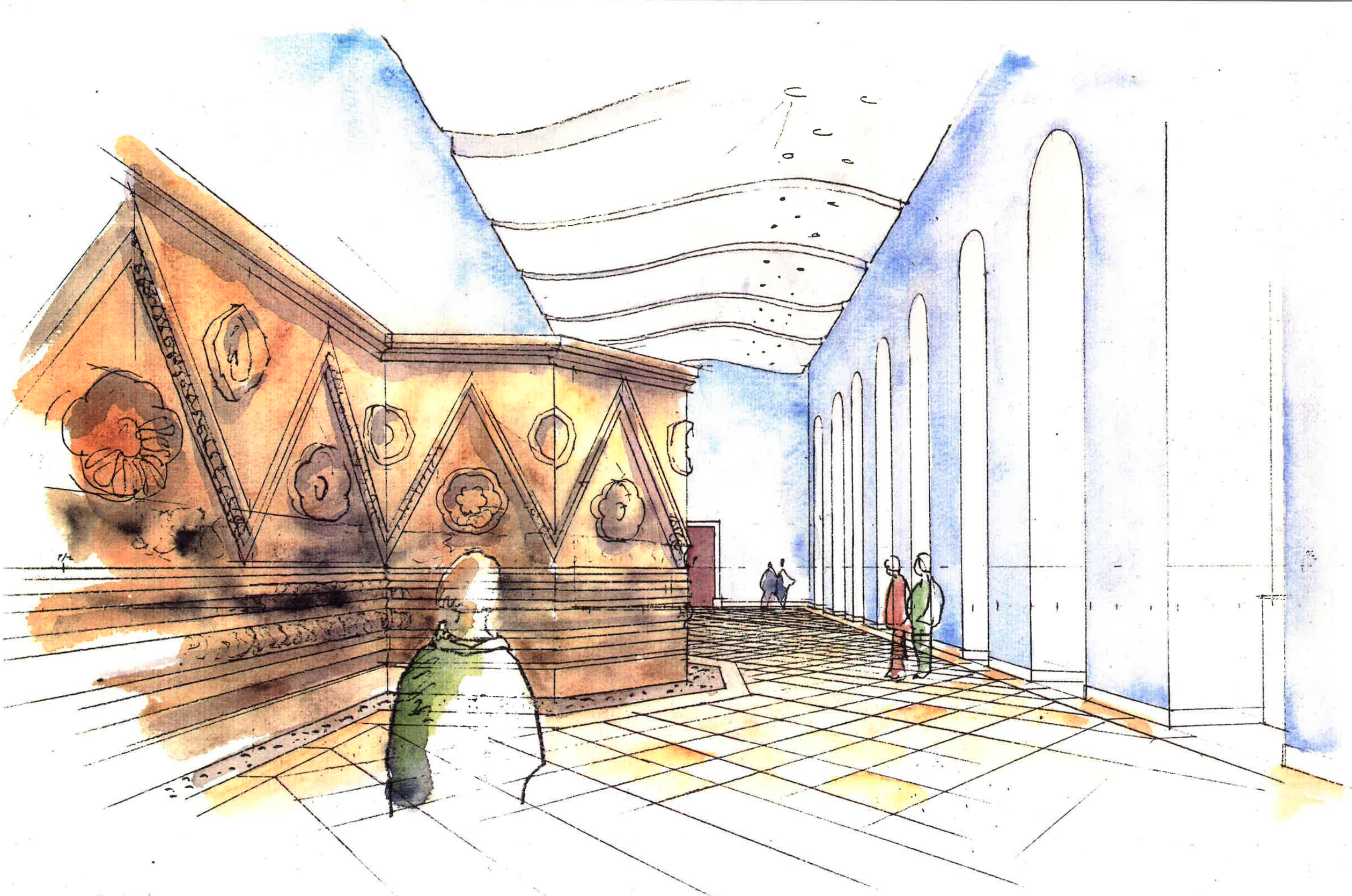
Plan / Progress drawing, north wing main floor — projected for restoration of the Muhatta facade and neighbouring rooms. F. Sarre.

SECTION NORTH - SOUTH THROUGH PERGAMON MUSEUM.

Mshatta facade / perspective of new set up in north wing of Pergamon Museum

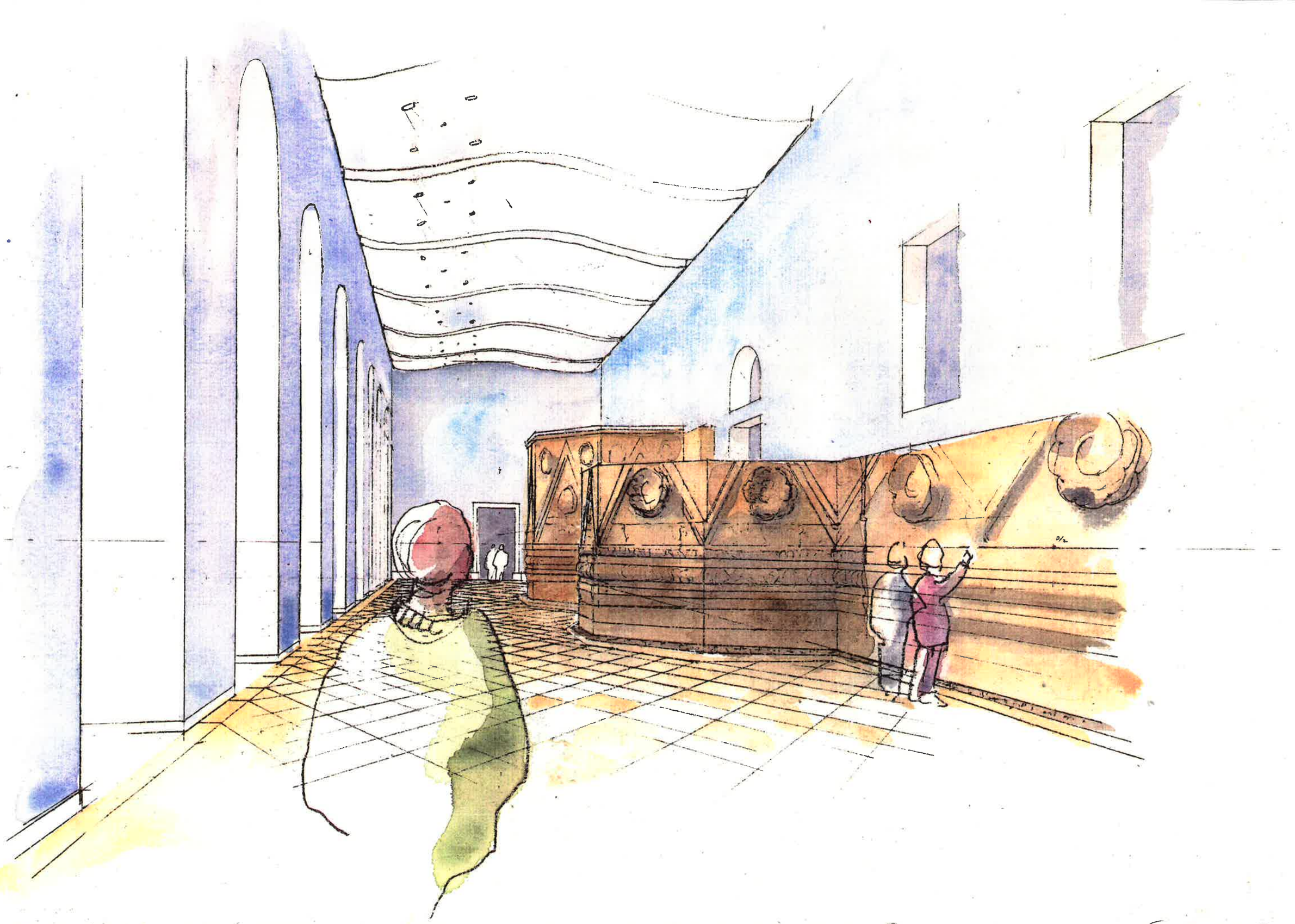


Pergamon Museum / perspective drawing of the north wing of the Pergamon Museum

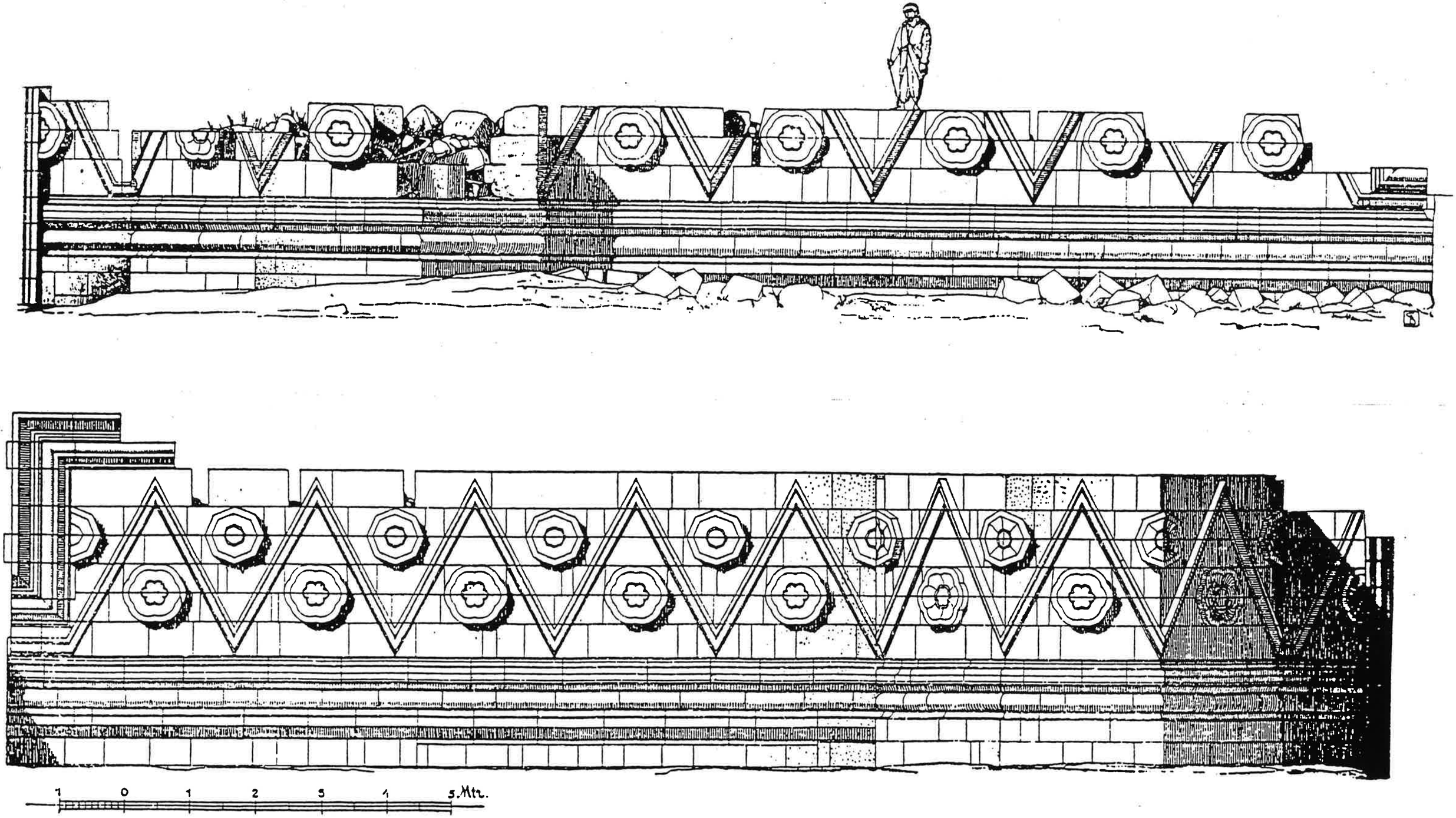


Asthetic facade / perspective Drawing in north wing of Pergamon Museum

H. Hollein.



Pergamon facade / perspective of new set up in north wing of the Pergamon Museum H. Adams.



Original survey of the Mschatta facade by Bruno Schulz, 1904.