

A Stranger from the East

By ROBERT H. DYSON, JR.

The blank, staring eyes and elongated chin of this portrait have a dark, haunting quality about them which stays in one's mind long after looking at them. This haunting quality has been produced through the accident of history, for when it was new the eyesockets and eyebrows were inlaid with shell or ivory. The original face thus had quite another character. Since it was made, however, it has been stored away along with other pieces of furniture in the second floor storeroom of a state building. Some years ago, two thousand seven hundred roughly, the building burned in a great fire which swept through it leaving it a smouldering ruin. The furniture in the second floor storerooms was scorched and shattered by the heat and pressure of falling debris. In the process, our figure lost its eyes and eyebrows as the adhesive material, perhaps bitumen, melted, allowing the inlay bits to slip away. At the same

time the heat charred the wood, thus preserving it for posterity. Last summer it came to light in the excavations at Hasanlu in Azerbaijan, Iran. Its style and the rarity of wooden sculpture from the prehistoric period in Iran make it unique. At first glance the face, or perhaps mask, looks like a total stranger to us. But a little reflection on it will soon call to mind the similar large nose, high cheekbones, and narrow chin seen in the face of the figure decorating a glazed wall tile from Hasanlu which is presently on exhibition in the Iran gallery of the University Museum. Elsewhere we may also find some resemblance to faces portrayed on the Luristan bronzes. It would seem that our piece, which is about three inches high, was a local product belonging to northwestern Iran. Appropriately, it now forms part of the national collection of the Archaeological Museum in Teheran.

