We have analysed the forty-three plates of the atlas comprised within the first group, but only concerning architecture per se and construction; we would therefore like to remind the reader that a large part of our reflections on decoration and ornamentation in architecture will apply as much to the plates of the first group as to the four plates which constitute the second.

It may perhaps be said that the Arabic abhorrence of nudity led to a desire to perceive the whims of imagination in visible form. Everything about, from buildings to furniture, from weapons to clothing, became so many bare objects to be dressed by fancy.

At first glance, the application of Arabic ornamental practices to buildings presents a particular cachet; but, although obliged to follow the precepts of the Koran and only touch upon that not concerning man himself, they nevertheless covered and surmounted stone and framework with the most marvellous ornamental conceptions; such as is seen in the plate representing part of the al-Azhar Mosque. Certain misconceptions must be abandoned, for although the Mohammedans in their haste borrowed ideas and materials from all around, they were in no way ignorant; on the contrary, there have been amongst them an incredible number of eminent men, renowned for their knowledge, particularly Arabs and Persians.

“The purest decorative science, rightly says our regretted friend, Adalbert de Neaumont, the most exquisite taste, have embroidered, cut out, braided, levelled, and carved these interlacings, flowers and animals, whose infinite yet always geometrical complications set the mind in search of the law which creates such marvellous arabesques.”

Prodigious efforts of imagination were required in order to vary the repetitious monotony of the characters of the alphabet; Arabic artists succeeded in rendering it monumental by adding, in the form of interlacing, these whimsical ornaments that were then coloured to add again to the decoration.

In all these Arabic edifices, ornaments are nearly always placed with much taste and discernment, the higher ones being always the largest and the least confused. However, there is a notable difference, as we have already said, between arabesques carved in stone and those carved in plaster.

Let us draw attention, in this respect, to the use of stone railings, a type of gate or openwork that is no longer seen today in Islamic buildings. These were in stone only, cut and carved in different patterns. Generally nine centimetres thick, they show a variety in the unity of the decoration most pleasing to the eye, so much the whole appears symmetrical at first glance.
Mosque of Ahmād ibn Tulun (Pl. XLIV).—We have given the details of the ornamentation seen in Plate XLIV in order to indicate precisely the known point of departure for this type of work. They demonstrate that in the 9th century (3rd century of the Hegira), Arabic religious buildings were already the object of minutious ornamentation research; we regret not having numbered them so as to make them better-known. Sculpted in plaster without the use of conventional models, they are scattered throughout the vast Ahmād ibn Tulun Mosque. These are indeed specimens of Arabic Art in a completely original form. Nothing in the 9th century resembled this ornamentation; the feeling is even that of a sui generis work, resembled by few others from this period on.

These ornaments, very simple, moreover, principally decorated intrados, jambs and windows in varied ways. Interior decoration, at this period, differed completely from exterior decoration. From without, mosques presented only smooth walls, doors were bare of any ornamentation and stalactites were not yet visible.

Tebiḥ Sheiḥ Husein Sadaka (Pl. XLV).—Plate XLV shows the principal part of the exterior decoration of the dome, frieze, piers and windows of Tebiḥ Sheiḥ Husein Sadaka.

The chemisheh or windows are all different and present some interest. The general rule, especially at this period, required that those of the dome be in the form of rectilinear interlacings, and those on the other side, in the form of more or less symmetrical arabesques. Here then, all is varied: piers, windows and frieze, yet all is in perfect harmony. The dome must have, we believe, been covered in arabesques, to judge by the several fragments which have resisted the ravages of time and man.

The escutcheons used as fillers break the monotony here and there upon the smooth walls.

Mosque of Qaysun (Pl. XLVI).—The windows of the Qaysun Mosque are in very poor condition, as is the entire edifice; situated at a great height, they are of highly varied decoration. However, the decoration repeats itself in a sufficiently large number of motifs, allowing us to complete each of the damaged parts through comparison with latticework of the same type from another grille. All the windows have a cissoidal arch with plaster columnettes presenting identical bases and capitals. These windows are thought to be the work of a foreign architect. The flowerbeds decorating the perimeter of the rectangular plaster surrounds bring to mind the charming point lace in the tomb of al-Gaouly and a few other edifices from the same period.

Bālt al-Amīr. Crownin of the Bath Door (Pl. XLVII).—This masterpiece of ornamentation, which stands out from all we have seen, adorns the top of the bath door in the residence of an amir, situated across from the door of Shirawi, street Bein al-Qasrein. This pampiniform panel, despite its great age, still shows vestiges of two different illuminations or colourings which are very difficult to date. In one, probably the more ancient of the two, the vine leaves which come out from a central vase, adorned with arabesques, seem to have been gilded as in the splendid mihrab erected by Caliph Walid in the ancient Mosque of Damascus. The narrowest border is yellow while the largest and most protuberant one runs about this splendid panel and forms a tore which the artist forgot to shadow and colour in red to set it off from the whole.

In another place, the colouring is perhaps more recent; the leaves are pale green, the vine branches dark green and the grapes blue, the whole less harmonious than the other, for that which is modern is gaudy. Escutcheons decorate the walls.
TEKIEH SHEIKH HUSSEIN SADAKA
Fragments of Decoration of the Dome (14th century)
MOSQUE OF QAYSUN
Decoration on Interior Windows (14th century)