BEIT AL-AMIR
Crowning on the Bath Door (17th century)
Plates XLVIII to LXVII
COVERINGS AND TILINGS

We feel it superfluous to preface the most beautiful plates in this group with detailed descriptions, only to repeat the work covered in the special chapter on this subject, concerning mosaics and inlays.

_Tomb of Sultan Qansu al-Ghari. Marble Panelling (Pl. LIII, LIV and LV)._—This handsome panelling throughout the sepulchral room is formed of a series of marble panels in the manner common to most mosques of this period. A band of white marble approximately 0.08 metres wide runs all around the room and borders a long panel of black marble, 1.7 metres to 2 metres in height, covered in gilded intaglio engraving. Most of these arabesques are formed of interlaced letters and express short sentences taken from the Koran or the hadith of the Prophet. The black panel alternates with other assorted marbles.

The panelling is crowned in the enclosure of the tomb by an epigraphic frieze in Neshki characters, recounting a chapter of the Book; in two recesses, it is surmounted by a small frieze of golden merlons, engraved in the same way as the ornaments, as may be seen in the first plate.

Several panels show most elegantly constructed calligraphic arabesques, and often include inscriptions in both ancient and more modern scripts within the same frame, thus lending even more variety to the composition.

The ornamentation is of a style quite unlike anything seen elsewhere, making a most unusual piece of this covering.

During repair work on the dome in 1859, this handsome panelling was brutally taken down from the wall, broken in many places and then resealed with neither symmetry nor order.

There are only ten different panels; alternately placed at varying intervals with an occasional simple variation in inscription, the loss of the missing panels is perhaps less regretted.

_Floor mosaic (Pl. LVI)._—The various specimens composing this plate are arranged to show the floor mosaics of the Doraq'ah and other oblong rooms. This typical arrangement was selected to group symmetrically diverse items collected here and there, and thereby give an idea of decorations much more varied than is usually seen. In the Mosque of al-Bordayni, there is a plat band which has several similar parts; this part is more complete, however, and comes from a house which gives it particular interest. The ligature linking the nine parts of the quadrilateral to make a whole is charming. It is found on the covering of a tomb, laid out in the same way.

_Stucco Inlays (Pl. LVII and LIII)._—In these various specimens, the grounds or designs carved in the marble are, whether they be wholly or partially full or inlaid, formed by stucco or coloured cement.

The origins of this type of mosaic made of coloured inlays lie in the Orient; in Italy, it is commonly known as "scagliuola".

This type of decoration, so widely used in Egypt yet barely known in France, deserves to gain recognition. The varied specimens found in Arabic Art will perhaps serve to increase appreciation for these fine arabesques, so elegantly drawn on the marble that they seem part of it.

When ornaments are large and swollen, instead of stucco, the Arabs use pieces of marble or artificial stone.

The plat band taken from the Diwan of Adami, like many others, is composed of a strip from a large panel; this method employed by Arabic artists gives a disjointed and incomplete look to the decoration which is often shocking.

There is a plat bande formed from the same interlacing in the mihrab of the Mosque of Ibrahim Agha but the colours of the marbles are less evenly arranged, creating confusion in the mosaic.

Ornaments engraved in marble and filled with different-coloured stucco are quite common in the interior of
edifices from the 16th century on. They are the result of an inlay process similar to that used in Paris today, where all sorts of designs are executed in marble panels with pieces of different coloured crumbled marble. Here, stucco, instead of crumbs of marble, fills the engraved patterns.

The stucco used by the Arabs is a sort of cement made of marble dust and lime, capable of a high polish. It hardens little by little, becoming stronger than plaster and holding fast the colours given to it.

Ornaments made with this process are easily done anywhere; moreover, they have the advantage of being far more economical than the same arabesques inlaid in marble or as mosaics.

*Mosque of al-Bordayni. Various Mosaics.* (Pl. LX to LXV).—The Mosque of al-Bordayni, once entirely decorated in mosaics, has been dilapidated by the local inhabitants; among others, Abd-Allah-Bey, nephew of a Minister of War, brutally stripped the Mosque of its most beautiful mosaics to decorate his palace. We have not returned to the Mosque since the appearance of these vandal, and so cannot say whether the three specimens represented here are still in place at this time.

The first is of no particular interest, but the second offers one of the finest examples of a calligraphic mosaic. The interlacing forming the main part of this precious scene reveals, in rectilinear Kufic script, the names of the Prophet and the principal caliphs, his successors.

The third example, also found in the mihrab of the Mosque of Ibrahim Agha, is a mosaic in mother of pearl whose sheen competes with the glitter of stained glass pastes.

In order to give a more exact idea of the handsome mihrab in the Mosque of al-Bordayni, decorated like the rest of the edifice, we have had to present its geometrical development (Pl. LXII) so as to display the regular lines of this mosaic in marble, mother of pearl and stained glass pastes. The interlaces are laid out in mother-of-pearl tongues whose opaline hues sparkle harmoniously over the main compartment.

*Mosque of Qa'amu al-Din.* (Pl. LXIII to LXVI).—The tomb enclosed within this mosque of uncertain age presents unusual and rarely encountered forms. Like a souvenir of the Crusades, it could well have been the vision of some architect with delusions of Jerusalem.

Built in black and white marble, the sculpted ornaments on and about the tombstone alternately display well-matched Arabic and Persian motifs. The arabesques are not very pure and would seem to indicate the end of the second period; but all things considered, the disposition of the tombstone is delightful.

The frieze running around the tomb portrays the 256th verse of the second sura of the Koran, an admirable profession of faith: “God is the one God; there is no other God but God, the Living One, the Eternal one, etc.”

The stone beneath which lies the deceased bears the following inscription in front of the sepulchral slab: “The just will live among fountains and gardens, in the abode of truth, near the all-mighty king.” (Koran, sura 54: the Moon).

The entrance of a tomb near Mosque of Sisarieh (Pl. LXVII) is adorned in marble sculpted with highly decorative arabesques.
WALL MOSAICS
(12th and 14th centuries)
MAUSOLEUM OF SULTAN BARQUQ
Details of the Minbar (14th century)
PANELS ON THE TOMB OF BARSABAY
Details of the Mosaics (15th century)
MOSAICS
Fragments from Wall and Floor Decorations (15th to 18th centuries)