Plate XCIII

TOMB OF SULTAN AL-GHURI
Carved Wooden Cupboard. Door Leaves and Borders. (16th century)
NICHEs AND WOODEn BORDERS

Plate XCIV
Plates XCV to CVII
DOORS

In order to protect the interior of mosques and to close off certain areas, Islamism imitated both the ancients in their temples and the Christians in their churches by making use of leaves of various forms, numbers and dimensions as a system of door-closing: the front and back sides of these leaves could be, according to circumstances, more or less richly decorated.

To all appearances, the nature or constitution of these leaves was quite varied. Not only of carved, painted and gilded wood, or with partitioned additions, they were also made in metal, that is to say, iron or bronze.

To acknowledge the existence of Arabic door-leaves in bronze is to advance that the smelting of this metal was practiced by the Arab people. The setting of a specific date to the works produced by this industry demonstrates the progression of this art through diverse phases. Indeed, any study destined to seek out, define and to classify such transformations could be considered a sort of history of this branch of technique.

The history of Arabic metallurgy would be quite an interesting subject to pursue, and would doubtless result in the reporting of new ideas and facts of all kinds. These, in order to be suitably treated, would require nothing less than the thorough examination of all metals ever in use throughout the ages.

Those works giving some idea at least of the period of their making provide irrefutable proof that the melting-down of metals, but more especially that of bronze, was practiced and cultivated by the Arabs.

There are few mosques in Cairo whose main doors are not decorated with bronze appliques, nielloed or damascened in gold or silver. We have represented a large number of varied doors, some dating back to distant times. The most elegant and complete ones are those of the al-Yusufi Mosque, whose damascening has disappeared but of which some traces yet remain. Those of the al-Ka'bah Mosque, which we have also reproduced, contain animal figures subsisting in one of the corners; these figures were probably designed by the artist, but they have been obliterated in the other compartments by an over-scrupulous sculptor.

The arrangement and ornamentation of these doors hardly varies. All the elements respect a general given rule as the same constituent parts always take the same place. Apart from the inscriptions, the arrangement is the same as that of certain marble or enamelled tile panels, as well as most tapestries of this period.

The bronze doors that adorn the mosques of Cairo are not cast in solid bronze, but are made of bronze-plated wood. The doors of the Church of St. Sophia, transported from Constantinople to Venice where they decorate the Church of St. Mark, are cast in solid bronze.

In the Mosque of Cordoba, there are five doors either in bronze or plated in bronze; there were formerly twenty-one.

*Mosque of Talai' Abu Rizk. Front and Back of the Main Door* (Pl. XCV).—This door is of a more recent period than the edifice to which it belongs, and appears to us to date from the restorations done after the earthquake, by order of Sultan Muhammad ibn Qala'un.

The same plate shows the ensemble and details of the double ornamentation of this beautiful door. It is decorated with a cutout and carved bronze covering. The geometric design, instead of being set in relief by a bulge or moulding, appears on the contrary to be intaglio, as if the decoration were incomplete; but there is no trace of
the nails which would have been used to secure the beading, and it is certain these were never used. Moreover, the door of the Mosque of al-Maz presents the same singularity. Certain parts of the decoration of the Alhambra are also made of small compartments jutting out from the background in such a way as to render intaglio the entire geometrical pattern.

On the back, the door is decorated with arabesques carved on the five wooden panels framed by a bronze cutout which form the leaf.

Mosque of Sultan Barqay, Bronze Door (Pl. XCVI and XCVII).—Instead of arabesques, this outer door is covered in symmetrical gadroons, to very fine effect; it bears no trace of damascening and everything seems to indicate that the covering was of uniform bronze, with no other effect than the relief itself.

Leaves from the Tomb of Salab Salab al-Din (Pl. XCVII).—The 1867 Great Exhibition in Paris gave quite a false idea of Arabic architecture, and in particular of doors. Apart from those of the Salamlik, decorated with cast bronze appliqués on the entrance to the Sibil Kiahya (Pl. CV), all the wooden doors were poor pastiches. These were made in Cairo by a Piedmontese cabinetmaker who, inspired by the plates of the Alhambra, inserted several authentic panels within arches, frames and small columns in a hybrid fashion, so successful that onlookers and artists alike were fooled.

Arabic doors are much simpler, and their main lines more regular. Those that we publish here, dating from the 14th century, are of a most admirable style. It would be difficult indeed, with so few lines, to produce a finer effect.

This cupboard door leaf, with its ornaments which simulate or bring to mind Kufic characters, and its hinge-cover adorned with arabesques of exquisite taste, is most attractive.

The leaf of a shutter, taken from the same tomb, is less original; but, with its panels adorned with inscriptions, it is as severe as it is elegant.

It would perhaps be interesting to compare these two specimens to the doors of the Mosque of Sisarich (Pl. CIV), which are more recent but inspired by the same artistic sentiment.

Mosque of Qeyshey, Decoration on Doors and Cupboards (Pl. Cl).—These painted ornaments, applied to doors and cupboards and brightened by the use of an egg-white varnish, are handsome and varied. They seem to us to have been reproduced on walls for the most part, so as to make an immense wall decoration up to the mosaic ceiling.

Fig. 1

Doors of the Mosque of Sisarich (Pl. CIV).—These two doors, decorated with geometrical designs represented by mouldings, count among the most handsome of this period, at the beginning of the decadence introduced by the Turkish conquest.

The interlace on the shutter shows irregular stars although it would have been easy to find one of greater symmetry. The cupboard door leaf is of the monotype so often encountered in modern panelling; but the two borders and the bronze paintings give it some value. The median striking plate received the corresponding element fixed to the other leaf, and the door was locked with a padlock whose long stem completed the effect of a vertical bolt (Fig. 1). This fairly primitive system of locking was succeeded by padlocked bolts.

Doors of houses and furniture were most commonly locked with a wooden lock such as the specimen given on the next page (Fig. 2).

Door of the Sibil of Abd al-Rahman Kiahya (Pl. CV).—This door at the entrance to Djemelieh was broken to pieces by accident during the Cairo revolt under Napoleon. At the signing of peace, the general-in-chief, having engaged himself to repair all damages, wanted to have the door to the fountain restored; finding no one capable of this, Mr. Dutertre, the illustrator of the expedition, was put in charge. After having all the pieces gathered up, he assembled them as best he could, and made up an ensemble which was melted-down with broken bits of canons by French soldiers and then put back in place, without any Arabs noticing the transformation; the door
has passed for the original ever since. Our drawing teacher, Mr. Dutertre, told us this factual account himself, as did J.-J. Marcel.

**Details of a Door of the Mosque of al-Khangah (Pl. CVI).**—The bronze appliques of this door seem to us to have been designed by a Christian architect; but, upon the fitting, the design underwent serious modifications. The part entrusted to the Coptic artist was carried out accordingly with the animals drawn by the architect, while the other parts, entrusted to the burin and file of the Muslim artists, were obliterated so as not to violate the laws of orthodoxy, much to the detriment of the thought lying behind the work.

**Arabic Door knockers (Pl. CVII).**—No. 1 on Plate CVII shows the most common form of bronze knockers found on house doors in Algiers. This is certainly the most finished of all those we have seen. It is enriched with a line of engraving which underlies and brings out the details of the ornamentation. The shadowed part, on which stands out the rosette, is a round of red morocco leather whose color matches the bronze patina marvelously. This detail, quite minimal in appearance, reveals the highly developed feeling for colour of the Arabic artist.

No. 2, also copied in Algiers from the door of a house neighbouring the Casbah, is of remarkable taste, and must come from an edifice of the finest era of Arabic art. It resembles sculpted ornaments on an ancient door of the Mahoud-al-Gaouly Mosque in Cairo which dates from the beginning of the 14th century.

The two other knockers have been copied on doors of private dwellings in the Teyloun Mosque quarter in Cairo. They belong to the finest period of Arabic art and go back to the 15th century.

It is quite rare to encounter door knockers of such pure taste, for most are very simple and rarely adorned, with the exception of those on doors of mosques; these are always linked to the ensemble of bronze arabesques decorating the entire surface of the door, over both leaves. Those that we publish here are affixed to unassuming doors, whose only ornamentation consists of a vast cartouche in the best Arab style, generally in red on a green background, and portraying the sacramental phrase: *Bismillah.*—"In the name of Allah", or a short inscription of the nature: "Allah is the best protector."
MOSQUE OF SULTAN BARRAD

Door (14th century)

Plate XCIV
Plate XCII

> TWO BRONZE DOORS

Mosque of Brang (14th century), Sark Khunt House (17th century)
MOSQUE OF TALAI' ABU RIZK
Front and Back of the Main Door (12th century)

Plate XCV
TOMB OF SALAH SALAH AL-DIN
Cupboard Door Leaf. Leaf of a Window Shutter (14th century)

Plate XCIX