Plate CLXXIX

MAQAMAT OF HARIRI

Mandarab (13th century)
MAQAMAT OF HARIRI
Caravan on the March (13th century)
Plates CLXXXI to CC
KORANS

Koran Ornamentation, Mosque of Qaysun (Pl. CLXXXI).—The first page on the right reproduced here contains verses 76 and 77 of the 56th sura of the Koran; the 78th verse lies on the facing page with the same decoration. Written ir kufic characters on these twin pages, the recommendaion was often to be found at the beginning of this the book par excellence: "The sublime Koran, whose prototype is hidden in the volume, must only be touched by those in a state of purity".

The first page of the superb Koran of the Mosque of Qaysun, built, it is said, by a Tartar architect, contains only a few Kufic words. The middle features a polychromatic interlace which could be used for a ceiling; it is surrounded by a border imitating openwork ornaments, adorned with cabochons.

Last page of a Koran, Mosque of Sultan Barquq (Pl. CLXXXII).—The Koran of the Mosque of Sultan Barquq is one of the most elegant possessed by the city of Cairo. We could have been satisfied with giving a single specimen of the calligraphic and ornamental art of Arabic manuscripts in the 14th century, but we are able to offer for comparison another masterpiece from the same period. Plate CLXXXII is an authentic reproduction of a magnificent Koran from the same century as the preceding motif. The veracity of our claim may be confirmed by referring to our text in Chapter VII.

Koran ornamentation, Tomb of Sultan al-Ghuri (Pl. CLXXXIII to CLXXXVII).—All those who visited the Egyptian Galleries at the 1867 Great Exhibition were able to admire in the showcases devoted to the Arts the superb pages of a Koran originally from one of the principal mosques of Cairo; these were displayed next to magnificent paneling, also originating from the pulpits of mosques.

We are convinced that this manuscript belonged to a Wafi of Sultan al-Ghuri written at the period of the founding of his mosque, sometime in the early 16th century.

Unfortunately, it was impossible to trace the double frontispieces which always adorn the beginning of this type of manuscript.

We were able to glean only the most attractive pieces which we have gathered and grouped together to compose five plates.

The variety of ornaments gives an exact idea of the decoration of manuscripts at this period in which Arabic art was already beginning to lose its primitive purity, although not yet weighted down by the Ottoman influence which was to dominate several years later after the conquest of Selim.

This Koran, from beginning to end, displays the same hand and the same style — the Arabic style; although constantly varying, it reluctantly conforms, here and there, to certain influences of Persia or Byzantium. It would have been of interest to the study of Arabic Art to compare its calligraphic ornamentations with those ornamentations covering the marble plaques and cupboard doors of the same mosque.

The tomb of Sultan al-Ghuri contained many relics and various splendidly decorated Korans. When the dome was repaired in 1858, one of the most handsome copies of this collection was removed from a transport cart and

1. See Prince d'Avennes, L'Art arabe d'après les monuments du Caire, volume of texts, same publisher.
sold to a Greek who brought it to Paris. The first page which contained the consecration of the book and the seal of the Sultan having been torn, an artist was put in charge of its restoration who then came to ask for our advice and entrusted us with the book. This was how we came to be allowed to copy at leisure ornaments we had only glimpsed, years before, in the hands of a caretaker of this tomb.

This Koran demonstrates that the ornamentation of manuscripts, even more so than the decoration of edifices, was a blend of all styles. The calligrapher who adorned it apparently wished to vary the chapter headings and, to do so, borrowed arabesques and characters from Islamic lands all over and from different periods.

In Plates CLXXXVIII to CXCII, we give several specimens of the ornamentation of Arabic manuscripts and Korans in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Moresque Koran (Pl. CXCII to CC).—Muhammad Abu Dahab endowed his mosque, built in the vicinity of al-Azhar, with this splendid Koran, said to have belonged to a Moroccan sultan, Sidi Muhammad. We have published the principal pages of this handsome manuscript, whose very pure and original Moresque style led all those who admired it at the 1867 Great Exhibition in Paris to believe it to be more ancient.

Apparently written and decorated in 1768 for Sultan Sidi Muhammad, Emperor of Morocco, the arabesques of this Koran are of very pure taste. A single glance at the manuscript reveals that it is written on Holland paper, bearing for watermark the motto Pro Patria above a crowned lion holding a two-edged sword in one paw and a bunch of arrows in the other, and followed by a knight armed from head to toe – all in a style indicative of the 18th century.

Moreover, the reading of the long inscriptions on the two last pages reveals to us that this splendid Masnahf was indeed executed in the year 1182 of the Hegira (1768 of the Christian era) for a Moroccan sultan of the Sherifian Dynasty. The inscriptions read as follows: “Glory to the unique God, may blessings and salvation be on he who has no prophet after him. He who commands the transcription of this noble Koran, which glorifies and honors God on high, is the master, the noble one, the glorious one, he who has high origins, in whom resides all honour and whose shining fame is appreciated by men, he whose virtues gladden the century, he whose odour of generosity gives flowers a perfume wafting all around, our master, the prince of Believers, the Caliph of God, Sultan Sidi Muhammad, son of Sultan our master Abd-Allah, son of Sultan our master Ismail. Year 1182 (1728 of the common era)”. “Bequeathed by Mohammed-Bey Abou-Dahab, to his mosque, year 1188 (1774)”. Above is found his seal.

The magnificent arabesques which decorate this volume always present two facing pages decorated in the same way, barring several minor details. Gilded lines and arabesques are the same, but other parts are coloured in a different manner, resulting in a symmetry and variety which give them much charm. As a general rule, the interfaze which forms the frame or diagram is blue, outlined in gold in one, then chrome equally outlined in gold in the other, or emerald green in the one and kermes scarlet in the other. The arabesques which decorate the interiors vary in colour according to no fixed rule. Gold, which dominates everywhere and outlines nearly all the ornaments, transforms each page into a leaf of gold, covered in cloisonné enamels. Very different from the arabesques admired in other illuminated manuscripts, most of these pages are decorated in an entirely architectural manner, which renders them doubly precious.

Each subject is coloured in seven to eight acid colours: lemon yellow, orangey colour, pink, red, crimson, blue, green and black. Gold encircles or shapes all the ornaments. Yellow, orangey and green grounds are pointillé or decorated in black while blue and kermes scarlet grounds are pointillé or decorated in white.

Motifs 1, 3, 6, 9 and 13 offer complete fac-similes. Motif 3 reproduces the first chapter of the Koran and the beginning of the second sura. Motifs 4, 5, 7, 8, 10 and 14 contain half-pages only; the text has not been reproduced in order to focus on the ornamentation and colouring.

There are beautiful motifs of doors and panelling therein that would be hard to come upon today.

These Moresque ornaments, published to serve as points of comparison with ornaments of Cairo from the same period, bring their contingent of varieties to our collection of arabesques and in so doing, allow it to present specimens of ornamentation from nearly all the Islamic lands.
Plate CLXXXI

KORAN ORNAMENTATION

Mosque of Qaysun (14th century)
LAST PAGE OF A KORAN
Mosque of Sultan Barquq (End of 14th century)