

side is divided from the bannister part by a looped double line and a border of delicate floral scrollwork ; and the bannister portion, or side of the staircase, is of six large square panels divided by narrower upright panels of floral scrollwork, and a central panel of arabesque. The large panels are ornamented, four with arabesque patterns, and two with geometrical designs arranged round a central star. The whole side of the pulpit is made in about twelve slabs, which are so well joined that only in two or three parts are the joints distinctly visible. The canopy and other parts are also carved stone.

It is, indeed, in the buildings of the Sultan Kāit Bey (1468-96) that both the pure arabesque and the finest geometrical ornament are seen in their perfection. This prince of Cairo builders allowed no portion of his edifices to be neglected, and the countless ornaments which were lavished upon his mosques and other erections were all cut in good limestone or marble. The arch of the sanctuary in his mosque *intra muros* is a good example of the richness of this ornamentation. It is about 30 feet from the floor to the keystone, and is placed in a square wall about 39 feet high. Nine courses of plain stone, alternately coloured red, form the pier of the arch, on which is a capital formed of three tiers of stalactites. From this the arch springs with a slight projection beyond the capital, owing to its incurved horse-shoe form. The arch is formed by twenty-three courses of stone, on either side, alternately red and white, and a red keystone. Each of the white stones is carved with arabesque and geometrical patterns, arranged alternately. The arabesques are of a prevailing type, consisting of a trefoil or fleur-de-lis surrounded by leaves very beautifully interlaced. The design is, however, varied, and I doubt if any two stones would be found to tally exactly. The geometrical patterns consist of interlacing lines, forming irregular pentagons and hexagons, with little apparent regard to symmetry, though they are all related to one another in the general plan. The arch is enclosed in a raised moulding, which forms a loop at



FIG. 19.—ARCHED ORNAMENT OF THE WEKALA OF KAIT BEY. 4th.
Fifteenth Century.



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the top, in which is carved a whorl of eight rays. The spandrils of the arch are filled with a bold arabesque design, enclosed in trifoliate borders, and in the centre of each is a circular medallion inscribed with the name and titles of the Sultan and a prayer for his success, arranged in three lines. These medallions are frequently seen in Cairo, and are generally filled with the name of Kāit Bey, though other Sultans adopted the same method of putting a seal on their works. It is interesting to note that a similar arrangement of the Sultan's titles within a medallion is seen on the fourteenth century glass lamps, and also on the gold coins of the Burgy or Circassian Mamlūks. A broad band of Arabic inscription, from the Korān, divided by arabesque panels, forms a frieze at the top, over which is a carved cornice. The whole effect of this arch, and of all the internal decoration of this beautiful little mosque, is extremely rich and finished: and it would be hard to point out a space unoccupied by some delicate design.

Among the buildings of Kāit Bey, none is more fruitful in designs chiselled in stone than his Wekāla or Khān, on the south side of the Azhar mosque. This magnificent building was only a sort of hotel for travelling merchants, but its external ornamentation is superb, and in no single building in Cairo do we find so many varieties of arabesque and geometrical design in such perfect preservation. The Wekāla consists of a spacious rectangular court, surrounded by lodgings for the merchants and their beasts. Unhappily, the interior is in confusion, and has long been deserted: heaps of crumbling stone and rubbish cumber the court, which was once no doubt surrounded by walls as carefully built and ornamented as the exterior. The front, however, facing the Azhar, is fortunately in a fine state of preservation, and deserves a thorough study. When I was in Cairo in 1883, I took casts of the ornament of this front, and was fortunately able to bring back paper squeezes, fortified with layers of gypsum, of every distinct ornament on the whole façade. From these squeezes plaster casts have been made,

and a set of these are exhibited in the gallery over the architectural court of the South Kensington Museum. The difficulty of obtaining every variety of design was less than it would have been in a work of an earlier date; for by the time of Kāit Bey the beauty of uniformity had been learnt, and the honest custom of the old workmen, never to repeat a design, had given place to a decorative system which while it encouraged variety approved of a certain symmetry and recurrence in the patterns. The whole number of designs in the long front of the wekala of Kāit Bey does not exceed twenty-two, if the end and doorway are not reckoned, although round the shops which run along the ground-floor of the façade there are no fewer than 120 panels of ornament.

The front of the Wekāla is decorated only on the ground-floor; the upper stories, save for small windows, are left unadorned. The ground-floor, however, makes amends for the shortcomings of the superstructure by its wealth of ornament. It consists of a row of thirteen shops, divided between the seventh and eighth by a splendid arched gateway,* the finest feature in a singularly fine building. This gateway is set in a recess, the jambs of which are coloured in the usual red and white stripes. The arch is broad, giving an opening of about eight feet, and pointed, and the edge is composed of stalactites in three tiers, with their surfaces carved with arabesque designs. Round the facing, above, runs a beautiful scroll border, like a wreath of roses, which forms a loop above the keystone, within which is inscribed the name of God. The same scroll border frames the spandrels. The recess in which this arch is set is brought back to the face of the front by vaulting; but in this case, instead of the common rows of stalactites, or simple arching, the depth being considerable, the vaulting is effected by a deep trefoil arch, of which the vault is formed by three smaller bays sup-

* This gateway is illustrated by Coste, *Architecture Arabe*; but the details are a little imaginative.

porting an upper bay. The side bays below are filled with stalactites, which seem to constitute natural corbels on which the superstructure rests; and the surfaces of the stalactites and the spare spaces at their sides are covered with arabesques. The base of the upper bay is worked with little shell patterns, and its back is ornamented with a sparse scroll ribbon, resembling somewhat the rose border below, arranged in zigzags. The alternate courses of the stones forming the edge of the upper bay are also carved, and the whole trefoil outline of the vaulting is enclosed in a double line, looped at intervals, outside which the spandrels are filled with arabesque designs.

The shops on either side of the great gateway are not unlike most other shops in Cairo. They are uniform recesses about six or seven feet high, and four to five wide; but they are surrounded with ornaments such as few other shops in Cairo can boast. Over the shop, forming a species of eave or fringe to the recess, is a wooden panel (*a*) bearing the name of Kaït Bey, in medallion form, with other carved or lattice panels, most of which have been destroyed or stolen. One or two are now in the South Kensington Museum. Over each shop is first an oblong panel (*b*) of shallow arabesque carving, the full width of the recess forming the shop, and rather over two feet high. At each side (figs. 17, 18) of this, dividing it from the similar panel over the next shop, is a narrow upright geometrical panel (*c*). Over each of the horizontal panels is a sort of arch (*d*), composed of nine small upright panels, (fig. 19) arranged so as to form an arch on the lower side and a straight line at the top, of the same width as the horizontal panel below. The four side panels (*e, f, g, h*) are counterparts each of the opposite one, though each is different from its neighbour, and the same four panels, with their counterparts or reverses, do duty for all the arched panels (except two or three which are covered with a continuous arabesque device, instead of being thus subdivided into nine pieces); the keystones (*i, k*) however are not identical over the several shops, but three different patterns are

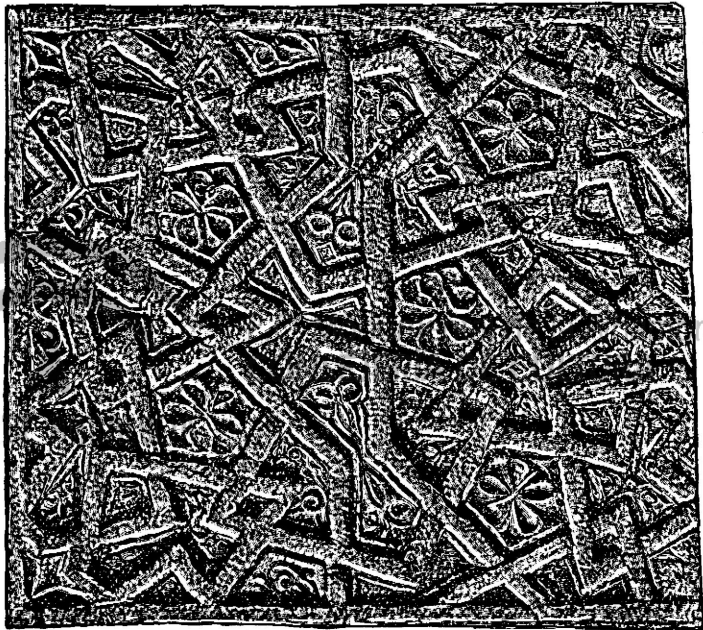


FIG. 20.—GEOMETRICAL ORNAMENT OF THE WEKALA OF KAIT BEY. $\frac{1}{2}$ th.
Fifteenth Century.

used. Between each of these arched panels and the next is a circular medallion (*e*) with the name and titles of Kāit Bey, of the kind already described. The subjoined outline will explain the arrangement:—

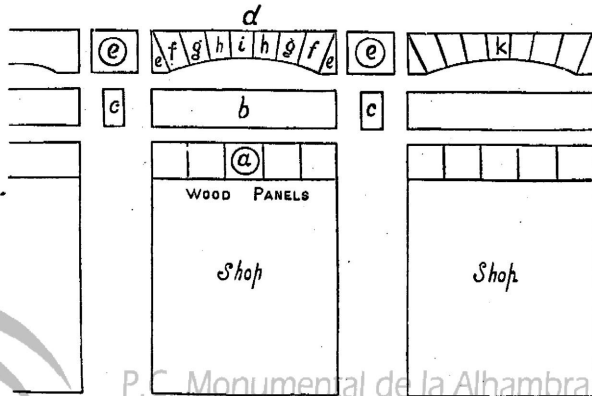


FIG. 21.—ELEVATION OF PART OF THE SHOP-FRONTS OF THE WEKĀLA OF KAIT BEY.

At the right-hand corner of the Wekāla is a Sebil or fountain with two large grated windows, one at the front, the other round the corner, each set in a border of wooden scroll-work, and surmounted by arabesque panels; and at the corner an engaged column is hewn in the wall, with a round base composed of two drums like a dice-box, a shaft of ten drums, carved with arabesque and geometrical patterns and an Arabic inscription, and a stalactite capital; and above and on either side of the capital are geometrical panels (fig. 20) in the wall.*

Between the Sebil and the shops is a small doorway, leading up to the school which surmounts the fountain. This little door has a square above it marked out by a double line, looped at intervals, and subdivided into nine rectangular compart-

* A plaster cast of this column is in the South Kensington Museum.



FIG. 22.—ARABESQUE ORNAMENT OF WEKALA OF KAIT BEY. 4th.
Fifteenth Century.

ments by the same means, each of which has its geometrical device, matching on opposite sides, except one in the centre, which is occupied by a small grated window. Over this square is a splendid rosette (fig. 25) of arabesque ornament, enclosed by four spandrils of the same pattern. Beyond the sebil, the portion of the Wekâla which stands back from the street is occupied by another



FIG. 23.



FIG. 24.

GEOMETRICAL ORNAMENTS OF THE WEKALA OF KAIT BEY. $\frac{1}{2}$ th.

door, surmounted by a trefoil vaulted arch, over which is a meshrebiya window.

Many of the ornaments of this noble building are engraved in this volume. The illustration (fig. 19) shows the arch (*d*), with its nine panels, seven of which exhibit the true self-contained arabesque, complete within the space it occupies, and formed by

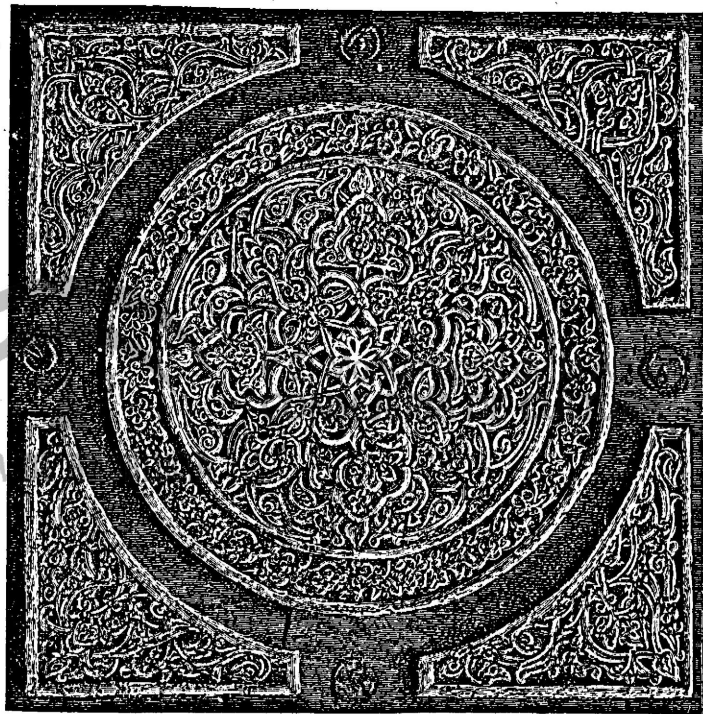


FIG. 25.—ROSETTE OF THE WEKALA OF KAIT BEY.
Fifteenth Century.

the knot-like interlacing of two loops, ending in trefoil heads; whilst two show the characteristic geometrical design of Kāit Bey, triangular (essentially, though with a fourth angle in the base) figures linked together, and the intervals ornamented with cinquefoils. The two varieties of side panels (*c*) are shown in figs. 17 and 18. Some of the larger ornaments, e.g., half of an arabesque panel and half the geometrical design over the corner column, are shown in figs. 20 and 22, where figures of four sides are linked together and ornamented with stars. The rosette over the small door and two small upright panels adjoining it are shown in figs. 23-5, and two examples of geometrical and arabesque patterns from the same façade appear in figs. 26 and 27.

The stone and plaster work of Cairo is, as has been seen, chiefly surface decoration, of an even or flat tone, which has little or no constructive meaning, and seems to be more or less derived from the patterns which were used for the decoration of textile fabrics. The stalactite or pendentive bracketing, however, is strictly constructive, and forms a strongly marked characteristic of Saracenic art (see fig. 10). Its first and principal use is for masking the transition from the square of the mausoleum to the circle of the dome. "In their domes the Arabs adopted, and improved on, the constructional expedient for vaulting over the space beneath, and passing from a square apartment to the circle of the dome, used by both Byzantines and Persians. The church of St. Sophia, at Constantinople, presents fine examples of its Byzantine form; but in later edifices of that style, constructional difficulties seem to have confined the architects to small domes. The buildings of the Sassanian dynasty also contain pendentives.* . . The Arabs, with their peculiar faculty for cutting away all superfluous material,

* The origin of the pendentive may be traced in the rude brick-work, projecting course above course, in the corners of the Kertsch tumulus, of which an illustration is given in Lane's *Modern Egyptians*, Appendix F, 587.

naturally arched the overlapping stones that filled up the angles of the building; and, by using *pointed* arches, overcame the difficulty of the Byzantine architects to which I have alluded. The pendentive was speedily adopted by the Arabs in Egypt in a great variety of shapes, and for almost every conceiv-



FIG. 26.—ARABESQUES OF THE WEKALA OF KAIT BEY (13th).

able architectural and ornamental purpose: to effect the transition from the recessed windows to the outer plane of a building; and to vault, in a similar manner, the great porches of mosques, which form so grand a feature characteristic of the style. All the more simple woodwork of dwelling-houses was fashioned

in a variety of curious patterns of the same character; the pendentive, in fact, strongly marks the Arab fashion of cutting off angles and useless material, always in a pleasing and constructively advantageous manner."*

* E. Stanley Poole, in Lane's *Modern Egyptians*, 5th ed., pp. 586—588.

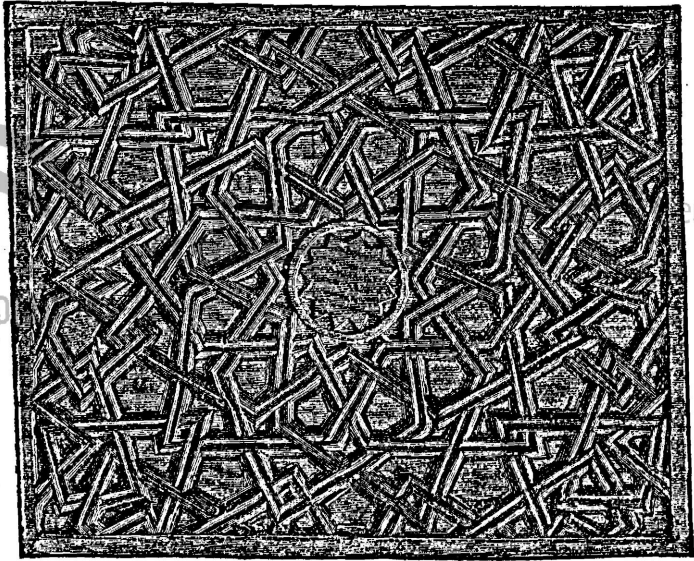


FIG. 27.—GEOMETRICAL ORNAMENT OF THE WEKALA OF KAIT BEY (11th).

CHAPTER IV.

MOSAIC.

AMONG the modes of decorating specially honourable parts of the mosque or house, none was more esteemed in Cairo than mosaic work, and none was practised with greater success. By mosaic, we understand the combination of small pieces of hard substances of different colours, to form a pattern for a wall or pavement. As hard substances are numerous, and the manner of combining them is susceptible of considerable variety, the term mosaic embraces a wide range of artistic processes. Of these the most familiar is the glass mosaic of Byzantium and Ravenna, in which cubes of glass, rendered opaque, and coloured with various tints, are so arranged as to represent figures of saints. Another kind of mosaic, scarcely less celebrated, is the well-known tessellated pavement of the Romans, of which there are many examples in England, where the pattern is formed by the combination of cubes and other small pieces of marbles of different colours. There is also a sectile mosaic, called Florentine, where the coloured marble is used as a sort of veneer, and backed by stouter but common material. The "Opus Alexandrinum" consisted of small geometrical pieces of coloured marbles let into a marble ground.

Saracenic mosaic, in Egypt, is a combination of the tessellated method with the larger proportions of sectile mosaic; but it does not exactly coincide with any of the usual European processes. In its most familiar application, as a dado about

four feet high, running along the wall of the sanctuary of a mosque, or round a principal room in a palace, it consists of upright slabs of marble of different colours and different widths, so arranged as to form a series of rectangular panels, divided and framed by narrower bands. Thus the tomb-mosque of El-Ghōry, built in 1503, has a niche inlaid with blue, yellow, and red marbles, in zigzag stripes, while the double dado on either side of it, running the whole width of the south-east wall, in two lines, one high up, the other low, is of red, yellow, and black marbles, arranged in square or oblong panels, the black forming the pattern, and the red and yellow the centres and borders of the design. The niche of Kalaūn has black, red, and yellow mosaic, picked out with little spots of blue tile. It is not uncommon to find fragments of tile thus used in combination with marble or earthenware: there are two specimens of this curious style in the South Kensington Museum (1499, 1499a). A more usual mode of varying the monotony of the tall slabs of marble and their narrower margins was by introducing between them a border of tessellated work, made of small cubes of marbles of various colours, mixed with red pottery or blue enamel, and frequently with mother-of-pearl. The contrasts between the different colours of marble, pottery, and glass, and the iridescence of the mother-of-pearl, give this peculiar class of mosaic a beauty of its own, which will bear comparison with any other kind of inlay. A fine example, from the St. Maurice collection, is now in the South Kensington Museum, and is engraved in fig. 28. It consists of three panels, enclosed in borders; the central panel is of rich porphyry, bordered with white and black marble, and with a geometrical edging of mother-of-pearl filled in with red pottery and yellow marble; the side panels are of streaked red marble within similar borders; and the whole is enclosed within a rim of greenstone. This triple panel was, no doubt, one of a series which formed the dado of a mosque or palace. Dados of this kind of mosaic are found in the mauso-

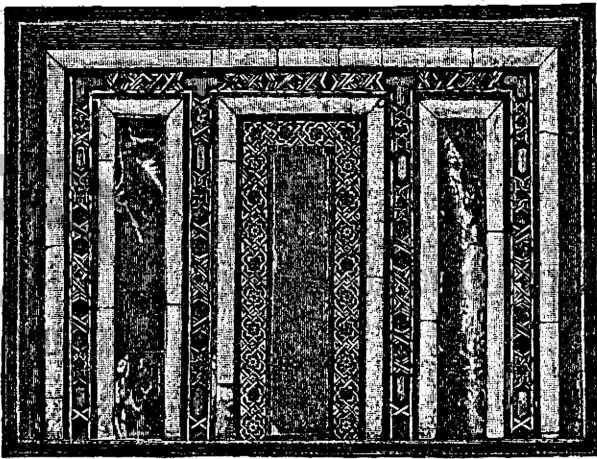


FIG. 28.—MOSAIC DADO ($\frac{1}{40}$ th).
(*South Kensington Museum.*)

leums of Kâit Bey and El-Ashraf, in the eastern cemetery, and beautiful examples of red marble inlaid with blue glass and mother-of-pearl are seen in the ruined sanctuary of the mosque of El-Mâridāny.

This is the specially characteristic mosaic of Cairo, and it will be at once recognized as distinct from the mosaics of Europe. It is made of natural marbles and mother-of-pearl, with only a sprinkling of such manufactured substances as pottery or glass enamel; it is arranged in geometrical designs, with no attempt at representing human or other figures; and it is fixed in a

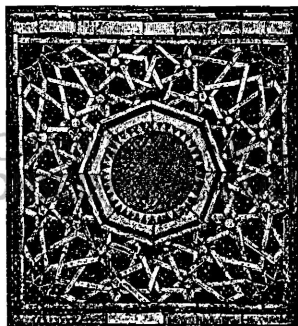


FIG. 29.—MOSAIC PAVEMENT ($\frac{1}{12}$ th).

(*South Kensington Museum.*)

plaster bed, and not inlet, like the "Opus Alexandrinum," into a marble matrix. These are the salient points of the Saracenic mosaic; and the minuteness and delicacy of the tesserae, the intricacy of the designs, and the lustre of the mother-of-pearl, combine to produce an exquisitely beautiful effect.

Precisely similar mosaics are found about the tribunes of the Coptic churches, and there is every reason to believe that the art is essentially a Christian one, preserved by the Copts in Egypt from very early times, while in the west it was suffered to die out

and be supplanted by the Byzantine glass mosaic. Eusebius's mention of variegated marbles on the walls of the church of St. Saviour at Jerusalem, in A.D. 333, seems to point to this form of mosaic, which would thus be traced back to the fourth century. Surviving specimens are, however, mainly found in Egypt; and the chief example in Europe is the apse of Torcello, the mosaics of which closely resemble the niche of a mosque or the tribune of a Coptic church at Cairo.*

The manner in which mosaics of this description were put together and set up against the wall was as follows:—Each piece of marble or tessera of this or other material, having been bevelled from face to back (as below), the whole mosaic is laid out on the ground, face downwards, and strong plaster is poured over it, which, entering the interstices (shaded in the cut) at the back, binds them



FIG. 30.—MODE OF BEVELLING MOSAICS.

together into one slab. Pieces of reed are then laid across the wet surface to strengthen it, and more plaster is poured on, till the thickness is about two inches. Large surfaces can thus be bound together, lifted, and plastered to the wall, without breakage. The beveling of the edges not only gives the plaster a grip on the tesserae, but saves labour in fitting the pieces together: for instead of the whole of the sides having to be

* A. J. Butler, *Coptic Churches*, vol. i., pp. 37, 38. That the Egyptian mosaic-work was derived from the art of the Lower Empire is supported by the circumstance that the common Arabic name for a tessera of mosaic is *fuseyfisā*, which is of course the Greek *ψήφος*. The term *fayṣṣ* is also employed in the same sense, and *mufayṣṣ* means "inlaid with squares of marble," or "covered with mosaic." The Greek emperor furnished the Khalif El-Welid with mosaics and workmen for his mosque at Jerusalem.

exactly parallel and accurately fitted to the adjoining side, only the faces and the top edges of the tesserae and slabs have to be ground, so as to form accurate junctures at the front alone; and the backs and sides are left quite rough. Tiles are bevelled in the same manner, and this constitutes a general distinction between Eastern and European tiles, for the latter are hardly ever bevelled. The Cairo mosaic worker, who gave Mr. Wild the foregoing account of the method of his art, also stated that no drawings were as a rule made beforehand, but the mosaic was constructed out of the artist's head as he arranged it on the ground.

Two spandrels of a niche in the South Kensington Museum present some peculiarities in colour and materials (884, 884a, St. Maurice). The ground is composed of red pottery, formed from powdered water jars; the geometrical pattern is marked out by lines of mother-of-pearl, and marble and blue enamel is restricted to the small points which form the centres of the geometrical systems; the edging of the whole is of greenstone.

Most of the Mamlūk mosques of Cairo have mosaics in their niches, and in the dado on either side, but the mosaic is not always of the rich and intricate character of the panel engraved in fig. 28. In many of the mosques, notably those of El-Ghōry and Sultan Hasan, the mother-of-pearl and pottery are omitted, and the mosaic consists of marble slabs and borders, in two or three colours. In Sultan Hasan the dado is of black and white slabs, simply arranged—



The pulpit is also constructed of variegated marbles, arranged in medallions, in a European style, with a much less pleasing effect than the usual wooden panelling; and a column is also formed of alternate drums of yellow, white, and black marble.

The mosaic pavements of Cairo are of a somewhat different character from those employed for wall decoration. Naturally such substances as mother-of-pearl and glass are not suited to pavements, where they would offer very inadequate resistance to the feet. The pavements are therefore generally composed entirely of marble tesserae (and sometimes red earthenware), of larger size than the delicate pieces that are included in wall mosaics, and arranged so as to form geometrical patterns within the space of about two feet square. Eighteen squares of this description are preserved in the South Kensington Museum, of which two are engraved in figs. 29 and 31. Each square is made separately, and the pieces are set, not in plaster, but in a composition of lime and clay, impervious to water: the clay must be unburnt, just as it comes from the pit. A slab (no. 490—1872) in the South Kensington Museum is of this composition, inlaid with porphyry, glass, and greenstone. The most common application of mosaic pavements is to the durkā'a, or lower floor of a room, which faces the entrance, and commonly contains a fountain. Mr. Wild has preserved drawings of several of these mosaic fountain floors, which would well repay reconstruction in England.*

The marbles most commonly employed in Cairo mosaics are the red, yellow, black, and white varieties, and the red is sometimes very beautifully streaked. It has been generally supposed that these were imported ready polished from Italy, but there is evidence that this was by no means the invariable custom. Nāsir-i-Khusrau, who visited Egypt in the eleventh century, in the reign of the Fātimy, Khalif El-Mustansir, states that marbles were very common at Ramla, near Alexandria, and that the walls of most of the houses there were coated with marble plaques, artistically inlaid, and carved with arabesques. The slabs were cut with a toothless saw and

* An engraving of a mosaic floor, surrounding a fountain of the simpler kind usual in good Cairene houses, may be seen in Lane's *Modern Egyptians*, pp. 12, 13, 5th ed.

Mekka sand, and the colours of the marbles were red, green, black, white, mottled, &c.* The traveller does not state where the marbles came from, in the rough; but there are certainly no marble quarries near Ramla, unless the ancient temples and other buildings of Roman and Christian times were utilized in this manner. The Mohammadan builders were in the habit of making raids upon the Christian remains of Egypt whenever they were in need of materials for a new mosque. We read how Beybars, when he was building his mosque outside the north gate of Cairo, in 1268, collected marbles from all the towns of Egypt, where no doubt

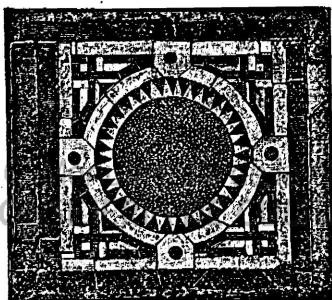


FIG. 31.—MOSAIC PAVEMENT (17th).

(South Kensington Museum.)

the churches still retained something of their ancient splendour; while the sanctuary was lined with marbles and carved wood brought from the fortress of Jaffa, which he had just captured at the point of the sword. The majority of the columns used in mosques appear to have been stolen from earlier buildings, and the ancient Egyptian monuments were laid under contribution. 'Abd-el-Latif, the physician of Baghdād, who travelled in Egypt in the year 1200 A.D., tells us how attempts were made to pull down the granite of the Red Pyramid of Menkara, at Giza, for building

* *Sefer Nameh*, ed. Ch. Schefer, p. 65.

purposes, so early as the reign of the Khalif El-Mamūn, in the beginning of the third century of the Flight; and though the attempt failed, and the workmen declared that they could make no impression upon the huge mass, the practice of borrowing stone from the pyramids and temples of ancient Egypt still continued. Hieroglyphic inscriptions are occasionally found on blocks of black diorite and other stones in the mosques, *e.g.* of El-Gāwaly. It is therefore not improbable that the Ramla marble-works were supplied, at least in part, from the older monuments of Egypt, though they may have been reinforced by importation.

The red porphyry, or *rosso antico*, the green-stone or serpentine, and the black diorite and slate, which occur in mosaics, are quarried in the mountains of the Arabian desert, between the Nile and the Red Sea; and alabaster, which was sparingly used in mediaeval times, was found near Asyūt, on the Nile.



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CHAPTER V.

WOOD-WORK.

WHEN we remember how little wood grows in Egypt, the extensive use made of this material in the mosques and houses of Cairo appears very remarkable. In mosques, the ceilings, some of the windows, the pulpit, lectern or Korān desk, tribune, tomb-casing, doors, and cupboards, are of wood, and often there are carved wooden inscriptions, and stalactites of the same material leading up to the circle of the dome. In the older houses, ceilings, doors, cupboards, and furniture, are made of wood, and carved lattice windows, or meshrebiyas, abound. In a cold climate, such employment of the most easily worked of substances is natural enough; but in Egypt, apart from the scarcity of the material, and the necessity of importing it,* the heat offers serious obstacles to its use. A plain board of wood properly seasoned may keep its shape well enough in England, but when exposed to the sun of Cairo it will speedily lose its accurate proportions; and when employed in combination with other pieces, to form windows or doors, boxes or pulpits, its joints will open, its carvings split, and the whole work will become unsightly and unstable. The leading characteristic of Cairo wood-work is its subdivision into numerous panels; and this principle is obviously the result of climatic considerations, rather than any doctrine of

* The wood commonly used for lattice windows is the pitch pine, which is imported from Asia Minor in lengths of about twenty feet.

art. The only mode of combatting the shrinking and warping effects of the sun was found in a skilful division of the surfaces into panels small enough, and sufficiently easy in their setting, to permit of slight shrinking without injury to the general outline. The little panels of a Cairo door or pulpit may expand without encountering enough resistance to cause any cracking or splitting in the surrounding portions, and the Egyptian workmen soon learned to accommodate themselves to the conditions of their art in a hot climate.

Wood is the prevailing material employed for the fittings and furniture of a mosque. The furniture is, however, of a much more restricted character than that of a Christian church or

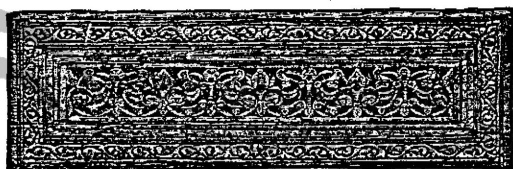


FIG. 32.—CARVED PANEL OF PULPIT ($\frac{1}{4}$ th).
(South Kensington Museum.)

cathedral. Where the ministers and congregation sit cross-legged on the floor, and in a service where there is no music and therefore no choir or organ, we cannot look for carved chancel-stalls, *misereres*, choir-screens, organ-lofts, or other points of decoration in our more ornate churches. The niche towards Mekka takes the place of our altar, and though it is sumptuously adorned with marbles and mosaic, it does not afford the opportunity for wood-carving which is found in our chancels. Nevertheless, the Mohammadan church has its points of wood-carving. These are the pulpit, the lectern or Korān desk, the doors of the recesses or cupboards which contain the various objects required by the ministers of the mosque; and although there is no choir-screen, in the splendid sense familiar in our cathedrals, the

sanctuary or eastern arcade of the mosque is sometimes railed off from the court by a turned wooden screen. And as many of the mosques of Cairo have chapels, where the founder or members of his family are interred, the Muslim artist would sometimes employ his skill in carving the wooden casing of the tomb with elaborate arabesques, arranged in intricate panels.

The form of a Cairo pulpit, termed in Arabic *منبر* *minbar* (pronounced *mimbar*), is seen in fig. 34. It represents a pulpit, now in the South Kensington Museum, which bears the name and titles of the Mamlūk Sultan Kāit Bey, who reigned in the last third of the sixteenth century, but the precise mosque from which it came is not known. As one Sultan would



FIG. 33.—CARVED PANEL OF PULPIT (4th).
(South Kensington Museum.)

sometimes place a pulpit in the mosque of another, and Kāit Bey was especially generous in this kind of restoration, it is possible that the pulpit did not come from any of his own mosques; and the tradition is that it belonged to that of El-Muayyad, which, however, has a pulpit of its own, bearing its founder's name. Wherever it originally stood, the pulpit is an admirable example of the typical Cairene *mimbar*. It consists of a staircase, entered through folding doors, and enclosed by high sides, and terminating at the top in a sort of niche, surmounted by stalactites and a copper cupola. The position of the pulpit was always on the left side of the niche, as you look out towards the court, and the doors were turned to face the con-

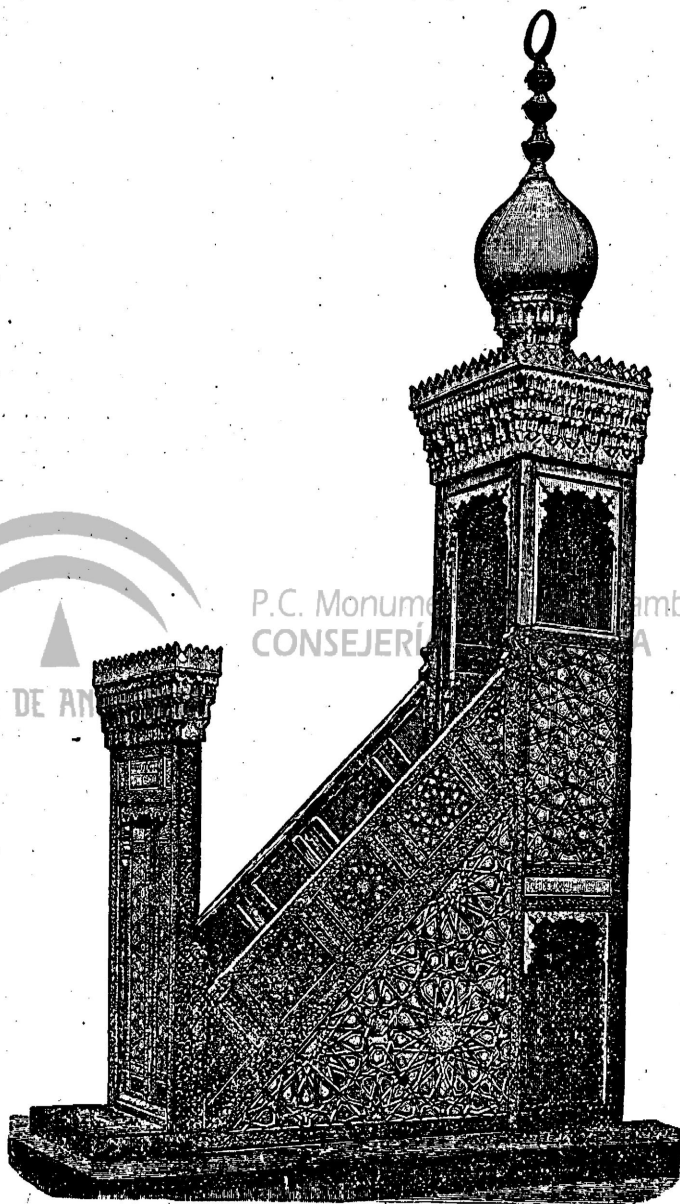


FIG. 34.—PULPIT OF SULTAN KAIT BEY.
Fifteenth Century. (Conte Kensington Museum.)

gregation. The *mimbar* is only required during the Friday (or Muslim Sunday) prayers, when the weekly sermon is preached by the Imām or Khatib of the mosque, who is a layman selected from the people of the neighbourhood, and in no special sense a priest. Standing on the topmost step but one, and holding in his right hand a long wooden sword, which is kept for the purpose behind the doors of the pulpit, he delivers the oration of the Friday Service. The reason for the position on the second step is rather curious: Mohammad the Prophet always preached from the top step, and the Khalifs, his successors, modestly descended each a step lower than the preceding, in order to reserve the post of honour to the most worthy. But when two or three steps had thus been descended, it was discovered that the process if continued long enough would land the preacher in the bowels of the earth, and it was accordingly decided to reserve the top step for Mohammad himself, and to preach from the next lower on all future occasions.

The ornament of the pulpit is generally elaborate. Some of the more modern pulpits are indeed very plain, and constructed merely of panelled and painted wood. On the other hand, one *mimbar*, erected by Kāit Bey in the mosque of Barkūk, in the eastern burial-ground of Cairo, is of solid stone slabs, admirably carved with arabesques and geometrical designs (fig. 16). But most of the pulpits are like that of Kāit Bey, engraved in fig. 34; and are covered with carving and inlaid with ivory and ebony. The amount of work involved in the complicated arrangement of little panels, each of which is supported in a frame of wood beading, which is itself chiselled and sometimes made in two or three envelopes, must have been very considerable; and the carving of the panels with arabesques of varying designs, no two of which are alike, in work of the best period, must have involved incredible toil and ingenuity. It may be taken as a rule, which is exemplified in most arts, that the older the work is, the simpler, freer, and more varied it is; while

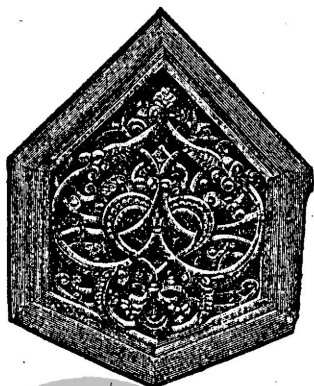


FIG. 36.

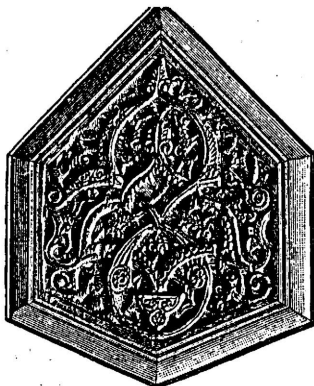


FIG. 37.

P.C. Monumental de la Alhambra y Generalife
CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA



FIG. 35.



FIG. 38.

CARVED PANELS OF LAGIN'S PULPIT, ONCE IN THE MOSQUE OF IBN-TULUN.

A.D. 1296.

(*South Kensington Museum.*)

complexity, intricacy, and a tendency to repetition, are signs of a later style.

The specimens engraved in figs. 35—43 will convey a fairly complete conception of the character of this typically Cairene mode of carving. The panels figs. 35—40 originally formed part of a pulpit which the Mamlūk Sultan Lāgīn erected in the mosque of Ibn-Tūlūn in the year 1296 A.D., when he undertook the restoration of this ancient mosque. In the present day there is a very inferior pulpit there, and this must have been introduced when the fine work of which these panels formed part was taken away, by whom we do not know. The removal must however have been effected in comparatively recent times, for when Mr. James Wild, the present Curator of Sir John Soane's Museum, was in Cairo, about 1845, the older pulpit was still standing; and he made a drawing of the geometrical arrangement of the panels, which is still preserved in his sketch-books, and which was turned to advantage some years ago, when the fragments of the pulpit sides were acquired by the South Kensington Museum from M. Meymar. This sketch shows that the side included one large circular geometrical arrangement (comprising eight large octagonal panels, carved alternately with stars and arabesques round a central star), and four half-systems of the same plan, two of which were placed so that their diameters coincided with the edge of the balustrade or border of the pulpit, while the other two touched the back. The balustrade was of open lattice work, something like the narrow open panels in the Kāit Bey pulpit engraved in fig. 34, and the length of the base and back of the triangular portion of the side, occupied by the carved panels, was 15 feet 9 inches. The doors were filled with carved geometrical panels, with the usual arrangement of two horizontal panels, filled with Arabic inscriptions, one above and one below each door, and a longer inscription on the lintel. The pulpit did not arrive in England in its original shape, but consisted merely of a collection of loose panels, which Mr. Wild, with the help of his sketch, arranged in a

square, which now hangs on the walls of the Museum (no. 1051); with the exception of a few pieces which remained over, and some of the horizontal panels, two of which contain the name of the Sultan Lāgin and the date of the erection of the pulpit, A.H. 696, while others are filled with scroll-work. Two of these are engraved in figs. 39 and 40; one has an arabesque scroll,



FIG. 39.—ARABESQUE PANEL OF LAGIN'S PULPIT, ONCE IN THE MOSQUE OF IBN-TULUN.

(*South Kensington Museum.*)

and the other the inscription *الملك المنصور حسام الدنيا والدين لاجين* "The victorious king, sword-blade of the State and Church Lāgin." When the Museum acquired the magnificent collection of M. de St. Maurice, in 1884, I was able to identify the fine panels which the late owner had fitted into the frame-

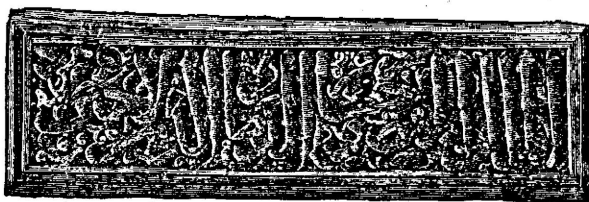


FIG. 40.—PANEL OF LAGIN'S PULPIT, BEARING HIS NAME AND TITLES.

work of a modern and ill-proportioned door as portions of the same pulpit, and some of these are engraved in figs. 37 and 38.

The panels of Lāgin's pulpit show the Cairene carving in its boldest and finest style. Later arabesques may be more delicate and graceful, but no carvers in Egypt excelled those who made this pulpit, in freedom of design and skill of execution. As is