

"The chief of wisdom is in the fear of God." Another piece of lattice-work, of a finer and more elaborate character than is commonly seen, has the inscription in fine Kūfy letters, الله و ملائكة صلى على النبي "God and his angels bless the Prophet," formed by pieces of thicker wood, inlaid with ivory lines.

This more elaborate style of *meshrebīya* work deserves special mention. It is more particularly used for the open panels of the balustrade of pulpits, of which narrow examples are seen in fig. 34, but it is also found in the upper panels of the partition screens of mosque sanctuaries, and in other positions. The principle of construction is the same as in ordinary lattice-work, but the component parts are carved, and sometimes inlaid with ivory. A fine example in the St. Maurice collection is engraved in figs. 59 and 60, in which the front and back are quite different in treatment and effect. The lattice, instead of comprising oval balls and round links, is composed of hexagons joined by triangles and turned links, and the hexagons and triangles are carved and inlaid. On one side the triangles are inlaid with carved ebony triangles pointing the opposite way to the triangles in which they are set, and the hexagons are studded with dark wooden bosses. On the other side the triangles are carved with trefoils, and the hexagons with sixfoils, each set in ebony and ivory borders. Work of this description is uncommon.

Turned lattice-work may unquestionably be included among the native arts of Cairo, though it was also made elsewhere. According to M. Prisse, this craft is not practised now in Cairo, and the modern specimens come from Arabia, notably Jedda. It is unfortunately true that very little of this work is now done in Cairo, but it is not wholly extinct, and in the earlier half of the century it was still a considerable industry, though Lane records that the work was then inferior to the old style. The Egyptian turner sits cross-legged to his work, and uses a primitive lathe, which he causes to revolve with a bow, employing his toes as well as his fingers.

Lattice *meshrebīyās* form the principal wood-work in a Cairo house ; but there are other uses of wood to be described. The delicate carved and inlaid panelling which is usual in mosque pulpits is seldom employed in houses, though probably the old palaces of the Mamlūks, had they been preserved, would have displayed examples of such work as rich and elaborate as any in the mosques. The panelling generally seen in the doors of the

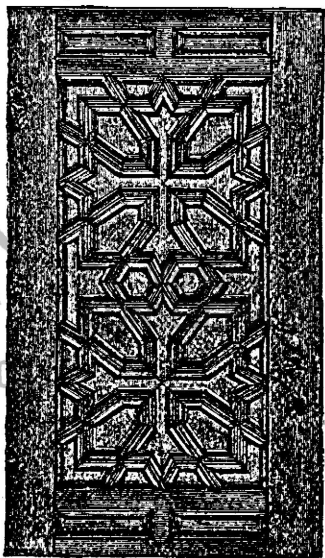


FIG. 61.—PANELLED DOOR FROM A COPT'S HOUSE.
(South Kensington Museum.)

wall-cupboards (which surmount the divan in Cairo rooms, and consist of a central cupboard with double door, surrounded by little arched recesses for pottery and other ornaments), and also used in the interior doors of rooms, is of a simple kind, intended more to guard against the warping effects of the heat than to serve as an ornament to the room. Nevertheless, the effect is sometimes very pleasing, as in some of the doors engraved in figs. 61-4, where the

panels are ingeniously arranged in a sort of L pattern, reminding one of some of the designs of Saracenic metal-work, or in chevrons, or in a hexagonal figure with a central star, or, finally, with a Coptic cross (fig. 64), which indicates that the door in question belonged to a Christian house.

This simple panelling of the door and wall-cupboard, and the fine lattice-work of the *meshrebīya*, constitute the most conspicuous ornaments in wood of the ordinary Cairo room; but there is yet another manner of treating wood, which holds an important place in the better chambers, and also in the mosques. This is seen in the ceilings, which are often the most beautiful part of a room, and are elaborately decorated in both mosques and houses. The coffered ceiling of the finest class consists of, first, the beams of the roof, which are suffered to appear in their natural position, with that true appreciation of the principles of good decoration, in which structural features are turned to account, instead of being hidden, which characterized the Cairo architect. The beams are of rough pine trunks, of considerable thickness, and are either left in their natural round or half-round shape, or more generally are covered with thin boards, which are frequently made in a square form. The latter is the common plan in the mosques, but in houses the round outline of the beams is often preserved to within a couple of feet of the end, when stalactites mask the transition to the square. The beams, whether round or square, are covered with a coating of canvas saturated with plaster, like the Italian *gesso*, and decorated in colours, generally red and blue, with gold and white to give light; and the deep hollows between the beams are divided into small coffers and similarly coated and painted, or the bare planks are similarly painted, with arabesques and other designs of great beauty. All this work, Mr. Wild informs me, is done on the ground, and only put up in its place when finished.

The whole effect of this kind of ceiling,—with its contrasts between the heavy beams and the delicate patterns between them,

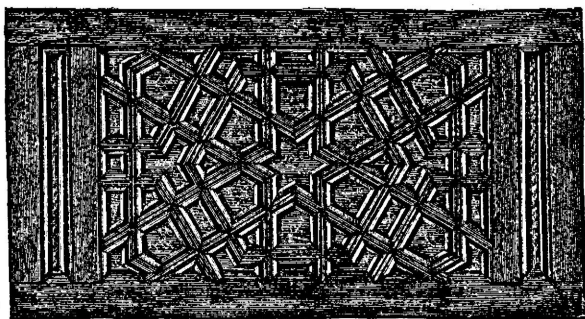


FIG. 64.

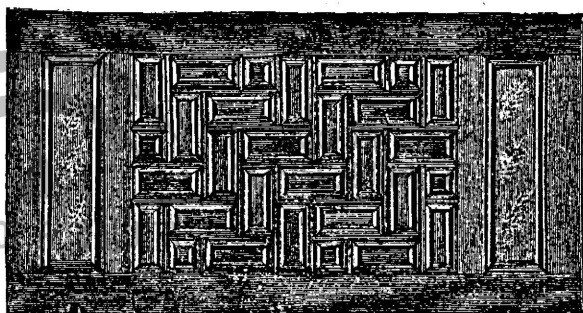


FIG. 63.

PANELLED DOORS.
(*South Kensington Museum.*)

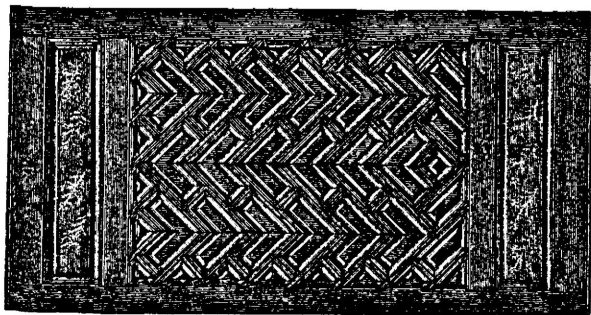


FIG. 62.

and the gleam of gold in relief against the deep-toned blue and red decoration,—is exceedingly rich.

Another mode of decorating a ceiling is by nailing thin strips of wood on the planks that constitute the roof, in a geometrical

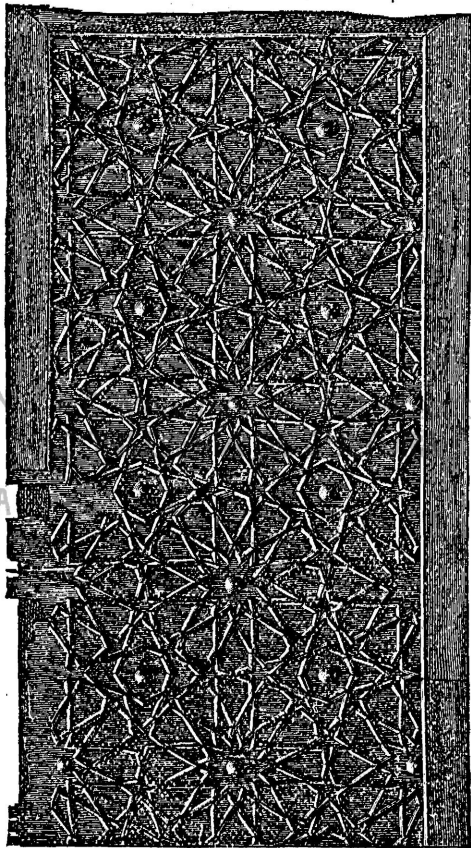


FIG. 65.—CEILING OF APPLIQUÉ WORK.
(*South Kensington Museum.*)

design, and covering the whole with a thin surface of plaster, on which various arabesque and floral ornaments are then squeezed while the material is soft, and the whole is then painted and gilt.



FIG. 66.—TABLE (KURSY).

(Cairo Museum.)

The cut, fig. 67, represents a ceiling in the St. Maurice collection, acquired by the South Kensington Museum. The design is raised by means of strips of wood about half an inch thick, and these strips are gilt, with lines of red to shade the gold; the intervening arabesques are in plaster, gilt, with edges of red and blue. The general effect is very handsome. Sometimes the ceilings are made in this *appliqué* style with no decoration in the interstices. Such is the example (fig. 65), which comes from a comparatively modern and poor class of room. The strips of wood are nailed on the planks in a geometrical pattern, with a few bosses to form centres, and the whole is tinted with red ochre. This and the preceding ceiling (fig. 67) belonged to meshrebiyas, and the style was only employed for ceilings of small size, where no heavy beams were required, such as those over meshrebiyas and over the durkā'as of small rooms. It should be noticed that a somewhat similar style of *appliqué* work is used for the bases, as well as for the ceilings, of meshrebiyas. In the illustration (fig. 12), the corbelling of the nearest meshrebiya is covered with rosettes and stalactites, all of which are first cut out with a chisel and fret-saw, and then nailed on to the window. Fret-work is also used for the pendentive eave which surmounts all good meshrebiyas.

The furniture of a Mohammadan house is so limited, that it is not difficult to sum up the chief wooden objects. An ordinary room in Cairo contains,—beside such structural wood-work as the lattice-window and the panelled wall-cupboard, and the simple shelf that runs round above the latter, supported by common gallows-brackets,—nothing but divans, supported on a frame, which is not ornamented, and perhaps a little table (*kursy*), and a desk for the Korān. The *kursy* (which must not be confounded with the lectern of mosques, also called *Kursy*) is generally of inlaid ivory or mother-of-pearl, but some are of turned wood, as in the engraving fig. 66, which is from a table preserved in the Cairo Museum. Portions of the stalactites are broken off, but the design is sufficiently preserved for us to judge of the effect, which is heavy, and

inferior to the mother-of-pearl tables with which we are more familiar. The reading-desk is of the crossed-leg or camp-stool order, and is generally inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which covers the greater part of the surface of the table, and is fixed with glue. The ordinary Cairo patterns are very simple, and consist in stars and geometrical designs; but the Syrian tables, of the same shape and material, are carved with figures on the mother-of-pearl, and touched with red and green paint. In both kinds the mother-of-pearl is set off by black wedge-shaped pieces of horn or bituminous composition. Rarer objects are the thrones or chairs of carved and lattice-work, used formerly for a bride's robes. A seat of lattice-work (*dikka*) also stands in the entrance of many houses for the door-keeper.

The age of the wood-work, other than carved, is not easy to determine. The meshrebiyas, exposed to the weather, do not seem able to last very long, and we shall be probably right in assuming none of them to be older than the seventeenth century. The more elaborate and squarer form of meshrebiya, used in mosques, is of course older than this, and may date from the fourteenth century. The ceilings vary in date with the mosques or houses to which they belong, but they are not found in mosques earlier than the fourteenth century, and no Cairo houses can be ascribed with certainty to even that period.



FIG. 67.—CEILING OF A MESHREBIYA.
(South Kensington Museum.)

CHAPTER VI.

IVORY.

IN the preceding chapter we have often had occasion to mention inlaid lines of ivory set round carved wooden panels, and even whole panels of ivory set in wooden borders (pp. 132—138). The artists of Cairo preferred this combination of substances, and the use of ivory alone is rare, though the Egyptians had every opportunity of obtaining large quantities of it through the Sūdān trade. In the Coptic churches of Old Cairo, indeed, we find ivory more prevallyngly used than in mosques or Muslim houses. Mr. Butler thus describes the screen of the church of Abū-s-Seyfeyn: *
“It is a massive partition of ebony, divided into three large panels—doorway and two side panels—which are framed in masonry. At each side of the doorway is a square pillar plastered and painted; on the left is portrayed the Crucifixion, and over it the sun shining full; on the right the Taking Down from the Cross, and over it the sun eclipsed. . . . In the centre a double door, opening choirwards, is covered with elaborate mouldings, enclosing ivory crosses in high relief. All round the framing of the doors, tablets of solid ivory, chased with arabesques, are inlet, and the topmost part of each panel is marked off for an even richer display of chased tablets and crosses. Each

* *The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt*, vol. i., pp. 86, 87.

of the side panels of the screen is one mass of superbly cut crosses of ivory, inlaid in even lines, so as to form a kind of broken trellis-work in the ebony background. The spaces between the crosses are filled with little squares, pentagons, hexagons, and other figures of ivory, variously designed, and chiselled with exquisite skill. The order is only broken in the centre of the panel, where a small sliding square, is fitted; on the is inlaid, above and below a tablet containing an Arabic scroll-work. In no through-carving; the in the form required—next the design is chased the ivory ground and a piece is then set in the round with mouldings of ivory alternately. It is of the extraordinary richness of details, or the splendour Mr. Butler ascribes this with the tradition of the church, and though the style lead us to infer a date of the tenth century, his authoritative statement must not be disregarded. The church called El-



FIG. 68.—CARVED
IVORY PANEL.
(S. K. M.)

window, fourteen inches slide a single large cross low which is an ivory bic inscription interlaced these ivories there is block is first shaped cross, square, or the like; in high relief, retaining raised border; and the wood-work and framed ebony, or ebony and difficult to give any idea ness and delicacy of the of the whole effect." screen, in accordance church, to the tenth cen- of the arabesques would later by two or three tive statement must not Another screen, in Mu'allaka, in the fortress

of Babylon, is unique of its kind. "Above and below are narrow panels of carved cedar and ebony, alternately, chased with rich scroll-work and interwoven with Kufic inscriptions; the framework is also of cedar, wrought into unusual star-like devices, and the intervals are filled with thin plates of ivory, through which, when the screen was in its original position, the light of the lamps behind fell with a soft rose-coloured glow, extremely pleasing.

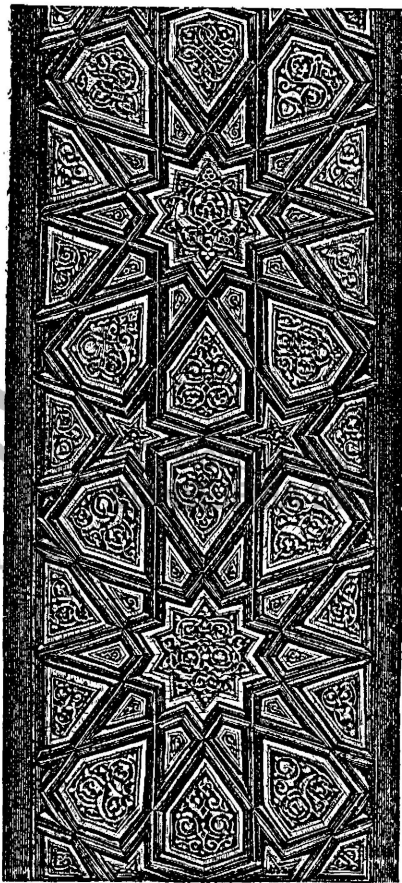


FIG. 69.—CARVED IVORY PANELS OF A PULPIT DOOR.
(*South Kensington Museum.*)

There is an almost magical effect peculiar to this screen, for the design seems to change in a kaleidoscopic manner, according as the spectator varies his distance from it." * This changing effect has often been remarked as a characteristic of Saracenic geometrical design, and is due to the combination of large and small patterns in such a manner that different parts of the design stand out more conspicuously at varying distances.

These Coptic screens are undoubtedly the models upon which the ivory carvings of the mosques were founded. Probably Coptic artists were employed for the work just as Coptic architects had been proved the most skilful for the planning of the mosques themselves. There is a close analogy between the style of the Coptic screens and that of the Muslim pulpits, with the necessary exception that the cross which forms so prominent a feature in the former is omitted in the latter, and the designs are restricted to geometrical patterns filled in with arabesques. A fine example of the Muslim development of the art is seen in the pair of pulpit-doors in the South Kensington Museum (nos. 886 and 886a, of the St. Maurice collection), one of which is engraved in part in fig. 69. The doors in their present modern frame-work are 6ft. 7in. high, and each leaf is 1ft. 6in. wide. The design is marked out by wooden mouldings, and the interstices are filled with ivory tablets, carved with delicate arabesques, no two of which are the same. Above and below each leaf is a horizontal panel filled with ivory scroll-work. It will be noticed, that fine as is the style of carving, the effect is harder than that of the best period of wood-carving in Cairo, though these doors probably belong to the same epoch, the fourteenth century. The stiffness is the fault, one must conclude, of the material, not of the artist; for the men who chiselled the panels of El-Māridāny and Kūsūn (pp. 132—138) were in all probability the mates of those who carved the ivory panels of these doors. The designs are also very similar, though varied with the

* *The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt*, vol. i., p. 212.

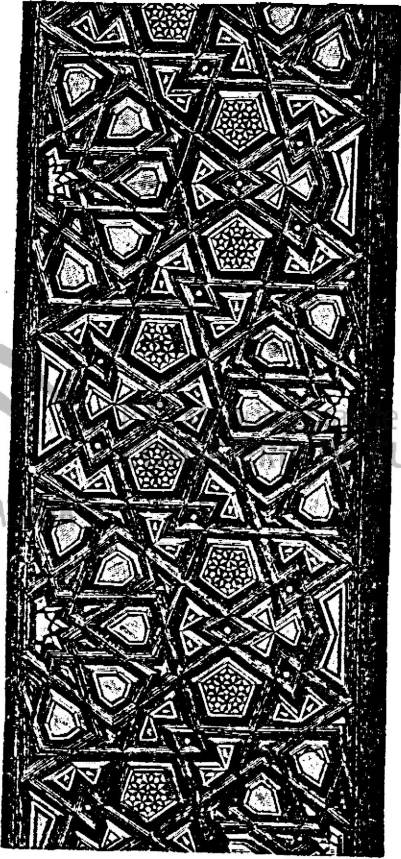


FIG. 70.—INLAID IVORY AND EBONY DOOR.
(*South Kensington Museum.*)

JUNTA DE ANDALUCÍA

de la Alhambra y General
CULTURA

marvellous ingenuity of the Saracenic artist. The softer material, however, seems to have lent itself more readily to the expression of these graceful outlines.

The four panels (no. 885) of the St. Maurice collection, one of which is engraved in fig. 68, are in a similar style. The work is of the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century type, but very well executed, and much softer in effect than those described above; and the panels have this peculiarity—a sign of rather late date—that the designs of all four are absolutely identical. Another style of wood and ivory pulpit-door is seen in fig. 70, where small panels of perfectly plain ivory alternate with pentagonal mosaics of inlaid ivory and ebony tesserae. This style may be referred roughly to the fifteenth century, but we are at present without exact evidence as to the precise date. The beautiful panel of inlaid ivory and ebony (fig. 71) is from a table in the Arab Museum at Cairo, and belonged to the mosque of Umm-Sha'bān, built in 1368.

Ivory work, except in combination with wood, is rare in Egypt. Two pieces, which I had the good fortune to secure in Cairo in 1883, are now in the South Kensington Museum, and both are dated. The first is a little cup, engraved with a band near the lip, containing between scroll borders a verse from the Korān, lxxvi. 5—*ان الابرار يشربون من كأس مزاجها كافور* "Verily the righteous shall drink from a cup flavoured with camphor," describing the drink of the blessed in Paradise; while on the bottom we read, "Made by Mohammad Sālih at El-Kāhira [Cairo] in the year 927," A.D. 1521. The second is an ink-horn (fig. 72) of the usual Eastern shape, to hold ink in the cavity at the head, and reed pens in the handle; and worn in the girdle by the Egyptian scribes and learned men, who do their writing often on the backs of their donkeys. The head is covered with floral ornament of a late style, and the sides with Arabic verses between scroll borders; and on the bottom of the head are inscribed the words, "Made by the Seyyid Mohammad Sālih at Misr [also Cairo] in the year 1082," A.D. 1672.

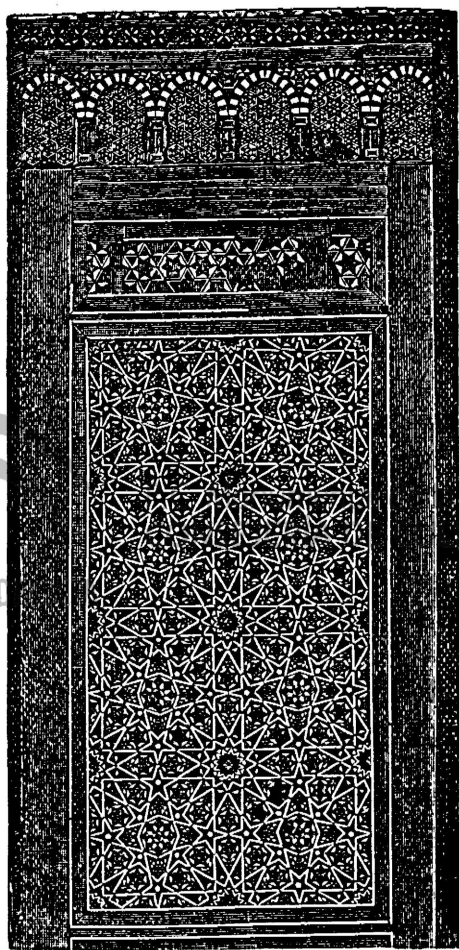


FIG. 71.—INLAID IVORY AND EBONY PANEL FROM A TABLE.
(Cairo Museum.)

The verses are these :—

لا تحسبوا ان حسن الخط ينفعنى
ولا ساحة كف الحاتم الطائي
وانما انا محتاج لواحدة
لنقل نقطة حرف الخاء للطاء

“ Think not the grace of the pen's my desire,
Or the Arab chief's generosity :
For one thing only do I require,
That the point be moved from the *h* to the *t*.”

The meaning is, that by transferring the diacritical point of *الخط* (“ penmanship ” or “ writing ”) to the second letter, thus *الحظ*, the word is changed to “ good fortune.” The Arabic gives the name of *Hâtim Tây*, the typical Arab hero, renowned for his prodigal hospitality and unselfish chivalry, and the subject of numerous Eastern legends and poems.

It looks as though the art of ivory carving had remained hereditary in one family, and the second Muhammad Sâlih were a descendant of the first ; but the names are common enough, and the identity may be purely accidental. These are the only specimens of Cairo ivory vessels with detailed dates and names with which I am acquainted. They are late, but for that reason all the more interesting, for our Museums are particularly poor in specimens of sixteenth and seventeenth century carvings.

The ink-horn of the shape shown in fig. 72 is usually made of brass or copper, but some of the better sort are of silver, though I have never seen one of this material ; and one is mentioned in history as made of glass, but this was taken as a proof of extreme humility. A not uncommon kind is made of plain ivory, inlaid with little brass annulets filled with coloured ivory and brass mosaic, in the style familiar on Shirâz muskets ; but this is not of Cairo manufacture. An example is shown in the South Kensington Museum.

Ivory was also used as a base on which silver plates were laid.

Such is the style of the Bayeux casket (illustrated in *Prisse*, iii., pl. 157), which belongs probably to the eleventh century. Figure carving in ivory is not found in the Egyptian school of art, but it certainly obtained in Spain, as is proved by the splendid ivory box made for Ziyād ibn Aflah in A.H. 359, A.D. 969, now in the South Kensington Museum, on which are various spirited representations of figures and animals, even winged centaurs, closely resembling the Mōsil decoration of metal objects. There can be little doubt that, wherever made, this box represents the influence of Mesopotamian artists, probably conveyed through the Fātimy Khalifs of Africa to Spain and Sicily.

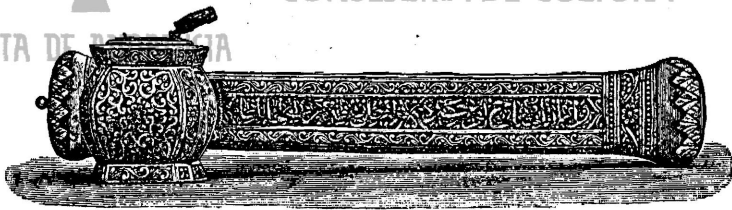


FIG 72.—IVORY INK-HORN.
(*South Kensington Museum.*)

CHAPTER VII.

METAL-WORK.

1. *Brass and Bronze Inlay.*

SARACENIC metal-work, so far as we are acquainted with existing dated specimens, begins in Mesopotamia in the early part of the thirteenth century of our era. That the art must, however, have been developing for centuries before this date, possibly at other places, is clear from the perfection of the workmanship displayed on the very earliest pieces; indeed, the oldest are as a rule the most elaborate and finished. Moreover, there is every reason to believe that the art of metal-working, engraving, and chasing, existed in a continuous development from very ancient times in the region of the Tigris and Euphrates. The earliest Saracenic bowls are decorated with hunting-scenes which remind one at once of the favourite designs of the Assyrian bas-reliefs; the bronze gates of Balawat, and the Sassanian cups which have come down to us,* present many points of close resemblance to these first examples of the Saracen artist. There was, however, a special reason for a notable extension and development of the art in the thirteenth century.† During the earlier ages of Mohammadan rule, though the Khalifs were not remarkable for their piety or observance of the laws of the Korān, a certain decent outward appearance of conformity to the regulations of Mohammad seems to have prevailed. Among other prohibitions, that which forbade the representation in art of animate creatures was particularly observed. The rulers may have cared little about such laws, but the people

* A. de Longpérier, *Œuvres*, i., 71, 254.

† Compare what has been said above, pp. 126 ff.

probably had not yet shaken off the impression of Mohammad's puritanical teaching, and there were enough orthodox Arabs about the court of the Khalifs to make any flagrant deviation from such a law as that which proscribed images dangerous in the extreme. The coins of the period prove that this was the case. 'Abd-el-Melik's abortive attempt to follow the Byzantine model, and place his own image on the coinage, was succeeded by a strictly plain currency, on which no approach to the representation of a living thing appeared for five centuries. But when the Turkish guards, whom the Khalifs unwisely imported for their own safety, were followed by Turkish hordes, who founded dynasties and by degrees abstracted the whole power of the Khalifs, the observance of the law against images became less stringent. The Turkish immigrants were Mohammadans, but they did not adhere to the strictest sect of the Muslim Pharisees, and took a lenient view of the minor regulations of Islām. We cannot be too thankful to them for this happy indifference, for we owe the highest development of Saracenic art in the East to Turkish or Tartar rulers. Among the earliest to introduce the representation of images on the coinage were the small dynasties of Mesopotamia, who followed in the wake of the great Seljūk invasion. The large copper coins of the Urtukis and Beny Zenky abound with figures of men, saints, princes, and beasts, some derived from Byzantine coins, others taken from the symbols of astrology.* Christ and the Virgin are among the images employed by these indiscriminating coiners, while such emblems as the two-headed eagle and the centaur-like figure of Sagittarius show an oriental and probably Assyrian derivation. Coins of this kind begin to be common in the twelfth century, and it is not hard to trace a connection between this sudden appearance of imaged coins and the almost contemporary fabrication of metal bowls and cups and caskets bearing similar images and emblems. The two-headed eagle, the signs of the zodiac, the

* S. Lane-Poole, *Catalogue of Oriental Coins in the British Museum*, vol. iii.; *International Numismata Orientalia*, vol. i., pt. 2.

images of aureoled saints or horsemen engaged in the chase, are found alike on coins and vessels, but in much greater abundance and variety on the latter, where the large surfaces naturally afforded more room for their display. We cannot be far wrong in assuming that the art of metal-working, which had for ages been characteristic of Mesopotamia, where the needful mines were found,* after slumbering under the Khalifs, received, like the coinage, a sudden stimulus from the advent of the Turkish dynasties. Up to the twelfth or thirteenth century the arts doubtless lingered on under the stigma of the orthodox, and it needed only the favour of the powerful, especially of princes so fond of display and gorgeous surroundings as the Tartar dynasts, to give a new life to the long-restrained skill of the Mesopotamian artists, and to encourage them to higher efforts.

The Mesopotamian, or, to use a shorter term, derived from its chief seat, the Mōsī style is characterized by a predominant use of figures of men and animals. Aureoled horsemen engaged in the various methods of the chase, to which the Persians had ever been addicted, surround the bowls or other vessels in broad bands; with lance or bow, with leopard or chitah on the crupper, with hawk on wrist, or attended by hounds, they pursue the bear or lion or antelope or other quarry; crowned and aureoled princes, seated cross-legged on high-backed thrones, attended by pages, and holding the forbidden wine-cup in the hand, occupy panels or medallions; musicians with cymbals, lute or pipe, dancers, and other types of festivity, or the personified Signs of the Zodiac combined with their ruling planets, vary the monotony of the hunting-scenes; and combats between animals, birds, and men, are among the subjects of the engraver's skill. In one instance the bottom of a large bowl is covered with the spirited represen-

* Mesopotamia and the adjacent districts have been famous from remote antiquity for copper mines, and in the present day near Māridīn is a kiln where the copper is refined which is extracted from the mine of Argana Ma'dīn; and copper vessels are still made at Tōkāt, and exported to Syria and Egypt.

tation of a sporting party on the water: a boat is pulled by three men, two others shoot wild ducks with their arrows, another is engaged in cutting the throat of a wounded duck, a seventh sits at the mast-head on the look-out, and another dives beneath, pursued by an alligator.* Long chains of beasts of the chase, lions, panthers, chitahs, antelopes, hounds and birds, pursue one another in narrow borders, and bands of scroll-work or twist-pattern divide the different zones of the ornamentation, while the intervening spaces are filled with ducks and other water-fowl. The ground is generally covered with bold arabesques, or with a kind of hook or key pattern, and little medallions or annulets filled with a simple rose design serve to divide the borders into equal sections. Arabic inscriptions, in the Naskhy character, run round the



FIG. 73.—INSCRIPTION INTERWOVEN WITH FIGURES ON THE "BAPTISTERY OF ST. LOUIS.

vessels in narrow bands, sometimes (but rarely) having the tops of the letters chased in the image of human faces or interwoven with the legs of an upper border of beasts of the chase (fig. 73). Occasionally a meaningless inscription, consisting of a few decorative letters frequently repeated, takes the place of the genuine inscription, and so far is this from being an indication of late date, (though it is perhaps most common on late work,) that it is found on objects which undoubtedly belong to the thirteenth century, and occurs, for example, on a cup found buried with the body of Bertrand de Malzand, Abbot of Montmajour, who died in that century.† As a rule, the shoals of fish, which are

* In the Arsacid relief of Takhti-Bostan, the king hunts from a boat, exactly as on this bowl.

† A. de Longpérier, *Œuvres*, i. 390.

so common at a slightly later period on the bottom of drinking vessels and other utensils intended to hold liquids, do not occur on the early Mōsil work.

But the main characteristic of Mōsil and all early Saracenic metal-work is the lavish use of silver inlay. Gold does not appear to have been employed by the Mōsil artists, but in silver they were prodigal. Every part of the design was covered with plates of the precious metal, and the intervening spaces, amounting to little more than narrow lines, were generally filled with a black bituminous composition which concealed the copper or brass, and set off the brilliancy of the silver designs. The silver inlay is as nearly as possible let in to the level of the brass base, and is secured by no pins or solder. The delicate hold obtained by the process employed has unfortunately in most instances permitted the greater part of the inlay to escape in the course of wear, and we are thus enabled to observe accurately the method of inlaying adopted by the Saracen workmen. This consisted, in all work of the best period, in cutting away the surface to be inlaid in planes deepening towards the edges, slightly undercutting the edges themselves, and then forcing the silver into the cavity thus excavated, and burnishing the rebated edges over the inlaid plaque.* In the

* This inlaying, or rather the precious metal thus inlaid, is termed in Arabic *keft* كَفَّت (2nd conj.) means to plate or cover with a leaf of metal. We read in El-Makrīzy of نحاس مكفت بالذهب والفضة, "Copper, plated with gold and silver;" نحاس اصفر مكفت بالفضة, "Brass, plated with silver;" and elsewhere of فولاد مكفت بالذهب, "Steel, plated with gold;" and saddles, bridles, and precious stones, مكفت, "plated" with, or set in, gold and silver. العظيم (from طعم) means "incrustation," "inlaying;" and مطعم practically the same as مكفت, only it does not necessarily imply metal-plates. El-Makrīzy writes—الكسفت هو ما تطعم به اواني النحاس من الذهب والفضة which shows that مطعم is applied to inlaid metal-work as well as مكفت. But it is also used for inlaid ivory and wood: e. g. خشب مطعم بالعاج والابنوس, "Wood, inlaid with ivory and ebony," صنع تابوتا من ابنوس مطعم بالصدف بالصدف, "He made a box of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl." See El-Makrīzy, *Hist. des Mamlouks*, (Quatremère,) ii. i. 114, note.

case of large surfaces, in order to get a better hold, the edges were not only undercut, but slightly toothed or serrated, but this is by no means universal, and is often a sign of a later repairing of the vessel by less skilful hands. In the inlaying of very narrow lines, where there was hardly room for undercutting, a series of notches were punched along the line with an oblong-headed instrument, and the inlay beaten or pressed with agate or jade into the holes, which served to hold the thin thread. The earliest work is never treated in the mode which became common in Venetian and later inlay, by the process of stippling the whole of a large surface with little triangular notches, which served like teeth to hold the metal plates. Whenever we find such stippling on ancient work, it is a sign that the inlay has dropped off, and has been restored by a later hand. The only approach to stippling in early work is the punching oblong (not triangular) notches in inlaying thin threads of silver or gold.

M. Lavoix, in an interesting paper on "Les Azziministes,"* distinguishes three methods of inlaying; (1) incrustation, where a thread of gold is inserted in an under-cut groove; (2) plating, where a plate of metal is enclosed between slightly raised walls, which, he says, is the Damascus manner; and (3) where the workman runs a sort of spur-tool rapidly over the surface to be inlaid, so as to make a series of notches, and then presses on the thin leaf of metal.† The last method, he adds, is that chiefly in vogue in Persia, or *Al-Ajam*, to give the country its Arabic name, whence the art came to be known in Europe as *Alla gemina*, *Algerminia*,

* *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, xii. 64—74.

† With regard to these distinctions, I must say that the first, which is real Damascening, is the only method employed on early Saracenic work, and it is used alike for large surfaces and small; but *not* for mere threads, which are, I believe, generally fixed by the punched mode described above. Raised walls, mentioned in M. Lavoix's second method, are not known to early Saracenic art, and certainly do not apply to Damascus work: they only came in when the Venetian style of cutting away the whole surface except the pattern became the vogue. The third method is the late and bad one.

All Azzimina, and the inlayers took the name of *Algemina*, or *Azzimina*. The Comte de Rochechouart* describes the three processes of damascening or inlaying still employed in Persia. He distinguishes the processes as follows: (1) *Zarkhonden*, damascening in relief, where the base is cut out and the edges under-cut, and the precious metal pinned on with gold nails, after which the surface is chased. (2) *Zarnichanest*, damascening in the flat, where the same process is used, but the gold is pressed in with a piece of jade, and all that projects is burnished off. (3) *Zarkouft*, which, he says, is the most usual way, where the design is traced with the graver, but is not cut out, and the surface is toothed with a special tool, and the gold leaf, which is used very thin, is pressed on with jade, and then exposed to the fire till it sweats, after which it is again burnished with jade, and the process is repeated until the incrustation is firmly fixed. The last process is very cheap, as little gold is used. It is evident that in this last process (which preserves only the name of the old *Keft* work), we have an inferior development of the stippling process employed by the Oriental artists of Venice, and by the late repairers of Mōsil work. The difference is, that instead of using an honest plate of gold or silver and really inlaying it in a sunken bed, relying on the stippling only to keep the central portions down, the modern Persian method depends wholly on the stippling and the heating, and is not inlay at all, but a cheap imitation. Another process, mentioned by Sir Digby Wyatt (in *Waring's Art Treasures*, 1857), is described as consisting in punching little holes round the outline of the surface to be covered, and burnishing down the silver till it is forced into the holes and thus held; but I cannot recall any example of this process among the Saracenic objects I have examined.

When with incredible labour the whole surface of a bowl or other object had been excavated in the intended designs, and

* *Souvenirs d'un Voyage en Perse*, 1867, pp. 236—9.

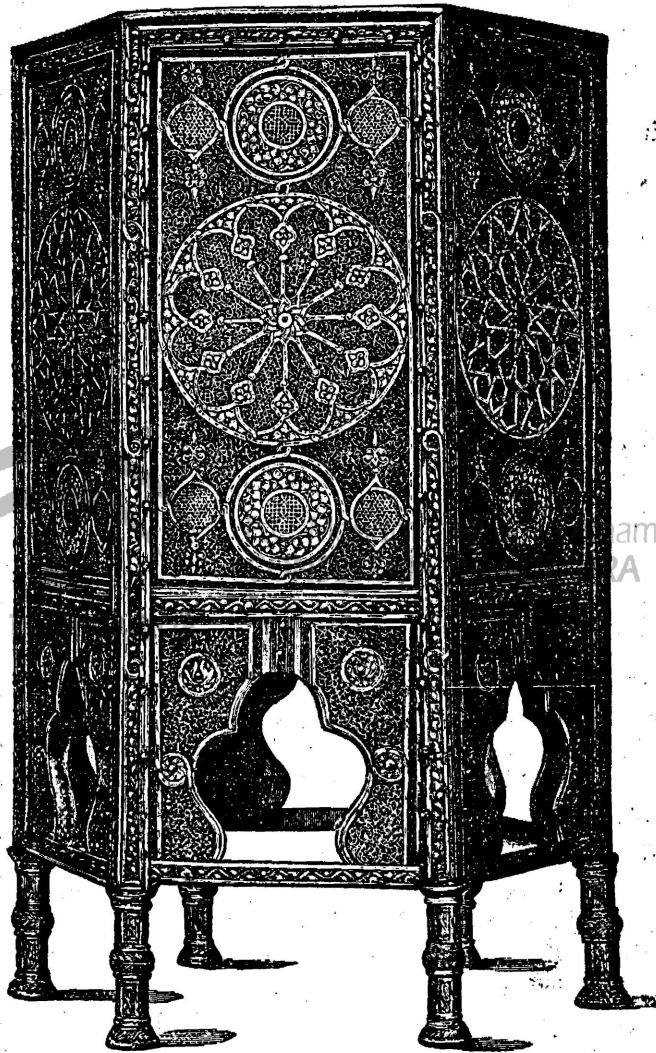


FIG. 74.—TABLE FROM THE MARISTAN OF KALAUN.
Thirteenth Century. (Cairo Museum.)

the edges had been under-cut, and the silver plates burnished into the recesses thus prepared, the work of the Mōsil artist was only half done. He had next to chase the surface of each plate with details which could not be represented in the outline. The faces and dress of the horsemen and princes, the fur of the beasts, the feathers of every bird, and countless other details, had to be slowly and minutely engraved on the surface of each little plate of silver, till the extraordinarily delicate and finished effect which is characteristic of true Saracenic work had been attained. There were no half-measures, no scamped work, with the Saracen artists; every part of the inlay, if only the size of a pea, if it represented anything but the smooth face of an Arabic letter, must be chased; and these old-fashioned workmen had not yet learned the economical practice of modern artisans, who neglect whatever part is not likely to be seen, but took as much pains with the portions of their work that were not to be seen as with those that were meant to be always visible. Mahmūd the Kurd, a Saracen artist of Venice, carried this principle of honest work so far, that when he made use of the stippling process to retain his silver plates in their places, he traced his stipples in a graceful scroll-pattern, although he knew that they would immediately be concealed by the silver they were designed to hold. If the silver had not accidentally been worn off, we should never have suspected the true artist's spirit hidden beneath.

What has been said about the processes of inlaying and chasing applies to the whole of the best period of Saracenic art in the East, to the Syrian and Mamlūk styles, as well as to the Mōsil work, but the predominance in 14th century Mamlūk work of large inscriptions, which need no chasing, instead of the multitudinous figures of the Mōsil artist, renders the later work slightly less elaborate, though even here the prevalence of ducks and birds in the ground-decoration demands prodigious labour in chasing.

Between the Mōsil work and the commoner Mamlūk style, I have distinguished a class to which I have ventured to give the name of *Syrian*. It combines some of the characteristics of the earliest Mōsil style with others that belong to the succeeding art of the Mamlūks. Thus it shows on some examples the usual Mōsil decoration of figures, while it presents numerous examples of the confronted birds, or fighting cocks, and groups of four or six ducks or other fowl arranged in a circle with their heads together, and also the rosette of flowers and leaves which remind one of Damascus titles,—all of which are typical of the later work of the Mamlūks. One special ornament is to be noticed in this class: this is a medallion filled with a sort of key ornament, consisting of a number of Z's arranged in a circle, and inlaid with gold wire. These little medallions occur in large numbers all over the writing-boxes, which appear to have been the special product of this school of metal-work, and they seldom recur in similar abundance at any other period. The reasons which lead me to regard this class as the fabric of some Syrian city, probably Damascus or Aleppo, are these:—the style is certainly distinct from both that of Mōsil and the later art of Cairo; gold inlay is historically known to have been a favourite decoration with the Damascus artists, of whom, according to M. Lavoix, there was a distinct school;* the rosettes of flowers and leaves have a decidedly Damascus look; the only name, or rather title, that can with probability be identified on the objects classed under this division, appears to refer to a prince of Aleppo, whose slave or Mamlūk made the writing-box described on p. 222.

The third, or Mamlūk, class is at once the most numerous and best identified by inscriptions. The greater number of examples

* "I have seen," says Nāsir-i-Khusrau, in the 11th century, "copper bowls of Damascus containing each 30 menn of water; they shine like gold. They tell me that a woman owns 5000 of them, and lets them out daily for a dirhem a month."

belong to the time of the Sultan En-Nāsir Mohammad ibn Kalaūn and his many and wealthy courtiers, the Nāsiry Mamlūks,

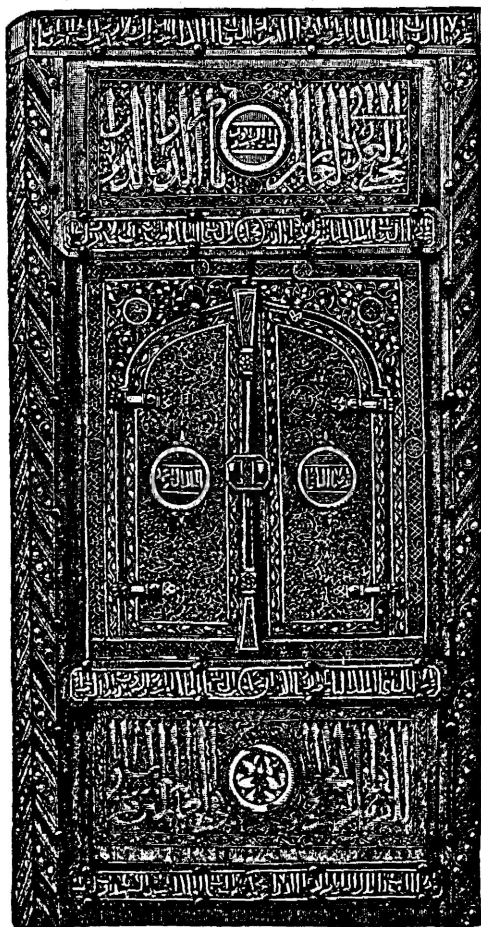


FIG. 75.—PANEL OF TABLE OF EN-NASIR, SON OF KALAUN.
(Cairo Museum.)

and it is probable that the style acquired its distinctive character during this period of sumptuous magnificence in the fourteenth



FIG. 76.—LAMP OF SULTAN BEVBARS II.
A.D. 1309—1310.

century. Indeed we shall see that Beysary, who lived through Kalāūn's reign, employed the art of Mōsil for his perfume-burner. Kalāūn, again, to judge by his carved doors in the Māristān, preferred the Mōsil style of figure-work, which still probably held the market as the best of its kind. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to place the beginning of what I have called the Mamlūk style at the accession of En-Nāsir Mohammad, who reigned from A.H. 693 to 741 (A.D. 1293 to 1341). From this time onwards, at least until the conquest of Egypt by the Othmānly Turks, the Sultāns and Amirs of Egypt delighted to surround themselves with exquisitely chased and inlaid vessels and furniture. The Museum at Cairo contains two inlaid tables (figs. 74 and 75), one of which bears the name and titles of the Sultan En-Nāsir ibn Kalāūn, in brass filigree work, inlaid with silver medallions, panels of flowers, and geometrical designs, and Naskhy and Kūfy inscriptions. These tables were used to support such a tray as the splendid specimen preserved in the South Kensington Museum, described at p. 229, on which the Sultān's repasts, and the wine service that followed, were spread in the usual Eastern manner. The doors of the mosques of this period were covered, not with the rough but effective plaques of *cast* bronze, which we see on the doors of Beybars (figs. 83-6) in the thirteenth century, but with *cut* bronze plates, chased and sometimes inlaid with silver. Mosque lamps, when they were not of enamelled glass, were of exquisite filigree silver inlay (fig. 76). Large chandeliers hung in front of the niches of many of the mosques, made of *repoussé* bronze in an arabesque design and covered with chasing, or of iron filigree work (fig. 78), with zones of shining copper, bright as red gold. Korāns were enclosed in gold cases adorned with precious stones.* The utensils of the royal and aristocratic palaces were of inlaid brass and bronze; large bowls or tanks, small cups and trays, censers, candlesticks of ungainly form but

* El-Makrīzy, *Mamlūks*, ii. 246.