

The intermixing of ornamental artistic elements in Granada's and Tlemcen's monuments between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries

اختلاط العناصر الفنية الزخرفية في آثار غرناطة وتلمسان  
بين القرنين الثالث عشر والرابع عشر ميلادي

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**Abstract (English):** The joining of the Andalusian region with the Maghreb region under Almoravid and later Almohad rule resulted in a unity agreement that led to a mixture of art in both regions, which made their architectural structures distinct from those of other regions. This led to the emergence of a unique artistic style, the Maghrebian-Andalusian style, which continued to evolve and flourish during the reign of the Zayyanids and Marinids in the Maghreb, and the Nasrids in Andalusia. This essay attempts to address the artistic unity of the monuments of Andalusia and the Middle Maghreb between the 13th and 14th centuries AD through the monuments of Tlemcen and Granada.

**Keywords:** Maghrebi-Andalusian; Zayyanids; Marinid; Tlemcen.

ملخص باللغة العربية

ضم المنطقة الأندلسية إلى منطقة المغرب العربي في ظل حكم المرابطين، ثم نتج عن حكم الموحيدين اتفاق وحدة أدى إلى اختلاط الفن في المنطقتين، مما جعل هياكلهما المعمارية مميزة عن المناطق الأخرى. ومن ثم برز أسلوب فني فريد وهو الأسلوب المغربي الأندلسي الذي استمر في التطور والازدهار تحت حكم الزيانيين والمرينيين في المغرب العربي والنصرين في الأندلس. هذا المقال محاولة لمعالجة الوحدة الفنية للمعالم في الأندلس والمغرب الأوسط بين القرنين الثالث عشر والرابع عشر الميلاديين من خلال معالم تلمسان وغرناطة.

كلمات مفتاحية: المغربي؛ الأندلسي؛ الزياني؛ المريني؛ تلمسان.

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## Introduction

Islamic art occupies a prominent place among the artistic styles that human civilisation has known in general, and it has spread to different regions from the Far East to beyond the Atlantic Ocean in the west. It has been marked for its general style that the eye cannot confuse, in addition to the character of unity at the same time.

Local styles have branched out and adhered to it, each with its own independent character and personality that distinguishes it from other territories. One of the styles belonging to Islamic art is the Maghrebian-Andalusian style, which fused the two art forms. This art appeared with the appearance of the Almoravids followed by the Almohads, who despite their religious orientation and their reputed lack of architectural and ornamental value, their immersion in the Andalusian civilization induced their artistic orientation. They thus developed an interest in architecture, leaving behind unique masterpieces that testify to their ability to harmonize their heritage with their innovation thanks to their knowledge of both territories, the Maghreb and Andalusia, not to mention the artistic heritage and cultural resources that each region exploited.

### 1- Artistic unity of the Maghreb and Andalusian territories

The political, economic, social and historical unification of the Maghreb and Andalusian territories was the birth of artistic unity, as it facilitated the movement of craftsmen and builders, equipped with their artistic heritage and diverse skills, who collaborated in the construction and decoration of many architectural structures.

Despite the cultural prosperity observed in the Islamic Maghreb during the reign of the Almoravids and Almohads, political divisions emerged during the 7th century A.H. (13th century A.D.) after the unity that prevailed during the reign of the Almohads. Some Walis exploited the regressing Empire and declared their independence from it, which led to the appearance of three states on the political (الرحمان) the Hafsidi dynasty under Ifriqiya rule, the Ziyyanid dynasty in the central Maghreb, and the Marinid sultanate in the far Maghreb (Morocco). Andalusia, during this period, was under the rule of the Nasrid dynasty in Granada (George, 1957) ( These states were involved militarily, politically and socially as much as circumstances allowed until conflicts arose. Given the situation of the Ziyyanid dynasty, which was in the centre, it was continually under attack (موسوعة، 1994) and the expansionist aims of its neighbours, the Hafsidi dynasty and the Marinid sultanate alternately; They laid siege to it on several occasions with the aim of extending their influence and unifying the political bodies of both regions. They succeeded in annexing it at

certain times; Tlemcen was under their domination for almost a quarter of a century until Sultan Abu Hammu Musa II took it back.

Despite the recurrent military attacks and political conflicts that the Marinids increasingly inflicted on the Zayyanids, this did not affect their sultans' obsession with the construction and decoration of their kingdom's buildings using the most innovative artistic elements. Under their reign, Tlemcen gained notoriety and became a cultural centre of the Islamic Maghreb, following the example of Fez and Granada. Even their neighbours, the Marinids, competed with them by constructing numerous buildings in their kingdom, some of which have ceased to exist and others still struggle against the factors of time, such as the Sidi Boumediene Mosque (الاحمر، 2001) and the Sidi Elhaloui Mosque.

It is worth mentioning, however, that the Marinid landmarks, in addition to the Zayyanid landmarks, enriched the artistic value of Tlemcen and anchored the Maghrebian-Andalusian style, which reached its apogee with the Nasrid dynasty in Granada, the Marinids in the Extreme Maghreb (Morocco) and the Zayyanids in the Central Maghreb.

## 2- The Maghrebian-Andalusian style:

Ornamentation occupies an essential place in Islamic art, and this is reflected in the Maghrebian-Andalusian style, which is characterized by the excessive use of ornamentation in architectural constructions. This excess of ornamentation did not take on a great importance during the Almohad period, but it was perceptible and clear in the constructions of the 8th century, corresponding to the 13th century.

Andalusian art, in the course of its evolution, was based on autonomy. It was fed by the resources of the Maghreb during the time of the Almoravids and Almohads, until it's flourishing during the time of the Nasrid sultans. The art of ornament reached an unprecedented level of refinement in Andalusia (maturity) during the 13th-14th centuries. It became a school that has its distinctive characteristics and its prominent character in the Nasrid and Maghreb states. The craftsmen continued the same path taken by the previous ones and reached the art of ornament to aesthetic creativity. The Alhambra palace, the one that still amazes visitors with its rooms, domes, gardens, plaques and colored walls with its striking geometric-pattern. It is the most beautiful model of Islamic art in Europe (الحليم، 1994) It is known that artists travelled from Granada to the rest of the Andalusian and Maghrebian cities(المالك، 2012) from where they delivered the artistic

techniques they knew in the Alhambra Palace. The main characteristic of this style is to cover the walls with a diversified, rich, precise and frescoed decoration that attracts and delights the eye.

The Maghreb-Andalusian style dominated the architectural constructions of the 13th and 14th centuries in the Maghreb and Andalusian regions. It is worth mentioning that due to the loss of Muslim power in Andalusia and the decline of the last Islamic kingdom (Granada), Islamic art in Andalusia had a strong presence with the Mudejars (الدين، 1991) who chose to stay, so that the art continued in the style of the Mudéjar that the Christian rulers admired after being influenced by the Islamic landmarks they saw (دودز، 1998). Thus, they invited the skilful Mudejars who were commissioned to build and decorate their monuments, which are distinguished by the preservation of Islamic stylistic features.

### 3- the influence of Islamic art on foreign arts:

Islamic art spread outside Andalusia and its artistic impact moved to other parts of Europe. After becoming aware of the greatness of the Islamic civilization, Europeans decided to take advantage of its achievements and architectural elements that were taken from Andalusian buildings: the shapes of the square minarets that became towers for churches.

Islam as a culture took firm root in Spanish America in various forms. Mudejars and Christians who inherited Islamic architectural art and ornamentation arrived with Columbus from 1492 AD, and brought these techniques to the New World during the 16th and 17th centuries.

### 4- Decorative art Zayyanids and Marinid in Tlemcen

While in the Middle Maghreb, the city of Tlemcen experienced a marked development in architectural ornamentation. The Zayyanids were concerned with building their kingdom and embellishing its buildings: mosques, castles and schools (الرحمان). Although, there were turbulent periods that the Zayyanids witnessed, they used the calm periods to build constructions and decorate it with ornamentation.

Not much remains of their constructions, most of which have been obliterated by neglect and sabotage. Some of the models that still preserve the authentic ornaments are: "The Sidi Bellahsen Mosque and the Sidi Ibrahim El Masmoudi Mosque" which reflect Zayyanid art and reveal the techniques of the Zayyanid artist in the application of ornaments. Their constructions are characterized by the maturity and extreme mastery of techniques, whether it be the general conception of the ornament or the formations, and the ornamental elements, in addition to greater skill in the precision and execution of the work.

The city of Tlemcen had an aesthetic touch by landmarks of Zayyanid art and Marinid art due to the domination of the Zayyanids and Mariniddynasts over the region, thus, the art took the same direction resulting in an artistic unity rooted in the region the convergence of art Zayyanids and Marinid and Nasirid

Thanks to them, the 13th and 14th centuries were characterized by the prosperity of architectural art which began its developmental journey with the Almoravids and then the Almohads, to flourish with the Zayyanids and Marinids in the Middle and Greater Maghreb.

By studying certain patterns of ornamentation in the architectural constructions of the Middle Maghreb and the Nasrid constructions, we deduce the following:

- The mosque of Cordoba is the main source of Islamic arts (Marçais, 1926) in the regions of the Mghreb and Andalusia, as the Zayyanid artist, the Merinid artist and the Granada artist were inspired by the mosque in their innovations.
- The transmission of Andalusian impacts to the Middle Maghreb does not mean that the Islamic Maghreb did not have its own innovations.
- The transmission of Andalusian impacts to the Middle Maghreb does not mean that the Islamic Maghreb did not have its own innovations, as it does not deny the existence of oriental impacts (Marçais, 1926) such as prominent entrances and Muqarnas.
- The predominance of fresco ornamentation in the decoration of architectural constructions in the 13th and 14th centuries CE. It became a characteristic feature of Maghrebian-Andalusian art that took hold of the buildings of Tlemcen in the Middle Maghreb and the buildings of Granada in Andalusia as well. (عثمان، 1993).
- The process of ornamentation was first based on the division of the walls into rectangles and squares, and harmoniously superimposed polygons. Then, the written, geometric, botanical and ornamental elements were distributed according to the appropriate space. In addition, the style of overall ornamentation was adopted for the covering of the walls (L'art islamique en Mediterranean cycle international de exposition. Musse son frontier, 200).
- The use of the moulding and engraving style in the execution of fresco decoration in the landmarks.
- The use of the watercolour technique in the ceiling of the Hall of the Kings following the lions, the painting depicts 10 kings sitting and talking. It was done by a Christian artist(العزیز، 2011)

- The emergence of elements common to both Zayyanid and Marinid landmarks built in Tlemcen. However, the Marinids have different elements that show their influence by Zayyanid art by adopting their workshops.
- The ornamentation of Nasrid buildings differed from that of the Zayyanids and Marinids in its beauty and the precision of its manufacture; what made it more exquisite was the diversity of its forms and its wealth.
- The diversity of ornamentation that the Zayyanid, Marinid and Nasrid artist adopted through botanical forms such as buds in all its kinds; hollow forms, ornamented and formed by integration or fusion. In addition to the palm fans which are smooth, flowery, jagged and decorated with calligraphy, circles, grooves and various stems. The artist also used the flowers and plants formed from the palm fans.
- The geometric elements represented in the calligraphies with all its types, star plates, geometric shapes, polygons and circles...etc.
- Written ornamentation was marked by the extensive use of Kufic script and Naskh script, both of which became a feature of the architectural elements that belong to the 13th and 14th centuries in the Maghreb and Andalusia.

Granada and Tlemcen formed the best models of influence and civilization that prevailed in all the territories of the Maghreb and Andalusia for 8 centuries. The artistic impact, which included Muslims, Christians and others, did not end with the decline of the kingdom of Granada, but continued firmly and spread to all the lands of Western Europe and crossed the New World (America). Nevertheless, the correlation that characterized the relationship between Granada and Tlemcen left its mark on the capital of the Zayyanid dynasty in various forms, notably by decorating their architectural buildings with the magnificent ornamentation of frescoes and their eagerness to revive the fresco craft.

Although there are some points of divergence in the ornamentation between the Zayyanid, Marinid and Nasrid monuments, this does not eliminate their belonging to the Islamic art that bears the character of unity during all Islamic periods. Thus, all art historians recognize the unity of Islamic art because of the unity of its roots; its initial phase of creation was based on architectural and ornamental elements compatible with its spirituality's. All Islamic art constructions are similar in almost all Islamic territories, with slight differences in each environment.

When we look at the buildings, we need to know how to read them in order to understand them in the right way. Islamic design fulfils the need for which it was built, regardless of the aesthetic qualities and colorful ornamental forms that must also be addressed. Islamic art is a unique character that has a message and a function, it is the great image that Islamic civilization has presented and it parallels the images that literary texts have also presented, namely the exquisite Islamic architectural constructions, considered as a source to understand the rich Islamic culture. The Alhambra Palace, the pearl of Granada, its title and historical logo, is a great showcase of creative imagination and dreams breaking the very limits of what is possible. Perhaps this palace is no longer valuable as a legacy, but it remains an amazing collaboration and achievement, witnessing architectural value that contains highly artistic techniques, employed for many purposes and tasks.

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