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The Almohad Caliphate: A Look at Al-Andalus through Arabic Documentation and Their Artistic Manifestations

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Received: 14 June 2018; Accepted: 23 July 2018; Published: 1 August 2018



Abstract: The main objective of this article is to reflect on the importance and influence of the Andalusian cultural legacy during the years of the Almohad dominance in the Islamic West. To do this, I will examine the written Arabic documentation and those material testimonies that have reached us, which will allow me to get closer to a greater knowledge of this reformist movement. In this sense, I will analyze the artistic, political and religious landscape, which will lead me to address a reality that becomes the vehicle of legitimation of this new caliphate.

Keywords: caliphate; Almohad; Maghreb; al-Andalus; Umayyads; architecture

1. Introduction

The Almohad movement (*al-muwahhīd*), which emerged at the beginning of the 12th century in North Africa, has been a case study for prestigious specialists for decades. The works accomplished by historians, philologists, archaeologists and art historians, among others, allow us to approach their knowledge with an interdisciplinary character, a reality that is increasingly necessary to achieve a greater understanding of this particular period of time. In this sense, the investigations carried out on the origins and evolution of this new reformist dynasty (Millet 1923; Huici Miranda 1949, pp. 339–76; Saidi 1984), the doctrine it professed (Abboud 1996, pp. 6–13; Nagel 1997, pp. 295–304; Martínez Lorca 2004, pp. 399–413) and the material testimonies that have been preserved, are fundamental, consisting of several examples to which I will be referring in this article.

The emergence of this movement, based on the practice of a new religious doctrine against the ideals that the Almoravids professed (*al-murābiṭūn*) and which is recorded in written documentation (Le Livre de Mohammed Ibn Toumert, Mahdi des Almohades [1903] 2010; Kitāb al-Ansāb 1928, pp. 18–49 (ed.), 25–74 (trans); Lettres d’Ibn Tūmart et de ‘Abd al-Mu’min 1928, pp. 1–13 (ed), 1–24 (trans.); Un recueil des lettres officielles almohades. Étude diplomatique analyse et commentaire historique 1942), led to the territorial expansion of this new empire, progressively expelling the Almoravids from the Maghreb until they conquered Marrakech in March 1147. From this moment on, the old Almoravid capital became the Almohad political-administrative centre.

As a consequence of this territorial advance, and in view of the political weakening that al-Andalus was currently going through (Viguera Molins 1992, pp. 205–11; Codera y Zaidín [1899] 2004), the Almohad armies crossed the Strait in the Summer of 1147, incorporating the *Ġarb al-Andalus* (West of al-Andalus) into their domains and making Seville the peninsular capital of their empire (Ibn al-Aṭīr 1898, p. 559; Al-Nuwayrī 1917, vol. II, pp. 214–15). In the same way as in Marrakech, the city of Seville underwent a profound and progressive urban transformation due to its status as a capital city, being on a par with its counterpart in North Africa (Viguera Molins 1998, pp. 15–30; Jiménez Martín 2000, pp. 43–72; Fierro Bello 2009). But it was not until the death of Amir Ibn Mardaniš

(1147–1172) that the Almohads were able to incorporate the *Šharq al-Andalus* (Levant of al-Andalus) into their empire, thus reaching the peak of their political, religious and territorial development.

However, it was from this moment on that the influence that the Andalusian cultural legacy had during the years of Almohad domination in the Islamic West is evidenced not only in its most representative artistic manifestations, as I will comment further on, but also in the Arabic documentation. This scenario leads us to reflect on some aspects of great interest that will allow us to take a further step towards understanding this North African movement and its development, turning that inclination shown by the Almohads towards al-Andalus in the main *corpus* of my discourse and, therefore, to its main objective.

That is why I consider it appropriate to dwell on those material and written testimonies that support this reality, through the different personalities that succeeded each other in power, as well as their participation in the different events that took place during this period and that contribute towards corroborating this approach. I refer to the political, artistic and religious panorama, which will allow us to have a much more complete vision about this particular subject matter.

2. The Interrelation between the Maghreb and Al-Andalus: Material and Documentary Evidence

2.1. The Beginnings of a New Reformist Movement

The origin of the Almohad movement took place in Tinmāl—a spiritual center located in the Maghrebi Anti-Atlas—around the years 1125–1126 under the spiritual guidance of Muḥammad b. Tūmart (d. 1130), who was proclaimed by his supporters as the *Mahdī* (the one guided by God). This new doctrine that the Almohads professed arose as opposition to the Maliki tradition and to the relaxation of the Islamic orthodoxy to which the Almoravids had succumbed, thus wanting to return to the essence of Islam, the Indivisible Oneness or *tawḥīd* ([Le Livre de Mohammed Ibn Toumert, Mahdi des Almohades \[1903\] 2010](#); [Massé 1928](#), vol. II, pp. 105–21; [Fierro Bello 2005](#), vol. II, pp. 895–935).

However, it is known from Arabic written sources that, as a result of his interest in training in Islamic science (*‘ilm*), Ibn Tūmart began his studies in Cordova, where he was found around 1106–1107, continuing his journey shortly after in the East where he spent ten years in cities such as Alexandria, Mecca or Baghdad before returning to the Maghreb ([Ibn al-Aṭīr 1898](#), pp. 526–27; [Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākuṣī 1955](#), pp. 137–38; [Ibn ‘Iḍārī 1963](#), pp. 141–42; [Ḥulal al-mawṣiyya, Crónica árabe de las dinastías almorávide, almohade y benimerín 1952](#), p. 124)¹. The possible presence of *Mahdī* in Cordova, leads to the fact that Ibn Tūmart not only knew the legal practice that prevailed at that time in the territory of Andalusia and to which he was strongly opposed, the malikism, but he also knew the referent of religious architecture in the Islamic West, the Great Mosque of Cordova.

Ibn Tūmart was succeeded by his disciple ‘Abd al-Mu‘mīn (1130–1163)², originating thereafter what is known as the Almohad caliphate. It is during the years of the government of ‘Abd al-Mu‘mīn when the confrontation against the Almoravids becomes the general tonic of the moment, a period in which the Unitarians begin seizing their dominions in North Africa and establishing in Marrakech its capital in the month of March in 1147.

In this context ‘Abd al-Mu‘mīn ordered the construction of the Tinmāl mosque in memory of Ibn Tūmart ([Ewert 1986](#)). Regarding its dating, it has traditionally been thought that its construction began around the years 1153–1154, that is, after the first Kutubiyya mosque (Marrakech) and according to the Moroccan historian Ibn Abī Zar’ (m. 1310–1320). However, more recent studies advance its date to the year 1148, at which time, according to Ibn al-Qaṭṭān (d. after 1252), the caliph sent a letter to the *ṭalaba* of Ceuta announcing the construction of a mosque in Tinmāl ([Villalba Sola 2015](#), pp. 80–81).

¹ See ([Huici Miranda \[1956\] 2000](#), vol. I, pp. 28–32).

² On the biographies of Ibn Tūmart and ‘Abd al-Mu‘mīn see the studies carried out by [Lévi-Provençal \(1928\)](#) and [Boruouiba \(1982\)](#).

The mosque of Tinmāl was made of brick and stone, appreciating in it the characteristic decoration of these initial moments of the Almohad movement, as a result of the strict Islamic orthodoxy that they professed. Among the formal elements that define its architecture I must emphasize the use of pillars, *lambrequines*, pointed horseshoe arches, cusped arches and *muqarnas*, as can be seen through the remains that are preserved in the nave parallel to the *qibla* wall, specifically in the central and external sections (Ewert and Jens-Peter 1984). This section in particular, denotes the importance that this space had in relation to the rest of the mosque, relevance marked in turn by the arrangement of cusped arches and *lambrequines* that appear delimiting the transverse nave against the use of pointed horseshoe arches that make up the perpendicular naves of the prayer hall.

But it is significant to note how the facade of the *miḥrab* adopts a structure very similar to that of the Great Mosque of Cordova, divided into two bodies (Figure 1a,b). The lower body opens up the access arch to the *miḥrab*—horseshoe, slightly pointed and overlapped by another cusped arch—all framed by a double framing with geometric decoration and arabesque. In the upper body, and looking back on the case of Cordova, a frieze of blind arches is arranged, alternating in this case cusped and semicircular arches. A model which, as Cabañero Subiza and Lasa Gracia point out (Cabañero Subiza and Carmelo 2004, pp. 41–42), also obeys the compositional system present in the access to the western *alhanía* of the Salón Dorado (*Maʿylis al-Daḥāb*) of the Aljafería (*al-ʿĪfariyya*) of Zaragoza, historiographically finding the origin of this structure in the Puerta de los Visires (*Bāb al-Wuzarāʾ*) of the Cordovan *aljama*, restored by the emir Muḥammād I (852–886).

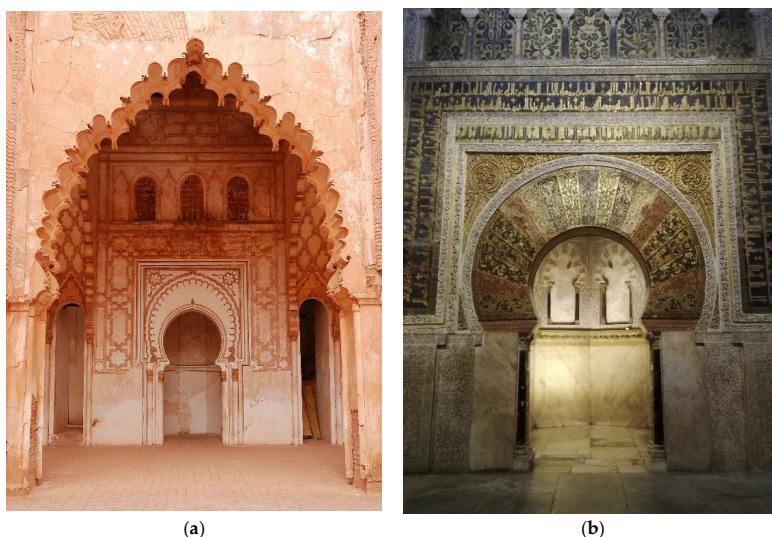


Figure 1. Facade of the *miḥrab* of the mosque of Tinmāl (a). Photo in public domain (cc) Rosino (<https://tinyurl.com/y75nyqrq>). Detail of the facade of the *miḥrab* of the Great Mosque of Cordova (b). Photo took by author.

The same happens on the *miḥrab* facade of the Kutubiyya mosque. This work was commissioned by the caliph ‘Abd al-Mu‘mīn at the palace of the emir ‘Alī b. Yūsuf (1106–1143) after the Almohad conquest of Marrakech in 1147, former Almoravid capital. However, between the years 1158 and 1163 he ordered to build a new mosque in its vicinity, hence the historiography refers to them as the first Kutubiyya—of which only some remains are still preserved—and the second Kutubiyya, respectively (Figure 2). In both Moroccan mosques the structure of the *miḥrab* facade also recalls the Cordovan model with that division into two bodies (Basset and Henri [1932] 2001, pp. 53–80, 183–233), the latter endowed with the formal elements and stylistic characteristics of the Almohad art that was already seen in the Tinmāl mosque.

All this seems to evidence that, during the first years of the Almohad Caliphate, there may have been a certain influence of Andalusian art, as will be seen below. In addition, it should be noted that,

by then, a large part of *Ġarb al-Andalus* (West of al-Andalus) had already become part of the Almohad state—with the exception of the Levant kingdom of the emir Ibn Mardaniš (1147–1172), placing Seville as the Almohad capital of the Peninsula.

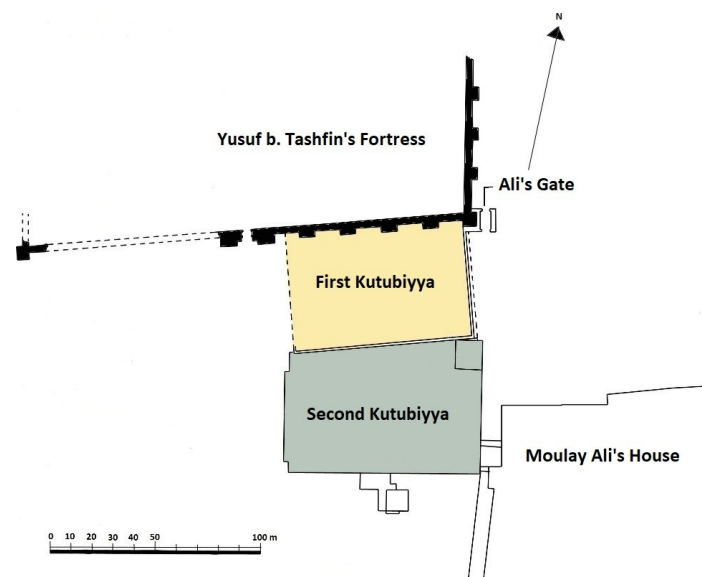


Figure 2. Drawing of the floor plan of the first and second Kutubiyya of Marrakech. Drawing made by author.

2.2. The Legitimation of the Almohad Caliphate: The “Memory” of Al-Andalus

At this point there are a series of written and material testimonies that allow us to uphold this approach, as well as the interest that the Almohads showed towards Andalusia, and what will constitute the axis around which this work will be articulated. This reality is reflected, for example, at the moment when the first Almohad Caliph wanted to preserve the *minbar* from its destruction, which is currently conserved in the al-Badi Palace in Marrakech (Figure 3).

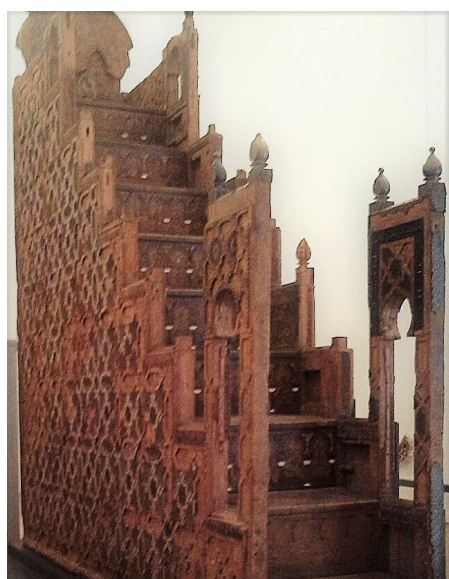


Figure 3. *Minbar* of the Kutubiyya mosque (Al-Badi Palace, Marrakech). Photo took by author.

It is known that this pulpit was made by Andalusian artists around the year 1137 by the expressed wish of the Almoravid Emir ‘Alī b. Yūsuf (Bloom 1998, pp. 19–20) for his mosque in the North African capital, that is, the mosque (*masġid al-yāmi*) of ‘Alī b. Yūsuf, which construction did not start until 1126, as it is known from Arabic written documentation (Chronique des almohades et des hafçides attribuée a Zerkechi 1895, p. 8; Ḥulal al-mawšīyya, Crónica árabe de las dinastías almorávide, almohade y benimerín 1952, pp. 115–16). When the Almohads entered Marrakech in March 1147, they destroyed the mosque, while the Caliph ‘Abd al-Mu‘mīn who, in the words of the author of Ḥulal al-mawšīyya, ordered the transfer to the Kutubiyya mosque “a large *almimbar*, which was made in al-Andalus, with extreme perfection” (Ḥulal al-mawšīyya, Crónica árabe de las dinastías almorávide, almohade y benimerín 1952, p. 172).

This *minbar* is 4 m high and has wooden panels with geometric ornamentation—among which eight-pointed stars predominate—arabesque and epigraphic decoration. Even the steps are adorned with horseshoe arches. Everything seems to indicate that the latter was very similar to the *minbar* ordered by the caliph al-Ḥakām II (961–976) for the Great Mosque of Cordova (Ibn ‘Idārī 1901–1904, vol. II, p. 413) and which outcome must have also seduced ‘Abd al-Mu‘mīn, although according to Nieto Cumplido of Ibn Marzūq (d. 1379), it never matched its beauty (Nieto Cumplido [1998] 2008, p. 246). The geographer al-Himyarī (13th–14th century) comments on the *minbar* of the Cordovan *aljama*:

To the right of the *mihrab* stands the pulpit, a work without equal in the whole world. It is made of ebony, box and fragrant wood. The annals of the Umayyad dynasty explain that it took seven whole years to finish it; six teachers were employed there, not counting those who were in their service as laborers; each of these teachers received a daily salary of half *mitqāl muhammadi* (Al-Ḥimyarī 1963, pp. 310–11).

A collation of all the above suggests it is logical to think that it was precisely Andalusian artists who were responsible for the construction of the *minbar* of the Almohad Mosque of Seville, whose description made by the court reporter Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salā (d. after 1198) allows us to find certain similarities with the *minbar*-s of Cordova and Marrakech:

This pulpit was made with the most extraordinary art, of which its artisans were capable. The richest wood was chosen carved and sculpted, painted and adjusted, according to the rules of art and calculation for it with admirable work and great shape and modeling, inlaid with sandalwood and with ivory and ebony applications, shining like an ember in the fire, and with plates of gold and silver and drawings in its work of pure gold, which shine with light, and takes them, the one who sees them in the dark night, by full moons (Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salā 1969, pp. 197–98).

But in addition, the decoration that appears in the interior panels of the upper part of the *minbar* of the Kutubiyya mosque is significant. In them there is an interweaving of arches that reminds us of the solution used in the expansion of the Great Mosque of Cordova during the Umayyad caliphate of al-Ḥakām II (961–976) (Figure 4a,b)—both in the spaces known as the Villaviciosa Chapel and in the area destined to the *maqṣūra*—and that also can be seen, emulating the Cordovan model, in the arcade that provides access to the north hall of the Aljafería of Zaragoza and in the pavilion of intersecting arcades of the *alcazaba* of Málaga (Cabañero Subiza and Carmelo 2004, pp. 42–43).

This same solution appears crowning the first body of the minaret (*sawma’a*) of the Kutubiyya mosque (Figure 5a), which is another indication that allows us to argue the influence that the Andalusian tradition had on Almohad art, even generating new forms prolonging, in an ascending way, the cross-linked tracing of the cusped arches. I refer to the *sebka* cloths, typical of this period, as can be seen in the old minaret of the Almohad *aljama* of Seville, in the southern portico of the Patio del Yeso in the Reales Alcázares of the Sevillian capital (Figure 5b) or, as far as the domestic sphere is concerned, in house no.10 of the former Islamic settlement of *Madīna Siyāsa* (Cieza, Murcia) (Navarro Palazón and Jiménez Castillo 2005, p. 255, Figure 165).

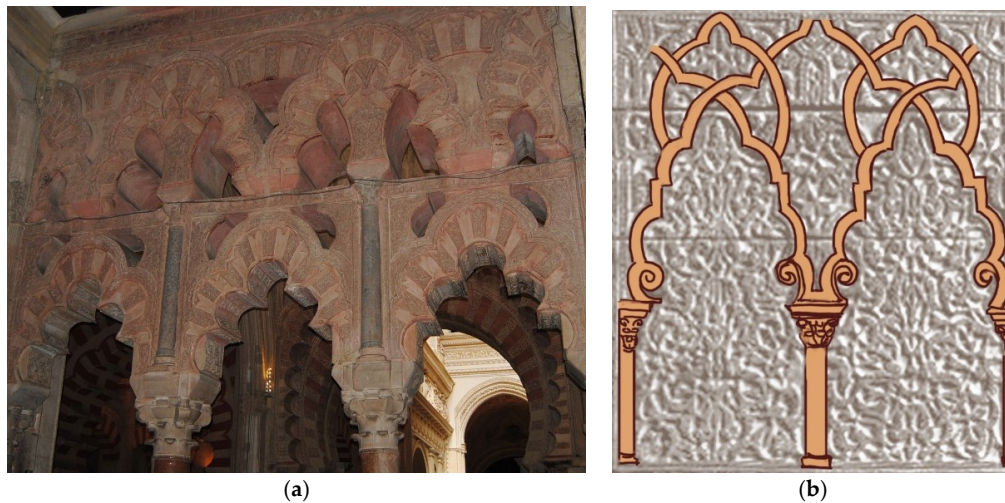


Figure 4. Southern elevation of the Villaviciosa Chapel (a). Photo took by author. Drawing of the decoration detail of the *minbar* of the Kutubiyya Mosque (b). Drawing made by author.

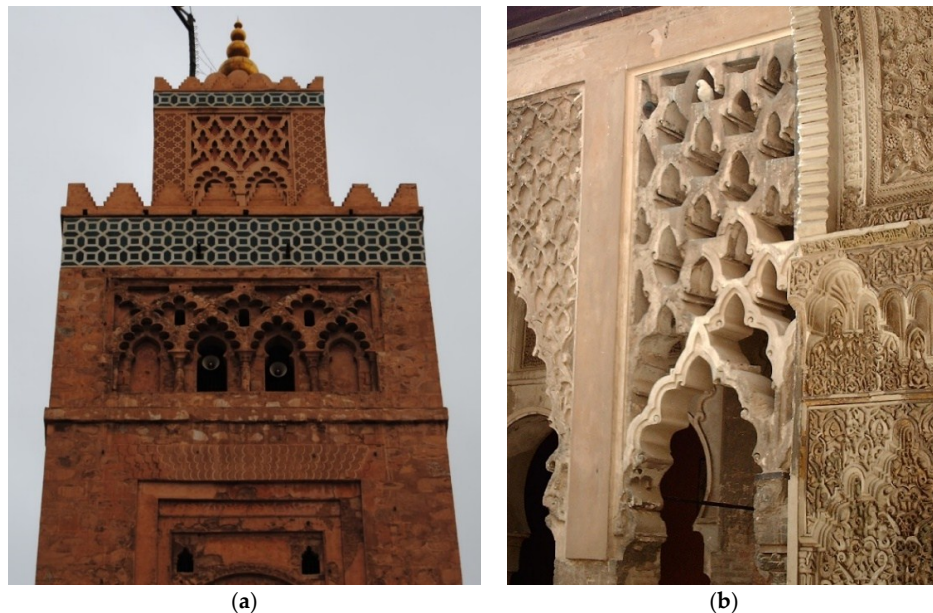


Figure 5. Finishing of the first body of the minaret of the Kutubiyya mosque (a). Photo took by author. Detail of the southern portico of the Patio del Yeso, Reales Alcázares (Seville) (b). Photo took by author.

As a consequence, it is not strange that Andalusian architects and artisans are found at the forefront of the most important constructions of the empire. This is the case of the architect and engineer from Málaga al-Ḥaṣṣāy I'yīš who, in addition to intervening in some works in al-Andalus—as in the case of Gibraltar and Seville ([Ḥulal al-mawṣiyya](#), *Crónica árabe de las dinastías almorávide, almohade y benimerín* 1952, p. 173; [Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salā](#) 1969, pp. 21–23, 190–91)—he took over the construction of the *maqṣūra* of the Kutubiyya mosque. According to the anonymous author of the *Ḥulal al-mawṣiyya* (14th century), it was endowed with a mechanical system, the panels of which were raised and lowered with the presence of the caliph:

The merit of this *maqṣūra* is that it was made with a mechanism with which it rose when the caliph would leave the palace and was lowered when he entered. That is, a door was made to the right of the *miḥrab*, inside which is the *almimbar* and to its left another door,

inside which there is a room, where the mechanisms of the *maqṣūra* and the *almimbar* are and by it had 'Abd al-Mu'mīn's entrance and exit. When the time to go to the mosque was approaching, on Friday, the mechanisms were set in motion, after removing the tapestries from the site of the *maqṣūra* and raising their sides at the same time, without exceeding each other in the least. The door of the pulpit (*almimbar*) was closed, and when the preacher got up to go to it, the door was opened and the pulpit came out with a single thrust of the mechanism and there was no noise or visual trace of the device ([Ḥulal al-mawṣiyya, Crónica árabe de las dinastías almorávide, almohade y benimerín 1952](#), p. 173).

However, it is not known if this particular *maqṣūra* corresponds to the one that was raised in the first Kutubiyya—the remains of it which were identified by Henri Terrasse ([Meunier 1952](#), pp. 45–50) or if, on the contrary, it was designed for the second Kutubiyya. This question arises when it is known that the space that included this *maqṣūra* does not seem to respond to the one that can be seen today in the first mosque built by the Almohads in Marrakech (Figure 6), since according to the author of *Ḥulal al-mawṣiyya* it had “an extension of more than a thousand feet” ([Ḥulal al-mawṣiyya, Crónica árabe de las dinastías almorávide, almohade y benimerín 1952](#), p. 172).



Figure 6. Remains of the mechanical system of the *maqṣūra* corresponding to the first Kutubiyya (Marrakech). Photo took by author.

On the other hand, and unlike the version offered by Huici Miranda, Gaston Deverdun points out in his translation, that this *maqṣūra* could accommodate more than 1000 men ([Meunier 1952](#), pp. 45–47, note 4). In one way or another there is no doubt about the vast capacity of this space, raising the possibility that when the second mosque was built, they chose to build a new *maqṣūra* with that same mechanical system, although much larger.

Focusing therefore on the second Kutubiyya, its plan consists of 17 naves perpendicular to the *qibla* wall, of which the central is wider than the lateral ones, and a nave parallel to the latter is endowed with five *muqarnas*; that is, one in the space that precedes the *miḥrab*, two in the intermediate spaces and two others along the sides (Figure 7). The schema reproduces the plan of the Tinmāl mosque, according to the different studies on the subject, but on a large scale.

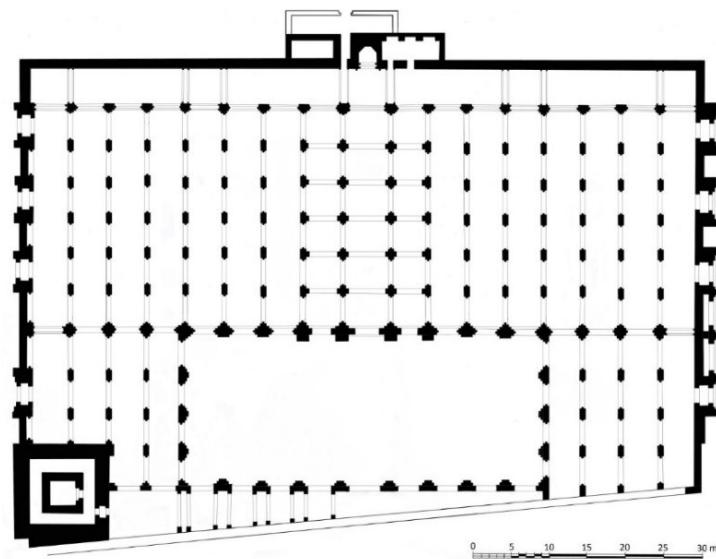


Figure 7. Floor plan of the second Kutubiyya of Marrakech. Drawing made by author.

However, the three central naves that go to the *qibla* wall are of great interest. Each of them appears compartmentalized by a series of sections of transverse arches that differentiate them from the rest of the prayer room. This leads us to wonder if all this space could have had some special meaning, as happened in the Great Mosque of Cordova with the expansion of al-Ḥakām II. Following the investigations carried out ([Abad Castro 2009](#), pp. 9–30), the space occupied by the three central naves was conceived, from the beginning, as the *maqṣūra*, thus a large area reserved for the caliph, his family and the court ([Figure 8](#)).

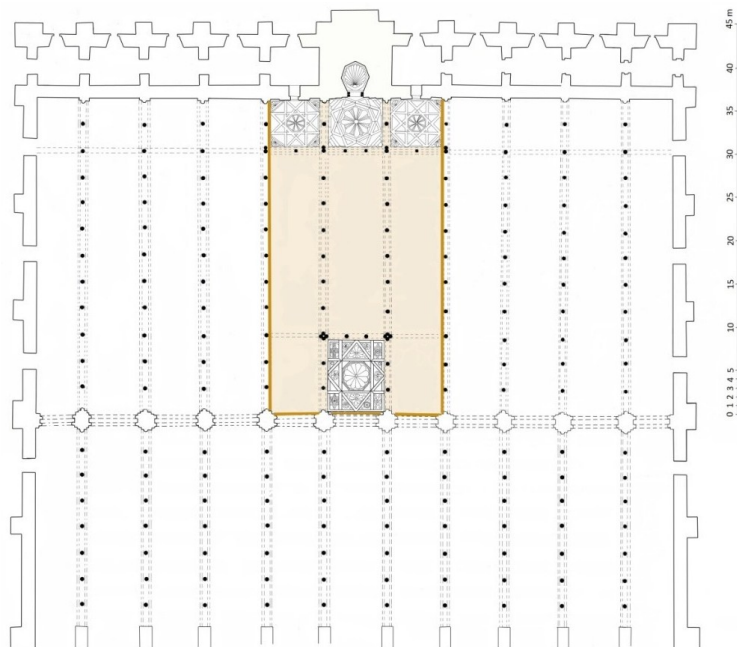


Figure 8. Floor plan of the extensions of the Great Mosque of Cordova during the emirate of ‘Abd al-Raḥman II (822–855) and the Umayyad caliphate of al-Ḥakām II. Detail of the longitudinal *maqṣūra* ([Abad Castro 2009](#), p. 11, Figure 2).

Could the three central naves of the second Kutubiyya of Marrakech be the extensive *maqṣūra* to which the anonymous author of *Ḥulal al-mawṣiyya* was referring to? If this is the case, I find myself once again with the desire of the Almohads, to legitimize their position, thus emulating the Umayyad caliphate of Cordova³. What is more, according to Dolores Villalba of *Kitāb al-Istibṣār*, the construction of the second Kutubiyya responds, as in the Cordovan case, to the expansion of the first mosque, but without breaking down the *qibla* wall:

[...] Caliph al-Imama [ʿAbd al-Muʿmin] built a great mosque there [the Kutubiyya], then he enlarged it equally or greater [than it was before] from his Qibla because it was small, and built its great minaret, as none have been known in Islam and it was finished by his son, the caliph Abū Yaʿqūb which Allāh is pleased with (Villalba Sola 2015, p. 133, note 96).

There is even evidence of how, after completing the work of Gibraltar towards the end of 1160, the engineer from Málaga al-Ḥaṣṣāy Iʿyīš returned to Marrakech (Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salā 1969, p. 23), possibly to be in charge of the construction of the *maqṣūra* of the Second Kutubiyya, to which works were carried out between 1158 and 1163. Additionally, I must mention that the first mosque was built shortly after the Almohads entered the old Almoravid capital, that was, in March 1147, when the Unitarians had not yet consolidated their position in the *Ġarb al-Andalus*, so I think the *maqṣūra* of al-Ḥaṣṣāy Iʿyīš to which the author of *Ḥulal al-mawṣiyya* is referring to, had to be designed for the second Kutubiyya, thus imitating the expansion of al-Ḥakam II in the Great Mosque of Cordova.

All this interest in the past of al-Andalus is supported when ʿAbd al-Muʿmīn orders to move, in 1162, the Almohad capital of Andalusia from Seville to Cordova. This allows us to corroborate the attention shown by the caliph not only to recover the prominence the city of Cordova achieved during the Umayyad period, but also to emulate this magnificent period and legitimize the Almohad Caliphate (Buresi 2010, pp. 7–29). Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salā says:

They received the supreme order [to the sayyides] to settle down in Cordova [...] to be the seat of government in al-Andalus, as the Banu Umayya were entitled to, since it occupies the center of al-Andalus, and where the functions of the government officials should be fixed on, so that they would be within the reach of those who came from their region (Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salā 1969, p. 48).

2.3. The Andalusian Legacy in the Political, Artistic and Religious Landscape

The immediate death of Caliph ʿAbd al-Muʿmīn in 1163 resulted in his son and successor, Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf (1163–1184), returning to Seville the rank of capital of al-Andalus. This does not mean that this taste for the Andalusian cultural legacy disappeared, but rather, that it was going to increase more over the years, as I will have occasion to argue next. A tradition that will be extended not only to the artistic field, but also to the political and religious.

As far as the political panorama is concerned, it will be at this time that the Almohads manage to incorporate the Levant kingdom of Ibn Mardaniš into their domain, specifically in the year 1172. The peaceful delivery of *Šarq al-Andalus* by the Mardaniši family and their adherence to the Almohad dogma (*tawḥīd*), led to the latter being granted a privileged position in the court, specifically in the Almohad state and military apparatus, as is the case of Hilāl and his brother Gānim, sons of Emir Ibn Mardaniš (Ibn Ṣāḥib al-Salā 1969, pp. 225–26; Ibn al-Aṭīr 1898, p. 598; Ibn ʿIdārī 1963, p. 447; Al-Nuwayrī 1917, vol. II, pp. 231–32).

The importance that this family had for the Almohads led to the creation of links between the caliph Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf and one of the daughters of Emir Ibn Mardaniš, as is known from the written documentation (Ibn ʿIdārī 1953–1954, vol. I, p. 22; Ibn al-Aṭīr 1898, p. 598; Ibn AbīZarʿ [1918] 1964, vol. II, p. 419; Al-Nuwayrī 1917, vol. II, p. 231). This circumstance contributed to achieving peace

³ I would like to thank Professor Concepción Abad Castro for all the observations and comments made in this regard.

and tranquility among the Muslims of the Andalusian territory, in spite of the confrontations they had with the Christians. But in addition, there is evidence that his son and successor Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr (1184–1199) also married another of the daughters of Ibn Mardaniš, Safīa, from whose union the caliph Abū-l-'Ulā al-Ma'mūn (1227–1232) was born (Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākūṣī 1955, p. 202; Ibn AbīZar' [1918] 1964, vol. II, p. 483) (Figure 9). All this is a further indication that allows us to understand the role that al-Andalus had during the years of Almohad domination, but in what way did these unions extend beyond the merely political?

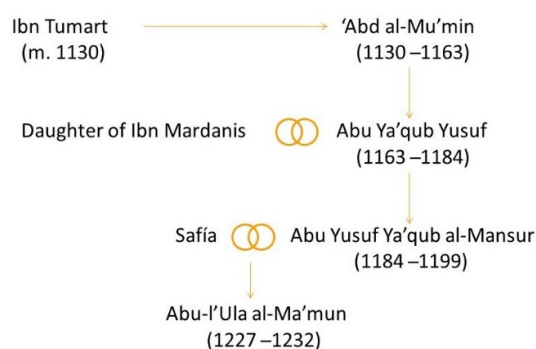


Figure 9. Marriages between the Almohad and Mardaniši dynasties. Drawing made by author.

Regarding the artistic field, the repertoire of elements and constructive solutions that the Almohads assimilated and adopted in their constructions—such as the use of *muqarnas*, *lambrequines*, pointed horseshoe arches or *sebka* cloths, must be added to those models of Caliphate tradition, finding an exchange between both shores of the Strait. I refer to the use of the horseshoe arch, as can be seen in the old minaret of the Almohade mosque in Seville -together with *lambrequines* and cusped arches—or in the entrance to the southern hall of the aforementioned Patio del Yeso. This arch is framed by a fine framing in which spandrels can be seen a decoration that simulates the traditional Almohad leaves arch. This type of arch is preserved in several examples in the same portico of the Sevillian fortress, inside the *mihrab* of the old mosque of Almería—current church of San Juan Evangelista—or in one of the arches recovered from the former Islamic settlement of *Madīna Siyāsa* (Cieza, Murcia), among others (Figure 10a,b).

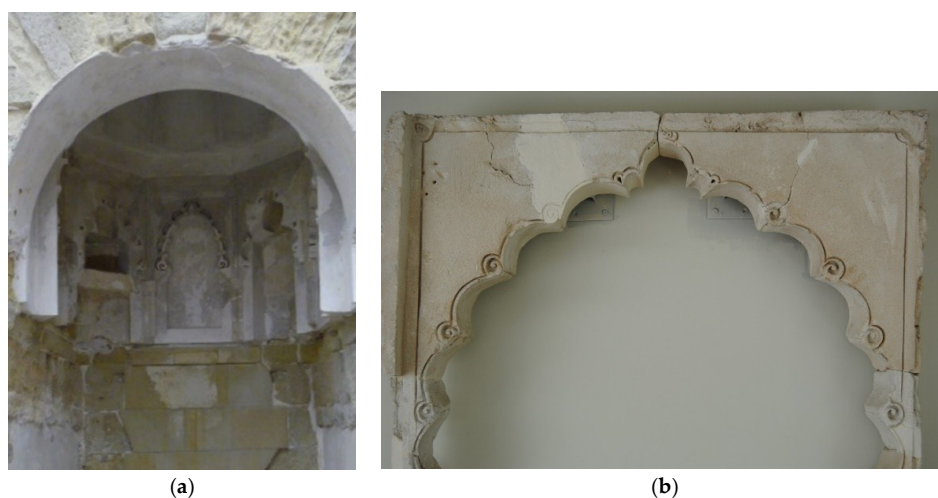


Figure 10. Interior of the *mihrab* of the old Aljama mosque of Almería (a). Photo took by author. Arch of Almohade leaves of the house no. 4 (b) belonging to the former Islamic settlement of *Madīna Siyāsa* (Cieza, Murcia). Photo took by author.

But also, as an element of the Caliphate tradition, it is worth highlighting the intersecting ribbed vault. This type of constructive solution can be found in the Great Mosque of Cordova, specifically in the Chapel of Villaviciosa and in the section that precedes the *mihrab* (Figure 11a), the door of the *ṣabaṭ* and the *bayt al-māl*. A system that survives in the Almoravid period, as evidenced in the *Qubbat al-Barudiyyin* of Marrakech or in the section that precedes the *mihrab* of the mosque of Tremecén (Algeria). Even during the years of Almohad domination, this type of vault is used in the upper chamber of the minaret of the Kutubiyya mosque, which model is similar to the one that rises in the Toro-Buiza house, in the Reales Alcázares de Sevilla (Almagro Gorbea 2011, pp. 45–53) (Figure 11b), or in the Torre del Homenaje del Castillo de Villena (Ferre de Merlo 2000, pp. 303–7).



Figure 11. Intersecting ribbed vault that precedes the door of the *ṣabaṭ* in The Great Mosque of Cordova (a). Photo taken by author. Intersecting ribbed vault belonging to the Toro-Buiza house, Reales Alcázares de Sevilla (b). Photo taken by author.

Similarly, the arrangement of the *jardines de crucero* brings to mind the gardens of *Madīnat al-Zahrā'*, among other examples such as in the Taifa palace of Onda (Castellón), in the Almoravid palace of 'Alī b. Yūsuf—on which the first Kutubiyya (Marrakech) was built—and on the Castillejo de Monteagudo or *Qaṣr b. Sa'd* (Murcia), built during the emirate of Ibn Mardaniš. In the Almohad period the use of the *jardines de crucero* became widespread, as can be seen in some examples of the Royal Alcazar of Seville. This is the case of the courtyard of the former Casa de Contratación (Figure 12).

This *patio de crucero* is built on top of another one whose configuration is unknown, although according to the latest research it could be possible that it had the same disposition (Almagro Gorbea 2007, pp. 190–93). The present patio responds to a later transformation. In my opinion, and following Valor Piechotta (2008, pp. 94–95), it belongs to a second Almohad moment. It has four sidewalks formed by rectangular sheets of water that join a central one through a number of small bridges and four causeways for vegetation. The typical Almohad leaves arches to which I have previously referred, can be seen in the northern portico, between brick pillars and supported by thin columns. At the bottom of the portico it is possible that a triple arcade of clear Caliphate tradition was opened as an access to the north hall.

At this point, it seems evident that the Almohades showed a certain taste and inclination for the Andalusian artistic tradition. But I intend to go further. This reality is not only reflected in the assimilation of the forms, but also in the reclaiming of pieces from some Umayyad monuments in al-Andalus that were in ruins and were even taken to cities like Marrakech for the purpose of using in its palaces and mosques (Rosser-Owen 2014, pp. 152–98). Many of these pieces were marble columns and capitals from, for instance, *Madīnat al-Zahrā'*. This is confirmed in the minaret of the old Almohad mosque in Seville, in the aforementioned courtyard of the Casa de Contratación of the Reales Alcázares of this same city, and even in the *mihrab* of the Kutubiyya mosque itself.



Figure 12. View of the courtyard of the former Casa de Contratación (Reales Alcázares de Sevilla). Photo took by author.

We are witnessing then a scenario in which the two great capitals of the Almohad empire were provided with these reclaimed pieces. But with what objective? Possibly, it might have been the idea of legitimizing the caliph ‘Abd al-Mu‘mīn government, who moved the supposed Koran (*Qur’ān*) of Utmān of the Great Mosque of Cordova⁴ to the *aljama* of Marrakech in the year 1157 (Dessus Lamare 1938, pp. 551–57; Nieto Cumplido [1998] 2008, p. 247).

Finally, and focusing on the religious panorama, it is significant to point out how the Caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb al-Manṣūr wanted to impose the *Sunni* orthodoxy, characteristic of al-Andalus, against those initial dogmatic principles of the Almohad movement and suppress, at the same time, the name of Ibn Tūmart from the *juṭba*. However, it will not be until the caliphate of his son Abū-l-‘Ulā al-Ma‘mūn—fruit of his union with Safīa, daughter of Ibn Mardaniš—when this initiative will be carried out:

Abū-l-‘Ulā al-Ma‘mūn also wrote with his own hand to all his country about suppressing the name of the Mahdī in the ceca and in the *juṭba* -sermon- [. . .] This is the letter quoted: From the servant of God, Idrīs, Amīr al-Mu‘minīn, son of Amīr al-Mu‘minīn, grandson of Amīr al-Mu‘minīn, the talibes and the notables and the people and those who are with you of the believers and of the Muslims [. . .] What we order is the fear of God and asking Him for help and trust Him; know that we have rejected the false and we have published the truth and that there is no more Mahdī than Jesus, son of Mary [. . .] Our Lord al-Manṣūr -God be pleased with him- had thought to declare what he saw more clearly than us and in replacing for the people the truth that we have restored; but his hope was not successful and his death did not give him time [. . .] (Ibn ‘Idārī 1953–1954, vol. I, pp. 319–20)⁵.

In my opinion, it is possible that the contact with al-Andalus justified this measure. However, we wonder if the mardanišī affiliation of Abū-l-‘Ulā al-Ma‘mūn could have contributed to this, just as it

⁴ See (Buresi 2008, pp. 273–80)).

⁵ On this point, see also (Huici Miranda [1956] 2000, vol. II, pp. 476–77).

also had to happen in the artistic field in which taste shown by the Almohads towards the Andalusian was still enhanced more from the submission of the Banū Mardaniš and their adherence to the Almohad dogma in 1172.

3. Conclusions

As a result of the territorial, political and religious expansion that the Almohads undertook in the Islamic West against the relaxation of the strict Almoravids' Islamic orthodoxy, al-Andalus became part of this reformist empire in the middle 12th century. With its incorporation, and given its importance during the Caliphate period, the Andalusian territory became an "instrument" through which this dynasty was able to consolidate and legitimize the emergence of a new caliphate.

This was proven when the Caliph 'Abd al-Mu'mīn ordered the Almohad capital of Andalusia to be moved from Seville to Cordova in 1161, with the aim of converting the former Umayyad capital into the political-administrative centre of al-Andalus. In this sense, it is enough to recall how, in 1157, 'Abd al-Mu'mīn transferred the precious Koran from the Cordovan *aljama* to the Kutubiyya Mosque in Marrakech. This Koran was identified in some Arab sources with the Koran at Utmān and, despite the existing doubts of its attribution, allows us to reaffirm the Almohads' desire to be the continuation of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordova. Even the close ties the Almohads maintained with their main opponents, the Banū Mardaniš, allow to corroborate this reality.

Besides, as we have been able to verify from the written Arabic documentation and from the material testimonies that have come down to us, from the first years of this reformist movement, there was a certain interest in the Andalusian cultural legacy that was increasing with the passage of time. This objective contributed to legitimize the position of this caliphate that emerged in the Islamic West, the Almohad. This can be seen through: the taste that the Unitarians were gradually showing towards the Andalusian art, as happened with the ancient Almoravid *minbar* of the Kutubiyya mosque or with the imitation of various architectural and decorative formulas; the cultural exchange between both shores of the Strait, with the presence, for example, of Andalusian artists in North Africa; and finally, the reclaim of numerous pieces of ancient monuments in ruins, as happened with those coming from *Madināt al-Zahrā'* and which can be seen in Almohad buildings.

This idea of legitimization the Almohad caliphate through Umayyad cultural tradition is reflected in the words of the compiler Ibn 'Idārī al-Marrakūšī (d. after 1313), referred to the time when the caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr traveled to Cordova in the year 1190 "and he stayed at the *alcázar*, which Brother Abū Yahyā had the pleasure of building, and went after that to al-Zahrā' for the purpose of meditating on the monuments of bygone centuries and peoples of the past" (Ibn 'Idārī 1953–1954, vol. I, p. 158).

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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