

Ceramic Mosaics in the Minaret of Sidi El-Haloui Mosque in Tlemcen - An Artistic Study -

**الفسيفساء الخزفية في مئذنة جامع سيدي الحلوي بتلمسان
-دراسة فنية-**

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Date of Receipt: 04/08/2025

Date of Acceptance : 31/10/2025

Abstract :

Ceramic mosaics first adorned the earliest Islamic architecture in the Eastern Islamic world, with their earliest examples appearing in the Dome of the Sakhra Mosque and other Umayyad mosques and palaces. This decorative tradition later extended across the Islamic West (Maghreb) through its various historical phases, reaching its peak by the end of the Almohad dynasty and the beginning of the successor states. These later dynasties left behind numerous architectural landmarks, including those in the city of Tlemcen. Of particular note are the Marinid structures, built during the period of conflict between the Zayyanid and Marinid dynasties. These buildings featured rich artistic decoration, most notably ceramic mosaics, which covered large surfaces and formed magnificent artistic panels, especially within mosque architecture. A prime example is the Mosque of Sidi El-Haloui, located on the outskirts of Tlemcen, where ceramic mosaics adorn key architectural elements such as the commemorative entrance, the minaret's shaft, and its pavilion. The decorative repertoire includes a variety of geometric patterns-used predominantly-alongside botanical motifs and, to a lesser extent, calligraphic designs. The diversity of colors and scales seen in these

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mosaics reflects the ongoing development and continuity of ceramic mosaic production and ornamentation in the Maghreb.

Keywords : Ceramic mosaic ; zellij; geometric decoration; floral decoration; minaret; Sidi El-Haloui Mosque; Tlemcen; Marinid dynasty.

الملخص:

زينت الفسيفساء الخزفية أولى العماائر الإسلامية بالمشرق حيث كانت أولى النماذج بمسجد قبة الصخرة وباقي المساجد والقصور الأموية الأخرى وغيرها، وامتدت لتشمل مباني المغرب الإسلامي عبر فتراتهما المختلفة لتصل إلى ذروتها مع نهاية حكم دولة الموحدين وبداية عهد الدويلات المتوارثة التي خلفت هي بدورها مجموعة من العماائر والمباني نذكر منها عماائر مدينة تلمسان، وبالأخص العماائر المرينية بالمدينة التي تشكلت خلال فترة الصراع الذي كان قائم بين الدولتين الزيانية والمرينية، كما شملت هذه المباني المذكورة زخارف فنية عديدة منها زخرفة الفسيفساء الخزفية أين احتلت فيها مساحات كبيرة وشكلت لوحات فنية رائعة شملت بدرجة خاصة زخرفة المساجد، كجامع سيدي الحلوي بأطراف مدينة تلمسان أين شملت هذه الفسيفساء كل من زخرفة مداخله خاصة مدخلة التذكاري، وكذا بدن وجوسق مؤذنته حيث تنوعت الأشكال الفنية المنفذة فيها بين الهندسية التي استعملت بدرجة كبيرة وأيضا الزخارف والتشكيلات النباتية، بالإضافة إلى الزخرفة الكتابية ولكن بدرجة أقل، كما تعددت ألوانها وأحجامها فشكلت بذلك امتداد لصناعة الفسيفساء الخزفية في بلاد المغرب والزخرفة بها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفسيفساء الخزفية؛ الزليج؛ الزخرفة الهندسية؛ الزخرفة النباتية؛ المؤذنة؛ جامع سيدي الحلوي؛ تلمسان؛ الدولة المرينية.

- Introduction:

Maghrebi arts developed distinctive aesthetic qualities and pioneered numerous artistic forms and styles, making significant contributions to Islamic art history, especially during the medieval period that reached its peak from the era of the Almoravids until the rule of the Zayyanid and Marinid dynasties, enhanced by extensive artistic exchange with Al-Andalus. This cross-cultural dialogue gave rise to the North African-Andalusian Art, representing the top achievement of Maghreb artistic through its sophisticated decoration applied across all available materials. Maghrebian Artists worked with stone, metal, marble, pottery, and ceramics, including mosaics and zellij, which revealed decorative possibilities previously limited by monochromatic materials. Zellij

introduced the crucial element of light through brilliant, lustrous colors that created luminous reflections, particularly when struck by sunlight. This craft distinguished the architecture of Maghreb as a whole, with buildings rarely lacking these elements. It then evolved and reached its peak during the rule of the Marinid and Zayyanid dynasties. We still find remnants of zellij and mosaic work on the monuments of Tlemcen as testimony to that period, defying the ravages of time. Its application was not limited to the Zayyanid architecture in the city alone, but also encompassed its Marinid counterparts, particularly during the period of siege and warfare between the two parties. During this time, the Marinid artist did not leave his love and appreciation for art, becoming known for his mastery of geometric basics through his embodiment of various forms, as well as his skill in blending and combining colors together, cautiously to use these techniques in all Marinid architecture in Tlemcen, as founded in the Mosque of Sidi El-Haloui, which maintain the Marinid traditions whether in terms of construction and design, or even through decoration with ceramic mosaics on entrances and minarets. Thus, how was the ceramic mosaic work in this mosque's minaret? And what were its characteristics?

Methodology of the Study: The nature of this subject necessitates the adoption of multiple methodological approaches. First, the historical method is employed to trace the chronological development of ceramic mosaics across various periods, with particular attention to the Marinid era and the specific historical context of Tlemcen during this time. In parallel, the descriptive method, fundamental to archeological research, is used to conduct a formal and stylistic analysis of the ceramic mosaics at the referenced monument. This includes the documentation and examination of decorative elements, forms, motifs, and color schemes. Finally, the study integrates a comparative analytical method: the analytical component was essential for identifying and deducing the general characteristics of the mosque's mosaics, while comparison was selectively employed to reinforce the analysis—particularly when contrasting the minaret's mosaic decoration with those found on the entrances or in other Marinid architectural contexts.

Previous Studies: This topic has been addressed by a range of historians and researchers. Historical sources provide references to the mosque's foundation, its associated structures, and related narratives. In more recent academic literature, scholars of history, archeology, art history, and architecture have studied the mosque from multiple perspectives-historical, archeological, artistic, and structural. Among the most notable contributors is Professor "Abdelaziz Laradj", whose doctoral dissertation and subsequent publications have focused extensively on Marinid monuments in Tlemcen. His work integrates historical, archeological, artistic, and ornamental analyses. Furthermore, he directed an excavation at one of these Marinid sites in the historic city of Mansoura, during which several fragments of ceramic mosaics and zellij tiles were uncovered and later studied in depth.

Objectives of the Study: This study seeks to highlight an important chapter in the history of Tlemcen: The Marinid period, which witnessed a significant architectural renaissance encompassing religious, civil, and military structures. These constructions were marked by rich decorative programs employing a wide range of ornamental media. Of particular interest are the glazed ceramic and pottery productions, which reached their artistic zenith through the creation of intricate ceramic mosaic and zellij panels. This research aims to document, analyze, and bring greater recognition to this artistic heritage by describing the composition, forms, colors, and spatial distribution of these ceramic decorations.

1. The Definition of Ceremic Mosaics:

1.1 Linguistically:

According to "Ibn Manzur": mosaic refers to colorful arrangements made from beads that are placed in walls, layered together and installed on interior house walls resembling painted decoration. A "mosaicked house" refers to a house decorated with mosaic. (Ibn Manzur, 2014, p. 164)

1.2.Terminologically:

They are small pieces or fragments of ceramics or faience that are glued next to each other to produce a complete decorative form. These mosaics are used in covering walls, mihrabs, and other surfaces (Hassan,

1999, p. 150). In archeological terminology, they are defined as a type of decoration based on creating different artistic forms made by means of small pieces or fragments of different materials in various colors (Rizk, 2000, p. 214). While ceramic mosaics specifically are small pieces of glazed pottery that were arranged alongside other materials such as marble and stones (Hamed, 2023, p. 437).

2. Historical Overview of Islamic Mosaics:

Mosaics were first known during the Greek era and were made from stone and marble, depicting images that narrated the religious and social life of Roman society. The use of these mosaics then transferred from Roman architecture to Byzantine architecture, becoming particularly known in the Gothic style, which employed them in the form of small pieces with cubic molds. The Byzantines further developed them in terms of their compositional elements and manufacturing techniques, creating them from colored glass rather than stone and marble, while occasionally incorporating stone and shell pieces, adorning the walls of their buildings and creating images that told stories from their holy book, with perhaps their greatest achievement being the mosaics of Hagia Sophia church (Rizk, 2000, p. 214).

This art form reached Muslims early, as during the Umayyad period they decorated the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem with mosaics, crafting them from small cubes of colored and uncolored glass, both transparent and opaque, along with cubes of white and pink stone and small sheets of mother-of-pearl fixed in a completely horizontal position, except for the gilded and silvered cubes which were placed at a slight angle to reflect light and enhance their beauty. The subjects were numerous and varied, and these mosaics also adorned the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, where a magnificent panel known as the Barada River panel was discovered, featuring natural scenes of trees, forests, and palaces along its banks. Similar works can be found in other Umayyad buildings such as “Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik’s” palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar, where a remarkable panel was uncovered in the floor tiling of its bathhouse, as well as in the mihrab and dome of the Great Mosque of Córdoba. During the Abbasid era, small pieces were found in Samarra, and the mosaics of this period did not differ from those of the Umayyad

era, continuing to be influenced by Hellenistic traditions. Iraq had craftsmen from Romans lands, from which raw materials were also imported, and their designs focused on floral ornaments and natural landscapes, deliberately avoiding the depiction of living beings in accordance with Islamic religious teachings that prohibited such representations, though some examples of figurative art existed in Umayyad palaces in the Syrian (Rizk, 2000, pp. 214-215).

As for ceramic mosaics, their initial use dates back to the Samanid period in Iran, where they were employed on a limited scale in certain parts of buildings. They developed gradually throughout the Islamic periods, particularly in Iran and Central Asia, due to craftsmen's desire to achieve more refined forms and a greater variety of colors. This technique evolved and became widespread especially during the late Seljuk period, when the Seljuks extensively used it in Anatolia in Asia Minor, introducing many innovative methods that reached their peak development in the 8th century AH/14th century CE. During this time, craftsmen succeeded in miniaturizing the component pieces of mosaics to execute finer details with brilliant colors, after initially being limited to light and dark blue, black, and white (Hamed, 2023, pp. 437-438). The finest examples were found in the mosques and tekkes of Konya during the 6th-7th centuries AH/12th-13th centuries CE, including the Mosque of Alaeddin Keyqubad, whose mosaic work represents some of the period's most extraordinary achievements, similarly impressive is the Sircalı school, which features mosaics that preserve the signatures of their creators, including Uthman ibn Sa'id al-Asadi among others. The Mosque's Mihrab of Sahip Ata further demonstrates this mastery through its complex interlacing and overlapping patterns, collectively exemplifying the sophisticated level of production attained during this era (Rizk, 2000, p. 215)

In the Islamic Maghreb and Al-Andalus, ceramic mosaics were known by several terms including zellij, qirati in Tlemcen, ceramic tiles, and architectural ceramics. Scholarly opinion varies on whether these represent identical concepts or distinct techniques, with some viewing zellij as a subset of ceramic mosaics characterized by smaller component pieces that, when assembled, create complete ceramic mosaic

compositions. This technique can be understood as decorative ceramic material used for wall coverings and floor applications throughout various buildings, gaining widespread adoption across the Islamic Maghreb and Al-Andalus. It constitutes a form of tessellated or ceramic mosaic work comparable to Eastern qashani, earning the same designation due to its similarity to Iranian qashani mosaics (Dendane, 2013-2014, p. 17). Georges Marçais characterizes it as polychromatic decorated ceramic tile work, noting that monochromatic or unornamented examples are exceptional. The term zellij originates from the Spanish "azulejo," potentially derived from "azul" meaning blue, and specifically refers to large-format squares measuring 0.20 meters per side with colored glazed surfaces (Marçais & Marçais, 2011, pp. 98-99).

Regarding the origins of zellij, opinions remain divided. European researchers argue for Andalusian origins, particularly tracing it to Granada. However, when examining the earliest Andalusian examples, specifically those found in the Alhambra Palace from the eras of Sultan Yusuf I and Sultan Muhammad V, these appear contemporary with similar work already present in Fez and Tlemcen, rather than predating them. Furthermore, even earlier precedents exist in Almohad architectural applications, such as the ceramic tile work found in the Kutubiyya Mosque minaret and Marrakech's Kasbah. The chronology extends back further still to Hammadid architecture at Qal'at Bani Hammad, where archeological excavations have revealed extensive use of ceramic tiles for flooring, wall decoration, and window elements. This archeological evidence suggests that zellij tradition originated in the Maghreb and subsequently spread to Al-Andalus, rather than the contrary. (Oulmi, 2012, pp. 97-98), and that does not negate the evolution in the zellij industry in Andalusia and the inclusion of its magnificent decorations in its buildings that was first found in the mihrab of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, and later developed in Granada during the era of the Nasrids, where it was used to cover walls and surfaces alongside plaster. Its main component was the eight-pointed star shapes that appeared for the first time in the royal chamber in Granada, then developed in the Portal Tower and Generalife and others. Zellij was also found on the floor of the Tower of the Captive, the floor of the Comares

Palace, and in the halls of the Alhambra Palace, such as the Hall of the Ambassadors and the Hall of the Abencerrajes, as well as the palaces Of Seville, like the Alcázar palace. The zellij included regular geometric and interlocking floral decorations, which might be intertwined with the calligraphic decorations in Kufic and Naskhi scripts. As for the colors, they are the same colors found in Maghrebi zellij, such as white, black, green and copper. (Maldonado, 2010, pp. 122-307)

Among the historical sources that mentioned the term "zellij," An anonymous Zayyanid-era author owned the book entitled 'Flower of the Garden in the Kingdom of the Bani Ziyan' describes a magnificent built school using the beauty of zellij by stating: "... the carpet of its floor is drawn with zellij, and its gardens are decorated with plaster proction, and the zellij of its flowers is among the most wonderful decorations" (Unknown, 2013, p. 336). This passage reveals zellij's use in floor decoration and confirms its primarily floral ornaments during this period. We also find reference in the Marinid court historian Abi Zar's book "Anis al-Mutrib bi-Rawd al-Qirtas" When describing luxurious building practices, he notes: "They refined their constructions with zellij, marble, and decorative carvings." (Al-Fassi, 1972, p. 395) This reveals zellij's status as an expensive luxury material used by the wealthy elite to decorate their buildings. Al-Maqqarri presents a different terminological approach in "Nafh al-Tib," employing "zellijji" rather than "zellij." Quoting Ibn Said: "In Murcia, Almería, and Málaga, they produce extraordinary and wondrous glass and glazed gilded pottery. In al-Andalus, they make a type of tessellated work known in the East as mosaic, and a type used to cover the halls of their houses known as zelijji, which resembles tessellated work. It has remarkable colors and they use it in place of the colored marble that the people of the East use in decorating their homes..." This can be referred to major carfts' centers in al-Andalus and emphasizes zellij's role as a colorful alternative to Eastern marble decoration, highlighting both its technical sophistication and aesthetic appeal.

2. Sidi El-Haloui Mosque:

Following the collapse of the Almohad state, the Islamic Maghreb was divided into three successor states: the Hafsids, Zayyanid, and

Marinid. These states were characterized by persistent military conflicts, particularly the struggle between the Zayyanids and Marinids, driven by each party's ambition to control the region, extend influence, and monopolize trade routes. During this period of intense rivalry, Tlemcen endured multiple sieges and battles, including a protracted eight-year blockade that ultimately resulted in Marinid occupation and settlement of the city leading to the construction of military camps and specialized buildings to accommodate their rulers and house their armies. Among these structures was the complex known as the complex of Sidi El-Haloui, of which only its mosque remains.

2.2.Location:

The Mosque of Sidi El-Haloui is located in the city of Tlemcen outside the Zayyanid walls from the direction of Bab el-Zawiya (Labter, 2007, p. 61) specifically in the northeastern part of the city in the village of "Sidi Said". It leads directly below the hill interspersed with trees to an arched entrance preceded by the courtyard where the mosque is located directly facing the ablution facility and in front of it a water source. From its northwestern side we find connected residential houses, while from the western side it connects with the hillside.

2.3. Historical Overview of the Mosque:

Sultan "Abu Inan Faris" wanted to get close to the inhabitants of the city of Tlemcen and win their approval, following his father Sultan Abu al-Hasan's example by constructing another complex similar to the Sidi Boumediene complex. That is the complex of Sidi El-Haloui, which is no less significant than the first and bears a similar design. It too was built to honor another of the city's saints, known as "Sidi el-Haloui", the Sufi saint affiliated with the Shudhi Sufi order, regarded among the great gnostic scholars dedicated to God. He served as a judge in Seville during the last period of the Almohad dynasty, then fled the judiciary and sought refuge in Tlemcen, disguising himself as a mad man.

The tomb of the pious worshipper after whom the establishment was named is located 100 meters above sea level on the southeastern side of the city walls. It consists of a small square building covered with a tile roof, beneath which lies the prayer hall that the Marinids constructed in honor of this pious man and the village that bears his name gathers

around it. Historical texts also mentioned the existence of a zawiya and a school connected to this mosque, though no trace of them remains today, nor do any sources provide information about their construction date or by whose order they were built (Marçais & Marçais, 2011, p. 401). The Following is the foundation inscription of the mosque as reported by Brosselard: "All Praise is due to God alone. Our Sovereign Abu Inan Faris [...] our Sovereign Abu al-Hasan `Ali ibn Sultan Abu [...] Uthman ibn our lord abu yusuf yaqub ibn abd al haqq may God strengthen his victory ordered the construction of this blessed mosque in the year seven hundred and fifty-four" (Brosselard, 1858, pp. 322-323). This inscription clarifies the name of the founder 'Sultan Abu Inan Faris', and some honorific phrases for the sultans of Beni Marin, in addition to mentioning the establishment's founding year as 754 AH.

2.4.The External and internal description of the mosque:

2.4.1. The External Description: (Image 1)

This mosque takes the shape of a semi-regular rectangle consisting of four facades, two of which are visible: the main facade and the facade extending on the eastern side, and two side facades, one of which is covered by the hillside. The first thing that can be noticed in this mosque is its prominent commemorative entrance, acceded by 6 doorsteps. Such entrances became common during this era, typically displaying the patron's name, foundation date, and dedicatory inscriptions. Compared to the Mosque of Sidi Boumediene, the latter is larger in size and more decorated and complex, while the entrance of the Sidi El-Haloui Mosque appears smaller in size and simpler. Above its double-leaf door and its horseshoe arch, there is an inscription bearing the foundation inscription in foliated transliteration executed on ceramic mosaic pieces in black on a white background within a frame of braids from white and green zellij pieces. This calligraphic frame and the entrance arch are surrounded by geometric bands of ceramic mosaics extending to the awning through three levels. These bands consist of eight-pointed Stellate motifs and geometric shapes in different colors. Directly above this inscription we find a rectangular brick frame consisting of 4-Stellate motifs centered by an eight-pointed star (Khatam) and polygons (fawraka) covered inside with black zellij. Stellate motifs are considered among the important

geometric decorations in ancient arts and Islamic art as a whole and particularly in Marinid art during the 7th century AH/13th century CE, and they developed greatly in the 8th century AH/14th century CE when their foundations and rules were established. They consist in their composition of a central star with multiple surrounding sides and vary with the multiplicity of their points (Laradj, 2007, p. 171). This entrance ends with a wooden awning standing on a Kufic calligraphic band, supported by a group of 12 corbels on which also rests a row of multi foil arches. The soffit of these corbels is decorated with floral motifs, consisting of a square centered by a shell surrounded by palm leaf fans, then followed by a row of pine cones below which are double palm fans. The ceiling of this awning is covered with green tiles. We also notice that the spandrels of this entrance arch are completely devoid of any decoration and covered in white, most likely traces of restoration that affected them and that their original mosaics were damaged and lost some of their parts. "George Marçais" mentions that the soffit of the arch was decorated with ceramics of which nothing remains. He also suggests that this entrance was undoubtedly covered like the mosque of "Sidi Boumediene" with interlaced arch arcades and corners spandrels decorated with geometric and floral arabesque patterns (Marçais & Marçais, 2011, p. 402).

Along the main entrance facade, specifically in the southwestern corner, we find the minaret which reaches a height of 25.17m. Like other minarets of the Maghreb, this minaret consists of two parts: a shaft reaching 20.35m in length with a base length of 4.67m (Bourouiba, 1973, p. 182), decorated with decorative panels of brick and ceramic mosaics on its four sides and ending with 20 crenellated merlons at a rate of 4 on each side, and a pavilion also covered with ceramics topped by a small dome then a finial consisting of three spheres topped by a crescent. Two subsidiary entrances (Image 2) on the eastern and western walls provide additional access to the prayer hall. These portals are considerably plainer than the main entrance, where above their wooden door a horseshoe arch surrounded by a multi foil frame inlaid with small zellij pieces of black, brown, and green colors, and surrounding the entrance

opening is a frame of brick and braided geometric patterns topped by green tile roofing.

2.4.2. The Internal Description:

Entering through the main portal leads directly into the nearly square courtyard (Image 3) (10.60m × 10.10m) (Marçais & Marçais, 2011, p. 404), featuring a central octagonal fountain. Diamond-patterned zellij covers the courtyard floor, while three-sided galleries frame the space beneath horseshoe arches. Geometric and floral plasterwork adorns the upper registers. Three double wooden doors with horseshoe arches and octagonal perforations face the entrance, providing access to the rectangular prayer hall measuring 17.5×13.20m (Bourouiba, 1973, p. 161). It consists of five aisles, the widest being the central aisle opposite the mihrab (Image 4) and four naves perpendicular to the mihrab wall interspersed with columns and supports carried on horseshoe arches forming rows of arcades. The first row consists of 4 supports, the middle two in the shape of a + and the two sides are split corners, while the remaining two rows consist of 8 marble columns, 4 on each side bearing carved decorations and inscriptions.

The mihrab occupies the center of the qibla wall and features a pentagonal design crowned internally by a Muqarnas dome. Above its opening sits a semicircular arch supported by two marble columns, while the arch frame and spandrels remain undecorated except for clerestory panels above. To its left stands the wooden Minbar, and the prayer hall is covered by a gabled wooden ceiling. The minaret is accessed through a door located in one of the courtyard's lateral sections. Its interior consists of a central core around which spirals an ascending staircase of 88 steps, averaging six steps per turn, topped by a barrel-vaulted ceiling. Lighting openings punctuate the structure, and the shaft terminates with crenellated parapets. The pavilion reaches a height of 4.40 meters and is accessed through a small iron door followed by three steps. (Figure 1)

3. Descriptive Analytical Study of Ceramic Mosaics in the Mosque Minaret:

The minaret, as we mentioned earlier, came decorated with panels of ceramic mosaics and brick, where we find in its shaft three types of panels on each of the northern and southern sides and two panels on the

west and east sides overlooking the courtyard. The first panel (Image 5) consists of a double arch in the form of pendants, whose spandrels are covered with ceramic mosaics consisting of eight-pointed Stellate motifs emanating from the center with an eight-pointed star in either white or black color. The colors of these stellate motifs alternate between black, brown, and green on a white background, and the meeting points of their vertices form small white stars. This mosaic is framed by green zellij strips extending along the arch spandrels, with black lobes appearing above it. Beyond the rectangular frame formed by this arch and its spandrels lies another brick frame, followed by a third frame surrounding the entire panel and covered with mosaics, also framed by green zellij lines. Within this frame are three geometric bands of mosaics executed on a white background. The two lateral lines consist of alternating shapes between small eight-pointed stars (Khatam) and polygons in vertical form in black (saft), while the third line enclosed between them also consists of eight-pointed stars and polygonal shapes but with color alternation in black, brown, and green. However, this frame differs in the corresponding panel on the southern side, where it also consists of three bands. The central band features intersecting crosses in black, brown, and green with eight-pointed stars at their centers on a white background, while the lateral bands display vertical black hexagonal polygons. The panel is always bordered by a green ceramic strip, and this panel is repeated only on the northern and southern sides. Directly above it sits the second panel (Image 6), composed of a double multi foil arch whose lobes and the spaces between the two arches are decorated with linear patterns of green zellij. The same thing we find regarding its soffit in the form of circles and teardrops. Regarding the spandrels of this arch, they came like their predecessor covered with ceramic mosaics consisting of interlocking eight-pointed stars whose center is a small eight-pointed star in brown or green on a white background. The colors of these stars alternate between brown, green, and black, while their intersecting vertices form additional small black eight-pointed stars. This mosaic is framed by green zellij pieces. Following the arch frame comes a second brick frame, then a third frame similar to that of the lower panel, composed of eight-pointed stars and small polygons made from ceramic

mosaics alternating as follows: a star shape followed by a horizontal polygon, creating three bands—two bands of black shapes with the central band between them incorporating the following colors: black, brown, and green. Following this, we find the third panel (Image 7) (Figure 1) on the minaret's shaft, which takes a rectangular form larger than the previous panels. It adopts a lattice pattern with floral vases framed with green zellij. The tower ends in a ceramic mosaic molding (Image 8) (Figure2) composed of 24-pointed stellate motifs in black (Khatam + Louise + Saft) radiating from a central 24-pointed green star, with four motifs on each side. This molding incorporates other geometric forms including rhombuses, triangles, small stars, and half stellate motifs in various colors black, green, and brown on a white background, bordered by a green ceramic strip. Surrounding the molding are two curved frames also made of mosaics. The upper frame consists of interlocking geometric rhombuses in brown and black on the characteristic white background, while the lower frame features interlacing refracted lines in black and brown, both outlined in green zellij. The top is crowned by a group of 20 crenellated merlons (Image 1) at a rate of 4 on each side and 4 enclosed in the corners, taking triangular forms with ceramic-lined interiors. Each merlon centers a nine-pointed star with individual points in black on a white background, outlined in green, while the merlon edges are covered in black zellij.

Regarding the minaret's pavilion, mosaics cover all four sides (Image 2) composed of geometric decorations featuring 12-pointed stellate motifs and small stars in black, light blue, and brown colors on a white background. Within the facades interior lies a recessed rectangular brick area containing a net of small rhombuses of the (bracket and stair) type, covered with mosaics featuring black plant buds on a white background, surrounded by green zellij border lines (Figure 3). Below this lattice sits a large rhombus of the same type bearing plant decoration consisting of interlacing black tracery composed of palmettes against a white background. However, this decoration does not repeat on all facades of the pavilion. This recessed frame is surrounded by green border lines with a central band of refracted lines in white and black.

Through examining the decoration of this minaret, regarding both its shaft and pavilion, we observe the abundant use of ceramic mosaics where the Marinid artist demonstrated mastery in employing ceramic materials and their ornamentation, integrating them with brick to create beautiful artistic compositions. This approach aimed to draw the viewer's attention through the manipulation of color elements and exploitation of light to impart a lustrous quality to the various forms. The decorations executed on the mosaic pieces display considerable variety, with geometric shapes and patterns predominating over floral motifs, which appear to a lesser degree. These include stellate motifs, squares, rectangles, rhombuses, and triangles bearing different colors—white, black, green, and brown, along with light blue to a lesser extent, representing the fundamental colors present in mosaic ceramics. The application of these mosaics throughout the minaret served multiple purposes across various locations. They appear within different geometric frames including braids and bands, sometimes within rhombuses and stellate motifs, as well as in arch soffits and spandrels through the use of stellate motifs and diverse geometric forms. They also function as inlay for arch lobes and as dividing lines between them, in the decoration of lattice lozenge rosettes, and occupy geometric and floral molding while covering the shaft's ends pavilion facades. Finally, they were used to decorate the crenellated merlons. We also find some elements repeated at the level of this minaret such as different stellar motifs of eight and twelve and twenty-four points, and eight-pointed stars and others that came as a base for arch spandrels, and in stellar motifs and within geometric frames. Additionally, we find different types of borders, such as those encircling the shaft arches composed of eight-pointed stars and polygons, the border crowning the shaft's terminal frieze consisting of interlocking rhombuses, another above it featuring interlacing refracted lines, and finally a frame within the pavilion's interior composed of angular geometric forms, not forgetting the ceramic border lines that define all shapes (Image 10). This is regarding the mosaic examples that remain extant in the mosque, noting that some have been lost while others have undergone restoration. We cannot overlook that the artist who applied these decorations possessed sufficient

expertise and familiarity with geometric sciences and the application of measurements required to produce these forms and generate new shapes from the intersections of their sides and vertices, in addition to avoiding leaving voids and working to cover them all, which is considered one of the characteristics of Islamic art through the dislike of leaving vacant spaces and blank areas.

So the art was aimed at presenting aspects of the universe in a more transparent and deeply significant way, and the Arabs understood that art is humanity added to nature (Bouhalala, 2023, pp. 116-117), and the image of the nature is characterized by beauty in everything, and all what exist are wonderful aesthetic manifestations (Bahjat, 2009, p. 93), and beauty means the sense, joy and delight that a person perceives in every corner of this universe, and whoever contemplates the splendor of nature, and the ability and the greatness of the Creator in depicting it, realizes beauty. Beauty in the Arabic abstract art is the beauty of monotheism, just as beauty can be in the blending and differentiation of the several units bond by fundamental links. This is most evident in visuals such as geometric shapes that we find in Arab-Islamic decoration in mosques and palaces (Bouhalala, 2023, pp. 115-125), and even in the zellij and mosaic pieces that we have previously studied (Jawabreh, 2023-2024, p. 2). Ibn Sina for instance looks at beauty on the basis that it is the unity as a whole through its parts. Thus, art has expressed beauty in all its fields and manifestations, and man as God's Caliph on Earth, is required to open his senses to contemplate beauty, hence the correlation between beauty and art.

Moreover, the divine self in Islamic art is transcendent, absolute and infinite, and cannot expressed in any art form or in any sort. We do not find its expression in arabesque, calligraphy or ornamentation, which we also observed in the mosaic pieces that we have. Also, the image in the ornamentation does not correspond to the natural development of the familiar plants, as the leaves, branches (Bouhalala, 2023, pp. 125-126) and boughs are drawn in a similar and repetitive way, which cannot happen in the living nature

And what distinguishes the symbolism in Islamic decorations is the use of colors, since color exerts its expressive authority on man because

color emits visual tones to arouse human feelings, either with joy or sadness, and the beauty of color suggests life (Balout, 2023, p. 186) and helps to clarify and communicate the idea, so each color carries its own special spiritual meaning. For example, the color white symbolizes purity and brings tranquility to hearts, and in contrast, we find the color black as evidence of strength and mystery and sometimes of annihilation in a reference to the end of life. As for the color yellow, it indicates joy and happiness, and the color blue represents the calmness and peace. The color green also creates a sense of harmony and balance. When a person sees these colors, a sense of calm and spiritual purity takes over him. So, we find that drawings and decorations on the zellij pieces, when mixed with calm colors, invite the mind to contemplate (Mona Galal, 2021, p. 146). In all cases, the colors of the zellij found in the city of Tlemcen were seen as a symbol of the colors of Paradise. White might refer to the inhabitants of the Paradise as mentioned in the Holy Quran, green as an indication of the plants of Paradise, and blue for the water and rivers within it. We also find significations in the drawings on the zellij itself. The star shape, for example, was associated with ancient civilizations with pagan beliefs and witchcraft. The floral motifs in which flowers, branches and stems appear symbolizes eternity found in Paradise. Those colors have religious, spiritual and Sufi impressions. As for the geometric shapes, we find the eight-pointed star used frequently in this zellij. In its design, it is composed of two squares and according to the esoteric interpretation, the first square represents the four forces of nature, while the second square expresses the four cardinal directions. With the intersection of the two squares, the powers of God are above the forces of nature and are spread throughout all of the existence (Balout, 2023, p. 181). In the Islamic art, and specifically in the Sufi discourse, we find a spiritual reading of the image in art where the price turns into a key or an entrance to perceive higher truths. Arab Islamic art has adopted the depiction of things from a different spiritual perspective, a perspective in which images of nature and the universe are transformed into transcendent infinite symbols, because it represents the great values (Bouhalala, 2023, p. 128). In the end, it is through artistic expression that a person's feeling, taste and values appear. The German

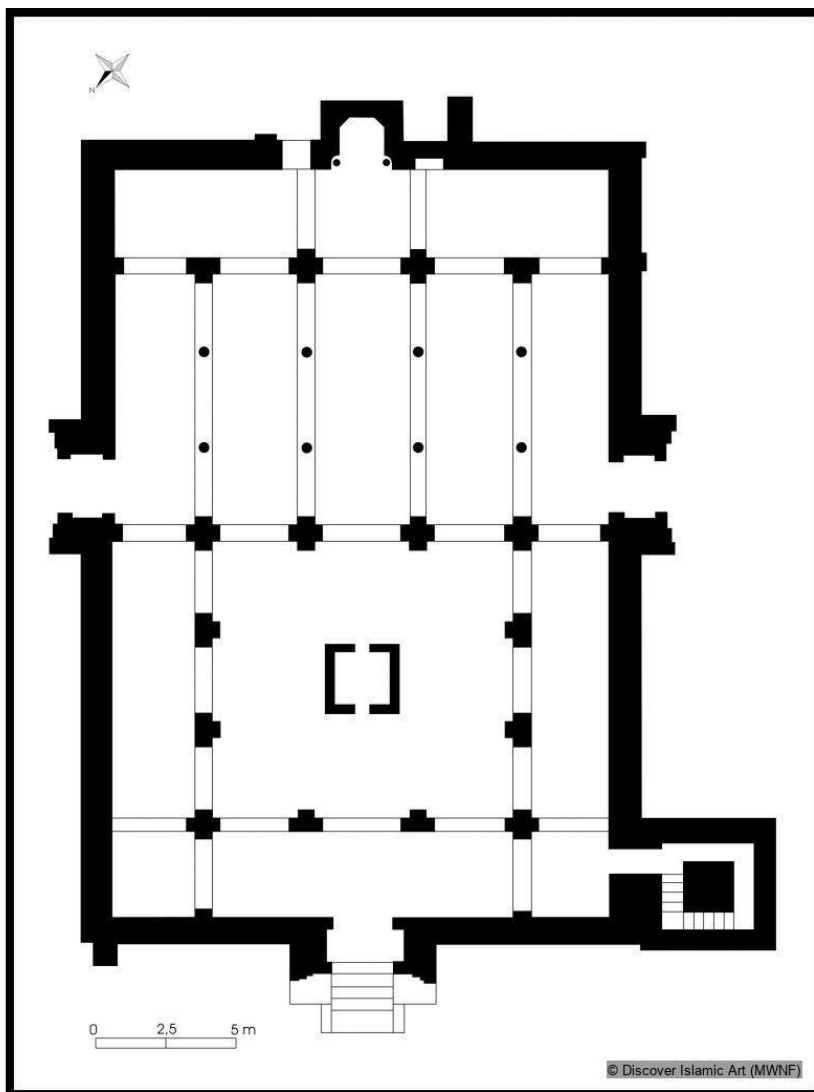
philosopher” Kant” sees that the aesthetic experience goes back to the feeling of pleasure which is based on the free play between imagination and mind, the artistic image is composed of the relationship of lines and colors that moves our conscience and inner emotion (Matar, 1989, pp. 8-38).

- Conclusion:

Ceramic mosaics or as known in the Maghreb as zellij had crucial contribution in decorating the facades of Islamic Maghreb buildings. Their functions and uses varied due to the ease of adapting and shaping them and the fluidity of their material and the vitality of their colors, making them the preferred choice for Maghrebi artists. They replaced previous materials like plaster that couldn't match zellij's aesthetic quality. Despite debates over its origins, zellij spread rapidly throughout the Maghreb, surpassing its Eastern counterpart and reaching its peak during the Zayyanid-Marinid period through skilled craftsmanship and proportional knowledge. It became integral to the region's shared artistic heritage, covering exterior surfaces including entrances, doors, and minarets while creating magnificent decorated panels with brick. Its flexibility allowed diverse decorative applications, though it specialized in geometric patterns due to easier execution compared to floral designs, with occasional calligraphic elements featuring architectural foundation inscriptions. Regarding the use of ceramic mosaics in the mosque of Sidi El-Haloui, they did not deviate from previous patterns in Marinid/Zayyanid buildings in Tlemcen, closely resembling those at Sidi Boumediene Mosque with identical forms, panels, and colors recurring in the minaret and pavilion. Perhaps the most distinctive elements of these decorations are the small and large stellate motifs set against backgrounds of various geometric forms, surrounded by frames from all sides, along with the lattice present in minarets of the bracket and stair type featuring rosettes inlaid with lustrous zellij lobes.

Figures:

Figure 1: Floor Plan of Sidi El-Haloui Mosque



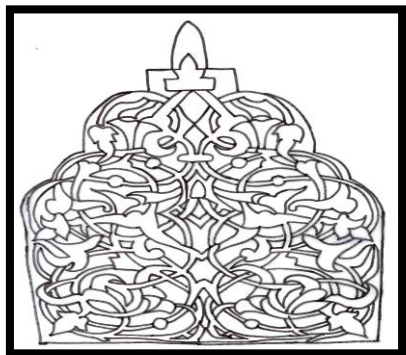


Figure 2: Decorative perforation of plant motifs

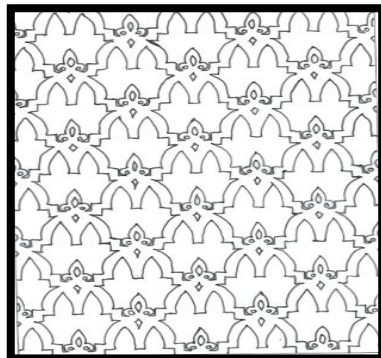


Figure 3: Decorative perforation of geometric diamond network

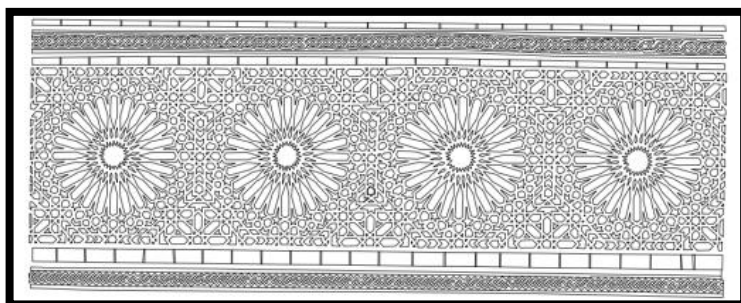


Figure 4: Decorative perforation of the geometric frieze



Figure 5: 3D layout of floral and geometric elements



**Image 3: The main entrance of the mosque.
of the mosque**



Image 4 : The Secondary entrance



Image 5 : the courtyard of the mosque.

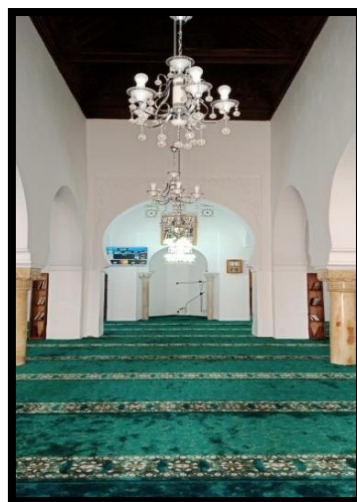


**Image 6 : mosque's prayer
Hall.**



Image 7 : The decoration of the first panel of the minaret



Image 8 : The decoration of the Second panel



Image 9 : The decoration of geometric rhombuses.



Image 10 : The decoration of geometric frieze



Image 11 : The decoration of serrated balconies



Image 12 : The decoration of the minaret pavillon.

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