



## *The Foundational Inscriptions of Mosques in the City of Constantine during the Ottoman Period*

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### Abstract

The Arabic calligraphy is a masterful Islamic decorative art, renowned for its role in transcribing the Quranic verses. Calligraphers strive to excel and develop various styles, such as Kufic, Naskh, and Thuluth, which are prominently featured in religious architecture, particularly mosques. These calligraphic decorations, executed in materials like gypsum, marble, and stone, adorn the walls, mihrabs, pulpits, doors, and windows, with diverse content ranging from Quranic verses to poetic inscriptions. The foundational inscriptions in Ottoman mosques hold great importance for researchers and calligraphers, as they provide tangible evidence for dating and offer opportunities for artistic and analytical study. This study examines the foundational inscriptions in the Ottoman mosques of Constantine, employing a descriptive and analytical approach to highlight their significance and encourage further in-depth research and preservation efforts, as they represent a valuable cultural heritage of Arab-Islamic civilization.

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## 1. *Introduction*

Mosques, in our noble religion, are considered the most sacred places to Allah. Muslims have therefore devoted attention to their construction, embellishment, and ornamentation, despite the prohibition in Islamic law and the emphasis on their construction and maintenance. Moreover, mosques have become the foundation of urban planning in Islamic cities, often located at the center of the city, surrounded by other facilities and establishments. This is due to their pivotal role in solidifying the Islamic faith, instilling values, principles, and noble ethics in the Muslim community. Mosques have become distinguished by their architectural styles, reflecting the historical period in which they were built, such as Abbasid-style mosques, Andalusian-style mosques, and Ottoman-style mosques. Kings and princes competed in their construction, seeking to leave a testament to the era they governed, with their names inscribed in golden letters on the pages of Islamic history.

One of the methods used to document the history of these mosques is through foundational or commemorative inscriptions, which are often written and displayed at the entrances of these mosques. These inscriptions contain information about the history of the mosque's establishment, its founder, and other relevant details. Consequently, these foundational inscriptions are considered among the most important archaeological and historical sources utilized by researchers to determine the dates of construction of these religious structures.

They serve as a reliable source of information, as they are difficult to forge, being mostly engraved on marble plaques in a manner that is challenging to alter. In this paper, we shed light on the foundational inscriptions of Ottoman mosques in Algeria, using the mosques of the city of Constantine as a model. During that era, Constantine served as the capital of the Eastern Beylik, and historical sources and references indicate that the city was home to numerous mosques. However, the French colonizers demolished many of them and converted others into administrative headquarters and churches. Only a few remain today, notably the Sidi Al-Kettani Mosque, the Souk Al-Ghezal Mosque, and the Green Mosque. These three mosques still stand to this day, with their foundational inscriptions bearing witness to their history and founders. Of particular interest is the fact that these inscriptions are written in the Arabic language, using various scripts of different clarity and precision, despite the fact that the founders were of Turkish origin. Additionally, these inscriptions often include Quranic verses, religious texts, and poetic verses, embellished with diverse floral and geometric patterns.

Based on the aforementioned, we can address the main question that revolves around the characteristics of these foundational inscriptions, both in terms of their form, calligraphic style, and their content, including the subjects they contain.

### *1.1 Study Objectives*

The objective of such studies is to highlight these foundational inscriptions

and encourage their study and utilization as a national intellectual heritage and cultural legacy. Additionally, these inscriptions serve as reliable sources of information for recording and dating purposes. Furthermore, they provide living evidence of the prevalent Arabic calligraphic styles during that era, especially considering that the inscriptions we have examined in this paper still maintain their general form and content, engraved in various Arabic scripts and containing diverse texts, including Quranic verses, religious texts, poetic verses, and historical dates.

### 1.2 Study Methodology

In this study, we adopted a historical methodology to examine the historical aspect of the studied structures. Additionally, we employed a descriptive and analytical approach.

## 2. Evolution of Arabic Calligraphy

Various accounts suggest that the origin of Arabic calligraphy can be traced back to Anbar and Hira in northern and southern Yemen. Inscriptions and writings indicate that Arabic calligraphy evolved from Nabatean script through Anbar and then Hira. The earliest form of Arabic calligraphy emerged in the fourth and fifth centuries in Syria before spreading through trade to the north and then to the Hijaz. Studies also indicate its presence in Hira in the second half of the sixth century. (Yassin Al-Jubouri, 1962, p. B)

The visual form of Arabic calligraphy in its early historical beginnings, prior to Islam, is not precisely known, except for what some Arabic linguistic and historical sources have provided. These sources

suggest that the Arabs in the pre-Islamic era referred to their script as "Al-Jazm," which denotes a dry and extended form. After the functional role of Arabic calligraphy flourished in the early days of Islam, a relative transformation occurred in the form of Al-Jazm script, transitioning from extension and elongation to fluidity. This shift resulted from the speed and agility of writing, and this form of script became known as "Al-Mashq". The artistic style of Arabic calligraphy developed based on principles of quality, aesthetic appeal, functionality, and performance since the first century of the Islamic era, forming two main systems that encompass various types of Arabic scripts. These systems are the "Mawzona" system (dry, extended, embellished, Kufic, etc.) and the "Mansuba" system (fluid, curved, absolute, Naskh, etc.) (Hanash, 2008, pp. 32-33) The Kufic script (dry) was the most common and widely used in various written purposes during the early centuries. However, its usage gradually decreased from the eleventh century and was gradually replaced by the Naskh script (fluid). (Demande, 1953, pp. 76-77).

Following these developments, Arabic calligraphy witnessed further innovations, such as diacritical marks and vowel signs. Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali (d. 67 AH) introduced diacritical points to the Quranic text to address reading errors. He used a mark, a single or double dot placed above, below, or between the letters to indicate the vowel sounds (fathah, kasrah, dammah). Later, Nasr ibnAsim and YahyaibnYa'mur added diacritical points to the letters. Khalil ibn Ahmad al-

Farahidi (d. 170 AH) introduced the various well-known vowel signs, including fathah, dammah, kasrah, sukun, shaddah, and tanween, which are still in use today. (Fattouni, 2002, pp. 14-18)

### **3. Arabic Calligraphy**

#### **3.1 Definition**

The term "khatt" (Arabic calligraphy) is a singular word that encompasses various script styles and the act of writing with a pen, i.e., inscription. (Al-Jawhari, 2009, p. 328) Ibn Manzur defines "khatt al-qalam" as the act of writing with a pen, while "khatt al-shay" refers to the act of inscribing or writing with any tool. "Takhattut" refers to the process of planning, outlining, and refining, while "khatt" represents the act of writing and similar actions. (Ibn Manzur, 1998, p. 1198).

#### **3.2 Conceptually**

Calligraphy is a visual representation of the spoken word, conveying the meanings and emotions that lie within. Calligraphy serves various needs and provides insight into knowledge and understanding. It is a noble craft with significant benefits. Arabic calligraphy, in particular, is known for its precision, quality, and meticulousness. (Ibn Khaldun, 2008, pp. 450-451), Both calligraphy and pronunciation share the function of expression, where speech conveys meanings, and calligraphy presents elegant forms and images, (Al-Kateb, 2003, p. 316) Calligraphy is a spiritual discipline and an art form, even though it manifests through a physical instrument. Arabic calligraphy consists of twenty-

eight letters, each capable of embodying precision and meticulousness that other scripts cannot achieve. It allows for speed and fluidity that surpasses other forms of writing. Its letters can be merged, displayed, elevated, or broken. (Ibn Nadim, 1997, pp. 15-16).

Therefore, Arabic calligraphy has attained a prestigious position in the Islamic world. In addition to its functional roles, it is considered one of the most important decorative elements found in artifacts and structures. This is due to the beauty, flexibility, and shaping possibilities inherent in its letters. Arabic calligraphy has been used to adorn pottery, glass, metal, wood, marble, and other materials. The texts often take the form of horizontal bands or fit within circular areas without compromising the rules of writing. They typically include the name of the artist, the place of production, the establishment or production date, Quranic verses, religious phrases, or poetic texts. Each letter carries its own aesthetic meaning. For example, the letter "alif" "أ" represents an elegant upright stature, "seen" "س" symbolizes beautiful teeth, "ra" "ر" signifies the crescent, and "meem" "م" represents a beautiful mouth, and so on (Ahmed, 2001), Muslim artists went beyond adorning buildings and artifacts with script bands; they excelled in writing intertwined phrases in the form of squares, rectangles, animals, or birds. (Zaki, In Islamic arts, 1938, p. 41).

### **4. The colors used in Arabic calligraphy**

The artist or Arabic calligrapher employs a combination of materials to create ink

with various colors and properties for artistic drawings and lettering. They blend soot and charcoal with Arabic gum, which is extracted from the Acacia tree. Iron sulfates are mixed with walnut gall to produce waterproof ink. The calligrapher also utilizes metallic pigments to achieve a wide range of colors. Red vermilion is obtained from safflower, blue from lapis lazuli, and shades of yellow, brown, and red from iron oxide. Malachite is used for green, while chalk yields white. Organic pigments are mixed with Arabic gum, taking advantage of its adhesive qualities. In addition to these materials, the Arabic calligrapher incorporates gold into the ornamentation in the form of powdered gold mixed with a special animal component. This technique is employed for gilding inscriptions (Wilson, 1999, pp. 8-9).

### 5. Types of Arabic Calligraphy

The various types of Arabic calligraphy exceed one hundred, with the most famous among them being Kufic, Naskh, Thuluth, Ijazah, Persian, Diwani, Ruq'ah, Tughra, Maghrebi, and Haruf al-Taj. Among these, we mention:

#### 5.1 Kufic Calligraphy

In its early stages, Kufic calligraphy was simple, devoid of complexity, embellishment, or interconnection between letters. Its materiality was purely written. However, it was skillful, serene, and dignified, adorned with decorative elements. Artists recognized the potential for decorative expression in its horizontal and vertical lines and took advantage of it, displaying their mastery and creativity.

They subjected some of its letters to compositional structures, transforming them from mere characters into vibrant artistic compositions. (Adly, 2011, pp. 149-150) From Kufic calligraphy, evolved illuminated and floral Kufic, where branches laden with leaves and flowers extend from its edges. Additionally, there is the victorious Kufic with interconnected letters, as well as the geometrically square Kufic with upright angles. (Al-Mousawi, 2011, pp. 176-177).

#### 5.2 Naskh Calligraphy

Naskh calligraphy has been used alongside Kufic since its inception and is also known as rounded script. Its name derives from the fact that early calligraphers used it to transcribe religious texts, manuscripts, and books. Naskh is characterized by its smooth and rounded appearance, with clear, well-proportioned, and precise letterforms. The interconnectedness of its letters creates regular spacing and rhythmic patterns. It employs a moderate level of ornamentation, ensuring legibility. (Al-Husseini Q. J., 2015, p. 108).

#### 5.3 Thuluth Calligraphy

Thuluth calligraphy emerged in the fourth century AH (tenth century CE), rooted in Naskh script. It is named Thuluth because it is written with a pen whose thickness is one-third of its width. Originally, Arab scribes used a script called "Tomar," which was very wide and consisted of 18 strands of horsehair. They gradually reduced it to two-thirds and then to one-third, thus giving rise to Thuluth. Thuluth calligraphy is one of the most challenging

Arabic scripts, with numerous and diverse letter forms characterized by spontaneity and flexibility. It allows for writing a single phrase in various different forms. Prominent variations of Thuluth include Moshabak, Wasat, Mufarraq, Mahbouk, Jali, Mukhtazal, Mutanadhir, and Thuluthi decorative script. (Arafat, 2010, pp. 54-55).

#### **5.4 Diwani Calligraphy**

Diwani calligraphy is a Turkish script derived from ancient Persian script. It is named Diwani because it originated from the chancellery (diwan) of the Ottoman sultan. Initially, it was exclusively used for official documents and records and was limited to calligraphers in the sultan's palace. This script began to evolve during the reign of Sultan Selim I and reached its peak maturity in the 19th century, where its most beautiful examples emerged. Diwani calligraphy is somewhat characterized by complexity, with intertwining, overlapping, and interlocking letters and words. (Hassanein, 2015, pp. 55-58).

#### **5.5 Tughra Calligraphy**

Tughra is one of the finest decorative forms of Arabic calligraphy, representing the unique signature of the Ottoman sultans. Turkish artists excelled in employing this script to serve art in a way that astonishes and impresses, surpassing the boundaries of classical calligraphy. They created rare works that were like eloquent paintings on silent walls. The text of the Tughra is written in Diwani or Thuluth script, intertwining and harmonizing to form a flowing composition with a central emphasis. The

Tughra includes various decorative elements such as lotus flowers, carnations, palm fronds, branches, and plant leaves. (Hassanein, 2015, pp. 71-75).

### **6. Definition of Epigraphic Inscriptions**

Epigraphic inscriptions refer to writings that are engraved or written on buildings and structures for the purpose of documenting their history, recording the name of the owner, builder, or inscriber, or inscribing Quranic verses and devotional phrases for blessing. These inscriptions serve as a primary source for dating the buildings and attributing them to specific regions or historical periods, (Zaki, Arts of Islam, 1948, p. 234) Additionally, these inscriptions were used as decorative elements in their own right, adopting various forms and patterns that enhanced the visual beauty of these structures (Rizk, 2000, p. 250).

Foundational inscriptions, on the other hand, chronicle the construction of various archaeological buildings and any subsequent changes such as restoration, demolition, renovation, or alteration (Al-Haddad, 2002, p. 17).

### **7. Importance of Epigraphic Inscriptions**

- Studying and analyzing foundational inscriptions helps acquire scientific knowledge that contributes to accurately dating and documenting the maintenance, restoration, renovation, and expansion processes that archaeological buildings have undergone throughout their history. They assist in correcting erroneous historical information.

- Epigraphic inscriptions represent the most essential authentic sources for studying artifacts and history alike. They are the primary references in Islamic archaeological and historical studies, as they reflect architectural, artistic, and applied features specific to a particular era or style.
- Epigraphic inscriptions contribute to studies related to biographies and biographical dictionaries. They contain names of important individuals and significant information such as their titles, occupations, educational levels, birth or death dates, or even the dates of construction of various architectural structures.
- The study of epigraphic inscriptions allows for an understanding of the prevalent script styles in each period. Calligraphers of each era adhered to specific rules governing the engraving and writing of letters. Epigraphic inscriptions serve as a constant record that highlights the variation in writing styles, scripts used, and calligraphic embellishments in each era and its developmental stages.
- Through epigraphic inscriptions, it is possible to identify the prevalent decorative motifs of each era, especially the plant-based or geometric decorations accompanying these inscriptions. Furthermore, they provide insights into the techniques used for carving or engraving.
- Epigraphic inscriptions enable the study of craft guilds and artisans. They serve as documents that bear the names of various craftsmen, artisans, calligraphers, and carpenters. This is

particularly evident with the practice of including the craftsman's or artist's name along with their signature on various products, including panels bearing different epigraphic inscriptions. They also facilitate the distinction between local and imported crafts.

- Epigraphic inscriptions contribute to studies on the political situations of each region. They provide information about the names and titles of different sultans and princes, as well as their cultural roles. The abundance of architectural structures dating back to a specific sultan's era indicates their interest in the social and cultural aspects of their rule (Yahyawi, 2015, pp. 41-45).
- Epigraphic inscriptions engraved on marble, gypsum, wood, or any other material are the most important means of dating architectural structures and writing history. These inscriptions have often helped unveil various attempts to alter or misattribute a specific historical event or monument. One famous example is the Dome of the Rock, which was initially claimed to be associated with the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun, whereas the foundational inscription dates back to the Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan.

### **8. The most important raw materials used for foundational inscriptions**

The primary raw materials used for foundational inscriptions include:

#### **8.1 Marble**

Marble is one of the most important materials used for foundational inscriptions. It is highly valued for its

durability, flexibility in shaping according to the required size, smooth texture, natural polish, beautiful colors, and ease of cleaning (Shehata, 2008, p. 47).

### **8.2 Stone**

Sandstone is commonly used for engraving inscriptions due to its softness and resistance to breakage or cracking during the carving process. It is also reasonably priced, making it a preferred raw material for foundational inscriptions and other purposes. (Mazouz, features of development in Kufic writings on inscriptions in Algeria, 2003, p. 229).

### **8.3 Gypsum**

Gypsum is widely used as a medium for inscriptions due to its numerous advantages. It is easy to carve, has a high whiteness suitable for religious architecture, can be easily colored and painted, and allows for the addition of various plant-based and geometric decorations to enhance the content of the foundational inscriptions. Gypsum can be prepared as a paste and easily shaped according to the artist's preference, either by direct carving on walls after applying the paste or by carving on gypsum panels and then affixing them to the walls (Sharaf, 2002, pp. 100-102).

### **8.4 Wood**

Wood is an important material used as a substrate for foundational inscriptions. It is known for its precise craftsmanship and the intricate designs that adorn inscriptions, including plant-based and geometric motifs. Wood is shaped into rectangular or elongated panels on which the foundational inscriptions are engraved. Muslim artists utilized the nature of wood and its ease of carving to create complex calligraphic designs intertwined with

vegetal motifs (Al-Husseini F. H., 2007, pp. 395-397).

## **9. The Composition of Foundational Inscriptions**

Foundational inscriptions in religious structures encompass a variety of formulas and expressions that can generally be classified as follows:

### **9.1 Religious Invocation**

This category includes frequently used formulas, notably "Bismillah" (In the name of Allah), "La ilahaila Allah" (There is no god but Allah), "A'udhu billahi mina ash-shaytanar-rajim" (I seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan), "Alhamdulillah" (Praise be to Allah), and "Salla Allah 'ala Nabiiyina Muhammad" (May Allah's peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad) (Bourouiba, Archaeological writings in Algerian mosques, 1979, pp. 23-24).

### **9.2 Descriptive Statements of Completed Works**

Directly following the religious invocation, these statements express the nature of the completed works, whether they pertain to construction, renovation, completion, or establishment. Prominent terms used in this context include "bana" (built), "shayada" (erected), "ansha'a" (established), "aqama" (erected), "asasa" (founded), "sana'a" (made), "ahdatha" (restored), "amala" (performed), "atqana" (excellently executed), "tala'a" (rose), "atama" (completed), "jaddada" (renewed), and others. Typically, these terms are accompanied by descriptors indicating the type of structure that was built, renewed, or repaired, such as "al-masjid al-mubarak" (the blessed mosque),

"al-jami' al-a'zam" (the grand mosque), "bayt Allah" (the House of Allah), "al-maqamal-karim" (the noble mausoleum), "al-qubba al-mubarakah" (the blessed dome), "al-minbar" (the pulpit), and so on. (Bourouiba, Archaeological writings in Algerian mosques, 1979, pp. 29-33).

### ***9.3 The Name of the Individual Who Ordered the Construction or Renovation***

This refers to the person who bears the title of founder or renovator of the structure. Various titles are used, such as "as-sultan" (the sultan), "al-amir" (the prince), "al-basha" (the pasha), "ad-day" (the dey), "al-bey" (the bey), "al-qaid" (the leader), "khadim al-masjid" (the servant of the mosque). Typically, the name is preceded by phrases like "by the hand of," "by the order of," or "organized by." Additionally, several expressions of praise accompany these titles, such as "Mawlana Mu'ayyid ad-Din" (Our master, the supporter of the faith), "Amir al-Mu'minin al-Mansur bi-Fadlillah" (Commander of the faithful, victorious by the grace of Allah), "Amir al-Muslimin" (Commander of the Muslims), "al-Homam" (the valiant), "al-Mu'azzam" (the honorable), "al-Arshad" (the guided), "Sahib al-Fadl" (the possessor of virtue), and other similar expressions. (Bourouiba, Archaeological writings in Algerian mosques, 1979, pp. 33-38).

### ***9.4 Supplications***

Following the religious invocation, the name, and the descriptive statements, supplications and invocations are offered for the builder, renovator, prince, or ruler.

These supplications are expressed in various forms, among the most common being "Ayadah Allah waa'azza nasrahu" (May Allah support and aid him), "Taqabbal Allah minhu" (May Allah accept from him), "Kataba Allah lahanfa' al-hasanat waarfa' ad-darajat" (Allah has ordained for him the most beneficial of good deeds and elevated ranks), "Adam Allah tawfiqahu" (May Allah perpetuate his success), "Ja'al al-jannah manzilahu" (May Allah make Paradise his abode), "Ghafara Allah dhunubahu" (May Allah forgive his sins), and so on. (Bourouiba, Archaeological writings in Algerian mosques, 1979, pp. 39-42).

### ***9.5 Date of Completion***

The date constitutes one of the most significant elements emphasized by calligraphers, alongside the name of the founder. It is expressed through various formats, including numerals, letters, a combination of letters and numerals, or words followed by a numbered date or a date indicated in letters. The date is based on the Hijri calendar and can specify the year alone, the month and year, or the day, month, and year. (Bourouiba, Archaeological writings in Algerian mosques, 1979, pp. 43-48).

### ***9.6 Quranic Verses and Poems***

Quranic verses and poetic verses are variable components in foundational inscriptions. Some calligraphers incorporate Quranic verses, while others may omit them. If included, these verses are often aligned with the nature and role of the structure, with a particular focus on verses related to worship, piety, and the sanctity of the place. Poetic verses, on the other hand, can be composed specifically for the inscription or drawn from existing poetic works. These verses often extol the

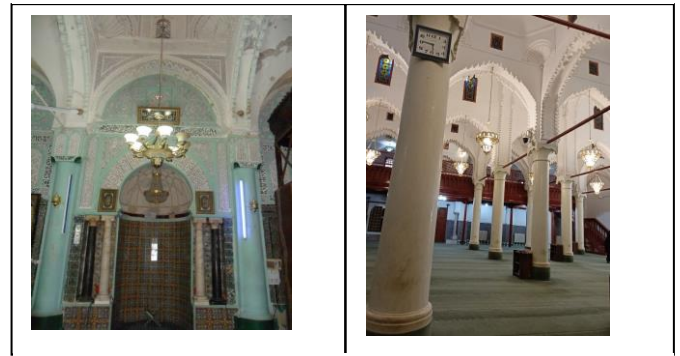
virtues of the structure, express gratitude to the founder, or evoke a sense of awe and reverence. (Mazouz & Dryas, Mosque of Arabic archaeological writings in Algeria, 2000, p. 16).

### **10. The foundational inscriptions in the mosques of the city of Constantine, dating back to the Ottoman period**

#### **10.1 Mosque Souq Al Ghezal**

Mosque Souq Al Ghezal is located on Dedouch eMurad Street (formerly known as Rue de France) near the boundaries of the Palace of Ahmad bey. It overlooks Shushan Abd al-Baqi Square from the north. The mosque is commonly referred to as "Jami' Souq Al-Ghezal" due to its proximity to the market where wool intended for textile production was sold, also known as "al-Ghazal" (Bourouiba, Constantine: Art and Culture Series, 1978, p. 98), It is also known as Jami' al-Bey, named after its founder, Bey Hussein Bey Qalian, who ruled the Eastern Province during the period from 1713 to 1736 CE, (Ibn Al-Antari, 2009, p. 54) According to the foundation inscription, the mosque was established in 1143 AH, which corresponds to the year 1730 CE. (Cherbonneau, Inscription Arabe de la province de Constantine, 1854-1855).

**Figure No. 01: Aspects of Mosque Souq Al-Ghezal**



**Source: the researcher.**

- ***The foundational inscription of Mosque Souq Al Ghezal (1143 AH/1730 CE)***

The foundational inscription of Mosque Souq Al Ghezal is preserved in the Museum of Traditional Arts and Cultural Expressions, located within Ahmed bey Palace, It is affixed to the northern wall of the Bey's kiosk, The preservation of this inscription within the museum may be attributed to the colonial period, particularly considering that Mosque Souq Al Ghezal was converted into a cathedral (church) during that era.

The inscription is engraved in Arabic language using the Thuluth script on a marble plaque measuring 125 cm in length and 62 cm in width. The inscription was executed using the technique of deep carving and filled with lead. It consists of a religious invocation at the beginning, followed by a Quranic verse (An-Nur 36), and six lines of poetic verses. The content of the inscription is carved on facing horizontal cartridges with knotted ends, some measuring 67 cm in length and others measuring 57 cm. The width of these cartridges is 7.5 cm. The inscriptions

are embellished with vegetal motifs, including twisted plant branches, flowers, and serrated leaves.

• **Text of the inscription**

The first line is a religious invocation, The second line is a Quranic verse from Surah An-Nur, verse 36, which encourages remembrance, prayer, and the construction of houses of worship.

The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth lines consist of poetic verses that include various provisions. Among them is the description of the accomplished work, which is the construction of the mosque. These verses also contain expressions of praise for the mosque, its founder, and prayers. The inscription concludes with the mention of the name of the builder and the date of construction.

**Line 1:** In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. May Allah bless our master Muhammad.

"بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم صلى الله على سيدنا محمد."

**Line 2:** In houses which Allah has permitted to be raised and His name to be mentioned therein, exalting Him within them in the mornings and evenings.

"في بُيُوتِ أَدْنَى اللَّهِ أَنْ تُرْفَعَ وَيُذْكَرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ فِيهَا بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ"

**Line 3:** Are they the chambers of praises or the palaces of worship Or the gardens of paradise for the diligent Or a mosque gathering all virtues, spreading its beauty, the most honored to be followed.

"غرف المحامد أم قصور تعبد أم جنة الرضوان للمجتهد\*\*\*أم جامع جمع المحاسن فانثنت في جيد منشييه أعز مقلد"

**Line 4:** A house where the pillar of faith stands under the shade of obedience to the One God, like the sun that never sets, while this remains in righteousness eternally.

"بيت يقام بها عماد الدين في ظل امتثال الإله الأوحد\*\*\*كالشمس إلا أن تلك إلى الأفول وهذه في البر ذات تخذ"

**Line 5:** It has expanded as much as the hands of "Hussein" have extended, laughing at those who prostrate themselves, hoping that through it, the secret will be revealed to the sinners when they come to it tomorrow.

"وسعت بما وسع يدا "حسين" ضاحكة بما للراكين السجد\*\*\*يرجو بها من يسبل السر المذال على العصاة إذا أتوه في غد"

**Line 6:** O best one to be hoped for, for every hopeful one, granting him happiness in both abodes. and If you inquire about his history, it leads to the era of Hussein bin Muhammad in the year 1142.

"يا خير من يرجى لكل مؤمل نوله في الدارين أسعد مقصد\*\*\*ولئن تسل تاريخه فأتي به باي الزمان حسين بن محمد سنة 1142."

**Figure No. 02: The Foundational Marble Inscription of Mosque Souq Al-Ghezal Affixed to One of the Walls of Ahmed Bay Palace**



Source: the researcher.

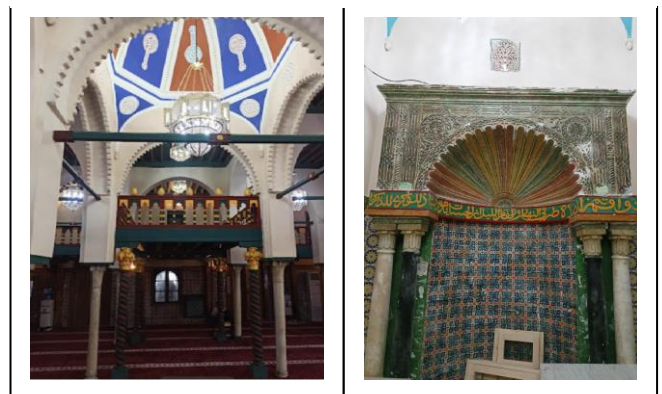
### 10.2 The Green Mosque

The Green Mosque, known as Al-Jami' Al-Akhḍar in Arabic, is located in the old city, It is situated between the streets of Ruwag Sa'id and Sidi Lakhḍar, near the neighborhoods of Al-Jazarin and Raḥbat Al-Ṣuf. Regarding its name, some believe it is named Sidi Lakhḍar in reference to the righteous saint Sidi Lakhḍar, who held great importance to the mosque and was buried behind it, (Ben Bella, 2008, p. 78) However, we differ in opinion and lean towards the view that it is called the Green Mosque due to its green color. This opinion is reinforced by the preserved Quranic manuscript in the National Library, which is associated with this mosque. The endowment text of the manuscript states that it was dedicated by Ḥasan Pasha for his Green Mosque (The Qur'an on display at the Green Mosque of Constantine, 1750).

The mosque's establishment dates back to the late month of Sha'ban in the year 1156

AH/1743 CE, as indicated by two commemorative inscriptions, (Bourouiba, Archaeological writings in Algerian mosques, 1979, p. 159)Its founder was Pasha Ḥasan, also known as Buḥank, who was referred to as A'jshi. He ruled over the Eastern Beylik from 1736 to 1754 CE, (Ibn Al-Attar, 2011, p. 129)It is affiliated with and follows the Hanafi school of thought. (Abu Al-Qasim, 1998, p. 84).

**Figure No. 03: Aspects of the Green Mosque.**



Source: the researcher.

#### • The First Foundational Inscription of the Green Mosque (1156 AH/1743 CE)

This inscription is located on the exterior façade of the prayer hall above the window that is situated between the two entrances at a height of approximately 2.25 meters. It is executed on a gypsum panel measuring 120 cm in length and 65 cm in width. The inscription is written in a Moroccan-style Naskh script using raised engraving technique within an irregular hexagonal shape. Its smaller sides are curved, and the two sharp angles terminate with a dotted circle in the center of which is a hexagonal star. From the star, vegetal ornamentation branches out, represented by a vegetal stem with three lobes surrounded by small floral branches. The

text of this inscription is written in five framed lines of varying lengths. Notably, the inscription does not include religious invocations or Quranic verses.

#### • Text of the inscription

The first and second lines contain statements indicating the nature of the accomplished works and the type of the structure that was built, namely the construction of a mosque. Its purpose is mentioned as prayer, remembrance, and education. The third and fourth lines include expressions of praise and supplication for the founder, mentioning his name and attributes. As for the fifth line, it includes the date of establishment in the Hijri calendar.

**Line 1:** The order to establish this grand mosque.

"أمر بتأسيس هذا المسجد العظيم"

**Line 2:** And the construction of its building for prayer, praise, and education.

"وتشييد بنائه للصلاة والتسبيح والتعليم"

**Line 3:** Our noble and wise ruler, our master,

"ذو القدر العلي والتدبير الكامل وحسن الرأي أميرنا"

**Line 4:** And our lord, Hasan Pasha, may Allah bless his days, and the completion of its construction.

"وسيدنا حسن باي أدام الله أيامه وكان تمام بنائه"

**Line 5:** In the late month of Sha'ban, in the year one thousand one hundred and fifty-six

"أواخر شهر شعبان سنة ستة وخمسون ومائة وألف"

**Figure N.04: The Foundational Gypsum Panel of the Green Mosque Mounted on the Exterior Facade of the Prayer Hall**



**Source:** the researcher.

with a central rose. Instead of a drawn rose, the central star is inscribed with the date of establishment. Each rectangle contains a portion of the poem.

• **Text of the inscription**

The first and second lines contain statements indicating the type of work accomplished, its nature, praise, and mentioning the name and attributes of the founder. The third line includes a prayer for the founder of the mosque. The third and fourth lines, separated by the central star, contain the date of establishment in numerical form. The fourth line mentions the year of the mosque's construction in the Hijri calendar along with praise and tribute to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

**Line 1:** We were built beautifully and splendidly, with the permission of the builder, for the sake of Allah's countenance.

تم بناؤنا البديع الباهيعن إذن بانيه لوجه الله

**Line 2:** By the order of Hasan, son of Husayn, it became a mosque for us, as you see.

به حسن بك بن حسين أمرا فصار مسجدا لنا كما ترى

**Line 3:** May Allah make his efforts rewarded and his recompense abundant.

جعل الله سعيه مشكورا وجزائه جزاء موفورا

**Line 4:** In the year one thousand one hundred and fifty-six from the migration of the one to whom belongs honor and nobility.

سنة ستة وخمسون ومائة ألف من هجرة من له العز والشرف.

**Figure N. 05: The Foundational Marble Panel of the Green Mosque Mounted on the Exterior Facade of the Prayer Hall.**

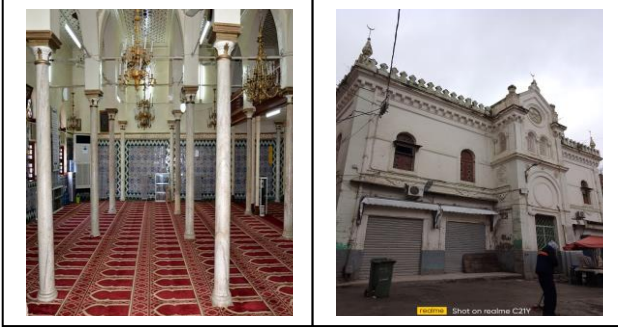


**Source: the researcher.**

The Mosque of Sidi Al-Kattani is located on Bouhali Al-Eid Street in the upper part of the old city of Constantine. It overlooks the Al-Kattaniya School to the east and the Al-Asr Market, also known as Salih bey's Friday Market, to the southeast, (Qashi, 1998, p. 129) After Salih bey assumed the rule of the Eastern Beylik in the mid-year of 1771 (1185 AH) (VAYSSETTES E. , 2010, p. 23), which lasted until his removal in 1792 (Gaid, 1978, p. 46), his initial thought was to construct a mosque for the purpose of prayer and worship of Allah, along with a school for higher education of the youth (VAYSSETTES E. , 2002, p. 134), This was realized in the year 1776 (1190 AH) (Cherbonneau, Inscription Arabe de la province de Constantine, 1856-1857, p. 111), and it was named after Sidi Al-

Kattani, in honor of the saint Salih who is buried at that location. (Tourki, 1981, p. 290).

### Figure No. 06: Aspects of the Sidi Kettani Mosque



Source: the researcher.

- *The foundational inscription of the Mosque of Sidi Al-Kattani (1190 AH/1776 CE)*

The foundational inscription of the Mosque of Sidi Al-Kattani is engraved on a square marble panel with a white background, mounted above the main entrance located on the southern side of the mosque. Due to its significant height and the closure and fencing of the entrance, we were unable to obtain its exact measurements. This panel is surrounded by a green frame, likely made of plaster, adorned with four decorative vegetal motifs composed of intertwined plant branches, interspersed with leaves and shoots. As for the inscription text, it was carved in a hollow relief style and filled with lead. It is written in Arabic using Maghrebi script in seven lines, shaped like cartridges with pointed ends, adorned with protruding pins resembling eight-petaled flowers. The content consists of poetic verses preceded by a religious invocation.

- *Text of the inscription*

The first line of this inscription text consists of a religious invocation, while the second and third lines praise the accomplished work. The fourth, fifth, and sixth lines mention the builder of this work, praising and praying for them. As for the seventh line, it indicates the construction date using numerical values and the Islamic calendar.

**Line 1:** In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. May Allah bless our master Muhammad.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم صلى الله على سيدنا محمد

**Line 2:** The signs of goodness emerged from the horizon of prosperity.

مطالع الخير جاءت من أفق شاو السعادة

**Line 3:** And the atmosphere brightened with the Mosque of Benefit.

وأشرق الجو منها بمسجد الإفادة

**Line 4:** It was built by the hands of Bay Al-Zaman, he is Salih the generous one.

بناه باي الزمان هو صالح ذو المجاده

**Line 5:** You see him striving in goodness, a treasure for the Day of Return.

تراه في الخير يسعى ذخرا ليوم الإعاد

**Line 6:** My Lord gave him a home in Paradise and more

حباه ربي بيتا في جنة وزيادة

**Line 7:** If you inquire about its date, say in the year 1190, it is a mosque for worship.

إن رمت تاريخه قل سنة 1190 ذا مسجد للعبادة

**Figure No 07: The Foundational Marble Panel of the Sidi Al-Kattani Mosque above the main entrance on the southern side**



Source: the researcher.

- **Foundational Inscription of the Mihrab of the Sidi Al-Kattani Mosque, 1202 AH/1787 CE**

The foundational inscription of the mihrab (prayer niche) of the Sidi Al-Kattani Mosque was inscribed on six colored cartouches in blue. Each cartouche had a pointed and equal length, measuring 42 cm, and a width of 14 cm. Horizontally distributed along the polygonal niche of the mihrab, it is most likely that these cartouches were made of gypsum. Surrounding them are shiny brown frames adorned with various vegetal motifs, such as branches and leaves. These motifs were engraved using the technique of hollow carving and filled with lead. The inscription is in the Arabic language, written in a style close to the Persian script (Mazouz & Dryas, Mosque of Arabic archaeological writings in Algeria, 2000, p. 182), The inscription consists of a religious invocation, followed by two

Quranic verses, and concludes with the name of the craftsman and the date.

- **Text of the inscription**

The first cartridge is an opening religious phrase that includes the Basmala (In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful) and seeking refuge from the accursed Satan. As for the second, third, fourth, and fifth cartridges, they contain the text of verses 114-115 from Surah Hud. On the other hand, the sixth cartridge includes the end of verse 115 from Surah Hud, and below it is written the name of Omar bin Qasim, believed to be the signature of the artist or craftsman who constructed and adorned the mihrab, Next to it, the date is written as the year 1202 AH, which corresponds to 1787 CE.

**Cartridge 1:** "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. Seek refuge [with Allah]..." (The letter "Bi" and "Hamza" may appear, but it is uncertain whether they were erased or written in this manner).

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ

**Cartridge 2:** And establish the prayer at the two ends of the day.

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ طَرَفِي النَّهَارِ

**Cartridge 3:** And in the approach of the night, indeed, good deeds

وَزَلْفًا مِنَ اللَّيْلِ إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ

**Cartridge 4:** ...remove evil deeds. That is a reminder.

يُذْهِبِ السَّيِّئَاتِ ذَلِكَ ذَكَرَى

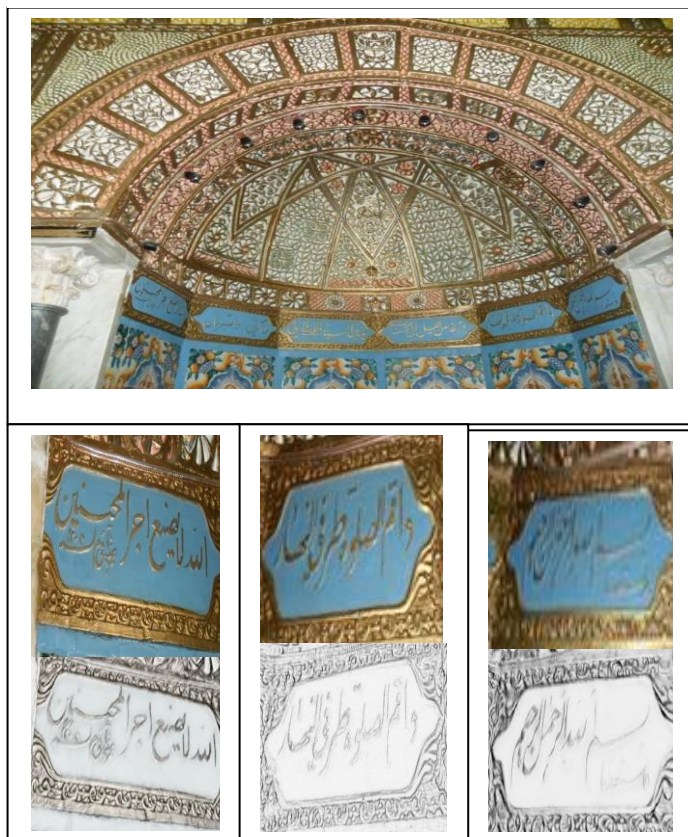
**Cartridge 5:** ..for those who remember, so be patient.

لِلذَّاكِرِينَ وَاصْبِرْ فَإِنَّ

**Cartridge 6:** ...Allah does not allow the reward of the doers of good to be lost. Umar Qasim in the year 1202 [AH].

الله لا بضيع أجر المحسنين، عمر قاسم في سنة 1202

### Figure No. 08: The Foundational Inscription of the Mihrab of the Sidi Al-Kattani Mosque



Source: the researcher.

- *The foundational inscription of the Minbar (pulpit) of the Mosque of Sidi Al-Kattani, 1204 AH/1789 CE*

The Minbar of the Mosque of Sidi Al-Kattani is considered one of the most beautiful and magnificent pulpits in Algeria, if not the most beautiful, according to the testimony of many researchers and archaeologists. It is made of marble and adorned with exquisite decorations. As for its foundational inscription, it is located on the front part that overlooks the entrance of the pulpit. It is executed in golden color on a marble panel with a green background, using the relief engraving technique. The inscription consists of two lines contained within four

facing cartridges, forming intricate vegetal branches. Each cartridge measures 70 cm in length and 16 cm in width, with pointed ends. The inscription is written in Arabic Thuluth script and includes a religious invocation, the name of the founder, and the date.

#### • Text of the inscription:

The first and second cartridges represent a religious invocation, symbolized by the Shahadah (Islamic declaration of faith). The third cartridge includes the type of establishment and the name of the founder, while the fourth cartridge contains a eulogy for the founder. Although the date is not mentioned in the inscription, it is attributed to 1202 AH (Mazouz & Dryas, Mosque of Arabic archaeological writings in Algeria, 2000, p. 183).

**Cartridge 1:** There is no deity worthy of worship except Allah.

لا إله إلا الله

**Cartridge 2:** Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.

محمد رسول الله

**Cartridge 3:** The pulpit was built with honor and victory by Saleh.

بنى منبر بالعز والنصر صالح

**Cartridge 4:** He has the paths of goodness and guidance.

له سبل الخيرات رشد.

**Figure No 09: The foundational inscription of the Minbar (pulpit) of the Mosque of Sidi Al-Kattani**



Source: the researcher.

### 11. Study Results

- ✓ The city of Constantine, like other major Islamic cities, witnessed the use of foundational commemorative inscriptions accompanying the construction of mosques. These inscriptions were used to indicate their construction history and identify their founders, including princes, governors, and rulers, immortalizing their memory.
- ✓ The Arabic scripts used in the foundational inscriptions in the city of Constantine were diverse, including Naskh, Thuluth, Maghrebi, and other scripts. This indicates the advancement of this art in Constantine during the Ottoman period and the development of Arabic calligraphy, with a multitude of artists and calligraphers.

- ✓ The raw materials used by the Constantine artists and calligraphers in documenting the commemorative inscriptions during the Ottoman era varied, especially gypsum and marble. This was due to their popularity and their features of ease of carving, aesthetic appeal, and durability. Various carving techniques such as hollow, inclined, raised, and others were observed.
- ✓ Despite the historical, archaeological, and literary value of these foundational inscriptions, they suffer from neglect and indifference, both in terms of maintenance and cleaning, as well as restoration. It was observed that the inscription specific to the Mosque of Sidi Al-Kattani has lost its luster, with some of its letters being obscured by dust and dirt, and even some plants growing on it (Figure 07). Despite being a marble panel that is relatively easy to clean and restore its shine, it has been neglected. Additionally, some inscriptions were affected by the brushstrokes of the restorers while painting the walls, as seen in the marble panel of the Green Mosque (Figure 05).
- ✓ The written inscriptions of the mosques of Al-Katatia and Al-Akhdar remain in their original locations, which adds to their authenticity and reliability. However, the foundational inscription of the Sidi Al-Ghazal Mosque was transferred to Ahmed Bey Palace during the colonial period in an attempt by the occupying authorities to erase the identity of the mosque after converting it into a church. Here, the significant role played by these inscriptions is highlighted, as they chronicle the history

of this mosque despite it being converted into a cathedral for nearly a century.

- ✓ In our study of these inscriptions, we found some linguistic and grammatical errors in their texts, as well as the use of some local terminologies. This could be attributed to the lack of proficiency in the Arabic language among the calligraphers and artists, such as writing "jaza'uh" in the third line of the marble panel of the Green Mosque.
- ✓ The studied foundational inscriptions were characterized by rich and varied texts, including religious invocations, Quranic verses, poetic verses, rhymes, dates, names of founders, their descriptions, prayers for them, and other textual elements.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident from our research that the foundational and commemorative inscriptions in the city of Constantine during the Ottoman period reached a high level of maturity, development, and quality in the field of calligraphy and writing, despite some minor errors and small mistakes. The artists and calligraphers of that era were characterized by their use of diverse scripts and unique styles, which were embodied on various materials and executed using multiple techniques. These inscriptions presented us with unique literary texts, and they served as a fertile ground for archaeologists, artists, and scholars to study and understand the decorative elements, stylistic approaches, and prevalent scripts of that period. Furthermore, these inscriptions contained important historical information about the city and significantly contributed to

correcting some false and misleading facts. However, our current observation during the study of these inscriptions indicates that they are at risk of damage or erasure due to negligence and a lack of awareness of their significant value. Therefore, it is crucial to preserve and protect them from deterioration and extinction, while also highlighting their status as a distinct Islamic-Arabic national cultural heritage, particularly amidst the ongoing restoration processes that these mosques are undergoing. In conclusion, it should be noted that this paper represents a modest study focusing on the foundational inscriptions of Ottoman mosques in Constantine. We selected only three mosques as examples in order to draw the attention of historians, researchers, archaeologists, literary scholars, and Arabic calligraphy enthusiasts to conduct further research and studies on this topic. Constantine city, being a fertile ground, offers ample opportunities for such studies and research endeavors.

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