

ALMORAVIDS, ARCHITECTURE

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Summary:

Almoravid architecture was the main artistic manifestation of the Almoravid emirs and governors. This is the field where the Almoravids contributed the most to the development of Western Islamic art. It was conditioned by different factors intrinsic to the movement itself: Mālikī orthodoxy, the territorial expansion throughout the Jihād and the tribal organisation of the Almoravid Emirate. In line with these factors, it can be classified into military, religious and palatial architecture. Their buildings became an important vehicle for transferring the ideas of the Almoravid emirs, linked to Occasionalism, political supremacy and loyalty to Baghdad.

Keywords:

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Almoravid architecture was the main artistic manifestation of the Almoravid emirs and governors (its main sponsors). It was conditioned by different factors intrinsic to the movement itself: Mālikī orthodoxy (Tabbaa, 101), the territorial expansion throughout the Jihād (Mukhtār al-‘Ibādà, 93-137) and the tribal organisation of the Almoravid Emirate (Heinz Golzio, 61-79). All these aspects were present from the emergence of the Almoravid Confederation, ca. 443/1052. In line with these factors, Almoravid architecture can be classified into three different types:

1. Military architecture
2. Religious buildings
3. Palatial constructions

The military architecture occupies a prominent place, as a consequence of the very essence of the movement and the turbulent situation after 513/1120: the revolts in Al-Andalus, the advance of the Christian Kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula and the emergence of the Almoravid movement in North Africa (Marcos Cobaleda, *Los almorávides*, 36-7). In the context of the urban military architecture, the constructions of the Qaṣr al-Ḥajar in Marrakech in the times of the emirs Abū Bakr (r. 450-63/1058-71) and Yūsuf b. Tāšufīn (r. 463-500/1071-106) (Ibn 'Idhārī, 42) and the first wall of this town in 519/1126 by the emir 'Alī b. Yūsuf (r. 500-537/1106-43) can be highlighted (Image 1). The main characteristics of the Almoravid military architecture were established with both buildings: the use of masonry (mainly in the time of Yūsuf b. Tāšufīn) and rammed-earth (in the time of 'Alī b. Yūsuf) as main materials (Marcos Cobaleda, *En torno*, 318), the presence of simple (most of them) or double bent access (Bāb Dukkāla in Marrakech) (Allain and Deverdun, 85-7) in the main gates of the wall, the use of pointed-horseshoe arches in the gates, and the massive quadrangular towers. These characteristics are also documented in the Almoravid walls in Al-Andalus (in Algeciras, built by Yūsuf b. Tāšufīn in 479/1086 (Marcos Cobaleda, *Restos*, 165-66) and in other Andalusī towns rebuilt by 'Alī b. Yūsuf thanks to the tax of the ta'tīb in 519/1126). Concerning the rural context, the Almoravids built several fortresses, as the system of fortresses built by 'Alī b. Yūsuf between the Atlas Mountains and Marrakech to slow down the advance of the Almohads. In these cases, regarding the towers, sometimes an upper chamber was built for surveillance purposes (Tāsghimūt) (Allain and Meunié, 388), and circular towers were used (Amergo, Zagora) (Marcos Cobaleda, *Restos*, 170-1).

The religious buildings are outstanding in the panorama of Almoravid architecture, due to the importance of orthodoxy from the beginning of the movement. Although there are references in written sources to some works in Al-Andalus during the Almoravid period (the reforms in the Friday mosques of Granada (Fernández-Puertas, 42), Murcia ('Abbās, 674) or Almería (Viguera Molins, 646)), the main Almoravid mosques were built in North Africa. The most important one was the Ibn Yūsuf Mosque in Marrakech built by 'Alī b. Yūsuf. Its sole remains are the complex of the

fountain, cistern and ablution pavilion (Qubbat al-Bārūdiyyīn) (Image 2), and the archaeological rests of its minaret, as well as its minbar (the Kutubiyya minbar). Other Almoravid constructions included the Friday mosques of Tlemcen (with its spectacular maqṣūra), Nedroma and Argel (all of them built by Yūsuf b. Tāšufīn and ornamented by his son ‘Alī), and the enlargement of the Qarawiyyīn Mosque of Fez (where the stalactite domes (muqarnaṣ) can be highlighted). These buildings became an important vehicle for transferring the religious and political ideas of the Almoravid emirs, thanks to the ornamental ensembles composed of arabesques, geometric patterns, muqarnaṣ and cursive epigraphy (Robinson, 22-45) (the last two introduced by the Almoravids into Western Islamic art). These ensembles can be related to the aesthetical theory of Occasionalism, the notion of political supremacy over the Almohads (Marcos Cobaleda, *En torno*, 336) and the loyalty to the Caliph of Baghdad (De Felipe, 57). Concerning the constructive elements, the horseshoe, pointed-horseshoe, lobed and mixtilinear arches, with S-shaped abutments, above brick pillars were used. Another type of mosque built by the Almoravids was the oratories for funerals named Masājid al-Janā’iz (Terrasse, 6; VVAA, 204–5). The only one conserved is the one beside the Qarawiyyīn Mosque (Image 3).

No Almoravid palatial construction has been preserved. Nevertheless, some archaeological rests still remain, as the Almoravid palaces under the first Kutubiyya (Meunié and Terrasse), where one of the most ancient crossing courtyards (riyāḍ) in the West was documented, or the plasters from the Carmen del Mauror in Granada (Marcos Cobaleda, *Estudio*, 383-412), where the richness of the Almoravid arabesques can be highlighted.

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