

**The First Zianide Minaret
"Minaret of Agadir"**

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Résumé

La dynastie Zianide de Tlemcen (1235-1556) est connue pour son habileté et son talent dans les domaines de l'architecture et de l'art à travers les différents vestiges qui nous sont parvenus de leur civilisation monumentale. Pour autant, les spécialistes n'ont pas effectué de recherches très approfondies dans le domaine décoratif et ont à peine effleuré ce sujet; abstraction faite de l'orientaliste Alfred Bel, auteur d'un article intitulé « Fouilles faites sur l'emplacement de l'ancienne mosquée d'Agadir (Tlemcen) 1910-1911 » dans la *Revue Africaine*, ou encore des frères Marçais, Georges et William, avec leur livre, *Les monuments arabes de Tlemcen* (1903), et enfin, de Rachid Bourouiba avec deux ouvrages, *L'art religieux musulman en Algérie* (1973), puis, *Apports de l'Algérie à l'architecture religieuse arabo-islamique* (1986).

C'est la raison pour laquelle, l'objet de notre recherche réside en la détermination des principes esthétiques de l'art Zianide, avec pour exemple l'un de ses minarets primitifs, celui d'Agadir, considéré comme le commencement de leur art décoratif architectural. En contribuant à la rédaction d'une petite partie de l'histoire de leur culture, notre intention est motivée par la préservation des traces de cette civilisation brillante.

Mots clefs: Zianides, Tlemcen, minaret, art, architecture, décor.

Abstract

The Zianid dynasty of Tlemcen (1235-1556) is known for its skill and talent in the fields of architecture and art through the various vestiges that have reached us from their monumental civilization. For that matter, the specialists did not carry out any thorough research in the decorative field and have scarcely dealt with this subject, except for the orientalist, Alfred Bel, author of an article entitled "Excavations made on the site of the Old Mosque of Agadir (Tlemcen) 1910-1911" in the *Revue Africaine*, or the brothers, Marçais, Georges and William, in, *The Arab Monuments of Tlemcen* (1903), and finally, Rachid Bourouiba with two books, *Muslim Religious Art in Algeria* (1973), and *Contributions of Algeria to Arab-Islamic*

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Religious Architecture (1986). This is the reason why the object of our research lies in the determination of the aesthetic principles of Zianid art, with, for example, one of its oldest minarets, that of Agadir, considered as the beginning of their architectural decorative art. By contributing to the writing of a small part of the history of their culture, our intention was to preservethe tracks this brilliant civilization.

Keywords:Zianides, Tlemcen, minaret, art, architecture, decor

Introduction

In his conception of the minaret, the Muslim architect wanted to concretize the idea of the upward orientation; the voice of the muezzin covers the other voices, and the phrase "God is the greatest" resonates in all horizons so that the call to prayer constitutes a link between earth and heaven that meet through man. Minarets rise from the ground level on which they are built, or can be connected to the mosque by the outer walls. They are located in the middle or in the corners of these, as they can be isolated and separated from the building but still close to it. As per their number, it differs from one mosque to another; sometimes there are three, four, or even six. Three words are used to designate the place from which the muezzin launches the call to prayer: Maadana مئذنة and Manara منارة in the Eastern countries, and Somaa صومعة in the Maghreb and Andalusia.

The shape of the minarets has changed over time and their appearance has also changed according to the place: the square minarets - comparable, all things being equal, to the old control towers - are located in Syria, Andalusia, South Africa, North Africa, and some time earlier, in Iraq and Iran. Another type known as the polygonal minaret - hexagon or octagon - dates back to the Fatimid and Mamluk periods. There are also cylindrical minarets prevalent in Asia Minor, Iraq, Persia, India, and Afghanistan. Even rarer are the cone-shaped minarets that take the form of pencil heads or arrows erect to the sky, which appeared in Asia Minor through the Seljuks and which, adopted by the Ottomans, spread throughout the world from Europe under Turkish rule then moved to Syria and Egypt.

The minaret usually consists of a main tower with a spiral staircase leading to the balcony wherefrom the muezzin settles for the call to prayer, then a smaller size than the main tower, and frequently crowned with a hemispherical cupola surmounted by a stem bearing three balls, a crescent, and a star.

Minaret building materials vary according to local availability: the stone has been used in Spain, Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, and the Arabian Peninsula; the bricks have been used in the

Maghreb countries, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. In India, stone and brick have been used concurrently depending on the nature of the soil. The ornament of the minarets has varied according to the dynasties. The geometrical decoration is the most current in the embellishment of the minarets. It bears diversified geometric figures such as squares, rectangles; circles; stars; diamond latticework; rosettes with several branches; muquarnas arches (stalactites); redans, and many others.

The floral decoration is much less used than the geometric one: it can be palms, floret. The epigraphic decoration, rather little attested, is expressed through various types of scriptures such as Kufic or cursive. As for the decorative materials of minarets arranged they are reduced to stone, brick, marble, or mosaic faience.

History of the Agadir Minaret

East Tlemcen is Agadir, an ancient city that was built on the ruins of the Roman city of Pomaria. At the time of the Idrissids, Idris Ier built a mosque in 173 H / 789J-C ⁽¹⁾, and was finished in 199 H / 814J-C by Idris II ⁽²⁾. Later, during the reign of the Zianides, Sultan Yaghmoracen Ibn Ziane, founder of this dynasty added to this building a sublime minaret ⁽³⁾ erected between the years 633/1236 and 681/1283. The mosque remained intact until the second half of the 16th century ⁽⁴⁾, but during Ottoman rule, it was vandalized. However, it continued to serve as a place of worship. The mosque, which was destroyed during French colonization, became a pile of rubble ⁽⁵⁾. Of this monument remains today only its minaret which rises majestically alone. It is considered as the archetype of the minaret of the Zianide epoch.

Architecture of the Agadir Minaret

According to archaeological excavations carried out by the orientalist Alfred Bel in 1910 in the site of the old mosque of Agadir, the minaret is located in the center of the north wall of the mosque, in front of the wall where is given the direction for prayer and in the axis of the mihrab ⁽⁶⁾. The quadrangular minaret is composed of two floors reminiscent of other minarets in the Maghreb with the exception of the minarets of the Grand Mosque of Kairouan and that of the Grand Mosque of Sfax, which have two superimposed towers whose levels are decreasing in addition to the lantern. The minaret of Agadir rises in its lower part on a pedestal, whose height exceeds six meters, formed of huge rectangular monoliths brought back from the ancient Roman city, and more precisely, buildings and tombs ⁽⁷⁾. These stones

are streaked with Latin inscriptions. As for the upper part of the minaret, it is composed of the main tower and the lantern made of red brick like the other Zianides minarets and covered with a limed coating.

In the architectural and decorative ensemble of the Agadir minaret, the Zianides were probably inspired by the Almohad minarets, whose most beautiful examples are the Seminar and the Grand Mosque of Seville, better known as the Giralda, the minaret of the Koutoubia mosque, from Marrakech to Morocco, and the unfinished minaret of the Hassan Mosque in Rabat, called the Hassan tower.

The proportions of the minaret of Agadir are average. Its height is 25.60m; the width of its main tower varies from 5.53m to 5.60m and its height is 22.30m. As to the lantern, its width is 2.40m and its height is 4.70m⁽⁸⁾.

Inside the minaret is a staircase which turns around a central axis. It is framed by three arches of edges; it is through these stairs that one reaches the platform of the minaret from where the muezzin launches the call to prayer five times a day. The dimensions of the inner side of the minaret vary between 3.85m and 3.95m, and the central core side is 2.1m; this stairwell has 127 steps, divided into 7 steps of 0.88m⁽⁹⁾ wide for each landing.

Decoration of the Minaret of Agadir

We note in the decoration of this minaret a significant resemblance between the east and west faces but also an identical ornamentation between the north and south faces.

Decor of the Upper Part of the Main Tower:

The upper part of the main tower is decorated in all the faces of the minaret by a rectangular frame whose width is greater than the height. It contains in its interior five lobed arches and each of these arches is adorned by nine small lobes; these arches rest on four marble columns without capitals. In the west face of the minaret above the center of each arch is an almond shaped inlaid with green zellige.

Decor of the Central Part of the Main Tower in the East and West Faces:

The central part of the main tower in its two faces is composed of a rectangular frame, the height of which is greater than the width. It is decorated with a network of lozenges whose upper part is in the form of a five-arc small lobe. This network is composed of four rows of four lozenges and four rows of three lozenges, or twenty-eight lozenges for each of the east and west faces. This lozenge network rests on two lobed arches, each of which has eleven

lobes. These two arches rest on a small central marble column. On each rhombus of the upper row of the diamond network is a small lobe shaped almond encrusted with green zellige.

Decor of the Lower Part of the Main Tower in the East and West faces:

The lower part of the main tower contains on both sides a small rectangular frame whose height is greater in relation to the width and which is much smaller than the frame of the lozenge network. It is adorned in its interior by a bow to the lambrequin of three heads, and above its central head rises an almond-shaped piece filled with green zellige.

Decor of the Central Part of the Main Tower in the North and South faces:

This part consists of a rectangular frame with a width less than the height, it is adorned with a lozenge network furnished with lozenges whose upper part forms a double-headed arched arch alternating with lozenges whose upper part forms a one-headed arched arc, the lozenge array is composed of eight rows of four lozenges with a two-headed lambrequin arch and seven rows of three diamonds with an upper part in the form of a single-headed arch and a row with a rhombus with an upper part in the form of a single-headed arch, giving a number of thirty-two lozenges with an upper part in the form of a two-headed arch and a number of twenty-two diamonds with a part superior in the shape of a single-headed arch, and the total is fifty-four diamonds. In each of the north and south facades, and above each rhombus, whose share the upper side is in the form of a double-headed arch. We have a small rhombus inlaid with green zellige, which is surmounted by a small floret in the form of two lobes inlaid with green zellige and crowned with an almond. As for the rhombuses from the upper row they are only surmounted by a small rhombus with two small lobes above and all three are encrusted with green zellige.

This large array of lozenges is supported by two arches with three head each, with over each head of the two arches, one notices a small rhombus encrusted with green zellige and surmounted by a floret which takes the form of two lobes inlaid with green zellige and crowned by an almond. These arches rest on a small central marble column adorned with a capital.

Decor of the Lower Part of the main tower in the north and south faces:

The lower part of the main tower contains in these two faces a small rectangular frame whose height is greater than the width, but which is much smaller than the frame of the lozenge network. It is decorated inside by two lobed arches, each of the arches has seven lobes supported by a small central marble column decorated by a very simple capital, and the upper lobe of each arch is surmounted by an almond shaped encrusted with green zellige.

Decor of the Lantern:

The lantern is composed on all sides of a rectangular frame whose height is less than the width; it contains a horseshoe arch followed by a lobed bow nine lobes, and above a lozenge network with diamonds with five lobes. It is arranged with a row of a rhombus in the middle and a half rhombus on each side, as to the bottom of these lozenges it is garnished with small mosaic tiles of green faience. The lantern frame is surrounded by a zellige border that occupies one third of the width of the frame. It is U-shaped which stops at the fall of the bow, decorated by a row of eight-pointed stars enamelled in green and glued to each other. There are thirty-four stars in each face of the lantern. These stars are arranged on a white background and bordered on all their sides by a narrow band composed of small green rectangles; the same band surrounds the upper part of the minaret. This lantern is crowned with a hemispherical couplet surmounted by a metal rod.

The Aliasing of the Platform:

The platform of the minaret is surrounded by a 1.40m small wall and a thickness of 0.56m. It is decorated by merlons with a height of 0.67m, a width at the base of 1.11m and their width at the top is 0.28m ⁽¹⁰⁾. These merlons include four merlons of angles and twelve single merlons, which gives us a merlon in each corner and three merlons in each face; these merlons take a form of teeth Inclined saws, consisting of six steps each.

The openings:

The openings in the minarets are only rarely used by the Zianides and their dimensions are very small, the minaret of Agadir contains eight small openings.

The north facade is pierced by four openings, two openings inside the two three-headed arched arches that support the diamond network, two openings above the diamond network on the right and left. The south facade has two openings inside the two three-headed valance arches that support the diamond network. The west facade has two openings inside the two lobed arches with eleven lobes each that support the diamond network.

Conclusion

The shape of the Zianid minaret is quadrangular, the height is medium, and the proportions are harmonious, which gives an elegant and graceful set. The decorative ornament of the minaret is of two types. The vegetal decoration is little used with the exception of the small

florets, but the geometric decoration is widely used. We find it with the rectangles, rhombuses, redans, and stars with eight tips. The architectural ornament of this minaret is understood by the use of lobed arches and arches; by the use of the couplette; and by columns and their capitals. The materials used in the decoration are marble for the small columns; the metal for the stem; the zellige or mosaic of faience for the incrustation of the florets, almonds and for the coating of the friezes with colors, which vary from green to white. The most used material is brick used for ornament arches, merlons, and lozenge networks.

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