

The Minbar from the Kutubiyya Mosque



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Jonathan M. Bloom; Ahmed Toufiq; Stefano Carboni; Jack Soultanian, Antoine M. Wilmering, Mark D. Minor, and Andrew Zawacki; and El Mostafa Hbibi

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Ediciones El Viso, S.A., Madrid
Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Kingdom of Morocco

The restoration of the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque and the accompanying volume that documents its history and preservation are made possible by Patti Cadby Birch.

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Unless otherwise noted, the color photographs in this volume were made by Bruce White, Upper Montclair, New Jersey. The drawings on pages 84 to 98 were made by El Mostafa Hbibi (figs. 86, 90, 91, 94, 98, 99, 102), Abdelaziz Zoubhir (figs. 84, 87, 93, 95, 96, 97, 101), or jointly by both (figs. 88, 89, 92, 100).

Map by David Lindroth Inc.

Typeset in Dante and Medici Script
Color separations by Professional Graphics, Rockford, Illinois
Printed on Consort Royal Silk 150 gsm
Printed by Julio Soto Impresor, S.A., Madrid
Bound by Encuadernación Ramos, S.A., Madrid
Printing and binding coordinated by Ediciones El Viso, S.A., Madrid

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque / Jonathan M. Bloom . . . [et al.].

p. cm.

 $Includes\ bibliographical\ references\ and\ index.$

ISBN 0-87099-854-4 (hc)

- I. Minbars—Morocco—Marrakesh. 2. Kutubiyya Mosque (Marrakesh, Morocco) 3. Architecture, Islamic—Morocco—Marrakesh.
- 4. Woodwork—Morocco—Marrakesh. 5. Wood-carving, Islamic—Morocco—Marrakesh. 6. Wood-carving—Morocco—Marrakesh.
- 7. Marquetry—Morocco—Marrakesh. 8. Minbars—Morocco—

Marrakesh—Conservation and restoration. 9. Marrakesh (Morocco)—Buildings, structures, etc. I. Bloom, Jonathan (Jonathan M.)

NA6090.2.M37K88 1998

726′.2′09646—dc21

98-9277

CIP

Jacket illustrations

Front: The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, Marrakesh, upper portion of the right flank. Photo: Bruce White Back: The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, right flank.

Photo: Bruce White

Frontispiece

The Kutubiyya mosque, Marrakesh, aerial view. Photo: © Yann Arthus-Bertrand

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It is with great pleasure that I commend the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of the Kingdom of Morocco and The Metropolitan Museum of Art for their profound commitment to preserve one of Morocco's unique treasures, the Kutubiyya minbar.

This magnificent work of art has endured the vicissitudes of time and has witnessed many social and economic changes over the centuries. The eight-hundred-year history of the minbar, as documented in this scholarly volume, offers valuable insights into the history of Morocco and its richly interwoven fabric of artistic and religious traditions.

On behalf of the Kingdom of Morocco, I extend sincere thanks to The Metropolitan Museum of Art for so generously sharing its technical expertise with us in the restoration and display of the minbar. I especially appreciate the work of the dedicated team of American and Moroccan professionals, whose tireless efforts have made this exquisite fragment of our heritage once more an object of great wonder. Once restored, it is my hope that the Kutubiyya minbar will speak to countless future generations of the friendship, goodwill, and cultural ties that exist on both sides of the Atlantic, reaching across time and space and linking the Old World with the New.

His Royal Highness SIDI MOHAMMED Crown Prince of MOROCCO

Director's Foreword

In April 1998, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Kingdom of Morocco, will proudly present a permanent exhibition at the Badi^c Palace, Marrakesh, of the minbar, or pulpit, from the Kutubiyya mosque, Marrakesh. This masterpiece of Andalusian woodwork was commissioned by the last Almoravid sultan, 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, and was made in Córdoba about 1137-45, at a time when that city was enjoying a brilliant renaissance in Islamic culture, arts, and letters. One of the most accomplished and beautiful works ever created by Islamic craftsmen, the Kutubiyya minbar displays a dazzling array of intricately carved wood panels and inlaid bone decoration that envelops its entire visible surface. Its extraordinary design established a decorative language that was imitated for centuries to come. In fact, experts consider its decoration a precursor for the intarsia technique, which ultimately had widespread influence in Europe, particularly in Renaissance Italy, where it achieved its most glorious manifestation, notably in the Gubbio Studiolo, recently reinstalled at the Metropolitan Museum.

The conservation of the Kutubiyya minbar marks the first time in the Metropolitan Museum's history that it has undertaken the restoration of a major work of art outside its own premises. This exception to the Museum's standard policy was made in light of two factors: first, the historical and religious importance of the minbar as one of the few surviving examples of monumental medieval Islamic woodwork, and second, the unique opportunity that presented itself, somewhat as a coda to the Metropolitan's landmark exhibition "Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain," which opened in Granada in March 1992. The idea of conserving the minbar as a collaborative venture, utilizing the combined expertise of Metropolitan Museum conservators and Moroccan craftsmen, originated in March 1991 at a meeting between His Majesty King Hassan II of Morocco and the Metropolitan Museum's Associate Director for Exhibitions, Mahrukh Tarapor. At that time, the Metropolitan had hoped to include the minbar in the "Al-Andalus" exhibition, which examined the

brilliant Islamic culture on the Iberian Peninsula from 711 until 1492. When it became evident that the conservation work could not be completed in time for the exhibition, as the Museum had hoped, the plan to preserve the minbar nevertheless endured, thanks in large part to the enlightened support of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the Metropolitan's many friends in Morocco, who are cited by Mahrukh Tarapor in her acknowledgments.

Although the minbar has come down to us in a good state of preservation, largely because of the relatively stable climate in which it has been maintained, a degree of conservation intervention was deemed necessary to preserve it for posterity. In the fall of 1996, the technical team—composed of Metropolitan senior conservators Jack Soultanian and Antoine M. Wilmering, assisted by Mark D. Minor and Andrew Zawacki, and their Moroccan colleagues El Mostafa Hbibi, Architecte des Monuments Historiques et des Sites de Safi-Essaouira, and craftsmen Abd el Hafid Lakmari and Abd Errahman Razkani began a nine-month course of treatment in which the minbar's structure was stabilized, its loose elements consolidated, and its surface decoration cleaned. The conservation treatment was facilitated by means of a special rigid steel frame to which the minbar was secured. Designed at the Museum by Franz Schmidt, Manager for Special Projects, Buildings Department, and shipped to Marrakesh, this ingenious structure enabled the minbar to be safely moved in the studio during treatment and now serves as its permanent base.

From the outset, the Metropolitan and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs shared the belief that the Kutubiyya minbar should be put on permanent display after its restoration, so that it could receive the international attention it so richly deserves. Following the completion of the conservation program, Metropolitan technical specialists Franz Schmidt and Zack Zanolli, Lighting Designer, and Assistant Curator Stefano Carboni worked closely with the Moroccan team to create an appropriate gallery setting that would explain the minbar's history and conservation.

The task of coordinating this complex trans-Atlantic enterprise was undertaken by Mahrukh Tarapor, who brought to it her customary vision, energy, and efficacy.

Finally, it is a singular pleasure to recognize the support, both financial and visionary, of Patti Cadby Birch, who perceived the importance of the project very early on. Without her steadfast interest, this historic collaboration simply would not have been undertaken. For all her efforts, great and small, as a patron, honorary trustee, and special friend, we record here our deep regard and professional gratitude.

Philippe de Montebello Director The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Acknowledgments

The Metropolitan Museum respectfully acknowledges the early interest of His Majesty King Hassan II of Morocco in the minbar project and his personal commitment to the preservation of this unique masterpiece of Morocco's national heritage.

The task of preserving and displaying the Kutubiyya minbar was a truly collaborative conservation enterprise, unprecedented in the history of the Metropolitan. When we first embarked upon this trans-Atlantic venture, we were aware it would require extensive time, effort, and travel. What we could not anticipate were the enormous rewards, both professional and personal, that would grow out of this collaboration. The exchange of knowledge during the process has been of incalculable value, and equally as gratifying are the mutual respect, esteem, and friendship it engendered.

To the Moroccan Ministry of Cultural Affairs—our partner in this historic endeavor—we offer our sincere gratitude for the opportunity to work so closely and pleasurably with such dedicated colleagues. We are particularly indebted to Mme Benani, Secrétaire d'État Chargé de la Culture, Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur de la Recherche et de la Culture, as well as to the former Ministers of Cultural Affairs, Abdallah Azmani and Mohammed Allal Sinaceur, for their support of the undertaking through all its various stages.

Special thanks are owed to the Metropolitan Museum's good friend, Mohamed Benaissa, Moroccan Ambassador to the United States, who, as Minister of Cultural Affairs in 1991, officially endorsed the project and who has never since wavered in his enthusiasm and support. We must also single out for his assistance, from very early on, Abdelaziz Touri, Directeur du Patrimoine Culturel. Mohammed Melehi, whom we also first met in 1991 when he was Director of Arts, has been helpful throughout.

We would like to extend the very warm thanks of the Metropolitan Museum team in Morocco to Prime Minister Abdellatif Filali and Mrs. Filali for the friendship and hospitality they have always shown to us in Rabat, and for the concern and interest with which they have followed the progress of the project over the years.

It was the Metropolitan Museum's good fortune, as our work in Morocco was coming to an end, to meet and have the privilege of working with André Azoulay, Counselor to His Majesty The King. We are deeply grateful for his prompt and gracious offers of assistance and hospitality, and we share with him the hope of making the great traditions of Moroccan art known to a wider international public.

No mention of our debts to friends in Morocco would be complete without a personal and heartfelt acknowledgment of the friendship, hospitality, and many kindnesses we have been shown by M'hammed Dryef, Governor of Fez. Throughout history, Fez has captured many hearts, and now ours as well, thanks in no small measure to the warmth with which we were received and to the insights we gained into this most alluring of cities.

Outside of Morocco, we are beholden to King Simeon of Bulgaria, a Metropolitan friend of long standing, for facilitating efforts during our first trip there, immediately after the Gulf War, and for providing sage counsel in the ensuing years.

The preservation and display of the Kutubiyya minbar were brilliantly carried out by a team of Metropolitan Museum and Moroccan professionals, whose cooperative effort, skill, and dedication we record here with gratitude: Jack Soultanian and Antoine M. Wilmering, codirectors of the conservation program, with conservators Mark D. Minor and Andrew Zawacki; Stefano Carboni, Assistant Curator of Islamic Art; Franz J. Schmidt, Manager for Special Projects, Buildings Department; and Zack Zanolli, Lighting Designer and Assistant Buildings Manager. In Morocco, the team was completed by El Mostafa Hbibi, project coordinator in Marrakesh, and craftsmen Abd el Hafid Lakmari and Abd Errahman Razkani. Hamza Banzanzan served ably as translator for the team.

Other Metropolitan Museum colleagues whose help has been essential are: Stephanie Oratz Basta, Assistant Counsel; Mechthild Baumeister, Associate Conservator, Objects Conservation; Albert Neher, former Conservator, now of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Herbert M. Moskowitz, Registrar; Linda M. Sylling, Associate Manager for Operations and Special Exhibitions; Jeffrey L. Daly, Chief Designer; Martha Deese, Senior Assistant for Exhibitions, and Sian Wetherill, Assistant for Exhibitions. Special thanks also to Richard R. Morsches, Senior Vice President for Operations; James H. Frantz, Conservator in Charge, Objects Conservation; and Daniel Walker, Patti Cadby Birch Curator in Charge, Department of Islamic

Art, who have patiently endured inconvenient and often prolonged absences of key members of their departments.

Like the exhibition, this publication is also a trans-Atlantic endeavor. We are greatly indebted to its authors, whose scholarship has been invaluable to the accomplishment of this project: Jonathan M. Bloom; Ahmed Toufiq, Conservateur, Bibliothèque Générale et Archives, Rabat; Stefano Carboni; Antoine M. Wilmering, Jack Soultanian, Mark D. Minor, and Andrew Zawacki; and El Mostafa Hbibi. The publication was overseen by John P. O'Neill, Editor in Chief and General Manager of Publications, and thoughtfully edited by Margaret Donovan, with an informative bibliography compiled by Penny Jones. Abdellatif El Hajjami, Directeur Général, Agence pour la Dédensification et Réhabilitation de la Médina de Fès, added essential help with photographic material. Brahim Alaoui, Director of the Museum and the Department of Exhibitions, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, kindly assisted with the French edition. Christiane J. Gruber and Negar Baharlou, formerly of the Islamic Department, provided research assistance and advice. Ediciones El Viso, Madrid, printed the volume, under the watchful eye of its publisher, Santiago Saavedra. For his indispensable assistance in this and many other aspects of the project and for his unflagging friendship and support, we are, as always, immensely grateful.

In conclusion, we would like to express our sincerest thanks to Patti Cadby Birch, honorary trustee of the Metropolitan Museum, who has been the soul and mentor of this project from the very beginning. Her informed advice and very great generosity have sustained us all through the course of this historic enterprise.

Mahrukh Tarapor Associate Director for Exhibitions The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Minbar from the Kutubiyya Mosque



The Minbar from the Kutubiyya Mosque

JONATHAN M. BLOOM

he minbar, or pulpit, from the Kutubiyya mosque in Marrakesh, Morocco, is one of the great examples of medieval Islamic art as well as the finest specimen of woodwork to survive from medieval Islamic Spain (fig. 1). Like other minbars from the western Islamic lands, the Kutubiyya

minbar consists of a triangular wooden structure—measuring 3.86 meters (12 feet 8 inches) high, 3.46 meters (11 feet 4½ inches) deep, and 87 centimeters (2 feet 10½ inches) wide—resting on two sets of wheels that allowed it to be rolled out of the closet to the right of the mihrab, in which it was normally stored. Eight steps along the hypotenuse lead to a seat, ostensibly for the *khaṭīb* (preacher), who addresses the congregation at Friday noon prayers. The preacher never actually sits there, for the seat is

traditionally thought to be reserved for the Prophet Muḥammad alone, but instead generally stands on one of the steps, no higher than the third from the top, to give the sermon (*khuṭba*). Since the sermon included an invocation in the name of the current ruler, the sermon and by extension the minbar itself became important symbols of authority throughout the Islamic lands.

HISTORY

According to an inscription on its left flank, the minbar was begun in Córdoba on the first day of Muharram (New Year's Day) in the year A.H. 532 (A.D. September 19, 1137). The date indicates that it was ordered during the reign of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf (1106–43), son of Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn (or

Opposite: Fig. 1. The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, Marrakesh (1137–ca. 1145), three-quarter view from the right

Tāshfīn; r. 1061–1106), the first great ruler of the Almoravid dynasty. Of Saharan Berber origin, the Almoravids (whose name derives from the Arabic term *almurābiṭūn*, "those who live in a *ribāṭ* [a kind of fortressmonastery]") professed a reformist form of orthodox Islam. After gaining strength throughout northwestern

Africa in the mid eleventh century, they were invited to cross into the Iberian Peninsula by the Muslim rulers of Spain, who asked their help following the fall of Toledo to the Christians of Castile in 1085. Within a decade of the Almoravid victory at the Battle of al-Zallāqa in 1086, they had annexed all the Muslim kingdoms in the Iberian Peninsula. They then renewed the war against the Christians, which culminated in the conquest of Valencia in 1102.

The inscription also states that the minbar was made specifically for the congregational mosque of Marrakesh, located some 800 kilometers (500 miles) from Córdoba across land and sea. Since the minbar is clearly too large to have been moved intact, particularly in an era when wheeled transport was not widely used, it must have been prefabricated in pieces and later assembled on site. Close examination shows that each flank of the minbar is composed of five large panels which were fitted together; the flanks were then joined with the backrest, risers, and treads, which were also made separately. It is likely that the pieces were shipped from Córdoba by boat down the Guadalquivir River and then across the Strait of Gibraltar to some Moroccan port. There the pieces would have been transferred to camels or mules and carried over the Middle Atlas to Marrakesh, located in a fertile plain between the Middle and High Atlas some 150 kilometers (100 miles) east of the Atlantic



coast. (A large stone basin also made in Córdoba may have been transported to Marrakesh at the same time to decorate the mosque for which the minbar was made or one of its annexes.)¹

Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn had developed Marrakesh in the mid eleventh century as a camp; at first it consisted only of a small qaşba (fort) and mosque. Tradition states that the ruler, who was known for his piety, worked alongside the masons constructing this mosque as a sign of humility. The city soon grew to considerable size and is said to have had one hundred thousand households by the reign of Yūsuf's son 'Alī, who had ordered a new and more magnificent congregational mosque built for the city, probably in the second decade of the twelfth century, to which the minbar made in Córdoba was later transported.² The settlement of Marrakesh lost its rural character only in 1126, when 'Alī, most likely fearing an attack by the Almohads, decided to encircle it with a set of walls. The Almohads (whose name derives from the Arabic al-muwahhidun, "those who believe in the unity [of God]") were another reforming Berber dynasty, which had come to power in the mountainous region south of Marrakesh. They first attacked the city in 1130 but did not capture it until 1147, when their great leader 'Abd al-Mu'min (r. 1130-63) took advantage of the disorder following the death of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf.³ The Almohads soon controlled all the Almoravid lands in Morocco and Spain, extending their sway even over Algeria (1152) and Tunisia (1160).

Along with all the other Almoravid mosques, the mosque in Marrakesh was destroyed and then rebuilt by the Almohads, for the supposed purpose of improving its faulty orientation.4 The present Ben (Ibn) Yūsuf mosque in Marrakesh preserves the site and memory of the earlier mosque; only the minbar and the charming qubba (pavilion) from its ablution complex have survived. 5 The Almohad mosque was begun in 1147 on the remains of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf's palace. 6 'Alī's minbar, salvaged from his mosque as a trophy of the Almohad victory, was moved to the new mosque (now known as the first Kutubiyya) and installed in a closet to the right of the mihrab. Examination and excavation of the site of the first Kutubiyya mosque reveal remains of the closet and of foundations consistent with medieval descriptions, which note the presence of a spectacular wooden maqsūra (enclosure for the ruler). When the ruler entered the mosque for Friday noon prayer, a counterbalance mechanism, presumably activated by his weight, raised the magsūra from the floor; when he left, the maqsūra automatically sank back into the floor.7 The minbar was also fitted with a similar mechanism so that it emerged from its closet automatically when needed for the Friday sermon.

Shortly after its completion, the first Kutubiyya mosque was deemed unsuitable for some reason, most likely faulty orientation, and a second, virtually identical mosque was begun adjacent to it, on a slightly different axis. This second mosque (the present-day Kutubiyya, or Booksellers', mosque, named for the dozens of bookshops that once surrounded it) was probably finished by 1162, and the minbar remained there until well into the twentieth century, while it came to be increasingly recognized as one of the greatest examples of western Islamic art.8 In 1962, following Moroccan independence, the minbar was replaced by a new one and transferred from the Kutubiyya mosque to the Badi^c Palace in Marrakesh, where it has remained ever since. It has been published in several histories of Islamic art and was included in the catalogue of an exhibition of Spanish-Islamic art in Granada and New York in 1992.9 In 1996-97 a team of Moroccan and American experts undertook the task of studying and conserving the minbar, as plans were being made for its display as the centerpiece of a new museum of Islamic art in Marrakesh.

Many examples of Islamic art that are well known today went totally unremarked by contemporary sources; in medieval Islamic society, as in the medieval West, texts expressing aesthetic appreciation of a particular work of art are rare. The few surviving examples of this type of writing are thus particularly important, and one such text—the report of the noted North African traditionist, preacher, and statesman Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Marzūq (ca. 1310/12–1379)—suggests that the Kutubiyya minbar was considered one of the marvels of its day. Ibn Marzūq, in discussing the minbar in the mosque at al-Manṣūra, the city established by his patron, Abu'l-Hasan ʿAlī, near his hometown of Tlemcen, wrote that

as for the minbar, all craftsmen at that time declare that nowhere in the world was the equivalent ever made. They agree that the minbar of [the Great Mosque of] Córdoba and the minbar of the Booksellers' [i.e., the Kutubiyya mosque] in Marrakesh are the most remarkable in craftsmanship, because it is not customary for Easterners to have fine woodwork in their buildings.¹⁰

In truth Ibn Marzūq was being somewhat hyperbolic, for fine wooden minbars were found in many of the mosques he knew in cities to the east. As a youth he had accompanied his father on travels throughout the great cities of the central Islamic lands—Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, Hebron, Alexandria, and Cairo—and had studied there with the greatest religious scholars of the day. Ibn Marzūq preached his first sermon extemporaneously at the age of nineteen in the mosque of Alexandria and

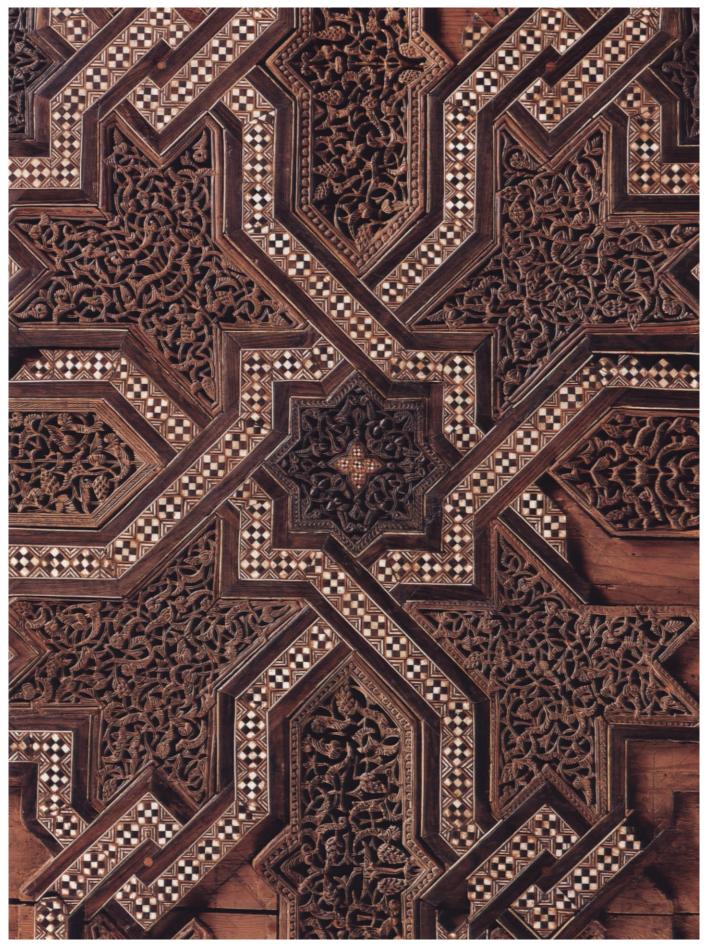


Fig. 2. Detail of the strapwork pattern and carved panels on the left side. The central star panel is the only one on the minbar to include inlay

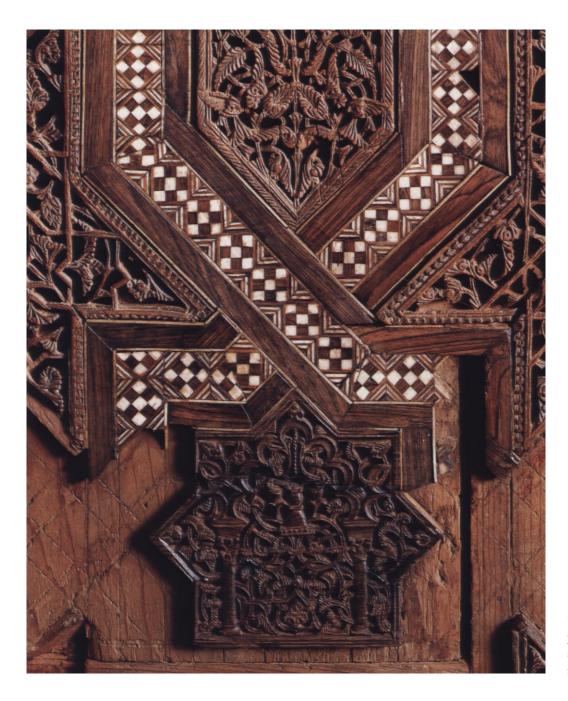


Fig. 3. Truncated small star panel on the lower left side with a representation of a lamp hanging from a scalloped arch

later claimed to have sermonized from forty-eight different pulpits. He must therefore have seen the magnificent mid-twelfth-century minbars of Jerusalem and Hebron, which survived into modern times, as well as those of Mecca and Medina, which did not. These minbars were made in a new style of woodwork, developed in twelfth-century Egypt and Syria, which was characterized by large-scale geometric patterns of grooved strapwork containing carved panels of interlocking polygons and stars. Over the course of the century, ivory and bone inlays were increasingly used to elaborate the panels. Nevertheless, to Ibn Marzūq's eyes (and in his memory), these Egyptian and Syrian minbars would have seemed coarse in comparison to the Kutubiyya minbar in Marrakesh, with its minute inlays and exquisitely detailed carving.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The carcass of the Kutubiyya minbar consists of five rectangular cedarwood frames of increasing size (see figs. 88, 89), which form each side. These frames, made of mortised posts and stiles and enclosing panels set flush with the frame to provide a flat surface for the decoration, were assembled with wooden pins, so that they could be separated for transport. The two sides are held together on the interior by a wooden armature (recently strengthened and visible from the back [see fig. 73]) and on the exterior by the treads, risers, seat, and backrest. The bottom and top of the staircase are flanked by frames pierced with arches; the frames are surmounted by carved wooden finials, as the projecting corners of the stepped sides once were. The

entire visible surface of the minbar was originally covered in a web of carved and inlaid decoration, some of which has fallen away.

Flanks

The most prominent (and best-preserved) decoration is that of the triangular sides, which consists of an interlace pattern (fig. 2) generated from eight-pointed stars and exactly coordinated to the height and depth of the steps, so that each step corresponds to one vertical and one horizontal repeat of the pattern (which measures 32 centimeters [125% inches] on either side). The pattern employs strapwork bands, worked in marquetry of bone and colored woods, which cross and twist around each other, forming a continuous mesh of bone-shaped elements (see fig. 91) and creating a design of stars and irregular polygons in the interstices. Finely carved wooden panels have been inlaid between the bands into recesses carved into the surface so that they are flush with the level of the strapwork. On either side there are fifty-four repeats of the design unit, in vertical rows of nine, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, and one.

Once the frames for the sides had been temporarily assembled to provide a flat surface, the outlines of the interlace design were drawn, using only a pair of compasses, a straightedge, and a sharp point or ink. Many of these construction lines can be seen where the decoration has fallen away from the wooden carcass (see figs. 54, 55), and they indicate that the strapwork bands, which measure 26 millimeters (1 inch) wide, were assembled directly on the minbar's surface. Indeed, these lines show that the proportions of the strapwork elements were determined during the laying-out itself. It was also probably during this step in the process that the areas between the strapwork bands were recessed.

The strapwork consists of three elements. A relatively broad (8-millimeter) strip of a dark brown wood (African blackwood; *Dalbergia* spp.)¹² is bordered on either edge by a thin strip of bone (fig. 3). Two of these pieces, placed parallel to each other, form the exterior bands of the strapwork, while the interior is filled with a continuous marquetry band (10 millimeters wide). This band was made by gluing rods and strips of wood and bone together into a pattern and then sawing the resultant bundle into tiles, which were then laid side to side. Five square rods of bone and four of dark wood were set in a quincunx and then glued up with seven increasingly narrow strips of bone and colored woods attached to its sides in such a way that the initial square was posed on the diagonal in relationship to the larger outer one. Cut into tiles about 5 mil-

limeters thick and assembled in a continuous band between the outer borders, these elements combine to give a pattern of checkerboards and chevrons. Since the strapwork bands are not mitered with a single cut at the angles where they bend, the bands must have been assembled on the minbar from the individual elements. When completed, the bands were planed or scraped smooth and polished; marks of the scraping are still visible on the surface under raking light. The bands on the left and right sides of the minbar are identical, except that on the left side, there are small dots of pale wood in the centers of the strapwork twists surrounding the large stars (see fig. 21). This suggests that the right side was completed first, and the designer, unhappy with the relatively large expanse of dark wood created where the bands twisted, changed the pattern for the left.

The spaces between the strapwork are occupied by four distinct types of finely carved wooden panels (see fig. 92): two sizes of an eight-pointed star (Arabic khaṭam, French sceau, "seal [of Solomon]"), an elongated hexagon with triangular projections on the long sides (Arabic mitraga, French marteau, "hammer"), and an irregular six-pointed star, or Y, with forked ends (Arabic difda^ca, colloquial jarāna, French grenouille, "frog"). The eight-pointed stars are 8.8 and 7.3 centimeters (31/2 and 27/8 inches) in diameter, the hexagons are 16.5 centimeters (6½ inches) long, and the Ys are 11.4 centimeters (4½ inches) across. The stars, both large and small, are made of African blackwood, which has such a fine grain that Henri Basset and Henri Terrasse supposed it was darkened ivory. It must have been the most valued of the woods used for the minbar, since the star panels are consistently the finest in technique, apparently having been entrusted to the most skilled carvers. The hexagons are all made of boxwood (Buxus spp.), while the Ys are made of jujube (Zizyphus spp.). The recent cleaning of the minbar has revealed that the carved panels are organized coloristically: the small dark stars are connected by pale hexagons, and the large dark stars are surrounded by intermediate-toned Ys.

Originally there would have been more than one thousand panels on the exterior of the minbar. Each side would have had 471 major carved panels, comprising 54 large stars, 74 small stars, 127 hexagons, and 216 Ys. Along the edges of the design, where the pattern comes up against the border, the hexagonal panels have lost one of their points and the small stars have lost two. There were also about 75 tiny triangular panels filling the interstices that would ordinarily have been completed in the design by the ends of a Y panel. Somewhat more than one-half of the original panels survive in situ. Four hexagonal panels, which had been held privately for some time, were



Fig. 4. Y-shaped panel on the right side with a representation of a scalloped arch. Photo: Jonathan M. Bloom

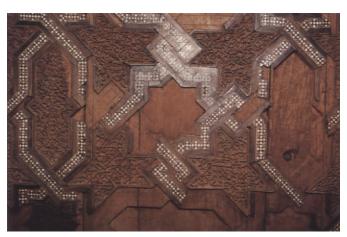


Fig. 5. Y-shaped panels with rectilinear trellises. Photo: Jonathan M. Bloom

acquired in 1969 by the Musée d'Art Africain et Océanien, Paris.¹³

All the panels, of whatever shape, are decorated with exquisitely fine arabesques of scrolling vines with characteristic double stems that support palmettes, split palmettes, pinecones, and blossoms. No two panels are exactly the same. Most are surrounded by a narrow border, the simplest consisting of a grooved molding, the most complex having a row of "pearls" or scallops inserted between



Fig. 6. Fragment of a small star panel with a regular design of tendrils

the lines of the molding. In every case, the borders were planed to shape; sometimes they were even removed entirely when the panels were fitted into the spaces prepared for them between the strapwork bands. Marks on the backs of the panels indicating their placement suggest that they were fitted in place in Córdoba but not glued until the minbar was finally assembled in Marrakesh.

Many of the panels are symmetrical in design, either along a horizontal or vertical axis or along both, yet this symmetry is rarely exact and mechanical. Some panels contain fantastic asymmetrical shapes, although the gracious rhythm and balance of the design are never compromised. A few are notable for containing representations: a small star on the left side bears a depiction of a scalloped arch resting on columns (see fig. 81), an image that is repeated on a Y-shaped panel on the right side (fig. 4); a truncated star panel on the lower left side contains a similar scalloped arch as well as a hanging lamp against a scrolling ground (see fig. 3). Other panels, particularly the Ys, have trellises generated by their outlines, through which grow the customary tendrils and leaves of the design (fig. 5). One fragment of a small star panel (fig. 6) has an unusually regular design which originally had four rows of four spiral tendrils, each containing a floral motif. Another small star is inlaid with a tiny checkerboard in the center (see fig. 2), a unique use of that technique in the panels. While the arabesque ornament on most of the panels is compressed into a relatively shallow plane, several of the hexagonal panels are carved in much deeper relief (see p. 23 below and fig. 21).

An inscription band 6 centimeters (2% inches) wide runs along the minbar's exterior stepped edges and the vertical strip along its back (fig. 7); along the base, instead of this border, there was a band of marquetry, much of which is lost because of wear. The marquetry was com-

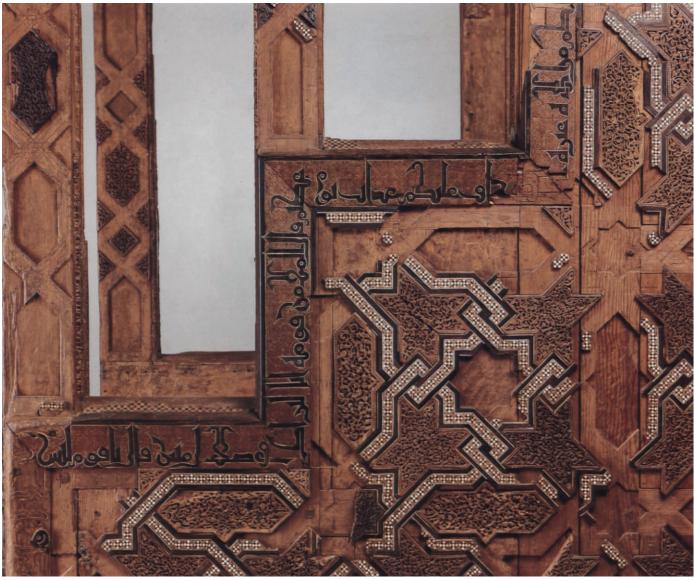


Fig. 7. View of the lower portion of the right side, showing pattern and inscriptions

posed of elements similar to those used in the interlaced bands of the field, but the colors and proportions were changed: the interior checkerboard tiles are made up of one central tan, four dark, and four bone elements arranged in a quincunx. These are surrounded by broader bone strips to form the strapwork bands, which twist around alternating hexagons and elongated hexagons made, respectively, of reddish and dark brown wood.

The masterpiece of Almoravid epigraphy, the inscription itself is one of the finest from all the western Islamic lands (see pp. 14–20 for a discussion of the texts). It is worked in marquetry on separate panels, which were later attached to the carcass. The panel is tilted forward in order to better display the broad lower surface on which the inscription lies; the upper surface, in blackwood, is separated from the lower by a thin strip of bone. Like the inter-

lace design of the field, the text of the inscription seems to have been first drawn on the surface of the individual panels, for remains of the baseline of the script and several corrections are visible where the marquetry has fallen off. Individual letters were then cut out from blackwood and surrounded by thin strips of bone, which were inserted in grooves that had been cut in the panels. These strips served not only to highlight the letters but also to anchor them in place.

The unpointed, angular script—of a type generally, if inaccurately, known as kufic—is brilliantly legible against the marquetry ground, a mosaic composed of small wooden tiles. The individual tiles, which measure some 9 millimeters square and 5 millimeters thick, have been made by piercing four square holes into the center of a square piece of pale wood to form a smaller square set on



Fig. 8. Lower right arched frame, exterior face



Fig. 9. Lower right arched frame, interior face. Note how the last letters of the inscription (bottom left) extend to fill the space

the diagonal. The holes have been filled with bits of reddish wood, and the edges of the resultant tiles have been cut with a series of radiating grooves and filled with a black paste to give the impression of lobes. Literally thousands of such tiles, here and on other surfaces of the minbar, were made using a technique that has so far remained inexplicable.

Lower frames

There are frames pierced with arched openings on either side of the stairway, at the bottom (see fig. 40) and top. Those at the bottom are taller, and their interior jambs are decorated with carved wooden panels in the shape of elongated hexagons and squares separated by strapwork bands (see fig. 20). The strapwork consists of two blackwood bands, each bordered by bone strips, on either side of a band of wooden mosaic tiles. These long, narrow tiles, similar in technique to those used for the ground of the inscriptions, create patterns of paired red heart shapes placed within lozenges with lobes on the outside.

The narrow front faces of the frames were decorated with a strapwork pattern which enclosed alternating



Fig. 10. Detail of fig. 9, showing the vertical extension of the letter $b\bar{a}^{\gamma}$ with a palmette to enliven the upper register

blackwood hexagrams (six-pointed stars) and hexagons. This decoration has largely fallen off, because of the handling to which this part of the minbar was subjected as it was pulled from the closet each week, but the scoring on the carcass shows how the pattern was generated. On the equivalent rear faces there are, below, narrow panels of exquisite carved arabesque and, above, the remains of a strapwork pattern formed by undulating blackwood strips bordered with bone fillets and leaving bone-shaped spaces filled with composite tiles. The intrados of each round horseshoe arch is decorated with marquetry in three wide and two narrow bands: the two wide outer bands, of a checkerboard design of alternating light and dark squares, are separated by plain narrow strips from the central band, which is composed of a line of tangent circles inscribed with squares set diagonally so that the corners of adjacent squares are touching. Each square is itself made up of four smaller squares, each containing a quatrefoil in light (red) wood against a dark ground.

On the exterior faces above the arches (fig. 8) there are panels of curvilinear interlaced bands, studded with bone "pearls," which surround carved quatrefoils and dodecahedrons with concave sides. Only one of the quatrefoils and two of the dodecahedrons are complete, the others having been cut off to accommodate the shape of the panel. Both of the complete dodecahedrons on each flank have three zones: a small central element, which seems to be broken off, a broad, smooth area, and a carved outer border. This arrangement suggests that the inner two zones once sported carved bosses, perhaps of ivory or bone.

The interior faces (fig. 9) have a series of African blackwood panels set in the form of an inverted U and carved with Qur'anic texts in an elongated angular script, whose polished letters contrast sharply with the scrolling arabesque tracery of the ground. The designer of these inscriptions took great pains to achieve balance, not only between the letters and the ground but also among the letters themselves. Thus, at the end of one inscription (see fig. 9) a pair of twisted verticals are inserted that have no semantic value but serve to break up the expanse of arabesque ground above the letters and to extend the inscription below the line, where the panel swells to accommodate the curve of the arch. Similarly, the letter $b\bar{a}^{\circ}$ near the beginning of the same inscription is visually extended upward by an unusual uncarved palmette (fig. 10). Within the inverted U, the remains of other strapwork designs separate deeply and finely carved blackwood panels, including a central eight-pointed star surrounded by four V-shaped elements alternating with small triangles. The strapwork band, worked in marquetry mosaic of wooden tiles similar to those used for the ground of the inscriptions on the flanks, continues around the outer edge of the panel inscriptions and is surmounted by a checkerboard band of alternating tiles and squares of dark wood. The edges of this checkerboard decoration make up a striped band when the intrados of the arch is seen from the side.

Each frame has a band of six-stepped reciprocal crenellations, alternately carved and smooth, on its outer surface and is topped by two finials. Each finial consists of a short, carved cubical base supporting moldings and a smooth, teardrop-shaped knob surmounted by a small sphere. The carving of the base is more sculptural than that of the inset panels. The narrow, curved top of each arched panel shows the remains of a fine checkerboard pattern.

Upper frames

The frames at the top of the minbar (fig. 11), because of their smaller dimensions, seem somewhat more like windows than those at the bottom. When viewed from the side, the front element of each frame is seen to bear a short epigraphic band, although it is not beveled like the main frieze itself, which runs along the back and bottom of the frame (see fig. 41). The pilasters supporting the arches are decorated on their exterior jambs with checkerboard patterns composed of two rows of the same boneand-wood tiles used on the strapwork bands of the flanks; this doubling results in the chevrons' forming concentric squares. The arch itself is a round horseshoe in shape, the extrados being formed by a large circle eccentric to the inner circle. The crescent-shaped archivolt thus created is decorated on the exterior with carved panels, alternatingly circular and concave, and with teardrop-shaped panels at either end, separated by a row of wooden mosaic tiles like those used on the lower arched panels.

On the interior (fig. 12), narrow carved panels correspond to the space occupied on the exterior by the inscriptions. They are surrounded by a line of the same narrow lozenge-heart tiles used on the lower frames but set so that their lobed edges are touching to give a different pattern. The jambs of the pilasters supporting the arches are decorated with marquetry designs in blackwood and bone apparently imitating veined marble, and the archivolt bears a symmetrical split-palmette motif worked in wooden tiles with carved panels at the extremities. Of the spandrels, only that at the left of the interior panel on the right side preserves its outline, showing that the upper surface had a slightly gabled profile. The interior surfaces of the jambs and arch are decorated with checkerboard marquetry. Each frame was originally surmounted by finials similar to those on the bottom (three of which remain) and by a unit of reciprocal cresting.

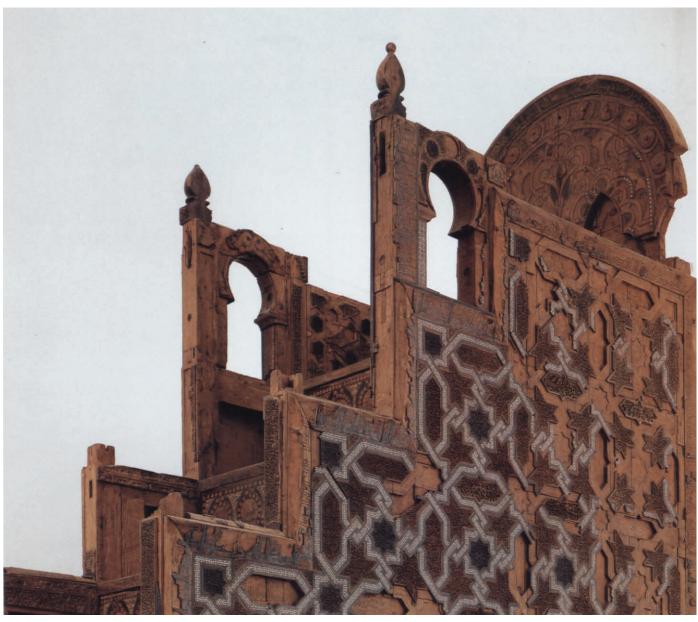


Fig. 11. Upper portion of the minbar, including the upper arched frames

Staircase

The staircase (see fig. 1) is recessed the width of a step from the edges of the triangular sides, thereby providing a sort of balustrade which would have originally been completed on the projecting corners by a series of finials, only one of which survives. At some time before the 1920s, a rather crude handrail was added on either side of the staircase, but it has since been removed. The vertical edges of these balustrade steps were decorated with narrow carved arabesque panels, while the horizontal surfaces—which are slightly rounded—have marquetry designs. The interior surfaces were fitted with squarish carved panels, each composed of four parallel boards. The only complete panel that has survived (fig. 13) displays a shallow lacy dec-

oration of cusped arches and arabesques. Within a narrow border of vegetal motifs, set closely without a ground and comparable to those found on the finial bases, two adjacent cusped arches are supported by pilasters on the outer edges and by a single column in the center. Both the area within the arches and the spandrels are filled with symmetrical arabesques against a plain ground. Judging from extant fragments, the other panels on the interior of the steps would have been similar but not identical. The interior armrests of the upper platform are decorated with marquetry designs of strapwork surrounding alternating hexagons and hexagrams of carved wood.

The arched motif continues on the risers of the steps, where a design in marquetry depicts arcades enclosing vegetal motifs (figs. 14, 15). On all but the two lowest risers

(which have been replaced), bone bases with red rings support six short blackwood columns topped by red rings and carved-bone capitals that are made up of symmetrical arrangements of simple and double palmettes. These in turn support plain blackwood abaci and a continuous horseshoe arcade of blackwood bordered with bone and inlaid with dotted "pearls." This arcade twists on itself and on the encircling frame over every arch. The arches themselves are enclosed within eccentric, crescent-shaped blackwood archivolts. The areas within the arcade are filled with curvilinear vegetal motifs worked in marquetry, in a technique similar to that of the inscription bands on the exterior (fig. 16). The main elements were cut from different colors of wood and small bone pieces dyed green and were bordered with thin strips of bone which served to anchor them into the underlying wooden panel; the ground is filled with wooden mosaic tiles like those used behind the inscription. In the spandrels between the arches, deeply carved designs of palmettes and pinecones are worked in relief without a ground.

On each riser the designs within the five arches alternate, with, for example, a flower on a tall stem alternating with



Fig. 12. Upper right arched frame, interior

one on a short stem. While each riser has a different set of patterns from the others, all the designs are closely related, with a single symmetrical plant motif centered under the arch against a mosaic ground. The treads of the steps (see fig. 101), which may largely be replacements, are decorated simply, with a narrow rectangular band of carved ornament in which palmettes appear within alternating chevrons.

Backrest

Although the decoration on the backrest has suffered particularly from wear and losses, the little that remains indicates that it must have been even more splendid than that on the risers—understandably so, since this was considered the most important area of the minbar. 14 The backrest panel, with a semicircular top, was originally an architectural composition of two intersecting cusped arches supported on three engaged columns (fig. 17), but the columns, their capitals, and bases have disappeared, along with much of the decoration around them, presumably because they were made of large blocks of precious ivory or wood. The grooves and recesses cut to accommodate the inlaid decoration give a good indication, however, of the nature and extent of the decorative scheme. Although only the carved wooden impost block on the left column survives (see fig. 31), the right one was still extant in the 1920s.

The tympanum now stands out in relief from the lower part of the composition, but the lost columns were once probably in the same plane. The area within each arch was originally decorated with a design similar to that found on the risers: against a reticulated ground of wood-and-bone tiles arranged to form alternating checkerboards and concentric squares, a single-stemmed plant terminating in a palmette leaf has three superposed pairs of curved branches ending in simple palmettes. Unlike the plant motifs on the risers, which are worked in marquetry, the narrow stems and leaves of the plant here are actually slender relief-carved panels. A few of them remain under the right arch.

On the tympanum there are the remnants of a composition of intersecting cusped arches worked in strapwork bands of wood-and-bone mosaic tiles. Each tile has a small bone cross in its center against a dark ground and is surrounded by eight minute reddish-wood squares inlaid in the matrix. In contrast to the lower half, where the decorative "subject" was worked in relief and the "background" in mosaic, here the "subject" is mosaic and the "background" is worked in relief. The interstices between the strapwork were filled with carved wooden panels, many of



Fig. 13. The only complete carved panel on the interior of the staircase to survive

which must have been openwork, for the ground preserves remnants of the gold leaf¹⁵ that would have glistened through the openings. Similar pierced panels decorate the undated minbar in the Almohad Qaṣba mosque in Marrakesh, which was presumably made about the time that mosque was completed (ca. 1190). ¹⁶ The tympanum of the Kutubiyya minbar is enclosed at the top by a double border. The inner border contained at least thirteen round bosses (probably of bone, ivory, or carved wood) linked by a continuous band of rectangular mosaic tiles. The outer border is damaged at its beginning and end, but its narrow cavetto bears a beautiful inscription carved in relief, and once highlighted against a blue paint ground, that records the termination of the work.

INSCRIPTIONS

The Kutubiyya minbar is inscribed with religious and historical texts on the backrest, around either flank, and on the interior of either lower frame. There is also a fragment of a graffito which can be interpreted as a signature.

(See the appendix for the text of the original Arabic inscriptions.)

All the inscriptions are essentially in kufic script (see fig. 96), although those on the flanks are worked in marquetry and the others in relief. The designs of a master calligrapher, they display a sophisticated fluidity and elegance. Within the space allotted for the inscription, the relatively low baseline leaves a narrow space for the descending letters, such as $n\bar{u}n$, waw, or $y\bar{a}^3$, but ample space for the ascending vertical shafts of such letters as alif and lām. The inscriptions are relatively sober, with elaboration restricted to only a few places. The vertical shafts of paired lāmalifs are occasionally knotted, and vertical letters often ascend to the upper edge of the band, then bend over as if constrained by the edge; at other times the wedge-shaped tips playfully extend a bit into the border band. The tails of such letters as 'ayn or $y\bar{a}$ ' are sometimes bent back or knotted, while those of final nun rise in sinuous curves reminiscent of the swooping Maghribi scripts in which contemporary manuscripts were copied. Most of these devices are attempts by the calligrapher to enliven the

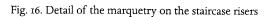




Figs. 14, 15. Two of the staircase risers, showing the variations in the marquetry designs

empty spaces left above the low letters by the Arabic script, and this concern is visible even in the minute inscription on the impost block of the backrest (see fig. 31).

Although the same devices are found elsewhere in Almoravid inscriptions, such as the epitaph of a princess who died in 1103,¹⁷ the inscriptions on the minbar (fig. 18) are unquestionably finer in design and execution and represent the very best of contemporary epigraphy. Some of these features, such as the inscription on the impost blocks and the knotted paired verticals, occur well before the Almoravid conquest of Spain in the 1070s and 1080s and show that epigraphic conventions were entirely independent of political developments. The extreme fluidity of the calligraphic line in these angular inscriptions seems almost cursive in intent, which is not surprising since this was exactly the moment when cursive scripts began to be



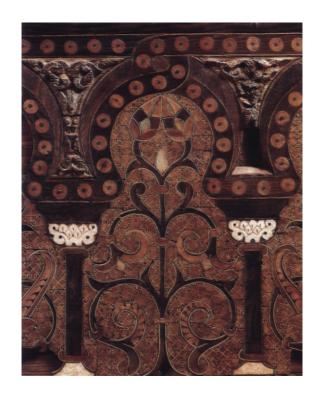




Fig. 17. The backrest, including the remains of decoration and the inscription on its circumference

used for monumental inscriptions, as, for example, in the interior decoration of the Almoravid *qubba* in Marrakesh or the Qarawiyyīn mosque in Fez.¹⁹

Backrest

The inscription around the cavetto of the backrest²⁰ (see fig. 17) reads as follows:

[bi'sm allāh al-raḥmān al-]raḥīm wa ṣallā allāh ʿalā muḥammad wa ʿalā ālihi wa sallama ṣuniʿa hādhā al-minbar bi-madīnat qurṭuba ḥarrasahā allāh li-hādhā al-jāmiʿ al-mukarram adāma allāh muddatahu bi-kalimat al-islām fa-tamma . . .

[In the name of God the Merciful and] Compassionate, and God's blessing and peace on Muḥammad and his family. This minbar was made in the city of Córdoba, may God protect it, for this venerated congregational mosque, may God make it endure with the word of Islam. It was finished. . . .

Owing to the damage at either side of the backrest, it is impossible to determine how much text is missing at the beginning and the end. The text could have begun with more than the simple *basmala*, whose presence is indicated by *raḥīm*, the first word remaining in the inscription. There may have been space for the *tacawwadh*, the prophylactic formula ("I seek refuge in God from accursed



Fig. 18. Detail of the right side, showing the inscription band along the stepped edge

Satan") often invoked before the basmala, particularly in North Africa, and found in other Almoravid inscriptions, including that on the right flank. Even more unfortunate is the loss on the left side exactly where one would expect to find the date when the minbar was completed. Basset and Terrasse, the first to publish the inscription, which had been read for them by the noted epigrapher Évariste Lévi-Provençal, understood it to mean that the minbar was made in Córdoba for the Kutubiyya mosque in Marrakesh (the "venerated" mosque), built by the Almohads between 1147 and 1162, in which the minbar formerly stood. Their attribution of the minbar to the patronage of the Almohad ruler 'Abd al-Mu'min was apparently confirmed by a reference in an anonymous fourteenth-century work, al-Hulal al-mawshiyya (The Embroidered Robes).21

All three impost blocks of the columns on the backrest were originally inscribed in very small kufic characters, with a few stems and leaves to fill the empty spaces. Although the central block has been lost, the right and left imposts were extant when Basset and Terrasse pho-

tographed the minbar in the 1920s; today only the left impost block remains (see fig. 31).

The inscriptions on the impost blocks are as follows, the right block inscription given as shown in Basset and Terrasse's photographs:

Right block: . . . allāhumma āyyid amīr . . . Left block: . . . [i]bn tāshufīn thumma waliyy ahdihi

O God, assist the emir . . .

. . . ibn Tāshufīn and after him his designated heir.

Basset and Terrasse initially published the inscriptions as eulogies—banal formulas of good wishes often found on medieval Muslim objects—but Jean Sauvaget's reexamination in 1946 ingeniously revealed their historical value. Sauvaget began with the fact that the text is clearly incomplete. The word *amīr*, which ends the first part, is missing the definite article *al*-, so that following the rules of Arabic grammar, it must stand in construct with a second noun, either definite or proper. Similarly, an emir mentioned in such a situation would appropriately be identified by

a personal name as well as by his patronymic (Ibn Tāshufīn). Taken together, these considerations suggested to Sauvaget that the impost block in the center of the backrest would have been inscribed with the missing information.

Sauvaget reasoned that the name *Ibn Tāshufīn* on the left panel pointed to the patronage of the Almoravid dynasty, not the Almohads as had previously been supposed, for the Almohads would hardly have been likely to mention the name of that ruler, the real founder of Almoravid power. Almoravid titulature normally included the title *amīr al-muslimīn* (prince of Muslims), and thus the central panel would have begun with the word *al-muslimīn*, followed by the personal name or names of the patron. The small space available precluded the citation of a full Arabic name such as "X son of Y son of Z": there would have been room for only one long name or two short ones. Sauvaget consequently suggested that the only appropriate possible names were those of Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn, his son 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, or 'Alī's grandson Ibrāhīm ibn Tāshufīn.

Sauvaget thought that Yūsuf was a bit too short a name to fill the space available, although this ruler was responsible for developing Marrakesh and founding its first mosque as well as for bringing artisans from Córdoba to embellish the city of Fez. Conversely, the name 'Alī ibn Yūsuf' seemed too long, although Arabic script does allow certain letters to be piled up on top of each other to gain space. 'Alī, who commissioned the mosque for which the minbar was constructed, was succeeded first by his son Sayr and then by his other son, Tāshufīn. Sauvaget rejected the name Ibrāhīm, although it fit best, because that sultan ruled only a few months in 1145–46 and was unlikely, during his brief and unsettled reign, to have commissioned any works of art.

While Sauvaget was unwilling to choose among the candidates, he drew two important conclusions from the inscription. First, the minbar had not been originally made for the Almohad Kutubiyya mosque but rather for one of the Almoravid mosques of Marrakesh (probably the Almoravid congregational mosque itself) and had been brought to the Kutubiyya mosque at some later date. Second, the placement and tone of the inscription indicate that it was more than a simple eulogy; it was, in fact, an official formula of the khutba, the sermon preached from the minbar every Friday. Sauvaget's conclusion is further bolstered by three factors: the placement of the good wishes for the sovereign directly on the minbar itself; the emphasis given to the title "prince of the Muslims," which defined the sovereign as chief of the community by invoking it before the personal name; and finally the mention of the designated heir.23

Right flank

On each triangular flank a beautiful Qur'anic inscription appears on a band that runs along the entire stepped edge and onto the vertical strip at the back. Along the bottom edge of each side an interlace design has replaced the text (see fig. 62), either because it was deemed inappropriate to have a Qur'anic text so close to the ground or because the inscription, had it run continuously, would have had to be read upside down.

The inscription on the right flank (see fig. 18) begins with the invocation

a'ūdhu bi'llāh al-'azīm min al-shayṭān al-rajīm bi'sm allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm

I seek refuge in God Almighty from accursed Satan In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate

and continues with Qur an 7:54-6124

[54] Surely your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days—

then sat Himself upon the Throne,

covering the day with the night it pursues urgently—and the sun, and the moon, and the stars subservient, by His command.

Verily, His are the creation and the command. Blessed be God, the Lord of all Being.

[55] Call on your Lord, humbly and secretly; He loves not transgressors.

[56] Do not corruption in the land, after it has been set

and call on Him fearfully, eagerly—surely the mercy of God is nigh to the good-doers.

[57] It is He who looses the winds, bearing good tidings before His mercy,

till, when they are charged with heavy clouds, We drive it to a dead land

and therewith send down water, and bring forth therewith all the fruits.

Even so We shall bring forth the dead; haply you will remember.

[58] And the good land—its vegetation comes forth by the leave of its Lord,

and the corrupt—it comes forth but scantily.

Even so We turn about the signs for a people that are thankful.

[59] And We sent Noah to his people; and he said, "O my people, serve God!

You have no god other than He; truly, I fear for you the chastisement of a dreadful day."

[60] Said the Council of his people, "We see thee in manifest error."

[61] Said he, "My people, there is no error in me; but I am a Messenger from the Lord of all Being. . . ." sadaqa

This particular Qur'anic passage, a beautiful statement of God's majesty, seems to have been chosen for use here because of the parallel it offers between the minbar and God's throne (Arabic 'arsh). Its opening verses (7:54–55) were also used to decorate the square border around the mihrab at the Great Mosque of Tlemcen, Algeria, a building also erected under 'Alī ibn Yūsuf's patronage at exactly the same time. The word ṣadaqa at the end of the inscription stands for the complete phrase ṣadaqa allāh wa rasūluhu (God and his Prophet speak the truth), traditionally said after reciting from the Qur'an and appearing in full after the Qur'anic quotation on the left flank.

The front element of the upper frame bears the inscription

a'taşimu bi'llāh wa kafā man tawakkil 'alā allāh

I seek refuge in God and it is sufficient for one to trust in God.

Left flank

The inscription on the left flank of the minbar begins with the invocation

bi'sm allāh al-raḥman al-raḥīm wa ṣallā allāh ^calā muḥammad wa ^calā ālihi wa sallama taslīm^{an}

In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate, and God's blessings on Muḥammad and on his family and complete blessing.

It is followed by Qur³an 2:255–57, the well-known Throne Verse and two subsequent verses:

[255] God
there is no god but He, the
Living, the Everlasting.
Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep;
To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth.
Who is there that shall intercede with Him save by
His leave?
He knows what lies before them and what is after them.

and they comprehend not anything of His knowledge save such as He wills.

His Throne comprises the heavens and earth; the preserving of them oppresses Him not; He is the All-high, the All-glorious.

[256] No compulsion is there in religion.

Rectitude has become clear from error.

So whosoever disbelieves in idols
and believes in God, has laid hold of
the most firm handle, unbreaking; God is All-hearing,
All-knowing.

[257] God is the Protector of the believers;
He brings them forth from the shadows into the light.
And the unbelievers—their protectors are
idols, that bring them forth from the light into the shadows;

those are the inhabitants of the Fire, therein dwelling forever.

şadaqa allāh wa rasūluhu

The Throne Verse, the eloquent statement of God's dominion over heaven and earth, is one of the most popular in all Islamic epigraphy and is used in a great many situations; its appearance on the minbar should thus be no surprise.26 The specific choice seems to have been additionally motivated by the logical comparison between the minbar and the throne (kursī) mentioned in the verse a metaphor begun in the Qur'anic verse selected for the right flank. The continuation of the text into the following verse is common in many inscriptions, and one can easily imagine that the designer of the inscription needed sufficient text to fill up the minbar's stepped side. The inclusion of the third verse, while less common, is also known from widely scattered examples.²⁷ That the designer ended the Qur'anic quotation with the verse containing the phrase "from the shadows into the light" might not have disappointed him, for it could easily be interpreted as referring to the minbar itself, which was pulled weekly from a shadowy closet into the light of the mosque.

The vertical strip descending along the back of the left flank preserves the following text, which was read only after the recent conservation of the minbar:

şuni'a hādhā al-minbar bi-qurṭuba ḥarrasahā allāh ilā al-masjid al-jāmi' bi-ḥaḍrat marrākush ḥarrasahā allāh wa kānat al-bidāya fī ṣan'ihi bi-'awn allāh fī awwal yawm min shahr muḥarram 'ām ithnayn wa thalāthīn wa khamsami'a a'zama allāh ajr al-amr bi-'amalihi wa al-nāzir...

This minbar was made in Córdoba—may God protect it—for the congregational mosque in the capital

Marrakesh—may God protect it. And the inception of its fabrication, with the help of God, was on the first day of the month of Muharram in the year 532. May God make great the reward of the matter of its work. And the supervisor. . . .

This inscription is obviously of the utmost importance, since it gives a precise date for the commencement of work on the minbar—A.H. I Muharram 532 (equivalent to A.D. September 19, 1137), which was New Year's Day in the Muslim lunar calendar. The precise date confirms Sauvaget's hypothesis that the Almoravid 'Alī ibn Yūsuf (r. 1106-43) ordered the minbar's construction, most likely as a sort of New Year's present for the mosque. It also indicates that the minbar was begun some two decades after the mosque for which it was intended and strongly suggests that it was completed, transported, and installed before the Almohad conquest of the city in 1147 (see p. 4). Written out several years after the beginning of work, the inscription must have served, like many inscriptions in Islamic lands, as an official document which recorded for posterity the legal status of the minbar, much as the inscription on the backrest served not only as a record of the completion of the work but also as a reminder of the minbar's official function as the place from which the sermon was pronounced.²⁸

The vertical strip at the front of the upper frame on the left flank contains a text which appears to read "al-wāḥid al-ḥāfiz allāh wa al-amīn ḥ-b-r-b-ā." Since this panel, like the corresponding one on the right flank, is not continuous with the rest of the inscription text, it is difficult to determine how it relates to that text as a whole. It could be read as the end of the signature or as some pious phrase like that found in the corresponding position on the opposite side, since the first two and the fourth words are three of the ninety-nine names of God (see p. 19). As it stands, however, it does not make any sense.

Lower frames

The interiors of both of the lower arched frames are inscribed with well-known selections from the Qur'an, taken from two short incantatory chapters near the end. The inscription on the left frame begins with the *basmala* (invocation), is followed by the *tasliya* (blessings on the Prophet and his family), and ends with Qur'an II2 (*Ikhlas*, "Sincere Religion"), which reads as follows:

In the Name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate Say: "He is God, One, God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him is not any one."

The interior of the right frame (see fig. 9) contains an inscription from Qur'an 113 (Falak, "Daybreak"):

In the Name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate Say: "I take refuge with the Lord of the Daybreak from the evil of what He has created, from the evil of darkness when it gathers, from the evil of the women who blow on knots, from the evil of an envier when he envies."

The inscription concludes with the phrase *naṣr min allāh* wa-fatḥ qarīb (help from God and a nigh victory [Qur³an 61:13]).

Sura 112, with its clear statement against Christian Trinitarianism, has been popular since the beginning of Islamic epigraphy and is commonly found in many media. The text breaks off just before the last word of the verse, for the entire blackwood inscription panel on the left side is missing. Since the text of Sura 112 would have ended at the corner, any variety of texts could have been inserted along the left side; in the inscription on the right arched panel, for example, the pious ejaculation "help from God and a nigh victory" from Qur³an 61 fills up the remainder of the panel.²⁹ It is possible that the panel was deliberately removed at an early date because it contained an objectionable text, such as an invocation in the name of the ruling Almoravid.

Graffito

On the rear jamb of the lower left frame, in an area presumably once hidden behind a carved capital supporting the arch, is incised "al-'azīz." This graffito (fig. 19) is most likely the personal name of a craftsman who worked on the minbar, although he is not otherwise identifiable. Such signatures are known on ivory caskets made in Córdoba, such as the pyxides now at Fitero (Navarra Iglesia Parroquial) and the Hispanic Society of America in New York (D 752), which are signed by a craftsman named Khalaf.³⁰ The large rectangular casket now in Pamplona (Museo de Navarra), made in 1005, bears the inscription "the work of Faraj and his pupils" on the inside of the lid, and at least four of the pupils inconspicuously signed various parts of the decoration.31 Signatures are also found on the stuccowork decorating the Qarawiyyīn mosque in Fez, which is exactly contemporary to the minbar.32

TECHNIQUE AND STYLE

The inscription on the left flank of the Kutubiyya minbar indicates that it was begun in Córdoba in 1137; the portion of the inscription on the backrest that would have given its



Fig. 19. Detail of the rear jamb of the lower left frame, with remains of the graffito

date of completion is now lost, but there are certain factors that help in estimating that date. First, assuming that the minbar was actually installed in the Marrakesh mosque for which it was intended, it would have to have arrived there before 1147, when the Almohads took the city. Thus, allowing for the distance the minbar had to travel, it must have been completed in Córdoba at the latest by 1145, eight years after it was begun. Second, it recently took a Moroccan craftsman one week to carve a rather coarse copy of one of the Kutubiyya minbar's hexagonal panels. While a more experienced craftsman might have been able to work faster, his work would also presumably be more detailed and finer in execution, which would have taken more time. Therefore the minbar's carved panels alone can be said to represent a minimum of one thousand man-weeks of work, equivalent to four craftsmen working continuously for five years. Since these carved panels represent only one part of the decorative program, it may be reasonably estimated that the Kutubiyya minbar represents the work of at least a dozen workers over some five years. Third, it is helpful to compare this estimate with the report by the twelfth-century geographer al-Idrīsī that six craftsmen and their apprentices worked for seven years making the inlaid wooden minbar in the Great Mosque of Córdoba, which had been ordered for the mosque by the Umayyad caliph al-Ḥakam II (r. 961–76) and was destroyed in the sixteenth century.³³

The Kutubiyya minbar presents a fixed point for the study of the state of luxury woodwork in Córdoba around 1140. No earlier examples of woodwork survive from Islamic Spain, but a series of nearly thirty carved ivory caskets, many bearing figural decoration, display similarities in technique and style of carving which strongly suggest that the minbar was produced in the same milieu. Made at Madīnat al-Zahrā and Córdoba in the late tenth and the early eleventh century, many of these caskets were intended as royal gifts for the Muslim elite and were subsequently preserved because they were adapted for use as Christian reliquaries, kept safely over the centuries in church treasuries. One must imagine that many other objects of ivory, bone, and wood from the workshops of Córdoba and Madīnat al-Zahrā have not survived.

Technical analysis of the Kutubiyya minbar has shown that it was inlaid with bone,³⁶ but it is possible that ivory was used for the large three-dimensional elements, where its special properties—such as its fine grain and the inherent size of the block—could have been exploited. Bone and ivory had been worked together at least from the time of the early Roman Empire, and the materials continued to be somewhat interchangeable in Byzantine times, although ivory was always more expensive and deemed more appropriate for sacred imagery.³⁷ The lid of a Byzantine casket at Dumbarton Oaks, for example, is decorated with a plaque of Christ carved of ivory, while the interceding Virgin beside him is of bone.³⁸ Cordoban artisans, like their contemporaries in Byzantium and Islamic Egypt, would have used bone where it was economically or aesthetically appropriate.³⁹ Considering the wealth of the minbar's patron, his access to sources of ivory in Africa, and the extraordinary effort expended on decorating the minbar with rare imported woods, it is difficult to imagine that bone was substituted for ivory here merely because it was cheaper. Contemporaries seem to have thought the inlaid material was ivory, just as they identified the precious imported dark-colored wood inlaid on the Córdoba minbar as ebony (ibnūs) and not the African blackwood it probably was.

Marquetry

The Kutubiyya minbar is decorated in two distinct techniques, carving and marquetry (fig. 20), although it could also be said that the minbar was entirely encrusted with marquetry, of which some of the elements were carved



Fig. 20. Jamb of the lower left frame, interior and rear faces

and others plain. While the ivory caskets made in Spain offer some technical and stylistic parallels for the minbar's carved woodwork, there are none for its marquetry: the Kutubiyya minbar itself is the earliest surviving example of marquetry from Islamic Spain. Its marquetry technique, in which the entire surface, including the background, is encrusted with other materials, is quite different from those used elsewhere in Islamic lands, in which the pattern pieces are inlaid in a ground that remains visible. ⁴⁰ One such technique, practiced in Egypt since ancient times, involved the art of inlaying ivory, bone, and colored woods and stones in a distinct wood ground. ⁴¹ That the technique continued to be used in

Islamic times is demonstrated by a group of sycamore panels, including one in New York, inlaid with ivory (?) and colored woods and attributed to late-ninth- or early-tenth-century Egypt. ⁴² Quite a different technique, in which a surface has been entirely encrusted with ivory (bone?) plaques, themselves inlaid with black, green, and red materials, was used to decorate a unique wooden casket in Palermo (Tesoro della Cappella Palatina), attributed to twelfth- or thirteenth-century Egypt, and the Tortosa Casket (Tesoro de la Catedral de Tortosa), attributed to the contemporary period in Spain. ⁴³

Despite the lack of extant parallels, the Kutubiyya minbar's marquetry is of such extraordinary quality and assuredness that it was clearly not a first attempt at the technique. This observation is apparently confirmed by descriptions of the minbar of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, which seems also to have been decorated in marquetry. The Moroccan historian Ibn 'Idhārī al-Marrākushī, a native of Marrakesh who lived from the second half of the thirteenth century to the early fourteenth, wrote that the Córdoba minbar was "inlaid" (Arabic *mudkhal*) with red and yellow sandalwood, ebony, ivory, and Indian aloewood and cost 35,705 dinars. ⁴⁴ Its elaborate marquetry must have been the prototype for that which still exists on the Kutubiyya minbar.

As exquisite as the marquetry on the Kutubiyya minbar is, certain peculiarities reveal that the technique was still in need of practical, if not necessarily aesthetic, development. This is particularly apparent in the strapwork on the flanks of the minbar. As previously noted, the strapwork was assembled directly on the surface of the minbar from the various constituent elements—thin strips of bone, thicker strips of blackwood, and checkerboard tiles of wood and bone. Each element was fitted individually into the space available to create the strapwork design. Where the strapwork bands bend, the marquetry joints are somewhat ungainly, for some elements are mitered and others are lap-joined (see fig. 28). In contrast, on the minbar in the Qasba mosque in Marrakesh (see fig. 48), which was made about fifty years later, strapwork bands were prepared separately and glued to a cloth base, then carefully mitered and joined to give a much more precise, if not so lively, result.

Marquetry continued to be produced in Spain and Morocco for centuries, to judge from the series of minbars surviving in Morocco and several articles of inlaid wood from Spain, including two writing desks attributed to the fourteenth century and a later casket in New York, as well as a pair of cabinet doors from Granada. ⁴⁵ It is likely that most of the other minbars were made in Morocco, perhaps by descendants or followers of the workmen sent from Córdoba to assemble the minbar in the Marrakesh mosque.

The carving on the minbar, although nonfigural, is arguably equal to or finer than that found on many of the Cordoban ivory caskets (see p. 21), and the variety of techniques and inventiveness of designs on the minbar surpass what was previously known of wood and ivory carving in medieval Islamic Spain. It has been a cliché in the history of Islamic art to decry the decline in craftsmanship following the fall of the Umayyad caliphate of Córdoba in the early eleventh century, and it has long been believed that after the caliphate's collapse, the court ivory carvers, who had worked at Madīnat al-Zahrā and Córdoba, found a refuge at Cuenca in Castile, which was under the rule of the Dhu'l-Nūnid dynasty from 1020.46 While Cuenca carving is decidedly inferior to that of the caliphal period, the high quality of the carving on the Kutubiyya minbar shows that the level of craftsmanship in Córdoba a century after all the workmen supposedly left had not declined one jot. The craftsmen who left Córdoba for Cuenca must already have been second-rate before they left; the ones who remained in Córdoba (although we have no surviving evidence of their work in the later eleventh century) must have maintained and even raised their standards so that their heirs knew how to carve the extraordinary panels that still decorate the Kutubiyya minbar.

It has also been a commonplace of Islamic history to brand the Almoravids as arrogant, uncouth, unlettered, legalistic, and intolerant barbarians, although in recent years some scholars have attempted to modify this view.⁴⁷ The beauty and inventiveness of the Kutubiyya minbar's designs and inscriptions indicate that 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, its Almoravid patron, had no need to be ashamed of his artistic taste and, further, that many of the artistic innovations previously credited to the Almohads had actually been introduced under their Almoravid predecessors.

Most of the minbar's carved elements are worked in the traditional style of Córdoba, in which more or less symmetrical vegetal elements are carved in a relatively shallow plane against a deeply carved and shadowed ground. The stems are normally delineated by a narrow median groove and interrupted by small round nodes or nodules. They terminate typically either in palmettes or half-palmettes or in pinecones which have, respectively, a curving central or a lateral vein from which a series of parallel grooves is cut. On several of the Spanish ivories, such as the Mughīra Casket (968) in the Louvre, the edges of the leaves have a series of drilled holes, but these are not found on the minbar.

Several of the panels, particularly the hexagons, are carved in a more three-dimensional style than is generally employed in the minbar (fig. 21); in these, the leaves and

pineconelike blossoms emerge in waves from the underlying stems. Such panels appear somewhat darker than the other hexagons because more of the ground is in shadow. Although the individual elements—stems, leaves, and blossoms—are identical to those used in the other panels, the total effect is noticeably different and somewhat "baroque," the term being understood within the minbar's rather restricted formal vocabulary. This more three-dimensional style is quite anomalous in Spanish-Islamic relief decoration, which is normally characterized by quite shallow relief.

Although this comparatively naturalistic three-dimensional style may have been the invention of a particularly gifted carver, close parallels with carved stucco decoration in Morocco and Algeria suggest that it was more than an individual creation. A comparable three-dimensionality is displayed, for example, in many of the lower panels decorating the interior vault of the Almoravid qubba in Marrakesh (fig. 22), which has been identified as the ablution pavilion of the very same mosque for which the Kutubiyya minbar was intended. The pavilion may have been built as early as 1117.48 Although many of the carved stuccos decorating the vaults of the Qarawiyyīn mosque in Fez have shallow and rather predictable relief decoration in the Cordoban style, several others display a similar sculptural sense. These vaults were constructed in 1136-37, precisely when the minbar was being made in Córdoba, on the order of the same patron, 'Alī ibn Yūsuf. 49 This distinct style is also found in some of the stucco decoration of the Great Mosque of Tlemcen, Algeria, which was completed for 'Alī ibn Yūsuf under the supervision of the gadi Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān in March 1136. Again, much of the decoration is rather shallow, but that between the ribs of the dome in front of the mihrab and in the spandrels of the central dome is unusually threedimensional.⁵⁰ The appearance of this three-dimensional style in four widely separated places at the same time demands an explanation: the simplest is that the style had developed in Córdoba by the early twelfth century and, on the orders of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, was brought by workmen trained there to Marrakesh, Fez, and Tlemcen.

The large pierced backrest panels of the Kutubiyya minbar have been lost, but they may have been similar to those still found on the minbar in the Qaṣba mosque, made about fifty years later. It seems a logical step in the evolution of Spanish Umayyad decoration to make the ground so deep that it passes, as it were, from the shadows into the light, as the solid ground dissolves into openwork. This taste for pierced decoration is evident as early as the tenth century at the *maqṣūra* in front of the mihrab at the Great Mosque of Córdoba. Perhaps the finest example,

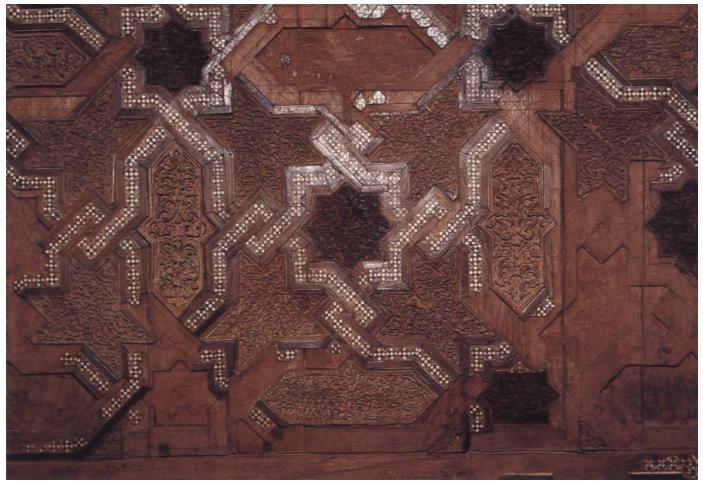


Fig. 21. Detail of the lower left side, showing several of the more deeply carved hexagonal panels . Photo: Jonathan M. Bloom

however, is the splendid pierced dome before the mihrab at Tlemcen (fig. 23), where a network of plaster ribs supports a stucco tracery through which an almost heavenly light penetrates into the mosque.

Conversely, other elements on the minbar, such as the bases of the finials and the spandrels between the arches of the risers (see fig. 16), are carved in a distinctive technique in which one element seems to rise up and swell from behind adjacent elements, no distinction being made between figure and ground. This "groundless" style, which is ultimately derived from the beveled style of carving that was popular at the 'Abbasid capital of Samarra in Iraq in the middle of the ninth century, became widely accepted in the eastern and central Islamic lands in the late ninth and the tenth century.⁵¹ It did not, however, reach the western Islamic lands until much later, primarily because political circumstances prevented many of the traditional means of artistic exchange between these regions from operating. The first appearance of the style in the western Islamic lands has traditionally been ascribed to Almohad patronage, for it was used, for example, in the intrados of an arch surviving from the Almohad mosque of Seville

(1172–98). Although never entirely supplanting the traditional Cordoban style of differentiating figure and ground, it was soon found in Muslim, Christian, and Jewish buildings throughout Spain and Morocco. ⁵² Its presence on the Kutubiyya minbar reveals that the style had already arrived in Spain by 1137, that is, under the Almoravids. Indeed, like the three-dimensional style found on the panels, the groundless style must have been known in Córdoba for some time before the construction of the minbar, because it too is found in the squinches of the Almoravid pavilion in Marrakesh, completed perhaps two decades earlier. ⁵³

The proposed Cordoban origin—at least in local terms—for these decorative techniques suggests that the city remained a cultural center well after the fall of the caliphate in the early eleventh century. It seems likely that these artistic ideas, as well as others such as *muqarnas* (stalactite vaulting) that appeared in Almoravid art at the same time, would have been introduced directly to Córdoba from points further east, rather than diffusing slowly across North Africa and Spain, as had previously been thought. From Córdoba these ideas would have been



Fig. 22. Interior of the stucco vault of the Almoravid qubba in Marrakesh. Photo: Jonathan M. Bloom

disseminated to other cities under Almoravid rule. Such a scenario confirms that the routes of human interaction remain a more important consideration than physical geography in understanding how artistic and other ideas were transferred in medieval times.

Pattern and color

A particularly distinctive feature of the Kutubiyya minbar's design is the geometric grid that organizes the decoration of its flanks, and indeed its entire design, for the placement of the steps is exactly coordinated to the geometric grid. ⁵⁴ The tread of each step aligns with the bottom edge of the large stars, so one might conclude that the design is based on them, but in reality it is generated from the radius of the smaller stars. The alignment was probably intended to place the pattern in such a way that the straight lines of the extended hexagons could be more easily adapted to the edges of the design. Fewer of the carved panels would then have had to be modified in shape.

The resulting pattern (see figs. 90, 91), when repeated over a large area, can be read in several different and

ambiguous ways, depending on which of the constituent parts are emphasized. It can be read as a pattern of overlapping irregular octagons which produce elongated hexagons where they overlap. It can also be seen to consist of a mesh of bone-shaped loops which are crossed and linked together, forming the smaller eight-pointed stars where they cross and the larger ones where they link. Although the orthogonals of the strapwork pattern all line up, the diagonals are not exactly in line because the stars are of two different sizes. This variance gives an unusual sense of vibrancy to what appears at first glance to be a static pattern.

In contrast to these linear readings of the pattern, some of the coloristic effect intended by the designers has become apparent after the recent cleaning of the minbar, although the loss of many panels and areas of strapwork on the flanks means that some of it has to be imagined. Seen from a distance, the flanks of the minbar display something of a mosaic pattern, with regularly placed dark stars linked by elongated hexagons of one brown shade and surrounded by Y shapes of another, all the elements being separated from each other by narrow white bands. This kind of composition is remarkably similar to those

typically associated with *zillīj*, a mosaic technique employing glazed ceramic tiles that was practiced in North Africa and Spain—as elsewhere in the Islamic lands—at least since the eleventh century.

The origins of the zillij technique in North Africa remain somewhat obscure, and the extensive restoration of many later examples may have confused matters even more.55 The large green and white tiles nailed to the cornices of the Kutubiyya minaret in Marrakesh (fig. 24), the earliest securely dated example of the technique in Morocco, can be assigned to the mid twelfth century, just a few years later than the minbar. While the scale of work at the top of a tower had to be much larger and coarser than the exquisite marquetry of the minbar, the pattern on the main cornice is remarkably similar in design and aesthetic effect to that on the minbar's flanks: bands of narrow white tiles separate square and elongated hexagonal green tiles to form a design of interlocking octagons.⁵⁶ As it is unlikely that this technique was invented in Almohad Marrakesh, once again it seems probable that ceramic mosaic was practiced in Almoravid Córdoba, although no examples are known to survive.

Patterns based on hexagons and octagons are ubiquitous in Islamic art, particularly in the arts of the western Islamic lands during the caliphal and subsequent periods.⁵⁷ Bands with these patterns are indeed so common in Almoravid and Almohad architecture⁵⁸ that one scholar has been led to believe that geometric patterns were introduced from Baghdad by the Berber dynasties because of their inherent ideological content.⁵⁹ Such patterns, however, had been known for centuries; some of the earliest extant examples in Spain are the marble window screens from the Great Mosque of Córdoba and the two window screens from an unidentified building of the caliphal period now in the Museo Arquelógico Nacional in Madrid.60 Although the geometry of the window screens is selfevident, it is sometimes concealed in other arts, as in the strapwork interlaces and twists that divide the decoration on several Cordoban ivories.61

Large fields of such regular patterns, as found on the Kutubiyya minbar, are rare in earlier periods, probably because they become monotonous when extended over a sizable surface. When geometric decoration was used on contemporary woodwork in the central Islamic lands, an entirely different approach was favored, one in which the angular interlacing strapwork radiated from central stars. In addition, the patterns are much larger in scale and only a fraction or at most a few repeats of it are visible. This is the approach adopted throughout Syria, Egypt, and Anatolia in such examples as the minbar ordered in 1091–92 by the Fatimid vizier Badr al-Jamālī



Fig. 23. Interior of the pierced stucco vault in front of the mihrab in the Great Mosque of Tlemcen, Algeria. Photo: Jonathan M. Bloom

for the shrine of al-Ḥusayn at Ashquelon, now in the Mosque of Abraham at Hebron; the wooden mihrabs of Sayyida Nafisa (1138–46) and of Sayyida Ruqayya (1154–60), both in the Cairo Museum; the minbar of the Great Mosque of Qus, ordered by the Fatimid vizier Ṭalāʾiʿibn Ruzzīk in 1156; the minbar in the ʿAlāʾal-Dīn mosque at Konya (1155–56); and the minbar, now destroyed, that was ordered at Aleppo in 1168–69 by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin) for the Aqṣā mosque, Jerusalem. A similar technique was also adopted for a wooden panel attributed to twelfth-century Sicily, in which strapwork separates carved figural panels. Si

That the subtlety and visual interest of the pattern on the flanks of the Kutubiyya minbar derive from the slightly different sizes of the larger and smaller stars can be seen by comparing its design with those on the minbars in the Qarawiyyīn mosque in Fez (see fig. 46) and the Qaṣba mosque in Marrakesh (see fig. 48). There the stars are all of the same size and the patterns are consequently less interesting, although the workmanship may be equal in quality. On the Qaṣba mosque minbar, the pattern was

increased in scale and the number of repeats diminished to fourteen on each side in an attempt to avoid monotony. Large expanses of such patterns are indeed found in $zill\bar{\imath}j$ tiles, and without the subtle use of color they can often appear decidedly monotonous.

The mathematical relationship between the two sizes of stars used on the flanks of the minbar can be expressed by a complicated formula, but the scribed construction lines visible there indicate that the entire design was generated quite simply, using a basic knowledge of geometry, a straightedge, a pair of compasses, and a marking instrument, tools that every carpenter would have had and known how to use (although it is also amply evident that this elegant minbar was not the work of any ordinary craftsman). The inherent nature of the design and of the grid on which it is based indicates that the pattern could not have been generated on graph paper, had such a thing existed at so early a date.⁶⁴

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

Despite the loss of much of the Kutubiyya minbar's decoration, it remains remarkably intact and provides an unusually complete example of contemporary design. Aside from the aspects we have examined, a few final words should be said about aesthetics. Perhaps the most important design principle embodied in the Kutubiyya minbar is that of contrast. Within its juxtapositions of carved and marquetry decoration, various kinds of threedimensional relief are contrasted with designs worked on a single plane. Even within one kind of decoration, there is a juxtaposition of textures. In the inscriptions along the flanks, for example, the elegantly smooth blackwood letters stand out against the intricate pattern of the mosaic ground; in the sculpted inscriptions on the lower frames, the sinuous, smooth, rounded letters appear against a lacy vegetal ground. A similar interplay may be seen between the monochrome carved decoration and the polychrome marquetry, as well as between the vegetal and the geometric decoration (in general, the carved monochrome decoration on the flanks is vegetal and the marquetry geometric, but on the risers and backrest, the vegetal decoration is worked in both marquetry and carving, contrasting above and below the arcade). There seems also to have been a delight in the alternation of materials, although much of the larger (presumably ivory) decoration has vanished. The pure white of the bone was constantly juxtaposed to the various browns of the different woods, whether in the tiny checkerboard tiles on the intrados of the arched panels or on the capitals of the columns depicted on the risers.

The second important principle of design in the minbar, as in much Islamic art, is ambiguity. There is no one single position from which it is possible to fully appreciate the minbar. At a distance the apparent regularity of the strapwork patterns and the relationships between the parts and the whole are obvious, but the individuality and brilliance of the panels are invisible, as the details blur into a textured surface. Close up, on the other hand, it is easy to become involved in the details of each individual panel and lose sight of the general composition and how, for example, all panels of a particular shape are of the same color. Thus, the Kutubiyya minbar, like many others elsewhere in the Islamic lands, is a work of art that constantly demands long and repeated looking, from near and from afar. Yet, like a Chinese scroll, it is a work of art that was normally stored until someone wished to use it. Kept in a closet to the right of the mihrab and rolled out for a few hours each week, the minbar could be seen in detail only by the few people in the mosque who might be able to come close enough. One cannot imagine that any contemporary had sufficient time to really see the minbar; to know it meant to devote a lifetime to brief glimpses.

The sense of ambiguity can also be found in some of the smallest details, such as the carved panels in the

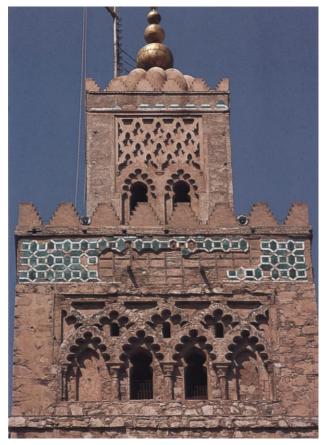


Fig. 24. Interlocking octagonal pattern of green and white ceramic tiles near the top of the Kutubiyya minaret, Marrakesh. Photo: Jonathan M. Bloom

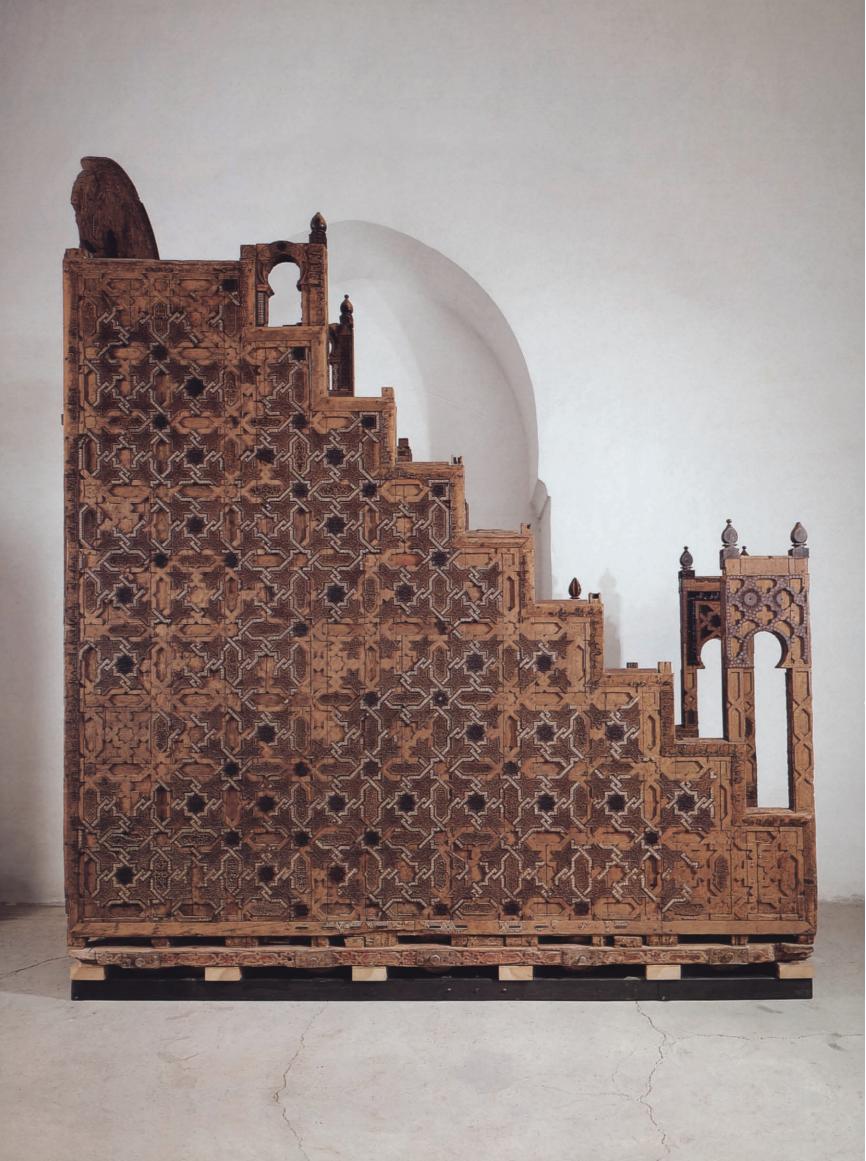
groundless style, or in the reciprocal quality of some of the decorative patterns. Does the decoration consist of marquetry and inlaid relief panels or only of marquetry, of which one set of inlaid elements is carved in relief? How does one describe the decoration on the flanks, when the "background" of the strapwork pattern is arguably more important or detailed than the pattern itself? That these questions must remain unanswered speaks to the continuing vitality of this extraordinary work of medieval Islamic art.

- I. This basin, made for 'Abd al-Malik ibn Abī 'Āmir (r. 1002–8), the son of the Umayyad generalissimo al-Manṣūr, was in the Ben Yūsuf Medersa in Marrakesh for centuries. See Lévi-Provençal 1931, no. 217; New York 1992, no. 43.
- 2. Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun 1957, p. 51.
- 3. EI², s.v. "Marrākush" (entry by P. de Cenival), vol. 6, p. 592.
- 4. Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun 1957.
- 5. For the gubba, see ibid.
- 6. Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun 1952.
- 7. Marçais [1954], pp. 202–3, quoting al-Ḥulal al-mawshiyya [1911], pp. 119–20.
- 8. H. Basset and Terrasse 1926a, pp. 168-204.
- Gómez-Moreno 1951, p. 294; Torres Balbás 1949, pp. 65–67; Sourdel-Thomine and Spuler 1973, pp. 285–86, figs. 230, 231. See also New York 1992, pp. 362–67.
- 10. The passage continues, "A number of fragments from the Córdoba minbar have appeared [in the Maghrib] and these have been compared with those from the Tlemcen minbar. The latter [minbar] does not suffer in comparison. It has carved pieces of wood the size of a hazelnut or a chickpea and incrustations of the size of a grain of wheat or almost: to see it, one is amazed. God will demand an account of he who causes the ruin of his masterpieces and chastise him because he destroyed monuments in which all the people of Islam took glory and which would have illustrated religion for eternity." Ibn Marzūq mentions only fragments from the Córdoba minbar; it would have been difficult if not impossible for him to see it, since the city was captured by Christians in 1236. The minbar, probably missing a few fragments, survived until the sixteenth century. For Ibn Marzūq, see Bloom forthcoming; for the Córdoba minbar, see Hernández Jiménez 1959.
- TI. The minbar ordered by the Fatimid vizier Badr al-Jamālī for the shrine of Ḥusayn at Ashquelon (1091–92; later transferred to the Ḥaram al-Khalīl mosque, Hebron) is the earliest extant example. The triangular fields on either side of the minbar are decorated with a geometric interlace of hexagons and hexagrams delineated by scrolled bands, and the interstices are filled with richly carved, delicate arabesques. Vincent and Mackay 1923, pp. 219–25, pls. XXV–XXVII; EI², s.v. "Minbar," vol. 7, pl. XIII. The Jerusalem minbar was commissioned by Nūral al-Dīn from four Aleppan artisans in 1168–69 for the al-Aqṣā mosque, in anticipation of retaking the city from the Crusaders. His nephew Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin) moved the minbar to Jerusalem after capturing the city in 1187, and it remained there until it was destroyed by arson in 1969. This minbar was notable for its extensive ivory inlays, used for the outlines of the polygonal figures and for some of the smaller interstitial stars.
- For the purpose of identifying the woods, wood species analysis was performed by Antoine Wilmering. See essay by Soultanian et al. herein, pp. 72–74.
- 13. Gift of the Parvillée family; Paris 1977, pp. 120-21.
- 14. For the role of the backrest as a trophy, see Bloom in New York 1992, no. 41.
- 15. The gilding was identified through polarized light microscopy performed by Jack Soultanian and through scanning electron microscope and EDS analyses carried out by Mark D. Minor. See essay by Soultanian et al. herein, pp. 73–74.
- For the Qasba mosque, in addition to H. Basset and Terrasse 1926b, see Ewert and Wisshak 1987, pp. 179–210.

- 17. Lévi-Provençal 1931, no. 24, pl. III.
- 18. Inscribed impost blocks appear around the main mihrab of the Great Mosque of Córdoba (dated 965) as well as on the epitaph of the Almoravid princess. Knotted verticals are found in an inscription from Seville dated 472. See ibid., no. 31, pls. III, VIII.
- 19. Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun 1957, pp. 49–51; H. Terrasse 1968, p. 80.
- 20. Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet 1931-91, no. 3230.
- 21. H. Basset and Terrasse 1926a, pp. 168-207.
- 22. The effect of Sauvaget's new reading can be seen in the differing attributions of the minbar in two volumes of Ars Hispaniae. Torres Balbás (1949, pp. 65–67) published it first as Almohad, but two years later Gómez-Moreno (1951, p. 294) knew it was Almoravid.
- 23. Sauvaget 1949.
- 24. This and the following translations from the Qur² an are taken from Arberry 1955 but are numbered according to the Standard Egyptian system.
- 25. Bourouiba 1973, p. 82.
- 26. See, for example, Dodd and Khairallah 1981, vol. 2, pp. 10ff.; Blair 1997.
- 27. Dodd and Khairallah 1981, vol. 2, pp. 18—19. It should be noted that although the passage cited here comprises only verse 255 to the middle of verse 257 according to the Standard Egyptian system, it constitutes all of verses 256 to 258 according to the Flügel numbering system.
- 28. Blair 1997, chap. 4.
- 29. This same phrase appears in the kufic inscription on the panel to the right of the mihrab at the Great Mosque of Tlemcen. See Bourouiba 1973. p. 84.
- 30. For these caskets, see Kühnel 1971, nos. 23, 28.
- 31. For the Pamplona casket, see ibid., no. 35; New York 1992, no. 4.
- 32. H. Terrasse 1968, pp. 78, 80.
- 33. "To the right of the mihrab is the minbar that is unequaled for craftsmanship in the populated world. It is made of ebony [ibnūs], box [baqs], and incense-aloewood. It is said in the annals of the Umayyad caliphs that it took seven years for its carpentry and inlay, and that six craftsmen worked on it, apart from those [apprentices] serving them. Every craftsman received half a mithqūl muḥammadī per day." Idrīsī 1866, p. 260. See also Ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī 1948—51, vol. 2, pp. 238, 250; Hernández Jiménez 1959, pp. 381—99.
- 34. For the Spanish ivories, see New York 1992, nos. 1–7; Kühnel 1971, nos. 19–51.
- 35. Shalem 1996.
- 36. This material was identified through visual and EDS analyses performed by Antoine Wilmering and Mark Wypyski. See essay by Soultanian et al. herein, p. 73.
- 37. For the relative use of bone and ivory, see Cutler 1994, pp. 59-64.
- 38. Ibid., pp. 151, 223, 271 n. 169.
- 39. For the use of bone in Islamic art, see *DoA*, s.v. "Islamic Art," sec. vIII, 7 (entry by Ralph Pinder-Wilson).
- 40. The Italian term *intarsia* is commonly used in many European languages to encompass both techniques. See *DoA*, s.v. "Marquetry."
- Monneret de Villard 1938; EI², s.v. "(Adj" (entry by Ralph Pinder-Wilson).
- 42. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (37.103). The others are in Berlin, Cairo, and Paris; see Anglade 1988, pp. 34–38.
- Monneret de Villard 1938. For the Palermo Casket, see Gabrieli and Scerrato 1989, fig. 159 (color ill.). For the Tortosa Casket, see New York 1992, no. 51.
- 44. Ibn ʿIdhārī al-Marrākushī 1948—51, vol. 2, pp. 238, 250; Hernández Jiménez 1959, pp. 386—87.
- 45. For the minbars, see H. Terrasse 1957; for one of the writing desks, the casket, and the doors, see New York 1992, nos. 53, 118. For a fifteenth-century desk, see Berlin 1995, no. 33.
- 46. See, for example, Ettinghausen and Grabar 1987, p. 153, which states that "the style [of ivory carving] had become dry and repetitive and the designs flat and without movement," or Ralph Pinder-Wilson in *DoA*, s.v. "Islamic Art," sec. VIII, 7(iii).
- 47. EI^2 , s.v. "Murābitūn" (entry by H. T. Norris), vol. 7, pp. 586–87.
- 48. According to the mutilated inscription, the pavilion was built for 'Alī ibn Yūsuf on "Thursday, the last day of Rabi I in the aforementioned year." Gaston Deverdun, the first to publish the inscription, noted that during the reign of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, the last day of Rabi I fell on a

- Thursday only in 1109, 1117, 1125, and 1140. On historical grounds, he believed that 1117 was the most likely of these dates. Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun 1957, p. 51, figs. 98–105.
- 49. H. Terrasse 1968, figs. 47, 75, 76.
- 50. Bourouiba 1973, pp. 67ff.
- 51. Herzfeld forthcoming; Ettinghausen 1952.
- 52. Torres Balbás 1949, figs. 37–40.
- 53. Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun 1957, figs. 104-11.
- 54. For an analysis of the grid, see essay by Hbibi herein, pp. 92-93.
- 55. For a convenient introduction, see Bernard O'Kane in DoA, s.v. "Islamic Art," sec. II, (ii)(c).
- 56. H. Basset and Terrasse 1925, p. 327.
- 57. See, for example, Pavón Maldonado 1975, pp. 110-14, 225ff., esp. 245ff.
- 58. See, for example, the hexagonal patterns on the intrados of the arches supporting the vault of the Almoravid *qubba* in Marrakesh in Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun 1957, figs. 24, 25.
- 59. Necipoğlu 1995, p. 101. Had contemporary eyes seen an ideological

- content in geometric patterns, it is highly unlikely that the Almohads would have used the same patterns that the Almoravids had.
- 60. New York 1992, no. 42a, b; Brisch 1966.
- 61. Among these are the Mughīra and Pamplona caskets, for which see New York 1992.
- 62. In addition to the sources mentioned in n. 11 above, see also David Weill 1931, pls. XIV, XVI, XVII; Garcin 1976, p. 115; Aslanapa 1971, fig. 20. The presence of geometric strapwork designs on woodwork ordered by Shi^cite and Sunni patrons alike should put to rest Necipoğlu's thesis (see_n. 59) that contemporary patrons saw in such patterns any ideological content.
- 63. Palermo, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia, inv. no. 5223. The piece is illustrated in Venice 1993, no. 86.
- 64. Modern craftsmen in Morocco are known to use graph paper for their designs, but the first documented use of paper with a predrawn grid is in sixteenth-century Italy. For Morocco, see Paccard 1979, pp. 226, 300, for example, and Necipoğlu 1995.



The Pulpit of an Empire

The Contemporary Political and Religious Environment of the Minbar from the Kutubiyya Mosque

AHMED TOUFIQ

he empire that concerns us is that of the Muslim West, encompassing the Maghrib (North Africa) and Andalusia, which reached its zenith under two powerful dynasties: the Almoravid (1056–1147) and the Almohad (1130–1269). The

pulpit (fig. 25) is the one from the Great Mosque of Marrakesh, also known as the Kutubiyya mosque, from its location in the booksellers' quarter (kutubiyyīn) of that city. To understand the history of this pulpit and better appreciate it, we must try (insofar as historical data will allow) to situate it in its contemporary political and religious contexts and, in particular, to determine its role in the process of Islamization—specifically of Morocco but also of the Maghrib in general.

Let us briefly recall several key dates and events in this process. After the death of the Prophet, in 632, and after the reign of the first four caliphs, the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) settled in Damascus, from which city its rulers furthered the propagation of Islam. Among the lands won over to the Muslim religion during this time were the Maghrib and Andalusia. The Umayyad lieutenant 'Uqba ibn Nāfi' conquered Ifrīqiya in 670 and, by 681, had led an expedition to the far reaches of the Maghrib. The conquest continued: in 711 the Berbers of Morocco, who had embraced Islam, joined the forces of the Arab lieutenant Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād in crossing the Strait of Gibraltar into Spain.

The efforts of the Arab conquerors (al- $f\bar{a}tih\bar{u}n$) were limited to a few cursory and short-lived military excursions, for the work of deep-rooted Islamization would be

Opposite: Fig. 25. The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, left flank

done by different actors and under different kinds of influences. Among the latter were the emigration of eastern populations to the Maghrib and Andalusia, the progressive adoption by the inhabitants of these regions of the culture imported by Islam, the stimulation of commercial

activity by new contacts with the cradle of Islam, and political and religious activism, led by agents of different sects and resulting from conflicts of interest and theological disputes.

The inroads made by the new religion were cemented by the founding of new cities, which acted as the missionary governors' head-quarters as well as centers for disseminating Islamic culture. Such new cities—among them Kairouan, Fez, and Marrakesh—were urban environments in which a civilization could be formed by the interaction

of local customs with elements imported from the Orient. In the heart of these newly established cities, and in existing ones that had been conquered, an edifice was built that characterized the new culture: the mosque, the emblem of Islam and the preeminent place of religious activity, which in this early period encompassed not only spiritual but also political, social, and scientific endeavors. All such activities within the mosque had the same goal—to establish a consensus and ensure its preservation. The Tradition of the Prophet held mosques to be sacred places, imbued with a serenity that would translate into well-defined modes of conduct, which would in turn determine the proper utilization of the space itself and the roles of those within it.

Whenever Muslims pray, wherever they are, they must face Mecca, or more precisely its mosque (al-masjid al-harām), where the Ka^cba, the most holy sanctuary of Islam, is located. Consequently, all mosques must face in



the same direction, an orientation called the *qibla*. A Muslim is expected to pray five times a day after he or she reaches puberty: at dawn, at midday, before sunset, at sunset, and after nightfall. Although this can be done alone, prayer within the community of the mosque is preferred. The Friday noon prayer is a divine obligation in any center having more than twenty settled inhabitants. Performed within the community of the faithful, the Friday prayer is preceded by an obligatory sermon (*khuṭba*). The person who leads the Friday prayer, the imam, stands on a pulpit (minbar) as he gives the sermon.

The use of the minbar, a freestanding stairlike structure installed in the mosque to allow a large assembly to hear the words of the sermon, is a tradition that goes back to the time of the Prophet. Adjoining the wall facing the *qibla*, it was used not only for the Friday sermon but also for making solemn announcements to the community. According to C. H. Becker, the minbar was originally the seat of the Prophet in his role as sovereign, and it continued as such for his successors and their representatives in the various lands of the empire. As the sermon was gradually limited to a spiritual exhortation only, the minbar became the pulpit of the religious orator; every mosque in which Friday prayer was celebrated had one.

In its first four centuries of history in the Muslim West, Islam underwent a series of political and religious developments that helped inform its subsequent destiny. During this formative period, seven political entities helped integrate the region into what might be called the global Islamic system—by establishing institutions based on eastern models, introducing religious doctrines and sciences, and adopting ways of living suited to Muslim life, especially in the cities. These entities were the Umayyads in Andalusia (756–1031), the Taifa Kingdoms (Mulūk al-ṭawā'if), which succeeded them (1031–86), the Idrīsids in Morocco and western Algeria (789-927), the Aghlabids in Ifrīqiya, Algeria, and Sicily (800-909), the Zīrids and Hammādids in Ifrīqiya (972–1152), the Rustamids in western Algeria (777-909), and the Fatimids in the Maghrib, Ifrīqiya, and western Algeria (909–69).

The three main dynasties—the Umayyads, Idrīsids, and Fatimids (before their departure for Egypt)—settled in the region to flee persecution from the 'Abbasids of Baghdad. The others, along with several principalities that developed mainly in centers of commerce, were made up of native Berbers who were just entering the global Islamic system. The most important development during this time was that, very early on, the Maghrib broke politically with the caliphate of Baghdad and aligned itself with Arab culture, which the Muslim West would develop, enrich, and adapt to its own needs and desires.

The time of the Almoravids (who built the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque) and the Almohads (who preserved it and imbued it with their glory) constitutes the moment when all the previous historical forces converged to encourage, as never before, the formation of a central state and the spread of the empire. These two fundamental dynasties, which would establish a brilliant civilization and a great empire, were neither from the Quraysh tribe, like the Andalusian Umayyads, nor sharifs (descendants of the Prophet), like the Idrīsids, nor Shi^cites, like the Fatimids. Their founders were latecomers to Islam, Sunni Berbers, but they were as ardent proselytizers as the others. While continuing the process of Islamization, they adjusted and put finishing touches to the belief systems of their compatriots—even as they based their doctrinal choices on interpretations deriving from similar experiments in the East. In addition, these Sunni Berbers had to put their choices into action, while staging them in a relatively sophisticated way. It was a time of internal intrigue in the country's political and religious affairs, but also the time during which the Maghribi definitively embraced the cause of Islam. They adopted all the rites that this choice implied and introduced the instruments necessary to the success of their mission, in particular, the instruments of power—the sword and the place of prayer.

A paramount concern during this period of change was the issue of legitimacy. To avoid the use of force, which was both onerous and perilous, the ruler resorted instead to argument and exhortation. Knowing that his own conduct had to conform to the precepts of the Qur³ an and the recommendations of the Prophet, he also had to win over his community, to make it respond to his needs and join in his projects. Mosques were the best places to impart such messages, but first they had to be built and furnished.

The earliest Moroccan mosques, whether private or communal, were built in a modest style. Generally small or midsized, they were mentioned by both eastern and Andalusian geographers, whose treatises, such as *al-Masālik wa al-mamālik* (Routes and Kingdoms), helped merchants find their way by providing descriptions of the buildings and markets scattered along the roads. Several of these were cathedral, or congregational, mosques (*masjid al-jāmi*^c), where Friday prayer was celebrated for the community.

The official establishment of mosques and cathedral mosques and their provision with minbars began with the Idrīsids, who are considered the founders of the first dynasty in the history of Muslim Morocco. Idrīs I (r. 789–91) arrived in Walīla (the Roman Volubilis) from the East in 788 and was proclaimed king by the Awrāba Berbers shortly afterward. He set out to conquer the non-Islamic or heretical tribes on the rich Atlantic plains of Morocco, before ven-

turing farther on to Tlemcen in 790. The governor of Tlemcen pledged his allegiance and, after various negotiations, Idrīs entered the city. There he built a cathedral mosque that conformed to the ideal in all respects and installed a minbar, on which he engraved a commemorative inscription dated the month of Safar in the year 174 (A.D. 790).2 His son and successor, Idrīs II (r. 803-28), founded the city of Fez in 808. He began by building along the right bank of the river, later known as the riverbank of the Andalusians, and exactly a year later continued on the left bank, where émigrés from Kairouan (al-qarawiyyīn) eventually settled. Idrīs constructed the cathedral mosque known as jāmi^c al-ashyākh on the first bank and instituted the practice of the Friday sermon before turning his attention to the other bank and building the cathedral mosque known as jāmi^c al-shurafā³.

Inspired by the Tradition of the Prophet, the founding of these early mosques both consolidated the process of Islamization and enhanced the respect the subjects felt toward the ruler. In turn, the ruler's successors were obligated to continue the practice and to go even further in creating these powerful religious instruments and political symbols.

During the first centuries of Islam, out of concern for doctrinal unity, and possibly to facilitate political mobilization, only one cathedral mosque was permitted in a single locality. Thus, in effect, there could be only one sermon and one pulpit for Friday prayer in each city. Ibn Abī Zar^c, the author of the *Qirṭās*, relates, for example, that the citizens of Fez first frequented the Mosque of the Shurafa, but when they became too numerous, the Friday prayer and sermon were transferred to the Mosque of the Qarawiyyīn, which was larger and more spacious. (The latter had been founded by a patroness, Fāṭima bint Muhammad al-Fihrī, in 859 and had been furnished in 956 with a minbar made of eucalyptus wood.) At least until the sixteenth century, the problem of a single pulpit in Fez remained, since we find it mentioned in the responsa of Wansharīsī.4

Before the founding of Marrakesh in 1070, the Almoravids were great nomads who moved between Oued Derāa in the northwestern Sahara and what is now Mauritania, up to the Senegal River. A small group of them had settled in the city of Aghmāt, the home of the Urīka tribe, at the foot of the Atlas Mountains, some twenty-five miles southeast of the site of their future capital. Until the third decade of the eleventh century, they had known very little about Islam. At their request, a disciple of the great masters of the North, well versed in religious beliefs and practices according to the rite of Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795), came to teach them the basic precepts of

the law. This disciple—'Abdallāh ibn Yāsīn al-Nafīsī, a Masmudian Berber from the Jazūla tribe of Sūs-eventually withdrew with the most faithful of the group to a spiritual retreat (ribāţ), hence their name, al-murābiţūn (the people of the ribāt). (Such a retreat for devotional or ascetic purposes, or to prepare to fight the enemy, was in accordance with the teachings of the Qur an.) Ibn Yāsīn's followers included a group of nomads who wore a face muffler covering the mouth and chin (al-mulaththamun, the veiled ones) and belonged to the grand confederation of the Sanhāja; these became his most zealous disciples, and he inculcated in them a rigorous discipline in order to prepare them for conquering the northern regions. Such plans for conquest were perfectly suited to his desires as a propagator of Islam as well as to the ambitions of the large nomadic population, which was always in search of richer pastures and more extensive territories.

Ibn Yāsīn thus launched the fighting force of the Ṣanhāja on a mission of conquest that was disguised as political and religious reform intended to complete the Islamization of Morocco and eliminate the corrupt regime. In the ten years of their holy war, he and his fighters swept through the rich and fertile plains of Tamāsnā, which were occupied by the heretical Berbers called the Barghawāṭa. Ibn Yāsīn died in 1059, after the conquest of the Barghawāṭa, but his goal of founding a political state guided by jurists and doctors of law survived him.

The two great figures of that state were Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn (r. 1061-1106) and his son 'Alī (r. 1106-43). Vigorous, virtuous, and ascetic, Yūsuf built the city of Marrakesh for his extraordinary wife, Zaynab, the daughter of the Nafzāwa6 sheikh of Aghmāt. Throughout his life, Yūsuf perpetuated the Almoravid tradition, which meant following the counsel of the Malikite doctors of law. He intervened in Spain to help embattled Islam when it faced the looming threat of the Christian reconquista and, in 1086, won the Battle of al-Zallāqa against Alfonso VI of León and Castile. And so it was that, under the Almoravids, the first Muslim empire was formed in the West, embracing Andalusia and the Maghrib and stretching from the Atlantic to beyond Tlemcen (fig. 26). In accordance with their orthodox principles, the Almoravids accepted the symbolic sovereignty of the caliphs of Baghdad. Marrakesh became their capital and the crucible of a civilization that combined elements of Berber, black African, Iberian, and Oriental culture.

In his refinement, and also perhaps in his weakness, 'Alī ibn Yūsuf incarnated everything that the culture of the Andalusian cities transmitted to the second generation of Almoravids. Born in Ceuta from the union of his father with a captured Spanish Christian, he was enthroned in

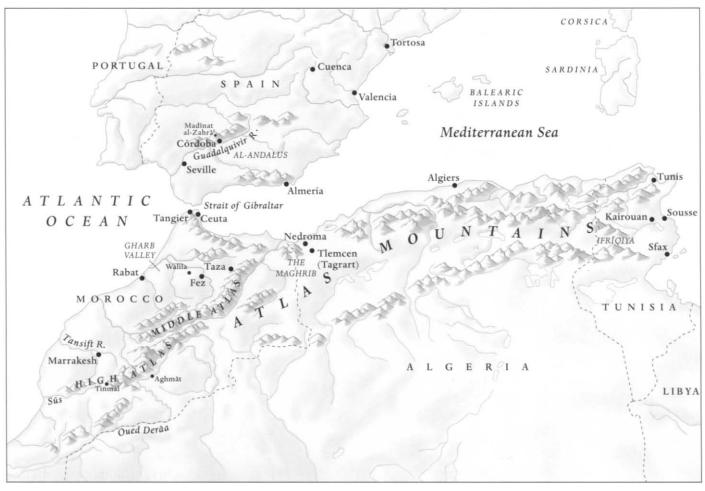


Fig. 26. The Maghrib and al-Andalus at the time the minbar was created (1137-ca. 1145)

Marrakesh at the age of twenty-three. Lacking his father's visionary breadth, he seems to have devoted most of his attention to problems of the jihad in Andalusia. His advisers were Andalusian and he shared his father's firm devotion to the Malikite doctors of law. On their advice, he surrounded his capital with solid walls and burned the Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn (Revival of the Religious Sciences), a theological work by al-Ghazālī, which Almoravid theologians (who preferred a literal interpretation of the texts) considered too mystical.

It was in this context of cultural fusion, doctrinal ferment, and political upheaval that 'Alī, in the year 520 of the Hegira (A.D. 1126), began construction of the cathedral mosque of Marrakesh. On this subject, the anonymous author of *al-Ḥulal al-mawshiyya* (The Embroidered Robes; 1381) wrote, "The Muslim emir, 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, began building the walls around Marrakesh in the month of Jumada I of the year 520. He also built the cathedral mosque and its minaret. To do this, he assembled foremen and artisans. He created one of the wonders of the world." And it was for this mosque that 'Alī ordered from Andalusia our minbar, the most beautiful and prestigious of the Muslim West. In

this minbar, 'Alī had found a public treasure, colossal for the time, that allowed him to satisfy his opulent tastes.⁸

In less than a century, therefore, the Almoravids had completely changed their way of life and ways of thinking: they had learned how to integrate themselves into the Islamic system. In such missions of conversion, the Word is paramount, and these former nomads accepted this truth without question. They were convinced that the Word of Islam was divine, whether spoken from atop a camel, as had been their custom, or proclaimed from the minbar, which was even higher than a camel's back. By preaching the Word, the ruler glorified it, and to accomplish this he built a temple and procured a minbar, beautiful as a jewel and raised on high like the Truth. For the Almoravids, however, this glorification of the Word in no way reduced the importance of the rite (madhhab); Malikism remained the consecrated rite, because it determined the choice of relevant religious themes and defined the rules of their interpretation.

In time, textual disputes inspired the political and religious reforms that led the Almohads (muwaḥḥidūn, "unitarians") to supplant the Almoravids, each claiming a

legitimacy based on more subtle interpretations of the Word. The tribal force that supported the Almohads, the Maṣmūda, was sedentary and lived in the Upper Atlas Mountains. Their founder, the theologian Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn Tūmart (1078/81–1130), devised a plan to gain power under the guise of religious reform, and, after a sojourn in the East, was able to emerge victorious from his polemical discussions with the Almoravid jurists. He was well versed in techniques of argument and debate, and like al-Ghazālī (whose ideas were in fashion in the Maghrib at the time), he had all the appropriate religious sources at his fingertips.

A gifted pedagogue and cunning strategist, Ibn Tūmart chose the messianic belief known as Mahdism as his dogma, while also still subscribing to the Sunni doctrine. He took the title of mahdī (guided by Allāh) and designated himself as "impeccable" (maʿṣūm). In his impregnable mountain lair in Tinmal, al-Mahdī preached to the tribes that rallied to his cause and urged them to attack the corrupt Almoravids. He dispensed his teachings in the Berber tongue, while instructing his followers in the basic tenets of Muslim theology.

For al-Mahdī also, the Word—in sermons and exhortations—was paramount. Al-Baydhaq, his traveling companion during his return from the East, described several events on the journey and spoke of the first verbal skirmishes that Ibn Tūmart had had with the Almoravids of Marrakesh: "Once in Marrakesh, the Imam went down to the mosque with its brick minaret, *masjid ṣawmaʿat al-ṭūb*. We remained there until Friday. Then he went to the cathedral mosque of ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf. He found the latter sitting on the cloak of one of his dignitaries, Ibn Tayzemt. The viziers were standing next to him. They said to the Imam, 'Address the Emir by his title of Caliph!' 'Where is the Emir?' he responded. 'I see only veiled women.'"

The author of *al-Hulal* relates the same scene, adding a few details: "Ibn Bujayr has said: Ibn Tūmart, known as al-Mahdī, entered the cathedral mosque [of Marrakesh] one Friday. He took his place in the front row, near the minbar. Some administrators of the cathedral mosque said to him, 'That is the place reserved for the leader of the Muslims ['Alī ibn Yūsuf].' Ibn Tūmart replied, 'Mosques belong only to God' [Qur'an 72:18]. When the Muslim emir arrived to sit in his habitual place [near the minbar], all those present stood up, except al-Mahdī."¹⁰

While al-Mahdī underscored the importance of the Word, he did not push provocation to excess. He used a combination of various procedures to intimidate and convince, all the while keeping in mind the importance of speech to a population undergoing conversion. Although the tribes he preached to had already been won over to

Islam, he portrayed those who disagreed with him as pure miscreants. The epithets and insults exchanged by the two camps during their bloody confrontation showed that mobilization was the first order of the day and that the war was above all a war of propaganda.

After ten years of ideological indoctrination and military action, al-Mahdī was sure of his success against the Almoravids, whom he continued to badger from his mountain shelter. Upon his death in 1130, his successor, 'Abd al-Mu'min (r. 1130–63), pursued his mentor's mission and finally conquered the Almoravid capital in 1147. On this subject, al-Baydhaq reports:

For three days, no one entered or left Marrakesh. Consultations were held to decide whether to settle there, but the Almohads refused. The fugahā² [jurists] of the city came to see them, saying, "What is your reason for not wishing to live in our city?" The Mahdī had refused, answered the Almohads. "This was mainly because the mosques of your city are not precisely oriented toward the qibla. There must be neither deviation nor incline in the orientation of the mosques for the people of Muhammad—glory unto him!"... "In that case," said the fuqahā, "the city will be purified and you will be able to live here." "And how will it be purified?" "The mosques will be demolished and others will be built." So they destroyed the mosques of the city, because of their deviation from the qibla and their incline toward the East. Among others, they demolished the cathedral mosque of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, but only in part."

The version in al-Hulal is less biased and more detailed:

When 'Abd al-Mu'min conquered Marrakesh, he laid hold of the storehouses of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf and the Lamthūna treasures. Their value was beyond description. Marrakesh remained sealed for three days, during which none of the conquerors entered and no one could leave. The muwahhidun refused to enter, because their guide, al-Mahdī, said to them before his death: "Do not go into that city until it has been purified." The muwahhidun asked their wise men to explain their guide's recommendation. The wise men said, "You will purify it by building another mosque yourselves." And so it came to pass. 'Abd al-Mu'min then built a mosque on the site of Dar al-hajar and there he instituted Friday prayer. Then he began to build the cathedral mosque, the Kutubiyya. He demolished the cathedral mosque that 'Alī ibn Yūsuf had built at the foot of the city. When 'Abd al-Mu' min finished building the mosque, he dug two secret tunnels linking it to the palace. He brought there a monumental

minbar that was made in Andalusia and of perfect accomplishment; it is composed of pieces of wood (imported from southeastern Asia) and red and yellow sandalwood; its metal decoration is in gold and silver.¹²

The author of *al-Ḥulal*, who was probably Ibn al-Sammāk, wrote his text in 1381, and one of its great merits is the citation of sources that have not otherwise survived. In the preceding paragraph, he furnishes clues relating to four separate, though related, elements: after conquering Marrakesh, the Almohads refused to enter the city until it was purified; the given explanation of the city's impurity was that its mosques deviated from the prescribed canonical orientation, the *qibla*; 'Abdal-Mu'min built a new cathedral mosque, the Kutubiyya, in two stages, in Dār al-ḥajar, next to the palace of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf; and 'Alī ibn Yūsuf's minbar was transferred into the new mosque of 'Abd al-Mu'min.

We must remember that the mountain Maṣmūda, who took the Almoravid capital by force, had always found that city repellent, for its prisonlike surrounding wall had disgorged militias of Christian mercenaries who had oppressed and sought to subjugate them. The staging of this mythical refusal, with its references to the predictions of the "impeccable" Ibn Tūmart, thus probably served mainly to conceal the greed of the conquerors, who lost no time in dividing up the spoils.

In any work, it is the details that provide the finishing touches. In the Islamization of Morocco, political reversals of fortune were also legitimized by the use of details. Here, the demolition of the old mosque was justified by a deviation in the orientation of its wall, and the correction of this "detail" was obviously preferable to condemning the entire city as injurious to spiritual health. The complaint was exaggerated for the needs of the cause. In reality, the Tradition of the Prophet is much more tolerant: it prescribes a wide-ranging *qibla* that could fall anywhere between the outstretched arms of a person facing east. (Jurists had even ruled that using geometry to precisely determine the zenith of the *qibla* was hardly necessary.)¹³

But 'Abd al-Mu'min indeed demolished the mosque of 'Alī to erect his own on the ruins of the latter's palace. The new regime, with its new teachings, required a new place for prayer and preaching, built specifically for those purposes. The demolition of the old mosque symbolized the irrevocable loss of the previous dynasty and the abandonment of its beliefs. It was not enough to kill the rulers and condemn their acolytes and collaborators: the echoes of their voices, which the very walls threatened to preserve, had to be silenced.

And so 'Alī's mosque had to be destroyed. But what about its minbar? What about the seat of the orator, the pedestal of the ruler's spokesman, the pulpit from which speeches so full of consequence were delivered? Should it be destroyed as well? Could it be exchanged for another one, one that was purer, more beautiful, more majestic? Of course not. All the Almohads had to do was close their eyes—or else open them enough to see the beauty and magnificence of the work. Even though it had been trod upon and "soiled" by the feet of those who fervently defended the Almoravids' Malikism (despised by the Almohads because, in their system of interpretation, it strayed too far from the sources), this imposing minbar still had to be salvaged by 'Abdal-Mu' min and transported into his new cathedral mosque.

By the first half of the twentieth century, archaeologists had noted that the Kutubiyya minbar had been transplanted into a structure for which it had not been designed, but it was actually the inscriptions on the minbar itself that helped them to reassign the work to the Almoravids. This conclusive research was carried out by Jean Sauvaget in 1949.14 An earlier work, by Henri Basset and Henri Terrasse, Sanctuaires et forteresses almohades, 15 had not properly interpreted the text of al-Ḥulal when trying to date the minbar. Basset and Terrasse had used the edition published in Tunis in 1911, which was deficient in many respects but the only one available at the time. In the more complete edition by Zakkār and Zamāmah,16 which is the one employed in this essay, it is clearly stated that 'Abd al-Mu'min "transferred" (nagala) the minbar and that it "had been built earlier, in Andalusia" (kāna qad suni a bi-l-andalus). The fact that al-Hulal keeps secret the name of the man who commissioned the minbar is no reason to doubt his identity.

Gaston Deverdun has brought up the question of where the minbar was kept after the Almohad conquest and before its transfer into the first Kutubiyya mosque of 'Abd al-Mu'min. He considers it likely that the pulpit was initially at the congregational mosque, which was located between the Zāwiyat-laḥḍer and al-Barūdiyyīn quarters, and was only partially destroyed by the Almohads. Deverdun thinks that the beautiful pulpit was hidden somewhere in the part of the mosque that escaped destruction and that "its transfer might have been carried out in secret when, after the first Kutubiyya was finished, it quickly needed a pulpit." ¹⁷

Although Deverdun's thesis seems reasonable, one cannot agree with his opinion that the Almohads' salvaging of 'Alī's minbar was largely a way to "make do." It is much more likely that the Almohads chose this minbar because they could never find a better one. Actually, there is no

shortage of examples to illustrate an all too well known fact: new rulers feel no hesitation about preserving objects from previous regimes when they prove to be beautiful or useful. Fortunately, this rule sometimes also applies to people; in this case, for instance, 'Abd al-Mu'min retained the Almoravids' high secretary, Aḥmad ibn 'Aṭīyya, the master of the epistolary art in his time. He, like the minbar, had proved too excellent to replace.

Such decisions were important for the Almohads, who, even more than the Almoravids, tried to attract followers by every means at their disposal. They were, of course, trying to seduce their Berber subjects (neophytes in all things related to Arab-Islamic culture), but it was more important to them to win over the Andalusians, who openly disdained anything from the Bank of the Setting Sun ('udwat al-maghrib). Thus, the Almohads employed the Word and its supports, the pen and its metaphors, the palaces, the mosques and their decoration—all this to convert a large community to an order and a doctrine and to ensure the continuation of their empire. Some 150 official letters by the Almohads—most announcing victories or containing exhortations to great causes—confirm that their rulers were dazzled by style as a means of conveying their force and grandeur.18

The place for every announcement, whether good or ill, was the Great Mosque of Marrakesh (fig. 27). From surviving traces, we can picture the members of the congregation as they sat facing the minbar: dignitaries of the empire, lords of the Masmūda, Andalusian members of the royal entourage, relatives of the ruler; lieutenants of the regime, serving in Ifrīqiya, Andalusia, or Sicily, sent on a mission to Marrakesh; Maghribi scientists drawn to the city, along with others from Andalusia and the Orient; Sufis and their followers, whether resident or on pilgrimage; men from the Sudan, both enslaved and emancipated; and all the others—the crowds of Marrakesh. Each has his eyes riveted on the niche of the mihrab, where the imam will stand to preside over the prayer ceremony. At the right time, the imam comes through a door to the side of the mihrab and approaches the niche of the minbar. The mechanism installed by the engineer al-Hajj Ya^cīsh of Málaga is activated, and the minbar surges out from its enclosure without disturbing the silence prescribed for the occasion. When the minbar has emerged completely, the imam climbs its steps but stops short of the uppermost ones out of humility toward the Prophet. Holding his wand, symbol of the wisdom that the forthcoming sermon or ruler's messages will impart, he gives his reading in two stages, as demanded by the Tradition of the Prophet.

The ruler's place, if he is present, is at the foot of the minbar. By the time of the Almohads, he no longer mixed

with the congregation, as he had in the days of the Almoravids; using a tunnel to travel between the palace and the mosque, he was separated from the crowd by a reserved enclosure (*maqṣūra*), roughly 2 meters (6 feet 6 inches) high, which could be hidden away using a mechanism invented by the same Málaga engineer. Describing the movements of the *maqṣūra*, which rose up in front of the ruler and disappeared when he left, the poet Ibn Mujbar of Velez (d. 582) said:¹⁹

Sometimes she surrounds those who are within her enclosure,

Like a wall among walls; And sometimes she avoids their gazes,

Like a secret among secrets;

And, as if she were aware of men's needs,

She acts with regard to them, according to the degree of their need:

When she senses that the emir will come to visit her, Accompanied by his retinue, she stands tall [in honor of] the visitors.²⁰

During the era of the Almohad caliphs, in this great mosque of the Kutubiyyīn, and at the foot of its valorous minbar, the atmosphere was permeated not only with the mercy of Allāh and with memories of the empire's victories but also with tragedy. The trial of Ibn 'Aṭīyya, for instance, took place there in 1155, after 'Abd al-Mu' min had disgraced him. On this subject, Ibn 'Idārī said, "'Abd al-Mu' min assembled the notables [the *shuyūkhs* of the Almohad tribes, the *ṭalaba*, and the Andalusians] in the cathedral mosque that is located next to Dār al-ḥajar and asked them to testify about the behavior of his grand vizier and secretary, Ibn 'Aṭīyya [who was in disgrace]. The latter was present. He was ordered to remove his turban [as a gesture of humiliation]."²¹

The minbar, which knew Ibn 'Aṭīyya well, must have shed bitter tears over his tragic fate. Its own fall from grace would come not long afterward, when the caliph Abū Yūsuf Yaʻqūb al-Manṣūr (r. 1184–99), the grandson of 'Abd al-Mu'min, on the eve of departing for Andalusia to fight the Battle of Alarcos (1195) against the Christians, decided to build a second cathedral mosque next to his kasbah. Although the reversal of fortune was less tragic for the Kutubiyya and its minbar than for Ibn 'Aṭīyya, from that moment on, the shadows of neglect began to envelop them.

The Kutubiyya minbar's moment of glory coincided with the glory of the Muslim empire in the West, when the Maghribi saw the minbar as a cherished and admired object, which preserved their cultural equality with the Andalusian civilization. During that period, the minbar fully lived up to these expectations: it fascinated, disturbed,

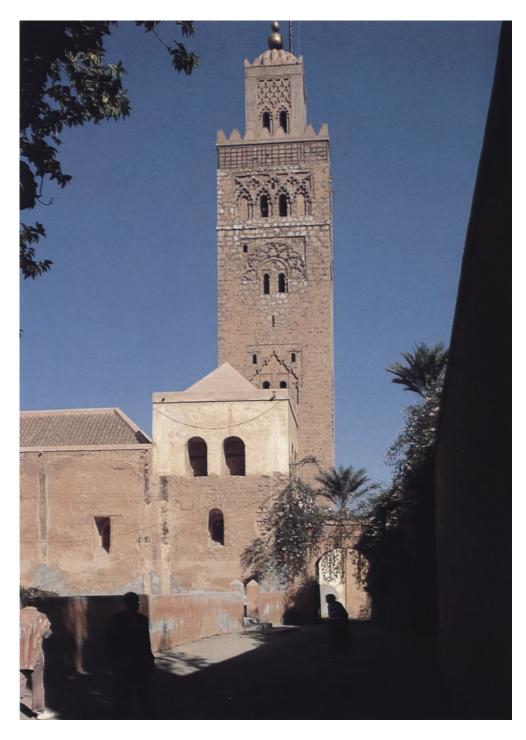


Fig. 27. The Kutubiyya mosque, Marrakesh (completed 1162). Photo: Jonathan M. Bloom

revived, and terrified. It stood in the Great Mosque of the imperial capital as a focal point for the intertwined political and religious life of the period. It was not reserved solely for Friday high prayer, which reminded worshipers in absolute terms of the good deeds that would help them avoid hell and reach paradise; it was also the instrument of state activism, the sovereign seat par excellence. From that pulpit, the most authoritative words were uttered, the most poignant appeals launched, the most staggering decisions announced, the most stringent regulations preached. Sometimes the sovereign himself was present beneath the

minbar, listening, in an attitude of striking humility, to words that pleased him.

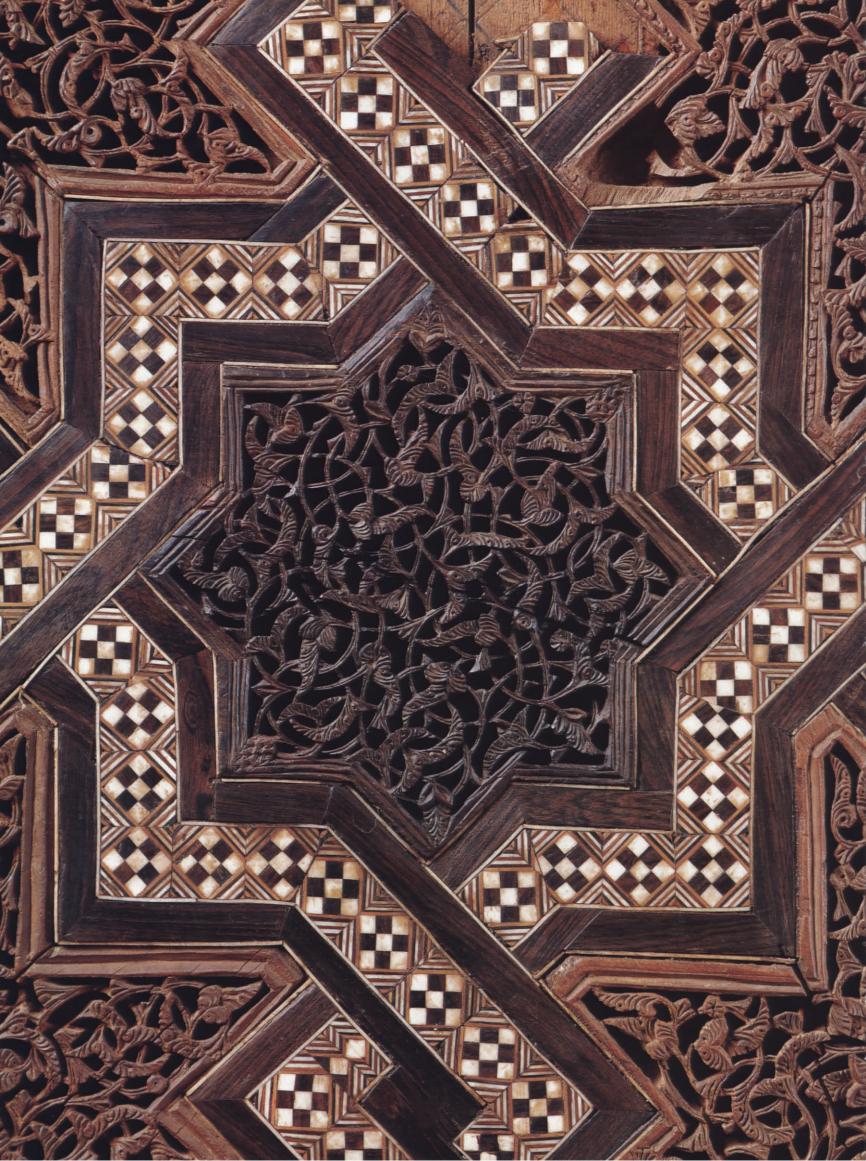
The eclipse of the minbar no doubt began with Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr's construction of a second cathedral mosque in Marrakesh, and the final blow was the transfer of the capital to Fez in the mid thirteenth century, under the Marīnids. A hundred years later, the great scientist, writer, and orator Ibn Marzūq was living in Fez. Known for his excellence in delivering the Friday sermon, he had won the admiration of the great Marīnid sultan Abu'l-Ḥasan, who asked him to do so in the Great Mosque of Fez. The old

ardor was no longer appropriate in the sermon, and Ibn Marzūq assumed a pedagogical tone in the collection of sermons that he left to posterity. Containing nothing controversial, his texts were designed to serve as models to preachers in all ages and in every clime. Nonetheless, Ibn Marzūq—an orator once called a knight of the minbar, who is never upset and never afraid, he who stood atop the minbars of more than forty Islamic cities in the Maghrib and Andalusia—could also admire the beauty of a minbar's mountings. That is why he says in his *Musnad* that all craftsmen... agree that the minbar of [the Great Mosque of] Córdoba and the minbar of the Booksellers' in Marrakesh are the most remarkable in craftsmanship.

Ibn Marzūq's comparison of the minbars of Córdoba and Marrakesh, apart from confirming their kinship, "expresses, in a symbol of clear eloquence," the fruitfulness of the contact between the Maghrib and Andalusia. The majesty of this minbar—and its political function as well—were swept away by the devastating storms of time. I have tried here to restore its memory, but its intrinsic beauty is as inimitable as it is indelible. There is a common adage in Marrakesh that applies perfectly to the minbar:

"Even when beauty fades, its 'letters' [features] resist; they are always there."

- I. Quoted in EI², s.v. "Minbar" (entry by G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville).
- 2. Ibn Abī Zar^c 1973, p. 38.
- 3. Ibid.
- 4. al-Wansharīsī 1991, vol. 1, pp. 259-73.
- 5. Qur³an 3: 200.
- 6. Kitāb al-istibsār 1985.
- 7. al-Hulal al-mawshiyya 1979, p. 140.
- 8. Deverdun 1959, vol. 1, p. 99.
- 9. Lévi-Provençal 1928, p. 108.
- 10. al-Ḥulal al-mawshiyya 1979, p. 100.
- 11. Lévi-Provençal 1928, p. 172.
- 12. al-Ḥulal al-mawshiyya 1979, p. 144.
- 13. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥalīm, n.d.
- 14. Sauvaget 1949.
- 15. H. Basset and Terrasse 1932.
- 16. See n. 7.
- 17. Deverdun 1959, vol. 1, p. 102.
- 18. Lévi-Provençal 1941; 'Azzāwī 1995.
- 19. al-Ḥulal al-mawshiyya 1979, p. 145.
- 20. Deverdun 1959, vol. 1, p. 176.
- 21. Ibn 'Idhārī al-Marrākushī 1985, p. 57.
- 22. Viguera 1981.
- 23. Ibn al-Khaṭīb 1973, vol. 2, p. 104.
- 24. Ibn Marzūq 1981, sec. A. 98.
- 25. The expression comes from H. Basset and Terrasse 1932.



The Historical and Artistic Significance of the Minbar from the Kutubiyya Mosque

STEFANO CARBONI

he minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, the decoration of which has been comprehensively described and analyzed by Jonathan Bloom in a previous essay, is clearly one of the wonders of its own age; it can also rightfully be regarded as among the most accomplished works ever created by Islamic artists and craftsmen in fourteen centuries of his-

tory. Although the recent conservation has given it new life and brought it once again to the attention of the world, the minbar is one of the rare works of Islamic art that has never ceased to be appreciated. The anonymous author of al-Ḥulal al-mawshiyya (The Embroidered Robes), a chronicle of the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties written in 1381, described it as "a monumental minbar that was made in Andalusia and of perfect accomplishment; it is composed of pieces of wood (imported from

southeastern Asia) and red and yellow sandalwood; its metal decoration is in gold and silver." A text by the seventeenth-century Spanish writer Ambrosio de Morales contains the following passage: "The most skilled craftsmen—wrote a chronicler of the fourteenth century who had an active part in the erection of some buildings in Tlemcen—are in agreement that the minbars of the mosque of Córdoba and of the Kutubiyya in Marrakesh are the best works that one can find; judging from their accomplishments, the orientals are less skilled [than the Maghribi craftsmen] in woodcarving." The chronicler mentioned by Morales is the traditionist, preacher, and statesman Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Marzūq (b. Tlemcen,

Opposite: Fig. 28. The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, Marrakesh (1137–ca. 1145), detail of carved panels and marquetry strapwork

ca. 1310/12, d. Cairo, 1379), one of the most prominent figures in the religious, political, and literary life of the Maghrib.³ Apart from the hint of rivalry between woodcarvers in the Maghrib and the Mashriq, which is an interesting and unusual phenomenon in itself in the fourteenth century,⁴ Ibn Marzūq's words speak loudly and clearly for the reputation of the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque

among "the most skilled craftsmen," that is, among those who had the expertise to judge the work from both the technical and the artistic points of view.

A presentation of the findings related to the minbar's recent conservation and a discussion of the complicated process of the minbar's production and assembly are found later in this volume. The present essay aims to place the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque into three different frameworks that can be

eventually merged into one comprehensive art-historical context. The first part will deal with the genesis of the minbar within the early Muslim community in Medina, its function in the first centuries of Islam, and its evolution in the Maghrib. The second part outlines the historical events under the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties in Spain and the Maghrib that relate to these dynasties' perception of political and religious matters generally and to their erection of mosques in particular. The third part includes a survey of other existing minbars in Morocco and the rest of the Maghrib which, for either historical or art-historical reasons, are relevant to a discussion of the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque. While the latter minbar is undoubtedly the preeminent one extant, this essay would not be complete without a comparative analysis of this typically Maghribi form of artistic expression.



THE ORIGINS OF THE MINBAR AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN THE MAGHRIB AND ANDALUSIA

In order to understand the role that minbars have played in the first centuries of Islam, it is necessary to look back to the formative period of the new religion and state, to a time when the Prophet Muḥammad was preaching in his adopted city of Medina.

The Arabic word minbar has been translated into English as "pulpit," a rendering that reveals the modern interpretation of the structure as the place from which the sermon is delivered in a mosque as well as drawing a comparison to its Christian counterpart. The word actually derives from the root *n-b-r* and, in its grammatical form, minbar, has the more general meaning of an "elevated, raised place." The most frequently used multivolume Arabic dictionaries, including Ibn Manzūr's Lisān al-ʿarab and Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon, contain only a few lines regarding this particular term: they define it as the staircase, or "pulpit," of the khaṭīb (the public speaker in a mosque), so called because of its height.5 The Arabists Friedrich Schwally and C. H. Becker, who devoted special attention to the etymology of the term, concluded that it entered the Arabic language originally through an Ethiopian loanword.6

It may seem surprising that the word *minbar* is never mentioned in the Qur³an, which is believed to embody the word of God (Allāh) as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad through the mediation of the angel Gabriel (Jibrīl). However, the Qur³an was meant to gradually introduce major doctrines and regulations to the Muslim community, not to indulge in descriptions of the physical settings of Muḥammad's mission; the pulpit on which he used to sit or stand is thus never alluded to.⁷

A far better source of information concerning Muḥammad's pulpit is the collection of texts called the Hadith (al-hadīth, Traditions [of the Prophet]), which contains accounts of the words and acts of the Prophet and of his tacit approval of something said or done in his presence. Regarded as second in authority to the Qur'an, the Hadith was compiled in its definitive form in six books by a number of traditionists, the most prominent of whom was al-Bukhārī, during the third century of the Muslim era (ninth century A.D.).8 Because so much time had elapsed since the death of Muhammad in 632, the codifiers of the Hadith required a chain of authorities (isnād) to support a claim of authenticity or veracity for a text; the last in such a chain must have been either a companion of the Prophet or a witness to his acts. Most of what we know about the Prophet's everyday life is, in fact, based on

the Hadith, which is generally accepted as a truthful and reliable text by the Muslim community.⁹

The Prophet's pulpit is almost always designated by the term minbar in the Hadith, the only other word sometimes used being a wad (the plural of ud, wood, a reference to its constituent material).10 The Hadith relates that, after Muhammad's move to Medina from Mecca in 622, the Muslim community began to grow at a fast pace and the Prophet therefore needed to be seen and heard over greater distances as he addressed an expanding congregation. Tradition assigns the construction of the Prophet's minbar to a carpenter who was a Coptic or Byzantine slave of the wife of an Anṣārī." In response to the woman's offer to have her slave build something for him to sit on, the Prophet ordered a raised seat to be made to enable him to address the community and had it placed in the mosque. This minbar, made of tamarisk wood (tarfā), consisted of two steps and a seat, just enough to elevate Muḥammad over the congregation. Its backrest was formed by three wooden boards (two uprights and a crossbar), and its arms ended in finials, over which the Prophet would rest his hands. 12 As for its dimensions, there is no agreement among the various authors, although it was probably just large enough for one person to sit comfortably. Muḥammad used his minbar to deliver sermons on Friday, to speak about community matters, and to answer queries from the members of the congregation.

There are a few anecdotes in the Hadith concerning the minbar of the Prophet. One relates that, before it was built, Muḥammad used to preach near the trunk of a date palm that served as one of the pillars supporting the roof of the mosque. When he started to use the minbar, the trunk began to cry like a pregnant she-camel, and the Prophet had to descend from his seat to quiet it. Another pertains to one of the few instances in which Muḥammad is mentioned as praying on the minbar. In that case, he also said the prayer invoking rain (ṣalāt al-istisqā²) from the pulpit, and it rained so heavily for a week that the following Friday he had to pray again to stop further rainfall and flooding.

Most of the references to the minbar in the Hadith do not specify whether the Prophet was sitting or standing on it. The more specific texts are, however, equally divided between the two positions; it was only later that, as an act of homage to the Prophet, the user of the minbar would remain standing. The informal attitude of Muḥammad toward his minbar is confirmed by reports that he used to sit on it for impromptu gatherings while his listeners and interlocutors squatted on the ground around him. As a matter of fact, the empty minbar itself became a sort of meeting point for the Prophet's companions, as we can

infer from the story that they congregated around it when worried about the rumor that Muḥammad had divorced his wives. Yet there is one recorded instance of the Prophet's allowing someone else to mount the minbar: his grandson al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī¹³ was at his side on the minbar when he officially presented the boy to the community as a sayyid¹⁴ who would be instrumental in making peace between two large groups of Muslims.¹⁵ When ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb¹⁶ had to select candidates for the caliphate after Muḥammad's death in 632,¹¹ they gathered around the minbar, and Abū Bakr (r. 632–34), the first caliph, recited the oath of allegiance while on the minbar.

During the very first decades of the caliphal period, the minbar—now also a permanent reminder of the Prophet's blessed presence—gradually evolved into a more complex symbol representing both throne and pulpit, state and religion. Yet, as a throne (minbar al-mulk, "the minbar of sovereignty"), it never became an emblem of hieratic contemplation and worship of the ruler, as it did, for example, in the Byzantine Empire, since it always remained the focal point of some kind of activity. In the Hadith, the first four caliphs as well as the first caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, Mu^cāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān (r. 661–80), are all reported to have ascended the Prophet's minbar to deliver the sermon (khuṭba), to address the community on political matters, to pray themselves, or, in their role as imāms (prayer leaders), to call the prayer (adhān). In addition to the caliphs, other companions of the Prophet or eminent personalities could speak to the community from the minbar.18 And moments of great emotion for the congregation took place around the minbar, as, for example, when the bloodstained shirt of the murdered third caliph, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (r. 644-56), was hung upon it.¹⁹

During the ninety years of Umayyad rule (661-750), the Prophet's minbar initially became formalized as the seat of state and religion before it began to acquire its definitive character as a pulpit used only for the khuṭba in the mosques on Fridays. One of the first symbolic acts to underline the minbar's importance was to place it on a pedestal, enshrined as a sort of relic. During the caliphate of Mucawiya, the governor of Medina, Marwan ibn al-Ḥakam,20 added six steps made of ebony to the base, which resulted in a new eight-step pulpit that was much more imposing but could no longer be moved. The entire minbar was, unfortunately, destroyed in a fire in the thirteenth century, although many visitors and travelers have written accounts of it.21 It is clear from these reports that the added socle was of the same width as the Prophet's seat and was solidly built with uprights and crossbars. A description by the geographer Ibn Rusta²² also implies that the basic stepped form of the new structure prompted the division of its surface into a pattern of squares; he reports that some areas on its flanks were covered with square panels while others (the most peripheral ones on each flank) were left uncovered. A finial ('irnāsa) was attached to the end of each upright bar, as on the Prophet's minbar, in order to punctuate the rising of the steps (fig. 29). A low pedestal, covered completely with marble, supported the entire structure.

A number of accessories were used in relation to the minbar during the Umayyad period, and most of these developed from details of the Prophet's tradition. The most noteworthy derived from Muhammad's practice of planting a javelin ('anaza)23 on the ground to mark the direction of the prayer. It became a custom to carry a spear, staff, sword, or bow on the minbar during the khutba, and the early caliphs adopted this practice as a symbol of their authority. Beating the staff against the floor both caught the attention of the public and gave solemnity to the act of ascending the minbar.24 This tradition has been maintained throughout the centuries, especially in the traditional Maghrib, where the khaṭīb still holds a staff during his sermon (fig. 30). In Syria and Egypt, a metal or wooden sword is used²⁵ and in Iran the imam usually holds a rifle with a bayonet. How essential the staff was thought to be during the khutba had been jokingly

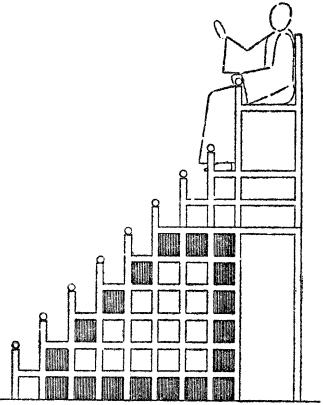


Fig. 29. Reconstruction of the Umayyad minbar of Medina (ca. 661–77). From Sauvaget 1947

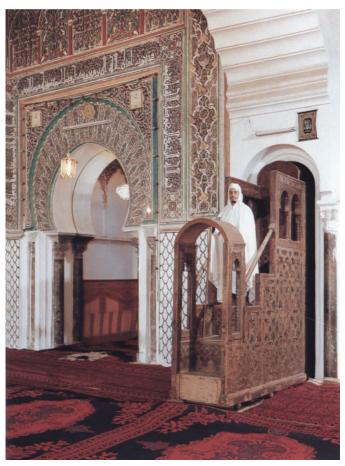


Fig. 30. Imam standing on the minbar of the Qaṣba mosque, Marrakesh (ca. 1189–95)

remarked upon by the celebrated prose writer al-Jāḥiẓ (ca. 776–868/69), who wrote that the preacher "can deliver the sermon without any clothes on, as long as he wears a turban and holds the staff." ²⁶ Ibn Rusta also noticed, at the top of the right armrest on the Prophet's minbar, an elongated empty socket made of silver that swiveled around a pivot. He learned that this object was commonly regarded as a toy, which Muḥammad's grandsons, al-Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, used to amuse themselves with while their grandfather addressed the community. It probably was originally meant to accommodate the banner that, even today, is sometimes placed on the minbar during the Friday prayer.²⁷

The caliph 'Uthmān is said to have been the first to cover the Prophet's minbar with a cloth, made of velvetlike fabric (*qatīfa*), when it was not in use; rugs have also been reported to have been used for the same purpose. This practice continued for a few centuries under the 'Abbasid caliphs (750–1258), who would send a new cover (*kiswa*)²⁸ from Baghdad every year, until it was discontinued sometime before the minbar was destroyed.

During the Umayyad period, the caliph gradually became established as the absolute ruler, as opposed to primus inter pares, while also maintaining his role as head of the religious community. This change, along with the codification of the ceremony of the khutba, required that additional activities take place in the immediate vicinity of the minbar. One of these, the burning of incense at the sides and back of the minbar during the Friday prayer, became common during the Umayyad period and was still practiced as late as the thirteenth century.29 The two most significant changes during this time were the addition of guards around the minbar to protect the caliph from possible attacks by religious and political opponents (the chances of his being murdered were certainly great in those days)³⁰ and the erection of a protective enclosure ($maqs\bar{u}ra$) around the mihrab and the minbar. Tradition assigns the construction of the first magsūra to 'Uthmān and relates that it was made of wood and included windows to allow the congregation to see the khaṭīb. However, it is much more likely that the magsūra was introduced only at the beginning of the Umayyad period; it was probably built in dressed stone and equipped with just one window. The confinement of the minbar for the sake of security must have come as quite a shock to those who once listened to the Prophet's speeches while he was sitting openly in front of them.

During the reign of Mu^cāwiya, Damascus was chosen as the new capital of the Umayyad dynasty, since Syria was in a more central position than the Arabian Peninsula for implementing the expansionistic goals of the caliphate. The seat of the caliphate moved to Damascus, and as the head of the Muslim community (umma), the caliph needed a minbar from which to deliver the khuṭba. The obvious problem arose of whether to bring the Prophet's minbar from Medina to the new capital or to build another one. Apparently, Mu'āwiya had wanted it brought to Syria (his successors, 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan [r. 685-705] and al-Walīd I ibn 'Abd al-Malik [r. 705-15], continued efforts to obtain it), but the growing importance of the cult of the Prophet made this difficult. Since nothing that the Prophet had said or done forbade the construction of other minbars, Mu^cāwiya ordered a new one built for the main mosque of Damascus.³¹ His minbar was portable and probably closely resembled the original seat of the Prophet before the six steps were added. We know that Muʿāwiya took this minbar with him on his pilgrimage to Mecca in 660, a fact that reinforces how important it was for a caliph to make public appearances on his throne/pulpit. Mucāwiya's minbar remained in Mecca until the 'Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786-809) was presented with a new one when he made his pilgrimage to Mecca in 786-87; Mu'āwiya's was then put up at 'Arafāt.32 The Meccan minbar was always portable, for it usually stood in the maqām33 and was

pushed on wheels to the side of the Ka $^{\circ}$ ba only during Friday prayer. The Ottoman sultan Sulaimān I (r. 1520–66) broke with this tradition of movable Meccan minbars when he ordered that a fixed pulpit made of marble be erected on the north side of the $maq\bar{a}m$.

Just a few decades after the death of the Prophet, minbars started to proliferate in response to the needs of the caliphate. We can postulate that Mu^cāwiya had a second minbar built in Damascus after he left the first in Mecca and that other important mosques, such as those in Kufa and Basra, would have had a minbar for the khutba. Eventually, as the number of minbars increased, the Umayyad caliphs decided to delegate to the various provincial governors the privilege of ascending the minbar to deliver the sermon. There must initially have been some opposition to this practice. Only two decades earlier, the second caliph, 'Umar, had forbidden his governor in Egypt, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ (d. ca. 663), from using the minbar (which 'Amr had built himself for the mosque at al-Fustat), since only the caliph could raise himself above other Muslims. We are informed, nevertheless, that 'Amr used the minbar after 'Umar's death, and we know that in the year 683-84 homage was paid to the Umayyad caliph Marwan ibn al-Ḥakam not only in Damascus but also from the minbars of the provinces of the Hijaz (Arabia), Egypt, Syria, the Jazira, Iraq, and Khurasan.34

Thus, about fifty years after the death of the Prophet, the main mosque in the capital of every province of the Islamic caliphate had its own minbar, which was supposedly built according to the original model in Medina, with or without the additional six steps. One can safely postulate that, as the empire expanded and the governors became increasingly conscious of their power and status, two steps were not thought to be enough to raise them sufficiently above the congregation, and thus more multistepped minbars were erected. Conversely, the caliph, while still delivering the khutba in Damascus, began to see himself as less of a religious leader and came to regard his own regal seat as a throne. It is probably at this moment that the minbar attained its definitive design as a multistepped pulpit in the mosque, while the caliph's palace seat was established as a much lower but very precious throne (sarīr, kursī, or takht).

By the mid eighth century, after power fell into the hands of the 'Abbasid dynasty and the Umayyad caliphate survived only in Spain, there were minbars not only in the provincial capitals but in every city that had a congregational mosque. The geographer al-Muqaddasī (ca. 945–1000) stressed the importance of a city's having a minbar when he wrote that "a town is so designated if it has a minbar." It was also at this time that the minbar became

defined solely as the pulpit from which the *khuṭba* was performed in the mosque and lost forever its connotation as a regal seat or throne.

It is appropriate at this point to narrow our discussion to the Maghrib (Tripolitania, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco) after the establishment of the Spanish caliphate in 756. One of the primary political aims of the caliphs of Spain (al-Andalus or Andalusia) was the continuation of the traditions of the Umayyad dynasty—a goal that was encouraged by the cultivation of religious attitudes harking back to the time of the Prophet. In such a climate, the doctrinal school that deepened its roots into the Muslim community and became the sole official rite of al-Andalus was the so-called Mālikiyya (madhhab mālikī), the most traditional of the four codified Sunnite schools. The Mālikiyya school derives its name from Imām Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795), an influential jurist chosen by the 'Abbasid caliph to establish a legal system because he had long been prominent in Medina, the city in which the principles of Islamic law had originated. According to Mālik ibn Anas, the Hadith constituted the "sunna" (custom) of the Prophet and as such it was legally as binding as the Qur'an itself. Malikism was introduced into Spain by Andalusian scholars who had been taught by Mālik himself or his pupils. The Medinan tradition thus survived in its purest form in al-Andalus as well as in the rest of the Maghrib, especially under the Aghlabid dynasty (800–909). It has maintained its status in the Muslim Maghrib to the present day.

The adoption of Malikism was understandably reflected in all aspects of life and particularly in religious matters and rituals. It is not surprising therefore that, as an important part of the ritual, the Friday sermon with its ceremonial would follow closely the tradition of the Prophet and the first caliphs. As part of the rite and one of the most powerful symbols of Friday prayer, the minbar itself would also be inspired by tradition: it would be made of wood and be multistepped, according to the model established by the caliph Mu^cāwiya and his governor Marwān. The khaṭīb would carry a staff and beat it on the floor of the minbar. As an act of devotion and submission to the Prophet, he would ascend only to a middle step of the minbar, not to the top, and would remain standing, since only Muhammad and the first caliphs had the privilege of sitting on the minbar. A maqsūra, most likely made of wooden screens, would surround the minbar and the mihrab for protection, in accordance with the practice followed when the caliph himself delivered the khutba.

The most interesting of the traditions that became distinctive of the Maghrib was the minbar's mobility. At first, this practice seems senseless, since minbars were never moved within the mosque, unlike the Prophet's pulpit,

which had been shifted from one place to another in response to his needs. Their position was fixed to the right of the mihrab, inside the maqsūra; even their distance from the gibla wall was regulated according to the Hadith, which designates a space between the wall and the minbar just large enough to let a sheep pass through.36 (The most prominent exception—the Umayyad minbar in Mecca needed to be mobile only because it was pushed every Friday from its resting place next to the Ka^cba.) The main reason why minbars are movable in the Maghrib, therefore, is not because they regularly moved as part of their function but rather because they had to be out of sight when not in use. The opinion of Malikite jurists that the minbar should not intrude upon the floor space of the mosque may also have helped to foster the tradition.³⁷ In fact, the Maghrib's movable minbars combined the tradition of the minbar of the Ka^cba in Mecca with the former custom of covering the Prophet's minbar with fabric, which had survived for a few centuries.

The simple but ingenious solution devised by architects and, most likely, by jurists to make the minbar "disappear" during the week and "reappear" on Friday was to store it in a recess in the qibla wall that was just high, wide, and deep enough to house it. An even more resourceful idea was the system of tracks and wheels developed to facilitate the task of moving the large, heavy, and awkwardly shaped minbar into and out of a small room.³⁸ As in the case of the minbar of Mecca, wheels under the base made the actions of pushing and pulling effortless, and the tracks, which represented a real innovation, were exactly long enough to position the minbar correctly inside the recess and outside, on the floor of the mosque. During the week the tracks were covered with rugs or mats. The recess needed to be only slightly larger than the dimensions of the minbar itself because all the operations could be performed by one or two persons without entering the storeroom. In fact, the entire system was so unobtrusive that only the door to the right of the mihrab revealed the presence of a minbar.

In his study of one type of minbar usually found in East Africa, Joseph Schacht presented a comprehensive chronological list of mosques in the Maghrib which, according to archaeological excavations or literary sources, included an elongated room for the minbar to the right of the mihrab.³⁹ The earliest datable of these mosques are the Great Mosque of Sfax (849), in Aghlabid-ruled Tunisia, and the Great Mosque of Tunis (864), two examples indicating that movable minbars were in use in the Maghrib just a few decades after Mālik ibn Anas's death and the promulgation of his doctrines by his pupils. Schacht also goes to great lengths to demonstrate that there originally was a room in the

qibla wall—and thus must have been a minbar—in the celebrated ninth-century mosques in Córdoba (in the extension of 848 by the caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān II); in Kairouan, Tunisia (the qibla wall is datable to 830, and the mosque's fixed minbar to at least 862–63; see figs. 32, 33); and, even outside the Maghrib, in Samarra, the 'Abbasid capital, north of Baghdad (848–52). Schacht's arguments are valid and should not be discounted, even if they might seem to serve his conclusions too well.

Nonetheless, it is an established fact that, from the tenth century onward, movable minbars on wheels became standard throughout the Maghrib and al-Andalus. This is evident from a number of existing mosques, or ruins thereof, and from a few extant minbars; included among these are the extension of the Great Mosque of Córdoba by the caliph al-Ḥakam II in 966, the minbar of the Mosque of the Andalusians in Fez of 980, the mosque of the Qal^ca of the Banū Ḥammād in Algeria (1007), the Great Mosque of Almería (1022), and the congregational mosques of Sousse (second half of the 11th century), Algiers (1096), and Tlemcen (1136). With this series of examples, we come to the Almoravid and Almohad periods, to which the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque—as well as its closest parallels—belongs.

THE ALMORAVIDS AND ALMOHADS IN MOROCCO: POLITICS, RELIGION, AND THE ERECTION OF MOSQUES

As indicated in the defective inscription on its backrest,40 the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque was made in Córdoba for the congregational mosque that the Almoravid ruler 'Alī ibn Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn (r. 1106-43) had erected in Marrakesh sometime between 1110 and 1120. Marrakesh was the capital of the Almoravid kingdom and had been founded by its chief commander, Abū Bakr ibn ^cUmar (d. 1087/88). It was developed only later, during the reign of Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn (1061-1106), who was 'Alī ibn Yūsuf's father and the first true ruler of the Almoravids.41 When the Almohads defeated the Almoravids and conquered Marrakesh in 1147, just a few years after 'Alī ibn Yūsuf's death, his palace and mosque were destroyed. A new mosque, the so-called Kutubiyya, 42 was immediately erected by the Almohad ruler, 'Abd al-Mu'min (r. 1130–63), over the ruins of the palace. We can assume, however, that a special importance was attached to the minbar of the Almoravid mosque, since 'Abd al-Mu'min ordered it transported to and installed in his new mosque. 43 Fifteen years later, by 1162, the size of the mosque had doubled, the direction of its qibla wall had been corrected after a large minaret was added in 1158,44 and the minbar had been



Fig. 31. The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, detail of the backrest, with the name *Ibn Tāshufin*

moved to the location it would occupy for the next eight centuries. 45

These events in themselves make it clear that politics and religion were paramount concerns in Morocco under the rule of the Almoravids and Almohads. The consequences for the history of art and architecture are evident, but we can at least be grateful to 'Abd al-Mu' min for sparing the minbar of his enemy. ⁴⁶ There is no doubt that this object, with the name of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn written on its backrest, was a powerful political statement that represented more to 'Abd al-Mu' min than either a pulpit for the Friday sermon or a valuable piece of artistic workmanship. For reasons that remain unclear, the name of Ibn Tāshufīn was not erased from the backrest and replaced by that of the new ruler (fig. 31); however, it is possible that some formulas of clear Almoravid content were eliminated from the minbar. ⁴⁷

A telling precedent for the reutilization of the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque had occurred in Morocco less than two centuries earlier. At the end of the tenth century a great rivalry arose between the Umayyad caliphs of al-Andalus and the Fatimids, whose power was concentrated in present-day Tunisia. While certainly political, the struggle was especially bitter for religious reasons, since the

Fatimids were of Shi^cite Ismā^cīli⁴⁸ belief and therefore regarded as heretics by the Sunnis. In Fez, the Zīrid Buluggīn ibn Zīrī (r. 972-84), formerly a governor for the Spanish caliph, switched allegiance from the Umayyads to the Fatimids after he conquered the city in 979. One of his first political acts was to construct a minbar for the Mosque of the Andalusians in his new capital. Its inscription recorded Buluggin's name on the backrest and, on the upper panels of the flanks, the date (980) as well as a Qur³anic verse (24:36) that drew on the Shi^cite ritual for the call to prayer (see fig. 36). Five years later, the fortunes of the Shi^cites changed when a renewed offensive by the army of the new Umayyad caliph, Hishām II, recaptured the city, and the army commander, al-Manṣūr, declared himself the new governor. Finding the minbar of the main mosque offensive, the new conquerors removed its backrest, which was probably sent as a trophy to the capital, Córdoba. A replacement, carrying the names of the governor and the Umayyad caliph, was positioned on the minbar and was obviously thought sufficient to render it acceptable to the new regime.49

The struggle for power between the Almoravids and Almohads, although more complex than the Umayyad-Fatimid/Sunni-Shi^cite confrontation, was of the same politico-religious character. Of Berber origin, each dynasty was born from a religious movement generated by a leader who had recently come back from a pilgrimage to Mecca. On his return to Morocco in 1035, Yahyā ibn Ibrāhīm al-Judālī, the chief of the Sanhāja tribe, met and brought back with him 'Abdallāh ibn Yāsīn al-Nafīsī, a man of learning who had inspired him with his insightful doctrinal interpretations. The two men, the founders of the Almoravid movement, retired with a few devoted followers to live an austere religious life in a secluded place, a kind of fortified monastery called a ribāţ. This confraternity became known as al-murābiṭūn (those of the ribāt), a name that evolved into Almoravids through Spanish permutation. In the brief space of about ten years, this predominantly religious movement grew into an actively proselytizing group that subjugated neighboring tribes and spread its power into the western Sahara. Yahyā ibn Ibrāhīm and 'Abdallāh ibn Yāsīn died in 1058 and 1059, respectively, and for a few years their role as spiritual leaders was carried out by a collective of religious scholars.

It was only in 1061 that the real founder of the formal Almoravid state, Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn (r. 1061–1106), consolidated his power and began to establish his capital in Marrakesh. Yūsuf's strictly orthodox religious attitude, inspired by Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm, his organizational skills as an army commander, and the political void left in Morocco after the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate in 1031 paved

the way for him to strengthen his position and extend his rule. By the time of his death in 1106, the Almoravid domain included the whole of present-day Morocco, the Algerian coast, and the southern half of the Iberian Peninsula. Yūsuf rigorously applied the Malikite rite in all its religious and legal facets and appointed Malikite jurists (fuqahā²) to influential positions. Viewing the Almoravid state as part of the larger Muslim community (umma), he sought investiture from the ʿAbbasid caliph in Baghdad, the official religious leader of the umma, and never used the caliphal title amīr al-mu²minīn (prince of the faithful). Within the Almoravid state, however, he saw himself, as the early caliphs had, as the spiritual and secular leader of the community.

'Alī ibn Yūsuf (r. 1106–43), who succeeded his father to the throne, had been brought up in the refined atmosphere of Ceuta and Spain rather than in the Bedouin environment of the previous generation, yet he adopted his father's strict religious attitudes and fostered only the Malikite rite of jurisprudence. The first part of his reign represents the period of the greatest extension of the Almoravid state, the second part being largely tainted by conflict with the Almohads. The preoccupation of both father and son with doctrinal matters is reflected in the great number of mosques they had erected. According to the historian Ibn Abī Zar^c, Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn reproached the inhabitants of any street he saw without a mosque, and he is said to have rolled up his sleeves and helped make bricks for his congregational mosque in the new capital of Marrakesh.50 That these mosques newly erected by the Almoravids strictly adhered to the implementation of Malikite jurisprudence can be seen, for example, in the fact that they did not possess towers (minarets).⁵¹

The predominant influence on the Almoravid mosques comes from caliphal Spain, in particular from the unchallenged masterpiece of Andalusian architecture, the Great Mosque of Córdoba. The Cordoban model was undoubtedly the inspiration for the plans of the congregational mosques Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn built in the recently founded town of Tlemcen (named Tagrart at the time), shortly after 1082, and in Algiers, which is datable a little earlier than its minbar, finished in 1096, as well as for the smaller mosque of Nedroma, an Algerian town near the border of Morocco, which was erected probably before 1086.52 Unlike his father, 'Alī ibn Yūsuf concentrated his building activities in the major cities of Marrakesh and Fez. Of his congregational mosque in Marrakesh, which, as mentioned earlier, was destroyed by the Almohads, only a small annex for ablutions has survived in the so-called Qubba of the Barūdiyyīn (1120). Among his other major projects, however, was a major renovation and extension of the Qarawiyyīn mosque in Fez (1136), as well as the rebuilding of the vault above the mihrab of the mosque built by his father in Tlemcen (1136).⁵³

During this period, as Morocco was growing into a unified political entity that would survive until the present day, it was those aspects of Andalusian culture considered acceptable by the rulers and their Malikite jurists that became principally responsible for the wealth of architecture and interior decoration found throughout the Almoravid kingdom. Modeled after Andalusian examples, Almoravid buildings had exteriors that were austere but interiors that presented a much greater visual variety, incorporating such features as multilobed horseshoe arches of different sizes, pierced vaults that let light filter through, and lavish stucco and wooden decoration. The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque clearly symbolizes such an Andalusian influence: we know it was made in Córdoba, and we can easily imagine how much it enhanced the interior decoration of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf's mosque whenever it was used. As discussed in the next section of this essay, the minbar was in fact the model for all Moroccan pulpits from the twelfth century onward, and thus the Andalusian influence survives, in this regard, virtually to the present time.

The Almohads, who became an increasingly powerful threat during the latter part of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf's reign, were founded by a rebellious religious reformer who, like Yaḥyā ibn Ibrāhīm, had returned to his Berber tribe (the Maṣmūda) as an erudite and zealous Muslim after his pilgrimage to Mecca. Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Tūmart (1078/81-1130) was an intellectual disciple of the distinguished philosopher and Sufi al-Ghazālī (1058–1111), whose thoughts were condemned by the Almoravids and who possibly met Ibn Tūmart during his pilgrimage. Ibn Tūmart decried the legalism of the Almoravid jurists, believing that it had caused them to lose sight of the true traditions of the Prophet. He also took exception to the anthropomorphism of the Malikite theologians, who accepted literal interpretations of some Qur'anic passages that spoke of Allāh's physical qualities; he stressed instead the need for allegorical interpretations of such passages in order not to impugn the unity and the oneness of God. His followers were thus called al-muwahhidun (the unitarians) and became known in Spanish as the Almohads.

Ibn Tumart was a brilliant theologian who is said to have won every debate with the official Almoravid jurists, except one in Marrakesh in 1121. Even so, 'Alī ibn Yūsuf refused to persecute him, on the ground that his own piety forbade him from harming another fervent Muslim; in time this attitude gave impetus and indirect recognition to the Almohad movement. Ibn Tumart became the spiritu-

al as well as the political head of the movement after he left Marrakesh in 1124 or 1125 for Tinmal, a village in the Atlas Mountains, where he proclaimed himself a descendant of the Prophet and spoke of his relocation as a hijra (migration), thus equating it with the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina.⁵⁴ Upon the death of Ibn Tūmart in 1130, his lieutenant and commander of the army, 'Abd al-Mu'min, assumed the leadership of the Almohads and later was proclaimed the first ruler of the dynasty. By the time he died in 1163, the Almohad kingdom had not only swallowed the entire Almoravid state but also expanded farther east to include Tunisia and part of the Libyan coast.

As previously mentioned, when 'Abd al-Mu'min conquered Marrakesh in 1147, he chose the site of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf's palace for his new mosque and seized its minbar before destroying the building. The Kutubiyya mosque, constructed in two phases (beginning in 1147 and 1158, respectively), represents 'Abd al-Mu'min's major effort in the erection of religious buildings in his kingdom. In addition, he ordered the construction in 1153-54 of a congregational mosque in the small village of Tinmal, where Ibn Tumart had lived the last part of his life and where he was buried, and also completed the first stage of the mosque in the village of Taza, which served as a bastion protecting the Gharb Valley between Tlemcen and Fez. The successors of 'Abd al-Mu'min, who would reign until 1269, when the Almohad realm was eventually divided into three smaller kingdoms,55 also had a share in the erection of large mosques, among them those of Seville (1184) and Rabat, which was left unfinished in 1199.

Although strongly opposed to the legalistic doctrine of the Almoravids, the early Almohads generally adopted the Almoravid style for their mosques—both for the overall plan (including the room for a movable minbar to the right of the mihrab) and for the interior decoration. Their most important innovation was the introduction of large, high square minarets for the call to prayer. Even today, three of these Almohad towers dominate the landscape of their respective cities: in Marrakesh, the minaret of the Kutubiyya mosque, which is still largely in its original condition; in Seville, that of the Giralda, the upper part of which was rebuilt in the sixteenth century after the mosque had been turned into a cathedral; and in Rabat, that of the Hassan mosque, the lantern of which was never built but which was meant to be the tallest of all Almohad towers.56

Unlike the Almoravids, the Almohads did not recognize the formal authority of the 'Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, and 'Abd al-Mu'min called himself *khalīfa* (caliph) and assumed the caliphal title of *amīr al-mu'minīn*. Ibn Tūmart's

hostility toward the Malikite rite and his desire for a return to what he saw as the true tradition of the Prophet were shared by 'Abd al-Mu'min and his successors. Yet pragmatic needs led for a while to the tacit toleration of the Malikite legal system, and it was not until the reign of Abū Yūsuf Yaʻqūb (1184–98/99), 'Abd al-Mu'min's grandson, that it was officially suppressed. But at the same time there was a growing interest, in the Almohad lands, in Sufism and other philosophical movements, partially inspired by the cult of Ibn Tumart as a saint with superhuman powers and by figures such as al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd (known from Latin translations as Averroës; 1126-1198), and Abū Bakr ibn Ţufayl (known as Abubacer; d. 1185/86). In response, the orthodox Almohad caliphs came to regard Ibn Tūmart, who had also declared that he was the impeccable mahdī (prophet), as an offensive figure; most of his doctrines were rejected and his name was omitted from Friday prayers. This theological and philosophical ferment led to the only possible solution for the ruling class: the return to the Malikite rite in juridical matters. No changes in the details of the ritual took place, however, and all the rules that had been codified earlier regarding religious matters and the construction of mosques continued to be applied as before.

Looking back on the history of the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, one can understand how central its significance was in this period of political and religious turmoil. It is possible to picture the Almoravid 'Alī ibn Yūsuf proudly watching his imam ascending the minbar and delivering the sermon, paying homage to the caliph in Baghdad, and probably cursing Ibn Tümart for his boldness in opposing the religious views of the ruling family.⁵⁷ And it is even more rewarding to imagine a later scene, involving the Almohad 'Abd al-Mu' min after he had built his Kutubiyya mosque and moved the minbar there. After the minbar had magically appeared from the door to the right of the mihrab and the wooden magsūra and Qur'an stand had risen from the ground,58 his imam would ascend the pulpit and deliver the khuṭba, denouncing the legalistic attitude of the Almoravids, invoking the protection of God over Ibn Tumart, and explaining to the congregation his ruler's plans for future conquests.

THE MINBAR FROM THE KUTUBIYYA MOSQUE IN RELATION TO OTHER MAGHRIBI PULPITS

The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque undoubtedly represents the most accomplished and best-preserved pulpit from the Almoravid and Almohad periods. When compared with extant minbars produced in the same area before and after, the work is also revealed as a watershed



Fig. 32. The minbar of the Great Mosque of Kairouan (862–63), left flank. Photo: Marilyn Jenkins-Medina

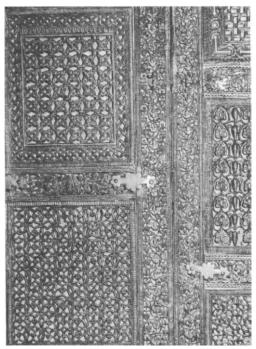


Fig. 33. The minbar of the Great Mosque of Kairouan, detail of carved panels on the left flank. Photo: Marilyn Jenkins-Medina

in the making of Islamic pulpits. To trace the story of minbar production in the Maghrib, we must begin outside Morocco, with the two pulpits made for the Great Mosques of Kairouan, Tunisia (862–63), and of Córdoba (975–76).

The first minbar (ca. 830) of the mosque in Kairouan was probably movable,59 but a fixed one has been positioned to the right of the mihrab since 862-63 (fig. 32). This pulpit, still in its original position, can be regarded as the oldest extant minbar. Its rectangular side panels with vegetal and geometric ornamentation were apparently sculpted locally from teakwood beams imported from the central lands of the 'Abbasid caliphate (fig. 33). 60 The panels, a number of which have been replaced with modern ones, are positioned on the minbar in thirteen vertical rows-an arrangement that highlights the elevation of the minbar, which, with its nine steps and height of 3.93 meters (12 feet 103/4 inches), is the tallest wooden minbar in the Maghrib. It does not have arched frames at its entrance or at the top near the seat, and its steps are decorated with smaller rectangular panels arranged horizontally.61

The minbar of the Great Mosque of Córdoba was reported by Ambrosio de Morales to have disappeared sometime in the late sixteenth century: "There was [in the cathedral] . . . a carriage on four wheels, made of wood, exquisitely ornamented, and provided with seven steps. It was destroyed a few years ago—I do not know why—and this was the fate of such a monument of antiquity." 62

Apparently, its wooden carcass survived for a few years, at least until 1615, when Martín de Roa, another Spanish writer, recounted that "only the empty structure remains while most of the rest is lost due to shameful negligence." ⁶³

The earliest mention of the minbar in Córdoba appears in a mid-twelfth-century text by the geographer al-Idrīsī: "At the right of the mihrab is the pulpit, which has no match in the entire universe. It is made of ebony, boxwood, and 'scented' wood. The Annals of the Umayyad caliphs report that it took seven years to sculpt and paint it: six craftsmen, in addition to their apprentices, were employed, and each one of them received a daily salary of half-mithqāl muḥammadī."64 Additional information is offered by the Maghribi historian Ibn 'Idhārī al-Marrākushī (second half 13th century-early 14th century), who mentions that "in the month of Muharram of the year 355 [A.D. 965] [the caliph al-Ḥakam II] ordered that the old minbar be placed next to the mihrab."65 He goes on to relate that "the [renovation of the] mosque was finished in 365 [A.D. 975/76]. The minbar built by al-Hakam was encrusted with red and yellow sandalwood, ebony, ivory, and 'Indian' wood. Al-Ḥakam spent 35,705 dinars and [the minbar?] was finished in five years."66

When the passages of the two Arab writers are compared, some minor inconsistencies appear. Different types of wood are mentioned, for example, and the use of ivory inlay is reported only by Ibn ʿIdhārī; one states that the construction of the minbar took seven years, the other

five. The quotations from Ibn 'Idhārī imply that two minbars were involved: al-Ḥakam had ordered the "old" one to be placed in the mosque in 965 and evidently supplanted it with the new wood- and ivory-encrusted minbar, which was in place by the time the enlargement and renovation of the mosque were accomplished in 975–76. An apparent anachronism regarding the destruction of al-Ḥakam's minbar is found in a passage by the fourteenth-century writer Ibn Marzūq, who recounts that "many fragments of the minbar in Córdoba have reached [the Maghrib]." It can be postulated that these fragments, which reached Tlemcen in the fourteenth century, belonged to the "old" minbar cited by Ibn 'Idhārī. In any case, some confusion must clearly have been generated as to which of the two became celebrated for its wondrous decoration.

According to a reconstruction that was proposed by Félix Hernández Jiménez, 68 al-Ḥakam's movable minbar had an arched frame spanning the entrance, smaller arches flanking the seat, a handrail, finials atop every stepped section of the sides, and wheels. The two flanks were subdivided into regular square panels which, exactly as in the descriptions of the Prophet's minbar, 69 would correspond in height to the risers of the steps and would punctuate the rhythm of the ascent, which culminated in the seat and the backrest (fig. 34). The panels were of differently colored woods, and each was individually sculpted and deco-

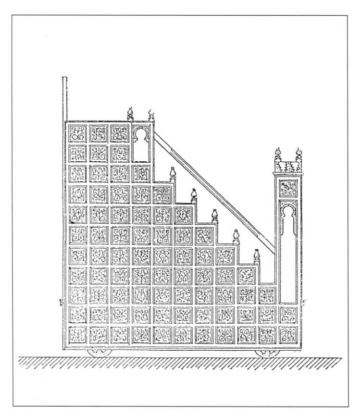


Fig. 34. Reconstruction of the minbar of the Great Mosque of Córdoba (975–76). From Hernández Jiménez 1959

rated with vegetal ornamentation. They were probably arranged on each flank in a way that would offer pleasing chromatic contrasts, as in the case of the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, while the ivory was possibly used to frame them and to decorate the arched entrance and the finials.⁷⁰

Both of the minbars from Kairouan and Córdoba—but especially the latter, with its overall structure, regular square panels, and wheels—can be regarded as the prototypes for other pulpits made in the following 150 years and, in some respect, for centuries to come. As demonstrated by Joseph Schacht, movable minbars were produced ubiquitously for the congregational mosques of the Maghrib since at least the mid tenth century. We can safely assume that those minbars followed the Cordoban model, to judge by the three that have partially survived to the present day: those made for the Mosque of the Andalusians in Fez and for mosques in Nedroma and Algiers.

The history of the minbar from the Mosque of the Andalusians has been addressed earlier in this essay to demonstrate how pulpits could be significant in Maghribi politico-religious struggles. The Fatimid minbar of 980, the backrest of which was replaced by the Umayyad governor in 985, is concealed today under a minbar that was built over it during the Almohad period (see p. 47); this structure is still used every Friday by the imam to deliver his sermon.⁷² When Henri Terrasse studied the pulpit for his book on the Mosque of the Andalusians,73 he realized that the backrest, which had the name of al-Mansūr inscribed on it, was earlier than the Almohad minbar, and thus he had the external frame removed to reveal what lay underneath. The Fatimid/Umayyad minbar appeared as a simple structure, originally of five steps, including a particularly high first step,74 and without arches at the entrance or handrails; its flanks were decorated with square panels in an arrangement that followed the ascent of the steps (fig. 35).75 Only two of the original sixty-eight panels have survived: each one has five elements nailed together that make up a pattern with scrolls of three-lobed leaves in relief and a central lobed arch resting on two columns.76 The two rectangular panels at the sides of the seat (together with the Umayyad backrest, now in the Musée du Dar Batha in Fez; fig. 36), which were also made at the time of Buluggīn, include very similar motifs. In addition, vegetal and geometric elements in relief appear on the armature, made of long vertical elements joined by short horizontal ones, that borders each flank and had originally framed each panel. The influence of the decoration on the Kairouan minbar is evident in these four panels and the armature. According to Terrasse, the great majority of the carved panels were destroyed when al-Mansūr had the backrest



Fig. 35. The Fatimid/Umayyad minbar of the Mosque of the Andalusians, Fez (980 and 985). From H. Terrasse [1942]





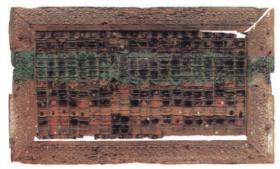


Fig. 36. Backrest and side panels of the seat from the Fatimid/Umayyad minbar of the Mosque of the Andalusians. Musée du Dar Batha, Fez

removed in 985.⁷⁷ The empty squares left by the missing panels were filled with turned wooden balusters arranged vertically in close proximity within each sunken square. These balusters, many of which have survived, are among the earliest examples of the bow-drill technique later known as *mashrabiyya*, in which spools and spindles were combined to make screens. This use of balusters is unique in the history of minbars, and it is impossible to know whether the Umayyad governor found inspiration in existing pulpits in Córdoba or whether they were simply used as cheaper and handier solutions to fill the empty squares and present a new-looking minbar in a short period of time.

There is a gap of about a century between the inner minbar of the Mosque of the Andalusians and the pulpits made for the mosques of Nedroma and Algiers. However, the basic structure of the minbar in Fez, as well as the division of its flanks into regular squares, served as the model throughout this period, which witnessed the rise to power of the Almoravids. Since only the backrest and portions of the flanks of the minbar of Nedroma, which is datable to about 1086,⁷⁸ have survived (fig. 37), it is not possible to determine its total height or number of original steps. However, what is left is sufficient to prove that the flanks were subdivided into undecorated square panels, that finials were present on the flanks alongside each step, and that no handrail was used.⁷⁹ Only the backrest, which carries the name of the Almoravid ruler Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn, or one of his sons, in addition to that of the qadi who ordered the construction of the minbar on behalf of the sovereign, presents a carved inscription in relief, albeit with no additional decoration.⁸⁰

If the minbar from Nedroma is the simplest in structure and the least decorated of all the surviving pulpits, that from the Great Mosque in Algiers probably most closely exemplifies the fabled lost model of Córdoba. According to the kufic inscription found along its sides and the top of its entrance arch, the minbar was finished on I Rajab 490 (A.D. June 14, 1097), during the reign of Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn.81 We also know the name of its maker, which is unusual for pieces of furniture (a signature has also been found on the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque; see essay by Bloom herein, p. 20 and fig. 19): a certain Muḥammad humbly signed only his first name here, thus maintaining his anonymity. A comparison of the reconstruction of the Cordoban minbar suggested by Hernández Jiménez (see fig. 34) to the pulpit in Algiers (fig. 38) reveals the close similarity between the two. Each has an arch at its entrance, flanks that are subdivided into decorated square panels of equal size, and, of course, wheels (the upper part of the minbar in Algiers, including the backrest, is missing). Every square panel of the Algiers minbar, as well as the parallelograms and triangles that fill the gaps dictated by its profile, is carved with vegetal, or more rarely geometric, motifs in relief. Most of the vegetal motifs are imaginative mutations of scrolling patterns ending in a variety of leaf shapes, while the geometric patterns are composed of interlaced lines, both straight and curved, arranged symmetrically.⁸² The only significant structural difference between the reconstruction of the pulpit in Córdoba and the minbar in Algiers concerns the original handrail. In Algiers, this is an integral part of the flanks, joined to the rest of the sides by means of wooden panels in the shape

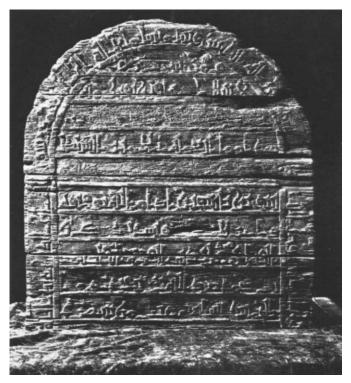


Fig. 37. Backrest of the minbar from the Great Mosque of Nedroma (ca. 1086). Musée National des Antiquités Classiques et Musulmans, Algiers. From Marçais 1950

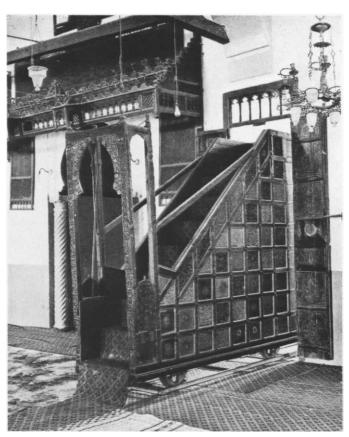


Fig. 38. The minbar of the Great Mosque of Algiers (1097). From Torres Balbás 1955

of parallelograms and triangles, while in Córdoba there was a finial on either side of each step and the handrail was formed by separate beams. An important aesthetic difference arises from the Andalusian taste for sophisticated polychromy: as reported by the sources, 83 woods of different colors as well as ivory were used in Córdoba, but in Kairouan, Nedroma, and Algiers the minbars rely only on monochromatic carved panels to achieve their decorative effects.

These similarities and differences are important to keep in mind when considering the production of the next minbar in our chronology: the subject of this publication, the pulpit from the Kutubiyya mosque, made between 1137 and 1145, only a few decades later than the minbar in Algiers. As we know, it was executed in Córdoba and assembled in Marrakesh for the Almoravid ruler 'Alī, the son of Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn.

The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque is, at the same time, a magnificent testament to the continuity of a well-established tradition and an extraordinary example of innovation (fig. 39). With its eight steps and arched backrest, it is second in height only to the minbar in Kairouan. It shares many characteristics with the lost pulpit of al-Ḥakam in Córdoba, such as the arched frames at the entrance (fig. 40), arches at the top of the staircase (fig. 41),



Fig. 39. The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque



Fig. 40. The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, arched entrance frame



Fig. 41. The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, upper arched frame

finials punctuating each step, a separate handrail,⁸⁴ polychromy created by the use of different types of wood and bone (fig. 42), the employment of gilding as ornamentation,⁸⁵ and, lastly, vegetal motifs carved on each panel (figs. 28, 43).

Yet the decorative mesh that covers the flanks of the Kutubiyya minbar transcends anything that had been produced earlier.86 The genius of its designer lies mainly in a novel approach to the overall pattern of decoration, which departs significantly from the monotonous subdivision into square panels found on all the earlier pulpits (including the Cordoban minbar). If one looks closely at the composition of the ornamentation (fig. 44), the division into squares is still evident: the horizontal and vertical hexagons (marteaux) represent the sides of each square, the smaller eight-pointed stars are placed at each vertex, and a larger star punctuates the center of each square. However, an entirely different rhythm is created by the marquetry strapwork in bone and dark wood, which comes alive especially when viewed from a few feet back. Following that rhythm, the eye wanders in all directions, blending the single squares into an organic pattern within which the individual sculpted panels are hardly noticeable.

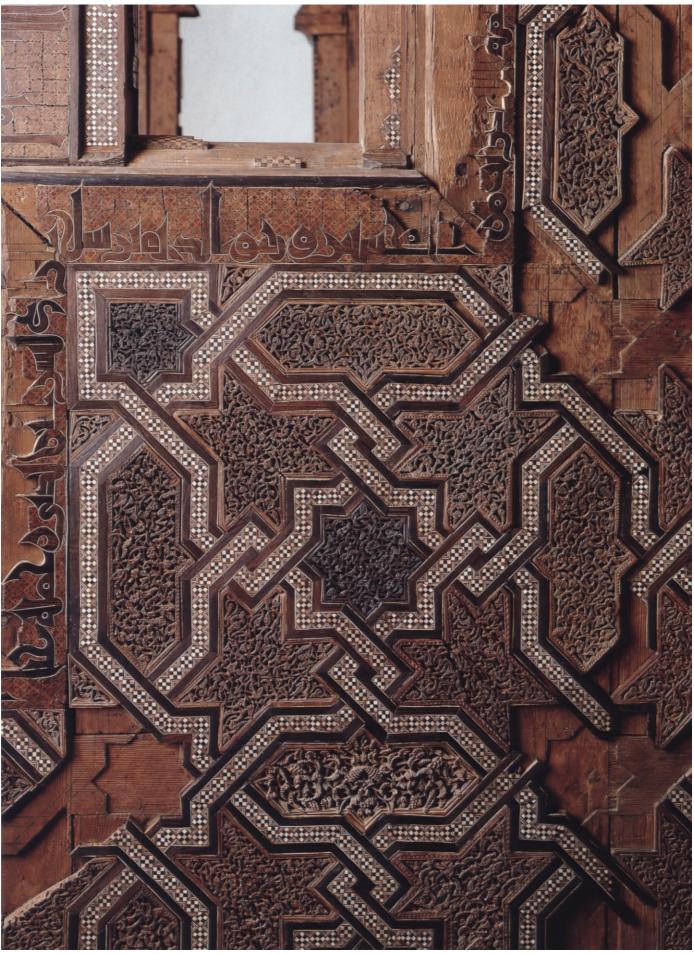


Fig. 42. The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, detail of the right flank



Fig. 43. The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, detail of carved panels and marquetry strapwork

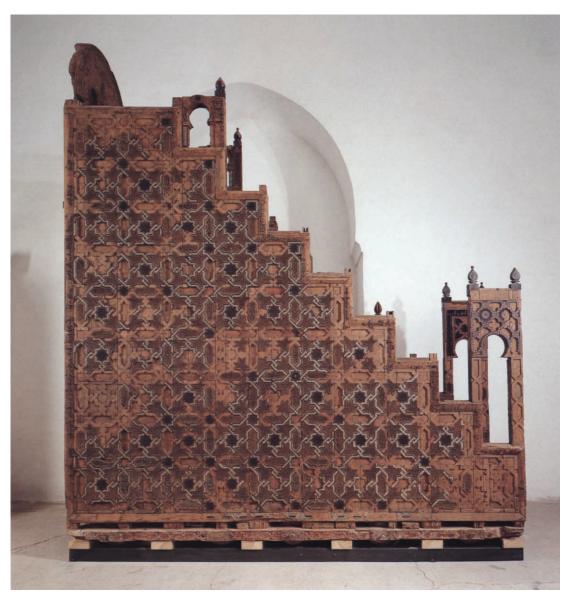


Fig. 44. The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, left flank

The traditional structure and ornamentation are still present in the Kutubiyya minbar, but it also represents the apogee of the Andalusian decorative taste (it should not be forgotten that the pulpit was conceived and made in Córdoba). It was created after the artistic refinements adopted during the caliphal era and after the subsequent period of unrest in the eleventh century, when the advent of the Almoravids brought a new stability to the Cordoban workshops. Ironically, it was also a time when the scarcity of precious ivory, so widely employed in caliphal Spain, necessitated the use of bone, its cheaper substitute, for the minbar. It is not surprising that 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, who was brought up in the centers of Andalusian culture, commissioned the minbar for his great mosque in Marrakesh from Cordoban craftsmen. He certainly knew that—with the model of the Great Mosque of Córdoba before their very eyes—they had both the ability to conceive it and the skills to execute it.

Toward the end of his reign, 'Alī ibn Yūsuf was also responsible for the renovation and expansion of the Qarawiyyīn mosque in Fez. This work, started in 1134 and terminated upon his death in 1143, included the expansion of the prayer hall, the adjustment of the axial nave, and the addition of a small mosque.87 A minbar, certainly commissioned by 'Alī ibn Yūsuf himself but not finished until a year after his death, was put in place after the mosque was completed (fig. 45). This minbar, which is still used for the Friday khutba, is very similar to, yet not as accomplished as, the pulpit from the Kutubiyya; since it was completed at approximately the same time as the other, it can be regarded as an expression of the same craftsmanship. A cursive inscription inlaid in bone 88 along the front of the arched entrance states that the minbar was finished in the month of Shacban 538 (A.D. February 1144).89

The Qarawiyyīn pulpit, which is 3.60 meters (11 feet 93/4 inches) high, 2.78 meters (9 feet 11/2 inches) deep, and 91 centimeters (35% inches) wide, is slightly smaller than the minbar in Marrakesh. When viewed in profile, the two minbars are very similar, but there are noticeable variations. Although the Qarawiyyīn minbar originally had seven steps, an eighth was added after its completion because the first step was too high (the addition clearly does not belong to the original structure, since it protrudes from the entrance). The arched frames at the entrance, as well as those at the top of the staircase, are taller and more prominent than those of the Kutubiyya minbar, and the entire structure has a more imposing appearance as a result. Both flanks extend to the top of the backrest, which itself is positioned at the front of the seat.90 Finally, a double handrail runs along the sides of the Qarawiyyīn minbar.



Fig. 45. The minbar of the Qarawiyyīn mosque, Fez (completed 1144). Photo: Mohammed Belamlih, Fez

This minbar's surface decoration, which is in the same poor condition as that of the Kutubiyya minbar before restoration, strongly recalls that of the other pulpit, although different individual motifs occur in both the marquetry work and the sculpted panels of the two.91 The marquetry strapwork on the Qarawiyyīn minbar and, consequently, the geometric shapes of the individual carved panels vary surprisingly from one flank to the other. The ornamentation on the right flank, similar in composition to that of the Kutubiyya minbar, includes Y-shaped and elongated hexagonal panels in addition to the eight-pointed stars that are placed at the vertexes of each square. Yet the left flank features arrow-shaped hexagons as well as triangles with a small triangular protrusion at the center of the long side (fig. 46). The strapwork on both minbars determines the shapes of the individual carved panels, but in the Qarawiyyīn example it does not create the space for the larger star that highlights the center of each square and that contributes so much, in the Kutubiyya minbar, to the vivacity of the entire composition. The two flanks of the minbar in Fez thus display a less inventive strapwork pattern that results in a more static design, although this



Fig. 46. The minbar of the Qarawiyyīn mosque, detail of the left flank. Photo: Mohammed Belamlih, Fez



Fig. 47. The minbar of the Qasba mosque, Marrakesh (ca. 1189-95)

minbar must have looked equally wondrous when it was in pristine condition.

Was the minbar of the Qarawiyyīn mosque the product of the same Cordoban atelier that executed the other, nearly contemporary pulpit? The fact that they were both made for the same ruler and their strong similarities might suggest a positive answer to the question. Nonetheless, the lack of mention in the Qarawiyyīn minbar's inscription that it was made in Córdoba, which is clearly stated in the Kutubiyya's inscription, and the differences noticed in a number of details seem to cast some doubts over such an interpretation. The puzzle can be solved only after a close investigation of the minbar in Fez that would establish if the same types of materials (various woods, bone, gold, and perhaps silver)92 were used in both and if they have similar underlying structures. Unfortunately, this will not be possible until the minbar in Fez is retired from its present function and made available to scholars. At present, it seems more likely that, at least during the Almoravid period, such specialized works were manufactured only in the workshops of Córdoba, which produced their masterpiece in the 1130s and soon standardized such a high-quality production that there was no further need to record their works' place of origin by means of a permanent inscription. 'Alī ibn Yūsuf may have decided to move workshops and craftsmen to Morocco, but this could not have taken place while the two minbars were being made, nor could a new generation of local artisans have been trained at the same time. Consequently, both minbars should be regarded as belonging to one and the same workshop. However—notwithstanding the fact that the two are nearly contemporary—the presence of the inscription and general considerations of quality suggest that the minbar from Marrakesh was commissioned and executed earlier and that the pulpit in Fez was ordered in the wake of the more important one.

The next important minbar to be considered is that from the Qasba mosque in Marrakesh. The Almohad 'Abd al-Mu'min had once coveted 'Alī ibn Yūsuf's minbar so much that he moved it to his new mosque, the Kutubiyya in Marrakesh. When his grandson, Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr (r. 1184-98/99), erected a new mosque between 1189 and 1195 in the kasbah (qasba) of the city, he in turn ordered a new minbar, smaller in scale but nonetheless as precious as those of the Kutubiyya and the Qarawiyyīn, to be built for it. Although hardly comparable to the great mosque built by his grandfather, the Qasba mosque had a grandeur that was consistently noted by chroniclers in the following centuries. The subdivision of its courtyard (sahn) into a central, larger space and four smaller ones at the corners also distinguishes this mosque from the others in Morocco.93



Fig. 48. The minbar of the Qasba mosque, detail of the right flank

Still used every Friday, the minbar in the Qasba mosque (height, 2.87 meters [9 feet 5 inches]; depth, 2.25 meters [7 feet 4½ inches]; width, 76 centimeters [29% inches]) is significantly smaller than the Kutubiyya minbar, and its surface decoration is comparable in quality (fig. 47). It has three tall steps, a seat with a high backrest placed at the back, and an arched frame at its entrance. The tall double arch at the top of the staircase, which is unique to this pulpit, gives it a harmonious profile. A handrail, probably part of the original work, 94 connects the two arched structures. There are no finials, and in fact—with its three steps and prominent arches—the minbar has only a single step available for one. The condition of the minbar is roughly the same as that of the Kutubiyya before conservation and the Qarawiyyīn, about half of its surface decoration being extant; the ornamentation on the backrest, however, is entirely lost.

The decorative composition is identical on the two flanks of the Qaṣba minbar and is very similar to that of the Kutubiyya pulpit: both have the same Y-shaped panels as well as elongated hexagons and eight-pointed stars. The peculiar greenish staining of a small number of the bone insets also links the two productions. The only difference is noticeable in the central star, which in the Qaṣba minbar has the same dimensions as the four stars at the vertexes

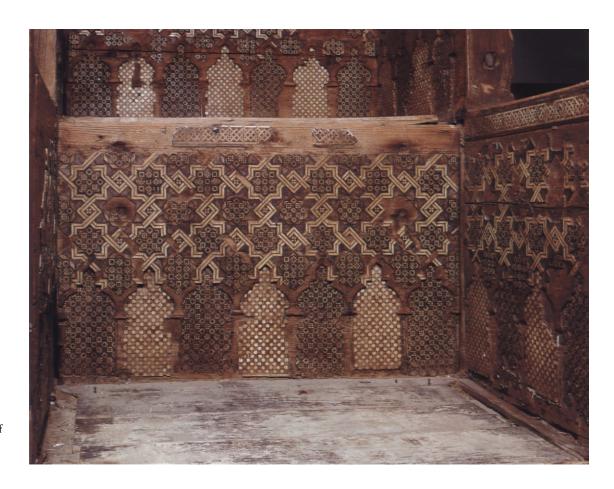


Fig. 49. The minbar of the Qaṣba mosque, detail of the steps

of each square (fig. 48). Consequently, its overall pattern is more regular and repetitive than that of the Kutubiyya. The marquetry work here dominates the overall decoration, as it does not in the Kutubiyya and Qarawiyyīn minbars. Ubiquitous on the risers (fig. 49) and arches as well as in the strapwork on the flanks, it is more refined and more accurately laid out than in the other two examples.

Considering that there is a gap of about fifty years between the two minbars in Marrakesh, the question of whether the later pulpit was made in Córdoba or locally cannot be easily answered. Its dependence on the older model is evident. In addition, the differences in structure and decorative details as well as the improvement of the marquetry technique may reflect a natural evolution experienced by the Cordoban craftsmen. However, a few technical details clearly differentiate the two objects: for instance, in the Qaşba minbar, all the sculpted panels are openwork and both the marquetry and the panels were glued to the wooden structure through the use of intermediary pieces of cloth, paper, or parchment.96 Furthermore, the complete absence of inscriptions in the Qasba minbar seems to point to a production method that was less individualized than that employed for the two earlier pulpits.

It is possible that, within the first fifty years after they had conquered Morocco in 1147, the Almohad rulers brought Cordoban artisans there in an effort to emulate the achievements of their archrivals, the Almoravids. Local apprentices may have learned the skills and improved or modified some of the techniques involved in the production of minbars under the supervision of Andalusian masters. Unfortunately, the numerous biographies of the Almohad kings do not clarify this issue. Nevertheless, it is likely that, by the end of the twelfth century, woodwork ateliers had been established in the main cities of Morocco, and thus the minbar in the Qaṣba mosque may possibly be regarded as the first one produced locally. Even so, the Cordoban tradition is directly responsible for its making.

The history of minbar production in Morocco after the beginning of the thirteenth century can be summarized in one word: imitation. A brief survey would begin with the external minbar of the Mosque of the Andalusians in Fez, which, as previously discussed (see pp. 51–52), now covers the older one from the end of the tenth century (fig. 50). ⁹⁷ As part of the Almohad renovation of the mosque during the first decade of the thirteenth century (ca. 1203–9), two wooden flanks, an arched entrance structure, finials, and a handrail were built. After they had been put in place, the old minbar was concealed almost entirely, only the original backrest being left uncovered. The decoration of this minbar was evidently executed in a much shorter period than that of all the previous ones, for time-consuming

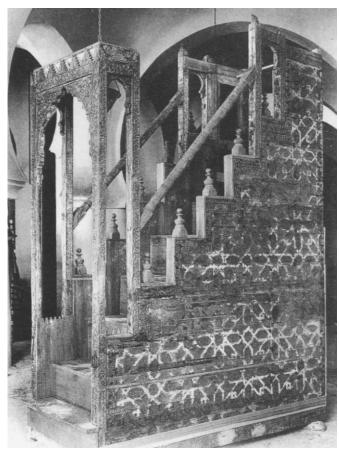


Fig. 50. The Almohad minbar of the Mosque of the Andalusians, Fez (ca. 1203–9). From H. Terrasse 1943

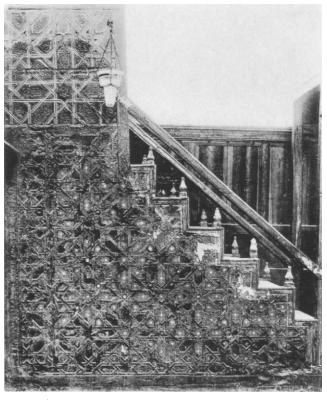


Fig. 51. The minbar of the Great Mosque of Taza (ca. 1290–1300). From H. Terrasse 1943



Fig. 52. The minbar from the Madrasa Bū ʿInāniyya, Fez (1350–55). Musée du Dar Batha, Fez. Photo: Jonathan M. Bloom

marquetry work was replaced here with painted imitations. In addition, the sculpted panels, which are set into a painted composition identical to the one on the left flank of the Qarawiyyīn minbar, are carved into simplified vegetal patterns. The best efforts were concentrated not on the decoration of the flanks but rather on the entrance arch and on the inscriptions in relief along the sides of the minbar; only in these respects can the minbar be assigned a true artistic value.⁹⁸

Three minbars can be attributed to the patronage of the Marīnids, who conquered Fez in 1248 and made it their capital until the dynasty collapsed in 1428. All of them are inspired by Almoravid and Almohad examples: the first was made in 1276 for the main mosque of the new city quarter called Fās-Jdīd (New Fez); the second was built for the Almohad congregational mosque at Taza, 99 which was enlarged during the last decade of the thirteenth century; the third was atypically assigned to a madrasa (Quranic school) that also functioned as a congregational mosque, erected in Fez between 1350 and 1355 under the sultan Abū 'Inān Fāris (r. 1348–58; hence, the madrasa is known as the Bū 'Ināniyya).

The two thirteenth-century minbars have no sculpted panels and rely instead on only one technique—marquetry—for their entire surface decoration. The reason

for this choice is not clear, since marquetry work is more time consuming than carving and accomplished woodcarvers were unlikely to have disappeared during this period. Marquetry should thus be viewed as a deliberate preference of the rulers, or governors, who commissioned the works. The two minbars are of very similar dimensions, profiles, and proportions. The pulpit in Fas-Jdīd is slightly larger (height, 3.50 meters [11 feet 53/4 inches]; depth, 3.17 meters [10 feet 43/4 inches]; width, 85 centimeters [33½ inches]) than the one in Taza (height, 3.25 meters [10 feet 8 inches]; depth, 2.96 meters [9 feet 8½ inches]; width, 80 centimeters [31½ inches]), owing to the fact that the former has eight steps, the latter only seven; each has an entrance arch, handrail, and finials, although the minbar in Taza is heavily restored and some parts are modern (fig. 51). The minbar in Fas-Jdīd has relatively simple decoration, probably inspired by that of the two earlier pulpits in the same city (those in the Qarawiyyīn mosque and the Mosque of the Andalusians): its marquetry panels are in the shape of eight-pointed stars, simple elongated hexagons, and pentagons with a small triangular protrusion on one side.101 In contrast, the decoration of the minbar at Taza reveals a complexity that, although less charming than that of the Kutubiyya minbar, equals it in inventiveness. Indeed, this is the only pulpit that rejects the traditional concept of subdivision into squares corresponding in height and width to one step in favor of a composition (four times larger) that shifts the focus to the center of each square, where a large eight-pointed star seems to be the source of the pattern. 102 Such a composition, which made it possible to vary the shapes of the individual panels more than in any previous minbars, was actually to become the most widespread for Islamic Maghribi surface ornaments in all media until the present day. Its influence is reflected, for example, in the glazed-pottery mosaic compositions known in Morocco as zillīj. 103

The mid-fourteenth-century minbar that was created for the Bū 'Ināniyya, now preserved in the Musée du Dar Batha in Fez, is generally similar in its dimensions to the pulpit at Taza, although it is the widest of the three extant Marīnid minbars (height, 3.28 meters [10 feet 9 inches]; depth, 2.90 meters [9 feet 6 inches]; width, 89 centimeters [35 inches]; fig. 52). It has seven steps, a single arch at the entrance and the top of the staircase, and tall flanks at the sides of the seat. Its original finials, handrail, and backrest have been lost, together with the risers of the steps. The decoration of this minbar marks a return to the technique of sculpted panels combined with marquetry work. Although neither its carving nor its marquetry compares in refinement to the twelfth-century examples, the composition of its flanks is a virtual copy of that found on the

smaller minbar of the Qaṣba mosque in Marrakesh, in which the central eight-pointed star of each square has the same dimensions as the four at the vertexes.

Another copy of the Qasba minbar was made in Marrakesh two centuries later for the Mosque of the Mu'assīn (Founders), which was erected under Sa'dian rule (1510–1603) between 1562 and 1573. 104 Still in use in the mosque, the minbar has five steps at present but originally had only three; though now taller than the pulpit in the Qaṣba, this minbar (height, 3.35 meters [10 feet 11% inches]; depth, 2.30 meters [7 feet 61/2 inches]; width, 78 centimeters [30¾ inches]) must have once been almost identical in dimensions. The use of pieces of cloth to glue the panels and marquetry to the surface of this pulpit (unlike the one from the Bū 'Ināniyya, in which the elements are glued directly to the wood) further links it to its model in the Qaşba. However, as expected in this later period, both the sculpting and the marquetry techniques are oversimplified. This minbar is the last of those from the historical period to be ultimately inspired by the pulpit from the Kutubiyya mosque. As time passed, the most successful pattern for the decoration of minbar flanks became that of the Qasba mosque, probably because it represented a simplified geometric solution, as compared with its grander model. The same pattern is reproduced on modern minbars, including the present one in the Kutubiyya mosque. While it is possible to appreciate that minbar as a representation of a tradition that has continued in the same place of worship for almost nine centuries, one cannot help longing for the original masterpiece and paying tribute to the skills, patience, and artistic vision of its twelfth-century creators.

One of the most accomplished works of art to have survived to the present day, the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque is an indisputable masterpiece of medieval Andalusian woodwork. Its genesis, construction, shape, and significance for the Muslim community hark back to the time of the Prophet Muḥammad in Medina, and it was created during a period of great political and religious turmoil in Morocco and Andalusia. Pulpits produced in the Maghrib before and after the Kutubiyya minbar clearly reflect on its quality and art-historical value. In fact, as an inspiration for woodworkers and other craftsmen for centuries to come, the minbar can be regarded as a turning point for medieval Maghribi Islamic art.

After the Almohad caliph 'Abd al-Mu' min seized the minbar from the Almoravid mosque, he made it the dramatic focal point of the Friday prayer in his new Kutubiyya mosque. "The door of [the closet containing] the minbar was closed, but when the preacher was about to ascend the pulpit, it opened by itself and the minbar

came out at once, silently and unrevealing of its mechanism." This "mechanism" was probably a system of counterweights and ropes hidden in a depression located in front of the door of the closet in which the minbar was kept. The *maqṣūra* had its own mechanical device, which made it rise from the floor when 'Abd al-Mu' min entered the mosque and sink back when he left. Similar mechanisms propelled the famous Qur'an, believed to have belonged to 'Uthmān, the companion of the Prophet and third caliph, that 'Abd al-Mu' min had brought from Córdoba. Placed inside a jeweled wooden box, it rose from a depression in the ground before automatically opening up to reveal the exact page of the manuscript needed for the reading on that particular Friday. ¹⁰⁶

This magical scenario was obviously one of the main reasons why the Muslim community of Marrakesh flocked to the Kutubiyya mosque every Friday. And perhaps not only human worshipers were present there: the Hadith mentions that each Friday, "the angels take their stand at every gate of the mosque to write the names of the people who enter, and when the imam sits on the pulpit they fold up their scrolls and get ready to listen to the sermon." If any pulpit deserved the presence of angels at its sides, it was certainly the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque.

- I. My translation is from the citation in French in Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun 1952, p. 45 n. 1 (the Arabic text from which the French translation was made appears in Allouche 1936, p. 119). In reference to "pieces of wood (imported from southeastern Asia)," I have so rendered the French "pièces de bois (des Khmers)," which seems to refer specifically to the Cambodian area. See also n. 66 below for the problem of identification of wood from Arabic sources. At present, no traces of silver remain on the minbar (see essay by Soultanian et al. herein, pp. 73–74).
- 2. My translation is from the citation in Spanish in Torres Balbás 1955, pp. 30–31. See also Hernández Jiménez 1959, p. 387. For the minbar of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, now destroyed, see pp. 50–51 herein and nn. 62–70 below.
- 3. See EI², s.v. "Ibn Marzūķ" (entry by M. Hadj-Sadok), vol. 3, pp. 865–68. The Arabic text and the translation in French of the passage quoted by Morales are in Lévi-Provençal 1925, p. 26.
- 4. The statement that "oriental" woodcarvers—presumably craftsmen from the Islamic world east of Egypt—were clumsy is obviously hyperbolic, and Ibn Marzūq should have known better since he received his early education in Jerusalem, Hebron, and Cairo, among other cities. The skills of such craftsmen are attested to by a few extant minbars, which I shall not discuss since they fall outside the scope of the present essay, and especially by carved doors. For a few examples of such minbars and doors, see EI², s.v. "Minbar" (entry by J. Pedersen et al.), vol. 7, pls. XII—XV; Vincent and Mackay 1923, pls. XXV—XXVII; Lamm 1936, pls. IXd, XI; Golmohammadi 1988.
- 5. Ibn Manzūr (A.D. 1233–1312) compiled his work from five earlier dictionaries. Lane based his monumental lexicon on a large number of texts by lexicologists and grammarians, including, of course, Ibn Manzūr. See Ibn Manzūr, n.d., vol. 5, p. 189; Lane 1863–93, vol. 8, p. 2758.
- 6. See Schwally 1898, pp. 146-48; Becker 1906.
- 7. The only seat that is regularly mentioned in the Qur^3 an is the Throne of God ('arsh).

- 8. A general survey of the Hadith is in El², s.v. "Ḥadīth" (entry by J. Robson), vol. 3, pp. 23–28.
- Since the Hadith was not totally exempt from criticism, as the Qur²an was, its veracity was not accepted by all Muslims.
- 10. The best source for research into the usage of the word *minbar* in the Hadith is Wensinck 1936–88. Another useful tool is the English translation of al-Bukhārī's book Ṣaḥīḥ in a database program (see bibliography under al-Bukhārī 1991). Unless otherwise noted, the information that follows is based on the six books of the Hadith and on the entry "Minbar" in El² (see n. 4 above). Useful information can also be found in Caetani 1905–26, vol. 1, pp. 432–60, and Strika 1978, pp. 26–30. On problems related to the transmission of the Hadith, see Juynboll 1983.
- II. The Anṣārs (Helpers) were the supporters that the Prophet attracted in Medina and were distinguished from the Muhājirūn (Emigrants), who had followed him to that city from Mecca.
- 12. The information concerning the arms and other facts in the following paragraphs may be found in Sauvaget 1947, pp. 86–87. In this remarkable study, the French scholar draws his information from the descriptions of the mosque of Medina sketched by Muslim travelers and geographers of the early Islamic period.
- 13. The son of 'Alī and Fātima, the Prophet's cousin and daughter, al-Hasan was seven years old at the time of Muḥammad's death.
- 14. The word can be translated as "noble," which became a title that is still in use today for Muḥammad's direct descendants.
- 15. The allusion is to internal struggles within the Muslim community, which had already started during the Prophet's lifetime and which would culminate in the division between the Sunnis and the Shi^cites.
- 16. Umar, one of the dearest companions of the Prophet, was caliph for ten years, until his death in 644.
- 17. The caliphate was instituted upon the death of Muḥammad when a "deputy of the Messenger of God [i.e., of the Prophet]" (khalīfat rasūl allāh) became necessary to lead the community as primus inter pares. The first four caliphs, the so-called al-khulafā' al-rāshidūn (Rightly Guided), were Abū Bakr (r. 632–34), 'Umar (r. 634–44), 'Uthmān (r. 644–56), and 'Alī (r. 656–60), before the Umayyads (661–750) took over the title as the first dynastic power in Islam.
- 18. The Hadith mentions Nu^cmān ibn Bashīr, a governor of al-Kufa and Hims, and ^cAmmār ibn Yāsir, another governor of al-Kufa. Al-Hajjāj, the most famous of the governors for the Umayyads, and Ibn al-Zubayr, a sort of anticaliph who was killed in battle against the Syrian troops under al-Hajjāj, also had the privilege of climbing the steps of the Prophet's minbar.
- 19. This episode is mentioned by al-Ṭabarī (ca. 839–923) in his monumental historical compendium entitled *Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk* (The History of Prophets and Kings). See al-Ṭabarī 1879–1901, vol. 6, p. 3255 (under A.H. 36).
- A cousin of the third caliph, 'Uthmān, Marwān later became the third caliph of the Umayyad dynasty for a short period in 684–85.
- 21. See Sauvaget 1947, pp. 87-89.
- 22. Ibn Rusta was a native of Isfahan who traveled to the Arabian Peninsula in 903. He wrote his *Kitāb al-a^c lāq al-nafīsa* (The Book of Precious Gems) between 903 and 913. Little more is known of his life.
- 23. Interestingly, the same word has survived as an architectural term in the Maghrib, where it signifies an external mihrab (prayer niche) for those who pray in the courtyard of the mosque. See Miles 1952.
- 24. Sauvaget 1947, p. 143, mentions that some Umayyad poets used the expression "to strike the minbar" (qara al-minbar) to allude to the khutba.
- 25. Lane 1978, pp. 90-91.
- 26. From al-Jāḥiz's Kitāb al-bayān wa al-tabyīn (The Book on the Explanation and the Demonstration). Quoted in Schwally 1898, p. 148 n. 3.
- 27. Lane (1978, p. 91) writes that two flags, slanting forward, are fixed at the top of the minbar; the profession of faith and the names of Allāh and Muḥammad are written on them.
- 28. The term kiswa usually refers to the cover for the Ka^cba in Mecca, which is still produced and replaced on a regular basis.
- 29. Sauvaget 1947, p. 144, quotes from a manuscript that includes a text by Ibn al-Najjār (1183–1245) mentioning this practice. It is tempting to compare the burning of incense in the mosques to the same custom in Christian churches and suggest that the latter influenced the ceremonials of the early Muslim community. However, no link can be established with certainty, and it should be noted that incense was a

- widespread commodity in the Arabian Peninsula at the time. For general references, see Groom 1981.
- 30. Three out of the four "Rightly Guided" caliphs were killed by political opponents.
- 31. The so-called Mosque of the Umayyads, which was built between 706 and 714 under the caliph al-Walīd (r. 705–15) and is celebrated especially for its mosaics. See Lorey 1931; Creswell 1932–40, vol. 1, pp. 151–210, 323–72; Ettinghausen and Grabar 1987, pp. 37–44; Hillenbrand 1994, pp. 68–73.
- 32. 'Arafāt, a plain about thirteen miles from Mecca, is the site of important ceremonies during the annual pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca.
- 33. Also called maqām ibrāhīm (the place of Abraham), this is now a small building near the Ka^c ba housing a stone with Abraham's footprints on it. The meaning and actual location of the maqām were often disputed among Muslim scholars, although it was certainly close enough to the Ka^c ba to allow the minbar to be moved in a short time. See EI², s.v. "Maķām Ibrāhīm" (entry by M. J. Kister).
- 34. The mention of the caliph's name during the *khuṭba* originated at this point, when he could no longer deliver the sermon himself. The implications of this practice will be addressed in the second part of this essay.
- 35. al-Muqaddasi 1994, p. 177.
- 36. al-Bukhārī 1991, vol. 1, no. 476.
- 37. Schacht 1957, p. 173 n. 75.
- 38. This system becomes even more remarkable when one considers that the use of wheels was uncommon in the Maghrib in the Middle Ages. See Bulliet 1990.
- 39. Schacht 1957, pp. 149–53. The earliest report of a minbar in the Maghrib appears in literary sources describing the reutilization of a pulpit (not specified as fixed or mobile) dated 814 in the Great Mosque of Tlemcen (Marçais 1932, p. 331 and n. 1).
- 40. See essay by Bloom herein, pp. 16-17.
- 41. For the history of the Almoravids, see the entry and the related bibliography in EI², s.v. "al-Murābiṭūn" (entry by H. T. Norris and P. Chalmeta). A useful chapter on the Almoravids in a readily available book is Abun-Nasr 1971, pp. 92–118.
- 42. The building was known as al-kutubiyyīn (of the Booksellers), which became familiarized in the adjectival form Kutubiyya. The name originated from the large number of booksellers' stalls found around the outside of the mosque.
- 43. For the history of the building of the Kutubiyya mosque and its minaret, which dominates the landscape of Marrakesh even today, see Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun 1952, pp. 33–52; Bloom 1989, pp. 120–21.
- 44. See p. 41 and n. 1 above, for the anonymous fourteenth-century chronicle that mentions these facts. See also n. 105 below.
- 45. When Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun published their book in 1952, the minbar was still in situ. Partly as a result of their seminal work, the minbar was moved for safekeeping in 1962 to its present location, the Badi^c Palace.
- 46. The custom of sparing the contents of a building, then destroying it because it represented a powerful and conspicuous symbol of the vanquished ruler was taken up again in recent times. When the Iraqi army occupied Kuwait in 1990, it carefully removed all the artifacts and the other contents of the recently built National Museum of Islamic Art and shipped them to Baghdad. Only then did it set fire to the building. The artifacts were kept crated and guarded in a museum in Baghdad and, luckily, were returned to Kuwait with few losses at the end of the war.
- 47. The problem is briefly discussed in the essay by Bloom herein, pp. 17–18.
- 48. The Ismāʿīlis constitute a major branch of the Shiʿite community with numerous subdivisions, the best known of which is today the Nizāriyya, whose spiritual leader is the Āghā Khān. Originally, the Ismāʿīlis had branched off from the Imāmiyya by tracing back the imamate through Ismāʿīl, the son of the seventh imam, Jaʿfar al-Sādiq (d. 765).
- 49. The most complete study of the minbar from the Mosque of the Andalusians in Fez is H. Terrasse [1942], esp. pp. 34–52 and pls. XLIX–XCVI. For the politico-religious significance of minarets and minbars, see Bloom 1989, which refers to the minbar in Fez on pp. 111–12. The Umayyad backrest is now in the Musée du Dar Batha in Fez. See New York 1992, no. 41, pp. 249–51 (entry by J. Bloom).
- 50. See Bloom 1989, p. 116.

- 51. Apparently, towers were not thought necessary in mosques since the muezzins should call people to prayer from doorways. See ibid., pp. 116–17 and n. 52 below.
- 52. For these mosques and their dates, see Bourouiba 1973, pp. 67-103.
- 53. More general information about Maghribi architecture in the Almoravid and Almohad periods may be found in, among others, Torres Balbás 1949, pp. 9–56; Gómez-Moreno 1951, pp. 282–96; Marçais [1954], pp. 191–212; Torres Balbás 1955; Bourouiba 1973; Hoag 1977, pp. 94–115; Hill, Golvin, and Hillenbrand 1976, pp. 110–11, 115, 121–29; Hillenbrand 1994, pp. 85–89.
- 54. For more on Ibn Tūmart, see Goldziher 1903; Fletcher 1992.
- 55. Namely, the Marīnids in Morocco (1196–1428), the Ḥafṣids in Tunisia and eastern Algeria (1229–1574), and the Zayanids in western Algeria (1236–1554).
- 56. See Bloom 1989, pp. 118-24.
- 57. The cursing of political and religious opponents from the minbar had been introduced as early as the period following the death of the Prophet, when it was employed against the recently formed Shi^cite movement. Often reported in literary sources as a normal practice, it was also used by the Umayyad caliphs in al-Andalus against the Fatimids when the latter threatened to attack the coasts of Morocco. See EI², s.v. "Masdjid" (entry by J. Pedersen et al.), vol. 6, p. 669; Bloom 1989, p. 108.
- 58. For more details on these "magical" mechanical devices, see p. 62.
- 59. See p. 46.
- 60. There has been some confusion among scholars as to the attribution of the workmanship of these panels to Iraq or Tunisia. When properly interpreted, original sources seem to indicate that the plain beams were imported to Kairouan and subsequently carved locally. See Creswell 1932–40, vol. 2, pp. 317–19; Ettinghausen and Grabar 1987, pp. 105–8.
- 61. Good black-and-white photographs of the flanks of the minbar and of details of the rectangular panels are in Creswell 1932–40, vol. 2, pls. 89, 90; Sebag 1963, pp. 68–71; Ettinghausen and Grabar 1987, pls. 81–83. An image of the minbar viewed frontally appears in Frishman and Khan, eds. 1994, p. 27. See the monographs by Saladin (1899) and Flury (1934) for more information on the mosque.
- 62. My translation of Morales 1792, pp. 62, 65, as quoted in Hernández Jiménez 1959, p. 387 and n. 4. See also above, p. 41 and n. 2.
- 63. My translation of a passage quoted in Hernández Jiménez 1959, p. 388, taken from Martín de Roa, Flos sanctorum (Seville, 1615), fol. 88r.
- 64. My translation is from the French in Idrîsî 1866, p. 260. Little is known of al-Idrīsī's life but it seems certain that he lived to complete his geographical work Kitāb nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq (The Book on the Pleasant Excursion While Traveling in the Provinces), which was dedicated in 1154 to the Norman king of Sicily, Roger II.
- 65. My translation is from the Arabic in Ibn $^{\varsigma}$ Idhārī al-Marrākushī 1948–51, vol. 2, p. 238.
- 66. My translation is from the Arabic in ibid., p. 250. See also Hernández Jiménez 1959, pp. 386–87. The "Indian" wood is probably one of the *Terminalia* species, which was originally imported from southern or southeastern Asia on the Indian Ocean maritime routes. I am grateful to Antoine Wilmering for his help in this matter.
- 67. Lévi-Provençal 1925, p. 65. For Ibn Marzūq, see above, p. 41 and n. 3.
- 68. Hernández Jiménez 1959, pp. 388–92, figs. 3a, b.
- 69. See p. 43.
- 70. The conservators who restored the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque observed that bone, not ivory, was used in that twelfth-century example. See essay by Soultanian et al. herein, p. 73. However, ivory was certainly more commonly employed for minbars under al-Ḥakam in the tenth century, and we can therefore trust Ibn ʿIdhārī in this respect.
- 71. Schacht 1957. See also above, p. 46.
- 72. In the following pages, the few minbars still in use in mosques will be discussed in addition to those, either intact or fragmentary, currently housed in museums. All of these have been published and/or described in varying detail in the middle decades of this century, principally by French scholars. Since non-Muslims are not allowed to enter mosques in Morocco at any time, let alone during Friday prayer, when the minbars are pulled out from their recesses, it was not possible to view the minbars still in use in order to report any additional details or any changes, including deterioration, that may have occurred in the past forty to fifty years.

- 73. H. Terrasse [1942].
- 74. Terrasse noted six steps but suggested that one was lost when the Almohad minbar was built as a covering. Ibid., p. 40.
- 75. The only photographic documentation of the inner minbar, which was concealed again under the Almohad structure after Terrasse studied it, is in ibid., pls. L-XCII. More recent publications discussing this minbar and especially its backrest and upper panels are H. Terrasse 1957, p. 163; Bloom 1989, pp. 111–13; Paris 1990, no. 406, pp. 188–90 (entry by C. Cambazard-Amahan); New York 1992, no. 41, pp. 249–51 (entry by J. Bloom).
- 76. H. Terrasse [1942], pls. LXXIII, LXXXI.
- 77. Ibid., p. 41.
- 78. For the dating of the mosque, see p. 48 and n. 52. The fragments of the minbar, formerly preserved in the Musée de Mustapha of Nedroma, are now in the Musée National des Antiquités Classiques et Musulmanes in Algiers. See also R. Basset 1901, pp. 22–23.
- 79. Marçais 1932, pp. 325–27, pls. III, IV; Marçais 1950, pl. 4; Bourouiba 1973, pl. XVI.
- 80. The inscription on the backrest is partially erased. Marçais (1932, p. 324) interpreted it as dedicated to the prince 'Azīz, one of Yūsuf's sons. Bourouiba (1973, pp. 122–23) favors the attribution to the Almoravid ruler himself. The name of the judge is partially preserved as Abū Muhammad 'Abdallāh.
- 81. In his comprehensive description of this minbar, Marçais (1921, p. 360) initially read the date as 409; he later amended it to 490 (Marçais 1926). See also Bourouiba 1973, pp. 121–22.
- 82. See Marçais 1921, figs. 4–9, pls. 1–VI. In addition to the drawings of the entrance arch and the two flanks, published in ibid., figs. 2, 3, side views of the minbar are found in Torres Balbás 1955, pl. 39; Bourouiba 1973, pl. xv; Ettinghausen and Grabar 1987, fig. 136. The minbar is still in use in the mosque, but two of its panels are now in the Musée National des Antiquités Classiques et Musulmanes in Algiers. See Marçais 1950, p. 16.
- 83. See pp. 50-51 and n. 64.
- 84. The handrail was removed sometime after 1962, when the minbar was moved from the Kutubiyya mosque to the Badi^c Palace, and is now missing. However, photographs published prior to that date clearly show it in position on both sides of the staircase; see H. Basset and Terrasse 1926a, pl. xxxi; Torres Balbás 1955, pl. 40. Although it is impossible to determine whether the handrail was original or merely a recent replacement, it seems certain that the minbar was meant to have one
- 85. See n. 1 and the essay by Soultanian et al. herein, pp. 73-74.
- 86. Just because it is the earliest to have survived, we cannot be absolutely certain that the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque was the very first one to be produced in this style. However, literary sources clearly mention that this minbar and the Cordoban one were the best ever produced, thus discounting the possibility that another one could have served as the model for the Kutubiyya pulpit.
- 87. For a survey of the extension, see H. Terrasse 1968, pp. 17-53.
- 88. In the absence of on-site investigation, I must assume that the material employed here, as in the case of the Kutubiyya minbar, is bone rather than ivory.
- 89. To my knowledge, neither the cursive nor the kufic inscriptions on this minbar, including the detail showing the date, have ever been published in their entirety, let alone transcribed into Arabic. There are also no published photographs that reproduce these inscriptions adequately. The Metropolitan Museum of Art was able to obtain a few recent color photographs of the minbar (here published for the first time), but these do not include sufficient details to allow a proper reading of the text. See Maslow 1937, pl. LVI, fig. 139; H. Terrasse 1957, pls. 17, 18, figs. 21, 22; H. Terrasse 1968, pls. 98–103.
- 90. As explained above (p. 45), the imam would not deliver his sermon while sitting at the top of the minbar but would instead stand a few steps down. Consequently, it was not essential for the backrest to be positioned at the back of the seat for the performance of the rite.
- 91. A more detailed description of these motifs is in H. Terrasse 1968, pp. 50–53, pls. 99–103.
- 92. Although the recent conservation treatment of the Kutubiyya minbar revealed the presence of gilding only (see essay by Soultanian et al. herein, pp. 73–74), the earliest source describing the minbar mentions silver as well as gold ornamentation (see p. 41 and n. 1).

- 93. A drawing of the plan of the mosque is in H. Basset and Terrasse 1926b, fig. 99.
- 94. Traces of marquetry are still visible on the handrail, notwithstanding Basset and Terrasse's claim (ibid., p. 248) that it was added recently.
- 95. For more details, see essay by Soultanian et al. herein, p. 73.
- 96. For more details, see ibid., p. 74.
- 97. See pp. 51–52 above.
- 98. H. Terrasse [1942], pp. 50–52, pls. XLIX, LIII, XCIII–XCVI.
- 99. See above, p. 49, and Maslow 1937, pp. 17-37.

- 100. See C. Terrasse [1927], pp. 24–29; Marçais [1954], pp. 291–94.
- 101. H. Terrasse 1957, p. 165, ill. p. 164.
- 102. H. Terrasse 1943, pp. 55–56, pls. LXX–LXXII.
- 103. A useful survey of this technique is Hedgecoe and Damluji 1992.
- 104. See H. Basset and Terrasse 1932, pp. 439–51; Marçais [1954], p. 386.
- 105. The passage is, once again, from the text of *al-Ḥulal al-mawshiyya* (see n. 1). My translation is from Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun 1952, p. 120.
- 106. Dessus Lamare 1938.
- 107. al-Bukhārī 1991, vol. 4, no. 433.



The Conservation of the Minbar from the Kutubiyya Mosque

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contemplation of the Kutubiyya minbar's conservation proposed a unique set of issues that needed to be evaluated for its proper treatment. The tremendous significance of

this great work was carefully considered during each

aspect of conservation treatment, equal weight being given to the nature of the materials used in its fabrication, its religious and historical importance, and its overall aesthetic appearance.

The conservation of the minbar, as with any constructed object, required that its structural integrity be reinforced before any other treatment could follow. Once that process was completed, the surface decoration and substrate wood were consolidated and cleaned. The approach to the

surface cleaning of the minbar was not unlike that considered for a painted surface. Above all, it was imperative to ensure that a degree of patina be preserved so that the viewer would instantly perceive evolved time and yet still read the powerful elegance of the minbar.

Speaking of such concerns, Paul Philippot in his landmark essay "The Idea of Patina and the Cleaning of Paintings" defines the essence of patina, "With regard to its restoration, every work of art presents a twofold historical character. On the one hand, it is historical in the sense that it is a human creation realized at a fixed point in time. On the other, it comes to us across a span of time that has elapsed since its creation and can never be erased. This span of time acts upon the materials used in creating the image; in the case of painting . . . certain transforma-

tions occur naturally that are totally irreversible." In the instance of the Kutubiyya minbar, these transformations have affected the colors of the woods employed, especially for the carvings and the substrate wood. Consequently, the chromatic relationship of the woods to the bone used

in the banding has been altered—a change that has disturbed the minbar's original unity. Essentially it is the balance between the minbar's carvings, the intricacy of which draws the viewer perpetually inward, and its dynamic banding, by which the viewer's gaze is released to move across its surfaces, that creates its unity. Together with the achievement of structural stability, it was precisely the retrieval of this unity that was the purpose of this conservation treatment (fig. 53).



TECHNIQUE OF CARVINGS AND INLAYS

The overall framework of the minbar was assembled with mortise-and-tenon joints, wood screws, and inset panels (see essay by Hbibi herein, p. 86–87). The geometric decorative pattern was drawn in ink or lightly incised into the surface with the aid of straightedges and compasses (figs. 54, 55). Next, the areas intended to receive the carved wood panels were hollowed out to a depth of about 5 millimeters. Subsequently, the finely carved "stars," "frogs," and "hammers," all about 10 millimeters thick, were placed into the cavities and glued with a natural protein adhesive. After all the carvings were set in place, they would still have protruded about 5 millimeters from the surface, the resultant interstices creating the "tracks" for the inlaid strapwork banding. The inlay itself would have been cut to a thickness of about 5 millimeters, so that after its

Opposite: Fig. 53. The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, threequarter side view, before conservation treatment

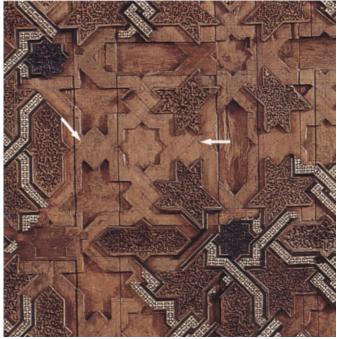


Fig. 54. Inscribed lines, clearly visible on the substrate wood (arrows), were intended to lay out the geometry of the decoration



Fig. 55. Inked lines (arrows) were also used to indicate the decorative patterns

application the entire decorated side would have had a level surface. The inlay of the risers and backrest was executed in a slightly different manner: while the tesserae were prepared as for inlay, they were adhered to a flat surface rather than being inserted into excavated matrix wood.⁴

The intricate patterns of the carvings were created with small drills and fine chisels or gouges, and incised areas were executed with the edge of a flat chisel or knife. Only a few of the carvings, such as those on the backrest, are pierced all the way through; rather, most are rendered in high relief that leaves the flat bottom surface intact. The various inlay patterns, like the carvings, were produced by a group of highly skilled woodworkers who fully understood the nature of their materials. The tools of these craftsmen, although perhaps simple in design, were advanced in materials—the steel, for example, must have been of the highest quality available. The woodworkers of Córdoba employed the standard range of tools—straightedges and compasses, planes and chisels, carving implements, and a variety of saws. However, they must have kept one of their instruments a secret: the fretsaw. Evidence of the use of this tool has not been noted before at such an early date; it does not appear in Western European woodworking until the sixteenth century.5 Although probably still in a rudimentary form, a fretsaw with a very thin and fine cutting blade has obviously been employed in creating the foliate inlays on the minbar's risers (fig. 56). The fine, undulating veins of these ornaments, cut from the 5-millimeter-thick tesserae, could not have been so precisely achieved with any other tool.

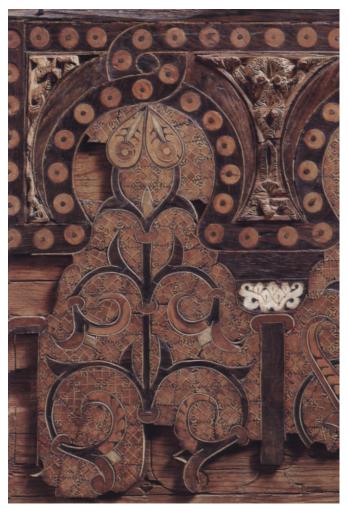


Fig. 56. The precise curvature of the veins on the leaves could not have been executed without the aid of a fretsaw

CONDITION PRIOR TO CONSERVATION TREATMENT

Given its age and the variety of materials used in its fabrication, the minbar was in a relatively good state of preservation. There was no evidence to suggest that any comprehensive conservation campaign had been undertaken, while periodic maintenance had taken place. The problems associated with its condition may be divided into four main categories: structural instability, losses to the frame and design elements, detached and lifting parts, and overall discoloration of the wood and bone.

Structural instability

The joinery of the minbar had weakened overall, and the construction holding the two sides together was especial-

ly fragile. The sides were connected on the inside by a rather random series of horizontal braces and at the back by two large cross braces and other arbitrarily applied horizontal pieces (fig. 57). These elements, all of later date than the minbar, did not accomplish their desired purposes—to make the minbar structurally sound and to correct its distinct list to the left.

Losses

The minbar was largely intact. Among its structural losses were the handrails that appeared attached to the minbar in a photograph published in 1926⁶ and the areas that contained the beginning and the end of the inscription on the backrest (fig. 58). This inscription had been thought to be a later addition, since it had been perceived as less accomplished than others on the minbar, for example, those





Fig. 58. The backrest, with losses to the carved inscription

Fig. 57. A back view shows the list of the minbar as well as the horizontal crossbars that had been previously added (see also fig. 73)



Fig. 59. The interior of the lower right arched frame, before conservation treatment



Fig. 60. After conservation treatment, the carved inscription on the frame is revealed as different in quality from that on the backrest

appearing on the interiors of the front posts (figs. 59, 60). This notion was called into question when a sample taken from the backrest inscription dated the wood between the ninth and the eleventh century. Further losses to the minbar included the original treads, first two risers, and top platform, as well as many finials and a complete square panel of the decoration at the rear of the left side (fig. 61). The missing risers and top platform had been replaced with cedar boards, the treads with walnut boards.

Most of the steps were loose and simply rested on the beams of the internal structure. Samples of the treads were taken from two locations for carbon-14 analyses, which gave a combined date of between the tenth and the thirteenth century. The treads may very well be early replacements, perhaps dating to the time of the minbar's first move (see essay by Bloom herein, p. 4). The third step was distinguished by having been secured with a later metal strap that extended onto the sides and covered part of the inscription. Similar straps had been used to secure the bottom tread to the structure.

The base and wheels on which the minbar currently rests also were later additions and may very well have been simple replacements for its reputedly ingenious mechanical operating system (see essays by Bloom, p. 4, and

Carboni, p. 62, herein). The physical evidence supporting a later date for the base, including a distinct difference in workmanship, was strengthened when a sample of the substrate wood submitted for carbon-14 dating gave an age of between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century. That the adjacent molding was also a replacement is evidenced by the different quality and pattern of its fragmentary inlays (fig. 62).

The minbar had lost approximately one-third of its carved and inlaid decoration. In some of the exposed cavities, fragments of paper and vellum were found directly on the substrate wood. It is unclear whether these were applied originally to facilitate the gluing of the inlay or whether they were a remnant of a past restoration. Significantly, the carved panels decorating the interior sides of the stairs were largely missing; only one, that located between treads four and five, on the right side, had been preserved (see fig. 13).

Much of the loss of the carved panels appears to post-date 1926, as evidenced in photographs of the minbar from that year which show the decoration from the left side, at least, to be largely intact. ¹⁰ Such a great loss within a brief period of the minbar's history may not be readily explainable by natural causes. The room in which the minbar has



Fig. 61. A replacement to a substrate panel was found at the rear of the left side (see also fig. 77)



Fig. 62. The molding and decorative strapwork along the bottom of the minbar are later additions

been stored for more than thirty-five years¹¹ has a fairly stable environment, with a relative humidity that adjusts reasonably from season to season.¹² The fluctuations in climate are gradual enough that they could not, in all likelihood, have contributed to so extensive a loss of these elements.

One possible explanation, at first seemingly implausible yet worthy of consideration, is given in a story circulating among the staff of the Badi^c Palace. It is said that a former keeper of the minbar was subject to migraine headaches, the cure for which, he believed, was to boil sections of the minbar's carved panels and to imbibe the resulting elixir. While this oral tradition may indeed be false, there is physical evidence found on the minbar to support it: several depressions in the substrate wood near areas that once held carvings (fig. 63). These depressions are clearly marks from the end of an instrument used to pry the carvings from their place. Whether for "medicinal" purposes or just as souvenir booty, a degree of human intervention is clearly at play.

Aside from the carved panels, the areas of greatest loss to the decoration are found, understandably, on the risers, with their high degree of foot traffic—every Friday for eight centuries—and, less explicably, on the backrest. This



Fig. 63. These indentations were presumably left by a tool used to pry out a now-missing section of a carved panel (arrow)

least accessible and most isolated section of the minbar is in the worst condition of all: well over one-half of its decoration is lost, a proportion unparalleled elsewhere on the minbar. These losses may have been caused by jostling of the backrest when the minbar was moved weekly from its closet next to the mihrab, a suggestion that may also explain losses to the lower sections of the inscription. Photographs from 1926 show that the backrest was in a relatively poor state of preservation by that date. In addition, examination of the minbar revealed extensive water damage near the top, which may also have contributed to the backrest's losses.

Detached and lifting parts

The carved panels and inlaid decoration were lifting overall because of drying-out and embrittlement of the glue originally used to adhere these elements to the substrate wood.

Discoloration

All the surfaces of the minbar were discolored from centuries of exposure. Dirt had settled, most disturbingly, on the exposed woods, a condition that made visual identification difficult; the interstices of the carved panels were filled with accumulated dust that obscured their true fineness. A scaly, highly intractable gray crust had also settled overall. Fortunately, it appeared that the minbar had not been extensively cleaned in the past, and thus the original surfaces were preserved underneath.

The substrate wood, never intended to be viewed, was visible in many areas because of the loss of carved panels and inlaid decoration. The range of discoloration in these areas was not a harmonious one, since the losses had occurred intermittently. Many substrate areas had grown dark with layers of grime; especially disfiguring were those with large deposits of old black hide glue.

MATERIALS ANALYSES

Wood species analyses were performed in order to determine the genera of the woods used in the carved and inlaid decoration. As a result of these analyses, the wood types employed in the manufacture of the Kutubiyya minbar were established for the first time. The range of woods is quite different from that reported for the minbar of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, made 150 years earlier, which is said to have incorporated yellow and red sandalwood, ebony, ivory, and Indian aloewood. ¹⁴

The Kutubiyya minbar is entirely constructed from Atlas cedar (Cedrus atlantica [Endl.] Carrière), except for



Fig. 64. Once bright, vivid, and highly contrasted in color, the yellow boxwood and reddish jujube now display more subtle tonal differences



Fig. 65. The vertical construction components were attached to each other with wooden screws that were fixed into position with handwrought nails

the replacement treads, which were cut from thick boards of walnut (Juglans spp.).15 The dark wood of the carved stars, inlaid banding and lettering, and inlaid strapwork fragments, popularly believed to have been ebony, proved to be African blackwood (Dalbergia spp.). Boxwood (Buxus spp.) was used for all the light-colored (yellow to pale brown) inlay on the sides, risers, and treads; the carved "hammers" on the sides; and the few remaining carved panels adjacent to the risers. Jujube wood (Zizyphus spp.) was employed for the carved "frogs" and was also found in the reddish-brown inlay on the sides and risers (fig. 64). Small amounts of African padouk (Pterocarpus spp.) were discovered as a blank inlay on the risers, above the bone capitals and above the disk-ornamented inlay of the arches. It was also used for the carved inscriptions on the interior of the front posts. 16 Although no wood species analysis was performed on the screws that hold the underlying vertical panels of the minbar together, it could be determined visually that all but one were made of live oak (Quercus ilex L.; fig. 65).17 These hand-cut screws, of an equal if not greater quality than the finest ones produced in the machine age, fully attest to the astounding skills of the Islamic woodworkers. The minbar's base was found to have been constructed of fir (Abies spp.), and its wheels were most likely made of the wood from the turpentine tree, or Atlas pistache (Pistacia spp.).¹⁸

As skilled craftsmen, the Islamic woodworkers of twelfth-century Córdoba were completely familiar with the materials and tools of their trade and knew very well how to choose their woods with regard to quality and color. For the framework of the minbar, they selected the best construction wood available in the area, Atlas cedar, which was either obtained locally or imported from North Africa (it grew abundantly in both regions). The wood has excellent working properties: it is lightweight yet strong, durable, and resistant to decay when properly cared for.

Walnut, introduced into Europe from the Far East in ancient times, is a warm-toned, middle-brown wood employed for the manufacture of many household goods. Not the most durable of woods, it is a surprising choice for the treads of the minbar; however, since these are likely to be replacements, the wood may not have been the choice of the original craftsmen. It is interesting to consider that, if the treads were replaced at a later date, the wood must have been imported into Marrakesh, since walnut is not indigenous to Morocco.

African blackwood grows predominantly in East Africa; Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique are among its other major sources. ¹⁹ It occurs in more modest numbers in northern Nigeria, Togoland, and Senegal, regions that bordered the Almoravid Empire and were the most

likely exporters of the wood into the Iberian Peninsula. Given its good working properties and beautiful dark pinkish brown or brown-black appearance when freshly cut, African blackwood is extremely suitable for the fabrication of luxury goods. ²⁰ It must have been a highly prized wood, preferred even over ebony (*Diospyrus* spp.), which was available from mid–East Africa but was not used in the Mediterranean region until the early sixteenth century.

Indigenous to southern Spain, boxwood had been used for centuries by woodworkers who recognized its good working properties, particularly its strength and durability. It was employed mostly for small luxury items such as combs, cups, and carvings and for the inlay on small boxes. The wood also grows in large quantities in the Near East, and when local supplies were inadequate, it was quite possibly imported from neighboring countries, including Turkey, which traditionally has been a substantial supplier of boxwood.

Jujube wood, originally introduced from China but now local to southern Europe, is not frequently found in household goods and decorative woodwork. The tree, like boxwood, is mostly small with a knotted stem; often not larger than a shrub, it provides very small quantities of usable wood, but these are of an appealing reddish brown. It must have been selected here for its color, which would have completed the dazzling chromatic scheme of the carved and inlaid materials: brown-black (blackwood), yellow (boxwood), orange-brown (padouk), and reddish brown (jujube) woods as well as the white and greenstained bone discussed below. The combination of the boxwood and the jujube also suggests an effort to match the reputed use of yellow and red sandalwood on the minbar from the Great Mosque of Córdoba.

African padouk, which is similar in density and working properties to African blackwood,²³ seems to have been used only in small quantities for the minbar's inlay.²⁴ When freshly cut, the wood ranges in color from bright orange to orange-brown, but in time it darkens to dark brown. The large trees from which padouk is obtained grow mainly in central West Africa and Indonesia.

These several wood species were supplemented by bone, which was used for the white material in the strapwork banding as well as for the incised capitals and inlaid bases on the risers. Commonly employed in Islamic decorative arts, this material was understandably often confused with ivory. The green-stained bone, found in the inlaid foliate ornaments on the risers (see fig. 56) can be recorded as one of the earliest applications of the material.²⁵

One unexpected and exciting discovery during the examination of the minbar was the presence of gilding

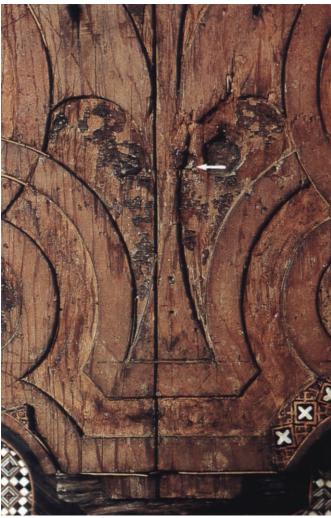


Fig. 66. Detail of the backrest, showing the presence of gilding (arrow)

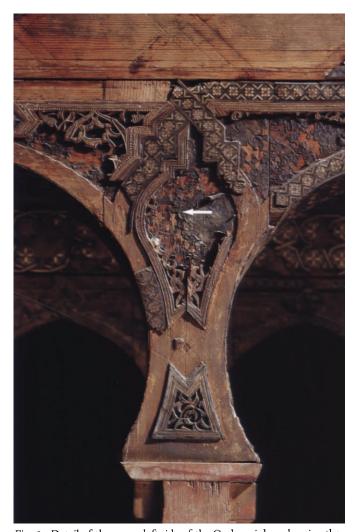


Fig. 67. Detail of the upper left side of the Qaṣba minbar, showing the presence of tarnished silver (arrow)



Fig. 68. Cross section of a sample of gilding from the Kutubiyya minbar ($200 \times magnification$)

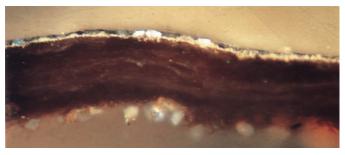


Fig. 69. Cross section of a sample of silver decoration from the Qaṣba minbar (200 × magnification)

(fig. 66). Its appearance is very localized—only on the backrest, beneath the areas of pierced decoration—and the intended effect would clearly have been for the gold to shimmer through these carved lattices. A similar technique was also found beneath the pierced carvings on the sides of the minbar from the Qaṣba mosque in Marrakesh, but there the leaf was silver, now tarnished black (fig. 67). Cross sections taken from both minbars show that the gold or silver was applied to a mordant on top of the prepared wood (figs. 68, 69), and analysis of the mordant from the Qaṣba minbar showed it to be proteinaceous in nature. One of the other wood surfaces of the Kutubiyya minbar has a sealant, and it must have been intended here solely as part of the preparation for the mordant and gold.

Traces of a blue pigment that occur in the recesses of the backrest inscription have been identified by EDS analysis to be azurite.²⁷ Aside from these few embellishments, the splendid effect of the Kutubiyya minbar was achieved exclusively by its wood-and-bone decoration.

CONSERVATION TREATMENT

The conservation treatment of the minbar was directed by two main objectives: first, to stabilize the overall wooden structure and consolidate any loose decoration and, second, to clean and chromatically balance the surface.

Before any conservation treatment was started, the minbar was secured at the bottom to a specially designed rigid steel frame. 28 This frame ensured the safe movement of the minbar in the conservation studio during treatment and now serves as its permanent base. The ingenious design of the frame allowed the minbar to be raised after four sliding Z-shaped arms were inserted into its corners (figs. 70, 71; see also fig. 57). Each of these arms contained a jackscrew and a metal plate, to which a wheel was attached once the frame was raised to a certain height. As the jackscrews were lowered, the complete weight of the minbar came to rest on the wheels, after which it could be gently moved. The base of the minbar was secured with four beechwood (Fagus sylvatica L.) blocks that were bolted to the frame. They protrude onto the base and were sized to exert minimal pressure on it, thereby preventing any possible side movement.

The initial stage of the conservation treatment involved thorough vacuuming of the minbar's interior. In the process of removing the dirt that had accumulated over several centuries, a wealth of fragments was retrieved. The original locations for most of these could not be determined with certainty, so they were sorted and stored separately for future study. Some of the more distinctive fragments could, however, be identified, and these were reattached in their proper positions. A small number of fragments were utilized for wood species analyses and examined for evidence of surviving surface finishes. Analyses of detached pieces of the checkerboard pattern, for example, eliminated the need for further sampling.

Structural stabilization

The large size of the minbar (height: to top of backrest, 3.86 meters [12 feet 8 inches], to upper horizontal rail, 3.29 meters [10 feet 9½ inches]; depth: 3.46 meters [11 feet 4¼ inches]; width: 87 centimeters [2 feet 10¼ inches]) caused complications for both the structural treatment and the surface cleaning. To facilitate easy access to all parts on every plane, a customized scaffold was placed around the entire structure before either of these procedures was initiated (fig. 72).

Other authors in this volume convincingly establish that the minbar must have been shipped from Córdoba in smaller sections and then reassembled in Marrakesh.²⁹ It is



Fig. 70. The minbar was placed on a specially designed platform created to facilitate its movement during treatment



Fig. 71. A Z-shaped arm with a removable wheel was inserted at each corner of the minbar

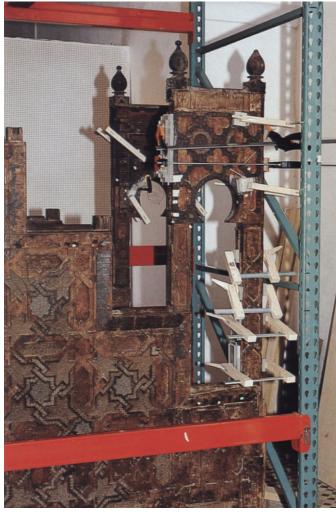


Fig. 72. A scaffold encased the minbar during the clamping process

believed to have served in at least two different mosques, with its longest tenure being in the second Kutubiyya.³⁰ With this in mind, it came as no surprise that the examination of the minbar revealed that its internal construction had been changed and reinforced on several occasions. The examination also indicated that it had acquired a list to the left of about 10 to 15 degrees, which needed to be corrected.

It was determined that most of the structural crossbars and X-bracing were either not original or not in their original locations (see fig. 57).³¹ These were removed after the sides of the minbar were secured with screw clamps to the scaffold, which formed a kind of cage around it. Two new frames were assembled from tulip poplar wood (*Liriodendron tulipifera* L.) and attached inside the minbar in order to tie the sides together and provide adequate struc-

Fig. 73. The list of the minbar has been corrected and two new cross-braces have been inserted





Fig. 74. Crossbraces were used for structural stability in the original construction of the Qaşba minbar

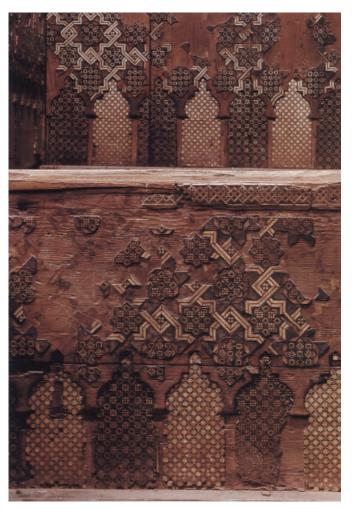


Fig. 75. Detail of the lower two risers of the Qaṣba minbar



Fig. 76. Detail of the lower two risers of the Kutubiyya minbar, after treatment

tural support.³² A facsimile of the early double X- bracing at the rear was constructed of cedar and then distressed and toned to match the other elements. These braces, carefully fitted and lap-joined, served to make the back of the minbar more rigid (fig. 73). A similar X-bracing still appears in its original state at the rear of the Qaşba minbar (fig. 74).

After the minbar's list was corrected, the Atlas cedar risers and walnut treads were aligned. The sides were brought closer together, by about 3 centimeters (1½ inches), so that all the risers and treads would fit equally well in the overall structure. It was obvious from physical evidence that the sequence of the treads had been rearranged in an attempt to reverse previous errors in their order. Some treads were split or broken and needed treatment; the ones that could be closed with simple clamp pressure were repaired with cold liquid fish glue. The substrate wood of the risers was structurally in good condition, but the inlay needed complete consolidation. Repositioning of the risers and treads was executed in tandem for each pair. The



Fig. 77. A new substrate panel was fabricated and inserted to replace a previous repair

treads were slanted slightly forward, and thin strips of wood were inserted between each tread and riser to make up for lost material.³⁵ Two new risers were made from Atlas cedar as replacements for the plain restoration boards found on the lower two steps. A decoration based on the pattern of the other risers was incised into the wood surface and toned. These replacement boards were more in harmony with the original risers, but a clear distinction between the two was maintained.

The reconstructed positioning of the treads had made it necessary to alter the size of the replaced lowest riser, which originally had been either a special, short piece or, as in the Qaşba minbar, one that extended fully downward between the longitudinal frame members of the base (figs. 75, 76). Since the original base of the Kutubiyya minbar is no longer extant, and its dimensions are still subject to speculation, it was impossible to choose between these two alternatives. Moreover, introducing a new type of decoration without secure precedence elsewhere in the minbar was not desirable, and thus "compressing" the design to fit a shorter space was not an option. It was therefore decided to simply trim the riser at the bottom, where the tops of the base mortises would have been. The riser now suggests the prevalent decorative form, yet remains appropriately ambiguous as to its original construction. The fragmentarily preserved carved-boxwood panels adjacent to the risers were treated for checks and splits. Where necessary, they were reinforced at their backs with Japanese tissue paper or small softwood tabs. The panels were reattached by using small screws inserted into preexisting nail holes.

In the course of treatment, it was decided for structural and aesthetic reasons to remove the three remnants of iron straps that had been secured to the minbar's front and right side during a previous restoration. Their function had been to keep the sides, lower risers, and treads in place, but they were no longer effective. After the list had been corrected, the treads and risers repositioned, and the two lower risers replaced, the straps became as superfluous as they were unsightly. For the same reasons, a cedar fillet that was a remnant of a restoration molding was removed from the base of the lower front stile at the left side. The straps and fillet received treatment where necessary and then were labeled and separately stored at the Badi^c Palace. The missing section of carved panels and inlay at the left side of the minbar (see fig. 61) had previously been restored with a crudely executed repair featuring cedar boards. These were replaced by a new cedar panel that had been carved with the shallow cavities to match the adjacent substrate wood and then distressed and toned (fig. 77).

Consolidation

All the lifting elements across the entire surface of the minbar, especially the inlaid decorations, were adhered with dilute rabbit-skin glue or fish glue, with sturgeon glue being used sparingly for the most delicate sections and those areas in which deep penetration was required. A few extremely fragile areas were faced with Japanese tissue paper before consolidation. Fish glue was used at full strength to reattach most of the loose carved panels. The sides of the scaffold were ideally suited to exert clamp pressure on the surface of the minbar during the setting of the glue. Custom-made vises were used in combination with regular woodworkers' clamps to hold the elements in position during treatment (see fig. 72).

The original risers had been constructed from two joined boards of Atlas cedar, with a planed lap joint and long nails attaching a strip, 3 to 4 centimeters (1½ to 15% inches) wide, at the bottom. Grooved patterns were cut into their surfaces to accept bone inlay strips, which formed the outlines for inset pieces of wood, bone, or inlay inserted according to the design. The greatest damage to the risers consisted of cupping and subsequent detachment, both whole and partial, of the sections featuring boxwood, jujube, and padouk inlay. The loss of decoration over the years had been substantial in these areas, not only because of the high level of use but probably also because the greater ratio of glue line that had become exposed once initial sections were lost had accelerated further deterioration.

The extensive cupping generally made regluing impossible without prior flattening of the decorative elements. In addition, particulate grime had filled the underlying grooves in areas where bone strips had become detached,

making reattachment difficult if not impossible without complete disassembly. Other areas of inlay that had been loose for any appreciable period of time typically had built-up powdery deposits behind them, which impeded their regluing without first removing and cleaning them.

The decorative elements of the risers were readhered in two ways: with injected 12 percent rabbit-skin glue, where they were flat enough not to require removal and/or where the undersides could be cleaned in situ; or with fish glue, where their removal had allowed use of the more viscous adhesive. Severely cupped sections were moistened with water and clamped overnight between Plexiglas sheets before they were readhered the following day with fish glue.

Surface cleaning

The process of surface cleaning was challenging, being complicated by several factors. Not only had the minbar been fabricated from a wide range of contrasting materials, from bright white bone to very dark African blackwood, but it had also acquired, over time, heavily soiled treads and large areas of discolored substrate wood. The cleaning itself had to produce a surface that would provide visual access to the minbar's decorative vocabulary, while preserving a light patina to convey an instant perception of evolved time. Examination of the surfaces of both the carved panels and the inlaid elements presented the conservators with some especially unusual problems. Except in the areas intended to receive gilding, no evidence was found of any surface finishing material, either applied at the time of manufacture or during later restorations.37 The original method of finishing seems to have consisted simply of burnishing the wood surface, which would have produced a soft, delicate sheen.³⁸ Over the course of several centuries, however, minuscule particles of airborne dirt, originating from a combination of whitewash and the local adobe building material, had settled on the unprotected wood and formed a strong bond with it. The result was a resistant, semiopaque surface crust that did not respond satisfactorily to several cleaning tests with the usual range of solvents.³⁹

The carved panels on the sides (African blackwood, boxwood, and jujube) were cleaned initially with dry, stiff brushes and spurts of compressed air. This was followed by an application of ethanol and gentle brushing to remove the grayish discoloration from the surface. The residue from this process was cleared with compressed air and absorbed by tissue paper. Resistant areas received further cleaning, employing the same method but supplemented by the use of scalpels and small dental tools for the removal of compacted dirt. The carved inscriptions inside the front posts of the minbar were cleaned in a similar fashion, with the added difficulty that the inherent colorants of the wood displayed a tendency to bleed during treatment, which required extreme caution during the course of the work. The carved areas on the risers were in an advanced state of degradation as far as color and surface checking were concerned. When coupled with other damages to the risers and with the extensive staining at their backs, this condition suggests contact with water, most likely repeated washing of the steps. The risers were cleaned with the method previously described, but they retained a somewhat blanched appearance.

The exposed substrate wood had not only grown very dark and accumulated a grime layer, but in some areas (especially the top left) it was marked by water stains, probably caused by a leak from above. It was cleaned in



Fig. 78. Abd Errahman Razkani brushing out accretions from the inlay decoration



Fig. 79. Abd el Hafid Lakmari removing surface dirt from one of the treads

several ways, according to the nature of its appearance. In areas where adhesive remained on relatively undegraded wood, suggesting more recent losses, the glue was removed with water gelled with Laponite. In other areas, where the wood showed signs of degradation, water gelled with methyl cellulose was used. In both cases, the surfaces were rinsed with water or saliva on swabs. Soiled substrate wood was cleaned with a solution of thickened deoxycholic acid (pH 8.5) and rinsed as the other surfaces. Small, stubborn areas of glue were removed with either methyl cellulose or Laponite, depending on the condition of the wood.

On the lower frames, the front faces of the front posts were covered with extensive areas of an unidentified green paint as well as with a very thick and largely intractable grime layer. After partial softening with methylene chloride, the paint was removed mechanically by scalpel. Fragmentary remnants of insoluble paint were retouched with dry pigments and shellac to match them to the surrounding wood color. The grime layers were removed with deoxycholic acid (pH 8.5) and occasionally with a dilute solution of ammonia in water (pH IO.5—II), worked very slowly. The substrate wood was toned in selected areas with watercolors and dry pigments in Mowolith-20 in order to achieve a surface appearance that would be balanced overall with that of the surrounding decorative ele-

ments. The remains of paper or parchment once laid underneath some of the carved panels were left wherever they were found, but their bright yellowish white appearance was retouched with watercolors to bring them into harmony with the rest of the substrate wood.

The treads were very heavily soiled, with compacted dirt often filling the inlay cavities. Approximately onethird of the inlay was missing, and most of the remainder was loose or lifting. They were also water stained and in many places showed splatter marks of green paint (fig. 78). Certain areas bore evidence of a patchy sheen resembling the remnants of an old varnish, although UV light showed no obvious autofluorescence. The only efficient way to clean the solid dirt and accumulated dust proved to be removal of the entire inlay. After all the detached elements were cleaned, fish glue was used to readhere them. Since no coherent nail patterns were found between the treads and risers, and one riser had no nail holes at all (clearly suggesting that it was a repair element), the nails were removed, tagged, and stored. Each nail hole was first filled with cedar wood up to a depth of 2 millimeters, then the resultant crevice and any adjacent dents were sized with hide glue and filled with an epoxy paste.

The risers had suffered as much as the treads from water damage, which had caused discoloration and detachment

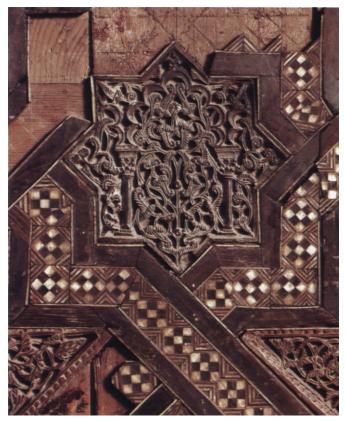


Fig. 80. Detail before cleaning

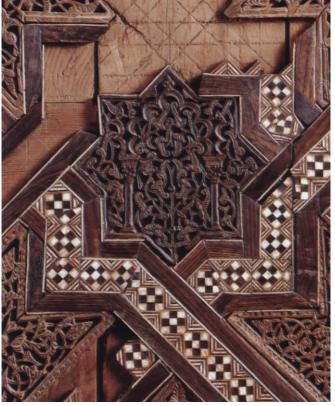


Fig. 81. Detail after cleaning



Fig. 82. The restored inscription before toning



Fig. 83. The restored inscription after toning

of their decorative elements.⁴⁰ Their surfaces were cleaned with a combination of deoxycholic-acid soap and saliva; calcareous deposits, typically found on the lower areas, were removed mechanically by scalpel (fig. 79).

About two-thirds of the inlay decoration could be cleaned with saliva. The remainder was encrusted with a heavy, often brittle layer that was opaque and visually disturbing. This layer seemed impervious to a purely liquid cleaning system, which would have left a satisfactory level of patina. The first step decided on was to clean the chevron portions mechanically with scalpels. Following this procedure, the crust on the checkerboard areas was thinned by applying saliva to a cotton cloth draped over a fingertip and then rubbing it, more or less vigorously, over the surface. This combination of methods proved to be both expedient and efficient: the mechanical cleaning of the chevrons vastly improved the legibility of the inlay and thus reduced the level of cleaning necessary for the checkerboard pattern (figs. 80, 81). The African blackwood banding of the strapwork decoration was cleaned by softening the crust layer with a thickened deoxycholic-acid solution, then employing a combination of mechanical and saliva cleaning techniques.

The inscription, which consisted of African blackwood lettering bordered with bone, was generally cleaned with saliva on swabs, in a manner similar to that employed for the banding of the strapwork decoration. Some sections

adjacent to the first two treads on the left side needed a dilute solution of ammonia and water, and care was taken in these cases to avoid contact with the bone fillets. A missing section of the inscription near treads six and seven on the same side was then reinstated. Since this inscription originates from a passage of a well-known sura, members of the Moroccan team⁴¹ were able to identify the missing words with great assurance and to render the design on the wood (figs. 82, 83). It was then skillfully carved in Atlas cedar by the Moroccan craftsmen, distressed, and glued to the minbar with liquid fish glue.

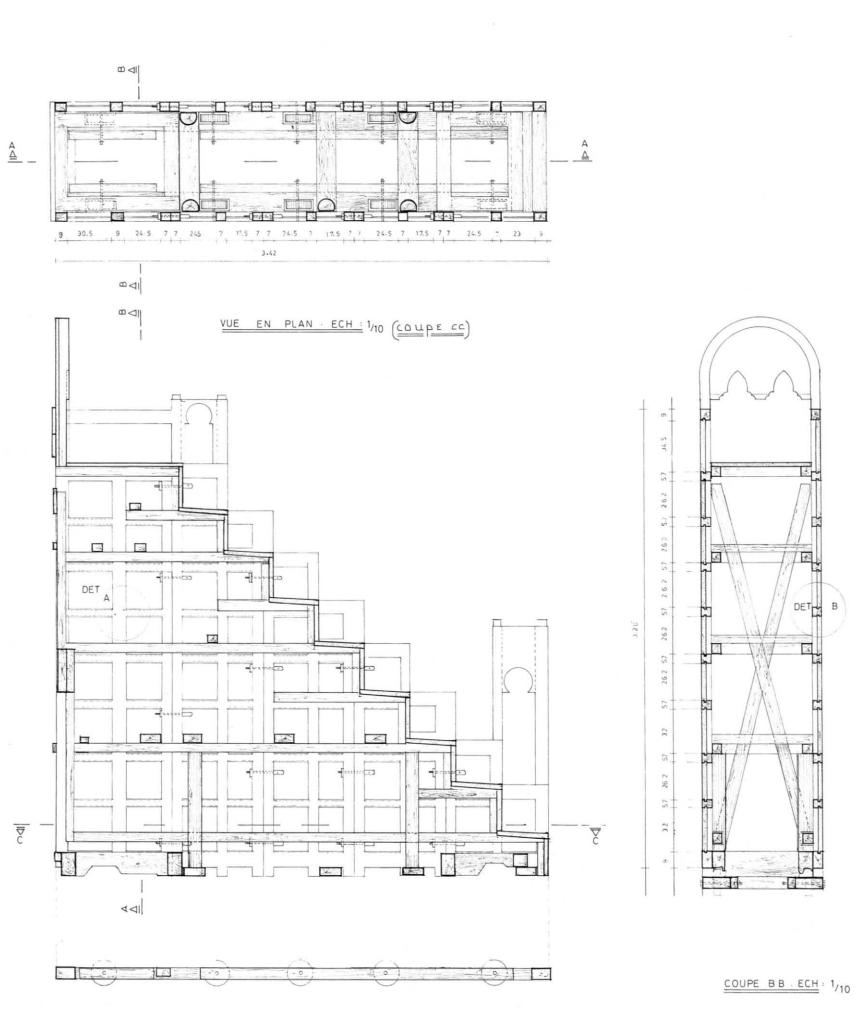
The elements of the backrest were consolidated and cleaned using methods and materials similar to those adopted for the sides and the checkerboards. Old glue was removed from crevices that once held decorative carvings by means of a mixture of either Laponite and water or methyl cellulose and water, depending on the relative state of preservation of the wood. The isolated areas with remnants of gilding were carefully cleaned with saliva, as was the remaining mordant layer without gold. The few remnants of blue paint in the recesses of the carved inscription further complicated the cleaning of the backrest. The wood in these areas was first lightly cleaned with saliva and then, where necessary, minimally retouched with watercolor or with dry pigments mixed with Mowolith-20 to create a balanced surface appearance.

- 1. Deepest gratitude is extended to Mrs. Patti Cadby Birch for her generosity in funding this project. Jack Soultanian and Antoine M. Wilmering, Conservators, Sherman Fairchild Center for Objects Conservation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, were project codirectors for the conservation treatment of the minbar, which was undertaken in Marrakesh between October 1996 and May 1997. Mark D. Minor, a conservator in private practice, oversaw the conservation treatment on site. He was assisted by Andrew Zawacki, conservator with the Department of Arkansas Heritage. The authors are grateful to Albert N. Neher, Senior Conservator at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and Mechthild Baumeister, Associate Conservator, Sherman Fairchild Center for Objects Conservation, for sharing their knowledge of the minbar, gathered on two separate visits to Marrakesh. The authors are greatly indebted to and kindly acknowledge Abd Errahman Razkani and Abd el Hafid Lakmari, two Moroccan craftsmen who assisted Mark Minor and Andrew Zawacki. Their great skills made an invaluable contribution to the successful result of the conservation treatment. A comprehensive conservation treatment report compiled by Mark Minor is on file in the Sherman Fairchild Center for Objects Conservation.
- 2. Philippot 1996, p. 372.
- 3. For the etymology of these terms, see essay by Bloom herein, p. 7.
- 4. Technically the inlay should be described as onlay, since it was not inserted into an excavated matrix wood but rather laid on the surface. Despite this technical inaccuracy, the word is used herein because it is the most prevailing terminology for this type of decorative element.
- 5. It was not until four hundred years later that the fretsaw was reinvented, probably by Fra Damiano da Bergamo (ca. 1490–1549), an Italian monk and master of intarsia.
- 6. H. Basset and Terrasse 1926a, pl. XXXI. It is impossible to determine from the photograph whether the handrails are the originals. However, examination of the minbar provided no physical evidence suggesting that there had been anything more than one set of handrails. They were attached with a complicated set of woodworker's joints that were probably necessitated because they were fitted after the minbar had been assembled. At the front, on the rear side of the front posts, they were fitted with traditional mortise-and-tenon joints that revealed a different hand from the rest of the construction joinery. At the back, they featured a "scarf" joint that was designed and cut to fix the rails into position after they slid down into the front of the rear posts. Although the photograph shows the handrails to be undecorated, this may indicate that they had lost their inlaid decoration rather than that they were not original. Such is the case with the original handrails of the minbar of the Qasba mosque, which have been preserved and which have lost more than 90 percent of their decoration.
- 7. The carbon-14 analyses were performed by Dr. Georges Bonani at the Institute of Particle Physics, Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, Zurich, Switzerland. The calibrated age of this sample was A.D. 886–1025, with a 100% probability.
- 8. See note 7. The calibrated ages of the two samples were A.D. 954–1165, with a 97.2% probability, and A.D. 1159–1298, with a 98.5% probability.
- 9. See note 7. The calibrated age of the sample was A.D. 1474–1667, with a 99.3% probability.
- 10. H. Basset and Terrasse 1926a, pl. xxxi.
- 11. The minbar was moved to the Badi^c Palace in 1962.
- 12. Readings taken with a data logger between July 1995 and March 1996 demonstrated that the temperature and relative humidity fluctuations were very gradual, ranging between 54°F and 85°F and 23% and 75% RH.
- 13. H. Basset and Terrasse 1926a, pl. XXXIII.
- 14. Bloom in New York 1992, pp. 362-67.
- 15. In analyzing unknown wood sections, it is not possible to identify the sample material to the species level unless there is only one species in a particular genus. However, it may be possible that the walnut sample is Juglans regia L.; the African blackwood, Dalbergia melanoxylon Guill. et Perr.; the boxwood, Buxus sempervirens L.; the jujube, Zizyphus jujuba Miller; and the padouk, Pterocarpus soyauxii Taub., P. angolensis DC., or even P. indicus Willd. Atlas cedar was identified without the aid of microscope analyses.
- 16. The use of padouk was confirmed in these areas by the bleeding of color from the wood's dyestuffs upon contact with ethanol.
- 17. The remaining one was cut from boxwood.

- 18. This tree (*Pistacia terebinthus* L.) is the most likely choice, given its wide distribution over southern Europe and its availability in Spain.
- 19. See Boerhave Beekman 1951; Kribs 1968, p. 75.
- 20. Today the wood is especially sought after for high-quality woodwind instruments.
- 21. López González 1982, p. 700.
- 22. It should not be ruled out, however, that the traditional notion about the use of yellow and red sandalwood could have been correct.
- 23. Padouk, when examined by eye, can easily be confused with brazilwood, which in turn can be mistaken for (red) sandalwood.
- 24. While it cannot be established with certainty that African rather than Indonesian padouk was used, it seems reasonable to assume that the wood was imported from central West Africa.
- 25. The presence of copper was confirmed by means of an energy dispersive spectrometer (EDS) attached to a scanning electron microscope (SEM). We are grateful to Mark T. Wypyski, Associate Research Scientist, Sherman Fairchild Center for Objects Conservation, for executing the analysis. That this material is bone and not ivory is supported by the presence of Haversian canals observed in some of the inlay and by the relative absence of magnesium in the examined samples.
- 26. The presence of protein was determined by IR microspectroscopy. Thanks to Suzanne Lomax, Organic Chemist, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., for performing this analysis and to E. René de la Rie, Head of the Scientific Research Department at the National Gallery for arranging the testing.
- 27. EDS analysis was executed by Mark Wypyski, Associate Research Scientist, Sherman Fairchild Center for Objects Conservation.
- 28. The frame was designed by Franz Schmidt, Manager for Special Projects, Buildings Department, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was made by Gerard den Uijl and Abdoul Ali of the Museum's machine shop.
- 29. See essays by Bloom, pp. 3-4, and Hbibi, p. 90, herein.
- 30. We are grateful to El Mostafa Hbibi for sharing this information with us.
- 31. The nails and nail holes of some of these structural elements did not match, and the workmanship of the crossbars and X-braces was too varied to have originated from one workshop. Some wood elements showed the markings of having been cut with a circular saw. Notches at the inside of the back stiles indicated that two large X-braces had previously been used as substitutes for four original small ones. Some crossbars had been crudely nailed to the back without taking into account the function of other structural elements; the minbar's list, for example, had been firmly fixed into position by the subsequent addition of several crossbars.
- 32. The new frames were fitted with custom-sized metal double sockets lined with Teflon pads. The sockets were bolted to the interior sides of the minbar and functioned as clamps, in order to facilitate easy reversibility.
- 33. Although the correct sequence of the treads could not be established with certainty, correlation between remnants of mortise-and-tenon joints at their sides and the interior of the minbar suggested the current arrangement. The upper and lower treads were switched, as were the third and fourth from the bottom; the others remained unchanged.
- 34. To attach the treads, several poplar blocks measuring 3 by 3 by 2 centimeters were fastened with fish glue to the underside of each tread, and bent anodized aluminum strips lined with sheet cork and measuring 2.5 centimeters by 2 millimeters were screwed into the blocks. The strips were then hooked onto the undersides of the horizontal side supports. Wooden wedges were spot-glued underneath the walnut to adjust the positioning of the treads and to minimize gaps.
- 35. It could not be determined with certainty whether such gaps had been filled by moldings (now missing?) or by some other decorative element.
- 36. The minbar's extraordinary inscription was similarly fashioned.
- 37. The surface was examined by ultraviolet light (UV), and small microscopic samples were analyzed in cross section under a microscope, but neither fluorescence nor any other evidence of a finishing material was found.
- 38. This technique, although not commonly in practice, can be applied to a surface by simply rubbing it with wood shavings or another piece of hardwood. Some material similar to a finish but exhibiting no UV

- fluorescence was observed on the treads; this was very probably soap or wax polish, the residue from centuries of scrubbing and mopping the steps.
- 39. The tests included an initial trial of cleaning with saliva on the strapwork decoration, the inscription, and the carvings. While this technique proved to be effective to a certain extent for the inlaid elements, it did not remove the crust to the desired degree and was not appropriate for so large a surface.
- 40. It should be noted that the general wear patterns on the risers suggest
- that they have been completely rearranged. The upper risers (numbers seven through nine) all show extensive losses as well as substrate wear at the bottom and in the center—precisely the areas where foot traffic would cause damage. However, since the imam typically would have stood on a middle step, the higher steps should have remained relatively free of damage. Yet risers three through six are the most complete and are devoid of central substrate wear (numbers one and two are missing). See also n. 33.
- 41. Specifically, El Mostafa Hbibi and his assistant, Abdelaziz Zoubhir.

CONSERVATION · 83



The Structure and Artistic Composition of the Minbar from the Kutubiyya Mosque

EL MOSTAFA HBIBI"

ating back to the time of Muḥammad, the chairlike pulpit known as a minbar has been considered a symbol that unites both the spiritual authority and the temporal power of the Prophet. Today, it is the sole piece of liturgical furniture indispensable in a congregational, or great, mosque

(masjid al-jāmi'), that is, one in which Friday worship is conducted. In fact, this type of mosque is sometimes called a "cathedral" mosque, because the minbar is somewhat equivalent to a bishop's cathedra. More generally, however, the minbar takes the form of a rather narrow staircase with five to eight steps (depending on the size of the mosque's oratory), which are usually protected by handrails.

Each Friday at noonday worship (*zuhr*), the white-garbed imam, or leader, delivers his weekly sermon

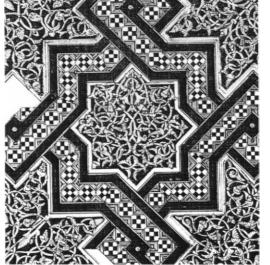
from one of the steps below the top of the minbar. Like the Prophet, he stands while speaking and carries a long stick ('anaza) in his hand. In the pause between the two canonical portions of the sermon, he sits briefly on the nearest step. The raised form of the minbar clearly enables the preacher to better dominate his congregation, for it helps his voice to carry and makes his gestures easier to follow. In the central and eastern Islamic lands, particularly from the eleventh century on, the simple basic structure of the minbar was often supplemented by an elaborate portal at the entrance and by a canopy or baldachin sheltering the seat. These additions give eastern minbars (fig. 85) a form quite distinct from that common in the western Islamic lands, where the minbar is mov-

Opposite: Fig. 84. Details of the structure of the minbar; see also fig. 87

able and stored to the right of the mihrab niche during the rest of the week.

The most glorious surviving example of a minbar from the western Islamic lands is the one that was formerly in the Kutubiyya mosque in Marrakesh (fig. 86). A work of supreme artistic merit, it has suffered losses over the years,

but it still retains great unity, a remarkable elegance, and a beauty that is both delicate and powerful. According to the inscription on its left flank, which we were the first to decipher, the minbar was made in Córdoba at the request of the Almoravid sovereign 'Alī ibn Yūsuf for the congregational mosque of his capital. Its construction was begun on New Year's Day of the year 532 of the Hegira (equivalent to A.D. September 19, 1137).²



STRUCTURE AND CONDITION

The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque is one of the few objects of woodwork to have survived from the Almoravid period (1056–1147). It undoubtedly owes its extraordinary state of preservation to the temperateness and aridity of Marrakesh's climate as well as to the reverence with which it has been treated over the centuries. Despite structural gaps and additions—the handrail and first two risers are missing, and a clumsy wheeled base has replaced the original one—the decorative scheme of the minbar can still be read perfectly. Measuring 3.86 meters (12 feet 8 inches) in height, 3.46 meters (11 feet 4½ inches) in depth, and 87 centimeters (2 feet 10½ inches) in width, the minbar appears as an imposing eight-step staircase that leads to a high seat in the form of a throne. Its steps are set back in an arrangement that coordinates exactly with the

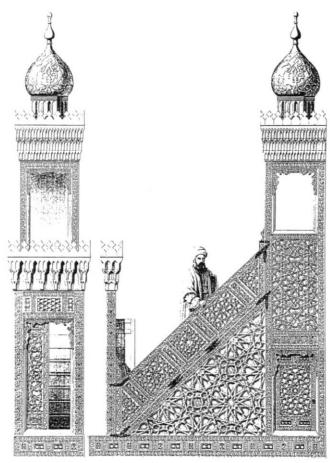


Fig. 85. An eastern minbar, from the Qā'itbāy mosque, Cairo (15th century). After Prisse d'Avennes 1877

stepped profile of the flanks. At the top and bottom of the staircase, there are two rectangular frames which contain horseshoe arches, once linked by the lost handrail. The lower frames harmoniously mark the minbar's entrance, while the upper frames serve as prolongations of the armrests for the seat. The stepped corners of the sides were originally surmounted by twenty finials, but only six remain. From the first, the minbar's mobility was assured by a base with five wooden wheels on each side connected by wrought-iron axles.

The two flanks of the minbar are constructed of coffered cedarwood frames, which between them contain the treads, risers, and backrest. The frames are assembled with exposed mortise-and-tenon joints pegged together with oak dowels to form modules that vary in height but match the width of two steps (figs. 84, 87). Each flank of the minbar is composed of five modules, which are attached with butt joints to their neighbors along the vertical sides with wooden screws and nuts (carved, respectively, from green oak and from boxwood). Horizontal reinforcing bars have been nailed to the inside face of each flank to join several modules and to serve as supports for the steps. The frames of the two flanks are connected to each other by internal horizontal crossbeams, the ends of which are nailed to the reinforcing bars fixed to the coffered frames. On the interior, under the seat, two other beams, which cross diagonally, assure the rigidity of the

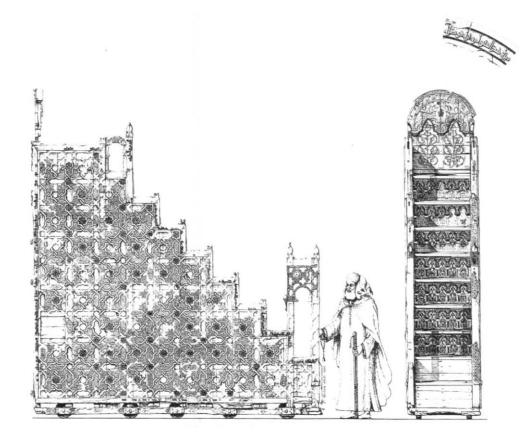


Fig. 86. The minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, side and front views

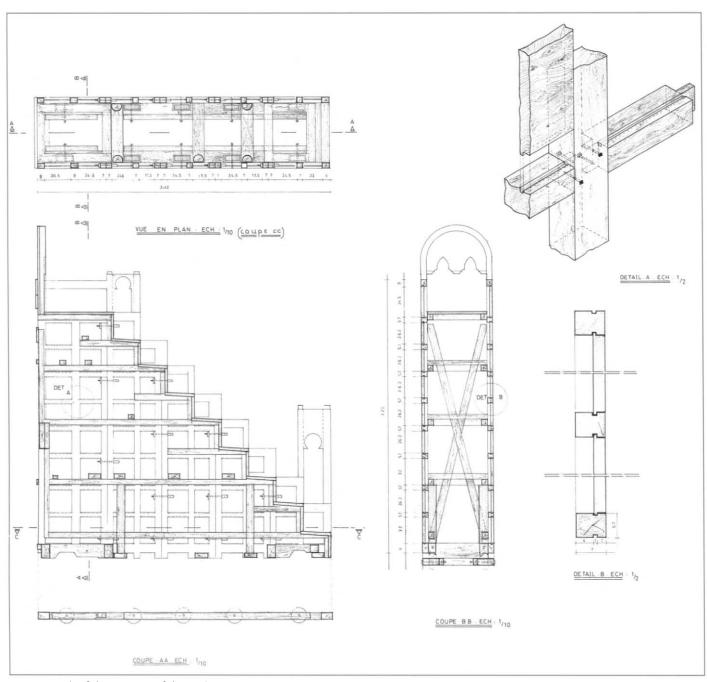


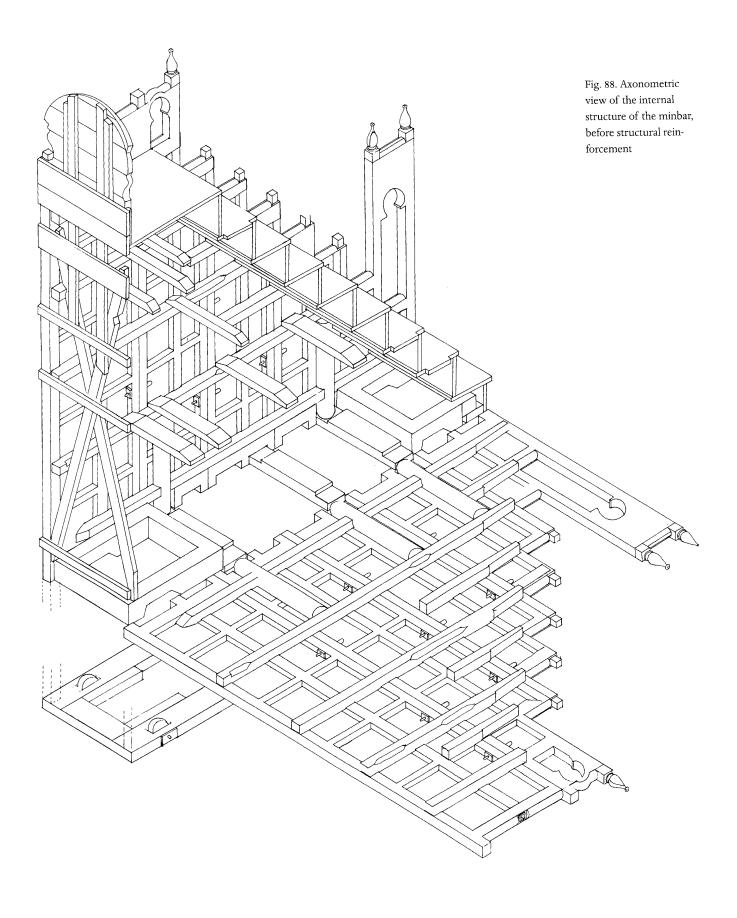
Fig. 87. Details of the structure of the minbar

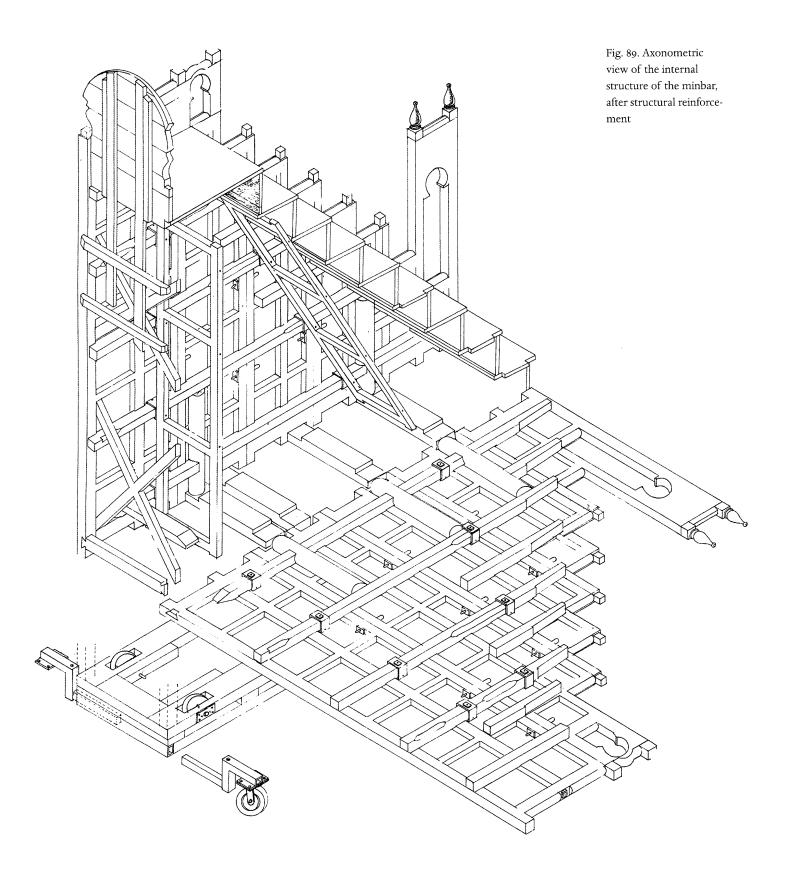
construction (figs. 88, 89). The width of the beams in the assembly averages 71 millimeters (2³/₄ inches).

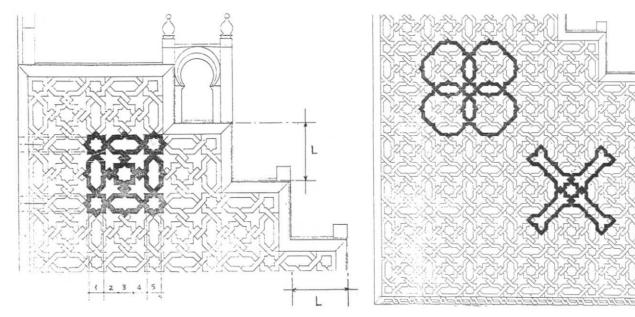
The coffered frames are set with cedarwood filler panels, placed flush with their outer surfaces. These panels, visible where the decoration has fallen away, provide a flat surface for the inlay and marquetry. Thirty millimeters (1½ inches) thick, they are set vertically and held in place by grooves cut into the horizontal members of the coffered frames. When they are assembled from two narrower boards, they are attached to each other with butt joints reinforced by two pegs buried in the thickness of the panels.

Thus, the ensemble involves a coffered framework of fifty-four quadrilateral panels of slightly varying dimensions, distributed over ten vertical registers (see fig. 87). A similar arrangement is found in two earlier minbars—the one in Kairouan, dated between 856 and 863, and that in Algiers, executed in 1097 (see figs. 32, 38). The major formal difference among the three is that in the Kutubiyya minbar, the staircase setbacks match the stepped form of the flanks, while in the Kairouan minbar, a continuous diagonal band runs along the top of the staircase's sides.

This ingenious concept of relatively light and easily handled modules assembled with a system of screws and







Figs. 90, 91. Possible interpretations of the strapwork patterns on the flanks

nuts (and therefore easily disassembled) demonstrates advanced technical skill and must have been adopted by the master craftsmen in Córdoba to facilitate shipping the minbar to Marrakesh. After a preliminary assembly and dry-fitting (that is, without glue) in Córdoba, all the key parts of the minbar would have been sent separately to Marrakesh, where the final phase of construction seems to have been done. The horizontal reinforcing bars and the crosspieces of the inner framework were also probably executed in Marrakesh.

To judge by its carved decoration and coloring, the present wheeled base is a very recent and awkward addition. Along with the steps, this part of the minbar was the most exposed to wear and tear, and it must have been replaced several times during the eight centuries of the minbar's "operational life." If we assume that each Friday it traveled 5 meters (ca. 16 feet) when brought out from its storage place and the same distance when it was returned, the minbar must have traversed more than 400 kilometers (250 miles) during its use within the mosque.

The original treads, like the risers, were probably made of cedarwood veneered with marquetry, but they apparently failed to withstand the use to which they were subjected. Dating analyses performed during the recent conservation treatment reveal that the present treads are approximately two centuries younger than the known age of the minbar.³ The original treads must thus have been replaced in the fourteenth century, in the time of the Marīnids. The present ones, cut from walnut and only lightly decorated to better withstand wear and tear, harmonize perfectly with the rest of the minbar.

DECORATION

While the cabinetmaking of the Kutubiyya minbar is quite unexceptional, its extraordinary richness resides essentially in its decoration—in the way virtually all its visible surfaces were covered with a mosaic of exquisitely sculpted plaques and complex marquetry inlaid with bone. It is estimated that the minbar, in its original state, comprised 1.3 million pieces of different dimensions, the smallest of which scarcely exceeded the size of a sesame seed. According to a rough estimate—based on an experiment carried out with the master craftsmen who took part in the recent restoration—the minbar represents some 72,000 man-hours of labor, the equivalent of three years' work for about ten master craftsmen or, in other words, the equivalent of thirty years' work for one master craftsman, practically a whole working lifetime.

Even today, despite the ravages of the centuries, one stands amazed at the decorative richness and technical perfection of this unique masterpiece. The fourteenth-century historian and connoisseur Ibn Marzūq wrote of the esteem in which the most accomplished craftsmen held this minbar and compared it with the one in the congregational mosque of Córdoba, which was destroyed in the sixteenth century: "[Master craftsmen] . . . agree that the minbar of [the Great Mosque of] Córdoba and the minbar of the Booksellers' [i.e., the Kutubiyya mosque] in Marrakesh are the most remarkable in craftsmanship."⁴ Ibn Marzūq was quite right in saying that this minbar remains the richest and most beautiful from the western Muslim lands and may be the finest that Islam and even the

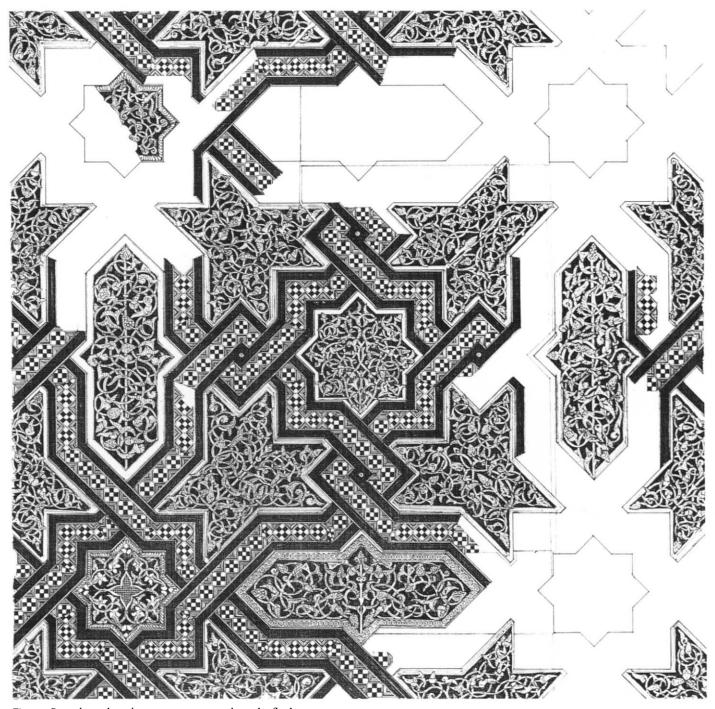


Fig. 92. Carved panels and marquetry strapwork on the flanks

entire Middle Ages have left us. Only the Córdoba minbar—sadly destroyed—could be compared to it.

Descriptions of the Córdoba minbar by such medieval authors as al-Idrīsī, Ibn ʿIdhārī, and al-Maqqarī indicate that it was inlaid with such materials as ebony, boxwood, red sandalwood, and ivory. Six master craftsmen with their apprentices worked on it for five—and possibly even seven—years, and it cost the Spanish Umayyad ruler al-Hakam II the sum of 35,705 dinars in the year 976 (see fig. 34). Everything prompts us to believe that the minbar

of the Córdoba mosque, which had, according to al-Idrīsī, "no equal in the whole universe," served as a model for the Kutubiyya minbar. This is especially evident when we realize that the artistic taste of its patron, 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, shows a return to the lavishness that had earlier characterized Andalusian art. Although his father, Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn, had reproached the previous rulers of Spain, known as the Reyes de Taifa, for their artistic exuberance, 'Alī himself believed that nothing could be too beautiful for the glory of God.

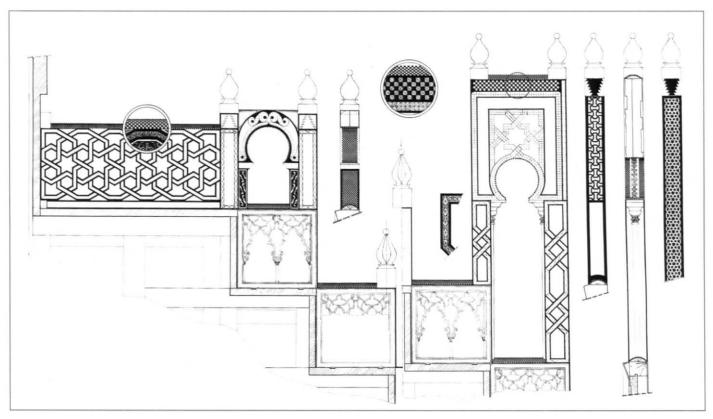


Fig. 93. Overall view of the designs on the interior flanks

When compared with older extant minbars of the Islamic world, the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque may be seen to share features with those from both the West and the East. From the western tradition, it takes its mobility, its form (without baldachin), and its structure (flanks composed of quadrilateral coffers). From the eastern tradition, it takes the interlaced decorative pattern of its sides, although it applies the pattern in a new and distinctive way.

In contrast to the sides of the Algiers and Kairouan minbars (see figs. 32, 38), which are decorated with a series of large, carved square or rectangular panels aligned in vertical registers that correspond to the structure, the Kutubiyya minbar displays the complex interlacing characteristic of the East, except that it is finer in scale and execution. The interlacing on eastern minbars rests on a primary framework, upon which a secondary pattern is applied; its stout lap-joint framing forms great polygonal rosettes. The interstices of the interlacings are filled with a multitude of small panels, sculpted or worked in marquetry, in a variety of shapes. On these minbars, the complete interlaced pattern is often too large for the space available on the flanks and cannot be spread out in full; the reading of the decoration is thus rendered somewhat tedious, if not actually confusing (see fig. 85).

In the Kutubiyya minbar, in contrast, the interlaced decoration is well suited to the space to be covered, for each of its square modules corresponds exactly in measurement to one step of the minbar (see fig. 86). Moroccan master craftsmen call this pattern *robâa mtarek* (four hammers), a term that derives from the similarity of the four elongated hexagonal elements framing the motif to the shape of a pointed hammer. Typical of the Muslim West, this pattern will later be found on the bronze-clad wooden doors of the madrasas built under Marīnid patronage in the fourteenth century.

The module of this decoration is a square, 32 centimeters (125% inches) to a side, the corners of which are stars that have eight identical points and are connected by four "hammers." At the center of this module is a fifth eight-pointed star, slightly larger than the ones in the corners, surrounded by four irregular polygons centered on the diagonals of the module. Spread over a large surface, this decoration can be read in several possible ways, including as interwoven octagons or as interlocking links (figs. 90, 91). Analysis of this motif indicates that the module is divided equally into five units, one unit representing the distance between the axes of the bands of interlacing that surround the smaller stars; the width of the interlaced bands themselves is equal to one-third of the unit.

This process of subdivision by five gives the components of the motif harmonious proportions. The number five may also have been adopted for its meaning and symbolism in Islam: it may suggest either the five pillars of

Islam—the profession of faith (*shahāda*), daily prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and the pilgrimage to Mecca—or else the five main daily prayers. In the Sufi cosmological order, five represents nature in the macrocosm (sky, fire, air, water, and earth) and the human being's five senses in the microcosm (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell).

Whatever its symbolism, the decoration clearly has a dazzling effect. Two woodworking techniques—fine carving and marquetry mosaic—are combined here to achieve a sumptuous composition and a rich natural polychromy (fig. 92). Plaques of various shapes were cut from different woods (African blackwood for the octagonal stars, pale boxwood for the "hammers," and red jujube wood for the irregular polygons), exquisitely sculpted, and enclosed in a vibrant mosaic checkerboard strapwork of red and black wood inlaid with bone. The plaques were fitted into recesses carved directly into the framework itself and then glued into place. The strapwork on the inner faces of the armrests and the rosettes on the exterior strapwork of the lower arched frames were also fixed in this way.

The technique for executing the strapwork-band marquetry is very complex and original. Thin rods and strips of black and red wood and bone were first assembled lengthwise, then glued and sawn perpendicularly to form end-grain geometric motifs. After the resulting small checkerboards were glued side by side, they were enclosed between fine bone strips and dark rosewood rods. The thickness of the strapwork band is I centimeter (3% inch); its width is 3 centimeters (11% inches). The predominant mosaic motif is a square that measures I.3 centimeters (1½ inch) on each side and is made up of thirty-seven parts. The same mosaic-marquetry technique was used on the lateral arcades of the backrest and on the inner faces of the armrests (fig. 93).

In contrast to this geometric decoration, the floral decoration on the risers and the backrest was executed in the classical marquetry technique, component by component (see fig. 101). Yet even this marquetry displays a curious and original feature: the use of strips of bone enclosed in a deep groove cut in the wood. This technique lends the

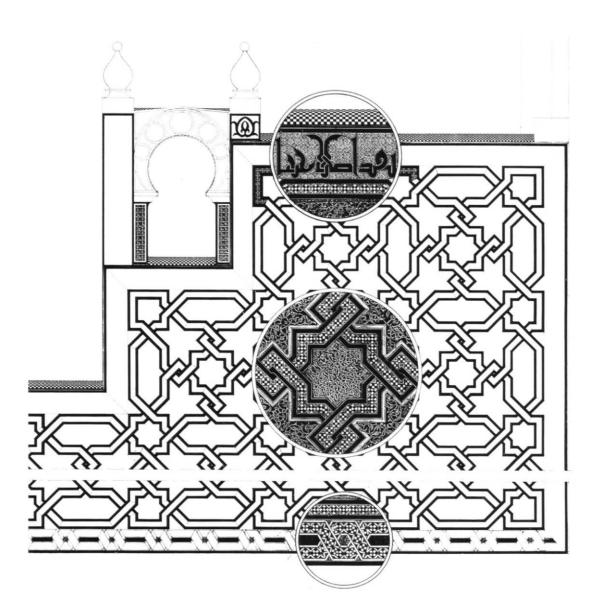


Fig. 94. Details of the inscription band, carved panels and strapwork, and base molding

ensemble greater solidity and cohesion while effectively emphasizing the motifs with a sure white line. The effect is particularly evident in the marquetry on the risers and on the inscription band along the edges of the flanks.

The flanks of the minbar are bordered along the stepped sides and rear verticals with a frieze of inscription plaques 6 centimeters (23/8 inches) wide and slightly tilted from the vertical (fig. 94). Containing verses from the Qur³an and the foundation inscription, this frieze employs an admirable style of kufic epigraphy. Its letters are cut from African blackwood and outlined with a bone strip against a reticulated background of fine mosaic. The script unrolls without foliate or floral ornament, the letters themselves constituting fascinating decorative elements (fig. 95). Since the baseline of the writing is placed at the bottom of the register, the top of the frieze is left free for the decorative play of ascenders and endings of letters. The paired verticals of the lām-alif group, for instance, intertwine in several imaginative ways, and the letter 'ayn sometimes has a horseshoe form, its tail curving in an unusual manner (fig. 96). These subtleties were executed by calligraphercraftsmen with a sure elegance, and the whole appears admirably balanced as well as clearly legible, thanks to the white bone border that outlines the characters. The two other examples of kufic epigraphy on the minbar are carved in solid wood with a powerful and well-executed relief. The first is a simple but graceful inscription in a cavetto molding around the arc of the backrest. The second, displayed against a sculpted vegetal ground, forms a frieze on the interior of each lower arched frame (fig. 97).

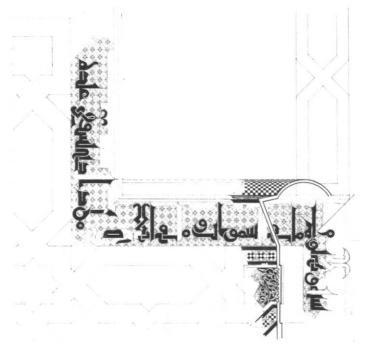


Fig. 95. Detail of the inscription frieze on the left flank



Fig. 96. Inventory of the kufic letters used in the inscription

Carved wood is found everywhere on the minbar. Combined with marquetry, it appears as the plaques on the flanks, on the uprights and edges of the risers, on the backrest of the high throne, and even on the risers themselves. Largely comprising floral motifs, this carved ornament is characterized by the clarity of its astonishingly delicate modeling, in which leaves, pinecones, and foliated scrolls combine in a complex, unrelenting precision (fig. 98). Such a floral repertory, found here in an Almoravid work, is in fact an extension of the art of the Taifa period as well as a vestige of the Umayyad art of Córdoba. Whether on single or double palmettes, the acanthus is

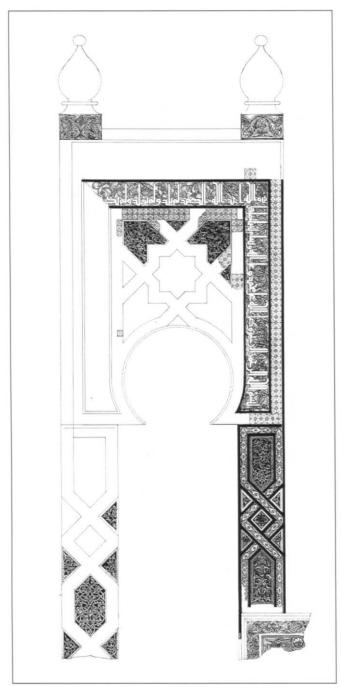


Fig. 97. The interior of the lower left arched frame, showing the inscription frieze

divided into fine, fingerlike veins, often—but not systematically—separated by buds, which regularly mark the axils of the double palmettes.

Despite their small scale, the palm leaves and the pinecone scales are of a prodigious precision. A stem half a millimeter thick will be split by a narrow groove to make up two coupled fillets. Under a magnifying glass, the quality of the cut—even in the most delicate foliage—is faultless in execution, without defects or repairs. Indeed, the chisel work seems to be striving for the technique of sculpture in the round. And as Henri Terrasse so aptly remarked,

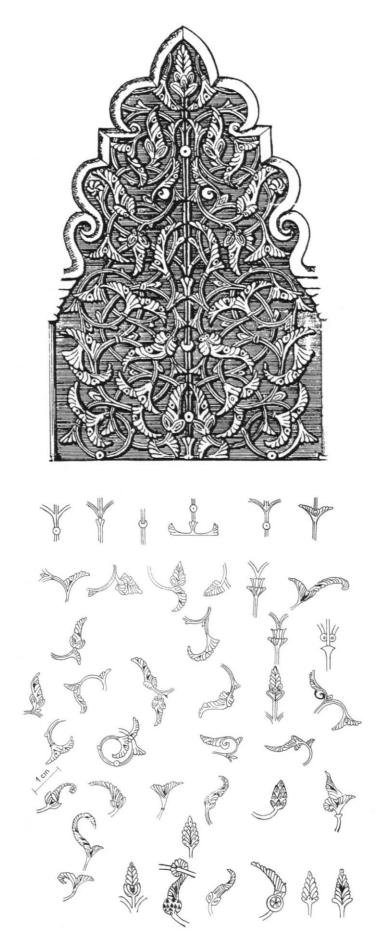


Fig. 98. Examples of the carved ornament on the minbar: backrest decoration (above) and leaves, pinecones, and foliated scrolls (below)

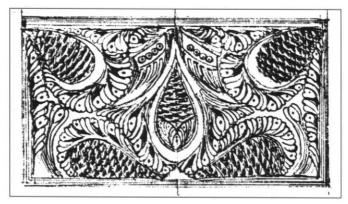


Fig. 99. Sculptural motifs on the base of a finial

"One would believe that a realistic breath had just vivified the old sculpture of the east. Hispano-Moresque art, which had prevailed by dint of its decorative passion, . . . wonderfully served by artisans of singular technical ability, seems close to revealing the most beautiful secrets of living sculpture." A few of the "hammers" actually have designs executed in such high relief that they appear almost carved in the round. The same sculptural technique is applied to the base of the finials (fig. 99) and to the spandrels above the arcade motifs on the risers.

The vegetal decoration on the Kutubiyya minbar encompasses various forms of palmettes, whose beauty and inventiveness are a constant source of wonder. Among the types to be distinguished are: three kinds of double palmettes, with uneven lobes (the largest of which

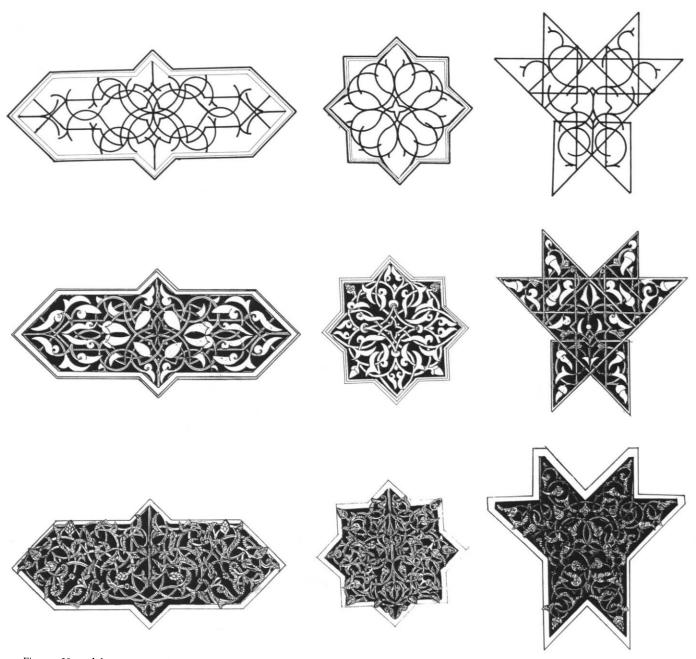


Fig. 100. Vegetal decoration on the carved panels (from top to bottom): various basic rhythmic patterns, preliminary designs, and final panels

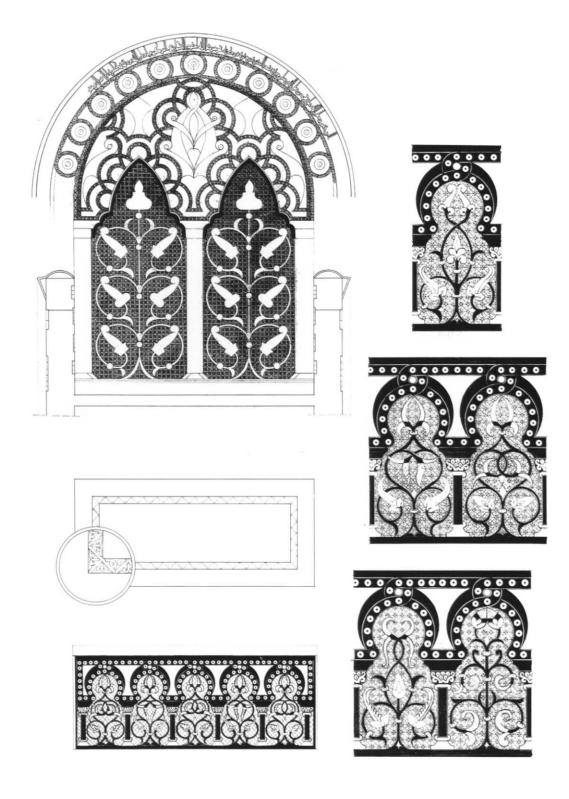


Fig. 101. Architectural decoration on the backrest, treads, and risers

is an emphasized coil), with convex coiling and an entirely coiled small lobe, and with a gap between the superimposed lobes; a single asymmetrical palmette with calyxes; and a pinecone with staggered scales. The distribution of these motifs over variously sized plaques and unusually shaped fields is always harmonious. The style of the carved foliage, with its multiple scrolls, determines the overall composition of the decoration, the palms are

arranged with consummate skill in balanced groupings, and there is no evidence of filling or padding (fig. 100).

The approximately six hundred carved panels that remain on the minbar are disconcertingly diverse in composition. Each piece has its special charm and is executed differently; in all, the decorative perfection shows the sure hand of genius. One of the basic ways to categorize a panel is to distinguish whether it has a symmetrical or

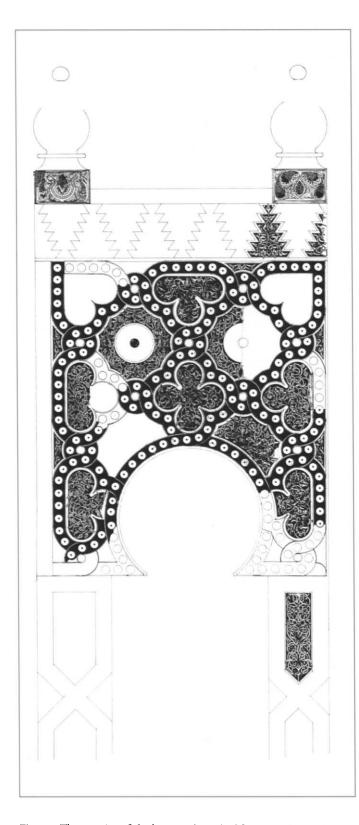


Fig. 102. The exterior of the lower right arched frame, with curvilinear strapwork $\,$

asymmetrical arrangement. Of the symmetrical arrangements alone, it is possible to identify those deriving from a central stem (tree of life); those along a longitudinal axis (without a central stem), a transverse axis, or both axes; those with respect to a central point, radiating and forming rosettes, or those freely composed; those combining floral decoration with rectilinear or curvirectilinear strapwork

trellises or with architectural decoration (such as polylobed arches on small columns with capitals); and one made up of a rosette with a marquetry flower in the center (see fig. 2).

The decoration on the backrest (fig. 101) is composed differently from that on the flanks. The lower half contains an architectural composition of two twin arches with sharply broken profiles. On the panels between the pilasters, a vegetal motif comprising a large-scale tree of life with three superimposed foliated scrolls stands out in contrast to a mosaic marquetry ground, which is identical to that of the strapwork band on the minbar's flanks. On the upper half, above the arches, mosaic strapwork decoration of polylobed bands separates carved panels; the whole is ringed by a double border of mosaic strapwork medallions which, at the top, frames the epigraphic frieze sculpted against a cavetto background.

The risers also have architectural decoration: five semicircular arcades are adorned throughout with floral marquetry composed of large elements set against a reticulated mosaic ground. Sculpted high-relief decoration in the spandrels of the arches embellishes the whole. The floral decoration of the arcades changes from one step to the other, and two compositions alternate on each riser (see fig. 101).

The contrasts in the decoration of the minbar thus become evident. On all the inner faces, from the first riser to the backrest of the high seat, the decoration is essentially architectural—predominantly curvilinear—made up of arcades and arabesques embellished with vegetal decoration. On the outer surfaces, it tends to be mainly geometric and rectilinear. This principle (rectilinear for the exterior, curvilinear for the interior) is employed throughout the minbar, except in the upper decoration of the lower arched frames, where it is reversed to make the transition between compositions felicitous (fig. 102; see also fig. 97). All in all, the effect is one of an admirably vigorous dynamism.

The decorative scheme of the Kutubiyya minbar is, in fact, a vast, delightful, and harmonious repertory upon which one can draw endlessly. The potentially shocking contrast between the minbar's imposing bulk and the economy of its small-scale strapwork and sculpted motifs is very ingeniously muted by a hierarchization of the decoration. At first sight, viewers are dazzled, but the decorative order soon leads them to discover the minbar's polished richness by studying it up close (and very few visitors can resist the temptation of touching it).

ARTISTIC CONTEXT

To better understand this unique masterpiece in its artistic context, it is necessary to stress the importance of the Almoravid period in the history of western Islamic art. The significance of this period has often been overlooked, particularly by Spanish historians, who have been largely responsible for writing its art history, because few if any monuments survive from this period in al-Andalus, that is, the regions of the Iberian Peninsula once under Muslim control. However, over the past seventy years, the increased study of monuments surviving in the Maghrib, or North Africa, has greatly expanded our knowledge of the artistic history of the entire Almoravid period.

Among the surviving monuments of the era are three mosques and their associated furnishings in Algeria⁷—the congregational mosque of Algiers and its minbar, the mosque of Nedroma and its minbar, and the mosque of Tlemcen and its *maqṣūra*⁸—as well as parts of several mosques in Morocco—the Qarawiyyīn mosque in Fez and its minbar; the mosque of ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf in Marrakesh, of which only the ablution pavilion survives; and the minbar that is the focus of this publication. These monuments clearly indicate that the art of the Almoravid period not only drew heavily on that of the preceding Taifa period in Spain but also incorporated much that would inspire the arts of the subsequent Almohad and Marīnid periods.

The patron of our minbar, 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, was of mixed Berber and Arab ancestry and culture; he is considered the founder of Maghribi-Andalusian civilization. The chief works of his period are preserved in North Africa, where we may learn much about the nature of Almoravid art, as reflected not only in architecture and decoration but also in liturgical furniture. Two phases may be identified: the first, dating to the reign of Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn (1061–1106), is characterized by a simplicity consistent with Yūsuf's reforming spirit; the second, during the reigns of 'Alī and his ephemeral successors (1106–47), displays an elaborate style inspired by the exuberance found in the Andalusian art of the Taifa period.

Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn, founder of the Almoravid empire, was also responsible for developing Marrakesh and for constructing congregational mosques in several cities in the central Maghrib. The mosques of Algiers, Nedroma, and Tlemcen, built under his patronage, originally displayed an austerity that derived from the doctrine of the "Veiled Saharans," whose leader Yūsuf had become. The Great Mosque of Algiers was built in a traditional style during the late eleventh century; this timing tallies closely with the precise date of 1097 found in the inscription on its minbar. The mosque of the small town of Nedroma, located northwest of Tlemcen, is a simpler and smaller version of the one found in Algiers. The backrest of its Almoravid minbar, which bears the name of Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn, and portions of its flanks can be admired in the

Musée National des Antiquités Classiques et Musulmanes, Algiers (see fig. 37). $^{\text{\tiny II}}$

The Great Mosque of Tlemcen was long believed to have survived largely unchanged from the time it was built. Two inscriptions—one, on the dome in front of the mihrab, dated Jumada II 530 (A.D. March-April 1136), and the other, on the wooden arch over the entrance to the maqsūra, dated Ramadan 533 (A.D. May 1139)—initially suggested that the entire structure could be attributed to the time of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf.12 However, after studying this monument at length, the noted French scholar Georges Marçais concluded that it was far from being a homogeneous work and had, on the contrary, been built in several stages. Marçais first distinguished a structural nucleus, which represented the original mosque founded by Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn about 1082; he then identified the portions of the interior that 'Alī ibn Yūsuf was said to have embellished between 1137 and 1140. He noted the much richer style employed in the transformation of the central nave with the mihrab and, particularly, in the addition of the dome in front of the mihrab in 1136. This style of decoration displays quite a different character than that found elsewhere in the Great Mosque of Tlemcen, which was enlarged and acquired its present form only in the thirteenth century.¹³ The closest parallels for this decorative style appear, significantly, in two other masterpieces of the same period, created for mosques in Fez and Marrakesh.

The original nucleus of the Qarawiyyīn mosque in Fez was built in 859 and enlarged for the first time in 955. During the reign of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, the mosque was refurbished and considerably enlarged; the preservation of its original transversal nave structure during these alterations sets it apart from other Almoravid-founded mosques, which had had their naves aligned in depth. An inscription on one of the cupolas of the central nave, built or rebuilt by 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, gives the date of Ramadan 531 (A.D. May–June 1137) for that nave and the date of Sha'ban 538 (A.D. February 1144) for the mosque's minbar (see fig. 45). ¹⁴

Marrakesh was the quintessentially Almoravid city, for it owed its very existence to the dynasty's first ruler; a considerable number of important monuments from that period must undoubtedly have once been found there. Unfortunately, Almoravid buildings in Marrakesh were systematically destroyed by the Almohads when they seized the city in 1147 and made it their capital. We do know, however, that it was 'Alī ibn Yūsuf who built the fortified walls of the city established by his father, equipped it with gates and a bridge over the Oued Tansift River, and supplied it and its suburbs with an ingenious system of underground aqueducts, known in Arabic as *khaṭṭaras* and comparable to the *qanāts* of Iran and Central Asia.

Archaeological research conducted in the 1950s and recently supplemented by other studies now enables us to glimpse what Almoravid art was like in its heyday roughly between 1106 and 1145. Of the Great Mosque built by 'Alī ibn Yūsuf in Marrakesh (to which our minbar was destined), there remains only one monument, but it is of exceptional value. The small pavilion known as the Qubba of the Barūdiyyīn was the central element that formed part of the annexes of the old Great Mosque, which, according to Jacques Meunié's excavations, also contained the foundation of a minaret that had two parallel staircases (as the Córdoba minaret had) and a cistern. 15 In this cupola we have a remarkable masterpiece that a contemporary inscription attributes to the time of 'Alī ibn Yūsūf. In addition, excavations at the site of the first Almohad mosque (the "first Kutubiyya"), adjacent to the present Kutubiyya mosque, revealed the remains of the palace of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf, known in the texts as the Osar al-ḥajar (Fortress of Stone), where painted glazes and sets of fountains attest to a sophisticated artistic wealth.16

The Kutubiyya minbar survives today because, fortunately, the Almohads understood its value. They spared it during the brutal taking of Marrakesh, when the mosque of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf and so many other Almoravid monuments were destroyed. The Almohad ruler 'Abd al-Mu'min, surely dazzled by this masterpiece, salvaged it for his congregational mosque and incorporated it into an ingenious system for a mechanical *maqṣūra*. This system remains unique in the history of Islam and was long the pride of 'Abd al-Mu'min. According to a description from the anonymous fourteenth-century chronicle of the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties, *al-Ḥulal al-mawshiyya*,

The caliph 'Abd al-Mu'min built on the [remains of the] Dar al-Hajar [the Almoravid fortress] another mosque for the congregational prayer on Friday and undertook the construction of the congregational mosque. He ordered the demolition of the congregational mosque at the other end of town, which 'Alī ibn Yūsuf had constructed. When 'Abd al-Mu'min had completed the construction of this [new] mosque, he had a vaulted passage built to link the palace and the mosque, . . . which he was the only one to know about. He had a monumental Andalusian minbar of rare perfection brought into the congregational mosque. It was made from Khmer wood and red and yellow sandalwood; its metal ornaments were of gold and silver. He also had installed a wooden maqsūra which had six sides and could hold more than a thousand men. The one who had been commissioned to build it was a man from Málaga, named al-Hajj Yacīsh, who also constructed the fortress of Jabal al-Fath [Gibraltar] as it now appears, during the reign of caliph 'Abd al-Mu'min ibn 'Alī. This magṣūra was arranged as follows: it was placed on a mechanism [harakat handasiyya] by means of which it was raised when 'Abd al-Mu'min appeared and lowered when he withdrew. To achieve this result, to the right of the mihrab stood a door behind which there was a room containing the working apparatus [harakat] of the magsūra and of the minbar. 'Abd al-Mu'min would enter the mosque and leave it through this [second] door. When, on Friday, the time to go to the mosque was drawing near, the mechanism was activated, after the mats covering the floor of the magsūra had been removed. The sides were raised simultaneously, for not even a minute [daqiqa] elapsed between their respective appearances. The door of the minbar remained closed, but when the preacher rose to climb the minbar, the door opened and the minbar came out at once, soundlessly and without allowing anyone to glimpse its functioning [tadbir].¹⁷

Such, then, was the jewel case that the Almohads had created for this gem, the minbar of 'Alī ibn Yūsuf. Indeed, Meunié's excavation at the site of the first Kutubiyya mosque confirmed the existence of this mechanized, retractable *maqṣūra*, which must have astonished the people of that time.

Although the fourteenth-century chronicler exaggerated the size of this magsūra when he wrote that it could hold a thousand men, he was entirely correct when he noted that the minbar had ornaments of precious metal, for technical analyses performed during the recent conservation treatement confirm his statements. 18 The deeply carved and pierced panels that decorate the backrest of the minbar had a gilded ground, which was probably designed to illuminate the hollows of the decoration and bring out the carved motifs. This curious and original technique was adopted on the highest point on the minbar, where it would accentuate the contrasts and, in so doing, make the reading of the decoration easier. The same technique was employed again in the Almohad minbar of the Qasba mosque in Marrakesh, but there the decorative pierced plaques on the flanks have been glued to a silver-plated background.

Our brief survey of Almoravid accomplishments has meant to establish the considerable importance of this period in the history of western Islamic art. And everything that best expresses the decorative spirit of western Islam can ultimately be found in the minbar from the Kutubiyya mosque, one of the most beautiful gems of Maghribi-Andalusian civilization. The minbar is a true art lesson, for its inexhaustible repertory has inspired decorative artists in the past and will certainly continue to do so. Famous once, then forgotten for years, and now with its splendor recaptured after restoration, the Kutubiyya minbar is the crowning jewel of the incomparable Badi^c Palace. In fact, the minbar and the palace share a common destiny: both have been brought back to life by efforts to rehabilitate the nation's museum of Islamic art.

It is our sincere hope that there will be similar endeavors to safeguard other endangered masterpieces—in particular, the Almoravid minbar in the Qarawiyyīn mosque in Fez and the Almohad minbars in the mosque in Taza and in the Qaṣba mosque in Marrakesh (the latter in effect a simplified miniature of the Kutubiyya minbar). These three twelfth-century minbars, so inadequately maintained, have never ceased to serve their purpose. We feel that the time has come to save them from destruction, before it is too late, and to offer them a well-deserved "retirement" in museum exhibition galleries.

I. We wish to thank all the members of the Moroccan-American team who contributed from near and far to the realization of the minbar restoration project. In particular, we are grateful to the operational

- team, which worked for seven months to ensure the minbar's stability and to recapture the original radiance of its decoration. We must not overlook the considerable efforts of the draftsman Abdelaziz Zoubhir in helping us make the surveys and drawings of the minbar. We would also like to thank Abdelaziz Touri, Director of the Moroccan Cultural Heritage, for entrusting us with the task of overseeing this project.
- 2. For a discussion of this and other inscriptions on the minbar, see essay by Bloom herein, pp. 14–20.
- 3. See essay by Soultanian et al. herein, p. 70 and n. 81.
- 4. Lévi-Provençal 1925, pp. 33 (Arabic), 65 (French); for an English translation, see Bloom forthcoming.
- 5. These woods were identified by wood species analysis performed by Antoine Wilmering. See essay by Soultanian et al. herein, pp. 72–73.
- 6. H. Basset and Terrasse 1926a, p. 176.
- 7. For these three buildings, see Bourouiba 1973.
- 8. The maqsūra was a kind of latticework partition, generally made of wood, that enclosed both the mihrab and the minbar and isolated them from the rest of the prayer hall; it served, in effect, as a special room reserved for the ruler.
- 9. H. Terrasse 1968.
- 10. Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun 1957.
- 11. For the minbar, see Marçais 1932.
- 12. Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet 1931–91, nos. 3076, 3090; Bourouiba 1973, pp. 82–84, 89–90.
- 13. Marçais devoted several articles to the building and its history. For a summary, see Marçais [1954], pp. 192–97. For a somewhat different interpretation of the history of this mosque, see Golvin 1966; Bourouiba 1973, pp. 71ff.
- 14. H. Terrasse 1968, pp. 49 (minbar), 78-80 (nave).
- 15. Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun 1957.
- 16. Meunié, Terrasse, and Deverdun 1952.
- 17. French translation by Gaston Deverdun in ibid., pp. 45–47, based on Allouche 1936, pp. 119–20.
- 18. See essay by Soultanian et al. herein, pp. 73-74.

Appendix, Selected Bibliography, and Index

Appendix: Arabic Text of the Inscriptions on the Minbar from the Kutubiyya Mosque

JONATHAN M. BLOOM

The text of the Arabic inscriptions on the minbar is, like that of all contemporary inscriptions in angular script, unpointed and unvoweled. To facilitate reading the transcription, I have supplied points, some vowels, and orthographic signs as well as marks to separate the verses, but I have respected the peculiarities of the Quranic orthography used on the minbar. The inscriptions are presented here in the order in which they are discussed on pages 14–20 of the text.

Backrest, cavetto

[بسم الله الرحمن الر]حيم وصلى الله على محمد وسلم صُنع هاذا المنبر بمدينة قرطبة حرّسها الله لهاذا الجامع المكرّم ادام الله مدّته بكلمة اسلام فتمّ ...

Backrest, impost blocks

اللهم آيّد أمير [[المسلمين علي بن يوسف] بن تسفين ثم ولي عهده

Right flank, stepped edge (Qur³an 7:54-61)

أعوذ بالله العظيم من الشيطان الرحيم بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم أن ربّكم الله الذي خلق السموات والارض في ستة ايام ثم استوى على العرش يغشى اليّل النهار يـطلبه حثيثاً والشمس والقمر والنجوم مسخرت بامره الاله الخلق والامر تبرك الله ربّ العلمين أله العوا ربّكم تضرّعاً وخفية انه لايحب المعتدين أو ولاتفسدوا في الارض بعد اصلاحها وادعوه خوفاً وطمعا ان رحمت الله قريب من المحسنين أوهو الذي يـرسل الريح بشرا بين يدى رحمته حتى اذا اقلت سحاباً ثقالاً سقنه لبادٍ ميتٍ فانزلنا به الماء فاخرجنا به من كل الثمرات كذالك نخرج الموتى لعلكم تذكرون أو البلد الطيب يخرج نباته باذن ربه والذي خبث لا يخرج الانكدا كذالك نصرف الايات لقوم يشكرون أله لقد ارسلنا نوحا الى قومه فقال يقوم اعبد والله مالكم من الاه غيره انى اخاف عليكم عذاب يومٍ عظيمٍ أقال الملا من قومه انا لنراك في ضلالٍ مبينٍ أقال يعقوم ليس بي ضلالة ولكنى رسولٌ من ربّ العلمين أله صدق

Right flank, upper arched frame

اعتصم بالله وكفى من توكل على الله

Left flank, stepped edge (Qur'an 2:255-57)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم وصلى الله على محمد وعلى اله سلم تسليما الله لا اله هو الحي القيوم لا تاحذه سنة لا نوم له ما في السموات وما في الارض من ذالذي يشفع عنده الا باذنه يعلم ما بين ايديهم وما خلفهم ولا يحيطون بشيء من علمه الا بماشاء وسع كرسيه السموات والارض ولايوده حظفهما وهو العلى العظيم لا اكراه في الدين قد تبين الرشد من الغى فمن يكفر بالطاغوت ويومن بالله فقد استمسك بالعروة الوثقى لاانفصام لها والله سميع عليم الله ولى الذين امنوا يخرجهم من الظلمات الى النور والذين كفروا اولئهم الطاغوت يخرجونهم من النور الى الظلمات الى اولئهم اصحاب النار هم فيها خلدون عصدق الله ورسوله عمن عرسها الله وكانت البداية في صنعه بعون الله في أوّل يوم من شهر محرّم عام اثنين وثلاثين وخمس مائة أعظم الله اجر الامر بعمله والناظر...

Left flank, upper arched frame

الواحد الحافظ الله والامين حبربا

Lower left frame (Qur'an 112:1-4)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم وصلى الله على محمد وعلى اله وسلم تسليماً ۞ قل هو الله احد ۞ الله الصمد ۞ لم يلد ولم يولد ۞ ولم يك[ن له كفواً احد]

Lower right frame (Qur³an 113:1-5)

قل اعوذ بربّ الفلق ﴿ من شرّ ما خلق ﴿ ومن شرّ غاشق اذا وقب ومن شرّ النفثت في العقد ﴿ ومن شرّ حاسد اذا حسد

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