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The Power of Curves: the Rise of Maghribi *tuluṭ* (Fifth–Sixth/Eleventh–Twelfth Centuries)

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Abstract

This article examines the origin and spread of Maghribi *tuluṭ*, a distinctive epigraphic style employed on buildings and inscribed artefacts in Northwest Africa and al-Andalus, from the late fifth/eleventh century onwards. The rise of Maghribi *tuluṭ* is part of a wider phenomenon that saw curvilinear scripts adopted in contexts and media previously dominated by angular “Kufic” scripts throughout the Islamic world, from Ghazna to Marrakesh. However, the circumstances of this epigraphic revolution differed from region to region, as did the techniques and stylistic features of the new curvilinear inscriptions. The development of Maghribi *tuluṭ* was the result of influences coming from the Eastern Mediterranean, assimilated and transformed in different ways within the cultural and artisanal milieux of Norman Sicily, Khurasanid Tunis, and the Almoravid Empire further west. This article considers the possible channels through which Maghribi *tuluṭ* spread across these regions – with an emphasis on chancery documents and practices – and how the Almohads ultimately transformed this script into a dynastic “brand” with ideological undertones.

Keywords

Almohads – Almoravids – Arabic epigraphy – Khurasanids – Maghrib – Marrakesh – Norman Sicily – Tunis

1 Introduction

In the month of Ġumādā 1 600/January 1204, a massive cast bronze chandelier was receiving the final touches in a workshop of Fes. As evidenced by an inscription on one of the stem-pieces, its construction was commissioned by the Almohad caliph Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Nāṣir (r. 595–610/1199–1213) for the middle dome of the axial nave of the Qarawiyyīn Mosque, five bays away from the mihrab, where it still hangs today (Fig. 1).¹ Some 120 years later, the Moroccan chronicler Ibn Abi Zar‘ reports that this great chandelier – *al-turayyā al-kubrā* – had replaced an earlier one of similar size, which had fallen into disrepair. The latter was dismembered, melted down, and re-cast with the addition of new metal “in the days of the righteous jurist and pious preacher ‘Abd Allāh b. Mūsā,



FIGURE 1
The great Almohad chandelier of
the Qarawiyyin Mosque, 600/1204
© IMAGE BY U. BONGIANINO

who championed its construction [*iğtahada fī ‘amali-hā*]” (Ibn Abī Zar‘, 1972: p. 66).² When the new chandelier was installed in 600/1204, ‘Abd Allāh had just been appointed preacher of the Qarawiyyin Mosque and was only eighteen years old; however, he was already renowned for his piety, wisdom, and good manners, and held in high esteem by al-Nāṣir himself, who was only a few years older than him (Ibn Abī Zar‘, 1972: pp. 73–4; see also al-Ġaznā’ī, 1991: p. 58). Since the inscriptions on the chandelier do not mention the young cleric, it can be argued that Ibn Abī Zar‘ exaggerated ‘Abd Allāh’s agency to the detriment of the caliph, in keeping with the anti-Almohad tinge of his chronicle. In a similar vein, al-Ġaznā’ī, another Marinid historian, adds that all 717 dinars spent on the chandelier originated from the revenues of the mosque’s endowments.³ This claim is evidently in contrast with the content of the dedicatory inscription: “this is what was commissioned by the caliph, the imam, the commander of the faithful, Abū ‘Abd Allāh, the son of the caliph al-Manṣūr, the son of the rightly-guided caliphs.”

The great Almohad chandelier of the Qarawiyyin Mosque is a highly symbolic artefact featuring a complex epigraphic programme chiselled in several different styles. A lengthy sequence of eulogies, prayers, and Quranic quotations adorns its dodecagonal base with the inner dome, as well as the openwork tracery of the wide circular

brim inserted between the base and the conical structure supporting nine tiers of lamp holders. In 1968, Henri Terrasse divided the epigraphic styles of the chandelier into two groups, “*koufique*” and “*cursif*,” a dichotomy that was maintained unaltered in all ensuing publications. In the catalogue of the 2014 Louvre exhibition *Le Maroc médiéval*, Terrasse’s first observations were updated only minimally by replacing the word “*cursif*” with the equally problematic term “*naskhī*” (Lintz et al., 2014: p. 334).⁴ However, the technical and stylistic variety of these inscriptions is visibly wider and more nuanced.

In particular, the outermost epigraphic band of the brim (Fig. 2) was chiselled in relief in a distinctive style that can be best defined as Maghribi round script, due to the accentuated semi-circular shape of some of its letters (in particular, the body of *ṣād*, *dād*, *ṭā*, and *zā*, and the tail of final *sīn*, *šīn*, *ṣād*, *dād*, *qāf*, and *nūn*). Since their earliest documented appearance in al-Andalus at the end of the third/ninth century, Maghribi round scripts had always remained specific to the written page. In fact, by the sixth/twelfth century, they had become the standard bookhands employed by all Maghribi copyists in their manuscripts, on both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar.⁵ The great chandelier of Qarawiyyīn may be the earliest instance – and indeed a very rare one – of Maghribi round scripts being used for an inscription on hard material. The only other known example from this period is found on a very similar chandelier produced four years later, in the same workshop, but this time for the Great Mosque of Meknes, where it now hangs from one of the domes of the axial nave, six bays away from the mihrab (Ṣalāḥ Sālim, 2015: pp. 116–8, figs. 29–32).⁶ Despite the almost identical shape and dimensions, the inscriptions on this second chandelier do not mention a royal patron, and the openwork tracery shows a lesser degree of finish. However, the Maghribi round script used in the outer band of its brim is the same as that of the Qarawiyyīn chandelier.

Both inscriptions constitute the longest unbroken Quranic quotations of the chandeliers’ epigraphic decoration, and they are positioned in what is arguably their most prominent spot, especially visible to those standing below them. The passages chosen are identical, with the addition of two verses in the Qarawiyyīn inscription, which is slightly longer.⁷ Most likely due to their Quranic content, the coppersmith at work on these epigraphic bands imitated with great mastery the calligraphic version of Maghribi



FIGURE 2
Maghribi *mabsūt* script on the
great Almohad chandelier of the
Qarawiyyīn Mosque (outer band)
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round script used by contemporary Quranic scribes, known to both mediaeval and modern scholars as *mabsūṭ* (“dilated”) script.⁸ In particular, the artisan managed to emulate beautifully the sinuous movements of a calligrapher’s pen, as well as the signs of notation and vocalisation employed in Maghribi Qurans: the horizontal strokes of *fatha* and *kasra*, the signs of *ḍamma*, *sukūn*, and *tašdīd*, and the tiny diacritical letters (*‘alāmāt al-ihmāl*) positioned below *ḥā*, *sīn*, *ṣād*, and *‘ayn*. All these elements, and the shape of the letters themselves, were directly drawn from the *mabsūṭ* scripts of coeval Quranic codices, such as the monumental one – originally in twenty volumes – produced in Seville in 632/1235 and endowed to the dynastic cemetery of Tinmal by the penultimate Almohad caliph al-Murtaḍā in 649/1251 (Fig. 3).⁹

It is especially significant that these two exceptional inscriptions should date from the heyday of the Almohad Empire, when the art of penmanship flourished in the Maghrib as never before. Under the Almohads, the finest Andalusī calligraphers settled down in cities like Fes, Marrakesh, and Tlemcen, contributing greatly to the development of the arts of the book in Northwest Africa (Bongianino, 2022: pp. 194–210; Puerta, 2007: p. 161; al-Manūnī, 1991: pp. 27–42). What can be observed on these two chandeliers is the fruitful collaboration between a master calligrapher specialised in copying the Quran, who laid out the preparatory drawings for the inscriptions, and a gifted coppersmith who fastidiously incised and chiselled them into the metal. These unique artefacts bear witness to a high degree of synergy between artists working with different materials, as



FIGURE 3
Maghribi *mabsūṭ* script in an
Almohad Quran copied in Seville,
632/1235
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AND ISLAMIC AFFAIRS,
KINGDOM OF MOROCCO

well as to the strong symbolic connotation of certain calligraphic styles: a script immediately recognisable as Quranic was chosen for the most prominent Quranic inscriptions, despite the technical challenges this choice presented.

As already mentioned, round *mabsūt* is just one of the several scripts displayed on these lavish metal objects, and a definite rarity in the corpus of Almohad epigraphy. By the time of al-Nāṣir's reign, Almohad inscriptions on hard materials were dominated by another curvilinear style, which also features prominently on the Qarawiyyīn and Meknes chandeliers: the so-called Maghribi *tuluṭ* (Fig. 4). Since Maghribi *tuluṭ* is the subject of this article, the reader may wonder why I began by discussing two inscriptions in a different style. The reason is that Maghribi *tuluṭ* is perhaps best defined by contrast with Maghribi round script: though both curvilinear, the two styles differ profoundly in aesthetic terms, and this has never been explicitly acknowledged. The aim of this article is to reconstruct the origin and diffusion of Maghribi *tuluṭ* in the epigraphic record of the mediaeval Islamic West, under the Almohads' predecessors. In particular, I shall focus on the Almoravid period in present-day Morocco and Western Algeria (r. 453–541/1061–1147), and on the emirate established by the Banū Ḥurāsān in Tunis (r. 451–553/1059–1158). I shall also consider the possible channels through which Maghribi *tuluṭ* spread across these regions – with an emphasis on chancery documents and practices – and how the Almohads (r. 541–667/1147–1269) ultimately transformed this script into a dynastic “brand” with ideological undertones.

From the examples just mentioned and the material presented below, it is evident that the ruling elites of the Islamic Mediterranean and the literate ranks of mediaeval Muslim societies were keenly aware of the functions, meaning, and suitability of different writing styles in different contexts, in a way that we are only now beginning to understand. The questions addressed here concern precisely the extent to which extra-textual messages were conveyed by the stylistic features of specific scripts and the possible reasons why certain artisans, calligraphers, and patrons decided that an inscription should be executed in one particular style rather than another. The aesthetic and symbolism of Maghribi *tuluṭ* represented a real revolution in the material culture of Northwest Africa during the fifth–sixth/eleventh–twelfth centuries, as this article aims to demonstrate.



FIGURE 4
Inscription in Maghribi *tuluṭ* with the date of completion of the great Almohad chandelier of the Qarawiyyīn Mosque
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2 Maghribi *tuluṭ*: Towards a Definition

In exactly the same way as Terrasse, all the Arabic epigraphers of al-Andalus and the Maghrib have hitherto founded their work on the distinction between angular and curvilinear styles, traditionally framed in terms of “Kufic” vs. “cursive” scripts.¹⁰ Of the former – an inescapable misnomer already attested in mediaeval sources – scholars have scrutinised the archaic, simple, foliated, and interlaced variants, from their earliest appearance in Idrisid Fes and Umayyad Córdoba, up until the eighth/fourteenth century. Less attention has generally been devoted to “cursive” scripts, frequently labelled with the technical term *nash* or *nashī*, which, strictly speaking, can only define those scripts used for copying books (*nasaḥa* means “to transcribe”), and not inscriptions on hard materials.¹¹ Moreover, while the “cursive” epigraphy of the Islamic East was connected with the codification of proportioned scripts (*al-ḥuṭūṭ al-mansūba*), this was not the case in the West, where Maghribi round scripts developed an aesthetic of their own, and were only exceptionally transferred to media other than parchment and paper.

A more pertinent term to define the curvilinear epigraphic scripts of al-Andalus and the Maghrib, I would argue, is *tuluṭ* (or *tulṭ*). During the last two decades, this expression has been timidly introduced in the literature on Nasrid and Marinid inscriptions – “*tuluṭ granadino*” (Barceló, 1998: vol. 1, p. 235; Puerta, 2017), “*tulṭ granadino-magrebi*” (Martínez Enamorado, 2005: p. 243) – but it can be effectively applied to earlier periods as well. Admittedly, even the term *tuluṭ* is not free of ambiguities. In fact, it is borrowed from the calligraphic traditions of the central and Eastern Islamic lands, especially Egypt, Iraq, and Syria.¹² Its etymology (*tuluṭ* means “one third”) refers to a set of fixed proportions either between letter shapes, or in the cutting and nibbing of the reed pen, which were theorised and observed by the master scribes of the East, but not in the West. However, the “imported” nature of the term *tuluṭ* may also be turned to its advantage, as it does point in the right direction: the source of inspiration for the curvilinear epigraphy of the Maghrib was indeed the Eastern Mediterranean, and there is textual evidence suggesting that Maghribi *tuluṭ* scripts were probably simply perceived as *mašriqī* (“Eastern”) by contemporaries. The Marinid historian Ibn Marzūq (d. 781/1379), for instance, refers to the style of the endowment inscriptions commissioned by his master, the sultan Abū al-Ḥasan, as *mašriqī* (Ibn Marzūq, 1981: p. 311).¹³ Another mediaeval source referring to the *mašriqī* script used by the Almohad caliphs will be discussed below.

Leaving terminology aside, more should be done to firmly identify the defining palaeographic features of Maghribi *tuluṭ* as a whole and from its earliest appearance, desisting from excessively narrow analyses of single artefacts, monuments, sites, or later developments.¹⁴ A preliminary list of traits shared by Maghribi *tuluṭ* inscriptions during the sixth/twelfth century include:

- The rather “loose,” flowing, and winding aspect of letter shafts and tails;
- The frequent stacking and nesting of groups of letters and ligatures, resulting in multiple baselines and a wavy, often convoluted *ductus*;
- The abundance of abusive ligatures between letters that should not be connected;
- The use of hairline strokes (*taš‘irāt*) at the end of letters such as final and isolated ‘*ayn*, ‘*gayn*, *mīm*, *yā*’ and *alif maqṣūra*;
- The presence of a head serif (*tarwīs*) oriented rightwards in the stems of *alif*, *ṭā*, *zā*, and *lām*, less frequently in isolated *bā*, *tā*, *ṭā*, *dāl*, *dāl*, *sīn*, *šīn*, and *kāf*;
- The left-turned foot of *alif*, sometimes rendered as a hook;
- Final “sloping” *rā*, *zā*, and *nūn*, traced without a denticle above the baseline and often ending in a small hook or curl;

- Final and isolated *sīn*, *šīn*, *šād*, *dād*, *qāf*, and *nūn* traced with rather flattened and stretched descenders, only moderately sloping downward, then curled upwards, and sometimes joined to the next letter through abusive ligatures;
- Final *hā'* and *tā' marbūṭa* “bowed upwards,” i.e., rendered with an open counter.

Some of these features depart noticeably from those of coeval Eastern *tuluṭ*, the best examples of which can be found in Zangid and Ayyubid epigraphy, Jaziran and Syrian metalwork, and Raqqā lustreware. In fact, it would be a mistake to consider the relationship between Maghribi and Eastern *tuluṭ* as merely imitative: the old-fashioned paradigm of the peripheral West slavishly adopting the artistic trends of the central Islamic lands does not seem to apply in this case. While Maghribi *tuluṭ* was undeniably inspired by contemporary Eastern scripts, it also represented a highly original re-interpretation of Eastern calligraphy.

3 Maghribi *tuluṭ* under the Almoravids

The rise of Maghribi *tuluṭ* was not a linear phenomenon confined to a single geographic area; in fact, it seems to have occurred along two main axes, at the end of the eleventh century. The first axis encompassed the “far” Maghrib (*al-Mağrib al-aqṣā*): here, the new curvilinear script made its earliest appearance in some of the main Almoravid cities of present-day Morocco and Western Algeria. On coinage, Maghribi *tuluṭ* is already attested in some undated quarter dinars minted in Sijilmasa under the Almoravid emir Yūsuf b. Tāšifīn (r. 453–500/1061–1106), whose name appears prominently on the reverse (Launois, 1967; Medina, 1988; Hazard, 1952: p. 103, no. 91, pl. 1) (Fig. 5). Subsequently, it was employed on several fractional silver coins struck by Yūsuf’s successors (Fig. 6), where it became increasingly flowing, while Almoravid dinars and dirhams continued to feature traditional angular scripts exclusively.¹⁵

As for monumental epigraphy, Maghribi *tuluṭ* was employed in the stucco decoration of at least three buildings erected under Yūsuf’s son and successor ‘Alī (r. 500–37/1106–43). The earliest of them is the ablution pavilion known as the Almoravid *qubba* (“dome”) in Marrakesh, tentatively dated by Gaston Deverdun to 511/1117 (Meunié et al., 1957: pp. 40–2, 49–52).¹⁶ At the base of its inner dome, the dedicatory inscription in praise of the ruling emir was carved in a flamboyant and winding style that reproduced very closely certain letter shapes found in contemporary fractional coins: crossed *lām-alif* with a round loop at the bottom, final swooping *nūn*, and nested clusters of letters. Interestingly, the inscription in the *qubba* was enhanced with foliated scrolls that no longer stem from the letters themselves, as in “Kufic” epigraphy, but form a delicate background to the text.¹⁷ It is precisely with the development of Maghribi *tuluṭ* that this three-dimensional effect is first achieved in the Arabic epigraphy of the Islamic West. The same script and approach to ornamental fillers can be observed in the frieze at the base of the elaborate dome added by ‘Alī b. Yūsuf to the Great Mosque of Tlemcen in 530/1136 (Marçais and Marçais, 1903: pp. 91–3; Bourouiba, 1984: pp. 102–5; Almagro, 2015: pp. 222–4) (Fig. 7). Finally, in a historical inscription above the mihrab of the Qarawiyyīn Mosque, dated to the following year, the same Maghribi *tuluṭ* is embellished with vocalisation marks, additional ligatures, and overlapping letters, in such an extravagant way that it did not require any vegetal background (Terrasse, 1968: pp. 36, 80) (Fig. 8).

As remarked by Georges Marçais in 1954, what these three inscriptions have in common is that they contain texts of a documentary nature, reporting the name of the patron, the date in which the work was achieved, and even, in the Qarawiyyīn Mosque, the name of the master mason or plaster carver, a certain ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad:



FIGURE 5
Two quarter dinars of Yūsuf b. Tāšifīn (d. 500/1106) with legends in Maghribi *tuluṭ*. Undated, struck in Sijilmasa. British Museum, London, inv. nos. 1999,1207.1-2
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FIGURE 6
Three Almoravid silver coins with legends in Maghribi *tuluṭ*. Top: *qirāṭ* of 'Alī b. Yūsuf (d. 537/1143), undated, unknown mint; middle: *qirāṭ* of 'Alī b. Yūsuf, undated, unknown mint; bottom: *qirāṭ* of Ishāq b. 'Alī (r. 537-9/1143-5), undated, struck in Córdoba. Museo Casa de la Moneda, Madrid, inv. RE 73957
© STEPHEN ALBUM RARE COINS (TOP AND MIDDLE), MUSEO CASA DE LA MONEDA (BOTTOM)

It is initially in the texts mentioning the founders' names and the foundations' dates that cursive is employed, while Kufic remains associated with religious formulae. Either the ruler preferred to proclaim his patronage in a style that could be more easily deciphered by the populace, or a subliminal correlation was established between the sacred text and Kufic, the learned and hieratic script used in the earliest Qurans.¹⁸

The documentary use that the Almoravids made of *tuluṭ* epigraphy is evident despite a few instances where curvilinear scripts were also employed for Quranic quotations. This happened in the Qarawiyyīn Mosque, on some *muqarnas* elements decorating the ceiling of the axial nave (531/1137) (Terrasse, 1968: p. 36, pls. 47, 52–3; Lintz et al., 2014: p. 200, cat. 102), and in the ivory-inlaid bands framing the arch of the Almoravid minbar, completed in 538/1144 according to written sources (Terrasse, 1968: pp. 49–53; Lintz et al., 2014: pp. 198–9, cat. 101) (Fig. 9).¹⁹ In the latter case, however, a surviving fragment



FIGURE 7
Epigraphic stucco frieze in
Maghribi *tuluṭ* under the
Almoravid dome of the Great
Mosque of Tlemcen, 530/1136
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FIGURE 8
Historical inscription in Maghribi
tuluṭ above the mihrab of the
Qarawiyyīn Mosque, 531/1137
© IMAGE BY U. BONGIANINO



FIGURE 9
Maghribi *tulut* inscription on
the Almoravid minbar of the
Qarawiyyīn Mosque, 538/1144 (?)
© IMAGE BY U. BONGIANINO

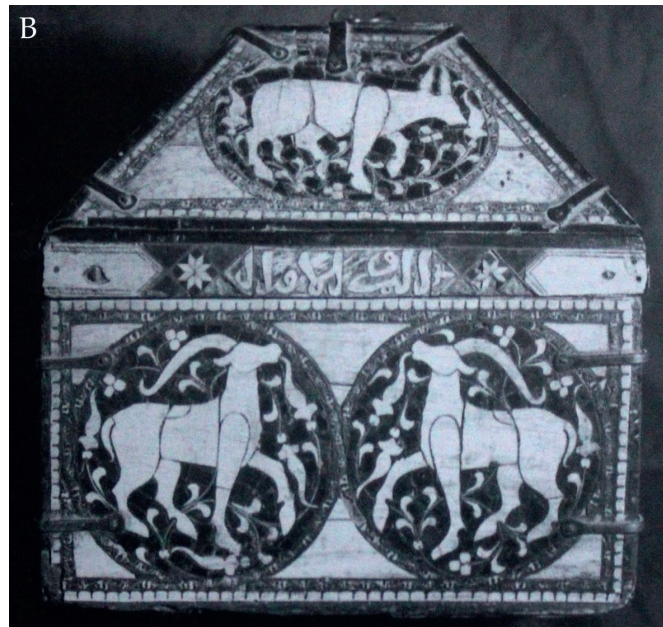
of the lost dedicatory inscription shows that it too was executed in Maghribi *tulut*, as would be expected.²⁰

If we consider portable objects, a comparable script and technique can be seen on three ivory-inlaid wooden caskets likely produced in al-Andalus, datable from between the end of the fifth/eleventh and the second half of the sixth/twelfth centuries. On one of them – probably the oldest – the epigraphic band features a poetic dedication in foliated “Kufic,” but the signature of the craftsman on the front of the casket, just under the clasp, is in a curvilinear script (Fig. 10).²¹ On the other two caskets (Figs. 11a–b), the bands are entirely inscribed in Maghribi *tulut*, with formulae invoking “success and prosperity” (*al-yumn wa-l-iqbāl*) upon the owner, and also a puzzling allusion to the “house of the caliphate” (*dār al-ḥilāfa*).²² This can be interpreted as a reference to the ‘Abbasids of Baghdad, to whom the Almoravids pledged allegiance, although the motto *al-yumn wa-l-iqbāl* (Fig. 11b) may indicate a connection with the rebel emir Ibn Mardaniš of Murcia and Valencia (r. 542–67/1147–72). Ibn Mardaniš upheld the Almoravids’ nominal loyalty to the ‘Abbasids, in opposition to the Maghribi caliphate established by the Almohads: under his rule, curvilinear epigraphy was introduced in Eastern Iberia, most notably to decorate palaces and mosques with the formula *al-yumn wa-l-iqbāl* (Martínez Enamorado, 2009: pp. 27–31). It is therefore possible that these two caskets were produced after the fall of the Almoravids for the court of Ibn Mardaniš, although using a script inherited from the previous rulers.

After this brief survey, the question arises as to why the Almoravids adopted a curvilinear epigraphic style of Eastern derivation to have their names, titles, and patronage proclaimed on buildings they erected or renovated, as well as on some of their



FIGURE 10
The artisan's signature in Maghribi *tuluṭ* on an ivory-inlaid wooden casket, late fifth/eleventh or early sixth/twelfth centuries
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FIGURES 11A–B
Epigraphic bands in Maghribi *tuluṭ* on two ivory-inlaid wooden caskets, mid-sixth/twelfth century
PHOTO © MUSEUM OF THE CATHEDRAL, TORTOSA

coins. As we have seen, Marçais thought they did so to improve the legibility of certain texts. That, however, is hardly convincing, since the aesthetic of Maghribi *tuluṭ* was not only very far from that of contemporary bookhands (i.e., Maghribi round scripts), but it also involved flourishes and decorative elements – such as the abusive ligatures and foliated background – which must have made this style as difficult to decipher for an untrained eye as angular epigraphy. Some thirty years ago, Yasser Tabbaa hypothesised an ideological motive behind the origin of Maghribi *tuluṭ*: through its adoption, the Almoravids may have wanted to express their loyalty to, and doctrinal alignment with, the ‘Abbasid caliphs in the East (1994: pp. 136–7; 2001: pp. 66–8).²³ Pace professor Tabbaa and his “Sunnī revival” theory, there is simply not enough evidence to support this conjecture: it is clear from the sources that the Almoravids’ allegiance to Baghdad was solely established through the conventional channels of Friday sermons, the exchange of diplomatic letters and gifts, and a reference to the ‘Abbasid “commander of the faithful (*amīr al-muʿminīn*)” on their dinars and dirhams (Bennison, 2016: pp. 49–50; Messier, 2010: pp. 87, 108–9, 212; Lagardère, 1989: pp. 165–7). The names and titles of the ‘Abbasid caliphs were never inscribed on the fractional coinage bearing legends in Maghribi *tuluṭ*, and they are also completely absent from Almoravid monumental epigraphy.

I would like to suggest here that the Maghribi *tuluṭ* introduced in Almoravid documentary inscriptions was derived from chancery scripts and practices imported from further east, but without a specific ideological or political agenda. We know that the ‘Abbasids employed flowing proportioned scripts in their documents and correspondence, including the official letter issued by the caliph al-Mustaẓhir in 491/1098 to invest Yūsuf b. Tāšifīn with the titles of “commander of the Muslims and defender of religion (*amīr al-Muslimīn wa-nāšir al-dīn*)” (Lévi-Provençal, 1955).²⁴ While neither this nor any other documents issued from ‘Abbasid Baghdad have survived in the original, copious evidence for the use of proportioned calligraphy comes from the extant decrees emanated by the Fatimid chancery of Cairo, by the command of Shīʿi rulers hostile to both the Sunni caliphs of Baghdad and their Almoravid vassals in the Maghrib.²⁵ Some of the scribes charged with designing inscriptions and coin legends for their Almoravid masters must have come from the emiral chancery (*dīwān al-inšāʿ*) of Marrakesh, an intellectual milieu imbued with literary influences and models imported from Iraq and the Eastern Mediterranean, equally in vogue at the ‘Abbasid and Fatimid courts (Lagardère, 1993–4; Soravia, 2005; El Aallaoui, 2007). In their preparatory drawings for the plaster carvers and die engravers, these professional scribes (*kuttāb*, sing. *kātib*) may have intentionally imitated the calligraphic styles of the ‘Abbasid and Fatimid chanceries simply because that was a widely recognised way of conveying royal titles and dating formulae in documentary contexts. These scripts were then copied by certain craftsmen in their own signatures, as can be seen in both the Qarawiyyīn Mosque (Fig. 8) and the Madrid casket (Fig. 10).

Several recent publications refer (albeit briefly) to the role played by the Nasrid *dīwān al-inšāʿ* in designing the epigraphic programme of the Alhambra – most of which is in Maghribi *tuluṭ* – in the second half of the eighth/fourteenth century (Martínez Enamorado, 2015: p. 165; Puerta, 2017: pp. 183–6; Puerta, 2007: pp. 172–92; Rubiera, 1995: pp. 100–1). It is likely that the same connection between chancery practices and royal inscriptions on hard materials already existed in the Maghrib under earlier dynasties. Unfortunately, not a single Almoravid document or letter has come down to us in its original form, so that it is currently impossible to know exactly what scripts the Almoravid secretaries employed.²⁶ However, corroborating evidence for my argument has survived from coeval Ifriqiya, a region roughly coinciding with present-day Tunisia.

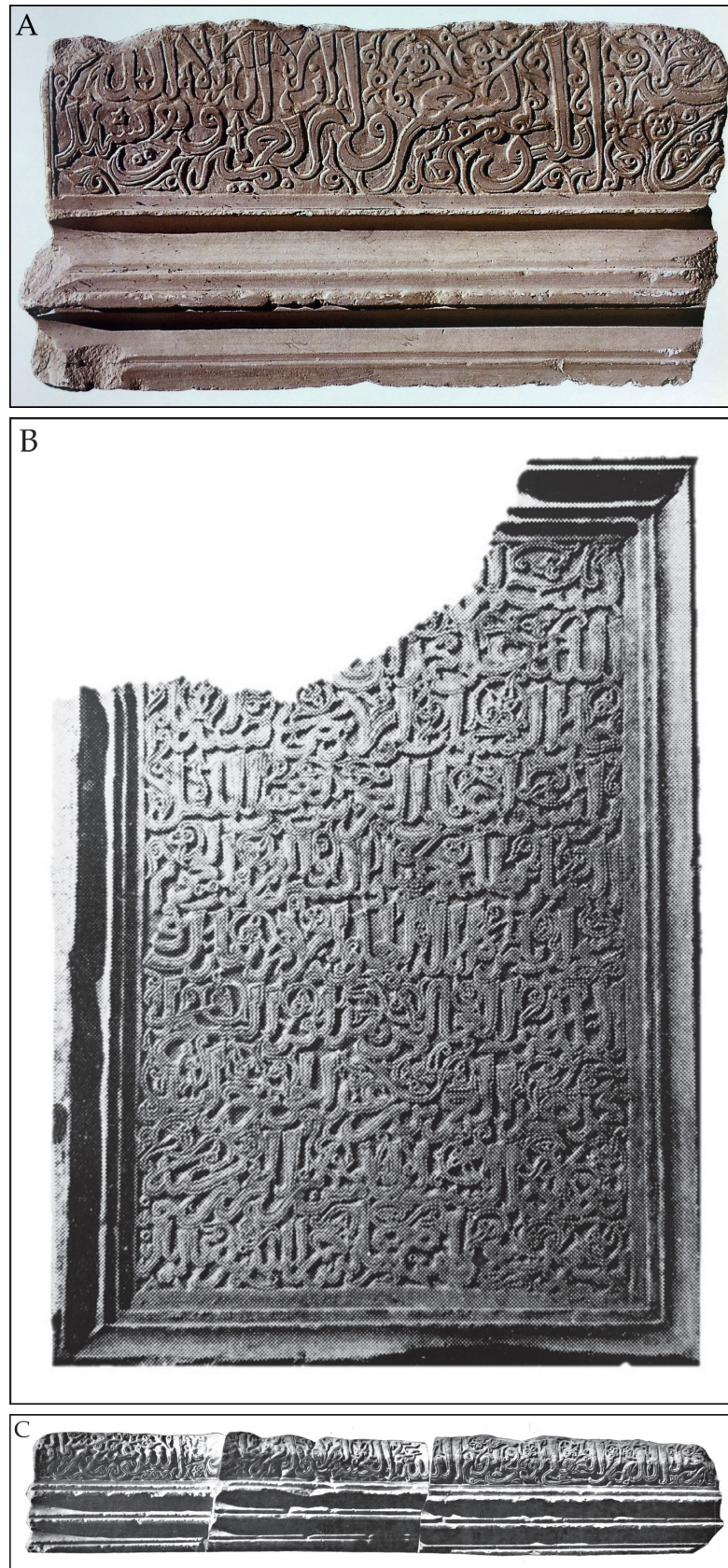
4 Maghribi *tulut* in Ifriqiya and Sicily

The second main stage for the appearance of Maghribi *tulut* epigraphy in the late fifth/eleventh century was the city of Tunis, then the capital of an independent principality ruled by the Banū Ḥurāsān, also known as the Khurasanid dynasty (Idris, 1962: vol. 1, pp. 263–6). In 486/1093, the emir ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 499/1105), together with his brother and heir apparent Ismā‘īl, erected a funerary monument in the shape of a domed pavilion within the Silsila cemetery, in the highest part of the walled medina, close to the palace.²⁷ Underneath this dome and all around it, the burials of the Banū Ḥurāsān were marked by either prismatic steles or rectangular plaques, elaborately inscribed with their names, titles, and dates of death (Zbiss, 1955: pp. 53, especially p. 68, 119–20; Maoudoud, 1983). All tombstones are the product of a single workshop, but while around fifteen of them are in foliated “Kufic,” ten feature sinuous and exuberant *tulut* scripts (Martínez Enamorado, 2015: pp. 157–8; Ben Romdhane, 2001: pp. 50–2) (Figs. 12a–c).

In these ten curvilinear inscriptions, the spaces between the letters are filled with finely carved foliage and scrollwork to serve as a background. Just as in Almoravid *tulut* epigraphy, the vegetal decoration does not interfere with the text: when the former meets the latter, it simply runs “behind” it. On the contrary, in the “Kufic” tombstones produced by the same atelier, the foliage intersects the letters on the same plane and often stems from them. This fundamental difference cannot really be explained as an attempt to improve the legibility of the text, since the exuberant ornamentation makes both types of tombstones equally difficult to decipher. Rather, it seems to indicate that, while the design and execution of the angular inscriptions were entirely in the hands of the stone carvers, the innovative lettering of curvilinear epitaphs was copied from models provided externally, probably by the court, and then enhanced with vegetal motifs of the artisans’ own devising.

Fortuitously, one document issued by the Khurasanid chancery in Tunis survives to this day: a letter sent by the emir ‘Abd Allāh (r. 544–54/1149–59) to the archbishop of Pisa, drafted in 552/1157, and still preserved in the Pisan State Archive (Fig. 13).²⁸ The long paper scroll was penned in a widely spaced, flowing Eastern script with nested baselines, stacked words, and abusive ligatures clearly modelled on those of Fatimid decrees. Decades before the Banū Ḥurāsān came into power, the Zirid emirs of Ifriqiya – initially vassals of the Fatimids – left indisputable evidence that such proportioned Eastern scripts were already known and practised at their court.²⁹ Therefore, it is likely that the chancery documents issued by the first rulers of the Banū Ḥurāsān were penned in the very same script, and that this practice continued unaltered until the last years of the dynasty, as demonstrated by the letter dated 552/1157. It is this very script that was imitated in the curvilinear tombstones of Tunis, the product of what Slimane Zbiss identified as an “*atelier royal*” active between 493–573/1099–1177 (1955: p. 68).³⁰ Unfortunately, the dearth of numismatic evidence from Ifriqiya between the late fifth/eleventh century and the 1160s leaves us in the dark about the script employed on Khurasanid coins (Launois, 1967: p. 67).

The epigraphic *tulut* devised under the Banū Ḥurāsān may also have influenced the style of some Arabic inscriptions at the court of the Norman kings of Sicily. In particular, I am referring to a set of panels in *opus sectile* that originally framed a portal in or around the Palatine Chapel of Palermo, and a second one in the royal palace of Messina, all commissioned by Roger II (r. 524–49/1130–54) (Andaloro, 2006: vol. 1, pp. 498–509, catalogue entries by Jeremy Johns and Annliese Nef). The inscriptions on these panels (Fig. 14) consist of poems in praise of King Roger, his munificence, and the beauty of



FIGURES 12A–C
 Inscriptions in Maghribi *tulum*
 from the cemetery of the Banū
 Ḥurāsān in Tunis. A) The earliest
 tombstone in Maghribi *tulum*,
 dated 493/1099–1100, photo
 from Ben Romdhane (2004);
 B) funerary plaque of the emir
 ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, dated 499/1105,
 photo from Zbiss (1955); C)
 tombstone dated 522/1128, photo
 from Zbiss (1955)



FIGURE 13
First section of a diplomatic letter from the emir of Tunis, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Ibn Ḥurāsān, to the archbishop and notables of Pisa, dated 552/1157. The interlinear Latin translation was added in Pisa
© PISA STATE ARCHIVE

his palaces, and explicitly mention his Arabic name (“*Ruġġār*”) and royal title (“*malik*”). Although the technique is completely different, several striking similarities can be identified between these Sicilian inscriptions and those of the royal tombstones in coeval Tunis: the isolated *alif* terminates with a rightward hook at the bottom; the final *yā*’ and *nūn* have flattened and stretched descenders with swollen extremities curled upwards; there is a general tendency to stack ligatures and words, and to superimpose tails and terminations. The palmettes and foliated scrolls filling the spaces between the letters also bear a remarkable resemblance, though in Tunis they are carved in relief, while in Sicily they are made from shaped porphyry pieces inlaid in white marble, and therefore look clumsier and more stylised.

Traditionally, the appearance of curvilinear scripts in the Arabic royal epigraphy of Norman Sicily has been related to the influence of Fatimid chancery practices, closely

FIGURE 14
Marble frieze in *opus sectile* with inscriptions in Maghribi *tulut*, originally in the Royal Palace of Messina, from the reign of Roger II (525–48/1130–54)
© INTERDISCIPLINARY REGIONAL MUSEUM, MESSINA



FIGURE 15
Inscription in Maghribi *tulut* on a fragmentary bronze brazier found at the Qal'at Banī Ḥammād (Eastern Algeria), early sixth/twelfth century
PHOTO FROM GOLVIN (1965)

imitated in the Arabic documents issued by the *dīwān* of Roger II (Johns, 2006; 2002: pp. 275–9). However, it is equally possible that the chancery scripts of other Muslim courts of the time, such as that of the Banū Ḥurāsān, had an impact on the stylistic shift from “Kufic” to curvilinear inscriptions in the palaces and pavilions of the Norman kings. With regard to portable objects, a Fatimid wooden casket incrustated with ivory in the treasury of the Palatine Chapel exemplifies an important channel through which the aesthetic of curvilinear epigraphy may have reached Sicily, though certainly not the only one.³¹ A fragment of an early sixth/twelfth-century bronze brazier found at the Qal'at Banī Ḥammād (Eastern Algeria), decorated with both foliated “Kufic” and Maghribi *tulut*, represents the sort of merchandise that could have easily travelled to Sicily from Ifriqiya (Golvin, 1965: pp. 274–8, pl. CVII) (Fig. 15). In fact, this and other metal artefacts excavated at the Qal'a bear strong similarities with a bronze pillar lampstand today in Petralia Sottana, Sicily, including a set of curvilinear inscriptions, badly worn yet still discernible (Johns, 2012: pp. 291–6).³²

5 Maghribi *tulut* under the Almohads

When in 554/1159 the last Khurasanid emir was ousted and exiled from Tunis, and the brief Norman occupation of Tripoli and Mahdiyya ended abruptly, it was due to the unstoppable advance of the Almohad army. Under the leadership of the newly proclaimed caliph ‘Abd al-Mu‘min (r. 541–58/1147–63), the new Berber dynasty annexed Ifriqiya into a unitary state that already encompassed the entire Maghrib as well as most of al-Andalus. Consequently, Maghribi *tulut* began appearing in myriad inscriptions on different media throughout the Almohad Empire.³³

Surely, the spread of this new curvilinear style should not be exclusively related to the patronage of the ruling elites. For instance, when around the mid-sixth/twelfth century Maghribi *tulut* was adopted as a calligraphic script by Andalusī Quranic copyists, it first appeared in small manuscripts produced for the market or non-royal notables. The earliest one is a parchment Quran dated 533/1138–9,³⁴ followed by a miniature paper codex from late Almoravid Almería (534/1139),³⁵ and by four more parchment manuscripts copied in Valencia, in the atelier of the Ibn Gaṭṭūs family, between 556–64/1160–9.³⁶ At that time, Valencia was still ruled by the anti-Almohad emir Ibn Mardaniš. Interestingly, Maghribi *tulut* was mainly used in the colophons of these Qurans, to inscribe the date of copying and the names of the calligraphers and patrons: once again, this writing style seems to have served a documentary function, conveying historical information about the artefacts, their makers, and their owners.

Nevertheless, it is also evident that the Almohads intentionally appropriated Maghribi *tulut* as a dynastic “brand” for their three main instruments of propaganda. The first one was coinage, where the new curvilinear script almost completely replaced the traditional “Kufic” still predominant on Almoravid dinars and dirhams (Prieto and Vives, 1915: p. 23; Fontenla, 1997: pp. 457–8) (Fig. 16). Surprisingly, this conspicuous change of style has received little attention in comparison to other aspects of the Almohad coinage reform, and it has been grossly misinterpreted as an attempt to “Berberise” the currency by making the legends intelligible to non-native speakers of Arabic (Fontenla, 2005: p. 62; 1997: pp. 457–8). Instead, I suggest it should be seen as a way to modernise Maghribi coins and visually express the Almohad political and doctrinal revolution. In a clever move, this aim was achieved by accelerating and completing a process already initiated by the Almoravids in their fractional coins. The designers of the legends on Almohad coinage must have been chancery secretaries just like their Almoravid predecessors, given that the Almohad numismatic reform was a highly centralised business.

A second important context for the deployment of Maghribi *tulut* was the illuminated manuscripts of the works of Ibn Tūmart (d. 524/1130), the founder and spiritual leader of the Almohad movement, produced under direct caliphal patronage. In particular, lavish frontispieces and colophons in curvilinear chrysography can be seen



FIGURE 16
Legends in Maghribi *tulut*
on an Almohad double dinar
minted under Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf
(r. 558–80/1163–84)
© ZÜRICH, MONEYMUSEUM

on two luxurious copies of Ibn Tūmart's recension of Mālik's *ḥadīṭ* collection, the *Muwattaʿa*, now in the Qarawiyyīn Library, Fes, and the National Library of Algiers.³⁷ The Algiers manuscript was specially made for the library of the caliph Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr (r. 580–95/1185–98) and bears a Maghribi *tuluṭ* invocation to God that He may strengthen and prolong the Almohad dynasty through the caliph's son and heir to the throne Abū ʿAbd Allāh (Fig. 17). In his *Rihla*, the Moroccan scholar ʿAbd Allāh al-Tāsāfatī (d. 1150/1737) records the presence of a lavishly illuminated copy of Ibn Tūmart's *Muwattaʿa* in the library of the Tinmal Mosque: “it was written in a beautiful royal script [*bi-ḥaṭṭ ḡayyid mulūki*], with the table of contents [*barnāmaʿ*] in gold. On its first page, the ex-libris [*tamlīk*] of the imam *al-mahdī* [i.e., Ibn Tūmart] was also entirely in gold lettering, written in a style comparable to that of Ibn Muqla” (Al-Tāsāfatī, 1992: p. 60). This reference to the Baghdadi master calligrapher of the fourth/tenth century leaves



FIGURE 17
Colophon in Maghribi *tuluṭ*
chrysography from a copy of Ibn
Tūmart's *Muwattaʿa* made for the
library of the Almohad caliph
Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr in
590/1103–4
© NATIONAL LIBRARY OF
ALGERIA



FIGURE 18
Almohad *ʿalāma* in Maghribi
tuluṭ from a treaty between
the Almohad caliph Abū Yūsuf
Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr and the Pisans,
dated 582/1186
© PISA STATE ARCHIVE

no doubt that the script seen by al-Tāsāfatī resembled Eastern proportioned scripts, much like Maghribi *tuluṭ*, and it was not a Maghribi round bookhand.

Finally, the evidence indicates that the Almohads used Maghribi *tuluṭ* in their official documents and correspondence in a way that we can only hypothesise about the Almoravids before them. In the original paper scroll containing a peace treaty between al-Manṣūr and the Pisans, drafted in 582/1186, the body of the document is in Maghribi round script, but the introductory formula, proclaiming the oneness of God according to the Almohad creed, *wa-l-ḥamd li-llāh waḥda-hu* (“and praise be to God alone”), is penned in a monumental Eastern script, with a special reed pen, and in a special ink (Fig. 18).³⁸ Writing at the beginning of the eighth/fourteenth century, the Moroccan historian Ibn ‘Idārī provides us with a precious indication of how important it was that this motto (*‘alāma*) should be penned in a special script, by the caliph himself:

The chamberlain and personal secretary of [the eighth Almohad caliph] Yaḥyā b. al-Nāṣir [...] was a eunuch named Abū al-Ḥamāma Bilāl, a renowned *ṣayḥ* who had studied the Quran in his youth. He was bright-minded and cunning, and Yaḥyā’s affairs depended entirely on him, to the point that he came to write the opening formula “*al-ḥamd li-llāh waḥda-hu*” on the official decrees, in Eastern script [*bi-ḥaṭṭ mašriqī*]. Before then, it was out of the question that someone else would write this formula instead [of the Almohad caliph] (Ibn ‘Idārī, 1963: p. 320).³⁹

Ibn ‘Idārī’s passage reveals beyond doubt that Maghribi *tuluṭ* bore a direct association with the script of caliphal documents, an Eastern style very different from standard Maghribi bookhands, whose use and display was meant to evoke the presence of the ruler and his authority. Perhaps this was the reason why it became so rapidly and widely imitated in all media, even on artefacts unrelated to the Almohad court. Be that as it may, it seems reasonable to suggest that the Almohad caliphs inherited the chancery practices of their predecessors, and deliberately appropriated this special script with its Eastern “flavour,” adding a dynastic-doctrinal layer to its original meaning.

6 Conclusion

The dissemination of Maghribi *tuluṭ* as the calligraphic emblem of Almohad rule indicates how much the choice of certain scripts mattered to the Muslim literate elites of the mediaeval Mediterranean. Circling back to the epigraphic programme of the Almohad chandeliers in Fes and Meknes, it can now be argued that the secular, royal, and Eastern connotations of Maghribi *tuluṭ* were meant to provide a counterpart to the sacred, Quranic, and Western character of the round *mabsūṭ* script. These subtle visual references would have resonated in the mind of contemporary viewers in a way that is extremely difficult to reconstruct today, due to the sources’ almost complete silence on the stylistic features of inscribed objects and how they were perceived by readers and beholders. Al-Tāsāfatī’s admiring description of the Tinmal manuscript represents an exception to the rule, and a closer scrutiny of mediaeval and early modern Maghribi literature might yield more such examples. It must also be noted that the semiotic substrate of ornamental scripts such as foliated “Kufic” or Maghribi *tuluṭ* did not prevent Maghribi artisans and calligraphers from experimenting – and indeed playing – with them rather freely, especially in non-royal contexts, and with increasing frequency from the seventh/thirteenth century.

Having argued for the derivation of Maghribi *tuluṭ* from chancery practices, two additional conclusions may be appended here. The first one is based on the observation that

Maghribi *tuluṭ* remained predominantly confined to the epigraphy of Northwest Africa until the second half of the sixth/twelfth century, while Andalusī craftsmen held on to their traditional angular scripts. This important fact highlights the active role of the region as an incubator of artistic change, and not just as a passive recipient of Andalusī stimuli, in line with the convincing arguments of some recent scholarship.⁴⁰ The second conclusion is methodological, and concerns the necessity to approach mediaeval Arabic epigraphy and palaeography through the same “semiotic framework” theorised by Gülru Necipoğlu in her seminal work on Islamic geometric patterns (1995: p. 83). As compellingly argued by Necipoğlu, “the ‘decorative versus iconographic’ polemic that has polarised the study of Islamic visual culture since the nineteenth century” should be best abandoned in favour of new approaches capable of revealing specific meanings in a visual tradition that often privileged nonfigurative idioms. In very much the same way, it is becoming increasingly evident that the artificial dichotomy between the “calligraphic” and the “iconographic” in Islamic art needs to be nuanced, if not dissolved, through the careful study of specific scripts, their history, and the range of culturally relevant associations they held. The case of Maghribi *tuluṭ* is only one of the numerous episodes in the history of Arabic epigraphy where the practice of script iconography may be fruitfully applied.

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Notes

- 1 The full inscription on the highest stem-piece is read by Šalāḥ Sālim (2015: pp. 110–6) as: “*Hāda mā amara bi-hi al-ḥalīfa al-imām amīr al-mu’minīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-ḥalīfa al-imām al-Manšūr amīr al-mu’minīn Abū [sic] Yūsuf ibn al-ḥulafā’ al-rāšidīn adāma Allāh ta’yida-hum wa-’izza-hum.*” Another inscription on the third stem-piece from the top reads: “*Šunī’at ḥādīh al-turayya bi-madīnat Fās ḥarasa-hā Allāh wa-kāna al-farāğ min-hā fī šahr Ğumādā al-ūlā sanat sittamī’a.*” Šalāḥ Sālim’s rendition of the dedicatory inscription differs slightly from the (partial) reading provided by Bulle Tuil Leonetti in Lintz et al. (2014: p. 334), and by Gaston Deverdun in Terrasse (1968: p. 80), who confused it with another inscription mentioning al-Nāšir on a second, smaller chandelier in the Qarawiyyīn Mosque. For a general description of the great Almohad chandelier, see Lintz et al. (2014: p. 334, cat. 190), and Terrasse (1968: pp. 57–9). For an overview of bronze lamps in al-Andalus and the Maghrib under the Umayyads, Almohads, Marinids, and Nasrids, see Fernández-Puertas (1999).
- 2 This account is repeated with minor discrepancies by al-Ġaznā’ī (1991: p. 69).
- 3 Al-Ġaznā’ī (1991: p. 69), “*kull dālik min mā al-ḥbās al-ġāmi’.*”
- 4 The Louvre curatorial staff explicitly stated that “*au moment de la rédaction du présent ouvrage, nous n’avons pu procéder à une lecture complète des inscriptions, qui doit être effectuée ultérieurement*” (Lintz et al., 2014: p. 580, cat. 190, n. 1).
- 5 For the origin and development of Maghribi round scripts, see Bongianino (2022).
- 6 The inscription under the dodecagonal base reads: “*Šunī’at ḥādīh al-turayya bi-madīnat Fās ḥarasa-hā Allāh li-ġāmi’ Miknāsa šarrafa-hu Allāh bi-dikri-hi wa-kāna al-farāğ min ‘amali-hā fī al-’išrīn min šahr Dī al-Qa’da sanat arba’ wa-sittamī’a.*”
- 7 The inscription of the Qarawiyyīn chandelier consists of the *Ta’awwuḍ*, *Basmala*, *Tašlīyya*, Q 31:33–4, Q 59:21–4, and Q 33:56. The inscription of the Meknes chandelier consists of the *Ta’awwuḍ*, *Basmala*, *Tašlīyya*, Q 31:33–4, and Q 59:21–3.
- 8 For the *mabsūt* script, see Afā and al-Mağrāwī (2013: pp. 62–3) and al-Bahnasī (1995: p. 137). The earliest mediaeval author to use the adjective *mabsūt* about calligraphy is the Nasrid secretary Ibn Simāk al-Āmilī (d. after 820/1417) in a passage of his *Rawnaq al-taḥbīr*, speaking of “the Quranic script used nowadays”: see Ibn Simāk (2004: p. 48).
- 9 Only the sixteenth volume of this manuscript survives in the Ibn Yūsuf Library (ms. 429), Marrakesh; see Ibn al-‘Arabī (1994: p. 37, no. 46). For this Quran, also see Lintz et al. (2014: p. 359, cat. 212), and *Dalīl ma’riḍ mašāḥif al-Mağrib* (2011: pp. 96–7).
- 10 For Spain, see especially Lévi-Provençal (1931), Ocaña (1964), Fernández (1992), Barceló (1998), Martínez Nuñez (2007), Puerta (2007), and Martínez Enamorado (2009); for Portugal, see Nykl (1946) and Labarta and Barceló (1987); for Morocco, see especially Bel (1919), Deverdun (1956), and ‘Awnī (2010); for Algeria, see Colin (1901), Mercier (1902), Van Berchem (1905), Ma’zūz (2000), and Ma’zūz and Diryās (2000; 2001); for Tunisia, see especially Zbiss (1955) and Abdeljaouad (2001).
- 11 For the correct definition of “*Naskh* script,” see Gacek (2012: pp. 162–7). It was Amador de los Ríos (1883: pp. 10–1) who first applied the term “*nesjī*” to the curvilinear Arabic epigraphy of al-Andalus. On the unsuitability of this term, see also Martínez Enamorado (2015: pp. 141–2).
- 12 For a definition of “*thuluth* script,” see Gacek (2012: pp. 274–5).
- 13 Ibn Marzūq’s reference is particularly reliable, since he claims to have designed these and other Marinid inscriptions personally.
- 14 For a palaeographic analysis of the Maghribi *tuluṭ* found in manuscripts from the nineteenth century, see Van den Boogert (1989: pp. 31–2), although he did not acknowledge the predominantly epigraphic use of Maghribi *tuluṭ*.
- 15 Hazard (1952: p. 247, no. 958) describes a *qirāt* struck in Córdoba in 502/1108–9 by ‘Alī b. Yūsuf; two undated *qirāt* struck by ‘Alī b. Yūsuf mentioning his heir Tāšifīn b. ‘Alī (1952: p. 247, no. 1001; p. 256, no. 1015); an undated *qirāt* struck by Tāšifīn b. ‘Alī (1952: p. 257, no. 1022); and an undated *qirāt* struck in Córdoba by Išḥāq b. ‘Alī (1952: p. 262, no. 1052). For Almoravid coinage, see also Kassis (1988).
- 16 For an alternative dating to the year 519/1125, see Marcos (2015: p. 149).
- 17 Meunié et al., (1957: p. 52): “*en principe, les caractères ne sont pas entremêlés mais tous ceux d’un même mot sont plus ou moins liés par un trait plus ou moins large, même s’ils doivent s’écrire sous la forme isolée. Aucune lettre n’a de terminaison florale.*” See also Deverdun (1956: pp. 27–31).

- 18 Marçais (1954: pp. 250–1): “*C’est tout d’abord dans les textes mentionnant des noms de fondateurs et les dates de fondation que le cursif trouve son emploi, le coufique restant réservé aux formules religieuses ; soit que le prince ait préféré, pour proclamer ses oeuvres, une écriture d’un déchiffrement plus accessible au vulgaire, ou qu’une association se soit établie dans les esprits entre le texte sacré et le coufique, écriture savante, hiéراتique, et qui avait servi pour les premiers Corans.*”
- 19 Ibn Abī Zar‘ (1972: p. 62) provides a description of the minbar and an account of its construction.
- 20 See Foukalne (2015: pp. 57–60), although her reading of this fragmentary inscription is not entirely convincing.
- 21 Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid, inv. no. 51015, discussed by Galán (2005: vol. II, pp. 95–6, cat. 03014) and Ferrandis (1935–40: vol. II, pp. 258–9, no. 161, pl. LXXXI). The casket was previously in the treasury of the Basilica of San Isidoro, León. The craftsman’s signature reads: “*amal Muḥammad ibn Sirāġ.*”
- 22 Only one casket survives in the Museo de la Catedral, Tortosa, as the other disappeared from the collection in 1936; see Galán (2005: vol. II, pp. 96–9, cat. 03015 and 03016); Dodds (1992: p. 265, cat. 51); and Ferrandis (1935–40: vol. II, pp. 260–2, nos. 162–3, pls. LXXXII–LXXXIII).
- 23 Tabbaa (2008) interpreted the Almoravid *qubba* of Marrakesh as an “Abbasid homage.” This questionable theory is still supported by Martínez Enamorado (2015).
- 24 For the scripts of the ‘Abbasid chancery in Baghdad, see Rustow (2020, pp. 173–89).
- 25 For the script of Fatimid decrees, see Rustow (2020: pp. 143–53, 319–28) and Stern (1964: pp. 103–6).
- 26 On the contrary, the text of numerous Almoravid letters and decrees has been preserved in the sources: see especially El Aallaoui (2007), Lagardère (1993–4), and Makkī (1959–60).
- 27 For the foundation inscription of the *qubba*, see Zbiss (1955: no. 19, pp. 42–3, pls. 10–1) and Abdeljaouad (2001: vol. I, pp. 272–4). For the building, see Marçais (1954: pp. 75–6), Zbis (1959: pp. 23–4), and Hadda (2008: pp. 86–8).
- 28 The document is held in the State Archive, Pisa, *Atti Pubblici*, 10 July 1157; it was edited by Amari (1863: no. I, pp. 1–6) and discussed by Banti (1988: pp. 47–50) and Ouerfelli (2015: p. 102, fig. 1).
- 29 I am referring to the chancery script used in the endowment certificates of the so-called “Nurse’s Quran,” dated 410/1020, on which see Roy and Poinssot (1950: vol. I, pp. 28–33, figs. 7–8) and Déroche (2017); but also to the script the “curse to the Fatimids” on the first page of a Quran endowed by the Zirid emir al-Mu‘izz (r. 406–54/1016–62) to the Great Mosque of Kairouan, on which see Roy and Poinssot (1950: vol. I, pp. 37–9, fig. 9).
- 30 There is some evidence to suggest that the curvilinear epigraphy of this Tunisian atelier was exported to Zirid Monastir (Zbiss, 1955: pp. 63–4 no. 67, pp. 70–1 no. 78) and to Hammadid Nāṣiriyya/Bigāya; see *Béjaïa* (1970: p. 21). Martínez Enamorado (2009: pp. 329–35) published a “Kufic” stele found in Cartagena that was probably carved in sixth/twelfth-century Tunis. Already during the 520s/1120s, the royal workshop of Tunis was producing tombstones in Maghribi *tulut* for non-royal notables; see Zbiss (1955: p. 92, no. 78).
- 31 Mariam Rosser-Owen (2011: 64–76) convincingly argued that this casket may have been a diplomatic gift sent from Cairo to the Norman king in Palermo.
- 32 As published by Golvin (1962: pp. 271–2, especially fig. 5, and the accompanying drawing), a similar curvilinear script was also employed on several mediaeval bronze mortars recovered from the sea off Trouville, near Oran (Algeria). While Golvin tentatively ascribed these objects to al-Andalus, in the light of the present discussion, they may well have been produced in Northwest Africa.
- 33 For Almohad monumental epigraphy, see Martínez Nuñez (2005: pp. 7–10); for epigraphic textiles, see Partearroyo (2005: p. 312).
- 34 The manuscript is kept in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Cod. arab. 4; see Bongianino (2020).
- 35 The manuscript is kept in the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid, ms. Res/272; see Bongianino (2017: pp. 176–8).
- 36 These four Valencian Qurans are discussed in Bongianino (2022: pp. 300–6); Lintz et al. (2014: pp. 354–5, cat. 208–9); Dandel (1993); Khemir (1992: p. 306, cat. 76); and Šarīfī (1982: pp. 259–69, 272–4).
- 37 The first manuscript is kept in the Qarawiyyīn Library, Fes, ms. 181/40; see al-Fāsī (1979–89: vol. II, pp. 188–92), and Lintz et al. (2014: p. 278); the second manuscript is kept in the National Library of Algeria, Algiers, ms. 424, and it was copied in 590/1193–4; see Fagnan (1893: pp. 108–9). For a general discussion of the works of Ibn Tūmart and their manuscripts, see Griffel (2005: pp. 765–70); Lintz et al. (2014: pp. 274–6).
- 38 The document, dated 15 November 1186, is held in the State Archive, Pisa, *Atti Pubblici*, and was edited by Amari (1863: no. v, pp. 17–22) and discussed by Banti (1988: pp. 52–5) and Ouerfelli (2015: p. 104, fig. 2).
- 39 For a discussion of this passage and the Almohad *‘alāma* in general, see Latham (1981: pp. 317–9).
- 40 For example, see Rosser-Owen (2014; 2012: pp. 29–30) and Anderson (2014). For a re-evaluation of Morocco’s Islamic heritage and material culture as a whole, see Lintz et al. (2014).