ANDALUSIAN ROOTS AND ABBASID HOMAGE IN THE QUBBAT AL-BARUDIYYIN IN MARRAKECH

Without any question, I was attracted to the field of Islamic architecture and archaeology through Oleg Grabar’s famous article on the Dome of the Rock, which I first read in 1972 in Riyadh, while contemplating what to do with the rest of my life. More specifically, the article made me think about domes as the ultimate aesthetic statements of many architectural traditions and as repositories of iconography and cosmology, concepts that both Grabar and I have explored in different ways in the past few decades. This article, on a small and fragile dome in Marrakech, continues the conversation I began with Oleg long before he knew who I was.

The Qubbat al-Barudiyyin in Marrakech is an enigmatic and little-studied monument that stands at the juncture of historical, cultural, and architectural transformations (fig. 1). Although often illustrated, and even featured on the dust jacket of an important survey of Islamic architecture, this monument is in fact very little known to the English-speaking scholarly world, a situation that reflects its relatively recent discovery and its location in a country long influenced by French culture. The inaccessibility of the relevant literature on the Qubbat al-Barudiyyin makes it imperative to begin this article with brief reconstructions of its urban, archaeological, and historical contexts before addressing its architectural form and ornamental and epigraphic program and investigating its function, the reasons for its construction, and its place among related medieval Islamic domes.

Like most North African architecture, the Qubbat al-Barudiyyin has generally been seen as a provincial variant of Andalusian architecture, whether in Cordoba, Seville, or Granada. Although recent scholarship has occasionally conceded some originality to North African architecture, its local historical significance and links with the central Islamic world remain poorly understood. Whereas this Hispanocentric perspective might apply for Moroccan architecture of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—when many Andalusian artisans are known to have resettled in Morocco—it seems anachronistic in dealing with periods when Andalusia itself was ruled by dynasties from Morocco, in particular the Almoravids (1061–1147) and the Almohads (1130–1260). More specifically, to view Almoravid architecture from an exclusively Cordoban perspective goes counter to the political and cultural associations of the Almoravids, who, in addi-
In addition, Ali b. Yusuf b. Tashufin (r. 1106–42) built several mosques, including his eponymous mosque, dated 524 (1130), which was located near the precise center of Marrakech, at an informal square where all the main roads from the city gates converged. In 1146, on the feeble pretext that it was improperly oriented, the Almohads vindictively destroyed this mosque, as they did most Almoravid buildings, leaving only a plain, square minaret, completed in 1133, which still survives. On the basis of the minaret and traces of the original street pattern, it has been proposed that the mosque measured 120 x 80 meters, making it the largest such building in the entire Almoravid domain and the sole congregational mosque in Marrakech. The only other survival from the mosque is its famous minbar, commonly known as the Qubba al-Kutubiyya, the subject of a recent study and conservation project conducted by a joint Moroccan and American team.

Finally, Ali b. Yusuf built a palace, called Dar al-Hajar (Stone House), at the southwestern end of the city. This palace, too, was destroyed by the Almohads, who built on its site the al-Kutubiyya Mosque, with its famous minaret. Three courtyards have been uncovered by excavation, but, other than their size, these tell us little of the original glory of this palace. It is possible, as Deverdun proposes in his map, that the region between the mosque and the palace of Ali b. Yusuf was a “Grande Place” or even a garden, although this suggestion cannot be proven archaeologically.

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**URBAN CONTEXT AND ARCHAEOLOGY**

Although the Qubbat al-Barudiyyin appears today nearly submerged beneath the surrounding streets, it once stood proudly at the center of the newly founded city of Marrakech (fig. 2). Marrakech was established by Yusuf b. Tashufin in 1070, as a military garrison and tribal capital that linked the Almoravids’ new empire with their ancestral home in the Atlas mountains. A simple mosque, a small market area (qasaba), and a mud-brick surrounding wall were built, but the city still retained the appearance of a desert settlement, with none of the normative civic aspects of Islamic cities. All this changed under Yusuf’s son and successor, ‘Ali, who acceded to the throne in 1106, and who wished to make Marrakech a great imperial capital along the models of Cordoba and Seville. One of his first building feats was to bring a steady water supply to the area, such that water reached all parts of the city and the surrounding gardens. It is not coincidental that the Qubbat al-Barudiyyin was a celebration of this great achievement.

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Despite its location in the middle of medieval Marrakech, the Qubbat al-Barudiyyin was actually “discovered” only in 1947. Though 12 meters high from base to apex, the Qubba was literally excavated from 7 or 8 meters of parasitic structures, debris, and ashes resulting from centuries of neglect and misuse as an annex to a hammam. A preliminary study by Boris Maslow eventually led to a concentrated period of excavation and restoration by a French team of architects and archaeologists led by Henri Terrasse and Jacques Meunié. In addition to thoroughly documenting the excavation process, this team also removed some later accretions and conserved the structure but abstained from overly restoring the ornament. As a result, the Qubba stands today as a remarkably well-preserved dome resting on an attenuated rectangular base, a solitary reminder of the glory of the Almoravids in their capital city.

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Fig. 2. Map of Marrakech under the Almoravids. (After Gaston Deverdun, Marrakech des origines à 1912, 2 vols. [Rabat: Éditions Techniques Nord-Africaines, 1959–66, 1: pl. VIII])
This change has been so profound that not even the careful excavation of the various layers inside and around the Qubba has succeeded in recreating its original context or in definitively establishing its intended function.\textsuperscript{13} What we do know is that the Qubba was originally located about 25 meters due south of the mihrab wall of the mosque of ‘Ali b. Yusuf, a curious location to which I will return (fig. 3). Furthermore, the Qubba seems to have been connected to a cistern-and-fountain structure located about 10 meters to its northeast, as evidenced by clay pipes connecting the two structures and by the frequent and quite similar restorations undergone by both structures over several centuries. It seems likely, therefore, that the cistern and the Qubba once belonged to an Almoravid water system, and that the Qubba may have originally sheltered a fountain, a possibility further reinforced by several levels of basins and pipes found beneath it.\textsuperscript{14}

These findings might be taken to suggest that the Qubba served as the ablution fountain for the original Almoravid mosque of ‘Ali b. Yusuf.\textsuperscript{15} But this otherwise plausible identification is contradicted by the location of the Qubba, which is too far away from the mosque and in the wrong direction. An ablution fountain is almost always located in the courtyard of a mosque, a few meters from the sanctuary façade, not 25 meters outside the mosque perimeter.\textsuperscript{16} Such a distant location, requiring the worshipper to go through the market area before reaching the mosque, is unprecedented and highly unlikely.

Also complicating the identification of the Qubba as the ablution fountain of the mosque is its foundation date, which, as will shown below, is 1117—fifteen years before the foundation of the mosque. No such chronology comes to mind for any other mosque: ablution fountains are either contemporary with mosque foundations or much later.\textsuperscript{17} All this suggests that whereas the Qubba may have sheltered a fountain it was not necessarily intended as the ablution fountain of the Great Mosque of ‘Ali b. Yusuf.
use of piers instead of columns begins sporadically in Spain only in the early eleventh century, becoming much more popular and then predominant in North Africa in the twelfth century.

The Qubba is an astonishing structure, inventively and flamboyantly decorated inside and out. The exterior is horizontally divided into three zones separated by moldings and merlons, featuring open-arched doors on the first level, arcaded galleries on the second, and a solid, lightly decorated masonry outer dome on the third, covering a highly ornamented inner shell of plaster-covered masonry. The architect took advantage of the unequal sides of the rectangle to display a varied repertory of arched doors and windows—pointed, horseshoe, trilobed, and foliate—set, in the Andalusian manner, within a recessed frame (aljiz). The decoration on the dome is itself divided into two zones, the lower with closely spaced interlacing arches and the upper with chevrons that surround a large seven-pointed star emanating from the center.19

Viewed in plan, the dome seems to rest on an octagon rotated within a larger octagon that is surrounded by an eight-pointed star made by the intersecting ribs of two rotated squares (fig. 4). But this impression vanishes when one looks up inside the Qubba or views it through its section. What appear in plan as continuous ribs are in fact four trilobed squinches and four trilobed arches in the middle of each side, which are surmounted by another level of eight shallow squinches rotated at 45 degrees (fig. 5). These are themselves

PHYSICAL FORM

In its present excavated and restored condition, the Qubba stands 12 meters tall and rests on a rectangular base 5.25 x 6.20 meters on its exterior. It is largely built of stone and brick, generally progressing from a stone foundation to stone-and-brick walls to purely brick arches and vaults. All supports and vaults are covered inside and out with a layer of plaster, thicker on the inner dome, where it is carved into various moldings and vegetal forms.

Although brick is not unknown in Spain before the early twelfth century, stone and wood were far more common materials, stone being used for columns, arches, and ribs and wood for roofing and pyramidal dome covers. Indeed, the earliest use of brick in a monumental structure in Spain, the mosque at Bab Mardum in Toledo, dated 390 (999 or 1000), is generally attributed to eastern influence.18 Similarly, the
yasser tabbaa

and the richness of the vegetal ornament create an opulent and mysterious effect that has never been surpassed by other domes in North Africa (fig. 8). Although the Qubba is not a muqarnas dome as such, its realization seems impossible without some knowledge of such domes. In effect, it appears as a synthesis of the ribbed domes of Cordoba and the muqarnas domes of Baghdad, a cultural duality that parallels its patron’s links with al-Andalus and the Abbasid caliphate (fig. 9).

The inner, hemispherical dome rests on an octagonal zone made of eight muqarnas squinches, and an eight-lobed ribbed dome on top (fig. 7). The attenuated and projecting arches of the corner squinches partially obscure four little lobed cupolas, each resting on two layers of muqarnas cells, producing an unusual three-dimensional effect. These four tiny muqarnas cupolas create something of a starry garland around the central dome, an effect known in some eastern muqarnas domes. The complexity of the layered and seemingly interlaced arches, the muqarnas corner domes, and the richness of the vegetal ornament create an opulent and mysterious effect that has never been surpassed by other domes in North Africa (fig. 8).

Although geometric planning was undoubtedly used in the layout of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, in particular the famous additions of al-Hakam in ca. 965, all indications suggest that it only became a prominent feature of architectural practice under the Almohads of the second half of the twelfth century—for example at the 1154 mosque at Tinmal. The use of harmonic proportions also help mitigate, but do not entirely resolve, the incongruity of using a rectangular base. Furthermore, it seems likely that the elevation of the dome and the relationship of its various levels to each other were also governed by a similar geometric principle, although this possibility remains to be tested.

Examined through its section, the Qubba consists of four zones separated by moldings: a long plain zone that contains the arched entrances, another long zone with two levels of superimposed arches, a short zone with eight muqarnas squinches, and an eight-lobed ribbed dome on top (fig. 7). The attenuated and projecting arches of the corner squinches partially obscure four little lobed cupolas, each resting on two layers of muqarnas cells, producing an unusual three-dimensional effect. These four tiny muqarnas cupolas create something of a starry garland around the central dome, an effect known in some eastern muqarnas domes. The complexity of the layered and seemingly interlaced arches, the muqarnas corner domes,
a fragile muqarnas or artesonado dome covered externally by a sturdy pyramidal dome with a tile roof. But a double-shell masonry dome like the Qubba is completely unknown in the western Islamic world, and its use here certainly points to an eastern influence. In other words, the design of the dome, as of other parts of the Qubba, partakes of both Andalusian and eastern Islamic architecture.

ORNAMENT AND INSCRIPTIONS

The precision of the plan of the Qubba contrasts with the opulence of its decoration, which softens the angles and gives the dome a deeply organic appearance (fig. 10). The lavishly carved stucco decorating brackets, which are inserted in the outer masonry of the structure. More wood inserts are used at the middle of the inner dome and near its apex, linking the inner shell with the outer masonry.

Double-shell domes are quite common in southern Spain and Morocco, where the inner shell is usually
The Qubba contains a single historical inscription that once ran along all four sides of the interior square, measuring 15 meters (fig. 11). Although it was deliberately defaced by the Almohads upon their takeover of Marrakech in 1147, enough of the text remained in 1957 to allow the epigraphist Gaston Deverdun to assign the Qubba to 'Ali b. Yusuf and even to tease out from the inscription an exact date of 511 (1117). Deverdun only tentatively identified the building as the ablution fountain for 'Ali b. Yusuf’s mosque.25

Even in its fragmentary state, the inscription is noteworthy for its declamatory tone and titulature. Most historical inscriptions tend to have an even, factual tone; this one, in a rare, direct plea, calls upon God to aid ‘Ali b. Yusuf in victory. A few inscriptions from the period of the Crusades contain similarly declamatory language with pleas to God for victory, which suggests that the Qubba may have served a commemorative purpose, a point to which I will return below.26

Just as interesting as the content, however, is the calligraphic quality of the inscription: a highly sinuous cursive script written on an arabesque background, making it the earliest monumental cursive inscription...
Returning to the Qubba’s exterior, we need to account for its most unusual decoration, consisting of interlaced circular arches and a seven-pointed radiating star above them (fig. 12). Carved masonry domes are known in Cairo, but none are so early, and none contain interlaced arches. A handful of Almoravid domes—including two at the mosque al-Qarawiyyin in Fez and one at the mosque Bayn al-Qahaoui in

Fig. 10. Qubbat al-Barudiyyin, view of interior ornament. (Photo: Yasser Tabbaa)

Fig. 11. Qubbat al-Barudiyyin, detail of inscription. (Drawing: Yasser Tabbaa)

in western Islam, about twenty years earlier than the cursive inscriptions at the mosques of Tlemcen and al-Qarawiyyin, both of which also date to the reign of ‘Ali b. Yusuf.27 In addition to their cursive script, which in itself suggests an eastern source, these inscriptions share several features that link them with early Seljuk and Zangid inscriptions and ultimately with the *thuluth* script of Ibn al-Bawwab, intimately associated with the city of Baghdad.28

THE QUBBA IN AN ABBASID CONTEXT

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Sousse—have vertical zigzag decoration, but they do not approach the complexity and elegance of the Qubba. To my knowledge, this feature is not known in any other preserved dome and would be considered a complete oddity were it not for a vivid passage by Ibn Jubayr about similar domes at the Haram of Mecca.\(^{29}\) In this passage, Ibn Jubayr describes four domes (qubab) that must have piqued his interest for their height and excessive decoration, and that he calls qarnasa, which may designate not actual muqarnas but simply minute and extensive decoration. These domes are the Qubba above the sacred spring of Zamzam, the Qubba al-ʿAbbasiyya, the so-called Qubba al-Yahudiyya, and the Qubba at Bab Ibrahim.\(^{30}\) The description of the last dome—built by the caliph al-Muqtadir’s governor in Mecca in the early tenth century—is especially noteworthy:

Over the portal is a large dome (qubba), remarkable because it is almost as high as the adjacent minaret (sawmaʿ). Its interior is covered with marvelous plasterwork and qarnasi carvings that defy description. The exterior is also made of carved plaster, resembling interlaced drums.\(^{31}\)

It seems clear, therefore, that one or more of these Meccan domes closely resemble the Qubba in attenuated form, rich interior stucco carving, and exterior interlaced arches. Furthermore, since these domes were built by Abbasid caliphs, they presumably reflect an architectural type that existed in Baghdad. It follows then that the Qubba, in addition to its obvious Cordoban links, also includes many architectural, ornamental, and epigraphic features that emanate from the central Islamic world, and these might have originated in the Abbasid capital. Once again our attention is directed to that city of vanished glory.

What does all this mean? Why would a newly arrived Berber dynasty thousands of kilometers away from the Abbasids have been so determined to use the Abbasids’ artistic language and architectural forms? Why would an early-twelfth-century dome in Marrakech so closely resemble domes that probably existed in tenth-century Baghdad and eleventh-century muqarnas domes that most likely originated there? And, finally, why was this monument built, and why did it take on the form of a dome over a fountain?

Dynastically, the Almoravids are quite comparable to their near contemporaries the Great Seljuks: both were foreign military dynasties, staunch Sunnis, and supporters of the spiritual hegemony of the Abbasid caliphate.\(^{32}\) In fact, Almoravid Sunnism had a distinctly Abbasid flavor, for their foremost theologian, Abu ʿImran al-Fasi, was directly influenced by al-Baqillani (d. 1013), the greatest Ashʿari-Shafiʿi theologian of his time and the propagator of the caliph al-Qadir’s Sunni politics.\(^{33}\) In the following century, al-Ghazzali himself was initially very influential, exchanging letters with Yusuf b. Tashufin before the local conservative, and apparently ignorant, scholars turned against him and burned his book, Iḥyāʿ ‘ulūm al-dīn (Revival of Religious Sciences).\(^{34}\) Finally, both Yusuf and his son ʿAli exchanged letters with respective Abbasid caliphs—as many as seven letters have been recorded—that emphasize the central questions of jihad against the forces of the Reconquest, of Sunni orthodoxy, and of allegiance to the Abbasids.\(^{35}\)

In return for their homage and gifts, the Almoravids received from the Abbasid caliph robes of honor, decrees of territorial possession, and the use of the title Amir al-Muslimin. This title occurs on the Qubba inscription and on the Almoravid coins struck by ʿAli and his father.\(^{36}\) Interestingly, it was preferred by both the Almoravids and the Almohads over the caliphal title Amir al-Muʿminin, out of respect for the office of the caliph and perhaps also to emphasize İslām over imān (faith) in contradistinction to the Ismaʿili Fatimids. Ismaʿilism, with its bipartite division of faith into exoteric and esoteric (ẓāhir and bātin), normally equated İslām with exoteric rituals and imān with the deeper meanings of the faith.\(^{37}\) This concept was opposed by all Sunnis, in particular the Malikis of North Africa, who privileged the exoteric dimension of Islam and rejected any esoteric reading.\(^{38}\)

Seen within this artistic, courtly, and politico-theological discourse, the Qubbat al-Barudiyyin should no longer be viewed as a poor man’s copy of Cordoban architecture or a pastiche of unresolved influences but must be acknowledged as an original monument that, among other things, reflected Almoravid allegiance to the Abbasids as the symbolic rulers of Islam and the safeguard of Sunnism. More than just a dome above an ablation fountain, the Qubba was intended to pay homage to the Abbasid state and perhaps to evoke the pious acts of the Abbasids at the Haram of Mecca, allusions that perfectly coincide with the Almoravids’ political and religious orientation.

None of this is to deny the Qubba’s obvious affiliations with Cordoban architecture. After all, the patron of the Qubba, ʿAli b. Yusuf, was born in Ceuta and raised in Seville, and the architect, according to Ter-
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monument, and does this idea have precedents in medieval Islamic architecture? In the case of Qubbat al-Barudiyyin, it seems that the choice of a fountain should be linked to 'Ali b. Yusuf’s most important accomplishment in the city of Marrakech, namely, the development and expansion of its waterworks. Using the khettara water-supply system, which resembles that of Iranian qanāts, or subterranean canals, his engineer 'Ubaydullah b. Yunis brought water to most quarters in the city, sending the surplus to the surrounding gardens. The fountain, therefore, may have served as the celebratory focus of this important achievement, a phenomenon known in the Islamic world and elsewhere.

The second part of the question, why a dome was used for this possibly commemorative or ceremonial purpose, is somewhat more difficult to answer. While most early Islamic freestanding domes were mausolea, other rare examples of ceremonial domes, including commemorative structures and palace pavilions, did

A CEREMONIAL DOME?

Two final interrelated questions remain: why was a domed fountain chosen to serve as a commemorative monument, and does this idea have precedents in medieval Islamic architecture? In the case of Qubbat al-Barudiyyin, it seems that the choice of a fountain should be linked to 'Ali b. Yusuf’s most important accomplishment in the city of Marrakech, namely, the development and expansion of its waterworks. Using the khettara water-supply system, which resembles that of Iranian qanāts, or subterranean canals, his engineer 'Ubaydullah b. Yunis brought water to most quarters in the city, sending the surplus to the surrounding gardens. The fountain, therefore, may have served as the celebratory focus of this important achievement, a phenomenon known in the Islamic world and elsewhere.

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exist. Possibly the earliest of the commemorative type are the above-mentioned Abbasid domes constructed around the perimeter of the Haram at Mecca. Devoid of religious function beyond defining the borders of the Haram and marking some of its venerated sites, such as the Well of Zamzam, these domes, in particular the one at Bab Ibrahim, declared the Abbasid presence in this sacred precinct.41

It can be argued, however, that the Qubba in Marrakech belongs to the class of palatial domes. It seems likely that the famous dome of the Mouchroutas, built in the twelfth century adjacent to the throne room of the Byzantine imperial palace in Constantinople, as well as a few Norman palatial domes in Sicily dating from the reign of William II (1166–89), corresponds to the typology of the Qubba and ultimately to an earlier Abbasid dome type. According to contemporary descriptions, the Mouchroutas (Arabic makhrur, cone) very likely had a conical muqarnas dome.42 Built at a time when the Rum Seljuk prince was living in the Byzantine palace, it may have served a ceremonial function as a reception hall for visiting dignitaries. Although its exotic form and unusual function are perhaps more directly linked to Rum Seljuk ceremonial, the Mouchroutas may ultimately reflect the same Abbasid prototype that produced the Qubbat al-Barudiyyin.

The handful of domes and garden pavilions built by the Normans in Sicily also seem to belong to the same type, sharing openness to the exterior, muqarnas vaulting, and a water element beneath the dome but not the attenuated profile. Although the three remaining domes—La Zisa (1166), La Cuba (1180), and La Favara—ultimately belong to a palatial Abbasid dome type, their form was used for its broadly imperial and exotic effect rather than as an expression of homage to the Abbasids.43

Was the Qubbat al-Barudiyyin a palatial ceremonial dome? If so, was it intended as a freestanding pavilion within a garden, like those of Norman Sicily, or did it belong to a palace? The architectural context has almost entirely vanished, and the textual references are much too vague to allow us to reconstruct an Almoravid palace. Barrucand has proposed in passing that the Qubba was part of the aforementioned Dar al-Hajar palace complex. But the three excavated courtyards apparently belonging to the Dar al-Hajar are located several hundred meters southwest of the Qubba, which therefore could not have been part of the same complex (fig. 2).

I would propose instead that the Qubba was built within a garden south of the mosque of 'Ali b. Yusuf, a garden that originally may have extended all the way to the Dar al-Hajar. As such, its primary function would have been to serve as a ceremonial station between the mosque and the other great creation of 'Ali b. Yusuf, his palace complex.44 Within a few decades of the completion of this complex, both mosque and palace were destroyed, and with them must have vanished the garden and its associated structures. Only the solitary Qubba remained, and its survival should most likely be linked to its altered function: from a symbolic victory edifice whose dome announced the imperial grandeur and sophistication of the Almoravids to an Almohad ablution fountain surrounded by latrines. Could revenge be any sweeter?

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NOTES

5. This connection has also been made by Gülru Necipoğlu, in idem, The Topkapı Scroll, Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture: Topkapı Palace Museum MS H. 1956 (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995), 101.
7. For the justification of the destruction of Almoravid mosques by the Almohads see Bloom, Minbar, 35. The problem of mosque orientation has a very long history, both theoretical and practical. In theory, it would certainly have been pos-
sible in medieval Islam to build mosques very precisely ori-
entated towards Mecca. In practice, such precision was almost
never the case, as most mosques had to be inserted within a
preexisting urban fabric. Although most legal scholars con-
ceded considerable latitude in this matter, it was still pos-
able for dynasts to use “incorrect” orientation as a pretext
for destroying mosques.

8. The mosque was as expensive as it was large, reputedly cost-
ing 60,000 dinars: see al-Ýirfº, Dawlat al-Murºbitºn, 374.

9. See Bloom, Minbar. 36. Instead of destroying the minbar,
the Almohads were apparently satisfied to have the names
of Almoravid patrons removed from its inscriptions.

10. Bloom, Minbar, 35–37 and 49, discusses the circumstances
that led to the destruction of this palace and the erec-
tion of the Kutubiyya Mosque, referring to the anonymous
al-Hulul al-Maushiyya fi dhikr al-akhdºar al-Marºrakushiyya: Chro-
niques anonymes des dynasties almoravide et almohade, ed. I. S.
Allouche (Rabat, 1936).


12. See n. 3 above.

13. It is of course highly unlikely and completely incongruous
that an important and elegant structure like the Qubba would
originally have been surrounded by latrines as it is today.


15. This is the conclusion reached, for example, by Bloom, Min-
bar, 27, and by most other scholars.

16. Even mosques without a courtyard, particularly from the
Ottoman period, often have freestanding ablution fountains
just a few meters outside the façade of the sanctuary.

17. Although many Mamluk and Ottoman mosques were built
equipped with ablution fountains, most early mosques had
ablution fountains added at a much later date: examples
include the Great Mosques of Damascus and Aleppo and
that of Ibn Tulun. In no case known to me was the ablu-
tion fountain built before the mosque.


19. A seven-pointed star is extremely unusual in Islamic geome-
tric ornament, where even numbers are far more common.
See, meanwhile, the interesting but inconclusive comments
made by Meuniº, Nouvelles recherches, 35–37, where the authors
acknowledge the uniqueness of this carved dome and its dec-
oration.

20. Barrucand, Moorish Architecture, 154. See also Christian Ewert,
Forschungen zum almohadischen Moschee II: Die Moschee von
Tinmal, Madrider Beitrage, Bd. 10 (Mainz: P. v. Zabern,
1984).

21. For example, the muqarnas domes of the shrines of Yahya
and ‘Aww al-Din in Mosul and the shrine of ‘Abd al-Samad
in Natanz. All these domes postdate the Qubba by one or
more centuries. Such corner domes also exist in Cordoba
and Toledo, but there they are rib vaulted like the main
dome. The use of muqarnas in these little domes and else-
where in the Qubba may in fact be the earliest documented
instance of this eastern feature in Moroccan architecture.

22. Gaston Deverdun, Marrakech, des origines à 1912, 2 vols. (Rabat:
that “Islamic art has never surpassed the splendor of this
extraordinary cupola.”

23. Most Islamic stucco ornament was in fact painted, usually
in light blue and ochre with occasional gold highlights and
black outlines. Such painting is known in Samarra, Ghazna,

24. See, for example, Barrucand, Moorish Architecture, 154–55.

25. See n. 3 above.

26. One similar plea for God’s aid in victory comes to mind:
the long and impassioned inscriptions on the side of the
minbar made by Nur al-Din for the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusa-
lem. See, inter alia, Yasser Tabbaa, “Monuments with a Mes-
sage: Propagation of Jihad under Nur al-Din,” in The Meeting
of Two Worlds: Cultural Exchange Between East and West dur-
ing the Period of the Crusades, ed. V. Goss and C. Vézar-Born-
stein (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986),
223–41.

27. Yasser Tabbaa, The Transformation of Islamic Art during the
Sunni Revival (London and Seattle: University of Washing-

28. See Yasser Tabbaa, “The Transformation of Arabian Writing
“The Transformation of Arabic Writing II: The Public Text,”

29. This passage was first noted by Jonathan Bloom, who used
it in his discussion of the late Fatimid domes and minarets
of Upper Egypt. See idem, “The Introduction of Muºqarnas

30. Muhammad b. Ahmad Ibn Jubayr, Rihlat Ibn Jubayr (Beirut:
Dâr Sadir, 1964), 66 and 77–78, where Ibn Jubayr further
describes the wood and plaster qarnasº in these domes.


32. As noted in Necipo‰, Topkhano Scroll, 101.

33. Al-Ýirfº, Dawlat al-Murºbitºn, 168–75.

34. Ibid., 324–28.

35. Ibid., 174–75, and Husayn Muºnis, Subº wathº’iq jadºda ‘an
Dawlat al-Murºbitºn (Cairo: Dâr al-Ma’arif, 1959), 66–68.

36. According to contemporary chroniclers, the elders of his
tribe proposed to Yusuf that he adopt the caliphal title Amir
al-Mu’mínin, but he turned it down because he felt only the
Abbasids were its legitimate possessors. Instead, he accepted
the title Amir al-Muslimin, which was subsequently used in
his coinage and spoken during the Friday khutba.

37. On this question see Irene Bierman, Writing Signs: The Fatimid
Public Text (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998),
67–70, where she presents a particularly interesting interpri-
tation of Fatimid coinage reflecting their concept of imán.


39. Jacques Meuniº, Nouvelles recherches: according to Henri Ter-
rasse, 19, “It is certain that ’Ali b. Yusuf brought the best
Spanish artists for the decoration of his shrines and pal-
ceses.”

40. Al-Ýirfº, Dawlat al-Murºbitºn, 369–70. In fact, the same con-
cept was applied by other patrons in the Islamic world, who
often celebrated their hydraulic accomplishments by build-
ing fountains and sabªbº. See, in particular, Tabbaa, “Monu-
ments with a Message,” 230.

41. The attenuated and decorative character of these domes,
according to Bloom, seems to have inspired similar domes in
Upper Egypt; the founders of these Egyptian domes wished
to emphasize their piety and sophistication by emulating
domes they would have seen during the Hajj. See Bloom,
“Muºqarnas,” passim. See also Jonathan Bloom, “The Qubbat
al-Khadra’ and the Iconography of Height in Early Islamic Architecture,” in Premodern Islamic Palaces, ed. Gülru Necipoğlu, special issue of Ars Orientalis 23 (1993): 135–42. Of these domes, the one at the mosque of Qus comes the closest to the Qubba in its attenuated form, its exterior and interior ornament, and even its rather indefinite function.


44. This relationship between the mosque and the Qubba actually recalls the association of the Masjid-i Jami in Isfahan and its north dome, which is generally seen in terms of imperial and ceremonial iconography. See Oleg Grabar, The Great Mosque of Isfahan (New York and London: New York University Press, 1990), 38–41.