

Luṭfī 'ABD AL-JAWĀD [=Lotfi ABDELJAOUAD]

النقاشون وورشات صناعة النقائش العربية بالقيروان

(بين القرنين ٣ و١١ هـ/ ٩ و١٧ م)

Al-Naqqāshūn wa-warshāt šinā'at al-naqā'ish al-'Arabiyya bi-l-Qayrawān (bayn al-qarnayn al-thālith wa-l-ḥādī 'ashar hijrī / al-tāsi' wa-l-sābi' 'ashar milādī)

[Stone Carvers and Workshops of Arabic Inscriptions in Kairouan (3rd-11th centuries AH / 9th-17th centuries CE)]

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With this relatively short yet rich monograph, profusely illustrated with 115 figures, Lotfi Abdeljaouad makes a significant contribution to the study of Arabic epigraphy in Kairouan, the medieval capital of Ifrīqiya, based on his research experience of more than 20 years. In particular, the book focuses on signed inscriptions (especially funerary) offering evidence of the craftsmen's names, preceded by the noun *'amal* ("the work of"). The evidence mainly dates from the 11th century, when 24 out of the 677 inscriptions examined by the author were signed by their carvers (p. 8–9). Unsigned inscriptions are attributed to specific craftsmen and ateliers thanks to a meticulous and compelling examination of their stylistic and palaeographic features.

Chapter I (p. 13–19) deals with the stone carvers of the Aghlabid period (9th century), about which precious little is known. Apart from an undated graffito from the Great Mosque of Kairouan signed *"Sābiq"*, and a signature left on the marble *miḥrāb* of the same mosque by a certain *"Abū al-'Āfiya Ghulām al-Andalusī"* (read by Abdeljaouad as *"Abū al-'Āfiya, the young servant of the Andalusī master"*), the chapter argues for the existence of two distinct workshops specialised in carved tombstones, active between 856 and 908. The first one employed a particularly deep style of carving with elongated straight lines, regular letter shapes, and rising tails of final *nūn*. The second produced inscriptions that are far less neat and harmonious, with some stacking of letters. The tombstones from this period lack the decorative frames that would appear later on, and those made

of reused column shafts do not yet feature the characteristic globular heads.

In Chapter II (p. 20–28) the author discusses the epigraphy of the Fatimid period (908–973). The rare architectural inscriptions still in situ (mostly containing pious formulae, some intentionally effaced at a later date) show a certain degree of innovation, interpreted as a break with the tradition of Aghlabid stone carvers (vegetal endings, more elaborate letter shapes). As in the previous period, two distinct workshops seem to have been active at the same time. The author ascribes to the first one 53 tombstones, which feature a rather conservative epigraphic style and one surviving signature (*"Ibn al-Mukhrij"*). He suggests that the same craftsmen also produced foundation inscriptions, such as one in the *ribāṭ* of Monastir dated 966. The second workshop is represented by 13 tombstones, described as a *"qualitative turning point"*: their inscriptions are characterised by thin and slender letter shapes, raised *fā'* and *qāf*, bifurcated serifs, rising tails of *mīm*, *nūn*, and *wāw* ending in a vertical shaft, and some foliated appendages. To the same workshop can also be attributed the earliest known prismatic stele from Kairouan, dateable to 990–998 (Abdeljaouad calls this typology *"sword-shaped"*).

Chapter III (p. 29–78) forms the core of the book and focuses on the first half of the 11th century, when Kairouan was ruled by the Zirids. The only signed architectural inscriptions from this period are some painted ones on the wooden ceilings of the Great Mosque. In terms of portable object, there survives a remarkable signature on a bronze lamp made by Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Qaysī al-Ṣaffār (*"the copper smith"*) for *"al-Mu'izz"*, either the Zirid emir al-Mu'izz b. Bādīs (r. 1016–1062) or the Fatimid caliph al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh (r. 953–975). The wealth of epigraphic data from the Zirid period comes from hundreds of extant tombstones, which the author attributes to six different ateliers: that of Abū al-Qāsim 'Atīq b. Ḥasan (with 280 inscriptions), that of Khalūf b. Abī al-Khayr (58 inscriptions), and four anonymous workshops identified with the letters A (135 inscriptions), B (98 inscriptions), J (11 inscriptions), and D (4 inscriptions). These attributions are solidly grounded in stylistic as well as textual analysis (predilection for certain formulae and syntactic structures, idiosyncratic mistakes). The tombstones produced in these workshops are decidedly more elaborate than those of the previous two centuries: the cylindrical stelae are topped by carved globular heads, while the prismatic ones feature multiple mouldings and bead-and-reel bands; the inscribed panels are framed

by geometric borders and scrollwork; the epigraphic style remains angular and slender but is embellished with knotted and twisted letter shapes. Among the distinctive features of each group are, for instance, the delicate and intricate tendrils that stem from 'Atīq's letters, or the cross-shaped element inserted by Khalūf between the two *lāms* of the word Allāh. The few products of workshop D date from a slightly later period (between 1092 and 1097) and reflect a new epigraphic trend attested in contemporary Tunis: the lettering becomes larger, and the foliated elements are turned into slim scrolls serving as background filler. The author remarks on the sharp decline in the number and quality of tombstones during the second half of the 11th century, when Kairouan suffered a phase of profound decadence and some prismatic stelae were partly re-carved and re-employed.

The later history of Kairouan was characterised by a slow creative recovery, but the local stone carving industry remained modest by comparison with the coastal towns of Ifriqiya, which explains the brevity of the next four chapters. In the mid-12th century, 33 tombstones (two of which signed) attest to the activity of Ḥasan b. 'Abd Allāh al-Mahdawī al-Naqqāsh, a craftsman from Mahdiyya who carved cylindrical stelae in an innovative script that Abdeljaouad calls "Almohad Kufic" (Chapter IV, p. 79–90). After the Almohad conquest of 1160, this bold angular script with minimal use of foliated elements became prevalent, as shown by an important tombstone dated 1171 that may represent a new phase in the production of Ḥasan al-Mahdawī's workshop (Chapter V, p. 91–96). Under the Hafids (13th–16th centuries), the 45 known tombstones carved in Kairouan reflect epigraphic innovations developed in the new capital of Tunis, including the introduction of curvilinear scripts, but virtually no signatures are known (Chapter VI, p. 98–108). Finally, the epigraphy from the Ottoman period (1574–1867) is briefly presented, including marble tombstones poorly carved in the local tradition, and some marble plaques engraved and inlaid with an unidentified black substance, featuring inscriptions in both Ottoman *thuluth* and Maghribī round scripts (Chapter VII, p. 109–115). The book ends with a discussion of various issues related to the stone carving industry of Kairouan as a whole (Chapter VIII, p. 116–131). They include the juridical permissibility of writing on tombstones (with the citation of a *fatwa* by al-Wansharīsi); the difficulty of assessing whether the recorded signatures belong to workshop supervisors who only designed the inscriptions, or to sculptors responsible for both the inscriptions and the decoration; the sourcing of the marble from classical and late antique ruins; the

technique of carving in low relief; the relationship between the gender of the deceased and the shape of the tombstones; and the unusual practice of recording the death of two siblings on the same stele.

This monograph is a useful source of information for anyone interested in the history of Kairouan and its material culture, written by a rigorous historian and epigrapher who knows these inscriptions intimately. All the tombstones discussed and illustrated in the book carry the inventory number of the National Museum of Islamic Civilisation where they are presently stored, but no complete catalogue of the collection yet exists. Until such catalogue is compiled and published, there is no better way to approach this material than through Lotfi Abdeljaouad's publications. While drawing on previous epigraphic surveys, his latest book adds new fascinating dimensions to the study of medieval Arabic inscriptions, a discipline in great need of renewal.⁽¹⁾

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(1) Previous work on the inscriptions of Kairouan includes: B. Roy and P. Poinssot, *Inscriptions arabes de Kairouan*, Paris, Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1950-1983, 3 volumes; R. Dagorn, « Quelques réflexions sur les inscriptions arabes des nécropoles kairouanaïses », *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 13–14, 1973, p. 239-258; M. El-Habib, « Stèles funéraires kairouanaïses du III^e/IX^e au V^e/XI^e siècles. Étude typologique et esthétique », *Revue des études islamiques*, 43, 2, 1975, p. 227–285; S. Zbiss, *Corpus des inscriptions arabes de Tunisie III: Nouvelles inscriptions de Kairouan*, Tunis, Direction des Antiquités et Arts, 1977; K. Maoudoud, « La signature des lapicides dans les stèles funéraires ifriqiyennes », *Bulletin des travaux de l'Institut National d'Archéologie et d'Art*, 3, 1989, p. 89-113; L. Abdeljaouad, *Inscriptions arabes des monuments islamiques des grandes villes de Tunisie: Monastir, Kairouan, Sfax, Sousse et Tunis (II^e/VIII^e–X^e/XVI^e siècles)*, thèse de doctorat, Université de Provence Aix-Marseille I, 2001; L. Abdeljaouad, « L'inscription de la fortification de Sabra al-Mansouriyya à Kairouan (437/1045–1046): restitution et nouvelle lecture », *Revue tunisienne d'histoire militaire*, Décembre 2009, p. 36–41; L. 'Abd al-Jawād, « Ṣinā'at al-naqā'ish al-janā'iziyya bi-l-Qayrawān: al-warshāt al-ghayr al-muwaqqā'a khilāl al-qarn al-khāmis al-hijrī (al-ḥādī 'ashar milādī) », *al-Majalla al-Tūnusiyya li-'ilm al-āthār*, 1, 2013, p. 31-55; L. 'Abd al-Jawād, « Warshāt al-kitāba wa-ṣinā'at al-naqā'ish bi-l-Qayrawān fi al-'ahdayn al-Muwaḥḥidī wa-l-Ḥafṣī », *al-Majalla al-Tūnusiyya li-'ilm al-āthār*, 3, 2016, p. 41-63.