

# Architectural Ornamentation of the Sidi Kacem Al-Jellizi Monument

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**Abstract-** The Mausoleum of Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi is a Tunisian historical and archaeological monument distinguished by the richness of its decorative surfaces and the presence of a ceramic tile collection spanning from the 15th to the 19th century. Through a typological and chronological analysis, this article aims to shed light on the evolution of decorative techniques and the heritage-related challenges posed by successive restoration campaigns. It also seeks to identify Hispano-Moorish influences, the persistence of Hafsid traditions, and the emergence of Ottoman art during a later period.

**Keywords -** Sidi Kacem El-Jellizi, architectural influences, decorative cladding, ceramic tiles.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Mausoleum (Zawiya in Arabic) of Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi is a monument from the Hafsid era. The term Zawiya, which originally referred to a corner of the mosque or an adjacent room used for Quranic instruction, later came to designate a Sufi religious structure typically built over the grave of a saint (Wali in Arabic). Constructed in the 15th century, the mausoleum houses the tomb of Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi, renowned for his exceptional mastery of ceramics.

While his legacy is firmly rooted in Tunisian cultural heritage, the exact birthplace of Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi remains a subject of scholarly debate. Georges Marçais [1] and Abdel-Hakim Gafsi [2] claim he was of Andalusian origin, with Gafsi specifically mentioning the region of Galicia in northwestern Spain as his hometown. Abdelaziz Daoulatli [3] asserts that the saint was from the city of Fes and lived for an extended period in Andalusia, where he learned his craft. To support his theory, Daoulatli relies on a late inscription found behind the cenotaph of the Mausoleum, where the saint's full name, Ab el-Fadl Qasim Ahmad as-Sadafi al-Fasi, is engraved on a marble plaque.

We do not know the exact date he arrived in Tunis or when he completed his residence, which was later converted into a Mausoleum after his death. In fact, we know very little about his life and activities. The building was a residence that was converted into a Mausoleum in the 15th century. It is a monument of great historical and artistic value, and it was enlarged in the 17th century and restored in the 18th century.

The building continues to foster the devotion to Sidi Kacem and ensures the transmission of his Islamic Sufi spiritual values. The saint was known for his benevolence and abilities, acting as a patron for the weak and marginalized. During the Hafsid era, the Mausoleum was transformed from a home and workshop into a marabout and a place of refuge for the Moriscos expelled from Spain after the conquest of Granada in 1492 [4].

The Mausoleum of Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi is located in the southern suburbs of Tunis on the Kasbah hill. It is built on an irregular angular plan, constrained by neighboring buildings. The facades are simple, with an entrance door set within a limestone arch. The monument consists of an entrance vestibule, an oratory, a patio surrounded by four galleries, a sanctuary, rooms, dependencies, and a garden. The main feature is the burial room where believers gathered.

The museum collection is easy to date as it belongs to the Qallaline workshops. The pottery pieces are well-dated and cataloged thanks to the expertise of researchers specializing in the Middle Ages. However, the rich polychrome decoration that embellishes the walls is difficult to date due to the monument's successive modifications and restorations.

The presence of a collection spanning from the 15th to the 19th century within the same monument requires us to be cautious before giving hasty dates. For example, on the facade of the funerary hall, a faience mosaic panel is next to pseudo-Cuerda seca tiles and is topped by a Cuerda seca frieze. In the oratory, a Cuerda seca frieze is juxtaposed with Spanish tiles and Qallaline tiles. This combination suggests that we need to examine restoration reports to identify the non-original elements.



**Figure 1:** Left photo. The Mausoleum of Sidi Kasim Al-Jallizi after the demolition of the gallery [5]. Right photo. The Mausoleum from the courtyard. (Photo by authors)

The Mausoleum of Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi was designated a protected historical monument in 1912 [6], and was later converted into the National Museum of Islamic Ceramics in the early 1980s. It hosts a permanent exhibition of pottery and architectural ceramics from the Middle Ages and the modern era. The site also houses the National Center for Artistic Ceramics, which offers courses in ceramics and pottery and organizes an annual exhibition showcasing the work of its students.

## II. STUDY OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF CERAMICS TILES ON THE MONUMENT

Andalusian influence in Ifriqiya developed in two stages; the first corresponds to the Andalusian exoduses that occurred under the Hafsids in the 13th and 15th centuries. The second wave took place during the reign of Uthman Dey (early 17th century). During the first phase, in addition to the active role of the Hafsids, Moroccans such as Sidi Kasim al-Jallizi collaborated with the Andalusians to spread and root the Hispano-Maghrebi style. In this research, we will trace the Hispano-Moorish influences, the persistence of Hafsid traditions, and the manifestation of Ottoman art in a later period [7].

### The entrance vestibule

One enters the interior of the Mausoleum through a two-leaf door. It is framed by rectangular, pinkish Khadhel stone. We note the use of skillfully carved voussoirs surmounting the lintel. One reaches the patio through three successive vestibules (Skaif in arabic).



**Figure 2:** The entrance vestibule of the Mausoleum of Sidi Kasim al-Jallizi (Photo by the authors)

The first two vestibules are separated by an arched doorway with alternating two-tone voussoirs. The jamb is adorned with serpentine motifs carved into Khadhel limestone. On either side of the doorway, two ceramic tile panels can be seen, each composed of a juxtaposition of 36 identical tiles of type CQ 82, framed by a black border strip measuring 3 cm in

width. To the right of the first vestibule (Skifa in Arabic), a door opens into the oratory. To the left, one can access the exterior. The panels are composed by assembling four identical tiles arranged in a grid of diamond-shaped squares. Their design features fine interlaced white bands. They display eight-pointed star motifs in purplish-brown, star-shaped polygons, and are surrounded by regular and irregular polygons painted in olive green and ochre yellow.



**Figure 3:** Panel of CQ 82 ceramic tiles decorating the entrance vestibule of the Mausoleum of Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi. Early 17th to 19th centuries. 8.5x8.5cm.  
(Photo by the authors)

These tiles, which are attributed to the Qallaline workshop, are characterized by the assembly of four small tiles with a radiant and symmetrical composition along a median oblique axis. Thanks to the intertwined white bands, they form an eight-pointed star rosette at the center. Star polygons and regular and irregular polygons are colored in cobalt blue, emerald green, and yellow ochre in a Hispano-Moorish style.



**Figure 4:** The 2nd Skifa (Photo by the authors)

The second Skifa offers worshippers the opportunity to sit on two long built-in benches arranged symmetrically, and to enjoy a pleasant view through two windows that open to the outside. Upon crossing it, one enters the third Skifa, which allows visitors to access the small necropolis located to the left, the room adjacent to the oratory on the right, or to continue their path into the patio.

### The Oratory and the Adjacent Room

During the Husainid dynasty in the 18th century, the monument was expanded near the first Skifa, adjacent to the main entrance. A small Masjed was built following a classical peristyle layout, featuring three naves and three bays with semicircular arches resting on columns with Hafsid and composite capitals.

The prayer hall has a distinctive layout: the naves are arranged parallel to the Qibla wall, a configuration typical of certain Moroccan sanctuaries. Although this arrangement might suggest a Moroccan influence linked to the saint's origins, it is unlikely to be the case. It appears instead that the small Masjed was a later addition from the Husainid period. Apart from this unique layout, the rest of the architectural elements follow the Ifriqiyan style. The Hafsid-style columns support the traditional entablature with impost blocks and abacus. The Mihrab resembles, in its lower section, that of the Kasbah Mosque, while the upper section reproduces a motif commonly found in Tunisian buildings from the Ottoman era. [8].



**Figure 5:** The interior of the masjed (Photo by authors).

The Mihrab stands at the center of the Qibla wall, set within a hemispherical alcove adorned with intricately carved plaster known as Naksh-hdida. The

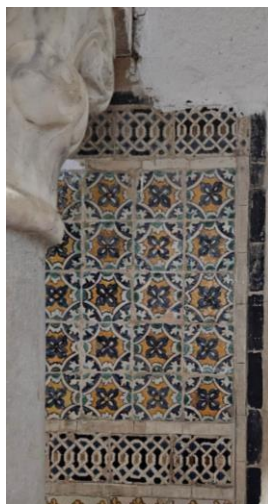


wall is lined with white Carrara marble and decorated with panels of marble marquetry.



**Figure 6:** On the left: the Mihrab of the oratory. On the right: a tomb in the room adjacent to the oratory, enhanced with Jneh Khutifa tiles. (Photos by authors)

The Qibla wall is adorned with two large polychrome ceramic panels measuring 55 cm by 237 cm, symmetrically placed on either side of the Mihrab. Three main registers are separated by a wide Cuerda-seca 1 frieze featuring interlaced bands, dating back to the late 15th century. The upper and lower panels are composed of a juxtaposition of 30 identical tiles of type CQ 55a, with a design inspired by Hispanic compositions. The central panel, measuring 53 cm by 100 cm, is composed of Spanish tiles of Type CUE 17, arranged side by side. These tiles feature star-shaped motifs rendered in two subtle tones.



**Figure 7:** On the left: Upper panel composed of CQ 55a tiles, bordered above and below by a Cuerda-seca 1

frieze. On the right: Central panel made up of Spanish tiles of Type CUE 17. (Photos by the authors)

The oratory is connected to a gallery with three arches, which are believed to have originally opened onto the main patio. Following renovations in the 18th century, the gallery was linked to a higher space with lateral windows. This rectangular annex leads to the third Skifa. It is adorned with a panel of interlaced tiles of type CQ 82 (see figure 3), identical to those flanking the first Skifa, measuring 9×9 cm and featuring geometric interlace patterns. Can we affirm that the Skifas and the oratory were built in the 18th century?

Saint Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi was highly esteemed by the Hafsid sultans. Several high-ranking dignitaries are buried in his mausoleum. The room annexed to the oratory, which currently houses the pottery wheel workshop and the electric kiln of the National Center for Artistic Ceramics, contains three small tombs measuring 55×150 cm. These are decorated with black-and-white bicolored Jneh Khutifa tiles (see figure 6).

### The Peristyle Courtyard

The peristyle courtyard is rectangular and forms the central element of the building. The four porticoes are narrow, each measuring 163 cm in width. The arcades rest on columns and corner colonnettes in the Hafsid style.



**Figure 8:** The Peristyle Courtyard (Photo by the authors)

The patio is decorated with marble marquetry featuring intricate compositions of interlacing and geometric motifs. Reused materials such as marble fragments, Khadhel stone, and ceramic tiles of type

CUQ 24 were likely added during the most recent restoration campaign.

A cistern (Mejel in Arabic) was installed in the courtyard to collect rainwater and supply the building. According to Marçais, the rooms of the mausoleum, intended to accommodate pilgrims, occupy the perimeter of the building, except on the eastern side, where the Kuba stands. He also notes that the architecture of these rooms is not particularly rich in decorative elements [9].



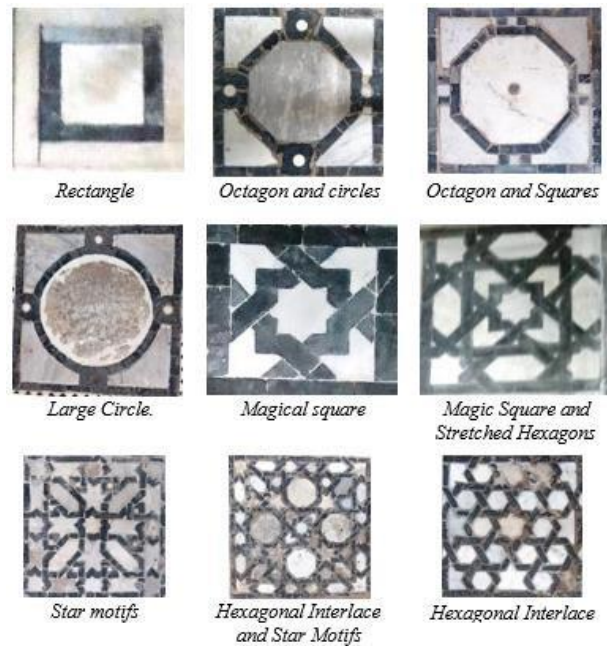
**Figure 9:** CUQ 24 Jneh Khutifa Tiles. Qallaline. Early 18th century to present. 10×10×2 cm (Photo by authors)

These tiles, attributed to the Qallaline workshop, are distinguished by a reddish clay body with a fine texture and strong cohesion. The bicolored tile, designed with diagonal symmetry, is produced using a manganese brown glaze over a white tin background. It is commonly known as Jneh Khutifa, or « swallow's wing ».

The courtyard is paved with a marble marquetry of white Carrara and black stone, inlaid with small black-and-white ceramic tiles measuring 5 × 5 cm, which are regularly restored. We identified ten distinct types of rosettes—rectilinear, curvilinear, or interlaced. These motifs decorate the first Skifa, the patio, and the lunettes of the arches. The southern gallery houses a tomb with a gravestone finely engraved with floral motifs in a Turkish style. The marble marquetry reaches its peak in the main courtyard.

The names used refer to Daoulatli's publication [10], in which he identified and described these elements, although some have been altered during restoration campaigns. One example is the rosette known as the Large Circle, which was once surrounded by Qallaline

ceramic tiles of types CQ 35 and CQ 157. These tiles no longer exist and have since been replaced by white and black marble marquetry.



**Figure 10:** Marble Marquetry of The courtyard. Names taken from Daoulatli's classification. (Photo by authors)

At the center of the courtyard stands out a large square rosette composed of a central black marble ring, surrounded by six other rings of identical dimensions known as Seven Circles. Around these, a succession of frames of varying widths alternate shades of white, gray, and black marble.



**Figure 11:** Central Rosette of the Patio: Seven Circles, flanked by two smaller rosettes. Top right: Hexagonal Interlace; left: Large Circle. (Photo by the authors)



Around this central rosette, four smaller square rosettes are arranged, composed of interlaced bands with either rectilinear or curvilinear designs. These feature patterns of octagons, regular and irregular polygons, and star-shaped elements. The rosettes—or marble marquetry—are crafted through the inlay of black marble ribbons into white marble.

According to Marçais, this technique is closer to Hispano-Maghrebian ceramic marquetry than to the commonly used marble marquetry [11]. The northern facade is pierced by five olive-green painted wooden doors. The eastern facade contains one door and two barred windows.



**Figure 12:** Top: Rosette known as Star Motifs. Bottom: Rosette known as Hexagonal Interlace and Star Motifs. (Photo by the authors)

### The Front of the Funerary Hall

Abdelaziz Daoulatli states that at least three sides of the courtyard of the Zawiya—north, east, and west—were originally surrounded by porticoes. He published a photograph showing the demolition of

the western portico, adjacent to the tomb chamber, during the restoration works initiated in 1962. We support this hypothesis, as the oratory and the annex room are more recent additions compared to the rest of the monument (late 18th century).

Each gallery is adorned with five horseshoe arches resting on white Carrara marble columns. These columns are topped with Hafsid-style capitals. The western façade is the most ornate, featuring a colossal door, a barred window, and a niche. The composition is symmetrical along a central vertical axis passing through the oratory door. A white marble frame surrounds the window and niche, both topped with bicolored lintels of Hafsid influence.



**Figure 13:** Facade of the Funerary Hall (Photo by authors)

A rectangular polychrome panel displays a one-of-a-kind faience mosaic. This panel was likely produced by Saint Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi or one of his fellow craftsmen. It features a geometric composition of interlaced white bands, star motifs, and regular polygons. It is framed within a double border of creamy white and dark brown hues.

The panel is structured in registers composed of Qallaline ceramic tiles. The lower register is rectangular and made exclusively of Qallaline specimens of type CQ 20, known as Turki, with Anatolian influences. Above it are CQ 52 tiles adorned with stylized palmettes and floral motifs.



**Figure 14:** Polychrome Panel on the Facade of the Funerary Hall (Photo by the authors)

The doorway is surmounted by two polychrome ceramic panels. The left panel is composed of a juxtaposition of Cuerda Seca 2 tiles featuring star motifs, along with similar Qallaline tiles of type CQ 157 in a pseudo-Cuerda Seca style. It also includes eight tiles of the Cuerda Seca 1 type and eight Cuerda Seca 1 frieze tiles. The entire composition is framed by a 3 cm-wide border strip.



**Figure 15:** Decoration Surrounding the Door of the Funerary Hall (Photo by the authors)



**Figure 16:** Top: Cuerda Seca 1 Tiles.  
Bottom: Cuerda Seca 2 Tiles. Late 15th century.  
13×13 cm (Photo by the authors)

These tiles, attributed to the workshop of Saint Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi, are distinguished by repetitive motifs rendered in shaded blue, emerald green, ochre, manganese brown, and milky white. They are applied on a fine-textured, brick-red clay body with high cohesion.

A pillar located to the right of the funerary hall's doorway features a polychrome cladding that is less restored and more authentic. Notably, it contains no Qallaline tiles and retains its original decoration: sixteen Cuerda Seca 1 tiles, twenty-four Cuerda Seca 2 tiles, and two Cuerda Seca 1 frieze tiles.

The entire ensemble is topped by a Cuerda Seca 2 frieze measuring 5 × 10 cm. On either side, four Cuerda Seca 1 tiles measuring 10 × 10 cm, adorned with octagons and star-shaped elements, are framed twice with black and white border strips

The window is barred with wide wrought iron rods painted green. A broad frieze is composed of a sequence of ten identical tiles of the Cuerda Seca 1 type. We observed remnants of a wooden axis where the doorposts were once attached. This suggests that the original door was taller and that the upper frieze in Naksh Hdida style was later modified. But we didn't know when these transformations take place.





**Figure 17:** Window of the Funerary Hall (Photo by the authors)

### The Exterior Cladding of the Funerary Hall

The pyramidal roof is covered with hollow green tiles. Marçais asserts that this type of pyramidal roofing dates back to the Hafsid period and is therefore one of the earliest examples of Hispano-Maghrebian tradition, whose use would become increasingly common in Tunis [12]. Poinssot notes that in the 17th century, the Andalusian sheikh Abu al-Ghayth al-Qashshesh undertook restoration works that focused particularly on the dome [13]. In the following century, the Husaynid dynasty expanded the entire mausoleum. On the other hand, Daoulatli states that the current roof covering was restored in 1962 [14].



**Figure 18:** Northern and Eastern Facades of the Funerary Hall (Photos by the authors)

The front of the funerary hall is adorned with two lowered arches made of sandstone known as Harsh. Qallaline tiles are arranged within square, rectangular, or oval frames. These decorative elements enhance the surfaces and break away from the sober aesthetic typical of the Hafsid style.



**Figure 19:** Western Facade of the Funerary Hall. Panel Composed of Cuerda Seca 7 Tiles. 11×11cm. Late 15th century. (Photo by the authors)



**Figure 20:** Southern and Western Facades of the Funerary Hall (Photos by the authors)

On the western face, we identified a panel composed of a juxtaposition of fourteen full tiles and fourteen



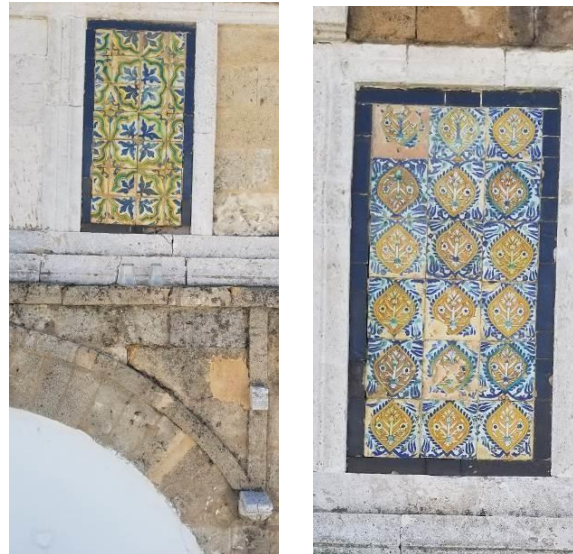
half-tiles of the Cuerda Seca 7 type, which dates back to the construction of the roof—that is, after 1496 (Figure 19).



**Figure 21:** Southern Facade of the Funerary Hall. Panel Composed of Cuerda Seca 1 Tiles (13 × 13 cm) and Cuerda Seca 5 Tiles (10.5 × 10.5 cm). Late 15th century. (Photo by the authors)



**Figure 22:** Western Facade of the Funerary Hall. Left: Cuerda Seca 7 tiles panel. Right: FQ62a tiles Panel (Photos by the authors)



**Figure 23:** Northern Facade of the Funerary Hall. Left: CQ35 tiles panel. Right: CQ6a tiles Panel. 15x15cm. Qallaline. Late 15th Century. (Photo by authors)

### The Interior Cladding of the Funerary Hall

The residence of Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi was converted into a mausoleum. It is assumed that his spiritual and artistic disciples contributed to the ornamentation of the monument shortly after his death in 1496. The funerary hall stands on the western side of the patio. It is square in shape, measuring 492 cm × 532 cm, with a surface area of approximately 26.17 m<sup>2</sup> (excluding the alcoves).

The space is divided by a horseshoe arch with alternating voussoirs, decorated in black and white marble. The arch rests on two columns topped with Hispano-Maghrebian capitals. The polychrome decoration is framed by stucco panels carved with geometric and floral motifs.



**Figure 24:** The Interior Cladding of the Funerary Hall.  
(Photo by authors)

The funerary hall is preceded by an antechamber, separated by a wooden grille painted in olive green. The front wall is covered with ceramic tiles crafted using the Cuerda Seca technique, dating back to the construction of the Mausoleum in the late 15th century. The tiles are arranged in four registers.

The lower register is the most extensive, displaying Cuerda Seca 1 tiles adorned with star-shaped polygonal motifs. The middle register consists of a Cuerda Seca 1 frieze. Only two types of Cuerda Seca friezes have been identified as works produced by Saint Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi or his disciples, who continued practicing the craft even after his death in 1496. This frieze features a sequence of interlinked polygons enclosed within wide interlaced bands.

The third register is a Cuerda Seca 2 frieze, composed of a succession of sawtooth triangular motifs evoking cypress trees. These alternate in a striking light/dark contrast. A final frieze, referred to as MF Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi 1, crowns the polychrome wainscoting. It is adorned with chevrons sketched in faience marquetry. The

carved plaster cladding spreads out and occupies the background of the horseshoe arch. The motifs consist exclusively of stylized lotus flowers enclosed within a frame of elongated diamonds. On the

southern wall, a large flat-bottomed niche is carved. It was recently decorated with polychrome tiles during the restoration works of 1962. This architectural element is a decorative technique that is omnipresent in Fatimid and Zirid architecture. It continued to exist under the Hafids and remains in use to this day.



**Figure 25:** The Interior Cladding of the Funerary Hall.  
(Photo by authors)

This niche is adorned with Jneh Khutifa CUQ1 tiles, arranged within a large frame and bordered by the famous Macadnussi tiles of type CQ10, whose name means parsley.

The niche is harmoniously decorated to juxtapose rich and varied materials, such as white and black Carrara marble, polychrome ceramics, and carved stucco.



**Figure 26:** Macadnussi Tiles. Qallaline.  
From the early 18th century to the present day.  
12×12 cm. (Photo by the authors)





**Figure 27:** The tomb of the saint Sidi Kacem Al-Jallizi.  
(Photo by the authors)

The room houses the rectangular tomb of the saint Sidi Kacem Al-Jellizi, topped by a wooden catafalque and wrapped in an olive green Sanjak. The oldest decorative register is the horseshoe arch, featuring a cursive inscription engraved in Carrara marble. The background is treated with a grayish material (apparently paint or lead) to enhance the light/dark contrast and improve legibility. The spandrels of the arch are covered with Cuerda Seca 2 tiles, carefully cut to follow the curvature. These are framed twice with alternating white and black Khdhib friezes. Above the arch sits a mosaic frieze of faience tiles : MF Sidi Kacem Al-Jellizi 2, featuring interlinked cypress trees.

The lower register is covered with Cuerda Seca 1, 2, 4, and 8 tiles. These are the oldest tiles, dating back to the conversion of Sidi Kacem's residence into a Zawiya in the late 15th century. These four distinct types coexist and are enhanced with glazes in cobalt blue, shaded green, ochre yellow, violet-brown, and creamy white. However, the second panel on the left contains two distinct types—Cuerda Seca 4 and 8 tiles—suggesting a deliberate intervention during restoration works. These panels are framed in black Khdhib and separated by small corbels, similar to those adorning the facade of the funerary chamber.



**Figure 28:** The Interior Cladding of the Funerary Hall.  
(Photo by the authors)

The west wall, along with portions of the south and north walls, is covered with 18th-century tiles arranged in large framed compositions. These tiles, CQ 55a and CQ 73a, are of Spanish influence, featuring foliated elements and acanthus leaves organized in modular patterns.

To the right of the arch with cursive inscription, an alcove is adorned with CUQ 1 and CQ 10 tiles, also arranged in large frames. Similarly, the window jamb is enhanced with Qallaline tiles. These decorative elements are believed to have been installed during restoration works in the 18th century.

The stucco cladding displays geometric interlacing, interspersed with floral motifs such as sinuous stems and vine leaves, reminiscent of Zirid designs. These are separated by long friezes of star-patterned braids, inspired by Almohad-Hafsid aesthetics.

The ceiling is made of wooden coffers shaped into twelve-pointed polygons, painted green and decorated with garlands of arches and Italianate leaflets. On either side, two diamond-shaped coffers are symmetrically placed. In the anteroom leading to the sarcophagus, the ceiling features Italianate painted woodwork with two juxtaposed hexagons, adorned with floral motifs and interlinked scrolls.



### III. CONCLUSION

Despite the abundance of Andalusian elements, the Mausoleum of Sidi Kacem El Jellizi adopted technical methods, architectural features, and decorative elements rooted in Ifriqiyan traditions. This monument represents a unique type of structure where Andalusian heritage evolved after three centuries of presence in Ifriqiya (from the 13th to the 15th century). Indeed, faience marquetry, Cuerda Seca tiles and friezes, pseudo-Cuerda Seca tiles with geometric interlacing, Qallaline tiles with Hispanic motifs, and finally Spanish tiles are the result of various restoration campaigns. These were carried out in the 17th, 18th, and 20th centuries, and now coexist on the wainscoting of the mausoleum. On the panels adorning the facets of the funerary chamber, Turkic-style tiles from the 18th century bear witness to later interventions.

The building stands as a living testimony to the multiple influences that have shaped the art of architectural design and ceramic tile installation. The various types of tiles used have become true historical markers, allowing us to trace the evolution of ceramic techniques across the major periods of Tunisia's history. Rather than attempting to restore the site identically, successive restoration efforts have favored respectful interventions, preserving the original tiles and avoiding historical falsification—thus enhancing the authenticity and integrity of the site.

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