

Critical Readings in the Thought of the French Orientalist Georges Marçais through His Book "Islamic Art"

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Abstract:

This research aims to review the main scientific findings of the French Orientalist Georges Marçais in his book "Islamic Art", from the emergence of the initial nucleus of Islamic architecture and applied and fine arts, tracing the major influences and cultures that inspired Muslim artists in their creative endeavors. It examines the spread of these arts and their unity throughout the vast Islamic state, their impact on European art beyond its borders, and identifies the major theoretical and practical scholarly methods employed by the Orientalist in his book. The study critiques these methods against modern specialized studies in the field of Islamic civilization in order to assess the objectivity of his research and to reveal his religious and political ideology in scientific authorship.

Keywords: Orientalism, Islamic Art, Islamic Architecture, Ornamentation, Fine Arts, Applied Arts.

Introduction:

Orientalism began with the study of Islam and the Arabic language and culminated in Western colonial expansion into the East, leading to the study of all Eastern religions, traditions, and prominent languages. Nevertheless, the focus on Islam, Arabic literature, and Islamic civilization remains the primary concern of Orientalists to this day. The Orientalist movement left its mark on Islamic societies through its various activities, which sought a continuous intellectual invasion of Islamic culture. In this way, the West sought to preserve its cultural achievements of the colonial period, expand its cultural influence, direct Islamic life toward Western norms, and deprive it of its cultural and national identity by impressing Western cultural traits on Arab-Islamic societies. Moreover, it tried to erase the bright legacy of Islamic civilization in human history by covering the features of its cultural and artistic achievements with a Christian artistic style.

Architectural studies received special attention from the Orientalists as they found the Islamic material heritage buried for several centuries. They presented academic studies based on modern theoretical and practical scientific methods, especially since most of the Orientalists had an encyclopedic knowledge of the history of civilizations, which led them to accurate scientific conclusions. Among them is the French Orientalist Georges Marçais, author of "Islamic Art".

In this study entitled "Critical Reading in the Thought of the French Orientalist Georges Marçais through His Book 'Islamic Art'," we have tried to subject the architectural and artistic Orientalist studies to the scales of scientific objectivity and critical scientific methodologies, highlighting the religious, political, and cultural ideologies of Orientalists in scientific authorship, using the book "Islamic Art" as a case study.

The following questions can therefore be raised: Georges Marçais's book "Islamic Art" is undoubtedly of great scientific importance for the study of architecture and art in the Orient. What is his scientific approach to the definition of the Islamic material heritage? To what extent are the scientific results achieved by the author objective? What are the religious, political and cultural ideologies of Georges Marçais in his scientific writings?

And in our attempt to comprehensively address the issue from all its aspects, we adopted a descriptive approach dominated by analysis in presenting the ideas of Georges Marçais, especially regarding the influences of previous civilizations on Islamic art, especially Byzantine, Christian, Gothic, and Roman art. We critically evaluated the author's scientific conclusions against modern studies of Islamic civilization in order to assess their scientific objectivity.

1. Orientalist Studies on Islamic Art:

The credit for introducing Islamic architecture and art is largely attributed to Orientalists, who traced its origins and development across various historical periods. They identified the different influences from preceding and contemporary civilizations, highlighted its significant artistic achievements, and illuminated its bright page in human history, culminating in its impact on later art forms. Thus, his study serves as a cornerstone that provided academic researchers with the necessary scientific material for conducting their studies and contributed to revealing the architectural plans of Islamic Arab structures, whether civil, military, or domestic, as well as examining their architectural and decorative elements.

Among the notable works of Orientalists in this field, we can mention, for example

The book *Islamic Art* by Ernst Gombrich, professor of law, archaeology, art history and philosophy at the universities of Paris, Vienna and Munich, is one of the works dedicated to the study of Islamic artefacts and art. It applies modern scientific principles and methods to the organisation of artefacts and devotes special chapters to the study of Islamic architecture, including mosques, palaces, castles and fortifications. Other sections include applied arts such as pottery, Islamic ceramics¹, textiles and carpets, and chapters on various types of fine arts such as Islamic decoration, sculpture and painting. The book includes illustrative appendices that complement the main text and include architectural plans, hand-drawn illustrations of architectural elements, and photographs of various Islamic artworks and artefacts, with each appendix prominently displaying a descriptive title.

In addition to his valuable work, Kreyzwell published a massive encyclopaedia containing over 12,300 works on Islamic art: **Early Islamic Architecture: The Umayyads, Abbasids, and Tulunids**, published by Oxford University in two volumes between 1932 and 1940. This work traces the initial emergence of Islamic architecture and identifies the Western influences that contributed to its development, which preceded the formation of Islamic art. He summarises these influences as including Hellenistic influences, which appeared in Syrian Christian architecture before the Islamic conquest, and Persian influences, which led to the emergence of Abbasid art and its expansion².

The book "Damascus" by the French orientalist Jean Sauvage is a valuable reference in the field of Islamic architecture and art, as it is a collection of his lectures on the history of the city of Damascus from antiquity to modern times, presented under the auspices of the Institute of Islamic Studies and the Institute of Ancient Art and Archaeology in Paris³. The book also includes architectural plans illustrating the distribution of architectural structures in Damascus and the development of its urban landscape through various historical stages. In addition, the author includes images of the prominent monuments of Damascus, such as the Umayyad Mosque, its walls, and its markets.

David Talbot Rice's "Islamic Arts Across Different Eras" addresses the question of the unity of artistic models produced throughout the vast Islamic state, highlighting the diversity of artistic traditions in the conquered territories. He pays special attention to Islamic calligraphic decoration because of the numerous styles of Arabic script and the skill of the Muslim artist in shaping them, giving them artistic and aesthetic qualities. This distinctive quality distinguishes the Arab Islamic civilization from previous and contemporary civilizations. The author examines the emergence of early Islamic art and its development in different periods

¹- Ernest Connell, *Islamic Art*, translated by Ahmad Moussa, Dar Saader, Beirut, 1966, pp. (05-09).

²- Creswell, *The Early Islamic Monuments*, translated by Abdul Hadi Abta, Dar Qutayba for Publishing and Distribution, Damascus, 014th ed., 1404/1989, pp. (08-09).

³- Jean Sauvage, *Damascus: A Historical Overview from Ancient Times to the Modern Era*, Catholic Press, Beirut, 1931, pp. (02-06).

and regions, including Persia, North Africa, and Anatolia⁴. Due to the vast nature of Islamic art and its intricate components, the author faced the challenge of covering the subject comprehensively in a single book; thus, the study is limited to selected examples of Islamic architecture and applied and fine arts specific to each era of Islamic art, with concise scholarly analysis and commentary.

Thomas Arnold collaborated with colleagues Christy Arnold Briggs and Martin Briggs on a book entitled 'The Heritage of Islam in Art, Painting and Architecture'. Briggs contributed a chapter on Islamic decorative arts and their influence on European arts, including applied or industrial arts and fine arts used for decoration. Martin Briggs wrote a chapter on Islamic architecture, emphasising its continuing influence in modern European cities, particularly in Spain. Arnold wrote a chapter on painting and its impact on European art, noting that Muslims did not prioritise this art form or seek to develop it for well-known religious reasons. His study focused on certain illustrations found on the surfaces of Islamic manuscripts and decorative motifs carved on Islamic artefacts, as well as the subject of calligraphic decoration and its influence on European art. One criticism of this chapter, however, is the neglect of the murals at Qasr Amra, which were executed using a technique similar to the fresco method known to Europeans⁵. According to Richard Ettinghausen, these paintings were characterised by a remarkable variety of subjects spread across the walls, with sudden transitions from one subject to another, in an attempt to divide the scene into units - a quality which later became a feature of Arab painting and which is in keeping with the aims of modern visual art⁶.

The book *Arab Heritage Monuments of Tlemcen*, written by the French Orientalist Georges Marçais with his brother William Marçais, is one of the most important field studies in Islamic art, focusing specifically on architectural aspects. It identifies and dates Islamic architecture in the city of Tlemcen, revealing the civil, religious, and military architectural structures within the city, such as the Agadir Mosque, the Great Mosque, the city of Mansoura, the suburb of El-Abbad, and the tombs of the city. This book was published in French in 1903⁷. In addition to the field study of architectural art, the book provides insights into the social, economic, cultural and political life of the city, thanks to the various sources of information used by the Orientalists.

The importance of this scientific reference also lies in the inclusion of illustrative documents, such as plans showing the distribution and development of the urban fabric of Tlemcen, as well as architectural and planning studies of the city's most important structures, particularly its mosques. It also analyzes various floral and geometric decorative motifs found on the walls of these buildings. In many cases, the Orientalists have commented with precise scientific methods in order to contextualize the art of Tlemcen or to clarify the school of Islamic architecture to which the architectural or decorative element studied belongs.

Another area worth mentioning is the efforts of Orientalists in preserving the Arabic manuscript heritage. They have played a significant role in identifying Islamic Arabic manuscripts, publishing their texts and studying prominent figures of the heritage. They sought out the manuscripts of the works they wished to edit, worked with local scholars in Arab countries to transcribe these texts, and ensured their accurate rendering. They undertook the task of cataloguing the works they edited and devoted themselves to researching the scholarly significance of the edited manuscripts and their relationship to earlier works on the same subject, as well as to later texts influenced by them.

The contributions of Orientalists to the Arabic manuscript heritage can be summarised as follows:

- Searching for manuscripts, travelling to collect them, transferring, preserving and maintaining them.

⁴- David Talbot Rice, *Islamic Arts Through the Ages*, translated by Fakhri Khalil, Al-Ahliya Publishing House, Amman, 1st ed., 2013, pp. (05-07).

⁵- Christy Arnold Burgess, *The Heritage of Islam in Decorative Arts, Painting, and Architecture*, translated by Zaki Muhammad Hassan, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, Beirut, 1st ed., 1983, pp. (01-05).

⁶- Richard Ettinghausen, *The Art of Painting Among Arabs*, translated by Isa Salman and Salim Taha Al-Tikriti, Humanity Heritage Library, Baghdad, 1974, p. 29.

⁷- William Marsé and George Marsé, *Arabian Archaeological Landmarks of Tlemcen*. translated by Murad Belaid, Ali Muhammad Bourouiba, and Fella Abdul Mziyam, Al-Asalah Publishing and Distribution Company, Algeria, 1st ed., 2011, pp. (21-25).

- Cataloguing, documenting, indexing and summarising manuscripts.
- Editing Arabic manuscript texts.
- Conducting heritage studies and focusing on dictionaries.
- Translating manuscript texts into other languages⁸.

One such example is the Swedish Orientalist Carl Johan Tornberg, who specialized in Arabic coins and Islamic history. He catalogued the Oriental manuscripts in the Lund University Library (Lund, 1850). He also catalogued Arabic, Persian and Ottoman manuscripts in the Uppsala Library (Uppsala, 1849)⁹.

In addition, the Italian Orientalist Gabriele Giuseppe, who held the position of librarian at the Lincean Academy, focused his scientific activity on the history of Oriental studies in Italy, its connections with the East, Arabic-Islamic research, translations of Arabic works, their history and literature. One of his most important scientific contributions is the collection of Eastern manuscripts donated by Prince Kaitani to the Lincean Academy (Lincean, 1911) and the arrangement of the manuscripts of "Al-Wafi bil-Wafayat" by Al-Sudafi (Lincean, 1912-1915). He mentioned the catalogs of manuscripts in the East and among the Arabs, organized them by city names, and applied Islamic history to Christian history, discussing Islamic artifacts, art, and coins, along with indexes and tables. The resulting work was published in two volumes with a total of 491 pages (Rome, 1915-1917).

He also counted Eastern manuscripts in Italian libraries (Tripoli Magazine, 1, 1924-1925), catalogued the collection of Arabic manuscripts in the Vatican (1930), and listed Eastern manuscripts and maps in Italian libraries (Florence, 1930)¹⁰.

The efforts of the French orientalist Lévi-Provençal, who was born in Algiers in 1893 and studied at the University of Algiers under René Basset and Georges Corm, are also noteworthy. He described the Arabic manuscripts in the Escorial Library based on the notes of Hartwig Darenburg, with revisions and updates¹¹.

2- Translation of George Marsais

George Marsais was a French orientalist born in the city of Rennes (France) on March 11, 1876, from a family renowned in the arts and literature. He was the brother of William Marsais. He graduated from the School of Fine Arts, where he obtained a doctorate, and began teaching at the University of Algiers in 1919 as a professor of Islamic archaeology¹².

George Marsais specialized in history and geography and oversaw the establishment of the Institute of Eastern Studies in Algeria, where he worked for a long time in teaching and writing in the field of Islamic arts and archaeology. The institute comprised members of well-known French orientalist scholars such as: Bousquet, Henri Pérez, Lévi-Provençal, Alfred Bel, André Basset, Léon Gautier, and others. The institute published annuals focused on the historical, archaeological, artistic, linguistic, ethnic, and racial study of the Maghreb¹³.

George Marsais is considered one of the best researchers who dedicated themselves to studying the history of Morocco, due to his long residence there. He also served as the director of the Museum of Stéphane Gsell (now the National Museum of Ancient Antiquities and Islamic Arts) and was a member of the African Institute, having been elected a member of the Academy of Writings and Literature in 1930. His historical

⁸- Ali bin Ibrahim Al-Namla, Contributions of Orientalists to the Dissemination of Arab Islamic Heritage: An Analytical Study and Examples of Investigation and Translation, King Fahd National Library, Riyadh, 1st ed., 1996, pp. (22-25).

⁹- Abdel Rahman Badawi, Encyclopedia of Orientalists, Dar Al-Ilm for Millions, Beirut, 1st ed., 1984, pp. (98-99).

¹⁰- Najib Al-Aqiqi, Orientalists, Vol. 1, Dar Al-Ma'arif, Cairo, 4th ed., pp. (430-431).

¹¹- Abdul Rahman Badawi, Encyclopedia of Orientalists, previous source, pp. (354-356).

¹²- Yahya Murad, Dictionary of Orientalist Names. Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiya, Beirut, 2005, p. 994.

¹³- Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, The Cultural History of Algeria, Vol. 6, Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, 1st ed., 1998, p. 11.

and architectural works are numerous¹⁴, including: "The History of the Arabs in the Lands of the Berbers from the 11th to the 14th Century" and his work on the history of relations between the Maghreb and the Mashreq in the Middle Ages, as well as a collection of historical research on the Mashreq.

His most important architectural work is the studied book titled: "Islamic Art", in which he documented the origins of Islamic architecture and art, tracing their development through different Islamic eras, highlighting their main centers and styles. He summarized the book "Islamic Art", which dealt with Islamic architecture in the Maghreb and Al-Andalus.

Together with his brother William Marsais, he also wrote a valuable work on the archaeological monuments of the city of Tlemcen¹⁵ and another book on Islamic antiquities in the Middle Ages, in addition to research on several mosques and palaces of scientific importance. He participated in the editing of the manuscript "The Garden of the Two Roses in the History of the Banu Marin" with Ghauthi bin Ali, who served as the chief teacher at the Great Mosque of Tlemcen. He also conducted a documentary study of wall inscriptions collected by Raisaj during a mission to the central desert.

He has published a number of researches in the annuals of the Institute of Oriental Studies, including: a commentary on a glass weight in collaboration with Lévi-Provençal, "How did North Africa become Arabized?", "The Art of Islamic Beauty", "The Great Mosque of Tlemcen", "The Tomb of Sidi Okba", "Christian Art and Berber Art", "Arabic Pottery", "Coastal Cities of Algeria and Piracy in the Middle Ages".

Among his scientific researches in the African Journal, we note: "Materials for the Index of the Mustafa Museum", "Mosques of Cairo", "Tlemcen: City of Art and History", "A Marble Lion in the Castle of Beni Hamad", "The Lands of the Berbers According to Al-Yaqubi", "The Hafids in a Modern Book", and "A Story from Morocco". He died in Paris on May 20, 1962¹⁶.

3- Introduction to the Book on Islamic Art:

The book "Islamic Art" by George Mahroug addresses how the unique and independent character of Islamic art developed apart from the ancient art forms from which it originated. It examines how it evolved through various Islamic eras and the factors that contributed to this development.

The author divided his book into an introduction, four parts, and a conclusion. The first part contains four chapters, while the other parts each consist of three chapters. The first part discusses Islamic art in the unified Islamic world, noting that its inception occurred in Damascus in 660 CE, linked to artistic traditions inherited from Christian art and elements of Iranian art. At this stage, its character was not yet fully formed, with its evolution resulting from the genius of the peoples in the open regions of Iraq, Egypt, and Africa. Thus, its artistic output in architecture, ceramics, textiles, and metalwork exhibited uniformity defined by the general characteristics of Islamic art, despite some variations due to local influences in each region.

The second part is dedicated to the evolution of Islamic art during the era of the three competing caliphates: the Iranian, Fatimid, and Andalusian-Moroccan. During this period, which lasted about two centuries (11th-12th centuries), Islamic art began to establish its distinctive features, imposed by Islamic religion, with pilgrims, students, artists, and traders facilitating the transfer of artistic styles between the widely dispersed regions of the Islamic state.

¹⁴- George Marsé, *The Maghreb and Its Relations with the Islamic East in the Middle Ages*, translated by Muhammad Abd Al-Samad Haikal, Manizilat Al-Ma'arif, Alexandria, 1999, pp. (01-03).

¹⁵- Abu Al-Qasim Saadallah, *The Cultural History of Algeria*, Vol. 6, previous source, p. 58.

¹⁶- Yahya Murad, *Dictionary of Orientalist Names*, previous source, pp. (994-996).

The third part, entitled 'The Legacy of the Three Caliphates', covers three centuries during which a variety of Islamic architectural schools emerged in the three regions. The author identifies the planning, architectural and decorative characteristics of the Iranian, Syrian and Egyptian-Syrian schools, analysing specific architectural examples from each school and looking for common features between them.

The final part of the book, entitled 'The Iranian World and Turkish Domination', discusses the development of Islamic art during a period when Moresque art continued to flourish and the architectural characteristics of the Ottoman school that dominated in Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria. Here, mosques with central domes appeared, allowing the architect Sinan Pasha to reduce the number of columns in the mosque halls. This architectural feature is recognised as one of the great achievements of Islamic art.

The book contains a collection of architectural plans that researchers can use to understand the architectural, planning, and decorative descriptions, along with the comments provided by the author. Additionally, it features various images of buildings and decorative subjects executed on their walls or ceilings. The images also include artifacts such as pottery, textiles, jewelry, and more. It is noteworthy that the author mentioned various additions and modifications made to the studied buildings, which added scientific value to the work and showcased the author's skill in applying historical and descriptive methodologies.

The author included two indexes: the first is a special index for the plates, consisting of 39 plates, detailing the title, date, location, and a brief description of each. The second index is devoted to the architectural plans, which included only eight forms

4- Review of the book *Islamic Art*: George Marseille examined in great detail the influences of architecture and Islamic art from previous civilisations. He found that this new creation (Islamic art) was imbued with artistic traditions, blending elements of Christian and Persian art. He pointed out that the earliest Islamic mosques in Syria and Palestine are significant witnesses to Hellenistic traditions, such as the use of domes, radiating plans and decorative motifs composed of three leaves, along with wall coverings of marble tiles made of ceramic sheets or glass paste. This was a departure from the use of human forms in ancient Greek art. Marseille claimed that Islamic art did not begin in the first year of the Hijra, nor did it appear at the time the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) established the Islamic state. He explained that the Prophet's mosque in Medina was built for the purpose of prayer, and its architecture was not permanent, having been renovated by Caliph Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him). According to him, it did not reach the level of the magnificent structures built by the Umayyad caliphs¹⁷.

It is important to clarify that the Prophet Muhammad's mosque in Medina is considered to be the first Islamic building. Initially, it was very simple and austere, just a shelter made of palm fronds supported by palm trunks, without any architectural features, except that it was the first plan of the future mosque with its basic components: a very large courtyard and a prayer hall with columns adjacent to the courtyard and facing the Qibla. The prayer hall was wide and shallow, its dimensions determined by the communal prayer system, and a mihrab was later added to the hall. The pulpit was also used during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)¹⁸.

Regarding the design of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, George Marçais affirmed that Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan was inspired by Christian art for its layout, which is characterized by a central circular space surmounted by a dome and surrounded by an octagonal wall. A similar layout can be found in some churches, such as the Church of Basra and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The dome and the arcades surrounding the building, along with the columns ending in exquisite capitals shaped like the acanthus plant, reflect the well-known "Theodosius" style, named after the Roman emperor¹⁹.

Marçais also suggested that the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus represented the first significant success of Islamic architecture, in which ancient Christian traditions merged to serve an Islamic architectural vision. The

¹⁷- George Marsé, *Islamic Art*, translated by Abul Abdul Razaq, National Center for Translation, Cairo, 1st ed., 2016, pp. (31-35).

¹⁸- Afif Bihni, *Islamic Art in Its Early Formation*, Dar Al-Fikr, Damascus, 1st ed., 1413 AH/1983, p. 14.

¹⁹- George Marsé, *Islamic Art*, previous source, pp. (34-35).

characteristics of ancient Christian architecture remained evident in the Islamic architecture that replaced it. Although the general character of this mosque, with its vaulted arcades and domed ceilings, does not originally denote Christian architecture, the large qibla arcade in the Umayyad Mosque is one of the models of Christian architecture that was transferred to other mosques. The large wing that intersects the qibla wall, forming a T-shape, is reminiscent of the plans of early Christian churches²⁰.

Through these and other citations, George Marçais attempted to classify Islamic art as a branch of Roman or Byzantine civilization, denying its independent identity from other cultures. He regarded Christian art as the primary model from which Islamic art derived its architectural and artistic innovations, arguing that the early Muslims were mere imitators and borrowers, lacking significant contributions in architecture and the applied and fine arts²¹.

It is essential to acknowledge that Islamic arts, like those of preceding civilizations, were influenced from their inception by the cultures of the regions they conquered, such as Sasanian, Byzantine, Gothic, and Hellenistic civilizations. They excluded mythological aspects, avoided mimetic imitation, and developed their inherited and innovative compositions. They addressed their abstract arts in accordance with Islamic teachings and philosophy, refining all inherited artistic styles until they evolved into a unique art form with its distinct character, making it difficult to discern the impact of other arts upon it²².

Marçais described the murals in Qasr Amra and the diverse subjects they depicted, such as governors of the regions directly under the caliph, enigmatic compositions with various symbols, hunting scenes, sporting activities and representations of naked women. The murals also include a semi-celestial dome with a collection of wandering stars, representing a classical tableau²³. The decorative techniques combine Hellenistic and Iranian elements. He noted that the decorative styles used in the Dome of the Rock and the Umayyad Mosque were Byzantine, supplemented by elements derived from Hellenistic traditions, with the predominance of plant motifs, especially the acanthus flower and vines, inspired by classical plants previously used in pagan temples and Christian basilicas²⁴.

It can be said that the murals in the Umayyad palaces, especially those at Qasr Amra, defined the essential characteristics of Islamic painting that modern pioneers of fine art continue to strive for, particularly in terms of filling the space within the artwork, either by adding formal elements in representational art or by emptying abstract or botanical elements in Arabic calligraphy, ensuring that all areas of the artwork are occupied. The variety of subjects within the same work of art allows a single element to become an independent painting, unrelated to the original subject, and possibly to return as part of a miniature painting. These works show that the Arab artist was careful to avoid imitating God's creation by neglecting the third dimension, which serves as a vessel for the spiritual essence of things.

George Marseille referenced Hertzfeld's classification of plaster decorations in Abbasid art. He noted that the first style belongs to Hellenistic traditions established in Mesopotamia, featuring various classical elements such as soft plant leaves inspired by acanthus, pearl motifs, and branches. Another style is represented by the decorations of Samarra from the 7th century, which show Hellenistic influences seen in Jerusalem, particularly in the Al-Mashtah Palace. He observed the same forms and plant species, especially the grapevine, prevalent in Umayyad decorations. The character of Samarra's decorations was confirmed through the comprehensive and cohesive use of classical elements.

The author describes the capitals of columns and the interiors of arches in Tulunid residences, noting the use of floral motifs and palm fronds to fill spaces defined by solid or interlaced arches. The method of creating these interlaces was familiar to mosaicists from Roman times, who used a band that wrapped around the top

²⁰- Same source, pp. (37-38).

²¹- George Marsé, *Islamic Art*, previous source, pp. (45-48).

²²- Afif Bihni, *The Aesthetics of Arab Art*, National Council for Culture and Arts, Kuwait, 1978, pp. (38-41).

²³- George Marsé, *Islamic Art*, previous source, pp. (61-68).

²⁴- Same source, p. 76.

and bottom of the element to be decorated. This geometric element gave rise to many architectural styles in which dense plant motifs were used to fill the entire framework.

Although the Muslim artist did not invent new decorative plant units, he arranged them in unprecedented ways, innovatively harmonising their components to create an appearance as if they had been invented for the first time. He effectively combined inherited units, blending them with his philosophy and illuminating them with his genius. This transformation altered the natural appearance of the ornamental plants and animals, almost depriving them of their character and essence, yet they retained the capacity to inspire new decorative images that evoke joy and delight in the human soul. He subjected the imagination to balance, contrast and symmetry, which are the basic principles of Islamic decoration²⁵.

The level of decoration and embellishment in Arab and Islamic countries reached the point where entrances and porticoes were adorned with muqarnas, decorative niches resembling honeycombs, stacked in layers. These were used to transition from the square to the octagonal and then to the circular shape of the dome²⁶.

Conclusion:

After researching and delving into the topic “A Critical Reading of the Ideas of the French Orientalist George Marseille Through His Book ‘Islamic Art’”, we have come to several conclusions:

- The book ‘Islamic Art’ serves as an important resource for academic researchers as it chronicles the architecture and art of Islam from its inception to its heyday and spread to the various regions of the Islamic state, even influencing areas beyond its geographical boundaries.
- The importance of the book lies in its practical aspect, which includes a field study of various Islamic structures. The author has systematically and scientifically examined their planning, architectural elements and decorations, demonstrating the creativity of Muslims along with precise scientific commentary. George Marseille has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the history of civilisations.
- The Orientalist George Marseille, by tracing the influences of Islamic art on Byzantine and Roman art, attempted to deny its independent character by categorising it as a branch of Byzantine and Roman civilisation. He argued that Christian art was the model from which Muslim artists drew their architectural and artistic inspiration.
- Academic researchers in the field of Islamic art should subject Orientalist studies to the standards of scientific objectivity and methodology, and critically evaluate their scholarly findings. This distinction is necessary to distinguish between academic studies that serve science and knowledge and those that aim to facilitate the colonialist occupation of Eastern countries, control their economic resources, distort their religion, undermine their teachings and values, and erase the cultural identity of Muslims, thereby obscuring the bright pages of Islamic civilisation in human history.

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²⁵- Muhammad Abdul Aziz Marzouk, *Islamic Art: Its History and Characteristics*, As'ad Printing House, Baghdad, 1968, pp. (179-182).

²⁶- Muhammad Hussein Joudi, *Islamic Arab Architecture*, Dar Al-Masira for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, 1st ed., 1427 AH/2007, p. 71.

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