

An Orientalizing fad of the Sienese": Reading Arabic Pseudo-Inscriptions from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century

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This essay reviews different readings of Arabic pseudo-inscriptions between the mid-19th and mid-20th centuries. The formalist approach, relying on drawings and black-and-white plates to highlight the characteristics of ornament, often led to overlook meaning and visual effects, as well as mediums and technical properties. Through specific examples, this article attempts to explain the common use of the words «Kufic» and «pseudo-Kufic» to name a wide range of graphic signs. It is possible that the initial focus on Romanesque art is partly responsible for the application of «Kufic» to later examples taken from Italian painting and rather related to the so-called cursive scripts. The extensive understanding of Kufic and the paradigm of «oriental influence» responded to the challenge of naming and explaining Arabic lettering in Christian art, but sometimes resulted in overlooking the historicity of ornament and graphic styles.

Thème(s) de recherche

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