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Figures.

1. Manuscrits coptes — Catalogues. 2. Eluminure copte.

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**INTRODUCING THE CATALOGUE, IN PROGRESS,
OF THE ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPTS
IN THE COPTIC MUSEUM**

BY

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This communication outlines the project and our approach and gives few examples of the breadth and importance of the collection.

A. THE NEW GENERAL CATALOGUE OF THE COPTIC MUSEUM

The catalogue is part of an international project in preparation, the new General Catalogue of the Coptic Museum in Cairo. I was invited to coordinate the project by Dr. Gawdat Gabra, the Director of the Museum, to whom I would like to record my thanks, as also to Madame Samiha Abd el-Shaheed the Curator of MSS, and other members of the staff.

The Museum's library, built up at the beginning of this century, houses nearly 50 illustrated Coptic-Arabic manuscripts, as well as other material, notably a Greek lectionary, papyri, separate parchment folios, and bindings. As a whole, the collection comprises biblical, historical, hagiographical, homilistic and liturgical texts, spanning the seventh through the nineteenth centuries. The main body of the collection - and the core of this catalogue - is a series of Bohairic Coptic/Arabic manuscripts, comprising Gospels, Epistles and Acts, as well as theological texts, Psalms, prayers, lectionaries and other liturgical books. Several contain detailed colophons and inscriptions, pointing to their provenance and use, as Dr. MacCoull points out in her paper here. Many were made for churches and private patrons in Cairo and so add substantially to the cultural history of Christian Cairo. Twenty-five of the manuscripts are dated. These provide fixed points in charting Ms production and the development of libraries in medieval and post-medieval Egypt.

At an early stage in planning this project I decided that the work would benefit from being done collaboratively with textual scholars. Little work had been undertaken since the preliminary catalogues published by George Graf in 1939 and Marcus Simaika Pasha in 1942¹. The groundwork for art historical study had been laid by Hugo Buchthal and Otto Kurz in 1942 and

1) Georg GRAF, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes chrétiens conservés au Caire* (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Studi e Testi LXIII) (Vatican, 1934); Marcus SIMAIKA Pasha, assisted by Yassa 'ABD AL-MASĪḤ Effendi, *Catalogue of the Coptic and Arabic Manuscripts in the Coptic Museum, the Patriarchate, the Principal Churches of Cairo and Alexandria and the Monasteries of Egypt*, Vol. I: *The Coptic Museum* (Cairo, 1939).

l'Abbé Leroy in 1974². But much information has needed to be checked and supplemented, alongside the wider study of the relation of text and image/illustration to the liturgical function and cultural milieu. To this end I invited the collaboration of Dr. Leslie MacCoull and Father Wadi^c Abullif to work respectively on the Coptic and Arabic texts and inscriptions. We worked together for a month in late 1990/early 1991, with the full support and cooperation of the Museum staff.

B. THE AIM OF THE PROJECT

The aim of the project, then, is to produce a critical catalogue of the library's illustrated material. This will both compile essential information about the manuscripts - their contents, palaeography, illustration and bindings - and bring out the importance of the collection as a whole. While the early material is disparate, manuscripts from the 13th-14th centuries shed light on the religious life of the Coptic community in Egypt, especially Cairo, at crucial stages in its history³. One aspect of particular importance is the transmission of texts, from Greek and Coptic to Arabic, as Arabic became the dominant language not only of administration and daily life but also of Christian worship. Several of the Gospel manuscripts conform to the mid-13th century recension developed by the Al-^cAssāl brothers, (of whom see Father Wadi^c Abullif's paper here) and have bearing on the theological and social developments of that time. An integral approach to the manuscripts' texts, inscriptions and illustrations shows how scribes and artists worked during the 13th-14th centuries to promote Christian Arabic texts. Many of the later manuscripts on the other hand, display a closer overlap with Islamic book production.

C. A FEW EXAMPLES

Finally, I should like to give a few examples of the nature and significance of the illustrated material throughout the whole period, commenting

2) Hugo BUCHTAL and Otto KURZ, *A hand list of illuminated Oriental Christian Manuscripts* (Studies of the Warburg Institute, Vol. 12) (London, 1942, rpt. Nendeln, 1968); Jules LEROY, *Les manuscrits coptes et coptes-arabes illustrés* (Institut Français d'Archéologie de Beyrouth), Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique, t. 96 (Paris, 1974). [= LEROY, *Manuscripts coptes*].

3) A book in preparation by Lucy-Anne HUNT on Christian Coptic/Arabic manuscripts and wallpaintings, with special reference to the 12th-14th centuries.

on the relationship between text, script and image. Several manuscripts are lavishly illustrated with carpet pages, frontispieces, headpieces, cycles of figural scenes, marginal illustrations and portraits of saints. While some have been published, other have received scant attention until now. Bindings too form are an important, understudied, aspect.

1. A fragment of a painted book cover (Coptic Museum 3852) (fig. 1), depicts two standing holy figures, one holding a scroll, the other a staff⁴. It is attributable to the White or Red Monastery at Sohag and is an example of monastic art of the 7th-8th centuries. There are parallels with wallpainting of the period, both in the figure style and facial features and costume, as well as the background columns and canopies. This implies that artists - probably monks themselves in this case - undertook monumental work alongside book illumination.

2. Bibl. 94, containing the Epistles and Acts in Bohairic Coptic/Arabic, is part of a New Testament of which the rest is now in Paris (Institut Catholique, Copte-Arabe 1)⁵. Fig. 2 shows fols. 129^v-130^r, the beginning of the text of the Catholic Epistles. There is a decorated title piece above the text and, preceding it on the left, a combined portrait showing the authors under an ornate canopy. Each holds a volume of his epistles. The richness of the use of gold and blue, and the quality of the painting itself, puts this manuscript on a par with the best work being produced for Islamic patrons at the time. Interestingly, though, the author resorts to a much more traditional Coptic interlace design to surround the colophon (fig. 3, fol. 216^r), giving his name (Gabriel the priest monk) and the date of 1249-50 and the name of the patron (as elsewhere in the manuscripts) as Shaykh al-Nushū Abū Shākir B. al-Skaykh al-Sanī al-Rāhib B. al-Muhadhdhab, teacher of the al-^cAssāl brothers⁶. Gabriel, (later Patriarch Gabriel III) probably painted

4) LEROY, *Manuscripts Coptes*, 89-90 with pl. 27 (1).

5) SIMAIKA, *Catalogue of the Coptic and Arabic Manuscripts*, 5-6, serial no. 4; GRAF, *Catalogue de Manuscrits*, 63-64, no. 151. LEROY, *Manuscripts Coptes*, 174-77, with pls. 10 (2), 20 (1-2), 93-95; Lucy-Anne HUNT, *The illustration of a Thirteenth-Century New Testament Manuscript from Cairo (Paris, Institut Catholique Copte-Arabe, 1)*, PhD thesis, London University, 1981; Lucy-Anne HUNT, «Christian-Muslim Relations in Painting in Egypt of the Twelfth to mid-Thirteenth Centuries: Sources of Wallpainting at Deir es-Suriani and the illustration of the New Testament MS Paris, Copte-Arabe 1/Bibl. 94», *Cahiers Archéologiques* 33 (1985) 125-41.

6) Adel Y. SIDARUS, *Ibn ar-Rāhibs Leben und Werke: ein koptisch-arabischer Encyclopädist des 7/13 Jahrhunderts* (Islamkunliche Untersuchungen, 36) (Freiburg/B, 1975), 8-

this page himself, resorting to a professional painter to undertake the more elaborate illustration in the book.

3. A detail of fol. 22^v (fig. 4) of a dual frontispiece of a large, fine Gospel book in Arabic written in Syria in 1340 for Shaykh al-As^cad by the priest George, using Hibatallāh ibn al-^cAssāl's version of the test. It is notably «Islamic» in its ornament, as can be demonstrated by comparison with near-contemporary Koran frontispieces⁷.

4. It is frequently assumed that Coptic book production and book illumination did not survive the travails of the Mamluk period. However, the issue of book production by Christians under the Ottomans can be demonstrated by a bilingual Copto-Arabic Lectionary (Lit. 312) made for the church of the Virgin at Haret Zuwaila in Cairo in 1624-5, a time when this church was the seat of the Patriarchate, and is one of the unexpected highlights of the catalogue⁸. It is one of the unexpected highlights of the catalogue. A large and lavish book, fig. 5 here reproduces fols. 5^v-6^r, the cross frontispiece opposite the opening page of the bilingual Coptic and Arabic text. Both languages were written by the same scribe, Joseph, who records his name in both languages in the manuscript. The creative interplay of ornament and calligraphy that is a feature throughout the book's illustration, and shows the interweaving of script and illustration. The manuscript also includes bird motifs, which although broadly based on traditional forms, is radically innovative in the handling of design and colour, especially in the extensive use of different blues.

10, 23 note 82; Wadī^c Abullif, «Vita e Opera del Pensatore Copto al-Ṣafī Ibn al-^cAssāl (sec. XIII)», *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea* XX (1987) 134-35.

7) For the MS: GRAF, *Catalogue de Manuscrits*, 77-81, no. 180; SIMAIKA, *Catalogue of the Coptic and Arabic Manuscripts*, 11-12, no. 13. See the comments of Lucy-Anne HUNT, «Christian Muslim Interchange: The Medieval Churches of Old Cairo», paper to the *Second Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium or Arab Christianity and Islam, Coptic Arabic Christianity before the Ottomans: Test and Context, Proceedings* (ed. David Thomas) forthcoming in *Medieval Encounters* II (Leiden, 1995).

8) GRAF, *Catalogue de Manuscrits*, 61-62, no. 150; SIMAIKA, *Catalogue of the Coptic and Arabic Manuscripts*, 88-89, no. 179. Its new Registration no. is 207. See now «Christian Manuscript Production under Ottoman Rule: Note on an Illustrated Seventeenth-Century Copto-Arabic Lectionary in Cairo», and Leslie MACCOULL, «Coptic Museum MS. Lit. 312 Revisited», both forthcoming in *Scriptorium* (1994 or 1995).

5. Finally, an Arabic Gospel book of 1689 (Bibl. 75) may be introduced, which shows the incoming influence of Safavid art of Iran⁹. First the binding (fig. 6) which is «christianised» by its inscription, referring to the Gospels as the Rivers of life.

6. The beginning of Matthew's Gospel (fig. 7, fols. 27^v-28^r) is decorated as Persian-style frontispieces with a deep blue ground and floral motifs. This is comparable with, for example, fols. 1^v-2^r, a double frontispiece in a late 16th century Firdausi, *Shahnameh* from Safavid Iran, in the Mingana collection in Birmingham (Persian 9), which has similar blocks of densely coloured ornament built around cartouche shapes¹⁰.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to intimate the richness and variety of the material in the Coptic Museum, with its examples from all periods of the life of Christians in Egypt under Islam, with reference to the relationship between text and image. The Catalogue aims to make this important material more widely available.

Lucy-Anne HUNT

9) GRAF, *Catalogue de Manuscrits*, 243-44, no 667; SIMAIKA, *Catalogue of the Coptic and Arabic Manuscripts*, 15-16, no. 22. Its new Registration no. is 21.

10) Lucy-Anne HUNT, «A Survey of illustrated manuscripts in the Mingana and related collections, Selly Oak Colleges Central Library, Birmingham», forthcoming in *Manuscripts of the Middle East* (Leiden), no. 102.

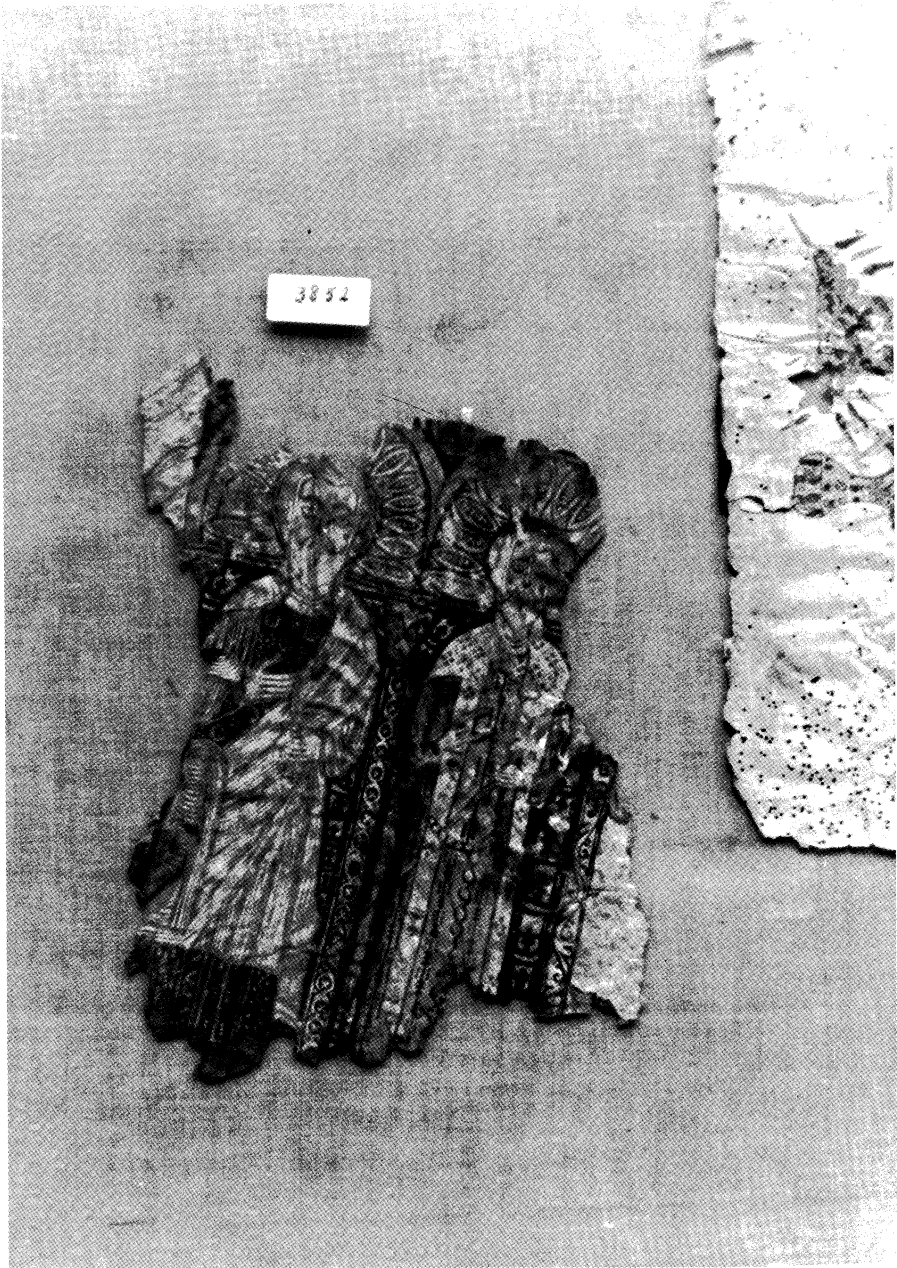


Fig. 1: Cairo, Coptic Museum 3852 Book cover.

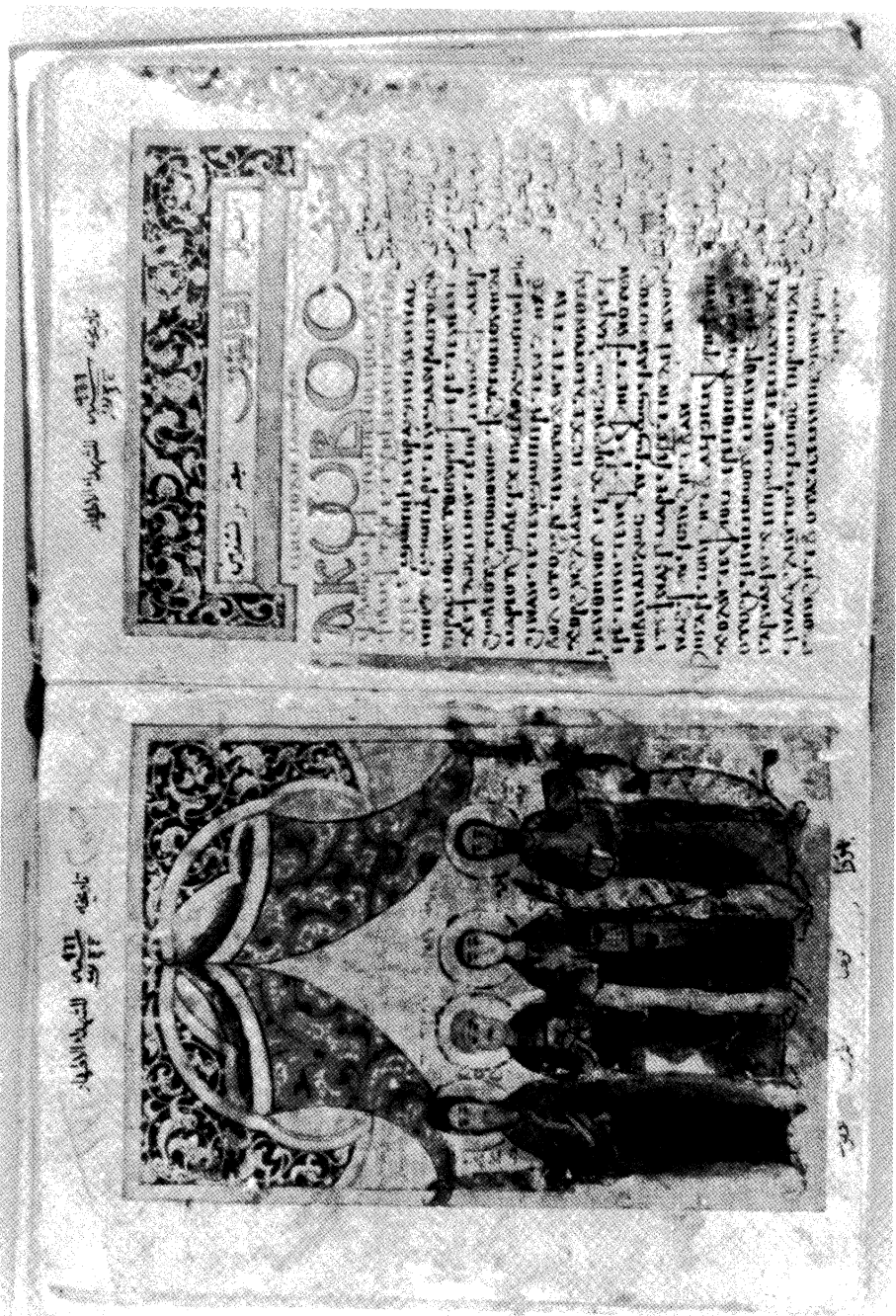


Fig. 2: Cairo, Coptic Museum Bibl. 94 fols 129^v -130^r.

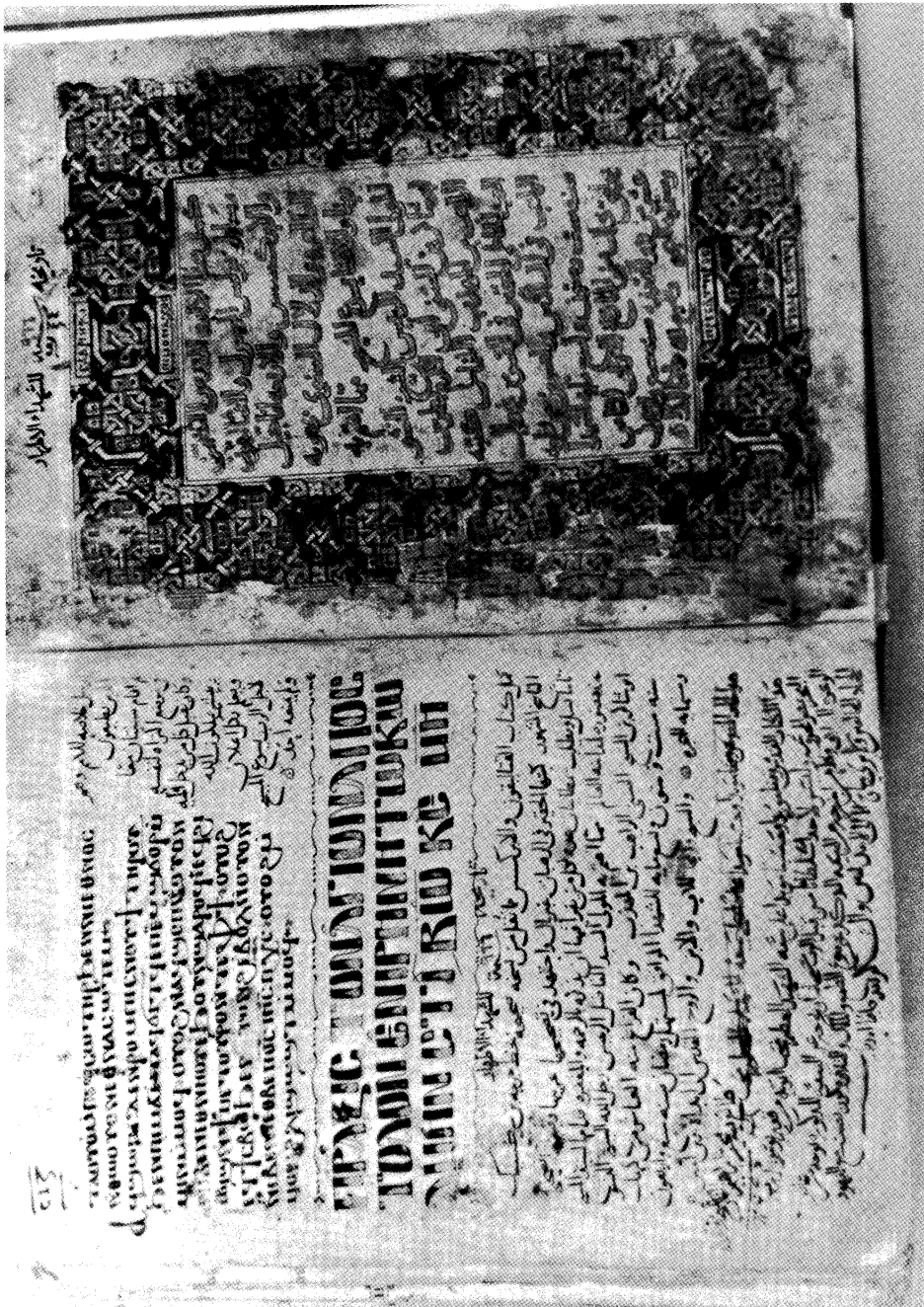


Fig. 3: Cairo, Coptic Museum Bibl. 94 fols 215^v-216^r.

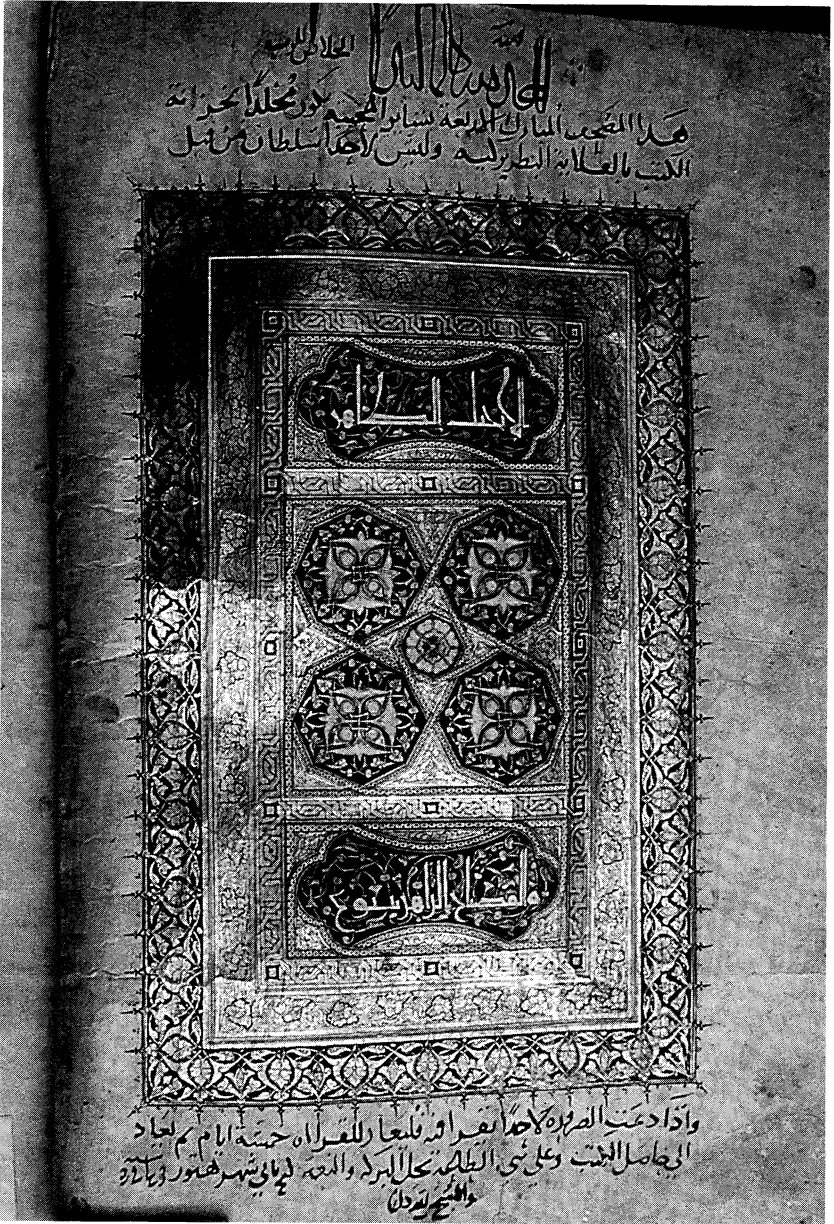


Fig. 4: Cairo, Coptic Museum Bibl. 90 fol. 22^v.

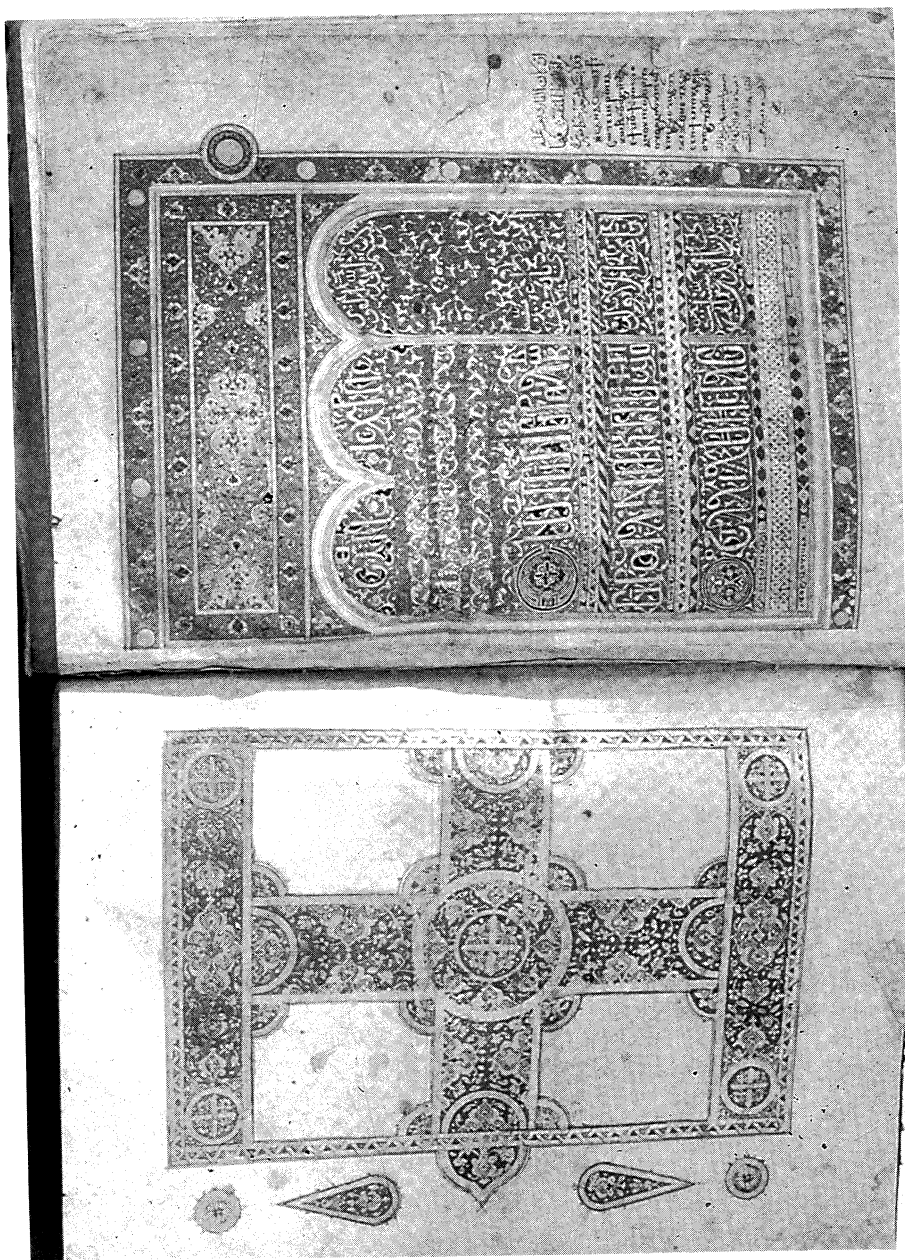


Fig. 5: Cairo, Coptic Museum Bibl. 90 fols. 5^v-6^r.



Fig. 6: Cairo, Coptic Museum Bibl. 75 Binding.

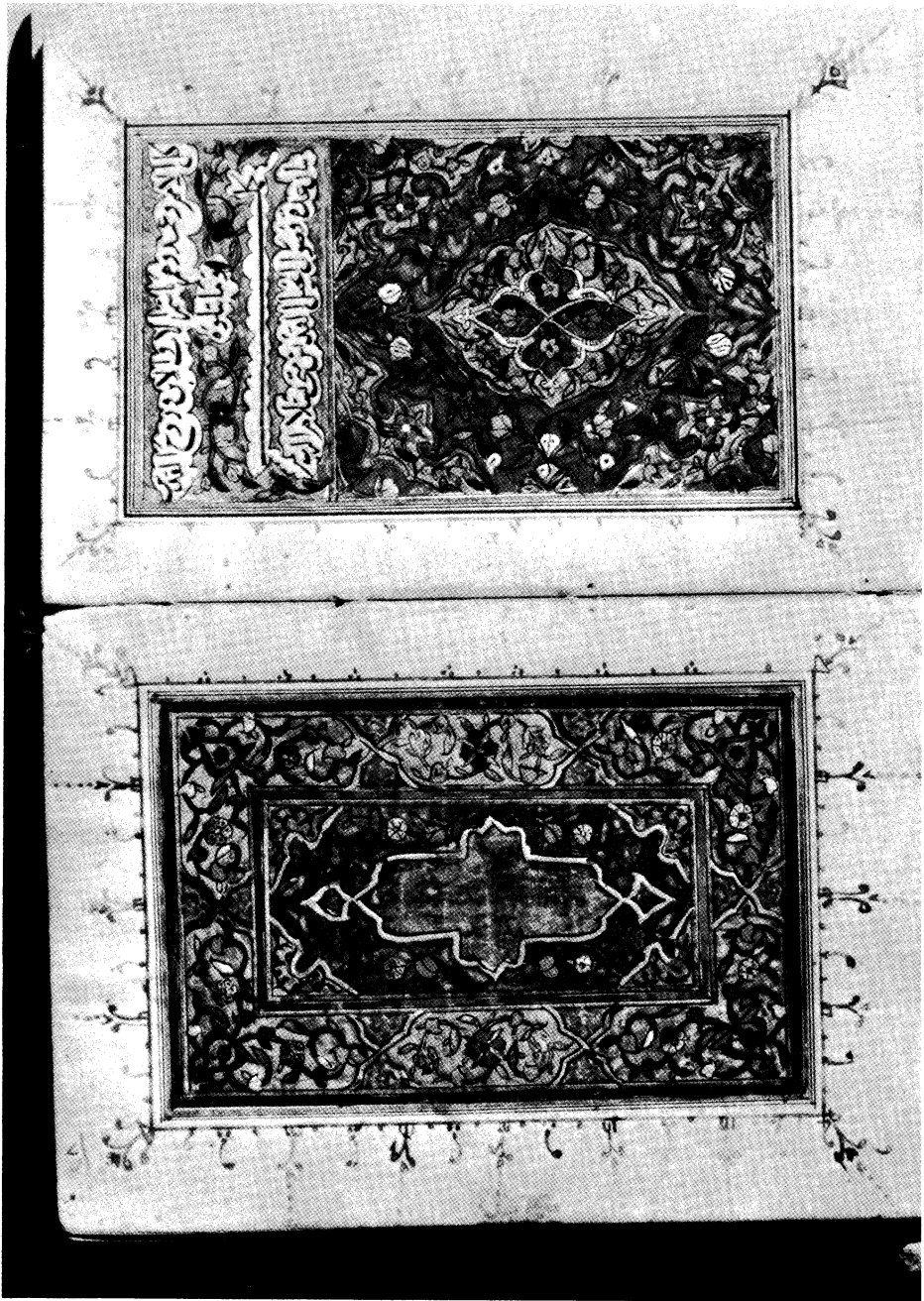


Fig. 7: Cairo, Coptic Museum Bibl. 75 fols. 27^v-28^r.