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# The Origin and Early Development of Floriated Kufic <sup>(1)</sup>

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Among the eight varieties of Kûfic

1. primitive or simple Kûfic (coufique primitif)
2. Kûfic with elaborate apices
3. foliated Kûfic
4. floriated Kûfic (coufique fleuri)
5. plaited or interlaced Kûfic (coufique à entrelacs)
6. bordered Kûfic <sup>(2)</sup>
7. architectural Kûfic (coufique architectural)
8. Kûfic rectangles (coufique carré)

the floriated Kûfic (no. 4) is the most attractive; it is the most decoratif variety of lapidary styles and marks a culminating point in the development of the Arabic script.

Inscriptions in floriated Kûfic are known to Western scholars since the first quarter of the XVIIIth century—two dated 348 and 392 A.H. respectively and found in Persia were reproduced by *Chardin* <sup>(3)</sup> — but they did not attract any special attention; only their difficult readability was repeatedly stressed. <sup>(4)</sup> The origin of this script was in complete obscurity, and it was only at the beginning of the XXth century that theories about its origin were formed.

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(1) Communication présentée en séance du 25 avril 1955.

(2) According to the description of this variety, given by S. Flury in *Pope, A survey of Persian Art II* (1939), pp. 1743 f., 1745 (with fig. 602), that a purely *ornamental border* is added to the upper part of the band of writing, script and ornament thus forming two horizontal zones clearly separated from each other, it is actually no question of a new kind of *script*, but of a distinct accessive decoration of the *frame* only.

(3) *Voyages en Perse III* (Amsterdam 1711), Plate beside p. 118.

(4) E.g. by J.J. Kehr, *Monarchiae Asiatico-Saracenicae Status* (Leipzig 1724), paragraph 4. *Chr. Th. von Murr*, *Inscriptio Arabica litteris cuficis auro textili picta in infima fimbria pallii imperialis Nürnberg 1790*, p. 12; J.J. Marcel, *Paléographie Arabe* (Paris 1828), p. 10.



Fig. 1. Tombstone of Tashkend 230 A.H.  
(after M. Hartmann, OLZ ix,  
1906, plate opposite col. 235).



Fig. 2. Tombstone of Qairawân 341 A.H.  
(after Houdas-Basset, Epigraphie  
Tunisienne, pl. III).

Before I go into details, it is necessary to make a clear differentiation between *a)* foliated Kûfic and *b)* floriated Kûfic, for both have been frequently confounded, even by experienced scholars.

*Foliated Kûfic* is characterized by the decoration of the *apices* of the letters, consisting of half-palmettes and two-or three-lobed leaves, the bifurcation of the endings of the letter Alif which might extend even to initial forms and the terminal letters (fig. 1,2).

*Floriated Kûfic* shows the same decoration, but in addition floral motifs, tendrils and scrolls growing from the terminations or even from the median forms of the letters (fig. 3,4). These tendrils are of course to be distinguished from those growing from the upper edge of the band of writing, or forming the floral background of the inscription (1). For the essential characteristic of *coufique fleuri* is that the tendrils and perfect arabesques form an organic unit with the letters from which they grow. (2) Since *J. G. Chr. Adler* (3) and *Marcel* (4) this floriated Kûfic is also known by the name *Carmatian* (*Qarmatique*, *carmatique*) which points to the Fâtimids. Unfortunately no sharp distinction was made between foliated Kûfic and floriated Kûfic, the term *coufique fleuri* being employed for both styles of script. So e.g. the script of the inscription of the *Gâmi' al-'Attârîn* in Alexandria (5) is called *coufique fleuri* by *van Berchem*, although it is obviously *foliated Kûfic*. The script of the tombstone no. 4288 (dated 243 A.H., 857 A.D.) in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (fig. 5), a rich foliated Kûfic, is even described by *Wiet* (6) as "*coufique simple*". So *M. van Berchem* has used the expression

(1) *S. Flury*, in *Pope*, *A survey of Persian Art* II, p. 1758, has included such inscriptions into foliated Kûfic, since the visual impression is the same.

(2) Cf. *E. Herzfeld*, *OLZ* xiv (1911), col. 432; *S. Flury*, *Die Ornamente der Hakim- und Ashar Moschee* (Heidelberg 1912), pp. 10 f., *W. and G. Marçais*, *Les monuments Arabes de Tlemcen* (Paris 1903), pp. 87, 88; *M. van Berchem*, *Amida*, p. 24.

(3) *Museum Cuficum Borgianum Veletris* (Rom 1782), pp. 11 f., 32 f., *Arabes, elegantia scribendi supra modum forte studiosi, variis lineolis, ornamentisque illud augere inceperunt, e quibus denique alia scriptio orta est, quae primo obtutu a Cufica omnino aliena videtur, et re vera simplicitati, maiestatique Cuficae scripturae longe inferior est. A nostratibus Carmatica vulgo dicitur.*

(4) *J.J. Marcel*, *Paléographie Arabe*, p. 10; *W. and G. Marçais*, *op. cit.*, p. 88; *M. van Berchem*, *Revue Africaine* no. 257 (1905), p. 185; *N. de Khanikoff*, *J A v série* tom. xx (1862), pp. 129-130 ("*coufique enchevêtré, improprement nommé karmatique*")

(5) *CIA* I/4, *Egypte*, p. 701 (*MMAF* xix, 1903). The same is the case with the inscription *ibid.* *CIA* I, no. 48 (p. 79), Pl. xviii no. 3, and no. 45 (p. 74), while the inscription of *Badr al-Gamâlî* of 480 A.H. (*Bâb al-Futûh*), showing a tendril with three-lobed leaf in *Râ*, is designated as "*coufique fleuri à rinceaux*" (*CIA* I, no. 36, Pl. xviii no. 2, p. 61).

(6) *Stèles funéraires* II (Cairo 1936), p. 28, Pl. IX.

“coufique fleuri à riches rinceaux” for genuine floriated Kûfic <sup>(1)</sup> e.g. in the inscription of the tympanums of the arches in the sanctuary of the Azhar Mosque, which *Flury* <sup>(2)</sup> called “a developed phase of Coufique fleuri”. To this vagueness in terminology comes another inconvenience concerning method : in the investigations, hitherto made, extending to the decorated apices and the development of foliated Kûfic, the influence of the manuscript-style on the lapidary-script has been completely neglected, although *J. von Karabacek* <sup>(3)</sup> has pointed out this important phenomenon as early as 1874.

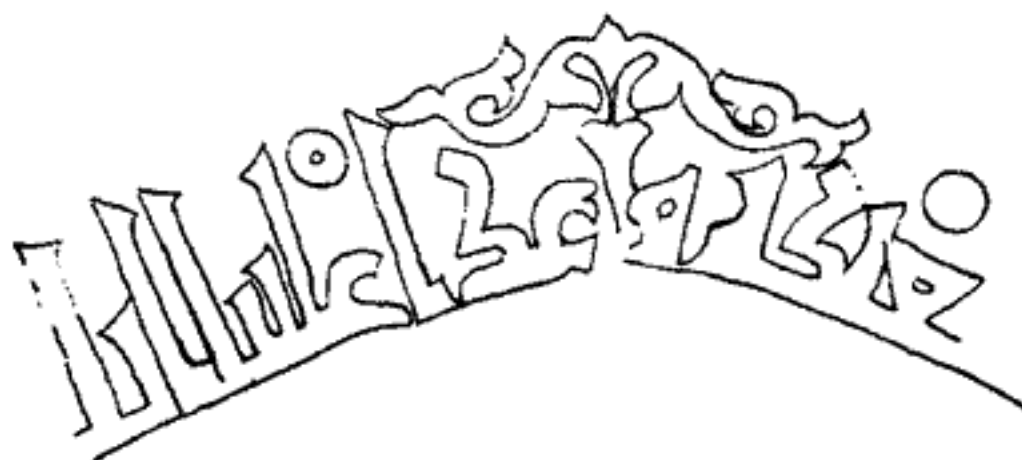


Fig. 3. Inscription in the transept of the mosque of al-Azhar, Cairo (after K.A.C. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture in Egypt*, fig. 17, p. 54).

The problem of the origin of “Coufique fleuri” was first discussed by *W. and G. Marçais* <sup>(4)</sup> in 1903; he said that this angular floriated character, known as Carmatian (quarmatique), appeared for the first time in Tunisia in 341 A.H. <sup>(5)</sup> and was then transferred to Egypt, perhaps by the Fâtimids. *M. van Berchem* <sup>(6)</sup> at first shared the same view in 1905, but, under the influence of the appearance of the famous stela of Tashkend, dated 230 A.H. (844 A.D.) <sup>(7)</sup>, he changed his opinion <sup>(8)</sup> and considered this epigraphical document as the oldest

(1) CIA I, no. 31, p. 53, Pl. XVI no. 2.

(2) *Syria* XVII (1936), p. 368.

(3) *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Mazjaditen* (Leipzig 1874), pp. 16, 51-53, 56, 64-65.

(4) *Les Monuments Arabes de Tlemcen* (Paris 1903), p. 88.

(5) The epitaph from the Qubba of Sidi Ribâh in Qairawân; *Houdas and R. Basset*, *Epigraphie Tunisienne* no. 16, *Bulletin de Correspondence Africaine* IV (Alger 1882), p. 126, Pl. III.

(6) *Revue Africaine* no. 257 (1905), p. 185.

(7) See below p. 5 and fig. 1.

(8) *Amida*, p. 24.



example known of this type of script, although he expressed serious doubts about the correctness of the date and said that the Tashkend stela undoubtedly was engraved later. *Martin Hartmann* <sup>(1)</sup> who had discovered this tombstone on the occasion of his journey to Turkestan in the Museum of Tashkend, declared this stela to be the preeminent example of the new style of writing, which manifests its existence so energetically in the Fâtimid inscriptions of 470 A.H. in Cairo, and arrived at the conclusion that this floriated Kûfic ("Blumensteil") has come *from the East* to Egypt <sup>(2)</sup>. He was followed in this view by *J. Strzygowski* <sup>(3)</sup>, who took the advancement of this ornamental script *from Central Asia to the West* as a proved fact, and even supposed that also the Kûfic palmette and the ornamentation of the Arabic tombstones in Cairo came from the East to Egypt and is related to the patterns of Persian textiles.

But both theories soon met with serious objections. First of all *J. von Karabacek* <sup>(4)</sup> proved with most serious arguments that the Tashkend-stela in question (A), published by *M. Hartmann*, is only a *copy* or *replica* of a stone originally dated 230 A.H., and is contemporaneous with a second tombstone (B) equally published by *Hartmann* <sup>(5)</sup> from the same Museum and dated 541 A.H. (1146 A.D.). *Karabacek's* view was fully approved by *Herzfeld*. <sup>(6)</sup> So the basic preliminary condition for an early appearance of Coufique fleuri in the East was eliminated. *Herzfeld* <sup>(7)</sup>, in his famous review on *Strzygowski's* *Amida*, has further pointed out that the stela of Tashkend (fig. 1), used by *Strzygowski* as an argument for the spreading of coufique fleuri from Turkestan to the West, offers by no means this style of writing—no tendril, no flower. Indeed, a comparison of the two figures I and 2 with real floriated Kûfic (e.g. fig. 3,4) shows clearly that there is a frequent use of the lobed terminations of letters in *both* tombstones, but *nowhere* even a *disposition* to develop these terminations to a scroll, tendril or arabesque, growing out of the letters. So neither the stela of Tashkend (ca. 540 A.H.) nor that of

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(1) OLZ IX (1906), col. 71-73.

(2) Ibid. col. 34.

(3) *Amida* p. 375; *Ornamente altarabischer Grabsteine in Kairo, Islam II* (1911), p. 334.

(4) *Problem oder Phantom*, Sb. Akad. Wien 178/5 (1906), p. 15.

(5) OLZ IX (1906), col. 235 and Plate opposite it.

(6) OLZ XIV (1911), col. 433. *Islam V* (1914), p. 363.

(7) OLZ XIV (1911), col. 432 f.

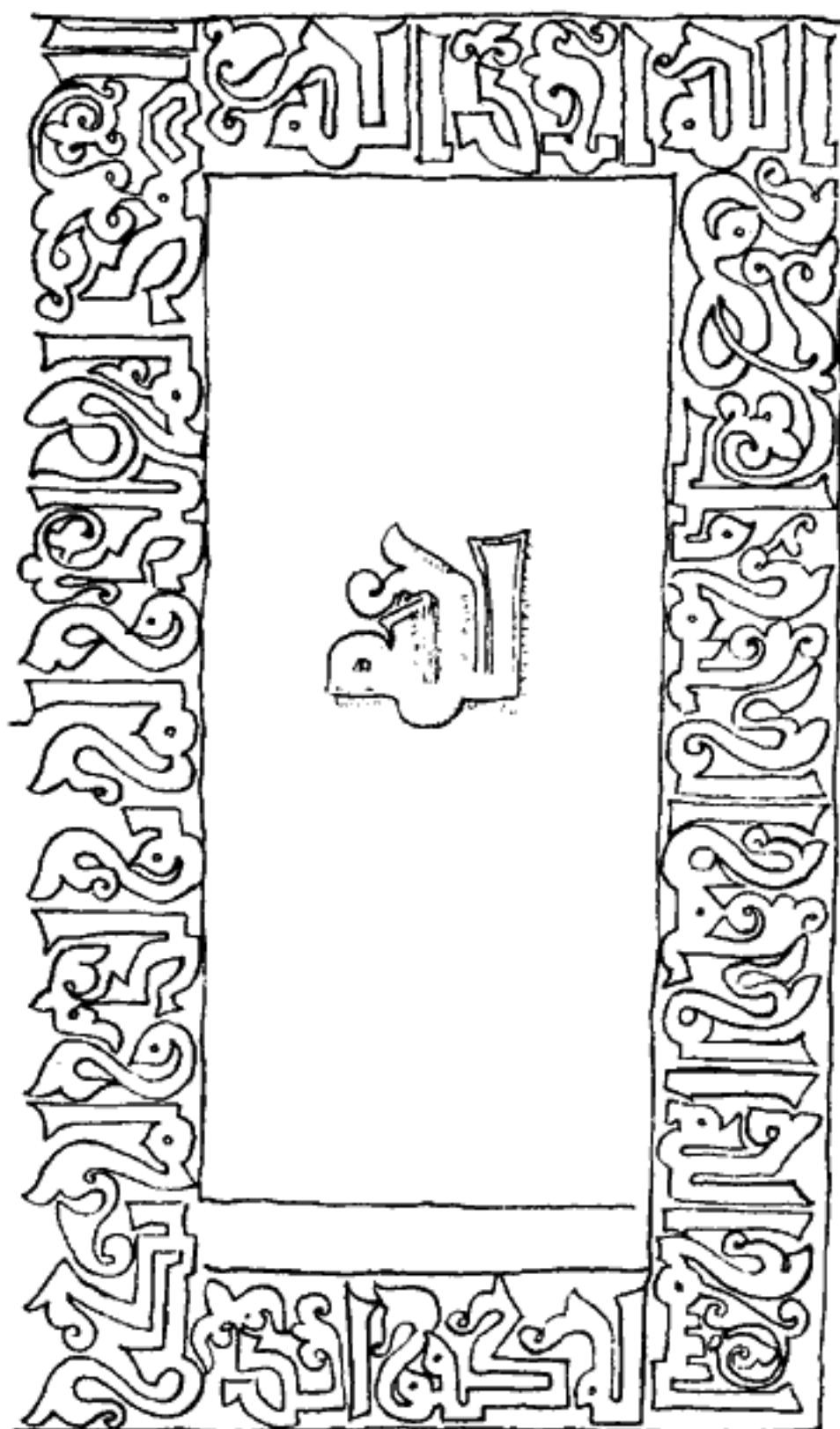


Fig. 4. Alabaster slab in the mausoleum of Shêkh Fathî, Mosui (after *Sarre-Herzfeld*, *Archäologische Reise im Euphrat- und Tigris-Gebiet* I, fig. 18, p. 28).



Fig. 5. Epitaph no. 4288 in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo.  
(After a photograph in the Museum of Islamic Art).



Qairawân (341 A.H.) can be considered as a preliminary step to the developed form of coufique fleuri, and the way from Tunisia to Egypt is out of the question.

But *Herzfelds* negative criticism of the theories of *Hartmann* and *Strzygowski* already contained *one* positive and important statement: i.e. the *decoration of the apices* by elegant palmettes, beginning on Egyptian tombstones since ca. 240 A.H., might be considered as a *preparation* for, or first step to, coufique fleuri. So the way was indicated on which further investigations had to start, especially, when new material, inscriptions as well as papyri, had come to light. In spite of the statement of *Flury* <sup>(1)</sup> that we obtain from Amida just as little information as from Cairo about the sudden appearance of the Kûfic decorative writing, it is in the first place *Egypt*, where the investigations concerning the *first steps* of the development of floriated Kûfic are vigorously demonstrated by papyri and epitaphs.

There is no doubt that the decoration of the letters begins with the most significant letter of the Arabic alphabet, the Alif. The top of the shaft is provided with a barb or hook, turned to the left or right. Both forms are connected with late Nabataean forms of the Alif in Sinaitic inscriptions—the former with Euting no. 657, the latter with Euting no. 329—and are to be found in papyri from Egypt and Palestine (Khirbet Mird) of the first to the third centuries A.H. The hook or barb then developes to a thorn or half arrow-head, a loop, a half-palmette and finally to a three-lobed leaf (437 A.H.) which had a decisive influence on the development of floriated Kûfic. The thorn apex and the three-lobed apex first occur on epitaphs in Egypt, dated 180 A.H. <sup>(2)</sup> and 192 A.H. <sup>(3)</sup> respectively and develop some years later to a three-lobed half-palmette (210 A.H.) <sup>(4)</sup> which is obviously connected with the same pattern occurring in the marginal decoration and as side-acroteria of the same tombstone. <sup>(5)</sup> This decoration is apparently taken over or imitated from Coptic tombstones, where it occurs already in the V/VIth century A.D. <sup>(6)</sup>.

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(1) *Islamische Schriftbänder Amida-Diarbekr* (Basel 1920), p. 10.

(2) *Hawary-Rached*, *Stèles funéraires*, I, no. 1506/142, Pl. 1.

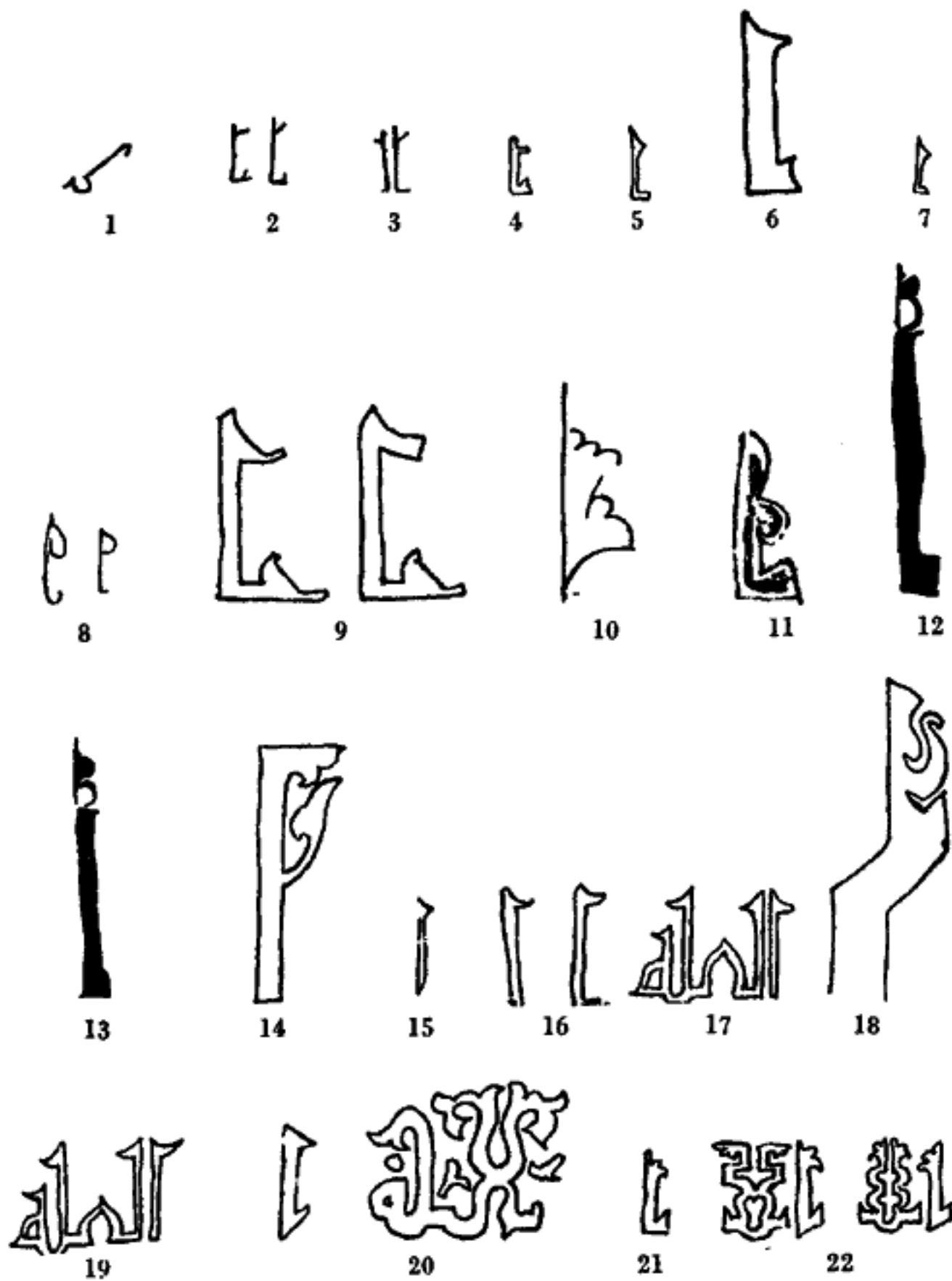
(3) *Ibid.* no. 1506/46 Pl. VII.

(4) *Ibid.* no. 4506/171, Pl. xxi, 210 A.H.

(5) Cf. *Islam II* (1911), fig. 5, p. 311. *Hawary-Rached*, op. cit. no. 1506/171 Pl. xxi, 1506/6 Pl. x, 3944/11 Pl. xi, ecc.

(6) Cf. Inv. no. 8609, 8585 in the Coptic Museum, Old - Cairo.

## Diagram A



1. J. EUTING, *Sinaitische Inschriften*, no. 329. 2. HAWARY-RACHED, *Stèles funéraires* no. 1193 (Pl. VI, 190 A.H.). 3. Ibid. 4. Ibid, no. 2711/138 (Pl. VIII, 196 A.H.). 5. Ibid. no. 8360 (Pl. L, 232 A.H.). 6. Nilometer of al-Rôdha. 7. G. SALMON, *Notes d'épigraphie Arabe* (BIFAO II), no. 9 (263 A.H.). 8. E. HERZFELD, *Arab Inschriften*, fasc. III, p. 36. 9. *Matin the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo* (Inv. no. 8244). 10. *Tiraz*, E. KUHNEL, *Catalogue of dated Tiraz fabrics*, Pl. XLIII, In. no. 73567. 11. Ibid, Pl. LI, XIth cent A.D. 12. *Tirâz*, *Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo* (Inv. no. 12224). 13. *Tirâz* C.J. LAMM, *Dated or datable Tirâz in Sweden* (*Le Monde Oriental* XXXII, 1938) no. 9 (334-358 A.H.). 14. S. FLURY, *Islamische Schriftbänder Amida-Diarbekr*, fig. 3 (476 A.H.). 15. G. WIET, *Stèles funéraires*, Pl. XVII (479 A.H.). 16. Ibid., Pl. XVIII (485 A.H.). 17. Ibid., Pl. XIX (511 A.H.). 18. S. FLURY, *op. cit.*, fig. 6. 19. M. LANCI, *Trattato delle sepoltrali iscrizioni II* (Eucca 1840), Pl. XX (517 A.H.). 20. Ibid., Pl. XXII (569 A.H.). 21. Ibid., Pl. XXX (650 A.H.).

## Diagram B



1. J. EUTING, *Sinaitische Inschriften*, No. 657, Pl. XXXVIII. 2. Papyrus Khirbat Mird no. 4. (1st cent. A.H.). 3. PER Inv. Ar. Pap. no. 1003 (1st cent. A.H.). 4. Inv. no. 9291, Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo. (71 A.H.). 5. A.U. POPE, *Assurvey of Persian Art*, II, fig. 580 Makki script in Chester Beatty's manuscript of the *Kitāb al-Fihrist*. 6. Inscription of Ascalon (155 A.H. RAO I, Pl. XI). 7. PER Inv. Ar. Pap. no. 1920 (Second half of the IIIrd cent. A.H.). 8. ELITTMANN, *Arabic Inscription*, no. 136, p. 94. 9. HAWARY-BACHED *Stèles funéraires I*, Pl. 2 no. 1506/142 (180 A.H.). 10. Ibid., Pl. III, no. 3360 (182 A.H.). 11. Gospel manuscript 279 A.H. (ZDMG XV, 1861, Pl. oppos. p. 384). 12. PER Inv. Ar. Pap. no. 2150 recto (IInd-IIIrd cent. A.H.). 13. PER Inv. Perg. Ar. no. 130 (IIIrd cent. A.H.). 14. PER Inv. Ar. Pap. 2149 (IInd-IIIrd cent. A.H.). 15. Tirāz Bonaki Museum Athens no. 61 (286 A.H.). 16. Tirāz ibid. no. 144 (309 A.H.). 17. Arabic papyrus APEL III no. 8, Pl. III (309 A.H.). 18. Arabic Inscription CIA II, Pl. IV no. 18 (395 A.H.). 19. Plate, Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (*Ars Islamica* III, fig. 4, oppos. p. 177, 386-411 A.H.). 20. M. LANCI, *Seconda opera cufica* III, Pl. XIX (437 A.H.). 21. Coran, 557 A.H. (*Arabic Paleography*, Pl. XLVII). 22. Epitaph (579 A.H.), J. KARABACEK. *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Masjaditen*, p. 53. 23. Ibid., p. 53. 24. Inscription in the Mosque of al-Hasan, Cairo (750 A.H.). 25. Coran, 801, A.H. (*Arabic Paleography*, Pl. LXVIII).



Fig. 6. Decoration of a tombstone.  
(After Der Islam II, p. 311, fig. 5).

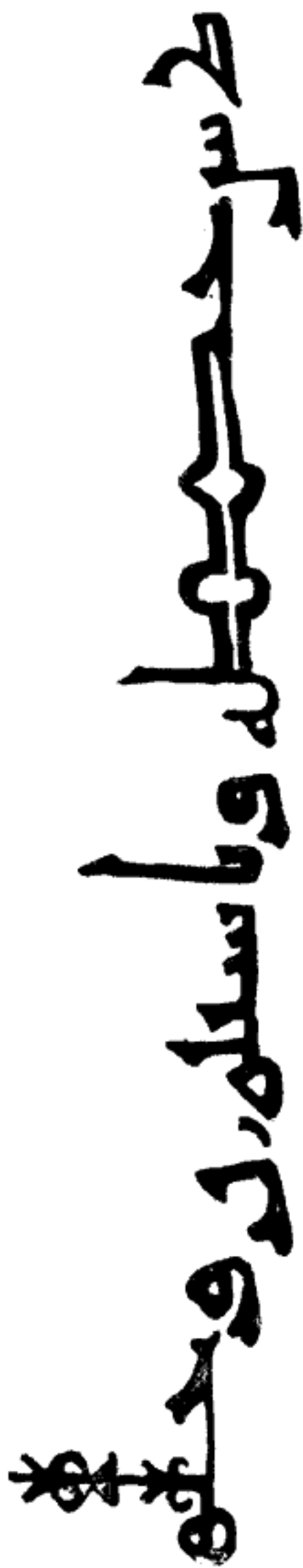


Fig. 7. PER Inv. Ar. Pap. 10019.



Fig. 8. Epitaph no. 1506/72 in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo.  
(After a photograph in the Museum of Islamic Art).



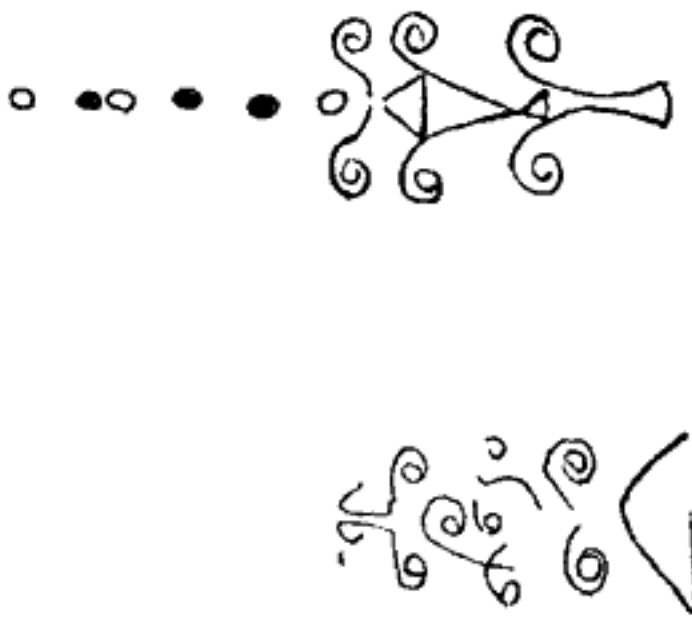


Fig. 9. Marginal decoration in a Greek manuscript (After Stasoff, L'ornement Slave et orientale, Pl. 120 no. 15).

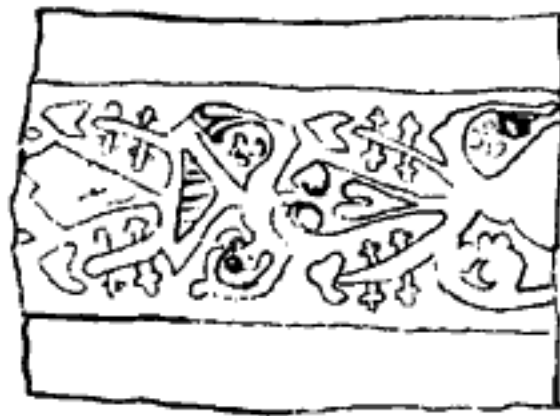


Fig. 10. Decoration of a Coptic textile (After M. Dimand, Coptic tunics, fig. 19, p. 251).

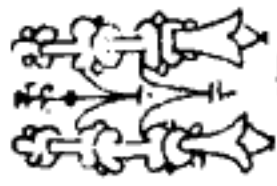


Fig. 11. Initial in a Greek manuscript. (After Bordier Description des peintures et autres ornements contenus dans les manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale, fig. 38, p. 97).

*E. Herzfeld* <sup>(1)</sup> has noticed that with these palmette-like apices the preparation for coufique fleuri is effected. In 228 A.H. we see a further step in this evolution : the apex of the Alif is decorated in form of a *tree*, a decoration which occurs in terminal-Mîm already in an epitaph dated 217 A.H. (822 A.D.) <sup>(2)</sup> and has a parallel in the Lâm of a sketch on papyrus (PER Inv. Ar. Pap. 10019 fig. 7) dating from the first half of the third century A.H. and recurs in an epitaph <sup>(3)</sup> dated 234 A.H. (848 A.D. fig. 8). Also this floral decoration is borrowed from Coptic patterns of the V/VIth century A.D. <sup>(4)</sup> possibly connected with the marginal decoration of Greek manuscripts of the IV/V th century A.D. (fig. 9) <sup>(5)</sup> It represents the well known "tree of life" which not only recurs on Coptic epitaphs—e.g. no. 8585 in the Coptic Museum Old-Cairo—but also on Coptic textiles of the VI/VII th century A.D. (fig. 10) <sup>(6)</sup>. The infiltration of such tree-patterns into a letter is not confined to Arabic writing; it is also significant for Greek initials, e.g. of the X th century A.D. in MS. Grec 438, dated 992 A.D. in the National Library in Paris (fig. 11) <sup>(7)</sup> and for the decoration of Hebrew manuscripts of the IX/Xth century A.D. <sup>(8)</sup> (fig. 12).

Already in 205 A.H. (820 A.D.) the decoration of the three-lobed palmette which was hitherto restricted to Alif and Lâm, is extended to other letters and increases more and more in the following years. Palmette-trees and palmettes are now used simultaneously as decorations of the letters—e.g. in the epitaph no. 1506/72, dated 234 A.H., 848 A.D.—and especially the three-lobed palmette prevails now more and more in Egypt, North-Africa (Qairawân 303, 306 A.H.), Persia, the Yemen and in Spain. Two highly developed forms may illustrate the almost unlimited possibilities of decoration : one is a stucco relief from Sâwa (Persia) found in the tomb of Tughril-

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(1) *Islam I* (1910), p. 50.

(2) *Hawary-Rached*, op. cit. no. 1267 Pl. xxviii.

(3) *Hawary-Rached*, op. cit. no. 1506/72.

(4) *Dimand*, *Coptic Tunics in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York 1930), p. 251, fig. 19. *A. F. Kendrick*, *Catalogue of textiles from Burying grounds in Egypt II* (London 1921), no. 354, 370 Pl. xix. (pp. 30, 34).

(5) Cf. *L. Stasoff*, *L'ornement Slave et Oriental* (Petersburg s.a.) Pl. 120 no. 15.

(6) Cf. *Ars Islamica IV* (1937), p. 382 fig. 28.

(7) *H. Bordier*, *Description de peintures et autres ornements contenues dans les manuscrits Grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris 1885), p. 97, fig. 38.

(8) *Günsberg-Stasoff*, *Miniatures of Hebrew Bibles of the IXth and Xth centuries*, Pl. VI.



Fig. 13. Stucco relief from Sâwa (after a photograph of Prof. K.A.C. Creswell)

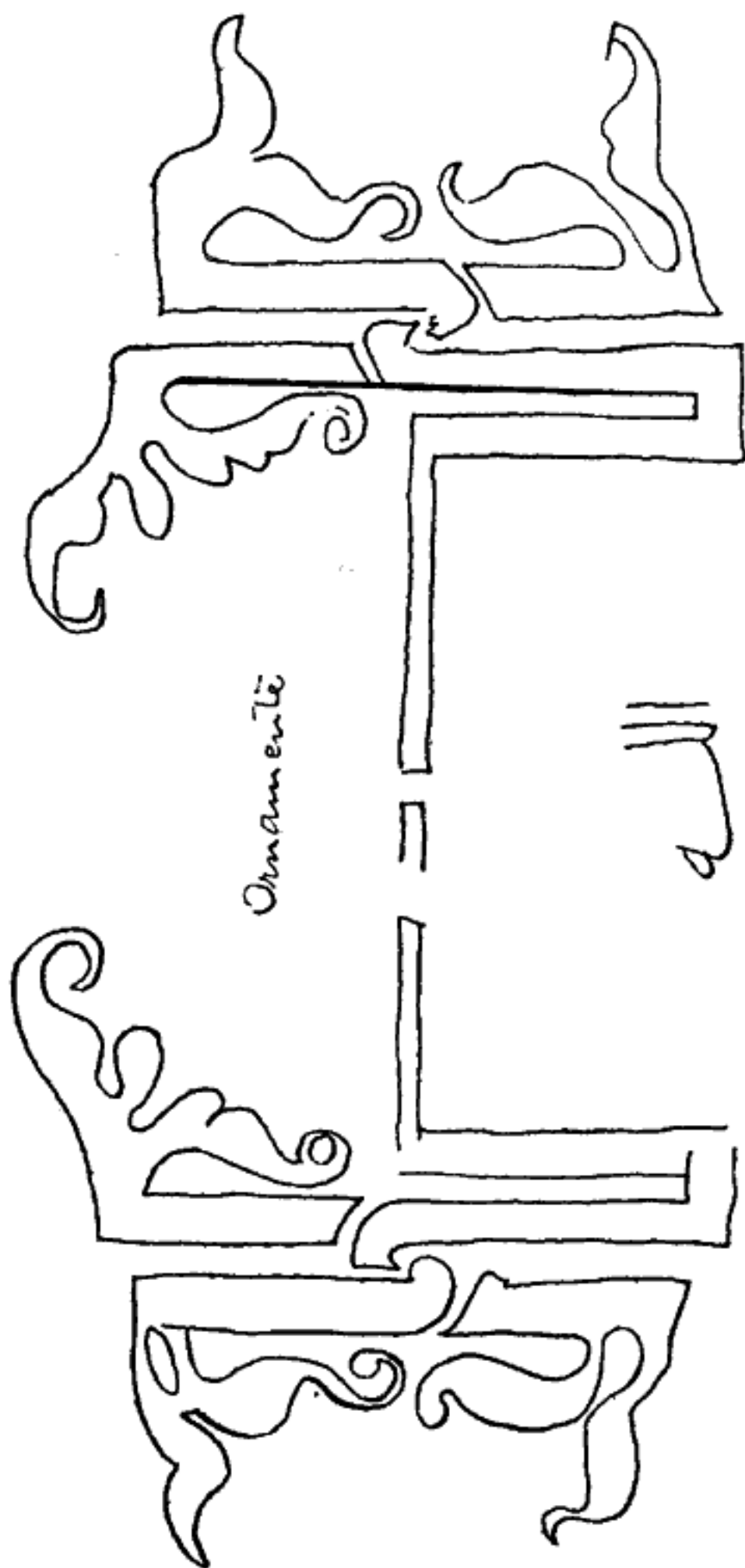


Fig. 14 Inscription on a silk textile in the Schloss-Museum in Berlin (Inv. no. K6807, XIIIth cent. A.D.).



Bey II (died about 1202 A.D.) (fig. 13), (1) the second an inscription in the former Schloss-Museum in Berlin (fig. 14).

The highest and ripest degree of development is nevertheless reserved to the Fâtimid period, and the best examples are again shown by Egypt. And it is *here* that the evolution from *foliated* Kûfic to *floriated* Kûfic is accomplished. It has long been believed that the floriated Kûfic first appears in Amida (2) or had been brought to Egypt by the Fâtimids from North-Africa. We have already seen that the latter supposition is baseless. In return, an epitaph dated 243 A.H., (848 A.D.) in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (Inv. no. 3904, fig.15) really shows full decoration of the apices with three-and four-lobed leaves and full-palmettes as well as tendrils growing up from the letters and filling in the blank spaces between the letters, motifs, which partly correspond to the palmettes of the marginal frame. Of two further inscriptions, which belong stilistically to the same period, one (Inv. no. 1241, fig.16) is preserved in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, the other (3), dated 247 A.H. (861 A.D.), in the building of the Nilometer at ar-Rôdha. Three years later, 250 A.H. (864 A.D.) follows the remarkable tombstone from Higâz (fig. 17) : it not only shows genuine tendrils growing out of the terminations of the letters (Tâ, Mîm, Nûn, Kâf, Wâw), but also floral motifs, scattered in the spaces between the letters, motifs which also here correspond to the palmette-tendrils in the marginal frame. The mutual relations are therefor absolutely obvious in both examples and give evidence for the origin and course of development which has already been exposed. So the middle of the third century of the Hîgra represents the evolution of foliated Kûfic to floriated Kûfic in *Egypt* as established and definitely existing. Further steps in this evolution certainly existed in the neighbouring countries, e.g. in Palestine, where an inscription of the time of al-Muqtadir billâh, dating between 300 A.H. (913 A.D.) and 317 A.H. (929 A.D.) in the enclosure wall of the Haram at Jerusalem (4) (fig. 18) shows an even more developed foliated Kûfic than the tombstone of 243 A.H. (fig. 15). This is all the more important since the inscription of the same Caliph in

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(1) Pope, *A Survey of Persian Art*, V (1938), Pl. 518.

(2) S. Flury, *Islamische Schriftbänder Amida-Diarbekr*, p. 11.

(3) See Kamel Osman Ghaleb Pasha, *Le Mikyâs ou Nilomètre de l'île de Rodah*, MIE LIV (1951), Pl. iv, no. 3.

(4) M. van Berchem, *CIA II/i* (MMIF xlv, 1925), no. 144, p. 7 ff. and fig. 2, p. 7.





Fig. 15. Epitaph no. 3904 in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo.  
(After a photograph in the Museum of Islamic Art).



Fig. 16. Inscription no. 1241 in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo.  
(After a photograph in the Museum of Islamic Art).



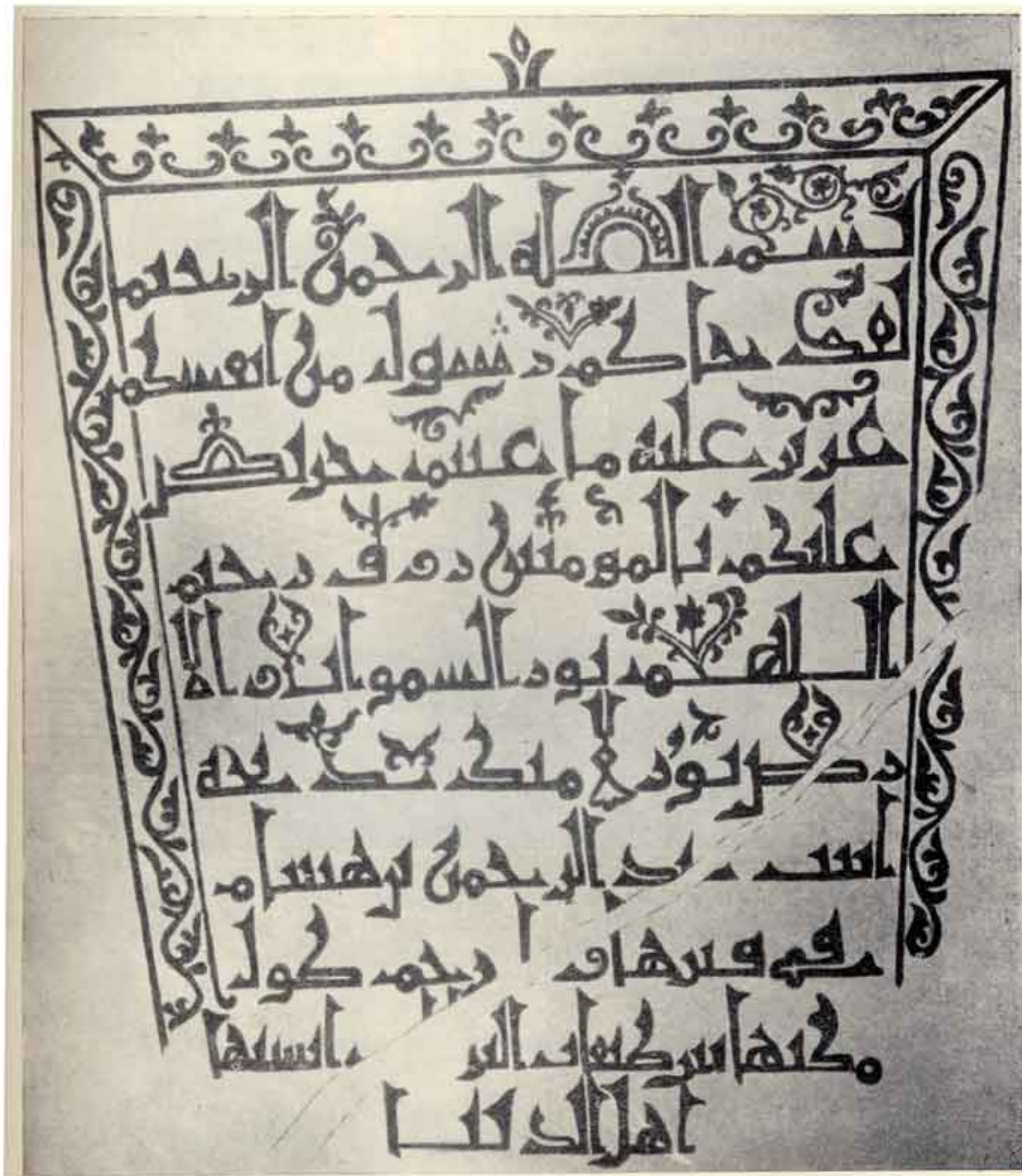


Fig. 17. Tombstone from the Higâz (dated 250 A.H.). After a photograph in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo

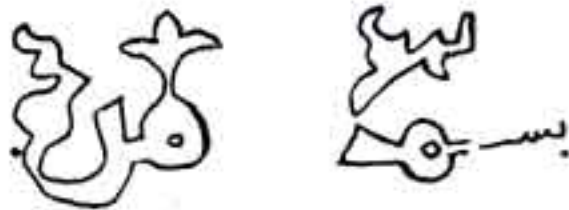


Fig. 18. Letters from the inscription of al-Muqtadir, Jerusalem.



Fig. 19. Inscription of al-Muqtadir in Amida. (After *M. van Berchem*, *Corpus inscriptionum Arabicarum* II, fig. 2, p. 7).



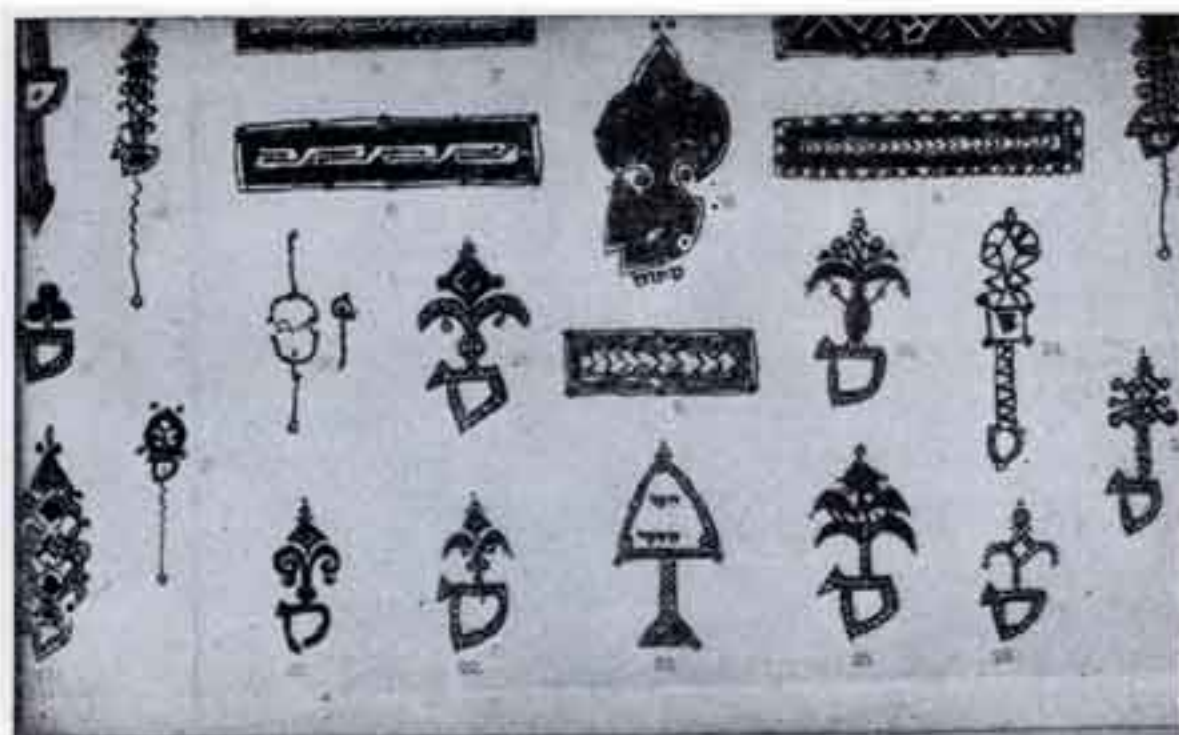


Fig. 12. Decorated Hebrew letters.  
(After Günzberg-Stassoff, *Minatures of Hebrew Bibles of the IXth and Xth centuries*, Pl. VI).

Amida (fig. 19) represents a modest foliated Kûfî only. Anyhow, the high standard attained in Egypt is not yet traceable elsewhere. For the next period this initial phase of floriated Kûfic is not able to impose itself fully, even not in Egypt. This is proved by the terminations of Dâl, Râ, Nûn, Wâw and Yâ in a Tirâz (1) made in al-Fustât for the Caliph al-Mutî' lillâh (334-363 A.H., 945-974 A.D.) (cf. fig. 20) in large Kûfî with elegant arabesque endings in stems and tails characteristic of the early phase of "floral Kûfic", and by stone inscriptions in relief from the early Fâtimid period, e.g. Inv. no. 8832 in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (fig. 21) and a marble-tablet in the Great Mosque in Esnâ (fig. 22), dated 474 A.H. (1081/82 A.D.), if compared with the fragments of an inscription containing the throne-verse (Sura II 256) from the North-East-wall of the Azhar-Mosque (2) (316 A.H., 972 A.D.) (fig. 23), where the half-palmettes in Alif, Tâ, Râ, Dhâd, Wâw already trend to the developed phase

(1) E. Kühnel, *Archaeologica Orientalia in memoriam E. Herzfeld* (New York 1952), p. 144 f., Pl. xxvi. A fragment of this tirâz is preserved under Inv. no. 12224 in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. Fâ'iz was sâhib al-tirâz between 334 and 358 A.H. the fragment is therefore to be dated 344 A.H.

(2) Cf. S. Flury, *Syria xvii* (1936), p. 368 and fig. 2, p. 369, K.A.C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, III, p. 57, 18, 19.

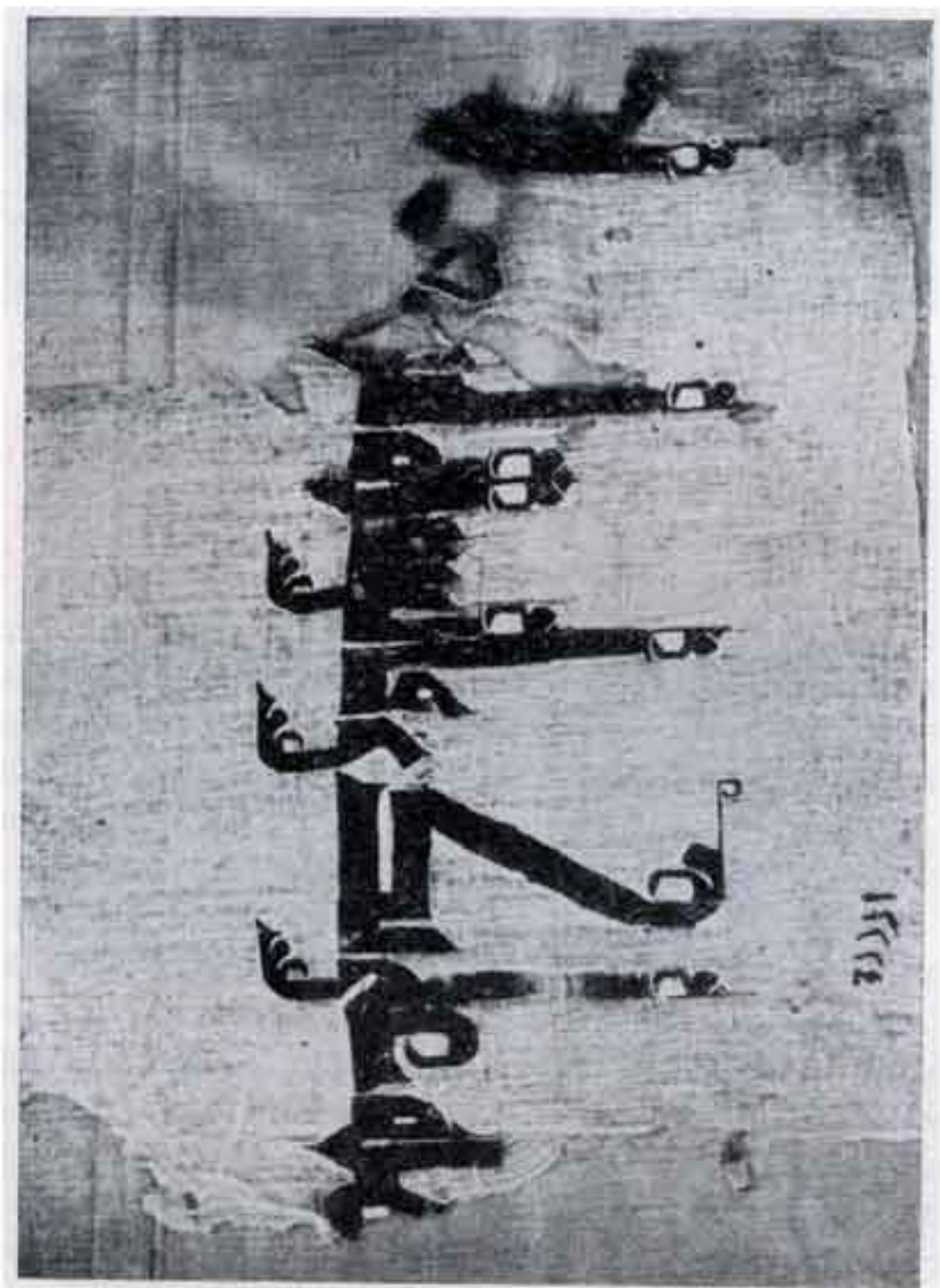


Fig. 20. Tīrāz-inscription no. 12224 in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo.  
(After a photograph in the Museum of Islamic Art).



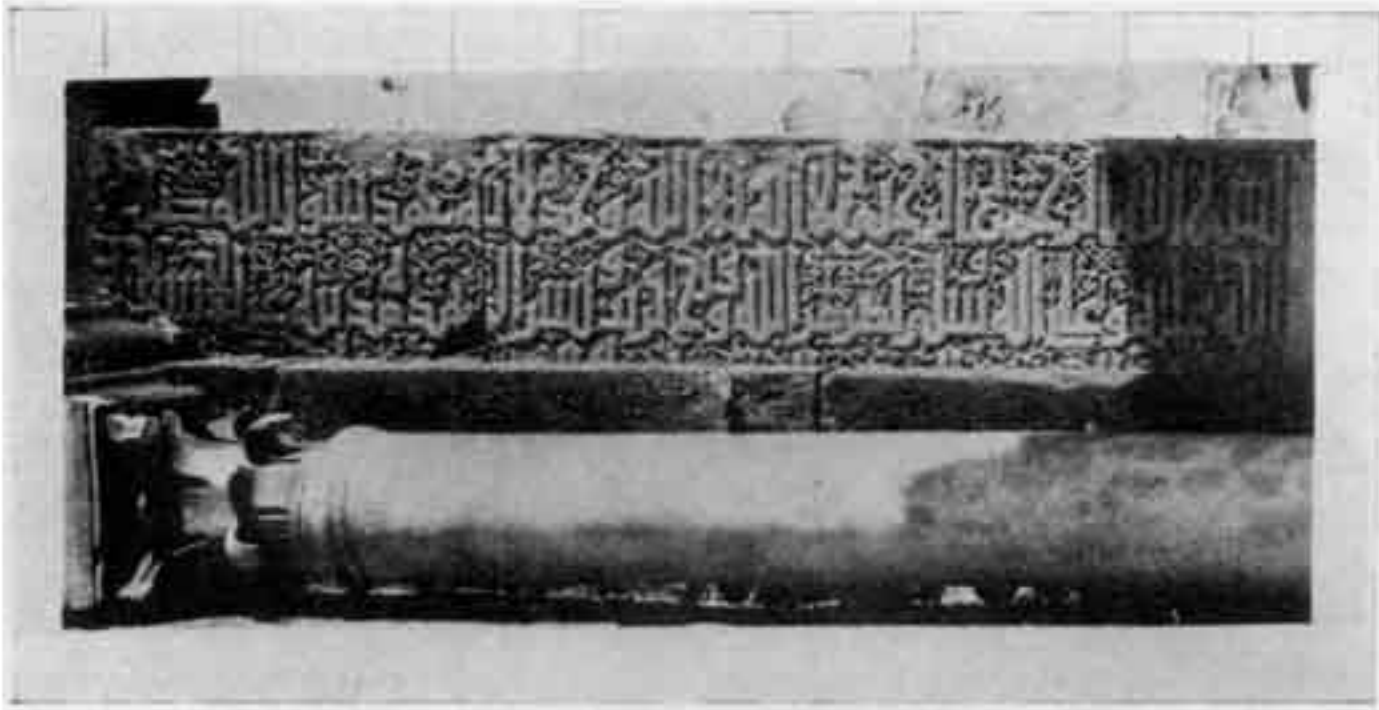


Fig. 25. Inscription of Bâb Tûnis (Qairawân, 437 A.H., 105 A.D.)  
(After a photograph of Prof. K.A.C. Creswell).

of coufique fleuri. But even more apparently this is demonstrated by the bands of writing in the Hâkim-mosque (before 393 A.H., 1003 A.D.) (fig. 24) which show a quite particular connection of writing and floral tendrils growing out of the letters and forming with them an organic unit, serving at the same time as an ideal filling in of the space (Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, Inv. no. 2639, 2640, and 6730)<sup>(1)</sup>.

It is certainly from *here* that its development has advanced to Mesopotamia <sup>(2)</sup> on one side and to North-Africa on the other, where we find it, differing from that in Mesopotamia, in its most beautiful evolution in the inscription of the Bâb Tûnis in Qairawân (437 A.H., 1045 A.D.)<sup>(3)</sup> (fig. 25). Here as well as in the inscription of the sanctuary of the Mosque Sidi 'Oqba (406-453 A.H., 1015-1061 A.D.)<sup>(4)</sup> the tendrils are apparently connected with the shafts and terminations of the letters, but so discretely that the impression of a floriated background is given.

(1) S. Flury, *Die Ornamente der Hakim-und Ashar Moschee*, p. 9.

(2) Cf. S. Flury, *Islamische Schriftbänder Amida-Diarbekr*, p. 10 f., fig. 1, Pl. II Amida no. 8, 426 A.H. 1034/35 A.D.; no. 9, 42. A.H., 1029-38 A.D., p.12 and Pl.III; Amida no. 10 Pl. iv 437 A.H., 1045/6 A.D., pp. 13-15; Amida no. 11 444 A.H., 1052/3 A.D. Pl. vi, p. 15).

(3) I owe the photograph to the courtesy of Prof. K. A. C. Creswell. The tendrils have been omitted in *Houdas-Basset*, *Epigraphie Tunisienne*, Pl. IX (cf. p. 191).

(4) Cf. H. Saladin, *Les monuments historiques de la Tunisie II* (Paris 1899), Pl. xxiii-xxv; E. Herzfeld, *Islam* xii (1922), p. 99.

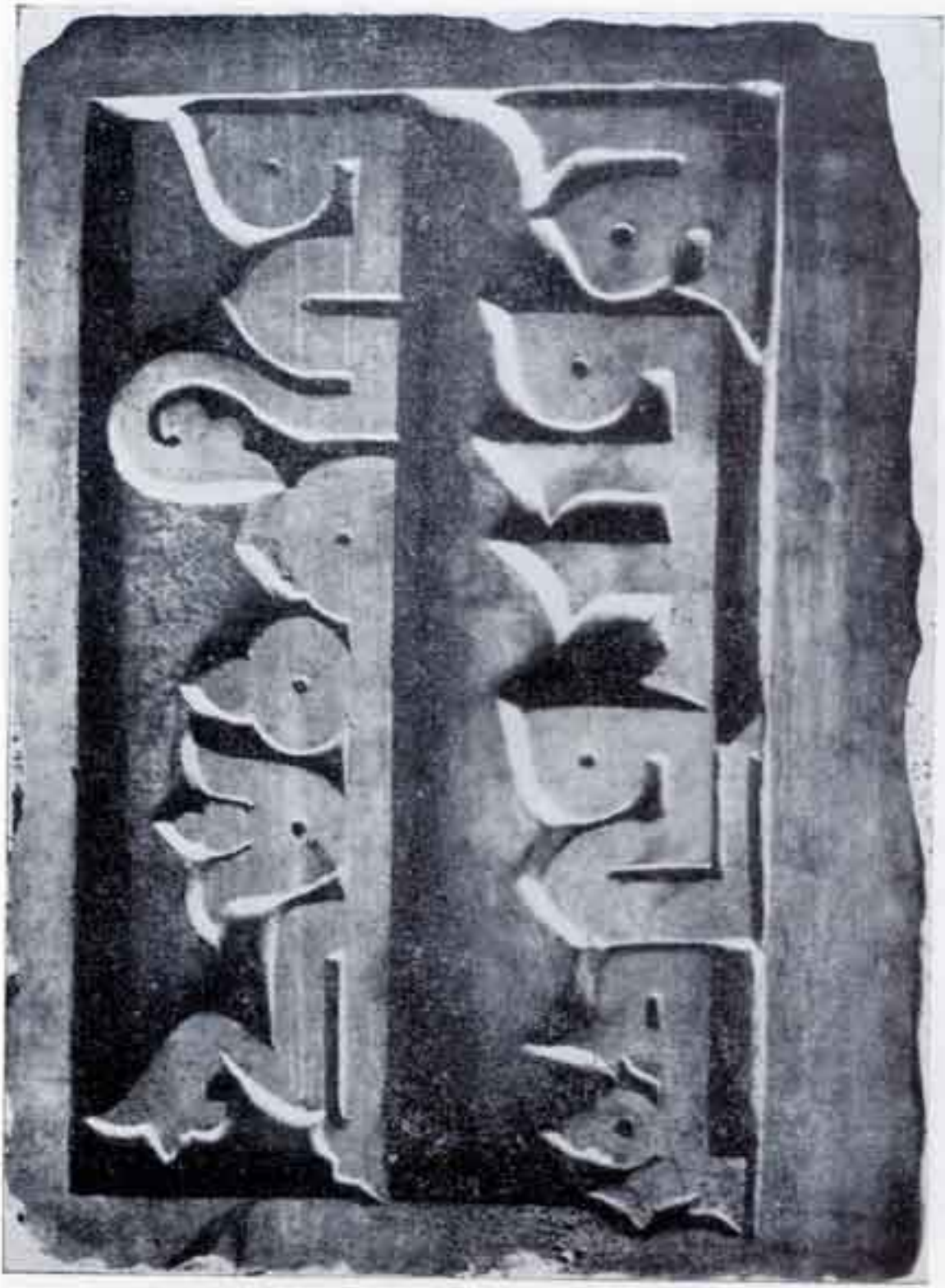


Fig. 21. Stone inscription no. 8832 in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo.  
(After a photograph in the Museum of Islamic Art).



Fig. 22. Inscription in the great Mosque in Esnâ  
(Inv. no. 4864, Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, after a photograph in the Museum).



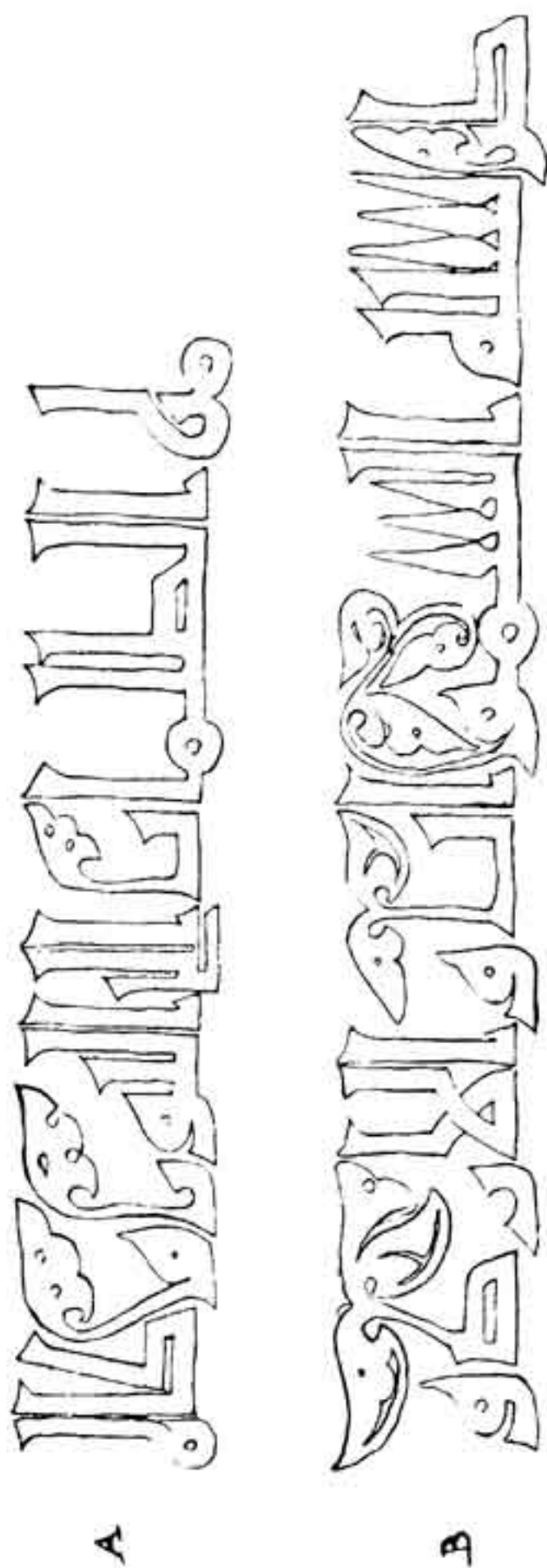


Fig. 23. Inscription on the North-East wall of the Azhar-Mosque  
Cairo (After Syria XVII, 1936, fig. 2, p. 369).



Fig. 24. Stone inscription from the Mosque of al-Hakim  
in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (After a photograph in the Museum).

But *where* has this peculiar decoration come into existence ? *S. Flury* <sup>(1)</sup> has, in connection with the discussion of the band of writing on the minarets of the Mosque of al-Hâkim, stated that the decoration of the North-Minaret shows motifs which are borrowed from *Coptic Art*. He further brought the tendril, growing out of Wâw <sup>(2)</sup> (fig. 26), into relation with the oldest Christian Art of Egypt referring to its prototyp on capitals, decorated with crosses, in the Arab Museum <sup>(3)</sup>, and he supposed that the more developed "coufique fleuri" must have flourished already in the IVth (Xth) century, otherwise a band of this perfection would be unimaginable. <sup>(4)</sup>

It is astonishing that *Flury* did not risk the further step, so near at hand, to trace back the ornamentation of the Hâkim-Mosque to Coptic influence, as it would be expected according to the statement made above. He refers <sup>(5)</sup>, concerning the letters, decorated with half-palmettes, to the textile of al-Hâkim in the South-Kensington Museum (Inv. no. 133-1896) and for the palmettes and small tendrils in the band of writing in the Azhar Mosque to Hebrew Manuscripts <sup>(6)</sup> containing letters with individual palmettes and small tendrils. Apparently the idea was present in his mind that these Hebrew manuscripts contained materials for a comparison which had not survived elsewhere. Certainly these manuscripts are of some importance, but they form—in the IXth and Xth centuries A.D.—at most intermediate links, for which older prototyps are to be supposed. If we, e.g. compare the Alif with the trefoil in the inscription on the North-Minaret of the mosque of al-Hâkim <sup>(7)</sup> (fig. 27) with the initial Ita in the Ms. Grec no. 423 in Laon (VIIth century A.D.) <sup>(8)</sup> (fig. 28) or with the initial T in

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(1) *Die Ornamente der Hakim-und Ashar-Moschee*, p. 45. The western minaret shows initial 'Ain with palmette-shaped splitting of the initial stroke (Pl. xxix no. 3)—which recurs in the mosque Sidi Bû Medîne (xiith cent. A.D.) in *W. and G. Marçais*, *Monuments Arabes de Tlemcen*, p. 254, fig. 55 — from the foot of Dâl grows a double-lined undulating tendril (Pl. xxxiii no. i), while the upstroke of Dâl is three-lobed (Pl. xxiv no. i, xxviii no. 4, xxix no. 3, xxxiii no. 1). From the horizontal bifurcated termination of final Mîm (in *kum*) a double lined undulating tendril grows up (Pl. xxxiii no. 1). In a stone ornament from the northern minaret such a tendril extends over the whole line.

(2) *Ibid.* Pl. 12, fig. 2.

(3) *Ibid.* Pl. xxii 1.

(4) *Ibid.* p. 46.

(5) *Islam* vii (1917), p. 156 note 1, 157 note 2.

(6) *S. Flury* referred to *Günzberg-Stassoff*, *Miniatures of Hebrew Bibles of the IXth and Xth Cent.*

(7) *K. A. C. Creswell*, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt III* (Oxford 1952), p. 98, fig. 40.

(8) *Ed. Fleury*, *Les manuscrits à miniatures de la Bibliothèque de Laon I* (Laon 1863), Pl. I.





Fig. 26. Letter from a band of writing in the Hâkim-Mosque  
 (After S. Flury, Ornamente der Hâkim-und Ashar-Moschee, fig 2, p. 12).



Fig. 27. Band of writing of the socle of the North-Minareet of the Hâkim-Mosque  
(After a photograph received from Prof. K.A.C. Creswell).

the Greek manuscript of Gregory of Nazianz in the National Library in Paris (Ms. Grec 510, IXth Century A.D., fig. 29) (1), the striking resemblance between the ornamentation of the Arabic and Greek letters is immediately obvious. Did we possess more manuscripts of the period between 728 and 842 A.D., characterized by iconoclasm, more and older material would be available for comparison. Since hesitating attempts to decorate initials with spiral involutions exist already very early, e.g. in the Orosius-codex in Florence of the VIth century A.D. (2) Therefore it could also easily be surmized that similar floral decorations and scrolls, *accompagnant* the initials in Coptic manuscripts of the VIII/IXth century A.D. (3) from Akhmîm, had somehow become part of the initials themselves, as it is really the case in Hebrew manuscripts of the IX/Xth century A.D. (fig. 12) (4).

For the connection of palmette or acanthus-leaf with the letter I should like to refer to another instance, the importance of which has already surprised *van Berchem*, i.e. the inscription of the cistern in Bîr el-'Anêziyya north-west of Ramla (Palestine) on the road to Jaffa (5) (172 A.H., 789 A.D.). We see here in line 4 (fig. 30) a three-lobed palmette growing out of the head of Wâw. *M. van Berchem*—who anyhow suggested that these striking ornaments (cf. line 2 in Bâ) are *independant* from the letter which is *not* correct—is right in saying that this ornament forshadowes the rise of coufique fleuri called Carmatian, which appears much later (6). Perhaps he was influenced in his tardy recognition of the realities by his inclination to accept *Marçais'* theory as to the Tunisian origin of floriated Kûfic.

Therefore three neighbouring countries participated decisively in the evolution of floriated Kûfî : Palestine with the first traceable connection of a floral element with a letter (inscription of Ramla 172 A.H.), Egypt, where in the middle of the third century A.H. the decoration of letters with palmettes already has reached a high perfection (cf. fig. 15 and 16) and where the decoration of the

(1) *H. Bordier*, op. cit., fig. 26, p. 88.

(2) Cf. *C. Nordenfalk*, Before the book of Durrow, *Acta Archaeologica* XVIII (1947), p. 152, fig. 10, 153, fig. 11.

(3) Cf. *W.E. Crum*, Coptic monuments no. 8004, 8007, 8008, 8010, 8012.

(4) Cf. *D. Günzberg-V.Stassoff*, L'Ornement Hébraïque (St. Petersburg s.a.) Pl. I and Miniatures of Hebrew Bibles of the IXth and Xth century, Pl. vi.

(5) *M. van Berchem*, Inscriptions Arabes de Syrie, Pl. II.

(6) Les curieux ornements qui les accompagnent sont indépendants du caractère, mais ils font déjà sentir la naissance du coufique fleuri dit carmatique, lequel n'apparaît que beaucoup plus tard.



Fig. 28. Initial-Iota in the Ms. Grec no. 423 of the Library in Laon (after *Ed. Fleury*, *Les manuscrits à miniatures de la Bibliothèque de Laon* I, Pl. I).

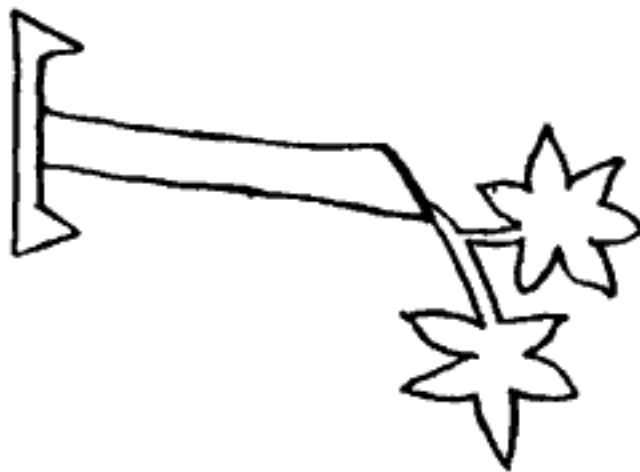


Fig. 29. Initial-Tau in the Ms. Grec no. 510 of the National Library, Paris (After *H. Bordier*, *Description des peintures et autres ornements dans les manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, fig. 26, p. 88).

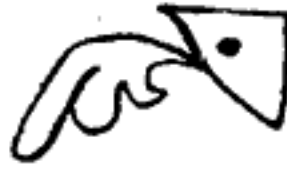


Fig. 30. Waw with floral decoration in the inscription of al-Ramlah (After *M. van Berchem*, *Inscriptions arabes de Syrie*, Pl. II).



apices of the letters had been invented possibly in imitation of Coptic forerunners, and the Higâz, where the tombstone of 250 A.H. shows genuine floriated Kûfic definitely established. It was then in Egypt that the first steps to the highest perfection of this new style of writing were made, represented by the inscriptions in the Mosque of al-Azhar and of al-Hâkim bi amr illâh in Cairo. The idea of ornamenting the script, such as we see it in the inscriptions of Amida (426 A.H.), obviously reached Northern Mesopotamia from Egypt. It has been possible to connect the idea of decorating a letter with floral elements with certain initials in Greek manuscripts, then also in Hebrew manuscripts, both belonging to the same sphere of Hellenistic Art which was created in the Near East as from the third century A.D. We know that the school of painters and book-illuminators in Alexandria played a very important rôle not only in Egypt, but also in early book-illumination and illustration in Rome, and spread with Manichaean book-art as far as Mesopotamia, North-Africa and even Turkistân. A direct way leads from this centre of art down to early Islamic book-art—Tûlûnid and Fâtimid—and it also seems very probable that Egypt had a decisive influence in embellishing the Arabic script, whereby Coptic patterns apparently formed a bridge of transition from the late Hellenistic art. For example the developed palmette tendril serving as a marginal frame in the Arabic epitaph no. 3380/12 in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, dated 204 A.H. (819/20 A.D.) <sup>(1)</sup> recalls a similar tendril on a textile of the late Roman period (III rd/IVth century A.D.) from Akhmîm in the Victoria and Albert Museum. <sup>(2)</sup> So Egypt has much more contributed to the development of Islamic Art than has been hitherto admitted, although it was early recognized that an individual development had taken place here <sup>(3)</sup>. The evolution of the foliated and floriated Kûfic in Egypt gives a new example of the activity of this individual creative power, which willingly accepted and developed inspirations from abroad or from former times.

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(1) *H. Hawary-H. Rashed*, *Stèles funéraires*, I, Pl. xiv.

(2) *A.F. Kendrick*, *Catalogue of Textiles from burying grounds in Egypt I* (London 1920), no. 183, Pl. xxv, p. 99. Even certain forms of the arabesque already existed in the Vth century A.D., e.g. in a tendril-frame on the arch-way from Bâwît in the Coptic Museum (Inv. no. 6472 A) and in a tendril on a textile from Akhmîm (VI/VII th century A.D.) in *A.F. Kendrick*, op. cit. III (London 1922), no. 838, Pl. xxx, p. 87.

(3) *E. Herzfeld*, *OLZ* xiv (1911), col. 420.