

COPTIC AND
COLLAGE
ANCIENT TECHNIQUE,
MODERN APPLICATION



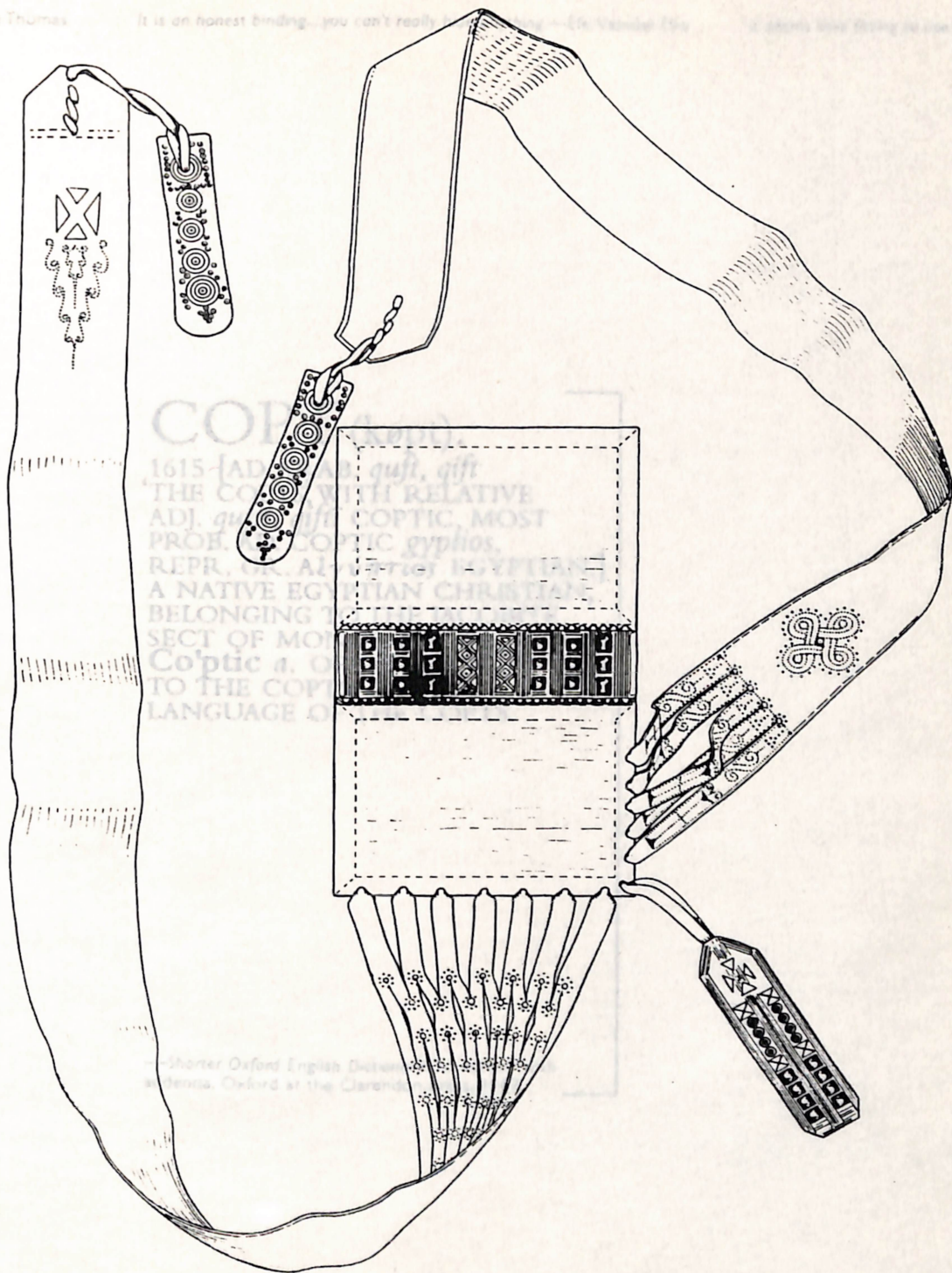
COPTIC AND COLLAGE

ANCIENT TECHNIQUE,
MODERN APPLICATION:

A SURVEY OF CONTEMPORARY
IMPLEMENTATIONS OF
THE COPTIC STRUCTURE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN SHARPE. PUBLISHED IN
CONJUNCTION WITH THE
EXHIBITION ON VIEW
APRIL 12— JUNE 14, 1997,
CURATED BY ZAHRA PARTOVI,
AT THE CENTER FOR BOOK
ARTS IN NEW YORK CITY.

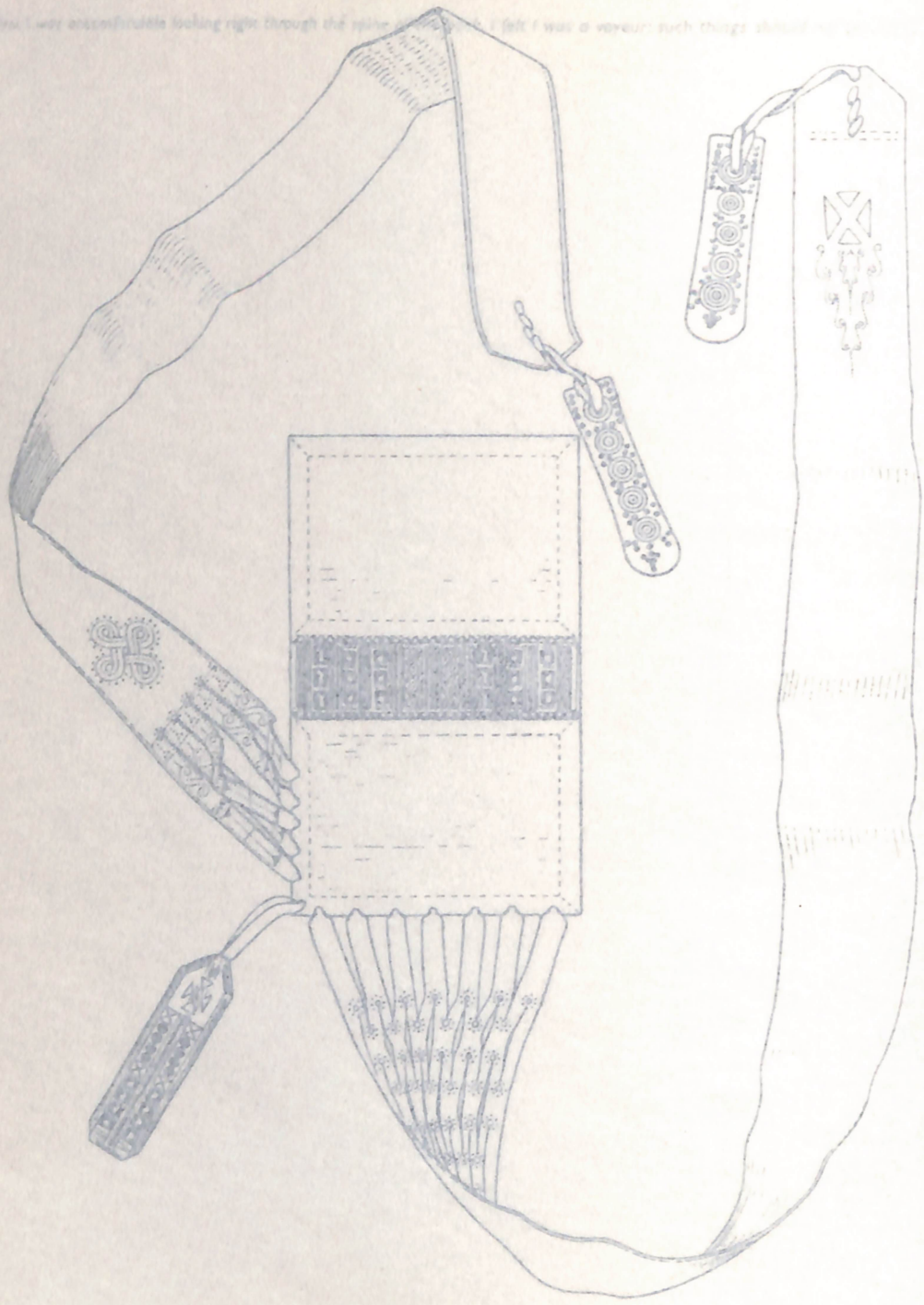
At first I was uncomfortable looking right through the spine of the book. I felt I was a voyeur; such things should not be seen...—Peter &



COPTIC
1615 [AD] *qust, gift*
THE COPTIC WITH RELATIVE
ADJ. *qust* COPTIC, MOST
PROB. *qust* COPTIC *gyphtos*
REPR. *qust* COPTIC, *qust*
A NATIVE EGYPTIAN CHRISTIAN
BELONGING TO
SECT OF MONASTIC
Coptic a. c.
TO THE COPTIC
LANGUAGE C

Shorter Oxford English Dictionary
Oxford at the Clarendon

to find I was embarrassed looking right through the mirror I felt I was a voyeur: such things should not be



COPT (køpt).

1615 [AD. ARAB. *qūst*, *qūst*
'THE COPTS', WITH RELATIVE
ADJ. *qūstī*, *qūstī* COPTIC, MOST
PROB. AD. COPTIC *gyptios*,
REPR. GR. Αἰγύπτιος EGYPTIAN.]
A NATIVE EGYPTIAN CHRISTIAN,
BELONGING TO THE JACOBITE
SECT OF MONOPHYSITES. HENCE
Coptic *a.* OF OR PERTAINING
TO THE COPTS; *sb.* THE
LANGUAGE OF THE COPTS.

—*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 3d edition with
addenda. Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1967.

IN AN EFFORT TO EXPRESS HIS IDEAS

AND PRESERVE
THEM IN A WRITTEN
LANGUAGE, MAN HAS
TAKEN MANY GIANT
STEPS IN THE ART OF
BOOKMAKING.

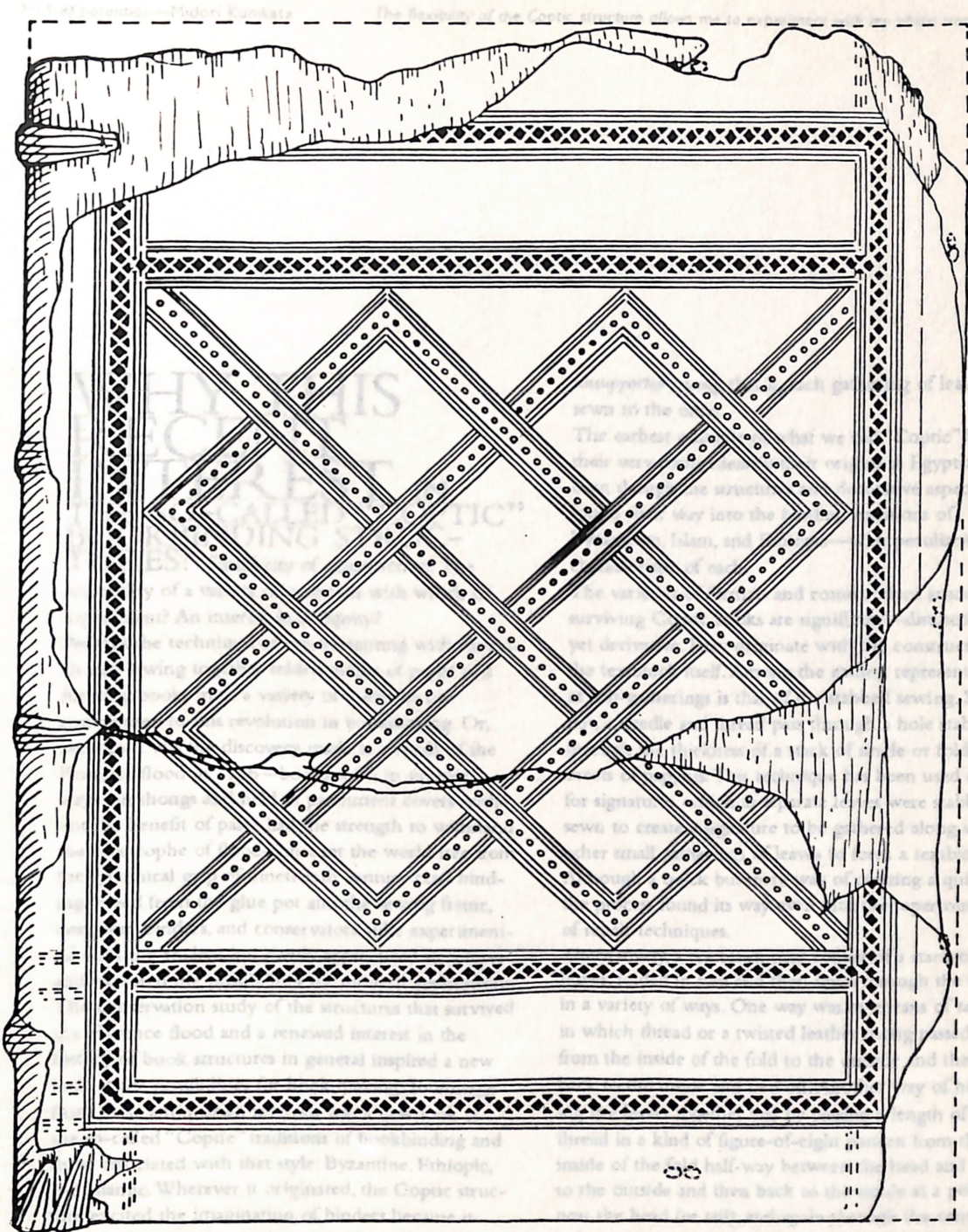
One such crucial step was the advent of the sewn book developed around the first century A.D. Following the refinement of this great discovery, we arrive at several monasteries scattered around Northern Egypt. It was here that the monks of the Coptic Church perfected the sewing structure and the protective covers of their codex to what we know today as Coptic Binding.

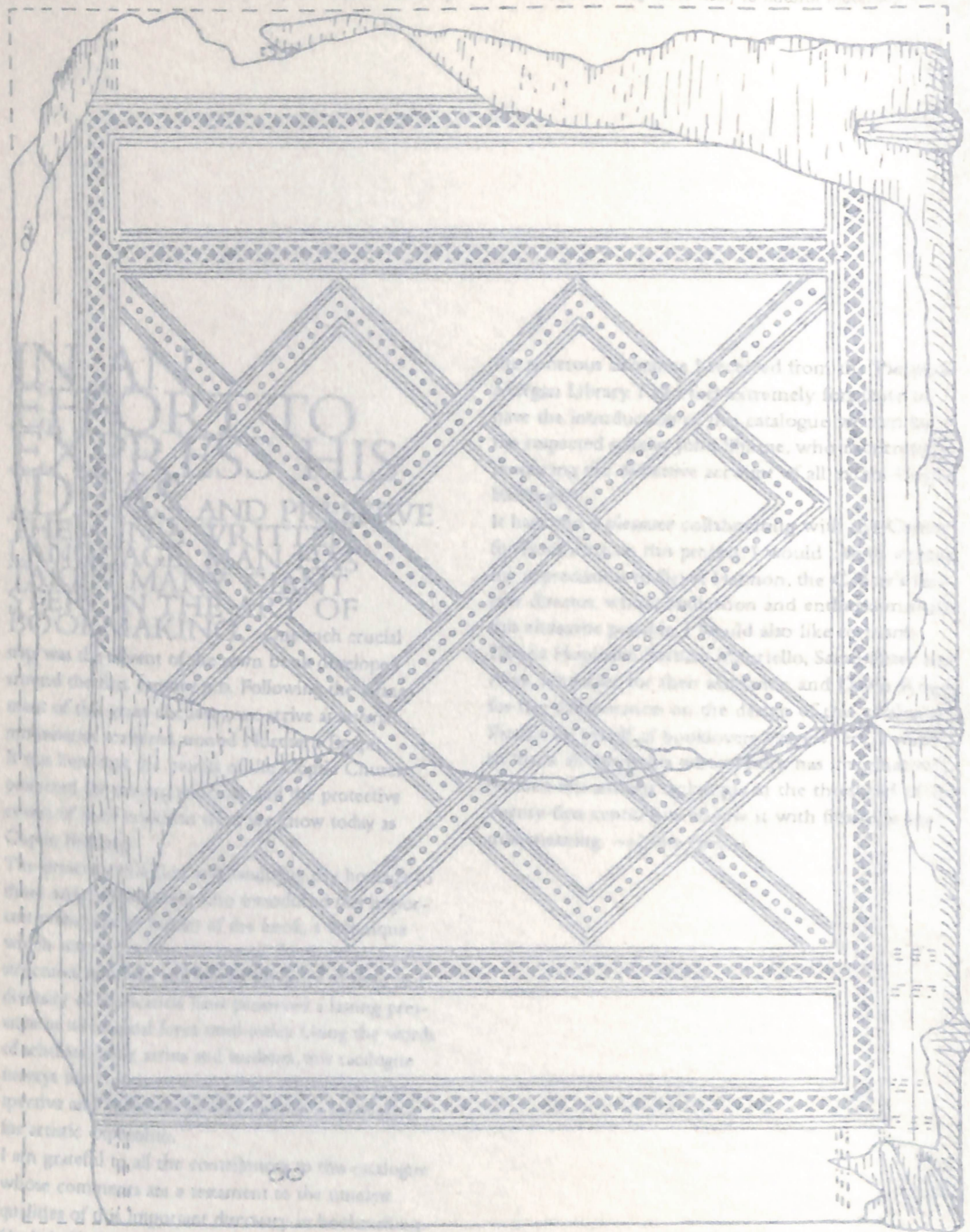
The present exhibition and catalogue pay homage to those early bookmakers who introduced this important technique to the art of the book, a technique which was to become the model for all other book structures to come, and whose integrity of style and diversity of application have preserved a lasting presence in its original form until today. Using the words of scholars, book artists and students, this catalogue surveys the Coptic structure from a historical perspective and examines its contemporary application for artistic expression.

I am grateful to all the contributors to this catalogue whose comments are a testament to the timeless qualities of this important discovery in bookmaking. On behalf of the Center for Book Arts and myself, I would like to express my profound gratitude for

the generous assistance I received from the Pierpont Morgan Library. I also feel extremely fortunate to have the introduction of this catalogue written by the respected scholar John Sharpe, who is currently producing the definitive account of all extant Coptic bindings.

It has been a pleasure collaborating with the Center for Book Arts on this project. I would like to express my appreciation to Brian Hannon, the Center's former director, whose dedication and enthusiasm made this endeavor possible. I would also like to thank Donna Honicker, Barbara Mauriello, Sarah Peter and Nina Schneider for their assistance, and Dawn Rogala for her collaboration on the design of this catalogue. Finally, on behalf of booklovers everywhere, I want to thank all the artists whose work has imaginatively recalled this ancient technique at the threshold of the twenty-first century, to endow it with fresh life and new meaning. —Zahra Partovi





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 I would like to express my profound gratitude for

WHY THIS RECENT INTEREST IN THE SO-CALLED "COPTIC" BOOKBINDING STRUCTURES?

Simplicity of construction? The availability of a variety of materials with which to experiment? An interest in antiquity? Perhaps the technique of experimenting with materials and sewing together folded pieces of paper and forming books from a variety of materials has contributed to this revolution in bookmaking. Or, perhaps it was the discovery made as a result of the Florence flood in 1966—books sewn in simpler ways—on thongs and held in parchment covers without the benefit of paste had the strength to withstand the catastrophe of flood—that set the world free from the tyrannical grip of nineteenth century craft binding. Freed from the glue pot and the sewing frame, designers, binders, and conservators alike experimented with the ancient but newly appreciated structures and explored the possibilities for modern applications. The conservation study of the structures that survived the Florence flood and a renewed interest in the history of book structures in general inspired a new look at the possibilities for book making. To emerge from these antiquarian interests was a new look at the so-called "Coptic" traditions of bookbinding and those associated with that style: Byzantine, Ethiopic, and Islamic. Wherever it originated, the Coptic structure excited the imagination of binders because it offered an alternative to the straitening effect of the sewing frame: the single most significant identifying characteristic of the so-called "Coptic" structure is

unsupported sewing, that is, each gathering of leaves is sewn to the other.

The earliest example of what we call "Coptic" by their very name identify their origins as Egyptian even though the structures and decorative aspects found their way into the binding traditions of Byzantium, Islam, and Ethiopia—with peculiarities characteristic of each.

The varieties of formats and constructions among surviving Coptic books are significant—distinctive yet derivative. They originate with the construction of the textblock itself. Among the earliest representations of leaf-gatherings is that of the stabbed sewing. Simply put, a needle and thread pass through a hole stabbed through the thickness of a stack of single or folded sheets of papyrus. This technique has been used even for signatures, which as separate leaves were stabbed-sewn to create a signature to be gathered along with other small gatherings of leaves to form a textblock. Although a quick but dirty way of creating a quire, the process found its way even into the repertoire of repair techniques.

Alternatively, a textblock may consist of a stack of leaves, folded in two and then sewn through the fold in a variety of ways. One way was by means of *tackets* in which thread or a twisted leather thong passed from the inside of the fold to the outside and then back to the inside and tied off. Another way of holding the leaves together was by passing a length of thread in a kind of figure-of-eight pattern from the inside of the fold half-way between the head and tail, to the outside and then back to the inside at a point near the head (or tail), and again through the center hole to the outside, to return once more to the inside of the fold to be tied off where the whole process began, at the hole in the center. Of the latter practice

there are a number of variations depending upon where one starts and how many times one passed the needle through the spine-fold before finally tying off the loose end.¹

This was one way of sewing a single quire codex. Another was by means of "tacketing." Among the best examples of tacketing are those from Nag Hammadi. The textblock was sewn with pairs of tackets of twisted leather thongs, one near the head and the other nearer the tail, through the center fold of the textblock. The textblock was protected on the outside of the spine fold by means of a leather spine stay the height of the leaf. In the center of the fold of the textblock, in order to protect the papyrus from breaking at the point of sewing, the tacket passed through a patch stay and was tied off. Sometimes instead of two patch stays, the binder used a long single patch stay to accommodate both tackets. For most of the Nag Hammadi codices, the textblocks were tacketed and then the covers attached.

However, where the structure broke down, as in Nag Hammadi, II, VII, and XI, we find that the textblock has been sewn through the cover to the outside.

In the sewing of single-quire codices, tacketing as a kind of permanent binding technique soon passed out of use. As long as books were written by hand, however, it remained as a means of holding together the leaves of a quire until they were given over to the binder.

As an alternative to tacketing for binding, "lengthwise sewing" found a useful place for sewing the single-quire codex.²

As for the covers, whether the textblock was tacketed or sewn lengthwise, they may be made separately and attached, or may be sewn on with the sewing of the

textblock. In either case, coverings of several extra leaves of papyrus (or of parchment) were wrapped around the single-quire and sewn when the folded sheets were sewn.

The stiff protecting covers were created by pasting together several of the outer leaves, forming a "paste board" of papyrus at the front and back, over which a piece of leather was then pasted. It was then folded onto the inside of the fabricated board covers. The outermost free endsheet at the front and back of the book were then pasted onto the inside of the boards covering the turnins.

The single-quire codex had obvious disadvantages: the outer leaves took the most wear and consequently broke off; they are also wider and hence the lines of text longer than those of the inner leaves; and the fold of the bulk of the text block caused each leaf to be subjected to the same stress with every turning of the page. Bulkiness and the breakdown of the structure soon forced the binders to abandon the single quire in favor of the multiquire codex.

When binders attempted this with papyrus, it soon became evident that the materials could not endure the stress at the spine folds. In order to protect the material from breakdown where the thread passed through the folds, a guard of parchment or leather was laid down on the inside and sometimes the outside of the folds to prevent the sewing thread from breaking through the folds at the center of the gathering.

In the meantime binders discovered that smaller units of leaves—of, say no more than four or five sheets folded to form a signatures of eight or ten leaves—could be attached by a kind of chain-link sewing technique whereby each quire was sewn to its neighbor. When the multiquire codex of papyrus was created it soon became obvious that papyrus was not

1. Several surviving examples of this ancient style of construction are Berlin: Staatsbibliothek, MS. Or. Oct. 987; Berlin: Staatsbibliothek, MS. fol. 3065; Cairo: Coptic Museum, Papyrus 10758. An excellent example of this technique has been preserved in the Berlin, Staatsbibliothek MS. Or. Oct. 987.

Although not now in its original condition, the single quire papyrus codex was at

one time even equipped with a tooled leather wrapping with ties.

2. Examples of this are to be seen in Keith Smith, *Non Adhesive Binding Books without Glue or Paste* (Rochester, New York: Keith, 1966), 1, 57-65.

3. Dublin: Chester Beatty Codex AC 1499. See especially Alfons Wouters, *The*

Chester Beatty Codex AC 1499: A Gracco-Latin Lexicon on the Pauline Epistle and a Greek Grammar ("Chester Beatty Monographs," No. 12: Peeters; Leuven, 1988), pp. 4ff.

4. New York: Morgan G67.

5. Princeton University: Scheide 144.

6. Barcelona: Palau Ribes 181, 182, 183.

so well suited for this technique, even though narrow full length supporting parchment stays were affixed to the center of the signatures through which the sewing passed. The solution was inadequate because of the difference in the materials—the brittle papyrus usually broke along the edge of the narrow, stiffer parchment stay.³ The question remains as to whether this change in technique forced the scribe and book-binder to look to the more pliable and durable parchment as the material of choice, or whether the multi-quire papyrus codex was an imitation of the already existing multiquired parchment codex. Whatever the reasons, the chain-link sewing technique so identified with the Coptic style was successful only when parchment for the textblock replaced papyrus. With parchment as an alternative, it was possible to fold four or five parchment sheets and assemble as many as practical to form the textblock. Sewing through the folds did not present the problems that the binder encountered with papyrus.

By the chain-link sewing construction, it was possible to hold together multiple quires with as few as two sewing stations or—depending on the size of the sheet—as many as five.

The binders were creative in developing their sewing

techniques; there are a number of examples. Sometimes they used one thread passing through two sewing stations, thus creating two chain-link bands across that outside of the spine, or if the textblock were sufficiently tall, the binder may have simply doubled his efforts and used two needles—thereby creating four sewing stations with four chain-link bands across the spine; or perhaps even three needles creating six bands. Even among the earliest representatives of this type of sewing, variations are numerous, and the technique has been explored with creativity since this construction first appeared.

Among the earliest examples with chain-link sewing to have survived are the Glazier Codex⁴ in the Morgan Library, the Scheide Codex⁵ at Princeton, the Palau-Ribes Codex⁶ in Barcelona, the Mudil Psalter⁷ in Cairo, Bodmer XIX⁸, Chester Beatty 813 and 814⁹, and the Freer Washington Gospels¹⁰. All of them date from before the seventh century¹¹. However the distinguishing characteristic of this clutch of manuscripts is the method of attaching the covers to the textblock. In each case the covers were made separately and then attached as with a case binding, held in place by affixing the first leaf of the first signature and the last leaf of the last signature to the inside of the

boards. Furthermore, each has wooden covers and none has a full leather covering. Finally, each was equipped with long strips of leathers anchored in the upper board—one at the head and the other at the fore-edge. The long leather straps were wrapped around the codex from head to tail and from fore-edge to spine, and each secured with a flat piece of bone which was slipped under the wrapping which held it in place. Manuscripts with the simplest preparation for the wrapping are Glazier, Scheide, Palau-Ribes, and Bodmer XIX. Each has only two anchorage points at the head and fore-edge of the upper cover respectively. Whereas more elaborate attachment structures are found on the Chester Beatty 813 and 814 and the Freer Gospels, each of which has multiple anchorage points at the head and fore-edge for the wrapping bands. This multiplication of anchorage points is also seen in the construction of the covers.

Constructed separately, the wooden case covers were attached to one another by means of a leather spine strip. The edges of it overlapped onto the inside of the spine edge of the boards and there affixed by means of adhesive. In addition, a number of thin leather strips were laced from the inside of the lower cover through the board, emerging in the center of the board edge, passing from there through to the inside of the back strip across the width of the spine to emerge on the outside of the leather spine strip, then again to pass through the edge of the board to the inside of the board and there laid down between the spine strip and the surface of the board. The number of these thin spine lacing slips, as well as the number of anchorages for the wrappers on the upper cover varies. The Scheide, Glazier, and Mudil codices each have four, five, and four spine slip

anchorages respectively. For wrapping anchorages, Mudil and Glazier have two each. The Scheide codex has two at the head and three on the fore-edge. Meanwhile, both Chester Beatty 813 and 814 have five at the head and eight at the fore-edge, and Freer has eight at the head and *two* sets of seven—one at the head and another at the tail.

As for the number of spine slips which were laced from the inside of the boards through the spine strip, Chester Beatty 813 and 814 have the most with 35 and 38 respectively, while the seventh-century Freer Washington Gospels has 26.

The distinctive Coptic contribution to bookmaking is this peculiar method of making and covering the textblock—two distinct operations. The textblock is sewn using a variety of chain-link stitching techniques as a first and an independent operation. Sewing the textblock did not begin with the preparation of the board at this period. The board covers were made separately and attached simply by means of adhesive to the textblock and were left bare. The long leather wrappings functioned both to keep the codex closed and to protect it.

The use of a long thong or cord for wrapping books was a familiar one. It certainly would not have been a strange technique to bookmakers, as attested to by the books from Nag Hammadi, and from wooden tablets¹². It was even used for some of the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹³ The technique continued in use among the Ethiopic and Islamic traditions.

The period covered by the Coptic book ranges from at least the third through the tenth centuries. This period saw a number of changes in the means and varieties of materials and construction, the one constant was unsupported sewing.

At the beginning, covers for codices like the single-

7. Cairo: Coptic Museum. Mudil Psalter.

8. Geneva-Coligny: Bidmer XIX.

9. Dublin: Chester Beatty Library, Coptic MSS 813 (A) and 814 (B).

10. Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art. 06.297-8.

11. C₁₄ dating of the leather covering places it as early as AD 420.

12. See J. Sharpe, "The Dakhlah Tablets and Some Codicological considerations," *Les Tablettes à Écrire de l'antiquité à l'époque moderne*, edited by Élisabeth Lalou (*Bibliologia*, 12. Brepels: Turnhout, 1992), 127-148.

13. See John Cerswell, "Fastenings on the Qumran Manuscripts," *Qumran Grohe 4:11: Discoveries in the Judean Desert*, VI

(Oxford: University Press, 1977), 23-28.

quire examples from Nag Hammadi were made of leather over laminated papyrus sheets. The leather wrapped around the laminated covers was sometimes affixed only by adhesive but sometimes, as mentioned above, sewn onto the textblock with the textblock sewing. The small multiquired parchment codices had covers of wood with leather spine strips, which were constructed and attached as in a case binding. With the development of the style of construction as represented by the books from Hamouli, the change is significant: the covers served as the foundation upon which the quires were sewn. In contrast to the small multiquire codices represented by Glazier and Scheide, where the covers were in fact case bindings, the Hamouli bindings present a new set of concepts in book construction.

In this change, the quires were attached just to boards of cartonnage and then the textblock sewn using the chain-link sewing method. The whole was then enclosed in a case of leather-covered boards, also of cartonnage. Since the binders were not using wood for the covers, they resorted to constructing boards of layers of papyrus, parchment, and even disused bindings, held together with gesso, to create a strong structure. This required a new approach. First they had

to create an upper and lower board, the spine edges of which were usually slightly chamfered and wrapped with a leaf of papyrus or parchment prepared by means of loops of thread sewn through the center of the board and looped to the spine edge onto which the quires could be sewn. These boards were usually edged with a leather border at the head, fore-edge, and tail.

Once the gatherings had been sewn onto either the upper or lower board, the remaining board was attached, and a spine liner of coarsely woven linen was wrapped around the outside of the spine and onto the outside surface of the boards. The endband was worked through the spine cover.

Then the final outer covering was prepared and attached in the manner of a case binding. The boards were made in the same fashion as those onto which the quires were sewn; however, the outer boards were covered completely (on the outside) with leather that was decorated variously.

A favorite means of decoration was the use of cut-outs, or a kind of filigree backed by variously colored or gilded parchment or leathers. This practice is frequently found among the manufacturers of leather goods, especially shoes, of the period, where gilding,

cutouts, overlays, and sewing with delicate stitchery were all part of the decorative technique.

When the outer board covers had been prepared in the manner of a case, it was then wrapped around the textblock which had already been sewn to the inner boards.

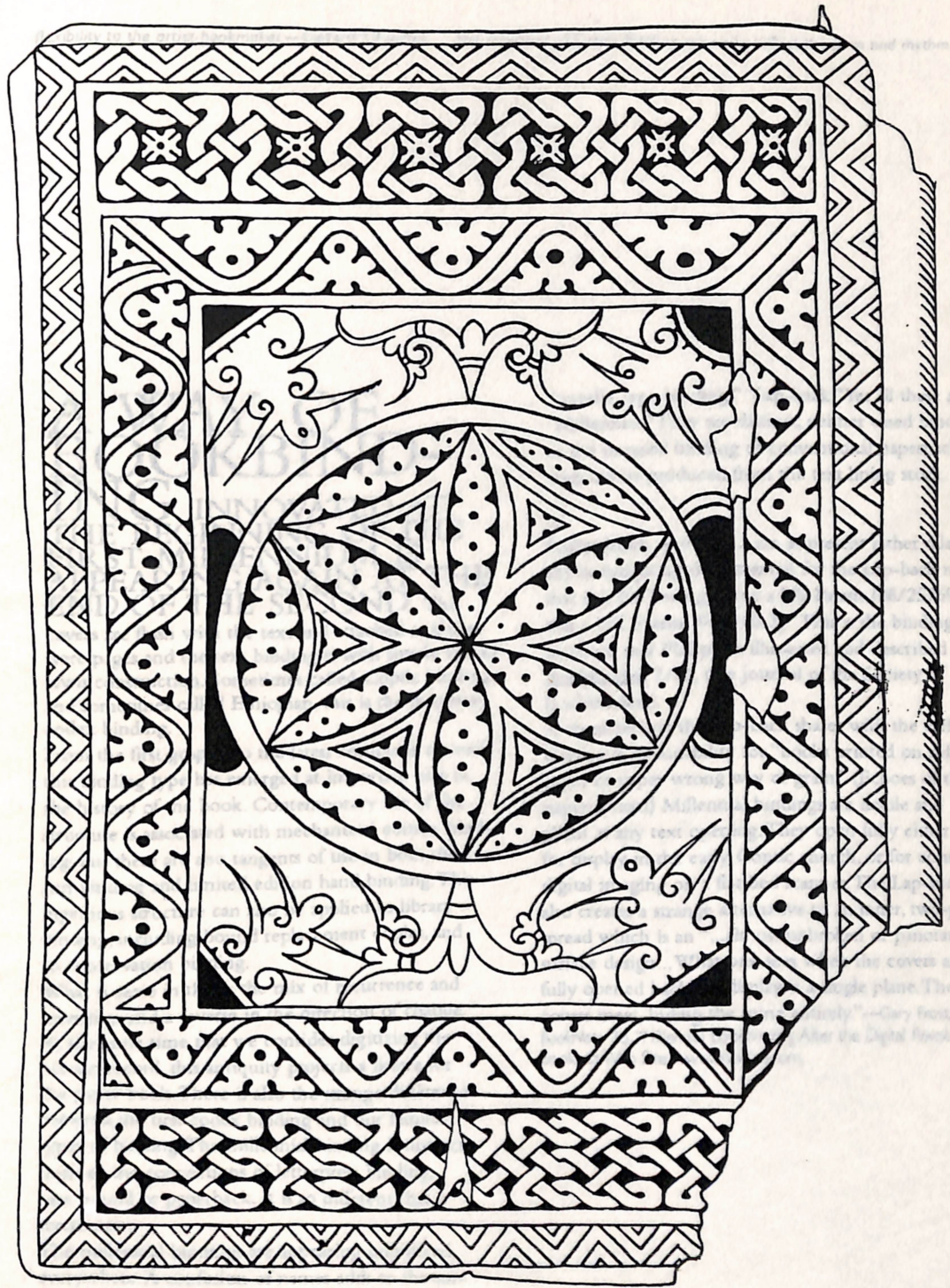
At some stage, either when the outer boards were prepared or even after they were in place, closures were prepared of leather toggles and loops and finally even a marker and lifting tabs might be added.

The system of sewing the quires to the covers was taken over by the Ethiopic and Byzantine binders who developed their own methods of bookblock construction. However, they almost always used wood for the covers as opposed to a construction of cartonnage or paste board.

Following the Coptic method of unsupported sewing for the textblock, the Ethiopic and Byzantine binders developed their own style in attaching covers. While the Byzantine binder characteristically prepared each board by bridling the spine edge so that the one half of the quires could be sewn onto each board and then the two halves assembled for covering, the Ethiopic binder did not separate the preparation of the boards from the process of sewing the quires. Nevertheless, both traditions relied upon unsupported sewing for the text-block while developing their own styles with creative and ingenious methods.

The Coptic, or "Egyptian" book, has origins that are much earlier than the name implies. The evidence is a gift of the environment of Egypt where dry sand has preserved for us records of bookmaking from the early centuries of this era. However, even as the Byzantine, Ethiopic, and Islamic bookmakers drew upon earlier binding traditions themselves, it is likely that the Copts likewise derived their inspiration from

some long-forgotten source. But while we have preserved these ancient remnants of a fascinating craft tradition of bookmaking, its precise origins are at best dim, if not elusive. —John Sharpe





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A WAY OF BOOKBIND- ING INNOVATED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM IS APPEARING AGAIN AT THE END OF THE SECOND.

The covers are flush with the text and attached as if they were pages and the text binding is with simple thread sewn construction. Sometimes called Coptic binding and sometimes called Ethiopian, this is the primeval codex binding.

From the first gospels to the latest computer manuals this binding type has emerged at important eras in the history of the book. Contemporary use of the structure is associated with mechanized edition binding, but there are also tangents of use in both short run binding and limited edition hand binding. This ingenious structure can also be applied to library binding, including bound replacement copies, and to conservation binding.

What is eerie in this is the mix of recurrence and invention and a reverse in the direction of change. At the same time that we consider digitizing the human record, this antiquity projects a future for the paper book. There is also the strange difference between the first codex binding and our familiar types of binding. The millennial binding is distinct from all the conventions of letterpress binding, case bound or paperback. It is so different that it seems new.

The millennial bindings are appearing unnoticed, everywhere. A confusion of names adds to the surprise; "Otabind," "lay-flat," "RepKover," "sewn board,"

"transfer tape binding," "Lap-back." Yet all these are "Millennial." They are distinct; neither cased binding or the uncased binding of conventional paperbacks with covers produced from the text lining stock.

...

Philip Smith writes; "...I am at present rather dilatorily investigating the potential for the Lap-back now that this has been granted a US Patent [08/257692] and a UK Patent [940540-3]." This is the binding structure that Philip has illustrated and described in *Bookbinder*, 7/93, (the journal of the Society of Bookbinders).

A characteristic the Lap-back shares with the earliest binding is its suitability for "books printed on stiff paper or paper wrong way of grain." (Echoes of the papyrus text!) Millennial bindings are docile and pliant at any text opening. They open fully either for display in the early Coptic church, or for accurate digital imaging on a flat bed scanner. The Lap-back also creates a strange alternative to an inner, two-page spread which is an "...almost unbroken or panoramic surface design... What one sees when the covers are fully opened back for display is a single plane. The covers meet, hiding the spine entirely."—Gary Frost, *BookNote* 3.5, "Millennial Bookbinding After the Digital Revolution," BookLab Web Site, www.booklab.com.

EARLY TECHNIQUES OF BOOK SEWING AND BOOKBINDING USED IN EGYPT FROM "COPTIC BINDINGS IN THE PIERPONT MORGAN LIBRARY"

UNPUBLISHED NOTEBOOKS OF THEODORE C. PETERSEN AT
THE PIERPONT MORGAN LIBRARY, NEW YORK

I. BOOK SEWING

- A. Stabbed Sewing (piercing the full thickness of the book close to its left edge)
 - 1. for lacing together groups of separate leaves
 - 2. for lacing together groups of double leaves (separately folded sheets)
 - 3. for lacing together quires of sheets (folded together in single gathering)
- B. Lengthwise Sewing through the Fold of Single-quire Books
 - 4. done with single stitch
 - 5. done with several stitched
 - 6. stitched to include an outer covering (consisting either of a parchment sheet or of several additional papyrus sheets later pasted together into laminated boards)
- C. Chain-stitched Sewing of Multiple-quire Books (lengthwise through the fold and across the backs of the quires)
 - 7. sewn with single stitch resulting in two chainstitch bands
 - 8. sewn with two or more stitches and three or more chainstitch bands
 - 9. sewn to include also chainstitch bands at head and tail
- D. Sewing on Cords
 - 10. as reported in recent published accounts and as found in ninth century repair work
 - 10a. Orihon sewings
- II. Book Covers
 - 10b. of flexible leather
 - 11. of wood
 - 12. of layers of laminated papyrus sheets
 - 13. of layers of laminated parchment leaves

III. HINGING OF COVERS

14. by means of eyelets made of looped cords which were anchored in the covers and laced to the book sewing
15. by joining the upper and lower boards with a back strip of leather or linen which was glued to the spine of the 'gathered book,' so as to form a set of 'cased' covers
16. by using double or split boards of which the first or inner set of boards was laced to the book sewing, and the second (outer) one was glued over the inner one in the form of a 'cased' cover

IV. Head Banding

17. the technique used in the Hamuli manuscripts
- 17a. other techniques

V. Decoration of Covers

18. with inlay work
19. with paintings
20. with metal incrustation, ivory, precious stones, silk, etc.
21. with leather (plain)

VI. Ormentation (of the leather covering)

22. with inked or painted designs
23. with line tooiling
24. with incised and pared work
25. with stamping
26. with pierced work
27. with braid work

VII. Clasps

28. fastening on pegs
29. fastening on leather buttons
30. consisting of wrapping bands and bone slips

VIII. Bookmarkers

31. appended to the covers

IX. Tabs

32. for listing the covers
33. serving as markers

XX. Repair Work

34. on the sewing of the quires
35. on the joints

THE POET MARTIAL, WRITING IN OR NEAR 85 A.D., DESCRIBED CODEX BOOKS, THOUGH NOT USING THAT TERM FOR THEM.

In perhaps the clearest of his several references, he described a book containing the works of Homer in 'multiplici pelle,' much-folded or many-layered leather. The context of his references suggests that the codices he had in mind were curiosities, his general point being that by this means (as compared to the standard alternative, the roll) a substantial text could be contained in quite a small, handy volume. His precise meaning is not certain; some scholars have conjectured that Martial was describing books in miniature scripts. It is worth considering, however, that codices were inherently twice as economical of space as rolls, for they were routinely written on both sides of the leaf, whereas rolls were written only on the inside. Additional advantages of the codex over the roll can be adduced: they are more easily and rapidly handled, especially when searching out specific passages, and cross-referring. They do not have to be rerolled when the end is reached. Even a very long text can be contained in a single codex volume by increasing the number of the leaves; the same text might require several or many rolls.

...
Indeed, for the first seven centuries of its history, and especially for the first four, evidence for the codex book comes almost entirely from Egypt: more specifically from the Nile valley and the basin of Fayyūm,

fed by a branch of the Nile. This circumstance results from the accidents of survival. The dry sands above the high-water mark of the river have uniquely preserved written materials of types formerly in use throughout the Roman Empire. Elsewhere, virtually everything written on parchment or papyrus in late antiquity has disintegrated. Even in Egypt, a high proportion of what has been found is fragmentary, for excavations have primarily turned up the discarded writings of antiquity, mixed in rubbish heaps or recycled as mummy wraps. On the other hand, of the relatively small number of ancient codices with non-Egyptian provenances, or which left Egypt at an early date, such as the famous deluxe Bible manuscripts of the fourth and fifth centuries, all have in the course of time been rebound. It follows from this that until about 700 A.D. very few codices have survived in their original covers; and those that have are all Egyptian. The earliest surviving integral bookbindings are those covering the Gnostic codices found after World War II near the village of Nag Hammadi, on the Nile about 300 miles south of Cairo. The find, comparable in importance to that of the Dead Sea Scrolls, comprised thirteen volumes preserved in a jar, eleven of which were in their original covers. The manuscripts are now, with one exception, in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. This discovery brought to light an entire library of Gnostic writings, almost all hitherto unrecorded. A major sidestream of early quasi-Christian thought was revealed, formerly attested only by the anti-heretical treatises of orthodox christianity, the winning side.⁴ The textual importance of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts at first eclipsed their codicological importance, and all the codices were in fact removed from their covers. Recently, significant work has been done on the physical make-up

of the volumes. For our purposes a brief description of these primordia of the bookbinder's craft must suffice.

The Nag Hammadi codices are written on papyrus. Their language is Coptic, the native language of Egypt as recorded in the third century A.D. and after. Coptic script is a modification of the Greek alphabet, reflecting the fact that, in its written form, Coptic was essentially the language of Egyptian Christianity, whose early literature (including the heterodox Gnostic texts) was in large part translated from the Greek. The Nag Hammadi codices were written and bound in the first half of the fourth century, presumably within a religious community. The site of the find was near Chenoboskion, where in the early fourth century a monastery was established by St. Pachomius, the founder of conventual Christian monasticism. The burial of the Gnostic writings may have followed a fourth-century purge there of heretical literature.

—Needham, Paul, Twelve Centuries of Bookbinding 400-1600.
Pierpont Morgan Library and Oxford University Press, 1979.

**MATERIAL:
SOMETIMES
OF RED
GOAT-SKIN,
SOMETIMES OF DARK
BROWN LEATHER. THE
BOARDS ARE USUALLY OF
PAPYRUS, NOT WOOD;**

and the use of thin papyrus instead of stout oak or beech made it possible to give to one of the bindings in the British Museum—and presumably to many that have now perished—a certain delicacy and elegance which is rivaled or perhaps surpassed in some of the beautiful leather shoes of the period, but, with a single exception....by no European binding before the finest Parisian work of the seventeenth century. Sometimes the papyrus boards were double, to allow the upper board to be pierced; the edges were grooved, a fashion which spread to Greece and thence to Europe, where it was thought to be Greek in origin, and was used sometimes on Greek books till the seventeenth century. The two bindings belonging to Mr. Chester Beatty... stand alone; the boards are of bare wood inlaid with bone or ivory; one of them probably belonged to a third-century papyrus of the Book of Daniel and may be the oldest binding in the world. The inlays on this cover consist of four partial borders, broad at the head and foot, narrow at the sides, with formal and liners ornament, and a central plaque which is unfortunately missing. On the other binding there are two rosettes and two half borders with arrowheaded finials. These appear to be the only surviving Coptic bindings with bone or ivory inlays; but others must have existed, and they probably suggested the bone inlays which are a

unique feature of the Mohammedan binding with architectural decoration at Berlin.¹

No. 85 [a binding in the collection of the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.] has recently been removed from the manuscript of the four Gospels, written during the fourth century in Egypt, which perhaps belonged to the Church of Timothy² in the Monastery of the Vinedresser, near the Third Pyramid. The manuscript was re-bound at an early date, and the paintings on the wooden boards of the binding are assigned on stylistic grounds by Professor Charles R. Morey³ to the first half of the seventh century. The decoration—which was applied after⁴ the book was bound—consists of full-length figures of the four Evangelists, crudely painted, probably with a reed brush, in masses of ground colour, on which all the details are overlaid. No similar binding is known; and it is impossible to say whether this was as common a method of decorating book covers in Coptic Egypt as in medieval Sienna. Technically the binding is interesting; the spine consists 'of a leather⁵ backing applied over interlacing cords of the same material.' The ends of 'these cords were inserted in twenty-six holes on the side of each cover, and fragments of them still remain in place.' Other holes on the opposite edge of the upper cover may 'have to do⁶ with the attachment of a casing of cloth or leather which was folded round the book'—presumably like the broad straps on three of Mr. Chester Beatty's manuscripts.

...
PLACES OF ORIGIN: The Vienna, Pierpont Morgan, and Chester Beatty bindings come from the Fayyūm, south-west of Cairo; most of those in the British Museum from Edfu, in Upper Egypt; none seem to have been found in the Delta, though it is

1. See F. Sarre, *Islamische Bucheinbände*, Berlin, 1923, Pl. I, and Grohmann, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

2. Information from Mr. J.E. Lodge, Director of the Smithsonian Institution.

3. *East Christian Paintings, &c.*, p. 75.

4. Morey, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

5. Morey, *Facsimile*, p. vii.

6. *Ibid.*, p. viii. His alternative suggestion that the holes were used 'for the attachment of flaps or the like by which to lift the left-hand cover, thereby avoiding contact with the paintings' does not seem very probable.

7. See *post*, p. 210, n. 2.

8. In *The Library*, June 1932, p. 111.

9. See E.G. Duff, *The Great Meame Myth*, Edinburgh, 1918, p. 8.

certain from the discoveries at Achmin-Panopolis⁷ that fine leather-work was produced there. The Edfu bindings are the less important of the two groups, most of them being decorated with linear patterns and small tools of little interest, though No. 10 [from the British Museum] is a handsome binding, well designed and well executed.

...
BINDERS: By whom were these books bound? By monks, it is generally supposed; but a study of the bindings suggests, as already remarked, that some at least are by professional leather-workers and some by less highly skilled hands; there is little to show whether these inferior craftsmen were monks or secular priests or laymen. Most of the Edfu bindings are not above the level of European monastic work, many of the Fayyūm bindings are. Probably conditions varied in the various monasteries, some would have both binders and scribes, some scribes only, and some neither. The only piece of direct evidence known to me, namely the colophon quoted by Mr. Douglas Cockerell,⁸ suggests that one not particularly distinguished binding was not the work of a monk. The colophon states that B.M. Or. MS. 7029 was copied by the son of an archdeacon when he was

still a student, and that the cost of copying and binding was defrayed by a certain pious deacon. No doubt the manuscripts were written by clerics, regular or secular, who were almost the only people able to write, and perhaps many of them were bound by illiterate laymen. If this division of functions existed, it may have given rise to the contempt in which, during many centuries, the bookbinder's office was unjustly held.⁹ All was not good that came from Egypt. —Hobson, G.D. "Some Early Bindings and Binders' Tools, part I, Coptic Bindings," *The Library*, fourth series, Vol. XIX, 1938.

“COPTIC” IS A TERM USED LOOSELY

THESE
DAYS TO REFER TO VARI-
OUS BINDING STRUC-
TURES THAT ARE BASED
ON, OR INSPIRED BY,

historical examples from the Eastern Mediterranean. These binding structures share several characteristics.

First, the sections that compose the book are attached to each other mechanically by means of their sewing threads rather than being attached to each other by adhesive. They belong therefore to a larger class of bindings referred to as “non-adhesive” structures.

Second, the sections are attached to each other solely by means of the sewing thread, using one of a variety of stitches but generally a “link” stitch, rather than by means of common supports such as tapes or cords.

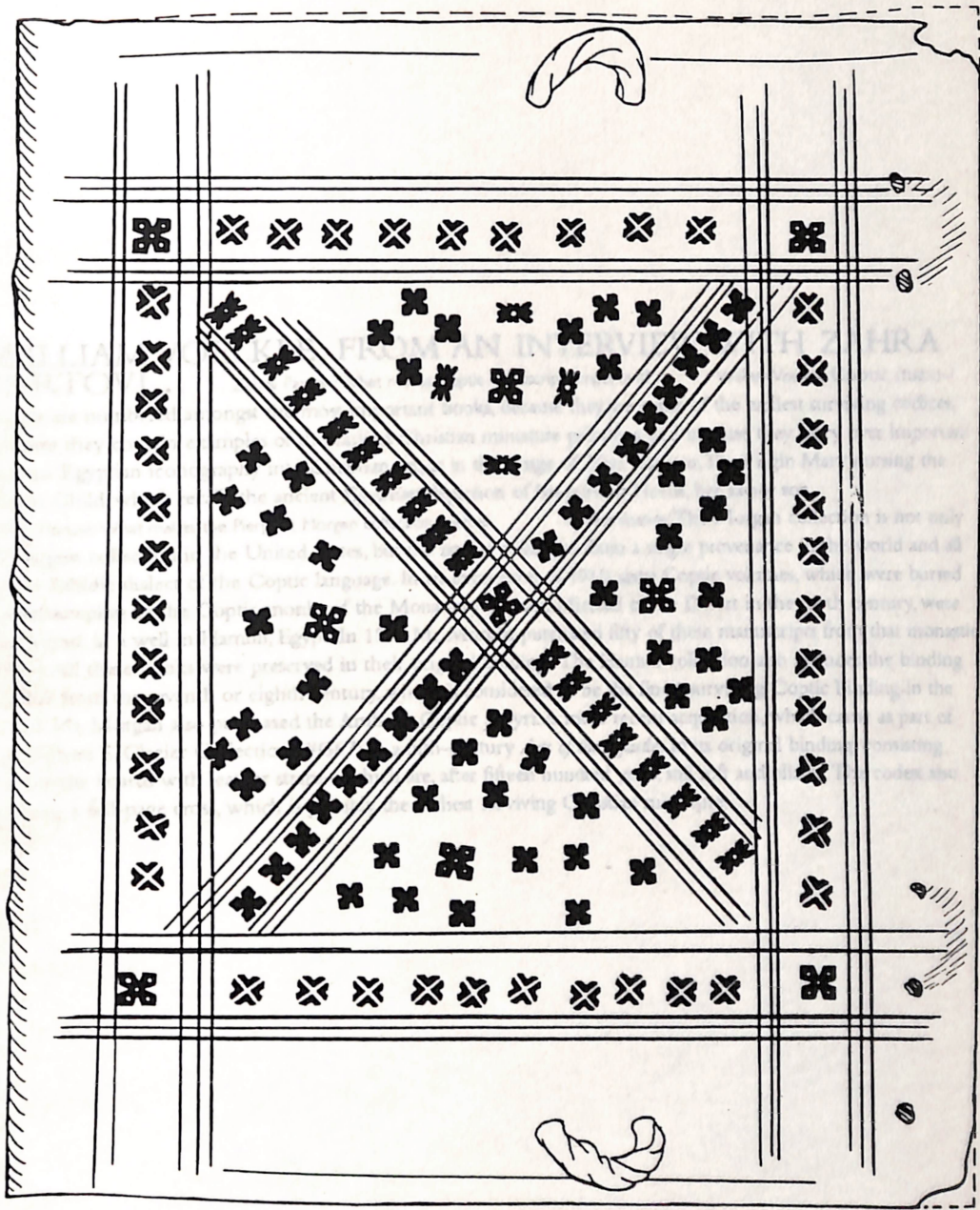
Therefore, they are referred to as “unsupported” structures.

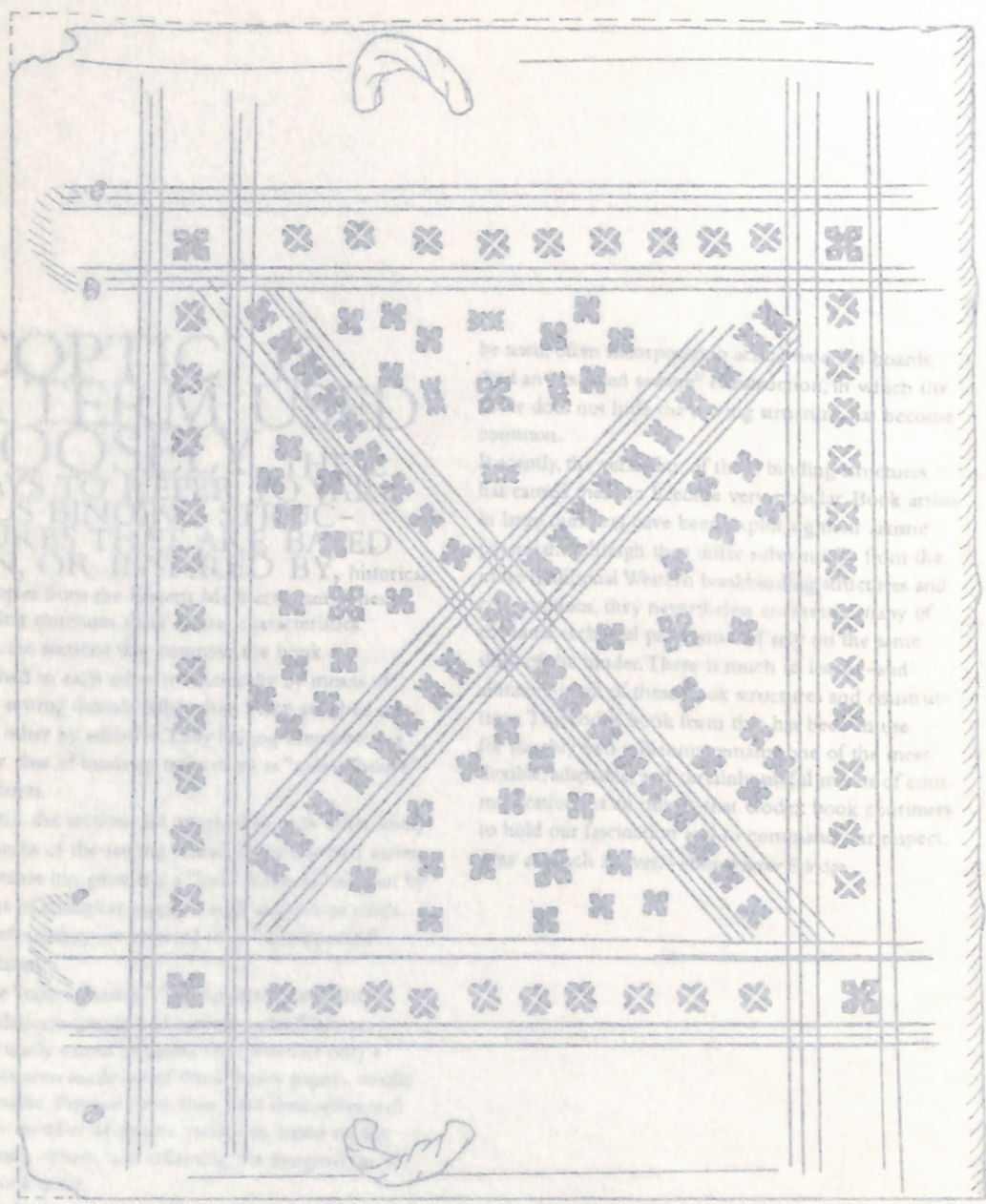
These “non-adhesive”, “unsupported” structures are relatively simple and easy to make. They are particularly suited to books comprised of only a few sections made up of thick, heavy papers, usually handmade. Furthermore, they lend themselves well to any number of artistic variations, based on the materials chosen and reflecting the imagination of the book artist.

Similarly, the covers used on these structures may be of many different types depending on the materials and techniques chosen. A “limp” cover or wrapper construction may be used by including the cover in the initial sewing. A “hard” cover construction may

be used, often incorporating actual wooden boards. And an “exposed sewing” construction, in which the cover does not hide the sewing structure, has become common.

Recently, the versatility of these binding structures has caused them to become very popular. Book artists in large numbers have been exploring their artistic potential. Although they differ substantially from the more traditional Western bookbinding structures and constructions, they nevertheless encounter many of the same technical problems and rely on the same skills of the binder. There is much to learn—and admire—in all of these book structures and constructions. The codex book form that has been in use for roughly two millennia remains one of the most flexible, adaptable, and certainly useful means of communication. As an object, that Codex book continues to hold our fascination and to command our respect, now as much as ever. —Betsy Palmer Eldridge





WILLIAM VOELKLE, FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH ZAHRA PARTOVI...

Zahra Partovi: What makes Coptic manuscripts important? William Voelkle: Coptic manuscripts are numbered amongst the most important books, because they are some of the earliest surviving codices, because they contain examples of the earliest Christian miniature paintings, and because they carry over important ancient Egyptian iconography into Christian art, as in the image of *Virgo Lactans*, The Virgin Mary nursing the Christ Child, which recalls the ancient Egyptian depiction of Isis nursing Horus, her savior son.

Zahra Partovi: What makes the Pierpont Morgan collection unique? William Voelkle: The Morgan collection is not only the largest collection in the United States, but the largest collection from a single provenance in the world and all in the Sahidic dialect of the Coptic language. In an excavation of 1910, sixty Coptic volumes, which were buried for safekeeping by the Coptic monks of the Monastery of Saint Michael of the Desert in the tenth century, were discovered, in a well in Hamuli, Egypt. In 1911 Mr. Morgan purchased fifty of these manuscripts from that monastic library. All these books were preserved in their original bindings. The Hamuli collection also includes the binding M. 569 from the seventh or eighth century, which is considered to be the finest surviving Coptic binding in the world. Mr. Morgan also purchased the Amherst Coptic papyri. A more recent acquisition, which came as part of the William S. Glazier Collection (#G67), is a fifth-century *Acts of the Apostles* in its original binding, consisting of wooden boards with leather straps—which are, after fifteen hundred years, still soft and pliable. The codex also contains a full-page cross, which is possibly the earliest surviving Christian miniature.

Exhibited Works

AGID, SHANA

Hunger is the Best Sauce, March 1996. Author, John McPhee, *Oranges*. 5" x 5" x 1", handtyped text, xerox transfer, copper panels, one-of-a-kind.

BRINDLEY, JUDITH

Sew Biz, 1996, 12 1/2" x 5", mixed media; one-of-a-kind.

CHANG, JIN KYOUNG

Shadows, 1996, 10" x 10" x 1 7/8", plaster, acrylic, polymer, one-of-a-kind.

CHARRIER, GERARD

To The Consciousness of a Shooting Star, 1986. Poetry by David Rattray. Title page calligraphy by Jerry Kelly. Letterpress printed on handmade papers by Yasuichi Kubota and Dieu Donne Papermill, bound in paper-covered boards, edition of seven. Published by Vincent FitzGerald & Co. (On loan from Vincent FitzGerald & Co.)

CRONE, KATHERINE D.

A Journey, 1996, 11 3/4" x 9" x 3", maps, tickets, brochures, and other collage, one-of-a-kind.

ELLIS, ELSI VASSADAL

Dear El Lissitzky, 1994, 1 1/4" x 1 1/4" x 1 1/4", white offset cut-offs, black letraset for cover, edition of fifty.

FROST, GARY AND CECILIA

Millennial Binding—Small, 1997, 11" x 7" x 1 1/5", painted Tyvek, #465 ADH transfer tape, copier paper, plastic box.

Millennial Binding—Medium, 1997, 17 1/2" x 12 1/2" x 1 1/2", painted Tyvek, #465 ADH transfer tape, copier paper.

Utopian Ethiopian Binding—Special, 1996, 18" x 12 1/2" x 3 1/2", painted Rives BFK paper, mesquite boards, deer skin ties.

Utopian Ethiopian Binding—Production, 1997, 12 1/2" x 7 1/2" x 2", Lana paper, mesquite boards, deer skin ties.

Sewn Board Edition Binding Sample, 1996, 24 1/2" x 16 1/2" x 1 1/2", painted Rives BFK paper, linen spine with Iris cloth sides.

GOLDENBERG, LISA

Italian Memory, 1996, 3 1/2" x 6" x 1", sheet metal covers, photo transfers on metal and paper, one-of-a-kind.

GOSWELL, JOAN IVERSEN

Visual Sound, 4 3/4" x 2 1/2" x 1 1/4", 1994, wood, sumi, handcut eraser stamps, one-of-a-kind.

HAYS, SUZANNAH

Egypt, 1993, 13 1/2" x 10 1/2" x 1", papyrus over eight-ply Museum boards, edition of eighteen.

KUNIKATA-COCKRAM, MIDORI

The Norse Myths, 1992. Author: Kevin Crossley (Holland). $8\frac{9}{10}$ " x $5\frac{9}{10}$ " x $2\frac{1}{2}$ ", oak wood, cooper, leather, Japanese paper, one-of-a-kind.

KURAHARA, TED

To The Blue Wall, 1993. Poetry by David Rattray. Calligraphy by Jerry Kelly. Etchings by Marjorie Van Dyke and Vincent FitzGerald. Letterpress printed on Rives BFK and handmade paper from Dieu Donne Papermill, wood covers, edition of fifty. Published by Vincent FitzGerald & Co. (On loan from Vincent FitzGerald & Co.)

LONG, MARY ELLEN

Kansas City Girls, 1996. $8\frac{5}{8}$ " x $5\frac{3}{8}$ " x $1\frac{5}{8}$ ", antique book covers, waxed linen thread, vintage photo, ribbon, silk organza, one-of-a-kind.

MATTHEWS, MARY ELLEN

Little Shorty, 1996. 13 " x $10\frac{1}{2}$ " x $1\frac{1}{4}$ ", boot-leather, xerox on silk and thread, one-of-a-kind.

MULLEN, DENISE

Everglades Florida, 1996. $11\frac{1}{2}$ " x $8\frac{7}{8}$ " x $\frac{3}{4}$ ", palladium prints, acrylic rolled endsheets, letterpress title page, plexiglass covers, one-of-a-kind.

PISANO, MARIA

Silent Running, 1995. $7\frac{1}{8}$ " x $4\frac{3}{4}$ " x $1\frac{1}{2}$ ", wood, dyed linen thread, one-of-a-kind.

SHERWOOD, KRISTIN

Spike, 1996. $4\frac{1}{2}$ " x 5 " x $1\frac{1}{8}$ ", steel, linen thread, one-of-a-kind.

SMITH, KEITH

Keith Smith With It, 1996. 9 " x 6 " x $1\frac{1}{2}$ ". Basingwerk etching paper and Mohawk Superfine, digital photographs and watercolor, edition of ten.

WALKER, REGINAL

Haqazzuzza, 1985. $6\frac{1}{2}$ " x $7\frac{1}{4}$ " x $1\frac{1}{4}$ ", rubber stamps, one-of-a-kind. (On loan from Gerard Charriere.)

WEIL, SUSAN

The Moon, 1995. Etchings by Marjorie Van Dyke and Vincent FitzGerald. Calligraphy by Jerry Kelly. Letterpress and silkscreen, bound in paper-covered boards, edition of twenty-five. Published by Vincent FitzGerald & Co. (On loan from Vincent FitzGerald & Co.)

Catalogue Illustrations

The illustrations in this catalogue are drawings of Coptic cover designs by Theodore C. Petersen for the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE PIERPONT MORGAN LIBRARY, NEW YORK:

- 19. Cover design of M. 567, *The Book of Kings*, 893 A.D. or earlier.
- 35. Cover design of M. 663, detached binding, ninth century.
- 47. Cover design of M. 633, *The Martyrdom of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus*, 1004 A.D.

All of the above are from the Monastery of St. Michael of the Desert.

FROM OTHER COLLECTIONS:

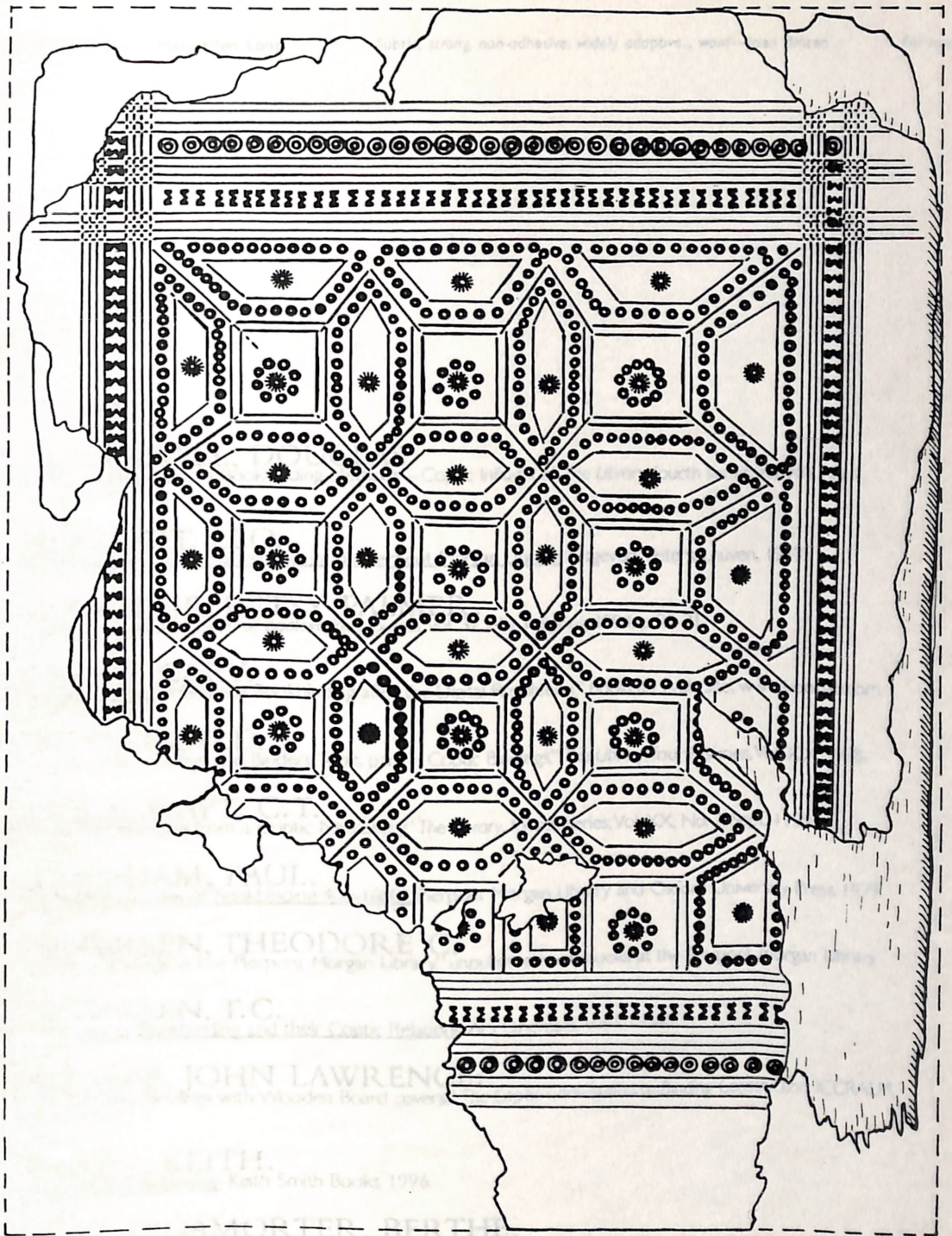
- 30. Wrapper design of the facsimile of manuscript of *The Acts*, and *St. John*, 600 A.D. or earlier, original remnant at Chester Beatty Library, facsimile at the University of Michigan Library.
- 39. Cover design of manuscript of *Poll-tax Book*, Greek, Papyrus, B.M., Pap. INV. No. 1442, first half of eighth century, British Museum.

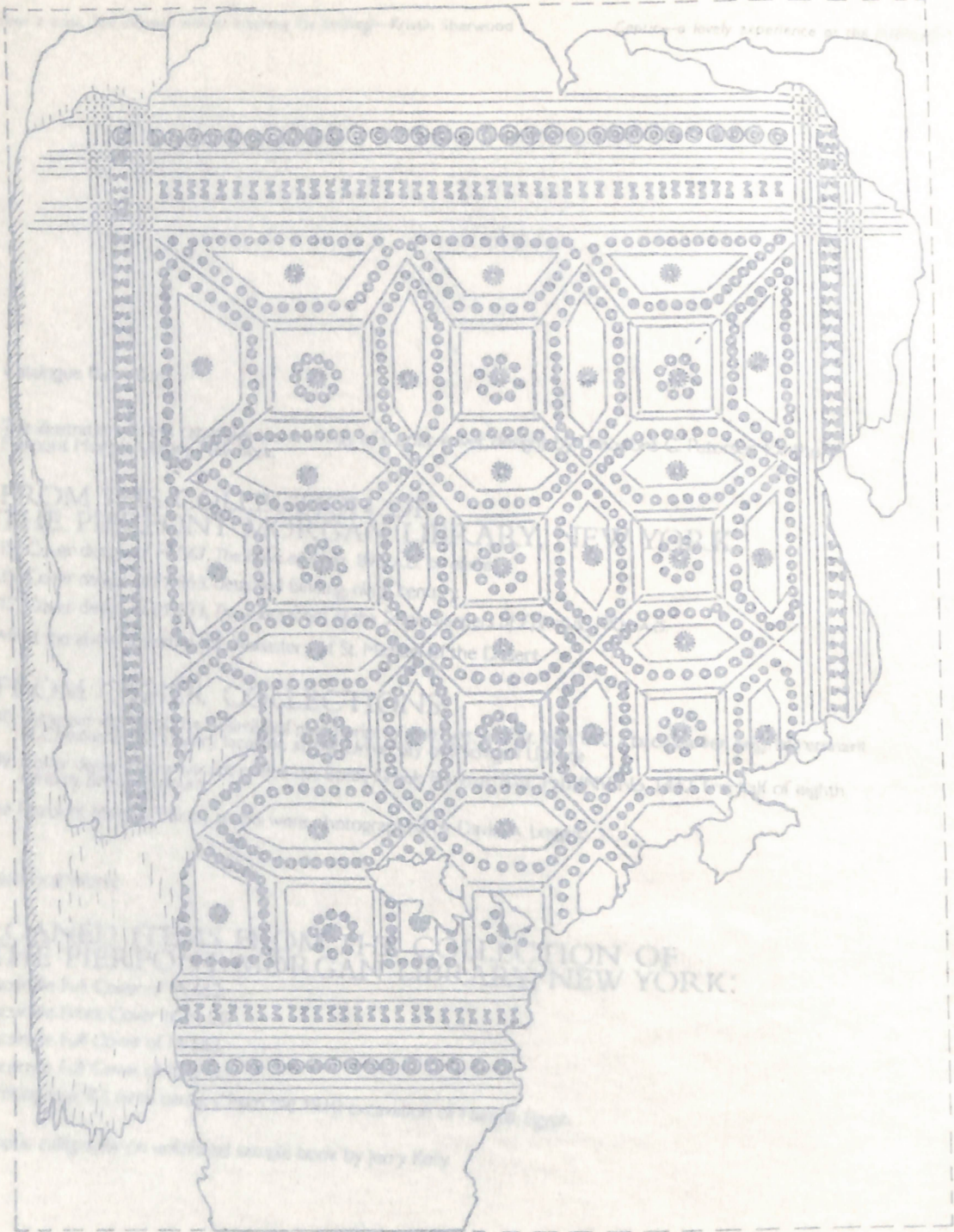
All Pierpont Morgan Library works were photographed by David A. Loggie.

Historical Works

LOANED ITEMS FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE PIERPONT MORGAN LIBRARY, NEW YORK:

- Facsimile Full Cover of M. 663.
- Facsimile Front Cover of M. 567.
- Facsimile Full Cover of M. 583.
- Facsimile Full Cover of M. 595.
- Writing box #3, ninth century, from the 1910 excavation of Hamuli, Egypt.
- Coptic calligraphy on unfinished sample book by Jerry Kelly.





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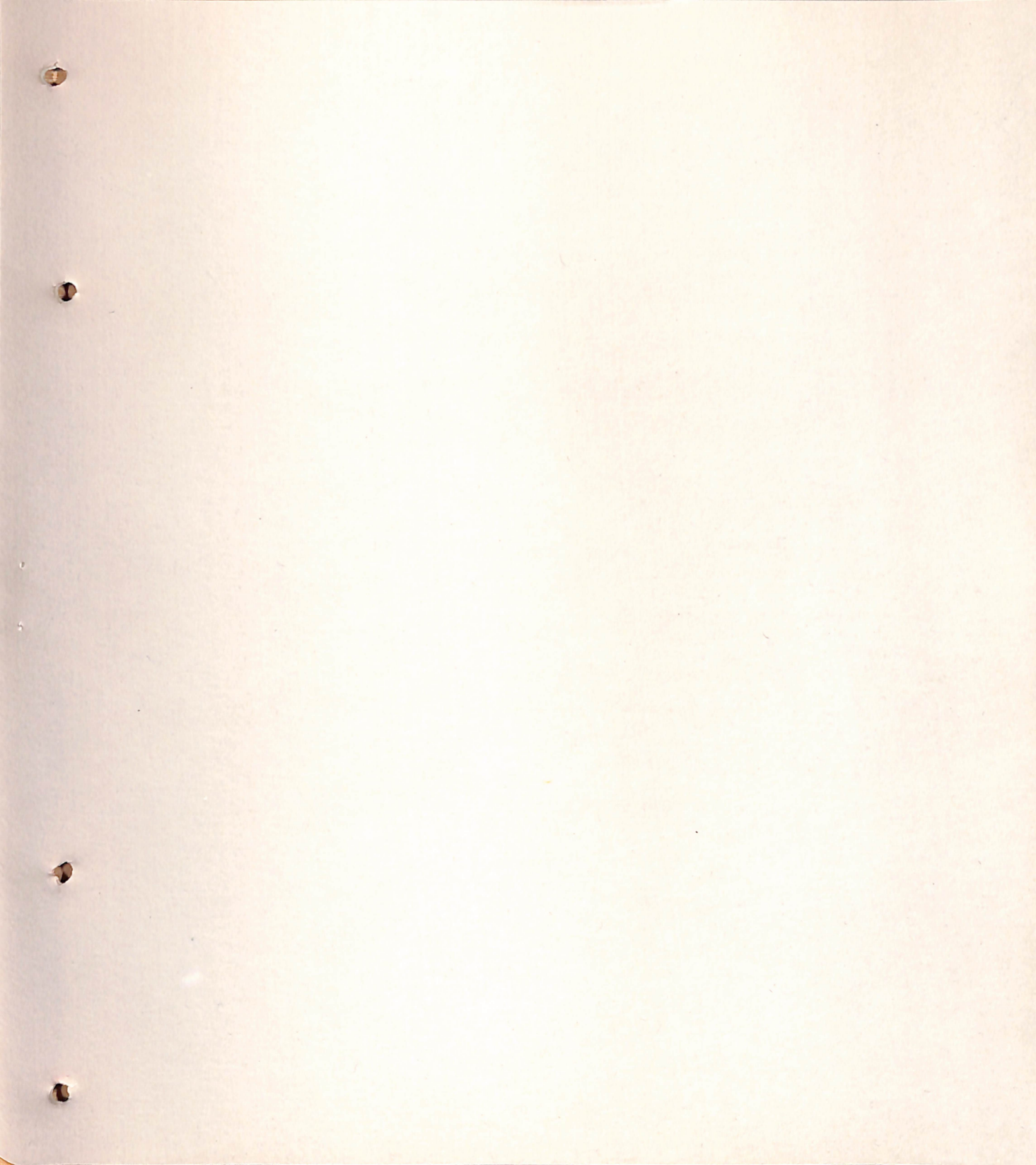
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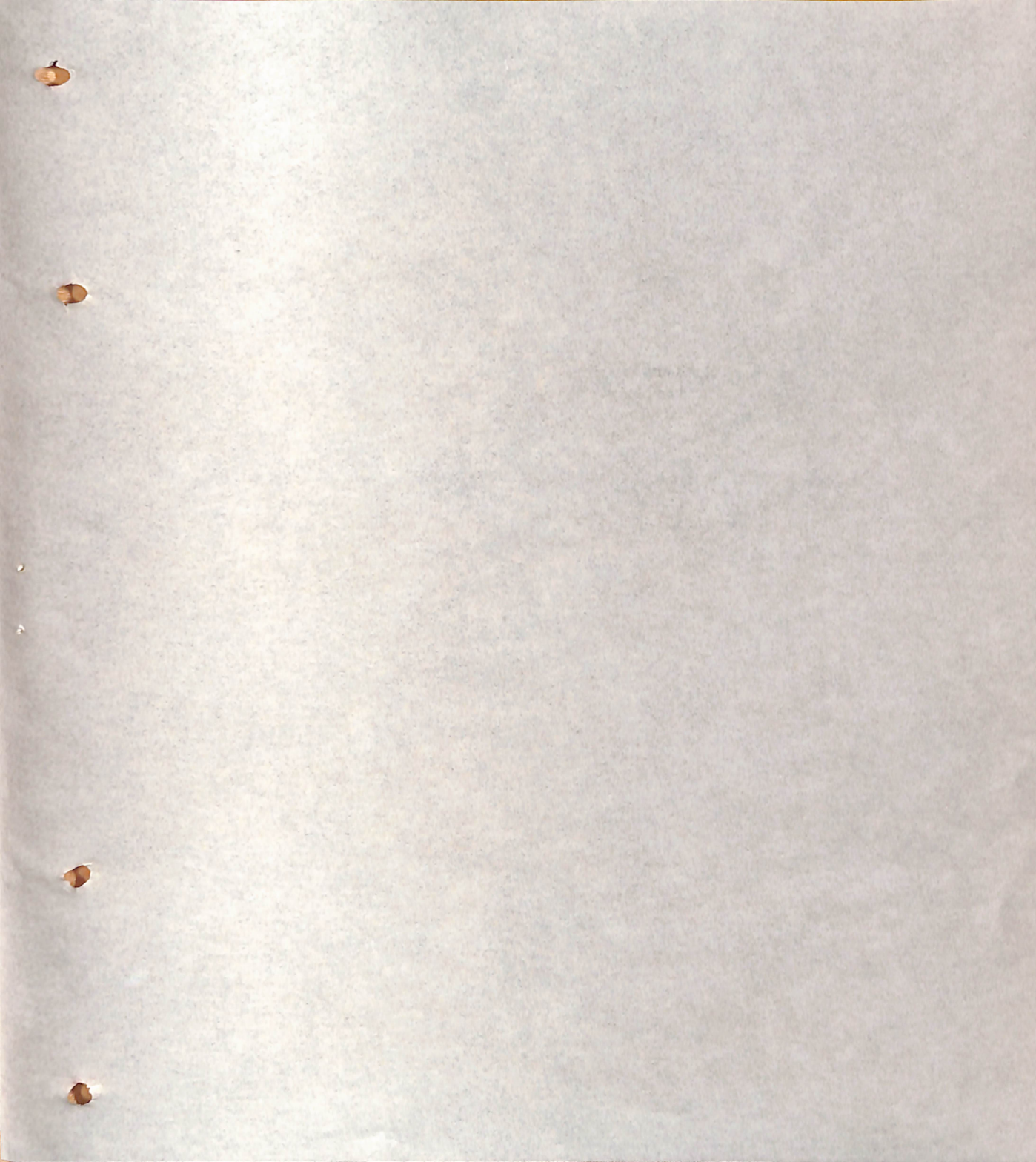
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Two hundred copies of this catalogue were xerographically reproduced on Mohawk paper in Adobe Bembo and Gills Sans Light typefaces. The illustrations were printed onto vellum. Catalogue design is by Dawn Rogala. The binding is based on an early stabbed sewing model also used by the Copts. The catalogues were bound by volunteers at the Center for Book Arts. The vellum was generously donated by New York Central Art Supply.



Two hundred years ago, the first
settlers came to the coast of
Alaska. They were the first
to discover the rich resources
of the land. They found
on an early stage of development
the Coast Range. The mountains
at the Coast Range were
generally thought to be the

