

The Coptic Library

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Abstract: Bindings were made of wood or leather, strengthened with old papyrus sheets. Long thongs, completed with a decorated bone fastener could be tied around the book and protect it. In the Coptic Museum, the Nag Hammadi codices show a range of such bindings dating back to the 4th century CE. The Coptic Psalter found in a little girl's grave, in the cemetery of al-Mudil, had leather binding with a looped-cross shaped bone peg. This is a very rare example of the art of making books in the 4th or 5th century CE. Bindings in the Pierpont-Morgan collection show the evolution of this art from the 5th to the 10th century. A codex of the Gospel of St. John, dated to CE 1100, was wrapped in a decorated leather binding, found in the coffin of a man, in the medieval Coptic cemetery at Naqlun.

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Introduction:

The Ancient Egyptian civilization did not come to an end with Ancient times (Pharaonic Egypt). The Egyptian People continued developing the Egyptian civilization, developing their linguistic, spiritual, religious, scientific and artistic aspects into what is so-called 'the Egyptian Christianity'.¹ Some historians consider the 'Egyptian Christianity of Egyptian history to date from the second century CE., simultaneous with the formation of the Coptic Language (200 CE to 1000 CE);² other prefer the benchmark 451 CE., the date of the Council of Chalcedon. The Arab ruled Egypt in 640-641 CE, which is generally considered to mark the end of the Egyptian Christianity.³ Although the Egyptian Christian never ruled Egypt, they contributed to all aspects of Egypt's culture.⁴ Every indigenous culture evolves in a place, conditioned by the nature of the local landscape and responsive to resonant of the special features of that landscape.⁵

¹ Pahor Labib. 'Some Aspects of Coptic civilization', *Coptic Studies of the Third International Congress of Coptic Studies*, Warsaw, 1984, P. 211

² Bently Layton, *A Coptic Grammar*, Wiesbaden, 2004, p. 1

³ For more details about the end of the Coptic period see:

M.S.A. Mikhail, 'An Historical Definition for The Coptic Period', in; Mat Immerzeel and J. Van der Vliet (eds.), *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a new Millennium*, vol. I, Leiden, 2004, P. 973: 981

⁴ Gawdat Gabra, *Historical Dictionary of the Coptic Church*, AUC press, Cairo, 2008, P. 1

⁵ Leslie S.B. MacCoull, 'Towards a new understanding of Coptic Egypt', *Studi e ricerche sull'Oriente cristiano* 13 (1990), P. 9

The term "Copt" and its adjective "Coptic" are elastic in an ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious sense. A certain amount of confusion has surrounded the use of the term "Copt" by scholars of several disciplines and sometimes of the same discipline.⁶ Moreover, Egyptian - Coptic Christianity is one of the most remarkable developments of the world of Christianity towards the end of the second millennium.⁷

The Egyptian Christianity is distinguished by many remarkable achievements; the use of rolls of papyrus was overshadowed and book making, as we know it then appeared for the first time. The idea of pagination was also adopted, due to the spreading of books and manuscripts dealing with many branches of knowledge. The Coptic monks and their scribes being the former pioneers in this favorable and distinguished role made the culture flourish throughout the world. In this paper I will deal with a topic which relates to one of these achievements, the "Coptic Library". The paper will focus on what was the meaning of library in Egyptian Christianity? What were its design, content and importance?

The Coptic library:

We get our information about the library in Egyptian Christianity; through the archaeological ruins of monasteries libraries, literary sources and the book collections which were found. We have to deal with books collection (Nag Hammadi, and Manichaean texts, etc...) as library as well. Shenute of Atripe (white monastery) did not mention the word of library

⁶ Gawdat Gabra, *Historical Dictionary of the Coptic Church*, P. 69

⁷ Otto F.A. Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, AUC Press, Cairo, 2002, p. 1

in whole his works, he usually used to refer to $\square\square\square\square$ and $\chi\square\square\square$ from which he takes quotations. Simply the library does not mean at all times a building, the main idea of library to have books which anybody can read it. Thus, there is always a place connected to the library in Egyptian Christianity; where a scribe-monk can copy manuscripts is called *Scriptorium*. In this room a master instructed the scribes how to produce manuscripts; hence the word took the meaning of the school that developed around it. A letter from Athanasius reports the existence of *scriptoria* in Alexandria in the 4th.⁸ Therefore some monasteries had *Scriptoria*, where copyists were engaged in transcribing manuscripts.⁹ Even in non-Egyptian Christian monasteries such as Syriac had a *Scriptorium*, it was able to produce a Syriac manuscripts.¹⁰ Normally copyists were administrators, monks, priests and deacons of the monastery or the Church; sometimes there were professionals and volunteers as well.¹¹ It should be noted here that in the fourth century some monks were found to be copyists setting up a small library for them or making copies for others.¹² At the time the monastic cell was the most basic architectural element of monasticism and should have in its simple design a room for study and keeping vigil with a desk and wall cupboards.¹³

Actually, most of the Coptic manuscripts are in the religious context hence most of their contents is religious, for example the Coptic Biblical texts.¹⁴ The Earliest texts could be dated by the fourth and fifth century. Because of there are a few numbers of Christian manuscripts likely to have existed in Egypt

in the second and third centuries.¹⁵ So, the ruins of libraries or the books collection are relating to the monasteries or to the religion in general.

Before Egyptian Christianity; there were libraries in the temples of Ancient Egypt.¹⁶ Moreover, the library of Alexandria is particularly well known for the Hellenistic period. It had preserved a huge number of scrolls, but in 48-47 BCE. It was destroyed because of a conflagration. A second library of Alexandria, located at the Serapeum, was also destroyed in 391 CE during the storming of the Serapeum.¹⁷ The Egyptian Christianity has played a central role, mainly because the survival of the huge number of papyri,¹⁸ and manuscripts than was available elsewhere, the dry climate of Egypt is responsible for preservation of Papyri, books, libraries, and organic materials, to know more about the libraries in Egyptian Christianity.

Almost every monastery contained a library, even small monasteries,¹⁹ According to the literary sources, Coptic Monasteries possessed libraries; some of them were large, as for example those of the monasteries of St. Macarius in Wadi al-Natrun, the Archangel Michael in Fayoum and St. Shenute in Sohag.²⁰ Concerning the monastery of St. Shenute at Atripe (in Sohag); Tito Orlandi is quite sure that the monastery had a library from the beginning, and possibly also a *scriptorium*.²¹

It is a very well-known phenomenon to find a library – place of education - belonging to the cult places. In ancient Egypt it was found that pr-anx belonged to the temple and in the Islamic period we

⁸ M. Krause, 'Scriptorium', CE 7, 2108.

⁹ Gawdat Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries: Egypt's Monastic Art and Architecture*, p. 3

¹⁰ Lucas Van Rompay and Andrea B. Schmidt, 'Takritans in The Egyptian Desert: The Monastery of the Syrians in the Ninth Century', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 1 (2001), p. 47

¹¹ Samiha Abdel-Shaheed Abdel-Nour, *Copyists and Sponsors of Manuscripts in The Coptic Church (XIIIth – XVIII th Century)*, in: N. Bosson et A. Boud'hors (eds.), *Actes du huitième congrès international d'études coptes*, (Paris, 28 juin – 3 juillet 2004_ vol.1, Peeters, Leuven, 2007, p.1-2

¹² For more details about this see: L. Störk, *Koptische Handschriften 2, Handschriften der Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg*, Teil 2, (Stuttgart, 1995), 52-77.

¹³ Gawdat Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries: Egypt's Monastic Art and Architecture*, p. 30

¹⁴ Amongst the most important recent discoveries is the book of Psalms in the dialect of Middle Egypt (Mesokemic).

¹⁵ Roger S. Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt*, Princeton and Oxford, 2009, p. 50

¹⁶ In the ancient Egyptian times, most of the temples possessed collections of religious and scientific books. The library attached to the celebrated schools of Heliopolis, where Egyptian and Greek philosophers are said to have made their studies, was probably the largest and most important of these.

¹⁷ J-Y. Empereur Alexandria Rediscovered, London, 1998, p. 96

¹⁸ Roger S. Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt*, Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 3

¹⁹ Hugh G. Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of The Wadi 'n Natrun*, part 1, New York, 1926, p. viii

²⁰ Gawdat Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries: Egypt's Monastic Art and Architecture*, AUC Press, Cairo, 2002, p. 3

²¹ Tito Orlandi, 'The Library of the Monastery of Saint Shenute at Atripe', in: A.Egberts, B.P. Muhs, and J. van der Vliet (eds.), *Perspectives on Panopolis: An Egyptian Town from Alexander the Great to the Arab conquest*, (Brill, Leiden, 2002), p.211

find that the library belonged to the grand mosque.²² The library of the archbishop of Alexandria was particularly large. It also served for the theological instruction at the Theological School of Alexandria. Many lists of manuscripts reflected the richness of the libraries of ancient monasteries in significant literary works that have been lost.²³

There are several school books that remained. They show us how a Coptic monk used to learn his first letters.²⁴ Here it should be noted that the rule of Pachomius required that those entering the monastery should not only learn Bible texts by heart but they should also learn how to read and write in general.²⁵ Simply, the Pachomian monastic rule made literacy obligatory for everyone. So the establishment of the library in the monastery was also so important and obligatory. The quantities of papyri and manuscripts discoveries in the ruins of some places may have belonged to the library, give us an imagination how large some libraries was.²⁶ Most of our information about libraries in Egyptian Christianity comes from the manuscripts which were found. For example; the library of monastery of Saint Michael,²⁷ which is locates Fayoum region.²⁸ Crum mentioned that '*the largest and in some ways, the most important of extant collection*'.²⁹

But it is difficult to know more details about the libraries and its contents – except the library of the monastery of saint Shenute at Atripe.³⁰ Regarding to and as general rule, ancient Coptic library collections,

²² Theodore C. Petersen, 'Early Islamic Bookbinding and their Coptic relations', *ARS Orientalis I* (1954), p. 41

²³ Gawdat Gabra, *Historical Dictionary of the Coptic Church*, P. 166

²⁴ W. Kammerer, 'Coptic Bibliography', *Ann Arbor* (Michigan, 1950), 104 no. 1832-1839.

²⁵ M. Krause, 'Libraries', *CE* 1448

²⁶ Martin Krause, 'Papyrus Discoveries', *CE VI*, 1898

²⁷ The monastery of St. Michael is situated near the present day village of Al-Hāmūlī in the Fayoum district.

²⁸ The Fayoum Oasis has always been one of the richest archaeological areas in Egypt and thus has revealed much evidence for the late antique and medieval periods. See: Anne Boud'hors, 'Manuscripts and Literature in Fayoum Coptic', in Gawdat Gabra (ed.), *Christianity and Monasticism in the Fayoum Oasis*, AUC press, Cairo, 2005, p. 22

²⁹ W.E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary*, Oxford, 1939, p. v

³⁰ Tito Orlandi, 'The Library of the Monastery of Saint Shenute at Atripe', in: A.Egberts, B.P. Muhs, and J. van der Vliet (eds.), *Perspectives on Panopolis: An Egyptian Town from Alexander the Great to the Arab conquest*, (Brill, Leiden, 2002), p.211-231

and in some cases the single manuscript, have survived only in a dismembered and fragmentary state, with their components now is being dispersed among the museums and the library's collection over the world.³¹ Moreover, the fact is the lack of scientific excavations in the ruins of ancient monasteries.

It should be noted here that not the only Egyptian – Coptic monasteries had a library but also a Syriac monasteries had; for example, the monastery of the Syrian in Wādi'n Natrūn.³² When The Syriac monks settled in the monastery, they rebuilt it, and started setting up the library with Bible, Egyptian and Syriac ascetical, theological, and homiletic literature, and liturgy.³³

The design of the library:

To know what the design of the library was? The library of the monastery of St. Shenoute at atripe is a good example. The location of the library, in the monastery buildings which still exist, is not clear.³⁴ In a room situated to the north of the great apse of the church of the White Monastery,³⁵ inscriptions were found on all four walls that name the titles of books – the inscriptions from 9th to 11th centuries-, sometimes with the number of copies of the book concerned. From this Crum concluded that the ancient library of the monastery was located in this room. ³⁶ But Lefebvre and Orlandi think that this room became the repository of the codices only when they were no longer in use. This opinion could answer the question about what did happen to the codices of papyrus, parchment or manuscripts in general, which became old and not readable? The same happened when Arabic replaced Coptic as the ecclesiastical language; the codices of the white monastery were stored in a

³¹ L. Depuydt, *Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library*, Peeters, Leuven, 1993, p. XLVI

³² The official name of that monastery is "the monastery of the house of the mother of God, of Abba Bishoy (in the desert of Scetis), took the addition "of the Syrians"

³³ Lucas Van Rompay and Andrea B. Schmidt, 'Takritans in The Egyptian Desert: The Monastery of the Syrians in the Ninth Century', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 1 (2001), p. 47

³⁴ Tito Orlandi, 'The Library of the Monastery of Saint Shenute at Atripe', in: A.Egberts, B.P. Muhs, and J. van der Vliet (eds.), *Perspectives on Panopolis: An Egyptian Town from Alexander the Great to the Arab conquest*, (Brill, Leiden, 2002), p.211

³⁵ In this room; most of the manuscripts were found by Maspero, and the inscriptions were readable till early of 20th century, but now they have disappeared.

³⁶ W.E.Crum, 'Inscriptions from Shenoute's Monastery', *JTS* 5(1904), p. 552-569

secret room in the north-east corner of the church building.³⁷

According to the inscriptions, and from the colophons of the codices: the books of the New Testament were on shelves on the northern wall, those of the Old Testament on the southern wall, the homiletic and historical books on the eastern wall and the biographies on the western wall.

The Contents of the library:

The library of the monastery normally, consisted of new and secondhand books.³⁸ It is very difficult to give an exact number of books in the monastery library, but it is at least possible to give an idea of number and contents of the codices so far identified and reconstructed. On one hand, an impression of the number of books of a church (small library) is reflected by the inventory list of the Church of Theodorus in Hermopolis, which mentions thirty-one books without naming the titles.³⁹ According to Crum,⁴⁰ the Coptic manuscripts of Turin may have belonged to a church in Abydos. There is another book list in Turin.⁴¹ On the other hand, the number of the books in a big library in a monastery (library of White monastery for instance); Tito Orlandi mentioned that *'taking into consideration the manuscripts entirely lost, we can speak of a library of at least 1000 codices, an astonishing number compared with the largest western libraries of the same time, which seem to have kept 300 to 500 codices'*.⁴² In general, the libraries of the monasteries were large, from the evidence of the literary sources; From the Hamuli manuscripts which is so-called the library of the monastery of the Archangel Michael in Fayoum, give us a good idea of what the books in the monastic libraries were like

when they were whole, a rough guide to how the contents of an Egyptian Christianity library were organized into volumes.⁴³

Normally, library contains, in addition to books of the Old and New Testaments lectionaries homilies, and an antiphony. They are biblical and apocryphal writings, homilies and passions. From the Middle Ages come the remains of the libraries of the monasteries of Wadi al-Natrun.⁴⁴ It should be noted at this point that; the Syriac monastery library used to have some ancient Egyptian books.⁴⁵

One of the most important manuscripts in the libraries of the monasteries and churches is the translation of the Bible, from Greek into Coptic and other religious books. According to the tradition of the Coptic Church, the translation of the whole Bible was made in the Catechetical school in Alexandria, under the supervision of the Clement and Pantaeus, the head of that school, in the later part of the second century CE. The Coptic version was translated towards the end of the second century or at the beginning of the third century CE.⁴⁶ The library of the monastery of Syrian used to import some books from the Syrian homeland.⁴⁷

It is important here to consider the very old library from Dishna? (4th to 5th) centuries; it is very special because of the mixture of the Greek, Latin, Coptic texts, and pagan and Christian literature.⁴⁸ Moreover, the monastery manuscript list deriving from Fayoum, showed that the libraries had Greek and Coptic codices as well.⁴⁹ The works of Origen and Didymus, written in Greek, that were found in 1941 in

³⁷ Tito Orlandi, 'The Library of the Monastery of Saint Shenute at Atripe', in: A.Egberts, B.P. Muhs, and J. van der Vliet (eds.), *Perspectives on Panopolis: An Egyptian Town from Alexander the Great to the Arab conquest*, (Brill, Leiden, 2002), p.212, 227

³⁸ Lucas Van Rompay and Andrea B. Schmidt, 'Takritans in The Egyptian Desert: The Monastery of the Syrians in the Ninth Century', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 1 (2001), p. 47

³⁹ W.E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the Collection of John Rylands Library*, Manchester, 1909, no. 238, 112-114.

⁴⁰ W.E.Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London, 1905, XII, no. 5

⁴¹ W. E. Crum, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes II*, New York, 1926, p. 205 and n.3

⁴² Tito Orlandi, 'The Library of the Monastery of Saint Shenute at Atripe', in: A.Egberts, B.P. Muhs, and J. van der Vliet (eds.), *Perspectives on Panopolis: An Egyptian Town from Alexander the Great to the Arab conquest*, (Brill, Leiden, 2002), p.225

⁴³ Stephen Emmel, 'The Library of the Monastery of the Archangel Michael at Phantou (al-Hamuli), in: Gawdat Gabra (ed.), *Christianity and Monasticism in the Fayoum Oasis*, UCL Cairo, 2005, p. 68

⁴⁴ H. Evelun – White, *The Monasteries of The Wadi'n Natrun*, 3 vols. , New York, (1920: 1921)

⁴⁵ Lucas Van Rompay and Andrea B. Schmidt, 'Takritans in The Egyptian Desert: The Monastery of the Syrians in the Ninth Century', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 1 (2001), p. 47

⁴⁶ O.H.E. Burmester, 'The Bohairic Periscope of Wisdom and Sirach', *Biblica XV* (1934), p. 453

⁴⁷ Lucas Van Rompay and Andrea B. Schmidt, 'Takritans in The Egyptian Desert: The Monastery of the Syrians in the Ninth Century', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 1 (2001), p. 48

⁴⁸ Tito Orlandi, 'The Library of the Monastery of Saint Shenute at Atripe', in: A.Egberts, B.P. Muhs, and J. van der Vliet (eds.), *Perspectives on Panopolis: An Egyptian Town from Alexander the Great to the Arab conquest*, (Brill, Leiden, 2002), p.227

⁴⁹ M. Krause, 'Libraries', *CE* 1448

the monastery of Arsenius at Turah also came from a monastery library.⁵⁰

At this point; Enormous quantities of Greek, Coptic,⁵¹ and Arabic papyri and manuscripts were found by scientific excavation, people from the area or sold by dealers at the end of the nineteenth century, and are now held in well-known museum collections like the Coptic Museum, the Papyrus collection in Vienna or the Musée du Louvre in Paris,⁵² and etc... including the writings of the New Testament, the Psalter and lectionaries in several copies, (Greek and Coptic), and a series of theological books. Some of the codices were of papyrus, some of parchment, and paper.⁵³ Give us an impression how large and invaluable the libraries in Egyptian Christianity were.

The importance of the Coptic library:

The important monasteries were arranged. By time the manuscripts remained in half-forgotten rooms or caves,⁵⁴ deteriorating little by little from dust, humidity, animals and age.⁵⁵ Many lists of the manuscripts reflect the richness of the libraries of ancient monasteries in significant literary works that have been lost.⁵⁶ Monastic libraries served as repositories of Greek, Syriac, Old Nubian, Ethiopian, Armenian and Arabic as well as Coptic manuscripts. In addition to the intrinsic value of these manuscripts, they provide evidence of the multiethnic character of some monastic communities. Over many centuries monastic libraries preserved Coptic literature and the Christian Arabic literature of the Christian Egyptian, which are not only significant for the history of Christianity and the Church in Egypt, but also for biblical, patristic, hagiographic, and liturgical studies.⁵⁷ To know what can only one monastic library

provide us, Stephen Emmel,⁵⁸ mentioned 'No volume about the history of Christianity and monasticism in Fayoum region would be complete without a chapter about the famous group of parchment books known generally as "the Hamuli manuscripts," which are another of extraordinary monuments of Christian Egypt that the Fayoum has bequeathed to us from its long history', which it is called "the library of the Monastery of the Archangel Michael at Phantou (al-Hamuli).

The Coptic library was a model for other libraries, for example the Catechetical School was model for the library of Jerusalem and also the library of Alexandria was the model for the library of Caesarea.⁵⁹

Coptic bookbinding:

Coptic bookbinding is one of the remarkable achievements of the Egyptian civilization in the Coptic era, the changing from the papyri rolls to codices was one of the achievements of the Coptic era,⁶⁰ it also relates to the monks and scribes of the monasteries and Churches, it was part of their work at library. Books were made by sheets bound together at the back or spin, in contrast to the scroll, which attaches sheets in a continuous roll,⁶¹ which we called codex format.⁶² The Latin word *Caudex* was referring to the trunk of a tree or a block of wood, then the word codex passed from wood to other materials bound in the same way.⁶³

The Coptic bookbinding had been used since the fourth century CE.⁶⁴ The Coptic manuscripts were covered with leather bindings for their protection, so that the art of binding flourished in the monasteries and attained a splendid standard among the monks of each monastery. There was a group trained in this profession, they ornamented the outside covering with fine designs or with figures of apostles or saints by embossing them with special carved seals. Many of these seals and various tools for binding have been

⁵⁰ Koenen and Muller –Wiener, "Zu den Papyri aus dem Arsenioskloster bei Tuar" *ZPE* 2(1968), p. 48 and n. 14

⁵¹ The fayoumic dialect of the Coptic Language was probably spoken up to at least the tenth century, because it was used in letters, contracts, funerary inscriptions, and manuscript colophons up to that time.

⁵² Anne Boud'hors, 'Manuscripts and Literature in Fayoum Coptic', in Gawdat Gabra (ed.), *Christianity and Monasticism in the Fayoum Oasis*, AUC press, Cairo, 2005, p. 22

⁵³ M. Krause, 'Libraries', *CE* 1448

⁵⁴ Until western travelers and manuscript hunters rediscovered these manuscripts, and renewed interest led to the removal of many from the native monasteries to libraries around the world.

⁵⁵ Tito Orlandi, 'Literature, Coptic', *CE* V, p. 1459

⁵⁶ Gawdat Gabra, *Historical Dictionary of the Coptic Church*, p. 166

⁵⁷ Gawdat Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries: Egypt's Monastic Art and Architecture*, p. 3

⁵⁸ Stephen Emmel, 'The Library of the Monastery of the Archangel Michael at Phantou (al-Hamuli), in: Gawdat Gabra (ed.), *Christianity and Monasticism in the Fayoum Oasis*, UCL Cairo, 2005, p. 63 (63-70)

⁵⁹ M. Krause, 'Libraries', *CE* 1447

⁶⁰ Pahor Labib. 'Some Aspects of Coptic civilization', *Coptic Studies of the Third International Congress of Coptic Studies*, Warsaw, 1984, P. 217

⁶¹ Everett Ferguson, 'Codex', *Encyclopedia of early Christianity*, New York, 1990, P. 219

⁶² Myrian Rosen-Ayalon, 'Bookbinding', *CE* II, P. 407

⁶³ Everett Ferguson, 'Codex', *Encyclopedia of early Christianity*, P. 219

⁶⁴ Theodore C. Petersen, 'Early Islamic Bookbinding and their Coptic relations', *A.R.S Orientalis* I, 1954, P. 52

found in the monasteries.⁶⁵ It should be mentioned that the copying and binding was done in the monasteries and churches along the edge of the deserts of Upper Egypt and Fayoum.⁶⁶ It is important to mention also that the codex distinguished Christian writings from the Jewish scrolls of scripture and pagan rolls.⁶⁷

The monks used, as it happens nowadays in convents, to stick the pamphlets of the manuscripts with a mixture of powdered fenugreek and salt after they were boiled together, in order to avoid all the harmful insects and worms that usually seduce the manuscripts and expose them to rapid destruction.⁶⁸ In the sixth century CE, monasteries had become the principal centers for manuscript collection and production.⁶⁹

It should be noted that the early Egyptian bookbinding of the Coptic era has become typical for the Islamic time in Egypt. During the latter it is only a matter of further development of the same methods and the same ornamental designs.⁷⁰ This means that the Islamic bookbinding owed much of its early inspiration and technical skill to Coptic sources.⁷¹

Coptic bookbinding techniques are the prototypes of almost all those in use today throughout the West and the near East.⁷² It should be added that the study of the Coptic bookbinding in principle (its materials and its structure) used to recognize the Coptic paleography.⁷³ The history of the book cover begins at the same time as the introduction of the codex. The technique for making book covers by hand has not substantially changed from its beginning till today. The Copts, who were known for their skill in binding, adorned the leather covers with geometrical figures in low relief.⁷⁴

Bindings were made of wood or leather, strengthened with old papyrus sheets. Long thongs, completed with a decorated bone fastener could be tied around the book and protect it. In the Coptic Museum, the Nag Hammadi codices show a range of such bindings dating back to the 4th century CE. The Coptic Psalter found in a little girl's grave, in the cemetery of al-Mudil, had leather binding with a looped-cross shaped bone peg. This is a very rare example of the art of making books in the 4th or 5th century CE. Bindings in the Pierpont-Morgan collection show the evolution of this art from the 5th to the 10th century. A codex of the Gospel of St. John, dated to CE 1100, was wrapped in a decorated leather binding, found in the coffin of a man, in the medieval Coptic cemetery at Naqlun.

Letters and books were written on sheets of papyrus, parchment and paper, whereas pottery or stone ostraca were preferred when a less valuable matter was engaged. Writers use ink-pots, kalams, and styles to place the rulings on parchment. Pencil-cases or holders were sometimes decorated. Leather ones, found in Antinoopolis, were linked to the ink-pot and engraved with figures of saints. A famous exemplar in the Louvre museum bears an image of saint Philotheos and the name of owner, Pamiyas. Another one (of unknown provenance) is engraved with the figure of the Mother of God, between the archangels Michael and Gabriel. Important documents were sealed by means of wooden or metal stamps the design, or the letters, intended to be print, were put in the reverse, to get an accurate result, but, confusedly, they were sometimes put in the classical way of writing, so that the stamp was upside down.

⁶⁵ Raouf Habib, 'Coptic Manuscripts', *The Outstanding Aspects of the Coptic Art*, Cairo, P. 5

⁶⁶ Theodore C. Petersen, 'Early Islamic Bookbinding and their Coptic relations', *A.R.S Orientalis I*, 1954, P. 52

⁶⁷ Everett Ferguson, 'Codex', *Encyclopedia of early Christianity*, P. 220

⁶⁸ Raouf Habib, 'Coptic Manuscripts', *The Outstanding Aspects of the Coptic Art*, Cairo, P. 5

⁶⁹ Carroll D. Osburn, 'Manuscripts', *Encyclopedia of early Christianity*, P. 565

⁷⁰ F. Sarre, *Islamic Bookbinding*, P. 11

⁷¹ Theodore C. Petersen, in: *A.R.S Orientalis I*, 1954, P. 41

⁷² Myrian Rosen-Ayalon, 'Bookbinding', *CE II*, P. 409

⁷³ Bently Layton, 'Towards a new Coptic paleography', *Acts of the Second International Congress of Coptic Studies*, Rome, 1980, P. 153

⁷⁴ Anne Boud'hors, 'Paleographie et codicologie Coptes, progress et perspectives', *Acts of the Eighth*

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