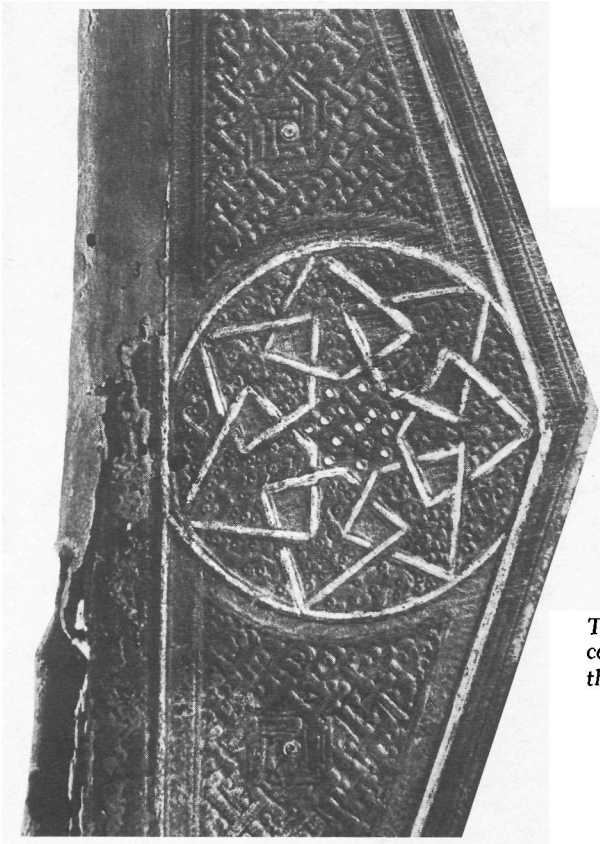


The Islamic Bindings and Bookmaking Symposium

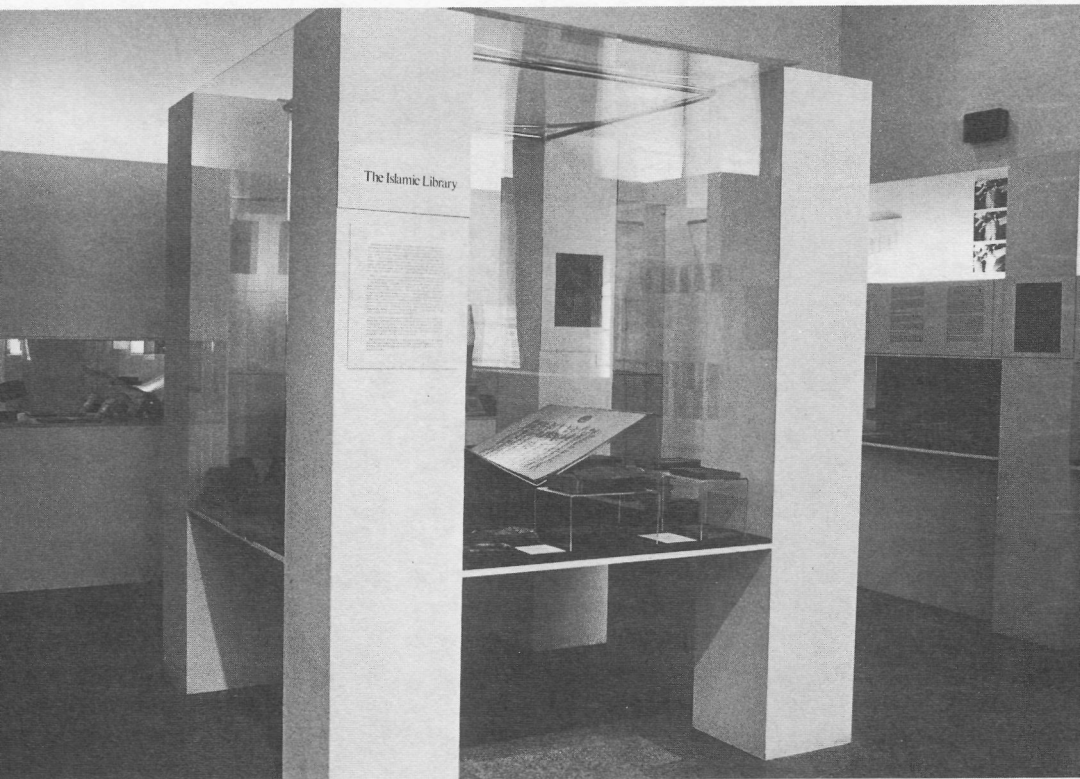
John Carswell

A two-day symposium to mark the opening of the Islamic Bindings and Bookmaking exhibition was held at the Oriental Institute May 18 and 19, 1981; and a total of one hundred and sixteen participants from North America, Europe, and the Near East attended. These included not only Islamic art historians, but rare books librarians, early bindings specialists, and museum officials, which made for a great diversity of opinion in the discussions which followed each paper.

A 14th-15th century binding from Egypt or Syria lent by the Chester Beatty Library (all photos of bindings are from the catalogue of the exhibition; this is No. 4)



The flap of an early 15th century Egyptian binding in the Institute's collection (No. 8)



The rectangular object on the floor of the case, center front, is actually a set of Jewish phylacteries, illustrating related use of leatherwork contemporary with the bookbindings

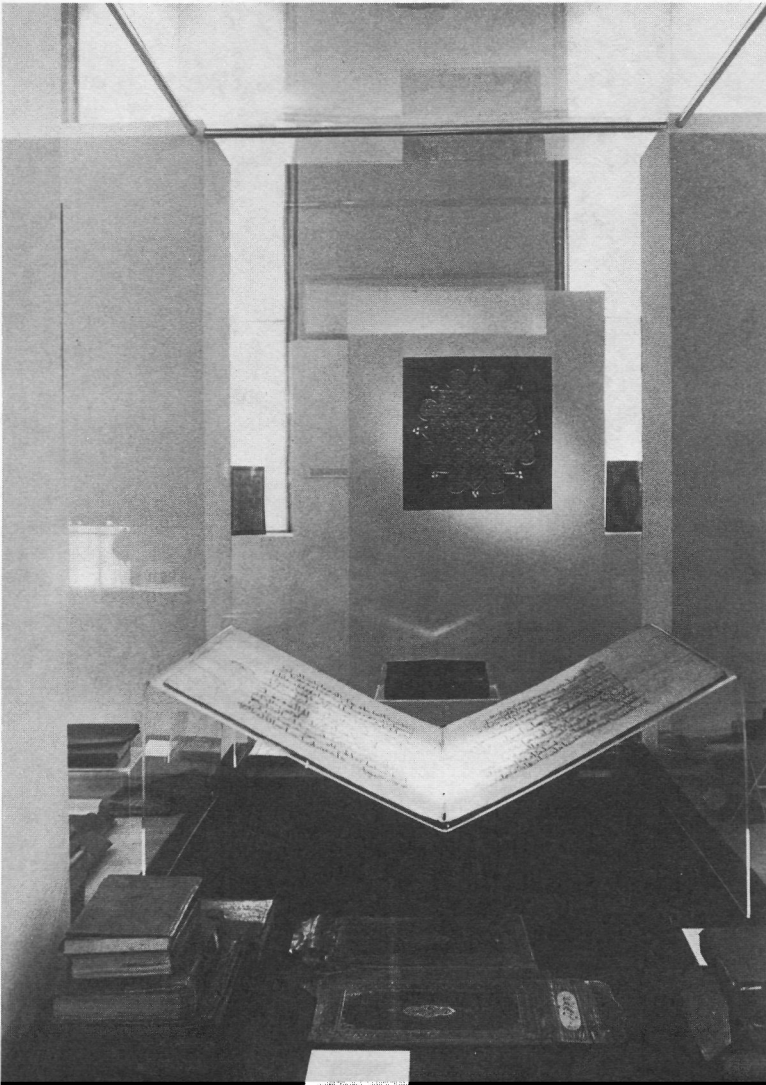
The catalogue was available to the participants before the symposium, who were also able to attend a special viewing of the exhibition. The exhibition, based on Bernhard Moritz's collection of Islamic bookbindings from the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries which was acquired by the Oriental Institute in 1929, was intended to display the bindings in the wider context of bookmaking and book production in the medieval Islamic world; and the symposium explored this theme in depth.

At the first session, the Director J. A. Brinkman welcomed the participants to the Oriental Institute, and Gulnar Bosch delivered the opening address. Professor Bosch, once herself a student at this

The other side of the same case, featuring pages from the third largest Koran in the world

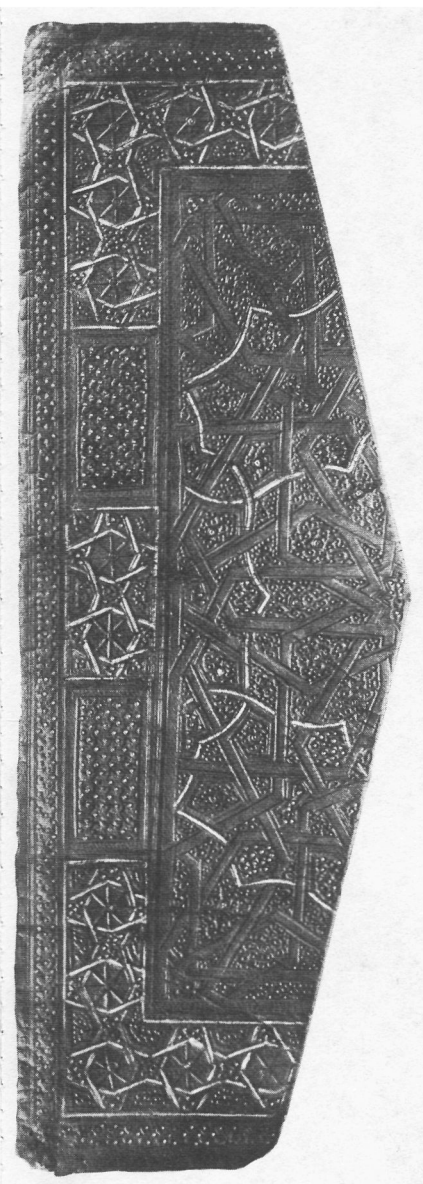
university and the first person to investigate the Moritz bindings in detail, stressed the collaborative nature of the exhibition, combining research into the historical, technical and esthetic branches of the subject. Then Guy Petherbridge, as a specialist in early Oriental bookmaking, described the technique of manufacture of the Islamic book and the characteristics that differentiated it from the Christian and European traditions. This was followed by Ernst Grube's paper, tracing the emergence of the pictorial style in the decoration of Islamic book covers from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries.

In the afternoon, Duncan Haldane described the important but little-known collection of Islamic bindings in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, which he is at present preparing for pub-

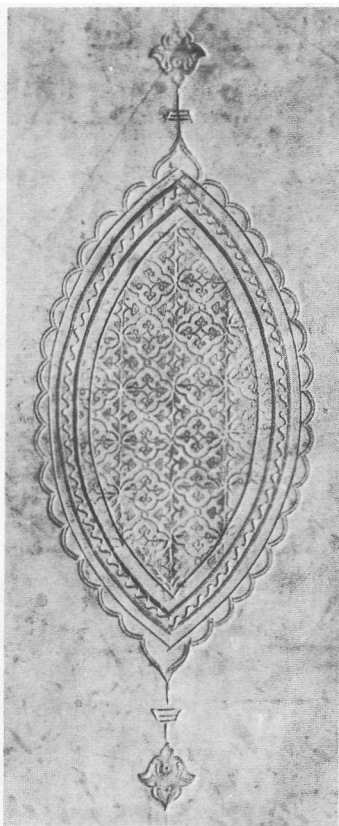




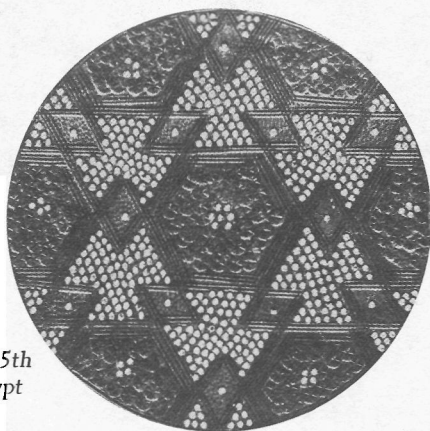
A 14th century binding from Egypt or Syria (No. 12)

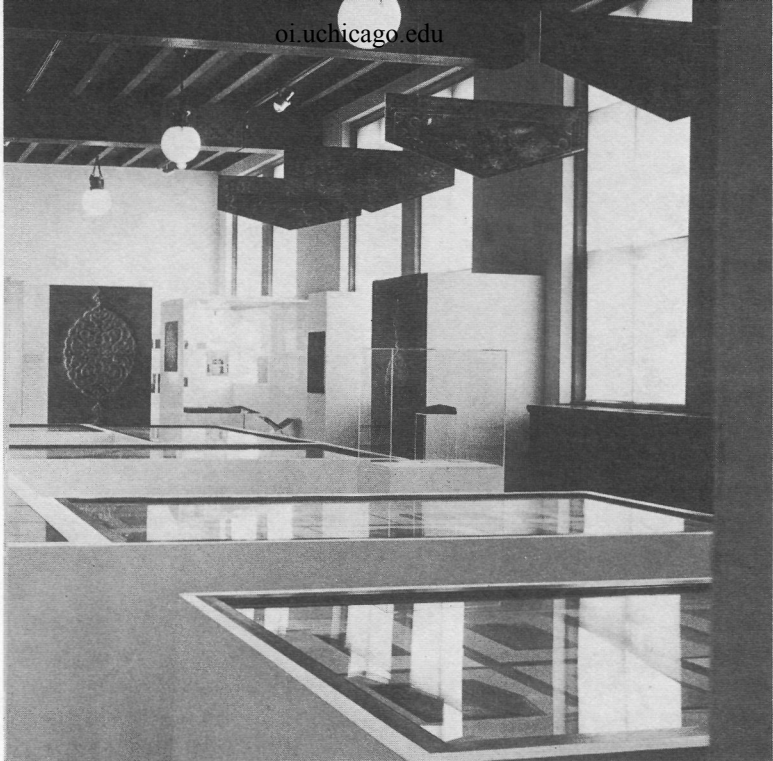


*Detail from a 14th-15th
century flap from Egypt
or Syria (No. 53)*

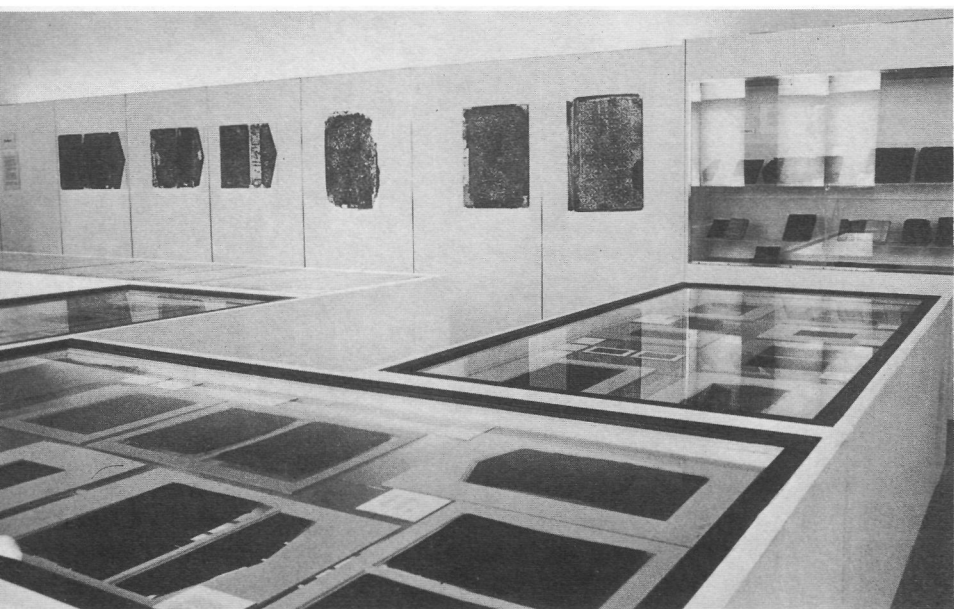


*The mandorla from a doublure
(lining), also 14th-15th century,
Egypt-Syria (No. 76)*





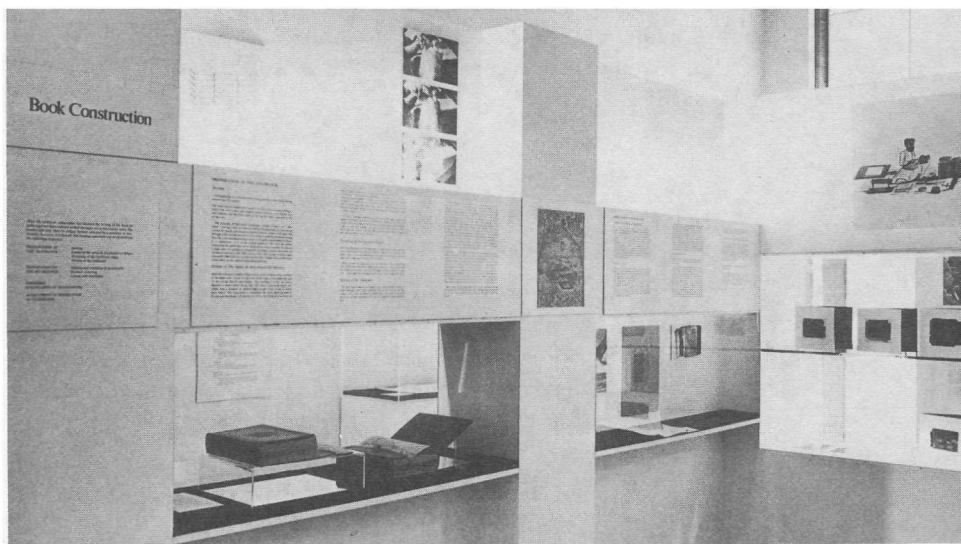
The bindings were displayed in cases mirrored so the backs could be studied as well; greatly enlarged photographs of the more striking flaps were suspended from the ceiling beams



Well over a hundred objects—bindings, books, and photographs—usurped the entire Palestinian Gallery

lication. This was followed by a well-illustrated paper by Oktay Aslanapa from Istanbul University, on the bindings in the most famous of all collections, that of the library at Topkapu Saray. In the evening before the opening of the exhibition to the public, Basil Gray, formerly keeper of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum, gave a lecture on Il-Khanid and Mamluk manuscript production.

On the second day, Gulnar Bosch gave a detailed description of the doublures in Islamic bookcovers, and an analysis of their decorative motifs and derivation. Julian Raby, of the Oriental Institute at Oxford, described with a detective's precision his researches into



The exhibition involved the study and display (above right) of contemporary descriptions and depictions of the bookbinder's craft

the curious phenomenon of a Greek Christian scriptorium in Istanbul, operating under the direct patronage of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II. In the afternoon the present writer described the formation of the Moritz collection and its subsequent dispersal and the relationship between the bindings and other forms of Islamic decorative art. The final paper was given by Anthony Hobson, who talked about the evolution of European medieval binding and its indebtedness to the earlier Islamic style. To conclude, Farouk Mustafa of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations once again stressed the importance of the book in Islamic society and brought the symposium to a close.