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Front cover:

The *cakra* for the separation of the guardian deities from the person they are protecting. A separate folio, 55×20 cm.

Back cover:

Plate 1. Cakras for summoning spirits of foes and for warding off evil spirits, as well as the articles used to perform the ritual for propitiating of the goddess IHa-mo. A separate folio, 55×20 cm.

Plate 2. The cakra for the suppression of the dam-sri spirits. A separate folio, 55×30 cm.

Plate 3. Cakras for calming illnesses and acquiring wealth, and the articles used to perform the corresponding ritual. A separate folio, 55×20 cm.

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TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS: DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH

Valery V. Polosin

FRONTISPIECES ON SCALE CANVAS IN ARABIC MANUSCRIPTS

The splendid catalogue by F. Déroche [1], where photographic illustrations are given with a scale, makes it possible to apply the materials published there for the study of a never considered before phenomenon of the Arab manuscript culture. We mean the type of artistic design of a manuscript page which is represented in this catalogue on eleven illustrations (I, IV A, V B, VI B and C, VII B, XXIV B, XXVI B, XXVII A, XXVIII B and XXIX B) reproducing pages of ten manuscripts of the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris: Arabe 418, Arabe 5841, Arabe 501, Arabe 427, Arabe 400, Smith-Lesouëf 206, Arabe 5816, Smith-Lesouëf 28, Smith-Lesouëf 25, Arabe 426.

The ornamental type presenting the subject of this article has striking and easily remembered compositional and decorative features. Its compositional background is formed by a vertical rectangular frame with a square dominating the centre. The space above and below the square is filled by symmetrically arranged rectangles of equal size. The decorative peculiarity of this type consists in the presence of ornamental lines projecting, like a fringe, to the margins of manuscript pages along the perimeter of decorated space.

This very fringe offers grounds to make its available samples into a separate type of decorative design. There is all reason to think that it is directly connected with the constructive principles of the main decoration and therefore may be useful for its understanding.

1. Illustration I in the catalogue by Déroche represents folio 3a of the Qur'ān manuscript dating (on the evidence of a *waqf*-statement) not later than 1003/1594 and originating, according to Déroche, from Iran [2]. Its decorative design, if to omit all details and to consider only its principal structure, consists of the main frame with three geometric figures (a square between two equal rectangles) arranged within it, and the bordering frame with fringe-like lines projecting to the margins along its whole perimeter (see fig. 1). interesting in itself. The frame presents a rectangle set vertically, its sides correlating proportionally as 9:5. This proportion is maintained with much precision. A regular square in the middle of the rectangle forms two equal rectangles above and below. Their width, as well as the width of the square, corresponds to the width of the main frame, their height turns to be equal to the diameter of a circle forming a large flower-shaped rosette (octofoil) within the square — one more decorative element. The enumerated features are enough to admit that the decorative pattern considered here has been created deliberately, according to some plan. The triptych "square between two rectangles" presents a very common pattern of filling the main frames of manu-

a very common pattern of filling the main frames of manuscript ornamental decorations. Its existing variants are so numerous that a special work should be dedicated to their classification. Some of these variants are present in the manuscripts described by Déroche; they are reproduced in a supplement to his catalogue.

Let us return to the first manuscript (Catalogue, No. 535). The deliberate setting of geometric figures revealed in its decorative design obviously demanded certain calculations. The artist, who created it, should have used some measures of length. Our conjecture is: could the length of the sections between the lines of the "fringe" be the measure applied in this case?

Our guess has been confirmed — at least this time. It turned out that one half of such a section is equal to one *sha*'*irah* of the so-called "Indian cubit" which is equal, according to W. Hinz [3], to 91 cm. This measure of length discovered in the "fringe" we applied to the frontispiece, in order to find out that it fits well. In the concordance table given below we compare the measurements of the geometric figures forming the frontispiece expressed in a triple way: a) in parts of the "Indian cubit", b) in millimeters, c) according to the scale of the photograph in the catalogue by Déroche (also in millimeters).

The arrangement of figures within the main frame is

external frame	54 × 34 shaʻirahs	341.2 × 214.8 mm	192 × 120.8 mm
internal frame	45 imes 25 shaʻīrahs	284.3 × 157.9 mm	160 × 88.9 mm

rectangles	10 × 25 shaʻīrahs	63.2 × 157.9 mm	35.5 × 88.9 mm
square	25 × 25 shaʻīrahs	157.9 × 157.9 mm	88.9 × 88.9 mm
diameter of the calyx of octofoil	10 shaʻīrahs	63.2 mm	35.5 mm

Triptych "square between two rectangles"

These measurements are especially persuasive for the main (internal) frame. They confirm that the correlation of its sides (9:5) is not a matter of chance: their absolute measurements (284.3×157.9 mm), translated into historical length units, appear as whole numbers (45×25 sha'īrahs). It confirms that the format was selected consciously. The size of figures set within the frame and forming the composition of the frontispiece is also expressed in whole numbers (in historical measures of length). The reader can take a ruler and a calculator and check the precision of our calculations (taking into account that the scale of illustrations in the catalogue by Déroche is 22.5 to 40). Those who, by chance, happen to come to Paris will not, I hope, loose the opportunity to check and to confirm our results by measuring the original.

If we recognize the reliability of our calculations we must, on their evidence, make certain conclusions. First of all, that the decorative "fringe" was used by the artist as a unit, corresponding to a real historical measure of length. We were long ago aware of its existence, but it is the first time we come across it in practice. 28 decorative lines divide the height of the frontispiece into 27 sections, each equal (or must be equal) to two sha'irahs of the "Indian cubit" (the horizontal side of the frontispiece has 19 lines instead of the expected 18, but we shall consider this problem later). Then, the "Indian cubit" equal to 91 cm, for some reason excluded by Hinz from the list of historical measures of length, appears here again as a real unit --- the problem which must be re-considered. Finally, there arises the necessity to verify the provenance of the manuscript with this frontispiece. In the catalogue Iran is indicated as the place of its making (though with no arguments to confirm it).

The most important result, however, is the proportionality of the decorative elements basing upon historical measures of length, a phenomenon previously unknown.

The reality of this phenomenon can not be confirmed by just one example, therefore let us continue to investigate the samples represented in the catalogue by Déroche.

2. A manuscript of the Qur'ān dated by Déroche between 784/1382 and 801/1399, originating, in his opinion, from Egypt (Catalogue, No. 347) [4]. The decorative framing of the text on folio 2a (see *fig. 2*) presents a variant of the familiar pattern — square between two rectangles. Here the whole device is also basing upon the inner frame, a vertically set rectangle, its sides correlating as 8:5. The proportion is exact, the absolute measurements of the frame are 102.5×64 mm on the illustration, 243.8×152.4 mm in reality (the scale of the photograph is 16.75:40). This corresponds to 51.2×32 sha'irahs of the "Istanbul cubit" equal to 685.79 mm [5].

Three lines of the text on folio 2a of this manuscript divide the space of a rectangle 46×32 sha'irahs (placed within the frame, between the axes of two cartouches) into four equal parts. The distance between the lines is equal to

11.5 sha'irahs. The halves of the upper and the lower parts are used to build up two figures (of the three obligatory for this type) — two rectangles by the sides of a square. As for the third figure — a square — there is some space left for it within the frame, a rectangle 36×32 sha'irahs [6], remarkable for the presence of two squares which the artist managed to arrange there in a special way. These can be noticed when the observer's sight is moving from the upper line of the text to the lower and back.

The main frame considered above is encircled by a row of bordering frames, some of them narrow, some wide. The units employed when constructing the main frame are most probably used here also. It is a difficult task, however, to trace them measuring each frame from a reduced copy, moreover that it does not add anything to the solution of the problem. It is enough to say, that the artist was striving to get whole numbers in every case: the last, exterior decorative contour framing the text reveals a very insignificant deviation from whole numbers: 62.2×39.1 sha^c irahs. This slight error could be caused by any of the bordering thin frames (there are several), or it could be due to an accumulation of errors.

Thus we find the measure of length corresponding to the elements of the decorative design of this manuscript. We must take into account that the suggested origin of the manuscript (from Egypt) in this case again comes into contradiction with the measure of length applied to its decorations. The "Istanbul cubit" was introduced in Egypt 120 years later than the date of the Qur'ān manuscript analyzed here (see note 5).

After these two examples considered in detail it is enough to give only the principal characteristics of the samples from the catalogue by Déroche.

3. A manuscript of the Qur'ān of Turkish origin (Catalogue, No. 506), dating, according to a waqf-statement record, approximately to 1124/1712 [7]. The size of the main frame, which is of white colour on the photograph (see fig. 3), is 106.6 \times 62.2 mm (on the photograph — 80 \times 46.6 mm, scale 40:40). It corresponds to 24 \times \times 14 sha'īrahs of the "Tripolitan cubit" equal to 640 mm [8]. Within the main frame there is a triptych square (containing a text) between two rectangles. The vertical sides of the square are made thinner by yellow stripes running along them. It is constructed not too precisely its height is shorter by several millimeters than its width: 62.6×58.7 mm. The length of the sections between the lines of decorative "fringe" (*i. e.* the distance between the neighboring lines) is equal to 3 Tripolitan sha'īrahs.

4. A manuscript of the Qur'ān of the late 9th/15th century; Iran (Catalogue, No. 530) [9]. The familiar triptych "square between two rectangles" appears on the photograph of folio 2b of this manuscript (see *fig. 4*, right side). Its construction has some unusual features we have not met before. The triptych is inserted into a frame 15×11 sha'īrahs (the cubit equal to 728.04 mm), which is equal to $75.8 \times$



Fig. 1



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3





Fig. 5



Fig. 6

.5



Fig. 8

 \times 55.6 mm (on the photograph – 63.5 \times 46.6, scale 33.5 : 40).

Among the specific features of this sample is the slight masking of the square in the middle of the main frame. Striking is the rectangular field assigned by the artist for the text of the manuscript. The field of the text is surrounded with a decorative frame. If we include the upper and the lower part of this frame into the text field, it will be restored to a square 8×8 sha' $\bar{i}rahs$ or 40.4×40.4 mm $(33.8 \times 33.8 \text{ mm} \text{ on the photograph})$. Actually, this construction is concealing a whole series of squares — it is enough to demonstrate here the two most important ones. If we remove the upper (or the lower) rectangle from the triptych within the main frame, the combination of the two figures left will form a square, its side equal to 11 sha'irahs (= 55.5 mm, on the photograph - 46.5 mm). Once more we come across a hidden square (see above, sample 2); in the former case, however, it was just one of the figures of a triptych, now it is itself forming a canonical triptych filling the whole inner frame.

5. Manuscript of the Qur'an of the 10th/16th century, India(?) [10]. The structure of the decorative device on folio 2a of this manuscript (see fig. 5) is similar to the one we have just considered. The size of the main frame is 32×24 sha'irahs of the "Egyptian cubit" equal to 581.87 mm (129×96.9 mm, on the photograph — 80.8×60.6 mm). It includes the usual triptych which, how-

ever, being conventionally divided into two figures turns into a "hidden square" (i. e. a square plus 24×24 sha'irahs, a rectangle 8×24 sha'irahs). Within the triple composition the central figure of the triptych presents a square $16 \times$ \times 16 sha'īrahs set between two rectangles arranged vertically.

6. The Qur'an copied 1263/1847 by Ahin mad al-Rafiq, originating from Turkey (Catalogue, No. 518) [11]. Folio 1b (see fig. 6) reproduced in the catalogue (fig. XXIV B; scale 39:40) has an external border framing the text, its size 15×8 sha'irahs of the "Tripolitan cubit" equal to 640 mm (see above, sample 3). Its dimensions on the photograph are 65×34.6 mm, which must correspond to its real size of $66.6 \times$ \times 35.5 mm.

7. The Qur'an copied in 974/1567 by Muhammad b. Shams al-Dīn b. Muhammad al-Qādī, Iran (Catalogue, No. 533) [12]. Folio 3a (see fig. 7)

A × 1 ŧ I I ł B

reproduced in the catalogue (fig. XXVI B; scale 29.5:40) makes it possible to reckon that the text is framed by a narrow border, its dimensions corresponding to $28 \times$ \times 16 sha' irahs of a cubit equal to 775 mm (150.7 \times \times 86.1 mm, on the photograph – 111.1 \times 63.5 mm). Three lines written in large characters occupy the rectangles set within this frame, their sides equal to 3×16 sha'irahs $(= 16.1 \times 86.1 \text{ mm}, \text{ or } 11.9 \times 63.5 \text{ mm} \text{ on the photograph}).$ Two more frames with text are placed symmetrically between these rectangles — their size 10×9.5 sha' *i* rahs, *i*, *e*. 53.8×51.1 mm (on the photograph — 39.6×37.7 mm).

8. A manuscript of the Qur'an of the 10th/16th century, originating from Iran (Catalogue, No. 541) [13].

Its decorative device (Catalogue, fig. XXVII A; see fig. 8 in our reproduction) is basing upon a frame with the usual triptych, its size 58×29 sha'īrahs of the "Egyptian" cubit" of 581.87 mm (which corresponds to $234.3 \times$ \times 117.1 mm, on the photograph - 100.7 \times 50.3 mm; scale 17.2:40). The "square between two rectangles" composition is set within the frame. The correlation of the three figures is proportional, all together they make a double square $(14.5 \times 29 + 29 \times 29 + 14.5 \times 29 sha'irahs =$ 58×29 sha'irahs).

Developing the decorative pattern of this page the artist managed to conceal the initial construction from the observer, substituting the left side of the frame for a new vertical line (AB on fig. 9), over which several layers of bor-

> dering were formed (in all there are ten frames). By shifting aside the left border of the main frame he changed the total area of the rectangle including the triptych, re-arranging it among the figures of the triptych (by means of a series of additional contours) in such a way, that central figure the the square - received several unaccustomed visual interpretations simultaneously (two of these are marked with arches on fig. 9).

9. A manuscript of the Our'an, of the 10th/16th cen-Iranian tury, of origin (Catalogue, No. 540) [14]. Folio 1b of this manuscript (see fig. 10) shows a decorative composition basing upon a frame 34×16.5 sha'irahs of "Egyptian the cubit" of 581.87 mm. As in the previous case, the artist shifted the frame to the right by 0.5 sha'īrahs. A new rectangle (a double square) $34 \times$

 \times 17 sha' irahs was formed between the left border and the new right border. Within this rectangle there is a triptych formed by two figures $11 \times$ \times 17 sha'īrahs and one figure 12×17 sha'irahs, the last one including a square $12 \times$



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



 \times 12 sha'*īrah*s. One can not be absolutely sure of the exactness of the measurements given here, because the photograph is too much reduced (its scale is 26:40), and the border framing the figures of the triptych is not narrow enough to be ignored and not wide enough to be properly taken into account in measurements.

The use of the "Egyptian" and not some other cubit is, however, well confirmed here by a frame composition around the text on folio 283b of the manuscript (it is reproduced on *fig. XXVIII A* of the catalogue; the scale is slightly different — 25.75:40). Within a frame $35 \times 20 \ sha^{\circ} irahs$ (141.4 × 80.8 mm, on the photograph — $92 \times 52 \ mm$) three lines written in large characters occupy three rectangles $5 \times 20 \ sha^{\circ} irahs$ (20.2 × 80.8 mm, on the photograph — 13.1 × 52.5 mm). Two more text frames are arranged symmetrically between them (their size — $10 \times 14 \ sha^{\circ} irahs = 40.4 \times 56.6 \ mm$, or $26.2 \times 36.7 \ mm$ on the photograph). The composition of frames on this page is practically identical with that on folio 3a of the manuscript described in the catalogue under No. 533 (No. 7 of the present article).

10. The last sample — folio 1b (see *fig. 11*) from a miniature Qur'ān manuscript of the 10th/16th century, originating from Iran [15]. Its life-size reproduction is given in the catalogue. The size of the frame — 52.5×31.4 mm — which corresponds to 15×9 sha'īrahs (if we take a cubit equal to 503 mm [16]). The length of a section between the lines of the scale canvas formed by a "fringe" is equal to 2 sha'īrahs of this cubit.

Let us summarize the results of our investigation.

The number of samples in the illustrative supplement to catalogue of Arabic manuscripts by Déroche, presenting certain common features — first of all, the presence of lines projecting beyond decorative frames to the margins of folios — are confined to these ten manuscripts from Bibliothèque Nationale. They were included into the supplement for reasons which have nothing to do with the subject of our investigation. They can be regarded therefore as a chance selection from a great number of samples of the same type preserved in libraries. We may expect that our suggestion (that the "decorative fringe" in Arabic manuscripts presents at the same time a scale canvas) will not be disproved by any other group of manuscripts with similar decorations.

It turned out that in ten manuscripts seven different measures of length had been applied by their decorators. We were aware of their existence before, but only from literary sources, not coming across them in real measurements. Thus we discovered a new source in illuminated manuscripts, which presents a good opportunity to check the available data and is promising some revival in the field of historical metrology. There is nothing sensational, as we can see, in our first tests. Still, they have confirmed the validity of the data we have, at the same time demonstrating the precision of medieval instruments and the accuracy of manuscript decorators using them.

I expect that the suggested method of analysis of elaborate manuscript decorations which can be attributed to the "scale canvas" group, will be of some significance to art historians. Within this method three components should be distinguished: determination of the measure of length; reckoning of the main ornamental frame; classification and description of all decorative elements. The study of new samples will, probably, reveal other possibilities of this method.

New possibilities are opening also for codicologists. The materials surveyed here make us consider the problem of the significance of historical length measures for determining the origin of manuscripts. Let us remind the reader that our attribution of the cubits in some cases contradict the locations indicated in the French catalogue. Further development in this direction seems expedient and worthwhile.

Finally, it should be mentioned that while working on this article the author had no opportunity to handle all the manuscripts mentioned here, which he was greatly missing. This had been planned, but the financial conditions of the time when the article was being written made it impossible. For this reason all the arguments in the article were confined to computations, and the article itself is just stating the problem but not solving it.

Notes

1. F. Déroche, *Les manuscrits du Coran. Du Maghreb à l'Insulinde* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, 1985) (Bibliothèque Nationale, Départament des manuscrits. Catalogue des manuscrits arabes. Deuxième partie: Manuscrits Musulmans. Tome I, fasc. 2); review of the publication by K. Schubarth-Engelschall see in *Orientalische Literaturzeitung*, Bd. 84, Hf. 2, März/April (1989), Sp. 191–2.

2. Ms. Arabe 418. In the catalogue this manuscript is described under No. 535.

3. W. Hints, *Musul'manskie mery i vesa s perevodom v metricheskuiu sistemu* (W. Hinz, Islamische Masse und Gewichte. Umgerechnet ins metrische System), trans. from German into Russian by Yu. E. Bregel (Moscow, 1969), pp. 66—7 (with a further reference to J. Fryer's *A New Account of East-India and Persia, in Eight Letters: being nine years Travels begun 1672, and finished 1681*, published in London, in 1698, p. 206). Later Hinz probably doubted the reliability of the evidence on this "91 cm cubit", as it is not mentioned in his article for *Encyclopedia Islamica*, see W. Hinz, "Dhirā", *El*, 2nd edition (Leiden, 1983), pp. 231—2.

4. Ms. Arabe 5841.

5. Hinz, p. 67 (with a further reference to the *Chronicle* by Ibn Iyās, a 15th—16th century author; there it is mentioned that the "Istanbul cubit" was introduced in Egypt in November 1521).

6. There is a noticeable error in its construction.

7. Ms. Arabe 501.

- 8. Hinz, p. 66, with a reference to al-Qalqashandī, Şubh al-A'shā, iv (Cairo, 1914), p. 233.
- 9. Ms. Arabe 427.
- 10. Ms. Arabe 400.
- 11. Ms. Smith-Lesouëf 206.
- 12. Ms. Arabe 5816.
- 13. Ms. Smith-Lesouëf 218.

14. Ms. Smith-Lesouëf 215.

15. Ms. Arabe 426.

16. Hinz, p. 67 (thirā' al-dūr, with a reference to Journal asiatique, 8-e sér., t. VIII (1886), p. 491).

Illustrations

(clichés Bibliothèque Nationale de France Paris, copyright B.N.F.):

Fig. 1. Ms. Arabe 418, fol. 3a (= F. Déroche, pl. I).

Fig. 2. Ms. Arabe 5841, fol. 2a (= F. Déroche, pl. IV A).

Fig. 3. Ms. Arabe 501, fol. 2a (= F. Déroche, pl. V B).

Fig. 4. Ms. Arabe 427, fols. 2a, 2b (= F. Déroche, pl. VI B and C).

Fig. 5. Ms. Arabe 400, fol. 2a (= F. Déroche, pl. VII B).

Fig. 6. Ms. Smith-Lesouëf 206, fol. 1b (= F. Déroche, pl. XXIV B).

Fig. 7. Ms. Arabe 5816, fol. 3a (= F.Déroche, pl. XXVI B).

Fig. 8. Ms. Smith-Lesouëf 218, fol. 2a (= F. Déroche, pl. XXVII A).

Figs. 9—10. Ms. Smith-Lesouëf 215, fol. 1b (= F. Déroche, pl. XXVIII B).

Fig. 11. Ms. Arabe 426, fol. 1b (= F. Déroche, pl. XXIX B).