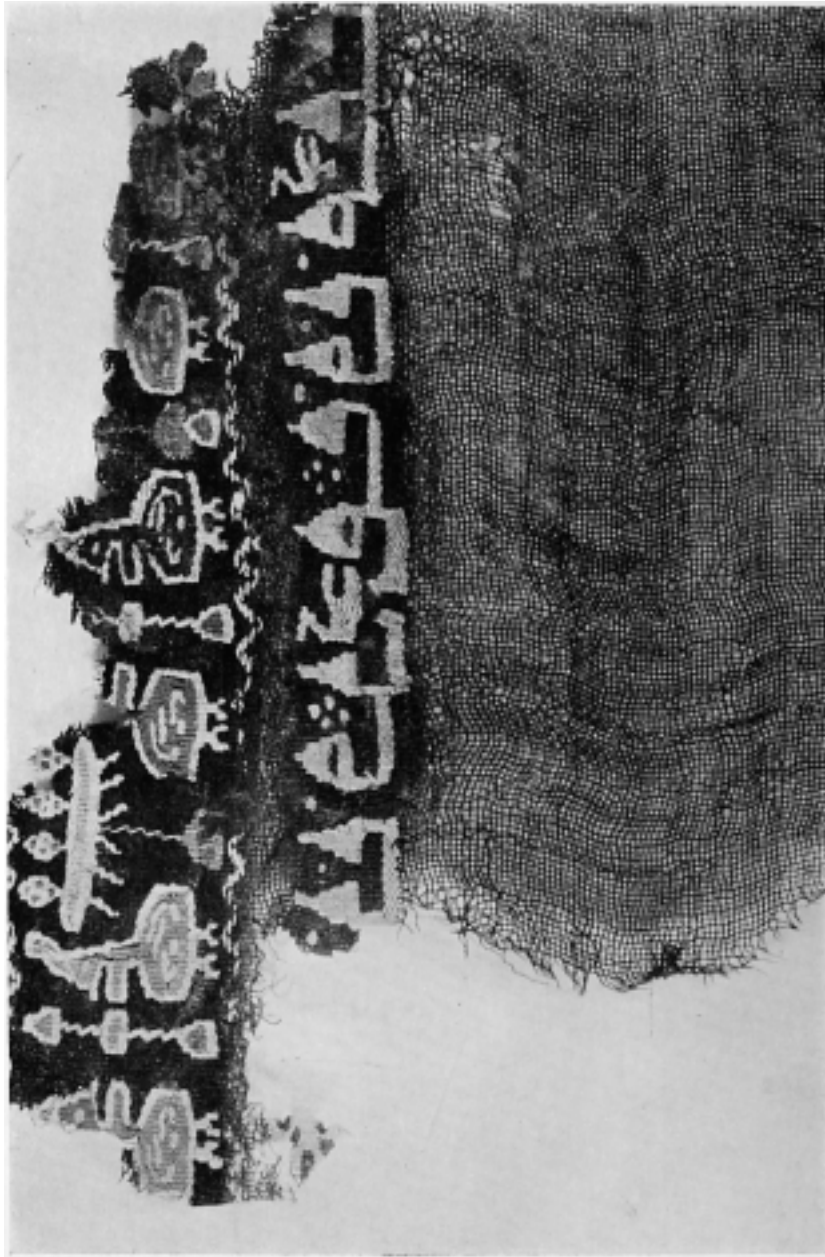


CATALOGUE OF THE ELSBERG COLLECTION
OF
EGYPTO-ARABIC EMBROIDERIES
OF THE MEDIÆVAL PERIOD

No. 1

FRAGMENT OF A TAPESTRY BORDER, with embroidery added in wool, on loosely woven black wool gauze. The design is of Eastern origin, and is formed by compartments separated from each other by what appear to be simulated Kufic letters. The compartments contain alternately geometrical six-pointed stars in brown, red and tan; confronted birds with star shaped crests in green, red, tan and brown, separated by a form apparently of the "hom," which appears to be a fire altar, and two confronted animals, possibly meant for lions, in the same colors, also with star-like crests, separated by a form of the "hom," similar to that which separates the confronted birds. The tapestry ground of all the compartments is in black. The simulated letters are in three-ply overcast stitches, as is also the line below, connecting them. Below these compartments, and separated from them by what originally must have been about one inch of the gauze ground, is an inscription embroidered in overcast stitch, each word, or sequence of letters, separated from the other, by a small dotted figure, embroidered in darning stitch. The inscription, which has not yet been translated, is probably an Egyptian dialect, written in Greek letters. This does not mean that



DETAIL

NO. 2

the group of pieces, numbered from one to five, found in the Fayoum, is to be attributed to Coptic (Christian) weavers, but more likely to Egyptian weavers working under the Arab conquerors, who had brought Sassanian and Eastern influences with them. These weavers probably used, in their written intercourse with each other, the Egyptian language written in Greek characters.

Egypto-Arabic, 9th century or earlier. Found in the Fayoum.

Size 5 x $9\frac{1}{4}$ in.

No. 2

FRAGMENT OF A TAPESTRY BORDER, with embroidery in wool added, on loosely woven purple wool gauze, similar in workmanship to No. 1, though without any Coptic suggestion in the design. The tapestry band consists of confronted human figures, rather difficult to recognize in red, tan and brown, separated by a geometrical motif in the same colors, doubtlessly meant for a "hom." Each pair of confronted human figures is separated from the next by a motif, which recalls one form of the "fire altar" with leaping flames. Both sides of the band are bordered by a small zig-zag line, embroidered in darning stitch. Above and under the band there is a fine inscription in Kufic, on purple tapestry ground, repeating the word "Strength."

The spaces between the letters, which are in tan colored tapestry, are filled by birds, or small embroidered dots of the same color. The design, by its confronted human figures the "hom" (tree of life), the fire altar, and the birds, shows strong Sassanian or other Eastern influences, which connects it with the other four pieces in the group.

Egypto-Arabic, 9th-10th century, or earlier. Found in the Fayoum.

Size 6 x 7 in.

No. 3

FRAGMENT OF A TAPESTRY BORDER in wool and linen, on a ground of loosely woven black wool gauze, with part of the outline embroidered in three-ply linen thread. The design consists of a series of compartments, set next to each other and forming a band, each compartment containing



NO. 3

a motif or device, no two alike. The centre one shows the figure of a man on a horse, bearing on his right wrist what apparently is a bird,—possibly a crude representation of a falcon; another man, with both arms lifted, is leading the horse; the group appears to represent a hunting scene. The two human figures are grotesquely drawn and have the appearance of caricatures. The incomplete compartment to the left shows a heraldic bird. The one on the right contains an all-over pattern of small geometrical rhombs, filled in with small squares, and is plainly Eastern in drawing, as are the two narrow borders of the band, which contain the Sassanian beads. The compartments are separated by two embroidered lines of overcast stitches, between them a small geometrical pattern in tapestry. The heraldic bird is also framed in a double line of embroidered stitches, with small bird motives between them. The colors are two shades of brown, tan, green and black. The design clearly shows Sassanian or other Eastern influences and must be Pre-Fatimite, or of the period when Coptic traditions had not been entirely forgotten. It is interesting to note that this piece shows the selvedge of the tapestry work, and also the selvedge of the gauze ground.

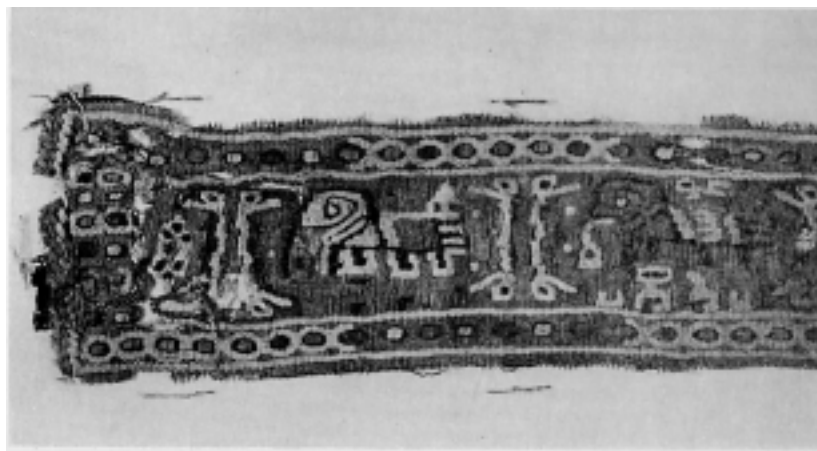
Egypto-Arabic, 9th–10th century or earlier. Found in the Fayoum.
Size 6 x $7\frac{1}{4}$ in.

No. 4

FRAGMENT OF A TAPESTRY BORDER, with embroidery in wool added, on loosely woven black wool gauze. There are only vestiges of the gauze left. The design is a band of elephants, all facing to the left, each one in a separate compartment, over the back of each a small bird in flight. They alternate in color, though the prevailing colors in each are tan, brown and black; the difference is made by the way in which the colors are placed. The elephants are separated by a symmetrical motif in tan, green and black, which may be simulated letters. The whole design is framed in double lines containing small round figures (Sassanian beads). The end of the border is indicated by a double line of beads and by a double row of overcast stitches in two colors of tan and brown. The Sassanian influence in this fragment is quite definite.

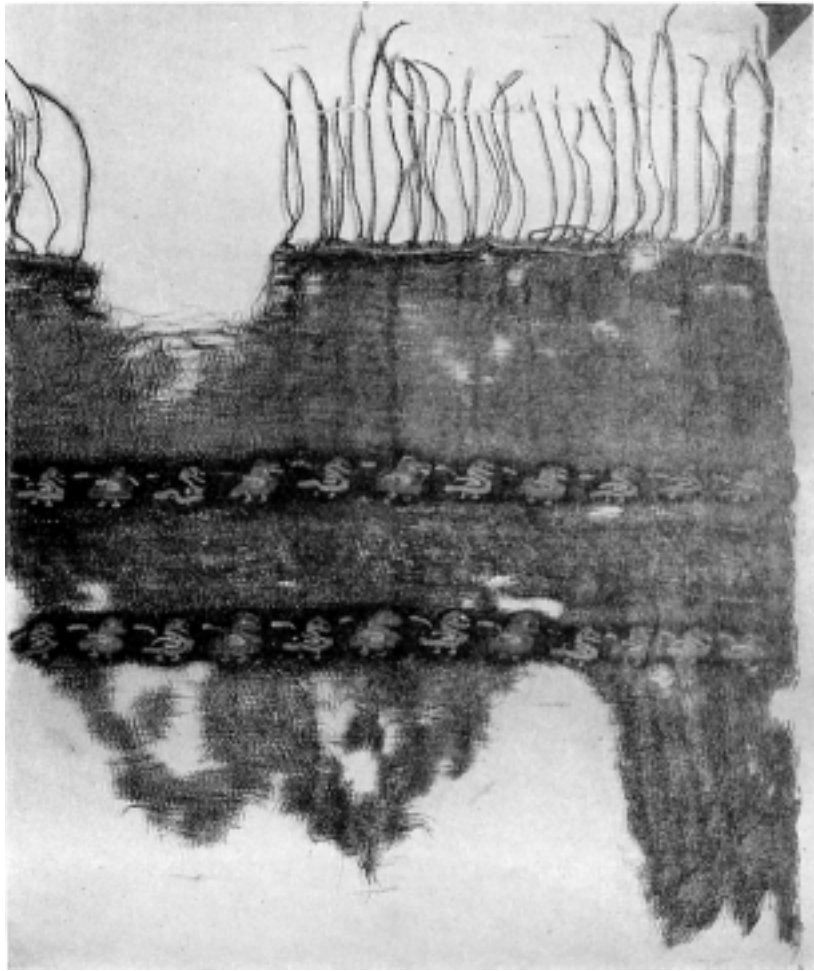
Egypto-Arabic, 9th century(?) Found in the Fayoum.

Size 2 x 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.



NO. 4

DETAIL.



NO. 5

DETAIL

No. 5

FRAGMENT AND END OF A FRINGED SCARF, decorated with two tapestry bands, each about $\frac{5}{8}$ inches wide, crossing the loosely woven black wool gauze ground, from selvedge to selvedge. The ornaments of the tapestry bands are birds following each other, i.e., arranged in file and facing to the right; they alternate in color, the first bird being in orange and tan, the next in red, green and yellow. The birds are on a black tapestry ground. Between the two rows of birds, there is a band of geometrical figures embroidered in yellow wool in running stitch. The birds with their floating scarfs are Sassanian in drawing, and between the gauze and the actual fringe there is a red woven line to which the fringe is attached. The design shows a markedly Eastern influence, as do the four others of this group excavated in the Fayoum. Apparently no pieces of the same category have been described and they appear to be the first found unless the pieces already mentioned as illustrated in the Kühnel catalogue are the same.

Early Fatimite period, 10th century(?) Found in the Fayoum.
Size 13 x 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

No 6

FRAGMENT OF A LINEN GARMENT, embroidered in dark blue silk, in couched stem stitch as shown in illustration (Fig. No. 6-A). The upper inscription in small Kufic letters repeats the one word "God" (Allah!) many times. The lower in large Kufic letters, is apparently only decorative and without meaning, though the letters may be the monogram of a Caliph. The rather coarse linen appears to have been glazed.

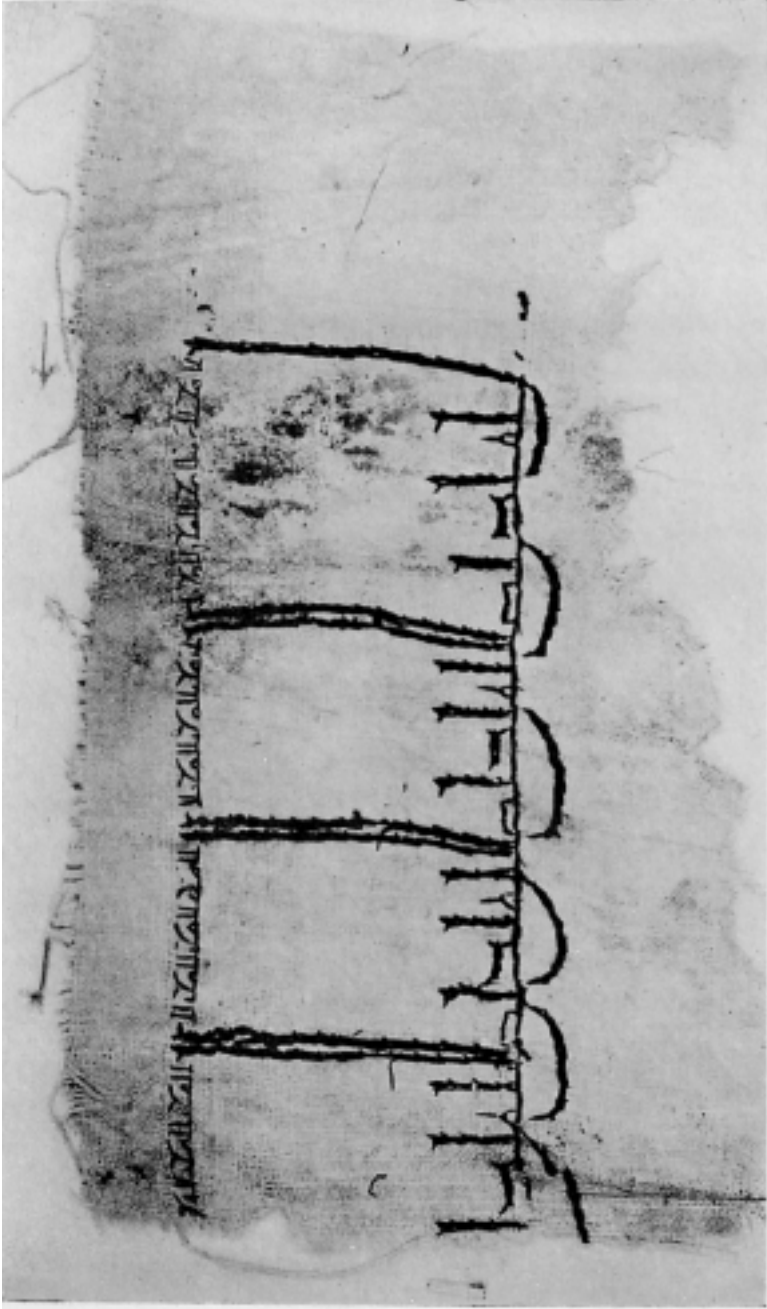
There is a piece similar in type in the Victoria and Albert Museum, No. 947 Kendrick¹ catalogue, classified as 10th century or earlier; also one in Berlin, Kühnel² catalogue No. 3278, Plate 25, as 9th-10th century.

Fatimite period, 10th century or earlier. Found at Fostat.

Size 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

¹ Kendrick, Catalogue of Muhammedan Textiles of the Mediaeval Period.

² Kühnel, E. Islamische Stoffe aus Ägyptischen Gräbern, Berlin, 1927



NO. 6



NO. 6A

STITCH USED IN NO. 6

No. 7

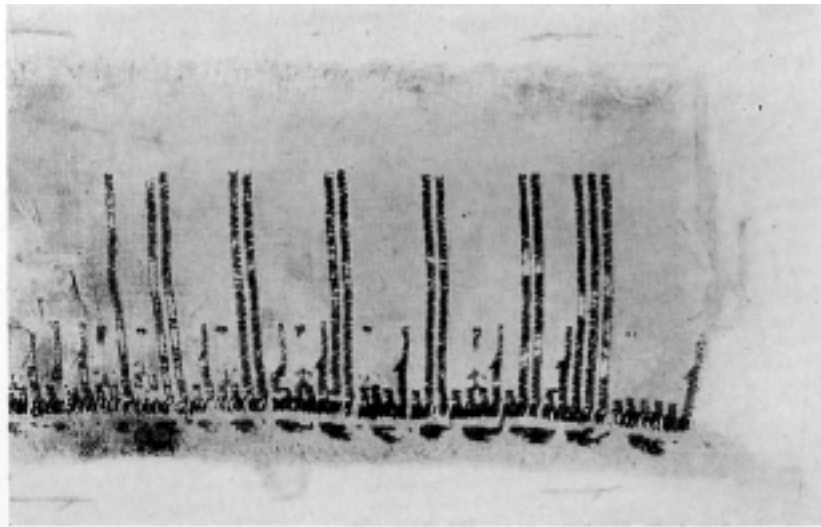
FRAGMENT OF A BORDER, PROBABLY PART OF A GARMENT, embroidered in red silk on rather fine linen, with a Kufic (Arabic) inscription, containing the words:

“In the name of God (Allah!), the Merciful, the Compassionate! Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds . . . of (from) God . . . perpetual . . . after the days . . .”

The breaks in the inscription are caused by mutilated letters. When the fragment was first found and the inscription deciphered, it apparently contained the words:

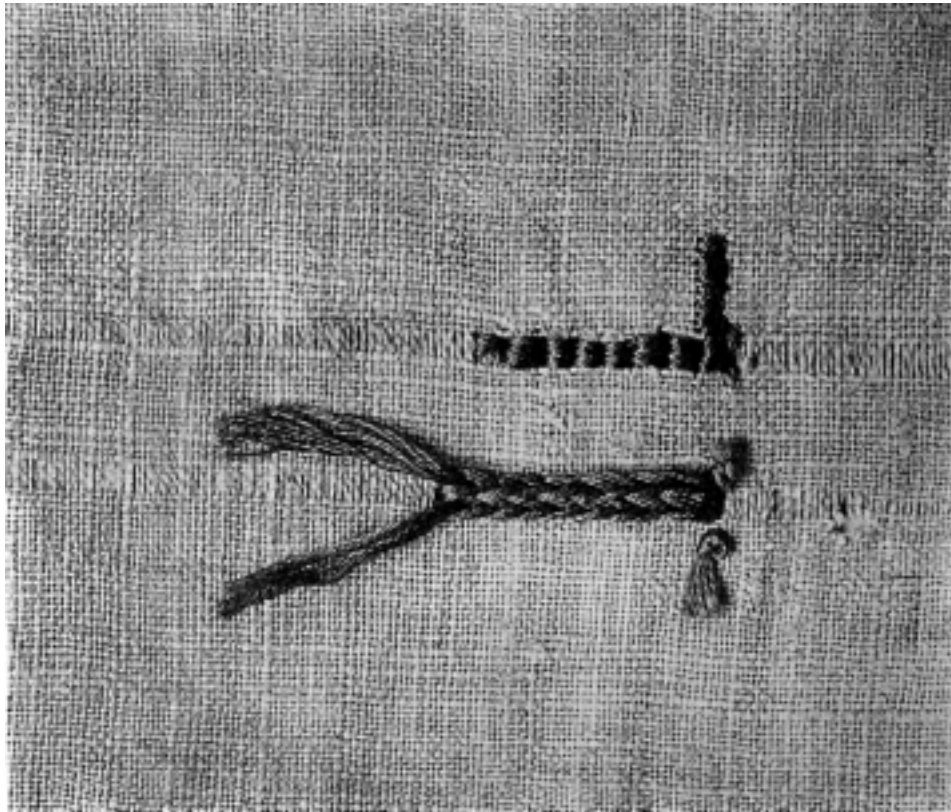
“El Hakim bi'allah (bi' amr' allah) commander by the grace of God.”

This was the third Fatimite Caliph of Egypt, Abu Ali al-Mansur, who reigned under the name of El Hakim bi' amr' allah from 996 to 1020 A.D. (A.H. 386-411). In this fragment the embroidery stitches are of excep-



NO. 7

DETAIL



NO. 7A

STITCH USED IN NO. 7

tional interest. The letters are embroidered in an overcast stitch, both sides alike; the heaviest line at the bottom is a variation of a chain stitch, made over warp threads, remaining after the filling threads were drawn out. This chain stitch is made on the wrong side, giving an entirely different effect on the right side. An illustration of this stitch, both on the right and wrong sides, and the manner of making, is shown. It recalls closely the needlework of Soumak carpets. (Fig. No. 7-A).

Fatimite period, 10th–early 11th century. Found at Fostat.

Size $2\frac{1}{4}$ x $7\frac{3}{4}$ in.

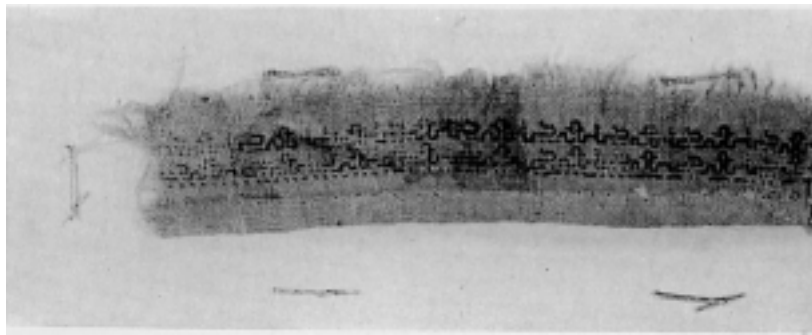
No. 8

FRAGMENT OF A BORDER, embroidered in red silk on fine linen, in two lines of a Kufic inscription, repeating the stylized word "Blessing."

The inscription is embroidered in back stitch regularly made over two threads of the linen.

Egypto-Arabic, 9th century(?) Found at Fostat.

Size $1\frac{1}{4}$ x 8 in.



NO. 8

DETAIL

No. 9

FRAGMENT OF A BORDER, embroidered in silk on a very fine linen gauze, in three horizontal stripes. The middle one consists of small interlaced medallions, in red and green with yellow ground, containing alternately a bird outlined in red, and a Kufic inscription, either in red or blue, reading:

“The Power (belongs) to God (Allah!)”

The upper and lower stripes are scroll ornaments, of fine quality, and design of Eastern origin, outlined in red on yellow ground. All the outlines, as well as the inscription, are an unusual chain-like stitch, akin to a split stitch on the wrong side. The spaces between the outlines, and the ground are filled in with what is apparently a closely worked back stitch, made on the right side over very few threads, thus giving the effect of a looped stitch.

Egypto-Arabic, 9th century. Found at Fostat.

Size 4 x 5½ in.

No. 10

FRAGMENT OF A BORDER, embroidered in brown silk on fine linen, with a Kufic inscription not yet translated, but probably the name of a Caliph. The letters are embroidered in couched stitch and the small decorative rondels between are in long chain and back stitch. The two simple lines bordering the inscription are threads of silk substituted for linen threads drawn out.

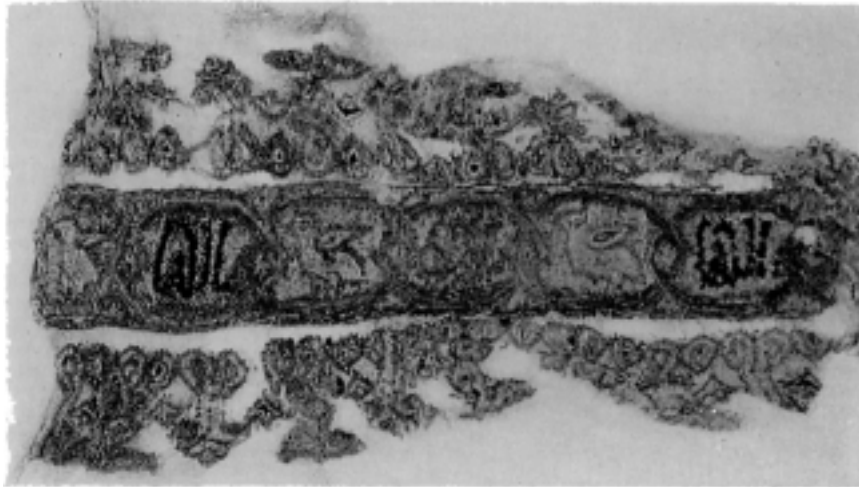
Kühnel³ illustrates some pieces similar in stitch on Plate No. 26, Nos. 3256 and 3257 of his catalogue, and says their inscriptions are in Nashki and 12th-13th century(?).

The inscription on the piece appears to be in Kufic and the linen finer and of an earlier period.

Fatimite period, 10th century (?). Found at Fostat.

Size 3½ x 17 in.

³op. cit.



NO. 9



NO. 10

DETAIL

No. 11

FRAGMENT OF AN EMBROIDERED INSCRIPTION, in red wool on coarse linen, in darning stitch, and overcast stitch for the heaviest lines. The inscription consists of a mutilated word in Kufic used as decoration.

Kühnel mentions a similar piece embroidered in dyed linen thread, Plate 39, No. 3165 of his catalogue, and calls it part of a towel and Fatimite, 12th century(?). This piece is probably earlier.

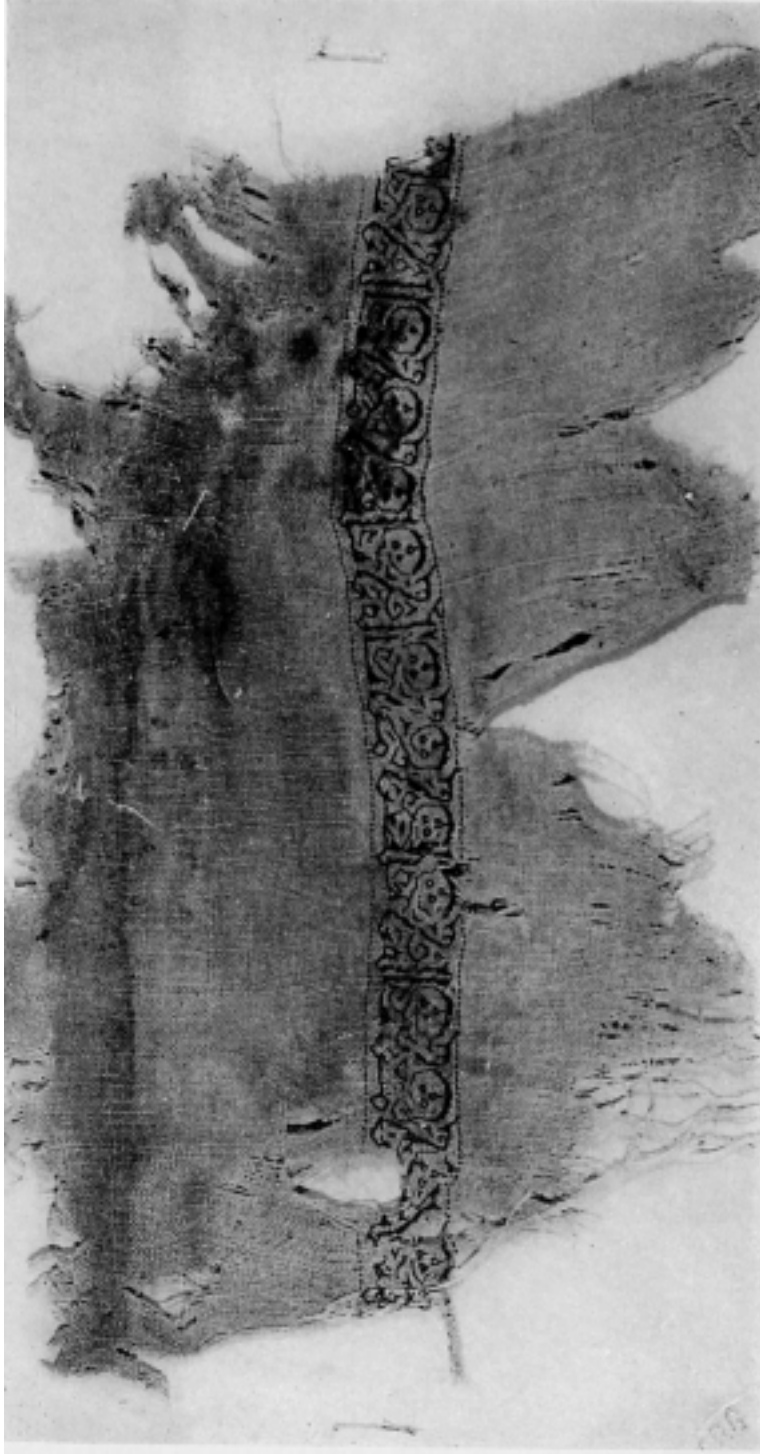
Fatimite period, 11th–12th century(?). Found at Fostat.

Size $3\frac{1}{2}$ x 13 in.



NO. 11

DETAIL



NO. 12

No. 12

FRAGMENT OF A BORDER, embroidered in brown silk on rather fine linen, in what appears to be a Kufic inscription; it is however, only ornamental and simulates letters, which are outlined with a couched thread. The scroll ornaments are in long chain stitch for the heaviest lines, and back stitch for the light ones. The two lines bordering the embroidered band are threads of silk substituted for linen threads drawn out. The linen appears to have been glazed. Kühnel describes similar pieces (Plate No. 26, Nos. 3256 and 3257) in his catalogue, and calls them 12th–13th century (?).

It would appear that such embroideries are earlier, based on similar stitching and ornament found in pieces with inscriptions that are dated.

Fatimite period, 11th–early 12th century. Found at Fostat.

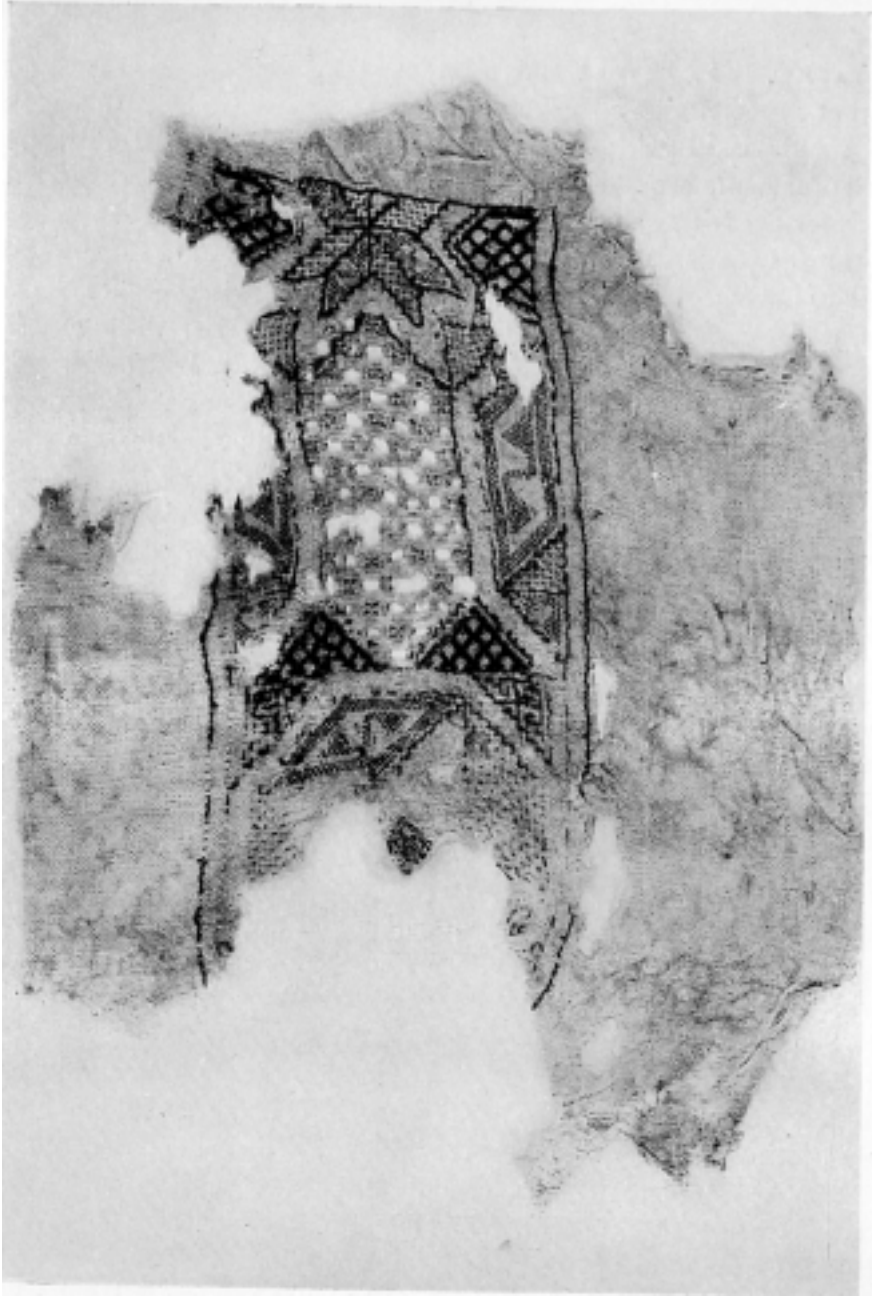
Size $5\frac{1}{2}$ x 7 in.

No. 13

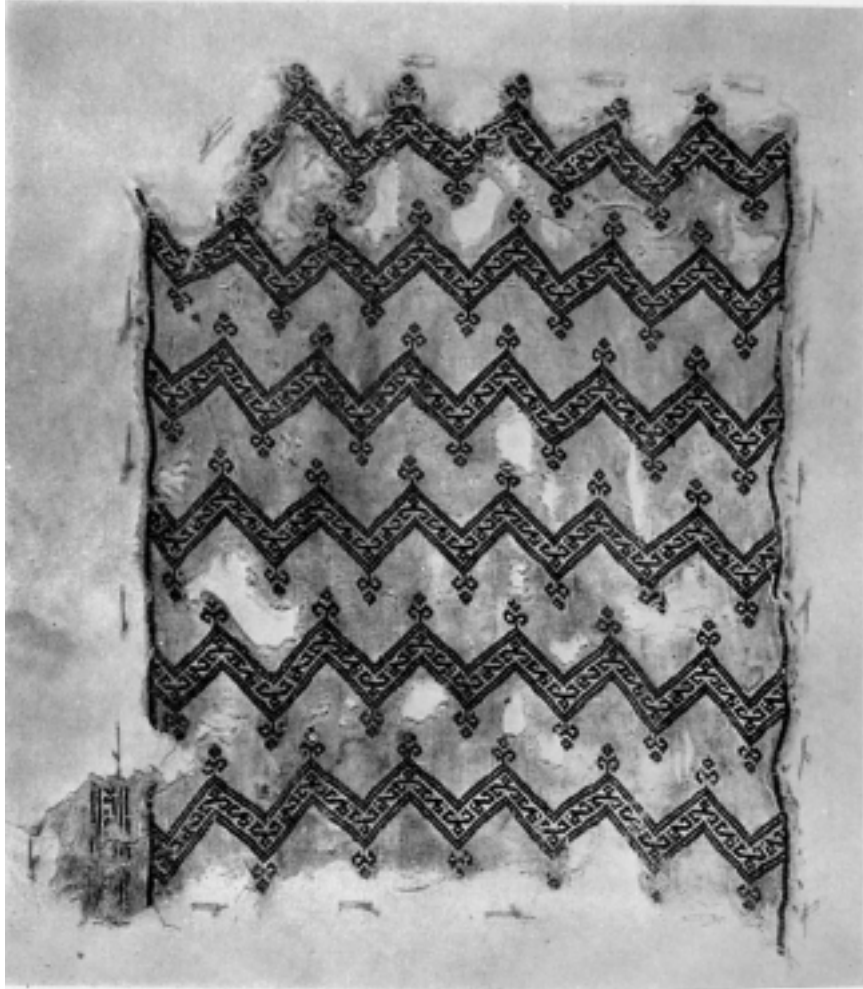
FRAGMENT OF A BORDER, of embroidery and drawn work on fine linen, in a geometrical pattern of alternate stars and arabesques. The careful symmetrical arrangement of the blue silk embroidery and of the drawn work, showing star and "S" motives, point to an Eastern origin of the design. Several stitches are employed; in the drawn work, binding overhand stitch and twisted double running stitch; for the embroidery in two shades of blue, regular surface darning stitch, double running stitch and darning stitch. The workmanship is of the best. Kühnel describes similar pieces in his catalogue (Plates 37 and 38, Nos. 3272, 3273, and 3240), and calls them 13th–14th century. There is a piece in the Victoria and Albert Museum, No. 1320, which is simpler in design.

Ayubite period, 13th century. Found at Fostat.

Size $5\frac{1}{2}$ x 7 in.



NO. 13



NO. 14

No. 14

FRAGMENT OF A BORDER, embroidered in blue silk on very fine linen. The design is a horizontal double line zig-zag, giving the effect of chevrons, embroidered in darning stitch with epigraphic ornaments between the lines. The angle or point of each zig-zag or chevron is crowned with a motif resembling the fleur-de-lis. The sides of the border appear to have been ornamented with a straight double line band enclosing an inscription. There is only a fragment of this left. The workmanship is of the best.

Fatimite period, 12th century. Found at Fostat.

Size $7\frac{1}{4}$ x $8\frac{1}{2}$ in.

No. 15

FRAGMENT OF A LINEN TUNIC, embroidered in silk in an all-over pattern of squares enclosing geometrical eight-pointed stars in cross stitch, alternately in red and green. The outlines of the squares are in a closely set herringbone stitch in green. The squares are separated by lines of small double cruciform motives in red.

Late Fatimite or early Ayubite period, 12th-13th century. Found at Fostat.

Size $7\frac{1}{2}$ x 10 in.

No. 16

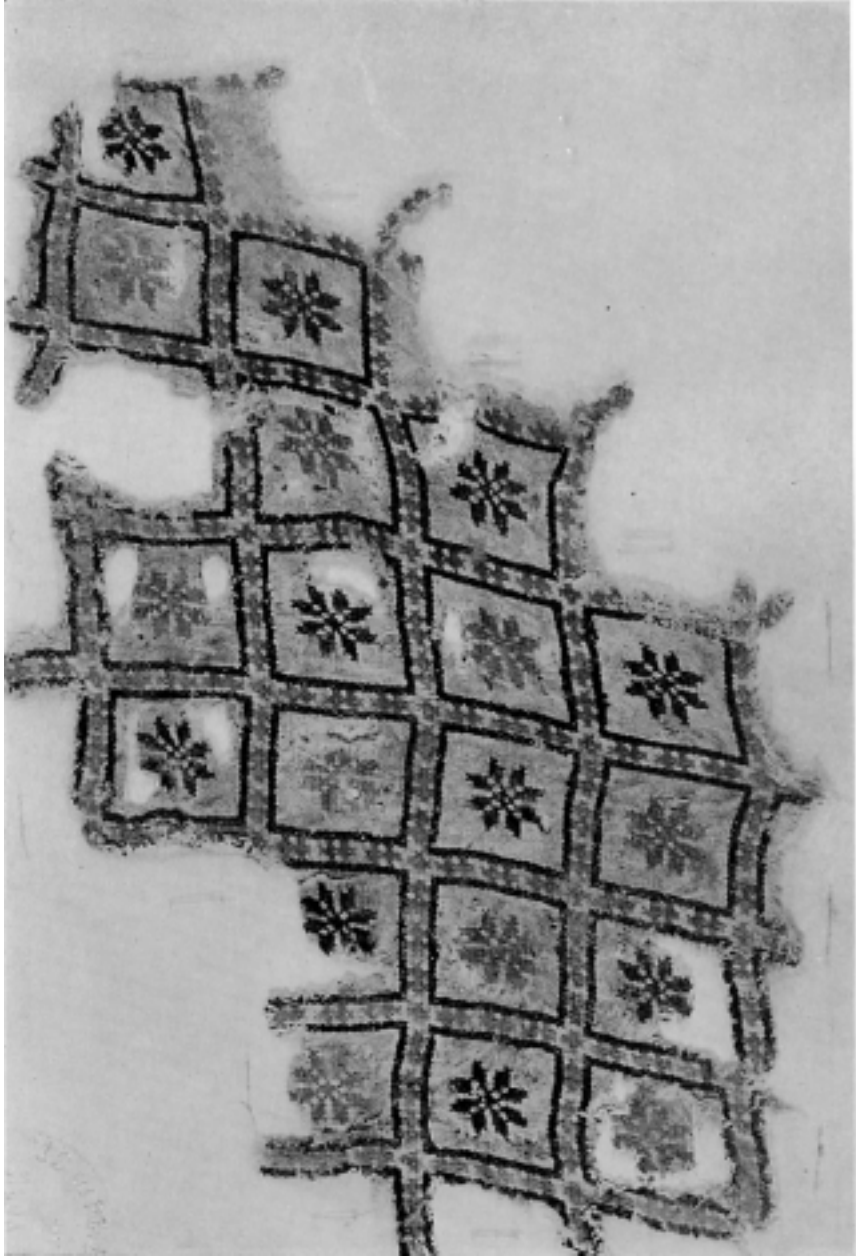
FRAGMENT OF A BORDER, (frontispiece) embroidered in blue silk on rather coarse linen, in double running (Holbein [Kühnel]) stitch, which stitch permits the embroidery to be alike on both sides. The design is a "motif chevronné" surmounted by a cross at the end of each point or angle of the chevrons.

The design while geometrical seems to show upon the Moslem embroiderers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the influence of the architectural details of the crusaders' chapels.

Early Mameluke period, 13th century. Found at Fostat.

Size 6 x $12\frac{1}{4}$ in.

The inscriptions were deciphered with the aid of Prof. N. N. Martynovitch, of Columbia University.



NO. 15