



## Sensory Variability in Calligraphy and Paper in Early Modern Persian Book Arts

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Penned in gold and silver on pink tinted paper are shimmering images of real and fantastic creatures including dragons and *sīmurghs* (mythical bird in Persian culture), and cranes moving amongst curving trees, flowers, other foliage and circular, flame-like clouds. On the reverse side of the same folio, three figures, one on horseback and two in conversation move amongst a similarly shimmering and fantastic landscape (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> The folio included here comes from a *divān* (collected works) of the fourteenth-century Persian poet Ḥāfiẓ whose pages are dispersed in various museums worldwide. Visually spectacular, the curved lines repeat, intersect, and direct the viewer's eye to the centered text and out again to the marginal decorations, thus, maintaining constant visual movement in and around the entire page. Further supporting the sensory effect of motion are the metallic materials and heavy use of gold and silver pigments, whose visual effects are rendered mute due to oxidation and the darkening of silver with time and also the uniform lighting common to contemporary methods of display and reproduction. Imagine, however, the ways in which the images would shimmer and move with every turn of the page or as light from the sun or a lit candle flickers across the folio. In effect, the images never stabilize; they come to life and bring to mind a world at once real and moving and yet completely fantastical. Rather than merely embodying the sublime, however, I argue that their visual instability and constant movements visually mimic the rhetorical instability or ambiguity available in the poetry and reflect an early modern Persianate concept of aesthetics.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the prolific use of colored and gilded marginal decorations in sixteenth-century manuscripts like the above example, recycled, fragmented, colored, and gilded papers likely imported from China were used as visual and physical supports for a selection of Persian literary texts copied by celebrated calligraphers

<sup>1</sup> Anthology of poetry by Ḥāfiẓ and Sa'dī, calligrapher Sulṭān 'Alī Mashhadī, attributed to Herat, late fifteenth century, New York, NY, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 11.84.9.

<sup>2</sup> For lack of a better term, I choose Persianate to describe a cultural arena spanning Greater Iran, Central and South Asia where Persian was a primary cultural language despite significant ethnic and linguistic diversity throughout. Hodgson, Marshall: *The Venture of Islam: the Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974.

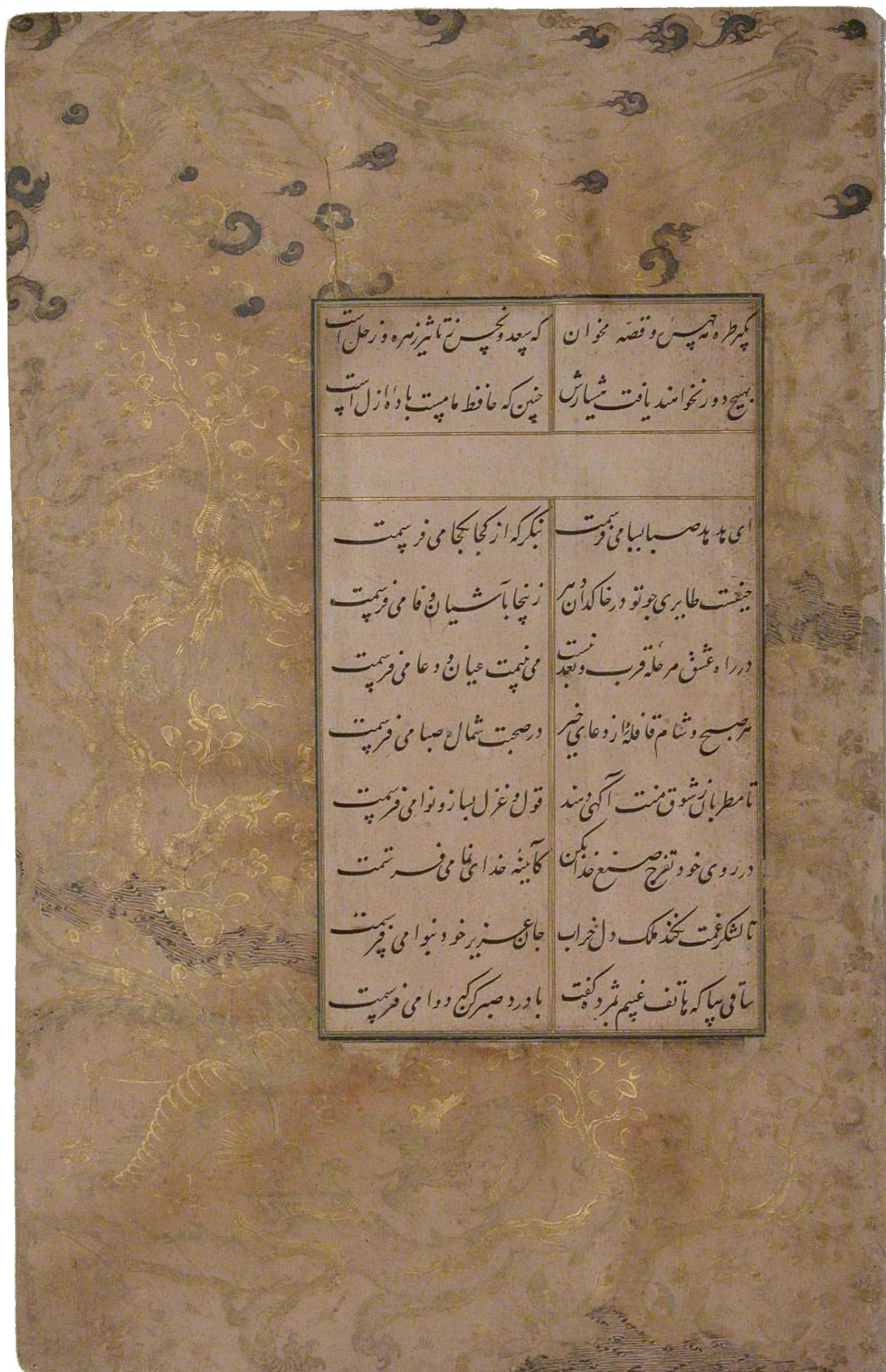
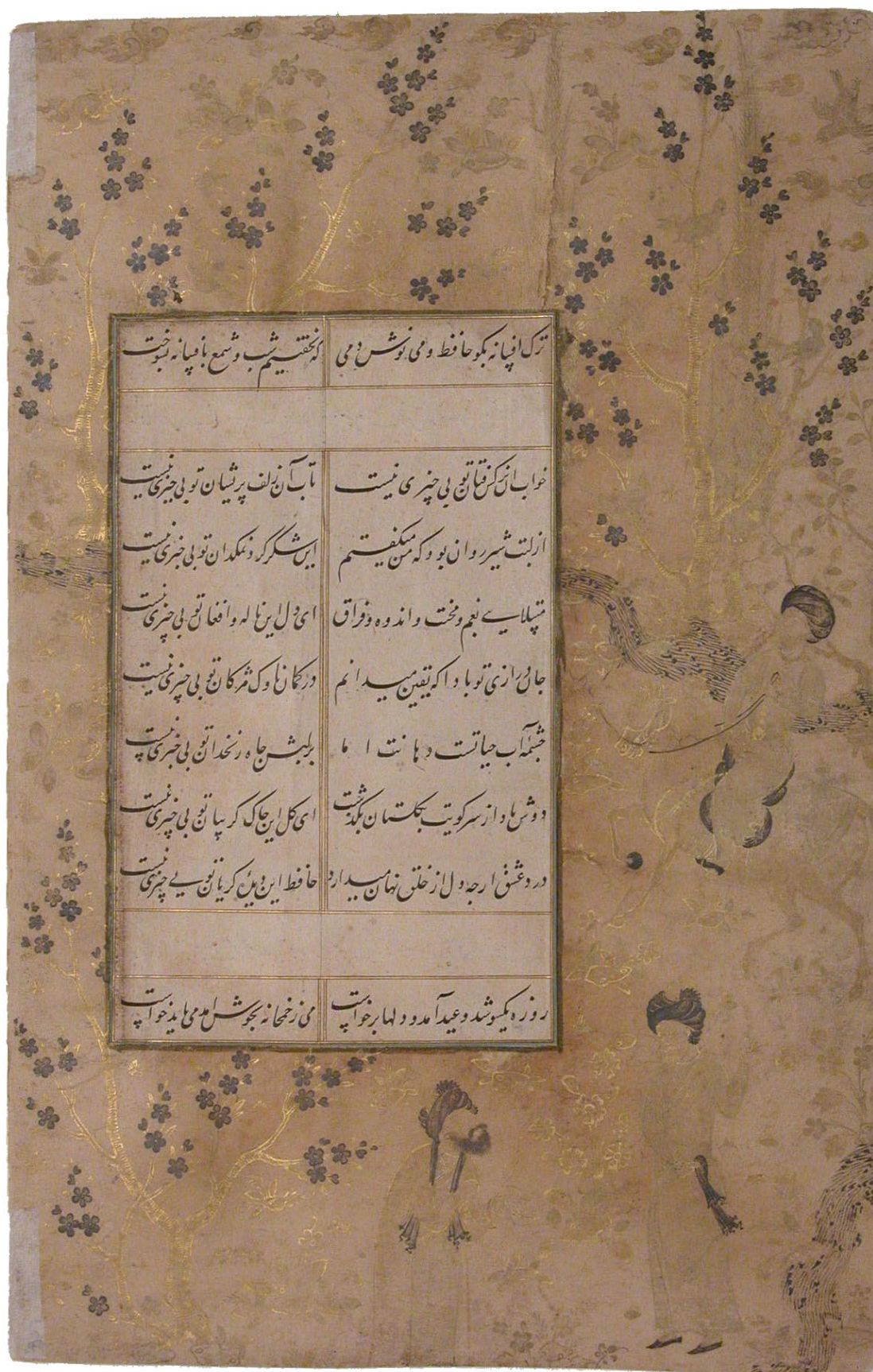


Fig. 1: Recto and verso side of folio from anthology of poetry by Hāfiz and Sa'di (above includes ghazals of Hāfiz), late 15<sup>th</sup> century, Sulṭān 'Alī Mashhadī (calligrapher),





attributed to Herat, late fifteenth century, Ink, opaque watercolor, silver and gold on paper, 30.2 x 19 cm, New York, NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 11.84.9

beginning as early as 1437.<sup>3</sup> Stiff, heavy, and surprisingly colorful, the papers function as evidence of the Persian tradition's significant admiration of Chinese visual forms and also signal a new development in Persianate arts of the book, in which gilded and glossy figural and vegetal imagery creep into the margins of the page.<sup>4</sup> Like the papers introduced above, the Chinese papers are visually unstable. Their gilded imagery is cut and often turned on its side, revealing fragments of larger landscapes akin to those common in Chinese paintings and other images of birds and fruit trees. Further polished, the papers gain texts and are gathered in codex form. Assembled in a Persianate book, the paper supports recall their potential Chinese origins yet serve to enhance the look and feel of the literary texts copied therein.

Most of the manuscripts copied on decorated Chinese papers were penned in the mid-fifteenth century and regularly include a special corpus of interpretively difficult and mostly non-narrative poetry, including collections of *ghazals* (short lyric poems) as well as several Qur'ans.<sup>5</sup> These types of texts rarely are associated with figural images or paintings, and it is only after they are copied on the Chinese papers that many of the collections of poetry, like the *Divān* of Ḥāfiz, receive accompanying paintings.<sup>6</sup> Given popular resistance to associating especially ghazals with images, why juxtapose these texts with fragmented natural imagery? What is the relationship between the papers and texts, if any? That the papers' fragmented landscapes and fruit trees offer no iconographical link to the texts helps to support a merely decorative function. The corpus, however, is skewed to religious material (the multiple Qur'ans and treatise on Sufism) and

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<sup>3</sup> Ilse Sturkenboom, in her contribution to this volume, carefully analyses the paper's materiality, origins and circulation and is a welcome addition to other earlier studies including: Blair, Sheila: "Color and Gold: the Decorated Papers used in Manuscripts in Later Islamic Times", *Muqarnas*, 17 (2000), pp. 24–36; Soucek, Priscilla: "The New York Public Library *Makhzan al-Asrar* and its Importance", *Ars Orientalis*, 8 (1988), pp. 1–37; Roxburgh, David: *The Persian Album: 1400–1600: From Dispersal to Collection*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, pp. 158–161; and Farhad, Massumeh – Simon Rettig (eds.): *The Art of the Qur'an Treasures from the Museum of Islamic and Turkish Arts*. Washington D.C.: The Freer and Arthur M. Sackler Galleries of Art and the Smithsonian Institute, 2016, pp. 241–43. Christies recently (25. 06. 2020) sold an undated mid-fifteenth-century Qur'an copied on the papers for a record £7 million, a number that has caught the eye of numerous Islamic art historians and raised questions regarding its more recent provenance.

<sup>4</sup> Blair, Sheila: "Color and Gold"; Bloom, Jonathan: *Paper Before Print, The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World*. New Haven/London: Yale University, 2001, p. 71; and Schmitz, Barbara: *Islamic Manuscripts in the New York Public Library*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 68. Schmitz further suggests that the relatively small size of Turkmen manuscripts copied on these papers after 1468 results from smaller stock-piles of paper. I am hesitant to draw hard lines between Timurid and Turkmen manuscript production and use of the Chinese papers. It is clear that the Chinese papers circulated widely and were used for a number of specific texts.

<sup>5</sup> Sturkenboom has broadened the corpus of manuscripts copied on these papers. For a current list, cf. tables 1 and 2 in her essay in this volume.

<sup>6</sup> Shortle, Margaret: "Illustrated *Divans* of Hafiz: Persian Aesthetics at the Intersection of Art and *Ghazal* Poetry, 1450–1550", [PhD dissertation], Boston University, 2018, pp. 163–66.

much celebrated yet interpretively difficult, if not mystical, poetry and lyrics dedicated to love and longing.<sup>7</sup> The strong links between the types of texts copied do suggest that papers connect to the texts in some manner. At the very least, these papers were reserved for these types of texts.

This paper seeks to understand a potential aesthetic relationship between the literature and their visual and material supports. Although the essay focuses more closely on the colored and gilded Chinese papers, its arguments easily extend to later emulations like the marginal papers introduced above as well as a fuller understanding of ornament in manuscript studies and the broad appeal of glittering, shiny and visually unstable decorative devices. While ornament certainly serves to visually embellish and enhance the viewer's experience of text, ornament also functions as a visual device for content — narrative content, commentary or even the suggestion of an abstract yet elusive subject.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the following essay seeks the subject in ornament and to firmly place ornament in the discussion of text and images in Islamic art. Parallel aesthetic concerns for both the visual and verbal arts are expressed through comparative descriptions of beauty in both cases. Although a detailed study of the poetry penned remains beyond the scope of this short essay, I suggest that the combination of visual, material and poetic elements evokes an aesthetic of sensory instability that helps to clarify the intersections of word and image in the Persian tradition.

While source material concerning the reception of the Chinese papers does exist, most merely hints at the papers' aesthetic import. The papers were valuable commodities and presented as diplomatic gifts from the Ming court in China to the Timurids in Central Asia.<sup>9</sup> Calligraphers too praise the papers when writing guidelines for good calligraphy practice. They suggest that Chinese paper is excellent and enhances good writing. Still, little more is suggested and few indications are made in regard to pairing paper to texts.<sup>10</sup> The famed fifteenth-century calligrapher Sulṭān 'Alī Mashhadī, for example, claims that:

<sup>7</sup> Of the non-Qur'anic manuscripts, many are poetic anthologies or *divāns* inclusive of *ghazals* and *rubā'ī* (quatrains) or overtly mystical works like the *maṣnavīs* by 'Aṭṭār, Jāmī's *Ṣubḥat al-abrār* or Navā'ī's *Ḥayrat al-abrār*. Missing are poetic works more commonly associated with visual imagery including especially the *Khamsas* of Nizāmī or Amīr Khusraw.

<sup>8</sup> Beyer, Vera – Christian Spies (eds.): *Ornament. Motiv – Modus – Bild*. Munich: Wilhem Fink Verlag, 2012, pp. 13–23; and Necipoğlu, Gülru – Alina Payne: *Histories of Ornament from Global to Local*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018, cf. especially the introduction and Vittoria di Palma's chapter, "A Natural History of Ornament".

<sup>9</sup> Roxburgh, *The Persian Album*, pp. 158–60.

<sup>10</sup> In a rare exception, Simi Nishapuri suggests that white paper is best suited to royal correspondences. Thackston, Wheeler M.: "Treatise on Calligraphic Arts: a Disquisition on Paper, Colors, Inks and Pens by Simi Nishapuri". In: Michel Mazzaoui – Vera Mourens (eds.): *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990, pp. 221–223.

“[Chinese paper] is excellent,  
and it embellishes good writing.  
For writing on slightly tinted (*nīm-rang*) paper is suitable,  
That it should be restful to the eye  
The red, green, and white colors  
Strike the eye, like looking at the sun.”<sup>11</sup>

While it is clear that the calligrapher values the Chinese papers, the full statement asserts a certain level of ambiguity regarding colored papers. The colored or tinted papers should be restful to the eyes and improve the viewer’s ability to see and presumably read. The red, green and white colors are, however, like the sun, cause the eyes to squint or dazzle the eye (*chasm rā rang-i surkh va sabz va safid / khīra sāzad chu dīdan-i khurshīd*). Although seemingly painful for the modern reader, it is not quite clear whether this blinding effect is an entirely undesirable quality.<sup>12</sup> Sulṭān ‘Alī Mashhadī does not elaborate. To be sure, the Chinese papers are good and embellish good writing. Colored papers seem to encourage restfulness while other are more active. Also, the presence of both green and red (likely pink) in the surviving manuscripts on Chinese papers, suggest either that the advice, if negative, was not heeded or that emphasis rests instead on astonishment or bewilderment, often desirable aesthetic effects. The papers’ preferred impact on reception remains uncertain. What is more, the alternating colors — light and deep blues, deep violet, pale pink, magenta, burnt yellow, orange and chartreuse green — in a single manuscript do activate alternating perceptions in a manner that both invites looking and begs the viewer to look away due to some pages perceived luminosity.

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<sup>11</sup> Aḥmad Ibrāhīmī Ḥusaynī Qumī, Qāzī Mīr: *Gulistān-i Hunar (Rose Garden of Skill)*. Ed. Ahmad Suhayli Khwansari, Tehran: Manuchihri, 1352, p. 70; Translated to English by V. and T. Minorsky: *Calligraphers and Painter, A Treatise by Qadi Ahmad, son of Mir Munshi. (circa A.H. 1015/A.D. 1606)*. (Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers, 3:2). Washington D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, 1959, p. 115. The final two *bayts* are reversed in edition by Ahmad Suhayli Khwansari. Although it seems to suggest that green, red, and white colored papers are not suitable supports, a later line, not included in Minorsky’s translation, determines that writing in white on red paper is best. Cf. also Barkeshli, Mandana: “Historical Persian Recipes for Paper Dyes”. *Restaurator* 37:1 (2016), p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> Cummins, Thomas: “Gilded Bodies and Brilliant Walls: Ornament in America before and after the European Conquest”. In: *Histories of Ornament from Global to Local*. Eds. Gülru Necipoğlu – Alina Payne. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016, pp. 238–249. Cummins examines the universal appeal of gold, especially for metaphysical effect. While he maintains focus on the reception of this effect for the Inca, his discussion of blinding luminosity as a desirable effect of gilded ornament supports the possibility that Sulṭān ‘Alī Mashhadī’s statement may not be entirely negative. Also supporting this possibility is a commonly published statement by the thirteenth/fourteenth-century master ceramicist from Kashan, ‘Abu’l Qāsim. In a treatise on calligraphy he favors, “that which has been fired evenly glistens like red gold and reflects like the light of the sun.” Cf. Allan, James: “Abu’l Qasim’s Treatise on Ceramics”. *British Institute of Persian Studies*, 11 (1973), p. 114.



This oscillating visual impact parallels the shifting effects of gold sprayed or painted on the same pages. In fact, some pages are so heavily flecked with gold that they are simultaneously mesmerizing and exceedingly difficult to read as is the case with one half of a two page spread from a Qur'an in the Detroit Institute of Arts (fig. 2). Other pages are significantly more subtle in both the intensity of color and the amount of gold flecking or spray present. The juxtaposition enhances these manuscripts and their papers' visual instability. They seemingly attract the viewer's gaze and simultaneously reject complete conceptual comprehension of the words penned. In this respect they mirror circulating aesthetic concepts based on apophatic logic and commonly present in both literature and descriptions of the visual arts.

## The Unstable Aesthetics of Perfect Calligraphy

Persianate aesthetics and descriptions of beauty can be examined according to two separate yet connected threads. First are descriptions of ideal beauty, informed by religious interests and the impossibility of truly knowing God's creation, the standard of ideal beauty.<sup>13</sup> These descriptions, in turn, inform the mystical language embedded in poetry and equally evoked in framing texts related to the visual arts, such as album prefaces, that introduce a sixteenth-century Persianate theory of calligraphy and painting.<sup>14</sup> Second are practical descriptions of ideal beauty and its perception that can be exhumed from treatises on calligraphy. Here, too, mystical language is espoused. But, the mystical language is more trope than sentiment. It is telling of the difficulties one faces when trying to define beauty — an abstract and highly contextual concept related to experience.

Highlighting the first is the language in an album preface commonly attributed to the Timurid/Safavid historian (d. 1534) known as Khvāndamīr.<sup>15</sup> The album

<sup>13</sup> Interesting discussion of materiality and the visual expressions of both God's and artistic creation include Weinryb, Ittai: "Living Matter: Materiality, Maker and Ornament in the Middle Ages". *Gesta* 52:2 (2013), pp. 113–32; and Flood, Finbarr Barry: "God's Wonder, Marble as Medium and the Natural Image in Mosques and Modernism". *West 86<sup>th</sup>, a Journal of Decorative Arts, Design and Material Culture*, 23/2 (2016), pp. 168–219. Cf. also Necipoğlu, Gülru: *The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture*. Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1995, pp. 93–97; and Tabbā, Yasser: "The *Muqarnas* Dome: Its Origin and Meaning". *Muqarnas* 3 (1985), pp. 61–74.

<sup>14</sup> Porter, Yves: "From the 'Theory of Two Qalams,' to the 'Seven Principles of Painting:' Theory, Terminology, and Practice in Persian Classical Painting". *Muqarnas*, 17 (2000), pp. 109–18; and Roxburgh, David: *Prefacing the Image, The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran*. Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Ghiyāṣ al-Dīn b. Humām al-Dīn Muḥammad, known as Khvāndamīr, or his contemporary Amīr Ṣadr al-Dīn Sulṭān Ibrāhīm Amīnī, known as Amīnī, wrote a preface to an album of painting and calligraphy assembled by the famous fifteenth and sixteenth century artist, Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād. The album no longer exists, but the preface is preserved in a collection of Khvāndamīr's writing, the *Nāma-i Nāmī*, a copy of which exists in the Bibliothèque Nationale in

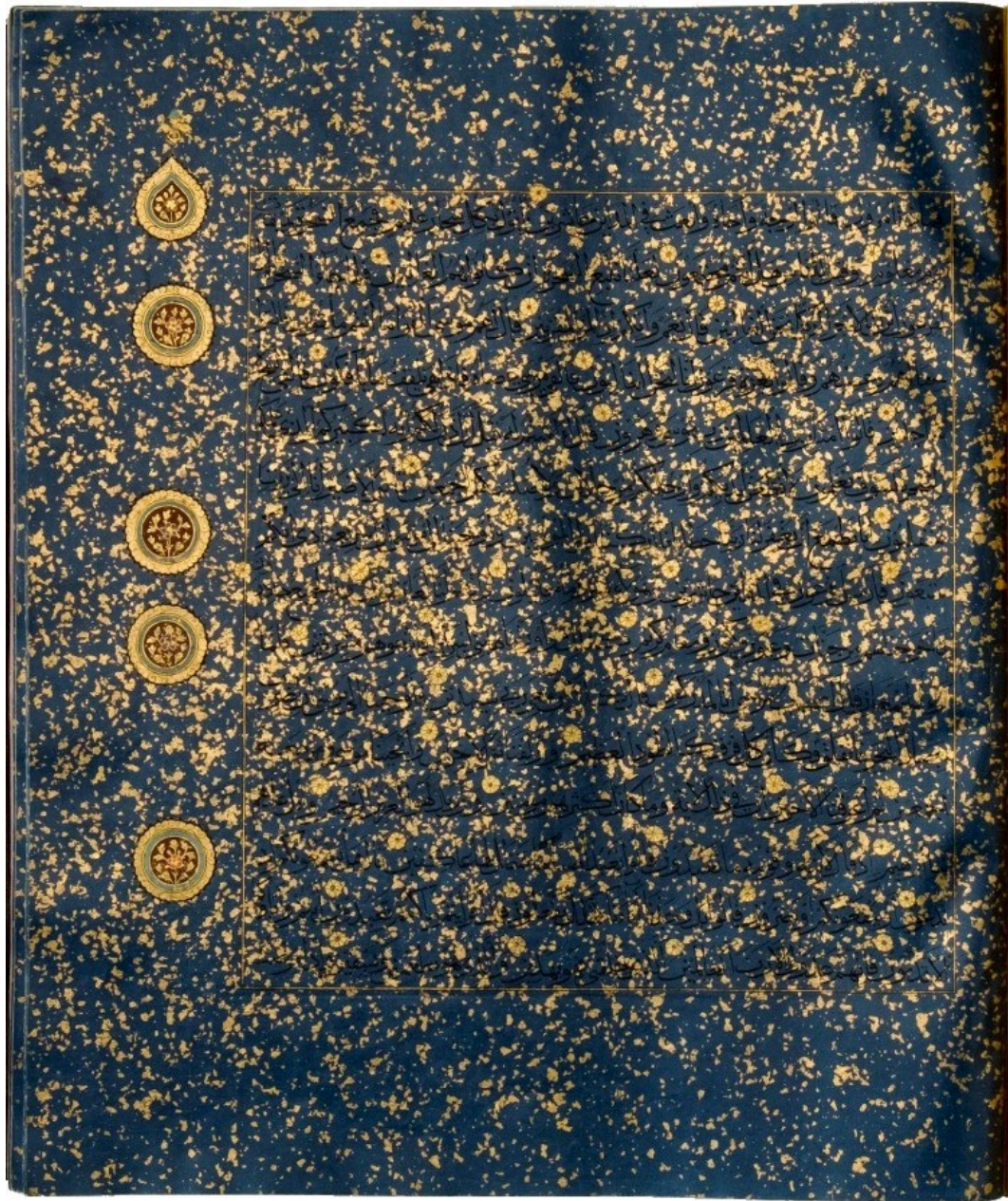
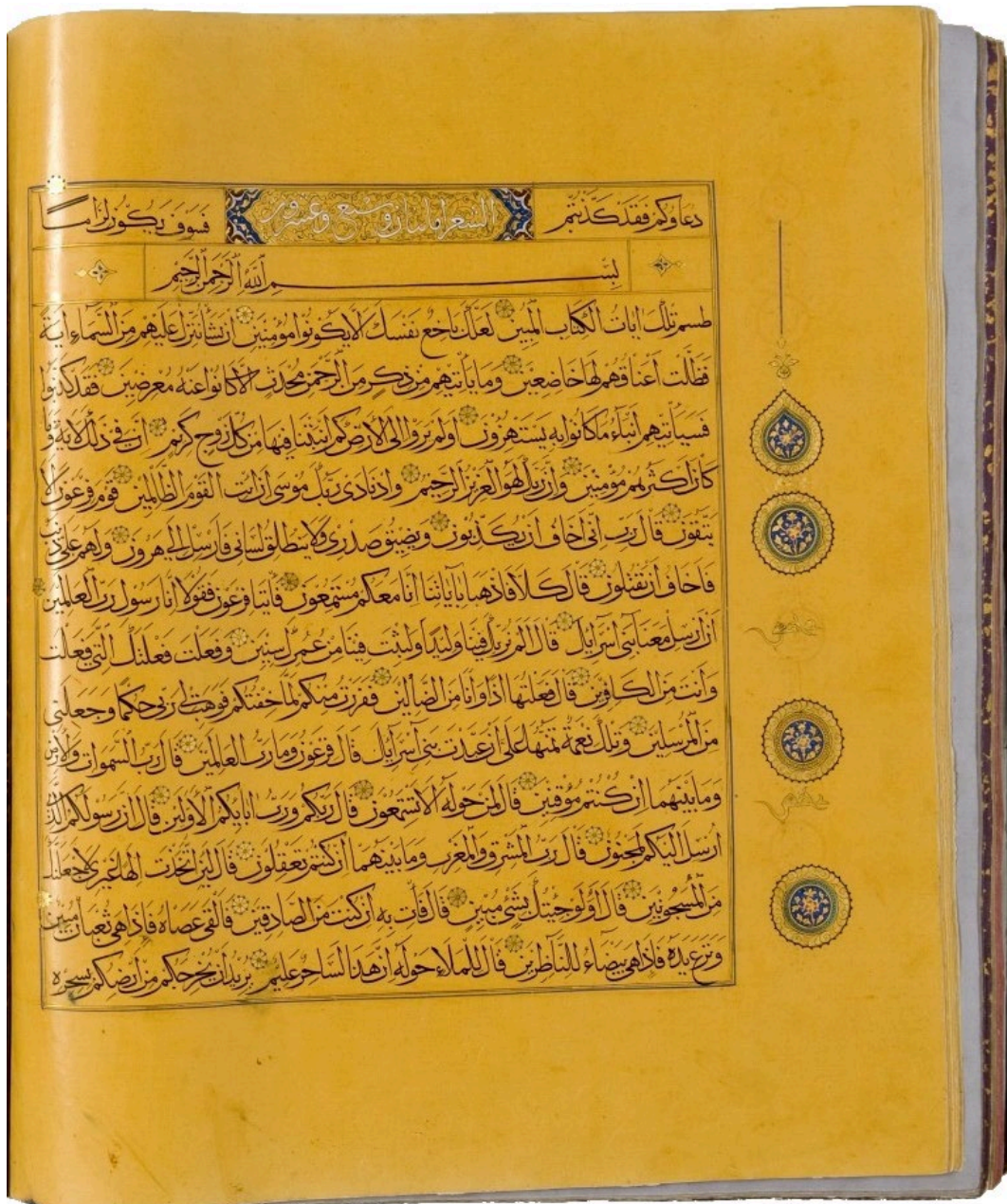


Fig. 2: Open double page spread from a Qur'an, c. 1450/1560, leather, paper, ink, colors, gold, book, 44.5 × 38.1cm; manuscript, 30.5 × 26.7 cm, Detroit, MI: Detroit Institute of Art, acc. no. 30.323.

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Paris. An edited version of the text and an English translation can be found in Thackston, *Album Prefaces and Other Documents*, pp. 41–42. For problems of authorship, cf. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image*, pp. 24–26.





preface presents numerous ideas regarding calligraphy and painting as an introduction to an album compiled by the famous artist Bihzād. Khvāndamīr, the author of the preface, employs a discursive language that on the one hand seeks to understand artistic beauty in terms similar to God's creation; he introduces the calligraphy and paintings collected in the album with a creation story that casts God as the first artist.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, he is caught in an effort to avoid reifying the transcendent as an "entity," "being" or "thing," whose creation may be emulated or described in word or image.<sup>17</sup> Importantly, he struggles to verbalize beauty in terms analogous to what he sees. The following passage, which begins with a short verse followed by an explanatory prose section, exemplifies this struggle:

"The lot of beautiful writing, in the opinion of the wise, is greater than can be imagined. The delight of the human spirit derives from painting and depiction, which is the lot of prince and vizier, rich and poor alike, *cannot be put into words*, and it is impossible to describe even an iota of the beauty, joy and rapture that rare art imparts through the brush and fingers."<sup>18</sup>

By prefacing a description of painting's abilities with the same abilities of writing, Khvāndamīr equates the two arts and maintains that neither is capable of capturing real beauty through description or emulation. Both calligraphy and painting are a means of depiction or description of the natural world, and Khvāndamīr highlights this connection by prefacing the above verse with two Qur'anic references to the pen that further connote his esteemed value of writing and the idea that God, the first calligrapher and painter, created the natural world via the pen.<sup>19</sup> Khvāndamīr asserts that artistic creation metaphorically parallels divine creation through mimesis of nature.

Khvāndamīr's struggle to describe beauty relates too to his highly metaphorical descriptions of the album his writing prefaces and the artworks collected therein.

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<sup>16</sup> This framework is common in many album prefaces. Cf. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image*, especially pp. 189–192.

<sup>17</sup> My thinking here may be attributed to discussions of apophysis in medieval Islamic thought and literature in Sells, Michael: *The Mystical Language of Unsayings*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 6; and also in relation to the epiphanic descriptions of ancient Greek art in Platt, Verity: *Facing the Gods, Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, especially p. 53.

<sup>18</sup> Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, p. 42. My emphasis; literally *qābil-i tahrīr nist* translates "is unworthy of beautiful writing/ornamented description;" alternatively, it may also translate, "is unworthy of serving God." I use Thackston's translation because it works well in English and is sufficient for supporting my claim. The literal translation serves to further bolster my suggestion that the passage demonstrates a belief in the impossibility of both knowing and describing fully God's creation.

<sup>19</sup> Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, p. 41. Cf. also *Qur'an* 68:1 and 96:4, which state, "Nun (N), by the pen and what they write," and "He (God) taught by the pen."

When introducing the album, he relies on visually unstable objects stemming from the natural world, namely pearls and gems:

“every coveted pearl that is nourished in the ocean of contentment,  
is to be found in this sea (i. e. the album)  
like beauty, it lights the torch of the eye,  
like the meeting of lovers, it seizes every heart”<sup>20</sup>

Pearls and gems appear repeatedly to characterise well-formed artworks, both verbal and visual.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the metaphors provide a primary means for connecting the visual to the verbal. They elevate calligraphy’s hierarchical status to that of poetry and embrace the manuscript or album, like in Khvāndamīr’s example, as the accumulation of multiple artistic treasures. Maybe it should come as no surprise that the visual and material paper supports for these collections seek to emulate key characteristics of pearls and gems, the primary descriptors of great art.

In poetry, the comparison between a well-formed individual verse and pearl is so common that poets tend to play with the trope; the allusion to poetry, often their own, remains unambiguous. The following *bayt* from a *ghazal* by the thirteenth-century poet Sa’dī, for example, nicely compares the aural and written traditions by juxtaposing pearl-like speech with the gilded letters of the manuscript:

“Instead of poetry, pearls dropped from Sa’dī’s speech.  
If you had silver [= money], you would write his words with gold.”<sup>22</sup>

In this case, Sa’dī highlights the monetary value of his artwork by comparing it to the expensive and luxury nature of pearls and gold. In regard to the *topos* connecting precious stones to poetry, scholarship tends to focus on examples like Sa’dī’s above or the following *bayt* from Ḥāfiz, which suggests that the poet pierces pearls, i. e. individual *bayts*, and strings them together to form a necklace, i. e. complete poem or *ghazal*:

“You composed a *ghazal* and pierced a pearl, come and read/sing well, Ḥāfiz  
for over your composition, the firmament will scatter the necklace of the Pleiades.”<sup>23</sup>

The allusion establishes a direct and strict comparison: a pearl is equated with individual *bayts* of poetry, and, thus, it provides metaphorical reference for the

<sup>20</sup> Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image*, p. 93; Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, p. 42; *har gawhar-i murād ki dar baḥr-i khūshdīlī/ parvarda-and jumla dar īn baḥr hāṣil ast/ hamchūn jamāl-i mash’ala afrūz-i dīda hast/ hamchūn viṣāl khurramī andūz-i har dīl ast*

<sup>21</sup> Schimmel, Annemarie: *A Two-Colored Brocade, the Imagery of Persian Poetry*. Chapel Hill/London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992, pp. 156–60 and pp. 204–05.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

<sup>23</sup> Ḥāfiz, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad: *Divān-i Ḥāfiz*. Ed. Khalil Khatib. Tehran: Intisharat-i Safa Alishah, 1387/2008, p. 5; *ghazal gufti-o durr suftī biā khush bikhān Ḥāfiz/ ki bar nazm-i tu afshānad falak ‘ iqd-i suraiyā rā*.



verbal arts.<sup>24</sup> The *ghazal* and individual *bayt* are further juxtaposed with the heavens and stars, the imagery oscillates between its parts and whole.

Calligraphy, too, is compared to a pearl, and the same *topos* nicely establishes an extended comparison between the visual art of calligraphy and verbal art of poetry. The fifteenth-century calligrapher Sultān ‘Alī Mashhadī, for example, suggests that through a careful and sustained study of a master’s writing, the student’s “letters should become like a pearl.”<sup>25</sup> By suggesting that each letter of calligraphy be a pearl, Sultān ‘Alī Mashhadī uses the popular trope for poetic beauty and extends this to calligraphy. So the connection is not missed, he prepares the reader by utilizing a similar trope for poetry as a metaphor for great calligraphy in previous lines and also comparing the inventor of the calligraphy form *naskh ī ta’liq* (*nasta’liq*), Khvāja Mīr ‘Alī Tabrizī (active ca. 1370–1410), to a great and admired poet, Shaykh Kamāl Khujandī (d. 1400).<sup>26</sup> Importantly, Sultān ‘Alī Mashhadī suggests that Mīr ‘Alī’s pen, “exudes sugar.”<sup>27</sup> Great poetry is very often compared to sugar, and Sultān ‘Alī Mashhadī employs the trope a second time and in reference to poetry when he states:

“he was a contemporary in that assembly of great writers  
shaykh of sweet speech, the perfect Shaykh Kamāl  
for whose poetry is like the orchards of Khujand  
it is sweeter than sweet meats and sugar.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The allusions and split between the individual *bayts* and full poem also serve academic debates regarding unity in the *ghazals* of Ḥāfiz. For an early translation of this bayt that stirred the debate, cf. Jones, Sir William: “A Persian Song”. In: *Grammar of the Persian Language*. London: 1771, pp. 133–135. For criticism of the translation, cf. especially Arberry, A.J.: “Orient Pearls at Random Strung”. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 11.4. Cambridge/London: Cambridge University Press, 1946, pp. 699–712; and Meisami, Julie Scott: “Sir William Jones and the Reception of Eastern Literature”. *South Asian Review* 8/5 (1984), pp. 61–70.

<sup>25</sup> Qāzī Mīr Aḥmad, *Gulistān-i Hunar*, p. 73. Minorsky, *Calligraphers and Painter*, p. 117. *harf harfat chū durr shud zi khaṭṭash*

<sup>26</sup> Qāzī Mīr Aḥmad, *Gulistān-i Hunar*, 72; Minorsky, *Calligraphers and Painters*, p. 116. Khvāja Mīr ‘Alī and Shaykh Kamāl Khujandī were contemporaries from Tabriz. For more on Khvāja Mīr ‘Alī, cf. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image*, pp. 131–33; Rettig, Simon: “Ja’far Tabrizi, ‘second inventor’ of the *nasta’liq* script”. In: *The Diez Albums, Contents and Contexts*. Eds. Julia Gonnella – Christopher Rauch – Friedrike Weis. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017, pp. 194–220; Soucek, Priscilla: “Ali Tabrizi”. In: *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (1985); idem, “The Arts of Calligraphy”. In: *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia: 14<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Ed. Basil Gray and Oleg F. Akimushkin. Paris/London: Unesco/Serindia Publications, 1979 pp. 7–35; and Blair, Sheila: *Islamic Calligraphy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, pp. 275–79. For more on Shaykh Kamāl Khujandī, cf. Rypka, Jan: *History of Iranian Literature*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing, 1968, pp. 262–63.

<sup>27</sup> Qāzī Mīr Aḥmad: *Gulistān-i Hunar*, 72. *nav-i kalakash āz ān shakar rīz-ast*.

<sup>28</sup> For an alternative translation, cf. ibid. *Būd mu’āsir bi-majma’ al-afzal/ shaykh-i shīrīn-i maqāl shaykh-i kamāl/ ānki shī’r-ash chū mīva-hā-yi khujand/ hast shīrīn-tar āz nabāt ū zi qand*; the verse immediately preceding these two verses also aids the connection between poetry and calligraphy: *khaṭṭ-i pāk-ash chū shī’r-i ū mauzūn* (his clear/clean calligraphy is like his verse, balanced/harmonious) / *hast ta’rīf-i ū zi ḥadd birūn* (praise to him is without limits).

Through his clear juxtaposition of a great calligrapher to a great poet, Sulṭān ‘Alī Mashhadī upholds calligraphy to poetry’s equal. Further he expands the pearl *topos* and through assimilation, beautifully connecting the ligatures of individual letters is akin to composing the full poem or stringing the pearls of necklace. Each character, like an individual *bayt*, is an individual art form, and the metaphor implies that artistic skill is achieved once a student can write beautiful letters and also artfully attend to their relationships in a full composition. The principles regarding the reception of skilled calligraphy in relation to the pearl or gem metaphors, as with poetry, continually oscillate between a part and the whole.

Aside from the general assumption that perfectly formed poetry, calligraphy, and real pearls are all rare and, thus, to be celebrated for their unique beauty, the three forms have materially little in common.<sup>29</sup> It is, however, precisely the pearl’s materiality that makes the pearl and other gems appropriate images for verbal and visual arts, and this logically extends to the starry night sky or the silvered and gilded ink in the marginal papers from the *Dīvān* of Ḥāfiẓ above.<sup>30</sup> Naturally iridescent and visually opalescent, the pearl is instantly recognized for its luminosity, the colors and sheen of which shift and change as one turns the stone in one’s hand or views it under flickering and shifting light, like that of a candle.<sup>31</sup> The temporality of visual perception of both a pearl and the paper supports mirrors the momentary aural experience of performed poetry. Because the black ink of calligraphy seems fixed and permanent by comparison, the material and sensory connection between poetry, calligraphy, and pearls requires some elaboration.<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, Sulṭān ‘Alī Mashhadī’s use of the pearl metaphor assumes familiarity with the oft-repeated trope and the multiplicity of meanings it may elicit. On the other hand, the pearl metaphor is connected to contemporaneous concepts of aesthetics marked by verbal evocations of sensory instability,<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> The idea regarding a rare pearl and thus its allusion to a unique and individual *bayt* or sample of calligraphy is a modern concept; nevertheless a subtle appreciation of artistic individuality does exist and David Roxburgh demonstrates this idea by pointing to the indexical nature of Islamic calligraphy in “The Eye is Favored For Seeing the Writing’s Form”: on the Sensual and Sensuous in Islamic Calligraphy”. *Muqarnas* 25 (2000), pp. 275–298.

<sup>30</sup> Avinoam Shalem discusses the materiality of pearls and its nomenclature in medieval Arabic and also classical literature in “Jewels and Journeys: The Case of the Medieval Gemstone called al-Yatima”. *Muqarnas* 14 (1997), pp. 42–56, especially pp. 44–45.

<sup>31</sup> In his book on stones, al-Birūnī (10<sup>th</sup> c.) indicates that pearls resemble the stars in luster and brilliance, hence their name, *najm* (star). Shalem, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> At times calligraphy was glittered with crushed stones or scented with musk or *ambergris*, thus, providing a sensory experience that matches the metaphoric language.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Birūnī determines that the Arabic term *tala’la’a* (to glisten) stems from *lu’lu’* (pearl). This further extends to his citations of various Arab poets who verbally connect the glistening effects of pearls to the starry night sky; Shalem, p. 43. The Persian poets retain similar juxtapositions of the stars and pearls. The above verse from Ḥāfiẓ, for example, combines the imagery of a poem, pearl, Pleiades/starry sky and necklace. For studies on materiality and description of glistening and visually unstable objects, cf. Saba, Matt: “Abbasid Lusterware and the Aesthetics of ‘*ajab*’”. *Muqarnas* 29 (2012), pp. 187–212; Pentcheva, Bissera: “Moving eyes, Surface and shadow in the Byzantine mixed-media relief icon”. *RES, Anthropology and Aesthetics* 55/56 (2009),

and these ideas help to govern the look and feel of the manuscripts copied on colored and gilded Chinese papers.

Returning to Khvāndamīr's struggle, it is clear that he acquires language shared between the descriptions of the visual arts and the Persian poetic tradition.<sup>34</sup> Momentary temporality or the brief encounter with the beautiful form epitomizes Khvāndamīr's concept of understanding or nearly understanding that beautiful form. In the introductory section of the preface, Khvāndamīr describes divine writing, the most beautiful of all writing, and frames his following discussion of actual calligraphers. Here, he describes a "musk-crushing pen," which calls to mind various cultural or religious associations relating the smell of musk to the prophet Muhammad or the Garden of Paradise.<sup>35</sup>

A certain referential slippage exists, and I suggest that Khvāndamīr's description of musk-smelling ink continually oscillates between reality and metaphor or the sensuous experience of writing and calligraphy and a verbal descriptor of ink as literary trope with iconographic significance. That scent, a sense whose perception is impermanent, helps to mediate a conceptual understanding of beauty as it relates to the art of calligraphy and further supports the underlying thematic stance that beauty escapes verbal description. Consistent with apophatic logic, Khvāndamīr participates in a rhetoric commonly found in Islamic mystical thought and subsequently used in Persian poetry and poetic treatises. Whether conceptual, verbal or visual, all representations acknowledge the impossibility of capturing their subject, be it God, the beloved, or beauty. The brevity of sensory perception suggests that the subject — full understanding of true beauty in the case of calligraphy described by Khvāndamīr — remains just beyond reach and, yet, simultaneously affirms its existence, encouraging the viewer to look and engage with the object as an intermediary.<sup>36</sup> Visual experience is emphasized, yet

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pp. 222–234; Idem: *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual and Senses in Byzantium*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2010, especially pp. 128–147.

<sup>34</sup> It is also a language shared with Islamic mysticism, which informs the all too common mystical interpretations of Islamic art broadly and ornament and calligraphy in particular. For a brief historiography of this kind of approach in Islamic art history and the problems involved, cf. Necipoğlu, Gülru: "The Concept of Islamic Art: Inherited Discourses and New Approaches". In: *Islamic Art and the Museum*. Eds. Benoît Junod – Georges Khalil – Stefan Weber – Gerhard Wolf. London: Saqi Books, 2012, pp. 8–10.

<sup>35</sup> Gacek, Adam: "Scribes, Copyists". In: *Medieval Islamic Civilization, an Encyclopedia*. Ed. Josef W. Meri. New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 705. Schopen, Armin: *Tinten und Tuschen, des Arabisch-Islamischen Mittelalters*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006, pp. 35–61 and pp. 183–186. For a comprehensive history of musk in Islamic culture and societies, cf. King, Anya: "The Musk Trade and the Near East in the Early Medieval Period". [PhD dissertation], Indiana University, 2007, especially chapters four and five.

<sup>36</sup> Verity Platt traces a similar phenomenon in Graeco-Roman art and the textual recordings of epiphanic encounters in *Facing the Gods*, p. 53. Also Oleg Grabar frames ornament including calligraphy as an intermediary in *The Mediation of Ornament*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.



intellectual comprehension remains inaccessible. About this phenomenon in writing, Khvāndamīr is rather explicit:

“The eye takes pleasure from the form of the writing,  
but the heart is unaware of its inner meaning.”<sup>37</sup>

Importantly, the means by which one may experience or see divine writing are always defined by their momentary existence. Divine writing, according to Khvāndamīr, makes “a rivulet of golden water,” whose material essence is characterized by movement — both the continual movement of a small stream of water and the fluctuating and shimmering properties of gold.<sup>38</sup> Because it is constantly moving, this writing is unstable and continually fluctuating; thus, it may only momentarily, if ever, be captured and perceived. Again, Khvāndamīr’s preface introduces and frames the following presentation of numerous examples of calligraphy and paintings collected in the album. Presumably the most beautiful, divine writing, here, serves as a benchmark, against which these following examples will be judged.<sup>39</sup> It should come as no surprise, then, that the material qualities of paper and ink in calligraphy examples from this same tradition physically embody the same fleeting or constantly fluctuating sensory appeal.<sup>40</sup> Indeed ink might be scented with musk, as noted above, and gold was a common material used in inks and liberally applied to the page via spraying, flecking, or other marginal decorations including figural and vegetal stamps or drawings.

The gilded Chinese papers and their use in Persianate manuscripts shortly predate the preface and album compiled by Khvāndamīr; nevertheless, they are an excellent example of the preferred use of visually shifting and unstable materials in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Persianate artistic traditions, and they certainly inform the later use of colored and gilded papers and margins in the early modern Persianate manuscripts. By fragmenting the imagery available, and, at times, obscuring the writing on the page, these papers function at a glance and also demand sustained viewing, encouraging the audience to look, read, and repeat. They materialize via the constantly shifting and changing properties of gold flecking and fragmented and gilded landscapes and other natural images, a concept of ideal beauty that is verbalized in Khvāndamīr’s preface.

<sup>37</sup> Thackston, *Album Prefaces*, p. 41; Roxburgh, 2008, p. 280.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> For an expert and comprehensive analysis of this and other similar prefaces and their social and political implications, cf. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image*, pp. 62–72.

<sup>40</sup> The actual contents of the album for which the Khvāndamīr preface was written no longer exist or are not retained as a collection. Cf. note 15 above.

## Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī's Guide to the Perception and Creation of Calligraphy

The medieval Arabic theorist, Ibn al-Haytham, whose writings were still current in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, differentiates between “glancing perception” (*idrāk bi l-badīha*) and “contemplative perception” (*idrāk bi t-ta’ammul*) and suggests that one perceives beautiful forms quickly through recognition of a previously seen and understood beautiful form and also through sustained observation, by which one may slowly comprehend and arrive at an understanding of the beautiful form.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, the Chinese papers engage the viewer via the glance and simultaneously encourage and obscure reading, thus, begging the viewer’s sustained and contemplative attention. Although centuries old, Ibn al-Haytham’s two-part approach to the perception of beauty provides a worthwhile entry and frame for discussing the practical guides to the visual arts.<sup>42</sup> Practical texts, especially those concerning calligraphy, like Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī’s *Ādāb al-Mashq* (*Manners of Practices*) clarify how the visual arts were taught and perceived in actuality rather than in mere theory. Building on my introduction of ideal beauty, I turn now to descriptions of well-formed calligraphy via Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī’s sixteenth-century treatise on calligraphy practice, the *Ādāb al-Mashq* and clarify how the all-important experience of beauty was conceived.

Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī repeats some of Khvāndamīr’s spiritual language and mysticism and his text has been analysed for its mystical potential.<sup>43</sup> Although present, the spiritual elements are eclipsed by his emphasis on technique, terminology and practices, and most allusions to mysticism repeat a formulaic spiritual language used to frame discussions of ideal beauty in relation to artistic practices already discussed. Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī’s *Ādāb al-Mashq* expands Sulṭān ‘Alī Mashhadī’s advice and includes commentary on ethics, internal discipline, and the various levels of mastery of calligraphy. Collectively, they lay a foundation with which to understand the material relationship between calligraphy and ideal beauty as represented by the oft-repeated and sensorially unstable metaphors — pearls and gems — noted above. A detailed guide, Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī writes for the practitioner. Emphasis, for example, is given to action and the push and pull of the pen in his explanation of the various parts of calligraphic

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<sup>41</sup> Sabra, A.I. (trans.): *The Optics of Ibn al-Haytham, Books I–III on Direct Vision*, I. London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1989, p. 209.

<sup>42</sup> King, David A.: *World Maps for Finding the Direction and Distance to of Mecca, Innovation and Tradition in Islamic Science*. Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 1999, pp. 130–132.

<sup>43</sup> Ernst, Carl: “The Spirit of Islamic Calligraphy: Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī’s *Ādāb al-mashq*,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 12, no. 2 (1992), pp. 279–286. Maryam Ekhtiar repeats this connection in reference to Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī’s treatises in “Practice Makes Perfect: The Art of Calligraphy Practices (*Siyāh Mashq*) in Iran”. *Muqarnas*, 23 (2006), pp. 107–113. For more on the connection between Islamic calligraphy and Islamic mysticism, cf. Schimmel, Anne Marie: *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture*. New York: New York University, 1984; reprinted London: I.B. Tauris, 1990.

characters. Difficult for a modern reader, the technical language espoused may be clarified once one imagines the action of writing, which also helps to secure the text's broader aesthetic concerns.

The third section of the *Ādāb al-Mashq* analyses the three levels of competence of calligraphic practice and is the section relevant for determining beauty in calligraphy. This section is divided further in three parts, visual practice (*mashq-i naẓarī*), pen practice (*mashq-i qalamī*), and intellectual or imaginative practice (*mashq-i khayālī*). The final practice, *mashq-i khayālī*, has garnered attention in art historical scholarship due to its emphasis on individuality, or what David Roxburgh suggests is the desired indexical quality of Islamic calligraphy.<sup>44</sup> Imaginative practice, according to Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī

“is when the scribe writes not according to a model but with reference to the power of his own nature, and he writes every composition that appears [to him]. The benefit of this practice is that it makes the scribe a master of spontaneity (*taṣarruf*), and when this practice mostly takes the place of pen practice, one's writing becomes non-reflective (*bī-maghz*). If someone makes a habit of pen practice and avoids imaginative practice, he lacks spontaneity, and is like the reader who grasps the writing of others but himself cannot write. Spontaneity is not permitted in pen practice.”<sup>45</sup>

This passage emphasizes a master calligrapher's ability to spontaneously and without thought write well. Translating *taṣarruf* as spontaneity fits not only Roxburgh's interest in the individual but also an emphasis on spirituality and writing as a talent performed without external cause or deliberation. In this context *taṣarruf* also means “power, control, influence, art, and cunning.”<sup>46</sup> An even fuller definition, however, would also include “changing” and “turning.”<sup>47</sup> Imbedded in these alternative translations, especially a nuanced and combined understanding of “spontaneity,” “changing,” and “turning” is an emphasis on the fleeting power of visual perception that calligraphy may hold. In regard to reception, *taṣarruf* implies that great calligraphy is only momentarily grasped as its image employs imaginative practice and perpetual change or spontaneity.

Dedicated to pen practice (*mashq-i qalamī*), the second section outlines twelve elements important to good writing. The final three elements are indicative of mastery when present and, therefore, best arrive at a comparison with ideal

<sup>44</sup> Roxburgh 2008, pp. 282–283.

<sup>45</sup> Ernst, p. 284; Roxburgh 2008, pp. 282–283; Ekhtiar, pp. 111–112. For the original, cf. Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī: *Ādāb al-mashq, bā-risāla-i naṣā'ih al-mulūk*. Tehran: Karkhana-i Mashhadi-yi Khudadd, 1317/1938, pp. 265–268. I thank Shoreh Jandaghian for kindly and patiently reading with me the *Ādāb al-Mashq* in its original Persian while I was working on my dissertation. My analysis is indebted to our discussions with regard to these materials, but any mistakes are entirely my own.

<sup>46</sup> Ernst, p. 284, note 32.

<sup>47</sup> Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, p. 305.



beauty. The first, *uṣūl* (principles) regards the skillful control of the previous nine parts. According to the text:

“All writing that contains even a little of [*uṣūl*] is precious and easily will be held dearer than jewels... It is no secret that the [first] nine parts of script are in the position of the body and *uṣūl* are in the position of the soul.

By God, you will not know the flavor of

This wine until you taste it!”<sup>48</sup>

Again, calligraphy is compared to jewels and also, here, wine, which serve as descriptors for assessing *uṣūl* (principles) or the exceptional aesthetics of a writer’s work. Taste is a key component of *uṣūl*, and the clarifying verse rests on the subjective realization of this concept. *Uṣūl* cannot exist without an audience, which complicates the spiritual emphasis prescribed to Isfahani’s text but certainly does not eliminate it. Importantly *uṣūl* is the first part of writing to shift a calligrapher’s practice from pen practice to imaginative practice and enable spontaneity or *taṣarruf*. Positioned in the soul, *uṣūl* is identified as a subjective experience like tasting wine.

The second to last part of writing further establishes the grounds for a subjective approach to calligraphy and also descriptions of paper, to which I will turn shortly. This part calls for *ṣafā* or purity, which is:

“that condition which makes the temperament happy and refreshed, and makes the eye luminous. One cannot attain it without cleaning the heart. As Mawlana [Sulṭān ‘Alī Mashhadī] said,

(Verse): Purity (*ṣafā*) of writing is from purity (*ṣafā*) of heart. Through this quality there is complete possession of [the art of] writing. Just so the human face, no matter how proportionate, is not attractive if it lacks purity. It is no secret that if principles and purity are joined with ‘authority (*sha’n*),’ some call it ‘taste (*maza*),’ and some also call it ‘effect (*aṣar*).’”<sup>49</sup>

Here Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī directly addresses taste and effect and highlights the tenuous relationship between subject and object with regards to calligraphy’s aesthetics. *Maza* implies taste as possessed or embodied by the object, which then must be sense or received by the subject.<sup>50</sup> *Aṣar*, which translates here as “effect” also suggests impression or imprint, indicates an exchange between subject and object and reasserts the aforementioned line, “one cannot attain *ṣafā* without [first] cleaning the heart.” In Persian poetry, the heart is like a mirror and must

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<sup>48</sup> Ernst, p. 283.

<sup>49</sup> Ernst, p. 283; cf. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, p. 16.

<sup>50</sup> Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, p. 1224. Here *maza* translates as taste or flavor and typically would be accompanied by the verb *dashtan* (to have).

be polished or cleaned in order to both receive and reflect the image of the beloved. The trope draws on the mirror *topos* utilized in Islamic mysticism, an important aspect of which is not necessarily achieving unity with the divine but rather the preliminary effort required.<sup>51</sup> Within this context, Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī's text gains additional spiritual weight. Taken alone, however, he calls attention to the exchange between an object and its subject. Indicative of the subject, *aṣar* must receive the impression of that which belongs to *maza*, the object. Because the quotation states that, "some call it *maza*, [while others] call it *aṣar*," Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī indicates that the two are mirror images of one another that calligraphy exists as an intermediary and an impression of both its production and consumption.

*Ṣafā* or purity of writing renders the eye clear. Stemming from the heart, which is like a mirror, *ṣafā*, thus, prepares the viewer to better see calligraphy. Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī's description of *ṣafā* nicely parallels the descriptions of the Chinese papers mentioned earlier. According to Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī, good writing was meant to "clear the eyes" or, like *ṣafā*, "make the eye luminous," and therefore improve the viewer's ability to see.<sup>52</sup> The function is preparatory and helps to support the final part of script, *sha'n*, which is characterized by the luminous sparks that the beloved emits or reflects and is by far the most intellectually elusive of the twelve parts of calligraphy.

*Sha'n*, according to Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī, builds on this idea of sight, mirror imagery, and the mystical language of annihilation or loss of self. Further it points to a psychological understanding of artistic practice and equally may be viewed as encouraging continued artistic practice regardless of the artist's religious inclination.<sup>53</sup>

"*Sha'n* is that condition in which the scribe comes enraptured from its display when it is found in writing, and he has done with egotism. When the scribe's pen possess *sha'n* (authority), heedless of the pleasures of the world, he turns his heart toward practice (*mashq*) and the luminous sparks of the real beloved's beauty appear in his vision.

[Verse]: everywhere the sparks of the beloved's face are found."<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Sells, *The Mystical Language of Unsayings*, pp. 90–92 and pp. 105–106; and Berlekamp, *Persis: Wonders, Image, & Cosmos in Medieval Iran*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2011, especially chapter three, "Mirrored Visions, Penumbral Wonders and the Position of the Viewer".

<sup>52</sup> Minorsky, *Calligraphers and Painters*, p. 52.

<sup>53</sup> Ernst is particularly interested in the spiritual implications of this passage as they relate to a concept of inner beauty, which I believe is reflected in his translation. Rather than focusing on broad spirituality, one could additionally examine the additional three parts of script, *uṣūl*, *ṣafā*, and *sha'n*, which, when added to the first nine known from earlier treatises, makes twelve and may reflect an interest in a general reverence for that number and its ties to Safavid political ideology and twelver shi'ism.

<sup>54</sup> Ernst, p. 284. Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī, *Ādāb al-Mashq*, p. 217. Literally, the passage translates: "*sha'n* is that state which when it exists in writing, the writer, from beholding it, is drawn towards

The passage suggests that the quality of *sha'n* strikes the viewer, who is, here, the calligrapher himself, and incites awe. Dazzled by his writing, the calligrapher desires to see its form again, and is driven to continued practice.<sup>55</sup> Constantly writing, he repeatedly produces the quality of *ṣafā*, which clearing the eyes enables the simultaneity of *maza* and *aṣar*. Perfect and ideal beauty in calligraphy exists somewhere between its production and consumption, and it seems that it is only momentarily grasped for it immediately encourages the process to be repeated. It is not surprising, then, that in attempting to nail down what the writer sees, Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī relies on luminous rays of light, *partāv-i anvār*, an unstable and fleeting visual image that nicely approaches this underlying concept of aesthetic instability and recalls Sulṭān 'Alī Mashhadī's description of the colored papers which "strike the eye, like looking at the sun."<sup>56</sup>

Returning to the Chinese papers, which again were understood to embellish good writing and could subsequently "clear the eye," and enable sight, one may additionally presume that these papers were intended to prepare the reader for a better experience of the text. The visual elements of the individual pages from a *Dīvān* of Ḥāfiẓ on the colored and gilded Chinese papers are such that they visually engage the calligraphic script and possibly affect its reading (fig. 3a). The painting in gold is rendered with a delicate and sensitive line that evokes spatial volume and also imbues the painting with an intangible or atmospheric lightness. These qualities enable the image to both sit behind and emerge from the text block creating a shared experience of image and text. Fully emphasizing this arrangement, the golden *va-lahu*, a term that separates the two poems, merges with the golden mountain in the background and appears to create another ridge (fig. 3b, detail).<sup>57</sup> The thickness and thinness of the letters (their strength and weakness, both elements of good calligraphy) are such that they mirror the strength and weakness of the lines in the Chinese drawing.<sup>58</sup> The juxtaposition encourages the viewer to

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it and becomes free from (his) self; when the pen of the writer becomes endowed with *sha'n*, it becomes independent from the sensual pleasures of the world/ (alternatively) it becomes enriched from the world's sensual pleasures; the face of the heart makes (turns) completely toward practice and the brilliant rays of the beautiful (face) of the true witness appear in his eyes."

<sup>55</sup> Modern Iranian scholars and practitioners of calligraphy hone in on this quality of *sha'n* and define it as the part of script that is so attractive that when seen, it encourages the writer to continually practice and produce. Cf. Ghilich-khani, Hamid Riza: *Farhang-i Vazhagān va Istilāhāt-i Khushnivi va Hunar-hā-yi Vabasta*. Tehran: Intisharat-i 'ilmi va farhangī, 1373/1995. Like poetry, calligraphy is a living tradition in Iran, and the early modern sources examined here continue to inform practice today. Both scholar and calligrapher, Ghilich-khani bases his dictionary of calligraphy terms on Sultan 'Alī Mashhadī's and Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī's treatises as well as others.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. note 10 above.

<sup>57</sup> *Va-lahu* repeatedly and routinely separates individual *ghazals* in *Dīvāns* of Ḥāfiẓ and other authors.

<sup>58</sup> Importantly, I follow Bābā Shāh Iṣfahānī's descriptions. The weak end of the letter *lām* occurs at the letter's most vertical point, where it ends at an angle corresponding with the angle of the pen. It is important to note that the horizontal strength in the letter *lām* appears visually duller.

oscillate between text and image and focus on the page as an integrated whole and urges close looking. The visual comparison acts to heighten the aesthetic relationship between the papers and excellent calligraphy, descriptions of which are not that different.

Although the black ink of the main text does not seamlessly disappear into the landscape like the *va-lahu*, features of the writing echo the calligraphic line in the gilded drawing. The horizontal extensions on the top of the *kāfs* and *gāfs*, for example run parallel to the mountain's ridge-line (fig. 3b, detail). Likewise, the tails of the *mīms* are such that they curve inward and slowly draw out to a point (fig. 3b, detail). They are especially dynamic and reminiscent of the quick stroke of a brush rather than a reed pen. This continual shift from image to text are evidence that the manuscript's pages make their point not through calligraphy and text alone but rather through the combination of materials, composition, and text.

If we consider the original sheets from which these pages were taken, it is evident that the pages' compositions relied heavily on extracting the pictorial images from their original context and, thus, refuse to capture the natural images present in their entirety. The initial Chinese sheets, reconstructed by Priscilla Soucek, show a large landscape scene and a full page of delicately rendered birds perched atop a branch of a blossoming fruit tree.<sup>59</sup> Seen as a whole, these images are clear and discernible paintings and are quite different from the fragmented images seen in the individual manuscript pages. They reflect Persianate concepts of beauty and refinement that often hold Chinese objects in especially high regard.<sup>60</sup> Once fragmented, the images are rearranged in the manuscript and are often turned on their sides. They recall their Chinese origins but equally negate their initial function as a complete painting. Unlike the larger, original paintings, the lines of these fractured images extend beyond the edge of the page. They are abstracted and suggest a visual expanse far greater than what may be seen in the original landscape, thus, leading the reader to imagine the visual possibilities not represented materially. The reader's experience is, therefore, subjective and reliant upon a combination of text and image that is never stable but constantly moving. In this way, the new Persianate papers materialize a concept of real or physically mirror the many metaphorical descriptions of beauty in the available sources on the visual arts. Fragmented and shimmering the visual recalls the ver-

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It retains the appropriate thickness or strength required of good pen practice, as outlined by Bābā Shāh Isfahānī, and also visually matches the density of gold ink in the painted mountain.

<sup>59</sup> Soucek 1988, pp. 15–16 and pp. 31–32.

<sup>60</sup> For a discussion of transcultural relations between China, Central Asia and Iran and its impact on visual culture, cf. Roxburgh, David (ed.): *Turks, a Journey of a Thousand Years, 600–1600*. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005; and Masuya, Tomoko: "Timurids, Central Asia, and Ming China, 1370–1507, Chinese and Turko-Mongol Elements in Ilkhanid and Timurid Arts, Part 2". In: *A Companion to Islamic Art and Architecture*. Eds. Finbarr Barry Flood – Gülru Necipoğlu. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017, pp. 652–667.



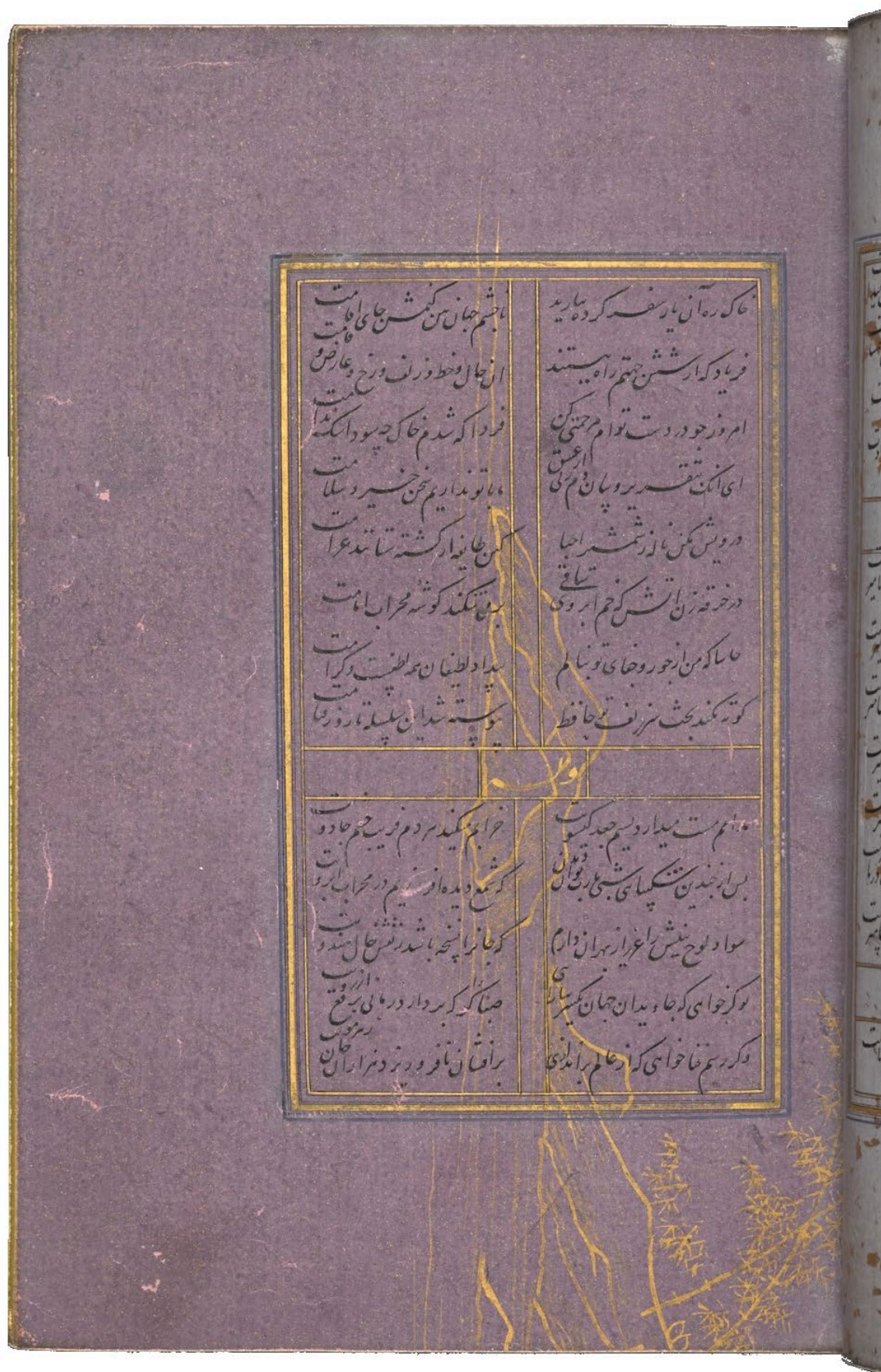
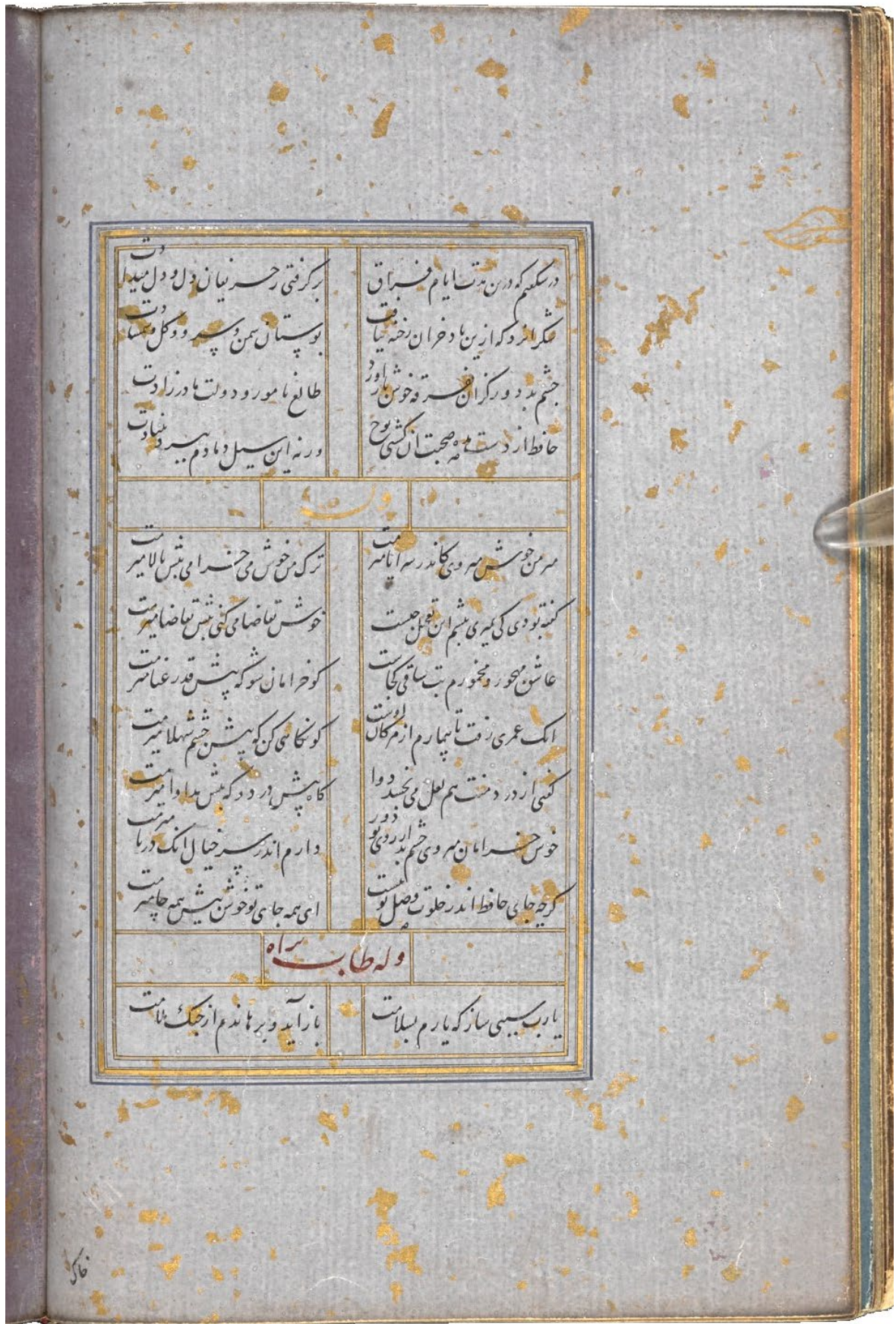


Fig. 3a: Folios 20b and 21a, Divan of Ḥāfiẓ, A.H. 855, A.D. 1451, copied by Sulayman Fushanji, London, British Library, Add. 7759





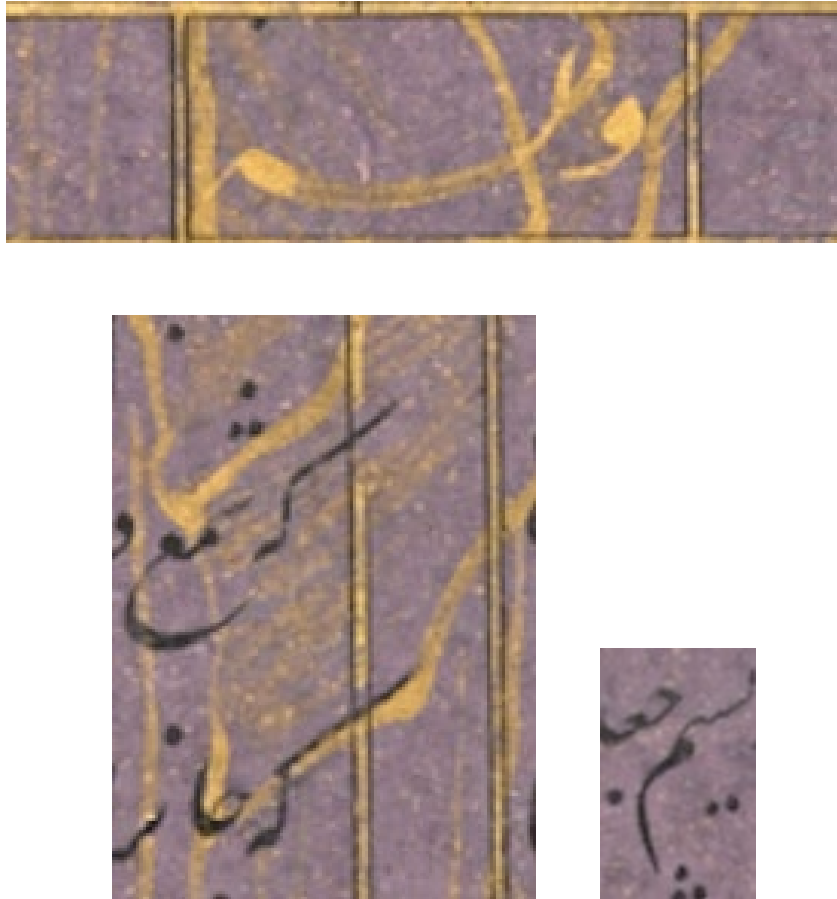


Fig. 3b: Detail from folio 21a from *Divan* of Ḥāfīz, BL Add. 7759

bal, whose own aesthetic beauty is also likened to similarly unstable material objects; recognition of content remains fleeting. The papers are, therefore, visually and materially appropriate supports for the variety of intellectually difficult poetry copied therein.

## Sources of Illustrations

Fig. 1: New York, NY, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 11.84.9 — Fig. 2: Detroit, MI, Detroit Institute of Art, acc. no. 30.323 — Fig. 3: Copied by Sulayman Fushanji, London, British Library, Add. 7759