
‘Chinese’ Paper and Margins of Gold in a Fifteenth-Century Shiraz Anthology*



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Abstract

Within the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, is a small, but especially interesting anthology of Persian poetry. Although the manuscript’s colophon is missing, the stylistic evidence of its badly damaged illustrations and illuminations indicates that it was produced in Shiraz in the 1430s or 1440s. The discussion considers two unusual features of the manuscript, the first of which is that seven folios of a type of paper, generally thought to be of Chinese manufacture, are included among its 171 folios of otherwise Islamic paper. As is typical of this so-called Chinese paper, the folios are coloured—in this case an olive green—and one is decorated with a gold painted design of what appears to be an immature fruit of some sort, along with lobed leaves on a curling vine. Equally intriguing are the scenes and patterns, painted exclusively in gold, that fill the margins of the folios throughout the manuscript. No other such margins are known in any other contemporary manuscript.

Keywords: Shiraz; Persian; Timurid; Chinese; anthology

Poetic anthologies are recognised as a specific feature of Timurid manuscript production, one that probably should be credited to the apparent penchant for such manuscripts on the part of Iskandar Sultan (d. 1415), governor of Shiraz from 1409–1414 (AH 812–816). One small, but intriguing, anthology has so far evaded scholarly attention, other than the description by B. W. Robinson in 1962 in the catalogue of the Persian manuscripts of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.¹ The small manuscript, with 171 folios measuring just

*All photographs are copyright of the Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library (CBL), Dublin. I would like to thank Sinead Ward, Jenny Greiner, and Jon Riordan of the CBL photographic services for kindly facilitating their reproduction. (A list of abbreviations is included at the end of the article.)

¹See B. W. Robinson, in A. J. Arberry, B. W. Robinson, E. Blochet and J. V. S. Wilkinson, *The Chester Beatty Library. A Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts and Miniatures. Vol. 3, MSS 221–398* (Dublin, 1962), pp. 62–63; available at https://chesterbeatty.ie/assets/uploads/2018/11/A-Catalogue-of-The-Persian-Manuscripts-and-Miniatures-Vol-III_Part1.pdf (accessed 21 April 2022). The manuscript was repaginated in 1998 to exclude from the page count the seven front- and eight back-flyleaves; therefore, the folio numbers given here do not coincide with those given by Robinson. At the time of writing, the manuscript is scheduled to be digitised and to appear online shortly; see <https://viewer.cbl.ie/viewer/> (accessed 21 April 2022). The manuscript is accession no. 643 and was purchased in

15 x 9.6 cm and bearing inventory number CBL Per 294, is not dated (the final folio is missing), but the stylistic evidence of its five illustrations and ten sets of illumination (each consisting of a *shamsa* followed by a heading) indicate that it was produced in Shiraz in the 1430s or 1440s.² The finely executed illustrations are badly damaged, as are the headings and, to a lesser degree, the *shamsas*.³ It is, however, not these aspects of the manuscript but two other, highly unusual features of it—namely the inclusion of so-called Chinese paper and gold marginal decorations—that will be discussed here.

Paper

The unusual layout of the text consists of two columns of oblique lines of *nasta'liq* script copied onto Islamic laid paper (Figure 1). Describing the colour of the paper used in a manuscript is always problematic, but Robinson's description of the paper used for the manuscript's small folios as 'pale cream, pink, yellow, coffee-colour, and green' is misleading, creating the false impression of a manuscript of brightly coloured folios. In fact, the majority of the paper is off-white in colour (or, in Robinson's terminology, pale cream), some with a slight hint of tan, others with more of a yellow tinge. A much smaller group of folios are slightly pinkish. But these are all mere hints of colour that are in fact easily overlooked, especially in low light. However, there are, indeed, dark tan, coffee-coloured folios, but only three of them.

Robinson states that the inclusion of coloured paper is 'characteristic of anthologies of the middle Timurid period' and, as anyone familiar with fifteenth-century Persian manuscripts knows, this is indeed true. To back up this statement, he lists three other manuscripts with coloured paper, and, even though he never actually says that all four employ the same type of coloured paper, the impression, though false, is that they do. The first manuscript Robinson cites is another Chester Beatty anthology, CBL Per 127, dated 1449 (AH 835) and measuring 21.2 x 7.7 cm.⁴ Anthologies in the long and narrow format of this manuscript are known by

France for £13. No date of acquisition is recorded but based on those of other manuscripts recorded at the same time, it was probably bought in May or June of 1955. I would like to thank Hyder Abbas of the CBL for kindly providing this information.

²The illustrations occur on ff. 88a, 120b, 141b, 149a, and 161a; the illuminations are on ff. 1, 27, 36, 40, 54, 73, 102, 152, 170, and 171. The *shamsas* are in the well-known style of Shiraz, typified by tiny, un-outlined floral motifs in gold on a dark blue ground; what little is visible of the original, undamaged headings indicates they were in the floral/palmette-arabesque style that appeared in Shiraz in the early 1430s and which used a broader palette and made greater use of the palmette-arabesque than the earlier blue-and-gold Shiraz style of the *shamsas*. As here, these two illumination styles were frequently used side-by-side in manuscripts. See Elaine Wright, *The Look of the Book: Manuscript Production in Shiraz, 1303–1452*. Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers, New Series, Vol. 3 (Washington DC, Seattle and Dublin, 2012), pp. 106–111 and figs. 63–68 and 70.

³The manuscript as a whole has suffered considerable damage: most folios are water stained, mainly at the upper edge; frequently the outer edge of a folio has been patched (e.g. ff. 142, 146, 148 and 169) with, where necessary, the marginal decoration being repainted using a now-green pigment, probably some sort of tarnished metallic pigment originally intended to replicate gold (e.g. on ff. 54–65 and 75–80); the same now-green pigment has been used to decorate the margins of two replacement folios (ff. 137–38), as well as the margins of the 'modern' flyleaves at the beginning and end of the manuscript (see note 1, above); the main body of all headings, except the one on f. 102b, has been overpainted with this now-green pigment; and there appear to be both disordered and missing folios throughout the manuscript.

⁴For CBL Per 127, see A. J. Arberry, M. Minovi and E. Blochet, *The Chester Beatty Library. A Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts and Miniatures. Vol. I, MSS 101–150* (Dublin, 1959), pp. 55–57; and also Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles and Washington DC, 1989), p. 202 and cat. no. 103, p. 350. Two other *safinas* with paper decorated in this same manner, both

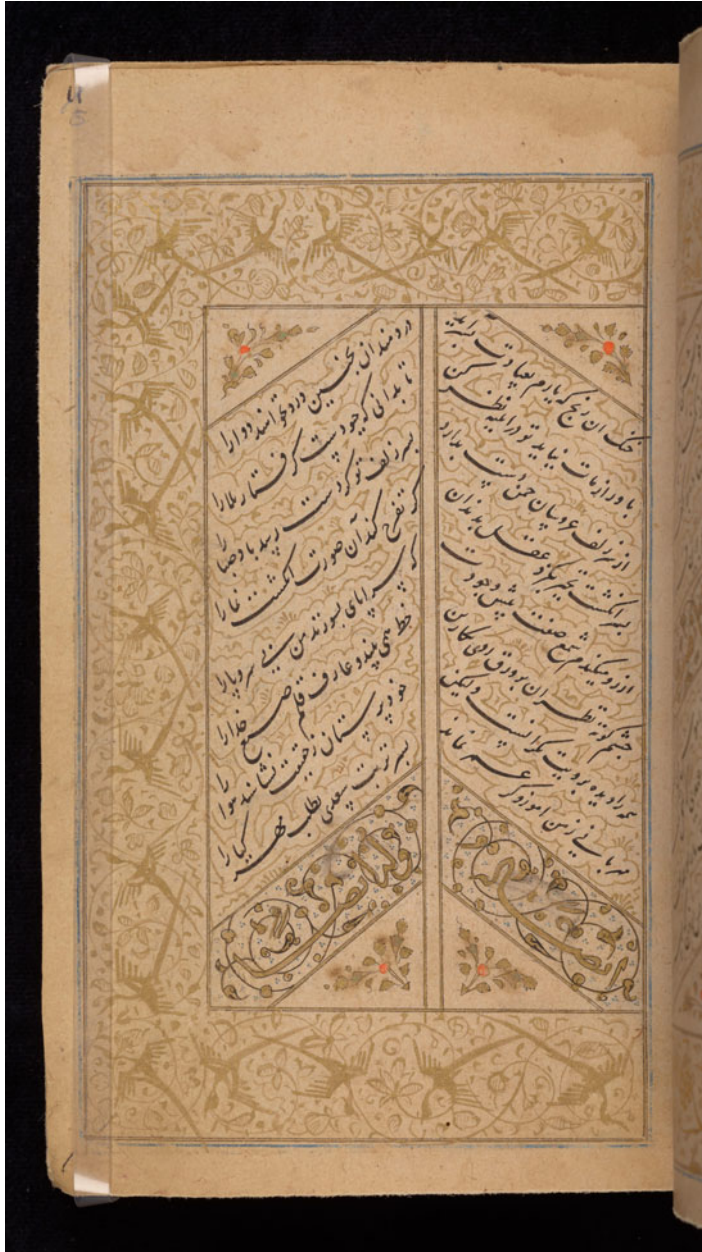


Figure 1. CBL Per 294, f. 5a.

in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Suppl. persan 1798, *circa* 1450, and Suppl. persan 1425, *circa* 1480), are reproduced in Francis Richard, *Splendeurs persanes, Manuscrits du XII au XVII siècle* (Paris, 1997), no. 49, p. 83 and no. 55, pp. 88–89 and 100, respectively.

the term *safina*; they were especially popular in the fifteenth century and are well-known for their usual inclusion of at least some coloured pages, usually in medium shades of mauve or a pinky-peach/salmon colour but in other, darker colours as well. Thus, unlike the barely coloured paper of CBL Per 294, these coloured pages are a prominent feature of any manuscript in which they occur. Moreover, typically they are decorated with stencilled patterns, left in reserve, with the coloured pigment filling the surrounding ground, though confined to the framed text area of the page, leaving the margins of the page uncoloured. The colour therefore is not part of the fabric of the paper, as are the mere hints of colour in most of the paper of CBL Per 294, but has merely been applied as surface decoration.

The third manuscript Robinson offers as a comparative example of an anthology with coloured paper is the well-known one produced in Shamakhi (Shirvan) in 1468 (AH 873), with folios that measure 23.2 x 13 cm, now in the British Library (Add 16561; see App. A.7).⁵ It consists exclusively of bright, intensely coloured folios of mauve, pink, or yellow-green paper, which again is not in the least like the paper of CBL Per 294 described above or even that of the *safina*, CBL Per 127. Moreover, the paper is a distinct and highly identifiable type, generally thought to be of Chinese manufacture, though no definitive proof of its origin has as yet been found.⁶ Surprisingly, seven folios of this same type of paper are included in CBL Per 294: ff. 72, 133–134 and 165–168 (Figure 2). All are an olive-green colour of medium intensity. Robinson seems not to have noticed the difference between these seven folios and all the others in the manuscript (or, for that matter, the difference between this type of paper and that used in the *safina*, CBL Per 127), having simply included 'green' in his list of paper colours.

Including BL Add 16561, a total of 17 manuscripts consisting of this type of paper exclusively are currently known,⁷ while individual sheets of 'Chinese' paper—74 of calligraphy and one with a drawing—are included in two albums in Istanbul.⁸ Paper of this type may be undecorated or decorated with large flecks of gold and/or various gold designs, with both types of decoration appearing to have been added at the time the paper was manufactured, or at least at some point before it was purchased or otherwise obtained for use in any

⁵Robinson identifies the second of the three manuscripts (the current location of which is unknown) as no. XXII in his 1953 unpublished catalogue: B. W. Robinson, 'The Kevorkian Collection, Islamic and Indian Illustrated Manuscripts, Miniatures and Drawings'. It has not been possible to obtain a copy of the catalogue, but it is said to indicate that the manuscript is written on the same type of Chinese paper as BL Add 16561; see Denise-Marie Teece, 'Vessels of Verse, Ships of Song: Persian Anthologies of the Qara Quyunlu and Aq Quyunlu Period', unpublished PhD dissertation, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 2013, p. 242.

⁶The earliest reference to paper of this type being of Chinese manufacture appears to have been Armenag Sakisian (see App.B.a) followed a few years later by M. Aga-Oğlu (see App.B.b).

⁷CBL Per 294 is the only manuscript known to me that includes only a few folios of 'Chinese' paper. Twelve manuscripts consisting only of 'Chinese' paper have previously been published and are listed in the Appendix, along with bibliographic sources. However, new research currently underway has revealed other, as yet unpublished, manuscripts. Ilse Sturkenboom (Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich) and Yusen Yu (University of St. Andrew's) are currently engaged in (separate) studies of so-called Chinese paper. At the workshop 'Decorated Papers in Early Modern Islamic Manuscript Culture', sponsored by The Islamic Manuscript Association, held on 23 November 2019 in Istanbul, each presented a paper on the current state of their research, noting, between them, five manuscripts previously unknown to me: Sarikhani Collection, London, Ms 1029; National Museum of Tehran, Mss 3598 and 4236; Suleymaniye Library, Istanbul, AS 4334; and Tareq Rajab Museum, Kuwait (inv. no. unknown).

⁸See App.B.e; Tanındı notes that these separate sheets of paper, which 'may be green, violet, blue, pink and dark blue', are mainly the work of Qara Quyunlu and Aq Quyunlu calligraphers.



Figure 2. CBL Per 294, f. 134a.

particular manuscript. In the British Library's Shamakhi Anthology, openings with facing pages decorated with large flecks of gold alternate with those that have no 'Chinese' decoration at all. The earliest known manuscript with paper of this type—all in shades of grey—is a *Kulliyat* of Sa'di in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, dated 1437 (AH 840; BOD

Pers. e. 26; App.A.1), and likewise in this manuscript openings with no gold decoration almost always alternate with decorated ones. However, here the decoration is either flecks of gold or a variety of designs meticulously painted in gold: landscapes of mountains and trees (in one case including a Chinese-style building), swirling waves, and depictions of fruit on the stem or vine, including pomegranates, small melons, and what appear to be cherries or grapes. By contrast, of the seven folios in the Chester Beatty Anthology, only one page—f. 134a—has original, 'Chinese' gold decoration, in this case what appears to be an immature fruit of some sort and lobed leaves on a curling vine (see [Figure 2](#)).⁹

This graceful gold painting begins at the upper edge of the page and extends downwards for about three-quarters of the length of the page, but clearly it is only a section of a larger, more complete design. This is typical of the gold designs found in other manuscripts of 'Chinese' paper, wherein the design on any one page most often consists of a few, often incomplete elements surrounded either by large areas with no decoration at all or only gold sprinkles. Among the most extreme of such examples are a lone, bare branch emerging uncomfortably from the lower, gutter edge of a page (e.g. BL Add 7759, f. 30b; App.A.6) and a few short wavy lines enigmatically positioned down the long outer edge of a page (e.g. BOD Pers. e. 26, f. 179a), with the remainder of each page decorated with gold sprinkles only. Priscilla Soucek has reconstructed several of the sheets of 'Chinese' paper from which were cut the bifolios used in a copy of *Makhzan al-asrar*, dated 1478 (AH 833) and now in the New York Public Library (Persian Ms. 41; App.A.9).¹⁰ These reconstructions make clear what is suggested by the incomplete designs on the folios of all such manuscripts, namely that, curiously, these were large and expansive designs that were never intended to be confined to a single page, or even to a single bifolio.

As for the seven folios in the Chester Beatty Anthology, it was surely mere chance that only one page is decorated with a 'Chinese' gold design, the other folios simply having been cut from blank areas of otherwise decorated sheets. This would have been possible especially because of the small size of the folios and bifolios.¹¹ Indeed, the fact that so few folios are included, when all other known such manuscripts consist solely of this type of paper, suggests that these few folios were probably cut from the remains of sheets of paper used for another, larger manuscript. In other words, they were mere scraps, although expensive and very precious scraps.

Like all such paper, each of these 'scraps' has an exceedingly sleek and smooth, almost porcelain-like, finish. Islamic paper is typically sized with starch (often wheat starch), which, when highly burnished, results in a smooth and characteristically hard surface. However, the surface of this 'Chinese' paper is different, having a silky sort of feel not typical

⁹Of the other folios of 'Chinese' paper, some have margins filled with the types of painted gold decoration discussed below and which is contemporary with the production of the manuscript, either landscape scenes (ff. 72a, 133a, 165a, 166b and 167a) or large floral motifs (ff. 134b and 168b); the margins of the other folios are filled merely with tiny sprinkles of gold paint (ff. 72b, 133b, 165b, 166a) or both gold sprinkles and a tiny sort of floral motif (ff. 167b and 168a), probably also contemporary with the production of the manuscript.

¹⁰See App.B.g, pp. 15–16 and figs. 15, 17 and 19. Soucek's argument suggests that the size of the two sheets of paper used was dictated by the intended size of the bifolios. The problem of manufacturing such long, unseamed sheets of paper (the larger of the two is suggested to have been 44 x 280 cm) needs to be considered.

¹¹Folio 72 of CBL Per 294 is a single 'tipped in' folio, while ff. 134 and 135 form a bifolio; however, the rebinding of the manuscript is too tight to be able to determine if the other folios are 'tipped in' singles or bifolios.

of Islamic paper and lacking its hardness. The paper is also unusually heavy. If, when turning the pages of a manuscript, a folio of typical Islamic paper—or indeed of almost any type of paper—is held upright and then released, it generally falls with, at most, only a very slight curving or bending, being capable (more or less) of supporting its own weight. This is true also of the seven olive-green folios of CBL Per 294 and those of other manuscripts of a similar small size, such as the NYPL manuscript, which consists solely of light blue folios measuring 18 x 10.5 cm, and the slightly larger BL Shamakhi Anthology. Although the unusual weight of individual folios is not evident in these small-format volumes, it is very apparent in folios of a larger size, such as those of the two companion volumes of the poems of Farid al-Din ‘Attar in Istanbul with folios in rich shades of pink, purple, orange/peach, and grey, and now measuring 35.9 x 24.3 cm (*Sitta* of ‘Attar, TPL A.III 3059; App.A.2) and 34.5 x 25.9 cm (*Khamsa* of ‘Attar, TIEM 1992; App.A.). Both volumes were made for the Timurid ruler, Shah Rukh (d. 1447/850), although only the one in the Topkapi Library is dated, to 1438 (AH 841). In turning the pages of these two manuscripts, each folio must be fully supported: if left to fall on its own, it will curve and bend dramatically, the sheet of paper being unable to support its own weight. Of course, when even a small manuscript consisting only of paper of this type is lifted, its unusual weight, as a whole, is immediately obvious. It has, in the past, been suggested that the very smooth surface finish and weight of the paper might be the result of the application of a lead¹² or a clay¹³ glaze, while Barbara Schmitz refers to the paper of the NYPL manuscript as ‘waxed’.¹⁴ Recent scientific testing of the Bodleian manuscript has, however, revealed that the paper has a very high lead content.¹⁵

Marginal decoration

Throughout the manuscript, the margins of the folios are filled with an array of scenes and patterns rendered entirely in gold and apparently executed freehand.¹⁶ Of these two basic types of decoration, the more prevalent is landscape scenes. Most consist of dense vegetation, in which trees play a prominent role, in particular the especially tall and straight trees of the long outer side margins and those that are dramatically bent to fit within the shallow height of the upper and lower margins (Figure 3). Populating these landscapes is a variety of animals and birds (Figure 4), as well as other beings, both human and celestial (angels) or mythical (simurghs, dragons, and horse-headed bipeds). Repeat patterns fill the margins of other pages, and these most often consist of blossoms and leaves on an interlaced or scrolling

¹²The late Don Baker, personal conversation with the author, July 1994.

¹³A. F. L. Beeston speaking in reference to BOD Pers. e. 26 (see App.B.c), and, speaking more generally, Wright (see App.B.n).

¹⁴See App.B.i.

¹⁵The paper of BOD Pers. e. 26 was tested in early 2019 using X-ray fluorescence spectrometry (XRF). I am grateful to David Howell, Head of Heritage Science, and Marinita Stiglitz, Head of Paper Conservation, at the Bodleian Libraries, for kindly providing me with the test results. A third paper presented at the 2019 Istanbul workshop (see note 7, above), by Claudia Colini (University of Hamburg), who is working with Ilse Sturkenboom, discussed the preliminary results of a project concerning the scientific testing of paper used in Islamic manuscripts, including ‘Chinese’ paper. The results for the ‘Chinese’ paper tested so far are in line with those of the Bodleian tests, with the precise source of the lead not yet determined.

¹⁶But see note 9, above.



Figure 3. CBL Per 294, f. 107b.

arabesque vine (Figure 5). Often various beings, especially birds, populate the arabesque vine, in which case the blossoms and leaves are small, merely filling the background rather than being the dominant element of the pattern (see Figure 1). In neither of these two types



Figure 4. CBL Per 294, f. 22b.

of decoration—landscape scenes and repeat patterns—are any of the elements and motifs outlined, and if interior parts, such as eyes, are delineated, this is usually achieved merely through the absence of pigment, with many forms therefore depicted largely in silhouette. The manipulation of the colour, density, and surface finish of gold typical of all-gold borders

of Safavid and Ottoman manuscripts of later years is absent here. Human figures often have elongated torsos, as in Jalayrid paintings, and wear the tight-fitting caps (see Figure 4) seen in both Jalayrid and early Timurid paintings. Non-human figures can be slightly odd, likewise with elongated bodies (see the lower margin of Figure 3) or perhaps unusually long and thin necks, while swimming or seated ducks, as well as other birds, are often little more than a quickly executed S- or Z-shape (see the long outer margin of Figure 3). Or, animals might be correctly proportioned but awkwardly positioned. The oddities of the various elements create an immediate impression that the marginal decoration has all been hastily executed by someone not overly skilled, but closer contemplation generates a more positive view of the presumably lone artist responsible for it. Considerable care was clearly needed to execute the many minute details of the vegetation of the landscapes, and, despite the repetition of the same motifs and elements, the variation in the details, in both the landscapes and the intriguing array of patterns used for all other margins, suggests the margins are the product of a fertile and agile imagination.

As Robinson points out, these are the earliest known examples of a type of marginal decoration—namely, executed solely in gold—that otherwise does not appear in Persian manuscripts until the sixteenth century.¹⁷ However, while a harbinger of what is to come, certain elements of the margins hark back to the decoration of earlier Shiraz manuscripts. The first of these is the manuscript generally referred to as the Bihbihani Anthology, after the calligrapher, Mansur ibn Muhammad Bihbihani, whose name, along with the date 1398 (AH 801), is recorded in the manuscript's colophon. Now in Istanbul (TIEM 1950), the manuscript is a product of Shiraz. Ten of its eleven paintings are landscapes devoid of human figures, which are rightly described by Bernard O'Kane as being 'among the most intriguing in Islamic art'.¹⁸ As O'Kane has shown, a propensity for landscapes was a feature of painting during the period of Muzaffarid rule (1353–93/754–95), both in manuscripts and architectural decoration.¹⁹ While there are no exact parallels between the landscapes of this manuscript and those in the margins of the Chester Beatty Anthology, there are clear reminiscences of the former in the latter, the most obvious of which are the tall, straight-trunked trees that are so much a feature of the paintings of the earlier anthology. Many of the tree trunks in the paintings of the Bihbihani Anthology are entwined by what O'Kane describes as a 'waving tendril of boa-like vegetation'²⁰ consisting of densely spaced green leaves on a thin and barely noticeable red stem.²¹ Wrapped around other trees, however, are longer and thicker

¹⁷However, in these later examples the gold is generally manipulated as indicated above.

¹⁸Bernard O'Kane, 'The Bihbihani Anthology and its antecedents', *Oriental Art* 45.4 (1999–2000), p. 9; available at <https://aucegypt.academia.edu/BernardOKane> (accessed 21 April 2022).

¹⁹According to O'Kane, 'the landscape miniatures of the Bihbihani Anthology can . . . be considered the culmination of the outdoor aesthetic of the Muzaffarid style of painting'; O'Kane, 'The Bihbihani Anthology', p. 12. Although TIEM 1950 is dated a few years after the end of Muzaffarid rule, it is still very much a Muzaffarid manuscript in terms of its style and overall aesthetic; indeed, many years earlier, in 1382 (AH 783), and thus working for a Muzaffarid patron, the scribe of TIEM 1950 signed the colophon of the *Shahnama* section of a composite manuscript made in Shiraz (TPL H. 1510); see O'Kane, 'The Bihbihani Anthology', p. 11, and, especially, Priscilla Soucek and Filiz Çağman, 'A royal manuscript and its transformation: the life history of a book', in *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, (ed.) George N. Atiyeh (Albany, 1995), pp. 182, 186 and fig. 10.2.

²⁰O'Kane, 'The Bihbihani Anthology', p. 12.

²¹For example, f. 180b, reproduced in O'Kane, 'The Bihbihani Anthology', fig. 2.

vines, usually a deep red, that are devoid of vegetation except at their upper reaches.²² It is trees encircled by this latter type of vine, in which the stem itself is visually prominent, that are clearly recalled in so many pages of the Chester Beatty Anthology, although there it is always an entirely leafless vine that wraps itself around straight-stemmed trees placed within the long outer margin (see Figure 3).²³ The type of tree itself varies, but of particular note are trees with distinctive feathery leaves, of the type depicted in Figure 3, and probably intended as types of willow, which also feature prominently in the Bihbihani manuscript.²⁴ Whether or not the artist of the Chester Beatty margins was looking directly back to the Bihbihani Anthology and other Muzaffarid manuscripts in which similar types of paintings appear²⁵ or to now-lost intermediary models is impossible to say.²⁶ Nevertheless, although relegated to the margins, the manuscript's focus on painted landscapes is highly unusual for its time. It is, however, about the same time as the margins were painted that landscapes populated with animals and birds—both real and mythical—began to appear stamped onto the exterior covers of bindings, as on the binding of the 1438 *Sitta* of 'Attar manuscript, mentioned earlier for its use of folios of 'Chinese' paper.²⁷ These landscapes in leather may also have been a source of inspiration for the Chester Beatty artist.

The second manuscript to which the marginal decoration of CBL Per 294 appears to be greatly indebted is the well-known anthology produced in 1410–11 (AH 813–14) for the Timurid prince and then governor of Shiraz, Iskandar Sultan (BL Add 27261).²⁸ The relative fame of Iskandar's so-called London Anthology is in large part due to its decorated margins, even though on less than six per cent of its pages (or folio sides) are the margins actually filled with decoration.²⁹ On only two (facing) pages are the margins decorated with a treed landscape (ff. 414b–415a), and these are very different to the many landscapes that fill the margins of the Chester Beatty Anthology. In the latter, a complete landscape appears in each of the

²²For example, f. 181a, reproduced in O'Kane, 'The Bihbihani Anthology', fig. 2.

²³Included among the many pages of CBL Per 294 on which this motif occurs are ff. 3b, 13b, 27b, 34b, 52b, 94b, 95a, 99b, 103b, 105b, 107b, 114b, 115b, and 130a. On other pages, such as ff. 100a, 113a, and 116a, the tree trunk itself curves, also recalling, though to a much lesser extent of course, the vine-wrapped trees of the Bihbihani Anthology.

²⁴For example, ff. 85b and 181a, reproduced in O'Kane, 'The Bihbihani Anthology', figs. 3 and 2, respectively.

²⁵For example, see the sole landscape painting to have survived intact in the *Khamsa* of Nizami portion of a composite manuscript (for which also see note 19, above), now in the Topkapi Palace Library (H. 1510, f. 682b); the date in the colophon of this section of the manuscript has been altered, but was probably 1374–75 (AH 776). See Soucek and Çağman 'A royal manuscript', pp. 182, 192 and fig. 10.8; and also O'Kane, 'The Bihbihani Anthology', pp. 9–11.

²⁶Also of interest are three paintings in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery detached from an anthology, the current location of which is unknown. As noted in the catalogue description of the paintings, they relate in many ways to Muzaffarid paintings, while the landscape details in two of them (but in particular cat. no. 50) especially recall the landscapes of the Bihbihani Anthology. The authors have assigned the paintings to Iran, along with the date 1417–18 (AH 820), noting that a Sultanate provenance has also been suggested. See Glenn D. Lowry and Milo Cleveland Beach, *An Annotated and Illustrated Checklist of the Vever Collection* (Washington DC and Seattle, 1988), cat. nos. 48–50, pp. 37–38.

²⁷Reproduced in Oktay Aslanapa, 'The art of bookbinding', in *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia, 14th–16th Centuries*, (ed.) Basil Gray (London, 1979), fig. 39 (and figs. 42–43 for similar bindings of the same period); and in Aga-Oğlu (see App.B.b).

²⁸See http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_27261 (accessed 21 April 2022).

²⁹Unlike the Chester Beatty Anthology, the text of the London Anthology is arranged as a central block of text with a marginal column on its three outer sides filled with oblique lines of text. The pages on which this marginal column is filled with decoration, not text, all occur in the second half of the manuscript: ff. 339a–345a, 403b–420a, 533b, 534b–539a, 540a, 541b, and 542b.

upper and lower margins of a page, with ground, sky, animals, and trees included. The tall trees of the long outer margin serve to link these seemingly separate scenes, creating what can then be imagined as a single continuous scene. Notably, the trees and plants are shown in their entirety, but on the two pages in Iskandar's anthology they are not, with the lower portion of all but a few trunks and stems being cut off and seemingly hidden behind the large block of text. It is therefore not with this but with the second type of decoration used to fill the margins of the Chester Beatty Anthology that parallels with Iskandar's anthology are found.

Of the many different patterns included in the margins of CBL Per 294, some of the most striking are arabesque vines incorporating birds, usually with exceptionally long tails. Sometimes the birds are an actual part of the vine, which enters through the bird's tail feathers and emerges from its beak. But other times, as in [Figure 1](#), the birds instead appear to create a second, upper layer of interlacement, their crossed, elongated tails and long arched necks creating a rhythmic, wave-like movement across the width/length of the margin equal to that created by the scrolling arabesque vine. Both types of pattern are first seen in the margins of Iskandar's London Anthology, on ff. 406a and 407b, and also in the upper band of decoration on f. 543b. Related to these are two other examples from the London Anthology (ff. 407a and 408a), where the long-tailed birds are partially hidden behind large blossoms or leaves. That on f. 407a is especially interesting, as it is closely paralleled by a pattern that appears on numerous pages of the Chester Beatty Anthology, though minus the birds ([Figure 5](#)). In the Iskandar version, large blue leaves with lobed edges are the most prominent element, again creating a wave-like pattern as they force the eye to travel across, down/up, and across the margin. The artist of CBL Per 294 has created a slightly more elongated leaf with a serrated edge, but it, too, as in the Iskandar version, is an actual part of the vine, not merely attached to it, and this and its prominence creates the same sense of movement as in the earlier version. The artist has, moreover, copied the earlier artist with regard to the types of smaller blossoms chosen to fill the surrounding ground.

Two of the most appealing margins in Iskandar's anthology appear on folios 405b and 408b. On the former, split palmettes are arranged to form an enclosed space that contains either a leonine face or a large lotus blossom.³⁰ Between these medallion-like spaces are pairs of birds with long, crossed tails, whose bodies are twisted to create other, smaller spaces, which, though not totally enclosed, nevertheless resemble medallions or shields. On folio 408b, some of the enclosed medallion-like spaces are again formed by the careful arrangement of split-palmettes, but paired fish surprisingly form the contour of alternate medallions. Roughly similar types of pattern, in numerous variations, exist in the Chester Beatty Anthology, although the main repeated unit is not the fully enclosed, and thus tightly defined, space of the Iskandar margins, but rather a collection of many, often more freely floating, motifs. Nevertheless, in both, the repeated unit is either defined by and/or encloses one or more figures. For example, on two facing pages, ff. 37b ([Figure 6](#)) and 38a, there is a repeat pattern consisting of a seated, cross-legged winged angel with outstretched arms contained within a

³⁰In many margins, both in Iskandar's anthology and that in the Chester Beatty, the pattern has been altered somewhat to fit within the long outer margin, as is the case here, on f. 405b, where the leonine faces do not appear in the long outer margin. (Generally, descriptions given here are of a pattern as it appears in the upper and lower margins of a page.)



Figure 5. CBL Per 294, f. 145b

space loosely defined by the vine and animal heads of a surrounding *waqwaq* (a vine populated with human and animal heads). Similarly, on two other pages, the repeated unit consists of a *waqwaq* surrounding a single bird with outstretched wings on one (f. 31b) and surrounding paired birds with crossed tails on the other (f. 2a).

Although examples of the *waqwaq* are known on Islamic metalwork and other media from at least the thirteenth century,³¹ the earliest painted examples appear to be those in Iskandar's anthology, such as the one in the margins of f. 536a. Others, with animal heads only, appear elsewhere in the manuscript: in three so-called thumbpieces (on ff. 10b, 20a, and 28a) and in one of the central medallions on f. 543a, while on f. 405b a greatly abbreviated *waqwaq* emerges from the mouth of each leonine head. Like other motifs in the margins of Iskandar's anthology, such as paired birds with crossed tails and paired fish, the *waqwaq* appears in other Timurid manuscripts, but especially anthologies in the *safina* format.³² *Waqwaqs* occur in the margins of several pages of the Chester Beatty Anthology, but most often serving only a secondary role, as in Figure 6.

Overly large blossoms on long, streamer-like stems wend their way through the margins of many pages of CBL Per 294 (Figure 7), with both the types of blossoms depicted and their precise arrangement within the margins closely mirroring the margins of f. 412a of Iskandar's anthology. Parallels with other margins within the earlier anthology are less certain. For example, the palmette-arabesque on f. 73a of the Chester Beatty Anthology is a close match for that on f. 420a of Iskandar's manuscript (with a slightly less close match on f. 411a), but palmette-arabesques are so prevalent in Islamic art that it is difficult to claim that the earlier anthology might have provided the model for the later one. Parallels with, and possible models for, many other margins in CBL Per 294 do not exist in the Bihbihani Anthology, Iskandar's anthology, or seemingly in any other known manuscript, and so these may be original creations of the Chester Beatty artist. These include cloud bands arranged in a zigzag pattern (e.g. f. 27a) and an array of arabesque patterns, some including figures such as prancing angels (e.g. ff. 41b–42a). It is, however, the myriad details included within the landscapes that are especially beguiling: benign displays of the many varied types of creatures included in the manuscript, such as harpies (f. 43a); pastoral scenes, such as that of figures herding rows of camels (ff. 60b–61a); somewhat amusing scenes, such as that of two large and angry roosters confronting one another in the upper margin of a folio (though while a hunter shoots a gazelle in the lower margin) (see Figure 4); and ferocious displays of animals, usually simurghs and dragons, attacking one another (e.g. f. 42b; see also the lower margin of Figure 3). Occasionally facing pages form pairs (though they are never precisely identical), but whether this was originally the norm has not yet been determined, many of the folios now appearing to be disordered.

The illustrations and illuminations of the Chester Beatty Anthology are in the usual Shiraz styles of the time, and even if these had been the extent of the manuscript's decoration, when new, it would have been a fine, if small, manuscript. However, before production of the manuscript actually began, decisions were clearly made to increase the visual appeal—and overall prestige—of the manuscript beyond that of most other illustrated and illuminated manuscripts of its time. Although only briefly mentioned above, the least of these

³¹See Esin Atil, W. T. Chase and Paul Jett, *Islamic Metalwork in the Freer Gallery of Art* (Washington DC, 1985), pp. 137 and 140, for a metal bowl made in Egypt or Syria for Sultan Najm al-Din Ayyub in about 1240.

³²See CBL 127.153b, a detached folio from the *safina* dated 1449, referred to previously (see note 4, above), and CBL Per 292.5, an undated folio possibly also detached from a *safina*. On both of these, paired fish form a medallion shape around the head of a div. For *waqwaqs*, see an unpublished and undated, but fifteenth-century, *safina*, BL Or. 13193, ff. 28a and 64b–65a.



Figure 6. CBL Per 294, f. 37b.

decisions surely concerned the layout of the text, which is unusual. The obliquely positioned, upward- or downward-facing lines of script may impede easy reading of the text, but their arrangement is appealing and memorable precisely because it is so unusual. The two volumes of ‘Attar’s poems, made for Shah Rukh, each consist exclusively of



Figure 7. CBL Per 294, f. 122a

large folios of 'Chinese' paper. Even if the seven small folios included in CBL Per 294 are, as suggested, mere scraps, salvaged from the production of a larger, now-lost manuscript, the inclusion of such a luxurious and exotic product among the pages of an otherwise 'ordinary'

manuscript was undoubtedly seen as a means of increasing the manuscript's overall prestige, and perhaps also—and more specifically—as a means of symbolically linking the small manuscript to royal production in Herat, the Timurid capital. But certainly the boldest and most innovative decision was that the margins of each and every page should be decorated with a vast array of scenes and patterns executed exclusively in gold, something unknown in any other contemporary surviving manuscript and something that definitely raised the manuscript above the level of 'ordinary'. As intriguing as the mere existence of the decorated margins is the obvious response of so many of them to Iskandar's earlier, highly prestigious London Anthology. We do not know who the patron of the CBL Anthology was—nor do we know the exact date of its production—but the most obvious possible person is, of course, Iskandar's cousin, Ibrahim-Sultan ibn Shah Rukh, a patron of fine manuscripts himself, who also served as governor of Shiraz, from shortly after the end of the rebellious Iskandar's governorship in 1414 (AH 816) until his death in 1435 (AH 838).³³

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³³For details of Iskandar's life, see Priscilla Soucek, 'Eskandar Solṭān', in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. VIII, Fasc. 6, pp. 603–604; available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/eskandar-soltan> (accessed 21 April 2022); and for the life of Ibrahim-Sultan, see Priscilla Soucek, 'Ebrāhīm Solṭān', in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. VIII, Fasc. 1, pp. 76–78; available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ebrahim-soltan> (accessed 21 April 2022).

Abbreviations

BL: British Library, London

BOD: Bodleian Library, Oxford

CBL: Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

NYPL: New York Public Library

TIEM: Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum (Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi), Istanbul

TPL: Topkapi Palace Library, Istanbul

Appendix

A: Previously published manuscripts copied exclusively on 'Chinese' paper (citations refer to sources listed in B below)

1. BOD Pers. e. 26, *Kulliyat* of Sa'di, dated 1437 (AH 840), and see <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/p/cdf9a3de-9551-4128-b675-f192f484d042> (accessed 21 April 2022) (cited in c, l and n).
2. TPL A. III 3059, *Sitta* of 'Attar, 1438 (841), for Shah Rukh (cited in a-b, e-l and n).
3. TIEM no. 1992, *Khamsa* of 'Attar, n.d., but *circa* 1438, for Shah Rukh (cited in a-b, h-l and m).
4. TIEM 41, Qur'an, n.d., but poss. *circa* 1440 (cited in a, g, l-m and o).
5. Detroit Institute of Arts, No. 30.323, Qur'an, n.d., but *circa* 1440, and see <https://www.dia.org/art/collection/object/quran-49203> (accessed 21 April 2022) (cited in i-j and l).
6. BL Add 7759, *Divan* of Hafiz, 1451 (855), and see http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?index=0&ref=Add_MS_7759 (accessed 21 April 2022) (cited in i-j and l).
7. BL 16561, Anthology, 1468 (873), and see http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_16561&index=5 (accessed 21 April 2022) (cited in e, g, i-j and l).
8. TPL M. 100, Qur'an, n.d., but poss. *c.* 1470 (cited in a, f, i-j and l).
9. NYPL Spencer Collection Persian Ms. 41, *Makhzan al-asrar*, 1478 (883) (cited in d, f-g and i-l).
10. Sotheby's, 26 April 1995, lot 29, Qur'an, n.d., but poss. *circa* 1480 (cited in j).
11. Christie's, *Islamic and Indian Manuscripts*, 5 May 1977, lot 56, a treatise on Sufism by Abu al-Vafa ibn Sa'id ibn Muhammad ibn Yusuf ibn Mahmud, n.d. (cited in f-g, i-j and l).
12. Christie's, *Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds including Oriental Rugs and Carpets*, 2 April 2020 (catalogue date) and 25 June 2020 (re-scheduled sale date), lot 29, Qur'an, n.d.

B: Bibliography for manuscripts listed in A above (arranged by publication date)

- a. Armenag Sakisian, *La miniature persane du XIIe au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1929), p. 56.
- b. M. Aga-Oğlu, *Persian Bookbindings of the Fifteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, 1935), caption for pl. 1.
- c. A. F. L. Beeston, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindustani and Pushtu Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library. Part III, Additional Persian Manuscripts* (Oxford, 1954), no. 2579, p. 29.
- d. Priscilla Soucek, 'The arts of calligraphy', in *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia, 14th–16th Centuries*, (ed.) Basil Gray (London, 1979), pp. 22, fig. IV and 30.

- e. Zeren Tanındı, 'Some problems of two Istanbul albums, H. 2153 and 2160', *Islamic Art* I (1981), pp. 37–38.
- f. Norah M. Titley, *Persian Miniature Painting and Its Influence on the Art of Turkey and India* (London, 1983), pp. 240–241.
- g. Priscilla Soucek, 'The New York Public Library *Makhzan al-asrar* and its importance', *Ars Orientalis* 18 (1988), pp. 1–37 for no. App.A.9, but otherwise pp. 14–16.
- h. Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles and Washington DC, 1989), p. 121 and cat. nos. 39–40, p. 337.
- i. Barbara Schmitz, *Islamic Manuscripts in the New York Public Library* (New York and Oxford, 1992), pp. 67–69.
- j. Sotheby's, *Oriental Manuscripts and Miniatures*, London, 26 April 1995, lot 29.
- k. Sheila S. Blair, 'Color and gold: the decorated papers used in later Islamic times', *Muqarnas* 17 (2000), p. 26.
- l. David Roxburgh, *The Persian Album, 1400–1600: From Dispersal to Collection* (New Haven and London), 2005, pp. 161–165.
- m. Seracattin Şahin et al., *The 1400th Anniversary of the Qur'an. Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art Qur'an Collection* (Istanbul, 2010), cat. no. 70.
- n. Elaine Wright, *The Look of the Book: Manuscript Production in Shiraz, 1303–1452*, Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers, New Series, Vol. 3 (Washington DC, Seattle and Dublin, 2012), n. 79, pp. 356–357.
- o. Massumeh Farhad and Simon Rettig, *The Art of the Qur'an. Treasures from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts* (Washington DC, 2016), cat. no. 34.