
The Art of Bookbinding in Fifteenth-Century Khorasan

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Introduction

A study of the arts in fifteenth-century Khorasan, with a particular focus on surviving works and insights from historians and art experts, indicates that two primary practices flourished in the period: architecture and manuscript decoration. While surviving fifteenth-century buildings can readily serve as indicators and symbols of architectural art, the analysis and interpretation of styles in manuscript decoration and bookbinding can be achieved using two methods:

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1. Examining and identifying surviving manuscript copies in libraries, museums, and personal collections.
2. Extracting information from primary texts based on the knowledge presented about artists, artworks, and prevalent professions in libraries and bookbinding workshops.

During this period, libraries played a fundamental role in forming and developing the art of book decoration. Although bookbinding and book decoration were also carried out in places other than libraries, the magnificent book covers and the famous bookbinders of this era testify that major developments took place first and foremost in libraries, especially in those affiliated with the royal court and princes.

Book Decoration Workshops in Khorasan in the Fifteenth Century

The vast land of Khorasan, stretching from the western bank of the Sindh River to the eastern region of Ray and from the northern Sistan to Transoxiana, was the realm of the Timurids throughout the fifteenth century CE (ninth century AH). Two Timurid leaders had exceptionally long reigns: Shah Rukh, who ruled between 1404-1447 CE (807-850 AH), and Sultan Hussein Bayqara, who ruled between 1469-1506 CE (873-911 AH). Both had their capitals in Herat, but Shah Rukh ruled over vast regions of Iran, while Hussein Bayqara's realm was limited to Khorasan.

A closer examination of the evolution of bookbinding, particularly book decoration, indicates that Khorasan was the main center for the arts during this period. This was true not only for bookbinding, but also for other creative practices, including calligraphy, painting, and illumination, all reflecting the political and social transformations of the time. However, artistic centers beyond this region should not be overlooked. For example, the first half of the fifteenth century CE (ninth century AH) witnessed the evolution of the Shirazi art school in Shiraz. Nevertheless, Khorasan was the main center of artistic activity throughout the entire century, and most of the scribes who left their names and marks in manuscripts were active in cities such as Herat and Samarkand. The

geographical distribution of art workshops during this period of Iranian history also confirms this view: most of them were located in this region.

In the absence of any surviving workshops, a study of fifteenth-century texts indicates that alternating between Herat and Samarkand as the capital had a significant impact on their function. The years of Shah Rukh's reign in Herat and the simultaneous rule of his son Ulugh Beg (1394–1449 CE / 796–852 AH) in Samarkand were an exception. Although the capital was Herat during this period, Samarkand's culture of science and its renowned observatory led to significant artistic creations in the book arts in this city.

The Evolution of Bookbinding in Khorasan

Despite our relatively limited knowledge of bookbinders and the art of bookbinding, two facts are widely accepted among researchers:

1. The growth and elevation of the art of bookbinding in the fifteenth century.
2. The centrality of Khorasan in the art of bookbinding.

What makes a detailed analysis of this issue difficult is the lack of information about the history of how this art came to Khorasan and the pioneering artists in this field. Among the few opinions expressed on this subject is a quote from the author of the *Tazkereh-ye Khatt va Khattatān* [Biographical Dictionary of Calligraphers and Scribes] who believes that the tradition began in Khorasan during the Barmakid dynasty, named for a well-known Iranian family originally from Balkh who held great power and influence in the early decades of Abbasid rule. The author of *Tazkereh-ye Khatt va Khattatān* does not go into further detail: after a brief mention of the above point, he discusses bookbinding in the Timurid era.²

Some Western writers have also raised possibilities in this regard, including Arnold and Grohmann, who attribute the familiarity of Khorasan bookbinders with the technique of gilding on leather to earlier centuries, suggesting that the art was imported

² Mohammad Taqi Daneshpazhooh, "On the History of Bookbinding and Its Sources," in *Traditional Bookbinding* (Tehran: Central Library and Document Center of Tehran University, 1978), 46.

to Khorasan from the territory of the Uyghurs in East Turkestan.³ Although the exact origin of the art of bookbinding is not known, what is certain is that innovations by Muslim artists gave Islamic book covers a specific identity. Duncan Haldane refers to one innovation by Muslim bookbinders as follows:

It is to be noted that one of the greatest contributions made by Islamic binders to the craft in general was the invention of the flap or *lisān* which was attached to the rear cover and tucked under the front cover of the book over the outside edge of the pages, thus protecting them and keeping them free of dust.⁴

The most fundamental point to be made from examining surviving fifteenth-century book covers is the utmost artistry and skill of the bookbinders in applying gold tooling and decoration to book covers. The arts of the Far East, especially China, are an obvious influence. The use of plant and animal images, especially mythical and imaginary animals, is its main characteristic, evident not only in this art but also in paintings from this period in general. Images of dragons, inspired by Chinese examples, can be found on the covers and on the three-cornered *lisān* – as previously mentioned, an innovation by Muslim bookbinders. Of course, this category was not limited to mythical animals, but also included animals such as foxes, deer, and birds. Mohammad Aghaoghlu suggests that the surviving book covers reflect the artistic sophistication of this period and the artistic environment prevailing in libraries and bookmaking workshops.⁵ The major development in book cover decoration at this stage was the invention of large metal molds. This method, which replaced the widespread method of stamping, let bookbinders produce more intricate cover designs, especially landscapes, while also increasing the speed of work. In the traditional method, the bookbinder had to repeatedly stamp the design: in

³ Thomas W. Arnold and Adolf Grohmann, *The Islamic Book: A Contribution to its Art and History from XII-XVIII Century* (Paris: Pegasus Press, 1929), 38.

⁴ Duncan Haldane, *Islamic Bookbindings in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1983), 14.

⁵ Mehmet Agaoglu, *Persian Bookbinding of the Fifteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1935).

some surviving precious copies, the number of stamping operations is estimated to have exceeded half a million.⁶

Another development during this period was the creation of inlaid book covers, mostly made for luxurious copies. The invention of this method, known as “carving on the cover”, is attributed to Master Ghiyath al-Din, a bookbinder from Tabriz discussed further in the next section. In this method, thin pieces of charred leather⁷ were cut in the Selimi style and glued onto shapes inside the cover, usually as triangles or half-triangles. Burned and inlaid designs were fragile and therefore placed inside the cover, unlike stamped designs that were used on the cover and sometimes had less artistic value than internal decorations. In these examples, bookbinders did not use highly patterned molds, which added beauty and grandeur to the cover. For the cover lining, they used the Millefiori style on leather, which was often dyed blue.⁸ Innovations by prominent bookbinders such as Ghiyath al-Din continued until the early Safavid era. During the reign of Shah Tahmasp (1524-1577 CE / 930-984 AH) as the Aghamiraki method. Unfortunately, this method was forgotten in the late Safavid era.⁹

The Status of Bookbinders and Bookbinding as an Art

In old texts, bookbinding was considered a part of the woodworking profession and a bookbinder was someone who covered a book without a cover or restored a worn-out copy. This profession was considered sacred due to its association with books of a religious nature.¹⁰ There are instances of Persian poetry and prose texts from various centuries that refer to the position and status of bookbinders. Some Arabic sources also

⁶ Berthe Van Regmorter, *Some Oriental Bindings in the Chester Beatty Library* (Dublin: Hodges Figgis, 1961), 17.

⁷ Charred leather is a type of dark brown leather that has been widely used in bookbinding. Apparently, the name “charred” refers to its dark color, which was common in Isfahan (translator’s note).

⁸ Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 66.

⁹ Ghazi Ahmad Qomi, *Golestan-e Honar* [Golistan of Art], ed. Ahmad Soheili Khansari. (Tehran: Manochehri Library, 1972), 38.

¹⁰ Iraj Afshar, “Bookbinding and Cover Making,” *Baharestan Letter* 3, no. 2 (2002): 330.

discuss bookbinding, including volume 5, chapter 30 of *Muqaddimah* [The Introduction] by the famous Maghrebi historian Ibn Khaldun. Given the date of the work (1377 CE / 778 AH), which coincides with the early years of the Timurid dynasty, we can piece together a general view of the art of bookbinding in the Eastern Islamic world and Iran in the latter half of the fourteenth century. However, it should be noted that Ibn Khaldun's concept of bookbinding extended to other practices related to bookmaking, such as copying manuscripts and papermaking. One interesting issue that he mentions with regret is the decline of bookbinding in the western Islamic world. As he wrote, the art was on the verge of destruction and complete loss in Egypt, the Maghreb, and Andalusia, while it remained prosperous and impressive in the East, especially in Iran:

We now hear that the craft of transmission (technique) still exists in the East. The sciences and crafts are in demand there, as we shall mention later on, and, therefore, those who want to, find it easy to establish the correct text of writings. However, the script for good copying surviving there is that of the non-Arabs, and found in their manuscripts.¹¹

Fifteenth-century Persian texts also provide insights into the bookbinding profession. Among them, the writings of Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad Khwandamir, the most famous historian of the late ninth and early tenth centuries AH, are noteworthy. In his book *Nama*, a handwritten copy of which is preserved in the Malek National Library and Museum, Khwandamir mentions the position and status of bookbinders:

The sixth word of the third line in the writing of *Suhuf*, which bookbinders and book coverers were unable to write. The profession of bookbinders and book coverers, in terms of dealing with celestial books and noble works of human beings, is the noblest craft and surpasses other professions...¹²

Another text which references bookbinding and calligraphy is Kamal al-Din Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi's work *Matla' al-Sa'dain va Majma' al-Bahrain* [The Rise of the Two

¹¹ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 2:394.

¹² Ghias al-Din Khwandamir, *Nameh Nami* [Renewed Manuscript], n.d., National Library and Museum of Malek, no. 3788: 109.

Fortunate Stars and the Confluence of the Two Seas].¹³ After mentioning the names of calligraphers at the court of Baysonqor Mirza in Herat, he briefly refers to bookbinding:

The art of bookbinding and the remaining inscriptions and industries were executed with such exquisite delicacy and beauty that it is scarcely conceivable they could have been accomplished by the endeavors of preceding monarchs.¹⁴

It seems that bookbinding in the fifteenth century was carried out in two different ways. Firstly, bookbinders worked in libraries at the courts of sultans, princes, and emirs, where they were considered as part of the library staff. The best historical record in this regard is the report by Jafar Baysonqori, a famous calligrapher and the head of the Baysonqor Library in Herat, who wrote to his superior on the bookbinders in his service and their progress.¹⁵ This group was naturally involved in making exquisite bindings for valuable manuscripts, many of which are preserved in major museums around the world. The use of images and animal motifs is also commonly seen in the work of these bookbinders.

Other bookbinders worked in trade alongside other occupations, in markets and shops. The fifteenth-century historian Jafar ibn Muhammad Jafari's discussion of the bookbinding market in *Tarikh Jadid Yazd* [New History of Yazd],¹⁶ as well as the image discussed below, can serve as evidence for this claim. It cannot be determined precisely to what extent developments in this art influenced the work of the second group of bookbinders. It may be logical to presume that advances, especially new styles in important manuscripts, stemmed from bookbinders working in libraries, while bookbinders operating outside of libraries in the trade sector used more traditional and common methods. Even if a bookbinder was familiar with the sophisticated new techniques, they were too expensive for the ordinary people and scholars who were his

¹³ Kamal al-Din Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi, *Matla' al-Sa'dain va Majma' al-Bahrain*, ed. Muhammad Shafi'i (Tehran: Gilani Press, 1963).

¹⁴ Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi, *Matla' al-Sa'dain va Majma' al-Bahrain*, 1963, 656.

¹⁵ Ahad Parsa'i Ghods, "A Document Related to Art Activities in the Baysonqori Library of Herat," *Art and People* 175 (1977): 43.

¹⁶ Jafar ibn Muhammad Jafari, *New History of Yazd*, ed. Iraj Afshar (Tehran: Bongah Tarjomeh va Nashr Ketab, 1959), 196.

customers: they could not afford the luxury bindings made for courtiers and high-ranking officials. Because the royal library managed bookbinding and the crafting of exceptionally valuable copies, there was no need to relocate these works. Additionally, given the exceptional value of these books, it was unwise to remove them from the palace library.

The collection of Khwaja Abdullah Morvārid, also known as the *Sharafnameh* or *Morvārid Manuscripts*, includes a reference to an order by Amir Ali Shīr, instructing bookbinders and scribes to prepare a work from the library collection: “They should all be adorned in a manner befitting the principles of protection and integrity, so that the binding may be secure and preserved”.¹⁷

Sharaf ul-Dīn Ali Yazdī, a renowned historian and owner of the *Zafarnāme* [Book of Triumph], also left interesting poems about bookbinding. Most were composed for the covers of specific editions. For example, he refers to a couplet written for a copy of Rumi’s *Mathnawī* [The Spiritual Couplets]:

This Mathnawī of Rumi is encrusted with divine secrets,
It is a treasure, but you must listen to its spiritual essence.

Or a couplet he composed for the cover of a copy of *Khamsah* by Nizami:

Anyone who sought a treasure from a gem,
From the gem of Nizami, words were measured.

There are numerous other poems by Sharaf ul-Dīn Ali Yazdī regarding a specific edition of *Shahnameh*, which have been mentioned in various sources.¹⁸

No images of bookbinders or their work and tools have been found in surviving fifteenth-century manuscripts. However, a tenth-century miniature in *Majalis al-*

¹⁷ Abdullah ibn Muhammad Bayāni Kermāni, *Sharaf: Translation and Interpretation of Hans Robert Roemer’s Letter* (Group of Orientalists of the Farhangestan-e Mainz-Weisbaden, 1951), leaf b75 corresponding to page 134 of German translation.

¹⁸ Quoted in Iraj Afshar, “Bookbinding from the Perspective of Culture and History,” in *Traditional Bookbinding: A Collection of Fifteen Speeches* (Tehran: Central Library and Document Center of Tehran University, 1978), 83-6.

Ushshaq [The Assemblies of Lovers]¹⁹ by Kamal al-Din Husayn Gāzargāhī²⁰ features an image of bookbinders at work. This image, held in the French National Library in Paris, is based on a story from the book. It depicts the punishment of a book thief, with the bookbinder's workshop above it. In one part of the shop, an apprentice is busy preparing bookbinding materials; in another, two people are looking at a book. There is also a shelf in the image where apparently leather-bound volumes are hanging. The bookbinding tools clearly depicted include the hammer held by two apprentice bookbinders. As mentioned earlier, this image can also serve as evidence that bookbinding was practiced alongside other crafts. Gāzargāhī's narration of the life of Hājī Mahmud Mojallad, a famous bookbinder, provided the inspiration for the artist:

That esteemed person would often visit the bookbinder's shop, where he would sit and engage in conversation under the pretense of browsing through books. He would discreetly take one book after another from the shopkeeper's hands and gather them by his side, carrying them along. The next day, Mawlana Hājī Mahmud would summon the young man to his own residence in order to settle matters regarding the books. Through this means, they would meet every day.²¹

Renowned Bookbinders and Prominent Manuscripts

The anonymity of bookbinders during this period poses a significant challenge to researchers seeking to identify and study them. Two main reasons contribute to this anonymity. First, bookbinders and cover-makers seldom wrote their names on the bindings they produced.²² An analysis of manuscripts in the University of Tehran Central Library confirms that out of sixteen thousand manuscripts, only ninety-nine bindings

¹⁹ *Majalis al-Ushshaq* [The Assemblies of Lovers] is a prose work that includes the biographies of 76 mystics and Sufis written in the late fifteenth century. Some authors, like Edward G. Browne, have mistakenly attributed it to Sultan Husayn Bayqara (translator's note).

²⁰ Kamal al-Din Husayn Gāzargāhī, *Majalis Al-Ushaq*, ed. Gholamreza Tabatabai Majd (Tehran: Zarrin, 1996). Not to be confused with his contemporary Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn Abīvardī, Amīr 'Alīshīr Nawā'ī's librarian. For further information on the latter, see Gholamreza Amirkhani, "Jayegeh-ye Ketab dar Manasabat-e Farhangi-ye Teymurian" [The Role of Books in the Cultural Relations of the Timurids], *Journal of Ketāb* 15, no. 60 (2005): 54-9.

²¹ Gāzargāhī, *Majalis Al-Ushaq*, 1996, 243.

²² Ahmad Taheri Iraqi, "Masters of Bookbinding," in *Traditional Bookbinding* (Tehran: Central Library and Document Center of Tehran University, 1978), 63.

contain the bookbinder's name and date, and none are from the fifteenth century.²³ The author could only identify one fifteenth-century manuscript with the bookbinder named: a copy of Imad Faqih's *Diwan*, produced by Zain al-Abidin bin Muhammad in Yazd in 1477 CE (863 AH). In this case, the bookbinder was named because, unusually, he also acted as scribe, illuminator, and cover maker.

Another reason is that few texts include the names and marks of bookbinders, with the result that our knowledge about them is significantly limited compared to calligraphers, illuminators, and even scribes. For example, Mustafa Ali Afandi's *Manaqeb-e Honarvaran* [The Virtues of Artists] provides extensive information about the artists of the time and mentions their names, yet it does not mention any bookbinders or cover makers.²⁴

Yet bookbinders during this period demonstrated superb mastery of arts such as gilding, marbling, painting, and calligraphy. Additionally, they were often people of virtue and men of letters. Some mentioned in fifteenth-century CE texts include

1. Darvish Mohammad bin Amir Sheikh Mohammad Ramaki, originally from Ghazna, lived during the first half of the century. He gained access to the courts of many nobles through his art, and he is also the attributed author of *Ansab Mahmoudi*.²⁵
2. Ghawam al-Din Tabrizi, also known as Ghawam al-Din Mujallad, whose main work was embossing book covers. He is mentioned as one of the artists and librarians at the Baysonqor Library in Herat.²⁶

²³ Susan Asili, "Volumes with Numbers, Dates or Inscriptions in the Collection of Manuscripts at the Central Library and Document Center of Tehran University," *Nameh-e Baharestan* 3, no. 2 (Autumn and Winter 1381/2002-2003): 397.

²⁴ Agaoglu, *Persian Bookbinding of the Fifteenth Century*, 1935, XVII.

²⁵ Abdul-Hai Habibi, *The Art of the Timurid Era and Its Derivatives* (Tehran: Iranian Culture Foundation, 1976), 44.

²⁶ Abdul-Raouf Fekri Soltani, "Mentioning Some Calligraphers and Illuminators of Ta'liq Script on the Preface of Doost Mohammad Ketabdar Heravi," *Journal of History*, Kabul (1970): 62.

3. Haji Mahmoud Mujallad, mentioned earlier here in our discussion of *Majalis al-'Ushshaq* [The Assemblies of Lovers].
4. Anvari Isfahani, who apparently worked in the Amir Ali Shir Nava'i Library.²⁷
5. Hassan bin Haj Ali Gharimi, also mentioned with the name Harimi.²⁸
6. Mowlana Mir Qureishi, who had a bookbinding workshop in Samarkand and who wrote poetry under the pen name Khata'i.²⁹
7. Mir Sa'id,³⁰ who was a skilled master and wrote poetry using the pen name Faghani.³¹

Some of the masterpieces of the bookbinder's art that have been identified so far are as follows. A significant percentage of these manuscripts are preserved in libraries and museums in Turkey:

1. Illustrated version of *Kalila va Dimna* [Kalila and Dimna]: This manuscript containing nineteen miniatures is housed in the Topkapı Palace Museum in Turkey. It was produced by the workshop of Mirza Baysonqor, chief librarian at the Baysonqor Library, in 1430 CE. The scribe was Jafar Baysonqori. Its cover is made of brown leather with an embossed leather cover.³²
2. Baysonqori version of *Shahnameh*: This renowned manuscript, recently registered as a UNESCO World Heritage item, is preserved in the Golestan Palace in Tehran. It is widely considered the most finely illustrated Persian

²⁷ Daneshpazhooh, "On the History of Bookbinding," 1978.

²⁸ Daneshpazhooh, 1978, 47.

²⁹ Ali Shir Navai, *Majalis Al-Nafayes* [Gatherings of the Precious], ed. Ali Asghar Hekmat (Tehran: Manuchehri Library, 1944), 47.

³⁰ Mir Sa'id, commonly known as Faghani, was a renowned Persian calligrapher and bookbinder who lived during the 15th century CE. He gained fame for his exceptional skills in calligraphy and his contributions to the art of bookbinding. However, the pen name Faghani was used by several poets during that period. To accurately determine the specific works and achievements attributed to Mir Sa'id (Faghani) and to avoid any potential confusion with other poets using the same pen name, further investigation and research are necessary (translator's note).

³¹ Ali Shir Nava'i, *Majalis Al-Nafayes*, 80.

³² Agaoglu, *Persian Bookbinding of the Fifteenth Century*, 1935, 17.

manuscript in the world. It was bound by Ghawam al-Din Tabrizi, who completed the work in 1429 CE. Abdulhadi Habibi, an Afghan researcher, attributes the cover to Qiyam al-Din, who is likely the same person as Ghawam al-Din.³³

3. *Jami' al-Usul min Ahadith al-Rasul* [Compendium of Fundamentals from the Hadiths of the Prophet]: A compilation of the six canonical collections of Sunni hadiths, where the hadiths are arranged alphabetically. The author is Ibn Athir.³⁴ A precious copy of this work is preserved in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, Ireland, with a completion date of 1435 CE. It was made for the Baysonqor Library or for Baysonqor's father, Shah Rukh. The cover is intricately designed, featuring an inner lining adorned with a diamond-shaped almond pattern, while the four corners showcase a hexagonal design. Diamond-shaped inlays embellish the cover's edge. Crafting this cover was a substantial undertaking, taking approximately five years due to the extensive work involved: it required the use of 550,000 individual metalwork pieces and 430,000 goldwork decorations.³⁵
4. Two copies of works by Attar of Nishapur, *Khamseh* and *Setteh*, which are apparently a pair: These two manuscripts, preserved in the Topkapı Palace Museum, were created in 1437 CE by order of the Shah Rukh Library. Both copies are on Chinese paper; the first copy, unlike most bindings of that period, bears the signature of the bookbinder, Nezam Tabrizi, on the cover. Despite extensive research, no further information about Tabrizi has been found. The decorations on this binding, including filigree work and red backgrounds with fabric and carpet-like patterns, resemble other contemporary arts.³⁶

³³ Habibi, *The Art of the Timurid Era*, 1976, 480.

³⁴ Majd al-Din Mubarak bin Muhammad, known as Abu al-Sa'adat (1149-1209 AD), was a Shafi'i jurist and hadith scholar who was the older brother of the historian Ibn Athir (translator's note).

³⁵ Arthur Upham Pope, *A Survey of Persian Art: The Art of the Book and Textiles* vol. 9, (Tehran: Soroush, 1977), 975.

³⁶ Ronald Ferrier, *The Arts of Persia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 237.

5. Kammal Khojandi's *Divan*: This copy was produced in 1452 CE / 840 AH for the library of Sultan Mohammad bin Baysonqor. Interestingly, the bookbinder dedicated it to his own brother, Abu al-Qasim Baberr. The cover has a blue background and is decorated in the Chinese style. This manuscript is also preserved in the Topkapı Palace Museum.³⁷
6. Rumi's *Mathnawi*: A highly valuable copy of Rumi's *Mathnawi* is held by the Turkish and Islamic Art Museum in Istanbul. It was created in 1482 CE for the library of Sultan Husayn Bayqara in Herat. The skillful use of under-lacquer painting in the binding reflects advances in bookbinding art during the fifteenth century.

The common factor among these six copies is that they were all created in the city of Herat. Bindings made in other locations include a copy of *Zij e Ulugh Beg* [Astronomical Tables of Ulugh Beg] dating from 1439 to 1441 CE, which was produced for the library near the observatory in Samarkand.³⁸

Conclusion

The study of the developmental trajectory of bookbinding and book decoration, which saw significant advances during the fifteenth century CE, highlights the flourishing tradition of manuscript production and bookbinding across Iran. The epicenter of this artistic renaissance was the region of Khorasan, particularly the city of Herat, as evidenced by the six aforementioned manuscripts, all originating from the city. While the sixteenth century CE and the Safavid era saw these artistic disciplines garner special attention, with the Safavid libraries becoming renowned for producing valuable manuscripts, the seventeenth century witnessed a gradual decline in book craftsmanship. This decline impacted not only bookbinding and book decoration but also the art of manuscript illumination. In other words, the magnificence and grandeur of the

³⁷ Barbara Brend, *Islamic Art* (London: British Museum Press, 1991), 228.

³⁸ Abolala Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts: Selections from the Art and History Trust Collection* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 69.

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bindings produced in fifteenth-century Khorasan, true masterpieces of the book arts, remained unparalleled in any subsequent period.