

GILT-STAMPED BINDINGS OF THE LAST QUARTER OF THE 16TH CENTURY AND THE QAZWĪN WORKSHOP

Research in Persian binding faces multiple challenges mostly related to dating. A calligrapher's copying date is often confusing due to repeated re-binding for several reasons. The binding is the most vulnerable part of the book, first because its stitching was not intended to open fully (users were supposed to place the book on a special stand with an opening angle between 90 and 120 degrees). For the second, a calligrapher's copy might remain unbound for one reason or another. Among the known cases are the early 16th-century works of the masters of Harāt, taken out by the Şafawids and Şhibānids who conquered the town in turn. Moreover, with binding designs soon growing out of fashion, a new owner may wish to encase his "pearl" in a new style. The process was particularly vigorous during the second part of the 10th / 16th century, namely between the 1570s and the 1580s (AH 980s—990s). Abundant bindings of this period for manuscripts copied earlier, widely representing contemporary developments in the art of the book, gave rise to confused views of their dates and place of production. In fact, bindings dating from the second half of the 16th century do occur, though rarely, in 17th- or even 18th-century books.

The 16th century, especially its second half, is the golden age for the art of the binding (and we may add — for the margin decoration as well). Indeed, in the 16th century one can find vanished bindings with miniature or ornament on black, gold or coloured background, the covers combining gold-ornamented varnished surface and a gold stamping, and the traditional stamped leather covers which are usually gilt [1].

Among this variety not very many book-covers are known decorated with gilt "stamped miniature" more often showing birds and animals in the Garden of Eden or in a forest. Their inner sides usually represent a leather gauze rectangular that is placed straight on the painted cardboard base. (In this technique, the artisan would at first stamp a decorative element on a scrap of leather, then remove odd leather fragments with a cutting tool, and encase the resulting gauze in the leather cover. Early in the 16th century considerable improvement in this openwork technique allowed binders to handle up to five layers of fine leather at once [2].)

One of such gilt-stamped covers is signed by the bookbinder Muḥammad-Zamān b. Mīrzā-beg Tabrīzī. It belongs to 'Alī Şhīr Nawā'ī's *Kulliyāt* ("Collected Works") copied by calligrapher Naẓār 'Alī Fayḍī in Qizil-Ağach of Azarbāyjān and Mūghān (plate 2). The manuscript, which is housed in St. Petersburg in the National Library of Russia, bears several dates between 1001 and 1004 / 1592 and 1596. It was ordered by Farhād-khān Qaramanlu, a statesman and patron of art [3]. The name of the binder, Muḥammad-Zamān b. Mīrzā-beg Tabrīzī, is indicated in gold at the bottom of the front cover (fig. 1). The signature was found out and firstly published by Anatol Ivanov [4].

Taking into account the fact that the margins of the *Kulliyāt* were obviously cut (a colophon is carefully saved) in accordance with the size of the covers, we may suppose that the lasts were made not especially for this book but at an earlier date and for another job, and then taken for the *Kulliyāt*.

The distinguish features of the covers' composition are a monkey sitting on a tree and a falcon (or hawk?) catching a stork (or crane?). The outside covers produced with the same or very similar metal panel can be found also in two more manuscripts:

(i) One set belongs to Niẓāmī's *Iskandār-nāma* in the copy of 990/1582 from the National Library of Russia (fig. 2).

(ii) Another example — the back cover of the *Khamsa* by Khusrāw Dihlawī in A. M. Sackler Gallery, Washington D. C. (S. 86.0472) [5]. Glenn D. Lowry and Milo Cleveland Beach described the binding and also a frontispiece (S. 86.0072) as made ca. 982—1008 / 1575—1600 in Qazwīn [6]. It's interesting that the stamp is very similar to the previous ones but not exactly the same.

The front cover of the binding of the *Khamsa* from Washington is stamped with another metal plate of the same decorative style and represents birds in a forest. At least three bindings are known decorated with the same block-stamping:

(i) One of them belongs to the copy of *Shāh-nāma* by Firdawsī housed in the Top Kapı Museum, Istanbul (H.1513) [7].