



## AFŠĀN

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**AFŠĀN** (“sprinkling”), the decoration of paper with flecks of gold and silver, sometimes called *zarafšān* “gold sprinkling” (an expression otherwise used to describe the scattering of gold coins as a gesture of largesse). Textual sources on the technique’s origin and development are scanty but can be supplemented by evidence from manuscripts and album leaves. It was popular in both China and Japan for centuries before being introduced to Iran and Central Asia by an unknown route, apparently during the Timurid period. Best documented is the use of gold-sprinkled paper for manuscripts during the time of or bearing the name of Šāhroḡ b. Tīmūr (r. 807-50/1405-47); in some cases the paper is decorated with gold paintings which appear to be of Chinese origin. Another early instance is a page bearing the titles of Ƙalīl Solṭān, the ruler of Transoxania (807-12/1405-09; Topkapi Sarayi Library, Hazine 2152, fol. 16). In all these cases colored, heavy paper is employed. The enthusiasm for gold sprinkling soon spread to western Iran; a manuscript copied in Shemakha (Šamākī) in 837/1468 is executed on the same type of heavy paper, perhaps also of Chinese origin, used in Šāhroḡ’s manuscripts (London, British Library, Add. 16561). Gold-sprinkled paper was favored for calligraphic specimens in Shiraz and Baghdad at the court of Pīr Budaḡ Qara Qoyunlū and in Tabrīz at that of Ya’qūb Āq Qoyunlū; it is uncertain whether the paper was produced locally or imported either from Khorasan or China.

Herat and Mašhad appear to be the first cities to produce gold-sprinkled paper in the Iranian region; according to Qāzī Aḡmad it was used along with other forms of gilding. He refers to a 9th/15th century calligrapher and gilder from



Mašhad, Sīmī Nišāpūrī, who wrote a treatise giving specific instructions on how the gold is to be prepared and applied. Textual and visual evidence suggest that *afšān* was only one of several techniques used concurrently to embellish album pages and manuscripts; during the 10th/16th century it was supplanted by paintings executed in various tones of gold. Both were most often used for margins, although in some instances texts are written over decorated pages. Biographies given by Qāzī Aḥmad indicate that gold sprinkling continued to be a speciality of Khorasani artists during the 10th/16th century. The technique was also popular in Tabrīz and was used for some important Safavid manuscripts. Notable is its use in the *Šāh-nāma* of Shah Ṭahmāsp produced between ca. 931/1525 and ca. 947/1540. However, in a *Kamsa* of Neẓāmī copied for the same patron between 945/1539 and 950/1543, the margins are painted with various shades of gold with silver accents, a form of decoration that may also have been known as *afšān*. Qāzī Aḥmad relates that a 10th/16th century Mašhad illuminator, Moḥammad Amīn, is said to have produced gold sprinkling in various degrees of fineness by *afšāngarī-e . . . ḥall karda*. The words *ḥall karda* may designate a pigment containing pulverized gold. *Afšān* was also employed in Mughal and Ottoman court workshops during the 10th/16th century.

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