



## CUT PAPER

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**CUT PAPER** (*qeṭ'a* “decoupage,” also *monabbat-kārī* “filigree work”), a type of applied ornament documented in Persian manuscripts and sometimes on bookbindings from the approximate period 895-1060/1490-1650; in Turkey the art of *qeṭ'a* (*kati*) continued into the 19th century and included a greater variety of subjects (Çiğ; Rogers, pp. 18-23, 34; *Türkische Kunst* II, pp. 119-21; Duda, I, pp. 119-20, 145, II, figs. 361, 379). In Persian manuscripts *qeṭ'a* was devoted to calligraphic passages (see [calligraphy](#)), especially in *nasta'liq* script. The master bore the professional title *qāṭe'*, comparable to the designations *modahheb* (gilder) and *naqqāš* (painter); he worked with a minuscule penknife having a very sharp blade (Arseven, p. 321).

*Calligraphic decoupage.* Possibly the finest surviving creation in the *qeṭ'a* technique from Persia is a copy of the *Dīvān* composed in [Chaghatay](#) by Sultan [Ḥosayn Bāyqarā](#) (Supplement), the Timurid ruler in Herat (875-912/1470-1506). Twenty-nine folios are kept in the Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi, Istanbul (no. 1926; Ḥabīb, p. 261; Lentz and Lowry, p. 359 no. 148, 2 illus. in color). Others were removed from the volume in the late 19th century and are now in museums and private collections throughout the world (Duda, I, p. 123, figs. 362, 364, 368; Minorsky, p. 7 no. 404; Welch, 1979, pp. 170-71 no. 72; Falk, pp. 64-66 no. 35; Lentz and Lowry, pp. 270, 359-60 no. 149; Aghdashloo, p. 16). On the first opening four lines of cut-out script are included within typical Timurid illumination (Lentz and Lowry, p. 359 no. 148). On each of a series of subsequent leaves eight lines of very fine *nasta'liq* have been cut from light-blue, yellow, or white paper and pasted onto dark-blue sheets; illuminated



panels serve to divide sections of the text. This manuscript of the *Dīvān* is undated, but, as the name of Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā is accompanied by the formula “may God make his reign eternal,” it was probably completed during his lifetime.

An inscription in the Istanbul fragment of the *Dīvān* includes the name of the *qāṭeʿ*, ‘Abd-Allāh (Ḥabīb, p. 261); the name Solṭān-‘Alī (Mašhadī), the most famous of Sultan Ḥosayn Bāyqarā’s calligraphers (d. 913/1507), appears on the folio in the Aydin Aghdashloo (Āydīn Āġdāšlū) collection. Moṣṭafā-‘Alī Efendi, in his *Manāqeb-e honarvarān*, completed in 995/1587, noted that ‘Abd-Allāh Qāṭeʿ, who had been raised and trained in Herat, was the most accomplished of the *qāṭeʿān*. By the age of eleven years he was already cutting out the calligraphy of Solṭān-‘Alī Mašhadī, including a number of his early specimens; ‘Abd-Allāh’s fame was greatly enhanced by his association with this master calligrapher (p. 63; cf. Karīmzāda, I, p. 312). Other folios of Solṭān-‘Alī Mašhadī’s calligraphy cut out by ‘Abd-Allāh are to be found in *moraqqa*’s (albums) in the Topkapı Sarayı library, Istanbul; one of them includes the name of a patroness, Şāḥeba Bahrām (Ḥabībī, p. 647).

‘Abd-Allāh’s son Dūst-Moḥammad Qāṭeʿ (erroneously identified by Moṣṭafā-‘Alī, p. 63, as Moḥammad-Dūst) learned the art of paper cutting from his father, whose skill he rivaled. Although he is better known to students of Persian and Mughal art as a painter, several examples of his *qeṭʿa* are known. Three of them are in an album in the National library, St. Petersburg (Dorn, p. 147); one is dated 917/1511-12 (Kostygova, p. 15), when Dūst-Moḥammad would have been around twenty years old (Dickson and Welch, pp. 118-19). Another example of his decoupage is in the Bahrām Mīrzā album in the Topkapı Sarayı library; according to the signature, “Dūst-Moḥammad Moṣawwer *qāṭeʿohā*” (its *qāṭeʿ* was Dūst-Moḥammad the painter), a clear indication that he worked in both media (Bayānī, *Košnevīsān*, pp. 84, 305). A *qeṭʿa* in the Aghdashloo collection, Tehran, is signed “*raqam-e Mīr ‘Alī Heravī qāṭeʿohū* Dūst-Moḥammad Kūšavānī” (script of Mīr ‘Alī Heravī; its *qāṭeʿ* was Dūst-Moḥammad of Kūšavān [a village near Herat], Aghdashloo, p. 19).

According to Moṣṭafā-‘Alī (p. 63), Dūst-Moḥammad Moṣawwer had a student named “Sangī-‘Alī” Badaḳšī, “whose calligraphic pieces are universally prized” (Karīmzāda, I, p. 228). An unusual folio of his cut-out calligraphy is in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Plate XXXV). The four lines of calligraphy, placed diagonally, are the negative of the usual cut-out script; presumably the lines cut from this sheet formed another *qeṭʿa*. The piece is signed



“*kātebohā al-faqīr Mīr ‘Alī qāṭe’ohā Sangī-‘Alī Badaḳṣī* (its scribe was the humble Mīr ‘Alī; its *qāṭe’* was Sangī-‘Alī Badaḳṣī). Another specimen, written in 943/1536 in Bukhara, is included in the *Moraqqa’-e golšan* in the Golestān library, Tehran; still others are in the Shah Esmā‘īl album in the Topkapı Sarayı library; the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; and various private collections (Bayānī, *Ḳoṣnevīsān*, pp. 494-95; Schimmel, p. 178 n. 144; Drouot-Richelieu, lot 413). Sangī-‘Alī Badaḳṣī must therefore have been employed in the library of the Uzbek ruler ‘Obayd-Allāh Khan (918-46/1512-39) or possibly that of his son ‘Abd-al-‘Azīz Solṭān (r. 946-57/1539-50). Mīr ‘Alī Heravī also worked in Bukhara after 935/1528 (see *Eīr* IV, p. 714 pl. XCIV). Another master *qāṭe’*, Naḍr-‘Alī Qāṭe’ of Badaḳṣān, was mentioned by Qāzī Aḥmad in *Golestān-e honar*. Qāzī Aḥmad provided the following vivid description of the work of Naḍr-‘Alī: “Maulānā Nadhr [*H*: Naẓar]-‘Alī Qāṭī’ came to Holy Mashhad from Badaḳḥshān. He walked about dressed in felt, in darvish attire, and was an extremely spiritual and pure man. Looking at samples of Mīr-‘Alī’s script he cut out *qiṭ’a* that there was no difference and no superiority between what was written and what was cut out; all that came out of there (out of the sheet of paper) became a *qiṭ’a*, and that from which cuttings were made was in itself another *qiṭ’a*. He settled down in Holy Mashhad and many people studied under him and imitated him, but could not equal him” (tr. Minorsky, p. 193). No works signed by Naḍr-‘Alī are known, but his life and way of working seem to parallel those of “Sangī-‘Alī” in some respects.

The last Persian master mentioned by Moṣṭafā-‘Alī Efendi (p. 63) was Mīr Moḥammad-Bāqer Heravī, the “mature child” and son of the calligrapher Mīr ‘Alī: “Both his cuttings and his brilliance are as exquisite as his father’s calligraphy.” Although Moḥammad-Bāqer’s own calligraphy is documented (Bayānī, *Ḳoṣnevīsān*, pp. 659-61), no example of his *qeṭ’a* is known at present. Several *qeṭ’as*, including one in the “Bellini album” in The Metropolitan Museum (no. 67.266.7.7) and two in the Aghdashloo collection (Aghdashloo, pp. 15, 18), bear the name Mīr ‘Alī as calligrapher but no indication of who cut out the script and arranged it on the pages; they may well have been the work of the young Mīr Moḥammad-Bāqer.

Another *qeṭ’a* in the Aghdashloo collection, inscribed “*qāṭe’ohā Bonyād Tabrīzī*” (its *qāṭe’* was Bonyād Tabrīzī) and dated 1049/1639, reveals changes in both the composition and quality of such work in the 17th century (Aghdashloo, p. 38). The monumental and spacious *nasta‘līq* is arranged horizontally on the folio, and the effect is of much greater simplicity than in



the work of the 16th century. Later examples of Persian calligraphic decoupage are not known at present.

One example of Persian cut calligraphy combined with cut designs is known, an anthology (*safīna* or *bayāz*) in the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh (Pers. ms. 2332). It contains five miniatures attributable stylistically to Shiraz ca. 1540 and seven pages of mixed cut designs that must have been executed at the same time and place (Ashraf, pp. 87-88). On folio 113b there are three roundels arranged vertically; the top one frames a scene of two seated men, one handing the other a cup, the other two *qeṭʿas* on scrolls with arabesque leaves (*rūmī*); the original gold paper cutouts, set on dark-blue backgrounds, are now discolored bronze. On a second folio (52b) there are cutouts of trees, two deer, and birds in black, on a blue ground, with a painted figure defending himself from an attacking bear. As these images resemble designs on contemporary cut-leather bookbindings, it is probable that this *qāṭeʿ*, at least, was also skilled in *monabbat-kārī*.

*Decoupage on bookbindings.* The painter and *qāṭeʿ* Dūst-Moḥammad also wrote a treatise on art, *Hālāt-e honarvarān*, in which he reported that a 15th-century Tabrīzī bookbinder, Qewām-al-Dīn, had invented filigree work (*monabbat-kārī*; Binyon et al., p. 185). His report was in error, however, as leather-filigree decoration had previously appeared on 14th-century Mamluk bookbindings (Bosch et al., no. 71) and had a long tradition in Egypt (Arnold and Grohmann, pls. 29-30, 19; *Survey of Persian Art*, pl. 951 B).

The earliest datable example of Persian filigree work is to be found on the doublure of an anthology made for Sultan Aḥmad Jalāyer (784-813/1382-1410, with an interruption) in Baghdad in 809/1406-07 (Türk ve İslam Müzesi, no. 2046); it was derived from earlier Mamluk prototypes in both style and technique (Aslanapa, p. 68, pl. XII). According to Dūst-Moḥammad's treatise, when the Timurid prince Bāysonqor Mīrzā (q.v.) transported Qewām-al-Dīn and other artists of the book from Tabrīz to Herat, he ordered them to produce manuscripts "in shape and pages and illustration exactly like those of Sultan Aḥmad of Baghdad" (Binyon et al., p. 185).

*Monabbat-kārī* did indeed have its greatest flowering in Herat in the 15th century (Aslanapa, pls. XI, XII, XIV, XIX; figs. 32, 36, 40, 44, 46, 47, 49, 52-54). Usually the delicate filigree patterns were cut from thin pieces of leather, gilded, and pasted onto colored parchment or paper; the procedure was time-consuming, and, as early as the 16th century, pieces of gilded paper were



increasingly substituted for leather filigree, as they were both cheaper and easier to prepare (Gratzl, p. 1980). It is difficult to distinguish paper from leather filigree without the use of a magnifying glass. A good example of 18th-century Persian paper filigree is on the doublure of a bookbinding in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Haldane, no. 112).

Aside from the fact that the implement used for *monabbat-kārī* was the same as that used for *qeṭ'a*, a page of cut-paper calligraphy in the album of the Ottoman sultan Morād III (982-1003/1574-95) in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna (Mixt. 313, fol. 4b), offers evidence that there was a relationship between practitioners of *monabbat-kārī* and of *qeṭ'a*. Four diagonal lines from one of Jāmī's *ḡazals*, written in *nasta'liq* on bright-rose paper and pasted on a dark-blue background, are dated 961/1554 and signed by the *qāṭe'* Moḥammad-Ṭāher, who described himself as *mojalled al-kāqānī* (imperial bookbinder; Duda, I, pp. 111-12 fig. 350; Bayānī, *Ḳoṣnevīsān* III, p. 783). Although this specimen of cut calligraphy was probably made in the Ottoman empire, it suggests that artisans drawn from the ranks of the bookbinders and skilled at cutting out leather designs also produced calligraphic *qeṭ'a*.

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Plate XXXV. Calligraphy by Mīr ‘Alī, cut out by Sangī-‘Alī Badaḳṣī. Persia, second quarter of the 16th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Louise V. Bell Fund and Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1967, no. 67.266.7.6. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.