



Exploring page layout principles in Iranian manuscripts: A comprehensive review from Seljuk to Safavid Era

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Abstract

This article explores the historical development of Iranian manuscripts and their significance as a platform for artists. The focus is on the page layout of Iranian manuscripts from Seljuk to Safavid Era, aiming to understand the evolution of book design styles. By analyzing various samples, the study reveals the presence of clear and systematic principles governing the page layout of Iranian manuscripts during these eras. The findings suggest that these historical layouts can be extracted and imitated to revive the page layout of modern books. The research employs documentary study methods to examine different sections of Iranian manuscripts, including text and image pages, table of contents pages, cover pages, title pages (*Sarlouh*), and beginning pages. Each section follows specific visual methods for organizing elements and combining different parts. Over time, the principles of page layout within each category have undergone changes influenced by the artistic principles of the respective era. The article specifically investigates the title (*Sarlouh*) and the beginning pages of a manuscript to illustrate their interplay and evolution.

Keywords: Beginning and title (*Sarlouh*) pages, Book design, Composition, Page layout

Extended Abstract

Introduction: The art of Iranian painting has predominantly manifested in manuscripts, which serve as a platform for presenting artists' work. It acts as a means to coordinate and connect text, images, and empty spaces, thereby achieving beautiful and balanced page layouts that have captivated the attention of artists throughout history. This study explores the evolution of book design styles in Iranian manuscripts from Seljuk to the end of Safavid Era. To accomplish this, an examination of the page layout of Iranian manuscripts is conducted, focusing on the principles that governed its organization during these historical eras. This investigation delves into the visual methods employed for different sections, such as text and image pages, table of contents pages, cover pages, title pages (*Sarlouh*), and beginning pages, individually or in conjunction with one another. By scrutinizing these layout patterns, it becomes possible to extract and imitate them, potentially revitalizing the page layout of modern books. To undertake this research, documentary study methods and content analysis are employed to analyze the page layouts present in the studied manuscripts thoroughly.

Purpose and scope: This study aims to shed light on the historical development of Iranian manuscripts and their significance as a medium for artistic expression. The aim of exploring the page layout principles and design styles prevalent during the Seljuk and Safavid Eras is to enhance our understanding of the evolution of Iranian book design. The study also seeks to identify the underlying factors that have influenced changes in page layout over time. This research contributes to preserving and reviving traditional Iranian book design aesthetics by achieving these objectives. The scope of this study encompasses the examination of various sections within Iranian manuscripts, with a particular focus on the title (*Sarlouh*) and beginning pages, providing insights into their form and evolution over time.

Method: This research employs documentary study methods (Payne & Payne, 2004) as the primary approach to investigate page layout patterns in Iranian manuscripts. Documentary methods enable extracting meaningful insights from analyzing historical documents. An extensive review of relevant literature and scholarly sources ensures a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical framework surrounding Iranian manuscripts. This literature review establishes the necessary conceptual context for the research. Carefully selected influential manuscripts for their historical significance and relevance undergo meticulous examination. The aim is to uncover the specific visual methods utilized for organizing various elements and combining different parts within sections of the manuscripts. This involves detailed analysis of page

layouts, considering the strategic placement of text, images, decorative elements, and empty spaces. By closely observing the intentional design choices made by the artists and scribes, the underlying principles and strategies governing page layouts during Seljuk and Safavid eras can be revealed. Specific attention is given to spatial relationships between elements, use of color and ornamentation, and overall compositional harmony. This meticulous attention to details provides a nuanced understanding of the aesthetic considerations and visual methods employed. Extensive documentation of analysis findings ensures accuracy and consistency. Once data collection and analysis is complete, the findings are interpreted and connected to the broader theoretical framework established through literature review. This involves identifying patterns in layouts and exploring developments in design styles across the historical eras examined. Referencing relevant theoretical concepts enriches the interpretation, enabling a deeper understanding of the significance of the findings. By combining a comprehensive literature review, meticulous manuscript examination, and thoughtful data interpretation, this research methodology allows for a holistic investigation of page layout principles and their implications for contemporary book design.

Findings and conclusion: The thorough analysis of the studied manuscripts reveals clear and systematic principles that governed the page layout of Iranian manuscripts between the Seljuk and Safavid Eras. Each section, whether text and image pages, table of contents pages, cover pages, title pages (Sarlahou), or beginning pages, exhibits distinct visual methods for organizing elements and achieving aesthetic harmony. Over time, the principles of page layout within each category have evolved, influenced by the artistic principles of the respective era. One significant finding of this study is the profound impact of the title (Sarlahou) page on shaping the form and presentation of the subsequent beginning pages. The insights gained from this research contribute to a deeper understanding of the historical development of Iranian book design and provide valuable guidance for reviving and adapting traditional page layouts in contemporary books. In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of incorporating these findings into book design practices and recommends further research in this area.

Keywords: Beginning and title (Sarlahou) pages, Book design, Composition, Page layout

INTRODUCTION

Page layout is a modern concept, yet manuscript illumination integrates text, image, and space as interconnected parts. Traditional layouts viewed books holistically in certain eras, like the Herat School and Safavid Period. As Iranian paintings emerged in manuscripts, their coordinated text, image, and space achieved beautiful, balanced page designs that captivated artists. Masterworks indicate refined elements, harmonized colors, bold combinations, and depth without perspective, inspiring later artists. Studying factors like surface division, decorative impacts, text placement, symmetry, and pattern relationships reveals layout principles in manuscripts applicable to contemporary graphic design. This research examines page layout methods in Iranian manuscripts (from Seljuk to late Safavid) and their modern book design implications. It analyzes the combination and governing principles of the initial and main pages, detailing patterns that shaped their layout. The aim is to uncover established page layout techniques from historical manuscripts.

Evolution of Page Layout in Iranian Manuscripts

Manuscripts have played a vital role in Iran's cultural heritage, serving as repositories of knowledge, literature, and religious texts across the ages. The art of page layout in these manuscripts has been integral to their creation, reflecting the aesthetic traditions of different eras (Johnson & Martinez, 2018). This review examines the evolution of page layout in Iranian manuscripts from Seljuk to Safavid eras.

Artistic developments

The production of manuscripts flourished under royal patronage, resulting in refined page layouts. The Timurid Era (14th-15th century) marked a peak in achievements in calligraphy and layout (Smith, 2010: 45). During the Safavid Era (16th-18th century), illuminated manuscripts with intricate designs gained popularity (Sarukhan, 2015: 89). These developments shaped page layout aesthetics.

Page layout analysis

While most research has focused on calligraphy, some studies analyze page layout specifics. Davazdah Emami and Bankizadeh (2013) compared the layout in *Shahnameh* manuscripts. Sahragard and Shirazi (2012)

examined lineation in Quran layouts. Analyses of texts like the Divan-e-Hafez reveal layout techniques (Mohammadi et al., 2018: 15). Such studies offer insights into scribes' design choices.

Digital imaging advances

Digital techniques have advanced manuscript analysis, enabling the study of minute details (Smithson et al., 2019; Liang et al., 2022). Digitization provides interactive engagement with manuscripts, offering new perspectives on their historical context (Patel & Gupta, 2021). Digital methods reshape historical understanding.

Contemporary influences

Iranian manuscript layout has deeply influenced modern book design and graphic arts, blending tradition and innovation (Adams, 2021; Chen et al., 2020). Contemporary compositions mirror the harmonious text-image balance of the past. This reflects the enduring impact of Iranian page layout history on current visual media. This review has summarized key research on page layout in Iranian manuscripts and their lasting influences. Further analysis of layout methods from Seljuk to Safavid eras can reveal new patterns to blend tradition and modernity harmoniously.

METHOD

This research employs documentary study methods (Payne & Payne, 2004) to investigate the page layout patterns in Iranian manuscripts. These methods are chosen for their suitability for analyzing historical documents and extracting meaningful insights. An extensive review of relevant literature and scholarly sources establishes a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical and conceptual framework surrounding Iranian manuscript calligraphy. The identified manuscripts are meticulously examined to discern the visual methods employed in organizing elements and combining parts within the various sections. The data obtained from this analysis are then interpreted and connected to the broader theoretical framework.

Samples were selected based on the following criteria:

1. The manuscript should have significant content.
2. The manuscript should have a confirmed historical value.
3. The manuscript should have a confirmed value regarding visual components (artistic components and those related to page layout).

In the second stage, the following criteria were considered:

1. Complete sample pages should be available from the manuscripts.
2. One literary manuscript (poetry, story, mysticism, etc.) and one general manuscript (scientific or historical) were selected from each historical Era.

Analysis

Based on the criteria mentioned in the first stage of sample selection, 120 manuscripts from the beginning of Seljuk Era until the end of the Safavid Era were examined. And finally, 57 of them were analyzed in this research.

FINDINGS

Layout design on a page creates suitable visual relationships between texts, images, and empty spaces. Mirhosseini (2011) notes that a key principle in Iranian calligraphy is the internal correlation between image and text, with written lines shaping images. Layouts combine words and images in a syntactic composition to “induce and convey news, formed by combining visual and verbal elements” (Dandis, 2002: 226). Regarding the roots of modern Iranian layout, while Western influence is undeniable, the tradition has reshaped today’s techniques. An image alone risks becoming ambiguous over time. However, artists convey meaning through

textual hints, even reaching pictorial verse. This shows Iranian painting's literary richness. In some books, images aid text comprehension and appeal. Valuable artworks have retained their essence despite evolving contexts. Remarkably, alongside images, the text has not harmed the work's spirit concerning "knowledge, management, and the conflict between calligraphers and painters" (Mirhosseini, 2011: 16).

Calligraphers emphasized writing spaces amidst images, by sometimes describing paintings. More than captioning, integrated text served a purpose. This multiplicity of embedded writing resembles modern page designs. Thus the unity of text and images can be explored from a contemporary perspective (Mirhosseini, 2011). Skilled artists deftly combined technical and aesthetic elements (Davazdah Imami & Bankizadeh, 2013: 19). Artists separate text through framing, creating a pleasant "proportional layout" (Mirhosseini, 2011: 17). Different fonts distinguish text levels, demonstrating artistic dexterity. Current books also permit varied fonts. Spatial segmentation places text and images, frequently positioning text in the optimal 3:2 "golden" ratio. Adapting this can emphasize chapter titles. The integrated use of visual and textual factors creates engaging spaces. These refined achievements have been passed down and can consciously inspire modern Iranian graphics. Text calligraphy indicates precision and optimizes page space for images, adding beauty through active fluidity of slanted lines. The proximity of logically sequenced texts and images creates harmonious spaces for contemplation, which holds relevance for layout. Designers must arrange elements to direct viewers through the material.

Manuscript Illumination in Iran

The linear manuscript is considered one of humanity's most valuable cultural and artistic heritage, which has had a special place in Islamic civilization from the beginning: Islam's special attention and value to the concept of writing and reading on the one hand, and the prohibition of imagery in this religion directed all interests toward the ancient art of manuscripts on the other hand. However, in the Islamic world, "manuscripts have flourished simultaneously with the writing of the Quran since the second century AH" (Jabbari & Mosleh Amirdahi, 2016: 86).

The term *illumination* is seen from the emergence of Persian poetry in the works of poets such as Rudaki (died 329 AH). Speakers engaged in composition, secretarial work, and librarianship were naturally more familiar with these terms, and some poets were also more interested in using these terms. In the notes of the poets of the Timurid and Safavid Eras, calligraphy and other parts of the speakers are often referred to. In the notes of calligraphers, the literary and literary skills of some artists are praised. During the Safavid era and at the same time as the Gorkanids of India, manuscript and bookmaking arts were of interest to kings (Ghlichkhani, 2016). However, "the history of the layout of linear copies in Iran probably dates to the Sassanid Era, and the Manicheans had also made great progress in bookmaking" (Pakbaz, 2001: 406). Understanding the basic principles of ancient art is the key to apprehending the art of bookmaking, which "encompasses the Elamite, Median, Persian, Parthian, and Sassanian eras, and Manichean painting, which is all the art of ancient Iran" (Mehregan, 2004: 40). Historical evidence shows that bookmaking has existed in the Middle East since ancient times. The oldest accounts suggest that the Avesta was written on twelve thousand cowhides using liquid gold and adorned with precious gems. According to Mahevan (2013: 25), "Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* also repeatedly mentions that the words of kings were written on silk with liquid gold." This indicates the decoration and embellishment of writings.

Any evaluation of ancient Iranian art of painting must start with the report by Doust Mohammad. "He attributed the art of painting to Daniel, Mani, and Shapur in the Sassanid era, according to his work's introduction" (Robinson, 1959: 3). This Sassanid and Manichean tradition persisted for several centuries after the emergence of Islam. It is stated in "religious texts that the illustrated version of Arjang (Mani's book) was kept in the Ghazni treasury and preserved in Ghazni for five centuries after Islam's acceptance" (Tabibi, 2007: 9). *Arjang*, *Artenge*, or *Ardahang* is the name of an illuminated manuscript or illustrated book created by Mani, one of the Iranian prophets, in the third century AD in the Sassanid era, and he claimed prophethood by it. In this book, he used painting to demonstrate his fundamental teachings and beliefs about the creation system to make it easier for his followers to understand. These paintings depicted the inner world of Mani's other books, known as The Gospel of Life. In these images, "the two worlds of light and darkness, as well as the creation of the present world, were shown" (Amid, 1996: 42). Recognizing the roots of Iranian decorative art and book

decoration leads to a better understanding of ancient Iranian myths (Mehregan, 2004). Muslims, who attached special importance to writing and embellishing the Quran from the beginning, utilized various cultures' achievements in this field according to their goals and desires. Initially, they decorated Quran manuscripts with simple geometric patterns, but soon they began to use intricate designs on the margins and headers of pages, taking advantage of highly ornate calligraphy. On the other hand, the inclination towards translating and writing scientific and historical texts during the Abbasid caliphate made it necessary to illustrate books, including images of humans, animals, and plants, in handwritten copies. The use of paper instead of parchment elevated the art of bookbinding. Some Arabic manuscripts, such as *Kitab al-Tiryāq*, preserved in the National Library of Vienna, indicate the contribution of Iranians to the evolution of bookbinding during the Seljuk Era. The peak of this art's evolution in Iran is the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries AD/ninth and tenth centuries AH (Pakbaz, 2001: 406). The Timurid rulers invested in attracting artists to their court and worked to expand and develop the art of bookbinding and the artistic activities of their libraries (Azhand, 2008).

Bookbinding in Iran has a deep connection with Persian literature, and it is not without reason that the most prominent examples of this art can be found in copies of works such as *Ferdowsi's Shahnameh*, *Khamsa Nizami*, *Jami's Haft Orang*, *Saadi's Gulistan and Bustan*, and *Divan of Hafez*. Many of the early Persian manuscripts were lost during the Mongol invasions. Still, some books of poetry, such as "*Varka-o-Golshah* and *Samak-e-Ayar*, have survived and showcase the fidelity of Iranian artists to the previous artistic and literary traditions" (Mirhosseini, 2011: 12). Bookbinding in Iran peaked during the 14th to 16th centuries CE (8th to 10th centuries AH). The rulers interested in art and literature played an influential role in this transformation by establishing bookbinding workshops. Still, it was mostly the artists who, with their taste and creativity, gradually perfected the principles of book decoration and applied them to different parts of the book, from the cover and endpapers to the text and illustrations. The common goal of calligraphers, painters, illuminators, and bookbinders was to achieve sublime beauty that would not only please the eyes but also enlighten the hearts. The complete manifestation of such an art can be seen in many Persian manuscripts, including *the Shahnameh of Bayasanghori* and *the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasbi* (Pakbaz, 2001).

Linear manuscript in Iran has various elements and sections. Generally, a manuscript in Iran consists of the following sections:

1. Text pages
2. Text and image pages
3. Image pages
4. Table of contents page
5. Cover page
6. Title page (*Sarlouh*).
7. Beginning page

The process of designing a linear manuscript is such that the layout and combination of each manuscript follow a specific method from beginning to end. This method affects the placement of all the elements on the page. The manuscript's existing elements, including text, titles, images, margins, decorations, and tables, follow this method. The layout governing the copy should be considered the same knowledge as the modern page layout. Of course, in a linear manuscript, each era's method and style adhere to the general principles governing the manuscript of that era. However, some unique and specific methods belong to certain manuscripts. In this study, the layout and principles governing two sections of an Iranian linear manuscript, namely the beginning pages and title pages (*Sarlouh*), are analyzed and examined. The patterns governing the layout of these elements in different eras are also extracted.

The Beginning Page

The beginning page (Figures 1, 2), prepares the reader's entry into the book and has undergone many changes over time based on the text and type of books. The beginning page's format largely depends on the type of book. If the text is historical, it is very simple and plain, like the *Jami' al-Tawarikh* (Compendium of Chronicles) during the Ilkhanid Era. Suppose it is about poetry and literature or has a mystical and literary style. In that case, it is adorned with many decorations, colors, and glossy finishes, such as the *Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasbi*, the *Divan of Saadi*, the *Khamsa of Amir Khosrow Dehlavi*, and the *Mehr and Moshtari* in the

Safavid Era. The designs and decorations used in most beginning pages include decorative suns accompanied by various types of flowers, leaves, and arabesques, along with geometric patterns. However, most of them do not have any text or writing.

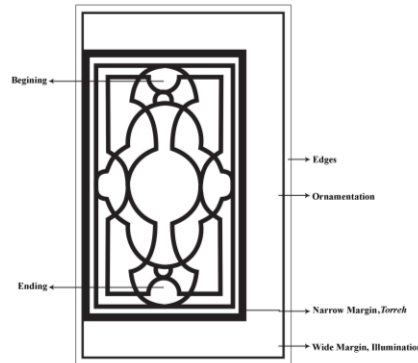


Figure 1. Gilding and margin, Timurid Era

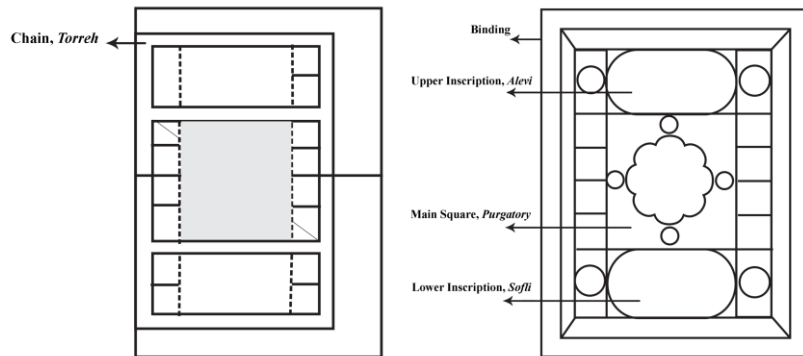


Figure 2. Illumination and ornamentation of the Timurid Era

Based on the limited examples examined in the Seljuk Era manuscripts, examples of using beginning pages have yet to be found. Therefore, the beginning pages seem to begin during the Ilkhanid Era (Figures 3, 4). Generally, from the Ilkhanid Era to the end of the Safavid Era, four main methods can be seen in the construction and decoration of beginning pages:

1. Full-text pages as an introduction.
2. Pages containing independent images or images with text.
3. Pages with various combinations of table layouts, different margins, front and back panels, and elaborate decorations.
4. Ornate pages with a *Sun Shamseh* or Central Medallion (*Toranj*).



Figure 3. Tarikh of Jahangushay (left) and Manafi al-Haywan (right), Ilkhanid Era

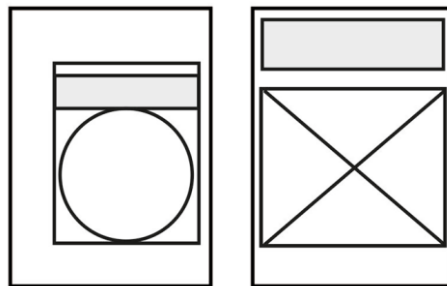


Figure 4. The pattern of the beginning page, *Tarikh of Jahangushay* (left) and *Manafi al-Haywan* (right), Ilkhanid Era

The original layout of the initial page consists of a circle, diamond, or square in the center and one or two horizontal rectangles in the form of a tablet at the top and bottom of the page. Simple single-colored decorations in flowers can be seen at the end of the top and bottom frames. This combination mostly emerged during the Jalayirid Era (Figures 5-6). It continued until the end of the Safavid Era, such as in the version of the *Divan of Khvaju Kermani* and the *Masnavi of Khosrow and Shirin* from the Jalayirid Era, the *Gulchin of Eskandar Sultan* from the Timurid Era, and the *Kolliyat of Saadi* from the Safavid Era.



Figure 5. *Masnavi of Khosrow and Shirin* (left) and *Divan of Khvaju Kermani* (center & right), Jalayirid Era

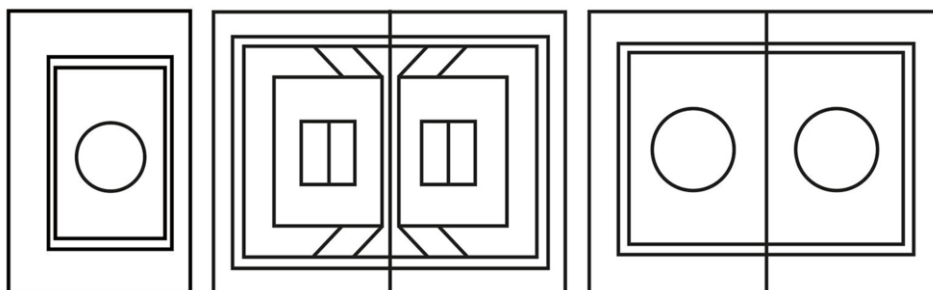


Figure 6. The pattern of the beginning page, *Masnavi of Khosrow and Shirin* (left) and *Divan of Khvaju Kermani* (center & right), Jalayirid Era

During the Ilkhanid Era, this page mostly features the evolution of images or illustrations that cover a large part of the page, such as in the manuscript of *Manafi al-Hayawan*, *Tarikhnameh*, or smaller versions of *Shahnameh*, or in the comprehensive manuscript of *Jami' al-Tawarikh* by Rashid al-Din. These geometric shapes are initially covered with writing and, of course, floral and foliage decorations. The text is seen alongside the image, and independent illustrations and illustrations with text were used during this era. In some manuscripts, such as *Manafi al-Hayawan*, the title is written in bold letters at the top of the page.

No illustrations or decorative elements were used on the beginning page of the comprehensive manuscript of *Jami' al-Tawarikh* from the Ilkhanid Era. The beginning page consisted only of text. Unfortunately, in the samples from the *Alainjou* and *Almuzaffar* Eras, the use of the beginning page is not seen. However, by examining the samples between Ilkhanid and Jalayirid Eras, it can be inferred that the beginning page has undergone an evolutionary process. From the Jalayirid Era onwards, manuscripts take on a more decorative state, and their beginning pages, such as in the manuscript of *Diwan-e Khojavi Kermani* and *Manzoomah-e*

Khosrow and Shirin, are very beautiful with elaborate decorations in three styles, including pages with small illustrations and ornate margins, pages decorated with single-pointed stars or suns in the center of the frame, and pages with illustrations. The beginning pages of later eras, which combine decoration with writing, have a unique composition that first appeared during this era.

From the Jalayirid Era onwards, one can see a variety of forms and styles in the composition of the title page. For example, in the version of *Divan of Khojavi Kermani*, the beginning page covers the entire page. Still, in the *Khosrow and Shirin* manuscript, the title on page 12 is only decorated with a central sun motif inside a small decorative frame. One can observe a different method of decorating the beginning page during the Jalayirid Era in the *Divan of Khojavi Kermani* version. During the Safavid Era, in the usual third method of decorating the beginning page, which is accompanied by detailed and intricate grid lines, the wide margin that is seen between the edge of the paper and the narrow border of the grid lines is decorated with balconies, flowers, leaves, and even calligraphy. However, in the version of *Divan of Khojavi Kermani*, this margin is filled with text and writing in a slanted manner. This method has received attention in subsequent eras for the layout of text pages in many different versions. The design of the beginning page during the Ilkhanid Era is seen as a single page. Still, based on the studied examples in this research, a new style is seen in the Jalayirid Era as two facing pages in the *Khojavi Kermani* version with different decorations and compositions repeated in later eras. This unified pattern of two-facing pages was followed from the Timurid Era onwards. This pattern includes two facing pages with headers in the form of inscriptions at the top and bottom, a sun in the middle with Islamic decorations and flowers and leaves around it, and a margin around the page. In addition to using single-page beginning pages, multi-page beginning pages are also a method that began in this era as seen in the *Divan of Khojavi Kermani* manuscript. The beginning of each section or entry in a manuscript is adorned with a new beginning page.

In the Timurid Era (Figures 7, 8), the beginning page typically featured a small or large central sunburst with a rectangular frame and floral or Islamic decorations (but not too elaborate). Examples include the *Baysonghori Shahnameh*, *Divan of Hafez* (with inscriptions at the top), *Mantiq al-Tayr*, and *Khamsa of Nizami*. In the Timurid Era, using several pages as a beginning page (a set of pages) was also common. A complete example of these can be seen in the *Shahnama Baysonghori*, which has five title pages consisting of two sunburst pages, one decorated with a small table, and two independent illustration pages. These pages can then be considered introductory and dedication pages. The independent illustrations depict a visual representation of the patron or person who sponsored or ordered the book.



Figure 7. *Khamsa of Nizami* (left) and *Shahnama Baysonghori* (center), *Gulchin of Eskandar Sultan* (right), Timurid Era

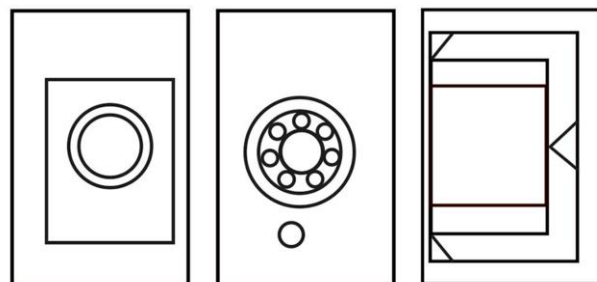


Figure 8. The pattern of the beginning page, *Khamsa of Nizami* (left) and *Shahnama Baysonghori* (center), *Gulchin of Eskandar Sultan* (right), Timurid Era

The diversity of decorative styles began in the Timurid Era, and a new decoration method can be observed in each form of the beginning page. In the rows of pages decorated with *Shamseh* and Central Medallion (*Toranj*), although the grids are simpler than in previous eras, Central Medallion (*Toranj*) and *Shamseh* can be seen in various and diverse forms, and with different designs (such as *Khamsa of Nizami* and *Shahnama Baysonqori*). *Sharfa* (the lines drawn around *Shamseh*) and head medallions (*Toranj*) are common in this era. Even in the selected version of the Alexander Sultan Golestan, the beginning page is decorated with several beautiful medallions (*Toranj*) instead of one medallion (*Toranj*). The beginning pages decorated with combinations of grids are more elaborate and include sections such as the top and bottom inscription, central square, surrounding air duct, border (narrow margin), *Sharfa*, and punctuation seen in the logical manuscript *Mantiq al-Tayr*.

The Timurid version of *Divan of Hafez* is one of the unique examples of this era that has yet to adhere to the principles of that era. The beginning page in this version begins with the text of the first ghazal of the Divan. The wide margin of the page is covered with illumination, and the header continues to the edges of the frame. This style was highly regarded in the Safavid Era and was used in the text pages.

In the Safavid Era (Figures 9, 10), the beginning page reaches its peak of beauty and perfection with complete Islamic decorations, arabesques, half-arabesques, bright colors, and gilding. Examples include the *Khamsa of Amir Khosrow Dehlavi*, which is only decorated and contains no text, the *Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasbi*, *Mehr and Mah*, *Masnavi-e-Ma'navi*, and *Kolliyat of Saadi*. The variety of styles in the beginning pages of the Safavid Era is remarkable, and the use of a set of beginning pages can be seen in many versions of this era. Numerous small tables with abundant decorations and half-arabesques cling to the central table's narrow border covering the entire page. Large and even larger upper and lower inscriptions have shrunk the central square to a very small size. Even in the version of *Amir Khosrow Dehlavi*, it has turned into a small window in the middle of the table decoration. Balconies in the margins, center, top, and bottom medallion (*Toranj*) are new decorative elements used in abundance.

In the Safavid Era, beginning pages were decorated with illustrations and *Shamseh* and had little text. Examples include the *Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasbi*, *Rawdat al-Safa*, *Mehr and Mah*, *Golestan of Saadi*, and *Khamse of Nizami*. However, in the *Haft Awrang Masnavi* of Jami, the style and proportion of the Timurid and Jalayirid Eras are revived, and the small circles on the right side of the image, which are decorated with an illustration, form the beginning page again. Of course, no text is seen in pages that depict only illustrations and *Shamseh*, except for pages that use headers at the top and bottom, in which even inscriptions are used. Examples of such pages include the manuscript of *Khvajju Kermani's Divan*, *Saadi's Kolliyat*, *Hafez's Divan*, *Jami's Khamsa*, *Saadi's Gulistan*, and *Ilkhani's Kalila and Dimna*. Since the Timurid Era, the title page has been moving towards becoming the beginning page and is seen with elaborate decorations and illustrations. During the Safavid Era, the use of the beginning page became prevalent.



Figure 9. *Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasebi*, *Kolliyat of Saadi*, *Golestan of Saadi*, and *Haft Awrang Masnavi of Jami*, Safavid Era

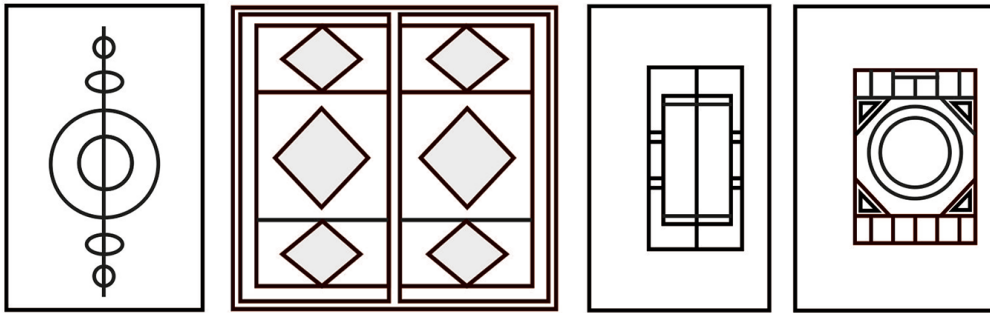


Figure 10. The pattern of the beginning page, *Shahnameh* of Shah Tahmasebi, *Kolliyat* of Saadi, *Golestan* of Saadi, and *Haft Awrang Masnavi* of Jami, Safavid Era

Title (*Sarlouh*) Page

The title (*Sarlouh*) page is one of the most common decorations in manuscripts during the text's beginning pages, which has a structure similar to headers and porches of buildings. The title page is usually divided into two sections. One section, called the small rectangular frame, usually contains the work's title or a prayer in a *Kitabeh* located in the lower section, which is named and has only the aspect of a crown (*Taj*) written inside it. The other section of the title page, which is drawn at the top of the *Kitabeh*, is decorative, and the beauty of the title depends heavily on the style in which it was drawn. An example of title pages that do not have a crown (*Taj*) is “*Sarlouh Kitabeh*” (Mayel Heravi, 2001: 41). The concept of *Sarlouh* has been seen since the Al-Jalayer’s time. Each book chapter has a *Sarlouh*, and the beginning sections have a title. This style begins with Al-Jalayer. The title and headline are placed in a decorative box that is filled with margin and *Toranj* (an ornamental element). A complete decorative *Kitabeh* can be seen in the manuscript of *Khwaju-i Kermani’s Divan* from Al-Jalayer’s time, which reached its peak of beauty and perfection in the Safavid Era.

The structure of *Sarlouh* in manuscript copies is based on their division into two parts: the *Kitabeh* (inscription panel) and the decoration above it. In some pages of *Sarlouh* in manuscripts, the decorations extend to the edges of the page from the top, left, and right sides, resembling a mihrab's forehead. This area is referred to as the crown (*Taj*). However, this is only the case in some parts of the *Sarlouh*. The appearance of *Sarlouh* on manuscript pages can be traced back to the Safavid Era. The term *Sarlouh* page is first seen during the Safavid Era. On the *Sarlouh* page, a closed or open frame is seen from the top. In the free text, the title is placed in the center. For example, works like *Al-Baqiyah*, *Munis al-Ahjar*, and *Jami’al-Tawarikh* (Figures 11, 12) were designed during the Ilkhanid Era. Sometimes, it is placed in a simple frame that separates the title from the text but is separated by a simple line. It has a simple inscription style. The small central table within the text, where the title is placed, is straightforward and without decoration. It is simply a table layout repeated once to several times on a page, from the Ilkhanid Era to the Timurid Era, without any decorative elements (Figures 13, 14).



Figure 11. *Jami’al-Tawarikh*, Ilkhanid Era

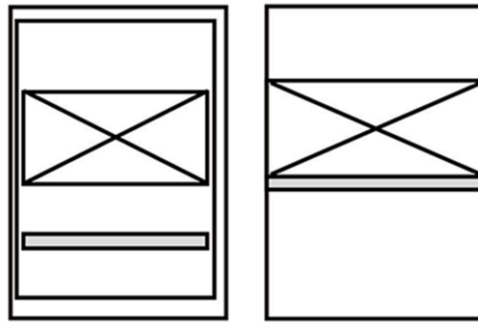


Figure 12. The pattern of title (Sarloh) page, *Jami'al-Tawarikh*, Ilkhanid Era



Figure 13. Mozaffari's *Shahnameh Shiraz* (left), Al Muzaffar Era. *Divan of Khwaju'i Kermani* (right), Jalayirid Era

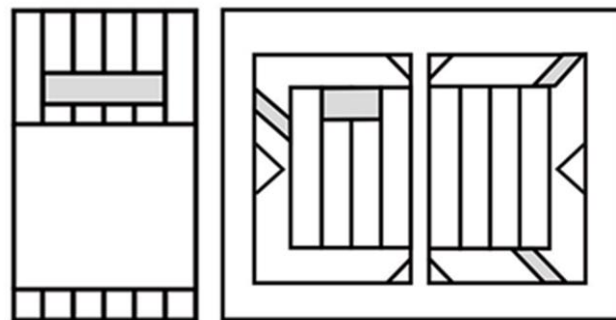


Figure 14. The pattern of title (Sarloh) page, Mozaffari's *Shahnameh Shiraz* (left), Al Muzaffar Era. *Divan of Khwaju'i Kermani* (right), Jalayirid Era

The background decoration of the title frame was simple until the Timurid Era. From the Timurid Era onwards, it is seen as elaborately decorated. It transforms from a frame to a full page and is used as a method in the manuscript design of handwritten copies until the end of the Safavid Era. What was very simple in the Ilkhanid manuscripts is filled with various decorations in the manuscripts of the Timurid Era, including illumination, interlacing, half-interlacing, Islamic motifs, and beautiful and captivating colorings of geometric patterns. This style is well observed in the manuscript of *Divan of Khwaju'i Kermani* (Figure 13, 14) from the Jalayirid Era, possibly for the first time. When the title is placed next to a decorative panel, it transforms into a method called *Sarlouh* (headpiece), a frame with the title and decorations above it. The manuscript of *Jami'al-Tawarikh* from the Ilkhanid Era is exceptional due to the absence of any small central tables in the main text, employed titles, and the use of illustrations, make it a unique example.

In manuscripts where the text of the *Sarlouh* is placed within a fully decorated frame, a small frame with textual decoration was initially designed. They would first create a separately decorated frame for the title and place it next to the *Sarlouh* until both the decorated title frame and the *Sarlouh* became unified. This unification can be seen in the Timurid Era manuscripts of *Koliat Khwaju Kermani's* collected works, *Khamsa Nizami*,

Baysonqori Shahnameh (Figure 15, 16), and almost in all Safavid Era manuscripts (Figure 17, 18). It has become a form of page layout style.

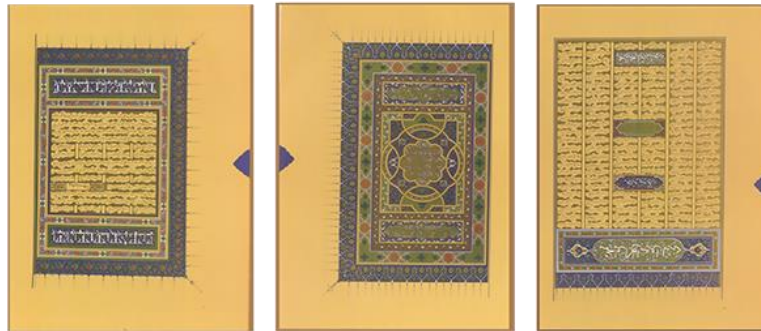


Figure 15. Baysonqori Shahnameh, Timurid Era

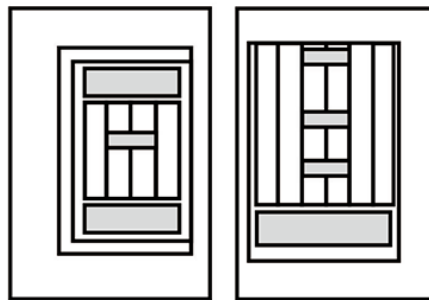


Figure 16. The Pattern of Title (Sarlouh) Page, Baysonqori Shahnameh, Timurid Era



Figure 17. Koliyat of Saadi, Safavid Era

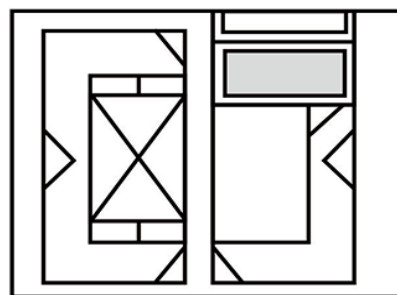


Figure 18. The pattern of title (Sarlouh) page, Koliyat of Saadi, Safavid Era

CONCLUSION

This research has analyzed the visual patterns prevailing in Iranian handwritten manuscripts in two important sections; the beginning page and the title page *Sarlouh*. These two sections define the beginning of a

manuscript and the beginning of a section within the manuscript. The diverse composition of the beginning page signifies its significance in the overall layout of a manuscript. Although the text and writing are often replaced on this page, the attention given to its composition indicates the importance and credibility of this page in handwritten manuscripts. Over time, the significant changes and variations in these sections reflect the evolution of manuscript production in Iran.

The *Sarlouh* is a branch or continuation of these beginning pages and other sections within the manuscripts, referred to as the *Sar Onvan* (headline). Simple title headers were common in the early Islamic centuries, gradually evolving into decorated titles with various combinations. This diversity and the creation of new combinations led to the emergence of *Sarlouh* pages, which were influenced by the decorations of the beginning page. In some manuscripts, visual coordination between the decoration and composition of the beginning page and the *Sarlouh* pages can be observed. The following noteworthy results have emerged from the analysis of these two sections:

1. The beginning page in pre-Jalayirid manuscripts is designed as a single page with simple decorations, mostly illustrations.
2. From Jalayirid onwards, less space was allocated to the beginning page.
3. In the Safavid Era, the beginning page peaked in perfection and beauty, adorned with complete Islamic decorations, such as arabesque, trefoil, semicircles, and bright colors with gilding.
4. The concept of *Sarlouh* can be observed in the design of the initial page from the Jalayirid Era onwards.
5. The rectangular and circular shapes are repeated from the Ilkhanid to the Safavid Era.
6. From the Timurid Era onwards, the *Sarlouh* page tends to transform into a beginning page and becomes more elaborate, adorned with intricate designs and illustrations.
7. From the Safavid Era onwards, the *Sarlouh* page is characterized by a frame containing the title and decorations or a simple section encompassing the title with decorations above it.
8. From the Timurid Era onwards, the decorated title frame transformed into a page known as the *Sarlouh* page, which was extensively utilized in the layout of handwritten manuscripts until the end of the Safavid Era.

In summary, this research provides insights into the visual analysis of the dominant patterns in Iranian handwritten manuscripts, focusing on the beginning and *Sarlouh* pages. The changes and developments observed in these sections demonstrate the evolution of manuscript artistry and its influence on the overall composition of handwritten manuscripts in Iran.

Authors' Contributions

The authors contributed equally to the study.

Competing Interests

There is no potential conflict of interest.

Ethics Committee Declaration

Ethics committee approval is not required.

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