

## Final Report of the workshop:

### Iskandar's Splendour: Art, Patronage and Representation at the Court of Iskandar b. 'Umar Shaykh

By Dr Ilse Sturkenboom, University of St Andrews, on 21 December 2017

Attached document: workshop programme

The workshop *Iskandar's Splendour* was convened at the University of St Andrews on 27-28 October 2017. It brought together scholars from the fields of Archaeology, Art History, History and History of Science to interdisciplinary discuss aspects of art, patronage and representation at the court of the Timurid prince Iskandar b. 'Umar Shaykh (1384-1415). The valued sponsorship of the St Andrews University's Institute of Iranian Studies has allowed nine scholars from Europe and the US to come together in St Andrews, to present their research and to engage in scholarly exchange with Scotland-based academics and students.



Figure 1

Speakers, participants and chair people gather for the beginning of the workshop.

Photograph by Dr Paul Churchill, reproduced with the photographer's permission.

The idea for this workshop arose from the wealth of the available material, which calls for study by scholars from various disciplines. Although Iskandar is well-known amongst historians of art, literature, politics and science, the corpus of works produced during his reign has hitherto not been collected, let alone studied, in its entirety. The workshop therefore aimed to publicise newly discovered material and to discuss and evaluate approaches and open questions. Remarkably by one of the speakers and confirmed by the other speakers and participants of the workshop, this has been the first event on a Timurid princely figure. We thank it to the maturity of study, to the generosity of the sponsors and to the University of St Andrews that such a specialised workshop could take place.



Figure 2

Introduction by Dr Tim Greenwood, Director of the Institute of Iranian Studies, University of St Andrews. Photograph by Mrs Fatemeh Khansalar, reproduced with the photographer's permission.

This specialist character and the many open questions still to be discussed were the reasons to design this event as a workshop instead of a formal conference. The workshop was opened by Dr Tim Greenwood, Director of the Institute of Iranian Studies, University of St Andrews, who underscored the importance of convening focussed workshops and the necessity for the publication of their outcomes (fig. 2). The framework of the workshop itself consisted of five thematic sessions of presentations of twenty minutes, which were followed by ten-minute discussions (please see the attached programme for more details). In many ways, the presentations have not only met but even surpassed the expectations; Thrilling new material was presented and participants generously shared their original views, insights and queries. The friendly and open atmosphere allowed for lively exchange after the talks, during breaks and dinners, and, especially, in the final discussion-session. The latter was based on discussion questions and topics that the speakers had formulated prior to the workshop, as well as on those that came up during the two days of intense engagement with Iskandarid material. In this immensely fruitful session, we amongst others debated about the concept of patronage, names and titles of Iskandar, relationships to the Jalayirid dynasty and the legacy of artistic and intellectual production under Iskandar in later Timurid history. Discussing approaches to this abundant material, the workshop's speakers unanimously agreed on continuing this project, which will be dealt with at the end of this report.

Unexpected challenges consisted of cancellations by speakers, who, against their wishes, were unable to attend. Dr Ali Shojaee Esfahani from the Art University of Isfahan did not receive his visa on time, but generously sent a pre-recorded presentation which was shown during the workshop. Unfortunately, Dr Karin Rührdanz had to cancel due to health reasons. She kindly sent here presentation and paper, which was read by Dr Ilse Sturkenboom. Both

Dr Karin Rührdanz and Dr Ali Shojaee Esfahani received questions after their presentations by telephone.

Another unexpected but very welcome occasion was the offer of Mrs Fatemeh Khansalar to display artworks by herself and the Shiraz-based Goleaan group of Iranian miniaturist. Their lacquer painted objects brought even more aesthetics and colour to our workshop (fig. 3).



Figure 3

Dr Peyvand Firouzeh delivers her paper *Iskandar b. 'Umar Shaykh's Patronage of the Shah Vali Khanaqah in Taft and Divine Self-fashioning*. Artworks by Mrs Fatemeh Khansalar and the Goleaan group are on display in the foreground.

Photograph by Mrs Fatemeh Khansalar, reproduced with the photographer's permission.

Bringing together scholars to discuss the artistic and intellectual output of Iskandar's reign has had a synergetic effect (fig. 4). The knowledge and insights presented often seamlessly connected one presentation to another, and scholars' approaches also proved to be valuable for others. Through this cooperation we all gained a better understanding of Iskandar and his time. As mentioned earlier, the unanimous consent is that this knowledge should not go to waste. We decided to work together in producing an edited volume that beyond publishing the results of this workshop should form a comprehensive handbook for all those seeking to gain knowledge about Iskandar's courtly life. In order to achieve such a comprehensive book, some speakers committed to publish on a topic deviating from their presentations and further scholars who were not present are and will be asked to contribute, too. Working towards this publication, we stay in contact through the online platform 'Iskandar Circle', which allows for further exchange of knowledge, ideas and material.

We remain grateful to the Institute of Iranian Studies for enabling this workshop and for significantly contributing to its success.

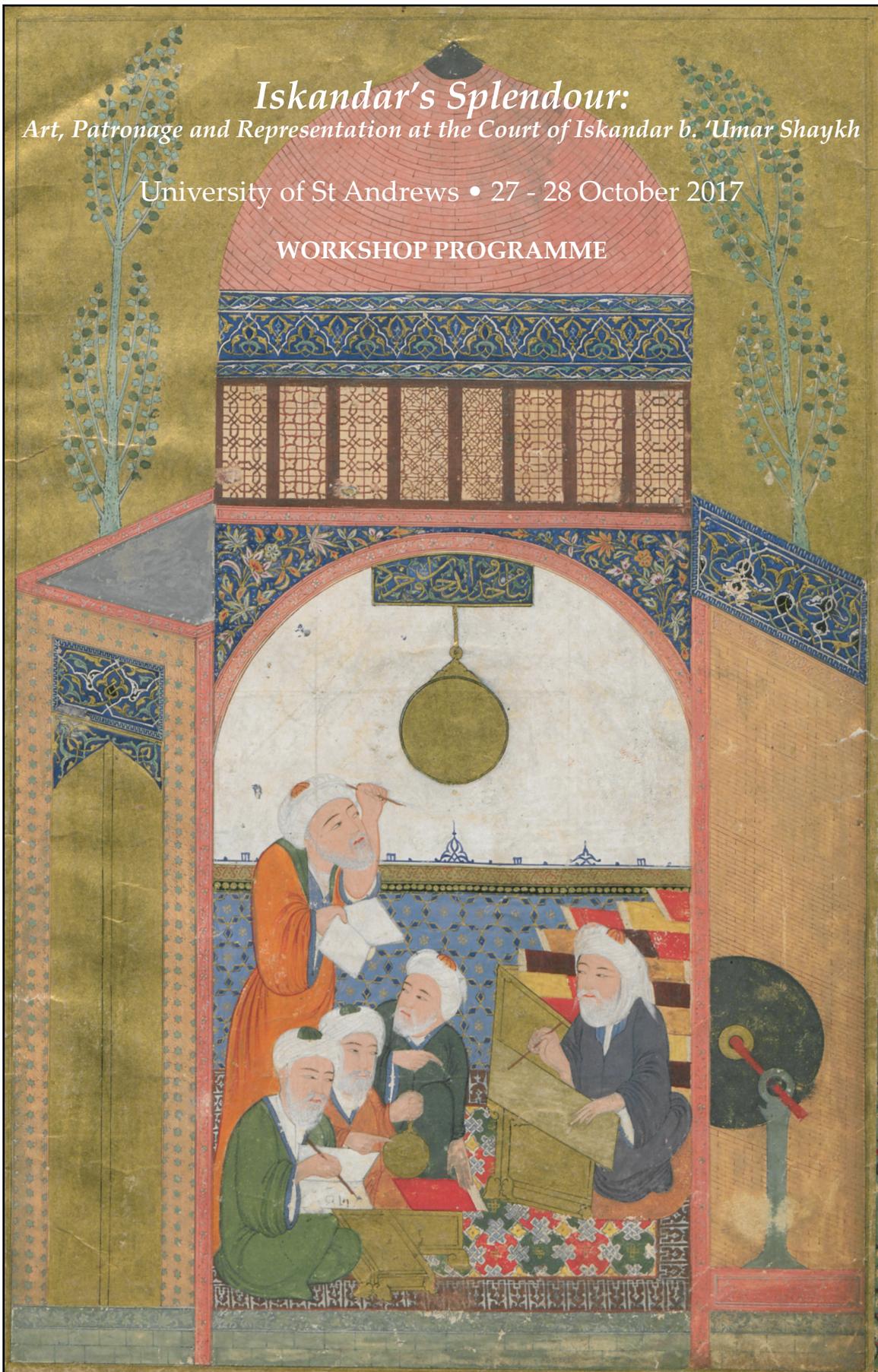


Figure 4  
Speakers and participants continue their discussions over dinner.  
Photograph by Dr Paul Churchill, reproduced with the photographer's permission.

*Iskandar's Splendour:  
Art, Patronage and Representation at the Court of Iskandar b. 'Umar Shaykh*

University of St Andrews • 27 - 28 October 2017

WORKSHOP PROGRAMME



Our sponsors include: The British Institute of Persian Studies, Iran Heritage Foundation, The Barakat Trust and University of St Andrews - School of Art History and Institute of Iranian Studies.



The British Institute of Persian Studies  
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# PROGRAMME

## FRIDAY, 27 OCTOBER

• 15:30-16:00: Tea/Coffee

• 16:00-16:30: Introductions: Dr Tim Greenwood, Director of the Institute of Iranian Studies, University of St Andrews, and Dr Ilse Sturkenboom.

### **Session 1, 16:30-18:30: History, nature and science**

**Chair:** Dr Maryam Ghorban Karimi

• 16:30-17:00: Dr Evrim Binbaş, Universität Bonn.

*On the Relationship between Mu'īn al-Dīn Naṭanzī and Iskandar b. 'Umar-Shaykh: New Sources and Perspectives*

• 17:00-17:30: Nicoletta Fazio, M.A., Universität Heidelberg, Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin.  
*Red Sulphur and the Royal Body, or what can Alchemy tell us about Iskandar's Political Vision?*

• 17:30-18:00: Dr Karin Rührdanz, Independent scholar.

*The providential variety of nature and its hidden forces visualised*

18:00, End of session.

• 19:30: Dinner at local restaurant.

## SATURDAY, 28 OCTOBER

### **Session 2, 09:00-10:00: Iskandar's architectural patronage**

**Chair:** Dr Ilse Sturkenboom

• 09:00–09:30: Dr Ali Shojaee Esfahani, Art University of Isfahan. (Pre-recorded.)

*Archaeology of Borders: Eskandar Soltan's Domain Between Fars and Kerman and its Architectural Manifest in the Kamar-e Marj Fortress*

• 09:30–10:00: Dr Peyvand Firouzeh, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz.

*Iskandar b. 'Umar Shaykh's Patronage of the Shah Vali Khanaqah in Taft and Divine Self-fashioning*

10:00, End of session.

• 10:00–10:30: Coffee break

### **Session 3, 10:30-12:00: Iskandar's Horoscope**

**Chair:** Dr Saeed Talajooy

• 10:30–11:00: Dr Rob H. van Gent, Universiteit Utrecht.

*The Astronomical and Astrological Aspects of Iskandar Sultan's Horoscope*

- 11:00-11:30: Dr Eleanor Sims, Independent scholar.  
*The Illumination of Iskandar's Horoscope*

12:00, End of session.

- 12:00-13:00: Lunch

#### **Session 4, 13:00-14:30: Illumination, ornamentation, decoration**

**Chair:** Dr Richard McClary

- 13:00-13:30: Dr Elaine Wright, Independent scholar.  
*Illumination in the Manuscripts of Iskandar Sultan*
- 13:30-14:00: Dr Emily Shovelton, Independent scholar.  
*On the Edge: The decorative margins of Iskandar Sultan's Miscellany*
- 14:00-14:30: Dr Barbara Brend, Independent scholar.  
*The Man and the Margin – thoughts on the sources of ornamentation on Add. 27261, fol. 538a*

14:30, End of session.

- 14:30-15:00: Refreshments

#### **Session 5, 15:00-16:00: Other Encyclopaedias**

**Chair:** Dr Dimitri Kastritsis

- 15:00-15:30: Dr Ilse Sturkenboom, University of St Andrews.  
*Yet another Encyclopaedia: The New York Anthology (MMA 13.228.19)*
- 15:30-16:00: Prof. Priscilla Soucek, The Institute of Fine Arts, NYU.  
*LA 161 and its Sources, A Speculation?*

16:00, End of session.

- 16:00-16:30: Tea break

#### **Session 6, 16:30-18:00: General Discussion**

Session led by Dr Ilse Sturkenboom.

18:00, End of session.

- 19:00: Dinner at local restaurant.

# ABSTRACTS

Barbara BREND

*The Man and the Margin – thoughts on the sources of ornamentation on Add. 27261, fol. 538a*

The marginal ornamentations are a great feature of the Anthology or Miscellany copied for Iskandar Sultan in 814/September-October 1411 (British Library, Add. 27261). The figural elements include men and animals, sometimes presented singly, and sometimes interacting. The figures or incidents portrayed appear to be a finely executed patchwork of random pieces. The more purely decorative elements may be geometric but for the most part are scrolling patterns. One of the single figures appears to be in European costume of surprisingly up-to-date fashion. Could it be that the scroll-work that accompanies him also owes something to Europe?

Evrin BINBAŞ

*On the Relationship between Mu‘īn al-Dīn Naṭanzī and Iskandar b. ‘Umar-Shaykh: New Sources and Perspectives*

Iskandar b. ‘Umar Shaykh’s princely dispensation in Southern Iran stands out among the competing Timurid princely houses with its historiographical legacy as rich artistic production which took place during Iskandar’s short reign. The intellectual who grants the distinction to Iskandar in the field of historiography is Mu‘īn al-Dīn Naṭanzī whose prominence as a Timurid historian has been overshadowed by the later Shāhrukhid historians, most prominently by Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī and Ḥāfīz-i Abrū. It is important to note that Naṭanzī’s chronicle is the first Timurid universal chronicle and its complex composition process may reflect the transformation of the Timurid political and constitutional ideas in the context of the competition between the Iskandarid and Shāhrukhid dispensations. Earlier scholarship has suggested that Naṭanzī wrote his universal chronicle first for Iskandar, and that he then revised and dedicated his chronicle to Shāhrukh after Shāhrukh had defeated his first patron Iskandar. More recently, a shorter so-called Synoptic Account was also attributed to Naṭanzī. In my paper, I will revisit this chronology, and present a re-interpretation of the logic of patronage in the light of recently discovered manuscript fragments of Naṭanzī’s chronicle. I will argue that the notion of princely patronage does not provide for us an appropriate conceptual framework to understand the chronology and the contents of Naṭanzī’s historiographical works.

Nicoletta FAZIO

*Red Sulphur and the Royal Body, or what can Alchemy tell us about Iskandar’s Political Vision?*

The London and Lisbon anthologies compiled for the Timurid prince Iskandar bin ‘Umār Shaykh (1384-1414) between 1410 and 1411 both contain a miscellany of texts and sources that well represent the cultural and intellectual panorama of a princely court in fifteenth-century Iran. Iskandar was an intriguing figure in the political landscape of the early Timurid period and scholars can have a grasp on his personality mainly through his artistic patronage and the ample manuscript material that he left behind him despite a relatively short reign. For a long time the Lisbon and London anthologies have been studied in relation to their important cycles of illustrations; more recently they have started to be seen as complex and integrated systems of meanings and symbols. The present paper takes its move from this approach as it aims to offer a portrait of Iskandar’s strategies of self-representation by combining textual and art historical analysis of part of the material contained in Add. 27261 and L.A. 161.

Recent publications on Iskandar and on the intellectual and political panorama of early fifteenth-century Iran have highlighted the importance of occult sciences in the articulation of power discourses among the princes of the House of Timur. In this paper I will focus on a small corpus of alchemical texts that have been compiled upon Iskandar’s order to be inserted among the scientific texts present in both anthologies. Alchemy has been for long relegated in a subordinate position and it may appear as an unfitting tool for political analysis. However, the deep interest that Iskandar showed in several branches of occult sciences can turn alchemy into a valuable tool to further analyse the construction processes of his political persona. The analysis of the alchemical texts prepared for Iskandar can lead to interesting results as they can throw some light on the position that alchemical knowledge might have held in the construction of an ideal of kingship among Timurid princes. Hand in hand with the analysis of decorative devices and illustrations present in both the London and Lisbon anthologies this paper aims to make visible possible webs of meanings and cross-references among different parts of such manuscripts, thus showing their nature as objects of aesthetic contemplation and tools of political discourse.

Peyvand FIROUZEH

*Iskandar b. ‘Umar Shaykh’s Patronage of the Shah Vali Khanaqah in Taft and Divine Self-fashioning*

Iskandar b. 'Umar Shaykh is known for his patronage of illuminated and illustrated manuscripts. Yet, his patronage of architectural projects has not been adequately explored. This presentation focuses on one of such projects, the khanaqah of the Sufi-poet Shah Ne'matullah Vali (d. 1431) in Taft, situated in a small valley on the northern skirt of the Shirkuh Mountain, near Yazd and en route to Shiraz. The purpose of the paper is to reconstruct what the Khanagah was, and meant at the time of its inception. What functions were imagined for the complex? What socio-political significance did it have for the Sufi order and the patron? These two inquiries lead the two parts of this presentation.

The khanaqah at Taft was founded during the tenure of Iskandar as the governor of Yazd, Shiraz, and Isfahan during 1405-1414 by means of dedicating four years of the revenue of Taft and its dependencies to the construction. With only one of the many initial structures of the complex extant today, the question of "what the khanaqah was" is surrounded with ambiguities. I use the fragmentary material in situ and in museum collections (Taft and Tehran), as well as textual sources (local histories, waqf documents, poems) in the first part of the presentation to work out the chronology of this site, its hypothetical form, as well as its natural and built settings.

The consequent reception of the site from as early as 821/1418-19 until the sixteenth century shows a continuity of refurbishment and expansion campaigns of different scales. The involvement of elite patrons including the Timurid chronicler Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi (d. 858/1454), possibly members of the Qara Qoyunlus, and Khanesh Beygum, sister of Shah Tahmasb Safavid, allude to the political and religious authority held by the site. How can we understand this architectural palimpsest vis-à-vis Iskandar's architectural projects, and specifically his patronage of similar projects? Special attention is paid to the khanaqah of the Sufi, Shaykh Ali Baniman (d.781/1379-1380) in Bidakhvid, near Yazd, which was completed in 816/1413. In a broader view, how are we to understand the khanaqah in the context of Timurid's patronage, or lack thereof, offered to contemporary Sufi orders? These questions are taken into several directions in the second part of the presentation. Firstly, the khanaqah at Taft was the first institution ever built for the order, and the first and only time they received court patronage from the Timurids for a building. Secondly, the Shah Vali khanaqah was described as replicating the Ka'ba. Thirdly, we know of Iskandar's relationship with Sufism and his epistolary connections between Shah Ne'matullah in the form of theological questions and answers. Finally, the textual and hagiographical narratives built around the khanaqah at Bidakhvid indicate that patronage of the complex (and by extension that of similar projects) was entangled with competition, political prestige, and pious significance. I argue that these threads converge on Iskandar's ambitions for political dominion and sacral kingship.

Rob H. van GENT

*The Astronomical and Astrological Aspects of Iskandar Sultan's Horoscope*

In my paper, I will first give a short introduction in Islamic astronomy and astrology which will make it easier for non-specialists to understand the astrological contents of the Wellcome Collection manuscript and the associated horoscope figure. I will then discuss the horoscope of Iskandar Sultan in more detail, explaining in lay-man's terms how it was computed and how the horoscope figure can be interpreted as a factual representation of the heavens at the exact moment of Iskandar Sultan's birth.

Karin RÜHRDANZ

*The providential variety of nature and its hidden forces visualised*

The paper aims at understanding the sudden appearance of thoroughly and finely illustrated 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt manuscripts about 1420 comprising a Persian version authored by Zakariyā' b. Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī in 664/1265-66. It will compare those manuscripts to the Tuḥfat al-gharā'ib selections contained in anthologies made for Iskandar Sultan and, as far as the visualisation is concerned, to fragments preserved from an illustrated Tuḥfat al-gharā'ib. In light of recent publications on the intellectual climate in Shiraz in the first quarter of the 15th century one may see a common characteristic of both texts in the emphasis they place on khawāṣṣ. Thereby they provided not mere knowledge about nature but also advice how to manipulate it. Unusually elaborate colophons in three 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt manuscripts show that this type of knowledge that mostly derived from antique authors was particularly appreciated and recommended to the reader.

It is obvious that the 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt miniatures are stylistically connected to the decorative drawing/painting as found in the anthologies for Iskandar Sultan. Seemingly contradictive effects of the illustrations of different chapters deserve further study: the loss of astronomical information in favor of astrological signs, on the one hand, and well characterized plants and herbs, on the other.

Ali SHOJAEE ESFAHANI

*Archaeology of Borders: Eskandar Soltan's Domain Between Fars and Kerman and its Architectural Manifest in the Kamar-e Marj Fortress*

Numerous artworks can be attributed to the short period of Eskandar's reign. Yet, contrary to what Timurid sources tell

us about an extensive phase of construction activities, e.g. in Yazd, Fars and Isfahan, apart from few examples in Yazd, no architectural evidence of the said activities has been found. The fortress of Marj, located on the border of Fars, is the only building that represents several modifications which were definitely executed when Iskandar Soltan was in power.

The fortress is in Marj, a remote village in the Kerman province. Marj Fortress holds five inscriptions in which Iskandar Soltan's names and titles are given along with the name of the commander who actually built the stronghold in 816 A.H/1413 CE. This corresponds to the year in which Iskandar Soltan reached the height of his power. According to pre- and post-Mongol written sources, the Marj area was part of the border region between Fars and Kerman, and the presence of the fortress and its development during Iskandar Soltan is yet another indicator of its strategic location. Furthermore, having control over the fortress would lead to gaining control over one of the major roads that connected Fars to Kerman.

By examining historical and archaeological sources, this paper will explore the importance of the Marj Fortress and the reasons for Iskandar's constructions.

Emily SHOVELTON

*On the Edge: The decorative margins of Iskandar Sultan's Miscellany*

Iskandar Sultan's Miscellany of A.H.813-4/A.D.1410-11 (British Library, Add. 27261) has long been recognized as a magnificent book, both for its wide-ranging texts and for its paintings. However, although the illustrations and their impact on the development of Persian painting have been much discussed, other aspects of the manuscript tend to be overlooked. Distinctive margin designs are found in three sections of the book, which range from drawings to geometric patterns. This paper will explore these diverse margins, to understand better the structure and purpose of this book.

Eleanor SIMS

*The Illumination of Iskandar's Horoscope*

I shall discuss the ornamental illumination in the Horoscope of Iskandar-Sultan in the Wellcome Institute in London (MS Persian 474). This impressive document was, with virtual certainty, once part of the large Anthology in the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon (L.A. 161); their folios are virtually the same size, and both have dates of completion in the month of Dhu'l-Hijja 813, March-April of 1411.

The Horoscope's illumination is in three different modes but none is characteristic of the older Shiraz "minute, unoutlined" style usually associated with his other manuscript-commissions. I shall present each of the three; discuss its parallels in other Timurid manuscripts; and comment on why each of these might have "made an appearance" in this one stellar example of the Timurid arts of the book.

Priscilla SOUCEK

*LA 161 and its Sources, A Speculation?*

The ruined state of the manuscript LA 161 in the Gulbenkian Foundation precludes any detailed consideration of the execution or coloration of its illustrations and illuminations. However, other more general factors such as its physical structure and textual content still offer avenues for inquiry. Although various sections of its text are worth examining in detail, issues raised by its version of Nizami's Khamsa will provide most of the examples treated in this paper.

Ilse STURKENBOOM

*Yet another Encyclopaedia: The New York Anthology (MMA 13.228.19)*

While about a dozen anthology manuscripts of the period 1410-14 are dedicated to Iskandar in colophons and frontispieces, others have merely been attributed to this corpus based on a variety of factors. In this paper, I will present one such attributed manuscript: the 'New York Anthology', housed in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Comparisons with the London and Lisbon Anthologies demonstrate close similarities in page layout, in selections and organisations of the texts, and in calligraphy. Added paintings, illuminations and texts now obscure the features of this anthology, but examinations under infrared light lead to suggest that it was in fact dedicated to Iskandar. This adds yet another anthology with repeating, but also with different literary works to the list. I will conclude with some considerations concerning possible purposes and uses of these anthologies.

Elaine WRIGHT

*Illumination in the Manuscripts of Iskandar Sultan*

Certain manuscripts produced for Iskandar Sultan are illuminated in the well-known blue-and-gold floral style, which

had been used in Shiraz manuscripts since the 1350s. Other manuscripts, such as his London anthology, are at least partially illuminated in a 'new' style based on that of the Jalayirids. Illumination under Iskandar is, however, much more complex than it might initially seem: combinations and blends of the two styles are frequent, but, in particular, many innovative features appear in the manuscripts illuminated for him. This paper will present an overview of illuminations produced for Iskandar but it will, especially, consider both these innovative features and Iskandar's legacy as a patron of illuminated manuscripts.

## Discussion topics and questions

### Politics

- Did Iskandar have a consistent political and constitutional program?
- Looking at the bigger picture of Iskandar's artistic and cultural patronage, including works that are lost, how can we make sense of his investments in the context of his political ambitions?

### Patronage

- To what extent is the concept of patronage an appropriate framework to study the intellectual and artistic production in the Timurid period? What role did the Timurid princes, in particular Iskandar b. 'Umar Shaykh, play in deciding the form and contents of historiographical and artistic works?
- In drawing a picture of Iskandar as a patron of art and culture, to what extent and in what ways can we work out his level of involvement?

### Anthology manuscripts

- Is there any relation between the marginal work and the main texts?
- Is there more behind decorative arrangements of trees, plants and animals in this period?
- What are the parallels and dissimilarities in the paintings of the anthologies produced for Iskandar?
- Could the switching to Qazwīnī's 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt (compared to the Tuḥfat al-gharā'ib) reflect a step in the direction of "scientification" by providing first information on the ṭabā'ī, the natural/obvious qualities of an element of nature before talking about its khawāṣṣ?
- What is the significance of mysticism in Iskandar's anthologies?

### Iskandar's Horoscope

- Manuscripts such as the Wellcome Collection's manuscript offer a rare insight into how Timurid astrologers actually performed their craft. A complete annotated edition and translation of this unique manuscript would be a very important contribution to our current understanding of astrological knowledge and practice during the Timurid period.
- The astrologer who compiled the Wellcome Collection manuscript may be related to the well-known Timurid astronomer Ghiyāth al-Dīn Jamshīd al-Kāshī (died in 1429) who around 1420 became the director of Ulugh Beg's celebrated observatory in Samarqand. It would be of interest to trace such connections if they can be corroborated by other sources.

### Jalayirid connections

- Given that the marginal work in the Divan of Sultan Ahmad Jalayir is to be construed as depicting complete scenes, how much did Iskandar acquire from him, both in terms of inspiration, and in terms of actual models?
- What might one learn about the contents of the dowry Iskandar's Jalayirid wife would have brought to her marriage to Iskandar.

### Legacy

- What impact did Iskandar's life and work as well as the artistic and intellectual production in the Iskandarid dispensation have in the later Timurid and the post-Timurid Islamic history?

### Approaches

- In understanding the nature and degree of Iskandar's sacral ambitions, what methods and sources are we to rely on? What is at stake for the different disciplines involved?
- (How) Can a corpus of texts, art and architecture be attributed to Iskandar? Which disciplines are needed to adequately study the abundant material?

### Publication of the workshop's papers

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