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POEM TO SULTAN AL-BUKHARI

TEXT: IRAN OR AFGHANISTAN; 16TH CENTURY
FRAME: INDIA; 1640-50

This leaf from an album from the Mughals' court library in Delhi is a tribute to the master calligrapher and Sufi Sultan al-Bukhari. "To our master Sultan al-Bukhari. Not in every mountain does one find the ruby from Badakhshan; not in every sea are pearls and corals found; not all beggars are like a sultan. To be Sultan al-Bukhari is not the lot of anyone at all."

The distinctive combination of Persian poetry with references to Sufism, the Nastaliq script, and the minutely detailed margin decorations are found in abundance in the calligraphy collections of the great Mughals. Shah Jahan (1627-56), in particular, was an enthusiastic collector of art of this type.