A significant characteristic of documents from Islamic Iran is the intentional removal of the right bottom corner. It is the result of a deliberate scribal practice to avoid a perfect four-square shape (Arabic/Persian: *tarbīʿ*). This practice had been noted by some French travelers in 17th-century Safavid Iran, but it has remained unexplored since. In this presentation, I will delve into its roots and show its evolution. I will rely on the largely unpublished Ardebil archives, the most extensive collection of pre-Safavid judicial and administrative documents, alongside other documents from the Safavid (16th-18th c.) and Qajar (19th c.) periods. Statistical analysis will allow the categorisation of the modifications made to these documents. Based on a vast array of references in writing manuals and poetry, I argue that before the 14th century, the practice of eschewing perfect four-square shapes was closely tied to astronomical beliefs linked to the cycles of the moon. In a further part, I will show the influence of the same tradition on the layout of the codex-shape manuscripts, highlighting how it determined the choice of a special kind of frame for the margins, as well as the intentional extension of text beyond the margins.

This talk will not only shed light on a unique aspect of Iranian manuscript culture but also challenge the perception of such imperfections as anomalies or the result of mere superstition.