

Shāhnāmeḥ of Ferdowsi

folio 116

Rostam Watching the Combat of Pilsam and Guv

The composition is nearly symmetrical, being divided by an implied central axis that vertically splits the painting into two halves, with all of the Iranians disposed on the right side, and the Turānians on the left. The two combatants are shown near the center of the composition engaged in one on one combat, Pilsam the Turānian having charged from the left, and Guv from the right. Each move, each gesture of Pilsam and his horse is paralleled with a similar action by Guv and his mount. But Pilsam's sword thrust is wide, while Guv's has found its mark in his opponent's chest. Beside the two contestants, a total of twenty-one other personage and three horses are represented, all observers to the event. Two small groups consisting of three Iranians and three Turānians are nearly symmetrically disposed in the near foreground, their lower extremities cropped by the frame. The balance of the personage witness from beyond the ridges in the background. There are ten figures behind the nearer ridge, consisting of five personage from each side, distributed in a row across the picture, including the towering figure of Rostam on his horse just to the right of center, clad in his familiar leopard and tiger skin cuirass. Behind the second ridge, further in the background, are five trumpeters, three on the left, and two on the right. The accoutrements of the warriors are similar with the exception that the Turānians wear turbans or helmets wrapped with turbans, while the Iranians have bare pointed steel helmets. The staffs and pendants of standards are seemingly everywhere. The setting is a barren hillside almost completely devoid of vegetation except for widely dispersed tufts of grass. The hillside culminates in a rocky crest about one-third of the distance down from the top. Beyond it is a second ridge, and in the far distance a sky with clouds.

Miniature dimensions: 25.5 x 16.5 cm. There are three lines of four column text above, and below the miniature. A rectangular frame encloses miniature and text. There is a fine tear in the upper right corner. A miniscule *raqam-e kamineh fa'āl 'ali* appears in the center foreground between two horses, and Mo'in's signature, *raqam zad kamineh mo'in-e moṣavver*, is in the center of the lower margin. The overall style is that of Mo' in, but the sky at least, and perhaps other details, appear to be by Fa'āl 'Ali.

Location:

New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acq. 13.228.17 (Cochran 4)

Miniature references:

J&Y, PM, p.36, no.21 (not ill.).

Robinson, Islamic Art, p.78, no.21 (not ill.).

Text references:

This episode is not included in either Warner or Mohl.

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