

Shāhnāmeḥ of Ferdowsi

folio 338

Bahrām Gur Hunts Lions

Bahrām Gur (Bahrām V, 420-438AD) gained the throne of Iran by ordeal upon the death of his father Shāh Yazdegerd. Bahrām was famous for his brashness, carousing, and overindulgence in the pleasures of life. The hunter *par excellence*, he is the subject of many anecdotal stories in the *Shāhnāmeḥ* in which he confronts and slays many wild and mythological animals: dragons, a unicorn, gazelles, an onager, and a monkey-lion. Shown here is the often illustrated episode in which he confronts wild lions.

Bahrām Gur, on a dark colored horse, charges from the right, with bow drawn taught and arrow pointed at his prey. He wears a tunic and a jewel studded crown, with a feather and black aigrette of royalty; quivers and bowcase hang from his belt. The horse gallops, its hindquarters cropped by the right frame. Directly before Bahrām, on the left, a lioness advances with its mouth open directly towards him. In the foreground is a second lioness, lying belly up, with an arrow buried deeply in its side. The setting is a sloping hillside that rises to a rocky ridge near the top. Tufts of grass are evenly dispersed over its surface, and at the top is a rock outcropping on which some bushes grow. Beyond the ridge in the upper left are the forequarters of a saddled horse and a groom shown in profile. Balancing them, on the right side, are two helmeted warriors. In the distance is a wash sky of the Mo'in type. A small stream with vegetation on its banks weaves its way down the left side to the foreground.

Miniature dimensions (without extensions): 22.5 x 16.5 cm. The text is written in four columns above and below the painting, with a rectangular frame enclosing miniature and text, except on the left side where the hind leg and tail of the lion protrudes into the margin. The text has been smeared in a number of places, but the only noticeable damage to the miniature occurs just below the neck of Bahrām's horse. The miniature is not signed by either artist, but is executed in excellent Mo'in style, and the detailing is indistinguishable from Mo'in's other work.

For other paintings by Mo'in illustrating Bahrām Gur in various pursuits, see Ms. E, nos. 9 and 10; Ms. F, no. 11; Ms. G, folios 331, 347, and 354.

Location:

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

Miniature references:

J&Y, PM, p.38, no.39 (not ill.).

Robinson, *Islamic Art*, p.79, no.39 and p.85, fig.23.

Text references:

Warner, VII, p.77.

Mohl, V, pp.530-31.

