
History of Shāh Esmā'il

This miniature is problematic with regard to the proper identification of the subject. A complete copy of the text of the manuscript has not been available, and therefore the text preceding and following this folio. Subsequently it has been necessary to rely upon the two printed versions by Muntazar and Shokhri, and the complete text of Ms. L. Since the texts of these manuscripts vary substantially one from another, one cannot readily interpolate. In the Mahboubian Catalog, this miniature is listed as *Shāh Esmā'il Killing Bāyrak Solṭān*, an identification presumably derived from the red marginal inscription. The accompanying text, which begins in the middle of a sentence, speaks of Bāyrak Solṭān being sliced like a fresh cucumber, but the name of the person doing the slicing unfortunately appears on the preceding page. Bāyrak Solṭān was the governor of Baghdad, who was unseated from power by Esmā'il in 908/1503 and fled to Aleppo, according to Eskandar Monshi. Muntazar's text states that Bāyrak fled when the tide of battle turned against him, but he and Esmā'il never faced each other in battle, and as much as the shāh would have liked to kill him, never had the opportunity. The location in Muntazar's text conforms to the dating advanced by Monshi, yet folio 94v in this text follows by seven folios an event that can be pinpointed to 913/1507-8 (cf. folio 87). An additional dichotomy is evident in the painting itself. The Safavid killing Bāyrak Solṭān, identified by inscription as Shāh Esmā'il, wears the black aigrette of a ruler on his hat, which among the qezelbāsh could only have been worn by Esmā'il, yet he is shown wearing purple garments while in all other miniatures the shāh is portrayed in a white uniform. A similar misrepresentation is also evident in the miniature on folio 87, where the main figure is identified by inscription as Esmā'il but the supportive evidence indicates that it is someone else.

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folio 94v

Esmā'il(?) Kills Bāyrak Solṭān

The composition is basically circular with a quilting of overlapping dark forms that comprise the clothing, horses, and weapons, set against a light off-white hillside. A fierce battle is taking place with the participants brandishing swords, lances, bows and arrows. The vanquished are heaped at the bottom, while others are tumbling from their mounts. The principal Safavid personage, questionably identified by inscription as Shāh Esmā'il, dressed in a purple coat and riding the same gray steed as Qarā Khān in folio 87, lunges forward to thrust a sword through his opponent Bāyrak Solṭān (correctly identified by the inscription on his shoulder), who slumps forward from his horse. Altogether seventeen figures (seven Safavids, seven opponents, and three bodies) and seven horses are depicted in the composition., including two *qezelbāsh* observers who peer at the event from over the hilltop at the upper right. A touch of blue sky can be seen at the top, along with a slight suggestion of shrubbery. Horses and clothing provide a thick quilting of vermillion, mauve, light orange, brown, black, white and beige.

Miniature: 21.3 x 15.2 cm. One line of text above and below the miniature. Frame encloses miniature and text, except for three pendants that protrude beyond the frame into the margins. No evident signs of damage or retouching. A marginal inscription in red, presumably of later date, describes the event depicted. Inscriptions are also written on two of the figures, incorrectly identifying one of them as Shāh Esmā'il and the other as Bāyrak Solṭān.

Miniature references:

Mahboubian Cat., #923, folio 94v (not illustrated)

Text references:

Muntazar, p.160-64.

Savory, SA, p.55.

