

## Shāhnāmeḥ of Ferdowsi

folio 176v

### Manizheh Feeds Bizhan

Manizheh is lowering a pouch on a string through a narrow orifice at the top. The pit, a hollowed out “hill” rather than a hole going below ground, is roughly oval in shape, and shown in a peculiar cross-section as if the front half has been removed, permitting one to view inside. True to the narrative, Bizhan, with chains shackling his hands and feet to his neck, sits cross-legged at the bottom. But the Bizhan portrayed hardly gives the appearance of being incarcerated: well groomed, with youthful almost effeminate features, wearing fresh white clothing, vessels of food and drink at his side, and chains so slack that they hardly seem an impediment to his movements. The walls of the pit are coral-like craggy rock that curve inward to form a narrow opening at the top. Under close scrutiny many of these craggy tips form minute grotesque faces, a device dating back to at least the sixteenth century. Manizheh, not naked as in the narrative, but dressed in a plain white shroud with only her face and right hand visible, peers through the opening and lowers a pouch to her lover below. The large boulder that blocks the entrance to the pit is in an ambiguous spatial position behind Manizheh, appearing more like a continuation of the walls than an impediment to the entrance. There are no other participants except for a jackal and a goat on the rocks in the upper left. A large tree trunk emerges from the rock formation in the upper right, and wisps of shrubbery grow at various junctures.

Miniature dimensions: 23 x 16.5 cm. The text is written in four columns above and below the miniature, with a rectangular frame enclosing miniature and text. The minuscule signature *raqam-e kamineh faẓl ‘ali* appears just above the neck of the jackal. In the lower margin, written in Mo‘in’s hand, is the signature *raqam-e kamineh mo‘in moṣavver*. The miniature is attributed by Jackson and Yohannan to Faẓl ‘Ali, and by Robinson to Mo‘in with the assistance of Faẓl ‘Ali. The painting is in excellent Mo‘in style; the detailing indistinguishable from the master’s. Yet the Faẓl ‘Ali signature suggests that Mo‘in had assistance. However, the role of the lesser artist must have been such that his contribution is inseparable from the master’s.

For a slightly later portrayal in the narrative see folio 184.

#### Location:

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

#### Miniature references:

Pavry, *Heroines*, opp. p.40 (ill.).

Guest, *Ars Islamica X* (1943), fig.20 opp. p.151.

J&Y, *PM*, p.37, no. 27 (not ill.).

Robinson, *Islamic Art*, p.78-79, no.27 and p.83, fig.17.

#### Text references:

Warner, III, pp.310; Mohl, III, pp.264; Levy, p.165.

