
History of Shāh Esmāʿil

Moḥammad Bābor Mirzā, called in this text Bābor Shāh (full name Ḍāhir al-Din Moḥammad Bābor Mirzā b. ʿOmar Shaykh b. Solṭān Abu Saʿid Mirzā b. Solṭān Moḥammad b. Mirzā Mirānshāh b. Amir Timur Gurkān), the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India, was expelled from his ancestral homeland of Transoxiana by Shāhibeg Khān in 906/1500-01. During the following decade Bābor made several attempts to regain his homeland, often enlisting the support of the qezelbāsh, and sometimes being successful in securing limited victories.

The text describes in some detail a series of assaults by Shāhibeg Khān against Samarkand, which Bābor and his Chaghatāy army under the command of Ātāliq successfully defend against, killing large numbers of Uzbegs in the process. During one of the prolonged sieges, Bābor requested assistance from the governor of Bokhara, who responded and was in turn defeated. Subsequently, Shāhibeg Khān came in control of Bokhara. The battle depicted on folio 135v follows the earlier series of assaults and also takes place at Samarkand, apparently about 1507. The text makes little mention of the battle other than saying that Shāhibeg arrived with an army from Bokhara, a pitched battle took place in which 8,000 Uzbegs were killed, and Shāhibeg was forced to flee with all that remained.

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folio 135v

Bābor Shāh Chasing Shāhibeg Khān

In the depiction the pursuit takes place in front of a high walled enclosure, intended to represent the city walls of Samarkand, with arched doorway, turret, and crenelations. Bābor Shāh, dressed in vermillion and brandishing a sword, is in the right center on a brown horse that springs forward toward the left in hot pursuit of his adversary. He is accompanied by two mounted warriors shooting arrows, and one meek standard bearer behind him. No contemporary Mughal portraits of Bābor are known, but comparison with a portrait of his grandson Akbār, executed in the time of Jahāngir (c.1605, Musée Guimet, Paris, ill. Grube, WI, color pl.97, and S.C.Welch, MI, pl.29) reveals similar facial characteristics to the Bābor here represented. Shāhibeg, with sword in hand, together with four other Uzbeks, all mounted, occupy the left half of the miniature. He looks to the rear at his pursuers, as does a horseman to his right who defends himself with a shield, and another in the lower left who turns to fire an arrow. All five riders are, however, obviously intent on fleeing rather than fighting. Shāhibeg Khān is emphasized by the whiteness of his uniform and horse within a composition that is completely colored, but Bābor Shāh is the dominant figure in the miniature by virtue of his size, relative visual isolation, and the brightness of his vermillion clothing. The artist may have taken some liberties, however, in portraying Bābor Shāh in the midst of the foray, for there is no indication in the text that he personally pursued Shāhibeg Khān, and in actuality seems to have preferred observing a battle from a high vantage point and leaving the direction of the hand to hand combat to his field commander Ātāliq Solṭān. The foreground is executed in light mauve; the backdrop is the citadel wall colored in buff, light salmon, and white. Since the background is executed entirely in pastel colors, the horses and riders stand out by contrast: vermillion, maroon, yellow-orange, and purple clothing; chestnut, light brown, black, white, and gray horses.

Miniature: 17.8 x 15.2 cm. One line of text above and below the miniature. Frame encloses miniature and text; one banner protrudes beyond the frame into the margin. Shāhibeg's face has been very crudely retouched; no other signs of damage or retouching. A marginal inscription in red, presumably of later date, describes the event depicted. An inscription in red also appears on one of the figures, identify him as Bābor Shāh.

Miniature references:

Mahboubian Cat., #923 folio 135v (not illustrated).

Text references:

Muntazar, p.260.

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