

History of Shāh Esmā'il

folio 280

Shāh Esmā'il Kills Abu'l Kheyr Khān in Battle

Cf. manuscript L, folio 232, for another version of this miniature, and for a summary of the event depicted. For a third variant see also manuscript N, no.7.

The date is the year 919/1513; the place is somewhere in Khorasan, and the principal combatants are Shāh Esmā'il and the Uzbek Abu'l Kheyr Khān, son of Qāsem Khān (see folio 273v). Across the center of the miniature, moving from right to left, Shāh Esmā'il is pursuing his adversary. As in previous miniatures, the shāh is dressed in a gold trimmed white knee-length coat, with a red and white flat top *qezelbāsh tāj* on his head, and bow and quiver case hanging from his belt. His usually light gray horse is here shown with a bluish cast, but true to form its lower quarters are stained brownish-red with blood or mud. Esmā'il leans slightly forward in the saddle, and with his right arm fully extended, thrusts a sword to cut his adversary in two vertically from head to waist. Abu'l Kheyr Khān, dressed in purple astride a brown horse, and holding a bow in his left hand, has attempted to defend himself by holding a shield over his head. But it has been of no avail - the awesome power of the shāh's blow has split the shield as well as his body, and blood gushes forth.

Behind the shāh, on the far right, is a *ghāzi* shooting arrows at some unseen assailant, while in the lower foreground another Safavid, dressed in vermillion and riding a black horse, swings a heavy mace in pursuit of three Uzbegs. The three, dressed in vermillion, purple, and olive respectively, and all wearing white turbans, seem more intent on fleeing and defending themselves than fighting. The last in the group raises a shield to ward off the blow of a mace swung by a *ghāzi*.

Customary with many of the other miniatures, the event is depicted on a hillside simply rendered in a light mauve, which rises to a craggy rock formation near the top of the picture. Beyond the crest are the multi-colored tents of the Uzbek encampment populated by three figures whose upper torsos only are visible. One gestures frustration, but the other two, on horseback, seem oblivious to the events occurring below.

Although there are considerable differences between this miniature and the two other variants cited above, that they are mutually influenced is certain. Yet they are not slavish imitations of one another where one could establish an original and derivatives. This version seems to be the most refined and finished in the group, but not necessarily the most successful in all aspects. There are several elements of awkwardness - although Esmā'il is behind Abu'l Kheyr Khān, his sword penetrates him from the front; the turban of the Uzbek in the lower left is partially obscured by Abu'l Kheyr Khān's horse which is further back in the pictorial space - which do not occur in the British Library variant that appears looser and more accomplished in draftsmanship.



Miniature: 14.3 x 13.0 cm. One line of text above and below the miniature. Frame encloses miniature and text, except for the tops of the Uzbek tents that protrude beyond the frame into the upper margin. A marginal inscription in red, presumably of later date, describes the event depicted. Inscriptions in black appear on two of the figures, identifying them as Abu'l Kheyr Khān and Shāh Esmā'il, and also on Esmā'il's horse calling it the "mule of Manşur". The meaning of this phrase is not clear, but it also appears on a horse in the miniature on folio 217. Other than normal wear, there are no signs of damage or retouching.

Miniature references:

Mahboubian Cat., #923 folio 280 (not illustrated).

Text references:

Muntazar, p.493.

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