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DOUBLE FRONTISPIECE FROM AN EDITION OF FIRDAWSI'S SHAHNAMA. 'GIFTS FROM BILQIS ARRIVE AT THE COURT OF SULAYMAN'

IRAN, QAZVIN; C. 1570

EACH LEAF: 34.9 × 14.6 CM

Because of the expanding Ottoman Empire, Shah Tahmasp was obliged as early as 1548 to move his capital from Tabriz to Qazvin, where a slightly simpler and less refined painting style emerged than the one in art's golden age in Tabriz.

There are different variants of the story of Sulayman and Bilqis: the Biblical King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. On the left are angels sent by Bilqis with gifts for Sulayman, in the hope that she will not be obliged to make the journey herself and submit to his religion. On the right is Sulayman, surrounded by his vizier, Asaf ibn Barakhya, and his whole motley court of animals and demons, whose languages the wise king can speak.