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MINIATURE FROM A COPY OF SHARAF AL-DIN YAZDI'S ZAFARNAMA (BOOK OF VICTORY). "THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST CHINA AFTER TIMUR'S DEATH IN 1405"

IRAN, SHIRAZ; 1436

THE PAGE: 33.7 X 24.5 CM

Al-Yazdi's Zafarnama tells the story of the conquests of Timur Lenk (1336-1405) across the Middle East and Central Asia. The miniature comes from an illustrated copy of the Zafarnama commissioned by Timur's grandson, Ibrahim Sultan (1394-1436), who was the governor in the city of Shiraz and the surrounding province of Fars.

The miniature shows the cavalry vanguard on its way across the steppes. The rider in the fore is beating a pair of drums, the next one is playing a wind instrument, and the two riders at the back are carrying the army banners with golden standards and colored yak tails.

According to the text around the miniature, it illustrates a short-lived effort to invade China, after the death of Timur in 1405, under the direction of Ibrahim Sultan, later the patron of the Zafarnama

manuscript. The text on the back of the page uses a mixture of poetry and prose to relate the story of how Ibrahim's troops reach Utrar in present-day Kazakhstan before the succession dispute among Timur's heirs makes it impossible to continue towards China.

The piece was originally the left half of a double miniature. The right half shows a royal rider under a decorated parasol¹. The rider was earlier assumed to be Ibrahim Sultan's father, Shah Rukh (1377-1447). Judging from the text, however, it is more likely that the rider is Ibrahim Sultan as an adult, although he was only 11 years old in 1405.

With its minimalistic depiction of nature and its few but large human figures, the miniature represents the simplistic and monumental style of painting that characterized several historical works from the early Timurid period, including Hafiz-i Abru's world history, *Majma al-tawarikh*, which was written and illustrated in Herat in around 1425. (See e.g. 19/2004 and 8/2005.) From around 1450, however, the monumental style was replaced by a more refined and detailed style of painting that lived on in the Safavid miniature tradition from the 16th century. (See e.g. 30/1988.)

The manuscript from which this miniature comes is the oldest preserved copy of al-Yazdi's *Zafarnama*. This manuscript, moreover, is considered to have the finest illustrations of the only four surviving manuscripts from Ibrahim Sultan's studio in Shiraz.

¹ Eleanor G. Sims: "Ibrahim-Sultan's illustrated *Zafar-nameh* of 839/1436" in *Islamic art*, 4, 1991, p. 194, fig. 36 and 37. The right half of the double miniature is now in the Reza Abbasi-museum in Teheran.

Published in:

Catalogue of the International exhibition of Persian art at the Royal Academy of Arts, 3. ed., Royal Academy of Arts, London 1931, p. 238, cat.no. 457b;

Laurence Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson and Basil Gray: *Persian miniature painting : including a critical and descriptive catalogue of the miniatures exhibited at Burlington House, January-March, 1931*, London 1933, p. 62, cat.no. 31b;

Rudolf M. Riefstahl: *An exhibition of Persian and Indian miniature paintings from the collections of Demotte, Inc.*, New York 1934, p. 19, cat.no. 20;

Phyllis Ackerman: *Guide to the exhibition of Persian art*, 2. ed., New York 1940, p. 296, Gallery X, cat.no. 76;

Eleanor Sims: "Ibrahim-Sultan's illustrated *Zafar-nameh* of 839/1436" in *Islamic art*, 1991, 4, fig. 37;

Kjeld von Folsach, Joachim Meyer and Peter Wandel: *Fighting, Hunting, Impressing. Arms and Armour from the Islamic World 1500-1850*, The David Collection, Copenhagen 2021, cat.no. 10;