



Inv. no. 32/1988

CAT. 47. MINIATURE FROM A COPY OF FIRDAWSI'S SHAHNAME
(BOOK OF KINGS)

IRAN, TABRIZ; BETWEEN 1520 AND 1535

THE FRAME H: 31.4; W: 24 CM

Isfandiyar was not a king, but a Persian king's son who – like many true-to-life princes – impatiently had ambitions to replace his father, Gushtasp, on the throne. This prompted Gushtasp to send the brave young man to carry out a number of difficult tasks as a condition for his abdication.

The miniature illustrates one of Isfandiyar's many ordeals in which he must slay the evil Simurgh, a bird as enormous as a mountain with wings. He crawls into a cage covered with blades and spears and when the aggressive Simurgh attacks the prince again and again, it finally begins to bleed to death. Then the crafty prince jumps out of the carriage and can give the monster the deathblow while his men look on admiringly at a safe distance.

The heroes in Firdawsi's *Shahnama* are most often brave, but they are

also crafty and ready to use tricks that are not entirely honorable. They are described as complex characters with both good and bad sides.

The miniature, like cat. 40 (inv.no.30/1988), comes from a sumptuous copy of the *Shahnama* that was made for the Safavid Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524–1576).