



Illuminated leaf from Shahnameh, Abdul Qasim Ferdowsi: Esfandiar Slaying Dragon
Iran, 16th century Shiraz school

Ink, watercolour and gold on paper

Folio 36.5cm high, 24cm wide

Provenance: Private European Collection

Stock no.: A4231

This illuminated manuscript leaf illustrates a story from the Persian Book of Kings, Shahnameh, in which Esfandiar, a legendary hero, must perform and endure seven trials. The story illustrated here is of Esfandiar slaying the dragon. The nasta'liq calligraphy is represented in four columns with foliage and mountains against a blue sky. The left side is painted with an elaborately depicted dragon overlapping the border. The dragon is facing the approaching horse carriage with three figures hiding behind the rocks. On the lower part of the miniature, there are four columns of nasta'liq calligraphy set against rocks and fauna. The reverse of the miniature has four columns of nasta'liq calligraphy describing the story of the Fourth Labour, the killing of the sorcerer. This illustration depicts Esfandiar hiding inside the chest in the horse carriage. However, the dragon sees from afar the approaching horses. Esfandiar becomes very excited when he sees the screaming dragon and jumps out of the chest with a sharp sword in his hand cutting the dragon's head into two pieces.