



Iskandar Entertains Kanifu

Circa: mid-late 16th century

From the A'inah-yi Iskandari chapter of Amir Khusrau's Khamsah

Attributed to Shiraz, Iran, mid-late 16th century

Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper

Painting: 19.5cm x 16cm

Provenance: Private European Collection

Stock no.: A4665

This Safavid miniature painting depicts a scene from the A'inah-yi Iskandari (Alexander's Mirror), one of five chapters from Amir Khusrau Dehlavi's Khamsah (Quintet). Iskandar (Alexander the Great) partakes in a feast with the women from his harem to celebrate his successful campaign in China. Kanifu, a beautiful female warrior who joined Iskandar's retinue when defeated in battle, plays the harp. In addition to describing Iskandar's military conquests, the A'inah-yi Iskandari also relates his scientific fascination with measuring the depths of the ocean and his spiritual mission for the 'water of life'.

In this version of the scene Iskandar is depicted centrally sitting on his throne, rendered slightly larger in scale than the others to indicate his status. A tray with pomegranates is presented to him, while surrounding attendants celebrate and drink wine. They sit on the grass among flowers with a stream passing below. The scene is set against a pale mauve landscape implying rocks, with flowers, small tufts of grass and a gold sky. Four gold columns of script fill the upper and lower field of this painting, containing two lines of naskhi script outlined in white.

For examples of this scene from other manuscripts, see Brend, p.132, pl. 33; p. 144, pl. 53; p. 164, pl. 63; p. 222, pl. 90.

Literature:

Brend, B. Perspectives on Persian Painting: Illustrations to Amir Khusrau's Khamsah, Routledge, London & New York, 2003

Sharma, S. Amir Khusraw: The Poet of Sultans and Sufis, Oneworld Publications, London, 2005.