16. Bizhan slays Hūmān (190b)

Afšārīyāb assembles an army; hearing this, Kay Khosru sends his force under Gūdarz to meet it. On the banks of the Jayhūn, Gūv conducts negotiations with Pirān, but these prove fruitless. While Gūdarz pauses cautiously, Bizhan urges battle to Gūv. Hūmān, brother of Pirān, comes to taunt the Irānians; hearing of this, Bizhan obtains permission from Gūdarz to encounter him. Unwilling at first to see his son undertake this combat, Gūv at length yields him the armour and horse of Siyāvush. The two champions with their interpreters seek out a desert place, and they give battle. Bizhan prevails:

'He threw him down and sheared his head away.'

As though he were a dragon in the fray', Bizhan gives thanks to God. Then in order to pass by the army of Tūrān he takes off the armour of Siyāvush and puts on that of Hūmān. The Tūrānians at first believe that their champion has been victorious, but their joy is short-lived. Gūv, however, rejoices when his son returns to the Irānian camp with Hūmān's head slung from his saddle.

The illustration, which takes up only half a page, is relatively undistinguished. The brownish ground is streaked; this is not infrequent in this sort of colour, and may be an effect of time. The figures of men and of horses are rather over-long, and the composition has a simple, archaic symmetry, horses and interpreters flanking the central action, and bows and bow-cases laid out on either side. However, the central action is vigorous, with Bizhan standing to wrench back the head of Hūmān, whose feet kick desperately. The folds of Hūmān's garment are carefully indicated and the bow-cases are finely decorated in a chinoiserie manner whose confidence is at odds with the picture as a whole. The main rocky outline of the horizon has rather tentative texture strokes, but an outcrop of blue rock on the right is treated in a different and more painstaking manner, its segments seeming somewhat smooth and being set off by shading, so that they slightly suggest fantastic petris. The painter is more successful in detail than in composition, and the fact that he is allotted half a page is surely significant; he may be a novice, or possibly an illuminator who is not entirely at home in narrative painting.