Nobody knows exactly when this extraordinary composition was produced. It seems likely that it originates from the same milieu as the dramatic representations of figures attributed to the Black Pen. It is also difficult to identify what the source of inspiration for the image might have been. It could perhaps have been a sketch for the lamp's attack on a bull that concludes the story of the antiques of the two jackals Hulil and Ommash (see next page), but it displays none of the characteristics of the elegant and brightly colored paintings that decorate most manuscripts of the text. This image is dominated by the ferocity of the animal's postures and expressive features and is thus from another source.
and expressions. The two beasts are prowling around each other seeking and waiting for the moment to strike. The viewer sees all this from above, as if he were in an arena. The space separating the two adversaries is, though empty, consumed by their expressions and their movement—a composition technique rarely encountered in the Iranian tradition. Similarly, the musculature of their bodies and the brusqueness of the draftmanship, particularly in the representation of the fox with its distended paws, makes it more akin to work produced in Nest or China than the paintings of the Muslim world. For all these reasons it is hard to specify the piece of execution or the creator of the painting, though one can of course admire the originality of its form.
The story is a simple one. Through their manoeuvring, the two jackals, Kollah and Dimnah, shown on either side of the principal scene, have forced a lion to attack a bull and eventually kill it. Proof enough of their successful intrigue. The lion's brutal strength has brought down the bull. The artist has created two starkly contrasting masses of color. The lion represents brute force while the bull with its neck chains, the rings on its horns and its finely drawn tail is a civilized creature. The posture of the two jackals reflects the excitement of this small pair who, out of malice, drive the great creatures of this world to the limit and eventually to their mutual destruction. On this promontory all the vegetation is in bloom and the soft curls of the rocks and the ground contrast with those of the animals. Here we are presented with the stark contrast between the appealing view of nature and the brutality of living beings.