



Visvamitra visits Vasishtha's hermitage

Not on display

Title/Description: Visvamitra visits Vasishtha's hermitage

Born: 1700 c. - 1799

Object Type: Drawing

Materials: Gold, Paper, Watercolour

Measurements: h 197 x w 293 mm (frame: 353 x 451 x 21 mm)

Accession Number: 542

Historic Period: 18th century

Production Place: Asia, India, Punjab Hills

School/Style: Indian Miniatures

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Paintings from the valleys in the foothills of the western Himalayas are known as "Pahari" paintings, or paintings "from the hills". Schools of painting developed at the Hindu courts of Kulu, Guler, Mankot, Nurpur, and Mandi (all represented in the Sainsbury Collection) and also at Kangra and Basohli. The seclusion of these hill courts protected the princes from the Mughal fighting on the plains, so early Jain or Hindu styles were maintained in their studios.

By the 18th century the artist Nainsukh had left the court in Delhi after it was sacked (1739) and, settling in Guler, he introduced the warm colours and graceful lines of Mughal art. These later Pahari paintings are some of the most expressive in Indian art with faces in profile and long almond-shaped eyes. Rhythmical lines are often used to give a sense of poetry, and symbolic colours are used. The scenery in these valleys is some of the most beautiful in India and the hilly landscape and lush vegetation form a dramatic background in the paintings.

Kulu is in a remote valley and maintained its Hindu style and themes. The figures are often stocky and angular but the paintings are full of colour and human interest. The *Shcmgri Ramayanawas* an illustrated version of the Ramayana produced by four Kulu artists.

This represents a Hindu religious story from the Ramayana and was painted before Mughal art had any influence. In the Ramayana, Visvamitra supervised the god Rama's upbringing and this painting shows Visvamitra in a scene from the epic. He and his attendant, both in princely dress and with hands in respectful prayer pose, are shown greeting the hermit Vasishtha outside his leaf hut. Their *jamias* fasten under the left arm, Hindu fashion.

The formal style, the faces, and the flat yellow background show Jain influence, as does the red border. The palm-leaf shaped trees are stylistic and the cow and bull may indicate fertility. The style of the painting is therefore Indian with no obvious indication of Mughal influence.

Description taken from the 'Art From The Indian Sub-Continent In The Sainsbury Centre' catalogue by Margaret A. Willey (Sainsbury Centre, UEA, 1995).

Provenance

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
