

Medieval Manuscripts: The Book of Felicity

By Stefano Carboni

The Book of Felicity – which the sultan himself, whose portrait appears on folio 7v, commissioned especially for his daughter Fatima – features descriptions of the twelve signs of the zodiac accompanied by splendid miniatures; a series of paintings showing how human circumstances are influenced by the planets; astrological and astronomical tables; and an enigmatic treatise on fortune telling.



Photo courtesy Moleiro Editor

November: The Image of the Sign of the Zodiac Scorpio

Following the most common representation of Scorpio, there are two scorpions in the illustration even though the name of the sign is singular, something that probably has to do with astronomical images of the constellation. One of the two insects is grasped by its tail by Mars's outstretched left hand, whereas the other floats in the sky in front of the planetary lord. Mars in this instance is dressed for combat: his tunic is reinforced by a coat of mail around the neck and shoulders; he wears metal forearm defenses and a helmet whose plates also protect the ears and the sides of the neck. He holds high in his right arm

a long and slightly curved sword, the sheath of which hangs from his belt.

The lords of the three decades are Mars again, here a much younger man without a beard holding a mace; the Sun; and Venus playing the tambourine.



Photo courtesy Moleiro Editor

This was an excerpt from the Book of Felicity commentary volume by Stefano Carboni (curator of Islamic art at the Metropolitan Museum, New York). Our thanks to Moleiro Editor for this text and images. You can learn more about the Book of Felicity by visiting their website: www.moleiro.com