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MUGHAL MANUSCRIPTS

The *Hamza-nama*

In July 1564, Akbar went to capture elephants in the forests of Narwar, near Gwalior, and was immensely excited to find a herd of more than seventy. He immediately decided to stay there for the night; as the *Akbar-nama* tells us, "The chamberlains by the help of the court carpenters made a platform for the royal repose and covered it with scarlet cloth." The next morning

when the world warming sun had sate on the throne of the horizons, H.M. the Shahinshah with the desired prey in his net and the cup of success at his lip sate on that auspicious throne and graciously ordered his courtiers to be seated. Then for the sake of delight and pleasure he listened for some time to Darbar Khan's recital of the story of Amir Hamza.¹

These tales of wild and fantastic adventures are known to us as the *Dastan-i-Amir Hamza*, the *Qissa-i-Amir Hamza*, or more usually the *Hamza-nama*, and the young Akbar's enthusiasm for the stories must be seen as a clue to his personality. Babur, his grandfather, for example, had made a rather derogatory reference to the work in his memoirs. Discussing his chief justices, he wrote:

One was Mir Sar-i-barahna (Bare-head); he was from a village in Andijan and appears to have made claim to be a sayyid. He was a very agreeable companion, pleasant of temper and speech. His were the judgement and rulings that carried weight among men of letters and poets of Khurasan. He wasted his time by composing, in imitation of the story of Amir Hamza, a work which is one long, far-fetched lie, opposed to sense and nature.²

The *Hamza-nama* is a mélange of fact, folk tales, and fantasy. The heroic Hamza seeks to spread Islam throughout the world, and this takes him to Ceylon, Byzantium, Egypt, and the Caucasus. He falls in love with Mihrnagar, the daughter of the Iranian king, his greatest foe, and marries both her (she is eventually slain) and a peri or spirit. Murders, kidnappings, imprisonments, and escapes follow in rapid succession, interspersed with battles against Iraq, the king of the fire worshippers, and Zumurrad Shah, a gigantic sorcerer. Together with his friend Amr and his converted foe Landaher, Hamza defeats the Iranians and vanquishes all his enemies.

The date of the execution of this illustrated *Hamza-nama* is controversial, and as the question has been

thoroughly discussed in a recent publication, we are tentatively accepting here the proposed date of 1562-77.³

The manuscript originally numbered 1,400 illustrations, although only about 150 are presently known.⁴ These are overwhelmingly from books ten and eleven. Most known pages came into Europe from Tehran and were probably taken there as booty during Iranian raids on the Mughal empire after 1739. The major concentration of pages is in the Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna; these sixty folios were purchased in 1873 from the Persian Pavilion of the Vienna World's Fair. The other large group of twenty-seven illustrations is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. One of these was purchased in Tehran in 1876, and twenty-four were found in 1881 in a wooden house on the Hawa Kadal Bridge in Srinagar, Kashmir, where they were tacked over windows to serve as protection from the weather. An additional two pages were found in Srinagar in 1913.⁵ The majority of folios in American collections came from a group of twenty-six purchased by General Riza Khan Monif in 1912 from a sister of the then shah of Iran, and the remaining works have surfaced less adventurously and usually individually. Several of the pages had faces rubbed out by Muslim iconoclasts and were repainted in the nineteenth century.

Because so few of the pages have survived, it is difficult to be sure of the overall character of the manuscript or of any chronological evolution of style. The *Maathir-ul-Umara*, however, states that "Each folio contained two pictures and at the front of each picture there was a description delightfully written by Khwaja Ata Ullah Munshi of Qazwin,"⁶ while the *Tarikh-i-Akbari* asserts that the illustrations were painted on paper and backed with cloth.⁷ Neither of these statements is true of the vast majority of the pages known to us, for most have illustrations painted directly on the cloth on one side only, with text confined to the reverse. But of the fifteen folios identifiable as belonging to the first four books of the narrative, ten combine illustration and text on the same folio side, and two of these are double sided. The references quoted, therefore, seem to reveal the initial, intended format for the manuscript. Several of these earliest pages, as well, are in a style that can only be termed provincial Iranian, and they show little originality of conception. Mir Ala-al-Daula Qazwini wrote in the *Nafa'is al-Maathir*, a contemporary history, that under Mir Sayyid Ali's direction the first four books of the project were completed, but that it took him seven years. At the end of this time he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca, and:

The task of preparing the afore-mentioned book has been assigned to the matchless master Khwaja Abd al-Samad, the painter from Shiraz; the Khwaja has

greatly endeavoured to bring the work to completion and has also notably reduced the expenditure.⁹

The remaining ten books were completed in another seven years, suggesting that not only was Abd as-Samad more efficient, but that the most vital and original paintings were largely made under his direction.

Beyond this, however, it is presently difficult to determine a chronology, which requires much needed study to isolate artistic personalities and relate the illustrations to the text. The *Tarikh-i-Akbari* says that 100 painters, illuminators, and gilders, and other craftsmen were involved in the work, while the *Nafa'is al-Maathir* notes specifically thirty painters.⁹ If correct, this would average about three illustrations per artist each year, which seems reasonable. Some pages, however, are clearly the joint effort of two or more painters.

As we have noted, the project was supervised first by the elderly Iranian master Mir Sayyid Ali and then by his younger compatriot Abd as-Samad, and Akbar's memoirs list them as the greatest painters in the royal studios (see page 24). No *Hamza-nama* pages seem attributable to either artist, however, and the overall style of the book is far more inventive than other works known by either master (cat. no. 16d). Their position, therefore, may have been largely ceremonial or administrative. Following these prestigious Iranian émigrés in rank were two Indian artists, Daswanth and Basawan. Daswanth cannot yet be properly studied, for his major identified works are illustrations that he designed but which other, lesser artists executed. His work seems to stress the emotional, irrational, and visionary, shown through unanticipated shifts of scale, for example, or by especially complicated radiating rhythms.¹⁰ Basawan, on the other hand, was a rationalist, and after Daswanth's death by suicide in 1584, his style came to dominate the imperial studios. Daswanth, during his lifetime, was the greatest of Akbar's Indian painters—as revealed by Akbar's memoirs, which lists artists hierarchically. It is unthinkable, therefore, that he would not have worked on the *Hamza-nama*, especially as earlier illustrations are found in the Cleveland Museum *Tuti-nama* manuscript.¹¹ It would seem that many of the wildest later *Hamza-nama* paintings can be credited to the authorship or inspiration of Daswanth, who was a student of Abd as-Samad. Pages by Basawan have already been identified,¹² and the Freer illustrations represent the calmer aspects of the work.

REFERENCES: C. Stanley Clarke, *Indian Drawings: Twelve Paintings of the School of Humayun* (London, 1921); Stewart Culin, "Illustrations of the Romance of Amir Hamzah," *Brooklyn Museum Quarterly* (October 1924): 138–43; Helen Comstock, "The Romance of Amir Hamzah," *International Studio* 80 (1925): 348–57; Heinrich Gluck, *Die indischen*

Miniaturen des Hamzae-Romanes im Österreichischen Museum für Kunst und Industrie in Wien und in anderen Sammlungen (Leipzig, 1925); Heinrich Goetz, "An Illustration from the Hamza-nama, the Earliest Mughal Manuscript," *Bulletin of the Baroda State Museum* 2: 31–34; Maurice Dimand, "Several Illustrations from the Dastan-i-Amir Hamza in American Collections," *Artibus Asiae* 11 (1948): 5–13; Wilhelm Staude, "Les artistes de la cour d'Akbar et les illustrations de Dastan I-Amir Hamzah," *Arts Asiatiques* 2 (1955): 47–65, 83–111; Karl J. Khandalavala and Jagdish Mittal, "An Early Akbari Illustrated Manuscript of Tilasm and Zodiac," *Lalit Kala* 14: 9–20; Gerhart Egger, *Der Hamza Roman* (Vienna, 1969); Anand Krishna, "Reassessment of the *Tuti-nama* Illustrations in the Cleveland Museum of Art (and Related Problems on Earliest Mughal Paintings and Painters)," *Artibus Asiae* 35 (1973): 241–68; Gerhart Egger, *Hamza-nama*, vol. 1 (Graz, 1974); Pramod Chandra, *Tuti-nama*.

5a SAÏD ARRIVES WITH KHUSH KHURRAM ON THE ROOF OF THE CASTLE AND SEES TWO GIRLS WRESTLING

From the *Hamza-nama*

Circa 1562–77

67.6 × 51.3 cm. (26 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.), on cloth

Ex-collection: Kevorkian

60.14

Illustration, p. 61

Saïd, the leader of Hamza's armies, once so astonished his foes—he picked up an elephant—that they embraced Islam. He was the beloved of Malak-mah, who had seen him one night when she came to his camp disguised as a man. When Saïd was captured by enemies and imprisoned, Malak-mah decapitated his guard but was herself abducted by a sorceress. Saïd, once free, rode for a whole day and then stopped to rest under a tree. He heard an unexpected voice, looked up, and saw Khush Khurram high in the branches. She explained that she had herself just escaped from a troop of black bandits. Saïd suggested that they travel together; they went to the coast, boarded a ship, sailed to the base of a mountain, disembarked, and were promptly attacked by a tiger. They killed the beast and rode off on an unfamiliar path, at the end of which was a partially open entrance, which they entered. Buildings and pavilions surrounded them, and when they wandered through one of the castles, they suddenly came upon two girls wrestling. One was Malak-mah, who, seeing Saïd, felt faint. They related to each other their adventures.

This typically lively episode comes from the end of book eleven. The illustrations for each volume are numbered separately in Persian script from 1 to 100 (although many numbers are no longer visible). This is illustration 78; both 77 and 79 are in Vienna (see Egger, *Der Hamza Roman*, V. 48 and 49).

The *Babur-nama*

On this day the Khan-Khanan produced before the august Presence [Akbar] the Memoirs of Firdus Makani (Babur) which he had rendered into Persian out of the Turki, and received great praise.¹

The original text, really a journal, was a chronicle of Babur's life, a natural history, and an extraordinary revelation of the first Mughal emperor's character. It was written in Chagatai Turkish, the family language of the Mughals, and the translation mentioned above was presented to Akbar on November 24, 1589. Abd ar-Rahim, Khan Khanan (Commander-in-Chief), was himself a noted patron of literature and painting (see cat. nos. 15 and 18a), and it may be that, like Faizi, he simply refined and polished a text actually translated by others.

There are several known illustrated Akbar-period copies of the memoirs. Ellen Smart, who is in the process of publishing a major study of the group, lists and dates the works in the following order:²

Babur-nama

Circa 1589

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and dispersed. Of the original 191 illustrations, 108 have been located by Dr. Smart, 21 making up the well-known group in the Victoria and Albert Museum. She believes this to be the first presentation copy. Several pages are reproduced in *BM* 1976, nos. 21–26.

Babur-nama

Circa 1591

British Library, London (Or. 3714)

The work originally had 183 paintings, 143 being still in the bound volume. Ninety-three illustrations are reproduced in *Suleiman*. See also *Titley Miniatures*, no. 268.

Babur-nama

Circa 1593

State Museum of Oriental Cultures, Moscow, and Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore (W.596)

Two major groups of folios have survived: fifty-nine are in Moscow, thirty-four are in Baltimore. This manuscript also contained 183 illustrations. The Moscow portion is reproduced in S. Tyulayev, *Miniatures of Babur-nama*. In Russian. (Moscow, 1960).

Babur-nama

Dated 1597–98

National Museum of India, New Delhi

Of the 183 illustrations, 173 remain in the volume and are in process of being fully published by the National Museum.

In addition, there is a fifth manuscript in the Government Museum, Alwar (Rajasthan),³ but several of

the folios are of the nineteenth century. The original portions seem to be early seventeenth century and are related to the manuscripts made at Allahabad for the young Jahangir.

Of these copies, the Victoria and Albert Museum set is clearly the most important. It is the only manuscript worked on by Basawan (who executed five designs for figural scenes, the greatest number by any artist), and its style is the earliest and most tentative. It is also the only one executed primarily by designers and assistants, rather than by single artists working alone. It seems generally true also that illustrations in the later manuscripts were by lesser artists, either those whose powers were declining (Mahesh), minor painters (Asi or Shankar Gujarati, who was assigned the greatest number of scenes in the British Library volume), or the young and relatively immature (Daulat or Payag). Presumably, these copies were made for presentation. There is a question, however, as to the date of the Victoria and Albert Museum manuscript, for many of the illustrations seem to be earlier than 1589, the date of the Khan Khanan's translation. This was the most famous and complete translation, but it was not the first to be made. During Babur's lifetime, Shaikh Zain-ud-din Khawafi (died 1533–34) prepared a Persian version of the text relating to the years in India, while Mirza Payandah Hasan Ghaznavi began in 1584 a translation of the earlier sections, a project completed (to the year 1528) by Muhammad Quli Mughal Hisari.⁴ The Khan Khanan's text is likely to be closely related to these earlier efforts, and an analysis of these—and of their relation to the known illustrations—should be made. The proposed date of circa 1589, therefore, can be considered tentative.

REFERENCES: Annette Susannah Beveridge, *The Babur-nama in English*. Reprint. (London, 1969); Ellen Smart, "Four Illustrated Mughal Babur-nama Manuscripts," *Art and Archaeology Research Papers* 3 (1973): 54–58; Ellen Smart, "Six folios from a dispersed manuscript of the Baburnama," *Colnaghi* 1978, pp. 111–32.

7 [Recto] TWO WILD BUFFALO
[Verso] TWO BLUE BULLS and
TWO HOG DEER

From the *Babur-nama*

Designed by Kanha, painted by Mansur

Circa 1589 or earlier

25.3 × 15.1 cm. (10 × 5¹⁵/₁₆ in.), full page

Ex-collection: Kevorkian

PUBLISHED: *Beach GM*, fig. 12.

54.29

Illustration, p. 75; detail, p. 178; colorplate, p. 50