BOARD OF THE FREER AND SACKLER GALLERIES

Mrs. Hart Fessenden,  
Chair of the Board
Mr. Richard M. Danziger,  
Vice Chair of the Board
Dr. Siddharth K. Bhansali
Mr. Jeffrey P. Cunard
Mrs. Mary Patricia Wilkie Ebrahimli
Mr. George J. Fan
Dr. Robert S. Feinberg
Dr. Kurt A. Gitter
Mrs. Margaret M. Hallman
Mrs. Richard Helms
Mrs. Ann R. Kinning
Mr. H. Christopher Luce
Mrs. Illi Honnor Ma
Mr. Paul G. Marks
Ms. Elizabeth E. Meyer
Mrs. Constance C. Miller
Mrs. Daniel P. Moynihan
Mr. Frank H. Pearl
Dr. Gursharan Sidhu
Mr. Michael R. Sonnenreich
Mr. Abolala Soudavar
Professor Elizabeth ten Crotenthuis
Mr. Paul F. Walker
Ms. Shelby White

Honorary
Sir Joseph Hotung

Published on the occasion of the exhibition  
The Adventures of Hamza  
organized by the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

This exhibition is made possible by generous grants from  
Juliet and Lee Folger/The Folger Fund and The Starr  
Foundation. Additional funding is provided by the Friends  
of the Freer and Sackler Galleries and the Else Sackler Public  
Affairs Endowment of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. This  
exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal  
Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Published by the  
Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery,  
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC  
In association with  
Azimuth Editions Limited, London

Distributed in the United Kingdom by  
Thames & Hudson Limited  
184 High Holborn, London WC1V 7QX  
Tel. (020) 7835 5000  Fax. (020) 7835 5050

Available in the United States through  
D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers  
155 Sixth Avenue, 2nd Floor New York, NY 10013  
Tel. (212) 627 1999  Fax. (212) 627 9498

© Smithsonian Institution 2002

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be  
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted  
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,  
photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior  
permission of the copyright holder.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from  
the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Data applied for


Produced by Azimuth Editions Limited  
Unit 2A, The Works, Colville Road, London N3 8BS  
Designed by Ankit Associates  
Reproduced and printed by P'Hrint, London  
Bound by Skyline, Dorking, Surrey

The cover and pp. 6-7 show details from Zumurrud Shah  
flies with his army to Antall by flying through the air on  
uninsent by sorcerers (cat. 57)  
The frontispiece shows a detail from Alevitan attacks  
Hamza and his men (cat. 37)
CONTENTS

8 FOREWORD
Vidya Deheja

10 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

12 INTRODUCTION
John Seyller

PART 1: CONTEXT

18 The intellectual and artistic climate
at Akbar’s court
Egba Koch

27 The organization and use of the Hamzanama
John Seyller

44 The Hamzanama and early Mughal painting
John Seyller

52 Selected artists of the Hamzanama
John Seyller

54 Catalogue of early Mughal paintings
John Seyller

PART 2: CATALOGUE
John Seyller

80 Cast of characters

82 Catalogue of the Hamzanama

256 Reconstruction of the Hamzanama
manuscript

PART 3: APPENDICES

280 Technical aspects of the Hamzanama
manuscript
Antoinette Owen

285 The Hamzanama and the Austrian Museum of
Art and Industry 1873–1900
Rainald Franz

288 Translations of text accompanying catalogued
Hamzanama paintings
Wheeler M. Thackston

313 GLOSSARY

314 NOTES

315 BIBLIOGRAPHY

319 INDEX

320 PHOTOGRAPHIC ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
FOREWORD

The *Hamzanama* ("Adventures of Hamza") tells the fabulous exploits of its eponymous hero, Hamza, the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad. The tales, replete with monsters and giants, heroes and villains, appear to have originated in Iran and spread from there to regions as widespread as Anatolia and Indonesia, where they were often recited in popular gatherings, even into the twentieth century. The *Hamzanama* found, however, a monumental expression in what was one of the grandest manuscript commissions of all time. Produced in the mid-sixteenth century for the Mughal ruler of India, the Emperor Akbar, while he was still in his teens, the *Hamzanama* comprised a remarkable total of 1,400 images, each of huge size. The scale of the undertaking is even more impressive as the paintings were among the earliest products of a fledgling imperial studio which harnessed the talents of Indian artists to that of emigrés from Iran. Above all the large paintings projected the narrative vigor of the stories, and captured the immediacy of the oral presentations they were intended to accompany.

For a manuscript of such acknowledged importance, it is surprising that this is the first extensive study of its pages since the long out-of-date publication by Heinrich Glöck in 1925, and the exhibition it accompanies the first to bring together many of the finest and best-preserved examples of the approximately two hundred extant *Hamzanama* pages.

In this catalogue, the entries for individual paintings are intended to help viewers follow the creative logic of several known painters' narrative and compositional choices and explore the nuances of their working methods. A series of essays establishes the political and artistic context of this remarkable commission, reconstructs its overall organization, and analyzes the multi-layered physical structure of the painted folios. The exhibition, too, is designed to evoke the flavor of some of the *Hamzanama*’s colorful tales by means of translation, description and performance.

Begun nearly a decade ago, this project is the culmination of the commitment and efforts of an international group of collaborators to whom the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery owe tremendous gratitude. Milu C. Beach, former Director of the Freer and Sackler galleries, played a pivotal role in the genesis and evolution of the project; we are indebted to him. His boundless enthusiasm for Mughal painting and intense pursuit of scholarly excellence gave a shape and direction to the project that shines through in this presentation.

Thomas W. Lentz, the galleries' former Deputy Director and current Director of the International Art Museums Division, Smithsonian Institution, administered the early phases of the project, with foresight and sensitivity; through his efforts the primary team was brought together, the initial studies of the paintings for exhibition were organized, and the groundwork for this project was laid.

The galleries are especially grateful to the MAK—Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art, Vienna. No serious exhibition or study of the *Hamzanama* could be accomplished without its participation. The late Dr. Hanna Egger, former Deputy Director, championed the project through its early development; we regret that she is unable to see the fruit of her labor. Dr. Peter Noever, Director, was supportive from the project's inception and committed considerable MAK resources toward its completion, including the generous loan of twenty-eight pages from its collection. In the Library and Graphics Collection, Dr. Rainald Franz, Curator, contributed an essay to this catalogue and lent his administrative and curatorial expertise, while Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel, Department Head, continues to contribute ongoing administrative support to the exhibition. Manfried Trummer and Beate Murr, assisted by Anka Schäning, executed the conservation of the paintings.

Because of the rarity of extant *Hamzanama* pages, we owe deep gratitude to all of the lenders to the exhibition. Their generosity in making their paintings available for travel enables the rich presentation
offered at each of the exhibition venues; elsewhere in this volume they are acknowledged individually.

Professor John Seyller admirably rose to the dual demance of author and curator. His work here and in his many other publications provides the most thorough understanding of the development of Mughal painting to date, and many of his conclusions have forced reconsideration of long-accepted assumptions and enlivened the debate.

Dr. Ebba Koch enriched this book with her discussion of the cultural climate of Akbar’s court and his patronage of the arts, while Dr. Wheeler Thackston contributed expertise even beyond his remarkable translations of the Hamzanama texts contained in this volume.

At the galleries, Massumeh Farhad, Associate Curator of Islamic Art, coordinated the presentation of the exhibition and provided invaluable curatorial expertise to both the catalogue and installation. Debra Diamond, Assistant Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art, contributed curatorial oversight in the early phase of installation planning. Through their considerable talents, Dennis Kois, Head of Design and Production, and Rebecca Lepkowski, Graphic Designer, brought both elegance and vitality to the installation and its didactic materials. Lynne Shaner, Head of Publications, edited the didactic text with utmost care and provided helpful counsel on the catalogue production. Rebecca Gregson, Associate Registrar, coordinated the myriad registrarial details of a complex exhibition. The rich educational programs complementing the presentation were conceptualized and administered by Ray Williams, Head of Education, and Joanna Pecore, Exhibitions Liaison. But perhaps no one person at the galleries worked longer or more diligently to make this exhibition and catalogue a reality than Cheryl Solis, Exhibitions Coordinator, who from beginning to end brought a keen sense of creativity, analysis, and disciplined planning to a host of challenges, ranging from complex negotiations with lenders and venues to the securing of photography and permissions for the catalogue.

This catalogue admirably conveys the spirit and dynamism of the paintings, and we are grateful to the team at Azimuth Editions for producing a book that so effortlessly marries the popular and the scholarly. Special thanks are due to Julian Raby and Alison Effeny who structured and edited the volume, and to Misha Anisk for his work on the design, and to Lorna Raby at PJ Print for the exquisite color reproductions and print.

The support and cooperation of the staff of the other exhibition venues is gratefully acknowledged. In particular: at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, its Director Arnold Lehman, Amy Poster, Curator of Asian Art, and Senior Conservator of Paper, Antoinette Owen, who played a critical early role in the project by conducting the initial conservation survey of the Vienna pages, by providing treatment proposals and generously sharing her expertise with the MAK staff; at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, Professor Philip King, President, Sir Philip Dawson, former President, Emeline Max, Head of Exhibitions Organization, and Isabel Carlisle, Deputy Exhibitions Secretary, and at the Museum Rieberg Zürich Dr. Albert Lütz, Director, and Dr. Eberhard Fischer, Senior Director.

We are deeply indebted to Lee and Juliet Folger/The Folger Fund. Lee Folger provided early and immediate financial support for the catalogue and additional support for the installation, his natural enthusiasm for the project having been augmented by recent travels in Central Asia and Iran. The Starr Foundation provided a generous grant, with additional funding provided by the Friends of the Freer and Sackler Galleries. We are also grateful for the grant of an indemnity by the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Vidya Dehejia
Acting Director
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The idea for this exhibition was born as a result of a conversation I had a decade ago with Dr. Milo Cleveland Beach, a valued colleague who has a similar passion for Indian painting. I am deeply indebted to him for agreeing to host the prestigious and resources of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery to this undertaking at a very early stage, and for deftly guiding the project to fruition. Dr. Thomas Lentz, formerly Deputy Director of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, threw himself wholeheartedly into the project early on and spent countless weeks courting potential venues and negotiating loan arrangements with crucial institutions. I am profoundly grateful to him for his encouragement and effectiveness. Once the exhibition was scheduled, I was introduced to Cheryl Sobas, Exhibitions Coordinator at the Freer and Sackler galleries, who cheerfully shouldered much of the extra institutional burden that comes with having a guest curator, and kept the arrangements for both the catalogue and exhibition on pace with aplomb and good humor. I will long be beholden to her for remarkable efforts.

The catalogue and exhibition have benefited enormously from the contributions of several other authors, experts all in their respective fields. Dr. Wheeler Thackston has provided masterful translations of the relevant text pages of the manuscript, including many in less than pristine condition; he also patiently read and discussed with me a number of other difficult inscriptions. Dr. Etba Koch not only contributed a fascinating study of Mughal culture under Akbar, but also greatly facilitated matters in Vienna. There, Rainald Franz of the MAK-Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art kindly agreed to write on the history of his institution’s acquisition and interest in the Hamzana paintings. Through her tireless examination of Hamzana folios in collections in the United States and Europe, Antoinette Owen became a leading authority on the technical aspects of the manuscript.

I must express my thanks to many individuals who provided assistance on matters large and small. In Washington, I am grateful to Jim Smith and Rocky Koen for making available for study over the years the Hamzana paintings at the Freer and Sackler galleries, and to Dr. Massumeh Farhad and Dr. Deora Diamond for attending to a host of exhibition-related matters. In New York, Amy Poster of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, who has long been a most enthusiastic supporter of my research on the Hamzana, cultivated support for this exhibition. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dr. Stefano Carboni, Dr. Navina Haidar, Marie Lukens Svetochowski, and Daniel Walker all provided valuable help at one point or another. My thanks also go to Subhash Kapoor and Navin Kumar.

Elsewhere, in the United States, I owe a debt of appreciation to Abolala Soudavar, Art and History Trust; Dr. Joan Cummins, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Dr. James Cuno and Mary McWilliams of the Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, and Julia Bailey, formerly of that institution; Dr. Glenn Markoe, Cincinnati Art Museum, and Ellen Avril, formerly at the museum; Dr. Stanislaw Czuma, The Cleveland Museum of Art; Dr. Stephen Manier, Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Dr. Danielle Mason, Philadelphia Museum of Art; and Dr. William Jay Rathbun, Seattle Art Museum. I am fortunate to be able to rely on Dr. Catherine Benaim and Dr. Ellen Smart as colleagues willing to share their vast knowledge of Indian painting.

In London, I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Ebadollah Bahari, Edmund and Richard De Unger, Sven Gahlin, Sir Howard Hodgkin, Dr. Linda Loach, and Indar Paresh; Dr. Ernst Grube and Dr. Eleanor Sims generously made available to me their entire file of Hamzana material. Other professional kindnesses have been extended to me by Dr. Henry Ginsburg, Jeremiah R. Lucy, and Muhammad Isa Waley of The British Library, Dr. Sheila Canby, The British Museum, Rosemary Seton, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Marcus Fraser, formerly at Sotheby’s; Francesca Galloway; and John Guy, Dr. Deborah Swallow, Susan Stronge, and Mike Wheeler of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Elsewhere in Great Britain, I have been given access to exceptional material and resources by David Scrase, The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University, and by Dr. Andrew Tophofield, Ashmolean Museum, and Adrian Roberts, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

In Paris, I am grateful to Francois Richard of the Bibliothèque nationale; Maria Van Berge-Gerbaud, Fondation Custodia; Amina Okada, Musée Cluny; and A.M. Kevorkian. Kjeld von Folsach of the David Collection, Copenhagen, Dr. Michael Ryan and Dr. Elaine Wright of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, and Dr. Anna Contadini, formerly of that institution, and the late Hannah Egger at the MAK, Vienna, all went beyond the call of duty in making their paintings available for study and loan. Dr. Karin Riehildt provided valuable information about the Fahnama and the Hamzana paintings formerly in German collections. Sheikh Nassir al-Sabah and Katie Marsh took time away from their own busy exhibition planning to respond to our loan request. Dr. R.N. Cosway and Dr. Sharon Littlefield provided useful documentation of some paintings in Indian collections.

I gratefully acknowledge the private collectors who agreed to lend their works but wish to remain anonymous.

The National Endowment for the Humanities and the University of Vermont provided much-needed financial support for my research on this topic.

My wife, Anna, read over the nightly roughs of the catalogue, and helped keep track of mountains of paperwork. Her encouragement and patience have sustained me over the years of involvement with this project.

JS

I wish to thank the numerous conservators involved in exchanging information on the folios: Mag. Anka Schäninger, private conservator, Vienna; Mag. Beate Murr and Mag. Manfred Trummer, MAK, Vienna; Mike Wheeler, Pauline Webber and Anna Hillcoat Imanishi, Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and Carolyn Tomkiewicz, Brooklyn Museum of Art, for her German-English translations.

AC

Detail of car 86
INTRODUCTION
John Seyller

The Hamzanama ("Story of Hamza") is, literally and figuratively, a fabulous book, one that has enthralled many different audiences since its creation in sixteenth-century India. Its appeal is direct and immediate, and requires no schooling in the refined conventions of the more customary literary and artistic fare of the Mughal court. Unlike the standard classics of Persian poetry, whose virtue lay in subtleties of metaphor and rhyme, or Mughal dynastic histories, which blend prosaic fact with high-flown propaganda, the Hamzanama is a popular collection of action-filled stories that recount in straightforward, vernacular language the exploits of legendary heroes. Born of the tradition of Persian oral literature that regaled predominantly illiterate audiences around nomadic campfires and in urban coffee-houses, the fantastic tales of the Hamzanama so captured the imagination of the young Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) that he recited them personally, and commissioned his fledgling painting workshop to make its first major project a spectacular illustrated copy of the text. The Hamzanama is by far the most ambitious of all manuscripts illustrated at the Mughal court, absolutely dwarfing contemporary projects in both size and scope. Whereas most illustrated manuscripts can easily fit in one’s hand and include only a dozen or so images, the Hamzanama originally comprised 1,400 folios more than two feet high, each painted in a manner that combines passages of unprecedented boldness with others of fine detail. By its scope, size, and execution, then, the Hamzanama lends itself to two very different kinds of viewing experience: one, as part of a public recitation dramatized serially by a professional storyteller, the other as the focus of a more intimate perusal of its illustrations.

THE LEGEND OF HAMZA

The tales of Hamza form one of the oldest and most popular romances of the Persian world. Said to have been commissioned originally by one Hamza ibn Abdullah Khareji (d. 818–20), the Hamzanama’s basic outline is thought to have been established in Iran even earlier than Firdawsi’s celebrated tenth-century epic, the Shahnama (Book of Kings), with which it shares some anecdotes and verses. Unlike the Shahnama, however, the Hamza romance remained largely within the oral tradition. As it was told and retold over the centuries, it became known in many different versions, in many different languages, including Arabic, Urdu, Turkish, Georgian, and even Malay. Even when one particular version happened to be copied out, it never became codified. Thus, there is no standard text to which one can turn to trace the loosely organized narrative, which takes many an unpredictable turn, and is enhanced with optional episodes. The number of sections, for example, varies even among the Persian versions of the Hamzanama, ranging from sixty-nine to eighty-two. This narrative elasticity does much to keep oral performances fresh and vibrant, but it greatly complicates the reconstruction of the Hamzanama manuscript that is the focus of this book. Similarly, although every effort has been made to coax the present selection of illustrations into a number of coherent story lines, circumstances compel some episodes to stand practically alone. In these cases, our expectation of a sustained narrative development should yield to the spirit of the romance tradition, which prizes a good yarn above all, no matter how it fits into the overall narrative scheme.

Like other popular Persian romances, the Hamza legend has a historical figure at its core. In this case, it is Hamza ibn Abdul-Muttalib, the paternal uncle of the Prophet Muhammad and purportedly his ‘milk brother,’ having been suckled by the same nursemaid. Hamza, who was born in Arabia about 569, initially rejected Muhammad’s teachings, but converted to Islam about 615. He thereafter became one of the faith’s most stalwart champions, and figured prominently in the
glorious victory of Badr in 624. In 625, he died at the battle of Uhud, when an Abyssinian named Walshi struck him down while he was engaged with another opponent. Hamza’s extraordinary valor and the ignominious defiling of his corpse have burnished his memory in the popular imagination as both hero and martyr. The Hamza legend also features the nearly contemporary figures of the Sassanian ruler Anoshirvan (r. 531–579) and his minister Buzurjmihr. This nominally locates at least some of the collections of stories in the sixth and seventh centuries. But anachronisms abound, and some parts of the story are colored by the penchant for the fantastic developed in medieval Islam. Many of these picturesque interpolations seem to have been inspired by another figure named Hamza, one Hamza ibn Abdullah, who lived in the region of Sistan in Iran in the late eighth and early ninth centuries and who led the struggle against the caliph Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809). Although this second Hamza was much less orthodox in his religious orientation, he did venture further afield. Over time, then, the two Hamza figures appear to have been conflated into an idealized and Persianized combination of righteous bravery and piety. The Hamza romance, therefore, is neither a biography of a single historical individual nor an account of the spread of Islam, but a collection of wildly entertaining stories something in the order of The Thousand and One Nights or the lore of Rubai Hood.

The Hamzanama is, above all, a tale of heroes, foremost of whom is Hamza himself. Persian heroes are typically handsome, courageous, chivalrous, strong, and proud, but their list of virtues really stops there. They are not particularly intelligent and almost never pause for any sort of philosophical reflection, so other characters are introduced to complement the king or champion: the vizier offers him wise counsel, and an ayyar, a kind of resourceful spy, faithfully does whatever dirty work is necessary. The ayyar is usually delegated to baffle, torment, or execute enemies, swelling tasks a hero personally avoids as much as possible. When a hero is compelled by duty to take the life of an opponent, he does so only after giving him ample opportunity to submit and convert. The same complementary pairing of personalities occurs among the women whom a hero encounters. Princesses are inevitably beautiful and virtuous, and are the objects of fleeting but honorable romantic attachment (Hamza, for example, marries a Greek princess), but the women who participate in the most dangerous activities are usually their clever handmaids (see cat. 60, 61, and 66). Similarly, a hero’s primary opponents are often kings or princes in their own right, complete with their own ministers and ayyars. Naturally, they are not nearly so capable or handsome as the heroes; indeed, they tend to be artless in thought and oversized in physique. Sometimes defeated brawny opponents become a hero’s staunchest allies, as is the case with Landhaur, an imposing Moor from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) who is carried away by a demon (cat. 23), and Umar Ma’dikarib, who displays the heft and sturdiness of Friar Tuck (cat. 40).

Most characters assume sobriquets or names that reveal their nature. This standard device, which announces the figure’s basic identity to the audience, is used for major and minor characters alike. Hence, Hamza is often referred to as Sahib-Qar (‘Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction’), while the archfiend Zumurrud Shah occasionally has ‘the Wayward’ or ‘the Lost’ appended to his name. One of Hamza’s offspring, Prince Bad Fuzzaman (‘Wonder of the Age’, cat. 42), has his glorious fate writ in his very name, whereas typically fearsome adversaries, Markhu Boat-Tooth (cat. 41) and Ra’im Khun-Asham (‘Ra’im Blood-Drinker’, cat. 39), have their reprehensible behaviors indelibly tagged by theirs. A friendly ayyar goes by an epithet that highlights his sseed or stealthiness, such as Songhur Balkhi (‘Falcon of Balkh’; cat. 58, 64) or Sabukpay (‘Fleet of Foot’; cat. 58); conversely, a hostile ayyar’s