1570s started a Kaspar Hauserian experiment. He had children brought up in a secluded house with nurses who were not allowed to talk to them, to find out whether they would speak on their own and in what language, and what religion and sect these infants would incline to, and above all what creed they would repeat. The project failed tragically when 'after three or four years they all turned out dumb'—some of the children even died. This experiment bespeaks the Mughal empirical approach (which was to take a turn toward natural history in Akbar's son, Jahangir) but it also has a long tradition among kings and appeared at different times in different cultures.

In 1578, Akbar's comparative religious studies acquired a new dimension; he asked the viceroy of Goa 'for two learned priests who should bring with them the chief books of the Law and the Gospel', in 1580, the first Jesuit mission reached the Mughal court, bringing along the latest and most prestigious edition of the Bible then available in Europe, the Royal Polyglot Bible, which had been sponsored by Philip II of Spain and published by Christophe Plantin in Antwerp between 1568 and 1572. The Jesuit fathers joined the religious 'think tank' at Akbar's court in the misguided hope of converting him to Christianity; they misunderstood Akbar's pre-Enlightenment interests because these did not fit into their mono-religious thinking (fig. 6).

Eventually Akbar accepted all religions, perceiving reason as their common truth, as he tells us in his own words in his letter to Philip II:

As most men are fettered by bonds of tradition, and by imitating the ways followed by their fathers, ancestors, relatives and acquaintances, everyone continues, without investigating the arguments and reasons, to follow the religion in which he was born and educated, thus excluding himself from the possibility of ascertaining the truth, which is the noblest aim of the human intellect. Therefore we associate at convenient seasons with learned men of all religions, thus deriving profit from their exquisite discourses and exalted aspirations.

One would like to know how Akbar's ideas were received at the court of the Most Catholic King Philip II, the promoter of the Spanish Inquisition. Even Akbar knew the king as a 'life giver to the Christian laws (muhyi-yi marasim-i 'sawii) and the Jesuits—with whom he discussed an embassy that would take the letter to Philip—would have informed him about the uncompromising attitude of the Spanish Habsburgs toward other religions during the reconquista of Spain. Philip's father, Emperor Charles V, had allowed an entire cathedral to be built right in the middle of the eighteenth century Great Mosque of Cordoba, as a visible sign that Spain had been wrested from the Muslims. Akbar would have been better understood by thinkers like Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648), the father of English deism and a contemporary of Descartes. Lord Herbert commended a 'natural' religion, demanded and established by reason common to all men, and capable of finding universal acceptance.

The Polyglot Bible that the Jesuits had brought to the Mughal court had been created out of an interest similar to the one that had driven Akbar to ask for it, namely to obtain an authentic and reliable text, but the two rulers' ultimate motivations were, of course, different. The Polyglot Bible was to be the one and final Catholic answer to the host of translations into vernacular languages with which Protestant reformers had flooded Europe. Plantin himself had a vested interest in publishing the Bible because he hoped thus to free himself from accusations of heresy. The publisher was a member of the Family of Love, one of the sects which had come into being in the spiritual climate heralded by the proclamations of Luther and Calvin; their creed held up universal love.
Fig. 6
The Jesuits Ludovico Agostini and Antonio Monserrato at Akbar's court.
From an imperial copy of the Akbarnama.
Painted by Nai Singh, Mughal, 1597, 28 x 20 cm.
Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, ms. f. 2659.
or charity as the supreme doctrine and dismissed all religions and religious establishments as superfluous. A kindred spirit reigned at the Mughal court, which was deeply influenced by the ideas of the great Spanish Sufi thinker Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240), who wrote:

My heart has become capable of all forms, It is a meadow for gazelles and monastery for Christian monks, A temple for idols and the pilgrim’s Kaba, The table of the Law and the book of Koran, I profess the religion of love, and whatever direction Its steed may take, love is my religion and my faith. An inscription composed by Abu’l-Fazl for a temple at Kashmir reflects these thoughts: O God, in every house I see people that seek you, and in every language I hear spoken, people talk about you, Infidelity [kufr] and Islam walk on your way and say, ‘He is one, without companion,’ If it be a mosque, people remember you with holy calls, and if it be a church [kalisa], they ring the bell out of desire for you, Oh the arrow of your love – the heart of the lovers is its target... Sometimes I withdraw to a monastery [dair], and sometimes I stay in a mosque, but it is you whom I search from house to house, Your servants have no dealings with either infidelity or Islam; for neither of them has access behind the curtain of the submission to you, Infidelity to the unbeliever, and religion to the orthodox, The smell of the rose petal belongs to the heart of the perfume-seller, This house was erected for the purpose of binding together the hearts of the Unitarians of Hindustan, and especially the worshippers of the Deity in the region of Kashmir, By order of the Lord of the throne and the crown, the lamp of creation, Shah Akbar... He who looks at this building with insincerity and destroys it should first demolish his own place of worship; for if we look at the heart, we must bear with all men, but if we look to the external [lit. water and clay], we find everything proper to be destroyed. This questioning of established religions and institutions at the Mughal court did not represent an isolated elite moment; it reflected ideas widespread in sixteenth-century Indian society, propagated by Sufi orders and bhakti sects. Eugenia Vanina has tried to draw a parallel between these movements and the sects which came into being in Europe during the Reformation, and to explain their differences and points of connection. One difference is certain: in sixteenth-century Europe these ideas never rose to an imperial level.

HISTORIOGRAPHY
Akbar’s search for truth and the authentic text also determined the particularly intense phase in Muslim history writing that he sponsored. This was dominated by Abu’l-Fazl’s great history of his own reign, the Akbarnama. An essential source of inspiration was the Chingizid and Timurid tradition of historiography, at the beginning of which stood the monumental Il-Khanid Mongol...
world history of Rashiduddin Fazlullah entitled *Jami' uttabwirkh,* 'one of the greatest achievements of historical research of all time.' Ata Malik's history of Chingiz Khan, the *Tarikh-i Jahangusha,* completed in 1260, was also well known at the Mughal court. Sharafuddin All-i Yardi's history of Timur which had served Babur as a guide to conquering Hindustan, the *Zafarnama,* was highly influential. From India, there was the historiography of the sultans of Delhi, which had had its best moment under the Tughluqs in the fourteenth century, and the famous *Rajatarangini,* the Sanskrit history of the kings of Kashmir, which was written by the Kashmiri Brahman Kalhana in 1148-49 and continued by several authors until some years after the annexation of Kashmir by Akbar in 1586. Akbar recognized this as an outstanding historical work full of important notions about Indian kingship and had it translated by several scholars, including the ever-relevent...
ARCHITECTURE

Akbar’s efforts at religious and cultural reconciliation, in particular between his Hindu and Muslim subjects, have been used to explain the arts created for him, especially architecture. Akbar built more and on a larger scale than any Indian ruler before him. We owe to his patronage the great Mughal fortress palaces of Agra (1564–1570s) and Lahore (completed 1580), the suburban residence Fatehpur Sikri with its monumental mosque (1571–85), and Humayun’s tomb at Delhi (1562–71), to name just the most outstanding architectural achievements of his reign. It is, however, not quite clear to what extent Akbar was personally interested in architecture; Abul Fazl has remarkably little to say about it, and Antonio Monserrate, chronicler of the first Jesuit mission to the court of Akbar, refers to it only as an occasion for Akbar to demonstrate his physical prowess, when he mingled with his builders and carried blocks of stones. The official Akbari view on architecture can be obtained from Muhammad Arif Qandahari, another historian, who claimed that Akbar designed parts of Fatehpur Sikri, and who represented the architecture of his emperor as a testimony to his rule:

a good name for kings is [achieved by means] of lofty buildings ... That is to say the standard of the measure of men is assessed by the worth of [their] building (imarat) and from their high-mindedness is estimated the state of their house.

... Whosoever saw the spacious expanse of that place [makan] and the arrangement of ornament [muchar] of that edifice [burjyan] [the Agra fort (fig.8)] found the affairs of the kingdom and means of authority in full accord with this order and the high and low, in consonance with allegiance and obedience.\[30\]

These statements justify the interpretation of Akbar’s architecture as a ‘lithic expression’ of his policies.\[35\] But art historians have too easily drawn an equation between the forms of Akbar’s architecture and his Weltschauung. A common practice, which goes back to British notions of the nineteenth century, is to describe arches and vaults as ‘Muslim’ and brackets and beams as ‘Hindu,’ and their common use in one building as an expression of Akbar’s tolerance.

Abul Fazl saw the use of Indian forms rather in regional terms; he tells us that the buildings of the Red Fort of Agra ‘were built in the beautiful styles of Gujarat and Bengal.’\[34\] Gujarat in particular had, as no other region of India, absorbed older local forms in its Muslim architecture. Thus the Gujarati building types and forms adopted in Akbari architecture could be read as ‘Hindu,’ if one wanted to disregard their historical development. A particularly telling example comes from the so-called Astrologer’s Seat at Fatehpur Sikri (fig.9). Its prominent caterpillar (lika-valama) brackets are a characteristic element of the architecture of Gujarat and thus they have caused this pavilion to be cited frequently as evidence of the direct imitation of Gujarati Hindu or Jain religious architecture. But the structure has a much closer forerunner in an Islamic building in Gujarat, the Mukabbar kiosk in the courtyard of the Jamī Masjid in Cambay, constructed in 1251 (fig.7). This means that in the Astrologer’s Seat Akbar’s builders were making reference to what they considered a transculturally successful regional style of India. Another Indian style which was highly influential on Akbari architecture was the ornamental sandstone tradition of the early Delhi sultanate. It had gone out of fashion during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Delhi but continued uninterrupted in provincial centers like Bajana or Karnaul, creating an architectural heritage from which early Mughal buildings could draw inspiration.\[35\]

We may want to regard Akbari architecture as a testimony of his rule, but it seems more likely...
that its intention was to bring 'the regional' on to a supra-regional, imperial level. Selected styles and forms from Hindustan were merged with the building principles and forms of Timurid Central Asia. These components were given new emphasis by magnified proportions, by a new approach to structural logic, reflected in décor and detail, and, at least in the heartland of Mughal building activities at Delhi, Agra, and Fatehpur Sikri, by the unifying medium of red sandstone, which had a high symbolic value. Red had been the color of kings since ancient times and was also used exclusively for imperial Mughal tents. In India, old shastric texts, such as the VishnuDharmaMottara (probably eighth century), recommended red stones for the buildings of the kshatriyas, the warrior and kingly caste, and white for brahmans, the priestly caste. By adopting red sandstone as their preferred building material and by highlighting it with white marble, the Mughals revived a practice of the early sultans of Delhi and associated themselves architecturally with those they considered their counterparts, the uppermost ranks in the Indian social hierarchy. Since red sandstone had royal

properties in both the Muslim and Hindu traditions, it worked, if we may make this cross-disciplinary comparison, even better than the Persian language as a unifying, appropriating element.

PAINTING
Humayun's stay in Iran had a decisive impact on the formation of Mughal painting. By the time he was to leave the court of Shah Tahmasp in 1544, his host had repudiated the interest in painting of his youth, and thus Humayun was able to bring back to India some of the outstanding masters who had worked on the Shah's great illustrated manuscript, the Shahnama-i Shahi, which had been completed in the late 1330s. Often known as the Houghton Shahnama after the twentieth-century collector, but now more fittingly referred to as the Shah Tahmasp Shahnama, it is considered by many art historians to be the greatest masterpiece of Persian painting (see cat. 2). The Iranian painters Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdul Samad joined Humayun in 1549 in Kabul, where he resided before his return to Hindustan. Later, under Akbar, they became the leading masters of the Mughal court atelier in which a large number of artists created a specific Mughal style, bringing together Persian, Central Asian, Indian, and European painting traditions.19
Abul-Fazl discusses Akbar's patronage of painting in more detail than his architecture and draws attention to the personal interest the emperor took in this art. Abdul-Samad himself instructed the young Akbar in drawing, and later, as emperor, Akbar supervised the work of his painters on a regular basis. He also spoke repeatedly in defense of painting, which, in contrast to architecture, was a controversial art. Abul-Fazl's reports reflect the ambivalent attitude of Akbar's court to painting, and even he cannot free himself entirely from the traditional bias of Muslim treatises on calligraphy and painting when he gives preference to the written word. In an intriguing argument he begins in almost post-modern terms anticipating Saussure's notions of 'sign,' 'signifier,' and 'signified,' continues on a neoplatonic, post-Tridentine note in conceding that painting, especially European naturalism, may serve as a means to recognize a higher truth, and ends with the superiority of writing:

A picture [surat] leads to the form it represents [khodawand-i khwud, lit. 'its own master'] and this [leads] to the meaning [ma'ni] just as the shape of a line [paikari khati] leads one to letters [ka'far] and words [san] and from there the sense [ma'rifum] can be found out. Although in general they make pictures [taswir] of material appearances [ashshah-i kawn], the European masters [karbordazan-i frang] express with rare forms [ba shiqir suratha] many meanings of the creation [bas ma'ani khalqi] and [thus] they lead those who see only the outside of things [zahimigahan] to the place of real truth [haqqi qazari]. However, lines [khat, writing, calligraphy] provide us with the experiences of the ancients and thus become a means to intellectual progress.  

Painting was most acceptable when it appeared in connection with the word and thus illustrated books were traditionally the preferred context for painting in Islamic culture. The rich production of books at Akbar's court went hand in hand with their illustration, and producing 'miniatures' for manuscripts was the main occupation of Akbar's court atelier. We also have evidence of figural wall-painting, which made its appearance in Islamic societies over the centuries under 'image friendly' patrons. Akbari wall-paintings are preserved in Maryam's House at Fatehpur Sikri, and we learn that great miniaturists of Akbar's court atelier practiced this art, even in non-imperial buildings. Abdul-Samad, who eventually became the second director of the Hamzanama project, painted 'with his own blessed hand [ba dost-i mukhak-i khud]' the private apartment [khilwat khana] of the house of Khan-i A’zam Mirza Aziz Koka (d. 1624) situated inside the Agra fort.

In Akbar's painting studio artists from different regions of India worked together, and Abul-Fazl takes pains to point out the excellence of the Indian masters. The Hamzanama project dominated the studio's early years, and in its production we observe the trend toward merging various painting traditions, Persianate, Central Asian, regional Indian, and European to produce what was, for a book, a format on a monumental 'imperial' scale, a development comparable to that seen in architecture.

Besides the Hamzanama, Abul-Fazl's artists produced paintings for the main works of the imperial scriptorium, illustrating several texts more than once. The focus was first on stories and romance, the Tu'inana (circa 1565-70), Duwal Rani wa Khizer Khan (1568), and Darabnama (circa 1577-80); then on historical works, the Tarikh-i Khandan-i Timuruya (circa 1584-86), Baburnama (1589), Akbarnama (1596-97), and the Chingiznama (1596); and then on translations of works of Sanskrit literature, the Mahabharata (Razmnama, 1584-86), Harivamsa (circa 1585), and Ramayana (1588-91), to name only the principal projects. At all times special interest was taken in the Persian classics, the Gulistan, the Khamsa of Nizami, and the Anwar-i Suhayli. The last of these belongs to a
genre known as the ‘Mirror of Princes,’ which consisted of political theories, often expressed by fables with a didactic content. The Anwar-i Shadili was illustrated several times—in 1570, circa 1575, and 1596–97—and was rendered by Abu’l-Fazl into simplified Persian prose as the Ijar-i Danish and illustrated circa 1594. This book of animal tales, which in Arabic is known under the title Kalila wa Dimna, had an astonishing history. It goes back to an Indian source, the Panchatantra, and became an unparalleled international success as a guide to wise and correct behavior, especially that of rulers.43

AKBAR AND THE HAMZANAMA

It remains to try to place Akbar’s patronage of the Hamzanama within the intellectual and artistic climate of his court, whose activities were intended to establish Akbar as a universal ruler through political and cultural integration on all possible levels in a complex interaction between the regional and supra-regional.

His involvement with the fictional story of Hamza demonstrates the young Akbar’s personal interest in the fantastic and ahistorical, which stands in contrast to the emphasis on reason and search for historical truth of his mature years. He thought differently from Babur, for whom the Hamzanama served as an example of literature he disliked, ‘contrary to good taste and sound reason.’ Even Abu’l-Fazl, in his preface to the translation of the Mahabharata, warns his readers about the fantastic and fictitious aspects of this work. Badauni for once was of the same opinion as Abu’l-Fazl when he compared the Hamzanama ironically with the Ramayana:

Hence it is evident that these events are not true at all, and are nothing but pure invention, and simple imagination, like the Shahnamah; and the stories of Amir Hamzah, or else it must have happened in the time of the dominion of the beasts and the jinn—yet God alone knows the truth of the matter.44

Akbar’s openness toward the less rational aspects of life also manifested itself in his actions, when as a young man he hunted obsessively and risked his life by jumping on the back of an elephant gone wild, or when he allowed Abu’l-Fazl to record for posterity in the Akbarnama that he fell in a trance (or an epileptic fit) in the forest during a hunt in 1578.

Akbar also made his court a haven for poets, and Mughal poetry came to its real flowering during his reign. Akbar was the patron of Ghazali Mashhadî (d. 1572–73) and Fayzi (d. 1595–96), poets, who, despite being attached to the court, wrote in their own right and not as humble court servants, as did the later eulogists of Shah Jahan; Akbar’s commander-in-chief Abdulrahim KhanKhânân patronized the great Urfi from Shiraz (d. 1590) and Nazirî (d. 1612/13). It was only at the end of Akbar’s reign that Abu’l-Fazl could report on a triumphant note: ‘As the foundation of poetry has been placed on fancy and fiction, H.M. pays less regard to it.’45 Abu’l-Fazl did not see that in engaging ‘fancy and fiction’ Akbar proved himself more of a universal man than Abu’l-Fazl had ever conceived him to be.
THE ORGANIZATION AND USE OF THE HAMZANAMA

John Seyller

With every known volume of the Mughal Hamzanama manuscript broken up, and the opportunity to view more than two or three pages at one time now a rarity, it is easy to lose sight of the original scale and function of this remarkable work. We can, however, reconstruct the way in which the Hamzanama was organized and used by the Mughals by gleaning information from scattered literary references and the long-overlooked physical evidence of folio construction and size, folio numbers, inspection notes and seal marks on the paintings themselves.

LITERARY REFERENCES TO THE HAMZANAMA

The limited set of contemporary literary references to the Hamzanama agree on most aspects of the manuscript: its physical size, the number of paintings per volume, the key artists employed, and the rate of production. But these same sources contradict each other on a few important points, notably the number of volumes and the dates of production, and have thereby provoked some longstanding scholarly disagreements. To resolve these discrepancies, one must assess the authority of each writer, and measure the accuracy of his statements against the facts that can be verified now.

The earliest reference to the Hamzanama, or Qissā-i Amir Hamza ("Story of Amir Hamza"), as it is always known in contemporary texts, is the Nafūs al-Maāṣir ("Riches of Glorious Traditions"), a commentary on poetry and a compendium of biographies of poets written by Mir Ala al-Dawla Qazwini. The author belonged to a distinguished family of scholars. His father, Mir Yahya Hasan Sayfi, was an eminent court historian for Bahram Mirza, the brother of Shah Tahmasp, but was imprisoned in his old age because his enemies impugned him for being a Sunni; his elder brother, Mir Abdul-Latif, seeing the harsh new religious climate in Iran, fled to India at Humayun's invitation. By the time he reached India, the young and unlettered Akbar had ascended to the throne and, receiving Mir Abdul-Latif with honors, quickly accepted him as his tutor and confidant.1

Mir Ala al-Dawla himself, who is recorded as being in Qazwini in AH 971 (AD 1563–64), made his move to India shortly before AH 973 (AD 1566–66), when he commenced the Nafūs. The autograph copy of the text uses chronograms to give the dates of inception, AH 973 (AD 1566–66), and completion, AH 979 (AD 1572–73).2 An eight-folio addendum to the manuscript, written on different paper but apparently in the same hand, recounts the events of a campaign in Gujarat that transpired after the completion date, that is, AH 980 to 11 Muharram 981 (AD 1572–15 May 1573). A concluding section of forty-six folios offers a hagiographical tribute to Akbar. On the final folio (335a), below the chronogram and a separate numerical date of AH 979, is a three-line note written in Arabic; it states that Nīżām b. Ahmad Dihlawi wrote some sections of the book on 8 Rabi‘ 11 (8 August 1572) in the city of Ajmer.3 On the opposite side of the final folio is a note indicating that the book was presented to Akbar for his approval, which, it is postulated, must have been before the emperor left Ajmer for Gujarat on 22 Rabi‘ 12 (1 September 1572).4 Thus, it appears that the text in the main portion of the manuscript was written between AH 973 and AH 979 (29 July 1565–25 May 1571), and that the section by Nīżām b. Ahmad Dihlawi and the author’s marginal notes throughout the manuscript were penned later, that is, between AH 980 and AH 981 (14 May 1572–22 April 1574).

These admittedly involved chronological details are important because Mir Ala al-Dawla makes two crucial series of remarks about the Hamzanama in a biographical entry on the painter Mir Sayyid Ali, who also wrote poetry under the nom de plume of Juddi. The first, which appears in the body of the text, is as follows:

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It is now seven years that the Mir has been busy in the royal bureau of books (kütüphân-i nāsir-i ʿalî), as commanded by His Majesty (hâzzat-i ʿalî) in the decoration and painting of the large compositions (taswir-i magâlis) of the story of Amir Ḥamza (qissâ-i amir Ḥamza), and strives to finish that wondrous book which is one of the astonishing novelities that His Majesty has conceived of. Verily it is a book the like of which no connoisseur has seen since the azure sheets of the heavens were decorated with brilliant stars, nor has the hand of destiny inscribed such a book on the tablet of the imagination since the discs of the celestial sphere gained beauty and glamour with the appearance of the moon and the sun. His Majesty has conceived of this wondrous book on the following lines. The amazing descriptions and the strange events of that story are being drawn on the sheets for illustrations in minuscule detail and not the slightest requirement of the art of painting goes unfulfilled. That story will be completed in twelve volumes, each volume consisting of one hundred leaves (waqaṣ); each leaf being one 'yard' (qâr) by one 'yard,' containing two large compositions (magâlis-i taswir). Opposite each illustration, the events and incidents relative to it, put into contemporary language, have been written down in a delightful style. The composition of these tales, which are full of delight and what your fancy, is being accomplished by Khwaja Atâullâh, the master prose stylist (munsârâ) from Qazwin. Although, during the aforesaid period, thirty painters, equal to Mâni and Rizhâd, have constantly been devoted to the task, no more than four volumes have been completed. One can imagine just from that its grandeur and perfection. May God bring their work to completion under the sublime and majestic shade. 

A marginal note beside this entry (datable, as we have seen: to between May 1572 and April 1574) provides further information:

At present, the Mir having obtained permission to go on Hajj, the task of preparing the aforementioned book has been assigned to the matchless master Khwaja Abd al-Ṣamad, the painter from Shiraz; the Khwaja has greatly endeavoured to bring the work to completion and has also notably reduced the expenditure.

In sum, these statements, written while the Hamzanama project was still under way, indicate that the manuscript was ordered by Akbar; that it would eventually consist of twelve volumes of one hundred folios each, with each folio containing two paintings, presumably one to a side; that the accompanying stories were composed by Khwaja Ataullah; that these scenes were being realized by thirty painters; that in seven years of labor only four volumes were completed; and that Mir Sayyid Ali, having obtained permission to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca, was ultimately replaced as supervisor by Abdul-Samad.

A second comprehensive account of the Hamzanama is provided by Muhammad Arif Qandahari in a text known alternatively in two incomplete and corrupt copies as the Tarikh-i Akbari ("History of Akbar") or Tarikh-i Qandahari ("History of Qandahari"). Muhammad Arif was less intimately involved with Akbar; indeed, for much of his career he was attached to Muzaffar Khan, a prominent noble who spent most of his time in Bihar and Begar until his death in AH 988 (AD 1580). Most of the work was written by AH 988 (AD 1578–79), as established by the last date mentioned in one copy of the text; and the present tense used for events of that year, but upon Muzaffar Khan's demise, Muhammad Arif made some changes and rededicated the text to the emperor. Muhammad Arif draws upon his predecessor's work, as was customary for most historians of the time, but supplies some new details about the Hamzanama.
The emperor is a designer of marvels since he has ordered that of the story of Amir Hamza (qiṣṣa-i
amīr hamza), which has 360 tales, each tale should be illustrated with large compositions (maqālīd).
Close to one hundred matchless painters (muqawwārī), gilders (muzāhhīb), illuminators (naqṣāshī),
and binders (muqallād) are working on that book. The size (qat') of that book is one 'meter' and a half
(yak gaz-o-nim-i shar'); its paper is imbued with colours; its borders have floral designs (jul-kāri);
and between two sheets of paper a sheet of chautār cloth has been placed to make it more perma-
nent. All the pages are illustrated and gilded. It has been ordered that munshīs possessing unique
elegance and a sweet tongue should narrate the entire story in measured and rhythmic prose and
that mercury-paved fine calligraphers should put it down in the book. In spite of this, in every two
years, one volume is prepared; and on each volume close to one million tanka-i-siyah are spent.

From Muhammad Arif, then, we learn that the Hamzanama contained 360 stories; that almost
one hundred artists of various specializations were set to work on the project; that the paper was
colored; that the borders were decorated with floral designs; that a layer of coarse cloth was inserted
between two sheets of paper to strengthen each folio; that multiple narrators composed the
stories; that it took two years to complete one volume; and that the total expenditure for each
volume was about one million tanka-i-siyah.

The last two points require further explanation. First, although Muhammad Arif wrote after Mir
Ala al-Dawla, he maintained the latter's estimation that the volumes were being produced slowly,
that is, at the rate of one volume every two years, a statement that Mir Ala al-Dawla himself had
emended in his marginal note. Moreover, in the latter of the two copies of Muhammad Arif's text, this
line is crossed out, as if in recognition that it was no longer true. Second, Muhammad Arif's estimate
of the cost of producing a volume is instructive, though again it probably should be revised in light
of Mir Ala al-Dawla's remark that Abdul-Samad had reduced the production cost of a Hamzanama
volume. With one million tanka-i-siyah equivalent to 50,000 rupees and one hundred folios in each
Hamzanama volume, the cost of each folio— including material and labor for text, illustration, and
borders—averages 500 rupees. In some respects, this lofty estimate is not surprising for a book of this
size and exalted reputation, yet it far exceeds the valuations assigned to all individual Mughal paint-
ings, which are typically 5-20 rupees for paintings approximately one-eighth to one-quarter the size
of Hamzanama illustrations, and easily outstrip even the costliest of Mughal manuscripts of any
period. This latter comparison is particularly noteworthy because the Hamzanama lacks the one fea-
ture that determines almost every high valuation: truly fine writing by a well-regarded calligrapher.

Abu'l-Fazl, historian and advisor to Akbar, refers to the Hamzanama twice in his chronicles of
Akbar's reign. In the Akbarnama, the official court history of Akbar's lineage and reign begun in
1589, he mentions that the emperor relaxed to the stories after capturing wild elephants in the
thick forests near Narwar in 1564.

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 auspici-
uous throne and graciously ordered his courtiers to be seated. Then for the sake of delight and
pleasure he listened for some time to Darbār Khān's recital of the story of Amir Hamza. 

In the A'in-i Akbari ('Annals of Akbar'), a voluminous description of the various institutions of Akbar's
reign completed in 1598, Abu'l-Fazl includes the Hamzanama in his discussion of the art of painting:
As this art has gained in status more and more masterpieces were prepared. Persian books of both prose and poetry were decorated and a great many large and beautiful compositions (maqāls) were painted. The story of Hamza (qīṣa-i āmir hamzā), put into twelve volumes, has been illustrated (rang āmez kardand), and magic making masters have painted fourteen hundred astonishing pictures of as many incidents (mauzū).12

Thus, writing approximately a quarter-century after the end of the imperial archives at his disposal, Abu’l-Fazl concurs with the former’s tally of twelve volumes, but confuses the situation by adding that there were 1,400 illustrations in all. This formulation departs from the two earlier accounts, each of which had one hundred folios per volume.

Abu’l-Fazl’s contemporary and rival, Badauni, wrote Muntakhab’ut-tawārikh (‘Selected Chronicles’), an unofficial and often critical account of Akbar’s reign. In one section dated to the end of A.H. 990 (A.D. 1582), Badauni describes with some distaste Akbar’s decision to have a famous Hindu religious text, the Mahabharata, translated into Persian. He prefaced the emperor’s rationale for doing so – to have felicitous and spiritually important works made accessible in his name – with these remarks:

When he had had the Shahnamah, and the story of Amīr Hamza, in seventeen volumes transcribed in fifteen years, and had spent much gold in illuminating it, he also heard the story of Abū Muslim, and the Jāmi’-il-Hikāyat, repeated, and it suddenly came into his mind that most of these books were nothing but poetry and fiction; but that, since they were first related in a lucky hour, and when their star was in the act of passing over the sky, they obtained great fame.13

Elsewhere, in a biographical account of Jādul (Mir Sayyid Ali), he describes the Hamzanama in this way:

The story of Amīr Hamza in sixteen volumes was illuminated and completed under his supervision. Each volume of it fills a box, and each page of it measures a yard wide by a yard long, and one page is a picture.14

Badauni, then, augments the earlier computation of twelve volumes to sixteen and even seventeen volumes. That he not only deviates from the total given by Mir Ala al-Dawla and Abu’l-Fazl, but also provides two different numbers in his own chronicle, suggests that he is not an entirely reliable source for the precise details of the project, with which he was apparently little concerned.15 Indeed, Badauni provides many fewer details than the other authors do. Aside from mentioning that the paintings were a yard square, a description matching early ones, he makes but three points. The first is that the Hamzanama was completed under the supervision of Mir Sayyid Ali, something completely at odds with Mir Ala al-Dawla’s detailed marginal remark that Mir Sayyid Ali was replaced as supervisor by Abdul-Samad. The second is that each volume filled a box, an observation that may be a clue as to how the volumes were organized and stored (for which, see below). But it is Badauni’s third point – that the Hamzanama was transcribed over fifteen years – that has emerged as the most crucial of all, for it factors in every estimation of the absolute dates of production.

A seventeenth-century author, Qāṭfī, does not offer a full physical description of the Hamzanama in his Majma’ al-Shu’ara Jahangirshahi (‘The Poets of Jahangir’). His essentially biographical remarks, however, contain three pertinent points about the Hamzanama. According to Qāṭfī, the calligrapher Mir Husayn al-Husayni (also known as Mir Kalangi)16 worked together with Mir Dasrī
and Hafiz Muhammad Amin to "write the story of Hamza which I [Qat’i] had made and finished and brought into bound volumes, and they displayed their fine writing." 11 As Annemarie Schimmel notes, this statement by the elderly Qat’i contradicts Mir Ala al-Dawla’s claim that Khwaja Ataullah, a fellow native of Qazwín, composed the Hamzanama. It also names three of the calligraphers who actually copied out the text of the manuscript, and describes the volumes as ‘bound.’

The final Mughal literary comment on the Hamzanama is by Shah Nawaz Khan, the author of the Maqsir al-Umara ("The Feats of the Commanders"), a biographical compendium of Mughal nobles begun in 1742 and completed in about 1780. In the entry for Darbar Khan, the Iranian-born professional storyteller associated earlier with the Hamzanama, Shah Nawaz Khan relates with some distress that Darbar Khan and Akbar regarded each other with such affection that the storyteller asked to be buried like a dog at the emperor’s feet, a wish that Akbar granted by having a domed tomb built for him. He continues:

Though Akbar did not possess fully the arts of reading and writing, yet he occasionally composed verses, and was versed in history; especially he was well acquainted with the history of India. He was very fond of the story of Amir Hamza which contained 360 tales. So much so that he in the female apartments used to recite them like a storyteller. He had the wonderful incidents of that story illustrated from beginning to end of the book and set up in twelve volumes.

Each volume contained one hundred folios, and each folio was a cubit (275 cm) long. Each folio contained two pictures and at the front of each picture there was a description delightfully written by Khwaja ‘Ali Ullah Munshi of Qazwín. Fifty painters of Bihārī-like pencil were engaged, at first under the superintendence of the Nādir-i-mulk Humayunshah ‘Saidi ‘Ali Judai of Tabriz, and afterwards under the superintendence of Khwaja ‘Abdu-s-Samad of Shiraz. No one has seen such another gem nor was there anything equal to it in the establishment of any king. At present the book is in the imperial library.12

Writing from a vantage point nearly two hundred years removed from the Hamzanama project, Shah Nawaz Khan had no possibility of independent information, and relied most heavily on Mir Ala al-Dawla’s account. Accordingly, he reiterates the earlier author’s formulation of twelve volumes of one hundred folios each, with two paintings per folio. He increases the number of painters involved in the project from thirty to fifty, an emendation recorded already in one copy of the Nafais al-Maqasir.13 He does, however, add one valuable tidbit of information, that is, that the Hamzanama was still in the imperial library. As one scholar has noted, this implies that the Hamzanama was not seized by the Iranian king Nadir Shah when he sacked Delhi in 1739.14

This point is complicated by a Persian source, Nama-yi Alam-Ara-yi Nadiri, written by Muhammad Kazim, who specifically mentions the Hamzanama and the magnificent Kuh-i Nur diamond as the most prized possessions acquired in the campaign in Delhi. A recent scholarly study summarizes the relevant passages of this Persian source in this way:

And there is some new physical data, such as ‘each folio measured 1½ x ½ royal cubits, and was set in pasteboard [mugavvah].’ Above all, we get some notion of the value placed on the Tales [Hamzanama], when we read that with the volumes packed on two camels for shipment to Iran, the Emperor sent his Grand Vazir with a special plea for their return. The conqueror was welcome to all his treasures, but he begged to be spared the loss of this book. The Shah was gracious in his reply: ‘Ask but the return of all your treasures, and they are yours—but not the Amir Hamzei’15
Given the complexity of the project, it is not surprising that these various literary sources provide descriptions of the making of the *Hamzanama* that differ in details. These details can, however, be corroborated, qualified or contradicted by the physical evidence of the surviving folios. The folios also carry evidence crucial to the dating of the project, which is a topic the literary sources do not address explicitly.

**THE PHYSICAL EVIDENCE OF THE HAMZANAMA**

All the literary sources agree that the *Hamzanama* folios were large, with all authors but Muhammad Kazim using a single measurement (1 yard, or 1½ pdr., i.e., meters) for both height and width, thereby implying that the folios were square or nearly so. Even the largest of the surviving folios (cat. 38), measuring 88.8 by 73 centimeters, falls well short of these absolute dimensions, and only folios that obviously have been cut down from their original size approximate a square. Thus, it appears that either the dimensions cited by various authors were intended only to convey extraordinarily large size without pretense of exactness, or that the borders have been substantially reduced from their original form. As Antoinette Owen demonstrates in her essay (pp. 281–2), the margins—which were themselves covered with colored paper—are attached to the main support of the folio in an unexpectedly complex way, and all show signs of having been trimmed. This alteration probably explains the absence of the floral borders mentioned by Mir Ala al-Dawla, and perhaps even his description of the paper of the *Hamzanama* as being colored. It is more likely that this latter description refers to the paper on which the text is written. Most folios, of course, have text on the reverse written on cream-colored paper decorated with flecks of gold, but several folios ostensibly from the early volumes of the manuscript have panels of text written on strips of blue or pale-green paper placed above and below the painting. Likewise, although Mir Ala al-Dawla’s remark that there were two paintings to a folio is generally dismissed as a simple error, it may well have some basis in fact. At least one *Hamzanama* folio has a painting on each side, and several others (e.g., cat. 19) have nothing but plain paper on their reverse. In light of the laminate structure of the folio described by Owen, this may be the result of the cloth-backed sheet of paper on which the following text was written having been stripped away from the painted sheet. A more likely explanation, however, is that some of these folios once had a second painting on their reverse, and that a dealer separated the addressed paintings in order to maximize his opportunity for commercial gain. In short, Mir Ala al-Dawla’s remarks often seem to be informed by an awareness of the *Hamzanama* in its early phase, a point implied by the contemporaneity of his statements. ‘It is now seven years that the Mir has been busy...’ and ‘the story will be completed in twelve volumes.’

One standard observation about the *Hamzanama* in the literary sources is that each of its volumes had a hundred illustrations. This is corroborated by a series of numbers written in black immediately below most illustrations and in red above the penultimate line of text on the reverse. These numbers do not follow the traditional manner of foliation, that is, with each folio bearing a single numeral, and the numerals arranged in consecutive order. Instead, a given painting and the text on the preceding folio bear identical numbers. For example, one folio (cat. 30) has a painting numbered ‘3’ and the following text numbered ‘4’; the painting on the next folio in the manuscript (cat. 31) is numbered ‘4’ and the text on that folio is numbered ‘5.’ Thus, the true unit of the manuscript was not a single folio, but the painted scene and its accompanying text, which appear on two separate folios.
No folio bears a numeral above 100, but several numerals – 2, 6, 10, 14, 15, 23, 26, 58, 74 – appear on as many as three separate folios. This confirms that each volume was foliated separately from one to one hundred. The sole occurrence of the latter, in the MAK-Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art, Vienna (b.i. 8770/18), has the number 100 written in red on the central dev's right leg; on the reverse, where on an earlier folio a page of text would normally follow, there is a blank field impressed with three seals. This suggests that this was indeed the last folio of the set, which consisted, as Mir Ala al-Dawla claimed, of 100 folios. Conversely, two folios (MAK, b.i. 8770/1 and 8770/20) commence with a blank field on which seals are impressed and inspection notes are written, and follow with a page of text that is apparently the beginning of a new volume (figs 11 and 12).

Thus far, then, Mir Ala al-Dawla has been proven reliable on nearly every count. This pattern changes, however, with the number of volumes, which Mir Ala al-Dawla had claimed would be twelve. A projected total later repeated as the final end result by Abu'l-Fazl and others. Among the many inscriptions on the aforementioned initial pages are two inspection notes that begin, respectively, 'eleventh volume' (fig. 11b) and 'twelfth volume' (fig. 12a). These notes, therefore, provide unequivocal evidence that there were, in fact, at least thirteen volumes in the manuscript. Acknowledging this evidence, and following the reconstruction put forward in 1925 by Heinrich Gluck, most scholars have accepted Abu'l-Fazl's statement that there were 1,400 pictures, and, excusing as an error his contradictory one that there were just twelve volumes, have concluded that there were actually fourteen, each with a hundred folios.

Although the issue of the absolute dates of the Hamzanama project is not addressed as such by any of the contemporary Mughal chroniclers, it has vexed modern art historians for almost a half-century. Some have entertained the possibility that the project commenced during the reign of Humayun, but most scholars concur that Mir Ala al-Dawla's mention of 'His Majesty' (HOZAR-E-I A'LA) can only refer to the reigning sovereign, Akbar. Hence, the earliest possible inception date of the project is February 1556, the date of Akbar's accession. Beyond this, however, great controversy ensues, fueled often by unabashed speculation about when the young emperor's level of maturity, state of mind, or success in military and political matters might have made the project most likely.

One position, developed in the 1960s and argued forcefully thereafter by Karl Khandalavala and his followers, posits a chronological framework of 1559-82; another, formulated about ten years later by Pramod Chandra, uses literary evidence far more judiciously to propose dates circa 1562-77. Khandalavala, for example, takes without any justification whatsoever Badauni's mention of 1562 as the terminus ad quem of the Hamzanama, and by subtracting fifteen years from that date, arrives at a starting date of 1547. But at the heart of each of these two positions is the date of the Naqai as-Maasir, and more specifically the date from which the seven years taken to produce the first four volumes should be reckoned. If one uses literary sources alone, there is little hope of determining this point with the kind of precision that most scholars now seek.

Fortunately, new evidence found on the manuscript itself helps to clarify the issue of the Hamzanama's chronology. In 1993, this author recognized that a number on one illustration (cat. 74), previously misread by Gluck as '672' and understood by him to be an unprecedented three-digit painting number (i.e., the seventy-second painting of volume 6), should actually be read as '772'. Written beside the flaming tripod in the lower center of the painting, this number 772 did not seem to be a painting number, for there was already one ('74') in the usual position in the border below the painting; moreover, written just below the three-digit number was another number.
The number 972 therefore appeared to me to be something else altogether: a date in the Hijra calendar corresponding to August 1564–July 1565. It might be objected that the putative date appears without the word ‘year’ (sana), customarily written directly below nearly all numerical dates; indeed, one scholar has recently proclaimed that a date on such an elaborate manuscript appearing in any form but a proper monumental inscription is utterly implausible. In my opinion, however, this position places excessive faith in the applicability of orthodox practice in Persian manuscripts to workshop customs in Mughal India, and ignores the unparalleled amount of informal documentation written directly on the painting fields of all sorts of imperial manuscripts.

The number 6 written nearby, ignored altogether by Glück, must be nothing other than a volume number. It is, in fact, one of six known examples of the volume number being written on the painting field immediately below a painting number. In this case, the appearance of a volume number on a dated painting proves exceptionally important, for it provides exactly the firm point of reference that literary sources do not. If we accept Mir Ala al-Dawla’s statement that only four volumes were completed in the first seven years of the Hamzanama project, and count backward from this secure date of 1564–65, we arrive at an inception date of no later than mid-1558. Given that this dated painting appears well into volume 6, when according to Mir Ala al-Dawla the rate of production accelerated, we should push back the starting date slightly further, to late 1556 or, as seems more likely, AH 965 (October 1557–October 1558). This latter date tallies reasonably well with the earliest possible one calculated seven years from the stated commencement of the Nafis in AH 973 (1565–66), that is, AH 966 (October 1558–October 1559). Thus, we conclude that the Hamzanama project was begun about a year and a half after Akbar acceded to the throne, and continued for fifteen years until AH 980 (AD 1572–73), the probable date of Mir Ala al-Dawla’s
marginal comment about Mr Sayyid Ali being replaced by Abdul-Samad as supervisor.

In light of the unusual placement and form of this date, an intriguing series of three black marks on another painting (cat. 28) merits consideration as another fortunate instance of painterly graffiti. Under magnification, the tiny marks, which are written obliquely beside the right-most bear in the foreground, seem to be too deliberate to be accidental effects. Indeed, they resemble the numbers 975, albeit somewhat malformed and generously spaced ones. If this reading is correct, the three numbers very probably represent the Hijra date corresponding to 1567-68. Given that the seven volumes (7–14) were produced in the years between 1565–66 and 1572–73, we can calculate an approximate production time of twelve months per volume. By this reckoning, cat. 28, dated AH 975 (AD 1567–68), or three years after a painting late in volume 6 (cat. 24), would fall in volume 9 or volume 10. By extension, volume 11—the volume to which most extant paintings belong—would have been executed throughout 1569 and 1570.

It is surprisingly difficult to determine the narrative order of the Hamzamama’s many stories and thus to reconstruct the position of most surviving folios in the original manuscript. The text itself offers little help in this regard, for unlike such classical Persian texts as the Bustan and Gulistan of Sa’adi, the Hamzamama does not divide its narrative into discrete and individually numbered stories. One cannot even depend absolutely on apparent chronological progression, for one illustration of

Fig. 11
Inspection seals and inscriptions on the final folio of volume 11.
MAX-Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art, Vienna, 8 v. 873217.

Fig. 11a
Detail of inspection seals and inscriptions in Fig. 11:
‘God is almighty. On the date of 14 Zil’Hijja year 32
(7 October 1656)
On the date of the first of Shahrivar year one
[15 August 1655] transferred to Mulla Abdul-Chaffar
the scribe; inspected on 3 Muhir the Iskandar month, year 94 (equivalent to 14 Zil’Hijja
[3 September 1659].

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the events occurring at the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (cat.22), who shared his childhood with Hamza, seems unrelated stylistically to other paintings associated with the four early volumes. Sometimes, however, one can use narrative elements in combination with inscriptive evidence to assign a given painting to a particular volume. Occasionally, this placement has significant ramifications for the manuscript as a whole. Cat.24, for example, illustrates the murder of Hamza's son Qubad. A profusely illustrated mid-fifteenth-century Hamzanama manuscript produced in northern India (see p.77) forges the scene of the murder itself in favor of one illustrating Hamza's wife Mihr-Nigar mourning her dead son. Three folios later, another small painting features Umar searching for Hamza at the grave of Mihr-Nigar, who has evidently relinquished her life in grief. In one of the rare coincidences of the two manuscripts' illustrations, the Mughal manuscript illustrates Umar beholding the corpse of Mihr-Nigar. The narrative and physical proximity of the mourning scene to the one of Qubad's murder indicate that this painting of Umar's discovery of Mihr-Nigar's body must also belong to volume 6. Yet this folio has two lines of text written on paper affixed above the illustration, a feature thought to be present only on folios from volumes 1-4, that is, before the physical structure and format of the folios assumed their most commonly found form. Thus, there does not seem to have been a sharp break in the format at the end of the first seven years of production, as is commonly assumed.

THE USE OF THE HAMZANAMA

The format and size of the Hamzanama suggest how the manuscript was used at the Mughal court. The text, written on cream-colored paper flecked with gold, has one feature strikingly atypical of Mughal manuscripts. Each page of text has nineteen lines. For the most part, these lines are written in a respectable manner, with proper spacing between individual letters and words, the latter the result, it seems, of lines scored into the paper to guide the calligrapher. Yet a number of folios show noticeable compression in the last line or two, and sometimes have additional passages—occasionally as much as a full line—crowded below the final regular line and even wrapped around its left end. This decidedly ungainly effect must have been driven by narrative concerns, for it is completely at odds with the highly codified aesthetics of Islamic writing, which, no matter the proficiency of the individual calligrapher, always mandated a harmonious rhythm of spaces between individual letters and words as well as among separate lines of text. This situation is compounded by the fact that the story on each page of text continues uninterrupted onto the following page, but only resumes in summary after a new introductory phrase. Thus, it is clear that each folio—or to be more precise, each unit of text and image on consecutive folios—was effectively a separate entity within the manuscript, and superseded usual manuscript-wide considerations.

As we have seen, the designers of the Hamzanama arrived at the distinctive format of a full-page painting backed by a full page of text only after the project had been underway for at least seven years. They may have understood that the separate production of text pages and paintings would be more efficient and thus less costly, as Antoinette Owen suggests, or recognized that they could augment the already large size of the painting field if they abandoned the small panels or strips of text on the painted side of the folio. It is, however, most likely that the change in format was precipitated by the gradual realization that the more traditional manuscript format—that is, with text above and below the painting—was ill-suited to the actual function of the Hamzanama folios: to support or enhance the recitation of Hamza's adventures at court. By contrast, the later
arrangement, in which text and illustration were physically separate, must have had obvious practical advantages. A professional storyteller such as Darbar Khan could read aloud the colorful narratives from one page of text while an assistant of sorts could hold up the painting for all to see, and another point out the relevant details in the accompanying illustration. As with great music or poetry, no two performances of the tales of Amīr Hamza would have been the same, for it is almost certain that the renowned storytellers at court did not read verbatim the rather tersely described actions related in the text. Instead, they must have referred to them only as a narrative guideline, embellishing certain characters and situations as they pleased, a point confirmed by the wide variation in narrative coverage among the many different copies of the text.

Yet these entertaining public performances cannot have been the only way in which the Hamzanama paintings were used. Although many Mughal sources discuss the number of discrete volumes, only Qāfi mentions that the volumes were bound; this observation is presently unsupported by physical evidence, such as a wider outer margin, indicating that the folios were originally bound. This was probably a pragmatic decision, for a binding would have made public recitations and displays impractical and handling the gathered folios an unwieldy, even onerous experience. Once more, it seems that we should take Mir Ala al-Dawla at his word, and accept his statement that each set of a hundred folios was stored in a box, perhaps protected by something approximating an oversize portfolio.

Even unbound, the painted folios are so large that a seated individual would be hard-pressed to see them well as he held them in his hands; in the case of royal viewers, this inconvenience must have been mitigated by servants who physically handled the paintings. Nonetheless, the artists seem to have designed and executed the paintings with an intimate viewing distance in mind. Mir Ala al-Dawla notes with pride the minuscule detail in which the illustrations are rendered, and lauds them as examples of the most sophisticated kind of painting. These comments are borne out by the formal observations in the individual entries that follow in the catalogue, many of which dwell on subtle visual passages measuring no more than a centimeter or two across. Thus, in most formal respects, the Hamzanama illustrations are simply enlarged versions of contemporary Mughal painting. In fact, the only concession the painters really made to situations in which audience members would be seated several meters away from the illustrations is that they featured more large-scale, organizing forms than do other Mughal paintings of the period.

Scattered across the otherwise plain side of the initial folios of volumes 11 and 13 are a series of notes and seals that record the date of inspection and document the transfer of the volumes from the custody of one imperial librarian to another (figs. 11a, 12b). Such notes, which are found on the fly-leaves of most manuscripts that once belonged to the imperial library, are exceedingly formulaic in nature. They usually contain a precise date and month, chosen from either the traditional Islamic calendar or the ilahi calendar used by Akbar, a regnal year, and the names of one or two librarians. By correlating these dates to the named librarians, we can chart the times at which the manuscript was brought out for official inspection over the course of a century.

It is clear that these official library inspections do not denote actual royal viewings. Nevertheless, an analysis of thousands of such notes demonstrates that the most precious manuscripts were inspected most frequently, sometimes as often as once a year.14 Despite the Hamzanama's contemporary renown, however, the manuscript was inspected relatively infrequently. Because the record of inspection shows that for the most part volumes 11 and 13 were inspected in tandem,
one can reasonably assume that a single librarian would normally have been able to account for the presence of all fourteen volumes over a day or two. The earliest documented inspection occurs only on 3 Mihr, the equivalent of 15 Zul-Qa'da, of year 34 of Akbar’s reign, a date corresponding to 13 September 1589. Although this date is too late to shed any light on the date of the manuscript itself, the gap between it and the probable completion of the manuscript in 1572 should be seen more as a reflection of the developing custom of recorded inspections than as an indication of the infrequent use of the volumes. Later, however, the situation changes. Against the backdrop of increasingly regular inspections of manuscripts during the reigns of Jahangir (1605–1627) and Shah Jahan (1628–1658), the meager number of notices garnered by the Hamzanama throughout the seventeenth century—the early years of Jahangir’s reign seeing the greatest number of inspections and Aurangzeb’s reign (1658–1707) the fewest—strongly suggests that imperial enthusiasm for these kinds of tales and paintings had waned significantly since the dawn of Akbar’s reign. In many ways, this relative disfavor comes as no surprise, for the later emperors and their courts differed from Akbar as much in character as in aesthetic taste, with physical vigor and cultural ebullience gradually giving way to more cerebral and calculated manners and more conspicuously refined styles.
In many ways, the Hamzanama is the key to all early Mughal painting. The sheer scale of the project made it a kind of crucible of workshop organization. The imperial order to produce a huge, multi-volume manuscript required the painting workshop to establish the mechanisms to ensure a steady supply of sheets of paper of unprecedented size, to have accomplished storytellers compose and competent calligraphers copy out hundreds of sheets of text on separate pieces of decorated paper, and to assemble the text and illustrations in a timely and permanent manner. All these activities were, however, relatively routine tasks familiar to any painting workshop, including the royal Safavid atelier in which Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdul-Samad had been junior members before they came to India. Yet nothing in the experience of these two Iranian-born artists could have prepared them for the far more formidable task of recruiting and retaining a large number of Indian artists, whose hereditary skills emphasized qualities quite unlike the linear forms, fine execution and finished surfaces featured in Iranian art (see cat.1).

An examination of other early Mughal works, both those sponsored by Humayun at Kabul and Delhi and by Akbar in the first years of his long reign, makes clear the galvanizing role that the Hamzanama played in the development of the Mughal style. The few paintings commissioned by Humayun in the first half of the 1550s (cat.5–7) are essentially akin to contemporary Safavid works; indeed, apart from a slight increase in the suggestion of volume, the most noticeable difference is one of clothing fashion, as figures are shown wearing a turban type invented by Humayun or a jama, a distinctive tunic-like garment worn only in India. This is to be expected, for these small-scale works are either ascribed or attributed to the six known Iranian artists present at Humayun’s two courts, where they presumably worked on paintings individually.1

Although Mughal painting can be said to mirror generally the personality and taste of the reigning emperor, the specific timing of discernible shifts in style bears a more tenuous relationship to the patron. There was, for example, little change in Mughal painting in the immediate aftermath of Akbar’s accession in 1556, as can be seen in a painting ostensibly dated to the first year of his reign (cat.9) or another made about five years later (cat.8a). One might argue that Akbar was still too young to possess or display a pronounced personal taste, or too weak politically during the regency of Bayram Khan to impose it on his painters, but such an argument merely taints the description of political conditions to fit a hypothetical model of patronage. To my mind, a more persuasive line of thinking abandons the assumption that painters responded to their patron in every aspect of their craft, and sees the art of painting in more pragmatic terms. In cat.8a, for example, Mir Sayyid Ali builds upon his personal repertoire of forms, characterizing an elderly figure only slightly more naturalistically than he had another greybeard depicted when he worked for Shah Tahmasp (cat.3), or a youthful figure made when he painted under the aegis of Humayun (cat.5). These three works together present a more coherent picture of Mir Sayyid Ali’s gradual personal development as an artist rather than of the momentous artistic philosophies of three different patrons.

Opportunities for individual artists to demonstrate such subtle and personal growth were limited or obscured by the massive scale of the Hamzanama project, which crowded out all others until the mid-1560s and necessitated a high degree of collaboration among artists. To meet the greatly increased demand for paintings, the workshop expanded from fewer than a dozen artists to over thirty. Akbar might have followed his father’s lead and stocked his workshop with still more Iranian-born artists, who, in the mid-sixteenth century, were ever in search of more stable and lucrative employment, instead, to judge from the many Indian names mentioned in contemporary

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1. The number 1 is likely a typo and should probably be removed or clarified in the context of the text.
literary sources and actual ascriptions, he directed his master painters to seek out local Indian talent. Despite the gradual influx of artists unfamiliar with the norms of Iranian painting, the first few volumes of the Hamzanama are dominated by Safavid pictorial conventions. In a work dating to circa 1560, for example, the artist conceives the palace as an absolutely flat backdrop, with every architectural form but the staircase in the lower right set parallel to the surface of the painting (fig. 13). Unlike Mir Sayyid Ali (cat. 3) and Abdul-Samad (cat. 2), this anonymous artist, whose style suggests training in the Shirazi idiom, delineates his forms so tentatively that the wide chamber becomes little more than a series of symmetrical forms and dainty patterns, including typically Iranian filigree on the back wall and spandrels. And while most major domes in later Hamzanama paintings are covered with bold, occasionally flamboyant tiled patterns (for example, cat. 20), a feature that gives them an assertive, if not always fully three-dimensional presence, this artist overlays the pair of white domes with a large Persianate scrollwork design, effectively placing them on the same plane as the adjacent foliage and sky. The relentless compositional symmetry, maintained in the matched set of half-open doorways and cypress trees and even in the central position of the small-scale protagonists, underscores the generally conservative nature of this early Hamzanama effort.

By the middle volumes of the project, which date to about 1565, all this changes. In one illustration
from volume 7 (cat. 26), the architecture is still beset with patterns, most strikingly in the long, flower-filled cartouches along the top of the ramparts and the gleaming, diamond-shaped maccicolas below them, and more typically in the tilework running the height of the bastions. Nevertheless, the fortress displays the Mughal artist's growing concern with volume and space. The gate towers, for example, are rendered as hexagonal forms visibly projecting on either side of the drawbridge. Likewise, the large covered chamber in the upper center is shown obliquely, so that it intrudes conspicuously into the courtyard before it and encloses a sleeping figure. The landscape, too, diverges noticeably from Safavid models. Although it continues to feature the pastel-colored outcrops ubiquitous in Iranian painting, it has replaced their abstract, sinuous curves with knobby, space-defining earthen forms. Within a matter of a few years, these forms are still more loosely painted and more vigorously outlined. Finally, this artist, like many of his peers, begins to incorporate details from the Indian environment he observes all around him: roots sprouting from tree limbs and snaking unerringly toward the ground, a brushwood fence ringing a modest cluster of huts, and villagers slumbering on rope-strung cots.

By the time the last few volumes of the *Hamzanama* were finished, in the years around 1570, the birth of a distinct style was complete. Recently fashioned Mughal architectural forms—deep
sandstone eaves, extravagantly knotted brackets, and coiling foliate bases and capitals — crop up in a representative illustration from volume 11 (cat. 64). The cast of characters takes a decidedly local turn, so that swarthy complexions and native Indian clothing styles, from four-pointed jamas to loin cloths and dhotis, appear here and become more commonplace throughout the manuscript. Beyond this, the figures strike animated poses and have recognizable expressions absolutely unknown in either Iranian or pre-Mughal Indian painting. Artists improvise a host of new compositions and descriptive effects, experimenting with the possibilities of suggesting deep vistas, depicting figures directly from behind or nearly so, and rendering the volume of limbs and garments with ever greater acuity. This painting demonstrates that the palette has also metamorphosed, with the unmodulated, pastel colors of Iranian art now constituting only part of a palette more varied in hue and tone; standard colors such as bright orange or red are supplemented by greenish black in the upper right, the deep brown of the low courtyard wall and the shaded blue of the central figure’s lower garment. Many of these features were loosely inspired by European works of art, examples of which had begun to trickle into the imperial court as gifts from solicitous missionaries and ambassadors. Such foreign material was known elsewhere in the Islamic world, but never before had it been received so eagerly and adapted so creatively as it was at the Mughal court.

Thus, in no more than a decade, Mughal artists forged a new and distinctive style. Writing in the Alīn-i Akbarī some thirty years later, Abu’l-Fazl lauds the formulation and later refinement of Mughal painting as marvelous accomplishments, on a par with the achievements of a legendary Iranian master and wondrous European artists, and beyond anything India had ever known. He discusses painting in terms of absolute quality, both in material and expressiveness, and never as a calculated vehicle of cultural fusion. In typical fashion, Abu’l-Fazl credits Akbar as being the catalyst for every positive development in painting.

Drawing the likeness (ṣabīḥ) of anything is called ṭawīr (painting, pictorializing). Since it is an excellent source, both of study and entertainment, His Majesty, from the time he came to an awareness of such things [i.e., his childhood] has taken a deep interest in painting and sought its spread and development. Consequently this magical art has gained in beauty. A very large number of painters has been set to work. Each week the several ḏīrāḡhos [superintendents] and bītikhs [clerks] submit before the king the work done by each artist, and His Majesty pays a reward and increases the monthly salaries according to the excellence displayed. His Majesty has looked deeply into the matter of raw materials and set a high value on the quality of production (ṣabīdir). As such qualities, composition has taken a new beauty (ẓāng-dīmi hūṣ-i digar pagārāft), and finish a new clarity (ṣaffāhā rū ḍabāristā ṭāla paqdī ṣHadū). Such excellent artists have assembled here that a fine match has been created to the world-renowned unique art of Bihāzd and the magic making of the Europeans (ṣahi-fārāng). Delicacy of work (maʿzuki-kī), clarity of line (ṣafī-i ṣuqāṣ), and boldness of execution (ṣabāt-i dast, lit., stability of the hand), as well as other fine qualities have reached perfection, and inanimate objects appear to have come alive. More than one hundred persons have reached the status of a master and gained fame; and they are numerous who are near to reaching that state or are half-way there. What can I say of Indī? People had not even conceived of such glories; indeed, few nations of the world display them (such glories).2

These remarks also relate the manner in which painters had their works presented and remunerated,
as well as the formal criteria by which paintings were judged. These qualities are considerably more varied and sophisticated that the sheer miniaturism praised so often, and can readily be discerned in many Hamzahnama illustrations.

Abu’l Fazl continues with some invaluable biographical information about the foremost artists of the atelier.

Among the forerunners on this high road of knowledge (āqhā) is Mir Sayyid ‘Ali of Tabriz. He had learnt a little from his father. When he obtained the honour to serve His Majesty and thus gained in knowledge, he became renowned in his profession and bountiful in good fortune. Next there is Khwaja ‘Abd al-Samad, the shirin qalam (lit. sweet pen/brush) of Shiraz. Though he knew this art before he joined the royal service, the transmuting glance (ikšt-i binis) of the king has raised him to a more sublime level and his images have gained a depth of spirit. Under his tutelage many novices have become masters. Then there was Daswanta, the son of the palanquin-bearer (kahar), who was in the service of this workshop and, urged by a natural desire, used to draw images and designs on walls. One day the far-reaching glance of His Majesty fell on those things and, in its penetrating manner, discerned the spirit of a master working in them. Consequently, His Majesty entrusted him to the Khwaja. In just a short time he

Fig. 15
As a child at play, Timur assumes the role of king from the Tarkhi Khurshid-i Timurnameh. F. 16. Designed by Daswanta, painted by Jaghjana Kahan. Mughal, circa 1585. 27.3 x 17.9 cm. Khoda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna

Fig. 17
The wise thief thwarts the efforts of the foolish monkey sent to steal the ants on the king’s bread from the Anwari Sahih. F. 99b. Attributed to Daswanta. Mughal, 1570. 25.3 x 15.7 cm. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, MS.10012.
became matchless in his time and the most excellent (sār-dimad-i nūzgān), but the darkness of insanity enshrouded the brilliance of his mind and he died a suicide. He has left several masterpieces, in designing (torāthī), painting faces (chīra kushī), colouring (rang-amēzī), portrait painting (mānind nīqārī), and other aspects of this art, Basawan has come to be uniquely excellent. Many perspicacious connoisseurs give him preference over Daswanta.1

Here, too, Abū’l-Fazl describes the emperor as being responsible for the change in style that came over Mir Sayyid Ali and Abdul-Samad, described as gaining ‘a depth of spirit,’ and for the discovery of Daswanta’s hitherto unrecognized talent. The chronicle predictably cites Akbar’s tutelage as the reason for Daswanta’s excellence, but attributes the artist’s suicide to insanity. The terse comparison of Daswanta and Basavana implies that at least some members of the court routinely examined paintings with an eye to the identity of their makers and exercised some critical judgment of their work (see cat.8a, 8b).

Using literary references to the Safavid atelier and the abundant documentation of the practices of the Mughal studio from about 1577 on, scholars have surmised that in each case one master was put in nominal charge of the library and atelier, and probably assigned given projects or even individual manuscript illustrations to certain teams of artists; it is widely assumed that since Mir
Sayyid Ali was director of the *Hamzanama* project, he was also the overall director of the atelier. Once the initial allocation of work was made, the designated project supervisor chose the subject of the individual illustration, conceivably—not but probably—in consultation with the patron. In Mughal India, this information was conveyed to the artists assigned to execute the painting either through direct oral communication or by brief notes written on the painting field. In the latter instance, the artists were supposed to paint over the notes as they did their work, but occasionally failed to do so. In most manuscripts, the painting was a collaborative effort, usually with the more senior or talented artist designing the composition, and the more junior one doing most of the actual coloring or painting. In many cases, however, the designer also supplied prominent passages such as the central figures, a habit documented sporadically in some extended ascriptions and discerned frequently in individual paintings in which there is an obvious shift in style.

Available documentation indicates that many Mughal artists, including several of those featured in this selection of *Hamzanama* paintings, had careers lasting on average about thirty years. Occasionally, a painter’s career could extend well beyond this, as is demonstrated by two paintings in the exhibition (cat. 2, 18) that bracket the sixty-five-year career of Abdul-Samad. Most artists developed distinctive idiosyncrasies over the course of their careers and consistently used most of them in their work. These are often what must seem to be very minor details: certain facial types and hair fashions, preferences for particular colors or degrees of tonal contrast, the means of suggesting corporeality, and the structure of rock formations. Scholars learn to recognize these subtle distinguishing differences, and try to gauge each artist’s creative latitude.

Only one *Hamzanama* painting bears anything resembling an ascription. Near the bottom of a much-restored painting in the Fondation Custodia, Paris, the name Ali is written in white. While it is tempting to take this as an indication that Mir Sayyid Ali personally executed at least part of this work, the atypically abbreviated name and the unusual placement of the ascription make it extremely unlikely. A few individual paintings and manuscript illustrations from the 1550s and 1560s bear ascriptions to individual artists (for example, cat. 7, 8a, 10, and 11), but it seems that this information did not become a regular feature of the documentation on Mughal manuscripts until the late 1570s, when it first appears on the *Darabnana* (see below). The unprecedented effort to record officially the names of the individual artists responsible for each painting coincided with elaborate workshop procedures instituted to impose a certain standard of quality on every part of a given manuscript. In most cases, this standard seems to have been determined primarily not by the type of literature (historical, poetical, religious) represented by the text of the manuscript, but by a prior decision to produce a physically sumptuous, ordinary, or even lackluster book, much as a modern publisher might do. To ensure that an especially high level of quality would be maintained, for example, a supervisor might select a certain kind of paper, a particularly accomplished calligrapher, and a group of elite painters and illuminators, and offer them a lenient schedule by which they were expected to complete their work. Thus, to identify and understand the creative choices made by a particular artist working on the *Hamzanama* or another contemporary manuscript, we must measure them against the backdrop of both the unique characteristics of a given project and the stage of development of Mughal painting.

The manuscript that overlaps the *Hamzanama* most significantly is the Cleveland *Tutinama*, dated circa 1565–70. To judge from the approximately one dozen ascriptions written informally in the lateral margins of illustrated folios, the small paintings were done by artists working individually.

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**Fig. 10**
Krishna arrives in Duryodhana’s court as a mediator.
Khoza from a *Razmnama* manuscript. Designed and painted by Jagana. Mughal, circa 1584. Size unknown. Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Jaipur. A.C.129-20 (after Banerjee 1978, fig. 144b)

**Fig. 21**
Dashrath Gujr demonstrates his hunting prowess to Pana.
From a *Khamsa* of Nizami manuscript. Fol. 14ab. Ascribed to Muhammad Mughal, circa 1563–90. 8.3 x 6.3 cm. Keir Collection, London.
Several of these ascribed paintings afford a clear glimpse of the very beginning of the careers of some well-known artists, notably Dasavanta and Basavana (cat. 10, 11). Our understanding of the style of the manuscript is complicated by the fact that Mughal artists painted over many illustrations rendered in an earlier Sultanate style. In some cases, the new paintings are in a wholly Mughal style, and point directly to the attribution of contemporary works in the *Hamzanama* (for example, cat. 33, 66). Conversely, some other ascribed paintings in the *Tutinama* (figs. 14 and 15) show vestiges of the underlying illustrations. In these instances, we must differentiate the facial features peculiar to an individual Mughal artist from the compositional and surface effects created by the underlying Chandayana-style illustrations, only then can we use them as the basis for further attributions.

Dasavanta’s two very painterly illustrations in the *Tutinama* lead directly to the attribution of a few paintings in the *Hamzanama* and indirectly to a good number more. These newly attributed works are a major addition to this master’s known oeuvre, which had been limited to a few drawings, a single, jointly painted illustration in the Khuda Bakshi Library *Tanakh-i Khalil-i Timurida* (fig. 16), and a series of collaborative efforts in the long-inaccessible manuscript of the *Razmnama* in Jaipur, the last project in which he participated before his death. The *Hamzanama* paintings (for example, cat. 39, 64) in turn allow us to recognize Dasavanta’s handwork in another contemporary manuscript, the *Anwar-i Suhayli* of 1570, in the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (fig. 17). Here, then, working alone on an ambitious illustration in a high-quality manuscript, Dasavanta employs many forms seen in his works in the *Hamzanama* — an arcade below an open chamber, a blazing torch, a bold tilework pattern, brushy foliage, heavily modeled clothing, and an intensely focused facial expression featuring an eye with a large, dark pupil. The subject of the illustration calls for a night-time scene with a limited number of figures, and the original layout of the manuscript compels him to incorporate the text panels above and below into the architecture forming the core of the expanded painting field, but otherwise Dasavanta’s work in this illustration is stylistically indistinguishable from his *Hamzanama* contributions.

The profusely illustrated *Darabkhana* in the British Library, dated circa 1577–80, which rises above an average level of quality only occasionally, is the first Mughal manuscript to have formal inscriptions written below nearly all its illustrations. Because the manuscript postdates the *Hamzanama* by less than a decade and its medium-sized miniatures were apparently made by artists operating individually, the manuscript is one of the most useful sources of visual documentation of the artists involved in the *Hamzanama*. On the basis of these illustrations (figs. 18 and 19), artists such as Jagana and Mithra, the latter little known from contributions to subsequent manuscripts, can be readily associated with distinctive figure and facial types that appear throughout the *Hamzanama* (for example, cat. 68). Similarly, the large, jointly produced illustrations in the Jaipur *Razmnama* of 1584–86 flesh out the work of these same artists and demonstrate the consistency of their personal styles. In a few examples a single artist, Jagana, was charged with both the design and the execution of a painting, making it a particularly valuable touchstone of his work (fig. 20). Finally, there is Mah Muhammad. A minuscule inscription in the corner of one painting (cat. 14) reveals Mah Muhammad’s inclination to work in an elegant and somewhat Persianate style. As we trace certain forms from this work to a very different kind of scene (cat. 15), and match them to others found in a solo painting in a tiny copy of the *Khamsa* of Nizami (fig. 21), we discover that this hitherto obscure artist played an unexpectedly prominent role in the *Hamzanama*, a masterpiece whose legacy is both its grand vision and collaborative realization.