9. AKHABAR DRIVES A BULLOCK CART

From the outset, it is apparent that this hitherto unpublished scene is very early in date. The figure style is still exceedingly Persianate, and the bullocks and the cart they draw are crisp forms set against an almost entirely plain ground. The subject is, at first, a bit enigmatic: a handsome, richly turbaned youth with a golden-handled whip in hand driving a team of piebald bullocks. The vehicle he guides appears to be a utilitarian one, for it features large, solid wheels, a long, flat platform extending well beyond the wheelbase, and a driving or sitting area surrounded on three sides by an intricate wooden screen, but otherwise left open. Much of the platform is covered with a fine pictorial carpet, depicted as though folded in half, with a scene of a mounted figure hunting deer in each quadrant. Behind it stands a slender, dark-skinned figure, who holds a plumed object with an oval base in his hand as he looks toward the driver.

The overall impression of royalty is corroborated by the inscription oriented vertically in the upper left; it reads, "Portrait of His Exalted God-fearing Majesty at the beginning of royalty, year [16]." This, then, is Akbar shortly after his accession in February 1556, an interpretation supported by the royal driver's obvious youth. But why is Akbar shown driving an empty bullock cart? The answer may lie in the elusive year noted at the end of the inscription, which becomes somewhat unclear as it runs across the thin black border and possibly also under the adjacent gold band. If the word beneath the numerals is sama ("year"), as would be customary, then enough of that word is cut off or obscured to allow for a second and third digit to the left of the clearly written number 4. The most logical date would be 1556 A.H. (November 1556–October 1557), in fact, the beginning of Akbar's reign.2 If, however, the mark to the immediate left of the black line is no number at all, then the year stands at [regnal year] 4, or March 1559–March 1560. The appeal of this reading is that the image suddenly acquires a specific rationale, that is, to commemorate the presentation to Akbar of a bunch of fine bullocks, described as 'unequaled and fit for the royal hunting equipage,' by Shaykh Muhammad Chawas in exactly that year.3 One serious objection to this tidy coincidence is that dates formulated in regnal years were not used until after AH 992 (AD 1584), when they were applied retroactively in historical texts. Thus, if it is a regnal year, it would follow that the inscription was added well after the painting was made, a scenario that would accord well with the retrospective quality of the phrase 'at the beginning of royalty' (i.e., his reign).

Whatever its exact date, this painting of a bullock cart designed and outfitted for transporting cheetahs to the hunt may safely be attributed to Abdul-Samad.4 The dark hair, slanted eyebrows, pointed chin, and slender, compact body of Akbar strongly resemble those of the young prince and many of the courtiers in Abdul-Samad's famous treehouse painting of 1553 in the Gulshan Album, as well as some of the original attendants in Princes of the House of Timur.5

1. The Persian reads 'sūrat-i haftat al'ā, khallad adhī mu'kahu, dar avdiyi-i qābilāhāt sama fāz.' I am indebted to Wheeler Thackston for his thoughtful exposition of the substance and date of this inscription.

2. The digit beside the 4 is overwritten with the numeral 2 and an abnormally small upper element, but there's evidence of the bowl of the number 6 beneath and to the left of this overwritten number.

3. Akbar Name, 2, pp. 233–34. One might also note the existence of a similar old-style painting by Abū'l-Hasan of circa 1605-10 showing a young Akbar being driven in a camphor vehicle drawn by two bullocks; the painting, whose location is unknown, is reproduced in Mhta, p. 76, opposite p. 76.

4. For comparable carts shown carrying cheetahs, see Sen, pls 10 and 39, and Arnold & Wilkinson, p. 25.

5. For reproductions of these paintings, see Cat. 3, n.2.
10 THE MONKEY IS SLAIN SO THAT HIS BLOOD CAN BE USED TO CURE THEAILING PRINCE HE HAS BITTEN

The earliest painting ascribed to Basavana is this illustration from the Tutinama, a collection of colorful stories recounted by a parrot to his mistress Khjasta night after night to keep her from straying during her husband's long absence. This painting is the third of five illustrations accompanying the story of the fifth night, which tells of the misfortune that arises inevitably when creatures of dissimilar natures associate with one another. In this case, despite the protestations of his own kind, a monkey skilled in chess befriends a prince. One day, the monkey makes a rude gesture during a chess match and deeply embarrasses the prince before his friends. The irate prince wacks the monkey with a chess piece, and the monkey retaliates by biting him on the hand. Soon the prince falls ill. When it seems that the prince is at death's door and no ordinary medicine can save him, a doctor recommends that the offending monkey be killed and his blood applied to the infected wound. Basavana juxtaposes the bedridden prince with the fatal bloodletting required for the proposed remedy. The sallow prince, who wears a vacant expression and an odd, European-inspired head covering, weakly lets his arm hang down to allow an attendant to take his flagging pulse. Basavana demonstrates his early receptiveness to European art in the subtle modeling of the prince's sheets, which cling to the patient like a shroud, and in the more conspicuously voluminous rendering of the upswung bedchamber curtains. In this painting, this three-dimensional quality is still absent from his figures' clothing, which differs from other work in this manuscript only in the unusual brown used for the executioner's jama. The figures' faces, however, are marked already by Basavana's distinctive soft features, a quality created by the tiny overlapping strokes used to define both the eyes and eyebrows as well as the fuzzy facial hair. Together with the black-streaked sky and the bristly foliage of one tree, these are the first hints of Basavana's longstanding interest in the expressive possibilities of painterly effects.

11 THE HUNTER SELLS THE MOTHER PARROT TO THE KING OF KAMARULU

Basavana's second ascribed painting in the Tutinama comes near the end of the fifth night's story. A mother parrot, who earlier had told her nestlings the cautionary tale of the chess-playing monkey, now finds that they have not heeded her and have continued to consort with some foxes. When a wildcat devours the baby foxes, the mother fox blames the parrot family and plots retribution. The fledglings are eventually caught in a hunter's net, but save themselves by feigning death as their mother had instructed them so that the hunter discards them. The mother parrot, who is taken in their place, persuades the hunter that she is more valuable alive than dead, for she is well-versed in the medical arts and can cure any disease. The hunter agrees and sells her to the king, who is afflicted by leprosy. Under the parrot's care, the king's leprosy begins to abate, but when she tricks him into freeing her from her cage, she flies off and leaves the cure half-done. With this conclusion, the parrot relating the tale to his mistress assures her by advising that she should hasten now lest her own love affair be left similarly undone. As, as usual the parrot's story has gone on so long that dawn has come, and the would-be unfaithful woman must wait another day before she can slip out to consummate her affair.

This painting demonstrates Basavana's unsurpassed ability to render mass and texture. The hunter's tunic is not a flat color overlaid with schematic suggestions of folds at the waist and cuffs; rather, it is a pale blue that the artist has lightened in some parts and darkened in others to convey a sense of rounded form. Similarly, Basavana uses paint and crosshatching so subtly that the hunter's scarf changes imperceptibly from white to grey, and reads convincingly as a roughly woven fabric. Like other artists who contributed to the Tutinama, Basavana incorporates some elements of the underlying Chandayana-style painting into his updated version of the scene. He keeps some of the ornamental passages, such as the white cornice, the floral valance, and the stepped gold band overhead. Conversely, he paints over many other parts, including the framing columns and the kiosks above, and obscures the pavilion's original intercars with a thick layer of gold. One telling sign of the original composition is the three swords extending into the text area; these have no rationale in the present scene, and must have belonged to a different set of courtiers.
برونیتا یاروزع سکار خور و خلف و نیم بریسه من ماند
کرک بزگ و پویتا و بیگزنداد در جسد سلافان مدهخر نانج
برونیت و همای و هنی و لول که دختر خور خر گرفت و درک
نری بزگ و بشر دیک و دیک با خود ذخایر هر دستارودا نستن.
12 THE MERCHANT’S DAUGHTER ENCOUNTERS A WOLF AND A THIEF ON HER WAY TO FULFILL HER VOW TO THE GARDENER

On the twelfth night, the parrot counsels his mistress to discern the real character of her paramour before she commits herself to an affair. As with most stories in this profusely illustrated manuscript, one illustration is dedicated to the parrot addressing Khosasta, a nother to the framing story, and several more to the encapsulated tale. This painting represents the last phase. A merchant’s daughter comes across a perfect flower in a garden. She asks the gardener if she may have it, but he replies that it is priceless, and can be had on only one condition: that she give herself to him on her wedding night before she consummates her marriage with her husband. The woman promises to do so, and plucks the flower. On her wedding night, she persuades her husband to accept her arrangement by saying that an honorable person must keep her promises. On the way to her rendezvous, she encounters a wolf. The wolf looks at her with ravenous eyes, but she declares that he must not devour her until she fulfills her promise, for otherwise she would be dishonored. Next, she is intercepted by a thief, but she dissuades him, too, from waylaying her by pointing out that he should not cause her to violate the vow that her husband and the wolf have already allowed her to honor.

When, in the following illustration (cat.15), the woman finally meets the gardener again, she proclaims that she is ready to abide by her promise. The gardener, however, has grown devout and wise, and declines to exact his carnal recompense, saying “If I pick a rose from another garden, others will covet my garden.”

This painting is one of a small group of Tutinama paintings made by artists trained in the indigenous Indian tradition represented by cat.1 and painted over a Chandayana-style illustration of circa 1540. The row of highly schematic trees is common to both older traditions, but here these are tempered by Mughal clumps of grass at the base of their trunks and the blue sky painted over the original gold one. In a gesture to the emerging Mughal style, the artist has rounded slightly the faces of the merchant’s daughter and her companions, and has applied a thin coat of paint to the thieves to give them a semblance of volume. This layering of paint often results in a somewhat murky surface, as it does here.

13 THE MERCHANT’S DAUGHTER ARRIVES TO FULFILL HER PROMISE TO THE GARDENER

The final illustration of the story of the twelfth night shows the merchant’s daughter prepared to make good on her promise to surrender her virginity to the gardener in payment for the perfect blossom she had coveted. The gardener, identified by the shade resting on his shoulder, raises his hand in address and tells the woman to return home and never burden her husband again with such affairs again.

Like most Mughal painters, this artist does not insist on absolute consistency in a figure’s costume or complexion in consecutive illustrations. In this case, however, he also arbitrarily increases the number of the daughter’s companions from two to three, even though this required further changes to the underlying Chandayana-style scene. Examination of the painting under infra-red light reveals that the painter not only reworked three women and the gardener in face and dress, but also added the leftmost figure; this, in turn, compelled him to truncate the tree above her, which previously extended to the lower edge of the painting. To maintain compositional balance, he shortened the trunk of the rightmost tree by covering its lower half with grass and tile, an alteration visible even to the naked eye. He retains the foliage of the original screen of trees, but now fronts it with three plantain trees. These more typically Indian plants crop up in several Hamzanama paintings, notably cat.59 and 76, where they are rendered in more muted tones and are usually set in much more naturalistic environments.

Few Chandayana-style features survive in such unalloyed fashion in the Hamzanamas: This suggests that while a few artists trained in this older style were allowed to maintain it in their work on projects as modest as this Tutinama manuscript, new recruits to the imperial workshop were generally obliged to embrace the emerging Mughal style or to seek employment elsewhere.
AN AYYAR LEADS A ROYAL HORSE

The figure leading this dappled grey steed is no ordinary groom putting his master’s horse through its paces. Battle-axe in hand and dagger tucked in belt, he is much too heavily armed for such mundane matters. Wiry and whipplike, he is perfectly outfitted for speed and stealth. He is, in fact, an ayyar, a kind of spy shown skulking about in many a Hamzanama illustration, here brought out in the open for a solo performance. Ayyars never ride, so the richly caparisoned horse must be that of a prince or amir.

The ayyar’s delicate features, the elegant linear rhythms of the horse, and the stone-strewn landscape have led some scholars to attribute this painting to Abdul-Samad. In the lower right corner, however, is a minute inscription to Mah Muhammad, an artist heretofore little known in Mughal painting. His only other ascribed work—illustrations in the Hamzanama of Nizami (fig. 21) in the Keir Collection and the Albkhanama in the Victoria and Albert Museum—exhibit the same Persianate figure style, though in those slightly later paintings, it is tinged by Mughal modeling. The landscape of the Keir Hamzanama illustration is stippled and less barren, but features discrete stones scattered beside a stream in much the same manner as they appear here.

15 BATTLE SCENE

This painting gives a good idea of how the Hamzanama might look if it were produced on a typical miniature scale. All the elements of a regular battle scene are here—the ranks of charging horsemen, the large ridge dividing the composition into discrete zones, and the fortified city. The visual effect, of course, is completely different; one easily takes in the composition in a single glance, and begins to regard the figures as so many antlike forms rather than as characters with their own stories to tell. At this scale, too, the precision of detail usually breaks down, and remains beyond the technical ability of many Mughal artists.

In this battle scene by Mah Muhammad, the elegance of his ayyar and horse (cat. 14) has become daintiness, the former crispness of paint and color has grown soppy and muscled, victim of both miniatuism and the irregular painted surface below. Mah Muhammad had considerable skills, but it took the perspicacious supervisors of the Hamzanama to recognize how best to make use of his talents.

Indeed, Mah Muhammad’s work is evident in the Hamzanama, albeit not in any whole painting, nor even in any part involving primary figures, his weakest suit. Rather, he is assigned to paint architecture, where pattern and fantasy can compensate for sometimes faltering draftsman ship and a tenuous sense of pictorial space. Many fortresses, of course, have similar features; indeed, one Hamzanama illustration by another artist (cat. 66) uses a gateway cut off again by a darkly outlined intrusive ridge and framed by nearly identical hexagonal towers. Yet Mah Muhammad’s architectural ensembles are conspicuously more naive and boxy, and typically lack the rich detailing that sustains visual interest and gives substance to domes, courtyard, and defensive openings. These qualities are particularly pronounced in cat. 26 and 55, both of which are also attributed to this artist.

1. This painting, like many in the group of early paintings divided between the British Museum and the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1948, was painted over an earlier image; the result is an unusually murky surface.
Attributed to Mukunda
India, Mughal dynasty, c.1570–80
19 x 12.8 cm.
The British Museum, London,
1983.7-27-01
Published: Rogers 1993, fig.10;
Brand & Lowry 1985a, no.20;
Christie’s, London, 13 June 1983,
lot 44.

PILGRIM

From as early as 1561, when Akbar was still in his teens, he took an interest in spiritual seekers, both Muslim and Hindu. Abul Fazl records that
in his abundant carefulness he [Akbar] sought for
truth among the dust-stained dervishes of the
field of reflec-tion — and most of the really great
study it under this disguise — and consorted with
every sort of wearers of patched garments such
as yogis, sanyasis and splendidos, and other solitary
sitters in the dust, and insolvent recluses. From
their outward ways and conversation he got at
their real natures. 3

This striding pilgrim is one of the earliest depic-
tions of these captivating dervishes. The painting
shows a fully colored figure trudging alone across an
otherwise plain compositional field, a serpent-headed
staff in one hand and a mendicant’s bucket in the
other. For one who has purportedly renounced
worldly ways, the figure is ostentatiously festooned
with golden earrings, necklaces, bracelets, chains,
bells, and tassels. He wears a heavy fur-trimmed
jama in a peculiar manner, closed at the breast by a
golden clasp and left open below this to expose an
ample belly. Although one author has proposed that
the source of such subjects is albums compiled in
Iran, 4 the bulky sleeves and fluttering shawl actually
suggest a connection with European images, per-
haps simply at the level of physical oddities. 5

The pilgrim has an unusual countenance, with a
plump face, tousled hair, rounded blue eyes, and a
crinkly mouth. Many of these features reappear in
another, albeit lightly colored, image of an ascetic
with a pet sheep ascribed to Mukunda, and support an
attribution to this artist. 5 The schematic modeling
of the garments and the large, blockish, heavily out-
lined hands also recur in Mukunda’s paintings in the
1593 Khamsa of Nizami in the British Library. 5 One
damaged Homanama painting shows a giant
named Sarفارangi wearing a jama open in the same
fashion and exhibiting similarly thick limbs and
hands. 5 This suggests that Mukunda, a prolific and
highly regarded artist, was also involved in the
Homanama project.

1. A’in i-Akbari, 3, p.236.
3. See, for example, Europeans Embracing (Los
Angeles County Museum of Art, M.83.105.20), pub-
lished in 1993, no.53, which also seems to be by
Mukunda.
4. For this painting, now in a private collection, see
5. Fols 184v and 318a; Brand 1999, fighs 23, 42.
See Reconstruction, no.32.
JAMSHED WRITING ON A ROCK

Jamshed, an ancient Iranian king credited in legend with the rock-cut marvels of Persepolis, is shown kneeling with pen and inkpot in hand as he prepares to inscribe a small urn adorned rock face in the wilderness. While this subject, which is described in the couplets above the painting, has few visual precedents, Jamshed was a staple exemplar of royal wisdom in Persian literature. It is possible that Abdul-Samad was asked to concoct a scene with Jamshed as a visual pendant to Akbar’s grandfather Babur, who refers to Jamshed’s act in his memoirs.1

Abdul-Samad isolates a young Jamshed on one side of the composition, his golden raiment setting him off from the gloomy environment all about him. The rocks—one of Abdul-Samad’s most distinctive features—display many of the contradictory impulses of his late style. Most of his peers would use the sharp, linear outlines that bind the rocks’ flickering shapes to define a series of large, unified forms. In Abdul-Samad’s work, however, those rocky forms dissolve into small nodules with muted striations and a stippled surface; only edges silhouetted against the sky or a distant background preserve the crispness of the landscapes of his Iranian heritage. Internal segmentations are thus paradoxically both geometric and soft, and never create the sense of volume that more painterly treatments do. This particular painting also exhibits a palette tempered heavily with a dark tonality, with bright, unmodulated color relegated to a few compact areas on the clothing of figures placed at the composition’s periphery.

Abdul-Samad’s penchant for precisely painted forms is well suited to the figure scale employed here; at this miniature size, the technically impressive amount of delicate detail in face and gesture more than compensates for its inhibited expression.

1. Sceoe 1985, p.166, for the classical literary expression of this association, see Wickens 1974, p.30.

2. See Baburnama, p.135. Wheeler Trackston has suggested that the Timurid crown worn by Jamshed might serve to associate him with Babur (personal communication).

18 TWO CAMELS FIGHTING

This painting, a close copy of an original composition by Bihzad, embodies the legacy of the Persian master whose work became the nominal standard of quality for Mughal painters from this time on.2 Bihzad’s painting had probably entered Mughal hands before Abdul-Samad made this copy about 1599, for it was included in the majestic Gulshan Album being compiled at exactly this time. Abdul-Samad’s version of the camel fight has been dated variously from 1570 to 1599, a chronological range that testifies to the overriding conservatism of his style. But in the dedicatory inscription above this painting, the artist effectively dates it by mentioning his age, which, at eighty-five, surpasses even the ‘great old age’ inscribed on his 1589–88 painting of Jamshed (cat.17).

At the age of eighty-five, when his energies were sapped and his vision dimmed, the halting brush of this broken painter made this as a remembrance for his wise and ingenious son, Sharif Khan, who is fortunate enough to have been chosen for the blessing of the Merciful God. May his life be prolonged, illustrated by Abdul-Samad.2

Abdul-Samad undoubtedly realized that his reprieve of Bihzad’s composition would inevitably be judged against the master’s work. Reversing the composition, Abdul-Samad makes minor adjustments in the heads and legs of the fighting camels so that the balance of power shifts in favor of the beasts. The enraged camels now joust in earnest, and their uncontrolled keepers make only a half-hearted attempt to control them with rope and stick. The Mughal artist dedicates a proportionately greater amount of the composition to the landscape, and treads the newly meandering horizon from the shape and rhythm of the camel’s backs. The result is a scene more naturalistic in action and space, albeit without the compelling lateral tension of Bihzad’s composition.

The earliest of the eight Mughal inspection notes and seals on the reverse dates from 1637.3 The painting was given a Mughal valuation of Rs. 30, a high but not extravagant amount for an animal painting.

1. For Bihzad’s painting, made about 1525, see Bahari 1997, fig.120.

2. As translated by Sahari (1997, p.216). This translation differs in one crucial detail from that put in Brand & Lowry 1983a, no.38, where the slightly damaged first two words are read as ‘This mudder and shaykh’ [In ustād wa shaykh] rather than “at the age of eighty-five (dar ssīn-i hāshād wa panj).”

3. The seal is that of Abdul-Rahman, “servant of Shah Jahan Padshah Ghazi, year 11.” Other Mughal documents follow closely in date, and ends in the first year of Alangir’s reign (1658–59).
THE ADVENTURES OF HAMZA