CAST OF CHARACTERS

Ajil
One of Amir Hamza's brothers

Baba Jumay
Argush's jailer, now retired and running a caravanserai

Bad'Uzzaman
One of Amir Hamza's sons

Buzurjmihr, Khwaja
Anoshirvan's wise vizier

Hamid Ruby-Tunic, Prince
(Lat' Qabo) One of Amir Hamza's sons

Hamza
Son of Abdul-Muttautil, historically the paternal uncle of the Prophet Muhammad. He is the hero of the Hamzanama, in which he is referred to by his titles, Amir and Sahib-Qiran ('Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction')

Humuz
Anoshirvan's eldest son, the crown prince of Sassanian Iran

Ibrahim, Prince
One of Amir Hamza's sons

Khoshr-Khurram
Daughter of Malak Mah's nurse, a female oughar

Khuwar
Son of King Jamshed of Takaw

Khwarimnah
A princess, daughter of the enemy Malik Qimar and beloved of Prince Ibrahim

Landhaur
Son of Sa'dan, the king of Ceylon, a warrior companion of Amir Hamza

Mahiyah
Maid servant of Sher Banu, who acts as an oughar for Prince Ibrahim

Malak Mah
Daughter of the enemy King Na'im and the beloved of Prince Sa'id Farrukh-Nizhad

Milhadkhut
Daughter of the enemy Malik Tjuhur and plucky wife of Prince Hamid

Mihir-Nigar
Anoshirvan's daughter, who marries Amir Hamza and bears him Qubad

Mishbah
A grocer who assists Amir Hamza's oughars

Mughil
Amir Hamza's adoptive brother

Nu'man, Khwaja
One of Amir Hamza's oughars

Qasim, Malik
('the quick-tempered') King of the west, ally of Amir Hamza

Qubad
Son of Amir Hamza and Princess Mihir-Nigar

Qubad
Son of Sa'd Padishah and Amir Hamza's great-grandson

Sa'd Padishah
Amir Hamza's grandson

Sa'd Farrukh-Nizhad
A prince and ally of Amir Hamza

Sanawbar Banu
Sister of the enemy Tahmasp Anqail who falls in love with Amir Hamza

Solomon
The biblical king who commanded all creatures on the earth. The 'Solomonic court' refers to Amir Hamza's court.

Songhor Balkhi
One of Umar's oughars

Tul Mast
Son of Salsal the Zangi, one of Amir Hamza's oughars

Umar
Son of Umayya Zamir, loyal comrade of Amir Hamza and the greatest oughar of the age, often referred to as Khwaja Umar and Baba Umar

Umar Ma'dikarb
A former opponent of Amir Hamza, now a stalwart, sometimes comical, warrior companion

Yazak the Cathayan
(i.e. from China) One of Umar's companions

Zambur
One of Prince Ibrahim's oughars

THE ARMY OF ISLAM

Afkar Banu
A princess with whom Prince Hamid Ruby-Tunic falls in love

Alamshah Kumi
('the Greek') One of Amir Hamza's sons

Anoshirvan
Sassanian emperor of Iran; Amir Hamza's father-in-law

Ashqar
Amir Hamza's three-eyed, winged horse, born of a demon and a pei

Asma
A fairy who marries Amir Hamza and helps him in his struggle

INFIDELS AND ENEMIES

Argush, Malik
King of Takaw, ally of Zumurrud Shah

Bakhtik
Anoshirvan's evil vizier and counselor. He is perpetually hostile to Hamza

Iraq Nawjavun, Malik
Leader of the Iranian fire-worshippers

Mahur
An enemy oughar

Mazmahil
A surgeon from the sorcerer-held city of Antal

Marzaq
King of the Franks (Europeans)

Nimrod
A Zoroastrian

Shahrshob
An enemy oughar who abducts Amir Hamza

Zandushat
Zinduster, leader of Iranian infidels, considered the foremost of sorcerers

Zumurrud Shah
(Gumish, 'The Lost') King of the east, a gigantic, perennial enemy of Amir Hamza
HAMZA FIGHTS THREE DEVS

Like genii or pirs, devas (demons) figure in many tales in Islamic literature, and pose the same kind of otherworldly challenge to those who aspire to be heroes among men. Although they are essentially anthropomorphic, devas are hideous in every respect, from their menacing fangs and antlerlike horns to their hairy, spotted bodies and wickedly sharp claws. Most wield weapons readily available in nature—clubs, hammers, and the like—but some manage to procure huge maces or daggers, and brandish them easily to demonstrate their prodigious strength. All heroes must confront these devas at some time. Most often they dispatch them from this earth, but truly far-seeing ones such as King Solomon are able to harness their energy in tasks that benefit all.

These imposing devas are still far from that rehabilitated state. They lumber through the landscape and threaten to pin the hero, probably the young Hamza, against a tree. One has drawn so near that he has part of Hamza’s tunic in his grasp, and now prepares to pulverize the mortal with an enormous mace. But Hamza demonstrates his pluck by clutching his assailant’s beard and stepping inside the arc of the mace swing so that he can bury his dagger in the dev’s chest. He seems to have mastered this maneuver, for he has already staggered the still larger devil in the foreground. That one now swoons, blood pouring from his disemboweled abdomen, his bladed mace lying abandoned at his feet. A third devil advances heedlessly across a stream, brandishing with both hands what remains of another type of kistin mace. (Attached by a chain to one end of the long handle is the mace’s globular head, its once golden surface now thoroughly effaced but its circular outline still clear at shoulder height.) A cudgel and horn hang from the sixth tied about his waist and fastened with a large lobed buckle.

The artist embelishes these creatures with whimsical details. All devas have shaggy breasts and limbs, but the one dying here has distinct tufts of hair sprouting like epaulets from his shoulders. His bluish counterpart is aided in the fray by his own dragon-headed tail, and the pinkish devil has no hope of shedding his comical appearance soon as he has mismatched eye-rips and a single fang issuing from the center of his lower lip. All three devas wear breeches or skirts, and have developed knobly protruberances on their knees and elbows from clawing about on all fours.

This painting must belong to one of the early volumes of the Hamzanama. The folio has been stripped of the text on the reverse, a feature common to most extant paintings from the initial volumes. It also has a strongly Persianate style. The devils, for example, are considerably flatter than the corresponding demon in cat. 23, and read primarily as large two-dimensional shapes embedded in a carefully constructed compositional pattern. The ground is an unmodulated field of green interrupted only occasionally by a well-placed flower or two. Most old-fashioned of all are the remarkably flat and sharp-edged rocks belying both sides of the narrow stream and lying by Hamza’s legs. Such unnatural rocks, which resemble nothing so much as lithic shards, are found frequently in Safavid art, and almost never in early Mughal painting. They are the strongest indication that the painter had substantial training in the Safavid idiom.

There were, of course, very few painters in the Mughal workshop with such experience. Mir Sayyid Ali and Abul-Samad both incorporated the kind of plane tree seen here in paintings made over their respective careers, but in every case the tree trunk has a smoother texture and more elegantly outlined contours. Hamza’s face is abraded, but the eyes are clear enough to be distinguished from those in Mir Sayyid Ali’s figures. Similarly, the sharp-edged geometric rocks, which recur along streams in several of Mir Sayyid Ali’s paintings, including A School Scene (cat. 3), are strained together with much less rhythm here.
One indication of the increasingly fantastic quality of the Hamza legend is the number of stories in which Hamza consorts with peri(s) or fairies and genii, supernatural beings who sometimes attend King Solomon. Normally, the relationship is a mutually beneficial one, with Hamza periodically assisting the fairies in their ongoing struggle against the devils, and the fairies returning the favor by taking the Amir’s side in battles against his mortal enemies. In this case, however, the relationship is put to the test by Hura the genie, who for unknown reasons arranges for a dragon to carry off Hamza’s right-hand man Umar. Hamza sees this abduction and recognizes Hura’s complicity in it, but says and does nothing. Hura, who is surprised by Hamza’s passivity, asks him why he did nothing to stop the dragon. Hamza deftly replies by praising Hura and his lineage, and stating that he knows that they would never do anything bad. With this subtle reproach, he lets Hura know that he is fully aware that the genie had orchestrated the entire matter; the embarrassed Hura makes amends by arranging to have Umar and Aydi brought back quickly and discreetly, and then orders his servants to prepare a great banquet in their honor.

This illustration appears at the point when the dragon is still waiting to pounce on Umar. Hamza sits politely before a male genie, presumably Hura, while his companion, Umar, gestures excitedly toward the lurking dragon. Other winged female peri(s) gather around the small pavilion. Two frothy-spotted dev(s)—presumably the rehabilitated, sympathetic variety—tear at the body of an unfortunate creature, in the process soaking the ground with blood and stirring it with the severed limbs and head of a human. A great rocky screen meanders around two small temples and cordons off a third, more resplendent one and some onlookers in the foreground.

Hamza, whose distinctive facial style is manifested in the large white eyes and the prickly hairs of Hamza’s sculpted beard and Umar’s mustache (see, for example, cat 35 and 30), casts Hamza as a demure figure who, despite the long golden sword he carries, sits with his head bowed slightly and his hands crossed gently on his lap. Umar, by contrast, is the picture of agitation, his neck craning nearly as far as actively as his wildly gesticulating arms. Seated to the side of the pavilion and addressing the Amir is Hura; his face now too flaked to indicate gender, but his body lacking the small, high breasts seen on the accompanying fairies. The pavilion itself is decorated with the usual carpet and vessel-filled niches, but it oddly turned corner, truncated carpet, and the gleaming tiles of its wraparound platform demonstrate Hamza’s penchant for bringing exuberance to his architectural forms. The foreground temple has a spectacularly patterned dome, crenellations outlined in white, and narrow inlaid bands set in a checkerboard pattern, all recia a architectural forms found in several other works attributed to this artist (cat 35, 61 and 74).

Although the peri(s) are peripheral to the composition and action, they still attract a fair amount of attention. Their large and flamboyant colored wings surely contribute to the effect; but the faces that have survived intact are also noticeably more sensitively painted than those of the protagonists. Indeed, the peri whose face is framed by the body of the spotted red devil along the left edge of the painting has all the hallmarks of Basavana: almond-shaped eyes with small pupils, softly brushed features, and a subtly colored headress. This attribution to Basavana, which can be extended to all the peri(s) in this painting, suggests that the contemporay peri(s) shown in a painting in the British Museum are also by this master. Other features by Basavana here include the soft, painterly rocks studed with barren stumps, and the lively rendering of the dragon coiled around the outcrop in the upper right. The trees, conversely, are much too flatty conceived and blandly colored to be his work, and are almost certainly that of Jagana.
Hamza travels far and wide, compelling infidels everywhere to accept Islam. On one occasion, his conquests take him far to the west, where he encounters the Franks, the name by which Europeans were known in medieval Islam. Two paintings from volume 6 depict the believers' encounter with Marzuq, the Frankish king. The first (painting no. 2) shows Khwaja Umar, who, having been captured by Marzuq, is secretly negotiating his freedom with his jailer, one Zangawa. The second is this painting, numbered 34, beside the lowest rock along the shore.

“When the ill-starred Marzuq fled from the fortress, the princes of the age, the champions, and the Sahib-Quran killed many Farangis that night. The fire of battle blazed forth. The next day the Sahib-Quran was informed. He entered the fortress and met his sons, warriors, and champions and showed great kindness to the warriors...[Farangi], Marzuq’s nephew, fled to the sea with his household and family.”

This illustration depicts several concurrent events in the capture and evacuation of the fortress. In the foreground, a number of oversized soldiers rush through the gateway while some smaller ones wait behind a low ridge. In the courtyard fronted by a confusing stack of towers, battlements, and walls, and bounded diagonally by a wall rammomed with large white crenelations, Hamza’s forces behold the sprawling corpse of the last of the enemy holdouts. It is right time, and Hamza himself has not yet arrived, points established by the blazing torches and confirmed by the first few lines of the following text. Instead, this mop-up operation is being directed by the mountainous Umar Mal’da’karb, who stands closest to the enemy, the position always reserved for the allied leader. Disconsolate Frankish womenfolk witness the spectacle of defeat from a gallery above. In the adjacent courtyard, the systematic plunder of the fortress has already begun, as Hamza’s men methodically remove and pass along chest after chest of booty. Meanwhile, Marzuq’s forces flee with all they can. An armed soldier wearing a foreign hat ushers a group of Frankish women out a second gateway toward two waiting boats. Seated at the prow of the larger boat, Marzuq himself, wearing a foreign hat and a great sword and supervising the loading of his prized horse. The other boat, apparently reserved for royal women and their belongings, contains two women dressed in white burqas huddled behind an enclosed lattice and a chest of goods.

To feature all these separate activities simultaneously, the artist has employed an unusually busy and complicated composition. Walls banded with bright and assertive patterns zigzag across the center, and patterns of every type and color jostle for visual attention elsewhere. In some instances, such as the wall running diagonally along the shore, structural elements are downplayed in favor of decorative ones, so that the luminous floral band along the top of the ramparts actually overshadows the wall proper. Figures often must squeeze into this world, as do, for example, the huge horse and two figures passing through the lower gate, or the eight figures filling the central courtyard. This conspicuous disparity in scales is a sure sign that one artist laid out and executed this maze-like environment, and another supplied the major figures.

Because every face in this work has been repainted, albeit with a finer and more careful hand than usual, the identity of the latter artist cannot be determined. The other artist, however, is certainly Mah Muhammad, who, in fact, used a similar composition and miniaturized scale in cat. 60. This attribution is supported by many architectural features, most notably the tightly geometric towers and the honeycomb pattern on the red dado panel in the upper right. Other elements also connect this painting with cat. 75, which is attributed to Mah Muhammad. These include the delicate whorls on the water, here reduced to a pattern of unprecedented density, a discreetly colored strip of land along the water’s edge, and widely scattered rocks overlaid with a single large white swirl.

The text on the reverse has one exceptional feature: in addition to the usual nineteen lines, there are long panels of text written on blue paper applied to both lateral edges of the page.