Two short sentences at the very end of the preceding folio, describing Umar and Yazak the Cathayan as they begin their rescue mission, inspire this illustration: “In short, he took ten slaves and six months’ provisions, and he charged Sa’d, saying, ‘Whenever news of the Amir arrives, arm yourself and come as quickly as possible.’ Saying this, and bidding farewell to the kings and champions, he and Yazak the Cathayan got in a boat. The sails were trimmed, and they set out on the sea.”

When the text on the reverse of this folio resumes with an account of a sea journey, one naturally assumes that it will be the next instalment of Umar’s escapades. Instead, the reading audience eventually surmises that the narrator has shifted abruptly to a new story, about another boat with a different crew, which is adjoined to the previous one because both involve sea travel. The remainder of the text recounts the second crew’s adventures in the city of Takaw, which forms the subject of the next painting.

The juxtaposition of two essentially similar images of a boat departing invites comparison of the nuances that the artist has added to a standard type of scene. Standing beside the bright mast and backed by an anxious crew, Umar uses a two-handed gesture of supplication to express his indebtedness to the ‘kings and champions’ gathered at the shore. Yet the focus on Umar be diminished, no one among those luminaries is singled out by dress or pose; rather, their collective presence before a city underscores the royal sponsorship of Umar’s expedition, and lends it a propitiousness that the handful of nondescript figures seen off Shahrasb in cat 30 can never bestow upon the spy. So, too, does the open display of the lavish fittings of Umar’s vessel—from the golden ewer and mound of assorted weapons at his feet to the magnificent sail billowing directly above his head—contrast with the furtiveness implied by Shahrasb’s nudy bound barge. The distinction between meritorious and base action is extended even to so stock a Mughal figure as the boatman, at each stem. Attired in regular clothing, Umar’s pilot blends in easily with the figures behind him, and does not intervene between the boyar and his well-wishers; Shahrasb’s seafarer wears but a scanty loin cloth, and stands out for it.

Much of the painting is given over to water, which here becomes an expressive element, as it does so often in this manuscript. Mughal painters had developed this irregular convention for water only within the decade, and they seemed eager to flaunt the mesmerizing power of its eddies and swirls whenever circumstances allowed. They intuitively recognized that its dark color and random visual texture provided relief from the flat, patchwork forms of dense figurative groups. In this painting, Dasavanta exploits the spatial implications of this contrast in color and visual texture to particularly great effect, so that Umar, garbed in brilliant red and isolated against the dark churning sea, is made all the more prominent.

India teems with animals, a fact that Mughal artists rarely left out of their paintings. While the four fish exploding out of the sea add life and rhythm to its surface, the trio of goats grazing nonchalantly beside and behind the tree in the upper right are probably nothing more than an artist’s fond recollection of the quiet sights of village life.
When Alashan and his companions reach shore, they stash their boat, change into some local clothes, and slip into town.

"Yunus took them to an inn, which the comrades entered boldly and then sat in a corner. Yunus went to the aged innkeeper. When the old man saw him he asked him how he was. Yunus asked for a room in the inn. The old man said, 'People have taken over the inn. There is no room."

"There is a group of nobles,' Yunus said. 'It would be worth your while to let them in.' He accepted and gave them a chamber over the gate."

The travelers decide to sell some of their valuables for cash, and to this end Yunus and Baba Junayd contact Khwaja Nu'man, a wealthy merchant who many years earlier had aided Hamza and befriended Alashan.

"By chance he had landed here and acquired untold wealth, for which he was well known in the city. Baba Junayd went to him and said, 'A group of merchants are selling gold and jewels.'"

In short, he took Khwaja Nu'man to the comrades' chamber, and when Nu'man's eye lighted on Alashan Nawayjan, he recognized him, but said nothing, waiting for a better opportunity."

The Illustration stages this encounter in the upper right of the composition, but prefaces it with the hubbub of a caravan sral where weary travelers and their animals settle down cheek by jowl for the night. Each vignette becomes an opportunity for narrator and painter to comment on the business of life. Some horses bury their heads in feedbags. A traveler dozes off beneath a makeshift tent, goods and weapons hard by his head and feet. A servant lays out a gristy banquet for two resting camels, while men behind him bustle about a pair of trunks. Other travelers converse before a dark gateway and staircase. Above, in the tight quarters where the red-clad Nu'man meets Alashan and his companions, the air is heavy with secret dealings. The architecture creates much of this climate, as dark brick walls enroach upon the unfamed chamber from both ends. The figures, too, are close-packed in the chamber, and Tul assumes such gigantic proportions that he threatens to burst through the low parapet at even the slightest shift of his weight. Two smaller figures on an adjacent corridor huddle together as a muezzin issues the evening call to prayer from a kiosk rooftop.

All this activity occurs within an unusual composition. Rather than employing the customary level view into an open-sided courtyard or an elevated view over the walls of a gated compound, the artist frames the scene with an uninterrupted low brick wall in the foreground and two contiguous eaves above. This construction fosters a sense of intimacy as the audience is permitted to peer down into the cloistered space from a nearby vantage point.

The innovative composition is the first sign of the handiwork of a master artist, but there are many other indications. Typically, they are concentrated on the key figures in the illustration. In this case, they include the gaunt rendering of the white scarf around Nu'man's shoulder, the rounded contours of his jama, the exceptionally fine drawing of his feet, the rich brown color of Ayjil's turban, and the luminous modeling of Tul's scarlet jama. All these features point unmistakably to Basavana, the only Mughal artist able to incised to draw and paint in this manner. Similarly, the faces of all four named figures are strongly characterized, as Basavana's normally are; to realize the level of accomplishment here, one need only glance at the rapid expressions of the assistants to their left, surely the work of another painter, in all likelihood Ranavari. But Basavana often expanded his role in collaborative work beyond the description and a few key features, and one can easily see his touch in the camels' little necks and bristly hair, the fluid modeling of the green sheet covering the slumbering figure, and the plumed figure in blue behind the camels. This figure's face bears a profound resemblance to the king in one of Basavana's ascribed paintings in the Tuinans (cat. 111), Banavari, by contrast, seems to have a relatively restricted range of figures, best represented here by the two figures isolated against the blackened gate.

Attributed to Basavana and Banavari

Volume 4, painting number 5, text number 6
India, Mughal dynasty, circa 1650
36 x 28 cm
Caption: Ayjil, Alashan, and Tul Tangi are recognized by Khwaja Nu'man in the city of Takaw
MFA: Australian Museum of Applied Arts & Contemporary Art, Vienna, a. i. 1297, cat. 141

1. One minor technical feature worth noting here is the faint label with Tul's name which is inscribed above his head. This is a rare example in this project of a supervisory note left for the artist, probably to ensure that Tul, who is identified as Zangi (Thiopian) in the caption, would be given appropriately dark skin.
2. Many of these features are found, for example, in Basavana's ascribed work in the Dohomnis in the British Library, London, f. 23a, Welch 1978, p. 6. See fig. 20 on p. 52, above.

CATALOGUE
ZUMURRD SHAH WITNESSES THE PROWESS OF MAHLAJ, WHO THRUSTS HIS SPEAR THROUGH A TREE

Word spreads of a festival at which various champions will perform feats of great skill for Malik Arghus, the king of Takaw, in his lovely spring garden. Ayijl, Alamsah, and Tul Mast, who take pride in their own strength and skill, are naturally interested in this spectacle, and make their way to the site in disguise.

"The name of the garden was Payzabad. "Two rows shots away a pavilion had been erected, and there Zumurrud Shah, Hurriz, and all their officers sat mounted while many people were standing. Opposite the pavilion was a huge tree, and at the base of the tree was a slab of stone weighing nearly three or four thousand mounds.

Mahlaj mounted a horse and began to exhibit his skill in spear-throwing. A camel stuffed with sand was brought, and Mahlaj charged it and planted his spear into its side in such a way that it passed straight through. Then he picked up the camel and its load and hurled it over his head. A cheer arose from the people. Next he scattered the tree so hard that it split in two.

"My Lord," said Mahlaj, "if anyone can pull this spear out of the tree, he will have performed a real feat."

Recognizing the dramatic possibilities of the last lines of the text, the artist depicts the mounted Mahlaj in mid-stride as he plunges his lance into the tree. In the foreground is the sprawling corpse of the hapless camel, tongue lolling and blood trickling from its leg. The sandy ballast lashed to the camel's saddle was obviously no protection against Zumurrud Shah's prodigious might; it has come undone and been cast aside along with a tent, a ewer, and a now useless feedbag. Zumurrud Shah, finger raised to his mouth in amusement, witnesses the spectacle from a viewing box designed for one giant alone; his host, Malik Arghus, the bearded figure in yellow, and Arghus's son, the plumed youth beside him, look on from ordinary positions below. At the base of the tree, in the corner opposite Zumurrud Shah, is the slab of stone weighing nearly three or four thousand mounds.

Observing the events from an inconspicuous position between the tree and left edge of the painting are the three Iranian heroes. Tul has resumed normal proportions, no small trick of a disguise, and the plumed figure, either Ayijl or Alamsah, has shed the beard he wore in the previous illustration.

Mahlaj's extraordinary feat has inspired a painting of uncommon boldness. By his very size, Zumurrud Shah has an unsettling effect on any composition, one enhanced here by the juxtaposition of his huge head with the smaller and more decorative forms around him. The real visual attraction of the painting resides in the plane tree. It is more than simply big; it offers a compelling contrast between the painterly surface of its broad, greyish trunk and the precise forms of its colorfully bifurcated and speckled five-pointed leaves. The tree must have been considered sufficiently resplendent to represent a named garden, for the site is bereft of plantings other than the loosely rendered, long, yellow tufts of grass.

This work, too, contains some features that support an attribution to Basavana. Foremost among these is Zumurrud Shah's face, which has the narrowed, focused eyes, thin but fair eyebrows, and sensitive modeling found in many figures by that artist. Moreover, Zumurrud Shah's scarf, as seen in the previous illustration. Similarly, the sprawling camel is consistent with Basavana's version of these beasts in both form and texture. Basavana even reuses the plane tree, albeit on a much smaller scale, in a later composition. In that instance, the trunk is very similar, but the leaves lack the flamboyant coloring seen here. The bright leaves, skinlike tufts of grass, and treatment of most figures suggest that Basavana designed this Hamzana painting, but left much of the detailing to a collaborator.

To judge from the strong resemblance of Mahlaj's face to those of several guards standing to the left of Hamza in cat. 35, that collaborator was Jagana. Many of the figures here demonstrate his penchant for noticeably broad bodies, a trait seen again in cat. 61. Both paintings also feature a wide architectural floral band with golden half-medallions; in this painting, that element appears immediately below Zumurrud Shah's box.
Two of Malik Arghus's operatives, Khwaja Bakhtyar and Malik Kanyar, greet Shahrashob's three henchmen - Namrud, Larghay Chain-Chewer, and Shirft b. Beest-Chain - at the water's edge, and are subsequently informed that Shahrashob holds the Amir captive. They relay the news to a delighted Arghus, who orders the drums sounded. Ayvil, Amskash, and Tull Mast learn the cause of this morbid celebration, and vow to rescue Hamza at all cost.

Hamza is led on a chain to the court. Zumurrud Shah commands Hamza to prostrate himself, but Hamza defiantly proclaims that he will do so before God alone. Zumurrud Shah orders him killed, but is dissuaded by Arghus on the grounds that a public killing might provoke those Iranian champions who had just exhibited their awesome might. Zumurrud Shah agrees and orders Shahrashob to escort Hamza personally to prison, a place so daunting and dreadful that no escape is possible. By chance the cortège passes by the caravanserai of Baba Junayd, where the Iranian champions continue to reside. Hearing the commotion, Tull looks out the window and sees the Amir, captively proud, but he and his companions can do nothing for the moment.

Shahrashob takes Hamza into the prison, and warns Tamat the jailkeeper not to let anyone else in; Tamat swears that no one other than his sons ever have or ever will enter, inadvertently disclosing how prison security could be breached. Hamza reminds everyone just how dangerous he is by kicking aside the enormous stone capping the dungeon. Once he is lowered into the dungeon, he meets a youth who has languished there for eighteen years and who tells him that he is Khusrav, son of Jamshed, the legitimate king of Takaw. Hamza promises the incredulous Khusrav that one day he will free him and install him on the throne that is rightfully his. This development links Khusrav's fate to Hamza's, and gives Baba Junayd, who long ago was ensnared in the events leading to Khusrav's imprisonment, a stake in Hamza's liberation.

Meanwhile, Alamshah learns of Hamza's remarkable feat in prison, and excitedly plans to fight all of Takaw to spring him. Nu'man counsels prudence, and advises them to fetch Hamza's army first. Yunus, the sailor who had guided the trio to Takaw, volunteers to return to Sabayl to seek help. By a twist of fate, Umar, lost at sea for two months, is now sailing in exactly the opposite direction. Sarraj, the pilot of Umar's boat, climbs the mast to check his course and sees another boat approaching. As it draws near, Sarraj realizes that at the helm is none other than his brother, Yunus. The two brothers embrace, and Yunus tells Umar of Hamza's imprisonment. Yunus continues his mission to Sabayl, and Umar presses on toward Takaw. At last he eschews a huge mountain and fort, where he will soon discover a new ally to aid him in the last leg of his quest.

When Umar lands, he is taken before Mikal Long-Bow, an old champion who expresses a wish to help Hamza even before he hears Umar's story. An informant arrives with news of Hamza and Khusrav in prison, and advises Umar to proceed to Takaw by boat. Umar is instructed to stay in the caravanserai, which is both close to the prison and run by Baba Junayd, a man who sympathizes with the prince's cause. Umar does as he is told. Makaw, where he pretends to be a merchant, Umar is escorted by a customs official to the caravanserai of Baba Junayd, where he has his money and politeness hurled back in his face. Finally, a chagrined Nu'man personally offers Umar two rooms, and thus comes to know another of Hamza's friends.

Detail of cat 36