50 TURNING THE WHEEL ON THE SHISAN DAM, TAYHUR RELEASES A TORRENT THAT FLOODS HAMZA’S CAMP AND DROWNS HARDAM DEVANA

The next day more battles ensue, with a foe named Tayhur inflicting many casualties on Hamza’s forces. Many champions volunteer to face this enemy, but the following day, Hamza himself prepares to fight alongside them. Tayhur attacks, blaspheming all the way.

“When the wind swept the field clear of the dust, the two sides looked at each other until Tayhur, mounted on his steed, entered the field. After displaying his prowess, he headed for the lines of the army of Islam and shouted, ‘God worshippers, know that the god of the east has fated your death at my hands. Fare you well!’ As he said this, from the army of Islam the world-conquering Amir halted on his steed and said, ‘Come into the field of combat and show me your array of horse, for after me no one will come into the field.’”

In short, the Amir spurred his horse into the arena and came opposite Tayhur. Through the grace of the Creator he sent that infidel from the field bound hands and neck, and he returned to Solomon’s tent, where he took off the gear of battle and washed the dust and blood of the field from his hands. After that, he ordered a party given during which Tayhur was brought in and offered a chance to convert to Islam. Tayhur agrees and is rewarded, but the next day, on a mission ostensibly to win over his brother, he reneges on his conversion, and seizes control of the pass once more.

“Tayhur turned the crank, and the rock rolled away from the mouth of the hole, and a deluge of water poured down so that all the ground was engulfed. Many men were lost. Of those of name, Hardam Devana was drowned. Such an uproar arose in the camp that the Amir imagined that soldiers had attacked the camp.”

This dramatic illustration brings into play the earlier description of the Shisan dam and its ingenious floodgate. The narrow gorge across the pass has been sealed with a brick dam, edged in cut stone, and topped with ornamental tiles. Placed to one side is the colossal wooden crank used to raise and lower the circular brass plug. The artist shows the mammoth brown stopper exposed completely, with a dark oval space around it, to indicate that the waters have been unleashed deliberately. Curiously, however, he does not depict Tayhur, the culprit responsible for this catastrophe, probably to keep the focus on the dam mechanism and the deluge. To do this, he uses an extreme close-up view, so that the water gushing from the base of the dam occupies not only the center of the scene, but nearly a third of the entire composition. Nearly every detail speaks to the sheer fury of the waters. A camel strains to keep its head above water, a man grasps hold of a small tree to avoid being swept away, and others struggle to save kin and kine. Beside a half-submerged tent a giant bobs by. Only on the left does the situation seem less dire; there, one tent still stands, and one warrior has time to salvage his quiver. Everything, from people to rocks to the dam itself, is writ large.

The artist responsible for this tumultuous scene is Jagana. Many Mughal painters give their figures slightly projecting eyes, but Jagana makes his figures’ eyes round and relatively small in proportion to their faces. He renders their features with a crispness often lacking in other artists’ characters; this quality can be seen here, for example, in the neatly delineated mustaches and beards of the soldier holding his quiver aloft, or the figure below him leading a horse from the surging waters. Jagana shows no interest here in contemporary Mughal experiments with European-derived modeling. The faces and cloth of every figure are unabashedly flat, with modeling limited to the kind of minimal and formulaic convention seen at the gatherings at the waist of the figure in the lower left. Similarly, the colors are absolutely unsullied by tonal shading, with the result that this scene of utter devastation is rendered with an oddly cheery palette.
After this straightforward episode, which is not summarized at the beginning of the following text page as is often the case, the story returns abruptly to Kayhur, now described as an oggyr rather than as a devil. He steals into Hamza’s camp, and slipping by the dozing guards, beheads two champions.

“When it was night and the Amir Sahib-Qiran was contemplative, an alarm broke out in the camp of the army of Islam. Kayhur got his oggyr’s paraphernalia together and got himself across mountain and cliff to the army of Islam. As black night fell and the sky once again became a stage for the hosts of Ethiopia, the oggyr of the night vengefully cut off the head of the Bahram of the day.”

The murders are discovered when morning comes, and an agitated Hamza orders his oggyr to try to track the killer. Their efforts are fruitless. That night, Kayhur exacts his bloody toll once more, this time decapitating Prince Umar-Gorad. Hamza directs an infuriated Umar to redouble the search.

“Finally, when he reached the barrier, he thought, ‘One can get through this way.'” When he was near the barrier, he saw that nearly two hundred fully armed men were standing with torches. Umar came and got seventy renowned champions of the Amir Sahib-Qiran like Qasim, Rabi’, Almashah, Landhur, Malik, and Tufi-Mast. When these came, battle broke out. Tayhur was on top of the barrier. Almashah split him in two and...”

With this act, the text on the preceding folio ends; when it resumes on the back of this painting, it mentions in the space of little more than one line Kayhur delivering the severed heads of his victims, his brother reporting the death of Tayhur, the sowing of the dam, the blocking of the water, and the seversing of the chain. Therefore, it recasts a new and prolonged round of battles.

Like the earlier double depiction of Baba Junday’s caravan scene (cat. 47), this composition repeats virtually all the major elements of the preceding painting. The gorge and dam, the crane and ball, the torrent and its victims—all these recur in the second painting with negligible change. Indeed, the major difference between the imagery of the two illustrations resides in the inclusion of Almashah, who scuttles up the rocks on the right, and Tayhur who lies well out of striking distance of Almashah but has already been sliced into two. Fewer souls founder in the water, and conversely more figures have the physical luxury of gazing at Almashah on one side and Tayhur’s bloody corpse on the other. But the brass stopper remains raised and the torrent rages unabated.

The fundamental similarity of the two illustrations raises questions about how this particular pair of images would have been used in recitations. The two paintings could conceivably be viewed in close sequence, as the narrative unfold and resemble a variety of illustrated manuscripts, with a linear progression that occurs between the episode at the dam. Yet if this had been the intention, the text could easily have been rearranged to accommodate this, with Tayhur’s demise much preceding the unrelated series of assassinations carried out by Kayhur. Instead, it seems that the story was written down in its present arrangement, precisely so that the scene would be depicted twice, for in each case the subject illustrated is described at the very bottom of the text page.

Indeed, one wonders if these twinned images were a kind of informal competition between two artists, or despite their many compositional and narrative similarities, these works are surely by different hands. This artist, Shravana, pulls farther away from the cataclysm, and generally uses a smaller scale. His figures are much more voluminous and hairy than Jagana’s, and their janams are decorated with the medallion patterns exhibited in his earlier works (cat. 42 and 47). His rocks are also closely related to those in one earlier work (cat. 42), with heavy shading applied around each rectangular facet within the larger outcrops, these more three-dimensional forms encroach upon the terrain both laterally and spatially, inadvertently diminishing its sweep and power.
LIFTING AN ELEPHANT SINGLE-HANDED, FARRUKH-NIZHAD SO ASTONISHES TWO BROTHERS THAT THEY CONVERT TO ISLAM

As the two armies vie for supremacy, Hamza seeks honor for the slain and retribution for the wicked. The ever capable Umar steals back the severed heads of the assassinated champions, and then, catching the fiendish Kayhur off guard, burns him with naphttha. Aad Man-Eater comes out for battle, and spurs Hamza's demand that he convert to Islam, an act that in this legend inevitably augurs imminent defeat or death. Princes, among them Hamza's sons Ibrahim and Badruzzaman, prove their mettle in a series of individual combats against the backdrop of vast legions and thrashing war drums.

It is not long before Aad gets his first encounter. Two of his warriors, brothers named Jang-Fil ('War-elephant') and Sarab-Fil ('Mirage Elephant'), swagger onto the battlefield.

"One brother took an elephant by its front two legs and the other brother held it by its back legs, and they hurled it into the field. After that they set out for the Amir's army, saying, 'O God-worshippers, can any of you perform such a feat on the field of battle?' Witnessing this feat, the soldiers were astonished. Suddenly a cavaller emerged from the army of Islam. Not a horse but an eagle he spurred forth. Not a blade but a crocodile he wielded.

And he entered the field and faced the two brothers, saying, 'What have you done? Two people, one elephant... what say you?'

'Let us see,' they replied.

Prince Sa'id Farrukh-Nizhad grabbed the elephant by the chain around its waist. As the two armies watched, what was transpiring on the field of battle, that courageous one mentioned the name of the God of the people, seized the elephant and swung it around the field... The drums of rejoicing were sounded in the army of Islam, but Sa'id Farrukh-Nizhad slammed the elephant down on the ground so hard that its body was crushed. The two brothers came forth and sincerely became Muslims at the hand of the prince."

Mahesa knows enough to let the fantastic action speak for itself. He fills the entire center of the composition with the elephant, tipping him forward just enough to let the viewers that the creature appears here in extraordinary circumstances. Only after taking in this spectacle do we catch sight of the diminutive Farrukh-Nizhad as he performs the ultimate power lift. Mahesa disregards the textual specification that Farrukh-Nizhad grasps the chain goding the elephant, a decision he probably made to avoid the artistic problems of drawing the elephant at the angled view that this would necessarily entail. Directly opposite the elephant's head stand the two newly humbled brothers, whose broad faces and bulky, inflated bodies recall those of Mahesa's figure of the giant manasp in cat.46. They express their astonishment and contrition with a well-established gesture of surprise, a gesture one brother doubles, apparently for emphasis.

The remaining elements echo the central forms and actions. The boulder-studded ridge and even the bend in the trunk of the central tree are designed to parallel the forms of the elephant and the brothers. Likewise, the small horse and groom and the pool of water are inserted to fill otherwise disturbingly vacant spaces in the foreground. The soldiers looking on from beyond the ridge provide the requisite battleground audience, but do not complete the composition in the usual way. Instead, a second bowing ridge and a buffer zone of blue-grey paint are added behind them. The result is a remarkably awkward solution to the corner, one never used again in painting of this period. In effect, Mahesa painted himself into the corner by predicating everything, particularly the left half of the scene, on the brothers and the elephant.

Ironically, the centerpiece of the painting, the elephant itself, is not Mahesa's work. It is rather the creation of an artist with a profound interest in naturalism, as is evident in the elephant's subtly colored trunk, ragged ear, and thick, splayed skin. These features, together with their rich, painterly surface, identify the collaborator as Kesava Dasa, who, in fact, made and signed a very similar elephant; painting about a decade later (see fig.26). Kesava probably strengthened the contours of the original ridge and added the second layer of rocks. He also brought his naturalistic touch to a few minor elements as well, notably the heavily-modelled trunk of the withering tree, and the feathery grasses at its base and around the pool. He repeats these three features in three other works catalogued here (cat.55, 56, and 85).
At many times in many places, Umar and Zumurrud Shah are pitted against one another, each doing his wily best to outwit his foe and foil his designs. Here, Umar pulls off one of his more outrageous pranks. The preceding pages have been lost, and so we know nothing of the details of his deed. We can, however, surmise from both the painting and the following text that what is shown is an elaborately orchestrated spectacle involving Lakman, king of the Zangis, and a number of his followers. In the Hamza legend, Zangis (Ethiopians) are portrayed as exotic tribal people, so it would be a particularly humiliating experience for Zumurrud Shah to be held at their mercy.

The text that follows the painting supplies the enormity of this ruse. Hamza rewards Umar for his action, accepts the homage of Lakman and grants that Zangi control of some distant territories, and takes the opportunity to chastise Zumurrud Shah.

"Zumurrud Shah the Lost and the black-faced infidels were summoned to be given advice, but no matter how much he stressed his points, it was of no use. What profits advice to the black-hearted? An iron nail will not go into stone." If they had bound me by force of manliness and chivalry," said Zumurrud Shah, "the advice would have had an effect on my heart. But you, my lord, bound me through trickery. All this talk is of no use."

"Actually," the Amir said, "what Zumurrud Shah says is not untrue. Take the bonds from Zumurrud Shah's and the other infidels' hands and feet." As ordered, the men rushed to release them, and the infidels were released and went to their homes."

The painting presents the culmination of Umar's ruse. Seated on a luxurious throne set beneath a large plane tree is a black-skinned, white-bearded figure, apparently Lakman, the Zangi king. Pressing close to him are his subjects, many of them robed in white and black. Above the throne, an inscription in gold letters is written on blue paper. The figures themselves are among the liveliest in the whole of the Hamzanama. The Zangis treat their bodies and carefully personalises their appearance, each with his own unique style. A finely detailed turban and earrings are seen on his head, and a finely detailed turban and earrings are seen on his head. The Amir, with a small label written on his jama or turban, sits on a fine carpet before some open books and writing implements. Three other captives are recognizable by their distinctive physiques: landshark, the huge, black-skinned figure on the left; Umar, the roly-poly creature in the middle; and Zumurrud Shah, the familiar bearded nemesis. Each of these figures, including the Amir, has a small label written on his jama or turban, identifying device. Important because one other figure is labeled as well: the enthroned king, who is named as Umar in an inscription between his body and his throne. If this means what it seems, then Umar, who often carries out his subterfuge in disguise, has really outdone himself.

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The masters who created this memorable scene are Shrivana and Dasavanta. Shrivana's genius is manifested most vividly here in his figures' highly animated expressions and original poses. See, for example, the assortment of characters with which he fills the lower right corner: a plump, docile figure with an oversized handbag, a toothy, weaselly figure straining forward with his jama torn open; and a youth who turns outward to glance knowingly at the audience. He also supplied the fine plastic pattern of the throne and the foliate border of the carpet on which Hamza is seated.

Dasavanta, who probably conceived the scene as a whole, handles paint in a distinctive manner. In general, he is less fluid than Basavana, a difference evident when one compares the faces of Zumurrud Shah in his painting and in cat. 33. Similarly, the trunk of the plane tree in Basavana's painting is loose and convincingly modeled; this one is more decorative, its mottled markings seemingly pulled out across a flat form in a manner seen later in Dasavanta's one ascribed painting in the Tanakh-khandari-Timurjiya (see fig. 66). Dasavanta often resorts to stippling, a technique used to great effect here in the Zangis' hats and cloaks. Conversely, in the center of the painting Shrivana lays down a carpet of flat green, an effect rarely created by other artists.