This illustration of an impromptu meeting between Misbah the grocer and the spy Parran has no obvious explanation now, for the text that once preceded it is missing and the text that follows alludes only to Parran in a very oblique manner. Nonetheless, a textual passage on an illustration five folios before this one relates Hamza's concern about the sudden disappearance of his son, Prince Ibrahim, as well as Umar's dispatch of Parran, one of Ibrahim's spies, to discover his whereabouts. Further remarks establish that an enemy officer named Firuz had kidnapped Prince Ibrahim from his bed and had taken him to the Mihrata Fortress. Malik Saidj Abihi, Ibrahim's initial jailer, is eager to test the handsome youth's fabled strength, and so challenges him to a wrestling match, but makes Ibrahim swear that should he win, he would submit to imprisonment once more. The honorable Ibrahim agrees, and quickly displays his physical superiority. An alarmed Saidj comes away from the match with a heightened appreciation of just how formidable his prisoner can be.

This illustration picks up the story when Parran reaches the city where he believes Ibrahim is being held. He somehow encounters Misbah the grocer, a believer in a city of infidels and something of a clandestine operative in his own right. The caption below the painting indicates that Misbah has brought Parran back to his own house, almost certainly to discuss plans to free Ibrahim from prison. Indeed, the text that follows describes the counter-measures Malik-Qamari and his spies take to ensure that no one can possibly liberate Ibrahim. Misbah later becomes involved in the search for another of Hamza's allies, Malik Bahman (cat. 58), and is finally rewarded for his devoted service by being made chief of police.

For a grocer, Misbah has quite an imposing presence. Even with his legs drawn up beneath him, the customarily mannered of sitting, he towers over his visitor and the servants ringed the courtyard. Parran, crouching before Misbah and speaking animatedly, looks every bit the seasoned spy. He wears a rakish fur cap on his head, a tigerskin cloak over his bare shoulders, a long horn across his back, and ample golden chains about his neck and ankles. Misbah's house shows no sign of his regular occupation; instead, it is crisscrossed with spy paraphernalia of every sort, from swords and shields to arrows and pels. Most of the surrounding figures have already availed themselves of this stock, and one young follower worryingly clutches a musket, among the earliest depictions of this newfangled weapon in Mughal painting. By contrast, only two figures attend to the lavish platters and flasks set on and around the brilliant red cloth in the center of the courtyard.

Dasavanta's hand is seen in many parts of the painting. Most obvious are Misbah and Parran, the one given a voluminous jama and a deep black-green scarf with streaky gold highlights, the other characterized strongly and rendered in an adventurously back-turned view. As in cat. 59 and cat. 64 - both scenes involving spies - Dasavanta emphasizes the courtyard's crisp geometry by framing it with an absolutely flattened doorway and a wall comprised of repetitive niches, and by filling it with an exceptionally assertive octagonal tilework pattern. He continues this tendency to maximize contrast in the chamber itself, using a pure white wall both to silhouette the figures and to set off the ornamental display of weapons. The vibrant foliage of the tree in the upper right is also typical of his work.

The other figures are by Mithila, an artist who played a secondary role in a number of paintings in this volume. His figures have noticeably oval faces with large, dark features, and often assume strikingly apprehensive expressions. Several figures have had their faces partially or entirely repainted, most conspicuously Misbah and the soldier in white in the lower right.

CAT. 54
55 UMAR WALKS AROUND FULAD CASTLE, MEETS A FOOTSORIDER AND KICKS HIM TO THE GROUND

Now Umar demonstrates the skill that his job requires. Sent out on a reconnaissance mission around Fulad Castle, Umar sees a stranger approaching. He hides until the armed footsoldier is before him and then ambushed him, knocking him to the ground with one powerful kick. Umar pours it on him, and sitting on his chest, threatens to kill him. The perturbed footsoldier, an aygar named Haybat, pleads for mercy.

"Khwaja Umar, don't kill me, for I will render you good service. I will show you the way into the castle." Khwaja Umar rejoiced and took the aygar to the Amir. When the Sahib-Quran asked him about himself, he said, "O prince, if you mount! I will show you the way." The Amir Sahib-Quran mounted with a group of champions with that aygar in front. He led them to the foot of a mountain and showed them a tunnel.

Hama immediately puts the aygar's information to good use. He proceeds down the tunnel that the aygar revealed, and pops up in the middle of Fulad Castle, where he touches off a great commotion. The lord of the castle, Fulad Aad, learns from his valorous that the intruder is Hama, a hero without equal, one for whom no task is too difficult. With this unstoppable figure in their midst and his followers at the gate, the visier advises Fulad Aad to abandon the cause of Zurna Shah and to convert to Islam. This Fulad Aad does gladly. All the people of his domain convert as well.

The ambush itself, which must be the act described at the very end of the preceding page, is depicted with great flair and narrative economy. Umar, for whom weapons are normally superfluous, holds his battle-axe behind him as he scuttles across the highest point of the composition in pursuit of his victim, whose escape is cut off by a stream. The unluck aygar sprawls helplessly before his attacker. He is clearly panic-stricken: his expressions are anxious, his turban has come utterly undone, his scone is tattered, and his arrows are beside him like so many empty quills shed in vain. In the background is Fulad Castle, where a lone woman watches from a window placed incongruously in the middle of its walls.

This dramatic scene is the work of Kesava Dasa. Kesava Dasa was particularly enamored of European-style modeling, an effect, used selectively here, as it typically is throughout his work, to convey the deep, voluminous folds in Umar's fringed robe and the clinking, body-revealing quality of his running shorts. It is probably no coincidence that Kesava chooses to dress Umar in a deep blue, the color worn by many religious figures in European painting, and one that he employs often in his later work. Both figures also have the long, narrow nose and tight, dark features that Kesava habitually favors in his facial types.

Much of the appeal of this painting stems from the luxuriant landscape, which belies the sinister mood of the episode. Some details, such as richly textured, willow-like trees, and the feathery, spider-like tufts of grass, are familiar from Kesava's previous Hamtonama painting (cat. 52). Others, such as the dark sword along the stream and the date palm tree, are new to his work. Still others come into view only after some time. The trace of partridges resting in the very center of the painting, the peacock and peahen roosting discreetly above them—these bits of closely observed nature bring moments of vitality and joy to even the most violent of scenes.

The upper part of the painting appears to have been done by another artist. The castle is presented as a conglomeration of boxy forms, a far cry from both the rich naturalism seen below and the spatially complicated cityscapes that Kesava designs in his later works. One notable departure from this formulaic quality is the bulbous base of the turret, rendered as a streaming thin wash quite unlike the even, opaque forms behind it. And when we realize that the patch of paint beside the base describes no form in nature, but only serves to blur the transition between the groove in which Umar feels his aygar counterpart and the architecture of Fulad Castle, we see how two artists could cobble together their separate contributions to produce a painting of this size and complexity. The architecture has the same naive quality as Mah Muhammad's other efforts in this vein, and should be attributed to him.
The conversion of Fuzul Aad sets in motion events that bring both death and deliverance to Hamza's family. As Hamza prepares to marry off one son at the newly converted city, he sends for Sanawbar Banu, who, because she is pregnant with his child, is to travel from Noshad by sea.

"She started out in a boat, but the heavens rumbled and an adverse wind arose. The whole sea became so stormy that the boat crashed against a cliff and sank. Sanawbar Banu got onto a raft, and her labor pains began. She brought forth a son on the raft. She had a jewel from the Amir on which his name was engraved. She bound the jewel to the infant's arm, wrapped him up in a piece of cloth, and died three days later. The child remained on the raft for two more days. The raft floated until it reached the island of Siquliya, where all the people were worshippers of water. Siquliya was the king, and he possessed three thousand leagues of land. There were several wise men among the people. The child grew up and was a worshipper of water and did not obey Zumurud Shah."

However, there was a fisherman in that city named Iskandar. It was his habit to go to the edge of the sea to fish from morning till evening, and thus he lived and passed his time. By chance, one day he was busy fishing when from a distance his gaze fell upon a raft. When he looked carefully he saw the raft coming into view, and there was something wrapped in cloth on it. At once he stripped, bound his loin clothes, pronounced the name of the One God, jumped into the sea, and swam out. When he reached the raft, he took hold of the raft and swam back to the shore. When he opened the bundle, he saw that it was a crying babe. His heart melted. He kissed the child with love and affection, took it into his arms, and adopted it as his own child, giving it the name of his own father, Darab. Then he took it home and entrusted it to his wife. She was childless, but she was very desirous of having children, so she took the child in her arms, and at once milk flowed into her breasts. Thus she began to raise the child."

Kesava illustrates the poignant moment when Iskandar looks into the eyes of the helpless Darab. To enhance the drama, he shifts this moment backward in time so that the babe is still adrift on the waters. Likewise, he moves the encounter to the shallow waters just beyond the shore, a decision that enables him to include a heap of nets and baskets that identifies Iskandar as a fisherman. It also gives him an opportunity to show Iskandar wading rather than swimming, a pose that reveals nearly all of Iskandar's muscular body.

Because this concise group of forms occupies no more than a third of the painting, Kesava is free to fill the remainder of the scene with whatever pleases him. He begins by constructing a low screen of rocks and thick trees in an arc parallel to that of the shoreline. He staggering this screen with a series of arches, and he uses that resulting bright space to introduce a highly developed genre scene: a shepherd ladling out a cup of milk, a mother and child, a family of ducks in the grass.

Kesava again invokes his favorite effects and forms. Iskandar's body, for example, displays a subtle muscular articulation unknown in comparable figures, such as the scantly clad boatman in cat. 30. The infant is wrapped in heavily modeled swaddling, here made red to set off from the dark raft and sea. The sea itself is studded with fish and aquatic life. The latter enlivens the waters, of course, but also adds to the young castaway's perils. Considerable care is exercised even in the most minor details. Kesava, for instance, originally included four ducks to the left of Iskandar's outstretched hand, but later painted them out because they diluted the encounter between Iskandar and Darab. The artist also indulges his keen interest in various textures, manifested most strikingly in the decayed surface of the blasted stump on the right, the coarse weave of the shepherd's cloak, and the raised stippling of the white sheep's wool.

Once more he lets another painter supply the architectural backdrop. This time, however, Kesava does not merely run his ponderous rocks over parts of the buildings and the people before them, he also interpolates an entirely new building, the finely detailed white temple in the upper left. He even dabbles in the sky, which changes from a flat blue to a streaky blue-black—a favorite color of his—at exactly that point.
The story returns again to Zumurrud Shah, the resilient archrival, who once more must flee before Hamza's might. He heads for Antali, a city ruled by Mālik Zanduhush Shīr (Zoraster). Informed of Zumurrud Shah's intention to take refuge there, Mālik Zanduhush Shīr calls together in council hundreds of thousands of sorcerers. They know that while Zumurrud Shah professes the wrong religion, they have heard that Hamza accepts Islam as the only legitimate religion. Concluding that Hamza poses a greater threat to their power, they agree to welcome Zumurrud Shah to Antali and do everything possible to thwart Hamza. For sorcerers, of course, this involves incantations. To neutralize Hamza, no novice in the art of magic, they cast a spell upon him so that he can remember neither spells nor counter-spells, and then conjure up fantastic illusions to terrify his followers. Hamza is helpless until a sympathetic sorcerer appears before him and tells him that he must kill the sorcerer iblis to break the spell's power. When Hamza does this, the tide of battle turns against the sorcerers.

Zumurrud Shah learns of these unexpected developments while still on his way to Antali; in which the sorcerers have protected with a forcefield of spells.

"How are we going to get past the talismans?" asked Zumurrud Shah.

'I will send someone and inform them of your approach,' he said. He made a bird of clay, wrote a letter, tied it to the bird's wing, worked his magic, and made it fly to Antali.

Two days later they saw that several jars had appeared. Zumurrud Shah and all his commanders, horsemen, and soldiers were sat on the jars, and off they flew into the sky toward Antali. The next day when the sun in the orient lit up the ancient world, several thousand jars appeared in the sky, and all of Zumurrud Shah's horsemen and soldiers were sitting on the jars. The whole city of Antali was festively decorated, strange and fabulous shapes were made, and fine carpets were laid. Then, when Zumurrud Shah stopped at the gate to Mālik Zanduhush Shīr's house, sorcerers gathered all around Zumurrud Shah to welcome him and escort him into the palace, where a banquet was given in his honor.

What a spectacle! Pride of place in this unlikely airborne cavalcade is given to Zumurrud Shah, who soars so high that he flies over a tall tower and bursts out the top of the composition. Although the huge urn he bestrides has been outfitted with saddle and stirrups, Zumurrud Shah betrays his uneasiness by flailing his arms and opening his eyes wide in amazement. Nonetheless, he is the very picture of composure by comparison to his soldiers. One clings wild-eyed to makeshift reins even as one companion clammers aboard behind him and another peers into the vessel. A warrior in the upper left tentatively ponders the sport of jug-walking. In the center right, still another rider performs a rodeo move as he tries to maintain control of his rambunctious red standard. And in the lower right corner, one particularly hapless 'rider has managed to get himself wedged into his urn, an act whose stupidity he acknowledges with a sheepish look.

Because this scene has so many wonderfully inventive expressions and details, one naturally thinks first of the most original Mughal painters, Dasavanta and Basavanta, as its likely creator. Yet the painting is actually by Shavana, an artist whose earlier works in this catalogue (cat. 42 and 47) are considerably tamer. Nevertheless, Shavana's hand is recognizable in many details: the bristly square brow of the figure to the left of the tower, the focused eyes and tight mustaches, the jaman's pattern and selective modeling, the palette, and even the broad foliate pattern on the neck of the urn in the lower right. Some credit for this fanciful scene must also go to the original author of this tale, for one could fail to be inspired by such outlandish whimsy.

Zumurrud Shah is executed in a markedly different style. His large, dark outline and rounded features rival those of Basavanta's figures in sensitivity, but the eyes are more languid, the lips fuller, and the beard thicker than the corresponding features of Basavanta's Zumurrud Shah (cat. 32). This figure is, in fact, by Madhava Khurd, an artist recognized as being so gifted in rendering faces that he was often called upon to add special faces to collaborative works. Here, he supplies the entire figure of Zumurrud Shah as well as the thick, buoyant clouds, which, on the evidence of the forms they overlap, were apparently the last element to be painted.