With one longstanding separation brought to a happy end, and a brief battle concluded in victory, the story returns to the tribulations of that other star-crossed couple, Sa‘id Farrukh-Nizhad and Malak Mah. Sa‘id Farrukh-Nizhad is transported to Aqiqnagar, where Malak Taysun orders him imprisoned again. Meanwhile, Hamza’s spies—Songhar Balkhi, Lulu, Jaldak, and Khosh-Khiram—join Malak Mah in her search for the prince. As they reconnoiter the streets of Aqiqnagar, Malak Mah falls slightly behind. Her lingering soon has ruinous consequences. An old hag leaps out from behind a tree and snatches Malak Mah by the hair, clasping the other hand over her mouth so that she cannot call for help. The spies eventually turn around to check on Malak Mah, but she has vanished into thin air, the victim of a sorceress’s wiles.

The drama of abduction—a sudden, usually violent change of circumstances—undoubtedly appealed to many Mughal artists, for it offers the bewitching combination of latent apprehension and blood-curdling terror. Dassavanta, however, never makes the latter too explicit, as Tesawa Dasa does, for example, in the spy whom Umar accosts in cat. 55. Instead, Dassavanta mutes the victim’s expression, enticing the audience to imagine and vicariously experience the spine-tingling dread and rush of emotion for themselves. Here, he begins by shifting the kidnapping to an innocuous place beyond the city walls. He reduces the squad of spies from four to two, and shows both professional oggans, Songhar and Lulu, proceeding with grim-faced deliberation. A tree placed centrally at the very edge of the painting serves as a precedent for the Dassavanta’s ability to create a tense and suspenseful atmosphere.

The figures bear all the hallmarks of Dassavanta’s personal style. His oggans are closely related by facial type and a sense of modeling to their counterpart Umar in cat. 36. The alarmed Malak Mah is convincingly disheveled and wide-eyed, an expression particularly well-suited to Dassavanta’s habit of making the pupils of his figures’ eyes larger and more thickly painted than normal. The sorceress’s gnarled features would normally be still more distinctive, but appear to have been obliterated, as often occurs in the manuscript; in fact, they were never finished, as the clear contours of her bony profile and the detectable underdrawing of her hair and eyes attest. Most distinctive of all is the hag’s robe, a strident shade of green modeled emphatically with wet, painterly streaks. This effect is mimicked by another painter, Mukhias, in one of Dassavanta’s collaborative efforts (cat. 58), but in less adept hands becomes drier and more formulaic. As usual, Dassavanta makes the natural environment a vibrant and inviting one, with rustling trees and watchful birds.

Beyond the ridge and trees is the city of Aqiqnagar, which is the work of Mukhias. Many of the forms replicate those found in cat. 58. Beyond the outer walls is a thicket of doves and roofs, the former mushrooming from unseen courtyards, the latter tilting at every odd angle. The colorfully dense and still ensemble is a welcome change of pace from the open but disturbing action in the foreground.
Songhur Balkhi and Lulu are received by Baba Bakhsha, a former spy living in Aqiqnagar.

Songhur Balkhi and Lulu return to their caravan. In hope that Malak Mah might have turned up there, but their comrades have no news of her. They decide that they will need some knock-out drugs to use in the rescue of Sa'id Farrukh-Nizhad, and reckon that they can obtain them most easily from one of the wine-sellers in town. They make their way to a pleasant-looking wine-shop, and install themselves at a well-situated table. Before long, the proprietor escorts two merchants to their table and introduces them as disciples of Baba Bakhsha. Travellers, a veteran spy living in the city. The four begin to converse, and soon the merchants disclose that they belong to a cell of spies given the mission of freeing Sa'id Farrukh-Nizhad, and the four spies are told to procure some knock-out drugs. Delighted at this convergence of missions, Songhur and Lulu reveal that they are the Iranian spies, but caution against being seen together in public for too long. At this, the four spies retire to Baba Bakhsha's establishment. It is a spy's paradise, stockpiled with weapons of all sorts and staffed by youths honing their skills in guerrilla warfare. Songhur and Lulu are brough before Baba Bakhsha, a grizzled but still vital man. Baba Bakhsha embraces them, kisses them on the forehead, and offers them food and wine.

Because this standard scene of greeting makes modest narrative demands, Dasavanta is able to concentrate his inventive powers on the colorful characters who frequent this den of spies. Songhur Balkhi leads the small delegation of Khan's spies into Baba's lair. Baba Bakhsha remains seated, and greets Songhur by clapping both hands around his. Although Baba Bakhsha is said to have been in the business of spying for some seventy years, he is still physically imposing, with muscular arms marked with ritual burns, a hairy chest crisscrossed with heavy chains, and a full, black beard untouched by age. Other attributes—his coiled pose, the reddish fur and heavy ornaments gathered about his waist, the wicked dagger protruding from his belt, the exotic fur-trimmed cap, and, of course, his tigerish mat—make Baba Bakhsha exude a dangerous, slightly savage quality. He also accurses power from his equally formidable coterie of spies, cloaked in fur and outfitted with similar weapons and chains, as well as from the assorted shields, swords, and skins hanging before a brilliant white wall. Dasavanta accentuates both the contours and volume of Baba's arms and legs with a pronounced but nuanced brownish outline, and models selected articles of clothing with deep, European-inspired streaky folds. He also paints the backturned figure in the foreground in the lost-profile view, a radically new view in Mughal painting.

Dasavanta brings together several other signature features. The small, scantily dressed boy in the foreground and the other preparing bhang beneath the banyan tree are closely related to several figures in one of Dasavanta's few ascribed works. He introduces for the first time two large water vessels and an oversized golden vessel; the latter complete with glowing duck heads, a feature found on a prow in one of his earlier paintings (cat. 36). Predictably, too, his figures usually have large pupils and feet with a splayed big toe; likewise, the unmodulated greenish black seen earlier in cat. 59 occurs here. As well, some of the secondary elements of the painting were left to Mukhils. Among these are Hamza's four spires (save for Songhur Balkhi's head), the waveling cubic tilework pattern of the courtyard, and much of the extra-

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Attributed to Dasavanta
and Mukhils

Volume 1, painting number 79, text number 75
India, Mughal dynasty,
1570-1580
Painting 68.4 x 53.1 cm,
folio 78 x 46.2 cm
(detail p. 92-93)
MAK-Austrian Museum of Applied Arts/Contemporary Art, Vienna, 181.1.7/1959
Published: Weindorf 1978, pl. 9; fig 172; pl. 42; Gluck 1995, pl. 40.
1. Holy War, Royal Library, Windsor Castle, IN 100509, f. 22v. See Beach 1982, fig. 10.