TO RID HERSELF OF FOUR SUITORS, MIHRUDUKHT PROMISES THAT SHE WILL HAVE WHOEVER IS FIRST TO RETRIEVE AN ARROW, BUT ESCAPES IN A BOAT WITH AN OLD MAN

Mihrudukht, on a quest to find her husband, Hamza’s son Prince Hamid, is traveling disguised as a young man. A lovely princess, Afsar Banu, takes pity on the wayward youth and invites Mihrudukht to stay with her a while. One day the princess invites Mihrudukht to join her in hunting gazelles. Afsar Banu soon brings down her gazelle, but Mihrudukht chooses hers without success.

“When Mihrudukht had gone very far in the chase, night fell on the plain. She kept on going until daylight, when she reached the edge of the sea. There was a ship sailing by, but no matter how much she cried out, the ship would not turn back. However, when she promised her horse to the captain, he brought the ship around, and Mihrudukht gave him her horse. She got on the ship, but then the sea became turbulent. The sea was as full of water as a crying eye, and the people were in a situation as bad as that of the pupil. The ship struck a rock and broke apart. All were drowned, but by chance Mihrudukht clung to a piece of wood floating on the surface. After two days she reached the shore. She thanked God and went onto the island. As she looked around she spied a rowboat in the distance. There were four young men and one old man in the boat. When they got out of the sea and their eyes fell upon Mihrudukht and they realized that she was a girl, they all desired her and started fighting over her. Mihrudukht saw that the old man in their midst was saying nothing, but was attempting to stop them from fighting. ‘Friends,’ said Mihrudukht, ‘there is no need to fight. I will shoot an arrow, and I will accept whoever brings it back first.’ They agreed to this.

The narrator says that Mihrudukht was an extremely good archer. The young men turned to Mihrudukht and said, ‘All right, shoot the arrow.’ She shot, and the young men ran off after it. The old man turned to Mihrudukht and said, ‘My beauty, what are you planning?’

I thought I would get in the boat and escape,’ she said. The old man was highly pleased by this. Mihrudukht got into the boat, and they set out.”

Mihrudukht’s reprieve is all too temporary, however, and she soon stumbles into yet another misadventure. But that, as the narrator says, is a story for another day.

Banavari, the designer of the painting, illustrates this fetching tale with a simple, even naive composition. Employing a very large figure scale to emphasize each of the six characters, he shows the four youths, each dressed in a different bright color, racing inland. It does not appear that they will be occupied for long. The youth in blue, who holds the end of his jama so that he can run unimpeded, is already within arm’s reach of one arrow, and his counterpart in red has set his sights on a second. The other two youths hotfoot it in other directions. Meanwhile, Mihrudukht and the old man have already begun to head out to sea. The old man is armed with bow and arrows, but Mihrudukht, whose arrow shot sets everything in motion, has dispensed with her own bow and is content to point toward her suitors’ frenzied search.

Before Banavari executed the figures, he turned the painting over to Mah Muhammad, who supplied most of the landscape. Mah Muhammad, whose work to this point in the volume has been generally limited to architecture, accentuates the curving shoreline with a dark green zone that flares out at the bottom of the composition just enough to accommodate the figure of the youth in red. He overlays this area with dense stippling, an old-fashioned technique rarely seen in the Hamzanama. He also punctuates it with five very schematically isolated rock clusters—one for each of the youths plus another to mask the base of the greyish tree trunk at the top—and garnishes them with a ring of leaves and large red flowers. His trees are formulaic, with roots ending abruptly and knotholes placed more artificially than ever.

Banavari conceives his figures as flattened shapes, a trait most conspicuous in the youths’ solidly colored jamas, but most memorable in the single breast protruding from Mihrudukht’s. The water is truly inspired. Flotsam, fish, and snakes sporadically break up its surface, but for the most part the water forms whirls as delicate as soap bubbles. Finally, Banavari probably also strengthened the upper reaches of the landscape, and, perhaps in a slight allusion to the youths’ randy disposition, included four insatiable goats.
Many a maiden’s hand is won by a suitor who demonstrates his worthiness by performing a feat of great strength or skill. Mihrudukht, who earlier used her prowess in archery to throw her four youthful admirers off track, now devises a different sort of challenge for a new group of suitors. Standing on the balcony of a lofty pavilion, she takes aim at a small ring dangling from the mouth of a golden bird installed at the top of an imposing tall tower. With incredible ease, shelets fly an arrow with such unerring aim that it passes cleanly through that ring. Only one who can match this, she declares, will ever earn my affection.

Because this painting has been said of its caption and text, we have no idea how many suitors tried their hand at this challenge and failed. Inevitably, however, a champion emerges from the pack and succeeds where all others have gone awry. The situation is complicated by the fact that Mihrudukht is married, though cruel fate has kept her apart from her husband, Hamid, for months on end. True enough, a handsome young man fires an arrow exactly as Mihrudukht herself had done, and comes to claim her as his prize. When he appears before her, however, Mihrudukht swoons as she recognizes him, for he is none other than Hamid.

This climactic story is told in two largely identical scenes. The first captures Mihrudukht as she draws her bow. Her immediate attendants buzz at the audacity of her challenge, but the three maidservants lingering outside the pavilion entrance seem oblivious to the ongoing drama. One man, almost certainly a watchman who has momentarily stepped inside the compound, looks up at the golden target; another, probably a disheartened suitor, glances over his shoulder as he flees. The second illustration repeats the setting of a garden pavilion, altering only the location of the entrance and some minor architectural details. Now the dashing Hamid addresses Mihrudukht, but she has fallen in shock at his sudden appearance. Consternation spreads throughout the garden, where five unsuccessful suitors gaze at the momentous reunion, and outside the compound walls, where Hamid’s groom waits anxiously with the prince’s stallion.

The sequential illustrations are executed by two different teams of artists. Basavana, who seems to have designed this painting, creates a spacious garden by reducing the size of its walls, and by introducing a distant side wall at an oblique angle. His painterly touch is apparent in both the spreading plantain tree and the pair of palm trees, whose forms complement that of the soaring tower in different ways. Mihrudukht herself has a slightly more blockish head than Basavana’s later images of women in profile, but also has a distinctly narrow eye, subtle wisps of a smile, and gauzy veil; this combination strongly recalls Basavana’s figure of Khosh-Khira in cat. 66. A second artist has clearly supplied the other women on the balcony, for their flattened faces and large, globular breasts are entirely unlike those features in Basavana’s work.

To judge by the appearance of many familiar architectural patterns, this second artist is Jagana. He uses his favorite trilobed pattern twice on the garden fountain, and again outlines the doorway panels with a black- and-white inlaid border. Likewise, he repeats from the dado and gateway of cat. 35 the intricate cubic pattern on the balcony balustrade and the interlocking arrow-headed pattern of the outer wall. The exuberantly wavy patterns on the capitals and bases of the slender sandstone columns have no precedent in Jagana’s work, but are probably the most striking manifestation of his decorative interests.
Although the text and caption describing this scene have been lost, the following text and painting number provide enough clues to allow us to identify its hero and villain and to illustrate the illustration in the manuscript.

In the opening lines, Prince Hamid vows to heap further abuse on an opponent if he does not do as he is told. That opponent seems to be Mahval, one of the henchmen of Malik Khizrshah, the ruler of Nüriya. Soon afterward, Mahval reports to Khizrshah and urges him to avenge his humiliation. Khizrshah reads two hundred thousand men to teach the insolent Iranians a lesson, and Hamid answers by amassing similarly vast legions. Before the battle is joined, however, Hamid sends an emissary to Khizrshah with an ultimatum to convert. Afsar Banu, Khizrshah's daughter, comes to court dressed as a man, and impudently rejects the emissary's demand. The armies clash the next day. On the following day, Afsar Banu takes the field wearing a veil, and finally encounters none other than Hamid himself. She removes her veil, thereby revealing her great beauty, and Hamid is hopelessly smitten.

The reintroduction of Afsar Banu relates this episode to cat. 25, in which Hamid's plucky wife, Mihrduki, is befriended by Afsar Banu. That painting, number 91 of volume 11, appears toward the beginning of a series of stories involving Mihrduki; this one, eleven illustrations later, rounds out this sequence of events by continuing a suddenly amorous relationship between Mihrduki's long-lost husband and her erstwhile companion.

Before he falls into his new romantic adventure, however, Hamid has other affairs to settle. Mahval has appeared at the court of Hamid, and evidently has spurned his order to submit to Hamza. A fight breaks out. The brawny Mahval draws his sword on the unarmed Hamid, but the prince leaps up and catches hold of his wrist before the brute can strike a blow. Then, knocking him to the ground, Hamid plants his foot on the infidel's throat, grasps his ear, and threatens to rip it from his head. Hamid's attendants look on with astonishment as Mahval pleads for mercy.

This lively scene is the joint effort of three artists. Shrivana, who probably designed the overall composition, is responsible for the courtyard and much of the splendid pavilion. He applies his trademark foliate border to the carpet and even to part of the throne back. Beyond this, he supplies the carpet, throne, fence, eaves, and unusual trefoil merlons, the last of these appearing only once in cat. 59. Curiously, he allocates the remainder of the pavilion to Mukhils, an artist with a penchant for bold and sometimes exuberant forms. From cat. 58 and 64, we recognize Mukhils's hand in the stark pavilion base, the florid capitals and bases of the clustered columns, the flaring supports of the miniature domes, the pinwheeling arrowheaded tiles of the rooftop, and the magnificent and utterly flat central dome itself.

Having delegated this much of the backdrop to Mukhils, Shrivana can concentrate on the figures. He again resorts to his favorite figure type: men with plump faces, tapering chins, broad bodies, and jambs with oversized patterns; all these features are found in many of his earlier works, notably cat. 45 and 47. As accomplished as these figures are, Shrivana yields the two key figures engaged in the rough-and-tumble scuffle to a third artist. This is Kesava Dasa, who seems to have a special affinity for subjects involved in violent confrontations. Hamid's face has flaked off, but the color and weave of his turban, the modeling and pattern of his jardan, and the fine drawing of his feet are all unmistakable indications of Kesava's handiwork. Similarly, Mahval bears a strong resemblance to Haybat, the enemy oggar in cat. 55, and to Zumurrud Shah in cat. 28. Kesava completed the painting with dark, brooding trees, strongly outlined rocks, and a streaky sky.
The vainglorious Zumurrud Shah, who constantly seeks to exercise his dominion over all the world, gets more than he had bargained for in the figure of Malik Iraj, a sun-worshipper who has yet to throw in his lot with the gigantic sovereign. At Faranghushia, a city near the boundaries of the Darkness, Zumurrud Shah goads the young Iraj into a fight that he knows he will surely win. Iraj answers the call, however, with unimaginable ferocity and strength. First, he savage ly rips the trunk right off Zumurrud Shah's elephant, causing the beast to spew blood all over the courtyard. Then, catching hold of the massive giant, he hurls him 120 cubits into the air. Zumurrud Shah plunges to the earth, where he lands with a thunderous crash in a heap of dust. At this sight, Iraj's troops let out a tremendous roar of acclaim and his drummers strike up a frenzied beat. Even Iraj completes his humiliation of Zumurrud Shah by binding the bewildered giant. Zumurrud Shah uncharacteristically acknowledges his worthy opponent with gestures and words of approval.

"Zumurrud Shah looked and saw that all the people of the city of Faranghushia were standing on the tops of tall buildings, on the mountains, on the walls of Alexander's garden, and on the hills, and when their gaze fell upon that adept warrior, they began to shout. Malik Iraj bowed his head."

Zumurrud Shah does not stop there. Instead, seeing Malik Malakut shower Iraj with gold, he extols Iraj as Harsha's equal, calls him 'son,' and awards him vast tracts of land in the east.

"Zumurrud Shah said, 'My son Iraj, I offer you thirteen thousand leagues of the kingdom of the east.' So saying, he extended his hand, took the ring from his finger, and gave it to Malik Iraj. Seven times he kissed the ground, and then he put the ring on his finger."

Iraj accepts these honors graciously, and puts his city at Zumurrud Shah's disposal.

Kesava Dasa, who designed the composition, excels in the dramatic details of this episode. He shows a compact Iraj, legs widespread to increase his thrusting ability, lifting his colossal opponent high above his shoulders, a pose obviously reminiscent of the rendering of Farrukh-Shah's display of heroic strength (cat. 52). Zumurrud Shah's huge crown falls to the ground, and parts of the balastrade, broken by his flailing limbs, shatter on the tiled courtyard. These details conflate Zumurrud Shah's precipitate ascent and descent, showing both the cause and effect of the giant's ignominious defeat.

For unknown reasons, the faces of Zumurrud Shah and Iraj have suffered an exceptionally concentrated loss of paint. Yet the underdrawing of both figures is so accomplished that the absence of pigment in these areas hardly detracts from the visual impact of the work. Exhibiting again his predilection for explicit, animated expressions, Kesava details Zumurrud Shah's gaping mouth, bushy eyebrows, deep-set, wrinkled eyes, and even the hair on his mustache and pate. All that remains of his normally full beard, now too thin to cover even the vertical lines of the wall behind him, is a dark fringe of black paint studded with tiny jewels. Kesava strengthens the contours and folds of Zumurrud Shah's green jama with rich, thoroughly blended streaks of black paint; the result is a tangible sense of volume well beyond the rudimentary modeling employed by most of his contemporaries. More schematic is his rendering of Zumurrud Shah's hands, which are flattened, glove-like shapes with a pronounced stylized curve running from the index finger to the thumb. Conversely, he achieves the same level of naturalistic mastery in this spectacularly bloodied, albeit docile, elephant; as he did in cat. 52, once more taking note of such features as the deep folds of skin around the eye and the speckled pink patches on the forehead and ear.

Once Kesava had established the architectural framework of the composition and sketched the figures of Zumurrud Shah, Iraj, and the elephant, he turned the painting over to Mitra, who supplied the assorted retainers and architectural detailing. Mitra likes to deploy his figures in bunches, a device used to particularly strong effect in the five attendants cowering in and gawking from a narrow doorway. His figures often have conspicuously rounded faces, an appearance exacerbated by their distinctively flattened circular turbans. Despite his preference for this idiosyncratic type, Mitra produces a convincing range of facial expressions, from the puffed-out cheeks of the trumpet-blowing to the wary glances of the attendants below.