PLATE 8

*The Foppish Dervish Rebuffed*

When the wise and holy sufi Abu'l 'Abbas Qasab came upon a foppish dervish, busily sewing his artfully ascetic robe, he spoke strongly: "That robe is your God!"

Basawan unfailingly strikes dramatic chords. Here, the lively wiggling of the dervish's patched coat captures our eyes immediately, and from it we are led to the two men: the gloowering, hostile fop and the firmly persuasive sufi. After making his dramatic points, the artist lets us expose further. We enjoy Basawan's world of suckling animals and take in the baroque rhythms of entwining trees. Counterpointing the anecdote, one of nature's best attired creatures, a peacock, strides on the rooftop and huffily turns his back on his "holy" rival. But in Basawan's work there is always more to find, such as the chambers and passageways of a massive Mughal building, into which he lures us, and where imponderables await. This picture, from one of Akbar's most precious copies of a literary classic, represents Basawan's mature style.
PLATE 9

Noah's Ark

According to Muslim tradition, Noah's ark was threatened by Iblis, the devil, who was thrown overboard, as here, by his sons. This delightful retelling of the story can be ascribed to Miskin, one of Akbar's greatest artists, whose sleek, often humorous animals are unmistakable. As usual in his work, some of the animals here were studied from life, while others—such as the dippy lions—staring at us from the crowded hold—emerged from Miskin's inner zoo.

Miskin was happiest with a subdued palette, as here, to which he added a few bright accents. His compositions are organic, bringing to mind such natural patterns as the roots of trees or veins of leaves.
PLATE 10

_Lord Krishna Lifts Mount Govardhan_

To protect his followers from the wrath of the rival God Indra, who has conjured up a holocaust, Krishna lifts Mount Govardhan like some huge umbrella. The villagers and their herds evoke today's India and must have been even more familiar to sixteenth-century viewers. Such pictures were intended by Akbar to explain Hinduism to his Muslim courtiers, and thereby instill them with religious toleration. The artist, therefore, has made every effort to lend credulity to the God's miracle.

Amusingly, Akbar assigned one of his most orthodox Muslim men of letters to translate the _Harivamsa—Badaoni_, the author of the _Muntakhab-i-Tawarikh_ ("Selections from Histories"). Unlike Abu'l Fazl, whose _Akbar-nama_ he must have considered pure propaganda, Badaoni strongly disapproved of Akbar's religious policies, and it is remarkable that the emperor suffered him so leniently. It is as much as Badaoni's selections is a rich source of personal anecdote ("gossip"); it seems likely that the emperor found him as amusingly informative as we do.

With slight reservations, we assign this delightful painting, with its humorously characterized people and animals, to Miskin.

PLATE 11

_The Raven Addressing the Assembled Animals_

This mountain of birds and beasts may come from the copy of the _Amur-i Subahi_ prepared for Akbar by Abu'l Fazl himself. Its large scale and brilliantly imaginative conception link it to such manuscripts as the _Harivamsa_ (Plate 10) and the _Akbar-nama_ (Plates 12-14).

Although natural history paintings were especially favored by Akbar's son, Jahangir (Plates 25-27), Akbar's paintings, while less sensitively naturalistic, are imbued with fuller animal vitality. Without sacrificing their endearing innocence, Miskin painted birds and animals with high spirits and wit verging on human personality. As late as 1590, the ambiance of Akbar's circle was still earthy and intuitive; Akbar and his artist could empathize with all creatures, a talent progressively inhibited by sophistication and self-consciousness. Here there is a perfect coordination of feeling, insight, and technical refinement.
PLATES 12–13

Akbar Restrains Hawai, an Enraged Elephant and Spectators

This double-page composition is one of the most exciting miniatures from the copy of Akbar's biography by Abu'l Fazl owned by the emperor himself. The episode is best described in the author's words:

"Hawai ("Sky-Rocket") was a mighty animal...a match for the world in cholera, passionateness, fierceness and wickedness." Elephant drivers mounted him with difficulty and scarcely dared make him light. Akbar, then nineteen, however, mounted Hawai at the very height of his ferocity and pitted him against Ran Bagha, a beast of almost equal power. Such behavior "turned the gall-bladder of the lion-hearted to water." Atta Khan, Akbar's prime minister, was summoned to put a stop to this imperial folly. He came, bared his head, cried, and lamented. But Akbar persisted until Hawai had triumphed over his opponent. Ran Bagha turned to flee, pursued by Hawai. After a long chase, he came to the river Jamna and the great bridge of boats. Some of the pontoons were submerged, others lifted up under the weight of the animals. Akbar restrained Hawai's fiery temper; Ran Bagha escaped with his life. Later, the emperor told Abu'l Fazl that he knowingly and intentionally mounted on murderous elephants in heat...thereby putting himself at God's mercy, for he could not "support the burden of life under God's displeasure."

(paraphrased and quoted from the Akbarnama, vol. II, pp. 234–235)