**Public access description**

The Hamzanama, or 'Book of Hamza' was commissioned by the great Mughal emperor Akbar in the mid-16th century. The epic story of a character based very loosely on the life of the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad chronicles the fantastic adventures of Hamza as he and his band of heroes fight against the enemies of Islam. The stories, from a long-established oral tradition, were written down in Persian, the language of the court, in multiple volumes. These originally had 1400 illustrations, and their creation is known to have taken 15 years. Work is thought to have begun in about 1562. Fewer than 200 illustrations have survived, and the original text is only that on the back of each remaining folio, meaning that the complicated stories are often difficult to follow. This painting depicts the dismembered body of Hamza in the cave, following his death in battle at Mount Uhud. The folio was acquired by Sir Raleigh Gilbert Egerton in Srinagar, Kashmir, in 1913.

**Descriptive line**

Painting, Hamza, killed in battle at Mount Uhud, is beheaded and mutilated, illustration from the epic romance the Hamzanama, gouache on cotton, Mughal, c.1562-1577

**Physical description**

Painting, gouache on cotton, depicting Hamza, killed in battle at Mount Uhud, is beheaded and mutilated, illustration from the epic romance the Hamzanama. Within an enclosure, surrounded by embroidered screens, is seated on the throne a bearded man dressed in a green and gold robe and turban, behind whom are other bearded men, one of whom offers a white scarf to the seated man. Before him, another man of high rank presents a young woman clad in a flowered blue choli who is partially concealed by a screen. Before him, another man of high rank presents a young woman clad in a flowered blue choli who is partially concealed by a screen. In the upper part of the picture is a cave in which lies the decapitated body of a man dressed in an orange robe with a katar (dagger) thrust into his white girdle. Around him are the disorderly remains of a feast. To the left are the same man and woman, seen lower down in the enclosure. In the background are rocks and trees. On the reverse side is a page of manuscript in black ink on coarse paper splashed with traces of gold. Hamza was a character based partly on a historical Iranian insurrectionary leader from Sistan, and was also identified with the uncle of the Prophet Mohammed.

**Dimensions**

Height: 70.5 cm page, Width: 55 cm page, Height: 865 mm Mount, Weight: 640 mm Mount

**Museum number**

IM.4-1921

**Object history note**

The 'Hamzanama' was the first major project undertaken by the new painting studio of the Mughal court. Directed by two Iranian masters (Mir Sayyid 'Ali and ‘Abdus Samad) brought to India by Humayun, work began under Akbar as early as 1562 and was said to have taken fifteen years to complete, drawing from artists from all over northern Hindustan. It was said to have consisted of fourteen volumes. The paintings are unusual for their large format and for being painted on prepared cotton rather than on paper.

**URL**

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O18925/hamzanama-painting-unknown/