Public access description
The illustrated volumes describing the fantastic adventures of Hamza (called the "Hamzanama", or "Book of Hamza") were commissioned by the Mughal emperor Akbar who ruled from 1556 to 1605. They were the first major project of the royal painting workshops and are known to have taken 15 years to complete, probably between about 1562 and 1577. The work was directed by Mir Sayyed 'Ali and 'Abd as-Samad, two Iranian masters brought to India by Akbar's father. No independent, contemporary version of the Persian text survives and many of the original pages are missing. It is now therefore difficult to reconstruct the complicated stories of the battles between Hamza and his heroic followers, and their enemies, who included infidels, dragons, witches and giants. This page shows Hamza killing a lion, with a gory depiction of a figure who has been sliced in half in the foreground.

Descriptive line
Painting, Hamza kills a lion on the way to visit Anoshirvan at Mada', from the epic romance the Hamzanama, gouache on cotton, 1562-1577

Physical description
Painting, gouache on cotton, Hamza kills a lion on the way to visit Anoshirvan at Mada', from the epic romance the Hamzanama. Soon after Hamza's arrival, Mihr-Nigar falls in love with him. He then breaks in a magic horse, is rescued by Buzurjmihr, and gains honors with Anoshirvan. In the upper middle of the picture a young man in an orange and gold robe, green trousers and white turban, mounted on a black horse, cleaves the head of a lion with his sword. A young man on a white horse watches this feat with admiration. In the foreground is the dismounted corpse of a man, cleft from the head to the waist, clad in a green tunic and red trousers. At his side is a sheathed sword and on the ground is a mace. His brown horse is seen disappearing on the left. The subjects are set in a rocky landscape with sparse vegetation, trees and bamboo. On the verso is a page of Persian manuscript in black ink on coarse paper with patches of gold.

Dimensions
Height: 65.2 cm, Width: 51.8 cm

Museum number
IM.5-1921

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 Sayyd ‘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/O66604/hamzanama-painting-unknown/