
THE ELEPHANT IN MUGHAL PAINTING

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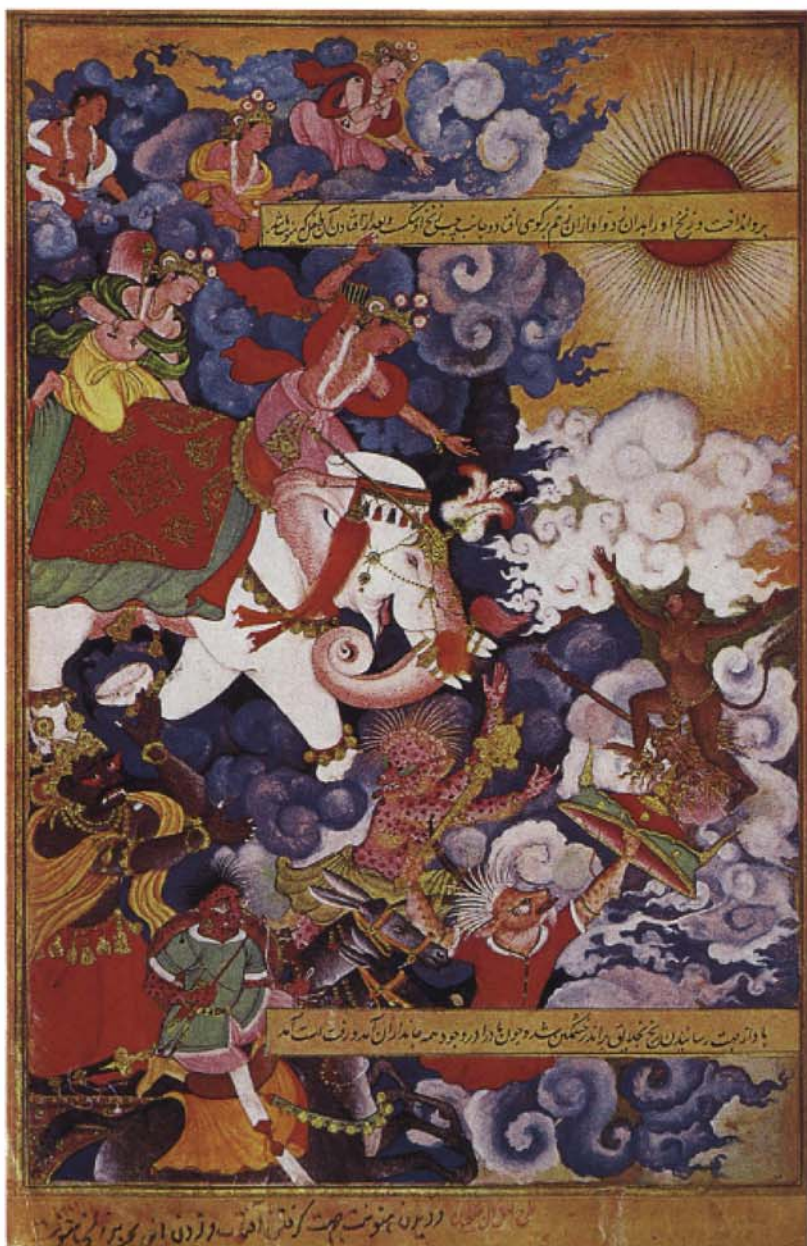
The Mughals were fascinated by the elephant. Migrating from the remote Central Asian state of Farghana, they did not have much familiarity with this huge, strange-looking animal. The emperor Babur was impressed with its sharp intelligence, faithful nature, and indispensability in the battlefield. He also found it very useful as a pack animal carrying heavy loads across large and swift-running rivers, thick jungles, and difficult mountain terrain. He enjoyed watching the deadly sport of the elephant fight as noted in his memoirs, *Tuzuk-i Baburi*.¹

Akbar's interest in the elephant almost verged on infatuation. From boyhood when he was presented with a perfectly quiet elephant (named Dilsankar) by his father, till the last days of his life when he watched some of his fiercest elephants in combat, his interest never waned. The *Akbarnama* is full of references to the elephants received by him as homage or booty from all over the country, trapped by him in the jungles of central India, Gujarat, and Bihar, or acquired through his nobles and officials. Many of the elephants are named and identified in a fitting manner. Abu'l Fazl deals with elephants in his seven-section-long text in the *A'in-i Akbari*, where every single detail about them, their classification, upkeep, food, kinds of staff appointed to train and look after them, fines levied for slackness or wrongdoing by the staff, and interesting comments on the

khasa elephants (for exclusive use of the emperor) and how Akbar handled them, is described.²

Akbar had at any given time as many as 101 elephants for his personal use, each given a name, an exalted position, trained staff for proper upkeep, and special diet. These were used for ceremonial rides, shikar, sport including the elephant fight, and for the battlefield. Abu'l Fazl's comments on the war elephants are worth repeating: "The noise of battle makes some superior elephants just as fierce as at the rutting season; even a sudden start may have such an effect. Thus His Majesty's elephant Gajmukta: he gets brisk as soon as he hears the sound of the imperial drum, and gets the abovementioned discharge."³

The painters of Akbar's sprawling *taswirkhana* (atelier) took great delight in showing many of these elephants, either in illustrations of biographical works like the *Akbarnama* or as individual studies of favourite animals for mounting in an album. Besides these, there are numerous pictures of elephants in several historical, biographical, religious, and literary manuscripts illustrated for Akbar. Though these are not always images of specific elephants, the painters drew them with the same care and attention. Since the Mughal painters were from different parts of the country where elephants had been painted



1
 Indra prevents Hanuman from catching the sun.
 Illustration from the *Ramayana* prepared for Emperor Akbar, 1589. Composed by La'1 and painted by Jagjivan. 30.3 x 24.0 cm. Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum Trust, Jaipur. No. A.G. 2016.

2

Hawai mounted by Akbar pursuing Ran Bagha across the pontoon bridge on the Jamuna. From the *Akbarnama*. Left half of a double-page composition by Basawan and painting by Chetar. 33 x 20 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. No. 2-1896 IS 22/117. Courtesy V&A Picture Library.



or shown in reliefs and sculptures in the round from the dawn of history, their works are accurate, attractive, and full of vigour. This is apparent in the images of the great *Dastan-i Amir Hamza* or the *Anwar-i Suhaili* (1570) or the *Razmnama* (1584–86), and the *Ramayana* (1589) manuscripts. Of special interest among these is the detail of a picture in the *Ramayana* showing Indra, king of the gods, mounted on his white elephant Airavata (figure 1). The painters La'l and Jagjiwan no doubt followed the classical Indian art iconography. Nevertheless, their handling of the subject undoubtedly reveals familiarity with such an elephant present in the imperial elephant stables (*filkhana*).

However, the best pictures of elephants in Akbar's *taswirkhana* are to be found in the

Akbarnama fragment in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Among the pick of the lot is a double-page illustration showing Akbar's adventure with the full-blooded (*mast*) elephant Hawai. Akbar was adventure-loving and fearless. He could ride the most fierce and deadly demon in *mast* when even its own mahout declined to ride. Abu'l Fazl writes: "... he rode more than a hundred times on *mast* elephants which had killed their drivers and were men-slayers, and were capable of smiting a city or perturbing an army and engaged them in fighting."⁴

The elephant Hawai, according to Abu'l Fazl, was "a mighty animal and reckoned among the special elephants. In cholera, passionateness, fierceness and wickedness he was a match for the world. Strong and experienced drivers who had spent a long life in riding similar elephants mounted him with difficulty.... One day without hesitation Akbar mounted this elephant, in the very height of its ferocity.... After that he pitted him against the elephant Ran Bagha which nearly approached him in his qualities.... The lion-hearted Shahinshah calmly went on with his terrifying pursuit until the elephant Hawai by the strength of a hidden arm, and the divine fortune, got the victory over his opponent. Ran Bagha let fall the strong cable of steadfastness and turned to flee. Hawai looked neither behind nor before and disregarded heights and hollows and went like the wind in pursuit of the fugitive.... Owing to the great weight of those two mountain forms the pontoons were sometimes submerged and sometimes lifted up."⁵ The leading master of Akbar's atelier, Basawan, composed the scene with these two elephants on the pontoon bridge over the river with great dexterity and elan (figure 2). The

defeated Ran Bagha is shown running for his life followed by the triumphant Hawai flapping his ears and curling his trunk, controlled by Akbar with his special *ankusha* (goad). Akbar is also manipulating the *kalawa* (neckband) with his left leg. The elephants, interestingly enough, have light-coloured trunk, forehead, ears, and underbelly – all signs of rarity and good stock, enhancing their position and value. It may be mentioned here that the elephant Hawai on which Hemu was riding during the Battle of Panipat, was none other than the “Hawai” of Akbar.⁶

Akbar was extremely fond of shikar. Among all kinds of shikar, elephant trapping (*kheda*) is the most difficult and dangerous. He undertook numerous expeditions in the dense forests of Malwa and the adjoining regions to capture wild elephants. In two remarkable paintings the Akbari masters La’l and Sanwala, and Mahesh and Keshav *Khward* (younger) present some details of Akbar’s elephant-catching adventure. During his return march from Mandu to Agra, Akbar was keen to capture a young *mast* elephant remarkable for the beauty of his movements noticed in a herd of seventy elephants in the forest near Sipri. When all attempts failed Akbar called for the fighting elephant Bhirun (or Ran Bhirun) to fight with it in order to exhaust it. Mahesh visualized the scene in a wonderful manner with the two fighting elephants watched by Akbar on a piebald horse in the centre of the composition (figure 3). Another large elephant captured by his men is shown tied to a dried up tree at the top left. In the lower half divided into diagonal segments, several wild elephants are shown frolicking in a waterbody and two trained female elephants lead another wild elephant



3
Akbar watching elephant catching near Sipri with Ran Bhirun fighting with a wild giant. From the *Akbarnama*. Composition by Mahesh and painting by Keshav *Khward*. 32.5 x 20.0 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. No. 2-1896 IS 40/117. Courtesy V&A Picture Library.

while the courtiers on horseback and the men engaged for the expedition look on. Mahesh was assisted by Keshav *Khward* who did the colouring.

The second painting by La’l and Sanwala is visually more attractive and compositionally more effective (figure 4). After the elephants were captured and herded within the fort of Sipri, the leader fought with another special elephant of Akbar, Khandi Rai, and broke the strong stone wall of the fort and went off into the wild. It was recaptured by Yusuf Khan and made to fight with Ran Bhirun, to break it in. Finally it was brought to the foot of a large tree and bound with strong ropes. “Slowly he grew tame, and was gradually included among the special elephants. He received the name of Gajpati,” reports Abu’l Fazl.⁷ La’l was a great master with an eye for detail and a flair for



4

Akbar inspecting the newly captured Gajpati outside Sipri fort. From the Akbarnama. Composition by Lal and painting by Sanwala. 32.5 x 20.0 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. No. 2-1896 IS 39/117. Courtesy V&A Picture Library.

expressing the true spirit of the subject in his composition. Here he has shown with commendable ease not only the newly captured giant Gajpati, but also the powerful Ran Bhirun, “distinguished among the special elephants”. Gajpati is expressing his anger and disapproval by raising his right foot and flapping his ears. La’l and his able assistant Sanwala have used muted colours for the field, the vegetation, the fort in the upper horizon, and the bare-bodied *bhois* (elephant handlers) to highlight the gigantic elephants, and the emperor riding a chestnut-coloured stallion of fine proportion. La’l’s familiarity with the elephants of Akbar’s *filkhana* is apparent from the treatment of the three shown in the painting. Ran Bhirun has a whitish underbelly, white ears, and a partly white trunk while the youthful Gajpati of excellent proportions has similar white touches.

There are several other paintings in this manuscript showing some of the finest elephants of Akbar’s *khana filkhana*. The rebellion of Ali Quli Khan Zaman and his brother Bahadur Khan in the eastern provinces and Akbar’s counter-measures to curb it were a long-drawn affair, illustrated in no less than nineteen paintings, including a few remarkable ones.

Akbar made elaborate preparations for the eastern campaign in 1567 in order to capture the rebels, and as many as two thousand war elephants were pressed into service. The mighty Ganga was then in spate and Akbar’s companions were apprehensive. But the emperor was in a hurry and without any hesitation decided to cross the river on his special elephants. He had a group of seven elephants and five horses and crossed the turbulent river in the darkness of the night.

Two of his most fierce and best elephants, Khuda Bux and Bal Sundar,⁵ were in the group, and the former suddenly became very cautious after making the crossing. Akbar had so much faith in his elephants that he took the cue, decided to make a halt there and postpone his pursuit for the night. The scene is graphically presented in a remarkable painting (figure 5). It is among the finest examples in the manuscript and stands out for its dense colouring and effective composition. The figure of Akbar looms large at the top of a pyramidal arrangement of men and animals against the surging blue-grey swirls of the mighty river. The row of dark trees and towers of temples and houses in the distant horizon cast ghostly shadows on the lush green grounds



5
Akbar crossing the Ganga in spate on elephantback. From the *Akbarnama*. Painting by Ikhlas and august portrait by Madhav. 32.5 x 20.0 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. No. 2-1896 IS 60/117. Courtesy V&A Picture Library.

War elephant
Chitranand crushes
the rebel elephant
Udiya. From the
Akbarnama. Left half
of a double-page
painting. Composition
and august portrait
probably by Keshav
Kalan and painting by
Chetarmuni.
31.9 x 20.2 cm.
Victoria and Albert
Museum, London.
No. 2-1896 IS 115/117.
Courtesy V&A Picture
Library.



of the river bank. The name of the composer is not written, while Ikhlas finished it and the portraits were retouched by Madhav.

In another painting of this series the masters of Akbar's painting atelier have frozen the drama and fury of the moment when the royal elephant Chitranand collided with rebel elephant Udiya and killed him (figure 6). In the battlefield Bahadur Khan's horse was suddenly struck by an arrow in the mouth; the horse reared and he was flung to the ground. When Ali Quli was making enquiries about Bahadur, Chitranand, who was in a *masf* condition, attacked Gaj Bhanwar, "which was one of the special elephants and which had ceased to be *masf*". The latter ran for his life when Chitranand charged at Udiya and with a "mountain-breaking blow stretched him on the dust of destruction". The painters, whose

names have not been recorded on the lower margin of the mount, succeeded in capturing these dramatic moments in an amazing manner. Chitranand, armed in his headshield, has struck his blow with such force and fury that Udiya's neck is broken. His agony and pathetic plight can be fathomed from the glassy look in his left eye.⁹

The other painting singled out here is a composition by Miskina that shows the punishment meted out to those who joined hands with Ali Quli (figure 7). The punishment for sedition and rebellion was always ruthless. The Mughals sometimes employed trained elephants to trample the offenders. In this painting four elephants were engaged for the task and the gory details in the painting reveal their accomplishment. However, in the centre of the painting we find the elephant catching one man with his trunk and playing with him. This is Mirza Mirak Mashhadi, who was a Saiyid and foster-brother (*atka*) of Akbar's wife Salima Begum. As the clear sign for his execution was not given, the elephant "caught him in his trunk and squeezed him and the stocks, and shoulder-boards and flung him from one side to other for five successive days" before he was released. The elephants were well trained enough to precisely follow the spirit of the order. Akbar had a "punishment elephant" which was so wise that if the victim it was supposed to trample, though found guilty by the judge, was in reality innocent, the elephant would refuse to move and gently push the terrified man or woman aside with his trunk.¹⁰

The Mughals were fond of all kinds of outdoor sport, and one exclusively preserved for their pleasure was the elephant fight. The fight of two giant elephants specially trained by



7
Trained elephants
executing the followers
of Ali Quli while Mirza
Mirak Mashhadi was
spared. From the
Akbarnama.

Composition by
Miskina and painting
by Banwali Kalan.
33.5 x 20.0 cm.

Victoria and Albert
Museum, London.
No. 2-1896 IS 90/117.
Courtesy V&A Picture
Library.

their mahouts or even drugged is a deadly sport often ending in tragedy. In fact, the Italian traveller Manucci who stayed in the Mughal court in the third quarter of the seventeenth century, wrote: "When the king makes them [the elephants] fight, the wives of the drivers remove their ornaments, smash their bracelets, and put on mourning just as if they were widows. If their husbands come back alive they give a great feast, just as if newly married; for in these encounters and combats the drivers put their lives in great jeopardy."¹¹ Thomas Roe found Jahangir sitting at the *jharokha* (window) at noon to see the fight of the elephants and wild beasts every day during his stay at Ajmer and Mandu.¹² There are many excellent pictures of elephant fights in Mughal albums and manuscripts including two oft-reproduced examples in the *Baburnama*

and *Akbarnama*. The former shows Babur witnessing an elephant fight on the banks of the Jamuna before a grand reception given to his nobles.¹³ The second one is a *nimqalam* (drawing with light colouring) work from the brush of Farrukh with the portrait of Akbar by Basawan (figure 8). It shows Akbar witnessing an elephant fight during his visit to Nagaur arranged by Khan Kilan, the *fauzdar* (commandant) of the city.¹⁴

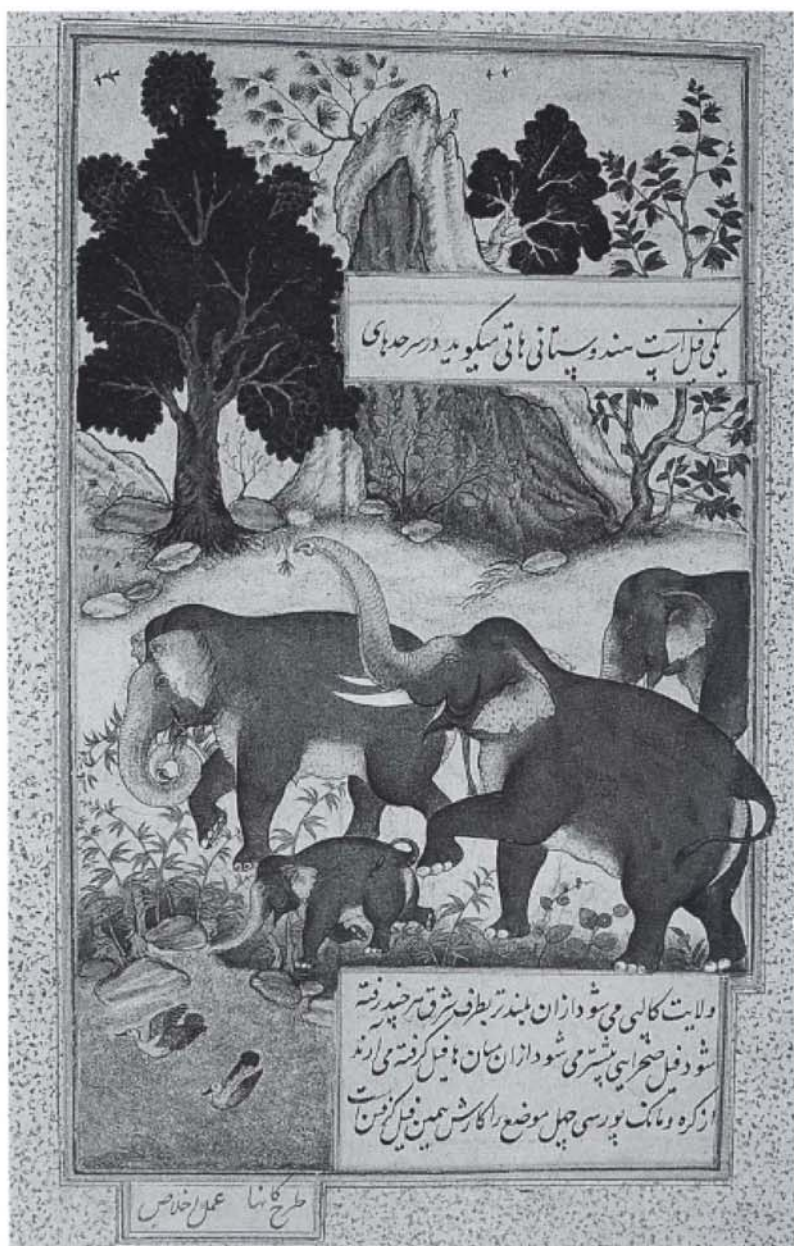
Pictures of an elephant herd or group are not rare. The finest among these are to be found in the detached folios of the *Baburnama* and *Akbarnama*. The painting of a family of elephants designed by Kanha and painted by Ikhlas from the *Baburnama*, now in the Sadruddin Aga Khan Collection, brings out the gentleness and intelligence of these massive animals (figure 9). It shows a calf being gently nudged by a huge tusker with its left forepaw towards the waterhole while the mother elephant keeps a watchful eye with her ears turned and trunk curled up. A fourth animal, visible partly, completes the group. Kanha's precise lines, and the judicious use of colours brilliantly capture the bond in the family. It reminds us of the observation made by Abu'l Fazl in the *A'in-i Akbari* that "an elephant never hurts the female... he never will fight with young elephants, nor does he think it proper to punish them.... When he was in the height of excitement a small elephant came in his way; he kindly lifted up the small one with his trunk, set him aside, and then renewed the combat."¹⁵

Though Jahangir's interest in elephants was not as all-pervading as Akbar's, it was much more than usual. He maintained a large *filkhana* containing many prize animals, presented special elephants to leading nobles,



8

Akbar watching an elephant fight while on a visit to Nagaur. From the *Akbarnama*. Painting by Farrukh with august portrait by Basawan. 32.5 x 20.0 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. No. 2-1896 IS 81/117. Courtesy V&A Picture Library.



9
 Elephant herd near
 Kalpi. Stray folio from
 the *Baburnama*.
 Composition by
 Kanha and painting by
 Ikhlas. 22.5 x 13.6 cm.
 Collection of Prince
 Saqrudin Aga Khan,
 Geneva.

10

Alam Guman, the chief elephant of Rana Amar Singh, and other elephants. Painting on cloth. Painter's name illegible. National Museum, New Delhi.



visiting envoys, and favourites, and collected rare elephants from far and near. He even participated in an elaborate *kheda*, or elephant-trapping expedition, near Dohad during his leisurely travels to Gujarat and central India and captured many elephants. He looked at them with the eye of a zoologist, taking note of their behaviour, gestation period, and so on, and even gave orders to use lukewarm water for their bath in winter.¹⁶ Being an ardent lover of painting, Jahangir got many of his elephants painted by his master artists. Some of these have their names and other relevant details written in by Jahangir or Shah Jahan. However, none of the portraits of the majestic animals found in the royal *muraqqa*'s preserved in Berlin, Tehran, and Washington, DC are identified. Since the number of elephants mentioned in the *Tuzuk*

is fairly large, it is not possible to hazard any guess about their identity.

Among the portraits of prized elephants identified by Jahangir, three stand out for special mention: Alam Guman in the National Museum, New Delhi, Gaj Ratan in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, and Pawan Gaj in a private collection at Kuwait. Alam Guman (Arrogant of the Earth) was the chief elephant of Rana Amar Singh of Mewar. It was sent with seventeen other male and female elephants of the Rana's stud by Prince Khurram to Jahangir as a Nauroz gift on March 21, 1614. The emperor was immensely pleased with it and the following day, knowing it to be propitious for a ride, mounted it and "scattered about much money".¹⁷ The picture, larger than an average album picture and painted on cloth instead of paper, shows the

giant elephant of majestic proportion tied to a tree along with three young calves (figure 10). It has a pinkish trunk, light-coloured neck lapel, and ears with white spots and edges – features associated with rare and valuable specimens. Two Jahangiri autographs in a large hand give its name and other details. The name of the painter is unfortunately not legible. Another painting of the same elephant but drawn some years later has recently been found. It shows the elephant richly bedecked with a maroon velvet under-blanket and a brocaded over-blanket with tulips and irises, golden bells, and gold and enamel chains of various designs around his body and forehead, with a mahout astride his neck holding a golden *ankusha*. An inscription within a gold coloured cartouche reads: "Picture of Alam Guman Gajraj valued at one hundred thousand rupees".¹⁸

The picture of Gaj Ratan in the Indian Museum (figure 11) is also painted on cloth. It shows a giant elephant of excellent proportion standing majestically in a landscape with its hind legs securely tied to a post. Though it is completely unadorned, a red canopy with yellow frill (*jhalar*) is erected over it indicating its special status. A well-formed *nastaliq* inscription gives its name as Gaj Ratan. From the details of landscape comprising hills of many hues with modulated contours and trees and a golden sky akin to Persian art, it appears to be an early work. There is a reference to a special elephant named Gaj Ratan presented by Jahangir to Khan Jahan in 1621.¹⁹ Jahangir writes in 1608 of another elephant presented by Ratan, son of Bhoj Singh Hara of Bundi, that was much approved and entered among the special elephants with the name of Ratan Gaj. This was presented to Prince Parwiz in 1623.²⁰

When Jahangir was travelling through the elephant forests near Dohad he wanted to participate in elephant trapping with Gajpat Khan, superintendent of the *filkhana*, and Baluch Khan, chief huntsman. The pick of the catch of 185 male and female elephants was Pawan. When it was brought to the court it was kept near the *jharkha* on the river side on orders from Jahangir as he wanted it to be constantly under his eye. Recently a wonderful shaded drawing of this elephant has been found (figure 12). It shows a young elephant of good proportion with a medium-sized trunk and a pair of whitish ears worthy of Jahangir's special attention. An inscription in his hand written below the trunk gives its name as Pawan Gaj and that of the painter as Nanha. Nanha seems to have done the preliminary



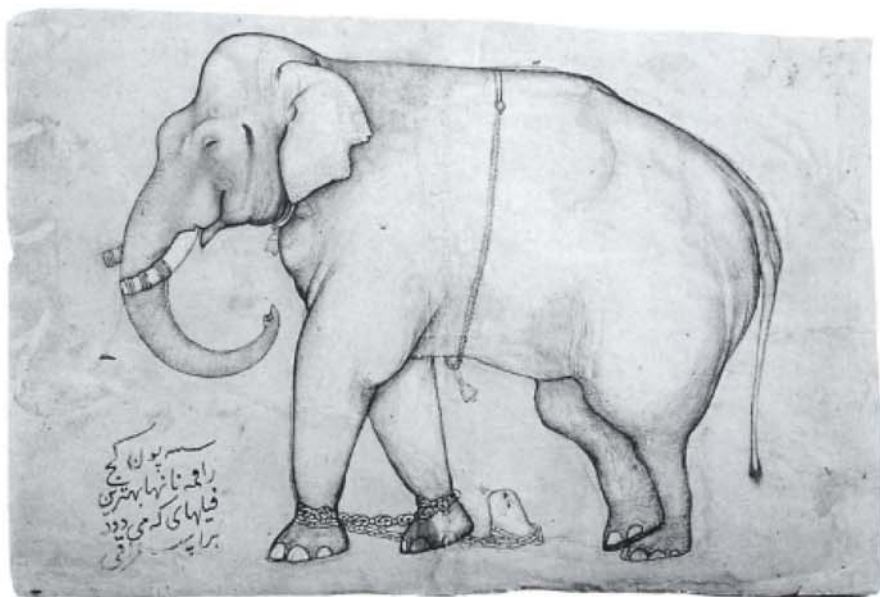
11
Gaj Ratan standing
under a canopy.
Painting on cloth;
41.5 x 29.8 cm.
Courtesy Indian
Museum, Calcutta.
No. R.647/S.77.

drawing on the spot as revealed by the marks of correction in delineating the trunk and the left hind leg.

Reference should be made to another prized elephant brought by Prince Khurram from the Deccan in 1617. This elephant, Sarnak (Sirnag in Wheeler Thackston's translation), was the finest of the elephants of Adil Khan's offering. A few days later Jahangir inspected it and noted in his memoirs: "Having called Sarnak elephant to me, I saw without doubt that what had been heard in its praise and of its beauty is real. It stood all the tests in size, form, and beauty. Few elephants are to be seen of such beauty. As it appeared acceptable to me, I myself mounted it and took it into my private palace, and scattered a quantity of gold coins on its head, and ordered them to tie it up inside the royal palace. With regard to this I gave it the name Nur-bakht (light of fortune)."

Though there is no contemporary image of this elephant, it is shown in an illustration to Shah Jahan's biography, the *Padshahnama*, painted by Murar some years later. It only shows its head and shoulder forepart bedecked in rich cloths and velvets and gold ornaments with a mahout wearing Deccani dress and headdress.²¹

The *Tuzuk* is full of references to elephants of rare quality and character commanding a high price and reputation. Jahangir's son and successor Shah Jahan continued the family's interest in elephants and the painters of his *taswirkhana* continued to produce outstanding images of many of them. These include the portraits of Mahavir Dev in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London,²² Madhukar by Hashim in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge,²³ Man Murat with Dara Shukoh and his son on its back by Govardhan



12
Pawan Gaj, the pick of the catch in the elephant *khedra* near Dohad. Drawing by Nanha. 19.5 x 31.2 cm. Private collection, Kuwait.



13
 Prince Aurangzeb
 controlling the mast
 elephant Sidhkar.
 Illustration from the
Padshahnama, detail
 showing the elephant.
 The Royal Collection
 © Her Majesty Queen
 Elizabeth II.
 No. RL.OMS.1631,
 fol.134a.

in the Staatliche Museum, Berlin, Sardar Gaj by Lalchand formerly in the Kevorkian Collection,²⁴ and the superb illustration to the *Padshahnama* showing Prince Aurangzeb taming the raging giant Sidhkar (figure 13). The picture of Mahavir Dev, which is again unsigned, contains the following note in Shah Jahan's autograph: "Picture of elephant Mahavir Dev, formerly known as Khus Khan, presented by Adil Khan valued at 300,000 rupees". This is perhaps the highest value of an elephant ever recorded. The drawing of Madhukar also contains Shah Jahan's autograph giving only its name. Another drawing (unpublished) of the same elephant is mounted in an album in the Staatliche Museum, Berlin where its name is written as Madhukar Gajraj.

The rarest and most prized and revered elephant is the one with a pink-white complexion. Indra, the king of the gods, rides

on Airavata, the mighty elephant of whitish complexion. Abu'l Fazl writes in the *A'in-i Akbari* that the divine elephant Airavata with white skin and white hair guards the east.²⁵ The Buddhists hold such elephants in high esteem as the Buddha according to legend took the form of a white elephant before his birth. In the dense forests of Upper Burma and Thailand, elephants of white and partly white complexion are occasionally found. Elephants with white ears, trunk, forehead, underbelly, and toenails are also considered holy. They automatically become royal property as a white elephant is the portent of an auspicious reign. They are brought to the capital with great fanfare, kept in state in gilt stables, and fed in gilt silver vessels. When one of them proceeds to the river for bathing it moves under a canopy of silk and gold accompanied by musicians. The English traveller Ralph Fitch, in the course of his tour of Pegu in

14
The white elephant.
Bharat Kala Bhavan,
Varanasi.



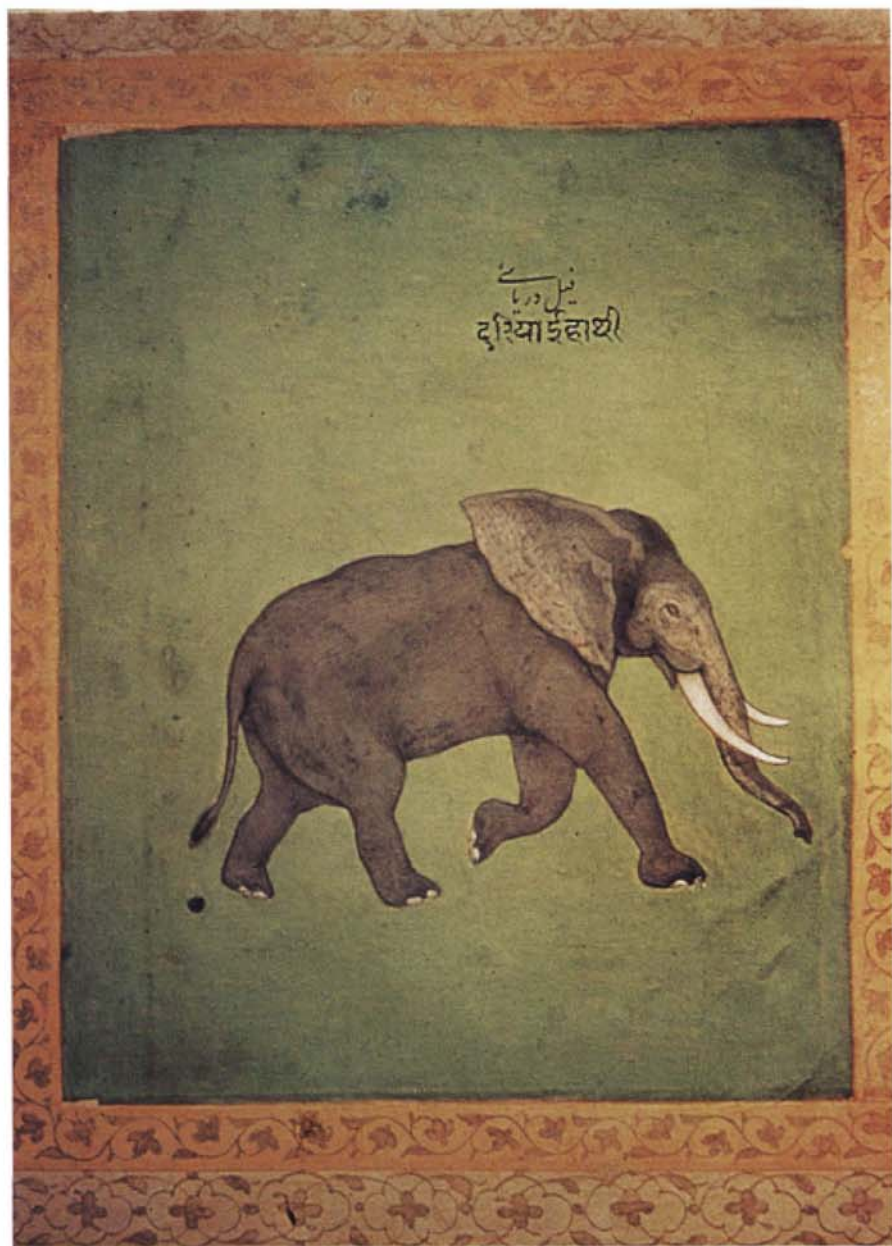
1586–87, noticed as many as four white elephants with the King of Pegu. At least one of these was captured by the King of Arakan as mentioned by Benedict Goes. About 1602–03 another European traveller Felipe de Brito

visited Arakan and informed the king about the impending invasion of Raja Man Singh who had promised Akbar that he would be lord of the white elephant then in the possession of the Arakanese king.²⁶

The Mughals did not attribute any divine portent to a white elephant and there is no reference to such an animal in the *Akbarnama* or *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*. However, the arrival of a white elephant in the court of Shah Jahan has been duly recorded in the official court chronicle. A seafaring merchant Khwaja Nizam obtained a small elephant of whitish complexion and left it with Sayyid Diler Khan Barha, a high-ranking official of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, before setting out on a voyage to Arakan and Pegu in 1617. In twelve years' time it attained puberty, whereupon its complexion turned white and pinkish. In August 1629,

15
Dara Shukoh's pink elephant Gajapati:
Attributed to Bichitr.
24.6 x 34.5 cm.
Anonymous loan,
Arthur M. Sackler
Museum, Cambridge,
Massachusetts.





16

An African elephant in the Mughal court.

From an album of the period of Aurangzeb.

18.0 x 13.6 cm.

Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum

Trust, Jaipur.

No. A.G. 955.

Barha dispatched the animal to the court of Shah Jahan, where it was paraded before His Majesty, who was pleased by it.²⁷

In the Mughal *taswirkhana* the special traits of these rare and revered animals were properly noticed and several pictures of white or partly white elephants have survived. The best known among these are the white elephant under a canopy in the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi (figure 14) and the pink elephant with a young prince on its back in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts (figure 15). The former shows many stylistic features of the Akbari period. Moti Chandra tried to relate it with the celebrated white elephant originally in the possession of the King of Arakan. Raja Man Singh invaded Arakan in 1603 but it is not known if he had brought the prized elephant for Akbar or not. Such a valued possession would invariably be taken away by the victor. In the painting the elephant is shown richly ornamented and standing majestically under a brocaded canopy with red *jhalar* and accompanied by two smaller grey elephants, a camel, and attendants, including one with a saddled horse. Jahangir writes in 1613 about the arrival of some Maghs from Pegu and Arakan with Husang, son of Islam Khan, Governor of Bengal and of an elephant called Banshibadan brought from Bengal that was put among his special elephants.²⁸ It was presented to Prince Khurram a few months later but it was never described as of white complexion. Nor does he include an elephant in his list of albino birds and animals.²⁹

The Sackler Museum picture is a superb example attributed to Bichitr (see figure 15). The elephant is most luxuriously caparisoned in jewel-encrusted gold, with pearl tassels,

golden chains for the neck and hind part, golden anklets and bells, and a richly designed velvet overcloth set with seedpearls and small gems. The animal has been rendered with rare sensitivity and soberness expressing its sweet temperament. The young prince mounting it has been identified with Dara Shukoh. It is taken here as a portrait of the white elephant presented by Sayyid Diler Khan Barha.³⁰

The Mughals were also aware of the African variety of elephant. Jahangir furnishes two instances of African elephants arriving at the Mughal court. While no pictures of these African elephants have been traced, two later images of African elephants have come to notice. One of these is published in the Ehrenfeld catalogue,³¹ while the other is mounted in an Aurangzeb-period album in the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Jaipur (figure 16). The pictures do not furnish any information besides the label "*dariyai hathi*" and "*hathi dariya ri*". However, Sarkar refers to two embassies from Abyssinia (Habsh country) arriving at Aurangzeb's court in 1665 and 1671 though no details on the arrival of such an elephant are available.³²

Elephants continued to attract the attention of Mughal painters and many lively images of royal elephants, elephant groups, and elephant fights were painted by them for Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb, and the later Mughals. Outside the Mughal court, the painters of Bundi and Kota, especially Kota, continued the tradition and painted numerous pictures of brilliantly spirited elephants. In Jaipur the court painters prepared an album of drawings of royal elephants with a feeling and care similar to that of their Mughal predecessors.

NOTES

1. A.S. Beveridge, tr., *Baburnama* (London 1921), Vol. II, pp. 488-89, 631; W. Thackston, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor* (New York 1996), pp. 334-35, 416.
2. Abu'l Fazl, *A'in-i Akbari*, tr. H. Blochmann (Calcutta 1873), Vol. I, pp. 22-29.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 128. Abu'l Fazl relates the story of an elephant (Barbir) belonging to the Gujarat force appearing wherever it hears the sounding of war drums and scattering the troops there. It could be caught only when the sounding of the drums was stopped [Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnama*, tr. H. Beveridge (Calcutta 1907-39), Vol. III, pp. 35-36]. Gajmukta was employed in the Battle of Gogunda to tackle the Rana's elephant Lona (*ibid.*, pp. 245-46). A double-page illustration in the Chester Beatty *Akbarnama* shows both these elephants as well as the champion elephants Ram Pershad, Gajraj, and Ram Madar [Linda Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library* (London 1995), no. 2.158 (left half), and A. Heeramanek, *Masterpieces of Indian Painting* (Los Angeles 1984), pl. 165]. For details of devastations caused by some of Akbar's fiercest war elephants during the siege of Chittor, see *Akbarnama*, Vol. II, pp. 473-74.
4. *Akbarnama*, Vol. II, pp. 115-16: The first elephant rode by Akbar without any help was Fauj-bidar. The first *mast* elephant rode by him was Damodar, and the first *mast* elephant rode by him to fight another *mast* elephant was Jhalpa during the siege of Mankot when he was only fourteen. For La's rendition of the siege of Mankot in the Chester Beatty *Akbarnama* where these elephants are shown: vide, Leach, *op. cit.*, no. 2.102.
5. *Akbarnama*, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 234-35; also see *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, tr. A. Rogers, ed. H. Beveridge, Vol. II, pp. 41-42.
6. *Tuzuk*, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 39-40.
7. *Akbarnama*, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 356.
8. About Bal Sundar, Abu'l Fazl had this to say: "The merits of this elephant are beyond description. Together with rank-breaking might and strength to cast down mountains he was perfectly sedate and quiet. He showed discretion even when in the height of being *mast*. He did

nothing immoderate without the hint of his driver."

Akbarnama, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 124. Akbar mounted it while marching towards the camp of Khan Zaman (*ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 430). It was taken in a subsequent expedition to the eastern provinces in 1574. A superb illustration from the Chester Beatty *Akbarnama* now in a Swiss private collection shows him along with two female elephants crossing the Ganga on a boat. See B.N. Goswamy and E. Fischer, *Wonders of a Golden Age* (Zurich 1987), no. 36.

9. Cf. the picture of the blind elephant who had tumbled into a pit in the *Tutinama* MS (1580-85) [Leach, *op. cit.*, colour plate 7].
10. Rumer Godden, *Gulbadan* (London 1980), p. 150. Abu'l Fazl relates the story of an elephant who refused to accept food from Akbar during a review of royal elephants near Lahore in 1590. On enquiry it was found that he was ashamed at his mahout's falsehood. He resumed eating only when the mahout admitted his guilt. *Akbarnama*, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 870.
11. N. Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, tr. W. Irvine (Calcutta 1907-09), Vol. II, p. 340.
12. William Foster, ed., *The Embassy of Thomas Roe to India, 1615-1619* (Jalandhar 1993), p. 85.
13. R. Pinder-Wilson, ed., *Paintings from the Muslim Courts of India* (London 1976), no. 26 (painted by Ramdas and Madhav Chela); M.S. Randhawa, *Paintings of the Babur Nama* (New Delhi 1983), pl. 350 (work of Barwali Khwurd). Along with elephant fights there were camel and ram fights and wrestling bouts on that occasion.
14. The subject of elephant fights like the well-known Persian subject of camel fights was transformed into a motif and used in painting: for example E.W. Smith, *The Moghul Architecture of Fatehpur Sikri* (Allahabad 1894), Vol. I, plate CXII; *A la cour du Grand Moghol* (Paris 1986), no. 59, etc.; glazed tiles: for example Bamber Gascoigne, *The Great Moghuls* (London 1971), p. 174 etc.; carpets: for example E. Gans-Ruedin, *Indian Carpets* (London 1984), p. 67, etc.
15. *A'in-i Akbari*, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 143. For some other pictures of elephant herds: vide, Randhawa, *op. cit.*, no. 267; *A la cour*, *op. cit.*, no. 130; R. Hickman and

- V. Enderlein, *Indische Albumblätter* (Leipzig-Weimer 1979), pl. 23; the Victoria and Albert Museum *Akbarnama* illustration no. 2-1896 IS 44/117 (sketch by La'l and colouring by Khem), and the *Iyar-i Danish* illustrations in the Chester Beatty Library (Leach, op. cit., nos. 1.135 and 1.136).
16. *Tuzuk*, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 265, 410.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
18. *Christie's Sale Catalogue*, April 27, 1993, lot 3. Apparently there was another elephant named Alam Guman in the Mughal *filkhana*, as Jahangir sent an elephant of the same name to Raja Man Singh (*Tuzuk*, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 170). Later in his reign he noted in his memoirs, "in the elephant stables of H.M. Akbar the largest elephant I saw was Durjan Sal. It was long the premier elephant.... At present among the elephants of my establishment the largest athlete is Alam Gajraj, which H.M. Akbar himself has caught" (*ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 18).
19. *Tuzuk*, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 209.
20. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 140; Vol. II, p. 260.
21. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 395-96. Milo C. Beach and Ebba Koch, *King of the World* (London 1997), pl. 9.
22. T. MacNerney, *Indian Drawing* (London 1983), no. 17; John Guy and Deborah Swallow, eds., *Arts of India: 1550-1900* (London 1990), col. pl. 72.
23. *Ibid.*, no. 16.
24. A. Topsfield and M.C. Beach, *Indian Paintings and Drawings from the Collection of Howard Hodgkin* (New York 1991), p. 36, fn. 4.
25. *A'in-i Akbari*, op. cit., p. 128. For the image of Airavata as visualized by the masters of Akbar's *taswirkhana*, see figure 1. Abu'l Fazl writes: "The colour of the skin of the elephant is threefold: white, black, grey" (*ibid.*, p. 125).
26. Moti Chandra, "The White Elephant", *Lalit Kala*, Nos. 1-2 (1956-57), pp. 96-97, where he quotes C.H. Payne, *Jahangir and the Jesuits* (London 1930), pp. 196, 255, n. 7.
27. W. Begley and Z.A. Desai, eds., *The Shah Jahan Nama of Inayat Khan* (Delhi 1990), p. 33. Moti Chandra refers to the *Padshahnama*, Vol. I, pp. 267-68. He further states that this elephant later came into Shah Jahan's possession as one of his poets composed a verse in its honour.
28. *Tuzuk*, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 236-37.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40. However this list was prepared early in his reign - late 1609.
30. There is another picture of a pink elephant with Dara on its back in the Staatliche Museum, Berlin (no. 4596 f12), unpublished.
31. The Ehrenfeld elephant is discussed and reproduced in D.J. Ehnbohm, *Indian Miniatures, the Ehrenfeld Collection* (New York 1985), no. 22 (where it is attributed to Govardhan and dated 1616).
32. J.N. Sarkar, *History of Aurangzeb* (Calcutta 1972), Vol. III, pp. 78, 78-79 fn.

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