

A M I R M O H T A S H E M I



Maquette of the Qutb Minar

India, 19th century (the lower three tiers); 21st century (the upper three tiers)

Lower portion teak, upper portion poplar

160cm high (original section); 251cm high (with 21st century extension)

Stock no.: A5767

Provenance:

Collection of Harry Myron Blackmer II, Athens.

Collection of Christopher Gibbs, Manor House at Clifton Hampden; his sale, Christie's London, 25-26 September 2000, lot 137.

Canadian private collector David Graham; his sale, Christie's London, 'An Adventurous Spirit: An Important Private Collection Sold to Benefit a Charitable Foundation', 13 December 2018, lot 62.

The Collection of Count Manfredi della Gherardesca.

This monumental wooden maquette represents the Qutb Minar in Delhi, constructed between 1199 and 1503. The tower was built on the ruins of Lal Kot, a historic fortified city. It is commonly thought to be named after Qutb-ud-din Aibak, the Ghurid ruler who commissioned the structure.¹ It represents a hybrid of Islamic architecture and local Hindu culture.

The lower three tiers of this model, made from teak, reflect the current appearance of the Qutb Minar. Twelve semicircular and twelve flanged pillars alternate around each level, separated by balconies and *muqarnas*. The owner of the maquette between 2000 and 2018 commissioned the upper three tiers in poplar to reflect the Qutb Minar's appearance in a painting of c. 1830 from the collection of Mildred Archer (Victoria & Albert Museum, London, [IM.42-1923](#)). The first storey of the Qutb Minar was constructed in 1192 CE by the first Mamluk Sultan, Qutb ud-Din Aibak. His successor, Iltutmish (r. 1211 to 1236 CE), added three further tiers. When a lightning strike of 1369 destroyed the fourth tier, it was replaced by two smaller tiers in white marble. The Qutb Minar remained structurally unchanged until 1828, when Colonel Robert Smith, the garrison engineer of Delhi, added a cupola. This extension proved so controversial that after it was damaged by an earthquake in 1848, it was removed entirely. The painting, and therefore this maquette, capture the Qutb Minar as it appeared for just 20 years.

A maquette of similar style, though some 83cm shorter, is held in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (accession no. [EA2010.36](#)). Though it does not include Robert Smith's cupola, it clearly shows the marble additions of Firuz Shah Tughlaq. Architectural maquettes like these were commissioned for colonial exhibitions and world's fairs, generally made by English craftsmen. Indeed, a metal model of the Qutb Minar was shown in the 1911 Festival of Empire in London.²

This maquette has an illustrious provenance. Its first known owner, Harry M. Blackmer II, was a renowned American collector. Photographs of his Athens home, including this maquette, were featured in *World of Interiors* magazine in May 1983. Blackmer's executor, Christopher Gibbs, inherited the maquette. A friend of Mick Jagger and known as 'London's most famous antiques dealer', Gibbs kept the maquette at his country home at Clifton Hampden. Following a period with the Canadian collector David Graham, it was purchased back by a friend of Gibbs, Count Manfredi della Gherardesca. The maquette is featured in a 2019 *Financial Times* article about the Count's Kensington home.³

[1] Though more likely to be named after a later Sufi, Saint Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki.

[2] Hendley, T. H. 'Festival of Empire and Imperial Exhibition, 1911', *The Journal of Indian Art and Industry* 117.15 (1911), p. 5, no. 360.

[3] Shollenbarger, Maria. 'Manfredi della Gherardesca on the colours of Jaipur, the charm of Madrileños and 'the art world's Bryan Ferry'', *The Financial Times*, October 15 2019.