



Bronze Pilgrim Flask

Probably Deccan, Central India, 17th century

Bronze

31 cm high, 26 cm wide

Stock no.: A5934

Provenance: European private collection.

Of crescent form on a diamond-shaped foot, with distinctive volute terminals, tubular spout, and a rounded lid, this bronze pilgrim flask was made in India in the 17th century. Suspension rings are attached at the shoulder and neck, through which chains or leather cords could be threaded to allow servants to carry the flask suspended from a stick.¹ Extending from the neck into the body is a lightly-modelled palmette lappet.

Though relatively few examples survive, particularly with their lids, pilgrim flasks of this form are well-represented in Indian miniatures (see, for example, 'Poet in a Garden' in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, accession no. [14.663](#)). The form derives from Ottoman leather bottles (matara), such as those in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg (accession no. [1893.196](#)) and an example in the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna (inv. no. [C.28](#)), which was gifted to Kaiser Rudolf II by Sultan Murad III in ca. 1580. John Carswell traces this form to pre-Islamic, nomadic peoples, who sewed up the hind

quarters of a quadruped to form a water canteen, one leg becoming the spout and the other the handle.²

Similar metal pilgrim flasks in public collections include bronze (accession no. [2020.11](#); Deccan or North India, 17th century) and brass (accession no. [1992.50](#); Deccan or North India, early 17th century) examples in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; a brass flask in the David Collection, Copenhagen (accession no. [32/2008](#); North India, 17th century), and another brass example in the British Museum, London (accession no. [1969.0317.1](#); Deccan, 16th century). Several examples in private collections are also illustrated in Zebrowski (1997).³

[1] Zebrowski, Mark. *Gold, Silver & Bronze from Mughal India*. London: Alexandria Press in association with Laurence King, 1997, p. 200.

[2] Carswell, John. *Iznik Pottery*. London: British Museum, 1998, p. 84.

[3] Zebrowski. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 202–204, figs 308–319.