

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Indo-Dutch Carved Ebony Chair

Netherlands East Indies, probably Coromandel Coast, ca. 1660–1680

Ebony with upholstered seat

100 cm high, 54 cm wide, 47 cm deep

Stock no.: A6137

A richly-carved solid ebony chair, typical of work made for the European market in the Coromandel Coast, Southeastern India. It has spiral-turned legs, stretcher, and spindles. The mid and top rails are carved and pierced with swirling foliage, known in Sinhala as *liya væela*.¹ The finials are in the form of parrots (*giravā*). At the centre is a winged head which frequently appears on coromandel ebony furniture. It has sometimes been described as an amorino, but it is possible that this is a Sinhalese motif.

Carved ebony chairs of this kind have been recorded in English collections from as early as the mid-eighteenth century, leading to the belief for much of the 19th century that they were made in Tudor England.² They were therefore used to furnish many of Britain's great houses in the belief that they were period pieces. For example, the National Trust properties of Tyntesfield, a Victorian Gothic Revival house in Somerset (see [NT 20196.1](#)) and Treasurer's House (see [NT 592861](#)), a Medieval house in York which was renovated in the 19th century. They were even purchased for Windsor Castle: an illustration of the Grand Corridor at Windsor Castle in 1846 (see Royal Collection Trust [RCIN 919781](#)) shows several Coromandel chairs. The chairs in this illustration may have been the set of seven purchased by George IV (1762–1830) which are nearly identical to ours (see accession no. [RCIN 21606](#)). Another near-identical chair in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. [IS.6-2000](#)) is attributed to the Coromandel Coast and dated 1860–1880.

Please note that all ivory has been removed and substituted with inorganic material.

n.b. accession nos are clickable links

[1] Coomaraswamy, A.K., *Medieval Sinhalese Art*, 2nd ed., New York: Pantheon Books, 1956, pp. 98–99.

[2] Jaffer, Amin. *Luxury Goods from India: The Art of the Indian Cabinet-Maker*. London: V&A, 2002, pp. 46–47; Wainwright, Clive. 'Only the True Black Blood', *Furniture History* 21 (1985), pp. 250–257: p. 251.