

# Amir Mohtashemi

*Cross-Cultural Art*







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## *Cross-Cultural Art*

We are delighted to present you our latest catalogue, *Cross-Cultural Art*. Through a group of objects produced in Asia between the 16th and 20th century, this catalogue hopes to demonstrate the power of cross-cultural artistic exchange under the backdrop of early modern global trade.

Fuelled by international trade and curiosity towards the “Other,” early modern Europe witnessed a growing volume of travels to foreign lands as well as a market demand towards tastes of the “exotic.” Using expensive materials including rare woods and ivory, objects tailored for the tastes of foreign clientele were produced in places renowned for their craftsmanship – China, India and the Philippines, to name a few. They were then transported via land or sea routes to destinations near or far.

Yet, instead of an east-west binary, or a one-way or even two-way artistic exchange, some objects in the catalogue demonstrate that cross-cultural exchanges, either via travelling agents or objects, are more diverse and nuanced than previously understood. For example, instead of catering for the European market, the series of glass paintings (Cats.18–22) shows how Chinese artisans, after combining characteristics of European landscape paintings and Indian miniatures, produced Chinese-looking figures for wealthy Indian clientele. Or the blue-and-white *kraak* dish (Cat.1), which, taking its name after the Portuguese ship that contained Chinese porcelain in thousands, was painted with Persian style figures.

The objects discussed here were made in a variety of different media, including paper, ceramic, metal, glass and wood. Their repertoire of design demonstrates the cross fertilisation between diverse cultures in addition to the high level of technical and artistic skills. They represent the intricate nature of cultural exchange, trading goods and transmitting ideas beyond borders.

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# Blue-and-White *Kraak* Dish

Made for the Islamic market  
Jingdezhen, China. 17th century

Porcelain decorated in underglaze cobalt blue  
50 cm diameter

Provenance: From the collection of a French noble family.

This large blue-and-white *kraak* porcelain dish has in its centre medallion two seated Persian figures, possibly female. Facing each other, they are both wearing long garments and headdresses with the aigrette, worn by the nobility. The figure on the left, shown against a rocky outcrop, holds a small drinking cup in the right hand. The figures are set amidst a landscape of flowers and vegetation consisting of grasses and a small tree. The centre is enclosed by a border of stylised flowers, including tulips.

The rim of the dish is composed of eight wide panels, which have Chinese narrative scenes alternating with different floral designs. The scenes depict a scholar seated inside a pavilion in a rocky landscape and flying geese, an angler carrying a fishing rod with a creel, a farmer wearing a straw-hat with produce on a shoulder pole, and a peasant with a hoe. In the background are trees and Western style dwellings with gabled roofs. The panels of flowers have tulips and pomegranate fruits with outward sprouting, ornamental leaves. The narrower panels, flanking the alternating narrative panels, consist of flower-sprays of carnations, irises and other flowers. The exterior of the dish is decorated with lozenges alternating with tulips and pomegranates, between narrow panels of prunus, pine and flowering plants.

*Kraak* refers to a group of Chinese blue-and-white export porcelain, made in Jingdezhen in Jiangxi province in southern China. *Kraak* wares were shipped to Europe, the Middle East, Japan, Southeast Asia and Mexico in huge quantities during the late 16th and 17th centuries.<sup>1</sup> The name *kraak* is thought to derive from the Portuguese name for their merchant ships, *caracca*, used to transport porcelain; both the Portuguese and the Dutch East India Company (VOC) controlled the porcelain export trade from China to Europe. However, it has also been suggested that the name may come from the Dutch word *kraken*, “to break easily”.

Shah ‘Abbas I (1571-1629) of the Safavid dynasty is known for his donation of luxury vessels to the Ardabil Shrine (northwest Iran) in

the early 17th century, most of which were Chinese blue-and-white porcelain. To accommodate this substantial collection, one of the chambers at the shrine was converted and renamed *chīnikhāne*, or the “house of porcelain”, where niches on the walls displayed the porcelain objects. The *chīnikhane-s* were then copied by the nobility for displaying precious blue-and-white wares. Being held in high regard, they were even depicted in Safavid book paintings.<sup>2</sup> This attests to the popularity of Chinese porcelain in the upper echelons of the Safavid society.

The central motif of the two Persian figures implies that the dish was made to order for the Persian market. Figures with elongated narrow eyes, straight noses, thin long braids and short curls on the sides of the face, dressed in loose cut long garments with an aigrette in the headdress, are established in the Persian painting tradition and can be found in 16th and 17th century Safavid book paintings (see S.1986.152, S. 1986,297 and S.305 Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.). A large *kraak* dish at the British Museum, dated to ca. 1635-1650, has a central motif of two Persian figures identical to ours.<sup>3</sup> The rim also has panels with two Chinese narrative scenes of a farmer carrying a load on a shoulder pole amongst stylised flowers, such as tulips, carnations and also pomegranates (British Museum, PDF C645. See also a dish with similar figures, Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore, 1995–03897).

There are several comparative blue-and-white *kraak* dishes, dating to the second quarter of the 17th century with Chinese imagery in the centre but also with very similar decorative border schemes in the collection of the Topkapı Museum, Istanbul (see figures 1600, 1601, 1602, 1603, 1604 and 1606 in Regina Krah, *Chinese Ceramics in the Topkapı Saray Museum Istanbul, II Yuan and Ming Dynasty Porcelains*). *Kraak* porcelain was exported around the world in large quantities; however, the pieces specifically made for the Persian market, recognised by their distinctive imagery, are rare.

M.A.

### Footnotes

1. Kerr and Mengoni, *Chinese Export Ceramics*, 2011, 22.
2. Canby, *Shah ‘Abbas*, 2009, 121. See a ca. 1640 miniature painting illustrated in Canby, fig. 80, p. 167.
3. The British Museum dish is 45.7 cm in diameter.

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- Ströber, Eva. *Ming. Porcelain for a Global Trade*. Arnoldsche Art Publishers, Stuttgart. 2013.











2.

## Porcelain Ewer

Made for the Indian market  
China. Kangxi reign period  
(1662-1722)

Porcelain decorated in underglaze  
cobalt blue  
26.5 cm high, 16 cm diameter

Provenance: Dutch private collection

An Islamic ewer comprises a central chamber joined to a spout, foot, neck and handle. The vessel allows water to flow, for Quranic injunctions judged flowing water to be “pure”. Ewers of this type have their origins in Iran and the Middle East, and were introduced to India by Muslim invaders in the late 13th-early 14th century. In India, they were employed for handwashing and became a practical vessel for hospitality. Visitors were greeted by pouring water over their hands and feet into a basin; the liquid could be delicately scented rosewater.

The profile of the ewer, with its deeply indented neck, bulbous body, domed lid and upright spout and handle, conforms to Indian metal prototypes of the 17th century.<sup>1</sup> Such ewers were commonly used and made in the subcontinent and in lands across the Middle East. A Chinese porcelain ewer of similar form, decorated in overglaze red enamel and gilding, and dated to the early 18th century, is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, having been acquired in Iran in the 1870s.<sup>2</sup> Similar ewers, one bearing Ottoman silver gilt mounts, are preserved in the Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul.<sup>3</sup>

The vessel is made of porcelain and decorated with a slightly greyish-blue cobalt with a simple pattern of four blossoms round the belly of the ewer. The undecorated white ground that surrounds the blossoms simulates the polished surface of metal and is not typical of Chinese porcelain painting that loved to fill entire surfaces. Flowering lotus scroll decorates the neck, and the patterns are bordered by scrolling and hatched bands. The simplicity of the design and its calm balance enhance the shape, and all point to production geared towards the Islamic market.

R.K.



### Footnotes

1. Mark Zebrowski, *Gold, Silver and Bronze from Mughal India*, New Delhi, 1997, pp.139-140, 218-219.
2. Rose Kerr and Luisa E. Mengoni, *Chinese Export Ceramics*, V&A Publishing, London, 2011, p.108, pl.152.
3. John Ayers and Regina Krahl, in collaboration with Nurdan Erbahar, *Chinese Ceramics in the Topkapı Saray Museum, Istanbul. A Complete Catalogue, vol.III, Qing Dynasty Porcelain*, London, 1986, pp.935, 1192.



## A Pair of *Albarelli* (Drug Jars) with Lids

Made for the Islamic market  
China. Qianlong reign period (1736-95)

Porcelain decorated in underglaze cobalt blue  
29.5 cm high

Provenance: From the collection of a prominent Scandinavian collector, who collected these pieces while working in China as a geologist between 1914-17 and 1921-28.

Both the shapes and the major part of the decorations of these two jars derive from sources outside China. Their shapes originate from cylindrical vessels used by physicians in the Middle East to store medicines and plant-based remedies, designed so that their rims could be covered with parchment or leather and banded with cord to keep their contents dry. The addition of a porcelain lid is decorative, but not that practical.

The name *albarello*, by which such jars are known today, is Italian, because Italian potters employed similar vessels from the early 15th century onwards, taking their forms from Middle Eastern jars that were produced in Egypt, Syria and Iran as early as the 12th century.<sup>1</sup> In China such oddly shaped pieces would have been seen as a novelty, and were chiefly decorative. They were known in Chinese as *zhuangguan* (lit. “robust jar”) and had first been copied in China during the early Ming dynasty, when Middle Eastern shapes and patterns were much in vogue. Their destination was the imperial court, where foreign-inspired decorative arts were displayed and appreciated by the emperor. Several such items are preserved, including an *albarello* dating to the reign of the Yongle emperor (1402-1424).<sup>2</sup>

The influence of Islamic design on Chinese decorative arts from the 14th century onwards has been noted by several scholars.<sup>3</sup> In the 14th century, blue-and-white porcelain decorated with Iranian cobalt became very popular in China, while in the early 15th century

Middle Eastern vessel shapes and decorations were employed for items made by imperial command, for display in the palaces. These were exotic novelties, prized for their interest and rarity. Interest in foreign forms and decorations revived in the 18th century, when this pair of jars was made. However, their reappearance was based on earlier Chinese wares, not on a direct interest in Middle Eastern design. It is interesting that a comparable pair of *albarelli* is in the collection of Her Majesty the Queen, and was presented to King George III by the Qianlong Emperor in 1793, indicating its imperial provenance.<sup>4</sup> During the Qianlong period (1736-1795) of the Qing dynasty, the emperor commanded the imperial porcelain factories at Jingdezhen to produce porcelain in imitation of early Ming ware. Thus, our jars are imperial-quality archaistic treasures.

The *albarelli* shown here are painted in violet-blue cobalt with a geometric pattern of hexagons like a honeycomb, similar to that found in Islamic design. The repeating, interlocking, geometric scheme recalls that found on panels of tiles and on ceramic vessels.<sup>5</sup> An Ilkhanid period metal tray, dated to c. 1300-1310, has a very similar honeycomb pattern to that on our jars (see Figure 1). This foreign geometric element is combined with wave bands, *baoxiang* flower scrolls and a petal panel round the foot, taken from the Chinese design repertoire. The non-figurative patterning of the surface would be deemed appropriate by Islamic clients.

R.K.



Figure 1  
Tray, Fars, Iran, 1300-1310 AD  
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

### Footnotes

1. See a 12th century Iranian jar in the Metropolitan Museum, Accession Number 57.61.12a, b) which is published in Court and Cosmos: *The Great Age of the Seljuqs* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2016).
2. The Yongle period albarello in the imperial collections is illustrated in 故宫博物院藏文物珍品全集 青花釉里红I (*The Complete Catalogue of Treasures of the Palace Museum Blue and White Porcelain with Underglaze Red, volume I*) (Hong Kong, 2000), no.43 and can be seen <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/ceramic/227626.html>.
3. Margaret Medley, “Chinese Ceramics and Islamic design”, in *The Westward Influence of the Chinese Arts, Colloquies on Art & Archaeology in Asia No.3*, The Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1973, pp.1-10; Jessica Harrison-Hall, “Courts: Palaces, People and Objects” in *Ming: 50 years that changed China*, The British Museum, London, 2014, pp.44-111.
4. John Ayers, *Chinese and Japanese Works of Art in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen, Volume 1*, Royal Collection Trust, London, 2016, nos.420-421, p.201. See also Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 45222. This pair is almost identical to ours.
5. For example, an Ilkhanid period jar in a private collection, illustrated in Oliver Watson, *Persian Lustre Ware*, London, 1985, pl.95, p.116 and a sequence of Kashan tiles in Tim Stanley, *Palace and Mosque. The Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London, 2004, pl.65, pp.50-51.













4.

## Cloisonné and Gilt-Bronze Bottle (şurāḥī)

Made for the Islamic Market China. Qianlong reign period (1736-95)

Cloisonné enamels with gilding on a copper base  
28.5 cm high

The basic shape of the bottle with pear-shaped body and long neck follows a Chinese prototype that is seen frequently in Chinese decorative arts, including cloisonné enamel.<sup>1</sup> The shape was already common by the second century BC (the Han dynasty, 206 BC-220 AD).<sup>2</sup> In this piece, however, the form has been modified to that of a *şurāḥī*, a vessel for water known across the Islamic world. The original *şurāḥī* were made in metal, and were distinguished by the bulbous rib halfway down the neck. The shape was also often made in ceramic, and was common in the 16th and 17th century.<sup>3</sup> It was a form unknown in China, thus demonstrating that this rare cloisonné vessel was made for export to Southeast Asia, India or the Middle East. It is a luxury product of high quality made in an expensive medium, that of enamels on copper. Cloisonné enamel vessels in China were only made for temples and palaces, not for ordinary use. Thus the bottle must have been a “special order” rather than an ordinary export piece.

The pattern on the bottle is of scrolling *baoxiang* flowers, a common design in Chinese decorative arts. *Baoxiang* are composite flowers that symbolise good fortune and combine elements of peony, lotus and chrysanthemum. It was a recurrent motif on gold and silver utensils, embroidery and architecture in ancient China, and from there lent itself to ceramic and cloisonné decoration also. The regularity of the *baoxiang* pattern, the shapes of the flower heads and the stubby leaves, and the colour of the enamels, are comparable with other vessels made during the Qianlong reign, for example an altar vessel with Qianlong reign mark in the Khalili Collection and a pair of long-necked vases in the Pierre Uldry Collection in the Museum Rietberg in Zürich.<sup>4</sup> Rising from the bottom of the body is a circle of upraised lotus petals, symbolising purity and attainment, and above the foot a squared, geometric design derived from ancient bronzes. Thus all the decorations on the bottle are auspicious in Chinese terms, while also being non-figurative to satisfy Islamic clients.

R.K.

### Footnotes

1. For example, a pair of long-necked vases in Béatrice Quette (ed.), *Cloisonné. Chinese Enamels from the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties*, Bard Graduate Center, New York; Les Arts Décoratifs – musée des Art Décoratifs, Paris; Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2011, no.6, p.226.
2. A bronze example dating to the 2nd century BC is in James C.S. Lin, *The Search for Immortality. Tomb Treasures of Han China*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, no.187, p.313.
3. See the following ceramic *şurāḥī* at the Victoria and Albert Museum; Accession Numbers and Dates: 70-1866, ca. 1535-40; C.2012-1910, dated to ca. 1545; 6784-1860, second half of 16th century; C. 2002-1910, dated to ca. 1585; 2497-1876, dated to 1630-60; 2495-1876, dated to 1650-1700.
4. Rose Kerr, “Enamel in China” in *Enamels of the World 1700-2000. The Khalili Collections*, Haydn Williams (ed.) The Khalili Family Trust, 2009, no.67, pp.122-123.  
  
Helmut Brinker and Albert Lutz, *Chinesisches Cloisonné. Die Sammlung Pierre Uldry* (Museum Rietberg, Zürich, 1985), no.251, p.252.







5.

## A Study of a Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*)

Made for the European market  
Calcutta, India. c. 1800–1850

Opaque colours and ink on paper  
47.3 cm high, 32.1 cm wide

Provenance: Paul Beilby Lawley  
Thompson, 1st Baron Wenlock (1784–1852).

At just under half a metre in length, the impressive figure of a greater coucal is an arresting bird. A cloak of cinnamon wing feathers wraps around the black plumage of the body, while the head and neck shimmer exquisitely with blacks suffused with cobalt. The soft grey chest feathers lead to charcoal tones on the belly and the magnificent claws have a black patent gloss.

Below the rufus barred wings, the paint ceases and reveals the pencil underdrawing of the tail feathers. There is seldom opportunity to consider the nature of the artist in this manner and we must therefore embrace any window into this secretive realm. The outlines of feathers are suggested through subtle and delicate lines, there is a great fluidity in the hand and a lively quality to the markings. All of these meritorious attributes combine to indicate the work of a tremendously experienced and gifted individual.

Artists such as Ustad Mansur (active 1590–1624) in the atelier of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (1569–1627) produced exceptionally fine portraits of birds and a tradition of natural history painting marked by exquisite detail and refined painterly technique was fully established. Imbued with these attributes, the most accomplished Company School artists were able to combine Mughal mastery with the requirements of their European patrons, as watercolour was introduced and subjects appeared on plain backgrounds, in the manner of taxonomic recording. The present work is a fine example of this marriage of traditions. The bird has been extremely well considered and the result is well proportioned, technically accurate and a fine example of its type. Moreover, the bird's face is expressive, its beak glistens and feathers descend in a shimmering cascade. The resultant image is not merely a scientific recording but an ebullient celebration of this magnificent bird by a truly masterful painter.

This study is numbered '418' and inscribed in Persian '*mahuk* (greater coucal)'.  
C.H.



**Bibliography:**  
Welch, Stuart Cary. *Room for Wonder: Indian Painting During the British Period 1760-1880*. American Federation of Arts, 1978.  
Archer, Mildred. *Natural History Drawings in the India Office Library*. Commonwealth Relations Office, London, 1962.



# A Study of a Male Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*)

Made for the European market  
Calcutta, India. c. 1800-1850

Opaque colours and ink on paper  
47.3 cm high, 32.1 cm wide

Provenance: Paul Beilby Lawley  
Thompson, 1st Baron Wenlock (1784-1852).

Perching on a branch set against a plain background, a male Asian koel remains vigilant. With glossy black plumage, rich chestnut wing feathers and white tipped primary covets, his colouration is markedly distinct from the female.

This arboreal species may be found in China, Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent. Known as *kokila* in Sanskrit, the birds are revered for their melodious song and often feature symbolically in classical Indian poetry.

The work was formerly part of an album of Company School paintings in the possession of the aristocrat and Whig politician Paul Beilby Lawley Thompson, 1st Baron Wenlock (1784-1852). The album featured a magnificent array of paintings from the Lucknow and Calcutta Schools and was undoubtedly compiled by an astute collector with a great appreciation of the genre.

Other notable European collectors of the period were Lady Impey in Calcutta and Marquess Wellesley in Barrackpore. They commissioned Indian artists to produce natural history studies with scientific accuracy. The resultant works were highly accomplished depictions, rendered with extraordinary colour and ornament.

Undoubtedly a member of this canon, the present study demonstrates the work of an exceptionally talented hand. Not only is the bird technically accurate, the work also conveys a sense of its vitality; the feet clasp onto the branch as the weight descends, the body compresses in anticipation, as though he might spread his wings and fly off the page at any moment.

Bearing the J. Whatman watermark, the study is numbered '402' and erroneously inscribed in Persian '*ku'el māde* (female Asian koel)'.

C.H.



**Bibliography**  
Churchill, WA. *Watermarks in paper in Holland, England, France, etc., in the XVII and XVIII centuries and their interconnection*, Amsterdam: Nieuwkoop B De Graaf 1985, authorized reprint 1935, pp.83-84.

Archer, Mildred. *Natural History Drawings* in the India Office library. Commonwealth Relations Office, London, 1962.







# A Study of a Female Asian Koel (*Eudynamis scolopaceus*)

Made for the European market  
Calcutta, India. c. 1800-1850

Opaque colours and ink on paper  
47.3 cm high, 32.1 cm wide

Provenance: Paul Beilby Lawley Thompson,  
1st Baron Wenlock (1784-1852).

This exceptionally refined work highlights the elegance of the female koel and captures her alert nature as she raises her head and casts her beady eye toward the viewer.

The plumage of the bird’s head and body is of mottled browns and greys, and the black wings are punctuated by white spots. Her three barred rectrices continue this sophisticated colouration.

Members of the cuckoo family, Asian koels are canny brood parasites; laying their eggs in other birds’ nests, where their chicks hatch first, commanding more attention from their host parents. Recently scientists have discovered that the female koel’s plumage specifically evokes that of a local raptor species, and by mimicking these birds of prey they scare off the would-be host birds and deposit one of their eggs in the unguarded nests.

Artistic prowess abounds in this work; subtle blending from brown to buff to grey and white, overlaid with minute wisps of black creates an exquisitely soft feel to the downy breast feathers. Further extraordinary detail appears within the glistening reflection in the bird’s eye and dash of pale pink at the edge of the beak, as though stained by the juice of a recently eaten forest fruit.

The work bears the ‘Strasbourg Lily’ watermark, which appeared on Dutch, German and English papers from the late 17th - 19th century. Below the bird is a Persian inscription, erroneously labelling it as a ‘*ku’el nar*’ (male Asian koel)’. To the right of this appears the album number ‘401’.

C.H.



## Bibliography:

Welch, Stuart Cary. *Room for Wonder: Indian Painting During the British Period 1760-1880*. American Federation of Arts, 1978.

Archer, Mildred. *Natural History Drawings in the India Office Library*. Commonwealth Relations Office, London, 1962.



## A Panel with Mother and Child

Made for the European market  
Gujarat, India. Late 16th to early 17th century

Lacquer on wood  
20 cm high, 30 cm wide

Provenance: US private collection

This wooden panel painted in coloured shellac and highlighted in gold features a central scene and a floral border (partially cut off) with vegetal scrolls on a red ground. The central field depicts a courtly outdoor scene on a green ground. Slightly off centre to the right, is a small raised canopied pavilion with a removable step; the flat textile canopy is supported by four corner posts. On the raised dais a woman sits on a chair embracing her naked child in a pose reminiscent of the Virgin and Child. The woman is attended by three female servants. Although their attire seems to derive from European sources, possibly from prints like those which inspired contemporary Mughal paintings, the style follows long-established Persian conventions. A large flowering tree in the background and plants and flowers sprinkled in the foreground cover much of the remaining space. As in similar Persianate depictions of garden scenes, such as contemporary Mughal and Deccani paintings, food is being served by attendants and there are typical Persian-shaped bottles for water or wine (*ṣurāḥī*) and cups. There are also two dogs in the foreground, birds flying over the flowering tree and Chinese-style clouds.

This wooden panel was part of a now lost drop-front writing cabinet called *escritório* in Portuguese. It belongs to a rare group of furniture painted in shellac made in Gujarat (and also in Thatta in Sindh, present-day Pakistan) for export to Europe probably under Portuguese commission and following a European prototype known mainly from Germany, where the most coveted and expensive ones were produced, known as *schreibtisch* or writing desk. The hinged front would drop down to form a surface for writing while the interior drawers would be used to store writing implements and valuables. Prevalent in the interior furnishings of European noble

and patrician households, portable drop-front writing cabinets were a basic requirement of Portuguese officials, merchants and traders living and travelling in Asia.

To this rare group belongs one drop-front writing cabinet in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (inv. IS.142-1984) painted with both secular and Christian imagery depicting Europeans.<sup>1</sup> Missing its front panel, this cabinet shares many decorative and iconographic features with the present panel. One other complete example, probably made in Sindh on account of its highly Persianate style and the materials used, belongs to the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (inv. EA1978.129). Another drop-front writing cabinet, also missing its front panel and similarly decorated with Christian imagery combined with Hindu iconography and more Persianate figures has recently been identified in a Portuguese private collection and was made in Gujarat. Also modelled after European prototypes, two Gujarati small table cabinets veneered in tortoiseshell belong to this group, one in the Museu Municipal de Viana do Castelo (inv. 1080) and the other to the Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis, Porto (inv. 2689 Mob MNSR). This second one, the so-called 'cabinet of the family scenes', is one of the most important objects made in India under the Portuguese as it depicts the same Portuguese couple and their family in their different activities while living in India.<sup>2</sup> A myriad of images is painted on every available surface of the drawers, the sides and top veneered in mottled tortoiseshell, some relating to surviving contemporary Jain paintings. While the floral decoration on both this table cabinet and the present example match in style, the painting style of this panel is more Persianate and draws less on the local Gujarati Jain painting tradition.

H.C.

### Footnotes

1. Jaffer 2002, pp. 25-26
2. Crespo 2021, pp. 57-67

### Bibliography

Crespo, H. M. *India in Portugal: A Time of Artistic Confluence (cat.)*, Porto, Bluebook, 2021.

Jaffer, A. *Luxury goods from India: The art of the Indian cabinet maker*, London, V&A Publications, 2002.









8.

## Anglo-Indian Writing Box

Made for the European market  
Vizagapatnam or  
Masulipatnam, India. 1720–40

Ebony and Ivory

12cm high, 58 cm wide, 40 cm deep

This large, rectangular ebony document box is superbly decorated on all sides with fine ivory inlaid flowers and small leaves on scrolling vines within rectangular borders; some of the flower heads appear somewhat geometrical in shape. In the centre of the lid is a coat of arms, almost certainly apocryphal, which nevertheless suggests this box was made for the European market. The design consists of stylised feathers, forming a tail at the base, with plumage in the middle flanked by a scrolling floral design on each side. The design in the centre of the box is within a frame of geometric motifs. A repeat pattern of leaves decorates the outer border of the lid.

The lid opens upwards to reveal two long silver hinges in trefoil form and a large storage space, ink well and hidden compartments with decorated lids. The inside of the lid has a design of three flowering trees in stylised vases; the tree in the middle is flanked by two delicately engraved flying birds on either side. The box has silver mounts, carrying handles, hinges and escutcheon; in addition to four silver studs around the escutcheon and on top of the lid.

This box has many similarities to others made during the first quarter of the 18th century at Vizagapatnam in Andra Pradesh, on the Coromandel Coast of India. The British were involved in trading activity at Vizagapatnam, which has a natural harbour from the 17th century. The area was known for its high-quality furniture with intricate ivory inlay work, the speciality of the local artisans, who adapted the technique to adorn European style furniture including boxes of different shapes and sizes; in addition, different kinds of textiles were the staple of the Coromandel trade.<sup>1</sup> The opportunities for trade attracted other Europeans to the region, including the Dutch.





An ivory inlaid ebony box dated to c. 1720–30, held in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam is attributed to Vizagapatnam (BK-2012-1). The design on the box consists of large, lush flowers and leaves on scrolling vines in vases. A casket from Vizagapatam at the Victoria and Albert Museum (402-1854) and also dated to 1720–30, is decorated similarly to ours with flowers and small leaves on scrolling vines. A few of the ivory inlaid flowers are also somewhat geometrical, a distinct decorative characteristic on some of the boxes from the region.<sup>2</sup>

A slightly later document box at the Rijksmuseum, dated to c. 1740, is attributed to Masulipatnam (NG-854). The Dutch East India Company (VOC) had its trading post between 1686 and 1759 in the busy seaport of Masulipatnam, situated further to the south of Vizagapatam on the Coromandel Coast. This document box has similar delicate flowering vines to ours, within rectangular, decorated borders; it also has four metal studs around the square open-work lock and on top of the lid. The coat of arms is genuine, that of the Dutch Falck family.

The decorative scheme on these boxes, including ours, was seemingly inspired by locally made textiles.<sup>3</sup> 17th–18th century *palampores* (bed covers) from the Coromandel Coast had dense floral designs amidst scrolling vines and leaves; the main motif was in the centre within a rectangular border. The same format

seems to have been transposed to the decorative design on the boxes. A cotton chintz palampore at the Victoria and Albert Museum (15.4-1968) dated to c. 1720–40 and thus contemporaneous with our box, has a medallion in the centre, reminiscent of a coat of arms, while floral sprays and naturalistic flowers decorate the outer border.<sup>4</sup> The design on the inside of the lid on our box seemingly also drew its inspiration from local textiles: two palampores at the Victoria and Albert Museum each depict a tree growing from a vase (IM. 49-1919, dated to ca. 1700 and 15.36-1950, dated to 1720–40) and on another, small birds are delicately depicted amidst vegetation (15. 46-1956, dated to ca. 1720–50).

The boxes from the Coromandel Coast seem to have at least two types of decoration: one that consists of dense, somewhat heavy floral decoration, with large flowerheads and sometimes vases with flowers placed in elaborate vases; the other with delicate, scrolling vines with flower heads and leaves which decorate the surfaces, and despite this decoration covering all the surfaces, the effect is lighter in form.<sup>5</sup> Our box belongs to the latter type, as does the aforementioned box in the Rijksmuseum (NG-854). These objects were the products of fine local craftsmanship on the Coromandel Coast, made to European taste with distinct characteristics and can be regarded as examples *par excellence* of the export trade.

M.A.



Footnotes

1. An English factory for manufacturing textiles at Vizagapatam dates to 1668 (Jaffer, 2001, p. 172). The East India Company opened an office there in 1682.
2. For a similarly decorated document box dated to 1720–30 from Vizagapatam, in a private collection, see Jaffer, *op.cit.* fig. 80, p. 181.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 186–87. See also Veenendaal, 2019.
4. See a palampore dated to ca. 1710–25; the field has the coat of arms of the city of Amsterdam (Victoria and Albert Museum, Accession Number: 340-1898).
5. For the decoration with large flowerheads and scrolling vines that fill the entire surface, see a box from Vizagapatam, dated to 1720–30, Victoria and Albert Museum, Accession Number 482-1903.

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# Drop-Front Writing Cabinet

Made for the European market  
South China. Early 17th century

52 cm high, 70 cm wide, 46 cm deep

A drop-front writing cabinet probably made from camphor wood (*Cinnamomum camphora*), rectangular in shape and set with protruding stepped mouldings covering the edges. It rises from carved lion feet on the front and bracket feet on the back. The gilt iron fittings consist of the lock plate on the exterior surface of the drop-front and on the central interior drawer, the side handles, the hinges set on the inside and the pullers of the interior drawers, which are all fire gilded. The decorative arrangement of the exterior surfaces consists of a large central field – rectangular on the front, top and back, and almost square on the sides – with a narrow, beaded border. Each exterior panel, except for the underside and back, is deeply carved, lacquered and gilded, with a similar design of vegetal and flowering scrolls typical of this southern Chinese production made for export to Europe. On the exterior, the gilded vegetal decoration in high relief contrasts with a rich, dark brown lacquered ground. When opened, the present writing cabinet reveals a similarly exuberant floral decoration carved in relief and covered in gold leaf. It is fitted with four tiers of drawers, with a large central drawer occupying the height of two tiers. The upper and bottom tiers each have two drawers; while the two central tiers have shorter drawers which are placed on either side of the vertical central drawer. The high-relief carved decoration on the drawer fronts consists of highly stylised plants set in symmetry with two main branches within curling leaves. The carved decoration is similar in design to decoration found in other media such as the moulded ceramics of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), namely glazed earthenware tiles which were used to decorate temples and palaces. On the underside of the drawers and on the corresponding wooden structure there are Chinese characters (each set of two characters comprising the same character plus a different numeral). This system of

assigning matching characters to each drawer and compartment would ensure that the drawers fitted into their intended positions; a sign of thorough planning which may be seen in other examples of contemporary Chinese furniture.<sup>1</sup>

Like other small pieces of furniture of the same origin, which were probably used as jewel cabinets, the present drop-front writing cabinet belongs to a rare group of objects, of which some examples have recently been identified and published.<sup>2</sup> Some feature the same protruding stepped mouldings running along the edges, and others the same type of comb joint. The production of these pieces of furniture, modelled after contemporary European prototypes, is almost certainly linked to commissions from Portuguese noblemen and rich merchants living in Asia, namely in the south coastal regions of the Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang provinces.<sup>3</sup> Although the design and sumptuous decoration of these pieces is unlike the more sober style of the best-known Ming furniture, they correspond perfectly to how the first pieces of Chinese furniture for export to the European market are recorded in contemporary Portuguese documents.<sup>4</sup> Some documented examples may be found in the inventory drawn up in 1570, of the estate of Simão de Melo Magalhães, Captain of Malacca from 1545 to 1548, divided between his widow and children: “*one writing cabinet with silver mountings and also its lock with gilded drawers and silver pullers; one gilded writing cabinet from China; two round boxes from China each with two compartments, one gilded and the other worked in black damascened; and one old casket from China painted in red and gold.*”<sup>5</sup> These were certainly embellished with either Chinese decorative schemes and repertoire like the present example, or Renaissance motifs and compositions copied from European prints all in gold leaf set on a black or red lacquered ground.

H.C.



### Footnotes

1. Berliner 1996, pp. 12–15.
2. Crespo 2016, pp. 288–339, cats. 25–27.
3. Krah1 2007; Crespo 2015.
4. Bastos 2013; Crespo 2015.
5. Crespo 2014, pp. 44 and 105.

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10.

## Indo-Portuguese Drop-Front Cabinet

Made for the European market  
North-west India. 17th century

Teak, East Indian rosewood, ivory, dyed ivory and sandalwood  
26 cm high, 40 cm wide, 32 cm deep

This drop-front writing cabinet or *escritoire* is made from teak (*Tectona grandis*) veneered in East Indian ebony (*Diospyros melanoxylon*), East Indian rosewood (*Dalbergia latifolia*) and decorated with ivory, dyed ivory and sandalwood inlays. Its iron fittings include two wrought iron side handles, hinges and lock plate. The lock plate, on the front, is in the shape of a double-headed eagle or *gaṇḍabheruṇḍa*, a Hindu mythological bird thought to possess magical strength and probably used to ward off evil and protect the precious contents of the cabinet from unscrupulous people.<sup>1</sup> All the sides, except for the underside, are lavishly decorated following a carpet-like design, with wide borders in ebony with ivory fillets. The central fields are set in mirror, with large Persian-style baluster-shaped vases, each containing a lush tree, flowers and birds. On the front, this motif is flanked by two tigers, each crushing a small mountain goat, in its claws, and placed next to two smaller flowering trees crowned by peacocks with snakes in their beaks; the entire design is set in perfect symmetry following Mughal taste.<sup>2</sup> On the sides of the cabinet, the central motif is flanked by hunters dressed in an Islamic attire, aiming at birds with their bows and arrows. On the back of the cabinet, where the central field is of rosewood while only the wide border is of ebony, the same motif is flanked by two smaller trees and vultures, the mythical *jaṭāyu*, each pecking at their own chests while feeding their chicks, not unlike the Christian

pelican in her piety, an iconographic motif introduced to India by Portuguese missionaries. *Jaṭāyu* (literally “strong wind”) is the “devout bird” of Rāma and a Hindu demigod; *Jaṭāyu*, king of the vultures as portrayed in the epic Rāmāyana, is the youngest son of Aruṇa, the vehicle of the sun-god Sūrya. This depiction, like that of *gaṇḍabheruṇḍa*, has a clear apotropaic function, to ward off evil.

The top features the same central motif with a peacock in the middle, the treetop flanked by two large *simurgh*, mythical composite birds similar to phoenixes which, in their powerful claws, grasp elephants. This central motif is flanked by princely figures riding elephants accompanied by servants on foot holding banners. The inside of the drop-front features a smaller baluster-shaped vase with a flowering tree set on a table and flanked by a princely couple in Islamic attire; the courtship scene in turn is flanked by larger flowering trees and attendants set in perfect symmetry. When open, the present writing cabinet reveals an exuberant decoration of fauna and flora. It is fitted with three tiers of drawers, with a large drawer in the centre occupying both the lower and central tier. The upper tier, although appearing to have three, has, in fact, one large drawer, while the two lower tiers have two, each flanking the central drawer. The high-quality inlay decoration of the smaller drawer fronts consists of stylised flowering plants set in symmetry (with red-dyed turned ivory knobs) each flanked by two quails. The large central drawer





features a two-dimensional depiction of a domed pergola or pavilion with a balustrade running across the lower section on which sits a heron; two flanking baluster-shaped columns support the dome each surmounted by a bird facing the centre.<sup>3</sup>

The present writing cabinet was modelled after European prototypes, portable objects which rank among the most prestigious pieces of storage furniture from the 16th century. The hinged front drops down to form a surface for writing, while the many drawers, some with individual locks, give access to what was kept in the cabinet's multiple compartments, such as documents, writing implements and paper, or even jewels and other valuables. This type of luxurious piece of furniture was prevalent in the interior furnishings of European noble and patrician households and portable drop-front cabinets of this type were a basic requirement of European officials, merchants and traders living and travelling in Asia. Small, precious writing cabinets and boxes made in Asia with unusual and expensive materials such as exotic hardwoods, tortoiseshell and ivory were much admired and avidly sought after in Europe due not only to their appealing design but also to their technical perfection. As is known from documentary evidence, namely from contemporary travel accounts, the production of this type of furniture was based in north-western India, the coastal regions of Gujarat and Sindh (in present-day Pakistan), which were long-standing centres of production of luxury goods where firmly established merchant communities from the Middle East, South-East Asia and Europe lived and worked.<sup>4</sup>

Although clearly Mughal in style, objects such as the present cabinet would almost certainly not have been produced in the royal workshops of Delhi, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri or Lahore as has been argued,<sup>5</sup> given that information regarding the artistic output of these royal ateliers has survived and does not mention cabinetmaking.<sup>6</sup> The present writing box belongs to a rare group of similarly decorated objects. A very like example (32 x 48 x 39 cm), dated early 17th century, belongs to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (inv. 122-1906).<sup>7</sup> Another one, entirely made from teak with ivory inlays, belongs to the Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet, Paris (inv. MA12824).

H.C.



Footnotes

1. See Crespo Hugo Miguel and Penalva Luísa, "Joias Goesas: a Construção de uma Identidade Indo-Portuguesa. Goan Jewels: The Construction of an Indo-Portuguese Identity", in Penalva Luísa and Franco Anísio (eds.), *Esplendores do Oriente. Joias de Ouro da Antiga Goa. Splendours of the Orient. Gold Jewels from Old Goa*, Lisboa, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga – Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 2014, pp. 57-90, ref. p. 74.
2. See Skelton Robert, "A Decorative Motif in Mughal Art", in Pal Pratapaditya (ed.), *Aspects of Indian Art. Papers Presented in a Symposium at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, October 1970*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1972, pp. 147-152; Markel Stephen, "Jades, Jewels and Objets d'Art", in Pal Pratapaditya et al., *Romance of the Taj Mahal*, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art – Thames and Hudson, 1989, pp. 128-169; Markel Stephen, "The Use of

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3. On the baluster column, see Koch Ebba, "The Baluster Column – A European Motif in Mughal Architecture and its Meaning", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 45, 1982, pp. 251-262.

4. See Jaffer, Amin, *Luxury Goods from India. The Art of the Cabinet-Maker*, London, V&A Publications, 2002, p. 18; Dias Pedro, *Mobiliário Indo-Português, Moreira de Cónegos*, Imaginalis, 2013; and Crespo Hugo Miguel, *Choices*, Lisboa – Paris, AR-PAB, 2016, pp. 172-191, cat. 16.

5. See Carvalho Pedro Moura, "What Happened to the Mughal Furniture? The Role of the Imperial Workshops, the Decorative Motifs Used, and the Influence of Western Models", *Muqarnas. An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World*, 21, 2004, pp. 79-94.

6. See Castilho Manuel (ed.), *Na Rota do Oriente. Objectos para o estudo da arte luso-oriental. The Eastern Route. Objects for the study of Portuguese-Oriental art*, Lisboa, Manuel Castilho Antiguidades, 1999.
7. See Jaffer Amin, *Luxury Goods from India. The Art of the Cabinet-Maker*, London, V&A Publications, 2002, pp. 44-45, cat. 15.



# Sino-Portuguese Plaque (*The Piercing of Jesus’s Side*)

Made for the European market  
Manila, The Philippines. Early 17th century

Carved ivory, with traces of polychromy  
15cm high, 10cm wide

A rare religious plaque depicting *The Piercing of Jesus’s Side* (John 19:33-34), for personal devotion, delicately carved in ivory by Chinese craftsmen in South China or, most probably, in the Philippines (Manila). This and other similar plaques with complex religious imagery were intended as visual aids for devotional practices. They were promoted by the Jesuits in Asia in their missionary work and as items for export, namely to Central and South America, and the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>1</sup>

Recent archaeological finds, namely from the shipwreck of a Manila galleon, the *Santa Margarita* (1601) off the Mariana Islands (Ladrones), have yielded a wealth of information on the chronology and production of devotional ivories made by Chinese and Filipino master carvers in the Philippines in the early 17th century, a production which in fact predates the Goan ivory carving industry by half a century.<sup>2</sup>

The present plaque, with its carved moulded frame, is remarkable for the quality of its carving.<sup>3</sup> Some of the iconographic elements, given the fragility of the material, project dangerously from the background, for example the long spear and the legs of Longinus’s horse.

The carved plaque faithfully copies a contemporary engraving by Johan Sadeler I (1550-1600), after a drawing by Maarten de Vos (1532-1603) which miraculously survives in the Städel Museum, Frankfurt (inv. 2744).

Inscribed with the date 1582, it depicts *The Piercing of Jesus’s Side*, where we see Longinus, the Roman soldier (depicted as a centurion) on horseback, piercing the side of the crucified Christ with the Holy Lance, flanked by the two crucified thieves, while two angels on clouds collect the blood and water that flowed from the nails piercing His hands and the wound inflicted by Longinus on Jesus’s heart and lungs; in the right foreground are depicted the kneeling Mary Magdalene (with her ointment jar) and the standing figures of the Virgin and John the Evangelist.

The early 17th century Christian devotee would gaze at the finely carved ivory plaque and its powerful imagery and meditate on the water and blood that flowed from the crucified Christ’s wounds; the “water” symbolising entrance into the Church through baptism, and the “blood” symbolising the strength of life given through the Eucharist.

A similar example survives in the Capilla (or Iglesia) de la Vera Cruz in Salamanca, Spain; it has recently been published by the late Margarita Estella Marcos.<sup>4</sup>

There are some minor differences between the two plaques, namely in the presence of solar and lunar symbols above the arms of the cross, absent in our example; likewise, the postures of the angels, which do not appear in Vos’s drawing or in Sadeler’s print, are reminiscent of an earlier depiction of *The Crucifixion* by Albrecht Dürer.

While the quality of carving in our example seems slightly superior to the one preserved in Salamanca, it seems highly possible that the two plaques were made in the same Manila workshop in the early 17th century.

H.C.



## Footnotes

1. See Alan Chong, “Christian ivories by Chinese artists. Macau, the Philippines, and elsewhere, late 16th and 17th centuries”, in Alan Chong (ed.), *Christianity in Asia. Sacred art and visual splendour*, Singapore, Asian Civilisations Museum, 2016, pp. 204-207. See also Gauvin Alexander Bailey, “Translation and metamorphosis in the Catholic Ivories of China, Japan and the Philippines, 1561-1800”, in Nuno Vassallo e Silva (ed.), *Ivories in the Portuguese Empire*, Lisboa, Scribe, 2013, pp. 233-290; Margarita Estella Marcos, *Marfiles de las provincias ultramarinas orientales de España y Portugal*, Ciudad de México, Espejo de Obsidiana, 2010; and Trusted, Marjorie, “Propaganda and Luxury: Small-scale Baroque Sculptures in Viceroyal America and the Philippines”, in Donna Pierce, Ronald Osaka (eds.), *Asia and Spanish America. Trans-Pacific Artistic and Cultural Exchange, 1500-1850*, Denver, Denver Art Museum, 2009, pp. 151-163.
2. See Marjorie Trusted, “Survivors of a Shipwreck: Ivories from a Manila Galleon of 1601”, *Hispanic Research Journal*, 14.5, 2013, pp. 446-462.
3. For comparable examples regarding the quality of the carving, some whose engraved sources of inspiration of European origin have been identified, see Hugo Miguel Crespo (ed.), *A Arte de Coleccionar. Lisboa, a Europa e o Mundo na Época Moderna (1500-1800). The Art of Collecting. Lisbon, Europe and the Early Modern World (1500-1800)*, Lisboa, AR-PAB, 2019, pp. 334-338, cat. 49.
4. See Gloria Espinosa Spínola, Margarita M. Estella Marcos, Cristina Esteras Martín, *Visiones de América: Arte desde el confín del mundo. Colección Francisco Marcos*, Burgos, Fundación Caja de Burgos, 2018, p. 350.







## A Study of a Group of Southeast Asian Birds

Made for the European market  
Guangzhou (Canton), China. c.1829–50

Watercolour and bodycolour heightened with gum arabic  
46 cm high, 57.5 cm wide

Provenance: UK private collection

With masterful detail and great sensitivity, this vivid display captures the enchanting nature of a group of Southeast Asian birds. An arrestingly vivid black-naped oriole (*Oriolus chinensis*) occupies the foreground, with brilliant yellow plumage and black-tipped wings. Above a pair of cuckoos shimmer with electric indigos, iridescent greens and glistening chestnuts, set against their mottled breasts. Two munias are perched to the right, the black-headed munia (*Lonchura malacca*) with a rich copper sheen and scaly-breasted munia (*Lonchura punctulata*) with cascades of brown and white scales. The elegant male olive backed sunbird (*Cinnyris jugularis*) appears on the lowest branch, its slender, arched beak adept at reaching the most inaccessible nectar.

Perched within the meandering branches of a viburnum, the birds inhabit the space with tranquil equilibrium. Clusters of dainty fruits and pink flowers accentuate this feeling of languid rhythm. Layers of paint achieve a great sense of depth, while minute details such as a wisp of feathers protruding into the oriole's beak, reveal an exceptional level of observation. Dashes of silver highlight the branches and several of the leaf tips display yellowing blemishes. Such accomplished style, depth and observation typify the hand of a Chinese artist, hailing from the classical tradition of natural history painting.

From the Song dynasty (960–1279) accomplished artists were trained to paint flowers and birds (*huaniao*) with exceptionally fine brushwork (*gongbi*). Latterly artists referred to the influential *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, multiple copies of which were reproduced from the 17th to the 20th century. The text presented detailed instructions for painting plants and flowers with naturalism and accuracy. The long-established tradition of natural history painting amongst Chinese artists proved valuable to Western patrons. Many of those serving in the East India Company commissioned paintings of local flora and fauna, creating albums of particular scientific interest. Notable examples include The William Farquhar Collection commissioned between 1819 and 1823, donated to The National Museum of Singapore, the Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles Collection obtained between 1811–1824, in the British Library, London and The Reeves Collection established between 1812–1831, now held in the Natural History Museum, London.



These enlightening collections provide highly accomplished studies of birds, animals and flowers whilst incorporating refined Chinese painterly techniques with Western taxonomic interests. The present work bears significant comparison to these studies (see for example black-naped oriole, *Oriolus chinensis*) from an Album of 51 Drawings of Birds and Mammals made at Bencoolen, Sumatra, for Sir Stamford Raffles. Originally published in c.1824. British Library, London). The present study would also have comprised part of an album, it bears the number 15 on the top and the paper is marked J. Whatman Turkey Mill, 1829. Between 1817–1830 the majority of drawings sent by John Reeves to England were on J. Whatman paper, which was used frequently by East India Company officials commissioning local artists.

One notable exception between the present work and that of contemporaneous albums produced by Chinese artists lies in the composition. The great majority of studies in the Raffles, Farquhar and Reeves collections depict either individual specimens or breeding pairs of birds. This group portrait of various different species appearing together is therefore rare and insightful; it indicates the specific requirements of the patron and demonstrates the versatility and imagination of the artist. The result is a resounding success, as the graceful composition echoes the melodies of the songbirds themselves, their exceptionally detailed feathers and glinting eyes suggest these spirited creatures might depart their perches at a moment's notice.

C.H.









13.  
A Study of a Red-Tailed Shrike  
(*Lanius phoenicuroides*)

Made for the European market  
China. c. 1820-1860

Watercolour and bodycolour heightened with gum arabic  
31 cm high, 31 cm wide

Provenance: UK private collection

With a keenly poised eye, sharp beak and projecting breast, this astute bird appears moments away from swooping upon its unsuspecting prey. Above the white underside, rufus feathers descend from the crown to the tip of the tail, contrasting against a velvety black eyestripe and primaries. A dash of yellow marks the formidable point of the beak. The bird perches on a giant thorny species of clumping bamboo (*Bambusa arundinacea*), which is native to China, India and Pakistan.

The red-tailed or Turkestan shrike occupies shrubby and open countryside in Central Asia. Frequently shrewd hunters, they are known to impale their prey, such as insects, on the thorny spines of bushes. These caches attract the females, as do snail shells and colourful objects acquired by the males to adorn their territory.

This highly accomplished study of both flora and fauna adheres to the classical Chinese tradition of bird and branch paintings typified by finely balanced compositions and detailed observation. Chinese artists also illustrated plants with browning foliage and pale green undersides to the leaves, as instructed in traditional painterly texts. The astoundingly minute brushstrokes delineating the patterns on individual tail feathers and highly subtle tonal gradations around the bird's cheek attest to the mature conviction of a truly experienced hand.

This work would likely have formed part of an album of scientific studies for a western patron, keen to discover the natural wonders of distant lands.

C.H.

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# A Study of a Camellia

Made for the European market  
Guangzhou (Canton), China.  
c. 1800-1830

Watercolour on pith paper  
38.5 cm high, 30.5 cm wide

Provenance: UK private collection

Known as ‘*cha hua*’ in Chinese, this highly valued plant consists of up to three hundred species and approximately three thousand hybrids, including *Camellia sinensis* whose leaves are used to create tea. Native to Southern and Eastern Asia, Camellia plants were collected in the 18th and 19th centuries by European travellers, keen to add winter and early spring colour to their botanical gardens.

The present study displays a camellia branch with a flower in full bloom and another still closed. A further flower exhibits the underside, and the leaves appear from various angles and in different stages of their life cycle. These detailed observations would certainly have fulfilled the requirements of a taxonomically minded European patron, keen to amass a great deal of botanical information within one image. Employed as a tea inspector for the British East India Company, John Reeves (1774-1856) was responsible for the introduction of several garden plants to the West. An ardent botanist, Reeves oversaw the painting of a great number of species by Chinese artists in Canton and Macao. For a comparable work in the Reeves Collection, see John Reeves Collection, *Camellia japonica*, unknown artist, 1812-31. Watercolour, Natural History Museum, London.

As with Reeves’s *Camellia*, the present work depicts the plant with rich green tonal variations on the leaves and fluid lines throughout the foliage and stem. Precise shading demarcates individual white petals and delicate light brown scallops form the sepals. Not only does the study exhibit the characteristics of the finest botanical painting of the period, but it is also an eloquent record of this most cherished species.

C.H.



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15.

## A Study of a Plant from the Malvaceae family

Made for the European market  
Guangzhou (Canton), China.  
c. 1800-1830

Watercolour on pith paper  
38.5 cm high, 30.5 cm wide

Provenance: UK private collection

*“To be without method is deplorable, but to depend entirely on method is worse.”*  
Lu Ch'ai, 17th century Master of Chinese brush painting.

This magnificently verdurous specimen consists of wide, lobed leaves in forest greens with rich mossy undertones. These waxy leaves are heavily veined, encouraging water on its path towards the roots. A profusion of golden stamens erupts from the puce centre as four white trumpet shape petals curl outwards.

The sturdy branch indicates a tree or possibly large shrub. Its textured bark grey with brown detailing terminates with a sawn-off end, yet the base and a further branch seem to have been snapped and consequently appear in a more naturalistic fashion. Emergent buds resembling those of a magnolia tree weigh the lower stem down, causing it to bow in a sweeping arc. This correlates with the opposite stem, which echoes the curve in an upward motion as another bud prepares to open. This sinuous movement embodies the vitality of a plant bursting into flower.

This truly exquisite study epitomises the classical tradition in Chinese art of conveying the spirit of a particular botanical subject, as described by 6th century texts outlining the key principles of Chinese painting. Exceeding a mere record of the plant's features, the work is suffused with energy; there's a melodic quality to the brushstrokes and the whole plant seems awash with life pulsing through its veins.

C.H.



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Bailey, Kate. "The Reeves Collection of Chinese Botanical Drawings", *The Plantsman* n.s. 9(4), 2010, pp. 218-225.





16.

## A Study of Cotton Rose (*Hibiscus mutabilis*)

Made for the European market  
Guangzhou (Canton), China.  
c. 1800-1830

Watercolour on pith paper  
38.5 cm high, 30.5 cm wide

Provenance: UK private collection

Also known as the confederate and cotton rose, *Hibiscus mutabilis* is a large shrub or small tree originally from Southern China and Taiwan. The cordate leaves have five lobes and serrated edges. The white flowers open at dawn before turning pink towards the afternoon, then a deep red by the evening.

The present study shows a branch with two flowers, three mature leaves, a young leaf and three buds. A profusion of white petals cascades languidly in all directions as the largest flower bows under their weight. From the centre exceptionally delicate white lines appear against a fawn shadow, creating a sense of volume and movement. As the petals curl, tinges of pinks fading to white appear on their undersides. Surrounding the flower, three buds are ready to burst open. Their wavering sepals creating the sense of them bobbing in the breeze adheres to the naturalistic element of Chinese painting during the early 19th century. The browning of the leaves also indicates a Chinese hand, as does the presentation of the underside of the leaves in a pale green.

The inscription at the bottom reads "*Hibiscus mutabilis, flora plena*." Deriving from the Latin phrase meaning 'many flowers', *flora plena* refers either to flower varieties with a double set of petals or to flowers with an exceptionally large number of petals. Known as *mufurong hua* in China, the dried flowers have a cooling property and are used in traditional medicine for burns, scalds, swelling and pain.

Comparable examples may be found in the collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (AC. D.103-1890).

C.H.



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# A Group of Twelve Paintings of Southeast Asian Birds

Made for the European market  
Guangzhou (Canton) or Macau. c.1800-1860

Watercolour on pith paper  
All 35.5 cm high, 30.5 cm wide

This exceptionally vibrant group of twelve studies of Southeast Asian birds presents a series of highly accomplished works that demonstrate some of the finest examples of Chinese export painting.

Individual species are typically shown, with the exception of paradise flycatcher, with a female black-naped oriole, (no. 17.8), and the study of a paradise flycatcher, with a black-collared starling (no. 17.11). All of the studies feature native vegetation such as blossoms, fruiting shrubs and tall grasses, providing ornamentation and emphasising their naturalistic context. The artist's playful nature is also revealed as one of the spotted doves keenly observes a beetle as it unwittingly approaches it on the underside of a stem. The compositions also depict a graceful elegance, illustrated by the arching grasses evoking the curve of the jacana's tail and the tips of the foliage echoing the bird's sharply pointed feet and beak (no. 17.7). The works are also typified by a soft palette of exquisitely rich mineral pigments, fine shading around the bird's eyes creating expressive vitality and exceptionally detailed plumage, highlighting individual feathers. These qualities invite the viewer to truly contemplate the attributes of each species in their individual magnificence.

The present studies also bear comparison to works in other notable collections. The pheasant-tailed jacana (no. 17.7) appears in a similar manner to a red-crowned crane, plate 61 in the John Reeves Collection of Zoological Drawings from Canton, China. In both works the bird appears facing to their left with tall grass behind them, drooping under the weight of their seed heads. Both drawings depict rocks either underneath or beside the birds and the foliage behind the two birds is extremely similar in their pale green hues and depictions in small clusters. The birds also share the same poised expression, extremely fine detailing of the feathers and soft shading to demarcate the wings.

John Reeves worked for East India Company as a tea inspector. Spending time in Canton and Macao, under his direction he commissioned Chinese artists to paint the local flora and fauna, these works were sent back to England between 1817-1830 and were an invaluable contribution to the study and understanding of natural history.

The notable similarities between this exceedingly accomplished group and the Reeves collection firmly places this series within the canon of highly acclaimed Chinese export paintings, produced for distinguished western collections.

C.H.







171.

## A Study of a Pair of Red-Whiskered Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus jocosus*)

A pair of red-whiskered bulbuls perch in a kumquat tree as they turn toward each other with affection. These charming, spirited birds have pointed black crests, distinctive red and white cheek patches, brown and white bodies and a red vent on the underside of their tails. Feasting on fruit and invertebrates, the bird's habitat includes forests, farmland and urban gardens. Found mainly in Southeast Asia they have also established themselves in America and Australia. In early spring their evocative *kink-a-joo* cries increase as the birds engage in theatrical courtship rituals.

C.H.







17.2.

## A Study of a Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*)

A resplendent male mandarin duck resides under a lotus flower at the edge of a pond. The bird's elaborate plumage consists of a broad white eye-stripe bounded above by a shimmering green crest and below by flammeous cheeks. The pale orange raised 'sail' feathers culminate the bird's ornate display to attract a mate.

Widely regarded as the world's most beautiful duck, the Mandarin is a native of China and Japan, although they have travelled widely and even established colonies in the United Kingdom.

A symbol of fidelity, mandarin ducks frequently appear on wedding gifts in China and were traditionally presented to newly married couples.

C.H.





17.3.

## A Study of a Black-Capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileate*)

With a striking coral beak and rich purple-blue wings, the black-capped kingfisher is an exceptionally beautiful bird. A member of the Alcedinidae family, these tree kingfishers are widely found in China, Korea, India and Southeast Asia. Frequenting mangroves, rivers and coastal waters, their keen eyesight and rapid wings enable them to dive for fish and insects with masterful precision. In 1821 the English naturalist William John Swainson first introduced the genus *Halcyon* to the Black-capped Kingfisher. Deriving from Greek mythology, the *Halcyon* was a kingfisher that was able to charm tempestuous oceans into a state of calm.

C.H.







174.

## A Study of a Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

The shimmering emerald feathers and raised black crest provides an arresting study of the male northern lapwing. Also known as the green plover or peewit, lapwings can be found widely across temperate Eurosiberia. In winter large flocks often migrate to China, India, and North Africa. Slender legs enable them to wade across their preferred habitats of wetlands, meadows, marshes and fields. During the breeding season, males perform captivating displays of aerial dives as they rotate from side to side whilst maintaining a constant call.

C.H.





17.5.

## A Study of a Grey-Headed Swampphen (*Porphyrio poliocephalus*)

A grey-headed swampphen preys upon an unsuspecting snake in this animated study. With glossy indigo, azure and turquoise plumage, displayed in riotous contrast against a vermillion bill and frontal shield, it is evident why the Romans kept swampphens as ornamental birds. The species is native to the tropical and subtropical regions of southern China, Thailand, India and the Middle East where the birds reside in freshwater swamps and marshes. Swampphens demonstrate an unusual method of feeding, often employing their long toes to raise food toward their beaks, rather than stooping down.

C.H.







17.6.

# A Study of a Male Grey Peacock-Pheasant (*Polyplectron bicalcaratum*)

A male grey peacock-pheasant stands before a pink poppy and flowering rose. The bird's fawn coloured plumage is enlivened by a dazzling iridescence of green-blue 'eyes' on their backs and tail feathers. Both sexes are similar, although the males have longer tail feathers and a crest that may be extended forward to cover their beaks. Consuming fruits, seeds and insects, the birds stealthily travel through the dense forests of China, Northern India, Southeast Asia and the Malayan Peninsula. During the breeding season, males spread their wings and open their tails, providing a hypnotically shimmering display for the females.

C.H.





17.7.

## A Study of a Pheasant-Tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*)

The extraordinary pheasant-tailed jacana is the only member of its genus. It is also unique in its taxonomic family as it displays a different plumage during the breeding season, as represented in the present study. The bird's white face and throat is divided by a black stripe running down from the crown, framing the brilliant yellow feathers on the nape of the neck. The chestnut brown and white body is accentuated by the magnificent elongated central tail feathers. The bird is also commonly referred to as the water pheasant and belongs to a family of wading birds whose large feet enable them to walk upon floating vegetation in search of their prey. Pheasant-tailed jacanas may be found in China, throughout the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.

C.H.







17.8.

### A Study of a Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradise*) and a Female Black-Naped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis*)

A female black-naped oriole perches upon a rock beside a brilliant orange lily. Her subtle plumage of mustard yellows and grey-browns provides excellent camouflage in the forest canopy for this secretive bird. Despite its name, *Oriolus chinensis* frequents woodlands in Russia, India, the Philippines and China where it feeds upon insects and fruit.

Above, the magnificent blue tinged paradise flycatcher is daintily perched upon a branch. The bird's exceptional tail feathers are displayed to their utmost in this well conceived portrait. Female paradise flycatchers favour males with long tail feathers and breeding pairs share in protecting their young with great tenacity.

C.H.





17.9.

## A Study of a Male Green Peafowl (*Pavo muticus*)

This resplendent portrait of the male green peafowl depicts the bird in its true glory. Crowned by an upright crest, the lustrous plumage meanders between copper, emerald, lapis blue and green-black tones. The tail feathers glisten and shimmer as the bird struts forward.

Green peafowl can live in a range of habitats including tropical forests, savannahs and grasslands. They feed on insects, fruit, plants and may even prey upon snakes. Native to the forests of Southeast Asia, regrettably the species is in rapid decline due to habitat loss and hunting.

The earliest record of a European seeing a green peafowl was the French naturalist François Levaillant, notably the bird had been sent from Macau to the Cape of Good Hope.

C.H.







17.10.

## A Study of a Pair of Spotted Doves (*Spilopelia chinensis*)

This charming study depicts a pair of spotted doves perched in a banana tree as one of them keenly eyes an approaching beetle. With grey heads lapsing into a pinkish-buff, darker feathers on their wings and long tails, their distinctive black collars, finely spotted with white dots. They are an attractive member of the columbidae family. Native to southern Asia, spotted doves can now be found in many parts of the world. They frequent woods, scrub, farmlands and are often found in urban locations. Breeding pairs are monogamous and often forage for fruit together. During courtship males perform 'bowing' displays on branches as they lower their heads and call to the females.

C.H.







17.11.

# A Study of a Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradise*) and a Black-collared Starling (*Gracupica nigricollis*)

A male paradise flycatcher perches above a black-collared starling in this attractive composition. With pure-white plumage and magnificent cascading tail, the flycatcher displays a unique elegance. Typically males don't develop their long tail feathers until two or three years old, when they may grow up to a remarkable 30 cm long. The birds prefer the dense coverings of forests in China, Sri-Lanka, India and Myanmar, as well as central Asia where they swoop beneath the canopy to gather insects.

Perching on a loquat branch, the black-collared starling has a white head with a yellow patch of skin beneath the eye and a distinctive band of black feathers around the neck. The mantle and back are an iridescent sepia and the wings are a paler brown with white tips. These social birds may be found in a wide range of habitats across Southeast Asia including China, Myanmar and Thailand.

C.H.





17.12.

## A Study of a Pair of Tawny-Breasted Parrotfinches (*Erythrura hyperythra*)

A male and female tawny-breasted parrotfinch call to each other as they prepare to feed on ripe rice plant seeds. First described by Reichenbach in *Canores Exotici*, 1862, these secretive birds display moss green wings set against vivid orange breasts, with sturdy beaks capable of prizing open the toughest of seeds.

A member of the Estrildidae family, the birds are commonly found in the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. They frequent tropical and subtropical shrublands, forests and arable lands.

C.H.

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Kate Bailey. 2010. "The Reeves Collection of Chinese Botanical Drawings". *The Plantsman* n.s. 9 (4): 218-225.

Rosalien van der Poel. 2016. *Made for Trade Made for China, Chinese Export Paintings in Dutch Collections*. Leiden University.





# A Series of Reverse Glass Paintings

Made for the Indian market  
Western India (or Canton,  
China). c. 1800

Original Chinese gilt frames in the style  
of Louis XVI

These six reverse glass paintings were produced by Chinese artists for an elite Indian clientele. There was not only a high demand for Chinese reverse glass paintings in Europe and America, but they were also exported from the mid-18th century onwards to the west coast of India by Parsi traders. By the late-18th century Chinese commercial artists had settled in western India to produce such paintings. These included Chinese artists who were employed at the royal courts of the princely states, for example, Kutch and Mysore.

The reverse glass painting technique originated in 15th-16th century Europe, and it is thought that Jesuit missionaries introduced it to China, where reverse glass paintings were made as early as the 1730s. They became very popular in the Chinese export art trade, which began in the 18th century and reached its height between 1800-1850, catering for the demand in the West for paintings and porcelain made in China. Guangzhou (Canton) was the centre of production for export art, including reverse glass paintings.

In export art, the Chinese artists applied European visual representation together with Chinese artistic features. Thus, the end result was a hybrid product made to meet Western demand and taste for the exotic but with some familiar characteristics to the intended viewer. As the term implies, in reverse glass paintings, the artist paints the image in reverse on the back of a sheet of glass, using a master drawing to transpose the outline, to which colours were applied, beginning with any shading and highlighting and followed by the body colour. At the end of the process, the glass is turned over and the finished picture is viewed from the front, unpainted side of the glass.

M.A.





## Two Seated Ladies

40 cm high, 50 cm wide (with frame)  
34.5 cm high, 44 cm wide

Two women are depicted on a rug, one of whom is seated on a cushion and is being offered a drink by the other kneeling in front of her, holding a tall drinking vessel and a bottle.

Both women wear short, open jackets and long skirts with intricate details. Their jewellery is made of rubies and pearls, including hair ornaments. The scene is set within a room and behind the seated woman is a *chīnikhāne*, a Persian term that means “house of porcelain”; it has ornamental mouldings, influenced by those seen in Indian Mughal art and architecture. A collection of blue and white imported Chinese ceramics painted with floral decorations is displayed on the shelves. A *chīnikhāne* is also depicted in a c. 1750 Indian miniature, holding imported Chinese porcelain (The David Collection, 38/1980). To the right of the *chīnikhāne*, there is a dark

hanging panel, illustrated with gold motifs and an ornamental red border. Behind the seated woman is another decorative textile panel. The enclosed space is accentuated by the sloped, low wooden ceiling.

The composition has parallels to 18th and 19th century Chinese export watercolours and other paintings that depict interiors of shops and residences. The function of the space is defined by the furniture and wall accessories: in the case of our painting, by the *chīnikhāne* and the hanging panel. The Chinese ceramics indicate a wealthy, cultured household, emphasised by the prominent place of the *chīnikhāne* in the composition. The motif of pink flowers in a porcelain vase features frequently in Chinese export paintings (see a Chinese reverse glass painting dated to c. 1775–85 in the American Museum in Britain, 2007.5).

M.A.







19.

## A Female Devotee

50 cm high, 40 cm wide (with frame)  
44.5 cm high, 34.5 cm wide

A female devotee making a *namaste* gesture with her hands is depicted before an altar which supports a chalice with emanating smoke. She has removed her shoes and is dressed in a full, diaphanous skirt (*ghagra*) with floral patterns and richly embroidered edgings, striped pyjamas underneath and a blouse (*choli*); a light *odhni* covers her head and body. The altar and the chalice are both classical in shape. The scene is set within a landscape of trees, flowers, distant mountains and a lake. The trees are blue-green and the flowers are red and pink, whilst the white lines on the water indicate waves. The landscape shows a mixture of Chinese and European features; the pine tree behind the devotee is characteristic of the Chinese painting tradition whilst the clouds and the trees by the lake are reminiscent of European landscapes. The altar and the chalice are derived from classical European forms, created by an artist unfamiliar with devotional rituals in an Indian cultural context (for an Indian reverse glass painting depicting a Zoroastrian prayer scene, see Granoff, fig. 8).

M.A.







20.1.

## Two Ladies in a Garden

Two women are depicted by a lotus pond, each holding a plum blossom in her right hand.

The woman on the left wears a *ghagra* (a full skirt), a long-sleeved blouse and a diaphanous long headdress, *odhni*. The pale blue skirt has a floral pattern, gold embroidery and a gold and pink undergarment. On her forehead, there is a red ruby set within a pearl roundel; she also has pearl earrings, bracelets and anklets, and on her feet, she wears tiny slippers. The woman on the right facing her is similarly dressed and wears jewelled armlets, bracelets and a gold necklace and strings of pearls. Both women have almond shaped, brown eyes, and their complexion is delicate light pink, with shading around the noses and necks. The skin colour of the woman on the right is light pink with a natural undertone. The woman on the left is holding onto a branch of a young, flowering plum tree (*prunus*) whilst the other female is holding one of the ends of her *odhni*, the delicate textile motifs of which can be seen against her left arm. The light blue sky fades into pink at the horizon. The landscape consists of hills, shrubs and scattered small flowers and the very dark

green, at times blue colour of the bushes and the brown hills can be compared to those in 18th century Chinese reverse glass paintings. Although the luminous blue sky with pink horizon is portrayed in Indian miniatures from the 17th century onwards, similarly painted horizons are typical of the late 18th–19th century Chinese export paintings, ultimately derived from European pictorial representation (for two 18th century Indian miniatures in the British Museum, see 1920, 09I7.0.12.34 and 1974, 06I7.0.21.45. For a depiction of the pink sky at the horizon in a Chinese export painting, dated 1785–1815, see E79708 Peabody Essex Museum).

The women's facial features with tonal shading and their delicately painted eyebrows and fingers are characteristics of figural depiction in Chinese export art whilst their jewellery and elaborately patterned costumes are Indian. The subject matter of a woman holding a flower, often a lotus in her hand, is found in Indian miniatures, and symbolises a divine perfection. The plum blossom is a feature in Chinese traditional painting, and amongst its other virtues, symbolises beauty and purity.

M.A.



20.2.

## Two Ladies in a Garden

40 cm high, 50 cm wide (with frame)

34.5 cm high, 44.5 cm wide

This painting is identical to the one above, but a mirror image with some very slight differences in the landscape. The hills are lighter brown and the jewellery of the woman on the right is more golden in colour.

M.A.



# Dancer on a Terrace

39.5 cm high, 50 cm wide (with frame)  
34.5 cm high, 44.5 cm wide

The painting depicts a young female dancer on a terrace in an elaborately detailed costume. Her white, luminous skin has light pink shading on the inside of her elbows and palms of her hands; the right-hand side of her face is also delicately shaded. She is wearing a pink, open bodice with three-quarter sleeves and ornate edgings. Thin jewelled armbands with tassels are attached to both sleeves. She has a matching gold necklace with a ruby surrounded by pearls, a long necklace ornamented with white pearls and bangles on her arms. The gathered skirt is made of diaphanous material with floral patterns and an embroidered hem; a scarf with ornate edgings hangs from her right shoulder down her back. The toes are painted pink, and she wears thin gold anklets. Her long black hair has a jewel as a decoration. Both the costume and jewellery are Indian; floral patterns like those on her skirt are depicted in many Indian miniatures from the 17th century onwards as is the jewellery (for armbands and a necklace with tassels, see c. 1750–75 Pahari miniature in Goswamy and Fischer, p. 187. For similarly portrayed floral textile patterns and a scarf, see an Indian miniature painting from Farrukhabad, Avadh, dated to 1770, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001.421).

The abstract motifs on the carpet resemble Chinese scrolling clouds, and the floor tiles have a dark blue pattern popularly found in Indian textiles and art. Behind the blue stone balustrade are pink peonies, camellias and other red flowers amidst lush greenery. The sky is painted in hues of blue and white.

The facial features of the dancer, with her soft, almond-shaped eyes and luminous skin, are Chinese inspired. The Chinese influence is also evident on the carpet and on the flowers in the background. Scenes set on a terrace with a stone balustrade are often depicted in Indian miniature paintings where the balustrade acts as a spatial divider.<sup>2</sup>

Our painting has many similarities to a late 18th century reverse glass painting from India, *Nawab Namdar Tegh Beg Khan Bahadur* (1790–91) at the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts (see Figure 1). In this painting, the governor and his servant are depicted on a terrace with a stone balustrade; in addition, both the carpet and the tiled floor with a dark blue pattern are almost identical to those in our painting. Furthermore, behind the stone balustrade there are pink and red flowers, and the sky is depicted in tones of blue and white similar to our painting.

M.A.



Figure 1

**Indian artist**

*Nawab Namdar Tegh Beg Khan Bahadur*, 1790–1791

Reverse painting on glass

17 ½ x 25 ⅞ inches (44.5 x 65 cm)

Gift of Nathan Cook, 1825

E9942

Courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.

Photography by Jeffrey R. Dykes.







22.

## Ladies by a Swing

40 cm high, 49.5 cm wide (with frame)

34 cm high, 44 cm wide

A woman is pushing another on a swing amidst a landscape of trees and hills. The first woman wears a very fine, diaphanous costume with striped pyjamas underneath and slippers on her feet. A hat with a plume which is very similar to hers, is depicted on a c. 1660 casket from Golconda, India (Victoria and Albert Museum, 851-1889). The other woman is similarly bejewelled and clad, but she is barefoot, her slippers neatly placed on the ground. The swing is suspended from the branch of a pine tree and there is a lake in the background; both the pine, a symbol of longevity, and the lake are often-seen features in 18th century Chinese reverse glass paintings.<sup>3</sup> The small tree with the sprouting branches on the left may be compared stylistically to that in a Chinese export watercolour, dated to c. 1785 (Victoria and Albert Museum, D. 1085-1898). There are also influences from European painting: the rolling hills and the shrubs in muted colours are typical of the pastoral scenes of the 18th century. The lake is light grey, the white on its surface denoting the reflection of the clouds. These types of clouds would have been unknown in Chinese or Indian painting tradition and were transposed from European paintings. The hilly landscape is similar to that in paintings 2 and 3 as is the blue and green vegetation. Added to the fusion of Chinese and European landscape elements are the figures dressed in an Indian fashion but with non-Indian physiognomic features including the light pink skin colour. The subject matter of a female on a swing, pushed by another is found in Indian miniature paintings. The build-up of the clouds seems to allude to the longing for the monsoon, with an underlying meaning of separation from the beloved. The artist has used a simple perspective where the mountains in the background fade at the horizon.



There is a fusion of artistic influences in each of these reverse glass paintings. The landscape elements are a mixture of European and Chinese influences, the former with a strong Chinese artistic interpretation. The exterior scenes, some set at water's edge, portray lush greenery and flowers, with distant hills and horizons. Whilst the pine tree and the pink flowers are popular symbols in Chinese pictorial representation, the trees and shrubs in muted colours, with the cloud formations and pink horizons, have been adapted from a Western tradition. The peculiar blue green colour combination, copied from European lithographs by Chinese artists, is frequently found in such reverse glass paintings. A simple perspective is used in many of these paintings where the hills and trees diminish towards the horizon.

In Indian miniature painting tradition, the eyes of the figures are also almond shaped but more accentuated and larger whilst in these reverse glass paintings the artist has made the eyes more natural looking by softening their shape. The delicately arched eyebrows and the aquiline nose with a full rosebud mouth are further defining features of the figural depiction, as is the very finely painted hairline. The pale white complexion of the figures has been delicately shaded with pink, which has also been applied to toes and arms. This type of physiognomy and shading is evident in many Chinese reverse glass paintings exported to the West, which portray Chinese women with luminous white faces, shaded in light pinks (see a Chinese reverse glass painting dated to c. 1760-1780 in the Victoria and Albert Museum, FE. 26-1970). The technique of tonal shading derives from European painting; it is not characteristic of traditional Chinese painting. The more naturalistic portrayal of the figures in our paintings has been achieved by a fuller body form and depicting them in a three-quarter view position, the latter is also used in Indian miniature painting but not with a naturalistic effect. The portrayal of the figures in our paintings is idealised: the facial features and expressions are identical in all of them, with similar

dress and jewellery.

Chinese export paintings used visual symbols and motifs from traditional Chinese painting and represented the exotic in a landscape familiar to the western market. These six reverse glass paintings are also examples of Chinese export art but made for an Indian clientele. As in the export art destined for the West, the scenes are set in a European inspired landscape combined with Chinese characteristics; the figures, however, wear Indian costumes and jewellery accompanied by additional pictorial elements such as the stone balustrade, the lotus pond and the *chīnīkhāne* derived from Indian hybrid cultural contexts. These characteristics are typically depicted in many miniatures from different regions of the subcontinent and are thus instantly recognisable to Indian viewers.<sup>4</sup>

The gilt frames on each of these paintings are original, using a Chinese system of fixing the wooden back in place. This type of frame with a row of carved pearls (*cadre à perles*) is a Chinese copy of the French Louis XVI frame; they were made in China from the final decades of the 18th century until early 19th century.<sup>5</sup>

The high quality of these six paintings implies a skilled artist, familiar with the technique of Chinese reverse glass painting. Their subject matter, the idealised portrayal of beautiful women including dancers, was popular at the royal courts of the princely states in western India. Furthermore, features such as the *chīnīkhāne* and the sumptuous dress and jewellery, strongly suggest they were made for a wealthy and elite clientele with refined tastes. Many of the published reverse glass paintings produced in western India by Chinese commercial artists were aimed at the popular market, often painted in garish colours with sketchy details and are therefore not directly comparable to these unique and finely executed reverse glass paintings.

The author would like to thank Dr Thierry Audric, France for his helpful comments.

M.A.

Footnotes

1. Thampi, Madhavi. *Sino-Indian Cultural Diffusion through Trade in the Nineteenth Century*. Collège de France, Paris, 2020. <https://books.openedition.org/cdf/7541?lang=en2020>, pp.3-4.
2. A Mughal miniature dated to the first half of the 18th century has the compositional elements of the terrace with a stone balustrade and the rug on the floor that are very similar to this painting. See Zebrowski, Mark. *Deccani Painting*. Sotheby Publications, London. 1983, fig. 214.
3. Audric, Thierry. *Chinese Reverse Glass Painting 1720-1820: An Artistic Meeting Between China and the West*. Peter Lang, London, 2020, p. 76.
4. For portrayals that are practically identical to the jewellery, floral patterns on women's costumes and cushions in our paintings, there are many examples in Indian miniature paintings from a geographically wide area. For example, 46/1980 and 17/1981 dated to c. 1760-65; for a striped skirt, see 15/1981 mid-18th century, all in the David Collection, Copenhagen. For different skin colours, see a c. 1760-80 Indian miniature from Murshidabad in the David Collection, D28/1994.
5. Audric., pp.34, 110-113.

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## Silver Filigree Casket

Made for the Iberian and South American markets  
The Philippines. 17th century

Silver filigree  
21 cm high, 25 cm wide, 16 cm deep

Provenance: From the collection of a prominent Belgian princely family

This large silver filigree casket has a rectangular box and a trilobate, and a fluted lid that raises from a bracket socle; the casket is set on ball-shaped feet. Featuring two scalloped trilobate handles on the sides and a similar third one on top, it has a large, imposing lock plate with a raised circular escutcheon in the centre with a side latch hinged to the lid. The lock, like the raised oval medallions decorating the exterior faces of the box and lid, is made from gilt silver filigree in contrast with the white silver of the casket. The lock features a raised oval box for the key and is set on an escutcheon profiled like a double-headed eagle, a common design in objects made in the Philippines for the Iberian and South American markets. The filigree decoration consists of rectangular panels, separated by serpentine borders, which are filled with four kidney-shaped elements each set in two-fold symmetry. Following the characteristic stylistic features of this production, the filigree design makes use of a very thick square-section wire for the main motif, in contrast with the subtle flattened twisted wires that are used in the filigree filling. The weight is also a characteristic feature of this production, contrasting with lightweight pieces made later in India.<sup>1</sup> Although the source for the shape of the lid is hard to identify, the overall shape of the casket, with its bracket socle is certainly Chinese in origin, such as small chests for storing documents and valuables set with flat lids known as *xiaoxiang* and seal boxes with bevelled or canted lids known as *yingxia*.<sup>2</sup> While large caskets similarly made for export in the Philippines exist in public and private collections, the presence of applied gilt silver elements, such as those on the present example, is less frequent.

The fine silver filigree design of this casket is typical of the Philippines, albeit made according to Chinese techniques and style probably by Chinese or mestizo craftsmen working in Manila. Similar pieces in design and decoration were recovered from the shipwreck of the Manila galleon, *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*, which went down on 20 September 1638 off the Mariana Islands while bound for Acapulco, Mexico.<sup>3</sup> The ‘treasure’, found, duly recorded and studied but unfortunately poorly known, contains several pieces of gold filigree of the highest artistic and technical merits, undoubtedly transported as a commodity and all produced for export given the sheer number of surviving pieces. The recurrent features in the filigree jewellery found there, while indicating the same workshop, do not enable us to determine their exact origin. Similar pieces





brought by junk sailing from Guangzhou (Canton) in Guangdong province, Quanzhou or Fuzhou in Fujian province, were made in southern China or Manila, the likely production centre of our piece. The stylistic features present in these valuable pieces are serpentine friezes; friezes decorated with ‘s’ motifs with coiled ends forming an ‘o’, which is deemed quintessentially Chinese; and pentagonal rosettes formed of wire with a granule at the centre, an exclusive feature of Chinese-style filigree. Such features as seen on the present casket, alongside its shape and the double-headed eagle on the lock, help us to identify its centre of production with the Philippines. Similarly shaped caskets, with identical decoration, together with other objects identified with certainty with this production centre, have recently been published, including a perfume flask made from a carved pili nut (*Canarium ovatum*), a species indigenous to the Philippine archipelago, with silver filigree mounts similar in design to those occurring on the present casket.<sup>4</sup> According to its carved inscription, the flask was commissioned by Don Baltasar Ruiz de Escalona, Treasurer Judge of the Royal Treasury of the Philippines who died in Manila in 1658.

H.C.

Footnotes

1. See Crespo 2015, p. 135
2. See Crespo 2021, p. 15
3. See Chadour 1990; and Crespo 2015, pp. 102–103
4. See Crespo 2016, pp. 366–381, cat. 32

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24.

## Model of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

Made for the European market  
Ottoman Jerusalem. 17th or 18th Century

Olive wood, ebony, inlaid mother-of-pearl and ivory  
42.5 cm wide, 37 cm diameter

Provenance: UK private collection since the early 1900s.

This exquisite model of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is made of olive wood and inlaid with mother-of-pearl, ivory, and ebony. It was constructed with the intention of being sold as a souvenir to pilgrims visiting the Holy Land. Interestingly, the model can be taken apart so that the architectural details of the interior can be revealed, allowing pilgrims to recall their journey to the individual areas of religious significance within the building.

The square courtyard floor is inlaid with mother-of-pearl design to imitate a mosaic floor and it also has a cross pattée in the centre within a circle of inlaid decoration and outer square border of inlaid mother-of-pearl decoration. On the walls of the church there are inlaid mother-of-pearl quatrefoils and rosettes. The detachable dome has a spiral flight of steps made of inlaid ivory and mother-of-pearl on one side. Around the bottom of the dome, there are four inlaid ivory inscriptions in Latin that indicate the four primary directions: *Meridies* (South), *Oriens* (East), *Septentrio* (North) and *Occidens* (West). Under the detachable cupola, there is a model of the Tomb of Christ made of inlaid mother-of-pearl. Furthermore, the square bell tower has five tiers with arched windows that are defined by fine ivory columns.

Craftsmen working in Franciscan monasteries in the Holy Land may have been influenced by the detailed plans and drawings made by Bernardino Amico, a Franciscan friar, who arrived in Jerusalem in 1593. Amico's architectural surveys of the main shrines and chapels in the area were published in his book, *Tratto delle piante & immagini de sacri edifizii di Terra Santa* (1609), where he emphasised that his detailed account of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre aimed to provide a working scheme to anyone who wished to build a model of it.<sup>1</sup>

There are similar models of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre held in several prestigious institutions, including: the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (AN1887.3089.2009.2), the British Museum in London (OA.10338), the Museum of Fine Arts Boston (2016.91), the Museum of the Order of St John in London (LDOSJ 3034, LDOSJ 3033 and LDOSJ 3035),<sup>2</sup> and the Burghley Collection in Stamford, Lincolnshire (EWA08635).

V.G.

### Footnotes

1. See, Zur Shalev. 2012. *Sacred Words and Worlds: Geography, Religion, and Scholarship*, 1550-1700. Leiden: Brill. p.114.
2. Michele Piccirillo. 2007. *La Nuova Gerusalemme: Artigianato palestinese al servizio dei Luoghi Santi*. Bergamo: Edizioni Custodia di Terra Santa. p.87.











25.

## Arabic Calligraphic Scroll

She Junyou (Muhammad Qasim) (b.1951)  
China. 1995

Ink on paper  
147 cm high, 80.5 cm wide

The paper of this scroll is framed with dark blue fabric, decorated with yellow embroidered floral design. The stamp at the top right corner marking the beginning of the scroll is the *bismillah*. Following the stamp is the *bismillah* written in Chinese Islamic script. The bottom left writing reads “*yihai dongyue* (the 11th Month of 1995/2007) *al-Qāsim*” and the stamp bears the artist’s name “*shejunyou yin* [Seal of She Junyou]”.

This monochrome painting depicts a still life composition, with a large vase in the centre that contains lotus flowers, a seedpod and a lotus leaf. Painted with several bands of decorations, the style of the vase is reminiscent of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain. On both sides of the vase are wooden stools in traditional Chinese silhouettes, on each stool is a ceramic plate containing various kinds of symbolic fruits: pomegranates, pears, peaches and apples. Behind the vase is a *ruyi*, a decorative scepter that symbolises ‘good fortune’ in traditional Chinese visual culture.

This painting may appear to be conventionally Chinese at first, upon closer observation, one finds Quranic verses embedded within the vase and flowers.

The lotus leaf reads:

“محمد

” (Muhammad. There is no power but from Allah the Almighty)

The vase neck reads:

“الله ربي” (Allah is my lord)

The vase belly reads:

قل الحمد لله رب [...] الخي

” (Say praise to Allah lord of [...], the Eternity, Lord of Heavens and Earth is King)

This painting is the most recognisable style of work by the artist She Junyou, a well-known Arabic calligrapher based in China. He was born to a family of Muslim scholars, where his father and grandfather were both Hui *imams*. He studied Arabic calligraphy from a young age, and works in Kufic, *Nasta’liq*, *Thuluth* scripts. His works have been collected by public institutions and private collections in Iran, China, and Malaysia, namely the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM-1998.3.15). One of his most famous work is the thirty-volume Qur’an woodcarving at the Great Mosque of Xi’an, China. His work was recently sold at Christie’s London (Lot 79, *Arts & Textiles of the Islamic & Indian Worlds*, 28 April 2017)

S.L.

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