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## Rare Italo-Moresque Albarello

Tuscany, Italy, Second half of the 15th century

Tin-glazed earthenware, painted in blue  
33.5cm high, 14.5cm diameter

Provenance: German private collection, bought between 1949 and 1971; thence by descent.

In addition to this albarello, only 24 other examples with similar blue and white pseudo-Kufic decoration are known. The majority of these albarellos are housed in museums, including the Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche, Faenza (accession no. 24886), Musée National de Céramique, Sèvres (accession no. MNC22667), Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence (accession no. DC46), Naples, Getty Museum, Los Angeles (accession no. 84.DE.96), the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (accession no. C. 181-1991).<sup>1</sup> Three are displayed in the ceramics room at the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession nos 1150-1904 and 1143-1904, and 1147-1904), and the latter shares the same flat base, white glaze, and straight sides as our example. A fourth albarello in the same museum (accession no. 372-1889) is emblazoned with a coat of arms identified as belonging either to the Marzalogli family or the Buffoni family of Bologna, leading to the suggestion that the entire group was commissioned for a pharmacy owned by the patron family.<sup>2</sup> The majority of jars in this group measure between 21 and 25cm high. Only three measure between 27.5cm and 33.5cm high, making the present example one of the largest known.<sup>3</sup>

Large quantities of Hispano-Moresque lustreware were imported into Italy from Valencia during the 14th and 15th centuries. Blue and white lustreware with pseudo-Kufic decoration, such as an albarello in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. 488-1864), may have provided a prototype. ‘*Albaregli damaschini*’ are mentioned in 15th century inventories. The term initially denoted their origin [Damascus, Syria], referring to jars like the 15th century pair in the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto (accession nos AKM567 and AKM568), but later was used more generally to indicate any jars with blue decoration.<sup>4</sup>

The central band of ornamentation features pseudo-Kufic script, imitating Arabic calligraphy. Kufic was well known in Italy, especially Tuscany, as testified by its use in altarpieces by Florentine artists such as Ugolino di Nerio, Gentile da Fabriano, Masaccio, and Domenico Ghirlandaio. One of the most famous examples of this is found in the Barbadori altarpiece, today in the Louvre, Paris (accession no. 339). Completed by Filippo Lippi in 1438, it features pseudo-Kufic script on the hem of the Virgin’s clothes.

An albarello of this type is depicted in an altarpiece of the Virgin and Child with Saints by the Sienese artist Giovanni di Paolo, now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena (no. 191). The altarpiece was completed after 1453, giving rise to speculation that this group was made in mid-15th century Siena.<sup>5</sup>

M.L.



### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive list see Hess, Catherine. *Italian Maiolica: Catalogue of the Collections*. Malibu: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1988. pp. 36-38, cat. 10.
- <sup>2</sup> Hess, Catherine. *Italian Ceramics: Catalogue of the J. Paul Getty Museum*. Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2002. p. 72.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71.
- <sup>4</sup> Poole, Julia. *Italian Maiolica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. p. 22.
- <sup>5</sup> ‘Pharmacy jar: C.181-1991’, *The Fitzwilliam Museum*, retrieved online via <https://collection.beta.fitz.ms/id/object/48308> on 09/01/2025.







2

## Hispano-Moresque Albarello

Manises, Spain, c. 1450

Lustre-glazed earthenware  
28.5cm high

Provenance: French private collection.

This pharmacy jar, or albarello, is decorated with an intricate ivy leaf pattern; the motif was commonly used to decorate 15th-century Valencian lustreware, with dated pieces suggesting a manufacturing period of c. 1427-1478.<sup>1</sup> This albarello was likely made towards the beginning of that period. The large leaves are decorated with sgraffito veins, painted alternately in copper lustre and cobalt blue. As the century progressed, the leaves decreased in size and the use of sgraffito diminished. The negative space

is filled by fern fronds and floral motifs in copper lustre, which was most common in the middle of the century.<sup>2</sup>

Similar albarelli are held in the Hispanic Society of America, New York (accession no. E597, dated 1435-1475), the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 56.171.95, dated 1435-65), the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (accession no. WA1967.44, dated 1440-1480), and the British Museum, London (accession no. 1968,0204.1, dated c. 1450). Albarelli with ivy-leaf decoration appear in altarpieces of the late 15th century, the best known of which is the Portinari Triptych in the Uffizi, Florence (accession no. 1890 nos 3191, 3192, 3193), painted by Hugo van der Goes in 1482.

M.L.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Ray, Anthony. *Spanish Pottery 1248-1898, with a Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum*. London: V&A Publications, 2000. p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 84.



# Hispano-Moresque Dish

Manises, Spain, Second half of the 15th century

Glazed fritware  
22.5cm diameter, 3.5cm deep

Provenance: French private collection.

This small dish is decorated with golden-brown lustre and cobalt blue. Alternating bands of spirals and solid lustre radiate across the rim and cavetto from a heraldic shield. Three clover-like rosettes in cobalt blue are evenly spaced around the rim.

A shield outlined with cobalt blue sits at the centre of the well. The central device, a triple-barred cross and an orb, has been variously identified as the arms of the Datini merchants

of Pisa and the Pazzi family of Florence.<sup>1</sup> It also appears to be associated with apothecaries, as several pharmacy jars (albarellos) bear this symbol. Examples can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 41.190.226) and the Hispanic Society of America, New York (no. E598). Anthony Ray identifies a letter 'P' inside an orb and double-barred cross as the symbol for powder.<sup>2</sup>

A similar, though larger, dish in the British Museum, London (accession no. 1852,0628.1) is dated to c. 1470. Patterned bands radiate from a shield in the well, bearing a lion rampant. Four rosettes are positioned on the rim.

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 MCM. 'Lusterware Apothecary Jar (albarello)', *The Hispanic Museum & Library*. Retrieved online via <https://hispanicsociety.emuseum.com/objects/3941/lusterware-apothecary-jar-albarello?ctx=418748c8-29ef-4878-b62d-00cb3e9de2e8&idx=7> on 30/10/2024.
- 2 Ray, Anthony. *Spanish Pottery 1248-1898, with a Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum*. London: V&A Publications, 2000. p. 364.







4

## Hispano-Moresque Cup

Manises, Spain, 16th century

Glazed fritware  
8.5cm deep, 15.5cm diameter (inc. handles)

Provenance: French private collection.

This small cup dates from early 16th-century Manises. Known as an *ensiamera* or *encisamera* (server), this form is first mentioned in 15th-century inventories.<sup>1</sup> It is a bulbous vessel with a short foot-ring and four s-shaped handles. The vessel is decorated with motifs typical of those from the turn of the 16th century. The well is divided in four by a large cross. Each segment contains a cross-hatched tree and two square flowers. The walls are decorated with a block of lustre. A decorative band below the inside rim is divided by triangles containing fleur-de-lys.

The exterior is decorated between the handles with square cartouches filled with wheat ears and square flowers. A more classically 16th century chain border decorates the top of the foot ring. Below the rim is a garbled Latin inscription, based on the opening of St John's Gospel in the New Testament: *in principio erat verbum* (in the beginning was the word). This inscription, and *exsurge domine* (arise, O Lord), were added to Spanish ceramics in the late 15th century and continued to c. 1530. However, as the 16th century progressed, the inscriptions became less legible. A near-identical inscription and font is seen on dishes dated 1500-1525 in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. 302-1893) and the British Museum, London (accession no. 1855,1201.88). A dish of the same *encisamera* form with a garbled *erat verbum* inscription is held in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. 4-1907). It is dated to 1500-1525 from the Valencia region.

M.L.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> González Martí, Manuel. *Cerámica del Levante Español*. Barcelona: Labor, 1944. p. 251. In Ray, Anthony. *Spanish Pottery 1248-1898, with a Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum*. London: V&A Publications, 2000. p. 100.





# Portrait of Sultan Murad II (1404–1451)

Circle of Cristofano di Papi  
(called dell’Altissimo)  
Italy, late 16th to early 17th century

Oil on board  
64cm high, 48.5cm wide (framed)

Provenance: European private collection where it was since at least the end of the nineteenth century.

This portrait of Sultan Murad II is a late 16th or early 17th-century copy of a portrait in the famous Giovio series of ‘Illustrious Men’. Giovio’s collection was made up of portraits by different artists copied from second-hand sources: existing portraits, death masks, medals.<sup>1</sup> Each painting was accompanied by a biography and modelled on Petrarch’s *De viris illustribus* (*On Illustrious Men*). Amongst the 484 portraits of kings, generals, artists, and popes, were eleven portraits of Ottoman sultans.<sup>2</sup> Each portrait was given a number within the series. Murad II was number 23, which is also stamped on the back of the frame.<sup>3</sup>

Several sets of copies of the Giovio series were made in the 16th century. The most famous of these are the paintings by Cristofano dell’Altissimo commissioned by Cosimo I de’Medici in 1552. Between July 1552 and October 1556, Cristofano dell’Altissimo sent an average of 25 portraits per year to Florence, where they were hung in the Palazzo Vecchio in a room called the Guardaroba or Mappamondo, set up by the art historian Giorgio Vasari as a place to collect human knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

Other sets were made for Cardinal Federico Borromeo, now in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan, and for Donna Ippolita Gonzaga by Bernardino Campi, now lost.<sup>5</sup> A set of miniature copies was made for the Habsburg duke Ferdinand II between 1578 and 1599 to hang in the Schloss Ambras in Innsbruck (now housed in the Kunsthistorische Museum of Vienna).<sup>6</sup> In the 17th century, the Uffizi copies were themselves copied for the Petite Galerie of the Louvre.<sup>7</sup>

At least two other versions of this portrait of Murad II are known. A version by Cristofano dell’Altissimo is in the Uffizi Gallery (no. 00290331). Another version, which belongs to a series called the Newbattle Turks after the Scottish stately home

where the collection was kept since the 17th century, is now in the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia (IAMM), Kuala Lumpur.<sup>8</sup> It is unknown, however, who commissioned this portrait. The depiction of Murad in the present portrait is strikingly similar to both the Uffizi and IAMM versions, distinguished only by the use of more vibrant colours. It is tempting to think that Cristofano himself painted all three versions. However, the difference in the Latin inscriptions – *Amurathes II* (Uffizi), *Amurates II Wernesii Acievictur* (IAMM), *Amurates II Acie Vict(o)r* (present portrait) – suggests a different hand for each.

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Lorne, Campbell. *Renaissance Portraits: European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990. p. 190.
- 2 Le Thiec, Guy. ‘L’entrée des Grands Turcs dans le Museo de Paolo Giovio’, *Mélanges de l’école française de Rome* (1992), pp. 781-830; p. 781.
- 3 The numbers are recorded in Bruno Fasola’s ‘Per un nuovo catalogo della collezione gioviana’, *Paolo Giovio, il Rinascimento e la Memoria. Proceedings of the Raccolta Storica Conference 3-5 June 1983* 17. Como: La Società a Villa Gallia, 1985. pp. 169-180.
- 4 ‘Ritratto di Murad II’, *Le Gallerie degli Uffizi*, retrieved 07/10/2024 from <https://catalogo.uffizi.it/it/29/ricerca/detailiccd/1187779/>
- 5 Sharples, Joseph. ‘Cardinal Ippolito d’Este’, *National Inventory of Continental European Paintings* (University of Glasgow), retrieved on 07/10/2024 via <https://www.vads.ac.uk/digital/collection/NIRP>
- 6 See Kenner, F. ‘Die Porträtsammlung des Erzherzogs Ferdinand von Tirol’, *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses* 14 (1893).
- 7 Lalanne, L. ‘Inventaire des tableaux et des autres curiosités qui se trouvaient au Louvre en 1603’, *Archives de l’art français* 5 (1853-5), pp. 49-60.
- 8 Published in de Guise, Lucien (ed.). *Orientalist Painting: Mirror or Mirage*. Kuala Lumpur: IAMM, 2022. p. 17.





# Ottoman Manuscript (An'am Sharif)

Ottoman Turkey, 18th century

Ink and gilt on paper bound in leather  
16cm high, 11cm wide.

Provenance: According to an inscription, taken as booty by Count Louis Andrault de Langeron at the Siege of Izmail in 1790.  
French private collection.

A richly-illuminated Ottoman prayerbook in its original Morocco binding, comprising a selection of Suras in the first half and a description of the Prophet in the second. There are 11 lines of naskhi calligraphy on each page, spread over 91 written folios with 5 additional blank folios.

Named after its opening Sura, number 6 (*Al-An'am*, or the Cattle), this prayerbook is an example of an *En'am-ı Şerif* (lit. Noble En'am). The *En'am* was the most popular Ottoman prayer book of the late 18th century, and was used for memorising and reciting prayers.<sup>1</sup> Though the number of Suras varies between copies of the *En'am*, the selection is generally chosen from a list of 30.<sup>2</sup> In the present example, Sura 1 (Al-Fataha) and Sura 6 are followed by 10 more: Ya-Sin (36); *Ad-Dukhan* / the Smoke (44); *Al-Fath* / the Victory (48); *Ar-Rahman* / the Gracious (55); *Al-Waqi'ah* / the Inevitable (56); *Al-Mulk* / The Sovereignty (67); *An-Naba* / the Tidings (78); *Al-Ikhlâs* / the Unity (112); *Al-Falaq* / the Dawn (113); and *An-Nas* / Mankind (114). These Suras are followed by prayers and invocations known as *du'a*.

The second half of the manuscript contains tables listing the 99 names of God and the 99 attributes of the Prophet Muhammad. These tables are followed by *hilyeler*, or descriptions of the Prophet's physical form and moral character based on *hadith* accounts. The earliest *hilyeler* were written on single sheets of paper or parchment and carried as protective amulets.<sup>3</sup> In the second half of the 17th century, the calligrapher Hafiz Osman included a *hilye* in an *En'am*, establishing the standard layout of a circle of calligraphy. It has been suggested that when the circles of calligraphy are laid out across a double page, as in the case of this *En'am*, the *hilye* looks like a pair of eyes. By gazing into these calligraphic eyes, the reader might be blessed with a vision of the Prophet.<sup>4</sup>

After the *hilyeler* follow *ta'viz*, illustrations of seals (*muhr*). These seals are said to have apotropaic powers, including warding off illness and the evil eye or protecting the reader.<sup>5</sup> Further apotropaic illustrations are included, with representations of the Prophet's relics (his footprint, his sword, his handprint), and his personal effects including his Qur'an, prayer beads, ewer, prayer mat, and comb. Interspersed throughout are illustrations of the tombs of the prophets, and of the pilgrimage sites of the Ka'ba in Mecca, Medina, Damascus, and Jerusalem. Like the act of reading or reciting the Suras in the first half, the illustrations in the second half of the *En'am* serve as a conduit for *baraka*, 'the spiritual energy which emanates from the Divine and which passes through saintly persons or objects'.<sup>6</sup>







An inscription in French at the front of the prayer book reads:

*'Ce livre de prières a été pris au siège d'Ismail par Monsieur de Langeron émigré français. Souwaroff écrivit à l'impératrice Catherine: Gloire à Dieu, louange à Catherine! Ismaïl est à vos pieds. Vingt-quatre mille Turcs furent tués par les Russes dans cette place.'*

'This prayer book was taken from the siege of Izmail by the French émigré Monsieur de Langeron. Souwaroff wrote to the Empress Catherine: Glory be to God! Praise be to Catherine! Izmail is in the palm of your hands. Twenty-four thousand Turks were killed by the Russians in this place.'

A roughly contemporaneous Ottoman *En'am-i Şerif* is held in the Sabancı Museum, Istanbul (object no. 101-0288-AE). Dated to 1193 AH (1779-1780 CE); it was copied by the calligrapher Abdullah Edirnevi and illuminated by Hafız Mehmed. Like the present example, there are 11 lines per page. Following the collection of Suras, it also ends with the names of the Prophet Muhammad and other prophets, and illustrations of Mecca and Medina. Other contemporaneous examples of *En'am-i Şerif* include an eighteenth-century copy held in the Smithsonian Museum of Asian Art, Washington, D.C. (accession no. F1906.304) and a copy dated to c.1790 in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard (accession no. 1985.260).

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Bain, Victoria. 'The late Ottoman *En'am-i Şerif*: Sacred text and images in an Islamic prayer book' (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 1999), p. 1; Rettig, Simon. 'Rise of the *En'am-i Şerif*: Investigating the Production of Selections of Suras in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire', *The Word Illuminated: Form and Function of Qur'anic Manuscripts* (1-3 December 2017).
- 2 Dévényi, Kinga. 'Manuscripts of *En'am-i Şerif* in the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences', *The Arabist: Budapest Studies in Arabic* 37. pp. 12-13.
- 3 Bain. *Op. Cit.* p. 74.
- 4 Grüber, Christiane J. *The Islamic Manuscript Tradition: Ten Centuries of Book Arts in Indiana University Collections*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2010. pp. 131-133.
- 5 Bain. *Op. Cit.* pp. 78-92.
- 6 *Ibid.* p. 132.

The inscription refers to the events of the Siege of Izmail in 1790, during the Russo-Turkish War (1787-1792) between Catherine the Great of Russia and Sultans Abdul Hamid I and latterly Selim III of Turkey. Souwaroff (General Suvorov) was the Russian leader who allowed his troops to massacre the Muslim civilians of the Ukrainian Black Sea town of Izmail. Count Louis Alexandre Andrault de Langeron (Monsieur Langeron) was a French soldier who entered the Russian army due to his opposition to Napoleon. The signature below this French inscription is illegible, but it is clearly written by a different hand to the body of the text. It is possible that both inscription and signature were added by a descendant of Langeron.

On the page preceding the first illuminated pages, an inscription of a prayer by the Sufi philosopher Shihab al-Din ibn Habash al-Suhrawardi is dated 1773-74, suggesting that the manuscript was produced no later than this date.





# Early Ottoman Silver Gilt Cup with Tughra of Sultan Selim I

Ottoman Balkans, Reign of Selim I (1512-1520)

Silver gilt  
9.5cm diameter, 3.5cm deep

Provenance: From the estate of the art historian Richard Ettinghausen.

This small drinking vessel comes from an important group of Balkan hemispherical silver gilt bowls, produced in the late 15th and 16th century.<sup>1</sup> They were made in the metal rich areas of Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia, and Bulgaria, which were the primary sources of silver within the Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup> These bowls were primarily used in secular settings for drinking wine or sherbet.<sup>3</sup> However, Arabic and Cyrillic inscriptions on some bowls attest to their use by in both Christian and Muslim religious settings.<sup>4</sup> The present example is stamped with the *tughra* of Selim I, reading ‘Sultan Salimshah bin Bayezid’, which dates the bowl to 1512-1520. Selim I learned the craft of goldsmithing (*kuyumculuk*) as a young man, and continued to patronise the goldsmith’s guild throughout his reign.<sup>5</sup>

The bowl is engraved with arabesques, comprising *rumi* split palmette motifs and *hatayi* or Chinese blossoms. The *rumi-hatayi* style is most commonly associated with Baba Nakkaş (literally Papa Painter) Iznik ceramics of the late 15th century, which went through a revival in the 16th century. A border of knotted fret, also derived from Chinese ceramics, runs below the rim on the exterior of the bowl. The inside of the bowl is lightly engraved with *rumi-hatayi* arabesques.

A small hole 2mm in diameter pierces the base of the bowl where a decorative disc would have been inserted to form a raised omphalos. These disks were held in place by pins, often in the form of animals, particularly deer. An example of this form, with a gold omphalos disc decorated with three birds, can be

seen in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. M.11-1953). This form became more popular in the second half of the 16th century, as under the rule of Selim II (r. 1566-1574) the ban on the drinking of wine was lifted. The present bowl is therefore a rare early example of the form.

A bowl dating to 1580-1587 (reign of Bayezit II) of similar form and engraved with a pattern of Ottoman foliate arabesques is in the Benaki Museum, Athens (no. 14074).<sup>6</sup> Its detachable base is decorated with more arabesques, and at the centre there is a small cast lion. The base has Greek inscriptions, indicating that this object was for use in the Archbishopric of Euripos in the Greek island of Evia. Other collections of similar Balkan bowls can be found in museums in Hungary and Sofia, Bulgaria. A large horde of Balkan silver gilt bowls was discovered in Serbia; they are of the same hemispherical form and decorated with floral and plant arabesques. This group is now housed in the Hungarian National Museum,<sup>7</sup> whose director, Géza Féher, writes that they date back “almost without exception to the 16th century...owing to the 17th-century decline of the Ottoman Empire”.<sup>8</sup> Another group of these bowls is housed in the National Archaeological Institute Museum in Sofia (nos 33, 971, 835, 750, and 3773).<sup>9</sup>

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Ballian, Anna. ‘Silverwork Produced in Ottoman Trikala (Thessaly): Problems of Taxonomy and Interpretation’, in Ibolya Gerelyes and Maximilian Hartmuth (eds). *Ottoman Metalwork in the Balkans and in Hungary*. Budapest: Hungarian National Museum, 2015. pp. 11- 35; p. 14.
- 2 *Ibid.* p. 14.
- 3 Stankova, Lilyana. ‘Sixteenth-Century Silver Vessels from the Collections of Sofia’s National Archaeological Institute with Museum and National Historical Museum’ in Gerelyes and Hartmuth. *op. cit.* pp. 163-179; p. 176.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- 5 Féher, Géza. ‘Ottoman Remains and Treasures in Hungary’. *Erdem* 9.26 (1996), pp. 665- 692; p. 674.
- 6 Illustrated in Ballian, Anna (ed.) *Relics of the Past: Treasures of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Population Exchange*. Benaki Museum/ 5 Continents Editions: Milan, 2011. p. 158.
- 7 Illustrated in Féher. *op. cit.* Fig. 111.19.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 675.
- 9 Illustrated in Stankova. *op. cit.* Figs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.





# Iznik Jug

Ottoman Turkey, c. 1566-1580  
(reign of Selim II)

Fritware, wheel thrown, and painted with polychrome under a colourless glaze  
23.5cm high, 15.2cm max. diameter

Provenance: Leopold Hirsch Collection; His sale, Christie, Manson and Woods, May 7th, 1934, lot. 111.  
E. L. Paget Collection; His sale, Sotheby’s London, 11th October 1949.  
Kolkhorst Collection; His sale, Sotheby’s London, 23rd March 1959, lot 39.  
German private collection.

A rare intact Iznik jug with outstanding provenance, it is of pear-shaped form with a lightly splayed cylindrical neck. A strap handle is attached at the rim of the jug and to the shoulder.

Jugs represent some of the most inventive designs of Iznik potters. Whereas tiles were typically made to order for architectural purposes, vessels could be sold commercially as artworks.<sup>1</sup> The present piece therefore incorporates several motifs which are not typically seen in combination. The decoration of the body is enclosed between two linear friezes of black patterns, the lower interlocking ‘y’ shapes and the upper black dots. Four cobalt blue pomegranates are evenly spaced around the body, two decorated with a sprig of three red and white prunus blossoms, and the other two decorated with a red and white *çintamani* motif or triple leopard spot. Further *çintamani* motifs are positioned below and slightly to the left of centre of each of the pomegranates. Typically associated with Buddhist symbols, the *çintamani* first appeared in Iznik ceramics in the first quarter of the 16th century, but it is most commonly seen in the period between 1570 and 1585.<sup>2</sup> It had connotations of strength and

courage through its association with the leopard.<sup>3</sup> The space between the pomegranates is filled by tulips with viridian green stems, blue sepals, and red petals, the largest of which have white spots in reserve. The upper register of decoration is painted with a simplified version of the motifs on the body. Just below the rim is a blue band decorated with half prunus blossoms. The handle is decorated with horizontal cobalt blue lines, perhaps emulating stitches from a leather prototype.<sup>4</sup>

The present example belongs to a small group of jugs that are decorated with pomegranates, flowers, and *çintamani* motifs. Two examples, both with red tulips, are in the Musée de la Renaissance in Écouen, France, dated to c. 1565 (E.Cl.9292) and 1570 (E.Cl.9293).<sup>5</sup> The latter has very similar linear friezes, and a pattern of blue clouds at the top of the body. A jug dated c. 1570 in the Benaki Museum, Athens, has a similar design with red carnations in addition to red tulips.<sup>6</sup>

Notes:

- 1 “The Iznik Pottery Industry: C15th-C18th”, *Islamic Ceramics*, retrieved online via islamicceramics.ashmolean.org on 08/01/2024.
- 2 Ribeiro, Maria Queiroz. *Iznik Pottery and Tiles in the Calouste Gulbenkian Collection*. Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2009. p. 80.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- 4 Carswell, John, and Mina Moraitou. *Iznik Ceramics at the Benaki Museum*. Athens: Gingko/The Benaki Museum, 2023. p. 75.
- 5 Hitzel, Frederic, and Mireille Jacotin. *Iznik: L’aventure d’une collection*. Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2005. P. 143, cat. 160 and p. 143, cat. 165.
- 6 Carswell and Moraitou. *Op. Cit.* p. 156, cat. 99.







## Iznik Tankard (*Hanap*)

Ottoman Turkey, second half of the 16th century

Fritware decorated underglaze  
21.5cm high, 12.8cm diameter

Provenance: Greek private collection since the 1970s;  
thence by descent.

A cylindrical Iznik tankard or *hanap* made from polychrome glazed fritware. It has an applied angular handle, painted with short horizontal strokes of black on a white ground and on the sides, prunus blossoms on a cobalt blue ground. The body is painted with long, upright cobalt blue hyacinths and bole red roses on a white slip ground. The upper and lower borders comprise a turquoise band decorated with an undulating split palmette vine in black. The use of black outlines and newer colours such as turquoise and red bole, alongside more traditional cobalt blue and olive green, is indicative of a transitional period piece, dating from the second half of the 16th century.<sup>1</sup>

The cylindrical tankard or *hanap* emerged in the second half of the 16th century. It likely derives from Northern European prototypes like the *humpen* or stein, or wooden tankards made in Andritsaina, Greece.<sup>2</sup> The unusual horizontal lines on the handle may be attempts to copy stitching from leather prototypes.<sup>3</sup> The Iznik *hanap* was popular in the European market, as testified by examples with contemporaneous European mounts.<sup>4</sup>

A tankard of the same form in the Sadberk Hanım Museum, Istanbul, (no. SHM 3892 – HK.829) is dated to c. 1560-1580.<sup>5</sup> It is

decorated with elongated hyacinths and carnations and bordered with bands of turquoise painted with thin, black spirals. A tankard in the Calouste Gulbenkian Collection, Lisbon (no. 777), dated to c. 1575, has identical upper and lower borders, of split palmette vines on a turquoise band. Another in the same collection (no. 820), dated to c. 1560, has a different colour scheme, but is decorated with similar upright hyacinths and split palmette borders.<sup>6</sup>

M.L.

### Notes:

- 1 Bilgi, Hulya. *Dance of Fire: Iznik Tiles and Ceramics in the Sadberk Hanım Museum and Ömer M. Koç Collections*. Istanbul: Sadberk Hanım Museum, 2009. p. 30.
- 2 Lane, Arthur. 'The Ottoman Pottery of Iznik', *Ars Orientalis* 2 (1957). pp. 247-281; p. 261.
- 3 Carswell, John, and Mina Moraitou. *Iznik Ceramics at the Benaki Museum*. Athens: Ginkgo/The Benaki Museum, 2023. p. 75.
- 4 See Denny, Walter B. *Iznik: The Artistry of Ottoman Ceramics*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2004. p. 170.
- 5 See Bilgi. *op. cit.* p. 250, cat. 137.
- 6 See Ribeiro, Maria Queiroz. *Iznik Pottery and Tiles in the Calouste Gulbenkian Collection*. Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2009. pp. 48, 98. Cat. 20, 57.





# Iznik Dish

Iznik, Ottoman Turkey, c. 1565-1585

Fritware with polychrome underglaze decoration  
28.5cm diameter, 5.5cm deep

Provenance: French private collection.

An Iznik dish decorated with the *Quatre Fleurs* motif of carnations, sweet briars, tulips and prunus blossoms in cobalt blue, viridian green, and bole red, with black outlines against a white ground. Sprouting from the same tuft of grass as the flowers is a large question-mark-shaped *saz* leaf decorated with raised dots of bole red. The rim is decorated with a stylised rock-and-wave pattern in black and cobalt blue, a motif derived from Chinese blue and white porcelain such as the 15th century Jiangxi albarello in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C (accession no. F1954.117a-b). This motif was used as a background on the wells of Iznik dishes as early as 1540, but only became a standard feature for the rims by the 1570s.<sup>1</sup> The reverse is plain but for ten small stylised flowers around the cavetto in cobalt blue with black outlines.

The decoration on this dish, sometimes known as ‘storm in a teacup’, typifies the move towards naturalism during the last quarter of the 16th century.<sup>2</sup> This is exemplified by the carnation on the right hand side of the dish, which hangs from a broken stem. This motif, which represents a move away from symmetry and perfectionism, reached its highpoint between 1565 and 1585.<sup>3</sup>

A dish with very similar composition, dated to c. 1575, is in the Benaki Museum, Athens (no. 27).<sup>4</sup> Like the present example, a *saz* leaf bisects the dish, with red roses, a red tulip, and blue hyacinths on either side. Both the rim and reverse motifs are very similar.

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Atasoy, Nurhan, and Julian Raby. *Iznik: The Pottery of Ottoman Turkey*. 2nd ed. London: Alexandrian Press, 1989. p. 121.
- 2 El-Sayed, Laila. ‘Interpreting Iznik Floral Motifs’, *Illuminating Objects*, retrieved from <https://sites.courtauld.ac.uk/illuminating-objects/illuminating-objects-home/iznik-dish/> on 11/09/2024.
- 3 Hitzel, Frederic, and Mireille Jacotin. *Iznik: L’aventure d’une Collection*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2005. p. 177.
- 4 Carswell, John, and Mina Moraitou. *Iznik Ceramics at the Benaki Museum*. Athens: Gingko/The Benaki Museum, 2023. p. 86, cat. 32.





## Iznik Dish

Iznik, Ottoman Turkey, c. 1565-1585

Fritware with polychrome underglaze decoration  
28.5cm diameter, 5.5cm deep

Provenance: German private collection founded in the 19th century and built up in the 20th century.

An Iznik dish decorated with the *Quatre Fleurs* motif of carnations, sweet briars, tulips and prunus blossoms in cobalt blue, viridian green, and bole red, with black outlines against a white ground. Spouting from the same tuft of grass as the flowers is a large question-mark-shaped *saz* leaf which bisects the well. The rim is decorated with a stylised rock-and-wave pattern in black and cobalt blue. The reverse is decorated with alternating stylised flowers and crescents in cobalt blue, emerald green, and black.

An Iznik dish with similar composition is in the Cinquantenaire Museum, Brussels (inv. no. IS.2722), and dated 1550-1600. Like the present example, it features a rock-and-wave rim, and the *Quatre Fleurs* (including a rose with a broken stem) arranged around a curling *saz* leaf.

M.L.







12

## Iznik Tile with Red Roses and Cloud Motif

Ottoman Turkey, 16th century

Fritware with underglaze polychrome decoration  
29.5cm square

Provenance: US private collection since the 1970s.  
US private collection, acquired from above in the late 1980s;  
thence by descent.

This striking Iznik tile is decorated with relief red, cobalt blue, and emerald green on a white slip ground. Two open roses are presented full face, an unusual feature of Iznik pottery of the second half of the 16th century.<sup>1</sup> Disappearing over the edges of the tile are two blue with viridian green stems and leaves, dotted with red bole. Above the tulips are two blue and red rosettes. Between the tulips and the rosettes is a swirling s-cloud motif, drawn from Chinese auspicious clouds (Xiangyun). The cloud

motif became widespread during the reigns of Selim II and Murad III in the second half of the 16th century, particularly as a way of filling negative space.<sup>2</sup> Above the pair of rosettes is another cloud motif, but this time resembling a more traditional Ottoman lotus palmette.

A frieze dated to 1565 to 1575 in the Louvre, Paris (inv. no. AD 5972 a), incorporates a very similar tile, suggesting that the present example was also once part of a larger frieze. Other tiles from the same frieze are housed in the Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon (inv. no. 1653), dated to 1565-1575,<sup>3</sup> and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (accession no. M.87.103). A set of tiles forming an archway in the David Collection, Copenhagen (accession no. 2/1962) also has full face roses.

M.L.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Queiroz Ribeiro, Maria. *Iznik Pottery and Tiles in the Calouste Gulbenkian Collection*. Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2009. p. 53; 'Iznik Timeline', *Ashmolean Museum*, retrieved online via <https://islamicceramics.ashmolean.org/Iznik/timeline.htm> on 19/12/2024

<sup>2</sup> 'Iznik Timeline', *Ashmolean Museum*.

<sup>3</sup> Queiroz Ribeiro. *op. cit.* p.55, cat. 7.





13

## Square Iznik Tile with Split Palmette Arabesques

Ottoman Turkey, c. 1560

Fritware, white slip decorated in underglaze cobalt blue, pale turquoise, viridian green, and relief red, with black outlines  
25cm square

Provenance: US private collection since the 1970s.  
US private collection, acquired from above in the late 1980s;  
thence by descent.

This square fritware tile is decorated with a central polychrome rosette, from which spans a rotational geometric pattern of split leaf arabesques. This tile is identical in pattern to those framing the doorway of the Rüstem Pasha Mosque in Istanbul, built by

the Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan between 1560 and 1563 under Süleyman the Magnificent. The mosque was commissioned by Rüstem Pasha, husband of Mihrimah Sultan, a daughter of Süleyman the Magnificent.

Identical tiles are found in the Benaki Museum, Athens (Inv. no. 102), each tile measuring 23.5cm square. In this case, a full panel of twelve square tiles is framed by its oblong border tiles, decorated with a tiger stripes and leopard spots, known as *Chintamani*.<sup>1</sup> A set of three tiles of the same design are found in the Harvard Art Museum, Cambridge (accession nos 1960.23.A, 1960.23.B, 1960.23.C), each 24.5cm square, while another set of three is in the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto (accession nos AKM862, AKM583, AKM584), measuring 24 x 25cm.

M.L.

### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Carswell, John, and Mina Moraitou. *Iznik Ceramics at the Benaki Museum*. Athens: Gingko/The Benaki Museum, 2023. p. 192, cat. T23.







14

## Iznik Border Tile with Red Background

Ottoman Turkey, c. 1575

Fritware decorated with polychrome underglaze  
15cm high, 26cm wide

Provenance: US private collection since the 1970s.  
US private collection, acquired from above in the late 1980s;  
thence by descent.

An Iznik border tile decorated with spiralling cloud arabesques in reserve on a ground of bole red, with highlights in turquoise and cobalt blue. This style is often referred to as *rumi-hatayi*, with *rumi* denoting split palmettes derived from Ottoman metalwork, and *hatayi* denoting Chinese elements like cloud scrolls and lotus

flowers. In this case, the Ottoman split palmettes have scalloped edges which resemble Chinese cloud motifs known as *xiangyun* (auspicious clouds). In the early 1500s, potters emulated Chinese motifs and the blue and white palette. In the second half of the century, however, greater artistic freedom allowed a distinct Iznik style to emerge, merging Chinese and Turkish motifs. The brief use of coral red, made from the red earth (or bole) of Armenia, from c. 1550 to c. 1600, makes the style of this period even more distinct.

An identical tile is held in the Benaki Museum, Athens (Inv. no. 101).<sup>1</sup> Another similar tile dated to 1575 with cloud scrolls reserved on a red ground is held in the Ömer Koç collection.<sup>2</sup>

M.L.

### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Carswell, John, and Mina Moraitou. *Iznik Ceramics at the Benaki Museum*. Athens: Gingko/The Benaki Museum, 2023. p. 200, cat. T53.
- <sup>2</sup> Bilgi, Hulya. *The Ömer Koç Iznik Collection*. Istanbul: Vehbi Koç Foundation, 2015. p. 140, Cat. 29.





15

## Iznik Tile Decorated with Mandorlas, Lotus Palmettes, and Saz Leaves

Turkey, c. 1575

Fritware with underglaze polychrome decoration  
25cm square

Provenance: Christie’s London, 7 April 2011, lot 323.  
Belgian private collection, acquired at Mansour Gallery,  
London on the 14th of April 2011, and thence by descent.

An Iznik tile with exceptionally refined *rumi-hatayi* decoration in bole red, cobalt blue, and viridian green with black outlines on a white ground. Connected by a network of swirling arabesque branches with saz leaf terminals are large red mandorlas filled with *rumi* or Ottoman split palmettes, green leaves decorated with

*hatayi* or Chinese-derived *tchi* clouds in reserve, lotus palmettes, and rosettes. The use of red bole, recognisable for its tomato red shade and raised texture, helps to date the piece as it was only in use between the 1550s and 1580s.

Tiles of this pattern decorate the mausoleum of Selim II in Hagia Sophia, designed by the renowned architect Mimar Sinan.<sup>1</sup> Three identical tiles are held in the Benaki Museum, Athens, dated to c. 1675.<sup>2</sup> Another is in the Louvre, Paris, and dated 1560 to 1580 (no. OA 3919/2-75). Other tiles with different colour schemes but similar design comprising mandorlas and lotus flowers arranged on a network of vines are held in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, (no. 347-1880) and the Louvre (OA 3919/172), both dated 1560-1580. The present tile is a particularly vibrant and flawless example of this design.

M.L.

### Notes:

- 1 Denny, Walter. ‘Dispersed Ottoman unified-field panels’, *Μουσείο Μπενάκη* 4 (2004). pp. 149-157: 150, fig. 1.
- 2 Carswell, John and Moraitou, Mina. *Iznik Ceramics at the Benaki Museum*. Athens: The Benaki Museum, 2023. pp. 182-183, cats T11 and T12.



16

## Iznik Tile from the Çinili Hamam

Ottoman Turkey, c. 1575

Fritware decorated with polychrome underglaze  
23cm high, 27cm wide

Provenance: Acquired from Momtaz Islamic Art, London,  
in the early 1990s.  
UK private collection.

A hexagonal tile of fritware, decorated underglaze with two shades of blue on a white ground. At the centre is a complex rosette, around which two bands of floral decoration seem to rotate in opposing directions. The inner band is made up of six flowers, each with six petals, and the outer band of larger five-petalled flowers. These flowers are derived from Chinese sources, known as *hatâyî* in Turkish. The flowers are attached by swirling tendrils, from which grow *saz* leaves.

Tiles of identical design were commissioned for two important buildings in Istanbul in the 1530s, helping to date this tile. They can be seen around the tiled entrance of the Circumcision Chamber (*Sünnet Odası*) of the Topkapı Palace. While only built in 1640 by Sultan Ibrahim, the façade was almost entirely decorated with tiles re-used from other settings. For photographs of these tiles in situ, see the Walter B. Denny Islamic Art Slide Collection at the University of Washington (accession nos TT64 and TT52). The *Çinili Hamam* (Tiled Bathhouse) in the Zeyrek district of Istanbul, for which construction began in 1530, was also decorated with blue and white hexagonal tiles. A group of tiles from this bathhouse, including an identical one (accession no. 1020-1892), can be found in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Other identical tiles are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 40.181.11), dated to c. 1535, and the Louvre, Paris (accession no. AD 1732), dated to 1530-1535.

M.L.





17

## Ottoman Dagger with Niello Decoration

Turkey, Second half of the 17th century

Silver, niello, wood, steel, and gold  
37cm high, 5cm wide

This Ottoman *hançer* features a typical I-shaped grip. The lightly curved, watered steel, double edged blade is decorated with a panel of gold foliate inlay. The scabbard is decorated in layers of silver gilt, providing a richly textured surface. A meshed vegetal pattern, created from stylised fleur-de-lys descends from the locket and arises from the chape. Mirroring this motif, the belt loop is in the shape of a fleur-de-lys. The scabbard terminates in an oversized, fluted ball with an angular knop at the end, with hatched niello decoration.

This Ottoman *hançer* belongs to a group of similar daggers which were looted during the 1683 Siege of Vienna and related battles of the Ottoman-Habsburg Wars (1521-1791), known as *Türkenbeute* (Turkish loot). Part of the famous Karlsruher *Türkenbeute*, a very similar *hançer* is held in the Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe (accession no. D 269). At 35.8cm long, the Karlsruhe dagger is roughly the same size as the present example with similar decorative features. Amongst the *Türkenbeute* at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien (Vienna) is a *hançer* of the same form with a silver gilt scabbard and similar vegetal ornamentation (accession no. C 105). Others are housed in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (accession no. B.O.-3089) and the Furusiyya Collection, Vaduz, Liechtenstein (inv. R-420). The latter example is dated to 1682 and stamped with the *tughra* of Mehmed IV (r. 1648-87).<sup>1</sup>

M.L.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> See *The Arts of the Muslim Knight: The Furusiyya Art Foundation Collection*. Milan/ New York: Skira, 2008. pp. 165-166.





# Ottoman Silver Gilt Dagger

Ottoman Empire, 18th century

Silver gilt, steel, gemstone  
50cm long (overall); 47.5cm (the dagger)

Provenance: Collection of Henry-René d’Allemagne.

This unusual Ottoman dagger dates from the late 18th or early 19th century. Its simplicity is striking. But for a thin band of engraved floral decoration at the locket of the scabbard and a foliate suspension loop just below this, the silver gilt runs uninterrupted from the gemstone at the top of the pommel to the bud-shaped finial of the scabbard. The unadorned surface allows for the refined craftsmanship and high-quality materials to be admired.

The contemporaneous watered steel blade is also simple, with just three ridges as decoration. Daggers from this period, particularly straight hilt-less daggers called *kards*, often have panels of plain silver gilt applied to both ends of the scabbard. An example in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 36.25.730a,b) is dated to the late 18th or early 19th century. It is more unusual, however, to have a *hançer* which is entirely covered in silver gilt, including the hilt. A few examples are held in Russian collections. A *jambiya* in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (accession no. B.O.-483), is entirely covered with silver gilt. Another dagger in the same collection (no. B.O.-3275) comprises an Indian jade hilt with an 18th-century unadorned silver gilt sheath. Several daggers in the State Historical Museum, Moscow, have similar features. A dagger (accession no. 1785/1 op) and its corresponding sheath (accession no. 1785/2 op) are entirely covered in silver gilt, and smooth but for a thin band of floral engraving at the top of the sheath and a foliate suspension loop. Another, (no. 1186/1 op for the dagger and 1186/2 op for the sheath) is also dated to the 19th century. It has a more pronounced band of floral decoration on the scabbard, but otherwise is entirely unadorned.<sup>1</sup> Another example, dated to the 18th century, is in the Furusiyya Art Foundation, Vaduz (Inv. R-981) and paired with an earlier hilt.<sup>2</sup>



This dagger comes from the collection of Henry-René d’Allemagne (1863-1950), a French historian, author, and collector of Islamic art. He travelled extensively throughout the Middle East, building his collection. Most of his collection is now divided between the British Museum, London, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Also illustrated in Astvatsaturian, E.G. *Turkish Weapons in the Collection of the State Historical Museum / Турецкое оружие в собрании Государственного Исторического музея*. St. Petersburg: Atlant, 2002. p. 173.
- 2 Di Lallo, Emanuela (ed.) *The Arts of the Muslim Knight: The Furusiyya Art Foundation Collection*. Milan: Skira, 2008. p. 175, cat. 163.







## Indian Girl on a Street in Poonah

Signed Edward Frederick Green  
Pune District, 1847

Oil on canvas  
76cm high, 63cm wide

Provenance: Swedish private collection, acquired from a Swedish collector in the 1980s.

A young woman is painted in motion, adjusting her sari as she steps across the road. Amongst her Gujarati-style jewellery is a toe ring, which indicates that she is married. The eye is drawn by the red of the young woman's sari. It is a colour strongly associated with celebration, prosperity, and good fortune due to its association with Lakshmi.<sup>1</sup> In fact, on a couple's wedding day, they are believed to become Lakshmi and Vishnu, making red the most popular colour for wedding saris.

In the background is a Jain temple, recognisable by its *shikhar* or sculpted domes, atop which are *kalash*, or golden pot finials. Though Green gave the location of the painting as 'Poonah', it is difficult to identify the location in the image. Not only has Pune City changed significantly in the past 175 years, becoming the largest city in Maharashtra (even larger than Mumbai) thanks to its booming automobile and technology industries, but Pune District is also a vast administrative region encompassing many other cities and towns. Furthermore, the building may be Green's invention, combining classical architectural elements to create an idealised temple. Whether or not the female subject was painted from a model or merely an idealised representation of an Indian woman is also to be questioned. Green may have drawn inspiration for the subject matter from the work of British artist Tilly Kettle (1735-1786), whose famous Dancing Girl portrait, now housed in the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven (accession no. B1981.25.385), depicts a young woman posed, dressed, and accessorised very similarly to the woman in the present painting.

Edward Frederick Green was born in London in 1801. He was admitted to the Royal Academy as a student from April 1822. One of his works from his time in London, a portrait formerly identified as the writer William Hazlitt, now hangs in the Guildhall Art Gallery, London (accession no. 848). In 1845, tragedy struck. Green's wife, Catherine Colona Stilton, died in London from consumption (tuberculosis). Three weeks after her death, Green sold all of his paintings at auction and moved to India. The architecture and landscape of India was a major attraction for artists. However, it was portraits which proved to be the more lucrative subject.<sup>2</sup> Not only did artists paint posed portraits of local dignitaries, but also ordinary citizens of India engaged in daily life. Green's address is recorded as Bombay, however, his paintings from this time are signed with 'Poonah'. Given that the city of Pune was under the administration of the Bombay Municipality since falling to the British in 1817, it is possible that Green was a resident there. During his time in India, Green also painted two portraits of snake charmers, one of which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1851. A painting of six Indian girls at a well, possibly in Pune, is also attributed to Edward Frederick Green.<sup>3</sup>

M.L.



### Notes:

- 1 Lochtefeld, James G. *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, Vol. 1. New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2002. Pp. 385-386.
- 2 McAleer, John. *Picturing India: People, Places, and the World of the East India Company*. London: British Library, 2017. p. 133.
- 3 See Amir Mohtashemi catalogue, *Indian and Islamic Works of Art*, March 2014. Cat. 22.



# View of Benares

Varanasi, 1894

Watercolour heightened with white gouache on paper  
watermarked ‘V’  
21.2cm high, 31.2cm wide

A view of Bhonsale Ghat, Varanasi (anglicised as Benares), with the Mosque of Aurangzeb in the background. A similar view was photographed by Samuel Bourne during a royal tour of India taken by the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, in 1875-76 (see Royal Collections Trust, accession no. RCIN 2701729). This view no longer exists, as one of the mosque’s minarets fell down in 1948 and the other was pulled down for safety reasons soon after.

Bhonsale ghat is one of the most imposing of Varanasi’s 84 ghats, or sets of steps leading down to the Ganges. Its backdrop is the fort-like palace built by the Maratha rulers of Nagpur. The sandstone walls are tall and solid to prevent flooding, whilst open oriels and battlement-like windows at the top of the palace allow for air circulation. The tiny figures provide a sense of the immense scale of the ghat. Some sit cross-legged in meditation, but others carry out daily activities like washing, conversing in groups, and carrying terracotta jars of water.

The watercolour is unsigned, but in the bottom lefthand corner of the painting the artist has written ‘1894 Benares’. The handwriting is in a distinctive German font called *Kurrent* (cursive). It was in use from the 18th century to the mid-20th century primarily in the German-speaking world, including Austria and Switzerland, but was sometimes used in Denmark, Norway, and the Czech Republic. Light pencil inscriptions mark out the intended colour on almost every surface of the painting, indicating that the artist sketched from life before returning to their studio to add paint. On the sandstone palace is written ‘gelb’ (yellow) and the abbreviations ‘gb’ or simply ‘g’, as well as ‘r’ for ‘rot’ (red). The trees and the roof of the small boat are labelled ‘grün’ (green). The more you look, the more annotations become visible.

Benares was considered one of the most important places in India for artists to visit. Lady Charlotte Canning, Vicereine of India and an amateur watercolourist, felt that Benares was the most authentic city in India, ‘for not a trace or touch of anything European exists there’.<sup>1</sup> Benares attracted English artists such as James Prinsep, William Hodges, Edwin Lord Weeks, William Carpenter, Edward Lear, William Simpson, and the Daniells. Artists from the German-speaking world, such as Eduard Hildebrand, Erich Kips and Ludwig Hans Fischer, also spent time in Benares.

M.L.

Notes:

1 Quoted in McAleer, John. *Picturing India: People, Places, and the World of the East India Company*. London: The British Library, 2017. p. 122.





# Mughal Miniature of a Fat-Tailed Sheep

Northern India, probably Uttar Pradesh, late 17th to mid 18th century

Gouache heightened with gold on paper  
Painting: 12.5cm high, 8.9cm wide  
Leaf: 37.8cm high, 25.7cm wide

Provenance: Acquired from Robert Ellsworth, New York, July 1993.

The fourth Mughal emperor, Jahangir (r. 1605-1627), commissioned portraits of interesting and unusual animals by court artists, most notably Mansur. His successors, as well as wealthy North Indian patrons, continued this tradition. This miniature portrait depicts a fat-tailed ram, framed by dark blue, red, and light blue borders and mounted on a dark blue sheet decorated with gold flecks. The sheep, probably a Balkhi, stands on a flowery hillock. He has a black face, a tan and white coat, black forelegs, and black and white hindlegs. It is tethered to a peg in the ground with a red leash, attached to a gold collar. Behind the sheep, small birds are silhouetted against a sunset. Gold outlines produce the effect of sunrays breaking through the fluffy clouds. Though

great care has been taken to capture the textured woollen coat of the sheep and the gradient between black and tan markings, the perspective is somewhat distorted, with sheep’s hindlegs misaligned with the body.

The regal red collar with gold ornamentation suggests that this sheep was kept in the Mughal royal menagerie. Several examples of similarly tethered animals exist. A portrait by the famed Mansur of a zebra presented to Jahangir for Nowruz is in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. IM.23-1925). The zebra, facing right, is tethered with a red bridle to a small peg in the ground. A miniature dated c. 1625-1650, in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (no. W.899), depicts a ram wearing a red collar with gold bells. The hair on his back and above his hooves has been dyed red with henna. A very similar study of a ram, dating to c. 1585, which may provide the *terminus ante quem* for this composition, is in the Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio (accession no. 2013.298) and dated to c. 1585. Three portraits of fat-tailed sheep, one black and two grey, wearing decorative gold collars are in an incomplete album of portraits, animals, and birds in the British Royal Collection (accession no. RCIN 1005069, plates 34, 73, 74). Furthermore, several other studies of fat-tailed sheep are known, which are so similar as to suggest a common source material. An 18th-century version is in the British Museum, London (accession no. 1920,0917,0.99) and a late 17th-century version is in the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya Museum, Mumbai (accession no. 15.276).

M.L.





# Kashmiri Qur’an

North India, 18th century

Ink, gold and lapis lazuli on paper with lacquer covers  
17.8cm high x 10.2cm wide (the manuscript). 17cm x 9.5cm wide (each page).

Provenance: Formerly in the collection of ‘Abd al-Wahhab Khan, Nizam ul-Mulk (1848-1916); thence by descent to a London private collection in the early 20th century.

This single volume Qur’an contains 392 folios made of thin, cream laid paper, plus 6 fly leaves of oriental paper. The first and last fly pages are covered with silver leaf embossed with motifs of waves. The illumination is contained within a double frame of 20.3-6 cm high and 11.4-6 cm wide. The inner frame delimits the text copied in *naskh* with 15 lines per page, in black ink on gold within ‘clouds’. The verses are separated by a gold disc. Sura headings (including title, place of revelation and number of verses) are written in *riqā’* style in blue ink in a gold cartouche, covering one or two lines. The area between the inner and outer frames is reserved for marginal devices and textual divisions. The latter are located in the lateral area: the *rukū’* are indicated by the letter ‘*ayn* in red within a leaf shape. The *juz’* and their quarters (*rub’*), halves (*nisf*) and thirds (*thalath*), written in red in leaf shapes, are associated with a large central medallion (four or eight lobes) with three ornamental pendants on either side, mainly in gold and blue. The *sajda* (*sunnat* ‘recommended’, and *wajib* ‘obligatory’) are marked in red ink. The catchword is placed in the lower inner corner, close to the spine. In the top right-hand corner of each right-hand page is the number of *juz’*, whilst the title of the Sura appears on the left-hand page. These medallions are duplicated towards the end of the text, as several Sura headings appear on the same double opening page.

The manuscript includes eight magnificent illuminated double pages placed between the Suras *al-Fātiḥa* (Q.1) and the beginning of *al-Baqara* (Q.2), then at the beginning of the Suras *al-Mā’ida* (Q.5), *Yūnus* (Q.10), *Banī Isrā’īl* (Q.17) *al-Shu’ arā’* (Q.26) *aṣ-Ṣaffāt* (Q.38) *Qāf* (Q.50) and *al-Falaq/al-Nās* (Q.113 and 114). The first, fourth and last illuminated double pages have almost identical decoration: the text is framed by a border with a polychrome floral motif that continues to the top of the page. Beyond, there is a large gold and lapis lazuli decoration using broad interlacing motifs enhanced by floral motifs. The second and fifth illuminated double pages feature a wide border with gilded floral scrolls on a blue background. The third, sixth and seventh illuminations are made up of flowers and leaves in gold on a white background. These illuminations mark the division of the manuscript into seven sections (*manāzil*), allowing the entire text to be recited over the course of a week.

Though the lacquer covers are contemporaneous with the text, the book was rebound, as evidenced by the later fly leaves. The front and back covers are decorated with floral motifs and a central medallion with verses 79 and 80 of *Sura al-Wāqī’a* (Q.56) respectively. The dark brown leather spine is unadorned. The inside covers feature red and gold floral motifs on a black background.



This manuscript is an example of production attributed to the province of Kashmir in northern India. The arts of the book – especially papermaking and bookbinding – are said to have emerged in this region during the reign of Sultan Zayn al- ‘Abidin (1420-1470), but it was mainly from the 18th century onwards that a dynamic manuscript tradition developed. The French traveller Victor Jacquemont, who travelled to Kashmir in 1831, recalled that there were around 700 to 800 copyists, transcribing the Qur’an or the *Shahnameh* and working to order. Their manuscripts were traded in the region and beyond. In the late 1740s, the transfer of power from Mughal to Afghan Durrani rule in the province of Kashmir had an impact on manuscript production, and the quality declined.

It is extremely hard to rely on material evidence to reconstruct the history of manuscript production during this turbulent period. Kashmiri manuscripts almost never include colophons giving the date and place of copying. A few rare exceptions, including a Qur’an now in the Gulistan Library in Tehran, has a colophon which states that the volume was copied in Kashmir in 1173 AH / 1759-60 CE. Thanks to these few exceptions, we may assume that high-quality Kashmiri Qur’ans, like the present example, were made before 1740. Other examples can be found in the Khalili Collection (object no. QUR396) and the Morgan Library, New York (MS G.69).

This Qur’an comes from the collection of ‘Abd al-Wahhab Khan (1848-1916), son of Mirza Kazim Khan Nizam al-Mulk, and the grandson of Aqa Khan Nuri, prime minister of Iran from 1851-58. ‘Abd al-Wahhab Khan inherited his father’s post of Minister of the Army and the title Nizam al-Mulk after his father’s death in 1889. He was appointed Governor of Tehran in 1892. On his death in 1916, the Qur’an was transferred to family in London.

E.C.





# Talismanic Shirt

North India or the Deccan, Late 15th to early 16th century

Cotton and ink  
65cm high, 94cm wide

Provenance: UK private collection since the 1960s.

Talismanic shirts are cotton garments decorated with qur’anic inscriptions and worn for their apotropaic effect. They were most commonly used on the battlefield under armour, but sometimes worn by the sick to aid with recovery. In 1539, Hürrem Sultan, the first wife of Süleyman the Magnificent, sent him a shirt made in Mecca because “it had sacred names woven in it and would turn aside bullets”.<sup>1</sup>

The present example is one of a series of almost identical talismanic shirts originating from the late 15th or early 16th century from North India or the Deccan. Made from a densely woven cotton, closer in texture to parchment than cloth, all 114 Suras of the Qur’an are inscribed on the shirt. Though the size of the garments may vary, the cut is always the same: a simple form consisting of a large rectangle, flanked by two smaller rectangles for the sleeves, and a simple circle for the head. The precision of the ornamentation implies that measuring equipment, such as rules and compasses, was used. The pectoral roundels in striking red and blue, the epaulettes, and fringe-like lower border emulate traditional armour.<sup>2</sup> Discolouration around the underarms from the sweat of the wearer confirms that this shirt was used.

Each square panel contains a single verse, with Sura headings in red, written in the micro calligraphic *ghubari* script, a script whose name means dust-like for its minute size.<sup>3</sup> The back panels tend to be inscribed with the Qur’anic verse 12:64 (Sura Yusuf), which states that “God is the Best Guardian and the Most Merciful of the Merciful Ones”.<sup>4</sup> The *shahada* is inscribed in two large medallions on the chest in a style known as *tughra*. The



only colours used are black, red, blue, and gold. The borders are decorated with red dots, in which are enumerated the 99 names of God in a script known as Bihari. A variant of *naskh* used prior to the establishment of the Mughal Dynasty, the use of Bihari may help to date these garments to before 1526 CE.<sup>5</sup>

A talismanic shirt in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 1998.199) with almost identical ornamentation, is dated to the 15th to early 16th century, and attributed to Northern India or the Deccan. Another very similar talismanic shirt, also dated to late-15th to early-16th century India, is housed in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. T.59-1935). Other examples are in the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore (accession no. 2017-00015), dated to the 16th century, and the Musée Guimet, Paris (MA 5680), dated to 15th century North India. A third example, identical but for the lobed edges to the bottom band, is held in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, USA (accession no. T.59-1935) and is dated to the first half of the 15th century, North Indian or Deccan.

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Rogers, J.M., and Ward, R.M. *Süleyman the Magnificent*. London: British Museum, 1988, p. 175 in Von Folsach, Kjeld, Meyer, Joachim, and Wandel, Peter. *Fighting, Hunting, Impressing*. Copenhagen: The David Collection, 2021. p. 159.
- 2 Brac de la Perrière, Eloïse. ‘Les chemises talismaniques indiennes d’époques pré-moghole et moghole’, *Journal Asiatique* 297.1 (2009). pp. 57-81 ; p. 59.
- 3 Islam, Shumaila. ‘Calligraphy as a Spiritual Experience beyond the Script’, *Al-Qamar* 5.1 (2022). pp. 126-152; p. 131.
- 4 Gruber, Christiane. ‘The Arts of Protection and Healing in Islam’, *Ajam Media Collective*, retrieved online via <https://ajammc.com/2021/04/30/premodern-ppe-talismanic-shirts/> on 15/04/24.
- 5 Brac de la Perrière, Eloïse. ‘Manuscripts in Bihari Calligraphy: Preliminary Remarks on a Little-Known Corpus’, *Muqarnas* 33 (2016). pp. 63-90; p. 64.









# Mother-of-Pearl Pilgrim Flask

Gujurat, India, 17th century

Mother-of-pearl and brass  
13cm high, 13.5cm wide

Provenance: French private collection.

This mother-of-pearl flask was made in seventeenth-century Gujarat, likely for the Deccani market. Boat-shaped, the flask features a flared, trumpet-shaped neck, a tubular spout to one side, and it stands on a brass splayed foot. Possibly double-spouted in origin, it lacks its original dome-shaped cover, which was probably linked and secured to the rim of the neck with a loop chain. In addition to the foot and spout, the metal fittings include bands on the edges of the vessel to secure the mother-of-pearl plaques, a collar on the base of the neck and on its rim, and two loops flanking the neck for suspension, likely by two loop chains. From its iridescence and colour, the mother-of-pearl used in its construction can be identified as the shell of the green turban snail (*Turbo marmoratus*), a marine gastropod that provided the best and most prized material for this Gujarati production.<sup>1</sup> While the sides of the body were made from two large sections of the green turban snail, the upper section consists of four sections, and the neck comprises eight vertical panels. As with other comparable Gujarati vessels made from mother-of-pearl, the neck opening features a pierced openwork roundel to facilitate a smoother flow of the liquid contained within the vessel.

The crescent shape of this flask derives from leather pilgrim bottles, its construction emulating the sewn leather panels of the original prototype. Such leather containers are frequently depicted in seventeenth-century Deccani paintings.<sup>2</sup> A notable example, likely enamelled and set with gemstones, appears in a famous painting made between 1620 and 1627 by ‘Ali Riza. The work depicts Ibrahim ‘Adil Shah II (r. 1580-1627), Sultan of Bijapur, venerating a Sufi shaykh, to whom he presents gifts, including the jewelled flask.<sup>3</sup> Similar vessels are also depicted in earlier Mughal paintings. One example, shown on a large folio



from the *Hamza-Nama* (ca. 1562-1577) now in Vienna, appears as a painted leather vessel without a spout. It hangs from a saddle set on a magical, flying earthenware barrel ridden by one of the followers of the giant Zumurrud Shah.<sup>4</sup> Another example, shown in a folio of a Persian translation of the *Ramayana* (completed in 1594) kept in the library of Emperor Akbar’s mother, also features scrolling terminals and lacks a spout. This vessel hangs from a tree and is shaded by a textile.<sup>5</sup>

A number of comparable surviving flasks is published by Mark Zebrowski in his ground-breaking volume on Mughal metalwork. According to Zebrowski, such bottles were intended to carry water or wine on journeys or into battle, their shape related to the pilgrim flasks of medieval Europe.<sup>6</sup> One example, a seventeenth-century Deccani brass pilgrim flask (21.1 cm in height) of this shape, belongs to the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (inv. 2020.11). Decorated with Timurid-style vegetal scrolls, it features a single side spout, scrolling volute terminals, and a square-shaped foot. Another vessel in the same museum (inv. 1992.50), cast in a golden brass alloy, has recently been published, albeit oddly identified as a ewer.<sup>7</sup> It has been dated to around 1580-1600 and attributed to the territories of the Mughal Empire. The boat-shaped body of flasks similarly made in the Deccan is sometimes fashioned in the form of two geese facing backwards with their heads and necks coiled, while the flaring neck takes the shape of a rising lotus flower. A comparable Gujarati flask, similarly made from *T. marmoratus*, features engraved decoration on both the body and the neck.<sup>8</sup>

H.M.C.

Notes:

- 1 For this production, see Crespo, Hugo Miguel. *Gujarat & Portugal. Mother-of-pearl, Tortoiseshell and Exotic Woods*. Lisbon: São Roque, Antiguidades & Galeria de Arte, 2024. pp. 9-29.
- 2 R.H. Pinder-Wilson, R.H. and Tregear, M. ‘Two Drinking Flasks from Asia’, *Oriental Art* 16.4 (1970), pp. 337-341.
- 3 Made at the Bijapur court and painted with opaque watercolour and gold on paper, the painting belongs to the collection of the British Museum, London (inv. 1997,1108,0.1). See Akbarnia, Ladan et al. *The Islamic World. A History in Objects*. London/New York: The British Museum - Thames & Hudson, 2018. p. 195, fig. 2.
- 4 The painting, made in the Mughal court and painted with opaque watercolour and gold on cotton backed with paper, is housed at the MAK - Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna (inv. BI 8770-28). See Stronge, Susan. ‘The reign of Akbar: The creation of a new art’, in Susan Stronge (ed.) *The Great Mughals. Art, Architecture and Opulence* (cat.). London: V&A Publishing, 2024. pp. 35-73, on p. 57, fig. 29.
- 5 The painting, depicting ‘Rama and Lakshman hear from Sugriva, King of the Monkeys about the completion of the bridge to Lanka’, and painted with opaque watercolour and gold on paper, is now in The David Collection, Copenhagen (16/1992). See Stronge, *op. cit.* pp. 35-73, on p. 27, fig. 10.
- 6 Zebrowski, Mark. *Gold, Silver and Bronze from Mughal India*. London: Alexandria Press, 1997. pp. 202-203, nos. 301, and 308-315.
- 7 Melikian-Chirvani, Assadullah Souren. ‘The bronze and copper wares of Mughal Hindustan’ in Stronge, *op.cit.* pp. 75-89, on p. 89, fig. 73.
- 8 Renard, Alexis. *Game of Gods. Game of Love*. Paris: Galerie Alexis Renard, 2016, cat. 7.





# Mughal Rosewater Sprinkler

North India, probably Lucknow, 18th century

Silver, parcel gilt, and niello  
33cm high, 12cm wide, 7.3cm deep

Provenance: French private collection; thence by descent.

A rare Mughal rosewater sprinkler (*gulabpash*) in the form of a scallop shell or flattened bud. Rather than the typical bulbous flask and elongated neck of rosewater sprinklers (see, for example, 02635(IS) in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London), this rosewater sprinkler is in the form of a scallop shell or a flattened bud. As is typical of Mughal rosewater sprinklers, the neck unscrews from the body and the bud at the top, which is pierced to create a spraying effect when the bottle is shaken, unscrews from the neck. The foot is in the form of an upturned flower, mirroring the base of the neck, to which the handles are attached. The handles are in the form of acanthus leaves, a motif particularly prevalent in Lucknow, which was borrowed and adapted from Ancient Greek architecture.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the distinctive form, the ornamentation on the neck and body is also unusual. A matte effect is created with fine stippling made by circular punch marks. A pattern of roses, perhaps to reinforce the connection to the liquid within, is etched into the body and neck, and inlaid with a black mixture of sulphur, copper, silver, and lead, known as niello. A rather similar pattern, although created with openwork, is seen on a scabbard for a *katar* in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond (accession no. 2003.49). Dated to 18th century Lucknow, the leafy chevron pattern on the edges of the scabbard also resembles the edges of the rosewater sprinkler.

This rosewater sprinkler is one of a pair, with the other held in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond (accession no. 2003.54). Not only does it share the form and ornamentation, but also its dimensions. These rosewater sprinklers are part of a wider group of parcel gilt flattened rosewater sprinklers. A heart-shaped example dated to the late 18th century in the National Museum of Asian Art at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (accession no. F1990.1), has handles in the form of a peacock and a peahen. Another, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 2018.230), is dated to the late 18th century and attributed to Lucknow. This example also features heavy use of the acanthus leaf motif.

M.L.

Notes:

1 Markel, Stephen. “‘This Blaze of Wealth and Magnificence’: The Luxury Arts of Lucknow”, in *India’s Fabled City: The Art of Courtly Lucknow*. Los Angeles: LACMA and DelMonico Books, 2010. pp. 198-225: p. 206.



Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2003.54. Photo: Travis Fullerton. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.













## Silver-Clad Indian Wooden Table

India, 19th century

Wood, silver  
71cm high, 68cm diameter

This round table from India is a marriage of indigenous Indian silver cladding and European furniture tastes. Chasing, the technique of working sheets of soft metal over hard wood, had been applied to furniture in India since the Mughal period (1526-1707). Thrones, footstools, and even beds were intricately clad with silver and gold. Recollections from visitors to Indian courts confirm this. Charles Pridham found that the 18th century throne of the Kings of Kandy (Sri Lanka) was made of 'wood, entirely covered with a thin gold sheeting'.<sup>1</sup> A guest of the Maharaja of Patiala in the 1930s, Rosita Forbes, marvelled at being given a 'bed plated in gold'.<sup>2</sup>

When European colonisers arrived, finding that Indians mostly sat on low stools or the floor, they commissioned chairs. They provided local craftsmen with models of European furniture in popular styles of the day, including Regency, Neoclassical, and in this case, Rococo. The Indian furniture was then clad in silver and gold according to local tradition. Examples of fine tables like this one are, however, rare.

The wooden frame, often teak (*Tectona grandis*), is covered with sections of silver sheet about 1mm thick, affixed to the body with nails. The sheet metal was first hammered to shape from the back, then fine detail chased onto the front, in a process called repoussé.

The ledge of the table is ornamented with alternating roses and fleurs-de-lys, which are both common European heraldic symbols. The feet of the table are three lions' heads. Silver chased furniture was frequently worked with insignia, whether Indian royal insignia or British heraldic symbols during colonial times. Though it changed frequently, the East India Company at one point had as its crest the fleur-de-lys, lion, and rose. A throne chair in the collection of the Victoria & Albert, London (accession no. IS.10 to C-1983) made in the Bengal Presidency, has similar rococo motifs. It has been attributed to Baudh due to the peacocks on the chair's back, which form the cipher of the Royal House of Baudh.

M.L.

### Notes:

- 1 Pridham, Charles. *An Historical, Political and Statistical Account of Ceylon and its Dependencies*. London: T. and W. Boone, 1849, cited in Jaffer, Amin. *Furniture from British India and Ceylon: A Catalogue of the Collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Peabody Essex Museum*. 1st ed. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2001. p. 226.
- 2 Forbes, Rosita. *India of the Princes*. London: Ebenezer Baylis and Son, 1939. p. 127, cited in Jaffer, op. cit. p. 226.





# Rare Royal Indian Painted Table

Travancore, India, c. 1866-1875

Carved and painted padouk wood  
77cm high, 145cm diameter

Provenance: US private collection, purchased in the early 1990s.

This exceedingly rare table is decorated with 22 Company style oil paintings on each of the panels around the edge of the tabletop. They are arranged around a large floral burst in the central panel of the table, reminiscent of Dutch Old Master paintings. Carved into the rim of the table under each of the paintings is an escutcheon bearing a conch shell, the emblem of the Kingdom of Travancore. One of the panels (fig. 1), features the portrait of Ayilyam Thirunal Varma, Maharajah of Travancore from 1860 to 1880. It appears to be copied from a photograph taken in 1866, when Ayilyam Thirunal received his first decoration from the British. As in this portrait, he wears the sash and medal of the Order of the Star of India. Our table may have been commissioned to commemorate this event, either as a gift to the Maharajah or from the Maharajah to the British colonial administration in recognition of his gratitude. Next to the Maharajah stands a woman who sports a large bun towards the front of her head, a distinctive hairstyle worn by the Nair women of Kerala. She is dressed in a white slip with a red shawl, a privilege reserved for royal women of Travancore, suggesting that this is the wife or daughter of the Maharajah. An example of royal dress in this period is provided by Rajah Ravi Varma’s 1887 painting *Presentation of a Jubilee Address to Queen Victoria* in the Royal Collections Trust (accession no. RCIN 404097).

The remaining panels depict scenes of caste and occupation in Travancore and parts of the Madras presidency, ranging from Poo Pandaram, a Shaivite priestly caste (fig. 16) to the fishermen of the Kanikkaran (fig. 15).<sup>1</sup> In the background of several panels (figs 16, 21, 22) we may note the *gopuram* of a Dravidian temple. It may be the Thanumalayan Temple in Suchindram, which was under the administration of the Maharajas of Travancore until the merger of Kanyakumari with Tamil Nadu. Ayilyam Thirunal introduced a lottery in 1875 to raise funds for the restoration of a large portion of the temple, and its inclusion may be a nod to his patronage.<sup>2</sup>

The most esteemed court painter of Travancore was Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906). Varma, who was closely related to the royal family of Travancore, was patronised by Ayilyam Thirunal. Varma was critically acclaimed during his own lifetime, winning medals at several international expositions.<sup>3</sup> Since his death, he has been internationally recognised and acclaimed as ‘the father of Indian modern art’.<sup>4</sup> Though he is best known for his oil paintings of Indian mythology which amalgamate Western artistic techniques and traditional Indian iconography, he painted several scenes of courtly life which resemble those painted on the present table. An 1881 painting depicting Ayilyam Thirunal and his brother and heir, Visakham Thirunal, welcoming the Duke of Buckingham, Governor of Madras, to Trivandrum, shares this style (now in the Ganesh Shivaswamy Foundation, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India).<sup>5</sup> There is no evidence that Varma ever painted on wood, and without a signature it is impossible to make the attribution. However, the style, period, and fact that this was a royal commission make it likely that this was painted by a court artist in the circle of Varma.

The table itself is made from padouk, the wood of the *Pterocarpus* tree. It is carved in the style of the Madras Presidency. The rim of the tabletop is carved and pierced with a grapevine motif. The tilt-top mechanism stands on a columnar pedestal, which is carved with Rococo vegetal motifs. The base is comprised of four flat legs, carved with the same grapevine pattern and terminating in peacocks, standing on lobed ball feet. Standing on each of the legs is a fearsome lion with one paw raised and holding a cross. Though it is possible that the combination of lion, cross, and peacock represent the elements of a coat of arms, it is likely derived from designs in European cabinetry books such as Thomas Chippendale’s *Gentleman & Cabinetmaker’s Director* and Thomas Sheraton’s *Cabinetmaker and Upholsterer’s Drawing-Book*, which European clients provided for Indian craftsman.<sup>6</sup>

Notes:

- 1 Vysakh, A.S., ‘Ethnographic Notes on Travancore as Gleaned from 18th Century Paintings’, *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 8.1 (2020), pp. 811-840; Iyer, L.A. Krishna. *The Travancore Tribes and Castes*, vol. 1. Trivandrum: Superintendent Government Press, 1937. p. 59.
- 2 Sugalchand Jain, N. *Lotteries: Beyond Fortunes*. New Delhi: Sugal and Damani, 2005. p. 55.
- 3 Mitter, Partha. *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. p. 182.
- 4 Kapur, Geeta. ‘Representational Dilemmas of a Nineteenth-Century Painter: Raja Ravi Varma’, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*. New Delhi: Tulika, 2000. pp. 145-178; p. 147.
- 5 The painting can be viewed on Google Arts and Culture, <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-maharaja-of-travancore-welcoming-the-duke-of-buckingham-and-chandos-rajah-ravi-varma/tQGeQwWzIUf5Xg?hl=en>
- 6 Jaffer, Amin. *Furniture from British India and Ceylon. A Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Peabody Essex Museum*. New Delhi: Timeless Books, 2001. pp. 15-16.



Ayilyam Thirunal, 1866. Image credit: Dr. Manu S. Pillai.







fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5



fig. 6



fig. 7



fig. 8



fig. 9



fig. 10



fig. 11



fig. 12



fig. 13



fig. 14



fig. 15



fig. 16



fig. 17



fig. 18



fig. 19



fig. 20



fig. 21



fig. 22







# Maquette of the Qutb Minar

Lower three tiers, teak, 19th century;  
upper three tiers, poplar, 21st century

Height: 251cm (original section 160cm)

Provenance: Collection of Harry Myron Blackmer II, Athens. Collection of Christopher Gibbs, inherited from the above in 1989; his sale, Christie’s London, 25-26 September 2000, lot 137. Canadian private collector; his sale, Christie’s London, ‘An Adventurous Spirit: An Important Private Collection Sold to Benefit a Charitable Foundation’, 13 December 2018, lot 62. The Collection of Count Manfredi della Gherardesca.

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

The lower three tiers of this model are made from teak. Twelve semicircular and twelve flanged pillars alternate around each level, separated by balconies and *muqarnas*. They resemble closely the current appearance of the Qutb Minar. The owner of this maquette between 2000 and 2018 commissioned the upper three tiers in poplar. These additions reflect the appearance of the Qutb Minar in a painting of c. 1830, now in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. IM.42-1923). The first storey of the Qutb Minar was constructed in 1192 CE by the first Mamluk Sultan, Qutb ud-Dīn Aibak. His successor, Iltutmish (r. 1211 to 1236 CE), added three further tiers. When a lightning strike of 1369 destroyed the fourth tier, it was replaced by two smaller tiers constructed in white marble. The Qutb Minar remained structurally unchanged until 1828, when Colonel Robert Smith, the garrison engineer of Delhi, added a cupola. This extension proved so controversial that after it was damaged by an earthquake in 1848, it was removed entirely. The painting, and therefore this maquette, capture the Qutb Minar as it appeared for just 20 years.

A maquette of similar style, though some 83cm shorter, is held in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (accession no. EA2010.36). Though it does not include Robert Smith’s cupola, it clearly shows the marble additions of Firuz Shah Tughlaq. Architectural maquettes like these were commissioned for colonial exhibitions and universal expos, generally made by English craftsmen. Indeed, a metal model of the Qutb Minar was shown in the 1911 Festival of Empire in London.<sup>1</sup>

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

M.L.



Victoria and Albert Museum, London, IM.42-1923.

Notes:

1 Hendley, T. H. ‘Festival of Empire and Imperial Exhibition, 1911’, *The Journal of Indian Art and Industry* 117.15 (1911), p. 5, no. 360.









# Pair of Indian Sandalwood Carvings of Incarnations of Vishnu

Mysore, India, 19th century

Carved sandalwood  
23cm high

Provenance: Acquired by Lieutenant General William George Gold (1800-1868) of Garthmyl Hall, Montgomeryshire, or a member of the Pryce family (to whom he was related by marriage) of Gunley Hall in the same county; thence by descent until 2012.

The Dashavatara are the ten primary avatars of Vishnu. Though the list varies across different sects, the most standard is the following: Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parashurama, Rama, Krishna or Balarama, Buddha or Krishna, and Kalki.<sup>1</sup> These two carvings depict Varaha and Kalki and were presumably part of a series of ten.

Varaha is the third avatar of Vishnu. He is always represented as a human with the head of a boar.<sup>2</sup> When the demon Hiranyaksha dragged the Earth in the form of the goddess Bhumi to the bottom of the cosmic ocean, Vishnu took the form of a boar to rescue her. He fought the demon for a thousand years, eventually slaying it and then raising the earth from the water on his tusks.<sup>3</sup> Kalki is Vishnu’s prophesied tenth and final avatar. He will appear at the end of the present age, in the year 428,898 AD, to bring about a return to righteousness (*dharma*).<sup>4</sup> Though Kalki is a human avatar who will ride a white horse named Devadatta, many carved depictions merge the two, giving Kalki a horse’s face.<sup>5</sup>

This style of intricate carving comes from Mysore, Karnataka. It emulates the lacy styel of the 12th-14th century Hoysala Kingdom of the Deccan, which is characterised by layers of intricate detail and deep undercutting.<sup>6</sup> Figures are festooned with elaborate jewellery: head ornaments, earrings, shoulder tassels, chokers, long necklaces, anklets, bracelets, and garlands.<sup>7</sup> Fine stone carvings in this style adorn the outer walls of many temples in Karnataka, including the Hoysaleswara Temple in Halebid, the former capital of the Hoysalas, and the Chennakesava Temple in Belur. Both of these temples feature carvings of the avatars of Vishnu (see accession no. INC1261 in the University of Washington Libraries for the carving of Varaha at Belur).<sup>8</sup> Carvings in this style in sandalwood proliferated in the mid 19th to early 20th centuries, possibly due to the patronage of the rulers of Mysore. The Maharajas of Mysore sent examples of sandalwood carvings to international exhibitions, where they were described as the ‘most perfect samples’.<sup>9</sup>

A sandalwood model of a Hindu temple with deities housed in niches is held in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. IM.321-1924). It was made in Mysore between 1900 and 1923 and displayed at the British Empire Exhibition in Wembley in 1924. Not only does it feature the same style of layered lacy carving as the present example, but the deities are also presented on similar plinths to the carvings of Varaha and Kalki. The dress, with tall crowns, ornate jewellery, and garlands, is also comparable. A sandalwood album case in the Royal Collection Trust, London (accession no. RCIN 90629), which was presented to King Edward VII in Mysore in 1875, is carved in the same style with Hindu deities.

These carvings were acquired by Lieutenant General William George Gold (1800-1868) of Garthmyl Hall, Montgomeryshire, and have been in the family ever since. Lieutenant Gold served in India in the 53rd Shropshire Regiment, receiving the Sutlej medal in 1846 for his service at the Battle of Aliwal during the First Anglo-Sikh War. Later that year, he served at the Battle of Sobraon, sustaining an injury which would send him back to England. He likely purchased these carved avatars of Vishnu as a souvenir of his time in India. That these carvings are labelled – ‘Varaha (Pig)’ and ‘Kulki (Horse)’ – with transliterations of the Sanskrit names and with the English names of the animals, supports the idea that they were made for an English-speaking client with little knowledge of Hinduism.

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Raikar, Sanat Pai. ‘Dashavatara’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 7 Jul. 2023. Retrieved online 18 July 2024 via <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dashavatara>
- 2 Bhattacharyya, A.K. *The Iconography of Hindu Images*. Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, 2019. P. 231.
- 3 Storm, Rachel. *Indian Mythology: Myths and Legends of India, Tibet and Sri Lanka*. London: Anness Publishing, 2000. p. 48.
- 4 *Ibid.* p. 49.
- 5 Dalal, Roshen. *Hinduism: An Alphabetical Guide*. London: Penguin, 2014. p. 188.
- 6 Dye, Joseph M. (III). *The Arts of India*. Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2001. pp. 174, 176.
- 7 *Ibid.* p. 63.
- 8 Photographed by Krishna C. Gairola between 1968 and 1999.
- 9 Watt, G. *Indian Art at Delhi, being the official catalogue of the Delhi Exhibition, 1902-1903*. Calcutta: 1903, p. 150 in Meghani, Kajal. *Splendours of the Subcontinent: A Prince’s Tour of India 1875-6*. London: Royal Collection Trust, 2017. p. 202.







Kalki



Varaha



## Processional Figure of Nandi

South India, Late 19th to early 20th century

Carved and painted wood, glass  
132.1 cm high, 137.2 cm wide

Provenance: Spink & Son, London (1981).  
US Private Collection.

A monumental statue of Nandi, the mount or *vahana* of the Hindu deity Shiva, in the form of a zebu bull. Monumental figures of *vahanas* were commonly carved for temporary use, to be processed through towns and displayed outside temples. They were replaced regularly due to the degradation of the wood in the hot and humid southern Indian climate. The paintwork on this bull correlates with depictions of the Shiva atop Nandi originating from 19th century Tamil Nadu in the British Museum (accession nos 2007,3005.16 and 1993,0806,0.77). The highly textured floral motifs on the rim of the saddle, the harness, and in the floral garland, correspond to depictions of Nandi originating from Thanjavur, in Tamil Nadu.<sup>1</sup>

Very similar wooden Nandi statues are found in the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore (accession no. 1995-01825) and the Museum of Asian Art, Berlin (accession no. I 5958), both of which originate from 19th-20th century South India.

M.L.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> See Chakravarthy, Pradeep. *Thanjavur: A Cultural History*. New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2010.





# Indian Carved Jade Backscratcher

India, 18th century

Jade, gemstones, turquoise, silver gilt, painted and lacquered wood  
93.3cm long

Provenance: Vertical Art Collection.  
Christie's New York, '500 Years Decorative Arts Europe Including Oriental Carpets', 29-30 November 2012, lot 408.  
UK private collection.

A jade backscratcher (*pushṭkhār*) in the shape of a hand mounted on a long shaft of lacquered wood. This backscratcher was made within the Mughal empire, probably in the late 18th or 19th century. Rings of emerald, and ruby adorn the thumb, index, ring, and little finger, whilst a bejewelled bracelet, with carved details imitating pearls, encircles the wrist. The lacquered terminal is approximately contemporaneous but may be a replacement of an original jade or bone handle. Dense floral patterns are painted onto the wood, and shellac has been applied to give depth and sheen. A gilt collar inset with emeralds joins the handle and the hand.

Though the use of these backscratchers has been debated, they appear to have ties to Sufism. The following is written in an 1823 book on Sufi mysticism:



‘Most Faqīrs never carry with them anything save a crooked stick or a piece of iron, sometimes painted...a back-scratcher (*pushṭkhār*), like an artificial hand, made of some metal with a handle, with which they scratch themselves.’<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, a Mughal miniature in the collection of the British Museum, London (accession no. 1999,1202,0.3.3) dated to the 18th century shows a Kanphat Yogi, a member of a Hindu ascetic order, carrying out a religious ceremony in the women’s quarter of a palace. In his left hand he holds a flywhisk, and in his right hand he holds a gold backscratcher with hand finial.

Several detached hand finials are held in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (see accession nos 1265-1874, 1269-1874, 1266-1874) in addition to a complete backscratcher with an 18th century hand and later terminal (see accession no 1268-1874). A

fine nephrite jade back scratcher in the Al Thani Collection in Paris, purportedly owned by Robert Clive, is dated to the mid 18th century.<sup>2</sup> The hand is a similar shape with jewelled rings and bracelet, but the thumb ring is not set with an emerald.

This back scratcher comes from The Vertical Art Collection of canes and walking sticks, gathered by an anonymous collector. The collection is published in *Vertical Art: The Enduring Beauty of Antique Canes and Walking Sticks* (Hudson Hills Press, 2008) although the present back scratcher does not feature.

M.L.

Notes:  
<sup>1</sup> Sharif, Ja’far. *Islam in India or the Qānun-i-Islām Customs of the Musalmāns of India*. Abingdon: Routledge Library Editions, 1832/2018. 293.  
<sup>2</sup> Stronge, Susan. *Bejewelled Treasures: The Al Thani Collection*. London: V&A Publishing, 2015. Cat 38, p. 83.





## Mughal Gem Set Jade Hilted Khanjar

India, 18th Century

Steel, jade, gemstones  
38cm long (overall), 24.5cm long (the blade)

Provenance: Australian private collection since at least 1990.

The *khanjar* is a double-edged dagger with a slightly recurved blade and a pistol grip hilt. The distinctive pistol-grip can be traced to the southern Deccan, where it developed from hilts in the shape of parrot heads.<sup>1</sup> No weapons with a pistol grip hilt appear in the Windsor *Padshah-nama*, considered the best source for weaponry of Shah Jahan's reign, suggesting that they were popularised during the reign of Shah Jahan's successor, Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707).<sup>2</sup>

This *khanjar* has an unusual hilt with alternating silver and gold chevron inlay. Each side of the pommel is set with a roundel of rubies and emeralds around a rose cut diamond, perhaps designed to emulate the eyes of a parrot. Between these 'eyes' is a smaller, oval-shaped medallion of rubies and emeralds around a teardrop diamond.

The double-edged watered steel blade is carved at forte with an arabesque.

A *khanjar* with a very similar hilt, featuring jade inlaid with silver chevrons and a jewelled roundel at the pommel, is published in Robert Hales' *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour* and dated to the 18th century.<sup>3</sup>

M.L.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Welch, Stuart Cary (ed.) *India: Art and Culture 1300-1900*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Hales, Robert. *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour*. London: Robert Hales C. I. Ltd., 2013. p. 22 cat. 55.





## Mughal Jade Hilted Khanjar

The Deccan (probably Hyderabad),  
India, 17th Century

Watered steel, jade, silver  
36cm long (overall), 23cm long (the blade)

Provenance: Australian private collection since at least 1990.

A *khanjar* with a hilt of carved dark green nephrite jade, inlaid with carnation and cypress leaves in silver, recalling the technique of *bidri*. The double fullered watered steel blade is decorated at forte with a small etched flower panel. A dagger of such quality would only have been used ceremonially or worn at court, and never in combat.

A *khanjar* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 36.25.667), attributed to 17th-18th century Deccan has a similar pistol grip hilt. Though the scalloped blade is quite

different, the silver inlay on the hilt is a similar pattern. The hilt of a *khanjar* with near identical silver inlay, though paler green jade, is held in the British Museum, London (accession no. 1878,1230.883), and is dated to 17th-century India. A dark green jade pot in the National Palace Museum, Taipei has the same pattern.<sup>1</sup> It was published alongside a number of other daggers in this group by Stephen Markel, who theorised that they were made in Hyderabad.<sup>2</sup>

This dagger was exhibited in Paris in the ‘Splendeur des armes orientales’ exhibition in 1988.<sup>3</sup>

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Teng, Shu-p'ing. *Exquisite Beauty-Islamic Jades*. Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2021, p. 101 cat. 110.
- 2 Markel, Stephen ‘Non-Imperial Mughal Sources for Jades and Jade Simulants in South Asia’, *Jewellery Studies* 10 (2004). pp. 68-75; p. 70, in Alexander, David G, Stuart W. Pyhrr, Will Kwiatkowski, and Cynthia Clark. *Islamic Arms and Armor in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015, p. 216.
- 3 Missillier, Philippe and Howard Ricketts. *Splendeur des armes orientales*. Paris: Acte-Expo, 1988. p. 112, cat. 189.



## Indian Peshkabz Dagger with Banded Agate Grips

India, 18th century

Agate, watered steel, gold  
39.5cm long (overall), 28cm long (the blade)

Provenance: Australian private collection since at least 1990.

The *peshkabz* originated in Safavid Iran but became popular in the Mughal Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries. The name is thought to come from the front girdle worn by Persian wrestlers, indicating that the *peshkabz* was worn centrally as opposed to other blades which were worn at the side. Characterised by its recurved blade which tapers to a needle-like tip, the *peshkabz* was designed to pierce through mail armour.

This example comes from Mughal India. It has a full tang fitted with a grip of agate, the banded form of the mineral chalcedony. The agate is various shades of brown and blond. It is secured to the tang with five gold pins in the form of flowers. The blade is of fine *wootz* (watered/Damascus steel), with pronounced spine which gives a T cross section. The blade is much straighter than a typical Safavid *peshkabz*, indicating that this is an Indian example.

M.L.



## Sosun Pattah Sword

Rajasthan, probably Bundi, India,  
Second half of the 18th century

Steel, gold inlay  
Blade 57.5cm, overall 78cm

Provenance: From a US Private Collection, passed down through several generations.

A fine Mughal sword, known as a *Sosun Pattah*, meaning ‘lily leaf’ in Urdu. This name is used for two different swords: one, known as the Rajput form, has a wide blade with a concave segment taken from the tip, and is mounted with a basket hilt (see, for example, a Gujurati *Sosun Pattah* in the Royal Armouries, Leeds (accession no. XXVIS.118)); the other, including this example, is known as the Islamic form. It has a tulwar hilt, sometimes known as the Indo-Muslim hilt, and a recurved blade which broadens at the tip.<sup>1</sup> The blade has a thick T-section false edge of 0.8cm wide. It is plain but for a punched ‘bite’ mark on the short ricasso, a feature which is believed to have been copied from Genoan swords imported to Asia.

The proportions of this hilt are not typical of the regular ‘disc and dome’ pommels of Mughal Indian swords. This hilt has a relatively small disc with a wide upturned edge, capped by a small dome (*katori*) with a bud-shaped lanyard ring (*nath*) to which a wrist strap could be attached. The *koftegari* ornamentation of the hilt is unusual. Straight vines run vertically across the hilt, with large lotus flowers at regular intervals, creating a diaper pattern. A *kirich* (SSP/82) and a *talwar* in the Jodhpur Armoury, are also decorated with lotus flowers on a blackened steel ground.<sup>2</sup> Both swords are dated to Bundi in the 18th century.

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Rawson, P.S. *The Indian Sword*. London: Herbert Jenkins, 1968. p. 46.
- 2 Elgood, Robert. *Rajput Arms and Armour: The Rathores and Their Armoury at Jodhpur Fort*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. New Delhi: Mehrangarh Museum Trust in association with Niyogi Books, 2017. pp. 330, 358.





## Outstanding Afghan Pulwar

Blade Western India, 17th century  
Hilt Afghanistan, 18th/19th century

Watered steel, silver, gold, leather  
90.5cm long (overall), 76cm long (the blade)

Provenance: Purchased in London, November 1991.  
Australaian private collection.

This fine *pulwar* from Afghanistan represents the highpoint of Indian, Persian, and traditional Afghan techniques. In the 18th and 19th centuries there were no hard borders between these nations, meaning that craftsmen were free to travel between regions, bringing their influences and techniques with them. Furthermore, British rule across the region brought European swords as well as encouraging movement of weapons between each country.<sup>1</sup>

The steel hilt is of typical Afghan form. The downturned quillons terminate in lotus buds. At the centre of the crossguard is a quatrefoil. The fretted pommel of this *pulwar* is dome shaped, distinguished from the Indian *tulwar* by its more bulbous shape. There are two types of pommel: spherical, which are found in combination with shamshir-type blades, or hemispherical, as in this case, which have a small, dome-shaped elevation on the flat side with a loop, through which a silk or leather cord can be threaded.<sup>2</sup> The curved hand guard, which is found on many swords from late 19th century Afghanistan, is of typical Afghan pierced steel openwork.<sup>3</sup>

The craftsmanship on this *pulwar* is, however, much finer than typical Afghan examples. The underside of the dome of the pommel is pierced with a pattern of split palmettes. Two *pulwars* in the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (accession nos B.O.-1945 and B.O.-3762), show a more standard pattern of perforations. The precision of these perforations is often used as a way to determine the skill of the craftsman.<sup>4</sup> A 19th century *pulwar* with similar openwork on the hand guard but considerably

cruder piercing around the hilt is pictured in Dmitriy Miloserdov’s *Edged Weapons of Afghanistan: 19th – early 20th century*.<sup>5</sup>

Scrolling vegetal patterns are etched into the hilt and inlaid with gold. This technique, known as *kofrigari*, is much more typical of India than Afghanistan. In small cartouches around the guard, invocations to Names of God and to the Prophet Muhammad are applied with *kofrigari*:

يا سميع / يا بصير / يا غفار / يا قهار / يا الله / يا محمد  
O All-Hearing! O All-Seeing! O Forgiver! O Subduer! O God!  
O Muhammad!

The hilt is fitted with an earlier Indian blade. Etched on both sides are pseudo-Latin letters and a personified sun, or *suraj-mukhi*. It is characteristic of blades made in the *firangi* or ‘foreign’ style in Western India in the 17th century, where Indian craftsmen copied the inscriptions from European blades, resulting in nonsensical inscriptions. A broad *firangi* blade with near identical inscription and font across three fullers, and a sun design below, is in the Jodhpur Armoury (no. ARM/76/73).<sup>6</sup> The blade is housed in a scabbard of leather over wood, with a long fluted chape, characteristic of the Afghan style.

This pulwar was published in *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour*, p. 193, cat. 466, as a late 18th or early 19th-century pulwar.<sup>7</sup>

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Miloserdov, Dmitriy. ‘Sabres of Central Asia of the XIX – early XX centuries’. *VIII МЕЖДУНАРОДНАЯ НАУЧНО-ПРАКТИЧЕСКАЯ КОНФЕРЕНЦИЯ МИР ОРУЖИЯ* (2020), pp. 321-331; p. 326.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 327.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Miloserdov, Dmitriy. *Edged Weapons of Afghanistan: 19th – early 20th century*. Saint Petersburg: Atlant, 2019. p. 156, cat. 26.
- 6 Elgood, Robert. *Rajput Arms and Armour: The Rathores and Their Armoury at Jodhpur Fort*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. New Delhi: Mehrangarh Museum Trust in association with Niyogi Books, 2017. p. 318.
- 7 Robert Hales. *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour*. London: Robert Hales/ C.I. Ltd., 2013. p. 193, cat. 466.





## Indian Matchlock Rifle (Toradar)

Sindh, First half of the 19th century

Wood, watered steel, gold  
157cm long

Provenance: UK private collection.

Firearms first arrived in India with the Portuguese in 1498, who brought matchlock muskets and ships armed with cannons.<sup>1</sup> The *toradar* evolved from this technology, and despite the invention of the more efficient wheellock and flintlock mechanisms, the matchlock remained in use in India well into the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> In the tradition of the *jezail* from neighbouring Afghanistan, guns from the Sindh region of India (modern day Pakistan) have long barrels and fishtail butts. The function of its most distinctive feature, the curved stock, is debated, but a possible explanation is that it helped hold the gun under the armpit whilst the bearer rode a horse. The trigger is positioned on the stock, rather than directly below the mechanism, making it an infamously unwieldy weapon.<sup>3</sup>







Typical of *toradars* from Sindh, the barrel is made from highly textured Damascus steel. The barrel is mounted onto the stock with five engraved silver *capucines*. Silver panels engraved with similar floral and vegetal motifs are applied at the butt and the receiver. Gold *kofigari* floral inlay enriches the muzzle, ramrod, and breech. A matchlock rifle in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 36.25.2141), dated to the second quarter of the 19th century, shares similar *kofigari* ornamentation on its Damascus steel barrel.

Highly unusually for an object of this date, there is an inscription in a Laṇḍā script. Laṇḍā scripts were used in Punjab and parts of North India to write Sindhi, Pashto, Punjabi, Hindustani, Kashmiri, Saraiki, and Balochi, as well as other dialects. They fell out of use in the 19th century in favour of Perso-Arabic scripts and Devanagari.

This is the only example known to us of a rifle from Sindh with an inscription in Laṇḍā, rather than Perso-Arabic.

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Gahir, Sunita and Spencer, Sharon (eds). *Weapon: A Visual History of Arms and Armor*. New York City: DK Publishing, 2006. 156.
- 2 Ibid., 260.
- 3 Reddy, Ravinder. *Arms & Armour of India, Nepal & Sri Lanka*. London: Hali, 2018. 356.





38

## Indian Shield (Dhal)

Bikaner, Rajasthan, 19th century

Painted lacquer with gold bosses  
46cm diameter, 7cm deep

An Indian shield lacquered black all over and then painted with floral, vegetal, and cloud motifs. It has four unusually shaped gold bosses, etched with floral motifs. Highly decorated hemispherical shields like this one were often used to give a dowry of money, weapons, and jewels to the groom.

The ornamentation, excluding the gold bosses, is nearly identical to that of a shield held in the National Museum, New Delhi (accession no. 75.615).<sup>1</sup> Another, with different bosses but the same design, is in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. IM.228-1922). Others from the same group, all dated to 19th century Rajasthan (nos 229-1922, 230-1922, 3321(IS)), are held in the same museum.

The decorative scheme appears to derive from a group of 17th-century Indian shields which were produced in Bengal and then sent to Japan to be lacquered, before being returned to India where they made valuable diplomatic gifts.<sup>2</sup> These shields were typically decorated with foliage and animals in gold lacquer on a black ground, frequently with European coats of arms at the centre. Examples of this group are held in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (accession no. AN1685.B.13) and the Wallace Collection, London (no. A315).

M.L.

### Notes:

- 1 Pictured in G.N. Pant and K.K. Sharma. *Indian Armours in the National Museum Collection*. New Delhi: National Museum, 2001. p. 97.
- 2 Körber, Ulrike. 'A Study on 16th and 17th Century Luso-Oriental (Luso-Asian) Lacquerware', *16th Triennial Conference ICOM-CC*. Lisbon, 2011. pp. 1-3.







## Portrait of Naser Al-Din Shah Qajar

Iran, c. 1850

Opaque watercolour, ink, and gold on woven paper  
20.5cm high, 13.5cm wide

Provenance: John Murray III (1808-1892).  
Private collection, Bermuda (likely part of the family collection for well over 50 years); thence by descent in London.

This portrait is Naser al-Din Shah as a young man. He is dressed in European military uniform, consisting of a deep red frockcoat embroidered with gold brocade, and braided epaulettes. He also wears a jewelled belt, armbands (*bazubands*), and a square hat (*Kolah-e-Qajari*) with a jewelled aigrette. His left hand grips the hilt of a sword, while his right hand rests on his hip.

Reflecting the turbulence of the early years of his reign and a desire for security both overseas and internally, Naser al-Din Shah was frequently portrayed in military settings in the 1850s. A series of portraits dating to 1850 depict the Shah in almost identical dress and pose, but his hand rests on a cannon rather than on his hip. One example is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 2023.248). Another, a portrait from an album of Qajar paintings by Mirza Baba al-Husayni al Imami, is in the British Library (Or 4938, f. 3).



Mirza Baba al-Husayni  
Portrait of Naser Al-Din Shah  
Courtesy of The British Library Board,  
Or 4938, f. 3.

A painting in the Malek National Museum and Library, Tehran (accession no. 1393.01.00063), completed between 1848 and 1860, depicts Naser al-Din Shah's visit to the army training ground at Mashgh Square. He wears a black European frockcoat, which is heavily embroidered with gold thread. He also wears braided epaulettes, a jewelled belt, and a square hat embellished with an aigrette. In his left hand he holds a Persian *shamshir*. Behind him march hundreds of soldiers, dressed in red coats like British soldiers. Not only is this a magnificent display of might – cannons fire in the background – but also a display of European influence.

The present example follows the conventions of European military portraiture: the subject is depicted from the knee upwards, on the three-quarter turn, touching the hilt of his sword. Similarly, the Shah's elegantly manicured handlebar moustache, which is quite unlike the style he sported in his early years (see for example the famous photograph of the Shah standing next to a chair in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession no. 1977.683.22), speaks of a desire to present himself as a European dandy. Yet, his thick continuous eyebrow recalls depictions of Fath 'Ali Shah from the beginning of the century (see Victoria & Albert Museum accession no. 707-1876). Framed in the language of European portraiture, yet reflecting the language of earlier paintings, this portrait reflects the attitudes of a ruler with one foot in the West and the other firmly rooted in tradition.

This painting comes from the collection of John Murray III (1808-1892), a renowned British publisher, responsible for the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. Murray was also a writer in his own right, travelling extensively and writing travel guides. Later in his career he published the first modern commercial guidebooks. Papers sold at auction in 2024 include documentation labelled "Pass for Mr John Murray proceeding to Shiraz and Persepolis", dated with the Hirji year 1266 (Gregorian year 1850). It is likely that Murray bought this painting during his travels in Iran in 1850.

M.L.



# Safavid Illuminated Portrait

Isfahan, late 17th to early 18th century

Watercolour on paper heightened with gold  
13cm high, 7.8cm wide (the portrait); 32.5cm high, 21.2cm wide (overall)

Provenance: William H. and Lily F. Diehl Collection, New York, probably acquired in 1947 from Persian Antique Gallery, New York; thence by descent.

A miniature portrait of a young woman, mounted on a small cobalt blue and floriate panel, and again on a larger panel of gilt arabesques. The subject stands on grassy hill amongst blue irises. Though significantly faded, a pastoral scene can be identified in the background. Over her right shoulder, a winding river flows past a small settlement and towards the mountains in the distance. Over her left shoulder, two men use a ladder to climb a tree, possibly to collect fruit or bird nests.

The young woman is dressed in typical Isfahani court dress from the reign of Shah Sulaiman (r. 1666-1694), as illustrated by Jean Chardin, who travelled through Iran from 1673 to 1677, in plate XXIII of his *Voyages en Perse et autres lieux de l’Orient*.<sup>1</sup> Her undergarments consist of a collarless pink silk shirt, fastened at her right shoulder, and loose striped trousers which taper at the ankle. Over this, she wears a tailored jacket, which is cinched at the waist and flares outward to accentuate her curves. In the later Safavid period, jackets became shorter and more fitted, possibly emulating European styles.<sup>2</sup> She wears orange slip-on shoes, known as *galesh*, which sport a Cuban heel to help secure the foot in stirrups.<sup>3</sup> They are probably made of shagreen, the untreated hide of a horse or shark skin, dyed red as per custom in the 17th century.<sup>4</sup> She wears a split brim pillbox cap lined with fur, likely inspired by Georgian fashion.<sup>5</sup> The ensemble is completed by teardrop earrings, henna tattoos on her hands, and a beauty spot applied between the eyebrows, probably made from woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) or indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*). Her hair is fastened into a low ponytail and two ringlets are pulled in front of her ears, which was considered particularly attractive for women.<sup>6</sup>

This portrait resembles the work of the Isfahan School during the second half of the 17th century. Unlike earlier miniatures, which tend to depict idealised visions of youth, this woman has distinctive, characterful features. Her face is modelled and shaded, a technique adopted from European art, the presence of which increased following the arrival of the Dutch East India company

in Iran in the 1620s. The background uses perspective, which was only adopted by Iranian court artists in the mid-17th century.<sup>7</sup> ‘Aliquli Jabbadar (active c. 1666-1694) was one of the first artists to incorporate elements of European art into traditional Safavid miniatures. An example of his work in the British Museum, London (accession no. 1920,0917,0.295), depicts a prince and a courtesan, with similarly modelled faces. The courtesan sports the same hairstyle as the subject of the present portrait, under a similar split brim fur hat. A miniature by Muhammad Zaman, a contemporary of Jabbadar, in the British Museum (accession no. 1948,1211,0.19), depicts a ruler on horseback and his attendants. Their delicately shaded faces and feathered curls display the same techniques as the present portrait.

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 See Chardin, Jean. *Voyages de Monsieur le chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l’Orient*. Vol. II. Amsterdam: J.L. de Lorme, 1711. p. 51, pl. XXII. Retrieved on 29/11/2024 via Gallica, Bibliothèque Nationale de France <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1050392t/f63.item>
- 2 Munroe, Nazanin Hedayat. ‘Fashion in Safavid Iran’, *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (October 2015). New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Retrieved online from [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/safa\\_f/hd\\_safa\\_f.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/safa_f/hd_safa_f.htm) on 29/11/2024.
- 3 Semmelhack, Elizabeth. *Standing Tall: The Curious History of Men in Heels*. Toronto: Bata Shoe Museum Foundation, 2015. <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/persian-riding-shoes/YAFBiIkDNEd3nA?hl=en>
- 4 Le Bruyn, C. *Travels into Muscovy, Persia and Part of the East Indies*. London: 1737.
- 5 ‘Fashioning an Empire: Safavid Textiles from the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha’, *National Museum of Asian Art at the Smithsonian*. Retrieved online on 26/11/2024 from <https://asia.si.edu/whats-on/exhibitions/fashioning-an-empire-safavid-textiles-from-the-museum-of-islamic-art-doha/>
- 6 ‘Cosmetics’, *Encyclopædia Iranica* [online edition] New York, 1996. Retrieved from <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cosmetics-pers> on 29/11/2024.
- 7 Sardar, Marika. ‘The Arts of Iran, 1600-1800’. *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (October 2003). New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Retrieved online from [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/safa\\_2/hd\\_safa\\_2.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/safa_2/hd_safa_2.htm) on 29/11/2024.







## Safavid Textile with Birds and Flowers

Iran, Late 17th Century

19cm high, 70cm wide  
Woven silk and metal-wrapped threads

Provenance: French private collection.

This metal-ground silk textile is adorned with a repeated motif of a bird in a rosebush and a nightingale overhead with a small deer approaching the scene. In addition to the roses, a poppy, tulip, and foxglove-like plant are also evident. A particularly popular motif in Safavid art was the *gul-u-bulbul* or ‘rose and nightingale’. It derives from Safavid miniatures, such as a painting of a bird on a twig with a butterfly in its beak in the British Museum, London (accession no. 1922,0316,0.1). The birds in these painting may have, in turn, come from European ornithological books, such as Ulisse Aldrovandi’s *Ornithologiae hoc est de avibus historiae libri XX*, published in Italy in 1634 (see Zentralbibliothek Zürich, no. 10.3931). The *gul-o-bulbul* motif references Nizami’s poetic image of a nightingale singing to a rose as a metaphor for unrequited love:

*In every plane tree the ringdove cooed their love-stories  
And on the topmost branch the nightingale was sitting,  
Sighing like Majnun: while below, the rose lifted her head  
Out of her calyx towards the bird, like Layla.<sup>1</sup>*

When the Safavids came to power at the turn of the 16th century, the Iranian textile industry was already well developed. However, it was under the reign of Shah Tahmasp (1524–76) that the industry began to be centralised, with royal workshops established to service the court. It was Shah ‘Abbas who developed a state monopoly over the silk trade. When the capital of the Safavid Empire was established in Isfahan in 1598, Armenian textile workers were moved to New Julfa, a neighbourhood near the palace of Shah ‘Abbas.<sup>2</sup>

This strip would once have been part of a larger panel, with the direction of the birds and deer alternating with each row. An example of a complete panel with this pattern is held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 49.32.99). Patterned silks were made into garments, such as overcoats, turbans and sashes, with multiple patterns clashing in one outfit. A pair of oil paintings in the Museum of Islamic Art, Qatar (accession nos PA.106.2009 and PA.72.2011), dating from the 2nd half of the 17th century, provides an excellent depiction of the use of silk in male and female Iranian court dress. The

tightly woven, rigid structure of this silk means it may have been more suitable for use as a curtain or door-hanging. Certain garments did, however, require rigid fabric. The liturgical copes of Armenian clerics were made from rigid fabric with metallic threads.<sup>3</sup> An example of a silk cope adorned with irises in metal-wrapped threads is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 49.32.71).

Other fragments of silk of the same pattern are preserved in the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven (accession no. 1937.4871), and the George Washington University Textile Museum, Washington, D.C. (accession no. 3.141). A piece of silk with a similar design but with an additional rabbit motif is held in the same museum, and another with a pattern of birds and flowers is held in the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City (accession no. R57-9/13). These textiles, like the present example, are all approximately 71.5cm–72.5cm in width, suggesting that this was the standard size of looms.

M.L.

Notes:

1 Nizami, *Layla and Majnun*. pp. 61–62 in Bier, Carol (ed.) *Woven from the soul, spun from the heart: textile arts of Safavid and Qajar Iran, 16th–19th centuries*. Washington, D.C.: The Textile Museum, 1987. p. 176, cat. 20.

2 Munroe, Nazanin Hedayat. ‘Silk Textiles from Safavid Iran, 1501–1722.’ In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (2012). New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-. Retrieved online from [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/safa\\_3/hd\\_safa\\_3.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/safa_3/hd_safa_3.htm) on 2 August 2024.

3 Bier. *Op. Cit.* p. 172.



# Safavid Sūrahi with Qajar Mounts

Kirman, Safavid Iran, 1650-1700 (the base)  
Qajar Iran, 19th century (the mouthpiece)

Polychrome glazed fritware with metal and turquoise mouthpiece  
32cm high (including the mouthpiece); 18cm high (the base);  
16cm diameter

Provenance: UK private collection since the early 1940s.

This huqqa base (*kalian*) is made from a ceramic bottle (*sūrahi*) to which a 19th century metal mouthpiece ornamented with turquoise has been added. The base was made in Kirman, South-eastern Iran. It depicts an incident from the epic poem Khosrow and Shirin, where Khosrow catches Shirin unclothed as she washes her hair in the river. This scene has been widely depicted in illuminated manuscripts (for example, a 16th-century manuscript in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession no 13.228.7.3).

Kirman polychrome is a subcategory of Safavid blue-and-white ware, adding splashes of distinctive tomato reds, and small amounts of black, chocolate-brown, and green to the colour palette. The blue-and-white sections are generally treated with ornament drawn from late Ming blue-and-white ceramics.<sup>1</sup> Polychrome areas, conversely, feature more indigenous designs.



Such motifs include cypress trees, peacocks, pheasants, and less frequently, as in the present example, galloping gazelles. These gazelles are also seen on a *kalian* in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. 611-1889). Both the colour and the somewhat primitive form of the gazelles provide contrast to the detailed floral and figural ornamentation of the rest of the base. Their inclusion may be an allusion to the poetic subject matter, as the similarity between the Farsi word *ghazaal* (gazelle) and *ghazal*, a form of Perso-Arabic love poem, has led to the depiction of deer in courtship scenes.

The designs almost always featured a stylised makers mark, derivative of the Chinese reign marks (*nien-hao*). Pieces from Kirman typically carry a blue tassel mark. This piece can be comfortably dated to the 17th century. Only one piece of Kirman pottery, dated by its maker to 930 H (1523 CE), is currently thought to survive from the 16th century. Equally, no examples are assigned to the eighteenth.<sup>2</sup>

A *kalian* in the British Museum, London (accession no. 1890,0517.13) from 17th century Kirman depicts the same scene. The composition of Khusrow hunting in the forest when he finds Shirin is strikingly similar to the present example. Khusrow, with a quiver slung across his back, rides a black horse decorated with ornamental bridles. His left hand outstretched, he stumbles across Shirin, who sits cross-legged in a river. A *kalian* in the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession no. 615-1889), dated to 1650-1800, depicts another horseman, presumably Khusrow. Though very similar blue floral decoration has been applied, the figures are less refined than the present example.

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Watson, Oliver. *Ceramics from Islamic Lands*. London: Thames & Hudson in association with The al-Sabah Collection, 2004. p. 471.
- 2 Lane, Arthur. *Later Islamic Pottery: Persia, Syria, Egypt, Turkey*. London: Faber and Faber, 1957. pp. 82-83.





# Safavid Blue and White Charger

Safavid Iran, probably Mashhad, 17th century

Fritware decorated with cobalt blue underglaze  
48.2 cm diameter

Provenance: Gifted to Michael Archer (1936-2022) by Arthur Lane’s widow in the mid-1960s. Thence by descent.

This monumental blue and white Safavid charger features an unusual repertoire of motifs and forms. The moulded white cavetto is fluted with a flanged rim. Enclosing the central decoration is an 8-bracketed frame, borrowed from Kraak dishes. It consists of alternating fish scale design and an interlocking diaper pattern, which derives from a simplified version of the Chinese character 壽 (shòu), meaning ‘longevity’.<sup>1</sup> The well is decorated with a large vase, from which emerge two veined Kraak-style flowers and two leafy peaches. Below the vase are bamboo foliage, and flying above is an insect. The reverse of the dish is highly unusual. It is entirely cobalt blue, but for the underside of the well which is white and marked with a blue potter’s mark. It is a square seal mark with pseudo-Chinese characters, imitating a *nienhao* (reign mark).

The decorative scheme derives from Chinese export ceramics. Vase compositions contained within patterned frames are a common feature of Chinese ceramics, such as a Kraak dish made in the early 17th century in Jingdezhen, Eastern China (see Victoria & Albert Museum, London accession no. CIRC.568-1921). The fluted rim may be inspired by chrysanthemum petal dishes, which were made in large quantities in Jingdezhen during the Wanli period and exported throughout Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas. Two such examples are held in the Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul (accession nos TKS 15/2416 and TKS 15/2511).<sup>2</sup> Both have Kraak borders with alternating diaper patterns, with a vase of flowers in the central medallion.

The cavettos of both are moulded, the former with fruits and the latter in chrysanthemum pattern. That these dishes are held in the Topkapı Palace demonstrates that they were exported to Middle Eastern clients and may well have provided the prototype for the present dish.

This dish shares characteristics with dishes produced in both the main centres of Safavid ceramics, namely Mashhad and Kirman. Dishes produced in the first half of the 17th century in Mashhad are characterised by a central medallion decorated by a Chinese-derived design, such as flowers in a vase, waterfowl, or dragons. The design is enclosed by a ‘Kraak’ frame, whilst the cavetto is left blank. Dishes in this group almost always have square potters’ marks, made up of a box with a hatched square in one corner and pseudo-Chinese characters in the other three corners.<sup>3</sup> However, they tend to have incised cavettos, rather than fluted, as well as white undersides with a band of decoration above the foot ring. An example of such a dish is held in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (accession no. 995.143.1). Dishes made in Kirman in the second half of the 17th century feature cobalt bases with a white, fluted rim. However, this group has incised floral decoration in the well. Examples from this group are in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (accession no. 998.54.1) and the Victoria & Albert Museum (accession no. 2805-1876).

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Macioszek, Amelia. ‘Negotiating Appropriation – Later Safavid Adaptations of Chinese Blue-and-White Porcelain’, *Art of the Orient* 8 (2019), pp. 75-92; p. 76.
- 2 Illustrated in Krah, Regina, Nurdan Erbahar, and John Ayers. *Chinese Ceramics in the Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul: A Complete Catalogue. Vol. II*. London: published in association with the directorate of the Topkapi Saray Museum by Sotheby’s, 1986. p. 713, cat. 1235 and 1236.
- 3 Golombek, Lisa, Robert B. Mason, Patricia Proctor, and Eileen Reilly. *Persian Pottery in the First Global Age: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Arts and Archaeology of the Islamic World. Leiden: Brill, 2013. p. 82.





## Safavid Blue and White Jar

Iran, Mid-17th century

Fritware decorated with two shades of blue and black.  
25.8cm high, 24.5cm wide, 12.5cm diameter at rim.

Provenance: UK private collection, since before 1959.

Of rounded form and with a rolled rim to allow for cotton or leather to be tied across the aperture, both the form and decoration of this storage jar are drawn from Chinese porcelain.<sup>1</sup> Chinese porcelain reached Iran via the Gulf as early as the 1320s, creating an almost instantaneous demand for blue-and-white porcelain. By the late 15th century, large volumes of Chinese export wares were arriving in Iran to meet the demand.<sup>2</sup> Such was the value of Chinese porcelain that Shah ‘Abbas I (r. 1588-1629) endowed the Safavid ancestral shrine at Ardebil with 1162 pieces, for which he built a special gallery called the *Chini-khāneh* (literally, China house). The majority of these pieces were blue and white Ming porcelain, 805 of which are documented by John Alexander Pope.<sup>3</sup> Safavid potters soon began to copy the Chinese porcelain, producing such high quality imitations that they were easily mistaken for the real thing by European traders.<sup>4</sup>

The form of this vessel is appropriated from the Chinese *kuan* or *guan*, a wine jar with an ovoid body and short neck. The motif of cranes in flight amongst *ruyi* clouds, which features on the shoulder of the present jar, also comes from China, where the crane was seen as auspicious due to the bird’s association with longevity.

An early example of a *kuan* from the Tianshun period of the Ming Dynasty (1457-1465) decorated with cranes is in the British Museum, London (accession no. 1937,0716.79). However, it is on Wanli period (1563-1620) *kuan* jars, such as no. 1717-1876 in the



Victoria & Albert Museum, London, that the motif was most commonly used. Another *kuan* jar dated to the Wanli period was discovered at the Ardebil shrine, featuring lotus panels and dividers.<sup>5</sup> This motif was also copied by Safavid potters. In larger jars, such as the present example, a band of floral decoration was generally placed below the lotus panels. In this case, half flowers in reciprocal triangles form a border. A similar motif is seen on an example in the V&A (accession no. 2541-1876), which dates to the 17th century.

A dragon with a mane wraps around the jar. Dragons are popular motifs on Safavid blue-and-white porcelain. A *kuan* jar in the V&A (accession no. 992&A-1876) dated to the 16th or 17th century depicts a 3-clawed dragon and another in the Louvre, Paris (accession no. MAO 695) dated to 1600-1650 depicts the same. The combination of cranes in flight, dragons, and lotus panels is even seen on a vase held in the V&A (accession no. 1032-1883) and dated to 17th century Iran. The dragon in the present example, with its scaly body, wings, and serpentine form without feet is rare. Only one other example is known. It likely derives from a Chinese prototype, perhaps from the Ardebil shrine. It is probably a sea creature described in the *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (*Classic of Mountains and Seas*), a mythical geography and bestiary of China dated to the 4th century.<sup>6</sup>

Safavid blue and white wares are generally made at one of two main centres: Mashhad and Kirman. It had at one time been assumed that blue and white ceramics with tassel marks came from Kirman, whilst those from Mashhad had black outlines and square potters’ marks. However, it has been shown that these assumptions are incorrect, and the only accurate way to determine the city of manufacture is scientific analysis of the petrography.<sup>7</sup> This piece has a black rectilinear grid mark, which according to analysis carried out by Lisa Golombek, indicates a date of manufacture of 1650-1680.<sup>8</sup>

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Crowe, Yolande. *Persia and China: Safavid Blue and White Ceramics in the Victoria & Albert Museum*, 1501-1738. Geneva: La Borie, 2002. p. 90.
- 2 *Ibid.* p. 9.
- 3 Pope, John Alexander. *Chinese Porcelains from the Ardebil Shrine*. Publication (Smithsonian Institution). Washington: Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, 1956. pp. 6-10.
- 4 Crowe. *Op. Cit.* p. 21.
- 5 *Ibid.* Plate 27.
- 6 Chen Ching-kuang, ‘Sea Creatures on Ming Porcelains’, in Rosemary Scott (ed.) *The Porcelains of Jingdezhen, Colloquies on Art and Archaeology in Asia* No. 16. London: Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, London. pp. 101-122.
- 7 See Mason, R.B. and Golombek, L. ‘The Petrography of Iranian Safavid Ceramics’, *Journal of Archaeological Science* 30 (2003), pp. 251-261.
- 8 Golombek, Lisa, Mason, Robert B., and Reilly, Eileen. ‘Potters’ Marks’, *Persian Pottery in the First Global Age*. Leiden: Brill, 2014. pp. 245-259; p. 257.





# Safavid Gombroon Bowl

Safavid Iran, Late 17th or Early 18th century

Fritware, pierced and glazed  
20.8cm diameter

This delicate bowl is finely decorated around the wall with a pierced (‘fenestrated’) design. At the centre of the bowl is a small dome (omphalos) decorated with black asterisks, around which is a ring of radial cobalt decoration. The rim is decorated with black dots in groups of four. Its translucent appearance is characteristic of the group termed ‘Gombroon ware’, which dates to the late 17th and early 18th century. Gombroon ware resembles Chinese export porcelain from the Dehua kilns, known as Blanc de Chine. Unable to make porcelain, Iranian potters pierced directly through the fritware walls to form patterns which were then filled by transparent glaze. Light is then able to shine through the opaque fritware, emulating the translucency of thin porcelain.<sup>2</sup> The increase in manufacture of white ceramics in Iran during the 17th century corresponds to the fall of the Ming Dynasty in 1644, when exports from China temporarily ceased.<sup>3</sup> Historically, Gombroon was the name used by European traders to identify the strategic trading port Bandar-e Abbas on the Persian Gulf. Hence, Gombroon was a point of export rather

than a place of production. Possible centres for the production of Gombroon wares are Shiraz, Yazd, Kirman, or Isfahan, however, no archaeological evidence has thus far supported these claims.<sup>4</sup> An almost identical bowl, dated to the late 17th or early 18th century, with asterisk pattern on the omphalos, radial cobalt pattern, groups of four dots on the rim, and similar fenestration, is held in the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon (Inv. 946).<sup>5</sup> Other examples of Gombroon ware can be found in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (C.7-1909), which has three black dotted marks on the rim, the British Museum, London (1878,1230.609), which has four marks the rim and not dissimilar pattern on the omphalos, and several footed bowls in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (1389-1876; 1399-1876; C.1962-1910; 424-1872; and 1401-1876).

M.L.

- Notes:
- 1 Fehérvári, Géza. *Ceramics of the Islamic World in the Tareq Rajab Museum*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000. p.292.
  - 2 Maryam D. Ekhtiar and Kendra Weisbin. *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, edited by Maryam D. Ekhtiar, Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. p. 233.
  - 3 Ekhtiar and Weisbin. *op. cit.* p. 233.
  - 4 Fehérvári. *op. cit.* p. 292.
  - 5 Pictured in the *Calouste Gulbenkian Museum Catalogue*. Third Edition Revised and Enlarged. Lisbon: Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995. p. 202, Cat. 192.





# Rare Safavid Elephant Kendi

Iran, third quarter of the 17th century

Fritware, glazed and slip-painted  
17.5cm high, 21cm long, 11.5cm wide

Provenance: Greek private collection since the 1970s;  
thence by descent.

An elephant-shaped *kendi* from the Kerman monochrome group, decorated with an olive-green glaze and carnations in white slip.

The *kendi* is a Southeast Asian drinking vessel, typically formed from a bulbous base and short rounded spout, with a long neck. The form spread throughout Europe and Asia when it began to be exported from China during the early Ming dynasty.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese prototypes included zoomorphic *kendis*, including elephants (see an example in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 2003.232)). Amongst the Chinese porcelains presented to the Ardebil Shrine by Shah Abbas I (r. 1588-1629), was an elephant *kendi* dating to the late 16th century.<sup>2</sup> In the 17th century, Persian potters adopted the form of both the regular and the zoomorphic kendi as a huqqa base, known as *kendi-qalyan*.<sup>3</sup> Examples of *kendis* in the form of a duck (accession no. 647-1889), a cat (accession no. 1225-1876), and a monkey (accession no. 644-1889) can be seen in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, and an elephant in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (accession no. 68.180).

This *kendi* belongs to a group of monochrome ceramics attributed by Arthur Lane to Kirman, Southeast Iran.<sup>4</sup> They are characterised by their rich turquoise, cobalt blue, or, as in this case, olive green glazes. The latter is an attempt to emulate the much-desired Chinese celadon.<sup>5</sup> This group is often decorated, over the monochrome glaze, with arabesques and flowers in a

thick white slip. It is the similarity between this ornamentation and that seen on polychrome wares from Kirman that led to the attribution.<sup>6</sup> There are several monochrome *kendis* in this group in the V&A (nos 422-1878, 1088-1883, 2508-1876, and 616-1889), the latter of which is dated on its base 1049 (1658-1659 CE), thus giving an estimated date to the group of the third quarter of the 17th century.<sup>7</sup> However, no other examples are known of elephant-shaped *kendis* in Kirman monochrome ware.

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Crowe, Yolande. *Persia and China: Safavid Blue and White Ceramics in the Victoria & Albert Museum, 1501-1738*. Geneva: La Borie, 2002. p. 98.
- 2 Pope, John Alexander. *Chinese Porcelains from the Ardebil Shrine*. Publication (Smithsonian Institution). Washington: Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, 1956. pl. 97.
- 3 Finlay, Robert. 'The Pilgrim Art: The Culture of Porcelain in World History', *Journal of World History* 9.2 (1998), pp. 141-187; pp. 180-181.
- 4 Lane, Arthur. *Later Islamic Pottery*. London: Faber and Faber, 1957. pp. 106-107
- 5 Golombek, Lisa, Robert B. Mason, Patricia Proctor, and Eileen Reilly. *Persian Pottery in the First Global Age: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Arts and Archaeology of the Islamic World. Leiden: Brill, 2013. p. 412.
- 6 Lane. *op. cit.* pp. 106-107.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pl. 88b.





## Pair of Kangxi Ewers made for the Islamic Market

Jingdezhen, China, c. 1710

Porcelain painted in iron-red enamel and gold  
35.5cm high

Provenance: French private collection since the 19th century.

These elegant, porcelain ewers are decorated with iron red and gilt on a white ground. The pear-shaped body stands on a short foot ring. A lightly curved s-shaped spout attaches at the centre of the body, and a curved handle at the top of the body. This form derives from Indian metal ewers (*aftaba*), used for hand-washing and ritual ablutions.<sup>1</sup> A raised petal collar links the body and neck, which is divided in two by a bulbous band. Each ewer retains its lid, with onion shaped knob. The form is derived from Indian metal ewers (*aftaba*), used for hand-washing and ritual ablutions.

A panel in the form of a raised teardrop at the centre of the body is decorated with a double handled vase containing a sprig of flowers and decorated with a small lotus flower. This motif is surrounded with *ruyi* clouds in relief. A similar ewer with lid, dated to c. 1710, is in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. 240B&C-1876). Two more dated to c. 1710-1730 are held in the Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul (TKS 15/4042 and TKS 15/4058), but neither has its original lid and one is missing its original handle.<sup>2</sup> All three comparative examples have stylised lotus flowers at the centre of the teardrop panel on the body, rather than the vase motif.

M.L.

### Notes:

- 1 Examples illustrated in Zebrowski, Mark. *Gold, Silver & Bronze from Mughal India*. London: Alexandria Press in association with Laurence King, 1997. pp. 139, 144, 160.
- 2 Illustrated in Krah, Regina, John Ayers, and Nurdan Erbahar. *Chinese Ceramics in the Topkapı Saray Museum, Istanbul: A Complete Catalogue*. London: published in association with the directorate of the Topkapı Saray Museum by Sotheby's, 1986. p. 1192.





# Atlas Moth (*Attacus atlas*)

China, c. 1805

Watercolour on Whatman paper  
40cm high, 29cm wide

This striking watercolour depicts an Atlas moth, or giant Chinese silk moth. The painting is a near life-size depiction of the insect, which has a wingspan of 24cm, the third largest of any lepidopteran.<sup>1</sup> This is the female of the species, with the male having broad, feathery antennae. The white fleshy spines on the abdomen of the moth show that it is in the later stage of its lifespan. The triangular windows in each of the four wings, through which the plant behind can be seen, are thought to reflect light in order to scare predators. It also uses its elongated wing tips as a defence mechanism, shaking them to imitate a snake's head.<sup>2</sup> The texture of the wings is particularly well observed. Minute brush strokes create the soft, velvety texture of the moth's scales.

Not only does this colourful moth make an attractive subject of a work of art, but it also represents a valuable resource. The cocoons of the Atlas moth larvae are used in Asia to make

silk, known as *etles* or *fagara*. The silk is traditionally coloured with natural dyes, like walnut bark and saffron, a practice common amongst the Uygur people of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China. Unlike traditional silk produced by the silkworm *Bombyx mori*, atlas silk is fibrous and coarse, creating warm, wool-like textiles.<sup>3</sup>

M.L.

Notes:

1 Kons, Hugo (Jr.). 'Largest Lepidopteran Wing Span', *The University of Florida Book of Insect Records*. Department of Entomology and Nematology: 1998. Retrieved online from [https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/walker/ufbir/chapters/chapter\\_32.shtml](https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/walker/ufbir/chapters/chapter_32.shtml) on 02/11/2024.

2 Sargent, Channing. 'How the Atlas Moth Imitates Snakes to Ward Off Threats', *One Earth* (2022). Retrieved online via <https://www.oneearth.org/species-of-the-week-atlas-moth/> on 06/12/2024.

3 Reddy, Narendra, Yi Zhao, and Yigi Yang. 'Structure and Properties of Cocoons and Silk Fibers Produced by the *Attacus Atlas*', *Journal of Polymers and the Environment* 21 (2013), pp. 16-23.





# Communion Cup

Probably Batavia (present-day Jakarta),  
Indonesia, 17th century

Gilded silver and silver filigree  
13.5cm high

Provenance: Danish private collector (1848-1932);  
thence by descent.

This standing cup and cover rises from a circular, high-stepped base, its baluster stem fitted with two shouldered knobs. The bowl is of double-wall construction, with a plain inner liner made of sheet silver, fire-gilt on both the inside and outside, and an outer filigree ‘cage’. The stepped cover, also double-walled and with a gilt-silver liner and filigree ‘cage’, is topped with a shouldered knob serving as a finial. While the filigree on the foot, stem, and cover features the typical combination of thicker flat wire for the frame and twisted wire forming spirals as the filling, combined with serpentine friezes more commonly seen, the openwork rosettes and arches with serpentine friezes of the ‘cage’ bowl are less usual. This cup and cover were likely used in post-Reformation Protestant worship to serve the consecrated wine and bread during Holy Communion. During the Reformation, worship became simpler and more direct. Protestants rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of ‘transubstantiation’, which holds that the bread and wine of the Mass are miraculously transformed into Christ’s body and blood. Instead, they introduced a symbolic communion service in which the congregation actively participated by regularly receiving both bread and wine, rather than remaining passive observers. Unlike Protestant communion cups, which were invariably fitted with covers, chalices used in Counter-Reformation Catholic Masses tend to do lack covers.



This fine silver filigree communion cup reflects Chinese techniques and style, which were widespread in East Asia and practiced by local artisans in South China—Guangzhou, Quanzhou, or Fuzhou—by overseas Chinese craftsman in the Philippines, known locally as *sangleys*, and by ethnic Chinese silversmiths based in Dutch colonial Batavia.<sup>1</sup> Pieces featuring similar filigree motifs and techniques were recovered from the *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*, a Manila galleon that sank in 1638 off the Mariana Islands while en route to Acapulco.<sup>2</sup> This little-known treasure includes exceptional gold filigree pieces produced for export, their recurring features suggesting a single workshop, though no precise origin can be determined. Key stylistic elements include serpentine friezes, ‘S’ motifs with coiled ends forming ‘o’ shapes, and pentagonal rosettes with granules, all distinctively Chinese. Similarly decorated objects include a *pili* nut perfume flask with silver filigree mounts, commissioned by Don Baltasar Ruiz de Escalona, treasurer-judge of the Royal Treasury, who died in Manila in 1658. While the flask was undoubtedly made in the Philippines by *Sangley* artisans, this communion cup—modelled after contemporary Protestant examples from England or the Netherlands—was more likely produced in Dutch-ruled Batavia. Comparable religious pieces include two pairs of altar cruets, one set belonging to a private collection in Portugal, complete with its original stand and fitted with the initials ‘V’ and ‘A’, for *vinum* and *aqua* in Latin (wine and water), crowning their thumb-pieces. A previous, more traditional view attributed this pair to Portuguese-ruled Goa, but subsequent research, supported by documentary and archaeological evidence, now points to the Philippines or Batavia as the likely production centres, with Chinese craftsmen as the creators.<sup>3</sup> Objects intended for Catholic use were likely produced in the Philippines, whereas those made for Protestant contexts were almost certainly made in Batavia.

H.M.C.

Notes:

- 1 For Chinese filigree of the Ming and early Qing dynasty, see Bertrand, Arnaud and Gascuel, Hélène (eds) *Ming Gold. Splendours and Beauties of Imperial China*. Paris: Musée Guimet, 2024. For silver filigree made for export in the Philippines, see Hugo Miguel Crespo. *Choices*. Lisbon: AR-PAB, 2016, pp. 366-381, cat. 32. For export filigree attributed to Dutch-ruled Batavia, see Jan Veenendaal, *Asian Art and Dutch Taste*, The Hague, Waanders Uitgewers Zwolle - Gemeentemuseum, 2014, pp. 122-133.
- 2 Chadour, A. Beatriz. ‘The gold jewelry from the Nuestra Señora de la Concepción’, in William M. Mathers, Henry S. Parker, Kathleen Copus (eds) *Archaeological Report. The Recovery of the Manila Galleon Nuestra Senora de la Concepcion*. Sutton: Pacific Sea Resources, 1990. pp. 133-395.
- 3 Crespo, Hugo Miguel. *Jewels from the India Run*. Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 2015. pp. 76-78, cat. 56. For the second pair, see Mário Roque et al. (eds) *Age of Discovery. Portugal, the First Global Empire*. Lisbon: São Roque, Antiques and Art Gallery, 2024. pp. 290-293, cat. 44.





# Barniz de Pasto Casket

Colombia, 17th century

Lacquer on cedar wood  
18cm high, 45.5cm wide, 21.5cm deep

Provenance: UK private collection for at least two generations.

Though this workbox belongs to a group of objects termed *Barniz de Pasto*, meaning ‘varnish from Pasto’, it is neither varnished nor made in Pasto. Rather, it is lacquered with the resin of the *Elaegia pastonensis* tree, known as *mopa-mopa*. Unlike other natural resins used for lacquering, mopa mopa is insoluble. Artisans chew the resin to soften it and then knead in pigments. The resin is stretched into thin layers and cut into intricate shapes. The pieces of resin are layered onto an organic material, chiefly wood or gourd, and without the need for any additional adhesive.<sup>1</sup>

When the Spanish arrived in Pasto in the first half of the 16th century, the indigenous population already used *mopa-mopa* to decorate beads, which are the only pre-Columbian examples of the technique to survive.<sup>2</sup> In the late 16th century, during the Viceroyalty of Peru’s consolidation, lacquer began to be used as a coating for wooden surfaces, giving rise to the association with *barniz* or varnish. Artisans would stretch the coloured resin into thin sheets with their hands and teeth, cut the sheets to shape, then apply to the wood with no need for additional adhesive.<sup>3</sup> Pieces are categorised as either *barniz brillante*, where silver leaf is added between layers of resin, and *matte barniz*, as in this case, where no silver is added.



On the lid of the work box is a heraldic escutcheon, featuring a phoenix sinister with wings displayed and elevated, emerging from fire. In Christian iconography the phoenix is typically seen to be a symbol of the resurrection. The Latin phrase *ex me ipso renascor*, meaning ‘I am born again from myself’ wraps around the typical Iberian oval cartouche. The same escutcheon appears on a *Barniz de Pasto* writing desk (accession no. W.5-2015) in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, dated 1625-1675. This emblem appears to have been appropriated from the printers’





devices of Juan de Bonilla and Nicolás de Asiain, who worked together in the first half of the 17th century in Zaragoza and Navarra, Spain.<sup>4</sup> The former the editor and the latter the printer, they published the works of great authors like Cervantes, in addition to legal, royal, and religious decrees.<sup>5</sup> Another example of this emblem on a Barniz de Pasto coffer is held in a private collection, and illustrated in Yayoi Kawamura's 'The Art of Barniz de Pasto and its Appropriation of Other Cultures'.<sup>6</sup> A similar phenomenon occurs in the Church of Carabuco, next to Lake Titicaca, a Quechua cultural area. A mural on the wall of the choir of a large golden compass and the phrase 'Labore et Constantia' matches the printer's device of the Antwerp publisher Plantin-Moretus.<sup>7</sup>

Non-native animals like camels and lions, in addition to mythical beings like griffins, derive from 15th and 16th century European sources, such as illuminated manuscripts, prints, and drawings, most likely supplied by Catholic missionaries.<sup>8</sup> The visual language of *Barniz de Pasto* was also derived from Japanese lacquer. In 1573, the Spanish trade route between Manila and Acapulco was launched, allowing for shipments of Namban and pictorial lacquer between the Asian and American outposts of the Spanish Empire. This led to 'the greater commoditisation of Asian goods in the viceroyalty of New Spain than in Castile'.<sup>9</sup> The red border with gold diaper pattern is reminiscent of *shippo*, a pattern of interlocking circles made from mother of pearl, found on Japanese Namban lacquer.<sup>10</sup> Examples of this border can be seen on a retable in the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem (accession no. AE85752), a cabinet in the British Museum, London (accession no. 1977,0406.1), and a coffer in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 2016.508). The shift from orange-brown backgrounds to black in the later *Barniz de Pasto* pieces further increased the resemblance to Japanese Namban.

A portable writing desk of similar design is held in the Hispanic Society of America Museum and Library (accession no. LS2446). Like the present casket, it opens to reveal a pistachio

green crucifix and the 'INRI' device above. An inscription just above the drawers reads 'CAPSULA H(A)EC EST MARTINI DE TOLOSA', which means 'this box belongs to Martin de Tolosa'. Martin de Tolosa was chief sacristan at the Cathedral of Popayán, Colombia, from 1630 to 1643. The similarities between the two pieces suggest a close location and date of manufacture. A *Barniz de Pasto* tabletop in the same collection (no. LS2447) which also shares similar decoration, is dated to c. 1643. The inside of the lid of the present casket bears the monogram 'Y.S.'

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Newman, R.; Kaplan, E.; Derrick, M. 'Mopa Mopa: Scientific Analysis and History of an Unusual South American Resin Used by the Inka and Artisans in Pasto, Colombia'. *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 54.3 (2015). pp. 123-148. For photographs of contemporary Colombian craftsmen making *Barniz de Pasto*, see 'Colombia Artesanal: Barniz de Pasto, un proceso inspirador', *Artesanías de Colombia*, 23/04/2021. Retrieved online via [https://artesaniasdecolumbia.com.co/PortalAC/Noticia/colombia-artesanal-barniz-de-pasto-un-proceso-inspirador\\_14722](https://artesaniasdecolumbia.com.co/PortalAC/Noticia/colombia-artesanal-barniz-de-pasto-un-proceso-inspirador_14722) on 01/11/2024.
- 2 Álvarez-White, María Cecilia. 'El barniz de Pasto: Reflejo de la naturaleza', *Naturaleza & Paisaje: IX Encuentro internacional sobre barroco* (2019), pp. 339-346; 340.
- 3 'Box of mysteries', *Victoria & Albert Museum*, retrieved online via <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/box-of-mysteries> on 22/05/2024.
- 4 See for example the cover of *Emblemas morales* by Juan de Horozco y Covarrubias (1604), published by Juan de Bonilla.
- 5 Itúrbide Díaz, Javier. *Los libros de un reino: historia de la edición en Navarra (1490-1841)*. Navarra: Gobierno de Navarra, 2015. p. 140.
- 6 Kawamura, Yayoi. 'The Art of Barniz de Pasto and its Appropriation of Other Cultures', *Heritage* 6 (2023), pp. 3292-3306; p. 3302, figs 14 and 15.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 3303, 3304.
- 8 Codding, Mitchell. 'The lacquer Arts of Latin America', in Dennis Carr (ed.) *Made in the Americas – The New World Discovers Asia*. Boston: MFA Boston, 2015. pp. 75-82; p. 79.
- 9 Gasch-Tomás, José L. *The Atlantic World and the Manila Galleons: Circulations, Market, and Consumption of Asian Goods in the Spanish Empire, 1565-1650*. Leiden: Brill, 2019. p. 42.
- 10 Impey, Oliver and Jörg, Christiaan. *Japanese Export Lacquer 1580 – 1850*. Amsterdam: Hotei, 2005. p. 78.





# Barniz de Pasto Portable Writing Desk (*Escritorillo*)

Pasto, Colombia, mid 18th century

Mopa-mopa (*Elaeagia pastoensis* Mora) resin and silver leaf on Spanish cedar  
20.5cm high, 37cm wide, 25.5cm deep

Provenance: US private collection for at least 15 years.

This portable writing desk (*escritorillo*) is decorated with colourful *Barniz de Pasto*, a lacquer made from the resin of the *Elaeagia pastonensis* tree, known locally as *mopa-mopa*. Although the technique of lacquering organic materials like wood and gourds had been practiced by indigenous people before 1500, the arrival of the Spanish fundamentally changed its appearance. European forms, such as coffers and drop front portable writing desks like the current example, were favoured by the colonial administrators. The technique of *barniz brillante*, which involved adding layers of silver foil between layers of resin to give a luminous appearance, likely derived from the Spanish practice of *estofado*.<sup>1</sup> When commissioning *Barniz de Pasto* objects, clients, often from Europe, would provide books and engravings to copy, thus introducing European decorative motifs to the craftsmen. As nearly identical figures are repeated across multiple objects, it seems likely that the craftsmen shared reference images.

On the back of the *escritorillo* is an indigenous woman, apparently from the Amazon, dressed in a short, feathered skirt and a feathered crown. She is barefoot, hunting a jaguar. Her appearance contrasts with that of the Spanish figures, two on the front and two on the lid, who wear hats, shoes, and breeches. A similar portable writing desk in a private collection has an indigenous man, depicted similarly with feathered clothing, and a Spanish figure holding a sword.<sup>3</sup> A casket in a Bogotá private collection (*‘arca del emblema jesuita’*) shows an indigenous person with a very similar feathered skirt and headdress, hunting a wild boar on the other side of a tree. Like in the present example, the skin is left in the background shade.<sup>4</sup>

Various creatures – real and mythical – adorn the casket. A wild boar on the inside of the lid provides an excellent example of the technique of excising tiny details from the resin sheet to create the texture of hair. Very similar depictions of boars appear on a writing desk in a Mexican private collection and on the aforementioned Bogotá *‘arca del emblema jesuita’*.<sup>5</sup> The numerous birds are orioles (*Icteridae*), which also appear on an octagonal tray in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. 1262-1855). This tray, made in the Viceroyalty of Peru between 1650 and 1750, also shares squirrels, monkeys, deer, and dogs, scampering about swirling vines.<sup>6</sup> The large, colourful flowers on the V&A tray, possibly peonies and passion flowers, hint at what the faded areas on the lid of our box may once have looked like. On the inside of the lid is a pair of birds with human heads, a creature which appears on other *Barniz de Pasto* objects, such as a casket in the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin (accession no. 2018.351). Creatures from Andean mythology were



popular amongst European clients, as they seemed to amplify the European idea of being classical heroes in an inhospitable land.<sup>7</sup> *Barniz de Pasto* provides a unique record of Andean mythology, as images of mythical creatures do not feature in any surviving murals or paintings.<sup>8</sup>

M.L.

## Notes:

- 1 De la Mata, Ana Zabía. ‘New Contributions Regarding the Barniz de Pasto Collection at the Museo de América, Madrid’. *Heritage* 7 (2024), pp. 667-682; p. 669.
- 2 Kawamura, Yayoi. ‘The Art of Barniz de Pasto and Its Appropriation of Other Cultures’, *Heritage* 6 (2023), pp. 3292-3306; 3294, 3295.
- 3 See ‘Escritorillo de la Virgen de la Merced’, Álvarez-White, María Cecilia. *El Barniz de Pasto: Secretos y Revelaciones*. Bogotá: University of the Andes/ Ediciones Uniandes, 2023. pp. 88, 93, figs 4.2 and 4.5.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 251, 253, figs 7.62, 7.64.
- 5 See Álvarez-White, María Cecilia. ‘El barniz de Pasto: Reflejo de la naturaleza’, *Naturaleza & Paisaje: IX Encuentro internacional sobre barroco* (2019), pp. 339-346; p. 344, fig. 7, and Del Pilar López Pérez, María. ‘Imágenes y tradición a través de los objetos recubiertos con barniz de Pasto. Una aproximación a su interpretación’, *Anales del Museo de América* 28 (2020). pp. 127-146; p. 133, fig. 4.
- 6 For more examples of animals on *Barniz de Pasto*, see María del Pilar López Pérez. ‘Reflections on the Forms and Arrangements of the Surface Images in the Art of Barniz de Pasto, from the 16th to the 19th century.’ *Heritage* 6.7 (2023), pp. 5424-5441.
- 7 Paniagua Pérez, J. ‘Animales y mitos clásicos en Indias’, *Humanismo y pervivencia del mundo clásico. Homenaje al profesor Juan Gil. Instituto de Estudios Humanísticos*, 2015, vol. 2. pp. 753-775; p. 768.
- 8 Álvarez-White, María Cecilia. ‘Seres míticos en el barniz de pasto colonial’, *Barroco: Enigmas & Misterios XI* (2024), pp. 227-234.









## Mamluk-Style Mosque Lamp (attributed to Philippe Joseph Brocard)

France, c. 1870

Enamelled glass  
32.5cm high, 22.5cm diameter at rim

Provenance: From the collection of a French noble family since at least 1900, held at a castle in Eure-et-Loire.

Of green transparent glass with ornamentation applied in blue, red, green, and white enamels, this lamp was made in the late 19th century by the Belgian-born orientalist glassmaker Philippe-Joseph Brocard in the style of a 14th century Mamluk mosque lamp. On the flared neck is a *thuluth* inscription in reserve on a blue ground decorated with swirling vines. It reads: ‘*izz li-mawlana al-sultan al-malik al-‘alim al-‘adil al-malik al-nasir ‘azza nasruhu*’ or ‘Glory to our lord, the Sultan, the King, the Learned, the Just, al-Malik al-Nasir, may his victory be glorified.’

On its splayed pedestal base is the repeated word *al-‘alim*, meaning ‘The Learned’. Around the bottom of the body are alternating roundels and shield-shaped medallions filled with pseudo-Arabic inscriptions. Six lug handles have been applied to the bulbous body, from which the lamp could be hung from the ceiling.

Brocard began his career as a conservator of glass at the Musée de Cluny and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. He was captivated by the 14th century Mamluk mosque lamps in these collections and recognising the demand for antique Islamic glassware in France in the 1860s, began to recreate them. He initially copied the Mamluk designs faithfully, but from the mid 1870s onwards he began to alter the designs.<sup>1</sup> Brocard pioneered the revival of Islamic enamelling techniques, applying vitreous enamels to the surface of the vessel along with gold leaf, which were then fused to the glass by the firing process.<sup>2</sup> His work was first displayed at the Paris Exhibition of 1867, and went on to be shown at the 1871 International Exhibition in London, the Vienna Exhibition of 1873, and the Paris Exhibition of 1878.<sup>3</sup>

The present example appears to be based on an amalgamation of two lamps in French collections. The first, in the collection of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris (inv. no. 4409), is similar in form and ornamentation to the present example. Dedicated to Sultan Baybars II, it is dated 709 (1309-1310 CE). A blue calligraphic band runs around the neck, with foliage and *thuluth* calligraphy applied in reserve. Delicate floral patterns created in fine red enamel form a backdrop for the rest of the ornamentation.

The second, also dated to 1309-1310, is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (accession no. 17.190.987), but belonged to the collection of Charles Mannheim in Paris until 1910. Though the decorative language is similar to both the Baybars lamp and the present example, it is the inscriptions from which Brocard appears to have drawn inspiration. The inscription around the neck is the same as that of the present Brocard lamp, although it is applied with red enamel rather than blue. A section of the inscription on its body, which reads ‘*al alim*’ in blue enamel, appears to have been appropriated to form the repeating inscription on the foot of the present lamp. Both Mamluk examples are made from pinkish-brown glass rather than the distinctive pale green of Brocard’s glass. Furthermore, their blue is darker, which Edward Dillon suggests is because Brocard used cobalt rather than lapis.<sup>4</sup>

An almost identical lamp made by Brocard, dated to 1860-1880, is held in the Corning Museum of Glass, New York (accession no. 78.3.17). The glass is slightly more yellow in hue, but the ornamentation is remarkably similar and the inscriptions identical. A second Brocard lamp in the Corning Museum (accession no. 53.3.20) has clearly been modelled after the same prototypes but is made from brownish-yellow glass. A mosque lamp at the Louvre Abu Dhabi (accession no. LAD 2012.011) lacks the splayed pedestal, sitting instead on a foot ring. However, both the body and neck share very close ornamentation and colours, and the glass itself is the same transparent colour. A lamp signed by Brocard and dated 1870 on its base was sold at auction in 2022. Its inscriptions and ornamentation are identical to the present example, suggesting a contemporaneous date of manufacture.

M.L.

Notes:

- 1 Rudoe, J. *Decorative Arts 1850-1950: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*. London: British Museum, 1991. p. 22, cat. 27.
- 2 *Ibid.* p. 22.
- 3 *Ibid.* p. 23.
- 4 Dillon, Edward. *Glass*. London: Methuen, 1907. p. 152.





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