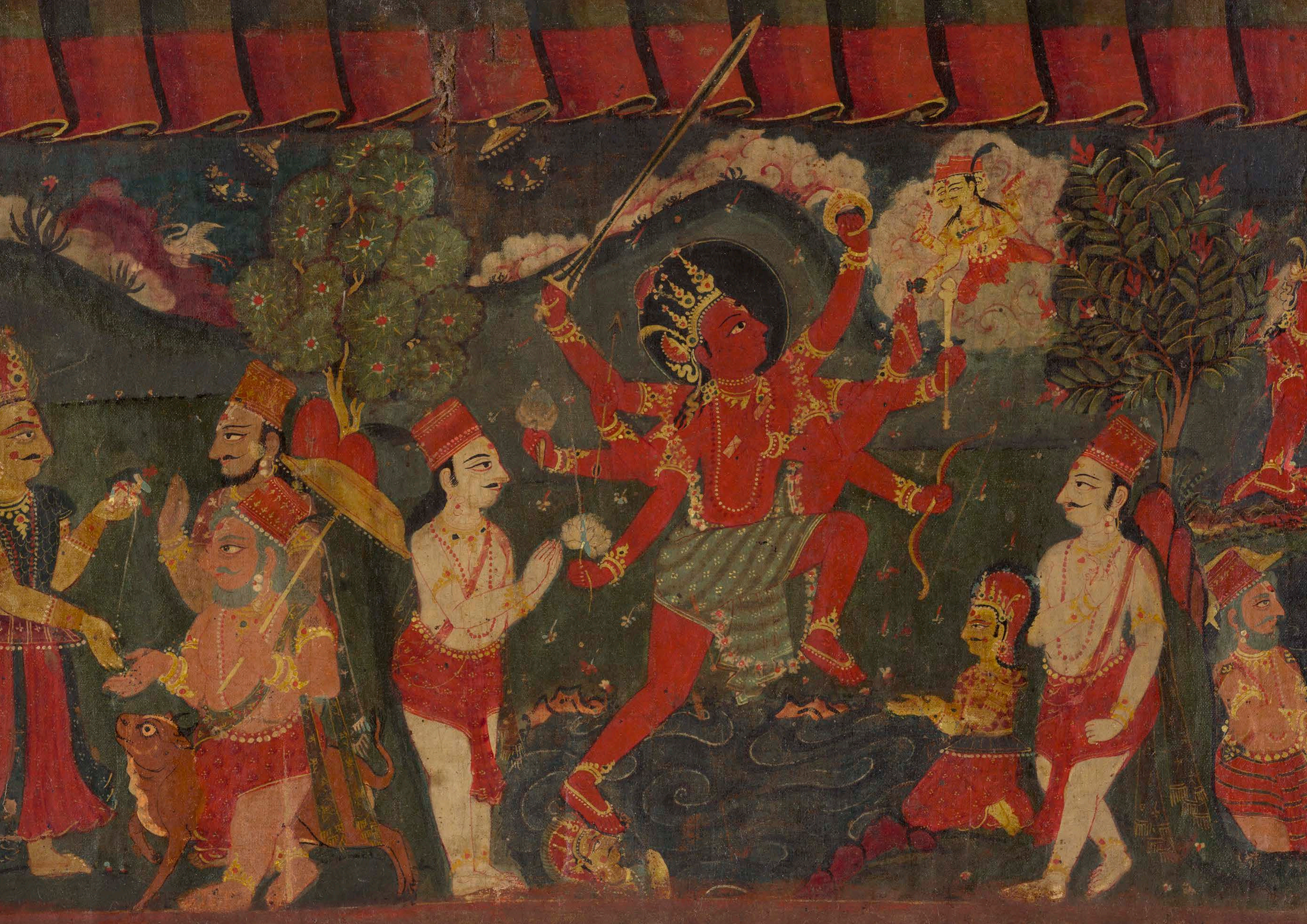

Prahlad Bubbar

Spring Exhibition 2018 London

Recent Acquisitions

18th April - 16th May 2018

Acknowledgements

Vrinda Agrawal
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CATALOGUE

I. A NEPALI HANDSCROLL WITH THE LEGENDS OF RATO MACCHENDRANATHA, VAMANA, AND SINGHASARTHABAHU

Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, 17th/18th century
Opaque pigments on cloth, 33 x 337 cm

The present painted handscroll (a *bilampau*, in Newari) is a 17th or 18th century example of the traditional long paintings on cloth from Nepal. The format of such paintings favours a long continuous narrative, in which different moments or episodes are depicted in sequence. Time is thus spacialised, signalled by the recurrence of some of the characters across the scroll.

Pratapaditya Pal mentions how Nepali handscrolls "invariably depict narrative themes with a clear didactic intent and were equally popular with Hindus and Buddhists." Even though there is evidence that the history of Nepali narrative scrolls dates to a much earlier period, the earliest known examples are from the seventeenth century (Pal, 1985). Pal also notes that "in Nepal these scrolls are now brought out and displayed in Buddhist monasteries on special religious occasions. In more ancient times, they must have been hung along the walls or supported on bamboo poles as the storyteller delivered his narration."

The present scroll references several religious narratives. The first section, starting from the left side of the scroll, tells the legend of Rato Macchendranatha (Bunga Dyah or "Macchendranath" of Patan), a form of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara that is peculiar to the Kathmandu Valley. At the far left of the scroll, human bodies are being thrown into a pot laid over fire. However, the red Avalokitesavara miraculously appears from the same pot in the next scene, worshipped by the two men who had been feeding the bodies into the vessel. In the following scene, Macchendranath blesses a group of noble worshippers, and is next seen instructing a group of gods or demigods. The red god is then shown emanating the various Hindu gods, in a form known as "Shrishtikantha Lokesvara".

The next scene seems to begin the completely different narrative of Vamana, the fifth avatar of Vishnu whose form is of a dwarf mendicant brahman. Vamana, holding an umbrella, is receiving instruction and blessing from the Asura king Mahabali, a deity and demon king who is performing a *homa* ritual, or a fire offering. Mahabali has acquired disproportionate power over the Universe, and so the story tells of his defeat at the hands of Vishnu.

The image of Buddha Sakyamuni flanked by his standing disciples Maudgalyayana and Shariputra, and with the goddess Prajnaparamita on the left (to the god's right side) and the god Shadakshari Avalokiteshvara on the opposite side, is likely not intended to be part of the narrative. This scene is interjected, showing the donor of the scroll and his wife prostrated on each side of the gods.

After this interjected scene, the narrative of the dwarf avatar of Vishnu continues, and we see the demon king, with two other assistant brahmans, grant a boon to Vamana. The legend mentions that the dwarf brahman requests from the king only three paces of land, which are granted by Mahabali, who sees the wish as insignificant. However, Vamana then grows into a giant of cosmic proportions (Trivikrama, literally "the three steps"), and in one step covers the earth, in another covers the heavens and, in a final one, steps over Mahabali, who had offered his head as a sign of defeat.

The present scroll depicts this final step taken by the god, whose form is now of an exuberant red multi-armed deity, while the next scene shows Mahabali admitting defeat to the dwarf brahman.

The last sections of the scroll tell the story of Singhasarthababahu, the leader of a group of Newar merchants who travelled to Tibet. We see a group of women conversing and scheming, planning their future ambush of Singhasarthababahu, who in turn is seen in the adjacent scene at the head of his group of merchants planning their journey. The following scene shows the merchants in dire peril, their boat having capsized in a Tibetan river, while the group of women depicted beforehand come to their rescue. Singhasarthababahu is then shown inside a palace, with his consort sleeping next to him, after he and his men arrived in Lhasa and took up the lovely women who saved them earlier. However, Singhasarthababahu is having a vision in the flame of his lamp, where Avalokitesvara appears and warns him that the women are in fact demonesses who are planning to kill and eat him and his fellows.

Avalokitesvara guides Singhasarthababahu and the other merchants to the place where they can see the skeletons of previous men that fell victim to the demonesses. The deity finally saves the men by taking them to a white horse, which they all ride to narrowly escape death at the hands of the evil women.

Nepalese handscrolls were painted following particular rules regarding style of representation: “By and large the Nepali painting tradition was figural, with the human form, either in its mortal or divine guise, predominating. Landscape elements, such as rocks and trees, were added symbolically to indicate locale. By the mid-seventeenth century, however, Newari artists increasingly emphasized natural forms. In narrative scrolls, scenes were placed against a background of continuous, undulating mountains. The ground was no longer painted the ubiquitous red but was often green to create the illusion of grass. Attempts were also made to delineate the sky with flying birds and floating clouds. Trees, however, continued to be employed decoratively, although a much greater variety is displayed in some paintings. Generally, trees and streams were deftly integrated into the composition of the narrative scroll both as topographical references and separators of depicted incidents.” (Pal, 1985). Certain compositional elements, such as the figures and their dress, create a link with Rajput painting from Central India of the same period.

The present scroll shows great variety in the figurative elements that populate the painted surface. Each tree, for instance, is painted with a different pattern of vegetation and floral motifs.

The generalised use of green for the mountainous landscape shows an approach to a greater level of naturalism, which is however combined with more stylised and expressive elements such as the depiction of water, fire, clouds and rocks, or a more classical drawing in the architectural features.

Provenance:
Private collection, UK, 1970s-2017.

Reference:
Pal, Pratapaditya. *Art of Nepal*. Los Angeles: LACMA, and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

2. A *MANDALA* OF THE MITRA YOGIN TRADITION

Tibet, 18th century
Pigments on wood, 29 x 29 cm

"The mandala, one of Himalayan Buddhism's most ubiquitous symbols, is created as an artistic aid for meditation. Depicting a realm that is both complex and sacred, the mandala is a visualization tool meant to advance practitioners toward a state of enlightenment." Rubin Museum

The *mandala* is a Buddhist representation of the universe, used for meditation on the path of enlightenment. Geometry is a crucial structural element of the cosmos, used to create diagrams that place the divine in the centre as the origin of the universe, from which the natural and inhabited world radiates.

The present Tibetan *mandala* follows the Mitra Yogin tradition of *mandalas*. Mitra Yogin compiled a collection of one hundred and eight Tantric *mandalas* in the 12th and 13th centuries, the Mitra Gyatsa, which became one of the most important iconographic resources for describing the deities and mandalas of Himalayan and Tibetan art.

In the present *mandala*, the four-armed red Guhyasadhana Avalokiteshvara can be seen at the centre with his consort, placed in a lotus flower within a double triangle and seated in *vajraparyankasana*, the diamond pose. He has his principal hands in anjali mudra, the gesture of salutation, before his chest, his secondary hands holding padma, and mala at each of his shoulders. Outside the palace ground of square shape there are concentric circles with decorative motifs and elements representing the natural world, where we can see detailed and elegant delineation of different figures and landscapes.

Provenance: Private collection, Switzerland.

Reference:
Pal, Pratapaditya. *Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure*. The Art Institute of Chicago in association with the University of California Press and Mapin Publishing, 2003.

3. KRISHNA SLAYS PUTANA

A rare Vijaynagar Ivory panel
Vijaynagar, India, 16th century
Ivory, 11.2 x 13.5 cm

This rare ivory panel was used to decorate a 16th century casket from Vijaynagar, the capital of the great eponymous Empire that flourished in the 15th and 16th centuries in the Deccan plateau region in Central India.

The panel is executed with great refinement, with a sunk centre where several figures are carved in a dynamic and expressive scene. It is one of the two end panels of the casket, and the dovetails on its sides joined it to the front and back of the casket. The undecorated section on the top of the panel would be covered by the arch-shaped end of the casket's hinged lid. Therefore only the carved areas would be visible when the casket was closed.

The story being told in the present panel is the episode of Krishna slaying the Demoness Putana, which occurs in different Hindu scriptures and other Indian narratives such as the *Bhagavata Purana*, and was also a theme depicted in many miniature paintings. In fact, the present panel follows the iconography and representational technics of some Indian miniature paintings, in the way that it depicts the scene as a continuous story, told in juxtaposed three different moments combined in one seamless composition.

Putana was a demoness sent by Krishna's evil uncle, the king Kamsa, to kill the infant Krishna. She lived in a cave deep in the forest, and had a hideous appearance. She was, however, sent by Kamsa as a young and beautiful woman, who met and offered to suckle Krishna with her poisonous milk. Krishna, however, instead of succumbing to death, sucks all the life out of Putana, who reverses back to her original form before dying.

Putana thus stands for a symbol of danger or disease inflicted on infants. Given the symbolic meaning of the scene where Krishna slays Putana, it is possible that the present ivory panel was seen as invoking the protection of infants.

A similar panel from an ivory casket belongs to the collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (2004.16). Its shape is virtually the same as our panel, and it is also identified as a 16th century piece, but its origin is thought to be the Kotte region in Sri Lanka, which might account for the stylistic differences.

Provenance: Private collection, UK, 1960s-present.

Reference:
Topsfield, Andrew (ed.). *In the Realm of Gods and Kings*. London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2014.

The Invisible Demon Indrajit Fires Arrows at Rama, Lakshmana, and Their Monkey Allies.
End Panel from a Casket. Possibly Kotte Sri Lanka, 16th century. Ivory, 12.07 × 13.65 cm.
© Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.

4. LARGE AND IMPORTANT IVORY PANEL OF A TEMPLE DANCER

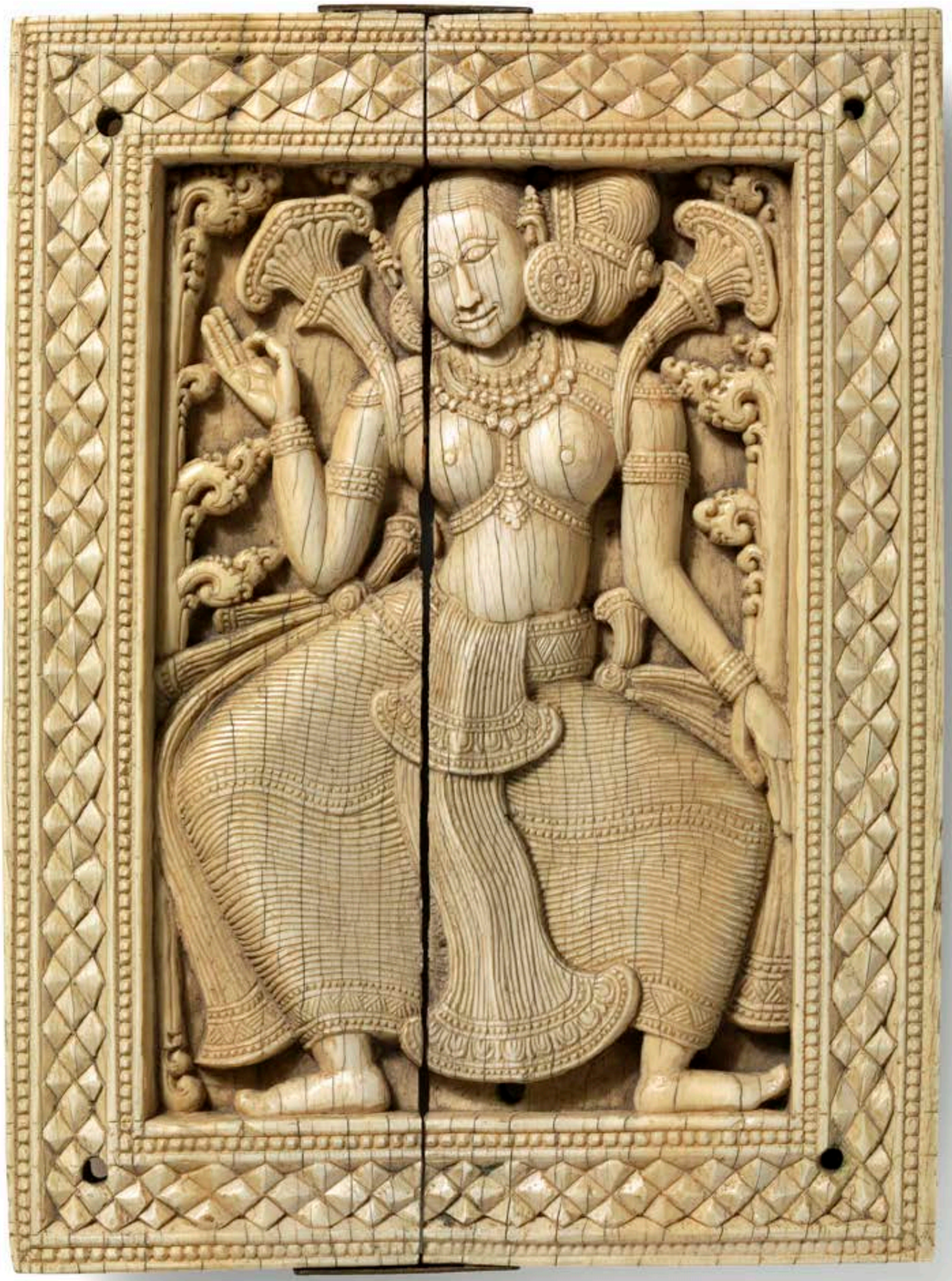
Kandyan, Sri Lanka, 18th century
Ivory, 23.7 x 17.8 cm

The present ivory panel, carved in high relief with a sunk centre, depicts a young female dancer, an iconic figure of Sri-Lankan art that crossed centuries of sculpture and relief carving. The girl assumes a characteristic dance pose, facing the front with legs wide apart and knees bent, her right arm raised with thumb and forefinger making a mudra, and the left arm pendant. She wears a beautiful accordion-pleated skirt, carefully carved in waves that modulate the volume of her legs, and dynamically evoking the movement of the dance. Another characteristic element is the double waist-scarf that hangs from the waistband, introducing different decorative patterns in the clothing, and further contributing to the sense of movement with the ends of the scarf that emerge and swing upward from underneath the girl's armpits. Her torso is nude, but ornamented with rich jewellery, below the bare breasts and also around the neck, shoulders, arms and wrists. She also wears large earpieces, and her hair is done in a large chignon on the left side of her head.

Further adorning the scene there are spiralling elements on each side of the figure, and the raised framed is embellished with two rows of bead-device, and most significantly a band of diamond-diaper.

An almost identical piece is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (IM.370-1924), a mirror image of the present panel, most likely used in the same location of a temple or monastery. The two panels can thus be attributed to the same workshop, with only slight differences in some of the ornamental elements and perhaps more importantly in the facial features of the dancers, giving it a sense of individuality.

Our panel was most likely used to decorate a pavilion within a temple or monastery (*vihara*). Reliefs of this kind can also be found in other types of ivory objects (such as combs), as well as in wood carvings in pillar and doorjamb decorations in Kandyan period buildings.



There is a strong connection between the present panel and the masterful carvings at Embekke Devale, a 14th century temple dedicated to the deity Skanda or Mahasen (also popularly known as Kataragama deviyo). The wood carvings decorating the temple's Drummer's Hall (*Hewisi Mandapaya*) have similar frames decorated with diamond-diaper. These depict a variety of subjects, including a panel with an identical figure of a female dancer, assuming the same dance pose. The present ivory panel is of the Kandyan era, more precisely from the 18th century, which is reflected in the fine detailed carving, the smooth volumes created and the intricate ornamental elements.

There is also a deep link between the arts of wood and ivory carving. Mastering the skill of wood carving was often a preliminary step towards the initiation into carving on ivory, a delicate and esteemed art which was seen as the pinnacle of the artisan's craft.

Provenance: Private collection, UK, 1960s-2017.

References:

Topsfield, Andrew (ed.). *In the Realm of Gods and Kings*. London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2014.
Coomaraswamy, Ananda Kentish. *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art.* New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1956.

Temple Dancer. Kandyan, Sri Lanka, 18th century. Ivory, 23 × 15 cm.

FOUR IMPORTANT AND RARE CLASSICAL BIDRI OBJECTS

The art of Bidri metal ware has produced objects of unique beauty, since before the 17th century, and until this day. Originating in Bidar, the Bahmani capital that gave them name, these are objects that reflect great elegance of shape, as well as refinement and inventiveness in the figural and geometric elements that cover their surface.

Bidri objects are cast from an alloy composed mostly of zinc, with smaller amounts of lead, copper and tin. Floral, zoomorphic or geometric motifs are incised along the surface of each object, and the grooves are then inlayed with silver and sometimes brass. The alloy background is covered with a paste containing salt ammoniac, and then polished to give it a final black sheen. The contrast between the dark background and the shiny metallic inlays produces a great, lustrous effect, with the decorative elements emerging as if light shining through darkness.

Bidri objects were amongst the preferred by Deccani patrons: “Deccani patrons preferred the Mannerist style in their arts, in which overblown fantastical flowers are shaken by the wind, and dramatic rocky hillocks, elongated palm trees, and courting cranes fill the moonlit landscapes. Architecture and architectural ornamentation provide vital comparative material as many bidri objects are miniature shapes and forms of instantly recognizable Deccani building types.”

The comparison with Deccani architecture is crucial to the understanding of the power of Bidri objects. The balanced shape of a small object reflects the real physical harmony of a monumental architectural form, creating a play of scales that has the potential of connecting the micro to the macro, or the human to the cosmos. Therefore, references to religious architecture, and a form of design that is connected with cosmological meaning, give Bidri objects a “metaphysical quality that goes beyond their utilitarian function or a simple desire to be beautiful”.

Provenance:
Spink & Son, London, 1970s.
Private collection, UK, 2017.

References:
Haidar, Navina Najat and Marika Sardar. *Sultans of Deccan India, 1500-1700: Opulence and Fantasy*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015.
Zebrowski, Mark. *Gold, Silver & Bronze from Mughal India*. London: Alexandria Press, in association with Laurence King, 1997.

5. A FINE AND UNIQUE BIDRI BOTTLE WITH FIGURAL DECORATION

Bidar, Deccan. Early 18th century. (H25cm)

Long-neck bottles (*surahis*) have not survived to this day in great numbers. This early 18th century bottle, in particular, is an extremely rare example of a Bidri object with zoomorphic decoration, with great variety of shapes that also depict topographic landscape, floral and architectural motifs. The globular form of the bottle is superbly put to use to create a complex and continuing scene where animals depicted at different scales inhabit a fantastical jungle landscape replete with palm trees, oversized flowers, mountains and pleasure pavilions, all on a wavy shore by a waterfront with sea animals. Amongst the animals, we can find felines, antelopes, elephants, monkeys, peacocks and other birds, and a horse with rider. Framing the figurative scene, there are also floral decorative motifs forming bands above and below.

The diversity of shapes, but also the graphic richness in the use of silver lines and volumes, make this object a beautiful example of the Deccani representational style. Expressiveness and energy are given priority over naturalism, and the resulting surface replete with silver elements is not constricted by attentiveness to natural scale, perspective or depth. This particular character is perhaps underlined by the addition of an aquatic scene on the bottleneck, thus placing water above land, inverting what is the usual convention of the natural order of the world.

The present bottle is published in Mark Zebrowski's seminal book 'Gold, Silver & Bronze from Mughal India', on plates nos. 286 and 511. Zebrowski also attributes the bottle with certainty to the same workshop that created a beautiful *huqqa* base that belongs to the collection of the National Museum of India in New Delhi, praising its individual figures for being "sharply observed and masterfully rendered with a sensitivity more commonly reserved for line drawings on paper".

Published: Zebrowski, p307, no 511.

Figurative Huqqa Base with Scenes from the Padmavat
Bidar, Deccan, late 17th/ early 18th century (H18.4 cm) © National Museum of India, New Delhi.

6. A SUPERB BIDRI TRAY DECORATED WITH IRISES

Bidar, Deccan. Early 18th century. (H25cm)

Trays, or *sinis*, were part of "smoking sets", on which the *huqqa* and respective ring would rest. They were also possibly used on their own to serve food or drink (Zebrowski). Bidri trays again show great elegance and a sense of harmony in their composition and play of light and darkness. They used either floral or geometric decoration, and their shape was usually round, octagonal or in the shape of flowers.

The present tray, from the early 18th century, is an elegant example of a flower-shaped Bidri tray inlayed with silver, with the particularity of sitting on eight feet. It combines geometric elements in its centre with several floral motifs that enrich the composition. Twelve large irises surround the central circle, while twice as many smaller flowers populate the petal-shaped raised edges of the tray. Separating the two floral rows, there is an additional geometric decorative band. The use of irises to decorate the tray creates a direct link with Deccani painting of this period, namely in the typical use of irises to decorate the borders of miniature paintings.

The fact that the silver inlays do not cover the totality of the surface of the tray creates a stark graphic effect, with silver irises radiating light against considerable areas of dark background. Combined with the perfect symmetry of the composition, there is a sense of overall harmony and dynamic balance.

The present tray is published in Mark Zebrowski's seminal book 'Gold, Silver & Bronze from Mughal India', on plate no. 435.

Published: Zebrowski, p307, no 511.

7. A FINE BIDRI HUQQA BASE WITH ASSURED DESIGN

Bidar, Deccan. 17th century. (H17cm)

The earliest *huqqa* bases or water pipes date from the seventeenth century (Zebrowski), and had a globular shape. Used to smoke tobacco, a new habit at the time, they were brought into the Mughal court from the Deccan at the very beginning of the century.

The present *huqqa* base, an example from the seventeenth century, has a globular form with a short cylindrical ringed neck gently broadening at the mouth. The body is moulded with vertical fluting, each flute inlaid with floral scrolls and divided by narrow chevron bands. The shoulder has the shape of a flower, and the motif of its petals is repeated at the bottom of the base, as well as in the neck, which is in turn also decorated with ring mouldings, one with chevrons and the other with lotus petals.

An example of a fluted Bidri *huqqa* base is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, from the Tayler Collection (856-1874). In that piece, however, the floral decoration is repeated in the fluted body, unlike the present example. What they have in common is a smaller size, following the tendency in the late 17th century for extremely refined and elegant objects: smaller *huqqas* with less bulging shapes and narrower necks.

The remarkable feature of the present *huqqa* base is that each of the sixteen flutes that make its body has a unique floral scroll. The great inventiveness of this piece is expressed is the varied and never repeated floral motifs, which include lotuses, irises and many other flower types. This is a rare characteristic that sets this huqqa base apart as an example of originality in Bidri metalware.

8. AN EXTREMELY FINE FIGURAL BIDRI PANDAN

Bidar, Deccan 18th century. (H7cm, W9cm)

Pandans, or the containers of betel (*pan*), were important and treasured objects in India and other parts of South Asia for centuries. The chewing of betel is a very old habit, associated with leisure and a refined lifestyle, with particular social functions that were greatly important at court and with the upper classes: "During royal audience (darbar), the ruler would "calmly" chew betel, perhaps to show his detached, and therefore superior, judgement. The offering of the royal pan to a courier was a sign of extraordinary favour, and an even greater honour would be the offering of the betel container (pandan). On a less august level, betel was offered to guests in aristocratic and middle-class homes, usually after a meal and just before their departure." (Zebrowski, 263).

The present 18th century figural Bidri *pandan* has a rectangular shape, and its interior is divided into different compartments to suit its function of containing the different ingredients of the betel. It is ornamented with poppies on all four sides, while the lid is covered by an exuberant cornucopia where a large and full fruit bowl and two adjacent flower pots are inhabited by several birds. The same element of a poppy is repeated along the sides of the pandan, with a decorative floral band below. The elegance of this typical floral decoration, however, is used to frame and embellish the great inventiveness shown on the fantastic lid. The drawing shown there is of great variety, with the delineation of fruits such as pineapples and grapes, as well as different kinds of flowers, birds, and decorative objects. Some elements are drawn with a finer line, while others are shown as volumes where the silver inlays are allowed to shine more strongly. The attention to detail is great, perhaps nowhere greater than in the inclusion of figurative scenes decorating the flowerpots on each side of the replete fruit bowl.

The present *pandan* combines a particular Deccani expression and energy in the almost excessive quality of the banquet scene, with a more Mughalised kind of representation that leans towards a greater naturalism. The cornucopia that decorates it might have also originated in a European model of a still life.

9. A FOLIO FROM THE IMPERIAL MUGHAL *HAMZANAMA*

With the help of Khwaja 'Umar, Gawhar Malik rescues Gulrukhsar

Attributed to Mahesh, artist working for the Emperor Akbar
Mughal, India, c. 1565-70
Opaque pigments and gold on prepared cotton;
calligraphy on reverse on paper. 66.5 x 51.5 cm

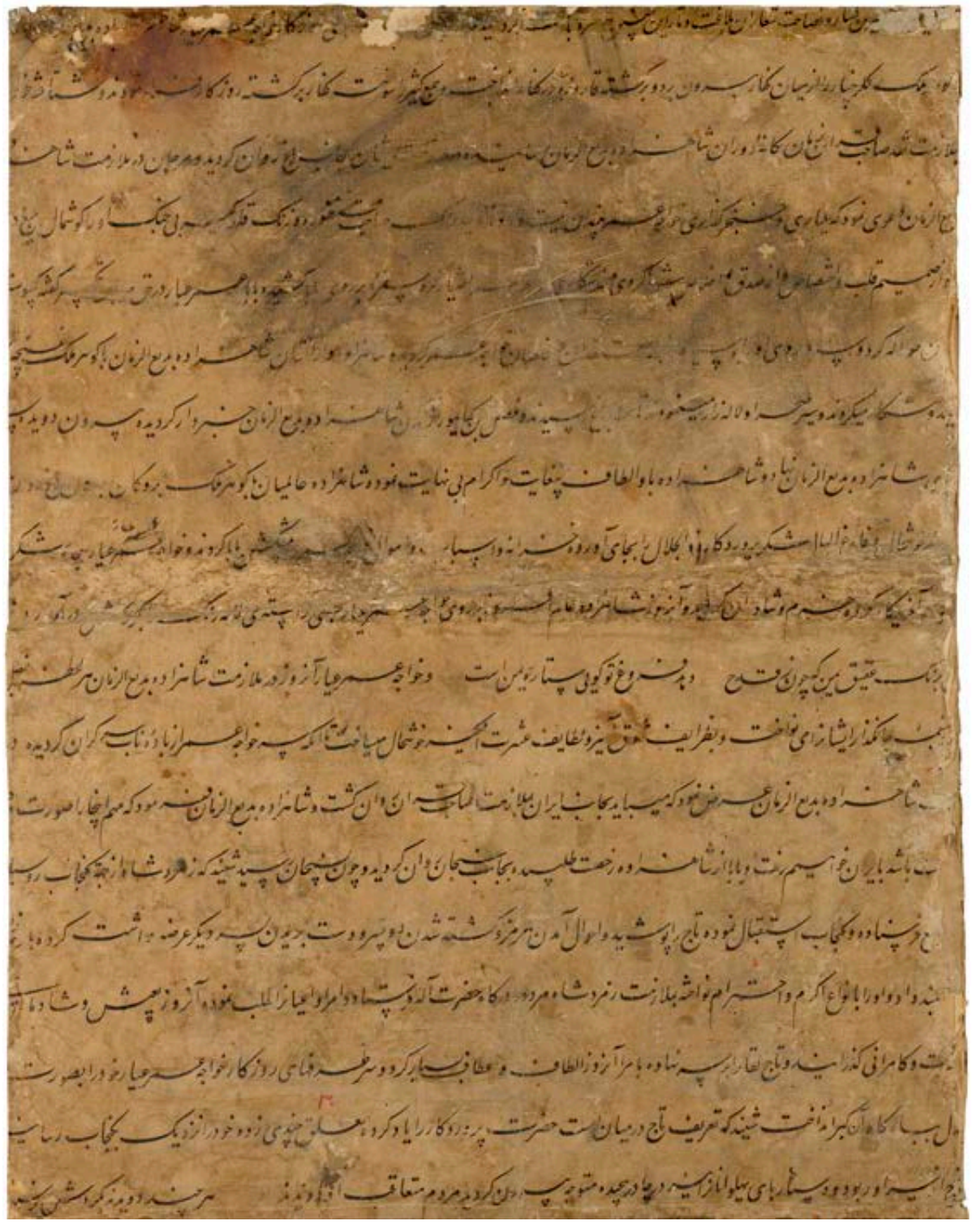
'The *Hamzanama* ('Story of Hamza') is, literally and figuratively, a fabulous book, one that has enthralled many different audiences since its creation in sixteenth-century India. Its appeal is direct and immediate, and requires no schooling in the refined conventions of the more customary literary and artistic fare of the Mughal court. Unlike the standard classics of Persian poetry, whose virtue lay in subtleties of metaphor and rhyme, or Mughal dynastic histories, which blend prosaic fact with high-flown propaganda, the *Hamzanama* is a popular collection of action-filled stories that recount in straightforward, vernacular language the exploits of legendary heroes. Born of the tradition of Persian oral literature that regaled predominantly illiterate audiences around nomadic campfires and in urban coffee-houses, the fantastic tales of the *Hamzanama* so captured the imagination of the young Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) that he recited them personally, and commissioned his fledging painting workshop to make its first major project a spectacular illustrated copy of the text.

The *Hamzanama* is by far the most ambitious of all manuscripts illustrated at the Mughal court, absolutely dwarfing contemporary projects in both size and scope. Whereas most illustrated manuscripts can easily fit in one's hand and include only a dozen or so images, the Hamzanama originally comprised 1,400 folios more than two feet high, each painted in a manner that combines passages of unprecedented boldness with other of fine detail. By its scope, size, and execution, then, the *Hamzanama* lends itself to two very different kinds of viewing experience: one, as part of a public recitation dramatized serially by a professional storyteller, the other as the focus of a more intimate perusal of its illustrations.' John Seyller

The *Hamzanama* is a magical adventure tale about the first generations of Muslims. It narrates the fabulous exploits of the legendary Amir Hamza, an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad. All of the paintings of the Imperial *Hamznama* are on prepared cloth, with Persian calligraphy on paper pasted to the reverse. It is thought that the pages were made for use in storytelling performances, where one person held up a painting for an audience while another read from the back of a different folio. With this monumental pictorial project, a new Mughal style evolved, combining elements from the regional traditions of the Indian subcontinent with an Iranian compositional framework and distinctively Iranian motifs.

The present folio is attributed to Mahesh, whose style is characterised by Milo Beach as follows: "His figures can be immensely lively, as shown by gesture, stance, and facial expression, and this animation is enhanced by generally bright colors. Even the early pages show a developed delight in bearded faces and an ability to make mustaches expressive. The smooth, distinctive forms he develops for mountains remain relatively unchanged throughout his career."

Other folios from the Imperial *Hamzanama* that are also attributed to Mahesh are in some of the most important Museum collection in the world, including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS 1509-1883 and IS 1520-1883); MAK - Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna (8770/49, 8770/30, 8770/8, 8770/52 and 8770/26); the Freer Gallery of Art/ Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC (F1960.15); Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York (24.46, 24.48 and 24.49) and the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1937-4-1).



NOTES ON A *HAMZANAMA* LEAF ATTRIBUTED TO MAHESH

Report prepared by Prof. John Seyller

In the *Hamzanama*, a wide-ranging adventure story known in oral and written form throughout West and South Asia in Persian, Urdu, and other languages, there are so many hostile challenges to be met and dastardly menaces to be parried that there is never a lack of opportunity for heroes to prove their mettle. Sometimes these heroes must pass trials that are mostly tests of sheer physical prowess and moral superiority, and involve the physical defeat of a formidable unbeliever. At least as often, however, they must avail themselves of guile and derring-do to achieve their desired outcome. Such is the case in this painting from the great *Hamzanama* manuscript, a magisterial project of 1400 illustrations produced under the auspices of the Mughal emperor Akbar over fifteen years, a period reckoned in the most recent scholarly accounts to be 1557/58 – 1572/73.

Without the caption originally written in the now-lost lower margin, the painting can be identified only by reference to the brief summary of the story provided in the damaged first two lines of the page of text on the folio's reverse. This text page follows the painting and actually sets up the narrative illustrated on the ensuing painting on a separate two-sided folio. The text page is numbered 30 (which accordingly would make the painting number 29), but there is no indication to which of the fourteen volumes the folio belongs, and therefore the position of this episode in the larger narrative remains murky at best[1]. Various considerations suggest that it probably falls within volumes 7-10, from which relatively few illustrations survive. The illustration itself depicts not Hamza, but his principal sidekick, Khwaja 'Umar, a wiry, sighthound-like ayyar or spy, running at full sprint even as he carries two figures in his arms. His human cargo is identified in the text as Gawhar Malik, a companion of Hamza, and Gulrukhsar, the beautiful daughter of Zardasht Jadu, a Zoroastrian sorcerer. In short, 'Umar is spiriting away the two figures from a swarm of agitated infidel soldiers, probably to escape in two unoccupied ships waiting in the distance.

The trio on the run are rendered in a relatively large scale in the upper right, the ayyar gazing forward and upward, and the two would-be lovers looking back towards the hoodwinked army giving futile chase. Turbulent waves roil the sea behind them, adding to the sense of hurried movement. The figures themselves are a veritable tangle of limbs. The two figures sit high on 'Umar's shoulders, Gawhar Malik's booted legs pointing leftward (opposite the orientation of his body), and Gulrukhsar's lone visible leg planted on 'Umar's thigh. The spy's own cloak and spindly legs jut outwards, and sword, sceptre, and spear become complementary thinner protrusions from the figural mass.

The overall composition is dominated by one unusual element. Looming in the centre is a tall mountain, a triangular heap of puffy rocks organised into broad arcs and barren but for eighteen discrete clusters of assorted flowers, several of which are very finely done. Its compositional function must be to literally put ground between guards and fugitives, and thereby suggest the latter's ongoing escape. Coursing diagonally though the remainder of the scene is a narrow rock-lined stream that flows by three different kinds of trees. The first has a cylindrical and twisted double trunk, palpable bark, a web of roots, and spade-shaped leaves outlined in gleaming yellow. The second is a dark green mass overlaid with uniformly narrow, yellow-rimmed leaves. But it is the third tree that is rendered in a truly eye-catching manner: a flurry of extremely painterly yellow daubs inundating the green foliate cluster at its centre. Such a radical expressionistic technique appears occasionally in the *Hamzanama*, and is regarded as the purview of only a handful of artists, namely, Daswant, Basawan, and Kesava Das. Here, however, its use is limited to a single passage that lacks even the loose structure of marks seen elsewhere. In short, it seems to represent an initial attempt at an experimental technique by a mainstream artist who normally did not venture far in that direction.

That artist is Mahesh, an accomplished and prolific painter who contributed a number of paintings to the *Hamzanama* project and continued to serve in the imperial atelier until 1600.[2] The key element supporting an attribution to Mahesh is the figure style, which is amply displayed in the many soldiers astonished by the getaway. Mahesh's warriors have flat faces with thin features, especially distinctive slit-like eyes, and tend to wear armoured tunics studded with an oversize polka-dot pattern. The artist displays a predilection for large, flat shapes, a habit evident in such objects as the horses' caparison. He enlists numerous battle flags as a device to punctuate masses of troops, distributes patches of his favourite colours – yellow and red – as compositional accents, and repeats specific decorative patterns, such as the now abraded radiating design on the red shield in the lower right, from his other *Hamzanama* paintings.[3]

Although the fleeing heroes have suffered some surface damage, most obviously in the face of Gulrukhsar, their facial articulation and dress here correspond to Mahesh's figures elsewhere in the *Hamzanama*. The three-quarter view of Gawhar Malik's large and smooth face, for example, matches that of another hero, Qasam al-'Abbas, in the form of the nose and eyes, and particularly in the rendering of the latter with a narrow gold rim around the black pupil.[4] Likewise, the white diamond pattern on Gawhar Malik's tunic is quite rare, but occurs in almost the same formulation in another of Mahesh's paintings in the manuscript.[5] This stands in contrast to the dense and irregular chainmail pattern on his leg armour, which has no known counterpart in Mahesh's work. Conversely, the billowing shape and light articulation of the rocky landscape are entirely in keeping with the artist's oeuvre.

[1] The numeral 46 scrawled on the painting near the top of the mountain does not belong to any series of numbers, and remains inexplicable.
[2] Other *Hamzanama* paintings attributed to Mahesh are published in John Seyller et al, *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India* (Washington, D.C., 2002), nos. 22, 26, 39, 43, 46, 49, 52, 65, 70, and 71. A sample of a painting ascribed to Mahesh is published in Seyller et al 2002, fig. 30.
[3] Seyller et al 2002, no. 46.
[4] Seyller et al 2002, no. 46.
[5] Seyller et all 2002, no. 52.

Published: Seyller et al 2002, R163, p. 277.

Provenance:
Charles Ratton, Paris.
Private Collection, UK, 1976-present.

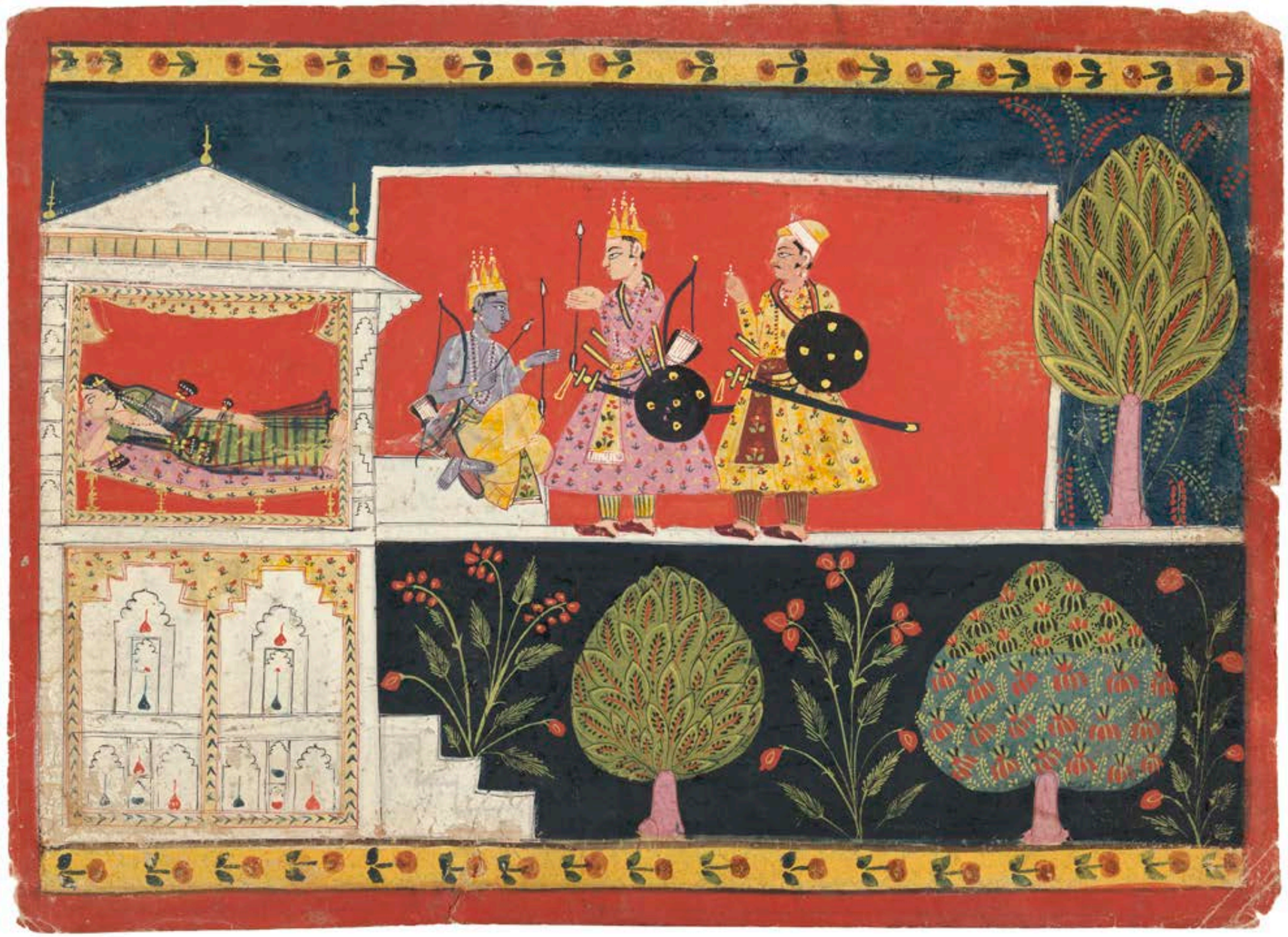
Reference:
Seyller, John, et al. *The Adventures of Hamza: Painting and Storytelling in Mughal India*. Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, in association with Azimuth Editions Limited, London, 2002.

10. AN ILLUSTRATION FROM THE *RAMAYANA*

Malwa, India, c. 1650
Opaque watercolour on paper
Folio: 20 x 28 cm; Painting: 18.5 x 26.5 cm

This scene from the Hindu epic Ramayana shows the hero Rama, and his wife Sita during the fourteen years that they were in exile from Ayodhya. Though Rama was to succeed to the throne, he had to leave the kingdom to fulfil a promise made by his father, king Dasharatha to his favourite queen Kaikeyi who wanted her son to become king instead. Sita and Lakshmana, his younger brother, voluntarily sacrificed royal life to accompany him into the forest.

Even though the pavilion on the left looks palatial and Rama has a crown on his head, there are other signs that indicate this to be a moment from his life in exile. Firstly, his upper body is bare and he is depicted in a simple yellow dhoti, a plain translucent white cloth draped around his neck, while the other two male figures are both dressed in floral jamas, suggesting that they are still part of the palace and court while he has given up all such luxuries. Another noticeable difference is that Rama only carries a bow and quiver of arrows – more suitable for hunting in the forest, but the other two figures also have swords and circular black shields meant for close combat in battle. Since one of the two men has a crown, he is clearly also a prince, and he stands with his hands folded in respect for his older brother. The man behind him, in the yellow turban and jama is a courtier and not a member of the royal family as indicated by the lack of a crown. It is quite possible that the two have travelled into the forest to inform Rama of the death of Dasharatha, who died shortly after the crown prince left because he was unable to bear the pain of banishing his beloved son.



This would make the second crowned figure prince Bharata who was accompanied by Sumantra, a prominent minister, on this melancholic journey. Sita's bereaved disposition would also be explained by this, she collapses on the bed inside, unable to bear the news of her father-in-law's passing.

The treatment of space in this work is quite typical of the paintings from Malwa, with the division of the picture plane by the use of contrasting colours. With its lack of visual depth and a simplification of forms, Malwa was largely unaffected by the styles that evolved in the Mughal and Deccani ateliers as a result of their preference for realistic depictions. Instead, it seems to draw quite heavily from a much earlier series, the Chaurapanchasika (c. 1550), and therefore also has striking similarities to the prominent Rasikapriya series of 1634.

The unique characteristics of this style set it apart among the art of India, and are at times, easy to dismiss as crude or even "folk". However, the abstract minimalism of these images reveals the highly developed visual language of the artists who combined large spaces of solid colours with delicate lines to create stunning images. This reflects not only skill, but an aesthetic and symbolic system of representation, developed through centuries of 'reduction' and refinement. The cluster pattern of the tree leaves, the tassels of Sita's clothes, the running chevron like design on the pavilion, give the eye "busy" areas to focus on against the "plain" areas of colour, heightening the viewer's aesthetic experience.

Provenance: Private collection, UK, 1980.

References:

McInerney, Terence, Steven M. Kossak, Navina N. Haidar. *Divine Pleasures: Painting from India's Rajput Courts: The Kronos Collections*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016.

Pollock, Sheldon I., trans. *Ramayana - Book Three: The Forest*. New York: NYU Press, 2006.

II. A ROYAL COUPLE BENEATH A TENT

An Illustration from a Ragamala or Rasikapriya Series
India, Rajasthan, Mewar, Early-Mid 17th Century
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper
Folio: 25.7 x 19 cm; Painting: 21.9 x 15.6 cm

Seated below a bright canopy, this royal couple is depicted in a moment of intimacy as they embrace while gazing into each other's eyes. The maiden's arm wraps around her beloved to hold him close, and he too places his hand on her shoulder. Around them lie pillows and a paandan – to hold betel, and an attendant stands behind them, offering a cup of wine.

The bold lines and colour choices make this image characteristic of the Mewar style, specifically the paintings done during the reign of Maharana Jagat Singh I (1628-52). From his royal atelier, the most prominent was the master artist Sahibdin, responsible for some very important sets such as the Ragamala (c. 1650-60), which is now in the National Museum, New Delhi. The style of the karkhana (or workshop) was heavily influenced by Mughal art and made innovations to the existing Rajput style. The palette became softer but did not lose its vibrancy. Another significant change was in the proportions of the facial features, specifically the size of the eyes evolved to be smaller and more realistic. Comparing this image to paintings attributed to the imperial atelier, the jama of the male figure and the style of his turban, along with the ladies' jewellery, their fitted ghaghras, short blouses, and transparent odhnis, are the most noticeable overlaps.

While the two flaps of the canopy and the round cushions on the ground appear three dimensional, other surfaces, like the bed, remain flat. The figures have distinct faces – the two women have individualised features, but the trees in the background remain highly stylised. There is minimal use of ornamentation and the only pattern is a simple geometrical design that runs horizontally through the composition. Despite this, the careful juxtaposition of deep tones of warm and cool shades gives vitality to the whole scene, not just the three figures, as the artist captures a glimpse of an intimate moment between two lovers.

Artists in Mewar painted many sets to illustrate romantic poems like Keshavadasa's Rasikapriya, Jayadeva's Gita-Govinda and the Sat Sai of Bihari. Mostly, the yellow rectangle at the top would contain text that accompanied the image, however, here it remains empty, making it extremely difficult to identify the exact scene and the identity of the figures.

Provenance:
Heeramaneck collection, USA, 1960s.

Reference:
Topsfield, Andrew. *Court Painting at Udaipur: Art under the Patronage of the Maharanas of Mewar.* Zurich: Artibus Asiae. Supplementum Vol. 44, 2002.

TWO DEVAGIRI RAGINIS FROM BILASPUR

Ragamala paintings like these belong to elaborate series that illustrate ragas and their accompanying raginis. Though there are different systems, artists of the Pahari workshops relied almost exclusively on the classification of Mesakarna or Kshemakarna, a sixteenth-century rhetorician from Central India. According to him, ragini Devagiri is one of the wives of the Hindola raga, as also identified in the inscription on the back of the painting dated c. 1720. The broad red margins with the white and black lines are also seen in other paintings from ragamala sets of this school, one of which is at the Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin.

Both folios belong to the period (from 1650 to 1780) that was cited by the eminent art historian and writer W. G. Archer as the time in which the hill state of Bilaspur flourished, comparable in status to other prominent kingdoms of Garhwal and Mandi in the 'Punjab Hills'. Known as Kahlur then, the overall prosperity of the state allowed its rulers to freely patronise the arts – dance, music and painting, resulting in an increased commissioning of ragamala sets. Archer believed that these paintings served as "accompaniments to music", reflective, as they were of the integral mood of musical modes (Archer, 1973). It is only natural then that artists translated these purely abstract ideas into stunning works of visual art, capturing the spirit of each raga through personified characters.

Created for the pleasure of royal patrons, folios from ragamala sets have since then become dispersed and travelled over the world, moving often between collections. Archer, who had spent years in India as a civil servant before becoming a curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum, acquired many paintings for his personal collection directly from kings and princes of the Hill States. Like him, another prominent British Civil Servant, Dr Alma Latifi, CIE, OBE, amassed a sizeable collection of Indian paintings in the 1930s and 1940s.

12. DEVAGIRI RAGINI

From a Ragamala series
Bilaspur, Punjab Hills, India, c. 1690
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Folio: 26 x 20 cm; Painting: 21 x 15.5 cm

Provenance:
Private collection, UK, 1980.

Some of these works are now in prominent art institutions like the British Museum, London and the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai, while others are in private collections. For a painting of the same set as our Devagiri Ragini from c.1690, see "Madhava Ragaputra" in Steven M. Kossak's Kronos Collection. On the other hand, our Devagiri Ragini from c. 1720, with the solitary ragini seated on the floor, was formerly in the Latifi collection, along with other fine ragamala paintings from Bilaspur.

In the first painting, the graceful ragini performs aarti – with a diya lamp in one hand and a bell in the other. Dressed in a red blouse and a long pink skirt, her head is covered with a translucent blue odhani that wraps around her lower body. She stands in devotion, facing the shivalinga, the aniconic form of Shiva. Opposite her an attendant dressed in the same colours, but reversed, also looks at the sacred image placed at the very centre of the composition. Both women are decked in bejewelled gold ornaments from head to toe, painted delicately to further embellish their beauty.

A slightly later depiction varies so much that it is only through the inscription that we know it to be of the same ragini. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, wearing only a deep yellow dhoti, this elegant beauty's long dark hair falls over her shoulders, clinging to her as if still wet. Her idealised form is exaggerated by the slenderness of her waist and limbs. Extending her henna coloured right hand, she holds a shankh or conch shell. The object of her devotion is a saligrama stand in the shape of Vishnu's vehicle, the Garuda. Stands like this were, and still are, used to hold salagrama stones – fossilised shells collected from riverbeds, that are worshipped as aniconic forms of Vishnu. Also part of the worship are other offerings and vessels that lie around the stand, and a slight smoke gently rises from the dhoop or incense.

The long pretty faces are in profile – almost in a straight line from the forehead to the tip of the nose, accentuating the curves of their big slanting eyes and arched eyebrows. The gentleness of the images, the rich contrasting colours, and the charming splendour of the figures is characteristic to the style of Bilaspur, as are the trees that flank the two buildings, their slender branches completely laden with flowers.

13. RAGINI DEVAGIRI OF HINDOLA

Bilaspur, India, c. 1720
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper
Folio: 26.5 x 17.5; Painting: 21.5 x 12.7 cm

Provenance:
Alma Latifi, 1930-40s.

A preference for the naturalistic style in painting is attributed to influences of Mughal art, as Bilaspur remained more or less independent from the eminent styles of the other hill states.

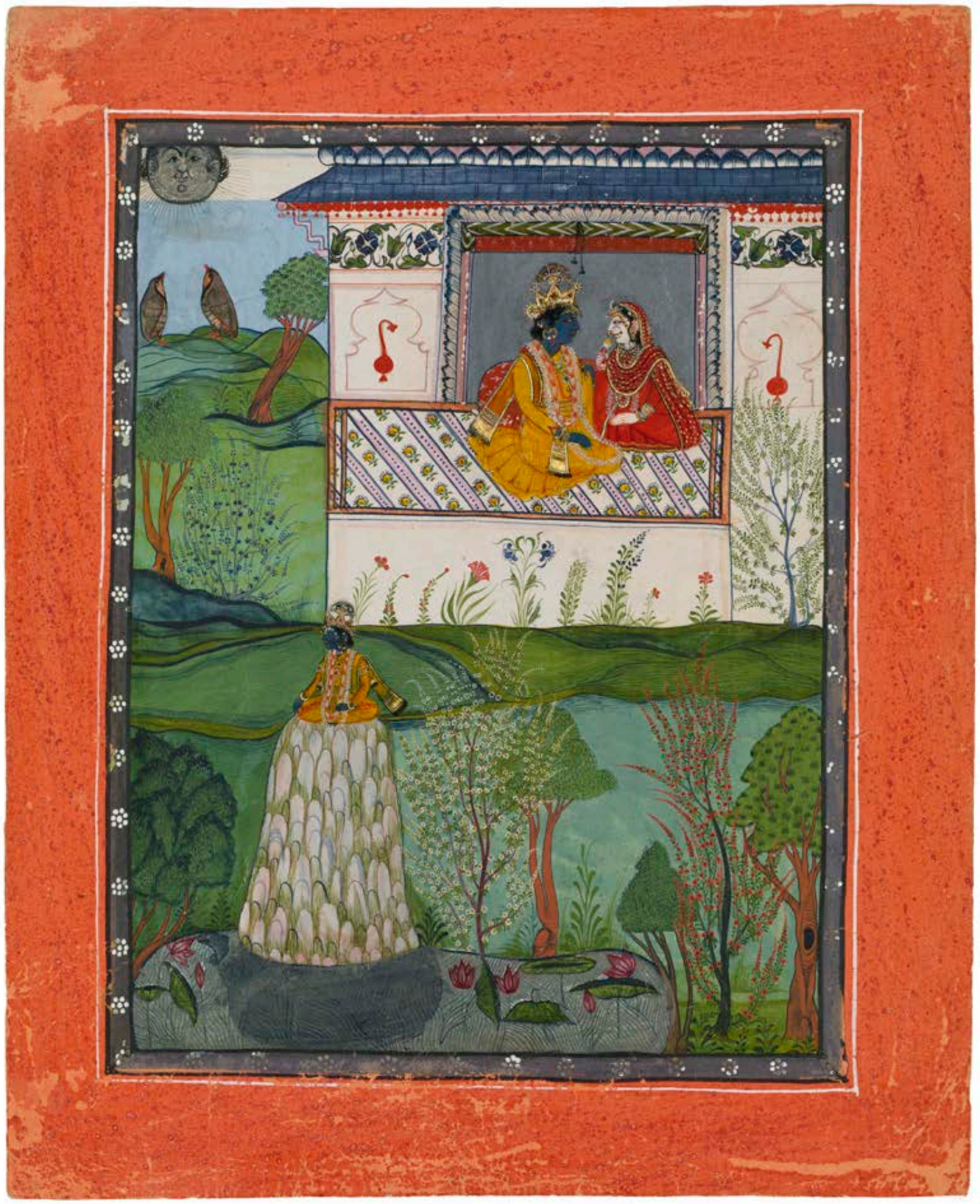
Despite this, some attributes still remained highly idealised, such as the faces of the women, and the flat ochre-green background that almost stands like a wall behind the buildings, cut off sharply to reveal the blue sky.

The slight shadowing around the linga, and the parallel rows of grass on the ground below, are the artist's attempts to add depth to the composition. In the second painting, the small square terrace on top, with the stairs leading up, creates three-dimensionality, even though the nearby minarets remain quite flat. Though usually in paintings from this state, there was a preference for rectangular architectural spaces that lie horizontally within the image, both structures in these paintings rise up towards the top edges of the paintings. It has also been noted that Bilaspur workshops were unique in their preference of a vertical format for ragamalas, instead of the prevalent horizontal system.

As the bell in the raginis hands indicate, music is an integral part of worship in the Hindu tradition. So much so that ragas and raginis are, at times, tied to specific deities, serving as tools for devotees to invite gods and goddesses into their earthly images. Devagiri ragini is always depicted in prayer, a testament to her devout and pious nature, though the deity she worships changes based on the religious inclinations of the patrons and artists.

A painting of this ragini from the same school, in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (17.3218), also shows the ragini, accompanied by an attendant, worshipping a saligrama.

References:
Archer, W. G. *Indian Paintings from the Punjab Hills: A Survey and History of Pahari Miniature Painting*. London: Sotheby Parke Bernet Publications, 1973. pp 226.
Ebeling, Klaus. *Ragamala Painting*. Basel: R. Kumar, 1973.
Gangoly, O. C. *Ragas and Raginis*. Mumbai: Nalanda Publications, 1948.



14. AN ILLUSTRATION TO THE *GITA GOVINDA*

Mandi, India, c. 1780
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Folio: 31.5 x 25.5; Painting: 25 x 19.5 cm

This painting has many wonderful moments. The incredibly delicate treatment of the flora – flowering trees and shrubs, scattered all over the composition, is only one beautiful detail that exemplifies the skill of the artist. Withdrawing from the finer details and looking at the image as a whole, one sees that the artist has created different areas within the picture that have become placeholders for three different scenes that unfold simultaneously. In the architectural structure that dominates the top right, the divine couple Krishna and Radha sit close to each other, looking intently into each other's eyes. This is where the main focus is. The prominence of the figures becomes apparent not only in the care with which their garments and ornaments have been painted, but also their size in relation to the rest of the composition.

A few lines from Jayadeva's 12th century poem, the Gita Govinda, are inscribed on the flap of the painting:

Your beauty is fresh as rain clouds
You hold the mountain to churn elixir from the sea.
Your eyes are night birds drinking from Sri's moon face.
Triumph, God of Triumph, Hari!

In this part of the longer love poem, the poet uses each stanza to describe a few of the many myriad qualities of Vishnu's as Krishna. Most clearly seen here is the comparison between the colour of rain bearing clouds and Krishna's skin. The deep blue is complimented by his yellow clothes and juxtaposed with the light radiant skin of his beloved Radha.

Just as he gazes at her face, two chakor birds (Chukar partridges) look up at the moon. According to folklore, these birds never tire of looking at the moon, and the poet compares this characteristic to Krishna's insatiable attraction to Radha's resplendent beauty.

At the bottom left of the painting, is the Kurma avatar of Vishnu, in the form of a tortoise that bore the weight of the Mandara mountain during the churning of the cosmic ocean that yielded amrita or elixir of immortality, coveted by both the gods and the demons. Seated atop the mountain is a smaller, but almost identical figure of Krishna, in the same yellow garments and the peacock feathered crown. The tortoise is completely submerged in water, except for its head, and instead of the cosmic ocean, here he is contained within a lotus pond.

This painting comes from Mandi, an erstwhile kingdom situated in the valley of river Beas, that was a centre for trade, as alluded to by its name which means 'market'. Like some of the other prosperous states, Bilaspur, Guler, Kangra, the rulers of Mandi encouraged the arts by being generous patrons. Their religiosity was reflected in the works they commissioned, and the Gita-Govinda set to which this folio belongs, was probably made for a devotee of Krishna, or possibly for a wedding, given the romantic nature of the lyric.

Provenance:
Mandi Royal collection, before 1968.
Private collection, Germany.

Reference:
Miller, Barbara Stoler. *Jayadeva's Gita-Govinda: Love Song of the Dark Lord*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978.

15. MEGH SINGH HARA

Bundi, Rajasthan, India, c. 1760
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Folio: 21 x 16.2 cm; Painting: 16.2 x 11.4 cm

Inscribed in *Devanagari* in the red border: *Megha Singhaji Hodo*

Sitting cross-legged and barefoot against a large, dark blue bolster is a white-haired Megh Singh Hara. He is identified by the inscription, written in Devanagari script, at the top of the page and within the broad, red border. The raja bears distinct facial hair, which consists of a thin mustache, a full beard, and a shaven chin. He wears a red turban bound with white fabric that is decorated with red and yellow flowers. Around Megh Singh's neck is a long, double-stranded necklace of pearls as well as a necklace bearing a large pendant adorned with rubies and emeralds. He wears a burnt orange and white shirt, a translucent white jama (robe), and green trousers decorated with a floral pattern. Tied at his waist is a gold patka (waist sash), its ends detailed with large pink irises. His right leg is bent across his lap, revealing a gold anklet.

He holds the monal (mouthpiece) of his hookah between his thin lips. The hookah pipe curves down to a dark blue base covered with flowers. The base sits on a blue and white porcelain dish. His left hand leans on the cushion behind him. Perched on Megh Singh's right hand, which is protected by a yellow and red falconer's glove, is a peregrine falcon, distinguished by its colouring and markings on its chest. Red jess strings connect the bird of prey from its feet to Megh Singh's patka. Megh Singh stares past his falcon, deep in thought, while the raptor leans back and appears to be looking towards the sky, perhaps scanning it for prey. In front of the figure on the colourful, floral carpet is a sheathed talwar, a type of sword classified by its disc-shaped pommel and recurved knuckle-guard. The green sheath has gold blooms running down the length. The portrait is set against a seafoam green background with, at the top, a thin strip of blue sky containing wispy, white clouds.

Megh Singh Hara may refer to Rawat Sawai Megh Singh Ji II (b. 1740-1804), popularly known as Megh Singhji, who ruled Begu, in southeastern Rajasthan. He was bestowed the honorary title of 'Sawai' (a quarter over one in strength and intelligence) for suppressing a Bhil rebellion in Bhilwara, in the Mewar region of Rajasthan.

The painting is nearly identical to a portrait of Rao Raja Sardar Singh of Uniara, formerly in the collection of Dr. Claus Virch. The paintings portray the rajas seated in the same position on a floral carpet, smoking from a hookah and accompanied by a falcon and a sheathed talwar. The backgrounds are essentially the same. Both depictions are also surrounded by a red border with the inscription identifying the sitter at the top. Due to their many points of comparison, it has been suggested that the paintings most likely come from the same source, perhaps a dispersed series of portraits of rulers from Bundi and the surrounding region.

Provenance:
Heeramaneck collection, USA, 1960s.

References:
Beach, Milo. *Rajput Painting at Bundi and Kota*. Zurich: Artibus Asiae, 1974.
Heeramaneck, Alice. *Masterpieces of Indian Painting from the Former Collections of Nasli M. Heeramaneck*. Verona, 1984, p. 25 and 54, pl. 56.

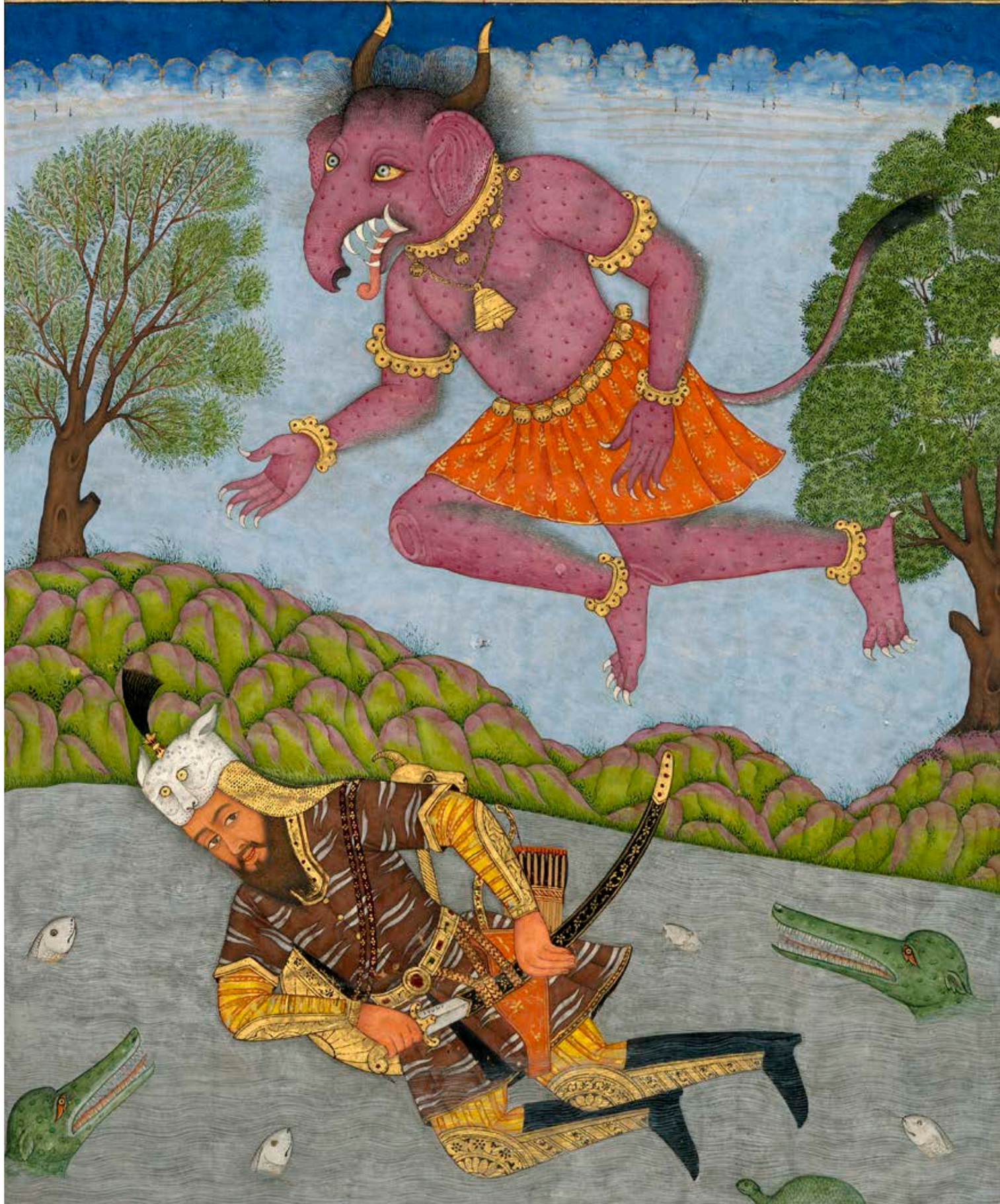
16. RUSTAM FIGHTS AKVĀN DĪV

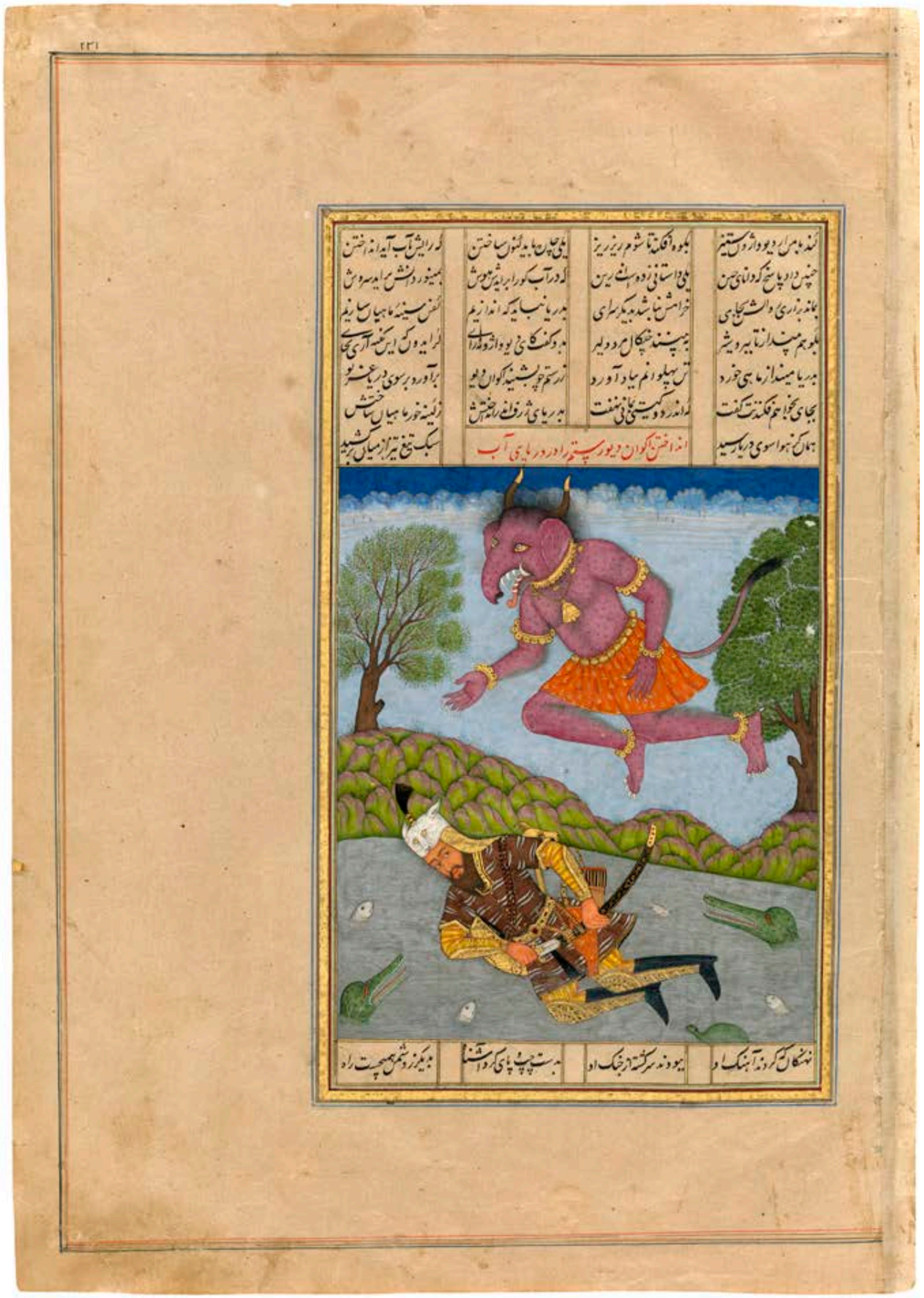
Illustration to a large *Shahnama*
Mughal, 18th Century
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper, 39 x 27 cm

The *Shahnama* (Book of Kings) of Firdausi is a great Persian epic of almost sixty thousand rhyming couplets. It narrates the story of the rulers of Iran from mythical beginnings up until the conquest of Iran by the Arabs, and the coming of Islam. This epic captured the imagination of generations of people and illustrated manuscripts of it were produced across regions and time. Therefore there is no one standard edition, and there exist many variations of it. There are however, various iconographic elements that make characters and scenes easy to identify no matter which manuscript one is looking at.

In a key episode of the *Shahnama*, a scene from which is depicted here, Rustam sets out to kill the demon Akvan who first appears before him in the form of a large and powerful wild ass. Rustam chases him on horseback for three days and three nights but every time he approaches Akvan, he conceals himself using magic. Finally when Rustam grows tired and falls asleep, Akvan cuts the piece of earth on which Rustam is resting, and lifts him up to the sky, asking him if he would like to be thrown on a mountain or into the sea. Knowing the demon's evil ways fully well, Rustam asks to be thrown onto the mountain and as he had expected, he was thrown into the sea instead. He manages to save himself and locate his horse, Rakhsh after which he confronts Akvan once more. On this occasion he manages to snare him with a lasso and beheads him.

The moment in the story when Rustam is flung into the sea by Akvan, is depicted here by the painter. Rustam, who plays on the psyche of the Div and manipulates him, lands in water as he had hoped. He is shown reaching out for his sword as he intends to attack the Div. He is dressed in a tiger skin coat and a leopard helmet as per iconographic convention.





He also wears elaborate armour, carries a shield under his arm, a sword and has a quiver full of arrows on his hip. The Div Akvan is shown as an ugly demon with long hair, blue eyes, black lips, an elephant's head and a mouth full of tusks. His body is purple, his nails long, and he has horns on his head. He wears nothing but a bright orange skirt with a belt made of bells. Another large bell hangs on a chain around his neck.

The artist has paid great attention to depicting the scene in line with the story and conformed to iconographic norms. The painting is composed in bright hues—oranges, greens and blues, which are a very Indian feature and noted in paintings from the Punjab region in this period. The rocks hint at the pinkish Mughal type but have clearly undergone phases of evolution. The illustration of the scene occupies more than half of the page of this *Shahnama* manuscript. The poetry is written in black ink in four columns, in nasta'liq. These columns are separated by double inter-columnar divisions. The episode/ section heading, also in nasta'liq, is written in red at the centre above the painting. The entire composition, including the text and image, is framed by a thin gold border.

After the sacking of Delhi by Nadir Shah and the decline of Mughal power, artists from the court dispersed to many provincial centres. This period of the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century saw these artists assimilating the Mughal style with regional elements and the paintings of regions such as Punjab are testimony to this.

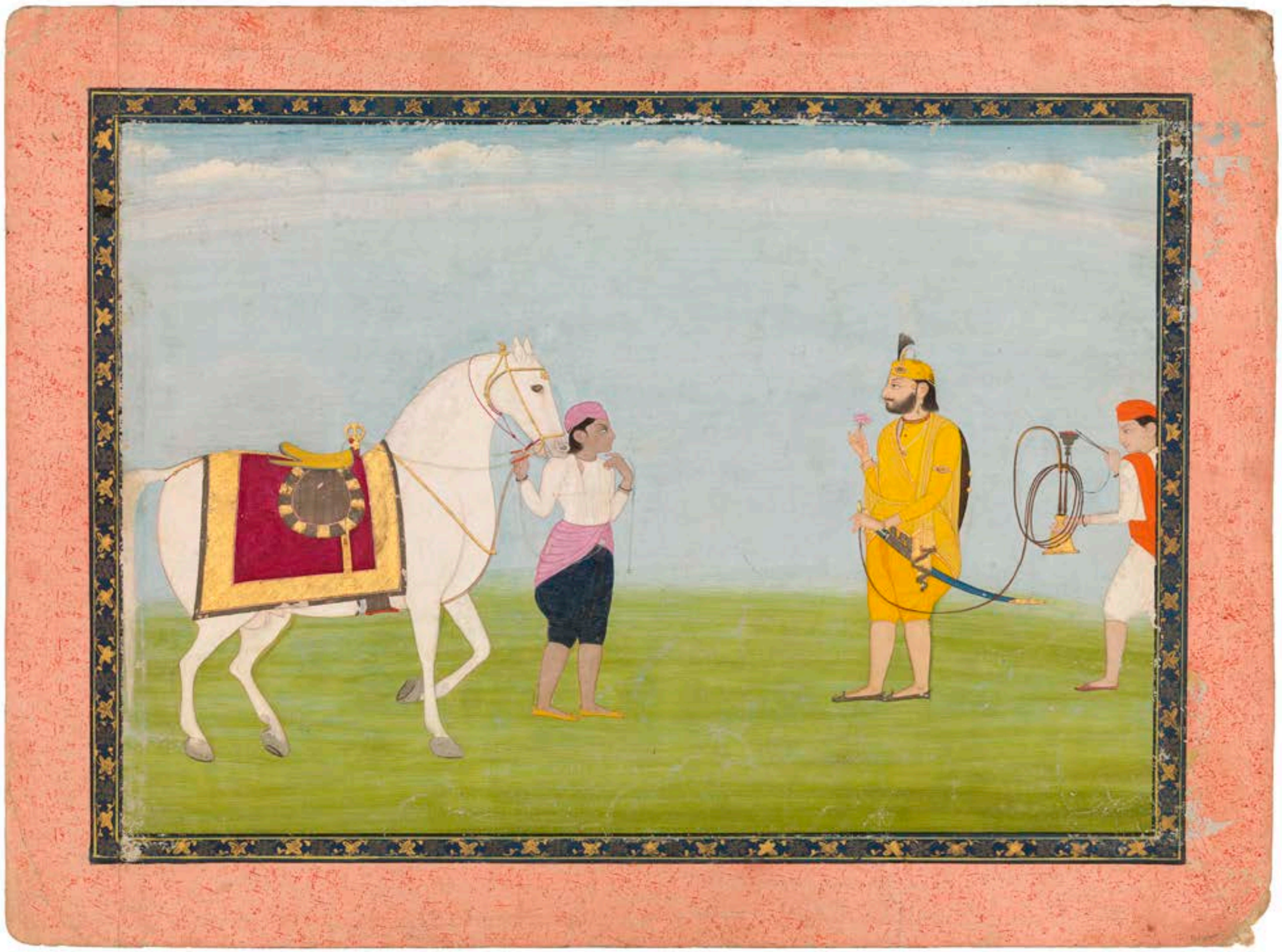
Provenance:
Private collection, UK, 1950s to 2015.

17. A GROOM LEADS A WHITE STALLION TO A NOBLEMAN

Guler, Punjab Hills, India, c. 1820
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
Folio: 23.2 x 33.4 cm; Painting: 18.8 x 26.7 cm

This portrait of a nobleman, dressed in yellow, is most likely from the former princely state of Guler, a prominent name in Pahari painting. Guler's art was first brought into the spotlight by M. S. Randhawa who wrote quite extensively on the "gentleness" of these paintings, and further scholarship on the artists Nainsukh and Manaku by B. N. Goswamy has made paintings from their prolific family extremely important in the art historical context of the region. In the 1950s, Randhawa acquired a sizeable collection from the rulers of the Pahari states for the Chandigarh Museum and Art Gallery, and the royal portraits purchased from Guler contain many similarities to this present work.

Unlike large Mughal or Rajput workshops, artist families in the Hill states worked in closer proximity to their patrons, as exemplified by the carefully observed portraits of rulers in intimate settings. Artists of Guler, who later migrated to Kangra and other neighbouring states, particularly exhibited remarkable skill in capturing the personalities of the rajas. These images are important not only because of the biographical information they contain but also because they document crucial details of the socio-economic climate. Comparing portraits of successive generations, one very noticeable feature is the change in the style of headgear, facial hair, and garments. By the early 19th century, Guler was annexed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh chief, and the impact of this becomes more and more visible in portraits of the rulers. The figure here, though looks Sikh due to the style of his turban and beard, is in fact a Hindu prince or nobleman. Two key differences are the marking on his forehead and the presence of the hookah. A Sikh would not be shown smoking tobacco as it is against the teachings of the faith.



However, hookahs of this kind are often present in royal portraits of the Hindu rajas of the Pahari states. The preference for this style of beard and turban simply reflects the fashion prevalent at the courts at the time. The attendant carrying the hookah emerges out of the frame at the right, partially cut off. This is another overlap with the royal portraits, that show attendants bearing fly-whisks similarly breaking out of the frame, almost caught mid-movement.

Facing the figure is another attendant who brings a horse to him. The beautiful, pure white stallion is painted with great care and dexterity. Horses often appear in royal paintings because of their importance in royal life but also because the princes and rajas were very fond of their animals. The stallion is saddled in gold and maroon, ready to be taken for a ride. As the nobleman approaches, he carries a flower in one hand, indicating this to be a leisurely activity. Interestingly, he also carries his shield and sword, probably as an indicator of his warrior status.

Apart from the figures, the artist has also painted the background with marked skill. Instead of a solid green ground and blue sky, there is a gentle transition from ground to horizon in a more realistic attempt to create perspective. This is another characteristic of the work of Guler artists, attributed by some to influences from Mughal art.

Provenance:
Heeramaneck collection, USA, 1960s.

References:
Goswamy, B. N. *Piety and Splendour: Sikh Heritage in Art.* Delhi: National Museum, 2000.
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18. GHULAM HUSAYN KHAN, AN AFGHAN, WITH MUNNI BANU AND HER CHILD

By a master artist working for William Fraser
From the Fraser Album
Delhi, India, c. 1820
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper, 31 x 41.8 cm

The gifted East India company officer William Fraser was based around Delhi from 1806, when he employed a painter to compile an exceptional visual and ethnographic record of the people and places. He worked as a revenue officer in the rural territories in the environs of the capital.

The group of superb images known as the Fraser album, include some of the finest company paintings. The master artist recruited by Fraser became a close member of his entourage and travelled with him understanding his taste and requirement. He developed an individual style using transparent watercolour, elongated figures, stippling emphasizing the brushstrokes, and miniaturist attention to detail.

William Fraser is known to have read and spoken Hindustani and Persian, besides having more than one Indian wife. His diaries vividly inform us about his interactions with people and offer a glimpse of the extent lives of the Indian and British were intertwined. A number of individuals portrayed in the album are people who worked for William, including 'Ummee Chand', his faithful servant who saved his life, dressed in the uniform of Skinner's horse in a work now in the Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan collection.

The sensitive portrait group of the Afghan family, he holds a bow and is dressed primarily in white. The painter's skill at communicating the volume and detail of costume is striking. The woman and child form a vertical counterpoint in a bold compositional form as the picture has a plain background. The detailing of her indigo sari is exquisitely painted with white highlights that delight the eye. There are highlights of gold on the ornaments worn by the sitters that add a layer of complexity to the restrained palette.

Lines of text in *nasta-liq* calligraphy identify the subjects at the top of the leaf.

Published:
Archer and Falk. *India Revealed: The Art and Adventures of James and William Fraser 1801-35*. London, New York and Sidney: Cassell, 1989.

Provenance:
William Fraser, thence by descent.
Private Collection, London, 1984-2015.

Reference:
Dalrymple, William and Sharma, Yuthika (eds.). *Princes and Painters in Mughal Delhi, 1707-1857*. New York: Asia Society, in association with Yale University Press, 2012.

19. THE GODDESS DURGA RIDING A LION WITH DEVOTEES ALONGSIDE

Bengal, late 19th/early 20th Century
Oil paint, silver on canvas
74 x 58.5 cm

Early oil paintings from Bengal, as the present one, are unique examples of the seamless blending of opposing cultures that came in contact during the British Raj. Painting with oil-based paints on canvas, a purely Western technique, was adopted for predominantly Indian themes and subjects. The results are rare works like this remarkable image of goddess Durga riding her vahan (or vehicle). Two Brahmin devotees stand alongside her with their hands folded in devotion, but the goddess looks directly at us.

Dressed in a bright red sari that is almost the same tone as her skin, Durga is heavily ornamented with jewels all over her body. Her magnificent crown doubles as a nimbus and rays emanate from it, giving the area around her head a subtle glow. Though she is meant to be seated on her lion, she seems to float above it, resting her right foot on its limb, which in turn is placed on a red orb. The highly idealised face of the animal looks fierce for its enlarged round eyes.

Clearly, the artist was not aiming for realism though the technique of using oil on canvas had thus far been associated with the academic realism taught at Euro-centric institutions. Modelled after academies in England, art schools were established in prominent colonial cities. Specifically the Government College of Art and Craft in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1854, focused on art practices and teaching methods that were borrowed from Europe rather than indigenous arts and techniques. Already from the 18th century, British and European painters travelling through Bengal were working on commission for the Bengali zamindar (feudal) families. It is only natural that they were influenced by Indian traditions, but their presence also made a significant impact on the work of the locals.

By the middle of the 19th century trained Bengali artisans, such as Kalighat painters, who had painted religious figures and themes on cloth took to oil painting but their subjects remained unchanged despite the drastic shift.

Though there are some attempts at adding depth and creating perspective, many things carried forward from pre-existing Indian traditions. As seen here, the division of the background into ground and sky, both of which lie flat behind the figures, is incredibly similar to the manner in which artists of miniature paintings treated space. Also in our painting, the faces of the figures, particularly that of goddess Durga, is purely Indian and no aspect of her is altered from the established iconography.

Provenance: Private collection, UK, 1970s-2017.

References:
Mitter, Partha. *The Making of a New Indian Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
Sarkar, Rakhi, Jogen Chowdhury, Amiya Bhattacharjee. *Art of Bengal: Past and Present, 1850-2000*. Kolkata: Centre of International Modern Art and National Gallery of Modern Art (Mumbai), 2001.

20. A COLLECTION OF 22 PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAJA DEEN DAYAL

Albumen prints
India, c. 1882-87

(Additional images available upon request)

The present collection comprises exceptional and rare images by the eminent early Indian photographer Raja Deen Dayal. A majority of these images were taken during the heyday of his career in the years 1886-87. Comprehensively, they present a panoramic picture of his oeuvre and illustrate his talent as a brilliant image-maker.

The 22 photographs are also closely related to another group of Deen Dayal's photographs in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art (2016.266).

Raja Deen Dayal is celebrated for his pioneering effort in recording the landscapes, architecture and people of India with objectivity. His understanding of the land, his familiarity with its history, his awareness of its culture, all distinguished him from the major photographers of the late 19th century. His images go beyond the search for the characteristic and the "picturesque"; they do not aim to survey the land and its wealth but attempt to create a portrait of life in India. The variety in subject matter along with the quality of images makes Deen Dayal's work unparalleled.

Deen Dayal was born in 1844 in Sardana, near Meerut, in North India. After completing his education as a draughtsman, he started working as head estimator for the Public Work Department at Indore, Central India. It was here that he was introduced to photography.

Deen Dayal's first patron was the Maharaja of Indore, who appreciated his work and later introduced him to the British Agent Sir Henry Daly. Soon after his decision to take up photography as a profession, Deen Dayal was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to photograph the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, on his visit to Central India in 1875. The following year he was appointed photographer to the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin. At this time, photography was still in its infancy in India – it was only after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 that photographic equipment had become available.

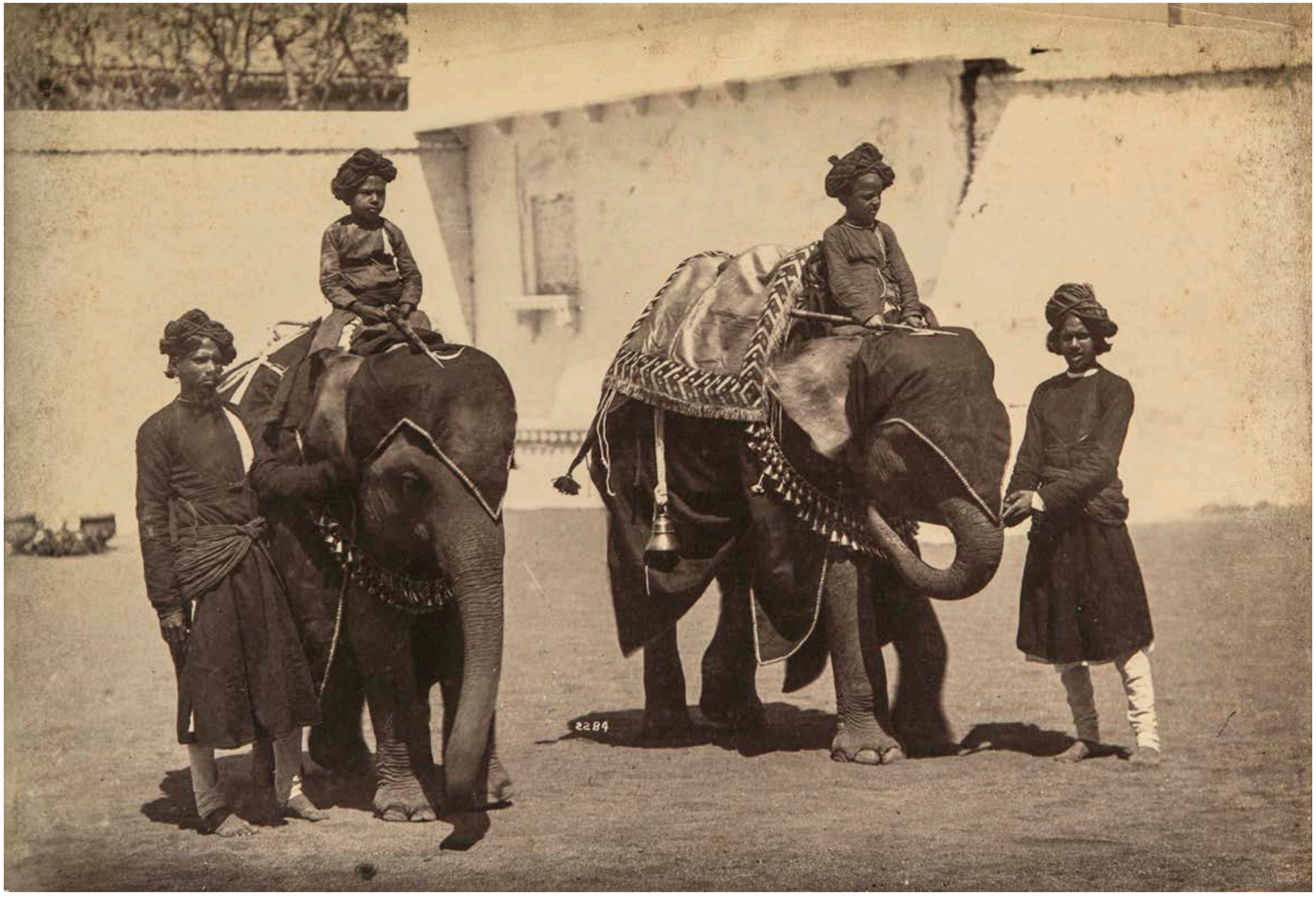
Between 1875 and 1885, Deen Dayal travelled extensively in the search for images, occasionally in the company of British agents, who were also patrons. In his memoir A Short Account of my Photographic Career, Deen Dayal states: “I accompanied Sir Henry Daly on his tour of Bundelkhand photographing views and native chiefs. After his retirement, I was patronized by the successive Agent Governor Generals of the Central India Agency”. During this time Deen Dayal began producing albums with images for the Maharajas and the British gentry. He is known to have carefully composed the albums with the intention of conveying a truthful image of India.

Deen Dayal was the first photographer to capture magical visions of palace interiors and the lifestyle of Indian Royals. A turning point in his career was his appointment in 1884 as Court Photographer to Mahbub Ali Khan, the Nizam of Hyderabad, a ruler and visionary, known for the planning of his city and the translation of scientific texts into local languages. This was the first time that a Court Photographer replaced a Court Painter; Dee Dayal was given the title of ‘Raja’ by the Nizam, in a gesture of appreciation and respect in 1894.

During his lifetime, Deen Dayal was recognised as the greatest photographer of India. The author of an article published in The Gentleman in the year 1897 thought “interesting that an India practitioner maintained his place in the first rank of the profession”. At the time, Deen Dayal’s work was only partially understood for its technical and aesthetic qualities. Only today we are in a better position to comprehend the difficulty of creating images in a world where divergent forces and cultures were at work.

Provenance:
Private collection, UK, 1960s to 2015.

References:
Dewan, Depali & Deborah Hutton. *Raja Deen Dayal: Artist-Photographer in 19th century India*. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing & The Alkazi Collection of Photography, 2013.
Hutton, Deborah. ‘The Portrait Photography of Raja Deen Dayal’, in Bubbar, Prahlad, ed. *Indian Paintings & Photographs: 1590-1900*. London: Prahlad Bubbar, 2012.
Dehejia, Vidya, ed. *India Through the Lens: Photography 1840-1911*. Washington D.C.: Freer Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2000.



Young elephants, Rutlam (Negative number 2284)
Rutlam, India, c. 1886-7
Albumen print, 13.2 x 19.5 cm

Picnic party, Mashobra, Simla (Negative number 2935)
Simla, India, c. 1887
13.6 x 19.7 cm

Maharaja of Scindia, nobles, and high officials, Gwalior (Negative number 2895)
Gwalior, India, c. 1887
Albumen print, 17.5 x 26.8 cm

Jhansi fort and Elephant Battery (Negative number 2802)
Jhansi, India, c. 1886-7
Albumen print, 19.6 x 27 cm

The Maharaja of Scindia and Sardars (Negative number 2879)
Gwalior, India, c. 1887
Albumen print, 18.2 x 27 cm

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