Narasimha Avatara, the Man-Lion incarnation of Vishnu disembowelling the evil king Hiranyakasipu, Basohli, c.1600

gouache with some gold on stout paper, red border with black rule, taked inscriptions in upper border, reverse with nine lines of descriptive text, in mauve
184 by 270mm., with border 211 by 295mm.

Provenance and published:

This is from an otherwise unknown series produced at Basohli at the end of the seventeenth century. The theme of the series must have been the incarnations of Vishnu, while the style of the painting is close to that of the 'third' Ramayana series, painted by Devidas of Nurpur in 1645 (Archer, 1978, vol.I, pp.45-6, vol.II, pp.29-30, Goswamy and Fischer, 1990, pp.66-75). Narasimha was a popular image in the Hills, appearing far more frequently than in Rajasthani painting. As here, the intensity of the early Pahari idiom is especially suited to this subject. Narasimha is nearly always shown in Pahari painting with the raised mane of a male lion and the stripes of a tiger, so that he often appears as if on fire. In this miniature, the artist's skilful repetition of the orange used for Narasimha's coat in the architectural orifice, the king's unwound turban, and his wife's skirt all serve to reinforce this fiery allusion.

Narasimha was employed both as an invocation at the beginning of literary texts in the Hills (see Aijazuddin, 1977, Basohli 4(ii)), and in Vishnu avatara sets. In these avatara series, the narrative of the half-man, half-lion was apparently often told through sequential illustrations, with this scene as the climactic episode. A complete sequence from Mankot shows the gods paying homage to Narasimha, the pious child Prahlada punished by his father for his devotion, the emergence of Narasimha from inside a pillar of the palace durbar room, and finally Narasimha's disembowelling of the blasphemous king (see Leach, 1982, nos.385 and 386 for two of the four illustrations). The horizontal arrangements of this particular scene show Prahlada holding his slate standing on one side and Hiranyakasipu's wife on the other, both offering obeisance to the terrible figure before them. (For other versions of the composition used here, see Barrett and Grey, 1963, colour frontispiece and Archer, 1973, Vol.II, Nurpur, no.54).

The late seventeenth century Basohli school is recognised as being one of the most innovative and visually arresting of Rajput styles. The present picture, being apparently the only extant example of an obviously important and powerful series, is a significant and rare work.

£25,000-£35,000

Illustration from the 'Shangri' Ramayana: Rama and Lakshmana in a wood with Viswamitra during their childhood, Kulu or Bahu (Jammu), c.1600

gouache on stout paper, red border with thin black rule, reverse with chapter title and series number at one corner obscured by paper reinforcement, in mauve
196 by 295mm., with border 223 by 332mm.

Provenance and published:

The Shangri Ramayana is universally recognised as one of the most important narrative series of Pahari painting. It derives its name from Shangri, the place of residence of the branch of the Kulu royal family who formerly owned the finest portion of the series. When discovered in 1958 by M.S. Randhawa there were as many as 270 paintings. W.G. Archer found Kulu the most likely origin for the series. More recently, B.N. Goswamy has reattributed the Ramayana to Bahu (Jammu), since there are three inscribed portraits of Bahu nobles in this style. (Goswamy and Fischer, 1992, no.28, fig.28 and Archer, 1973, p.246, no.11). However, these depictions may have been done as records of visiting dignitaries, since portraits of Mankot rulers in the same idiom are also extant. A portrait of a Kulu ruler and one of his subordinate chieftains in 'Kulu' style that is unlikely to have been done outside the state may affect Goswamy's Bahu attribution (Skelton, 1961, pl.61). Finally there is an inscribed portrait of the Bahu ruler Anand Dev in quite a different, non-Kulu style which seems to be that of his home state. (Archer, 1973, p.132, no.1; see also Titev, no.112 illustrated for a mahant of Jammu in 1719). Thus a final attribution of the Shangri Ramayana's place of origin requires further research.

This episode is from Book I (the Bal Kanda) of the Ramayana which tells of the childhood of Rama and his brother Lakshmana, trained as fighters in their youth by the formidable sage Viswamitra. Viswamitra takes the children to the forest, where, because of Rama's supernatural strength, the boys are able to kill demons terrorising the forest ascetics. In this scene, the sage, wearing a saffron dhoti, carries a pot of holy Ganges water and has a small animal skin draped over his shoulder. He also bears prominent asceticic markings on his forehead and body. Unarmed himself because he is a brahmin, he is nevertheless training the young Rama and Lakshmana in combat. The present illustration is a striking example of the series. The hot, Carly style of the background conveys a vibrancy, while psychological tension is present in the danger posed by the wild animals - a wolf and tiger - half hidden behind trees at the left and right of the scene.

Archer divided the Shangri into several stylistic sections; this artist is one of a number working in what he termed 'Style II'. The 'Style II' miniaturists painted in closely related idioms and were probably members of the same studio assigned to illustrate one or more large sections of the Ramayana which they then divided among themselves. The particular miniaturist who painted this page was also
Two princes on horseback hunting boar in a landscape, Bundi, c.1600-80

gouache on stout paper, red border with black rule, in mount
262 by 250mm., with border 231 by 279mm.

Provenance:

One of the figures in this hunting scene may represent Maharao Bhao Singh of Bundi (1699-82), who appears in a painting of a court scene attributed to Bundi c.1685 in the National Museum of India, New Delhi (Beach, 1974, fig.28, pl.XXIX) and in a portrait sold in these rooms, 20th October 1981, lot 60. A related scene was sold in these rooms, 8th October, 1979, lot 85; and a related, though slightly later hunting scene, formerly in the collection of Ralph and Irene Beacon, was sold in our New York rooms, 25th March 1987, lot 90.

£8,000-12,000

12

Vishnu and Lakshmi seated on a golden throne surrounded by female attendants who minister to them, by Rukunnudin, Bikaner, dated 1678

gouache with gold on stout paper, border of sprinkled buff paper, inscribed on reverse in naghari bave rukn di in 1735 (1678 A.D.), painted surface in good condition, border slightly defective, in mount
193 by 259mm., with border 265 by 328mm.

Provenance and published:

This is a particularly polished example of the work of Rukunnudin, the most accomplished artist of the Bikaner school in the late seventeenth century. The work is based on an important painting by Ali Reza, one of several miniaturists known from the Bikaner archives to have come to the state from Delhi (Khondalalata, Chandra, and Chandra, 1969, pl.E, no.85). It seems probable that Rukunnudin, who produced this similarly composed but more delicate painting of Vishnu and Lakshmi approximately thirty years later, may have learned much from the older artist.

Rukunnudin must have been one of Bikaner’s most prolific miniaturists, since his career in the atelier of the state lasted almost fifty years. A vignette leaf dated equivalent to 1646 seems to be his earliest documented work (Sotheby’s, 13th July, 1973, lot 18), and his latest dated work appears to be about 1697 (Krishna, p.275). Although numerous paintings have been attributed to Rukunnudin, comparatively few works are inscribed and dated as in this example. The Vishnu and Lakshmi composition gives an important indication of Rukunnudin’s highly precise, finely detailed style in the middle of his career. The archival records of Bikaner list numerous paintings done by Rukunnudin which cannot be identified today. This work is one of those which can be clearly shown to correspond with archival records (Krishna, p.277). From these records and from other painting inscriptions, it appears that Rukunnudin’s sons followed him in this career, carrying on some of his traditions.

For related works see Sotheby’s, 24th April 1979, lot 80.

Further literature:
Krishna, pp.254-259
Krishna, 1985, pp.25-27
Welch, 1975, no.32.

£15,000-20,000
13

Ladies worshipping at a shrine, attributable to Chokha, Dewgarh, c.1800

gouache with some gold on stout paper, red border with inner black, yellow and blue rules, reverse with inscription, one small hole in red border at left, otherwise in good condition, in mount

miniature 206 by 298mm., including border 257 by 342mm.

Provenance:

The Desgarh artist Chokha worked in several styles, but virtually all his paintings are light and playful compared with those of his colleagues, such as Bagla, who specialised in very heavy forms. Here, Chokha's women gathered around a rural shrine are unusually delicate and petite. As one woman anoints the lingam, her companions bring forward offerings to the shrine and to its resident yogi standing with his dog; the two other yogis seated nearby with their quiescent tiger typify Chokha's gentle humour. The scene in the background may possibly depict Bhitin Singh of Mewar in a boat.

Miniatures closely related to this one in style or subject matter that are also attributable to Chokha include a scene of a lady approaching a Nandi shrine picturing the birth of Kartikeya (Brown and Wollner, no.17; Leach, 1982, no.135; Kumrach, 1986, no.58). Chokha loved both female figures and horses, repeating such themes again and again (Welch, 1985, no.202; Leach, 1979, fig.16; Leach, 1982, no.166; Topsfield & Beach, no.41; ANDHARE, 1967, no.48). He was also expert at adapting religious or literary scenes to his very personalised idiom (Welch, 1976, no.59; Khandalavala and Chandra, 1965, pl.82; Brown and Wollner, no.50).

£6,000-8,000

14

Maharao Ram Singh II of Kota hunting buffalo, Kota, c.1850

gouache with some gold on paper, red border with inner blue and yellow rules, numbered in lower border, some small patches of flaking and disdaining on lower half of picture, border slightly defective at edges, in mount

miniature 420 by 465mm., with border 475 by 535mm.

Provenance and published:

The Kotah maharajas were fanatical huntsmen and frequently shifted to the forest for months on end with virtually the entire court, including painters, in attendance. Pictures of Ram Singh II hunting from a shooting platform are numerous (Barrett and Gray, p.158, also Beach, 1974, no.165 and Archer, 1959, no.45; Sotheby's 11th July, 1973, lots 115 and 172; Archer and Binney, no.22). In this miniature, the maharaja hunts on horseback in open country, but with great formality and with much of the court surrounding him. A drawing showing Ram Singh in armour spearing a buffalo compares quite closely with this painting, though the image is reversed (Archer, 1959, no.49).

Another painting of Ram Singh II hunting is illustrated in Beach, 1974, and others have been sold in these rooms 26th April 1994, lot 15, and in our New York rooms, 15th June 1979, lot 692.

£5,000-7,000
Maharao Ram Singh II of Kota in procession with a delegation of British officers, Kota, c.1850

 gouache with gold on stout paper. British officers identified with nagent inscriptions in gold, red border with inner yellow rule, damaustina at upper left corner; some folding in lower portion of picture; framed miniature 472 by 667mm.


Regardless of widespread deterioration in artistic standards at many Rajput courts in the nineteenth century, Maharao Ram Singh II of Kota (1827-1865) persisted with the patronage of artists who produced large-scale paintings of good quality and distinctive style. Many of these paintings verge on the eccentric, he himself having a reputation for eccentricity, and it seems certain that he took a personal interest in what his artists depicted.

This particular picture is an interesting example since it shows the interaction of the ruler of Kota with British political and military authority. Turning to face the Maharao is the Political Agent for Kota, Capt. W.H. Leydon. Immediately behind Ram Singh is the ‘Bara Sahib’, i.e. the Agent to the Governor General of Rajputana, who is Major General (later Sir) George St. P. Lawrence. Behind him is the Political Agent for Jaipur, Major J.C. Brooke. Behind him is the officer called Skinner (or Alexander - perhaps Sikandar Sahib), and finally another officer, apparently an ADC to Lawrence. Along the top runs an inscription naming the Maharao himself with the usual honorific titles.

£12,000-18,000

Portrait of Ran Bihen Singh of Bundi, Kishangarh, c.1880-1890

gouache with gold on paper, inner border band of floral designs on orange ground, green outer border, border ruled in black, white and gold, reverse with inscription of identification in nagent, in mount 183 by 146mm., with border 342 by 261mm.


The subject of this portrait, Bihen Singh, succeeded as ruler of Bundi in 1723 while still an infant following the sudden death of his father. His mother was a Kishangarh princess, which explains why his portrait should have been painted in typical Kishangarh style with a tensely arched back and exasperated upturned eye (Tod, Vol II, pp. 403-4). When grown, Bihen Singh devoted himself wholly to hunting, allowing the quality of art in his own state to deteriorate (Archer, 1959, p.7). Thus this spirited Kishangarh depiction reveals more of Bihen Singh’s vitality than a representation of his native Bundi (Victoria and Albert Museum, L.S.253-1955; L.S.50-1969).

£3,000-5,000

The Burmese ambassador and four attendants, from the ‘Frasier’ album, Delhi, c.1812-20

watercolour with gold on paper, figures identified with their Burmese titles in Persian, laid down on stout buff paper with borders ruled in black and gold, in mount 383 by 270mm., with border 400 by 289mm.

Provenance: Commissed in India by William and James Fraser, c.1820.

By direct descent to Malcolm R. Fraser Esq., his sale in these rooms, 7th July 1989, lot 32.


Published: Sotheby’s, 7th July 1980, lot 32.

Archer and Falk, 1989, no.82, p.104.

William Fraser (1784-1835) and his brother James Raliffe Fraser (1784-1806) visited India in very different capacities. William travelled there at the age of sixteen to take up a career in the political service of the East India Company. James followed years later in 1814 when he hoped to raise his family’s financial fortunes by joining a merchant house in Calcutta, by which time William had been posted to Delhi. When James finally met up with his brother, at the end of the Nepal War in 1815, he found a man steeped in the ways of India and the Indians. In addition to his duties as a political officer William had the task of recruiting and maintaining an irregular force suitable for scouting and skirmishing in the difficult hilly terrain in which the Gurkha enemy was so at home.

It was during their time in the Hills that James took up drawing with great enthusiasm. But his amateur difficulties with drawing figures led him to ask an Indian artist, hired by William, probably from Delhi, to provide pictures for him of some of William’s servants and Gurkhas. It was this initial step which led James to the idea of commissioning a series of such drawings to be taken back to Europe and used in support of his projected publications. Some of the Indian characters depicted were from villages in the region of Delhi, where William’s peace-time duties were centred. Many were actual Gurkha, defectors to the British and subsequently the foundation of future Gurkha regiments, while others included merchant travellers, diplomats and other interesting peripatetic characters.

The present watercolour shows the Burmese ambassador with his attendants, who are identified in small inscriptions above their heads. King Bodawpaya of Burma (reigned 1792-1819) sent several delegations to Northern India in the hope of forging alliances with Indian princes against the British. The Burmese had no strong idea of the real political situation, but were suspicious of the monopoly of the East India Company. Between 1807-23 six embassies travelled into India under the guise of pilgrim bands, but the British became aware of their ulterior motives and prevented any serious diplomatic contact.


£6,000-8,000
AN IMPORTANT ILLUSTRATED MUGHAL MANUSCRIPT

Kitab-i-Sa’at (Book of Hours - an astrological treatise), illustrated Persian manuscript on paper with twelve miniatures, copied by the scribe Muhammad Yusuf for Mirza Aziz Koka, a foster brother of the emperor Akbar, at Hajipur, dated A.H.991/A.D.1583

51 leaves, 17 or 19 lines per page of neat nasta’liq script in black ink on cream paper, numerous words and phrases picked out in red, green or purple, headings written in green, red, orange or purple within gold-ruled panels, numerous tables neatly laid out in black, red and gold ink, four circular zodiacal diagrams, twelve miniatures depicting the planets in the zodiac stations, one illuminated opening panel, margins ruled in colours and gold, ff.1-9 later additions, vermilion throughout, seventeenth century brown lacquer binding with central medallion and border bands of gilt floral motifs, the field speckled with gilt flakes, cracked, worn at edges, laid down onto red morocco, doubtfu of red lacquer

text wins 195 by 117mm., page 273 by 199mm.

Provenance:
Made for Mirza Aziz Koka, a foster brother of the Mughal emperor Akbar, at Hajipur, near Patna, on 21st of Shawwal A.H.991/7th November A.D.1583.
Collection of Hagop Kevorkian, his sale in these rooms, 12th April 1976, lot 192.

Published:
Colnaghi, 1978, no.5.
Falk, 1985, no.123, p.149.
Brand and Lowry, 1985, no.56, p.85.

This is a highly important illustrated Mughal manuscript. It is the earliest extant dated sub-imperial Mughal manuscript and is of significance for its subject matter, its miniatures and its patron.

There was a high regard for horoscopes and astrology during the Mughal period and evidence in several other manuscripts, including the Akbarnama, indicates that it was taken seriously at the court of Akbar. The present manuscript is divided into three sections. The first section (ff.1-9) is mostly in tabular form and was added at a later date. The middle section (ff.10-55), which forms the majority of the manuscript and contains the majority of astronomical tables, the four zodiacal diagrams and the twelve miniatures, concludes with a colophon containing an asyet undeciphered code, and the final section (ff.56-51) concludes with the more useful colophon giving the name of the scribe, date, patron and place of origin.
The twelve miniatures, representing the sun, moon and other planets in the twelve zodiac stations, are important examples of high quality sub-imperial painting. The pictures are finely and delicately painted, the landscape backgrounds being lightly coloured with greens and browns, while the human and animal figures are painted with stronger pigments. Falk discerned the hands of two different artists (Colnaghi, 1978, p.221), one showing closer attention to detail in the landscapes and more movement in the figures. The exact compositions of several of the miniatures offer interesting juxtapositions of Hindu iconography within a Persian-Mughal setting. The miniatures on ff.33a and 34a show Saturn in Capricorn and Aquarius, Saturn being represented by a dark-skinned, eight-armed yogi carrying Hindu emblems. This fusion of the Persian and Rajput influences was typical of Akbar’s reign, during which he commissioned the translation into Persian and illustration of Hindu texts such as the Mahabharata (as the Rasamala), the Ramayana, the Harivamasa and the Jag Ballaish.

The subjects of the miniatures are as follows:
- f.29b Mars in Aries: a warrior holding a severed human head, and a ram appearing from behind a rocky outcrop. Artist A. 6 3/4 by 11.5cm.
- f.30a Venus in Taurus: a girl playing a nay alongside a white bull in a rocky landscape. Artist A. 6 by 11.5cm.
- f.30b Mercury in Gemini: a scribe seated near two naked twins who stand arm in arm in a landscape. Artist B. 7 by 11.5cm.
- f.31a Moon in Cancer: a moonlit landscape with a crab emerging from a pool, and a distant town. Artist A. 8 1/2 by 11.5cm.
- f.31b Sun in Leo: the sun shining on a lion standing in a landscape. Artist A. 7 3/4 by 11.5cm.
- f.32a Mercury in Virgo: a scribe alongside a maiden holding a scythe and a sheaf of wheat in a landscape setting. Artist B. 5 7/8 by 11.5cm.
- f.32a Jupiter in Sagittarius: an elderly man with a stick stands alongside a centaur drawing a bow. Artist A. 5 by 11.5cm.
- f.32b Jupiter in Capricorn: an eight-armed yogi stands beside a seated ram. Artist A and/or B. 9 by 11.5cm.
- f.33a Saturn in Capricorn: an eight-armed yogi alongside a man pouring water from a pitcher. Artist B. 8 by 11.5cm.
- f.33b Saturn in Aquarius: a bearded man kneels beside two fish in a sheltered setting. Artist B. 8 1/2 by 11.5cm.

The patron, Mirza Aziz Koka, was born about the year 1542, the younger son of Shams ud-Din Muhammad Khan Atta. He was the same age as Akbar and, being a favourite playmate, was taken as a foster brother by the future emperor. This association allowed Aziz Koka to lead a privileged life, but his successful military exploits made him a leader in the army and one of the most trusted of Akbar. From about 1570 onwards he had notable success in putting down rebellions and in leading campaigns in Patna, Bengal and the Deccan. From 1580-88 he was resident at Hajiari, near Panna, where this manuscript was made for him. He died a natural death in 1624.

Further discussion of the manuscript and the patron can be found in the works in which it is published, especially Colnaghi, 1978, pp.19-24.

$90,000-80,000