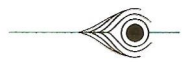


Splendours of the subcontinent



A PRINCE'S TOUR OF INDIA 1875-6



KAJAL MEGHANI



SHIELD



Rajasthan, c.1870–5, enamelled mounts Jaipur, c.1875
RCIN 11348
Rhinoceros hide, gold, velvet, enamel, diamonds, rubies
and emeralds
50.0 × 9.8 cm
EXHIBITED: London 2001

Mohammad Ibrahim Ali Kahn, the Nawab of Tonk, presented this shield to the Prince of Wales in Agra, where the Prince held a reception in January 1876. The floral designs are painted in gold, black and red, and certain sections of the pattern are applied with gesso to raise the motif from the surface of the shield. The entire surface is finished with a clear lacquer varnish.

The ‘lacquered’ effect on this rhinoceros hide shield shows Japanese influences. In the seventeenth century,

Indian objects were taken by Portuguese merchants to Japan, where they would be decorated. They were subsequently brought back to India for presentation as diplomatic gifts. This decorative design and method appears to have been reinterpreted by Indian craftsmen.¹

The Prince received several shields with very similar designs from Rajasthan, suggesting that they were produced by one workshop.

1 Weston 2014, pp. 45–56.



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Western India, probably late eighteenth century or early nineteenth century

RCIN II458

Rhinoceros hide, lacquer, gold, emeralds, rubies, diamonds, velvet, gold and silver thread and gold sequin

Shield 39.5 × 9.0 cm; sash 105.0 × 7.0 cm

This ornate shield was presented by Vibhaji II Ranmalji, Jam Sahib of Nawanagar (1827–95), in Bombay in November 1875. The translucent hide is decorated with four large ornate bosses, and painted on the central reserve is the face of Chandra, the Hindu lunar deity to represent the lunar dynasty, from which the Nawanagar rulers descended.

The purple velvet sash is embellished with *zardozi* (gold embroidery) and is attached to a padded, embroidered cushion on the back of the shield, also made of

purple velvet with silver and gold thread decoration. This cushion would have served to protect the hand of the wearer. The dimensions of the shield are significantly smaller than others presented to the Prince, and, with its conspicuous bosses, it is likely that this shield was designed for use in processions and ceremonies rather than in battle.





SHIELD



India, possibly Punjab, nineteenth century

RCIN 11411

Rhinoceros hide, gold, diamonds, emeralds,
pearls, enamel and silk

55.7 × 11.5 cm

The most striking feature of this shield, presented to the Prince by Mahendra Singh, Maharaja of Patiala, is the enamelled and diamond inlaid bosses in the form of curled-up cheetahs. It appears that the front of the shield had originally been lacquered, but by the time of its presentation to the Prince of Wales this finish had worn away, leaving a speckled surface. This would

suggest that the shield predated the tour and came from the Maharaja's armoury.

Diamond-shaped openwork ornaments, similar to the one in the centre of the shield, were usually attached to ornate sashes worn as belts.¹ This ornament was described in the *Illustrated London News* as a brooch, suggesting that it was a later addition to the shield.²

¹ See London 2015, p. 116.

² *ILN*, 12 August 1876.

