

COURT PAINTING IN RAJASTHAN



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EARLY PAINTING AT BUNDI

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The principalities of Bundi and Kota constituted Harauti or Haravati, "the country of the Haras", the most important branch of the Chauhan dynasty. Painting at Bundi already existed in the fifteenth century. Its style, however, was so close to the Western Indian style favoured by the Jain community that it can hardly be called "Bundi" as such.

After Rao Surjan Hara of Bundi (r. 1551–85) had accepted Mughal suzerainty in March 1569, following Akbar's siege of Ranthambhor, a strong Mughal influence is felt in the paintings done for Bundi's rulers. Rao Surjan surrendered the great fortress of Ranthambhor to the Mughals on very favourable terms. This event is illustrated in a frequently published, near contemporary painting of the *Akbar Nama* in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (acc. no. IS 2-1896.75/117). The official policy of the Bundi rulers thereafter, was to cooperate with the ruling power. Kumar Duda, Rao Surjan's eldest son, it must be noted, never accepted his father's cooperation with Akbar. He must have considered his father's policy as being against the Rajput cause and hence he still supported Bundi's former ally, the Maharana of Mewar who fought the invaders. Duda, referred to as Daud or Doda by Islamic historians, ventured a guerilla war against the Mughals, until he was defeated on imperial command by his father's and his younger brother's armies. He died in August 1585.

Rao Surjan served the Mughals in Allahabad, Bihar, Peshawar, and Bengal with a

mansab of 2,000, before he died at Banaras.

The name of the Hara Mahal at Fatehpur Sikri, for some time the Mughal capital under Akbar, certainly alludes to the Hara presence at the imperial Mughal court.

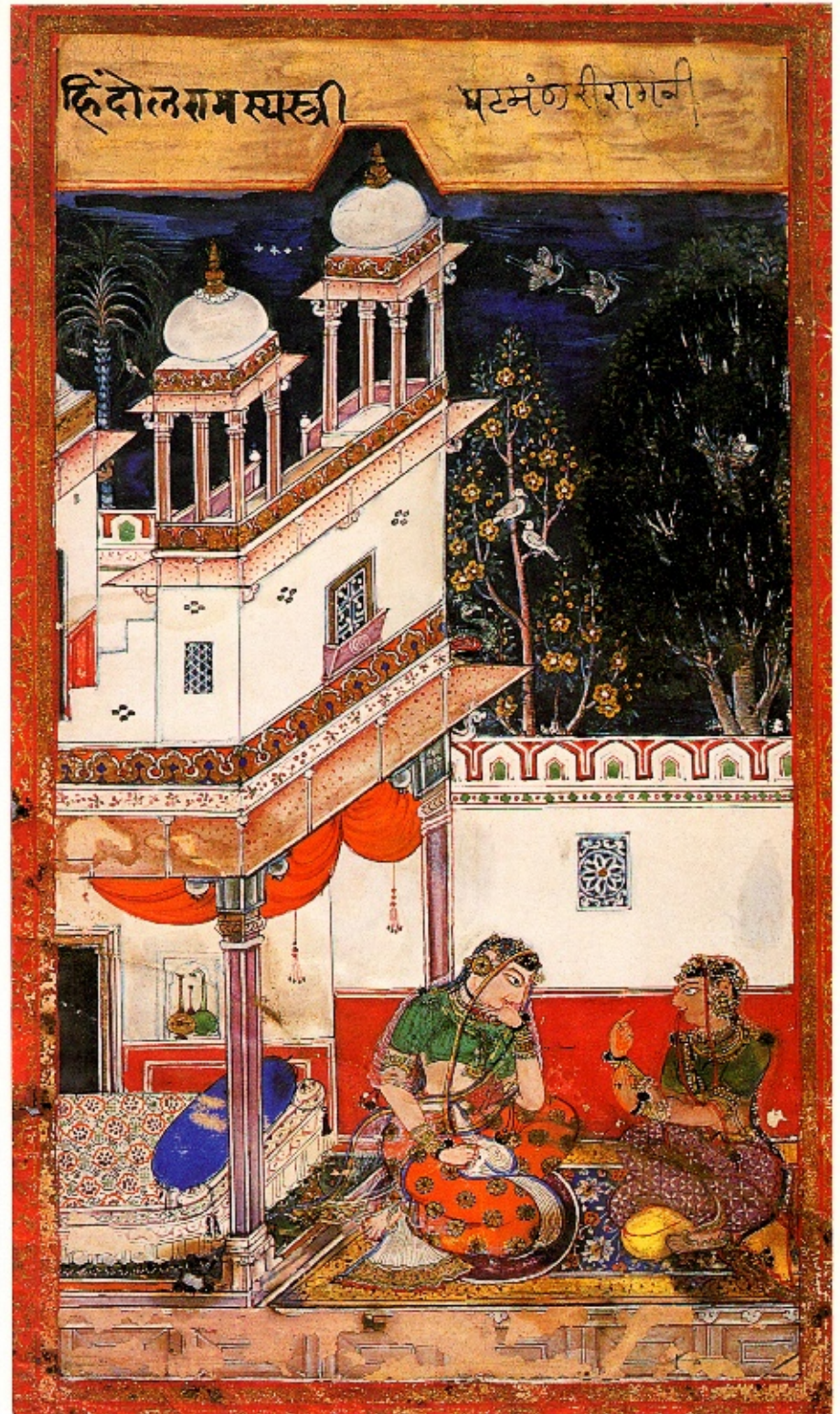
Rao Bhoj Hara and the Dated Beginnings of Bundi Painting

When Bhoj, Surjan's second son, succeeded his father in 1585, he was thirty-four years of age. Five years later he still must have been posted at Chunar near Banaras, where his father had lived at the end of his life. At Chunar, disciples of the founders of the Mughal atelier of painting (Mu Sayyid 'Ali and 'Abd al-Samad) completed a *ragamala* of thirty-six paintings, which afterwards became the standard topic of painting for almost all subsequent Hara chieftains. This *ragamala* "was ready on the day of Wednesday at the time of the mid-day prayer in the place Chunar...on the date of the 29th of the month Rabi' al-Akhir, year 999 [February 25, 1591]...". This set of paintings with its Nagari inscriptions in the text panel constitutes the oldest dated *ragamala* and the earliest dated proof of Mughalized painting done for a Rajput ruler. That these paintings were commissioned by a Hara is shown by the very numerous later copies of this set of paintings, which in course of time became more and more Rajput and less and less Mughal in style. Figure 1, illustrating the *Putamanjari ragini* from this dated set, shows some typical features of this early Bundi style. The treatment

of nature is very realistic, and everywhere outside the walled premises of the palace are various kinds of birds; in other paintings from this set there are also scorpions, squirrels, peacocks, frogs, fishes, bees, etc. Large areas of basic colours are left undisturbed by patterns. In the present example, the white walls are devoid of linear divisions and the red surface in the lower part of the wall shows no relief or painting. The almost square heads of the women are all shown in strict profile with the eye painted in frontally. The earrings are large and the *pallu* of the sari is separated from the head as if on an air cushion; it does not rest directly on the hair or shoulders as it should.

Figure 2, a portrait of "Hara Rao Bhoj", according to the Nagari inscription on the back, belongs to a set of Bikaner portraits of the rulers of Bundi. It is a later version of an often published painting from 1606 by Nur Muhammad, now in the Sidhu collection, California, which reportedly represents Rao Bhoj Rathor, uncle of Raja Rai Singh of Bikaner. Earlier writers have already remarked on the Deccani fashion of the Rao's costume, and it is probably due to the Nagari inscription, which identifies the subject with a member of the Rathor clan, that the ruler has been known as Bhoj Rathor ever since its first publication in 1949. Figure 2 and its earlier version, however, originally stem from the same collection, as is attested by two identical stamp-impressions on the back of the paintings, as well as the signature of "Khet Singh". In 1606 Rao Bhoj Hara was fifty-five years old, an age which would suit the earlier, dated version very well. Besides, in the early seventeenth century Rao Bhoj actually served in the Deccan: he accompanied Rai Singh of Bikaner to Ahmednagar in 1601 and met Rai Singh again in 1605. Moreover, he was most probably an uncle of Rai Singh Rathor since he was married to at least two Rathor princesses, one of whom was among the eight

1
 Patanamajari ragini. From the
 Chunar ragamala. Chunar,
 Sub-Imperial Mughal style for
 a Bundi ruler, dated 1591.
 Opaque watercolour and
 gold on paper; 20.5 x 11.0
 cm (within inner rules).
 Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras.
 Photograph: J.K. Bantze.



Rao Bhoj Hara. From a set of portraits of the rulers of Bundi. Bikaner, circa 1680. Opaque watercolour, silver and gold on paper; 29.8 x 19.9 cm (folio). Private collection. Photograph; J.K. Bautze.

satis, or women who immolated themselves on the Rao's funeral pyre. Another Rathor princess of Rao Bhoj is mentioned as "Rathor Akhaikumari" by the Bundi chronicler Surya Malla Mishran.

Rao Bhoj Rathor, who is recorded nowhere else, is hence in all probability Rao Bhoj Hara, the said ruler of Bundi. This is even more plausible when we remember that the Bikaner royal collection once included a near-contemporary portrait of Rao Surjan Hara as well.



A slightly later Dutch description of the city of Agra, for many years the Mughal capital, mentions a palace of Rao Bhoj on the river Yamuna ("...van Radia Bobos, den vader van den tegenwoordigen Ray Routan..."). The enumeration of Rao Bhoj among the other Mughal and Rajput nobles underlines Jahangir's statement that he (Bhoj) was "included among the great Amirs".

Rao Ratan, the Most Powerful Hara of the Seventeenth Century

Ratan, eldest son of Rao Bhoj, was born on the tenth of the bright half of Agahan (November–December) in the Vikrama year 1625 (1568 CE). He became the ruler of Bundi in VS 1664 (1608 CE) after his father's death. In early 1608, Emperor Jahangir noted: "At this time Ratan, son of Bhoj Hara, who is one of the chief Rajput nobles, came to the camp and waited on me, bringing three elephants as an offering. One of these was much approved, and they valued it in the office at 15,000 rupees. It was entered among my private elephants, and I gave it the name of Ratangaj... I dignified Ratan with the title of Sarbuland Ray." A contemporary Mughal portrait of that elephant has survived in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. This reference to elephants in the possession of the Hara rulers attests to their predilection for this royal animal, which is otherwise shown in numerous paintings on walls as well as on paper.

Rao Ratan Sarbuland Ray was sent on campaigns by Jahangir. In 1614 he fought against Rana Amar Singh of Mewar, Bundi's former suzerain. A year later Ratan's brother Hriday Narayan was sent to Kangra in the north, where he fought until 1620. In 1617 Rao Ratan moved to Burhanpur in the Deccan. He was recalled from there to the court in 1623 and received "a special jewelled dagger". From Agra he was to go to the Deccan again, in order to pursue the army of the rebellious prince

Khurram, the future Shah Jahan. In course of time, he became "chargé d'affaires" of the Deccan and was rightly called the "incarnation of loyalty and chivalry". Often he was strongly pressed, and it is known that he fought from the back of an elephant called "Light of the World". He so gallantly defended Burhanpur from the attacks of the united armies of Malik Ambar and prince Khurram, that he received the further title of Ram Raj, "than which there is no higher title in the Dakhin". He was also awarded the *mansab* of 5,000 *zat* (infantry) and 5,000 *sawar* (cavalry), a rank which he held from 1624 to his death on the 10th of the bright half of Margashirsha in the Vikrama year "elephant [8], snake [8], taste [6], earth [1]", i.e. 1688 (1631 CE) following the Bundi historian.

Rao Ratan had taken over the palace of his father in Agra, where he would have seen the murals in the Bagh-i Nur Afshan, commonly called Ram Bagh. This probably led him to have the Badal Mahal in Bundi, also built by his father, decorated with frescos which are stylistically still very Mughal but betray more of a Rajput influence than any other paintings done hitherto for a Hara ruler. His building activity is best shown by the Ratna Daulat, today called Daulat Ratan, within the ancient palace complex of Bundi. This part of the palace can be seen in the right-hand part of figure 3. The topmost part is occupied by the Badal Mahal.

In the Deccan, where the Rao spent the greater part of the rest of his life, he founded Ratanpur near Burhanpur. In Burhanpur, Rao Ratan must have met a European merchant, Mr Willoughby, from whom he purchased "some tapestry", presumably from Arras. Of the 18,450 rupees due, according to the traveller Peter Mundy, "Raw Rutton" only paid 1,000 by November 1630. Echoes of these tapestries can still be seen in the "farangi" frescos of the Badal Mahal in Bundi, to which we will refer below.



No other Hara of the seventeenth century was more often portrayed than Rao Ratan, and it is not surprising when we see him inspecting a painting of an elephant amidst his nobles, as part of a large mural in his own palace in Bundi. No more surprising are certain Deccani influences, such as the long sword or the Deccani shawl worn as a sign of honour and rank. Rao Ratan appears to be of lighter complexion in the wall-paintings of the palace of his ancestors than in a number of miniature paintings, especially those executed by Mughal (not Rajput) artists. Figure 4, an inscribed portrait in a Sub-Imperial Mughal style, shows him at an advanced age with a slightly darker complexion, as he appears in a few other portraits as well.

In the absence of Rao Ratan, Bundi was ruled by his eldest son, Gopinath, who was born on the second day of the bright half of

3
Inner courtyard within the old palace of Bundi with the Daulat Ratan to the right, the Badal Mahal, centre top, and the courtyard facing the Chhattar Mahal, left. Photograph: J.K. Bautze.

4
 Rao Ratan Hara. Formerly in the "Joidan" (royal collection) of Mewar; Sub-Imperial Mughal style in Rajasthan, circa 1630. Opaque watercolour and gold on paper: 19.7 x 12.3 cm (folio); 13.6 x 8.0 cm (image). Private collection. Photograph: J.K. Bautze.



Bhadrapad in VS 1646 (1589 CE). Besides Gopinath, Rao Ratan had three more sons (Madho, Hari, and Jagannath), and two daughters (Badankumari and Harikumari). Gopinath married eleven princesses and had thirteen sons. He died, in circumstances which are not entirely clear, during his father's lifetime. It was hence Gopinath's eldest son Shatru Sal who succeeded to the throne of Bundi with the *mansab* of 2,000/3,000, the title Rao, and the fief of Bundi. Shatru Sal followed the example of his predecessor Rao Ratan and presented forty elephants to Shah Jahan.

The Badal Mahal Frescos

Despite the fact that Rao Ratan figures prominently in the wall-paintings of the Badal Mahal, they were – due to his prolonged absences – in all probability not commissioned by him, but either by his son Gopinath or one of his queens. The murals within the Badal Mahal can be divided into five different, more or less horizontal levels; the northern





5
(facing page)
The northern wall within
the Badal Mahal, in the old
palace of Bundi. Photograph:
J.K. Bautze.

6
The painted ceiling of the
Badal Mahal, Bundi, circa
1620–30. Photograph:
J.K. Bautze.

7

The central cupola of the painted ceiling of the Badal Mahal, Bundi: Krishna dancing the Rasamandala with the full autumn moon in the centre, and dancing peacocks and women holding burning candles in the adjoining squinches, circa 1620–30. Photograph: J.K. Bantze.



wall can be seen in figure 5. Level A comprises the wall above the floor and below eye-level. As in figure 1, it is painted red, and measures about 1.12 m in height. Level B is marked by mostly vertical recesses (thirteen in all) and other vertical areas of rectangular shape. It measures about 94 cm in height and basically contains a *ragamala*, the major subject of my monograph published in 1987. Level C, an uninterrupted band, 56 cm in height, is situated above eye-level, about 2.15 m from the floor. This level illustrates, in a kind of continuing narrative, events from the life of Rao Ratan. It includes the depiction of various sports such as elephant fights, polo games, and several

hunting scenes. Level D is the last level on the perpendicular wall. It is situated above a floral band visible in figure 5 and consists of painted areas with a pointed arch. The murals within these arches mainly illustrate events from the lives of both Krishna and Rana and have to be seen together with the large frescos on the ceilings: level E. This constitutes the paintings in the squinch nets, the central cupola, and the two adjoining half-cupolas, as demonstrated by figure 6. In the central cupola, for which see also figure 7, Krishna dances the round dance with the gopis. In the centre of this Rasamandala appears the full moon which also serves as a lotus with petals which shelter the

gods who have assembled to witness Krishna's dance. Clockwise around the central cupola flies Rama with Sita and Lakshmana in the magical Pushpakavimana, carried in the manner of a palanquin by angel-like female figures in the eastern half-cupola. In the opposite half-cupola flies Krishna with his favourite beloved in a carriage drawn by two horses. Ganesha acts as Krishna's charioteer while further angelic figures escort the chariot through the sky. The squinch nets around Krishna are filled with the ten avatars of Vishnu while the same areas around Rama are painted with scenes from the Ramayana or life of Rama.

Figure 7 reveals more details of the painted ceiling. The colours are strong and bright. The blue-complexioned Krishna contrasts effectively with the predominant red which the artist selected for the background. The green pigment of the banana trees placed in each corner of this ceiling star has flaked badly and, if intact, would have dramatically enhanced the overall effect of this composition. Peacocks with spread tails in the adjoining segments serve as a frame, while women with burning candles in the four corners seem to illuminate the central cupola which otherwise receives comparatively little daylight; this is why the colours here are still unfaded and appear in their original freshness.

Each of the four corners of level D is painted with a scene showing life-size European characters, as in figure 8 showing one of these compositions. These four murals constitute the earliest proof *in situ* of the so-called "farangi theme" in Rajasthani painting. The "farangis" are dressed in a mixed European-Indian fashion, but basically what the Indian artist considered to be European. Some appear to be blond-haired; they all wear European swords and a rather unusual headdress, and are all shown in three-quarter view as a rule. As might be expected, they are generally of fair



complexion. The colourful flowering shrubs in some of these murals betray a certain Deccani influence.

The western interior wall of the Badal Mahal represents, in level D, not only one of the most exciting hunting scenes to be found in seventeenth-century painting from Rajasthan but certainly the most monumental: figure 9 reproduces less than its northern half. The southern half contains in its southern extremity a published portrait of Madho Singh, Rao Ratan's second son, hunting boars from horseback. The northern or right-hand part of

8
Fresco in the northwestern corner, northern wall, of the Badal Mahal, Bundi, representing "farangis" (Europeans), circa 1620-30. Photograph: J.K. Bantze.

the composition includes the killing of one or more tigers by a number of archers and swordsmen, as also occurs in an often published folio from the *Akbar Nama* in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (IS 2-1896.17/117). This right half of a double-page composition painted by the artists Basawan and Tara illustrates Akbar's lion hunt at Narwar, which occurred in the summer of 1561. As the V&A *Akbar Nama* is generally dated to circa 1590, it might be surmised that the artist of the mural had seen this or a similar illustrated manuscript executed during Akbar's reign. Figure 10, a detail from the central part of the hunting scene, shows a lion trying to elude the group of beaters which has almost encircled it. Lions of

this kind had always been present in Bundi painting and were to become still more famous when some of the court artists migrated south to Kota and founded what was to become the Kota idiom of Bundi painting, until it eventually became stylistically almost independent from its parental Bundi school.

The three paintings below that part of the hunting scene illustrated here by figure 9, level B, depict, from left to right, the *ragini's* Ramakari, Gauri, and *raga* Malavakaushika or Malkauns. Compared to the murals in the upper levels, they were painted later and can be dated to the 1640s, especially since they bear certain stylistic affinities to the so-called Kota *Bhagavata* series, datable to the 1630s (Bautze 1987).



9 Northern third of the western wall in the Badal Mahal, Bundi: Scenes from a hunt and swordsmen and archers killing tiger(s) in level C (top level in this illustration). *Ragini's* Ramakari, Gauri, and *raga* Malavakaushika, from left to right, below (level B); circa 1620–30 (level C), circa 1640–50 (level B). *Ragini* Ramakari: 94 x 52 cm; Gauri: 94 x 50 cm; *raga* Malavakaushika: 94.0 x 50.5 cm. Photograph: J.K. Bautze.



10
Badal Mahal, Bundi,
western wall, centre: A lion in
the wilderness surrounded by
beaters, detail from a hunting
scene, circa 1620–30.
Photograph: J.K. Baurze.

Early Seventeenth-Century Bundi Painting on Paper

The earliest seventeenth-century Bundi paintings are actually drawings: a *ragamala* in particular, of which a number of examples are in the National Museum, New Delhi, in addition to three formerly in the Pan-Asian collection dispersed in London in 1983. Of the latter group figure 11 illustrates *ragini* Gauri. As this *ragini* is drawn with the greatest precision, it was evidently not intended to be coloured in a later stage of the work; it was to serve as a guideline for future generations of artists. Its details are so minutely drawn that it reminds one more of Mughal than Rajasthani drawings. Compared to more typical Bundi painting, the head of the woman is almost square and betrays strong Mughal influence. The shape of her breasts and her large eyes are reminiscent of early Rajput painting. Monkeys and birds inhabit the foliage of the deciduous trees, the leaves of which are individually drawn. The peacocks here are large-eyed as well; the realistic treatment of their feet,



11
Ragini Gauri. Bundi, circa
1600–20. Ink and watercolour
on paper; 18.6 x 11.0 cm.
Formerly Pan-Asian
collection, now in a private
collection. Photograph:
J.K. Baurze.



12
Krishna being praised by
Indra and Narada. *Bhagavata
Purana*, Book 10. Bundi,
1630s. Opaque watercolour
on paper; 33.0 x 21.6 cm.
Government Museum, Kota,
no. 1950-27. Photograph:
J.K. Bautze.



13
Ambika Puja, detail with
Shiva being worshipped.
Bhagavata Purana,
Book 10. Bundi, 1630s.
Opaque watercolour on
paper; 34.3 x 22.2 cm (full
painting size). Government
Museum, Kota, no. 1950-30.
Photograph: J.K. Bantze.

however, betrays again the skill of an artist trained in an imperial Mughal atelier. The overall effect of the drawing is that of finesse. It hence cannot be dated later than the first or second decade of the seventeenth century. A small number of drawings have survived which are in all probability by the same hand as most of the frescos in levels C, D, and F of the Badal Mahal. These drawings were, however, not available for publication.

Stylistically, the closest comparison with the *ragamala* murals in level B is offered by the Kota *Bhagavata*. Known from several published paintings, the series illustrates incidents from the life of Krishna as narrated in the tenth book of the *Bhagavata Purana*. It got its name from the Government Museum, Kota, which houses forty of its folios (acc. nos. 1950.1-40). Other single folios are in the collection of Vinod Kanoria, Patna, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Victoria and Albert Museum (IS 150-1949). Several paintings from this set are unfinished.

Figure 12 illustrates the 27th chapter from Book 10 of the *Bhagavata Purana*: Krishna had lifted Mount Govardhan and thus saved the inhabitants of Vraj, his village, from a deluge caused by the god Indra. Indra had to acknowledge Krishna's superiority and is shown here, wearing a crown, together with Narada praising an elevated, seated Krishna. Indra's mount, the elephant Airavata, is waiting at a distance behind. Figure 13, a detail of a painting showing the worship of Ambika at the river Sarasvati, introduces the god Shiva shown in full profile with a woman, apparently Ambika, seated next to him. Although the nearest dated comparison is offered by several folios of Book 8 of the *Bhagavata Purana* illustrated by the Mewari artist Sahibdin in 1648, now in the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, the Kota *Bhagavata* retains certain traits known from earlier Mughal

painting. The turbans are flat and often leave some space at the back of the head making the hair there visible, as in Akbari or early Jahangiri portraits. The *jama* with a four-pointed hem (*chakdar jama*), which was falling out of fashion by Shah Jahan's reign (1628-58), still makes its appearance. The faces, however, are round as in the Badal Mahal *ragamala*, which also shares with the Kota *Bhagavata* the rendering of the landscape in the background. Besides, the parting of the hair is very pronounced in both the Badal Mahal *ragamala* and the Kota *Bhagavata*, as is demonstrated here by the seated woman near Shiva in figure 13. In view of the above mentioned "archaisms", however, it appears difficult to date this set later than the 1630s.

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