



Raja Viram Dev of Ghanerao out riding with attendants

Shihab al-Din

Not on display

Title/Description: Raja Viram Dev of Ghanerao out riding with attendants

Artist/Maker: Shihab al-Din

Born: 1770

Object Type: Drawing

Materials: Gold, Paper, Watercolour

Measurements: Unframed: (h. 440 x w. 325 x d. 1 mm) Framed: (h. 612 x w. 486 x d. 20 mm)

Accession Number: 576

Historic Period: 18th century

Production Place: Asia, India, Rajasthan

School/Style: Indian Miniatures

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

From the 16th - 19th centuries many equestrian portraits and durbar scenes were produced. Often, the characteristic fort at Jodhpur, built on a massive rocky outcrop and towering over a flat semi-desert landscape, is shown in the background of these paintings and can help to identify them.

The Raja is painted in the typical Mughal equestrian portrait style. His face is in profile, his large moustache and large red turban are unmistakably Rajasthani, but his fine flowing costume and jewellery are painted in the detailed Mughal style. There are quite a lot of amusing details - attendants on foot carry various objects, a mace, a tether, a leafy branch and a picnic carpet, and there is even one attendant running alongside with the *huqqa* so the Raja can smoke as he rides. There is general air of enjoyment. In the background, on the other side of the river, there is a small white Hindu temple and a procession with elephants and horsemen. Jodhpur tort is not shown in the background but the hills are possibly the Aravalli range near Jodhpur.

Description taken from the 'Art From The Indian Sub-Continent In The Sainsbury Centre' catalogue by Margaret A. Willey (Sainsbury Centre, UEA, 1995).

Within the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury collection lies a small but fascinating group of Indian paintings on paper. Perhaps aesthetically the finest is the 1680 portrait of Sultan Jamshid Qutb Shah, ruler of Golconda, but my greatest affection, perhaps because of my long involvement with Jodphur, but also for its own aesthetic qualities, is for another work acquired at the same time: a portrait of Raja Viram Dev of Ghanerao (r. 1743–1778) by the Bikaner artist Shahib al-din.

The rulers of Ghanerao, a small feudatory territory of Marwar (Jodphur) in Rajasthan, belonged to the Mertia sub-clan of the region's dominant Rathor clan. The Rathors themselves had been subjugated to the Mughals in the late 16th century, and imperial culture began to exert substantial influence on court life, although the region retained a strong local and regional culture, social organisation and identity. The Rathors of Jodphur became active patrons of painting depicting courtly life, and their feudatories, particularly Ghanerao, followed suit.

The depiction of a ruler riding with attendants is a frequent theme within both Mughal and Rajput painting. Here Viram Dev, riding and smoking a huqqa, is the central focus, but the work is not a simple portrait and clearly references an event.

As he rides across a landscape of gently rolling hills, in the background a significantly grander procession with canopied elephants and many attendants riding and walking, and bearing a mound of material, approaches a small temple. The dark sky and the bright green of the landscape suggest the monsoon season, but whatever the referential intent, the effect of the green behind the white of the horse and the raja's and attendants' garments, with their contrasting coloured turbans and patterned and crisply delineated textiles, creates an overall effect which is both highly pleasing and evocative of the life and landscape of Marwar.

—

Deborah Swallow, Director, Courtauld Institute of Art

Provenance

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
