

Arts of Asia Lecture Series Spring 2015
Masterpieces and Iconic Artworks of the Asian Art Museum
Sponsored by The Society for Asian Art

Royal Rides: AAM's Silver Howdah And Its Virginia Relation
John Henry Rice, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
April 3, 2015

Key Works

AAM Howdah

India, Chhattisgarh, former princely state of Surguja, ca. 1870–1920
Partially gilded and painted silver over wood, with velvet and wicker
Acquisition made possible by Nancy B. Hamon in honor of Johnson S. Bogart, 2001.12.a-c

VMFA Howdah

India, Chhattisgarh, former princely state of Surguja, ca. 1870–1920
Gilded silver, wood, velvet, glass, paint
Robert A. and Ruth W. Fisher Fund, 2004.17a-b

Key Names and Terms

Howdah (also houda, howda, houdah, houdar, houer, howder): A seat to contain two or more persons, usually fitted with a railing and a canopy, erected on the back of an elephant
From Persian & Urdu *haudah*, mod. Arabic *haudaj*, a litter carried by a camel or elephant

Mahout: elephant driver

Chauri: fly-whisk, important item of regalia for Indic kings and gods

Chhatra, Chhatri: parasol or umbrella, a frequent marker of divinity and kingship in India

Raj: Hindi 'rule' or 'ruler'; term used for the period of British Crown Rule in India 1858-1947

Maharaja: Sanskrit 'great king'; one of many titles assumed by the nominal sovereigns of India's 'Princely' or 'Native States' subject to the indirect rule of the British Crown

Durbar (from Persian *darbar*): formal court gathering presided over by the Shah or Mughal Emperor; term used by successors to the Mughals, including the British, for state ceremonies

Surguja (also Sirguja, Sarguja): Princely State in present-day Chhattisgarh ; 6055 sq. miles; capital Ambikapur

Baudh: Princely State in present-day Orissa; 1156 sq. miles; capital Baudh Raj

Important Dates

1851: The Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace, Hyde Park, London

1858: Indian Rebellion / Mutiny ends; last Mughal Emperor exiled; British East India Company dissolved; Crown Rule established
1875-76: The Prince of Wales (future Edward VII) tours India
1876: Victoria named Empress of India
1877: Imperial Assemblage in Delhi to proclaim Victoria Empress of India
1879-1917: Surguja reign of Raja Raghunath Saran Singh Deo
(from 1887 with personal style *Maharaja*)
(from 1895-96 with personal style *Maharaja Bahadur*)
1879-1913: Baudh reign of Raja Jogendra Deo
1903: Imperial Durbar in Delhi to commemorate coronation of Edward VII as Emperor of India
1911: Imperial Durbar in Delhi to commemorate coronation of George V as Emperor of India;
Capital of British India relocated from Calcutta to Delhi
1917-1947: Surguja reign of Raja Ramanuj Saran Singh Deo
(from 1918 with hereditary style *Maharaja*)
1913-1947: Baudh reign of Raja Narayan Prasad Deo

Selected further reading

The Raj: India and the British 1600-1947, ed. C. A. Bayly (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1990)

Maharaja: The Splendour of India's Royal Courts, eds. Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer (London: V&A Publishing, 2009)

Elephants and Ivories in South Asia, Pratapaditya Pal (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1981)

Delight in Design: Indian Silver for the Raj, Vidya Dehejia (Ahmedabad: Mapin, 2008)

Metal Techniques for Craftsmen: A Basic Manual for Craftsmen on the Methods of Forming and Decorating Metals, Oppi Untracht (New York: Doubleday, 1968)

“How to Dress an Elephant” (V&A & AAM) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9RtvHRj3OU>