



THE COLLECTION OF BIDRI WARE IN THE NÁPRSTEK
MUSEUM AND THE NATIONAL GALLERY, PRAGUE,
CZECH REPUBLIC

Dagmar Pospíšilová¹

The Origin of *Bidri*

Metal casting has embodied the finest tradition of Indian applied art and crafts. The term, *bidri*, designates black-mordanted cast metalwork made of an alloy of zinc, copper, lead and tin, with the predominance of zinc.² The surface of *bidri* ware is decorated with silver, brass, and occasionally gold. The art of *bidri* blends the domestic tradition of metal casting, with the tradition of inlaying base metal grounds with decorative elements in precious metals or brass, an art that was brought to perfection in the Islamic world. The craft has served to satisfy the perennial human desire for luxury items, objects which delight the eye, without at the same time transgressing the Islamic religious taboo imposed on the use of precious metals in the making of utility vessels.³

The exact origin of this craft has not been traced down, and it is more than likely it never will. Utility vessels made of metal were always short-lived. This was essentially for two reasons: namely, wear and tear, and changes of fashion. For what they were worth, they were scrapped and the material thus obtained was recycled for the production of new vessels. On the other hand, metal vessels inlaid with either silver, or gold and/or brass, ranked among luxury items and were never mass produced. On the contrary, their output was invariably dependent on commissions by a patron or a wealthy customer. The craftsman, whether Muslim or Hindu, also styled the decoration of his products in compliance with such com-

¹ The article was completed during the author's Gonda Fellow affiliation to the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leyden, the Netherlands, March-July, 2001.

² See Appendix 2, Table.

³ For more on the art of inlaying, see: Ward, R., 1993.

missions. Surviving *bidri* artifacts, the earliest of which date from the 17th century, demonstrate the high level of craftsmanship characteristic for the heyday of this particular craft. Even truly competent sources fail to furnish sufficient information about the origin of *bidri*; for their part, Indian Hindu authors, who would obviously prefer to locate its beginnings to pre-Islamic India, recall the legend of the Hindu ruler of Bidar who had initiated the production of *bidri*, as he employed artifacts made by this method in his private acts of worship.⁴ The earliest written mention of *bidri* is relatively recent: it is contained in the Persian history of India, *Chahar gulshan*, dating from 1759.⁵ *Bidri* is an adjective derived from the name of the residential city of the Bahman sultans, Bidar, where the craft flourished. Whether it was also known under some other name than *bidri* is not now clear. In its time, Bidar was a melting-pot of domestic pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions, and exoticism which came to develop under the influence of a powerful influx of aliens, coming not only from the Islamic countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East and Central Asia, but also from Africa.⁶ Apparently it was this particular context which became the fertile soil nurturing the development of a craft whose existence has not been documented anywhere else outside Indian territory. From the 17th century depictions of *bidri* artifacts began to feature in Deccan miniatures; their decorative patterns combine traits of both Deccan and Mughal architectures.⁷ Regardless of the exact nature of the craft's previous history, both the miniatures and surviving items make it clear that what we have to do with here are masterpieces of a craft which reached its peak in the 17th century. In the subsequent period the craft spread from Deccan, which had fallen under the Mughal rule by the late 17th century, onwards, to northern India, where new production centres cropped up in Lucknow, Purnea and, in the 19th century, Murshidabad. Thanks to colonial exhibitions, *bidri* was in the 19th century brought to the attention of the general public in Europe, whereupon it became a sought-after business article.⁸ Indian craftsmen worked with metallic zinc from as early as the fifth century, as evidenced by archaeological finds from Taxile.⁹ The use of this material brings up the question of where the zinc was then mined for. In *A'in-i Akbari*, of 1596, a reference can be found

⁴ See e.g. Mukharji, T.N., JIAI, vol. 1, p. 41, Art-Manufactures of India, p. 183.

⁵ See: Stronge, S., 1985, p. 15

⁶ See: Mehta, J.L., Vol. I, repr. 1997, p. 275.

⁷ See: Stronge, S., 1985, p. 17.

⁸ For more on history, see: Stronge, S., 1985, pp. 15 - 32.

⁹ See: The Crossroads of Asia, p. 242.

to the „territory of Jalor, which is a dependency of the Suba of Ajmer,“ a site where *jast* (pewter) was extracted, which was believed to be a *ruh-i tutiya* resembling lead.¹⁰ The site in question was identified as Zawar, Rajasthan, and field research carried out there in the early 1980s revealed the method used in the production of metallic zinc, a process which was patented in Europe only as recently as 1738.¹¹ It is evident that since the beginning of the 19th century the production of zinc in this locality is over.¹² O. Feistmantel fails to mention zinc in his work on rocks and minerals in India. In the section dealing with elements, he mentions deposits of platinum, gold, silver, copper, and lead, but not zinc.¹³

The question of correlation between production centres and zinc ore deposits is yet to be adequately researched.

The Origin of the *Bidri* Collection

The origin of the *bidri* collection in the Czech Republic is not exactly known even in the cases of those items which come from identified specific sources¹⁴ since it is not clear how they were brought into this country. Two *bidri* artifacts, *surahi*, a bottle with a stopper, and a mirror (Figs 13, 14), were part of an extensive gift received from the Republic of India in 1957, whose purpose was to familiarize the public in this country, through the good services of the All India Handicraft Board, with a representative collection of Indian applied art and crafts objects. As regards items brought into the country by the Czech geologist and paleontologist Ottokar Feistmantel, who stayed in India between 1875 and 1883, these are duly mentioned in his book, *Eight Years in East India*; in its chapter entitled *Damascene Work*, paragraph b) he refers to a class of objects known as *bidri*, and goes on to give a list of such items he brought in. The entries include a *surahi* from Purnea, northern Bengal (Fig. 10), a *sini* from Lucknow (Fig. 12), and another two salvers, also from Lucknow, of which only one eventually reached the Náprstek Museum (Fig. 11), „in which, however, the decorations are not inlaid but rather fastened onto the surface. They are very similar to the style of Tanjore, but the base metal here is different.“¹⁵

¹⁰ *A'in-i Akbari*, Vol. I, pp. 41 - 42. (The Hindi word, *jast*, translates as zinc; *ruh-i tutiya* is the Persian equivalent for oxide of zinc. Note of the author).

¹¹ See: Stronge, S., 1985, pp. 12 - 13; L.K. Craddock's writings from 1983 - 1985 and 1995.

¹² See: Craddock, P. T. and Hughes, M. J., 1985, p. 240; Tod, J., 1829, p. 399.

¹³ See: Feistmantel, O., 1889, p. 82.

¹⁴ See e.g. the objects deposited at the National Gallery in Prague, Figs Nos 2, 4 and 6.

¹⁵ Feistmantel, O., op. cit., p. 100.

With the rest of the items, the ways whereby they got into the museum are purely a matter of guesswork, as in more than a few cases the only thing known is that the objects in question were found in a depository, without acquisition numbers, some labelled only with numbers indicating they had been relocated from another museum which in its turn had discovered them in its own collections, only to find they had no meaningful relation to its mission. Neither has it been possible to trace individual objects down to their original owners, as in the majority of cases the museum had no documentation pertinent to the items.

The *bidri* collection is kept in two locations in the Czech Republic: namely, the Náprstek Museum (11 objects), and the National Gallery in Prague (three objects). The individual items represent the output of the traditional workshops in Deccan (Figs 1 - 7, 13, 14), Purnea (Figs 8 - 10), and Lucknow (Figs 11 - 12). The standard range of *bidri* artifacts comprises *huqqa* bases (water pipes), *pandan* (boxes for betel), *surahi* (bottles), *aftaba* (ewers), *sailabchi* (basins) and miscellaneous types of vessels, such as *ugalдан* (spitoons), *sini* (salvers) and *katora* (wine cups). The Czech collections' most numerous objects are *huqqa* bases (six pieces), followed by salvers (three), bottles (three), a cosmetic box (one specimen), and a mirror (one).

The long-necked *surahi* bottles are closely linked with the Islamic culture of the Middle East and India, and they figure frequently in Mughal and Deccani miniature paintings, where they are usually depicted in wall niches.¹⁶ Three such bottles are kept in the Czech collections. One of these, of recent making, acquired in 1957, is an imitation of 18th-century European models (Fig. 13): this means the decorative pattern does not cover the entire surface as was the standard practice in Islamic art, but only its part. The second bottle (Fig. 7) is damaged at the foot and lacks the neck. Its body is covered with well preserved zig-zag pattern symbolizing water. The all-surface silver decoration does not reveal too much of the black ground, therefore failing to generate the effect of anything like a distinct contrast. That notwithstanding, the vessel makes an overall impression of refinement and sophistication. The third bottle (Fig. 10), along with a vase-shaped *huqqa* base (Fig. 9) exemplifying the production of Purnea workshops, and a pair of salvers from Lucknow (Figs 11, 12) were made for exhibition purposes, not as actual utility objects. That is also why they have been preserved in perfect condition to this day.

¹⁶ See: Zebrowski, M., 1997, pp. 185 - 197.

Sini, salvers, like *huqqa* and *surahi*, were traditionally regarded as important features of courtly interiors, a fact that is obvious from their depictions in period miniatures. The salver from the collection presented here dates probably from the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries (Fig. 2); it exemplifies the popular single flower design, in this case within the split leaves of palmettes forming an endless pattern covering the entire surface of the salver. The silver inlay, which was originally gilded, is comparatively well preserved. The gilding is almost completely worn off.

In what is the collection's most substantial section, its assortment of *huqqa* bases contains items exemplifying diverse decorative designs and shapes. From the 17th century, when tobacco first reached India, the appearance of the *huqqa* base underwent a series of transformations, evolving from egg-shaped variants, through spherical ones derived from the shape of the most common type of vessel, the *lota* (including the presence of a matching ring to secure the vessel's stability), whose rounded form resembled the shape of ripe fruit, to bell-shaped, flat-based varieties known as *farshi*, whose production started between 1730 and 1740, to less standard types in the shapes of mango fruits or vases.¹⁷

The pear-shaped *huqqa* base (Fig. 3 a, b) resembles a bottle, a seminal decorative motif of Islamic art and architecture.¹⁸ Its graceful form helped to boost the impact of a courtly interior. The spherical *huqqa* base from the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries (Fig. 4) displays a distinctive feature of Mughal decorative art: a single flower within a trellis pattern or in arched and cusped medallion or arcade, designs associated with the heyday of Mughal art which introduced new norms of taste influenced by the Italian Renaissance.¹⁹ Single flowers in mid-seventeenth century Mughal style also decorate a threfoil-shaped cosmetic box of handy size, in which were detected traces of arsenic. (Fig. 1 a, b)

The collection contains three bell-shaped *huqqa* bases decorated with patterns featuring peacock feathers (see Fig. 5), or diagonal trellis with crosses (see Fig. 6), and the most common Deccan pattern of poppy flowers whose already highly stylized variant came to be used in the decoration of vessels in Purnea in the 19th century (see Fig. 8). The *huqqa* base decorated with the peacock-feather pattern was reconstructed in the museum's workshop in the 1970s. However, the silver ring between the vessel's neck and body strikes the eye as an alien element. The design

¹⁷ See: Zebrowski, M., 1997, pp. 225 - 245.

¹⁸ See: Zebrowski, M., 1997, p. 135, plates 269, 273, 274.

¹⁹ See: The Indian Heritage, 1982, p. 25.

is relatively well preserved, even though the vessel is damaged in several parts.

The composition of the alloys employed in the individual production centres is dealt with in writings on *bidri* published in the 19th century.²⁰ Anyhow, in all those cases zinc is cited as the dominant component,²¹ the ratios of the alloy's other components varied from case to case. However, the hypothesis on the individual centres using their own formulas was not corroborated by our testing.²²

1. a

Cosmetic box.

Deccan, 1n: unknown²³

NpM: 53 870



²⁰ See: Mukharji, T.N., 1886, p. 42; Mehta, R., 1960, p. 29; Watt, G., 1903, p. 47.

²¹ In contrast to that, O. Feistmantel believed that *bidri* had been cast from copper, lead and tin (Feistmantel, O., 1884, p. 100). For the similar opinion see: Birdwood, Sir G., 1880, p. 164.

²² The composition of the alloys used in the individual items was analysed by combined chemical and physical methods, at the Nuclear Physics Institute, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. For more on the method of analysing the element composition of *bidri* ware see Appendix 1, Technical Analyses.

²³ See above on the origin of the Náprstek Museum's collection.

Trefoil box used for cosmetic purposes, three separate lids fastened at the centre by a silver screw in the shape of a lotus blossom. Each of the lids features a blossoming plant inlaid with silver and gold (flower centres) in *tehnishan* technique, framed by borders of rectangles and chevron pattern copying the lob shape of the lid. Decoration featuring identical flowers within foliage scrolls continues on the sides and is divided by chevron-patterned vertical bands at the edges. The most interesting feature is represented by the back side of the box, decorated with carnation flowers and serrated leaves inlaid with the use of *afatabi* technique, rare in the museum's collections.²⁴ The XRFA and INAA analysis²⁵ taking into account the surface decoration did not specify whether the inlay is gold or gilded silver. Gold would seem to be likely in case of 18th or 19th century items, but comparison of the character of decoration on the salver,²⁶ with similar carnation flowers inlaid in silver shows remains of gilding there on the entire surface, evoking the salver's golden appearance in the past. The box's elegant appearance, enhanced by both its attractive shape and handy size, attests to a long and well developed tradition and the skill of the craftsman who created it.

Compare:

Stronge, S., 1985, plate, 18, p. 54 (similar shape of flower heads, Deccan ?, 18th - 19th centuries).

Lal, K., 1990, plate 163, p. 132 (similar carnation flowers, Hyderabad, 19th century).

Zebrowski, M., 1984, Ornamental Pandans of the Mughal Age, plate 12, p. 39. The pandan decorated with similar flowers but inlaid with brass and silver in an arrangement opposite to that of the above mentioned box (the flower centre is in silver) is considered to be „the most classically Mughal *bidri* piece in existence“ and is dated to the mid or late seventeenth century. Since gold inlaying was probably not standard in the period in question, we dated our box to the 18th century. As M. Zebrowski stated: „Inlays of brass into *bidri* are already rare by the early eighteenth century...“. See: Zebrowski, M., 1997, p. 236

Bibliography:

Knížková, H., Pospíšilová, D., 1997. Plate 10.

Pospíšilová, D., The South and Southeast Asia Collections of the Náprstek Museum, p. 79

(back side of the box introducing the *afatabi* technique). In: Annals of the Náprstek Museum, 20, 1999, pp. 71 - 84.

Pospíšilová, D., Kovové užitékové nádoby z Indie (Metal Utensils from India). Arts and Crafts (Prague), 2000, No. 3, p. 53, plate 18 (back side decorated with *afatabi* technique). The box was dated there to the 19th century but subsequent research located a piece to the 18th century.

²⁴ See: Stronge, S., 1985, p. 42.

²⁵ See Appendix 2. Table.

²⁶ See Fig. 2 below.

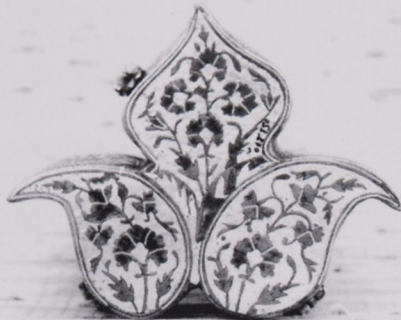
Exhibited:

Permanent exhibition of the Náprstek Museum at Liběchov near Mělník.

Metamorphoses of Metal, Náprstek Museum, Prague, Czech Republic, 1997.

1. b

Back side of the cosmetic box
decorated with *aftabi* technique.



2.

Salver.

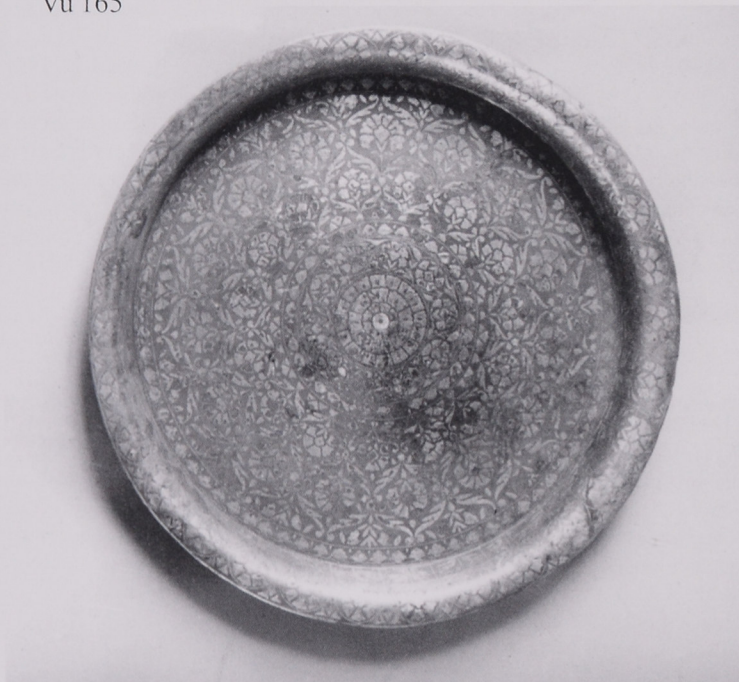
Deccan, late 18th or early 19th century.

Diameter: 36.5 cm

Height: 2 cm

Acquisition: purchase from private collection, 1960.

NG: Vu 165



Sini, circular salver with the everted lip covered with an overall pattern of stylized carnation flowers within intricate split-leaved palmettes set in a large frieze within two narrow foliage-patterned borders on a cusped line running round the central medallion inlaid with silver plates. Another row of the design is situated between the foliage-pattern border and the central medallion. Identical flowers are repeated in arches at the border of the rim. Decorated with *tehnishan* technique in silver, originally gilded; remains of the gilt visible on various parts of the surface.

Compare:

Lal, K., 1990, plate. 163, p. 132 (similar carnation flowers, Hyderabad, 19th century).

Stronge, S., 1985, plate 61, p. 77 (similar split-leaved palmettes, Eastern India or Deccan, late 18th and early 19th century).

Zebrowski, M., 1997, plate 391, p. 236 (comparable palmettes, Deccan, Bidar, early 18th century).

Exhibited: Asian Art, Brno, Czech Republic, 1961.

Previously unpublished.

3. a

Huqqa base

Deccan, late 17th or early 18th century.

Diameter of the pedestal: 10.3 cm

Height: 22 cm

Acquisition: unknown

NpM: 49 693

Pear-shaped huqqa base with a high circular pedestal and a neck flaring above the projecting moulding. The design, executed in *tehnishan* and *tarkashi* technique, features narrow vertical borders with stylized poppy flower heads within cusped and lobed cartouches set on a large frieze between horizontal borders of identical design, trefoils on a cusped line, repeated on the flat surface of a stepped section of the foot, and a border filled with circular motive, rectangles and lotus leaves. Ring mouldings between the body and the neck and between the body and the pedestal are decorated with chevron pattern. The design of poppy flower head within serrated leaves decorates the upper part of the pedestal. The design of cusped and lobed cartouches continues on the neck. A considerable loss of inlay suggests this is probably an item made in the 17th century. As M. Zebrowski stated: „Eighteenth-century bidri pieces have, in general, suffered far less loss of metal inlay.”²⁷ The pear shape of the huqqa

²⁷ See: Zebrowski, M., 1997, p.236.



base resembles shapes depicted in views of palace interiors in 17th century Deccan miniature painting.²⁸

Compare:

Unfortunately we did not find a comparable piece in available literature. Not even the essential study on metal objects by Zebrowski, M., 1997, included a similar huqqa base.

²⁸ See: Zebrowski, M., 1997, eg. plate 362, 364.

The only comparable pear-shaped huqqa base, see: Mukharji, T. N., JIA, vol. I, 1886, No. 14, plates documenting *bidri* ware from Hyderabad include one huqqa of a similar shape. Indian Heritage, plate 470, p. 140, introducing a ewer of a similar shape, Deccan (?), 17th century. The same ewer in: Stronge, S., 1985, plate 5, p. 43, mid-17th century. Plate 6, p. 44, op. cit., Deccan, late 17th - early 18th centuries, shows a pair of slaves of the carpet with a comparable stepped base, though in that case, rectangular.

Bibliography:

Pospíšilová, D., Kovové užiték nádob z Indie (Metal Utensils from India). Arts and Crafts (Prague), 2000, No. 3, p. 54, plates 19, 20 (including a drawing reconstruction of the design). The *huqqa* base was dated to the 18th century in this article. Subsequent study indicated that dating to the 17th century was more probable.

Exhibited:

Permanent exhibition of the Náprstek Museum at Liběchov near Mělník.
Metamorphoses of Metal, Náprstek Museum, Prague, Czech Republic, 1997.

3. b

Detail of a partly flaked off *tahnishan* and *tarkashi* decoration of the pear-shaped huqqa base.



4.

Huqqa base.

Deccan, late 17th or early 18th century.

Diameter: 18.5 cm

Height: 19.5 cm

Acquisition: purchased from the estate of a private collector, 1973

NG: Vu 2919

Spherical *huqqa* base decorated with a continuous pattern of highly stylised single flowers in arched and cusped interlocking cartouches. The flower petals were formerly inlaid with silver, the flower centres, stems and leaves were decorated with brass with the use of *tahnishan* and *tarkashi* technique. The same single flowers framed with arcades can be found round the neck. The borders of lotus petals are featured round the rim of



the neck, round the projecting moulding, round the body between the neck and the body and in the lower section, between the body and the undecorated bottom. The entire surface of the vessel is pitted because the inlay has largely disappeared. The bottom is encircled with a groove indicating a lost matching ring formerly giving the *huqqa* base its stability.²⁹ Spherical *huqqa* bases appear in paintings from about 1620 and are commonly depicted in 18th century miniatures.³⁰

Compare:

Zebrowski, M., 1997, colour plate 487, Bidar, Deccan, 17th century (similar design of the single flowers in arches on the rim of the tray) or plate 380, p. 231, Bidar, Deccan, 17th

²⁹ Almost all rings have been separated in pre course of time. see: Zebrowski, M., 1997, p. 228.

³⁰ See: Stronge, S., 1982, p. 40, 42.

century (similar spherical shape and design of single flowers in cusped and lobed medallions).

Stronge, S., 1985, plate 7, p. 45, Deccan or North India, late 17th or early 18th century (arcade framing single blossoming plants round the neck).

Exhibited:

Asian Art, Brno, Czech Republic, 1961.

New acquisitions of the National Gallery, Prague, Czech Republic, 1974.

Previously unpublished.

5.

Huqqa base.



Deccan, 18th century

Diameter at the bottom: 16.7 cm

Height: 31.5 cm

Acquisition: unknown

NpM: A 9 951

Bell-shaped *huqqa* base decorated with overall imbricated scale pattern which may represent feathers. The inlay is made with the use of *tarkashi* technique. The same motive continues on the upper part of the neck above the projecting moulding. There is a lobed collar around the base of the neck (partly broken), decorated with double engraved line and depressions on the lobes. The upper part with a spout is made of silver and decorated with chased and engraved pattern in horizontal bands. The central band introduces a foliage scrolls design. A silver ring between the body and the neck is of a similar design. The reconstruction of the *huqqa* was carried out at the museum's restoration workshop in the 1970s; the authenticity of the shape is questionable.

Compare:

Stronge, S., 1982, plate 13, p. 50, Eastern India or Deccan, 1750 - 1800 (similar bell-shaped *huqqa* base decorated with the same pattern).

Exhibited:

Permanent exhibition of the Náprstek Museum at Liběchov near Mělník.

Metamorphoses of Metal, Náprstek Museum, Prague, Czech Republic, 1997.

Previously unpublished.

6.

Huqqa base.

Deccan, late 18th - early 19th centuries

Diameter: 15.5 cm

Height: 17 cm

Acquisition: gift of a private collector, 1960

NG: Vu 331

Bell-shaped *huqqa* base decorated with an overall geometric pattern of diagonal trellis with superimposed crosses at the points of intersection. The design is set in three horizontal friezes separated by four narrow borders of rectangles accompanied by single fillets. An identical single fillet forms a zig-zag pattern on the surface of a projecting moulding of the neck (wire inlay has disappeared). The body decoration continues on the neck. Silver inlay in *tarkashi* technique is well-preserved. Bell-shaped



huqqas marked a major change from spherical *huqqas* between 1730 and 1740.³¹ In terms of shape and decoration alike, this item appears to date from the late 18th - early 19th centuries.

Compare:

Similar pattern of trellis and crosses is amply documented in available literature, e.g.: Lal, K., 1990, connects the pattern with 18th - 19th century Hyderabad, e.g.: plate 8, p. 34, plate 34, p. 49, plate 99, p. 97, plate 129, p. 112.

Stronge, S., 1985, plate 14, p. 50, probably Deccan, 1750 - 1800 (bell-shaped *huqqa* base decorated with motives including trellis and crosses) or plate 50, p. 68, Bidar (?), 19th century (an ovoid box with cross and trellis pattern).

Previously unpublished.

³¹ See: Zebrowski, M., 1997, p. 236.

7.

Bottle.

Deccan, late 18th - early 19th centuries

Diameter at the bottom: 8.2 cm

Height: 14 cm

Acquisition: unknown

NpM: 13 574

Surahi, a spherical bottle with a low splayed undecorated ring foot that has been damaged in part. The neck is lost. The bottle is decorated with vertical hexagonal panels filled with water pattern in *tarkashi* technique. The central frieze with the panels is encircled with borders of rectangles and with a row of chased scrollwork of stylized carnation and a row of petals on a cusped line. The neck moulding is decorated with a standard chevron pattern. The colour of the vessel is greyish rather than black, and consequently the contrast between the silver inlay and the background is not as bold as usual in *bidri* ware.



Compare:

Stronge, S., 1985, plate 14, p. 52, probably Deccan, c. 1750 - 1800 (similar design of vertical hexagonal panels).

Indian Heritage, plate 473, p. 141, Deccan, late 17th - early 18th centuries (water pattern).

Bibliography:

Knížková, H. and Pospíšilová, D., 1997, p. 22 (a detail of water design in *tarkashi* technique).

Exhibited:

Permanent exhibition of the Náprstek Museum at Liběchov near Mělník.

Metamorphoses of Metal, Náprstek Museum, Prague, Czech Republic, 1997.

Previously unpublished.

8.

Huqqa base.

Purnea, mid -19th century

Diameter: 15.5 cm

Height: 16 cm

Acquisition: unknown

NpM: 13 772



Bell-shaped *huqqa* base decorated with highly stylized poppy flower heads arranged in diagonal bands within borders of rectangles in the main frieze. Identical border of rectangles encloses a horizontal band of poppy-heads design round the shoulder and the base of the body. The projecting moulding of the neck is decorated with lotus petals, as is a band around

the chevronet moulding. The design in the main frieze repeats itself on the neck. *Tehnishan* and *tarkashi* technique. The *huqqa* stands on three circular feet made of a different alloy containing silver.³²

Compare:

Sen, S. N., 1983, plate 17, Purnea, undated (similar poppy heads design).

The Indian Heritage, 1982, plate 477, p. 141, Deccan, mid-18th century (similar poppy heads design).

Stronge, S., 1985, plate 67, p. 81, Purnea, 1866 (similar poppy heads design).

Bibliography:

Asijské kultury ve sbírkách Náprstkovy muzea. Stálá expozice na zámku v Liběchově (Asian Cultures in the Collections of the Náprstek Museum. Permanent Exhibition at Liběchov). Praha, Národní muzeum, 1981. 181 p. (plate No. 29)

Exhibited:

Permanent exhibition of the Náprstek Museum at Liběchov near Mělník.

Metamorphoses of Metal, Náprstek Museum, Prague, Czech Republic, 1997.

9.

Huqqa base.



³² See: Appendix 2, Table.

Purnea, 1867

Diameter at the bottom: 8.2 cm:

Hight: 23.5 cm

Acquisition: unknown

NpM: 13 771

Vase-type *huqqa* base with a low splayed ring foot and pear-shaped body decorated with leafy swags and oval cartouches influenced by European Neo-classical ornament, inlaid with *tehnishan* technique.³³ The design is arranged in horizontal friezes enclosed within silver fillets. Lotus petals design arranged in rows on the projected moulding of the neck, on one of the borders around the neck and around the ring foot. One of the four cartouches features the letters, C. B. and the date 1867, the year of the Paris Exhibition. The *huqqa* was probably commissioned by the Committee of Bengal as a showpiece to represent Bengal arts and crafts at various exhibitions.³⁴ The incorporation of the initials into the design documents Indian craftsmen's adjustment to European customers in India and to their tastes.³⁵

Compare:

Stronge, S., 1985, plate 64, p. 78, Purnea, 1867 (identical decoration), plate 84, p. 88, Lucknow, c. 1850 (similar shape)

Exhibited:

Permanent exhibition of the Náprstek Museum at Liběchov near Mělník.

Metamorphoses of Metal, Náprstek Museum, Prague, Czech Republic, 1997.

Previously unpublished.

10.

Bottle.

Purnea, 1880s

Diameter: 17.5 cm

Hight: 33.5 cm

Acquisition: Purchased by Ottokar Feistmentel at the 1880 exhibition in Melbourne, where it was displayed by the Committee of Bengal as stated on the preserved label.

NpM: 13 544

³³ See: Stronge, S., 1985, p. 78. Zebrowski, M., 1997, p. 241.

³⁴ This opinion was formulated by H. Knížková in a booklet on *bidri* published by the Náprstek Museum in 1973.

³⁵ See: Smith-Parr, G., Colonial-period decorative arts. In: The Dictionary of Art, vol. 15, § IX, p. 724.

Surahi, a bottle (stopper missing) with globular body and a long neck, decorated with single flowers in medallions within a pattern of foliage garlands inlaid with the use of *tehnishan* and *tarkashi* technique. The low ring foot is decorated with lotus petals. The projecting moulding and the rim of the neck feature the same pattern. The design of the body repeats itself on the neck. This *surahi* is a well preserved product of a Purnea workshop that was made to represent Bengal arts and crafts at exhibitions, equally as the vase-type *huqqa* base listed above.

Compare:

Lal, K., 1990, plate 86, p. 88, Hyderabad, late 18th century (comparable in terms of both shape and the design of foliage borders). Its description as an 18th- century item from Hyderabad appears dubious.

Stronge, S., 1985, plate 69, p. 82, Purnea, c. 1865 (almost identical with the bottle mentioned by Lal, K., see above)

Bibliography:

Feistmantel, O., 1884, p. 100, naming *bidri* ware, *surahi* and plates (see below) that he brought from India.

Knížková, H., Pospíšilová, D., 1997, p. 23

Exhibited:

Metamorphoses of Metal, Náprstek Museum, Prague, Czech Republic, 1997.



11.

Salver.

Lucknow, 1870s

Diameter: 16.5 cm

Hight: 1.5 cm

Acquisition: gift of Josefa Náprstková, 1878. Purchased by Ottokar Feistmantel.

NpM: A 5 627

Circular, dished salver with a very low ring foot. It is inlaid with chased silver in *zarbuland* technique and decorated with foliate pattern within the three medallions, and with a border of fish pattern around the rim. The salver exemplifies a typical fish design, the symbol of Lucknow navabs.

Compare:

Sen, S. N., 1983, plate 22, Lucknow, undated (salver with a similar fish and foliate design inlaid with chased silver in *zarbuland* technique).

Stronge, S., 1985, plate 78, p. 87, Lucknow, c. 1880 (similar shape and design in *zarbuland* technique), plate 82, p. 86.

Lucknow, 1880 (similar design of chased flowers attributed unmistakably to that centre). Mukharji, T. N., JIA, vol. I, 1886, No. 6, colour plates documenting similar salver and *bidri* ware from Lucknow.

Bibliography:

Feistmantel, O., 1884, p. 100 (naming two *bidri* plates brought from Lucknow; for the second one, see below, No. 12).

Exhibited:

Permanent exhibition of the Náprstek Museum at Liběchov near Mělník.

Metamorphoses of Metal, Náprstek Museum, Prague, Czech Republic, 1997.

12.

Salver.

Lucknow, 1870s

Diameter: 17.5 cm

Acquisition: gift of Josefa Náprstková, 1878, purchased by Ottokar Feistmentel.

NpM: 43 580

Circular, dished salver inlaid with silver in *tehnishan* and *tarkashi* technique and decorated with foliate overall pattern in a cross composition around the central medallion. Each of the four sections contains large flower heads, chased animals, birds and four trefoils around the central medallion. The rim is decorated with a border of lotus petals.

Compare:

Lal, K., 1990, plate 159, p. 130, Hyderabad, 19th century (similar foliage pattern with birds and animals).



Mukharji, T. N., JIA, vol. I, 1886, colour plates documenting similar salver and *bidri* ware from Lucknow. Stronge, S., 1985, plate 77, p. 84, Lucknow (?), mid-19th century (birds and animals in chased silver), plate 84, p. 88, Lucknow, c. 1850 (similar design of large flower heads). Mukharji, T. N., JIA, 1885, plates 8 and 10, Lucknow (similar birds in the design).



Bibliography:

Feistmantel, O., 1884, p. 100 (naming two *bidri* plates brought from Lucknow, for the other one, see above, No. 11).

Exhibited:

Permanent exhibition of the Náprstek Museum at Liběchov near Mělník.

Metamorphoses of Metal, Náprstek Museum, Prague, Czech Republic, 1997.

13.

Bottle and stopper.

Hydarabad, mid-20th century

Diameter: 8,5 cm

Hight: 28 cm

Acquisition: gift of the All India Handicraft Board, 1958

NpM: 13 401

Bottle with a rounded body, a tall flaring neck, a domed cover with a lotus-bud finial and a low ring-foot, decorated with silver in *tahnishan* and *tarkashi* technique. The main decoration on the body is in five roundels with central rosettes imitating 18th century items whose design was influenced by European Neo-classical motives leaving the surface of the vessel partly undecorated.



Compare:

Stronge, S., 1985, plate 10, p. 48, India, 18th century (similar design of roundels with central rosettes).

Zebrowski, M., 1997, plates 400, 401, p. 237, Deccan, 18th century (design influenced by European Neo-classical motifs).

Exhibited:

Metamorphoses of Metal, Náprstek Museum, Prague, Czech Republic, 1997.

Previously unpublished.

14.

Mirror.

Hyderabad, mid-20th century

Diameter: 12.8 cm

Height: 32.5 cm
(including handle)

Acquisition: gift of the All India Handicraft Board, 1958

NpM: 13 402



Round mirror with a handle in the shape of a trefoil, made of zinc alloy; however, the decoration is not inlaid with silver with the use of any known technique, but engraved in the light zinc background. Mirrors are not part of the traditional repertory of *bidri* ware and this item has no comparison in available literature.

Exhibited:

Metamorphoses of Metal, Náprstek Museum, Prague, Czech Republic, 1997.

Previously unpublished.

Glossary

koftkari (koftgari) (P.) = used in the meaning of inlaying

kuftan (kubidan) = to beat, to strike

kufte kardan = to make mosaic

kufte kari (gari) = mosaic

tehnishan (P.) = deep koftkari, the silver is beaten into deep grooves or depressions forming the pattern in a way that leaves the surface smooth

teh (tah) = below, down, bottom, levelling with the ground

neshan (nishan) = sign, mark

zarnishan (P.) = used in the meaning of a pattern (mostly in silver) rising slightly above the surface

zar = gold

zarnigar (zarnegar), zarkub, zarkubidan = to decorate, to inlay with gold

tarkashi (P.) = inlaying with a wire
 tar = wire
 kashidan (keshidan) = to pull, to draw
 aftabi (P.) = used in the meaning of a technique in which sheet silver fills the background
 of the pattern
 aftabi = adj. of aftar = sun
 farshi huqqa = huqqa with a flat bottom
 farshi (P.) = adj. of farsh = carpet

Abbreviations:

adj. = Adjective; P = Persian; NpM = Náprstek Museum; NG = National Gallery

Bibliography

- Abu'l Fazl:
 The A'in-í Akbari translated by H. Blochmann, 3rd ed., New Delhi 1977.
- Birdwood, Sir G.:
 The Industrial Arts of India, London, 1880. 2 vols.
- Craddock, P. T.:
 Early Mining and Production. Edinburgh, 1995. 363 p.
 Zinc Production at Zawar, Rajasthan, pp. 229 – 241. In:- and Hughes, M. J. (eds.), Furnace and Smelting Technology in Antiquity, London, British Museum Occasional Papers, No. 48, 1985. 247 p.
- Chaudhury, A. R.:
 Bidri Ware, Hyderabad, Salar Jung Museum, 1961.
- Errington, E. and Cribb, J. (eds.):
 Crossroads of Asia, Cambridge, 1992. 306 p.
- Feistmantel, O.:
 Osm let ve východní Indii (Eight Years in Eastern India, 1875 - 1883), Praha, 1884. 117 p.
 Nerosty a užitečné horniny Východní Indie Britské (Minerals and Ores of the British East India). Věstník královské české společnosti nauk (Praha), 1889, pp. 43 - 84).
- Grube, E. J.:
 The World of Islam, London 1967 (trans. Ján Pauliny, 1973).
- Guy, J. and Swallow, D. (eds.):
 Arts of India: 1550 - 1900, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1990. 227 p.
- Indian Heritage. Court Life and Arts under Mughal Rule, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982. 176 p.
- Jones, Owen:
 The Grammar of Ornament. London, 1856.
- Knížková, H. and Pospíšilová, D.
 Metamorphoses of Metal, Prague, National Museum, 1997. 27 p.
- Lal, K.:
 National Museum Collection. Bidri Ware, New Delhi, 1990. 146 p.

- Markel, Stephen A., Bidri Ware. Lyric Patterns. In: Safrani, Shehbaz (ed.), Golconda and Hyderabad. Bombay, Marg Publications 1992. pp. 45 – 68.
- Mehta, J. L.:
Advanced Study in the History of Medieval India, New Delhi, repr. 1997.
3 Vols.
- Mehta, R.:
Handicrafts and Industrial Arts of India, Bombay, 1960. 157 p.
- Mittal, J.:
Indian painters as designers of decorative art objects in the Mughal period.
In: Skelton, R.(ed.), Facets of Indian Art, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986, pp. 243 - 252.
- Mukharji, T. N.:
Bidri ware, Journal of Industrial Art, vol. 1, April 1885, No. 6, pp. 41 - 4 and plates 1 - 11. Vol 1, July 1886, No. 13, p. 98 and plates 13 - 16.
Art - Manufactures of India: Calcutta, 1888. 451 p.
- Sen, S. N.:
Catalogue on Damascene and Bidri Art in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, 1983. 39 p.
- Skelton, R.:
A Decorative Motif in Mughal Art. In: Pal, P., Aspects of Indian Art, Leiden, 1972. Pp. 147 - 152.
- Stronge, S.:
Bidri Ware. Inlaid Metalwork from India, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1985. 91 p.
- Swarup, S.:
Mughal Art. A Study in Handicrafts, Delhi, 1996. 136 p.
- Untracht, O.:
Metal Technique for Craftsmen, New York, 1975. 509 p.
- Ward, R.:
Islamic Metalwork, London, British Museum, 1993. 117 p.
- Watt, G.:
Indian Art at Delhi 1903, Calcutta, 1903. 546 p.
- Yazdani, G.
Bidar. Its History and Monuments, Hyderabad, 1947.
- Zebrowski, M.
Gold, silver and bronze: from Mughal India, London, 1997. 367 p.
The Indian ewer. In: Skelton, R.(ed.), Facets of Indian Art, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986, pp. 253 - 9.
Ornamental Pandans of the Mughal Age. In: Symbols and Manifestation of Indian Art, Bombay, Marg Publ., 1984, pp. 31 - 40.
Bidri. Metalware from the Islamic Courts of India. Art East. A Review of Islamic and Asiatic Art, 1982, No. 1, pp. 26 – 29.