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A visit to Musée Guimet in Paris

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On January 30, we had the privilege of visiting the beautiful Musée Guimet in Paris as part of our Buddhist Art class at Leiden University. The trip was organized by our teacher Marijke Klokke and received generous financial support from the De Cock fund.

The day started early as we took the Thalys train from different locations. Some of us got on the train at Amsterdam Central Station, some at Schiphol Airport, and some at Rotterdam Central Station. The group was complete around 7 AM when we were headed to Paris. We arrived in Paris around 10 AM and went straight to the museum, which is located in the 16th arrondissement.

Our first guided tour was given by Nicolas Engel, who showed us the Afghanistan exhibition.

We learned that this exhibition was specially arranged due to the relations between Afghanistan and France. Engel's insights and knowledge of the history of the art pieces were impressive. We were in awe of the unique pieces in the exhibition, including the Bactrian gold.

After exploring the exhibition, we enjoyed lunch at a French bistro. The delicious and affordable food made it a perfect spot for our student budget. After lunch, we had some free time, and most of us got some famous French pastries and roamed around the museum to see the other exhibitions.

Our second guided tour was by Pierre Baptiste, the curator for Southeast Asian collections. We were fascinated by his knowledge

and insights into the history of Buddhist Art in South and Southeast Asia.

He told us many background stories about the different art pieces he showed and the history of the area where they were found. It was remarkable to see how different cultures influenced each other and how Buddhism spread throughout the region.

Around 5 PM, the tour was finished, and we headed to the Eiffel Tower, which was only a short distance away. We were in awe of the magnificent structure and took the opportunity to take pictures and enjoy the view of Paris from the Esplanade Joseph Wresinski.

We left the Eiffel Tower and took the metro back to Gare



Bodhisattva, Afghanistan.
Musée Guimet, Paris.



Buddha heads from Hadda, Afghanistan. Musée Guimet, Paris.



Part of a naga railing from Prach Khan, Cambodia. Musée Guimet, Paris.

du Nord. We still had some free time, and some of us got dinner and bought some souvenirs before we boarded the Thalys train back to the Netherlands. We arrived back in the Netherlands around 10 PM.

Overall, it was a fantastic trip, and we were grateful for the opportunity to visit such a remarkable museum. We learned a lot about the history of Buddhist Art, its influence on different cultures, and how it has evolved. We also got to experience the beauty of Paris and its iconic landmarks. We hope to have more such trips and experiences in the future.

Thank you to our professors and organisers for arranging this trip and to our fellow students for making it an enjoyable and memorable experience.



Plastercasts reproducing part of Angkor Vat, Cambodia. Musée Guimet.

Ranjit Singh, the archer king on horseback

Ellen M. Raven

At the farewell conference that the VVIK organized in Leiden for Prof. Hans Bakker back in 2013, I showed how a state portrait of the newly appointed King Willem Alexander of The Netherlands had unmistakable parallels in early Modern portraiture from India. I compared the Dutch state portrait with a mural painting portraying Sawai Madho Singh of Jaipur (r. 1880-1922), carried out in a blended Indian-and-European format that resembled an early studio photograph¹.

Painters at the courts of the Rajput kings and Mughal emperors competed for elite patronage by making attractive portraits of the ruler, his close family members and influential courtiers. Studies have shown that in such images, a Rajput ruler usually carries a weapon such as a sword, a shield or a dagger, or a tall staff-sceptre. The special status of the ruler was often marked by giving him a halo. The portrayed VIP sits or stands, or he may ride a horse or an elephant while in the field.

In 1843, young Queen Victoria received from Sher Singh, the son of Ranjit Singh of Lahore, such a portrait of his father on horseback, painted in a local Rajput style by the Lahore-based artist Imam Bakhsh. This painter was active between 1825 and 1845. The *raja* in this painting (of c. A4 size) is accompanied by an attendant waving a whisk with a white yak's tail, while his compatriot holds an umbrella over the king (fig. 1). The *raja* clutches a white kerchief in his raised left hand and the reins of the horse in his right hand. The hilt of a *kirpan*, a ceremonial dagger worn by Sikhs, is just visible on the left hip.

The positioning of the king on a galloping horse and the presence of the attendants holding up emblems of royal fame fit a traditional presentation of Indian kingship quite well. Europeans visiting the court were impressed how, when mounted on horseback, Ranjit Singh got an aura of power and grace which – when he was seated in an armchair or standing in state – was not as palpable. Portraying the maharaja of the Punjab riding a horse would have pleased him most, as ‘horses he loved even more than human beings’ (Singh 2001:212). An inquisitive man by all means, Ranjit Singh's greatest interests were horse artillery and horses. Even though blind in one eye as a result of smallpox and prone to attacks of paralysis



Fig. 1. Ranjit Singh on horseback, watercolour painting given by Sher Singh to Queen Victoria (RCIN452414).

throughout his life, Ranjit Singh would daringly lead his men into battle while brandishing his sword.

Local noblemen and Europeans employed at the Rajput court also commissioned portraits from Imam Bakhsh, for instance to use these as gifts. Thus, we find that in 1841, Claude Auguste Court, a high-ranking military officer in the army of Ranjit Singh, requested from Imam Bakhsh an equestrian portrait of their royal employer. The painting eventually found its way to the Musée Guimet in Paris². Its iconography closely resembles that of the portrait gifted to Queen Victoria, although the painter chose different colours for the king's clothing and for the horse. The theme of Ranjit Singh on horseback returns in several of Imam Bakhsh's paintings. One of these is presently in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The museum mentions the ‘traditional indications of royalty, such as the halo and parasol, as derived from Mughal painting’. At the Bakker conference I showed that such indicators of kingship have a much longer history in the Indian representation of kingship than the Mughal age, and this also holds true for the horse as a royal mount.

General Jean Baptiste Ventura, an Italian military man also employed by Ranjit Singh, wanted to present an oil painting of the Rajput *maharaja* to King Louis Philippe of France in 1838. For this task he commis-

sioned a painting from Alfred Dedreux, a French artist who was considered one of the best painters of horses in 19th century France. He was well known for preparing portrait paintings of horses of French noblemen and of their masters while on horseback. The painting (measuring 128 x 115 cm) is now in the



Fig. 2. Ranjit Singh on horseback holding bow, oil painting given to Louis Phillipe in 1838 (Louvre INV 4096)

Musée du Louvre (INV 4096).

Dedreux's painting of Ranjit Singh presently features in an exhibition in the Hong Kong Palace Museum entitled 'Grand Gallop: Art and Culture of the Horse' (fig. 2). Reviewers of the exhibition commented that 'the visual power of the horse aggrandizes imperial majesty. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's passion for horses is legendary. ... The glow of the white horse imbues his kingdom with enchantment'.³

Alfred Dedreux's portrait was reportedly done after an equestrian portrait of the raja by Imam Bakhsh. If we look closely at Dedreux's rendering, we notice some interesting iconographic changes. For one, the king is no longer nimbate, which is understandable in a western reworking. In his right hand, Ranjit Singh holds a bow with its string turned towards the horse's head. The posture of the arm is somewhat rigid. A quiver is secured on the right shoulder of the horse. The attendant with the whisk, the ceremonial importance of which Dedreux could probably not know,

was done away with, but he retained the attendant with the umbrella. The horse is not galloping but walks in a gentle trot with its left leg raised.

We may wonder which instructions for the portrait General Ventura gave to Alfred Dedreux for him to introduce such subtle but unmistakable changes. Apparently, the general commissioned the painting while he was on leave in France.⁴ Occasionally, we find Rajput portraits of princely figures yielding bow and arrow among their martial attributes, but such portraits do not seem to have been so common and the iconography of those that I came across is not the same.

In India, besides paintings, coins could serve to inspire arts in different media, not in the least because they were both collectible and conveniently portable in India and abroad. However, Sikh coins from the era and region of Jaipur carry legends in calligraphic scripts but no imagery that could have inspired Ventura to request portraying the king as an archer on horseback.

How about coins from other regions of India? Like several other Europeans stationed in India in the 19th century, both Ventura and Court collected early, Indo-Greek and Kushana coins from the northwestern regions of the subcontinent (ancient Gandhara and the Punjab) dating back to the centuries around the start of the common era. These coins carry images of rulers, but these are mostly in the form of busts and standing portraits.

The gold coins of the Guptas, who ruled over North India after the Kushanas has lost power in the Northwest, do include glorious portraits of an equestrian archer king. In 1836, James Prinsep published the first known Horseman coin of King Chandragupta II in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. This leading academic periodical of its time would have been read across British India and in Europe by those interested in archaeology and ancient artefacts of the subcontinent. We know that both Ventura and Court took an active interest in things archaeological. The two gents are reported to have spent huge sums buying up coins in Peshawar (Errington 1995). Court had started building a collection of Indian coins some years before Prinsep brought out his first article, and the general mentioned the collection in his *Mémoires*. It included Kushana gold coins and many others, but so far there is no evidence that Court had acquired Gupta coins as well.⁵

However, in the time that Court and Ventura served at the Jaipur court, the first important collections of Gupta coins were built by British residents

in India such as Tregear, Stacy, James Prinsep, and George Eden, who, as Lord Auckland, was Governor-General of India between 1836 and 1842.⁶ In Prinsep's first-ever published Horseman coin, from the Tregear collection, the king's horse trots to the right, assuming the exact same stance as the horse carrying Ranjit Singh in Dedreux's oil painting. But the Gupta king does not hold a bow and there is no attendant with a parasol either.⁷ There is, however, another coin image of Candragupta II on horseback, in which the king does hold his tall bow as prominently as Ranjit Singh does, with the string turned forward (fig. 3). The horse is trotting in the exact same stance as well. This Gupta coin, now on display in the British Museum, was acquired from H. Nelson Wright in 1910. How the latter came to possess it I do not know, but similar Horseman coins may have been circulating among early British collectors or treasured as precious and perhaps somewhat mysterious antiquities of India's past by Indian princes. I have found no evidence to prove that a Gupta coin inspired Ventura's vision for this portrait. In any case, not only *maharaja* Ranjit Singh on horseback but *maharaja* Candragupta II on horseback as well could have easily lit up the Hong Kong 'horses-in-art' exhibition with the fiery glow of his 'imperial majesty'.



Fig. 3. Gold coin showing Candragupta II on horseback, c. 410 CE; 8 g, diameter 2 cm, British Museum #1910,0403.26.

Footnotes

¹This portrait, one in a series of similar mural paintings, was commissioned by Thomas Holbein Hendley, the first curator of the Albert Hall Museum in Jaipur.

²The print was acquired from the collection of Comte Philippon in 1938. See <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dalbera/sets/72157690807018973/>.

³In the portrait gifted to Queen Victoria, Ranjit Singh's horse is blue. It seems that Imam Bakhsh may have been mostly focused on creating a strong contrast in colours between the rider and the horse rather than on the whiteness of the animal as such. Of old, white and gold were colours associated with the fame of true kingship.

⁴UK Punjab Heritage Association, on Facebook, photograph 'randjiit-sing-baadur-king-of-lahore-1838-alfred-de-dreux.'

⁵The archaeologist Alexander Cunningham bought up many coins from the Court collection after the latter's demise. He was a keen collector of Gupta coins. Cunningham's coins were eventually acquired by the British Museum.

⁶Lists of early European collections of 'Oriental' coins mention gold, silver and copper coins, though often details are missing, and the coins may be untraceable now. The coins of the Kushanas are among such gold coins, as these were found in archaeological contexts and as stray finds in the northwest of the subcontinent.

⁷The Gupta kings used the motif of the king standing beneath a parasol held up by an attendant in another of their coin series.

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De cirkeldansen van Tingri in Tibet

Bernard Kleikamp

Boudhanath bij Kathmandu is een belangrijke boeddhistische pelgrimsplaats met de grootste stupa ter wereld (het kost vier minuten om er omheen te lopen, zie foto 1) en zo'n vijftig Tibetaans-Boeddhistische kloosters op een oppervlakte van vijf vierkante km¹. Ook herbergt het een grote hoeveelheid Tibetanen, onder wie veel uit het Tingri-gebied, naar schatting ongeveer 10.000 (maar er zijn geen officiële tellingen want het aantal gevluchte Tibetanen wordt niet bijgehouden door de Nepalese overheid). Voor vluchtelingen is dit een aantrekkelijke plek om zich te vestigen, vanwege de nabijheid van de kloosters en de stupa en omdat Tingri niet zo ver weg is.

Tingri's hoofdstad Gangga in Tibet ligt hemelsbreed zo'n 200 km ten NO van Kathmandu. Mount Everest (Qomolungma) ligt ongeveer halverwege, op de grens. Tingri (transcriptie: ding ri) is de naam van de regio rond de stad Gangga (bestaande uit in totaal zes dorpen) in het district Tingri, prefectuur Shigatse in Ü/Tsang, Tibetaanse Autonome Provincie (TAR), China. Tingri grenst aan Nepal. Gangga (transcriptie: sgang dga) betekent zoiets als "gelukkige heuvel".

Één keer per jaar, op de 15e dag van de 6e maanmaand, is er een feestelijke dag van de Tingri expats in Boudhanath. 's Ochtends is er een puja in een klooster en in de middag zijn er cirkeldansen, liederen, drankjes en een gezamenlijke maaltijd op de binnenplaats van het klooster, onder een luifel die beschermt tegen de lichte moessonregens die nu en dan vallen.

Er worden alleen maar cirkeldansen (uitspraak: gorshey, transcriptie: skor gzhas) uit het Tingri gebied uitgevoerd en de onderwerpen van de liederen waarop gedanst wordt, hebben altijd met de Tingri regio te maken.

Ik was een ooggetuige tijdens de viering van 27 juli 2018 en tussen drie uur en half zes 's middags filmde ik 16 cirkeldansen. Hier is een YouTube link met één daarvan: <https://youtu.be/H7fq1n-hb5k>



Foto 1. De stupa van Boudhanath (foto: Bernard Kleikamp).

De middag begon met lofliederen op de beschermgoden.

In het Tibetaans-Boeddhistische geloof is de bodem beziel. Elk prominent kenmerk van de natuur, een berg, een rots, een heuvel of een meer, kan zijn eigen beschermgeest of -godheid hebben. Mensen die in de buurt wonen, maken lofzangen over die goden, die vaak historische figuren kunnen zijn die werden vergoddelijkt. Ook Tingri heeft zijn goden: de god van het westen is Yangönpa; de god van het oosten is



Foto 2. Sonam Dhundup met trommel (foto: Bernard Kleikamp).

Phadampa Sangye. Beiden zijn historische figuren en leefden zo'n duizend jaar geleden². Phadampa Sangye komt voor in veel van de chöd 'lineages' en is in Tibet bekend geworden als de "Vader van chöd". Simpel gezegd is chöd een vorm van meditatie. Er is een klooster gebouwd bij de grot waarvan aangenomen wordt dat Phadampa Sangye er altijd mediteerde, in een berghelling boven Gangga. Ook Yangönpa heeft zijn eigen klooster ergens in de bergen van Tingri bij het dorp Lha Thong.

Een deel van de dansen wordt begeleid door Sonam Dhundup (zie foto 2), net als alle anderen uit Tingri afkomstig, en in ca. 2008 in Boudhanath beland. Hij begeleidt de gorshey cirkeldansen op de middelgrote tweezijdig trommel rnga, die voor zijn buik hangt en die met een touw om zijn nek is bevestigd. Sonam Dhundup was/is ook mijn belangrijkste informant over de gorsheys van Tingri.

Andere cirkeldansen worden begeleid door twee of drie muzikanten op piwang (tweesnarig gestreken snaarinstrument) en/of dranyen (Tibetaanse luit) en voetgestamp van zowel muzikanten als dansers (zie foto 3). De dansen beginnen gewoonlijk in een traag tempo, maar halverwege wordt het tempo opgevoerd en dan zie je dat met name de mannelijke dansers zich flink uitleven.

De dansers zijn gekleed in kleurige traditionele kostuums. Aan de kostuums kun je herkennen uit welk dorp ze afkomstig zijn. In de danscirkel zoeken de dansers uit hetzelfde dorp elkaar op en dansen naast elkaar. Iedereen kent de liederen en zingt mee. Er zijn serieuze liedjes ("s zomers geven we bloemen aan de

god") en niet-zo serieuze ("het rivierwater bij Gangga smaakt beter dan chang bier"). Iedereen heeft het grootste plezier, inclusief ondergetekende.

Ik moet ergens die middag een verkoudheidje hebben opgelopen, want de volgende dag zat ik de hele tijd te snuffen in het vliegtuig tijdens mijn terugreis. Dit was vóór corona, anders was ik waarschijnlijk niet in het vliegtuig toegelaten.

¹ Zie voor uitgebreide informatie hierover mijn essay "The Boudha Bubble", dat is te downloaden van mijn academia.edu pagina: https://www.academia.edu/42101452/The_Bouddha_Bubble_A_pan_heterotopia_of_Tibetan_Buddism

² Uitgebreide informatie over deze goden van Tingri is te vinden op rigpawiki: https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Main_Page en ook op: <https://www.himalayanart.org>.



Foto 3. Tingri cirkeldans met muzikale begeleiding (foto: Bernard Kleikamp).



JAYASTAMBHA

Victor van Bijlert

zijn pijlen op Westerse universiteiten die zich bezig hielden met de studie van het Midden-Oosten en de Islam. Volgens Said had deze academische bezigheid feitelijk tot doel het Midden-Oosten politiek en cultureel te onderwerpen. Er was veel voor Said's these te zeggen. Over de koloniale overheersing van India had Said het niet. Maar zijn idee van *Orientalism* werd spoedig opgepikt door anderen die de formule

verder uitwerkten. Ronald Inden was de indoloog die het 'orientalism' in 1990 voor India inventariseerde in *Imagining India*. 'Orientalism' werd een academische zonde waaraan men zich niet schuldig wilde maken. Zeer terecht uiteraard.

Daarna kwam postkoloniale theorie in zwang en nog weer iets later ging men zich ook richten op het 'dekoloniseren' van academische kennis. Dit houdt onder meer in: wees je goed bewust van het Eurocentrisme in veel takken van wetenschap, want de Westerse metropool wil het patent hebben op universeel geldige kennis. Alle alternatieve inheemse vormen van kennis worden door dit eurocentrische universalisme monddood gemaakt. Dergelijke kritieken en theorieën hebben een gemeenschappelijk doel: het ontmaskeren van Westerse hegemonie en machtsaanspraken. In zeer rechtse politieke kringen in Nederland wordt deze vorm van kritiek 'cultuurmarxisme' genoemd. De universiteiten zouden vol zitten met cultuurmarxisten die de Westerse beschaving ondermijnen.

Toch blijkt iets heel anders wanneer we Indiase dekoloniale kritiek op Westerse wetenschappelijke hegemonie goed bekijken. Niet al die anti-Westerse kritiek komt uit marxistische hoek. Eigenlijk komt er weinig van uit de marxistische hoek. De linkse kritiek van Said heeft al enige decennia een niet zo heel linkse vaste woonplaats gekregen onder bepaalde Indiase academici, gefortuneerde NRI's in de VS en een (groeïend?) aantal indologen. Voor wie dit niet gelooft: doe wat intensief speurwerk op internet rond de naam Rajiv Malhotra en Infinity Foundation. Men zal versteld staan.

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Lid worden?

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