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POWDER HORN MADE OF A CONCH SHELL EXTENDED WITH MOTHER-OF-PEARL, GILT COPPER AND POSSIBLY WOOD

INDIA, GUJARAT; 17TH CENTURY

MAXIMUM H: 15.2 CM

This powder horn is made of a conch shell whose outer calcareous layer has been sanded down to expose its inner layer of reddish mother-of-pearl. To increase the volume of the horn, the conch shell has been extended upwards with panels of mother-of-pearl framed by gilt copper. The construction is presumably reinforced by an inner wooden structure. At the top is a circular cover with inlaid floral decorations in mother-of-pearl and a small, baluster-shaped spout with a sliding lid.

The horn would have contained a considerable amount of gunpowder, which could be poured down the barrel of a muzzle-loading gun via the spout. In addition to this horn, the gunner would also have carried a smaller powder flask with very finely grained gunpowder to be used as a primer (1/1974, 31/1987).

The conch shell is that of the seasnail *turbo marmoratus*. The species is found in the Indian Ocean, and its shells have long been collected along the west coast of India for the sake of its mother-of-pearl. From the sixteenth century onwards, Gujarat was particularly famous for its mother-of-pearl items (22/1983, 35/1976), which were exported to the rest of the Islamic world and to Europe, where Indian mother-of-pearl was an exotic feature in many princely collections.

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Kjeld von Folsach, Joachim Meyer and Peter Wandel: *Fighting, Hunting, Impressing. Arms and Armour from the Islamic World 1500-1850*, The David Collection, Copenhagen 2021, cat.no. 50;