



Inv. no. 13/2022

FURNITURE ORNAMENT OF GILT AND ENAMELLED SILVER

INDIA, DECCAN; C. 1600&NBSP;

H: 20; W: 12; D: 6.9 CM

The ornament depicts a rearing lion with a demon-like face, curled horns, gaping maw and lavish adornments on its body, comprising strings of beads, vines and flowers. Known as a *yali*, this lion figure originates from Hindu mythology. *Yalis* often appear in South Indian Hindu temple architecture, for example as gatekeepers, but in the fifteenth century the sultans of the Deccan adopted the imposing mythical creature as a symbol of power. In the sixteenth century, *yalis* came to adorn many fortress walls and city gates in cities such as Bidar and Golconda.¹ *Yalis* also appear on many smaller art objects from the Deccan, such as a carved ivory book stand (7/2022) and a dagger with a gilded bronze hilt which may have belonged to Sultan Ali Adil Shah I of Bijapur (36/1997 and 6/2013).

A closed lotus bud rises up from the back of the lion figure. Like parts of the *yali*'s fur, the tongue-shaped leaves of the bud are covered in semi-transparent, green enamel paint. Enamelling was a European

decoration technique which presumably came to the Deccan and the Mughal Empire via the Portuguese colony of Goa. Exactly when Indian artisans adopted the technique is unclear, but sources confirm that enamelwork was produced in the court workshops of the Mughal emperor Akbar around the year 1590.² Only a few Indian enamel objects from the first half of the seventeenth century have survived (for example 34/2019). This lion figure must have been among the earliest experiments with the new art form.

At the bottom, the ornament terminates in a short, round socket, suggesting that it may have been a finial on a post, perhaps on a royal piece of furniture. The Deccan and the Mughal Empire both had a tradition of richly decorated thrones and palanquins, and a miniature from c. 1614 shows the Mughal emperor Jahangir on a throne decorated with two duck figures with unfurled lotus flowers on their heads.³

¹ Mark S. Zebrowski: *Gold, Silver and Bronze from Mughal India*, London 1997, p. 103; George Michell and Helen Philon: *Islamic Architecture of Deccan India*, Woodbridge 2018, pp. 331–335.

² Susan Stronge: 'Gold and silver in 16th and 17th century Mughal India' in Nuno Vasallo e Silva (ed.): *The Heritage of Rauluchantim*, Lisbon 1996, pp. 69–70.

³ Susan Stronge: 'The sublime thrones of the Mughal emperors of Hindustan' in *Jewellery Studies*, 10, 2004, p. 55.

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