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BOTTLE OF MOTHER-OF-PEARL AND BOX OF WOOD COVERED IN LEATHER

INDIA, GUJARAT; C. 1600 (BOTTLE)&NBSP;  
TIBET?; 17TH CENTURY? (BOX)&NBSP;

H: 20.5; MAXIMUM D: 15.5 CM (BOTTLE)&NBSP;  
H: 22.5; MAXIMUM D: 19.2 CM (BOX)

In Gujarat, conch shells of the species *turbo marmoratus* have been collected for centuries for their inner layer of pink mother-of-pearl (36/1980). The shiny material was popular in India as well as in the rest of the Islamic world, and by the 16th century it was also exported to Europe.

The mother-of-pearl could be cut out in various shapes and was, for example, used for inlays on lacquered wood furniture (22/1983). It was also possible to build entire objects from mother-of-pearl plaques (62/2007). While such objects were often supported by an inner frame of wood or metal, this bottle consists entirely of mother-of-pearl plaques arranged in two layers held together by glue and small metal pins.

The body of the bottle has a distinctive, almost melon-like shape presumably inspired by Indian metalwork.<sup>1</sup> It is made up of twelve convex pieces of mother-of-pearl cut from several conch shells. This composite form is also known from other bottles from Gujarat, several of which have been further processed by European goldsmiths.<sup>2</sup>

The bottle was acquired together with a box made of wood and red shagreen-patterned leather, in which it was presumably kept for an extended period. Shagreen is an artificial granular pattern created by pressing small seeds into the surface of the leather while it is moist and malleable. The technique is believed to have originated in East or Central Asia.

<sup>1</sup> *Kjeld von Folsach: Art from the world of Islam in The David Collection, Copenhagen 2001, cats. 540 and 543; Mark Zebrowski: Gold, Silver and Bronze from Mughal India, London 1997, pls. 270 and 279.*

<sup>2</sup> *Helmut Trnek & Nuno Vassallo e Silva: Exotica: The Portuguese Discoveries and the Renaissance Kunstammer, Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Lisbon 2001, cat. 27; A. Moore, N. Flis and F. Vanke: The Paston Treasure: Microcosm of the Known World, Newhaven 2018, cat 21; Christie's, Paris, 7/12-2005, lot 63.*

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