Gods, Kings, and Tigers

The Art of Kotah

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Kotah's Lively Patrons and Artists

Background and Setting: The Kotah Rajputs and Their Fort

Locale and setting, as well as people and events, shape artistic style. Kotah art would be drastically different had it not been created in the context of — if not within — Kotah's magnificent fort, which must have existed many centuries before a dynamic Bundi prince, Madho Singh (b. 1599; r. 1631–48 C.E.), established his court there. This complex was not only strategically placed at a scenic bend of the Chambal River; it also adjoined some of the finest hunting grounds in all of India. Now a forty-minute drive from Bundi, it was formerly half a day's ride on horseback, and a much longer trip — at three miles per hour — by elephant. For Madho Singh, it was sufficiently far from his ancestral dynastic capital at Bundi to encourage freedom and self-reliance, but close enough for contact when needed.

The charismatic, energetic Madho Singh was a characteristic founder — an ambitious man, born to lead, happiest in the midst of his own people. Although the historical record tells us that Kotah was granted independence from Bundi by the Mughals in 1631, it is likely that Madho Singh had established his court at Kotah somewhat earlier.

As a Hara Rajput of the Chauhan clan, descended from India's ancient Aryan invaders, Madho Singh was a leader of the traditional second Hindu caste, the Kshatriyas. His role, therefore, was to defend those of the first caste, the priestly Brahmans, and to look after those of the third and fourth castes: the Vaisya, who were business people, and the Sudras, who were agricultural workers. In addition, because the area of Kotah — in 1948, 5,725 square miles — abounded in tribal Bhils, whose ancestors probably laid the foundations of Kotah's fort, it was up to him and his successors to see to it that these casteless aboriginals, with their own traditions and leaders, remained in harmony with all the others.

Kotah Fort was the state's pivot. Its massive walls, intricate interior spaces, and courtyards seem not to have been designed and built, but to have grown organically to satisfy the requirements of its occupants over many centuries. Exploring the fort in its present form reveals a great deal about both the Rajputs and the town of Kotah, which was founded in 1264 C.E. Primarily, the fort was a spiritual center, containing several household shrines and providing shelter and protection for nearby temples, houses, and bazaars. To fulfill religious responsibilities and to serve family and community, it was a formidable stronghold, symbolic of the ruler's armed might as well as the center of his government, from which he ruled the many thousands of people who inhabited the princely state. At the main gate, the arrival of distinguished personages was heralded by the vigorously melodic fanfare of musicians, performing on drums, trumpets, and oboes (*shahnais*). On entering, visitors face an early medieval sculpture of Lord Ganesh, of the family of Lord Shiva, sacred to learning and — appropriately — to beginnings. In addition to shrines sacred to the Kotah divinities, the fort contains public and private audience halls and spaces for trials, celebrations, and the reception of local and foreign dignitaries. On most occasions, royal hospitality was extended; the large halls and courtyards were within reach of the royal kitchens and pantries, which were capable of preparing, delivering, and serving food and drink for hundreds of guests at a time. A superb early complex, perhaps Madho Singh's inner audience hall, is enriched by fine, early pierced stone windows, foliate red sandstone ornament, and an impressive throne platform.

The fort also contains two family complexes — the men's quarters (*mardana*) and the zenana, for women and children — each with its own shrines, baths, kitchens, larders, personal storage places, and servants' quarters. The ruler and his senior wives occupied their own royal apartments. Like the other public and private areas, these were connected by a network of narrow corridors and staircases zigzagging through the massive stone walls to myriad chambers (some of them adorned with wall paintings), courtyards, and gardens. Each was artfully located for warmth, coolness, sunlight, shade, dryness or moisture, breezes, and views. Some of these spaces encourage thoughtful, meditative tranquility, others amorousness, merriment, or serious conversation.

Much of the lower floor of the fort is devoted to stables for elephants and horses — each with its own staff of grooms and menials — and to storage: massive quantities of food — particularly grain — and water were required to weather a siege. Arms and armor were kept, refurbished, and probably manufactured in special areas. Godowns for textiles and costumes were staffed by

Figure 1
Rao Ram Singh of Kotah Pursuing a Rhinoceros, *attributed to the Kotah Master, c. 1690, Kotah. Opaque watercolor on paper, 32.1 x 47.6 cm. Private collection in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

clerks, tailors, and seamstresses who combined the duties of museum curators, couturiers, and dry cleaners. Protected from insects by neem leaves, textiles were wrapped in white cotton and shelved. Jewels and jeweled objects were stored in particularly well-guarded chambers. State documents and unillustrated manuscripts also had their places, superintended by librarians, scribes, and guards. Religious texts, ritual objects, and the many embroidered and painted sacred textiles were maintained by a staff of pandits in the service of the household gods.

Paintings were kept in the airy, dry picture storeroom (*pothikhana*), where they were piled on massive stone shelves. Paintings and drawings were usually wrapped in cotton bandannas to protect them from insects, dampness, and light. The bundles were arranged according to topic and size. Many shelves were devoted to sets portraying Hindu divinities and saints and to illustrations of Hindu classics, such as the *Gita Govinda, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata,* and *Madhavanala Kamakandala-chaupai. Ragamalas* — sets of musical modes or "garlands of melody" — and the *Barahmasas* (Twelve Months) were nearby. Another section was taken up by illustrated histories, astronomical and astrological works, medicine (human and veterinary), erotica, studies of animals — especially of horses and elephants — geography, and local and world history. All of these were available to the ruler, his family, and favored members of his establishment and guests. For a Rajput's continuing traditional education, they were among the essential sources.

Also instructive and enjoyable were paintings and drawings showing Kotah places and events: forts, palaces, pavilions, battles, festivals, marriages, darbars (court gatherings), hunts, polo games, and receptions of fellow rulers and other eminences. Many of these pictures include portraits of the raos and maharaos, their families, courtiers, staff, and guests. Large numbers of single portraits were also commissioned and collected; although most of these depict Kotah people, they include important personages from other Rajput states, the Mughal emperors and members of their courts, Marathas, and others whose lives touched on Kotah.

Each picture was inscribed with vital information, either on the recto or the verso, or on both. They were also numbered and occasionally enriched with comments accumulated over years of viewing. Like books in library stacks, they remained in storage most of the time and were brought out only when requested. On such occasions, they were examined, enjoyed, and commented on by the ruler and his family, friends, and guests.

At present, the Kotah collection includes several hundred paintings and drawings, ranging in size from tiny sketches to such vast pictures on cloth as *Maharao Ram Singh's Visit to Delhi* (cat. 65). Among them, a small number were painted elsewhere than at Kotah, and came as gifts or loot, or by purchase. These include a superb and perfectly preserved mid-seventeenth-century musical modes set from Malwa, several Bundi paintings, fine Maratha, Devgarh, and Jodhpur portraits, and a few folkloristic mandalas

and other subjects. Conspicuously absent are examples from the Mughal and Deccani courts — a surprising omission considering the political and cultural ties between these two important polities and Kotah.

Kotah's Eminent Artists

In 1957, the painting *Rao Ram Singh of Kotah Pursuing a Rhinoceros* was sighted among many hundreds of cast-off Indian pictures heaped atop a large table (fig. 1). A paper conservator's nightmare, its surface was abraded; the rhinoceros's mask and most of the elephant's posterior had been worn away. Worse, part of the rump and hind legs of the elephant had been reverently but clumsily replaced. Like an overused dollar bill, the picture had been folded and refolded so often that a "cross" of paper losses threatened to sunder it into four pieces. Nevertheless, the painting's composition, with its mighty, fire-eyed elephant and gracefully whiplashing bell-ropes, demanded attention. Three years later, it enlivened the cover of an Asia Society exhibition catalogue, Sherman Lee's *Rajput Painting*.[1]

Such discoveries inspire searches for more of their kind, and very soon other drawings and paintings assignable to the same hand came to light. Among them were two small drawings of fish, geese, and three dragons, which stimulated speculation about their artist's life and training (fig. 2). The dragons imply links to distant Tabriz, the western Iranian center of culture and trade with China, Europe, and India. During the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Tabriz artists drew and painted large numbers of snorting, romping dragons, derived from imported Chinese ceramics, metalwork, and embroideries acrawl with statelier members of the saurian family.[2]

But why should an artist working at Kotah in the late seventeenth century be so aware of fifteenth-century western Iranian dragons from Turkman Tabriz? History explains, transporting us through space and time to several centers of the Turko-Indo-Iranian world — first to the Deccan, where we meet Sultan-Quli, founder of the Muslim dynasty at Golconda. This aspiring soldier and statesman was born in western Iran to a princely Qara-Quyunlu, or "Black Sheep," Turkman family, who had been replaced by the Aq-Quyunlu, or "White Sheep," Turkmans. After suffering further persecution when Sultan Yaqub came to power in 1478, twenty-year-old Sultan-Quli and his uncle, Allah-Quli, were dispatched by Sultan-Quli's father to India to recoup the family fortunes by trading in horses.

Although Allah-Quli and Sultan-Quli brought valuable presents to help smooth relations with local rulers, they were ill-received in northern India. They ventured southwards into the Deccan, where they fared better, especially at Muhammadabad-Bidar, the still-glorious capital of the Bahmanid sultans. According to legend, young Sultan-Quli gained royal favor in the hunting field. His prowess was honored by a sultanly gift of 150 Arab, Turkish, and Iraqi horses, each with a golden saddle. He was also granted the title of Khawas Khan, and to provide for his herds and himself he received the lucrative estate (*jagir*) of Kurangal. Another legend claims that his success stemmed from making wise investments for ladies of the royal household; yet another ascribes it to saving the life of the king. For whichever reason, in 1496 he was appointed governor (*tarafdar*) of Tilangana and assigned the great fort at Golconda. Always loyal to the Bahmanids, Sultan-Quli, by now titled Qutbul Mulk, abstained from proclaiming himself a sultan, even when the territories of the collapsing Bahmanids were divided

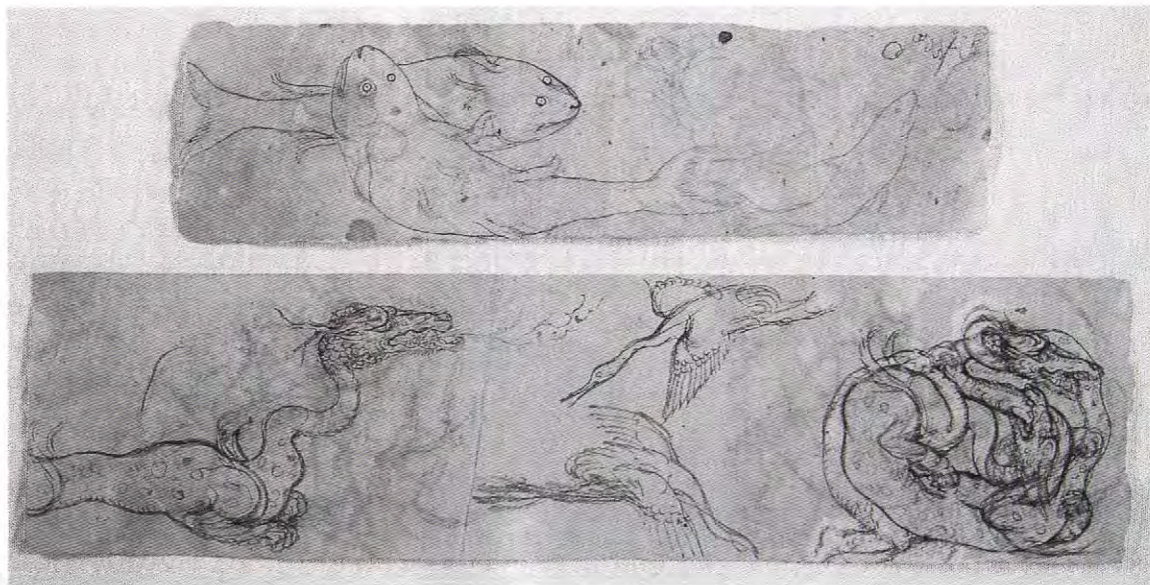


Figure 2
Fish *and* Geese and Three Dragons, *attributed to the Kotah Master, c. 1700, Kotah. Black and red line on paper, (top) 3.4 x 13.7 cm, (bottom) 4.6 x 18.7 cm. Private collection in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

Figure 3
Inhabited Arabesque, *late sixteenth century, Deccan, Golconda. Reddish black ink with touches of white line on paper, 11.4 x 6.4 cm. Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art, Hyderabad.*

into five independent dynasties — the Imad Shahis of Berar, Nizam Shahis of Ahmednagar, Barid Shahis of Bidar, Adil Shahis of Bijapur, and his own, the Qutb Shahis of Golconda.[3]

Over the years, the sultanate of Golconda prospered, and its rulers distinguished themselves as enlightened and energetic patrons of every art. Invariably, their pictures and objects combined elements from Iran with those of the Deccan, blending imported Muslim and indigenous Hindu elements. This exciting synthesis is represented by a small, lyrical drawing of inhabited arabesques in Hyderabad (fig. 3).[4] The drawing underscores the extraordinary energy, finesse, and fantasy of Golconda art and looks ahead to the equally exciting works of art that emerged from the diffusion of its contagiously appealing style.

History warns that great success can cause trouble. The lucrative diamond mines, trade, and fertile lands that fueled Golconda's artistic flowering also aroused envy. Toward the end of his reign, the ever-expansive Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) initiated military campaigns against Golconda and the other Deccani sultanates. After his death, his ambitions were kept alive by the continual, wearying campaigns of his successors, until, toward the end of the seventeenth century, his great-grandson Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707) finally weakened and defeated his southern rivals.

Because Hindu Rajputs served as officers in the imperial armies of the Muslim Mughals, heroic Kotah warriors, including the rulers Madho Singh (r. 1631–48), Jagat Singh (r. 1658–83), and Kishor Singh (r. 1684–96), spent many years — and spilled much of their blood — in the Deccan. There, at the imperial base camps, first at Burhanpur and later at Aurangabad, a remarkably catalytic cultural synthesis took place. Mughals and Rajputs — each accompanied by family, court, staff, and armies — learned not only to appreciate one another's arts and traditions but also to admire those of the artistically inventive Deccanis. Because Rajput coffers were filled both from the imperial exchequer and by lavish gifts doled out to imperial generals by enemies eager to delay the inevitable Mughal triumph, these warrior-connoisseurs could afford to cultivate the arts of peace.[5]

Akbar's and his successors' Deccani campaigns in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries prompted increasing numbers of Deccani artists and craftsmen to seek the security of north Indian employment. Toward the end of the seventeenth century, with the defeats of Bijapur and Golconda seemingly imminent, they flocked to Aurangabad, the Mughal enemy's military outpost, which had become a bustling metropolis. If a Mughal or Rajput enriched by his share of the imperial spoils needed a poet, theologian, philosopher, cook, musician, weaver, metalworker, or artist, he could choose from an eager array of talent trained at Bijapur or Golconda. It seems most likely that at Aurangabad, Jagat Singh of Kotah encountered, admired, and offered employment to the artist whom I call the "Kotah Master," whose work shows powerful influences from both Golconda and Aurangabad.[6]

A portrait attributable to the Kotah Master shows the patron enthroned like a sultan in a formal garden, accompanied by lady attendants (fig. 4).[7] As though riding the full moon, he occupies a golden throne on a round marble platform set in a lush formal garden. Near the lower border, a majestic sarus crane displays every graceful plume to his ladylike inamorata, metaphorically extolling Jagat Singh's magnetism. The bird's impassioned gestures are as expressive as those of Rao Ram Singh's hurtling elephant (fig. 1). As finely painted as a Persian or Golconda miniature, this joyous

play on symmetry, burgeoning with flowers and spouting fountains, turns a moment of royal Kotah ease into paradise on earth.

The Kotah Master's apparently simple but in fact exceedingly subtle and difficult technique — essentially opaque watercolor, or gouache, on paper — is part of an artistic legacy from India, Iran, and beyond. Rooted in the ancient classical and Eastern worlds, it was almost identical not only to the technique of every other traditional Turko-Indo-Iranian miniature painter but also to the methods of miniature painters in the West.[8]

Traditional artists learned their craft as apprentices, either in the extensive royal ateliers, in the few workshops supported by great nobles, or in the bazaars, where work was carried out less painstakingly and with less costly materials. An important part of artists' training was the use of tracings (*charbas*), which enabled them to borrow earlier motifs from paintings or sketches and transfer them to works for presentation. This shortcut not only instructed fledgling painters in the elements of the Kotah style, but enriched their work with quotations from the impressive Kotah classics. Thus, a dying lion painted in 1700 by the Kotah Master might be reborn in a hunting scene of 1830.

Although many of the drawings and paintings seen here are painstakingly detailed, finished works intended for royal appreciation and collection, others — especially drawings — were made for the artists' own purposes, in many cases as steps toward the creation of a commissioned work. Varying in degree of finish, and often from life, some of the sketches were casual jottings, never intended for public view. Owing to the emphasis on line at Kotah — Rajasthan's most draftsmanly school — many Kotah pictures could be described as tinted drawings. Among the finished works, some qualify as masterpieces, for they seem to have been made from beginning to end by master artists working virtually unassisted. Others are joint creations by major masters in collaboration with their apprentices or assistants, since it was more important for pictures to meet standards of quality than to be executed entirely by a single eminent hand.

Interaction between patrons and artists at Kotah is not easy to define, owing to the unavailability (and loss) of archival material. Helpfully, several paintings were inscribed with such formulas as "This is obtained from the hand of the painter S[h]eikh Taju, given by him" (cat. 45). This suggests that it might have been an actual gift and implies cordiality between Maharao Umed Singh I (r. 1771–1819) and his leading artist. The exhilaration of many Kotah pictures, regardless of date or artist, conveys the artists' infectious pleasure in their accomplishment. This strongly argues that the relationship between artists and patrons was a happy one; when especially pleased, the latter lavished presents on the former. It should be remembered, however, that Kotah rulers were often away from Kotah, serving in the Deccan, Qandahar, or elsewhere. It is likely, therefore, that supervision of the Kotah ateliers sometimes fell to other members of the royal family or to senior staff members. In any case, the active, appreciative guidance and support by royal connoisseurs no doubt contributed greatly to Kotah art's vital zing.

The Kotah Master's major predecessor in the Kotah style was a gifted and engaging artist whose earliest works exhibit stylistic links to paintings from the commercial workshops of Agra, the Mughal capital where Kotah princes attended imperial gatherings. Although this important artist's name is not known, his development at Kotah can be traced from several pictures assignable to him on stylistic grounds over a span of years. The key to understanding his artistic personality and identifying his work at Kotah is a group

Figure 4
Jagat Singh of Kotah in a Garden, *attributed to the Kotah Master, c. 1675–1700, Kotah. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 27 x 17.8 cm. Private collection in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

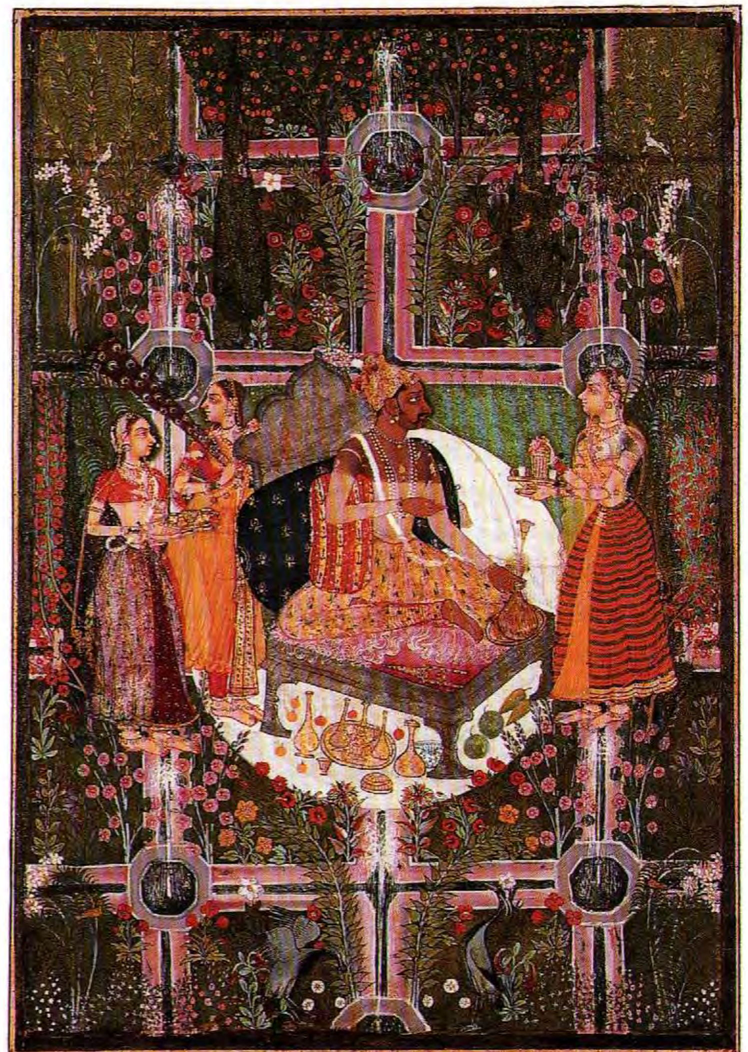


Figure 5
Elephant Combat with Figures in a Landscape, *wall painting in the Baddal Mahal, Bundi Fort, c. 1600–25, Bundi. Opaque pigments on fibrous ground prepared with lime.*

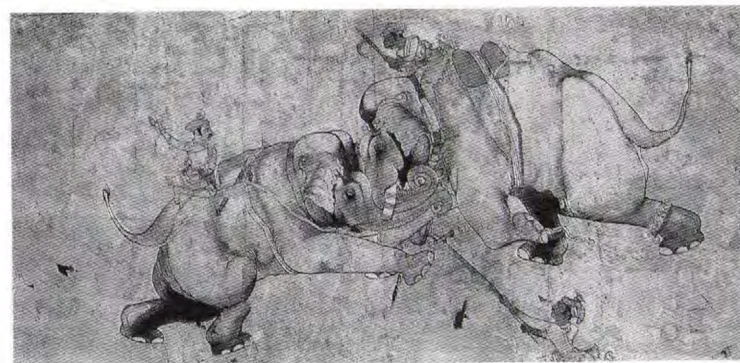
of late-seventeenth-century drawings of elephants that are clearly by a single innovative, highly idiosyncratic artist. Characteristically brilliant is his elephant combat in the Lucknow Museum, tantalizingly inscribed with a name (or more likely a nickname), "Niju," and with the year 1725. The date, however, is forty or so years later than the style of the picture, so it is possible that the inscription postdates the drawing and is therefore not as reliable as we might wish.[9]

Because the brilliantly spirited elephants are stylistically identical to several drawings in other collections, all depicting elephants, the artist's — and Kotah art's — quintessential subject, this artist may best be designated the "Master of Elephants." Prior to the arrival of the Kotah Master, he most likely served as the chief Kotah court artist, working exclusively on royal projects. Because his earth-trembling elephants recall those in the still strongly sixteenth-century-style wall and ceiling paintings of the Baddal Mahal of Bundi Fort, it would appear that he studied either them or other, now lost Bundi pictures of comparable power (fig. 5).[10] Along with Madho Singh's personal servants, cooks, and bard, this artist seems to have accompanied the ruler everywhere — including Bundi — whether on military campaigns, on hunting expeditions, to weddings, or on pleasure trips. Like today's photographers and filmmakers, he would have kept close to the royal presence in order to document noteworthy events day by day. When not on the road, he — like other leading court artists — probably lived with his family in town and worked both there and in studios within the fort.

A second wonderful elephant combat of the same date, in the collection of Sir Howard Hodgkin, amplifies our understanding of this artist's undulating line, incisive as wire, and of his vibrant images, which hover between tangible, observed reality and the dream world of a fervent imagination (fig. 6).[11] However well this vigorous artist rendered people, trees, black bucks, or cows, only his elephants were truly visionary. Without them, his accomplishment might be overlooked. Because he flowered artistically at Kotah, a major center of elephants, he could scrutinize his archetypal subject daily. And if we compare his elephants to those of virtually any other of the world's artists, most of whom imbue them with the ponderousness of battered old sofas, it is evident that only he fully appreciated their catlike antics and the look of bones, gristle, and muscle fluidly packed into thick, flexible skins. Heightening empathy, he calculatedly exaggerated hollows and lumps, and contracted or expanded distances between anatomical parts.

Close study of the Hodgkin and Lucknow Museum drawings enables us to identify other major Kotah pictures as his. Early among them is the series of illustrations to a *Bhagavata Purana* of about 1630 or 1640, given by H.H. the late Maharao Bhim Singh II to the Government Museum of Kota (cat. 3–5). In one of these, *Krishna Slays the Elephant Kuvalayapida* (cat. 5), he concentrated on the heap of elephant debris with far more than the usual Rajput artist's concern for anatomy. Although painted decades earlier, it so closely prefigures his Lucknow drawing both in quality of line and in the analytical, scientific approach to the elephant that this painting may be attributed to him at the time of his emergence as a Kotah artist. This attractive painting, in which the personage in the "window of appearances" (*jharoka*) might be Madho Singh himself, conveys the state of pictorial art at Kotah in about 1635. Together with *Krishna Quells the Snake, Kaliya,* perhaps the most attractive illustration from this series (cat. 4), it indicates that Madho Singh was the progressive and imaginative patron of a gifted and innovative artist, and the first of a long line of Kotah ruler-patrons who put their frequently visionary stamp on Kotah art. Like many devoted

Figure 6
Elephant Combat, *attributed to the Master of Elephants, c. 1675–1700, Kotah. Black line heightened with opaque watercolor and white on paper, 34.3 x 67.4 cm. Collection of Sir Howard Hodgkin, London.*



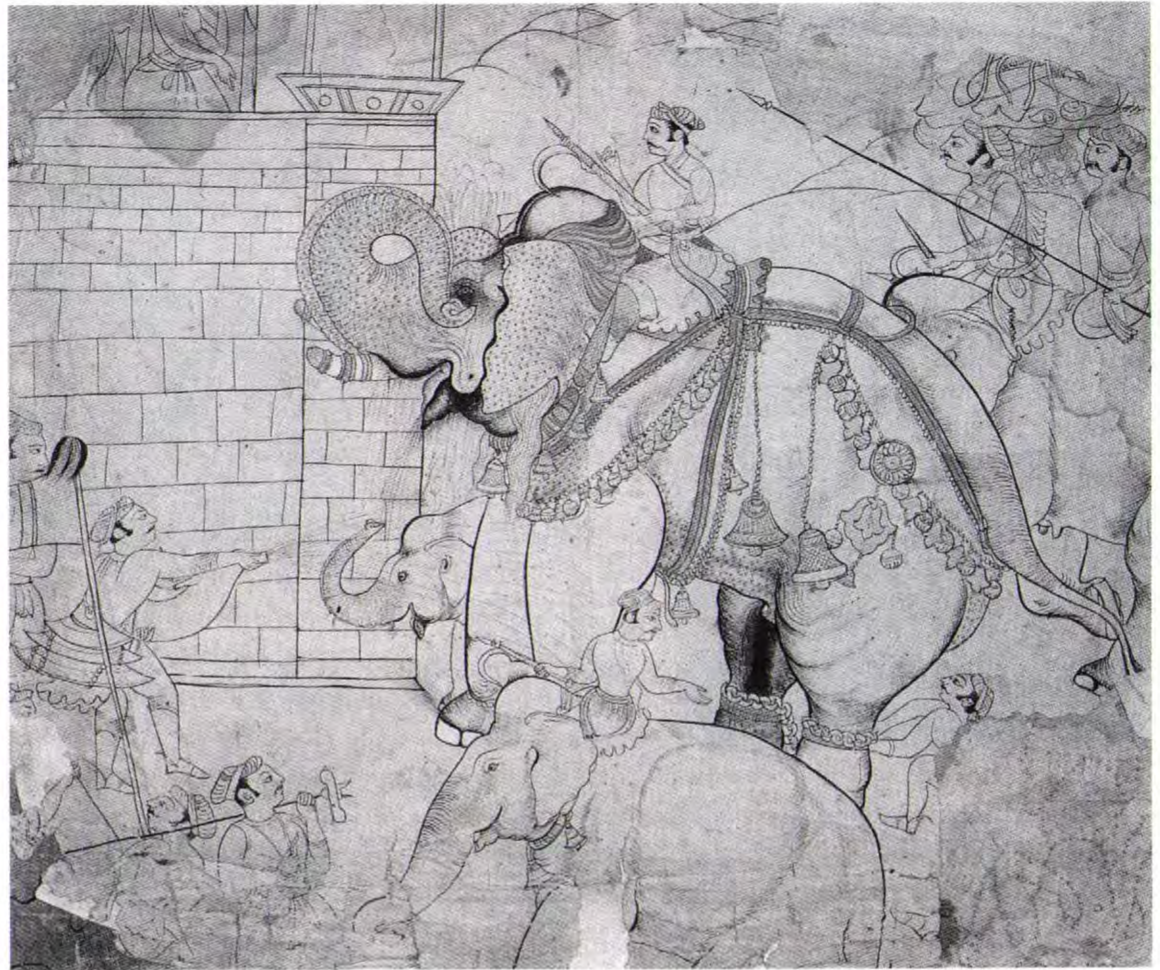


Figure 7
A Proud Elephant with Progeny Viewed by a Prince, *attributed to the Master of Elephants, c. 1640–50, Kotah. Black line heightened with opaque watercolor on paper, 24 x 28 cm. Private collection in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

hunters, Madho Singh not only loved and sympathized with the animals he pursued, but wanted to know everything about them, inside and out. Under his patronage, Kotah painting established itself as *the* hunting, shooting, and fishing school of Rajput art.[12]

In 1631, Madho Singh earned Shah Jahan's approval by felling the despised traitor Khan Jahan Lodi, whose severed head was brought to Shah Jahan to enhance his pleasure while boating on the Tapti River, near Burhanpur. The Kotah ruler's close contacts with both Jahangir and Shah Jahan probably familiarized him with imperial Mughal art; particularly influential were its sensitive and detailed reportage and its success in representing many people and animals in space. Both are apparent in a damaged drawing attributable to the Master of Elephants showing a richly caparisoned, apparently overagitated elephant and its progeny being sprayed with water beneath the eye of a now headless prince, probably Madho Singh (fig. 7).[13] Less accurately observed than the Hodgkin and Lucknow drawings, it nevertheless shares their even, controlled line, vibrant spirit, and use of broadly brushed darks — instead of crosshatching and massed arcing lines — to deepen shadows. Above all, it brings out the Master of Elephants' sharply sensitive observation of elephant behavior and psychology. One of his stock human characters reappears here — the same acquiline-nosed, mustached man who risks life as a mahout in the Hodgkin elephant combat. Later than the series of preparatory drawings for the Government Museum of Kota's *Bhagavata Purana* paintings, this work can be dated to the 1650s or early 1660s, between the *Bhagavata Purana* project and the Hodgkin and Lucknow drawings.[14]

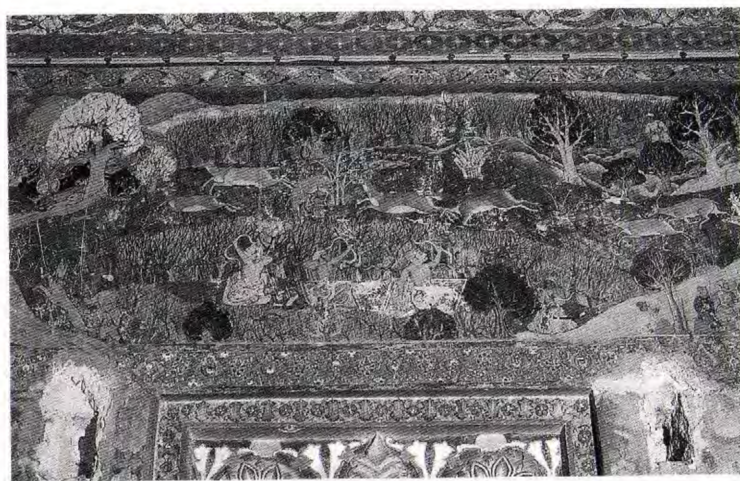
The Kotah ateliers worked hard and spiritedly at varying assignments. Like many Renaissance artists in the West, artists at Kotah were called upon not only to paint both secular and religious subjects on paper but also to adorn walls. The most ambitious commission from Rao Madho Singh was a cycle of murals in the inner room of the fort's Chhattar Mahal. This complex panorama showing the fort, nearby temples, and hundreds of lively figures of men and gods was daubed over by well-intentioned late-nineteenth-century hacks, who scrupulously followed every line of the original work; although no single figure, animal, tree, or flower can be enjoyed in its present state, a few darkened but intact patches of once-splendid floral border attest to the high quality of the otherwise unattractively veiled original.

It would be hard to overemphasize the importance to Kotah art of these ill-served wall paintings. Their iconographic program

Figure 8
Madho Singh Converses with a Pandit, *detail of wall painting in the Chhattar Mahal, Kotah Fort; underdrawing probably by the Master of Elephants, original drawing c. 1630 (wholly repainted in the late nineteenth century), Kotah. Opaque watercolor over fibrous ground prepared with lime.*

contains the entire gamut of Kotah subjects, religious and secular: episodes from the *Bhagavata Purana,* anecdotes of town and court life, gardens, river-boating, hunts, elephant and other animal combats, and more elephants, shown in Kotah service and being caught in the wild. On entering the room, one faces, at the left side, a busy celebration of the arrival at Kotah Fort of Krishna and Radha, who then enter the building and reappear upstairs, where Krishna bestows the sacred forehead mark (*tilak*) on Madho Singh. On the floor above, the busy god joins Radha on a throne platform, where

Figure 9
Princes Shooting Deer; Dogs Hunting Down Boar, *wall painting in the Baddal Mahal, Bundi Fort; c. 1600–25, Bundi. Opaque pigments on fibrous ground prepared with lime.*



they are blessed by Brahma. To the right on the same wall, we see Madho Singh in formal audience, facing a pandit to his right (fig. 8). To his left are men of his family and courtiers, all enjoying music and dance. The entire left-hand wall is devoted to a large view of the palace and gardens during the reception of a delegation of prestigious Mughals, a few years before Kotah's enfeoffment as an independent state by the emperor in 1631. They have brought an offering of golden vessels to Madho Singh, who most casually grants them an audience while taking his ease on a platform at the center of a garden pool. Next, in the upper left, the Mughals honor the enthroned ruler in his hall of private audience. In every scene, the prestige of the Kotah ruler is raised and that of his imperial visitors lowered. Pointedly, Madho Singh's menial employees, including a gardener and water-carrier, are of Mughal ilk, with characteristic Muslim beards. Other walls of the cycle are richly painted with familiar Hindu motifs. Throughout, alas, the lively animals, gods, royals, courtiers, attendants, and townspeople (if such they are) of the original have been reduced to zombiedom.[15]

Stylistically very similar to these wall paintings are many unretouched miniatures in the Rao Madho Singh Trust Museum, Fort Kotah, illustrating the *Madhavanala Kamakandala-chaupai.* Two are included here (cat. 1 and 2). The set can be dated between 1620 and 1630, and although stylistic elements of the commercial Mughal style of Agra predominate, it contains women posed in the geometricized Chaurapanchasika style of the pre-Mughal period, while already (like the more complex, somewhat later compositions of the Chhattar Mahal murals) looking ahead to riper periods of Kotah art.[16] Vegetation and architectural detail — especially the deeply scalloped pediments and picturesquely silhouetted domes — anticipate later Kotah motifs. Moreover, the leading royal personage, facing the heroine in *A Lady Swoons* (cat. 2), strikingly resembles Madho Singh, with his lengthy, drooping mustache, as known from the bedaubed Chhattar Mahal murals. If these attractive small pictures, probably the earliest to have survived from Kotah, contained elephants or other animals to compare with those by the Master of Elephants, they might more confidently be attributed to this multifaceted pioneer of Kotah art.

The latest of the stunningly powerful drawings attributable to the Master of Elephants is an energetic study, belonging to the Rao Madho Singh Trust Museum, of a raging elephant struggling to break its chains (cat. 12). Increasing the animal's frustration, he is hemmed in by grooms (now missing) who are attempting to subdue him by brandishing terrifying spinning fireworks at the ends of poles, ignited by smoldering lengths of rope (*charkis*). In addition to being one of Indian art's most powerful depictions of an elephant, this drawing represents the Master of Elephants' accomplishment at a critical, final stage. It also constitutes evidence that he was a major influence on, if not the tutor of, the Kotah Master;

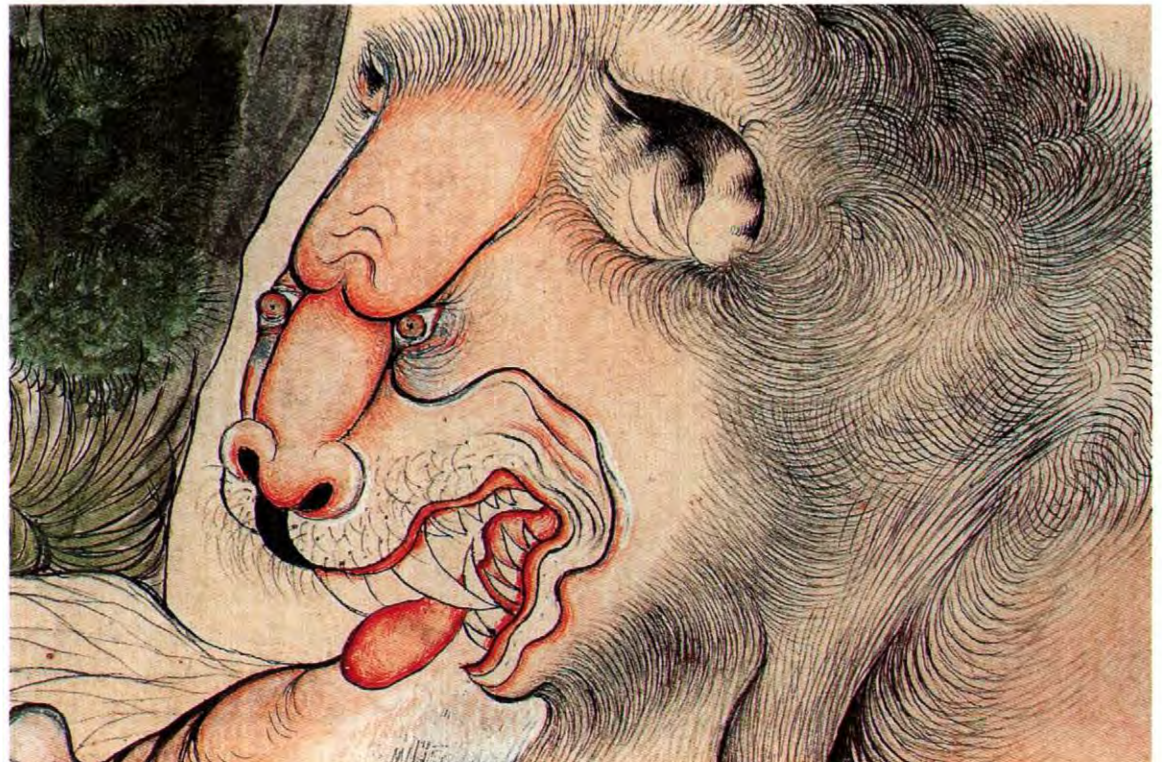
indeed, without the earlier Kotah artist's examples of elephant drawing, the later one could not have excelled so remarkably in this Kotah specialty.

Other significant works were also painted before the Kotah Master appeared in the Kotah studios. *Two Princes Shooting Deer; Dogs Hunting Down Boar,* a paradoxically lyrical hunting scene, stands alone in the Kotah collection (cat. 6). On the basis of Joachim K. Bautze's discoveries, we know that this picture was based on a wall painting at Bundi, in the Baddal Mahal, datable to the first quarter of the seventeenth century (fig. 9). Because Bundi was the senior Hara house, from which Kotah emerged under Madho Singh, it would be surprising if the artistic connections between them were not close. The present picture, dating from about 1660 or slightly earlier, stands midway not only between Bundi and Kotah but also between secular and religious painting. The two virtually congruent figures, not quite portraits, bring to mind Rama and Lakshman, the godly brothers whose heroism enlivens the *Ramayana,* a great Hindu epic.[17]

Also unusual within the canon of Kotah art are two large sets of illustrations to the *Rukminimangala* (Tale of Rukmini), one with simple red borders, the other with borders adorned with floral arabesques. They represent Kotah religious painting in about 1660, sometime before the arrival of the Kotah Master. Everyone in these densely packed, brightly hued, busy compositions is lively and individualized. Although they are lacking in psychological depth, anecdotal incidents and bright faces abound. Unlike the earlier Kotah illustrations to the *Madhavanala Kamakandala-chaupai,* these are excellent sources of information about buildings, costume, all of the decorative arts, and human behavior, both formal and informal. The opening picture of the more sumptuous, slightly later set includes a splendidly dressed Jagat Singh standing before a sage (cat. 8). Jagat Singh's short, richly flowered robe of honor (*kaftan*)

Figure 10
Bhoj Singh of Bundi Slays a Lion, *attributed to the Kotah Master, c. 1700–25, Kotah. Opaque watercolor on paper, 47.6 x 66 cm. Stuart Cary Welch collection in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

Figure 11
Detail of Bhoj Singh of Bundi Slays a Lion, *attributed to the Kotah Master, c. 1700–25, Kotah. Opaque watercolor on paper, 47.6 x 66 cm. Stuart Cary Welch collection in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*



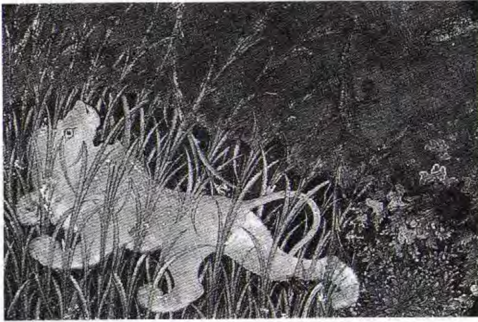


Figure 12
Detail of Faridun Crosses the River Dijleh *(fol. 33b of the* Shahnameh *of Shah Tahmasp, the* "Houghton Shahnameh"*), attributed to Sultan-Muhammad, c. 1525, Tabriz, Iran. Opaque watercolor, gold, silver, and mica on paper, 47 x 31.8 cm. Private collection in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

is of the sort presented by the Mughals to appreciated courtiers and distinguished visitors, and most of the lesser noblemen's costumes are also of imperial cut. The artist projects life at its material and spiritual best. Everyone seems to be dressed for a wedding reception or darbar. These pictures document the increasing wealth of Kotah, whose princes had been sharing in the Deccani spoils since the days of Madho Singh. One wonders where these opulent miniatures were painted, at a time when the ruler probably spent very little time at Kotah, and for whom the Raj Mahal (Throne Room, or "throne-tent") was set up wherever he happened to be. The paintings exhibit no traces of the Master of Elephants' style or of the style of any other known Kotah artist. Perhaps the accomplished artist, who seems to have worked with an assistant, was an Aurangabadi influenced by Mughal, Rajput, and Deccani art. If his reportorial tendencies are indebted to the Mughal example, his penchant for purples and rose-violets is reminiscent of the Deccan. Whatever his place of origin and wherever he lived, he worked diligently and well on these two series, after which his style vanished from the Kotah artistic scene.

Other examples from the Kotah school's evolution provide further agreeable divergences from the artistic norm, with its emphasis on the rulers' active roles at Mughal and Deccani cultural centers. A nameless colleague of the Master of Elephants and of the Kotah Master during the last quarter of the seventeenth century is identifiable from his idiosyncratic manner. He painted an ebullient scene of ladies — one of whom is coyly pouting — celebrating the spring festival of Holi with the god Indra's vehicle, an astoundingly obliging elephant with four tusks named Airavat (cat. 13). Gently, femininely soft in design, drawing, and color, this almost rococo confection brings to mind another delightful picture, probably by the same hand: *Prince in the Zenana Garden,* from the collection of the late Kumar Sangram Singh of Nawalgarh.[18] Lacking the linear power associated with the Master of Elephants and the Kotah Master, both of whom normally painted pictures celebrating the masculine activities of the men's quarters, they may have been commissioned especially in zenana taste for the delectation of Kotah ladies. During the formative period of the Kotah ateliers, artists' places of origin ranged widely. Although the "Master of the Zenana," as he might be known, appears to have shed most earmarks of his original style after settling at Kotah, enough traces remain to allow speculation. He seems to have emerged from the central Indian tradition, in which artists interpreted the world in rhythmic, broad, flat, brightly colored areas, rich in decorative formulas for trees, flowers, and water — elements that persist here.

The Kotah Master seems to have joined the workshops of Jagat Singh at a propitious moment. The ruler was rich with Deccani spoils and had time for the arts. The workshop of which the Kotah Master was in charge was modest, probably consisting of no more than one or two permanent senior artists and a few apprentices and helpers. (Written historical evidence for the Kotah ateliers is scarce, although information might be found in the archives stored at Bikaner. Visual evidence, based on a survey of a great many Kotah pictures, indicates that there were never more than a few master artists, assistants, and apprentices working at Kotah at any one time.) Once the Kotah Master himself entered Kotah employment, his themes were fundamentally transformed. Stock Muslim heroes such as Rustam or Bahram Gur became

Figure 13
Daydreaming Youth, *Aqa Riza, c. 1585, Isfahan, Iran. Reed pen or brush and black ink on paper, 12 x 6.7 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

Kotah warriors and hunters; dragons and simurghs metamorphosed into elephants and lions or soaring geese. Golconda palaces were transmuted into Kotah forts and pavilions. In *Bhoj Singh of Bundi Slays a Lion,* attributable to him, one of the Kotah ancestors looses a killing arrow into the heart of a striding lion (fig. 10). Close inspection of the angered beast, particularly of his mask, reveals the artist's empathy with the dying animal — and also points to his artistic sources. The stylization of the mask harks back to the noble lions of Persepolis and to those painted in Turkman, Timurid, and Safavid Iran. It scarcely seems coincidental that a striding lion in the foreground of *Faridun Crosses the River Dijleh,* painted by the great Persian artist Sultan-Muhammad in about 1525 for Shah Tahmasp Safavi's copy of the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings), could easily be mistaken for a Kotah picture (figs. 11 and 12).[19] In the Kotah lion's mask and well-groomed mane, crescendos of calligraphic line thicken, thin, and crisscross with expressively defining elegance. They demonstrate the Kotah artist's mastery of the calligraphic style of Aqa Riza,[20] the influential later Safavid draftsman and painter, who drew in the rhythmic flourishes of Nastaliq script; for visual evidence of the spread of the Iranian's style to Kotah via Golconda and Aurangabad, we might compare the undulating sinuosities of the Kotah Master's lion mask with Aqa Riza's brilliant reed pen sketch of a youth (fig. 13).[21] Both artists delighted in metaphor: the Kotah Master lent his lion's ears the geometric grace of conch shells, and Aqa Riza's youth's hands became flowers.

The Kotah Master's interpretations of blood sports transmuted them from mundane reality to otherworldliness. If we compare earlier hunting pictures from Bundi or Kotah to his, it is evident that he brought new symbolic depth to this very Rajput activity. In *A Raja Slays a Tiger,* for example, probably painted at Bundi in about 1625, a true-to-life hunter batters a ferociously credible wounded beast with the butt of his matchlock (fig. 16).[22] Tree, rocks, starry sky, and grass are alive with rhythmic force and glowing color; but the drama — with its pathetic white cow serving as dead tethered bait, a terrified fellow huntsman, and the intent raja, balancing on a cot (*charpoi*) safely up a tree — describes a particular act of skill and bravery. It contrasts sharply with *Bhoj Singh of Bundi Slays a Lion* (fig. 10), in which the splendidly regal, jeweled, and plumed Rajput, graceful as a Safavid Bahram Gur or Rustam, draws his bow with Nijinskian verve, releasing an exquisite shaft into a lion more magnificent than those from any jungle. Although the artist has captured the determined spirits of both man and beast, he projects their drama as an emblematic, cosmic metaphor: a good ruler triumphing over an evil monster.

The Kotah Master's Iranian — specifically Turkman and Safavid — stylistic roots are even more clearly demonstrated in a partially colored drawing attributable to him (fig. 14). In it, a graceful, Rustam-like hero topples a snarlingly petulent demon (*div*). Line for line, this was borrowed from a powerful Turkman picture in the so-called Yaqub Bek Album[23] preserved in the Topkapi Sarayi Museum Library of Istanbul (fig. 15). It is quite likely that the Kotah Master's picture was based on a version of the Turkman picture brought to Golconda by its founder, Sultan-Quli Qutbul Mulk, the erstwhile Aq-Quyunlu prince admired for his knowledge

Figure 14
A Hero Topples a Demon (Div), *attributed to the Kotah Master (perhaps working after a tracing from the painting shown here as fig. 15), late seventeenth century, possibly the Deccan, Golconda or Aurangabad. Black ink and opaque watercolor on paper, 24.2 x 22.5 cm. Private collection in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

Figure 15
A Hero Topples a Demon (Div), *showing Aq-Quyunlu Turkman style, c. 1450–1500, Tabriz, Iran. Black and opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 19.2 x 27 cm. After Ipsiroglu 1976, pl. 32.*

and patronage of poetry and art. Whether executed at Golconda, Aurangabad, or Kotah, this spirited picture owes its existence to a tracing or pounce, which the artist chose to reverse. While drawing it, he transformed the fifteenth-century Aq-Quyunlu line of the original into the more graceful and currently influential mode of Aqa Riza. Examined together, details of the Kotah Master's lion mask and his demon's face point strongly to a Turkman-Golconda-Kotah connection.

Works attributable to the Kotah Master show him to have been greatly prolific: he not only drew and painted on paper, but also turned his hand to painting murals, at least one of which, a ceiling in the Chhattar Mahal, has survived (fig. 17). Although crudely restored in areas damaged by monsoon rains, the swirling composition of simurghlike birds, geese, and other local plumed game, framed in characteristic Golconda arabesques, brings to mind the sharply observed sketch of Kotah geese reproduced above (fig. 2). Occupying a space that was once the portico leading into the room containing the Master of Elephants' mural cycle, the ceiling suffered considerably from lengthy exposure to intense sunlight before the wide entrance was narrowed toward the end of the nineteenth century. At that time, the new interior walls, to the right and left of the door, were decorated with awkwardly amusing pictures containing railway trains, steamboats, Victorian costumes, and other exotic elements. These can be assigned to the same daubers who so carefully gummed over the Master of Elephants' murals.

Far more important, and calling for serious study, are the earlier, also faded and damaged, wall paintings in this erstwhile portico. Consisting of hunts, processions, darbars, animal studies, and many other standard secular Kotah topics, they appear to have been painted over several decades, from the later seventeenth century into the 1740s. Masterly and finely drawn, and colored in a style that contains Deccani, Mughal, and Kotah elements, they can be ascribed to the Kotah Master, working over several decades, later assisted by his most illustrious successor, Sheikh Taju, who is discussed below. Although they do not display the full measure of the Kotah Master's linear exuberance, many details are strikingly similar to his more familiar work, in full Kotah style. As noted above, *Rao Ram Singh of Kotah Pursuing a Rhinoceros,* for instance, appears on the wall in the restrained Deccani-Mughal mode probably representative of the Kotah Master's style before he adjusted to the more dynamically expressive Kotah ways shown him by the Master of Elephants. Similar in style are hundreds of figures, among whom are several in early-seventeenth-century Safavid dress, with the bulky, loosely tied turbans also seen in mid- to late-seventeenth-century Golconda pictures. It is tempting to posit that

Figure 16
A Raja Slays a Tiger, *c. 1625, Bundi. Opaque watercolor on paper, 18.4 x 23.7 cm. Private collection in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

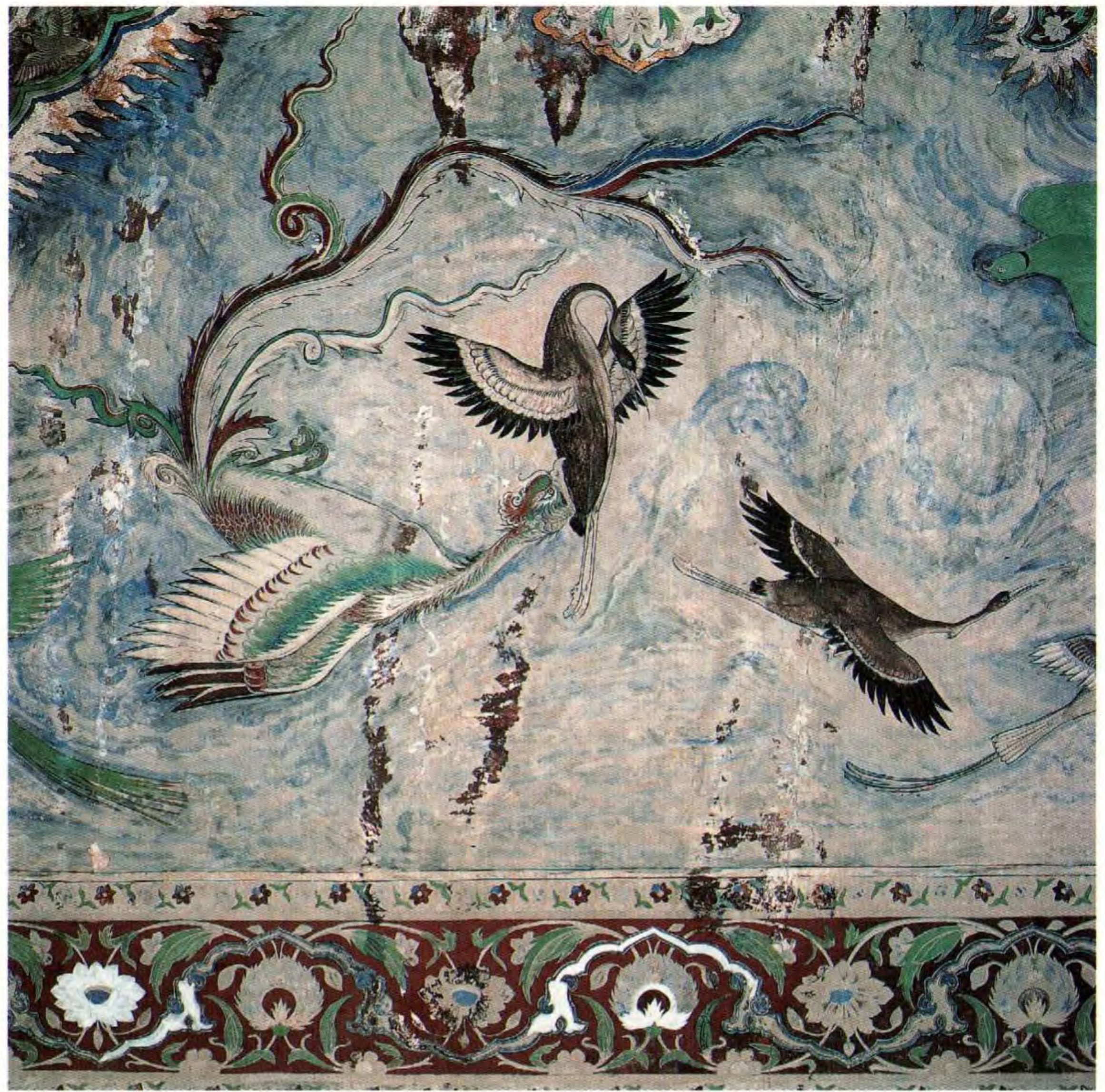


Figure 17
Worldly and Otherworldly Birds, *ceiling painting from the Chhattar Mahal, Kotah Fort, attributed to the Kotah Master, Kotah, c. 1680–1710. Opaque watercolor on fibrous ground prepared with lime, detail illustrated approx. 305 x 305 cm.*

these fascinating murals were initiated by the Kotah Master, working in his disciplined Mughal-Deccani style, shortly after he had arrived in Kotah from Aurangabad, perhaps just before his painted ceiling. In any case, this mural cycle must have been carried out over many years, eventually in collaboration with Sheikh Taju, who probably finished it after the Kotah Master's death. Unfortunately, most of the rulers' portraits, which would have helped to date the pictures, have been effaced or covered over.

Few if any other Rajput artists of any period drew as brilliantly as the Kotah Master, who seems to have carried brushes, paints, and paper on his daily rounds — a constructive and sociable habit emulated by later generations of Kotah artists. His powerful yet subtle sketches provide candid glimpses of local folk in fort, palace, and town. Like other inventive artists in the Turko-Indo-Iranian tradition, he drew from life to provide models for his finished works, which almost always reveal draftsmanly bones beneath their coloring. When he sketched, most often with a brush, his line was fine and free, spirited onto the paper at lightning speed. He usually began with faint outlines in red or gray pigment, strengthening them later with deeper grays and blacks. Like his colleagues, he drew corrections over the scumbled whites employed to hide mistakes. In works intended for presentation to his patrons, backgrounds were often enriched and lent lively depth around figures and animals by networks of crosshatching. Beautiful in themselves, these are as crisply articulate as another characteristic element of his pictorial vocabulary: banks of fine, arcing brushstrokes, reminiscent of wheatfields undulating in a brisk wind. When, like other Turko-Indo-Iranian artists, the Kotah Master pointed his brush, he created richly colored abstractions, unique as handwriting in their shapes and touch. His are especially rich, dense, and emotionally charged, akin to Jackson Pollock's inspired drips or Cy Twombly's poetic scribbles.

Beyond his piercingly observant eye, or even the dynamic grace of his line, the Kotah Master's harmonious understanding of nature was his rarest gift. He may have embraced the Sufi mysticism that flourished in Muslim India. In any case, he seems to have been able easily to project himself into the movements of clouds, flowing water, or animals, and although he happily painted royalty and royal activities, nothing was too humble, trivial, or small for his attention. Every inch of his pictures rewards scrutiny, from the spontaneous rhythmic choreography danced by tiny hairs sprouting from Bhoj Singh's lion's upper lip (fig. 11) to the sensitively rendered veins, resembling river systems or charts of the human nervous system, on the back of an elephant's ear (fig. 18). His pictorial range, encompassing the entire panorama of Kotah — its people, architecture, flora, fauna, and still life — was established not only by his own inclinations, but by his patrons' requests. Without these, the Kotah Master might not have drawn and painted so many Hindu subjects, the multiplicity of which reflects the increasing interest in Vaishnava devotion, not only at Kotah, but at other Rajasthani centers, during the eighteenth century. In the past, religious subjects had usually been painted or drawn in appropriately traditional, archaic, and indigenous modes, giving form to inner visions rather than to anything observed. In this respect, they differed greatly from the comparative naturalism of hunting scenes, historical incidents, or portraits, which were often influenced by Mughal and European examples.

Although the Kotah Master was probably born a Muslim, his Golconda influences clearly included tolerance — also a Sufi value; in Golconda, the arts blended Muslim elements from Turkman and Safavid Iran and Mughal India with those from indigenous Hindu traditions of Andhra Pradesh. Equally accepting and understanding of religious and cultural differences were his Kotah patrons, whose long Mughal service in the Deccan taught them to appreciate Muslim culture. Prior to the move to Rajasthan, however, it is unlikely that he experienced life in a predominantly Hindu Rajput community. Once there, busily painting and drawing, he partook of local customs and festivals, thereby expanding his artistic repertoire. Initially, however, Hindu subjects attributable to the Kotah Master were his least characteristic pictures, and it would seem that some if not all of them were carried out with the aid of his workshop. Later, he enriched standardized compositions with motifs derived from his sketches, as can be seen in several sets of musical modes, the *Barahmasas*, and others. Included here is his *May/June (Jeth Masa)* — the hottest month, when elephants seek shade and are so distracted that they will suffer the presence of their archenemy, the tiger (cat. 40). Also attributable to the Kotah Master and his workshop is *Krishna Hiding the Milkmaids' Clothing (Gopivashtraharana)*, the much-loved scene of youthful Krishna playfully hiding the clothes of bathing milkmaids (cat. 28). If the Kotah Master was disinclined to paint such pictures, which at times verge on sentimentality and occasionally are explicitly amorous, there is no hint of any distaste in his work.[24]

Emperor Aurangzeb, the last militantly orthodox emperor, unintentionally sparked a Hindu renaissance. His defeat of the Deccani sultanates, achieved at the cost of overextending Mughal territories and draining imperial power, not only catalyzed and enriched northern Indian culture by bringing in talent from the Deccan but also enabled the rajas, maharajas, and raos to remain at home long enough to cultivate religion and the arts of peace. Kotah painting's themes and moods reflect this in such exciting projects as the Kotah Master's delightfully inventive *Ramayana* set, probably commissioned by Rao Ram Singh (r. 1696–1707) and left unfinished at his death. One of its lively illustrations, in the collection of Dr. Horst Metzger, depicts the battle of tyrannical Ravan and his demon army against admirable Ram and Lakshman, who triumphed with the help of toothy black bears and two sorts of scampering monkeys (fig. 19). Although small in size, this jubilantly gratifying scene of good vanquishing evil again recalls works by Sultan-Muhammad, whose comically ferocious demons and soldierly animals are rivaled in zaniness only by the Kotah Master's.[25]

Like Emperor Jahangir's favorite artist, Abul Hasan, the Kotah Master seems to have been able to paint anything and everything. Both painters stand out among Indian artists of all schools for their brilliant psychological portraits, natural-history studies, and densely complex scenes containing many human figures, buildings, and animals; both drew and painted with compelling verve and total conviction.[26] The Kotah Master's breadth is apparent in a damaged drawing laying bare the horrors and heroics of battle, probably as experienced at Dharmat in 1658, when four Kotah princes were slain and only one survived.[27] Perhaps a design for a wall painting or large picture on cloth, this venturesome composition is coherent and dramatic. The sprawling melee of compacted horsemen, elephants, and foot soldiers, charged with bloodcurdling anecdote and pinned together by a rhythmic war dance of spears, attests to the artist's intellectual capacity in its resourceful disposition of wheeling multitudes. Probably commissioned by the survivor, Kishor Singh (r. 1684–96), whose bleeding but bright-eyed young body is shown being hauled from the welter, it can be seen as a tattered dress rehearsal for a later painting, dated 1720, *The Battle of Pandher*.[28] Although damaged, clumsily reworked in several areas, and apparently carried out with the help of an assistant, this surging clash of arms includes troops of elephants, horses, and bold Rajputs, presented in the Kotah Master's vigorously authoritative manner. A more evocative presentation in Indian art of the noise, chaos, bravery, and horror of hand-to-hand combat is difficult to imagine.

The Kotah Master was also a gifted portraitist. His delightful characterization of a beguilingly assiduous matchlock-maker, squatting next to his tools while shaping a stock, is evidently based on a sketch from life (cat. 26). It is one of several portraits that exemplify his knack for making psychologically penetrating likenesses of every kind of person: royalty, ladies of the zenana, soldiers, craftsmen.

Although Maharao Arjun Singh reigned only from 1720 to 1723, there are paintings that surely commemorate his effective and congenial patronage of the Kotah Master. From them, it is evident that the maharao's character was true to the Kotah pattern: a blend of religious devotion, sociability, and good humor, qualities vitally united by the Kotah Master in a pair of large compositions showing the maharao celebrating Krishna's birthday, the Janmashtami Festival (cat. 21 and 22). For Arjun Singh, in whom worldliness and spirituality met, the artist combined his religious mode — the dashing style associated with his musical modes and other Hindu subjects — with the finely finished, more naturalistic style usually reserved for secular topics. In these sparkling souvenirs of a joyous party, the merry ruler, his family, courtiers, musicians, and a battery of singing and dancing girls and youths seem to have tripped from the flashing brush at dizzying speed. We meet the artist's entire repertoire of figures and faces, many of them in profile. Eyes resembling half-opened clamshells and talkative open mouths issue from a seeming chaos of knowingly scribbled dashes, dots, and rectangles. Casual as these shorthand brushstrokes might seem, they were rendered with such utter conviction that the people they evoke ring true. These amusing yet serious pictures, painted after the death of Aurangzeb, describe the ecstatic releases of Vaishnava bhakhti practices. This movement flourished at Rajput courts during the early eighteenth century, and inasmuch as its divine message and techniques of worship — dancing, singing, and spinning — are paralleled in Sufi practices, they would probably not have been unfamiliar to the Kotah Master.

The maharao's devotions appear again, hardly less festively, in *Brijnathji and Maharao Arjun Singh aboard a Hunting Barge on the Chambal River* (cat. 19). Like the two pictures of Krishna's birthday party, this one was painted in the Kotah Master's simplified, bold style. God, maharao, and devotee share not only a barge, but the shapes of nose and beak. The shape of the maharao's is echoed in the beak of the Garuda (the mythical parrotlike godling whose plumed form is both Brijrajji's vehicle and Kotah's emblem) and in the noses of the devotee and of Brijnathji (the tutelary deity of Kotah; cat. 42). Painterly passages abound here, in the glittering configurations of the seated god, the reverent devotee, the adoring maharao, the boatloads of musicians, and the aloofly royal, dragonlike crocodile finial on the prow. Boulders and rocks along the riverbank form a worshipful chorus of grotesques.

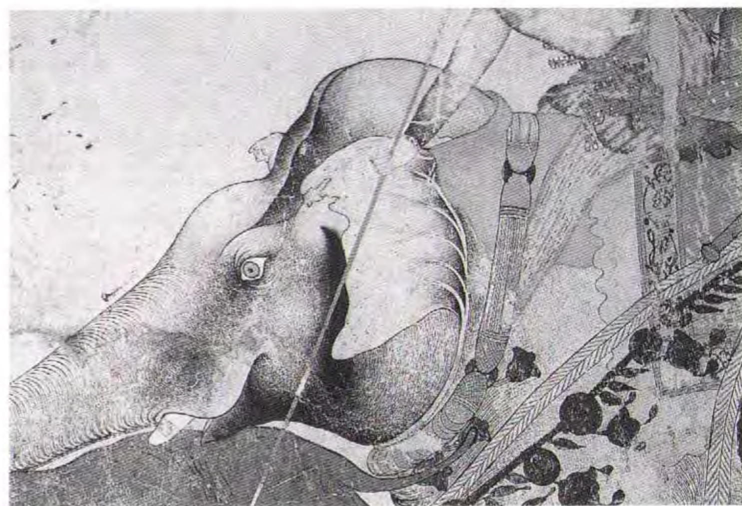


Figure 18
Detail of Rao Ram Singh of Kotah Pursuing a Rhinoceros, *attributed to the Kotah Master, Kotah, c. 1690. Opaque watercolor on paper, 32.1 x 47.6 cm. Private collection in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

Yet another vigorous picture attributable to the Kotah Master at about the same time honors Maharao Arjun Singh's militaristically Rajput persona, in the role of Brijnathji on a war chariot (cat. 20). Even such minor details as ropes and bridles recall the Kotah Master's powerful line, as seen in the bell-ropes of Rao Ram Singh's hurtling elephant.[29] Slightly earlier, perhaps, is *Dancers*, a large painted pas de deux, in which natural forms are transformed into startlingly playful shapes (cat. 33).

A large hunting scene of golden-skinned Brijnathji and Maharao Durjan Sal (r. 1723–56) hunting lions seems to have been planned and largely drawn and painted by the Kotah Master himself, with the assistance of a lesser hand, perhaps Sheikh Taju (cat. 29). The visionary junglescape, with its rhythmic patterns of flowering trees, lacy grasses, and stands of bamboo harking back to the setting of *Bhoj Singh of Bundi Slays a Lion* (fig. 10), is reminiscent of the artist's strength in landscape painting.

By the later 1730s, the Kotah Master shows signs of age; his hand seems to lose its steadiness, and his eyesight some of its sharpness. Like other wise old artists, he continued to explore new ground, as can be seen in his very late, small, deeply glowing portrayal of Maharao Durjan Sal and Brijnathji hunting deer (cat. 35). The god, who resembles Arjun Singh, props his matchlock on the shoulder of an obliging bull, perhaps a good-humored reference to the artist's own need for help in stabilizing his brush. The deer and bull, painted with undiminished charm, are hesitantly outlined, and passages of crosshatching, while still vigorous, lack crispness. This humble, slightly awkward little painting is nevertheless one of the artist's most moving compositions.

The Kotah Master's evolution as an artist is traceable from the 1670s, when he might have been in his late twenties, into the 1730s, when he was eighty or older. Most of his career seems to have been spent at the Kotah court. After having been hired by Jagat Singh and brought to Rajasthan, he eased away from his Golconda-Aurangabad style — perhaps under the guidance or influence of the Master of Elephants — and adjusted fulfillingly to Rajput life. His patrons included six Kotah rulers, whose Hinduism he clearly respected. Encouraged by imaginative and supportive patrons, the Kotah Master changed the course of art at Kotah. Along with his essentially serious vision of humanity and nature, the scintillating line of his reportorial vignettes of Kotah's people, animals, and places provided a legacy that was studied, emulated, and expanded upon by generations of successors.

Sheikh Taju and Later Kotah Artists

Sheikh Taju probably entered Kotah service when the Kotah Master was well on in age. Following his dynasty's custom, the patron, probably Maharao Bhim Singh I (r. 1707–20), sought an artist of equivalent stature to assist, learn from, and eventually replace the genius from Aurangabad.[30] Sheikh Taju was prolific, industrious to a fault, and almost as talented as the Kotah Master. If his name were not known from several inscribed pictures, he could be dubbed the "Master of Elephants II," for these quintessential denizens of Kotah art were his primary subject. In the tradition of the Master of Elephants, he studied their many moods with the combined intensities of a scientist, documentary filmmaker, choreographer, and stand-up comedian.

Sheikh Taju seems rarely to have put down brush, paints, and paper; even more than his predecessor, he explored the far reaches of the kingdom of Kotah, from its forts to its towns and countryside, drawing everything that crossed his path. A major inscribed work, and a key to his style, is a finely finished studio picture, a processional double portrait showing Maharao Durjan Sal and Maharana Jagat Singh of Mewar (r. 1734–52) carried in a palanquin (cat. 36).[31] Sensibly and practically, the artist lavished time on the rulers' portraits: their faces, jewels, and costumes were built up painstakingly, with several levels of finely burnished pigment. While these minutely detailed passages show that he had mastered the nuances of Mughal and Deccani technique, he took less trouble when drawing and painting mere soldiers. The maharana and maharao are impressively characterized, worthy of close inspection; their underlings, reduced to ranks of squat, mustached ciphers, are unlikely to be examined with care, or remembered.

In such pictures, intended for presentation, Sheikh Taju's formal style is apparent in all its strengths and weaknesses. Outlines are hard-edged and firm; shading, based on the techniques of the Master of Elephants and the Kotah Master, is carried out with almost excessively fine, localized crosshatches or arcing lines. Proportions of people and animals are compact, almost squat. Always impressive, spritely, and enjoyable, the best of his presentation pictures are also expressive and moving. The least good, somewhat overwrought, become dryly, admirably academic.[32]

Resembling this double portrait is another likeness of an eminent figure in a palanquin, *The Mughal Emperor Farrukh Siyar Carried in a Palanquin* (cat. 18). Farrukh Siyar (r. 1713–19) welcomed Rajputs into his personal circle at court. Here, the artist follows the Kotah Master's formula for eyes (half-opened clamshells), carefully modeled forms, and repeated curlicues, but the senior artist's penetrating characterization is missing. Although no element of Farrukh Siyar's august countenance has been omitted, the emperor, in whose studios Sheikh Taju probably was trained — and perhaps intimidated — is little more than a clotheshorse. The characterization is far less penetrating and sympathetic than the sheikh's studies of elephants. A more compelling side of Sheikh Taju is found in a drawing inscribed with his name: *Siege of a Strong Fort*, a detailed and informative encyclopedia of military techniques (cat. 17).[33] This fanciful yet believable sketch tallies well with the sheikh's other spontaneously conceived pictures, a survey of which reveals a penchant for military topics. Forts, battles, and soldierly paraphernalia are itemized so accurately as to suggest that he, like a number of Mughal artists who were soldiers as well as painters, had experienced military life. But if he was soldierly, he was also an aesthete, and at times a visionary. This *Siege* and two other attributable works — *Great Siege* (cat. 23), a tinted, cartographic fantasy reminiscent of Brueghel's *Tower of Babel*, and the monochromatic *Bird's-Eye View of a Fort* (cat. 38) — are among his most imaginatively appealing drawings. Although both hint that his military specialties might have included topographical rendering and mapmaking, the second quite literally carried its artist and the viewer above earthliness, to heights from which fort walls resemble unmilitarily frivolous ribbons. The picture's amusing, mysterious incidents reward close inspection. Near one of the edges of this drawing, which can be approached from every direction, is a scene worthy of comic opera: two tightrope walkers inch along, to the sound of drumming, to one of the battlements.

Related to this group is the small bird's-eye projection of fort ramparts, garden, and moat, made all the more delightful, yet hauntingly nostalgic, by the total absence of people and animals

Figure 19
Ram and Lakshman, Aided by the Bears and the Monkeys, Defeat the Demon Ravan *(from a* Ramayana *series), attributed to the Kotah Master, c. 1700, Kotah. Opaque watercolor on paper, 28.2 x 36.6 cm. Collection of Dr. Horst Metzger.*

(cat. 39). The palette, the sheikh's favorite, is limited to the natural tone of the paper, white, black, and Indian yellow, to which have been added tiny accents of richly colored flowers.

Ranking high in the great tradition of paintings of elephants established by the Master of Elephants and the Kotah Master is a starkly moving tinted drawing, *A Chained Elephant,* attributable to Sheikh Taju (cat. 31). Confronted by the low protective wall between elephants during combats — the frequent lifesaver of both elephants and mahouts — this monumental champion looms silently. At once eager, pensive, and apprehensive, he is the soulful Hamlet of his breed. Though his head is held proudly and his rear legs are dug in as though to lunge against an opponent, his tail sags slightly, suggesting doubt. As in the bird's-eye view of a fort, colors were chosen with wise economy: yellows, whites, discreetly placed bright accents, and admirably scumbled greens, hinting at past battles. Starkly dramatic, this is one of Sheikh Taju's most expressive presentation pictures, one in which his excitement seems to have been fully sustained throughout the long process of making it.

Comparably praiseworthy is another splendid elephant attributable to Sheikh Taju, *Maharao Durjan Sal's Elephant, Kisanprasad* (cat. 27). In this true portrait, surely based on an actual episode, Kisanprasad lifts into the air a snarling, terrified panther, whose imminent and gory death by crushing and tusking is signaled by the mahout's blood-red saddle blanket. Blood spurts unsettlingly from the panther's eyes. Although this hunting drama ranks among Kotah art's inspiring achievements, in several ways it is outshone by the Kotah Master's animal studies. If we compare the dynamic gestures, impassioned expressions, and whipping lines of bell-ropes by the earlier artist to equivalent passages by Sheikh Taju, the latter's are slackly ponderous, less sharply observed, and considerably less animated.

A group of drawings of Mughal darbars attributable to Sheikh Taju further attests to the artist's presumed affiliation with the imperial ateliers. The earliest of these (cat. 16) resembles darbar scenes in the *Padshahnameh,* Shah Jahan's official history of his reign. In the drawing, the enthroned emperor receives three of his four sons, Princes Dara Shikoh, Shah Shuja, and Murad Baksh, who appears to be about fifteen, which dates the darbar to about 1639. Whatever the occasion, Aurangzeb is absent. Although parts of this composition closely resemble comparable passages painted for the now incomplete Windsor Castle manuscript, it is not based on any specific painting as yet uncovered. The drawing is painstakingly detailed, finely worked in lean, wiry outlines. There are no traces of Kotah idiom. Although attributable to Sheikh Taju, it must have been composed in a Mughal workshop by tracing segments of Mughal originals prior to his departure for Kotah, for only there would its especially fine and thin paper — finer than those employed at Kotah — have been available.

The second, considerably larger, drawing of a darbar scene exemplifies Sheikh Taju's work after he had joined the Kotah ateliers and learned the Kotah style. Purely Kotah in draftsmanship, characteristically zoomorphic, and comically outlandish, it shows a young tiger striding unabashedly through an imperial darbar. Although he is silhouetted against the throne platform, no one is in the least perturbed. The emperor, most formal of all, does not deign to look, and his many courtiers are resolutely unflappable (cat. 15). The third darbar, mistakenly inscribed with the name of Emperor Aurangzeb, depicts Kotah Rajputs being received at court, probably to hear their imperial assignments or to be rewarded for bravery. Demonstrating solidarity with their overlords, the Kotah courtiers are lightly bearded in Mughal style.[34]

Sheikh Taju continued to grow as an artist during his long life at Kotah, where he served under a succession of seven maharaos. His second Kotah patron probably was Maharao Bhim Singh I's heir, Maharao Arjun Singh, and he remained in service during the reign of Maharao Umed Singh I, if we are to accept the date of 1780 on an unfinished tinted sketch of a hunting scene.[35]

Sheikh Taju's fine Mughal brush drawing gradually gave way to bolder Kotah idioms, carried out with thicker brushes, often over charcoaled outlines. Artists at Kotah adjusted their styles to their patrons' wishes and needs. When a maharao commissioned a portrait, hunting scene, wall painting, or elephant study, he, or someone in charge of the painting atelier, stipulated the size, complexity of the composition, and degree of finish. Sometimes, it appears, he asked for work in the earlier manner of a particularly admired picture. Sheikh Taju, therefore, painted and drew pictures of great variety. Although he seems to have been happiest when drawing and painting boldly from nature, he occasionally was called upon to revert to his finely naturalistic Mughal mode, as in his contributions to the wall paintings initiated by the Kotah Master in the portico of the Chhattar Mahal, beneath the ceiling of simurghs, geese, and arabesques. Inasmuch as the atelier's earlier works, by whichever artist, were readily available, they could be reused at will; and many of the motifs in these murals were traced from admired older images. One of these, as previously noted, is the memorable *Rao Ram Singh of Kotah Pursuing a Rhinoceros* (fig. 1).[36] Fresh designs were also made for this complex of images, balanced across the walls like a juggler's lemons, oranges, and pineapples. One of them, a circular hunting composition in which two furious water buffalo ram their horns deeply into two horses' bellies, shows Maharao Durjan Sal (r. 1723–56) wounding one of them with an arrow.

Inasmuch as Sheikh Taju's tenure at Kotah seems to have overlapped with the Kotah Master's, it is not surprising that attributing pictures to one or the other can be difficult. *Elephants and Horses Assembled before the Image of Brijnathji, Who Is Seen Looking Down from a*

Balcony in the Palace, an excellent large drawing, probably for a wall painting, could almost be their collaborative effort (cat. 30). Although its logical treatment of space would seem to stem from Sheikh Taju's imperial training, the dashingly bold draftsmanship is reminiscent of the Kotah Master. Complex and highly finished portraits of elephants in ranks, each inscribed with its name; a mob of formally arranged soldiers and attendants; and the particularly detailed and articulate study of the main courtyard of Kotah Fort must represent several weeks of hard work. One of the elephants, animatingly redrawn over whited-out mistakes, prostrates himself before Brijnathji. Behind him stands a mysterious boxlike structure once used to house the tigers or other animals released in staged combats. The small, seated observer, almost outside the picture at the lower right, appears to be a portrait of a friend — or even a self-portrait.

Two spirited drawings are easier to attribute to Sheikh Taju working alone. The first, *An Elephant near a Palace Gate,* of about 1730 (cat. 24), retains Mughal spatial characteristics in the relationship between figures and architecture, while harking back to both the Master of Elephants and the Kotah Master in its vigor of interpretation. It suggests that the excellence of Kotah pictures of elephants — even Sheikh Taju's — depended largely on the atelier's rich archive of drawings and tracings by the major earlier artists. The second, *Camp of Maharao Shatru Sal I,* is a monumentally large, later, and bolder tinted drawing on cotton, probably conceived as a major piece of ephemera to adorn a tent wall (cat. 44). Datable to 1764, this tour de force commemorates a prestigious gathering following a battle. For Shatru Sal I (r. 1758–64) and the throngs of guests, troops, and attendants seen in the picture, it would have been a gripping forerunner of today's newsreels or televised current events. In response to the ambitious challenge, the artist thoughtfully expanded his usually far smaller slice of the world to encompass a spectacular panorama as seen by a bird in flight. Artfully, he filled the corners with forms that lure the viewer's eyes back toward the center; then he roughed in tents, enclosures for horses, elephants, and other animals; finally, he piled anecdote upon anecdote. Sheikh Taju's endearing corrections, one of which buries horses beneath an elephant, lend spontaneity to this stirring entertainment, in which every consequential personage can be found — in a few cases, several times. Shatru Sal I and his powerful chief minister, Zalim Singh Jhala, chat in a tent; courtiers babble; cooks cook; waiters wait; and grooms struggle to separate fighting stallions. For insights into Rajput life at camp, no more explicit account could be found.

Sheikh Taju was commissioned to paint religious pictures as well as portraits, hunts, and depictions of every sort of Rajput activity. *Heroine Going to Meet Her Lover (Krishna Abhisarika Nayika),* datable to about 1750, brings a much-loved Hindu scene to a Kotah setting. The eager heroine approaches a pleasure pavilion, observed from above by Krishna, the Divine Lover (cat. 37). H.H. Maharao Brijraj Singh, in his thoughtful account of this painting, suggests that the pleasure palace is Umed Gañj, seven miles east of Kotah; he also identifies many of the trees and bushes.[37] Sheikh Taju rendered these in an ornamental counterpoint. Clusters of foliage and green fruit emerge from rhythmically composed trunks and limbs akin to those in his hunting pictures. Reminding us of the affinity between painting and music in Rajput art, these rhythms intensify the picture's sensuous spirit. Passionate anticipation is stirred by the flaming reds and oranges of the costumes, canopies, and carpets, glowing against the charged patterns of greenery beneath a broodingly dark sky.

Figure 20
A Conversation of Elephants, *stone relief from one of the Kotah cenotaphs* (chatris), *perhaps designed by Sheikh Taju, eighteenth century, Kotah.*

Although his characterizations of people probe less deeply than the Kotah Master's, Sheikh Taju compensated for this by becoming Kotah art's most penetrating psychologist of elephants. In revealing nuances of mood, his portraits of them surpass those of his predecessors. Never sentimentalizing or anthropomorphizing these fascinating animals, he recorded not only the truculence that makes them dangerous and as hard to handle as live bombs but also their moments of amiability, tenderness, and even self-doubt. On grounds of style, it seems likely that Sheikh Taju's elephants were so respected that he was commissioned to design and supervise — if not cut into stone — bas-reliefs of elephants on several of the Kotah cenotaphs (*chhatris*), the memorials to the raos and maharaos constructed at the locations where their bodies were burned (fig. 20).

Kotah's major artists give every evidence of being long-lived. Neverthless, the time came when Sheikh Taju's final patron, Maharao Umed Singh I, fearing that his studios might lose their director, sought younger talent. The search seems to have been

carried out with the help of Zalim Singh Jhala, whose distaste for half measures prompted the hiring of not one promising master, as in the past, but several. On the basis of their work, it is clear that these well-trained new arrivals came from Mewar, the seniormost Rajput court, which had become ever more closely linked to Kotah under Maharaos Durjan Sal and Umed Singh I. The new artists' decoratively patterned trees and foliage, long a Mewar specialty, attest to their place of origin.[38]

Seemingly appreciative of the newcomers' gift for decorative landscape, Sheikh Taju employed such passages to enrich the hunting scenes eagerly commissioned by Maharao Umed Singh I and his chief minister, both of whom were ardent shots. At Kotah, as at Bundi, hunting pictures had been favored by a succession of patrons, but now that so many more were ordered by the maharao and his chief minister, a problem loomed. Although Sheikh Taju himself could — and did — satisfy some of the demand, it was insatiable. He needed help. Unfortunately, the new arrivals' animals were undistinguished. Although few Rajput artists could match their cheerfully bright, tapestrylike jungles and gardens, their animals are drab. At best, they are sleek but lifeless; at worst, they resemble overchewed teddy bears or Christmas stockings.

Sheikh Taju's example, and cleverness, saved the day. He devised eye-catching compositions in which both hunters and hunted — as though camouflaged — are hard to single out in lushly conceived Kotah junglescapes. Despite problems of draftsmanship, these hunting pictures stir delight, ranking high not only among Kotah pictures, but among Indian paintings of all schools. They could, indeed, be the legendary pictures occasionally supposed to have inspired the Douanier Rousseau's lushly poetic canvases of nude women in jungles.

Maharao Umed Singh and His Chief Minister, Zalim Singh Jhala, Tiger Shooting is one of the earlier examples of this greatly appealing genre (cat. 45). Fully inscribed, like most of these hunting pictures, it gives the huntsmen's names along with the time and place of the kill. It also says that it was "from the hand of the painter S[h]eikh Taju." Most of the painted surface is taken up by visually exciting jungle vegetation, within which men and animals are as difficult to spot as they would be during an actual hunt.

Although the Mewar artists never recorded animal anatomy or plumbed animal psychology to the degrees achieved by earlier Kotah artists, they soon adjusted to the Kotah style. Before he vanished from the Kotah scene, Sheikh Taju served as mentor and teacher to Joshi Hansraj, Joshi Hatuva, and Sita Ram — who are known by signed paintings — and others. Soon, and with remarkable grace, the Mewar contingent not only mastered, but further enriched the Kotah style.[39]

Kotah Painting and Drawing of the Later Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

The arts at Kotah continued to flourish. Whenever a stylistic flowering seemed to have gone to seed, another sprang to life. Eventually, even Maharao Umed Singh I's thrilling cycle of hunting pictures with their tigerish heroics, royal bravery, and decorative splurges of vegetation lost their savor; the Cleveland Museum of Art's wonderful related picture, in which Vaishnava religiosity and the mysteries of field sports blend, is an exception.[40] But as before, another talented newcomer, under the patronage of another maharao, Maharao Kishor Singh (r. 1819–27), breathed fresh life into the Kotah tradition. This time, art was inspired not by a ruler's enthusiasm for festivals or hunting, but by a certain kind of Vaishnava devotion.

More than his predecessors, Maharao Kishor Singh turned his attention to the shrine at Nathadvara to Shri Nathji, an avatar of Lord Krishna. This shrine centered around a powerful naturally formed image. When it was banished from Mathura by Emperor Aurangzeb, the image was offered sanctuary at Udaipur, the capital of Rajputana's senior ruler, by the rana of Mewar. The god was carried in a sacred procession toward Udaipur, but not many miles from its destination it refused to budge. However many bullocks, camels, elephants, and men tugged at ropes attached to his chariot, Shri Nathji would go no further. The god insisted on remaining at Nathadvara, which soon became one of the holiest of Vaishnava pilgrimage places. Complex rituals, carried out by a large staff of priests, were developed to honor Shri Nathji, who received offerings and changes of costume hour by hour. The shrine expanded, and the holy town of Nathadvara prospered in the service of the deity. Its craftsmen and artists, employed to serve both visiting pilgrims and the temple, developed a new style of painting in the service of Shri Nathji, for whom painted backdrops were commissioned by the shrine's head priest (*mahant*) and staff. Easily damaged, these large pictures on cloth were frequently replaced, lest they offend the god they were made to honor. Visitors to the shrine eagerly acquired paintings of the image and offerings, of the shrine, and of the priests. As at other religious centers, such as Banaras, Puri, and Madurai, accomplished artists supplied works of art for everyone, from simple villagers who could barely afford to spend a few cents for folkloristic daubs, to Maharao Kishor Singh, who preferred highly finished works.

The Kotah collection contains several pictures by a nameless but remarkable Nathadvara artist who apparently was brought to Kotah, along with his work, by the ardent maharao. One of these paintings is a crisp and glowing depiction of Shri Nathji attended by priests (cat. 54). Challengingly, it occupies a stylistic zone midway between Kotah and Nathadvara. This vibrant style, with its

crystalline outlining and subtly modulated purple-reds, blue-greens, burning red-oranges, and sulfurous yellows, would have excited Mondrian, Rothko, or Ingres. Evidently, it also excited Maharao Kishor Singh, who nevertheless prompted this remarkable painter from Nathadvara to adjust his style in honor of the Kotah tutelary gods, Brijnathji and Brijrajji. For the maharao, the artist painted two series of devotional pictures, in which the Kotah gods are rendered as Shri Nathji had been, but in a style enriched by the example of earlier Kotah art. As Woodman Taylor has pointed out, Maharao Kishor Singh himself appears as a royal worshiper in many of these brilliant small paintings.[41]

Several of the small devotional pictures commissioned by Maharao Kishor Singh rank high among Kotah paintings. Most impressive, perhaps, is the one in which the household image is backed by two lashed-together palm trees, silhouetted against a vivid red-orange. Although trained as a painter of Shri Nathji and the Nathadvara priesthood, this artist became a remarkable portraitist and still-life painter. His greatest contribution, however, was his extraordinarily original handling of color, which achieved new heights following the move from Nathadvara to Kotah.

The Nathadvara master was a worthy successor to his Kotah predecessors. He perpetuated Kotah's draftsmanly tradition by sketching everything that crossed his path, animals included. For Maharao Kishor Singh — a seeker not of game but of the divine — he probably painted the magnificent devotional hunting scene at Cleveland mentioned above, India's equivalent to Dürer's vision of St. Eustace, in which a gentle, godlike deer, blue as Krishna, transmutes the gory chase.

This last great Kotah artist continued to paint during the reign of Maharao Ram Singh (r. 1827–66), who was one of Kotah's most vigorous and jovially eccentric patrons. Like earlier Kotah rulers enamored of art, he encouraged his painters to note every aspect of Kotah life. And, like Emperor Jahangir, Balwant Singh of Jammu, and other Indian patrons fascinated by people, Maharao Ram Singh urged his artists particularly to fathom and record the personality and activities of his kingdom's preeminent figure, himself. Sometimes, this task was carried out with unanticipated candor. A drawing in a private collection, blessed with the linear elegances associated with ancient Greek oil-jug (*lekythos*) painting, portrays the spirited ruler sportively adoring five ladies at once. In another picture, he mans an elephant, shoots a tiger, and, without pausing for breath, celebrates the art of love. Apparently given to robust pranks, he — if we are to believe a painting mounted in the Bada Mahal — coaxed an elephant to ascend to the upper floor of a building and walk death-defyingly around its seemingly far too flimsy sandstone skirting. The aftermath was not recorded.

It is a loss to travel art that Maharao Ram Singh was born too early for steam vessels; had he and his artists visited London, Paris, Rome, and the Egyptian pyramids, their fascinatingly quirky paintings and sketches would have revealed new facets of the world. In compensation for these uncreated masterpieces, Maharao Ram Singh's artists left us such delightful pictures as *Maharao Ram Singh Playing Polo near Gagraon* (cat. 63). Soaring at the center of the picture is a large red ball, bracketed by the players and set against a telling if schematic view of Gagraon Fort, protector of the state's southern districts. By now, Mughal-inspired spatial logic and naturalism had given way to older Rajput traditons, in which people, animals, and architecture were assigned amounts of space appropriate to their importance within the royal scheme. Maharao Ram Singh himself and a few admired noblemen loom larger than their underlings, who have been further reduced to unindividualized geometric formulas. Nevertheless, the artist conveys the mood of a friendly game on a sunny day at a particular place, about which we are shown everything Maharao Ram Singh thought we should know. The royal traveler's artists also accompanied him to Jaisalmer, where he was depicted as a bridegroom at the entrance to his bride's palace (cat. 66). He is faced by his new father-in-law, Maharawal Gaj Singh, whose features are as craggily and invitingly caricaturable as Maharao Ram Singh's own.

The gigantic painting commemorating Maharao Ram Singh's visit to Delhi in 1842 (cat. 65) is his penultimate Kotah masterpiece. Crammed with humorous incident, anecdote, and imponderables, it weaves a spell dedicated to its two principals: the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah II (r. 1837–58), and Maharao Ram Singh. Together, they could recall two and a half centuries of close dynastic connections. Sharers of history and legend, the thirty-four-year-old maharao and the sixty-seven-year-old emperor must have been greatly curious about one another, and eager for conversation. Both suffered from a single serious problem: the British. The emperor had lost virtually every vestige of power to them and now held sway over no more than a once-proud palace (the Red Fort of Delhi, or Shah Jahanabad) inhabited by vast numbers of needy retainers and a mob of indigent relatives. But if the Mughal state was enfeebled, Mughal culture continued to thrive. The emperor's intelligence and energy were narrowly channeled by circumstances into writing poetry, which was good, and to encouraging the verse of others, such as Ghalib, which was far better. Maharao Ram Singh had lost less. Although also dominated by the British, life in distant, airy Kotah, with its hunting grounds, agricultural wealth, and supportive court, was less trying. Still, a major mutual complaint must have been the grinding, constant presences of British government residents, nannyish busybodies as unbearable at Kotah as in Shah Jahanabad.

To document this visit, Maharao Ram Singh's artists accompanied him. They sketched diligently from life, noting everything necessary to vivify a picture even larger than Sheikh Taju's sketch

of Maharao Shatru Sal I's camp (cat. 44). Maharao Ram Singh is shown twice: once in an outer court of the fort, resplendent on a richly caparisoned elephant, and at the far left, near a comically dressed monkey. From the Shah Burj (Imperial Tower), Bahadur Shah II peeps at the Kotah visitor through a newfangled gilt-brass telescope. From a balcony, the emperor's stout senior wife gazes upon the busy scene. Given the nature of Kotah art, it is not unexpected that this painting is the most detailed, explicit, and lively view of the imperial fort and its surroundings. These include every building, garden, and wall as well as Chandni Chowk (the market) and Shah Jahan's Friday mosque, in which a rude English couple amorously hold hands. Other picturesque topics range from dancing goats to skittish camels, rows of shops and shopkeepers, someone having his armpit shaved by a barber, and — of course — elephants. Who, one wonders, is the fashionable, stout Delhi citizen trotting along in his British carriage? Could he be Hindu Rao, a social force in Delhi prior to the Indian Mutiny?

This huge work, however, was not painted — and then repeated at Kotah as a mural — merely as a diverting account of Maharao Ram Singh's doings in Shah Jahanabad. Despite all of Maharao Ram Singh's efforts, despite his and the emperor's curiosity, and despite his artists' detailed reportage, we are not shown the anticipated fulfilling encounter. Based on the evidence presented by this mural-size painting, we can only conclude that the emperor and the maharao in fact never met. Had they done so, surely the artist would have shown them together. The reason for this frustrating nonevent is easy to guess: neither the Mughal nor the Rajput was permitted to meet the other because their British residents both feared the consequences.

Maharao Ram Singh's visit to Shah Jahanabad took place in 1842, only fifteen years before the Indian Mutiny of 1857, of which Bahadur Shah became the nominal leader. Already rankled in 1842, both the Mughal and the Rajput must have harbored anti-British sentiments, and so the latter's visit was more likely intended for the delivery and discussion of messages from an alliance of his fellows than for sightseeing. This picture, therefore, can be interpreted as a particularly subtle allusion to a Kotah hunting trope. Although Maharao Ram Singh failed to enter the "hunting blind" (*machan*) — that is, the Red Fort — or even to meet his imperial fellow-huntsman, and although the actual hunt was delayed until 1857, it is hardly coincidental that during the Mutiny Major Burton, the resident, and two of his sons were slain at Kotah. For this crime, and for what was deemed less than full support of the British cause, the maharao's salute was lowered by several guns. Emperor Bahadur Shah was tried in 1858 and exiled to Rangoon, where he died.

Maharao Ram Singh's son and successor, Shatru Sal II (r. 1866–89), maintained his father's studios. Early in his reign, artistic standards were high, sustained by Maharao Ram Singh's surviving painters, who provided fine portraits and genre pictures of an increasingly Westernized world. Kotah artists broadened their repertoires by studying and copying illustrations from imported books and magazines: fashion plates of English ladies and gentlemen, steel engravings of such topics as Napoleon and of Phrygian-capped French revolutionists, and mythological subjects. Studies for architectural decoration — stained-glass windows, stucco ceilings, and tile revetments — were also commissioned, and, as in the past, artists explored fort, palace, and town, sketching everything picturesque. Kotah zest survives in *Thunderous Tryst*, the latest painting included in this exhibition (cat. 67). As passionately erotic as its dragonish golden lightning, this determinedly awkward spoof describes the perils of a disjointed Rajput lover: in hot pursuit of his beloved, he ascends a rope wobbly as overcooked spaghetti.

The royal Kotah ateliers dwindled after the death of Shatru Sal II; photographs replaced miniatures. Maharao Umed Singh II (r. 1889–1940), the next ruler, perfectly exemplified the "age of the Maharajas." Born toward the end of the nineteenth century, he escaped the hostile bitterness of the British following the Indian Mutiny, and his death in 1940 spared him both the rigors of World War II and the dramatic disruption of royal Indian life that marked the end of the Raj in 1947. He was educated when it was the policy of the Queen Empress's goverment to control India's Native States through their traditional princes. As a Rajput of high degree, he could rule — provided he conformed to a deceptively flexible behavioral code. He was assigned a British resident, but one of a new sort — more courteous, subtler, and seemingly less demanding than the likes of Major Burton. Because Umed Singh II's behavior was most gentlemanly, his life was tranquil. As a youth, the maharao was among the first students to attend an institution modeled on Eton College: Chiefs' College, Rajputana, which survives, at Ajmer, as Mayo College (cat. 75). Albeit insulated by servants and attendants, he followed a curriculum that combined traditional Indian and English subjects, emphasizing Shakespeare and Browning more than the *Bhagavad Gita* or Kalidasa, the renowned Sanskrit dramatist. Cricket, polo, tennis, and other acceptably upper-class sports were leavened by tiger shooting and pig-sticking.

As a virtually ducal Rajput, the maharao was strongly encouraged to forsake the militaristic independence of his family fort and to build a palace comparable to a great English country house. In time to receive King George and Princess Alexandra on the occasion of the darbar of 1911, he commissioned Sir Swinton Jacobs to design the Umed Bhavan. Work began in 1906 on this huge Indo-Saracenic edifice, which includes darbar and banquet halls, men's quarters and zenana, vast inner courtyards, and a billiards room. Sir Swinton was artistic but practical. Historical expertise that

blossomed in Rajput-Mughal archways and pierced stone windows was matched by his grasp of such practicalities as plumbing and air-cooling. An impressive network of lengthy, thickly walled stone passageways maintains coolness even on sweltering June nights. Although Rajput darbars and festivals were still held, the Umed Bhavan was also suited to receptions, garden parties, teas, and balls. Like equivalent palaces at Bikaner, Mysore, and elsewhere, the Umed Bhavan was plumbed, electrified, and outfitted with the finest British goods. Its carpets, draperies, furniture, pictures, and objets d'art were all imported from England. And inasmuch as living in such surroundings under the encouraging eye of the resident demanded a certain way of life, there was a never-ending list of needs to be supplied. Horse-drawn carriages — and, later, Rolls Royces and Bentleys — shotguns, shooting-sticks, plate, jewels, and more were chosen, with the discerning advice of the resident, and imported from England.

Although after the death of Shatru Sal II the traditional arts ceased to flourish at court, a few families of painters live on at Kotah, kept busy and modestly prosperous. When a commission comes from H.H. Maharao Brijraj Singh, a painter bicycles to the Brijraj Bhavan to discuss subject matter, color, size, and other traditional concerns. Artists at Kota recreate eighteenth-century Kotah miniatures to supply the new patronage of international tourism. Before long, variants of Maharao Umed Singh I's tiger hunts, the Master of Elephants' pachydermal fantasies, and Sheikh Taju's *Barahmasa* series will brighten bedroom walls in the Umed Bhavan, parts of which have been remodeled as a comfortable, supremely spacious four-star hotel.

NOTES

1 Lee and Montgomery 1960, no. 36. A traced drawing of this miniature was apparently made in order to reemploy it for a mural in the outer chamber of the Chhattar Mahal of Kotah Fort, which is discussed below. The drawing, made before the painting was damaged, is in a private collection. Both are published in Beach 1974, figs. 74 and 73. Other publications of this painting include Welch 1983, 79–80, fig. 4, and Welch 1985, 359–60, no. 242.

2 Although the Kotah artist's fighting dragons, knotted together like pretzels, are more wiggly and "noisy" than those in an otherwise comparable Turkman drawing in Istanbul, the latter appears to be an influential ancestor from the Kotah creature's family tree. It is in the so-called Yaqub Bek Album (H. 2160), the richest of several containing Turkman material in the Topkapi Sarayi Museum Library, Istanbul.

3 Sherwani 1974, 3–15. For the Turkmans, see Woods 1976. For Turkman drawing and painting, see Dickson and Welch 1981, 1:15–26.

4 For further discussions of this drawing, see Welch 1976, 67, no. 28, and Welch 1983, 78–93.

5 Dr. John Fryer wrote in the 1670s that "the Mogul hath made no farther Progress of late Years, satisfying himself to keep these Kingdoms in the nature of Vassals, though never absolutely Conquered; frustrated by the great Omrahs [nobles] who live Lazily and in pay, whereupon they term Deccan, The Bread of the Military Men." In the preceding paragraph, he refers to the Deccanis "stopping the Mogul's Mouth with a Tribute, as also his Generals with large Presents." See Roe and Fryer 1873, 402.

6 For an account of a great Aurangabad artist hired by a Rajput from Kishangarh, see Welch 1994. This topic will be amplified in a forthcoming publication by Dr. Navina Najat Haidar.

7 For other portraits in the collections of Gopi Krishna Kanoria and Ralph Benkaim, see Beach 1974, figs. 68 and 69. Both might be by the Kotah Master.

8 See Craigen W. Bowen's essay, below, for a discussion of pigments, papers, brushes, binding medium, etc.

9 For the Lucknow drawing, see Beach 1974, fig. 126. I am grateful to Pramod Chandra for telling me that "Niju" is a nickname offering no hints as to the artist's religion, caste, or place of origin. The date probably refers to the year when one royal personage presented the drawing to another. This idea is supported by Joachim K. Bautze's statement to the author that the inscription is probably in a Mewar hand. It might have been presented to the rana of Mewar by Maharao Durjan Sal (r. 1723–56), who was strongly connected with the Mewar house.

10 For these magnificent pictures, see Bautze 1989b. The Master of Elephants' career may have included a stint at Bundi, between his Agra and Kotah periods.

11 For the Hodgkin drawing, see Welch 1976, 89, no. 44; Ashton 1950, no. 484; and Hodgkin and McInerney 1983, no. 20.

12 For another instance of Indian scientific concern with anatomy during the early seventeenth century, consider Jahangir's order to dissect a lion in 1616:

On the 16th [January 25], we decamped. After marching four and an eighth kos we stopped in the vicinity of the village of Ghiri. Along the way the scouts brought word of a lion in the area. I set out, intending to hunt it down, and polished it off with one shot. Inasmuch as the bravery and valor of lions and tigers are established facts, I wanted to open it up and have a look. After it was cut open it was apparent that, unlike other animals, whose gall bladders are outside the liver, lions' and tigers' gall bladders are located inside their livers. It occurs to me that lions' and tigers' courage is due to this fact.

I am grateful to Wheeler M. Thackston for permitting me to quote from his translation of Jahangir's memoirs (Jahangir, forthcoming ed.).

13 Private collection; published in Beach 1974, fig. 81, and Hodgkin and McInerney 1983, no. 25. The latter publication illustrates two other drawings attributable to this artist in about 1670–80, *Elephant Being Excited by Fireworks*, no. 23, and a large, ambitiously conceived *Royal Elephant Hunt*, no. 38.

14 Several preparatory drawings for the *Bhagavata Purana* series, attributable to the Master of Elephants, are in the National Museum of India, New Delhi, and in a private collection.

15 It is hoped that conservators will be able to remove the dismaying overpaint from this important early monument of Rajput art at Kotah. Although at present outshone by the extraordinary, comparatively well-preserved wall and ceiling pictures in the Baddal Mahal of the fort at Bundi (see Bautze 1989b), they deserve serious attention.

16 For the Chaurapanchasika style, see Khadalavala and Chandra 1974.

17 For early Bundi painting, see Bautze 1987a.

18 Published in Beach 1974, fig. 70.

19 See Dickson and Welch 1981, 1: pl. 10.

20 More accurately known as Riza-yi Abbasi of Isfahan; see Canby 1996.

21 Harvard University Art Museums, Alpheus Hyatt

Fund, 1952.7. Published in Simpson and Welch 1980, no. 30.

22 This powerful painting is closely related to inscribed works by Fazl, who was employed at Burhanpur by Abdur-Rahim, the Khan Khanan, a poet, statesman, and soldier in the service of both Akbar and Jahangir, for whom see Schimmel 1987. The hunting scene is published in Welch and Beach 1965, no. 11, with the suggested identification of Gopinath Singh of Bundi. It seems most likely that the Burhanpur style was transmitted to Bundi and Kotah by Rajputs who had served there under the Rajput-inclined Mughal. The Khan Khanan maintained his own ateliers and commissioned subimperial illustrated manuscripts of Hindu epics as well as of Persian classics. Fazl, whose influence can be seen in the so-called Laud *Ragamala* series at Oxford (see Stooke and Khandalavala 1953), must have painted this hunting scene at Bundi, or even Kotah, during the 1620s. His unmistakable hand is evident in the shapes and peculiarly glowing colors of rocks and in his characteristic treatment of grasses and trees. The Khan Khanan's manuscripts are listed and described in Beach 1982, no. 15; see also Beach 1983.

23 H. 2153, fol. 64b.

24 Several erotic pictures can be attributed to him. Most bring together "this world" and "the other," as in depictions of Maharao Durjan Sal envisioned as Brijrajji in flagrante delicto.

25 For a preparatory drawing for this series, see Welch 1976, 47, 92–93. For demons attributable to Sultan-Muhammad, see Dickson and Welch 1981, 1: pl. 4, fig. 92, and 2: pl. 8; and Zettersteen and Lamm 1948, pl. 16. Other illustrations from this *Ramayana* are in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

26 Many works by Abul Hasan will be included in Akimushkin, Ivanov, and Welch, forthcoming.

27 Beach 1974, dustjacket and figs. 78 and 79; Welch 1976, 90–91, no. 45.

28 See Joachim K. Bautze's historical remarks, below. For a comparable hunting scene of Maharao Durjan Sal, also on cloth and by the Kotah Master, see Topsfield and Beach 1991, no. 37; other fragments of this painting are in a private collection.

29 Another picture in this mode shows Durjan Sal inspecting a white horse; see Beach 1974, fig. 84.

30 An impressive, life-size portrait on cloth of Maharao Bhim Singh 1 hangs in the armory of Kotah Fort. Although the face appears to have been touched up, it would seem to have been painted by Sheikh Taju.

31 For three closely related paintings, see Beach 1974, figs. 82 (Severence Milliken Collection) and 128 (Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art, Hyderabad); and Noey and Temos 1994, 61, no. 31.

32 See Leach 1995, 2: 996–1003, no. 10.41, pl. 13.

33 A related drawing, perhaps a fragment of this one, is in the Red Fort Museum, Delhi.

34 At Kotah, princes sometimes adopted this imperial mode. Note the beard worn by a Kotah prince in the Zenana Master's rendering of a gathering in a zenana (Beach 1974, fig. 70).

35 The lower half of this signed and dated picture is in the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art, Hyderabad; for the upper section, see Hodgkin and McInerney 1983, cover and no. 35. Although I do not question the attribution of this sketch, which could have been done by Sheikh Taju at the age of eighty or so, the identification of the faintly outlined ruler, who resembles Maharao Guman Singh (r. 1764–71), and the inscription, which might have been added in 1780 to a somewhat earlier work, are puzzling.

36 Sheikh Taju's drawing is in a private collection.

37 M. B. Singh 1985, 36, pl. 6.

38 See Topsfield 1980, especially nos. 12, 62, 66, and 84. For a typical mid-eighteenth-century Mewar painting, see Sotheby's, Inc., 1996, lot 34, *Maharana Jagat Singh (1734–1751) Shooting Tiger from a Shooting Box at the Corner of an Enclosure*. Although lacking the magic of Maharao Umed Singh 1's zestfully composed hunting pictures, Mewar paintings of this sort contain most of their ingredients, particularly in their finely — too finely — detailed vegetation.

39 Such adjustments by "foreign" artists were frequent in Rajasthan and in the Hills, where artists from Mughal, Deccani, or other outside traditions not only learned to paint in the manners of Kishangarh, Bikaner, or Basohli with astonishing speed and skill, but became leading, often innovative figures at their new courts.

40 See Leach 1986, 197–203, no. 77, as *Ladies Shooting from a Pavilion*, pl. 8, and dustjacket.

41 Woodman Taylor's identification is based on many surviving likenesses of Kishor Singh that feature his aquiline nose and firm jaw, including a fine large portrait in the Bada Mahal of Kotah Fort. It can be ascribed to the artist from Nathadvara.