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LIVE AUCTION 22675

ART OF THE ISLAMIC AND INDIAN WORLDS INCLUDING RUGS AND CARPETS

Lot 96

Closed 25 April 2024

Sold GBP 327,600

A FOLIO FROM THE 'FIRST' BABURNAMA OF 1589

BABUR HUNTING RHINOCEROS IN SWATI

THE PAINTING DESIGNED BY LA'L, WORKED ON BY SARWAN, MUGHAL INDIA, CIRCA 1589



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Opaque pigments heightened in gold on paper, text panel within the painting containing 9ll. black nasta'liq, set within gold and polychrome rules, plain buff paper margins, red librarian's annotations in the lower margin, recto with 14ll. black nasta'liq, set within gold and polychrome rules, the margins plain, mounted, restored

Painting 9 ½ x 5 ½in. (24 x 14cm.); folio 10 3/8 x 6 ¾in. (26.5 x 17.1cm.)

PROVENANCE

H. Kahn Monif (1888-1964), New York

Private collection, London, circa 1950s-60s

Thence by descent until acquired by the present owner 2022

Lot Essay

The memoirs of the first Mughal Emperor Babur (r. 1526-1530) were translated from the original Chaghatay Turkish into Persian by Abd al-Rahim at the behest of Babur's grandson Akbar. The text, entitled the Baburnama, was completed and presented to Akbar in 1589 and the Emperor commissioned a number of illustrated copies in the following years. The manuscript details the wanderings of Babur through Central Asia until his conquest of Delhi in 1526. A connoisseur of calligraphy, literature and painting, Babur was also keenly observant and recorded in great detail the flora and fauna of the different regions he encountered.

This illustration belongs to the 'first' Baburnama, originally thought to have 193 illustrations (Susan Stronge, *Painting for the Mughal Emperor: The Art of the Book 1560-1600*, London, 2002, pp. 86-91). The illustrations differ in style and quality. Those featuring the Emperor, like the present scene, are of a higher quality finish and more typically in the Akbari style. The others are studies of plants and animals which are freer in style and finish. Within the next ten years, six other illustrated versions of the text were produced for Akbar with one version in the British Library, one in the National Museum in New Delhi, and one split between the Baltimore and Moscow State Museums.

Twenty illustrations from the 'First' Baburnama are in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, and this is sometimes referred to as the 'South Kensington' Baburnama. Nineteen of the Victoria & Albert Museum illustrations were acquired in 1913 from the bookseller Messrs Luzac & Co., London, after the manuscript had been broken up - possibly done by either by Luzac & Co or the dealer Georges Demotte from who we know an illustration was purchased, now in the National Museum of Asian Art, Washington (Acc. no. S1986.231). The Victoria & Albert also bought one illustration from a Parisian dealer in 1950. A further six folios are in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, which were acquired from Charles Vignier in Paris. Three folios are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and others are distributed between the collections of major international institutions and private collections.

The episode illustrated in the present painting shows the Emperor Babur hunting rhinoceros in Swati, northern Pakistan. On 16th February 1519 Babur begins: "After starting off the camp for the river, I went to hunt rhinoceros on the Sawati side which place people call also Karg-khana (rhino-home)" (Beveridge, *The Babur-nama in English*, London, 1969, p. 378). The hunt is described in detail with Babur's party failing to hunt an adult rhino although they do kill a calf, before leaving Swati. Another illustration of the same scene is in the Baburnama in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (acc. no. W.596.21B).

Our painting is ascribed with the name of two artists, La'l and Sarwan. The red ink inscription which names the two artists shows that this was a royal copy made for the Emperor Akbar himself. Collaboration between two or more artists was common practice in the Mughal workshop. Typically one artist would be responsible for the outline and design of the work, in this case La'l, and the other carried out the painting. La'l was one of the most prominent court artists under Akbar and one of the most prolific designers of manuscript illustrations. Sarwan was not quite as prolific or prominent as La'l but he is recorded as working on many illustrations during Akbar's reign. In addition to working on this copy of the Baburnama, Sarwan is recorded as painting five illustrations to the Victoria & Albert Museum Akbarnama of circa 1590-95 (Acc. no. IS.2-1896).

Illustrations from the 'First' Baburnama recently sold at auction include those sold in these Rooms, 25 June 2020, lot 82; 2 May 2019, lot 78; and 21 April 2016, lot 1. Illustrations have also sold at Sotheby's, London, 27 October 2021, lot 139; 8 June 2000, lot 4; 23 March 2000, lot 192; 25 March 1999, lot 201; 20 March 1997, lot 10; and 26 April 1991, lot 64.