

## **From Nomads to Royal *Flaneurs* : The Global Language of Red Velvet**

Naman P. Ahuja

**T**he tents of the last of the grand garden dwellers in the cultivated paradisiac river flows of South Asia, were preserved in the Rajput courts of Jaipur and Jodhpur. They are remarkable examples of the physical mobility of people. Tented dwellings brought one community into contact with another creating a space where a change took place in the nature of the traveller as well as the people that traveller came in touch with. This article examines the story of one panel of red velvet from a Mughal/Rajput tent, to see how it opens up an understanding of mobility of material, people and also registers a shift in taste, which, in turn, is reflective of an aspirational mobility of class and custom and indicative of social change.

An opportunity to compare Indian tents with the English equivalent of a grand garden marquee and the formalism of European gardens was afforded by a rediscovery of one left behind by Lutyens in the Rashtrapati Bhavan along with a variety of 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian ceremonial velvets.<sup>1</sup> Immediately after, it was about three years ago now that we were in the midst of detailed discussions on curating a selection of objects from Indian museums to pair with objects that came from the rest of the world for the exhibition on India and the World. My co-curator and I were charged with bringing to bear a history that showed some of the sumptuousness of the courts. Yet, surely, extravagance was not one of the most important aspects of telling a history of the world I argued. Luxury and richness can be seen very differently by those viewing the culture from a different social class, for whom the very object of splendour can be a marker of their oppression. Yet courtly culture preserved and codified the customs and etiquette of a civilisation, held relevance for a people and earned their respect. How was this done? Propaganda could have bestowed the monarch an aura, but could not have sustained respect. That would have required a reaching out to the people. And all other options considered, I was delighted to learn from Rahul Jain that the

National Museum of India had a portion of the same remarkable Mughal style tent that lay in many other museums and collections of the world. It made an ideal choice for several reasons.<sup>2</sup>



Fig.1 : *Qanāt* (tent panel)

Velvet with applique gold leaf (applied gilding / *kharī* or *khadī*)  
 CE 1650-1720; Probably Jaipur, Rajasthan, India  
 Height: 263 cm / Width: 143 cm  
 National Museum, New Delhi (48.7/20)

This panel (Fig.1) comes from a grand *sāmiānā* that was once in the *tośakhānā* of the royal collection of Jaipur from where it was dispersed in stages: first in the 1930s through the Delhi based Hungarian dealer Imre Schwaiger and then again some fifty years later, via Durgesh Vijaywargia of Jaipur.<sup>3</sup> The tent panel that forms the central object of this article belongs to the same set of tent panels that Peter Andrews discussed in great depth in his book on the Calico Museum's collections.<sup>4</sup> Apart from what must remain still in the locked up stores of Jaipur, there are over sixteen tent panels which are published. Andrews lists all these comprehensively.<sup>5</sup> Curiously he misses out the one in the National Museum which is illustrated here. The panels from the original tent come in three different sizes. The National Museum's panel which is 263 cm high, is from the group of the largest ones.

## Size and Purpose

Mughal tents were 'portable cloth palaces': base-camps for military campaigns (which occupied Mughal rulers like Akbar, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb for exceptionally long periods in their lives). Tents were their royal homes away from home, from which affairs of state were conducted, where guests were received and from where a vast empire was administered. It had to be folded up, carried with an enormous retinue, and re-erected at a suitable place. It transpires that the actual homes of the Mughal emperors for 40 percent of their time was indeed the tented palace according to some detailed calculations on how much time the emperor spent in their palaces versus their tents during 1556 to 1739.<sup>6</sup> Agra was Akbar's official capital for 36 years out of his nearly 50-years reign, and of those 36 years he was away in camps for 22 years, i.e. 60% of the total period. Jahangir, similarly, was absent from Agra for 14 out of his 22 years rule.

The National Museum panel is closely comparable in dimensions to the panels now lying at the Metropolitan Museum, New York (Fig.2).<sup>7</sup> These, as



Fig.2 : Floral tent panel  
Silk, gold; cut velvet, painted  
c. 1635 CE  
L: 268.6 cm, W: 562 cm  
Metropolitan Museum of Art (1981.321)

Andrews has revealed, form a part of the walls of an enclosure rather than its ceiling, which would have been approximately one meter lower in size, and



Fig.3 : Tent hanging

Stencilled velvet and painted with gold leaf  
18<sup>th</sup> century; Probably made in Jaipur, Rajasthan  
Victoria and Albert Museum (IM.30-1936)

versions of which are preserved in the V&A (Fig.3), for instance. At over 260 cm in height, the MET and National Museum pieces are higher than the sight of a person on horseback, an essential design requirement. The MET piece still carries traces of leather tabs at the back strengthening the batten pockets that would have accommodated the supports used to erect it, while the inner lining preserved at the V&A (Fig.4) shows the most exquisite embroidered pink roses on a golden beige ground. This is startling because one would have imagined the red would have been the desired and more sumptuous interior.

When they were all together, these textiles now scattered, must have then formed a grand tent palace. The decor of the exterior would have been of a series of arched niches in gold outline against a deep red velvet ground, each containing a large floral spray derived from the motif of a poppy. Delicate and expensive velvet

adorned with gold leaf does not, at first, appear to be a suitable material for external use, incapable as it would have been to withstand the dust and rain. How then has it survived? Was it only ornamental?

Abul Fazl's account in the *Ain i-Akbari* is informative. He clarifies firstly that there were essentially two main types of encampments: small ones used on short journeys, and hunting parties, while larger camps which were like veritable townships were intended for royal tours and military expeditions, that the office of the tent managers was of tremendous importance, and that the red tent reserved for the king was the most sumptuous. Many further cloth walls and screens would have made up the whole tented encampment surrounding the



Fig. 4 : Tent hanging  
Embroidered cotton with gold-wrapped thread and floss silk  
c. 1700 CE; Possibly Mughal or Deccan  
Victoria and Albert Museum (IM.48-1928)

royal tent. With carpets and mats pressing down and soaking up the dust, this tent must have been more protected from the elements and that might explain how such a panel has survived (Fig.5).

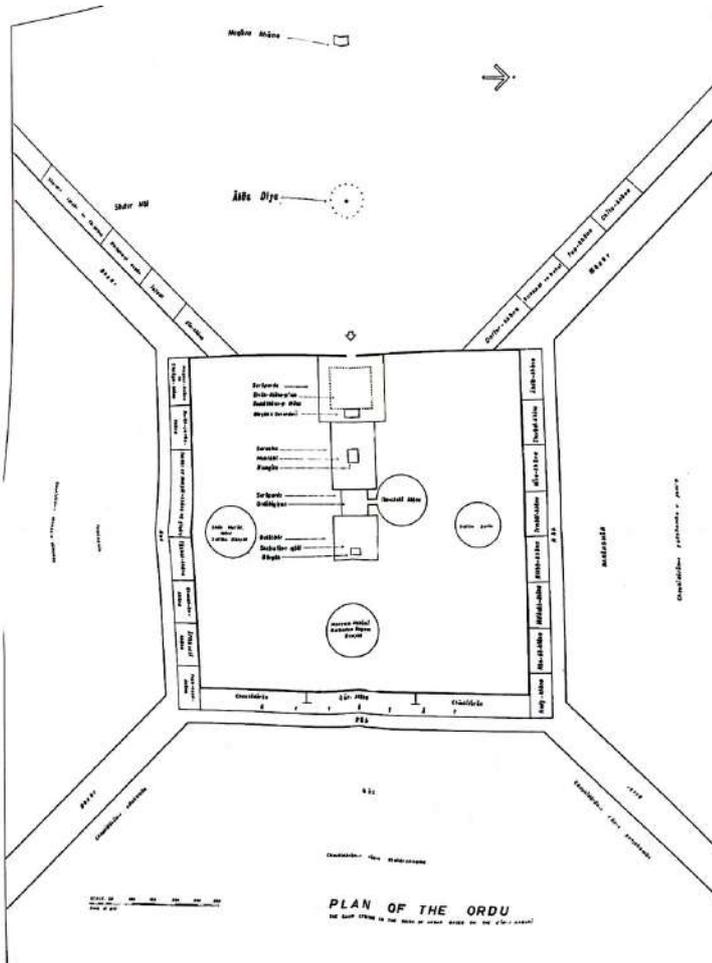


Fig.5 : Plan of the Ordu: The camp centre in the reign of Akbar based on the *Ain-I Akbari*, after Akbar's reform, c. 1604 CE  
 After Andrews, Peter Alford, *Felt Tents and Pavilions: the nomadic tradition and its interaction with princely tentage*, London: Melisende, 1999

When talking about the camps made for expeditions, Abu'l Fazl writes that, "First the *gulāl-bār* (red wall) is a great fence brought into use by the Lord of the World."<sup>8</sup> The quality and importance of the tent is made clear when Fazl describes the office of the tent pitcher himself,

"[The emperor] regards this department as an excellent dwelling-place, a shelter against heat and cold, a protection against rain, and an ornament for the empire. And because he considers its decorative-ness as part of the pomp of sovereignty he accounts the care given it as divine worship. Through his expert knowledge it has been

improved in both quality and quantity, and enhanced by the cheerful appearance of new types. I shall record part of these things, and review some examples for the benefit of those who wish to know.

The *bārgāh* (tent of state) can, in the largest cases, hold ten thousand people or more sitting in its shade. A thousand skilled tent-pitchers erect such a tent in a week with the help of traction machines. Most have two main poles (*surugh*), each of which is jointed together with several iron bands (*āhan-jāma*). Plain ones, in which cloth of gold and velvet and gold fringes are not used, cost ten thousand rupees and more. The value of richly-worked ones is beyond the limit of words. The price of other kinds is analogous to the former."<sup>9</sup>

Tented dwellings have been used for millennia and few parts of the world can rival their rich history amongst Central Asian nomads (which includes the

Mughal ancestors), and the Arabian deserts. The type and nature of tents changed over time. Chaghatai tents were domed (*aq üy*; the so-called yurt), which were known for their exceptional felts, as well as woven, embroidered and appliqué designs. Scholars of Persia and Turkey have similarly mined sources to reconstruct a history of the tented living in those regions. Bernard O'Kane says, "The value of tents can also be gauged from the way in which they were considered to be parts of treasuries. They were included in the dowry of one of Timur's wives, and on campaign Timur occasionally gave presents of tents to captured royalty or to generals who had distinguished themselves."<sup>10</sup> The few references to contemporaneous tents in Sultanate times in India reveal that they were already using the red enclosure in the encampment for the ruler. Such considerable investment in the preference to live in nature, enjoying different climes must of course go back to grand old Mongol and nomadic routes. It was important to the many migratory communities of the world - the Rabaris, Banjaras, and Bedouin too.<sup>11</sup> Rather than focus on the history of migrations and tented architecture, in this article I shall draw attention only to some specific contexts of trade and mobility that were manifest in sixteenth century - an extraordinary moment in time - which enabled the creation and use of a velvet tent such as this.<sup>12</sup>

About the tent, Andrews further states that "The inside is decorated with cloth of gold and velvet, and the outside with scarlet broad-cloth surrounded with a girth of silken webbing (*navāri*)".<sup>13</sup> This then must have been the outer shell around the golden core. Accounts reveal that nearly one thousand carpets covered the floor of just the *Divan i-khas* (Hall of Private Audience). Rougher carpets and mats would cover the dusty ground throughout. Not only was the paraphernalia of the office of the tent master enormous, the whole collection had to be duplicated. One set (*pīś-khānā*) needed to be sent on ahead and erected to wait the arrival of the emperor and his followers while the one that had just been occupied was packed up to reach the subsequent destination. Each encampment required 100 elephants, 500 camels, 400 carts and 100 bearers, as well as up to 2000 foot soldiers and labourers. When the army also travelled, the size of the encampment was even larger: doctors, supplies, entire support services, bazaars and of course, the soldiers themselves. And, as is to be expected, the township traversed no more than 16 km a day.

Carla Sinipoli elaborates on the planning of the tented township. "The imperial camp. . . was constructed according to a formal plan, described as a mobile version of Akbar's capital of Fatehpur Sikri (Richards 1978: 259). A large wall of cloth screens enclosed the royal camp, forming an east-west oriented rectangle nearly 1400 m long. The emperor's tent and royal reception areas were consistently placed in the centre of the eastern end of the royal enclosure. His was the only two-storied tent in the imperial camp, enclosed within walls of distinctive scarlet cloth. Next to the emperor was a screened area containing the tents of the royal harem; beyond this were enormous awnings for public and private royal audiences. Tents for nobles were aligned in carefully specified locations that spatially expressed their relations with the ruler. Beyond the royal enclosure were the tents of lesser nobles and the military, as well as administrative facilities, stables, arsenals, workshops of attached specialists, and kitchens. Merchants and money-lenders formed neat bazaar areas along the streets of the massive tent city."<sup>14</sup>

The tented township then, makes us understand the ideas we now associate with vernacular architecture of ephemeral materials so much more. Students are taught all too often in their lessons on art and architectural history that perishable antecedents provided the impetus to the building of the permanent structures of stone. Can we then use the rich information that surrounds Mughal tentage to see how it may have inspired the buildings of the Mughals? Can it be equally true then, that rather than the city of Fatehpur Sikri being the model for the tented township, it was the other way around: wherein centuries of spatial organization that had been learnt through the erection and re-erection of tents in which emperors spent much of their lives, gave urban planners the much needed experience they required?<sup>15</sup>

### **Mobile Sovereignty**

Even though the tent was lavish, it also carried with it a capacity of allowing the emperor to be subject to the vagaries of weather, encounter new habitats and people. In fact, the shape and the construction of a tent has, through its history, been closely allied to the mobile dwelling of an ox, camel or horse-drawn cart used by travellers and nomads. Produce had to be acquired from local traders and farmers in as much as exchanges with the area's educated and landed

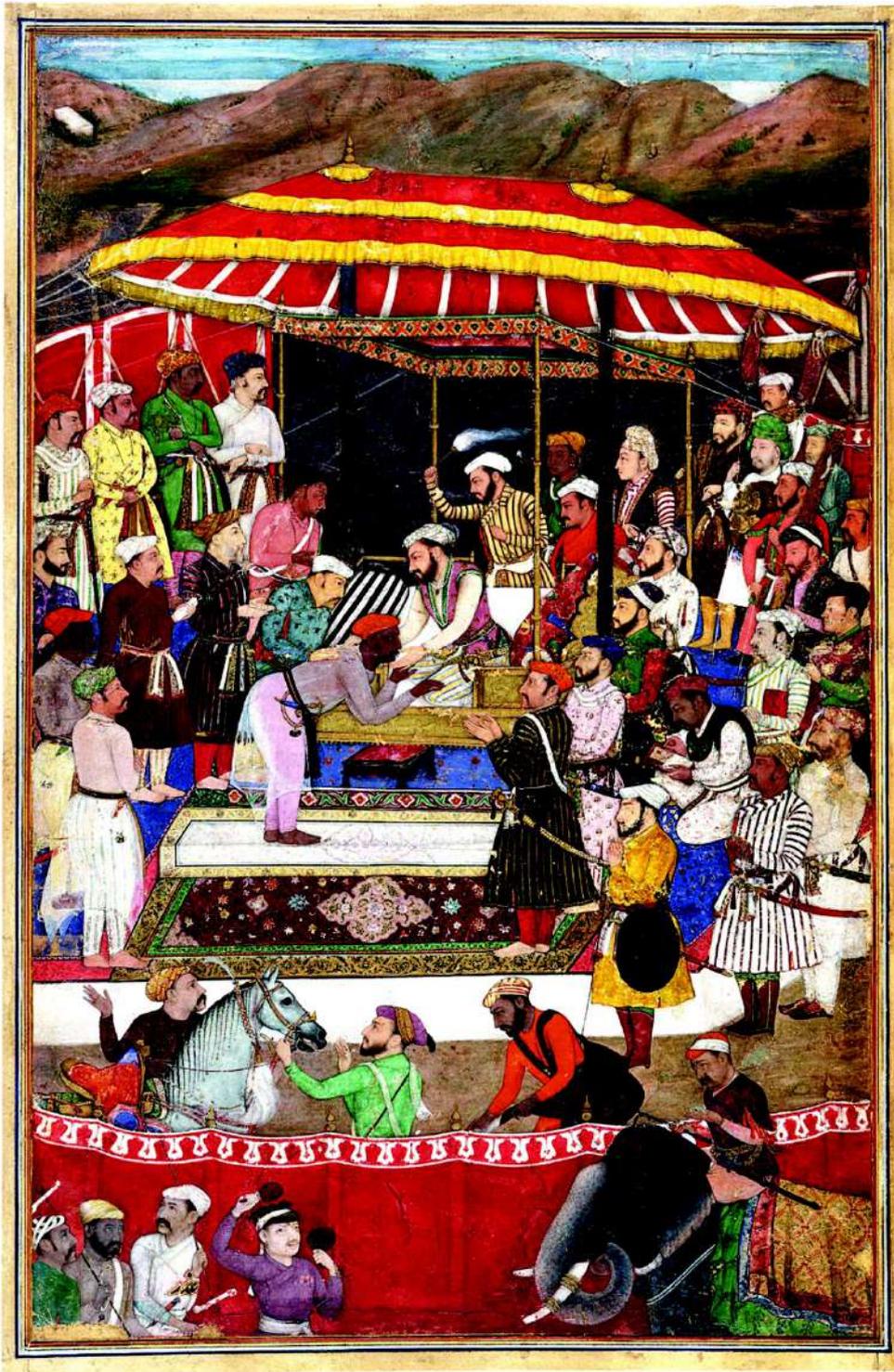


Fig.6 : Maharana of Mewar and Prince Khurram

Opaque water-colour and gold on paper; Painter: Nanha; Mughal; c. 1615-18 CE  
Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.185-1984)

This historic encounter between the Rajput house of Mewar and the Mughals took place in a tented encampment in the desert. The *Pādsāhnāmā* at the Royal Library in Windsor (RCIN 1005025.g) has a closely comparable example made decades later in 1656-57. The consistency in the details of the tents make these paintings a reliable historical source.

makes clear that the imperial tent was spectacular and celestial in appearance.<sup>16</sup> Awesomeness apart, he further notes that the labour and

were necessitated by the progress of the expedition. And so, as much as we think of the people coming to the court and being struck by the aura of the Emperor, (something we see page after page in the grand hierarchy of the paintings of Shah Jahan's *Pādsāhnāmā*) (Fig.6), we also need to remember that it was the king who parked himself in areas where he would receive ambassadors and kings.

In as much as the tent strengthened the monarch's connection with his people and land, the grandeur of the royal tent is noted in nearly every ambassador's account. This opulence was deliberate: it made the necessary impact to maintain hierarchies. Shah Jahan's chronicler (and Aurangzeb's teacher) Muhammad Saleh's description

mechanical devices required for its elevation and maintenance was also equally grand - a veritable performance and boastful prerogative of a mobile display of imperial power, that could arrive, if you were lucky, just outside your land, and if you were not, within your territory and lay claim to it. The slow march of the mobile court had a huge impact on the artistic traditions and courtly etiquette of the people they encountered.

Even more powerful, however, was the idea that the king could function from multiple capitals: not just Agra, Delhi, Lahore, which were constructed of stone, but the mobile ones ensured that there were other functioning headquarters too. These notions of mobile sovereignty come down from Mongol times. Was this the case with the Rajputs as well? After all, this panel is from Jaipur.

Zirwat Chowdhury has revealed how Jodhpur's ruler Abhai Singh (r.1724-1749) emulated the Mughal tent and courtly culture to be able to assert his own authority.<sup>17</sup> The interior of the tents was generally lined with a material different from the outside, which was red - a colour strictly guarded as royal privilege. So embedded was the *Lāl Derā* (Fig.7) in the public consciousness as the seat of power, that it served exactly the type of propaganda a Rajput ruler like Abhai



Fig.7 : Lal Dera  
Imperial tent; Velvet, Late 17<sup>th</sup> - early 18<sup>th</sup> century; Jodhpur  
The Mehrangarh Museum, Jodhpur

Singh then required after having come to power himself in less than honourable circumstances. The pomp and authority exerted by the Mughal tent provided exactly the legitimacy he required.

Red tents were reserved for the royal enclosure, and this can be seen in the painting in the folio from the *Bāburnāmā* (Fig.8). Red tents were the exclusive prerogative of the Emperor throughout the Middle East since Seljuk times. So precious were they to the Mughal ancestors that "The third of Güyük Qan's ceremonial tents had been given by the Kitay, that is in Carpini's terms the former Chin Kingdom of Northern China. He describes it as "a wonderful tent all of red velvet, *tentorium mirabile totum de purpura ruffa.*" This is the first recorded appearance in the Mongol-Turkic milieu of the colour traditionally associated with royal tents in the Middle East; in this instance, however, it is doubtful whether it carried such associations, for the donors at least, as red was not a royal colour for the Chinese."<sup>18</sup>

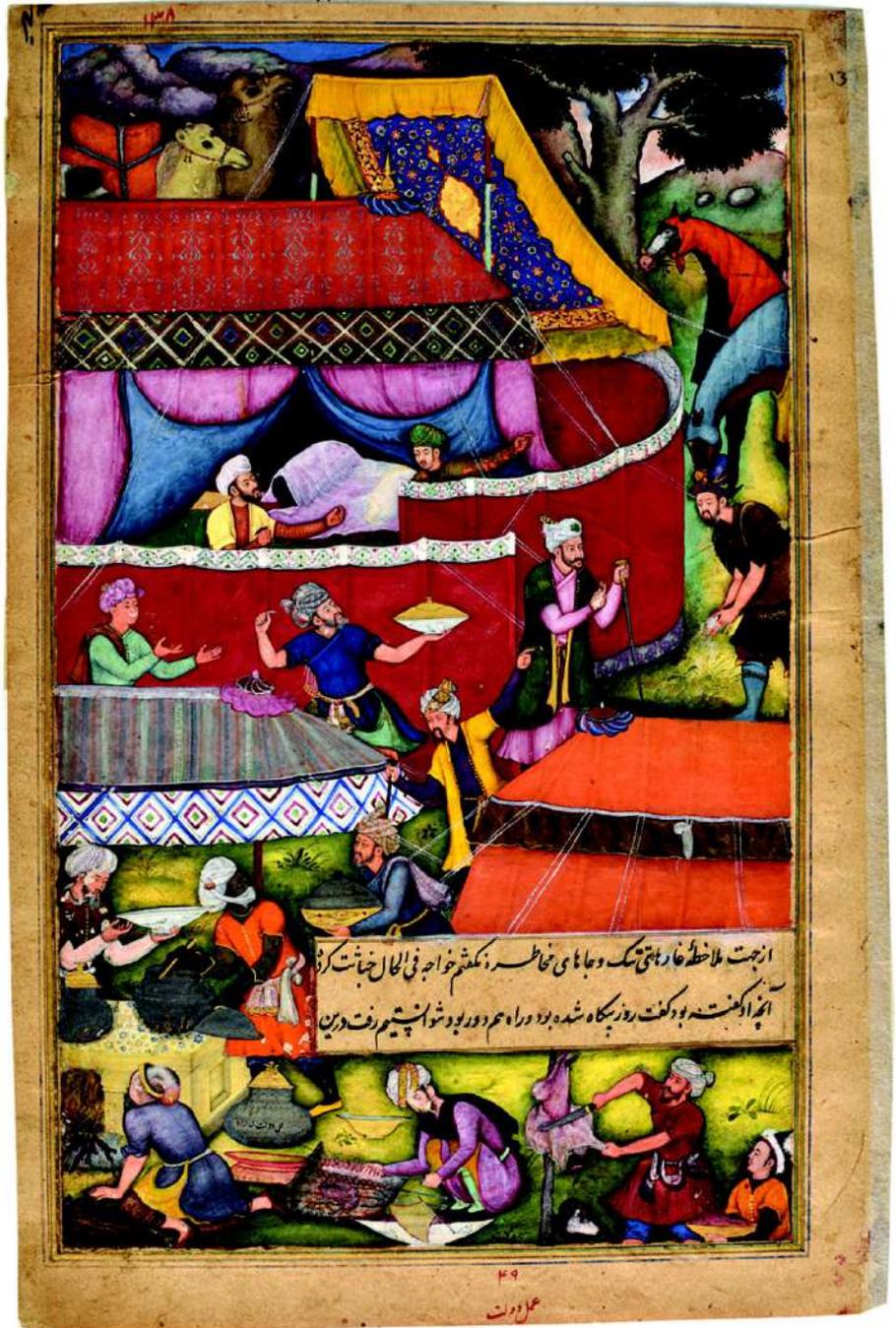


Fig.8 : Feast during a night halt at Kohat (Punjab)  
 Folio from a *Bāburnāmā*; Inscription: *Amal-I Daulat* (Work of Daulat)  
 Ink, mineral pigments and opaque water-colour on paper  
 Mughal, about CE 1598; Probably Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India  
 Height: 26 cm / Width: 17 cm  
 National Museum, New Delhi (50.336)

The panel at the National Museum might have been made as early as the reign of Raja Jai Singh I (r.1611-1667) or his successor, Raja Ram Singh I (r.1667-1688), of Amber, later known as Jaipur. The Jaipur court had a close association with the Mughals ever since the reign of Akbar who forged an alliance with Raja Man Singh I and made him a general and a chosen minister. The families intermarried, and innumerable gifts, books and carpets were exchanged between both courts. The Mughals and Rajputs, it is known, had exceptionally close ties and were deeply interconnected through diplomacy and marriage and deep filial connections. Rajput cousins of Mughal princes would have grown up around them in the tented palaces. And so, moving from its form and function, we now come to a question about whether the present tent which was found originally in the stores of the palace of Jaipur, was a Rajput or Mughal object? And further, how can we date it?

### **Dating the Material, Motif and Colour**

In parts where it is well preserved, the National Museum *qanāt* is crimson, but the parts that have faded look scarlet. This is off-set by the applied gold leaf. A study of multiple panels has shown the gold leaf (Arabic: *waraq*) was burnished onto gum applied to the velvet in the shape of the pattern with the help of a wooden block or template (as one would while gilding a wall, for instance).

The dye on a comparable textile from the same group was analysed by the Textile Research Associates of New York in 1995, and was found to be cochineal with some presence of lac indicated by thin-layer chromatography. Lac is a distinctly Indian ingredient, long used to dye cotton, but the prevalence of cochineal, an imported dye, is significant. Unlike madder which is derived from a root, and ochre which comes from a mineral, both lac and cochineal are derived from insects. American cochineal was introduced in Asia first in the sixteenth century. This is an early example the absorption of American trade in distinctive luxury materials like cochineal at the same time when items of personal adornment such as Columbian emeralds, and plants like marigold flowers, tomatoes, potatoes and chillies entered India from the Americas, forever changing how Indians ate, and the most essential flower with which they worshipped.

Extremely expensive, trade records show that attempts by English merchants to sell cochineal in India met with little success,<sup>19</sup> and was used only by the wealthiest. Its extensive presence on the many surviving panels of this tent

might indicate that the velvet itself may have come from elsewhere, possibly Europe rather than have been made locally with the expensive foreign dye.<sup>20</sup> There is a rich history of similarly red shades of velvet used in the European, especially Venetian context. Often dyed a deep red, it was only used for the most important royal and papal ranks. The history of silk velvet is closely tied with Ottoman velvets of circa 1550-1650. Highly prized, these velvets made their way to Hindustan at the same time. For instance, Andrews quotes the famous Timurid historian, author of the *Humāyun-nāmā*, Ghiyas al-din Khwandamir's account of 1535-1536 where he records that in 1533, he saw a tent made of *makhmal i-faraṅg* or European velvet in the vicinity of Gwalior in Hindustan.<sup>21</sup> Andrews also cites Sir Thomas Roe (English ambassador to India 1615-1618), who mentioned Venetian hangings of velvet with gold in the ladies quarters of the court of Jahangir.

Velvet is, strictly speaking in Indian languages, known as *makhmal* (as opposed to *śanīl*/chenille). Andrews mentions that *makhmal-i bādīlā-bāf* or brocaded velvet is a term distinctly Indian and not found in Arabic, Persian or Turkish texts. *Makhmal-i faraṅg*, is also a term found widely in Indo-Persian texts upto the end of the reign of Jahangir, which refers to the European velvets that were being imported. What makes matters confusing when reading the literature, is that while several writers talk of expensive silks and brocaded/embroidered ones too as being made in India, it is not always clear if they were unfamiliar with the specific words for velvet, or carpets with a pile. The study of velvets should, technically be speaking, be done alongside carpets since both use the technique of rendering a pile on the base warp and weft. Silk pile carpets were certainly made in India in the reign of Shah Jahan, again pointing to a naturalisation of using a silk pile technique sometime towards the end of the first quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> Paśmīnā pile carpets were made on a silk warp and weft, but silk pile carpets, although known, apparently did not become popular till the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>23</sup> It is not absolutely certain therefore if the cloth of the red velvet tent panels retrieved from the Jaipur *tośakhānā*, is Indian. As Andrews sums up, "The velvet has been said to be possibly Dutch, and its ascription to Europe led Veronica Murphy of the V&A, in [1982] *The Indian Heritage* (cat. no 208) to judge it as probably from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, citing a specialist opinion that it was unlikely to be earlier than 1725." While at the same time, he notes that, "An argument for the European origin of the velvet was advanced, according to Rahul Jain, by Nabuko Kajitani (Former Head Conservator of Textiles at the MMA) based on the loom width and the presence

of the red cochineal dye. Rahul Jain however argues that these velvets are indeed Indian.<sup>24</sup>

Jain studies the group of the earliest known Indian velvets from the reign of Shah Jahan that are preserved in the Calico Museum, Ahmedabad for their stylistic features, structure and technology.<sup>25</sup> The stylistic features leave little doubt that the treatment of those velvets is distinctly Indian and Mughal, and must have been made especially for the Mughal court. They therefore suggest that it is likely that the tradition of making silk velvet was naturalised in India sometime during the reign of Shah Jahan. Unlike the later Jaipur red velvet however, the early Shah Jahani pieces in the Calico Museum are all in soft shades of beige-gold, with raised (cut) irises and other flowers in the typical or distinctive style of the period between 1635-1650. Similar floral patterns such as the one on the Calico Museum's tent panels are a widespread occurrence on walls in the paintings of the *Pādsāhnāmā*. Every individual bud and blossom is given attention, the leaves are less important than the flower, and the stem is more erect than the gold printed poppy in the tent panel we are studying here. At first glance, it is obvious that a cusped arch with a poppy motif would be dated to the reign of Shah Jahan at the earliest, and given that the poppy seems to have compressed flowers, many leaves and the cusps of the arch are a little bit squat/squashed, it shows a 'debasement' of a pattern that would have been at its peak at the reign of Shah Jahan and could be regarded as coming probably from the reign of Aurangzeb. Interestingly, the lining of the tent panels we are discussing here, are also creating a golden beige interior with pastel highlights (Fig.4).

Dating textiles on the basis of an analysis of its style when compared with architecture and painting needs to be attempted with caution. Textiles have their own history and were oftentimes the place where techniques, ideas and motifs were experimented on before they were committed to stone or even incorporated into official paintings. The presence of floral sprays in arches can be seen as early as 1590 in the harem tent in the famous V&A *Akbarnāmā*'s painting of Akbar slaying animals in an enclosure at the occasion of the punishing of Hamid Bakkari (Fig.9). However, the arches in this tent are not cusped and the flowers are in the nature of sprays of blossoms rather than a single plant that has been amplified. By contrast, the depictions of red tent panels with gold *kharhi/khadi* flowers in the paintings of Maharana Ari Singh of Mewar in 1767 are more gold than red - stuffed with gilt flowers and leaves a style which tends to be emulated in the Rajput

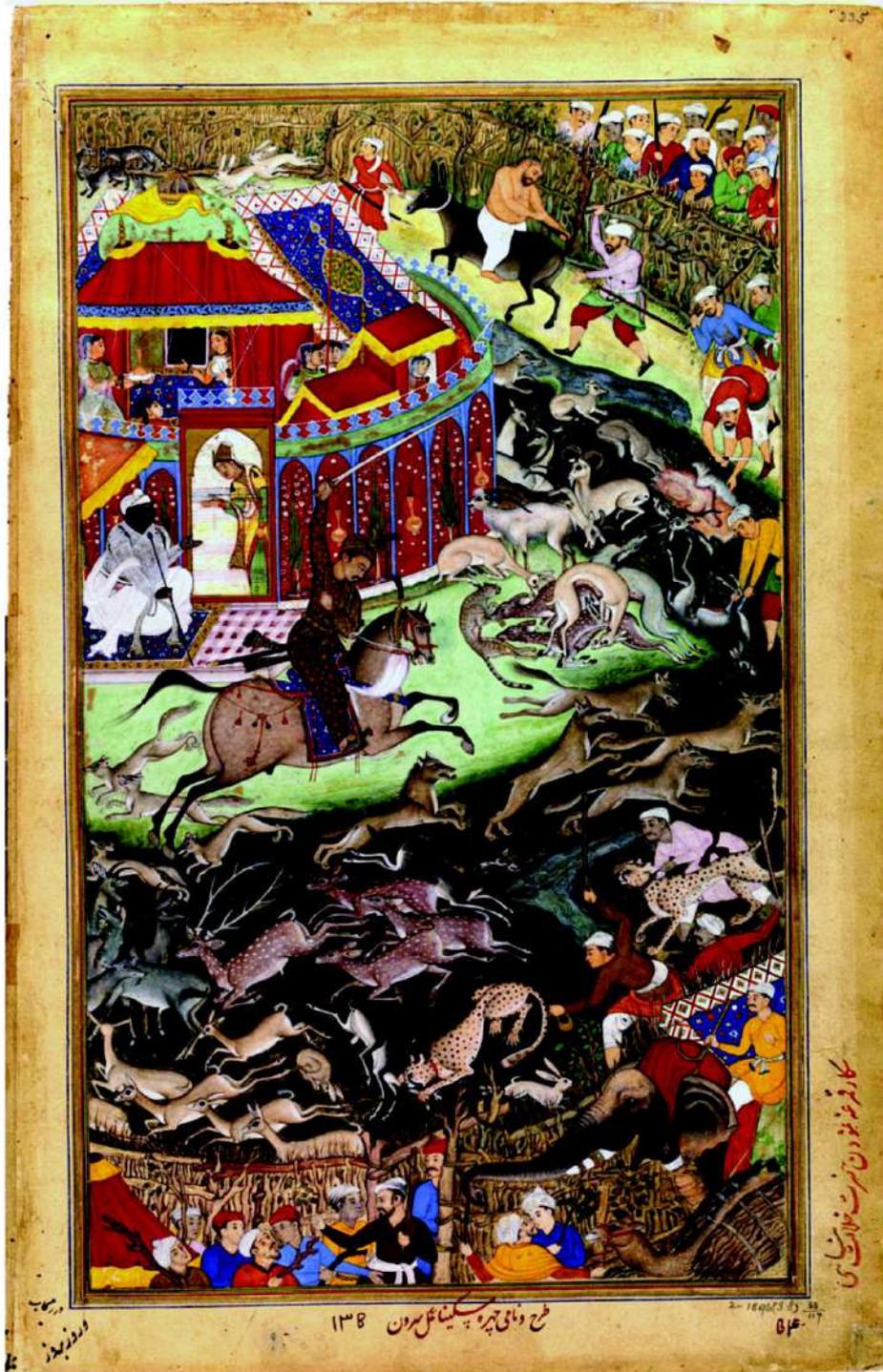


Fig.9 : Akbar and Hamid Bakari  
 Opaque water-colour and gold on paper  
 Artist: Miskina/Sarwan; Mughal, c. 1590-95 CE  
 Victoria and Albert Museum (IS.2:55-1896)

paintings of Kota from the early to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

When discussing comparable material from Kota,<sup>26</sup> it seems the tradition only reached there sometime in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as evidence for this can be seen in the Rajput paintings of Ari Singh and Sangram Singh. But it is no doubt made by a similar workshop to the one that produced the older Jaipur *tośkhānā* tent. Paintings from Kota show red being used inside a tent or palace. However, in Jaipur paintings of 1830 (Fig.10) they are shown outside as well. Could this Jaipur tent which must originally have been vivid when it was first made late in the reign of Jai Singh I (1611-1667) have faded so badly because it began to be used on the outside by rulers like Sawai Jai Singh III in the 1830s?<sup>27</sup>

Later Indian velvets from the 19<sup>th</sup> century are widely preserved. Invariably embroidered in the *bādlā* technique found in almost all north Indian royal collections. There is also a sizeable collection in the Rashtrapati Bhavan of symptomatic ones that can be dated to the early twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> Given the



Fig.10 : Maharaja Jai Singh III of Jaipur receiving Maharana Jawan Singh of Mewar in his camp  
Gouache heightened with gold on paper; Jaipur; c. 1831 CE; 43.2 x 54.5cm

Collection of Gursharan S. and Elvira Sidhu

Previously shown at the Victoria and Albert Museum in the 1982 exhibition *The Indian Heritage: Court Life & Arts under Mughal Rule*, illustrated in the catalogue of the same name, pl. 5a, no.155, p.66, and also in Ehnbom, Daniel J., *Indian Miniatures: The Ehrenfeld Collection*, New York, 1987, no. 78, pp.168-9.

differences in the qualities of velvet, material, techniques and style, there is no doubt the Jaipur velvet panels could not possibly be as late as these, and are likely to date from the reign of Aurangzeb or late in the reign of Shah Jahan, that is late in the reign of Jai Singh I of Amber, or his successor, Raja Ram Singh I (r.1667-1688). That would have been a period when cultural interconnections between the Mughal and Jaipur courts would have been prolific, craft technologies would have been shared widely, and would have been a phase when Jaipur itself would have become a nodal point that lent the capacities of its many *kārkhānās* to other Rajput states.

## Conclusion

Little advance has been made in the scholarship about the actual workings of the textile design studios, (the payments to workshops, the lot of weavers or even their procurement of raw materials) from the records of Mughal and Rajput courts even though information about these matters is attested in many archives in Rajasthan. By contrast, years of research on the oeuvre of painters has finally yielded a turning point in scholarship that allows the scores of unsigned works to be attributed to a particular painter's hand, and linked with his or her biography. Their interactions with their patrons, the industry that supported them and the histories of the workshops and communities in which they worked are becoming better known. A *qanāt* such as this: on luxurious velvet that either came from Europe or emulated European velvet in India, dyed with South American ingredients, decorated in gold in a pattern made popular by Shah Jahan but printed in the long-standing technique of Rajasthan, found in the store-rooms of a Rajput king enamoured by the court customs of his neighbours, encapsulates a rich history of India and the World.

The early Mughal emperors and their courts were constantly on the move and spent almost as much time in tented palaces as in the cities they founded. These ephemeral but lavish mobile palaces drew praise in the accounts of Mughal and European chroniclers. Apart from just the movement of materials and techniques that connect the world, in the exhibition *India & the World*, we wanted to show that courtly culture, manners and etiquette, are something that move with people and materials. The absorption of this tent into a Rajput environment then reveals the aspiration to a new high culture through a type of interior decor - this fashion itself and the style is thus a signifier of so much more than just a limited understanding of a copying of styles. It shows the adoption of a hierarchy, the desire for the possession of an identity.

The intention of the gallery in which it was displayed was to show how complex these exchanges were, and how cultures and traditions were adopted and adapted anew. Such transformations were not limited to or only within India. Near this tent panel were other artworks from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which captured similarly rich stories: the celebrated German artist Dürer's famous etching of an Indian rhinoceros that had arrived in Lisbon as a gift from the Sultan of Gujarat and a sketch the famous European painter Rembrandt made when copying a Mughal portrait of Shah Jahan were

both examples of the great fascination with the exoticism of another land. A group of Japanese paintings which emulated Chinese ones revealed how they promoted the ideals of Chinese courtly culture and social aspirations in Japan. A portrait of the African (Ethiopian) slave Malik Ambar from Ahmednagar revealed how his extraordinary skills, which were unappreciated in one country were so valued in another, that became one of the most famous prime-ministers of India (Fig.11). To make its point about mobility of tradition and adoptions of identity, the gallery began with a painting from the *Bāburnāmā* which showed how the Emperor Babur wanted to impress the local rulers of the region of Kohat (in the Northwest Frontier) by throwing them a feast in his red tent, while beside it was this example of a panel of one such Mughal-inspired grand red tent that a Rajput ruler himself had managed to acquire in turn, to be able to display similar pomp and largesse to his audience.

Lest we forget, mobility leads to identities anew - the Mongolian and Chaghtai/Turkic word for a tented camp is called *ordo* or *ordu*, which is the



Fig.11 : The National Museum's tent panel on display in the exhibition *India and the World* at CSMVS, Mumbai in a gallery on court cultures.

Image courtesy: Somaya & Kalappa Consultants

standard and common term for the same tented encampments of Hindustan where different people were forced to live cheek by jowl and where a new language developed that was given the name 'urdu' after the name of the camps in which it evolved. What can be a greater reminder of the richness of the intermixing of cultures, people, traditions and identities, than to get a sense of the circumstances in which the birth a beautiful new language that expresses that confluence of cultures took place?

## References & Notes

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2. Naman P. Ahuja and J.D. Hill, *India and the World: A History in Nine Stories*, Delhi: Penguin, 2017.
3. Peter Alford Andrews, *Tentage at the Calico Museum and its Patterns*, Ahmedabad: Sarabhai Foundation, 2015, p.84. Andrews suggests that the design of the tent at the Calico Museum matches that of a complete tent now in the *farrāsakhānā* at Jaipur Palace, attributed, probably wrongly, to Man Singh.
4. Andrews, 2015. The most definitive studies on Mughal tentage had already been conducted by Peter Alford Andrews previously in his extraordinary two-volumes work titled *Felt Tents and Pavillions: The Nomadic Tradition and its Interaction with Princely Tentage*, London: Melisende, 1999, which devotes more than 500 pages (out of 1700) to a study of the changing nature of the Mughal tent in the reign of each emperor. He succinctly summarised this in his article 'The Generous Heart or the Mass of Clouds: The Court Tents of Shah Jahan' in Oleg Grabar ed. *Muqarnas Vol.4*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987, pp.149-65.
5. Andrews, 2015, pp.98-100.
6. Carla M. Sinopoli, 'Monumentality and Mobility in Mughal Capitals', In *Asian Perspectives*, Vol.33, No.2, University of Hawai'i Press, 1994, pp.295-96 utilises the research by S.P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India, 1639-1739*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.97 and I.P. Gupta, *Urban Glimpses of Mughal India: Agra, The Imperial Capital, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries*, Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 1986, p.88.
7. See : MET (1981.321), MET website: Tent lining; Silk, gold; cut velvet, painted; c.1635 ; and Stuart Cary Welch, *India: Art and Culture, 1300-1900*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985, p.252. It also matches a single one in the V&A (I.M.30-1936), one in the MFA Boston (1981.661), a set of three at the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore (1997.2617), one in Francesca Galloway's gallery in London (2013), and one seen at Colnaghi's (gallery, London) in 1982.
8. Peter Alford Andrews, *Felt Tents and Pavilions: The Nomadic Tradition and its Interaction with Princely Tentage*, London: Melisende, 1999, p.1277.
9. Andrews, 1999, p.1283.

10. O' Kane, 1993, p.251.
11. On the history of Gujarati and Rajasthani nomads' tents in India, see: Jyotindra Jain and Jutta Jain-Neubauer, 'Wall Decorations of a Mobile People' in Jan Pieper and George Michell (eds.), *Impulse to Adorn, Marg*, Vol.34, No.4, Bombay: Marg Publications, September, 1982, pp.33-42.
12. For a background of the sixteenth century see: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *From Tagus to the Ganges: Exploration in Connected History*, Delhi and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (The Mary Flexner lectures/Bryn Mawr College), Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012; also see Gordon Stewart, *When Asia Was the World: Traveling Merchants, Scholars, Warriors, and Monks Who Created the "Riches of the East"*, Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2009.
13. Andrews, 1999, p.1283.
14. Sinopoli, 1994, p.296.
15. For a similar exchange of ideas between architecture and tents in the Turkish world, see: Nurhan Atasoy, 'Ottoman Garden Pavilions and Tents' in *Muqarnas*, Vol.21, Essays in Honour of J.M. Rogers (2004), pp.15-19, p.17.
16. Muhammad Salih Kambu Lahauri, *'Amal-I Salih*, ed. Ghulam Yazdani (Calcutta, 1923-39), Vol.1, pp.282-83.
17. Zirwat Chowdhury, 'An Imperial Mughal Tent & Mobile Sovereignty in Eighteenth century Jodhpur', in *Art History*, September 2015, pp.668-68.
18. Andrews, 1999, p.511-12.
19. R.A. Donkin, p.866 in "The Insect Dyes of Western and West-Central Asia." *Anthropos: International Review of Ethnology and Linguistics* 72 (1977a), pp.847-80, and also, by comparison, R.A. Donkin, "Spanish Red: An Ethnogeographical Study of Cochineal and the Opuntia Cactus" 1977b, pp.1-84.
20. On the significance and history of cochineal see Carmella Padilla, Barbara C. Anderson and Blair Clark, *A Red Like No Other: How Cochineal Colored the World : An Epic Story of Art, Culture, Science and Trade*, New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2015, exhibition cat. that accompanied "The Red that Colored the World" held at the Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico from May 17, 2015-September 13, 2015; Also see Peter Alford Andrews, Tentage at the Calico Museum and its patterns, p.88 which provides the study of the tent that was scientifically examined in the specimen came from Francesca Galloway's gallery in London.
21. Andrews, 1999, p.869 and p.873; and also: Andrews (1987), where he mentions that "under Humayun these had already been integrated in an extravagant display, where a trellis tent named Felicity and Heart's Desire (*khargāh-I sa'ādat u murād*) and an extravaganza called the Zodiac Tent (*khargāh-I davāzdah burj*) were pitched within the royal enclosure".
22. Robert Skelton (ed.), *The Indian Heritage: Court life and Arts Under Mughal Rule*, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982, No.222, p.87. For a vivid account of velvet in Shah Jahan's reign, Andrews (1987, p.151), quotes Muhammad Amin Qazvini, *Pādśāhnāmā*, MS B.L. Or. 173, fols.149 ab-b: in the account of the celebration at the New Year festival in the year of Shah

Jahan's accession 1037 (1628) at Agra, is described by Qazvini as follows: "And executives from the royal workshop pitched the *aspak* Dal-Bādal in the public and private courtyard of the state hall at the capital; in magnitude and dignity of height and in extent and the width of its skirts it is a tenth to the nine spheres, like the great tent of the heavens. Within the Dal-Bādal were set up an *aspak* of gold-brocaded velvet, and around it awnings (*śāmyāna-hā*) of gold-brocaded velvet, on columns (*sutūn-hā*) of silver and gold. Underneath the *aspak* were silver trellis tents (*khargāh-hā-yi nuqra*) with coverings of velvet brocaded and embroidered with gold, and many-coloured carpets and ornamental rugs were spread: thrones and golden seats were set out, and parasols (*chatr-hā*), jewelled with pearls falling in drops, were erected. The doors and the walls of the public and private hall were decked out with cloth of gold from Gujarat, and European curtains (*parda-hā*), and brocades from Turkey and China, and cloth of gold from Irāq...".

23. Daniel Walker, *Flowers Underfoot: Indian Carpets of the Mughal Era*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1998, p.22.
24. Andrews, 2015, pp.96-97.
25. See Rahul Jain's detailed study: *Mughal Velvets in the Collection of the Calico Museum of Textiles*, Woven Textiles Technical Studies Monograph No.2, Sarabhai Foundation, Ahmedabad, 2011.
26. A tent panel in a more florid style with greater amounts of gold akin to the later Udaipur/Kota paintings recently came up for sale. See: <http://www.sothebys.com/cn/auctions/ecatalogue/2017/howard-hodgkin-portrait-artist-117120/lot.375.html> accessed on 15 May 2019.
27. "The design of the Jaipur tent unmistakably resembles the internal tent panels shown in a Jaipur painting dated c.1830: this depicts Sawai Jai Singh III of Jaipur receiving Mahārānā Jawan Singh of Mewar in state (Ehnbom, 1988. No.78). His tent is of white chintz with multi-coloured floral designs outside, a material, which apparently replaced the imperial red exterior at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The painting is stylised, so that the number of velvet panels cannot be counted, and the poppy plants are over sized; nor are there any multi-foil arches visible. Nevertheless, the resemblance is striking and we are given a good impression of the splendour these panels must have created. Mark Zebrowski, who with Robert Alderman owned the painting, believed it showed this very tent." Andrews, 2015, p.97.
28. Monisha Ahmed, 'From the Flag Above the Dome to Carpets Beneath their Feet' in Naman P. Ahuja and Partha Mitter (eds.), *The Arts and Interiors of Rashtrapati Bhavan: Lutyens and Beyond*, Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 2016, pp.282-321.

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