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Fig. 1  
Ahilyaoodhar  
Picture Post Card  
Printed in Luxemburg, Germany  
Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
13.8 x 8.9 cms  
Coll.: CSMVS, 2009.1008, Gift of Chitralkha Pal &  
Dr. Pratapaditya Pal

## NOTES

# Indian Gods German Renditions in Porcelain

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ANTIQUITIES from different parts of the world – particularly from Europe and the Far-East – are exhibited on the second floor of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS). Particularly intriguing among them until recently, were three small porcelain figures featuring Indian themes viz., Sarasvati, Dattatreya and Bhairavi. Probably European, the Museum records with the caption labels provided no clue, except that these are inspired by Ravi Varma's paintings. The figurine bore no factory mark and my enquiries with various scholars especially from Germany yielded no answers.

In 2015, the CSMVS received a gift comprising 101 porcelain figures, fifty of which were of Indian Gods – objects for which I had been seeking information for years. Fortunately, three of them have stamps which indicate that they are from Germany, and once again my interest in this subject was aroused.

The technique of lithographic printing in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was one of the greatest German inventions which revolutionized the mass production of prints not only in Germany and Europe, but in India as well during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Lithography was called *Steindruck* in German which means using stone for printing. On specially prepared limestone tablets, designs/images were drawn and printed with greasy inks. This technique allowed cheap and fast production of prints on a large scale. Early coloured lithographs were printed in one or two colours. For adding details or more colours, artists did hand colouring over the lithographs known as hand coloured lithographs. Gradually oleography, the method of multiple blocks for multiple colours was introduced.

This German printing technique took immediate roots in India. Indian artists and publishers got lithographs and oleographs of their works printed in Germany, Austria, Belgium and Luxemburg (Fig.1). Saxony and Bavaria in Germany were main centers of such printing. These prints documented the people of India, its temples, mosques, flora, fauna, scenes from mythology, characters from Sanskrit literature and most importantly, images of gods

and goddesses which became hugely popular. In course of time, some enterprising Indians set up their own litho presses using German inks, machines and technicians.

Between the late 1870's and early 1890's, Calcutta and Poona became the main centers of printed image production in India. The Calcutta Art Studio was started by Ananda Prasad Bagchi (1849-1905) with the help of established artists who were ex-students of the Calcutta School of Art. The Calcutta Art Studio issued prints depicting religious themes and popular divinities.

The Chitrashala Steam Press was started in 1878 by Vishnu-Shastri Chiplunkar at Poona with the aim of encouraging the Fine Arts. It published prints featuring various deities, portraits of Peshwas and their ministers, freedom fighters, saints, *ganjifa* (traditional Indian Playing Cards) and educational charts.

Europe in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, introduced the practice of using printing technology to popularize the works of leading artists. Famous paintings were turned into prints to bring them within the reach of common people. Seeing its advantages, Raja Ravi Varma was, perhaps, the first Indian artist, to set up his Fine Arts & Lithographic Press in 1894 at Girgaum, Bombay. The city provided facilities for importing machinery from Germany as well as ease with which printed works could have wide distribution. To achieve excellent results, he not only imported German machines but also employed Fritz Schleicher, a master German lithographer together with his assistant P. Gerhard. In 1898, the press known as Ravi Vaibhav F.A.L. Press was shifted to Ghatkopar on the outskirts of Bombay, and later moved to Malavali, Karla near Poona in 1901.

Raja Ravi Varma was credited with the introduction of the humane look (god in the image of man) in representing Indian gods. Brought up in a religious environment, he grew up listening to his parents singing hymns and chanting *mantras*. At an early age, he was able to recite the Soundarya Lahari and Dhyana *shlokas*. The descriptions of the divinities in these texts were real for him and he could visualise their presence which he later reproduced



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Fig. 2  
 Saraswati  
 Oleograph of Raja Ravi Varma's Painting  
 Ravi Varma Press, Karla, Lonavala, Registered No. 15  
 Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
 36.5 x 50.2 cms  
 Coll.: CSMVS, 85.1/1, Gift of Ms. Sandhya Bordewekar, Baroda

Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning is Ravi Varma's most famous painting. This print of his iconic painting depicts the goddess with *vina* and other attributes *pustaka* (manuscript) and *akshamala* (rosary). She is seated on a rock in charming natural surroundings. The first print appeared in 1894 and became a model for many later renderings of the goddess not only in prints (Fig. 3) but also in porcelain (Fig. 4). This rendering of Goddess Saraswati by Ravi Varma was widely accepted in educational institutions as representing the tutelary deity. Printed or cast in clay and other materials, schools, colleges and museums were adorned with her image.

in all his paintings. Almost a decade before Ravi Varma started his press, his well-wisher Sir T. Madhava Rao, the Dewan of Travancore wrote him a letter in 1884 suggesting that he should send his works to Germany for making lithographic prints.<sup>1</sup>

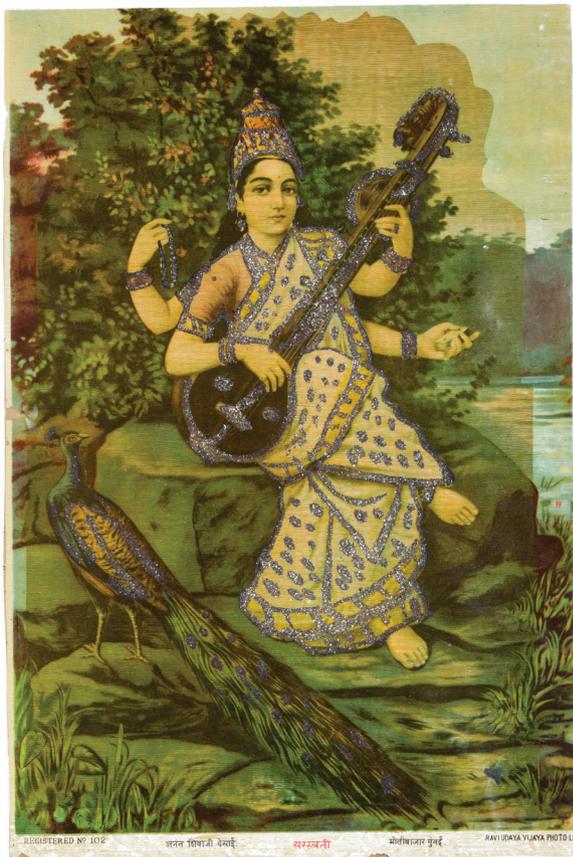
Sir T. Madhava Rao wrote: “There are many of my friends who are desirous of possessing your works. It would be hardly possible for you, with only a pair of hands, to meet such a large demand. Send, therefore, a few of your select works to Europe and have them oleographed. You will thereby not only extend your reputation, but will be doing a real service to the country.”

Lithographs and oleographs of Ravi Varma’s paintings became highly popular and were known as ‘god photos’. These included prints made in Germany as well as those printed in India. Ravi Varma’s Press produced and distributed prints in large numbers. While owning Ravi Varma’s original paintings was a prerogative enjoyed only by aristocratic families, the colourful prints of his religious and mythological paintings were within the reach of the common man (Figs. 2 and 3).

Even today, for most Indians, more than a sculpture or a miniature painting, their first visual encounter with the appearance of a god is through the calendars or prints of Ravi Varma’s paintings. Thus, these prints introduced a new pan-Indian iconography which had a socio-religious impact in India.

All these prints whether printed in India or in Germany gave a boost to yet another art form – that of producing porcelain figures of gods, goddesses, and mythological characters or episodes in Germany for the Indian market. They were based on late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century prints produced by the Ravi Varma Press, Calcutta Art Press as well as Chitrashala Press (Figs. 4-7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 17-20).

These prints also led to yet another art form – the embellished prints. The colourful prints were embellished by women with *zardozi* embroidery material like *tiki* (sequins), *badla* (flattened wire), *kasab* (fine metal wire), *zik* (delicate metal spring) and pieces of satin cloth (Fig. 3, 15). Sometimes the prints were sent to Burma for embellishment.



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Fig. 3  
Sarasvati

Oleograph of Raja Ravi Varma’s painting decorated with *chamki*-glitter powder

Ravi Udaya Vijay Press, Mumbai, Registered No. 102

Publisher – Anant Shivaji Desai, Moti Bazar, Mumbai

Late 19<sup>th</sup> century CE

45.8 x 30.7 cms

Coll.: Dr. Saryu Doshi



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Fig. 4  
Sarasvati  
Glazed Porcelain  
Numbered 15 on verso  
Germany

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE

Ht. 24.2 cms

Coll.: CSMVS, 82.8/1, Gift of Shri Bal Tambe  
Inspired by Ravi Varma’s Painting of Sarasvati



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Fig. 5  
Sarasvati  
Bisque Porcelain  
Germany  
Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
Ht. 25.5 cms

Coll.: CSMVS, 2015.162, Gift of Ms. Rekha Naik in memory of Dr. Deepak Naik

Inspired by a chromolithograph of Calcutta Art Studio (1885-1890).<sup>2</sup> This porcelain shows the European influence on facial features; the absence of *tika* or *bindi* on her forehead is prominent.



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Fig. 6  
Dattatreya  
Glazed Porcelain  
Numbered 15 on verso  
Germany  
Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
Ht. 24 cms

Coll.: CSMVS, 82.8/2, Gift of Shri Bal Tambe

Dattatreya was yet another popular painting of Ravi Varma of which innumerable copies were printed at Ravi Varma Press. Dattatreya is syncretistic deity, considered to be an incarnation of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. He holds attributes of each of these gods viz., rosary and water pot of Brahma, conch and wheel of Vishnu, trident and *damru* of Shiva. The three-faced god is dressed like a monk and is surrounded by four dogs and a cow symbolic of four Vedas and the mother earth. This porcelain figure of Dattatreya seems to be inspired by Ravi Varma's painting.



Fig. 7  
 Nala leaves Damayanti in forest  
 Glazed Porcelain  
 Germany  
 Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
 Ht. 20.7 cms  
 Coll.: CSMVS, 2015.180, Gift of Ms. Rekha Naik in memory of  
 Dr. Deepak Naik

This porcelain is inspired from a Nala Damayanti lithograph of c.1883 of Calcutta Art Studio. The drapery and vegetation behind Nala shows European influence.<sup>3</sup> Innumerable prints of Ravi Varma's painting of this episode of the Nala Damayanti story were made.

Images of Hindu deities from different parts of the world testify to the existence of an import trade in such items. In addition to German porcelains, Japanese ivory and porcelain images of gods and Chinese glass paintings on Indian themes were also popular in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> The Museum Collection has an ivory image of Harihara and porcelain images of Shiva, Krishna and Kurma *avatar* from Japan. Unfortunately, none of the German porcelain figures that have come to light have any factory marks. Some of the figures interestingly bear the stamp 'B. Rigold & Bergmann, Made in Germany, Registered in London'. Many others have just a stamp mentioning, 'Made in Germany', Registered.



Fig. 8  
 Hamsa Damayanti  
 Oleograph of Raja Ravi Varma's Painting  
 Ravi Varma Press, Karla, Lonavala, Copyright  
 No. 01  
 Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
 36.2 x 50.2 cms  
 Coll.: CSMVS, 85.1/7, Gift of Ms. Sandhya  
 Bordewekar, Baroda

Based on Ravi Varma's painting, this print narrates the love story of Nala Damayanti from the Mahabharata. King Nala sends a *hamsa* (swan) to sing praises himself to Damayanti prior to the *swyamvaram*. Here Damayanti is depicted listening to the swan.

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Fig. 9  
 Damayanti  
 Glazed Porcelain  
 Germany  
 Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
 Ht. 23.5 cms

Coll.: CSMVS, 2015.178, Gift of Ms. Rekha Naik in memory of  
 Dr. Deepak Naik

Inspired by Ravi Varma's painting of Hamsa Damayanti (Fig. 8). The image of the swan on the pedestal is missing here. But it is very interesting that when photography was invented and introduced in India, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of the young girls, brides-to-be, loved to pose like Damayanti. Many of the photo studios had ready settings for this.

9



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Fig. 10  
 Ramapanchayatan  
 Lithograph  
 Chitrashala Steam Press, Poona  
 Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
 48 x 35.5 cms  
 Coll.: CSMVS, 78.6/30

Rama-panch-ayatan (Rama together with five) represents the practice of worshipping Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughana. Hanuman, the devout follower of Rama is always included in Ramapanchayatan – and was a favourite subject with several artists during the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Numerous copies of Ravi Varma’s paintings of this theme were printed by Ravi Varma Press as well as Chitrashala Press.

Fig. 11  
 Ramapanchayatan  
 Glazed Porcelain  
 Germany  
 Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
 Rama & Sita image Ht. 22.7 cms  
 Other images Ht. 25 cms (approx.)  
 Coll.: CSMVS, 2015.139-144, Gift of Ms. Rekha Naik in memory of Dr. Deepak Naik

This porcelain set is inspired from a lithograph of Chitrashala Press (Fig. 10). The sculptor has copied every detail of the lithograph while modelling the figures. Minute details of ornaments, garments and postures closely correspond to those in the lithograph.



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Fig. 12  
 Kirata Bhilla (Shiva and Parvati as Hunters)  
 Oleograph of Raja Ravi Varma's Painting  
 Ravi Varma Press, Karla, Lonavala, Registered No. 11  
 Publisher – Anant Shivaji Desai, Moti Bazar, Mumbai  
 Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
 36.6 x 51.5 cms  
 Coll.: CSMVS, 85.1/12, Gift of Ms. Sandhya Bordewekar, Baroda

This episode from a mythological story describes how Shiva, after a quarrel with his consort, left for the forest in the garb of a *kirata* (hunter) and began to practice austerities. Parvati, disguised as Bhillini (a tribal woman) attracted Shiva's attention by singing and dancing. Shiva inspired by her beauty and singing left his austerities and followed her. This print of Ravi Varma's painting depicts Shiva with Parvati dressed like a Bhillini.



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Fig. 13  
 Bhillini  
 Glazed Porcelain  
 Germany  
 Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
 Ht. 15 cms  
 Coll.: CSMVS, 96.2/6, Gift of Dr. & Mrs. P. Pal in honour of  
 Shri S. V. Gorakshkar



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Fig. 14  
 Bhillini  
 Bisque Porcelain  
 Germany  
 Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
 Ht. 17 cms  
 Coll.: CSMVS, 2015.173, Gift of Ms. Rekha Naik in memory of  
 Dr. Deepak Naik

This figure has a stamp below mentioning 'Registered, Made in Germany'. Both the images of Bhillini are inspired by Raja Ravi Varma's painting of Shiva and Parvati as hunters (Fig. 12). They depict Parvati disguised as a Bhillini in a dancing posture.



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Fig. 15  
Calendar of an insurance company  
Off-set Print  
Mumbai  
Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
44 x 53.5 cms  
Coll.: CSMVS

The calendar has been converted into a display frame. It has been embroidered with *zardozi* and satin cloth. The frame has been created with a black cloth and has floral embroidery around it. It depicts a mother and a young girl and has text printed on it:  
With Compliment from A. D. GHURYE, INSURANCE AGENT, 9<sup>th</sup> LANE, KHETWADI, GIRGAUM, BOMBAY



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Fig. 16  
 Ras Krida  
 Oleograph of painting of Vasudeo H. Pandya, 1925  
 Published by Shree Vasudeo Picture Co., Bombay  
 Printed in Germany  
 Early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
 38.2 x 50.8 cms  
 Coll.: CSMVS, 2017.142, Gift of Dr. Kalpana Desai

Fig. 17  
 Radha and Krishna  
 Bisque Porcelain  
 Numbered 1414 and 1236 at the base  
 Germany  
 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
 Ht. 19.4 cms

Coll.: CSMVS, 2015.147, 149, Gift of Ms. Rekha Naik in memory of Dr. Deepak Naik

These images of Radha and Krishna are quite similar to the images depicted in the Ras Krida oleograph printed in Germany. (See Fig. 16).

Germany was a European leader in printing and exported a large number of prints of Indian themes as well as printing ink and machinery to India (Fig.16). The Company B. Rigold & Bergmann, (1895-1916), was listed in the 1910 Directory and Chronicle of The Hong Kong Daily Press Office, as merchant and commission agent having offices at London, Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and Lahore.<sup>5</sup> This Company produced and distributed picture postcards with Indian themes, lithographs and porcelain figures on Hindu religious themes.<sup>6</sup> They were all produced in Germany. It is curious that Germany was interested in printing lithographs, picture post cards and manufacturing porcelain figures with Indian themes when it did not have any colonial interests in India. The reason lies in the fact of its mastery and advancements in printing, porcelain making and textiles. German superiority in these areas attracted several British firms to procure German products to supply to its colonies, especially India. It is important to note that the German printers mass produced the pictures of Indian Gods for their British Clients who in turn employed them in the form of packaging and labeling a variety of goods like oils, soaps and food as exports to India: it was a promotional device. Often these prints were used as calendars or posters promoting British products in India, which explains why numerous postcards, prints, and porcelain figures produced in Germany bear the mark of being registered in London.

In comparison to the number of prints and postcards available, the number of porcelain figures so far known are very few. Perhaps they were made for a rich and aristocratic clientele. Several museums' collections and private collectors in India as well as abroad have such figures in their possession.<sup>10</sup> Calcutta Notes of 19<sup>th</sup>

Fig. 18  
 Ganesha  
 Bisque Porcelain  
 Numbered 5861 at the base  
 Germany  
 20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
 Ht. 12.2 cms  
 Coll.: CSMVS, 2015.135, Gift of Ms. Rekha Naik in memory of Dr. Deepak Naik

Has a stamp below 'B. Rigold & Bergmann, Made in Germany, '5861', Expressly for London'.

The modelling of this figure is very crude but is reminiscent of Shree Ganesha lithograph of The Calcutta Art Studio.<sup>7</sup>



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Fig. 19  
Goddess Kali  
Glazed Porcelain  
Germany  
20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
Ht. 21.5 cms

Coll.: CSMVS, 2015.168, Gift of Ms. Rekha Naik in memory of Dr. Deepak Naik

Has a stamp below 'B. Rigold & Bergmann, Made in Germany, Registered London'.

The modelling of this figure is very crude particularly the image of Kali. The artist has tried to copy the style of Kalighat paintings where generally cloth drapings are depicted as backdrop. Here the artist has shown it in form of a shrine interior.<sup>8</sup>



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Fig. 20  
Shiva Parivar (Shiva with family)  
Bisque Porcelain  
Numbered 4165 at the base  
Germany  
20<sup>th</sup> century CE  
Ht. 12 cms

Coll.: CSMVS, 2015.185, Gift of Ms. Rekha Naik in memory of Dr. Deepak Naik

This figure seems to be inspired by a lithograph of Calcutta Art Studio.<sup>9</sup> It shows Shiva and Parvati seated on the bull Nandi, holding little Ganesha.



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Fig. 21  
 Display of German Porcelains at the time of Ganesh Festival  
 in Ms. Rekha Naik's home  
 Photo courtesy: Ms. Rekha Naik  
 18 x 12.5 cms

November, 1980 mentions porcelain figures of Kali, Durga, Sarasvati, Ganesh, Annapurna and Shiva Parvati. Two of them – Kali and Durga – have stamps of 'B. Rigold and Bergmann, made in Germany' and also mention London. It is mentioned that two of these porcelains were made for Sri Ganga Charan Das.<sup>11</sup> This indicates that such porcelains were specially commissioned. Further research will provide information about the porcelain house (factories) which produced such figurines.

Framed posters of Gods and calendars were used as objects of worship. However, the purpose of these porcelain figures of Gods is not clear. Probably they served a decorative purpose in living rooms as marks of modernity or sometimes used in elaborate displays on festive occasions like the Ganesh Festival (**Fig.21**). Thus, in this context, the Hindu religious images shifted from their purely cultic space of the shrine to the exhibitory space of the living room.

These porcelain figures are hollow and light weight. They are molded and categorised as either glazed or bisque (unglazed). Bisque is a particular process which imparts a matte appearance and texture to the touch. This technique was especially popular in Europe. But the majority of the porcelain figures on Indian themes so far seen are of the glazed category. It may be because Indians desire their gods to be bright and glossy in appearance.

#### END NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> E. M. J. Venniyoor, *Raja Ravi Varma, The Most Celebrated Painter of India, 1848-1906*, 2007, Parsram Mangharam, Bangalore, India, p. 28.
- Erwin Neumayer and Christine Schelberger, *Raja Ravi Varma, Portrait of an artist, The Diary of C. Raja Ravi Varma*, 2005, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 7, 302.
- <sup>2</sup> Richard H. Davis, *Gods in Print, Masterpieces of India's Mythological Art, A Century of Sacred Art (1870-1970)*, 2012, Mandala Publishing, San Rafael, p. 41, Pl. 31.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27, Pl. 17.
- <sup>4</sup> Partha Mitter, "Art And Nationalism In Colonial India 1850-1922" in *Occidental Orientations*, 1994, The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, Australia, p. 215, figs. 132, 133.
- <sup>5</sup> [www.michelhoude.com/BMSM/FirmHistories/1910Directory.htm#Top](http://www.michelhoude.com/BMSM/FirmHistories/1910Directory.htm#Top), accessed on 1/6/2017.
- <sup>6</sup> Jyotindra Jain, 'The Visual Culture of the Indo-British Cotton Trade', Jyotindra Jain and Naman P. Ahuja, *The Story of Early Indian Advertising*, 2016, Marg, Mumbai, Vol. 68, No. 3, p. 38.
- <sup>7</sup> Richard H. Davis, 2012, p. 21, Pl. 2.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 49, Pl. 39, p. 103, Pl. 80.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33, Pl. 23.
- <sup>10</sup> S. V. Gorakshkar, *Visions of Ganesha*, 1982, Trustees, Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, Bombay, p. 4, fig. 10.
- <sup>11</sup> From [www.clayimage.co.uk/bengal/19Nov.html](http://www.clayimage.co.uk/bengal/19Nov.html), accessed on 26/5/ 2017.