Object Summary



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Gold and Gem-Inset Ivory Elephant Figurine with Howdah and Mahout

19th - 20th century

India

British India/Princely States

Ivory, gold, seed pearls, glass pendants, hardstones, wood base

Overall: 4 x 2 3/8 x 3 3/8 in. (10.2 x 6 x 8.6cm)

This ivory elephant stands with its trunk curled, baring a rider ensconced in a bejeweled howdah, or seat, upon its back. The elephant’s royal regalia and elaborate charge are made of gold inlaid with jewels and fringed with seed pearls and glass beads. In India, elephants were associated with royalty, used as fearsome steeds in battle, and as magnificent mounts for ceremonial occasions. Their symbolic importance and utility continued into the 19th century, when much of India was under British colonial rule. In 1877, Queen Victoria was named Empress of India. Grand durbars were held in Delhi in 1902, 1903, and 1911 to mark the succession of the colonial rulers. A historic photo, now housed at the Library of Congress shows an elephant in full regalia, baring a mahout, howdah and rider at the Durbar Camp in Delhi.