



### **Silver Tea Caddy with a Lion Finial, Calcutta, India, Early 19th Century**

This silverware was likely produced in early 19th-century Calcutta. The Lion finial on top attracts the viewer's eye. The lion appears victorious, alert, and progressing. Lion is a symbol of power used worldwide. Here it denotes the British culture of heraldic lion symbolism. The afternoon tea in British customs was often accompanied by an elaborate setup for tea making, serving, and drinking.<sup>1</sup> Tea caddy was part of this tea setup. A tea caddy is a container to store tea leaves. In many regions of India, tea leaves are still stored and sold in metal-covered boxes. The shine of silver and the craftwork on the body make this particular tea caddy unique.

'Tea' and 'caddy' make the word tea caddy. Tea is an English word, while caddy comes from *kati*, a Malay word, denoting a measurement used in the tea trade of the region. England imported porcelain jars from China, which were called tea caddies. The British Museum has many 19th-century Chinese porcelain tea caddies. An animal finial at the top of a tea caddy might have arrived from the very tradition of Chinese porcelain tea caddies, which gave birth to the term caddy.<sup>2</sup> Animal finials were widely adopted in all traditions of Indian silverware during the 19th century. Kutch, Madras, and Calcutta all embraced the animal finial design. Vidya Dahejia's book *Delight in Design: Indian Silver for the Raj* show the use of animal finials in drawings of many silverwares.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marks, Tasha, In celebration of Afternoon Tea week, food historian Tasha Marks explores the history of the much-loved afternoon treat. British Museum Blog, 14 August 2020 <https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/tea-rific-history-victorian-afternoon-tea>

<sup>2</sup> Caddy, Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/technology/caddy>

<sup>3</sup> Dehejia, Vidya. *Delight in Design: Indian Silver for the Raj*. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2008. (Pp-41, 44)

A bowl-shaped pot rests on a low circular stand. The body of the pot is decorated with a central thick band of a hunting scene carved in low relief with repoussé technique, while the background is chased, creating a stippling effect. This hunting scene also might have derived from the Mughal tradition of depicting hunting scenes in carpets and paintings. A man riding a horse appears centrally in the hunting scene. The ponytail, full sleeve shirt and pant, the cummerbund make the man appear British. Next to the man on horseback, a lion leaps to hunt a deer from a flock. The deer runs away in response to the attack other deers stand frightened by the scene. The central band featuring a hunting scene is visible from all sides of the pot. The decorated band is placed in the belly of the pot, paired with polished bands on the neck above and base below. Each polished band in the neck and base is slit with a carved ring. The lid is divided into three parts: the foliage- worked lower border, a polished mound, and a lion finial. The foliage consists of acanthus leaves diagonally placed, facing upward and downward, with intervals of twig brackets. Unlike the weblike foliage work of Kutch, these silverwares have many places left unworked and polished. The subject of representation and rendering of figural images indicates the object to be from Calcutta.



Calcutta became the capital of the Bengal Presidency in the second half of the 19th century. The city of Calcutta transformed into a centre of British cultural production due to the establishment of colonial art schools and industrial sites. British officials and wealthy British people began to commission many objects from the local craftsmen. This object is a product of a historical time; British industrial taste was met by Indian craftsmanship.

Many workshops/companies grew to cater to this market for luxury goods; Hamilton & Co. was particularly important.<sup>4</sup>

Victoria and Albert Museum and Met Museum have many tea caddies in their collection many resemble this one in treatment of the low relief, although the subjects differ. The British Museum has a porcelain tea caddy with animal finial, the finial form resembles the lion of this tea caddy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dehejia, Vidya. *Delight in Design: Indian Silver for the Raj*. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2008. (Pp-185)

<sup>5</sup> Tea caddy (Porcelain)  
[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A\\_Franks-848-](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_Franks-848-)

The rendition here refers to an earlier imperial theme of hunting, unlike the later developed figural mythic /rural narratives in Calcutta silverware.<sup>6</sup>



This artefact was produced for luxury and now stands as a trace of history. This tea caddy now holds within it the stories of imperialism, trade, and culture in the 19th-century world. This tea caddy belongs to the earlier works in silverware; the mythological figures and rural scenes were yet to arrive. The Chinese- inspired form, Mughal-influenced hunting imagery, Indian craftsmanship, and British Imperial taste make this silver tea caddy a precious piece of history.

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<sup>6</sup> Dehejia, Vidya. *Delight in Design: Indian Silver for the Raj*. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2008. (Pp-185)

<https://archive.org/details/delightindesigni0000dehe/page/184/mode/2up?view=theater>

#### **Links to Similar Teapots from V&A and Met Museum for Reference**

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O158090/tea-caddy-and-cripps-william/>

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O373723/tea-caddy-and-william-shaw-and/>

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O104311/caddy-s-herbert/>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/834011>