

## Classical Imagery in the Graphic Arts of India under the British Raj

The recent discovery in Pakistan's Swat Valley of the site of ancient city Bazira, (modern Barikot) conquered by Alexander the Great, remind us of Megasthenes's lost work *Indika* and his brief description of the Sourasenoi, a people "who especially worshipped" Heracles and from whom Alexander claimed descent (Chrysopolis 2016; Bryant 2007, p.5). Many centuries later another wave of Hellenism washed over India when British Colonial rule (1858-1947) brought classical elements of European art into the culture of India. My paper will present examples of this dynamic found in the work of three well-known Indian artists. Using photographic evidence, CAMWS conference attendees will see how:

A.) the stance of "Tillottama Apsara," a portrait of the celestial nymph of Hindu mythology, painted by Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906) in 1896, relates to the statue of Aphrodite of Milos (Jain 2002, p.11). Varma, who was instructed in watercolors by Rama Swami Naidu and in oils by Danish artist Theodor Jenson, and considered today to be one of India's greatest painters, often depicted Hindu myth using realistic and historical European styles.

B.) the image of Hercules from Sir Joshua Reynolds's painting, "The Infant Hercules Strangling Serpents in his Cradle" (c. 1788, The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia) was put to commercial use by William Woodward to decorate the label he designed to sell a cure for colicky infants (Blumenthal 2000, p. 172; Sharma 2008, p. 217). Formulated by Woodward and also named "Gripe Water" by him, the herbal tonic became popular in India where its advertisers conflated the baby Hercules with the baby Krishna to stimulate sales (Bryant 2007, p. 5). Examples showing Krishna posed with

elements of the Hercules-Gripe Water label are found in the work of Mahadev Vishwanath Dhurandhar (1867-1944), noted painter and post card designer, who trained at Bombay's renown Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art. C.) the Pre-Raphaelite painter John Williams Waterhouse's "Hylas and the Nymphs," (1896, Manchester City Art Gallery, UK) influenced Raghuvir Mulgaonkar (1922-1976), pioneering creator of Indian calendar art, in the last years of his life when painting "Gopi Vastra Haran," his depiction of Krishna stealing the clothes of the Gopis (Jain 2002, p. 41-43).

This Anglo-Indian cultural exchange produced a unique visual hybridism which well demonstrates how materials with roots in classical antiquity remain continually susceptible to new interpretation and amalgamation.

#### Bibliography

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