

AMIR M O H T A S H E M I



A Study of a Stork Billed Kingfisher, *Pelargopsis capensis*

China, 19th century

Watercolour on paper

39 cm high, 25 cm wide

Stock no.: A5389

“The (Chinese artists) paint insects, birds, fishes, fruits, flowers and the like, with great correctness and beauty; the brilliancy and variety of their colours cannot be surpassed.” Wines, 1839.

A truly spectacular creature, the Stork Billed Kingfisher illuminates this exceptional example of Chinese painting.

These large members of the kingfisher species are recognisable for their striking coral beaks, which provide their namesake. They typically have olive green heads, which encompass the feathers around the eyes, although the present example bears exception to this with a rufous crown and black stripe across the eye. The throat and stomach are pale fawn and the primary and tail feathers are deep brown.

The principal wing feathers are a dazzling combination of royal and electric blues, as intricate feather patterns have been demarcated with the finest of brushstrokes. This combination of rich sapphire blues against brilliant corals illustrates some of the truly exquisite colour combinations that occur in the natural world.

The extremely confident brushwork paired with a naturalistic style bear the hallmark of Chinese painting during the nineteenth century. Furthermore the yellowing and torn leaves of the foliage also attest to a Chinese hand. One has a sense that against the natural imperfections and muted colours of the branch, the kingfisher appears with an even greater sense of the magnificent.

Favouring dense foliage beside lakes, rivers and coastal areas, stork-billed kingfishers perch quietly as they scan for prey. The species occurs in Southeast Asia and the tropical India subcontinent. Confident and territorial, they are known to deter much larger birds of prey as they encroach on the kingfisher's feeding grounds.

The work appears on J. Whatman paper and is numbered "545" on the reverse.

References

C H Fry and Kathie Fry; illustrated by Alan Harris (2000). Kingfishers, Bee-eaters and Rollers. Princeton University Press.

Rosalien van der Poel, Made for trade, made in China. Chinese export paintings in Dutch collections: art and commodity. Netherlands, 2016.