



Mughal Child's Bow (Kaman)

North India, 18th/19th century

Lacquered wood and horn

50.5cm high, 33cm wide

Stock no.: A5820

This small bow (*kaman*) is made from lacquered wood, horn, and sinew or catgut. It is sometimes known as a composite bow, due to the mixture of materials, or a crab bow, due to the unstrung shape.

When strung, the bow transforms. The grip is pushed inwards towards the tips, causing the bow to recurve. It is a strenuous process which requires binding parts of the bow to formers. Examples of strung crab bows can be seen in Mughal miniatures, such as a portrait of Emperor Jahangir with bow and arrow in the Smithsonian Museum (accession no. [1942-1947](#)) or the 18th-century *Hidayat al-rami* or *Guide for Archers* in the British Library ([Or. 14143.f.g](#)).

This bow is lacquered with intricate gold flowers on a red ground. The lacquer is in remarkably good condition: a Mughal bow of similar dimensions (50.5cm x 33cm) in the British Museum London (accession no. [As1981.Q.42](#)) has only remnants of its red lacquer remaining. This bow is significantly smaller than the average Mughal crab bow, so it is possible that this example was used as an exercise bow (*lezam*) for a child. Exercise bows were used to build muscle and were sometimes strung with a chain to increase resistance.¹

n.b. accession nos are clickable links

¹ Elgood, Robert. *Arms and Armour at the Jaipur Court*. New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2015. p. 222.

