



**Antique Indian Crown Style Cap, Silver Gilt and Embroidered, Lucknow c. 1855 Lucknow Crown  
POA**

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The V & A suggest that an impressive crown style cap, such as this one, would have been worn by a royal female or a young nobleman. The crowns around the base reinforce that this would have been made for a royal head whilst the abundance of fish signify that it was made for a member of the ruling family of Lucknow.

The cap comprises many parts, a headband, a cap which attaches to the headband and covers the head and an open-sided crown superstructure comprising eight fish whose heads attach to the headband whilst their tails attach to a central flower with star, placed above the cap. The embroidered cap is still visible through the gaps between the fish, which are not attached to each other at the sides but form a cage over the cap.

The needlework and textile treatments are amazing. The whole has been fashioned from silver on silk fabric. Real silver gilt threads have been embroidered and used to create the tinsel. Real silver gilt sequins have been used throughout. They have been used to form the bodies of the fish, the seeds of the sunflower and the background to the relief embroidery on the headband. The details of the fishes' fins, tails and heads have been embroidered and each fish has a fringe of small fine silver tinsel tassels to either side. The fish have red glass eyes.

The headband features raised silver embroidered elements comprising crowns and foliate sprigs with buds set against a silver gilt sequin covered ground. There are silver thread rope borders to top and bottom of the band, which define the panel.

The cap is of silk with a central Islamic eight-pointed star. It has been embroidered with stylised flowerheads and ears of grain, worked in metallic silver thread. This alludes to the fertile agricultural land of the region.

The V & A have several examples of Indian caps dating to the period c. 1855. Made in various cities, some of the elements are similar, accession number 0505 (IS) also features silver gilt sequins; 5739 (IS) tinsel and 6376 (IS) shares a similar crown style construction.

When Delhi, the home of the Mughal dynasty, was sacked by Iranian invaders in 1739, painters, poets, dancers and musicians re-located in droves to the prosperous and fertile region of Oudh and, in particular, to the city of Lucknow, where the new arrivals generated an artistic renaissance.

In 1754, ruler, Shuja al Daula came to the throne and made Lucknow his permanent residence. This marked the beginning of the city's 'golden age'. For just over a century, Lucknow, capital of the Mughal province of Awadh or Oudh, (now known as Uttar Pradesh), sparkled as an Indo-Muslim city of unparalleled sophistication and cosmopolitan culture, which became known as 'the city of gold and silver'. The last Nawab of Lucknow, Wajid Ali Shah, was removed by the British East India Company in 1856, when the province was annexed, ending the city's 'golden age'. This would have been very close to the time this crown cap was made, probably just a few years previously.

In 1819, Ghazi al-Din Haidar took the title of king and freed Awadh from the nominal suzerainty of the Mughals, with the blessing of the East India Company. He modelled his crown on those of European monarchs and the

concept of the crown as a symbol of kingship was adopted by the Nawabs of Lucknow. There is a wonderful photo by Felice Beato, which was taken in the 1850's, of Moostafar Ali Khan, the ruler of Oudh, showing him resplendent in his crown. Within the collection of the Royal Collection Trust is a gold, enamel, pearl, emerald and diamond crown which was presented to Prince Edward during his tour of India in 1875 by the Taluqdars (rulers) of Oudh.

A pair of fish had long been used in Lucknow as a symbol of identity and these were seen as auspicious symbols bringing good fortune. There are diverse theories as to how and why this originated but scholars believe that it sprang from the Maahi-Maratib, a Mughal military honour, although there are many diverse theories as to how one fish became a pair. However, the fish gained more prominence and became Lucknow's 'brand' after British Court artist, Robert Home, designed the royal insignia for Nawab Ghaziuddin Haider's coronation as the first King of Awadh. He used the twin fish as one of the chief visual elements, and after this, the twin fish became inextricably linked to Lucknow's identity and to that of its royal house. They featured prominently and everywhere, even boats were made in the shape of fish; but the twin fish motif featured on architecture, furniture, silver