

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

PERSIAN POWDER FLASK

Leather (camel), iron
Oriental Persia (modern Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan)
19th Century
MAH.R.2008.0658

Once muzzle-loading weapons became commonplace, both in war and in hunting, every individual started to carry their own powder flask. It was essential to carry all the gear necessary to maintain the gun in good functioning condition.

Both the guns and their accessories showcased the region and era in which they were created. Every detail, from its shape, materials and decoration, usually reflected the local tastes and traditions.

Powder flasks, such as the one on display here, were made out of the genital skin of camels, or, at the very least, camel leather moulded into their shape. These are typical to the Persian region (modern-day Iran), where they received their phallic shape during the 18th century (the 12th century in the Hijrah era). They remained in use until the 20th century.

The material used did not create sparks, and so, proved itself safe. In the 18th century, through its association with heavily codified male activities, such as war and hunting, it depends on the already culturally established symbolic lexicon to invoke virility.

This 19th-century specimen, which is part of Angra do Heroísmo Museum's Militaria and Armament Conservation Unit, not only showcases the traditional phallic shape but it is also decorated with geometric motifs and anthropomorphic figures. It also includes a small protuberance, which allowed an iron ring, through which the gun handler could tie the powder flask to their belt or their wrists.