

#CUTLERY

For Prayers With Meals

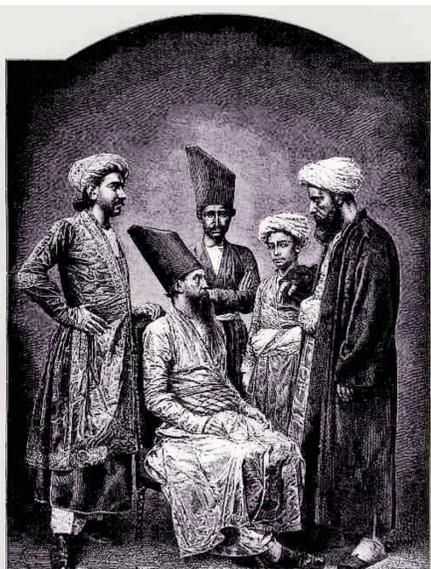
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otation knives are rare 16th Century CE. Renaissance serving knives with musical notation engraved on their blades, used to sing prayers before and after meals.

These knives, likely produced in Italy around 1550, were part of sets where each knife represented one voice part in a multi-voiced choral piece. One side of the blade carries the 'Benedictio mensae' (blessing of the table), sung before the meal: "Quae sumpturi sumus bene dicat trinus et unus." ("May the three-in-one bless that which we are about to eat.") The other side features the 'Gratiarum actio' (saying of grace), sung after: "Pro tuis deus beneficis gratias agimus tibi." ("We give thanks to you, God, for your generosity.")

The musical notation on the knives is polyphonic, with two known sets: Group A (six voice parts) and Group B (four voice parts). Despite their name, the knives are not a single artifact but a set of specialized cutlery designed to



In November 1890, when Crown Prince Nicholas II set off from St. Petersburg on an epic 290-day, 51,000-kilometre journey to Vladivostok and back via southern Europe and Asia, he was accompanied by Prince

Esper Ukhtomsky, a poet and close confidant who was passionate about India. Ukhtomsky knew more about India than most other Russians. His book *Travels in the East of Nicholas II When Cesarevitch, 1890-91* is a document of Nicholas II's 'Grand Tour to the East', including the assassination attempt on the crown prince in Japan. But it also serves as a peek into 19th-century India through the eyes of an outsider.

After crossing the Suez Canal and Aden, Ukhtomsky and Nicholas II landed in India at Bombay on board the Russian naval cruiser named Pamiat Azova. As they approached the harbour, Ukhtomsky could not contain his excitement.

"India lies before us," he wrote in his book. "Here holiness and peace appeared in visions unto men contemptuous of pleasure; since their age, the people live their self, same life, yearning for the Divinity, for freedom and atonement. Here, where the earthly realm of sorrow borders on the heavens, and when the soul is crushed by unceasing torments, this magic land calls us into a world of wonders, into the realm of the eternal mysteries and of boundless wisdom."

From the ship, Ukhtomsky could see Prong's Lighthouse and a 'fine chain of islands.' It was the middle of December and a 'dark, impenetrable cloud of morning fog' hung over the city. As the ship reached the port, it was politely told to wait for the official landing ceremonies since it had arrived a day later than the colonial authorities anticipated and it was still early morning.

The delay did not bother the Russians. The only concern they had was the city's weather, which, Ukhtomsky said, touched 25 degrees Celsius in the shade even in winter. "Apart from this, however, the near vicinity of Bombay makes

such a step forward in our long journey that the mind is imperceptibly relieved of a load of thought and doubt: there, beyond the distant blue hills, lies the land of the Mahabharata and Ramayana, the former dominion of the freedom-loving and courageous Marathas, the empire of the Moghuls, crushed by fierce invaders, and the architectural and sculptural relics of an undying antiquity."

Ukhtomsky was critical of colonialism right from the time he saw the warehouses, workshops and small buildings by the port as well as the Afghan Church. "In contrast to this scenery, on the right, the hilly islands become more and more picturesque," he wrote. "It is not surprising that Hindus from days of yore felt the attraction of these impossibly beautiful bays and promontories, peopling them with their myths and adorning them with their temples: into this broad clear bay came the frail barks mediaeval mariners and of daring pirates who wore their eyes on the neighbouring heights. The advent of European civilisation, with its enmity or contempt for the ancient civilisation of the land, with its utilitarian views of the world, its steam and gunpowder, has scarcely added to the charm of Bombay."

Red carpet cautious welcome
The 19th century was a tumultuous period in the relationship between Britain and Russia. There were passing moments of goodwill and cordiality to be sure, as when Nicholas II visited India. But never could the two empires get over their mutual suspicion, despite the familial ties between the royalty of the two empires.

When Nicholas II, a first cousin of George V, reached India, the British made sure to roll out the red carpet. The governor of Bombay, George Harris, boarded the Pamiat Azova to personally welcome him. After that, the Russian crown prince was given a 21-gun salute and then escorted to the governor's carriage. A large number of dignitaries, including consuls of European countries, turned up at Apollo Bunder to greet Nicholas II. As did curious locals.

"Though numbers of people had flocked out into the street from early morning, and though no small number of spectators had come from a distance to catch a glimpse of the Russian Grand Duke on his visit to Bombay, yet, the crowd is a pattern of order; stillness almost unbroken reigns around, and it is only gradually that a noisy animation makes its appearance," Ukhtomsky said.

Bombay Through The Eyes Of A Russian Poet

"Side by side with the successes of the English, the importance of the Parsee element kept increasing," he wrote, describing the community's rise during the Raj. "They became very skillful shipbuilders, tradesmen, bankers, enterprising merchants, etc. The opium trade with China and the development of the trade with the seaports of the Celestial Empire, their own capacity for adapting themselves to the requirements of the day, their successful attempts, finally, at self-education, soon raised the Parsees to a position of great prosperity, have made them invaluable to the English (even in their campaigns against Afghanistan), and have thus given rise to the exceptional position occupied by the 100,000 sun-worshippers in the empire of her Majesty the Queen-Empress."

#CRITIC



"The Governor's bodyguard, consisting of turbaned horsemen, under the command of an English officer, is quite in harmony with the native Outriders, managing the four horses which draw the lofty and somewhat old-fashioned carriage of the Governor," he added. "The windows and the balconies along the way, to say nothing of the sidewalks, are filled with spectators. Shouts of welcome are heard here and there. The variety of characteristic types of costumes, and of the peculiar native equipages (horse carriages), whence the gloriously robed ladies of rich natives look on at the procession, is so great that, at first, words and colours fail to picture Bombay as it appears on first acquaintance."

Ukhtomsky was disappointed to find Bombay 'too European' on the surface. Nevertheless, the city's architecture fascinated him, inspiring him to remark that the buildings which looked cold and 'unpicturesque' from a distance were actually attractive at a nearer glance.

About one of Bombay's prominent buildings, the Elphinstone College, he wrote, "Here is a building, in a mediaeval style of architecture, a school for natives of India, erected chiefly at the expense of a



Fire and the Sun worshippers
The Russians went to see the Elephanta Caves on their first full day in Bombay and were floored by its sculptures.

"The most striking among them is the Trimurti (a combination of Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra-Siva) in a separate three-faced statue," Ukhtomsky wrote. "The central face is calm and passionless, the one to the right of it is grim and threatening, while the one to our right wears a joyous expression. The dimensions alone of these faces (almost without bodies, and with a peculiar arrangement of the hair) are enough to produce a strong impression, even on a European, especially when attention is paid to details, to the finish of the several attributes: the lotus, the skull, the cobra."

The Indophilist, that is visible when Ukhtomsky writes about Elephanta, can be seen in other passages too. At a state dinner organised by Governor Harris in Nicholas II's honour, he was disappointed to see how anglicised most of the Indian guests were, with the exception of two Parsis and their wives. Ukhtomsky said that the attire of the Parsi women attracted the attention of the Russian visitors. "Black-

eyed, pale-faced (with a yellowish tint), with hair parted down the middle, they wore silk shawls (saris) on their heads, golden-tinted folds falling gracefully over their shoulders and waists," he wrote.

Among the guests at the state dinner was Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, a wealthy merchant and philanthropist who made his fortune in part by selling opium in China. Ukhtomsky mentioned that Jejeebhoy held the title of baronet and had received the title of Star of India from Queen Victoria.

The part played by the fire-worshippers, or speaking more correctly the sun-worshippers, in India, is in many respects similar to that played by Jews in Western Europe," Ukhtomsky wrote. "There are Jews too, on the Bombay coast, of Mesopotamian origin, with their own Rothschilds, the millionaire Sassoons, at their head."

Strange names
The British authorities organised another reception where Nicholas II could meet more members of the Indian elite. This time, it was at the old residence of the governor, now the Hatkine Institute in Parel.

"Name after name, one stranger than the other, strikes the ear as one inquires who the non-European guests are," Ukhtomsky wrote. "The names and titles sound so peculiar that it would be a pity not to mention some of them, e.g., Atmaram Trimbuck Kharka Rai Bahadur, Bujorji Zorabji Shroff, Bhagwandas Narotamdas, Bumonjee Cursetjee Bandupwalla, Damoderdas Tapedas Varajdas, Shwlal Motala, etc. Even a Russian ear, accustomed to the various names of our Asiatic borders, finds something strange in all these 'dasses' and 'jees'."

The majority of the guests at the Parel reception were Parsis, prompting Ukhtomsky to write about them in more detail.

"Side by side with the successes of the English, and the impotence of the Parsee element kept increasing," he wrote, describing the community's rise during the Raj. "They became very skillful shipbuilders, tradesmen, bankers, enterprising merchants, etc. The opium trade with China and the development of the trade with the seaports of the Celestial Empire, their own capacity for adapting themselves to the requirements of the day, their successful attempts, finally, at self-education, soon raised the Parsees to a position of great prosperity, have made them invaluable to the English (even in their campaigns against Afghanistan), and have thus given rise to the exceptional posi-



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Dippel, known for his obsession with the soul and for conducting strange anatomical experiments, had been using the potash to create an animal oil concoction known as Dippel's oil, which he claimed was the elixir of life, a legendary potion that is said to grant immortality and eternal youth. When Dippel mixed this tainted potash into his dye process, it triggered a chemical reaction that created a brand new substance: Prussian blue.

Whether or not Dippel was directly responsible is debated, this origin story comes from a 1731 account by chemist Georg Ernst Stahl, and no other contemporary source backs it up. Still, the coincidence is hard to ignore.

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iments, rumoured to include soul transference and corpse reanimation, helped inspire Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. So, while we may never know the full truth, the strange alchemy that led to Prussian blue is dripping with gothic intrigue.

What we do know is this: Prussian blue was the first modern synthetic pigment, and it quickly became a sensation. Before its discovery, artists had few options for a stable blue. Indigo faded. Smalt was dull. Ultramarine (made by grinding lapis lazuli gemstones) was so

expensive that it was worth more than gold.

Prussian blue changed everything. It was affordable, reliable, and vibrant, and it spread like wildfire, from oil paintings in Europe to Ukiyo-e woodblock prints in Japan. The brilliant blue wave in Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* is thanks to Prussian blue, and Hokusai's use of Prussian blue inspired the 'blue revolution' of Japanese artwork from the 1830s onwards.

Another surprising thing about Prussian blue is that it doubles as a medicine. In fact, it's on the World Health Organization's List of Essential Medicines. This deep blue marvel is used to treat heavy metal poisoning from thallium and radioactive caesium. Its secret lies in its structure: it binds to toxic metal ions and helps the body flush them out. So, whether it's catching the light in a painting or cleansing the body of poison, Prussian blue proves that it's anything but ordinary. A pigment that heals? Sounds like something straight out of Frankenstein's lab.

From gothic castles to global galleries, Prussian blue has travelled a strange and fascinating path. A colour born from alchemy and mystery, with links to both Frankenstein and life-saving science, it's a reminder that in art, as in history, the most unexpected accidents can leave the most lasting impressions.

#JOHANN JACOB DIESBACH

The Accidental Ingredient?

Instead of red, he got an intense blue, an outcome completely unexpected and previously unseen in European pigment history

In the early 1700s, a deep blue pigment appeared that would change the colour game for artists across Europe. It was rich, mysterious, and strangely enough, accidentally invented. But the most surprising part? It might have roots in the same shadowy soil that inspired *Frankenstein*.

The story begins with a painter named Johann Jacob Dippel. While working in Berlin, Dippel set out to make a red lake pigment using cochineal, a deep crimson derived from insects. But something went wrong. Instead of red, he got an intense blue, an outcome completely unexpected and previously unseen in European pigment history.

The accidental ingredient? Contaminated potash, borrowed from none other than Johann Konrad Dippel, a controversial figure dabbling in alchemy, theology, and experimental science.

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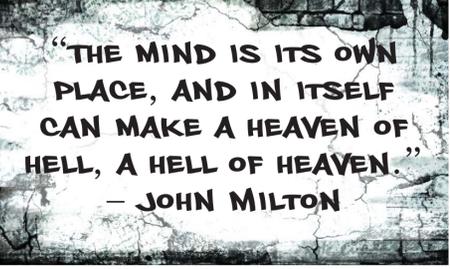
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THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman