

Scenes of the Hunt in Sindh

Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro on the paintings of hunting and animal combat to be found in tombs across Sindh



by Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro — December 18, 2020 in Features, Heritage [0](#)

A noble attacks his quarry with a spear - depicted in a Muridani Jamali tomb, Johi

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Sindh painters worked with a variety of themes in tombs from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. In fact, Sindh witnessed an unprecedented upsurge in tomb construction – sites which were mainly located in Thatta, Badin, Dadu, Larkana, Nawabshah, Sanghar and Hyderabad. The distinctive feature of these tombs was wall paintings and the painters' themes included folk romances, daily rustic life, sports, historic battles, hunting scenes and animal fights.

Hunting was the most recurrent theme in the tombs in Sindh. The hunters are shown hunting deer, leopards and birds. Deer- and leopard-hunting was the pastime of the rulers and nobles whereas bird-hunting was done by the ordinary people. The royal hunters are always shown on horseback.

Some of the earliest paintings are found in the tombs of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro (1657-1692) which depict leopard- and deer-hunting. Two tombs in the Muridani Jamali necropolis in Johi, Dadu district, bear impressive hunting scenes. In one of the tombs, there are three panels which show hunters on the horseback pursuing the deer. The hunters are depicted with firearms. The second tomb has also three panels depicting deer-hunting. As such, deer are found in a large number in the Khirthar Range. These tombs lie very close to this Khirthar Range and apparently, the inspiration came from times when rulers used to go hunting.



Muridani Jamali tombs, Johi, Dadu

Deer-hunting scenes are also found in the tombs of Muridani Jamali, Mir Allahyar Khan Talpur, Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro and the Jalabani Lagharis – and at Shahani near Chhini, Rodnani, Babar in Johi, Dadu and in the tombs of Abras and Marris in Nawabshah and Sanghar districts respectively. Chandia tombs particularly Dau Ja Quba also show leopard-hunting scenes. One finds a particularly impressive leopard-hunting scene in the tomb of Sahib Faqir Shahani near Chhini in Johi. In all these tombs, hunters are shown on horseback. There is only one exception in which a noble is shown hunting a wild boar. There are two panels in the tomb of Sultan Marri in Tilla Shah graveyard in Sanghar district. The first panel shows the noble hunting a wild boar with the help of soldiers and dogs. Dogs are shown attacking the wild boar and the noble and soldiers are shown attacking with guns and spears. The second panel depicts the attendants of the noble carrying the hunted quarry on wooden planks. This is a very interesting painting, not found in any other tomb of the Kalhoro (1700-1783) and Talpur periods (1783-1843).



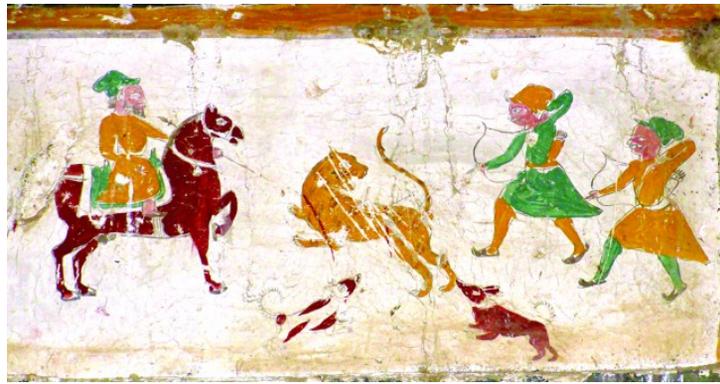
Men hunt a leopard – scene in the tomb of Sahib Faqir Shahani, Chhini

Leopard-hunting scenes are also found in the Kalhoro, Talpur and British period-tombs. The earliest one is seen in the tomb of Bego Awan in the necropolis of Mian Nasir

Muhammad Kalhoro and the later this also appeared in Muridani Jamali tombs. However, the most beautiful painting is in a tomb at the necropolis of Muridani Jamali. A noble is shown attacking a leopard with a spear and behind the noble's horse is depicted an attendant or a hunting helper with a firearm.

Dogs are shown attacking the wild boar and the noble and soldiers are shown attacking with guns and spears

Paintings of pouncing leopards being hunted are found in several tombs. However, the tomb of Sultan Marri at the necropolis of Tilla Shah depicts the most interesting scenes. There are two panels in the tomb which show the nobles hunting leopards. In one of the panels, the noble is shown attacking with a sword. The hunter is shown seated on horseback holding the spear in one hand and a sword in the other. Dogs are also depicted attacking the leopard. The hunting helper has got a gun aimed at the leopard. He is shown shooting the leopard from behind. In another panel, one finds three hunters: the noble is shown seated on horseback and two hunters are shooting the leopard with arrows. Dogs are also shown, one of which is depicted biting the left leg of the leopard. The noble has got a spear which he pierces into the chest of the leopard. Interestingly, the leopards are short-bodied, a special feature of Jodhpur painting. The inspiration might have come from there because the Kalhoras enjoyed friendly relations with the rulers of Jodhpur.



A leopard is cornered during the hunt – depiction in the tomb of Sultan Marri, Sanghar

The lion hunt also appears in the Rajput paintings. Short-bodied figures of tigers are a noticeable feature of Jodhpur and Marwar paintings. Leopard- or tiger-hunting frequently appears in the Mughal and Rajput paintings. Apart from tigers, we see wild ass and boar being hunted in the Mughal and Rajput paintings.

Falconry as a form of hunting was also a pastime of the rural elite – not only in the Kalhora and Talpur periods but also in colonial Sindh. In some of the tombs in Dadu and Kamber-Shahdadkot districts, falconry hunting is also painted. The best falconry hunting depictions can be seen in the Muridani Jamali tombs in Johi, Dadu.

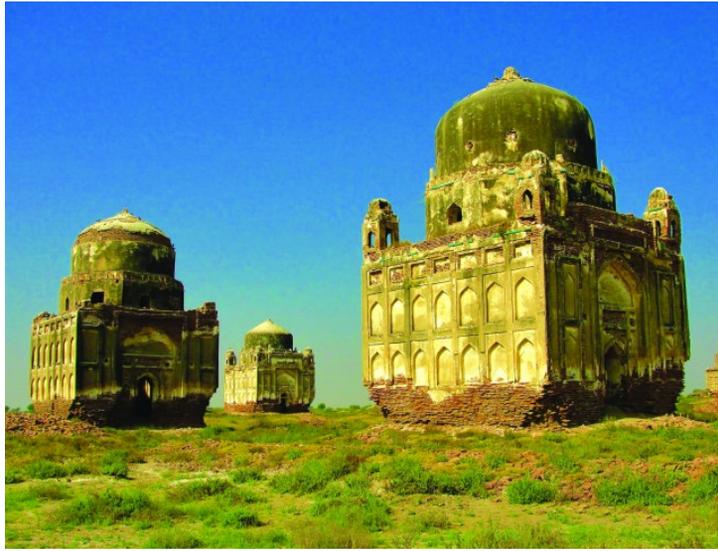


Falconry in a Muridani Jamali tomb, Johi

Apart from hunting scenes, Sindhi tombs also depict fighting animals. Some tombs depict only animals and the others human-animal combat. The earliest animal fighting scenes appear in the tombs at the necropolis of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro. The tomb of Babar Faqir depicts some of the remarkably exciting animal fighting scenes. One of the panels depicts a leopard viciously attacking a bull. This motif is also found in a few other tombs at the necropolis of Mian Nasir Muhammad Kalhoro. Some Kalhora- and Talpur-period tombs in Johi tehsil depict two fighting leopards. Two tombs near Hairo Khan village depict two leopards engaged in fighting.

Interestingly, there are some paintings of hunters holding leopards with their necks in their hands. This motif is reminiscent of the Mesopotamian warrior king and hero Gilgamesh

There are two clusters of tombs in and around Hairo Khan village. The first groups of tombs lie one km west of the Hairo village whereas the second group of tombs is located about 2 km east of the village. Both the clusters of tombs portray fighting animals. The tombs, which lie east of the village and belong to the Babar tribe, also show other animal fighting scenes. Two fighting leopards are also shown in one of the panels. This fighting scene is painted on the western wall of the tomb. Close to these fighting leopards is the representation of a deer. There is a painting of a man defending himself against the onslaught of a leopard. A man holding a sword in one hand and shield in the other is shown trying to protect himself from the pouncing leopard. The leopard was the symbol of power in Sindhi society. Fighting and hunting leopards were the pastimes of powerful elites.



Marri tombs at Tilla Shah in Sanghar district

Interestingly, there are some paintings of hunters holding leopards with their necks in their hands. This motif is reminiscent of the Mesopotamian warrior king and hero Gilgamesh. The most remarkable is the one that is painted above the main entrance of Dost Ali Faqir's tomb at Hairo Khan village.

Apart from these fighting scenes, there is a painting of a leopard and an elephant fighting in the tomb of Mir Manik Khan Talpur in the necropolis of Mir Allahyar Khan Talpur at Drigh Bala. A panel in the western wall of the tomb depicts a leopard attacking an elephant. A few men and animals engaged in combat can also be seen in the Chandia tombs at Rais Bambho Khan village, in Dau-Ja-Quba in Kamber Shahdaskot district and at the Muridani Jamali, Qalandarani and Shahani tombs near Chhini in Dadu district.

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Excerpts have been taken from the author's new book "Wall Paintings of Sindh, From the Eighteenth to Twentieth Century" published by Silk Road Centre.

All photos are by the writer

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