RUNJEET SINGH

THE GODDESS: ARMS AND ARMOUR OF THE RAJPUTS

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INTRODUCTION

To the Rajput and other Kshatriya races of India, the sword represents the Hindu Goddess of War herself. Often called Mata, or Mother, she can take on many forms, the most relevant of which is known as Durga. On one hand she lusts for destruction, while on the other she represents the primordial energy, or *Shakti*—the driving force of creation. Similarly, weapons too share this dual nature: desiring the blood, noise and fury of battle; yet also saving lives by providing protection and a means of defence.

For this reason, weapons are seen as inseparable from the Goddess and, consequently, they enjoy an elevated status within the Rajput community, providing a locus for worship during important events.

The colourful festival of Navratri is an example of this, and during it the Goddess is believed to come to life, or even come to take life. In what can be seen as a warrior's rite of passage, large numbers of goats are put before young Rajput men who then behead them with a single stroke of the sword (*chatka*). The ritual also serves as an illustration of the mythological story in which Durga slays the evil demon Mahishasur, with the former represented by the life-taking, blood-drinking sword; and the latter by the doomed, meek goat.

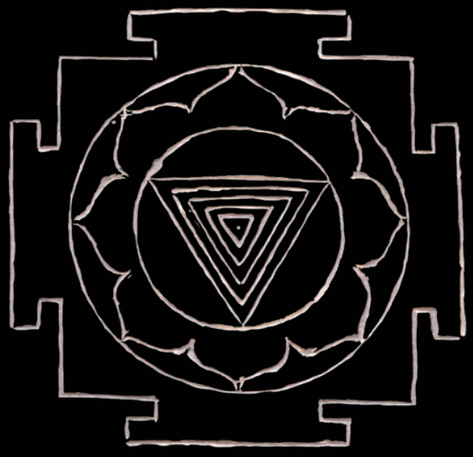
Lindsay Harlan elucidates further in her book *The Goddesses' Henchmen*:

> Supplied with victims—sacrificial goats and enemies—by Rajput warriors, the Goddess enables men to fight fiercely and so execute their duty as warriors (Kshatriya dharm) to protect their kingdoms and especially women, cows, and Brahmins, who are thought particularly vulnerable and dependent, and who are individually held up as emblems of truth and goodness (sat, sattva) and duty (dharm). Feeding the Goddess in ritual and war, warriors function as duly rewarded servants.[1]

Alongside the singing of the appropriate Sanskrit liturgy, Rajputs spend time worshipping their weapons through ritual acts of cleaning. Such careful treatment of their arms is seen as an embodiment of their great devotion to the Goddess and imbues these magnificent items with a spiritual energy and history rarely encountered.

References

1. L. Harlan, The Goddesses' Henchmen, Oxford University Press, 2003, p.21.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to all those who have contributed or supported me with the publication of this catalogue and the organisation of the accompanying exhibition. A special message of gratitude goes to the several strong and inspiring women in my personal and profession lives. My goal of celebrating Rajput arms & armour transpired to reveal an anti-patriarchal message from the Goddess- may Kali inspire all of you to harness the ad-Shakti within.

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Written by Runjeet Singh
Winter 2018

All prices on request

1

ALL-STEEL KATAR

Bundi, Rajasthan
18th Century

Overall 450 mm

With a fine level of polish, this katar's clean, confident lines show off the original owner's refined tastes. The blade is wide and double-edged, and has a shallow, flat fuller that is bisected by a central line of intricately feathered pinnate leaves that gradually reduce in size until they vanish into the weapon's thick tip. This is sometimes referred to as a 'tree of life' and is usually associated with the cypress—a symbol of immortality that coincides with the Rajput wish for a glorious death in battle. The blade has extra ornamentation in the form of two beaded bridges that connect with these leaves while nearby a superbly sculpted anthemion-type motif draws the eye to the connection with the hilt. More leaves can be found draped over this connection—an elegantly recurved steel bar holding the blade firmly.

The two grip-bars are square in section and linked by symmetrical 'C scrolls', additions that are typical of the katars historically produced in Bundi in the Indian state of Rajasthan[2].

For reference, a similar katar can be seen in *A Passion for Indian Arms* by Jens Nordlunde[3].

References

2. T. H. Hendley, Ulwar and its Art Treasures, 1888, plate XL

3. J. Nordlunde, A Passion for Indian Arms, 2016, p.113.

2

PISTOL KATAR

Bundi, Rajasthan
Mid 19th Century

Overall 425 mm

This beautiful weapon bears all the hallmarks of the katars produced in Bundi in the 19th century and, as we know that Maharao Raja Ram Singh (1811 to 1889), the ruler of Bundi, favoured combination weapons[4], it is very likely that this piece was made under his patronage.

Gold koftgari accents all of the elements of its construction, running in lines along the edges and blooming here and there as four or eight-petalled flowers. The faces of the long side-bars boast more flowerheads, this time framed by outlines and small trefoils—while the bars' narrow edges have been finished with a continuous line of dots, all rendered with more gold.

Also part of the side-bars are twin percussion pistols, their decorated barrels rifled to impart spin to their bullets and so help to make their trajectories more accurate. Both hammers are deeply knurled to aid grip and the guns' triggers neatly fold upwards and out of the way when not in use.

The wide blade has a deep, flat fuller that is bordered by a detailed hem of small leaves and a surrounding groove. This design is echoed by the fuller's central ridge, also flanked by such leaves. This elegant topography all meets at a point near the blade's tip were the steel thickens to facilitate its penetration of armour. A trio of screws helps to keep the blade secure in the hilt.

An almost identical example is in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum (object number 948.1.124)[5], having been donated in 1948 by the estate of Earl Herbert Kitchener (1850 to 1916). He was appointed commander-in-chief of India in 1902 and likely collected the dagger during his time there.

References

4. K. Meghani, Splendours of the Subcontinent: A Prince's Tour of India, 1875–6, Royal Collection Trust, 2017 p.136.

5. https://collections.rom.on.ca objects/327148/katar-punchdagger-with-flintlock-guns?ctx=55cc11b2-5592-4723-a5d3-72fbb921576b&idx=4

3

HEAVY KATAR

Rajasthan
18th - 19th Century

Overall 475 mm

This katar is unusual for a variety of reasons. The lean, fullered blade has a 25mm thick diamond section to it, making it not just capable of slitting chainmail links but also able to pierce heavier armour. Also notable is that this weapon is much larger and heavier than most of its kind and so it must have been made for a Rajput who possessed not just high social status but also great stature. The hilt's gold koftgari has been arranged into a series of dots and rendered as a repeating pattern of scrolling foliage that runs all along the frame.

Of note are the four bars that form the grip, their ends protruding through the side-bars. Similar examples have been published by Jens Nordlunde[6] and dated to the 18th century; while earlier varieties can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art[7] and in Robert Elgood's indispensable book about the Rathores[8]. Both the Met's and Elgood's examples are dated to the 17th century (the former being from South India, the latter being from Ahmadnagar in the Deccan), pre-dating any known Rajput specimen. It is likely that these earlier katars informed the Rajput design of which ours in an example.

References

6. J. Nordlunde, A Passion for Indian Arms, 2016.

7. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/31733

8. R. Elgood, Rajput Arms & Armour: The Rathores and their Armoury at Jodhpur Fort, Niyogi Books, 2017, p.678 (SSP/213E).

4

KATAR WITH OPENWORK SCABBARD

Rajasthan
19th Century

Overall 550 mm

Every surface of this notable Rajput katar's hilt has been finished handsomely with gold koftgari. As was favoured for the decoration of such high status weaponry, this gold has been arranged to present columns of leaves, stems and flowers, all accompanied by linear patterns. More of this precious metal can be found on the triangular blade where it meets its hilt, still foliate in theme but this time densely arranged in curling forms beneath an elegant multifoil arch and a trefoil pinnacle. This design has been laid across the undulating landscape of the polished blade's twin fullers and medial ridge and seems to be influenced by the cartouches found on Islamic blades.

The rare openwork scabbard has a strong geometric presence to it and has been decorated with gold koftgari in a similar way to the katar it protects. In addition, three sets of long-tailed birds perch amid leafy branches and admire each other across the central rib. The scabbard's inner lining survives and this material can be seen through the openwork, its ochre hues providing a background for the natural darkness of the iron and the bright lustre of the gold.

This large katar is an impressive piece indeed, especially when displayed within its scabbard.

5

RAMA KATAR

Rajasthan
19th Century

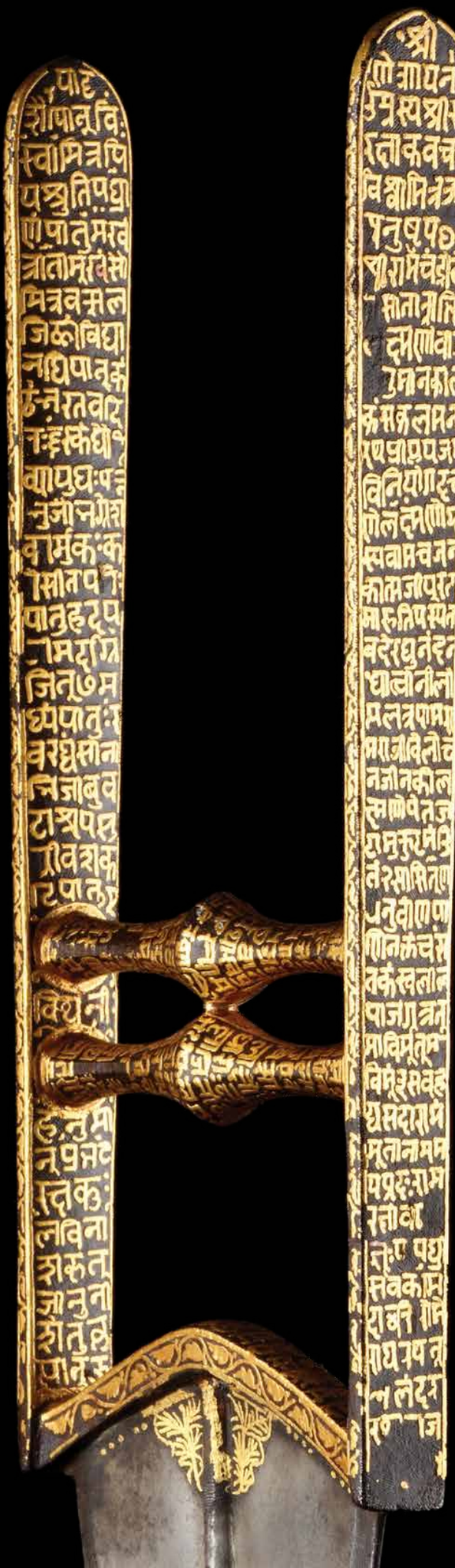
Overall 410 mm

This katar has sacred Hindu verses decorating its hilt, applied generously in gold on a cross-hatched, blackened surface. The calligraphy is neatly arranged: wrapping expertly around the handgrips and rendered in short, regular lines on the side bars. This text is a Sanskrit stotra known as the Rāma- rakṣā-stotra, attributed to Budhakauśika Ṛṣi. It is a hymn of praise, and used as a prayer for protection to Lord Rama. Like many stotra, it has a distinctly tantric character, its recitation often meant to be coupled with breathing practices, visualisations and the wearing of talismans—making it ideal for its application on this dagger, which would have been an important object of devotion.
The short blade is made of Indian crystalline wootz Damascus, with a pronounced central rib and a swollen, armour-piercing tip.

The original wooden scabbard still retains its red silk velvet covering, though it is now worn and faded by age. The silver chape is also original. A similarly decorated hilt is illustrated for us by Hendley[9] and shown as being inscribed with Shakti stotra—or lines in praise of the Devi. Another is in the new publication by Robert Elgood: Rajput Arms & Armour—the Rathores & their Armoury at Jodhpur Fort, page 662.

References

9. T. H. Hendley, Damascening on Steel or Iron as Practised in India, W. Griggs & Sons Ltd, 1892, pl. 16.



6

MULTI-TOOL KATAR

Rajasthan
Mid 19th Century

Overall 410 mm

With pleasing proportions and quality, this katar's hilt has thickly applied gold koftgari and shows interesting evidence that it changed ownership in the 19th century through the covering over of the V-shaped knuckle-bar's inscriptions and the removal of gold from its face.

The triangular blade is made from wootz steel and has a crisp median ridge. The steel of the two tapering fullers shows off the attractive wootz pattern while the cutting edges and the tip—purposefully swollen to aid its armour-piercing duties—have been polished to a bright finish.

Furthermore, the original scabbard has survived. This has a leather belt with a gilt-iron buckle, a silver chape, and still holds its four gold-adorned tools: two pairs of tweezers; a short, pointed tool; and a nail cleaner.

Katars with tools are rare but we previously published another, also from Rajasthan, in our 2016 work *Arms & Armour from the East*, page 12, number 3.

7

BEJEWELLED PESH KABZ

Punjab or Rajasthan
18th Century

Overall 420 mm

Of all-steel construction, this exceptional dagger's hilt is made up of two main components: the grip and the pommel. Both are hollow, with the pommel moulded to show a lion's head that opens by means of a single hinge at the base of its neck, providing a space for the storage of a dry substance. The lion proudly boasts superb details and generous decoration: the large ears are set with orange-toned citrines and an emerald at each base, while the hypnotising eyes are picked out with yellow citrines. The curving eyebrows merge into a long human-like nose as thick whiskers, almost moustache-like, sit above an open mouth, its sharp teeth revealed. A crown (or collar) of tapering rubies lies resplendent behind the ears adjacent to a 'tikka' of eight rubies surrounding a central citrine on the beast's forehead.

The grip is beautifully decorated with many flowerheads, the spaces between them filled with abundant, flowing leaves—a design that continues over the bolster and onto the base of the blade. Also reinforcing this junction is the lengthy backstrap that sits along part of the blade's spine and this too is richly bejewelled with a further seven rubies and another emerald. This blade has a T-shaped cross-section and has been forged from desirable wootz steel, the associated watery patterns visible playing within the wide fuller that runs almost to the very tip.

Due to the space within the hilt, a belief is held amongst collectors and dealers that these daggers were used for the storage of opium, and thus they have been termed 'opium daggers'.

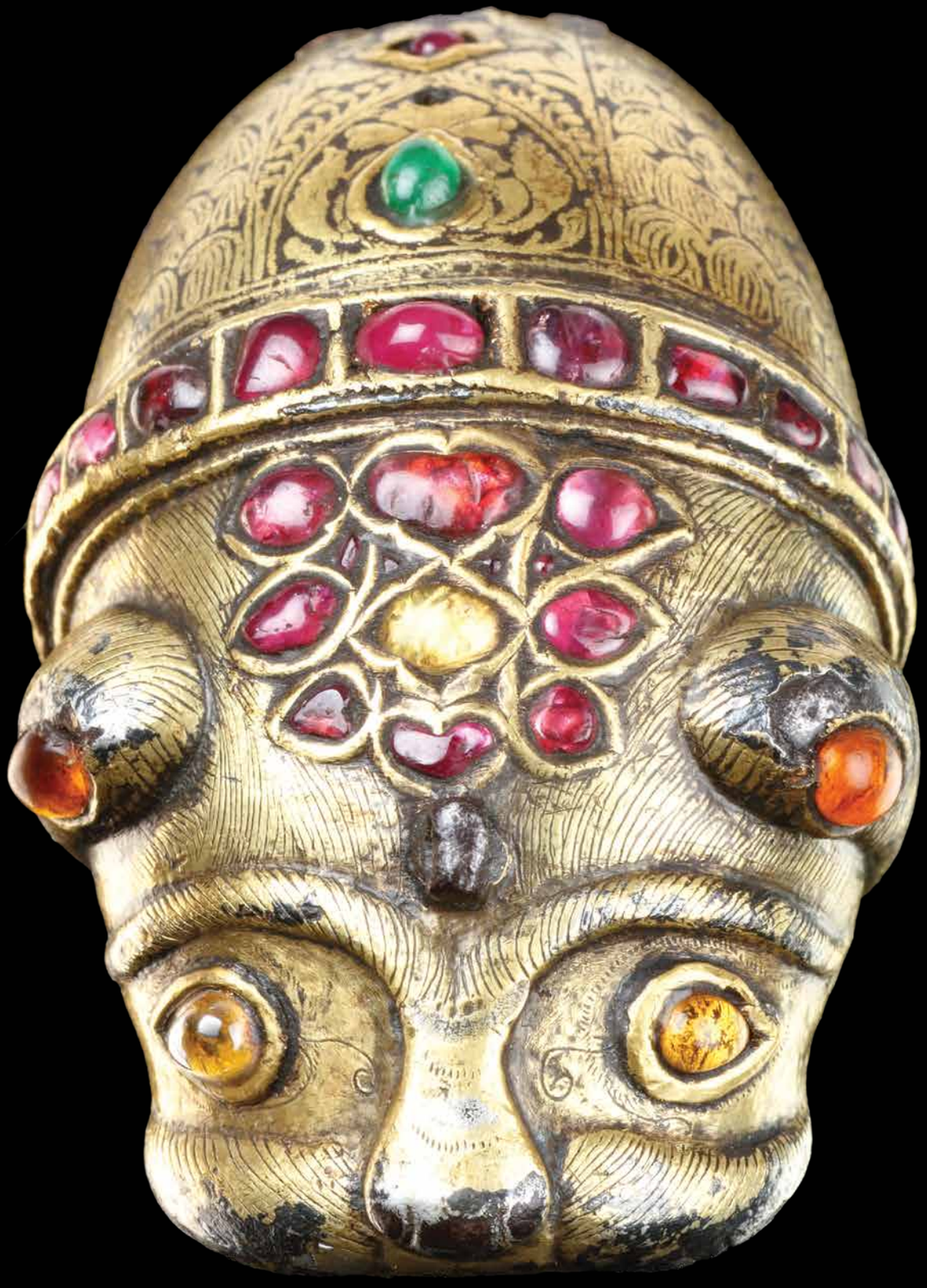
There may be some truth to this theory and we do know that opium was used by the Rajputs, a practice continuing to this day.

In an 1829 book *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (Volume I, page 57) Colonel James Tod writes of the Rajputs' opium use:

"The Rajpoot delights in blood: his offerings to the god of battle are sanguinary, blood and wine. The cup (cupra) of libation is the human skull. He loves them because they are emblematic of the deity he worships; and he is taught to believe Hara loves them, who in war is represented with the skull to drink the foeman's blood, and in peace is the patron of wine and women. With Parbutti [Shiv's wife] at his knee, his eyes rolling from the juice of the p'fool and opium, such is the Bacchanalian divinity of war."

The exceptional quality of this piece denotes its association with a person of great importance and its style indicates 18th century work. The lion was often used to signify royal connections by Rajputs and Mughals alike, and the opulent use of jewels is another indication of Mughal influence upon this Rajput design.

My thanks to Jvala Singh for pointing out the opium reference.



8

KARD DAGGER

Punjab
19th Century

Overall 390 mm

This splendid dagger is made from silver. The fluted handle leads to a robust lion's head, its detailed mane finely textured and its eyes being rubies fixed within gold settings. The chiselled bolster is beaded and made from iron, and it leads to a gracefully shaped, unfullered blade of wootz steel.

The velvet covered scabbard is equally as impressive: the chape and locket have stylised lily flowers that float against a textured ground while delicately styled fronds emanate from their borders. Concluding the scabbard is a curling bud finial.

The lion's head can be removed to reveal a container into which it is said opium was stored.

Despite lacking a typical silver mesh on the grip, the artistic elements of the hilt and scabbard help us to identify that this was probably made (or at least greatly influenced) by a silversmith of Jalandhar, a town in the Punjab. The armouries at Jaipur and Jodhpur[10] both also have multiple examples of this weapon-type—so it is possible that the Punjabi silversmith was hired by the Rajput maharajahs to make these intriguing daggers for them too.

References

10. R. Elgood, Rajput Arms & Armour Volume II, Niyogi Books, 2017, p.103, p.765

9

KHANJAR DAGGER

Jaisalmer, Rajasthan
18th - 19th Century

Overall 420 mm

This superb dagger presents us with an intriguing mixture of styles.

The polished grip is made of a type of jasper called sange meryam—a stone heavily associated with Jaisalmer in Rajasthan. It has been shaped into the form of a facetted 'pistol grip', a style rare enough that the esteemed Robert Elgood notes in his book *Rajput Arms & Armour Volume II*[11] that he has encountered only one such example.

The unusual and attractive guard is made of silver and its langets and quillons have been skilfully shaped to portray palmettes and acanthus leaves that cascade beautifully over the blade. This highly ornate style is redolent of Baroque art and mirrored by the decorative elements that can be seen in the scabbard's silver mounts.

The double-edged blade has a visible scarf weld near to the hilt and gently arcs and tapers until it concludes in a sharp point. The scarf weld gives the blade a flexible heel while still employing a brittle but hard and sharp wootz blade. The Rajputs called this a mala, meaning garland, and its inclusion would be considered auspicious[12]. The central ridge that runs the blade's entire length is interrupted only by a highly desirable feature known to collectors as *Tears of the Wounded*. Here, long slots can be seen in the steel, within which roll small, captive spheres. The purpose of this feature still inspires much debate amongst experts, but in this case its inclusion surely has only aesthetic motives—without doubt it shows off the exceptional skills of this dagger's maker (and the wealth of its purchaser).

References

11. R. Elgood, Rajput Arms & Armour Volume II, Niyogi Books, 2017, pp.734–735.

12. R. Elgood, Rajput Arms & Armour Volume I, Niyogi Books, 2017, p.190.

10

DEEP-SHEATHED KARD

Surapur (Dungapur),
Rajasthan
18th Century

Overall 380 mm

This is an old type of weapon, tracing its origins all the way back to the 7th century CE. It was popular with a wide variety of people, from traders to emperors, and as such was often included in Central Asian paintings[13]. The hard-stone grip of this kard, a tapering cylinder with swirling veins of pastel colours, leads to a silver-gilt bolster that moulds onto a heavy, straight blade. This blade boasts two inscriptions. In a deeply set square near the base, in beautiful Persian calligraphy, can be seen:

سوراپور سنه ۱۲۰۶

"Surapur, year 1206 (1791–2 CE)."

Surapur could refer to the village near Dungapur, a city in the southern-most part of Rajasthan where an ancient carved-stone temple still stands (its one-time ruler is depicted in a Mughal painting in the Victoria and Albert Museum[14]). A further, similarly deeply set cartouche has been worked into the blade near the tip. This time, it takes the form of a teardrop and its words are in Devanagari:

"Shree Gopala."
"Lord Krishna."

The long scabbard covers most of the kard's handle, as is traditional, and is made from wood covered with velvet that is now worn. It has been fitted with a silver chape that has been engraved and finished with attractive openwork, and decorated with silver wire ribbon.

References

13. S. Kaoukji, Precious Indian Weapons and other Princely Accoutrements (the al-Sabah Collection), Thames and Hudson Ltd, 2017, p.239.

14. http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O9416/painting-kesav-kalan/

11

NATHDWARA TULWAR

Rajasthan
Mid 19th Century

Overall 900 mm

This strikingly beautiful Indian sword is in superb condition and has significant religious associations. The long, sweeping blade is of agreeable proportions and is made from pattern-welded steel. It has two slim fullers that reside near the spine: one of which terminates not far from the centre of percussion while the other continues towards the tip. The hilt is richly adorned with Devanagari inscriptions set against a gold ground that is stippled and subtly chased with lines and depictions of birds. The inscriptions are religious in nature and adorn every section of the hilt, even appearing on the quillons.

The inscriptions are translated as follows:

> The sweet Lord, the enchanting flute player enamouring hearts.
>
> The one who pleases hearts, in order to obtain him people perform oblations and do worship for days.
>
> Lord Shri Nath Ji, Shri Nath, the lord, went to Nagor and graced it with his holy feet. The holy child, son of springs, this happened with the blessings of the goddess and Pranam to Devi.
>
> Salutations to Shri Dalbhanjan, Shri Gau Gange, Valla Vikala, shri saksam mohun, radhe radha radhe shri shri.
>
> Lord whose sublime touch blossoms the water of Yamuna, Lord Govind, companion of Haldhar and Sudama, Namo to him.

The end of both quillons read "Shri". The underside of the disc pommel bears salutations to some of the varied names of Krishna:

"Worshipping the holder of the mountain, the thrower of pebbles, the milkman"

and

"Worshiping the Ultimate Bliss, Lord Madhav"

The knucklebow, no doubt decorated in the same way, has been lost. A similar hilt to this is shown by Thomas Holbein Hendley in his Victorian work *Damascening on Steel or Iron as Practised in India*.

This sword is described as one used to kill animals during the sacrifices made to Shiva and Devi:

"In Rajputana, at the great native courts, the young nobles show their skill by decapitating goats, and even buffaloes, at one blow. If the head is not severed at a single stroke, the sacrifice is spoiled; [...] the swordsman thinks himself aided by a blade the very hilt of which is inscribed with the praises of his goddess."[15]

The sword's references to Shri Nath Ji suggest a significant connection to the shrine of Nathdwara. Shri Nath Ji is a manifestation of Krishna, first appearing from within Govardhan Hill and adopting the form of a black seven-year-old child. The Rajasthani town of Nathdwara is sacred to him and houses his principle shrine, a temple that dates to the 17th century. This connection to Nathdwara is supported by Jens Nordlunde in his 2016 book *A Passion for Indian Arms*[2] in which there is shown an enamelled sword inscribed with "VJ & son(?) Nathdwara", so we know that swords were made, or at least decorated, there.

The sword's scabbard is wooden and has been covered with red silk velvet. It is original to the sword and in remarkable condition, even retaining the colourful cord that loops over the reverse quillon to hold the weapon securely within it. Weapons with inscriptions like this one's are seldom seen on the market, but another can be found in this publication—please see catalogue number 6.

References

15. T. H. Hendley, Damascening on Steel or Iron as Practised in India, W. Griggs and Sons Ltd, 1892, p.14 pl.7A.

16. J. Nordlunde, A Passion for Indian Arms, 2016, p.190.

12

KALI SWORD

India
17th - 18th Century

Overall 0 mm

This 18th century straight sword (*katti*) has a hilt richly illustrated with golden flora. Long stems have been posed symmetrically, roaming from langet to quillon to pommel and enclosing small leaves and four-petalled flowers. A similar design can be viewed on an enamelled katar in the al-Sabah collection[17].

The sword's grip leans at an angle to the blade, a characteristic lost on swords in the 19th century. It is an arrangement meant to increase the sword's cutting capacity but, in this case, adds to the overall aesthetic qualities too. The blade is of a quite elegant form and made of pattern-welded Damascus steel, highly polished in the Indian fashion. A long, low yelman runs for a third of the blade's length.

Two markings can be found on the blade. The first is a local interpretation of the name Genoa and intended to give an already high-quality weapon an Italian association at a time when imported European weapons were highly prized in India (especially those exported from northern Italy). This mark is positioned between two 'eyelashes', as is typical, and found on both sides of the blade.

The second marking is a neatly engraved yantra. Yantras are mystical and geometrical cosmograms or diagrams used to worship deities as an aid in meditation, and they come in a variety of shapes and sizes, predominantly consisting of triangles, squares, hexagons, circles and so on[18]. Much like the eyes on the ramdao[19] swords of Nepal and Bengal, the yantra on this sword signifies Kali's 'presence'. It is considered to be a 'para-rupa' (an "abstract translation of the deity-image")[20]. Kali is a much known goddess, progressing from a folk deity to her debut in the Devi Mahatmya, and finally standing on her own with her later developed iconographies. Many images and yantras speak of her popularity in India and beyond, even in the contemporary period.

The reason behind the yantra's inclusion is intriguing. It is likely that the sword's patron was an ardent Devi worshipper but it is difficult to conclude whether the weapon itself was used as a sacrificial sword or for battle, or both. Either way, it has probably been included here to impart spiritual focus and guidance to the wielder.

The orientation of the yantra tells us something about how it was designed to be viewed, and perhaps meditated upon. At its centre is a small dot (or *bindu*) which represents the soul, surrounded by five equilateral triangles of ascending size and these are thought to represent the sheathes of human consciousness: the physical, the life force, the mental or emotional, wisdom, and bliss. The triangles are generally shown inverted on yantras and this refers to the regenerative power of the divine female. To view the yantra in the correct orientation this sword has to be held by the grip with the blade resting on the back of the other hand and the cutting edge away from the body. Translations of *Kulachudamani Tantra*[20] give instructions on how to meditate upon such symbols, of note ask the follower to meditate upon the Matrikas: "*Worship the eight mothers Brahmi, Narayani, Maheshvari, Chamunda, Kaumari, Aparajita, Varahi and Narasimhi*. (Also see item 27 of this catalogue.)

The blade is protected by the tulwar's original scabbard, and made of wood, with much of its beautiful silk brocade covering still surviving.

My thanks to Vinit Vyas for his help with the Kali yantra.

References

17. S. Kaoukji, Precious Indian Weapons and other Princely Accoutrements (the al-Sabah Collection), Thames and Hudson Ltd, 2017, cat. no.8, pp.48–49.

18. Primarily these deities are females or Devis. For further reading, see Madhu Khanna, Yantra—The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity, 2003.

19. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/24316

20. See Madhu Khanna, The Kali Yantra: The Changing Iconography of Dakshina Kali in Bengal, in–Art, Icon and Architecture in South Asia—Essays in Honour of Dr Devangana Desai, edited by Anil Verghese & Anna Dallapiccola, 2015.

13

SHIKARGAH TULWAR

Rajasthan
19th Century

Overall 905 mm

The style of gold ornamentation on this tulwar's hilt is reminiscent of the work produced in Sirohi, Rajasthan. Roaming leaves and stems bloom into flowers here and there, while neat borderlines enclose this foliage and give the hilt greater visual definition.

The single-edged blade is made from much sought-after wootz and the currents of carbon can be seen playing within the bright steel. Also visible is the junction where the two billets used to make the blade meet—the so-called *scarf weld*. The Rajputs coveted this feature and named it the *mala*, considering it to be an auspicious symbol much like the red string some of them tied upon their wrists.

Just as this sword shows high levels of craftsmanship, so too does the impressive scabbard.

This has been made from a wooden core covered in silver which has been manipulated through repoussage and chasing to depict floral motifs and a variety of hunting (shikargah) scenes. These scenes are rendered in a style redolent of that made in Kutch and are often most dramatic. Ferocious big cats fight to the death while horsemen close upon wild boars—their hound or spear ready to deliver the killing blow; elephants and dancers perform as hunters emerge silently from the foliage to stalk their unseen prey. One particularly interesting scene shows a fighter thrusting his katar into the belly of an attacking lion just as it sinks its teeth into his shoulder. In between all of this theatre, wild flowers spread their petals boldly and large leaves curl and intertwine with smaller ones.

Similar hunting scenes are illustrated as line drawings in the 1883 work by Hendley, *Memorials of the Jeypore Exhibition*[21], and described as outlines of ornaments on a silver tea service, engraved by Nund Kishore, Jeypore, and by Pani Lal, Ulwar. In the same publication is a gilt-brass and niello sword scabbard with similar decorations to our scabbard and this is said to be from the armoury of His Highness the Maharaja of Jeypore[22].

References

21. T. H. Hendley, Memorials of the Jeypore Exhibition, London, 1883, pl.XXXVII.
22. T. H. Hendley, Memorials of the Jeypore Exhibition, London, 1883, pl.IX.

14

HEAVY TULWAR

Jaipur, Rajasthan
19th Century

Overall 920 mm

Elegant in its simplicity and robust in its construction, this sword is exceptionally well made. The hilt is laminated with wootz steel while the blade is pattern-welded, both components showing high contrast watered patterns.

The wide, thick blade has a pair of slim fullers close to its spine while, towards the tip, a raised false edge—or yelman—appears just as the fullers vanish.

The hilt has facetted quillons, their silhouettes flowing seamlessly into the bulbous grip and then upwards to the langets. Each langet terminates in a trefoil, and more of these appear arranged perfectly around the disc pommel's hub.

The blade is marked twice. The first is an oval, stamped cartouche that records the bladesmith's name in Persian: "Made by Ibrahim".

Ibrahim is probably one of the famous Alwar artisans mentioned by Powlett in the 1878 *Ulwur Gazetteer*[23]. According to Powlett, these artisans were known far and wide and given land in lieu of pay—a testament to the high esteem they were held in by their royal employers. A blade made by Ibrahim resides in the Royal Collection and boasts of similarly high quality steel[24] (Royal Collection Trust of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II), and illustrated in the recent book by Kajal Meghani, *Splendours of the Subcontinent: A Prince's Tour of India 1875–6*, page 128 (RCIN 11297.a-b).

Although Ibrahim is renowned for dark-coloured wootz blades, this hilt and its mechanical Damascus blade are still of the quality we would expect to see from an artisan of his calibre.

The second inscription has been inlaid into the blade in silver Devanagari letters, supporting the fact that this was a high quality object made for an important man. It reads:

> "From the Silekhana (armoury) of Maharaj Shri Udai Singh the great donor."

The identity of Udai Singh is not currently known[25], but it should be noted that the title used is Maharaj, not Maharaja, and is a term of endearment and honour: not necessarily an official royal title. However, it is likely that he was a man of power, perhaps being a local ruler. What we do know is that he must have been a giant of a Rajput to control this heavy sword which weighs 2.5 kilograms. The Rajputs were known for using weapons as substantial as this and the new book accompanying the travelling exhibition *Peacock in the Desert*[26] provides us with insights:

> "The Rajputs trained hard using weights and exercise bows. Their personal weapons were heavier than the average in use in India. They also took opium in large quantities, which had the effect of giving them energy, dulling the appetite and pain from wounds, and acting as a coagulant. These factors together with their clan spirit and desire for heroic death made them exceptional warriors whose effectiveness on a battlefield far out-weighed their numbers.
>
> "Seventeenth-century miniature paintings show the very substantial size and weight of Rajput arms."

The fine Damascus blade is protected by the original scabbard which is made from a wooden core covered in black leather, finished with iron mounts.

For comparison, a sword attributed to Jaipur from the last quarter of the 19th century appears in *Arms & Armour at the Jaipur Court* by Robert Elgood[27]. This also has a wootz hilt of similar form and a similar stamp at the heel of the blade.

References

23. Powlett, Gazetteer of Ulwur, 1878, p.118.

24. https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/11238/sword

25. Tahakore Udai Singh, 13th on the gaddi (throne) of village Danta in the Sikar district has been suggested (part of the Kachawa Jaipur darbar) but this has not been substantiated. My thanks to Viraj Singh Chudasama for his input.

26. K. Jasol / R. Elgood Peacock in the Desert: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India, Yale University Press, 2018, p.109

27. R. Elgood, Arms & Armour at the Jaipur Court: The Royal Collection, Niyogi Books, 2015, p.142. cat.no.97

15

JODHPUR-TYPE TULWAR

Jodhpur, Rajasthan
Mid 19th Century

Overall 860 mm

This tulwar's hilt-form is typical of those made during the reign of Maharaja Jaswant Singh II and is commonly referred to as the Jodhpur type. It is made from steel and has been blued to provide an attractive background to its gold koftgari. This gold has been applied with great precision and delicate elegance, and shows fine quatrefoils, stems and related motifs throughout. The disc pommel has been finished with an elaborate sunburst design, likely a nod to Surya the sun-god that many Rajputs claim descent from.

A similar hilt can be found in the Jodhpur Armoury[28], with Robert Elgood commenting that the goldwork on that example can also be found on objects from Alwar and Jaipur—something that is true for our hilt too.

Similarities to a very fine tulwar in the Royal Collection Trust (recently on display at the Queen's Gallery) can also be noted.

This was gifted by the Mahrajah of Ulwar, Mangal Singh, to the Prince of Wales and has a blade made by the master smith Muhammad Ibrahim; it is tempting to think that our sword also has a blade made by his hand. Certainly, the quality of the wootz steel suggests it could have been, with Ibrahim's blades being renowned for the unusually high visual contrast between the darkness of their carbon content and the lightness of the silvery whirling lines—a contrast also found in ours. Perhaps this hilt was made in Jodhpur and then sent to Ulwar for decoration and blade fitting.

The wooden scabbard has been entirely covered with saffron-coloured velvet: a colour that the Rajputs linked with war and martyrdom.

References

28. R. Elgood, Rajput Arms & Armour: The Rathores and their Armoury at Jodhpur Fort, Niyogi Books, 2017, p.426.

16

CHEVRON TULWAR

Jodhpur, Rajasthan
18th - 19th Century

Overall 930 mm

Perhaps the most eye-catching aspect of this tulwar is the complex, curved singled-edged blade. Made with alternating, pre-shaped billets of watered steel and mild steel, it has been arranged to display a chevron pattern from forte to foible. Beautiful and rare, this pattern is understandably coveted by collectors. And the sword's benefits don't stop there, for its wide, sweeping blade boasts another exceptional feature: *Tears of the Wounded*. These 'Tears' are small ball-bearings captured inside seventeen rectangular slots near the blade's spine. It is generally accepted that this is a decorative feature, showing off the exemplary skills of the Rajput swordsmiths.

The tulwar's characteristic steel hilt is of the Jodhpuri type and is heavily decorated with gold-damascened foliage with very little loss of this precious material, despite the item's age.

For a similar sword, see Butterfield & Butterfield's *The Dr. Leo S. Figiel Collection of Mogul Arms*, lots 2025 and 2029–2031.

Provenance:

From the collection of Ravinder Reddy, and illustrated in his newly published book *Arms & Armour of India, Nepal, & Sri Lanka – Types, Decoration and Symbolism*.

17

LARGE FIRANGHI

India
17th Century

Overall 1150 mm

As befits a *firanghi* (literally meaning *foreigner*), this sword has a European blade, probably of 16th century Spanish or Italian origin. It retains its various symbols, crosses and letters, and has been partially enclosed by long reinforcing plates that present exquisite gold decorations of rows of crosses and meandering flora—chiselled, pierced and engraved. The Indian basket hilt and its long pommel stalk (its length meant to allow two-handed use) is similarly festooned with gold, as is the arcing knucklebow and the styled langets that protrude over the blade. The grip has been covered in vegetable fibres.

European sword blades were highly prized in India at this time and they were often mounted on Mughal dynasty hilts like this one, with only the most expensive receiving marriages of this enviable quality.

18

WOOTZ SHIKARGAH SWORD

Rajasthan
18th - 19th Century

Overall 905 mm

This shikargah (or hunting) sword has an important and fine blade. It is lightweight, with high contrast wootz steel and a subtle medial ridge that leads to a 'spear-point' tip. Its base is sandwiched between two openwork reinforcing mounts which are decorated with gold and depict an elephant boldly chasing down a tiger that has pounced upon a deer. Mounted in a silver-gilt basket hilt of small proportions, the silvering of the grip is a further indication of the richness of the piece as it would have typically been hidden by a covering of material. The hourglass-shape of the grip and the acute angles of its protrusions relates this to the Jodhpur type of hilt.

The scabbard is probably 19th century in date, having a wooden core covered with green velvet and fitted with a copper-gilt chape and suspension loop with an openwork design.

This piece is similar to two swords in the Jodhpur Fort, both of which are catalogued by Elgood[29] and thought to have been of royal ownership—certainly, the quality of this example suggests the same.

References

29. R. Elgood, Rajput Arms & Armour: The Rathores and their Armoury at Jodhpur Fort, Niyogi Books, 2017, p.503 and p.553.

19

GOLD FIRANGHI

Rajasthan
18th Century

Overall 1055 mm

The maker of this firanghi has created a pleasing visual contrast on the hilt by framing panels of wootz steel with ornamented gold borders. This gold decoration has been executed by an expert's hand and one can make out many details: small quatrefoils are linked by leaves and stems; while the larger flowers, anthemions, can be seen on the knucklebow and the architectural blade straps. The flowers reflects a natural Mughal style. The pommel, worn in places, has a prominent stalk for the wielder's second hand to grasp and this too has gold decorations: squares and zigzags that lead towards a ball finial.

The blade, from which the *firanghi* (or, *foreign*) takes its name, is of European origin and is double-edged, fullered and of a length that makes it viable as a cavalryman's weapon. The steel is tough yet flexible, making it less likely to break when put through the many rigours of 18th century combat.
For reference, Robert Elgood shows a shield, possibly from Alwar, in the book *Arms & Armour at the Jaipur Court* that has similar gold work[30].

References

30. R. Elgood, Arms & Armour at the Jaipur Court: The Royal Collection, Niyogi Books, 2015, p.165, cat.no.117.

20

BHUJ

Kutch
19th Century

Overall 545 mm

These polearms almost always originate from the town of Bhuj in Kutch, India, and that name has now become synonymous with them amongst collectors and researchers[31]. This particular bhuj is an outstanding example of its kind: splendidly ornamented and in excellent condition. Its blade's distinctive shape is typical of these weapons and designed to administer both cuts and thrusts to any enemy unfortunate enough to oppose it. Made from polished steel, the wide blade has a silver-gilt panel applied to both sides and these show flowers and leaves framed within a simple border. At its base resides an elephant's head, sculpted with great care to present to us many minute details and finished with a generous covering of gold. The animal's eyes are deep red crystals that have been set on a foil backing in order to catch the light and provide greater lustre, as are the stones that sit in the centre of the two paterae atop its head.

This head sits on a long, steel shaft that has more foliate decorations rendered in silver for its entire length.

Echoing the jewelled opulence found in the elephant's head is the pommel. This has been just as elaborately decorated and is, in fact, quite rare due to this; with more gilding and crystals resplendent beneath a bud finial. The entire pommel can also be unscrewed from the shaft to reveal a slender dagger.

This bhuj also retains its original scabbard—a rare bonus. It is made from gilt-copper and shows embossed sunflowers curling amid multifoil arches, all set against a stippled ground. The effect is one of rich texture. Small diamond-shaped flowers grow along a border that leads the eye towards the scabbard's tip where a cluster of leaves provides structural reinforcement. A further border, this time with a series of flutes, introduces the scabbard's mouth and has been expertly shaped to nestle into the contours of the elephant's head.

For a similar bhuj, though lacking the gemmed pommel and silver elements, please see the book *Splendours of the Subcontinent: A Prince's Tour of India* by Kajal Meghani.[32]

References

31. R. Elgood, Arms & Armour at the Jaipur Court: The Royal Collection, Niyogi Books, 2015, p.141.

32. K. Meghani, Splendours of the Subcontinent: A Prince's Tour of India, 1875–6, Royal Collection Trust, 2017, p.146.

21

TRIDENT

Rajasthan
19th Century

Overall 1500 mm

The trident (or trishula) is an important ancient weapon and symbol, and closely linked to the goddess form *Shakti*, as well as the male form, *Shakta*. The three blades represent the three aspects of the primordial power as creator, protector and destroyer. When the shaft is long it symbolises the axis of the universe, and through Indian paintings and scriptures we know it to be the main weapon of the goddess against evil personified by demons and monsters (see item number 27 of this catalogue).

The three blades on this example are all triple-sided and meant for armour-piercing. The central head is larger than its two cousins with beautifully executed hollow ground faces to each side. Traces of bluing remains and gold decorations have been rendered amongst it: garlands of flowers and leaves grow out of the lower and upper borders as neat posies seem to float between them. The two outer blades are actually formed from a single U-shaped piece, being retained on the handle by means of a ring at its middle. The long handle is made from steel and concludes in a facetted, domed design.

Two and three-headed spear use, while found more commonly in hunting and fishing, also saw sporadic employment in times of warfare[33]—often by warriors with a religious association to the weapon[34].

References

33. H. S. Cowper, The Art of Attack and the Development of Weapons, Naval and Military Press, 2006, p.102.

34. K. Roy and P. Lorge, Chinese and Indian Warfare—From the Classical Age to 1870, Routledge, 2014, p.329.

22

STEEL BOW

Punjab
19th Century

Overall 870 mm

From the collection of Blair Castle, Blair Atholl, Scotland, this magnificent reflex bow is made from steel and entirely decorated with gold in the Punjabi style. Slender fronds grow upon every surface, introducing cartouches filled with foliate spirals, all restrained by helical borders. These spirals continue onto the grip section which is threaded to allow the bow to be conveniently disassembled for storage or transportation. It probably would have had a silk bowstring.

Although already known in India, this type of bow was reintroduced by Muslim invaders, and the Rajputs, quickly deeming it to be a superior weapon, gladly adopted it. With wood and horn being susceptible to the Indian climate, metal bows such as this one were sometimes used as substitutes.[35]

A similar bow can be found in the royal collection of Jaipur.

References

35. R. Elgood, Arms & Armour at the Jaipur Court: The Royal Collection, Niyogi Books, 2015, pl.158.

23

PEPPERBOX CARBINE

India
18th Century

Overall 770 mm

This firearm comes from a small group of known Indian guns that have multi-shot cylinders, this one being unique for having five barrels arranged in the 'pepperbox' fashion instead of the more common single barrel served by a revolving cylinder with multiple chambers. The dark wooden stock of this gun is facetted with a sweeping cut-away to ensure a comfortable cheek-weld—and it has all acquired a pleasing patina, as has the metalwork it adjoins. The cluster of barrels is rotated by hand and has been liberally decorated with chevrons, crescents, lines and brass bands that all terminate at a flower-shaped plate that reinforces the ends of the five barrels, creating a cinquefoil effect.

Howard L. Blackmore, the well-known and respected British academic, in his 1965 book *Guns and Rifles of the World*[36], publishes an almost identical revolving carbine, the main difference being that it has only four barrels. This is in the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh (No.1956.612), and is dated to the 18th century.

A matchlock musket with a four-shot revolving cylinder and other comparable aspects is published in the book accompanying the travelling exhibition *Peacock in the Desert: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India*[37]. A further reference for our carbine can be found in our 2016 publication, page 62, catalogue number 25.

References

36. R. H. L. Blackmore, Guns and Rifles of the World, B. T. Batsford, 1965, no.550.

37. K. Jasol, Peacock in the Desert: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India, 2017, p.118, no.4.20.

24

COMBINATION GUN WHIP

Rajasthan
18th - 19th Century

Overall 635 mm

Derived from the horse whips that were long used by the nomadic peoples of the Steppes (such as the nagaika of the Cossacks), this combination weapon is extremely rare. The long, cylindrical handle is made from iron and generously decorated at each end with chequerboard sections of gold and silver koftgari, each square with an identical floral design within it; while a denser arrangement of bouquets adorns the centre. Both ends conclude in silver-gilt iron pommels, the lower being larger and having a ring.

The gun bore is hidden by a screw-in ramrod when not in use. The mid-section unscrews, to reveal a nipple upon which a percussion cap is fitted. Once re-assembled the lower end is unscrewed where it remains attached to the body of the pistol by means of a spring-mounted rod. This is then pulled back to 'cock' the gun (using the lower pommel with the ring for leverage). A small trigger on the under-body fires the gun.

This particular example is one of only two known Indian gun whips, with the other residing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exceptional collection[38]. While the Museum's example is unadorned and incomplete it shares characteristics with this one, including the elaborate and slightly mysterious way that the braided leather whip is lashed to the handle—perhaps there is an object or talisman woven into the whip.

With gun whips being so rare, the researcher must look further afield for comparisons. One such is a walking-stick gun in the Royal Collection[39] which has a similar method of cocking and was likely gifted to the then Prince of Wales by Maharao Raja Ram Singh of Bundi (1811 to 1889). A similarly shaped steel walking stick is described by Hendley in his 1892 work *Damascening on Steel or Iron as Practised in India*[40]. This is decorated in a comparable way to the whip—with a diamond pattern—and said to have been made in Sirohi, a location from which Maharao Raja Ram Singh is thought to have bought weapons from.

References

38. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/30566

39. K. Meghani, Splendours of the Subcontinent: A Prince's Tour of India, 1875–6, Royal Collection Trust, 2017, p.164, ref. RCIN 11484.

40. T. H. Hendley, Damascening on Steel or Iron as Practised in India, W. Griggs & Sons Ltd, 1892, pl.13.

25

JADE SWORD HILT

Deccan or
Mughal Dominions
17th - 18th Century

Overall 164 mm

This superb hilt is made entirely from nephrite jade. Of fine proportions, it has been carefully worked to offer recessed panels, a facetted grip-bulb and an upturned disc pommel completed by a bud finial. Carved lines accentuate these features, orbiting the domed quillons and the pommel, and running across and around the quillon block. The hilt has also been set with flowers made of large rubies and emeralds using the kundan technique. This highly skilled way of setting precious stones is historically associated with the Mughal emperors and allows the jeweller to adhere gems to non-metallic surfaces through the repeated applications and shaping of pure leaves of 24-carat gold. An emerald-centred flower displays its four ruby petals from the centre of the quillon block while another ruby blooms surrounded by gold petals from within a teardrop-shaped niche in the grip. A third flower, again with an emerald centre and ruby petals, has been rendered as if upturned towards a pommel whose shape and translucency so easily fills it with sunlight.

This beautiful and important sword hilt must have been owned by a man of great wealth and position. Mughal rulers gave weapons as gifts to their most important allies and, as such, the Rajputs were often recipients of exemplary items like this jade hilt. It would have been awarded in a formal ceremony, some aspects of which survive into today's Indian customs and ceremonies[41].

A similar hilt can be found in Kaoukji's *Precious Indian Weapons and other Princely Accoutrements*[42].

References

41. M. Athar Ali, The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb, OUP India, 1996, p.142.

42. S. Kaoukji, Precious Indian Weapons and other Princely Accoutrements (the al-Sabah Collection), Thames and Hudson Ltd, 2017, p.314.

26

THEWA MIRROR

Partabgarh, Rajasthan
19th Century

Height	375 mm
Width	245 mm

This tabletop mirror comes from Partabgarh in Rajasthan and depicts religious scenes from Hindu dharma surmounted by an impressive repoussé crest. This open-work crest, made from silver and applied to a red enamel background, shows two magnificent peacocks separated by a floral ornament in a vase.

A multitude of green glass panels are set within the mirror's extensive silver border, chased with flowery decorations and decorated by means of the *thewa* technique whereby a sheet of delicately pierced and patterned gold foil is fused to the glass by heat. These panels show different scenes, intricately made:

The top central panel shows a *trimurti* sculpture within a temple setting, representing the supreme divinities of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. A bearded man, probably a local ruler and the subject of the inscription at the bottom of the mirror, and his attendant, sit to the left of the trimurti in reverence.

The two flanking panels depict Rama, Sita and their most loyal follower Hanuman in a darbar.

Four more panels run down each side of the mirror and these show Shiva riding on his cow Nandi, Krishna with his gopis, or Radha in one of her playful poses.

In the top left and top right panels Krishna plays the flute to Radha and they stand in front of a low pillar wall which separates them from a lake filled with ducks, fish and turtles.

Bottom left and right, in the same panel where Shiva rides Nandi, a peacock spreads his train of feathers in a bid to court a peahen.

The bottom row has a central inscription flanked by two panels that each show three female celestial musicians. The inscription in the lower central panel is as follows:

Doha
Lal Dhal
Nar Bihal Bhupal

Translation
Doha
Son of Fatmal, who is the protector of the Hindu religion. A subject's happiness is a great gift from his King.

These vignettes all show lush gardens filled with such things as flowers, birds and pagodas, and help to frame the rectangular mirror beautifully.

Provenance:

This mirror came from the estate of the third Baron Lord Mark William Ogilvie Birdwood (1938 to 2015). His great-grandfather was Herbert Mills Birdwood CSI, LL.D (1837 to 1907) who was the brother of Sir George Christopher Molesworth Birdwood KCIE, CSI (1832 to 1917), keeper of the Indian Museum at South Kensington (now part of the Victoria and Albert Museum) and author of *The Industrial Arts of India*.

In his book, Sir George Birdwood[43] explains the process of making 'Pertabgarh work' and uses a casket from the collection of Queen Victoria to illustrate this. This casket was presented to Victoria by Maharaja Dalpat Singh of the princely state of Partabgarh, Rajasthan, in 1864 and it still forms part of the Royal Collection today. At the time of writing, it is on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum and displayed in the South Asia Gallery (LOAN:ROYAL.792)[44].

References

43. G. Birdwood, The Industrial Arts of India, Chapman and Hall, 1884, p.218.

44. https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O155082/writers-box-unknown/

27

GODDESS SHIELD

Udaipur (Mewar), Rajasthan
Circa 1850 - 1860

Diameter 470 mm

Around the circumference of this extraordinary shield sits eight Devi incarnations and Durga, the warrior goddess. This group is known as the Matrikas: mother goddesses who are all different forms of Parvati, the goddess of power. According to a later episode of the *Devi Mahatmya* that deals with the killing of the demon Raktabija, Durga created the Matrikas from herself and, with their help, slaughtered the demon army. When the demon Shumbha challenged Durga to single combat, she absorbed the Matrikas into herself.

Each goddess is beautifully painted seated in the lotus position upon her vahana (or mount) and holding a variety of objects that are mostly martial in nature. These include tulwars, khandas, ankus, trishulas (tridents), shields and a mace. We can identify each goddess. Proceeding clockwise from Durga (who is seated on a tiger on the eastern side of the shield):

Shachi, also known as Indrani (the queen to Indra, the King of Gods), is seated on an elephant and is said to be the goddess of beauty.

Varahi has the head of a boar and sits on a buffalo. She is the shakti of Varaha, the boar avatar of Vishnu. She sometimes wields the chakram and fights with a sword and tusks.

Brahmani, sits on a hamsa (a swan or goose) that holds her rosary in its beak. She is considered to be the Shakti of the creator-god Brahma, and an aspect of Adi Shakti, who is the personification of primordial cosmic energy, and the source of Brahma's powers.

The next goddess, astride a buffalo, is suspected to be an **Ishta-devi**, or a tutelary devi, favoured by the patron of the shield.

Vaishnavi comes next, seated on Garuda, and holding a trishula, snake, sword and shield. She is thought to be the shakti of Vishnu—one of the principle deities of Hinduism.

Maheshvari is also seated on a buffalo, but in contrast to the Ishta-devi, she brandishes a trishula in her left hand—an aspect she is known to take from Lord Shiva.

Chamunda sits upon the body of a man and is the only Matrika who is a Shakti of the great goddess Devi rather than a male god. She is also the only one of the group that enjoys worship in her own right and is traditionally offered ritual animal sacrifices and wine. She is very often identified with Kali and can be similar to her in appearance and habits.

Finally, **Kaumari**, the shakti of Kartikeya, the god of war, rides a peacock and, as expected, is well armed with a mace, sword, ankus and a small vessel.

At the shield's centre is Surya, the sun god, who many Rajput elders claim descent from. His image is found on shields from Mewar and used as the insignia of their royal court. Unusually, the four bosses around him have been painted black to match the rest of the shield, with golden details picked out by a steady hand. The rear remains undecorated but has four iron rings for the attachment of a pad and handles. These two factors suggest the shield is an older one that has been redecorated later in its life—a common practice in Rajasthan. For instance, a katar in a private collection known to the author bears an inscription that records a battle victory in 1831 AD, and its subsequent removal from the Silekhana Armoury and redecoration in 1872 AD.

Despite there being few published examples to go by, changes in how Surya is depicted at the centre of Mewari shields do seem to occur. These could be due to the styles held by different painters, or specific schools, but it is an interesting comparison nonetheless. On two early 18th century shields in the Delhi National Museum[45] he is shown with a thin face, eyes wide with small pupils, and his moustache stiff. However, on two shields in the Jodhpur Armoury[46], dated to circa 1820, he is shown with a fuller face, softer eyes and a round chin. Our example, from around 1850, depicts his face softened further, his eyes sleepy and his round chin more accentuated. The face on the following item in this catalogue (no.28) has a slightly rounder face than the two shields in Delhi but retains its intense gaze to confirm the 18th century dating.

My thanks to Naveen Kumar, CEO of the Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art, Hyderabad, for his help in identifying the goddesses.

References

45. G.N.Pant and K.K.Sharma, Indian Armours in the National Museum Collection, New Delhi National Museum, 2001, pp.85-88, nos. 76 & 77.

46. R. Elgood, Rajput Arms & Armour, Volume II, Niyogi Books, 2017, pp.886-887.

28

SHIKARGAH SHIELD

Udaipur (Mewar), Rajasthan
18th Century

Overall 500 mm

Radiant at the centre of this black shield is a fine golden portrait of the sun god Surya, the insignia of the Mewar royal court. Suitably crowned and with his curling handlebar moustache, he is surrounded by a stylised sunburst and a ring of intricately detailed flowers. Similar flowers border the shield's edge, with red accents adding variety for the eye to enjoy.

In four places atop this border artistic vignettes have been applied, all showing dramatic scenes of big cats and their game: an antelope, a running boar and a nilgai all fall as prey to vividly striped tigers, just as a dying camel submits to a fierce lion.

A similarly painted black shield in the National Museum at Delhi[47] has been attributed to Maharana Sangram Singh II who ruled Mewar from 1690 to 1734, it is also painted with golden scenes along its circumference, like ours.

The four copper-gilt bosses that surround Surya are probably later, 19th century additions, as is the brocade pad and straps.

References

47. G. N. Pant, K. K. Sharma, Indian Armours in the National Museum Collection, New Delhi National Museum, 2001, p.88, no.77.

29

INDIAN SUIT OF ARMOUR

Bijapur
17th Century

Total Height 1920 mm

It is extremely uncommon to offer to the market a suit of armour of this nature.

The armoured shirt is rare, with only a small group of such items known to exist. Its seven columns are each formed by arrangements of many small overlapping plates—each with an indented centre and a cusp along the lower edges—a hallmark of quality. At the back, there are a further five columns of these plates, while a large solid plate protects each of the warrior's sides, one with an old repair. The sleeves are elbow-length. Below all of this a skirt of riveted chainmail hangs.

The scarce helmet is of robust mail-and-plate construction too but this time with entirely straight edges. It is surmounted by a bulbously-shaped knop of the same form that is found on Deccani daggers of the 17th century. (The Furusiyya Art Foundation Collection has a group of such daggers for reference[48].)

However, the icing on the cake is the trousers—another pair is not known. There are three pairs of mail-and-plate trousers known to us, but they are made of large, vertical, splinted plates that are connected by narrow rows of chainmail. One is in the Royal Armouries, Leeds (XXVIA 309). Our trousers partly follow this pattern too. Each leg has six long columns of small iron plates that protect the wearer's thigh all the way down to the knee. Two of these columns have scalloped plates to match those in the shirt. Below each thigh section hangs a V-shaped piece of mail and a large knee plate with bat-shaped reinforcements applied to cover old areas of damage.

All of this is attached to a 19th century cotton liner stuffed with camel hair. This has deteriorated over the centuries but is now protected with conservation netting and backed onto felt for mounting.

Despite each of these elements being of identical 17th century Deccani manufacture, strictly speaking this set is a composite. Indian armouries did not, traditionally, keep 'sets' of armour: the shirts would have been kept separately to the helmets, and so on. However, we are quite certain that these three elements were de-accessions from the Bikaner Armoury in the early 1970s and, although there are no inscriptions on the metalwork recording this, there is very little doubt that they were part of the booty won by the general Maharajah Anup Singh (1669¬ to 1698) in the Golconda campaign of 1687 or the Adoni campaign of 1689, on behalf of the Mughal Emperor Arungzeb (1658 to 1707).

Provenance

Formerly in the Bikaner Armoury, India, and then the notable collection of Eric Vaule, USA.

References

48. B. Mohamed, The Arts of the Muslim Knight, Skira, 2008.

30

CHAINMAIL SHIRT AND TURBAN HELMET

Bijapur
16th - 17th Century

Mannequin 2060 mm

This long, heavy chainmail shirt has a number of interesting features. Firstly, the armoured collar is a rare inclusion as hardly any other examples have such an addition; and, similarly, the top buckles are scarce articles within this context. Also notable are the punch-dot decorations around the plates' borders—a fitting feature as the Bikaner armourers are known for having marked their weapons with punch-dot numbers.

The shirt has four large plates reinforcing the front (and two at each side), each having two agreeably styled fish-shaped buckles. One of these plates bears an inscription in Devanagari. It says:

"Sidh. Maharaja Anup Singhji Sa. 1748 ghara pakeen(?) khaso."

Which translates into English as:

"Important Armour Shri Maharaja Anup Singh Vikram Samwat 1748 (1691 AD)."

The date of 1691 AD is two years after the Siege of Adoni in 1689 when Maharajah Anup Singh (1669¬ to 1698) took the city on behalf of the Mughal Emperor Arungzeb (1658 to 1707) and famously brought back to Bikaner a huge cache of arms and armour.

At the rear, five columns of slim plates protect the wearer's back while allowing free movement, the central column boasting attractive shaping.

The shirt is made from alternating rows of theta and riveted links. The unusual inclusion of theta links gives the shirt extra strength at the cost of considerably greater manufacturing time and expense. This fact, along with the additional features described above suggest the armour was made for somebody very important. A shirt of similar form, also with a collar and fish-shaped buckles (although without the theta links), is in the Royal Armouries at Leeds, UK. A few international museums as well as a small group of collectors and dealers, including Eric Vaule purchased the best of the Bikaner Armoury's inventory when it was de-accessioned in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

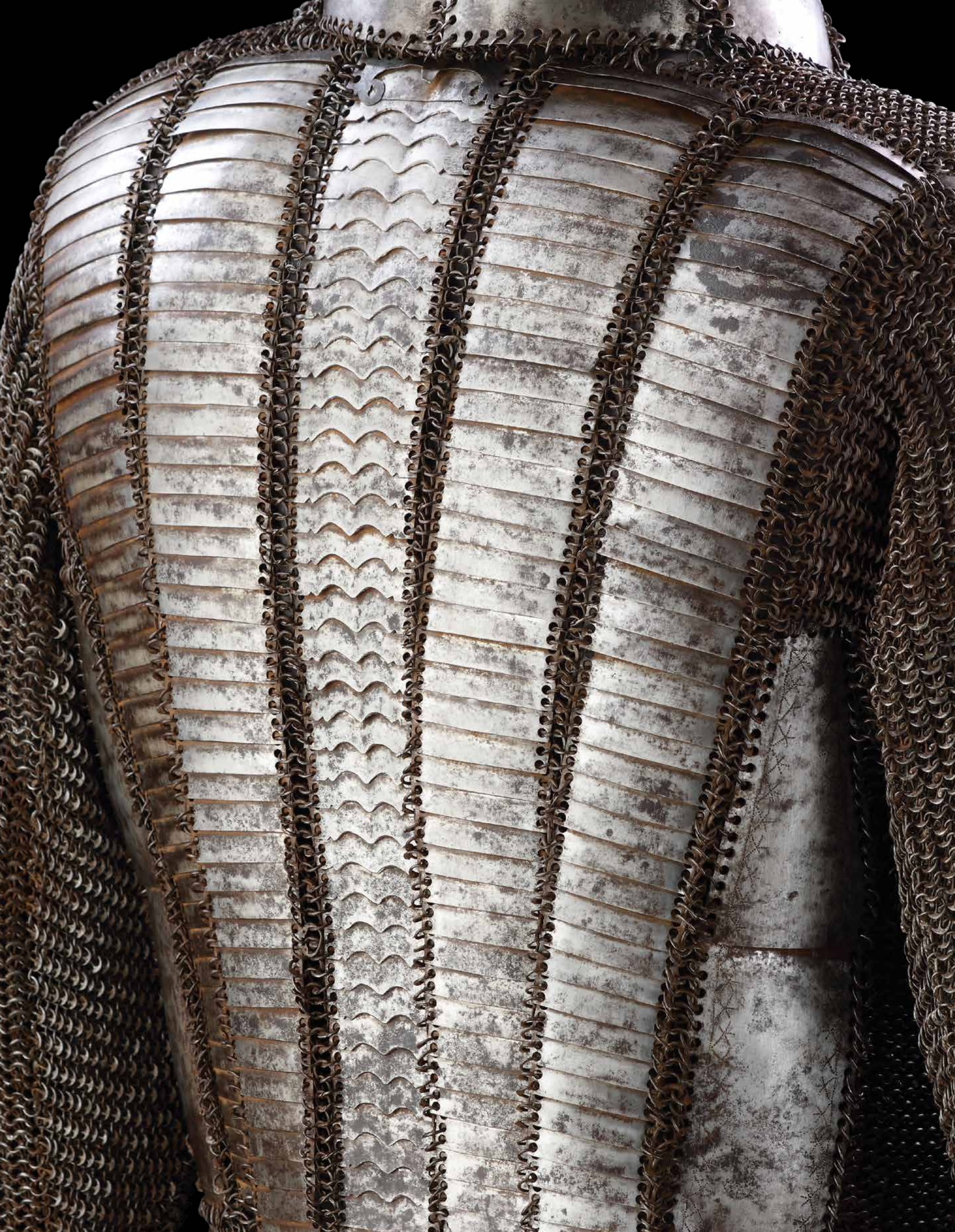
Complementing this shirt is its rare Indian helmet of turban form. Clearly, its design has been based on the turban helmets of the Ottoman Empire, the shaped ear flaps being indications of that heritage. A similar Indian helmet from the British Museum is illustrated by Robert Elgood in his 2005 book *Hindu Arms and Ritual*[49]. The top of the helmet and the plume holder are sympathetic modern replacements.

Provenance

The shirt was formerly in the Bikaner Armoury, India, and then the notable collection of Eric Vaule, USA. The helmet was formerly in the Bikaner Armoury, India, then in a private collection in England.

References

49. R. Elgood, Hindu Arms and Ritual, Chicago University Press, 2005, p.58, fig.5.3.



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CHAINMAIL COAT AND HOOD

Bijapur, India
16th - 17th Century,

Mannequin Height 1200 mm

This chainmail coat is much heavier than most, comes to us from the late 16th or early 17th century, and was part of the famous armoury at Bikaner, Rajasthan. Rectangular iron plates, contoured to sit against the body, reinforce the chest, sides and back; with those on the front each having three buckles with lobed discs. The plates at the rear are smaller, laminated and arranged into columns in order to afford the wearer some degree of movement.

A Devanagari inscription on the inside of the right 'breast plate' mentions the name of Maharajah Anup Singh of Bikaner (1669 to 1698) and records the fact that this shirt entered the Armoury when the Maharajah Anup Singh defeated the Adilshahi Dynasty at the Siege of Adoni in 1689. The front of the right breast plate has a short, neat inscription in Persian with the words *Darwish Sahib*—probably a reference to an important man to whom the shirt was presented after it entered the Armoury.

The hood (or *khula zirah*) is particularly long with the dags (triangularly shaped tails) designed to fall across the shoulders, upper chest and back to add a further layer of protection to those vulnerable areas. The rings that comprise it meet at the very top where an iron disc resides.

This example has one of those enigmatic lumps of lead incorporated into the chainmail—a feature of many of the best Bikaner armours and thought to have been an inventory tag (the lead's softness meaning any markings were rubbed away long ago). This hood is believed to be one of the largest and most impressive to have come out of the Bikaner Armoury.

Provenance

The hood was formerly in the Bikaner Armoury, India, and then in the notable collection of Eric Vaule, USA. The coat, formerly in the Bikaner Armoury, India, and then in a private collection in the UK.

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