RUNJEET SINGH

ARMS & ARMOUR FROM THE EAST

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HONG KONG

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INTRODUCTION

I'm excited to say that this is my first time exhibiting at Fine Art Asia and I'm looking forward to displaying a diverse group of exceptional objects from China, Tibet, Korea and India. Many of these pieces have formed important parts of collections in the West and been treasured for many decades. Several are decorated with powerful Buddhist themes—testament to the importance placed upon them by their makers and owners. It will be a great pleasure to bring them to the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre and share them with the collecting world.

I would like to offer a sincere message of appreciation to the numerous colleagues and friends who contributed to the research and production of this publication and the accompanying exhibition. I also thank my family for their endless love, patience and support.

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Written by Runjeet Singh

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All prices on request

1

SAWASA KNIFE

China, Qing Dynasty
18th – 19th Century

Overall 255 mm

This is a highly unusual Chinese eating knife with mounts of *Sawasa* (a term applied to a group of black lacquered and gilt artefacts made from a copper alloy with gold, silver and arsenic).

Sawasa is believed to have been made in Japan, Tonkin, Batavia and possibly Canton (the latter being the most likely place where this knife was made) between 1650 and 1800. The Chinese played a large and important role in the Sawasa trade, not only as manufacturers in the busy city of Canton but also providing vital transport via the Chinese maritime trade network.

The knife has a rosewood handle and a short, straight blade with a wavy, tempered single edge. The scabbard of triangular cross-section has a wooden core and is covered with emerald-coloured green shagreen. Alongside the knife sits a bone pickle skewer which is probably a later replacement.

The scabbard mouth is formed from a thick piece of silver alloy neatly engraved and inlaid with a gold key pattern along the outer face. The top mount of the scabbard shows a detailed dragon grasping at a pearl amidst storm clouds with waves below. On the rear, acting as a loop for a suspension cord, is a life-like three-dimensional squirrel with a wide, flat tail. The tail rests on a lower mount which comprises a gilded copper band with an applied silver key pattern that's framed by two thinner bands of twisted silver and copper wire. Attached below are silver wires shaped as Chinese fungi (or stylised clouds) filled with blue enamel.

Two further mounts in the form of bats (Chinese symbols of good luck) are decorated in contrasting techniques. The upper bat has a black body, silver wings and gold on the lower surfaces. The bat below has a silver body with black wings, also with gold on the lower surfaces. A further mount has an upper border of twisted silver and copper wire, with the main body made of gilded copper alloy with applied leaves and flowers. The leaves have a black lacquer finish with their lower areas in gold, and a silver flower.

The knife, pommel and the scabbard's chape both have gilded, granulated backgrounds with black highlights and applied flowers in alternate material and decoration: one silver and the other of black.

There are some features that set apart this piece from the well-known group of Sawasa objects exhibited at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam from 1988 to 1999 and shown in the 1999 book *Sawasa: Japanese Export Art in Black and Gold.* These features are the use of silver and copper twisted wire bands which appear on two of the mounts, and the band of enamelled fungi or stylised clouds. These additions, and the belief that this was made for the Chinese market rather than for exportation, makes this a highly unusual example.

We cannot find a similar set but we can compare the workmanship and materials to an oval tobacco box from a private collection which is illustrated in the Rijksmuseum catalogue, p.70, no.B.13.1.

Notes

Knives were highly important to the Manchus. Emperor Qianglong erected a tablet in front of the Jian Ting (the Archery Pavilion in the Forbidden palace)[1] emphasising that real Manchus should always carry knives to cut up their own pork at meals rather than having it cut up for them in the Chinese way. He said on another occasion:

"Now I can see that Manchu traditions have been much relaxed. For instance, Prince Yi did not carry his knife. What is the reason for that? I read records of Taizong (Hongtaiji, son of Nurgaci and second ruler in the dynasty) who said 'Imperial clan males who cannot cut their meat themselves and do not carry arrow quivers are not observing Manchu customs. What will become of their descendants?' These are the lessons taught by Taizong to his sons. He is already worried about his children and grandchildren giving up on tradition."[2]

Knives were part of the standard Manchu ceremonial attire and can be found depicted, partly hidden by pouches but clearly visible, in official portraits such as those published in *Life in the Forbidden City*, Hong Kong, 1985, pl.66, portrait of the Kangxi emperor, and pl. 73, portrait of the Yongzheng emperor. Qianglong can also be seen wearing a knife as part of his full ceremonial dress at the age of 25 in a painting kept at the Palace Museum, Beijing (Gu6464), attributed to Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766), circa 1736, which has been approved by the emperor by him stamping it with three seals.[3]

References

1. Ho and Bronson, Splendors of China's Forbidden City: The Glorious Reign of Emperor Qianlong, 2004, p.31, fig.18.
2. Tie, Qindi Dongxun (The Eastern Tours of the Qing emperors), 1991.
3. Rawski and Rawson, China: The Three Emperors, 2005, p.81, fig.39.

2

JIAN KNIFE

China, Qing Dynasty
19th Century

Overall 270 mm

This fine and unusual Chinese eating trousse is made up of a straight jian-type knife, a pair of chopsticks and a toothpick/tongue scraper.

The knife's hilt and scabbard are made from *jichimu*: which translates literally as 'chicken-wing wood' due to its fine tangential grain made up of purplish-brown lines that resemble feathers. It is an exceptionally rare and precious tropical hardwood in keeping with the overall high quality of this set.

The knife's hilt is mounted top and bottom with repoussé silver fittings, having granulated backgrounds and raised flowers and foliage. The straight double-edged blade of diamond section shows a folded, layered construction. The chopsticks are made from bamboo, spliced with high quality white bone top-pieces and having the appearance of elephant ivory. The scabbard is mounted with a large silver repoussé throat-piece and chape, decorated with a complex arrangement of foliage surrounding a central pattern of eight whorls circling a disc with a central cross.

The scabbard's mouth is gilt-copper decorated with a key pattern, with an applied block to hold a suspension ring which retains the finely woven original blue suspension cord with a copper button. The suspension block has two Chinese characters, 흠권, and appears to read *wan* (meaning ten thousand) which is often used synonymously with the word *eternal*. The rear of the scabbard shows a bone teardrop which, when removed, reveals the toothpick/scraper.

A similar knife in the Henri Moser collection is illustrated in *Collection Henri Moser-Charlottenfels: Oriental Arms and Armour* (1912), pl.XXXII, no.1070, and now part of the Bernisches Historisches Museum, Switzerland.

Notes

For further information about Chinese knives see item number 1.

3

SHAGREEN TROUSSE

China, Qing Dynasty
19th Century

Overall 325 mm

This classical and very well made Chinese eating trousse consists of a single-edged knife, a pair of chopsticks, two concealed toothpicks and a pair of tweezers on a chain.

The knife's hilt has grip scales of polished animal horn, with a pommel and lower section of elephant ivory. The grips are secured with steel pins and each side has ten decorative conical silver rivet-heads. The blade is forged from high quality steel with the traces of a Chinese inscription which is indistinct from having been worn by repeated polishing.

The wooden scabbard is covered with emerald green shagreen with an ivory chape. The scabbard houses two elephant ivory toothpicks, a pair of brass tweezers chased with floral patterns and attached by means of a brass chain, and two round-section chopsticks of ivory. The tweezers suggest that these sets served various functions, including that of grooming; perhaps a modern-day comparison could be made with the Swiss Army knife!

Notes

For further information about Chinese knives see item number 1.

4

DOUBLE KNIFE TROUSSE

China, Qing Dynasty
19th Century

Overall 310 mm

This unusual studio-marked double-knife Chinese trousse eating set has a pair of chopsticks, a toothpick and a small ear spoon.

The two knives' grips are made from nanmu burl, a highly regarded timber, frequently mentioned as materials *par excellence* in Ming literati writings[4] and often used in scholars' objects as well as for decorative cabinets' doors and tabletop panels. Both hilts are set with pommel and bolster pieces of elephant ivory. One knife is slightly longer than the other, both having high quality blades with visible temper lines and evidence of a folded layered construction.

The wooden scabbard is covered with a black lacquer finish and a white scaled (shagreen) pattern. It is mounted with silver bands, and conceals a silver ear spoon and toothpick. The silver pommel has a Chinese inscription which indicates the name of the studio: *Heng Yi He*, and translates to the word 'eternal'. The round-section chopsticks are also of elephant ivory, with delicately carved floral pommels.

Notes

For further information about Chinese knives see item number 1.

References

4. Evarts, Curtis, C. L. Ma Collection: Traditional Furniture from the Greater Shanxi Region, 1999.

5

AGATE KNIFE

Korea, Choson Dynasty
18th – 19th Century

Overall 310 mm

An exceptionally fine Korean eating knife known as an *eunjangdo*. *Eunjangdo* usually employ silver as their primary material and are worn by both men and women, sometimes with chopsticks—much like eating knives from China.

This example has an agate hilt and blonde tortoise-shell scabbard, suggesting it was a special commission for a wealthy patron. The large stone hilt of octagonal form has a tinge of pink, and displays a spectacular grain, set against a silver collar.

The simple, functional blade is typical for these knives, being straight with a single cutting edge. The wooden scabbard is covered with a veneer of blonde tortoise-shell and mounted with heavily gilded copper fittings. This *eunjangdo* is a traditional Korean accessory, and is fitted with a suspension ring to suspend it from the wearer's belt or *norigae* when wearing the *hanbok* garment.

A gilt-copper pickle skewer slides into the scabbard alongside the knife. It is faceted on the outer surface, with a flat inner surface, and surmounted with a very decoratively shaped button in the form of a chrysanthemum flower.

6

CUTLERY SET

Korea, Choson Dynasty
19th Century

Overall 390 mm

This rare and interesting cutlery set from Korea is housed in a black lacquered wooden case profusely decorated with silver wire inlay. The case is pill shaped and lacquered with a high polish. One side is decorated with large peony flowers, which are a popular subject matter in Korean lacquer. A similar decorative scheme is found on a Korean lacquer box in the Victoria and Albert Museum (no. FE.84:1, 2-1974)[5] which has mother-of-pearl and brass wire inlay. The lids and reverse of our case are both decorated with inscriptions in Chinese. The top lid is decorated with Chinese characters in a couplet comprising two six lines reading:

Du Shu Zhi Shang? Sheng Xian/ Wei Guan Xin? Jun Guo.
The reason I read books is to achieve piety and wisdom/ When I act as an official my heart is set to serve the Emperor and the country.

The bottom lid also has a two-line couplet, but this time comprising five lines, reading:

Liu Shui Gao Shan Zhe / Hua? Ming Yue Xin
My life goal is lofty like the running water and high mountain/The blossom is like a pure heart or bright moon.

The bottom left shows a framed seal which reads:

Fang Gu
Copying the Ancient

The reverse of the case has five large characters which read:

Fu Gui Chang Yi Hou Wang
(in seal script)
High status prospering suitable/ benefit marquis king

From the beautiful and revealing inscriptions it appears that this was made for a pious and high-ranking individual who served as a royal official.

The set contains an eating knife with wooden handle and bone mounts, a pair of bone-handled flat implements believed to be nail files, a pair of steel tweezers with a spiked tip, a pair of bone chopsticks, a nephrite jade handled gilt-copper fork with a bat symbol, and an ivory pickle skewer. A fork with a nephrite jade handle and a bat and coin design in gold is in the Palace Museum, Beijing, and illustrated in the book ***Splendors of China's Forbidden City***[6], being described as part of a set of eating utensils for imperial ladies at banquets. Our set must have served a similar purpose for a high-status family in a Korean setting.

References

5. https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O18996/box-inlaid-with-unknown/

6. Ho/Bronson, Splendors of China's Forbidden City: The Glorious Reign of Emperor Qianlong, p.207, no.260.


食貨日用本主

7

BRONZE DAGGER

Northwest China
6th – 7th Century BC

Overall 214 mm

This dagger has a characteristic hilt with a *taotie* mask (a zoomorphic Chinese evil fiend) at the base, and an elaborate scrolled openwork pommel at the other end. The eyes of the mask, and similar circlets which are present on the pommel, would have originally been set with small turquoise stones. The grip area is faceted but otherwise plain, suggesting that the knife was made with practicality in mind. The tapering blade with broken tip has a raised medial rib on each side. The broken end reveals that the rib was hollow and later filled with a slim brass rod, possibly for mounting or strength. The complex oxidisation and patina of the surface creates an arresting visual affect. The dagger is accompanied by two bronze spearheads and a bronze spear butt of unknown origin, and together they make a fascinating display.

The dagger shares characteristics with two known examples from the Harris collection[7] and, interestingly, appears to represent a transitional stage between the two.

References

7. So and Bunker, Traders and Raiders, 1995, p.126-127, no.'s 43 and 44.

8

SHORT SWORD

Sichuan Province, China
Warring States Period
(5th – 2nd Century BC)

Overall 565 mm

This Chinese short sword of copper alloy has a distinctive hilt and a rich and varied patina. The hilt is of an uncommon form and features a peaked pommel, a studded grip (probably to receive a twine binding), and a ricasso with arched, wide shoulders and a pair of long spikes protruding on each side. There are two published examples with this form of hilt that we can refer to. The first, illustrated in Orioli (1994, p.104, fig.13.2), is labeled as originating from Longpaozhai in Min River Valley; and the second, shown as a line drawing in Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens (2001, p.47, fig.9.d) and reproduced from Kaogou Xuebao (1977.2, p.51, fig. 16). Both examples are bi-metallic (bronze hilt and iron blade).

Stray finds of bronze hilts from bi-metallic swords from Sichuan and Yunnan are not rare; the iron blades have almost always broken off. However, extremely few are known to have blades also composed of bronze, so this sword is a scarce example. Bronze, of course, is harder than steel.

Notes

In the 1930s and 40s the archaeologist Cheng Te-k'un, surveying Sichuan Province, examined tombs consisting of pits lined with slabs of slate dug into terraces along the upper Min River. After assessing their contents, he designated these tombs as belonging to a local "Slate Tomb Culture" dating to circa 500 to 100 BCE, and linked these tombs with similar stone-lined tombs ranging northward to Manchuria. In the 1970s, Chinese archaeologists published further discoveries of stone-lined tombs in other highland river valleys of Sichuan and Yunnan. In the 1980s, Michèle Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens, one of the first to summarize the Chinese reports from these tombs, was instrumental in advancing the appellation "Cist Tomb Culture" based on the construction of the tomb (i.e., a pit lined with stones) rather than the type of stone used (not necessarily slate) and further corroborated the linkage of Sichuan and Yunnan with the northern steppes via comparison of tomb artifacts.

A spectacular example of a Sichuan cist tomb is the Moutuo Tomb discovered in 1992 near Mao Xian on the upper Min River. Its description and contents were published by Lothar von Falkenhausen, who followed Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens in attributing the tomb to the "Stone-Cist Building Culture", dating it to circa 450 BCE. Pirazzoli-t'Serstevens (2001) and Alain Thote further maintained the presence of a particular culture associated with the Sichuan cist tombs, while adjusting slightly downward dating of the Moutuo Tomb to circa 400 BCE.

Marcello Orioli, further summarising reports and drawings of finds of subsequent Chinese excavations in the mountainous regions of western Sichuan and north-western Yunnan, modified the designation of a homogenous "culture" that had been defined solely by a method of tomb construction. He pointed out that stone cist tombs were found over a wide geographical area and in varying habitation and subsistence zones corresponding to altitude, and so therefore additional cultural markers such as pottery should be more closely observed.

Nevertheless, since metal weapons could be widely distributed by way of exchange, whereas pottery would be more likely to be locally manufactured, the comparison of swords and daggers found in various cist tombs of Sichuan and Yunnan may be made here without further differentiating the cultures.

9

TIBETAN SWORD

Eastern Tibet, Kham Region
18th – 19th Century

Overall 780 mm

This particular type of Tibetan sword comes from Eastern Tibet's Kham region. It is categorised by the hilt which has a lozenge-shaped cross section, and by the attached iron pommel inlaid across the front with three narrow bands of different coloured copper alloy. Three short, cone-shaped iron protrusions sit on top of the pommel. The grip is made of wood, waisted in the middle, and covered in ray skin which has several large white nodules and is wrapped with a single leather cord in an open spiral. The guard is a round dish of heavy gauge iron with a hollow interior. A leather pad attached on the underside of the guard is painted cinnabar red, and ensures a cushioned seat for the scabbard mouth when the sword is sheathed.

The blade is straight and single-edged with an oblique tip. The pattern welding lines are faint but there appears to be five dark and four light bands, indicating two hairpin rods of darker iron alternating with two hairpin rods of lighter iron, with a single rod of darker iron in the centre.

The wooden scabbard is fitted with a U-shaped iron bottom mount of Bhutanese type, with a copper reinforcment at the center extending more than halfway up the scabbard. At the rear, this extension is iron. The leather within the exposed areas is dyed green and probably comes from the belly of a donkey or an ass. The upper half of the scabbard is covered with a separate leather sleeve.

The Metropolitan Museum, New York, has an extremely similar sword without a scabbard (acc.no. 36.25.1460) and La Rocca[8] points out another similar example in the National Museum of Natural History, Washington, with provenance stating it was made in Poyal, once part of the Kingdom of Derge and now part of the Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in western Sichuan province.

References

8. LaRocca, Warriors of the Himalayas, 2006, p.164-165, cat.no.68.

10

MYSORE SHAMSHIR

South India
17th – 18th Century

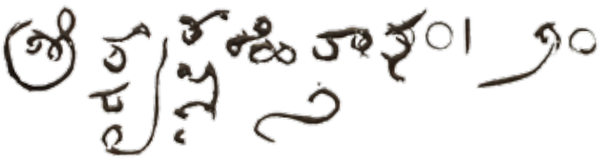
Overall 1100 mm

A large and impressive shamshir sword from the Mysore armoury*, South India.

The iron hilt of this sword is of large proportions, which is rare for an Indian sword as they usually have quite a small grip. A small grip is partially due to the physiology of the Indian race, but also due to the style of swordsmanship usually practised in India. The grip of our sword is wonderfully faceted and the arrow-shaped langets are pierced at the extremities. The attached quillons are flattened and short in length and have palmette-shaped tips, suggesting a local (South Indian) manufacture. This style can be traced back to 17th century Deccani hilts, and is found in a later stylised variation on 19th century South Indian brass hilts. Above the saucer-shaped pommel disc is a star-shaped finial cap surmounted by a bulbous button. The entire hilt is covered with thick gilt silver sheet which is worn in places.

The steel blade of heavy gauge displays a pattern of crucible steel (jawhar), that can be categorised as 'Sham Wootz' (named Sham after Bilad-al-Sham an ancient caliphate in Syria where Damascus was the capital). The characteristics of this steel are best described in the book that accompanied an exhibition at the King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic studies in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1991 called *Weapons of the Islamic World: Swords and Armour*[9]: "Beautiful wave-like patterns formed in well-cut, geometric designs and famous for the light, almost white colours; known for their smooth, rust-resistant blade, with soft, stippled surfaces and a generally light-grey colour." The blade is marked in Kannada script with the armoury marking of the Mysore armoury which reads:

"Sri Krishna Hitha Num 20."



Hitha possibly refers to the Hindu Lord Vishnu, Hetha being one of his 901 names. A sword with a similar inscription is published by Jens Nordlunde[10] (2016), p.246–247. The Nordlunde sword also bears the number 24 painted in white on the spine, which Nordlunde surmises was added by the former Austrian owner, Ferdinand Ritter von Hochstetter (1829–1884). The sword shown here is marked in the same way on the spine with the number 1 which is possibly a hint to the high esteem in which the sword was regarded when marked.

**The armoury, or Ayudhashala, of the Wodeyar royal family of Mysore is housed in the Mysore Palace, and according to Talwar*[11] *was established by Chamaraja Wodear V in 1635 AD Krishna Wodeyar III (1799-1868) who was restored to the throne by the British after the defeat and death of Tipu Sultan (1759-1799), was responsible for taking a full inventory, and marking each item with serial numbers and labels. He used his own name Sri Krishna as a prefix to each marking. Talwar states that in the last century (19th) there were said to be 1,300 items in the armoury, but at the time of publishing (1994) he says there were only 725 items.*

References

9. Weapons of the Islamic World: Swords & Armour, 1991.

10. Nordlunde, A Passion for Indian Arms: A Private Collection, 2016.

11. Talwar, Arms and Armoury of the Mysore Palace, 1994, p.23.

11

SOSUN PATAH

North India
Circa 1800

A rare Indian *sosun patah* sword. The name is Persian, Arabic and Urdu, and means 'lily leaf' which describes the shape of the blade. It is also known as the *kopis* blade. This example is what Rawson (1968) refers to as a *sosun patah* of Islamic form (the Rajput form having a more angled blade with a wider belly). Rawson claims that the *sosun patah* is directly influenced by the Turkish yataghan.

The elegant downward curved T-section blade is forged from fine *wootz* steel. These highly sought-after and important swords are often forged from the best quality steel. This example shows dark (kirk) *wootz* with contrasting silver and black circles and spirals.

The slender iron hilt is covered in fine gold *koftgari* in a highly unusual arrangement of stylised swastikas overlaid with two concentric circles against a dotted background. A symbol with strong connotations of good luck in both Hinduism and Buddhism, the use of it in Indian ironwork decorations is highly unusual, and has possibly been overlooked as Islamic-style arabesques which are commonly used in northern Indian, particularly Punjabi, decorations.

A breastplate from Punjab or Lahore that shows a swastika with twin concentric circles is believed to be in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, but at the time of writing a reference number is not available.

The contemporary wooden scabbard is covered with ornately tooled black leather and is fitted with a decorated brass chape.

A *sosun patah* of some importance is illustrated by Robert Elgood in his book on the Jaipur Royal collection, *Arms & Armour at the Jaipur Court* (2015), p.110–113, no.78. The sword's extensive inscriptions suggest that it belonged to Mughal Emperor of India, Arungzeb (1618-1707), who gave it to a court official by the name of Hamiduddin Khan.

12

VIETNAMESE 'BABAO' (EIGHT TREASURES) PROCESSIONAL STANDARD

Vietnam
19th Century

Overall 470 mm
(standard only)

This bronze 'Babao' processional standard is from Vietnam and dates to the mid-to-late 19th century. Its name is derived from the fact that these standards usually depict one of the eight precious things in Buddhism, also known as the eight treasures, or 'Babao' in Chinese. Similar examples are illustrated in line drawings on at least six occasions in Volume Two of the 1906 book by Henri Oger, *Technique du People Annamite*[12] *(Mechanics and Crafts of the Annamites)*. Each of the polearms illustrated are labelled Babao 八寶 (eight treasures) followed by what they are depicting—for example, a conch shell (Buddha's thoughts). In the third volume of the same book the author illustrates a traditional procession where three such polearms are carried in front of a palanquin and also labelled Babao.

This polearm probably depicts musical gongs: a ministerial emblem and a symbol of a just and upstanding life. A double-edged sword extends from the mouth of a horned and bearded dragon, the sword having a central disc in the shape of a stylised coin intended to represent wealth. Two large discs, chased identically on both sides into eight segments, are decorated in alternating textures. A central, raised area is decorated with a flower and a key pattern around the circumference. The wheels probably represent drums or gongs (Chinese 'lo'), with bulbously tipped drum-sticks attached. Further brass attachments fashioned as streaming ribbons add to the attractive and striking overall effect this polearm would have achieved when held aloft in a Vietnamese procession. It is mounted on a contemporary black base, red pole and copper collar.

References

[12] The Annamites are the people of the French protectorate Annam (1883–1948) which encompassed the central region of Vietnam. Before the protectorate's establishment the name Annam was used in the West to refer to Vietnam as a whole.

13

CHINESE MUSKET

China, Qing Dynasty
19th Century

Overall 1280 mm

The Yongzheng Emperor decreed in 1727 that "The Imperial Army's standard-issue musket (niaoqiang—literally, 'bird-spear') is capable of penetrating armour with sharp projectiles. It is most convenient. On the flat terrains of the interior provinces, the bow and arrow are to be used. In the coastal and border provinces, with their high mountains and dense provinces, the musket is to be used. In the interior provinces, every thousand soldiers are to be given three hundred muskets. In the coastal and border provinces, every thousand soldiers are to be given four hundred muskets."

Lianming, in his article *An Overview of Qing-Dynasty Guns*[13], states that in some strategically important provinces, the numbers of muskets and soldiers even reached parity—evidence of the importance of firearms to Qing rulers.

This example is of typical Qing form, having a slightly curved wooden stock, and a long iron barrel with flared muzzle set with front and rear sights. The stock has two belt rings (one being a later replacement) for attaching a shoulder sling.

To fire the gun the barrel was first loaded with gunpowder and a lead ball was rammed tightly on top using a ramrod. The pan was then primed with gunpowder. Next, a match (a thin rope previously soaked with saltpeter, then dried) was placed in the match holder. The end of this match was lit, which then smouldered until it was lowered into the pan by squeezing the trigger. The match then lit the priming charge, which in turn ignited the main charge situated in the breech via the touch hole. As the gunpowder burned instantly (exploded) a huge volume of gas was produced which fired the lead ball from the barrel. The original leather match cover is still attached to the stock, and is testimony to the high state of preservation of this musket, the bright red cinnabar lacquer being a striking feature of this rare survivor from Chinese military history.

References

[13] Lianming (Sotheby's catalogue: Supreme Number One: A superb imperial matchlock musket, 2016), An Overview of Qing-Dynasty Guns, p.29.

14

QING IMPERIAL QUIVER

China, Qing Dynasty
19th Century

Overall 235 mm

This rare Qing Dynasty Imperial Guard's quiver and archer's belt is covered in maroon velvet with applied gilt bronze mounts, attached to a red and blue archer's belt with similar mounts. In addition to the main pocket, the quiver has two rear, hinged pockets; and another pocket wrapped around the two hinged pockets. These hold extra or specialised arrows. Three large, stylised Chinese *shòu* 寿 (longevity) symbols sit prominently on the front in the position where on earlier quivers three slots would be present for the placement of the additional arrows. Three attractive 19th century hunting arrows give the quiver context. They have broad, curving steel heads and barbs at either side to prevent the arrow falling out of the prey, and they sit in the main pocket separated by the original pine needles.

An important quiver of matching adornment and similar form is in the Brooklyn Museum (acc. no.34.1386a-f)[14] as part of a full costume. The only significant difference between these two quivers is that the textile covering on the Brooklyn Museum's example is what is known as *suozijia*— a silk brocade with a pattern of interlocking Ys (in imitation of archaic armour) which is usually reserved for Qing princely ranks only.

A beautiful painting[15] of Qinglong Emperor in ceremonial armour and on horseback, dated to 1739 or 1758 and painted by Jesuit missionary Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), gives us context for this type of quiver and the Manchu tradition of its use. The Emperor wears the quiver on his right hip, presumably secured by a belt, with the arrows facing backwards.

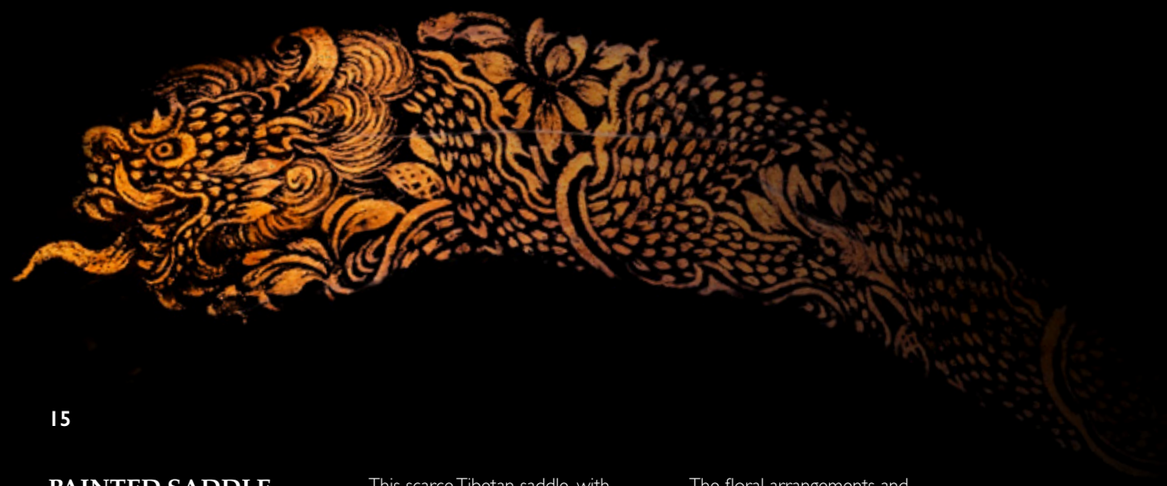
We can see the quiver, like ours, is wedge shaped, has a main pocket and three small, rear pockets that contain two distinctive arrows with black-and-white fletchings—signifying them to be whistling arrows. The main compartment contains seven arrows with feathers of the spotted argus: a large pheasant native to the jungles of Malaysia. These feathers are described in imperial regulations as phoenix feathers.[16]

References

[14] https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/38760

[15] Rawski and Rawson, China: The Three Emperors, 2005, p.166, fig.65.

[16] https://debtelin.nl/archery/the-qianlong-emperor-in-ceremonial-armor-on-horseback



15

PAINTED SADDLE

Tibet
15th – 17th Century

This scarce Tibetan saddle, with its highly decorative gilded and varnished leather panels, is attached to a wooden frame called a saddletree. The front plate (the pommel) and the rear plate (the cantle) are both arch-shaped and connected by a pair of sideboards that have end-board extensions. These extensions are decorated with en-suite leather varnished panels. For strength, these panels are bordered with iron frames chased with gold and silver foliate scrollwork in a typical Tibetan fashion. The largest panel, the pommel, consists of an outer leather area with an iron trim and a central, raised rib. A smaller leather section sits below this, bordered top and bottom with further iron arches. The cantle is of similar construction, but has a single piece of leather with a raised central rib—it too is bordered with wide, iron arches.

Dense sprays of lush, leafy stems and blossoms frame a central, flaming wish-fulfilling jewel that sits on a lotus base and is flanked by a pair of Makara dragons. All is beautifully, expertly painted in gold and set against a red background. The cantle also has the same decoration and, in my opinion, shows an even better pair of dragons, done so expertly it would rival any figural painting executed on Tibetan leather armour.

The floral arrangements and generally naturalistic style of painting are similar to a 17th century Tibetan wooden box from a private collection that is illustrated in the book *Wooden Wonders: Tibetan Furniture in Secular and Religious Life*.[17]

The collection of Tibetan leather armour in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and those published in Don La Rocca's 2006 book *Warriors of the Himalayas* cannot be overlooked as this saddle shows the same themes and patterns. La Rocca[18] explains that the lacquer-like effect appears to consist of a base layer or layers of pigmented shellac, with the gold designs in gold leaf, and then a further layer of shellac upon which the details are painted in fine black lines, finally to be complemented by a coat of tung oil glaze.

References

[17] Kamansky, Wooden Wonders: Tibetan Furniture in Secular and Religious Life, 2004, p.64, cat.no.241.

[18] La Rocca, Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armour of Tibet, 2006, P.105, cat.no.30.

16

HORSE CRUPPER

Tibet
19th Century

Overall 720 mm

Nomadic tribes take great pride in their horses and horsemanship—for example the Nihangs (nomadic Sikhs) referred to their horses as 'Jaan-bhai' which may be translated as 'life-brothers'. The importance Tibetans place on equestrian life is demonstrated by the elaborate and highly crafted equipment produced and now preserved in museums and private collections. This crupper, a strap buckled to the back of a saddle and looped under a horse's tail to prevent the saddle or harness from slipping forward, is no exception.

At the centre sits a prominent circular boss of pierced and gilded iron with a central golden wheel or *dharmachakra*. From this boss four iron rings project in an X pattern which are then riveted to four leather straps with blue, woven textile coverings. The straps are mounted with eight rectangular plaques each of pierced and gilded iron. The lower pair of straps is securely mounted with two heavy iron rings at the ends which would have taken a padded leather band to sit under the horse's tail. The rectangular panels and central boss are all pierced with symmetrical bifurcating scrolls; the iron rings being chased and gilded with the same scroll design but in a larger format on an undecorated iron surface, which creates a pleasing effect.

A relevant article on saddle and tack, stirrups and bridles is in the 2006 book by Don La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armour of Tibet*, p.214.

The object is mounted in a large X shape on a contemporary metal stand.

17

BRIDLE ELEMENTS

Tibet
Late 19th – Early
20th Century

L-Shape 147 mm
Square 40 mm

These two highly unusual iron elements are from a Tibetan horse bridle. The largest piece is a T-shaped plaque which would sit on the junction of the headstall straps. It depicts a large dragon (a common theme in Tibetan ironwork) and a unicorn (Tib. bse ru). The depiction of the unicorn in this application is highly unusual, and the pony-like stature of the animal suggests it is inspired by a typical Tibetan horse known as a Nangchen horse—a small breed native to the Kham region and thought to have been thoroughbred since the 9th century. They became known to the western world as late as 1994 due to the exploration of French anthropologist Michel Peissel[19]. Powerful and fast, they are said to contain no ancestry from any of the common sources of other Tibetan pony breeds, nor Mongolian, Arabian or Turkish horse blood.[20]

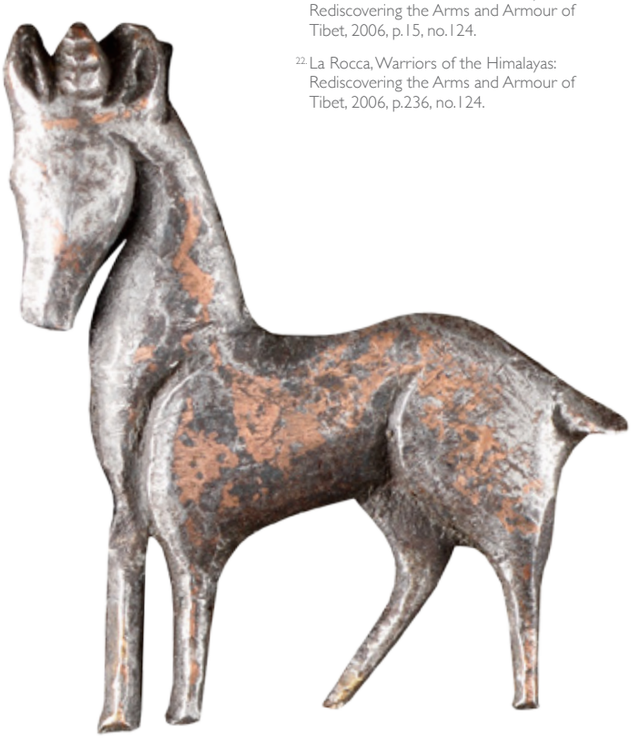
The smaller square element was probably used at the end of one of the straps and depicts a bird with its head facing backwards. It is likely a heron, with a characteristic head-crest.

The bifurcating scrolls which provide background decorations for both elements are used widely on Tibetan ironwork and provide a useful tool for dating. The larger symmetrical scrolls we see here are indicative of 19th and 20th century production, although the overlapping that can be seen is a slightly earlier trait. In addition to these findings, the unusual depictions of animals help us place the object's date in the later centuries, when craftsmen began to break earlier boundaries.

The traces of copper on the surface give us our final clue to dating the object, and they are an indication that the pieces were once gilded. La Rocca[21] explains that mercury gilding (also called fire gilding) is a technique used for applying gold to silver, bronze or copper alloys. However, La Rocca observes that it does not appear to have been used on Tibetan objects made of iron until the late 19th or early 20th century. Mercury gilding is executed with a paste (amalgam) made from gold and mercury. This is applied to a ground that has been coated with a thin layer of copper or copper sulphate.

The work is then fired, which drives off the mercury, and the fine layer of gold remaining is then burnished. The use of such plaques and elements can be seen on a bridle in the Metropolitan Museum which is also dated to the 19th or 20th century: acc.no.2003.230.1-.3a-e.[22]

These bridle elements are mounted on a contemporary Perspex stand.



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[19] https://web.archive.org/web/20050318035422/http://www.time.com/time/international/1995/951127/nature.html

[20] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nangchen_horse

[21] La Rocca, Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armour of Tibet, 2006, p.15, no.124.

[22] La Rocca, Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armour of Tibet, 2006, p.236, no.124.

18

SHIELD

Tibet
14th – 16th Century

Diameter 850 mm

This large, dome-shaped cane shield from Tibet has a 19th century Buddhist mirror at its centre. The outer surface of the shield has black painted diamonds set against a red background. Such shields are shown in a photograph of armoured cavalrymen in Tibet taken circa 1903–4 (see Waddell, Lhasa and its Mysteries, 1906, facing p.172). Another such shield is photographed hanging on a column in Drepung monastery, Tibet. The photograph was taken by Steven Kossak, 2001, (see La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armour of Tibet*, 2006, p.13, fig.14).

Mirrors, (me-long in Tibetan,) such as the one applied to this shield, play an important role in Tibetan Buddhist ritual. They are used in the consecration of thangka paintings and, in this case, have been mounted on shields perhaps to be hung in the chapels of a protective deity (gongkhang), where arms and armour were often displayed as votive objects.

The iron hooks at the top of the shield and the lack of hand grips on the back are further confirmation of this theory. The mirror is of typical construction, with a slightly convex central iron disc which acts as the 'mirror'. This is surrounded by an elaborate applied copper border embossed with complex scrollwork on a stippled background, richly gilded with some losses to highlights.

This shield comes from the same collection as the four-mirror armour published in an earlier catalogue.[23]

References

[23] Singh, *Arms & Armour from the East*, 2016, p.79, no.33.

19

FOREARM GUARD

Tibet
15th – 16th Century

Formed from a single piece of hardened leather, this scarce Tibetan guard would have been for protecting the left forearm. The small group of surviving examples are all for the left arm, and they were unlikely to have been made in pairs. A similar example in the Metropolitan Museum is illustrated by La Rocca in *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armour of Tibet*, 2006, p.118, cat. no.35. Another, sold by myself, is illustrated in *Arms and Armour from the East*, 2016, p.84, cat. no.34.

The surface was lacquered and coated with tung oil, which has hardened and subsequently crazed. Such craquelure is often found on Tibetan lacquered objects.

Five vertical iron straps are riveted to the leather, each formed with an integral diamond or half-diamond-shaped panel that is pierced with stylised clouds and tipped with an arrowhead-shaped finial. The central strap is slightly larger than the adjoining ones and incorporates the largest panel. The leather edge is strengthened by means of an applied iron border (with a small area missing) which, like the straps, is chased with single lines highlighting the design. The inside of the guard has a good texture and patina. A single leather lace holds the two edges together to form a cuff.

These straps compare to the iron fittings on a very fine Tantric door, dating from the 16th to the 18th century (illustrated by Kamansky and Hayward (2004), fig.126, p.307). The diamond-shaped openwork cartouches on the door, and on other similar armguards, are probably from the same workshop. Kamansky and Hayward cite a similar door to the one they illustrate as being located in Nechung, the traditional seat of the State Oracle in Lhasa. This might provide some context for our forearm guard and also give us an indication of the high status of the artist that produced this pierced ironwork.

20

EARLY HELMET

Tibet
14th – 17th Century

Bowl Diameter 220 mm

A six-plate helmet constructed from slightly convex and arched iron plates. The plates are held together by an internal iron strip and an external strip of copper alloy which are all riveted together with iron pins. Some of the pins pass through decorative conical silver rivet-heads. The copper alloy strips have pronounced median ridges and characteristic triangular tabs which act as fixing points. Each iron plate has a horizontal band of copper alloy at its base; and at its apex, a wider copper alloy plate. The helmet is surmounted by an iron plume socket with a lozenge-shaped knop sometimes said to derive from the shape of a stupa.

The copper alloy parts are thought to be used to reinforce the helmet and provide decoration. They are engraved throughout with multiple crescent shapes upon the upper and lower bands, and are finely scalloped along the edges.

The helmet is marked twice. The first marking is deeply engraved on one of the iron plates, and is the number 235 in Tibetan numerals—almost certainly an inventory number. The second marking is inlaid in gold on the plume holder and comprises a set of three characters of Old Permic script (Abur) which form the word *gairyeri* (gyei). Old Permic was devised in 1372 by the Russian missionary St Stephen of Perm, and was superseded by Cyrillic in the 17th century. The meaning of the inlaid word has not been ascertained.

This helmet is of highly unusual form and bears a striking resemblance to an eight-plate helmet in the Metropolitan Museum (acc. no.2002.226) which has been dated to 8th–10th century. The Met's example is illustrated in the book *Warriors of the Himalayas* by Donald J. La Rocca[24], in which La Rocca states that the Met's example is possibly the earliest piece of metal armour with clearly distinguishable Tibetan features.

The use of slim plates, each with a raised medial ridge and each with cusped edges and all using rivets with prominent dome-shaped heads to join the plates on multi-plate helmets, can be seen in an early helmet from Nineveh dated to the 3rd century AD, which is in the British Museum and is illustrated by Robinson[25]. The relationship between recognisably Tibetan helmets and the example from Nineveh speaks loudly of an unbroken tradition continuing for more than 1,500 years, and once more confirms Tibet as being the most outstanding source of extraordinary objects.

References

[24] La Rocca, Warriors of the Himalayas, Rediscovering the Arms and Armour of Tibet, 2006, p.68, cat.no.8.

[25] Robinson, Oriental Armour, 1967, p.19, plate IA.

21

SIXTEEN-PLATE HELMET

Tibet
15th – 16th Century

Bowl Diameter 235 mm

This helmet bowl comprises sixteen plates, with eight outer plates overlapping eight inner plates in an over-and-under pattern. The plates are secured by means of iron rivets with dome-shaped heads. This example has outer plates with cusps which are less pronounced than those normally encountered (see British Museum acc.no.1880-725[26] and Runjeet Singh[27]). Both examples quoted have outer plates with cusps that almost touch those of the adjacent plate.

The inner and outer plates each have a pronounced medial ridge, giving the impression of the helmet having many more plates than it does. The bowl is surmounted by a plume socket with a double knop, and the interior of the helmet has two partly detached brackets at opposite sides, presumably for securing ear and neck defences.

References

[26] La Rocca, Warriors of the Himalayas, Rediscovering the Arms and Armour of Tibet, 2006, p.58, cat.no.3.

[27] Singh, Arms & Armour from the East, 2016, p.97, no.39.

22

EIGHT-PLATE HELMET

Tibet
16th – 17th Century

Bowl Diameter 220 mm

This helmet bowl comprises eight plates, four outer and four inner. The plates are held together in an alternating over-and-under arrangement by means of iron rivets with large conical heads. The outer plates have a raised median ridge, which is a defining feature of a group of multi-plate Tibetan helmets which includes this example. The bowl is surmounted by a plume socket, whilst the brim is decorated with strips of brass, which cover a series of holes which are presumably intended for attaching lamellae defences for the neck and cheeks.

A similar Tibetan helmet is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and is illustrated by La Rocca (2006), see cat.no.7, p.66. The V&A's example can be traced to the Tibetan fortress of Phari Jong, which was occupied by the British without a fight on December 20, 1903, during the Younghusband Expedition.

23

RARE HELMET

China
Late 16th Century

Bowl Diameter 210 mm

A fine and rare helmet, the bowl is made from two polished iron plates joined vertically by iron strips. The brim is fitted with a brow plate and, above this, a short peak. The bowl is surmounted by an inverted cup-shaped mount with a tall socket for a pennant. The applied helmet fittings are thickly damascened with gold and silver on a background patinated for contrast. The decoration has a strong Buddhist theme, and includes repeated use of vajra symbols which the owner doubtless hoped would impart impenetrability and indestructibility to the helmet.

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VIETNAMESE 'BABAO'
(EIGHT TREASURES)
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