



ICONIC

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INTRODUCTION

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Asian Art in London and to mark the occasion I wanted to put on an exhibition of some importance. Entitled ICONIC, it will showcase highly desirable pieces that offer the viewer important inscriptions, symbols and markings—all representative in their own ways.

These pieces have been sourced from all over the West and, in many cases, have come from collections that have been hidden away for many decades. It is my great pleasure to bring such items to light once more and I explore many theories regarding these items within their descriptions. Some offer opportunities for further research and perhaps their new owners might enjoy continuing where I have left off.

The gallery exhibition which this e-catalogue accompanies runs from the 2nd of November to the 11th and takes place at 6 Ryder Street, London. It has been designed by the talented London architect Augustus Brown and I'm excited to say that this is probably my most ambitious gallery show yet. I hope to push the boundaries of presentation and display these significant, beautiful items in ways that I feel they deserve.

Lastly, as per tradition, and with great sincerity, I would like to offer my appreciation to the numerous colleagues and friends who have contributed to the research and production of this publication and its accompanying exhibition. I also thank my family for their endless love, patience and support.



I

GOLD JAMBIYAARABIA, MEDINA
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 320 MM

Weighty and richly decorated, this Assib jambiya is made in the Meccan style and, importantly, it is almost identical to two daggers which were famously worn by that eminent figure of British history, Lawrence of Arabia.¹

The I-shaped grip, typical of this weapon-type, is made of silver and has been generously gilded. It has two rosette-shaped buttons with pronounced central hemispheres, set against elegantly engraved foliate scrolls; with the rear showing a scaled pattern. The grip concludes with an attractive domed boss at each end of the pommel's two tips. The scabbard's design is in keeping with the above and presents a series of beaded bands that border a complex, beautiful arrangement of openwork motifs. Eyelets on either side provide the means to attach the jambiya to a belt while a diagonal band bisects the scabbard's front. Above this, a small inscription in Arabic reads:

عمل عبد [أ] لله روخان (؟)

"Work of 'Abd Allah Rukhan (Ruhan?)."

عمل عبد لله روخان

The scabbard's mouth is covered in maroon velvet, ensuring a quiet and elegant drawing and sheathing of the dagger. (The same velvet is visible through some of the pierced work above the diagonal band.) The scabbard's tip sweeps gracefully upwards until it terminates in a large, striated thumb, or pommel.

The blade itself is forged from high quality wootz steel—a rare feature—and one that further indicates that this dagger was made for an important man with refined tastes. Alexander² describes a Meccan dagger in the Metropolitan Museum's collection (31.35.1a-c) that is a very close relative to our example—it is likely that both were made in the same workshop.

Provenance

Private American collection.

References

¹ Elgood, *The Arms and Armour of Arabia: In the 18th–19th and 20th Centuries*, 1994, p.73, no.9.7 and no.9.9.

² Alexander (contributions by Pyhrr and Kwiatkowski), *Islamic Arms and Armor in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2015, p.226, no.91.



2

BELTED JAMBIYA

SANA'A, YEMEN
19TH – 20TH CENTURY

BELT 270 MM
DAGGER 270 MM



Originating from Sana'a, Yemen, this splendidly ornamented jambiya dates from the late 19th or early 20th century and was probably made in the Jewish quarter known as Qaa'al-Yahud (or simply Qaa)³. It boasts a higher quality than most, with the wooden scabbard finished with a large iron *thouma* that is decorated with silver and gold. The broad leather belt is lavishly adorned too, being stitched with gold and silver thread—the same precious materials used to decorate its iron mounts.

Both the purse-shaped mount on the belt and the scabbard's *thouma* have pierced borders of beautiful Arabic calligraphy, and around the belt-mount there is a hemistich from the *Qasidat al-Burda* of al-Busiri (d. 1294):

و من تكن برسول الله نصرته
ان تلقه الاسد في آجامها تجم

*"Whoever has the assistance of the Prophet of God,
If the lion should encounter him in the jungle, it will be meek before him."*

On the scabbard there are verses attributed to the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, Hamza ibn 'Abd al-Mutallib:

و احمد مصطفى فينا مطاع
فلا تغشوه بالقول العنيف

فلا والله نسلمه لقوم
ولما نقض فيهم بالسيوف

*"Since Ahmad Mustafa is obeyed among us,
Do not defame him with violent speech,
For, by God, we shall not hand him over to any people,
Until we have first perforated them with our swords."*

The dagger is mounted on the inside of the belt and this was typical of these daggers and the way the males in Yemen wore them. The hilt is of horn, decorated with a series of silver nails, a feature found on earlier jambiyas from Sana'a, such as one now in the Nationalmuseum, Copenhagen⁴ and purchased by the Danish orientalist Niebuhr in 1763. The blade itself is of the typically wide form associated with Yemeni examples, and has a raised central rib.

Provenance

European art market.

References

³ Elgood, *The Arms and Armour of Arabia*, 1994, p.88.

⁴ Elgood, *The Arms and Armour of Arabia*, 1994, p.87, fig.9.36.





3

BEDOK CHOPPER

JAVA

19TH OR 20TH CENTURY

OVERALL 300 MM

This chopping tool is known as a bedok and comes to us from Java. It is likely to be derived from that traditional Indonesian machete-sword called the golok. Van Zonneveld includes two examples of the bedok in his important work *Traditional Weapons of the Indonesian Archipelago* (see p.24, nos.70 and 71), describing them with the term bendo—an old classification widely thought to be inaccurate now.

This example, perhaps the finest I have seen, has a horn handle carved in the form of a bird's head and is in the manner of many wooden goloks originating from Tijipatjing, a known centre of production in the West of Java. The bird's upper beak whorls inward to form a curlicue while layered feathers cover the handle's rear. The short, wide-bellied blade has been manufactured to a high standard, with a temper line running the length of its edge. A wide fuller sits on each side near the spine and provides a background for Arabic inscriptions that are wonderfully executed and probably talismanic in nature:

SIDE A

(possibly to be read from the bottom upwards):

و المغرب (؟) لذاته و صفاته و افعاله و قواته و سلامه
اللهم (؟) ان دخل ... سليما و ملك سليمان من المشرق

"O God (?), indeed he entered... safely and King Solomon (Sulayman) from the East and the West (?), in his essence, attributes, deeds, powers and well-being."

SIDE B

(again, possibly to be read from the bottom upwards):

و جبرائيل و ميخائيل و اسرافيل و عزرائيل و ملك سليمان
من المشرق و المغرب ... و ريحا و غماما

"From the East and the West... a wind and a cloud, and Gabriel (Jibra'il) and Michael (Mikha'il) and Israfil and 'Azra'il and King Solomon."

The scabbard has an ebony throat-piece with a carefully chased lower border; and this sits against a main body that is made of red-brown wood with white-metal mounts. A belt hook projects from one side.

With such substantial and practical properties married to a design of high elegance, it is likely that this piece was made for somebody of high regard in Javanese culture.

Provenance

UK art market.



4

NAYAK DAGGER BLADE

MADURAI, INDIA
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 250 MM

This important dagger blade was probably made for Thirumalai Nayak who, from 1623 to 1659 ruled the ancient city of Madurai on the Vaigai River in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Two other daggers made for the Nayak ruler are known. One was sold by Spink of London and published in their 1986 catalogue Octagon (later to be sold by Simon Ray—see his book *Indian and Islamic Works of Art*, 2011, p.40); while the other was published in the important 2004 work by Robert Elgood, *Hindu Arms and Ritual* (p.174, nos.16 and 23) and sold by Sotheby's of New York, 24th September 1997. Elgood commented that at the time of writing his example was the only one known to him.

The connection to the Nayak ruler was established by the re-discovery of the Spink dagger (and its provenance) by Ray. Both examples mentioned are almost identical, and have intricately carved ivory handles. The handle of our blade has been lost but this too would probably have been made from ivory, although the shape and mounting must have been different due to the ricasso's form. It is possible that the hilt was broken but the blade preserved because of its fine workmanship and importance.

The central motif on the blade is a form of yali or vyala—a fabulous lion-faced beast or leogryph, and a symbol of bravery associated with great warriors and kings. The beast crouches at the blade's base, facing the tip, its mouth gaping beneath a long, curling nose. The winged body beckons the eye along the undulating tail that meanders beautifully towards the tip in a way the birds on the other Nayak daggers do not. All three of these blades share enough commonalities to suggest they were made by the same hand or workshop: the cross-hatched wings, the scaled bodies, the positions of the birds—they are all the same.

It is likely that this blade was made to be worn during less formal events, and could have been presented to a close family member of the king. Thirumalai Nayak was a patron of fine arts and architecture, and a painted portrait statue, with his queens, is illustrated in Vidya Dehejia's *Indian Art* (1997, p.241, fig.161).

Provenance

Private London collection.







5

TANJORE KATAR

SOUTH INDIA
EARLY 17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 520 MM

This elaborate South Indian katar push-dagger comes from a celebrated group of closely-related katars in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York—see Robert Elgood’s *Hindu Arms and Ritual*⁵ for further examples. The steel hilt is fitted with an imported European estoc (or tuck) sword blade that is held firmly in place by twin, reinforcing plates of elegant design. The blade makes this a slightly more unusual variant as most others employed classical European rapier blades instead. Estocs were specialised weapons with long, stiff blades that were sharpened only at the point—this giving them an improved capacity to endure the great forces necessary to pierce an opponent’s armour.

While gripping the central, bulbous handles, the side bars—which both taper to graceful, cusped ends—would have given some protection to the user’s hand and wrist. The chiselled and pierced forms of decoration that these side bars present are what characterises this particular group. Facing left is a prancing yali with bulging eyes, and flame-lie eyebrows.

His mouth gapes to better bare a set of razor sharp teeth. He proudly shows a fluted neck, pronounced breast and a body that looks spotted like that of a leopard’s. Upon a pair of identical fish he stands: a popular royal symbol in ancient South India. Below the fearsome yali, the side bars are decorated with a repeating pattern of trefoil sprigs, ending in a single inset panel that shows a deeply cut and chased bird, its beak pointing upwards and its wings outstretched. The use of birds is also employed on the underside of the guard, where two opposing parrots perched between borders made of rows of flower garlands.

Provenance
Private European collection.

References
⁵ Elgood, *Hindu Arms and Ritual*, 2004, p. 15, fig. 1.3, pp. 152–161, figs. 15.17–15.37.







6

HOODED KATARSECOND HALF OF THE
16TH CENTURY

OVERALL 620 MM



Sometimes attributed to a larger group of iron katars from the Tanjore Armoury, this hooded katar is a fine example of its type. Unusually, the sculpted hand guard is highlighted by gold koftgari that has been arranged in densely-packed floral patterns, and the reinforcing blade straps are covered in silver sheet. This ornamentation was added at the time of manufacture (many of these hooded katars received such enhancements only later, in the 19th century). The blade has sharp, narrow fullering and is locally-made and this helps us to date the weapon because Elgood⁶ points out that these blades were being replaced by those from cut-down European swords by the closing decades of the 16th century.

The hooded guard is beautifully modelled and takes influence from the Islamic architecture being adopted by the Hindu court of the royal centre in Hampi, in the mid-16th century.

This is particularly evident in the six cusped arches at the base of the guard and in the similar motifs at the top of the side bars. The hand guard sweeps up in elegant fashion, concluding with a gold-highlighted finial in the form of a ferocious *yali* head. This southern Indian mythological creature would have provided a spiritually protective function. The hand-grip is of typical form, with two parallel bars, each with large central spheres.

For a similar example see the Metropolitan Museum, New York, no.36.25.904.

Provenance

Private European collection.

References

⁶ Elgood, *Hindu Arms and Ritual*, 2004, p.145-148.15.37.





7

JEYPORE DAGGER

JEYPORE (JAIPUR), INDIA
1867 – 1912

OVERALL 380 MM

This intriguing Indian dagger of the chillanum type is marked to the Jeypore School of Arts. Robert Elgood in his 2015 book 'Arms and Armour at the Jaipur Court', p.16, explains the school was opened in June 1867 under the directorship of the surgeon and painter William Frederick de Fabeck, and as well as blacksmith's work including arms making other trades were taught including pottery, carpentry, and wood carving.

The blade follows the same elegant re-curved, double-edged and armour piercing design that is redolent of the type's form at the height of its popularity during the 17th century. The blade, however, is heavier and wider than what was generally produced at that time.

This example has a straight grip with a moulded collar; two moustache-shaped pommel arms, and two shorter, lower arms that form the quillons. Each arm has a U-shaped finial and surmounting all is a bulbous pommel. The entire hilt is covered in a repeating floral pattern beautifully rendered in gold koftgari and presenting large flower heads, creeping vines and other intricate foliage. The name Jeypore can be seen within a box on one side, while School of Arts can be read on the other.

The Horniman Museum, London, has a group of seven items⁷ which are attributed to the School of Art in Jeypore—all dated 1894–1912. They are all decorative and made from stone or ceramic materials, with koftgari-decorated metal seemingly a rarer production from the school.

Provenance
UK art market.

References

⁷ <http://www.horniman.ac.uk/collections/browse-our-collections/authority/agent/identifier/agent-8498>



8

MUGHAL KHANJARINDIA
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 360 MM



The pale-coloured jade hilt of this khanjar is exquisitely carved. Gentle, serpentine striations adorn a grip that, at each end, exhibits leaves that bloom into the finely-wrought flowers of the pommel above and guard below. A single ruby cabochon sits in a gold kundan mount in the middle of a carved four-petal flower. The slender, flat, double-edged and typically Mughal blade is of finely watered (wootz) steel, and resides in a wooden scabbard that is covered in maroon velvet (the chape missing). Hales⁸ comments that most jade hilts of this type were not decorated with stones, although occasionally they are found set at the corners. Interestingly, this khanjar hilt shares some of the characteristics of another dagger hilt in this catalogue, a chillanum (see Item 6).

Provenance
American private collection.

References

⁸ Hales, *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour*, 2013, p.23, no.58.





9

DHA DAGGER

BURMA
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 320 MM



This dagger is highly unusual in that it has no carved demon or other type of protective being which many dha include due to the superstitious nature of the Burmese culture. The blade, however, is quite typically wide and straight, and the silver collar is also as expected. Unfortunately, the scabbard is now missing.

The hilt is finely carved from elephant ivory into the form of an elegant lady. It is likely that this figure represents someone of the Burmese court as she sits on her knees in a typical courtly pose. Her left hand holds flowers while in her right there is a fan (or perhaps a pouch). Her face is similar to that of a lady who is believed to be Sita, consort of Lord Rama, and shown carved on a dagger-hilt illustrated by Hales⁹. Her neat hair combed back into a bun, a long pony tail descends below and rests against a hip-length jacket replete with a jewelled collar. Her *lungyi* skirt bears an intricate *acheik* pattern (also shown on the Hales example) which is a distinctive textile motif used only in Burma among the ruling classes, and exported to the Shan states for court ladies there. The photograph *Burmese Beauty* by Felice Beato, which is featured on the cover of the modern Penguin edition of George Orwell's novel *Burmese Days*, shares many similarities with our lady, who is believed to be unexampled in private or public collections.

The only serious attempt at discussing ivory dha handles is a published correspondence from Mr Noel Singer (see the book *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour*, 2013, by Robert Hales, pages 148–158). This type of dagger has been categorised by Western collectors and dealers as Burmese, but Singer states that they are the works of carvers from the Shan states who would travel between Laos, Thailand and Burma. He goes on to explain the correct terminology for these daggers is *dah hmyaung*, and swords: *dah shay*.

Provenance

UK art market.

References

⁹ Hales, *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour*, 2013, p.158, no.387(b).





10

THAI DAGGER

THAILAND
MID-19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 470 MM

A highly unusual knife from mid-19th century Thailand, the wooden hilt is carved in the form of a dragon swallowing (or regurgitating) a European man. This enlarged European head is a real anomaly. With distinctly non-Asian features and a head of long, curly hair he is quite distinctive—what was the thought behind this creation, and who is this man? Certainly, the figure has not been carved merely on a whim: it is masterful work and the artisan has even taken the trouble to depict the man's hands as he tries to escape the jaws of the beast.

The blade is forged from pattern-welded steel and displays an interesting 'bird's-eye' pattern. The hilt's collar and scabbard are both made from silver and engraved with gilded floral and foliate designs that are set against a contrasting black niello background. Sir George Birdwood, who is mentioned as part of Item 27 of this catalogue, proposed the following description for niello:

"Niello is the process and the result of annealing (literally 'blackening' or 'nielloing') or fixing by fusion on a decoratively incised polished metal (usually silver but occasionally gold) surface, an opaque, black (non-mercurial) amalgam of silver, copper and lead."¹⁰

The dragon of the handle shares its form with a more conventional, but still rather scarce, Thai dha sword which has a hilt that is carved from ivory (see Item 11 of this catalogue). A crack brought on by the dagger's age, now stable, can be seen on one side of the grip.

There is little question that this dagger was made for somebody of importance—and certainly not for exportation due to the subject of the hilt. The high-quality gold niello work suggests an owner of Siamese royalty and the subject matter implies it was made at a time when affairs with the West were tense.

One possible candidate for the figure's identity is the Englishman Sir John Bowring. He was an important figure in Siamese relations with the West and was the fourth governor of Hong Kong. Certainly, a painting of him in the National Portrait Gallery, London (ref. NPG-1113)¹¹ bears an uncanny resemblance to our subject, but does history provide a reason for Bowring to be so ill-depicted? It does indeed. In 1855, he visited Siam to negotiate a trade treaty with King Mongkut—a treaty that would end up being one-sided and leaving the Siamese royal family with great resentment.

Of course, this could all be coincidental—a chance likeness—but the figure's physical resemblance to Bowring is genuinely striking: the distinctive and long curly hair (not a common feature in European men); the large, aquiline nose; the thin lips; the well-defined, square jaw.

Finally, an English-made commemorative knife has come to my attention and it adds a further facet to this story. The blade bears a banner-scroll that reads, "Peace & Plenty, Unity & Concord" and "Between Siam and Great Britain 1855". The maker's details are stamped in the blade's corner (Moseley & Son, 17 & 18 New Street, Covent Garden, London) and the carved boxwood hilt is in the form of a scantily-clad lady carrying sheaves of wheat on her head. Perhaps the English knife was presented to the Siamese royal family by Bowring as part of the treaty and they commissioned this rather less amicable version in reply.



Provenance

London art market.

References

¹⁰ Birdwood, George. *Journal of the Society of Arts*; London 48 (Nov 17, 1899): 250.

¹¹ <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait.php?search=ap&npgno=1113&eDate=&lDate=>

¹² https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sir_John_Bowring.jpg









11

THAI SWORD

THAILAND
EARLY–MID 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 540 MM

This sword, or *dha* (correctly termed a *dah shay*), dates to the 19th century. Its long, cylindrical hilt is carved from elephant ivory to depict a dragon of similar style to that of Item 10 of this catalogue. The dragon is finely detailed, the ivory having attained that milky yellow patina that comes from decades of handling. The creature's tongue and teeth are visible within a mouth that snarls below drilled nostrils of the curled snout above. The scaled body fits into a long silver collar that joins the handle to a lengthy, straight blade covered in an intriguing and highly unusual pattern—presumably meant to represent an aesthetic continuation of the dragon's scales. The scabbard is unfortunately missing.

Despite there being two examples of *dha* with dragon hilts within this single catalogue it is actually highly unusual to encounter this form and even the most accomplished *dha* collections do not contain examples.

Provenance
European art market.





12

INDIAN HUNTING SWORD

TRICHINPOLOY,
TAMIL NADU, INDIA
LATE 19TH – EARLY
CIRCA 1860

OVERALL 570 MM

This most unusual Indian hunting sword hails from Trichinpoloy (known as Tiruchirappalli today)—an ancient city in the state of Tamil Nadu that was once a French concession of South India and later one of the most important cities under the British Raj. The sword boasts a rare, opulent and ambitious application of Trichinpoloy silver; the silversmiths having incorporated the 'swami' style of Madras to develop this unique fashion of dense and fine relief work.

Heavily mounted with the silver; the sword features a straight, partially double-edged blade that terminates in a sharp, central point. The cross-guard concludes on each side with a makara head. The lavishly decorated grip shows a variety of interesting subjects, all beautifully rendered. Look for: an elephant dressed for a procession; a large depiction of Saraswati, goddess of music, art and knowledge riding a peacock; the Trichinpoloy hill fort with flag aloft; Shiva as Nataraja; Matsya the fish god as an incantation of Vishnu; and finally Lord Krishna resting on a Nandi cow, playing his flute. Capping the pommel is a further ornamented elephant, striding within an oval frame.

The wooden scabbard is covered in worn green silk. Flowers and foliage provide a backdrop for the flamboyantly decorated silver repoussé that shows Hindu scenes of mythology and the architecture of Trichinpoloy. The scabbard is mounted with a throat-piece decorated with floral patterns, a central V-shaped mount with similar decorations, and a chape with a Trichinpoloy temple in a typical 'Trikula' tiered arrangement on one side and another architectural design on the other (perhaps depicting an inner building with columns either side and steps leading to three arches).

Provenance
American private collection.







13

SIKIN PASANGAN

SUMATRA, ACEH
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 810 MM

This sword is a highly desirable example of its type and boasts numerous inscriptions to the blade. The forked hilt has been profusely carved and presents neatly chequered panels and triangular sections of scrollwork. The blade is chased with Arabic numbers and scripts and inlaid with silver wire. The hilt probably comes from the 19th century, but the blade is conceivably earlier.

At the ricasso, on both sides, there can be seen talismans that contain magic numbers and the words of the *basmalah*. Below the talisman on side A is an inscription, undeciphered, while below the talisman on side B is an Arabic inscription, partly deciphered:

هذا وفق ...

"This is the talisman..."

Also in this area, and along the blade's spine, there is a quotation from the Qur'an:

لن يضروكم الا اذى وان يقاتلوكم يولوكم
/ الادبار ثم لا ينصرون ضربت /
عليهم الذلة اين ما تقفوا الا بحبل من الله
وحبل من الناس و باء و [ا] بغضب من
الله وضربت عليهم السكينة ذلك بأنهم كانوا
يكفرون بايات الله ويقتلون الانبياء
بغير حق ذلك بما عصوا وكانوا يعتدون

"They will do you no harm, barring a trifling annoyance; if they come out to fight you, they will show you their backs, and no help shall they get. Shame is pitched over them (like a tent) wherever they are found, except when under a covenant (of protection) from Allah and from men; they draw on themselves wrath from Allah, and pitched over them is (the tent of) destitution. This because they rejected the Signs of Allah, and slew the prophets in defiance of right; this because they rebelled and transgressed beyond bounds." (Surah III (Al 'Imran), vs. 111-112.) Translation: Abdullah Yusuf Ali, The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation & Commentary (3rd edition), Lahore, 1938.

Three examples of this type of sword are published in probably the most important and widely referred-to book on Indonesian weapons available: Albert van Zonneveld's *Traditional Weapons of the Indonesian Archipelago*, 2001, p. 126. None of the three have blades inscribed in this way.

Provenance
European private collection.

14

PISO SANALENGGAM SWORD

BATAK, NORTH SUMATRA,
INDONESIA
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 650 MM



A wonderful example of its type, this sword is not only a beautifully decorated object but also a highly effective weapon. The handle is carved from buffalo horn and has a bi-furcated pommel with two goose-neck finials. The upper part of the handle is shaped into a 'pistol grip', encouraging the user to naturally grasp the sword in a way that facilitates the cut as well as the thrust. Geometric patterns carved into the handle elevate the level of decoration and aid the wielder's grip. A long, brass collar is finished with intricate wire work. The big, bellied blade is forged from high quality crucible steel and has a very thick spine marked with a single X within parallel lines, its exaggeratedly clipped tip ensures this slashing weapon can also be used for stabbing.

The scabbard is painted with a vivid black and red theme, a shallow valley running down one half and a series of painted triangles on the other. A narrow border of the same wavy line design seen in the grip separates panels of more complex designs on the scabbard, and a carved device, presumably meant to aid in the slinging of the sword, is set upon a large decorative panel of naughts and crosses.

With the practical, high quality properties of the blade and the significant amount of decoration on the scabbard this sword is something of a hybrid and must have been made for a man of high status and competent fighting abilities.

Provenance
UK art market.



OTTOMAN SHAMSHIR

OTTOMAN TURKEY
EARLY 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 960 MM

This Ottoman shamshir is of very fine quality indeed and possesses a wootz steel blade of a rare and exceptional type. Wootz blades are sought after the world over, with the most popular type being Indian and Persian and having the so-called Mohammed's ladder (or *kirk narduban*) pattern, whereby approximately forty (on a sword) linear distortions are visible within the swirling crystalline structure. Only on extremely rare occasions do blades turn up with variations of the Mohammed's ladder pattern—and this is one of those occasions—because this example, probably imported from Persia, shows its ladder's rungs are connected with alternating diagonal lines: a exciting variant not published or known widely. There were none of this kind in the encyclopedic collection of wootz swords owned by Dr Leo Figiel which went to auction in 1998¹³. Figiel, in his 1991 study of wootz entitled *On Damascus Steel*, suggested that the use of a Mohammed's ladder sword during a holy war would ensure entry to paradise. This further explains the high value placed upon these blades when they were made.

This sword's grips were sculpted expertly from rhino horn before being polished and fitted to a wootz steel hilt that is adorned all over with a leafy design picked out with gold inlay. Not to be left out, the scabbard's mounts are also made from wootz, the gold decorations mirroring that found in the hilt. The leather covering, with its steel stitching, is typical of those paired with the Ottoman swords of this period. This is an exquisite, interesting sword in a state of superb preservation.

Provenance
European private collection.

References
¹³ Butterfield & Butterfield, The Dr. Leo S. Figiel Collection of Mogul Arms, 1998.







16

ASSAD'ULLAH TULWAR

BANDANWARA, INDIA
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 970 MM

This superb tulwar has survived the last 400 years well, preserving an excellent condition overall and retaining much of its high-quality gold koftgari. The hilt originates from the north of India while the blade was made in Iran during the Safavid Dynasty era.

The dark, iron hilt is highlighted by generous gold ornamentation with many irises, plants and leaves expertly represented. Across the pommel disc, quillons and langets the decoration is presented in attractive overlaid relief with a small area of old repair. The grip however, and the underside of the pommel disk is gold inlay. The pommel's knop still has its intricate openwork belt loop—a feature so often lost. The style of decoration can be compared to that of another dated to the 17th century from the Jaipur Royal Collection (see Elgood's *Arms & Armour at the Royal Jaipur Court: The Royal Collection*, p.115 no.80). The level of detail and sense of movement found in the flowers is also echoed by another gold-inlaid hilt dated to the 17th century which we can find in the al-Sabah collection (see Keene and Kaoukji's *Treasury of the World*, exhibition catalogue, London, 2001, p.90 nos.7 and 8).

The elegantly sweeping single-edged blade of curves to augment the wielder's cutting power and shows steps within the swirling patterns that denote the use of prized 'Mohammeds ladder' wootz steel, or *kirk narduban*. Two motifs, engraved and then inlaid with gold wire, adorn the blade. The first gives us the smith's name as Assad'ullah Isfahani; the second translates into English as "Slave of [the King of] Trusteeship, 'Abbas'". The blade's spine, near the hilt, is engraved with the number 35 which is perhaps an inventory marking.

A brown scabbard, made from wood and covered in velvet, protects the tulwar. It has finely detailed gilt-copper fittings and metal-thread seams.

A group of daggers from Bandanwara, Rajasthan, is widely known to collectors and has circulated for decades between dealers and collectors in the UK. These daggers bear the same scabbard label to this tulwar which was purchased with a relating tulwar which is offered as the next object in this catalogue. One notable collector of this group was the late Robin Wigington who is best known for accumulating the Tipu Sultan collection, sold at auction by Bonhams, London, in 2015.

In the teardrop cartouche, in Persian:

عمل اسد الله اصفهانی

"Work of Asad Allah Isfahani."

In the diamond-shaped cartouche, in Persian:

بنده شاه ولایت عباس

"Slave of the King of Trusteeship
(i.e. 'Ali), 'Abbas.'"

Provenance

London art market.





عبداللہ
عبداللہ
اصغر شاہ

عبداللہ
عبداللہ
رشدو



17

MANDALA TULWAR

BANDANWARA, INDIA
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 930 MM



This tulwar's pattern-welded single-edged blade begins its curve at its halfway-point before narrowing sharply to form the tip. It is marked with a simple mandala: a spiritual representation of the universe rendered geometrically. Along the sword's spine the number 57 can be read, along with neatly engraved Devanagari script that reads:

"Be peaceful two hundred times, dear lord of the twice-born, marked with the Vedas, earth-shatterer..."

This classically Indian hilt is generously decorated with gold koftgari and finished with pronounced silver lotuses that juxtapose the arabesque patterns surrounding them. These elegant and slightly raised floral decorations are similar to the fittings found on the scabbard of a sword in the Jaipur Royal Collection which Robert Elgood dates to the third quarter of the 19th century (see *Arms & Armour at the Royal Jaipur Court: The Royal Collection*, 2015, no.97, pp.142–143). The Jaipur sword carries a trishul monogram associated with Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh II, who reigned from 1835 to 1880. Another hilt with similar decorations is attributed by Robert Hales to the early 19th century (see *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour: A Lifetime's Passion*, 2013, p.186, no.442).

Complementing the tulwar is a velvet-covered wooden scabbard with koftgari of arabesques and lotuses inlaid into the iron mounts, and seams made up of metal thread.

Provenance

London art market.









18

CHEVRON TULWAR

RAJASTHAN, INDIA
18TH – 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 930 MM



Perhaps the most eye-catching aspect of this tulwar is the complex, curved single-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 Allah. The 'tears' are small ball bearings, captured inside 17 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, but engineers argue that the balls, moved along the channels by momentum, could have shifted more weight to the tip during a cut and made the sword bite more deeply.

The tulwar's characteristic steel hilt is widely accepted to be of Rajput shape. However, recently, it has been more precisely classified as being of the 'Jodhpur type' by the new work of Robert Elgood: *Rajput Arms & Armour: The Rathores & their Armoury at Jodhpur Fort*¹⁴. The angular hourglass-shaped grip is a clue to help the sword's classification. The hilt is heavily decorated with gold-damascened foliage with very little loss of this precious material despite the item's age.

For similar swords, see Robert Hales' *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour*, p. 163, fig. 399; and Butterfield & Butterfield's *The Dr. Leo S. Figiel Collection of Mogul Arms*, lots 2025 and 2029–2031.

Provenance
Private American collection.

References

¹⁴ Elgood, *Rajput Arms & Armour: The Rathores & their Armoury at Jodhpur Fort*, p. 468–471.



19

A 'TIPU' SWORD

MYSORE, INDIA
LATE 18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 920 MM



Tipu Sultan (1750–1799) was the ruler of Mysore until his death at the Siege of Seringapatam—he died while defending his kingdom and gained many admirers for his bravery. The most well-known of these in recent years was the late Robin Wigington of Stratford-upon-Avon who reputedly would fire a small cannon on the River Avon in honour of Tipu's birthday, each year. This sword was probably made for Tipu Sultan and placed for use within his Palace's armoury. The curving blade is single-edged and European in origin with triple, hollow ground fullers towards the spine.

As expected from a sword associated with Tipu Sultan, tigers are a prominent feature. The pommel has a large one with teeth bared and wide eyes, the quillons feature a single small one at each of their tips and there's one at the knuckle-bow's termination, above a series of chevrons. Even the rain-guards (or langets) are formed from a flattened tiger's head on the obverse and a body on the reverse. All are engraved in a similar style, with the familiar bubri pattern of tiger-stripping so closely associated with Tipu throughout. (In fact, he was so fond of the 'bubri tiger' that it is considered to be a royal mark.)

For another example of a bubri-decorated sword please see the 2015 Bonhams auction that re-offered much of the Tipu collection that was originally compiled by Wigington.¹⁵

Provenance
Private English collection.

References

¹⁵ <https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/22813/lot/161/?category=list&length=100&page=2>

20

DHU'L FAQAR SWORD

PROBABLY DECCAN, INDIA
17TH – 18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 970 MM

This is a scarce and iconic sword-type known as a *dhu'l faqar* or *zulfikar* and closely associated with the Prophet Mohammed. Its split tip and serrated edges reflect two different interpretations of the shape of Muhammad's sword. Of note, especially to Sikhs, is that the tenth Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh, is believed to have had a remarkably similar sword which was given to the Maharajah of Malerkotla by the Guru as a mark of gratefulness towards the ruler who refused to have the Guru's sons killed when they were brought before him for that purpose. An image which shows the sword with a straight khanda blade, scalloped at the sides and splitting at the tip is shown in a British Library document entitled *Descriptions and Brij Mohan's Drawings of Indian Arms Collected at Patiala 1904–1905*.

The hilt is of basket or khanda form and has a substantial, faceted stalk ending in a domed pommel and allowing the sword to be wielded with two hands.

The straight, double-edged blade is made of polished steel and flares towards the bifurcated foible. There is a short, reinforced ricasso and then the blade's two edges have alternating smooth and serrated sections, filed most sharply. Each side is engraved along most of its length with two shallow parallel grooves that conclude in bifurcation and emulate the blade's shape. A closely related sword is in the Metropolitan Museum (no.36.25.1508), and published in the book *Islamic Arms and Armour in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*¹⁶—it can also be viewed online on the Museum's website¹⁷.

Provenance

London art market.

References

¹⁶ Alexander/Phyrr/Kwiatkowski, *Islamic Arms and Armour in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2015, p.187, no.71
¹⁷ <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/24324>







21

INDIAN MATCHLOCK PISTOL

RAJASTHAN, INDIA
17TH – 18TH CENTURY

BARREL 235 MM

This finely decorated piece is also a robust one: the hardwood stock, which has developed beautiful, almost translucent red and brown colours, is reinforced by plates of wootz steel, each having ornamented borders with pierced designs. These plates extend on both sides—all the way from the muzzle to pommel, where a dedicated steel cap provides reinforcement should the pistol need to be reversed for use as a club.

The breech section is octagonal in form, becoming cylindrical halfway to the muzzle. Beneath this, a ramrod slides into a long, hidden recess while graceful floral designs, rendered in openwork against a silver ground, embellish the trigger plate.

Near the open pan is a hollow metal cone for holding a match or perhaps for snuffing one out. In the same spot a series of silver chains resides, holding captive various implements necessary for the pistol's operation: a pricker, a pan cover and its retainer.

A sequence of dots have been punched into the steel above the trigger. This seems to read "IBI H.H.BND"—could this possibly be a reference to His Highness Bandanwara or Bundi? See item 22 for a musket with a similar inscription.

This stunning pistol was originally in the collection of Richard Wagner, and published in the 2014 book, *Arms of the Paladins: The Richard R. Wagner Jr. Collection of Fine Eastern Weapons* by Oliver Pinchot, p.86, fig.5-2.





22

INDIAN
MATCHLOCK

RAJASTHAN, INDIA
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 1760 MM

This large Indian matchlock 'toradar' or 'bandook' has a tapering, two-stage sighted steel barrel. Steel side-plates buttressing the breech section are finished by a pair of peacocks shown beneath a floral device—a design frequently found on Rajput muskets. The original pan cover, pricker and steel ramrod are still present, however; later bindings have been added to better reinforce the long barrel. The slightly curved wooden stock is of unusual form, and carved with geometric linear designs. A large panel of carved scales can be seen before the stock terminates in a bone butt-piece.

The right-hand side-plate is marked with a number and "H.H.BND", which is likely an abbreviation for His Highness Bandanwara or Bundi (see Item 21 for a similar marking) and, although the quality of this musket would not suggest it was made for royalty, it still shows elegant embellishments and high standards of manufacture—unusual considering its length, as most similar 'fortress guns' were of very simple form in comparison.

Notes

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 saltpetre, 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.







23

ARABIAN MUSKET

SOUTHERN ARABIA
1885

OVERALL 1570 MM

Of extremely high quality, this matchlock musket shows characteristics associated with Southern Arabia and rivals a similar one believed to be in the Victoria and Albert Museum¹⁸. The Museum's example was presented to King George V in 1911 by the Abdeli Sultan of Lahej, while another in the Royal Collection was presented by Sultan Hessen in 1811¹⁹.

The breech of this musket is covered in panels of decorative silver; two having Arabic inscriptions:

مك (مالك؟) احمد صالح الاسطح
(؟) / ربيع آخر (كذا) سنة ١٣٠٢

This translates into English as:

"Owner (?), Ahmad Salih al-Astah (?).
Rabi' Akhar [sic] year 1302 (January–
February 1885)."

This style of matchlock is sometimes described as Indo-Arabian due to the large, rounded butt which South-Indian (Coorg) muskets adopted due to the influence of many centuries of trade with Arabic merchants visiting the Malabar Coast. Our example's butt is actually a separate piece of wood, attached to the stock and beautifully inlaid with rows of triangular and disc-shaped mother-of-pearl. The stock is also profusely inlaid, this time with silver shapes of varying sizes and designs, while the forend is embellished with alternating brass and mother-of-pearl discs. The twisted Damascus barrel is octagonal in shape and secured to the stock with ornate barrel bands. Two belt rings with a double silver rope can be seen: an extremely rare feature. The matchlock's ignition mechanism is still operational, the flash pan still has its pivoting rain-cover and the original silver-tipped ramrod remains concealed in its place beneath the barrel.

Notes

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 saltpetre, 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.

Provenance

European art market.

References

¹⁸ Elgood, The Arms and Armour of Arabia, 1994, p.42, no's 4.6-4.8.

¹⁹ <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/67043/rifle>





24

LANTAKA CANNON17TH – 18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 1240 MM

This large Indonesian 'lantaka' swivel cannon is made from bronze and would have been used to protect a high status vessel. Cast and chased in low relief, its design is of higher artistic virtue than many lantaka which are often more simply decorated with geometric chevron designs. Here, large and naturalistic foliage can be seen throughout, twin sea serpents lend their forms to provide lifting handles and a foresight made of a seahorse rests atop the flared, crenellated muzzle—all further indications, perhaps, that the original owner was a patron of the arts.

Lantaka were intended for use on merchant vessels travelling the waterways of the Malay Archipelago and this example must have helped to defend a large ship of high position. The sangka (swivel) and corresponding trunnions (projecting lugs on the lower sides of the barrel) enabled the cannon to be located securely into a base or carriage and still be maneuvered laterally as well as longitudinally. A long, pot-shaped cascabel sits at the end.

Provenance

London art market.









25

THEWA MIRROR

INDIA
(PARTABGARH, RAJASTHAN)
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 375 x 245 MM

This tabletop mirror comes from Partabgarh in Rajasthan, India and depicts religious scenes from Hindu dharma, surmounted by an impressive repoussé silver crest. The open-work crest, on a red enamel base, contains two opposing peacocks divided by a floral ornament in a vase. Green glass panels are set in a silver border chased with flowery decorations and surrounding the large mirror. The panels are decorated with the thewa technique, whereby a sheet of delicately pierced and patterned gold foil is fused by the application of heat to the transparent glass below.

The top central panel shows a *trimurti* sculpture within a temple setting, which represents the supreme divinity 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 panels run down each side of the mirror and show Shiva riding on his cow Nandi, and Krishna with his gopis or Radha in the playful poses that one associates with the eight avatar of Vishnu. All set in lush gardens filled with flowers, birds and pagodas. 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 panel with an inscription, flanked by two panels that each showing three female celestial musicians.

The inscription in the lower central panel:

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

Provenance

The 3rd Baron Lord Mark William Ogilvie Birdwood born 23/11/38, died 11/7/15. His great-grandfather was Herbert Mills Birdwood CSI, LLD (1837-1907) who was the brother of Sir George Christopher Molesworth Birdwood KCIE, CSI (1832-1917), keeper of the Indian museum at South Kensington (now part of the V&A), and author of 'The Industrial Arts of India'.

Of note, GC Birdwood²⁰ explains the process of making 'Pertabgarh work', and illustrates a casket with panels of Pertabgarh work from the collection of the Queen (Queen Victoria at the time). It was presented to H.M. the Queen by Maharaja Dalpat Singh of the princely state of Partabgarh, Rajasthan in 1864. It still forms part of the Royal Collection and is currently on loan to the V&A (LOAN:ROYAL.792)²¹, and at the time of writing the box is on display in the South Asia galleries.

References

²⁰ Birdwood, The Industrial Arts of India, 1884, P.218

²¹ <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O155082/writers-box-unknown/>





26

ARCHER'S RINGHYDERABAD(?) INDIA
17TH – 18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 40 MM



This archer's ring is probably forged from desirable wootz steel and is decorated with gold koftgari arranged into the cross-shaped pattern often found on enamel-decorated objects. A silver-gilt archer's ring in the al-Sabah Collection of the Kuwaiti National Museum (LNS 1866 J)²² displays the same pattern as ours does, in an enamel border; and is attributed to Hyderabad.

Archers' rings with an asymmetrical construction (such as this example) were designed to enable archers to release arrows with precision while still protecting the inner sides of their thumbs against impacts from the bow string.

Provenance
UK art market.

References

²² Keene/Kaoukji, *Treasury of the World: Jewelled Arts of India in the Age of the Mughal*, 2001, p.65, no.6.8.





27

INDIAN SUIT OF ARMOUR

BIJAPUR, INDIA
17TH CENTURY

Called a *zereh bagtar*, this is a rare form of Indian armour and was probably produced in the 'Adilshahi capital, Bijapur, sometime in the 17th century. This particular example comes from the armoury at Bikaner, Rajasthan, where the majority of armours had large rectangular plates at the front and rows of small plates at the back—shirts of the type shown here were the exception.

It is constructed of mail and narrow plates and opens completely down the centre with only a short opening up the centre of the back. The mail is composed of solid (forge-welded) and riveted rings, the heaviest and most densely constructed sections being reserved for the sleeves, the ends of which taper to a point. The plate components are arranged into a series of columns and consist of small, overlapping pieces meticulously assembled. These columns narrow slightly towards the bottom and each is separated from its neighbour by rows of mail, with the same arrangement repeated on the back. A pair of larger plates with old repairs evident protects the kidneys.

A Devanagari inscription on the inside of the right 'kidney plate' mentions the name of Maharajah Anup Singh of Bikaner (1669–98) and records the fact that this shirt entered the armoury at Bikaner in Rajasthan when the Maharajah Anup Singh defeated the 'Adilshahi Dynasty at the Siege of Adoni in 1689.

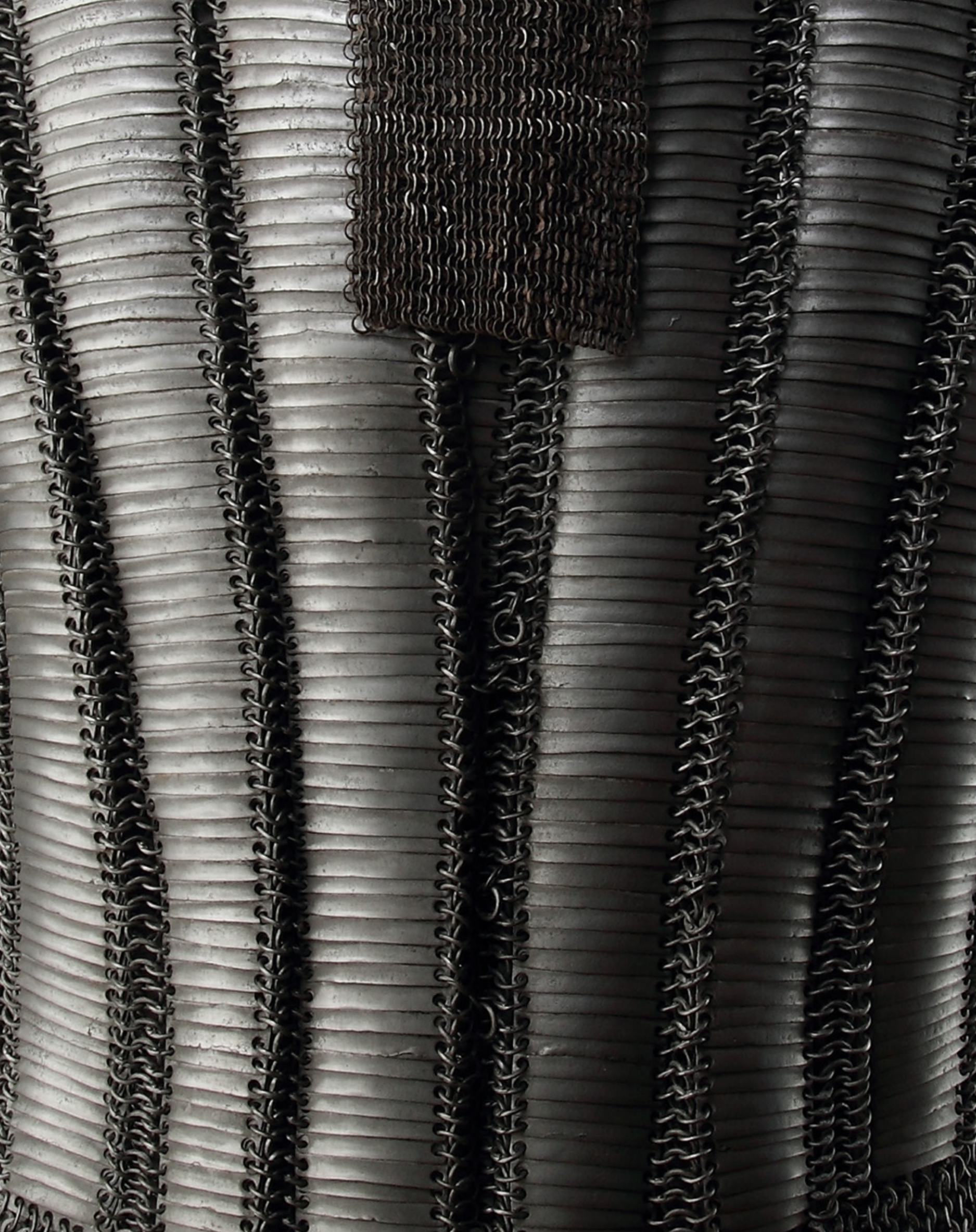
Mounted on a padded mannequin, the armour is complemented by a coif of fine riveted mail that has a frontal, triangular section which can be hooked out of the way to aid the wearer's vision. The coif is surmounted by a disc and tubular plume holder.

Provenance

American art market.

Formerly in the Armoury at Bikaner.





28

MORO SUIT OF ARMOUR WITH HELMET

MINDANAO, PHILIPPINES
19TH CENTURY

With its high standards of manufacture, this striking set of Moro armour was surely made for a man of high rank—perhaps a general. The armour consists of beautifully patinated brass plates attached with rows of mail rings. The main frontal plates present decorative panels of silver that show floral shapes, ten hexafoils and various sea monsters. Two matching latches with protruding studs lock the front together, while the upper back is protected by twelve overlapping plates that are lightly chased with floral designs and assembled in a louvre arrangement. The lower torso is protected by a hanging section of brass mail, a skirt of further plates and a mail trim.

The helmet is of burgonet form, with a two-piece skull surmounted by a tall, openwork comb that shows intricate scrollwork. Above the pair of hinged cheek-pieces (one replaced) more delicate openwork can be seen—the design matching that on the peak and neck defence (although here it exposes only an attached brass underlay, presumably to ensure the helmet is not weakened by such decoration). The base of the skull has 'lining rivets', cast in imitation. Fitted at the front-left, where the peak borders the comb, is a conical plume-holder.

Provenance

Helmet: London art market.

Shirt: Private American collection.









29

TENGPAI
WICKER SHIELD

CHINA
QING DYNASTY
EARLY 19TH CENTURY

A striking Chinese artifact of the Qing Dynasty, this iconic and rare tengpai, or 藤牌 (rattan shield), would have been carried into battle by 'Tigermen'—soldiers who were often colourfully dressed in a striped uniform to match their name.²³

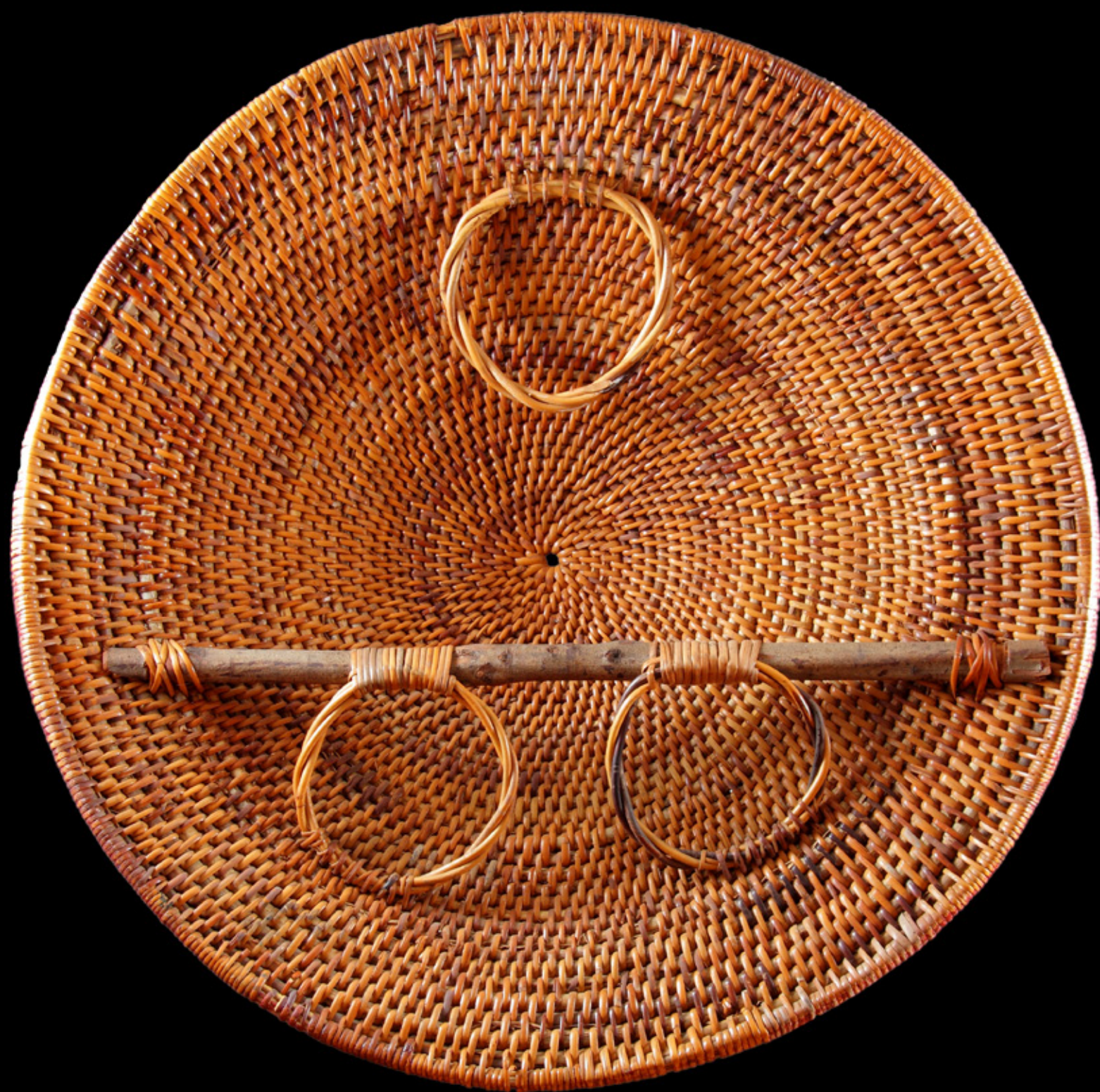
Of a broad, conical shape, the shield is made from a long coil of rattan, each row bound to its neighbours with fine, thin, tightly wrapped rattan strips. The surface is brilliantly painted, and the colourful tiger's face has been designed to roar fiercely at the enemy. The bright red stripes, the black eyebrows and mouth, the whites of the eyes and teeth—all provide a vivid contrast to the brown wicker face. Heath²⁴ suggests that this tiger could in fact be an ogre, a dragon, or another hideous monster; stylistically rendered as a tiger to frighten the enemy more effectively. The forehead is marked with the Chinese *wang* character (王) because the markings on a real tiger's forehead are a very close imitation of it. Meaning king in English, it is a common feature of these items.

A similar shield is in the Qing court collection at the Palace Museum, Beijing, China.²⁵

Provenance
American art market.

References

²³ Heath, *Armies of the Nineteenth Century: Asia – 2: China*, 1998, p58.
²⁴ Heath, *Armies of the Nineteenth Century: Asia – 2: China*, 1998, p51.
²⁵ Beijing, *Armaments and Military Provisions: The Complete Collection of Treasures of the Palace Museum*, 2008, p.264, no.286.





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