

RUNJEET SINGH

ASIAN ARMS & ARMOUR



# ASIAN ARMS & ARMOUR

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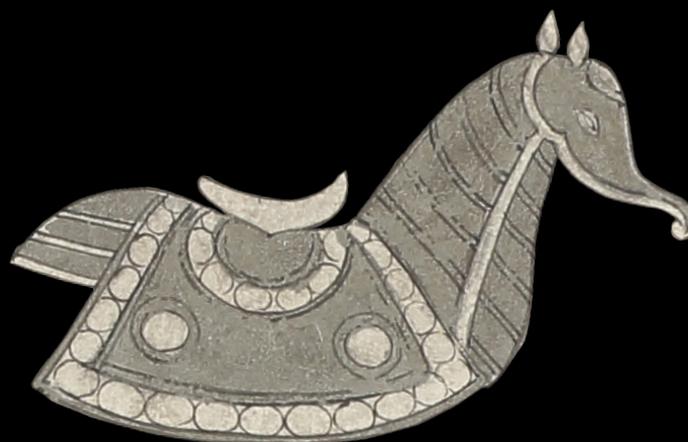


TEFAF  
ONLINE 2020

and on the occasion of Runjeet's new gallery

One Princes Place  
Duke Street  
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London  
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*(by appointment only)*



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**All prices on request**



I

## JADE DAGGER

MUGHAL DOMINIONS, INDIA  
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 360MM  
BLADE 230MM

Formed with a translucent jade hilt of 'pistol-grip' form, this dagger (or *khanjar*) represents a persuasive example of a weapon-type commonly sought after by collectors.

A slightly unfurled lotus – the texture of its petals and stigma picked out with close carving – sits serenely at the centre of the lobed quillon block. This motif is repeated at the pommel, though here the fuller structure of the flower is conveyed, as its long, ridged leaves splay out from the centre and over the medial brim of the hilt.

A fine 'wootz' steel blade of slender section completes the dagger, exhibiting a rich pattern over its surface and recurving gradually over the course of its length before the blade then tapers to a point.

We may compare the present example with another Mughal dagger exhibited by Runjeet Singh Ltd in *Treasures from Asian Armouries - TEFAF 2020* (Cat. No. 4), particularly on account of its similar floral carving.<sup>1</sup>

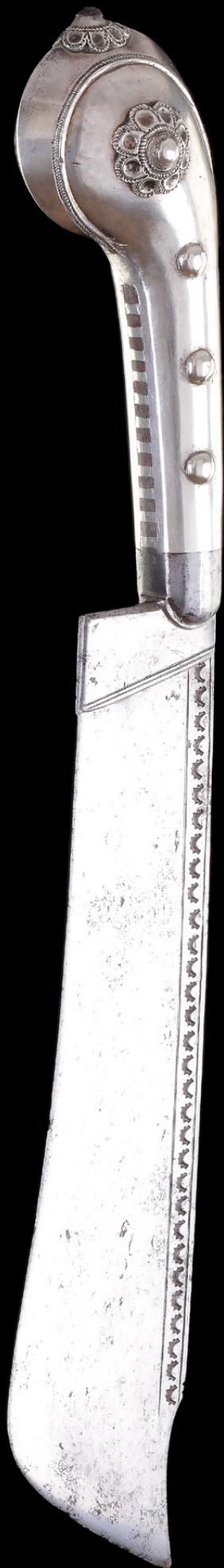
### References

<sup>1</sup> Runjeet Singh, TEFAF: Treasures from Asian Armouries, 2020, pp.16-17, No.4.

[https://www.runjeetsingh.com/inventory/355/armourpiercing\\_jade\\_dagger](https://www.runjeetsingh.com/inventory/355/armourpiercing_jade_dagger)







2

## PINCHANGATTI

COORG, SOUTH-WEST INDIA  
MID-19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 300MM  
BLADE 184MM

Normally referred to as *pinchangatti*, such elegant silver-mounted daggers as this were typically used by the Coorg people of Karnataka in south-west India. And since they often serve as a strong symbol of familial honour within Coorg culture, it is rare that these objects enter the Western art market.

Four small studs dot the silver surface of the hilt: three are placed at equidistant points over the grip; whilst the fourth is set at the centre of the pommel and formed with a beaded frame so as to depict a stylised flowerhead. Further flowers of different forms as well as fine geometric patterning appear over the backstrap and bolster of the hilt.

The blade is broad, single-edged, and clipped towards the point, whilst the scabbard comprises a wooden core covered with silver-sheet mounts including a locket and chape in exceptional condition, the latter formed with a neatly incised bud-shaped finial. An elegant steel suspension chain of two sections is attached to the reverse face of the scabbard and terminates in a beaded plaque with a range of miniature hygienic tools (among them tweezers, knives, and an ear spoon).

A similar dagger was published by Runjeet Singh Ltd in *Iconic: New York 2018 (Cat. No. 6)*,<sup>2</sup> whilst another (Accession Number 2800(1S)), preserved in the collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum, exhibits a hilt near-identical to that of the present piece.<sup>3</sup>

### References

<sup>2</sup> Runjeet Singh Ltd, *Iconic: New York 2018*, pp.22-23, Cat. No. 6 [https://www.runjeetsingh.com/inventory/178/coorg\\_pinchanagatti](https://www.runjeetsingh.com/inventory/178/coorg_pinchanagatti)

<sup>3</sup> <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O450045/dagger-and-sheath-unknown/>



3

## CHAKRAVARTI SHORT-SWORD

DECCAN, SOUTHERN INDIA  
15TH-17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 572MM  
BLADE 465MM



This alluring weapon is known as a *chakravarti* sword. Its unusual form is deeply imbued with both regal and religious symbolism, and as a work of art wonderfully embodies that sought-after merging of elegant form with a persuasive sense of history.

The archaic iron hilt retains large amounts of its original silvering and comprises sloping langets, spherical quillons, a centrally swollen grip, and the tri-spherical pommel which partly characterises such swords. A large cut panel of silvered steel fills the gap between the hilt and blade to reinforce the sword's structure, secured in place by two bolts at the quillons and another two over the langets. This latter pair have been cut to convey stylised flowerheads whose dotted petals pleasingly match the sphere-and-disc motifs that are central to the sword's symbolism.

The steel blade has been forged with a disc-shaped forte including a small semi-circular notch cut near to the hilt (possibly a later modification). Over the remaining course of its length, the blade tapers to a fine point, exhibiting a pronounced medial ridge and leaning gently to one side.

As alluded to above, the unusual forms and features of this exceedingly rare sword represent a complex network of symbols, for which Elgood (2004) provides the most thorough background and explanation. Firstly, the large, disc-shaped forte (or *chakra* forte) is connected closely with the ruling Rayas of the Vijayanagara Empire (circa 1336-1646 A.D.) in southern India, in that this disc shape may symbolise the sun or wheel of time (*kalachakra*), which as Elgood observes, "(...) would tie it to Vishnu, from whom the Rayas claimed descent, by association with his weapon the *chakra* known as *Sudarsana*."<sup>4</sup> For the kings of the Vijayanagara Empire, this *chakra* was, in turn, a powerful symbol of the right to rule. This would symbolically bestow the ruling *Raya* and owner of such a sword with the position of *chakravarti*, the title given to the ancient Indian concept of the Universal Ruler. The Sanskrit words *chakra* and *vartin* translate to "wheel" and "one who turns" respectively, meaning that he who became *chakravarti* would eternally spin the wheel of heaven (*kalachakra*, as above). Functioning in tandem with the powerful iconography of the *chakra* forte is the spherical tri-part pommel, which likely represents the Trimurti (trinity) of the gods Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, who embody the roles of creator, preserver and destroyer respectively.

Elgood concludes his detailed analysis as follows: "Are these swords symbols of kingly power? It seems probable."<sup>5</sup>

Linking such weapons as the present example to contemporary temple sculptures at Kanchipuram and Kumbakonam, as well as appearances of this weapon-type in the Laur-Chand manuscript, Elgood states that such swords must have been produced prior to 1610. A similar pair of swords are published in the Robert Hales collection,<sup>6</sup> and another in *The Hindu Warrior* by Roy Elvis,<sup>7</sup> though very few other examples are known. However, Elgood's discussion of the subject provides illuminating comparanda from various periods of the Vijayanagara Empire.<sup>8</sup>

### Published

Robert Elgood (2004), *Hindu Arms & Ritual: Arms and Armour from India 1400-1865*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, p.123, Fig. 11.24.

Robert Hales (2013), *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour: A Lifetime's Passion*, London, p.71, No. 155.

### References

4. Robert Elgood (2004), *Hindu Arms & Ritual: Arms and Armour from India 1400-1865*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, p.111.
5. *ibid*, p.112.
6. Robert Hales (2013), *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour: A Lifetime's Passion*, London, p.71, No. 154.
7. Roy Elvis (2020), *The Hindu Warrior*, London, Olympia Auctions, p.92, Cat. No. C109.
8. *ibid*, pp.109-126. Thus see figs. 11.1-24.





4

### THREE SPEARHEADS

LEFT AND CENTRE:  
DECCAN, INDIA  
18TH CENTURY

RIGHT:  
RAJASTHAN  
19TH CENTURY

LEFT 425MM  
CENTRE 310MM  
RIGHT 430MM

These spearheads are lavishly decorated throughout with fantastic motifs in gold.

All three of the spearheads are formed with a faceted socket, that of the first spearhead exhibits decorative bands of three-petalled flowerheads set amidst leaved vine stems over the entirety of its socket in gold *koftgari*. A separate, central band comprising a sequence of small dots in gold, when examined closely, leads charmingly into a miniaturised spearhead-shape. The long and slender blade is formed with a pair of shallow fullers which taper into the blade's reinforced, armour-piercing point at approximately halfway along its length.

The second with finely painted bands of curving leaves and minute flecks of gold adorn the cross-hatched surface of the final example's darkened steel socket. This leads into a bifurcated base which has been fitted with a bud-shaped finial and adorned with panels of vines that swirl and stretch over the greater part of the twin arms' lengths. The two blades then

are each formed with a forte of leafy branches thickly painted in gold that each lead into a stylised lotus and spear-shaped panel.

The third being decorated with fine lines of gold that delineate each of the sides. A bulbous moulding with foliate decoration sits just below the base, which has been cleverly formed as a pair of large, open-mouthed *makara* (two further *makara* in miniature appear at either side). The blade is then chiselled at the forte in deep relief with a uniquely detailed lotus flower, its curved leaves and petals neatly incised and so imbuing the artful panel with texture and realism. Sunken twin fullers appear over the greater part of the blade's remaining length at either side of a small, stylised lotus and an engraved medial ridge.

The third example shown at the left within the images may be compared with a spearhead (Cat. No. 15) published by Runjeet Singh Ltd in *Arts des Guerriers d'Orient* (2018), especially with reference to the chiselled unfurling flower visible

at the base of the blade.<sup>9</sup> Another, preserved in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Accession Number 20.151.5), similarly shows this theme at its forte.<sup>10</sup> In its decoration and form, the second and central spearhead of our set is also similar to a piece exhibited by Runjeet Singh Ltd in *The Goddess: Arms and Armour of the Rajputs - London 2018* (Cat. No. 21).<sup>11</sup>

#### References

- <sup>9</sup> [https://www.runjeetsingh.com/inventory/224/spearhead\\_and\\_but](https://www.runjeetsingh.com/inventory/224/spearhead_and_but)
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/22747>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.runjeetsingh.com/inventory/255/trident>







5

## MARATHA ROCKET

MARATHA CONFEDERACY  
(INDIA)  
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 1195MM  
ROCKET 233MM  
DIAMETER 44MM  
WEIGHT 2440G

This exceptionally rare and unusual object is an early kind of rocket that was deployed by a range of Indian armies as early as the 17th century. This example comprises firstly a long blade of Indian manufacture (though it is made in the style of a European rapier – note especially the forte and medial fuller). This is bound at the hilt-end with leather cords to a cylindrical steel case covered with red fabric. A crescent-shaped spike extends from the top-end of the case, whilst at the bottom-end is a short hole or nozzle used to hold the fuse. Gunpowder is kept within the cylindrical casing, so that upon firing, the entire piece would have been launched at great speed into enemy lines, wreaking havoc especially on crowded clusters of infantrymen.<sup>12</sup>

These rockets are found only rarely – perhaps unsurprising given their original function. And others preserved in both the Royal Artillery Museum in Woolwich, London, as well as the Bangalore Museum in India, show similar though ultimately varied forms to the present example.<sup>13</sup>

But how can these discrepancies in form – between the present example and those preserved within museum collections – be explained,

particularly with respect to this rocket's place of manufacture? Though the invention and production of such weapons has consistently been attributed to the Kingdom of Mysore and the forces of Tipu Sultan (1751-1799), both the contemporary literary evidence and the museum comparanda mentioned above strongly suggest that the present piece must possess a different history.

A written source, in this case, is able to provide vital insights as to the origins of our example. During his travels throughout southern and western India, James Forbes, an English bookkeeper, noted of a Maratha military camp as follows: "The war rocket used by the Mahrattas which very often annoyed us is composed of *an iron tube eight or ten inches long and near two inches in diameter. This destructive weapon is sometimes fixed to a rod iron, sometimes to a straight two-edged sword, but most commonly to a strong bamboo cane four or five feet long with an iron spike projecting beyond the tube to this rod or staff, the tube filled with combustible materials (...)*"

This description precisely matches the structure of the present piece, and in tandem with a range of

other sources, confirms the theory proposed by Nidhin G. Olikara – for whose instructive article we are grateful and give thanks – that rockets of this particular form were in fact made and used by the Maratha Confederacy.<sup>15</sup>

### Provenance:

Sir William Farington - Worden Hall, Lancashire, England

### References:

- <sup>12</sup> For further discussion of their use, for example, in the Anglo-Mysore Wars, see: H M Iftakhar Jaim & Jasmine Jaim (2011), "The Decisive Nature of the Indian War Rocket in the Anglo-Mysore Wars of the Eighteenth Century", *Arms & Armour*, 8:2, 131-138.
- <sup>13</sup> The second of the two illustrations that comprise the following item in this catalogue (Cat. No. 10) also depicts a rocket of similar form (the caption reads *bahmna*, which is very close to *bahn*, the traditional word for a rocket or 'fire arrow').
- <sup>14</sup> James Forbes & Eliza R. Montalembert (1834), *Oriental Memoirs: a narrative of seventeen years' residence in India*, London, pp.359-360.
- <sup>15</sup> Nidhin G. Olikara (?), "Changing Timelines: On the discovery of a fine 18th-century Maratha Rocket and its implication on the evolution and use of Rockets" (Forthcoming).







6

## PAINTED BLUNDERBUSS

KASHMIR  
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 534MM  
BARRELL 305MM  
MUZZLE DIAMETER 38MM

The decoration of this unusual 19th-century blunderbuss is spectacular. Polychrome scenes of amber-coloured figures and animals both in repose and in flight are painted over the wooden stock amidst bursting pink leaves and flowerheads whose gold outlines and contours contrast brilliantly against a dark ground of forest-green. A European (possibly French) flintlock mechanism is attached to the stock and adorned with fine lines and foliate patterns in gold *koftgari*, the remaining fixtures – side-plate, butt-cap and trigger-guard – all decorated *en suite*.

A Damascus-steel barrel is then secured to the stock by large domed screws visible on the side-plate, and chiselled at its breech with a symmetrical trellis of splaying leaves and circling vine stems in gold – a decorative scheme repeated at the flared muzzle which is the key characteristic of such firearms.

Another blunderbuss of this type is preserved in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg (Inventory Number 3.O.-5871),<sup>16</sup> showing the same schema and a similar colour palette in its painted decoration, as well as a near-identical barrel and flintlock mechanism. Another, preserved at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London (Accession Number 2604(1S)), may shed further light on the present example's origins.<sup>17</sup> Presented by H H Maharaja Gulab Singh of Kashmir,

it can be confidently dated to the early 19th century, and exhibits a highly similar short Damascus-steel barrel which has been adorned with cartouches of stylised foliate decoration in gold *koftgari*.<sup>18</sup>

Amin Jaffer's cataloguing of an armchair painted in this style of Kashmiri papier-mâché work provides further context, including a quote from Emily Eden, the famous poet and novelist, who during her travels in the Punjab during the late 1830s lamented, "I had a great miss this morning of some trays and cups japanned in Cashmere."<sup>19</sup> Similarly decorated items of furniture were used at the courts of the Sikhs, who ruled Kashmir from 1780 to 1846.<sup>20</sup>

### References

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/15.+weapons%2C+armor/669292>

<sup>17</sup> <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O84493/flintlock-firearm-unknown/>

<sup>18</sup> See also: Lord Egerton of Tatton, *Indian and Oriental Armour*, London, 1896, p.144, Cat. No. 762.

<sup>19</sup> Amin Jaffer (2002), *Luxury Goods from India: The Art of the Indian Cabinet-Maker*, V&A Publications, London, p.48.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*





7

## GOLD STIRRUPS

TBILISI, GEORGIA  
19TH CENTURY

HEIGHT 135MM  
WIDTH 123MM

These refined stirrups originate from the city of Tiflis (or Tbilisi, the modern capital of Georgia). Miniature birds in gold – their striking features and plumage picked out in close detail – sit at either side of the sloping apertures through which the original stirrup leathers would have been placed. Further damascene-work appears over the arms, conveying a lush menagerie of gold flowerheads and curving vines. As the arms widen, these flowerheads grow, before at the base one bird defeats another within an ogee-arched panel.

The stirrups' treads are hollow but formed with ridged upper edges so as to provide a firmer grip against the rider's footwear. The decorative band of stylised flowerheads and vines over the exterior face, and a plain band of gold at the interior, reveal most clearly the cross-hatching used to hold the gold inlay. An inscription at the underside of the treads gives the maker's name: "Khachatur (/Hatjatur) of Tbilisi".

This name likely refers to Khechatur Beburov, a weaponsmith born in 1766 who worked in the city of Tbilisi, Georgia.<sup>21</sup> He produced arms and armour for Russian royalty, and was held in sufficiently high esteem that on the 2nd August, 1792, he was given the status of a noble by the Georgian Tsar Heraclius II.<sup>22</sup> Though the year of his death remains uncertain, we know that Khechatur was still alive and working in 1827, since this is the year in which he produced and presented a fine sword to Russian emperor Nicholas I (r.1825-1855), which is now preserved in the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg (Inventory Number B.O.-38).<sup>23</sup>

We thank Gotscha Lagidse for his assistance in identifying the maker of these stirrups.

## References

- <sup>21</sup> A detailed article on Khachatur's biography can be found here: <https://www.gotscha.nl/khachatur-ru.pdf> (text in Russian).
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid*, see Fig./Doc. 7 taken from the Central Historical Archives of Georgia.
- <sup>23</sup> See Yuriy A. Miller (2004), *Caucasian Arms from the State Hermitage Museum*, St Petersburg, p.61 and <https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/15.+weapons%2c+armor/507566>.

Хачатур Хачатуров



8

## CHINESE STIRRUPS

CHINA  
18TH - 19TH CENTURY

HEIGHT 178MM  
WIDTH 165MM  
WEIGHT 1929G

This heavy pair of large Chinese stirrups exhibit unusual decorative features that make them unique from other examples (though antique Chinese stirrups are rare in any case).

Formed entirely from bronze, the present pair begin with a stepped top-section which in its design is reminiscent of Chinese temple architecture, each stirrup then including the typical rectangular apertures which would have originally held the stirrup leathers. The shoulders are cast to convey the faces of dragons that show sharp fangs and billowing manes. A sunken section extending from their mouths comprises the main surface of the stirrups' posts or 'arms', and in deep relief conveys a mantra inscription in the Lanca script (a Tibetanised form of Sanskrit), possibly the well-known mantra: *Om mani padme hum*.

Intersecting the posts and treads are further faces of those same dragons seen at the shoulders, though here they are depicted as if seen from above. Domed discs of turquoise are then inset within a centrally sunken border over the edge of the treads; each of the four sides holds twenty-two of these discs (eleven are missing in total). The main interior surface has been incised with a large central medallion containing a large Chinese character set within a border of delicately engraved foliage.

Two stirrups of similar weight and size were exhibited by Runjeet Singh Ltd in *Treasures from Asian Armouries - TEFAF Maastricht 2020* (see Cat. No. 17),<sup>24</sup> also showing dragon-shoulders and the same essential structure that is typical of such pieces, as well as a mantric inscription. A bronze censer (Object Number 24:2005a,b), preserved in

the Saint Louis Art Museum and made by a famous bronzesmith of the late Ming dynasty, similarly shows striking dragon faces.<sup>25</sup>

### References

- <sup>23</sup> [https://www.runjeetsingh.com/inventory/368/dragon\\_stirrups](https://www.runjeetsingh.com/inventory/368/dragon_stirrups)  
<sup>24</sup> <https://www.slam.org/collection/objects/43377/>







9

## TIBETAN STIRRUPS

TIBET  
16TH - 18TH CENTURY

HEIGHT 152MM  
WIDTH 117MM

Tibetan stirrups of this quality and age seldom appear on the art market. Indeed, they are sufficiently rare that much of what is known about Tibetan stirrups with respect to their form and categorisation originates from a single, obscure treatise published by Tashi Namgyal, a writer of the 16th century.<sup>26</sup>

Here thick plaques of damascened gold cover the stirrups' shoulders and convey stylised dragons' heads in profile at either side of the rectangular apertures originally used to secure the stirrup leathers. The posts (*rkang* in Tibetan) are formed of faceted iron damascened in silver, and curve gently down towards the lozenge-shaped treads (*mthil*). An elegant four-footed base completes each stirrup, chiselled and

engraved over its surface in deep relief to convey a foliate sequence in gold mostly *en suite* with that at the shoulders. The stylised leaves and tendrils rise and fall with a great sense of vitality – a bright and well-preserved schema which in turn provides a pleasing contrast to the archaic patina covering the iron underside of the treads.

Though it is difficult to pinpoint precisely similar examples, it is useful to compare the present stirrups with a pair (Accession Number 2002.136.1, .2)<sup>27</sup> preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, particularly on account of their deeper lozenge-shaped treads – a rare and unusual feature in such pieces – as well as the similarity of their chiselled decoration in gold.<sup>28</sup>

## References

- <sup>26</sup> On this and Tibetan stirrups, saddles and bridles, see Donald LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2006, pp. 214-266.
- <sup>27</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/25100>
- <sup>28</sup> See Donald LaRocca, *ibid*, pp. 245-246, Item Number 131.



10

**KALACHAKRA MASK**TIBET  
18TH CENTURYHEIGHT 230MM  
WIDTH 245MM

The fiery visage of this mask is mesmerising, with the brow, moustache and all edges of the face worked intricately in gilt-copper repoussé to depict spiralling flames that look as if they might leap out at the viewer. The mask's rubbed nose reveals the copper core of the frame, whilst the oval third eye and broad apertures for the wearer's cheeks and mouth provide generous space for the wearer's features.

Masks such as these were used by monks during a ritual Offering Dance (*Ghar* in Tibetan) of the Kalachakra Initiations. The ceremony sees monks dance in the guise of offering goddesses, so as to lend concentration to the *Kalachakra* Mandala, a manifestation of Kalachakra as the sacred realm of Buddha (Kalachakra literally translates to "Wheel of Time").<sup>29</sup>

As in many other examples, the nose here is rubbed and lays bare a copper surface, though the reason for this is unclear. An important comparandum (Museum Code ABR 041),<sup>30</sup> preserved in the Tibet Museum (Gruyères, Switzerland), similarly shows the copper interior of both its nose and third eye. Further important examples for comparison are published and discussed by Béguin (1977),<sup>31</sup> as well as Thurman & Weldon (1999).<sup>32</sup>

The mask possesses a rich and impressive provenance, having been first sold and published by Spink & Son Ltd in *The Mirror of Mind: Art of Vajrayana Buddhism* (London, 1995),<sup>33</sup> and subsequently by Christie's in 2004 (New York).<sup>34</sup> During the intermediary period, the mask was furthermore featured in an exhibition and subsequently published in *Monasterios y lamas del Tibet* (2000).<sup>35</sup>

**Published**

Exhibition Catalogue, *The Mirror of Mind: Art of Vajrayana Buddhism*, London, Spink & Son Ltd, 1995, pp.72-73, Cat. No. 44.  
Exhibition Catalogue, *Monasterios y lamas del Tibet*, Madrid, Fundación "La Caixa", 2000, p. 119, Cat. No. 60.

**References**

- <sup>29</sup> See also Cat. No. 9 above (i.e. the chakravartin sword).
- <sup>30</sup> <https://tibetmuseum.app/index.php?w=coll&cat=all&id=149#slide-0>
- <sup>31</sup> G. Béguin, *Dieux et démons de l'Himalaya*, 1977, cat. no. 329, ill. p. 265
- <sup>32</sup> R. Thurman and D. Weldon, *Sacred Symbols, The Ritual Art of Tibet*, 1999, cat. nos. 40 and 41.
- <sup>33</sup> Exhibition Catalogue, *The Mirror of Mind: Art of Vajrayana Buddhism*, London, Spink & Son Ltd, 1995, pp.72-73, Cat. No. 44.
- <sup>34</sup> Exhibition Catalogue, *Indian and Southeast Asian Art Including 20th Century Indian*, New York, Christie's, 2004, Lot 87.
- <sup>35</sup> Exhibition Catalogue, *Monasterios y lamas del Tibet*, Madrid, Fundación "La Caixa", 2000, p. 119, Cat. No. 60.





## II

**LACQUERED SHIELD**

RAJASTHAN, INDIA  
19TH CENTURY

DIAMETER 630MM

Originally presented as a diplomatic gift from India to the family of a Japanese ambassador, this black-painted leather shield may be related to a group produced by a single workshop in Rajasthan (see further discussion below).

Borders of thick black-and-gold paint adorn the shield's upturned brim, from which majestic floral splays in gold rise and intermingle with foliage in verdant green- and crimson-coloured paint. Four steel bosses, equidistant from one another, are attached to the shield's centre and cut to convey the repeating Devanagari characters which translate as 'MA' – perhaps initials of an individual involved in the shield's manufacture, or of the armoury that produced it. A central painted panel *en suite* with those that extend from the shield's brim completes this object's charming decorative schema.

The reverse face of the shield is fitted with a small red cushion, to which are attached the iron suspension rings and fabric straps originally used to secure the wearer's arm in place.

It is difficult to pinpoint the present shield's precise origins, though a group of examples preserved in the Royal Collection Trust may provide some guidance, particularly with respect to the colour palette and floral decoration (see RCINs 37945,<sup>36</sup> 11348,<sup>37</sup> and 38090).<sup>38</sup> As is explained in the case of the first shield just cited: "This Japanese-influenced style of decoration may have been inspired by seventeenth century Indian shields that were sent to Japan to be decorated with lacquer by Portuguese merchants based in the Indian subcontinent. These were subsequently presented as diplomatic gifts in India.

The Prince received several examples of these Japanese-inspired shields decorated with similar designs suggesting that they were made in one workshop." Whilst the floral patterns of the present shield are not precisely similar to those from this group, it may be that our own example represents a style inspired by them, as its decoration comprises floral motifs with a largely similar palette of gold, red and green painted on a black ground.

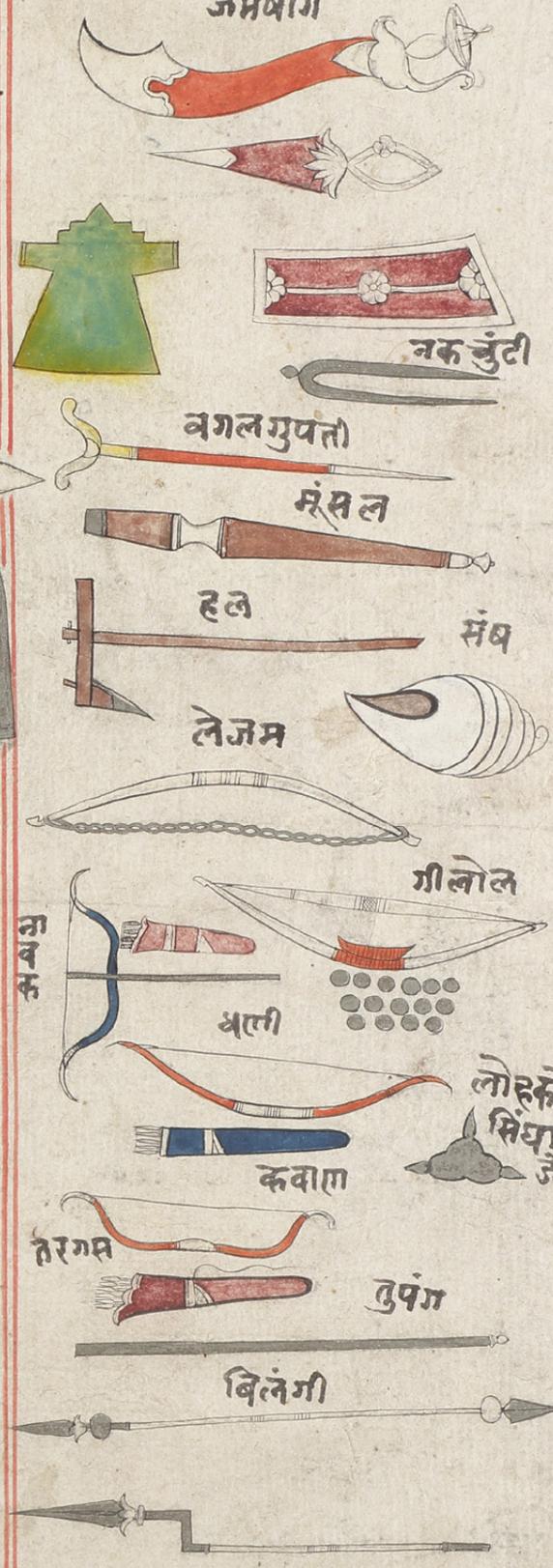
**References**

- <sup>36</sup> <https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/7/collection/37945/shield>
- <sup>37</sup> <https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/20/collection/11348/shield>
- <sup>38</sup> <https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/19/collection/38090/shield-dhal>

वेदीकमरीकमदाकी



जमषाग



लोहको  
सिंधा  
जे

peṭī kamariḥ kasavā kī - a cuirass (peṭī) "of tightness"



jamaṣāg



nakacuṃṭī - "prickly"



baḡal guṇṇatī - "Side knife"



mamaṣal - "fleshy"



hal - plough



ṣaṃṣā - conch



lejam - training bow



gīlōl - pellet bow



nāvāḡ - "sailor"

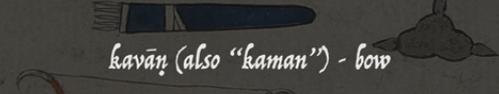


dhanī - "lord", "wealthy"



loha ko Ṣiṃghā ṇo - "heat the iron"

kavāṇ (also "kaman") - bow



tarāḡas

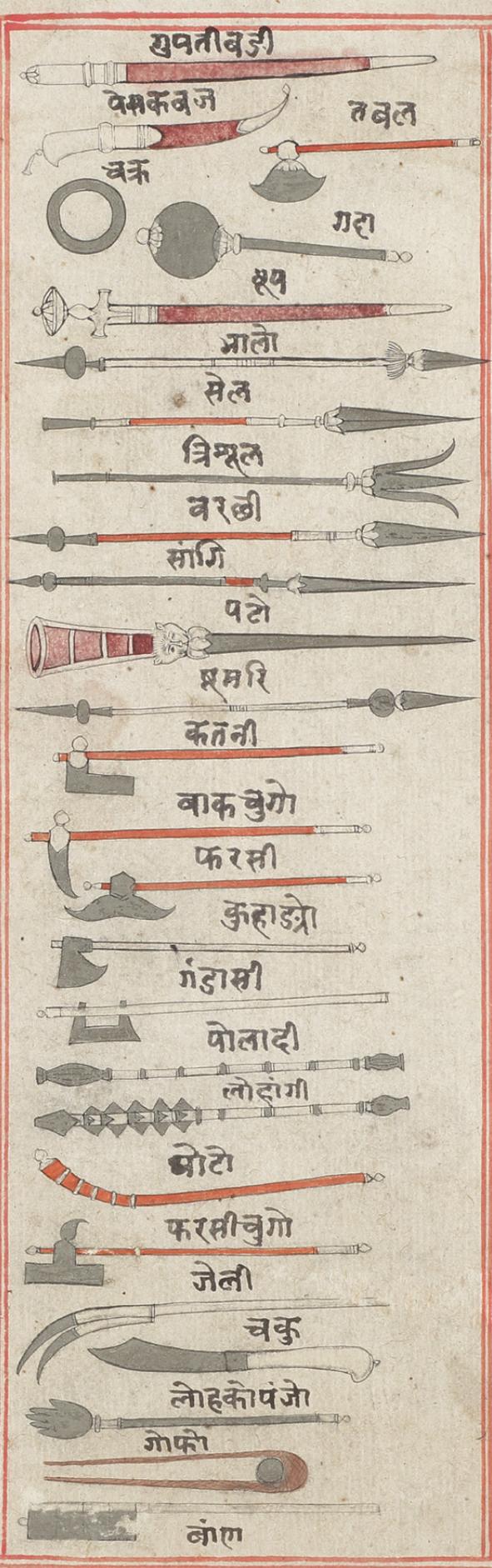


tupamḡ



bilamḡī





gupati badi - big knife, gup(a)t - meaning Secret

pesakavaj - Similar to "peshkabz" word for dagger

cakra - quoit

gada - mace/club

sup - long cover

bhale - Spears  
note devanagari says "bhalo" or "bhale" + marker for a vowel

Sela

trisula - 3 pointed Spear

varachi (or barachi) - Spear

Sangi - like "Sangu" Spear

Pato - patā, gauntlet sword

sumari

katanī - knife

bak cugo

pharasi - "persian"

kubāiro

gamdasi - blade

poladi - steel

lohamgi - a stick with iron on the end

ghoto - "pulverise"

pharasi cugo - persian pick

jeli - pitchfork

caku - knife

loha ko pamjo - "iron claws", back scratcher

gopho

bamna - (bani) - fire arrow (rocket)

cugo - pick

bamki - "crow bill"

damSaph

dhala phulata ki - "blooming shield"

amkusa - goad

pancasula - 5 pointed Spear

samajar - crooked knife

phulato - "blooming"

bamk - "crooked", "oblique"

pamjo ji rako - "claw to grasp"

katar - dagger

taravar - sword (probably tulwar)

samdo

sanga Similar to Sanskrit khandga - sword

bamdruk - gun

tamrico - firearm

topa - cannon

pakān kas - for cooking

vajra - thunderbolt

moja - Stocking/sock

top jilam - "jilam" hat

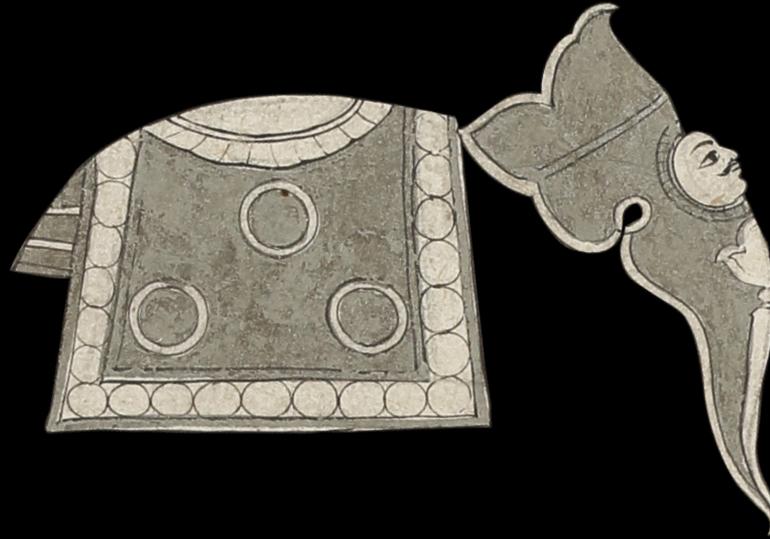
bakatar - goat

top bagatar ko - "worse" hat/helmet

poladi todo - "break the steel"

jamadhar - dagger

Sar par - to rip the head (par - meaning to rip)



12

## ILLUSTRATIONS OF ARMS AND ARMOUR

AWADH (OUDH),  
NORTHERN INDIA  
18TH CENTURY

HEIGHT: 318MM  
WIDTH: 210MM

This fine pair of illustrations depicts a broad and fascinating range of Indian arms and armour in bright colours and charming detail within red-painted borders.

Among the curiosities depicted, on the left panel of the first illustration, is a depiction of a brown *peti kamari kasava ki* – a kind of cuirass or cummerbund “of tightness”.

Further down is a *ghoda pasar* (“horse armour”) with recurved shaffron and decorative trappings, together with a brilliant *hasri pasar* (“elephant armour”) which shows much of the same detailing, though its shaffron furthermore depicts the mysterious face of a moustachioed man in profile. Next to a blue *dhal* (“shield”), at the bottom of this panel, is an unusual object which so far remains unidentified and is labelled a *bichuva*, or “scorpion”.

The greater part of the opposite panel then depicts a range of bladed weapons as well as bows and quivers, including a *gilol*: a bow with two “teeth” which would fire small pebbles or clay pellets here painted grey.

Within the left-hand panel of the second illustration, amidst a group of red-painted edged weapons, is a simply painted *chakra* (“quoit”), an iron ring both worn over a turban to defend the wearer from enemy attacks and used also as a deadly throwing weapon.

There follows a column of different hafted weapons, including a *lohamgi*, a club attached with a series of pointed metal ridges (the word roughly translates to “stick with an iron end”). At the base of the panel is a *bahmna*, a wooden pole attached with a metal casing at its end – likely a *bahn*, or “rocket”.

Amongst the fine pieces of the right-hand panel is a striking gauntlet-weapon here given the name *panjo ji rako*, which translates approximately to “gripping claw”. A trio of armour-pieces are then depicted further down, including a *bakathar*, the Persian word for an armoured coat made of mail and plate. Lastly, a *sar par* with seven steel blades and red base is shown at the bottom: *sar* (or *sir*) translates to “head”, whilst *par* means “to rip”, thus bestowing this formidable object the equally formidable meaning “head ripper”.

This pair of paintings is exceptionally rare and few precise comparanda are known. However, a page of the Gentil Album preserved in the Victoria & Albert Museum (Accession Number IS.25:34-1980) is particularly useful here.<sup>39</sup> The album comprises fifty-eight paintings depicting a variety of themes from 18th-century India, and is so-called after the French infantry colonel Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gentil (1726-1799) who commissioned the collection.

This example from the Gentil Album and our own illustrations depict many of the same objects, including a claw-type weapon, the “head ripper”, and armours for a man, horse, and elephant, as well as the scarce ‘bahn’-rocket (this providing further evidence to the theory that the region of Awadh was an important centre for the manufacture of such weapons).<sup>40</sup> Another important painted work for comparison is shown within the *Nujum Al-Ulum* manuscript (Bijapur, c.1570) preserved in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, and partly published in Robert Elgood, *Hindu Arms and Ritual* (2004).

We thank Kamala Lucas for her translation of the captions within these illustrations.

### References

<sup>39</sup> <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O402774/rites-and-festivals-of-muslims-album-page-unknown/>

<sup>40</sup> As in the description of Cat. No. 5, see Nidhin G. Olikara (?), “Changing Timelines: On the discovery of a fine 18th-century Maratha Rocket and its implication on the evolution and use of Rockets”, (forthcoming)

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