

RUNJEET SINGH

ARMS & ARMOUR FROM THE EAST





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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is fitting at the start of this work that I thank my mother, my late father, and my wife and children who have given me endless love, patience and support.

I would also like to offer a heartfelt message of gratitude to numerous colleagues and friends who contributed to the research and production of this publication.



I

SHIVA KATAR

RAJASTHAN, INDIA
CIRCA 1850 AD

OVERALL 440 MM
BLADE 225 MM



The wootz damascus or watered steel blade has large chiselled depictions of Lord Shiva on each side. He stands in a playful yogic stance with a small dog licking his leg in reverence. His long curling hair is adorned with flowers, and his third eye open - capable of imploding the cosmos, or paradoxically spreading light and wisdom into the world.

Each of his four hands carries an object: on the right, a trident or *trisula*, the three prongs representing his three aspects as creator, protector and destroyer; the long shaft representing the axis of the universe; also on the right he holds a wheel or *chakra*, the symbol of life and death, a throwing weapon. On the left, Shiva holds a double edged sword or *khanda*, a symbol of wisdom in the battle against ignorance and the forces of destruction. The last object he holds may be a shield, *dhal*, but is more likely to be a mirror, *darpana*, representing the aspect of Shiva that is not manifest. Shiva in his androgynous aspect carries a mirror in one of his left hands (the female side) as a symbol of wisdom and, at the same time, of the emptiness of all worldly matters.

This exquisite chiselled image has close similarities to Mewari painting in the first half of the nineteenth century and to the Kangra-Pahari school of painting of the same period. A related depiction can be seen in a painting of Shiva and Parvati in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.¹

The Bundi style hilt is covered in sheet gold decorated with stippled flowers, showing some wear. Nordlunde (2009) discusses this particular style of katar as belonging to the larger of two groups that were made in Bundi around 1850 A.D. A characteristic of these Bundi katars is the pierced floral design linking the distinctive grip bars.

A similar dagger was in the collection of the late Dr. Leo Figiel.²

References

- ¹ Accession number Acc.no.F2001.11. See the Freer and Sackler website <http://www.asia.si.edu/>
- ² For the sale of his collection see Butterfield and Butterfield, San Francisco, sale catalogue number 6824A, 1998, lot no.2117.

2

BUNDI KATAR

RAJASTHAN, INDIA
CIRCA 1850 AD

OVERALL 415 MM
BLADE 215 MM

'...the tongue of death' is how an identical katar in the Metropolitan Museum is described in a Sanskrit inscription on the forte of the blade. The dagger shown here has no such inscription, but the design belongs to the same small group commissioned circa 1850 AD by the Maharaja of Bundi, Rao Ram Singh (1811 AD -1889AD) whose name appears on a number of these katars.

The dagger would serve as an adornment in the cummerbund of its owner at court, but could be quickly drawn and was easily capable of piercing armour, or inflicting a fatal wound on a tiger in the hunting field.

The heavily gilt round side bars have a spiral twist, a distinctive feature of this group, as is the bridge of flowers linking the grips. The blade ricasso is bordered with a garland of flowers and an elephants' head. A work of art in steel, the craftsman has skillfully created a complex, highly efficient and decorative arrangement of fullers in the watered steel blade. A very similar arrangement of fullers on a pattern welded blade can be seen on a katar in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.³

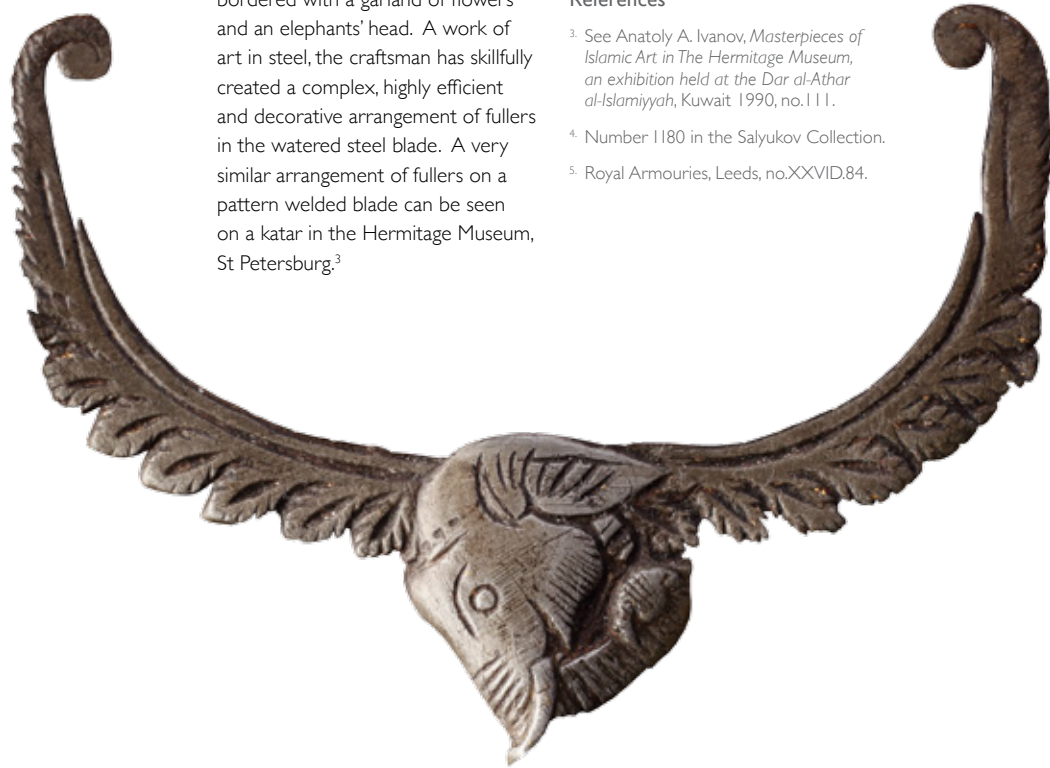
The Hermitage katar is catalogued as late eighteenth century and was originally collected by Count A. Saltykov.⁴ It transferred from the Tsarskoselskiy Arsenal to the Hermitage in 1885.

Prince Saltykov made two voyages to India, in 1841-43 and in 1844-46. In 1848, in Paris, he published his letters and drawings recording these journeys in *Lettres sur L'Inde* and the book became a best seller, delighting the Russian public. He made an important collection of arms and was extremely influential as an early collector of Oriental arms.

A similar katar is in the Royal Armouries, Leeds, purchased at London's Great Exhibition of 1851.⁵

References

- ³ See Anatoly A. Ivanov, *Masterpieces of Islamic Art in The Hermitage Museum, an exhibition held at the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah*, Kuwait 1990, no.111.
- ⁴ Number 1180 in the Saltykov Collection.
- ⁵ Royal Armouries, Leeds, no.XXVID.84.





GAJA-LAKSHMI
KATAR

RAJASTHAN, INDIA
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 410 MM
BLADE 224 MM

This katar has a blade with a chiselled depiction of Gaja-Lakshmi at the forte, one of the most significant ‘Ashtalakshmi’ aspects of the Hindu goddess Lakshmi. Both as a weapon and as a devotional icon the katar is fascinating. ‘Ashtalakshmi’ (eight Lakshmis) are a group of eight Hindu goddesses, secondary manifestations of Shri Lakshmi, who preside over eight sources of wealth. In this context, wealth would be strength, power and prosperity. The goddess sits beneath two elephants who stand on the open-book shaped lower hilt, illustrating her with water from their trunks which extend and touch in the centre. In a typical gesture the four-armed goddess holds lotus flowers in her upper two hands, and her lower hands subtly suggest abhaya-mudra (fingers pointing up, a gesture of peace) and varada-mudra (fingers pointing down, a gesture of wish granting and generosity). She sits in two scrolling leaves which join by means of a fleur-de-lis to a cypress tree leaf which extends down the centre of the blade, forming a decorative spine on the sunken central panel of dark wootz steel. The cutting edges are polished bright and extend to the armour piercing reinforced point.

The elephants are particularly well formed and although the goddess takes centre stage here, the exquisite three-dimensional modelling and contrasting steel and gold decoration provide an important focus which should not be overlooked. The elephant is considered one of the four Indian royal animals (the others being lion/tiger, the horse and the bull), and in the Vedas the symbol of royal splendour and the mount of gods and kings.

The Sanskrit text *Hastayurveda*⁹ describes the importance of the elephant to the prosperity of the state:

“If they did not pay worship to the elephant, the king and the kingdom, the army and the elephants, would be doomed to perish, because a divinity would have been disregarded. Contrarywise, if due worship is paid to the elephant, they will thrive and prosper together with their wives and sons, the country, the army, and the elephants”.

The side bars are chiselled on the outer surfaces with a border and floral panels top and bottom while the swollen grip bars are separated by ruby set ‘C’ scrolls. The entire hilt and forte are thickly decorated with repeating symmetrical floral patterns in gold.

The wooden scabbard is covered with red silk velvet, pleasingly faded and worn. It has a pocket containing a small watered steel bladed knife with a cracked agate hilt, a pair of steel tweezers decorated in gold, and lastly, a small, bone ear spoon. Very few katar scabbards retain their pockets which were once common, and it is exceedingly rare for them to retain the pocket’s contents.¹⁰

A similar privately owned katar known to the author belonged to a *thakur* (Lord) from Bikaner state, albeit the decoration is not elephants, but leogryph. The ‘C’ scrolls that separate the grip bars are usually attributable to Bundi where royal patronage encouraged the production of beautiful katars. However, we have evidence that a katar with “C” scrolls was made in Jaipur for Maharaja Sawai Pratap Singh (1778-1803).¹¹ Object number two in this catalogue shows a katar attributed to royal patronage from Bundi which also uses elephant iconography though not in such a prominent way.

We cannot currently attribute this katar to either of the princely states of Rajasthan, but we can say, it was made for royal or noble use and is a unique object which should be preserved and treasured by its new guardian.

References

⁹ Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilisation*, 1974, IV.22, p.108.

¹⁰ Elgood writes in *Rajput Arms and Armour. The Rathores and their Armoury at Jodhpur Fort*, (in publication) that: ‘The only complete example known to the author is from Kota and is in bad condition. The implements include: silver opium container; two very small steel churi missing handles; ivory ear cleaner with spoon end; solid silver tubular strip with knob finial, serving no obvious purpose. Two pairs of scissors. Nail cleaner with slanted chisel end and carved ivory grip; two bartana or ivory turban easers, one with finely carved end; sundry needles in corroded condition; and a flat, tapering, blued steel implement with a pierced and shaped head decorated with gold koft work, purpose unknown’.

¹¹ See Elgood, *Arms and Armour at the Jaipur Court*, 2015, p.92, no.67.









4

BEJEWELLED KATAR

GUJARAT, INDIA
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 470 MM
BLADE 260 MM

Sold to a private collector June 2016.

A beautiful and extremely rare variant of a nineteenth century katar from Kutch.

The form is described as a 'Garsoee Katar' by Egerton in his 1880 book, which has for many years left academics and researchers puzzled. It has been suggested by Nihang Nidar Singh who heard it from his master Baba Mohinder Singh that this is actually 'ghar-sue-e' meaning 'fort needle'. This translation from the Sanskrit word origins is supported by the sharp needle tip that these daggers exhibit.

Of iconic form, the copper gilt hilt has sweeping side bars and a central rhomboidal grip, giving the hilt an attractive sculptural quality which make this a favourite of arms and art collectors alike. This example is distinct from the classical Kutch katar;⁶ the setting of numerous foil backed crystals on the hilt being highly unusual.

The scabbard is equally magnificent, with a large brooch of gilt copper base, surrounded with a row of pearls, and set with green and red stones in the kundan manner. The scabbard is covered with pleasingly worn maroon silk velvet. The scabbard chape of gilt copper is chased with flowers in the classic Kutch style.

The only other bejewelled example from Kutch known to the author can be found at Powis Castle, Wales.⁷

My thanks to Nihang Nidar Singh for his translation of the term Garsoee Katar.

References

⁶ Singh, *Arms & Armour from the East*, 2015, p.11, cat.no.3.

⁷ Archer/Rowell/Skelton, *Treasures from India, the Clive Collection at Powis Castle*, 1987, p.51, cat. no.23.





5

GOLD CHILLANUM

DECCAN
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 405 MM
BLADE 280 MM

Sold to a private collector June 2016.

An elegant, high quality seventeenth century dagger or chillanum from the Deccan plateau, south-west India.

The sculptural iron hilt is decorated with koftgari gold flowers and bunches of grapes on scrolling vines. It has sweeping pommel arms and a curving knuckle guard terminating in a drooping lotus bud shrouded by a leaf. The oval hand guard has two bands of delicately pierced decoration and lotus bud finials at either end.

The re-curving blade in excellent condition is cut with eight finely worked fullers. The blade displays the 'watered steel' surface pattern which indicates that this blade is forged from wootz damascus steel.

I have previously likened the re-curved blade on such daggers to a Hindu goddess in her *tribangha* pose, but Elgood⁸ writes that the shape probably derived from an animal horn knife, being double-curved and double-edged. He further states the direct antecedent is the Mughal *khopwah*, a dagger listed in the *A'in-i-Akbari* and in the *Jahangirnama*. Mentioned frequently as a jewelled Mughal presentation weapon, the decoration on this example points to Mughal influence with the use of bunches of grapes with floral sprays.

Published

Frederick Wilkinson, *Swords and Daggers*, 1967, plate 177.

References

⁸ Elgood, *Hindu Arms and Ritual*, 2004, p.242, 250.



6

KUKRI

NEPAL
17-18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 270 MM
BLADE 170 MM

A remarkable kukri from Nepal with Sino-Tibetan influence.

The silver scabbard, throat piece and chape are beautifully pierced and chased in a distinctive Himalayan style, with a design of gilt dragons surrounded by stylized scrolls. The dragon on the throat piece clutches the elusive pearl in his front claw, sometimes referred to as the sacred pearl of wisdom, and in Buddhism, as the jewel in the lotus, a jewel that grants all wishes.

A similar configuration of a dragon entwined in curling scrollwork can be seen on a Nepalese pen case in the Victoria and Albert Museum.¹² The Metropolitan Museum also has a Bhutanese sword which has a dragon with similar characteristics chased on the centre of the scabbard.¹³

The scholars Slusser and Fuller comment that the vegetal motifs and the dragon, within the context of Sino-Tibetan art, did not enter Nepal much before the mid seventeenth century, so we can deduce that this kukri is no earlier, but from the prominent curved blade shape that denotes this as a 'sirupute kukri' (a kukri of pronounced curvature), we can say that this is a relatively early item, and a date of seventeenth to eighteenth century should be applied until further evidence comes to light.

The horn hilt has a profile that follows the curve of the blade, the blade being perfectly balanced, and marked with three 'eyelash' marks, a widely imitated quality mark originating from blades made in Genoa. The 'cho' notch at the base of the blade is said to signify the female sexual organs, and as a practical solution, a blood drip. The shallow cho as we see here is usually found on these earlier kukris and later develops into much deeper cho with a more pronounced central spike.

Both the Metropolitan Museum¹⁴ and the Wallace Collection¹⁵ have kukris with similar scabbard fittings, silver and gold respectively. However, neither have dragons incorporated into the design as in this example.

References

¹² Illustrated by Slusser and Fuller, *The Nepalese Ink-Well – Arts of Asia*, July-August 1987, p.78-87.

¹³ Metropolitan Museum 2014.281a, b. See <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/649101>

¹⁴ Metropolitan Museum 36.25.825a, b. See <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/31624>

¹⁵ Wallace Collection OA 2186.



7

VAISHNAVITE KNIFE

NEPAL
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 270 MM
BLADE 170 MM

An extremely unusual eighteenth century Nepalese knife or kukri with a carved ivory hilt. The leaf shaped kukri blade is polished bright exhibiting a complex pattern of pattern welded open swirls, one side with a forging flaw. There is a silver collar at the base of the hilt and the contemporary wooden scabbard has silver bands.

The top of the hilt is delicately carved with three Hindu figures. The most prominent is Ganesh, half man, half elephant; the second is a man thought to be Vyasa, author of the Mahabharata; and on top with spread winged, half eagle, half man, is Garuda, the mount (vahana) of Lord Vishnu.

It would be foolish to believe that the choice of characters carved on this hilt was by chance at the whim of the person carving the ivory. It was done deliberately and with good reason. We should establish the relationships between the characters.

The man presumed to be Vyasa has strong links with Ganesh. In book one of the Mahabharata, Vyasa asked Ganesha to aid him in writing the text, but Ganesha imposed a condition that he would do so only if Vyasa narrated the story without pause, to which Vyasa then made a counter-condition, that Ganesha must understand the verse before he transcribed it. On this hilt

Ganesh holds a scroll and conch in his lower two hands, his upper left is empty (object missing) and his upper right could be his noose, or a ring of fire. Vyasa holds a pen and a box of calligraphic tools.

The common theme appears to be Vishnu and the Mahabharata, a text embedded within Vaishnava philosophy. A closely related Nepalese dagger in the Metropolitan Museum could also be classified as Vaishnavite, the central carved figure on this object is Garuda.¹⁶ The distinctly Nepalese knife shown here gives further support to the Nepalese attribution of the Metropolitan Museum knife.

References

¹⁶ Acc.no. 2006.441 a,b, see Hales, *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour, a Lifetimes Passion*, 2013, p.13, cat.no.31.







8

**ROCK CRYSTAL
DAGGER**

INDIA
18-19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 500 MM
BLADE 355 MM

A large and impressive Indian 'pesh-kabz' dagger with rock crystal hilt and blade of wootz steel.

For those who are fortunate to handle it, there is no denying the power and beauty of this dagger; a massive piece of rock crystal, with some naturally occurring crystallisation. It is carved with a chevron border at the top and an integral pommel tag for a tassel. The steel bolster is decorated with fine gold koftgari with large Mughal style flowers surrounded by foliage.

The T-section blade is of exceptional quality and shows a high contrast watered pattern. The spine is decorated with thick gold koftgari for its entire length. The point is sharp and the edge polished brightly.

The wooden scabbard is covered with renewed black velvet and is fitted with the original copper gilt chape and throat piece, both fittings chased with floral scenes and butterflies.

Articles made of rock crystal, both for use and decoration, were in great favour at the Mughal court, and we should not overlook the use of rock-crystal for purposes of divination. Mughal emperors were fond of drinking wine from crystal cups. Seventeenth century French merchant and traveller, Tavernier, once presented Aurungzeb with a battle mace of rock-crystal, and states he saw the emperor drink from a crystal cup upon three different occasions.¹⁷

The cup (*jam*) of Jamshid (from Persian mythology) was said to be filled with an elixir of immortality and the whole world was said to be reflected in it. Divinations within the cup revealed deep truths. The cup has been visualized as a crystal ball, Zimmern's English translation of the *Shahnameh* uses the term "crystal globe". The Mughals took inspiration from Jamshid and I am sure the drinking of wine helped with any divinations or visions they saw.

A similar dagger is in the Royal Jaipur collection, illustrated by Elgood (2015), p.37, cat.no.10.

References

¹⁷ Ball and Crooke, *Travels in India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Baron of Aubonne*, 1925, vol.1, p.114, p.309.



MUHAMMAD'S- LADDER PESH-KABZ

PERSIA
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 395 MM
BLADE 280 MM

A beautiful Persian dagger (pesh-kabz) with walrus ivory (*jauhar-dar*) grips, and elegant sweeping blade of wootz with 'kirk-narduban' or 'Muhammad's ladder' patterned steel.

The walrus ivory grips are coarsely veined and spotted, a quality that Mughal Emperor Jahangir (1569 - 1627 A.D.) admired greatly, having first being exposed to this material when Shah Abbas, King of Persia, through Khan 'Alam (the ambassador to Persia) bestowed upon him a dagger, the hilt of which was made of walrus-tooth with black spots and veins. Of a subsequent *jauhar-dar* hilt that had been given to Jahangir by his son Shah Jahan, Jahangir said: 'it was so delicate that I never wish it to be apart from me for a moment. Of all the gems of great price that are in the treasury I consider it the most precious. On Thursday I girdled it auspiciously and with joy around my waist'.¹⁸

The grip straps, also forged from wootz steel, are precisely chiselled with eleven panels of Islamic calligraphy and panels of animals on the spine of the blade; a hare in one, and two birds fighting in another.

In cartouches along the grip-strap and up the outside edge of the tang:

Qur'an 112 (*al-Ikhlās*):

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ / الرَّحْمَنِ / الرَّحِيمِ قُلْ
هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ اللَّهُ / الصَّمَدُ لَمْ / يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ / كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

"In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him." (Trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, The Holy Qur'an, Lahore, 1938).

In cartouches up the inside edge of the tang occur attributes and names of God (*Asma al-Husna*):

يَا حَنَّانُ / يَا مَنَّانُ / يَا دَيَّانُ
ya hannan / ya mannan / ya dayyan

"O Clement! O Generous! O Judge!"
On either side of the bolster, further appellations to attributes and names of God:

يَا رِضْوَانُ / يَا بُرْهَانَ
ya ridwan / ya burhan
"O Satisfaction! O Proof!"

The watered pattern is even and in high contrast, the 'rungs' of the ladder, formed by a deliberate and decisive trauma to the hot steel in production. The rungs are very close together, an indication that the talented blacksmith had a steady hand and an eye for detail. These ladder blades were important, revered in the belief that the blade / ladder would lead the owner to paradise. Complete with a later scabbard covered in red velvet.

References

¹⁸ Rogers (trans), *The Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, 2006, p.96-99.







10

BRONZE HILTED CHILLANUM

SOUTH INDIA
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 410 MM
BLADE 270 MM

An intriguing Indian dagger, probably made in the Deccan or slightly further south, unique in design, influenced by the traditional chillanum dagger. The bronze hilt has a shapelier form than the classical chillanum, well-formed and well proportioned, the grip more satisfying to hold. There are jade hilts in this form dating from the early eighteenth century. The boat shaped hilt top comprises of a pommel cap and phallic shaped spike. The lower skirt discreetly covers the socket blade fitting. The bronze has a wonderfully deep glossy patina.

The blade is a re-used sword blade, like other daggers from the armoury at Junagarh Fort, Bikaner which adapted blades captured in Adoni in 1689. It is forged from wootz steel with twin fullers and re-curved profile, and has a dot-punched armoury number 532 in Devanagari on the spine.

See Elgood (2004) for further commentary and examples of chillanum daggers.



11

EARLY SOUTH
INDIAN DAGGER

TAMIL NADU
16TH CENTURY

OVERALL 365 MM
BLADE 235 MM

An important and extremely rare early South Indian dagger of a little known type, possibly unique in its metal grip as known examples are invariably ivory. Elgood provides some invaluable research, including photographs of stone warrior statues at Srirangam, wearing very similar shaped daggers on their waists, the carvings dating from the second half of the sixteenth century.¹⁹

Previous authors have failed to give a traditional name to this small group of daggers, with Elgood calling it a bulbous-hilted dagger. We can note the similarities it shares with both the khanjarli and chillanum and can also infer that these were a more exclusive dagger, due to the fact that they are found in less numbers than the other daggers mentioned.

This dagger is constructed from a single piece of iron, with only the large quillon buds at the base of the hilt being applied. The sculptural shape is quite feminine, with a profile like a goddess in her 'tribhanga' or triply flexed pose. In contrast, the proportions and weight are masculine which could be construed as a metaphor of Ardhanarishvara, the composite androgynous form of Shiva and his consort Parvati.

The hilt would have been covered in silver gilt, but now only traces remain. The resulting lack of surface decoration, the patinated surface, and the form, result in this object having huge visual drama with striking presence.

References

¹⁹ Elgood, *Hindu Arms and Ritual*, 2004, p. 169-170.





12

KHMER DAGGER

CAMBODIA
10TH–11TH CENTURY AD

OVERALL 220 MM
BLADE 110 MM

A small and very rare dagger from Cambodia, Khmer empire.

Of Indian form, the bronze hilt is wonderfully cast with an unusual triple-bulbous grip, with concentric ridges the entire length. A lateral guard and pommel of adorned crescentic shapes are at either end of the grip. The pitted diamond-section iron blade is leaf-shaped, a Chola design.

The dagger should be compared to a bronze example in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which bears an inscription with the date equivalent to 1040 or 1041 A.D.²⁰ Of similar form and size, the significant difference is that the Boston dagger has a bronze blade, and the example here is of iron. That is not necessarily an indication of a differing age of the two daggers (at this point the region had been producing iron for a significant time), but more likely the respective materials were chosen for the physical or ritual properties that the materials were believed to possess.

An analogous example of Indian origin, published by Hales²¹ is a somewhat similarly shaped (though larger), dagger attributed to the Deccan, prior to 1600 AD. It is a reminder of so called Greater India, and the Indic influences that the region adopted prior to the Khmer Empire (802–1431). The leaf-shaped blade appears in numerous ancient Indian examples,²² but there is also sculptural evidence in South East Asia, specifically a tenth century stone carving at Candi Shiva temple complex, Central Java, of a Vanara warrior wielding a comparable dagger.

Provenance

Private American Collection

References

²⁰ Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, accession acc.no.68.289. See <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/ceremonial-dagger-22443>

²¹ Hales, *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour, a Lifetimes Passion*, 2013, p.67, no.143.

²² Rawson, *The Indian Sword*, 1968, p.2.



13

SILVER KANDYAN KNIFE

CEYLON (SRI LANKA)
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 275 MM
BLADE 105 MM*

*Edged portion only.



Ceylonese knives have always been available on the antiques market and from Deraniyagala (1942)²³ we learn they have generally been inaccurately called *Piha-Kaetta*, when this term only applies to the heavy versions with chopper like blades.

Although Deraniyagala is a little general with his classifications, the example shown here is classified as an '*Ul Pihya*', a type reserved for high ranking individuals and as a royal knife. It has a wonderful form quite different to those more commonly seen.

Unusually, the grip scales are solid silver as is the applied ricasso. The usual material would be of an organic material like ivory or horn. This makes it surprisingly heavy for a small knife. A further application of thinner repoussé sheet silver is applied to the central portion of the blade including the spine. On the central area and spine we see floral patterns, with the last third of the blade inlaid with silver vines.

The hilt shape further separates this knife from most other designs. The dog-leg shape, unlike the term, is quite beautiful. Other hilts will have a gentle taper but this example has a bend and abrupt straightening of the pommel giving the knife a wonderful aesthetic.

The distinctive Ceylonese curling scrollwork all over this knife is termed *liya-pata* and *liya-vela*, and in this instance is especially intricate and brings the object to life.

See Hales (2013) no.131, p.63 for an example with the same shaped hilt.

References

²³ Deraniyagala, *Sinhala Weapons and Armor*, 2009 reprint, p.110-111.



14

BEJWELLED DAGGER

INDIA / TURKEY
17TH–18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 445 MM
BLADE 320 MM

A wonderful khanjar or jambiya dagger of almost identical form to a well-known example in the Dresden Armoury which was captured as booty at Varna by the Russians in 1828 and presented to Prince Carl of Prussia by Tsar Nicholas I.²⁴

This example with a similar pale nephrite jade hilt and scabbard mounts has more complex and abundant decoration with large flower heads and fruits in groupings of cabochon rubies, and leaves of cabochon emeralds. The base of the hilt has a row of small rubies and larger emeralds of ascending size, and the apex of the pommel with a double row of rubies terminating with green emerald tendrils on each side. The stones are all set in the Ottoman style, secured within silver gilt shaped collets and straps in imitation of Indian kundan work.

The wavy snake-like blade of watered steel has traces of gold decoration at the forte and a gold border. The re-covered wooden scabbard retains its original throat piece and chape of matching jade.

Provenance

Purchased by an American gentleman on the American market in the 1950's, sold to the London trade in 2015.

References

²⁴ Rustkammer, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Inv. No. Y143. See Schuckelt, *The Turkish Chamber: Oriental Splendour in the Dresden Armoury*, 2010, p. 124-5.



15

JADE KHANJAR

DECCAN, INDIA
MID 17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 360 MM
BLADE 235 MM

An elegant khanjar dagger from seventeenth century India, probably Deccan. Such daggers had become status symbols for courtiers as they were often given as gifts by the ruler.

The nephrite jade hilt in typical 'pistol-grip' form, has the light green colour that collectors yearn, and is wonderfully executed in relief carving of unusual flowering blossoms with long central petals. The raised flower design is very similar to rock crystal khanjar hilts, the best rock crystal mines being found in the Deccan.

The wootz blade is unusually heavy for this type of dagger, chiselled at the forte with deep and wide central fullers (some pitting in the fullers). A punch dot armoury marking suggests that the dagger was once part of the Bikaner armoury, Rajasthan. Later wooden scabbard covered with green silk velvet.





CHINESE SWORD

BEIJING, CHINA
LATE QING DYNASTY

OVERALL 750 MM
BLADE 590 MM

A magnificent Chinese sword from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, probably Beijing jewellers' work.

This is a particularly fine example from a wide variety of similarly decorated objects (including vessels, musical instruments, swords and daggers). This richly decorated example mixes semi-precious stones with deep and fine silver repoussé and chased silver work in the form of clouds, and fire-breathing dragons.

The large, heavy silver scabbard is not only a highly decorative object, but a carefully considered work of art. The two large jade discs are set in the central panel of the scabbard, representing the elusive pearl being chased by two beautifully formed silver dragons, riding amidst storm clouds and breathing fire representing bolts of lightning. Such cloud formations often appear in Tibetan thangkas. The craftsman of this scabbard has achieved a similar effect within a wonderfully complex landscape, with many layers of depth and varying tones and shades of silver enhanced by age and patina.

Each carved jade disk is set with a central red coral, representing the mystical flaming pearl, or night-shining pearl, usually depicted as a small red or white sphere, an indication that the craftsman was very aware of traditional iconography.

The two chasing dragons are shown with four claws, which on an imperial object would have been an indication that this sword was made for a minister of the emperor. A five-clawed dragon was reserved for the Imperial Palace or celestial dragon. The bodies chased with swirls, each circling in opposite directions. In European chivalric mythology this is the one vulnerable point on a dragon's body where a knight must thrust his weapon to slay the dragon.

The upper and lower panel seem to frame the central scenes of writhing dragons chasing pearls, not with clouds, but Makara-tail aureoles depicting 'rosaries of light'; complex arrangements of naturalistic swirls and highlighted makara-tails. The vegetal theme continues with three multi-petalled lotus flowers on each side, all set in turquoise. The scabbard has two suspension rings for a belt or chain, set between two pairs of gaping dragon heads.

The sword has a large round pale green jade hilt, with silver fittings set with turquoise and coral to match the scabbard. An oval hand guard, has the upper surface decorated with beautifully detailed chased flowers and scrollwork.

The leaf shaped blade is unusually made of crucible steel with a subtle and complex pattern of 'watering'. Crucible steel was often imported into China and Japan as a raw material where the high-temperature forges in those countries would melt the carbide particles and reverse the 'watering' affect. However, in this case the smith has managed to preserve the pattern and, with an arrangement of carefully ground fullers, has achieved a high quality and attractive blade. The shape is also an unusual pattern in China, probably inspired by Buddhist iconography and the revival of themes in earlier Buddhist art still extant in China and Tibet during the Ming and Qing periods. A model which was common on archaic and early medieval swords in India, Rawson²⁵ shows a very similar blade shape, from the Gupta period (5th A.D.) and the Pala period (tenth-thirteenth century).

The Exhibition catalogue Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan, 1995,²⁶ features ethnographic objects (mostly jewellery and adornment) in this style.²⁷

References

²⁵ Rawson, *The Indian Sword*, 1968, p.3.

²⁶ Berger, Bartholomew and others, *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 1995, p.106-116.

²⁷ See Hales, *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour, a Lifetimes Passion*, 2013, p.194, no.468, for analogous example.







17

GOLD TULWAR

NORTH INDIA
18TH–19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 900 MM
BLADE 790 MM



A classic tulwar sword from eighteenth or nineteenth century north India. The hilt of elegant form with a flat pommel disc with pierced and applied pommel cup and matching pommel tag. The elongated quillon buds sit at the end of thin quillon stalks. A sweeping knuckle guard with a drooping acorn shaped finial. The entire surface is profusely decorated with gold koftgari in an unusually dense arrangement of five petalled flowers surrounded by four leaves and foliage in a geometric formation. The gold, in high contrast against a dark metal background, precisely chased to add further detail.

The wide pattern-welded, or mechanical-damascus steel blade is light, wonderfully balanced and ideally suited for use on horseback. The sword bears a number of interesting marks on the forte. Scholars have had limited success interpreting such marks. Some serve an apotropaic purpose; they are a form of signature used by blade polishers to indicate that they have cleaned the blade while other marks indicate that the sword is the possession of a particular armoury. The latter was particularly important because each weapon was valuable, and the ruler often had to loan the contents of his armoury to his troops and retainers, and take it back after the campaign was ended.

On this example, the physical representation of two snakes (naga) in dark silhouette with fork tongues protruding, gives us an insight into the thoughts and beliefs of the maker or owner.

Snakes in India are both worshipped and feared, home to several deadly and poisonous snakes, until recent times, death by snakebite was one of the most common causes of death. Hindus worship snakes in temples, on the day of 'Naga-Panchami' in the months of July or August, peasants fast and catch thousands of cobras, which are taken as guests of honour to the Shiva temple where they are treated with milk and showered with flowers. Shiva, who loves these cold blooded creatures, is very pleased.

In return he blesses the barren with children, and protects the worshippers from snakebites. At the end of the festival, all of the slithering guests are released unharmed.

Snakes are associated with both Vishnu and Shiva and several other divinities including Indra, who rides an elephant called Nagendra, the lord of the snakes, probably in reference to Indra's control over the snake world. In the context shown here, they represent a destructive and deadly force, the same energy represented by Shiva the destroyer, who is often shown with snakes wrapped in his hair, around his neck, or arm. The naga is also the symbol of the eternal cycle of time and immortality, in a protective context the snake is often found on nineteenth century steel dhal shields from the Punjab, see Loureiro (2010). Often shown as a protective canopy behind a god's head, see bichawa dagger illustrated - Runjeet Singh catalogue (2015), and interestingly as a hood on a shield shown as a line drawing by Egerton (1968). Egerton identifies it as 'Nag-p'hani dhal' from Nepal.

There are also deeply struck concentric circle markings in a cross arrangement, probably inspired by European blade markings which were often copied by Indian swordsmiths. If we believe the 'old wives', or 'old dealer' story, each dot signifies a 'kill', and therefore this blade has despatched eight foe.

References

- ²⁸ In 2011 the American Society of Tropical Medicine claimed 46,000 people died every year from snakebites. The official Indian Government figure is 2000.
- ²⁹ Loureiro, *Rites of Power: Oriental Weapons - Collection of Jorge Caravana*, 2010, p.114, no.39.
- ³⁰ Singh, *Arms & Armour from the East*, 2015, p.22-23, cat.no.8.
- ³¹ Egerton, *An Illustrated Handbook of Indian Arms*, 1880, plate IX, no.365.







18

DECCANI SHAMSHIR

POSSIBLE BIDAR,
DECCAN PLATEAU, INDIA
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 970 MM
BLADE 810 MM

An important Indian sword incorporating styling from sword hilts from across the Islamic world, a rare object, the only other published example known to the author is in the Furusiyya Art Foundation Collection.³²

The iron hilt of uncommon form is strongly influenced by the North African nimcha in the pommel section, with long Turkish inspired quillons and arrow-shaped Indian langets. The pommel is pierced for a wrist strap, and the hilt is decorated in a style resembling local Bidar work (bidri), with silver flowers and scrolling foliage on a dark background.

The heavy Persian blade of dark grey wootz steel, has a high contrast and uniform 'watered' pattern. The blade is marked with a gold cartouche in a style that is comparable with the Furusiyya sword. It reads:

ادورد فیتجربلد کمیل صاحب بہادر

"Edward Fitz[er]ald Campbell
Sahib Bahadur"

Edward Campbell (25th Oct. 1822-23rd Nov. 1882) was commissioned into the 60th Rifles in 1841. He took part in the second Anglo-Sikh War in 1848-9, the Afridi Campaign of 1850, was ADC to Charles Napier and served in the siege of Delhi in 1858.

As Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Edward Fitzgerald Campbell Bart he was the Viceroy Lord Canning's Military Secretary after the Mutiny. It is likely that Campbell obtained this sword during his service in India, and the cartouche was added to the sword at that time.

Kept in a wooden scabbard with later blue velvet covering and later silver chape with floral patterns.

References

³² Mohamed, *The Arts of the Muslim Knight: The Furusiyya Art Foundation*, 2007, p.96, cat.no.60.



MAMLUK SABRE BLADE

EGYPT / SYRIA
14TH–15TH CENTURY

OVERALL 865 MM

A wonderfully preserved example of a Mamluk sabre blade of high quality wootz steel, with a tight and complex 'watered' pattern, dating from the fourteenth to fifteenth century. It is preserved in a custom made timber storage scabbard.

There are two blade inscriptions; on one side a rectangular cartouche with fine dot-punched markings filled with gold letters, the other; also dot-punched, but within a more stylistic diamond shape cartouche.

Currently only the rectangular cartouche can be deciphered:

نصر من الله وفتح قريب

"Help from God and near victory."
(Qur'an 61 (al-Saff), part of vs. 13).

The blade is slightly curved, of thick cross section with a ridgeline on each side following the contour of the spine. It is without grooves or fullers, the back-edge behind the tip defined by a simple bevel. The contour of the back-edge drops slightly to meet the tip in what cutlers call a 'spear point'. There is comparatively little distal taper from the forte to the beginning of the back-edge, resulting in a heavy blade weighted towards the middle, providing an ideal point of percussion for powerful sweeping cuts.

These characteristics can be seen on sabre blades attributed to various steppe-nomad groups originating in Central Asia during the early Middle Ages. Tribes such as the Avars moved westward to southeastern Europe (the north Caucasus steppe, the Ukraine, and the Danube basin), and are credited with bringing the concept of sabre (long-bladed hilt weapon with curved single edged blade) to the areas they conquered and settled. The Mamluks were of Turkic stock from Central Asia, and made their entry into the Near East as slave-soldiers serving the succession of dynasties which ruled the Levant, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. In time, their military prowess gave them the throne.

Earlier sabres of Central Asian type tended to be much narrower than this example. Often longer, almost straight, and quite thick in relation to width. A well-preserved thirteenth century blade in the Muzeum Wojska Polskiego has the well-defined ridgeline and a long sharp back-edge.³³

Analogous published examples include:

¹ A mature form of this type of sabre attributed to the fourteenth-fifteenth century is in the Furusiyya Foundation collection, inv.R-992.³⁴ The ridges are obscured by corrosion but still noticeable.

² A well-preserved example³⁵, probably dates from the early sixteenth century (with later Ottoman mounts circa 1575). There is no reason to believe that the blade could not be from the previous century or even earlier. The blade offered here has a close resemblance to this in terms of overall proportions.

³ Two Mamluk sabres in original hilts (Topkapi Sarayı 1/212 and 1/189).³⁶

⁴ Two further examples are in the Istanbul Military Museum.³⁷

Examples in three and four above are assigned a fifteenth century date, commensurate with the Furusiyya blade, except for Yücel, pl. 75 which is dated by inscription, which, if it truly reflects the date of manufacture, puts it at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

These groups were selected from amongst the larger body of Mamluk sabres by virtue of their un-fullered blades, it being apparent that the fifteenth century marked the beginning of a fashion for channeled blades which remained throughout much of the Ottoman period. Ridgelines as on this example and on analogous specimens one and two above, began a phase-out during the same century.

References

³³ Muzeum Wojska Polskiego, inv. no. MWP 165x. See Gutowski, *Bron i Uzbrojenie Tatarów*, 1997, p.83, no.16.

³⁴ Mohamed, *The Arts of the Muslim Knight: The Furusiyya Art Foundation*, 2007, p.50-51, no.16.

³⁵ Ricketts and Missillier, *Splendeur des Armes Orientales*, 1988, p.26, no.19.

³⁶ Yücel, *Islamic Swords and Swordsmiths*, 2001, p.57, pl. 55.

³⁷ Yücel, *Islamic Swords and Swordsmiths*, 2001, pl.58 and 75, nos.11598 and 257.





20

KLEWANG SABRE BLADE

INDONESIA
CIRCA 1900 AD

BLADE 945 MM

An interesting blade based upon a Royal Netherlands East Indian Army (KNIL) Klewang sword. The KNIL or, *Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger*, was formed by royal decree on 10th March 1830. It was not part of the Royal Netherlands Army, but a separate military unit specifically formed for service in the Dutch East Indies. The military Klewang sword was developed for use in the Dutch tropical colonies as a reply to the resistance from the fierce native warriors, usually made in Hemburg - Netherlands, or Solingen - Germany, this blade is made in Indonesia, and displays an attractive surface *pamor* or *damascus* pattern achieved by a native *empu* (smith) using the same technology used to produce the famous patterned Keris blades.

Never a military issue, or used by the natives, this blade was either a special commission or a presentation to a Dutch officer.

The blade, was probably never mounted, and has been preserved by the original case which is lined with red velvet. An attached old paper label with a hand written note in Dutch reads:

Echt gedamasceerde sabel
"real Damascus sabre".

It takes a refined form of the military sabre it is based upon, ground and highly polished. A deep spine fuller with a wide ground central panel; the tip shaped in what is termed as a 'clip-point'. The *pamor* pattern is achieved by forge-welding metal pieces of differing composition together; twisting and manipulating them, and etching the polished blade to reveal the desired pattern. In this case, revealed, is a wonderful dark background with silvery white lines.

This type of steel is usually found on shorter local swords, and in knives and daggers, such as the Keris, so to find an example in this length and form is highly unusual.



21

**SALAPA
(ZAFAR TAKIYA)**

DECCAN, INDIA
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 860 MM
BLADE 700 MM



A beautiful Indian sword known as a salapa, or zafar takiya (literally cushion of victory), circa eighteenth century.

The sculpted parrot is a very unusual subject matter for a sword, likely to be inspired by zoomorphic vessels of Sultanate and Mughal India, which were in turn inspired by comparable objects from the Middle East centuries earlier. Hanging lamps of similar form are still placed in Indian shrines, used in the worship of deities.

The restrained clean lines and lack of curled plumes on the bird might lead us to consider north India as a possible provenance, but the style and shape of the quillons is a specific style found on arms from south India.

The large hilt is beautifully modelled from thick, heavy, wonderfully patinated bronze. The full breasted bird looks backwards, the tail curling downwards to connect to a curved knuckle-guard which terminates in a small birds-head. The langets have a most unusual 'feathered' form.

This 'high quality Khyber-knife' blade is a form used widely in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is made of mechanical damascus or pattern welded steel with a tight 'birds-eye' pattern of subtle contrast. The spine with its strong T-section suggests that the maker of this sword was not only concerned with dramatic aesthetics, but also functionality too.

The previous collector commissioned the manufacture of a scabbard to conserve the blade. It is made of wood covered in black leather with a large chape decorated with floral patterns in traditional style, complete with a chased suspension loop.

The parrot styling of the hilt can be compared to a bronze lamp in the British Museum attributed to the eighteenth or nineteenth century Deccan.³⁸

References

³⁸ British Museum no.1953,0713.16. For a discussion on zoomorphic Indian lamps see Zebrowski, *Gold, Silver & Bronze, from Mughal India*, 1997, p.95-109.







22

NAIR (NAYAR) SWORD

KERALA, SOUTH INDIA
14TH–18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 720 MM

Robert Elgood, the only person to make serious attempts to study South Indian arms (see *Hindu Arms and Ritual*, 2004) suggests that a comparative blade³⁹ in the Government Museum, Chennai relates to swords from the Chalukyan dynasty that ruled large parts of South and Central India between the sixth and twelfth centuries. They both are unusually striated and of early manufacture, Elgood dates the Chennai sword to the fourteenth- or early fifteenth century, the blade on the example shown here could be as early as that, but the bronze hand guard and blade straps, now without grip and pommel, are probably seventieth or eighteenth century.

These swords were initially used for war but designs changed. However early temple sculpture showed the archaic form and therefore temples continued to use the early weapon for ritual purposes. From time to time the hilts deteriorated due to wear and tear and were renewed. This sword type is shown in a seventh century south Indian temple sculpture,⁴⁰ and remained in military use until the sixteenth century, when it became a ritual item, hence the sometimes incorrect 'Temple Sword' provenance given to these swords.

The hand guard, is made up of four identical bronze discs, each with seven concentric circles, almost certainly inspired by the seven Chakras of the human body. This would give the warrior a spiritual advantage in the belief that the sword would receive his energy and completing the cycle by circulating the energy back through his seven chakras.

A triangular blade strap and a smaller load bearing triangular strut sit on the hand-guard and connect to the blade, all deeply chased with stylised floral patterns and south Indian scrolls.

A further sword for comparison and good provenance is in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.⁴¹ The original collection index card (George Cameron Stone) reads: 'Sabre from Malabar: Curved blade 23in long with elaborate reinforcing pieces on each side covered with silver bosses. Hilt steel, horn, wood and brass rattles in the pommel. Oldman/Stone Collection'.

References

³⁹ Elgood, *Hindu Arms and Ritual*, 2004, p.83, no.8.14.

⁴⁰ Elgood, *Hindu Arms and Ritual*, 2004, p.83, no.8.13.

⁴¹ Metropolitan Museum, New York, acc.no.36.25.1583.

23

TRIBAL AXE

GOND, CENTRAL INDIA
EARLY 17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 800 MM
BLADE 288 MM



An elegantly sculpted, steel, tribal axe head, mounted on a later wooden haft, an axe from the Gond people of central India. Its quality is far superior to those usually seen, the craftsmanship suggesting it was made for a chief or other important person.

The haft fits into a beautifully shaped large socket, an integral part of the axe head, which acts as a counter balance to the blade and also as a stylish bludgeon for its owner. Despite its gory functionality it is a beautifully fluent design. Details such as the prominent curved back edges on the axe blade have the abstract sophistication of modern art and the clean sweeping lines give it an aesthetically pleasing sculptural quality.

We can compare this axe to two others in the Royal Jaipur Collection, published by Elgood (2015).⁴² Elgood suggests that the two Jaipur examples were possibly captured from tribal chiefs during Raja Jai Singh's campaign against the Gonds in 1630.

References

⁴² Elgood, *Arms and Armour at the Jaipur Court: The Royal Collection*, 2015, p.196-197, cat.no.133 and 134.



24

ZAGHNAL AXE

DECCAN, INDIA
17TH–18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 620 MM
BLADE 170 MM

An Indian all-steel 'zaghal' with an early Deccani curved blade, from the maharaja's armoury in the former princely state of Bikaner.

This zagnal, Persian for 'crows-beak', has a triangular, slightly curved blade of watered steel, with a raised central spine and swollen tip for armour piercing. The square section socket is marked with the Devanagari number '12' and a longer marking on the opposite face which is done with a punch dot, a technique which is another hallmark of the Bikaner armoury. Opposite the blade is a striking hammer, with an octagonal waist, the striking surface is also ground to an octagonal apex.

The tubular steel shaft is beautifully constructed in three parts, the upper part twisted, with the 'twists' each being chased with a thick line in the grooves. These were almost certainly inlaid with gold. A large central portion is nine-sided with a long Devanagari inscription on one face, which translates:

'Collection serial no.1952'.

The last octagonal portion is elegantly flared like a piece of Mughal jade, one of the sides has a further punch dot marking which seems to have more antiquity than the other markings.

The curved katar blade of the proportions shown here feature in Blochmans translation of Abu'l Fazl's, A'in-i-Akbari,⁴³ a manuscript originally written for the Emperor Akbar in 1589. Unfortunately, these nineteenth century drawings are grossly inaccurate. A photograph of the British Museum's A'in-i-Akbari manuscript dated 1621 is published by Elgood, 2004, p. 18. This shows a katar with a blade of this form. This very broad blade form is extremely rare, on a zagnal or on a katar, and there is reason to suggest that the blade on this axe is earlier than the haft and dates from c.1600.

See Elgood (2015), cat.no.137, p.202 for a similar item.

References

⁴³trans. Henry Blochmann. 3 vols.
Repr. Delhi, 1988, vol. I, p. 117.





25

REVOLVING MATCHLOCK MUSKET

WESTERN INDIA
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 1420 MM



A scarce matchlock musket with revolving multi-shot cylinder from Western India. The curved wooden stock painted black with a painted arched panel at the butt-end, and a similar arch at the breach-end; contained within the arches Mughal style flower sprays in red, green and yellow, all on a golden orange background. The arches provide a border for the central area where painted in golden red are an eight petalled flower; bottle or vase, a swan and a leaf. These objects are usually found on ivory inlaid matchlock guns from Jaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner. Elgood (2015) publishes an example from the Royal Jaipur collection,⁴⁴ another example from the Royal Collection Trust is kept at Sandringham House, and illustrated by Clarke (1910).⁴⁵ The Sandringham example was presented to the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, during his tour of India in 1875-76 by the Maharaja of Jaipur.

The polished steel cylinder, marked with a presumed armoury marking of 'SK12' has four chambers. Each chamber is capable of individual loading with supplied ramrod. Hand-rotating, the cylinder is located to the breech by nocks engaging the shaped top strap which connects the stock to the barrel. The serpentine is connected to the trigger by means of a simple linkage system which is hidden in the stock, when the trigger is squeezed, the serpentine is lowered slowly into the priming pan of the selected chamber. The barrel is slender, of round section and retained by four barrel bands. An old label is still attached to a suspension ring with the stamped date of 18th June 1973 and the handwritten number '162' and 'appraisal #17'.

Early prototypes and experiments with revolving firearms have always intrigued those involved with arms and armour; none less than Samuel Colt who travelled to the United Kingdom and studied an Indian matchlock musket with revolving cylinder, not dissimilar to the one shown here, which was then kept at the Tower of London, now part of the collection at the Royal Armouries, Leeds (XXVIF.2).⁴⁶ Colt went on to illustrate the musket in a lecture he gave in London on revolver design in 1851.



References

⁴⁴ Elgood, *Arms and Armour at the Jaipur Court: The Royal Collection*, 2015, p.256-257, cat.no.183.

⁴⁵ Clarke, *Arms and Armour at Sandringham*, 1910, p.18-19, cat.no.242.

⁴⁶ The Royal Armouries, object no. XXVIF.2, see <https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-30642.html>



S.K.
12



26

CURIOUS GUN

RAJASTHAN, NORTH INDIA
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 850 MM



A curious blued and decorated nineteenth century Indian metal instrument from Rajasthan. It has a nine-sided staff, in four sections which screw together; the last containing a flintlock pistol and the first fitted with a threaded replacement bulbous stop end. The first section has accurately drilled holes in the middle of each face. The sides are all precisely inlaid with gold in what appears to be a measuring system in Sanskrit. The pistol end is decorated with gold koftgari in a classic north Indian repeating floral pattern, with the jaws and the outside of the striking pan heavily gilded. A long lever trigger, is inscribed, puzzlingly, on the inside face with numbers which also appear to be calibrated in a similar measuring system, the trigger when not in use held in place by a gilded iron sleeve.

Both the Royal Armouries (Leeds), and the Royal Collection Trust (Sandringham), own similar objects which they describe as a 'Walking Stick Gun'. These are all of similar construction and undeniably made for the same purpose. Despite the uniformly attributed name, both institutions have differing opinions on the intended use of the instrument as can be seen in an article printed in the Royal Armouries Journal, I.I., 2004, the Royal Armouries have contradicting views on its application.

On their own website the Royal Armouries have suggested the application of a sundial. Ian Bottomley, writing in the Royal Armouries journal, suggests the most likely attribution as a gunner's baton, finding a comparison with similar scales used on European gunner's instruments for calculation of powder charges and weights of shot. The Royal Collection Trust have stated that the numbers are a calendar (a theory no doubt supported by the finding of an hour-glass in one of the sections).

The example shown here is in exceptional condition with all of the original gold and bluing still present, quite remarkable considering there is no handle as such. The Leeds example is heavily patinated as one might expect from such an object. The Sandringham example while not available for inspection due to building refurbishment, appears from the online image to be in better condition than the Leeds example. It is complete with a spring loaded bayonet, which the Leeds example and the example shown here probably never possessed.

It is important to note that the Sandringham example was presented to the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, during his tour of India in 1875-76 by Ram Singh the Maharao of Bundi, which helps us date, and geographically attribute this curious object.

References

⁴⁷ The Royal Armouries, Leeds, no.XXVIF.218, see <https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-9519.html>

⁴⁸ The Royal Collection Trust, Sandringham House, RCIN 37960, see <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/37960/walking-stick-gun>

⁴⁹ Bottomley, *Indian firearms curiosa*, *Arms & Armour* I.I., 2004: p.81-88.





27

HISPANO-ARAB DAMASCENED BOX

EIBAR, SPAIN
CIRCA 1920

OVERALL 50 x 50 x 24 MM

A small decorative iron box from the early twentieth century, damascened in two colours of gold in a style that was preserved, perfected, and popularised by the Zuloaga family of Eibar, Northern Spain; particularly Plácido Zuloaga (1834-1910), the supreme damascener of that family. The Zuloaga family were known first as gunsmiths and armourers but later as artisans for decorative objects.

Probably made in Eibar, Northern Spain, this pill box is closely related to two similarly damascened cigarette-cases (maker unknown) from an Eibar catalogue from the 1920's.⁵⁰ The three related objects conform to a brief 'Moorish' trend in Eibar in the early twentieth century. Cards retained by the Iraeta family of Eibar, and illustrated by Lavin, show interior views of the Alhambra in Granada and of the Alcazar Palace in Seville, a royal palace originally developed by Muslim rulers. These or other cards like them would have provided the source for the ornamentation of the box shown here.

The lid depicts a cusped Islamic archway underneath which stand a pair of robed and turbaned Muslim men. The archway is surrounded by panels of fleur-de-lis and various geometric designs, likely inspired by Hispano-Arab ceilings, plasterwork and wooden doors.

A winged projection from the lid provides purchase for opening, and each of the four sides of the box has a central elaborate eight-pointed star, flanked by leaning palmettes, all surrounded by foliate designs and profuse dot punching.

The turbaned men are an unusual depiction on such boxes, but a similar damascened pillbox from Eibar (1910-1925) decorated with the Nasrid motto 'there is no victor but God', is in the Khalili collection and illustrated by Lavin (1997).⁵¹

References

⁵⁰ Lavin, *The Art and Tradition of the Zuloagas: Spanish Damascene from the Khalili Collection*, 1997, p.140-141.

⁵¹ *IBID*, p.137, cat.no.39.





28

BRONZE DIE OR MOLD

INDIA
17TH-19TH CENTURY

DIAMETER 70 MM

A small bronze multi-impression die from India, seventeenth to nineteenth century. A fascinating curiosity, the convex surface is efficiently covered with decorative impressions in the form of symmetrical flowers, teardrop shapes, and small circles - some arranged in a pyramid or square formation. The rear is flat to provide a stable work surface. The upper, and more exposed surface has beautiful patination in a deep golden yellow colour; the underside, more protected and less handled, has maintained its natural silvery colour which exposes the high content of tin to give the die a higher degree of hardness.

The compact nature of this object, and the efficient use of the surface area, suggests that it was used by somebody for whom space was a premium. A likely candidate is a jeweller; but the symmetrical flowers are quite often found as decorative washers on objects such as weapons and armour.

Despite the inconclusive summary, the item remains an intriguing and decorative object, capable of sparking an interesting debate.

29

BETEL-CUTTERTAMIL NADU, INDIA
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 132 MM

The practice of betel-chewing is a historical cultural phenomenon which has been endemic throughout the Indian subcontinent, south east Asia and large parts of the western Pacific. 'Paan' in Hindi is a chew or 'quid' parcel of betel leaf containing areca nut, which is sliced using a betel-cutter; and a lime paste. It is chewed for its stimulant and psychoactive effects. The cutters are sometimes referred to as 'betel nut cutters' which is a misnomer since there is no such thing as a 'betel nut'.

This eighteenth century example is in the form of a handsome stallion with chiselled and pronounced features, and simple line decoration representing the mane. The blade is integral to the upper section and forms the horse's belly. A lower section, attached by a simple pivot at the base of the long neck of the horse, forms the partly protracted front legs. The curved cutter handles form the rear legs. When the cutter is closed, the horse is at rest but when opened, the horse appears to rise up on his back legs like a stallion rearing in the wild. The ears, mane and tail are represented by chased and shaped pieces of applied silver.

Brownrigg (1991) published the Samuel Eilenberg collection of betel-cutters, and shows a small group of horse cutters from Tamil Nadu. It is a popular subject matter for cutters not only from India, but also from Indonesia. He comments that an iron horse betel-cutter is an exception to the general rule that Indian horse cutters are usually made of brass. The reason for Brownrigg's observation is that brass is a far more malleable material, and the creation of an iron horse sculpture of the quality shown in the Eilenberg example⁵² and the comparable one shown here, would be a difficult task for the maker; thus, made at a higher cost, for a wealthier and more important client.

References

⁵² Brownrigg, *Betel Cutters - from the Samuel Eilenberg Collection*, 1991, p.77, fig.no.70.







LARGE VALAI-TADI

SOUTH INDIA
17TH–18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 400MM

A South Indian throwing weapon made of iron, known as a valai-tadi, Tamil meaning 'curved stick'. Other regional names are birundungi, katariya, or valari.

This weapon is crescent shaped, one end heavier than the other, the two-piece pommel providing a handle. This example has some simple chased decoration and a reinforced striking end. Men trained in the use of the weapon would hold it by the lighter end, whirl it a few times over their shoulders, and then hurl it with great force against a target. Experts in the art of throwing the valai-tadi could dispatch small game and even men. This example, bigger and heavier than most, was used against larger animals or in warfare.

The Dewan of Pudukkottai (a small state in Tamil Nadu), wrote in 1909⁵³ that the British encountered them during the Palaiyakkar Wars (1799-1805), fought between the Polygars (Palaiyakkarars) of the Tirunelveli Kingdom in Tamil Nadu, and the British East India Company. The Dewan further says that those still using these weapons would hunt hares, jungle fowl etc, but now these objects are mostly kept in the puja (prayer) room of Kallan and Maravan families, to be brought out, cleaned, and worshipped on Ayudha day (when weapons and implements of industry were worshipped). He goes on to describe how at a Kallan marriage, the couple visit the home of the bridegroom and boomerangs are exchanged before a feast is held. He quotes a saying: "Send the valai-tadi, and bring the bride".

References

⁵³ The Dewan wrote to Thurston concerning the latter's study of *Castes and Tribes of South India*, 1909, Vol I-A &B, xxviii, xxix.

31

DECORATED VALAI-TADI

SOUTH INDIA
18TH–19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 350MM

A slightly later 'valai-tadi' boomerang than the previous example (cat.no.30). This one is for hunting small animals. Lighter, but more decorative, the reinforced end has a dense pattern of leaves, with two rows of half circles along the spine, and three four-petalled flowers on each side. The two-piece handle has some damage on one side.

Elgood illustrates a similar example from the National Museum, Liverpool.⁵⁴

References

⁵⁴ Elgood, *Hindu Arms and Ritual*, 2004, (No.6.6.28D), p.191, fig.19.7.







32

MONASTERY DRUM

TIBET
19TH CENTURY

DIAMETER 600 MM

Tibetans love strong and vibrant colours and this monastery drum (Tibetan *nga*) is no exception. Nineteenth century or earlier, it has a wooden body forming the shell and leather goat skin covering each side. It is painted with dragons, skulls, and a large central gaykil (wheel of joy). A carved socket on the underside allows the drum to sit on a tripod like stand, or be held on a pole by a monk who would beat the drum with a curved stick.

We should begin by putting this drum into context, and a big clue lies in the imagery and importantly the colour of the background of the leather skin. Usually the main colour is green. However, in this case we see a black background, and thus draw comparisons with 'nag-thangs' (black paintings) which can be linked with wrathful deities or 'Dharmapalas'. The inference can now be drawn that the drum was perhaps kept in a 'mgon-khang' (chapel for a wrathful deity), linked with visions of cosmic apparitions and used for secret initiations or tantric dances, played by a single monk keeping rhythm for chanting, music, dancing; and symbolically with cosmic rhythm.

The timber shell is generally in good condition, but probably in its working life a small portion of the wooden rim has separated from the main body. It is completely stable now, but it leaves a small gap which interestingly reveals a piece of applied pink material, hardened with the application of animal glue. We do not know if it is some attempt at a repair or stabilization, or a devotional act.

The wooden body is painted with a red background, and depicted are two large dragons (Tib. *druk*, *brug*) with scaly bodies and fire like tails, writhing in a scene of storm clouds. The dragon often represents thunder, so in the context of a drum it is significant. Each dragon grasps a pearl in each claw, the pearls producing dew, and when the dragon clenches them tightly, a downpour of rain. The dragon has always had a strong association with weather prognostication, and used in this particular application, particularly pertinent due to the association of the drum with music and the weather.

The tanned leather skin is stretched over the wooden rim and held with dozens of wooden pegs.

The skin is decorated in a concentric pattern with a large central wheel of joy, representing Mount Meru, a sacred mountain with five peaks considered to be the centre of all the physical, metaphysical and spiritual universes. The area around this is considered to be the 'great salt ocean' which surrounds Mount Meru, also the drums striking area, decorated with eight laughing skulls with orange tendrils. Finally, there is an outer band of red with black outline beyond which is a rim in a deep golden yellow.

It is unusual for the striking area to be decorated. Not only is the laughing skull depiction interesting but there is an arresting visual impact, partly due to the surrounding orange flames which represent the incineration of the poisons of ignorance, desire, aversion, pride and jealousy. The skulls when linked here with the Wheel of Joy, symbolize the capacity to cut through all obstacles and illusions. The Wheel of Joy is the central hub of the 'dharmachakra', which literally means 'the wheel of transformation', or spiritual change. The four yin yang shaped sections are painted to represent the four seasons, and represent Buddha's four noble truths.



33

TIBETAN FOUR MIRROR ARMOUR

TIBET
18TH CENTURY

BREAST PLATE
DIAMETER 185 MM

A highly interesting and decorative set of steel Tibetan armour; in an arrangement that is commonly seen in India and Persia, and referred to as 'char-aina', literally 'four mirrors'. Held together with leather straps and secured to the body by means of iron buckles, it comprises a highly decorative front plate, with a more restrained back plate and two side plates. The slightly convex breast mirror is fitted with an applied gilt copper border, with the exposed steel showing signs of 'mechanical damascus' (folded steel). In the centre is a three-dimensional gilt head of Garuda, a large mythical bird of religious and spiritual importance.

The Indo-Persian variant was physically more efficient, as the plates were usually rectangular and larger; but for a Tibetan, a mirror-armour would provide powerful spiritual protection. In Tibet these mirrors would have been referred to as me long bzhi, meaning 'four mirrors'. In Buddhism the mirror represents the clear karmic past of previous lives, one of eight auspicious objects in Tibetan Buddhism of Indic, pre-Buddhist origin.

The border is in deep repoussé, chased with foliated scrolls. At the top is an interesting depiction of 'the wrathful offering of the five senses' (Tib. *Khro bo'l dbang po lnga tshogs*). Depicted in a traditional 'orma' arrangement, it is a dark and gory offering of body parts presented to wrathful deities or Dharmapala's. Shown is a kapala skull cup, resting on two severed heads, containing the five sense organs. Centrally, there is a heart (representing touch), attached to the sides of which are a pair of ears, and between the ears a nose with flared nostrils. Optic nerves emerge from the cup, with the attached eyes looking toward each other. A tongue hangs limp over the edge of the cup. Symbolically the presentation of this offering of the five sense organs represents the subtlest level of consciousness.

On the opposite side, in a pyramid formation, there is an offering of three jewels or ratna (Tib. *rin-chen* or *rin-poche*) or mani (Tib. *norbu*). On a lotus base, they represent the jewels of Buddha, dharma and sangha, while single flames emitting from the sides reflect the adamant Vajra nature.

The handsome Garuda (Tib. *Khyung, mkha' lding*) is an assimilation of the Indian Garuda (enemy of the Nagas), with the Bon khading – the horned golden eagle, king of birds and the bon bird of fire. Shown here with twisted hair and eyebrows like fire, and between his sharp horns a protuberance symbolizing a concealing of a naga jewel in his skull. This jewel, stolen from the King of the Nagas, is sometimes represented as a head ornament placed above the sun and the moon on his crown. A prominent curved beak, like that of an eagle or falcon, complete the powerful image. Garuda appears in many forms according to different traditions and lineages, but assumes greatest prominence in the Dzogchen transmissions of the Nyingma and Bon traditions. He is commonly the vehicle of Amoghasiddhi – the green Buddha of the north.

While the front plate gives spiritual offerings, and displays aggression in the form of Garuda, the pair of side plates, protecting the kidneys, provide defensive and indestructible imagery. The small 'vajra' symbolizing the impenetrable, imperishable, immovable, immutable, indivisible and indestructible, giving the wearer a superhuman belief in himself. The wearer would also be aware that the vajra symbolizes the masculine principle of method and skill, giving him further belief in his own martial or spiritual prowess.

The rear plate shows a single gilt skull, presented much in the style of the front Garuda head and the vajras on the side plates. While it is an obvious symbol associated with death, it is also said to be a reminder of impermanence and the consequent importance of giving up one's desires. A powerful object in Tantric ritual, it is further evidence that this armour would have been made primarily for ceremonial use.

LaRocca, comments on the presence of skulls on a spear, musket and musket barrel in his book *Warriors of the Himalayas*,⁵⁵ suggesting the objects were either installed as part of the panoply of armour and weapons often found in shrines devoted to a guardian deity, or that they were designed for use in a divination ceremony conducted by a high-ranking oracle, such as the State Oracle formally at Nechung in Tibet. A photograph in the same book⁵⁶ shows the oracle of the deity Baung Choje in 1928, wearing a very similar breast plate to the one being discussed here.

This is certainly an important set, and has comparable characteristics to many published oracle mirrors.⁵⁷ Possibly made for an important lama general, in the context of a Nyingma monastery, it is unlikely to be matched, and a wonderful relic of a magical place and people.

References

⁵⁵ LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas, Rediscovering the Arms and Armour of Tibet*, 2006, cat.nos.78, 103 & 105.

⁵⁶ *IBID*, p.39, fig.37.

⁵⁷ Ashencaen and Leonov, *The Mirror of Mind: Art of Vajrayana Buddhism*, Spink, 1995, cover image, p.1, no.1.









34

TIBETAN FOREARM GUARD

TIBET
15TH–16TH CENTURY

OVERALL 265MM

Formed from a single piece of hardened leather, this is a scarce Tibetan guard for the left forearm. Unlikely to have ever been made in pairs, the small group of surviving examples are all for the left arm. A near identical example is in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, illustrated by LaRocca.

The surface of the leather has been affected by age and climate but has taken on a wonderful reptilian appearance in red and gold that could be compared to the flames of hell. Perhaps the maker would be quite happy with this result! Either way it is evident that the leather was once decorated with gold and red/orange paint.

Five vertical iron straps and integral diamond/half diamond shaped cartouches are riveted to the leather, each tipped with an arrowhead like finial. The only exception being the largest central fitting, this seems to be unique in the fact it has a brass background, which can be seen through the openwork. The unusual central brass floral washer in the centre is also quite unusual, but can be compared to an example illustrated by Hales.⁵⁹ The leather edge is strengthened by means of an applied iron border; which, like the straps, is chased with single line highlighting the design.

These straps compare loosely to the fittings found on the Tibetan shield, cat.no.38 of this publication, but more closely to the iron fittings on a very fine Tantric door, dated sixteenth-eighteenth century.⁶⁰

The diamond shaped openwork cartouches on the door, and on other similar armguards, are probably from the same workshop. Kamansky/Hayward state a similar door to the one they illustrate can be seen in Nechung, the traditional seat of the State Oracle in Lhasa, which gives some indication of the high status of the artist producing this pierced ironwork.

The rear of the guard is undecorated, but shows good colour and patina. A single wax seal with a floral pattern is thought to be an early twentieth century Tibetan export seal. A similar seal is on a lamellar Tibetan helmet in the National Museum of Scotland,⁶¹ sold to the Museum in 1908 by F.M. Bailey (1882-1967). Bailey was an officer during the Younghusband expedition of 1903-1904, and spent time as the British Trade Agent in Gyantse, an important Tibetan town south west of Lhasa.

References

⁵⁸ LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas, Rediscovering the Arms and Armour of Tibet*, 2006, p.118, cat.no.35.

⁵⁹ Hales, *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour, a Lifetimes Passion*, 2013, p.298, fig.716.

⁶⁰ Kamansky/Hayward, *Wooden Wonders: Tibetan Furniture in Secular and Religious Life*, 2004, p.307, fig.126.

⁶¹ LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas, Rediscovering the Arms and Armour of Tibet*, 2006, p.54-56, cat.no.1.





MAIL AND PLATE ARMOUR

PHILIPPINE ARCHIPELAGO
19TH CENTURY OR EARLIER

TORSO HEIGHT 870 MM

An important Moro body armour of unusual form. The steel plates are chiselled with Islamic inscriptions in a style consistent with late Mamluk or early Ottoman armour of the sixteenth century.

The shirt consists of fifty-three iron plates attached together with large butted iron rings, assembled in a similar construction to Moro shirts from the Philippines, with a distinctive flared skirt. Related examples can be seen in the Islamic Arts Museum, Malaysia. However these are invariably nineteenth century and earlier examples have not been identified.

The inscriptions on the plates are Arabic honorifics commonly found on Mamluk objects. The maker of this shirt was somebody who has seen late-Mamluk or early Ottoman armour. The inscriptions include:

العز لمولا [نا]

al-'izz li-mawla[na]
"Glory to our Master"

المولو [ي] الاميري

al-mawlawi al-amiri
"The Lordly, the Amir"

العالم العالو (كذا) [العالى] (؟) ...

al-'alim al-'ali (?)
"The Learned, the Exalted (?) ...

الامير الدوادار (؟) الصالحي (؟) الع[لا]دلي (؟)

al-amir al-dawadar (?)
"The Amir, the Dawadar (?),
the officer of al-Salih, the Just (?)"

الاميري الكبير (؟) الغازي

al-amiri al-kabiri (?) al-ghazi
"The Commander in Chief,
the Ghazi"

Other words appear to be parts of Arabic benedictions, which are less indicative of Mamluk influence, and suggest rather early-Ottoman or Iranian influence. These include:

النصرة

al-nusra
"Victory"

الثنا و الراحة [ها]

al-thana' wa al-ra[ha]
"Praise and ease"

The use of iron plates, and iron rings is unprecedented in Moro shirts which are typically made from brass or horn plates with brass rings. From the materials chosen and the unique Mamluk or Ottoman style calligraphy, it is evident that a Moro armourer or his patron saw examples of Mamluk or Ottoman armour; probably due to trade contact with the Ottoman Empire. From the beginning of the Muslim era there were extensive trade links between South East Asia and Jeddah where communities of Asian Muslim merchants settled and prospered, particularly in the spice and timber trade. One of these is likely to have commissioned this armour, styling it quite deliberately in the manner of the rulers of Egypt.

The maritime links between the Red Sea region and the Philippines are extensive. The Ottoman Caliphs in Istanbul assumed the leadership of the Muslim world and took the title 'Custodian of the two Holy Places' (Mecca and Medina) after defeating the Mamluks in 1517. Successive Caliphs rendered assistance to Muslim communities. Ottoman records show that in the sixteenth century gunners and gunsmiths were sent to Aceh in Sumatra to help fight against the Portuguese and the Dutch, each of whom sought to dominate the pepper trade.⁶² The annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, was under Ottoman control from 1517 to the early twentieth century. This unique shirt was commissioned at an unknown date by a pious Muslim who sought the protection that the words convey to the wearer. Further protection was sometimes acquired by dipping the garment into the well at Mecca which was believed to contain the water of Paradise.

References

⁶² Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, *Symbols of Power and Beauty: The collection of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia*, 2015, p.120-123.

⁶³ Donoso, Issac, 'The Ottoman Caliphate and Muslims of the Philippine Archipelago during the Early Modern Era'. *From Anatolia to Aceh - Ottoman, Turks and Southeast Asia*, ed. A.C.S. Peacock & A. Teh Gallop. Oxford University Press, 2015.





36

HEAVY IRON SHIELD

INDIA
CIRCA 18TH CENTURY
1573–1615

DIAMETER 370 MM
WEIGHT 5.5 KG

An extremely heavy iron shield of convex form and elaborate decoration. The reason for the impressive 5.5kg weight is the fact that the shield is formed from a single piece of iron. The polished foliate scrollwork and borders that are clearly visible on the surface are not applied as would be expected, but carved from a single thick piece of iron with hammer marks distinctly present on the reverse side.

The lower surface has traces of gold that indicate that the entire surface has been gilded. However, a careful examination reveals that beneath the gold, the shield was blued, perhaps the gilding is a later embellishment; regardless, the contrast with the raised ironwork, now in high polish with traces of silver, was, and still is, quite striking.

The lower surface is chased with subtle floral patterns, stippled flowers and corner like scroll designs, within the raised arabesque scrollwork. Chased inscriptions fill the raised lozenge shaped panels that run around the circumference of the shield. The characters were originally filled with silver (traces remain), to contrast with the gilt background.

In the cartouches running around the border are two Persian couplets:

سپهری داشت / آن گزیده سوار
آسمان رنگ و / آینه کردار

همچه [كذا] (همچو) گرد قمر / منور بود
پرز یاقوت / لعل گوهر بود

"That elite warrior had a shield,
The colour of the sky and reflective.
Just as around the moon
[everything] is illuminated,
So is the spinel a jewel infused
with ruby."

The meaning of the second couplet is that whatever is in the orbit or vicinity of something superior increases in value by virtue of its proximity. The spinel (la'l) was generally held to be inferior to the ruby (*yaqut*). This also is a reference to the design of the shield on which the cartouches containing the verses are arranged in orbit around the central six-sided star; in which there appears to be the number twelve, possibly referring to the Shi'i imams.

The spelling of the word *hamchu* as *hamcheh* suggests strongly that this was not made in Iran, but rather has a regional provenance.

Due to the unusual construction and design, it is difficult to attribute this shield. However, the carved intertwined arabesques provide us with some clues, and we can begin to compare it to the patterns on a shield depicted by Egerton,⁶⁴ which he describes as Indian Punjabi work from Lahore which is Persian in character. This would support the fact that the inscriptions, while being identified as being in Persian, are not likely to have been executed by a native Persian due to language and spelling anomalies mentioned above.

Four unusual iron bulbous bosses are attached to small threaded rods, one with an old brass armoury tag with the number 100. Comment should also be made in regards to the weight, perhaps the intention was to make it able to deflect musket balls; it is too heavy to be carried in the traditional way except by some giant Sikh warrior.

Provenance

Stern Collection, New York

References

⁶⁴ Egerton, *An Illustrated Handbook of Indian Arms*, 1880, p.49, fig.7.



37

PAINTED DHAL SHIELD

INDIA
19TH CENTURY

DIAMETER 470 MM



A nineteenth century Indian shield known as a dhal, from Rajasthan, probably Ajmer. A similar shield is shown in a brightly coloured lithograph from the *Journal of Indian Art and Industry*.⁶⁵ It is labelled 'Shield made by Khuda Bux, of Shahpura, Ajmere'. Ajmer was a princely state in India, and is now a city in the state of Rajasthan. Ajmer is surrounded by the Aravalli mountain range, and these mountains could be the source of the landscapes we see on shields from this group.

This example is convex and made of buffalo hide. It has a base layer of black paint which is used to great effect with the creation of a hilly landscape on four sides of the front surface. With the use of various shades of red on the black background, the artist creates an organic and subtle bed to the elaborate floral arrangements. The flower beds are bordered by sandy coloured rocks which the artist has shaded to create a three-dimensional visual effect. This effect continues with complex sprays of flowers and although the same shading techniques have not been used, the flowers, blossoms, fruits and larger leaves have multiple paint layers to give a physical prominence from the surface of the shield in contrast to those leaves that are painted as background. The use of gold in the paints is apparent which gives the shield an opulent appearance.

The rear of the shield is also decorated in a similar way, the lower ground closest to the border having red hills, and the upper ground with shaded rocks. The grain of the leather is more apparent on the rear, and provides a clever sense of texture to the scenic painting. The shield has a later red velvet knuckle pad and cord handles.

The gilt-copper bosses have a style of repoussé found on objects from Kutch in the nineteenth century. Each is set with four large pieces of polished green agate. The bosses may have been added at a later date. In India bosses were treated as a removable accessory. We can see from Elgood's recent catalogue of the Jaipur collection that five of the six hide shields catalogued are without bosses.⁶⁶

The use of decorative stone in shield bosses however, is not unique to this example, the Metropolitan Museum publish an Indian shield from the Bashford Dean Memorial Collection, which has copper-gilt bosses mounted with green glass.⁶⁷

References

⁶⁵ JJA, vol. III, 1890, illus. no. 6.

⁶⁶ Elgood, *Arms and Armour at the Jaipur Court: The Royal Collection*, 2015, cat.no's. 114, 115, 116, 119, and 120.

⁶⁷ Alexander, David G, *Islamic Arms and Armor: In the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 2015, p.10, fig.10, Acc.no.29.158.598.



38

CANE SHIELD WITH IRON STRAPS AND UMBO

TIBET
14TH–16TH CENTURY

OVERALL 630MM

A heavy and substantial cane shield from Western Tibet with applied ironwork straps and umbo. Similar shields have been found in an excavation of Tsaparang, the capital of the ancient Guge Kingdom. Only slightly domed, it is formed from a continuous spiral of bound cane. The outer surface has black painted diamonds with highlights of red, the painting now partly obscure and worn. The shield is in superb condition with only small losses to some rattan binding.

In the centre is a large, three-stepped iron umbo, radiating from which are four iron trident shaped braces, each with a snake-like or arrow-like head. Each quarter created by the tridents is divided further with a short straight strut with the same shaped finial, hooked over the perimeter of the shield and terminating about half the distance from the centre of the shield. The rear is fitted with two large iron suspension rings, joined with a twisted piece of leather to form a handle.

We can compare the ironwork to a Tibetan arm guard, (cat.no.34 in this publication), and also to a group of Tibetan leather boxes.⁶⁸ Anninos dates the boxes with similar struts to the fifteenth-seventeenth centuries.

The obvious and deliberate arrangement of two separate iron struts laid upon each other to form a trident deserves at least some comment. While widely perceived as a Hindu symbol, for Buddhists it symbolises the powers derived from mastery of the three channels of the subtle nervous system, that yogis visualise in their meditations as a ball of energy fibres wound around a blue central spinal channel; so as we can see, the decoration of functional Tibetan objects is frequently influenced by religion and spirituality.

A similar shield is in the Royal Armouries collection and can be viewed online:
<https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-8997.html>

References

⁶⁸ Anninos, *Tibetan Leather Boxes: Arts of Asia*, Volume 30, Number 1, 2000, p101–117.









39

SIXTEEN-PLATE HELMET

TIBET
15TH–16TH CENTURY

BOWL DIAMETER 210 MM

The fifth Dalai Lama, writing in 1643, said that armour was first bought to Tibet from a district in Kham (*smar khams*) during the reign of the semi legendary ancient king Trigum Tsenpo (*gri gum tsan po*).⁶⁹ We now have a recognisable Tibetan tradition of lamellar plate armour and helmets to which this helmet conforms.

Made of sixteen iron plates, this is a more complex arrangement than those with the more common eight lames. Eight outer plates overlap eight inner plates in an over-under pattern, all secured with leather laces. The outer plates have a strong medial ridge, and have two cusps with a single point each side. The bowl is surmounted by a socket, secured around its border by laces, and an integral two level pagoda shaped plume holder.

The brim of the helmet is fitted with a thick cylindrical band of yak hair, dyed in vibrant colours of red, yellow and black. It is a wonderfully preserved piece of accoutrement that once again gives us an example of spiritual and religious representation in Tibetan design and manufacture. The six coloured segments take the spiralling form of a 'dharamchakra', the wheel of spiritual change. In this case there are six segments (three colours repeated twice) in a yin-yang pattern, which symbolise a wheel of enjoyment (Tib. *dga' khyil*), representing the trinity of Buddha, dharma and sangha, and the overcoming of the three poisons of ignorance, desire and aversion.

Another Tibetan helmet of sixteen plates, part of a matching armour set, is in the British Museum, London.⁷⁰

References

⁶⁹ *Early History of Tibet*, Delhi, 1967, p.8.

⁷⁰ La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas, Rediscovering the Arms and Armour of Tibet*, 2006, p.59, cat.no.3.



40

**WOODEN HELMET
(OKLOP)**PHILIPPINES
19TH CENTURY

BOWL DIAMETER 185 MM



A wooden hat or helmet, known as an oklop, from the Philippines, circa nineteenth century. Despite the precise ribs of the bowl, the maker has captured a sense of nature, and influence could have been taken from the sea and marine life. The scalloped brim is carved in an identical fashion to an Ifugao Duyu utilitarian bowl, which in turn mimics the star shaped shell ornaments worn as belt decorations by the upper classes.

Wooden helmets developed and worn by the northern tribes of the Philippines doubled as bowls and water vessels when needed. The artefact in question however, because of its shape, refinement and polish, is a different animal altogether; undoubtedly the property of a man of chiefly rank.

A collection mark of PL.53 in white ink can be found under the brim.

Provenance

Purportedly collected in the Philippines in 1926, by A.W. Price who was a member of the 31st Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Army.

Sold by the Price family to D.A.Schenne, New York in 1999.

Purchased from D.A.Schenne.

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Runjeet Singh
Arms & Armour From the East
© 2016 Runjeet Singh

ISBN 978-0-9934409-1-5

Published by Runjeet Singh
First Published November 2016

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PO Box 6365
Coventry
CV3 9LU
United Kingdom

Photography by Philip Connor
Printed by Taylor Bloxham Ltd.

