

RUNJEET SINGH

ARMS & ARMOUR FROM THE EAST



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I

LARGE GOLD KATAR

NORTH INDIA
19TH CENTURY

The *katar* offered here is a classical example of this particular weapon which is unique to the Indian sub-continent, and has been part of the formal dress of Indian and Mughal royalty for centuries. It is represented frequently in the *Hamza-nama* (1562-1577) and other period Indian paintings, sculpture and coinage. This specimen is set apart from others by the fine condition, impressive size and powerful proportions.

The steel hilt which is as long as the blade, is precisely decorated with thick gold *koftgari* in stylised floral and repeating patterns which act as frames for the central undecorated surfaces which show evidence of wootz damascus (watered) steel.

The heavy armour-piercing blade has a polished edge, and a sunken central panel which displays a fine wootz pattern. There are central arrow-shaped fullers, and two c-scrolls at the forte with a small decorative border. The original wooden scabbard is covered with green velvet fitted with a silver chape beautifully pierced and cut with typical Indian decorative motifs.







2

HOODED KATAR

VIJAYANGARA (SOUTH INDIA)
SECOND HALF OF THE
16TH CENTURY



A fine example of a so-called hooded *katar*, sometimes attributed to a larger group of iron katars from the Tanjore armoury. This example has great integrity and a crisp quality, which is particularly evident in the precise and sharp narrow fullering on the locally made blade. Elgood¹ points out that these local blades were beginning to be replaced by cut down European sword blades in the closing decades of the sixteenth century, which were highly prized exotic imports at the time.

The hooded shell guard is beautifully modelled, and takes influence from Islamic architecture which was being adopted by the Hindu court in the royal center in Hampi in the mid-sixteenth century. It is particularly evident in the four cusped arches at the base of the shell guard, and also at the top of the side bars which have similar arches, and are finished with bulbous pommels. The hand guard sweeps up elegantly to a finial in the form of a ferocious *yali* head, a south Indian mythological creature, which would provide a protective function. The grip is quite typical with two parallel bars each with large central spheres.

For a similar example see Metropolitan museum, New York, No.36.25.904.

References

- ¹ Elgood, *Hindu Arms and Ritual*, 2004, p.145-148.









3

IVORY KHANJARLI

ORISSA, INDIA
18TH CENTURY

A fine example of an Indian dagger known as a *khanjarli*, categorised as such by the short-recurved blade and distinctively shaped hilt. In this case the hilt is made up of four pieces of highly polished ivory, including a large lunette pommel. Fully developed in form, the *khanjarli* form is thought to have evolved from the *chillanum*², which was largely produced in the Deccan and South India in the seventeenth century.

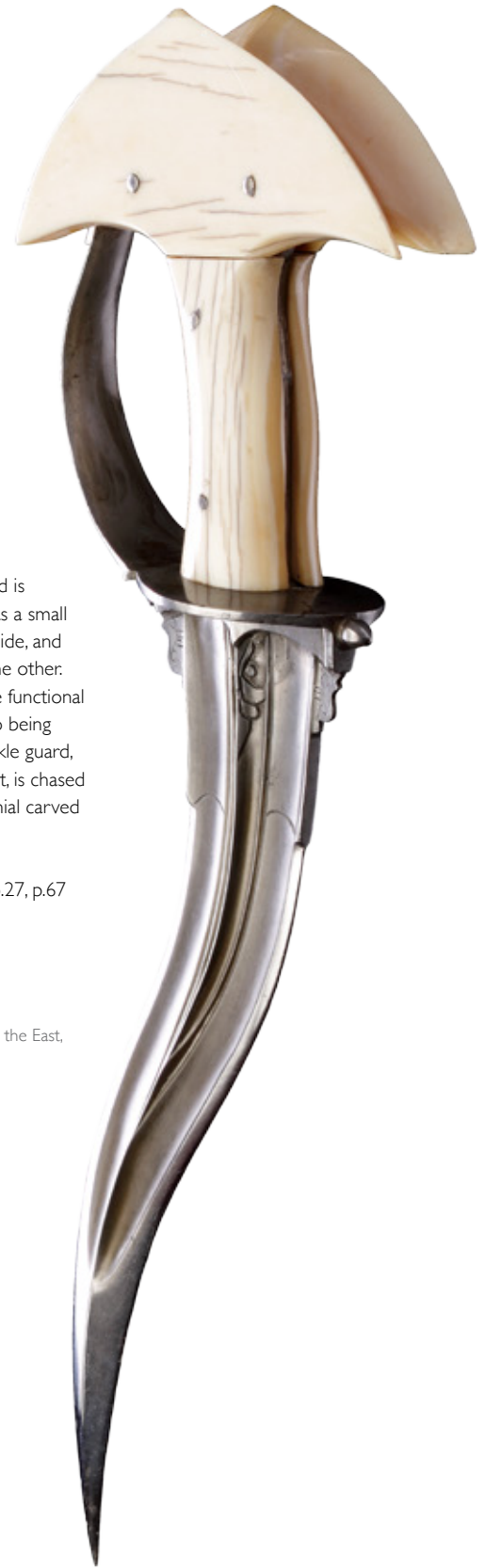
The blade is forged from wootz steel, with a particularly thick raised central spine which is flanked by deep precise fullers, and a central stylistic pattern. The upper portion of the blade has large flat edges with a stylized Yali or Makara either side, a symbol often used on arms and armour for its protective qualities. The steel tang on which the ivory grips are secured is forged as one piece with the blade.

An oval shaped hand guard is joined to the blade and has a small bulbous pommel on one side, and small drooping hook on the other. These are likely to provide functional applications as opposed to being decorative. The wide knuckle guard, also an applied component, is chased with patterns, and has a finial carved in the form of a Yali head.

See Nordlunde (2016), no.27, p.67 for a similar example.

References

- ² Singh, *Arms & Armour from the East*, 2015, p.19, cat. no.6.





4

TROUSSE EATING SET

CHINA

18TH / 19TH CENTURY

It is said that under the Qianlong emperor the wearing of eating sets became mandatory for all Manchus and Mongol. This was to encourage the traditional style of meat eating by cutting the meat straight off the bone, in contrast to the Chinese method, where the food was pre-cut into sizes that could be eaten with chopsticks. Traditional Chinese garments did not have pockets, so the sets would be attached to the owner's sash by means of pendants and toggles.

This example as well as having a knife and chopsticks, has a fork, which may be widely associated with western dining, but was purportedly used in China during the Xia dynasty (c.2070 – c.1600 BCE). More recent uncorroborated reports state that a steel knife and fork have been found in the excavation of the tomb of China's first emperor Qin Shihuang (259 BCE - 210 BCE). Forks were not common in Europe until at least the 17th century.

If we presume that these objects were an indication of the financial and social status of its owner, then the presumption would be that the owner of this set was a powerful and wealthy man.

The tubular gilt scabbard is covered with finely twisted silvered copper wire and buttons in an openwork arrangement. A top green-stained bone throat piece, and a bottom unstained bone mount with a copper bottom. A gilt copper mount sits below the throat piece heavily chased with foliage, with an attached belt loop chased with two small Chinese symbols, and an applied bat symbol beneath, chased with a four leaf flower.

The knife and fork are both mounted with light green jade handles and have gilt blade collars, one chased with patterns. The knife has a long slender blade of high quality steel, with a visible hardened edge, and the fork is made from gilt silver. The tortoise shell chopsticks have matching gilt finials.

A similar set with a jade hilted knife and tortoise shell chopsticks in the Metropolitan museum, New York, acc.no.36.25.989a–g







5

JADE KHANJAR

INDIA
MUGHAL PERIOD
17TH CENTURY



A seventeenth century Mughal dagger *khanjar* with jade hilt of slender and elegant proportions comparable to an important dagger in the collection of the Metropolitan museum (accession number 1982.321).³ Alexander compares the Metropolitan dagger to several pieces from the imperial Mughal workshops, and suggests that it may have been made for the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan around 1640 A.D.

Our dark green nephrite jade hilt is of conventional pistol-grip form, and like the Metropolitan dagger has a relatively small pommel and narrow central grip which unusually does not flare significantly towards the base. On most examples the central grip area is usually left uncarved; however, the Metropolitan dagger is profusely carved all-over, and the lapidary who carved our hilt has similarly expressed himself outside of the normal boundaries and extended the carved leafy stems to cover the central part of the hilt. The dark green stone has small areas of light green mottling, and also a natural brown russet inclusion which has been incorporated into the carved pattern. The pommel is set with a ruby in gold *kundun* on each side.

The strongly-recurved blade is forged from Indian *wootz* (watered) steel of a similar type used in the Metropolitan example, with a high contrast pattern and brightly burnished edges. The deep curvature of this example accents the graceful proportions of the hilt, indicating that the blade and hilt were built for each other.

References

³ Alexander, *Islamic Arms and Armour* – In the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015, p.214-215, cat.no.84.





6

GOLOK SWORD

WESTERN JAVA
19TH CENTURY

The overall form of this sword maybe familiar to those who collect and study the weapons of Indonesia, but the hilt form on this example is highly unusual. Beautifully carved in the form of a deer, it bears the similarities of realism and grace seen in the carving of deer and other animals in Mughal Indian jade dagger hilts.

The hilt (*Perah*), and the scabbard (*Sarangka*) are carved from wood, and the blade is steel. The grip and a large section of the scabbard are deeply carved with decorative patterns, and the tip of the scabbard is carved in a European style.

The blade is very well made with two spine fullers and a nicely shaped clip point tip, an indication that the maker was thoughtful and highly-skilled in his work. The most famous sword producing area in Java was a village by the name of *Tjikeroeh* (modern day spelling is *Cikeruh*), in the district of Jatinangor, Sumedang.

Many swords of this type are marked with the village name in the traditional spelling, and sometimes with a date from around 1880 into the 1900's. Although this example does not have a date it shares more in quality and workmanship with the earlier examples, so a date of around 1880 A.D. should be given. The omission of a date may also indicate that this example was never made for export, as many of the later ones were.

An example of similar quality is in the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, No. I 249-20⁴.

References

- ⁴ Van Zonneveld, Traditional Weapons of the Indonesian Archipelago, 2001, p.48, cat.no. I 15.



7

KIRK NURDUBAN SOSUN PATAH

NORTH INDIA
CIRCA 1800 AD

A rare Indian sword *Sosun Patah*, which is a Persian, Arabic and Urdu term meaning 'Lily Leaf' referring to the shape of the blade, also known as *Kopis* form. This example is what Rawson (1968) refers to as a *Sosun Patah* of Islamic form (the Rajput form having a more angled blade with wider belly). His classification refers to the theory that this sword is directly influenced by the Turkish *Yataghan*.

The elegantly downward curved blade has a T-section back, and is forged from fine *wootz* steel. These highly sought after and important swords are often forged from the best quality steel, and this shows dark (*kirk*) *wootz* with contrasting silver and black circles and spirals. In a further demonstration of the importance of this sword the blade falls into a category of a more specific type, known as *Kirk Nurduban*, or *Muhammed's ladder* [also the ladder of the Prophet Muhammad]. A variant considered by some as the most highly regarded, sometimes referred to as a blade of forty steps. It is characterised by transversely aligned distortions (like the rungs of a ladder) within the *wootz* pattern. The rungs are created mechanically while the blade is still hot, striking it with a chisel and hammer, forcing the crystalline structure to align into the straight lines we see here at regular intervals.

The iron hilt is covered in fine gold *koftagari* decoration of floral patterns set in large reticulated circles, with a nicely pierced and cut pommel tag in a Persian style, and a sweeping knuckle bow with bulbous finial. A contemporary wooden scabbard is covered with light green silk velvet.









8

RARE TIBETAN SWORD

TIBET
18TH–19TH CENTURY



A possibly unique silver mounted Tibetan straight sword. Most others of this period, and those with enough similar characteristic to be included in the same group, have trefoil pommels⁵. The pommel here is bulbous in form, and shares more in common with an important iron sword hilt⁶ (acc.no.1999.31) in the Metropolitan museum, New York, which can only be identified as Tibetan, Mongolian or Chinese, thirteenth to fourteenth century. The Met. hilt is heavily damascened with gold and silver, and on the pommel there is a large flaming pearl on a lotus base. We see the same concept on the sword shown here; the pearl replaced by a red coral, the flames and the lotus base, represented with pierced and chased heavy silver.

The grip is covered in ray skin with traces of blue, a pigment derived from azurite which could be found in deposits in the Tsang province north of the Tsangpo river. Jackson states 'because of the importance in painting, the Lhasa government strictly controlled the mining and primary distribution of the pigment (azurite), so that artists usually got it directly or indirectly from a government office.'⁷

The handguard is also unusual, consisting of a flat piece of silver in a teardrop shape, with a fretted skirt decorated with cloud patterns. The upper and lower scabbard mounts are decorated in much the same way as the pommel, and have pierced silver naturalistic swirls with a centrally mounted light green turquoise, and a red coral respectively. Two brackets for belt straps are attached to the right edge of the scabbard by two horizontal silver bands each pierced and chased and matching the other silver fittings. Each loop is flanked by two snarling *Makara* faces symbolising firmness and unshakability.



The wooden body of the scabbard is precisely made to fit the blade, which glides easily in and out. Covered on the exterior with what is believed to be vellum, this adds another fascinating and unusual aspect to this sword. The blade orientation in relation to the hilt indicates that it was made to be hung from a waist belt on the left-hand side of the body. Single edged, with an oblique tip, the blade is in fine condition, and displays a prominent hairpin pattern (*thur*) consisting of five thick dark lines. This forging technique is typical of Tibetan blades, in which alternating folded rods of hard and soft iron are combined with the aim of creating a blade which is both strong and flexible.

References

- ⁵ LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 2006, p.157-163.
- ⁶ LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 2006, p.156, cat.no.60.
- ⁷ Jackson, David and Janice, *Tibetan Thangka Painting*, 1984, p.75.



EARLY TIBETAN SWORD

EASTERN TIBET, KHAM REGION
15TH–16TH CENTURY



An important and early Tibetan short sword with high quality openwork iron fittings. It shares several features with a sword in the Metropolitan museum, New York (acc. No.36.25.1465a, b), which is dated as sixteenth to eighteenth century. This example is believed to be earlier, fifteenth to sixteenth century, due to the style of ironwork. LaRocca discusses this in a book of an exhibition held at the Metropolitan museum, New York, 2006, titled 'Warriors of the Himalays: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet'. He provides examples to illustrate that open ironwork from as early as the fifteenth century would have a naturalistic and organic nature that we see on the sword shown here. The dragon on the scabbard also matches with his descriptions; fierce, with a long sinuous body and four claws, one of which is opposed to the others. A further example of fifteenth century open ironwork to corroborate these conclusions, and in directly comparable with our sword, is a pencease in the Newark museum⁸. It not only shows the thick bifurcating scrollwork typical of this period, but like our sword has multiple dragons and a deer leaping through foliage.

The hilt has a lozenge-shaped cross section, with an attached iron pommel, pierced with scrolling tendrils on one side and chased decoration to match on the rear. Three iron short cone-shaped protrusions sit on top of the pommel, which are typical of swords made in Eastern Tibet, Kham province. The Metropolitan museum, New York, have an example with the same protrusions, although of a different type (acc.no. 36.25.1460)⁹ with provenance stating it was made in Poyal, once part of the Kingdom of Derge and now part of the Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in western Sichuan province. The central wooden grip is covered in ray skin, with eight applied brass lozenge-shaped studs. The lower part of the hilt has a further iron fitting decorated in the same way as the pommel, with a corresponding throat piece attached to the top of the scabbard.



The wooden scabbard has the same lozenge cross-section shape, and is covered with a black leather covering. The bottom is fitted with a U-shaped frame of iron, the front decorated with scrollwork, and in the center of the frame an iron panel in the shape of an arrow. This central panel has the same thick scrollwork but with a deer leaping through foliage, and an undulating dragon grasping a flaming pearl.

The blade orientation in relation to the hilt indicates that this sword was designed to be stored at the front of the body in a sash with the blade edge pointing upwards. Single edged, with an oblique tip, the blade displays a hairpin pattern comprising four light-coloured lines on a grey background which is the result of the forging process where alternating folded rods of hard and soft iron are combined with the goal of creating a blade which is both strong and flexible. The heel of the blade shows a swirling pattern, an unusual feature, which is described in the sword chapter of the Tashi Namgyal text as 'flowing and swirling designs'.¹⁰

References

- ⁸ Reynolds, *From the Sacred Realm*, 1999, p.108, plate 51.
- ⁹ LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 2006, p.164-165, cat.no.68.
- ¹⁰ LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas*, 2006, p.168.





10

CEREMONIAL TRIDENT

TIBET
18TH–19TH CENTURY

A Tibetan trident which relates to a similar example in the Guimet Museum, Paris, France (accession no. MA 5918). A trident is an important object in Buddhism, and is a frequently used attribute of the *dharmapalas*, a group of wrathful deities who symbolise the tremendous energy required to vanquish evil. *Dharmapala* is a Sanskrit word which means 'defender of the *dharma*'.

The main component is a double-edged flaming sword, with a thick central spine, giving the sword a three-dimensional form. The double-edged blade represents the indivisibility of relative and absolute truth. It is chased in the central areas with flames in gold, and at the tip in openwork-iron is a *vajra*-flame formation also damascened with gold. At the base of the blade sits a prominent double-sided gilt-copper skull, a reminder of our impermanence and of the consequent importance of giving up our desires. For a four-mirror armour with a similar skull on the back plate see Singh (2016), p.76-83, cat.no.33. The tubular steel socket is fitted to a contemporary wooden shaft painted blood red and mounted on a black steel base plate.

Two curling arms sprout from the sides of the skull in an organic manner, which sets it apart from the example in the Guimet, which is far more symmetrical. The arms curl in and out, and on each outside bend there are two steel flames hung on chain links, four in total; and on every internal bend there are three integral flames, six in total, perhaps symbolising the six perfections of Buddhism (giving, morality, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom). The tips of the arms are deliberately made to curl in opposite directions for an unknown reason, but to great visual affect, which adds to the uncontrived feeling of the design.

The chased flames on the blade surfaces resemble the decoration on a Tibetan lance head published by Singh (2015), p.64-67, cat.no.27. Both objects would have been installed as part of the panoply of armour and weapons often found in shrines devoted to a *dharmapala*. They were also used in a divination ceremony conducted by a high-ranking oracle.

The overall form of this trident is complex and unusual, which exposes it to intense debate and speculation.







II

LANCE (SANG) BUTT

SRIRANGAM, SOUTH INDIA
17TH–18TH CENTURY



A steel butt for a south Indian lance or spear known as a *sang*. It is of large proportions, very heavy, and would have been used to counterbalance a spear head such as the one formally in the collection of the late Richard R. Wagner Jr.¹¹

The Royal collection at Sandringham also have several examples of *sang* heads, and one particularly fine example¹² (RCIN: 38142) dated late sixteenth- or early seventeenth century was presented by the Princess of Tanjore.

Many notable collections contain *sang* heads, finely made with high quality steel chiseling for which the South Indian workshops are justly famous. However these heads have mostly lost their original shafts, and even those with hafts seldom retain an appropriate butt. This particular butt is delightful and would compliment the finest head. Of conical form with two bands of applied vertically-fluted and bulbous mouldings each secured by pierced and chiseled iron washers, identical with that surrounding the opening for the haft. The butt has a smooth polished patina.

References

¹¹ Pinchot, *Arms of the Paladins*, 2014, p. 12, cat.no.1-8

¹² Elgood, *Introduction essay to Arms and Armour at Sandringham*, Reprint 2008.

12

PEYTRAL (CHEST STRAPS FOR A HORSE)

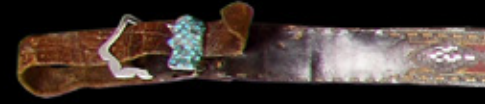
BUKHARA
19TH CENTURY

A highly decorative peytral; a horse breastplate, a piece of equestrian accoutrement, decorated in the distinctive Bukharan manner. Peytrals are intended to keep the saddle or harness from sliding backwards, and are positioned around the animal's chest. Comprising three silver bosses and smaller chapes and buckles, all inlaid with flat turquoise in typical geometric patterns. Three leather belts attach to the central larger boss and are cotton stitched with diamond patterns in vibrant yellow and red, with a blue/green border; all highlighted with silver wire.

Equestrian caparison was a particularly important indicator of rank, wealth and status, applying equally in the east and in the west. Many elaborate peytrals are retained in national collections, especially the Moscow Kremlin, Nos. K89, K149, K160, K284, K300, and K412.¹³ (see *Tesoros del Kremlin, Ceremonial de gala en la Rusia del siglo XVII*, 1990).

References

¹³ Kirilova, Martynova, Tijomirova, 1990, *Tesoros del Kremlin, Ceremonial de gala en la Rusia del siglo XVII*.











13

JADE DAGGER HILT

DECCAN, INDIA
18TH CENTURY

A pale green nephrite jade hilt of typical 'pistol-grip' form. The depth of carving and the particular opaque quality of the jade, provide the perfect contrast for the eye to appreciate the beautiful form of the flowering blossoms and elongated leaves. The raised floral design is very similar to a rock crystal *khanjar* hilt illustrated by Hales (2013), p.24, cat.no.60.



14

CUIRASS

HYDERABAD, INDIA
17TH–18TH CENTURY

A steel cuirass from the armoury of the Nizam of Hyderabad, India, in the European style. The armoury contained a number of these armours, but this one is unusual in its wide proportions, it was clearly 'tailored' for a well-fed man.

Many of the group were inscribed with a date and the name 'Sarkar Mir Nizam 'Ali Khan Bahadur' (1734-1803), who was given the title Nizam by the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah and subsequently ruled in Hyderabad in the Deccan under the name of Asaf Jah II (1762-1803). Alexander¹⁴ suggests that these inscribed armours were for a specially commissioned series, perhaps for a corps of bodyguards. The fact the one shown here has no inscription could mean it was specially commissioned, or left the armoury before the inventory.

The cuirass is composed of a breast and backplate attached at the shoulder and sides with iron hinges (some later replacements), held with decorative iron pins. The breastplate is shaped as a stylised 'muscled torso', with double engraved lines accentuating the pectorals and with a sharp median ridge bulging to allow sufficient room for the ample frame of the wearer.

The neck and arm openings have applied iron borders with a rolled outer edge and a serrated inner edge decorated with a row of punched dots. The border at the neck is extended at the center with a stylised palmette.

The back plate is shaped slightly over the shoulder blades which are also accentuated by double engraved lines, and has a shallow groove down the center (a small hole to the left shoulder blade). An upright rear iron collar with an applied border, the base extending into a stylised palmette, the bottom edge of the backplate has a matching palmette.

A similar example is in the Metropolitan museum, New York (acc. no.29.158.165a, b)¹⁵, and in the Nasser D.Khalili Collection of Islamic Art.¹⁶

References

¹⁴ Alexander, Islamic Arms and Armour – In the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015, p.53.

¹⁵ Alexander, Islamic Arms and Armour – In the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015, p.52-52, cat.no.15.

¹⁶ Alexander, The Arts of War: The Nasser D.Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, 1992, p.175, cat.no.108.









15

SIGNED DHAL SHIELD

GUJARAT, INDIA
19TH CENTURY

A beautifully painted Indian shield *dhal* from Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The convex shield, with rolled edge, is made from treated animal hide which is translucent when held to the light. The centre has a painted roundel of floral patterns, with an outer sunburst in gold. The main area of the shield has a deep-red repeating floral patterns on a black background. The outer rim is painted with a thick off-white to match one of the central discs and surrounded with another sunburst. Four brass bosses are located on a textile base so as not to damage the painted surface.

The rear is painted with a gold border, and scattered gold circular decoration. Iron rings, and a purple silk covered pad with brocade border. Signed by the maker on the outer edge:

*Khooshal Dhunjee & Sons
Painter and Shield Maker
Dhalgarwada Street
City Ahmedabad
Bombay Presidency
India*

A similar shield was presented to the Prince of Wales 1875-76 by the Nawab of Balasinor, Bombay Presidency (The Royal Collection, RCIN: 38128).¹⁷ Translucent hide *dhals* painted in this distinctive style were a renowned speciality of Ahmedabad, and this maker's particular address records the eponymous centre of that trade.

References

¹⁷ Elgood, Introduction essay to Arms and Armour at Sandringham, Reprint 2008.

KHOOSHAL DHUNJEE & SONS PAINTER AND SHIELD MAKER DHALGARWADA STREET CITY AHMEDABAD BOMBAY PRESIDENCY INDIA



16

DHAL SHIELD

INDIA

CIRCA 1800 AD

An interesting Indian shield *dhal* circa 1800 A.D. Of dark coloured and extremely hard leather with traces of red pigment. The surface is slightly concave with an up-turned rim that could be used to strike or parry. Indian shields usually have four bosses, mounted in a square formation at the centre, with some having the additional *ad-chand* (half-moon crescent), however the number of applied copper bosses in this case is highly unusual, indicating a special commission. The rear has two leather straps for holding the shield, and a cloth knuckle pad.



