

# RUNJEET SINGH

TREASURES FROM ASIAN ARMOURIES



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7 - 15 MARCH 2020

## TEFAF

MECC Maastricht  
Forum 100, 6229 GV Maastricht  
The Netherlands



# RUNJEET SINGH

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## INTRODUCTION

I bring to TEFAF Maastricht a subject matter which has – in some form or another – been seen here before, but in this exhibition, and accompanying catalogue, I hope to hold a magnifying glass to it (and perhaps even a spotlight or two). I am particularly pleased that this exhibition will provide an opportunity for the TEFAF audience to appreciate Asian arms and armour in all its amazing variety. This exhibition is a personal milestone and having the illustrious TEFAF brand attached to it is a badge of honour.

This collection is the result of many decades of patient and sustained work by mainly European and

American collectors; the works of art you see here have been brought from collectors and the art market in the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Spain, Germany, Finland, Australia, and the United States of America.

In thanking not only those responsible for acting as temporary custodians, I also want to give thanks to all those who have helped me in the production of this catalogue and the exhibition.

And so, on behalf of myself and all those who have contributed, nothing can give me greater pleasure than sharing with you 'Treasures from Asian Armouries'.

—  
*Runjeet Singh*



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Published by Runjeet Singh  
Spring 2020

**All prices on request**



I

## HORSE-HEAD JADE DAGGER

MUGHAL DOMINIONS, INDIA  
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 380MM



This finely crafted blue-grey jade dagger (*khanjar*) is most striking for its hilt, which has been carefully carved to depict the head of a horse with a dynamic expression: the eyes are narrow and nostrils flared; its open mouth bares closely carved rows of teeth; the jaw arches sharply so as to convey a face taut with determination; and the ears are pinned back – a final and subtle sign of the horse's resolve. Farther down, on one face of the hilt, the horse's mane has been detailed with gently undulating lines, the reverse face left clear and exhibiting the stone's polished texture. The craftsman's genius can most readily be observed in the hilt's persuasive colour contrast: the white part of the jade is carved to depict the horse's face, whilst the mane and neck exhibit the stone's darker hues of bluish-grey. The jade's natural inclusions also intimate the sinews and muscles on the neck of this powerful animal, and if not intentional, the darker complexion of the nose is a wonderful coincidence. Above the lobed quillons of the hilt rests a central iris flower in bloom, below which curving foliage spreads out horizontally.

The watered blade has been skilfully cut, three central ridges recurving together before meeting to form a gently lobed square section, the central ridge continuing into the blade's armour-piercing tip.

Two examples similar to the present dagger are preserved in the Al-Sabah collection, Kuwait, Cat Nos. 66 and 73, the former especially relevant as a comparison for the iris flower motif that unfurls just above the quillons.<sup>1</sup> In his study of the Windsor *Padshah-nama*, Stuart Cary Welch observes that in a *darbar* scene by Balchand, Dara-Shikoh (eldest son of Shah Jahan) is portrayed wearing a horse-hilted dagger (folio 72v) and comments that during the reign of Shah Jahan the wearing of animal-hilted daggers was exceedingly rare.<sup>2</sup>

### Provenance

Private European collection

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Salam Kaoukji, *Precious Indian Weapons and other Princely Accoutrements: the Al-Sabah Collection*, Kuwait, Thames & Hudson, 2017, pp. 194-195; 206-207.
- <sup>2</sup> Stuart Cary Welch, *India: Art and Culture 1300-1900*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986, pp. 257-258.







2

## NILGAI KHANJAR

MUGHAL DOMINIONS, INDIA  
MID-17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 360MM



Where the previous dagger in this exhibition portrays the head of a horse, the present example instead depicts that of a graceful *nilgai* antelope carved out of nephrite jade that exhibits a deep sea-green colour. The *nilgai* is endemic to the Indian subcontinent and is the largest Asian antelope, its name *nilgai* literally translating to “blue bull” on account of the animal’s bluish-grey coat. A painting (Acc. No. GLAHA\_43821)<sup>3</sup> by George Stubbs, simply titled “The Nilgai”, depicts the animal against a romanticist backdrop of hazy clouds and detailed foliage, and is preserved in the Hunterian Art Gallery at the University of Glasgow.

The contours of the face, eyes and ears are all carved in expert detail, and the eyes are inset with rubies on gold foil using the *kundun* technique, drawing our attention to the animal’s vigilant gaze. The collar and lobed quillons are decorated in gold *kofrigari* with four-petalled flowerheads between scrolling foliage.

The recurved steel blade is double-edged and exhibits a watered pattern, its surface cut with a medial ridge and broad fullers on either side. The 19th-century scabbard comprises a wooden core covered with dark purple velvet, a thin line of red and silver tape lining the seam on the scabbard’s reverse face. The scabbard is further fitted with a chape and locket of solid gold (the latter also attached with a small loop for suspension), each pierced and fretted to depict arcades of leaves with stylised lotus buds at their centres.

As explained in the cataloguing of the horse-head dagger, such pieces as this were reserved for important individuals in the Mughal courts. An example similar to our own at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accession Number 1985.58a, b) is confidently attributed to the imperial workshops of the time,<sup>4</sup> and another, formerly in the collection of Stuart Cary Welch was recently sold at Christie’s.<sup>5</sup> And indeed, in Welch’s important text on the *Padshah-nama* at Windsor Castle, a miniature entitled ‘Shah Jahan receiving an embassy of Europeans’ (folio 116 verso), shows the emperor’s sons, Dara Shikoh and Shah Shuja, wearing daggers with *nilgai* hilts.<sup>6</sup>

### Provenance

Private collection, USA

### References

- [https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-nilgai-138969/view\\_as/grid/search/keyword:nilgai--venue:hunterian-art-gallery-university-of-glasgow-5924/page/1#](https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-nilgai-138969/view_as/grid/search/keyword:nilgai--venue:hunterian-art-gallery-university-of-glasgow-5924/page/1#)
- <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/453253>
- Christie’s, Lot 190 (“A DEER-HEADED JADE-HILTED DAGGER”), *Maharajas & Mughal Significance* (Sale 17464), New York, 19th June 2019.
- Stuart Cary Welch, *India: Art and Culture 1300-1900*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1985, pp. 56-57.







3

### IRIS POMMEL DAGGER

MUGHAL DOMINIONS OR  
DECCAN, INDIA  
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 400MM

The elegant hilt of this dagger is cleverly carved to depict an iris flower in bloom: four slender leaves form the faces of the grip, those at the sides curving away from the central section of the hilt and attached to downcurved sepals. Careful lines cut into the surface of the pale-green jade recreate the grooved textures of the flower, bestowing this hilt with an especial sensitivity. The stem of the blossom is attached with a spirally fluted jade tang button with a forest-green hue, an intelligent respondent to the iris' stigma. Curling acanthus leaves slope over the quillons, and on each side of the guard a blossoming lotus has been carved at the centre.

Gilt panels etched on each face of the blade's forte contain later inscriptions and stylised flowers with outspread branches or stems. The inscription reads:

*khanjar-i badshah 'alamgir  
shud kalid-i mamalik az taqdir*

"The dagger of Emperor Aurangzeb became the key to the realms through predestination."

The inscription is a copy of the inscription on the dagger of Aurangzeb (M.76.2.7a-b) which is now in the Los Angeles Museum of County Art, and probably applied to this dagger in the 19th century.<sup>7</sup>

The steel blade curves gently for the greater part of its length before turning more sharply towards the point, its surface exhibiting a simple, elegant wootz pattern.

A similar dagger is recorded in the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait, showing in its hilt the same clever portrayal of the iris flower in bloom.<sup>8</sup>

#### Provenance

Private European collection

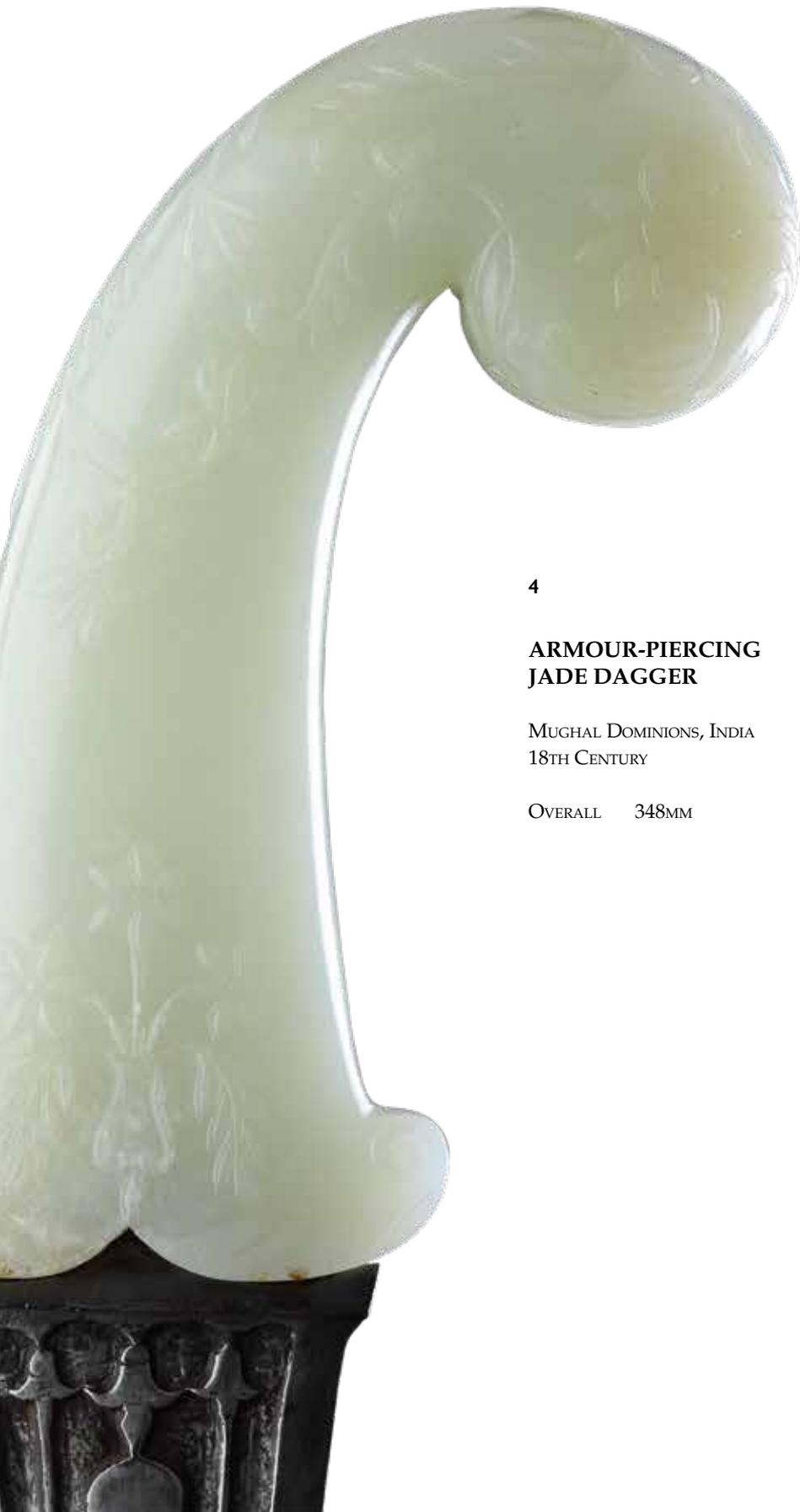
#### References

<sup>7</sup> <https://collections.lacma.org/node/226896>

<sup>8</sup> Salam Kaoukji, *Precious Indian Weapons and other Princely Accoutrements: the Al-Sabah Collection*, Kuwait, Thames & Hudson, 2017, pp. 232-233, Cat. No. 85.







4

### ARMOUR-PIERCING JADE DAGGER

MUGHAL DOMINIONS, INDIA  
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 348MM

Carved in typical 'pistol-grip' form, the jade handle of this dagger exhibits the pale green colour that is so often sought after by collectors. Though it is of considerable size and weight, the softly glowing stone has been carved with careful precision and attention to detail: blossoming flowerheads and recurving leaves appear throughout, seen in densest array at the pommel where they unfurl from a line of foliage which moves along the medial brim of the hilt. A central array of six-petalled flowerheads and drooping leaves is carved at the centre of the lobed quillon block on each face.

The steel blade – like the hilt – is of heavy section and cut with a complex array of four fullers separated at the forte of the blade by stylised lotuses. A central spearhead-shape curves in line

with the fullers before tapering to meet them just below the blade's heavily reinforced armour-piercing tip – though this feature is not uncommon in such blades, here it is particularly pronounced.

A dagger comparable for its weight and the pale hue of its hilt was exhibited by Runjeet Singh in *Arms & Armour From the East 2016* (Cat. No. 15).<sup>9</sup>

#### Provenance

UK art market

#### References

<sup>9</sup> Runjeet Singh, *Arms & Armour from the East 2016*, pp. 40-41, Cat. No. 15.





5

**OTTOMAN KNIFE**TURKEY (OTTOMAN EMPIRE)  
18TH - 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 197MM

This remarkable knife brilliantly exemplifies the artistry so often applied to exceptional pieces of arms and armour; its scabbard proficiently decorated throughout with roundels in a dazzling array of colours and patterns.

The hilt is formed of a faceted blue glass, while the blade of steel exhibits faux-watering and is inset with beads of coral at three equidistant slots just beneath the spine. The surface of the blade has also been etched over the greater part of its length with an inscription on one face with a part of the *Nada 'Ali* quatrain and on the other with "... *Muluk (?) sultan malik tahir (?)*" ("... of Kings (?), Sultan Malik Tahir (?)"") among vine tendrils that exhibit remnants of the original gilding. Gilt stellar motifs also line the spine of the blade.

The ivory scabbard is inset with a generous array of *khatamkari* roundels depicting celestial motifs with gems, mother-of-pearl and various metals. Of particular splendour are the ebony tesserae, which are overlaid with pointed stars in gold, some of the larger examples decorated at their centres with an inset turquoise or gold concentric circles. The craftsman has expended great efforts to ensure almost no space is left unfilled, inviting us to inspect the scabbard's surface as we might survey a busy night-sky. It is interesting to note, too, that the central roundel of the front face is decorated on a shimmering white ground in mother-of-pearl, whilst that on the reverse is black (ebony), as if the front and reverse of the scabbard signified the day and night skies respectively.

The scabbard's gilt-silver collar and chape are punched and chased to depict stylised leaves and roundels in imitation of the scabbard's central surface, and are further inset with small turquoises as well as coloured gem stones, the chape terminating in a cross-hatched acorn finial.

A miniature sword in the Walters Art Museum (Accession No.51.79) exhibits a similar sequence of insets along the back-edge of its blade.<sup>10</sup>

**Provenance**

UK art market

**References**

<sup>10</sup> <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/23603/miniature-sword/>



6

**GILT KATAR**

UDAIPUR (MEWAR),  
RAJASTHAN, INDIA  
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 380MM

This dagger – with generously applied gold *koftgari* work, a complete set of tools and a fine wootz blade – represents an excellent example of the *katar* weapon-type. The side-bars are decorated with sequences of eight-petalled flowers set within curved panels, whilst the two grip-bars of the hilt – attached together at their swollen centres and enclosing symmetrical 'C'-shaped scrolls – are decorated with central flowers and scrolling foliage.

Two broad sunken fullers exhibit the dagger's whorls of wootz steel, the blade unusually pierced along its medial ridge with a sequence of nine rectangular slots containing metal spheres in a feature referred to as 'tears of the wounded'. This ends where the fullers taper to merge into the blade's heavily reinforced armour-piercing tip, which has been burnished bright.

The scabbard, made of pattern-welded steel, has a frontal compartment fitted with a gilt latticework arrangement of six-petalled flowers set within curving panels, a motif repeated at the scabbard's chape and reminiscent of that on the hilt's side-bars. An inscription runs along the thin bar which is partially concealed by the floral panel, and identifies the katar as being from Udaipur, Mewar with the Hindu date of Vikram Samvat (V.S.) 185\* the last number being illegible. V.S. 1850s would convert to early 1800s A.D.

Placed within the frontal compartment are five tools: the first three in steel include an ear spoon, a pair of tweezers and a short knife decorated over the surface of their handles in gold *koftgari* with floral and foliate patterns, the fourth and fifth tools then being an ivory spatula and a pair of iron tweezers, their handles cut to depict the outlines of stylised flowerheads.

The katar is complete with a brown leather belt and chiselled gilt starburst buckle symbolising Surya, the sun god, the Royal insignia of the Mewar court.

Katars complete with tools are rare, though another was published in *Arms & Armour from the East* (Catalogue No. 3).<sup>11</sup> It also shows the 'C'-shaped scrolls that separate the present example's side-bars, a feature which is further observed in a dagger recorded by Robert Elgood and made in Jaipur for Maharaja Sawai Pratap Singh (1778-1803).<sup>12</sup>

**Provenance**

Private European collection

**References**

- <sup>11</sup> Runjeet Singh, *Arms & Armour from the East 2016*, pp. 12-16, Cat. No. 3.
- <sup>12</sup> Robert Elgood, *Arms & Armour at the Jaipur Court: The Royal Collection*, Niyogi Books, 2015, p. 92, No. 67.





7

**ENAMEL KINDJAL**QAJAR EMPIRE  
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 570MM

This rare and unusual Persian dagger with enamel work is closely related to Qajar enamel miniatures and portraits produced in the 19th century.

Applied sections of copper-alloy frame the vibrant decorative panels and portraits that feature on the hilt, forming stylised leaves, vine tendrils

and flowerheads that intermingle on a blue enamel ground. The central setting depicts a pink flower – the lines and flecks of its petals picked out in hues of red and white – enclosed above and below by flowers in blue. The rounded pommel shows the portrait of a young Qajar man with red cheeks and *kolah* (the tall black cap typically worn by Qajar aristocrats, courtiers and military officials). This portrait is repeated once more on the hilt and three times further over the blue fabric-covered scabbard whose chape and locket are decorated *en suite* with the hilt.

The double-edged blade is of superior quality, exhibiting an exquisite pattern with condensed curls of crucible steel. A single fuller has been carefully cut along the centre of the blade's surface, covering the greater part of its length and tapering towards the end before the blade finishes with a sharp point. The blade and mounts are in excellent condition, with no visible damages or signs of restoration, making this an object of notable craftsmanship and exceptional preservation.

But the weapon-type is interesting in itself here. Enamelled Persian jambiyas are well known: one preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Accession Number 36.25.683)<sup>13</sup> shows much the same decoration as our own.

Another is published in *La Collection d'armes orientales de Pierre Loti*, and identified by Pradine as "certainly a princely gift, probably a present from the brother or son of the Shah, since Pierre Loti visited the Qajar court assiduously."<sup>14</sup> Our example, however, belongs quite clearly to the 'kindjal' type, and as such likely owes its origins to the Caucasus region, an area that saw intense fighting between the Qajars and the Russian Empire in the first half of the 19th century. There can be little doubt that this object once belonged to an individual of considerable importance in the Qajar Caucasus at this time, equipped with this kindjal rather than a jambiya to fight against the empire's Russian invaders.

**Provenance**

Private European collection

**References**

- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/31853>
- <sup>14</sup> Stéphane Pradines, *La Collection d'armes orientales de Pierre Loti*, 2019, pp. 130-131. (author's translation from the original French text).





8

## TIBETAN SWORD

TIBET  
18TH - 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 970MM



With its trefoil pommel and wire-bound grip, this Tibetan sword offers a strong example of the type discussed by LaRocca.<sup>15</sup> But the trilobed guard is of particular interest for the similarities it bears to a rare sword (Acc. No. 1995.136) preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which depicts an anthropomorphic visage over its own guard, likely representing the face of a "protective deity or guardian figure."<sup>16</sup> The present hilt marks a well-preserved relation to this rare type of sword-guard.

Gilt-copper alloy has been applied to the pommel and embossed with symmetrical scrollwork on a punched ground, a coral bead inset at the centre and a ring attached to the reverse face which holds a knotted cord of red and gold fabric (rarely extant in such swords). The hilt's collar and guard are decorated *en suite* – the latter fitted with a large centrally mounted turquoise – and the wooden grip is bound with silver wire.

The single-edged blade is forged with an oblique tip and its surface exhibits traces of the hairpin pattern (*thur*), the result of a well-known Tibetan forging technique whereby alternating folded rods of hard and soft iron are combined with the aim of creating a blade that is both strong and flexible. The sword is complete with its scabbard, the greater part of which is covered with a leather likely made from the belly of an ass and dyed with a dark-green pigment (faded in places). The chape and locket are decorated with the same motifs as the hilt-mounts, the former inset with a large coral and both cut with an inverted ogee that contains a stylised lotus in bloom at its centre.

Within the selection of swords discussed by LaRocca in the work cited above, perhaps the most relevant comparandum is a sword (IM.218-1927) preserved at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, which exhibits the same symmetrical scroll motifs in its silver hilt and scabbard mounts.<sup>17</sup>

### Provenance

Private Australian collection

### References

- <sup>15</sup> Donald LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2006, pp. 157-163.
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/24959>
- <sup>17</sup> <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O456580/sword/>







9

**SILVER TULWAR**

RAJASTHAN, INDIA  
18TH - 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 1070MM

The stunning decoration of this sword's hilt is matched only by the formidable proportions of its blade.

Mughal-style flowers and dense foliage in silver *koftgari* intermingle over the entirety of the hilt's cross-hatched surface. The symmetry and structure of the hilt are masterful: a gentle ridge runs vertically along the swollen centre of the grip which is separated from the cross-guard by a double-chevron in gold. The hilt's medial ridge continues into rectangular langets and expands out horizontally from the centre of the cross-guard into the domed quillons. Gold lines all edges of the hilt to highlight its balanced form and create a striking colour contrast against the abundant silver *koftgari* work. The underside of the disc-shaped pommel is attached with a pieced pommel tag to complete the hilt.

The large blade – with a Devanagari armoury number engraved on one face that reads “Ra Ki Ma 233” – is cut with a pronounced cutting-edge, curving and tapering gently until flaring out again where the blade has been formed with a raised false edge, or ‘yelman’. The sword is complete with a wooden scabbard covered with black velvet and attached with a chape that is decorated *en suite* with the hilt.

The large weight and section of the blade, though impressive, are unsurprising; the Rajputs were known for using weapons such as this, and the book that accompanies the exhibition *Peacock in the Desert* provides us with insights in this regard:

“The Rajputs trained hard using weights and exercise bows. Their personal weapons were heavier than the average in use in India. They also took opium in large quantities, which had the effect of giving them energy, dulling the appetite and pain from wounds, and acting as a coagulant.

These factors together with their clan spirit and desire for heroic death made them exceptional warriors whose effectiveness on a battlefield far out-weighed their numbers.

17th-century miniature paintings show the very substantial size and weight of Rajput arms.”<sup>18</sup>

**Provenance**

Private European collection

**References**

- <sup>18</sup> K. Jasol / R. Elgood, *Peacock in the Desert: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India*, Yale University Press, 2018, p. 109.





10

**SANG (SPEARHEAD)**

SOUTHERN INDIA  
LATE 16TH OR  
EARLY 17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 520MM

The refined craftsmanship of this rare spearhead is best appreciated upon close examination. A large iron washer pierced with two concentric circles of small holes forms the base, above which the tubular socket comprises four bulbous mouldings alternating with silvered bands, all chiselled throughout with rows of recurrent geometric patterns and floral motifs.

The double-edged, gently curving blade is then intricately chiselled at the forte on each face with a symmetrical composition of opposing *makara* that exhibit large, curved fangs and stepped scales which have been cleverly cut to mimic the ridged texture of the mythological serpents' skin. A central lotus design separates the creatures and repeats in miniature at the base of the blade's deep-cut arrowhead fullers.

As explained in Dr. Ravinder Reddy's recent study, "Southern [Indian] spearheads tended to be weighty, straight or curved, adorned with chiselled mythological beasts and generally with no gold but sometimes with silver plate."<sup>19</sup> A spear remarkably similar to the present example has been illustrated in another recent publication, *The Hindu Warrior* (2019), a work by friend and client Roy Elvis.<sup>20</sup> Robert Elgood's discussion of these spearhead-types points to further comparanda that are preserved in important museums and collections, and observes that "the iconography also relates to the ornate Nāyaka style of the time."<sup>21</sup>

The Nayaks – renowned for their intricate artworks and spectacular architecture – formed a dynasty in Southern India after the collapse of the Vijayanagar Empire, and ruled from the 16th to 18th centuries.

**Provenance**

UK art market

**References**

- <sup>19</sup> Ravinder Reddy, *Arms & Armour of India, Nepal & Sri Lanka: Types, Decoration and Symbolism*, Hali Publications Ltd (2019), p. 110.
- <sup>20</sup> Roy Elvis, *The Hindu Warrior* (2018), p. 381.
- <sup>21</sup> Robert Elgood, *Hindu Arms and Ritual: Arms and Armour from India 1400-1865*, Eburon Academic Publishers, Delft (Netherlands), p. 194.



11

**QAJAR MACE**

QAJAR EMPIRE  
(MODERN-DAY IRAN)  
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 790MM

Undeniably the most striking feature of this mace is the papier-mâché head of a man looking out somewhat sombrely from within the unfurling jaws of an antlered beast.

An array of six-petalled flowerheads fills a short panel at both the top and bottom of the mace's shaft, fitted with a basal cap as well as a bulbous moulding that sits beneath the mace-head. A crowned and moustachioed man on horseback is etched on either side of the mace-head's extraordinary visage – he fires his bow behind him at an animal in retreat. Antlers and ears are attached to the "skull", the beast's mouth retaining most of its interior red paint and lined with sharp teeth. Looking out from the centre, then, is the carefully formed papier-mâché face of a man. The face is fully textured: his forehead is painted with thick black eyebrows and protrudes slightly, as do his nose, moustache, and mouth. The reverse of the mace head shows a man holding a pair of crossed clubs with a testimonial inscription below which reads:

*al-sultan nadir shah*

"The Sultan Nadir Shah"

Qajar maces with heads formed as beasts or demons are well-known. An ox-headed example (Acc. No. 36.25.1882)<sup>22</sup> in the Metropolitan Museum of Art is particularly engaging, as it recalls the ancient

Iranian hero Bahram Gur's weapon as described in the *Shahnama* (an epic poem by Firdausi), and well reflects the revived Qajar interest in ancient Iranian imagery.

It may be that the present example refers also to one of several Iranian myths. A late 16th-century copy (Inv. No. Or 4615) of the *Dārābnāmah* at the British Library describes and in a folio depicts the story of the hero Bahman, who was swallowed by a dragon.<sup>23</sup> Another more chilling story is shown in a folio (Acc. No. 1974.290.36)<sup>24</sup> from a copy of the *Shahnama* and tells of the hero Bahram Gur, who upon slaying a dragon and cutting it open found a dead young man within its belly.

In any case, the present example appears to be unique – no other mace known exhibits the face of a papier-mâché man.

**Provenance**

UK art market

**References**

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/30858>

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=or\\_4615\\_f003v](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=or_4615_f003v)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/452661>





12

**SIKH QUIVER**

NORTH INDIA,  
PROBABLY LAHORE  
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 960MM  
(WITH ARROWS)

The leather core of this quiver is covered over its surface with red velvet and generously embroidered throughout with gilt-silver thread to detail a charming array of floral and foliate designs. The front surface exhibits a central panel that contains a sequence of four-petalled flowerheads surrounded by leaved vines and separated by smaller quatrefoils. This design recurs along the central panel's border in miniature and with some with minor variations in other parts of the quiver. The belt, for example, exhibits more complex and varied foliage scrolling between its silver-gilt flowerheads, and is further pierced with loops for suspension that hold knotted red tassels.

A group of twelve matching wooden arrows of north Indian type are placed within the quiver, each fitted with an arrowhead cut to represent the form of a *katar*, a type of push-dagger that was a popular side-arm in India.

The foreshafts, reinforced with rings of iron and copper, exhibit an attractive dark-brown patina, and are decorated with pieces of inlaid horn and bone. The tail-ends have been painted in red and green, and though the feathers are lost, we can see that the arrows were originally fletched. The arrows' bulbous nocks are made from ivory and painted vermilion over their interiors.

A quiver similar to the present example and almost certainly made for Maharaja Ranjit Singh (reg. 1801-1839) on the occasion of the wedding of Khurak Singh in 1838 was sold by Bonhams in 2018.<sup>25</sup> Another is preserved in the Royal Armouries (Object Number XXVIB.32 A).<sup>26</sup> Though its style is somewhat different from the present example, its form and the materials used (red-velvet embroidered with silver-gilt thread) are the same.<sup>27</sup>

**Provenance**

Private European collection

**References**

- <sup>25</sup> Bonhams, Lot 205 ("A gold-thread-embroidered velvet-clad leather quiver and bow holder; almost certainly made for Maharaja Ranjit Singh (Reg. 1801-1839), the lion of the Punjab"), *Islamic and Indian Art including Sikh Treasures and Arts of the Punjab*, London, 23rd October 2018.
- <sup>26</sup> <https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-93314.html>
- <sup>27</sup> This quiver is discussed in Thom Richardson, *An Introduction to Indian Arms and Armour*, Leeds, Royal Armouries Publishing, 2007, p. 9.





## QUIVER AND BOW CASE

CHINA OR TIBET  
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 1130MM

The decorative quality and exceptional state of preservation are of especial note in this bow case and quiver:

Steel studs line the edges of the bow case and secure the front leather to the back. Enclosed within this border are lines of twisted thread dyed in a charming variety of colours – maroon, red, sky-blue and green among them – and the lower part of this patterning is interrupted by a trefoil symbol which curls in on itself made of twisted thread dyed in various shades of blue. At the centre of the case's black-painted ground, there is another symbol made of the same thread, depicting a stylised *gankyil* ("wheel of joy"), the inner wheel of the *dharmachakra* used in Tibetan Buddhist symbolism.<sup>28</sup> Iron loops are fitted to the reverse for holding a red strap, the front of the case then exhibiting domed silver bosses which secure the loops in

place and which have been cut to depict flowerheads as seen from above in low relief.

The quiver then is decorated mostly *en suite* with the case, though the symbols stitched on its central panel instead consist of a single scrolling cloud and rising basal pillar. It retains a bundle of knotted dyed fabric and a twisted cord for hanging the quiver from the wearer's shoulder. Five bamboo arrows, likely of Manchu origin, rest neatly in the quiver, retaining much of their original fletching and some with decoration in red and black paint.

Both the bow case and quiver are near-identical to those of the armoured cavalryman<sup>29</sup> at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, whose ensemble of equipment is based on photographs taken in the 1930s and 1940s at the Great Prayer Festival in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet.<sup>30</sup>

### Provenance

Private European collection

### References

<sup>28</sup> See Robert Beer, *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols*, Serindia Publications, 2003, p. 209.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/623025>.

<sup>30</sup> The cavalryman is also discussed in Donald LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2006, pp. 134-5, No. 46.





14

**INDIAN STIRRUPS**DECCAN, INDIA  
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 212MM

These stirrups are well-preserved and undeniably possess a certain architectural quality in both their decorative style and structure.

At the top of each stirrup is a rectangular slot which would have held straps, enclosed above and below by beaded copper lines and surmounted by a lobed arch, as if to give the appearance of the entrance to a tomb or temple. Beneath this formation is a stylised lotus flower in bloom, appropriately centred between the stirrups' sloping arches which terminate in drooping lotus buds. The arches recurve downwards and are carefully cut with raised crests and edges formed of large beaded mouldings. Though the vast majority of the stirrups' surfaces retain their gilding, the interiors reveal their copper core to convey a pleasing colour contrast.

The treads are cut at their edges with the same beads that line the arches, and at the centre of each is a flattened rivet head which secures the architectural features that hang from the stirrups. These comprise a pierced and engraved gallery which forms the inverted base for a bulbous fluted dome, surmounted by a discus with circumferential beads and a lotus-bud finial.

Few comparanda are known, though a similar pair are published in *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour: A Lifetime's Passion*.<sup>31</sup> Its resemblance to Deccani tombs of the 16th and 17th centuries applies also to our own example.

**Provenance**

Private European collection

**References**

<sup>31</sup> Robert Hales, *Islamic and Oriental Arms and Armour: A Lifetime's Passion*, Robert Hales C.I. Ltd, p. 349, No. 840.



15

## INDONESIAN STIRRUPS

SURAKARTA (JAVA),  
INDONESIA  
16TH CENTURY

OVERALL 130MM

These stirrups, originating from the historic royal capital of Surakarta, Indonesia, are exceptionally rare, beautifully formed, and – given their age – in excellent condition.

The vast majority of the iron stirrups' surface retains the original gold leaf that has been applied throughout, except at the top-apertures through which a leather strap would have originally been threaded to secure the stirrups to a saddle. At either side of the apertures, the heads of regal *naga* – mythical sea serpents thought to have entered the Javanese visual tradition from the 10th century A.D.<sup>32</sup> – face outwards, their mouths open to reveal rows of formidable teeth.

Their eyes are inset with rubies, as are their crowns, which indicate the *naga*'s dominion over the underworld.

The sidebars have been carved and engraved in close detail on their outer faces to depict the serpents' crescent scales and ridged crests. The treads then are pierced with a symmetrical openwork trellis pattern, the undersides applied with silver instead of gold.

As is indicated in the text cited below, the only known pair which is comparable to this example is preserved in the Court of Holland – these stirrups are, very nearly, one of a kind.

### Published

Eliane & Guy de la Boisselière,  
*Éperonnerie et parure du cheval*,  
Racine Publishing, 2005, p. 60, fig. 85.

### Provenance

The Eliane and Guy de la Boisselière  
collection, Belgium

### References

<sup>32</sup> Ann R. Kinney, *Worshipping Siva  
and Buddha: The Temple Art of East  
Java*, University of Hawaii Press,  
Honolulu, 2003, pp. 51-52; 201.





16

**OTTOMAN STIRRUPS**OTTOMAN EMPIRE (TURKEY)  
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 150MM

These copper-gilt stirrups are generously decorated throughout with foliate patterns and inset stones. At the top of each stirrup is a slot for threading through a strap, the surface of each carefully decorated with small circles in parts and moulded to depict stylised acanthus leaves that splay over the top-bar:

This decorative motif recurs at the corners where the top-bar merges into the sloping side-plates, which have each been cut to depict a symmetrical array of scrolling vine tendrils. Inset on one side-plate of each stirrup are three roundels and two rectangular segments of a reddish semi-precious stone with white striations (likely carnelian), enclosed by carefully lined edges. The roundels are further inlaid with gold decoration to depict stylised petals which – together with central beaded studs – give the appearance of flowerheads. To accommodate the boots of Ottoman riders, the treads are long, wide, and curved, their square corners serving also as a practical substitute for spurs.

A pair similar to the present example, inset with beads of turquoise, is preserved in the Kremlin in Russia and recorded in a Spanish publication by José-A. Godoy.<sup>33</sup>

**Provenance**

Private European collection

**References**

<sup>33</sup> José-A. Godoy (Spanish text), N.S. Vladimirskaia (ed.) et al., *Tesoros del Kremlin: Ceremonial de gala en la Rusia del siglo XVII*, Hirmer-Verlag Munich, 1990, No. 38.



17

**DRAGON STIRRUPS**CHINA  
18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 180MM

These stirrups are remarkable in part on account of their sheer size and weight (2.34kg or 5.15lbs), though perhaps their most eye-catching feature are the shoulders, which have been expertly formed to depict the heads of mighty dragons. They face outwards at either side of the rectangular apertures originally used to hold the stirrup leathers.

Their manes are engraved with fine lines and stream out behind them in the imagined breeze, and the scales of their crests are picked out in close detail. Plumes of smoke or clouds appear to billow out from their fanged visages and move down the sloping side-bars to the stirrups' oval treads, which have been engraved at their edges with a recurrent spiral pattern.

Comparanda for the present example are to be found in various museum collections. The Royal Armouries has a similar pair (Object Number XXXVIII.12<sup>34</sup> and recently published in the new volume *Chinese Arms and Armour*),<sup>35</sup> though its dragon-heads are cut with thicker lines and exhibit less detail. The Beijing Palace Museum also includes in its collection a number of saddles, many equipped with stirrups of similar design to our own.<sup>36</sup>

**Provenance**

The Eliane and Guy de la Boisselière collection, Belgium

**References**

<sup>34</sup> <https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-1599.html>

<sup>35</sup> Natasha Bennett, *Chinese Arms and Armour*, Trustees of the Royal Armouries, Leeds, 2018, p. 117.

<sup>36</sup> Beijing Palace Museum (author), *The Complete Collection of Treasures of the [Beijing] Palace Museum: Armaments and Military Provisions*, The Beijing Palace Museum, 2008, pp. 73-83, see especially Cat. Nos. 70-73.





18

## TIBETAN ARMOUR

TIBET  
18TH - 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 1800MM



A unique and decorative steel Tibetan armour, the majority of its elements dated to the 18th-19th centuries (the Indian mail shirt is 17th-century and the boots 20th-century, both used here for display purposes). In its entirety, though, the ensemble is firmly in keeping with photographs taken from the Great Prayer Festival in Lhasa (Tibet, 1943) by Harry Staunton.<sup>37</sup> And indeed, the present armour's only known comparandum, preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is also assembled from composite elements using Harry Staunton's photographs.<sup>38</sup>

The armour's Bhutanese helmet is fitted at its front with a short peak that exhibits a decorative engraved band of interlocking foliate patterns. A brass finial with round base and the miniaturised form of a *vajra* (translated from Sanskrit as both "thunderbolt" and "diamond") is attached to the top of the steel bowl. A silk lining is threaded through the holes pierced at the helmet's brim and exhibits a gold-coloured border; the greater part of its teal surface depicting symbols and stylised cloud formations in its skilful embroidery.

The breastplate comprises armour-panels formed in an arrangement that is commonly seen in India and Persia, and referred to as '*char-aina*', literally 'four mirrors'. For a Tibetan warrior, the four-mirror armour (*me long bzhi*) would provide powerful spiritual protection. The plates are held together with leather straps and secured to the body with iron buckles. The slightly convex breastplate-mirror is fitted with an applied gilt-copper border; the exposed steel showing signs of 'mechanical damascus' (folded steel).

At the centre is the three-dimensional gilt head of Garuda, a large mythical bird of religious and spiritual importance. The border is in deep repoussé, chased with foliate scrolls; at the top is an interesting depiction of 'the wrathful offering of the five senses' (Tibetan: *Khro bo' l dbang po lnga tshogs*). Depicted in a traditional '*torma*' arrangement, it is a gory offering of body parts presented to wrathful deities known as Dharmapalas. On the opposite side, in a pyramid formation, there is an offering of three jewels, Ratna (in Tibetan, *rin-chen* or *rin-poche*) or mani (*norbu*).

The armour's side-plates, protecting the kidneys, represent the armour's more protective attributes. The small 'Vajra' (which, as per the above, also appears at the helmet's finial) symbolizes the indivisible and indestructible, here fixed to the armour so as to bestow the warrior-wearer with superhuman self-belief. The rear plate shows a single gilt skull, a powerful object in Tantric ritual and further evidence that this armour was primarily for ceremonial use.

The armour includes a belt comprised of thin curved plates riveted to leather support straps that run horizontally across the belt's interior surface. Viewing the armour from the back, one can also see that the buckles and cords used to fasten the ends together survive. The belts of Tibetan armours are very rarely extant, and it is especially fortunate that the present example is in such excellent condition.

Finally, grasped in the left-hand of our Tibetan warrior is a spear of impressive proportions and form. The spear's shaft (*mdung shing* or

*mdung yu*) comprises a wooden core reinforced by spiralling iron strips. The spear is fitted with an iron socket which tapers gently into a faceted stem incised with a variety of diagonal lines. This sits just below the slender spearhead which includes two curved protrusions at its base and is cut with two thin fullers.<sup>39</sup>

The main components of this armour – the helmet, mirror-plates, belt, and spear – are of significant rarity as individual elements. To have them here assembled into a composite armour which accurately reflects those worn by the Tibetan warriors themselves makes this an object matched only by the armour at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York which guards the arms and armour galleries on Fifth Avenue.<sup>40</sup>

## Provenance

Various European and American private collections

## References

<sup>37</sup> See Donald LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2006, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 134-137. Accession Numbers: 36.25.25, .28, .351, .476, .583a-c, h-k, .842a-c, .2174, .2461, .2505, .2557. (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/35942>).

<sup>39</sup> For a similar example to this spear, see *ibid.*, p. 175, Cat. No. 75.

<sup>40</sup> See Note 2.







19

**MIRROR SHIELD**

TIBET  
14TH - 16TH CENTURY  
(MIRROR 19TH CENTURY)

DIAMETER 850MM

This large domed cane shield comes from Tibet and exhibits a 19th-century Buddhist mirror at its centre. The outer surface of the shield is painted with six black diamond-shapes set against a red background. Such shields can be seen in a photograph of armoured cavalrymen in Tibet taken circa 1903-4,<sup>41</sup> and another such shield – photographed by Steven Kossak in 2001 – is shown hanging on a column in Drepung monastery, Tibet.<sup>42</sup>

The mirror is of typical construction, with a slightly convex central iron disc which represents the 'mirror'. This is surrounded by an elaborate applied copper border embossed with complex scrollwork on a stippled background, richly gilded though with some losses to certain highlights. Mirrors (called *me-long* in Tibetan), such as the one applied to this shield, play an important role in Tibetan Buddhist ritual. They are used in the consecration of *thangka* paintings and, as in this case, are sometimes mounted on shields, perhaps to be hung in the chapels of a protective deity (*gongkhang*), where arms and armour were often displayed as votive objects.

This shield comes from the same collection as the four-mirror armour just previously described in this catalogue (Cat. No. 18).

**Provenance**

Private collection, USA.

**References**

- <sup>41</sup> Laurence Austine Waddell, *Lhasa and its Mysteries (With a Record of the Expedition of 1903-4)*, London, 1906, p. 172.
- <sup>42</sup> Donald LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2006, p. 13, fig. 14.



20

**TIBETAN HELMET**TIBET  
15TH - 16TH CENTURY

OVERALL 290MM

The bowl of this rare helmet is formed from thirty-two overlapping iron plates which have been attached together with rivets, the brass heads of which are visible on the external surface of the helmet. Certain features of the iron plates used here suggest that this helmet belongs to "a small group of rare multi-plate helmets made in this particular style."<sup>43</sup> The present example exhibits those features which help us to place the helmet within this important group: each of the overlapping plates (or "lames") is formed with a raised medial ridge and fitted at the left edge with a centrally cut brass brim, and a finial with brass-brimmed base rises from the crown of the helmet, its main iron section fitted with three diagonally incised brass bands that are set between two knops.

Around the lower edge of the helmet bowl are the holes that would have likely once held a leather lining, and at its front, the helmet is fitted by a series of iron rivets with a peak that shows a decorative scalloped border at its upper edge. The helmet has gained a rich patina with time, bestowing this object with an atmosphere of history that pleasingly supplements its fortunate state of preservation (the fittings of helmets belonging to this rare type – such as the peak, finial and brass borders – are often missing or damaged).

Two comparable helmets are of particular relevance here, both discussed in LaRocca's analysis of Tibetan arms and armour and preserved at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Acc. Nos. 2001.53 & 2005.146).<sup>44</sup> Both helmets show the same features in their construction: the medial ridges and brass bands applied to the plates, as well as the use of brass rivets rather than leather laces to attach the helmet's various elements.

**Provenance**

Private European collection

**References**

<sup>43</sup> Donald LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2006, p. 74.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/26597> & <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/27807>



21

## ZISCHÄGGE IN THE OTTOMAN STYLE

NUREMBERG, GERMANY  
CIRCA 1560-1580

OVERALL 280MM

Forged from a single piece of steel, this helmet presents a rare and fascinating case study into cultural fusion, mirroring in its conical form and etched decoration the Ottoman *çiçak* helmet-type, despite its manufacture in Nuremberg, a well-known centre of armour manufacture in 16th-century Germany.

Above the helmet's brim, a shallowly sunken horizontal band has been etched to depict intertwining foliage on a flecked ground. Struck with the mark of the Nuremberg armoury, the helmet is fixed at its front with a single bracket, which would have kept the helmet's nasal guard securely in place. Above this, the helmet is engraved with the Ottoman inscription for 'Mohammed' as well as a character resembling the letter 'c'. Around the brim are six suspension loops and pierced holes, once likely used to hold an aventail and other accoutrements. The main body of the helmet then has been embossed to exhibit slender fluting filled throughout with etched foliate patterns in the Ottoman style.

Rather pleasingly, the decorative motifs come in pairs, so that the patterning of one flute mirrors the one that follows it. The helmet's main section tapers to a sharp point with an engraved acorn finial at its apex.

Likely taken by the Turks during the Austro-Turkish War (1591-1606), this helmet was produced in Germany at a time of heightened tensions and ongoing conflict with the Ottoman Empire. Manufactured in Nuremberg for export to Central or Eastern Europe, the helmet is a captivating testament to their courts' interest in the unfamiliar yet vibrant arms and armour of their Ottoman foes. By the middle of the 16th century, in fact, parades in the Turkish (Hungarian) style were a feature in the courts of the Hapsburgs in Vienna and Prague.

The mark that reads 'Mohammed' or 'Mehmed' may be either an arsenal mark or a reference to the reign of Ottoman Sultan Mehmet III (1595-1603), who defeated the Holy Roman Empire at the Battle of

Mezokeresztes in 1596.

A similar helmet, also made in Nuremberg, is preserved in the Wallace Collection (Inv. No. A104). Another forms part of the important collection of arms and armour bequeathed in 1977 by C. Otto von Kienbusch to the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Accession Number 1977-167-107), and is particularly relevant here for the similarity of its etched foliate decoration to that on the present example.

### Provenance

Pierre Berge & Associés and Hermann Historica, Lot 89 ("A rare etched skull of a Nuremberg light Cavalry Zischägge in the Ottoman fashion"), *The Karsten Klingbeil Collection*, Brussels, Tuesday 13th December 2011.

Sotheby's Parke Bernet A.G., Lot 76, *Anonymous Sale*, Zurich, 25th November 1980.

Private European collection





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Runjeet Singh Limited  
© 2020 Runjeet Singh

ISBN 978-0-9934409-5-3

Published by Runjeet Singh  
First Published March 2020

PO Box 6365  
Coventry  
CV3 9LU  
United Kingdom

Photography by Philip Connor  
Designed by Clapham Creative



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