

RUNJEET SINGH

TREASURES FROM ASIAN ARMORIES



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13 - 22 MARCH 2019

The Fuller Building
41 East 57th Street, Suite 704
New York 10022

Gallery arrangement and wall art by Dorian Guo



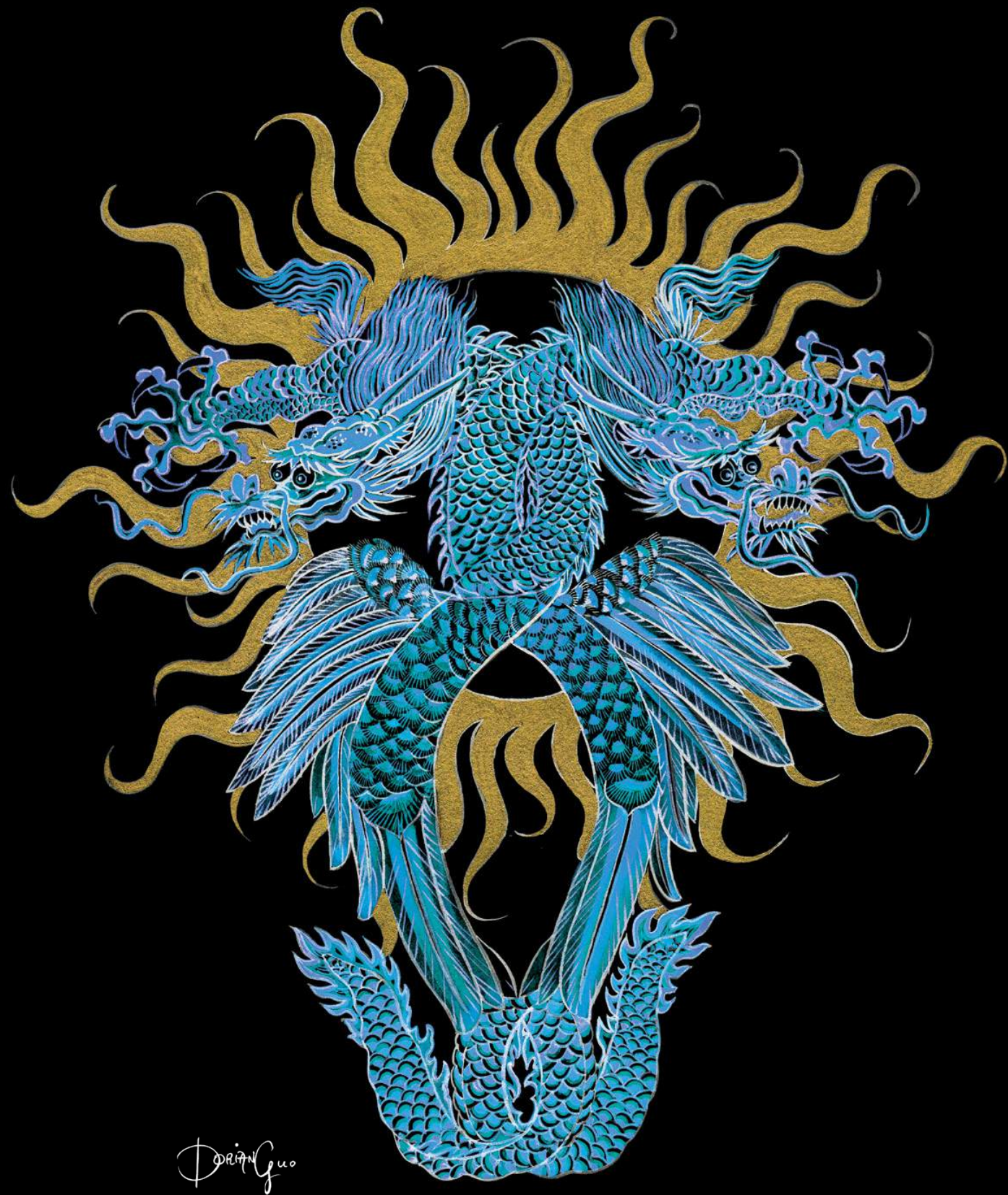
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INTRODUCTION

As an arms and armor specialist who is passionate about presenting these fine objects as works of art, I am proud to announce my collaboration with Paris-based art consultant, artist and interior designer Dorian Guo.

Dorian, inspired by the blend of Indian and Chinese art included in this catalog and its accompanying exhibition, has created artwork to adorn the gallery, visually intertwining aspects of these two great cultures.

He will also arrange the gallery, seeking to highlight not just the grace and beauty found in these pieces but also how they can be presented with European *Art de Vivre* in mind.

—
Runjeet Singh



I

GOLD KARD

JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN, INDIA
MID-19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 13.75"

A fine all-steel Indian kard dagger with a tapering watered steel (wootz damascus) blade. The handle is illuminated by gold *koftgari* in two colors, showing flowers and foliage against a background of thin, gold lines. Even the pommel is decorated, with four rosettes linked by a swastika of stems—a symbol of spirituality commonly used across the Indian subcontinent. All of this *koftgari* has been painstakingly applied and the top and underside of the grip both show pairs of feathered leaves from a cypress tree—an unusual design, but one that is repeated on a *sosun pata* sword dated to 1843 and illustrated in Elgood's 2017 book about Rajput arms¹ (and also selected by him to adorn the rear cover). This is also executed with two shades of gold and fitted with a similarly high contrast dark wootz blade, the close comparisons suggest that the two weapons were made in the same workshop and period.

References

¹ R. Elgood, *Rajput Arms & Armour: The Rathores and their Armoury at Jodhpur Fort Volume II*, Niyogi Books, 2017, p.526.





2

MUGHAL JADE KARD

INDIA
17TH - 18TH CENTURY

OVERALL 13"

A rare Mughal kard dagger with a tapering, watered steel blade, and fixed with green jade grip-scales, each delicately carved with three flowers whose centers show Burmese rubies held by gold *kundan* settings. The pommel is set with a further two matching rubies and a gold tag used for attaching a textile decoration or lanyard. The grip strap has been decorated with gold to show an organic floral design that continues along the spine, the meandering stems mirroring the flowing pattern visible in the high quality wootz blade.





3

AGATE KHANJAR

INDIA
18TH - 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 13.75"

The Persian-type blade of this Indian khanjar dagger is double-edged and curves away sharply from the center-line, its thin medial ridge continuing all the way to the tip. The steel is wootz: evidence of this can be seen in the watery swirls that roam across the blade's surface. The handle is oval in cross-section with a slightly waisted grip, and is of uncluttered form, made from an expertly worked brown agate—its subtle striations catching the light when held. The blade is painted with the inventory number 'D75'.



4

ZAFAR TAKIEH

INDIA/INDONESIA
LATE 18TH - EARLY
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 14"

An unusual Indian object known as a *zafar takieh* or *throne of victory*. The handle is made from jade and finely carved with raised leaves and buds, while a ruby is set into gold at its center. The handle's bow shape would have provided a convenient resting point for the owner's hand during a *darbar* or other official event. The blade is of Indonesian manufacture and follows the general form of the iconic kris dagger. Such a blade would have been a foreign curiosity to Indian rulers, and probably reached India through trade routes with South East Asia.

This slender, serpentine blade has a strong etched feather pattern known as *parmor* and the waves along the edge, the *luk*, represent the crucial elements of life brought

together through forging to create a weapon that has a living quality to it. The blade is painted with the old inventory number; 'D83'.

A comparable composite of a kris blade and Indian dagger-hilt can be viewed in *Arms and Armoury of the Mysore Palace*.² A jade *zafar takieh* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (acc.no. 36.25.734) also has the blade of another culture, this time from Solingen in Germany³.

References

² H.T. Talwar, *Arms and Armoury of the Mysore Palace*, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, 1994, p.9.

³ <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/31714>





5

BEJEWELED KATAR

DECCAN, INDIA
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 17"

The hilt of this exquisite katar has been inlaid with floral designs in gold zarneshan work, a rarely used technique that leaves the gold in relief to be further engraved and hatched. In this instance it bears a repeating pattern of chrysanthemums, each growing amid undulating stems, their centers set with rubies and emeralds.

Four fullers have been precisely worked into the blade, their dividing ridges set with more stones before traveling down the blade and converging to help reinforce the long tip. The steel has been polished while the fullers' valleys have been left to show those desirable currents of wootz. The cusped arch connection of the blade and handle suggests that this katar originated in the Deccan around the 17th century where the same design was used in architecture.



6

MUGHAL TULWAR

MUGHAL DOMINIONS OR
DECCAN, INDIA
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 38.5"



The hilt of this tulwar is inlaid with true damascened gold irises and detailed leafy foliage, all set on a blued ground that provides a rich contrast often worn away on other examples. The heavy and wide cavalry-style blade is made of Indian crystalline wootz.

The wooden scabbard is covered with red silk velvet and fitted with a throat-piece and chape, both of which have been crafted from solid gold, the highly skilled openwork showing lovebirds perching and grooming, embraced by plant life while, above and below, borders of serpentine stems enclose all.

The al-Sabah collection in Kuwait has two similar examples and both are illustrated by Salam Kaoukji in the 2017 book *Precious Indian Weapons*⁴.

References

⁴ S. Kaoukji, *Precious Indian Weapons and other Princely Accoutrements*, Thames & Hudson, 2017, p.294-299, no's 105 & 107.



7

DAO SABER

CHINA
QING DYNASTY,
MID-19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 35"

This Chinese saber, or *dao*, still has its matching scabbard, its original wrapping for the wooden grip and the lanyard cord that was used to bind it to the wielder's wrist. The curved blade is wide and has twin fullers cut into the steel near its spine. The chased and pierced silver mounts show dragons set amid twisting foliage on the pommel, ferrule and the disc guard; with

the scabbard having fittings to match (the leather covering being a modern replacement). A similar sword with copper mounts was sold by me in 2018⁵.

References

⁵ http://runjeetsingh.com/inventory/186/dao_sabre





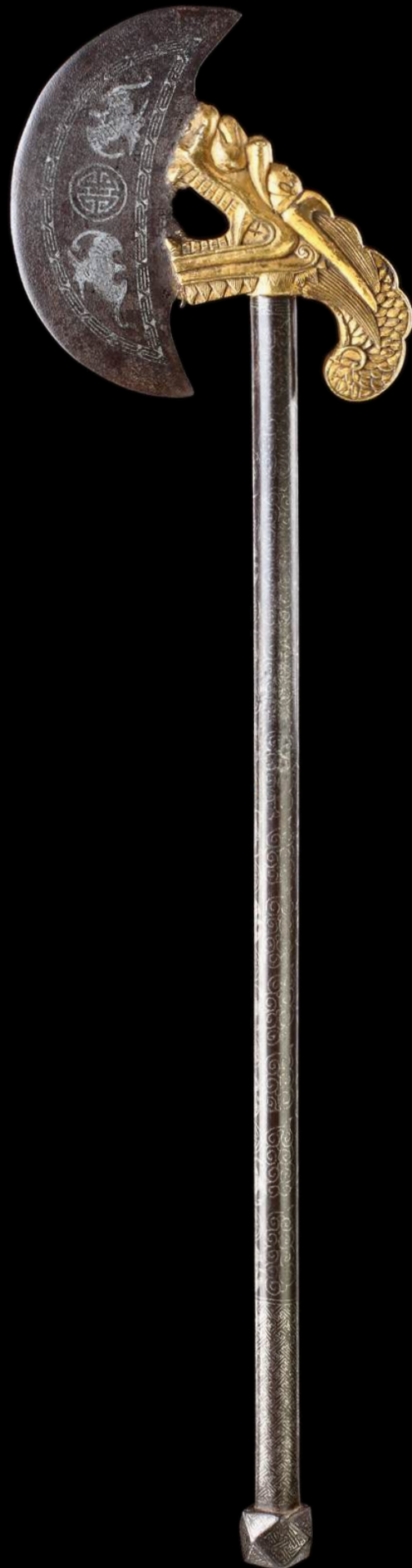
8

SWORD BREAKER

CHINA
QING DYNASTY,
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 28.75"

Chinese sword breakers are rare, and the sculptural design of this steel example makes it even more desirable. The wooden grip is secured in place with iron pins decorated with brass flowers. This grip is flanked by a pommel and hand guard in the form of simple steel blocks, each corner being chamfered. The tapering square section 'blade' is made from a single piece of steel and chiseled along its length to create a row of connected blocks. These not only facilitate the catching and breaking of an opponent's weapon but also transform this utilitarian object into an artful demonstration of metalwork.



9

CHINESE AXE

CHINA
QING DYNASTY
18TH - 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 25.25"

An extremely rare silver and gold damascened Chinese axe. Of ancient form, the crescent blade is decorated with two stylized bats flanking a *shou* symbol and is held in place by a large, gilded dragon's head, the open mouth exposing the creature's teeth while the scaled body curls downwards. The iron shaft is cylindrical and decorated with more bats and shou symbols among scrolling clouds, the dark patina providing a contrasting ground. A repeating key fret pattern can be seen on the lower grip section and this continues onto a faceted pommel that provides a stop for the wielder's hand. The only comparable axe found was sold at Sotheby's, London, in 2010⁶.

References

⁶ <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.257.html/2010/fine-chinese-ceramics-and-works-of-art-110211>

10

FLINTLOCK RIFLE

DECCAN, INDIA
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL 66"

A rare 19th century Indian rifle with unusual features, this fine piece is fitted with a high quality Damascus twist barrel and the stock is profusely inlaid with silver. The wide butt is reminiscent of Ottoman guns although the silver inlay is typical of Indian design—a checkered band providing further decoration and ease of grip. The lock is of English manufacture. The barrel has been decorated at the breech with repeating gold patterns and the muzzle is fluted and gilded. Elaborate silver barrel bands again suggest influence from the Ottoman Empire.



11

REVOLVING
MATCHLOCK
MUSKET

WESTERN INDIA
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 55.5"

A scarce matchlock musket with revolving multi-shot cylinder, from Western India. The stock is painted black with an arched panel at the butt-end and finished by a similar design at the breach-end.

Contained within these arches are colorful Mughal-style flower sprays that lead the eye to the central area where further motifs can be found. The polished steel cylinder is marked with a presumed armory marking of 'SK12' and has four chambers.

The famous Samuel Colt is known to have studied a weapon similar to this one, which was then at the Tower of London and now forms part of the collection at the Royal Armouries, Leeds (XXVIF.2)⁷. Colt would illustrate the musket in a lecture he gave in London on revolver design in 1851.

Another comparable musket is published in the book accompanying the traveling exhibition *Peacock in the Desert: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India*⁸.

Provenance

Sold at Christie Manson & Woods, London, 1973, lot 162 (illustrated). Achieved price: 280 guineas. A copy of the catalog is available upon request.

References

⁷ The Royal Armouries, object no. XXVIF.2, see: <https://collections.royalarmouries.org/object/rac-object-30642.html>

⁸ K. Jasol, *Peacock in the Desert: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India*, 2017, p. 118, no. 4.20.





12

LEATHER QUIVERCHINA
17TH CENTURY

OVERALL 14.5 x 8.25"

An exceptionally rare Chinese quiver from the late Ming or early Qing dynasties. The edge is trimmed with green ray skin and the front is mounted with iron fittings, including a small ribbon-ended square at the top left, three ovals at the base of three slits (which are designed to hold special arrows), a central round fitting, and a long band running along the base. Two fixtures are missing from the right side. These are all gilded openwork of extremely high quality with overlapping bifurcating scrolls set with corals and turquoises—a testament to the age of the quiver.

The rear is plain and omits extra pockets unlike the more commonly found Qing quivers, instead having three suspension loops which would help to counterbalance it on the wearer's hip. Inside are several layers of thick wool for the safe separation and storage of arrows.

While similar quivers are present in the Palace Museum in Beijing⁹ the appearance of one in a Western museum or on the open market is an extremely rare occurrence, the only known exception being an example offered on the UK art market approximately 12 years ago.

References

⁹ The Complete Collection of Treasures of the Palace Museum, Armaments and Military Provisions, p.92-98.





13

COURT HELMET

CHINA
QING DYNASTY,
19TH CENTURY

OVERALL HEIGHT 19.25"

Resplendent beneath a cascade of blond yak hair, this Qing dynasty helmet has been richly decorated. The copper bowl has now acquired a pleasing patina but it was once gilded. Such gilding remains intact upon the ornate framework that encloses the bowl and it is here that we find inset turquoises, corals, moonstones and red tourmalines dotted among serpentine dragons writhing within the finely detailed openwork. Of important note is that the feet of the dragons are depicted with four claws, confirming that the helmet was, as also suggested by the profuse adornment, made for a man of considerable status and taste.

An ink inscription in Chinese characters can be seen inside the helmet and translates to read '50 million'. For comparison, Brooklyn Museum holds a similar helmet which is dated 1821–1850¹⁰.

References

¹⁰ <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/38271>





14

TIBETAN ARMOR

TIBET
17TH - 19TH CENTURY

OVERALL HEIGHT 30"

Tibetan warriors referred to their *four-mirror* armor as *me long bzhi*. Not only did they believe that it provided the wearer with protection against physical attack but, with the mirror being venerated by Buddhists, it also served as a spiritual aegis. The convex iron plates are held by leather straps and worn here over a shirt of riveted chainmail, accompanied by an armored belt and a Bhutanese helmet in a similar arrangement to those seen on the cavalrymen in the photos of the Great Prayer Festival taken in Lhasa in the 1930s and 1940s¹¹.

The helmet is an undecorated iron bowl but has a distinct mechanical-damascus pattern. Mounted with a plume holder atop and modern felt flaps in place to demonstrate the shape of the originals. The armored belt is a rare component, most examples now only found in museums (such as the one worn by the Metropolitan Museum's armored cavalryman¹² who guards the arms and armor galleries on Fifth Avenue). It consists of shaped rectangular plates riveted to leather support straps that run lengthwise across the interior.

References

¹¹ D. La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet*, 2006, p.7.

¹² D. La Rocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet*, 2006, p.134–135, no.46.



15

MAIL AND PLATE SHIRT

KUTCH, INDIA
19TH CENTURY

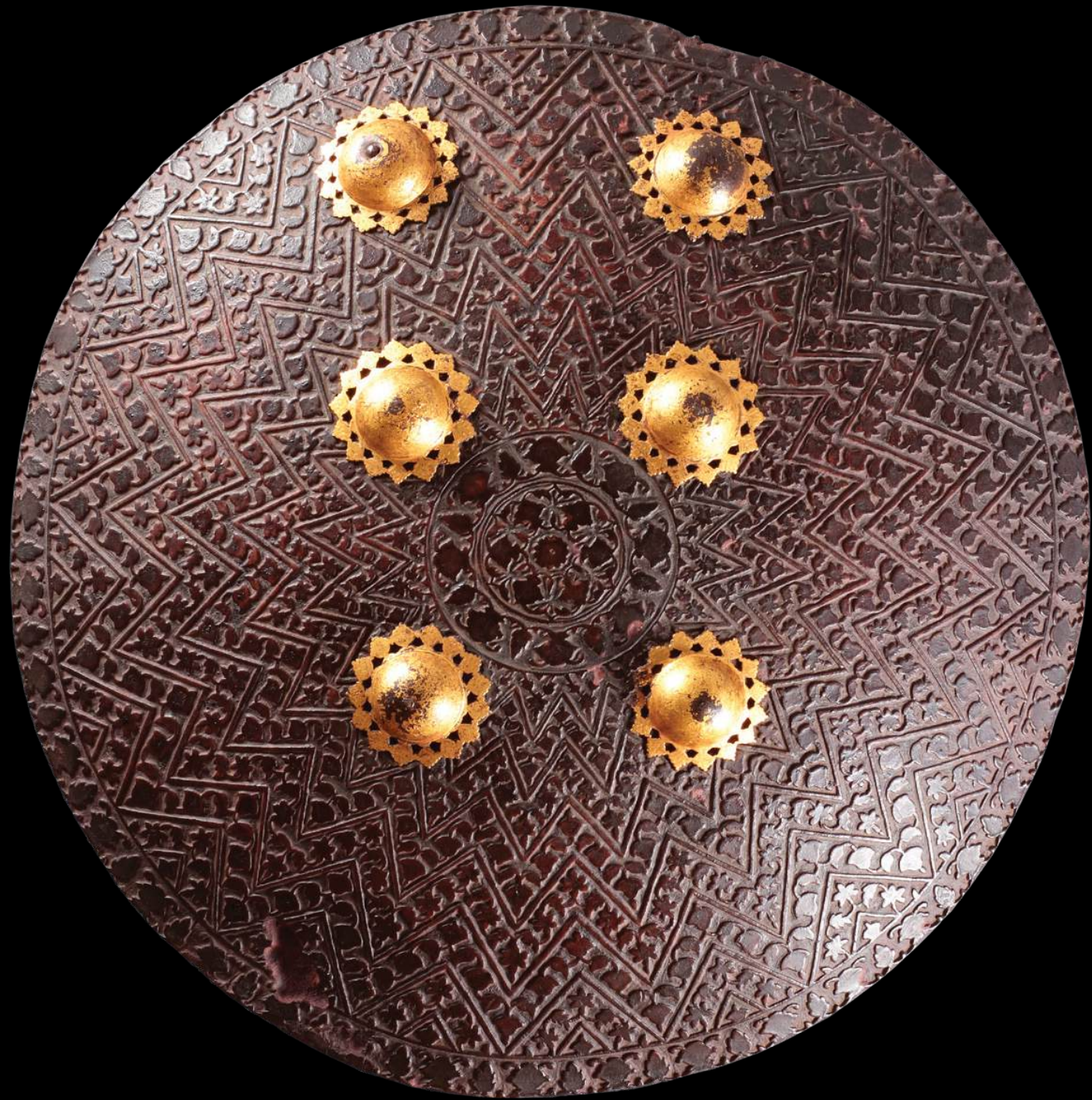
OVERALL LENGTH 23"

A handsome and rare Indian mail and plate shirt. Comprised of riveted and solid rings, the shirt is short-sleeved and thigh-length, opening at the front where two rows of three rectangular plates can be secured in the closed position by means of long pins. The front is overlaid in parcel-gilt silver chased with repeating designs of flower-heads against finely punched grounds, not dissimilar to the decoration on a fine bhuj weapon, also from Kutch, which was published in my 2017 catalog *The Goddess: Arms & Armour of the Rajputs*, pages 58 and 59 (cat.no.20)¹³. Further plates are positioned under the armpits and down the sides, and the back has five more en suite with three shoulder sections that have overlapping rectangular plates, each with cusped lower edges and overlaid with silver, chased with gilded florets.

References

¹³ <http://runjeetsingh.com/inventory/254/bhuj>





16

CARVED LEATHER SHIELD

BIDAR, DECCAN
17TH - 18TH CENTURY

DIAMETER 22"

The thick, stiffened leather of this shield, or *dhal*, has been carved with a close arrangement of concentric stars, radiating out from a hub and punctuated by six gilded iron bosses (an unusual number: four being the norm). The spaces between the zigzags are filled with flowers and leaves. A circular border orbits the rim, similarly decorated, and a central medallion has two rings of blossoms linked by leafy stalks.

This type of aesthetic theme is associated with art of the Bidar region and close comparisons can be found in two Bidriware objects, the first being a salver in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art¹⁴ and the second a dish from the Salar Jung Museum (illustrated in George Michell's book on Islamic Indian art and architecture¹⁵).

References

¹⁴ <https://collections.lacma.org/node/239934>

¹⁵ G. Michell, *Mughal Style: The Art and Architecture of Islamic India*, Thames and Hudson Ltd, 2007, p.99, cat no.84.

Runjeet Singh Limited
© 2019 Runjeet Singh

ISBN 978-0-9934409-3-9

Published by Runjeet Singh
First Published March 2019

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Coventry
CV3 9LU
United Kingdom

Photography by Philip Connor
Designed by Clapham Creative

