

## MANDARIN MANSION



Indian horse-head saber

Indian saber with horse head hilt. Kutch, Gujarat, North India. Circa 1780-1820.

Indian saber with *shamshir* blade made of fine grained wootz steel. While Persian in shape, little details like the ricasso point towards Indian manufacture.

The hilt is made of gilt copper, elegantly shaped horse head, very detailed down to the ears and glass eyes with black pupils. The hilt is further decorated with glass "gems" of a wide range of shades and colors.

Contrary to today, glass and especially colored glass could be very expensive in pre-industrial societies. Some glass wares were valuable imports from places like Belgium.

The scabbard is made of wood, covered with red silk velvet, its pile now mostly worn. It is fitted with six gilt copper mounts and its seems top and bottom are covered with gilt copper strips. All the gilding was done by means of fire gilding, resulting in a much thicker layer of gold than would be produced by modern methods.

All scabbard mounts are decorated with floral motifs in relief, this and the scabbard's strips are all typical for work produced in Kutch where this sword is undoubtedly from.

#### Comparable examples

A very rare type of saber that knows only few comparables. One is published in Robert Hales; *Oriental Arms and Armour*, a lifetime passion. Page 167.

Two others came from Carlton House, the former residence of King George IV, who later moved to Buckingham Palace. The Carlton House provenance means they were collected before 1820, and their relatively early entry on the list (1224) suggests they may even have been in the collection for quite some time before that. Later, they were moved to the Windsor Castle North Corridor inventory. No further provenance information is on record. They are now kept by the Royal Collection Trust under RCIN 62525 and RCIN 62525.2b.

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