

A M I R M O H T A S H E M I



Ottoman Dagger (Kard)

Turkey, 16th century (the hilt);

Istanbul, 19th century (blade, scabbard, and mounts)

Jade, gold, gemstones, watered steel, silver, silver gilt

29 cm long (unsheathed), 30 cm long (sheathed)

A late 16th-century Ottoman jade hilt, finely inlaid with gold split leaf palmettes. Very similar gold ornamentation is seen on the jade hilt of a khanjar in the Furusiyya Art Foundation, Vaduz, Liechtenstein (inv. no. R-981).¹ The hilt has been paired with a 19th-century watered steel blade, to which an elaborate scabbard and bolster have been added.

The bejewelled silver work is characteristic of a group of edged weapons produced in 18th- and early 19th-century Istanbul, often reusing older jade hilts. The majority of the surviving examples are found in American and European collections, suggesting that they were made as souvenirs for Western travellers in Turkey. The blades are frequently inscribed with pseudo-calligraphy and spurious 17th- and 18th-century dates.²

Work like this was probably produced by Armenian jewellers. The Istanbul jewellery trade was traditionally dominated by Greek artisans. However, Ottoman Sultans in the 16th and 17th centuries brought Armenian goldsmiths to Istanbul. By 1806, the majority of well-known goldsmiths in Istanbul were Armenian.³ A gun and its associated accessories, known as the 'Turkish Hunting Set', is in the Walter's Art Museum, Baltimore (no. 51.84). The jewellery it attributed to Hovhannes Agha Düz, an Armenian Christian who is believed to have been Mahmud I's chief goldsmith in the 1730s.⁴

A kinjal in the George F. Harding Collection in the Art Institute of Chicago (accession no. [1982.2167a-c](#)) is dated to the 19th century. The split-palmette arabesques inlaid in gold to its jade hilt closely resemble the craftsmanship on our kard. A group of five daggers in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (no. [23.232.1](#)), comprises four examples with earlier Mughal hilts.

[1] Furuşsiyya Art Foundation Collection. *The Arts of the Muslim Knight*. Milan: Skira, 2008, p. 175, cat. 163.

[2] Alexander, David, Stuart W. Pyhrr, and Will Kwiatkowski. *Islamic Arms and Armor in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015, pp. 11–12.

[3] Tokat, Osep. *Hay Artsatagorts Varpetner / Armenian Master Silversmiths*. VA: Northidge, 2005, p. 282.

[4] Keskiner, Bora, Ünver Rüstem, and Tim Stanley. 'Armed and Splendorous: The Jeweled Gun of Sultan Mahmud I', in Amy S. Landau (ed.) *Pearls on a String: Artists, Patrons, and Poets at the Great Islamic Courts*. Baltimore: Walters Art Museum, 2015, pp. 205–241: pp. 219–220.