

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Batak Sabre (Piso Podang)

Sumatra, 19th century

79 cm long

Steel, iron, gold inlay

Stock no.: A6109

Provenance: UK private collection by descent over several generations. Purchased in an estate sale in the early 20th century.

The *piso podang* is the sword of the Batak people of North Sumatra. The name '*podang*' may come from the Portuguese word 'espada' [sword].¹ Its form evidently influenced by that of the Indian talwar, the *piso podang* has a flattened cross guard with trefoil or diamond-shaped quillons and a hemispherical pommel. As with the talwar, this wide hilt stops the sword from slipping out of the hand. Unlike the talwar, the upturned pommel is often hollow to make it lighter. It also has no langet, rather a straight line across the crossguard.

The watered steel blade has a Qur'anic inscription at the ricasso:

LVII, (al-Hadid), part of verse 25:

وانزلنا الحديد فيه بأس شديد

["And He revealed iron, wherein is mighty power."]

Followed by an Arabic pious phrase:

لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله العلي العظيم

[“There is no power or strength save through God the Exalted, the Mighty.”]

A *viso podang* dated to 1800–1870 is in the British Museum, London (no. [As.7781.a](#)). It has a hilt of similar form, although with a langet. Another in the same collection is attributed to the Batak people in the early 19th century (no. [As1895.0902.6.a](#)).

Other similar examples are in the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore ([XXXX-05006](#) and [XXXX-05116](#)), both dated to the late 19th or early 20th century and attributed to the Bataks.

[1] Van Zonneveld, Albert G. *Traditional Weapons of the Indonesian Archipelago*. Leiden: C. Zwartenkot Art Books, 2001, pp. 109-110.