

# AMIR MOHTASHEMI



## Shamshir

Kutch, Gujarat, Second half of the 19th century

Gilt copper, watered steel, gemstones

93 cm long overall, 87 cm long without scabbard

Stock no.: A6185

A fine shamshir made in Kutch (now known as Kachchh), Gujarat, its hilt and scabbard decorated throughout with repoussé, and stippled gilt copper. Kutch metalwork was celebrated for its quality, with sophisticated repoussé work, floral decoration, and a high standard of purity.<sup>1</sup> In his guide to the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1888, T. N. Mukharji wrote: 'No part of India is more celebrated for its work in precious metals than Kach.'<sup>2</sup>

Swords made in Kutch have been prized since at least the thirteenth century, when they are mentioned in Fakhr-i Mudabbir's *Adab al-harb wa-l-shaja'a*.<sup>3</sup> By the 19th century, much of the market for Kutch metalwork was in Europe, where Kutch silver was sold in Liberty & Co., and Kutch arms were displayed at the Great Exhibition.<sup>4</sup>

The blade is of pattern-welded steel, a highly-skilled and time consuming technique whereby different layers of steel are combined and polished to create a wave pattern. The blade is inscribed in gold within a silver polylobed foliate cartouche with the Arabic 'Wilayat-e 'Ali' or 'Subject of Ali', a mark which is seen on other swords from Kutch.

A shamshir made in Kutch, although with Rajasthani enamelled hilt, in the Royal Collections Trust (no. [RCIN 11350](#)) has a very similar gilt copper scabbard. It is dated to 1800–1875.

According to family tradition, this shamshir was owned by Roustam Raza (1738–1845), mamluk of Napoleon Bonaparte. However, the dates suggest that this is apocryphal.

[1] Markel, Stephen. 'Kutch Silver: A Study of Stylistic Sources', in R. DeCaroli and P. Lavy (eds) *Across the South of Asia: A Volume in Honor of Robert L. Brown*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2020. pp. 153-168; p. 153.

[2] Mukharji, T. N. *Art-manufactures of India: especially compiled for the Glasgow International Exhibition, 1888*.

[3] Allan, James and Gilmour, Brian. *Persian Steel: The Tanavoli Collection. Oxford Studies in Islamic art XV*. Oxford: OUP, 2000, pp. 113-115.

[4] Elgood, Robert. *Rajput Arms and Armour: The Rathores and Their Armoury at Jodhpur Fort. Vol. 1. 2 vols*. New Delhi: Mehrangarh Museum Trust in association with Niyogi Books, 2017. p. 139.