



Inv. no. 27/2019

DAGGER WITH STEEL BLADE AND HILT OF CARVED JADE AND GOLD SET WITH RUBIES AND EMERALDS, WITH WOODEN SCABBARD COVERED IN SILK AND GILT COPPER

INDIA, MUGHAL; FIRST HALF OF THE 17TH CENTURY&NBSP;

L: 37.5 CM

The hilt of this dagger is made of two pieces of grey-white jade with sloping ends forming a distinctive bifurcated upper terminal. The jade is inlaid with rubies and emeralds set in gold, the gems forming birds, flowers and foliage. Between the two jade plaques runs a band of gold with inlaid gemstones. The guard is also made of gold, and its adornments include a large green emerald at either end.

Only a small group of Indian daggers with such cleft grips exist, and they date mainly from the first half of the seventeenth century. The type of dagger is believed to be particularly tied to the court of the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–27). In several miniatures, Jahangir himself carries a similar dagger in his scarf, and he can also be seen giving them away as gifts and tokens of honour to selected subjects.<sup>1</sup>

Courtly fashions appear to have changed later in the seventeenth century, with cleft dagger hilts disappearing in favour of designs such as ‘animal-head daggers’ (33/1979) and daggers with ‘pistol grips’ (32/1980).

The slightly recurved steel blade is probably a later replacement for the original blade, which, judging from depictions in miniature paintings, was presumably more or less straight. The silk-covered scabbard with a gilt-copper locket and chape is undoubtedly more

recent too.

<sup>1</sup> *Kjeld von Folsach, Joachim Meyer, Peter Wandel: Fighting, Hunting, Impressing: Arms and Armour from the Islamic World 1500–1850, Copenhagen 2021, cats. 122–123.*

Published in:

Christie's, London, 26/4-2012, lot 299;

Amin Jaffer (ed.): *Beyond extravagance: a royal collection of gems and jewels*, New York 2013, pp. 28 and 92, cat.no. 5;

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