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SADDLE AXE (TABARZIN) OF GOLD-INLAIDED STEEL AND IRON WITH
HIDDEN STILETTO

INDIA, MUGHAL; SECOND THIRD OF THE 17TH CENTURY

L: 50.5; L (HIDDEN STILETTO): 41.2; MAXIMUM W (AXE HEAD):
11.8 CM

This short axe is called a *saddle axe* because it was intended to sit in a sling at the front of the saddle, from which it could be easily pulled with one hand while the rider held on to the bridle with the other. Apart from India, the type is also known from the Ottoman Empire and especially from Iran (36/2019). It is believed to have been used since the sixteenth century.¹

The head of this axe is solid and sharp, and the bottom knob of the shaft can be unscrewed, revealing a long, thin stiletto dagger. As such, this is clearly a weapon that could be used in battle, but at the same time it is adorned with fine, gold-inlaid flowers and winding plant ornaments that cover the entire shaft and most of the head. On the upper and lower parts of the shaft, carnation-like and lotus-like flowers are arranged in a cartouche pattern created by criss-crossing,

feather-like leaves. This type of decoration was very widespread in Mughal art in the seventeenth century, appearing on both textiles and stonework (see for example 10/1989 and 8/2004).

Inlays require the use of more gold than overlaid decorations (*kofrigari*), where the gold is simply applied to the object's surface in a thin layer. Thus, this axe would have been precious, and indeed the combination of golden floral ornaments and darkened steel is a stylistic match for a group of gold-inlaid daggers and sabres that belonged to the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1627–1658) and his two sons, Dara Sikoh and Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707).²

¹ *Bonhams, 10/4 2010, lot 271; Robert Elgood: Rajput Arms and Armour: The Rathores and Their Armoury at Jodhpur Fort, New Delhi 2017, vol. 2, pp. 170-171 and 614.*

² *Kjeld von Folsach, Joachim Meyer and Peter Wandel: Fighting, Hunting, Impressing Arms and Armour from the Islamic World 1500–1850, The David Collection, Copenhagen 2021, cat. 24.*

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