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SABRE (*TULWAR*) OF STEEL, IRON, COPPER AND GOLD

INDIA, DELHI OR AWADH; THE BLADE 1163 H (1749–1750); THE HILT PROBABLY 2ND HALF OF THE 17TH CENTURY

L: 95.5; HILT L: C. 17 CM

The blade of this sabre is made of watered crucible steel, also known as *wootz* steel. The inlaid gold inscriptions state that it was commissioned by Safdar Jang Bahadur and made by Muhammad Baqir Mashhadi in 1163. At the time of writing, there are nine known published sabres with almost identical inscriptions, of which six are fitted with *shamshir* hilts and three with *tulwar* hilts.¹ They were forged while the Persian-born Safdar Jang was *nawwab* of Awadh and vizier to the Mughal emperor Ahmad Shah (1748–53), but whether the likewise Persian-born Muhammad Baqir produced them in Delhi or in one of the cities of Awadh is not known. Indian weaponsmiths did not usually sign their blades, whereas the practice was more widespread in the Iranian and Ottoman realms. Whether the sabres were intended for Safdar Jangs guard or as gifts is also a matter of conjecture.

The characteristic, Indian *tulwar* hilt is dominated by a large pommel

disk. This one has a tang nut, to which an eyelet with a wrist strap would originally have been attached. The swelling grip joins the short guard and the langet in forming a cruciform shape. The entire hilt, which is made of iron, is inlaid with flowers, stems and leaves as well as carefully delimited lines of gilt copper raised in relatively high relief. Some *tulwars* also feature protective hand guards. Stylistically, the hilt appears older than the blade. Replacing parts of sabres and daggers over time or reusing old ones was a common practice.

¹ Bernd Augustin: 'Persische Blumen erblühen in Indien: Das Werk des Muhammad Baqir Maschhadi: Klingen- und Goldschmiedekunst in Delhi unter Safdar Jang Bahadur', *Indo-Asiatische Zeitschrift*, 13, 2009 pp. 99 – 121 and Kjeld von Folsach, Joachim Meyer, Peter Wandel: *Fighting, Hunting, Impressing Arms and Armour from the Islamic World 1500–1850, The David Collection*, Copenhagen 2021, cat. 29.

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Bruun Rasmussen, *Asian and Islamic Art*, auktion 905, 1.december 2021, lot 287;

Joachim Meyer, Rasmus Bech Olsen and Peter Wandel: *Beyond words: calligraphy from the World of Islam*, The David Collection, Copenhagen 2024, figs. 57 and 58, pp. 86-87;