

# Islamic weapons in Polish collections and their provenance

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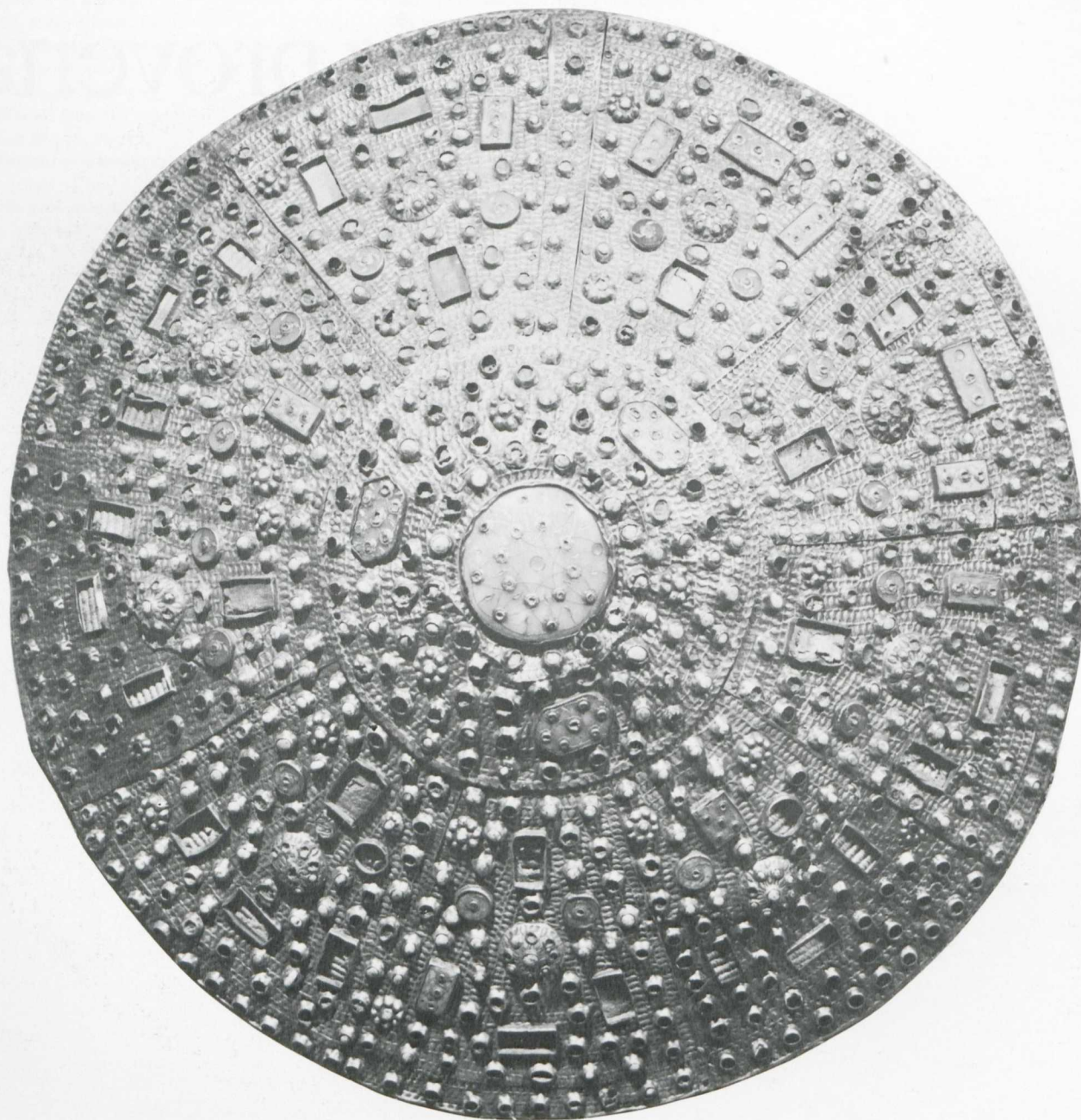
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By the early fourteenth century, trade and diplomatic relations between Poland and the Near East were firmly established, with well-defined commercial routes along which Constantinople, Lvov, Toruń and Gdańsk were important stages. From Gdańsk it was easy to go by sea to other European ports, particularly Amsterdam and London. Lvov (Lemberg), then in the east of the Polish State, became a commercial and manufacturing centre, the local Polish and Ruthenian citizenry being augmented by Greeks, Persians, Jews and a large number of Armenians. These last came from Turkish and Persian territories and were soon polonized, but retained their cultural links with the East, so that Armenian goods manufactured in Lvov show a distinctly mixed Polish-Oriental style.

Trade with the Orient was disrupted by the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453, and by Ottoman expansion generally, though for much of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Poland and Turkey were at peace. At that time, under the rule of the Jagiellonian dynasty, Poland was united with Lithuania and her

boundaries extended far to the East, close to the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire (see map iv). In the period of the last Jagiellonian kings, Sigismund I and Sigismund II Augustus, there existed an agreement with the 'Sublime Port'<sup>1</sup> under the terms of which merchants acting on behalf of the rulers of both states were exempted from all taxes and tolls. Sulṭān Sulaymān the Magnificent sent merchants to Poland and Russia every year, giving them the large sum of forty thousand ducats to purchase goods. In 1536, one of these merchants, Hajji Rejeb from Istanbul, died in Warsaw; in the inventory of goods left by him are listed many high-quality weapons, together with precious fabrics and gems.<sup>2</sup>

Polish-Turkish relations deteriorated at the end of the sixteenth century after Sigismund of the Swedish Vasa dynasty had been elected to the Polish throne. Polish diplomacy sought an alliance with Šafavid Persia against their mutual Ottoman foe, and in pursuit of this, emissaries and gifts were sent to the Shāh's court. In order to avoid traversing the Sultan's territory, an



216, 217 *Kalkan* (shield) of King Sigismund III. (Wawel State Collection of Art, Cracow)



alternative route to Persia, through Cracow, Moscow and Astrakhan – the *Via Moscovensis* – was usually taken. In 1607 a Polish embassy brought as a gift to Shāh ‘Abbās an illuminated French mid-thirteenth century Bible known today as the Maciejowski Bible (after Bernard Maciejowski, Bishop of Cracow, a sixteenth-century owner), an invaluable source of arms and armour illustrations, now in the Morgan Library, New York.<sup>3</sup> In addition to political legations, some solely commercial missions were sent to Persia by the Polish kings. The royal castles and palaces – particularly Wawel Castle at Cracow – were furnished with luxury items from both East and West. In 1601 an Armenian merchant, Sefer Muratovitch, was commissioned by Sigismund III of Vasa to purchase rugs woven with the royal arms, as well as costly fabrics, tents and weapons, specifically sabre blades of watered steel. Muratovitch did not take the Moscow route. Probably he had a Turkish safe conduct, for he passed through Wallachia along the River Danube, through the Turkish town of Mangalia on the Black Sea, and thence by boat

to Trebizond, Erzerum, Kars, the River Araxis, Ecbatana and finally to Kāshān in Persia, at that time famous for its textile industry. The purchased goods were transported by the same route to Poland.<sup>4</sup>

Today it is not possible to identify any of the weapons brought back by Muratovitch, though, on the strength of Sigismund’s reported fondness for Oriental, particularly Persian, arms we may assume that those purchased by Muratovitch were of the highest quality.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately all the portraits of Sigismund known to the author show him in western attire and do not provide evidence of the decorative fashion in sword hilts prevailing in Kāshān at this time. When in the late eighteenth century his coffin was opened, among the objects found was a *kalkan* shield (now displayed in the Royal Treasury in Wawel Castle<sup>6</sup> (216, 217) made of woven fig twigs, the outside being covered with gilded silver plate, embossed in floral motifs and set with turquoise and jade, while the inner side is lined with Persian fabric. Though generally attributed to Persia of the early





seventeenth century, this opinion rests on the presence of the Persian fabric and on representations of similar shields in Persian miniatures from the fourteenth century onwards, in which horsemen armed with such shields are plentiful; but hardly any of the shields themselves have come down to us. Those of Turkish manufacture in the Polish collections are very similar to Sigismund's though they are covered with cloth of gold and lined with plain velvet, and all date from the second half of the seventeenth century; some are booty from the great Polish-German victory over the Turks at Vienna in 1683.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the Near East and Islamic India, the mace with a globular or pear-shaped head was used as a military sceptre. This symbol can be traced back as far as third millennium BC Mesopotamia and Egypt, at which time they were furnished with stone or ceramic heads, and occasionally deposited in temples as votive offerings for victory. In sixteenth-century Poland, a solid-headed type of mace called a *bulawa* served as the insignia of the *hetman*, the highest commander of an army.<sup>8</sup> The Royal Treasury of Wawel Castle contains a superb early-seventeenth-century example made in Persia or by Persian craftsmen. It is entirely covered with gold, blue enamel, turquoises and rubies (218).

Another beautiful example is preserved in Wilanów Palace and is traditionally connected with Hetman Jan Karol Chodkiewicz<sup>9</sup> (219). It is interesting to compare this mace with the late seventeenth-century *bulawa*, made by Armenians in Lvov, in the Czartoryski Collection (220).

Very similar to the *bulawa* was the *buzdygan* mace; sometimes used as a badge of rank but primarily intended as a fighting weapon, it was popular all over the Eastern world. Various versions, locally made and imported, were used in Poland. Examples of Persian origin or made in the Persian style are preserved in Polish museums though they are rarely found elsewhere. The *buzdygan* head has six flanges with curved edges; it is mounted on a tubular-faceted haft terminating in a grip that contains a hidden dagger which may be withdrawn after unscrewing the bottom knob, and then fixed in reverse position to form a *jarid*-like weapon. The surfaces are usually damascened with finely executed floral motifs or small cypresses, or sometimes with the coat of arms of the owner (221).

From the late seventeenth century onwards, reports of the fabulous Mughal Empire influenced Polish national fashion. This is especially evident in the sashes adopted for the costume of the



218 *Bulawa*-mace, Persian, seventeenth century. (Wawel State Collection of Art, Cracow)



219 *Bulawa*-mace, Persian, seventeenth century. (The Wilanów Palace Collection, National Museum, Warsaw)





220 *Bulawa*-mace made by Armenian craftsmen in Lvov, late-seventeenth century; also shown, a Polish sash in Indo-Persian style. (The Czartoryski Collection, Cracow)



221 *Buzdygan*-mace, Polish under Persian influence, seventeenth/eighteenth centuries. (The Polish Army Museum, Warsaw)





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nobles, at first imported but later produced in Poland. As to weapons, the Polish *karabela* sabres came to include a variety called *indyczka*, 'Indian-like', distinguished by downcurved quillons with floral endings. Some of these were imported from India, others were made in Poland (222).

In the second half of the seventeenth century, Polish culture adopted a variety of Turkish styles and ideas. Wars with the Ottoman Empire had brought to the country an abundance of military trophies, but not enough to satisfy the demands of the gentry. Gentlemen disinclined to risk the hazards of war were able to buy the expensive Turkish arms that fashion had made *de rigueur*. Merchants from East and West continued to trade in spite of the periodic outbreaks of hostility, for Ottoman Turkey provided the greatest market in the Near East for Oriental and Western commodities. Goods in Persian and Indian taste were produced in Istanbul by artisans brought – sometimes forcibly – into the city. We know little about these immigrant workers, though information is probably to be found in the city's unpublished archives.

The Cracow Museums display a large number of objects which reflect the process by which Oriental styles intruded themselves in the Polish panoply in the course of the eighteenth century. To cite only one example: in Wawel Castle, among numerous saddles captured at Vienna, there is one complete with full trappings, *kalkan* and Polish-style sabre, all of which belonged to Jan Łącki, a castellan who participated in the campaign (223). The saddle has a very elegant form and is decorated with turquoises; judging by the fine watered steel damascened in a characteristically Persian foliate design the piece would seem to be of Persian make. (The fabric is not original.) To build an ensemble around this piece, trappings, shield and sabre to match were commissioned at an unknown later date but presumably during the use life, probably in an Armenian workshop in Lvov. By such commissions, Polish arms and armour makers came to be familiar with Eastern forms and decorations.

The combination of Persian elegance with Turkish ostentation is still more obvious in the share of the Vienna booty which fell to King John Sobieski, the commander-in-chief of the allied Polish-German army that raised the siege. There are sabres and pallasches, sumptuously mounted in gilded and chiselled silver, inlaid with jade and turquoise, with sheaths clad in shagreen or velvet. Though mounted to suit Ottoman taste, many of the blades are Persian, among them some of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-centuries type with a decoration of the *simorgh* and dragon in combat on the forte (224, 225). It would seem that these blades were highly prized by the Ottomans.<sup>10</sup>

Also in the Cracow Museum are two fine quality carved ivory powder horns of Indian origin. One of the horns has retained its original red and silver cord and tassels, decorated with small corals and sequins (226). Evidently there was a fashion amongst Ottoman Pāshās for such items for other examples are to be found in museums housing the Vienna Booty.<sup>11</sup>

Another heterogeneous Turkish object is a caparison, or horse cloth, made of Chinese brocade with golden and silver threads, the embroidered designs in the Turkish manner having been





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222 *Karabela* sabre, Turkish, eighteenth century, worn by the Polish gentry as 'the Indian sabre'. (National Museum, Cracow)

223 Saddle and trapping of Jan Łącki, Persian and Polish, seventeenth century. (Wawel State Collection of Art, Cracow)





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added at a later date (227); it is now preserved in the National Museum in Cracow among the Vienna booty taken by Hetman Mikołaj Hieronim Sieniawski. Very few Oriental caparisons have survived, and those in Cracow provide a good study collection. The same is true of the Vienna booty tents now in Wawel Castle: most are typically Turkish, but there are examples attributable to Persian workshops (228). The highest artistic and technical level of these was formerly exemplified by the famous tent which belonged to the Sanguszko family, unfortunately it has been divided into pieces and scattered among various collections, some beautiful medallions of velvet with figurative scenes being now in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

One of the great national collections resulted from Princess Izabela Czartoryska's life-long zeal in accumulating mementos of hero 'liberators' (Wilhelm Tell, Joan of Arc, Count Egmont, George Washington *et al.*). Her collection was transformed into a private museum between 1801 and 1809 when two specially designed buildings were erected at Puławy, a princely residence on the River Vistula not far from Warsaw. The Sibyl's Temple was intended as a pantheon of Polish history (housing also a part of the Vienna booty), whilst the Gothic House was devoted to world history; both museums were dedicated to national freedom. The Princess even managed to obtain objects formerly belonging to those rulers of Mysore and tenacious foes of the British, Ḥaydar 'Alī and his son Tipū Ṣāḥib, whose dramatic struggle for independence was finally crushed in 1799. A dagger formerly belonging to Ḥaydar 'Alī was presented to the Polish King Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski by the English statesman and Prime Minister, Lord North; it still bears its original handwritten museum label, 'Poignard de Hider Ali' (229).

The Czartoryski family corresponded extensively with the noted Orientalist Sir William Jones, who lived and died in Calcutta; but their interests were not merely antiquarian. After the Polish Uprising of 1831, a major part of the family moved to Paris (taking with them their collection) and established a political and cultural centre in their residence, the Hôtel Lambert. Ceaselessly in opposition to Czarist policy, they maintained friendly relations with politically influential Turks and sent agents to Istanbul while at the same time losing no opportunity to add to their Oriental collections. The variety of weapons added to the collection in the later part of the nineteenth century, may be judged from the two pieces shown here (230, 231 and 232).

It may not be inopportune to dwell briefly on the extraordinary career of one of the Czartoryski political agents, Ladislaus Kościelski. Born the son of a landlord in Great Poland in 1818, he served in the Prussian army but had to leave as the result of a duel with an influential Prussian *Junker*. He moved to France and took part in an Algerian expedition, then returned to Poland to fight in the Uprising of 1846–1848; after the failure of this movement he returned to Paris and joined the Czartoryski faction, who sent him to Istanbul. There he entered the service of Sulṭān Abdul Mejid and won his complete confidence. He excelled as a cavalry commander, gained the rank of general in the Crimean War and, assuming the name of Sefer Pasha but not converting to Islam, became Master of Ceremonies at the Sultan's



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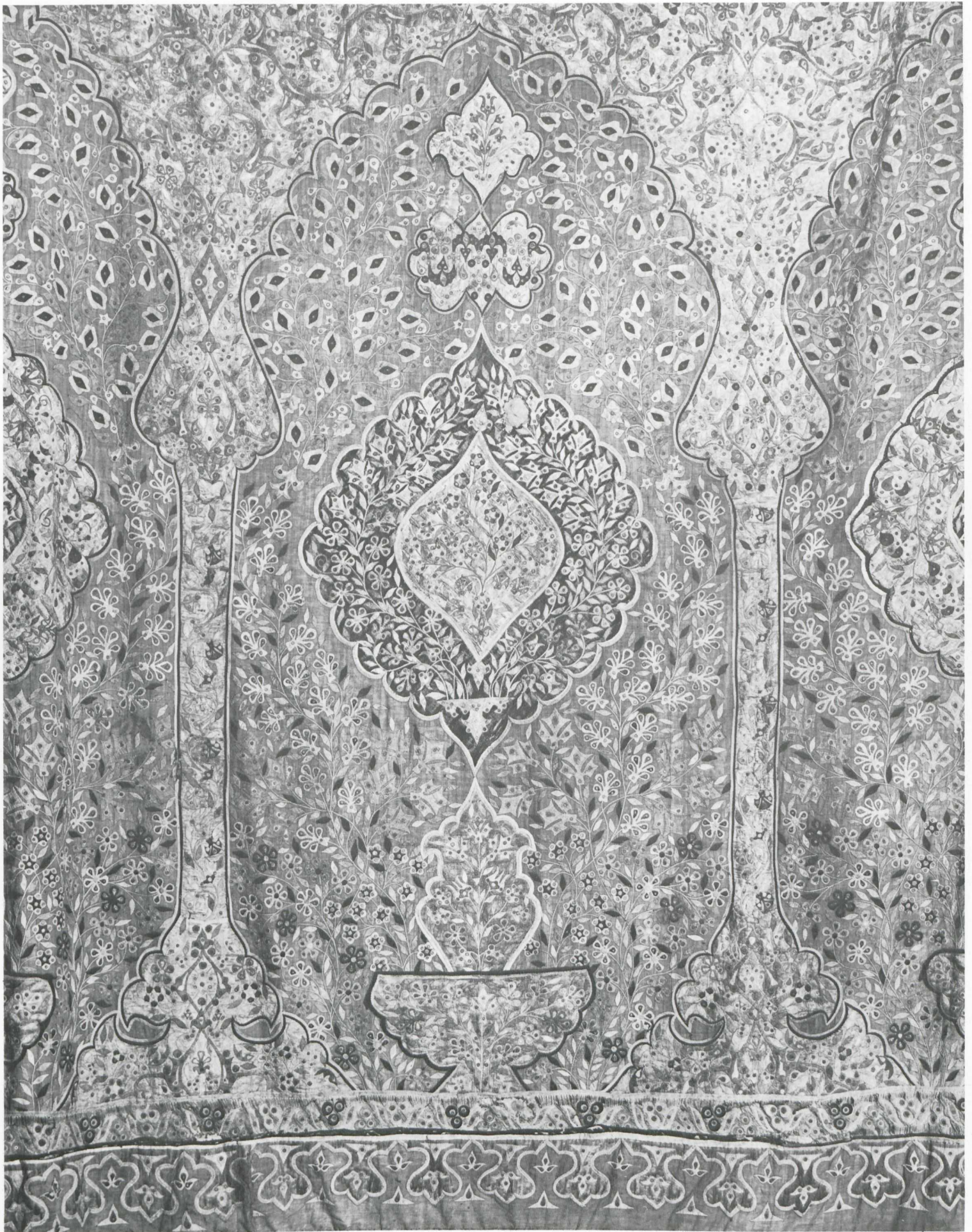
224, 225 Persian blades with *simorgh* and dragon. (Wawel State Collection of Art, Cracow)

226 Powder horn, Indian, seventeenth century. (The Czartoryski Collection, Cracow)









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227 Horse cloth, Chinese/Turkish, seventeenth century. (The Czartoryski Collection, Cracow)

228 Persian tent (a fragment), seventeenth century. (Wawel State Collection of Art)





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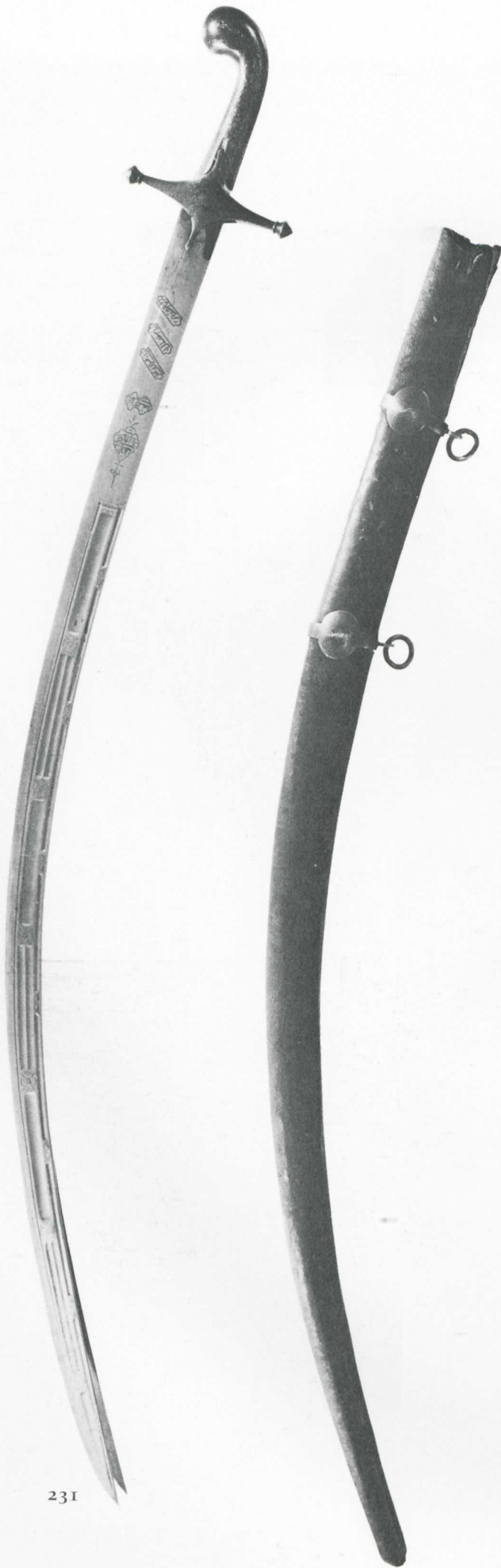


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229 Haydar 'Ali's dagger, Turkish, seventeenth century. (The Czartoryski Collection, Cracow)

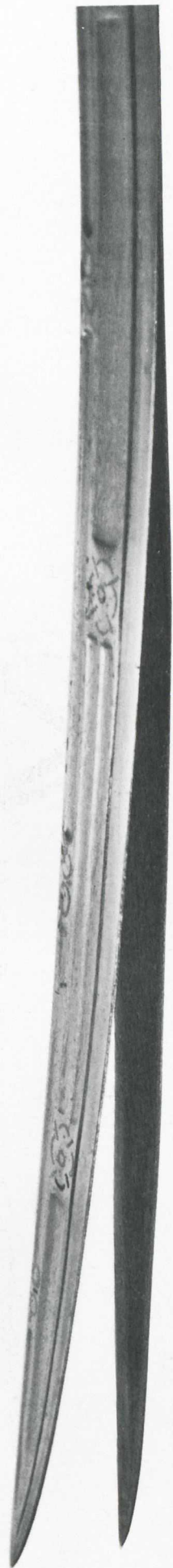
230 Tega sword, Indian, eighteenth century. (The Czartoryski Collection, Cracow)





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231 Sabre, Dhū'l-Faqār type, Indo-Persian, eighteenth century. (The Czartoryski Collection, Cracow)



232

232 Detail of (231).



court. Loaded with distinctions and riches, he gathered a notable collection of weapons, some of them personal gifts from the Sultan. In 1863, when Russian influence prevailed in the Ottoman capital, he moved to Egypt, where he soon emerged as an intimate friend and advisor to the Khedive, Ismā'īl Pāshā. He played an important role in the Suez Canal negotiations at the time of the diplomatic contest between France and Britain. In 1873 he purchased the medieval castle of Bertholdstein in Styria, which he soon transformed into a romantic neo-gothic residence, transferring there his collections and an entire stable of Arab horses. He died in 1895, having bequeathed most of his Oriental arms and armour to the National Museum in Cracow, where

fortunately everything survived both World Wars.

These donations consist of very high-quality pieces, mostly Turkish but also Persian and Indian. Among the finest is the armour of the Šafavid Shāh Sulaymān (ruled 1667–1694) shown in (233–236); it is not clear how this reached Sefer Pasha's hands, but it could have been a present first from Sulaymān to a Sultan of Turkey and then from Abdul Mejid to Sefer Pasha; but probably it was captured by the Afghans in 1722 and later sold (as was the Maciejowski Bible). The high technical and artistic level of the armour, as well as the name 'Sulaymān Shāh' in the inscriptions, makes the attribution certain. Another of Sefer Pasha's donations deserving attention is



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233 Detail of (234) (back).

234 Shāh Sulaymān's armour, Persian, late seventeenth century.  
(National Museum, Cracow)











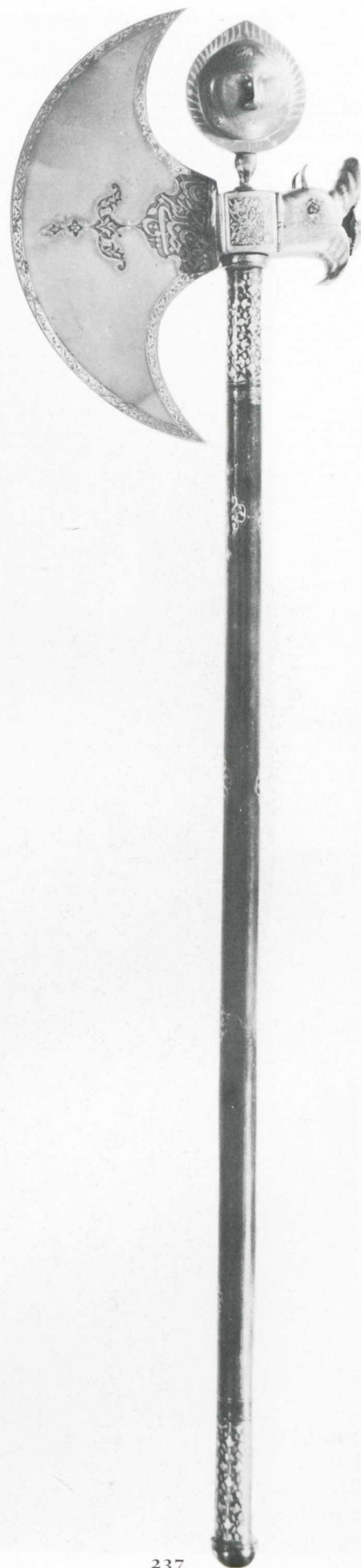
a ceremonial axe (237, 238). In various countries of the Near East such axes were used as a symbol of rank carried in front of dignitaries. Similar axes belonged to ceremonial regalia of the Ottoman Empire, though the *peiks* – one of the units of the Sultan's bodyguards – carried axes with double heads.<sup>12</sup> In Persia, axes fulfilled a symbolic role in various religious cults, for example, that of the Dervishes. The Cracow specimen is of very high quality workmanship, a ceremonial object worthy of use in the presence of the Shāh himself. It is difficult to find any other similar example of a ceremonial axe so clearly pertaining to the Islam of Persian Shī'is.



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235 Detail of (234) (front).

236 Detail of (234) (side).



237

237 Ceremonial axe, Persian, late seventeenth century. (National Museum, Cracow)





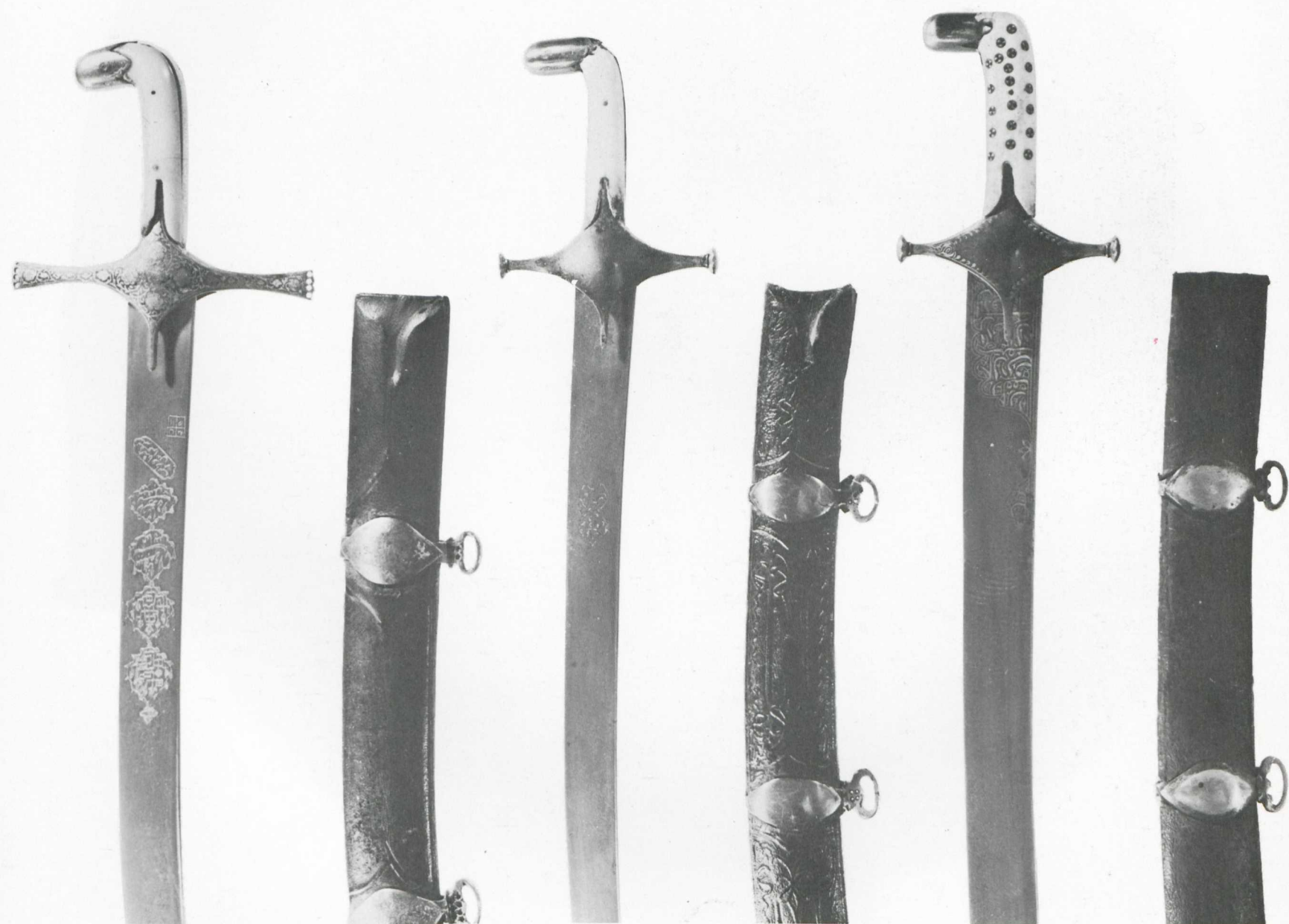
238 Detail of (237).



Among the large number of Persian edged weapons gathered by Sefer Pasha there are a number of sabres with the well-known signature of Asad Allāh, to be regarded not necessarily as proof of his handiwork but rather as a commonly imitated mark on watered steel blades (239), a practice not confined to Persia.

In the last fifty years, a number of fine Oriental weapons have been added to the Polish collections. The Armoury of Wawel Castle came into possession of a very precious helmet (240, 241) dating from the fourteenth century, formerly in the Krasiński family collection which was dispersed during World War II. Some beautiful though not unusual items of Persian and Indian

arms were bought for the Wawel Collection from private collectors abroad (242), but the major purchase was made in Poland in 1961: the rich collection of Bruno Konczakowski, consisting of more than 400 items. Konczakowski, a prosperous merchant in iron goods at Cieszyn (Teschin), had been collecting antique weapons since World War I. He bought mostly at auctions, particularly in Germany, so that the provenance of many objects is hard to trace. Before 1939 Konczakowski donated the Oriental part of his collection to the Army Museum in Warsaw. This Museum had a very fine oriental collection, some examples of which are shown here (243, 244).

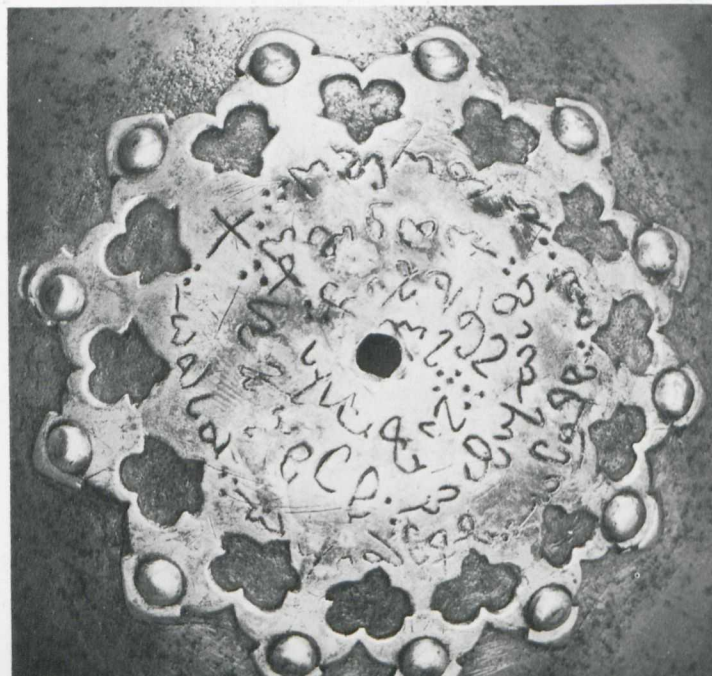


239 Persian sabres with Asad Allāh's signatures. (National Museum, Cracow)





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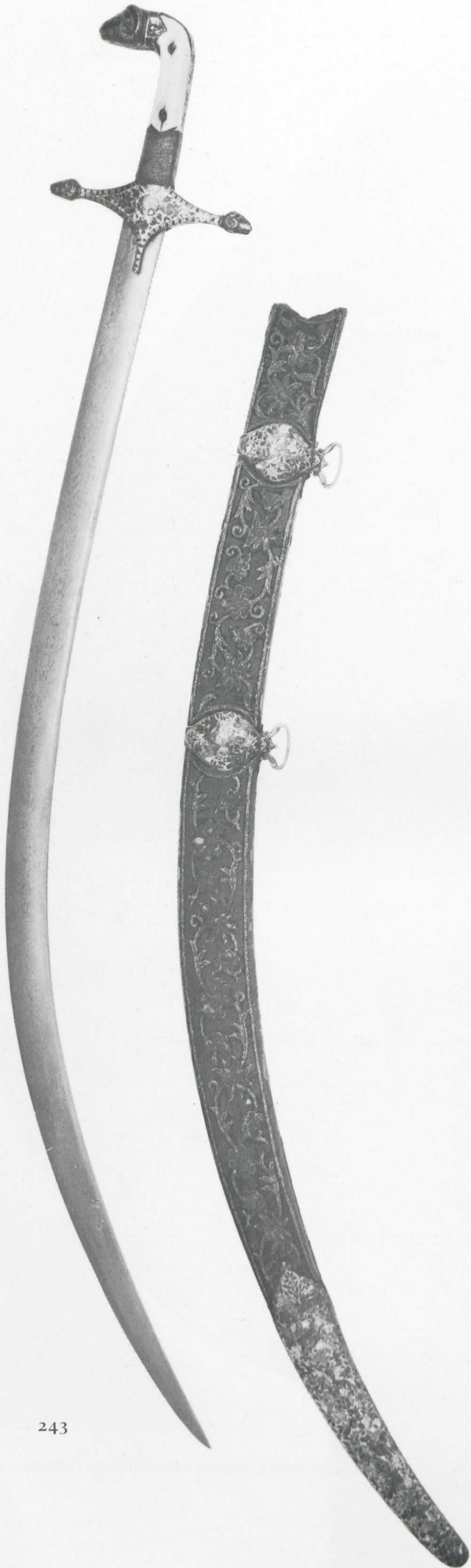
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240 Persian helmet, fourteenth century. (Wawel State Collection of Art, Cracow)

242 Persian shield, eighteenth century. (Wawel State Collection of Art, Cracow)

241 Detail of (240).





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244

243 Persian *shamshir*, eighteenth century. (Wawel State Collection of Art, Cracow)

244 Indian *talwar*, eighteenth century. (Wawel State Collection of Art, Cracow)





245 Persian *chahār ā'īneh* armour, eighteenth century. (Polish Army Museum, Warsaw)





246

246 Indian *pata* swords, eighteenth century. (Polish Army Museum, Warsaw)

During World War II a small but valuable collection of militaria, mostly of Arabian, Persian, and Turkish origin, was made by the Polish Armed Forces fighting at the side of the Allies in the Near East. On the order of the Polish Government, a museum section was organized and given the task of gathering documents, trophies and souvenirs of World War II campaigns, and also of buying old arms and accoutrements which might in the future replenish Polish museums devastated by the Nazi invaders. In 1961 a part of this collection was given on a long-term loan by the Historical Institute of General Sikorski in London to the National Museum in Cracow. Among the Oriental items it contains is a fine late-eighteenth century Indian armour from Sind (247, 248). It belongs to a small group of similar armours preserved in a few European museums, but is unfortunately incomplete, consisting only of helmet and a cuirass made of brass plates and mail. The helmet is the most interesting one in the entire group; its finely-shaped steel skull is crested with a bird. The flat brass face mask with almond-shaped visor apertures distantly recalls the anthropomorphic masks of Hellenistic helmets.

It is to be hoped that this brief review will be of interest to students of Islamic arms and encourage them to make use of the rich collections available for study in Polish Museums.



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247 Helmet of the Sind armour, late eighteenth century. (National Museum, Cracow)

248

248 Armour from Sind, late eighteenth century. (National Museum, Cracow)







## Notes

- 1 'The Sublime Porte (Bāb 'Ālī) was the rather grandiloquent title given to the palace inhabited by the Grand Vizier, the Chief Minister of the Sultan, from 1654 onwards. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was widely used in Western Europe, by extension, as a synonym for the Turkish central government as a whole.' M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923*, 1966.
- 2 This Turkish merchant, Hajji Rejeb, son of Hajji Mehsin, died in Poland in 1536 and was mentioned in a letter of Sulṭān Sulaymān the Magnificent to King Sigismund I. Ref: the Central Archives (AGAD) in Warsaw, portfolio 56, card 67; according to this document the merchant died not in Warsaw, as interpreted by some scholars, but in Wilna. Another important merchant sent to Poland (in 1531) by Sulṭān Sulaymān was Andreas Chalkondilos (or Carcocandella) also mentioned in documents signed by King Sigismund I, ref: T. Wierzbowski, *Matricularum Regni Poloniae Summaria*, iv, *passim*; see also T. Mankowski, *Orient w polskiej kulturze artystycznej* (Orient in the Polish Artistic Culture), Wrocław, Kraków (Ossolineum), 1959, p. 102; this book also contains information on Poland's extensive trade with the Middle East, from the early fifteenth century.
- 3 S. C. Cockerell, M. R. James, Ch. J. Foulkes, *A Book of Old Testament Illustrations of the Middle of the Thirteenth Century Sent by Cardinal Bernard Maciejowski to Shāh 'Abbās the Great, King of Persia, now in the Pierpont Morgan Library at New York*, Cambridge, the Roxburghe Club, 1927.
- 4 Muratovitch made a written report of his journey which remained unpublished until 1777. It was reprinted in 1807. See Mankowski, pp. 25-29.
- 5 It is, however, possible to identify the carpets obtained by Muratovitch. Some of these were included in the dowry of Princess Anne Catherine Constance, who in 1642 married Philip Wilhelm, Palatine of the Rhine. Today these rugs still adorn the Residenz-Museum in Munich. See H. Brunner, *Schatzkammer der Residenz München*, Katalog, München, 1970, *passim*, p. 22.
- 6 *Collection of the Royal Castle of Wawel*, Kraków, 1975, no. 260-261.
- 7 Z. Żygulski Jr. 'Turkish Trophies in Poland and the Imperial Ottoman Style', *Armi Antiche*, Torino, 1972, pp. 25-81.
- 8 Z. Żygulski Jr. 'Geneza i typologia bulaw hetmańskich' (Origin and typology of the hetman *bulawa*), *Muzealnictwo Wojskowe*, Warszawa, 1964, pp. 239-288.
- 9 Jan Karol Chodkiewicz (1560-1621), Polish military commander. Grand Hetman of Lithuania, distinguished in wars against the Swedes (great victory of Kirkholm, 1605), the Muscovites (1617), and the Turks (Khotin, 1621).
- 10 Persian sword blades with the design of the *simorgh* and dragon on the forte date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and were exported from Turkey to Europe by Italian and German merchants, one such being the Trading House of Fugger, in Augsburg. Once in Europe they were mounted in western hilts. Examples are to be found in collections in Munich, Vienna, Dresden, Paris, Zurich, Moscow and Cracow. There are many references in literature, see F. Sarre und F. R. Martin, *Die Ausstellung von Meisterwerken muhammedanischer Kunst in München*, Vol. iv, 1910, pl. 235, cat. nos. 231, 232, 233, pl. 238, cat. no. 248; H. Stöcklein, *Meister des Eisenschmittes*, Essingen a.N., 1922, p. 40, pl. VII; C. Blair, *European and American Arms c. 1100-1850*, London, 1962, p. 81; *State Armoury in the Moscow Kremlin*, Moscow, 1969, pl. 131.
- 11 For example the Historisches Museum, Dresden, the Badisches Museum, Karlsruhe, and the Ethnographical Museum, Munich. Other such powder horns are also to be found in the Hermitage, Leningrad and in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, USA.
- 12 *Peiks* (from the Persian, originally meaning messengers) - a guard at the Turkish Court, armed with axes and daggers, who accompanied the Sultan in his ceremonial exits from the Seraglio. Axes were also carried by the *baltaji* (from Turkish *balta*, the axe), the regiment of 'woodcutters', the sappers in the Turkish army; a part of them served as Harem guards and these were called the '*baltaji* with locks' (*zulufli baltaji*) as they wore caps with long artificial hair stitched on.