

THE SILVER DRAGON AND THE GOLDEN FISH: AN IMPERIAL OTTOMAN SYMBOL

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ABSTRACT - RESUMEN

This article studies and catalogues a group of ottoman swords decorated with dragon and fish emblems on their hilts. Both animals were associated to the imperial power according the oriental traditon.

Este trabajo estudia y cataloga un grupo de espadas otomanas decoradas con dragones y peces en sus empuñaduras. Estos animales fueron asociados con el poder imperial según la tradición oriental.

KEY WORDS - PALABRAS CLAVE

Swords. Sabers. Simbology. Islam. Topkapi Sarayi. Istanbul. Otoman Period.

Espadas. Sables. Simbología. Islam. Topkapı Sarayı. Estambul. Período Otomano.

THE SILVER DRAGON

In 1554 the Habsburg Emperor dispatched Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq as Imperial ambassador to Istanbul where he remained until 1562. Among the ambassadorial party was the German artist Melchior Lorichs (ca 1526-85), who produced a series of engravings depicting the city and various Ottoman dignitaries. One of these dated 1559 shows the ruling sultan Süleymān I (926-974/1520-66) standing in front of an arched gateway. The sultan is girded with a saber on the hilt of which is the image of a dragon (Illustration 1).

Surviving swords bearing this emblem are rare, however, other dragon imagery (such as quillons sculpted with dragon heads) is common on Islamic swords and sabers. This is probably due to the conflation of pre-Islamic ideas regarding the dragon as a force of power and destruction with the sword of the Prophet *dhūʿl-fāqar*;¹ consequently, many Islamic swords and sabers are in one way or another decorated with dragons.

In the Ottoman empire dragon imagery was widely used. During the period of the Mehmed II (836-86/1432-81), for example, dragons appear on coinage and on a large cannon probably used during the siege of Constantinople whilst the court poet and historian, Ibn Kamāl (ca. 873-940/1468-1534), described Mehmed as:

¹ Dragon symbolism was common throughout the Near East, as it relates to swords see Alexander 1999.



Fig. 1. Portrait of sultan Süleymān I carrying a saber decorated with a dragon emblem, Engraving by Melchior Lorichs 1559, British Museum, London 1848. 11-25.24.

...the victorious panther at whose side hung a dragon sword.²

This should not be interpreted as meaning that the dragon was an imperial emblem, for Mehmed or his successors, or that it was analogous to a Mamluk blazon or to the Hungarian Order of the Dragon.³ Its significance, almost certainly remains in the realm of a poetic image of power.

The present discussion, however, is only concerned with the dragon emblem on sword hilts and of these only two sixteenth century examples have been preserved. One is in the Historisches Museum, Dresden (Cat. no. 1), and the other in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Cat. no. 2). A third sword with a very stylized, or misunderstood, dragon emblem was presented by Elizabeth I of Russia to an Ataman of the Don Cossacks in 1154/1741 (Cat. no. 3).

CATALOGUE - DRAGON EMBLEMS

1.

SWORD

Turkey, Ottoman period, ca. 1574
Total length 101.5 cm, length of blade 88 cm.
Historisches Museum, Dresden inv. no. Y 72

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt of wood covered with leather has a rounded pommel cap sewn onto the grip a circular frame around the wrist strap hole and a dragon emblem on the side of the grip. The guard has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons that flair towards their spear-shaped tips. The blade is straight and double-edged and is damascened in gold with a series of diagonal cartouches decorated alternatively with arabesques and Persian inscriptions in a cursive script.

INSCRIPTIONS:

*May your blade be as prosperous as the Palace (Sarāy) of knowledge
O you whose aspirations are those of Farīdūn, the courage that of Rostam, the glory that of Jamshīd
May your blade be...victorious over your foes necks.*⁴

NOTES:

In 1574 Heinrich von Büнау an advisor to the Elector of Saxony visited Istanbul where he obtained this sword and in 1586 presented it to the Elector. Subsequently, it was placed in the Rüstkammer where it is first recorded in the inventory of 1606.

The decoration on the blade relates it to a large group of Ottoman blades decorated with a dragon and phoenix in combat. The earliest dated example of these is a yatagan made for Süleymān in 933/1526-27.⁵ The yatagan, however, is worked in high relief whereas the deco-

² Esin 1974, p. 211.

³ The Order of the Dragon was established by the Emperor Sigismund in 1408. A dagger in the Nemzeti Museum, Budapest inv. no. 341/1934 hints at a possible connection between the emblem of this order and that on the Ottoman swords it has a hilt and scabbard decorated in the Ottoman style and carved on the hilt is the circular dragon emblem of Sigismund's order and the date 1543, Petsopoulos 1982, p. 26. fig. 8a.

⁴ The inscription is recorded and translated in Melikian Chirvani 1982, note 31.

⁵ Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi (henceforth TKS) inv. no. 1/3776, the blade signed by Aḫmad Tekelü has been published many times, for example Washington 1987, no. 86.

ration on most of the other blades is damascened. The majority of these can probably be dated to the second half of the sixteenth century; Hans Stöcklein, for example, traced one to a dealer who purchased it for Prince Albrecht of Bavaria in 1562.⁶ Most were probably produced in the court workshops as presentation pieces for high ranking officers and other dignitaries.

The verse on the Dresden blade is significant as it mentions the Palace (Saray) and Melikian Chirvani has suggested that this might be a reference to the Topkapı Sarayı. Further evidence that these blades are Ottoman and not Persian is provided by a long knife or *Mec* with similar floral forms and inscribed cartouches containing a verse in Ottoman Turkish praising Ahmed I (1012-26/1603-17).⁷

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Schöbel 1961, no. 21; Schöbel 1973, p. 229, fig. 166; Melikian 1982, p. 78 note 31; Alexander 1984a, cat. no. 17; Schuckelt 1991/92 p. 58, fig. 1; Dresden 1995, cat. no. 87.

2.

SABER

The blade Ottoman mid 16th century; fittings probably Austro-Hungarian second half of the 16th century.

Waffensammlung, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. no. C. 102

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt is of wood covered with leather with a rounded and paneled pommel cap of silver gilt pierced and engraved floral rose design and set with rubies and turquoise. The ornamental rivet cover is in the form of a dragon. The guard is of steel plated with silver gilt and set with turquoise and rubies. It has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons, hexagonal in section with roundish caps. The blade is curved and single-edged with a double-edged section towards its point. It is engraved with an Arabic inscription in a cursive script, with an inscribed roundel and with a split leaf arabesque. The scabbard is of wood covered with leather and with ovular mounts of silver gilt decorated en-suite with the pommel cap. The backs of the mounts are engraved with a geometric square design within each square are rosettes. The lower chape is cut and pierced at its back with a palmette shape.

INSCRIPTIONS:

In the roundel «God is Truth»; along the blade, the opening verses of *sura* 48; around the roundel, *sura* 2:256

NOTES:

The blade is definitely Ottoman, although no precise Ottoman parallels exist for the decoration of the hilt and ovular scabbard mounts. It is possible, however, that the bands supporting the ovular mounts are Ottoman and the ensemble is certainly Ottoman in inspiration. Very similar decoration, perhaps from the same workshop occurs on another saber in Vienna which is thought to have been at one time in the possession of Ferdinand of Tyrol (1529-1595).⁸ It is probable that the fittings were made by an Austro-Hungarian craftsman, perhaps even a Muslim from the Balkans. The dragon emblem being added as an extra element of authenticity.

⁶ Stöcklein 1927, pp. 41-02.

⁷ TKS, inv. no. 1/80; see Alexander 1984a, no. 54.

⁸ Waffensammlung, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. no. A 929, see Kalmar 1971, p. 78, pl. 140; Vienna 1990, p. 240-41.

The lower chape is cut and pierced with a palmette, the negative area around the palmette in turn forming a leaf shape. This feature also occurs on a number of swords preserved in the Topkapı, including one bearing a fish emblem.⁹

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Leitner 1866-1870, p. 35, pl. 60/8; Boeheim 1894, p. 25, ill. 45/4; Groß and Thomas 1936 p. 101; Thomas, Gamber, Schedelmann 1963, p. 263, fig. 142; Kalmar 1971, p. 78, ill 139; Alexander 1984a, cat. no. 20; Vienna 1990, p. 241-42.

3.

SABER

Fittings Russian 1154/1741, blade Persian probably 18th century

Signed by Muḥib ʿAlī Iṣfahānī

Private Collection, present whereabouts unknown.

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt has a shim of silver terminating in a dragon's head and on the side a stylized dragon emblem. The guard of silver has hilt and scabbard prongs and one quillon with an acorn-like tip, the other connected to a fist guard. The blade is curved and single-edged and is engraved with the image of a bifurcated saber, *dhūʿl-fāqar*. It is inlaid in gold with a Russian inscription and engraved with a Persian inscription

INSCRIPTIONS:

Russian:

*Elizabeth I, Autocrat and Empress of All Russia granted this saber to the Don Cossack armies Alderman and Ataman of the Stanitzya Iyogkaya, Iariyon Skassyrski for his many faithful services, September 16, 1741 in St. Petersburg.*¹⁰

Persian:

Made by Muḥib ʿAlī Iṣfahānī.

NOTES:

This saber belongs to a group of Persian blades bearing Russian inscriptions many of which are now in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg.¹¹

The dragon emblem has been wildly misunderstood and transformed into a wavy bifurcated squiggle, yet it retains the impression of a dragon, mouth agape, winding its way towards the blade.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

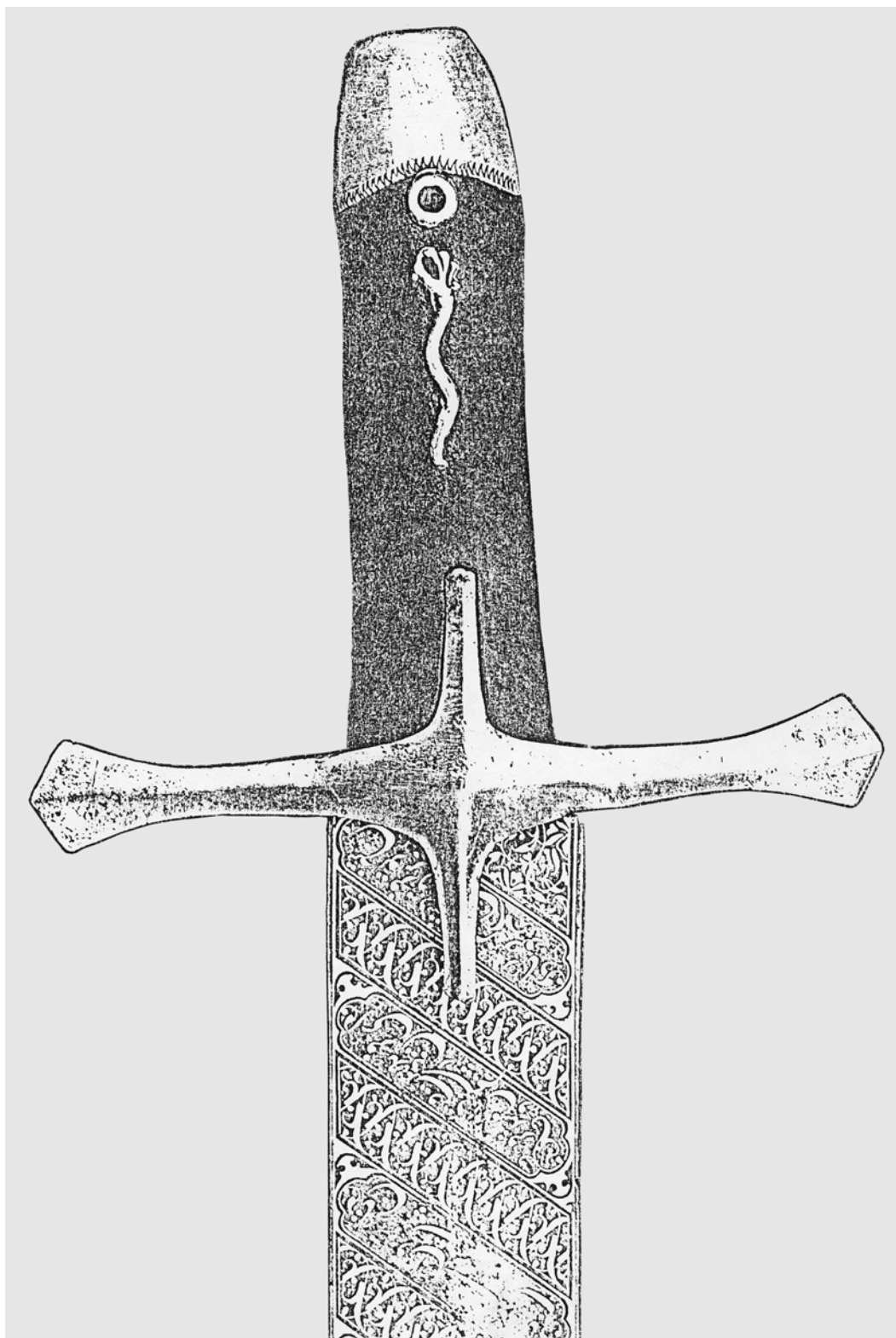
Alexander 1984a, cat. no. 18.

⁹ Such piercing occurs either on the pommel caps, the guards or on the scabbard mounts see below no. 15 (1/118).

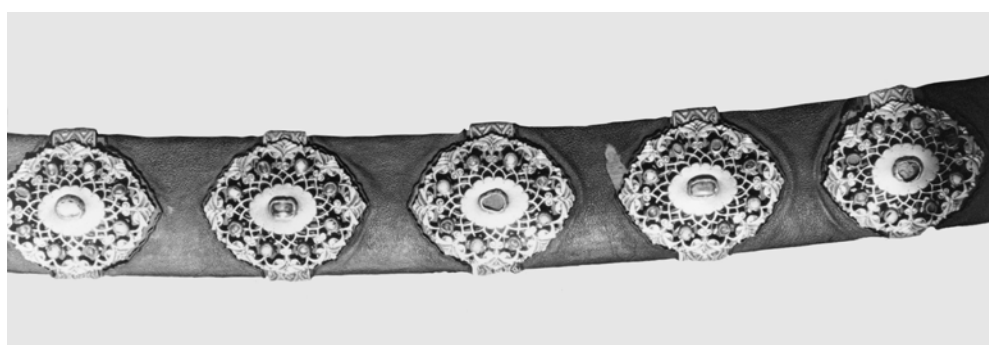
¹⁰ Leonid Tarrasuk trans., April 1982.

¹¹ Miller 1979, for Muḥib ʿAlī see Mayer 1962 pp. 62-3.

CATALOGUE N° 1



CATALOGUE N° 2



CATALOGUE N° 3



THE GOLDEN FISH

An Ottoman miniature painting of about 1049/1639 depicts sultan Murād IV (1032-49/1623-40) on horseback; strapped to his waist is a saber on the hilt of which is a fish emblem (Illustration 2).¹² A large number of swords and sabers with this emblem on their hilts have been preserved, mostly in the collection of the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi in Istanbul. The entire group is important in that all seem to have been produced in the court workshops, some by one of the greatest of the court goldsmiths, and many grace the hilts of blades attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions.¹³

The presence of this emblem was noted by Ünsal Yücel who remarked that a «swimming fish» motif was often used in Mamluk metalwork, especially on the interiors of large basins and bowls. But wondered whether the meaning of this feature could be «extended to include and explain» the use of the emblem on sword hilts.¹⁴

In most of the depictions on Persian and Mamluk basins and bowls the fish swim around a solar disc and some of them are strange composite creatures with human or animal heads and fish tail bodies. Eva Baer has linked these motifs to legends and stories recorded by Muslim geographers and cosmologists such as Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī (ca. 600-82/1203-83) and Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Damīrī (742-808/1341-1405). In general these scholars drew on three traditions; the first are accounts describing fabulous fish, often with human or animal heads that inhabit the various oceans of the world; the second are legends connecting fish with immortality;¹⁵ and the third is the legend of the gigantic fish that supports the world.

Ultimately, the legends about composite fish like creatures have ancient sources and can be traced Mesopotamian ideas about the creation of the Universe. Specifically, to the myth of the seven *apkallū* (seven sages) who lived before the Flood. These wise beings were said to have come from the primordial ocean surrounding the world to bring culture and knowledge to mankind. Mesopotamian clay figurines represent them with human heads and fish bodies.¹⁶ This perhaps follows from the idea that because they inhabited the primordial sea they must have been composite in form as God has not yet differentiated the separate species. They were regarded as solar creatures because it was in this sea that the sun was thought to begin its path across the heavens.¹⁷

The stories connecting fish with immortality echo other ancient myths. As regards Islamic metalwork the most relevant concern al-Kaḍir and the «Spring of Life.» In these legends al-Kaḍir is said to live by a mysterious spring whose waters confer immortality. There are many versions of this story but most tell of the search by Mūsā (or sometimes Alexander) for al-Kaḍir whose dwelling place is found by using a salted fish which resurrects when placed in the spring.¹⁸ In another version from the *Iskandernāma* (Book of Alexander) by the Persian poet Nizāmī (ca. 535-599/1141-1203) the prophets Elias and al-Kaḍir search for the Spring which is located in the Land of Darkness. During their search they stop by a spring in order to prepare a meal from a salted fish. The fish accidentally falls into the water and miraculously comes back to life.

¹² Stouchine 1966 pl. XII, TKS inv. no. H. 2134, folio 1.

¹³ The Companions of the Prophet, *aṣḥāb, ṣuḥbān*, were those believers who accompanied him, generally on campaigns, and often later transmitted traditions about him.

¹⁴ Yücel 2001, p. 18.

¹⁵ See Baer 1968.

¹⁶ Greenfield 1995, pp. 133-38 and Stolz, 1995 pp. 1390-1402.

¹⁷ This may also be the origin of the solar symbolism utilizing fish on the Islamic basins.

¹⁸ Wensinck 1978 pp. 902-05; there was also said to be a sacred fish in the healing waters at Saʿdī's tomb, Titley 1977, no. 354, 72. Another legend connecting al-Kaḍir with strange fish is found in the story of the City of Brass from the Arabian Nights. In this story travellers in search of magical brass bottles - esoteric knowledge - are given a meal of fish that are in human form, see Hamori 1971, p. 15.



Fig. 2. Murād IV carrying a saber with a fish emblem ca. 1639, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi inv. no. H. 2134, folio 1.

The third legend probably originates with the Vedic sun god Vishnu, who in Hindu mythology appeared in many different forms, *avatarāras*, each time to rescue the universe from destruction. One of his forms was as a fish, *matsya*, who saves Manu, patriarch of humanity, from the flood by allowing him to stand on his back.

The use of the fish emblem on the sword hilts can be traced to this general group of stories and creation myths, and especially to the legend of *matsya* swimming in the primordial sea and supporting the world on his back. This legend, somewhat transformed, is found in both the *Manṭiq al-Tayr* of the Persian poet and mystic Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (ca. 513-627/1119-1230?) and in the *ajāʾib al-makhlūqāt wa-Gharāʾib al-Mawjūdāt*, The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence, by Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī. According to ʿAṭṭār when God created the universe He:

used the mountains as nails to fix the earth; and washed Earth's face with the waters of the Ocean. Then he placed the Earth on the back of a bull, the bull on a fish, and the fish on the air.

Al-Qazwīnī records another version of the legend and describes a giant fish that swims in the Ocean of Eternity. On the back of the fish is a bull, on whose back is a rock. Standing on the rock is a Jinn who carries the Earth on his shoulders.

A Turkish translation of Al-Qazwīnī's text was made by Muṣliḥ al-Dīn Muṣṭafā b. Shaʿbān known as Sürurī (897-969/1491-1562) for Muṣṭafā the son of Süleymān I. This Ottoman version *Acaib ul-mahlukat* was not completed due to the execution of the prince at Süleymān's order in 1553. It is thought that the miniatures it contains were painted in about 1585 probably by nakkaş Ḥasan (d. 1033/1623). The text is illustrated by many oddities such as creatures with heads on their chests and a fish with the head of a rabbit. One miniature depicts the «worldfish» supporting a bull on whose back is an angel who in turn supports the world. (Illustration 3).¹⁹ The popularity and widespread use of this imagery is demonstrated by a Mughal miniature of about 1617 representing the emperor Jahāngīr supported by the world-fish (Illustration 4). Robert Skelton has suggested that this symbolism might be Messianic and pointed to the lower inscription which reads:

*By the good fortune of the coming of the Shadow of God
The earth has become firmly placed on the back of the fish.*²⁰

Sürurī's translation clearly shows that the legend of the world-fish was known at the Ottoman court. Even more importantly the Ottoman poet Neṣatī (d. 914/1509) who worked for both Meḥmed I and Bāyezīd II wrote a *qasida* in praise of the latter which connects the imagery of the world-fish with imagery about swords and universal justice:

*...His sword within his ocean-hand is even as that fish
Who firm doth on his back the ordinance of earth sustain...*

The Ottoman sultans of the sixteenth century must have adopted the concept of the «worldfish» as an emblem for imperial power, stability and justice. In this context the fish emblem symbolizes the idea that the sultan was an integral, indeed basic part in the Divine order of the universe, and as with the Mughals the use of the symbol hints at a Messianic role for the sultan.²¹

¹⁹ TKS, inv. no. A 3632, see Çağman and Tanındı 1979, p. 73, no. 168; another copy is in the British Library, Add 7894, see Titley 1981, no. 60, 110, folio 167a.

²⁰ Skelton 1988, p. 182.

²¹ For a discussion of imperial ideology during the reign of Süleymān I, especially in regard to mahdist expectations see Fleischer 1992.

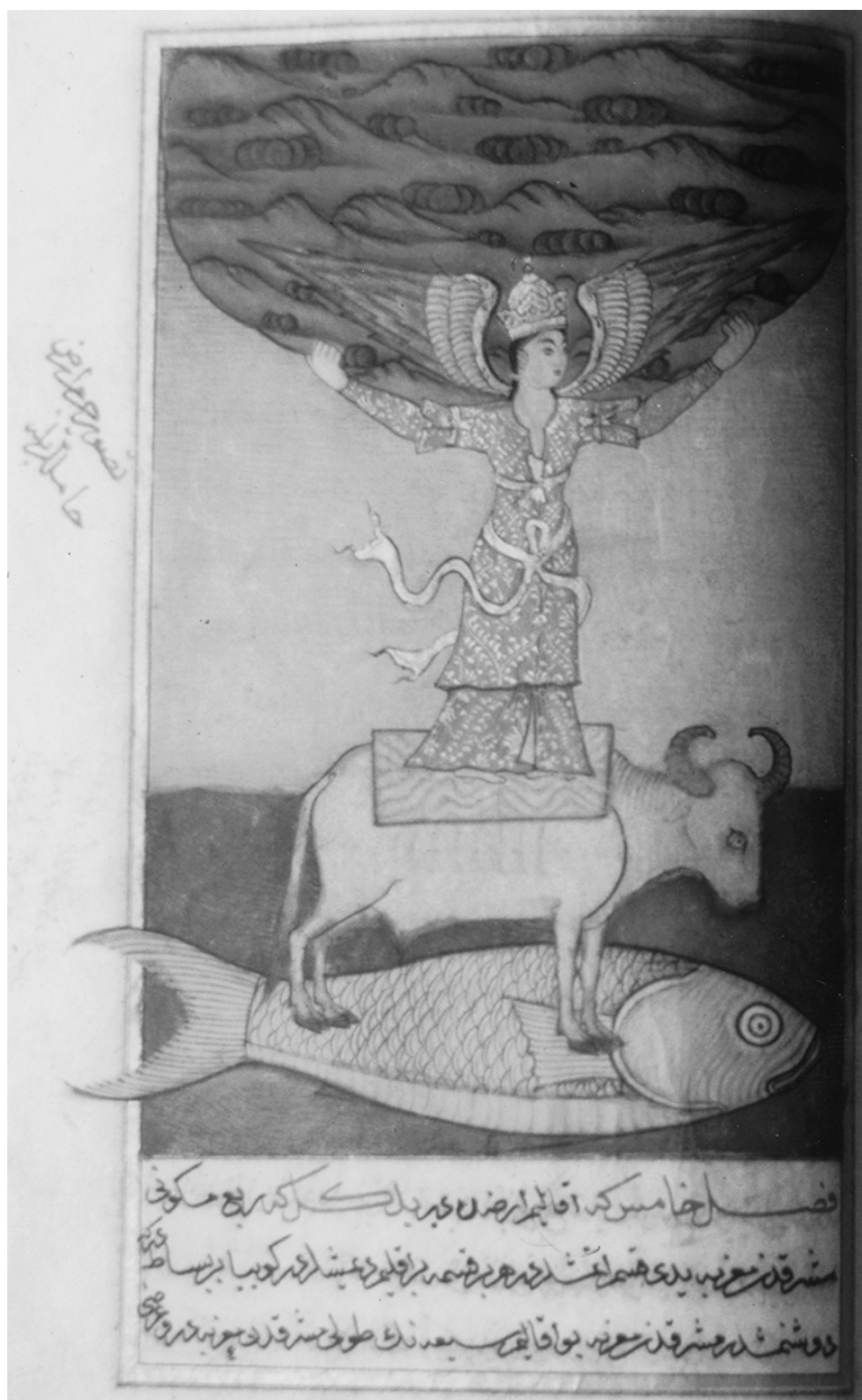


Fig. 3. «World-fish» from *Acaib ul-mahlukat*, miniatures probably painted in about 1585 by nakkaş Hâsan (d. 1033/1623). Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, inv. no. A 3632.

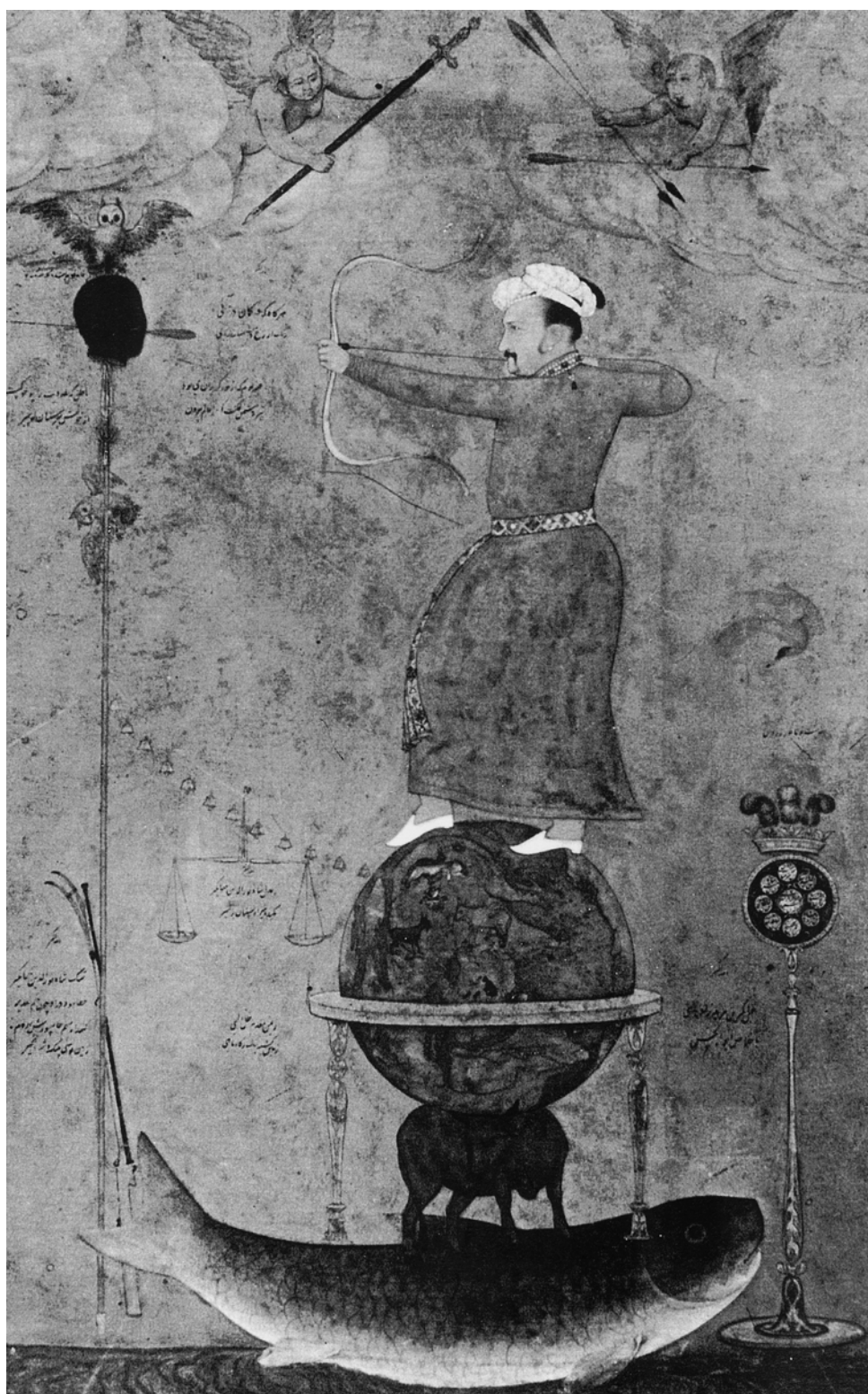


Fig. 4. Mughal miniature of about 1027/1617 representing the emperor Jahāngīr supported by the «World-fish.» Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, MS 7, no. 15.



Fig. 5. Saber made for Süleymān in 940/1533-4.
Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Istanbul inv. no. 1/474.

Among the edged weapons described below bearing a fish emblem the sword attributed to the Prophet is perhaps the most important, and it is significant that so many of the blades attributed to the Prophet and his companions are decorated in this way. The earliest swords and sabers in the group can be attributed to the period of Süleymān I. Unfortunately, none of these is dated but they can be assigned to his era on stylistic grounds and by comparison with other inscribed and dated pieces. The definitive object in arranging these weapons chronologically is a saber made for Süleymān in 940/1533-4 (Illustration 5) which retains its original hilt and guard, and is inscribed:

...This sharp sword was made for the fortified treasury of the sultān al-pasha sultān Süleymān ibn Selīm, may God give him success in the house of victory, Constantinople, in the year 940.²²

The hilt of this saber is of wood covered with black leather and is slightly inclined to one side, unfortunately, the pommel cap and rivet covers are missing, but the underlying shape clearly indicates that it originally had a rounded pommel cap and the positioning of the holes on the side of the grip suggest it may once have been set with a fish emblem. The guard is of steel and has elongated quillons that flair towards their pierced palmette shaped tips. Either side is damascened in gold with a delicate yet unassuming split leaf and floral arabesque that reflects the clean elegant lines of the Tabriz tradition.

²² Istanbul 1958 no. 54. Other blades with the same inscription, but either without hilts or with later hilts are Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. 7088 and TKS, inv. no. 1/461.

Two of these features are important for dating the sabers of the second quarter to the mid-sixteenth century; firstly, the slightly inclined grip and secondly, the elongated quillons with pierced tips.²³ These elements help define a much larger group which on the basis of their decoration can also be attributed to the period Süleymān.²⁴ Many of the dated sabers of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century are boldly inlaid with floral forms that are further delineated by delicate carving. This style has been attributed to the artist Baba Nakkaş and occurs on several weapons made for Mehmed II and also on several swords made for Süleymān.²⁵ Swords and sabers of this early period invariably have hilts that are either straight or only slightly inclined to one side;²⁶ more pronounced bends are a later development. Sabers of this latter type from the period of Süleymān probably date to the last years of his reign, between about 1550 and 1566.²⁷

It should, however, be remembered that many of the chronological attributions below are hypothetical and therefore remain imprecise - for example such as deciding whether a hilt was made during the later period of Süleymān's reign or under that of his son Selīm II. Added to this is the uncertainty in a number of cases as to whether the scabbard of a particular sword is original or whether sword and scabbard were associated at a later date. This mixing of elements is further complicated because fittings were often re-used and consequently a particular blade made have a grip of one period, a guard of another, an associated scabbard and an even later sword belt.

Another difficulty arises with dating fittings that can be attributed to the head of the court jewelers, the Bosnian Mehmed ibn 'Imād. Mehmed worked for Murād III (982-1003/1574-95) Mehmed III (1003-12/1595-1603) and Ahmed I (1012-26/1603-17) and in many cases it is impossible to know which of these sultans ordered him to make sword fittings for the Treasury. The fittings on eleven swords and sabers can be attributed to him or to his atelier.

A final complication arises from the many different styles produced in the court workshops during the second half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Naturally so, given the large number of craftsmen employed. In 1526 for example there were ninety goldsmiths and jewelers, in 1557-58 there were sixty-nine and in 1596 there were more than one hundred and ten. In addition to the goldsmiths and jewelers the Palace records note the employment of a foil maker one of whose tasks was to place gold or silver gilt foil over sword guards.²⁸

²³ Swords and sabers of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century generally have shorter quillons, the longer style seems to have been introduced during the sixteenth century as the result of European influence.

²⁴ In general, elongated quillons with pierced palmette-shaped tips can be dated to the sixteenth century, but this is not invariably true and at least one example, a saber in Dresden, is of the early seventeenth century, dated 1017/1608-09, Historisches Museum, Dresden inv. no. Y 82 see Dresden 1995 no. 152.

²⁵ For Baba Nakkaş see Atasoy and Raby 1989 and especially Raby and Tanındı 1993, pp.5960. For the swords made for Mehmed see Yücel 2001 no. 87; for Süleymān see Washington 1987 nos. 86 and 88. The latter has a hilt strongly bent at the pommel and this was reworked at a much later date.

²⁶ For example no. 4 (TKS 1/293).

²⁷ A painting by Nīgārī (ca 897-979/1492-1572) dateable to about 1560 depicts Süleymān followed by a page carrying a saber with a pronounced bend below the pommel cap; TKS inv. no. H 2134, folio 8, London 1988, p. 5.

²⁸ Washington 1987, p. 117, the figure for 1596 includes only goldsmiths, allowing for jewelers the figure may have been as high as one hundred and fifty. For swords and sabers with foil over the guards see eg. no. 10, (1/286).

CATALOGUE - FISH EMBLEMS

4.

SABER

Court workshop of Süleymān I, ca. 1530-40?

Total length 76 cm, length of blade 62.2, width of guard 15.2 cm, scabbard 64.2

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 1/293

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt of wood covered with black leather is slightly inclined to one side. It has a rounded and paneled pommel cap of steel, of flattened octangular section, inlaid and damascened in gold on a black ground with cloud bands, palmettes and a split leaf arabesque. The base of the cap is lobed. There is a fish emblem of steel damascened with golden scales on the right side of the grip. The guard of steel has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons that flair towards their pierced palmette shaped tips, it is decorated en-suite with the pommel cap. The blade of steel is slightly curved and single-edged with a double-edged section before its tip. The scabbard of wood covered with leather has bracelets bar shaped at the back with rectangular loops for the belt attachment and set at the front with ovular plaques they are decorated en-suite with the hilt but in addition some are inlaid in gold with petal and rose forms the flowers set with rubies and turquoise.

NOTES:

This saber has a hilt only slightly inclined to one side and is therefore very similar to the dated example made for Süleymān in 940/1533-34. The decoration on the guard is also similar to the dated saber and reflects the clean elegant lines of the Tabriz tradition. More unusual is the definition given to the settings for the turquoise and rubies on the scabbard. These are painstakingly worked with rose and petal forms and as such differ from the majority of Ottoman jewel settings attributed to the sixteenth century. The closest parallel for this delicate workmanship is on the hilt of the yatagan made for Süleymān in 1526-27. This saber is perhaps the earliest in the group bearing the fish emblem.

5.

SWORD

Called the sword of Dirār b. al-Azwar al-Asadī.²⁹

Court workshop of Süleymān I, ca. 1530-50

Total length 100 cm, length blade 86, width of blade 4.5 width of guard 16, scabbard 88 cm.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 1/204.

DESCRIPTION:

The grip is of wood covered with black leather, slightly inclined to one side and with a finger rest below the round topped pommel of gold pierced with a palmette shaped opening for the wrist strap hole and cut with palmette forms around the lower rim. There is a golden fish emblem on the side. The guard of steel has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons which flair towards their pierced and lobed tips. The blade is straight and double edged,

²⁹ Dirār fought under the command of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd. He is noted as having killed Malik b. Nuwawra who rebelled during the Caliphate of Abū Bakr.

and of flattened ovular section. It is engraved on either side with Arabic inscriptions in a cursive script. The scabbard of wood covered with leather has two ovular bracelets of silver gilt with pierced and lobed borders. They are chiseled with arabesques and interlacing flowers against a niello ground. The band at the back of each is decorated with a floral design within a cartouche. The belt of red, white, green and yellow woven with floral designs, has a junction mount of jade and a round silver gilt buckle pierced with a trefoil border.

INSCRIPTIONS:

*This has been made for....Shayh? This has been made for the commander of the Faithful, ʿUthmān bin Affan and ʿUmar bin ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz.
Made by...?*

NOTES:

The slightly inclined grip and the pierced rim of the pommel cap suggest an early dating for this piece. This is also true of the decoration and piercing of the scabbard mounts; especially the way in which loops are created at the inner side of each palmette form. Examples of the latter occur on bookbindings from the period of Mehmed II³⁰ but even closer parallels are on a belt inscribed with the name of Shah Ismāʿīl and dated 913/1507-8 and on the pierced border on an ivory mirror made in 950/1543-44 for Süleymān by a craftsman named Ganī.³¹ This would suggest a dating for the sword fittings between ca 1530-50. Similar pierced work and decoration is also used on one of the swords attributed to Khālīd ibn al-Walīd (no. 11).

6.

SABER

Court workshop of Süleymān I, ca. 1530-50

Made by Ḥajī Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Miṣrī.»

Total length 97.2 cm, length of blade 82, width of blade 3.6, width of guard 17.2, scabbard 85 cm.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Istanbul, inv. no. 1/288

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt of wood (leather missing) is of flattened octangular section and slightly inclined to one side. It has a rounded and paneled pommel cap of steel, its lower rim is cut and pierced with alternating trefoils and palmette forms. There is a steel fish emblem on one side of the grip. The guard of steel has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons that flair towards their pierced palmette shaped tips. The blade of steel is slightly curved and is double-edged before its point. It is engraved and chiseled on either side with a series of interlocking decorative grooves, arabesques inhabited by a bird and inlaid in gold with an Arabic inscription in a cursive script. The scabbard of wood covered with leather is badly worn and has no mounts.

INSCRIPTIONS:

Made by Ḥajī Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Miṣrī.

NOTES:

The shape of the hilt suggests a dating similar to the preceding examples, but the fittings are very worn and there is no trace of decoration. The maker of the blade may have been

³⁰ Raby and Tanındı 1993, nos. 11,12.

³¹ The style must have originated in Tabriz and been transplanted to Istanbul by craftsmen brought to the Ottoman capital by Selīm I in 1514; for the belt see Köseoglu and Rogers 1987, no. 115, TKS no. 1842, for the mirror TKS inv. no 2/2893 see Washington 1987, no. 73.

descended from a craftsman brought back from Egypt by Selīm I after the Ottoman conquest. The decoration on the blade is very similar to several others in the Topkapı and may be Anatolian of the 15th century.³²

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Mayer 1962, p. 79; Yücel 1988, no. 68; Yücel 2001, no. 68

7.

SABER

Court workshop of Süleymān I, mid 16th century

Total length 80 cm, length of blade 68.9, width of blade 3, width of guard 17.2 cm.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 1/290

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt is of wood covered with black leather and is slightly inclined to one side. It has a rounded and paneled pommel cap of steel inlaid and damascened in gold with a trefoil and floral arabesques and with large petal forms set with rubies and turquoise. The lower rim is straight and tapers towards the finger rest. On one side there is a fish emblem damascened with golden scales. The guard of steel has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons that flair towards their pierced palmette shaped tips, it is decorated en-suite with the pommel cap and on the quillons is inlaid in gold with Persian inscriptions in *nasta'liq* script. The blade of steel is slightly curved and single-edged with a double-edged section before its tip. There are traces of an inscription and on the right side, and on the left a lobed and divided roundel containing an inscription (both very worn). The scabbard of wood covered with leather has two large ovular bracelets cut and pierced with palmette borders decorated en-suite with the hilt; its lower chape of plain steel has traces of a damascened design and has a sculpted mouth which extends along the side of the blade's cutting edge.

NOTES:

This saber is decorated in a style similar to that on no. 4 above (1/293), although the floral settings are not as finely worked. The lower chape is probably a later addition.

8.

SWORD

Called the sword of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (13-23/634-44).

Court workshops mid sixteenth century

Total length 98 cm, length of blade 83.8, width of blade 4.8, scabbard 85 cm.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 21/134.

DESCRIPTION:

The grip is of wood covered with leather its pommel cap is rounded at the top, has paneled sides and a rounded lobed base cut and pierced with palmette forms; immediately below is a finger rest. There is a golden fish emblem on one side. The guard of steel has hilt and scabbard prongs and quillons that flair towards their palmette shaped tips. The blade is

³² The group includes a number of blades preserved in the Topkapı with arabesque decoration carved in high relief and often with animals or sphinx included in the design.

straight and double edged and is engraved on either side with an Arabic inscription in an angular script, the inscription on one side is too worn to read.

INSCRIPTION:

Caliph of the Prophet of God, Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Yücel 1988, no. 7; Yücel 2001, no. 7.

9.

SWORD

Called the sword of Abū Bakr

Court workshops mid sixteenth century

Total length 100 cm, length blade 84.3, width of blade 4.3 cm.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 2/131.

DESCRIPTION:

The grip is of wood covered with leather, slightly inclined to one side and with a finger rest below the pommel of gold pierced with a palmette shaped opening for the wrist strap hole and cut with palmette forms around the lower rim. The guard of steel has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons which flair towards their tips. The blade is straight and double-edged, ovular in section and slightly tapered. The scabbard has two bracelets of gold and a golden chape, the leather belt has two golden buckles, one set with agate the other turquoise. The bag of green velvet is inscribed with the name Abū Bakr.

NOTES:

Yücel notes that the placing of the hole on the side of the hilt suggests that this sword once bore a fish emblem.

This sword was at one time published as the sword of ʿUthmān. A sword attributed to Abū Bakr, perhaps this one, was seen in the arsenal of St. Irene by Robert Curzon in 1839.³³ The same cut and pierced trefoil shape, worked in the same style occurs on an Ottoman saber in Vienna and on the guard of a dagger in Vienna that is probably of the mid-sixteenth century.³⁴

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Çiğ 1967 p. 4; Yücel 1970, p. 46 fig 2, Nicolle 1976 p. 11 fig 3; Yücel 1988, no. 4; Yücel 2001, no. 4.

10.

SWORD

Court workshop of Süleymān I, mid sixteenth century

Total length 94.2 cm, length of blade 81.7, width of blade 4.8, width of guard 17.9, scabbard 83.6 cm.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 1/286.

³³ Hewitt 1859, pp. 116-17.

³⁴ Vienna C. 152, the dagger is first recorded in the Ambras inventory of 1603, and is thought to have been given to Ferdinand of Tyrol by Lazarus Schwendy, if so it was probably captured during the campaign of 1566; see Washington 1987, no. 93 p. 159.

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt of wood covered with leather is of flattened octangular section and slightly inclined to one side. It has a circular frame of gold around the wrist strap hole. The pommel is missing but the rounded shape of the underlying wood indicates that it was rounded. There is a golden fish emblem on one side of the grip. The guard of steel covered with gold foil has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons that flair towards their pierced palmette shaped tips. It is engraved and nielloed at the center with a lobed cartouche containing a split leaf arabesque. The blade of steel is of flattened ovular section and is straight and double edged. It is engraved on either side with Arabic inscriptions, letters and numbers. The scabbard of wood covered with leather has steel two bracelets bar shaped at the back with rectangular loops for the belt attachment and set at the front with ovular plaques, these have pierced borders and are engraved in relief and inlaid with gold niello with a flower and split leaf arabesque.

INSCRIPTIONS:

The inscriptions include the «beautiful names of God» religious texts, and the maker's signature but the latter is too worn to read with any certainty. There is also the phrase «intended for the warriors...»

NOTES:

The fittings on the scabbard are very worn but the floral settings are realistically and delicately carved. The guard with gold plate over a steel base relates to a number of other swords and sabers many of which are preserved in the Topkapı and in the Nemzeti Museum in Budapest.³⁵

The blade is engraved with talismanic inscriptions but also with the phrase «for the warriors in the (*jihād*)» and can be compared with several others in Istanbul and one now in London.³⁶

11.

SWORD

Court workshop of Süleymān I or Selīm II, ca. 1560-70

Called the sword of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd³⁷

Total length 95 cm, length of blade 82, width of blade 4.5 cm.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 21/144.

DESCRIPTION:

The grip is of wood covered with black leather, bent to one side and with a finger rest below the round topped pommel of gold pierced for the wrist strap hole and cut and pierced with trefoil, and leaf forms around the lower rim. There is a golden fish symbol covering the

³⁵ The same technique is used on no. 2 above, KMV no. C 102; there are three swords of this type dateable to the mid sixteenth century in the Nemzeti Museum, Budapest; one attributed to György Bebek (d. 1567), with a blade signed by Muḥammad al-Misr, inv. no. 55-3348, see Szendrei 1898, pp. 265-67, no. 824; and Kalmar 1971, p. 75, ill. 133. another attributed to György Thury (1520-1571) with a blade signed by Muḥammad al-Ansarī, inv. no. F 282, see Szendrei 1896, p. 276, no. 842 and a third attributed to Miklós Zríny (d. 1566) see Szendrei 1896 no. 818.

³⁶ TKS inv. no. 1/283 see Alexander 1984a, no. 43 and Victoria and Albert Museum, London, no. M. 47-1953 see Robinson 1955, pp. 33-5. Talismans in the form of numbered and lettered squares were often used on sword and saber blades and on talismanic shirts which were worn underneath armour, Washington 1987 cat. nos. 122-123, Alexander 1992 cat. nos. 33-34 and Maddison and Savage Smith 1997.

³⁷ Khālīd ibn al-Walīd accepted Islam in 8/630, he conquered Syria and was known as "the Sword of Allah." He died in 18/639.

rivets. The guard of steel has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons which flair towards their pierced and lobed tips. It is inlaid in gold with a symmetrical cloud band design and with Ottoman Turkish inscriptions in a *nastaʿlīq* script (unread). The blade is straight and double-edged, and of flattened ovular section. It is engraved on the right side with an Arabic inscription in a cursive script. The scabbard of wood covered with leather, has two steel bracelets, bar shaped at the back with rectangular loops for the belt attachment and set at the front with ovular plaques with pierced and lobed borders decorated and inscribed en-suite with the hilt.

INSCRIPTIONS:

Servant of the Prophet of God, Khālīd ibn al-Walīd.

NOTES:

The fittings on this sword closely resemble several others in the Topkapı, nos. 1/294 and 1/293, 1/290, 1/288 and scabbard of 1/286.

The pommel cap's pierced border relates not only to the pierced borders on several of the following sabers, but also to the pierced borders on the bosses of a large number of Ottoman cane shields. Several of these have been published and have been dated on the basis of their textile design to ca 1560-70.³⁸

A further reason for a slightly later dating for this saber is that its hilt has a more pronounced bend and its decoration, although finely worked lacks the elegant simplicity of the sabers described above.³⁹

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Zaki 1979 p. 205, no. 205; Yücel 1988, no. 17; Yücel 2001, no. 17

12.

SABER

Court workshop of Süleymān I or Selīm II, ca. 1560-70

Total length 93.8 cm, length of scabbard 87.8 cm.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 1/294.

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt is of wood covered with black leather and towards the top is bent to one side. It has a rounded and paneled pommel cap of steel inlaid and damascened in gold with cloud bands, petal arabesques and Persian inscriptions in a *nastaʿlīq* script, these are separated by petal forms set with turquoise. The base of the cap is pierced with a trefoil and split leaf arabesque. There is a fish emblem of steel damascened with gold on either side of the grip. The guard of steel has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons that flair towards their pierced palmette shaped tips, it is decorated en-suite with the pommel cap. The blade of watered steel forged with an overall wavelike pattern is slightly curved and single-edged with a double-edged section before its tip. There are traces of an inscription and inlaid floral design on the right side. The scabbard of wood covered with leather has two steel bracelets bar sha-

³⁸ TKS inv. no. 1/1930, in İstanbul 1983 no. E. 104, Esin Atil also published this shield but dated it to the mid-sixteenth century Washington 1987 no. 99; for another shield with a pierced bosse TKS inv. no. 1/2597, İstanbul 1983 no. E. 226, in Washington 1987 no. 102 dated to the second half of the sixteenth century.

³⁹ The fittings on this sword closely resemble several others in the Topkapı, nos. 1/294 and 1/293, 1/290, 1/288 and 1/286.

ped at the back with rectangular loops for the belt attachment and set at the front with ovular plaques decorated en-suite with the hilt.

INSCRIPTION:

May the world conform with your wishes and may heaven be your friend, may the Creator of the World be your guardian.

NOTES:

The hilt and decoration on this saber are very similar to the preceding example and it is therefore attributed to the same period.

The verse is from the *Būstān* by the Persian poet Saʿdī (died 690/1291). The same verse is inscribed on the pommel cap of a sword attributed to Muʿād Jabal (Illustration 6).⁴⁰ The use of Persian is not surprising on an Ottoman object. Persian was one of the languages current in the Ottoman court and sultans such as Selīm I and Süleymān I composed poetry in Persian.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Washington 1987, cat. no. 89; London 1988, cat. no. 86

13.

SWORD

Called the sword of ʿAmmār b. Yāsir⁴¹

Court workshop of Murād III (1574-95), probably by Meḥmed ibn ʿImād.

Total length 98 cm, length of blade 85.7, width of blade 4.9 cm.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 21/149.

DESCRIPTION:

The grip is of wood covered with black leather, it is inclined to one side and has a finger rest below the round topped pommel of gold pierced for the wrist strap hole and chiseled and engraved in high relief with a closely worked floral arabesque, its base is tapered and has a lobed rim. There is a golden fish symbol covering the rivets. The guard of steel covered with gold foil has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons which flair towards their round tips. It is inlaid in gold en-suite with the pommel cap. The thin blade is straight and double-edged, and has a ricasso below the hilt. It is engraved with an Arabic inscription in a cursive script. The scabbard of wood covered with leather has elongated chapes and two ovular brazelets of steel with pierced and lobed borders decorated en-suite with the hilt.

INSCRIPTIONS:

*Made by Aḥmad al Makkī...for the sake of God in Rajab seventy-six.
For ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him.*

NOTES:

The shape of the guard and the layout of its design is very similar to that on the «sword of the Prophet» which can be dated to the period of Aḥmed I. This sword, however, is probably slightly earlier as the closely worked floral design is almost identical to that on a binding made for Murād III by the court jeweler Meḥmed ibn ʿImād and dated 996/1587-8.

⁴⁰ TKS, inv. no. 1/299.

⁴¹ ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir was an early convert to Islam and a companion of the Prophet. He fought in many of the early battles and later became a partisan of ʿAlī.

Meḥmed is known by only three signed pieces; the binding for the *Divan-ı Muradi* mentioned above, a key for the Ka'ba dated 1002/1593-4, and a reliquary chest for the Cloak of the Prophet dated 1001/1593-4.⁴² A number of other works are attributed to him, including a binding for a Quṛān, a golden canteen and a crown made for Stephen Bocskay in 1605.⁴³ The fittings on at least nine edged weapons can also be attributed to him, (those catalogued here are nos. 13, 16, 17 and 20). In addition his work, or that of his atelier, probably includes a sword with a hilt in the North African style, now in Vienna (Illustration 7), a saber in Stockholm (Illustration 8), another sword attributed to Khālīd ibn al-Walīd with fittings dated 1001/1593, a sword with a blade attributed to Mu'ād Jabal (Illustration 6) a saber once attributed to the Caliph 'Uthmān (Illustration 9) and another sword no. 1/287.⁴⁴

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Öz 1953, p. 46; Mayer 1962, p. 20; Yücel 1988, no. 22; Yücel 2001, no. 22

14.

SWORD

Blade attributed to the caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān

Court workshops second half of the sixteenth century.

Total length 102.8, length of blade 90.8, width of guard 24.7, width of blade 7.6, scabbard 95 cm

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Istanbul, inv. no. 1/298.

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt of flattened octangular section is of wood covered with red velvet and is slightly inclined to one side and with a finger rest. There is a silver gilt fish emblem on either side and a lobed ornament around the wrist strap hole. The pommel cap of silver gilt has seven sides its flat top engraved on some of the sides with arabesques and on the top with an Arabic inscription in a cursive script against a floral design. The cross guard is of steel covered with gilt foil its center and the elongated quillon tips are engraved en-suite with the pommel cap. The blade of watered steel is of flattened ovular section. On the right side it is engraved in Arabic in a *tuluth* script. The scabbard is of wood covered with red velvet with fittings of gilt copper engraved en-suite with the hilt. The belt is of fabric enriched with gold.

NOTES:

The inscription is in the name of the caliph 'Uthmān 23-35/644-656 but Ludvik Kalus has questioned its authenticity, and attributes it to the fifteenth century.⁴⁵

The fittings on this sword are in many ways unique and consequently it is difficult to date. The pattern on the scabbard's bracelets, for example, resembles the so-called «tiger» stripe

⁴² Köseoğlu and Rogers 1987, no. 78, TKS 2/2107, and Sourdél-Thomine 1971 no. 18, TKS 2/2273 and Köseoğlu and Rogers 1987, no. 79, TKS no. 2120.

⁴³ For the Quṛān TKS 2/2121 see Istanbul 1983 no. E.200, and Washington 1987 no. 20; the canteen Washington 1987, no. 54, TKS no. 2/3825; the crown is now in the Treasury of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna see Fillitz 1971, pl. 15. cat. no. 60.

⁴⁴ The fittings of the sword in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna are worked in an identical style to the sword of 'Ammār, Vienna 1990, inv. no. C 180, p. 240, ill. 135; for the saber in the Stockholm, see Cederström 1930 pl. 38, the sword of Khālīd is TKS no. 2/146 worked in a style almost identical with the binding (TKS. 2/2107) mentioned above; the saber attributed to 'Uthmān is TKS inv. no. 2522 and the sword attributed to Mu'ād Jabal TKS inv. no. 1/299 is very similar in detail to the crown of Stephen Bocskay, the final example is TKS inv. no. 287.

⁴⁵ Ludvik Kalus unpublished catalogue of the swords in the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi.



Fig. 6. Sword with a blade attributed to Mu'ād Jabal. Probably court workshops of Ahmed I. Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 1/299.



Fig. 7. Sword with a hilt in the North African style. Court workshop of Murād III (1574-95), probably by Mehmed ibn ʿImād. Waffensammlung, Vienna, no. C. 180.



Fig. 8. Saber Ottoman court workshop, atelier of Mehmed ibn 'Imād. Gift from Gabriel Bethlem, Prince of Siebenburgen (r. 1613-29) to the King of Sweden. Gustav Adolf II (r. 1611-32). Livrustkammaren Stockholm, no. 3844 A,B.



Fig. 9. Saber with a blade once attributed to the Caliph ʿUthmān. Court workshops, atelier of Meḥmed ibn ʿImād. Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 1/2522.



Fig. 10. Sword. The blade attributed to Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib (Jaʿfar al-Ṭayyar). Court workshops, second half sixteenth century. Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Istanbul, inv. no. 21/143.



Fig. 11. Sword attributed to an anonymous companion. Court workshops, second half sixteenth century. Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 21/148.

or «spot and stripe» motif that often occurs in Ottoman art of the 16th century. It differs, however, in that the stripes do not alternate with three balls but rather with petal forms. The fish emblem differs from all the other examples in that it is more carefully sculpted, has an open mouth and piercings for its eyes. The floral frame around the wrist strap hole is of a type that occurs on a number of swords of the sixteenth century, but it, too, does not point to a specific dating.

15.

SWORD, *dhūʿl-fāqar*.

Court workshops, second half sixteenth century.

Total length 104.4 cm, length of blade 89.5, width of blade 5.8, width of guard 11.2 cm, scabbard 94.5

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Istanbul, inv. no. 1/118.

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt of wood covered with leather is octagonal in section, inclined to one side and set on the sides with a golden fish emblem. The pommel cap of silver gilt has a round top and lobed base. The guard has hilt and scabbard prongs and downward curving quillons the tips sculpted with split leaves. The blade of diamond shaped section has two gold filled holes along its length and a bifurcated tip, *dhūʿl-fāqar*. It is damascened in gold (in places in a contour réservée technique) with arabesque designs against a spiral ground and with Arabic inscriptions in a cursive script (worn). On the left side it is engraved with the *tamga* of the Ottoman arsenal. The scabbard of wood covered with leather has mounts of silver gilt. The bracelets have ovular lobed plaques at their fronts.

NOTES:

The curling leaf forms echo Seljuk design of the 13th century and also compare to those on a standard, *alem*, made for Selīm I (1512-20).⁴⁶ This Ottoman style represents a continuation of an Anatolian tradition transplanted to Istanbul after the Ottoman conquest. The leaf shaped quillon tips can also be related to a group of quillons carved with dragon heads in which the animals jowls curl in the same way as the leaves. One of these is on a dagger in Vienna which can be dated to before 1595 and provides a terminus ante quem for the sword fittings.⁴⁷

There are two other swords in the Topkapı Sarayı with identical guards; these are both kept in the Treasury of the Prophet. One is attributed to the Prophet's cousin Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib (Jaʿfar al-Ṭayyar); and the other to an anonymous companion (Illustrations 10 and 11). It is significant that the former has a pommel cap cut and pierced with a leafy palmette form almost identical to that on the rounded quillon prong of the Vienna dagger. An identical design occurs on the back of a golden throne made for Murād III in about 1585.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, these datings are too scattered in time to provide a reliable dating for this sub-group and any chronology remains hypothetical.

⁴⁶ For example the leaves carved on a Quʿrān stand now in the Konya Museum, no. 333, ill. Istanbul 1983, no. D. 177 and on a standard in the TKS, inv. no. 1/824, ill. Tezcan 1992, cat. no. 55, pl. 34, 35.

⁴⁷ Waffensammlung, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, no. C 152a, registered in the Ambras inventory of 1595, Ill. Washington 1987 cat. no. 93; the bejeweled ivory hilt of this dagger closely resembles a belt from the tomb of Selīm II (1566-74) suggesting a dating to the third quarter of the sixteenth century, for the belt see London 1988 cat. no. 55. Very similar workmanship is on a mec also in Vienna and attributed to the Ottoman commander Kashan Beg who was killed at Baden in 1532, unfortunately there is no documentary proof of this attribution and the weapon was first recorded in the Vienna inventory of 1841, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna no. C 162.

⁴⁸ The throne is illustrated in Washington 1987, fig. 16 pp. 115-16.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Mayer 1943, fig 10, 11, Alexander 1984a cat. no. 5, Alexander 1999, fig. 10

16.

SABER

Ottoman 16th century

Court workshop, period of Aḥmed I, possibly by Mehmed ibn ʿImād.

Total length 112 cm, length of blade 95 cm.

Schatzkammer Des Deutschen Ordens, Vienna, inv. no. 179

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt of wood covered with gold is slightly inclined towards one side and octagonal in section. Each of the eight faces are set alternatively with rubies and turquoise. A large ruby is set into the pommel. The grip of gold is set on either side with a fish emblem constructed from chips of turquoise; it has hilt and scabbard prongs and quillons that flair towards their palmette shaped tips. The blade is curved and single-edged with a double-edged section before its point. It is inlaid in gold with leaf and petal designs and set with turquoise and rubies, and is engraved and damascened with Arabic and Persian inscriptions in a cursive script. The scabbard of wood covered with gold is decorated en-suite with the hilt. The sling mounts are set with rings for the attachment of a belt.

INSCRIPTIONS:

The fish of the water of your saber are on the day of battle like so many crocodile hunters...

NOTES:

The inscription given in full in Dudik 1865 praises the blade and compares its watering pattern with fish. The saber is identical in style to a dagger with Turkish inscriptions on its scabbard, given to the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, Archduke Maximilian (1590-1618) both have been in the order's treasury since at least 1619 and both must have been sent as a presentation garniture.⁴⁹

The raised petal shaped settings for the gem stones and the subsidiary chiseled floral forms are identical with those on a number of objects now preserved in the Topkapı Sarayı. These include several jewel studded helmets, a mace, and a golden canteen; unfortunately, none of these are dated and all are attributed purely on stylistic grounds to the mid or second half of the sixteenth century.⁵⁰ Certain features of the workmanship, such as the chiseling of the rosette and *saz* leaves at the top of the blade recall that attributed to the court jeweler Mehmed ibn ʿImād and it is probable that the fittings date to the late sixteenth or even early seventeenth century.

This saber is certainly one of the most spectacular in the group and also one of the most enigmatic. Unlike all the others the fish (and other elements of the decoration) is worked in a technique called *firuzekari* and the weapon is the only one bearing a fish emblem that has left the Ottoman collections.⁵¹ Why it should have been given to the Grand Master remains a mystery.

⁴⁹ Schatzkammer Des Deutschen Ordens, Vienna, inv no. 173.

⁵⁰ TKS, inv. nos. 2/1187, 2/3825, 2/715 see Washington 1987 nos. 54, 84, 85 and London 1988, nos. 63, 82, 87.

⁵¹ *Firuzekari* is a technique employing chips of turquoise and was popular at the Ottoman court during the 16th and 17th centuries.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Dudik, 1865, p. 47-50.

17.

SABER

Called the sword of the Prophet Muḥammad

Court workshop of Aḥmed I, probably by Mehmed ibn ʿImād.

Total length 101 cm, length of blade 87.2, width of blade 2.7, width of guard 17.4 cm.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 21/130

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt of wood covered with black leather is bent to one side below its pommel cap of gold which has a rounded top, paneled sides and tapering lobed base. It is set on either side with a golden fish emblem. The guard of steel covered with gold plate (or silver gilt) is engraved and chiseled on the right side in high relief at the center with a saz leaf and rosette design, and on the other side with a similar design in low relief. It has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons that taper towards their ball shaped tips. The blade is slightly curved and single-edged and is inlaid in silver on the right side with an Arabic inscription in a cursive script. The scabbard is of wood covered with black leather with elongated chapes and large ovular plaques at the front, all are decorated en-suite with the hilt.

INSCRIPTION:

There is no God but God and Muḥammad is His messenger. Muḥammad ibn Abdullah ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib.

NOTES:

An almost identical *saz* leaf and rosette design to that on the right side of the guard is used on the emblem made for the throne of Aḥmed I and dated to about 1603.⁵² The use of slightly different designs on either side of a guard is not unique, and also can be seen, for example, on the sword attributed to ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir. The bent hilt, along with the elongated round capped quillons decorated with a central medallion and peripheral floral forms also occurs the sword of ʿAmmār.⁵³ Perhaps the closest parallel to the decoration is on a reliquary chest made in 1001/1593-4 by Mehmed ibn ʿImād.⁵⁴

According to Kemal Çiğ the fittings of the saber were made at the order of Aḥmed I.⁵⁵ Mehmed remained on the palace rolls until 1605 which provides a terminus ante quem for these fittings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Çiğ 1976, p. 222 & 229, fig. 8; Zaki 1979, p. 204; Yücel 1988, no. 2; Yücel 2001, no. 2.

⁵² Köseoğlu and Rogers 1987, nos. 1 and 5.

⁵³ 21/149, a similar hilt is on 21/140.

⁵⁴ Köseoğlu and Rogers 1987, no. 79

⁵⁵ Çiğ 1976, p. 222, the English text incorrectly names Aḥmed III but the Arabic reads Aḥmed I. Çiğ was previously director of the Museum and based his comment on the Palace inventories.

18.**SWORD**

Called the sword of Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām⁵⁶

Probably court workshop of Aḥmed I (1603-17)

Total length 103 cm, length of blade 89.8 cm, width of blade 4.9 cm, width of guard cm, scabbard 90 cm.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 21/140.

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt of wood covered with black leather is bent to one side below its pommel cap of gold which has a rounded top, paneled sides and tapering lobed base. The grip is set on either side with a golden fish emblem. The guard of steel covered with gold plate (?) has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons that taper towards their ball shaped tips. The blade is straight and double-edged and has two gold filled holes. The scabbard is of wood covered with black leather with elongated chapes and large ovular bracelets, all are undecorated en-suite with the hilt. The belt of metal enriched fabric has mounts en-suite.

NOTES:

The fittings are undecorated, that is in the «plain style» of the sixteenth century described by Julian Raby and James Allan.⁵⁷ The shape of the pommel cap, the bend of the hilt and the rounded quillon tips are all similar to the preceding example and this sword should also be dated to the same period.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Yücel 1988, no. 13; Yücel 2001, no. 13.

19.**SWORD**

Called the sword of Abū Ḥasan

Court workshop of Aḥmed I (1603-17)

Total length 98 cm, length of blade 83.8 cm, width of blade 4.1 cm, scabbard 96 cm.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. 21/141.

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt of wood covered with black leather is octagonal in section and strongly bent to one side below the pommel cap. The pommel cap of silver gilt is set with turquoise and rubies and has paneled sides and a tapered dentate base. The grip has a golden fish emblem on either side. The guard of steel has hilt and scabbard prongs and elongated quillons that flair at their flattened spatulate shaped tips; it is inlaid in gold with a trellis design against a subsidiary floral pattern and is set with rubies and turquoise. The blade is straight and double-edged and shows traces of an engraved inscription. The scabbard is of wood covered with black leather with mounts en-suite.

INSCRIPTION:

Abū Ḥasana, the scribe of the Prophet of God.

⁵⁶ Zubayr was a cousin of the Prophet and one of the most important companions. He was an early convert to Islam and one of the ten to whom the Prophet promised Paradise.

⁵⁷ Petsopoulos 1982.

NOTES:

The strap work decoration, spatulate quillon tips and strongly bend hilt suggest a later dating, probably to the period of Aḥmed I. There are six other sabers in the collection of the Topkapı with similar decoration and identical quillon tips. One has an inventory note on its scabbard attributing its blade to the Caliph ʿUthmān (Illustration 11);⁵⁸ two are inscribed with verses in Ottoman Turkish and Persian.⁵⁹ Of these three one is probably the work of Meḥmed ibn ʿImād.⁶⁰ However, the trellis enclosed decoration on the sword attributed to Abū Ḥasan is not as fine and it is probably the work of one of his associates or students. A fourth is decorated with jewels, *saḡ* leaves and rosettes and with a parrot,⁶¹ the fifth and sixth with jewels, floral forms and cloud bands.⁶² A seventh weapon belonging to this sub-group is in a private European collection.⁶³

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Yücel 1988, no. 14; Yücel 2001, no. 14

20.

SABER

Court workshops, Aḥmed I (?), probably by Meḥmed ibn ʿImād.

Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, İstanbul, inv. no. (?)

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt is of wood covered with black velvet with a flattened pommel cap of silver gilt, lobed at the base and rounded at the top and engraved in high relief with tiny *saḡ* leaves and floral forms and studded with rubies, all against a background of similar floral forms in niello. There is a golden fish emblem on either side of the grip. The guard of steel has hilt and scabbard prongs that flair at their flattened spatulate shaped tips, it is decorated en-suite with the pommel. The blade is curved and single-edged (unseen). The scabbard is of wood covered with black leather with oval mounts decorated en-suite. The belt of metal enriched fabric has mounts of gilt bronze embossed and chased with rococo like floral forms.

NOTES:

The guard with its spatulate like quillon tips is of the same type as the preceding example, although the decoration is more finely conceived and executed. The fittings are related to a group of objects and weapons all of which are generally dated to the late sixteenth century and which have parallels in the work Meḥmed ibn ʿImād.⁶⁴ The belt is a later addition and the grip of the hilt may also have been refitted at a later time.

⁵⁸ TKS, inv. no. 1/2522; the decoration on this piece has parallels with a number of pieces from the period of Aḥmed I especially with a Quṛān box dated 1026/1617 and an incense burner donated to his mausoleum in 1027/1618, TKS, inv. no. 2/1990 and Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi, inv. no. 29, İstanbul 1983, nos. E. 252 and E. 254.

⁵⁹ TKS, inv. nos. 1/291 and 1/287.

⁶⁰ 1/287, this is damascened with a rosette and *saḡ* leaf design in which the leaf forms are schematically rendered with dots and strokes. The closest parallel for this is on a bookbinding tentatively attributed to Meḥmed; TKS, inv. no. 2/2121 see London 1987, no. 26 and Washington 1987 no. 20.

⁶¹ TKS, inv. no. 1/313.

⁶² TKS., inv. no. 1/312 nd 1/310.

⁶³ Ricketts 1988 no. 19.

⁶⁴ Cf. for example Washington 1987, nos. 60, 61, 64, 94.

21.**SABER**

Ottoman court workshops, first half 17th century
Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Istanbul, inv. no. 1/297

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt is of wood covered with red velvet with a flattened pommel cap of gold and niello, lobed at the base and rounded at the top and engraved and embossed in high relief with saz leaves and floral forms and studded with rubies and turquoise. The top of the pommel cap is set with a large dome shaped turquoise. There is a golden fish emblem on either side of the grip. The guard of steel is plated with gold foil and has hilt and scabbard prongs and quillons round in section with rounded tips, its center is decorated en-suite with the pommel. The serpentine blade of dark gray watered steel is curved and single-edged; its ricasso is damascened on either side with arabesques, cloud bands and Arabic inscriptions. The scabbard is of wood covered with red velvet with lobed ovular mounts decorated en-suite.

INSCRIBED in the rectangular cartouche:

Made by order of al-maqar (al-sharif?)

NOTES:

The arabesque decoration on the hilt and the blade is schematic, lacking the form and consistency of pieces attributable to the sixteenth century. Certain elements such as the crude linear arabesque on the quillons is similar in feeling to the engraved linear forms on an incense burner made for the nurse of Osman II in 1033/1624.⁶⁵ For reasons such as this the saber is tentatively attributed here to the seventeenth century.

22.**SABER**

Ottoman court workshops 16th-17th century
Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Istanbul, inv. no. 1/43040

DESCRIPTION:

The hilt is of wood covered with black velvet with a flattened pommel cap of silver gilt, lobed at the base and rounded at the top and engraved and embossed in high relief with tiny saz leaves and floral forms and studded with rubies and turquoise. The top of the pommel cap is set with a large dome shaped turquoise. There is a golden fish emblem on either side of the grip. The guard of silver gilt has hilt and scabbard prongs and quillons round in section with rounded tips, its center is decorated en-suite with the pommel. The blade is curved and single-edged (unseen). The scabbard is of wood covered with black velvet with small lobed rectangular mounts decorated en-suite. The belt of metal enriched fabric has mounts en-suite with the ensemble.

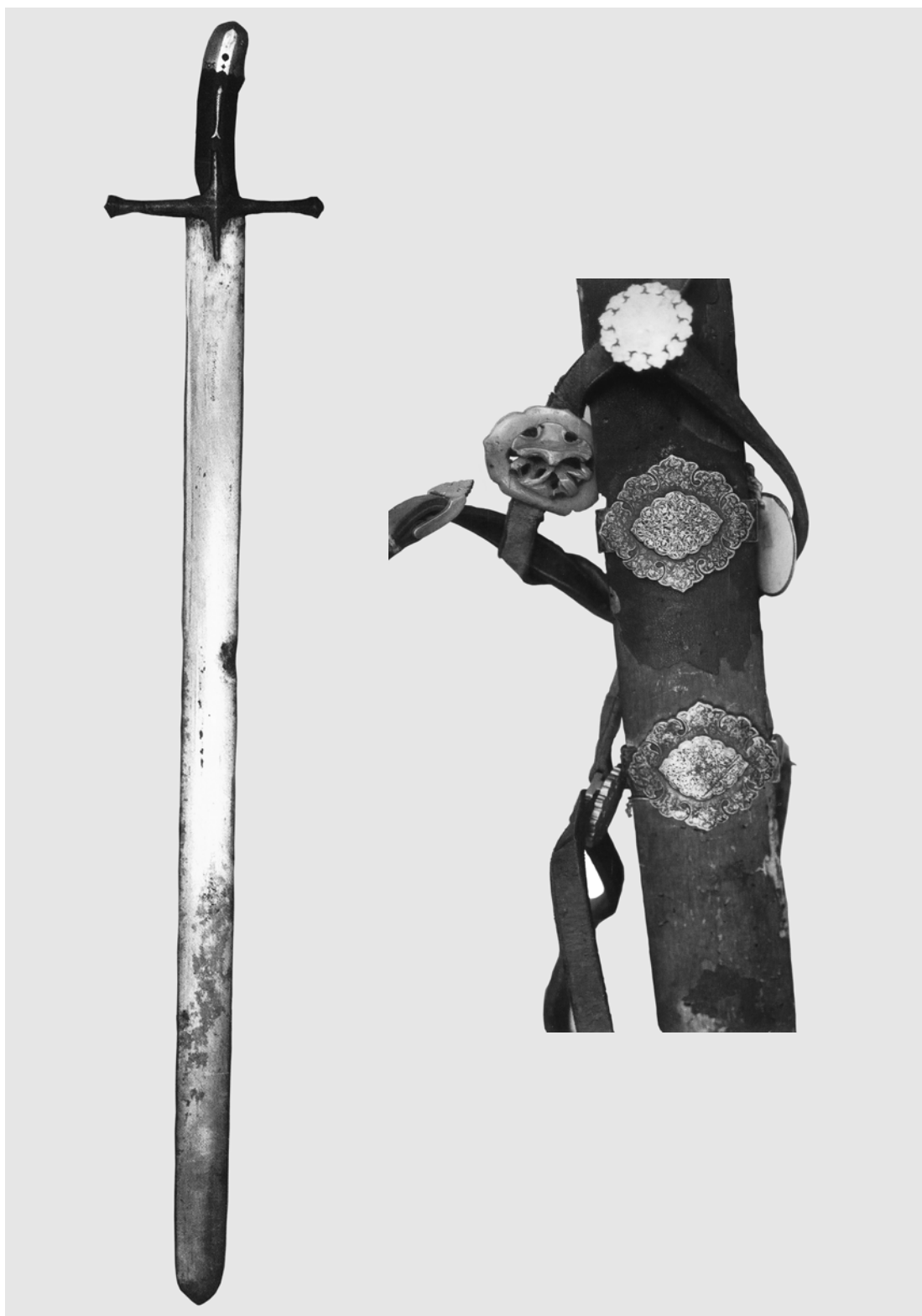
DAVID ALEXANDER
Puycelis, France

⁶⁵ Istanbul 1983, no. E. 257, Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi, inv. no. 18.

CATALOGUE N° 4



CATALOGUE N° 5



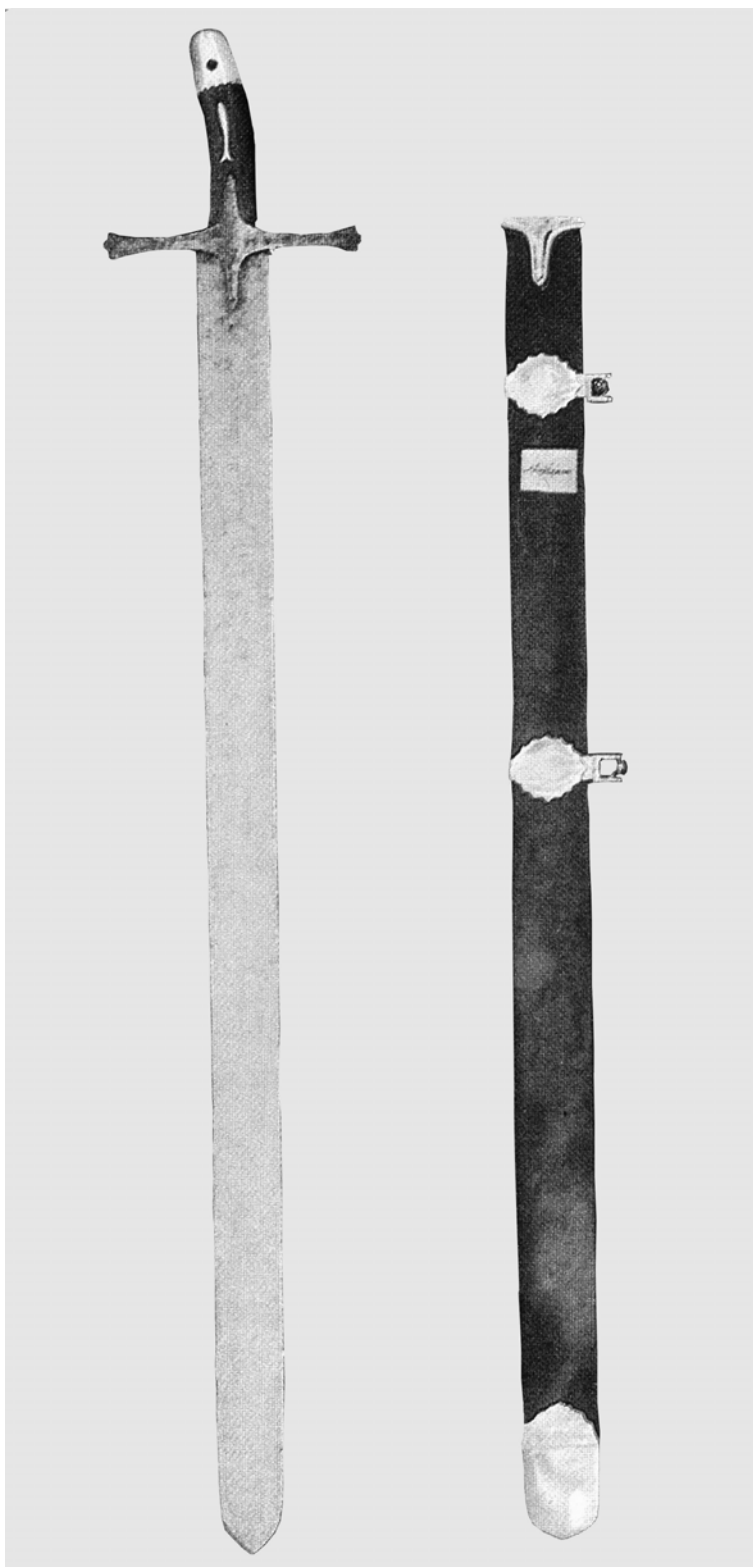
CATALOGUE N° 6



CATALOGUE N° 7



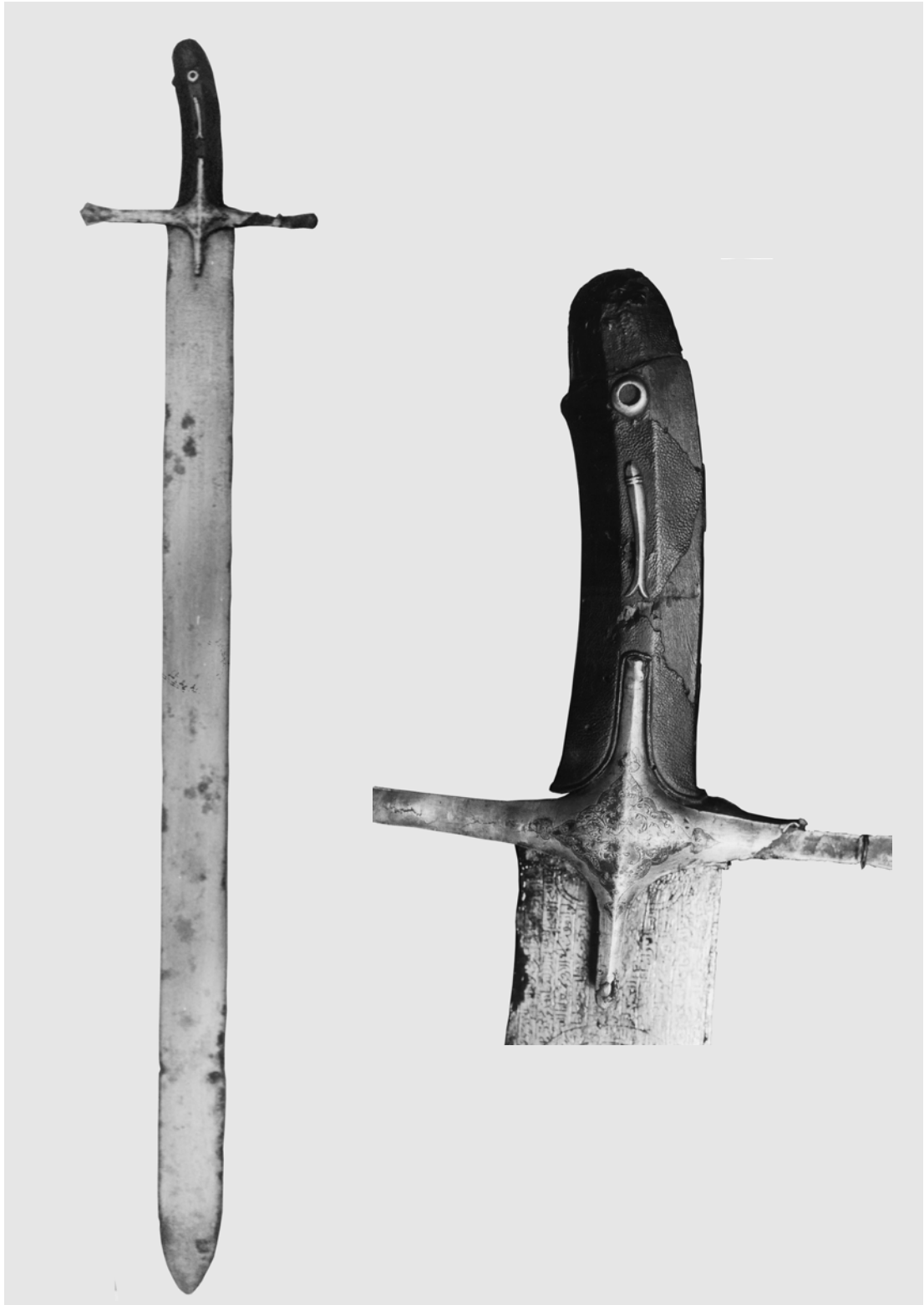
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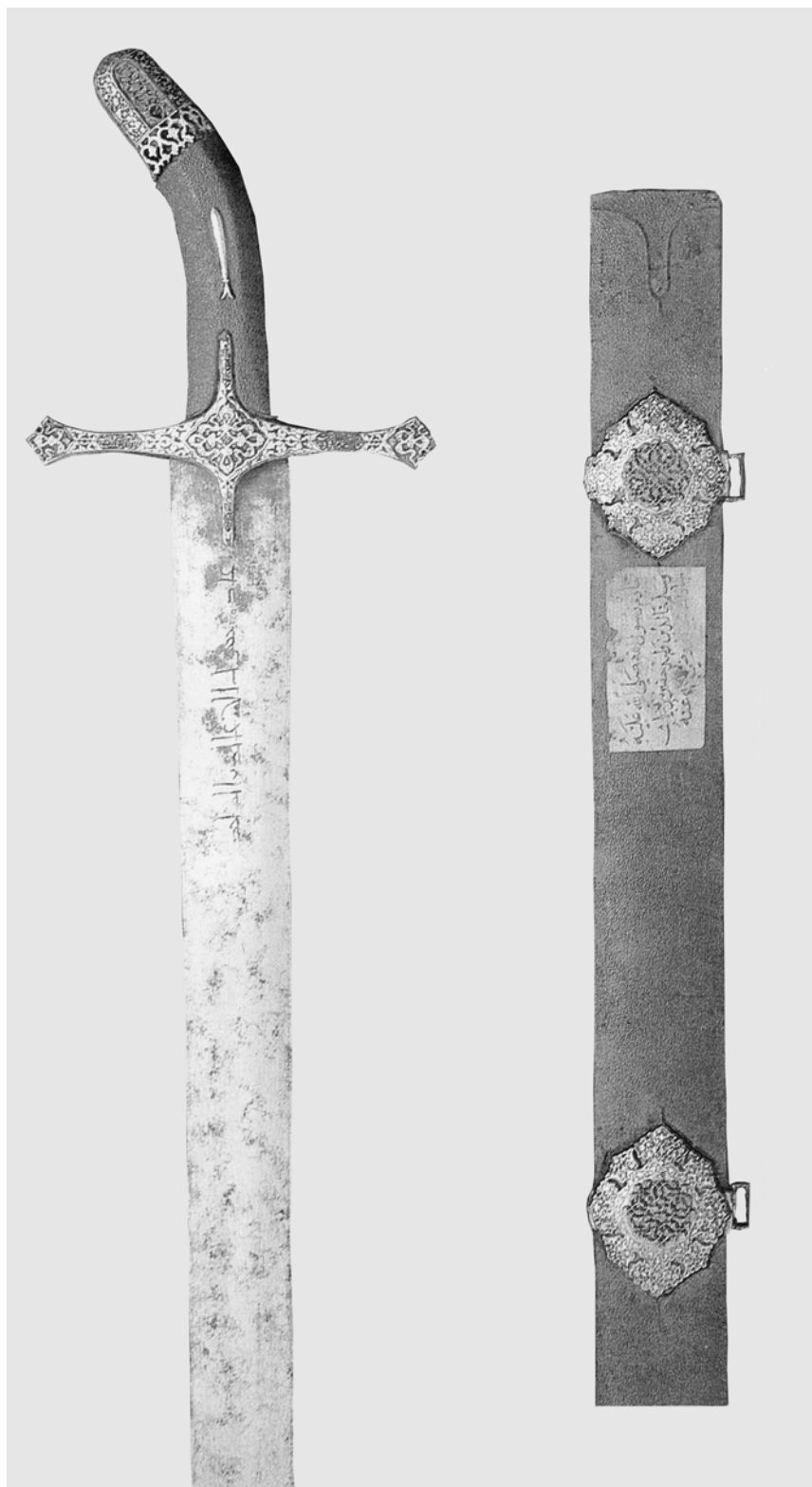
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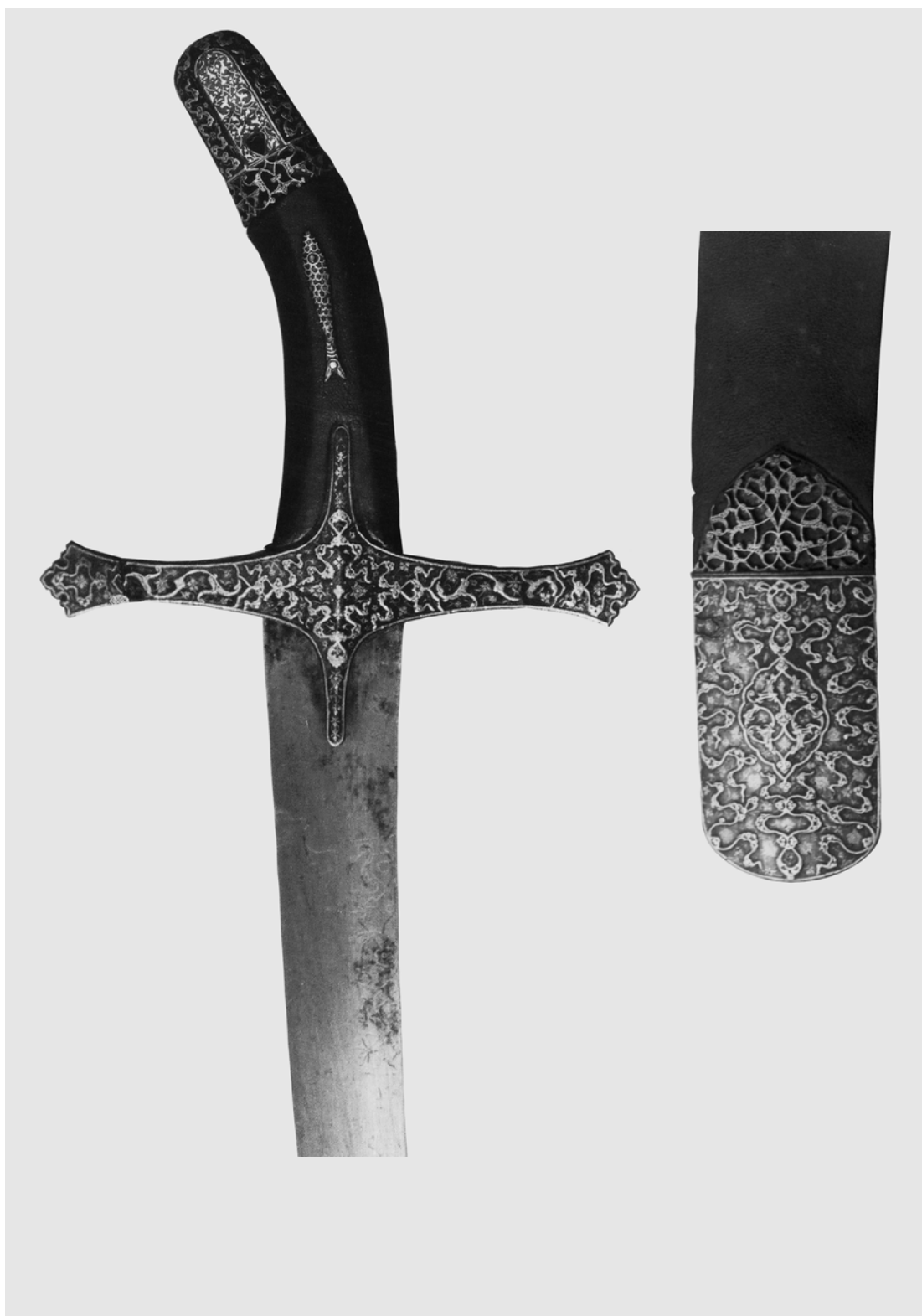
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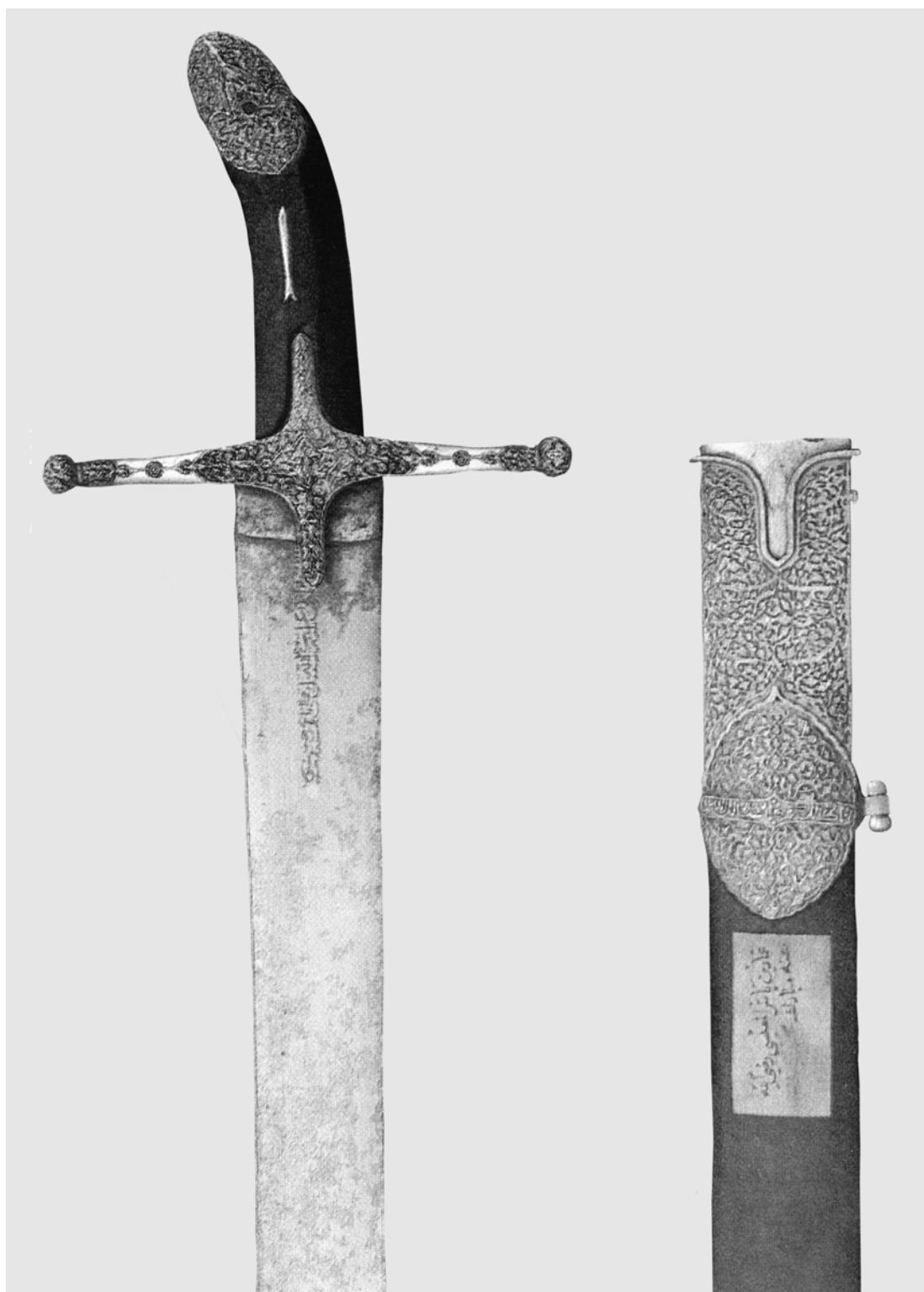
CATALOGUE N° 11



CATALOGUE N° 12

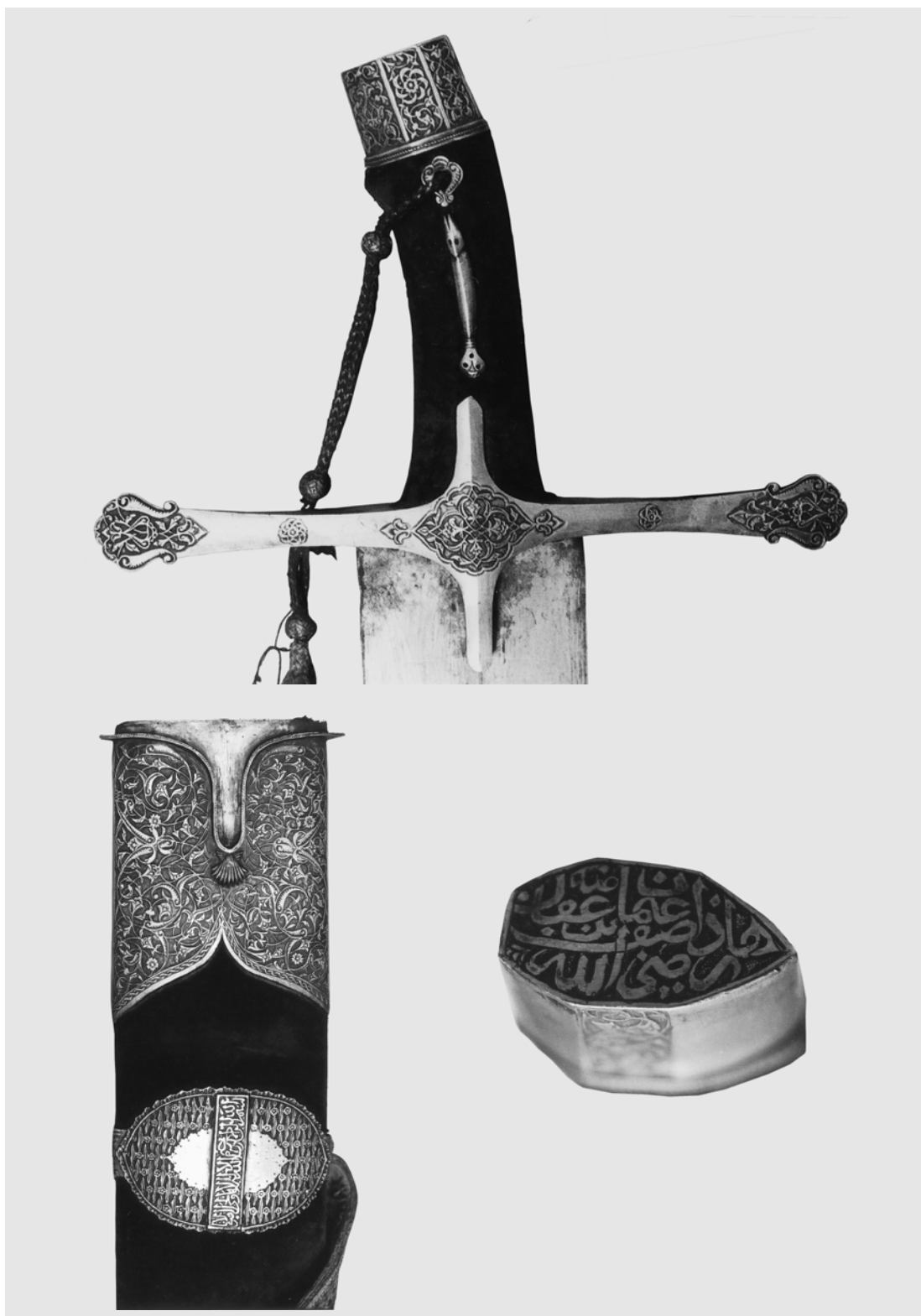


CATALOGUE N° 13 A



CATALOGUE N° 13 B

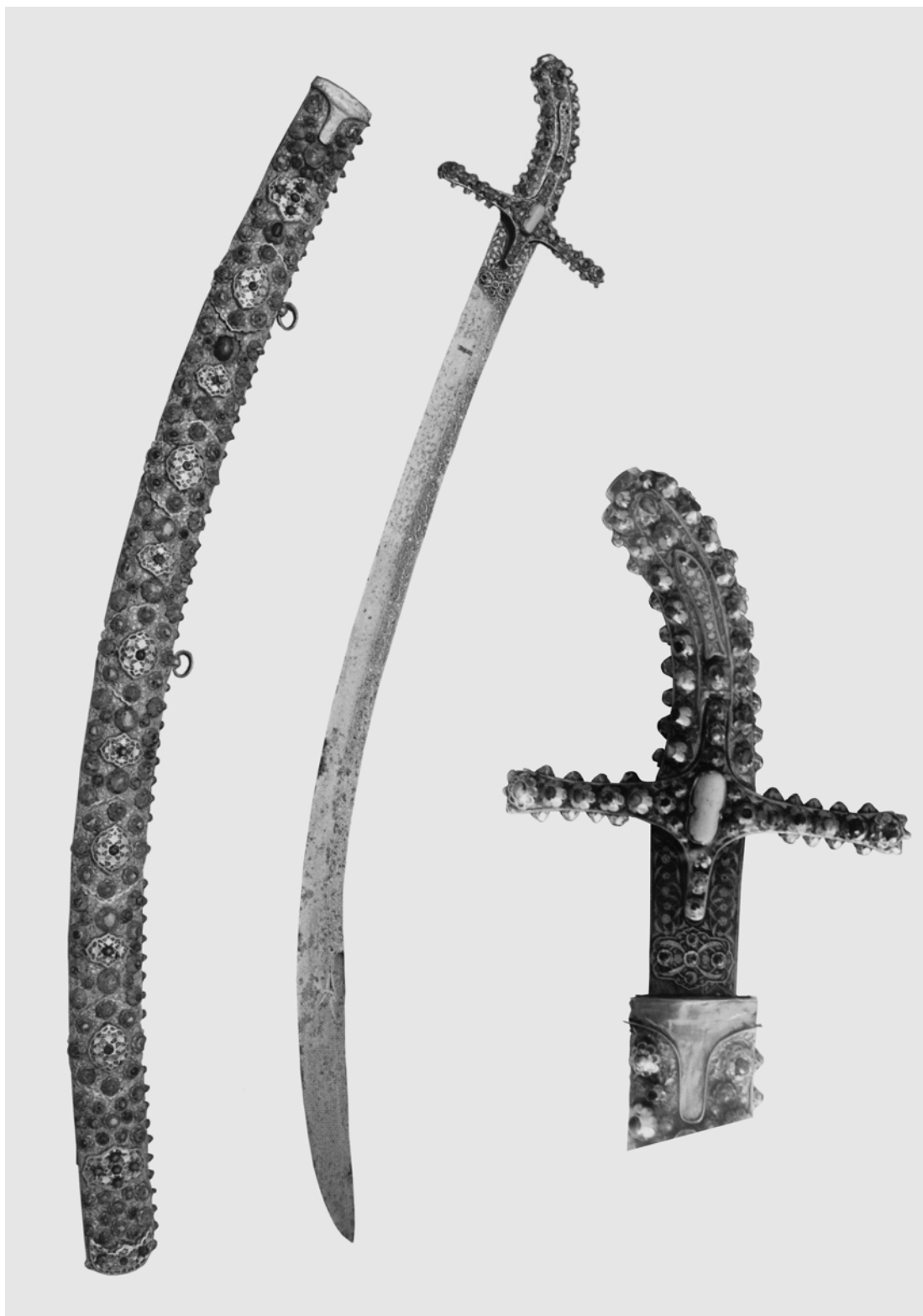
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CATALOGUE N° 15



CATALOGUE N° 16



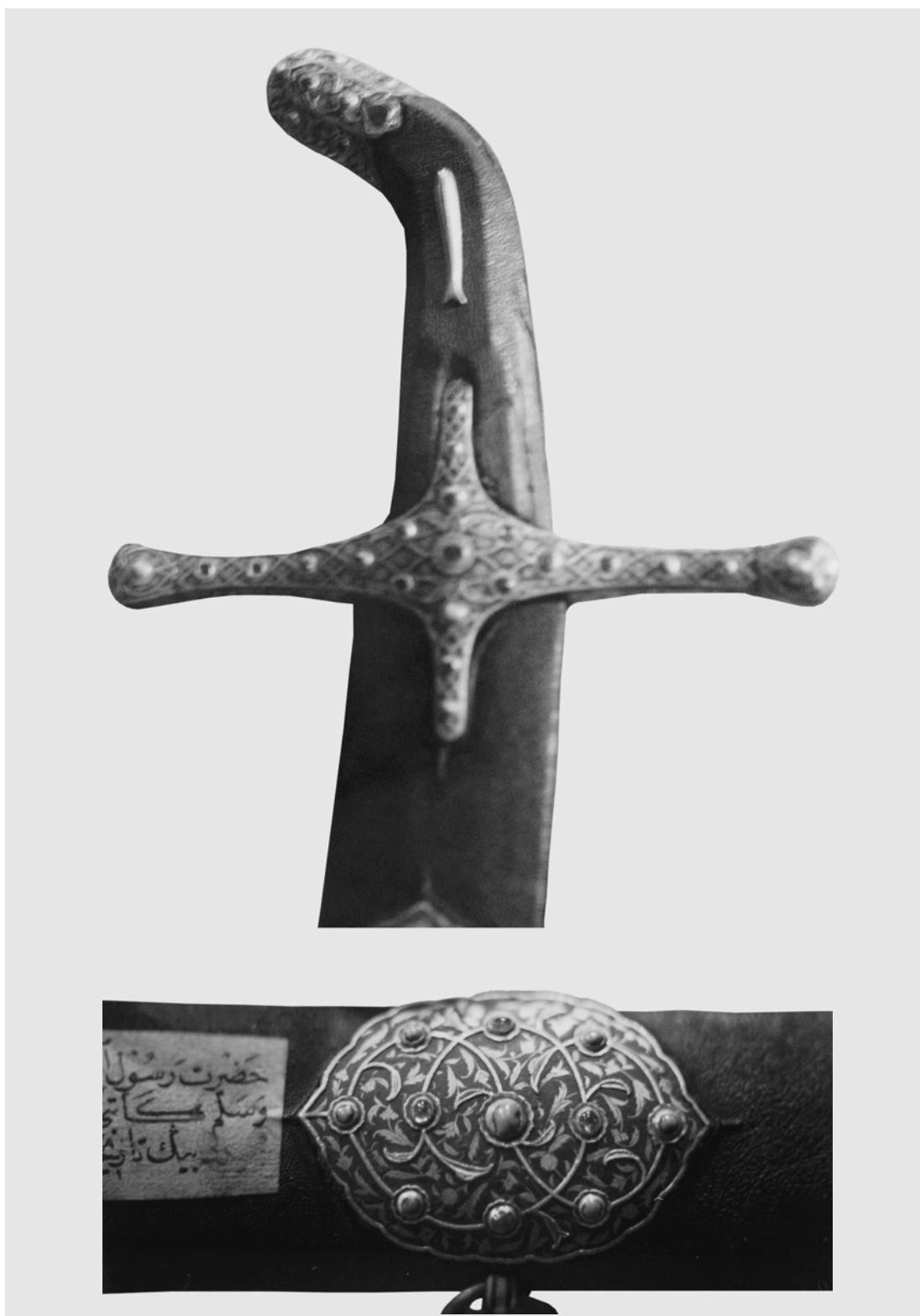
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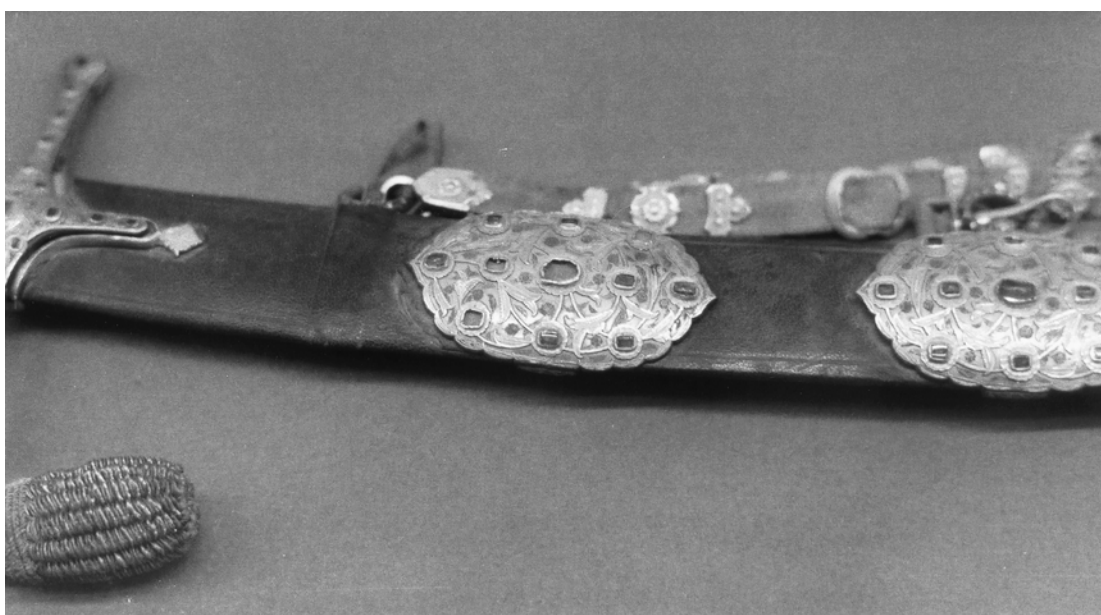
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CATALOGUE N° 19



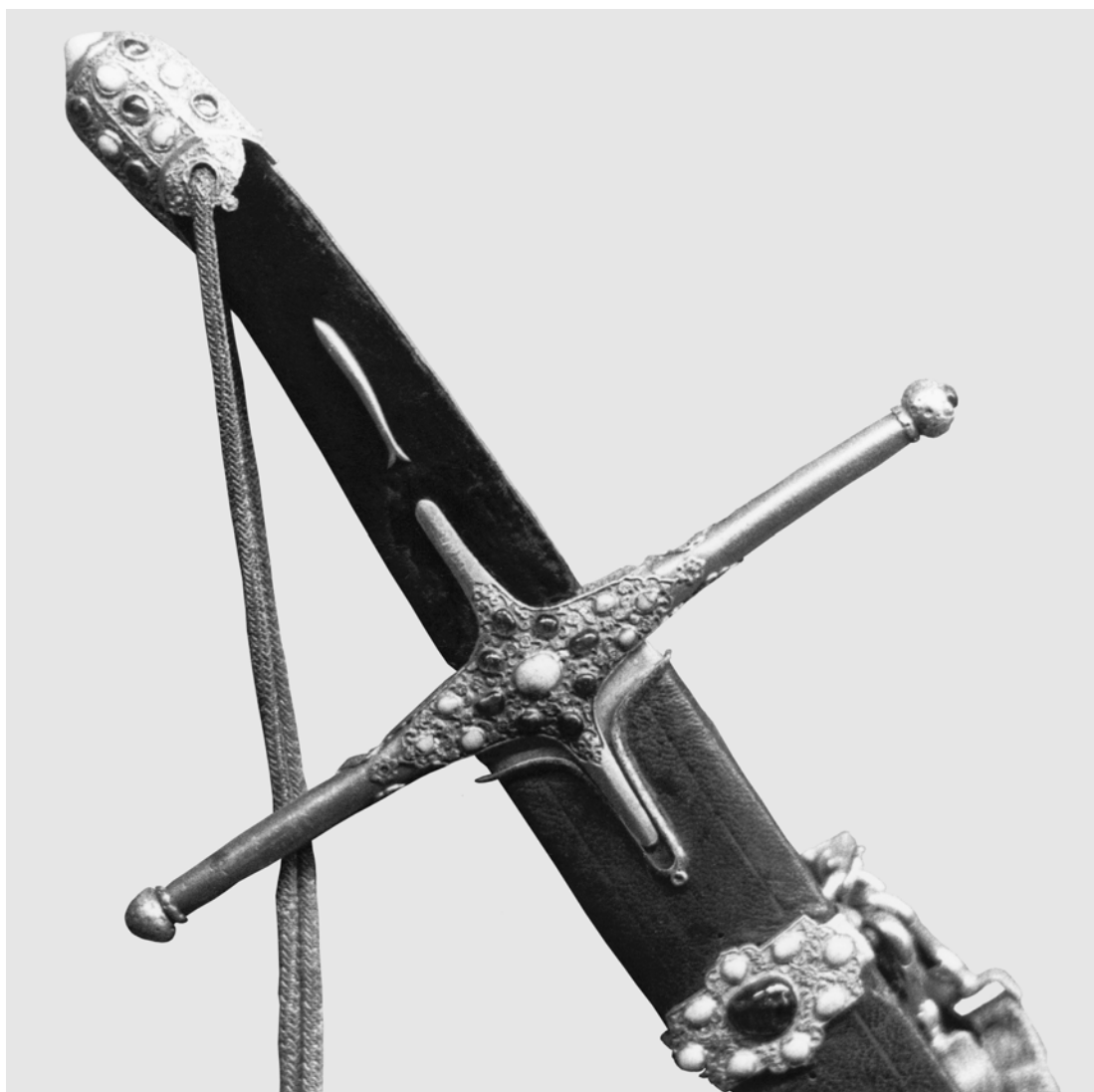
CATALOGUE N° 20



CATALOGUE N° 21



CATALOGUE N° 22



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