

ISLAMIC PATTERNS

DAGGER – 17TH CENTURY

The hilt on this dagger is made from pure gold, and decorated with rubies, emeralds and diamonds, using the kundan technique. The kundan technique is a traditional form of Indian jewellery-making, in which the stones are set into the gold with a layer of gold foil, and the jewels are rounded into the surface, not set on top of it. The hilt is carved into a tiger at one end, and a duck on the other. Workmanship of this degree of artistry and skill is of the utmost rarity.

The very precious gems and the exquisitely intricate patterns show that the design has taken precedent over the stones, giving it a certain prestige and status.

The blade has been made with a thicker tip, which reinforces the blade and prevents anything happening to it if it were used in battle. Like many pieces in the Wallace Collection armouries, it has been designed to look like a weapon but would primarily have been used as an ornament while displaying craft and skill as well as wealth, power and status.

At the Mughal court in the first half of the 17th century, jewelled daggers were used by the emperor and were given to courtiers and princes as a sign of royal favour. This dagger was almost certainly made for a prince of the Mughal court, probably for Shah Jahan (builder of the Taj Mahal).



IN DETAIL



DATE Early 17th century
MATERIALS Gold, watered steel,
rubies, emeralds, diamonds
SIZE 35.1 cm

MAKER Unknown
PLACE India

ACTIVITY Drawing a basic multifoil arch



Throughout Mughal art and architecture, you will see multifoil arches. One way of drawing these is using a compass and ruler.

- Draw a horizontal and vertical line (each 10cm long for an A4 piece of paper) meeting at 90 degrees.
- Open the compass to 10cm, placing the point on where the two lines cross. Draw an arc (part of a circle) from the top of the vertical line to the widest part of the horizontal one.
- Open the compass to a 2cm radius and place the point where the vertical line touches the arc. Draw in the circle.
- Move the compass with the same radius along the arc, and place the point where the small circle you drew crosses the arc.
- Repeat this with a series of circles - you will see a pattern forming along the arc.
- The tops of the circles form the pattern of the multifoil arch. At the very top of the arch, draw in a point by hand (think of the top of a soft-serve ice cream peak) and mark in the lines to make your arch.

