

# Asia

## **Samurai Armour from Japan**

The Samurai were the élite warrior class of Japan from the 10th to the 19th century. The armour was owned by Major Sir Robert Leatham Barclay, one of the founders of Barclays Bank in the 19th century. Extensive conservation work cleaned and stabilised this complex group of objects.

## **Samurai Helmet**

The helmet is the oldest part of the armour and dates to about 1540, during the Sengoku (warring state) period. The iron plates of the dome are connected by decorative rivets and the lacquered iron plates of the neck guard are laced together with silk braid. The gilded leather visor is stamped with a dragon and has an inscription inside naming the owner as Fumiyoshi of the Minamoto family, a famous warrior clan. Chin straps attach the helmet to the face mask with its horsehair moustache and detachable nose piece. The crest represents a peach and the side wings have a cut melon symbol, a clan or family crest.

## **Collar**

This sits underneath the body armour. It is made of wool felt, silk and lacquered leather.

## **Body armour**

This dates from the 18th to mid 19th century. The body armour is strong, light and flexible. Iron plates, lacquered with tree sap in a traditional Japanese technique called *urushi*, are laced together with silk braids and lined with leather. The metal plates are spattered with a decorative silver alloy to represent the sparkling of dew drops.

The chain mail sleeves, lined with blue silk, are from

an earlier date. They are decorated with butterfly hinges, metal gourds, cherry blossom motifs and other symbols. Shoulder protectors, a collar of padded leather and skirt pieces trimmed with bear fur were worn with the body armour. There is a hidden pouch under the front skirt section. The leg armour consisting of thigh and shin guards is too fragile to be displayed.

(SAFWM : 1940.3)

### **Dagger from India**

This curved dagger “used by the Inhabitants of the Hill Country” comes from Madras. It has a curved double edged blade usually called a *chilanum* which in various forms was used by soldiers of the Hindu Maratha Empire at its height in the 18th century. It was presented to the Museum in 1836 by Captain Henry Hall of the East India Company. The red fabric-covered wooden sheath, silver fittings and ivory handle suggest a high status ownership.

(SAFWM : 1836.157)

### **Buddha**

This Burmese Buddha was presented to the Museum in 1838 by Captain Hall of the 41st Native Infantry. The stylistic features suggest a late 18th or early 19th century date. The hands are in the *bhumiparsha mudra* position, which is a gesture of faith and resolution. The right hand touches the ground depicting the moment when the Buddha called on the Earth to witness his enlightenment. The figure is of gilded wood.

(SAFWM : 1838.50)

### **Chinese Robe**

Man’s quilted winter robe for semi-formal wear dating to 1898. This type of garment was worn once official duties were over or when friends came to dinner. The silk is woven into a pattern of stylized clouds to symbolize harmony.

The fabric layers have been quilted together and there are knot fastenings. The robe is hand-stitched and was made by a travelling tailor in Yamen, China.

(SAFWM : 2007.1.144)

### **Wooden models from India**

These carved and painted wooden figures are from a collection of 24 models brought from Kondapalli in Andhra Pradesh in India in the 19th century and sold at a British Red Cross jumble sale in Saffron Walden in 1917 for 30 shillings. These figures were made in great numbers, mostly for the colonial market and they represent persons of rank, servants and craftsmen including:

A male figure seated in a palanquin with sliding doors

A carpenter working on a beam with an adze

A washer or laundry man with linens

A chief or rajah riding on horse back

(SAFWM : 1917.124, SAFWM : 125, SAFWM : 126)

### **Model of a Granary from the Malay Archipelago**

Presented to the Museum in 1839 by Rev W.H. Medhurst, Missionary to the Chinese in connection with the London Missionary Society. It is described as “A Malay granary used for storing rice, the entrance to it by a ladder at a little door near the top. Made larger at the top than at the bottom as a defence against rats, white ants etc”.

(SAFWM : 1839.381)

### **Model Boat from Burma**

This model boat with a dug-out hull and pegged oars is decorated with red paint and gilding. It was presented to the Museum in 1891 and is thought to be from India or Burma, whose borders were indistinct at that time. Model boats were often found at shrines.

(SAFWM : 1891.139)

