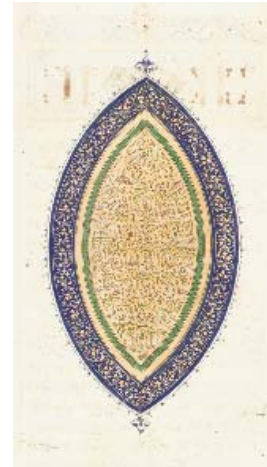
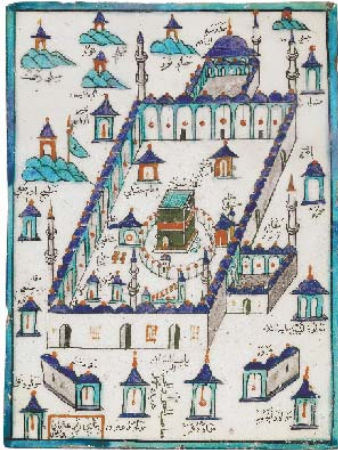


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**CHRISTIE'S**

Contact: Hannah Schmidt +44 (0) 207 389 2964 [hschmidt@christies.com](mailto:hschmidt@christies.com)

## **FATIMID ROCK CRYSTAL EWER LEADS CHRISTIE'S LANDMARK SALE OF ART OF THE ISLAMIC AND INDIAN WORLDS**



### **Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds Christie's London**

**Tuesday, 7 October 2008 at 10.30am and 2.30pm**

**London** – One of the rarest and most desirable works of art from the Islamic world, a carved rock crystal ewer from the Fatimid Royal Treasury, dating to the late 10<sup>th</sup> to early 11<sup>th</sup> century AD, will be offered at the strongest sale of *Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds* ever staged at Christie's, on Tuesday 7 October 2008. Estimated to realise in excess of £3 million, this Fatimid ewer is one of only seven fully-carved known surviving examples and the first and only one to be offered on the open market. This is an historic opportunity for private collectors and institutions around the world. The auction overall, which includes an extraordinary combination of outstanding works of art, spans a wide range of geographical areas, materials and time and is expected to realize in excess of £11 million.

### **FATIMID CARVED ROCK CRYSTAL EWER**

Few objects evoke the richness of mediaeval Islamic culture as much as the small group of carved rock crystal ewers made for the court of the Fatimid rulers of Cairo in the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of these is the treasure at the centre of this sale. It is further embellished with enamelled gold mounts, *illustrated right*, made in 1854, by the French silversmith Jean-Valentin Morel, who was appointed Goldsmith to Queen Victoria in 1852 (estimate: in excess of £3 million).



Fatimid rulers conquered Egypt in 969 and renamed their new capital city *Al-Qahira* (The Triumphant), which remains the Arabic name for Cairo. Ewers were amongst the works of art made in varied media to reflect this name through their cultural opulence. Such lavishness could not be maintained indefinitely and by the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century the state had become so impoverished that much of the Royal Treasury had to be sold, explaining the sudden dispersal of these ewers; a “fire sale” which was recorded by a Fatimid Treasury official in *Kitab al-Dhakhai'ir w'al-Tuhaf* (The Book of Gifts and Rarities).

Carved from a single piece of flawless rock crystal, which is as hard as toughened steel, the ewers were hollowed out and then carved by hand with extraordinary finesse, leaving a surface in the thinner areas that is only a couple of millimeters thick. Almost all surviving examples have come through cathedral treasuries and each is decorated with animal groups associated with hunting, surrounded by arabesque designs. Of the other six examples, one is in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, having been bought privately in 1862 (decorated with a hawk attacking a deer); two are in the treasury of the Basilica



of San Marco, Venice (one decorated with a lion, the other a ram); one is in the Cathedral of Fermo, Italy (decorated with a falcon); another is in the Louvre, having been in the treasury of the royal Abbey of Saint Denis, Paris (decorated with a small falcon), and one well-documented ewer (decorated with falcons) which was stolen from the museum in Limoges in 1980. In 1998 another example in the Pitti Palace, Florence (decorated with partridges), was apparently broken beyond repair. The Fatimid ewer being offered in this sale is decorated with cheetahs with link-chains, *detail illustrated left*.

### FURTHER ISLAMIC HIGHLIGHTS

Amongst the further highlights in this outstanding sale are **Islamic works from the mediaeval period**, including a carved ebony pen box with outstanding bronze mounts and a central inscribed ivory panel encouraging the reader to open the lid. This is attributed to the same extraordinary Fatimid dynasty as the ewer (estimate: £400,000-600,000). From the same period, but from even further west are two capitals from the Umayyad capital city of Cordoba (*Medina al-Zahra*) in Andalucia (estimate: £120,000-180,000 *illustrated above* and £50,000-70,000), together with the base for a column (estimate: £80,000-120,000). Exactly contemporary with these, are five rare Umayyad Andalusian wooden beams that were carved for the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. These beams are being sold with the full authority and agreement of Cordoba Cathedral Council. Each one is just under 6 metres in length and deeply carved with floral and strapwork designs, on three out of the four sides, including trefoil and diamond motifs. Considering their age, their original surface is remarkably well preserved. The estimates for the beams range between £150,000-£250,000 and £300,000-£500,000.



Another masterpiece offered for sale is a remarkable silver and copper inlaid bronze incense burner which was made in Damascus around 1230 by Muhammad Ibn Khutlukh al-Mawsili, a master metalworker whose only other work is in the British Museum; it is expected to realise in excess of £1,000,000 *illustrated right*. A magnificent massive carved arcaded panel with extraordinarily intricate interlaced designs coming from 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century Merinid Morocco (estimate: £300,000-400,000) is another key work.



**Later Islamic works** are also well represented and exemplified by the library of the late Djafar Ghazi; a collection of manuscripts and calligraphy by the very best Persian and Turkish masters, many of them specifically commissioned for Sultans, Shahs and Amirs in their gilded palaces. Central works in the library, which are offered in this sale, are two manuscripts made personally for Sultan Mehmet II, the Conqueror of the most famous city in Christendom, Constantinople in 1453, *a detail from one page is illustrated top right page 1* (estimates: £50,000-70,000 and £30,000-50,000). One of the best kept secrets of the Islamic collecting world, this private library was housed in the unlikely location of a top floor flat of an apartment building in Germany. Other collectors knew it was there but nobody had seen it, or been

allowed into the apartment for years. Also from Ottoman Turkey is a superb collection of Iznik tiles, mostly collected in Alexandria in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One tile depicts the holy shrine of Mecca, and identifies all the individual buildings around the compound, painted in around 1640 and, exceptionally, signed by the artist (estimate: £150,000-250,000), *illustrated top left page 1*. The condition, colour and design of these tiles is exceptional. Three other tiles in this collection are the largest to have been offered at auction in living memory, each at around 65 x 35cm., with estimates ranging from £60,000-80,000 and £100,000-150,000 *illustrated right*.



## INDIAN ART



From the Eastern reaches of the sale comes a strong section of **Indian Art**, including a group of spectacular 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century mother-of pearl overlaid furniture, *illustrated left*. This ranges from two pouring vessels (*kendi*) which are sold together with an estimate of £40,000-60,000 and two powder horns (estimate: £8,000-12,000), through to two caskets (estimates: £80,000-120,000 and £40,000-60,000). The second of the caskets is set with mounts, a form of embellishment practiced by goldsmiths working at various European courts at this time. Gujarat, in western India, was the centre of production of these luxury items, the appeal of which lay in the lustrous and iridescent surface originating from certain shells. International collectors of the day included the Tyrolean ruler Ferdinand II (1529–1595), the Hapsburg Emperor Rudolf II (1552–1612) and the Bavarian Archduke Albrecht V (1397–1439). They acquired pieces either through their royal cousins in Portugal, agents in Lisbon or goldsmiths who dealt in exotica. Amongst other works of significant Indian art featured is the most detailed Sikh group portrait ever to have appeared on the auction market, depicting Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his entire court in the fort at Lahore (estimate: £80,000-100,000), *detail illustrated right*.



## ANGLO INDIAN ART

Further paintings include **Anglo-Indian** works, which are being offered within the context of this sale for the first time. They provide an interesting visual record of India under British rule in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century by British and Company School artists. With estimates ranging from £5,000 to £50,000, works include two pages from the Impey albums; one depicting an Eastern Goshawk, by Bhawani Das, circa 1781 (estimate: £15,000-20,000) *illustrated right* and a Collared Dove by Shaikh Zayn-al-din (estimate: £12,000-18,000). These works will create considerable interest among collectors following the outstanding success of the Impey material at Christie's May 2008 sale of



*The Niall Hobhouse Collection*, including the depiction of a Great Indian Fruit Bat which sold for £168,500. Amongst the works from this distinctive genre is also a complete album of 101 ornithological illustrations of Indian birds and animals, a product of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Calcutta School (estimate: £20,000-30,000), which was probably assembled for one of the early British employees of the East India Company. Other examples include *Tollygunge, Calcutta* by Edward Lear (1812-1888) (estimate: £20,000 -30,000) and *Female Peasant of Ceylon*, by William Daniell, R.A.(1769-1837) (estimate: £30,000 - 50,000) *illustrated left*.



**Christie's South Kensington sale of Indian & Islamic Works of Art & Textiles on Monday, 6 October 2008 at 10.30am and 2.00pm**

**South Kensington** – Offering further delights, the *Indian & Islamic Works of Art & Textiles* sale on Monday 6 October 2008 will also feature 15th -17th century manuscripts, calligraphy and miniatures from the library of the late Djafar Ghazi. In addition, Christie's are pleased to offer several 18<sup>th</sup> century Rajasthani Stone Jalis from the Alan Mann Collection, including one pair with an estimate of £3,000-5,000 *illustrated below*, as well as Gandharan pieces, Ottoman works of art, arms and armour, and Indian paintings. With estimates from £500 to £15,000,



highlights range from a Kashmiri shawl, with saffron yellow ground, *circa* 1700 (estimate: £5,000-10,000) and a painting of a Nobleman and Consort, Jodhpur, *circa* 1750 (estimate: £2,000-3,000) to an Ottoman embroidered hanging, from early 18<sup>th</sup> century Turkey, *illustrated above right* (estimate: £10,000-15,000). Further key works include a Safavid blue-and-white Kalia, Iran, 17<sup>th</sup> century (estimate: £800-1,200) and a Qajar portrait of a Prince and Hawk, Iran, 19<sup>th</sup> century (estimate: £2,000-3,000). The sale as a whole is expected to realize in the region of £700,000.



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Images available on request

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**Notes to Editors:**

**Sale dates:**

**Christie's South Kensington**

- Monday, 6 October 2008 at 10.30am and 2.00pm: Indian & Islamic Works of Art & Textiles

**Christie's London**

- Tuesday, 7 October 2008 at 10.30am and 2.30pm: Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds

**Public Viewing dates**

**Christie's South Kensington**, 85 Old Brompton Road, South Kensington, London:

Between 2 and 5 October 2008

**Christie's London**, 8 King Street, St. James's, London SW1Y 6QT

Between 2 and 6 October 2008

**About Christie's**

Christie's is the world's leading art business with global art sales in 2007 that totalled £3.1 billion/\$6.3 billion. This marks the highest total in company and in art auction history. For the first half of 2008, art sales totalled £1.8 billion / \$3.5 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's conducted the greatest auctions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and today remains a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 600 sales annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$80 million. Christie's has 85 offices in 43 countries and 14 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Tel Aviv, Dubai, Hong Kong and Zurich. Most recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging and new markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.

\*Estimates do not include buyer's premium