

For Immediate Release

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TREASURE REVEALED

An Example of Earthly Paradise, The Greatest of Clive of India's Treasure to be Exhibited and Auctioned at Christie's in April



*The Clive of India Treasure – Magnificent Mughal Objects
Islamic Art, Christie's London – 27 April 2004*

London – A unique auction takes place at Christie's on 27 April 2004 when an extraordinarily splendid jewelled jade flask produced for the Mughal royal court in India in the 17th century will be offered for sale. Estimated to realize in excess of £1 million, it is the highlight of a rare collection of Mughal treasures bought back from India by Robert Clive of India (1725–1774).

This exquisite work of art is the largest Mughal inset flask ever offered at auction and is the most impressive of all the early objects collected by Lord Clive. The flask will be offered together with a selection of other pieces from the Clive collection – including a jewelled dagger, a flywhisk and a huqqa – creating an unprecedented opportunity.

The superb craftsmanship, quality and colour of the precious stones, and the astonishing condition, all combine to make the jewelled jade flask one of the most glorious of all Mughal jewelled artefacts to have survived to the present day. Painstakingly created by a craftsman working at the Mughal Court and standing just over 25cm high, the jade flask is intricately decorated in bands of emeralds and studded with ruby flowers, all set in gold.

The flask was once part of the Royal collection at the Imperial Court in Delhi and its form reflects its importance, combining the most extravagant materials and using workmanship of the highest sophistication. Such jewelled objects were the tangible demonstrations of wealth, power and importance of the Mughal Court and formed part of the magnificent display of the palace, so intricately recorded in miniatures of the time.

This flask probably formed part of the immense treasure removed from the court of the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah by Nadir Shah, the invading Persian monarch who famously looted the Mughal royal treasury in 1739. The only two other extant jewelled flasks, now part of the Hermitage Collection, are comparable in terms of rarity and splendour to the present example. They were part of the treasure taken by Nadir Shah who then subsequently sent a large number of richly decorated Mughal works to the Czar of Russia in St. Petersburg as threatening evidence of his military prowess. A further substantial part of this treasure was sent to the Ottoman court in Istanbul. Other parts of Nadir Shah's booty were dispersed along the return journey and it seems that Lord Clive was an unforeseen beneficiary of Nadir Shah's adventures.

The flask was possibly acquired by Clive following his victory at Plassey in June 1757 over Siraj-ud Daulah, Nawab of Bengal. As a reward for his help, the new Nawab, Mir Jaffir threw open the treasury and invited Clive to take what he wanted. There is no question that some artefacts in the Clive Collection were acquired at that time. In Parliament at a later enquiry into whether he had gained his fortune through questionable means, Clive exclaimed, "By god, Mr. Chairman, at this moment I stand astonished at my own moderation."

By 1760, this flask was the centrepiece of the extraordinary collection of 1st Baron Clive of Plassey, founder of British India. Clive remains one of the most enigmatic figures in the history of the British Empire – the son of a Shropshire squire, he became a soldier,

administrator, adventurer, and above all the man whose exploits ensured Britain's supremacy in India. By the age of 35, having risen through the East India Company, Clive had amassed a collection that epitomized the unimagined wealth of the superb decorative arts dating from a time when India had the richest treasury in the world.

As George III's representative in India, Clive was operating as ruler, and the acquisition of the superb objects from the Mughal courts was a natural progression during this period of British history. At the height of his career, he calculated his personal fortune at £401,102.

Jewelled objects, such as the huqqa, dagger and flywhisk, were important status symbols of wealth amongst the upper echelons of Indian society. Paintings from the Mughal period often depict Indian royalty with jewelled daggers in their waist sashes and smoking huqqas, with their servants holding flywhisks. All these works of art from Clive of India's treasure would have served to reinforce the prominent position in the eyes of Indian society of this extraordinary soldier, adventurer and entrepreneur.

Offered from the Collection is a particularly beautiful huqqa which is decorated with innumerable sapphires set off by a rich royal blue enamel ground (estimate: £50,000–80,000). The historical dating on the jewelled huqqa base and the colouring of the enamel that make them attributable to Lucknow, indicate that it was probably bought and possibly specifically commissioned by Clive.

Further bejewelled treasures from the Collection include a delicately carved dagger and unusual flywhisk. Dating to the reigns of the great Mughal Emperors Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, the pistol-grip dagger (estimate: £35,000–50,000) is decorated with elegant floral sprays with workmanship that points to the 17th century.

The flywhisk (estimate: £5,000–8,000) is made from banded agate and inset with rubies and would have originally been fitted with long horse or yak hair to enable servants to ward off flies from their masters during hot Indian days. Also carved from hardstone is a pale green nephrite jade bowl (estimate: £8,000–10,000).

Notes to Editors:

Christie's Exhibition Details

14-19 February – St. Moritz

20-24 March – New York

3, 5-7 April – Paris

22-26 April – King Street, London

Related Events:

By extraordinary coincidence, the two related flasks that are part of the collection of The State Hermitage Museum in Russia will be on loan to the exhibition ***Heaven on Earth: Art from Islamic Lands*** at the Hermitage Rooms, Somerset House, London, from 25 March to 22 August 2004.

This small but dazzling show of art from Islamic lands will be the most significant exhibition of its kind to be held in London since the *Festival of Islam* at the Hayward Gallery in 1976. *Heaven on Earth: Art from Islamic Lands* will draw on the collection of Hermitage in St Petersburg and the Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, London, both of which will be lending more than 60 works. The exhibition will show how the fine and decorative arts of Islam - illuminated copies of the Qur'an, paintings, textiles, jewels, metalwork and ceramics - were used to glorify both God and human rulers. The exhibits will range in date from the early medieval period to the 19th century and cover an area stretching from Spain and the Arab world to Persia and the Indian subcontinent.

Tickets are available in advance from First Call on 0870 906 3704 (24 hours), Booking fees apply.

Heaven on Earth: Art from Islamic Lands is generously supported by the Edmond J. Safra Philanthropic Foundation, Professor & Mrs Nasser D Khalili, Alex and Ella Krasner, Mr Tarek Juffali, NetJets, Dr and Mrs Mortimer Sackler, The Deborah Loeb Brice Foundation, Steven and Elena Heinz, The Suliman S. Olayan Foundation, Rashed Abdulrahman Alrashed & Sons, SABIC, and others who wish to remain anonymous.

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Images available on request

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