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6 March 2006

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RARE WOODEN BEAMS RAISE THE ROOF AT CHRISTIE'S

Islamic Art and Manuscripts

Christie's King Street, 4 April 2006

Oriental Rugs and Carpets

Christies King Street, 6 April 2006

London – Five important and rare original wooden beams from the former Great Mosque of Cordoba will be offered in the *Islamic Art and Manuscripts* sale to be held at Christie's London on 4 April 2006. In addition, the sale will include a fabulous array of works of art, manuscripts, Islamic pottery and metal from the 8th century through to the 20th century. The sale of *Oriental Rugs and Carpets* two days later on 6 April 2006 is led by a magnificent Persian royal throne room carpet from the 19th century.

A highlight of the sale is five rare Umayyad Andalusian wooden beams from Spain's former Great Mosque of Cordoba, 10th century (estimate: between £100,000-150,000 and £200,000-300,000). Each beam is just under 6 metres in length, having at some point been sawn in half longitudinally. On each beam, three out of the four sides have decorated surfaces including trefoil and diamond designs. Considering the age of the wooden beams, their condition is remarkably well preserved. Two in particular retain the original polychrome decoration from the late 10th century, unlike the beams that remain in the building in Cordoba which were all restored in the first quarter of the 20th century.

The impressive interior of the building that we know today was completed during the 10th century, with nineteen aisles and thirty-six bays. A wooden roof was also added, comprising of larch beams spanning the aisles every 80cm. In the 13th century, following the capture of Cordoba by Ferdinand III in 1236, the mosque was consecrated and became the city's cathedral. By the early 18th century, much of the original wooden roof was in such a poor state of repair that most of it was replaced by a new vaulted roof. However, it was not until 1928 that much attention was paid to the remains of the original roof and wooden panels below, when a detailed study was undertaken of the pieces that remained. While a considerable number of panels remained, there were few beams, many being only fragments, and most of these were damaged.

Another exquisite work in this sale is a magnificent and extraordinary large 14th century Qur'an from Mongol China. One of the most important Qur'ans ever to appear at auction, it is a unique survival from the period of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty, dated AH 737/1337 AD. Each *basmallah* at the start of each *sura* (chapter) is

written in a different way, in increasingly inventive and powerful scripts (estimate: £200,000-300,000). An early 19th century Ottoman embroidered silk curtain which includes the tughra of Sultan Mahmud II is also offered. Created to cover the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the mosque at Al-Madina, this richly embroidered covering was designed by the Sultan who was also a calligrapher (estimate: £40,000-60,000).

The earliest Iznik dish to be offered on the market for at least 100 years, datable to 1480-90, will also be included in the sale (estimate: £120,000-180,000). One of less than 10 surviving vessels from the earliest period of Iznik pottery, this magnificent example with cobalt blue on white decoration shows the fully mature style created by Iznik potters in the last decades of the 15th century. It reflects the growing taste for Chinese blue and white porcelain that was to become highly prized in the Islamic world. A strikingly beautiful work of art, both in design and in colouring, it challenges previously held assumptions about the early developments of the Iznik style. This dish was only recently discovered in a house in Europe, where it had been used as a fruit dish for years, its importance unrecognised. A tile panel which was probably made for the Darwish Pasha Mosque in Damascus dating from the 1570s (estimate: £50,000-70,000) also features. This arched mihrab design has candlesticks and footprints below the mosque lamp, while either side of the panel are columns decorated with painted marbling. A close examination of this reveals it to be inhabited by a wide variety of fish, birds and rabbits.

A superb cross-section of nearly 300 Oriental carpets and rugs will be included in the two-session sale of *Oriental Rugs and Carpets* on 6 April 2006. One of the highlights is a magnificent signed Kirman carpet, which is in remarkable condition (estimate: £25,000-35,000). The inscription makes clear that it was made specifically for the throne room in the Palace of the Qajar Monarch, Nasir Al-Din Shah. Woven in Kirman in 1869-70, the design was the height of fashion at the time and woven on a massive scale.

A group of three rare 17th century Polonaise silk and metal-thread rugs from Isfahan, Persia are also included in the sale. One of these rugs has been stamped on the back with the date 12 September 1683, which was the start of the Battle of Vienna when the Turks tried, but failed to lay siege to the city (estimate: £25,000-35,000). The sale also includes an early 20th century Turkish carpet which has been inspired by the Polonaise design (estimate: £40,000-60,000).

Two wonderful large silk Heriz carpets dating from the second half of the 19th century (estimates: £30,000-50,000 and £70,000-100,000) are also offered. Their soft colouring and delicate designs sit well in today's interiors. The sale also includes an interesting 17th century Khorassan kelleh, of panel and tree design, formerly in the Barbieri collection (estimate: £60,000-80,000), a rare 18th century Caucasian silk embroidered prayer rug (estimate: £17,000-22,000), and a strong group of other Caucasian rugs including a powerful Kazak rug in excellent condition (estimate £20,000-30,000).

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Images available on request

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