

For Immediate Release

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THE MICHEL WITTOCK COLLECTION

Fine and important Renaissance bookbindings from the libraries of Monarchs, Popes, Diplomats and Scholars

London – Christie's is delighted to offer 118 books from Michel Wittock's outstanding collection of bookbindings in London on 7 July 2004. The Wittock Collection is one of the largest of its kind in private hands and the forthcoming auction – part I of a three-part series – will be the most significant offering of fine bookbindings for half a century.

Previously exhibited at the Bibliotheca Wittockiana, Brussels, which was founded by Michel Wittock in 1983, this selection is principally composed of French and Italian Renaissance bookbindings, which provide an overview of the evolution of the bookbinder's art and the changing taste of patrons during the period. The remarkable provenances of these volumes – which include works from the libraries of Marie de Médicis, Giovanni Battista Grimaldi, Duke Albrecht von Sachsen-Teschen, Jacques-Auguste de Thou, Jean Grolier, and Johann Jakob Fugger – make these books even more desirable. Michel Wittock's decision to part with the earlier section of his bookbinding collection has been taken in order to create an endowment fund that will ensure the future of the library and its retained collections.

Michel Wittock has been particular attracted by books bound for Jacques-Auguste de Thou (1553-1617); one of the most beautiful of these is a binding of "Turkish" light brown morocco, stencilled in colour, on the rare first edition of the Commentarios of Alfonso d'Albuquerque, the founder of the Portuguese empire in India (estimate: £60,000-80,000).

Two "Apollo and Pegasus" bindings executed for Giovanni Battista Grimaldi are included in the sale – Alamanni's Opere toscane (estimate: £60,000-80,000), in red goatskin like all

the books in Italian, and Seneca's Tragoediae septem (estimate: £60,000–80,000), in olive green, the colour for classical works. The identity of Grimaldi, a rich young Genoese and the scion of a family of bankers that had prospered from loans to the Pope and the Emperor, was only determined in 1975 by A.R.A. Hobson. His books can be recognised by the distinctive "Apollo and Pegasus" device designed for him by his tutor the philosopher and poet Claudio Tolomei, who advised him on the formation of his library.

There are no less than six books bound for Jean Grolier, the most celebrated of Renaissance bibliophiles in the sale—the largest number to have been offered at one auction since the Abbey sale of 1969. They range in date from a book bound before Grolier placed his famous Jo. Grolierii et amicorum ownership formula on the covers, to the 1550s, when the first edition of Marcus Vigerius, Decachordum Christianum with a Parisian binding, was bound by the "Cupid's Bow Binder" for Grolier (estimate: £25,000–35,000).

The top lot of the sale is an outstanding example of the very small number of Parisian High Renaissance bindings with architectural decoration. The style appears to have been introduced to France by Jean Grolier. On offer is a Latin issue of the first edition of Jacques Gohory's Hystoria Iasonis Thessaliae (estimate: £100,000–150,000). The elaborate binding of the Wittock Gohory incorporates architectural and neo-classical motifs, and was executed by a Parisian atelier in circa 1563.

Further important books bound for distinguished figures include a copy of Dio Cassius' Romanarum historiarum libri bound for Joann Jakob Fugger, a member of the Augsburg banking dynasty and head of the bank. He was known as the richest and most learned man in Germany and collected Greek, Hebrew and Latin manuscripts and printed books on a princely scale, which he had bound at Venice by one shop known as the "Fugger Binder".

The French eighteenth-century books are to be sold in Paris later this year, but a few volumes of particular importance figure in the London sale: Pietro Santi Bartoli's Peintures antiques, 1757, one of only 30 copies printed, is bound in red morocco by the workshop of Antoine-Michel Padeloup, "relieur du Roi". The Wittock copy was previously in the collection of King George III's Prime Minister John Stuart, the 3rd Earl of Bute, a noted collector and patron of the arts (estimate: £20,000–30,000). Other later bindings include Dante Alighieri's La Divina Commedia, 1809, bound by Georg Friedrich Krauss for Duke Albrecht von Sachsen-Teschen, founder of the Alberina in Vienna. The edition was limited to 72 copies, of which this is No. V of eight copies printed on light-blue paper (estimate: £20,000–30,000).

Michel Wittock Collection Part II, French 17th and 18th Century bindings, Christie's Paris, 9th of November 2004 and Michel Wittock Collection III, Important Renaissance book bindings, Christie's Paris, 2005.

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