

For Immediate Release
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Contact: Matthew Paton

020 7389 2965

mpaton@christies.com

A NEW DISCOVERY - CAPTAIN COOK'S BOOMERANG LEADS CHRISTIE'S AUCTION OF *EXPLORATION AND TRAVEL* IN SEPTEMBER

Exploration and Travel
Thursday 25 September 2008



London – A previously unrecorded boomerang (estimate £40,000-£60,000) and two clubs (estimate £20,000-£30,000) from New Holland, Australia, likely to have been collected by Captain Cook on his first voyage in 1770, will be offered at the auction of *Exploration and Travel* at Christie's on 25 September.

Captain Cook was the first European to make contact with and survey the eastern coastline of Australia in April-August 1770 and hitherto just six aboriginal artefacts from Cook's collection (three fish spears, a lance or javelin, a spear shaft and a shield) have been traced to this first contact. While Cook

and his crew made large collections of such artefacts on his three voyages, trading with the various island populations through the Pacific, the real paucity of material which can be associated with Australia seems due to the perceived timidity of the aboriginals, as remarked on by Joseph Banks: *'they were a very pusillanimous people we had reason to suppose from every part of their conduct in every place where we were except Sting Rays [Botany Bay], and there the only instance of the two people who opposed the landing of our two boats full of men for near a quarter of an hour and were not to be drove away till several times wounded with small shot.... Everywhere else they behaved alike, shunning us and giving up any part of the country which we landed upon at once.'*

What appears to be one of the first descriptions of the boomerang of New Holland was given by Banks in his Endeavour journal, following a rare close encounter with the aboriginals at Botany Bay on 29 April 1770: *'they came down to the beach and invited our people to land by many signs and words ... all ... were armed with long pikes and a wooden weapon made something like a short scymetar. During this time a few of the Indians who had not followed the boat remained on the rocks opposite the ship, threatening and menacing with their pikes and swords - two in particular who were painted with white ... Each of these held in his hand a wooden weapon about 2.1/2 feet long, in shape*

much resembling a scymeter. ... These two seemd to talk earnestly together, at times brandishing their crooked weapons at us as in token of defiance.'

The boomerang, which would subsequently become such an icon of aboriginal Australia, was 'a wooden weapon' whose function and purpose was not understood by Cook and his crew. There are no descriptions of its use in the voyage journals and it would only be in the early years of settlement in the early 19th century that it came to be observed and more fully understood.

Previously unrecorded and unpublished, the boomerang and two clubs to be offered at Christie's were previously in the possession of Captain Cook's widow, Elizabeth, and have descended from her executor and residuary beneficiary John Leach Bennett to the present owner. The boomerang and clubs come from the same collection, all similarly descending from Cook's widow, as the Society Islands basalt pounder, sold in these rooms, 1 December 1993, lot 213, thought to have been a gift to Cook on the second voyage (which will be included by Dr Adrienne Kaeppler in the 2009 Cook-voyage exhibition in Bonn), the silver salver bearing Cook's coat-of-arms, and the Hodges watercolour of Matavai Bay offered in these rooms last year (Christie's, 26 September 2007, lots 12 and 13).

These rare artefacts with claims to be from the first contact between Europeans and the aboriginal population of south eastern New Holland are highlights of the *Exploration and Travel* sale in London on 25 September 2008. The sale will include art, literature and artefacts ranging from Captain Cook's first voyage to Scott's last expedition and the conquest of Everest. Further important Australiana in the sale include a rare goldfields subject by John Skinner Prout, painted following the discovery of gold in Australia in 1851, and a collection of mesmerising watercolours of butterflies, moths and birds of paradise of New Guinea by the Australian artist and flower hunter Marian Ellis Rowan.

Relics associated with Captain Cook are highly sought after by international collectors and institutions. *A pocket hammer carried by Captain Cook* sold for £71,700 (estimate £20,000-30,000), Christie's, 23 September 2004, *Captain Cook's Antimony Cup* sold for £220,800 (estimate of £40,000-£60,000), Christie's 21 September 2005, and *A George III silver salver engraved with the coat-of-arms of Captain James Cook, RN, FRS* (from the same collection as the present boomerang and clubs) sold for £72,500 (estimate £60,000-80,000), 26 September 2007.

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Images available on request
Visit Christie's on the web at www.christies.com

- The auction will be on public view from 21 September to 24 September 2008 at Christie's, 8 King Street, St. James's, London SW1Y 6QT. See www.christies.com for further details.

- Nicholas Lambourn, specialist in charge of the *Exploration and Travel* sale, will be visiting Sydney and Melbourne 3-5 September. For catalogues and further information please contact:

Ronan Sulich, Christie's Sydney (02) 9326 1422
Patricia Kontos, Christie's Melbourne (03) 9820 4311

rsulich@christies.com
pkontos@christies.com

About Christie's

Christie's is the world's leading art business with global art sales in 2007 that totaled £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 totaled £1.8 million / \$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.