

For Immediate Release
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**CHRISTIE'S TO SELL ONE OF THE GREATEST COLLECTIONS OF
ENGLISH HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS EVER ASSEMBLED**

The Harry and Brigitte Spiro Collection of English Historical Documents and Letters
3 December

London – Christie's is delighted to announce the sale of The Spiro Collection of English Historical Documents and Letters on 3 December. The collection of Harry and Brigitte Spiro is one of the greatest collections of historical English documents and letters ever assembled, spanning nearly 1000 years of history, and features a dazzling cast, from Richard the Lionheart to Sir Winston Churchill, and encompasses momentous events including Henry VIII's divorce, the nine days' reign of Lady Jane Grey, the Jacobite campaigns and World War II. Two of the most exciting historical moments are unveiled in a dramatic fashion in an impassioned letter from Elizabeth I expressing her outrage at the imprisonment of Mary Queen of Scots (estimate: £60,000-90,000) and a document by Henry VIII relating to his plans to divorce Catherine of Aragon (estimate: £15,000-20,000). The sale will include approximately 160 lots and is estimated to fetch in the region of £2,000,000.

“The Spiro Collection carries in itself part of the history of England, and the whole panorama is there,” says Tom Lamb, head of the London Book Department. “Many of the documents focus on important episodes in the reigns of the Kings and Queens of England, but the collection's attraction also lies in the fact that it chronicles personal and mundane matters too, often revealing fascinating new insights into the lives and personalities of the authors.”

Elizabeth I

A highly important group of correspondence relating to Queen Elizabeth I begins with a passport for Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, the Queen's ambassador, to go to the court of Mary Queen of Scots and prevent or delay her hasty marriage to Lord Darnley (estimate: £20,000–25,000). After Mary was imprisoned by the Scots, Elizabeth sent an impassioned letter expressing her outrage at the treatment of Mary, dated 27 July 1567 (estimate: £60,000–90,000). Although the Queen strongly disapproved of Mary's marriage, she was profoundly shocked at the attack on Mary's legitimacy in her own kingdom, and sent Throckmorton to seek to establish peace between Queen Mary and her Lords and to secure her liberation. Elizabeth's interventions proved futile and after dramatic events the following summer Mary escaped and fled to the border, seeking Elizabeth's assistance.

A further letter, dated 4 September 1572, also relates to Elizabeth's problem with Mary (estimate: £20,000–25,000). The letter is from Elizabeth I to the Earl of Mar (Regent of Scotland) to announce that she is sending her ambassador, Henry Killigrew to speak with the French ambassador in Scotland. Catholic supporters of the incarcerated Mary Queen of Scots, who were holding Edinburgh Castle, appeared likely to provide a possible base for French interference in Scotland, and Elizabeth began to contemplate a far more drastic solution to the problem. Killigrew's true purpose was to persuade the Earls of Mar and Morton that Mary (then imprisoned at Sheffield) should be handed over to the Scots, the most likely consequence being that they would execute her. Killigrew was summoned to a private audience with the Queen and ordered not to divulge her part in this plan.

One of the most dramatic lots in the collection is a document issued by Elizabeth's half-sister and predecessor, Mary I, during the crisis with which her reign opened. In the letter she issues a call to arms against John Dudley 'calling now himself Duke of Northumberland', denounces the sleight of succession by which he had 'most trayterouslie proclaymed one Ladye Jane daughter to the Duke of Suffolk for quene of Our said Realme which he hath married to one Guildford his sonne', and denies the rumours (the 'brute & false surmyses') that she herself has fled the country (estimate: £15,000–20,000).

A rare personal letter from Queen Elizabeth I reveals a gentler side as she writes to one of her ladies-in-waiting, Elizabeth Southwell, comforting her on the death of her husband: 'Good Bess ... we could not but be very sorry at the dolefull woord brought us of the decease of your late husband' (estimate: £15,000–20,000).

Among the wealth of Elizabeth's letters in the collection, perhaps the jewel is a letter to a fellow monarch, Henri de Navarre [later Henri IV of France]. Henri's status demands that

Elizabeth write to him in her own hand, and the document reveals a shock; Elizabeth's signature, painstakingly copied from the style of her writing master, Roger Ascham, is one of the most beautiful and sought-after in the field of autograph collecting. Her cursive handwriting, by contrast, is dreadful (estimate: £30,000-40,000).

A fine signature on an important document relating to Henry VIII's plans to divorce Catherine of Aragon is a further highlight (estimate: £15,000-20,000). The letter was written to Cardinal Benedetto de Accoltis, Bishop of Ravenna, on 16 January 1529, appointing Sir Thomas Boleyn, the father of his mistress, Anne Boleyn, to negotiate the divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. Anne Boleyn went on to become Henry's second wife but was later beheaded.

Other gems in the collection include James II, writing exuberantly in May 1692 of his hopes of returning in triumph to England with a French fleet, backed by French troops, blithe in his ignorance that on the previous day the same French fleet had been destroyed in the Battle of La Hogue (estimate: £1,400-1,800). In another notable lot, Henry VII fusses about the covers for his new bed: 'delyver ... asmoche grene bukram or blewe as will sufficiently suffice to lye between the Seler tester and counterpoynt [counterpane] of Oure bedde ... Also three quishions of blewe velvet' (estimate: £3,000-4,000).

Harry and Brigitte Spiro began collecting important English historical documents and letters in the late 1970s, a time when the field was little known and under appreciated. During the following decade purchases were made, along certain strict guidelines. The manuscripts were if possible to illustrate some notable event in the subject's life or cast light on a revealing aspect of character and good condition was obligatory. Other serious collectors entered the field in the 1990s and prices began to rise steadily; eventually Harry and Brigitte left the field and closed their collection. By the time Harry Spiro died in 2001 thoughts had turned to its dispersal and, once again, new collectors in the field will have the opportunity to acquire some of their treasures.

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Images available on request

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