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ART OF THE ISLAMIC AND INDIAN WORLDS INCLUDING THE SIMON DIGBY COLLECTION AT CHRISTIE'S LONDON IN APRIL



London – 2010 marked a record year for the category of *Islamic Art* at Christie's London, with sales totalling in excess of £30million/\$45million/ €34million and a new world auction record for any Islamic work of art established when a 17th century Kirman 'vase' carpet fetched £6.2 million, at Christie's in April. The auction of **Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds** on Thursday 7 April 2011 will continue to meet the hunger of this market for beautiful works of quality and rarity with over 400 richly decorated lots spanning a wide range of geographical areas, materials and time. Leading the sale is a highly important Fatimid bronze gazelle, dating to the late 10th or first half of the 11th century, Egypt (estimate: £800,000-1million), *illustrated above*, and a 16th century gold and turquoise-hilted knife, which is an exquisite example of jewelled metalwork from the golden period of Ottoman art (estimate: £400,000-600,000) *illustrated above*.

Among the many works offered with important provenance, the sale includes property from two private collections: the Estate of the Late Simon Digby, connoisseur, collector, scholar and linguist and that of Max Palevsky, an American innovator and forerunner in computers and systems technology. Other media featured includes Qur'ans and manuscripts, furniture, ceramics, metalwork, arms and armour, textiles, jewellery and miniatures, with estimates ranging from £1,000 to £1million. This sale is preceded by the auction of *Oriental and European Rugs & Carpets including Turkmen Weavings from the Collection of Erik Risman* on Tuesday 5 April, and is followed by Christie's South Kensington's sale of *Art and Textiles of the Islamic and Indian Worlds* on Friday 8 April.



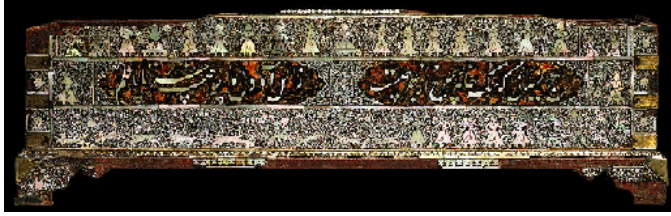
This gazelle is a very precisely observed and executed animal, both in its stance and physical attributes (estimate: £800,000-1,000,000). Of charming proportions, it measures 7.3/4in. (19.5cm.) high; 5.7/8in. (15cm.) long. Gazelles, along with antelopes, are also found in Fatimid lustre pottery, exemplified by a dish in the Islamic Art Museum in Cairo. This lot, like the impressive signed deer in the Völkerunde Museum in Munich, has openings under the belly which may indicate use as a fountainhead, in a similar way to the magnificent 10th century bronze hind sold at Christie's in 1997, which is now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar. A smaller Fatimid work of note is a carved rock crystal bottle dating to the second half of the 10th century (estimate: £200,000-300,000).

On the market for the first time in over 20 years, is an important Ilkhanid or golden horde engraved silver bowl from central Asia or Iran, in the second half of the 14th century, which is a further top lot of the sale (estimate: £400,000-600,000). This large silver bowl is very rare as little silver, unlike inlaid bronzes, has survived from the mediaeval period because it was easy to melt down and recycle into vessels of more fashionable forms or, more frequently, to provide much needed funds for impoverished rulers. Most known examples are small portable items, discovered in archaeological digs. It is unlikely that this bowl was buried due to the preserved surface, which boasts confident strong lines. Only one item in the Hermitage shares this strength of engraving, a massive 70cm. diameter tinned copper tray, formerly in the collection of Count Alexis Bobrinsky.



The exquisite knife, *illustrated page 1*, is made in a technique, called Firuzekari, that was only used for a very small number of items all of which have royal provenance (estimate: £400,000-600,000). Dagger and knife hilts are known in a variety of hardstones, using a solid piece which is then engraved and inlaid with gold. However, top quality turquoise – which was believed to protect against the evil eye and to fight against infection – was not available in such quantities and so smaller pieces of turquoise were set into the interstices, giving the appearance of a solid ground. The decoration on this hilt is the only jeweled object worked in this technique that includes any figural element in the design, in this case flying birds. Among the many other captivating Ottoman works is a very large and masterfully painted Iznik pottery tile, *circa* 1570 (estimate: £80,000-120,000); a striking 17th century voided silk and silver thread velvet panel (estimate: £50,000-70,000) and a delightfully naive mid-19th century copy of a book on divination, the *Fa'ida Ramz-e Jafr* (estimate: £3,000-4,000).

The proceeds of the 50 lots to be offered from the **Estate of the Late Simon Digby** (1932-2010), sold by order of the executors, will go to the Simon Digby Memorial Scholarship Fund. Born at Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, Digby was the son of Indian High Court judge Kenelm George Digby and Violet M. Kidd, a talented painter. A regular reviewer in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* and *The Times Literary Supplement*, he was held in enormously high regard and affection by scholars in Britain, America and India. Buying both in India and the West, Digby built up an enormous collection, largely comprising Indian metalwork. *For full biographical information on Simon Digby please contact the press office.*



In addition to many beautiful metal ewers, key lots from the collection include a rectangular Gujarati mother-of-pearl wooden pen box from North West India in the late 16th/early 17th century (estimate: £100,000-150,000). The surfaces are decorated with courtly figures, hunting animals, birds, and two architectural pavilions, against a background of very fine scrolling floral arabesques. Gujarat was first mentioned as the centre of mother-of-pearl work in 1502, when the King of Melinde, on the East Coast of Africa, presented Vasco de Gama with a bedstead of Cambay with gold and mother of pearl. In some instances these luxury items were made for Indian patrons, but they seem to have been created predominantly for the European, Near Eastern and Turkish export markets. The fragile nature of the medium has meant that only around 30 recorded examples survive, now almost entirely in museums.

Beyond the Digby collection, other fascinating Indian works include an important early printed cotton robe, from the 12th - 14th century (estimate: £100,000-150,000); a previously unpublished portrait of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, by one of his top court artists, Balchand, dating from around 1620 (estimate: £50,000-70,000) and two mid-19th century calligraphic compositions, one by and the other attributed to Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal Emperor (estimated to realise £3,000-5,000 and £2,000-3,000 respectively).

Art and Textiles of the Islamic and Indian Worlds ~ South Kensington ~ 8 April:

This is Christie's strongest South Kensington sale of ***Art and Textiles of the Islamic and Indian Worlds*** to date. Featuring three private collections, over 500 lots will be offered with estimates ranging from £500 to £8,000. The sale is expected to realise in excess of £800,000.

37 further works from the **Collection of the Late Simon Digby** are led by a fine 14th / 15th century Nepalese gilt-bronze Buddha (estimate: £6,000-8,000) and a very rare steel, brass and copper huqqa base in the shape of a yak's horn (estimate: £3,000-5,000). Following the success of the **Dr. Mohammed Said Farsi Collection** in 2010, 50 final Islamic lots will be offered including a



complete early 13th century Syrian Raqqa lustre pottery bowl, (estimate: £1,500-2,000). The third private collection is that of **J.D. (Dick) van Oenen**, which presents Gandhara schist sculptures, such as a head of a Bodhisattva (estimate: £3,000-5,000) and a benedictory frieze with Bodhisattva Maitreya (estimate: £3,000-5,000), *illustrated left*.

Elsewhere in the sale, a strong section of arms and armour lots from the Indian, Persian and Ottoman worlds features an elegant Persian gilt-brass dagger, *circa* 1800 (estimate: £2,000-4,000) and a large Ottoman silver-repousse *jambiyya* (estimate: £1,200-1,800). Manuscripts spanning nine centuries include a number of important scientific works as well as Qur'ans, other works on religion, poetry, and language, with a section from possibly the earliest recorded copy of Ibn Butlan's *Taqwim al-Sihha*- an important abbasid medical synopsis on hygiene and dietetics - written on beautiful 11th century paper (estimate: £5,000-7,000).

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