London – An abundance of riches from the Islamic and Indian worlds will transform Christie’s two London salerooms during Islamic Art Week from 8-11 April. The sale on 8 April 2014 of Oriental Rugs & Carpets will feature property from a number of exceptional private collections from around the world, including rare 16th century weavings from Egypt, Damascus and Ottoman Turkey. On 10 April the sale of Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds including a Private Collection Donated to Benefit the University of Oxford, Part V at King Street will cover works of art from across the Islamic world, notably Turkey, Iran and India. At South Kensington Arts & Textiles of the Islamic & Indian Worlds on 11 April will also offer a diverse array of works from across the spectrum of the category.
In the carefully curated sale of 145 Oriental Rugs & Carpets one of the highlights is the 26 lots from the collection of the late Peter Lehmann-Bärenklau, a discreet Hamburg-based collector who had fastidiously crafted an extraordinary collection of important early weavings throughout his life, the majority of which he kept hidden in an upstairs cupboard. The 16th century Mamluk and Cairene carpets in the Lehmann-Bärenklau collection are examples of rare court weaving and perfectly illustrate the transformation of weaving in Egypt in the early 16th century after the Ottoman invasion of 1517. The carpets of Mamluk Egypt are the oldest and most magnificent group of carpets to have survived to the present day. Their designs characterised by a complex, almost kaleidoscopic, geometry created by the juxtaposition of colour and form. After the fall of the Mamluk dynasty in 1517, Cairo’s carpet workshops had to adapt to accommodate the taste of the new Ottoman regime and began to combine Turkish design aesthetics with the materials and techniques of Mamluk carpet production. This can clearly be seen in these two carpets, both share a similar colour palette of greens and reds and the same soft, silky wool, but the designs are very different. The intricate, geometric designs of the Mamluk carpets were rejected in favour of curvilinear drawing and naturalistic floral forms and sickle leaves forming a happy marriage of two artistic traditions and creating some of the most elegant carpets that survive today. The Cairene carpet is estimated at £150,000-200,000 (lot 22 - $250,000-330,000) and the Mamluk is estimated at £250,000-350,000 (lot 20 - $420,000-580,000).

From a private Florentine collection is a very rare light blue ‘Star’ Ushak carpet dating to the late 16th century. The light blue colouring of the field and fabulous condition are very unusual and with the exception of a fragment in the Vakiflar Museum, Istanbul, we know of no other examples. Star Ushak carpets seem to have been a favoured design of King Henry VIII (r. 1509-1547) who is depicted standing on top of a Star Ushak in at least three paintings by Hans Holbein and Hans Eworth, a testament to the prestige that has aided their survival, albeit in very small numbers in this condition. The estimate is £70,000-100,000 (lot 50 - $120,000-170,000).

The Rothschild Arabesque Kirman ‘Vase’ carpet was woven in South East Persia in the late 17th century. It remained in the collection of the Rothschild family for over four generations until 1975 when it was bought by the current owner. It is probably as a result of its long uninterrupted ownership by one family that it has remained complete and in such good condition with excellent colouring, (lot 84 - estimate: £80,000-120,000 / $140,000-200,000).

Among the 15 rugs from the collection of the late Charles Damiano is a beautiful late 16th century variant medallion Ushak carpet. In this example, the length allows for one complete medallion enclosed with scrolling arabesques. Woven in West Anatolia, it is estimated at £40,000-60,000 (lot 96 - $67,000-100,000).

Another highlight from the Damiano collection is an important Tekke Bird Asmalyk, a wedding camel cover from West Turkmenistan, circa 1800. These unusual decorative weavings were created by a bride as a demonstration of her skill as a weaver to adorn the camel she would ride to her marriage upon. They were woven in pairs and draped over each side of the camel and this example is a rare survivor outside of museum collections (lot 90 - estimate: £20,000-30,000 / $34,000-50,000).

Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds including a Private Collection Donated to Benefit the University of Oxford, Part V – King Street, 10 April

The sale of Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds features the fifth and final installment of A Private Collection Donated to Benefit the University of Oxford, the highlight of which is a lavishly decorated Timurid copy of the Khamsa of Khwaja
Kirmani. It was copied for Sultan Muhammad (d. 1451) the son of the famous Timurid ruler, Baysunghur who was a noted bibliophile. This is the only manuscript that can be definitively associated with Sultan Muhammad. Interestingly, the manuscript has some part-worked paintings, and some completed in around 1700, which demonstrate the process of manuscript production in mid-15th century Iran. Two of the paintings are fully worked including the lyrical one which features on the front cover on the catalogue which depicts a young prince Noruz who falls asleep beneath a tree and dreams of two green parrots. The manuscript is estimated at £80,000-120,000 (lot 5 - $140,000-200,000).

The main sale features other manuscripts made for rulers from across the Islamic world. One example is a splendid Qu’ran section lavishly produced in 30 parts for the Zangid Prince Qutb al-Din Abu’l Muzaffar Muhammad who ruled over Sinjar, Khabur and Nusaybin in Northern Mesopotamia from 1198 to 1219 which is estimated at £30,000-50,000 (lot 48 - $51,000-83,000). Another rare feature of this Qur’an is the use of the decorative thuluth script in which the entire text is copied. Thuluth is typically only used in the writing of chapter headings. With extensive illumination in gold and lapis blue, one of the most expensive pigments available, it illustrates how Qur’an decoration was to evolve into the celebrated manuscript production under the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria. Other important manuscripts include a Qur’an for the Qajar ruler, Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar in the year of his coronation (lot 110 - £15,000-25,000) and a Diwan of Kamal Khojandi copied for the library of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror in around 1460 (lot 184 – lot £12,000-18,000).

From the Iranian world the sale features a group of Safavid and Qajar penboxes collected by Sir Walter Townley, a British diplomat who was posted to Iran between 1912-14. They first appeared on the market when they were sold at auction in 1921. The group is highlighted by an important Safavid example, dated to the third quarter of the 17th century and attributed to the artist Shaykh ʿAbbasi estimated at £20,000-30,000 (lot 98 - $34,000-50,000). From the Safavid Iranian world, another highlight is a group of early 16th century Safavid jewellery, including a bracelet, earrings, pendants and five rings. They have a combined estimate of £120,000-180,000 (lot 70 - $210,000-300,000). Safavid jewellery is very rare. The group presented here is typified by extremely finely worked niello arabesques and inset turquoise and rubies, features which are found on the few precious metal items that survive from the period. That jewellery was worn and appreciated both Safavid men and women is well known and documented. Sir John Chardin, a 17th century Huguenot traveller, wrote that you would typically see Persians ‘with fifteen or sixteen rings upon their fingers, five or six upon one finger only’.

Staying with jewellery but moving to the Mughal courts of India is a high quality jade pendant (haldili) elegantly inscribed with verses from the Qur’an. It is dated AH 1006/1597-98 AD – making it the earliest known Mughal jade. At this moment in the late 16th century the Emperor Akbar was still the head of the Mughal Empire but his young son – Prince Salim (later the Emperor Jahangir) – was beginning to make his play for power. Although there are very few extant Mughal jades that can be plausibly attributed to the period of Akbar’s reign, the existence of such works may be inferred through the visit to the Imperial court in 1563 of a Central Asian jade merchant Khwaja Mu’in who was the overseer at the main jade-bearing river in Kashgar (lot 130 - £15,000-20,000$26,000-33,000).

A folio from an important Mughal album made for the Emperor Shah Jahan in around 1620 is a fine example of its type. The refined quality of the marginal decoration demonstrates the Mughal rulers love of the natural world which here shows, in the detailed and delicate flowers. The European herbaria or gardens of the early 17th century that were bought into the Mughal court by Jesuit missionaries provided ample inspiration. The folio is signed Mir ‘Ali al-Katib Mir who is amongst the most important nasta’liq calligraphers. It is estimated at £30,000-50,000 (lot 146 - $51,000-83,000).

A strong section of Ottoman Turkish art is highlighted by a rare, early Iznik pottery bowl dating from around 1510. The white interior is decorated in two shades of blue with a central roundel filled with elegant rumi arabesques with a design of Cyprus trees swaying branches beneath a rim of cartouches. It is an extremely rare and intact survival from
this early period of Iznik production, and might well be the first appearance of floral design of this type on an Iznik pottery vessel. It is estimated at £300,000-500,000 (lot 188 -$510,000-830,000).

Featuring 459 lots the Arts & Textiles of the Islamic & Indian Worlds sale at Christie’s South Kensington on 11 April spans the 9th to 21st century and offers a diverse array of works from across the spectrum of the category. Islamic calligraphy is particularly well represented with examples of fine nasta’liq script from Iran, Turkey and India some of which are signed by renowned masters of the 16th to the 18th century.

One of the highlights is a large levha or calligraphic panel in jali ta’liq script dated to 1781-82 AD and signed by Muhammad As’ad Yasari, a master of Ottoman calligraphy (lot 266 £7,000-10,000). The Ottoman and Safavid calligraphic works are complemented by Kufic folios from the 9th and 10th century with the best example a Qu’ran folio from near east or north Africa with later Qajar illumination, estimated £7,000-10,000 (lot 237).

Persian arts are well represented in this sale, particularly through works from a Qajar princely collection (lots 219-231). This includes numerous calligraphic panels from Iran, one signed by the poet, scribe and Governor or Khurasan Hasan Shamlu (lot 223 - estimate: £1,500-2,000) as well as later Qajar and Indian works. A portrait of a Safavid youth with his dog exemplifies the elegance of 17th century Persian painting through a delicate and vivid portrait. The brightly dressed young boy stands and looks gently at the small white dog at his feet as he holds a gold cup and bottle in his hands. It is estimated at £3,000-5,000 (lot 154).

The Ottoman section of the sale shows some of the best examples of the arts of Turkey between the 16th and the 19th century, with a wide selection of Tombak or gilt-copper vessels, including a rare chocolate pot and an impressive basin for ritual ablutions, as well as a delicate decoupage view of Topkapi from the Bosphorus (lot 362 – estimate: £4,000-6,000).

Indian art is well represented with Mughal works as well as paintings from the Punjab Hills, South India and the Deccan. Included in the small selection of paintings of Sikh interest is a portrait of Rani Jindan, Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s youngest wife (lot 105 – estimate: £1,500 / $2,000). She is shown seated on an armchair, her feet resting on a low stool on a terrace under a marble arch. Rani Jindan was the mother of Duleep Singh and became Regent when her son ascended the throne when he was only 5. She died in London in 1863.

Textiles include refined Susani hangings from Uzbekistan, produced during the 19th century in the regions of Bukhara, Shakhrisabz and Tashkent. One example (lot 195 – estimate: £5,000-8,000) from Uzbekistan has eight cartouches with magenta floral sprays against palmettes and floral bud motifs.

PRESS CONTACT: Emma Cunningham | +44(0) 207 389 2664 | ecunningham@christies.com
Dernagh O’Leary | +44(0) 207 389 2398 | doleary@christies.com

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