

CHRISTIE'S

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A ROYAL TREASURE FROM THE COURT OF EMPEROR SHAH JAHAN A MUGHAL PASHMINA CARPET



Royal Mughal Pashmina Carpet

Northern India, *circa* 1650

9ft. x 8ft.11in / 275 x 274 cm

(Estimate £2,500,000 – 3,500,000

/ US\$2,900,000 – 4,100,000)

London – Part of a distinguished private European collection for the last 30 years, the **Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds, including Oriental Rugs and Carpets** live auction on 27 October is honoured to present this rare Royal Mughal pashmina carpet, (*illustrated above*), woven for the court of the Indian Emperor Shah Jahan, *circa* 1650, (estimate £2,500,000 - 3,500,000 / US\$2,900,000 - 4,100,000).

The carpet is of 'Lattice and Flower' design, exemplary for its brilliant colour and pattern, woven with the most luxurious and costly materials with prized pashmina goat hair woven onto a fine silk foundation. It is one of only four 17th century pashmina carpets remaining in private hands.

The carpet is now virtually square as it has been shortened: the length was originally about 4.4 meters. Three smaller fragments from the same carpet are known to have survived, two are in museums, the third is privately owned.

NOTABLE POINTS ABOUT 17TH CENTURY MUGHAL PASHMINA CARPETS

The workshops

The great Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556-1605) had ruled successfully for fifty years and was a devoted patron of the arts. He established royal carpet workshops during the last quarter of the 16th century in India which both his son, Shah Jahangir, and grandson Shah Jahan continued to support. All three were fine connoisseurs and committed patrons resulting in a renaissance of all forms of Indian art under their reign.

The Flower Style

This carpet is an important example of the new Flower Style in Mughal India which became popular in architectural decoration and the decorative arts under the emperor Shah Jahan (r. 1628-58). A variety of flowers represented in profile and organized in rows is a hallmark of the style. Roses, lilies, carnations and sunflowers amongst many others, were recorded naturalistically. The genesis of the Flower Style in Indian art can be traced to the visit of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (r.1605-27) to Kashmir in 1620. He was accompanied by his favourite natural history painter, Mansur, who on this trip produced more than 100 paintings of local flowers, of which three survive. However it was not until after 1630 that the vast majority of court carpets woven in India reflected the new taste for the Flower Style which dominated carpet design as well as all aspects of Mughal art. The Red Fort Palace, Delhi; the Agra Fort, Agra and Shah Jahan's monument to his late wife, the Taj Mahal, Agra, all reflect this same decoration within their architecture.

Pashmina

In most rug-weaving cultures, silk is the most valuable and sumptuous fibre. In Mughal culture, in northern India, this was not the case. The most highly prized fibre for the pile (that part of the carpet one actually had physical contact with and sat or walked on) was goat hair, pashmina, the undercoat of the Himalayan mountain goat (*Capra hircus laniger*). Each pashmina fibre measures almost one sixth the width of a human hair, which meant that these Mughal carpets were among the finest carpets ever woven. The highest knot count exceeds 2,000 knots per inch, which goes beyond what the eye can "read." The majority of examples fall between 400 and 1,000 knots and the carpet discussed has an average of 672 knots per sq. inch.

Painting with Knots

The ability of the goat hair to yield beautifully saturated colours led the Indian dyers to become masters of colour, to a degree more often associated with painters and illuminators. The juxtaposition of closely related colours without the use of defined outlines, a technique described as "shading," was an Indian technique to be found in pashmina examples. Shading was used to provide a sculptural quality or three-dimensional effect as found in the sequence of greens in the leafy lattice and the reds and pinks of the floral blossoms. A second technique mastered by Indian weavers was "colour mixing," in which knots of two different colours, not necessarily related, are juxtaposed in checkerboard fashion, yielding a third colour. The red

petals of the blossoms in the field show this technique very well, with an inner red zone created by mixing red and white and an outer zone of pink created by mixing pink and white.

Numbers define rarity - 17th century pashmina carpets from India are incredibly rare;

- **8** complete carpets exist, including several in a small format of these, **7** are in institutional collections, **1** in private hands
- **13** fragmentary examples which are “readable” and visually appealing of these **10** are in institutional collections , **1** in private hands, **2** whereabouts unknown

(There are approximately 30 small fragments which are deemed too fragmentary or worn to be able to read successfully).

Therefore only **4** (including the present carpet) remain in circulation.

Due to the fragility of the silk and the finely spun pashmina pile very few examples survive, making a carpet of this size and condition an extraordinarily rare survivor from the golden age of Imperial Mughal carpet production.

The Mughal Carpet will be on view and exhibition at the following locations during September and October;

- New York, Christie’s Rockefeller Centre, 16 - 19 September
- Dubai, Christie’s DIFC, 28 September - 3 October
- London, Christie’s headquarters, 22 - 26 October

The Royal Mughal pashmina carpet is a leading lot in the forthcoming live auction of the **Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds including Oriental Rugs and Carpets** taking place on 27 October at Christie’s London.

Notes to Editors:

Please find a selection of images in drop box of the Mughal carpet via this [link](#)

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PRESS CONTACTS:

Charlotte Brown | +44 | (0) 7920 504674 | charlottebrown@christies.com |

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