

*Oliver Hoare's*  
**CABINET OF CURIOSITIES**

An Exhibition at CIANCIMINO,  
85 Pimlico Road, London SW1 W8PH  
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# 1

## THE SILVER COIN

When I was a child my father gave me a battered money box half-filled with ancient coins. Most of them were Roman copper coins of different sizes stamped with the profiles of emperors, which I enjoyed laying out in lines until I knew them by heart. Among them were a few silver coins, small and thin except for one which was chunky and large, with a profile quite different from the severe Roman rulers, and coiffed with what looked like a trumpeting elephant's head. When I asked where it came from my father answered 'Persia', and from that moment on the land of Persia became a place of mystery and fascination for me, to which I longed to go. As a result, the moment I left school and had the possibility to travel independently, I set off for Persia, overland because air travel was beyond my means. The journey took a week, by train from Paris to Istanbul, and onwards by TBT bus to Tehran.

This first encounter with that magic land exceeded even what was brewed in my imagination, and thereafter I returned at every opportunity. Looking back, and realizing the impact that this long association with Iran has had on the course of my life, I am struck by the influence that a single silver coin, which still sits before me on my desk, has exerted on the way things have turned out. Not only that: the coin is not even Persian; it comes from Afghanistan.

It is in fact a Tetradrachma of Demetrios I, who ruled Bactria and northern India from 190 to 171 BC. He was the first Greek king after Alexander the Great to successfully establish his rule south of the Hindu Kush, by overcoming the Indian princes who had wrested their independence from the Mauryan empire. For this reason he coiffed himself with the elephant headdress that Alexander had adopted to signify his Indian conquests of 326 BC. On the reverse Hercules stands with his lion-skin and club, framed by a Greek inscription naming King Demetrios. I like the fact that, whatever the coin's real story, it has nevertheless acted like some *Arabian Nights* talisman with such effect on the focus of my interests ever since.

The idea for the catalogue, for which this coin provides an introduction, came from Jean-Claude Ciancimino, who is also hosting the exhibition in his gallery. His interests and taste have influenced many people, including myself, but he refuses to let me discourse on the subject. This Cabinet of Curiosities is a modest one, it is true, by comparison with what one associates with such a term, many remains of which are today scattered throughout the museums of Europe. And yet I hope it illustrates that even modest-seeming objects often have interesting tales

to tell. I have found that possessing an object even for a relatively short time enables one to learn from it in a way that is not possible from seeing it displayed in a museum or from reading about it in a book. Art and artefacts seem to contain a kind of energy that requires time as well as a receptive audience before it can be fully released – perhaps explaining why crowded exhibitions are never entirely satisfying. Not everything in this catalogue is for sale, for obvious reasons, but the exhibition itself contains a hundred-odd other pieces that are listed but not illustrated. Some of them resolutely refuse to tell their stories. The petrified joint bone of a holotherium (58) may have been used by a shaman to take the pulse, but who knows? Was the Mayan marble palette and three balls (54) a game, or perhaps a time-keeping device? What is the point of the Neolithic double disc (46)? It is often the inscrutability of objects that lends them their enduring charm. One of the old-time dealers in Iran told me many years ago that the point of a work of art was to make you dream, adding, of course, that when he detected this effect on a buyer he knew he could ask a high price. Sometimes knowing a lot about an object adds to its allure, sometimes its mystery has the same effect. Both kinds are in this Cabinet, along with others that are just good-looking.

*Oliver Hoare*



## BEKTASHI ROCK CRYSTAL TASLIM TAJ

*Turkey, 19th century or earlier**Diameter: 5 cm*

I spent the summer of 1972 driving around Anatolia with my mother, visiting Sufi shrines and other such places of interest. It was in the course of this trip that I saw Hajji Bektash's tomb for the first time, perched on a hillside overlooking a vast plain. He lived from 1209 to 1271, a contemporary of Jalaluddin Rumi, and had immense influence on Ottoman society, particularly on the military. Among the artefacts peculiar to the Bektashi Order were twelve-pointed stars made from a kind of greenish marble, often shot through with brown occlusions, a type of stone mined in Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. This substance was believed to be particularly useful for storing *baraka*, the equivalent of 'God's Grace' in the Christian tradition, and considered as an effective repository for this kind of energy. The walls of the shrine are embedded with numerous stars of various sizes. What drew my attention once inside the shrine was Hajji Bektash's own twelve-pointed Taslim Taj, as they are called, which was made of flawless rock crystal, sitting on the shelf of a display case. For some reason I found this object fascinating.

Back in London I was describing this stone to a friend one day, when, to my great surprise, he told me he had been in the Portobello Road Antiques Market the previous weekend and had seen something that sounded very like it. The following Saturday I went early to the market and found the stallholder. Yes, he had had such an object, but had sold it to someone I vaguely knew. For the next two years I followed the rock crystal star; sometimes I got near it but each time I missed it, until I gave up the search.

In April 1978, wandering down Bond Street and remembering that my second wedding anniversary was fast approaching, I walked into Boucheron, whose manager I then knew. I drew a twelve-pointed star on a piece of paper, and asked him to make a pendant in gold of that shape and size, engraved on one side with a camel tethered to a palm tree, and on the other a saying of the Prophet: 'Believe in God but tie your camel first'. It was something that my wife was then in the habit of quoting to me, exasperated, no doubt, by what she saw as my greater interest in the metaphysical than the practical. On our wedding anniversary we exchanged neatly wrapped packages. When I opened mine I found the rock crystal star I had pursued for so long. Not only that, when the gold star was put on the rock crystal, their sizes were identical.



## BEKTASHI TASBI

Turkey, dated 1300 AH/1882 AD

Length: 74 cm

A lot of fascinating folklore surrounds the prayer-beads of Turkey, the only country, curiously enough, with a tradition of producing beautifully crafted and harmoniously proportioned examples. Even the names of their famous makers of old, Ahmet the Black, for example, or Mehmet the Dwarf, are redolent of a rich history. I first came across this oral history over 25 years ago, as I met those who collected and dealt in *tasbis* in Istanbul, and went about making a collection for myself. One of the things that astonished me was that they could often tell who made a *tasbi*, even one made 200 years earlier, by the subtle variations of proportion and finish which were invisible to me. But gradually it all began to make sense.

One day I was taken across the Bosphorus to Uskudar to meet the last of the old-time *tasbi*-makers, Ustad Yusuf, where, sitting in his spartan room, I watched as he made a 99-bead *tasbi* with his foot-driven lathe. It was performed in a single, seemingly seamless, movement which transformed rods of wood into 99 matched and polished beads strung with their markers and Imam. It was the perfect illustration of craft as meditation.



On one of my visits to Istanbul I met a small-time antiques dealer from Bursa, who was unusual because everything he had, however modest, was interesting. When asked what I was looking for, I said an exceptional *cuka tasbi*. *Cuka* is the name given to an Indian nut, dense and hard to work, pleasing of colour that gives a distinctive ringing sound as each bead falls – long popular with the dervish fraternities of Turkey. Some months later in Istanbul, I was invited to dinner in a beautiful old house overlooking the Bosphorus. Late that night one of the servants came upstairs to the dining room and told me there was someone at the door asking for me. When I went downstairs I found the antiques dealer from Bursa. I asked him how he knew where to find me. No problem, he answered, in Istanbul everyone knows where everyone is. Out of his pocket he drew this *tasbi*, saying that I had asked him for something exceptional, and here it was. It was indeed the best I had ever seen, with the markers and Imam carved in the shape of Bektashi dervish’s turbans, and later when I looked at it closely found it was dated on the Imam. I did not even discuss the relatively huge price that was asked.

4

PORPHYRY URN

*Alexandria, Egypt, 1st–2nd century AD*  
*Height: 36 cm; diameter: 40 cm; width: 45.5 cm with handles*

The Gebel Dokhan mountain, a 600 million-year-old andesite of the Arabian-Nubian shield in the eastern desert of Egypt, is the unique source of porphyry. It seems to have been unknown to the ancient Egyptians, and the few small porphyry vessels of the early dynasties were probably made from surface pebbles. Mining was started by the Ptolemies, specifically by Ptolemy II Philadelphus (reigned 283–246 BC), who built the relay posts (known as the Porphyry Road) and the port of Qena on the Nile, which made possible the transport of stone blocks to Alexandria. Extraction by mining on an industrial scale began during the reign of Tiberius, when, on the 23rd July, 18 AD, Caius Cominius Leugas opened the quarries. It remained an imperial monopoly.

The colour purple became the symbol of royalty during the Hellenistic period, and so porphyry became a part of imperial propaganda, and the most emblematic stone of late Antiquity. Its extreme hardness was a symbol of excellence and made it precious. Pliny the Elder reported the gift of porphyry statues by Vitrasius Pollion, Procurator of Egypt, to the Emperor Claudius, which was greatly appreciated. It was during the reign of Hadrian that the production of huge columns for imperial buildings started, finished on site to

facilitate transport. Smaller blocks were fashioned into vessels in the workshops of Alexandria and Rome.

The quarries were abandoned in the 5th century, partly because they were largely exhausted, but mainly because the huge infrastructure involved in their mining – slave labour, expert craftsmen, administrators and the transport system – could no longer be sustained. Thereafter, all the porphyry used in Europe from the 6th to the 18th century was recycled from ancient monuments. Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt tried and failed to find its source, and the site was only rediscovered by James Burton in 1822. More recently, the surveys by the archaeological departments of Southampton and Exeter universities undertaken between 1994 and 1998 have done much to reveal the history of mining the Gebel Dokhan, or Mons Porphyrites.

The architects and sculptors of Renaissance Italy admired the precision and finish that the Roman stone-carvers achieved on their porphyry vessels, and assumed that the secret of how to work it had been lost since Antiquity. The main theory was that the Romans had a recipe for hardening the steel of their chisels, and according to Vasari, in 1555 Cosimo I of Medici solved this problem with a boiled-up mixture of herbs. Vasari also claims that both Alberti and Michelangelo found porphyry too hard to work satisfactorily. The latter was astonished one day to receive a roundel finely carved with a profile of Christ from the sculptor Francesco Ferruchi, who had understood, through his connection with generations of stone-carvers, that patience and endurance were the key, not the hardness of steel. Johann Wincklemann, the German art historian, was in Rome in the 18th century, and describes how the polishing of a single porphyry vessel took a year.

The most closely related porphyry urn, more modest but complete with its conical lid, was excavated in Aix-en-Provence in 1796, and is now in the Musée Granet. The urns which most clearly resemble this one, in form and in the details of the way the handles are shaped and attached, are not of porphyry but of alabaster, in the Carthage Museum. This is interesting because, by tradition, this urn was discovered in Carthage during the French colonial period in the early 20th century, when foundations were being dug for a villa.





5

PORPHYRY GRINDING BOWL FOR PIGMENTS

*Turkey, 16th century*  
*Width: 20 cm; depth: 9 cm*

While the Romans mined porphyry on an industrial scale for three centuries and more, the Byzantines recycled it on a post-industrial scale for much longer. Constantine’s column in Istanbul has five great drums of carved porphyry; Santa Sophia is splattered with it; the official delivery room for pregnant empresses in the Great Palace of Constantinople was called the ‘Porphyra’. And so, when the Ottoman Turks took over in 1453, they came into possession of a great deal of the stone, much of it recycled yet again into the decoration of their mosques and palaces. There are even Iznik tile borders in Topkapi Palace imitating porphyry. This bar of it, left over from Byzantine times, has been transformed, in typical Ottoman fashion, into a vessel to grind mineral pigments, and surely belonged to a painter. It is evidence of a tradition in Turkey, not mirrored elsewhere in the Islamic world, of making beautiful artefacts and tools connected with calligraphy and painting.

6

PORPHYRY OVAL VESSEL AND FITTED CASE

*Rome, 17th century, and France, 18th century*  
*Width: 9 cm; depth: 6 cm*

The thin walls of this porphyry vessel and its highly polished finish are typical of Roman work of the 17th century.





TWO PALAEOLITHIC  
GREY FLINT POINTED HANDAXES

*Probably England, before 10,000 BC*

*Lengths: 23.5 cm and 19 cm*

The most touching aspect of the two flints is the way the cortex skin of the stone has been left on the butt end to provide a better grip, and to soften the impact of working with them. It shows a kind of sophistication that one perhaps would not expect of our ancient ancestors. In his book *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, Neil MacGregor illustrates a somewhat similar-looking hand-axe from East Africa dating from 1.2–1.4 million years ago, and surmises that mastering the technology of making such tools enabled our ancestors to leave Africa and spread across the world.



## EARLY BYZANTINE HELIOTROPE CHALICE

*Constantinople, 5th–6th century AD**Height: 8 cm*

Heliotrope, also known as bloodstone or green jasper, was mined in India, which was the only source for the Ancient World where it was admired and valued for its red iron oxide inclusions. In the Christian era these inclusions were called the ‘Blood of Christ’, and it became known as ‘the martyr’s stone’. It also became the Pisces birthstone. In late Classical and Byzantine times, blocks of bloodstone large enough to be carved into a cup must have been extremely rare, to judge from the surviving hardstone vessels of the period, today in Venice, Vienna, Paris and Madrid. No other example made of a single piece of bloodstone is known, at least among the published pieces. Only in the 16th century did the Miseroni workshops in Florence and Prague have access to larger blocks or boulders, which probably came from the New World, or from China. The form of this chalice is known in other materials, particularly precious metals, and its proportions, with its squat foot, are typical of the early Byzantine period.





VISIGOTHIC MARBLE PLAQUE

*Cordoba, Spain, dated 8th February, 876 AD*  
*Height: 32.5 cm; width: 27 cm*

The inscription appears to be a statement of retirement from active life by a certain Basilus Selvius, who was joining a monastic order to dedicate himself entirely to the service of the Virgin Mary:

† Quisquis advenerit IMN-que legendo	Be it known to whosoever approaches and reads this inscription
Basilis Selvius commendeque Domino precibus	that Basilis Selvius committed in prayer to the Lord (God)
spiritumve valderis meus et condolens	with my spirit and strength and in compassion
iamque benigna propositum perago servabisque	having entered into the noble cause of completing my service
Virgo modesta obiit namque specie	to the gentle Virgin [Mary] [will carry on] in like way unto death
VI(idibus)(Februariis)era DCCCC-que XIIIa	6th of the Ides of February ERA 914 (8th February 876 AD)

This would have implied that his lands, wealth and political positions would be surrendered to his descendants (insofar as his wealth had not already been donated in his lifetime to the religious establishment concerned). The word *meus*, ‘my’, suggests that the statement is made during the lifetime of Basilis Selvius.

The date is given in the Spanish or Visigothic reckoning which commenced in 38 BC. This reckoning was adopted in the Visigothic realms in the late 4th century AD and survived in various parts of Iberia and southern France until the 15th century. So the date 914 (DCCCCXIII) is equivalent to 876 AD. This way of dating avoided either the Frankish or Islamic systems. The sixth of the Ides of February corresponds to the eighth of February. The inscription uses the full repertoire of abbreviations and suspensions found in the Latin script used in the Visigothic kingdoms.

Much is made of the peaceful and fruitful coexistence of the three Religions of the Book under Muslim rule in Spain, and while it was to some extent true if compared to the pattern of events elsewhere, it is frequently overstated. Not long before this plaque was carved there was an outbreak of Christian martyrdoms in Cordoba. It was called a ‘martyrs movement’, which suggests that the Christians were asking for it. The Amir Muhammad, who ruled Andalusia from Cordoba at this time, sent the remains of one of the martyrs, Eulogius, to King Alfonso II of the Asturias, which became the focus of a cult in Orviedo. The transfer was probably made in exchange for a suitable payment.

I am grateful to Bob Miller for deciphering the inscription.





## MARBLE ARMET

*Toulouse, France, mid-15th century**Height: 27 cm*

This grim-faced war helmet once crowned the tomb of a fallen knight. Separated as it is from its monument in Toulouse, we no longer know his name, or of his exploits, but it is possible that he fell in the latter stages of the Hundred Years' War. The pitting on the upper surfaces suggests the action of rain over a long period, so either it was outside, or more likely, in the exposed ruins of a convent or abbey. The ventilation holes on one side only of the visor are typical of such helmets, and not a sign that the blank side was set against a wall. Helmets of this type can be seen on the ground in Paolo Uccello's painting *The Battle of San Romano*.





## SULTAN ABDULHAMID II'S CARPENTER'S COMPASS

*Istanbul, Turkey, 3rd quarter 19th century**Height: 18.5 cm; width: 18.5 cm**Steel, gold and horn*

Each of the Ottoman sultans was obliged by tradition to learn a craft. Many were accomplished calligraphers, notably Sultan Bayezid II, who was taught by the celebrated master from Amasya, Shaikh Hamdullah. Suleyman the Magnificent trained as a goldsmith. Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876–1909) was a keen carpenter, and this beautifully crafted tool has his *tughra* inlaid in gold on each side. Another interesting detail of this instrument is the natural horn handle. At the time there were a number of German military advisers around the Sultan in charge of modernizing his army, and this handle is clearly more Germanic than Turkish in inspiration. The Sultan sent his servants to sell his wooden artefacts anonymously at the Galata Bridge, and only accepted to spend such money as he earned from these sales on himself. 'Abdul the Damned' he may have been known as in Europe, but this anecdote shows that he should have been known as 'Abdul the Dervish', for such behaviour is typical of the dervish path.



MAMLUK WOOD PANEL FROM SULTAN LAJIN'S MINBAR  
FOR THE MOSQUE OF IBN TULUN

*Cairo, 1296 AD*

*Diameter: 26.5 cm maximum*

*Provenance: Adda collection, formed in Alexandria  
in the early 20th century*

The mosque of Ibn Tulun is the oldest and grandest of Cairo's great Islamic monuments, constructed between 876 and 879 by the Abbasid governor of the city, Ahmad ibn Tulun. By the end of the 10th century it was in a bad state of disrepair, and was purchased by the Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim from Ibn Tulun's descendants, and eventually restored in the 13th century by the Caliph al-Mustansir. Husam al-Din Lajin, an officer in the service of the Mamluk sultans, took refuge there in 1293 when he was pursued for his part in the assassination of Sultan Ashraf Khalil, and while in hiding could not help noticing its dilapidated state. He vowed that if ever he were rehabilitated, he would undertake its complete restoration. In 1297 he became the sultan and set about fulfilling his vow.

Among the embellishments lavished on the mosque by the new sultan, employing many Andalusian craftsmen who had fled the political troubles at home, was a magnificent *minbar* (pulpit) for the main prayer hall, of which this sycamore wood panel was once a part. Its decoration was composed of interlocking polygons of which the larger octagons were carved with two different designs: one like this panel, and the other a dense arrangement of floral arabesques. The pulpit itself disappeared long ago, and all that remains of it are a substantial panel in the Victoria and Albert Museum, 32 polygons in the Museum of Art and Industry, Vienna, and individual octagons in the Louvre and in the Bargello, Florence. Sultan Lajin was also responsible for the domed structure over the pool in the mosque's courtyard which, incidently, was the inspiration for the shape of I.M. Pei's building for the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar.

The reason for including the panel in this catalogue, however, has less to do with its distinguished history, but rather more to do with the fact that it provides a curious insight into the casino-like nature of the art market. Over the last 35 or so years, only three panels from Sultan Lajin's *minbar* have appeared on the market. The first was in 1976 in my first exhibition as an independent trader, which I sold for £5,000 to the C.L. David Collection in Copenhagen, and considered it a good price at the time. The second appeared in a London auction in 2000 and sold for £531,750, bought by the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar. Then this panel was offered in two London sales in 2008 and 2010 with estimates varying from £15,000 to £7,000, and on each occasion remained unsold, in spite of a full





description and the Adda provenance, which is a triple-A reference in the field of Islamic art. I was travelling at the time of these sales and otherwise preoccupied, but after the second sale, astonished that there was no interest in it, I put in an offer and bought it after the sale for what seemed like an absurdly modest sum.

13

OTTOMAN IVORY AND WOOD DOOR PANEL

*Turkey, late 15th century*

*22.5 cm square*

The ivory used seems to be mammoth ivory, which the Ottoman Turks imported from Siberia through the port of Caffa. Extant customs records show that it was imported in great quantities; the Ottomans preferred it to elephant ivory for embellishing their buildings since they could cut larger slices, and it proved more resistant to weather conditions. Caffa was established by Greek colonists in the 6th century BC and became the predominant port of the Black Sea. Between the 13th and 15th centuries it was the scene of intense rivalry between the Genoese and the Venetians for control of one of the major outlets of the Silk Road. It was also from here that the Black Death arrived in Europe in 1347. The use of Kufic calligraphy exhibited on this plaque is a throwback to earlier Islamic times, and was much favoured during the reign of Sultan Bayazid (1481–1512), who restored and embellished many buildings in Turkey, particularly Sufi shrines.



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14

BANDED SLATE OTTER PIPE

Moundbuilder culture, Ohio or Indiana, 200 BC–100 AD  
Length: 10 cm

The beauty of this particular pipe comes from the choice of stone used to make it, which suggests water streaming from an otter’s fur as it emerges from water. It dates from the earliest times of tobacco cultivation in Central and North America, when smoking tobacco played an important part in shamanic rituals. Not only was tobacco considered a sacred substance, but also the pipe-carrier was believed to fulfil an important religious responsibility. The world over time has a way of turning things on their head, so that something once experienced as sacred is now thought of as the work of the devil.



15

HUBBLE-BUBBLE

India and Ireland, first half of the 19th century  
Height: 56 cm

Most children, or at least those who read or are read to, must first encounter a hubble-bubble in Tenniel’s illustration for *Alice in Wonderland*, showing the caterpillar sitting on a toadstool puffing away on one. It is a haunting image, redolent of the back-to-front logic of the work that weaves such a magical spell. It was certainly imprinted on my mind when I first arrived in Iran, and there found to my delight that the *narguileh* was everywhere, a fundamental part of the culture. Ladies of an older generation would while away the heat of the day with a pipe or two on a canopied terrace, and there were few pleasures to beat sitting on a carpet in the shade of a tree, feeling the mild narcotic effect of the aromatic local





tobacco while hearing the gurgle each time one drew a lung-full of smoke. This example, at least its upper part, is Indian, with its long velvet-clad pipe to further cool the smoke. The base is of Waterford crystal, from the factory in Ireland renowned for its fine flint glass, which was in operation between 1783 and 1851. It has two Waterford crystal mouthpieces, one straight and the other curved.

16

TEA BRICK

*Eastern Turkestan, last quarter of the 19th century*  
*Height: 24 cm; width: 18 cm*

Tea bricks were used as a form of currency throughout China, Tibet, Mongolia and Central Asia for centuries, owing to the high value of tea in many parts of Asia. They were already used as currency under the Sui dynasty (581–617) for barter with Mongolian nomads, who preferred them to coins. Nowadays the practice of dissolving your wealth in a pot of hot water seems rather quaint. The value of the highest grades of tea rose dramatically when the Russian nobility took to drinking it, and for this reason the bricks inscribed in Russian were always of the finest quality. In 1878 hydraulic presses began to be used, which enabled the bricks to be impressed with sharp images and designs, as on this example.

On my first trip around the Taklamakan desert I took a humidor of cigars and a gallon of pre-mixed dry Martini cocktail. As the temperature at night dropped to minus-10 degrees the dry Martini became a perfect temperature soon after the sun went down. One early evening as we sat in a remote tea-house, the owner of the establishment enquired what we were drinking, and so we gave him and his jolly wife a glass each to try. He then asked what we were smoking and I handed him a cigar. The sight of him with his feet up and a Montecristo clenched between his teeth, and his roly-poly pink-cheeked wife giggling next to him, has remained with me ever since. I half-expect to bump into him one day in Fortnum’s, a sort of reverse Marco Polo come to look for the exotic products that gave him such pleasure those many years ago.



PAINTING OF A FIRMAN OF THE MUGHAL  
EMPEROR AURANGZEB

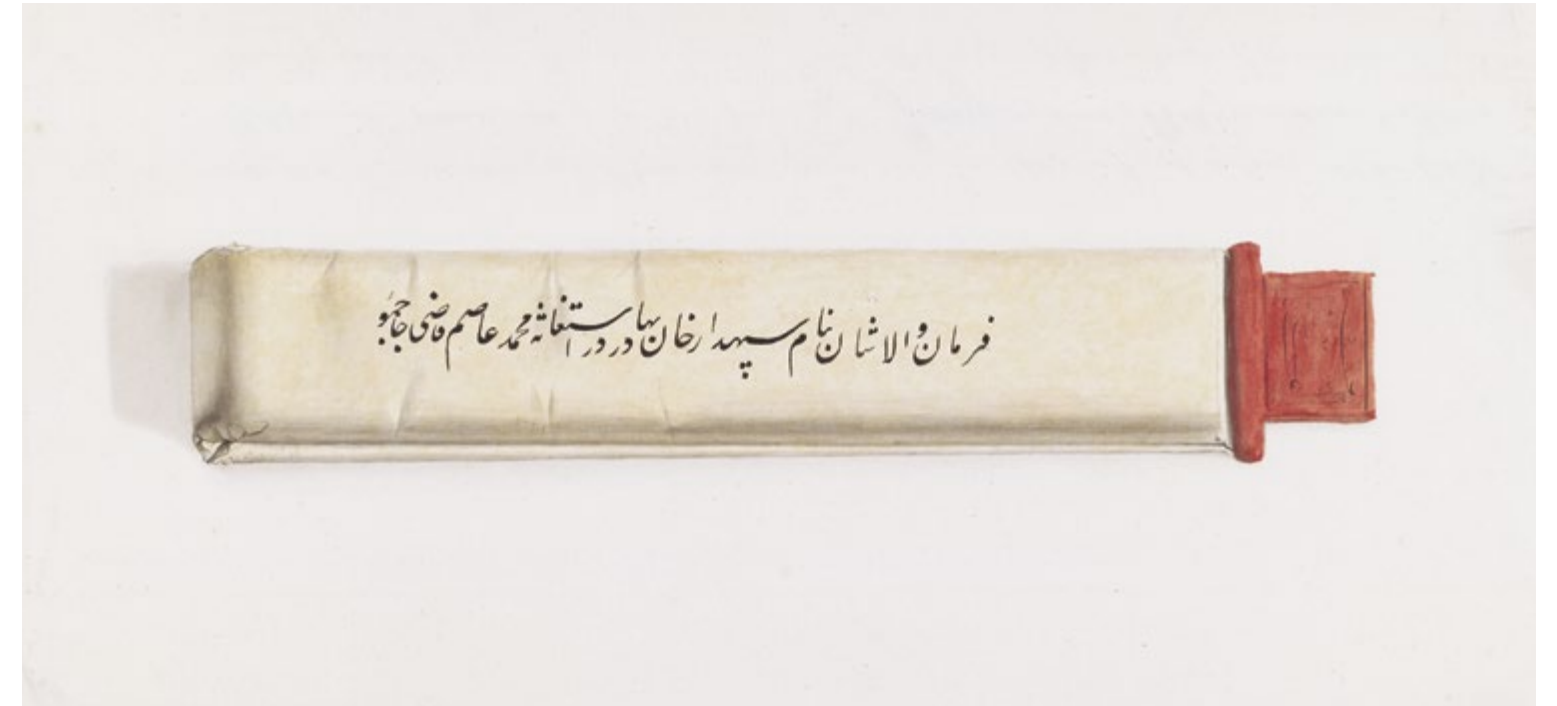
*India, late 18th century*

*15.5 cm × 32 cm*

This curiosity belonged to Captain James Hoare who served in India in the second half of the 18th century. It shows a *firman*, an official document issued by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (1658–1707, the sixth Mughal emperor), still folded and sealed with stamped wax, and inscribed in black ink: ‘The firman of the one of exalted rank, in the name of Sepahdar Khan about Muhammad Asim, the judge of Jajmu imploring assistance’.

On the reverse a now faint and partly undecipherable inscription in pencil recounts its story. The emperor issued the *firman* to confirm a *cadi* (judge) in his functions, which were to be transferred to his descendants. By the end of the century the family was ‘in a state of beggary from large possessions’, and for some reason a member of the family gave this painting to James Hoare in 1792. It is like a surrealist conundrum. The *firman* is shown unopened. Why was a picture of it given and not the original, and why should this be so interesting? Was it in exchange for some favour granted? Was James Hoare sufficiently tickled by this last vestige of the family’s prestige to have its portrait painted? Not knowing the answers is part of its charm.

James Hoare was an early member of the Asiatic Society established in Bengal by Sir William Jones, to which he contributed a book of drawings of Firoz Shah’s Lat in Delhi and the Lat in Allahabad. They were a major contribution to deciphering Ashoka’s inscriptions, and arriving at an understanding of the Buddhist past of India. He died of a fever while still in India.



RANJIT SINGH’S GILDED BEZOAR STONES

India, early 19th century  
Diameter: 6 cm

These unusually large bezoar stones belonged to Ranjit Singh (1780–1839), the ‘Lion of the Punjab’, and it seems appropriate that they are gilded, since one of his great good works was the gilding of the Golden Temple at Amritsar. His golden throne is in the Victoria and Albert Museum. He it was who established the Sikh Empire of the Punjab, after conquering Peshawar from the Afghans, as well as Multan, Jammu and Kashmir. A redoubtable warrior, and one-eyed as a result of smallpox as a child, he was unusual at the time for the humane treatment he accorded his conquered enemies. Unlike the Afghans who exterminated Sikhs wherever they found them. All religions were respected under his rule, although he greatly disliked the mullahs, whom he accused of fanaticism. Among his generals were mercenaries from France, Italy and America.

Bezoars are gall-stones of the Bezoar goat (*Caprus aegagrus Gm.*), also possibly of certain antelopes, which have been much prized as an antidote to poisons. References to them abound in Hermetic literature, in the treatise of the Ikhwan al-Safa’ and Al Biruni’s texts, in pseudo-Aristotle, and in Roger Bacon’s writings. The *caveat emptor* rule in the common law of England resulted from the purchase in 1603 of an apparently fraudulent bezoar stone. They have a musk-like aroma, which in this case has been preserved within a pine-lined box of a lead alloy.

These fine bezoars came to England with Ranjit Singh’s youngest son, Duleep Singh, last Maharaja of the Sikh Empire until dispossessed by the East India Company. He was exiled to England at the age of fifteen. There he became a great favourite of Queen Victoria, who found his eyes and teeth ‘too beautiful’. The bezoars came into my family with his other personal effects through the marriage of Duleep Singh’s son Prince Victor to my great aunt, Lady Anne Coventry. Unfortunately by then Lord Dalhousie had perfidiously purloined the Koh-i-Noor diamond for the British crown; otherwise it might have further enlivened this catalogue.

My first introduction to a bezoar stone came at Christie’s when I worked there so many years ago. Dr Dee’s bracelet came up for auction, and among the marvellous array of gewgaws that hung from his silver bangle was a small bezoar in a metal cage.





19

MAHARAJA

*Northern India, late 19th century*

*Height: 48 cm*

This is the largest and finest example of a small group of Indian ivory sculptures of the period, and remarkable for the detailed carving of its jewellery and textiles. I have always assumed it was a portrait, but so far his identity has proved elusive. His closest relative, artistically speaking, is the Parsi girl, 14.4 cm high, in the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, dated by Cary Welch to circa 1875.

20

MUGHAL CARVED IVORY TUSK

*India, Jahangir period, 1605–1627*

*Length: 10.5 cm*

This is the complete tusk of a baby elephant, not a fragment of a larger tusk. Carved with flamboyant flowering foliage in typical Jahangiri style, one can only suppose that a courtier with access to the court workshops wished to commemorate the sad and premature death of his baby elephant.





## GILDED CAST COPPER SHRI YANTRA

*Kathmandu, Nepal, 17th century**36 cm square*

This *shri yantra* was originally embedded in the stone floor of the ambulatory around the stupa of Swyambhunath temple above Kathmandu, one of a series probably put there in the 17th century by Pratap Mala, King of Kathmandu, when he constructed the eastern staircase. Swyambhunath temple is among the most sacred of Buddhist pilgrimage sites, and also revered by Hindus.

The *shri yantra*, symbol of Hindu Tantrism, is formed by nine interlocking triangles that emanate from the central point, the junction between the physical universe and its unmanifested source. Four of the triangles point upwards, the Masculine, and five point downwards, the Feminine, representing the union of the Masculine and Feminine Divine. The nine triangles interlace to form 43 smaller triangles symbolizing creation and the cosmos. These are surrounded by eight lotus petals, then sixteen lotus petals, and an earth square resembling a temple with four doors. In the tantric tradition it is considered 'the supreme instrument in the path of spiritual advancement', a powerful focus for meditation.



TIBETAN PRAYER WHEEL

Tibet, 18th–19th century

Length: 41 cm

Before the early 1970s, when hippies brought a considerable supply of Tibetan art to the London market, the most interesting pieces I saw when I worked at Christie’s came through an intermediary from the family of Sir Francis Younghusband. I now know the source was his daughter, Eileen, who died in 1981. This prayer wheel was one of these pieces, and remains the most beautiful of its kind that I have seen.

The copper drum, bound in brass, has three stones set into its cardinal directions: mother-of pearl, cornelian and turquoise, with a ball of silk fibres around the loop to which the fossilized shell and bronze weights for turning are attached. The pivot in the wood handle is also of fossilized shell. A roundel of bamboo provides a base from which the top brass finial is held by a steel rod. Inside the drum is a seemingly endless saffron-dyed silk roll inscribed with the mantra, *Om mani padme hum*, repeated countless times, wrapped in a saffron-dyed cotton envelope. The handle, with its pleasing patina, is bound in copper.

Younghusband led the British force that invaded Tibet in December 1903 on Lord Curzon’s instructions, with the excuse that the Tibetans had poached a few yaks from Nepalese herders on the border. The force included 5,000 soldiers, mainly Gurkhas and Sikhs, sappers, engineers, artillery and machine gun units, military police, cooks, medical staff, telegraph and postal specialists, diplomats and journalists, 10,000 porters and 20,000 yaks. Younghusband’s wardrobe included eighteen pairs of boots and shoes, twenty-eight pairs of socks, thirty-two collars and sixty-seven shirts, some flannel, others white, twilled, or coloured, along with studs and any number of ties, a dozen suits with matching waistcoats, twelve winter overcoats including a Chinese fur, a chesterfield, an old ulster, a posteen long coat, two Jaegers, and a waterproof, white and khaki helmets, a brown felt hat, two forage caps, a white Panama, a cocked hat, thick and thin solar topis, and a shikar for shooting partridges in the Chumbi Valley.

In skirmishes at Guru and Gyantse on their way to Lhasa the British Maxim gunners mowed down 2,600 Tibetans, which Younghusband himself described as a ‘terrible and ghastly business’. While the press in Britain was largely supportive, there was criticism of the plundering of monasteries and of the caravans of loot strung out over the tracks leading back to the Raj. In the absence of the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, the treaty Younghusband negotiated achieved little, and Curzon wrote to Sven Hedin that the expedition had ‘destroyed the virginity of the bride to whom you aspired’.





The day before his departure, Younghusband was presented with an image of the Buddha by a high lama, which he carried with him for the rest of his life, and which his daughter placed on his coffin in 1942. Soon after leaving Lhasa he underwent an experience while walking alone in the mountains that changed his life, turning him towards mysticism and the founding of the World Congress of Faiths. ‘Such experiences are all too rare’, he wrote, ‘and they but too soon become blurred in the actualities of daily intercourse and practical existence. Yet it is these few fleeting moments, which are reality. In these only we see real life. The rest is ephemeral, the unsubstantial. And that single hour on leaving Lhasa was worth all the rest of my lifetime’.

Information about the Younghusband expedition is from Wade Davies’ remarkable book *Into the Silence* (2011).

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TIBETAN HUMAN BONE MALA

*Tibet, 19th century or earlier*  
*Length: 42 cm*

By repute such rosaries were composed of discs cut from the trepan point of the skulls of 108 different lamas. Whether it is true or not of this example I cannot tell – the bone in many cases looks too thick – but the discs are strung on a beautifully woven string of yak’s hair and mounted with fossilized shell and coral. I first encountered a *mala* of this kind with Hannis Schmidt, who taught me about Tibetan art at weekends in his cottage in Sussex in the early 1970s. Whenever I took pieces to show him that had come in over the counter at Christie’s, where I worked at the time, he would inevitably bring out something that was better. When he died I was made executor for his collection, which included a remarkable group of Japanese tea-ceremony wares, today in the British Museum. His *mala* was made of thinner discs, honey-coloured, glowing and worn by much pious use. This *mala* came from the family of Sir Francis Younghusband: like the prayer wheel, a fruit of his 1903 expedition. After I took it home I suffered from several sleepless nights, which at the time I attributed to its disturbing influence. It was probably my imagination.



## EARTHENWARE SKULL CUP

*Tibet, 17th century or earlier**Length: 20 cm*

Cups made from the human skull are a familiar part of the ritual paraphernalia of Tantric Buddhism in Tibet. Wrathful deities in sculptures and paintings are often shown drinking blood from them. This example is unusual because while it has the shape of a human skull it is made out of fired earthenware, and would seem to belong to the Bon tradition, the principal religion of Tibet before the establishment of Buddhism in the 7th century. Mixed with animism, shamanism and folk religions, Bon was subsequently interwoven with Buddhism, which now makes its history and practices hard to decipher. The crown of the skull is divided into six zones by zig-zag lines, engraved with strange glyphs and Bon symbols such as the swastika and revolving sun. The inside is engraved with what looks like the neurological pathways of the brain, and a hole is pierced at the highest point of the skull, a sort of displaced trepan point. The strangest feature is the three knobs protruding from the frontal lobe, like a control panel for navigating unknown worlds. I have always seen it as an unusual object of power, whatever that means. In this case perhaps that whenever I have it near me, its strange presence almost eclipses my awareness of everything else.





SORCERER’S BAG

Tibet, 19th century or earlier

Phallus: 26 cm; horn: 15 cm; spatula: 12.5 cm

A label attached to the bag states: ‘A yak skin pouch containing carved wooden sorcerer’s horn with seeds and stopper, a black patinated ivory phallus for child-less couples (fertility rituals), an ancient ivory spatula (?) and a ‘sky-stone’ copper ring acquired in Shigatse Tibet, by myself.’ The owner has omitted his name, but the label could well date back to the Younghusband expedition of 1903. The copper ring is missing.

The phallus, with its marvellous molasses-like patina, is made of mammoth ivory from southern Siberia, where the great beasts roamed for some 5 million years before becoming extinct 10,000 years ago. The so-called ‘spatula’ is probably of similar material. The seed horn is finely carved as the forequarters of a scaly dragon embellished with animals, including a hog, a toad, a serpent, a beetle, a scorpion and a bat, along with a stupa and an incense-burner. The stopper has a *vajra* finial, and a double *vajra* is carved on the base. Such horns were used for exorcisms.





## A MAGNIFICENT CARVED COCO-DE-MER

*Seychelles, 1885(?)**Height: 40 cm; width: 105 cm*

The whole surface of the double nut is carved with remarkable skill and delicacy. On one side a boat is shown rowed by four oarsmen, with a bearded helmsman standing over the stern managing the rudder, and a sixth man in the bow bailing the vessel with a pot. They all wear tall hats, and the boat has the number 85 on its side, most probably referring to the date it was carved. A large smiling spiky sun shines over them as they approach land and a tall palm tree, whose coco-de-mer nuts they have no doubt come to harvest. A hut of stone stands on the shore, with a thatched roof, a door but no windows, and nearby a fierce crocodile is about to eat a startled armadillo-like creature. Behind the hut, a mask with puffed cheeks, a shock of hair and a pierced round mouth probably represents the wind. On the other side stands a stone-walled temple with a domed roof and arched windows and door between two trees. On either side a man is shown shinning up a coconut palm with the aid of a rope, carrying a knife and basket to collect the coconuts growing at the top. Below the temple two naked women sit by what appears to be a reservoir, manipulating a sluice-gate with ropes. A matching wind-mask blows from the corner. The areas of sky are defined by finely hatched bands of interlocking triangles; land and water are described with careful texturing; and the two types of palm are clearly defined.

The coco-de-mer palm grows in tropical rain forest on the islands of Praslin and Curieuse in the Seychelles, having become extinct on other islands of the archipelago. The name of the genus, *Lodoicea*, is derived from *Ludoicus*, the Latinised form of Louis, in honour of King Louis XV of France. Its scientific name, *Lodoicea maldivica*, originated before the 18th century when the Seychelles were uninhabited and the nuts were carried eastwards by the prevailing currents and washed up on the beaches of the Maldives. Until the true source of the nut was discovered in 1768, it was believed to grow on a mythical tree at the bottom of the sea. The nuts were much in demand from the 16th century onwards for the cabinets of curiosities of nobles and kings across Europe, and commanded high prices. Their pleasing resemblance to a woman's buttocks is reflected in its archaic botanical name, *Lodoicea callipyge*, which in Greek means 'beautiful rump'.













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GILDED SILVER PHALLUS-SHAPED SPRAY PUMP

*India, 18th–19th centuries*

*Length: 20 cm*

It may be surprising to learn that this suggestively shaped spray pump was made for Rajasthani maidens to squirt red dye over other revellers during Holi, the festival of fertility. It was also permitted during Holi for men to make rude gestures and obscene comments in front of women, which instead of being seen as threatening was part of the fun, and a girl brandishing a phallus-shaped spray must have been an appropriate riposte. Feminism has made almost any kind of expression of sexuality a dark subject, taking over from mainline Christianity, and so it is reassuring to find that not everybody everywhere shares this outlook, and is offended by our essential body parts.



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GREEN SCHIST PHALLUS

*Mongolia, probably 13th–14th century*

*Length: 14.5 cm*

This rather unusual tri-testicular tool, with its curious button for enhanced performance, was found some decades ago in the Altai region of Southern Siberia; there, where the throat-singing Tuvan people roam. It was in the bed of a river, which in diverting its course had inadvertently collapsed part of an ancient tomb that was found to be the final resting place of a Mongolian princess. There is something charming about the idea that she wished to take it with her to Eternity.



## BOXWOOD GLOVE

*Verona, second half of the 16th century**Height: 21 cm*

Eight rows of pointed spikes are set into the core of the glove, which is stamped with flower bouquets and rows of small triangles. Inscribed on top are the words: 'FABRICA DI CARIOLO GIUSSEPPE IN SACILE'. This kind of glove was used for a team ball-game played by the virile youths of Verona in the Roman amphitheatre, where today only operas are played. It was probably made to measure for the Giuseppe mentioned in the inscription who was left-handed, which like left-handed violinists in an orchestra must have made him a dangerous team-mate. It was, evidently, a violent game, and the painter Veronese was exiled from Verona for a time after he put out the eye of another player with an ill-judged swing of his arm.





AN INSCRIBED SWORD OF MAGIC

*Tunisia, dated 1254 AH/1834*

*Length: 1.25 m*

*Provenance: Henri René d'Allemagne,*

*Château de Polisy, Champagne*

The thick steel blade with blunt edges and broadened tip is incised on both sides with Kufic inscriptions; the wooden handle is fixed with steel bolts.

*Inscriptions:*

The inscription on one side in positive refers to an inscribed sword which came to Earth from the Seven Skies, and mentions the Jami’ Mosque in Qairouan and the Archangels Gabriel, Mikail, Israfil and Izra’il. The inscription on the other side is in negative, and mentions the children of the Arabs of Mecca and Yemen seeing a sword in the treasury in the Land of Africa. Umar ibn Salim al-Ayyar ibn Umar ibn Sa’d saw, by Divine command, the secrets in an uninscribed sword.

On leaving Christie’s to set up a gallery in 1975, I put an advertisement in the *Herald Tribune* announcing my interest in acquiring Islamic art. I had never done such a thing before, nor have I since. I had one reply, which turned out to be from the grandson of Henri René d’Allemagne, who invited me to Paris to see the eccentric remains of his grandfather’s house behind the Opera, where interesting Islamic artefacts dawdled among a flamboyant and decaying orientalist décor. This can now only be seen in *La Maison d’un Vieux Collectionneur* (1948). He then took me to the Château de Polisy.

This elegant Louis XIII château on an island at the confluence of two rivers had belonged to Jean de Dinteville (1504–1555), the left-hand figure in Holbein’s painting of the ambassadors in the National Gallery. By the time I got there the entire chateau had become a warehouse for vast quantities of bric-a-brac brought back by Henri René on his acquisitive travels throughout the Middle East three-quarters of a century before. He was an accumulator rather than a

collector, and the most interesting things among his accumulations, such as the Lusignan basin now in the Louvre, were sold at auction in 1950. But it was here among the debris that I first saw this sword. At the time it did not look so interesting, and only later did I learn that it was part of a group of similar pieces that he had extracted from a Sufi blacksmith’s tomb in Qairouan. Several of them are now in the Military Museum in Paris, and the others eventually filtered out onto the art market. A related example is in the Moser-Charlottenfels collection.

They belong to a tradition of magic in North Africa which is difficult to understand. We might call them objects of power, but I am not sure it brings us any closer to their perceived function. The few contacts that I have had with this tradition of magic showed me that people are able to live with a completely different construct of how life functions, and that it seems to work quite as well as ours. This magical outlook has also turned up from time to time at the heart of what we see as our own culture. The Roman emperor Septimus Severus was born in Leptis Magna, and brought something of his own culture with him. G.R.S. Mead writes in his essay *Apollonius of Tyana* (1901): ‘Flavius Philostratus, the writer of the only Life of Apollonius which has come down to us, was a distinguished man of letters who lived in the last quarter of the second and the first half of the third century (cir. 175–245 AD). He formed one of the circle of famous writers and thinkers gathered round the philosopher-empress, Julia Domna, who was the guiding spirit of the Empire during the reigns of her husband Septimus Severus and her son Caracalla. All three members of the imperial family were students of occult science, and the age was pre-eminently one in which the occult arts, good and bad, were a passion’.



COUNT CAGLIOSTRO'S DAGGER  
FOR THE EGYPTIAN RITE

*Paris, circa 1785*

*Length: 39 cm*

The curved steel blade has a 'speared K' monogram impressed into one side. The ivory handle is stained green with silver mounts, and inlaid with silver flowers and pseudo-Arabic lettering. The silver pommel is engraved with a shield with ancient Egyptian-style hieroglyphics. The green stained shagreen case has silver mounts, red velvet lining, Masonic symbols engraved on the chape, and a silver cartouche on the lid engraved with the name 'CAGLIOSTRO' in flowery lettering.

Magus, occultist, magician, cabbalist, charlatan, the notorious Count Cagliostro has been painted in many lights, but he has never ceased to fascinate. Subject of endless books, operas, films and articles in obscure journals, his role and purpose still remain rather mysterious. Casanova, for example, found him a prodigious forger, capable of producing a letter as if in his, Casanova's, own hand without understanding a word of what he was writing. He arrived in Paris in 1772 from Russia via Basel, where he became well known and welcome at Louis XVI's court. It is said that he was initiated into the Egyptian Rite of Freemasonry by the Comte de Saint-Germain, and was impressed by a vast mirror in the Temple of Mystery where he was received, above which was written: 'Store House of Wandering Souls.' When he set himself up with his wife Seraphina in grand style in a hôtel particulier in *Rue St Claude* in Paris' 3rd arrondissement, he was already a celebrity, and crowds gathered to applaud him when he rode out in his carriage with liveried footmen. It was here that he established his own temple for the Egyptian Rite for which this dagger was made.

Unfortunately for him, he was implicated in the scandal of Marie Antoinette's diamonds, along with Cardinal Rohan, and was incarcerated in the Bastille for nine months. Brought to trial, he was asked how it was that, with no visible means of support, he was able to live on such a grand scale. He answered that he had been in Russia, hoping to meet the Empress Catherine, and since he had to wait a long time, he took to spending his days in the oriental market in St





Petersburg. There he met a woman shaman from Central Asia who taught him how to heal. Eventually he was kicked out of Russia because of his Masonic activities, without meeting the Empress, and made his way to Basel. Here he met an important banker, whose children were afflicted with a disease that had proved untreatable, but which he succeeded in curing. Since then, wherever he was, whatever he needed was provided. He was acquitted, but by order of the King was immediately banished, and without being allowed to return to his residence was taken with his wife to the coast and expelled to England. His house was locked and abandoned for 24 years, remaining untouched throughout the Revolution. It was opened in 1810, and the contents were auctioned by order of the government. Included in the auction were all the contents of the Egyptian Temple, including this dagger. Its subsequent history is unknown until it turned up in a London auction some years ago.

It is probably fair to surmise that the flummery exhibited by this dagger, with its bogus Arabic lettering and hieroglyphs, is somehow a reflection of Cagliostro himself. And yet, for all his flummery, he knew how to cast a spell.

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SATORAREPOTENETOPERAROTAS

England, early 19th century

Height: 21.5 cm

This cylindrical instrument, made of ivory and ebony, has puzzled the most eminent experts in the subject of scientific paraphernalia. It has ten drums, divided into two sets of five, which revolve horizontally, each of them with ten apparently random numbers. On the back of its sleeve appear the initials ‘JEC’, a square of sixteen, eight of which bear numbers, and a palindrome.

This instrument was published in 2005 as ‘A Very Rare Early Victorian Ivory and Ebony Calculating Device’. The description suggests that it is probably a variant on Schott’s revolving cylinder based on Napier’s bones. John Napier was the inventor of logarithms in 1614 and further invented a method of multiplying and dividing – ‘Napier’s bones’ (rods) in 1617. In 1668 Gaspard Schott substituted revolving cylinders for Napier’s four-sided rods, and much later in 1840 McFarlane invented a more complicated calculating cylinder in Edinburgh.

This description ignores four significant features of the instrument. Most obviously the palindrome on the sleeve, and the square (with three sequences adding up to 34), which may provide the key to its combinations. But also, the fact that the instrument comes apart so that the drums can be assembled in any



order; and the nine removable cubes around the base – each has five numbers and a blank side – with a tenth blank space (intended, or a loss?).

The presence of the Rotas-Sator square suggests that this is not simply a calculating device, since the square is related to traditions of magic, not to mathematics. Its construction was a cryptic rebus consisting of a symmetrical combination of five words, each of five letters, the whole forming a square which can be read in four different directions. Its earliest known appearance is at Pompei, which dates it to before 79 AD when Vesuvius erupted. It shows up subsequently at Dura-Europas on the Euphrates (pre-256 AD); at Victoria Road, Cirencester, (3rd–4th century); Budapest (3rd century); on a Carolingian Bible of 822 AD from St Germain-des-Près; in a 12th-century church in the Ardeche and at Loches; on a 13th century parchment of Aurillac (birthplace of the magician-pope Gerbert); and in the 15th century as a talisman against fire at Chinon and Jarnac. By the 16th century it was in use in Milan and Lyon as a cure for insanity and fever. The Jesuit genius Anasthasius Kircher found it in use in Ethiopia in the 17th century as names of the Five Nails of the Cross. By the late Middle Ages the formula was established in the superstitions of Byzantine Cappadocia, Serbia, Germany and Italy, and soon North and South America.

Much ink has been spilt trying to elucidate the meaning of this mysterious and ubiquitous palindrome. Even the interpretation of the words – generally translated as Saviour, Plough, Rules, Works of Man, Creation – is disputed. Anagrams have been teased out to provide exorcisms and incantations to the Devil, even comfort to St Peter for denying Christ. In 1924 it was discovered that the letters could be arranged to produce two Paternosters with two A's and O's left over. Opinion is currently divided between ascribing the palindrome to early Christianity, or to the Jews, a community of whom, it is pointed out, lived at Pompei. They, after all had a long tradition of word magic, alphabetic acrostics and gematria, seeing letters as the symbolic representation of divine powers. Who knows? And nowadays, who cares? Putting a plug into a wall to turn on a television, light or toaster would have seemed improbable magic just a short time ago, as well as transferring your thoughts over great distances through a telephone without undertaking the demanding rituals required for steganographic communication. Progress is clearly no respecter of magic.

To get back to the point – the presence of the palindrome indicates a purpose beyond mathematical calculations. As does the square above it, which indicates some kind of key for the cylindrical drums. In my view there must have been another identical instrument which allowed two people to communicate in an unbreakable code, like an early Enigma machine. And whatever they needed to communicate was important enough for them to devise a system so complicated that its very machinery is incomprehensible to outsiders. It can probably be defined as 'A Twin Cylinder Magic Cryptogram Generator and Decoder'. All we know of its owner is that his initials were: 'JEC'.





## SATYR AND DEAD BACCHAE

*Austin Osman Spare (1886–1956)**21 cm × 25 cm*

Fame came early to Austin Osman Spare. Son of a London policeman, he was awarded a scholarship to the Royal College of Art at the age of fifteen; a year later one of his compositions was hanging in the Royal Academy, and he was hailed as a genius by the likes of John Singer Sargent and George Frederick Watts. The art critic P.G. Konody wrote: ‘Indeed this young man stands almost unrivalled as regards the power and expressiveness of his pen line,’ and another attributed to him ‘the hand of Dürer and the eye of Dante’. Herbert Budd, who attended the RCA with Spare and later became a teacher at St Martin’s, described him as: ‘A god-like figure of whom the other students stood in awe, a fair creature like a Greek God, curly headed, proud, self-willed, practising the black arts, taking drugs, disdainfully apart from the crowd’.

Austin Spare’s main focus of interest was magic and the occult as the means to express what was available to the subconscious and invisible to the conscious. His ideas in this area, for example his ‘automatic drawings’, preceded and pre-figured Surrealism, for which he had little interest. He did not want to belong to any movement, either artistic or intellectual, and referred to Freud and Jung as ‘Fraud’ and ‘Junk’. He collaborated for a while with Aleister Crowley for the publication *Equinox*, interestingly for me since at the time Crowley was living in the studio off Fulham Road where I have worked for the last decade. They then fell out, Spare deciding that Crowley was a poseur, while Crowley until the end of his life expressed his admiration for Spare. After the trauma of the First World War, during which Spare was a war artist for the Medical Corps, he inhabited slum dwellings south of the river, exhibited in local pubs, embraced his poverty without bitterness or regret, and felt free to explore the strange forces that moved through him. As a result a very great artist slipped out of public recognition.

I bought this drawing at Christie’s in 1968, which puzzles me looking back, since I had no money to spend and my main focus at the time was tribal weavings. Recently, when reframing it, I found the signature and title on the back in brown ink, along with a loose pencil sketch of a couple lying side by side. There is no date, but I would guess it was done around 1922, by comparison with his illustrations for *The Golden Hind*, the quarterly he produced with Clifford Bax, which sufficiently shocked polite society so that it was unofficially known as *The Golden Behind*.



## STARGAZER

*Central Europe, 5th–6th centuries AD**Height: 29.5 cm*

This rough-hewn stone provides a rare portrait of how the ‘barbarian’ tribesmen looked, who overwhelmed the Roman empire. This man could be an Ostrogoth, or a Visigoth, or even perhaps a Viking if my dating is wrong; nobody seems to know. He is long-haired, bearded and strong featured but yet his strongest feature of all is the blind gaze from his up-tilted head, which was once orientated towards the Pole Star from the top of the grave of a great chieftain. We have forgotten our ancient religions, observed by the Romans but obliterated by the Christians, and this rude sculpture is a reminder of what we have lost.





35

DEMON'S HEAD

*Afghanistan, 4th–5th century AD*

*Height: 25 cm*

This painted stucco head was once part of a group of heads from a Buddhist cave shrine in the Gandhara region. Each head was of a very distinctive type, representing the many different nationalities of people who flocked from all over to worship the Buddha. Among them was a Soghdian merchant with a curly black beard; a Chinese monk with shaven head; a Greek-looking woman with an elegant coiffure; and an adolescent boy. The presence of a demon in such an assembly is surprising, and unexplained since he does not appear in other groups of the kind. He may be a shaman, or simply a gargoyle, or even a guardian figure dropping in from much further East.



## PAIR OF BRONZE TEMPLE SANDALS

*South India, 12th–13th century**Length: 25 cm*

There is an age-old tradition of presenting sandals, in one form or another, as offerings to Vaishnavaites in South India. Kings gave them to commemorate victories, others in recognition of answered prayers. I would guess that they originally symbolized pilgrimage to a holy site, but nobody seems to agree. In any case, these examples cast in bronze, never intended for anything as vulgar as wearing, must rank as one of the most elegant representations of footwear ever devised.





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MIAO WOMAN'S SILVER APRON WEIGHT

*Yunnan, China, 18th–19th century*

*Height: 14 cm*

The Miao people of south-west China are striking for their colourful dress, the profusion of their jewellery, and the beauty of their women. This surprising ornament was used to fix a woman's apron behind her back. The Miao have an ancient history, and were the first to develop agriculture in China some 8,000 years ago. Then they migrated south, and the term 'Miao' today designates a variety of ethnic minorities who have little in common either culturally or linguistically, and include the Hmong who migrated to Vietnam, Laos and Burma, beginning in the 18th century, and later to escape Communism.

38

JADE AMULET IN THE FORM OF A FEMALE SEX

*Northwest China, Hongshan culture, 4000–3000 BC*

*Length: 6.8 cm*

This amulet, so beguiling to the touch, and pierced at the clitoris, must have hung from the neck of an ancient Chinaman, a reminder of what was most dear to him. In the Wari' language of Brazil, as recently revealed by Daniel Everett, the word for 'wife' translates as 'our vagina', which term probably implies the highest possible praise, as opposed to being insultingly reductive, as the 'sisters' will no doubt interpret it. I feel sure the original wearer felt like the Wari'.



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STONEHENGE

James Sowerby (1757–1822), 1802–1810  
19 cm × 47 cm  
Ink, pencil and watercolour on paper

The earliest images of Stonehenge so far discovered date from the 14th century; one in the British Library’s *Roman de Brut* of 1338–40, the other in the *Scala Mundi* chronicle of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, of more or less the same date. A 15th-century drawing was recently discovered in the *Compilatio de Gestis* manuscript in the Douai Library, published in 2007. Mention of Stonehenge occurs much earlier: in the *Historia Anglorum*, written by the archdeacon of Lincoln, Henry of Huntingdon, circa 1130; and in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britaniae* in 1136. In the 16th century it crops up as part of an iconography express-



ing an interest in our distant non-Christian past; for example in the well-known painting by Lucas de Heere of 1574.

We have rather scrubbed out a whole part of our intellectual tradition, represented by the likes of Dr Dee and Robert Fludd, plugged in as they were to the European movement of Humanism in its magnificent excess. And yet in the 17th century, the enthusiasts for monuments such as Stonehenge and Avebury were their direct heirs. In 1655 Inigo Jones published his *Most Notable Antiquity of Great Britain Vulgarly Called Stone Henge on Salisbury Plain*, with multiple plans, drawings and speculations as to its purpose. He was asked to make the study by King

James, who had visited it in 1620 while staying at Wilton. Jones’s interest was greatly aroused when he found that the geometrical grid defining the shape of Stonehenge was identical to Vitruvius’ ground-plan for a Roman theatre.

At around the same time, John Aubrey published a plan of Stonehenge in his *Monumenta Britannica*. In the mid-18th century, William Stukely seemingly showed that the monument was orientated towards the point of sunrise at midsummer, while recent research has revised this to midwinter sunset. To his extraordinary watercolour painted in 1835, Constable appended an inscription: ‘The mysterious monument of Stonehenge, standing remote on a bare and boundless heath, as much unconnected with the events of the past as it is with the uses of the present, carries you back beyond all historical records into the obscurity of a totally unknown period.’ We have, it seems, retained concepts in our culture, rather like we retain Stonehenge in our landscape, which we no longer understand. That we do not understand the purpose and function of our megalithic monuments is proved by the great number of interpretations that have been elaborated, from the driest scientific to the wildest esoteric. Perhaps it is just that our terms of reference in the way we think about things have changed so much that we end up looking down the wrong end of a telescope, reducing the meaning instead of seeing it more clearly.

James Sowerby was an important naturalist and illustrator, responsible for several huge botanical projects. His 36-volume work on the botany of England, known as *Sowerby’s Botany*, contained 2,592 hand-coloured engravings, both scientifically accurate and attractive. His *Mineral Conchology of Great Britain* was published over a 34-year time-span. He housed a collection of minerals and natural history specimens in his residence, much frequented by members of the Royal Society, which included the first recorded English meteorite that fell on Yorkshire in 1795. He did this sketch of Stonehenge at the time when my distant antiquarian ancestor, Sir Richard Colt Hoare, was undertaking the first excavations of Stonehenge with William Cunnington. Sowerby was brought in by Cunnington for his geological expertise in trying to determine the origin of the sarsens, and the smaller stones then believed to be part of a later structure. Their findings were published in two volumes entitled *The Ancient History of Wiltshire* (1812–19), which was and remains a landmark publication of the time. A watercolour by Philip Croker of Sir Richard digging up a barrow rests with the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society.



THE SPIRIT OF THE ROSE GARDEN

*Sophie Grandval, early 1970's*

*26 cm × 12.5 cm*

*Ink and watercolour on paper*

I first met Sophie Grandval in Paris in the mid-1960's, when I was a student and she was already a legend. Her first exhibition had caused a sensation, and every painting sold on the opening night. They have a powerful, naïve magic about them that seems to enchant all who look at them. She worked mainly in oils, but when Mrs Mellon commissioned her to paint all the vegetables and plants in the King's Vegetable Garden at Versailles in the early 1970s, she turned to watercolour. This mysterious Hermetic figure standing in his pale blue winged boots dates from that period. In 1973 she moved to Bath, mainly to be near John Mitchell, whom she considered the only person who saw the world as she did. Her rooms there were extraordinarily atmospheric, festooned with dried flowers, strange gewgaws, illustrations from magazines and books, and perfumed with the pungent aroma of hashish. On one visit she informed me that the previous evening she had been drinking in a pub when she realized that the Devil was sitting on the bar-stool next to her. This news was so surprising that I forgot to ask her what he was drinking.

Now she lives in Burgundy, and on my last visit there she told me this: 'I've got used to living alone in this remote part of France. Sometimes it's hard, but I like my solitude. I know what goes on in the world because I listen to the radio a lot while I paint. Instead of looking outwards I now look within, and find the same beauty there. I feed all the birds in the forest around my studio where I live since the house burned down, and only let the cats out at night when the birds are asleep. There are six jays who leave beautiful feathers to thank me for the food. I provide nuts for the squirrels who come to the door, and apples for the horses in the field next-door'.

This image is the direct descendant of Jacques le Moyne's watercolour in the Yale Center for British Art, engraved in 1590 as 'a yonge dowgter of the Pictes' in De Bry's America, which I am sure Sophie had pinned up on her wall in Bath. But I find her interpretation is altogether more mysterious and beguiling.









TWO PHYSIONOMICAL LANDSCAPES

France, early 19th century  
Drawings: 18 cm × 25 cm  
Ink on paper

I came across engravings of these two intriguing landscapes in my bathroom at La Grange, Mortefontaine, the first time I went to stay with my future mother-in-law, Lulu de Waldner. A couple of years later, by which time she was my mother-in-law, I went looking for a Christmas present for her, and decided to visit Geoffrey Bennison in Pimlico Road. There was nothing suitable, unusually, in the glorious clutter of his shop, so I went downstairs to have a coffee with him in his office at the back. In due course he pointed to a French commode sitting against the wall. He had just bought it, he said, and had found something in the top drawer which might do the trick. I looked, and there were these two drawings, the originals from which the engravings I admired had been taken.

Each engraving had a couplet underneath:

Le temps qui detruit tout, donne a tout l’existence:  
Des debris que tu vois, j’ai recu la naissance.

A me considerer tes soins sont superflus:  
Si tu m’appercevois, tu ne me verrois plus.

And in tiny script at the bottom, the information: Fortier sculpsit. A Paris, chez L.DUBOIS, Peintre, Rue de l’Eperon No.8. Et chez tous les M[archan]ds de Nouveautes. Depose a la Bibliotheque Imperiale.

42. NEOLITHIC FLINT DAGGER  
Denmark, Single Grave period, circa 2000–1700 BC  
Length: 20 cm

43. DIAN CULTURE AGATE BOSS IN NIPPLE FORM  
Yunan, China, 300 BC–400 AD  
Diameter: 7.5 cm

44. GREENSLATE BROADWING PECTORAL  
Tairona culture, Northwest Columbia, circa 1000–1500 AD  
Length: 36 cm

45. NEOLITHIC JADE PENDANT  
Inner Mongolia, Hongshan Culture, 3500–2500 BC  
Height: 6 cm

46. NEOLITHIC MOTTLED GREEN STONE DOUBLE DISC  
Siberia, probably 2nd millennium BC  
Diameter: 6 cm

47. SHANG DYNASTY JADE AXE BLADE  
China, circa 1200 BC

48. AGATE AXE-BLADE  
Indonesia, 2nd millennium BC  
Height: 15.5 cm

49. ECCENTRIC MAHOGANY FLINT  
Colima culture, Western Mexico, proto-classic period, 100 BC–250 AD  
Length: 36 cm

50. BACTRIAN BANDED AGATE POMMEL  
Afghanistan, 3rd millennium BC  
Diameter: 5.8 cm

51. BACTRIAN POLISHED AGATE FINIAL  
Afghanistan, 3rd millennium BC  
Diameter: 9 cm

52. BACTRIAN BANDED STONE WEIGHT  
Afghanistan, 3rd millennium BC  
Height: 25 cm

53. TWO POLISHED GREENSTONE CELTS  
Honduras, circa 300 BC  
Lengths: 14.5 cm and 13.5 cm

54. MAYAN MARBLE PALETTE WITH THREE BALLS  
Central America, circa 600 AD  
Diameter: 13.5 cm palette

55. OLMEC HARDSTONE RATTLESNAKE  
Mexico or Guatemala, 1100–400 BC  
Length: 19 cm

56. OLMEC CONCH SHELL TRUMPET  
Mexico, first half 1st millennium BC  
Length: 31 cm

57. GREY SCHIST LIBATION CUP  
Iran, 3rd millennium BC  
Diameter: 14 cm

58. PARTIALLY PETRIFIED JOINT BONE OF A HOLOOTHERIUM  
Siberia, before 30,000 BC and worked later  
Length: 14.5 cm

59. ELECTRUM RING  
Indus Valley Civilisation, 2nd millennium BC  
Height: 5 cm

60. JADE CHAPE  
Eastern Zhou, China, 4th–3rd century BC  
Height: 5 cm

61. TWO PIERCED BRONZE ANIMAL STYLE PLAQUES  
Central Asia, mid–1st millennium BC  
Length: 8.5 cm

62. PIERCED BRONZE ANIMAL STYLE MEDALLION  
Central Asia, mid–1st millennium BC  
Diameter: 7.5 cm

63. SKULL OF AN ALBATROSS  
Cape Horn, 19th century  
Length: 26.5 cm

64. TWO BIRD LURES  
Fars Province, Iran, 19th century  
Length: 18 cm  
Wood, duck feathers, turquoise and glass beads, brass, quill, thread

65. TWO IRON TETHERING HOOKS  
Northern India, 17th–18th century  
Lengths: 28.5 cm and 25.5 cm  
Such hooks were hammered into the wall of a caravanserail to tether the animals of a caravan.

66. ESKIMO MARINE IVORY GRINDING BOWL  
Alaska, 16th–17th centuries  
Width: 6 cm  
It was collected in 1942 by William Tarr, a professional sculptor serving in the US army sent to guard his country’s extreme territories. With its glassy patina and scored inner surface, it was probably made to grind pigments, and bears a painted inventory number.

67. ESKIMO MARINE IVORY HARPOON  
Old Bering Sea culture, St. Lawrence Island, 300 BC–100 AD  
Length: 10.5 cm

68. ESKIMO MARINE IVORY WHALE  
Alaska, 18th–19th century  
Length: 15 cm

69. ESKIMO WALRUS IVORY ADZE  
Alaska, 800–1400 AD  
Length: 25 cm

70. PLAINS INDIAN ELK HORN CLUB  
North America, 2nd millennium AD  
Length: 51 cm

71. SHAMAN’S IVORY WHISK HANDLE  
*Japan, 17th–18th century*  
*Height: 14 cm*

72. BRONZE SPIRAL SNAKE HEADDRESS ORNAMENT  
*Indonesia, 18th–19th century*  
*Height: 22.5 cm*

73. TWO SLITHERING SNAKES  
*Indonesia, 19th century*  
*Length: 20.5 cm*  
*Bone*

74. CHINESE FURONG TYPE SOAPSTONE SCORPION SEAL  
*China, dated 1882*  
*Height: 6.2 cm*  
*The calligraphy is in the style of Huang Mu Pu, founder of the Xiling Yin She school of calligraphy in the 18th century. The base reads: ‘Colour like jade’.*

75. SCHOLAR’S PEBBLE  
*China, dated 1904*  
*Length: 9 cm*  
*Dated to the reign of the last Ching Emperor Guangxu, the inscription reads: ‘There are oceanic prospects among mountain peaks’. On hopes that this modest yet poetic object provided solace for a languid scholar facing the upheavals of his times, in the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion, and with the final crumbling of the Imperial regime.*

76. MALACHITE BOULDER  
*Russia, 19th century*  
*Height: 40 cm*

77. HEAD OF ATLANTES  
*Gandhara, 2nd–3rd century*  
*Height: 19 cm*  
*Grey schist*

78. BRONZE IBEX FINIAL  
*South Arabia, 1st–2nd century AD*  
*Height: 20.5 cm*

79. SILVER AND GOLD INLAID STEEL STEM-CUP  
*Tibet, 17th–18th century*  
*Height: 11.5 cm*

80. TIBETAN THREE-PIECE SCRIBE’S WRITING TABLET  
*Tibet, 18th century*  
*Length: 27 cm*  
*Wood, lacquer, silk*

81. HUMAN FEMUR TRUMPET  
*Tibet, 18th–19th century*  
*Length: 32 cm*  
*Bone, yak leather*

82. IVORY SKULL  
*Tibet, 16th–17th century*  
*Size: 4.2 cm high*

83. HUMAN SKULL KAPALA  
*Tibet, 18th–19th century*  
*Length: 18 cm*

84. MUGHAL BUFFALO HORN BOW  
*Northern India, 19th century*  
*Length: 123 cm*  
*Captured during the Indian Mutiny in 1857; collection of Lord Seaforth of Bourne Castle; presented in 1951 to the Leeds Archers (founded 1857).*

85. SILVER BEAKER  
*India, 19th century*  
*Diameter: 9 cm*  
*Inscribed: ‘FOUND IN A TANK at the capture of Noorgond EI June 1st 1858 GTP.’*

86. MUGHAL IVORY ELEPHANT  
*Northern India, 17th century*  
*Length: 6.3 cm*

87. IVORY AND SILVER SONGBIRD CAGE  
*Lucknow, India, 18th century*  
*Height: 31 cm*

88. LOVERS ON A STARRY NIGHT  
*Kangra, India, circa 1820*  
*26.5×20 cm*  
*Opaque watercolour heightened with gold and silver on paper*

89. EVENING CONCERT ON A TERRACE  
*Sub-Imperial Mughal, India, 18th century*  
*Album page: 49×35 cm; miniature: 22×16 cm*  
*Gouache heightened with gold on paper*

90. ENTERTAINING A TOURIST  
*Company School, Kotah, India, circa 1840*  
*21.5×16.5 cm*  
*Watercolour and gold on paper*

91. PERFUME FLASK BEARD COMB  
*Northern India, 18th–19th century*  
*Length: 6.5 cm*  
*Silver with gold*

92. TWO SILVER LOTUS-BUD WEIGHTS  
*Northern India, 18th–19th century*  
*Heights: 11.5 cm and 9.5 cm*

93. TWO ENTWINED LADIES  
*Goa, India, 17th century*  
*Heights: 5.8 cm*  
*Copper*

94. TWO QAJAR GIRLS HAVING FUN  
*Iran, first half 19th century*  
*24×18 cm*  
*Watercolour on paper*

95. FIVE OTTOMAN STEEL AXE-HEADS  
*Turkey, 16th century*  
*Heights: 30 cm maximum*

96. FOUR OTTOMAN DIVIDERS  
*Turkey, 18th–19th century*  
*Lengths: 26.5 cm maximum, 16.5 cm minimum*  
*Steel, gold and silver*

97. OTTOMAN CYLINDER PADLOCK AND KEY  
*Turkey, 19th century*  
*Width: 8 cm*  
*Steel with gold*

98. OTTOMAN LOCK AND KEY  
*Turkey, 19th century*  
*Length: 25 cm*  
*Steel with gold*

99. OTTOMAN PADLOCK AND KEY  
*Turkey, 19th century*  
*Width: 5.5 cm*  
*Steel with gold*

100. OTTOMAN CYLINDRICAL CASKET  
*Turkey, mid–18th century*  
*Height: 23 cm*  
*Leather, wood, brass, felt*

101. OTTOMAN MARBLE TURBAN  
*Turkey, 17th century*  
*Height: 30 cm*

102. OTTOMAN WOOD TURBAN  
*Turkey, 18th–19th century*  
*Height: 32 cm*

103. ARCHITECT’S DIVIDERS  
*Turkey, 19th century*  
*Height: 51 cm*  
*Wood, iron, brass, tortoiseshell, ivory, bone*

104. FIRE BELLOWS  
*Turkey, 19th century*  
*Height: 37 cm*  
*Wood, tortoiseshell, ivory, leather, copper, brass*

105. GOTHIC BRONZE MORTAR AND PESTLE  
*Spain, 13th–14th century*  
*Height: 11.5 cm; diameter: 13.5 cm*

106. PAIR OF BLUE-AND-WHITE PORCELAIN BOWLS  
*China, 15th century*  
*Diameters: 17 cm*  
*Found in a ruined teahouse in Herat, Afghanistan.*

107. BASALT TALISMAN MOULD  
*Mesopotamia, 17th century or earlier*  
*Diameter: 7 cm*

108. IRON NEW VINTAGE SHERRY CASK TAP  
*Probably Jerez, Spain, 18th century*  
*Length: 33.5 cm*

109. CHISEL  
*Indonesia, 18th–19th century*  
*Height: 20.5 cm*  
*Bone and iron*

110. ROOT SCULPTURE OF THE TWELVE ANIMALS OF THE ZODIAC  
*China, 17th–18th century*  
*Length: 6.5 cm*

111. STAMPED SILVER INGOT  
*China, 19th century*  
*Length: 11.1 cm*

112. SAFAVID STEEL SUGAR AXE  
*Iran, circa 1700*  
*Length: 31 cm*

113. SILVER NECKLACE  
*Indonesia, 18th–19th century*  
*Diameter: 18.2 cm maximum*

114. SAFAVID SWORD-SHARPENER STEEL  
*Signed by Muhammad Abu Saif*  
*Iran, 16th century*  
*Length: 32 cm*

115. THE MOSQUE OF IBN TULUN. CAIRO  
*Henri Bechard*  
*Albumen print, 1870’s, signed*  
*39×28 cm*

116. SITAR AND TABLA  
*William Hooper*  
*India, 1870s*  
*18×15.5 cm*

117. ORDER OF THE GARTER  
*England, 19th century*  
*Length: 48 cm*  
*Silk, gilt metal thread, brass*

118. DERVISH’S NEFIR HORN  
*Turkey, 18th–19th century*  
*Length: 73 cm*  
*Horn*

119. DERVISHES BEHAVING BADLY  
*Mughal India, 17th century*  
*Album page: 26.5×40 cm; miniature: 19×27 cm*  
*Gouache on paper*

120. IVORY TRIBAL OLIPHANT  
*Zaire, West Africa, early 19th century*  
*Length: 70 cm*

121. OTTOMAN KERMANCHE  
*Turkey, second half 19th century*  
*Height: 42 cm*  
*Wood, ivory, tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl, gold leaf*

122. OTTOMAN KERMANCHE  
*Turkey, second half 19th century*  
*Height: 40.5 cm*  
*Wood, ivory, tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl, gold leaf*



123. OTTOMAN TANBUR  
*Turkey, second half 19th century*  
*Length: 138 cm*  
*Wood, ivory, tortoiseshell, bone, gold leaf*

124. OTTOMAN SAZ  
*Turkey, circa 1900*  
*Length: 108 cm*  
*Wood, ivory, tortoiseshell, gold leaf*

125. OTTOMAN OUD  
*Turkey, circa 1900*  
*Length: 90 cm*  
*Wood, ivory, tortoiseshell, horn, gold leaf*

126. OTTOMAN VIOLIN  
*Turkey, second half 19th century*  
*Length: 60 cm*  
*Wood, mother-of-pearl*

127. SPIKE FIDDLE  
*Iran, circa 1900*  
*Length: 84 cm*  
*Wood, bone, skin, iron*

128. TAMBOURINE  
*Turkey, 19th century*  
*Diameter: 26 cm*  
*Wood, mother-of-pearl, skin, brass*

129. MEVLEVI NEY  
*Konya, Turkey, 19th century*  
*Length: 66 cm*  
*Wood, brass wire*

130. HIGH LAMA'S HAT BOX  
*Tibet, 19th century*  
*Diameter: 30 cm*  
*Wood, leather, brass*

131. BRASS MAGIC BOWL  
*Middle East, 16th century*  
*Diameter: 21.5 cm*

132. MUGHAL BRONZE TURTLE  
*Northern India, circa 1600*  
*Length: 7 cm*

133. BRONZE INKWELL  
*Eastern Iran, 13th century*  
*Height: 14 cm*

134. THREE STEEL STRIKERS  
*Iran, 17th–18th century*  
*Lengths: 23 cm, 18 cm and 14 cm*

135. SILVER-MOUNTED AGATE PENDANT  
*Turkey, 17th century*  
*Height: 9 cm*

136. MINIATURE STONE IDOL  
*Anatolia, Beycesultan type, circa 2600 BC*  
*Height: 4 cm*

137. MINERAL SCULPTURE  
*Height: 5 cm*

138. TWO BRONZE ZEBU BULLS  
*Northern India, 1st millennium BC*  
*Heights: 13 cm*

139. DERVISH'S SWORD-STICK  
*Turkey, 19th century*  
*Length: 58.5 cm*  
*Steel with gold*

140. CEREMONIAL MACE  
*Turkey, 19th century*  
*Length: 62 cm*  
*Steel with gold*

141. OBSIDIAN CORE  
*Probably Ubaid, Turkey, 5th millennium BC*  
*Length: 21 cm*  
*The flutings along the sides of this obsidian peg are the result of blades being flaked from its surface. Already in the Stone Age obsidian was highly valued because of the sharp blades and arrowheads it provided. It is a naturally occurring volcanic glass of which the sources in the Ancient World were Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece and Italy. The Egyptians imported it from the Eastern Mediterranean, and in Pliny's Natural History the name Obsidianus is attributed to its resemblance to a stone found in Ethiopia by a certain Obsius. After Cortes' conquest of Mexico in 1527–30, American obsidian arrived in Europe, and Dr. Dee's scrying mirror, now in the British Museum, was among the first obsidian objects to appear from the New World. Today high quality surgical instruments are made from it, many times sharper than steel.*

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