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TRÈS RARE PANNEAU EN KESI INSCRIT CÉLÉBRANT LA VICTOIRE DE L'EMPEREUR QIANLONG LORS DE LA DEUXIÈME GUERRE CONTRE LES GURKHAS

CHINE, DYNASTIE QING, ÉPOQUE QIANLONG (1736-1795)

■ Post sale offsite storage

σ VAT (reduced rate)

Estimate

EUR 30,000 - EUR 50,000



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DETAILS

TRÈS RARE PANNEAU EN *KESI* INSCRIT CÉLÉBRANT LA VICTOIRE DE L'EMPEREUR QIANLONG LORS DE LA DEUXIÈME GUERRE CONTRE LES GURKHAS
CHINE, DYNASTIE QING, ÉPOQUE QIANLONG (1736-1795)
Dimensions sans cadre: 112,7 × 151,8 cm. (44 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 59 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.)

PROVENANCE

Collection of Sir Nicholas Roderick O'Conor GCB GCMG PC (1843-1908), and then by descent within the family. Sir Nicholas O'Conor joined the Diplomatic Service in 1866, holding various posts, including Secretary of Legation in Peking (1883-1886), Chargé d'affaires (1885-1886), Secretary of Legation in Washington (1886), Consul General in Bulgaria (1887-1892), and Minister Plenipotentiary to China and Korea (1892-1895), Russia (1895-1898), and Ambassador to Turkey (1898-1908).

FURTHER DETAILS

A VERY RARE INSCRIBED *KESI* PANEL CELEBRATING THE QIANLONG VICTORY OF THE SECOND SINO-GURKHA WAR
CHINA, QING DYNASTY, QIANLONG PERIOD (1736-1795)

Conditions of sale

Brought to you by



Tiphaine Nicoul
Head of department

Check the condition report or get in touch for additional information about this

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VIEW CONDITION REPORT

Lot Essay

The present textile belongs to a rare and distinguished group of exceptionally fine, inscribed *kesi* tapestries, exemplifying the pinnacle of 18th-century Qing dynasty weaving. The *kesi* technique, renowned for its ability to render images with the precision of ink paintings, allowed artisans to replicate the visual sophistication of court paintings from the Qianlong period. This particular panel is the only known example of its type to depict the Second Sino-Nepalese War.

The scene illustrated on the tapestry represents the Gurkhas' offering of elephants and horses as tribute in 1793, marking the conclusion of the Second Sino-Gurkha War—also known as the Second Sino-Nepalese War—one of the Ten Great Campaigns of the Qianlong Emperor's reign. This conflict, waged between the Qing dynasty and the Kingdom of Nepal in the late 18th century, was instigated by the Gurkha invasion of Tibet, then under Qing protection. The war ended in Nepalese defeat and the signing of a treaty that reaffirmed Qing sovereignty over Tibet.

A rare series of battle prints in the collection of the Getty Research Institute, *Pictures of the Campaigns against the Gurkhas*, was commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor and produced between 1793 and 1799. These works commemorate the emperor's successful military campaign against the Gurkhas and reflect the influence of European battle prints, which had been introduced to China by Jesuit missionaries or sent as diplomatic gifts from European courts. Initially, the Qianlong Emperor enlisted Jesuit court artists to create drawings, which were then engraved and printed at the royal workshop of Charles-Nicolas Cochin fils. Pleased with the results, the emperor later commissioned additional suites, this time by Chinese artists. The Getty prints belong to this later phase of production—created nearly three decades after the first series—and were executed around the same time as the present *kesi* panel. Emphasizing landscape in keeping with traditional Chinese modes of battle depiction, the style of the *kesi* panel closely parallels that of the Getty suite, particularly in its focus on terrain and setting.

One of the most distinctive features of the present *kesi* is the depiction of a church in the upper right corner—a highly unusual element in Qing military tapestries. It is possible that this motif reflects the Jesuit influence in Qianlong's court.

Although no other published *kesi* examples illustrating this specific scene are known, several comparable panels from the same period survive. A closely related Qianlong-era *kesi* panel, inscribed and depicting the arrival of a planetarium and celestial globe at the Summer Palace as part of Lord Macartney's embassy, is held by the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London (accession no. TXT0107). Another similarly woven panel, depicting an agrarian scene, was sold at Christie's Hong Kong, 29–30 September 1992, lot 961. A third related panel illustrating the *Gengzhi Tu* was sold at Sotheby's London, 1 November 2022, lot 30.

The poetic inscription on the textile was composed by the Qianlong Emperor in 1793. It is recorded in *The Imperial Verses*, Collection 5, Volume 84, within *The Complete Library of the Four Treasuries* (*Siku Quanshu*). The same verse is also documented in the *Huo Ji Dang* (translated archives), dated to the 27th day of the 3rd month of the 59th year of Qianlong's reign (1794), where it is noted that the Governor of Jiangxi presented the emperor with a pair of *kesi* panels depicting the Gurkhas' tribute of horses and elephants, each bearing inscribed poems. The present panel is very likely one of the two panels referenced in this archival record.

The inscription reads:

御製廓爾喀所貢象馬至京詩以誌事
異域歸降順事機，來朝奉表賚先歸

馬蹄象齒胥生致，鹿角狼胡笑彼微
軍務細咨憐衆苦，武功全戴賴天機
持盈業業惟增惕，敢曰遐荒接踵依

From distant lands, they submitted and aligned with the flow of events,
Coming to court, presenting their tributes, and receiving gifts before returning.

With horses' hooves and ivory tusks they brought offerings,
The barbarians with antlered caps and wolfish garb scoffed at their feeble stature.

Military affairs were carefully deliberated, and the people's hardship was met with compassion;
The success of martial campaigns was fully achieved thanks to Heaven's blessings.

In prosperity we remain vigilant and ever industrious,
How dare we boast, when distant frontiers continue to approach and seek allegiance?

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