





The sale's top lot, this imperial

bowl from the Qianlong period

for \$303,000. James Callahan

American collector. Made circa

the bowl is light green with areas

1774 for the emperor himself,

of russet and was estimated on

\$400,000/600,000. Its design

shaped clouds. (A ruyi is a

ceremonial scepter, often a

design.) Incised on the bowl's

interior is a poem penned by the

emperor, dedicated to the object.

A veneration of nature, it states

the dragons leaping from the

From the Taylor collection but

not brought to the Roadshow,

this bamboo-root carving from

\$154,050 (est. \$3000/5000). The

buyer was a private collector in

the room. The 6½" tall figure is

cape sitting on a rocky outcrop.

A carved jade mythical animal Pi

(not counting the stand), sold in

a post-auction deal for \$98,000

(est. \$200,000/300,000).

Hsieh with two cubs in pale

green with tan areas, 4" x 71/2"

It has some losses and repairs.

that of an immortal in a mugwort

the Qianlong period fetched

deep pond."

in part, "Into cascades and clouds

talisman, used in Chinese

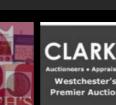
consists of five dragons and ruyi-

the Roadshow and for the

Skinner catalog at

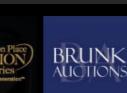
identified the buyer as an

(1736-95), sold to a phone bidder



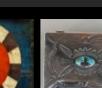


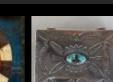












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December 23rd, 2009

## Chinese Jades Evade Million-Dollar Mark

by

carved jade

Skinner Inc., Boston, Massachusetts

Is the 18th-century Chinese carved jade bowl half full or half empty? The question was pertinent after Skinner's two-day Asian sale in Boston on October 17 and 18, 2009, when four jades dating from the Qianlong period (1736-95) brought a total of \$494,615 (including buyers' premiums). The trouble, if you could call it trouble, was that when consignor Jinx Taylor of Hampstead, North Carolina, brought the pieces to a June 27, 2009, appraisal for PBS's Antiques Roadshow in Raleigh, they were appraised by Skinner's James Callahan for \$710,000 to

\$1.07 million.

It marked the first seven-figure appraisal for the show, which starts its 14th season on January 4. The August 2009 issue of Antiques Roadshow Insider quoted executive producer Marcia Bemko as having called the million-dollar benchmark "our 'Great White Whale.'" If appraisals are meant to become actual sales, Bemko remains a frustrated Ahab. But of course, the Roadshow is about the business of television, not about the business of selling antiques.

Viewers will see Taylor's reaction in the segment scheduled to air on January 4. After Callahan told her the pieces' potential value, she was "stunned," he said. "If it's ten or fifteen thousand dollars, it's not life-changing. It means, 'Maybe we'll go on a trip to Europe.' If it's a million, it means, 'Maybe we'll live in Europe.'"

How did these objects, one of which was carved for an emperor, end up in North Carolina? Taylor told Callahan that her father, U.S. Army Colonel John G. Taylor (1912-1998), bought the objects in Peiping, now Beijing, while working there as a military liaison in the 1940's. She even had the name and address of the dealer who sold them, a Mr. Liang of No. 10 Jade Street. Skinner located the shop on an Internet map that shows the building still standing today, not

far from the Forbidden City. A couple of weeks after the Roadshow taping, Taylor and Callahan appeared on the syndicated TV newsmagazine Inside Edition. Shortly after that, said Callahan, the consignment

to Skinner was made.

results, Callahan said, "I think she was a bit disappointed. But in the end, how can she be?" Her total windfall is actually much greater than the nearly half-million dollars that the four items brought. That's because Taylor consigned to the same sale about 30 other items she had not brought to the Roadshow. Callahan characterized most of them as "just stuff" and didn't identify them in the catalog. Seven others, however, were major enough to note and brought another \$350,523. Score a total of at least \$845,138 for the Taylor siblings. Callahan offered this explanation of why he thought the four *Roadshow* objects didn't meet their Roadshow-generated expectations. Under

Neither Taylor nor her unnamed brother, who co-owned the objects,

attended the sale in Boston. Asked about her reaction to the auction's

normal circumstances, he sets estimates low, sometimes below sea level. It's one reason why his sales have such high sell rates, and this sale was no exception, with a 92% sell rate by volume and 98% by value on the 1170 lots that were offered. The estimates he set for the Roadshow jades, by contrast, were much more ambitious, in keeping with Roadshow standards, and he did not change those levels for the sale. The bidders, many of whom came to the sale from Asia and who surely knew nothing of the items' TV history, balked at those levels. According

to Callahan, "If it wasn't a cheap estimate, they didn't raise their hands. The lower the estimate, the higher the price." For example, a non-Roadshow piece from the Taylor collection, a bamboo root carving with damage, made \$154,050 on a \$3000/5000

estimate, while the sale's highlight, an imperial jade bowl, estimated at \$400,000/600,000, sold for \$303,000. Similarly, a jade carving of an immortal, which was not brought to the Roadshow, made \$90,060, more than six times its high estimate. One lot earlier, a jade carving of a mythical animal, with a Roadshow appraisal of \$200,000/300,000, failed to elicit one bid, although it did sell literally minutes later in a postauction deal for \$98,000. The buyer, who had been summoned from the gallery by Skinner CEO Karen Keane, was identified by Callahan as a dealer. Have these bidders balked at high estimates in the past? "They have, but not as much as this time," Callahan said.

At least on the day we attended the sale, there was also a noticeable antagonism between Skinner staff and the audience. It was communicated by the fairly stern tone used by Keane when she made the

usual announcements about the buyer's premium, et cetera. She even asked two people chatting in the front row to pay attention. "I think Skinner was afraid of pooling at the sale," said Callahan. "But I think maybe in the end we overreacted, because it was a case of there

being more than one pool. And it works only if there's one pool, if you

The sale as a whole fetched \$2,678,935. Callahan was more than pleased. "What happens in the Asian art market is dependent on what happens in the Chinese economy," he said. "They may have lost billions, but they still have billions, and their expenses are in the thousands. Part of the global economic recovery is a new world order, and I think this is evidence of

that." Signifying growth in this department, Skinner has hired an assistant for Callahan, Tianyue Jiang. The Beijing native, who speaks Mandarin Chinese, English, and several other languages, earned a bachelor's degree from Peking University and a master's degree in art history from

Williams College. Her specialty is Chinese art in general. As for the supply of Asian art, there's still plenty out there, just not in China. "There's little left in China," said Callahan. "It was cleaned out in the 1900's to the 1920's. There was another large exit of material in the 1940's. They're dying to get it back."

For more information, phone the Boston gallery at (617) 350-5400, the Marlborough facility at (508) 970-3000, or see the Web site (www.skinnerinc.com).

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