

Afghanistan's Hidden Treasures Inspire *Jack Abraham/Precious Gem Resources*



Archaeologist Dr. Fredrik T. Hiebert,
Mrs. Shamim Jawad, and Mr. Jack Abraham.

*Jack Abraham of Precious Gem Resources shares his awe
over 2,000 year-old gold artifacts from Afghanistan, his
birthplace and where East meets West.*

BY JESSICA TEISCH

Jack has traveled the globe in search of the rarest and most magnificent precious gems. As the founder of Precious Gem Resources, a leading purveyor of top quality rubies, sapphires and emeralds and manufacturer of one-of-a-kind platinum and gold jewelry, He has seen everything. Almost.

Jack, born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1943, was recently invited by His Honor the Afghan Ambassador, Said Jawad and his wife Shamim, for an evening featuring the traveling exhibit "Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul." The exhibition was organized by the National Geographic Society and the National Gallery of Art of Washington, D.C., in association with



Boot buckles with chariot drawn by dragons.

the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The evening supported the Ayenda Foundation, founded by Mrs. Shamim Jawad, which helps Afghan orphan children. Jack was in awe of the truly magnificent pieces and craftsmanship he witnessed. The exhibit contains 228 lots comprising 1200 pieces selected from 21,000 pieces of jewelry and artifacts from the Museum, most of which were thought to have been looted or destroyed during

Afghanistan's two decades of violence and civil war. "For a long time," Jack says, "everyone, except a few brave Afghans who had secretly stashed them away, thought the Russians or Taliban had stolen or destroyed these



Necklace

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irreplaceable pieces.” Instead, he explains, the artifacts were secretly hidden in crates in the Central Bank within the Presidential Palace by Mr. Omar Masoudi and other National Museum and Palace officials. These individuals risked their lives to keep these secret and prevent destruction by the Taliban. Archaeologist Fredrik T. Hiebert went to Afghanistan on behalf of The National Geographic Society in search of the lost collection. He was told quietly that, “We will show you the treasures, but you must guarantee that they will be meticulously and scientifically documented.” The priceless horde resurfaced in 2004 after the demise of the Taliban and replaced by an American presence in Afghanistan. “When they opened up the coffers,” Jack describes, “there were necklaces, earrings, rings, Indo-Greek jewelry and so many wonderful pieces, you wonder how they created these masterpieces with the tools that were available at the time.”

THE ORIGINAL COLLECTION WAS SAFE.

The artifacts, which date from the third century BC to the first century AD—when Jack’s forefathers were exiled to a part of Asia that is now Afghanistan—include gold bowls modeled after Mesopotamia’s art, bronze and stone sculptures from the former Greek city of Ai Khanum, painted glassware from Rome and India, and gold, silver and ivory ornaments found in nomad graves at Tillya Tepe. Jack marvels at this convergence of different civilizations—Greek, Roman, Persian, Indian, Chinese and Russian, “all mixing and producing these beautiful, sophisticated pieces.” Much of the art represents the vital, ancient crossroads of trade routes from Asia to the Mediterranean, collectively known as the Silk Road.

The collection’s jewelry in particular has inspired Jack’s sense of design and craftsmanship. He barely contains his glee when describing a portable, collapsible gold crown



Pair of bracelets in the shape of antelopes.



Headdress pendant depicting a Dragon Master.



Folding crown.

used by ancient nomads, who assembled and disassembled it wherever they camped. "I was very intrigued by the construction," Jack exclaims. Pins hold together the six separate pieces, shaped like trees, when folded up. But when opened, this first century crown was fit only for a king. Jack also enthuses about the 2,000 year-old pendant with human and animal figures crafted of gold, turquoise, garnet and pearl—"so inspirational," he claims, "that many designers could only hope to make some of these pieces today." Other unique pieces include a delicate gold Ram headdress, a fabulous dagger with different cultures' artistic impressions on it and a Chinese pair of boot buckles. "Together," Jack raves, "these pieces illustrate the amazing *mix* of culture, trade routes and artistry."

THE COLLECTION'S JEWELRY IN PARTICULAR HAS INSPIRED JACK'S SENSE OF DESIGN AND CRAFTSMANSHIP. HE BARELY CONTAINS HIS GLEE WHEN DESCRIBING A PORTABLE, COLLAPSIBLE GOLD CROWN USED BY ANCIENT NOMADS, WHO ASSEMBLED AND DISASSEMBLED IT WHEREVER THEY CAMPED,

The exhibit displays "one of the most beautiful collections ever, and makes us realize that Afghanistan was not a backward country—despite the violence of the Russians and Taliban, and the warlords and wars that hijacked an entire society," Jack exclaims. Instead, it testifies to the bravery of a handful of Afghans and the lingering beauty of an age-old culture, and *serves* as an inspiration for generations to come. "I highly recommend that my friends and associates in the gem and jewelry industry to see this extraordinary exhibition."

Jack Abraham of Precious Gem Resources shares his awe over Afghanistan Hidden Treasures. ■