



As bling goes, standards have clearly changed. Though handbags and heels may be the modern-day status symbols of choice, to the European royalty of long ago only diamonds would do. Seventeenth-century French queen Marie de Medicis was so taken by the wonder of the Beau Sancy diamond that she hectored her husband until he bought it for her.

A grand gesture by the king, but presumably he felt he could afford to be lavish; de Medicis came from a wealthy Italian family and Henri IV stood to make considerable gains from the union. The jewel was set in the crown that was worn during the queen's coronation, but the king was assassinated soon afterwards in what was the last of several attempts on his life.

It's not a history with which many of us would be familiar and it would have escaped my attention too were it not for the coverage of Sotheby's 'Magnificent Jewels' collection on display in Geneva. There the Beau Sancy was just won for over £5 million and has become the oldest diamond ever to be sold at auction.

Under new ownership, the gem will continue a four-hundred-year journey during which it has travelled from India to Europe and been passed between royals and aristocrats, the influential elites of the day. The successful bidder remains anonymous and the infamous jewel's final resting place may be no more glamorous than the dusty vaults of a private collection. A drab ending then for such an epic story.

And not a story that would usually catch my eye, but there was something captivating about the way this innocuous stone had become part of such a large sweep of history. I don't travel in those circles, but it's likely that the jewel's dramatic history played a part in stoking the unknown bidder's enthusiasm for the item.

Reading about the auction, I wondered if the jewel would become anything more than a pricey

coffee-table ornament or pretentious topic of conversation at the dinner parties of the well-to-do. It struck me that there was something profound and meaningful about the tale of the Beau Sancy. And it was this:

That all such things come to an end. That after all the heraldry and hoopla of the Renaissance, the houses of the European royals faded into history. That after ascensions and assassinations, Henri and Marie passed into memory just as their expensive trinkets were being passed around among a new generation of dilettantes. And that the Beau Sancy was no comfort to de Medici in her grave.

From the vantage of the Islamic worldview, this life is a time to accumulate treasures that yield good fortune in the Hereafter. The Muslim judges the worthiness of a life in terms of worship performed and virtue earned. The real assets are those that will put a person in good standing for the Judgement, rather than those that tarnish, fracture or pass out of fashion.

Knowing this, the teachers and students of our Association have always stressed the value of knowledge over wealth. The only way to be safe in the Hereafter is through studying the Religion and practising what one has learned. In the saying of the scholars of Islam, the luxuries of this world are as nothing compared to the riches that are enjoyed by the pious in the next. And that's something Henri and Marie would have done well to learn.