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# Camels, Courts and Financing the French Blue Diamond: Tavernier's Sixth Voyage

*Jack Ogden*

The memoirs of the French gem merchant and traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689) are well known and shed much light on the European gem trade with India during the 17th century. A surviving factum (a submitted summary of a legal case) provides some supplementary information, as it details a claim made by Tavernier against the children and heirs of Parisian jeweller Daniel Chardin following his sixth trip to the East. We learn something of Tavernier's practical problems regarding extortionate Ottoman customs-duty demands and how he financed his trade. The diamonds he purchased in India were bought and sold by him on behalf of a syndicate of French merchants and investors, all of whom received a share of the profits. The royal goldsmith Jean Pitan (or Pitau), who received a brokerage fee for their sale, was a close relative by marriage to Tavernier. One of the stones brought back to France by Tavernier on this sixth and final voyage was a large blue diamond of slightly over 115 metric carats, which he sold to King Louis XIV in 1669. It was recut in 1673 as 'the blue diamond of the crown' or French Blue, and ultimately became what we know as the Hope Diamond in the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Washington DC, USA. A letter dated early 1668 between British diplomats in the region provides a tantalizing hint that Tavernier might have purchased this large blue diamond in Isfahan, Persia, for the equivalent then of £7,000, and also sheds some light on Tavernier's competitor, David Bazu.

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## Introduction

Jean-Baptiste Tavernier's memoirs, *Les Six Voyages de J. B. Tavernier*, first published in Paris in 1676, are perhaps the best-known historical record of a gem dealer (Tavernier, 1676a,b). They recount in detail his six journeys to the East in the mid-1600s and provide a wealth of information,

from the mining of diamonds to the trade routes to the Mughal court. The title page of the 1678 Amsterdam edition of Tavernier's *Voyages* in Figure 1 shows Tavernier buying diamonds at a mine in India (Tavernier, 1678). Extracts of his work are quoted in almost every study relating to the gem trade in the past, and the *Voyages* even form

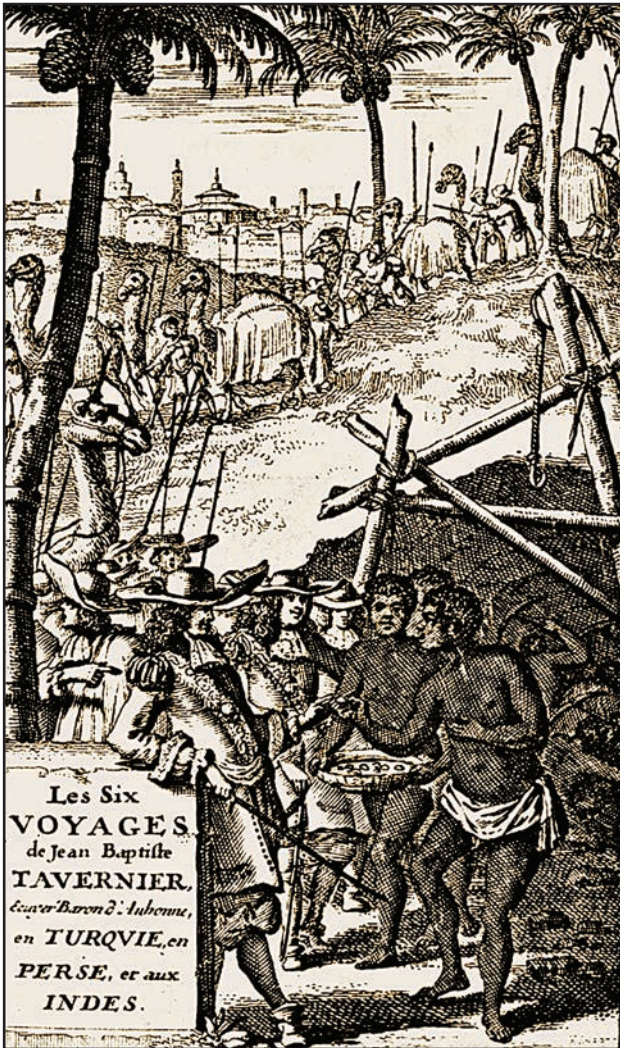


Figure 1: The title page of the 1678 Amsterdam edition of Tavernier's *Voyages* shows him being offered diamonds at a mine site in India, with a caravan of camels in the background.

the basis of an engaging historical novel (Wise, 2009). Tavernier provides us with information on the diamond trade in India in the 1600s and on some of the renowned diamonds mined there, including what was perhaps the Koh-i-Noor and the Great Mughal, the latter probably equivalent to the Orlov (Malecka, 2016).

However, the stone that Tavernier is best associated with is a large blue diamond of  $112\frac{3}{16}$  old carats (115.28 metric carats) that he obtained on his sixth trip (Figure 2) and sold to the French King Louis XIV. It had been roughly cut, perhaps as what we would term a preform to best show off its colour. It was soon recut for the king into what we know as the French Blue (cf. Figure 3), a kite-shaped brilliant of  $67\frac{1}{8}$  old carats (68.9 metric carats) according to the 1691 inventory of the king's

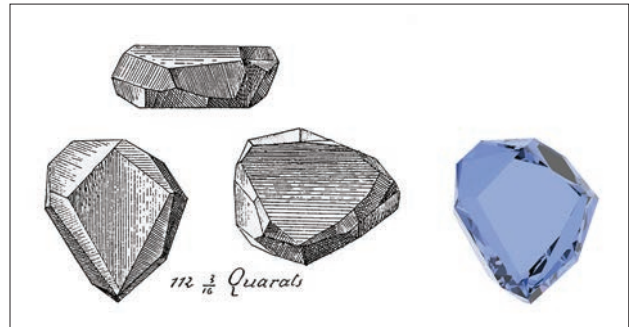


Figure 2: A drawing of three views of Tavernier's large blue diamond, as published in most editions of his *Voyages*, is shown together with a modern three-dimensional computer rendering of the stone prepared by the author.



Figure 3: This CZ replica of the French Blue diamond was faceted by Scott Sucher (The Stonecutter, Tijeras, New Mexico, USA), and represents the stone as it was cut by Piton. Photo by Scott Sucher.

jewels (Bapst, 1889, p. 374). The French Blue was confiscated and then stolen during the French Revolution, only to turn up, recut to 44.5 old carats (45.7 metric carats), for sale in London in 1812, where it was described and accurately drawn by the mineralogist James Sowerby (Ogden, in prep.). It passed into the gem collection of Henry Philip Hope and has retained the name 'The Hope Diamond' in the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, now weighing 45.52 ct. The meticulous research to prove that the Hope Diamond is indeed the French Blue recut, and a summary of its history, appears in Farges et al. (2009).

Despite Tavernier's extensive writing, we know little of the business and monetary aspects of his dealings, such as prices, how he was financed and his customers. This is understandable; few gem

dealers today would wish to publish such information. Supplementary documentation to fill these gaps is sadly sparse, but there is some to be found in various archives. Of his customers in Europe, we know of only two major ones by name: Louis XIV, of course, and Louis' younger brother the Duke of Orleans. We learn of the latter from a 1668 letter from Benjamin Lannoy of the British Consul in Aleppo, Syria, to Sir Heneage Finch, Third Earl of Winchilsea, Charles II's Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in Constantinople (modern Istanbul), where Tavernier is described as "a person who hath often bin sent [to India] by the Duke of Orleans and others to gather rarities for them" (Finch, 1913, p. 439).

Most informative about Tavernier's financing is a document of which at least three copies survive, although they are not well known: a *factum*, or summary of a legal case, prepared by Tavernier's legal advisor Procurator Marpon.<sup>1</sup> It is a claim against the children and heirs of French jeweller Daniel Chardin and his wife, and although its text sheds considerable light on Tavernier's dealings and although it has been mentioned by some writers in the context of Chardin's travels in the East (e.g. van der Cruyse, 1998), it seems little known in the gem world. The first page of this four-page *factum* is shown in Figure 4.

Factums were an interesting feature of the old French legal system. Cases were played out in written submissions and judgements rather than being debated in court. The *factum* discussed here gives some unique insights into the trade in diamonds in the 1600s, and it links three well-known figures in jewellery history: Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Daniel Chardin (the Parisian jeweller mentioned above) and Jean Pitan (or Pitau), the court jeweller to King Louis XIV who is best known for recutting the large blue diamond into the French Blue.<sup>2</sup>

## Background

Prior to Tavernier's departure on his sixth voyage to the East in 1663, he learned that there was animosity between Daniel Chardin and Jean Pitan. Pitan owed Chardin 20,000 livres<sup>3</sup>, as well as several years' interest. Chardin had goods as security from Pitan and was threatening to sell these and anything else of his he could get his hands on. Pitan approached Tavernier and begged him to help, assistance which Tavernier felt obliged to offer because of what the *factum* calls his 'new alliance' with Pitan. This alliance was one of mar-

riage. In 1662, in his late fifties, Tavernier had married Madeleine Goisse, the daughter of another Parisian jeweller, Jean Goisse, and his wife Elisabeth, formerly Elisabeth Pitan. The anonymous author of the introduction to the 1713 Paris edition of Tavernier's *Voyages* (and some subsequent editions) notes that he accepted Madeleine as wife in gratitude for the many services rendered to him by her father, a "jeweller-diamond cutter" (translated from Tavernier, 1713, Foreword). He added that he didn't look so good but had many merits, and that she was too old and could not give him an heir. She is sometimes referred to as Jeanne-Madeleine Goisse. This was not the only association of the families; Tavernier's older brother Melchior had married a Pitan (Joret, 1886, p. 161), and as early as 1619 Melchior was described as a brother-in-law at the time he and Jean Pitan were among the witnesses of an inventory made when Jean's brother, the painter G eral Pitan, died (Guiffrey, 1915, p. 103). So royal jeweller Jean Pitan—who cut the French Blue—was the brother of Tavernier's mother-in-law.

The *factum* explains that Pitan promised that, if Tavernier arranged to have the goods on pledge

<sup>1</sup> The three copies of this *factum* of which this author is aware are all in the Biblioth que nationale de France (BnF): Two copies are bound together in BnF manuscript Clairambault 1182 and the third is BnF manuscript Z THOISY-87 (f. 249). The latter can be obtained online at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k3120071/f1.item.zoom>. These are also the only three versions of this *factum* that are noted in Corda (1902, p. 27).

<sup>2</sup> Mentions of this diamond's recutting usually give the cutter's family name as Pitau, although it is clearly shown as Pitan in the *factum*. In 17th-century French handwriting, such as in a document relating to the recutting of the blue diamond by Pitan (described later in this article), the letters 'u' and 'n' are often indistinguishable, but this is probably not the root of the discrepancy. Jean was originally from a Flemish family, and it seems likely that Pitan (sometimes spelled Pittan, e.g. Guiffrey, 1872, p. 165) was the Flemish spelling. The spelling changed to how it sounded in French—'Pitau'—as he and his family assimilated into Parisian society. Certainly, when his son Nicolas, an artist, engraved a portrait of Louis XIV in 1670 it included the printed legend: *N. Pitau sculpsit 1670*. Since Tavernier, also from a Flemish family, refers to the royal jeweller as Jean Pitan, this is the spelling used in this article.

<sup>3</sup> It is not easy to suggest a modern equivalent value, but in Tavernier's time there were approximately 10 livres to the British pound and each livre was equal to around 12 g of silver. The debt of 20,000 livres was thus about £2,000, the equivalent of 240 kg of silver then (or £100,000 at current silver prices).

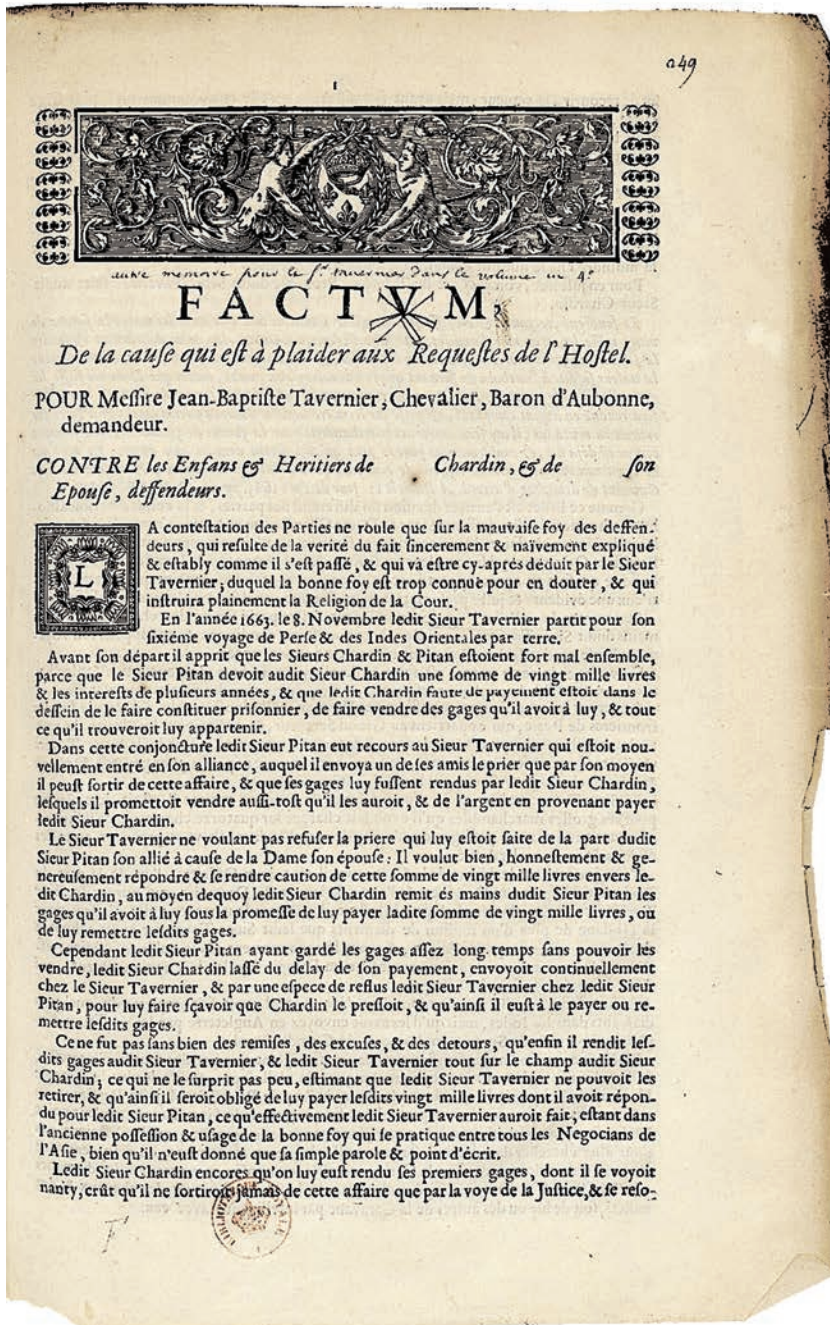


Figure 4: Shown here is the first page of the factum describing Jean-Baptiste Tavernier's case against the children and heirs of Daniel Chardin. Bibliothèque nationale de France, manuscript Z THOISY-87; © BnF.

returned to him, he could sell them quickly and pay Chardin back. So Tavernier “plainly and generously” (translated from p. 1 of the factum) acted as guarantor for the 20,000 livres Pitan owed Chardin, received back the goods and gave them to Pitan to sell. Unfortunately, Pitan had been overly optimistic and was unable to sell them quickly, but Chardin was impatient for his money. To resolve things, Tavernier volunteered to take the goods with him on his upcoming sixth voyage to the East, sell them in Persia or India, and on his return, give the proceeds to Chardin “without taking any profit or interest therein for his pains” (p. 2).

Tavernier would take the merchandise to the value of 20,000 livres from Chardin and bring him back 35,000 livres in cash or diamonds, whichever Chardin preferred. There was also a specific clause in the agreement that all the risks involved would fall to Chardin. This was fair and “the least thing that Sieur Tavernier could ask” (p. 2), but it caused problems later, as we will see.

The agreement, signed by Tavernier on 12 June 1663, is quoted in the factum, as shown in Figure 5. We know little specific information about the nature of the goods that Tavernier carried east, other than he had some diamonds with him (Tav-

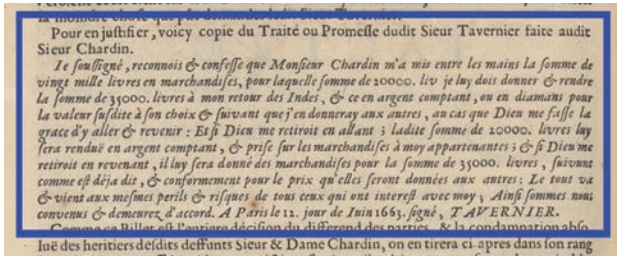


Figure 5: This section of the *factum* cites the 12 June 1663 agreement between Chardin and Tavernier. It includes the former’s agreement to cover the cost of the involved “perils and risks” of his expedition to the East. *Bibliothèque nationale de France, manuscript Z THOISY-87; © BnF.*

ernier, 1676a, p. 96), as well as a gold ring set with a diamond engraved with the coat-of-arms of the King of England (Tavernier, 1676a, p. 484). Letters from Consul Lannoy in Aleppo to the Earl of Winchilsea in Constantinople and from the Earl of Winchilsea to Lord Arlington, who was then in charge of foreign affairs for Charles II, also refer to this engraved diamond (summarized in Finch, 1913, pp. 477, 482, 493, 509). Part of the original text of one of these letters is shown in Figure 6, which describes it as the “Diamond ring belonging to his Majesty”. George Kunz, however, argues that this cannot have been the British monarch’s ring because there were later documents of the king that were impressed with this seal (Kunz, 1917, p. 154).

**The Journey**

Having obtained Chardin’s agreement to the details, Tavernier set out on his sixth trip. The *factum* says he left Paris on 8 November 1663, yet the date given in Tavernier’s *Voyages* is 27 November (Tavernier, 1676a, p. 253). The reason for the date discrepancy is unknown. He went via Lyon, down to Livorno in Italy and then sailed to Smyrna (modern Izmir) in Turkey, where he waited for more than a month to join a caravan. He then set off to Yerevan in Armenia and down to Isfahan in Persia, where he arrived on 14 December 1664 after more than a year of travelling. He took with him gems, goldwork and other objects totalling 400,000 livres in value to sell to the Persian Shah and the Indian Mughal emperor (Tavernier, 1676a, p. 253). This selling of precious objects brought from Europe to the Persian Shah is corroborated in various sources. A letter writ-

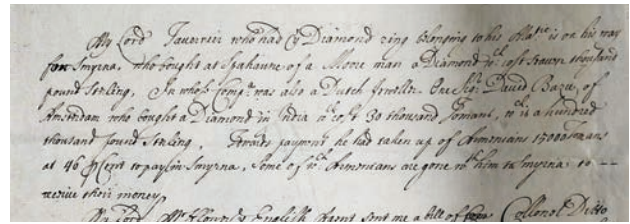


Figure 6: This portion of a 1668 letter from Consul Lannoy in Aleppo to the Earl of Winchilsea in Constantinople explains that Tavernier, then in a caravan heading to Smyrna, had bought a diamond in Isfahan in Persia for £7,000. Source: *The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland, Finch MSS p. 493/1.*

ten from Bandar Abbas in Persia to the East India Company in Surat, India, dated 10 April 1665, notes that Tavernier was on his way, sailing to Surat “having sold the King [the Shah] the value of 4000 tomands and upwards in jewells and other rarities brought with him out of Europe” (Foster, 1925, p. 16). The *toman* was the Persian currency, and the 1668 letter in Figure 6 conveniently tells us that 30,000 tomans were then the equivalent of £100,000. So Tavernier’s sale to the Persian Shah was for the equivalent of just over £13,000. If we link this to current gold prices, it represents about £5 million today.

Tavernier arrived in Surat on 2 May 1665 (Foster, 1925, p. 15), with three or four Dutchmen, en route to the Mughal Court to sell the rest of his goods on which he had “already made extraordinary proffit” (Foster, 1925, p. 16). It is unclear who these Dutch were. They did not include Tavernier’s competitor from Amsterdam, David Bazu (see below), who arrived in Surat on the following ship (Foster, 1925, p. 16). Tavernier does tell us in his *Voyages* that he left Paris with eight companions with useful professional skills (Tavernier, 1676a, p. 253). The first edition of the *Voyages* does not name or describe these people, but we know one was a surgeon who is mentioned several times elsewhere in the work (e.g. Tavernier, 1676a, p. 20). Another was probably the young painter whose many engravings of ‘courtesans’ proved popular (Tavernier, 1676a, p. 151), and there were two described as a horologist and a goldsmith who died during the trip (Tavernier, 1676a, p. 267).

In the ‘Corrections and Notes’ at the end of the 1713 French edition of the *Voyages* we find information that was supposedly brought to light

after the rest of the volume had been printed (Tavernier, 1713). This includes a description of Tavernier's eight companions: his nephew; an Armenian valet named Antoine; Destrem-eau, a surgeon; Kernel, a Dutch diamantaire; Pitan, Tavernier's 'parent' and a goldsmith; Calvet, a goldsmith from Castres in southern France; Bizot, an horologist; and Deslandes, who was "the only Catholic among the Huguenots". It is unclear from where this more complete list was compiled or how reliable it is. With regards to Pitan, the term 'parent' had a slightly wider meaning than just father. The goldsmith who died from a disease on the trip must have been Calvet and not Pitan, judging from Tavernier's fleeting mention of this tragic event. Nor can Pitan the goldsmith have been Jean Pitan himself unless he travelled only part of the way, because just a year after they all set off Jean Pitan is recorded as selling a gem-encrusted sword to the French king for 264,566 livres (Bapst, 1889, pp. 357 and 396). That the list of companions in the 1713 edition of the *Voyages* is not completely fanciful is shown by the presence among them of Deslandes. This was André Daulier Deslandes (1621–1715) who later, in his own report, expressed his disappointment that Tavernier sold a major part of the goods brought from Paris to Shah 'Abbās II in Isfahan without involving him in the negotiations (Deslandes, 1673; Yarshater, 1996). Tavernier describes his dealings with the Shah in Book 4, Chapter 15 of his *Voyages* (Tavernier, 1676a, pp. 464–476).

### Customs Demands

Having explained the background, the factum fast-forwards to Tavernier's homeward journey from the East in 1667–1668. After leaving Surat he travelled to 'Urzeron' (Erzurum), a large city in what is now eastern Turkey. Erzurum was an important Ottoman centre on the frontier with Persia, and the place where merchants paid the customs duties on goods they brought into the Ottoman Empire from the East, although in his *Voyages* Tavernier is not very flattering about the city itself (Tavernier, 1676a, p. 17). Tavernier and his caravan remained in Erzurum for three weeks, so that the relevant duties could be paid and provisions obtained for the onward journey. Tavernier paid the customs duties required for the merchandise, which he had loaded on to 14 camels.<sup>4</sup> The factum notes that if a traveller there

had no merchandise to declare, he would be taken for a spy and mistreated.

Then, three days before the caravan set off again, two men approached Tavernier—one on behalf of the governor of the city, who took a share of the customs revenues, and the other a customs official. They placed him under house arrest where he was staying, demanding 30,000 piastres<sup>5</sup> in customs duties on more than a million piastres worth of diamonds. These diamonds, they said, had been brought from India by Tavernier; they had learned of them from a Dutchman called 'Bazur', who claimed to have made the purchases. This was David Bazu, a diamond merchant and cutter who Tavernier says cleaved a large but flawed diamond that no other dealer in India would risk money on and made a loss. Bazu was travelling in the same caravan as Tavernier and inadvertently or deliberately let the officials know about the diamonds. In his edition of Tavernier's *Voyages in India*, Valentine Ball notes that on his return to Europe, Bazu "sold a number of diamonds and pearls to Louis XIV" (Ball, 1889, p. 99). This is something of an understatement: Shortly after Tavernier sold his diamonds to Louis XIV, Bazu also sold the king diamonds and other objects for more than 500,000 livres, including one large Indian-cut diamond of 70 old carats which represented 110,000 livres, half the price of the French Blue (BnF MS Mèlanges de Colbert, Vol. 281, f. 14). Once recut, this might have been the cushion-shaped brilliant later set in Louis XV's Golden Fleece ornament, above the French Blue (Morel, 1988, pp. 223–224; Farges et al., 2009, p. 6).

Tavernier explained to the two Ottoman officials that he had bought many diamonds in India but had sent them by sea from Surat to England aboard an English ship. The officials were sceptical. 'Bazur', they said, had revealed that when the caravan had recently passed through Isfahan, the Persian king had wanted to buy a good number of Tavernier's diamonds, which supposedly was

<sup>4</sup> A camel load is about 200 kg, so Tavernier's 14 camels must have been carrying something in addition to his own belongings, most likely Indian textiles, a major French import.

<sup>5</sup> The fineness and purity of the Ottoman silver currency varied during the 17th century, but the officials' demand of 30,000 piastres was then the equivalent of about 450 kg of fine silver.

proof that he had them with him. The problem was that the Ottoman officials did not relish the thought of having to search through the merchandise on the “two thousand camels and four or five hundred horses and mules” (p. 2 of the factum) that comprised the entire caravan. This shows the huge size of such caravans, more particulars of which are detailed by Tavernier in Chapter 10 of the first book of his *Voyages* (Tavernier, 1676a). In the background of the title page of a 1678 edition (Figure 1), one can see a section of such a caravan (Tavernier, 1678). Tavernier’s protestations that he had sent the diamonds by sea might have been true, and it was perhaps a safer way to transport his merchandise to Europe, but a letter dated 20 October 1667 from Lannoy in Aleppo, to the Earl of Winchelsea in Constantinople, after noting that Tavernier was travelling with a silk caravan, quoted a report from India that he and the Dutchmen in his company “had bought up in those parts vast quantities of jewelles, which they carry with them for Christendome” (Finch, 1913, p. 482).

The Turkish and Armenian merchants in the caravan supported Tavernier—the factum righteously explains that this was because “justice was wholly on the side of the said Sieur Tavernier” (p. 3 of the factum)—and they told the governor’s functionary and customs official that no merchant should have to pay duty on goods he didn’t have and which could not be found. This made little impression on the officials, and so the merchants appealed to the local Islamic scholars. These experts in Islamic jurisprudence decided that the officials were indeed wrong: The Koran expressly said that no rights shall be taken of things not made by man’s hands, and thus customs duties could not be levied on diamonds, gems, gold, silver and other minerals that are found in the ground. In the face of this ruling, and the clamour from the other merchants, Tavernier was released on payment of 10,000 piastres rather than the 30,000 they originally had demanded. The factum describes this payment as an *avania*—the tax or fee, typically an extortionate one, imposed on foreigners by the Ottomans.

The factum notes that this outcome was actually a great favour for Tavernier because it is “constant and true” that the more one tries to avoid paying tax, the more it costs, and “reason has no place” (p. 3). But as the factum also points out, merchants returned from the East with goods, not

money, so for Tavernier to raise this sum in cash was complex and expensive. When he finally reached Constantinople, and with the help of the French ambassador’s interpreter and 800 piastres paid for ‘presents’ for the provincial governor and other officers, it was agreed that the money he had paid in Erzurum should be returned to him. But to achieve this he would have to go back to Erzurum accompanied by two members of the Ottoman cavalry and a representative of the Grand Vizier (the prime minister of the Ottoman Sultan), paying them for their services as well as the costs of the trip. The extra delay in his return to France would add considerably to his time and costs. Besides, the French ambassador confided that it might be unwise to trust the three Ottomans who would accompany him. Tavernier decided that his best option was to return home.

### The Sale to the King

Back in France, Tavernier paid those who had put up goods for his voyage their capital investments and shares of the considerable profits. The factum specifically notes that these profits included the amount made on the diamonds sold to King Louis XIV. The investors also gave their word that, as per their original agreements, they would repay Tavernier their share of the unforeseen and unfortunate *avania* and associated costs once the calculations of this total amount, with relevant exchange rates, had been completed. This sum was found to be more than 48,000 livres in total, which we are told worked out that each of his investors was liable for 8% of their investment. This would suggest that the original investment was in excess of 600,000 livres, although Tavernier stated that he took goods worth 400,000 livres on his trip. The explanation for this discrepancy is unclear. In any case, all of the investors paid up apart from Daniel Chardin.

Tavernier could see no reason why Chardin should escape his obligations and requested payment many times, sometimes with witnesses present. The Chardins had the funds to pay and did not deny that the sum was due, but they thought it should be paid by Pitan. Their argument presumably was that they should not have to defray the costs involved in being paid back what was owed to them. Chardin fell ill and died while Tavernier himself was gravely ill for a long time and was in no state to press his case. Then, as one



accident typically follows another (as the factum sagely notes on page 4), Chardin's widow with whom Tavernier had taken up the case also died. So he had to turn to Chardin's children to get the refund of the *avania* and, mentioned now for the first time, 1½ percent extra for what we are told was the brokerage fee paid to Pitan on the sale of the diamonds. From this we might infer that Pitan, as the royal jeweller, played a facilitating role in the sale of the French Blue and the other diamonds to the king. The factum notes that the other investors had covered their shares of this brokerage. The Pitan heirs seemed to deny any involvement; the 35,000 livres debt had been paid back to Chardin, but not via their father, so they considered that they had no further liabilities or responsibilities. Recourse to the courts, and thus the drafting of the factum, was the only option left to Tavernier.

Tavernier was sure that if the record books of Chardin's business were made available (something he had often requested), the payments and the original agreement would be seen. This would provide clarification for the court, which would understand that it was not right for the Chardin heirs to take advantage of Tavernier's goodness and readiness to help, as had their father and mother. The factum concludes with the plea that the court will judge in his favour, not forgetting interest and expenses.

## The Case

The factum is undated, but it must date to after 1675, since it was taken out against Chardin's children and heirs, and Pitan's heirs are also mentioned. Chardin died in 1672; the date of his wife's death is unknown. Jean Pitan, noted in the factum as deceased, died in 1675; he was described as goldsmith to the king and "one of the first who executed these presents so rich and so varied which Louis XIV presented to foreign ambassadors and to his entourage" (translated from Maze-Sencier, 1885, p. 63). The factum leaves a blank space for the first names of Chardin and his wife. It is hardly likely that Tavernier didn't know their names, so it suggests Tavernier had not given this information to his legal representative and was not readily available to furnish it. Possibly this means that the factum was not issued until after 1689 when Tavernier left France, but that would mean an

extraordinarily long delay. The factum has the signatory 'Marpon, Proc'—i.e. Procureur (prosecutor) Philibert Marpon.

The detailed recounting of the Erzurum incident in the factum, even describing the number of camels in the caravan and the intervention of Islamic legal scholars, seems unnecessary in a French legal deposition, and one is tempted to think that this was partly intended to entertain the court and thus get it on Tavernier's side. The factum does, however, argue that it was unfair of Chardin and his heirs to deny him payment after he had undertaken "labours and risks which few people are capable of undertaking, and still less able to withstand and overcome" (p. 4). The copious details of the problems in Erzurum would provide the court with a clear idea of the perils involved in a business such as Tavernier's.

To date, the present author has not located court records that reveal whether Tavernier ever received his money from Chardin's heirs. Daniel Chardin and his wife Jeanne had several children. These included Jean, born in 1643, and Daniel, born in 1649. Jean worked with his father in the jewellery business and also travelled to the East. It has been suggested that he became a diamond dealer and travelled East as a replacement for Tavernier after the latter's business relationship with Daniel Chardin "soured" (Baghdiantz McCabe, 2008, p. 108). However, Jean first travelled East while Tavernier was on his sixth trip, thus before the matter of non-payment of the *avania* arose, and the factum does not imply any bad feeling between Tavernier and Daniel Chardin before this. Jean Chardin settled in England after the persecution of Protestants in France began, becoming Crown Jeweller there, and was knighted as Sir John Chardin. Daniel Chardin the younger became a merchant in Madras (now Chennai), India, and a business partner to Jean. There were three other sons, two of whom had died, and one recorded sister.

We should be grateful for Jean Pitan's non-payment of his debt to Chardin, without which the factum and its insights into Tavernier's business and challenges would not exist. Pitan might have been an excellent goldsmith, but he seems to have been poor at managing his finances. In 1699 his heirs were acquitted of another of Pitan's debts dating back to 1673 (Guiffrey, 1896, col. 306)—proof that slow payment is not a preserve of the modern gem industry.

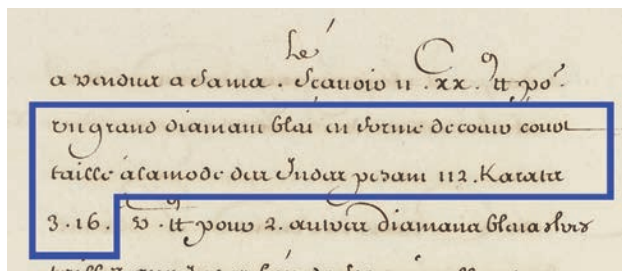


Figure 7: In this record of the 1669 payment to Tavernier for diamonds, the first stone listed is the large blue one. A translation of the outlined text says, “a large blue diamond in the form of a short heart cut in the Indian fashion weighing 112 $\frac{3}{16}$  carats”. Detail of BnF MS Mèlanges de Colbert, Vol. 281, f. 14; © BnF.

### The French Blue

The factum refers to the sale of diamonds, including the large blue one, to King Louis XIV, but it does not describe any of them individually or give the date of the sale. Nor does Tavernier say anything about the origin or purchase of the large blue diamond in his *Voyages*. The only possible clue to where he obtained it, of which this author is aware, is the letter of 31 January 1668 from Lannoy in Aleppo to the Earl of Winchelsea in Constantinople (Figure 6). This states that Tavernier, then on the way from Aleppo to Smyrna with the caravan, and travelling with “a Dutch jeweller One Signor] David Bazu of Amsterdam”, had purchased a diamond for the huge sum of £7,000 on his trip “at Spahaune [Isfahan] of a Moore man [i.e. an Arab merchant]” (Figure 6; also summarized by Finch, 1913, p. 493). The amount of £7,000 would have been around 70,000 livres. That is exactly the sort of price we might expect him to have paid for the large blue diamond that he sold to Louis XIV for 220,000 livres, according to its record of the payment, which survives today in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) in Paris among the collection documents of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, French Minister of Finance from 1665 to 1683 (Figure 7; BnF MS Mèlanges de Colbert, Vol. 281, f. 14). Of the other diamonds that he sold the king, the only one that would have shown a good profit on 70,000 livres was the third on his invoice, one of just over 51 old carats that he sold for 180,000 livres. On his invoice to the king he describes this rather lumpy table cut, and several others, as “cut in India”, whereas the large blue diamond he describes more enigmatically as “cut in the Indian fashion”—not a description he applied to any of

the others (Figure 7). The original invoice was quoted in full by Germain Bapst (1889, 403–405).

The possibility that Tavernier’s large blue stone, now the Hope diamond, was the one purchased from an Arab merchant in Iran is intriguing, but it is impossible to corroborate unless further archive documentation comes to light. But if nothing else, the 1668 letter does reinforce the view that despite what Tavernier had told the officials in Erzurum, he took some diamonds with him on his journey home; not all had been sent off by sea.

There have been some suggestions over the years that Tavernier might actually have purchased his large blue diamond on an earlier trip, but it is unlikely that he would tie up significant capital for so long (Morel, 1988, p. 158). That it was one of the diamonds purchased on his sixth trip is also shown by his drawing of the 20 most important stones he sold to the king, which appeared in most editions of his *Voyages* and of which Figure 2 is a detail. In the first edition of his *Voyages*, this drawing is clearly described as the “representation of twenty diamonds which the author sold to the king on the return from his last [i.e. sixth] voyage to India” (translated from Tavernier, 1676b; see p. 336 and adjoining plate). The drawing was probably made around the time of the sale in 1669 and certainly seems to have been in circulation by 1670. When the London diamond merchant John Cholmley wrote to his brother Nathaniel in India in December 1670, he enclosed “the prints for the great Dyamond hee [Tavernier] brought with him the last time from India” (Cholmley and Cholmley, 1664–1693, f. 0147). It seems probable that this refers to the Tavernier drawing.<sup>6</sup>

With Tavernier making no comment about where he purchased the diamond, India would be the natural assumption. The date of the sale can be placed with some certainty to 1669, soon after his return from his final trip and the year he was able to purchase the Seigneury (feudal lordship) of Aubonne near Geneva, an honour granted to him by the king on account of his services. A margin note in the handwritten record of Tavernier’s sale of the diamonds to the king—just

<sup>6</sup> The “Representation of a considerable number of excellent Diamonds, sold by one Monsieur Tavernier to his King” was also noted in Anonymous (1674). This author noted that the drawing had come into his hands ‘some while since’.

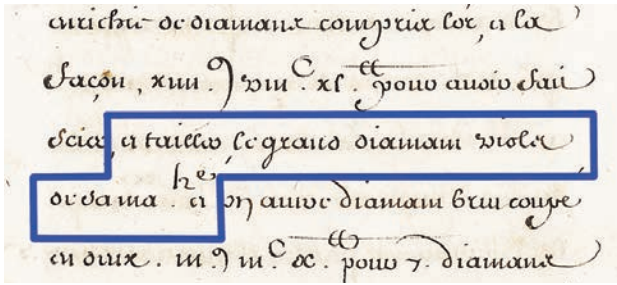


Figure 8: This shows a record of the payment to Jean Pitan for cutting the large blue diamond—"le grand diamant violet de sa majesté". Detail of BnF MS *Mélanges de Colbert*, Vol. 291, f. 341; © BnF.

off to the side of the excerpt in Figure 7—confuses the issue because it places the purchase by the king in the year 1666. However, this annotation is in a later hand, and little reliance should be placed on it. This document, a copy of the invoice from Tavernier, lists all the diamonds with their sizes, prices paid and sometimes a description of their shape or cut. Thus, it provides us with the total price paid: 898,731 livres. The large blue stone is described as "a large blue diamond in the form of a short heart cut in the Indian fashion weighing  $112\frac{3}{16}$  carats" (Figure 7), and its price is given as 220,000 livres. At today's silver prices these would represent about £4.5 million and £1 million, respectively (considerably more if relative gold values are used).

The 1668 letter in Figure 6 also tells us that David Bazu of Amsterdam, then on his way with Tavernier from Aleppo to Smyrna, had "bought a Diamond in India wh[ic]h cost 30 thousand Tomans, wh[ic]h is a hundred thousand pounds Sterling" (also summarized in Finch, 1913, p. 493). He had raised 15,000 tomans of this by borrowing from Armenians at 46% interest, noting that "Some of wh[ic]h Armenians are gone with him to Smyrna to receive their money" (again, see Figure 6). If this report is accurate, this diamond must have been truly exceptional—it was worth more than all the other diamonds that Tavernier sold to Louis XIV added together.

The Colbert documents also record the payment to Jean Pitan for cutting "the large violet diamond of his Majesty" (Figure 8; text translated from BnF MS *Mélanges de Colbert*, Vol. 291, f. 341). In 1673 Pitan reduced it into a kite shape that was essentially a brilliant, a very early example of the form. It was listed second and described in

an extensive 1691 inventory of the French Crown jewels as a "very large violet diamond very thick, cut in facets in the fashion of two sides, formed as a short heart of eight sides, very lively water and clear" (translated from Bapst, 1889, p. 374). At that time it weighed  $67\frac{1}{8}$  old carats, was set in a pin of gold with enamelled reverse and was estimated to be worth 400,000 livres. The first diamond listed in the inventory was the Sancy—weighing less at  $53\frac{3}{4}$  old carats, but valued more at 600,000 livres. As John Fryer, a surgeon with the East India Company, observed just a few years later, a diamond "of a Blue, Brown, or Yellow Water, is not worth half the Price of a perfect Stone of a White Water" (Fryer, 1698, p. 213). Coloured diamonds at that time were clearly not held in high esteem.

## Conclusion

The detail in the *factum*, along with other archive documents, adds to our understanding of the complexities and perils that impacted the gem trade in the 1600s and on Tavernier in particular. It also shows that even after his five previous trips, Tavernier remained reliant on fellow French merchants to provide the precious objects which he could sell in the East to finance his purchases. In particular, it indicates that his purchase of the French Blue and other diamonds was funded by selling jewelled objects in Persia and India that had been provided by a syndicate of French merchants and investors. The original value of the goods supplied by this syndicate was stated to be 400,000 livres—perhaps 600,000 livres, as noted above. If, as implied by the *factum*, the diamonds he sold to Louis XIV were all the diamonds he brought back, the profit was some 300,000–500,000 livres less the *avania* costs, Pitan's brokerage or commission fee ('courtage') and perhaps other expenses. That was a huge amount of money, but we do not know how large Tavernier's stakeholding was in this business, although his profit no doubt covered the 60,000 livres he paid for the Seignury of Aubonne in 1669, when he became Baron Tavernier. The possibility that Tavernier purchased the large blue diamond that was to become the French Blue—eventually the Hope—at Isfahan in Persia from an Arab merchant adds a tantalizing new angle to the history of this celebrated gem, but it is for now just supposition.

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## The Author

**Dr Jack M. Ogden FGA**

Striptwist Ltd., 55 Florin Court,  
Charterhouse Square, London EC1M 6EU  
E-mail: [jack@striptwist.com](mailto:jack@striptwist.com)

# Conferences

## 3rd Mediterranean Gem and Jewellery Conference

The sunny Mediterranean lured gemmologists, jewelers and appraisers (Figure 1) from 15 countries to the 3rd Mediterranean Gem and Jewellery Conference (MGJC), this year in Syracuse, Italy, with a view of Mount Etna in the distance. The theme of the conference was coloured diamonds, which formed the basis of most of the talks and also workshops before and after the 11–14 May 2017 conference.

A pre-conference morning workshop on the use of the handheld spectroscope for testing gems and coloured diamonds was instructed by Gem-A's **Claire Mitchell**. After her presentation on various techniques for using a spectroscope and the features to look for, the 12 participants practised on sample gems, while Mitchell was at hand to provide viewing tips and answer queries.

In the afternoon, 30 participants filled the room to attend a workshop on identifying synthetic diamonds, both loose and mounted in jewellery. The focus was on small diamonds (including melee), which are a growing concern in the industry. The workshop started with a presentation by conference co-organiser **Branko Deljanin** (CGL-GRS Swiss Canadian Gemlab Inc., Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), who reviewed synthetic diamond production techniques and characteristics that distinguish them from natural diamonds. Identification techniques included the use of crossed polarisers and observation of luminescence behaviour. The greater part of the workshop was taken with participants

examining up to 50 samples of synthetic and natural diamonds with the help of conference co-organizer **George Spyromilios** (Independent Gemological Laboratory, Athens, Greece). He brought new samples that included rings and earrings set with natural and both HPHT-grown and CVD-grown synthetic diamonds. Participants had the opportunity to use a PL Inspector, which provides short- and long-wave UV excitation to examine a sample's fluorescence colour, intensity and, importantly, any phosphorescence, which is a key identifying feature of HPHT synthetic diamonds. The instrument was designed by **this author**, who assisted and demonstrated the use of a smartphone to better view the luminescence reactions. Conference sponsors System Eickhorst and M&A Gemological Instruments brought various lighting devices and instruments (including UV-Vis-NIR, FTIR and PL spectrometers) so participants had access to a mobile gem lab.

The second day of the conference was more formal, with speakers delivering talks on a variety of topics. **Alan Bronstein** (Aurora Gems, and president of Natural Color Diamond Association, New York, New York, USA) related the story of polishing the 'Blue Moon' diamond. He recounted the stone's journey from its origin in South Africa in early 2014 to its transformation into a 12.03 ct Vivid Blue, Internally Flawless diamond that achieved a record \$4 million/carat at auction three years later. Grading fancy-coloured

Figure 1: Conference attendees gather at this year's MGJC for a group photo. Photo by J. G. Chapman.



# Literature of Interest

## Coloured Stones

**Age and origin of the tsavorite and tanzanite mineralizing fluids in the Neoproterozoic Mozambique metamorphic belt.** J. Feneyrol, G. Giuliani, D. Demaiffe, D. Ohnenstetter, A.E. Fallick, J. Dubessy, J.-E. Martelat, A.F.M. Rakotondrazafy, E. Omito, D. Ichang'i, C. Nyamai and A.W. Wamunyu, *Canadian Mineralogist*, **55**(4), 2017, 763–786, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3749/canmin.1600085>.

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