

RINGS

Through the Ages

A. Ward J. Cherry C. Gere B. Cartlidge



RIZZOLI

RINGS THROUGH THE AGES

Of all the means of self-ornamentation devised by the human race, none generates a more powerful atmosphere of mystery and magic than the ring. From ancient times until today the finger-ring remains the most popular form of jewelry. The fabulous history of rings is the subject of this encyclopedic survey; the ritual, custom and folklore of their use is examined as well as the technological record of production from prehistoric natural substances to the synthetic materials of the present day.

Through hundreds of illustrations and in a series of essays, this book delves into the history, significance, and art of these fascinating jewels. Here are royal rings, papal rings, engagement and wedding rings, and hundreds more, wrought of materials that range from the most precious of metals to iron and bone. There are also rings made to contain relics, set with signets and carved gems, encrusted with jewels, inlaid with enamels. There are rings from tombs and treasuries, circlets signifying power, joy and sorrow from every great period of civilization.

The book is divided into four sections, each of which has been written by an expert in the particular historical period. The first part, *The Rings of Antiquity* is by Dr. Anne Ward and covers every major civilization from the days of the Pharaohs to the Byzantine Empire. Part 2, *Medieval Rings (1100-1500)*, by John Cherry of the British Museum, investigates types both sacred and secular from all over Europe. The third part, *Rings from 1500 to 1900*, by Charlotte Gere, also of the British Museum, discusses magnificent Renaissance, Baroque and Rococo jewels. The fourth and final section, *Twentieth-century Rings*, is by Barbara Cartlidge, Director of the Electrum Gallery, London, and goes from exquisite Art Nouveau specimens through Art Deco and Cartier examples, concluding with rings made of unusual synthetic materials and those with erotic and Pop Art themes of the last decades.

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The Rings of Antiquity

by Anne Ward



The Rings of Antiquity

Of all means of self-ornamentation devised by the human race, none generates a more powerful atmosphere of mystery and magic than the ring. Almost every culture has its tales of rings that bring dominion over spirits or confer wealth, immortality, levitation or the fulfilment of three wishes on the fortunate possessor. One seldom hears of magic necklaces, brooches or bracelets, and not the least of the mysteries surrounding this evocative small adornment is the reason why it should have become the focus of so much occult lore.

No answer can be more than a matter of speculation, but one possible explanation lies in the extreme antiquity of the ring, surely among the earliest permanent decorations adopted by primitive man. In a world without mirrors, little satisfaction can have been derived from neck or head ornaments, visible as they were only in the envious gaze of the wearer's fellows (though this has proved, throughout the ages, to be no mean incentive to self-adornment). It seems far more likely that the earliest types of jewellery were those that could be seen and enjoyed by the owner himself when he wore them, and of these the ring is the most obvious choice — a reminder of personal status, beauty and distinction to be savoured with every movement of the hand.

¹
Painted mummy-case. Romano-Egyptian. C. AD 130. Life-size. Possibly from Meir. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 19.2.6.

The problems of combining such a highly idiosyncratic style as that of ancient Egypt with any other usually proved insuperable (Pl. 29), but for a short time a characteristic hybrid was achieved in the area around Antinoopolis, which includes modern Meir. Under the Roman Empire burials there were customarily made in wooden mummy-cases covered with modelled and painted plaster, Egyptian in type but unmistakably Roman in execution. Few examples are known, but one of the finest of them must surely be the young woman whose coffin is now in New York. The sides of the case bear traditional Egyptian prayers for the dead, while on the front the deceased girl is depicted bewigged and garlanded like an Egyptian queen and bejewelled like a Roman patrician, her curiously coarse hands weighted with a pair of snake bracelets and two massive rings with gems in heavy angular gold settings. Amid all this slightly alien splendour her small pointed face, with huge painted eyes, incongruously protruding ears and unforgettable dimples has a haunting and insistent pathos.

Metal-working Techniques

Rings of bone, stone and other ornamental materials must have been worn from time immemorial, but it was only with the rise of metal technology that rings, like other jewellery, were able to surpass their venerable ancestry and develop into a distinct and virtually universal art form. The incentive was supplied by the material: metal was at first novel and always strong, flexible, intrinsically ornamental and often valuable.

It would not be relevant, at this point, to investigate the much-debated question of the origins of metal technology; wherever and whenever metallurgy first appeared there can be no doubt that its development was, on a practical level, one of the most significant and far-reaching stages of mankind's progress. By the end of the fourth millennium BC the metal-workers of western Asia had achieved an adequate mastery of this new medium and were already exploiting its potential for personal adornment. Indeed, one of the most startling aspects of the early evolution of decorative work in precious metal is the extraordinary speed of its development. In 3000 BC the technology was tentative and a little crude, still obviously in the experimental stage, but by about 2500 BC the goldsmiths of Egypt and western Asia had remarkably little left to learn, and only a very few isolated processes were added to the repertoire within the entire subsequent history of the ancient world and even later.

A number of different factors combined at this time to provide an incentive for a swift advance in metal-working techniques. On the commercial front, the need for metal ores and workers with the necessary skills had led to a rapid extension of trade contacts and movements, and these wider horizons exerted a beneficial influence on the evolution of new expertise.

A further development, perhaps even more momentous in the spiritual and intellectual progress of mankind, was currently interacting with the new technology, both facilitating its advancement and inspiring its themes and motifs. Even before the arrival of metal-working, men had discovered the need for some means of extending their own influence beyond their immediate reach and of invoking beneficent influences on

behalf of the fragile and vulnerable argosies which they dispatched into a dangerous and often hostile world. This led to the evolution of a seal that might bear either a sign indicating the owner's name or a lucky amuletic motif with which he was personally associated. The obvious form for a personal seal was a ring, since it could be worn all the time and conveniently used without taking it off, and once a ring was inscribed with the sign which represented the owner — be he king, priest or modest trader — it became invested with shadowy intimations of personality, for the sign was the name and the name, the man. (Even today for many people their name is intimately connected with their sense of identity, hence that familiar if illogical twitch of irritation when one's own name is misspelled or mispronounced.) The ring's symbolic function as the transmitter of name-magic may be another facet of the explanation for its mysterious, even occult significance in ritual, custom and folklore. The appearance of name-signs is frequently a formative step on the way to writing and so it proved in the eastern Mediterranean, where the art of writing progressed alongside the development of metal technology. It is perhaps no coincidence that both crafts started early in Egypt and Mesopotamia, made rapid advances and had reached a surprising level of sophistication there by the middle of the third millennium BC.

Egypt perhaps had the advantage as far as raw materials were concerned, for in the Bronze Age by far the greater part of the available gold came from the mines of Nubia, and the processes of extracting the metal were quickly mastered, but the Sumerians of Mesopotamia marginally surpassed the Egyptians in technical expertise at this date. At the same time, so many of the technical words for metal-working seem to be derived from Anatolian roots (for example, the Greek word for refining, ὀβρυζα, is Hittite in origin) as to suggest that we should perhaps look further north for the originators of the goldsmith's art. By the mid third millennium BC, however, the main methods of goldsmithing were already familiar to most of the eastern Mediterranean people. Natural gold, with its alluring glitter, was easy to identify. The ore had to be washed to remove any loose detritus, leaving the heavier gold particles at the bottom of the vessel. The resulting gold still contained a number of impurities such as silver and base metals, and these had to be removed by the process of refining. Metal powder was put into a porous clay crucible where it was mixed with lead and heated to 1063° C, the melting point of gold. The goldsmith then directed the nozzle of his bellows to send a jet of air across the surface of the crucible, which helped to oxidize the lead and any other base metals, which were either blown away in this form or absorbed by the crucible's porous walls. This left a deposit of pure gold in the bottom of the vessel, except on the fairly frequent occasions when silver was present and had to be removed by a further process.

In ancient Egypt, the smiths combined general refining and the removal of silver in a single process. They mixed ore in a crucible with lead to oxidize the base metals and with salt and an

organic substance (usually corn husks) to separate the silver; then heat was applied. The base metals were oxidized and blown away as described, while the silver, now transformed by the salt into silver chloride, sank into the walls of the crucible. In this way gold and silver were separated and waste disposed of in a single operation.

Having prepared a lump of workable gold, the ancient jeweller was ready to shape and decorate a ring. Indeed, for most of antiquity he would require very few materials other than the gold, because for perhaps three of the four millennia approximately included in this part of the book, gold was the chief and often the only substance used in rings except in the case of seal-rings. As the calendar approached the year zero and turned from BC to AD, gems, coloured stones, glass and enamelling were increasingly featured, often as the main *raison d'être* of rings, but for centuries before they had functioned, if at all, only as a minor accessory to the goldsmith's art.

How Rings Were Made and Decorated

As a general rule the making of even the most unpretentious metal ring calls for at least one join. There are exceptions; a hoop or seal may be cast in a single solid piece (Pl. 20), formed from a simple strip of metal with open ends (Pl. 9) or made from a strand of wire with the ends twisted together in an ornamental knot (Pl. 16). For the most part, however, the hoop will consist of a strip or ribbon of gold bent into a circle with the ends joined, and a further joint will often be needed to attach the decorative bezel. The most basic joints were made by folding the two edges of the metal together tightly and subjecting them to pressure, a process which was easy and required no heat, but the resulting joint was inclined to be both too insecure and too bulky to be suitable for a ring. Alternatively, the two edges of the piece of metal might be sweated together: they were fixed in position, and the area was heated until the metal became soft and porous (but never liquid) and the surfaces interpenetrated. This process called for extraordinary accuracy of observation and promptness of action since if the joint was underheated it would not stick at all, while overheating would result in a depressing puddle of molten gold and not a ring at all. Other methods such as riveting and soft soldering were known but were far too heavy for use in ring-making.

The most effective type of joint for fine work such as ring-making was achieved by hard soldering, a method that relies on the fact that an alloy of gold melts at a slightly lower temperature than gold itself. For instance, a gold solder containing one-seventh silver melts at 970° C, while pure gold does not melt until 1063° C. The surfaces to be joined are therefore laid together and scraps of the alloyed solder placed between them. Before heat is applied, another problem must be faced; everything other than gold oxidizes when heated, and these oxides

form crusty lumps which prevent the solder from flowing smoothly between the two faces of the joint. To prevent oxidation and facilitate the spread of the solder, a smith first paints the joint with a flux. (In the ancient world this was usually bitartrate of potash made from the burnt dregs of wine; nowadays borax is often used.) Once the joint is assembled with chips of solder and a coat of flux, it is heated to 970° C. At this point the solder (but not the pure gold) melts and flows readily through the joint where the flux had been applied. A very little more heat (but not too much — it was essential to stop short of 1063° C) and general softening and intermingling take place, and after cooling and cleaning a firm and unobtrusive joint is achieved.

Once a goldsmith had made a basic ring he had an impressive repertoire of techniques for decorating the surface of gold. It could be worked in relief or intaglio with figures or patterns, and ornamental wires or beads could be attached, either alone or in conjunction with enamel, niello (p. 13) or inlaid glass or stones. Metal could be cast in a mould (this was seldom done with gold since the aim was to use as little of the costly metal as possible), stamped, engraved, moulded over a core and given a great variety of finishes, but perhaps the most direct and sensitive

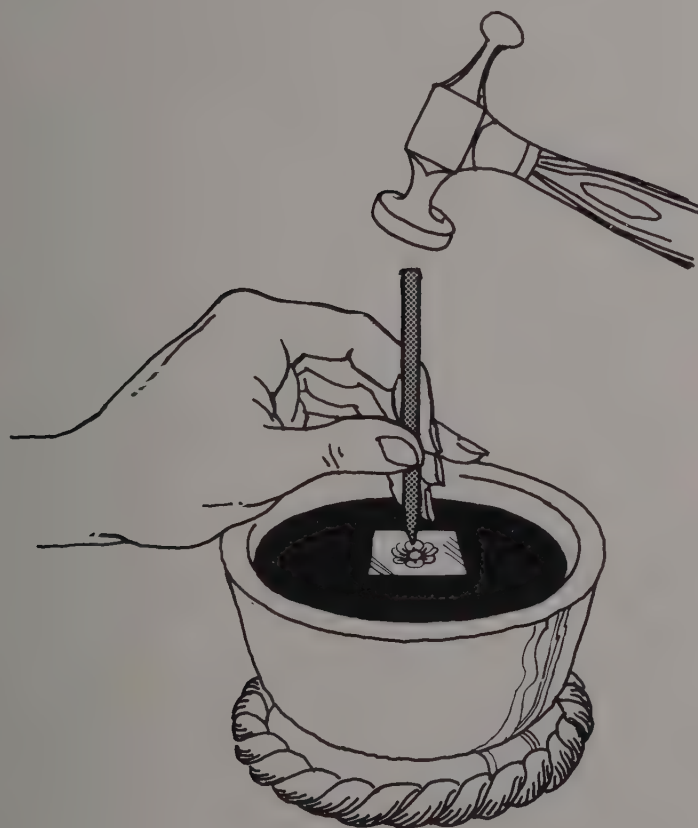


Fig. 1 *Repoussé* decoration is executed with a hammer and punch on work laid face downwards on a container filled with pitch that is steadied with a rope ring. Each piece is unique.

method of modelling in relief was *repoussé* work (Fig. 1). For this the artist needed a bowl or tray filled with some material which was firm enough to support his sheet of gold but yielding enough to give way to pressure. Pitch was discovered to be ideal for this purpose and was used throughout the ancient world. The gold was laid face downwards on the pitch, and the relief was worked with a hammer and a blunt punch from the back. Only when the design was virtually complete was the gold removed from the pitch and the finishing touches applied from the front.

Repoussé is a freehand process, and each piece is therefore unique. When a design was to be repeated exactly, a stamp or punch of hard material was used. Two dies carried the motif, one in relief and the other in intaglio. A sheet of gold was laid between the two dies, and a sharp tap applied to the upper one (Fig. 2). The motif would then be transferred to the gold, and the process could be repeated until the stamp grew too blurred from constant hammering to produce a truly clear-cut image.

Fine details were carried out from the front of the work with a sharp pointed tool, which might either gouge out a line of metal (engraving) or cut a furrow and push the surplus metal to either side (chasing). This tiny 'bank' beside the furrow, visible only

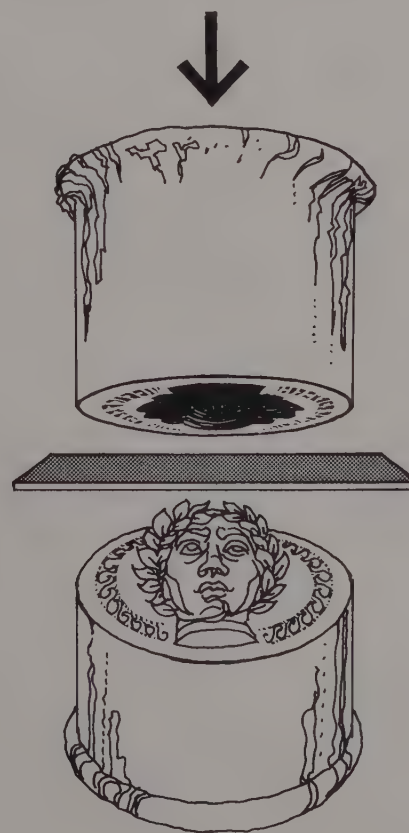


Fig. 2 Stamps can be used to repeat a pattern almost indefinitely (e.g. for making beads). Sheet gold is placed between a relief and an intaglio stamp and struck to reproduce the design.

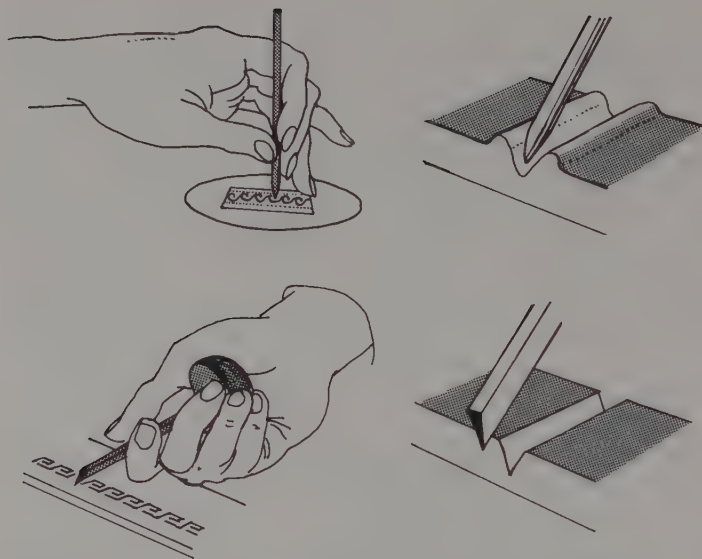


Fig. 3 Chasing and engraving are both methods of executing fine linear detail on the surface of the work. In engraving, a minute ribbon of the metal is gouged out by the tool, while chasing merely forces the metal aside.

under magnification, is the main difference between the two processes (Fig. 3).

More complex methods of decoration called for the addition of some further element to the surface of the gold, and one of the first to be developed was the process of filigree decoration with applied strands of plain or ornamental wire. Even the making of such wire was no mean technical achievement. Narrow strips of gold had to be cut from a thin sheet and then rolled between stone

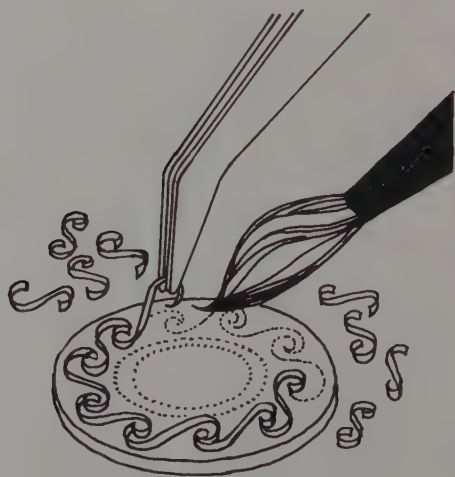


Fig. 4 Filigree is executed by forming decorative patterns in wire and soldering them to the surface of the work. If the wire ornament is fitted into a pre-shaped aperture in the piece, the result is open-work.

slabs to reduce the angular section to a circle. It was not until late Hellenistic or early Roman times that goldsmiths developed a draw-plate (Fig. 17) to simplify this process. The wire could then be twisted, beaded and plaited for filigree work. Shaped to the appropriate pattern, it was soldered to the gold, either on the surface or to fill spaces and produce an open-work effect (Fig. 4).

Possibly the most remarkable achievement of early Bronze Age goldsmiths was the development of granulation. In this case the pattern of the design is composed of lines or masses of minute gold grains, separately made and soldered to the background (Fig. 5). The necessary technique is so complex that it was lost in the Middle Ages and defied all attempts to recover it by even the finest jewellers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The chief problem was not in forming the gold grains; these were made by cutting wire into minute lengths, packing them in charcoal dust in a crucible, and then heating them until they melted into spherical droplets. Sieved to grade for size, the grains were then ready for use, and this was where the smith faced his greatest problem. Routine methods of soldering all required the use of a flux to prevent oxidization and encourage the solder to run freely through the joint, and it was found that the melting of the solder and the boiling of the flux always pushed the tiny light-weight grains out of position.

The rediscovery of a viable method was pioneered in the 1920s in Germany by Wilm and Rosenberg, and by Treskow who evolved several alternative processes, some of which were commercially patented by Littledale in the 1930s. One way of avoiding the displacement of the grains was colloid hard soldering. In this process an organic glue is mixed with a copper salt and the resulting tacky compound is used to stick the gold granules into position on the background; then heat is applied. At 100° C the copper salt becomes a copper oxide. At 600° C the glue turns to carbon. At 850° C the carbon from the glue combines with the oxygen in the copper oxide to become a gas, carbon dioxide, which dissipates leaving a pure copper joint between the gold grain and the background. The heating, which now needs to be monitored with the utmost care, is continued until the work reaches 890° C, at which point the gold and copper soften and intermingle at the point of contact, leaving a clean, strong and virtually invisible joint. Since pure gold does not melt below 1063° C the work is safe — chemical processes have taken place, but since no flux or solder is involved there is no danger of the grain shifting. To evolve this method in theory and control it in practice without the aid of modern technology must have required an inconceivable degree of expertise, and its development at so early a date (a primitive form of granulation was known at Ur in 2500 BC) was a colossal achievement.

All the processes described so far, however complicated, only involve working with the basic metal, but when gems are to be mounted or inlaying and enamelling carried out, the problem is to prepare or attach a suitable container to hold the decorative

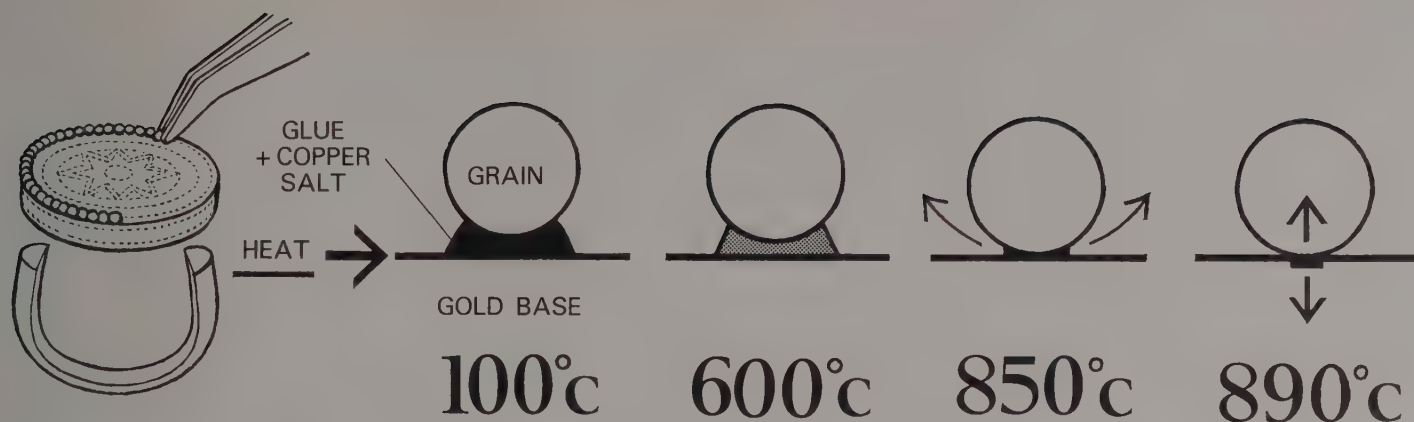


Fig. 5 In granulation, the design is painted in a dilute mixture of organic glue and copper salt. The grains are placed while the glue is tacky. Then the work is heated.

At 100° C the copper salt turns to copper oxide.

At 600° C the organic glue turns to carbon.

At 850° C the carbon and the oxide combine to form carbon dioxide, and this gas disperses.

At 890° C the pure copper merges with the gold base and becomes invisible.

material. This may either be a hollow gouged out of the metal or a cell on its surface made from a strip of gold ribbon or wire attached to the background (Fig. 6). When the additional material is sunk into a hollow in the work, the process is known as *champlevé*; when it is contained by a cell soldered to the surface, the technique is called *cloisonné*. Both methods can be used for setting stones or pieces of glass which are cut to shape, fitted into

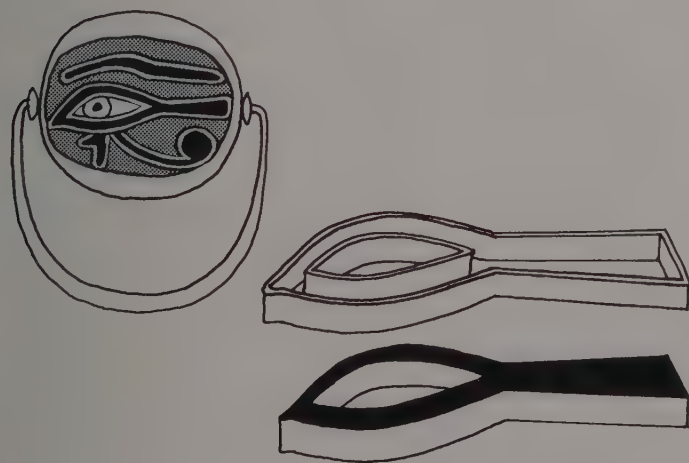


Fig. 6 Inlaying and enamelling both require a preformed cell to contain the decoration. In *champlevé* (not shown), the cell is hollowed out of the work, while in *cloisonné* work the cells are made by attaching the edge of a ribbon of gold to the background in the desired shape and pushing the edges of the metal over the inlay to secure it.

position and fixed by bending the outer edge of the cell or hollow over the insert, and both are suitable for enamelling.

Enamelling is one of the few decorative techniques unknown to jewellers of the third millennium BC. A version of it seems to have made a brief appearance in the Aegean about 1425 BC only to vanish for more than a hundred years, to re-surface again in Cyprus in the twelfth century BC. As the Dark Age engulfed Greece, the process of enamelling was predictably lost, and it did not become an established part of the goldsmith's repertoire until the sixth century BC, after which its popularity never waned. It is, perhaps, surprising that enamelling should post-date granulation by some centuries for it is a relatively simple procedure. Powdered or finely broken coloured glass is placed in a prepared cell, and the work is heated sufficiently to fuse the glass and render the background porous enough to fix the two together.

When a restrained and sober type of surface decoration was wanted, the smith might turn to niello, an attractive mat silvery-black substance much used in the later classical world for emphasizing linear detail. The basis of this process is a powdered silver sulphide which is placed in shaped recesses in the object to be ornamented. When heated gently the powder does not melt but becomes soft and pliant, and at this stage it can be pressed and moulded into the corners of the cell, where it will set when cooled. A form of niello was known in the eastern Mediterranean as early as the twentieth century BC, and the Mycenaeans used it to decorate some spectacular parade weapons, but the technique was lost for many centuries. Even after its rediscovery by Hellenistic goldsmiths it was not adopted into the jeweller's repertoire before about AD 300. It is interesting to note that, on its first appearance in jewellery, niello was used to decorate a ring, one of a pair from the Beaurains Treasure.

With the one notable exception of fully faceted stones (Fig. 16), it would be broadly true to say that the jeweller of the fifteenth century BC deployed all the skills known to his lineal descendant of the fifteenth century AD and could even avail himself of techniques such as colloid hard soldering which were completely beyond the reach of his later counterpart.

Types of Ring

This formidable range of techniques was applied thereafter to making rings of an apparently inexhaustible variety of shapes and functions, and our problem is, therefore, to discern some kind of order and pattern in the uses and designs of rings. It would be possible to classify ancient rings by the shape of the hoop or bezel, or a combination of the two; but this is mostly self-evident from the illustrations and in any case not particularly enlightening about the meaning of the rings in the age from which they originated. On close study, however, a number of viable categories begin to emerge from the seemingly limitless proliferation of forms (see table below).

A large number of rings, including many of the earliest, were used as seals (see also p. 56) and if this class is extended to include any example with an intaglio motif then it becomes even more widely applicable. Two subdivisions seem to exist: rings bearing a script in which the name or invocation is overtly stated, and rings bearing a pictorial or emblematic device. With this latter

subdivision, however, a major *caveat* must be entered; we can never hope fully to know the minds of the ancient designers of such an immensely distant age, and it is highly likely that many, if not most of the rings in this subdivision and the others may equally well belong in the third category, 'Ritual rings', under the heading of 'Religion and magic'. Perhaps, only in parts of the late Hellenistic and Imperial Roman worlds, when high society in general was pervaded by a certain intellectual cynicism and affected to despise the power of charms and amulets, were motifs sought purely for their decorative appeal. At all other times the world was so deeply permeated by superstition that the theme of a ring's decoration, no matter how apposite to its ostensible function, must almost always have included some additional magic allusion or charismatic significance now only rarely and partially understood. For example, the ring from Mari (Pl. 4) has been assigned to the category of 'seal rings with pictorial emblems' solely on the criterion of its intaglio carving (which is, incidentally, almost the only certainty about it), but actually shell is far too fragile to be used on coarse clay, and the bizarre winged genius that forms the motif cannot but have powerful magical, if

Types of Ancient Ring								
Seal Rings			Ornamental Rings				Ritual Rings	
with Script	with Pictorial Motifs		with Representational Motifs		with Abstract, Stylized or no Motifs		Religion & Magic	Civic & State
Pl. 7	Pl. 2	Pl. 44	Pl. 25	Pl. 96	Pl. 3	Pl. 75	Pl. 19	Pl. 10
15	4	45	27	98	8	77	21	26
16	5	46	45	101	12	78	23	68
17	9	50	48	105	18	80	29	69
20	11	64	49		24	81	53	70
28	13	102	51		31	82	58	88
90	14		52		36	83	85	100
93	30		54		47	84	86	107
109	32		56		60	87	99	
	33		57		62	89	106	
	36		59		63	91	108	
	37		61		65	92		
	38		73		66	95		
	39		76		71	97		
	40		79		72	103		
	43		94		74	104		

not religious, associations. The same could equally well be said of the golden sphinx (Pl. 5), the stark iron ring from Luristan with its 'sacred tree' motif (Pl. 9) and indeed, of most of the rings predating, say, the fourth century BC. From this time until the recognition of Christianity in the fourth century AD, aesthetic considerations tended to outweigh talismanic significance, although even at this time both aspects were encompassed in many of the ring designs (Pl. 64).

The second major category of rings — those designed primarily for ornament rather than for use — is equally open to question. Even when an ornamental stone, selected for its beauty, colour, rarity and value, was displayed in a carefully subordinated setting, we cannot be sure that the gem itself had no amuletic powers. Most of them certainly did, and even today there are brides who will not wear an emerald in the belief that green is unlucky, or an opal because they are alleged to bring tears. The superb ring from Tello (Pl. 3) seems to stand in need of no other advantage to supplement the vivid sense of colour which shaped segments of brilliant stones and inlaid them so judiciously, set off by the delicate golden ribbons of the metal cloisons between; but there might have been some specific magic in this particular combination of colours, of which we know nothing. This possibility is, perhaps, supported by the sturdy Egyptian ring with its blue glass cylinder (Pl. 18). Obviously the owner who could afford such a hefty gold hoop was not short of the means to procure real lapis lazuli, yet the bezel is an unabashed fake. Even the mighty pharaohs of the all-conquering Eighteenth Dynasty were, on occasion, ready to accept coloured glass instead of precious stones (Pl. 21), and since their wealth was virtually boundless, this points inevitably to the conclusion that the idea was of far more importance than the reality. Power was vested in the colour of the stone, not in its price.

This assumption seems to have been particularly true of jewellery made for funerary use only. As long as the piece looked appropriate, it could be guaranteed adequately to fulfil its function of exalting the owner's status in the life to come. This comes as no surprise in the case of the eschatology-orientated Egyptians, but there are indications that the pragmatic and realistic Romans subscribed to similar beliefs. A sumptuous-looking hand-ornament (Pl. 71) comprising three hoops and no less than five bezels is, in fact, a combination of flimsy gold foil with glass 'gems', and since it could never have withstood the rough-and-tumble of everyday wear, it must have been designed to function only at a funeral and in the insubstantial next world.

The rings of the Bronze Age Aegean, from Minoan to Etruscan, are perhaps the most obviously ambiguous of all. Nearly every ring bears an intaglio design and could therefore be used as a seal and has been classified accordingly. At the same time, however, there are few more obvious and clear-cut examples of ritual meaning than the fantastic cult-scenes of Minoan and Mycenaean religion depicted on these seals (Pls. 32—5). On the

other hand, two of the Etruscan rings (Pls. 40—1) have intaglio gems, but only the most perfunctory attention was paid to the carving. The huge, elaborately relief-worked settings and their contrast with the rich colour of the gems were clearly of far greater interest and importance to the makers. These are ostensibly seals but in practice they are flagrant ornaments, with little or no other function.

Apart from the colour of the gems which seems to have been a major consideration to the Egyptians, the Greeks and Romans attributed a variety of useful if occasionally unlikely powers to jewels (see also p. 58). The correct choice of gem was believed to cure anything from toothache to impotence, and though increased availability is undoubtedly the chief reason for the extensive adoption of bejewelled rings, these talismanic functions certainly provided an extra stimulus. Amethysts supposedly protected against drunkenness, sapphires against poison, emeralds against treachery and garnets against accidental injury. Amber was thought to have mysterious restorative powers for those suffering from headache or toothache (Pl. 58); in this case the character depicted on the ring looks as if he were in dire need of some such specific, and, despite its prohibitive price, lapis lazuli could always be sure of a market for it was reputed to have prodigious effects on the owner's sexual prowess.

Not the gems alone but even the metal from which it was made distinguished the Roman ring. In the early days of the Roman Republic when something more than lip-service was paid to the ideal of a sober and Spartan life-style, the citizens were proud to wear an iron ring. Ambassadors alone were permitted to wear gold rings, and even then, only while transacting official business; their gold rings had to be replaced in private by the modest iron ring. Human nature being what it is, the people of Rome from senator to slave predictably began to covet the right to wear the forbidden ornament, and by the early Imperial age gold and jewels were worn indiscriminately by all ranks, despite occasional unavailing attempts to curb this extravagance by the passing of sumptuary laws (see also pp. 53, 95). The poet Martial, in the first century AD, remarked acidly on a certain *nouveau-riche* citizen who wore no less than six gold rings on each finger. By this time the only people left in Rome who still obeyed the official rulings were the slaves who, then and always, wore only iron rings, being permitted no choice in the matter.

Like the right to wear a gold ring, the privilege of wearing a ring with an imperial portrait (Pl. 57) was at first confined to the small élite who enjoyed the Roman emperor's favour; later it was appropriated by so many people as to be virtually meaningless. Indeed, Roman rings are hedged about with so many prohibitions, regulations and statutory observances that it might perhaps be more accurate to classify them all under 'civic or state'.

A comparison of the different columns of our table, though it must be accepted with considerable caution, seems to indicate a number of possibly significant trends. The Greeks would appear

to have a marked predilection for pictorial representations on both seals and ornamental rings. With their passionate worship of beauty, human and artistic, it is not surprising that they tended to avoid the abstract and to devise miniature scenes from nature for their rings, nor that their sense of form sometimes led them towards wholly sculptural means of expressions (Pl. 53).

The Romans, on the contrary, seem to choose twice as many non-representational designs and to confine their pictorial selection largely to cameos (Pls. 57, 59). This term can strictly be applied to any jewel with carved relief decoration, but in practice it is generally used of substances such as stone or shell with alternating light and dark layers that can be cut away so that the contrasting colour emphasizes the relief. An opulent combination of gold and gems evidently pleased the Romans more than fine engraving or precise workmanship in a single material.

The comparative rarity in the classical world of rings decorated with an inscription only is another aspect of the same trend: to the Greeks lettering had insufficient pictorial appeal, while to the Romans it was evidently lacking in visual *éclat*. This tendency did not end with the classical world. Byzantine and Dark Age rings in general betray a continuing taste for the glow of colourful gems at the expense of figurative images, although the spread of Christianity did to some degree cause a return to the invocational type of motif.

The mass relegation of early European rings to the 'ornamental' category is an admission of failure, or at least of ignorance. They are clearly not seals, and many of them bear simple scrolled patterns that suggest no further significance. In the rare cases where figures appear (Pls. 73, 79), they are so grotesque as to indicate a decidedly superhuman application, but there are few if any criteria for interpreting these images.

The ambiguity of early European rings continued into the Dark Ages and may, in fact, be a curiously apt reflection of the power structure of the post-classical world. By the end of the fourth century AD, even much of 'barbarian' Europe had adopted Christianity, and as a result the city of Rome, although battered, moribund and abandoned by the emperors for a less precarious seat in Byzantium on the Bosphorus, wielded a spiritual power undreamed of by the earlier Caesars whose legions had so relentlessly dominated most of the known world.

The ambivalence of this situation is perhaps most dramatically illustrated by the confrontation between Pope Leo I and Attila the Hun. The way to Rome was open, and the city seemed defenceless when the indomitable pontiff, armed only with his mystic authority and accompanied by a handful of faithful clerics, went out to meet the ghastly conqueror and his army. Neither ever told what words were exchanged, but Attila turned back, and the tottering city of Rome won yet another reprieve, for the barbarian world acknowledged, even when it did not yet accept, a force beyond the reach of earthly armies.

For the most part, barbarian jewellery made at the height of the Imperial era stoutly resisted the blandishments of classicism and

preserved its own native character (Pl. 82). However, as Rome's temporal power declined, the city achieved a spiritual ascendancy that succeeded as never before in carrying classical influences into the barbarian world. At first, the techniques and motifs were those which still traced a tenuous line of descent from Hellenistic prototypes, but with the increasing pressure of Christianity, rings of all types gradually came to display the new religious iconography.

On the other hand, the 'new' city of Constantinople was Christian from the moment of its inception — officially. In practice, however, Byzantium, already more than a thousand years old when Constantine adopted it as his new capital, was a complex amalgam of eastern and Greek elements with the deftness and cunning of its innumerable components. On this apparently unpromising stock, the innocent new faith and the decadent old empire were to be grafted, and the transplant proved durable and fertile beyond expectation. The East provided raw materials, and the classical world the richness of its artistic and technical expedients, while stimulation, patronage and fresh inspiration flowed for centuries to come from the Byzantine court and the Church.

In Constantinople too, jewellers began by depending heavily on the already well-worn classical repertoire (Pl. 98), but original forms were soon developed. Motifs and inscriptions suited to the beliefs and rituals of the Christian East called for rings with flat bezels on which these themes could be clearly displayed, and the need for linear emphasis led to a revival of the long-abandoned arts of enamelling and niello (Pls. 107, 109), thus curiously linking the eastern Mediterranean with its most distant pre-classical forerunners. In type as well as technique these rings from the end of the ancient world seem to glance briefly backwards for, like those of the earliest civilizations, they show a preponderance of signets with pictorial or inscribed religious motifs.

If there is a certain pattern of consistency in the rings which originated in the Greek world or later, it is intriguing to see that by far the widest distribution of types was to be found in ancient Egypt. Almost every category in the table includes at least one example from Egypt (emblematic seals prove to be the only exception), and even making allowances for the invariable religious overtones of Egyptian jewellery, its diversity is amazing. The Egyptians were lavish with colour long before the Hellenistic extension of trade boundaries brought most of the more brilliant gems into the jeweller's repertoire (Pl. 24); they worked sculptural forms in plain gold (Pl. 27) and created stately ritual scenes in gold and jewels (Pl. 21). Name-magic, too, influenced them deeply, and queens as well as kings and officials proudly displayed their names and titles on their rings (Pl. 20).

Compared with Egyptian rings, those of western Asia were notably more limited and largely confined to seal emblems and abstract ornaments.

The rings illustrated here are, of course, no more than a minuscule and not necessarily representative cross-section of those which were made in the ancient world. In times of trouble the smallest and most valuable items were always the first to be hidden, lost or looted, and no one will ever have the remotest idea how many rings ended up in the melting pot for the sake of their metal content: in this respect their magic was no protection. Nevertheless, however inadequate this selection may be as a reflection of the whole, it undoubtedly shows that in the ancient

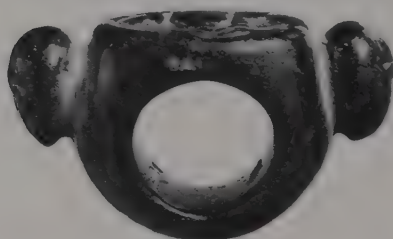
world, perhaps even more than in our own, the allure of rings was imperishable.

Only one of the rings illustrated defied tabulation. The sturdy iron key set in a Roman finger-ring (Pl. 67) has an attractively angular shape, but it is first and foremost an entirely practical key. It is far too small to have unlocked a door. The fact that its owner liked to wear it constantly on his person suggests that it safeguarded something of great value. I like to think it was the key to the casket in which he kept his rings.

WESTERN ASIA

2

Serpentine. Eastern Iranian. Possibly late third-early second millennium BC. Length 4.3 cm. Provenance unknown. Louvre, Paris, AO 22762.



Perhaps the first step towards writing is taken when man seeks to extend his own influence beyond his personal physical reach and devises a sign to act on his behalf where he cannot be present himself, and perhaps the earliest signs of all took the form of personal seals and charms to secure the protection and goodwill of the unseen powers which must have seemed to govern early life so capriciously. Serpentine, a remarkably soft soapy greenish stone, was particularly well adapted for carving these miniature signs, and a flourishing workshop devoted to the craft existed as early as the third millennium BC at Tepe Yahya in eastern Iran. On this ring, which may well be associated with that centre, a humped bull has been carved in intaglio on the oval bezel, while on either side is a boss worked with a small head. Hoop and bezel have been cut from a single piece of serpentine.

3

Gold, lapis lazuli and carnelian. Sumerian. C. 2500 BC. Height 1.5 cm. From Tello (ancient Lagash). Louvre, Paris, AO 277.

When this ring first came into the possession of the excavators at Tello, it had no archeological context to suggest a date, and they found it hard to believe that such a sophisticated example of the goldsmith's craft could date from an era as early in the history of metal-working as the accompanying circumstances seemed to suggest. However, subsequent discoveries, especially those from the Royal Cemetery at Ur of the Chaldees, proved that it could indeed be confidently ascribed to the mid third millennium BC, despite its advanced technique and artistic refinement. The ring is purely



decorative, with a continuous pattern of quatre-foils running round it between the embossed edges. Cloisons of gold strip hold inlays of carnelian from

the east of the Persian Gulf and lapis lazuli from Afghanistan in a combination that forms an ornament of remarkable distinction.

4

Shell. Middle Assyrian. Mid second millennium BC. Diameter 2.5 cm. From Mari. Louvre, Paris, AO 18319.

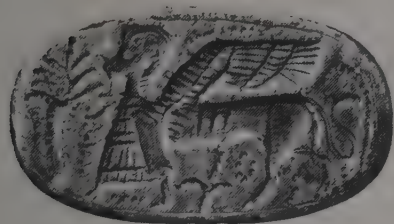
The illusion of dominion over the more incalculable aspects of hostile nature was predictably important in the ancient world. Wild animals, mostly lions or ibexes, were often used to symbolize the hunter and the hunted, and a curious humanoid figure, who made persistently recurring appear-

ances for more than a thousand years from Syria to Greece, was known as the Mistress of the Animals. She is usually shown in miniature on seals and other jewellery as a ritually garbed woman placed centrally and grasping in each hand the hind legs of a struggling animal that she effortlessly holds upside-down. In this version, on a fragile one-piece ring skilfully carved from shell, her affinity with the magical animal world has been strikingly affirmed by endowing her with four wings and the head of a long-beaked bird.



5

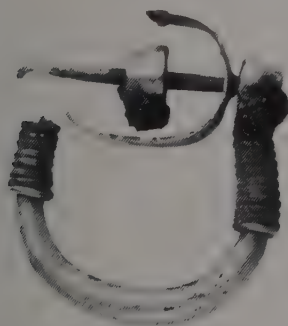
Silver. Syrian. Mid second millennium BC. Diameter 2.6 cm. From Ugarit (Ras Shamra). Louvre, Paris, AO 14730.



Ancient art and legend, throughout the eastern Mediterranean, is pervasively haunted by the enigmatic figure of the sphinx. All the tales agree that the sphinx was a creature of great power and potential threat, but its manifestations vary considerably from place to place. In Egypt the body of a crouching lion with the impassive kingly head of the pharaoh seems to establish the type, but this was not the riddling monster encountered by Oedipus outside Thebes. Sophocles mentioned wings and spoke of the creature as 'she', which seems to confirm its identification with the Near Eastern sphinx with its female torso, lion's body and wings. Common in the Mycenaean world, this sphinx reappears in Syria and was enthusiastically adopted by the people of Ugarit, where she was displayed as the stiffly formalized motif of this ring with a somewhat Egyptianizing shape (Pl. 11).

6

Gold. Palestinian. 1560–1480 BC. Diameter 2.5 cm. From Tell el Ajjul (ancient Gaza). British Museum, London, WAA 130 781.



The excavations at Tell el Ajjul raised a number of problems, not least those concerning the jewellery. In the earlier part of the Bronze Age, the area seems to have been technically backward, and the sudden appearance in the mid second millennium BC of quantities of advanced goldsmith's work in graves and hoards has never been entirely satisfactorily explained. A large number of scarab rings were found, many of which, like the example illustrated, had lost their stone and thereby gave an excellent view of the mechanism of the swivelling bezel, the

wire axis bound at either end round the terminals of the stirrup-shaped hoop. This form might suggest connections with Egypt, but no other indications confirm this, and it is now generally thought that the people of Tell el Ajjul owed their sudden expertise in goldworking to masters from the nearby island of Cyprus. An unassailable conclusion, however, has yet to be reached.

7

Copper. Hittite. C. 1500 BC. Width 2.4 cm. From Boghazkeoi. Louvre, Paris, AO 9599.



For much of the second millennium BC nearly all the central Anatolian plateau was dominated by the powerful Hittite Empire. The Hittites were not remarkably distinguished for their own artistic talents, but they opened their gates and their minds on many occasions to groups with stronger intellectual traditions, among whom were companies of Assyrian merchants who settled in and around Cappadocia. The Assyrians naturally used their own language and script on their numerous signets and records, but the Hittites too were able to produce seals. The circular copper disc (it is only 3 millimetres thick) set into this ring has been engraved, somewhat haphazardly, with the scattered syllables of a woman's name: LA-LA-WI. The fact that a woman could have enough civic function to need her own seal suggests a relatively enlightened contemporary attitude, but this is in no way confirmed by other archeological evidence.

8

Gold. Elamite/Babylonian. C. 1130 BC. Average diameter 2.2 cm. From Susa. Louvre, Paris, sb 6657–6.

Beneath the great temple of the god In-Shushinak on the acropolis of Susa a treasure of magnificent jewellery was buried, perhaps to mark the king's recent military successes. The Kassites, who had long dominated Babylonia, threatening Elam's eastern borders (and incidentally, causing the emigration to Susa of numbers of highly skilled refugee craftsmen from Babylon), had recently been expelled, and Elamite control extended beyond the earlier frontiers, so there was much to celebrate, and raw materials and craftsmen were abundantly available. It is virtually impossible to distinguish native Elamite from contemporary Babylonian



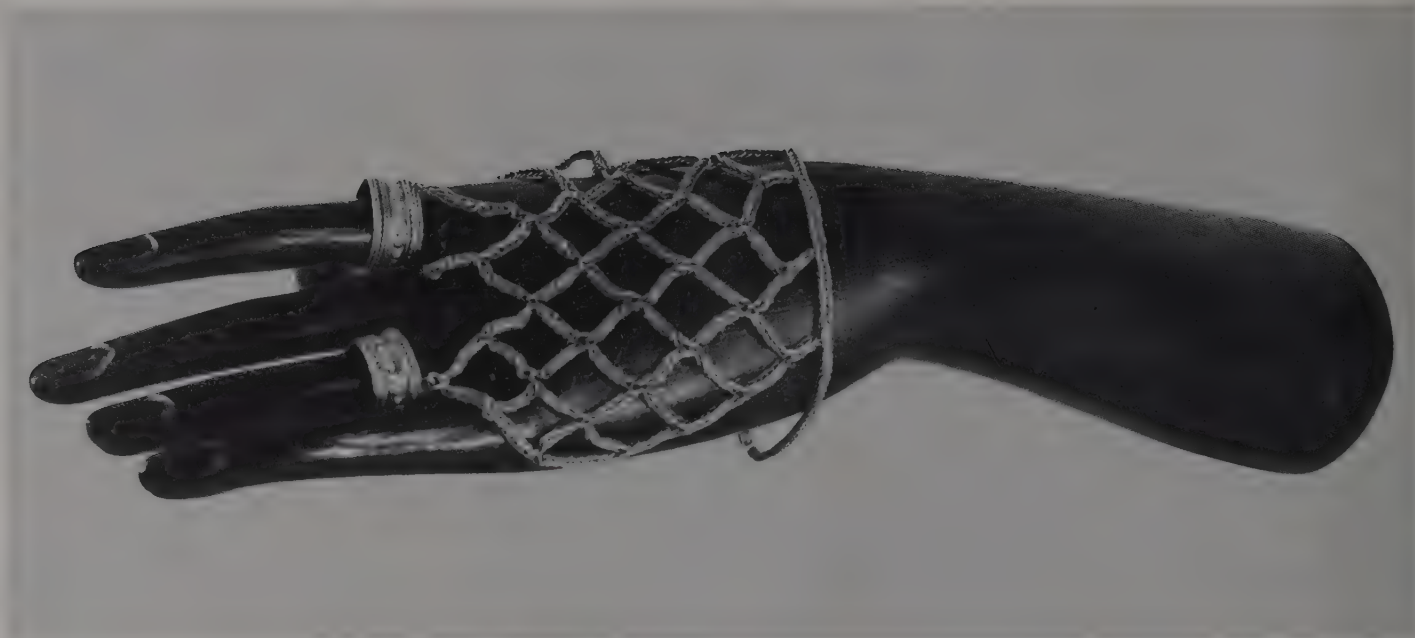
work, but whatever their origin, these two rings from the treasure display a remarkable degree of technical skill and artistic sensitivity in their restrained use of fine granulation.

9

Iron. Iranian. Probably twelfth–eleventh century BC. Diameter 3.5 cm. From Luristan. Louvre, Paris, AO 22369.



An extremely basic ring made of iron might seem to have remarkably little appeal to a discerning or wealthy patron. This one consists of a strip of metal, widening in the centre, bent into a hoop to encircle the finger. Since there is no bezel or stone and the ends are not even joined, it made minimal demands on a smith's skill and was, to all appearances, likely to be the least impressive item in any owner's collection. The motif, a somewhat perfunctory rendering of the widespread theme of confronted animals on either side of a stylized tree, does nothing to suggest why the ring was valued, and in fact the only acceptable explanation lies in its date. In the twelfth century BC, the first tentative experiments in iron technology were taking place and beginning to disseminate from centres in Anatolia, and the new metal with its unknown qualities and menacing potential was, as yet, a rare and startling acquisition to which magical properties were ascribed. This modest ring may have been, to its contemporaries, far more precious than the most costly gold or gems.



10
Gold. Possibly Median. Eighth or seventh century BC. Length 19 cm; width 12 cm. From Ziweye, Iran. Teheran Museum, 1019.

The fortified town of Ziweye in north-west Iran was said to be the provenance of a heterogeneous treasure apparently assembled from several areas but all confined to the eighth or seventh century BC in date. Many of the pieces seem too refined to be the work of local smiths, but in the case of this 'mitten' the combination of opulence and somewhat rough craftsmanship may indicate a native Median origin. The entire 'mitten' is formed from a mesh of gold chains fastened round the wrist (the clasp is modern), terminating in a ring for each finger, of which only two survive. The rings are relatively simple hoops decorated with a row of punched dots edged with twisted wire. Although the clumsy joins betray a certain lack of skill, the total effect must have been extremely striking.

11
Gold and carnelian. Phoenician. Sixth century BC. Width 3 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, WAA 136027.

The Phoenicians were among the most enterprising and adventurous merchants of the ancient world; in addition to their home ports, they could rely on a landfall at any of the numerous colonial cities they founded. The extent and intimacy of these foreign contacts may, perhaps, explain why they seem to have been so susceptible to the influences of the foreign cultures with which they came into contact that it can sometimes be difficult to tell imports from copies. Here a carnelian gem has been carved in the Egyptian style, as a revolving scarab, with intaglio figures of the Nilotic deities Isis and Osiris, between whom the infant Horus is suckling. The ring's hoop presents some problems;



although it is relatively wide from side to side, it is unusually shallow from front to back and may have been designed for wear as a pendant rather than as a finger-ring.

12

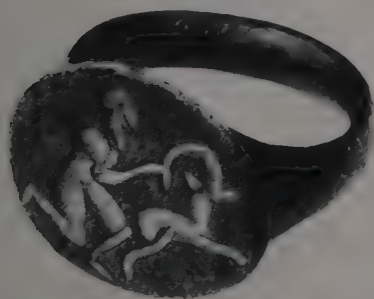
Gold with coloured glass. Phoenician. C. fifth century BC. Diameter 2.2 cm. From Tharros, Sardinia. British Museum, London, WAA 133397.



The Phoenician merchant fleet must have been a familiar sight throughout the Mediterranean, transporting not only their own native cedar wood but products from most of the Near East and absorbing, in return, a wide variety of alien influences as they fetched and carried goods throughout the Mediterranean and possibly even beyond. This ring illustrates their alertness to the decorative trends of their commercial contacts. The hoop is a thin strip of gold terminating in a lion mask on either side of the oblong box-shaped bezel with its open back, which has hints of both Greek and Etruscan styles in the elegant bands of filigree plaits and spirals. The stone, however, is an ingenious fraud; layers of coloured glass are arranged horizontally in imitation of banded agate.

13

Bronze. Persian. Probably fifth-third century BC. Width of bezel 3.5 cm. Louvre, Paris, AO 22489.



In every age there have been the rich who could afford the most luxurious ornaments on the market and the less fortunate who made the best show they could with limited means. Many examples are known of flimsy gold foil that must once have looked imposingly massive if it effectively concealed the worthless fabric underneath, while in other cases an unassuming material and honest craftsmanship combine to produce a lively and spontaneous impression. The court art of Achaemenid Persia was static and splendid (Pl. 14), but not always notable for its vitality; however, this modest bronze ring of a similar (or perhaps slightly later) date is full of movement and vigour. The oval bezel shows a muscular huntsman seizing a fleeing goat from behind by its long curving horns, interpreted in simple, direct forms of great energy.

14

Gold. Persian. Fifth-fourth century BC. Diameter 2.2 cm. From Amu Darya (Oxus) River, Russian Turkestan. British Museum, London, WAA 124004.



Among the curious miscellany of gold and jewelry that forms the Oxus Treasure, a number of different influences can be detected. Some pieces can be confidently attributed to the Scythians,

(Pl. 76) while others, such as this ring, are products of the imperial court of the Achaemenid rulers of Persia. The oval projecting bezel gives us a rare and correspondingly valuable glimpse of a noble Persian lady (women were never depicted in the monumental sculpture of the age). Seated on a low chair, she is richly dressed and wears her hair in a long braid; on her head is a crown ornamented with turrets, suggesting that she may even be a divinity: the goddess Anahita, whom the Greeks equated with their own Aphrodite, was often associated with flowers such as the wreath and blossom held by this seated figure.

15

Agate. Sassanian. C. fourth century AD. Diameter 2.1 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, WAA 119353.

One of the earliest kinds of ring known to the human race must have been devised when an enquiring primordial man pushed his finger through the perforation in a natural hollow pebble and found he liked the effect. Rings made entirely from stone predate the metal ages by many centuries if not millennia and persist long after the introduction of the more flexible material. This ring is an example of the persistence of apparently irrelevant forms and motifs in an alien place and culture. The Sassanians were deadly and sometimes victorious enemies on the eastern frontier of the later Roman Empire, and their culture lacked neither raw materials nor skill in metal-working, but this ring, a timeless circlet of cloudy coloured agate, borrowed the purely Roman motif of the she-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus. The inscription consists of the letters: B'NWKY, possibly the owner's name, in Pahlavi script.





ANCIENT EGYPT

16

Gold, lapis lazuli, carnelian and green feldspar. Egyptian, Twelfth Dynasty. C. 1800 BC. Width of scarab 1.6 cm. From Dabshur. Cairo Museum, CG 52240.

Queen Mereret, wife of Sesostri III, was buried near her husband's pyramid with a magnificent panoply of jewels, including this particularly fine example of a ring bearing a scarab, the sign of

regeneration. The hoop, a single strand of gold wire on which the scarab rotates with the ends twisted together beneath the finger, recalls the simple seals and amulets of earlier times. But there is nothing primitive about the bezel; the splendid scarab beetle is made of gold cloisons set with inlays of coloured stone: blue lapis lazuli to symbolize the heavens, green feldspar for growing vegetation and red carnelian for the blood of life. In this way a ring of apparently simple form combined a whole range of magical properties to protect and sanctify the wearer.

17

Gold and blue faience. Egyptian, Fifteenth Dynasty. 1674-1567 BC. Length 3 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, BM 37664.

At the end of the Twelfth Dynasty, Egypt fell into a state of anarchy and disorder that gave an opening to a foreign group — the Hyksos — who moved in and established a control which lasted something over a century. During this so-called Second Intermediate Period the arts made little progress, but one advance was made in the design of rings: jewellers finally came to recognize and accept the



fact that scarabs were no longer tied round the finger with a linen thread. They had not, indeed, been worn in this way for many centuries, but goldsmiths still continued to reproduce in gold the knot underneath the finger (Pl. 16). The Hyksos king Khyan's scarab is mounted on the new one-piece hoop (not shown) and displays a cartouche with the king's name and a prayer for longevity.

18

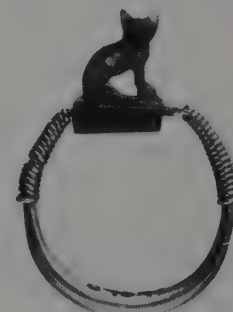
Gold and dark blue glass. Egyptian, Eighteenth Dynasty. C. 1400 BC. Length of cylinder 1.3 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, BM 2922.



This type of ring was rare in the Eighteenth Dynasty and echoes the form (but not the function) of the cylinder seals from the ancient Near East with its rolling ornamental stone. In this case there is no carving on the gem, which is designed purely for decoration. Lapis lazuli, with its symbolically celestial colour, was much favoured by the Egyptians, but the nearest available source was Afghanistan, whence it was imported with such enormous difficulty and expense that it provided, without further display, a very adequate testimony of the means and status of the owner. Imitations of lapis lazuli in coloured glass, which had the same symbolic significance at a fraction of the cost, were always popular. In this ring the glass stone is mounted in cup-shaped terminals and strung on a wire thread that is bound, at either side, round the massive hoop of solid cast gold.

19

Gold and carnelian. Egyptian, Eighteenth Dynasty. C. 1380-50 BC. Diameter 2 cm. Said to be from Alexandria. British Museum, London, BM 54547.



Egyptian women had their own particular tutelary deities, among whom was Bastet. This goddess was

often depicted in the form of her sacred animal, the cat, and had the genial function of presiding at festive occasions. She was also associated with fertility, hence her special appeal to women. This cat, carved in blood-red carnelian, sits erect on an oblong base, head alertly raised. The self-possessed composure so typical of the species has been accurately observed despite the minuscule scale of the representation. Each end of the gold hoop has been drawn out into a thin strand that passes through the perforation in the base of the figure and is bound round the other side just beyond the bezel.

20

Gold. Egyptian, Eighteenth Dynasty. 1378-62 BC. Length of bezel 1.9 cm. From Tell el-Amarna. Louvre, Paris, E 7688.



In early Egypt the most effusive and extravagant descriptions were habitually applied to royal personages, but the hieroglyph *nefer* ('beautiful') has seldom been more judiciously used than it is in the case of this ring, where it is emphatically repeated four times across the cartouche. The ring belonged to the resplendently lovely Queen Nefertiti, wife of the 'heretic' pharaoh Akhenaten, whom she accompanied when he abandoned Thebes to establish his new 'city of Aten' at Tell el-Amarna. The move involved innovations extending far beyond the field of religion, for a new spirit of naturalism also pervaded the arts of that era, and to it we owe the surviving portraits which preserve the memory of the queen's extraordinary beauty. However, this innovating tendency did not touch the massive signet-rings, cast in a single piece complete with inscription, by the *cire perdue* ('lost-wax') process (Fig. 19).

21

Gold with dark blue, turquoise and red glass. Egyptian, Eighteenth Dynasty. 1362-53 BC. Diameter 2 cm. From Thebes. Cairo Museum, JE 62428.

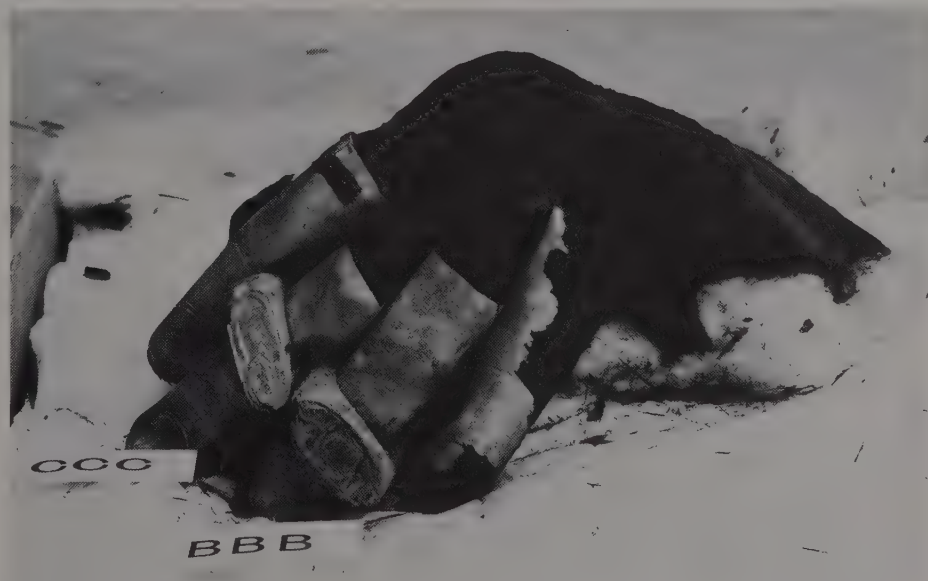


Ostentatious splendour is disarmingly combined with an astute eye for economy in this large, showy ring which was found in the coffin of Tutankhamun, close to the mummy's right hand. The massive shank is a triple hoop bound at the narrowest points with gold wire and terminating in papyrus blooms between inlaid buds. Only the closest inspection reveals that it is not made of solid gold but of gold foil over some dark filling material, probably resin. The focus of attention is the bezel, which is surmounted by a huge blue scarab carrying a crown of red glass with Horus, the hawk god, at one end and the golden barque of the moon at the other. It thus invokes the dignity of royalty in alliance with the powers of regeneration and renewal under divine protection.

22

The mummified left hand of Tutankhamun. Egyptian, Eighteenth Dynasty. 1362-53 BC. From the tomb of Tutankhamun, Valley of the Kings, Thebes. In situ.

The opportunity to observe ancient rings in position on the original owner's hand is rare indeed, but in the case of Tutankhamun the excavators had this moving experience. The young king's fingers were covered in gold sheaths, while on the top joints of his middle and third fingers were massive rings. The one on his middle finger is of heavy gold and bears a cartouche on which the figure of the king is engraved kneeling above a *neb* (a basket symbolizing 'all') hieroglyph and offering an image of the winged goddess Maat, while a falcon holding yet another propitious hieroglyphic sign, the *shen* ('infinity') hovers above him. On each shoulder of the ring there is another cartouche. The ring on the king's third finger is inlaid with dark blue glass in imitation of lapis lazuli. In the golden boat on the bezel are two apes (animals traditionally associated with the god Thoth), worshipping a crescent surmounted by a solar disc.





23
Gold. Egyptian, Eighteenth Dynasty. 1361-52 BC. From Thebes. Cairo Museum.

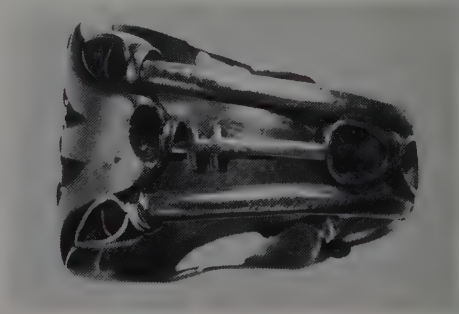
By Eighteenth Dynasty standards the tomb of Tutankhamun must have been modest to the point of meanness, and its splendid contents are therefore no more than a shadowy reflection of the riches which have been lost through centuries of tomb-robbing and plunder. Few surviving examples of Egyptian rings are as elaborate and massive as those from the thieves' hoard, a hastily snatched handful of eight rings wrapped in a scarf and subsequently stuffed into an inlaid casket by the ancient priests who tidied up after the predators. In the course of the excitement this ring had its hoop broken off, and only the bezel now survives — a complex miniature scene executed fully in the round: the

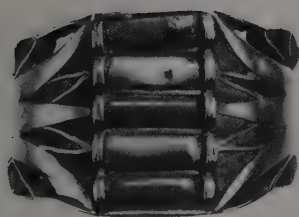
king kneels in worship before the great sun god Re, who sits enthroned and holds the symbols of life and sovereignty, while beside the king are two apes, the animals associated with the god Thoth, with upraised arms. At opposite sides of the circumference are the divine birds, the hawk god Horus and the vulture goddess Nekhbet, whose outstretched wings encircle and protect the group.

24
Gold, lapis lazuli, turquoise and carnelian. Egyptian, Nineteenth Dynasty. C. 1304-1237 BC. Diameter 2.2 cm. From Saqqara. Louvre, Paris, E 7725.

If there was one branch of the jeweller's craft at which the Egyptians excelled more than any other, it was the art of inlaying. This exacting technique calls for the utmost accuracy and precision in

preparing the coloured insets for the cells which have been formed to receive them (Fig. 6). If the inset is a little too small, the inlay will not stay securely in position; a little too large and it will not





fit in the cell at all. The slightest irregularity in the shaping and cutting of the inset will make the end product look unacceptably coarse and ragged. This ring, an outstanding example of skilled inlaying, has been associated with Khaemuast, priest of Ptah and son of Ramesses II. It is decorated with alternate bars of lapis lazuli and carnelian flanked by shoulders bearing inlaid blossoms of the lotus which was perhaps the most popular ornament in ancient Egypt.

25

Gold with red and blue glass. Egyptian, Nineteenth Dynasty. 1304-1237 BC. Width of bezel 2.1 cm. From Saqqara. Louvre, Paris, N 728.

The great majority of Egyptian rings are specifically designed to produce an effect of superhuman greatness and dignity. It is all the more delightful, therefore, to find an example which not only embodies an attractive vitality but possibly even provides a clue to its owner's individual taste. This gold ring, to which fragments of coloured glass still adhere, is decorated with a pair of lively horses, fully modelled in the round, that prance and curvet on the flat oval bezel with its granulated open-work surround. The ring appears to date from the reign of Ramesses II, whose interest in horses is attested by a number of monuments. Indeed, an account of the indecisive battle of Kadesh, when Egypt fought the Hittites and both sides subsequently claimed a victory, suggests that the pharaoh owed his survival to the speed of his chariot team.

26

Gold. Egyptian, Nineteenth Dynasty. C. 1210 BC. Diameter 2.3 cm. From Thebes. Cairo Museum, CG 52262.

Deprived of the symbolism of coloured stones, this ring relies for its meaning on a play of words and hieroglyphic signs. Many of the pharaohs had five names, any or all of which invoked the magical associations of their earthly and divine powers wherever they were inscribed. Here the name of Ramesses II is formed by open-work figures that project above the line of the hoop but in the same plane, so that they lie flat on the wearer's finger. The hawk-headed god Re crowned by a solar disc and the god Tanen wearing an *atef* crown confront each other on either side of a *user* ('strength') sign that supports a solar disc flanked by the royal uraeus. Re crouches on a *setep-en* ('chosen of') hieroglyph, Tanen on a *mery* ('loving') sign. The hoop of the ring consists of an *ankh* ('life') sign over a *neb* ('all') enclosed by the *waz* lily sceptres that symbolize Upper Egypt.



25



26

27

Gold. Egyptian, Twentieth Dynasty. 1166-60 BC. Diameter 2 cm. Provenance unknown. Louvre, Paris, E 11607.



For many ancient Egyptians, ducks must have been an almost indispensable part of life. In low-lying marshy parts of the Nile valley these birds abounded and provided the local people with a limitless source of both food and fun. For example, both these aspects had a place in the tomb of Tutankhamun, which was supplied with a stack of curious oval containers, each one filled with a trussed duck prepared and ready for eating, while a beautiful gold relief showed the king out hunting in the marshes with his little wife, Ankhesenpa'amun, who is pointing out a particularly fine duck as a target. Two plump ducks are featured on the bezel of this gold ring with a triple hoop. The underside of this gold ring is engraved with the name of Ramesses IV.

28

Blue faience. Egyptian, Twentieth Dynasty. Late twelfth century BC. Length of bezel 5.3 cm. Provenance unknown. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Edward S. Hewness, 1926, 26.7.825.

There seems to have been little or no prejudice, among even the wealthiest Egyptians, against the use of cheap substitutes to imitate costly gems. Coloured glass is found deputizing for turquoise and lapis lazuli even in the jewels of the colossally wealthy Eighteenth Dynasty, and during less prosperous eras these imitations sometimes form the entire ornament. The new style of ring illustrated here, introduced in the late twelfth century BC and associated, in this case, with the name of Ramesses VI, widens to a huge signet bezel with a slightly curved profile, designed to be used with a rocking action. This ring is made entirely of blue faience, a coloured paste made of powdered quartz glazed with soda-lime glass and much favoured for small articles during the Mediterranean Bronze Age. It bears an invocation to Thoth, god of the hieroglyphs, and Maat, goddess of justice, entreating a long and happy old age for the wearer in the royal retinue at Karnak.



29

Gold. Ptolemaic Egyptian. Third to first century BC. Height of figure 3.9 cm. Provenance unknown. Louvre, Paris, E 3878.

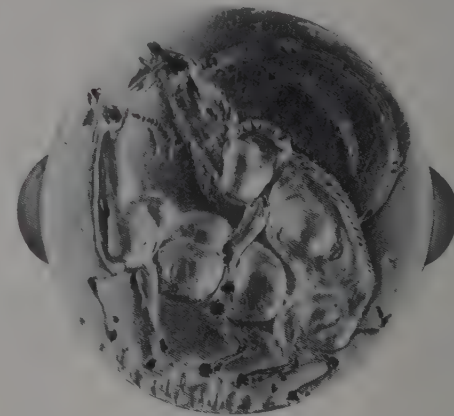


During the distribution of Alexander the Great's conquests after his early death, Egypt was allotted to General Ptolemy, who established the Macedonian dynasty that persisted until the Romans overthrew Cleopatra and absorbed the kingdom into their empire. In other parts of the Hellenistic world outside Egypt, local art styles tended to combine with insidious Greek influences to produce a frequently pleasing hybrid, but the individual character of Egyptian art is so strong that it can hardly ever harmonize satisfactorily with any other. It must be itself, or it is nothing. In some cases the Egyptian deities, now interpreted through the eyes of craftsmen accustomed to the Olympian gods, retain nothing of their origins but their names (Pl. 53), while in others Greek realism sits uneasily on traditional ancient Egyptian subjects: the life-like figure of the youthful god Harpocrates (the infant Horus), with his finger in his mouth and his hair twisted into the obligatory side lock, seems inappropriately three-dimensional on the bezel of this ring.

CLASSICAL FORERUNNERS

30

Gold. Minoan. 1700-1500 BC. Width of bezel 1.7 cm. From Crete. British Museum, London, GRA 14.



Solid and heavily made, this ring can nevertheless be termed a miniature seal-ring, for the hoop is too small for any finger larger than that of a tiny child. The circular field shows a pair of mountain goats mating, observed with all the sensitivity and executed with all the delicacy that characterize the Minoan craftsman at his best. A circular field is always difficult to fill with a representational motif, but in this case the adaptation has been achieved without strain or distortion and shows a true understanding of the demands of miniature art. Such perceptive sympathy with nature in its kinder aspects is rare in the ancient world and is one of the most attractive aspects of the culture of Bronze Age Crete.

31

Gold and lapis lazuli. Minoan. C. 1600-1500 BC. Diameter (top left) 1.9 cm; (top right) 2 cm; (bottom left) 2.1 cm; (bottom right) 2.3 cm. Said to be from Aegina. British Museum, London.



The history of the so-called Aegina Treasure is an amazing tale of smugglers, clandestine excavations and complicated antiquarian skulduggery, the truth of which may never be known fully. So obscure were its origins that the treasure was in the British Museum for six decades before it was finally identified as Minoan work of the sixteenth century BC. These rings are among the few Cretan specimens to show a variation on the usual intaglio religious motif. Inlaid with costly lapis lazuli imported from Afghanistan, they exhibit a number of comparatively abstract designs. One (bottom left) shows a reef-knot (later much associated with the hero Herakles, because his lionskin cloak is usually tied this way), while the bezel of another (bottom right) takes the form of a shield. The two simple hoops (top) are decorated respectively with a spiral fluted design and an early ancestor of the classical meander ('Greek key') pattern.

32

Gold. Minoan. 1500-1400 BC. Width of bezel 2.6 cm. From Isopata near Knossos, Crete. Archeological Museum, Iraklion.

Three voluptuous dancers, swaying sinuously in a landscape of flowers, raise their arms towards a fourth female figure who seems to be placed on an eminence above them, a separation which gives her superior importance and suggests that she may be a high priestess among acolytes or even a goddess. It is clear that in Bronze Age Crete religion and high fashion went hand in hand, since all the women wear the fantastically elaborate dress associated with life in the Minoan palaces. A curious feature of this ring is the fact that far more attention has been paid to the details of the dancers' clothes than to their heads and faces, which have been



reduced in scale and treatment to a mere cypher. Even more subordinate is the tiny doll-like being descending from the sky beside the dominant

woman. Grace and *joie-de vivre* are tellingly combined with a sense of mystery in this striking scene.



33

Gold. Mycenaean. 1500-1400 BC. Width of bezel 5.6 cm. From the lower town of Tiryns. National Museum, Athens.

Seated on a folding chair of curiously contemporary design, a hieratically crowned and robed figure executed in shallow intaglio holds up a chalice. Clearly this is no mere human being, for waiting to fill the cup are four attendant monsters bearing jugs, which must be among the most bizarre creations of the ancient world. They stand upright on

their feline legs, but have no other human attributes. Their dog-like heads are raised and behind its wasp-waist each one has a scaly crocodile-like tail that adds the final touch of fantasy. In the undulating line of the sky above them five ears of corn suggest that the scene invokes a prayer for the harvest, while the motif which fills the space below the figures is a common architectural decoration. The fluency and vivacity of the execution have a Cretan flavour, but the over-all impression of the design has a typically Mycenaean stateliness and dignity.



34
Gold. Minoan/Mycenaean. 1500-1400 BC. Width of bezel 3.4 cm. From Mycenae. National Museum, Athens.

In a strange scene full of pervasive symbolic significance an opulent female figure in Cretan court dress sits beneath a laden fruit tree holding a bunch of poppy heads in her hand. Two other women, apparently of less importance, approach her with gifts of flowers, and two more votaries, one tending the tree and the other also offering flowers, are shown as small girls — or perhaps as mortals in the presence of deities. The ring which, in design,

technique and motif, owes more to Minoan Crete than to its Mycenaean provenance, is a vivid reminder that very little, in the absence of written explanations, is known about Cretan religion. Who is the figure, nearly hidden behind the figure-of-eight shield, hovering near the sky where both sun and moon shine simultaneously? What is the meaning of the row of animal skulls filling the space behind the right-hand figure? Does the centrally placed double axe suggest a sacrificial scene, and if so, what is the offering and who is the recipient? There are many indications of occult significance, but no definite answers.



35

Gold. Minoan/Mycenaean. 1500-1400 BC. Width of bezel 2.9 cm. From Mycenae. National Museum, Athens, 3148.

Men rarely figure in scenes of Minoan-Mycenaean religion, and when they occur they are usually depicted as subordinates in scale or attitude. In this unusual example a young man wearing the brief kilt and laced sandals that were fashionable in Crete but with a short, typically Mycenaean hair cut is standing in front of a small shrine tending a plant growing on it. A small pillar is housed inside the shrine, a reminder perhaps that earthquakes are prevalent in the Aegean and that the home depended for its survival on the stability of the supporting columns. Behind the youth stands a truly magnificent and richly executed long-horned goat with another plant motif above its back. The tremendous dignity and impressive presence with which the animal is invested form a curious contrast to the restrained, almost perfunctory treatment of the human being. The spaciousness of the composition gives it a monumental feeling and represents a move away from the traditional Cretan *horror vacui*.

36

Gold. Minoan/Mycenaean. Fourteenth century BC. Height of bezel 2.1 cm. From Rhodes. British Museum, London, GR 1929.4-17-1.



Simplicity has often proved to possess a durable appeal that long outlasts the more ornate styles, since there is little about it to date it. Perhaps for this reason plain gold rings with a shield-shaped bezel set at right angles to the hoop became popular in the Aegean world as early as 1700 BC and persisted until the end of the Bronze Age in the eleventh century BC. Examples are attested in Cyprus, where moulds for casting this type of ring have been found, and there is, on the whole, remarkably little variation in the basic style throughout its unusually long history. Towards the end, the ring was increasingly decorated with inlaying or engraving, but the fundamental shape remained unchanged.

37

Gold and carnelian. Etruscan. Sixth century BC. Height of bezel 1.6 cm. From Vulci. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, Luyves 251.

When the nymph Amymone, sent by her father to find water in the arid district of Lerna in the



37

Argolid, was assaulted by a satyr, the great sea-god Poseidon came to her rescue. He hurled his trident at the attacker who fled, and the weapon lodged in a rock. Placing his foot against the stone, Poseidon pulled the trident out and caused an unending spring of fresh water to gush out for the nymph. To this day the fountain of Amymon still flows, and Poseidon's gift was immortalized by gem-engravers throughout the classical world. This Etruscan carnelian cut in a scaraboid shape and fixed in a rotating setting depicts the god freeing his trident, one foot braced against the rock. The carving is typical of the Robust Style, characterized by richly rounded forms achieved by free use of a drill, and

the scene is identified by the scattered letters of the inscription, which reads: NETHUNUS (Neptune was the name by which Poseidon was known in Latin-speaking lands).

38

Gold. Etruscan. Sixth century BC. Width of bezel 2.1 cm. Provenance unknown. Louvre, Paris, Bj 1075.

A new style of ring with a cartouche-shaped bezel decorated with relief (or sometimes intaglio) was introduced into the Etruscan repertoire in the late seventh century BC, a time when rings in general were relatively uncommon because of the shortage



of gold. This shape has a long history in the Levant (Pl. 11), and the Etruscans may well have adopted it, via Greece, from the Phoenicians, but its ulti-

mate origin is to be sought in Egypt, where it often carried the name and titles of a royal personage (Pls. 20, 28). This example shows a public fountain consisting of a masonry plinth with an animal-head spout very like those that still survive and function in the streets of Pompeii. The figures, however, are a complete departure from normality. Weird mixtures of human and animal, they are posed in hieratic attitudes that suggest a ritual significance. (The hoop is a recent addition.)

39

Gold. Etruscan. Late sixth century BC. Diameter 1.9 cm. From Etruria. Staatliche Antikensammlungen u. Glyptothek, Munich, 2409.



As early as the second millennium BC, the Phoenicians adopted an Egyptian type of ring with a cartouche-shaped bezel (Pl. 5). This design took a long time to make its way westwards, first to Greece and then to Etruria, where it first occurs in the orientalizing phase of Etruscan art in the seventh century BC and is sometimes seen in a remarkably novel form. The broad hoop of this ring consists of the bodies of a pair of lions modelled in low relief, and the bezel, set at right angles, is gripped in their teeth and forepaws. The motif of the bezel changes the theme completely: the weird marine monster seems to have some relationship to the Greek hippocamp, a fabulous beast with the forepart of a horse and the hindquarters of a sea serpent, but in this case the pointed muzzle and feline forelegs are at variance with the traditional type. The artist, probably a Greek, appears to have evolved his own variation of the familiar form.

40

Gold and sard. Etruscan. Fifth century BC. Width of bezel 4 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, 1917-6-1-354.



Immense care and skill have been expended to make this ring as rich and striking as possible. A dome-shaped oval gem of deep red sard, a type of chalcedony, is engraved with the full, rounded figure of a rider on horseback, and round the stone the goldsmith's skill and virtuosity have been allowed free expression. The convex curves of the

shoulders are decorated with playful animal figures executed in *repoussé* relief and surrounded by filigree motifs. It is, perhaps, a tribute to the designer's artistry that the presence of dolphins in this unlikely context seems neither incongruous nor unnatural. The relief of the figure work is further enhanced by the massed granulation of the background that provides a telling contrast of texture.

41

Gold and sard. Etruscan. Fourth-third century BC. External diameter 3.6 cm. From Tarquinii. British Museum, London, cat. of finger-rings, Marshall 355.

It is sometimes difficult to avoid the impression that the Etruscans enjoyed gold, with its promising malleability and the rich warmth of its colour, even more than the gems which they set in it. In this example an oval sard engraved with the figure of a nude warrior putting on his greaves is set at right angles to the hoop, but the chief feature of the ring is the massive gold setting. Surrounding the gem is a frame of beading, alternately plain and decorated with granulation, a technique in which the Etruscan goldsmiths achieved an unrivalled level of skill, while the shoulders of the ring break into luxuriant sprays of foliage; peering out from this growth are a pair of strange human faces, beardless but satyr-like, executed in low relief.



THE GREEK WORLD

43

Gold. Greek. Late fifth century BC. Height of bezel 1.6 cm. Provenance unknown. Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, West Berlin, FG 287.



In the fifth century BC, as Greek craftsmanship and prosperity advanced hand in hand, rings became not only more common but also more massive, and their engravers reached unsurpassed levels of artistry. The head of a bearded man, gaunt of feature and visibly betraying his years by his receding hair and the lines on his forehead, is a choice of subject with little obvious charm or picturesque appeal; however, the subtle delicacy of this miniature masterpiece invests it with an artistic stature that places it in the front rank among the monuments of the ancient world. The theme is approached without lyricism or sentimentality, and its lucid dignity is beyond question. Although the face seems to be strongly characterized, there is no reliable evidence to suggest that this was a portrait. The ring is, perhaps, lifted from the personal to the symbolic by the otherwise inexplicable presence of male genitals, which are depicted in front of the man's neck.

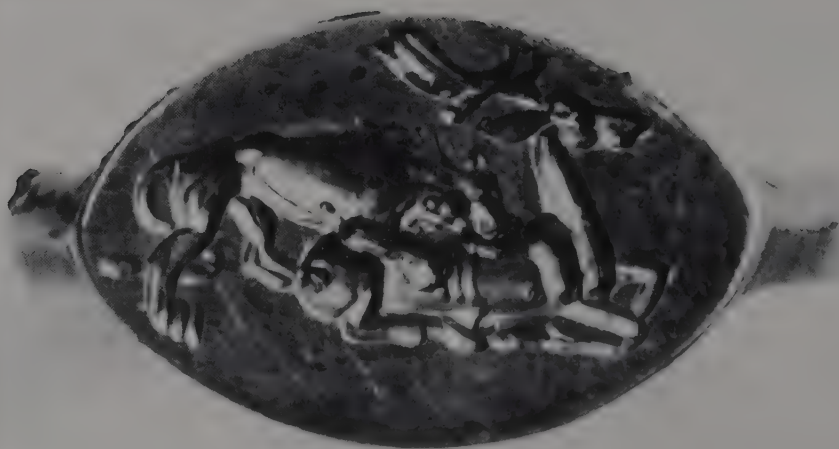


42

Painted terra-cotta sarcophagus (detail). Etruscan. 150-30 BC. Length 1.83 m; height 1.22 m. From Chiusi. British Museum, London, D 786 1887 4621.

Throughout their history the Etruscans were accustomed to bury their dead in carved or painted tombs equipped as lavishly as possible with luxuries for the life to come, in which an effigy of the living person reclined on a sarcophagus containing the ashes of the dead. At first these portraits were full of joy and vivacity, but as the power of Rome spread to

engulf Etruria they lost much of their freshness and spontaneity, as had the Minoans before them when their island was taken over by people from the mainland. What the Etruscans lost in gaiety, however, they gained in accuracy of detail. Here a lady named Seianti Thanunia Tlesnasa is holding her looking glass in a hand which shows that at least six massive rings might be worn at once, including several on the upper joints of the fingers — an impractical arrangement often favoured in societies where display had come to mean more than convenience.



44
Gold. Greek. Late fifth century BC. Diameter 2 cm. Provenance unknown. Louvre, Paris, Bj 1085.

Very little jewellery survives from the Dark Ages that followed the Bronze Age in Greece, and it is therefore curious to find that, when the goldsmith's art revived, its repertoire included a variant on both shapes and motifs of the distant past. Mycenaean seals were worked in intaglio on an oval bezel parallel with the hoop, and the motif of a

45
Gold. Greek. Late fifth century BC. Diameter of bezel 4.2 cm. From Pyrgos. Louvre, Paris, Bj 1089.

A large circular bezel, in this case considerably wider than the wearer's finger, became popular in the late fifth century BC (Pl. 50). Aphrodite, goddess of love (but not necessarily of marriage) is seated on the right of the engraving, embracing her son Eros, who is shown as a nude and magnificently



crouching horned animal with a lion springing onto its back and seizing it with teeth and claws was very popular. In the classical era the pointed eye-shaped bezel superseded the earlier form and remained a favourite shape for many decades. The likelihood is, however, that this type of bezel and motif was not an ancient local survival — tempting though the theory may be — but an import from the Near East, by way of the Asiatic connections established by the numerous Greek colonists who settled there.

winged youth. The round field presented a certain number of design problems: the two closely entwined figures form a somewhat emphatic vertical that does not entirely harmonize with the surrounding curves, particularly as this ring (like others of the same type) has no rim or frame to enclose the motif and help to occupy any superfluous space. The gracefully extended wings of Eros provide part of the solution, and to cope with the rest, the designer has placed a large wreath of foliage in the space behind Aphrodite.

46
Gold and blue chalcedony. Greek. Late fifth century BC. Width of bezel 3.1 cm. Provenance unknown. Private collection, United Kingdom.



Here a motif that enjoyed widespread popularity and a long history in the Near East is adopted by a Greek artist and interpreted on a blue chalcedony gem of scaraboid shape. The setting of the stone and the hoop of the gem are of twisted gold wire, restrained in style and reminiscent of Egypt and the East in the use of a looped joint which permits the engraved bezel to swivel. The treatment of the motif, however, is strictly Hellenic. A clearly defined ground line gives logic to the scene, and the dead stag with two birds of prey has been executed with a sense of space that would have been entirely alien to the Egyptian or Mesopotamian artist. The contrast between life and death is sharply emphasized by the juxtaposition of the powerful and dominating pose of the birds above the vulnerably extended figure of the stag.

47
Gold. Italo-Greek. Possibly fourth century BC. Diameter 2.8 cm. From Altamura, Apulia. British Museum, London, R 926.



Great resources of craftsmanship have been lavished on this late classical ring, which relies almost exclusively for its effect on its fine and delicate detail. A flat hoop bordered on each side with a rim of beaded wire forms the base for a convex circlet of open-work leaves, also decorated with beading. On top of the ring rests a small bird (perhaps a dove), its wings emphasized with granulation, while on the opposite side of the hoop is a female bust worked in repoussé (not shown). Apart from its great decorative appeal, this ring may also have served as an invocation to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, whose familiar creature was the dove. The ring was found in southern Italy and is an indication of the extent of the contacts between the Greeks and their neighbours. Greece colonized much of southern Italy, where exchanges with the Etruscans — the world's most skilful workers in filigree and granulation (Pl. 41) — gave added impetus to the Greeks' already considerable abilities in the goldsmith's craft.

48
Gold. Greek. Fourth century BC. Height of bezel 2.1 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, GRA 1934. II—151.



Rings with the motif worked in intaglio could function as seals or be worn purely as an ornament (or, of course, both), but examples with low-relief decoration, like those that became fashionable in Greece from the fifth century BC onwards, could have no other purpose but purely ornamental use. The rim of granulation enclosing the field stresses this aspect, as do the decorative tendrils filling the space on either side of the central motif — a dancing female figure. The execution of this ring is a clear illustration of the tendency of Greek art in the fourth century BC to move away from the severity and restraint of the previous century towards a more expressive and sensual style. Human forms were still idealized, but now they were invested with a warmer, more approachable feeling. The languid pose and richly curvaceous shape of this figure look forward to the almost theatrical exaggerations of some Hellenistic sculpture.

49

Gold. Greek. Fourth century BC. Diameter 1.8 cm. Provenance unknown. Louvre, Paris, Bj 1140.

The part played by the snake in Greek mythology was significant but mysterious. It appears to have had many different applications, some of which were of immense antiquity. To the Athenians, for



example, the snake was the family crest of the Erechtheids, founders of the house of Theseus, and closely associated with the beginnings of their city. Delphi, too, was apparently connected with an ancient serpent cult, for the oracle — the most famous and influential in the Greek world — was said to have been wrested by Apollo from the snake

goddess who reigned there before the coming of the Olympians. By the fourth century BC, however, the snake's occult significance probably meant less than its decorative possibilities. This type of ring, which consists of a number of sinuous coils with a snake's head and tail displayed at the top and bottom, remained in vogue for several centuries and was equally exploited in the form of rings and bracelets.

50

Gold. Greek. C. 400 BC. Diameter of bezel 2.5 cm. From Magna Graecia. British Museum, London, R 42.

Towards the end of the fifth century BC, a type of ring evolved with a thin hoop and a large almost circular bezel, possibly suggested by the remarkably high standard of contemporary coin design. Magna Graecia, the area of southern Italy and Sicily chiefly occupied by Greek colonists, produced some notable examples of both coins and rings. This ring, which echoes a Syracusan decadrachma of the fifth century BC shows Nike, the goddess of Victory, driving a four-horse chariot or quadriga. A miniature circular field is notoriously difficult to combine with a mobile and powerful motif, but in this case the artist has been outstandingly successful. By increasing the scale of the goddess he has given her importance, while using the curve of her back as she bends over the reins helps to fill the rounded field. The horses, comparatively small as they are, have been clearly differentiated by varying the angles of the heads, and an overall effect of amazing energy and force has been achieved.



51

Gold. Hellenistic. Second century BC. Height of bezel 6 cm. Probably from Carпени, Thessaly. Stathatos Collection, National Museum, Athens, Stath. 355.



As the art of the Hellenistic era grew more expressive, jewels too became more dramatic. The subtle shallow relief favoured in the fifth century BC (Pl. 48) gave way to an altogether more sculptural style with the motif worked in very high relief by hammering sheet gold over a core. The hollow oval bezel of this ring rises in five stepped stages decorated with alternate hatched and triangular incisions to the central medallion, which bears the bust of a woman with softly rounded features and a gentle, dreamy expression. She wears a band round her hair to hold the veil that falls behind her head, and her robe is fastened on the left, leaving her right shoulder bare. Neither the subject nor the owner of this ring have been identified, but the letters 'ZΩI' are engraved in dots on the back.

52

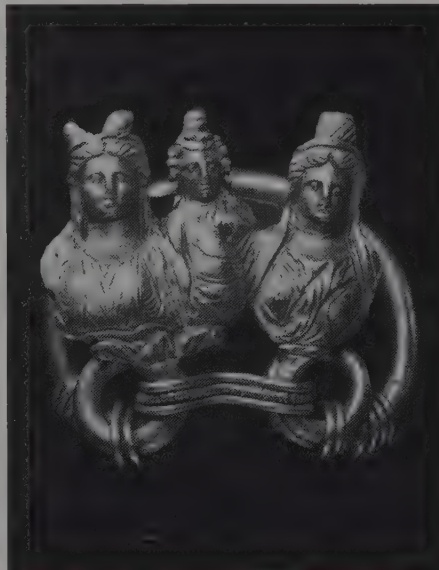
Gold. Hellenistic. Second century BC. Diameter of bezel 3.3 cm. Possibly from Egypt. Chatsworth, Derbyshire, England.

No one ever heard what the ancient oracle of Amun said to Alexander the Great when he visited its shrine in the Libyan desert in 331 BC. We only know that it told him (predictably enough under the circumstances!) exactly what he wanted to hear, and that thereafter he took to hinting at divine parentage, accepting divine honours and adding the ram's horns of the god Amun to his portraits. Since Amun was the chief god of the Theban pantheon, and therefore unacceptably foreign, he was made acceptable to Hellenic sensibilities by

assimilation with their own supreme deity and was henceforth known and depicted as Zeus Amun. On a hollow gold ring worked in low relief the head of

53

Gold. Ptolemaic Greek. Second century BC. Height of bezel 2 cm. From Egypt. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, 504.



Zeus Amun is shown in profile — bearded, wreathed and majestic — in amorously close proximity to that of a similarly crowned young woman.

Greek or Egyptian? This ring, which belongs to the period when Egypt was ruled by the Macedonian Ptolemaic Dynasty, defies classification, for though its provenance and subject are nominally Egyptian, the style and interpretation are totally Greek. A narrow sinuous hoop coils into a bezel decorated with the statuesque busts of two goddesses and an infant deity. The mature woman, the maiden and the child: the Egyptians would have called them Isis, Nephthys and the infant Horus (or Harpocrates, Pl. 29). However, it seems unlikely that they would even have recognized their native divinities in these stately Olympian figures, which approximate far more closely to Demeter the mother, Persephone (or perhaps Artemis) the maiden and Iacchus (youthful Dionysus) the child. The mother wears the angular crown of Isis, the maiden two feathers of Isis and the infant the *shen* ('infinity') sign, but even these have lost almost every trace of their original identity in this Hellenized version.

54

Gold with green glass. Hellenistic. Second century BC. Diameter 2.9 cm. From Egypt. British Museum, London, R 721.

Colour, novelty and a strong suggestion of the exotic, or even the erotic — all typical of Helle-

52



Phrygian cap. The placing of this dramatic and evocative motif in such a way that it would be virtually invisible in wear is characteristic of the quirks of Hellenistic design.

55

Gold, garnets and an amethyst. Hellenistic. First century BC. Diameter at widest point 3.5 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, R 843.

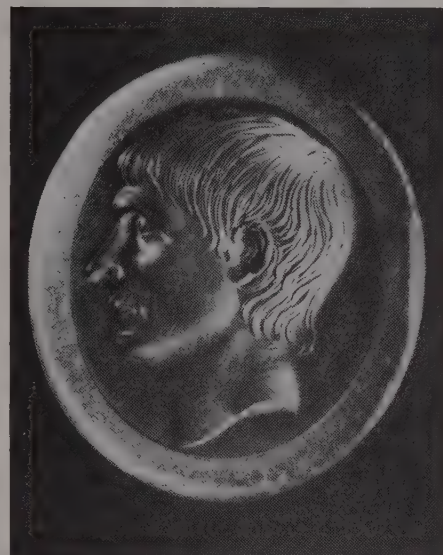
Perhaps the dominant feature of Hellenistic work is its extraordinary variety. This effect was enhanced by the introduction of a considerable range of colourful gems, and strongly contrasting forms and novel styles often occur. This ring has a large angular bezel rising in steps to enclose an oval cabochon amethyst. The hoop has a projection at the back and on either side which is set with small garnets, one circular and two pear-shaped. A curious and intriguing feature is the pair of hinges just below the bezel, which almost invisibly join the two parts of the ring together (one of the hinge pins is missing). They appear to have no vital constructional function, and the imagination hints at sinister vistas of Borgia-like iniquity, but the hinges may in fact be nothing more than an appealing novelty.



THE ROMAN WORLD

56

Gold. Greco-Roman. C. late third century BC. Maximum diameter 3.3 cm. From Capua. Museo Nazionale, Naples, 25085.

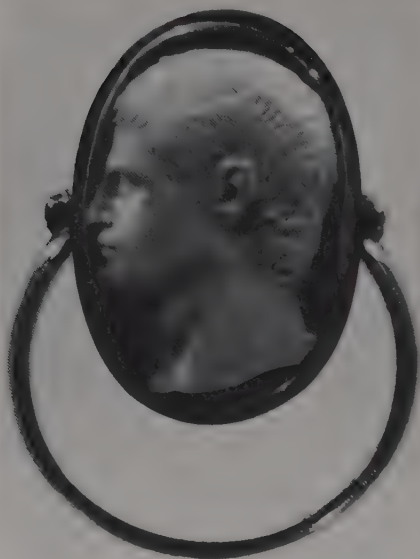


Few indeed are the occasions when the artist's own name can reliably be associated with an ancient ring, and it might be thought that when this occurs all other problems are automatically solved. This is, unfortunately, far from being true. In this case the artist's signature is clear — *Ηρακλείδης ἐποίησεν* ('Herakleidas made it') — but we are little the wiser for this information, since virtually nothing is known of him, and even the date has to be assigned on stylistic grounds. The only thing beyond question is his skill. On an oval bezel of slightly lighter-coloured gold, a middle-aged man is portrayed, beardless and short-haired, in the manner approved by the early Roman Republic. His serious features and thin, close-lipped mouth also conform to the contemporary ideals of gravity and piety. This ring, with its exquisitely sensitive Hellenistic workmanship, must have represented a major lapse from these severe standards.

57

Gold and chalcedony. Roman. First century BC or AD. Height 2.5 cm. Provenance unknown. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Cabinet des médailles, Luynes 232.

The serious, clean-cut features of the Emperor Augustus provided an ideal subject for early imperial gem-cutters. There are, however, fewer portraits of him in his younger days when, as adopted heir to Julius Caesar, he still used the name of Octavian. Here a simple chalcedony gem with two layers, brown and white, is carved in the cameo technique to show the profile of the youthful patrician bare-headed, without any of his later trappings of imperial state. Such gems were avidly sought as collectors' items from the Renaissance



57

onwards and, like many other examples, this one has been set in a later mount of plain gold with a pivot on either side of the bezel.

58

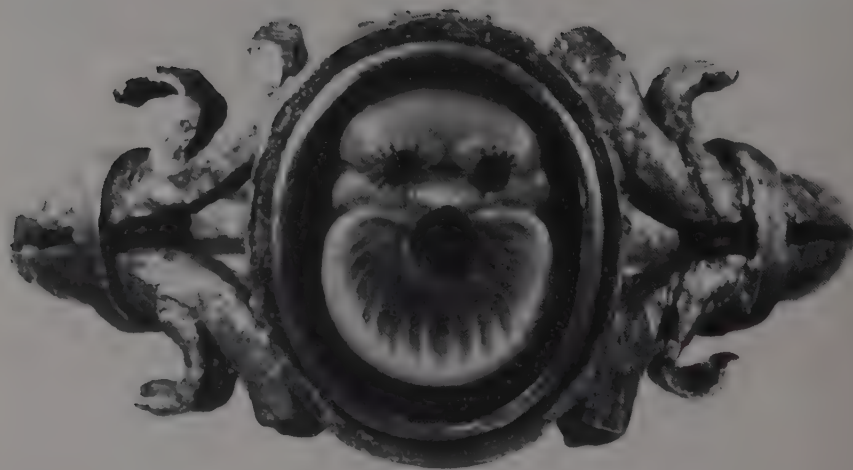
Amber. Roman. C. AD 100. Maximum diameter 5 cm. Provenance unknown. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Antikensammlung X 53.

Long before the development of metal technology, rings were made from a single piece of stone, naturally or artificially perforated, and this pecu-

liarily ancient form stubbornly persisted in later ages (Pl. 15). This ring, with its weird caricature of a male head, was carved from a piece of opaque, reddish amber. The ancient form, the grotesque features and above all the choice of material suggest an amuletic function, for amber seems to have had a magical significance throughout much of the early world. It was known in Mesopotamia as early as the third millennium BC and occurs in the grave circles at Mycenae in the second. Since the chief source of amber was the Baltic, the difficulty and expense of obtaining it provide a powerful testimonial to its efficacy in warding off the evil eye.



58



59

59

Gold and sardonyx. Roman. First or second century AD. Diameter 2.3 cm. Provenance unknown. Louvre, Paris, Bj 1302.

In Imperial Rome the theatre was more than a popular pastime. For many Roman citizens it was a real passion, and quite disproportionate amounts of public feeling were sometimes generated by the productions. Devotees liked to surround themselves, both in public and in private, with reminders of their favourites: the surviving graffiti at Pompeii include praises of popular actors; frescoes of theatrical scenes appear on the walls of homes, and garden colonnades were sometimes adorned with copies of the curiously stylized rigid masks worn by actors, from which stock characters were instantly identifiable. A simplified version of one of these masks, carved on a sardonyx cameo, has been set in a ring to be a continual reminder to the wearer of the delights of the theatre.

60

Gold, carnelian and emeralds. Roman. Second century AD. Diameter 2.4 cm. Provenance unknown. Benaki Museum, Athens, 1698.

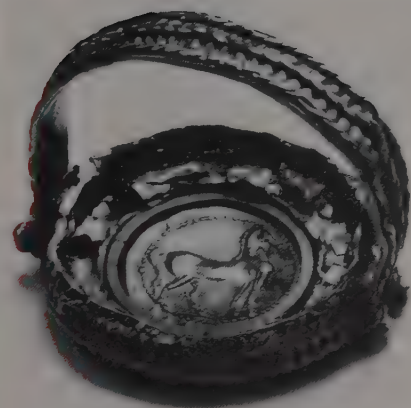
At the height of the Imperial Roman era the city of Alexandria in Egypt was a major production centre for jewellery, including a number of rings that closely resemble this example. It features two pairs of serpents whose entwined bodies form the hoop. Their raised heads are picked out with gems above and below a large central cabochon carnelian. The setting is enriched with granulation and undulating filigree wires, and an elaborately worked rosette is placed on each shoulder. The effect is restless, opulent and striking, but closer inspection reveals a perceptible decline in the standard of workmanship. There is a general lack of finish, neatness and regularity in the execution that would not have been acceptable a century or two earlier and that is not entirely disguised by the rich and colourful impact of the stones.



60

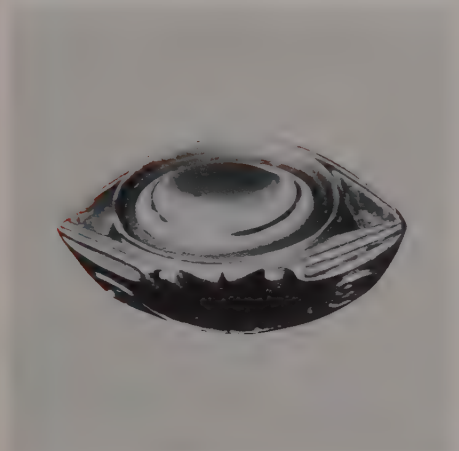
61
Gold. Roman. Third century AD. Diameter 2.5 cm. Provenance unknown. Louvre, Paris, Bj 1135.

With the annexation of Egypt in 30 BC, the Romans secured the ancient world's chief source of gold, and their jeweller's art flourished correspondingly. From the Hellenistic era onwards royal portraits set in rings had been presented to favoured subjects, but with their increased resources the Romans felt able, from the second century AD, to devote fine gold coins, regarded as notably ornamental, to use in jewellery. In this ring a stirrup-shaped hoop with braided decoration holds an open-backed mount surrounded by a double row of beading in which a



Carthaginian coin has been set. The head of the corn-goddess Ceres is displayed, and the horse on the reverse is visible through the back of the open mount.

62
Gold and nicolo. Roman. Third century AD. Width of bezel 4 cm. Said to be from Tarvis, Illyria (Yugoslavia). British Museum, London, R 802.



In matters of art the Romans tended to adapt almost as often as they innovated, and with so many fine models available this is neither surprising nor reprehensible. This ring combines something of the earlier Etruscan liking for a massive gold setting (Pl. 41) with the dignity of a stone simply cut in the shape of a truncated cone to display its natural layers of dark and blue-white coloration (sardonyx of this type is known as nicolo). The exterior of the heavy hoop is angular — not the most comfortable shape to wear — and features a pair of volute ornaments on each side of the shoulder, while flanking the raised rim that holds the gem in place are sunken triangular cut-outs. This ring is an admirable expression of the restraint and sober magnificence to which the Romans usually subscribed more enthusiastically in theory than they did in practice.

63

Gold and *nicolo*. Roman. Third century AD. Width of bezel 4.5 cm. From Tarsus. British Museum, London, R 801.



This ring is an example of the strength of fashion trends in the Roman Empire. It has so many similarities to Plate 62 that it would almost suggest some sort of mass production centre if it were not for the minor variations which ensure the individual touch. Here, too, is an oval *nicolo* gem (a type of sardonyx) cut in a truncated cone shape without engraving, but in this case the darker layer of the stone is featured. The parallels in the shape and decoration of the hoop are unmistakable: the angular exterior, ornamented on either side with relief volutes, the touch of scrolling above and below the gem and the massive pointed oval bezel with a triangular decorative field at either end of the stone. Here, however, the triangles are not sunk but worked with an eye-catching pattern of fine stippling.

64

Gold and *nicolo*. Roman. Third century AD. Maximum diameter 3.8 cm. Provenance unknown. Louvre, Paris, Bj 1287.



One of the most widespread and enduring types of Roman ring was the massive gold hoop expanding into wide angular shoulders on either side of a bezel

set with a gem in the shape of a truncated oval cone and having simple decoration of restrained scrolling above and below the stone. This form, enormously popular in the third century AD, seems to derive from a less complex version originating in the first century AD, and occurs at sites almost throughout the empire (Pls. 62-3). The gem was either chosen purely for its colour and displayed without decoration or, as in this case, carved in intaglio. The nude figure of a man with a curiously swathed head is depicted here holding a patera and a bunch of grapes.

65

Gold and garnets. Roman. C. third century AD. Height 3 cm. Provenance unknown. Louvre, Paris, Bj 1333.



The Roman taste for exotic and fantastic forms led to the development of a number of curious variations on the simple finger-ring with a hoop and bezel. Among the more restrained types is the

multiple ring thought to be derived from origins in Roman Egypt with some Hellenistic affinities. This type of ring maintained its popularity throughout the Roman era. The basis of the style was a narrow hoop with a projecting bezel, generally set with a cabochon gem. This bezel and a semi-circle of the hoop are repeated two, three or even four times and attached with the bezels in line above and below the basic ring, forming a spectacular ornament that seems to have exerted considerable appeal in the barbarian as well as the Roman sphere. This example is set with three garnets cut as high-domed cabochons.

66

Gold with garnets, sapphires and *plumas*. Roman. Third or fourth century AD. Exterior diameter 2.4 cm. From Athens. British Museum, London, cat. of finger-rings, Marshall 858.

One of the last original types of ring developed by the Romans makes the maximum use of the variety of coloured stones that had become available with the expansion of the empire. This ring has no bezel and consists of a hoop made entirely from sixteen separate settings, each holding a gem. There is little regularity in the shape and size of the stones, and the designer has relied almost exclusively for his effect on colour. Four of the stones are sapphires, which were not used in the Mediterranean world before Roman times. Garnets, a great favourite from the Hellenistic era onwards because of the richness and depth of their colour, account for five more, and the remaining four are *plumas*, a type of green chalcedony spotted with yellowish-white. Three of the settings have lost their gems.



67

Bronze. Late Imperial Roman. No date assigned. Width 2.4 cm. Provenance uncertain: Great Britain or Rome. Waterton Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 545—1871.



The Romans were accomplished locksmiths and devised a number of highly sophisticated closures, with appropriate keys to supersede the simpler bolts and bars of the earlier world. As they came to understand the full efficacy of this form of safeguard, the key naturally assumed a symbolic and amuletic significance in addition to its purely functional role. This small, apparently insignificant object which, by the mysterious arrangement of its barrel and wards, had the power to close and protect or to open and reveal was a potent symbol that was soon adopted for personal wear. This example is of bronze (many others exist in more costly metals) and displays, on its hollow barrel, an array of formidably practical-looking wards, positioned to lie along the length of the owner's finger in wear.

68

Gold. Late Imperial Roman. Third-fourth century AD. Width 2 cm. From Blagaj, Yugoslavia. National Museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo.

In the earlier stages of its history the privilege of Roman citizenship was confined exclusively to the natives of Rome, but as the frontiers expanded, so did the civic and political status of the people who lived within. Citizenship could be claimed by men who had never even seen Rome, and before the end of the second century AD, the imperial throne itself was being occupied by rulers of provincial origin and unbringing. This trend gave added incentive to the luxury arts outside Italy, including those of

Illyria (now the Adriatic coast of Yugoslavia), birthplace and retirement home of the Emperor Diocletian. This heavy hexagonal ring with a key-type bezel shows, in somewhat coarse open-work, the seated figure of Jupiter who is presenting the emperor with a figure of the winged goddess of Victory.

69

Gold. Eastern Imperial Roman. Fourth century AD. Diameter 2.5 cm. From Corbridge, Great Britain. British Museum, London, permanent loan from Her Majesty's Department of the Environment, 1947.



A technique evolved by the Romans and later much exploited by the Byzantine jewellers (Pl. 102) was *opus intarsiate*, a type of open-work cut with a chisel in sheet gold. A ring in this style made the enormous journey from the Greek-speaking lands of the Roman Empire to the Roman fort at Corbridge in Northumberland, where it was found in 1935. Its sixteen panels, each divided horizontally into three, appear at first glance to be cut with a leaf-shaped *pelta* motif, but in fact the ring contains a lightly concealed message. The cut-outs in the middle zone form the inscription: ΠΤΟΛΕΜΙΟΥΦΙΛΤΡΟΝ ('the love-charm of Ptolemios'). Rings of this type are extremely rare, since lettering was very seldom combined with *opus intarsiate*. The nature of the message suggests that Ptolemios had the ornament made for his betrothal or marriage.

70

Gold. Roman. Fourth century AD. Diameter 2.8 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, GR 649F.

Like most members of any society organized on



70

strongly formalized structural lines, the Romans were fond of social 'labels'. Anything which provided a visible sign of the owner's precise rank and personal status was welcomed and displayed with commensurate pride. Rings were peculiarly well adapted for this form of self-advertisement as they could be worn all the time and were clearly visible, not to say conspicuous, with every movement of the wearer's hand. In the late imperial era, the emperors bestowed simple inscribed gold rings on army officers as a token of appreciation and, no doubt, a simultaneous reminder of the allegiance and duty owed to the giver. This ring is inscribed with the word: FIDEM ('faith') on the bezel and the name of the Emperor Constantine (AD 306-37) round the hoop.

71

Gold and glass. Roman. Fourth century AD. Diameter of each hoop 1.9 cm; total length 7.1 cm. Provenance unknown. Benaki Museum, Athens, 1706.

Among the more bizarre forms of later Roman rings is this example, which resembles nothing so much as a jewelled knuckle-duster. The three adjacent hoops look impressive but are in fact relatively flimsy, since they are made of hollow sheet gold. They are soldered together, and the joints have been disguised with a small boss. Each of the three rings has a square bezel, and the spaces between them have been filled with a gold wire volute to which a circular bezel with a toothed setting for a stone has been attached. When worn, the effect would be that of five rings, but the function of this ornament is debatable; it is at once insubstantial and impractical, since the rigid joints would almost totally immobilize the wearer's fingers. It has been convincingly suggested that the piece might have been designed purely for funerary use.



71

EARLY EUROPE

72

Bronze. Central European. Middle or late Bronze Age. Height 2.9 cm. Provenance unknown. Louvre, Paris.



One of most ancient, widespread and enduring designs in the entire history of jewellery is the conjoined spiral (Pl. 340). It occurs among the earliest metal ornaments of the Middle East, and was popular with the people of the Bronze Age Mediterranean, but nowhere was it exploited with such frequency and zest as in central Europe. From the middle of the second millennium BC onwards, it was the most common decorative motif in the repertoire, and innumerable variations attest the virtuosity of the designers as well as the persisting enthusiasm of their patrons. Many interpretations of the motif have been offered; it has been seen as a symbol of life and death, day and night, rebirth and eternity. In the face of such profundity it may be invidious to suggest that a double spiral is no more than the most obviously easy, neat and decorative way for a jeweller to finish off and tuck in the ends of a wire or band of metal. At such a remote age, no definite conclusion can be reached, and it seems likely that the truth, as it usually does, lies somewhere between the extremes.

73

Gold. Celtic. Late fifth century BC. Diameter 2.1 cm. From Rodenbach. Historisches Museum der Pfalz, Speyer.

Although contemporary Mediterranean cultures were developing the representation of the human figure with spectacular success, rings with figure decoration are rare in Celtic art. On the few occasions when they occur, it is clear that they owe very little to any influences outside the Celtic world. This example, dated La Tène IA, consists of a luxuriant mass of decorative scrolling and stylized foliage that almost imperceptibly turns, at the widest point of the ring, into a pair of quasi-human faces set top to top. Formed entirely of animated curves and scrolls, they are beardless but show the



sweeping moustaches so frequently sported by Celtic men, which clearly made a lasting impression on the artists of the classical world. Eerie slanting eyes terminate in scrolls, and the whole face seems to melt back into the dense patterned background from which it emerged.

74

Gold. Celtic. Fifth century BC. Diameter 2.2 cm. From Zerf, Kreis Saarburg. Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Trier.



Gold objects do not corrode or tarnish by any natural means; since the metal itself is fairly soft, they are often much crushed and battered when unearthed. This particular ring, however, is exceptionally well preserved, and its surface is in such good condition that the maker's technique can be

studied in unusual detail. Unlike its near-contemporary from Rodenbach (Pl. 73) which was cast, this example was wrought on an anvil and decorated with punched work to produce an approximate effect of granulation in an abstract wave pattern. Smiths who were familiar with the appearance of granulation but lacked the skill, equipment or financial incentive (sometimes, no doubt, all three) to execute it, occasionally resorted to accurate and neatly placed punching to achieve a similar effect.

75

Silver. Celtic. Late fourth century BC. Diameter 2.4 cm. From Deisswil, Switzerland. Historisches Museum, Berne, BHM 32443.



This ring suggests some comparisons with the example from Dürrenberg (Pl. 78), although the findspots of the two are a considerable distance apart. It is possible that traders in salt, an indispensable commodity in the landlocked part of Europe, may have provided a common link with the great craft centre at Waldalgesheim in Germany, where the motifs of both rings seem to have originated. This hoop is worked with a continuous pattern of lyre-shaped motifs with a diamond lozenge between, which has some parallels with the bronze jewellery from Waldalgesheim. The forms, though basically abstract, have been combined to produce an uncanny hint of a human face in the overall design. One feature, however, is almost unique to this ring: it is made of silver, which was only very rarely seen in the western part of the Celtic world.

76

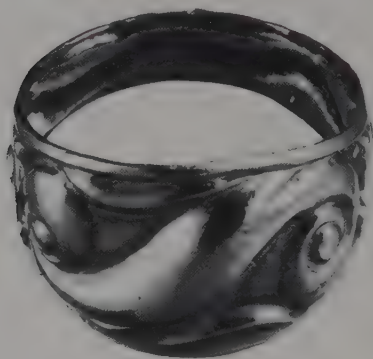
Gold. Scythian. Fifth-fourth century BC. Diameter of bezel 3.6 cm. From near the Amu Darya (Oxus) River, Russian Turkestan. British Museum, London, WAA 124012.

As the various Celtic groups extended their influence throughout most of non-classical Europe, the eastern border people must have been perpetually aware of the uneasy presence beside them of the Scythians, a fierce nomadic nation who originated in central Asia but were always alert for any openings into the western world. Their decorative style was highly individual, with a sensitive feeling for the overall shape and design of the object on which they were working, to which their animal motifs were artfully subordinated. The distortions this produced have little to do with the stateliness of contemporary Achaemenid work (Pl. 14) and still less with the lucid classicism of the Mediterranean, but it can be strikingly effective, especially when it is deployed on small pieces such as this ring, which shows an open-work lion, formerly inlaid, coiled round the bezel.



77

Gold. Celtic. Fourth century BC. Diameter 2 cm. From Étoy, Vaud, Switzerland. Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva.



The simplest of motifs such as a tendril, an S-scroll and some artfully placed small bosses combine here to form a ring of considerable elegance and restraint. It has no separate bezel, but widens from the back to the front, with the decorative emphasis placed on the widest point. An S-scroll, thick in the diagonal stroke and tapered towards the ends, occupies this space with a form of smooth and fluent mobility. This design has remarkably close affinities with that of a gold torc from Clonmacnoise (Ireland), where it is used to decorate the terminals. Parallels of this type seem too close and too frequent for coincidence or a distant interchange of ideas; they suggest that basic patterns were handed round and might travel very considerable distances before they were superseded.

78

Gold. Celtic. Late fourth century BC. Diameter 2.4 cm. From grave 28, Dürrnberg, Hallein. Stadtmuseum, Hallein.



This ornate gold hoop of a comparatively rare type shows the diversity of influences at work in the Celtic world at the time it was made (La Tène IB₁). The motif, carried out in *repoussé* work, runs in an unbroken frieze all round the hoop and consists of a garland of entwined palmettes. This is ostensibly a classical feature, but in this case it does not seem to

owe as much to the Mediterranean world as it does to the goldsmiths of central Germany. A number of ornaments from this area, including the magnificent Waldalgesheim torc, have decorative motifs that are strongly reminiscent of this ring and illustrate how freely the Celtic master could adapt a borrowed motif to his own highly individual style.

79

Gold. Celtic. Third century BC. Diameter 2.5 cm. Said to be from Sardinia. Waterton Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 418-1871.



For many years this ring, with its engagingly caricatured version of a podgy human face, remained in the museum with no attribution other than a vague (and erroneous) suggestion that it might be sub-Mycenaean and a tradition that it came from Sardinia. Its connection with the island is at best tenuous, and it should rather be assigned to the Celts who settled in and around the northern part of Italy in the late fifth century BC. Among their artistic achievements was the development of this pleasing variation on the traditional Celtic style. The ring tapers from front to back and is worked in *repoussé*, the main design between the raised borders being an attractively stylized, little fat face formed entirely of lively symmetrical curves.

80

Gold. Celtic. Probably first century BC. Diameter 2.3 cm. From Langør, Samsø Island. The Danish National Museum, Copenhagen.



The Celtic world's contacts with neighbouring peoples are intriguingly reflected in a number of aspects of their art. In the more southerly regions the stress was increasingly upon colour, as the

Hellenistic and Roman cultures came to prefer a polychrome effect in their ornaments. Perhaps it was the misty skies and paler landscapes of the north that encouraged a less colourful, more convoluted style in the arts originating beyond the insidious influence of the Mediterranean basin. This ring from Langør consists of a hoop decorated with a complex multiple braid of gadrooned wire between plain borders, coiling round the finger with a restless serpentine mobility that contrasts powerfully with the static and colourful styles derived from Roman prototypes (Pl. 83).

81

Gold. Celtic. AD 150-200. Average diameter 2.2 cm. From Vallöby, Seeland. The Danish National Museum, Copenhagen.



A whole series of Celtic royal burials, spanning several hundred years, throw an interesting light on the evolution of some types of ring. The earliest cache at Hoby in Denmark, which dates to the first century BC, yielded a thick, heavy single hoop, circular in section and highly polished but otherwise undecorated. In the first century AD the type reappeared as a multiple ring, flat on the inside and ornamented on the outside with three convex zones separated by two bands of beading. The second-century burial at Vallöby shows the last stage of development: the beading and the plain zones have changed places, and the effect is reminiscent of a pair of rings with smooth centres and beaded edges that have been joined together to make a single ornament.

82

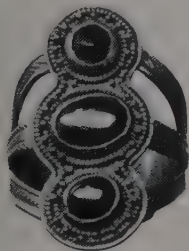
Gold. Germanic. First-third century AD. Height of bezel 4 cm. From Medelpad, Sweden. The Danish National Museum, Copenhagen.

An original and extremely striking style of ring, developed by the Germanic people outside the



northern borders of the later Roman Empire, is a distant echo of the trend towards multiplicity within the classical world (Pl. 65). The explanation for the design is fundamentally simple: if one ring looks well, three rings must look three times as well. A basic hoop, convex in section, was fitted with a curved oblong plate edged with beading to form the bezel. This apparently seemed insufficient, for a type soon evolved in which two such rings were made and joined above and below by a hoop of twisted wire. Still the goldsmiths were dissatisfied, and in the final version the basic ring has two additional bezels with two more half-hoops that curve inwards to join the central hoop halfway round its circumference. The resulting ornament would have sheathed at least half the wearer's finger in an impressive half-cylinder of *repoussé*-worked gold.

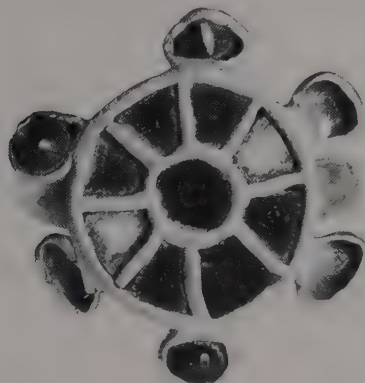
83
Gold and almandines. Late Celtic. Third century AD. From Aarslev, Fionie. The Danish National Museum, Copenhagen.



As Christianity gradually expanded its influence northwards the Celtic people correspondingly tended to lose their cultural identity and increasingly to adopt elements from others. These they stamped with their own distinctive trademark, and in these last stages, the result is an intriguing hybrid reflecting the transitional nature of the uncertain and frequently confused world from which it sprang. This ring from a royal burial at Aarslev seems to have been made from a small gold plaque, lavishly decorated with filigree and inlaid with the dark purplish type of garnets known as almandines. Its similarities to a fibula from the same hoard indicate that it was part of a set of jewellery in the Roman style, and a coin of the Emperor Geta (211–12) underlines this connection. However, the style of the mount with three pairs of shoulders merging into a single hoop (Pl. 82) is distinctly northern.

THE DARK AGES

84
Gold and garnets. Gothic. Probably fifth century. Diameter 2.9 cm. Provenance unknown. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 30219.



The most outstanding feature of Gothic art is its sheer glamour, an impression obtained by the combination of cut and inlaid coloured gems and enamel in angular metal mounts. In this ring all the surfaces are kept in the same plane, so that the glowing sheets of garnet separated by the sharply linear punctuation of the gold mounts oddly foreshadow the effect of stained-glass windows. Garnets, which can readily be split into flat plates, are particularly suitable for this type of work and were among the most popular jewels of the era. The compact central motif with peripheral projections is also characteristic of early Gothic art.

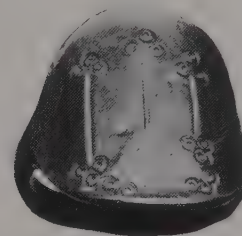
85
Silver. Avar. Seventh century. Diameter 2.5 cm. From Keszthely, western Hungary. Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, Budapest, 52.62.19a.

Surprisingly little is known of the Avars, a nomadic people who established themselves in eastern Europe and exerted some influence on their surroundings between the sixth and ninth centuries. Even the Avar language is obscure. During the brief period of their supremacy, the Avars controlled vast supplies of gold, and their smiths



developed remarkable skills, which were chiefly deployed in *repoussé* and beaded ornaments for the double belts that were popular. Apparently, rings were rather less esteemed, and a strip of metal spiralled round the finger without joint or decoration was often deemed sufficient. Other rings with the same basic shape indicate a talismanic function. In this case, the front of the strip widens into an eye-shaped bezel worked with an outline of punched dots enclosing a pair of concentric circles that may be yet another example of the widespread fear of the evil eye and the consequent abundance of protective charms against it: the Romans used amber (Pl. 58) and the Egyptians the Horus eye *udjat*.

86
Gold. Avar. Ninth century. Diameter 2.3 cm. From Bres-tovac, Bulgaria. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, VII B 73.



To the Byzantine chroniclers the Avar people of eastern Europe featured first as suppliants, then as allies and finally as a very real and formidable threat, to be bought off with heavy cash subsidies, but always to be regarded as a distasteful horde of hairy savages. Like many basically nomadic people, the Avars produced comparatively few artifacts apart from their personal ornaments and jewellery, which included this gold ring with a curved bezel. It bears an engraved sign that is probably some form of tribal identification.

87
Gold with a ruby. Probably Lombard. Seventh century. Diameter 3.2 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, RC 176 a.

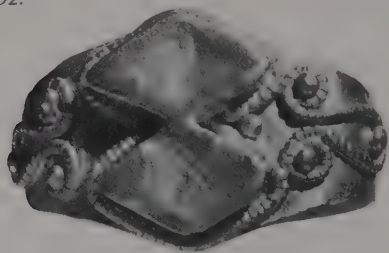
The heavy gold hoop of this ring terminates in flattened angular shoulders that expand towards



the bezel, supplying a wide surface for the engraved decoration of formal scrolls and lozenges set off with niello. The high bezel, unusual but not unique, is in the form of a stepped pyramid with five stages topped with a faceted ruby (a later addition). The setting of the stone, the type of bezel and the style in general are reminiscent of some late Roman designs, but the pattern of the niello work suggests a later date and seems closer to Lombardic than Byzantine originals, while examples of the stepped-pyramid bezel are known on Frankish and early Germanic rings. Serious in decoration and massive in form, this ring is an imposing ornament.

88

Gold. Lombard. Seventh century. Diameter 1.9 cm. From Castel Trosino, Museo dell'Alto Medio Evo, Rome, 1632.



The exchange of rings on the occasion of a marriage extended to the Lombard people, who developed a repertoire of their own for this function. This ring with its curious double bezel is a typical example of their decorative style, combining smooth gold surfaces with the contrasting texture of applied ornaments in twisted wire and beading. The symbolism of the motifs — a pair of lozenges placed horizontally, which are conjoined into one at the point of contact — needs no interpretation. The shoulders each bear a coil of wire rolled at both ends into a volute shape, with a gold bead set in the centre of each of the three loops.

89

Gold with green paste stone. Merovingian. Probably seventh century. Total height 2.9 cm. From Jouy-le-Comte, Val d'Oise. Musée des Antiquités Nationales, Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 24973.

This outstandingly splendid (if slightly deceptive) specimen of the Merovingian jewellers' art has a relief-worked hoop and a projecting bezel designed to display the square stone, a green cabochon that might easily be taken for an emerald. The gem is framed by a double row of granulation, and a small triangle of granules highlights the junction of the bezel and the hoop, which has a convex surface ornamented with vine tendrils executed in fine *repoussé* work. The high bezel, featured on rings from the Hellenistic era onwards (Pls. 54–5), is a natural sequel to the introduction of a new range of coloured stones which, by the second century BC, included the rich transparent green of emeralds from the mines in the hills in Egypt beside the Red Sea. These rare jewels were greatly valued — and widely imitated when the genuine article was not available.



89



90

Gold, traces of gilding. Merovingian. Second half of the seventh century. Diameter 2.5 cm. From Mazerny, Ardennes. Musée du Rethelelois et du Porcien, Rethel.

The Merovingians particularly favoured a ring in the form of a flat disc soldered to a hoop; the join and the edges of the disc were decorated with beading. This disc supplied a suitable space for an unusual and perhaps playful type of signet — playful because the general function of a signet is to

reveal the owner, while in this case, the name has been deliberately concealed in a decorative cryptogram. The letter 'S' crossed by a diagonal stroke often formed the centre of the signet, and around it were the characters of the owner's name, reduced to separate strokes and curves, used back-to-front, upside-down and sometimes several times over. This particular example, which was worn by a woman and went to her grave with her, has been deciphered as reading: SIGILLUM ANNEAE ('Anna's seal').

90



91

Gold with blue stones. Merovingian. Probably seventh century. Total height 3.5 cm. From La Bouexière (Ille-et-Vilaine). Musée des Antiquités Nationales, Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 13683.

As the display of the stone in a ring grew increasingly important, the settings gradually came to project further and further from the hoop, a tendency which took little account of the intrinsic value of the gem. Turquoises, aquamarines and

lapis lazuli were known in the ancient world; the first two were rare, and all three so expensive that they would have merited any attentions the jeweller cared to bestow upon them, but the blue-green paste substitutes in this ring could scarcely have been set in a more ostentatious mount had they been priceless. The centre of the bezel consists of a tall gold tube adjoined by four slightly smaller supporting cylinders, all with a stone set in the top. The composition is set off by a surround of typically graceful scrolling.

92

Gold and niello. Anglo-Saxon. Ninth century. Size not recorded. From the Reno River near Bologna. Museo Civico, Bologna.



A form of niello, the black metallic decorative substance made from silver sulphide, was known to the goldsmiths of the eastern Mediterranean as early as the twentieth century BC, but the art died out in the Bronze Age and was apparently not revived until late Hellenistic silver-workers began to use it. It did not join the goldsmith's repertoire until about AD 300, but from this time onwards it became an increasingly popular means of emphasizing motifs and details on jewellery. This massive ring widens into a broad bezel with nine shallow saucer-shaped depressions, each with its own motif set off by a niello background. One contains an equal-armed or Greek cross, the ends of which divide and circle round upon themselves, while the others are decorated with monsters. This ferocious theme is repeated on the hoop, where dragons worked in flat relief fill the whole space with their entwined bodies. This design may have been developed from the ninth-century manuscripts of the Canterbury school that were possibly made for the instruction of goldsmiths.

93

Gold. Byzantine (?). Possibly ninth century. Diameter 2.2 cm. Said to have been found in Rome. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 629-1871.

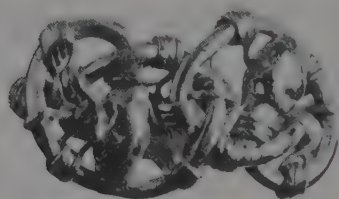
This ring provides a striking example of the problems which may arise in identifying an object



without any reliable details of the circumstances surrounding its discovery. In 1859 the museum authorities were simply told that it had been found in Rome with a hoard of coins of Alfred the Great. Since Alfred's sister was known to have made a pilgrimage to Rome and the ring bore the inscribed name: AVFRET, it was assumed for many years that the ring should be associated with this great Anglo-Saxon ruler. Recent research, however, has revealed that the coin-hoard may not have existed at all, and that the style of the ring is basically Byzantine rather than Anglo-Saxon. The portrait is now thought to be a copy of a coin, but it is by no means certain that the inscription refers to King Alfred. Only the ninth century dating has (somewhat tentatively) withstood contemporary critical analysis.

94

Gold with blue stones. Anglo-Saxon. Tenth-eleventh century. Diameter 2.4 cm. From Dorchester, Dorset. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1430-638.



Considering that the people of Britain regarded the arrival of the Vikings as the most terrible of disasters, it is surprising how strong a current seems to have flowed between them where the arts were concerned. In Britain, as in Scandinavia, the uncertainties of life in a seemingly hostile and dangerous world were reflected in the literary as well as the visual arts. The legends of the time, like the artifacts, are haunted by evil and potent dragons (Pl. 92) and this motif was used freely by both Saxon and Viking goldsmiths (Pl. 96). This open-work ring with a bezel in the form of looped snakes, the eyes picked out with blue stones and the coils bound with strands of wire, is one of the less alarming manifestations of the monster theme.

95

Gold with niello and red stones. Anglo-Saxon. Eleventh century. Diameter 3 cm. Found near Berkeley Castle, Gloucestershire. Property of Lord Berkeley.

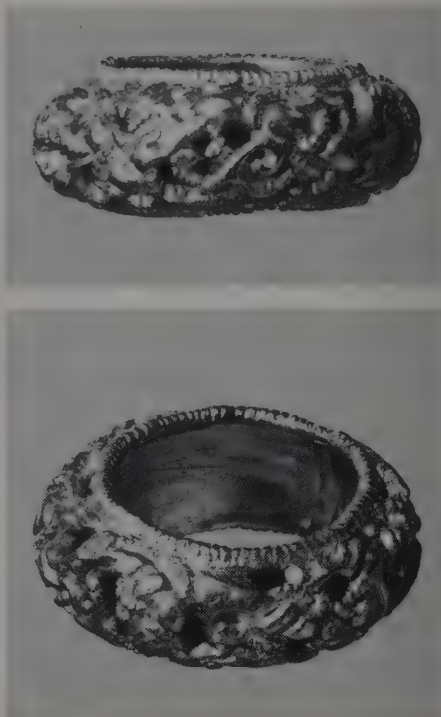
Typical of Anglo-Saxon art in its combination of Christian and pagan motifs but unique in design, this ring has a flat circular projection in the centre of its cruciform bezel. This roundel is filled with a cross formed of scrolling volutes made of beaded wire picked out with grains (Pl. 88), and the rest of the bezel consists of the heads of four dog-like monsters worked in *repoussé*, facing outwards with their pointed ears up against the rim of the central disc. The entire composition is enclosed in a border of double-plaited wire, and the only touch of colour is supplied by the stones, which emphasize the monsters' eyes with a ferocious red glow.



96

Gold. Viking. Tenth century. Exterior diameter 3.3 cm. From Simrishavn, Skåne. National Historical Museum, Stockholm, SHM 7065.

Long after most of Europe had adopted Christianity, the people of Scandinavia remained pagan, and while others were conducting orderly international trade through the medium of coinage, the Norsemen (when they needed anything from beyond their own borders) were mounting savage sea raids to take what they wanted by force. The very name Viking became synonymous with terror, and much of their art seems to be designed to create fear and despair. Serpents and dragons knotted into inescapable coils and tearing pitilessly at each other with cruel fangs even form the motifs on their personal ornaments. This massive ring, unique of its kind, has a solid ribbon-like centre to which the convex outer piece is attached; the junction is decorated with notches to simulate beading. The entire visible surface is filled with a meshed pattern consisting of four weird serpentine creatures, their heads twisted backwards and their bodies bound together by means of the beaded tails in a refined version of Jellinge-style decoration, a type of convolution. Perhaps the closest parallels are supplied by two arm-rings of the same date, one of which was also found in Simrishavn, but there are no other examples of this design on a ring.



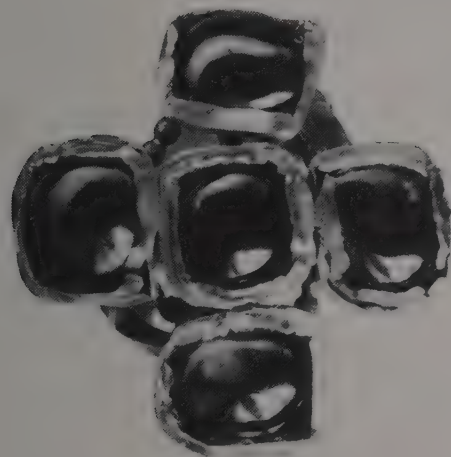
95

96

BYZANTIUM

97

Gold and garnets. Early Christian. Fourth or fifth century. Height of bezel 2.1 cm. From Syria. Louvre, Paris, Bj 2275.



The Hellenistic Greeks were the first to exploit to the full the rich decorative potential of garnets; this stone retained its popularity throughout the Roman Empire and was later adopted with even greater enthusiasm beyond the imperial frontiers, for example by the Merovingians. However, the development of such eye-catching colour combinations opened the door to a certain decline in the standard of goldsmith's work. Slipshod craftsmanship in gold was increasingly permitted, as later jewellers came to rely exclusively on the polychrome effects available to them. This decline is apparent in this ring decorated with five garnets enclosed in narrow gold fillets arranged in a lateral or diagonal cross: the stones are fine, but the corners of the rectangular settings are crude and ill-fitting, and the granules at the joins are irregular.

98

Gold and onyx. Early Christian. Fourth-sixth century. Diameter of gem 2.4 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, gem cat. 5.

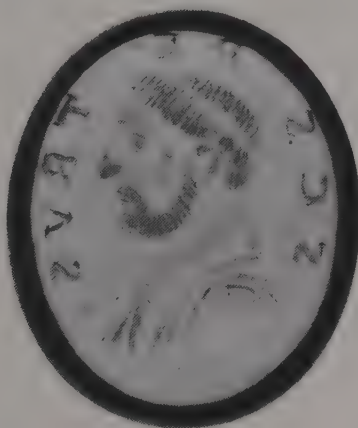
When the Roman Empire first became officially and increasingly Christianized, its grasp of the new



iconography was inclined to be tenuous, and artists often relied on themes inherited from classical antiquity, which they transformed by the use of appropriate symbolism to suit the new faith. The winged figure of Victory, either driving her own chariot (Pl. 50) or flying above the charioteer to guide, protect and crown him, had been familiar for centuries throughout the classical world and needed little adaptation. On the onyx gem with a layer of blue between two brown sections, a bearded man holding up a whip in his right hand is shown driving a chariot drawn by two horses under the direction of an angel who hovers above the team on outstretched wings.

99

Gold and chalcedony. Early Christian. C. fifth century. Height 2.2 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, gem cat. 518.



From the first century onwards, the gradual infiltration of Christianity was increasingly reflected in the arts. Although its adherents were still being persecuted as potential subversives in 304, less than ten years later they were receiving direct imperial support and protection, and by 325 the emperor was officially recognized as head of the Church. A rapid increase in the use of Christian motifs naturally followed this change, and the heads of the Olympian gods, which had ornamented gems for so many centuries, were superseded by those of saints. St Peter, thickly bearded and moustached, is shown here wearing a typical Roman tunic and pallium.

100

Gold and niello. Early Christian. C. 500. Diameter 2.8 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, F 304.

In form this ring with its seven equal medallions echoes the later Roman hoop consisting of a number of separate settings joined together (Pl. 66), but in this case there is an oblong bezel, also of engraved gold. The confronted busts of a man and a woman dressed in the clothes and jewellery of well-to-do Roman citizens are shown in profile, while between and slightly above them an equal-armed cross places this ring firmly in its religious context. The medallions that form the hoop are decorated



with engravings of alternate male and female busts surrounded by floral sprays. The lines are emphasized with niello, while small granules of gold are placed at the points where the medallions join. This is certainly an example of a marriage ring and may have been one of a pair. Its comparatively large size suggests that it was either made for the husband or to be worn on the forefinger or thumb.

101

Gold with a garnet. Byzantine. Fifth century. Diameter 1.3 cm. From the River Seine at Rouen. British Museum, London, F 130.



Unlike most of their later counterparts, the goldsmiths of the ancient world were often ready to recognize that the human hand has a palm as well as a back, and that both sides stood in need of decoration. It is not uncommon, therefore, to find a suitably small jewel set on the underside of the hoop, opposite the bezel (Pl. 55), which would be displayed when the palm was extended. In this case, the cabochon garnet at the back of the hoop supplies the only touch of colour. The projecting open-work bezel holds a coin of the Emperor Marcian (AD 450-7) with the obverse displayed (see also Pl. 61); the shoulders of the hollow hoop are ornamented, in a delightful touch of fantasy, with a pair of crouching hares, lightly modelled in low relief.



102

103



102

Gold and garnet. Byzantine. Sixth-seventh century. Width of bezel 2.2 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, 1930.11.7.1.

One of the most typical hallmarks of Byzantine jewellery and goldsmith's work is the lavish use of *opus interrasile*. In this process sheet gold is cut with a chisel into open-work designs and can, at its best, produce an effect of almost lace-like delicacy. It was not a Byzantine innovation; it also occurred in early Etruscan work, but it was not exploited on a wide scale until it was taken up by the Romans in the second century AD (Pl. 69). The Byzantines adopted it with enthusiasm, and it is featured in an immense variety of decorative work such as the hoop of this ring. A bezel projecting well away from the hoop is another Roman development, as is the truncated-cone shape of the garnet gem, which is carved in intaglio with a lion confronting a bull's head. The combination of all these elements, however, is characteristically Byzantine.

103

Gold and carnelian. Byzantine. Sixth-seventh century. Diameter 3 cm. Provenance unknown. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, VII B 22.

When jewellers first began to deploy a fine stone for its own sake as the main feature of a ring, they used a technique of setting that had been devised many centuries earlier for inlaying. A ribbon of gold was bent to shape and soldered to the background by one edge to form a container, the gem was placed in it, and the other edge folded round the stone to hold it firmly in position. Though serviceable, this method has the disadvantage of hiding part of the stone, and in this handsome ring in Vienna, a shrewd Byzantine jeweller has made an ingenious attempt to solve the problem. The deep circular bezel has four knobbed attachments from which four tongues of gold curve in a rudimentary form of claw setting on to the domed surface of a carnelian. The setting itself and the decorative additions are ornamented with extremely fine granulation and make an effective contrast in colour, texture and shape to the smooth surface of the stone.

104

Gold. Byzantine. Sixth-eighth century. Diameter 2.4 cm. From Madonna dell'Orto, Rome. Louvre, Paris, Bj 1164.

One of the more curious features of post-classical rings is the introduction of what can only be called tectonic motifs. The high bezel, developed primarily to display a spectacular stone to full advantage, acquires arched supports, and instead of a mounted gem, the bezel is finished off with a decorative 'roof'. This ring found in Rome has a hoop consisting of three plain bands with indented ornamental work between them. The bezel is square, the points of contact with the hoop disguised by the addition of gold globules, and on each side are two open-work arches holding up a pyramidal 'roof', each face of which is emphasized by a triangle of flattened beading. This architectural type of bezel was also much used on Jewish marriage rings (Pl. 218).



104

105
Gold. Byzantine. Sixth-tenth century. Height 2.8 cm. Provenance unknown. Waterton Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 615–187.

In Christian iconography the peacock was a symbol of immortality, an association that may have originated in the bird's habit of annually shedding and renewing its tail feathers, its most conspicuously gorgeous feature, or possibly from the fact that its flesh was believed to be incorruptible. In art peacocks are sometimes shown with the Virgin Mary, but in fact the use of this symbol predates the Christian era by many centuries: it is surely significant that Juno/Hera, queen of the Olympian gods, was traditionally associated with the same bird and that stylized representations of it occur in

the earliest Eastern art. On this middle Byzantine ring, two confronted peacocks, heads executed in the round, form the motif of the bezel, their low-relief bodies gradually merging into the hoop.

106

Gold and niello. Byzantine. C. seventh century. Diameter 2.4 cm. Provenance unknown. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 30097.



Surviving mosaics, illuminations and written records all attest the prodigious quantities of gold and gems enjoyed by the people of Constantinople during the centuries of the Byzantine Empire, and with the added stimulus of new Christian iconography and Church patronage, there must have been every possible incentive for the production of fine jewellery. The years of prosperity, long as they were, were followed by an almost (though not quite) equally protracted age of defeat, pillage and looting, in which the major part of the Byzantine Empire's accumulated wealth was lost. Even an unpretentious ring, however, can help to reconstruct several characteristics of the era. This ring's quatrefoil shape is based on the equal-armed cross, and the engraved — though much-worn — figures

of the Virgin and Child with attendant angels are picked out with niello, a typical Byzantine feature that was deployed with great subtlety and skill.

107

Gold and niello. Byzantine. Seventh century. Diameter 1.6 cm. Provenance unknown. British Museum, London, EC 130.



Made to mark the celebration of a marriage like the Roman example (Pl. 69), this ring consists of a flat octagonal hoop, each facet of which is engraved with a scene from the life of Christ. From right to left they are the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Presentation, the Adoration, the Crucifixion and the Angel at the Tomb, all engraved in outline and picked out with niello. The same technique has been used on the eight-foil bezel depicting Mary and Christ (above whom shines a seven-pointed star), blessing the bride and groom respectively. A line beneath their feet leaves a space which has been filled in with the engraved word: OMONA (ὁμόνοια, the Greek word for 'concord').

108

Gold, niello and pearls. Byzantine. Seventh century. Diameter 2 cm. Provenance unknown. Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, D.C., 53.12–79.



105

108

This striking ring appears to be unique in design and execution. The hoop is formed by a row of circles of gold open-work with a granule above and below each join, while in the centre of each circle is a single pearl, held in position with wire. There are two deep circular bezels attached side by side to the hoop and richly decorated with rims of cable-pattern work edged with beading. The motifs are monograms composed of Greek letters that make up the prayer: 'Lord, help', inlaid with niello. The restrained elegance of the black, gold and pearl combination is remarkable. Cross-shaped monograms of this type do not occur before the reign of the Emperor Justinian in the sixth century, and the only known parallel for dating the design is a seventh-century ear-ring in Athens.

109

Gold and enamel. Byzantine. Late twelfth century. Diameter



2.3 cm. From Constantinople. Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, D.C., cat. no. 158.

This late Byzantine ring, lavishly worked with enamelling, is one of the rare examples from early times that can be associated directly with an owner

whose name and career are independently recorded in history. The bezel bears the bust of the Virgin Mary surrounded by Greek characters spelling out the invocation: 'Mother of God, help thy servant', picked out in blue, pink, red, turquoise and green enamel. The thick gold hoop also bears enamelled Greek lettering that reads: 'Mother of God, help thy servant Michael, Admiral Stryphnos'. Michael Stryphnos, who probably received the ring on his appointment to the rank of admiral, was brother-in-law to the empress and appears to have presumed on the relationship to embark on an astonishing career of speculation and neglect, leaving the Byzantine fleet to fall into a disastrous state of disrepair. The empress, however, did not silence the angry questions that were asked when these deficiencies became apparent, and no doubt the admiral thereafter needed all the celestial help he could get.

Medieval Rings

by John Cherry



Medieval Rings

Rings and jewellery were important indications of status and wealth in the Middle Ages and were worn for many reasons: for adornment, for sealing documents and letters, as signs of religious devotion, love or betrothal, as amuletic protection and for mourning. The aristocratic young man in the painting by Hans Memling (Pl. 110), possibly a praying donor from the left wing of a triptych, wears a gold ring on the thumb of his right hand, showing how rings might be worn for ornament, display and also as an aid to religious devotion. Evidence for the existence of rings may be drawn from documentary sources, and evidence for the fashions in wearing rings may be deduced from effigies on tombs such as the one at Ashwellthorpe, Norfolk (Pl. 154), or, in the later Middle Ages, from portraits such as the Memling painting mentioned above or the portrait of Richard III (Pl. 202).

It is clear that by the fifteenth century it was often usual to wear a number of rings on both hands as the Ashwellthorpe effigy illustrates. Rings were worn on all the fingers, and there is a considerable variation in usage as to the combinations of the fingers: both sexes wore rings on the thumbs, but the second finger, considered the least worthy finger by the Romans, continued to be unpopular; rings were worn on both the upper and lower joints of the fingers, and occasionally two rings were worn on a single joint.

In the Middle Ages the ring was never employed as in the Roman period to distinguish a class of society (Pl. 70), nor was it recognized as a mark of military distinction. It was, however,

worn by bishops and also by abbots and abbesses to indicate their office. Rings were worn at all levels of society. It was only in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that an attempt was made to restrict the wearing of gold rings through the sumptuary laws that regulated dress and jewellery (see also pp. 15, 95). Such laws were passed in England in 1337, 1363 and 1463. In France in 1283, sumptuary regulations were passed that forbade the townspeople and their ladies from wearing precious stones, belts of gold and gold coronets. In Spain and Italy, each independent state issued its laws: in Castile in 1348, Alfonso XI was particularly concerned with ornaments of gold, silver and enamel on clothing; regulations in Lucca in 1337 were concerned with the ornamentation of women's dresses with gold and jewelled belts. In Venice in 1360, the sumptuary legislation was particularly aimed at the value of ornaments of precious metals on clothing. The English Act of 1363 attempted to limit the wearing of gold and silver rings to richer noblemen, although it is uncertain how effective this legislation was. It is clear, however, that bronze signet-rings of the fifteenth century often imitate gold rings and were presumably worn by the less rich, for instance, by craftsmen (Pl. 168).

The production of rings was a minor part of the goldsmith's work. Goldsmiths were certainly employed by large Benedictine monasteries such as St Albans in Hertfordshire in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Such goldsmiths, as well as producing objects for religious use, would also no doubt have produced rings and plate to be given as gifts: in 1284 or 1285, Bogo de Clare, an avaricious ecclesiastic, bought a considerable quantity of gold rings at prices ranging from 2s to 2s 6d for presents. In the fifteenth century most rings were produced by goldsmiths working in major towns, and it is clear both from the repetitive nature of late medieval iconographic rings as well as from the painting by Petrus Christus (Pl. 155), which shows a box full of rings for sale in a goldsmith's shop, that rings were being produced for sale rather than to specific order. Rings, often inscribed: EN BON AN, were ordered for specific occasions such as New Year's day, when gifts were exchanged. Rings were also commissioned for distribution by lawyers on their appointment as serjeants-at-law (Pl. 194).

110

Oil on panel: A Young Man at Prayer by Hans Memling, Flemish. C. 1475. 38.7 x 25.4 cm. Salting Bequest, 1910. National Gallery, London, 2594.

The painting shows a young nobleman looking to the right, and so presumably it originally formed the left wing of a triptych. His hands are raised in prayer, and on his right hand he wears a heavy decorative gold ring on his thumb and a smaller gold ring on the middle joint of his second finger. Each ring has a stone set on the hoop to the side of the bezel (Pl. 150). The main stone in the thumb-ring is purple and the side stones blue; the main stone in the ring on the second finger is red while the side stones are blue. In the fifteenth century decorative rings were often worn on the thumb by both sexes. The two rings and the pendant jewel hanging from a chain contrast with the dark cloth of the young man's doublet and illustrate the discreet finery of a rich nobleman in Flanders at the end of the fifteenth century.

Findplaces

Sources of evidence for the attribution and dating of medieval rings vary in reliability. Many rings have been lost and found without any associated material. One cannot even necessarily assume that a ring was made in the country in which it is found. The Cannington (Pl. 124) and Hvalsø rings were found in England and Denmark respectively, yet both were probably made in the same area — probably Paris.

The discovery of hoards of rings such as the ones at Colmar (Pls. 137—8) or Fishpool (Pl. 162) provides more satisfactory evidence of date. In coin hoards the associated coins provide an indication of the latest date of the burial and so a date before which the rings must have been made. However, some rings in hoards such as the Thame ring (Pl. 152) were made a considerable time before the hoard was hidden.

Portraits, while they show how rings were worn, rarely show sufficient detail to help with the problem of dating, but the illustrations of rings by Matthew Paris (Pl. 115), a monastic historian of St Albans Abbey, Hertfordshire, are of great value and are most unusual in their accuracy.

Rings have been found on excavations of medieval sites: deserted medieval villages have provided examples of simpler bronze rings; gold and silver rings have been found more often on ecclesiastical sites or in towns. Even when the date of loss can be established, it tells us nothing about the ring's date of manufacture.

The identification of the owner of a ring is possible in some cases: some rings bear the name of the owner (Pl. 170); others can be identified by the heraldic devices or badges (Pls. 164—5). In particular instances the findplaces can lead to rings being assigned to a particular owner, as the discovery of rings in the

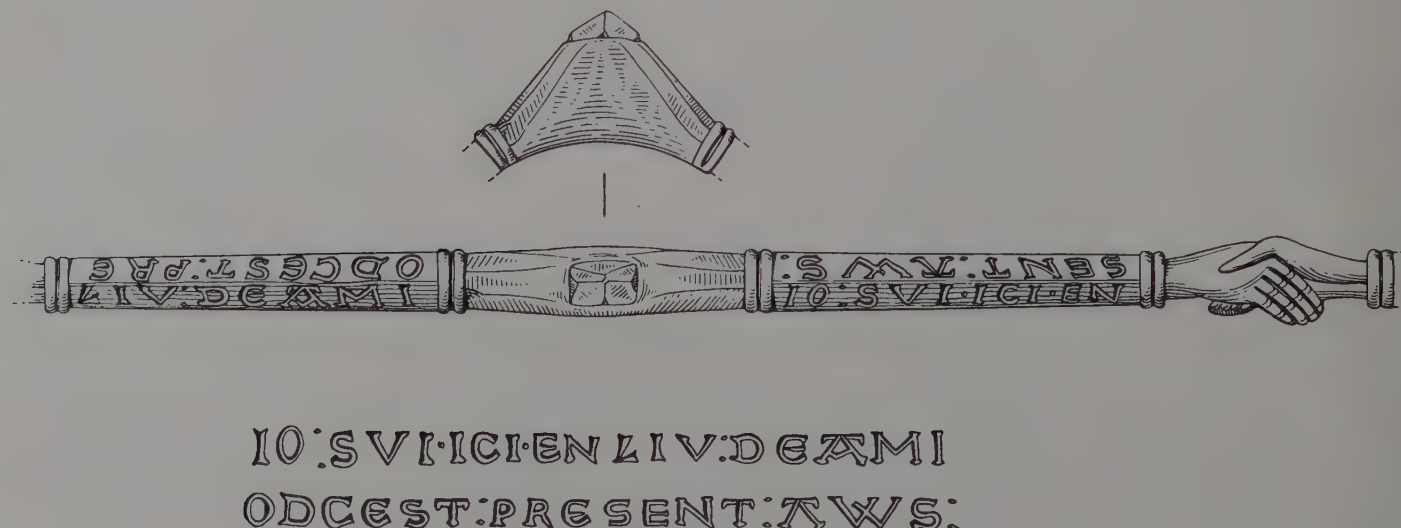
tombs of bishops illustrates. However, many of the identifications of particular tombs rest on slender evidence, and many early finds of this sort must be regarded with caution.

Inscriptions

A striking feature of medieval rings is the wide range of inscriptions that occur, for it is from these that one can understand why the rings were worn. Inscriptions on signet-rings were engraved on the face of the bezel (Pl. 139), otherwise inscriptions were generally on the outside of the hoop of the ring, although in the fifteenth century they were often engraved inside the ring (Pl. 196).

Inscriptions on rings or identification of the owner provide valuable evidence of dates and origin. The type of lettering may also provide a guide to date. It was engraved with a fine chisel, and the complex inscriptions on the inside of many late medieval rings are done with remarkable precision. The rounded type of lettering known as lombardic was popular in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. It is illustrated by the drawing in Figure 7. The shape of letters in inscriptions varies. Italian rings in particular are inscribed in a more florid style. Lombardic letters also occurred occasionally in the later Middle Ages and may be seen on the Thame ring (Pl. 152). In the second half of the fourteenth century, the angular Gothic script known as black letter became popular. It is first recorded in France in 1344 on the seal of Jeanne de Bourgogne, the first wife of Philip VI, and in England on the seal of Thomas Hatfield, bishop of Durham in

Fig. 7 Drawing of a ring illustrating lombardic lettering.



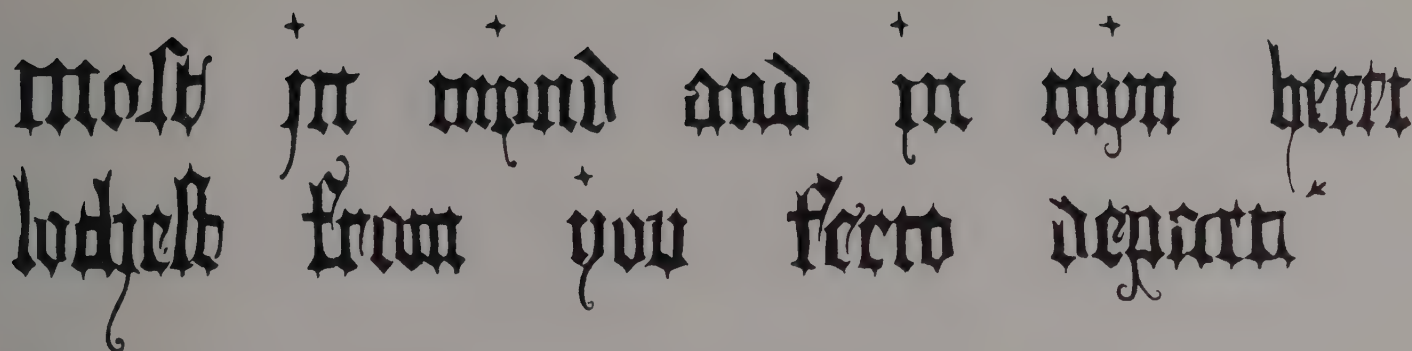


Fig. 8 Drawing of the inscription engraved inside the hoop of the ring in Plate 196 to illustrate black-letter or Gothic lettering.

1345. A drawing of the inscription on the ring in Plate 196 illustrates this type of lettering (Fig. 8). Black letter was used soon after for inscriptions on rings such as that of William Wytlesey (Pl. 148), archbishop of Canterbury. It was always more popular in northern Europe than in Italy, although Italian examples are known (Pl. 197). The use of black-letter inscriptions continued into the early sixteenth century (Pl. 189).

The language of an inscription may provide an indication of the country of origin, particularly if the inscription is in a vernacular language such as German (Pl. 169) or English (Pl. 196). French, however, was widely used in western Europe as a courtly language, and such phrases: *MON CUER AVEZ* or *EN BON AN* are an insufficient indication of a French origin. Nevertheless, those inscriptions with a more complicated use of language (Pls. 136, 198) probably indicate a French origin. Inscriptions in Latin, particularly from the Bible, are impossible to place.

Materials and Shapes

Gold, silver and bronze were the principal materials used to make rings in the Middle Ages. Only very occasionally are lead, ivory and jet rings found. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, silver was more common than gold, but in the later Middle Ages gold was the more common, reflecting an increase in the supply of gold in western Europe, which is shown by the revival of gold coinage — first in Italy, later in France and in England in the mid fourteenth century.

The decorative effect of medieval rings was achieved through the use of stones, different settings and variations in the shapes of both bezel and hoop. In the twelfth century the renewed fashion for rings set with gemstones may have been influenced by a revival of interest in classical lapidaries. Stones at this period were usually polished: faceting was rare. The principal stones

used were the ruby, sapphire, garnet, diamond, rock crystal and amethyst. The art of gem-engraving in intaglio and cameo was revived in Italy and flourished in France in the fourteenth century. Diamonds were not faceted until the fifteenth century, but before this the natural faces of the octahedral diamond crystal were polished.

The shape of a ring's bezel often had to conform to the shape of a very irregular stone. Such stones were either held with claws

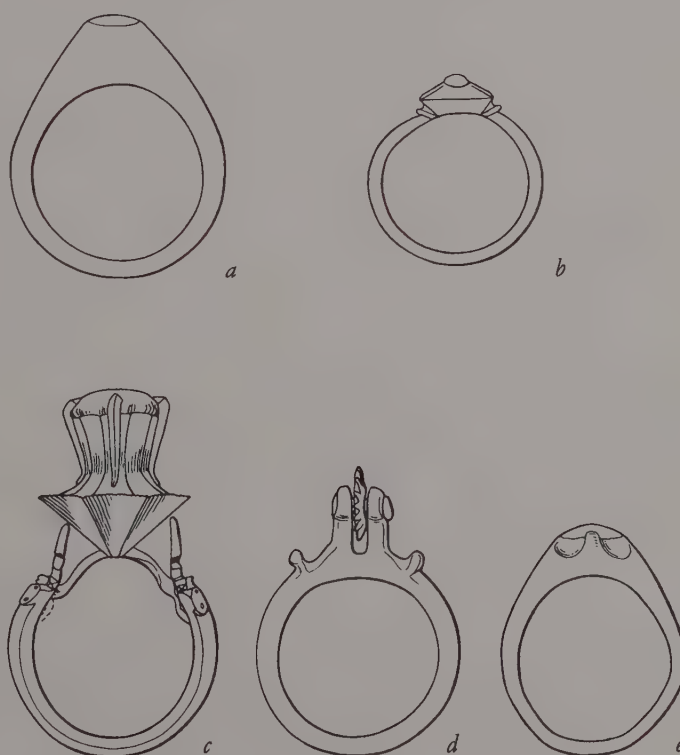


Fig. 9 (a) Stirrup-shaped ring; (b) ring with rectangular bezel sometimes called a 'pie-dish' bezel; (c) ring with an elaborate Gothic bezel; (d) ring with a rowel bezel; (e) ring with a turquoise set in a scalloped quatrefoil setting; compare with the ring in Plate 162. (All scales are 2:1.)

(Pl. 124) or with a continuous flange of metal around the stone (Pl. 130). Sometimes claws were pressed out of this flange in order to give a scalloped effect. The ring from Fishpool (Pl. 162) has a cinquefoil scalloped bezel, and the sapphire in William Wytlessey's ring (Pl. 148) a sexfoil scallop.

The shape of the stone often determined the shape of the bezel as in the Lark Hill rings (Pl. 111) or the Cannington ring (Pl. 124). The increasing elaboration of the bezel (Fig. 9) was a notable aspect of the development of the ring in the medieval period and a result of the versatility of the medieval goldsmith.

Types of Ring

The stirrup-shaped ring, a decorative ring so called from the shape of the triangular bezel and the hoop, often held a sapphire, ruby or garnet; it dates from the end of the twelfth century. These rings vary widely in size and weight, and the most elaborate have additional claws such as the ring of Geoffrey of Ludham (Pl. 126). Small and light stirrup rings have been found on secular sites, notably at Kings Lynn in Norfolk, England. Although most medieval rings have only a single stone, occasionally the appearance of the principal stone was enhanced with subsidiary stones; in the pontifical rings (Pls. 115, 127, 130) they are set in projecting stems called collets. Occasionally subsidiary stones were set in the hoop (Pl. 153); in the case of the Thame ring (Pl. 152) the outside of the hoop was entirely covered in amethysts.

In Italian decorative rings the bezel often projects dramatically from the hoop, as in the rings from Murano (Pl. 132), where the bezel is as long as the diameter of the ring, and the shape provides a foil to the effect of the stone. One of the most extraordinary treatments of the bezel is an Italian ring with its bezel in the form of a spur with a revolving rowel (Pl. 156). The most complicated elaboration of the bezel is on a ring from Chalcis (Pl. 153), where the bezel is a globe of filigree surmounted by a pearl on a revolving pin.

The junction of the hoop and bezel also provided an opportunity for decoration. The simplest decoration was a fillet between the hoop and its bezel. Occasionally when the bezel was in the form of a protecting collet, scrolls would be used to support the bezel (Pl. 136). Dragons' heads were often used as a decorative feature at the junction of hoop and bezel (Pl. 124). They were popular from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. Sometimes there is no distinction between the bezel and the hoop, as in two of the rings from Lark Hill (Pls. 112—13).

Occasionally, particularly in the fifteenth century, the shape and decoration of the hoop provided the sole decorative effect. The enigmatic ring with its hoop in the form of a knotted branch provides an English example of this type (Pl. 160), while the

open-work foliage with a stag in the middle provides a German one (Pl. 161).

Niello (a black metallic sulphide, see also p. 13) was used to decorate the bezels and hoops of rings. It occurs on the Lark Hill rings (Pls. 111—14) and was particularly used for inscriptions engraved on the hoops of rings. Niello decoration was especially popular on Italian love rings of the fifteenth century.

Enamel was not employed on medieval rings before the fourteenth century, although it was widely used on shrines and other religious objects such as crucifixes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Its use in the decoration of rings is associated with the increase in the popularity of gold iconographic and signet-rings, the shoulders of which were engraved with flowers and foliage that were subsequently enamelled.

Signet-rings possess engraved bezels in order that the mark of the owner of the ring may be impressed upon wax to authenticate a letter or document in the manner of a seal. Classical intaglios (Pls. 122, 135) were particularly esteemed for signet-rings in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and their reuse was an aspect of that new regard for classical antiquity in France and Italy that characterized the twelfth-century Renaissance. Intaglios were prized as artistic objects and valued for their magical and amuletic properties. Gems were also cut in the Middle Ages, certainly in Italy and France, where the engraving of sapphires and rubies was undertaken (Pls. 134, 139). The group of rings exemplified by Plate 134 may also have been engraved in France. The legend: TECTA: LEGE: LECTA: TEGE ('Read what is hidden; hide what is read') clearly demonstrates the use of the signet-ring to close a letter.

Some medieval intaglios were engraved with heads in profile imitating classical intaglios. These occur set in Italian (Pl. 139) or possibly English (Pl. 123) rings. Such gemstones, whether classical or medieval, are almost invariably set in gold enclosed by a band containing a legend in the manner of a seal or more rarely claw-set, for instance the ring found in a tomb of a bishop of Chichester (Pl. 116). The value placed on signets set with gems is illustrated by the bequest made in 1380 by Edmund, Earl of March, to Sir John of Bishopstone of his ring of gold with a ruby engraved as a signet.

It is not clear under what circumstances a signet-ring would be used as opposed to a small seal. It is certainly difficult to tell from wax seals on documents whether a particular impression was made by a ring or by a small seal. The same confusion is apparent in the references to Edward III's signet, which is sometimes referred to as a secret seal and sometimes as a signet. In some cases it is clear that the ring was used to make an impression on the back of a wax seal attached to a document.

Limitations in the supply of engraved gems meant that signet-rings of engraved metal were increasingly frequent in the later Middle Ages. This made it easier to employ a variety of devices that associated the impression with the owner of the ring: heraldic devices, merchant's marks, rebuses and initials.

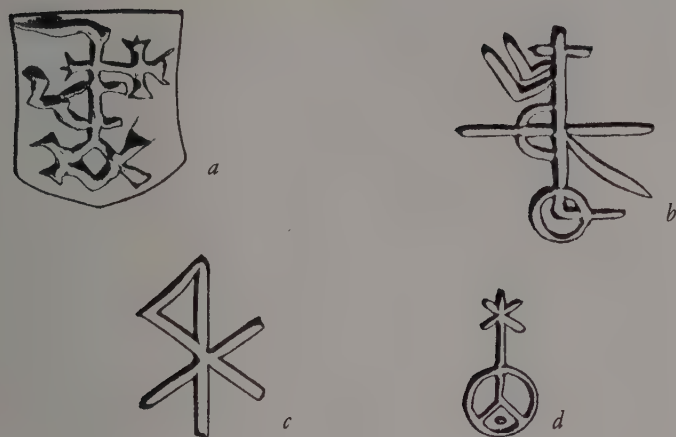


Fig. 10 (a) The merchant's mark on the bezel of the ring in Plate 167; (b) the merchant's mark of Henry Smale on the bezel of the ring in Plate 170; (c) the merchant's mark of Hans van Parghem on the bezel of the ring in Plate 169; (d) the merchant's mark of Noarius of Petrucius on the shoulders of the ring in Plate 139. (All scales are 3:1 except the last which is 6:1.)

Heraldic shields were used on rings in England and Italy and probably also in France as early as the beginning of the fourteenth century. Italian heraldic rings (Pl. 144) are particularly fine. In the fifteenth century the combination of a badge and personal motto was used, especially in England, rather than the coat of arms. The exact identification or associations of these rings is not easy to ascertain (Pls. 164–5), and sometimes identification is still unsolved, as in the case of the signet-ring found with the Fishpool coin hoard (Pl. 163). In these cases the weight of the rings suggests that they were used for counter-sealing.

Merchants and craftsmen not entitled to bear arms often used their merchant's mark (a symbol composed of lines frequently based on the cross or the figure 4) on their rings, sometimes alone and sometimes set in a shield (Fig. 10). Usually the merchant's mark was set in the bezel, sometimes with the name of the owner (Pls. 169–70), but occasionally it was on the shoulder of the ring. Merchant's marks first appeared in the fourteenth century and occurred on the rings of almost every country: Germany (Pl. 169), England (Pl. 170) and Italy (Pl. 145) are all illustrated.

Occasionally the bezel of a signet-ring shows a craftsman's tool such as the stonemason's hammer on the ring of William Mason (Pl. 168). Signet-rings sometimes also had devices related to an official position such as the signet-ring (Pl. 174) that may have been used as a sheriff's ring.

Rebuses (a device by which a surname is indicated by a combination of objects, the names of which make up the same sound as the surname) were very popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The fine silver ring (Pl. 173) engraved with a ship and a barrel (or a tun) probably represents the name Shipton.

An even more ordinary type of signet-ring, many of which were produced, was engraved with a letter, sometimes set underneath a crown, which probably stood for the personal name of the owner, for instance 'R' for Richard, Roger or Robert. These signet-rings were common in silver and bronze (Pl. 172) but much rarer in gold and were popular in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

The distinction between religion and superstition is not easily drawn in the Middle Ages, particularly in the case of rings that might be worn equally in the hope of safety in this world or salvation in the next.

Occasionally rings were made to contain relics. The Thame ring (Pl. 152) with its emphasis on the Crucifixion both in the enamelled plate at the back of the bezel and in the inscription: MEMANTO (*sic*) MEI DOMINE around the box-shaped bezel that may have contained a relic of the True Cross, provides a very fine and elaborate example of goldsmith's work. It may be compared with the bequest made in 1378 by Philippa, Countess of March, to her son of 'a gold ring with a piece of the True Cross'.

The late medieval devotion to the images of saints was reflected in rings by the development of the 'iconographic' ring, so called from the engraving of saints on the bezel. This particularly English type of ring first appeared in the late fourteenth century, and both gold and silver examples were common in the fifteenth century. The bezels have one, two or three divisions that are placed either in line with the hoop or at right angles to it. The quality of the engravings varies considerably. The hoops are often wreathed and bear traces of enamel; originally they must have produced a very colourful effect. Often these rings contain black-letter love inscriptions and so may have been given as gifts. The most popular saints to depict were St Barbara, St Christopher, St George, St John the Baptist and St Margaret, as well as the Virgin and Child.

The bezels of early decade rings were also often engraved with figures of saints. Decade rings (Pl. 184) had a very similar function to the beads on a rosary, since an ave was said when the smaller knobs on the hoop were touched and a paternoster at the bezel.

Late medieval preoccupation with death in popular religious art is demonstrated by a fifteenth-century silver-gilt ring (Pl. 188) with a bezel formed of a heart between two skulls. The engraving of a name on the hoop suggests that it may have been a memorial ring. Rings were often distributed after a person's death in accordance with instructions left in the will. Richard II (d. 1399), for instance, left in his will a gold ring to each of his nine executors, five of whom were bishops and four great nobles. The Coventry ring (Pl. 189) provides an example of a type of ring engraved with the Wells of pity, mercy and everlasting life that Sir Edmund Shaa (d. 1487), a London goldsmith, required his executors to make. The Five Wounds of Christ, called Wells, were a popular subject for devotion at the end of the Middle Ages. The Coventry ring is one of the grander religious rings; at the

other end of the scale, the bronze ring shaped like a buckle (Pl. 146) with the inscription: MEMANTO (*sic*) MEI DOMINE is of such a common type as to suggest that many may have been produced.

The Coventry ring (Pl. 189) also provides a good example of the combination of religion and magic in medieval rings. The reference to the Five Wounds of Christ is devotional, but the end of the inscription refers to the Three Kings or Magi and includes the two words: ANANYZAPTA, a charm against epilepsy, and TETRAGRAMMATON, one of the magical names of God.

Rings were thought to have an amuletic or protective property derived either from the stone with which they were set or from the inscription with which they were engraved. The use of stones in rings illustrates a revival of interest in the virtues or powers of precious stones based on early medieval lapidaries particularly that written by Marbode, bishop of Rennes from 1067 to 1081. In the Middle Ages, the sapphire (Pl. 119) was said to expel envy, detect fraud and witchcraft and cure snake bites; the emerald (Pl. 136) was reputed to be beneficial for those suffering from epilepsy or eye trouble; the diamond (Pl. 185) supposedly provided protection from nightmares and gave courage. The turquoise (Pl. 162) was especially popular at the end of the Middle Ages for it was thought to prevent falls while riding. Often a stone was set in the bezel so that it touched the skin of the finger, thus presumably increasing the efficacy of the stone's power. Water into which such a ring had been dipped was also thought to be beneficial.

The money, and later the rings, distributed by the king of England on Good Friday were held to be of great value in curing epilepsy or cramp. Such rings were often known as cramp-rings in the Middle Ages, but we do not know the exact appearance of these rings; they may have been plain hoops, occasionally decorated with enamel.

The use of engraved gems as talismans dates at least from the second half of the twelfth century. Engraved gems were thought to be particularly efficacious according to the nature of the signs engraved on them, which were often related to astrology. Gems engraved with magical symbols often associated with the Gnostics, an early Christian sect, were highly valued, and the gnostic gem set in a ring found in the tomb of a bishop of Chichester (Pl. 116) illustrates this.

Some stones were used to detect poisons and protect against their effects. The 'toadstone' was such a stone; it was held to be also efficacious against kidney disease. The stone was thought to be carried in the head of a toad; in reality 'toadstones' were the fossilized teeth of a fish called *Lepidotes*, which is common in the Oolitic and Wealden strata of England. The round brown 'toadstone' was particularly suitable for setting in rings (Pl. 149). Finally human teeth were sometimes set in rings, and Plate 131 combines a tooth in the bezel with the inscription: BURO+BERTO+BERNETO+, a meaningless series of words intended as a written charm against toothache.

Some rings derived their power from the inscriptions engraved on the hoop of the ring rather than from gems. The distinction here between religious and amuletic rings is often extremely difficult to establish. Simple religious inscriptions such as: AVE MARIA GRACIA PLENA ('Hail Mary, full of grace') were common in the thirteenth century (Pl. 124). Verses from the Bible (John I: 14; Luke XXIV: 26) were often engraved on the outside of Italian rings. The biblical verse most commonly used as an inscription was Luke IV: 30: IESUS AUTEM TRANSIENS PER MEDIUM ILLORUM IBAT ('But He passing through the midst of them went His way'), which occurs on both English and Italian rings (Pls. 139, 143—4). It was thought to give the bearer safe passage through thieves and so was regarded as having the quality of securing possessions. The names of the Three Kings — Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar — which are not mentioned in either the canonical or apocryphal Gospels but may have been introduced to the Middle Ages from an eastern Mithraic source, also appeared on rings. Their names appeared in charms against fever and also for the recovery of lost property (Pl. 199).

The belief in the power of the amuletic inscriptions on rings and the stones in rings, although it continued into the Renaissance and beyond, was perhaps never quite as prominent in the history of the ring as in the Middle Ages.

A ring was an essential feature of the consecration of medieval bishops. According to the Synod of Milan, held in the seventh century, a bishop's consecration ring had to be of pure gold set with a gem that had not been engraved. Otherwise there are no special characteristics with which to identify a consecration ring, and it is quite possible that the thirteenth-century rings from Wittersham (Pl. 119) and Cannington (Pl. 124) are such rings. One of the rings illustrated by Matthew Paris (Pl. 121) compares quite well with the Wittersham ring. All these rings are set with sapphires, and it seems that this was the favoured episcopal stone: many rings found in bishops' tombs are set with sapphires.

A medieval bishop undoubtedly had several rings, as the painting of St Nicolas of Bari (Pl. 201) illustrates, and it cannot be assumed that the ring with which a bishop was buried was his consecration ring. On the death of a bishop in England it was the practice for his ring to be handed over to the royal treasury. In 1299 and 1300 there were several episcopal rings — formerly belonging to three archbishops, four bishops and one abbot — in the royal treasury. A similar practice must have obtained in France, since the inventory of Charles V included eight bishop's rings.

While it was the general practice to bury a bishop with a ring, such rings vary considerably. The ring with the gnostic gem from Chichester (Pl. 116) or the very poor gem on the ring from the tomb of Archbishop Booth of York at Southwell were almost certainly not the rings with which the bishops were consecrated. However the finding of rings which appear to be episcopal rings (Pls. 126, 191—2) and the finding of pontifical rings (Pl. 127) in

the graves of bishops suggest that the royal claim to episcopal rings can hardly have been thoroughly enforced.

A characteristic of pontifical rings that may be deduced from documents is that they were of exceptional size and magnificence, often set with a large gem between a number of smaller ones. A bishop's pontifical ring was worn on the fourth finger of his right hand at High Mass and, since it was usually worn over a glove, it was of especially large size. Two of the rings drawn by Matthew Paris (Pls. 115, 130) are pontifical rings; that belonging to Henry of Blois (Pl. 115) is the earliest English example known. The rings found in the graves of Archbishops Walter de Gray (Pl. 127) and Jean de la Cour Aubergenville (Pl. 129) are both pontifical rings.

A number of other rings have been found in the graves of medieval bishops. Some of these rings were found in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, and the association of a particular grave with a specific bishop is often doubtful.

'Papal' rings (Pl. 193) are massive gilt-bronze rings set with glass pastes or crystals of small value. By the arms of the popes cast on them, they mostly date to the fifteenth century. Their use is uncertain, but it has been suggested that they may have been given as credentials to an envoy sent by a pope to a king.

In the Middle Ages lovers gave each other rings, and rings were used to mark betrothals and weddings, but it is not possible to distinguish these functions clearly from the surviving examples. Lovers' rings may be identified by the inscriptions — sometimes a brief motto such as: *MONCUER AVEZ* ('you have my heart') or *CANCDECYPARTIR* ('without division') or an amatory inscription often referred to as a posy (from poesy, poetry). Some posy-rings were set with gems, but many were simply plain hoops engraved either inside or outside. One of the most elaborate of such posy-rings is the one with the grammatically inspired inscription inside the hoop (Pl. 198).

Until the end of the Middle Ages the betrothal ceremony and the giving of a ring often took place at the church door. A ring was frequently given by the future bridegroom to his betrothed at the

ceremony. Sometimes rings were exchanged. During the marriage ceremony in the Middle Ages it was usual to bless the ring and place it on the right hand of the bride, rather than on her left hand as was more usual in later times.

Plain silver or gold rings without gems or inscriptions were used, but wedding-rings could also be set with stones: in 1503 Marion Chambers left in her will 'her marrying ring having a dyamond and a rubie therein'.

One of the most interesting types of love ring is the *fede* ring (from the Italian *mani in fede* ['hands in faith']), which has a representation of two clasped hands. This device was common in the classical world, when it often appeared on the bezels of rings. It certainly reappeared on medieval rings by the twelfth century, although the line of continuity between the classical and medieval use of the device has never been established. The motif was popular in both southern and northern Europe (Pls. 114, 125, 195). In the north it was used as the bezel and as a device in the hoop of rings, as well as on gold and silver brooches. In Italy a popular type of ring has the *fede* at the back of the hoop, while the nielloed circular bezel contains a woman's head.

The religious, ornamental, amuletic and business reasons for wearing rings in the Middle Ages may be summed up in the bequest John Baret, a prosperous merchant of Bury Saint Edmunds, made of his rings; it was recorded in his will dated 1463, the same period as the portrait (Pl. 110) was painted by Memling. To his wife John Baret left a gold ring with an image of the Trinity (presumably an iconographic ring); to Thomas Brews, his cramp-ring with black enamel and partly silver and gilt; to his niece Katherine, a gold ring inscribed within with the name of Jesus as a token of remembrance; to his nephew Thomas Drury his next best ring of gold to his signet with his motto: *GRACE ME GOVERNE* ('God's grace governs me') inside and his initials 'J B' enamelled. Finally a gold double ring set with a ruby and a turquoise and inscribed inside was left by him to Dame Margaret Spurdance as a remembrance of old love virtuously directed at all times to the pleasure of God.

111

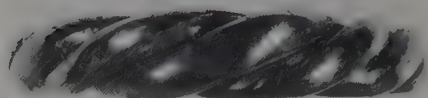
Silver and crystal. English. Twelfth century. Width 2.5 cm. Found at Lark Hill near Worcester, England, in 1854. British Museum, London, 1854, 8-20, 1.



This decorative ring contrasts with the three other rings illustrated from the Lark Hill Hoard (Pls. 112-14), since the emphasis on design is on the bezel. It is rectangular in shape and set with a rectangular crystal, beneath which are the remains of red foil. The crystal is set within a border of silver. The thin hoop has two ribs at the junction of hoop and bezel.

112

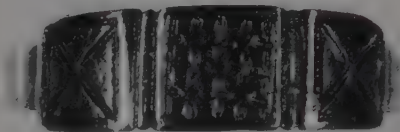
Silver. English. Twelfth century. Width 2.8 cm. Found at Lark Hill, near Worcester, England, in 1854. British Museum, London, 1854, 8-20, 6.



The hoop of this ring is formed of two thick wires twisted together. They are thicker at the front, and the junction at the back is hammered square. Rings — either of gold or silver — made in this manner are found usually in Viking or late Saxon contexts. The discovery of such a ring in a twelfth-century hoard is particularly interesting, since it is a late occurrence of the type. The ring may have been unfashionable when it was hidden.

113

Silver. English. Twelfth century. Width 2.1 cm. Found at Lark Hill, near Worcester, England, in 1854. British Museum, London, 1854, 8-20, 4.

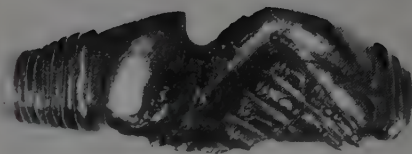


This silver ring was found with Plates 111, 112 and 114 in the same hoard of rings and coins. It has a very thin hoop and a long rectangular bezel divided into three square panels. On the middle panel of the bezel there are five small crosses set at an angle against a niello ground; the two panels on either side have a cross in niello, also set at an angle.

114

Silver. English. Twelfth century. Width 2 cm. Found at Lark Hill near Worcester, England, in 1854. British Museum, London, 1854, 8-20, 5.

This silver ring was found with five others in a hoard of rings and coins deposited around 1180. Rings such as this and those in Plates 111 to 113 provide rare examples of the type of decorative rings in common use in the second half of the twelfth century. This example has a flat hoop; the bezel is formed by two clasped hands, proving that



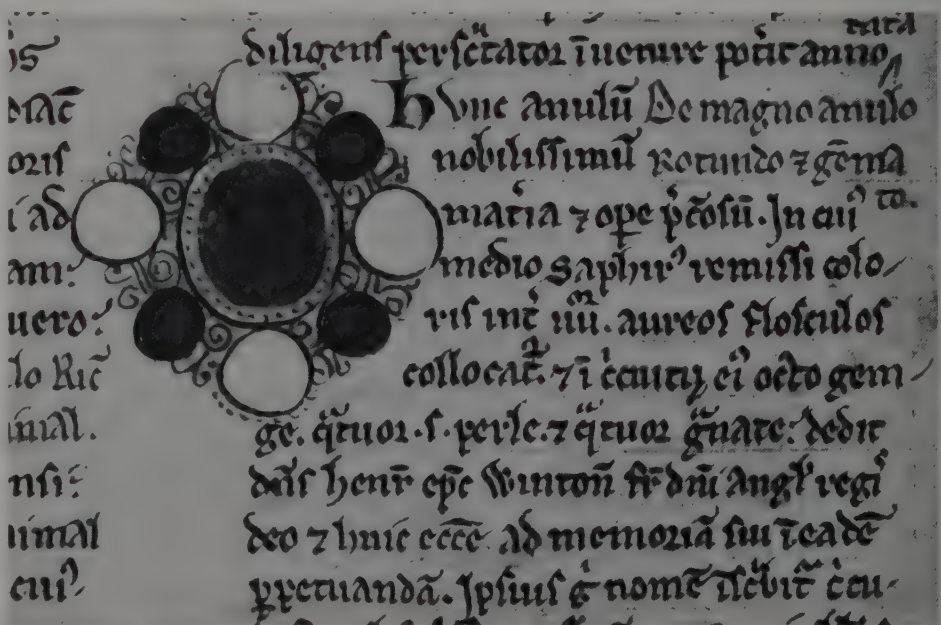
114

this device was certainly in use as early as the twelfth century. The wrists of the two hands are decorated with vertical ridges. The clasped-hands device was a sign of faithfulness, particularly in love and marriage. It occurs on Plate 125 in association with an amatory inscription and on Plate 195 together with a heart and the phrase: GOD HELP.

115

Drawing in ink of a ring from St Albans Abbey by Matthew Paris. English. 1257. Dimensions of drawn bezel 2.3 x 1.9 cm. British Library, London, MS Nero D.I., folio 146 v.

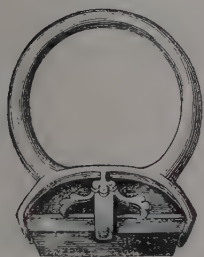
The drawing depicts the bezel of a twelfth-century pontifical ring of a bishop. It is set with a sapphire held by four flower-shaped claws, four pearls and four garnets. The pearls and garnets are set alternately and divided by scrolls. This ring belonged to the brother of King Stephen, Henry of Blois, bishop of Winchester, who was a noted collector and patron of the arts. His name was inscribed on the hoop of the ring that he donated to St Albans Abbey (Hertfordshire) before his death in 1171. It is the earliest English pontifical ring known, and therefore this drawing is particularly valuable as a record of a highly decorated twelfth-century ring.



115

116

Engraving of a gold ring set with a gnostic gem. English. Late twelfth or early thirteenth century. Width 2.6 cm. Found in the tomb of a bishop of Chichester in 1826. Chichester Cathedral.



This remarkable ring is set with an oval gnostic gem showing a figure (Abraxis) with the head of a cock and serpent legs, holding a shield and mace. (A gnostic gem is a magical gem used by the Gnostics, heretical sects among the early Christians who claimed to have superior knowledge of spiritual affairs and magic.) The gem is set into an oval frame with a cross behind, which is decorated with stiff leaf foliage. The tomb in which the ring was found has been attributed to Bishop Seffrid of Chichester (d. 1151), and if this is so, it provides an early use of such foliage decoration on a ring. It has been suggested by Martin Henig that the gem is a medieval copy of a gnostic gem. Another gnostic gem set in a ring was found in the tomb of Archbishop Walter of Canterbury (d. 1205). Since bishops wore rings set with unengraved stones, it is unlikely that either ring was used officially.

117

Gold, niello and a sardonyx. French. Second half of the twelfth century. Width 2.5 cm. Found in excavations on the tomb of Maurice de Sully in the choir of the Abbey of St Victor, Paris, during the French Revolution. Corroyet Collection. Musée de Cluny, Paris, dépôt du Musée du Louvre, OA 3357.

The ring is set with an oval sardonyx held in



117

position by an angular setting. The hoop is elaborately decorated on the back with a monster. The division between the hoop and the shoulders is marked by a twelve-petalled rosette from which foliate leaves spread out to support the bezel. The interior of the leaves is ornamented with scrolls. Although its association with Maurice de Sully, bishop of Paris from 1160 to 1196, is not certain, this ring is a fine example of the ring of an important twelfth-century ecclesiastic.

118

Gold and a sapphire. French. Twelfth century. Width 2.1 cm. Said to have been found in the tomb of a bishop of Verdun in 1829. Faily Collection, Londesborough Collection, Franks Collection. British Museum, London, 1866.

The very large cabochon sapphire on this ring is held by four claws rising from a bezel with a curved

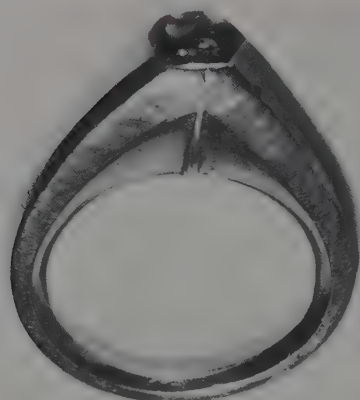


118

back; the claws emphasize the size of the stone. The sapphire supports the traditional provenance from a bishop's grave, since episcopal rings are often set with sapphires. The hoop, which bears no inscription, is composed of two shaped dragons and is moulded and engraved on the sides to form the dragons' wings. The hoop emerges from the heads of the dragons, which support the prominent bezel.

119

Gold with a sapphire. English. C. 1200. Width of hoop 3.7 cm. Found at Wittersham, Kent. British Museum, London, 1885, 6-15, 1.



This is an extremely fine example of the type of decorative ring described as 'stirrup-shaped' from the shape of the hoop. The hoop of chamfered section is circular on the inside, but on the outside it comes to a point at the bezel, which is set with a sapphire so that most of the sapphire is concealed by the bezel. The shape of the ring is emphasized by a raised line leading from the inner side of the ring to the bezel. The strong simple shape of this ring indicates that it was probably an early example of a stirrup ring. It is very similar to a gold ring found in a tomb at Chichester Cathedral that was attributed to Bishop Hilary of Chichester, who died in 1169.

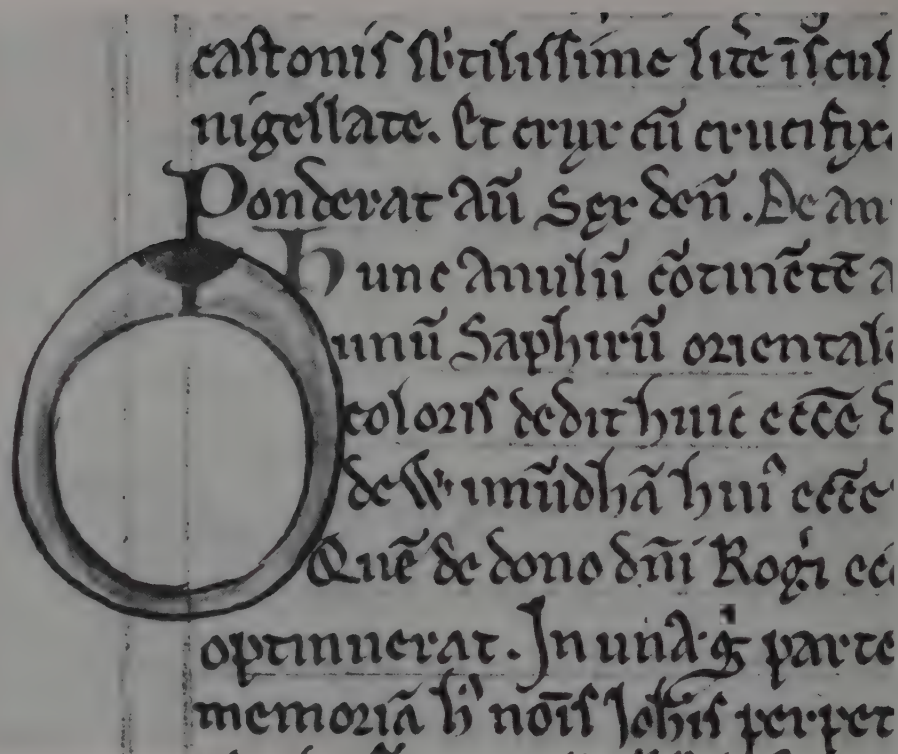
120

Drawing in ink of a ring from St Albans Abbey by Matthew Paris. English. 1257. Diameter of drawn ring 2.5 cm. British Library, London, MS Nero D. I., folio 146 v.

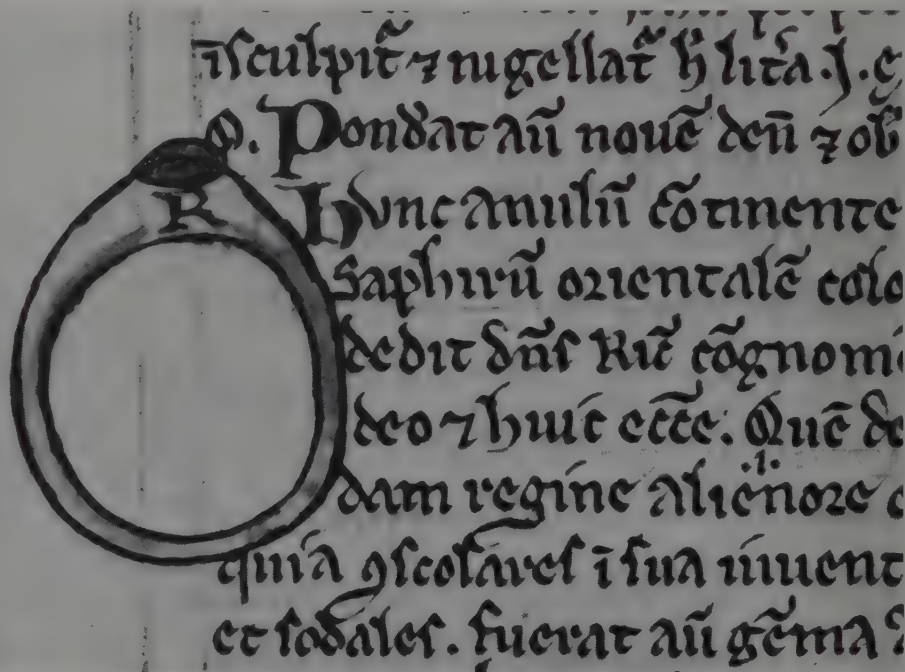
This thirteenth-century ring is set with a dark-blue oriental (*orientalem intensi coloris*) sapphire. The hoop is slightly stirrup-shaped, and the sides of the bezel were engraved and nielloed with the letters 'l' and 'o'. The first of these stands for Archdeacon John de Wymondham, who gave the ring to the abbey. Formerly it had belonged to Prior Roger de Norton, who became abbot in 1260.

121

Drawing in ink of a ring from St Albans Abbey by Matthew Paris. English. 1257. Diameter of drawn ring 2.5 cm. British Library, London, MS Nero D. I., folio 146 v.



120



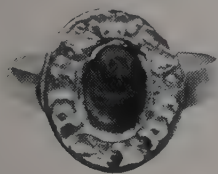
121

This twelfth-century French ring is also set with a dark-blue oriental sapphire (Pl. 120). It was given to St Albans Abbey by Richard Animal, who had studied in his youth with Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine (d. 1204) and received from her this ring. The letter 'R' was engraved on one side of the ring and on the other the letter 'A', standing for Richard

Animal. The ring is stirrup-shaped, and if Richard received the ring when he and the queen were in their youth, it may well have been made in France by or before 1140. This throws an interesting light on the origin of the stirrup-shaped ring, since the earliest English example for which a date can be suggested was made by 1169.

122

Gold and a plasma. English or French. Twelfth-thirteenth century. Width 2.2 cm. Guilboun Collection, Evans Collection. British Museum, London, 1962, 11-1, 1.



This ring is a good example of a signet-ring set with a classical intaglio in the bezel. The hoop is a plain narrow band of triangular section. On the green plasma, a type of chalcedony, set in the centre of the bezel is a standing female figure (probably Minerva) holding a branch. Around this stone is engraved the legend: S RICHARD RE (G ?) P. It has been argued that the last two words may indicate that the ring was the private seal of King Richard I of England, but it is also possible that it was a personal signet-ring of someone called Richard and that the last four letters formed the surname. The style of the inscription, together with the simple design of the ring, suggests a twelfth- or thirteenth-century date.

123

Gold and jasper. Italian. Thirteenth century. Width 2.2 cm. Found in Canterbury, Kent. Faussett Collection, Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 552.



The octagonal bezel of this ring contains an oval jasper engraved with the bust of a man in profile, wearing a pointed pendant hood. The engraving of the stone is medieval, and while medieval rings were sometimes set with classical intaglios, it is rare to find them set with medieval intaglios. The legend reads: * S' CRISTINE ALMARICI, indicating that it was the personal signet of Christine Almaricus. Although the name has not been identified as Italian, the shape of the ring and the engraving of the stone suggest the possibility that it is indeed Italian.

124

Gold and a sapphire. English or French. Thirteenth century. Width 3.3 cm. Found at Cannington, near Bridgwater, Somerset, England, in 1924. British Museum, London, 1925, 1-13, 1.



The hoop of triangular section, engraved for niello in lombardic lettering: AVE GRATIA PLENA DM ('Hail [Mary], full of grace; the Lord'), ends in two animal heads that grasp with their mouths the high open-work bezel, the sides of which are composed of birds with raised wings. The oval bezel is set with a cabochon sapphire held by four claws. Two

similar rings are known, one found at Hvalsø, Denmark, in 1949 and another, without provenance, in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, Maryland. The Danish ring is set with an amethyst, and the Baltimore ring is, at present, set with a malachite. All three rings were produced in England or France, possibly for bishops or abbots.

124

125

Gold and a sapphire. English. Thirteenth century. Width 2.3 cm. Found in Hatfield Forest, Essex. British Museum, London, 1980, 12-2, 1.



This ring is shaped like a stirrup ring and set with a sapphire. Two features indicate that it is a love ring. At the back of the hoop of triangular section, there are two clasped hands — a symbol of love and trust. Separated from the triangular bezel by dragons' heads, a lombardic inscription is engraved on the outer faces of the hoop: +IE. SUL. DE. DRUE. RIES. SI. NE. ME. DO. NEL. MIE ('I am a love token, do not give me away'). This inscription occurs on other medieval love rings and brooches. The combination of decorative elements such as the clasped hands, the inscription and the dragons' heads demonstrates the attention given to the decoration of the hoop on some medieval rings.

126

Gold and a sapphire. English. Early thirteenth century. Width 2.5 cm. Found in the tomb of Geoffrey de Ludham, archbishop of York (d. 1265), in York Minster in 1969. York Minster Treasury.



Donat aū. rñ. deñ. De lapide purpu
Anulus qm itū dñs rei coloris.
hamo de q fruis fecim' menconē
dedit cōuentui? castonē rotundū
hī cū qtuor tenaculis gēma ppu
rei coloris cōtinētē. cōsimile amecisto.
In castone g' nom' datoris isculpit' nigel
latū. fuerat aū anul' canē archiep'i S.
Donat utiq; nouē deñ. De anulo granēte

Set with an irregular hexagonal cabochon sapphire this ring is a rather grand version of the stirrup-shaped type of ring (Pl. 119). The size and shape of the sapphire necessitated a large bezel, which was impressively emphasized by the angles of the claws that rise from the hoop of the ring. The slight angle on the outside of the claws draws attention to them. This may well have been the ring with which Archbishop de Ludham was consecrated.

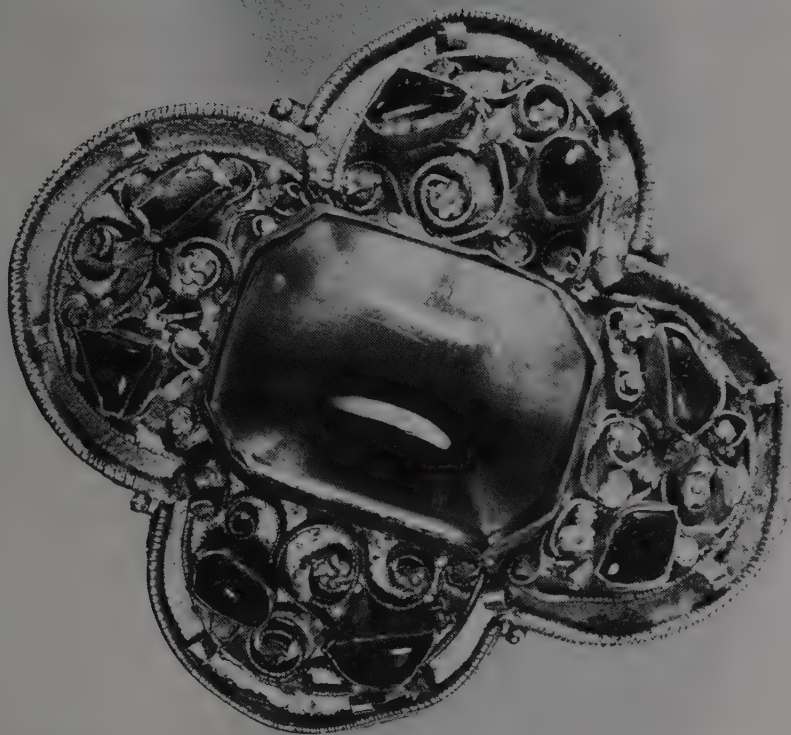
127

Gold, a sapphire, garnets and emeralds. English. Mid thirteenth century. Width 2.5 cm. Found in the tomb of Walter de Gray, archbishop of York (d. 1255), in York Minster in 1968. York Minster Treasury.

This very large cabochon sapphire is claw-set in an oblong octagonal bezel with incurved sides. Each side is decorated with a collet that has been set alternately with a garnet or an emerald. The hoop is

127

128



plain. This remarkable ring is a fine example of an archbishop's pontifical ring, which would have been worn at the major ceremonies of the Church. The use of a single large stone to contrast with smaller stones may be compared to the pontifical rings drawn by Matthew Paris (Pls. 115, 130).

128

Drawing in ink of a ring from St Albans Abbey by Matthew Paris. English. 1257. Dimensions of drawn bezel 2.3 × 1.9 cm. British Library, London, MS Nero D. I., folio 146 r.

This fine example of an early thirteenth-century episcopal ring has a round bezel set with a purple stone, perhaps an amethyst. It is held by four claws (*quatuor tenaculis*). This type of setting also occurs on a ring that is believed to be from the tomb of Bishop Woodlock (d. 1316) in Winchester Cathedral. The description recounts that the ring illustrated formerly belonged to Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury (d. 1228), and that it was given to St Albans Abbey by Hamo, a former sacristan, whose name was nielloed inside. It is interesting that the donor's name was written inside the ring.

129

Gold, a topaz, garnets and sapphires. French. Early thirteenth century. Width 2.6 cm. Found in the tomb of Jean de la Cour Aubergenville, bishop of Evreux (d. 1256), in the Cathedral of Evreux. Evreux Museum.

The quatrefoil bezel of this ring is set in the centre with a topaz within a band of gold. On each quatrefoil a garnet and a sapphire are set amidst gold filigree ending in naturalistic leaf forms. This style of filigree recalls the work of the goldsmith Hugo d'Oignies, and therefore the ring provides an interesting connection between a ring and larger goldsmith's work. The rectangular hoop has a beaded outer border enclosing a curvilinear filigree pattern on the outside. This burial of a high ecclesiastic with his pontifical ring, recalls the ring found in the tomb of Archbishop de Gray (Pl. 127).

130

Drawing in ink of a ring from St Albans Abbey by Matthew Paris. English. 1257. Dimensions of drawn bezel 3.5 × 3.4 cm. British Library, London, MS Nero D. I., folio 146 r.

This drawing shows the outside of the square bezel of another early thirteenth-century pontifical ring, the bezel being set diagonally to the hoop. The description indicates that there was an oblong ruby in the middle surrounded by small gems arranged in a regular disposition. The drawing makes it clear that there are four pearls, four sapphires and two emeralds set in filigree decoration, which may be compared to the ring of Jean de la Cour Aubergenville (Pl. 129). On the back of the bezel two verses were engraved, referring to John de Crundale who was chaplain to Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury, and later a monk of Holy Trinity, Canterbury. It is most probable that this ring belonged to Stephen Langton.

129



Anulus magnus De Anulis et
 cui casto huius gemis et pallis q
 scematis est atq sunt de thesau
 magnitudinis conro huius ecce
 tines una gema in medio scribea et ob
 longa videlicet deam ungarit rubibalo
 et pler gemulas in ei eccutu. in q et castone
 isculpunt duo insus cu h noie Johs. fuit
 nob adq sitis p dnm hamone qm da hui
 ecce sacstam et camerarii. Huc au a
 nulū gculit nob d Johs de Crundale dā
 dnm hamois auuclis ayonach ecce sce tri
 nitatis cantuarie et sacsta. et qm; capel
 lan dnm canē archiepi steph. De cunis

130



131
Gold and a tooth. English or French. Thirteenth century. Width 2.5 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 816–1902.

The shoulders of this ring have stiff leaf decoration, moulded in high relief and rising from open-work circles with crowns inside. The interior of the ring is engraved with a black-letter inscription that was probably added in the late fourteenth or early

fifteenth century. It reads: *BURO + BERTO + BERNETO + CONSUMATM (sic) E*; the three words beginning with 'B' were a magical charm to appease toothache, and the heart-shaped bezel set with a fragment of a tooth may have been intended to have the same effect. 'Consummatum', the beginning of the phrase: *consummatum est* — the last words of Christ on the cross — was used as a charm to calm storms.

132
Silver and a sapphire. Italian. Thirteenth-fourteenth century. Width 2.3 cm. Found at Murano near Venice, Italy. Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 1871.

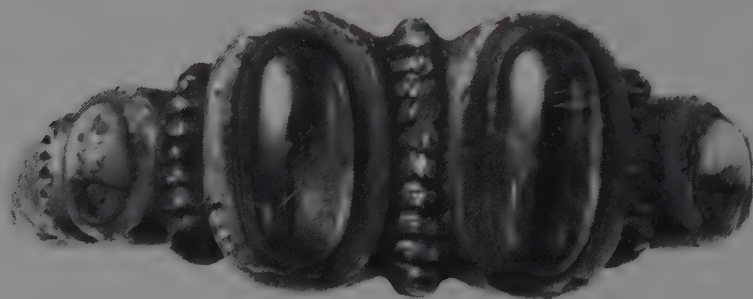


This ring has an elaborately modelled bezel. The high vertical top of the bezel contains a sapphire set within four claws. The base of the bezel is in the shape of an octagon with incurved sides. Pierced

supports rise from dragons' heads on the hoop of quadrangular section. The use of dragons' heads on the hoop may be compared with rings such as the Cannington ring (Pl. 124). Five medieval rings were found at Murano in the nineteenth century. Two are in the British Museum and three in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. The three in the Ashmolean were all found in a grave outside the cathedral at Murano and were therefore thought to be episcopal rings.

133
Gold, a sapphire, an amethyst and turquoises. English. Thirteenth century. Width 2.4 cm. Found in London. Roach Smith Collection. British Museum, London, 1856, 7–1, 2702.

The narrow hoop of oval section has two oval



settings containing a sapphire and an amethyst flanked by two smaller settings each containing a turquoise. The settings are separated by vertical strips engraved with notches, and the ring owes its attractiveness to the contrast in colour among the different stones and to the contrast between the stones and the gold setting. This setting of gems in line without a prominent bezel recalls the rings in the Lark Hill Hoard (Pl. 113). A comparable gold ring set with three uncut garnets has recently been found in archeological excavations at Cuckoo Lane, Southampton, and has been dated to c. 1200.

134
Gold and a sapphire intaglio. Probably French. Late thirteenth or fourteenth century. Width 2.3 cm. Found in a well in Hereford, England, in 1824. Waterton Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 89, 1899.



The oval bezel is engraved with the lombardic inscription: * : IECTA : LEGE : LECTA : TEGE ('Read what is hidden; hide what is read'). It is set with a sapphire intaglio engraved with a hooded head. The head has not been identified, but it may be a monk or the Virgin Mary. The open back of the setting enables the finger to come into contact with the sapphire. The engraving of sapphires was most frequently done in France, and the inscription on a similar ring in Salisbury Museum, which includes the form 'Artaut' for Arthur, supports a French origin for this ring.

135
Gold and a jasper intaglio. Italian. Thirteenth or early fourteenth century. Width 2.5 cm. Found in the Church of Sta Maria in Comedia, Suessa Arunca (near Naples) in 1845. George Barrett Collections (1851), Guilhou Collection, Dame Joan Evans Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M 275. 1962.

This classical intaglio of the third century AD is engraved with the motif of clasped hands and the initials 'CCPS/IPD'. It was set in a gold ring in the thirteenth or early fourteenth century to form the signet of Thomas de Rogeriis de Suessa, whose name is engraved in lombardic letters around the edge of the intaglio. This Thomas has not been



identified with certainty, since the name Thomas occurs in the family at least twice in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The inscription around the hoop may be extended to read: + CHRISTUS VINCIT, CHRISTUS REGNAT, CHRISTUS IMPERAT ('Christ conquers, Christ reigns, Christ rules') and + ET VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST ET HABITAVIT IN NOBIS ('And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us', John I: 14). This ring is a particularly fine example of the setting of a classical gem.

136

Gold and an emerald. French. Fourteenth century. Width 2 cm. Found in the Queen's Head Tavern, Hornsey, London, 1898. British Museum, London, 1899, 5-20, 1.



The conical bezel stands up from the hoop and is supported by two open-work scrolls, rising from two semi-circular knobs decorated with nielloed stars and rosettes. The hoop of triangular section is engraved with the legend: + QUI PLUS DESPENT QUA LI NAFIERT / SANS COLP FERIR A MORT SE FIERT ('He who spends more than belongs to him / Kills himself without striking a blow'). Proverbial inscriptions in French were certainly used in England in the fourteenth century, though it is unusual to find such an elaborate inscription on a ring. Despite the findplace, the shape and elaborateness of the French inscription argue for a French origin for this ring.

137

Gold and an onyx. French. Fourteenth century. Diameter 1.9 cm. Found with coins and other jewellery in a hoard during the demolition of a house in la rue aux Juifs at Colmar, France, in 1923. Musée de Cluny, Paris, CL 20668.



This ring was found in a hoard that also contained fourteenth-century coins, as well as silver belts and belt fittings. The bezel of the ring has a setting that

emphasizes the stone: four claws grasp the transversely set oval onyx. The hoop has hands grasping the bezel and is inscribed: AUDIVI ('I heard'). Although one of the belts in the hoard has a German inscription, the decoration of the two rings found there indicates a French rather than a German origin.

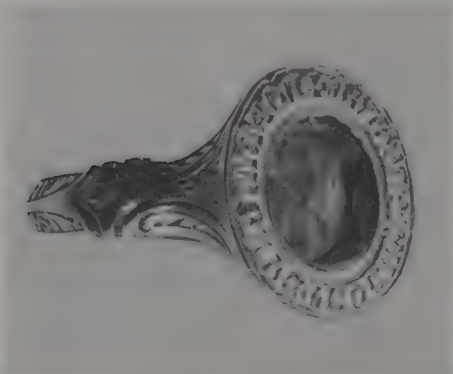
138

Gold and enamel. French. Fourteenth century. Diameter 2.3 cm. Found with other jewellery in a hoard at Colmar, France, in 1923. Musée de Cluny, Paris, CL 20658.

This ring was found with Plate 137 but provides a complete contrast to that ring. The hexagonal bezel is large and rises to a point. Each of the six sides are filled with enamel leaving a letter in reserve. The rectangular sides of the bezel are decorated with applied flowers within a beaded border. The circular hoop ends in dragons' heads that support the bezel. The elaborate box-shaped bezel recalls the ring found at Thame (Pl. 152), a contemporary French ring. The shape and findplace indicate that it was probably a Jewish marriage ring.

139

Gold and a sard. Italian. Fourteenth century. Width 2.3 cm. Count Milano Collection, Franks Collection. British Museum, London, 53, 2-18, 13.



The oval bezel containing a sard (a type of carnelian) — engraved in intaglio in the Middle Ages with an imperial bust in profile — is inscribed: +NOARIU DE PETRUCIU MERCATAT (sic) ('Noarius of Petrucius, merchant'). The oval bezel is slightly raised up from the shoulders of the ring, where a merchant's mark (a cross above a circle, Fig. 10d) confirms that this ring was the property of an Italian merchant. The hoop of triangular section is engraved with the lombardic inscription: IESUS AUTEM TRANSIENS PER MEDIUM ILLORUM IBAT IE SUS NOMINE TUO S, ('But He passing through the midst of them went His way'), this being the biblical verse Luke IV: 30 thought to be a protection against thieves, together with the phrase, 'Jesus your name is sacred'.

140

Gold and a ruby. (Gem): French. Late fourteenth century. (Setting): English. Fifteenth century. Width 2 cm. Arundel, Marlborough and Salting Collections. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M 554-1910.



138

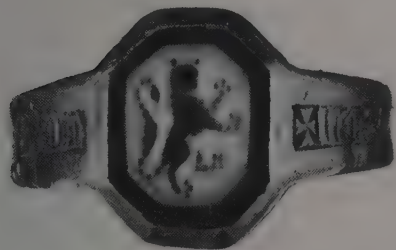


140

The circular bezel is set with a square ruby intaglio portraying a crowned head. Around the intaglio is engraved: TEL IL NECT ('there is nothing like it'). The shoulders of the ring are divided into panels containing flowers, in which traces of enamel remain. The gem was probably engraved in France in the late fourteenth century; gem-engraving flourished in Paris then, and the representation of the crowned head resembles that of Charles V (1364-80) on his coins. However, engraved floral decoration is characteristic of fifteenth-century English rings, and the gem may have been reset in England in the fifteenth century. If so, this gem may represent an item from the French royal treasure, which came to England in the course of the English occupation of Paris in the fifteenth century.

141

Gold and an onyx. Italian. Fourteenth century. Width 2.2 cm. Sidney Churchill Collections, Dame Joan Evans Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M190-1975.



A medieval onyx engraved with a lion rampant is set within an octagonal bezel in this gold ring. The lombardic letter 'P' (possibly the owner's initial) is engraved at the back of the bezel. The outside of the hoop is grooved and engraved: + IN MANUS: TUAS: DOMINE: COMENDO (*sic*): SPIRITUM: MEUM ('Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit', Luke XXIV: 46). This ring provides an interesting combination: a medieval signet-ring engraved with a heraldic device and with a biblical inscription around the outside.

142

Gold and an engraved sapphire intaglio. French. Fourteenth century. Width 2.3 cm. Treasury of St Denis, France. Musée du Louvre, Paris, MR 92.

This ring is made up of an engraved sapphire mounted on a gold hoop, enamelled on the outside with fleurs-de-lis. Inside the hoop is the lombardic inscription in niello: C'EST LE SINET DU ROY SAINT LOUIS ('This is the signet of the king, St Louis'). There is a standing king on the sapphire holding a spectre and globe with the two letters 'S' and 'L' (for SIGILLUM LODOVICI, the 'seal of Louis'). The inscription and the decoration of the ring's hoop suggest that the ring belongs to the second half of the fourteenth century, possibly to the reign of Charles V (1364-80); however, the



142

sapphire intaglio is probably earlier. It has been suggested that it is more likely to have been a signet

of Louis X the Quarrelsome (1314-16) than of Louis IX, St Louis (1226-70).

143

Gold and a ruby. English. Fourteenth century. Width 2.4 cm. Found in the ruins of the Château de Montpensier near Aigueperse, Puy-de-Dôme, in 1866. Pichon Collection, Guilhou Collection, Chappée Collection. Musée du Louvre, Paris, OA 9597.

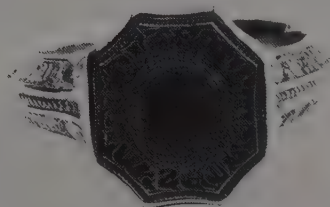
This remarkably fine gold signet-ring has an octagonal bezel set with a ruby engraved with a head and surrounded by the legend: + SIGILLUM (*sic*) SECRETUM ('secret seal'). On the sides of the bezel is the legend: S^c - GE - OR - GI - US ('St George'), while around the hoop of triangular section there is the legend: + LEXUS (*sic*) AUTEN (*sic*) TRANSIENS PER

MEDIUM (*sic*) ILLORUM IBAT ET VERBUM C — Luke IV: 30 and the beginning of John I: 14. ('But He passing through the midst of them went His way'; 'And the Word was made flesh'.) Luke IV: 30 was used as a protection against thieves. The words are divided by roses. The reference to St George, the patron saint of England, is the strongest argument for an English attribution. Although the quality of the ring points to an owner of high social standing, one cannot be certain of the attribution to Edward the Black Prince (1330-76), eldest son of King Edward III, that has sometimes been made. This magnificent ring may equally well have belonged to one of the prince's followers.

144

Gold. Venetian. Fourteenth century. Width 2.8 cm. Found at Aegium in the Peloponnese. Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 568.

The hoop of this signet-ring is formed into the unusual shape of a bow ring: the hoop with an extended point protects the thumb and improves the archer's handling of the long bow. The octagonal bezel is engraved with a shield on which are the arms of the Donati family surmounted by a helm and crest (column) and the inscription: S (IGNUM) DE ZENO DONATI ('seal or sign of Zeno Donati'). On the extended back of the ring, there is a column between two confronted wyverns, re-



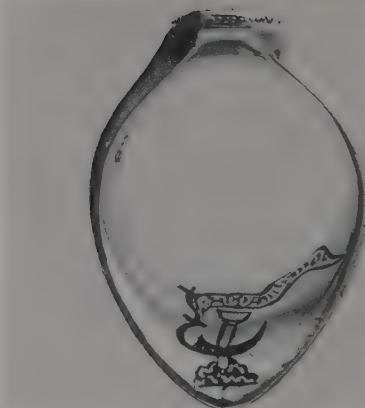


served against a niello ground. A column cut by a scythe is engraved inside the hoop; from the scythe issues a scroll with the legend: AIDA MEDIO. The

145

Gold. Italian. Fourteenth century. Width 2 cm. Waterton Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 88-1899.

This ring has a rectangular bezel engraved as a signet with a merchant's mark and the name: + GALGANO D'CICHO. The Christian name Galgano probably points to a Sienese origin for the ring,



meaning of this phrase is not clear, but it was presumably a special impresa and the motto of the Donati family.

which would further localize the Italian origin indicated by the style of the external inscription. This reads: + IESUS. AUTEM. TRANSIENS. PER. MEDIUM. ILLORUM. IBAT ('But He [Jesus] passing through the midst of them went His way,' Luke IV: 30). This verse of the Bible was normally used as a charm against attack by robbers, but it was also used as a charm to become invisible when inscribed on rings.

146

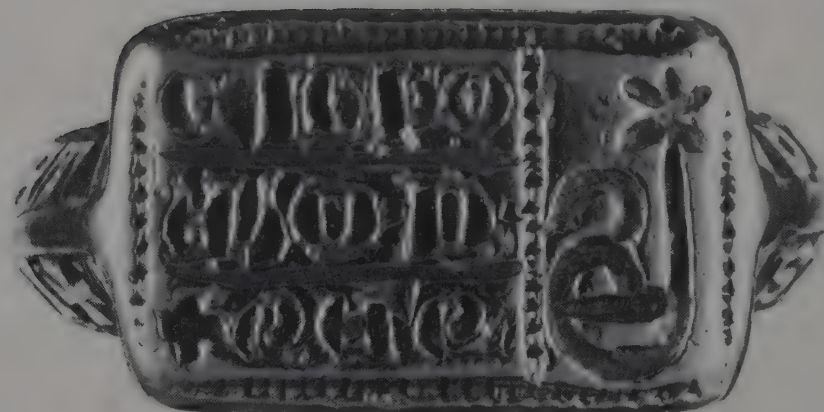
Bronze. English. Fourteenth century. Width of hoop 2.3 cm. Found at Stump Cross, Chesterford, Suffolk, before 1853. Green Collection, Braybrooke Collection, Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 882.



This bronze ring in the form of a buckled strap is engraved with the legend: MATER DEI MEMANTO (sic) ('Mother of God remember me') in reserve. The legend is known on fine gold rings of the late fourteenth century such as the Thame ring (Pl. 152) but was later used in this type of ring, which was produced in large numbers. The buckled strap could be adjusted quite easily to fit any size finger. Such rings were likely to have been sold, rather like lead pilgrim-badges, to pilgrims at a shrine.

147

Gold and a cameo sard. Italian. Fourteenth century. Width 2.8 cm. Spitzer Collection, Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 1010.



Although the cameo sard (a type of carnelian) set in the projecting oval bezel of this ring is a sixteenth-century replacement, the claw setting and the engraved flowers on the side of the bezel are fourteenth-century. The hoop of triangular section has the following inscription reserved in the metal: + IEXUS (sic) AUTEM TRANSIENS ILUI (sic) IEXUS (sic) AUTEM (sic) TRANSIENS LL; this is a confused version of Luke IV: 30, *Jesus autem transiens* ('Jesus passing through the midst of them'). It occurs on English, French and Italian rings (Pl. 145) as a charm against the dangers of travelling and particularly of being attacked by robbers.



148
Gold and a sapphire. English. Fourteenth century. Width 2.7 cm. Said to have been found in Canterbury Cathedral in the tomb of William Wytlesey, archbishop of Canterbury. Dame Joan Evans Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M191—1975.

In addition to the story of its provenance, the interior of the ring is inscribed in black letter:

149
Gold and a 'toadstone'. Italian. Fourteenth century. Width 2.2 cm. Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 1023.

WILLMS WYTLESEY. The octagonal sapphire is drilled longitudinally and set in a six-cusped setting. The hoop is stirrup shaped, and the shoulders are decorated with two panels of foliage and flowers. This ring provides one of the finest and earliest examples in England (William Wytlesey died in 1374) of elaborate floral decoration on the shoulder of a ring.

This ring combines an amuletic stone with an amuletic inscription. The projecting oval bezel contains a 'toadstone', worn as a protection against kidney disease. The 'stone' is, in fact, the tooth of a



fossilized fish (*Lepidotes*), common in limestone and chalk. The hoop of triangular section has a lombardic legend reserved in the metal. This reads: +IEXUS (*sic*) AUTEN (*sic*) TRANSIENS PER MEDIUN (*sic*) ILLORUM IBAT ET VERBUM CARO and continues on the back of the bezel: FACTUM EST ET. The first part (Luke IV: 30) is a common inscription (Pls. 145, 147), but the second part of the inscription from: ET VERBUM CARO ('And the Word was made flesh', John I: 14) is less common. It was a charm used against paroxysms. This ring would have been worn to protect its wearer against fits, thieves and kidney trouble.

150
Gold, a sapphire and a ruby. French. Fourteenth century. Width 2.3 cm. Said to have been found in the tomb of a bishop in France. Curzon Collection, Waterton Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 90—1899.

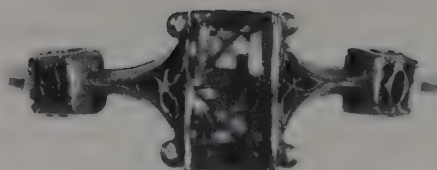


This ring has a large bezel in the shape of a square with projecting semi-circles. The centre of the bezel is set with a sapphire, and the space between the stone and the semi-circular projections is filled with an engraved leaf pattern. The shoulders are decorated with settings for gems, one of which contains a cabochon ruby; the other is empty. The impressive size of this ring, the use of subsidiary stones on the hoop and a comparison with the ring on the effigy of William of Wykeham, on his tomb in Winchester Cathedral, all confirm the suggestion that this is an episcopal ring.

151

Gold and emeralds. French. Late fourteenth century. Width 2.3 cm. Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 1094.

The four-sided hoop of this ring was originally enamelled on its outer faces. There is a cube on each shoulder, pierced on three sides with letters forming the word: AMOURS ('loves'). The technique of placing the inscription in single letters of open-work recalls the Thame ring (Pl. 152). Scrolls issuing from the cubes support the pyramidal open-work bezel, which projects upwards from the ring. The emeralds are replacements, but holes at the back of the bezel would have enabled the original stones to touch the wearer's finger. This ring shows



how enamel, open-work decoration and an open-work bezel can be combined.

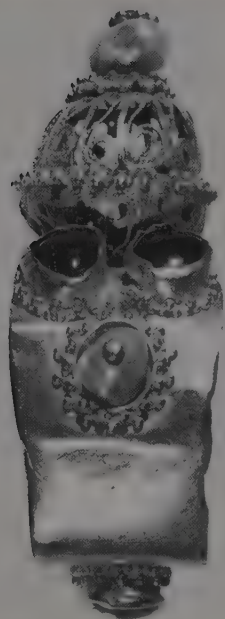
152

Gold, enamel and amethysts. French. Late fourteenth century. Width 2.6 cm. Found at Thame, Oxfordshire, England, in 1940. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1940-228.

On this superb ring, the outside of the hoop is set with square-cut amethysts. The box-shaped bezel has a double-armed cross of amethysts at the top. Under this there is a plaque engraved with foliage, and the space between it and the plaque at the back, engraved and enamelled with the Crucifixion, probably contained a relic of the True Cross. The inscription: MEMANTO (*sic*) MEI DOMINE ('Remember me, Lord') on the front and the sides of the bezel is formed of bastard lombardic letters in open-work. Although the coins with which the ring was found date to the mid fifteenth century, the ring is considerably older. Its fine craftsmanship as well as its size suggest that it was probably worn as an official ring by a high ecclesiastic.

152





153

Gold, rubies and pearls. Veneto-Greek. C. 1400. Width 2.2 cm. Found at Chalcis in Euboea in the first half of the nineteenth century. British Museum, London, AF 1860.

The rings found in the Chalcis Hoard, which was deposited in the fifteenth century before the end of the Venetian domination of the area in 1470, may be divided into those with Italian and those with Greek affinities. The main stones on this ring are set on the hoop. At the back of the hoop is a ruby, and on each shoulder there are two rubies and a pearl. The very elaborate bezel formed into a globe of filigree surmounted by a pearl on a revolving pin and the use of bands of pellets both on the bezel and on the shoulder settings is not paralleled among Venetian rings and therefore suggests a more eastern origin.

154

Alabaster effigy (detail). English. C. 1417. Life-size. All Saints Church, Ashwellthorpe, Norfolk.

This very fine alabaster monument commemorates Sir Edmund de Thorpe (d. 1417) and his wife. The rich dress ornaments of his wife, in particular her cloak-clasps in the form of birds, her elaborate hair-net and her collar show that she had many rings on.



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154 •



her fingers were only part of the lavish display of jewellery. On her left hand she wears a large ring with a stone on her first finger, pairs of rings on the lower and upper joints of the third finger and a single ring and a pair of rings on the upper joint of the little finger. On her right hand she wears rings on the third and fourth fingers. This effigy shows that rings were worn on both the upper and lower joints of fingers, as well as being worn in pairs.

155

Oil on panel: The Goldsmith and the Young Couple by Petrus Christus. Flemish. 1449. 98 x 85 cm. Oppenheim Collections, Lehmann Collections. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The painting shows a goldsmith weighing a ring set with a ruby that he is selling to the young couple standing behind him to the left; the young nobleman wears the badge of the dukes of Guelders. The importance of the goldsmith is attested to by the richness of his varied stock, which is depicted with great realism. It includes brooches, pearls, pieces of crystal, red coral, cups, a belt buckle and a small box of rings. In this box there are three tubes of parchment with six, four and three rings. One of the rings is evidently an armorial signet; there are three plain gold rings, and the rest are set with stones. This painting provides valuable evidence of the commercial sale of rings in the fifteenth century.

156

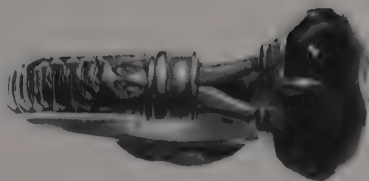
Silver. Italian. Fifteenth century. Width 2.3 cm. Castellani Collection, Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 1786.



This silver ring has a most remarkably shaped bezel divided from the hoop of triangular section by two knobs and projecting outwards in the form of a rowel spur. The twelve-pointed rowel revolves freely on a bar. A very similar ring is known from the Chalcis Hoard that was deposited before 1470, which confirms the Italian fifteenth-century attribution. The use of a spur for the ring's bezel may be simply decorative, but it may also have had a chivalric significance.

157

Gold and a sapphire. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.5 cm. Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 1869.

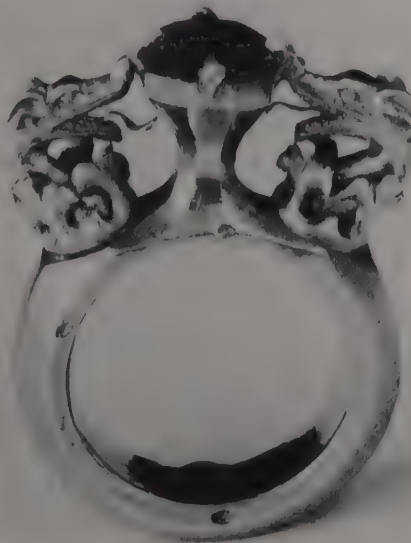


The shoulders of the hollow hoop of this gold ring are decorated with ribs; from each of the ribs two supports rise to the prominent bezel in which a sapphire is held by four claws. The outside of the hoop is decorated with rays at the shoulders and a black-letter inscription reserved against a hatched ground that was formerly enamelled. The legend reads: *ALS GOD WILS ACT BETER CM* ('As god wills, do better cm'). The language clearly indicates an English origin, but the shape of the elaborate bezel and the use of curved supports to relate it to the hoop recall the ring found at Hornsey (Pl. 136).

158

Gold and a sapphire. Western European. Fifteenth century. Height 3.4 cm. Sauvageot Collection. Musée du Louvre, Paris, OA 661.

This ring has a prominent bezel designed with great virtuosity. From the hoop of semi-circular section, there arise two dragon's heads, collared with



crowns of fleur-de-lis; each head touches the rim of the bezel with the tip of its nose. The use of elaborately modelled animal heads in the manner of heraldic supporters on either side of the bezel is otherwise unknown. The bezel itself is eight-sided, and the sapphire is held by four claws.

159

Gold and an onyx cameo. Italian. Fifteenth century. Width 2.5 cm. Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 1039.



This ring has an oval bezel with a pearled band around the sides. The bezel is set with three-layered onyx (dark, light, dark), cut in relief to form a dog lying down. On each shoulder there is a foliate ornament reserved against a niello ground, and round the outer side of the hoop the nielloed black-letter legend: *KUTE DORMIO, TUTE VIGILO VICTIS PARCO, NULLUM FUGIO*, which may be translated 'Alert I sleep; safely I watch; I spare the vanquished; I flee from none', possibly the motto of a soldier.

160

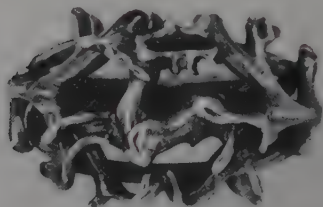
Gold, formerly enamelled. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.8 cm. Found in the Thames at Westminster, London, in 1841. Cotton Collection, Braybrooke Collection, Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 1047.



The hoop of this ring is shaped on the outside into a wreathed pattern of branches with circular knobs, indicating that branches have been cut off. Alternate branches are keyed for enamel. Enamelling the exterior of the ring in this way is unusual, but it does occur on circular wreathed brooches from the fifteenth century. The flat interior has an English inscription in black letter: WHAN YE LOKE ON THIS THYNK ON THEM YT GAVE YOU THYS, the sense of which has eluded exact interpretation, but which was clearly intended to inspire a sense of loyalty in the wearer.

161

Silver. German. Fifteenth century. Width 2 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1204. 1903.



Two rings of twisted silver form the basic structure upon which this open-work ring is constructed. Open-work silver was a technique popular among silversmiths in late medieval Germany, and this ring is a fine example of the application of the technique to jewellery. The hoop of the ring is formed of leafless branches that part at the front to reveal a stag in full flight.

162

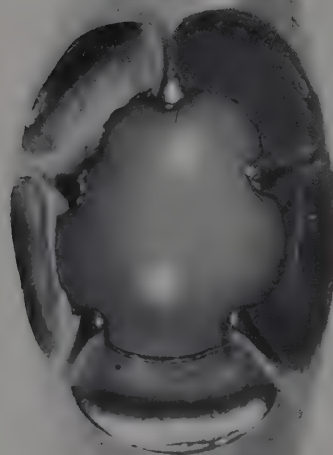
Gold and turquoise. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.8 cm. Found with other rings, jewellery and coins in a hoard at Fishpool near Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, in 1966. British Museum, London, 1967, 12-8, 2.

This hoard was buried, according to the evidence of the coins, in the early months of 1464 during the Wars of the Roses between rival claimants to the English throne. The four rings in the hoard included a gold ring without bezel, an iconographic ring, a signet-ring (Pl. 163) and this turquoise ring — the heaviest of the four. The cusped setting of the stone represents a development of the claw setting. Turquoise was much valued for its amuletic properties, since it was said to protect the wearer against poisoning, drowning or having an accident while riding.

163

Gold. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.5 cm. Found with other rings, jewellery and coins in a hoard at Fishpool near Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, in 1966. British Museum, London, 1967, 12-8, 4.

The other rings in the hoard are discussed under the previous ring (Pl. 162). The shoulders of the hoop of this ring are divided into three grooves, each of which has a flower with a sun above. Inside the



162

163

hoop the black-letter inscription: DE BON COER ('with a faithful heart') is engraved. The circular bezel of the ring is engraved with an enigmatic series of personal devices. In the middle is a hawk's lure, the wings bound with cords, above which is the letter 't' with fleur-de-lis on each side and flowers on each side of the lure. The device has not been identified, but it represents the type of personal badge or possibly rebus often used on signet-rings.

164

Gold. English. Midfifteenth century. Width 2.9 cm. Found at Towton, Yorkshire, near Tadcaster, in or before 1789. Durlacher Collection, Braybrooke Collection, Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 771.



The Battle of Towton Moor was fought on 29 March 1461 during the Wars of the Roses between the Yorkist and Lancastrian claimants to the English throne. Henry Percy, third earl of Northumberland, was killed in that battle. This fine heavy signet-ring, which is certainly of aristocratic quality, has therefore been ascribed to the Percy family. The bezel is engraved with a lion passant, which was certainly a Percy badge in the sixteenth century, but there is no definite evidence that the family used the motto: NOW YS THUS, engraved in black letter on a scroll about the lion.

165

Gold. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.6 cm. Said to have been discovered on the body of Richard Neville (1428–71), earl of Warwick ('the Kingmaker'), after the Battle of Barnet. George IV Collection, Sir John Evans Collection, F. Harman Oates Collection, Nelson Collection. Merseyside County Museums, 53 114. 292.

The oval bezel of this massive ring is engraved with



a bear chained to a ragged staff and with a scroll inscribed in black letter: SOULEMENT UNE ('only one'). The badge is that of the earls of Warwick, but the motto is not otherwise known. The ring is said to have been found on the body of Richard Neville, together with his seal, after the Battle of Barnet (14 April 1471), but there is no written record of this before the eighteenth century. The outside of the hoop is engraved with the black-letter inscription: BE GOODIS FAIRE FOOTE, which is an example of a popular medieval oath mentioning parts of the Deity such as the foot, heart, bones or legs of God. There is a silver duplicate of this ring (of uncertain date) in the British Museum.

166

Bronze. French. Fifteenth century. Width of hoop 2.8 cm. Friedeberg Collection. British Museum, London, 1847, 9–3, 1.



This large bronze ring has grooved shoulders leading to an octagonal bezel, which is engraved with a shield on which there is a greyhound's head. Below the shield is the black-letter inscription: GUILLE DE BERY ('William of Berry'). Bronze signet-rings are often difficult to attribute to particular countries, since their devices are usually indefinite, but this one is undoubtedly a French example.

167

Bronze. Western European. Fifteenth century. Width of hoop 2.8 cm. British Museum, London, ring cat. 518.



The octagonal bezel of this signet-ring is engraved with a merchant's mark within a shield (Fig. 10 a); the merchant's mark has not been identified. The hoop has been elaborately decorated after casting. The shoulders are engraved with a diaper pattern, having a stylized flower in the middle of each diaper. The whole ring has been subsequently gilded to give the impression of a gold ring. In the interior of the ring the names of the Three Kings — JASPER (*sic*), MELCER (*sic*), BALTAZAR (*sic*) — are engraved.

168

Bronze. French. Fifteenth century. Width 2.4 cm. Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 698.



This bronze signet-ring can be attributed with certainty to France, since it bears a French name engraved in black letter on the bezel: GUILLE MACON; this may either stand for William Mason or William the Mason. The device engraved on the octagonal bezel — a mason's hammer between two stars surmounted by a palm branch — suggests the latter interpretation. The tools of craftsmen were often depicted on their seal matrices or signet-rings.

169

Gold. German or Netherlandish. Fifteenth century. Width of hoop 2.3 cm. Fritzahn and Franks Collections. British Museum, London, AF 673.

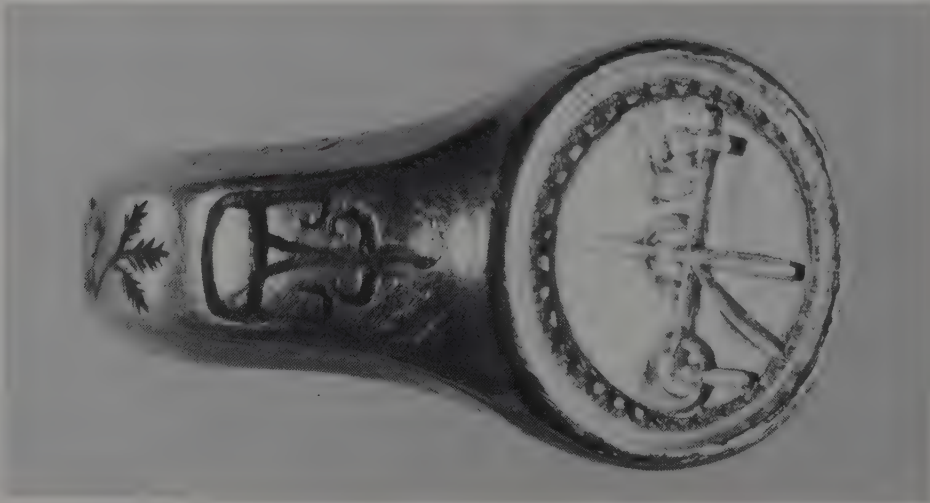


The wreathed hoop is engraved on the shoulders with the inscription: O MATER DEI MEMENTO MEI, HANS VA PARGHE ('O Mother of God remember me, Hans van Parghem'). The octagonal bezel is engraved with a merchant's mark within a cabled border; the mark is formed by a six-pointed star on which two of the points of the star are joined together (Fig. 10 c). This ring illustrates a religious appeal to the Virgin Mary combined with a German or Netherlandish merchant's signet-ring.

170

Gold. English. Mid-fifteenth century. Width 2.7 cm. Octavius Morgan Collection. British Museum, London, AF 657.

This fine gold ring is one of the very few that enable



a merchant's mark to be identified with an actual person. The broad hoop is engraved on the outside in black letter with the name: HENRY SMALE, the last letter ending in a leaf and a crown with an elaborate central fleur-de-lis on each shoulder. The circular bezel is engraved with a complex merchant's mark within a beaded border (Fig. 10 b). Although we do not know exactly when or where Henry Smale lived, the ring suggests a prosperous English merchant.

171

Silver. English. Fifteenth century. Width. 2.6 cm. Dame Joan Evans Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M 258. 1962.

This silver ring provides a good example of a merchant's signet-ring. Within a pearled border, the bezel has a pair of open shears with the letters



'grace' around them. The shears were the symbol of the tailor, and it is likely that the ring belonged to a merchant tailor named Grace. Symbols, like the merchant's mark, were a demonstration of status on signets. The hoop and shoulders are elaborately treated: the back of the hoop has five bands of beading, and the shoulders are divided into three grooves.

172

Bronze-gilt. English. Fifteenth century. Width of hoop 2.7 cm. Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 768.

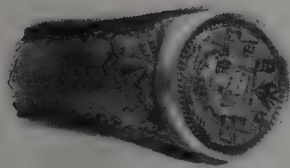


This ring has wreathed hoop, which is both pearled and ribbed. The oval bezel is engraved, within a cabled border, with the letter 'R' that has a crown above. Although it has been suggested that rings with the letter 'R' on the bezel were worn by retainers of Richard III of England, similar rings have been found with different initials, and so it is more likely that such rings were used by individuals whose Christian names began with that letter. The recent discovery of documents sealed with such signets, belonging to individuals with the Christian names Robert and Roger, confirms this suggestion.

173

Silver. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.9 cm. Bernal Collection, Franks Collection. British Museum, London, ring cat. 545.

This large silver signet-ring is engraved on the circular bezel with a ship and a tun (barrel), which is probably a pun on the name Shipton. The black-letter initials 'TS', also engraved on the bezel, confirm this interpretation. On the shoulders are figures of a bishop (probably St Thomas à Becket) and the Virgin and Child. Traces of niello remain on these figures and on the hoop. The combination of the elaborate device on the signet with the

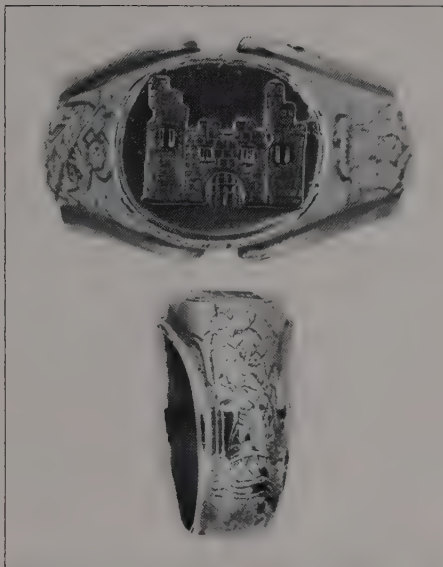


religious figures on the shoulders of the ring is very similar to the ring in Plate 174, and it is possible that they are from the same workshop.

174

Gold. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.6 cm. Found under London Bridge, C. 1720. Horace Walpole Collection, Waterton Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 695-1871.

This ring combines the function of a signet-ring with the decoration of a religious ring. On the



shoulders St Christopher and the Virgin and Child are engraved. The oval bezel is engraved with a castle gateway. This may have been a heraldic device but is more likely a symbol indicating that the ring belonged to a sheriff, since the castle gateway occurs on many late medieval sheriff's seals. Inside the ring, the inscription: EN BON AN ('I wish you a good year') is engraved in black letter, indicating that the ring was a New Year's gift.

175

Oil on panel: Portrait of a Young Man (*detail*) by Petrus Christus. Flemish. C. 1450-60. 35.6 x 26.4 cm. Salting Bequest, 1910. National Gallery, London, 2593.

This painting probably formed the left wing of a triptych. The young man in it holds an open book in front of him (shown) and on the lower joint of the first finger of his right hand, there is a silver signet-ring with a device engraved on the octagonal bezel. Signet-rings were often worn on the first finger, and this portrait — probably of a merchant who is wearing a fine purse — provides firm evidence of this fashion.



175

176

Gold. French. Fifteenth century. Width 2.2 cm. Dame Joan Evans Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M 200-1975.



This superbly engraved ring provides a fine example of a French signet-ring that belongs to the class of rings where the engraving of an animal is associated with an inscription enjoining the reader to secrecy. Secret or privy seals often combine an animal such as a squirrel or lion with an inscription indicating secrecy. Here the leash of the dog forms a beaded octagonal border for the signet within which the dog lies and above which is engraved the word: MUET ('dumb').

177

Gold. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.5 cm. Arthur Evans Collection. Dame Joan Evans Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M 202-1975.

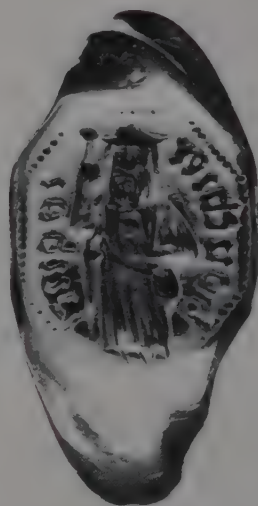
On the bezel of this signet-ring is a stag at rest with the inscription: EDMUND. It may represent a rebus



for Edmund Hart. The name together with the floral panels on the hoop, which include four- and six-petalled flowers, indicate an English origin. The panels retain traces of white enamel and have tau crosses in their centres. The tau cross was the emblem of St Anthony the Abbot and indicated either that the wearer was a member of the Confraternity of St Anthony or believed that the tau cross would protect him from the disease known as St Anthony's fire. This was the medieval name for ergot poisoning. Ergot is a fungus which develops on grain, particularly rye, and causes paralysis of the nervous system characterized by the cramps and violent muscular contractions often known as St Vitus's dance. The inside of this ring is inscribed in black letter: TOUT MA VIE ('all my life').

178

Gold. French. Fifteenth century. Width 2 cm. Waterton Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 688-1871.



The French origin of this signet-ring is indicated by the name: JACQUES BOUCHIER inscribed around the figure of St James the Great, who is engraved in the centre of the octagonal bezel. St James holds a staff and a book and was probably chosen since Jacques Bouchier had the same Christian name. The bezel has a beaded border, and the hoop is adorned with spiral gadrooning. The hoop and the representation of the saint make this an interesting and unusual combination of an iconographic and a signet-ring.

179

Silver-gilt. Eastern European. Fourteenth-fifteenth century. Width 2.8 cm. Fortnum Collection. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, F 370.

This large and impressive silver ring provides a fine example of an imitation signet-ring from eastern Europe. The central device of the circular bezel is a fleur-de-lis with two seeded stems. The inscription



is not engraved in reverse to give a correct reading on a seal impression, nor has it been satisfactorily read or interpreted. It probably reads: +NHEUNDN-NEUS, but it is possible that the engraver was copying an inscription that began to the left of the cross with 'S' (*sigillum*, 'seal'). The exterior of the hoop is decorated with four-petalled flowers in diamond shapes on the shoulders and a row of four-petalled flowers around the outside.

180

Gold. English. Fifteenth century. Width 1.9 cm. Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 902.



This is an example of the simplest type of iconographic ring: an oblong bezel with a single section that shows the Virgin and Child beneath a canopy. The outside of the wreathed hoop is engraved: MON CUER AVEZ, and the inside: CANCECYPARTIR; the two parts of the inscription mean 'you have my heart undivided'. This inscription occurs frequently on love rings and brooches; this ring illustrates that group of rings which, while devotional in subject, were also used as love rings.

181

Gold. English. Fifteenth century. Width 1.9 cm. Found at Fressingfield, Suffolk in 1891. British Museum, London, 1891, 11-24, 1.



This iconographic ring has a two-cell bezel divided by a central ridge. The bezel is engraved on one side with the figure of St Margaret holding a long cross and standing over a monster, and on the other with St Barbara holding her symbol, the tower. Behind the bezel is the black-letter inscription: MON COR AVES ('you have my heart'). The wreathed hoop is decorated with beading. The shoulders of the hoop are decorated with three grooves engraved with flowers, and both the background behind the saints and the flowers would have been filled with enamel.

182

Silver. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.5 cm. Found in Shapwick, Dorset, England, in 1854. Braybrooke and Franks Collections. British Museum, London, AF 933.



This silver iconographic ring has a bezel divided into three vertical sections and not three longitudinal sections like Plate 183. The cruder carving that often occurs on silver rings as opposed to gold ones may be seen in the figures of St Barbara, St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist on the three sections. The wreathed hoop is decorated with flowers that were probably formerly enamelled.

183

Gold. English. Early fifteenth century. Width 2.4 cm. Found at Norwich, England, before 1871. Whincopp Collection. British Museum, London, 1871, 3-3, 2.



The bezel of this iconographic ring has three concave panels with ridges between. The threefold design of the bezel is continued by the three grooves on the shoulders, which are engraved with flowers. Standing figures of the Virgin and Child, St Christopher and a female saint (probably St Barbara) are engraved on the bezel. The wreathed hoop is decorated with beading. Inside the ring is the black-letter inscription: HONNOUR ET IOYE ('honour and joy'), an inscription that was also found on the ring in the tomb of Archbishop Bowet of York, who died in 1423.

184

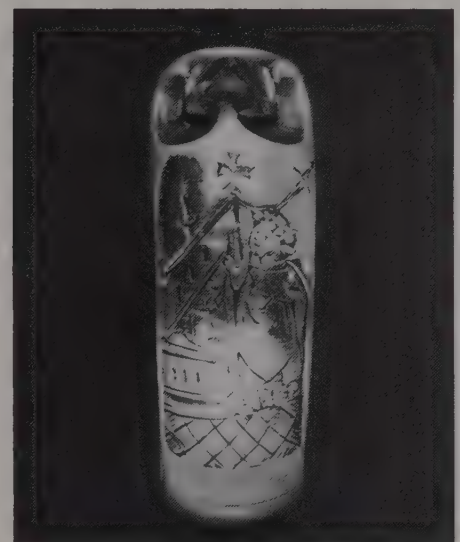
Gold. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.3 cm. Waterton Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 690-1871.



This gold decade ring combines figures of saints on the bezel with an amorous inscription: A MA VYE ('for my life'), on the interior. The two-celled bezel is engraved on one side with St Barbara and on the other with St Christopher. To both, the power of preserving people from sudden death was attributed. Decade rings were used in the same manner as a rosary; they usually had ten knobs, hence the name decade. An ave was repeated at each of the smaller knobs, and a paternoster at the bezel.

185

Gold and a diamond. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.1 cm. Found at Frittelstoke Priory, near Great Torrington, Devon, before 1847. Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 899.



This ring combines an ornamental setting for the diamond with shoulders engraved in the fashion of iconographic rings. The pyramidal diamond is simply cut and set into a scalloped trefoil setting. A standing crowned Virgin with Child is engraved on one shoulder; on the other St Thomas à Becket stands before an altar; a sword pierces his head from above. In the centre of the back of the hoop a heart has been engraved.

186

Gold and a crystal. German. Fifteenth century. Width 2.8 cm. British Museum, London, ring cat. 713.



This dramatic example of a late medieval religious ring has a high and very large octagonal bezel set with a crystal over a piece of red cloth; the crystal is held in place by four claws. The German origin of this ring is attested to by the black-letter inscription in slight relief on the outside of the hoop: *HELP GOTT UNDE MARIA GAUD* ('help God and praise Mary').

187

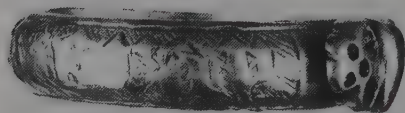
Gold. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2 cm. Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 644.



On this gold ring, the central section of the bezel is hinged on a pivot to the hoop, so it provides two different impressions. The rectangular bezel is engraved on one side with a key and a bell within a pearled border, and on the other with the picture of the face of Christ said to have been impressed on the handkerchief of St Veronica. The wide flat hoop is engraved with sprigs of flowers on the shoulders. Rings with elaborate bezels that contain a hinge or open like a triptych are rare and the result of the influence of more elaborate jewellery on the art of ring-making at the end of the Middle Ages.

188

Silver-gilt. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.6 cm. Water-ton Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 900-1871.



This gilt ring with a hoop of semi-circular section commemorates John Godefray, whose name: *IOHES GODEFRAY*, is in black letter in reserve against a hatched background of diagonal lines on the exterior of the hoop. There is an applied bezel consisting of a heart set transversely between two stylized skulls. Skulls were later to become a common feature of mourning-rings (Pls. 223-6); this ring is one of the earliest examples of the type.

189

Gold. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.7 cm. Found at Coventry in Warwickshire, in 1802. British Museum, London, AF 897.



This massive gold ring is engraved on the outside with Christ rising from the tomb; the Cross and Instruments of the Passion are behind Him. The outside also has the Five Wounds of Christ engraved as pointed ovals that can be identified as the Wells of pity, mercy, comfort, grace and everlasting life. There is a comment engraved inside in Latin to the effect that the Five Wounds, the Cross and Passion of Christ are the wearer's medicine; the names of the Three Kings are also engraved inside. This type of ring was first referred to in the will of Sir Edmund Shaa (d. 1487), a London goldsmith, who willed that his executors make sixteen rings: 'of fyne gold to be graven with the wells of pity, mercy and everlasting life.'

190

Silver-gilt and a green crystal. Western European. Late fourteenth or fifteenth century. Width 3.2 cm. New College, Oxford.

This ring is traditionally known as the 'pontifical' of William of Wykeham, bishop of Winchester, the founder of New College, who died in 1404. Although there is no record of its entering the college's possession, it is clearly an important late medieval ring. The bezel is triangular, and the stone is set in a scalloped collet with six claws. The shoulders of the hoop are decorated with cast figures that are much worn and therefore difficult to interpret: a naked winged figure with outstretched arms arising from a cauldron, beneath which is a person dancing or tumbling, and underneath this a saltire cross. The figure in the cauldron probably represents St Vitus, an early Christian martyr who was tortured by being burnt in a cauldron. He was particularly venerated in the

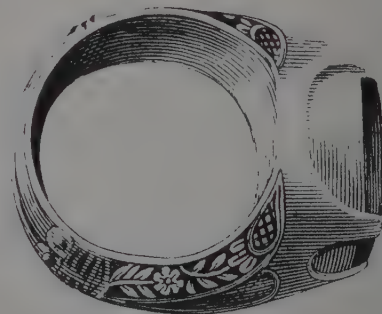


Middle Ages since he protected those who fasted on his feast day from epilepsy and St Vitus's dance (see Pl. 177). It is possible that the figure beneath the cauldron represents a sufferer from one of the two diseases.

191

Engraving of a gold ring with a sapphire. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.6 cm. Found in the tomb of John Stanbery, bishop of Hereford (d. 1474). Hereford Cathedral.

en bon an

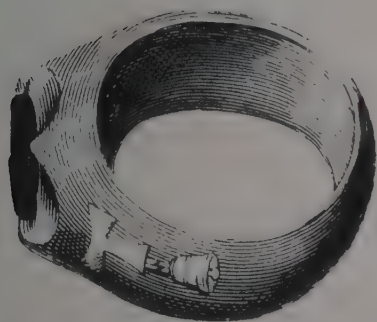


The sapphire in this ring is set in a combination of a scalloped and a claw-set bezel. The shoulders of the ring are engraved with flowers in two strips that turn outwards towards the bezel and are separated from the plain back of the ring by incised lines. Inside there is the black-letter inscription: *EN BON AN* ('I wish you a good year'), a New Year's greeting indicating that the ring was given as a New Year's gift. Since Stanbery was consecrated in June, this ring cannot have been worn at his consecration. The division of the foliage into two strips containing individual stalks and flowers may be compared with the all-over treatment of the ring of Archbishop Wytlessey (Pl. 148).

192

Engraving of an enamelled gold ring with a ruby. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.5 cm. Found in the tomb of Richard Mayo, bishop of Hereford (d. 1516), shortly before 1844. Hereford Cathedral.

AVG MARIA



The ring illustrated contains a ruby in a scalloped setting. The inside is decorated with the black-letter inscription: AVE MARIA ('Hail Mary'). On the

shoulders are engraved the letter 'T' and a small bell. The 'T' was filled with green enamel. This 'T' or tau cross and the bell are the symbols of St Anthony the Abbot who was regarded as both sending and protecting against divine fire or St Anthony's fire, which was the medieval name for ergot poisoning, a type of fungus poisoning from rye flour that caused nerve paralysis and cramps (Pl. 177). Symbols such as the tau cross, and less commonly the bell, often occurred on rings in order to protect against such diseases that were endemic in the Middle Ages.

193

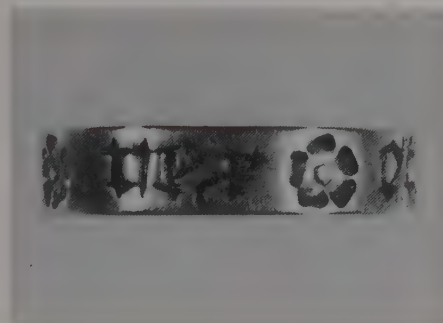
Bronze-gilt and a crystal. Italian. 1458-64. Width 4 cm. Windus Collection, Octavius Morgan Collection. British Museum, London, 1888, 12-1, 9.

The bezel of this ring is set with a flat crystal in a raised setting; on the sides of the stone are the Evangelists' symbols. The arms of the Piccolomini family surmounted by crossed keys are on one shoulder, on the other the papal tiara and the legend: PAPA PIO ('Pope Pius'). The cast detail on the outside is crude. At least nine other rings of this type bear the name of Pope Pius II Piccolomini (1458-64). The size and prominent display of insignia and name suggest that this heavy ring may have been used for wearing on the gloved thumb or finger of a courier or an ambassador.



194

Gold. English. Fifteenth century. Width 1.6 cm. British Museum, London, 1856, 6-27, 152.



This is the type of ring that was presented by a serjeant-at-law, a senior legal official, to various important people and friends on the occasion of his being appointed to office. Such rings are recognizable from the legal motto engraved on the outside. A new motto was chosen by each new serjeant or group of serjeants. This ring with a narrow flat hoop is inscribed in black letter: VIVAT REX ET LEX ('long live the King and the law'); cinquefoil flowers divide the words. The black-letter style of the inscription suggests that the ring dates from the end of the fifteenth century, and therefore, it is one of the earliest of such rings to survive.

195

Silver. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.4 cm. Londesborough Collection, Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 1113.



This is an example of a marriage or betrothal ring. The nature of the ring is exemplified by the clasped hands that form the bezel; here they are depicted in a naturalistic fashion with buttoned sleeves. At the back of the hoop is a heart in relief with two four-petalled flowers issuing from it. On the shoulders of the ring is the legend: GOD HELP, which indicates a desire for the marriage to be blessed and also confirms the English origin of the ring.



196

Gold. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2 cm. Found at Godstow Nunnery, near Oxford, England. Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 1075.

The outside of this hoop is richly engraved with flowers of six and eight petals amidst long pointed leaves into which three diamond-shaped panels are set. The panels contain engravings of the Trinity, the Virgin and Child and a male saint. The exterior

of this ring was formerly enamelled. The religious iconography of the outside contrasts with the amatory black-letter inscription in English engraved inside (Fig. 8): MOST IN MYND AND YN MYN HERT / LOTHEST FROM YOU FERTO DEPART. It was once believed that this ring belonged to Rosamund, the mistress of Henry II (1154–89), but the style of both the decoration and the inscription indicate that it was produced about three hundred years later.

197

Gold and a diamond. Italian. Fifteenth century. Width 1.9 cm. Castellani Collection. British Museum, London, AF 1090.



The hoop of this ring expands towards the shoulders, where it divides into two grooves. In these grooves is a black-letter inscription enamelled in black: LORENZO, A LENA LENA ('from Lawrence to Lena Lena'). It provides an interesting example of the use of a black-letter inscription in Italy. A narrow neck separates the hoop from the bezel of the ring, which is divided into a scooped quatrefoil that holds a cut diamond. The diamond is cut so that a pointed ridge connects the transverse claws of the setting. This ring provides a particularly fine combination of stone, setting and decorated hoop.

198

Gold and a sapphire. French. Fifteenth century. Width 1.7 cm. Pichon Collection, Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 1077.

The inside of this broad hoop is engraved with a lady, amidst flowers and foliage, holding a squirrel (a symbol of inconstancy) on a leash, while the outside is covered with a black-letter inscription. This reads: UNE FAME NOMINATIVE A FAIT DE MOY SON DATIFF PAR LA PAROLE GENITIVE EN DEPIT DE LACCUSSATIF ('a nominative report is given to me, the dative, by the genitive word, in spite of the accusative'). The inside is engraved: + M



(ON) AMOUR EST INFINITI (V)E GE VEU ESTRE SON RELATIFF ('my love is an infinitive which wants to be the relative'). The verse with its play on grammar recalls fifteenth-century French poetry, particularly that of Charles, Duke of Orléans (1391–1465).

199

Gold. English. Fifteenth century. Width 2.3 cm. Londesborough Collection. British Museum, London, AF 1017.



The outside of this ring of rectangular section is inscribed in black letter: JASPER (sic) MELCHIOR. BALTASAR (sic) INGODISAR. The names of the Three Kings were thought to be especially efficacious against epilepsy and fever; their popularity owed much to that of the Shrine of the Three Kings at Cologne. The names are found engraved on both rings and brooches. The second part of the inscription clearly indicates an English origin and may be the beginning of a phrase such as 'in god is our salvation'.

200

Gold and a sapphire. Western European, probably French. Fifteenth century. Width 2.2 cm. Dame Joan Evans Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. M 207–1975.

This decorative ring is a fine example of the elaborate development of the bezel in the fifteenth century. This bezel consists of a rectangular table



into which an oval sapphire, held by a collar and four claws, is set so that it protrudes above the table. The setting of the stone is held in place at the back of the bezel by a rivet, a technique that also occurred on Burgundian jewellery in the fifteenth century. Both shoulders of the ring are engraved with a black-letter 'Y' standing in reserve against a cross-hatched background; these may be the initials of the donor or of the recipient.

201

Oil on panel: The Virgin and Child with Saints (detail)
by Luca Signorelli. Italian. 1515. 2.65 × 1.93 m. National
Gallery, London, 1847.

St Nicolas of Bari (shown), who stands to the right beneath the Virgin, is depicted here as a richly dressed bishop wearing an elaborate mitre and cope with morse and crosier. He has no gloves on his hands but is shown with five gold rings, all set with stones. On his left hand he wears rings on the lower joints of the thumb and on the second and the fourth fingers, and on the right hand on the lower joints of the second and the fourth fingers. Although the second finger was usually avoided, here St Nicolas is wearing rings on this finger on both hands.





202

202
Oil on panel: Portrait of Richard III (detail) by an anonymous artist. English. Before 1542. 56.5 × 34.5 cm. Royal Collection, Windsor Castle. By gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen.

This is probably the earliest surviving portrait of Richard III (1452–85) and is conceivably contemporary. It was certainly painted before 1542. Richard is shown half length facing right, and on his right hand (pictured) he wears three rings. The thumb-ring is set with a stone that has been interpreted as a cameo; the ring on the lower joint of his third finger is also set with a stone. He is slipping a third ring, set again with a stone, onto the top joint of his little finger. No rings are painted on his left hand. Richard's hat badge was precisely depicted in this portrait, which suggests that the rings were also accurately illustrated. He is not wearing a signet-ring.



203

Silver-gilt and a rock crystal. Western European. Fifteenth century. Width 3.2 cm. Dame Joan Evans Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M 175–1962.

This ring is massive; its size indicates that it was probably worn over a glove. It may have been a messenger's ring like the papal rings (Pl. 193). The oval open-work bezel is set with an oval rock crystal. The bezel is pierced with a quatrefoil opening on each side and is set with coloured glass in the side collets. There are two coats of arms, which have not been identified yet, engraved on the bezel between the collets. The hoop of rectangular section is inscribed in a form of black letter on the outer surface against an incised background: S: ANDREAS ('St Andrew').

Rings from 1500 to 1900

by Charlotte Gere



Rings from 1500 to 1900

In the post-medieval period there begins to be a very complete record of the appearance of all kinds of jewellery, from which it is possible to construct a picture of how and why and, to a certain extent, by whom rings were worn.

In the most minute detail, Renaissance portraits show the great array of jewellery that it was customary for a noble or princely sitter to wear; no exercise of the imagination is needed to see how the jewels were made or of which materials — gems, enamels, techniques of goldsmithing were all treated with exact realism, and thus they can be matched with considerable accuracy to surviving jewels. It is apparent from these portraits that rings of every kind were owned and worn in great profusion by both men and women (Pl. 214). It was not unusual to find eight or nine rings being worn at one time — on the upper joints of the fingers as well as on the lower ones and even on the thumbs, though it is possible that more rings were worn while a portrait was being painted than was normal in everyday life.

The rings in these portraits serve as a useful aid to dating and determining the origins of the rings that have come down to us from the sixteenth century, when no record of their former owners has survived. In George Gower's portrait of Elizabeth Sydenham, Lady Drake, painted in about 1585, seven rings are shown with such perfect realism that it is possible to see how greatly the cutting and shaping of stones had advanced since the beginning of the sixteenth century. On her right hand Lady

Drake wears a ring set with a heart-shaped ruby, surrounded by diamonds that have been meticulously calibr  -cut to radiate from the central stone. The shape and ornamentation of the high bezels of the rings worn on her thumb could easily be copied from this painting.

While Lady Drake's portrait is a good example of this kind of record, it is by no means rare to find such excellently detailed representations of rings from all western European countries until almost the middle of the seventeenth century. Spanish portraits are particularly useful in this respect (Pl. 218), as are sixteenth-century German paintings (Pl. 209). Lucas Cranach depicted the rings and slashed gloves of his sitters in meticulous detail, so beautifully rendered that the gleam of the metal can be seen shining through the slits in the gloves. After about 1630, the evidence from portraits becomes disappointingly scanty, and the detailed depiction of jewellery in portraits only reappears in the Neo-classical period at the end of the eighteenth century (Pl. 204).

The evidence from portraits was confirmed by contemporary comment: the Venetian ambassador to the court of Henry VIII wrote of the king's fingers being one mass of jewelled rings. The inventory of the king's jewels, drawn up in 1530, listed no less than 234 finger-rings. Perhaps some of these eventually became the property of Henry VIII's daughter, Mary I, who was depicted in all her portraits wearing several rings. Henry VIII's second daughter, Elizabeth I, was described in 1598 by a visitor to the court, Paul Hentzner, as offering him her hand to kiss 'sparkling with rings and jewels'.

As can be seen from many sixteenth-century portraits, when the fingers of a hand became too laden with rings, it was customary to sew more rings onto the sleeve, the hat or even the ruff, or to wear them suspended from a gold chain or on a silk cord round the neck.

When rings were not being worn they were sometimes stored on a rod or a roll of parchment, as can be seen in the picture of a banker and his wife by Quentin Matsys in the Mus  e du Louvre or in Gerard David's portrait of a goldsmith in Vienna (see also Pl. 155). Henry VIII's inventory included 'a roll with thirty-nine Paris rings, with small stones'. Rings could also be kept in

204

Oil on canvas: Portrait of Madame de Senonnes by Jean-Dominique Ingres. French. C. 1814–15. 106 × 84 cm. Mus  e des Beaux-Arts, Nantes.

This portrait shows the revival of interest in rings in the Neo-classical period. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, few rings seem to have been worn; certainly they are rare in the portraits of that period. The delicate rings in this portrait are very unlike the sculptural enamelled rings of the sixteenth century, but the fashion for wearing a number of rings on each finger recalls the Tudor portraits and the German portraits of the early seventeenth century. It is known that Ingres (1780–1867) originally intended to paint the Vicomtesse de Senonnes reclining on a chaise-longue, thus making a close companion to his *Grande Odalisque* of the same date. Even in the altered pose, the suggestion of the same oriental opulent luxury is retained by the inclusion of a great array of jewels and rings and by the soft rich velvet of the dress.

neatly compartmented boxes like the one represented in the painting of a jeweller with his wares by Paris Bordone in the Pinakothek in Munich.

Inventories, Record Drawings and Designs

Other sources exist to supplement the information gleaned from portraits and paintings: the often remarkably detailed royal and princely inventories of the great collections of jewels that were owned by the reigning houses of Europe. It was during the sixteenth century that the concept of 'jewels of the crown' came into being, and certain fine pieces were declared to be inalienable heirlooms, associated with a dynasty rather than a family. Dispositions of this kind were made by Francis I of France in 1530 and by Albrecht V, Duke of Bavaria, in 1565. The inventories reveal the vast extent of these collections of jewels, which were regarded as an essential contribution to the prestige of a prince, in addition to being useful in a practical way, since they could be — and were — used as security for loans in times of financial crisis. The importance of jewellery in this connection is indicated by the dealings of the great banking house of Fugger at Augsburg. The Fugger not only lent money on the security of royal jewels, but they also dealt directly in both unset gemstones and finished jewels. At one time, Jacob Fugger owned the famous pendant of Charles the Bold, known as the 'Three Brothers'; and in 1543 his son sold it to Henry VIII; 'the Brethren', as it was sometimes called, is traceable in English royal inventories for nearly a century.

Few rings have characteristics as recognizable as that celebrated piece, but royal inventories do indicate the number of rings that were owned and the preferences in gemstones: Henry VIII, for example, had a taste for rings set with large cabochon-cut rubies.

Prized examples from these princely coffers were sent as gifts in order to extort favours from the members of powerful families or to clinch the negotiations in a royal marriage. The ritual of giving jewellery to mark every important occasion in the life of a prince ensured that the royal jewellery collections grew constantly. When he was hoping to open negotiations for a marriage between them, Philip II of Spain sent Queen Elizabeth I two precious rings that had belonged to her predecessor; needless to say, these gifts did not cloud the queen's judgment. Particularly revealing of the sixteenth-century mind are the lists of New Year's gifts received by the same queen. Many of the jewels have meanings that only the donor and the recipient could understand, but rings held a place of especial importance, for they were regarded as the most personal of jewelled ornaments.

Inventory descriptions vary greatly in their usefulness for the purpose of identifying individual jewels, but the shape of the

fashioned stones is often indicated, as well as the use of antique engraved gems as ringstones when it occurred. An inventory of some of the contents of the Secret Jewel House in the Tower of London, dating from 1587, lists the following: 'a ringe of golde wth a man's hedd of agate' and 'a ringe with historye of an agatt with a litle emerod and a litle rubie on each side of it'. (It should be mentioned that the French word *bague* ['ring'] was also used in the sixteenth century to describe a type of pendant jewel. The description was then sometimes, but not always, amplified to *bague à pendre*.)

Happily, there exist a few examples of pictorial inventories, illustrated with miniature paintings executed with meticulous exactitude, which supplement the descriptions of the written lists. The most celebrated of these pictorial records is the jewellery book dating from between 1552 and 1555, containing miniatures by Hans Mielich, court painter to Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria, and depicting the jewels of Albrecht's wife, Duchess Anna. That jewellery book has been widely used to date related examples of surviving jewellery. Duke Albrecht's wedding-ring, which is preserved in the Schatzkammer in Munich, has a bezel formed of a rosette of diamonds, a method of setting stones widely used to gain a maximum refraction of light in gems in the period before the development of multiple faceting (in use from the end of the sixteenth century). This form of rosette was illustrated by Mielich in the jewellery book, where it forms the central element in an elaborate gem-set pendant.

It has been suggested that some of the drawings by Hans Holbein the Younger, dating from about 1536 to 1543 (in the British Museum and at Basle), were also record drawings from the 'paper booke conteyninge diverse paternes for Jewelles' that is featured in the inventory of Henry VIII's jewels made in 1550, after his death. The same suggestion has been made about the album of jewellery drawings by Arnold Lulls, dating from about 1610, which shows jewellery associated with James I and his queen, Anne of Denmark. Both these groups of drawings contain drawings of rings, the one in the Lulls book being an engraved crystal signet backed with coloured foil; other rings of this type are the signet of Mary Queen of Scots in the British Museum (Pl. 210) and the gold and rock crystal sun-dial ring in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Pl. 205).

A more summary pictorial record, with only rough sketches of the jewels, appears in the account books of Sir Francis Child, who became jeweller to William III of England. It dates from 1674 and shows the increasing use of clusters of stones and of facet-cutting for ring bezels. The stones have become the principal ornament of the ring, which now has a plain hoop and shoulders without the elaborate sculptural ornament of the previous century. In Sir Francis' accounts the value of each jewel was given, as in the earlier inventories; the sums of money are surprisingly large, given the buying power of the pound in terms of food and shelter. Another list of jewellery, prepared by George Heriot, goldsmith to Anne of Denmark, appears in an account book

‘containing a description of ‘one great ring, in forme of a frog, all set with diamonds, price two hundredth poundis’, as well as ‘a ring with a single diamond, set in a heart betwixt two hands’ and ‘a ring with a heart and a serpent, all set about with diamonds’.

There is another type of illustrated record of jewellery styles: the *Llibres de Passanties*, a book of designs submitted by the Barcelona apprentices who were being examined for their mastership. The earliest dated example in this book is 1516; the record stretches from about 1500 to the end of the eighteenth century. Although the majority of the designs are for important pendant jewels, there a number of designs for rings, showing a cross-section of contemporary European taste rather than anything startlingly original.

Apprentices’ designs are rarely stylistically innovative, since they reflect the prevailing tastes of a period. Similarly, inventory drawings record the jewellery of the immediate past or even of a more distant date if heirlooms were depicted, and the use of these drawings in dating surviving examples of similar jewels is restricted by these limitations. It is rare to find the careful annotation that accompanies the detailed drawings of jewellery and regalia in the famous Talman albums (now in the British Museum). Included in that collection of record drawings of celebrated jewels from the treasuries of northern Italy is the ring from the Monza treasury (Pl. 237), now lost like so many of the pieces depicted. The wanton dispersal of such historic treasures, sold to raise money to pay the huge indemnity demanded by Napoleon I from the defeated Italian states in 1797, has made these drawings of great documentary value.

A further source of pictorial evidence is the depiction of jewels in the borders of illuminated manuscripts. The illuminations are important, for they were sometimes the work of artists who had been trained as goldsmiths, not an uncommon part of the education of artists in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Some of the finest Renaissance examples of jewels in the marginal decoration of these manuscripts are to be found in the choir books of the cathedral in Florence, in the Barberini Missals, in the Bible of Mathias Corvinus, King of Hungary, who as an accomplished miniaturist (now in the Vatican Library), in the Glockendon Missal of Nuremberg and in the Grimani Breviary in Venice. Although the illuminations cannot be categorized either as records of existing jewels or as jewellery designs, the finely detailed representations provide valuable information about the types of setting and the ornamentation on goldsmiths’ work.

Pattern-books

In addition to the record drawings discussed above, a number of designs for jewellery survived from the Renaissance, some from

the greatest artists of the time, for instance Martin Schongauer, Albrecht Dürer, Hans Holbein the Younger, Giulio Romano (who designed jewels for the Gonzaga court at Mantua) and his follower, Lelio Orsi, Buontalenti (the architect who worked for the Medicis in Florence), and another Florentine, Francesco Salviati, Etienne Delaune (a Frenchman who worked for Henry II), as well as a number of still anonymous designers from Italy, Germany, France and the Netherlands.

The most important development in jewellery designing from this period was the use of the newly discovered process of engraving to produce pattern-books for jewellers and goldsmiths. The pattern-books were widely circulated and were responsible for the creation of a coherent Renaissance style, which transcended the hitherto well-marked national characteristics; from this period these appeared only in local and traditional or peasant jewellery — a type of ornament that remained largely unaltered until well into the nineteenth century. A number of types of ring fall into this category, notably *fede* rings (Pl. 244).

The earliest publications of designs for ornamental metalwork dated from the last quarter of the fifteenth century, but these were mainly for church plate. Patterns specifically intended for jewellery first started being published in the 1520s with designs for jewellery, including rings, by Peter Flötner of Nuremberg. By 1548 Thomas Geminus, a Fleming working in England, was printing a set of pirated plates of Moresque and so-called ‘Turkish’ ornament in London for the use of gold-



Fig. 11 Anonymous designs for gem-set rings with enamelled hoops, sixteenth century. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, E. 3907—1910.

smiths and jewellers; the plates seem to have originated in Germany. The most important and extensive jewellery designs published in this period came from the workshop of Virgil Solis (1514–62) of Nuremberg. They reflect the influence of the great Nuremberg goldsmith-designers, Wenzel Jamnitzer and Peter Flötner. A number of ring designs in Solis's collection have the ornamented shoulders and hoops characteristic of the 1540s; Etienne Delaune drew and engraved designs for jewellery, many of which are datable to the period before he left France to escape the religious persecution to which, as a Protestant, he would have been subjected after the massacre of St Bartholomew in 1572. Delaune's own drawn designs include a group of six rings that recall the work of his contemporary, another Frenchman, Pierre Woeriot (b. 1532) of Lyons, who published his *Livre d'Aneaux (sic)* in 1561 (Pl. 212). At about the same date René Boyvin's *Livre de Bijouterie* (Fig. 12) was published, but the style is ponderously mannerist, looking back to the fashions popular at Fontainebleau in the 1530s. Other important pattern-books by Hans Collaert and Erasmus Hornick appeared during the sixteenth century, but they concentrated so exclusively on sculptural pendant jewels, which for most people are characteristic of the finest achievements of the Renaissance jeweller, that it is only appropriate to mention them here very briefly.

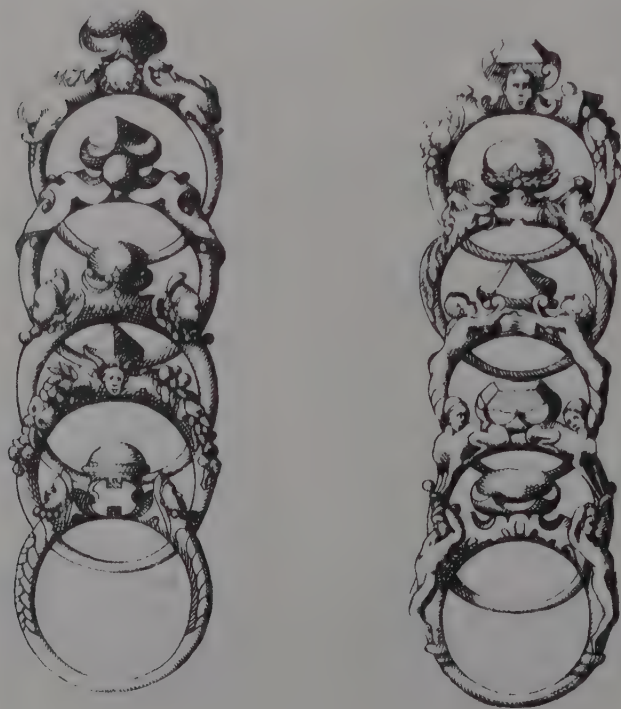


Fig. 12 French designs for sculptural gem-set rings by René Boyvin, sixteenth century. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, E. 397/398–1926.

At the very end of the sixteenth century, Daniel Mignot, a French goldsmith-designer working in Augsburg, produced a series of plates showing designs for black and white enamel decoration on pendant backs and settings; the series also included patterns for the shoulders and hoops of rings. This type of enamelling was evidently still in vogue in 1622, when it was used again by the Roman goldsmith-designer G.B. Constantini. The re-use of earlier types of ornament was very common in pattern-books, some of the designs recurring virtually unaltered over a period of a hundred years, which makes these prints of somewhat limited use for dating surviving jewels.

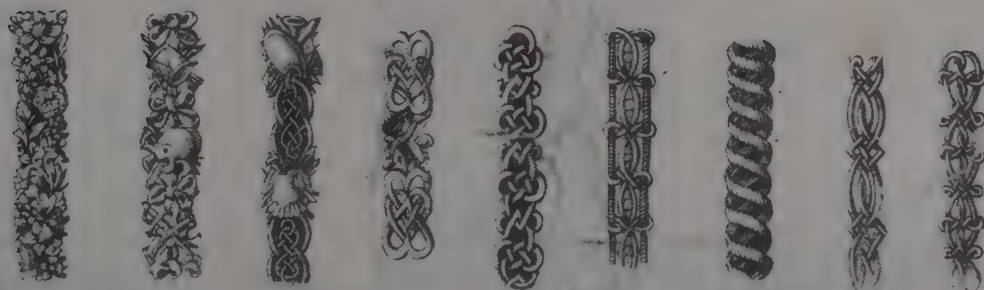
By the mid seventeenth century, enamelled grotesques had been superseded by delicately refined and naturalistic enamelled flowers on a white ground like those in the engraved designs of Gilles Légaré (Fig. 13), which date from 1663. Examples of coloured enamels used on a white ground to ornament the shoulders and hoops of rings are known from the last years of the sixteenth century (Pl. 216). By about 1610 or 1620, the fashion had spread to the modest jewellery of the type found in the Cheapside Hoard (a rare survival of fragile merchant-class pieces), many of which are delicately enamelled in opaque colours within cloisons of gold (Pl. 217).

The use of naturalistic floral ornamentation was stimulated by botanical research in the early seventeenth century; many of the rarest blooms were studied in the newly built hothouses of the Jardin des Plantes in Paris (Fig. 14). This style was to find its most popular expression in the beautiful designs for jewels in the form of accurately observed bouquets of flowers by Pierre Pouget, T. Bertren and the Parisian jeweller, Maria (Pl. 235), which date from the mid eighteenth century.

By the mid nineteenth century, illustrated magazines dealing with fashions or the decorative arts had proliferated and superseded pattern-books as useful sources of ideas for jewellers. Pattern-books that were produced during the nineteenth century are much more strictly practical in appearance; no attempt was made, as in the seventeenth-century examples, to provide an elegant pictorial image as well as a usable design. The change in approach is well illustrated by a change in the technique of drawing the images; they were executed in simple line, great attention being paid to the setting and cutting of the gemstones. The pattern-book issued by Etienne Julienne (1808–75) around 1864 gives a good idea of this style of jewellery design (Pl. 291). Inspired by the jeweller J.P. Robin *père* to create designs for goldsmiths, silversmiths, jewellers (and even furniture designers and fan-makers), Julienne eventually set up a studio

Fig. 13 Designs for rings by Gilles Légaré, dated 1663. British Museum, London, ornament prints, vol. 6.

Fig. 14 Designs for rings by Jean Bourguet, dated 1723. British Museum, London, 1871–2–9–429.



Gillet l'Égaré avec privilège du

Gillet l'Égaré



La bande de tête de bague de dessus est la même que celle de dessous; la première comme elle doit être taillée en taille basse, et l'autre comme elle doit être emallée et tirée au noir.

1/25

and course of instruction in ornamental design in a small print shop near the Théâtre de la Porte St-Martin in Paris in 1856. His course was attended by a large number of the best-known Parisian jewellers of the second half of the nineteenth century, and the influence of Julienne's style is very apparent in the surviving jewellery of the 1860s and 1870s.

Not only did illustrated magazines supersede pattern-books as a source of ideas for jewellery designs, but they also constituted a very comprehensive record of the jewellery styles of the period, which can be supplemented by the portrait photographs that began to appear in fashion magazines during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Cutting and Faceting of Gemstones

Two important aspects of ring designs, clearly demonstrated in the series of pattern-books and record drawings, are the development of the facet-cutting of precious stones and the increasing dominance of the lapidary's over the goldsmith's work.

The sophistication of gem-cutting throughout the whole of the Renaissance and the modern period was to culminate in the fashion for the 'solitaire' ring (Pl. 405) — a plain gold hoop with the bezel in the form of a claw-set pure white diamond, brilliant-cut using the method perfected by the Swedish lapidary Tolkowsky in the early years of the twentieth century. The variation of the brilliant-cut devised by Tolkowsky has more sharply angled facets beneath the girdle, effecting a considerable saving in the use of the diamond and reducing the height, thus making a single large stone suitable for setting in a ring. This is the ultimate celebration of the skills of the lapidary. The fashion originated in America, and by the 1920s was widely imitated in Europe.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, gems cut in simple pointed facets were beginning to take the place of the polished cabochons that had usually formed the gem-set bezel of earlier rings. The most common shape for a diamond was the pyramid, which followed the octahedral formation of the diamond in its natural state. Pointed diamonds, also known as writing diamonds from the fact that they were used on occasion for writing on glass, can be found in sixteenth-century designs, for instance those of Etienne Delaune as well as on one of the rings drawn on vellum, possibly by Hans Reimer, the goldsmith working for the Bavarian court at Munich in the mid sixteenth century (Fig. 15). A diamond ring belonging to Queen Isabella of Hungary was set with a pointed stone surrounded by four triangular-faceted stones set in an elaborately chased and enamelled hoop. A cluster of these pointed diamonds has been used to suggest the quills of a hedgehog or porcupine on the cover of the sun-dial ring in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, which, from the style of the goldsmith's work, seems to date from the end of the sixteenth century.

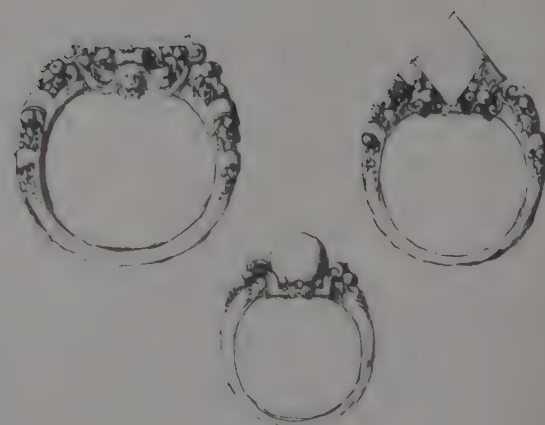


Fig. 15 Designs for rings in pen, black ink and coloured wash on vellum. German: Munich (?), c. 1580. British Museum, London, 1978—12—16—37.

Other forms of cutting in use in the sixteenth century were the lozenge-cut, which was used for the diamonds that formed the rosette ornamenting the bezel of the wedding-ring of Duke Albrecht of Bavaria mentioned previously and the so-called 'hog's-back' diamonds, shaped like a little roof. The latter were used for forming initial letters and monograms. Surviving initial rings include the 'M' ring said to have belonged to Mary of Burgundy, wife of Maximilian I of Austria, and the English ring in the form of a monogram 'ER' that contains portraits of Anne Boleyn and Elizabeth I. The inventories of Henry VIII mention another initial ring, this time in the form of an 'A'. A miniature by Hans Mielich, dated 1551, shows the unmounted stones in the collection of Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria in precise detail; from it the variety and complexity of facet-cuts already in use at this date are apparent. In addition to examples of the point-cut, there are a number of table-cut stones, as well as step-cut and rose-cut ones.

Evidence suggests that the rose-cut was developed either at the end of the fifteenth century or in the early years of the sixteenth, and from the rose-cut the brilliant-cut was developed, probably sometime in the sixteenth century. The loss of stone is very great in brilliant-cutting, and modifications where wastage is less were therefore often used. For large ring bezels the so-called cushion-cut was particularly common and the marquise or navette-cut for the pointed-oval shape that was popular at the end of the eighteenth century. Figure 16 summarizes the different facet-cuts used for ringstones.

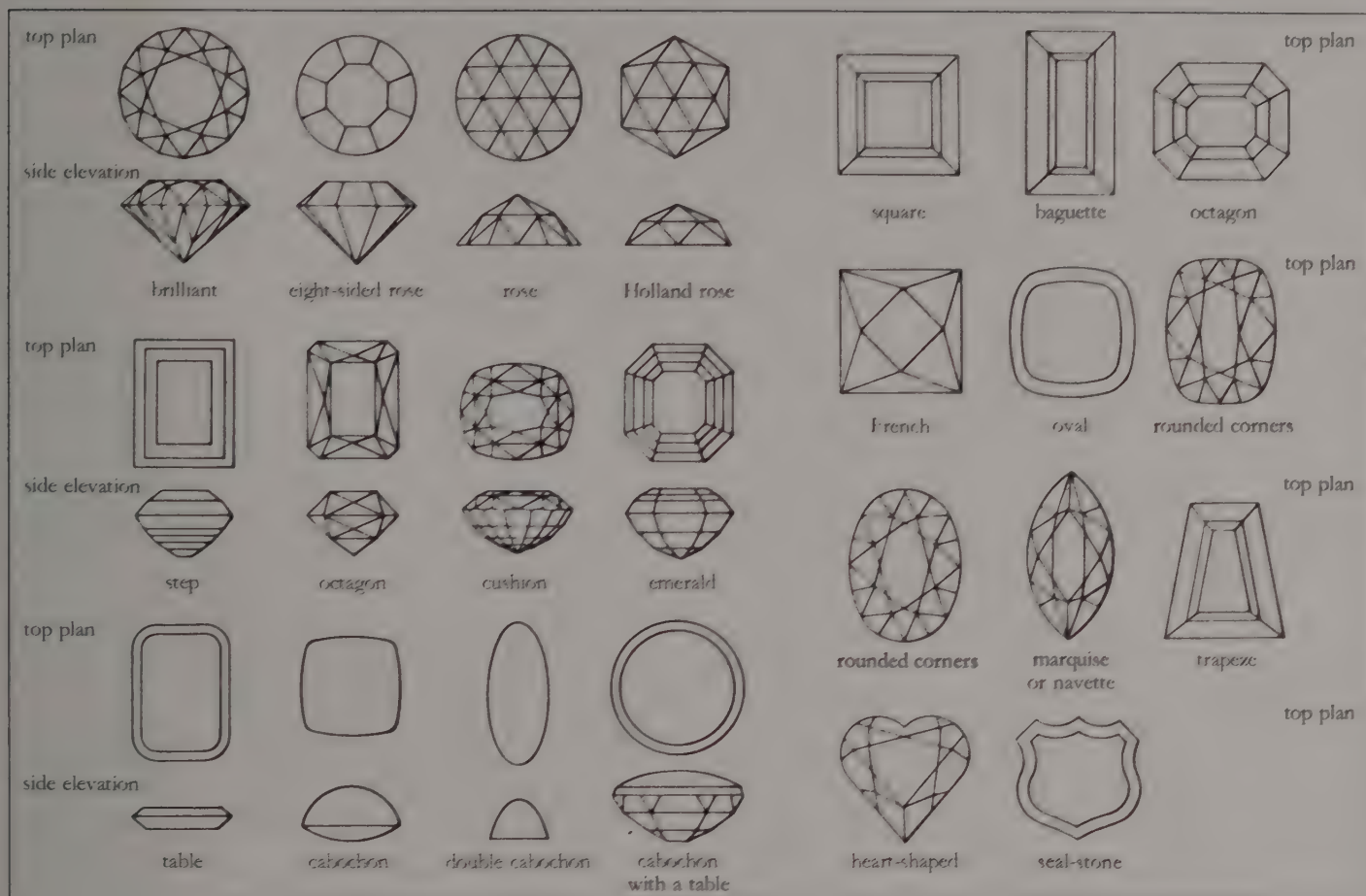


Fig. 16 Cuts of gemstones. From *Le Monde mystérieux des pierres précieuses*, courtesy of Pierre Liechti, Fribourg.

Types of Ring

With all these resources at our disposal, it is possible to build a continuous record of the development of style from 1500 to 1900, but while this information is very valuable for showing how rings were worn and for dating surviving pieces, it does not answer another equally interesting question — why rings were worn.

Obviously the primary reasons for wearing any kind of ornament that has no practical function is for display. This aspect of wearing rings had assumed great importance since the fourteenth century, when sumptuary laws limited the right to wear rings made of precious metals to certain classes of society (see also pp. 15, 53). Thus, the ownership of a gold ring became an unmistakable indication of social status. Almost without exception, royal and aristocratic portraits from the sixteenth century show the sitters to be owners of several magnificent gem-set

rings. The decorative rings of this period probably survived because each one was a beautiful work of art, ornamented with exquisitely chased and carved goldsmith's work, the finest enamelling and set with gemstones or antique cameos and intaglios. Fortunately for posterity, it seems to have been regarded as an unjustifiable act of vandalism to destroy such examples of the goldsmith's art simply for the value of the stones and the precious metal — a fate that almost always awaited later gem-set rings with simple unornamented settings. Knowledge of purely decorative rings from 1500 to 1900 is, therefore, more or less confined to those set with stones whose intrinsic value is small.

The craftsman's ring, where the bezel has been used to display exceptional skill in miniature-carving, pavé-setting or enamelling, comes into that category. In these rings, the workmanship was of far greater importance than the value, and the greatest hazard to their survival is their fragility. The craftsman's ring usually provides an example of the miniaturization of some prized form of decorative art, for example rings set with portrait miniatures taxed the skill of the miniaturist to its utmost to delineate the features, hair and clothing on such a minute scale (Pl. 259). More remarkable still are the tiny scenes crowded with

people that were the speciality of the Van Blarenberghe family, who worked in Paris in the second half of the eighteenth century (Pl. 257). In the late eighteenth century, ring bezels set with minute ivory carvings under glass were fashionable (Pls. 267—8), as were tiny figures and landscapes made of boxwood and fruitwood (Pl. 253).

As interest in magic and astrology was supplanted by a taste for scientific experiment, a fashion grew up for rings that exploited the potentialities of time-measuring instruments such as sundials (Pl. 205), armillary spheres marked on the inside with the hours of the day (Pl. 232), compasses (Pl. 213) or watches. All these types of ring provide additional examples of the art of miniaturization. The ring-watches from the Renaissance that survive (Pl. 215) were still necessarily very thick and heavy to wear. In the late eighteenth century the watchmaker J. Lépine celebrated his development of the keyless winder by making a ring-watch for Madame de Pompadour; an example of one of his ring-watches is illustrated (Pl. 274). Obviously these rings are not purely decorative, but neither is their function strictly practical, since the necessity of making them so small often rendered the implements very inaccurate. Such rings merely celebrated the scientific achievements of the age, and in this respect their function was still primarily decorative.

Rings also had a number of practical functions. The possibly mythical poison rings of the Borgias apart, rings with compartments (Pls. 287, 294) were used for perfumes or as reliquaries, but the most important use for a ring was as a signet. The famous 'fisherman's ring' of the pope was a signet used to seal papal documents; it was destroyed at each pope's death in a complicated ceremony designed to show that the authority vested in the late pope had passed to the conclave of cardinals and, with the making of the new ring, would pass to the new pope. The custom of sealing documents with the impression from a personal signet, engraved with a device such as a coat of arms identifying the owner, was a good precaution against the tampering with or altering of the documents. Rings engraved with merchants' marks were used for the same reasons (Pls. 168—70). The use of a rebus, whose meaning was obscure except to the owner, was popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One early example from the Waterton Collection, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, shows 'WY' and 'OT' flanking an elm tree: WY (elm) OT or Wylmot. The heraldic signet-ring became fashionable in the same period and has remained the most common type of signet-ring ever since. Signet-rings are rarely used for their true purpose nowadays, but they are almost the only kind of ring worn by men in modern times.

Another important function of rings was ceremonial, as rings of office, for instance bishop's rings, or coronation rings that have an important symbolic role in the coronation ceremony. Napoleon's ring was carried by Eugène Beauharnais on a cushion at the head of the procession and was described as follows by Maximim Deloche: '*Un anneau d'or portant une émeraude,*

emblème de la révélation divine, tandis que celui de Joséphine, orné d'un rubis, emblème de joie, fourni par le trésor de la couronne, reposait sur le coussin porté par le Maréchal Sérurier' ('a gold ring with an emerald, emblem of divine revelation, while Josephine's, adorned with a ruby, emblem of joy, from the Crown Jewels, lay on a cushion held by the Maréchal Sérurier'). The ring is also described in the inventory of the Crown Jewels of France dated 1811, as: '*une bague enrichie d'une émeraude, ayant servi au Sacre de sa Majesté*' ('a ring set with an emerald, used at His Majesty's coronation'). The emerald, of a fine colour and considerable size, was chosen by Napoleon I from the Treasury of the Crown Jewels of France, to be set in gold as his coronation ring. The stone was sent to Prague to be engraved with Napoleon's armorial bearings before being set by the jeweller Marguerite of Paris in gold with engraved ornament and with four eagle's claws, at a cost of 48 francs. When the Empress Marie-Louise, Napoleon's second wife, fled from Paris with her son, the King of Rome, in 1814, she took all the Crown Jewels with her. Napoleon ordered that these should be restored to the French state, but the ring was not among the jewels that were seized from the Empress's baggage train. By contrast, Queen Victoria's coronation ring was very modest (Pl. 286), being a reduced version of the ring worn by her predecessor William IV, and made of rubies, diamonds and sapphires to simulate the red, white and blue of the combined English and Scottish flags.

The most important category of functional rings embraces all those used in betrothal and marriage ceremonies. The acceptance of a ring has always implied a binding commitment, and this was reflected in the design of the rings — clasped hands on *fede* rings, interlocking hoops on gimmel rings (Pls. 207, 221, 227) — both symbolic of the indissolubility of the marriage bond. The posy-ring is a functional ring in two senses: it is a love offering and a guard-ring, designed as a 'guard' or 'keeper' for the gem-set rings worn with it.

As they had in the medieval period, rings with sentimental inscriptions continued in popularity throughout the whole of this period, until about the middle of the nineteenth century. Not all rings with loving inscriptions or 'posies' were used as betrothal or marriage rings, but today it is no longer possible to define their exact usage. These rings form a coherent group whose purpose is to convey a message of commitment and as such must be considered to come within the same category. A large number of the inscriptions on plain gold posy-rings have been collected, and the dating of them from the form of the lettering has been carefully discussed. They are among the most charming of all types of ring and have been widely collected in the past, but they do not look at all interesting in a photograph, so none have been illustrated in this section. Both *fede* rings and gimmel rings often have inscriptions on them, again like the posy-rings — with the lettering inside the hoop; the message was usually hidden within the interlocking bands (Pl. 207).

From the end of the eighteenth century, betrothal and marriage rings became plainer. There was a fashion in the first half of

the nineteenth century for the harlequin ringset with gemstones forming a word or a name. The most common of these was the REGARD ring (Pl. 280), but DEAREST was also popular. Like eternity rings that have a hoop set right round with gemstones, these REGARD rings were often given to mark anniversaries or the birth of a child. Wedding-rings nowadays are almost invariably completely plain.

Another category of rings is the large group of reminder rings that includes religious and memento-mori rings, mourning-rings, commemorative rings (including political and portrait rings) and love rings. Many of these rings are inscribed and some are dated. They form a secure group of documentary evidence from which many attributions of date and country of origin can be made. Owing to their often sentimental or pious associations, the survival rate was good, and they are the type of ring most eagerly collected, since their intrinsic value is rarely high, though their historical significance is considerable. The reminding aspect of these rings was often secondary to a more important function. In the Renaissance in particular, when the symbolic aspect of a ring was still of such great importance to the overall design, the combination of religious, scientific and memento-mori elements was not unusual (Pl. 215). Similarly at that date the themes of love and death were so closely identified and intermingled that it is often difficult to decide whether the primary function of a ring was as a memento-mori or a *fede* ring (Pl. 206). German gimmel rings of the sixteenth century may open to reveal a compartment containing both an embryo and a skeleton, the hoop being inscribed with a motto implying the binding commitment of marriage; thus in one ring reminders of birth, mortality and the need for fidelity were combined.

One of the most noticeable features of post-Reformation rings was the simplification of love and commemorative rings. After the death of Charles I (beheaded in 1649), his adherents frequently wore special memorial rings. A number of rings with miniature portraits of Charles I survive (Pl. 231), some inscribed with memorial or loyalist legends describing the king as a martyr. After the restoration of the monarchy in England in 1661, commemorative jewellery for the executed king was popular, and the later adherents of the deposed royal house of Stuart continued to wear 'Jacobite' commemorative jewellery well into the eighteenth century. A crystal or diamond cover often concealed the portrait on rings dating from the Commonwealth

period, for the wearing of certain portraits, if detected, would have endangered the owner.

The distribution of mourning-rings is known to date from at least the early fourteenth century, and the practice was widespread by the mid sixteenth century. Instructions for ordering and distributing memorial rings were often given in wills; the list of people who were deemed worthy to receive these rings was frequently quite long, and thus the expense was considerable. It is debatable whether such rings were actually much worn by the recipients. Surviving examples are often in very good condition, even though the rings were made of fragile materials, but in his diary Samuel Pepys gives a glimpse of the contemporary attitude to these reminders of mortality. He described a visit he paid on business to a certain Captain Cocke at Greenwich. Pepys found 'the house full of company at the burial of James Temple, who it seems hath been dead these five days. Here I had a very good ring which I did give to my wife as soon as I came home'. Many mourning-rings contained hair, sometimes within the bezel, sometimes encircling the hoop in a braided band (Pl. 295), and sometimes in a tiny glass-covered compartment inside the hoop.

Not all rings with hair enclosed were mourning-rings; some were love rings or tokens of friendship. The ring given by Marie Antoinette to her closest friend, Princess de Lamballe, after the abortive flight to Varennes comes into this category. The queen's unsuccessful attempt to escape from Paris and the revolutionary mob had turned her hair white overnight, and she enclosed a lock of it in the ring, inscribed: BLANCHIS PAR LA DOULEUR ('whitened by sorrow'). Like posy-rings, these memorial rings have been widely collected, largely for their documentary value as dated pieces.

That so much valuable evidence about the appearance and symbolic significance of finger-rings survives today is largely due to a handful of dedicated ring collectors whose activities span approximately the last one hundred and forty years. Happily, the fruits of these activities have been preserved for the large part in museums, either through bequests by the collectors or through judicious buying at the sales of the more celebrated collections. Thus the preservation of these fragile objects is assured, and it will be possible to study in great detail the most interesting aspects of jewellery's history, symbolism and sociological impact, which are the most manifest in ring design.

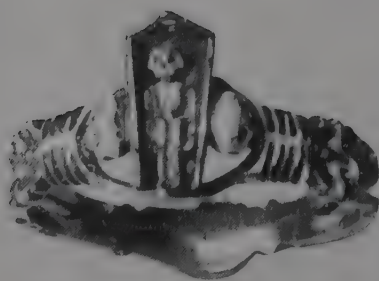
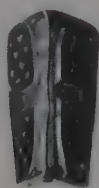


205
Gold, rock crystal and coloured foil. German. Sixteenth century. Diameter 2.8 cm. The Austro-Hungarian Imperial Treasury. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 2183.

The hoop of this signet-ring is unusually massive and elaborately ornamented, chased with masks and scrolling acanthus-leaf decoration in the style of the designs executed by Hans Holbein the Younger in the 1530s. The inside of the hoop is

inscribed with curving lines and symbols and works as a sun-dial when the light is allowed to shine through two holes pierced in the hoop. The rock crystal is engraved with an archducal coat of arms over coloured foil. The ring is presumed, from the details of the heraldic engraving, to have belonged to the Archduke Ferdinand I, who was elected King of Bohemia in 1526. It forms one of a group that includes the signet of Mary Queen of Scots (Pl. 210).

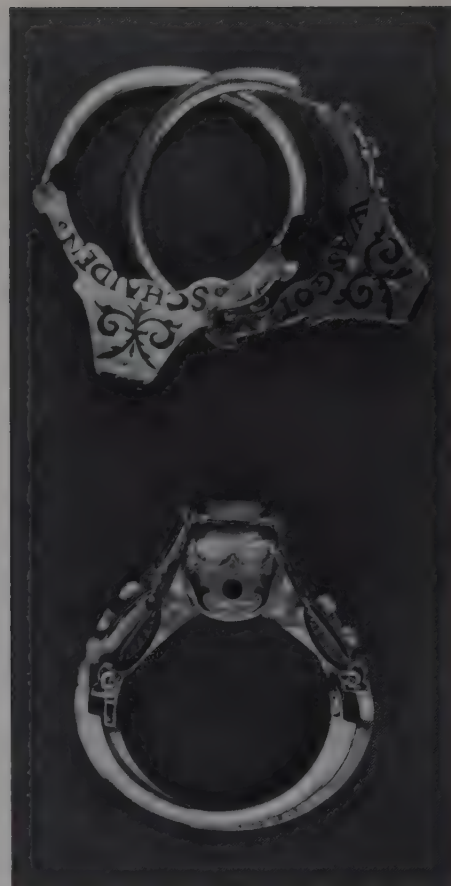
206
Gold and enamel. English(?). Sixteenth century. Width of bezel 1 cm. Londesborough Collection. British Museum, London, Dalton no. 1453.



This is an unusually specific memento-mori ring: the bezel is in the form of a coffin containing a skeleton; the shoulders are formed of skeletons and the back of the hoop of clasped hands. The ring belongs to the group of coffin jewels that contain minutely detailed skeletons and date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Designs for the external decoration of the coffins in Moresque style can be found in mid sixteenth-century German pattern-books, notably among the large number of jeweller's and silversmith's patterns engraved by Virgil Solis of Nuremberg in the 1560s. The combination of the symbols of love and death was not uncommon at this period, as we shall see (Pl. 208).

207
Gold, enamel, a ruby and an emerald. German. Sixteenth century. Diameter, 2.3 cm. Braybrooke Collection, Franks Collection. British Museum, London, Dalton no. 991.

The inscriptions and the construction of gimmel rings such as this one confirmed the inseparability of the married couple, bound by their vows. The bezel is in the form of a gem-set quatrefoil; inside the conjoined hoops is the inscription: WAS GOT ZU/SAMEN FIEGT DAS SOL DER MENSCH NIT SCHAI-DEN ('What God has joined together, let not man



207

sunder'). The two hoops were supposed to be given separately at the betrothal and joined together after the marriage. The surviving examples of these conjoined gimmals do not show evidence of this practice being followed, and it might be assumed to be merely a charming myth, were it not for the existence of one of a pair, bearing only half of the usual inscription. Famous gimmel rings of this type include the wedding-rings of Martin Luther and of Sir Thomas Gresham, which has the same inscription but in Latin.

208
Gold, enamels and jewels. German. Sixteenth century. Diameter 3 cm. Waddesdon Bequest, cat. no. 199. British Museum, London.

Rings that combine the symbolical features associated with both *fede* or betrothal rings and memento-mori rings were not uncommon in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This example incorporates the death's-head with the snakes of corruption and the toads of wisdom on the cover (a); the shoulders are in the form of two couples: Adam and Eve tasting the apple of knowledge and being expelled from Eden. Inside the bezel (b) in the form of a book, the clasp of which opens with a hinge, are passages from the Bible (Rom. XIV: 8, Ps. XXXVII: 5). The bezel also contains a recumbent figure, a skull and an hour-glass. At the back of the hoop are the clasped hands of the *fede* ring.



a

b





209

Oil on panel: Portrait of a Lady (detail) by Lucas Cranach the Elder. German. C. 1530. 36 × 25.1 cm. National Gallery, London.

The use of a high ornamental bezel on rings gave rise to a special fashion for wearing slashed gloves to accommodate the numerous rings that were still popular at this date. In addition, large rings were worn outside the gloves, a style that was to reappear with the large-bezel rings of the late eighteenth century (Pl. 243).

210

Gold, enamel and an engraved rock crystal. French(?). 1548–58. Diameter 2.25 cm. From Queen Charlotte to the Duke of York, who sold it in 1827 to Richard Greene, from whom it was purchased by the British Museum, London, 56, 10–15, 1.

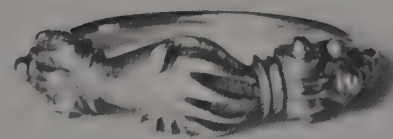
This signet-ring of Mary Queen of Scots bears her coat of arms; the metals and tinctures on the blue ground, with which the stone is backed, show through the crystal. On the reverse of the bezel, a monogram within a circle surmounted by a crown

is composed of the initials of Mary herself and her first husband, the boy-king Francis II of France, to whom she was married in 1558 and who died only two years later. Unlike many of Mary's jewels, whose whole history is known from the time of her death, nothing is known of this ring between 1587 and 1792, when it was in the possession of Queen Charlotte, wife of George III. Other examples of signet-rings of this date that show the heraldic colours through an engraved rock crystal are known (Pl. 205), for instance the seal-ring of Duke Maximilian I of Bavaria in Vienna and the 'Gresham' ring dated 1575, as well as the rings worn by Archbishop Cranmer and by Sir Matthew Parker in portraits.

211

Gold. French or German. Mid sixteenth century. Diameter 2.2 cm. Reubell Bequest, 1933. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 31096.

The *fede* ring with clasped hands, so-called from the Italian *mani in fede* (meaning literally 'hands in faith'), has been in use since Roman times (see also,



p. 59). It then signified a contract, and application to the Christian betrothal or marriage ceremony seems to date from the early Christian period. In the modern period, these rings continued in use throughout Europe until the present and represent an almost unbroken tradition in ring symbolism (Pl. 114) though no examples seem to survive from the Dark Ages.

212

Engravings of designs for finger-rings from the *Livre d'Aneaux* (sic) by Pierre Woeiriot. French. 1561. 16.8 × 10.6 cm. Bodleian Library, Oxford, pressmark Douce W3.



a



b

The usefulness of pattern-books for goldsmiths and jewellers can be judged by the relatively large body of related material that survives and is traceable to designs of the celebrated German and French *maîtres ornementistes* ('master ornamenters') of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Woeiriot's ring designs seem to have been particularly widely circulated and well used. (Compare (a) with Plates 223 to 226 and (b) with Plate 215; see also Pl. 244.)





213
Gold. German(?). C. 1570. Diameter 2 cm. Private collection, Switzerland.

The hinged lid on this ring opens to reveal a sun-dial and a compass; on the face of the bezel is an engraved seal with arms of the Von Steiger family. An impression from the seal on this ring is on a document signed by Johannes Steiger, Baron de Rolle (1518–81), now in the Bernese Staatsarchiv, dated 26 December 1571. The ring is also recognizable being worn in a portrait of his son, dating from the early seventeenth century. This

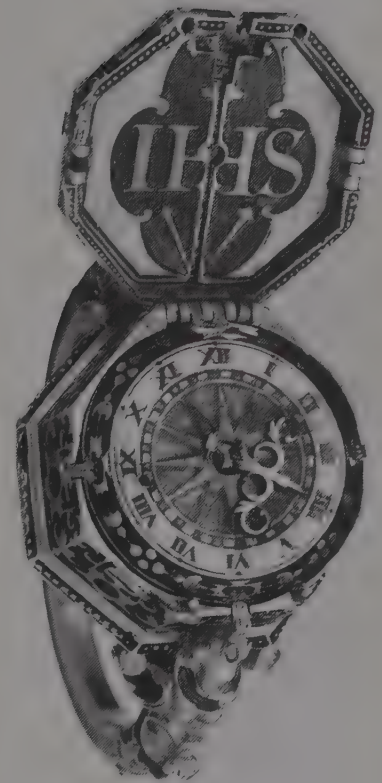
ring is very much more plain in design than the princely time-keeping rings with their sculptural ornament in enamelled gold (Pl. 215), but the interest in scientific discovery was not confined to the great courts of Europe.

214
Marble: tomb (detail) of Don Juan of Austria. Spanish. C. 1578. Life size. El Escorial, Monastery of San Lorenzo, Madrid.

Don Juan of Austria was the illegitimate son of the

Emperor Charles V of Spain and a German woman named Barbara Blomberg. In spite of his illegitimacy, he was brought up with all the privileges of imperial status; his style of living and dress were that of a royal personage. Don Juan was viceroy of Naples and governor of the Netherlands, a post he was awarded after his victory at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. In 1578, he died of typhus at the early age of thirty-three.

This detail of the hands on his tomb shows the way rings were worn even on the upper joints of the fingers in the sixteenth century.



215

Gold and enamel with a watch. German: Augsburg. C. 1585. Diameter of dial 1.9 cm. Schatzkammer der Residenz, Munich, no. 649.

This reliquary ring embodies the manifold intellectual interests of the princely patrons of the Renaissance. The symbolism is religious, but the watch with its alarm mechanism is a scientific instrument of considerable complexity. At this date, a clock or watch was still regarded as a marvel of scientific ingenuity; it symbolized life's passing hours — *vita est brevis* — and it could be made to refer to Christ's death upon the cross and human mortality.

This ring-watch incorporates a reliquary compartment with the Crucifixion and the Instruments of the Passion. The watch has an Augsburg assay mark and watchmaker's initials 'I.W.', probably for Jacob Wittmann of Antwerp, who worked in Augsburg from 1583 to 1623. The beautiful enamelled decoration of the case and the sculptural design of the hoop are typical of the taste of the period (Pl. 212b), when a piece of jewellery was conceived as a miniature work of art rather than as a purely ornamental accessory.



216
Gold, enamel and an onyx cameo. English. Late sixteenth century. Height of bezel 1.8 cm. Loria and Desmoni Collections. (Sotheby's, Desmoni Sale, 17 May 1960, lot 40.) Courtesy of Mr and Mrs Kenneth Snowman.

This ring is one of a group of pendant jewels and rings set with cameos depicting Queen Elizabeth I,

of which twenty-five are recorded by Roy Strong. The inside and outside of the hoop are decorated with flowers on a ground of white enamel. The jewels appear to have been made for presentation both to the queen and by her. One unmounted onyx cameo with a similar portrait of the queen was unearthed with the Cheapside Hoard (Pl. 217), and this supports the theory put forward by Charles

Oman that jewellers kept such cameos in stock to be mounted as they were required. Several artists have been proposed as the persons responsible for engraving these gems, among them, absurdly but inevitably, Valerio Belli, who died twelve years before Elizabeth's accession. The English engraver, Richard Astyll, who worked for Henry VIII, would probably have been too old as the earliest date suggested for these portraits is 1575. The repetition of many examples, which seems unlikely for a gem-engraver with a great reputation, may perhaps point to an unknown but competent journeyman. The profile portraits are close in many details to contemporary medallic representations of the queen. It has always been a widespread practice with engraved-gem portraits to use medals or coins as a source of inspiration.

217

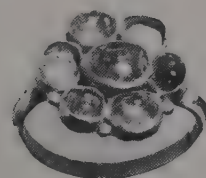
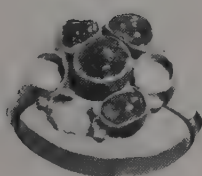
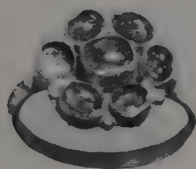
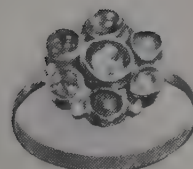
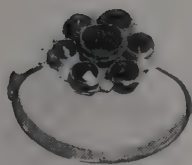
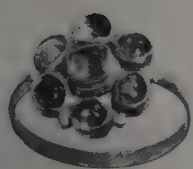
Gold, enamel, rubies, emeralds, garnets, amethysts and a chalcedony cameo of a toad. English. Late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Height of emerald-set bezel 2 cm. Unearthed from the foundations of a house in Cheapside, London, in 1912. The Museum of London.

The Cheapside Hoard of jewellery seems to have been concealed in about 1640, possibly because of the English Civil War. Its importance lies in the fact that it provides a large collection of jewellery of a type that rarely survives, consisting mainly of modest pieces of small intrinsic value. With the exception of a watch movement set into a large emerald matrix, the ornamental jewellery is in the taste of the prosperous merchant class of the period. No less than forty-eight rings survive; they differ from the princely jewellery of this date in the absence of heavy sculptural ornament, but the cutting of the gemstones is unusually complex: both the full 'rose' and the trap-cut were used, as well as complex cabochon-cutting to produce clusters of grapes for the pendant jewels. This hoard also includes a number of unset gems already cut for use in jewellery, as well as several cameos and intaglios, one a profile portrait of Queen Elizabeth similar to the one on the enamelled gold ring in Plate 216. It has been suggested that this hoard composed the unused stock of a jeweller who also acted as a pawnbroker. The workmanship of the enamelled jewellery is Italianate in taste, but probably English in origin.

218

Gold and enamel. Venetian and southern German. Sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Diameter inside the hoop of the largest ring 2.2 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 866–1871.

The history of these Jewish marriage rings is very difficult to trace. Though they are said to have been in use since the thirteenth century, only one of the surviving examples has a provenance going back further than the nineteenth century. They have been dated to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and ascribed to Venetian or southern German craftsmen for stylistic and traditional reasons. The position of Venice as the outpost in Europe for trade with the East makes it very probable that the examples ornamented with filigree and open-work



217



218



enamel originated from there, indeed the style of workmanship is similar to the imbricated *nef* pendants of Venetian origin. There are figures and raised lettering around the hoops. Many of the rings bear Hebrew inscriptions for 'good luck'. These large rings were used only during the marriage ceremony: they were placed symbolically on the index finger of the bride's right hand, after which they were thought to have been kept by the family.

Jewish marriage rings fall into two main groups, those ornamented with filigree, and those with raised ornament and lettering. The quality of workmanship varies greatly, becoming positively crude in the simple cast bands with applied ornament. The survival of examples of the plain rings with uninscribed bezels suggests private ownership, rather than the purely ceremonial function that has been ascribed to these rings traditionally, but the elaborate filigree rings were clearly not designed for wear, since the raised ornamental bosses (usually six in number) encircle the hoop. Although the *Encyclopaedia Judaica's* account of the origins and uses of these rings is scanty and vague, one fact emerges: gem-set rings were not considered appropriate for this purpose. The marriage rings were made of gold or gilt metal. The enamel was usually in blue and green over a base of white.

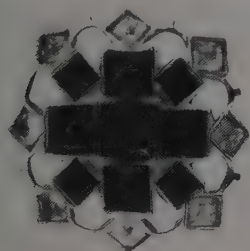
219

Oil on canvas: Portrait of Isabel of Bourbon, Queen of Spain (detail) by Roderigo de Villandrando. Spanish. Early seventeenth century. 2.12 x 1.30 m. Museo del Prado, Madrid, 1234.A.

Here Queen Isabel, wife of Philip IV, is shown wearing the rich jewels that were still fashionable until the early years of the seventeenth century. In 1624, as an act of atonement, she presented jewellery valued at 3.5 million *reales* to a Madrid church; however, in the succeeding years the queen may not have felt a need for the gems thus sacrificed, since later Spanish portraits show a new austerity, the sitters wearing only a simple gold chain. It seems likely that repeated attempts to restrain extravagance in personal adornment and to restrict the wearing of jewellery had, by the second quarter of the seventeenth century, begun to take noticeable effect.

220

Gold, rock crystals, emeralds, amethysts and a coloured paste. Spanish: Andalusia. Seventeenth century. Height of bezel, 2.3 cm. Gift of Dr Hildburgh. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M. 141-1937.



These delicate multi-gem rings are found in both Spanish and English portraits dating from the early years of the seventeenth century (Pl. 219). A design for a ring of this type with a cruciform bezel, signed by Joan Casabona, and dated 1628, made up of a large central stone with clusters of four stones forming the arms is preserved in the *Llibres de Passanties* (an album containing the *maestria* or mastership designs of Barcelona jewellers from about 1500 until the late eighteenth century). *Maestria* drawings usually followed well-established fashions, as is demonstrated by the earlier date of the



221

222

Gold. English. Seventeenth century. Height of bezel 2.3 cm. Waterton Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 739-1871.



The device on this ring, composed of the initials 'WR' in a heart, compares with the engraved signets of this type that show initials united by a love-knot. The most celebrated example is the signet of Henry Darnley, who was married to Mary Queen of Scots in 1565. In the seventeenth century

portrait by William Larkin (Pl. 230), which shows a gem-set cruciform ring of similar cluster shape.

221

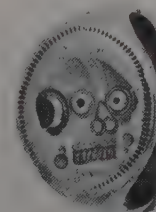
Gold and enamel. Flemish. Early seventeenth century. Height 2.4 cm. Waddesdon Bequest, cat. no. 197, British Museum, London.

This unusually elaborate *fede* or 'clasped-hands' ring incorporates the multiple bands sometimes found in betrothal rings.

the heart and initial device was often executed in enamel, and the engraved signet was more often executed in intaglio on a gemstone.

223

Gold. English. Early seventeenth century. Height of bezel 2.1 cm. Waterton Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 921-1871.



This is one of a group of gold mourning-rings with a device engraved on the bezel in the form of a death's-head and an identifying inscription on the reverse or bordering the skull. The ring pictured

bears the initials 'AB'. As on other rings with a commemorative or sentimental purpose, the use of enamel superseded engraved devices during the seventeenth century (Pl. 224).



224

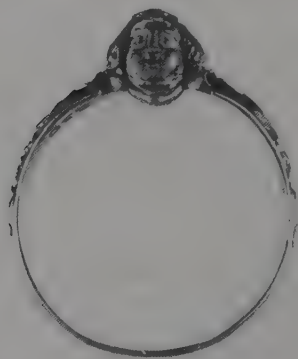
Gold and enamel. German(?). Mid seventeenth century. Diameter 1.9 cm. Reubell Bequest, 1933. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 30844.

This memento-mori ring features a death's-head, the skull backed by cross-bones of the same type as

the ring in Plate 223 but showing the change in style that came about with the introduction of enamelled decoration. Many of these rings are set with gems, and it is possible that this head once had cabochon stones or simply faceted diamonds for eyes.

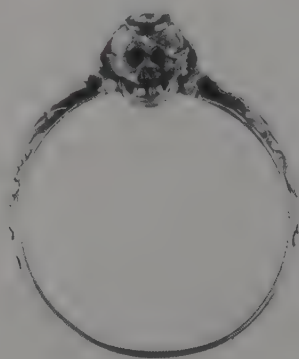
225

Gold, diamonds and enamel. Dutch or German. Late seventeenth century. Diameter 1.6 cm. British Museum, London, Dalton no. 830.



This memento-mori ring with a swivelling bezel, which reveals a plump, living head on one side and a grinning death's-head on the other, is a poignant reminder of mortality. It belongs to a group of rings from the same workshop, another example of

which survives in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. The form of this type of memento-mori ring has altered very little since the publication of Woeirot's design book (Pl. 212) more than a cen-



tury earlier, but such specifically macabre reminders of mortality were shortly to be supplanted by the more sentimental taste of the eighteenth century.

226

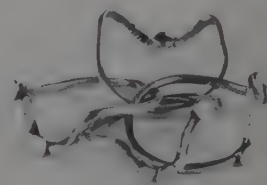
Gold, enamel and rose-diamonds. German(?). Late seventeenth century. Height 2.4 cm. Reubell Bequest, 1933. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 30848.



This is an example of the memento-mori death's-head ring on which the skull is set with gems. At this date, there was a stylistic similarity between rings connected with love and those connected with death.

227

Gold. European. Seventeenth century. Diameter 2 cm. British Museum, London, Dalton no. 1718.

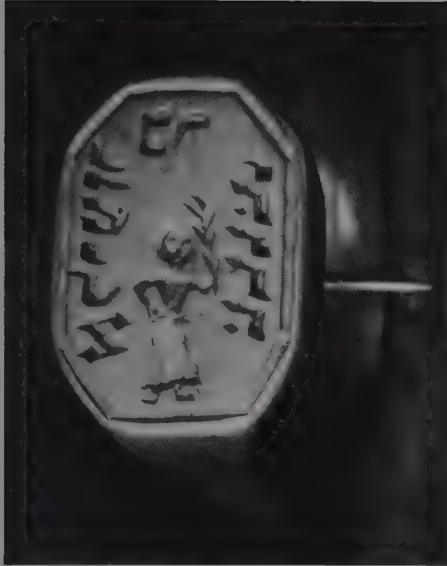


In his manuscript catalogue of his collection of rings, Edmund Waterton records the purpose of these puzzle rings that was given by Fortunio Liceto of Genoa in his *De annulis antiquis Librum singulare* (published in Udine in 1645) — they are mnemonic or memory rings. The Spanish term for multi-hoop rings (*memorias*), supports the theory that they were worn with a hoop dangling for each matter of which the owner wished to be reminded. The ring shown has four interlocking wavy hoops; rings of this type exist with as many as a dozen fine hoops. The Spanish rings were often set round the hoops with small diamonds. These rings are very difficult to date, since they have always been popular as curiosities and are still made today.

228

Bronze. Northern European. Seventeenth century(?). Height 1.7 cm. A. Rothschild Collection. Musée de Cluny, Paris.

The engraved inscription in Hebrew characters on



this signet-ring reads: ELEAZAR BEN JUDAH ('El-eazar, son of Judah'). The script is the square Ashkenazi form used in northern Europe, and the placing of the letters round the edge of the bezel suggests that the addition of a device such as the figure was intended, though the lettering is much more finely executed than the little man with his palm-branch.

229

Gold, enamel, an onyx cameo and rose-diamonds. German. Seventeenth century. Height 2.5 cm. *Waddesdon Bequest, cat. no. 200. British Museum, London, AF 2009.*



This cameo is cut with the head of a negro in the dark layer and is *habillé* or inset with diamonds to form a necklace on the bust. The shoulders of the ring are in the form of turbaned negro heads, and the hoop is enamelled inside with the sun and the moon. Negro-head jewels were very popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and this ingenious reversal of the usual use of contrasting dark and light layers of onyx is often found at this date.

230

Oil on canvas: Portrait of Anne Cecil, Countess of Stamford (detail) by William Larkin. English. C. 1614. 2.01 x 1.17 m. From Suffolk Collection, Charlton Park, Wiltshire. Estate of the Countess of Berkshire and Suffolk. Ranger's House, Blackheath, London.

One of the so-called Berkshire 'marriage' portraits, this painting shows the curious fashion for wearing



230

a ring secured to the wrist by a black silk cord. It has been suggested that the more frequent use of precious stones in rings of the seventeenth century led to a greater concern for their safety. It is interesting to note that these cord-tied rings are often set with black 'diamonds', i. e. either with real diamonds backed with black enamel or with jet, and therefore, they might be mourning-rings: the black cord would then have the same significance as the crêpe bands of a later date.

231

Gold. English. C. 1650. Height of bezel 2.5 cm. Sir John Evans Collection, Gift of Dame Joan Evans. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M. 274—1962.

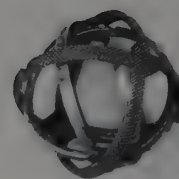


A commemorative ring for Charles I, who was beheaded in January 1649, this ring is dated 1648, since the year did not begin until Lady Day in March. Rings with more of a political significance than the usual royal mourning-rings began to appear soon after the death of the king and were designed to promote the Stuart cause rather than simply to commemorate the dead king. On one side of the swivelling bezel there is a profile head of Charles I in shallow relief, on the reverse a crowned skull, the initials 'CR' and the legend: GLORIA-VANITAS ('glory-vanity'). The inside of the hoop is engraved with the inscription: EMIGRAVIT GLORIA ANGL. ('the glory of England has departed').

232

Gold. English. Seventeenth century. Diameter 2 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M. 368—1923.

The hoop of this ring is composed of circles of cross-hatched gold that open out to form an armillary sphere; the hours of the day are marked inside the sphere. This is an example of a ring for telling time, part of the important group of scientific rings with bezels containing watch mechanisms, compasses or sun-dials (Pls. 205, 213, 215) that became popular as the spread of scientific knowledge overcame the old beliefs in magic and astrology.



233

Gold, enamel, diamonds and a turquoise. French (?). Early eighteenth century. Height of bezel 2.5 cm. Renbell Bequest, 1933. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 31016.

The doves, as messengers of Venus, are often incorporated into the design of betrothal rings. Jewellery employing emblems of love and fidelity was popular throughout the eighteenth century (Pls. 234—5).



234

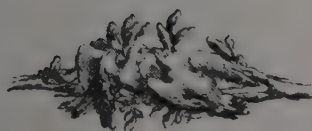
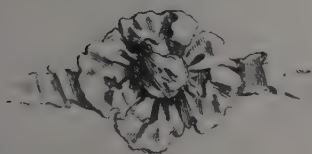
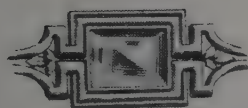
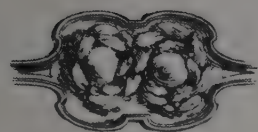
Gold, enamel and a minute ruby. French. C. 1765. Height of bezel 0.8 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, HG 213.

The shape of this ring — the bezel is composed of two billing doves — follows the published design by Maria (Pl. 235), a Parisian jeweller, so closely as to suggest that it was made in France soon after the publication of the pattern-book. In spite of its fragility, the ring has survived in perfect condition, a rare example of the modest but exquisite eighteenth-century enamelled betrothal rings.

235

Engravings from Premier livre de dessins de joaillerie et de bijouterie, designs by MARIA and engravings by B.ABEL. French, published in Paris. C. 1765. C. 10.5 × 16.5 cm. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Cabinet des Estampes.

These designs for small rings from a pattern-book for jewellers show, among a great variety of naturalistic devices that can be executed in enamel, a



ring bezel in the shape of a pair of billing doves. The influence of the Rococo can be clearly seen, with the asymmetry that only began to appear in jewellery design in the second half of the eighteenth century (Pl. 234).

236

Gold, enamel and rose-diamonds. Italian: Venice (?). Eighteenth century. Diameter 2.2 cm. Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan.

This is an example of the so-called carnival rings of the second half of the eighteenth century. In style and execution, these rings are closely related to the



memento-mori rings of the same date; they have a hinged bezel that opens and contains an emblem of love or death, and they use inscriptions enjoining or offering love and fidelity. This example opens to reveal a heart beneath the mask. It seems unlikely

that such elaborate jewels, often gem-set, would have only a decorative purpose as implied by the term 'carnival', and they more probably belong to the group that includes *fede*, memento-mori and love rings or posy-rings.



*J. Grisoni delin:
1719.*

*The ring which y^e Arch-Priest, of y^e Collegiate Church
of Monza near Milan, useth when he celebrates
Mass. it is of gold enamelled & set wth an aqua marine.*

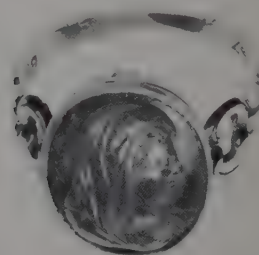
237

Drawing in gold paint overlaid with black and water-colours by Giuseppe Grisoni. Italian. 1719. 9.2 x 9.4 cm. British Museum, London, 1928-3-10-91.

This drawing of an enamelled gold ring set with an aquamarine is inscribed: THE RING WHICH YE ARCH-PRIEST OF YE COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF MONZA NEAR MILAN, USETH WHEN HE CELEBRATES MASS. IT IS OF GOLD ENAMELLED & SET Wth AN AQUA MARINE. J. GRISONI DELIN 1719. The ring is not among the treasures now at Monza. Several pieces of great historic significance were dispersed in 1797 with objects from Venice and Rome. The ring is from the smaller of the two albums of drawings collected by John Talman, which includes, as does the larger album, drawings of architectural details and vestments, as well as jewelled and precious objects. Three artists assisted Talman in the execution of these elaborate record drawings: Giuseppe Grisoni, Pietro Santo Bartoli and his son Francesco.

238

Gold, enamel and a ruby cameo. French. C. 1720. Height of bezel 1.8 cm. Herz Collection, Braybrooke Collection. British Museum, London, Dalton no. 389.



This ring is set with a ruby-cameo portrait-bust of Madame de Maintenon (1635-1719), who was secretly married to Louis XIV in 1684. In a period in France conspicuous for widespread criticism of the king's financial policies and for the waste of money and resources that resulted from the wars with the Netherlands, Madame de Maintenon was scrupulously modest in her appearance and never sought to take the place of a queen, refusing to accept or use any of the crown jewels, but even so she was always unpopular with the king's subjects. Cameo-set jewellery is rare in the seventeenth century, because the art of cameo-cutting, so highly regarded in the Renaissance, was eclipsed by the growing interest in facet-cutting and only revived in the mid eighteenth century. Nonetheless, cameos have always been prized as works of art, and there is virtually no period since antiquity when they were completely out of favour.

239

Gold and rose-diamonds. Western European. Mid eighteenth century. Height of bezel 2.5 cm. Meyer Gift, 1938. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 34168.

This ring is an example of the most conventional shape for the bezel of so-called *giardinetti* ("flower-garden") rings: an open-work design of flowers in a basket. Other examples of this type of ring treat the



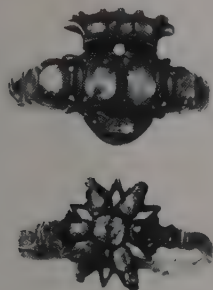
237

239

flowers even more naturalistically, using coloured gemstones or pastes for the petals and leaves. A two-handed urn-shaped vase was popular for *giardinetti* rings at the end of the eighteenth century.

240

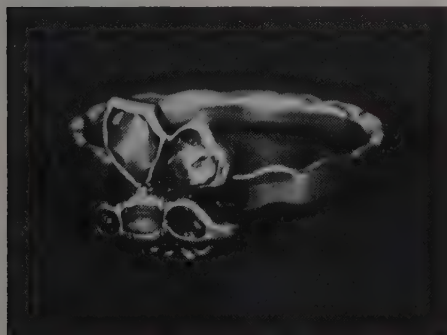
Gold, diamonds and coloured gemstones. Western European. Late eighteenth century-mid nineteenth century. Height of largest bezel 1.8 cm. British Museum, London, Dalton nos. 2106, 2109.



In spite of the name given to these *giardinetti* rings, the design is not always floral. They have in common the use of small gemstones and an open-work bezel, following the tradition established by the cruciform English and Spanish rings of the early seventeenth century (Pl. 220). As the name *giardinetti* suggests, many of these rings are of Italian origin, but they were popular throughout western Europe and were produced in Spain and Portugal well into the present century. Their function was originally as a guard-ring to keep the plain gold wedding-ring in place.

241

Gold, diamonds, a ruby, a garnet and a chrysoberyl. English (?). C. 1800. Height of bezel 0.9 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, HG 320.



This example is related in date and taste to the naturalistic *giardinetti* rings (Pls. 239–40). The gem-set butterfly on this bezel is attached to a wavy gold hoop. The butterfly was emblematic of the soul and was often found in jewellery design in association with a heart, gem-set in jewels, exchanged as a pledge of love and fidelity.



242

Gold and enamel. Austrian. Mid eighteenth century. Diameter 0.22 cm. Waterton Collection. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1003–1871.

An example of local and traditional craftsmanship,

this ring comes from the Tyrol and is one of a group of wide-band rings, often enamelled both inside and outside with a continuous scene, usually from daily life, travels or rural pursuits. The painted enamelling is delicate, and the drawing refined, in the tradition of contemporary box-makers.

243

Copper and yellow chrysoberyls. Portuguese. Second half of the eighteenth century. Height of bezel 4.5 cm. Meyer Gift, 1938. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 34167.



The use of these lime-coloured yellow chrysoberyls (often incorrectly known as 'chrysolites') is characteristic of eighteenth-century Portuguese jewellery, the main source of this material being the Minas Novas and the Minas Gerais in Portuguese-owned Brazil. Refinements in gem-cutting techniques had produced the calibre-cut that made this close pavé-covering of a curved surface possible.

The most elaborate calibre-cutting techniques were exploited by the English paste (or 'strass') cutters, but the relative popularity of such soft stones as crystals (*cailloux du Rhin*) and chrysoberyls encouraged experiments with this specially shaped cutting of gemstones.

244

Gold and a ruby. Western European. Second half of the eighteenth century. Diameter 1.9 cm. Reubell Bequest, 1933. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 30698.



Examples of the later type of clasped-hands *fede* ring now include a heart, usually formed of a gem — here a ruby — cut to that shape and often surmounted by a gem-set crown. Most of these rings bear sentimental inscriptions or 'posies' round the hoop, either inside or outside. The successive Wedding Ring Acts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which required that gold rings in England be fully hallmarked, almost put an end to the practice of inscribing the posy inside the band of the plain gold ring, and many later *fede* and be-

trothal rings have the words incorporated into the design of the bezel. The traditional form of the ring has hardly altered since Woeiriot's publication (see below and Pl. 212) two centuries earlier.



245

Gold and a carnelian intaglio. French. 1761. Height of bezel 2.2 cm. Collection J. Leturcq, Bt. 1873. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Cabinet des Médailles, K1111 25024C.



This ring is inscribed: GUAY D 1761. LAP POMPADOUR AN.AE.39 and has a portrait intaglio of Madame de Pompadour, cut by Jacques Guay. Madame de Pompadour (1721–64), mistress of Louis XV for twenty years, was a cultured and talented woman, whose patronage of the arts showed a great refinement of taste and knowledge of techniques. She was both patron and pupil of the celebrated gem-engraver Jacques Guay (1715–93), who also executed her beautiful bracelet clasps (portraits of Henri IV and Louis XV), still preserved in the Cabinet des Médailles in their enamelled and gem-set mounts with this ring and the companion cameo ring of Louis XV, cut by Madame de Pompadour herself.

246

Silver, Lisbon-porcelain portrait and rock crystals. Portuguese. C. 1783. Height of bezel 2.6 cm. Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF1466.



Queen Maria I of Portugal (d. 1816), whose portrait surrounded by rock crystals adorns this ring, married her uncle, Don Pedro, by special dispensation from the pope in 1760. Portrait medallions of both of them were made by the Lisbon Porcelain Factory (established in 1773) after designs by the Portuguese sculptor João Figueiredo. Dated examples in the Schreiber Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, suggest that the medallions were first issued between 1782 and 1783. In 1787, John Flaxman modelled a portrait of this queen for Wedgwood that is nearly identical to the Lisbon example. Another example is dated 1792, and the frequent mention of jewels and rings set with Queen Maria's portrait in contemporary journals suggests that they were popular and widely distributed.

247

Gold and jasper-ware. English. Late eighteenth century. Height of bezel 3.6 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M. 621–1894.



Jasper-ware medallions of this type, white on a blue ground, were made at the Wedgwood & Bentley Factory at Etruria in Staffordshire for setting in

jewellery and box lids. Much of the jewellery was made of cut steel by Matthew Boulton at his Birmingham factory, and gold setting is found more rarely. The figure group on this medallion has been adapted to the marquise shape of the ring by reducing the number of figures and adding flowering plants at the top and bottom.

248

Gold and jasper-ware. French (?). Late eighteenth century. Height of bezel 3 cm. Reubell Bequest, 1933. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 31053.



Wedgwood's jasper-ware was widely imitated, in France at Sèvres and at the Paris Porcelain Company, in Germany at Meissen and in Lisbon at the Porcelain Factory. These imitators encountered many difficulties in the manufacturing process, and the presence of fire cracks in this example suggests a continental factory rather than the English works in Staffordshire. Josiah Wedgwood was a perfectionist who would not have countenanced the keeping of so imperfect an example of his invention.

249

Drawings in pen and ink and water-colours by Jean Rasp. French. Late eighteenth century. Width 37.5 cm. Carré Sale, 1888, lot no. 598. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 4511.

These designs by Jean Rasp (c. 1781–5) are for marquise and shield-shaped ring bezels that are enamelled, set and bordered with gems and pearls that form messages of love and fidelity or initials. To judge from the relatively large number of surviving examples, these decorative rings were widely popular throughout western Europe in the late eighteenth century (Pl. 251).





250

Oil on canvas: Portrait of Queen Charlotte (detail) by Sir Thomas Lawrence. English. 1789. 2.39 × 1.47 m. National Gallery, London, 4257.

Queen Charlotte (1744–1818), wife of George III, is depicted here wearing a ring with a blue bezel, inset with a flowersprig of brilliants that can be compared with Plates 249 and 251.

251

Gold enamel and marcasites. English. Late eighteenth century. Height of bezel 2.2 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, HG 66.



Here is an example of the type of ring that appears in the designs of Jean Rasp (Pl. 249) and was fashionable until at least the turn of the century. The enamelled bezel is bordered and inset with marcasites. The use of marcasites (iron pyrites sometimes known as 'fool's gold' from the yellow metallic sheen on the surface of the stone) suggests that the fashion spread through many levels of society, from royalty (Pl. 250) to the prosperous middle classes. As substitutes for diamonds in rings of this style, both marcasites and cut steel were used, often in association with blue translucent enamel over engine-turned engraving, a form of ornamentation consisting of finely engraved lines radiating from a centre.

252

Drawings in pen and ink with water-colours. Portuguese (?). Late eighteenth century. 13.7 × 22.9 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, D316–99.

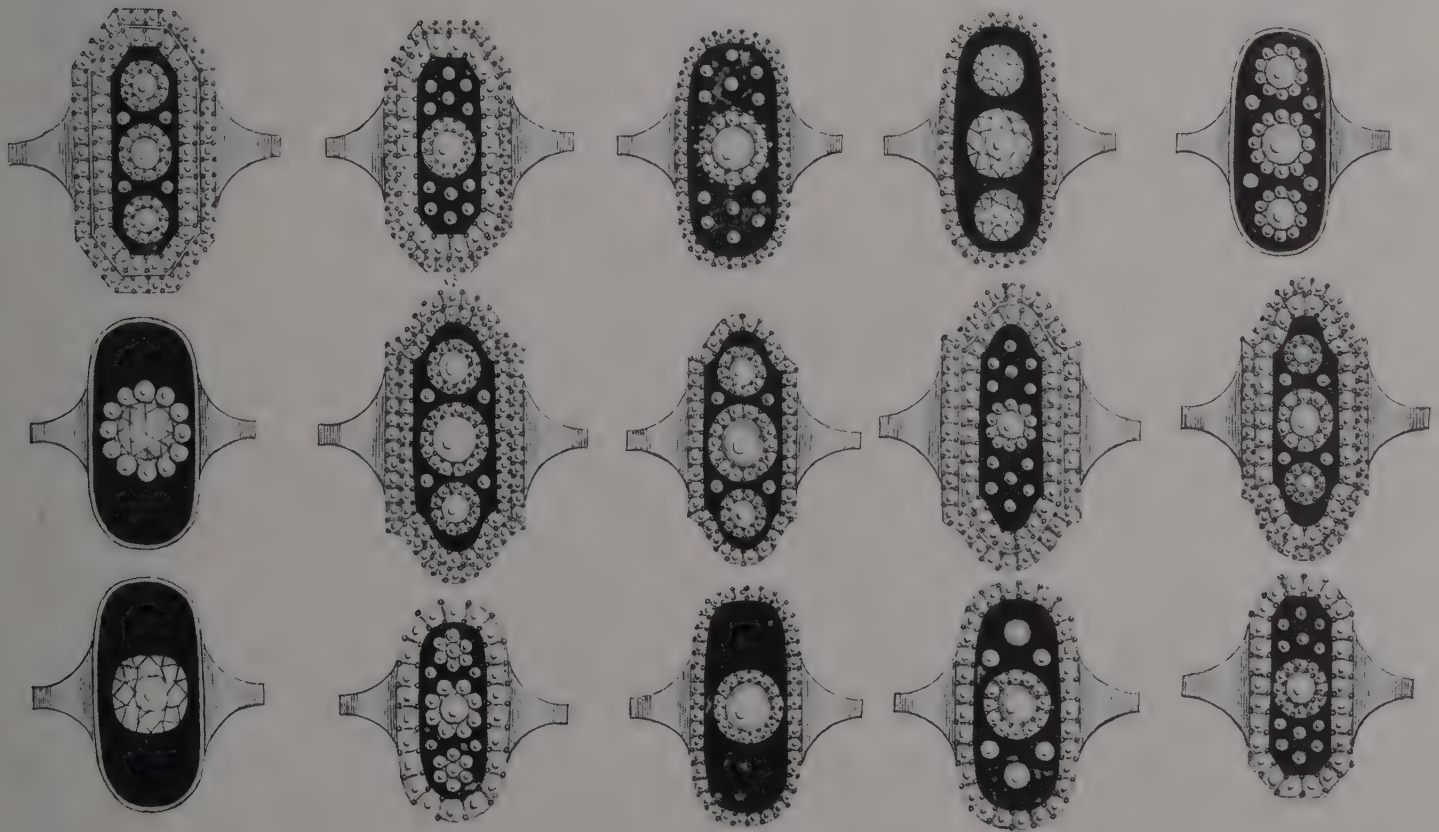
This page from a design book shows rings made of pearls and rose-cut diamonds with blue enamel. Although these rings are very close in style to English and French types of the same date, other designs in the album from which this drawing is taken point to a Portuguese origin.

253

Gold and seed pearls under glass. English. C. 1800. Height of bezel 3.2 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, HG 962.



This ring is the same style and shape as the enamel and diamond-set rings (Pls. 249–51), but the



252

ornamental device on the bezel is carried out in minute graded pearls. Jewellery with seed-pearl decoration of this type — here under glass on a blue ground — falls into two groups: it was either

executed entirely with graduated pearls or with pearls on a base of plaster or gesso, enriched with gold wirework. Many of these jewels bear sentimental inscriptions in French.



254

Gold, diamonds, carved fruitwood under glass. French. Late eighteenth century. Height of bezel 3.2 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, HG 515.

Minute sandal wood and fruitwood carvings for use in jewellery or to ornament box lids were the speciality of a craftsman of Italian origin, Giu-



seppe-Maria Bonzanigo (1745–1820) and his pupils. Jewellery like this finger-ring, in settings of French manufacture, survives set with such carvings dating from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; it seems, therefore, possible that Bonzanigo worked in France. On the reverse of the bezel is the guarantee mark used at Rennes, France, from 1774 to 1780.

255

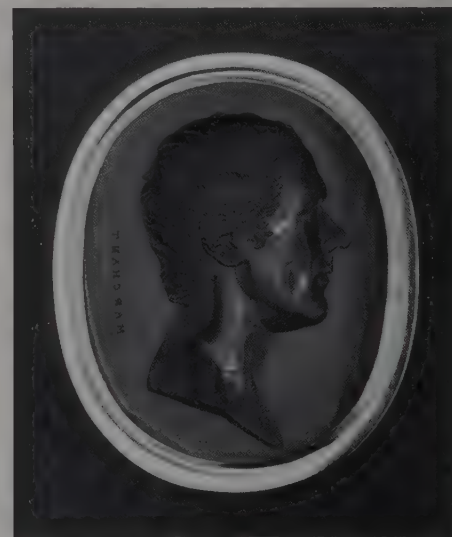
Gold and an onyx cameo. Italian. Late eighteenth century. Diameter 1.9 cm. Gift of Dame Joan Evans. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M. 231–1975.

The design of this cameo, depicting Theseus with the dead Minotaur, is based on an antique gem with the same subject, signed by Philemon, in the imperial collection in Vienna. It was widely published in the eighteenth century, for example by Baron Stosch in 1724 and by P.J. Mariette in 1750. The second half of the eighteenth century saw a great revival of interest in the art of gem-engraving, both Mariette and Johann Lorenz Natter published treatises on engraving. The collecting of a cabinet

of gems was a widely popular pastime, Rome being a great centre of the trade in gems of all periods, including the innumerable modern copies of antique examples.

256

Gold and a carnelian intaglio. English. C. 1781. Height of bezel 2.4 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, HG 817.



This portrait intaglio of Earl Spencer, engraved MARCHANT, was cut by the famous English engraver Nathaniel Marchant (1739–1816) at the time of Spencer's marriage in 1781 to Lavinia, daughter of the Earl and Countess of Lucan. The portrait was exhibited in London at the Royal Academy in 1791.

257

Gold, diamonds and a miniature. French. C. 1784. Height of bezel 3 cm. From Miss Alice de Rothschild. James A. de Rothschild Collection, Waddesdon Manor.



This is one of a group of nine rings in the Rothschild Collection with miniatures that are attributed to the Van Blarenberghe family, active in the second half of the eighteenth century, specialists in these minute scenes, crowded with figures executed in body colour — the opaque mixture of water-colours and white paint also termed gouache. The scene shows a balloon ascent, which took place in 1783 from the Tuileries Gardens in Paris. The balloon was constructed by the Robert brothers, one of whom took part in this ascent. (The journey lasted for four hours, and the balloon landed safely at Nesle, twenty-seven miles from Paris.) The miniature is bordered with diamonds. A defaced mark on the rear of the hoop may be the Paris excise mark for gold between 1819 and 1838.

258

Gold and a silhouette under glass. English. C. 1790. Height of bezel, 2.3 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M. 27—1939.



The use of a silhouette portrait to decorate a ring is much less common than either painted or enamelled miniatures. John Miers (1757—1821), who did this one of a young girl, was a celebrated silhouettist. He began his career in Leeds in 1781. A trade label of 1783 contains the first reference to the use of Miers's profile miniatures for setting in jewellery: 'Takes the most perfect likenesses either to hang in frames, or upon ivory, for rings, pins, lockets, bracelets, etc.' By 1791, after establishing himself in London, Miers had also set up as a jeweller, in partnership with John Field.

259

Gold and a miniature on ivory under glass. French. Late eighteenth century. Height of bezel, 2.3 cm. Meyer Gift, 1914. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 19453.

Rings set with portrait miniatures — this one depicts a young child — were popular from the seventeenth century. They often had a commemorative purpose, especially in the case of portraits of eminent or royal personages.



259



260

260

Gold, diamonds and a miniature on copper. English. Early nineteenth century. Height of bezel 2 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, HG 157.

This miniature of George III (1738—1820) shows his appearance in the 1760s. The style of the setting, bordered with diamonds, is similar to that of the miniature of Queen Charlotte (Pl. 261), his wife, and it seems possible that it was done at the same date.



261

Gold, diamonds and a miniature on copper. English. 1827. Height of bezel 2.4 cm. Buckingham Palace, London. By gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen.

This miniature of Queen Charlotte (1744 — 1818), wife of George III, which shows her at the time of her marriage in 1760, was set as a ring and bordered with diamonds by the royal goldsmiths, Rundell & Bridge, for her son, George IV, in 1827.

262

Silver. French. 1792. Height of bezel 2.5 cm. Labrousse Bequest. Musée Carnavalet, Paris, E. 13049.

This revolutionary seal-ring, which is engraved with the words: COMMUNE DE PARIS ('Commune of Paris') and LIBERTE 14 JET 1789 EGALITE 10 AOUST 1792 ('Liberty 14 July 1789 Equality 10 August 1792'), commemorates the successful storming of the Bastille and the release of its prisoners in 1789, as well as the massacre of the Royal Swiss Guard on 10 August 1792.



263

Iron and gold. French. 1793. Diameter 1.8 cm. Reubell Bequest, 1933. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 31020.

This plain iron band with applied portraits in shallow relief of heroes of the French Revolution was a popular form of base-metal jewellery for the French populace, called *sans-culottes*, who eschewed all show of aristocratic finery. The portraits are of Jean-Paul Marat and Louis-Michel Le Peletier de Saint-Fargeau and, the reverse of the ring is inscribed: MARTIRS DE LA LIBERTE ('martyrs of liberty'), with the date 1793. Marat was assassinated by Charlotte Corday in July of that year and Le Peletier de Saint-Fargeau by a royalist named Pâris in the previous January, after he voted to behead the king.

262

263

264

Gold and enamel. English. 1795. Height of bezel 1.8 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M. 877-1888.



One of a large group of mourning-rings with the bezel in the shape of a funerary urn, this ring is engraved with a memorial inscription to Ino

Brown (d. 1795). Many of the surviving rings of this shape have dated inscriptions that place the period of their popularity in the 1790s. Examples exist with hands holding the urn, and there are rings and brooches with the urns set all over with diamonds.

265
Gold, diamonds and carved ivory under glass. French(?). Late eighteenth century. Height of bezel 1.6 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, HG 622.



This ring is executed in finely undercut carving, unlike the memorial carvings that are usually executed in shallow relief to allow the scene to be laid over a ground of woven hairwork. The bezel of this ring is bordered with diamonds and ornamented with a miniature ivory carving of a pastoral scene under glass. It seems, stylistically, to relate to a very fine group of carved pastoral scenes used to ornament French boxes in the late eighteenth century. Maximin Deloche, in *La bague en France, à travers l'histoire* attributes to the workshop of Giuseppe-Maria Bonzanigo a ring of typically French taste with the bezel enclosing a scene of this same type in minutely carved ivory.

266
Ivory and gold. English. Late eighteenth century. Height of bezel 3.4 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, HG 1071.

This example of miniature ivory carving relates stylistically to a group of similar subjects signed by the partnership of G. Stephany and J. Dresch, who worked first at Bath, then in London and exhibited at the Royal Academy in the late eighteenth century. The names of many of the craftsmen who made these miniature carvings suggest an origin in Germany or Austria, both countries with a long tradition of fine ivory work. This ring has an ivory



hoop, and the bezel of ivory is bordered with gold and ornamented with a miniature ivory carving of a fully rigged ship at sea.

267
Gold, carved ivory and mother of pearl under glass. French. Late eighteenth century. Height of bezel 2.5 cm. Reubell Bequest, 1933. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 31039.



This is an example of a group of miniature ivory carvings that incorporates a sentimental inscription in French. The carved-ivory miniature on mother of pearl shows a figure in classical garments making an offering at the altar of love and is inscribed with the words: DONDEL'AMITIE ('gift of love'). Jewels of English and Italian origin were also frequently inscribed in French at this date, a practice that ended with the Napoleonic Wars.

268
Ivory under glass. French. Late eighteenth century. Height of bezel 3.2 cm. Meyer Gift, 1914. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 19454.



Rings were offered as a pledge of affection far more freely in the eighteenth century than they are today and were not necessarily reserved for betrothals only. The survival of these fragile objects was ensured by the fact that they were treasured by their owners for their sentimental significance and were rarely of any intrinsic worth. The inscription here reads: ON EST POINT ETRANGER · AU SEIN DE L'AMITIE ('friends are never alone').

269

Copper-gilt and a grisaille miniature under glass. English. Late eighteenth century. Height of bezel 3.7 cm. Meyer Gift, 1914. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 19455.

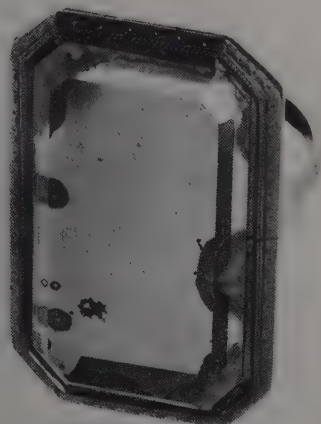


This ring is characteristic of English Neo-classical taste in mourning jewellery; it is a fine example and was probably executed as a special order. The miniature held by the widow may well be a recognizable portrait. In 1787 a London jeweller, G. Terry, published a pattern-book of subjects of this type to be used on mourning-brooches and mourning-rings. The designs incorporated all the conventional appurtenances of mourning: the willow tree, broken columns and the urns that are found in funerary monuments.

270

Gold and feathers. English. Late eighteenth century. Height of bezel 2.2 cm. Meyer Gift, 1914. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 19444.

This example of the decorative fantasy ring was executed with the minute craftsmanship characteristic of the period. The bird ornamenting the bezel is made of brightly coloured feathers and placed under glass. The time and labour expended on these rings shows no regard for the lack of intrinsic value in the materials.



270

271

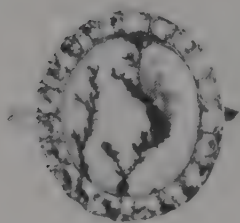
Copper-gilt and mirror-backed paste. English(?). Late eighteenth century. Height of bezel 3.6 cm. Meyer Gift, 1914. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 19435.

Glass pastes, facet-cut on one surface and backed with a reflecting surface to give the illusion of a facet-cut reverse, were known in England as 'Vauxhall' pastes, after the Duke of Buckingham's glass manufactory of that name in London. They might have been worn as a substitute for precious stones at the masquerades that took place in the London pleasure gardens where thieving and pick-pocketing were notoriously rife. Mirror-backed pastes were developed in the 1770s and in use in the first half of the nineteenth century.

272

Gold, aquamarines and a moss-agate. English. Late eighteenth century. Diameter 1.9 cm. Fortnum Collection. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, F632.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the use of curiously marked and veined hardstones became widely popular for jewellery and personal orna-



ments, desk-seal handles and boxes. This fashion reflected the widespread interest in geology, and among the most prized of these stones was the agate with mossy inclusions, taking a plant-like form, often of great delicacy. The moss-agate on this ring is bordered with aquamarines.

273

Gold, silk embroidered with hair and topazes. English. C. 1800. Width of bezel 1.7 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, HG 212.

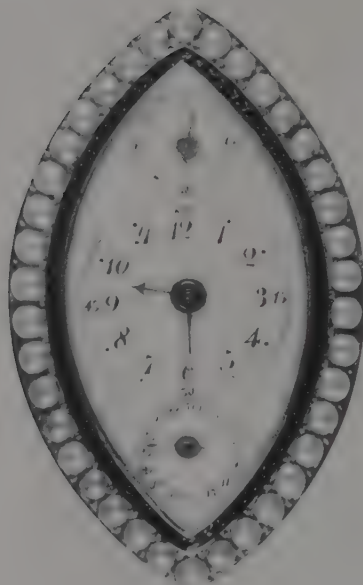


The curious practice of embroidering on silk with hair is here used to imitate moss-agate, which was much prized. The embroidered silk is enclosed under glass and bordered with flat-cut topazes. Other examples of hair-embroidery show landscapes or mourning scenes. This sort of minute, time-consuming work was designed to occupy over-abundant leisure.

274

Gold, pearls and an enamelled watch face. French. Late eighteenth century. Length 2.6 cm. Ilbert Collection. British Museum, London, CA 1292.

The idea of incorporating a watch into a finger-ring dates from the late sixteenth century (Pl. 215), and experiments in making both accurate and miniature movements have continued ever since. In the



274

275

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the success was only limited; the mechanisms used made the ring bezels unduly large and unwieldy. Although much smaller mechanisms existed at this date, they seem not to have been used. Jean Antoine Lépine (fl. 1769–83) was a famous watchmaker, the first to use the repeating mechanism that led to the successful development of the keyless winder. This movement, with cylinder escapement, is signed: LÉPINE A PARIS. ('Lépine in Paris'). The finger-ring watch was popular in the early nineteenth century, and gradually a thinner mechanism more suitable for the ring bezel was developed, but the ring-watch remained an impractical novelty that was finally superseded by the convenience of the wrist-watch at the end of the nineteenth century.

275

Gold and an engraved emerald. Russian. Nineteenth century. Height 3 cm. Gift of Lucien Baszanger, 1946. Musée du Louvre, Paris, OA 9522.

This magnificent ring was thought to be the lost coronation ring of Napoleon I and was exhibited as such at the Musée du Louvre in Paris in 1962. Recent research has shown that it is more likely to be a ring of the same date from the princely Yengaghtchev family, for the Russian coat of arms also includes an imperial eagle.

276

Gold, enamel and a portrait-head. French. Nineteenth century. Diameter 1.9 cm. Bought from Henry Boyle, the son of John Boyle of the firm of Wedgwood & Bentley. British Museum, London, F. 1424.



This ring is said to have been one of those given by Napoleon I to the French officers who assisted him to escape from his voluntary exile on the Island of Elba. John Boyle was given it by one of these officers who died in 1830. As with the Stuart commemorative rings (Pl. 231) the image — a tiny medallion portrait-head of Napoleon — had to be concealed when the new regime usurped the old. The portrait is covered by a hinged lid, enamelled on the surface with three flowers within a wreath. These tiny medallion portraits were popular for commemorative jewellery, particularly rings, in the early nineteenth century. Similar rings, without the concealing lid, celebrate Wellington's victories in the Iberian peninsula and the marriage of Queen Victoria.

277

Gold and enamel. English. 1806. Diameter 2.1 cm. British Museum, London, Dalton no. 1441.



The mourning-rings for Admiral Nelson were made at the request of Dr William Nelson, his brother and heir, by a London jeweller, Mr. Salter of 35 Strand, who had been a personal friend of the admiral. Every admiral and post-captain who saw action at the Battle of Trafalgar (1805), in which Nelson was fatally wounded, was presented with a mourning-ring, as well as the members of Nelson's family and their immediate connections, the Bolton and Matcham families. It is estimated that at least a hundred of these rings were distributed. The bezel of this ring bears the inscription: TRAFALGAR and the initials 'N' beneath a viscount's coronet and 'B' beneath a ducal coronet, for Nelson and Bronte, commemorating Admiral Lord Nelson, Duke of Bronte. The hoop is engraved inside: PALMAM QUI MERVIT FERAT ('Let him who has won it bear the palm'), which was adopted by Lord Nelson as his motto, and LOST TO HIS COUNTRY 21 OCT^R 1805 AGED 47.

278

Gold and enamel. English. C. 1811. Width of bezel 1.7 cm. Gift of Mrs. G.H. Goodman. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M. 314–1926.



A fine example of an early nineteenth-century enamelled memorial ring, this ring has an unusually informative inscription inside the hoop: CAPT^N. JAMES NEWMAN, LOST OFF THE HAAK IN THE HERO 74. DEC. 24 1811, AGED 46. The bezel has the Union Jack flag surrounded by a snake.

279

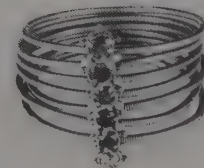
Gold and enamel with an engraved portrait. American. 1800. Height of bezel 2.4 cm. Gift of William H. Huntington, 1883. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 83.2.121.



By this date commemorative rings with portraits were becoming rare, and the nineteenth century was to see a great change in taste in both mourning and sentimental jewellery. George Washington was elected first president of the United States in 1789. When he died ten years later, after two terms as president, he was widely mourned over the whole country. This portrait of Washington by Charles de Saint-Mémin was engraved after the crayon portrait made by him in 1798.

280

Gold, rubies, an emerald, a garnet, an amethyst and a diamond. English(?). Early nineteenth century. Height 2 cm. British Museum, London, F 2172.



A REGARD ring is so-called because the initial letters of the gems spell the word 'regard': a ruby, an emerald, a garnet, an amethyst, a ruby and a diamond. These rings, like the similar DEAREST rings, were traditionally given at anniversaries or to mark the birth of a child.



281

Oil on canvas: Portrait de Philibert Rivière by Jean-Dominique Ingres. French. 1805. 116 × 89 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, M.I. 1445.

Monsieur Rivière is shown in this portrait wearing a fine cameo, carved in high relief with a gorgon's

head, set in a gold finger-ring. This portrait was painted in the same year that the first competition for a *Prix de Rome* (a scholarship for a year's study in Rome) in gem-engraving took place, an indication of the importance with which this great lapidary art was regarded by Napoleon I, a taste shared by many collectors of the period (Pl. 255).



282

Gold with black and gold verre églomisé. French(?). C. 1810. Width of bezel 2.5 cm. Meyer Gift, 1914. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 19449.

This technique of decorating under glass in black and gold with unfired painting and gilding (*verre églomisé*) was used by Bohemian glass-makers in the eighteenth century. These rings were popular in France and may have been made there by the same

methods as those used in Bohemia. Rings such as this reliquary one with a swivelling bezel that could conceal a sentimental inscription are said to have been popularized by Marie Antoinette, who gave rings of this type to Count von Ferson and Count Esterházy at the time of her abortive flight to Varennes. The pansy (or *pensée* in French) together with the inscription: A LUI on the hinged bezel of this ring is the French equivalent of 'think of him'.



283

Gold and a glass mosaic. Italian: Rome. C. 1820. Height of bezel 3.2 cm. Meyer Gift, 1938. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 34209.

In the eighteenth century, schools were set up in Rome (one in the Vatican itself) to teach the ancient art of mosaic work. Souvenirs of all kinds, from large table tops to minute plaques set in brooches or rings were produced, usually with specifically Roman images, either views of the famous ruins of antiquity, figures in the traditional costumes of the area or decorative motifs like these billing doves taken from antique wall paintings. These minutely fine mosaics were made possible by the development of the *filati smalti* ('fired thread of glass') technique and were produced well into the nineteenth century, but the quality of the work became coarse and badly set towards the end of the century.

284

Gold, turquoises, diamonds and a carnelian intaglio. English. 1821. Height of bezel 3 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, HG 393.



The massive gold hoop of this ring is set with turquoises and diamonds, and the bezel is set with a carnelian intaglio portrait-head in profile of George IV (1762–1830), cut to celebrate his coronation, probably by or after a model by Benedetto Pistrucci. The setting was possibly done by the royal goldsmiths, Rundell, Bridge & Rundell, who also issued the gold coronation medal designed by Pistrucci. (An exactly similar ring from the Sir John Evans Collections was given to the British Museum by Dame Joan Evans with a manuscript note stating that her father believed the intaglio to be by Pistrucci.) The inscription on the reverse of the bezel reads: GEORGIUS IV DEI GRATIA BRITT REX MDCCCXXI ('George IV, by the grace of God king of Britain, 1821').

285

Gold with an onyx cameo. English. 1821. Height of bezel 3.3 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, suppl. list 80.

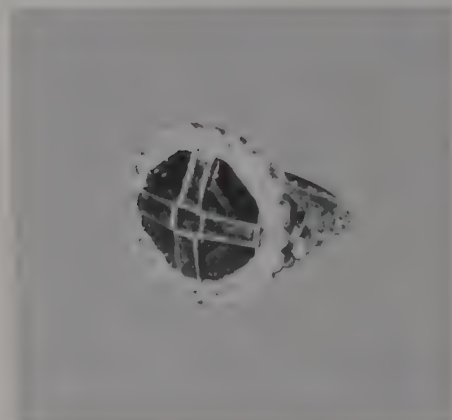


Cut to celebrate the coronation of George IV, this gold ring has an onyx-cameo portrait-head of George IV in profile, engraved on the reverse:

GEORGIUS IV D.G. BRIT. REX MDCCCXXI. ('George IV by the grace of God king of Britain 1821'). It is a fine example of one of a number of cameo versions of this portrait (Pl. 284), possibly from a model by Pistrucci. The cameo portrait of George IV signed by Pistrucci is cut in higher relief and corresponds much more closely to the medallion portraits that he designed.

286

Gold, rubies, sapphires and diamonds. English. 1838. Width of bezel 2.2 cm. Crown jewels of England. Tower of London, London. Crown Copyright. Reproduced with the permission of the Controller of Her Britannic Majesty's Stationery Office.



The coronation ring made for Queen Victoria (1819–1901) is a reduced version of her predecessor William IV's ring (pictured below), having a sapphire inset with a cross of rubies bordered with diamonds. It was given to her by her mother, the Duchess of Kent, and in his *Memoirs*, Greville records that the ring had been made mistakenly for her little finger instead of for the fourth finger, on which the coronation rubric prescribes that it should be placed. He continues: 'When the Archbishop was to put it on, she extended the former, but he said it must go on the latter. She said it was too small and could not get it on. He said it was right

to put it there, and, as he insisted, she yielded, but had first to take off her other rings, and then this was forced on, but it hurt her very much, and as soon as the ceremony was over, she was obliged to bathe her finger in ice water to get it off'. Usually a new

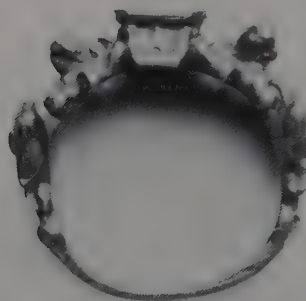
ring was made for each sovereign, and it then became their personal property, but the rings of both King William IV and his wife, Queen Adelaide, were worn on subsequent occasions by other monarchs.



287

Gold and enamel with a vinaigrette. French (?). 1830–40. Height of bezel 1.8 cm. Meyer Gift, 1938. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 34221.

An example of French neo-Renaissance taste, this decorative trifle incorporates a clasped-book vinaigrette (Pl. 294) and apes — but cannot simulate — the reliquary rings of the sixteenth century. Shorn of religious or memento-mori symbolism, the finger-ring has become merely a fashionable costume accessory.



288

Oxidized silver and gold. French, by François-Désiré Froment-Meurice. 1844. Diameter 1.9 cm. Londesborough Collection, Franks Collection. British Museum, London, AF 2578.

The ring, which was designed by F.D. Froment-Meurice from models by the sculptor Jean-Baptiste Klagmann, was bought in Paris in 1852 by Lord Londesborough, who thought it was of Renaissance origin. In the Londesborough catalogue, of 1853, it was already recognized as of dubious authenticity, and from then on it features in contemporary publications as 'modern French', although other versions were illustrated by Henri Vever in his monumental work on the French jewellery of the nineteenth century. It is curious to note how easily and quickly revivalist jewellery of the period can lose its identity, no matter how celebrated the designer.

289

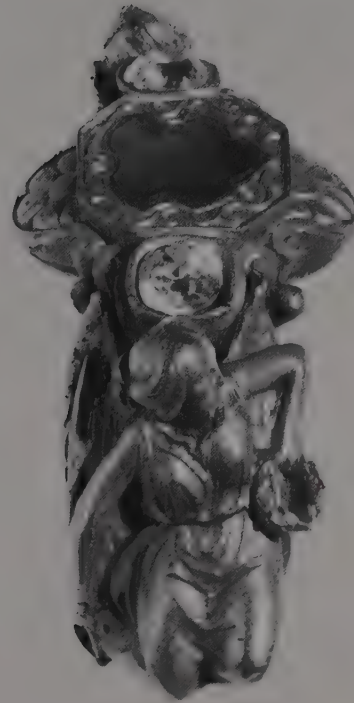
Gold, diamond pastes and an emerald. French, by Honoré Bourdoncle for Morel et Duponchel. 1845–8. Diameter inside the hoop 2 cm. Gift of Jules Brateau, 1901. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 9507 A.

Like the angels that support the bezel of the Froment-Meurice rings (Pls. 288, 290), these neo-Renaissance figures were designed by Jean-Baptiste Klagmann. The ring was made by the celebrated engraver Honoré Bourdoncle for the firm of Morel et Duponchel. Like Froment-Meurice, Jean Morel specialized in jewellery designs in the neo-Gothic and neo-Renaissance styles. These were first seen by a large public at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 and were regarded as fine examples of French originality and taste.

290

Steel and gold. French. C. 1855. Height of bezel 2.1 cm. From the Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1855. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2658–1856.

This ring of chiselled steel and gold was designed and made by François-Désiré Froment-Meurice, who was one of the most celebrated French jewellers of the nineteenth century. Victor Hugo called him the 'Cellini of nineteenth-century goldsmithing'. He was a pupil of the German jeweller Wagner, who worked in Paris and was one of the first designers to work in the neo-Gothic style. Froment-Meurice developed his own blend of neo-Gothic and neo-Renaissance designs, which he applied to sculptural jewellery, using heavy gemstones of little intrinsic value. The central group of this ring is nearly identical to the one on the ring illustrated in Henri Vever's *La bijouterie française au XIX^e siècle* (vol. I, p. 100), where the model is ascribed to the sculptor Jean-Baptiste Klagmann and dated 1844.



289

290



290



291

291

Engraved designs by Etienne Julienne from the periodical *La Pandore: Nouveau Recueil de Dessins, de Bijouterie, Joaillerie, Orfèverie*. French. C. 1864. C. 16 x 19.5 cm. *Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Paris*, p. 331.

Etienne Julienne ran a studio for instruction in design that was attended by many of the French jewellers of this period. These designs for finger-rings reflect nineteenth-century taste very accurately; they are modified versions of the massive sculptural designs of Jean-Baptiste Klagmann (Pls. 288, 290) and Jean-Jacques (called James) Pradier.

292

Gold and a cat's-eye chrysoberyl. French. Second half of the nineteenth century. Height 1.3 cm. *Vever Gift, 1924. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris*, 24503A.

Many of the unmarked jewels in the Vever Gift



292

were made by the Atelier Vever in the late nineteenth century. Massive rings with sculptural ornament were fashionable for men from the 1880s. This one, with smiling masks of satyrs on the shoulders of a chased *repoussé* hoop, is a characteristic example.

293

Gold and a cabochon sapphire. English, by William Burges. C. 1860. Diameter 2.1 cm. *Victoria and Albert Museum, London*, M. 281-1975.

The design of this neo-Gothic ring with applied trefoil decoration on the shoulders is ascribed to the celebrated Victorian architect and designer William Burges (1827-81); it may have been made for his own use. Burges designed a considerable quantity of jewellery, and references in his diary suggest that a number of the pieces were made up, but very few survive. The sources of his ideas were mainly French Gothic ornament, which he studied on

prolonged trips in the provinces of France, making detailed drawings as he travelled. Since this ring was made either for himself or on special commission, there was no need to mark it, but the attribution of this ring to him is confirmed by the surviving design from Burges's own sketchbooks, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

294

Gold. English. C. 1840. Width of vinaigrette, 2 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, HG 377.

The heat of crowded candlelit rooms was so great that a specific against fainting was an essential accessory at any grand social occasion; the perforated top of the vinaigrette allowed the user to benefit from the aromatic salts it contained. These vinaigrette-rings enjoyed a period of popularity, but few survive intact, since the rings have a greater value on their own. The vinaigrette on this ring opens to reveal a pierced cover for a compartment

that contained an essence-soaked sponge. Queen Victoria owned a similar vinaigrette-ring of French manufacture, which she was given in 1841.

295

Gold and plaited hair. French or English. First half of the nineteenth century. Diameter 2 cm. Maguin Gift, 1928. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 26526.

The inseting of the hoops of mourning-rings with the plaited hair of the deceased was a custom frequent in the early part of the nineteenth century. The hair rarely survives if the ring was worn; this ring is the more valuable for being in unusually good condition. The bezel is engraved with the initials 'TE'.

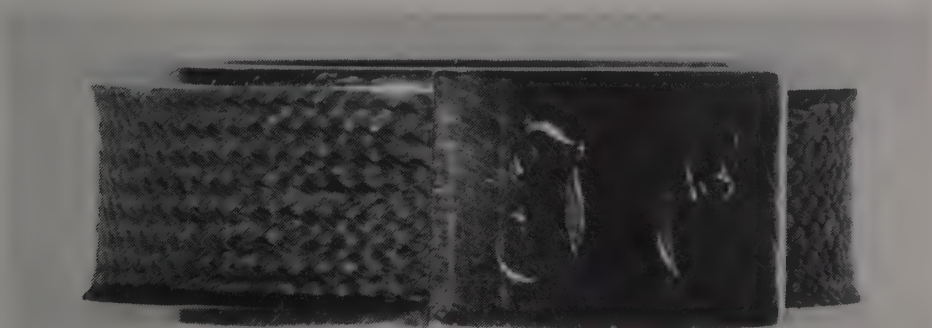
296

Gold (a) and silver-gilt with an amethyst intaglio (b). English. Between 1846 and 1861. Diameter 1.9 cm. (a), 1.5 cm. (b). Bequeathed by Sir Frederick Kenyon, GBE, KCB. British Museum, London, 1952, 10-2, 2-3.

293



294



295



a



b

The Browning finger-rings were worn by the poets Robert Browning and his wife Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and both refer to her — the one worn by Robert being engraved: BA, which was her family pet name, and the other being engraved with her initials 'EBB'. Two other inscribed rings belonged to Robert Browning: the one that he wore on his watch-chain, engraved with the Greek inscription: AEI (meaning 'forever'), which was reputedly made by the firm of Castellani in Rome, and another, also with a Latin inscription: VIS MEA ('my strength'), which belongs to Balliol College, Oxford.

297

Gold and enamel. English, 1846–7. Height of bezel 1.4 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum. London, HG 811.



This ring is of the same type as the Nelson memorial ring (Pl. 277). The bezel bears a ducal coronet and the device of the Duke of Northumberland; the outside of the hoop is inscribed: IN MEMORY OF, and the back of the bezel: HUGH DUKE OF NORTH-UMBERLAND. The inside of the hoop is inscribed: AT 61, OBT 11TH FEB. 1847. The inscriptions demonstrate the use of the abbreviated Latin words *obt* (*obit*) for 'died' and *at* (*aetate*) for 'aged'. These abbreviations were widely used for memorial inscriptions at this date. The ring also has the hallmarks for London in 1846 and 1847.

298

Gold, enamel, rose-diamonds and a miniature on copper. Italian (?). C. 1878. Height of bezel 2.5 cm. Gift of Mrs Brightwen. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, F. 786.



A late nineteenth-century example of the memorial portrait ring, in the same style as the Stuart memorial rings of the seventeenth century (Pl. 231), this ring has a crowned device: VE set with rose-diamonds; the bezel is in the shape of a compartment with a hinged lid enclosing a miniature, painted on copper, of Victor Emmanuel II, king of Italy (1820–78).



299

Gold, enamel and diamonds. English, by Carlo Giuliano. C. 1880. Diameter inside hoop 1.3 cm. Private collection, London.

Carlo Giuliano developed a very delicate style of

enamelling for his jewellery designs, based on Renaissance ideas but much less dependent than neo-Renaissance jewellery like Castellani's on early sources for its inspiration. This ring bears the mark 'CG' (for Carlo Giuliano) of 115 Piccadilly, London.

300

Gold, enamel, diamonds and a miniature on ivory. French. C. 1880. Height of bezel 3.1 cm. Bequeathed by Mrs Harriet Bolckow, 1890. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, M. 746–1890.

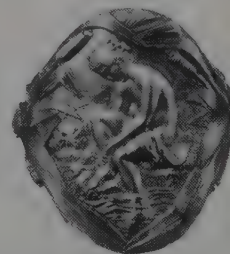
The bezel of this ring has a miniature painted on ivory, of *Psyche* by Charles Lepec (b. 1830), a celebrated French enamellist, who studied painting under Hippolyte Flandrin before beginning to

study enamelling in the 1860s. Lepec exhibited at the Salons from 1861 and at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1867. His work was sold in England through Robert Phillips of Cockspur Street, London, who had employed Carlo Giuliano (Pl. 299) when he first came to England in about 1860. The miniature is bordered with diamonds, and the hoop of the ring is enamelled in blue.



301

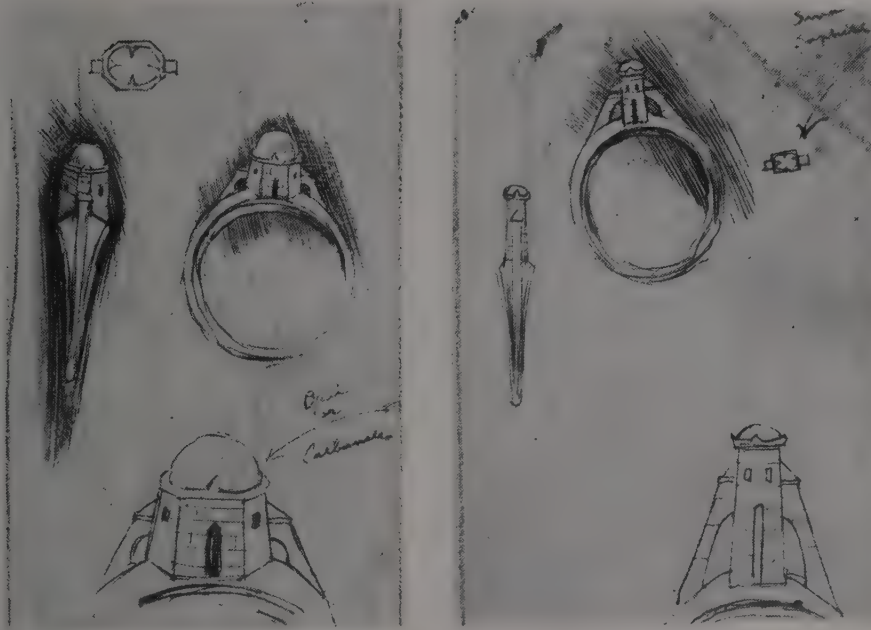
Gold. French. C. 1890. Height of bezel 2.2 cm. Hull Grundy Gift. British Museum, London, HG 643.



Rings with sculptural reliefs or groups, often with nude female figures, were fashionable in the late nineteenth century and were designed to be worn

by men. The chasing of this relief scene, showing a nymph bathing in a pool, is very fine, particularly where the nymph's feet are immersed in the water.

René Lalique, the great Art-Nouveau jeweller, was later to make a speciality of this type of sculptural ring (Pls. 310 — 12).



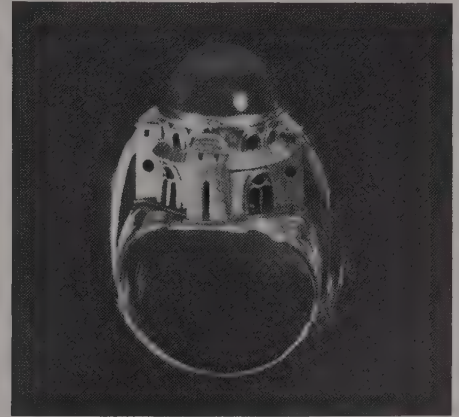
302
Drawings in pencil by Charles Ricketts. English. 1899.
C. 7 × 4.5 cm. British Museum, London, 1899-01.

These designs for a finger-ring for May Morris by

Charles Ricketts are from a small album of drawings for jewellery dated 1899. The ring actually made is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Plate 303 shows a ring that is an elaboration of the design at top left.

303

Brass and a cabochon amethyst. English, by Charles Ricketts.
1904. Height of basilica 2.2 cm. Fitzwilliam Museum,
Cambridge.



Based on the medieval idea of a ring with a reliquary compartment in the form of an arcaded temple or basilica and with the dome formed by a cabochon amethyst, the design of this Sabbatai ring is reminiscent of the Jewish marriage rings (Pl. 218) with their bezels in the form of turreted or pitched-roof buildings. It was designed by Charles Ricketts (1866 — 1931) for Katherine Bradley.

304

Bronze-gilt and a facet-cut colourless paste. French, by Hector
Guimard. C. 1900. Height of bezel 1.1 cm. Gift of Mrs
Hector Guimard. Museum of Modern Art, New York,
323.49.



In this model for a ring for his wife, Hector Guimard (1867 — 1942) uses the sinuous shapes that he evolved for the famous decorative ironwork in the Paris Metro stations. The form is purely linear without specific references to plant, animal or human forms.

Twentieth-century Rings

by Barbara Cartlidge



Twentieth-century Rings

It is truly amazing that a predetermined form as small as a ring can mirror the complex events that dominate and shape our lives, and yet that is precisely what it does. Throughout history, the ring has remained a meaningful and important personal possession regardless of its intrinsic value and, despite mass production or because of it, rings retain this importance on an even wider scale in the twentieth century. In fact, as we move closer to the years within living memory, the rôle played by rings in people's personal lives and in the context of wider issues comes more sharply into focus.

Turn-of-the-century Trends

From the turn of the century until the outbreak of the First World War, people were still markedly under the influence of nineteenth-century etiquette: rings were worn according to the occasion and the social standing of the wearer. A young girl would only wear a modest ring, probably with a floral design, that

had been given to her by a close relative; a lady of the middle class would own a dress ring or two for special occasions (Pl. 306). Only the very wealthy, the aristocracy (Pl. 320) and royalty, as well as people in the world of the theatre and the demi-monde were free to adorn their hands with more spectacular gem-encrusted rings.

It was the latter group that formed the illustrious clientele of famous jewellery houses like Cartier, Chaumet, Boucheron and Mellerio among others (Pl. 307). The family dynasties that ran these establishments had already served the forbears of their pre-war customers. The output of such well-established firms certainly dominated the period. All of them have survived to the present, and they are still in the hands of the direct descendants of their founders. Reading through the records of these well-known houses gives us a glimpse of world history on a personal level: the customers were heads of state, political personages, stars of theatre (Pls. 309, 313), famous writers and barons of industry.

Jewellers served these people with a devotion and personal attention to detail only equalled today by industry's painstaking market research with the aid of computers and modern psychology. Meticulous notes were kept on actual and prospective clients' credit-worthiness and purchasing potential, with full details of all official and 'informal' entanglements — marital and otherwise. These jewellers became the personal confidants and advisors of their clients, ready to travel great distances, if necessary, to be on hand when the occasion demanded a spectacular gift — to make a new conquest, to allay the suspicions of a jealous spouse discreetly or to mark the end of an affair.

The house of Cartier, for instance, enjoyed an enormous success in Paris and opened branches in London and New York. In the fascinating story of Cartier's progress by Gilberte Gautier, we learn that Pierre Cartier was particularly concerned with expansion into the American market. 'It is vital that those responsible for a European enterprise trying to establish itself in the United States be aware of the subtle differences in order to succeed — it is essential not to grant credit as easily as is common in France, since in America fortunes can change quickly . . . ' and Pierre Cartier proved adaptable in his designs too: 'I have

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Newspaper colour supplement from the Daily Telegraph: 'Verushka in Spain', by Franco Rubartelli. English. September, 1968. Daily Telegraph archives, London.

This picture, a photograph for an editorial on fashion, epitomizes the contemporary trend of wearing jewellery in bulk, which is the culmination of several developments: technically, it has become possible to mass-produce jewellery by modern methods in quantities never achieved before; ideologically, a period of economic boom coincided with the reaction of many young people against the establishment. The young, who sought to emulate Eastern religions and primitive cults, wore frayed jeans and ethnic clothes, which were complemented by the addition of large quantities of ethnic jewellery, either imported in vast numbers from third-world countries or produced at home. The designs for rings produced in the developed countries often featured heavy silver settings with stones of large proportions such as pebbles or tumble-polished agates. The two rings on Verushka's right hand are by Barbara Cartlidge. They are made of silver and set with an amethyst and a tourmaline respectively. On the index finger of her left hand, Verushka is wearing a large silver ring, set with an agate, by Emanuel Raft. The two other rings on Verushka's left ring finger are also by Barbara Cartlidge: one of the silver rings is set with a turquoise and the other with an amethyst. The remaining rings and the bead necklaces are from a London shop.

modelled a ring that is getting quite popular — it represents a bear and a bison locked in combat. In France we would have made it a lion and a bull — but for America the lion has no special meaning, and their eagle looks more like a vulture than our Roman eagle. Here the bear and the bison symbolize the power of finance: the rise and fall of shares on the stock-market. Depending on the individual method of the speculator, the model can be altered to let the bison force the bear down or the bear triumph over the bison.'

Cartier's interests extended in the opposite direction as well, to the Far East and Asia, where in 1909 two top representatives made an arduous business trip to Siam, China and India. The seven-month journey is recorded in the form of almost daily reports describing their progress and adventures: details of the climate, food, dangerous encounters and the personal preferences of their clients, who usually preferred rings made with diamonds and precious stones instead of with pearls (Pl. 320), which were considered unlucky in those parts.

The names of Cartier, Chaumet, Boucheron, Tiffany, Van Cleef & Arpels and Mellerio became hallmarks in themselves, names that stood for the very best money could buy, a guarantee for quality, design and intrinsic value, which of course, also meant good investment.

The era before the First World War was a period of enormous affluence for the very rich, who continued to indulge in all the outward manifestations of their standing, while the so-called 'lower orders' still knew their place and observed the rules — no self-respecting woman would display bejewelled hands not in keeping with her station, and if a girl were to be seen wearing such rings, she would be inviting suspicion as to her moral character, to say the least, if not actually of criminal tendencies.

At the same time, it was also a period in which the first cracks in the social structure were making themselves felt. Artists of international standing were in the avant-garde, expressing the need for change and the increasing demands of a broader section of society. The middle class, which benefited from the industrial revolution, was growing and ready for the new, romantic designs that attempted to streamline the cluttered over-ornamentation of the Victorian era.

Art Nouveau, *Jugendstil*, *Stile Liberty* or *Sezession*, as it was variously known, was born as a result. The movement, which began towards the end of the nineteenth century, gathered momentum, and its exponents (the disciples of John Ruskin, William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites) interested themselves in the possibilities of bringing fine art into all aspects of the environment, from furniture to fabrics and including jewellery.

At first, the movement was a direct attempt to get away from industrial processes, to disregard all technical innovations and keep hand-crafted artifacts alive. Later, perhaps from a feeling of inability to stem the advancing tide, the exponents of Art Nouveau began to make use of recent inventions and

scientific discoveries to achieve new effects such as iridescent enamels, finer castings and, last not least, to produce the larger quantities needed to satisfy the growing consumer demand. These artists worked from a deeply felt concern with social equality and justice and with the specific aim of making more art available to less affluent customers.

Georg Jensen in Denmark is a typical example of such an artist and jeweller. He set up a modest workshop in Copenhagen in 1904, specializing in silver and the use of semi-precious stones with the declared intention of appealing to an open-minded middle class rather than of catering to an elitist upper class. This meant that his work was frequently underpriced, and although he enjoyed the patronage of Det Danske Kunstindustrimuseum — which exhibited and bought much of his work — he had to struggle financially for some years. His first commercially successful venture was in Germany in 1909 when Carl Dyhr opened a shop in Berlin displaying Jensen's work. It was a promising start that came to an abrupt end in 1914 and was followed by more lean times in spite of the great acclaim Jensen received at the Baltic Exhibition in Malmö, Sweden, where the Swedish art dealer Niels Wendel (who later became a Jensen partner) bought all his work, and at a show during the First World War in San Francisco, where William Randolph Hearst purchased the greater part of Jensen's exhibits (Pls. 321, 323).

The Arts and Crafts Movement, as this attempted revival of handicrafts became known, spread across Europe and America powered by a great ideal: to bring hand-made, individually designed and executed jewellery to a younger, more informal generation. In these rings, and this jewellery in general, the foremost concern is not with the intrinsic value of the materials, rather this jewellery represents the first conscious efforts to bring new, aesthetic values into the daily lives of ordinary people. Although at the time this appeared to be a sporadic and mild 'revolution', dying from lack of commercial viability and wide popular support when the harsh realities of an approaching war made themselves felt, the Arts and Crafts Movement was none the less the immediate forerunner of the current international revival in arts and crafts, and its exponents made outstanding contributions.

France was undoubtedly the centre of this activity; there, the style of Art Nouveau was perhaps demonstrated at its most explicit within jewellery; there too, artists like René Lalique (Pls. 310—12), Georges Fouquet (Pl. 308) and Alphonse Mucha (Pl. 309) excelled in creating exquisite rings in gold and silver, in using baroque pearls, diamonds, rubies, sapphires and emeralds in conjunction with glowing enamels and finely sculptured forms.

There was a great deal of contact and mutual inspiration between the various groups in Europe and America. In Britain there were the 'Glasgow Four' from the Glasgow School of Art: architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh, his wife, Margaret MacDonald, her sister Frances and Frances's husband, J. Henry

McNair. Charles Robert Ashbee, another architect, founded the Guild and School of Handicrafts, and J. Paul Cooper and Henry Wilson taught their art in colleges and participated in international exhibitions. Their counterparts in Austria were the *Wiener Werkstätte* ('Viennese Workshops') (Pls. 326–7), founded in 1903 by the architect Josef Hoffmann (1870–1956), together with Koloman Moser, a painter and designer, and Fritz Warndorfer, a banker whose great interest in the arts led him to support the enterprise in practical terms. Hoffmann was a great admirer of Ashbee's Guild of Handicrafts and ran his workshops on similar lines with one exception — he employed only fully qualified craftsmen holding master's certificates, unlike the English Guild members who were often without formal training. The Belgian architect and designer Henry Van de Velde became very influential all over Europe and especially in Germany, where an artists' colony was set up in Darmstadt under the patronage of Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig von Hessen. Another small German group, *Die Brücke* ('Bridge'), formed itself in Dresden; one of its members, the artist Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (Pl. 330), also made jewellery.

Rings made by such artists varied enormously in technical quality and were perhaps to some extent the smaller part of these people's over-all activity, but the rings have become important and significant from a historical point of view. Many of them were made by artists with new and original ideas but little or no technical training; some are positively crude in execution, although that too was part of the intent. Silver and copper were favourite metals because they are malleable and cheap enough to experiment with. These rings represent only a tiny fraction of the total number of rings produced at the time, but they demonstrate clearly that even as early as the beginning of this century, 'outsiders' brought a fresh approach to a profession that is always in danger of becoming bogged down in pure technicalities and ignoring the artistic content of work, which is at least as important as craftsmanship.

While most of the commercial rings manufactured consisted of nineteenth- and even eighteenth-century reproductions, there were a number of firms who took up the new arts and crafts style and commissioned many of the artists mentioned above to design for them. Notably in England, Liberty's were foremost in bringing such new designs to the attention of the public. Their name quickly became synonymous with English Art Nouveau, particularly for metal-work and jewellery (in fact, in Italy Art Nouveau was known as *Stile Liberty*). One of Liberty's outstanding designers was Archibald Knox. He utilized a particular type of pewter with a high silver content, which bore the name of Tudric (a Celtic term) and became very popular.

The firm of William Haseler of Birmingham produced most of Liberty's jewellery at that time; much of it was designed by very young artists who were most probably still students then. Their names have remained unrecorded. These manufacturers commercialized the 'hand-crafted' look by using machinery for the

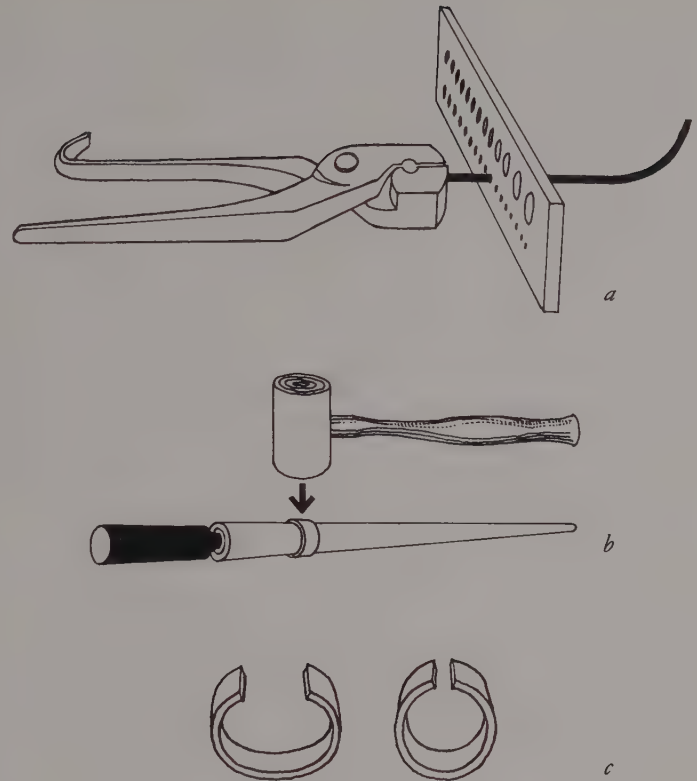


Fig. 17 Wedding-rings:

a) The wire for wedding-rings is drawn through a draw-plate.

b) The ring is 'trued up' on a triblet, using a leather mallet.

c) A length is cut according to the size required, and the ends are brought together for soldering.

basic forms, but then hand-finishing by beating, burnishing and often adding hand-set semi-precious stones or enamelled plaques imported from France. They also used different metals in unusual combinations, and the very distinctive appearance of these rings has made them easily recognizable as a product of the era.

The leading American Art Nouveau designer and interior decorator was Louis Comfort Tiffany, the son of a jeweller. Tiffany studied painting in Paris; he was a man of many talents and much vision who took over the family firm from his father, Charles Louis, in 1902. Louis Tiffany's reputation rests on his progressive business acumen; with it he expanded the activities of his firm into the modern idiom of interior design, particularly in glass and jewellery. Besides importing the work of many European artists, Tiffany also did much of his own designing and employed American artist-jewellers to produce a vast range of jewellery that has made the name of Tiffany a by-word for style and 'class' (Pls. 345, 379, 390, 405).

Eventually, commercial manufacturing methods reached a level that achieved much of what the Arts and Crafts Movement

had aimed for in their ideology — the new technical advances brought down the price of rings, so they became accessible to all but the very poor. Theodor Fahrner of Pforzheim, Germany, was one of the most successful manufacturers of the time (Pl. 314), employing many artists from the Darmstadt artists' colony and elsewhere; his output became known as *Fahrnerschmuck* ('Fahrner's jewellery').

Many of the firms in existence today were already flourishing at that time, for instance W. Wilkinson Ltd, London, an old family concern founded in 1832 by the present director's great-grandfather. In the early part of this century, Wilkinson's manufactured signet-rings and wedding-rings (Pl. 344). Their signet-rings were made from stampings that were then filed by hand. Wedding-rings were made from wire, drawn and individually cut, turned round a triblet (Fig. 17) and soldered using 'French blow-pipes' (a mixture of gas with air blown in by mouth through a second tube, a method hard on the lungs of the working jeweller but very effective in controlling the exact heat of the flame [Fig. 18]). For larger pieces, foot-operated bellows were used. It was common to use 22-carat gold for wedding-rings. Wide, half-round wedding-bands were popular and often decorated with hand-chased and engraved floral designs.

In America, Sears, Roebuck & Company of Chicago offered



Fig. 18. Using the mouth blow torch, which employs a mixture of gas and mouth-blown air.

fourteen different designs for '14-carat gold-filled' wedding-rings in their mail-order catalogue of 1902. These rings were superior to the gold-plated ones and made by the elaborate process of filling gold tubing with base metal before drawing it into wire (Fig. 17). This process gave the ring a heavier outer layer of gold. Also on sale from Sears were twelve types of diamond rings: the most expensive cost \$9.95 and contained eight fine rose-diamonds and four almandines (dark purple garnets), set in 'solid gold' (no carat stated). Above the designs in the catalogue a slogan maintains: 'We are among the largest buyers of diamonds in the country', a statement that was quite a boast considering that Tiffany's, among others, sold diamond garters at \$2000 apiece almost daily in those days.

By 1910, Sears's catalogue (Pl. 325) offered mainly plain, solid-gold wedding-rings, available in 10-carat, 14-carat and 18-carat gold, at prices ranging from \$1.23 to \$6.11, according to the weight and carat. Signet-rings for gentlemen were included in the selection, as well as a wide choice of rings set with imitation and genuine stones, from diamonds to rubies and pearls for babies, children and misses.

The First World War and the Inter-war Years

The outbreak of the First World War marked the end of an era. Interest in luxurious jewellery fell sharply in the face of the shattering events on all sides. The social order and etiquette were shaken into rather less formal attitudes. As able-bodied and skilled men were drafted into the military forces on both sides, many jewellery firms turned to making munitions, while others like Wilkinson's were left with boy-apprentices to carry on a minimal production. In America, Tiffany's workshops produced surgical instruments for the government.

Of all the various forms of jewellery, the ring became the most significant: often it was the only kind of private possession a soldier could have on his person in battle or could leave as a token to his beloved. Only too often it was the identifying object found on his body. In the trenches, soldiers on all sides made rings from shrapnel, wire or cartridges. They collected rings captured from their adversaries, while at home women frequently sacrificed their rings to answer appeals for funds to help the war effort. 'I gave my gold for iron' was one of the slogans.

Inevitably the war brought radical changes that were clearly reflected in rings. The social conscience that sprang up prevented the very rich from flaunting their wealth, particularly in Germany in the light of its defeat and the general economic crisis. Even in the victorious countries, the over-all political situation produced much the same effect; however, the widespread relief from war-time tension and austerity also gave rise to a strong desire for frivolity and glitter. The shape and design of rings became larger and bolder after the war; less expensive stones



Fig. 19 The principle of lost-wax casting:

- a) A prototype of the design is made in wax.
- b) The prototype is enclosed in a plastic mould. Air vents are made and a channel or sprue is cut into the centre.
- c) The mould is heated to allow the wax to melt and flow out of the channel.
- d) The mould is inverted, and molten metal is poured into the negative impression of the prototype.
- e) The mould is broken to retrieve the cast of the prototype.

were used, and even frank imitations became socially acceptable and fashionable as dress rings. The influence of the cinema and glamorous film stars stimulated the ambitions of a broad section of society, which copied cinema fashions and showed a marked predilection for the sparkling ornaments that could make hands look elegant and lady-like, even if the jewellery was made of base metals and paste diamonds.

Of course, those who could afford expensive jewellery loyally continued to patronize the famous houses of Cartier (Pl. 336), Tiffany, etc. These people wore really expensive jewellery, although, too frequently, they also took to having 'good' copies made, to avoid the risk of losing their valuables.

While older, more bourgeois ladies still wore only wedding-rings, with the increasingly popular diamond engagement ring (Pl. 405), during the Roaring Twenties young 'flappers' freely indulged in outsize paste rings to match their rhinestone and diamanté dresses for dancing the charleston.

The inter-war years enabled Jensen and his partners to resume work and to expand (Pl. 339); Georg Jensen Silversmiths was probably the most influential pace-maker for modern design in silver during the 1920s and 1930s. The Jensen style became distinctive and a popular hallmark of good taste and solidity. It was decidedly Nordic, characterized by clean lines and sculptured simplicity (Pls. 346, 351). Jensen's style illustrates the enormous change that had taken place in people's lives: women were enjoying a more liberated life-style and emerging from the restricted realm of their domesticity.

The developments that took place in the fine arts and in architecture during these years were echoed in ring designs. Cubism (Pl. 338), Futurism, Constructivism and the design

concepts of the Bauhaus all left their mark on the shape of rings, as they did on other creative art forms. There was a greater emphasis on form as a whole. Abstract, geometric patterns with clearly defined linear effects followed the trends expressed in fashion, furniture and buildings.

Again France was in the forefront of this new movement with artists like Jean Desprès (Pls. 329, 335, 337). Jean Dunand, Georges and Jean Fouquet (Pl. 334), Gustave Miklos, Gérard Sandoz and Raymond Templier (Pl. 332). Some of these men were born into families of jewellers; others came to jewellery design via fine-arts training. All of them created outstanding rings, as well as jewellery in general, that are typical of their period and express the spirit of their times — the essence of Art Deco.

Art Deco is the name given to the very distinctive style of the decorative arts in the 1920s and 1930s. Its name is derived from the great *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* ('International Exhibition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts'), held in Paris in 1925. Its originators were artists who deliberately sought to express their talent in areas of functional import also. They created objects of exceptional beauty for an elitist, wealthy clientele and used highly skilled craftsmen to execute their designs, often in rare and unusual materials, regardless of the cost. Characteristic of this style is a certain streamlining of figurative representations, bright colour combinations and geometric patterns with clear-cut, bold shapes as well as zigzag lines.

The ring gained in popularity as manufacturers availed themselves of new technical processes. The method of lost-wax casting (Fig. 19), which is several thousand years old, was replaced by investment casting using a liquid slurry, a method developed by Philbrook in 1898 for dental work. This development made it possible to eliminate metal shrinkage during the casting process, an advance that was important in connection with cast settings for stones. The real breakthrough on castings did not occur until 1935, however, when Jungersen invented the flexible rubber die in Canada (Fig. 20). It permits multiple wax patterns of complex structure to be cast at one and the same time. And with the help of another new and fast-growing industry —

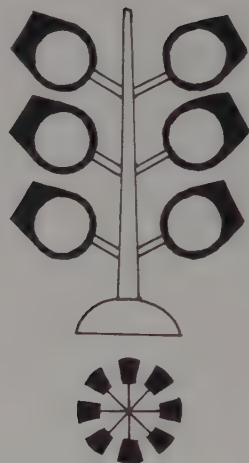


Fig. 20 Flexible rubber mould: it does not have to be destroyed to recover the cast. Multiple prototypes can be made from it in one operation. After the molten metal has hardened the whole tree is removed from the mould and the individual rings cut from their 'sprues'.

advertising — manufacturers everywhere sought and found wider markets for their rings.

The signet-ring had always been popular (Pls. 7, 134, 205) now it was adapted to another use as a college ring or fraternity ring. It became a symbol for belonging to a group. In America, the tradition of the college ring can be traced back to 1835 when the graduating class of cadets at West Point Military Academy decided to mark the event by having a ring specially designed and made for all of them. During the First World War, Lloyd G. Balfour started a jewellery business in Massachusetts. Soon he began to specialize in manufacturing that particular kind of ring (Pl. 358). Since the custom spread from colleges to high schools, sports clubs, fraternities of every kind (military and political) and even business organizations, the L. G. Balfour Company is still thriving today. By now something in excess of a billion such rings have been produced in the United States. Most are gold (14-carat is common), with an oval stone of the buyer's choice. The name of the organization or club forms the design surrounding the stone and includes the year being commemorated. Although they were at first predominantly worn by men (who constituted the greater part of students at establishments of higher education), nowadays class rings are worn by both sexes. The model for women is executed as a lighter, daintier version of the traditional design.

The custom of wearing class rings is less prevalent in Europe, although here, too, many organizations (rather than universities and colleges) have special rings worn by their members. It is not uncommon in Germany to award a deserving member with an *Ehrenring* ('ring of merit'). In the 1920s and 1930s, up to and including the Second World War, members of the *Waffen SS* were fond of wearing silver skull rings. Freemasons everywhere

sport gold rings with the insignia enamelled, usually in blue and white, onto a swivelling bezel that has the owner's initials engraved on the obverse. Other rings are set with carnelian intaglios.

As the number of crowned heads and affluent aristocrats diminished in Europe, large and famous jewellery houses became geared more than ever to the tastes of the oil, beef, automobile and cinema tycoons — mostly Americans. Together with film stars and a sprinkling of Asian princes, who now spent much of their time in Europe, these people were the new high society that set the fashions that millions of people aspired to copy.

The economic crises of the late 1920s and the sharpening of general political differences made themselves felt in the 1930s, and the gulf between highly priced, gem-set rings and mass-produced costume jewellery widened significantly. In some respects, interest in the shape and execution of rings receded at the upper end of the market in favour of intrinsic value: rings represented portable wealth, negotiable in any country. Large precious stones were bought and placed in heavy gold or platinum settings, intentionally often somewhat vulgar in form, in the hopes of deceiving the searching eyes of customs officers at the frontier, but these rings were of sufficient value to help make a new start in life possible elsewhere.

Although the majority of manufactured rings still followed nineteenth-century styles — a feature that has continued to some extent to the present — the quantity produced was enormous, so most women owned at least two or three dress rings, the value of which depended on their means.

The Second World War and the Period of Post-war Recovery

The Second World War brought most jewellery production to a standstill for the second time within the century. Of course, the specially fine precision techniques of the jewellery industry could be easily adapted to making the many small complex components needed in the armaments industry, as we have seen, and jewellers on both sides of the conflict turned their talents to that end.

In Britain, firms like Wilkinson's were ordered by the Board of Trade to reduce their output to 25 per cent of their standard pre-war production. Wedding-rings had to weigh 2 pennyweights (a measurement of weight, one pennyweight = 24 grains), be plainly designed, 9-carat gold and bear the government's mark of approval in the shape of two half moons stamped on the inside of the shank. This 'cc' or 'utility' mark (Fig. 21), as it was known, guaranteed that the product was

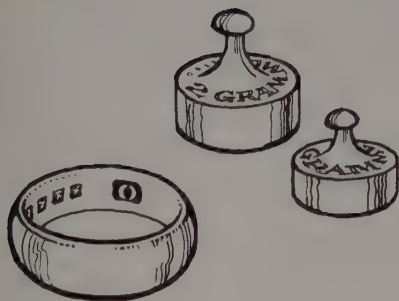


Fig. 21 The utility mark (two half-moons) was used on rings weighing two pennyweights.

made in conformity with government standards and regulations. (It also applied to other goods like clothes and furniture.) The mark was somewhat unpopular with war-time brides, so the father of the present director of Wilkinson's applied for permission to make his rings with a weight of only 1.5 pennyweights, thereby avoiding the need for the stamp.

Gold became scarce and was rationed everywhere. Platinum was unobtainable. Silver enjoyed a greater respectability for rings than ever before (Pls. 341—3).

Since jewellery manufacturers on both sides were often located in towns of general industrial importance, and therefore targets for concentrated air strikes and fierce ground battles, many jewellery factories and workshops were totally destroyed, along with their stocks, their machinery and much of their history. Pforzheim in Germany and Birmingham in Great Britain both suffered heavily from such attacks and subsequent losses.

With much of the general jewellery production sadly depleted or diminished and austerity again the order of the day, a handful of artists began to turn their attention to jewellery as an art form. Some of them were trained in jeweller's skills, while others were self-taught and deliberately employed primitive techniques to obtain effects that clearly represented a complete contrast to the uniformity of anything machine-made.

The rules for wearing rings relaxed to suit the individual, and women like Dame Edith Sitwell expressed this most vividly. A lady of magnetic presence, a celebrated poet and writer, she was also famous for her great passion for wearing large aquamarine and gold rings that emphasized her beautiful slender hands (Pl. 347). She always wore at least four of them, two on the ring finger of each hand.

The American sculptor Alexander Calder made jewellery for friends, primitive structures of great visual and tactile impact that were revolutionary in terms of accepted references for jewellery. Pablo Picasso, Max Ernst, Georges Braque, Salvador Dali and several other famous artists took an interest in jewellery

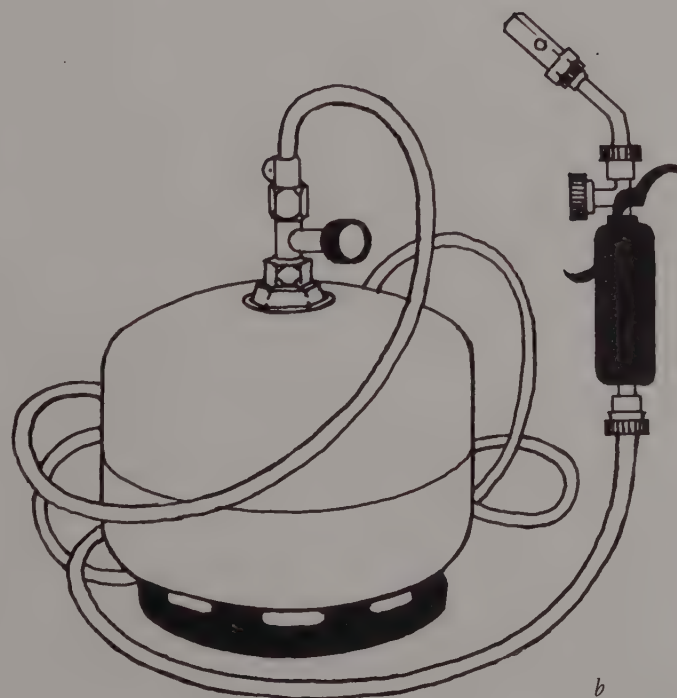
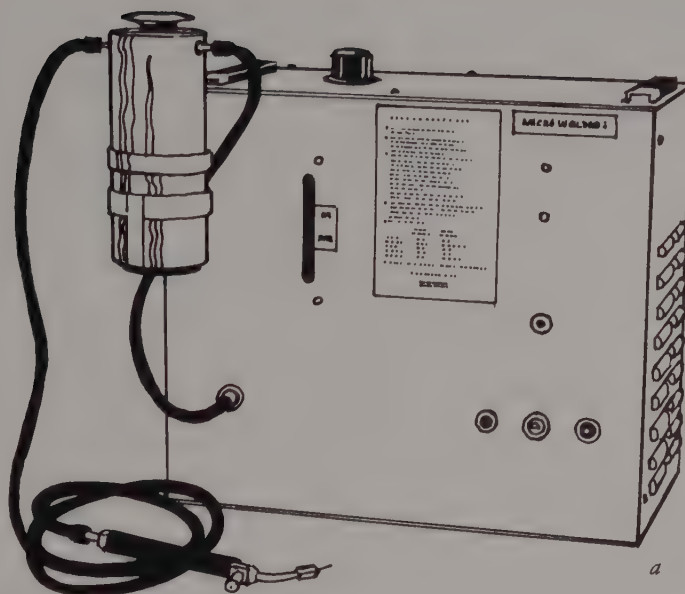


Fig. 22 Soldering equipment:

a) Microweld is an example of the new soldering equipment; it makes its own gas, which produces a very hot and extra fine flame, particularly useful for working with platinum and for precision soldering.

b) Bottled gas, on the other hand, has nozzles of three different sizes to cover most of the range of work in jewellery making.

and produced a certain amount of it, almost with a sense of playfulness, changing accepted rules and breaking new ground as they did in their paintings and sculptures. Picasso made his own jewellery, while Braque and Dali had professional jewellers execute their designs.

Sam Kramer was an early artist-jeweller of that time, a former journalist who opened a studio in New York in 1939 and made many highly distinctive pieces of unusual jewellery (Pl. 342). Kramer experimented extensively with casting and smelting, finding excitement and pleasure in free, abstract forms that, despite their small size, have great sculptural impact.

Once the war was over and the end of the 1940s approaching, the jewellery industry all over the world picked itself up out of the rubble and debris. By the beginning of the 1950s, widespread and significant changes had occurred that affected the making and wearing of rings.

Industrial advances over the next twenty-five years brought into being techniques and materials that made a whole new range of rings possible, on a scale never before achieved. New metal alloys (for example, hard silver that does not oxidize and cannot form a fireskin), triplet opals (a bakelite or onyx backing with a thin slice of opal and a crystal-quartz top), more convenient forms of flux to facilitate faster and better soldering, new blow torches with hotter, finer flames (Fig. 22) and a whole range of improved equipment all helped to speed up production and improve quality.

Technically the most important single advance was the shift from casting to blanking — a technique that did away with the laborious process of removing imperfections by hand-finishing, hand-cutting or hand-joining components. Blanking involves sophisticated machinery that ‘cuts down’ the desired shape and size of the ring from a metal block, while simultaneously adding pattern and texture. The process can be set to repeat time and again for any quantity.

Labour-saving methods and increased production lowered jewellery prices and launched new fashions. Wedding-rings became wider, more varied in shape and finish. Even the lowest income groups could now think in terms of engagement rings with diamonds — the favourite stone, chosen by over 80 per cent of all brides according to the statistics of De Beer’s, the world’s largest producer of diamonds.

Women began to exercise their prerogative to wear rings as they liked, when they liked and where they liked. Wedding-rings and engagement rings were still worn on the fourth finger of the left hand (or the right hand in some European countries), but any finger could now sport a ring depending on the wearer’s fancy. In England, although men seldom wore wedding-rings, they now began to wear some types of rings, predominantly signet-rings (Pl. 344).

Once again, repeating the same tendency as after the First World War only perhaps in a more pronounced fashion, the urge to get away from austerity and uniformity was strengthened by

the need to be ‘different’ and ‘individual’. For the sake of the economy, mass production was growing in all spheres; this created a very real need for pronounced individuality — particularly in the area of personal possessions, where the ring became, possibly, the most marked expression of this feeling.

Between the two World Wars, the Arts and Crafts Movement had been active in a different manner than in its early days. The Movement had become more accepted and less controversial; it fitted in nicely with the general trend towards Functionalism. However it was in the field of education that the Arts and Crafts Movement had its greatest impact. Pioneers like Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner introduced courses in handicrafts as a part of teaching techniques in pre-schools and primary schools. Progressive pedagogues everywhere began to have a growing awareness of the importance of children’s practical involvement with arts and crafts for the development of their personalities. Eventually this idea reached the higher levels of school education, and many art schools and colleges included courses in pottery, weaving, furniture-making and jewellery for the first time. Finally, such training became easily available to part-time students and at adult-education centres. The accessibility of such a wide range of training facilities — a result of the demands of the increasing number of students — gave rise to a whole new generation of jewellers: artists who could use jeweller’s techniques to express concepts formerly only applied in the ‘fine arts’, but which they now applied to ‘functional’ objects including rings.

Teaching methods changed too. Art schools no longer tried to copy the traditional approach of creating workshops that employed technicians recently retired from the ‘trade’ to impart the bare rudiments of a craft. Students were exposed to other forms of art education simultaneously; they were encouraged to draw, paint and carve in addition to learning metal-working techniques.

In England, artists like Alan Davie (Pl. 343), Mary Kessel and Richard Hamilton, among others, taught Basic Design to jewellery students. On the continent, artists like Max Fröhlich (Pl. 341) in Zurich, Mario Pinton in Padua, Friedrich Becker (Pl. 360), Hermann Jünger and Reinhold Reiling (Pl. 357) in Germany were breaking new ground by their example and their inspired teaching methods. In America, courses in metal-working and jewellery soon formed an important part of art education at colleges, many of which are a part of a state university. Often artist-jewellers in America are professors at such establishments and combine teaching with their own creative work; they gain wider exposure at the many exhibitions organized by SNAG, the Society of North American Goldsmiths, and by craft councils (Pls. 402–3).

Another important aspect of the last two decades is the widespread cultural exchanges that have had a great deal of influence on ring design and structure in both the Orient and the

West. The World Crafts Council (Pls. 376, 403), among other organizations, has held congresses and symposia all over the world, where artists can meet, work together and exhibit.

Japan is an enthusiastic newcomer to the jewellery field. Although it is rich in techniques eminently suited for jewellery making, for centuries Japan was not a country where jewellery was worn. The custom of wearing jewellery took root only after the Second World War. At first Japan was heavily committed to European design concepts; however, the last few years have seen the emergence of rings with typically Japanese design, having all the classic impact that that term implies (Pls. 369–70). In the comparatively short span of twenty years, Japanese artists and craftsmen have adapted their masterly skills and created original works of jewellery of unique quality (Pls. 380, 387, 391).

Two more very significant and important developments took place in the late 1950s: the advent of television and cheaper travel to far-flung destinations. Television brought the existence, art and artifacts of other cultures — ancient and contemporary — to viewers all over the world. Millions of people had their first opportunity to see the treasures of the past, to learn something about the life of tribal Africa and South America, to catch a glimpse of the rich cultural heritage of Asia and the Far East.

Stimulated by such knowledge, driven by an inherently youthful spirit of adventure and, last not least, to escape the mounting pressures and problems of Western society, many young people went in search of solutions or sought spiritual comfort in the religions and cults of those parts of the world previously accessible only to scholars and the privileged few. To demonstrate their revolt against the slick, smooth perfection of manufactured uniformity that had invaded every sphere of their lives, young people deliberately adopted 'worn clothes', frayed jeans, ethnic costumes and ethnic jewellery as their fashion (Pl. 305). This included the custom of wearing rings, preferably several on each finger. (Ironically, in the tribal societies that these young adults admired, jewellery was worn strictly to represent the wealth and status of the possessor.)

Since many of the countries that could now be easily visited were underdeveloped in the industrial sense, but rich in manual skills and labour, a flood of hand-crafted rings reached Western markets. These were cheap and primitively made rings. Naturally, every major town in Europe and America had its share of streetsellers offering Western 'ethnic' rings made by anyone who knew how to handle a blow torch and wanted to cash in on the boom. This fashion lasted well into the late 1970s, and it is not over yet. Moreover, it sparked off an unprecedented interest in and passion for jewellery *per se* and rings in particular.

The number of students enrolled in jewellery classes rose enormously everywhere, and girls soon accounted for nearly 50 per cent of the students — a new phenomenon in a profession that had been, with rare exceptions, a male occupation during all the past centuries.

Recent Trends

By the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, the wearing of rings began to be more important than ever before — a fact visibly demonstrated by their over-all size (3 cm across a stone was not unusual) and by the variety in design (Pls. 368, 377).

The educational revolution bore fruit; it produced artist-jewellers from people who, in earlier days, might have taken up careers confined to the fine arts. Young students were now drawn to making jewellery, because it offered them more scope for creation and a closer contact with the public than other, more traditional media (Pl. 403). These artists knew how to achieve meaning and artistry in a small shape; they had learned to express their own individuality and to make visual statements within the given limits of jeweller's techniques. They recognized that the intimate relationship between people and their jewellery gave artists access to a very personal environment — the emotional and intellectual inner self of another being (Pl. 382). They explored the ways rings can influence the bearing and attitude of the wearer; conveying feelings of security or giving a sense of belonging, incarnating an enjoyment of purely aesthetic values or a desire to shock. Reassurance, self-confidence, humour and even the physical movement of hands, and the body generally, are affected by rings.

In the early 1950s, when design still tended to be an extension of the Scandinavian look — clean and uncluttered — designer rings became more sculptural. Emphasis was on the involuntary, the 'happening' while casting or hammering; there was a positive delight in irregular shapes, textures and movements. Pebbles and agates were popular; simple techniques and rough finishes helped to underline the contrast with commercially produced rings. Tumble-polished stones and slices from geological specimens made attractive gems to set into rings. Emerald and amethyst quartz, topaz and citrine, turquoise matrix and tourmalines with their amazing colour ranges became firm favourites for ring-makers.

The divergence between the rings produced by designers for jewellery houses and made up in their workshops and rings manufactured by the jewellery industry at the top of the market, and those rings designed and made by artist-jewellers at the other end of the market was greater than ever. In 1980, old-established firms like Cartier, Chaumet (Pl. 393), Boucheron (Pl. 359) and Van Cleef & Arpels (Pl. 396) operate on a two-tier system; collections with unique designs are available to special clients, while mass-produced lines are sold at selected retail outlets (Pl. 397). What has happened to these jewellers is in some way similar to the fate of the *haute-couture* fashion houses.

The production of rings at every level reached an all-time high in the 1960s and 1970s. Fashionable women wore at least three or four rings at any given time, sometimes even more (Pl. 305), and men began to consider it less effeminate to wear other rings in addition to wedding-rings and signet-rings.

Ethnic rings were perhaps the most widely worn, because of their attractive ornamentation on silver. Frequently, they were set with brightly coloured stones like turquoise, carnelian and coral (Pl. 350). These rings became available at every street market, in boutiques and even in the costume-jewellery departments of large stores. Prices for ethnic rings were so low that people could afford several.

At the other end of the scale, artist-jewellers everywhere started to make a name for themselves by creating rings that were not just functional ornaments for the hand but objets d'art in their own right, with all the elements of a work of art. To emphasize this, these rings were often presented as a part of a sculptural entity — either a stand on which the ring rested when not worn (Pls. 363, 366), or a box containing the ring and of equal importance with it. (In some cases the lid of the box might even double as a brooch [Pl. 372].)

Rings were also designed to serve practical needs (as in former times for poison, smelling-salts or seals). The twentieth-century requirements were to hold pills, sweeteners or a tiny rubber stamp with the owner's name and address and an inking pad.

By the 1970s, all rules concerning the wearing of rings had virtually disappeared with the exception of one: the gift of a ring was still regarded as a very personal token of the affection between two people. While many people will freely buy themselves a ring today, that unwritten rule is still observed when it comes to giving a ring as a gift. A ring continues to signify a bond, a declaration of intent or a commitment to a relationship (Pl. 345). Many young couples who spurn the conventions of a legal marriage still wear a ring (not necessarily of the traditional shape [Pl. 386]) to bear witness to their union.

Rings altered their appearance again in the 1970s with the advent of new technology in the jewellery industry and elsewhere (Pl. 360). Emeralds are now grown in a matter of months in a laboratory. Cubic zirconia have replaced diamonds to the naked eye of anyone but the most experienced expert. Not only the design ideas but the actual materials used in space technology have been adapted to jewellery. Metals like titanium (Pl. 389), tantalum and niobium have come into use. Acrylics and plastics (Pls. 361, 366) add colour as a replacement for stones: their shape is easier to control, and jeweller's techniques can turn them into something very special and unique. Acrylics and plastics are often combined with precious metals and have become a cat-

egory of rings in their own right (Pls. 364-5, 378). At this time too, new gold alloys brought a wider range of colours into the higher carat ranges of gold rings (Pl. 402).

Every major movement in the arts — from Op and Pop Art (Pl. 378) to Realism, from abstract (Pl. 374) to very figurative (Pl. 392), geometric (Pl. 363) and conceptual art — is reflected in design. Inspiration from every aspect of our environment is echoed within rings (Pl. 371). The electronics industry made it feasible to build into a ring minute flashing lights powered by tiny batteries. Familiar shapes like nuts and bolts, coils and spools, toys, furniture and even electric plugs were used in rings (Pls. 356, 388). Other ring designs took their inspiration from science fiction (Pl. 386), mysticism or erotic (Pl. 367) and occult images.

The key-note to rings and their rôle in the twentieth century lies in their importance as personal statements from both artist and possessor. This applies particularly to unique and hand-made rings in any price range, which nowadays have become the prerogative of the many rather than of the few as in the past. Rings define status in a more varied and subtle manner today: by the shape and maker rather than by cost and intrinsic value (Pls. 392, 399). In other words, a contemporary ring is a surer guide to the wearer's character and outlook on life than to his or her bank account or social standing. It indicates the degree of taste and personal panache of its possessor rather than placing him or her in a clearly definable social group. Rings still have a vague connection with fashion insofar as the contemporary trend is decidedly to wear lots of rings (Pl. 305), but their shape is not dictated by fashion.

As a jeweller, it is always exciting for me to try to imagine how rings will continue to develop as we approach the year 2000 and the twenty-first century. Most probably, advances in science and technology will be foremost in shaping future rings. Strange new metals may be discovered that emit light or give off warmth, thus eliminating the need for gloves in winter. Perhaps one day someone will use a micro chip to build a tiny microphone and receiver into a ring and create a personal radio-telephone link, or a ring could become an electronic key device for opening doors and starting cars.

Whatever their shape, material or function in the future, rings will always contain all the magic with which we ourselves endow them — expressions of our needs, our artistic ability and our technical skills.



306

Poster: *La Bague Soleil* ('The Sun Ring') by L. Lefevre. French. C. 1900. Poster size. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

This charming poster informs us that a ring 'set with a diamond' cost 25 francs at Crespin & Dufayel in Paris at the turn of the century; ear-rings to match (with two diamonds) were sold for 45 francs. (The monthly income of a baker or carpenter at that time was around 140 francs.)

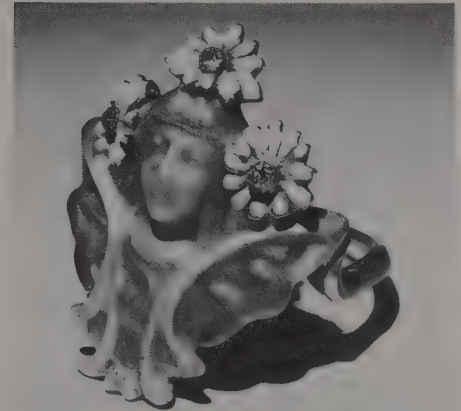
307

Photograph: 'A View of the Rue de la Paix'. French. 1900. Mellerio Collection, Paris.

This is a view of the famous Rue de la Paix, in the centre of Paris, the street that is home to such world-renowned jewellers as Cartier, Mellerio, etc.

308

Gold (18-carat) with diamonds and enamel. French, by Georges Fouquet. C. 1900. 2 x 2.3 cm. Sydney and Frances Lewis Collection.



308

The goldsmith and jeweller Georges Fouquet was born in 1862 and died in Paris in 1957. Having first studied the classics, he followed his father, Alphonse, into the jewellery business before the turn of the century. Their firm was located in the Rue Royale and had showrooms designed by Alphonse



307



Mucha (Pl. 309). Together with René Lalique (Pls. 310-12), Georges Fouquet was one of the great pioneers of Art Nouveau. His workshop not only executed his own designs but also those of the architect Eric Bagge, of the poster-designer Cassandre [Alphonse Mouron] and of the painter and sculptor Jean Lambert-Rucki (Pl. 338). Fouquet was very active in organizations promoting the Arts and Crafts Movement.

This ring is an exquisite example of Fouquet's work: the head of a typical Art Nouveau female, surrounded by enamelled daisies with diamond centres, forms the bezel. The enamelling method is *plique à jour*: the enamel is poured into compartments without a backing so light can shine through it like a stained-glass window. The body of the ring was cast in gold by the lost-wax method (Fig. 19).

309

Gold, enamel, opals and rubies. French, by Alphonse Mucha and Georges Fouquet. C. 1900. Circumference (ring) 6 cm., (bracelet) 21 cm. Michel Perinet Collection, Paris.

Georges Fouquet joined his father's firm in 1891, taking over from him in 1895. This bracelet ring is one of the most spectacular pieces of the period, an example of the many beautiful jewels designed by Alphonse Mucha (1860–1939) for Sarah Bernhardt and made by Georges Fouquet. It was designed for the actress to wear in her rôle as Cleopatra: the *cloisonné*-enamelled snake that forms the bracelet is repeated on a smaller scale as a ring decorating the index finger.

310

Green gold, enamel and a diamond. French, by René Lalique. C. 1900. Height 2 cm. Gift of Arconati Visconti, 1916. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 20373.

René Jules Lalique (1860–1945) is probably the most famous, and certainly one of the very best, exponents of Art Nouveau. He was apprenticed to the Parisian jeweller and silversmith Louis Aucoc (Pl. 317), who made up some of Lalique's jewellery designs. After working at supplying various manufacturers of jewellery for several years and spending two years in England from 1878 to 1880, Lalique bought a small jewellery workshop from Jules Destape. Lalique's artistry did not reach its full potential until the late 1890s when he made many of Sarah Bernhardt's theatrical jewels (cf. Pl. 309), as well as a large 'Egyptian' tiara in aluminium and glass for the actress Madame Barthet (now in the collection of the Musée Lambinet, Versailles). Lalique exhibited a spectacular collection of some one hundred pieces of his work at the centennial exhibition in Paris in 1900. Some of Lalique's most fantastic and original work (145 pieces in all), which were owned by Calouste Gulbenkian, are now in the Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon.

This ring is a comparatively modest example of Lalique's unique style: tendril-like gold wire supports a pear-shaped diamond, topped by a floral crown with green enamel inclusions.



310

311

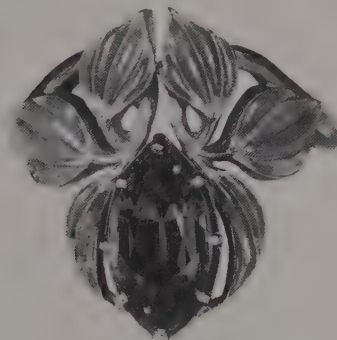
311

Gold and a baroque pearl. French, by René Lalique. C. 1900. Height 2 cm. Gift of Oppenheim, 1939. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 28864.

This very typical and fine example of René Lalique's sculptural art is formed by two nude couples dancing. Their entwined legs compose the shank. The centre supports a large baroque pearl. The technique Lalique employed would be lost-wax casting (Fig. 19), with hand-finishing to bring out the smoother curves and detail on the heads and hands.

312

Gold, enamel and an amethyst. French, by René Lalique. C. 1900. Height 2.3 cm. Gift of Dreyfus, 1947. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 35815.



This is another outstanding example of René Lalique's work, a ring cast by the lost-wax method (Fig. 19) and hand-finished. There is green enamel on the leaves that surround the pointed oval-shaped amethyst, which is held in place by plain claws.

313

Gold and an amethyst. French, by Georges de Ribeaucourt. C. 1900. Length 4 cm. Gift of G. de Ribeaucourt, 1937. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 32625.



Georges de Ribeaucourt died young, at the age of twenty-six, in 1907, but he had already participated in the Exposition Salon of 1902, where he showed jewellery made for the famous actress, Sarah Bernhardt. This ring is formed by sensitively carved reeds, cast by the lost-wax method (Fig. 19), gently entwined to form the ring's shank. They hold the long faceted amethyst in position gracefully. This is a typical Art Nouveau motif, executed with a fine sense of proportion.

314

Gold and enamel. German, by Theodor Fahrner. 1900. Height 2.3 cm. Schmuckmuseum, Pforzheim.

The firm of Theodor Fahrner in Pforzheim was one of the most prolific in Germany and produced comparatively inexpensive jewellery in low-carat gold and silver, using designs from an enormous variety of sources. Fahrner's employed excellent

artists from the Darmstadt artist's colony, set up by Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig von Hessen, who was a keen supporter of the German Arts and Crafts Movement. While it is difficult to attribute the

individual pieces of *Fabrnerschmuck* to specific artists, it is known that, among others, Fahrner used designs by Josef Maria Olbrich (1867—1908), the Viennese architect who was commissioned to create the buildings and interiors of the Darmstadt colony, and by Henry Van de Velde (1863—1957), an enormously influential Belgian architect and designer, who spent much time in Germany from the turn of the century until about 1917. Fahrner's had a wide international market and supplied contemporary jewellery to outlets all over Europe and the United States. They were closely associated with Murrel, Bennett & Company, London, for whom they often made up special collections, designed to appeal specifically to the English.

This ring was cast by the lost-wax process (Fig. 19) in solid 18-carat gold and represents a romantic girl's face in low relief. Her flowing hair is coiled around the shank in ornamental curls and covered with pale-green transparent enamel.



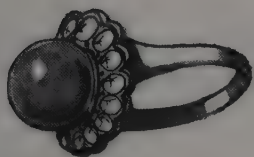
315

Drawings of ring designs in water-colours. French, by Paul Robin, Buguet & Cie, Successeurs. C. 1900. Gift of Paul Robin, Buguet & Cie, Paris. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, Cabinet des Dessins, Album 64 A.D.

These designs come from the sketchbooks of the firm of Paul Robin, Buguet & Compagnie, Successeurs, a company that manufactured jewellery for many of the well-known retail jewellers in Paris at the turn of the century. The butterfly motif illustrated was also much favoured during the Art Nouveau period, as it was previously in the 1800s (Pl. 241), and was reproduced in many different versions.

316

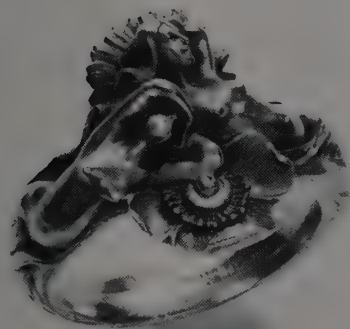
Design for a gold ring with a black pearl. French, by Cartier's. 1900. Private collection.



This drawing for a ring is a copy of a design executed in Cartier's workshop in 1882; it was made in 1900 for the Maharajah of Kaputhala. The design is inspired by Greco-Roman jewellery and made in gold, with a black pearl in the centre that weighs 10 grains. The pearl is surrounded by diamonds totalling 26 carats.

317

Gold. French, by Louis Aucoc. 1900. Height 2.6 cm. Schmuckmuseum, Pforzheim.



Louis Aucoc was the head of his family's firm of gold- and silversmiths in Paris, which hired René Lalique (Pls. 310-12) as an apprentice in 1876. At that time the firm occupied premises at 6 Rue de la Paix (Pl. 307) and was predominantly concerned with silversmithing, but for many years Aucoc's made jewellery as a sideline. In this ring, two female nudes — flower nymphs with classic Art Nouveau

proportions and flowing hair — are lying head-to-head, curved around the shank. Their heads are resting on two flowers, a daisy and an anemone. The lower part of their bodies and legs are concealed by drapery, which flows into the remainder of the shank to form the back of the ring. The ring is of solid gold and made by lost-wax casting (Fig. 19).



318

Gold with plique à jour enamel. French, by Lucien Gaillard. C. 1900. Height 2.1 cm, length 3.8 cm. Schmuckmuseum, Pforzheim.

Lucien Gaillard was born in 1861 into a family of well-known Parisian jewellers. Apprenticed as a silversmith in his father's workshop in 1878, he studied in several other workshops before succeeding his father Ernest as head of the family business in 1892. Lucien was extremely interested in Japanese styles and mixed-metal techniques. This eventually led him to employ Japanese craftsmen in his own workshop in order to perfect his skills in those methods. He also exhibited at the Paris Exhibition of 1889, where he won great acclaim for his work.

His friend and contemporary, René Lalique (Pls. 310-12), persuaded him to turn his talents to jewellery, and in 1904 Gaillard won a first prize at the Paris Salon. In many ways, he was greatly influenced and encouraged by Lalique, and they were both inspired by Japanese art. Gaillard's work undoubtedly ranks among the finest of the period.

This ring has three gold flowers placed at the head of a shield-shaped form, crisscrossed by fine curving gold bands filled with translucent enamel in a technique known as *plique à jour* (Pl. 308). Flower stems form the shank and surround of the shield, and the ring would have been made by the lost-wax process (Fig. 19).



319
Gold, plique à jour enamel, diamonds and a baroque pearl. French, by Georges Le Turcq. C. 1900. Length 2.4 cm, (with pearl) 2.7 cm. Schmuckmuseum, Pforzheim.

Born in 1859, Georges Le Turcq originally established himself as a jeweller in Paris in association with Julien Duval, whom he had met while studying at the School for Arts and Crafts. They set up a workshop together, intending to produce religious medallions, heavier and of better design than those made by other specialists, and they were enormously successful in their sales at home and abroad.

Since both men were good designers with excellent taste, they decided to commit themselves to a programme of creating new and exciting pieces of jewellery. Although the partnership was dissolved in 1894, each man continued to work on his own.

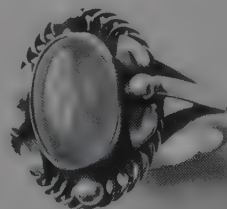
Le Turcq concentrated particularly on jewellery. The ring illustrated here is a fine example of his skill in executing elegant designs. The shank, set with pavé diamonds, curves upwards and divides above the pearl, hiding the setting underneath the ends of the two-pronged shank. The leaves are filled with translucent-green *plique à jour* enamel.

320
Design for a platinum ring with a grey pearl. French, by Cartier's. 1905. Private collection.



This design for a ring was made up in platinum for a French aristocrat, a descendant of Louis XV. It was Cartier's that, towards the end of the nineteenth century, first used platinum for jewellery. The grey oriental pearl on this ring weighs 11.5 grains; it is surrounded on each side by diamonds with a total weight of 3 carats.

321
Silver and chalcedony. Danish, by Georg Jensen. 1905. Size as ordered. Still in production today.



The small industrial town of Raadvad in Denmark, where knife blades were produced and ground, is the birthplace of Georg Jensen. His father was a grinder, and to this day the stainless-steel blades made in the factories of Raadvad are mounted with Jensen silver handles. Born in 1866, Georg Jensen was apprenticed in a brazier's workshop and eventually with a goldsmith. At Sunday school and later at evening classes, Jensen took up drawing and geometry with a view to becoming a sculptor. Although he also received quite a lot of attention for his work in ceramics, some of which is in the collection of Det Danske Kunstindustrimuseum ('the Danish Museum of Decorative Art') in Copenhagen, Jensen had to give up his ambitions in that field and opened a modest workshop for silverware and jewellery in 1904. From such small beginnings the world-famous company of Georg Jensen grew, over a period of nearly eighty years, into a by-word for style and solid quality. Many well-known artists have worked to perpetuate Jensen's 'house style' and to give its products the classic image embodied by the name Jensen.

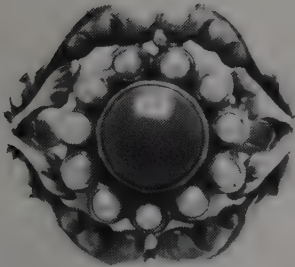
This ring was designed by Georg Jensen himself; it is made by hand from silver sheet and wire and is a stylized, streamlined ring that evolved from Art Nouveau.

322
Gold, rubies and diamonds. German, by Georg Kleemann (?) for Rupp & Company. 1906. Height of bezel 2.2 cm. Schmuckmuseum, Pforzheim.



This ring was probably designed by Georg Kleemann, a designer who worked for several firms in Pforzheim, including Rupp & Company. The clear and uncluttered execution of an almost geometric design is quite distinctive and must have been very much ahead of its time. The shank of the ring is made from squared wire, curved at each end before joining the central shape, a stylized drop ornamented with a raised geometric design and having a diamond in the centre. There are rubies in the three upper triangular sections.

323
Silver with seed-pearls and a semi-precious stone. Danish by Georg Jensen. 1906. Sizes as ordered. Still in production today.



This more elaborate design is also by Georg Jensen (Pl. 321). It incorporates curled leaves around the central cluster of a stone and seed-pearls.

324

Gold, sapphire, rubies and emeralds. German, by Messrs. Karl Rothmüller. 1907. Height of bezel 2.4 cm. Schmuckmuseum, Pforzheim.



Karl Rothmüller is a well-established jewellery business in Munich, although it is no longer owned by the Rothmüller family. The ring illustrated must have been considered ultra-modern when it was made. Its style is rather hybrid. The centre is composed of decorative lines around a stone setting that is quite typical of Art Nouveau; however, the spiral forms on both shoulders, surrounding the cabochon rubies, are motifs frequently used during the Art Deco period.

325

Printed page from Sears, Roebuck & Company's mail-order catalogue. American. 1910. Courtesy of Sears, Roebuck & Company, Chicago.

Sears, Roebuck & Company is a famous and gigantic store in Chicago, Illinois, still flourishing today as it did at the turn of the century. At that time, Sears was situated in 'one of the largest commercial buildings in the world occupied by one concern': it covered an entire city block. In addition to the vast premises for shoppers, Sears operates a huge mail-order business; its catalogue is published annually and offers every conceivable article needed to

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BABY RINGS ARE MADE IN SIZES FROM 0 TO 4. MISSES' RINGS TO FIT MISSES AND BOYS, AGES 14 TO 16 YEARS, IN SIZES FROM 5 TO 8 ONLY. For full instructions for measurement of ring sizes, see page 458. If mail shipment, postage extra on rings, 2 cents; registered mail, 10 cents extra.

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Price \$101.45

diamonds. Rings for children and young ladies were all engraved with small floral designs or scrolls, while a few were set with little diamonds, garnets, opals or rubies. The stones are mostly in star-settings, countersunk into the shank with an engraver — the engraving tool is used to push up a tiny scroll of metal that is then reduced to a grain by a beading tool.



326



327

326

Gold and an opal. Austrian, by Eduard Josef Wimmer. 1914. Height 2.2 cm. Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna, WT 1297.

Eduard Josef Wimmer (1882–1961) joined the *Wiener Werkstätte* in 1907, after completing his training at the Vienna Kunstgewerbeschule, and he remained with them until they ceased to exist in 1932. From 1918 to 1952 Wimmer also taught at the Akademie für angewandte Kunst in Vienna.

The ring by Wimmer shown here consists of a stylized vine; grapes form a delicately twisted shank in low relief that is held at the top and the bottom by two wire rings, which support the setting for the flat, oval opal.

327

Gold. Austrian, by Dagobert Peche. 1917. Height 1.7 cm. Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna, BI 1465.

Dagobert Peche (1887–1923) studied at the Technische Hochschule in Vienna from 1906 to 1910, as well as at the Akademie der bildenden Künste from 1908 to 1911. He was both a painter and an architect when he joined the *Wiener Werkstätte*. Eventually Peche became the director of their branch in Zurich, Switzerland.

The ring pictured was designed by Peche and made under his direction at the Zurich workshop. It is composed of interwoven leaves and flowers whose supporting stems turn around the finger twice and overlap at the back.

328

Gold (18-carat). French, by Louis Cartier for Cartier's. 1918. Private collection.



The first 'triple ring' was created in 1918 by Louis Cartier for the poet Jean Cocteau. Cocteau had developed a somewhat vague and paradoxical theory that there existed a connection between old signet-rings (which have existed throughout history and remain a symbol of high-level civilizations), 'the only jewel that is not a jewel', and the rings around Saturn. He met Louis Cartier, during the First World War in a military hospital. When they met again, Cocteau defined his ideas about the symbolism of the three rings more decisively and ordered two ring-sets, the second one for young Raymond Radiguet, author of *Le Diable au Corps*. With that Cocteau had launched the 'triple ring', which enjoyed international success and is still popular to this day. The ring consists of three half-round, interlocked rings, made of 18-carat white, yellow and red gold respectively.

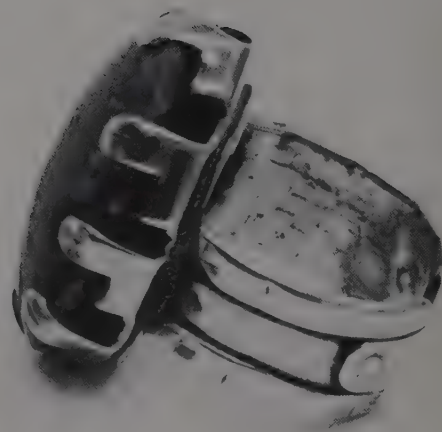


329
Silver, gold and lacquer. French, by Jean Desprès. 1925.
3 × 2.4 cm. Private collection, Paris.

Jean Desprès was born in 1889 into a famous family of glass-makers. His parents owned an establishment in Paris that dealt in art and jewellery. Desprès was trained as a jeweller in Avallon and

Paris and studied design and drawing at classes in the evenings. Living in Paris in the artists' quarter, Montmartre, he counted Georges Braque and Joan Miró among his friends. Desprès's fascination with metal, technology and geometry was awakened as a result of contacts with the aviation industry during his military service in the First World War. After 1925, when he participated in the Exposition

Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris, Desprès's work won him worldwide acclaim. This ring is a classic example of that work: the rectangular section of the bezel is made of gold with red and black lacquer. The sides, shank and half-round forms at the end of the bezel are of silver.



330

330

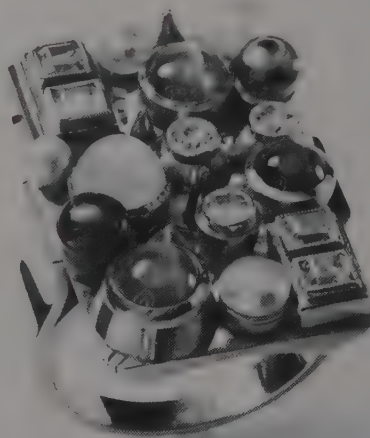
Silver, opal and nephrite. German, by Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. C. 1925. $3.5 \times 2.4 \times 3.2$ cm (left), $5.1 \times 2.3 \times 2.3$ cm (centre), $3 \times 2.2 \times 3$ cm (right). Private collection.

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (1873—1948) was originally trained as an architect but later took up painting. Together with two fellow-students — Heckel and Kirchner — he formed an association called *Die Brücke* ('Bridge') in 1905. All three men were pioneers of the Expressionist movement, and their group provided a link to other artists like Max Pechstein, Emil Nolde and Otto Mueller as well as to Kees van Dongen and Axel Gallen. Schmidt-Rottluff was born in Rottluff near Chemnitz. His work was condemned by the Nazi regime, but in 1947 he was appointed to the Academy of Plastic Arts in Berlin.

That Schmidt-Rottluff was very interested in African art can be seen clearly in the centre ring. Although his jewellery may look primitive from a jeweller's point of view, the construction is actually quite complex. The nephrite in the ring on the right is set on split claws; one half of each claw is bent inwards to make a higher base for the stone. The shank of the centre ring is slotted through two openings on the side of the bezel. The shank of the opal ring on the left is made from thin silver sheet; both edges are turned inwards for extra strength, and the oval shape holding the stone is riveted onto the shank in the centre.

331

Gold (18-carat), diamonds and pearls. German, by Elisabeth Treskow. 1928. 2.5×2.6 cm. Schmuckmuseum, Pforzheim.



One of the earliest outstanding female artist-jewellers was Elisabeth Treskow, born in 1892 and trained during the First World War at an arts and

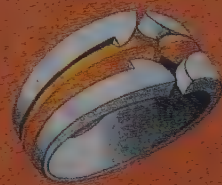
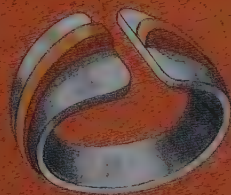
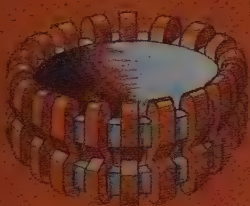
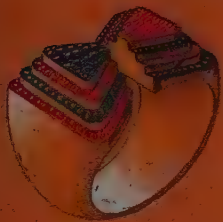
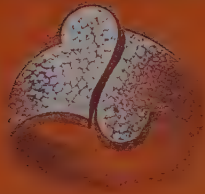
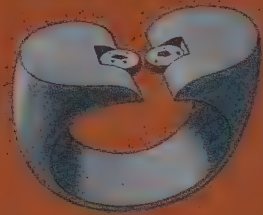
crafts school. After further studies in Munich and Schwäbisch-Gmünd, she obtained a Master's degree from Düsseldorf in 1925. Treskow made a name for herself in the 1920s by re-discovering the ancient technique of granulation (see also p. 12) and Byzantine techniques of enamelling while she was entrusted with the restoration of the ecclesiastical treasures at Cologne. At the same time she ran her own studio-workshop in Bochum, producing very original work of advanced design. She was awarded the *Ehrenring* ('ring of merit') from the Gesellschaft für Goldschmiedekunst in 1938. After the Second World War she taught at the Werkkunstschule in Cologne and was appointed professor in 1956. Although Elisabeth Treskow is living in retirement, she participated in the Schmuck International exhibition in Vienna in 1980.

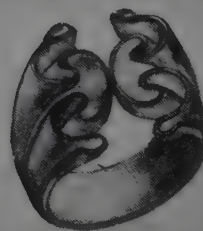
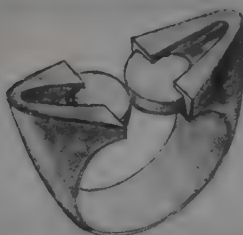
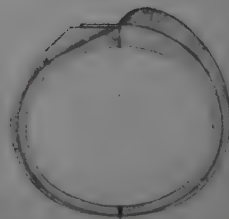
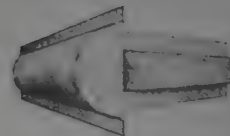
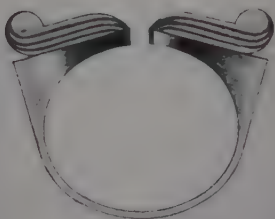
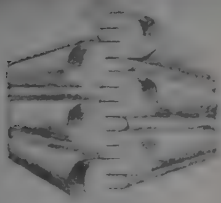
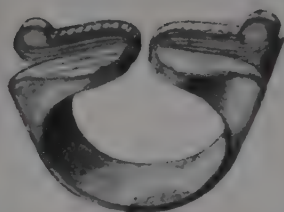
The ring illustrated was made from gold sheet. The arrangement of multi-coloured stones, typical for Treskow, provides a variety of colours and shapes — a free style that was most unusual for its time.

332

Drawings in pencil, crayon and gouache. French, by Raymond Templier. C. 1930. 64×49.5 cm. Private collection, Paris.

Raymond Templier (1891—1968) was born into a traditional Parisian jeweller's family. His grandfather founded the firm of Templier in 1849;





Raymond joined the family enterprise in 1912. Raymond Templier attended the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs from 1909 to 1912, but in 1911 he already exhibited his work for the first time at the Salon des Artistes Décorateurs. Templier continued to exhibit at many international shows, became a member of the Conseil Supérieur de l'Enseignement des Arts Décoratifs, co-founder in 1930 of the Union des Artistes Modernes, president of the section 'Arts Décoratifs' and vice-president of the Salon d'Automne. Raymond Templier was made a chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur.

These sheets of designs for rings by Raymond Templier show his great flair and the innovative ideas that have made him such an influential figure in the history of design. They represent very typical aspects of Art Deco design: bold rounded or angular shapes that rely on contrasting materials to underline the simplicity of the contours. Much use was made of enamels, since they offered perfect control over shape and colour, but frequently semi-precious stones were cut into the new forms demanded by the designs. Pavé-set diamonds were often in evidence for the same reason; they could be set in patterns on flat surfaces and thus be integrated into the over-all design concept.

333

Silver and black agate. German, by Fritz Schwerdt. 1929–30. Height 2.9 cm. Schmuckmuseum, Pforzheim.



Fritz Schwerdt was born in Pforzheim but established his jewellery workshop in Aachen in partnership with Hubertus Förster. They mainly specialized in silversmithing, making ecclesiastical regalia and hollow-ware.

This ring is typical of the Art Deco period. It represents a complete change from the soft, fluid shapes and lines of Art Nouveau and is characterized by the disciplined execution of designs inspired by mechanics. The setting Schwerdt used for the agate rod is innovative.



334

Platinum, diamonds, amethysts and opals. French, by Jean Fouquet. C. 1930. Width 3.2 cm. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, O.A 1114, on loan from the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, 6.8.1963.

Jean Fouquet, the son of Georges (Pls. 308–9), was born in Paris in 1899. He had a talent for writing (a detective novel he wrote in his youth was published in 1964) and studied the classics. Finally he was persuaded to abandon his studies and to enter his father's jewellery business. Until 1964, when he passed his clientele on to Raymond Templier (Pl. 332), Jean Fouquet was an active and decisive force in the development of Fouquet's house style. He designed the geometrically constructed jewellery produced by his father's studio-workshop and participated in the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs and Industriels Modernes in Paris in 1925. Since 1926 he has exhibited regularly at the Salons d'Automne. Jean Fouquet is the author of *Bijoux et Orfèvrerie* (1928) and co-founder with Raymond Templier of the Union des Artistes Modernes. Fouquet took part in the World Fair Exhibition in Brussels in 1958. Several of his designs are in the collection of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, and he is a chevalier of the French Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

The ring illustrated is a classic example of Art Deco style. It has pavé-set diamonds and amethysts around a centre of opals, cut in an unusual manner (they are semi-cylindrical) into baguette shapes.

335

Silver-gilt and a ball-bearing. French, by Jean Després. C. 1932–4. 2.9 × 3.2 cm. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 45980.



This ring by Jean Després (1889–1980) uses an entirely new manner of structuring: the elevated side pieces are placed upright on the shank to form the support of the ball-bearing in the centre. The simple and bold outline is quite a step removed from Després's earlier and much more complex designs (Pl. 329). The convex cuts near the shank allow for the fingers on either side of the one on which the ring is worn.



336

Gold (or platinum) with diamonds, onyx and emeralds. French, by Jeanne Toussaint for Cartier's. Since 1935. Private collection.

The 'panther ring' remains one of the masterpieces of Cartier's. The first panther jewel was created for the Duchess of Windsor by her friend, Jeanne Toussaint, who worked for Louis Cartier. Since 1935, necklaces and bracelets with the panther emblem have been made by Cartier's for prominent clients all over the world. The year 1980 has seen the undeniable triumph of the 'panther ring', made in gold or platinum; it is encrusted with diamonds and onyx, and the panther has emerald eyes.

337

Silver. French, by Jean Desprès. 1930-6. 2.3 x 2.1 cm. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 45977.

Jean Desprès maintained a life-long interest in aeronautics. This fascination with metal, geometry and engineering influenced many of Desprès's designs (Pls. 329, 335), of which this ring is a typical example. In fact, the ring might well belong to a whole collection exhibited in 1930 at the Salon de Marsan as 'jewellery inspired by aeroplanes'. Its shape is reminiscent of the rotating fan blades of airplane engines. The circular bezel with its raised central ring is supported on the shank by two angled side pieces. Desprès gained many honours and awards throughout his long working life, including an honours diploma at the Exposition Internationale de Paris in 1937, the year he was made a member of the Légion d'Honneur, and a gold medal at the World Fair Exhibition in Brussels in 1958. For several years, Desprès ran the gallery L'Art et la Mode in Paris, and he owned a shop near the Champs Elysées as well as a studio-workshop in Avallon, where he died in 1980.

338

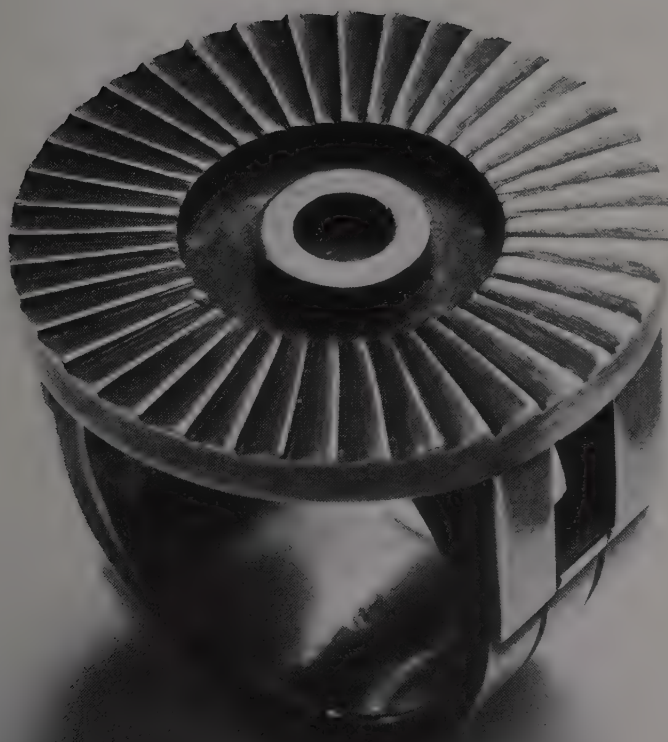
Drawing in Indian ink with gold highlights. French, by Jean Lambert-Rucki. 1936-7. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, CD 2302.

Jean Lambert-Rucki (1888-1967) was a painter and sculptor who also designed jewellery for Georges Fouquet's workshop (Pl. 308). These drawings are for a ring with matching ear-rings. The material has not yet been specified. Rucki's design is very sculptural, achieving a nice counterpoint effect with the play on circles. Clearly, he was much inspired by mechanical components. These designs also reflect the Cubist paintings and sculptures of the period.

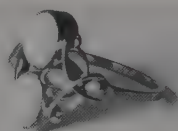
339

Silver and moonstones. Danish, by Henry Pilstrup for Georg Jensen Silversmiths. 1937. Size as ordered. Still in production today.

Georg Jensen's first apprentice, Henry Pilstrup, was born in 1890 and died in 1967. Pilstrup started work in the Jensen workshop in 1904, became a foreman in jewellery in 1918 and continued with Jensen's until his retirement in 1957. During that time he designed a number of pieces of gold and silver jewellery.

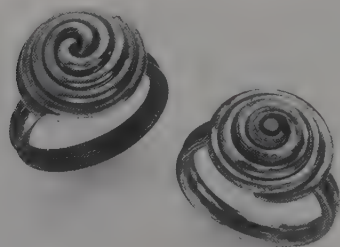


The design of this ring is still very much in the earlier tradition of Jensen's own designs (Pl. 321), and thus it continues the idea of 'house style' for which Jensen's is so famous. It features two moonstones set vertically on the finger in silver collets. A stylized floral ornamentation fills the areas between the settings on either side before joining the shank.



340

Iron wire. German, by anonymous soldiers. 1939-40. Diameter (right) 1.8 cm., (left) 1.9 cm. Schmuckmuseum, Pforzheim.



These rings were made by German soldiers guarding the western border fortifications that Hitler built from Aachen down to the Swiss frontier. To pass the time, the soldiers used the wire freely deployed within the fortifications, twisting it into a spiral with a double loop for the shank. The ring on the right has the wire turning from the centre downwards to form the shank first with two loops,

and then continuing in a spiral from the inside outwards. The ring on the left is a little more complex; its shank is formed by the wire, leaving long ends, that are then twisted in parallel outwards from the centre to form a spiral.

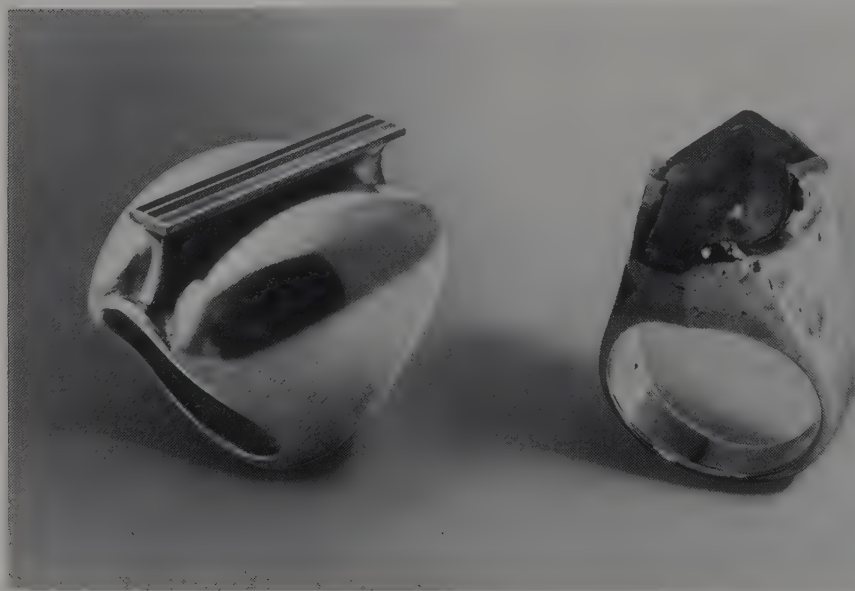
During the Second World War, between 1940 and 1941, an attempt was made in Pforzheim to manufacture these rings in a slightly more sophisticated and ornamented form, using highly polished steel wire for the 'war jewellery'. The initiative does not appear to have met with much success and was quickly abandoned.

341

Silver and rock crystal (right), silver and enamel (left). Swiss, by Max Fröhlich. C. 1940 (right), c. 1955 (left). 2 x 2.7 cm. (right), 2 x 2.7 x 3 cm. (left). The artist's collection.

Born in 1908 at Ennenda in Glarus, Switzerland, Max Fröhlich has lived in Zurich since 1934. He studied at the Ecole des arts décoratifs in Geneva and the Kunstgewerbeschule in Zurich from 1924 to 1928, and from 1934 to 1945 he had his own studio-workshop. Fröhlich became first a lecturer and then dean of the Metal Department at the Kunstgewerbeschule, a position he retained until 1972. He was a delegate to international congresses all over the world. With over seventy individual or collective international exhibitions to his credit, Fröhlich won the *Ehrenring* ('ring of merit') awarded by the Gesellschaft für Goldschmiedekunst in 1964 and the Bavarian State Prize in 1966. His work is in museums in both Germany and Switzerland.

The two rings illustrated are both cast and hand-finished. Their styles are diverse and illustrate the progression from the irregular shape and texture of the ring of the 1940s, with a typical asymmetrical stone, to the later ring with a smooth, sensuous form, accentuated by a very controlled and linear enamel bar in the centre.



342

Silver, tourmaline and garnet. American, by Sam Kramer. C. 1940. 4.5 x 4 x 4 cm. Private collection, London.



Sam Kramer attended the University of Pittsburgh's School of Journalism and graduated from the University of Southern California in 1936. He began making jewellery for his personal satisfaction while working as a reporter in Los Angeles and Hollywood. In 1939 Kramer opened his own studio in Greenwich Village, New York. In an article he published in the late 1950s in *Media Arts Magazine*, he wrote: '... I love strange contrasts, paradoxes of form and texture, the shock of things that at first appear ugly, but immediately seem natural and quite beautiful ... Although I have no formal credo for jewellery making, I have many loosely woven ideas which might possibly form a fabric for consideration by those who never thought of jewellery as a particular art form. Experimentation, for example, with metals, materials, gems, tools and techniques is doubtlessly the life flow of jewellery as a creative expression. Accident, aimless but recognized, which often suggests the new directions an artist can take, is another important element.'

The ring illustrated is made of solid silver and consists of a shank 1.2 centimetres wide attached to an irregularly shaped oval with a hole in the centre. This opening has a raised edge. A wire, partially bound by a spiral of a thinner wire, curls itself through the hole. One end of this curled wire protrudes at the side and carries a cabochon garnet, while the other end rests on the longest point of the central shape and supports a green tourmaline with only three plateau facets. There is an additional silver wire loop on the back of the shank.

343

Sterling silver. Scottish, by Alan Davie. 1950. 2 x 2.5 cm. The artist's collection.

Born in 1920 in Scotland, Alan Davie studied at the Edinburgh College of Art from 1937 to 1940 and began making jewellery to wear himself. After six years service with the Royal Artillery and a year at a teacher's-training college, Davie had his first one-man show in Edinburgh. Although he was beginning to enjoy a modicum of success with his paintings, Davie turned to jewellery for a living for several years, experimenting with primitive tech-

Wedding and Signet Rings



niques and lost-wax casting (Fig. 19). He was a great admirer of pre-Columbian gold objects and Ashanti gold weights. He made silver spoons for Asprey's, sold his jewellery to Harrod's and made the rings worn by Vivien Leigh in the film 'Antony and Cleopatra'. From 1953 to 1956 Alan Davie taught Basic Design at the London School of Arts and Crafts; since then, he has devoted himself almost entirely to painting, with much success, and since 1975 he has also worked with tapestries.

On this ring by Davie, two 'ducks' are sitting side by side on a rectangular plate that has a silver ball under each corner and rests on the flat band of the shank, which is 1 centimetre wide. The birds are constructed from sheet and wire; their wings are of wire coils with turned-up tails. The elongated beaks end in wire loops from which another link dangles.

344

Page from a catalogue of gold and platinum wedding-rings and signet-rings. English, published by W. Wilkinson Ltd. 1950. 18.5 x 12.5 cm. Courtesy of Mr. David Wilkinson.

W. Wilkinson Ltd is a very old established London firm of manufacturing jewellers. The present owner and managing director, David Wilkinson, is the fourth-generation descendant in a direct line from the founder of the enterprise in 1832. The catalogue these pages were taken from contains a quotation from John Ruskin: 'There is hardly anything in the world that a man cannot make a little worse and sell a little cheaper, and the people who consider price only are this man's lawful prey'. Wilkinson's specialize in wedding-rings and signet-rings, although previously they also made a variety of diamond rings.

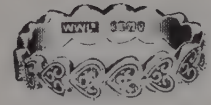
The two wedding-rings in the top row, made of hearts joined together, were first stamped out of gold sheet and subsequently joined into rings. The third example was made from half-round gold wire. All of the rings were then hand-engraved with patterns. The signet-rings were also made by stamping out the over-all shape and then hand-



1653
Heart



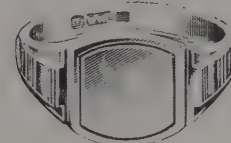
1654
Clifton



1655
Wide Heart



1656



1657



1658



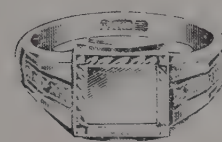
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1660



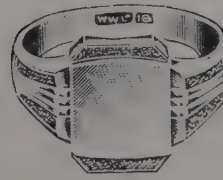
1661



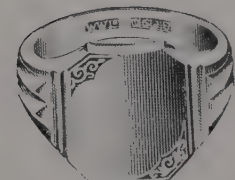
1662



1663



1664



1665

A style to fit every need

finished with a file and an engraver to provide the individual decoration. The bezel was left practically bare for the initials, with perhaps just a tiny

decorative border, while the sides and shank were given various contours from steps to horizontal ridges.



345

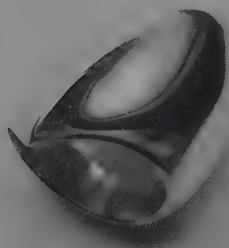
Gold (18-carat) and diamonds. American, by Jean Schlumberger for Tiffany's. 1956. 1 × 1.3 cm. Still in production today.

One of Tiffany's top designers, Jean Schlumberger came to jewellery almost by accident. Having bought some china flowers in the Paris flea market, he mounted them as clip-brooches for a few friends. They happened to catch the eye of Schiaparelli, the famous dress designer. She promptly commissioned Schlumberger to design costume jewellery, which proved so successful that he felt encouraged to attempt to make jewellery of gold and precious stones. (One of his first clients was the Duchess of Windsor.) During the Second World War, while still serving in the Free French Forces under De Gaulle, Schlumberger opened a business on Fifth Avenue in New York, together with his partner, Nicolas Bongard. In 1956 he joined Tiffany's, where he is now a vice-president and has his own salon on the premises. In 1977, Jean Schlumberger was made a chevalier of the Ordre national du mérite by the French government.

The ring pictured is a wedding band; it consists of gold ropes bound together by crosses set with diamonds.

346

Silver. Danish, by Nanna Ditzel for Georg Jensen Silversmiths. 1955. C. 2.5 × 3 cm. Still in production today.



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Photograph of Dame Edith Sitwell by Jane Bown. 1959. Courtesy of Jane Bown.

Nanna Ditzel has been one of Denmark's best-known jewellers ever since the 1950s. She was born in 1923 and opened her own design studio in 1946, winning prizes for her superb work — in 1950 First Prize in a competition organized by the Goldsmiths' Guild, the Lunning Prize in 1956 and a gold medal at the Milan Triennale in 1960. Her work has been exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Det Danske Kunstmuseum, Copenhagen, and the Louvre, Paris. She has lived and worked in London since 1970.

Nanna Ditzel's association with Georg Jensen Silversmiths goes back to 1954, and this ring was one of many successful designs that have a typical Jensen 'look'. The ring has a smooth, tactile, sculptural form; it is cast in solid silver, hand-buffed and polished.

Dame Edith Sitwell (1887–1964) became a legend in her life-time. Although she was born into an aristocratic family, she was not wealthy and relied on her earnings as a poet and writer for a living. She was always extremely proud of her hands, which were slender and very beautiful, and she had a passion for dramatic clothes and jewellery — particularly rings. Although Dame Edith did not possess all that many rings, those she owned were large and beautiful, worn on each hand, preferably two to a finger. She owned one heirloom ring, but the others she acquired for herself, notably two aquamarine rings, bought with part of her fee

(which she described as her 'wages of sin') for the script of 'Fanfare for Elizabeth', a film made in Hollywood in 1950.

The two rings on Dame Edith's right hand both have rectangular-faceted aquamarines in claw settings. One of the two rings on her left hand has a square stone with a cushion-cut, and the other an oval stone. Four of the five rings Dame Edith owned are now in a private collection; the fifth was buried with her.

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White gold (18-carat) and diamonds. Swedish, by Sigurd Persson. 1962. Diameter 1.9 cm. The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths' Collection, London.



Sigurd Persson was born in 1914 and completed his apprenticeship in his father's workshop. After attending the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Munich and the Konstfackskolan in Stockholm, Persson opened his own studio-workshop in Stockholm in 1942 and became a master goldsmith in 1943. Since the early 1950s, Sigurd Persson has exhibited widely, designed for George Jensen Silversmiths and received many honours and awards. He has received the Swedish Artist State Award that guarantees him a pension for life, indexed to the cost of living.

Sigurd Persson has always been in the forefront of new ideas and contemporary design. His deep understanding of the cool, reflective qualities of metal sets the key-note in his designs; he constantly strives to underline the three-dimensional, the uninterrupted line and the clarity of contours. Contrasting with the body's irregularities, Persson's jewellery emanates a smooth, reassuring tranquillity and directness. This ring was hand-forged from gold wire and has pavé-set diamonds on the continuous spiral.

349

Gold (18-carat), platinum, a cabochon emerald and pavé diamonds (a); 'bark'-textured gold (18-carat) and diamonds (b). English, by Andrew Grima. 1966. 4.5 x 3 cm. (a), 4 x 3.5 cm. (b). Private collection, U.S.A. (a), private collection, London (b).

Andrew Grima was born in Italy, brought up in England and left school at the age of sixteen to earn his living working for an engineering firm. After his war-time army service, spent mostly in Burma, Grima worked a short time in his father-in-law's



a



b



small jewellery business. That experience was the turning point in his career. He has become one of Britain's best-known jewellery designers with a flair and flamboyance distinctly his own. Andrew Grima now owns a showroom in London that was designed by his two brothers, George and Godfrey, who are architects; they commissioned the sculptor Paul Wright to provide the showcases.

Andrew Grima's rings are highly distinctive; he chooses unusual stones and imaginative shapes and employs a great variety of textures with bold, often irregular outlines.

Ring (a) is composed of a cabochon emerald surrounded by irregular pavé-set diamonds in platinum; the rest of the ring is made of 18-carat molten gold. Ring (b) is one of a collection of fifteen pieces that won Grima the very first Duke of Edinburgh's Prize for Elegant Design; the winning ring was chosen personally by the Duke in 1966. It is in the shape of a concave gold leaf, textured like bark and has tiny diamonds set all along the irregular edge. In the same year, Grima was also given the Queen's Award to Industry, the first time this honour has been bestowed on a hand-made product.

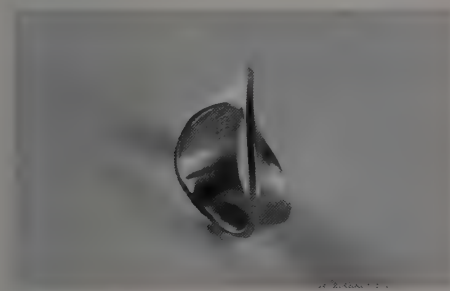
350

Photograph of silver rings from Vogue. English, by Marc Leonard. 1968. Height of child's ring 3.5 cm. © The Condé Nast Publications, Ltd.

Under the title 'Of Cabochons and Rings', this photograph appeared in the February, 1968 issue of *Vogue*. The text speaks of 'heralding the new spring scintillation — a panoply of jewels rich in memories of mediaeval courts'. Prices for the rings pictured varied from 17s 6d to £12. The cheaper ones were made by Adrien Mann, a firm specializing in costume jewellery in the lower price ranges, while two of the rings were imported from India ('sombre Indian jewels in a circling sea of silver'). The hand-made ring on the child's finger was made by Barbara Cartledge (Pl. 368). It is a large cabochon-cut amethyst quartz, about 2 centimetres in diameter, set in a wide band of silver. The band is decorated with triangles of silver soldered around the edge. There is a solid silver ball at the base of each triangle. The entire setting rests on a wide but tapered shank; the bezel has been cut out to allow light to penetrate to the stone from underneath.

351

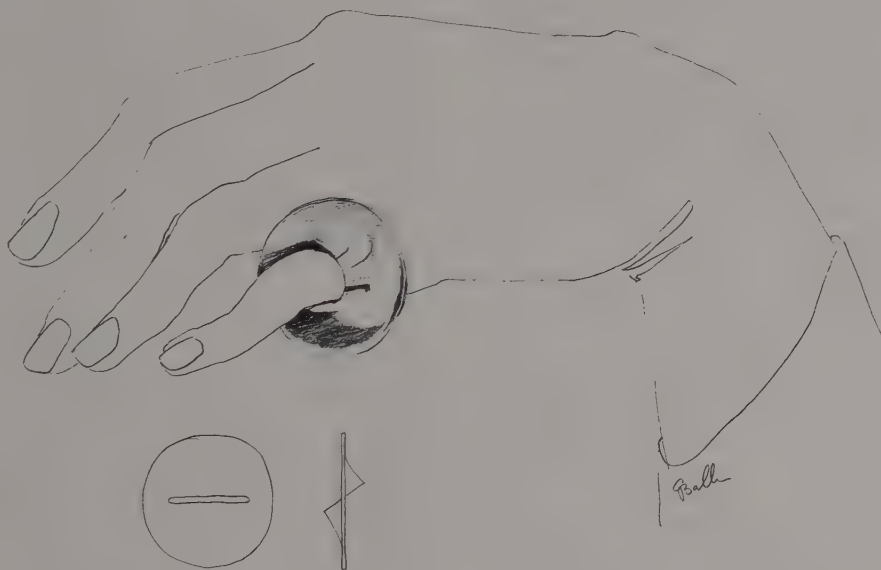
Silver. Danish, by Thorun Bülow-Hübe for Georg Jensen Silversmiths. 1968. Size as ordered. Still in production today.



Having received training in her native Sweden, Thorun Bülow-Hübe (b. 1927) moved to France in 1956, first to Paris and later to Biot in Provence, where she lived for eleven years. She is now living on the island of Java. From the early 1950s to the late 1960s, Thorun Bülow-Hübe won wide acclaim for her innovative and elegant designs in jewellery. Working from the basic Scandinavian concept of uncluttered sculptural shapes and having a great

feeling for smooth reflective surfaces, she created some very beautiful rings, necklaces and bracelets, often embellished with a moonstone or a clear rock crystal set in starkly simple silver forms.

The ring illustrated is typical of the classic designs made for Georg Jensen Silversmiths; it is a simple shape, a continuous spiral of solid silver and highly polished.



352

Drawing in pencil of a ring by Gijs Bakker. Dutch. 1968. Diameter 3.7 cm. Private collection.

Gijs Bakker was born in 1942 and studied at the Instituut voor Kunstnijverheids-onderwijs in Amsterdam and at the Konstfackskolan in Stockholm. From 1966 to the present, he has won much acclaim for his highly original designs for jewellery and for objects, including furniture, exhibited at international exhibitions and represented in the public collections of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and others. In his jewellery, Bakker has worked more with aluminium and stainless steel than with gold and silver. He is very concerned

with purity of form and proportion and totally opposed to all preciousness and mere ornamentation. He has even explored the possibility of making conceptual jewellery: he made a 'bracelet' of gold wire that had to be worn so tightly on the arm that it left an imprint for a considerable time, the imprint being the important thing.

This drawing of a ring he made in 1968 shows Bakker's innovative approach to the ring form as a whole. The ring is made from a circular piece of silver sheet that has a slot sawn out in the centre. The slot was widened by tapping the metal over a triblet (Fig. 17) until it curved outwards, each half in opposite directions, allowing a finger to pass through the opening.

353

Silver and a rotating movement. American, by Mary Ann Scherr. 1969. Height C. 5 cm. Private collection.

Mary Ann Scherr studied illustration and graphic design at the Cleveland Institute of Art. She has worked as an automotive designer for the Ford Motor Company and with an advertising agency in Chicago. After the birth of her first child, she took up metal-working by enrolling in an evening class at the Akron Art Institute. Six months later Mary Ann Scherr won her first award for a piece of jewellery. She has designed everything from mater-

nity clothes to furniture and children's books and has done an enormous amount of research on the use of steel in jewellery for the US Steel Corporation, as well as research on the medical applications of jewellery used for body monitoring.

It is difficult to choose just one from the many completely different rings she has made; there are useful rings such as a 'tequilla ring' that contains two compartments, one for salt and one for lemon, or commissioned heirloom rings — for instance a gold ring with tiny figures who are surrounded by a fence and have inherited diamonds sparkling above their heads. The ring illustrated has a bezel



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shaped like a silver carousel, complete with tiny horses, lions and chariots that rotate when a lever is triggered.

354

White gold (18-carat), an opal, pearls and diamonds. Austrian, by Elisabeth Kodré-Defner. 1969-70. Diameter across hand 8.5 cm., (bracelet) 6.5 cm., (rings) 2 x 0.7 cm., 1.9 x 2 cm. Private collection.

Elisabeth Kodré-Defner was born in Vienna in 1937 and graduated from the Akademie für angewandte Kunst there in 1961. She has her own studio, which she shares with her husband Helfried Kodré (Pl. 362), also a very fine goldsmith. She has many international exhibitions to her credit, and her work is displayed in a number of museums in Europe. In 1967 she won the Bavarian Staatspreis (Gold Medal), in 1968 the Wiener Kunstfonds Preis and the Diamond International Award in 1970.

Elisabeth Kodré-Defner is an expert in the art of lost-wax casting (Fig. 19), as the bracelet/ring illustrated shows. She assembles the separately cast components and hand-finishes the piece by adding settings, hinged joints and fastenings. This piece of jewellery is completely mobile and will not hinder the free movement of the hand. The narrower ring is intended for the index finger, while the other fits on the little finger of the left hand. The design is decidedly influenced by Art Nouveau, but the context is entirely contemporary. Elisabeth Kodré-Defner has an enormous feeling for natural forms. Here she has used actual leaves and twigs, cast and chased and re-assembled to give her the desired shape, and highlighted by clusters, or single precious stones and pearls. Her later work incorporates animal shapes, particularly shells and beetles, confirming her great affinity to nature and her unique talent for recreating it in a more permanent form.

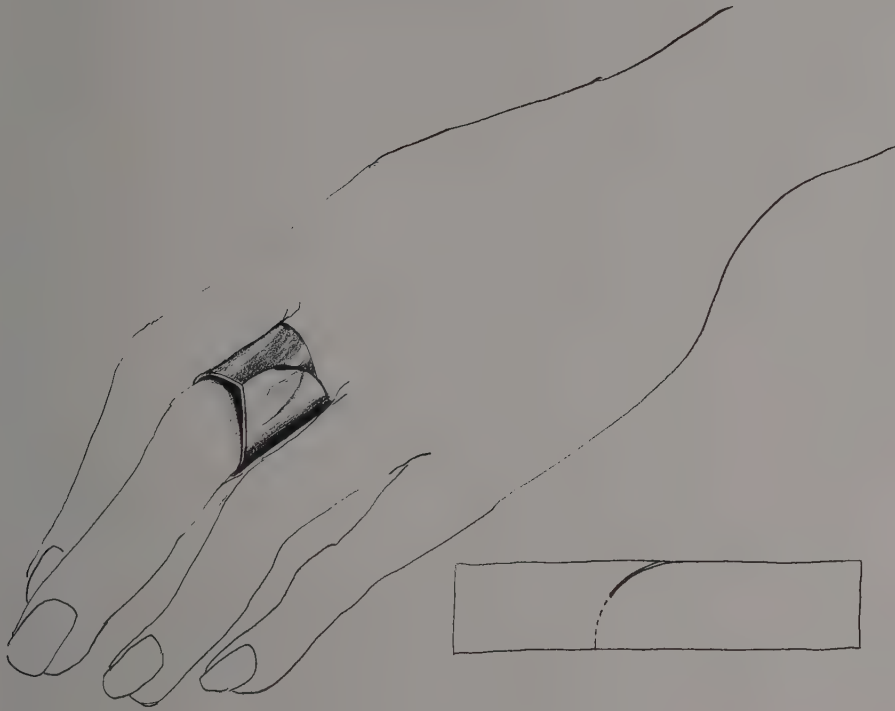
355

Drawing in pencil of a ring by Emmy van Leersum. Dutch. 1970. Width 1.9 cm. Private collection.

Born in Holland in 1930, Emmy van Leersum trained in Amsterdam at the Instituut voor Kunst-



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355

nijverheids-onderwijs and at the Konstfackskolan in Stockholm. Her work is present in public collections, and she has exhibited regularly all over Europe. Emmy van Leersum is married to Gijs Bakker (Pl. 352). Their work has an over-all affinity, yet each of them has a distinctive style of their own. This ring was made in 18-carat white gold and is totally unsentimental; none the less, it touches the senses because the otherwise perfect cylindrical form has been altered by an obliquely curved cut that ends in a bend. The smooth surface of the metal helps to deflect the light on the changed contours of the ring to dramatic effect.

356

Gold and diamonds. French, by Pol Bury. 1970. Height 2.7 cm., width 2.2 cm. Courtesy of Galerie Maeght, Paris.

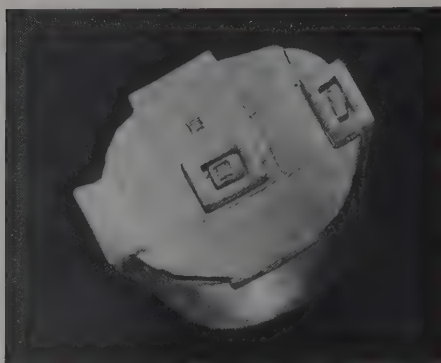
Born in Belgium in 1922, Pol Bury, who lives in France, is a sculptor of international repute. His jewellery is a natural extension of his sculptures, and his rings make the same point as his larger works. Bury's continuous exploration of the relationship between three-dimensional form and movement is expressed vividly in this ring: a solid sphere, pavé-set with diamonds. The sphere is mounted on a tiny spring set into the centre of an octagonal dish; the gentle and perpetual movement of the sphere throws constantly changing reflections onto the highly polished surfaces of the dish surrounding it. This is a witty ring and, turned upside down, it reveals its source of inspiration — a light bulb with its reflector shade. The ring, with its multiple views of sparkling diamonds, looks good on the hand.



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357

Gold (18-carat) and diamonds. German, by Reinhold Reiling. 1970. 2.5 x 2 cm. Private collection.



Reinhold Reiling was born near Pforzheim in 1922 and served an apprenticeship as an engraver and chaser before studying at arts and crafts schools in Pforzheim and Dresden. He worked six years as a designer of manufactured jewellery and then turned to teaching. Since 1969 he has been a professor at the Fachhochschule für Gestaltung in Pforzheim, Germany.

This ring is hand-wrought and has a mat-gold finish, partly textured by engraving and chasing and partly by fusing different sections to obtain varying levels. Square diamonds are set in the metal level with its surface. The ring is very sculptural and massive in concept, in complete contrast to the traditional treatment of precious stones and metals (Pl. 393).

358

Gold (14-carat), available with choice of stone. American, by L. G. Balfour Company. 1970. Sizes as ordered. Courtesy of L. G. Balfour Company.



This American college ring is one of approximately one million rings produced annually by the world's largest scholastic and fraternal jewellers, L. G. Balfour Company of Massachusetts. Lloyd G. Balfour, the founder of the company, spent a lifetime fostering the individualistic spirit of the ancient craft guilds among his three thousand employees. Every Balfour design for a school ring tries to incorporate some distinctive school mascot. Eagles and falcons are popular, but designs have also included alligators, snakes, skunks and even a ghost



(for a Pennsylvania high school). These rings are so distinctive that when a Spanish fisherman caught an octopus that had swallowed a ring belonging to an ensign aboard a US Navy destroyer on exercises off the Spanish coast, Balfour's records were able to trace the owner.

The ring illustrated was made for Bishop Stang High School and is a solid casting that bears the school's name around the stone. The shoulders have the school's initials and again the school's full name in smaller lettering around the school shield. Small decorative ornamentation fills in the spaces.

359

Gold and the 'Polar Star' diamond (41.28 carats). French, by the head designer for Boucheron. 1971. Christie's, Geneva, sale 19 and 20 November 1980, lot no. 653.

Undoubtedly one of the most expensive items illustrated in this book, this ring contains one of the world's famous diamonds — the 'Polar Star'. The stone weighs 41.28 carats and originated from the Indian mines of Golconda, now extinct. The facet-cutting of the stone is so perfect in its symmetry that the diamond can be balanced on its culet, and the pavilion has been cut to produce a double eight-pointed star.

The history of the 'Polar Star' goes back to Napoleon's brother, Joseph Bonaparte, who acquired it for a reputed fifty-two thousand Swiss francs. Subsequently it passed into the magnificent collection of Princess Tatiana Youssoupoff and was bought by Cartier's in the 1920s. Its most recent owner was Lady Deterding, widow of the founder of Royal Dutch Shell, for whom Boucheron mounted the jewel into a ring. The stone is held by double claws at each corner. The ring, one of the greatest attractions at Christie's 'Magnificent Jewels' auction, held in Geneva in November 1980 to sell Lady Deterding's jewellery, was sold there for eight million Swiss francs.

360

White gold (18-carat) and a rotating blunt-ended cone. German, by Friedrich Becker. 1971. 3 x 3 cm. The artist's collection.



Friedrich Becker is one of this century's most important German artist-jewellers; his work and teaching have made a great impact on the development of jewellery in the twentieth century. Becker was born in 1922 and served an apprenticeship as an engine fitter and studied aeronautics before attending the Werkkunstschule in Düsseldorf. He has exhibited at many international shows, and his work is represented in major private and public collections at home and abroad. Becker has been a professor at the Fachhochschule in Düsseldorf since 1972. He is an honorary member of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, London, holder of the Federal Cross of Merit First Class and the *Ehrenring* ('ring of merit') of the Gesellschaft für Goldschmiedekunst.

Much of his work has been devoted to rings, and this one is a classic example of Becker's expertise with kinetics, a field in which he has been particularly innovative. Technically he has achieved his

effect with joints and micro-ball-bearings, obviously helped by his earlier involvement with engineering and aeronautics. Quite apart from the beautiful balance and clarity of this design, the constant movement never fails to arouse interest and fascinate the eye.

361

Silver, perspex and plastic. Dutch, by Marion Herbst. 1971. 2 x 3 cm. Private collection.



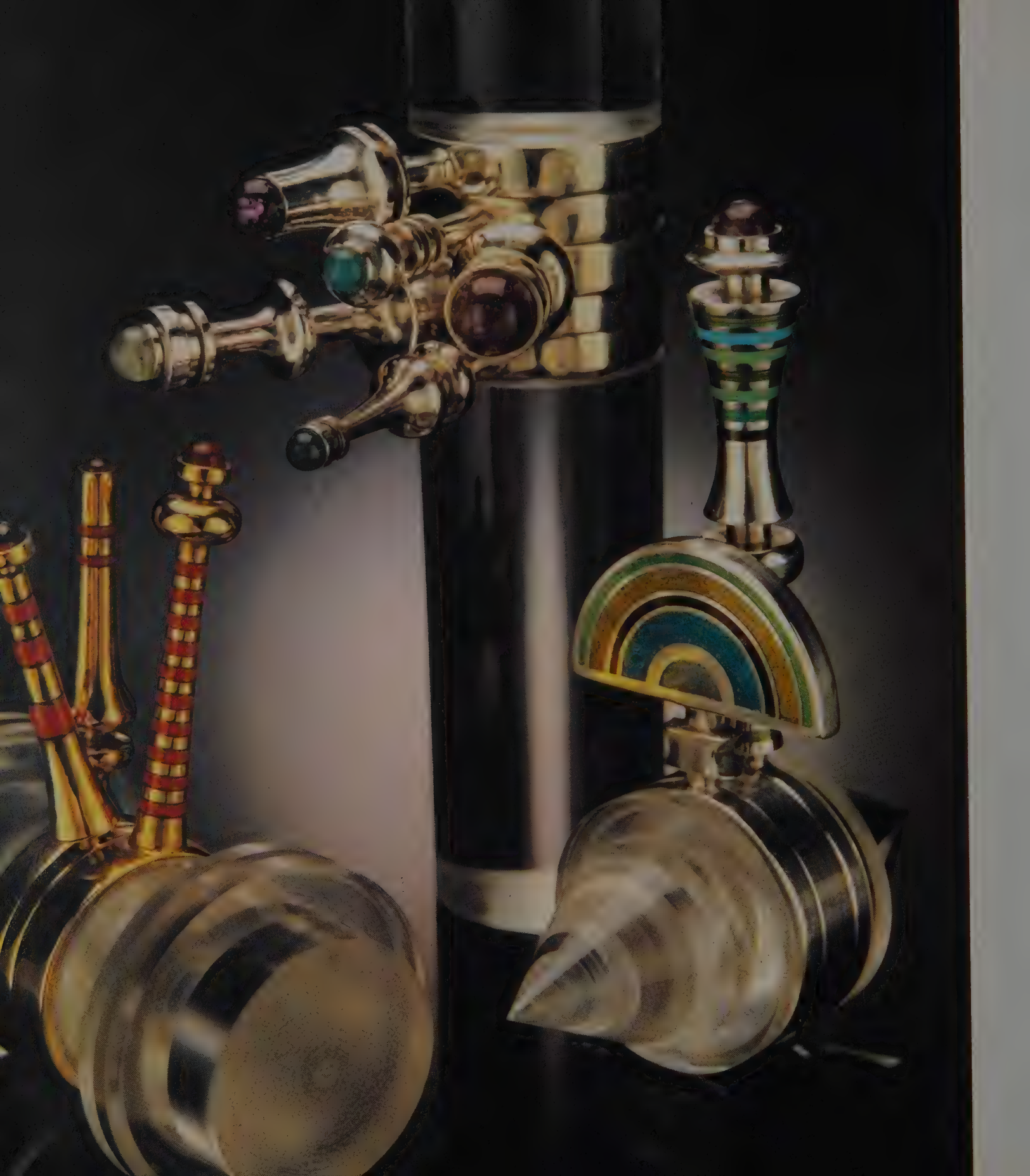
Born in Germany in 1944, Marion Herbst studied sculpture and jewellery at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam from 1962 to 1968. Since then she has exhibited in Europe, Curaçao and the United States. Several public collections own examples of her work.

This ring is made of sheet silver and has a clear perspex dome protecting a small plastic figure. It is a nicely balanced combination of an ultra-simple structure with a realistic figurative inclusion made of plastic, and also a very overt and witty alternative to highly priced gem-set rings.

362

Silver and gold (18-carat), a tourmaline and a ruby. Austrian, by Helfried Kodré, 2.2 x 2.8 x 2.5 cm. Private collection.





Born in Graz in 1940, Helfried Kodré originally studied the history of art but became interested in making jewellery when he met his wife, Elisabeth Kodré-Defner (Pl. 354), who taught him. Since 1962 they have shared a studio in Vienna where they frequently work jointly on jewellery, as well as pursue their own different concepts.

In contrast to Elisabeth's work, Helfried Kodré's work is still concerned with natural forms but in an abstracted manner. His fluid lines on broken surfaces, with subtle textures and intermittent pools of colour — here a flat uneven green tourmaline and a glistening red ruby — recall aerial landscapes. This ring was made by casting the silver and gold sections of the bezel separately; the shank and assembly are hand-finished.

363

Gold (18-carat), silver, carnelians, a garnet, agates, amethysts and enamel. English, by Wendy Ramshaw. 1971 and 1980. Height including shank (left to right) 5 cm., 5 cm., 6.3 cm. The artist's collection.

Born in Sunderland in the north of England in 1939, Wendy Ramshaw studied illustration and fabric design at the College of Art and Industrial Design in Newcastle upon Tyne and later gained a degree as a teacher from Reading University. Her work represents a significant contribution to the development of contemporary jewellery; it has won her much international acclaim and has been acquired by public collections. Wendy Ramshaw was the first woman artist-jeweller to win the Council of Industrial Design Award (in 1972), and she became a freeman of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, London, in 1973.

This unique design expresses the essence of contemporary jewellery concepts — the dual function of being wearable jewellery and small sculptural objects. It has the unmistakable flavour of the space age. Ramshaw's rings are striking and bold; often as many as twelve individual bands are grouped together and delicately blended for colour and shape, covering the finger from its base to the first joint. The set of rings on the left consists of three rings in gold, each with a turret-shaped elevation at the shank. They are decorated with bands of red enamel and topped with cabochon carnelians and a garnet in collet settings. The central set consists of five silver rings, each with variously shaped turrets at different heights, set with carnelian, agate and amethyst. The set on the right is composed of two rings; one has a semi-circular silver shape inlaid with bands of coloured enamel and the other a tall turret set with an amethyst. Each of these three sets of rings can be rearranged in endlessly variable combinations, and each set has its own special stand — perspex, nickel or brass — on which it can be displayed when not worn. (The stands open by unscrewing the centre.) Ramshaw uses both a lathe and hand-finishing in her work.

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White and yellow gold (18-carat) and acrylic. German, by Claus Bury. 1972. Height 2.5 × 3 cm. Margret Distelbarth Collection, Esslingen.



Claus Bury was born at Meerholz, Germany, in 1946. From 1962 to 1968 he studied at the Staatliche Zeichenakademie in Hanau and the Kunst- und Werksschule in Pforzheim. After two years working in London in Andrew Grima's (Pl. 349) workshop, Bury returned to Hanau where he has his studio. He alternates working with lecturing as a visiting artist in Europe, America, Australia and Israel. Claus Bury has taken part in international exhibitions all over the world, and his work is

represented in private and public collections. He is a tremendous innovator and researcher in both design and technique.

This ring was one of the first to use acrylic in conjunction with precious metals and jeweller's techniques; it is a fine example of Bury's concepts, very much inspired by technology and contemporary sculptural trends. The ring has mobile sections made from wire, tubing and laminated acrylics with extremely fine precision.



365

Silver and acrylic resin. English, by Susanna Heron. 1972. C. 3 x 4 cm. Private collection.

Born in 1949 in Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, Susanna Heron grew up in London and Cornwall and studied at the Falmouth School of Art and the Central School of Art and Design in London until 1971. From the very beginning, her jewellery was the expression of a continuous process of refining ideas, form and technique. Susanna Heron is particularly interested in jewellery as an extension of the body. After three solo exhibitions and having participated in major international shows, she has progressed from solid metal and figurative images to simplification and abstraction. Dissatisfied with creating jewellery for an elitist market, Susanna Heron collaborated with three contemporaries, Caroline Broadhead, Julia Manheim and Nuala Jamison to produce a touring exhibition entitled 'Fourways'. It contains jewellery in limited editions, available at accessible prices. During 1978 and 1979 she spent a year travelling through the United States on a British Council Bicentennial Arts Fellowship. That trip strengthened her determination to express her concepts in non-precious materials.

The rings illustrated here are made by piercing out a design from a solid sheet of silver and filling the openings with liquid resin. The sides of the rings are finished off to a smooth level surface with fine carborundum paper.

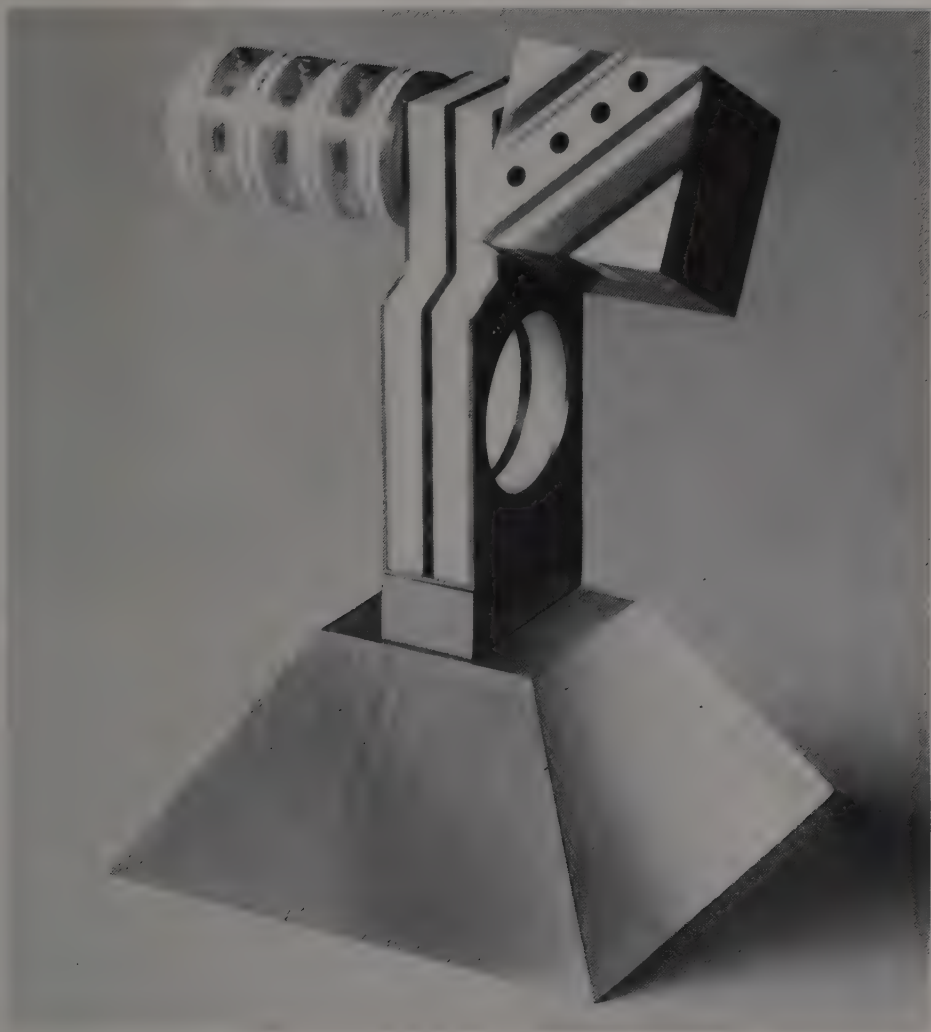
366

Gold (18-carat) and acrylic. Austrian, by Fritz Maierhofer. 1973. Size and whereabouts not available.

Fritz Maierhofer was born in Vienna in 1941 and received his diploma as a goldsmith, also in Vienna, in 1966. He spent three years in London, working in Andrew Grima's (Pl. 349) workshop at the same time as Claus Bury (Pl. 364), from 1967 to 1970. While they are in no way representative of popular trends, his work and designs express the very essence of the late twentieth century. Maierhofer has a complete mastery of traditional jeweller's techniques; he uses them to visually express social comment and critique, as well as the technology of our environment. He is one of several people like Claus Bury and Gerd Rothmann who experimented with acrylics in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The material's lack of intrinsic value at first proved a great stumbling block for many people, but seen in the perspective of other time-honoured materials such as enamel, faience, paste, etc., and treated with Maierhofer's skilful handling and imaginative application, acrylic jewellery has become a category in its own right.

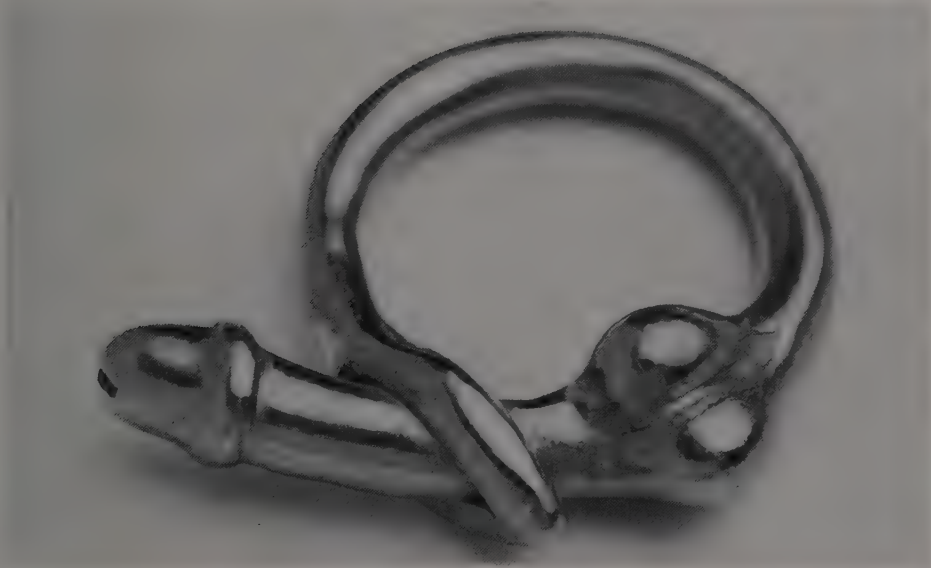
This ring owes little if anything to tradition. The basic component is a shape about 3 centimetres high and 0.8 centimetres thick, squared off at the base, with a hole for the finger cut through laminated layers of acrylic and gold. A round bar at the top supports a cube of gold and laminated acrylic sections at one end and at the other an acrylic rod with clear and opaque bands held in place by gold screws. The cross-section of the ring rotates, and the whole ring can be placed on a special acrylic stand, so it doubles as a sculptural object.

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Gold (22-carat). German, by Hubertus von Skal. 1973. Diameter 2 cm. Private collection.

Hubertus von Skal was born in Czechoslovakia in 1942 and studied at the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Munich. Since 1970 he has continually exhibited at one-man shows and participated in international group exhibitions. His work is in the collection of the Schmuckmuseum, Pforzheim. As an artist, Von Skal sees jewellery primarily as a visual manifestation of thought, an original and creative expression, capable of evoking a response in its own right. At times his search for new processes, shapes and materials has taken him into the field of sculpture. (He has created whole spatial environments for an exhibition at the Pinakothek in Munich.) Lately, however, Von Skal has returned to smaller objects and jewellery with special emphasis on faces.

This ring is from a period when Von Skal was much concerned with symbolism; during that time he created a number of witty 'erotic' pieces of classic quality. This ring was made by lost-wax casting (Fig. 19).

368

Gold (18-carat) and silver. English, by Barbara Cartlidge. 1973. 2 x 2.5 x 3 cm. Private collection.

Barbara Cartlidge, who was born in Berlin in 1922, came to England as a refugee in 1938. After a short spell as St Martin's School of Art, London, she took



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a secretarial course and worked during the war for Kelvinator's, a firm producing testing cabinets for aviation instruments, and at Denham Film Studios. In 1957, after marrying and raising a family, she took up jewellery making and attended the Central School of Art and Design, London, for three years. Barbara Cartlidge is a freeman of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, London, and a member of the Society of Jewellery Historians. Since 1971, she owns and runs Electrum Gallery in London.

The bezels of these rings are composed of a series of rooms in foreshortened perspective: a bedroom, sitting-room and bathroom respectively. The doors open and close in the usual manner, typical of London houses in the Victorian era. The doors are on hinges, and the handles turn a lever that locks onto a catch on the underside of the door frames. These rings are unique pieces, constructed from sheet and wire in silver and gold. The rooms were assembled and soldered onto the shank; the interior fittings were made separately and soldered into position before the outer door frame was finally soldered onto the edge.

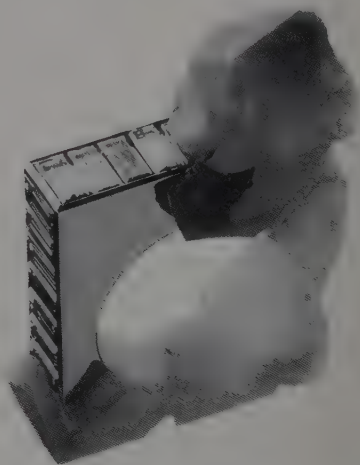
369

White and yellow gold (18-carat) and diamonds. Japanese, by Yoko Itoh. 1973. Size and whereabouts not available.

This classic example of good Japanese design and workmanship is also a ring very much in the contemporary idiom. It shows traces of the current renewed interest in Art Deco styles but provides an entirely new resolution in shape and technique.

370

Diamonds, jade and white gold. Japanese, by Yuji Takabashi. 1973. Size and whereabouts not available.



There is an interesting and effective contrast of forms in this ring, designed and made by the artist. The organic form of the jade provides a surprising counterpoint to the sharply defined contours of the baguette-diamonds in their angular setting.

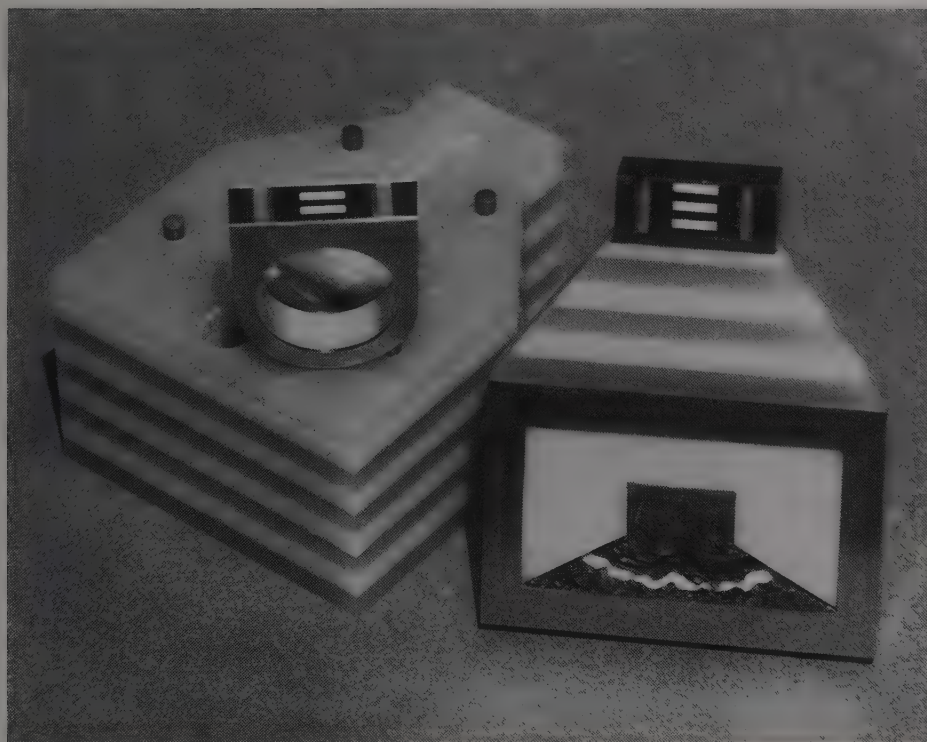
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Acrylic. Dutch, by Berend Peter. 1973. 8 × 5 cm. The artist's collection.

Berend Peter was born at Zandvoort am Zee in 1945. He studied at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam, in the department of sculpture from 1961 to 1968 and has exhibited in both Holland and England. His work is in private collections as well as in the City of Amsterdam government collection and in several museums.

Peter is perhaps one of Holland's most outspoken exponents of the 'revolt in jewellery'. No doubt the very pronounced bourgeois predilection for precious jewels in Holland — the centre of the diamond trade — helped to provoke an equally strong countermovement that uses the jewellery format to express violent rejection of the materialistic and status-seeking urges in people. The 'unwearable' rings shown here were contained within a locked aluminium suitcase and only visible through the clear perspex lid.

372

Acrylic and gold. English, by Roger Morris. 1974. 5.5 × 4.5 cm. (box), 2 × 0.7 cm. (ring). Private collection.

Born in Devon, England, in 1946, Roger Morris studied at the Central School of Art and Design and the Royal College of Art, London, from which he earned his master's degree in 1976. In 1974 Morris



won a travel scholarship to Trinidad and Tobago; the same year, he was awarded the Jablonec Gold Medal.

A comparative late-comer to the use of acrylics in jewellery, and influenced by Claus Bury (Pl. 364), who was a guest lecturer at the Royal College of Art during his studies, Roger Morris has produced some highly original combinations of jewellery in that medium, as the illustration shows. A brooch forms the lid of the box that contains the ring. All the pieces are made from different-coloured laminated sheets of acrylic and have sheet gold, partly inlaid and partly riveted on the top.

373

Gold (18-carat), nephrite, amethyst and sapphire. German, by Nele. 1974. 3 x 2.2 cm. (left), 2 x 1.9 cm. (right). Private collection.

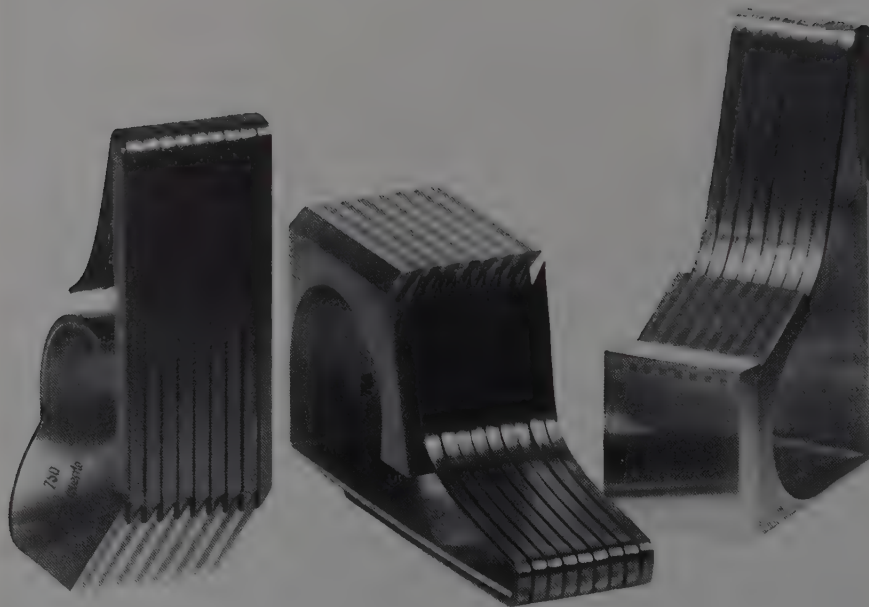
Nele's involvement in jewellery began in the early 1950s. Originally she was only interested in sculpture and was drawn to London by the work of Chadwick and Armitage. She studied at the Central School of Art and Design in London for three years where, together with her fellow student, Gerda Flöckinger (Pl. 383), she began experimenting with new shapes and materials. This experimentation gained early recognition for her at a students' exhibition, and she won the Prince Albert Stipend. Back in Germany, Nele turned again to studying sculpture under Professor Uhlmann and spent a year in Paris, learning copper-etching with Lacourrière. Since her first show of sculpture and jewellery at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Nele has exhibited in many important galleries all over Europe. She received the Gold Medal at the Triennale in Milan and an Award for Fine Arts and Gold Medal in Munich. Nele was made an associate member of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, London, in 1976.

Rings by Nele mirror her personality — exuberant, warm-hearted, full of fantasy, baroque and flamboyant. She models the rings in wax, using a generous amount of precious and semi-precious stones in brilliant colours and surrounds them with abstract shapes and figures. Her main theme is man's unity with nature: a face inside, a hand or foot emerging from an ammonite or a finely shaped hand clasping a stone and wearing a tiny ring with a ruby.

374

Gold (18-carat) and steel. German, by Norbert Muerrle. 1974. 2 x 3 x 2.2 cm. Schmuckmuseum Pforzheim (two rings), and private collection.

It was in Pforzheim, where Norbert Muerrle was born in 1948, that he also served his apprenticeship as a goldsmith and diamond setter; at the end of his apprenticeship in 1965, the Pforzheim City Council awarded him a prize. After gaining some practical experience working in various local firms, Muerrle attended the Kunst- und Werkschule in Pforzheim and earned a master's degree in 1969 after only two years at the Goldschmiedeschule. Since 1971 he has worked in his own studio-workshop, taking time off to design for prestige collections produced by various manufacturing



jewellers in Germany. Muerrle's work has been exhibited widely and is collected by museums. Norbert Muerrle is also an accomplished painter and etcher. His designs are very abstract, of geometric precision and highly innovative in shape and materials.

Muerrle, who was born, bred and lives in the centre of the conventional jewellery trade in Germany, has a very pronounced need to create what he terms *Objektringe* ('ring-objects'). These 'ring-objects', executed with all the traditional skill of his jeweller's profession, are valid aesthetic and critical statements in their own right; however, they can also be worn. The three rings illustrated are made from sheet gold, laminated white and yellow, with steel staples added.

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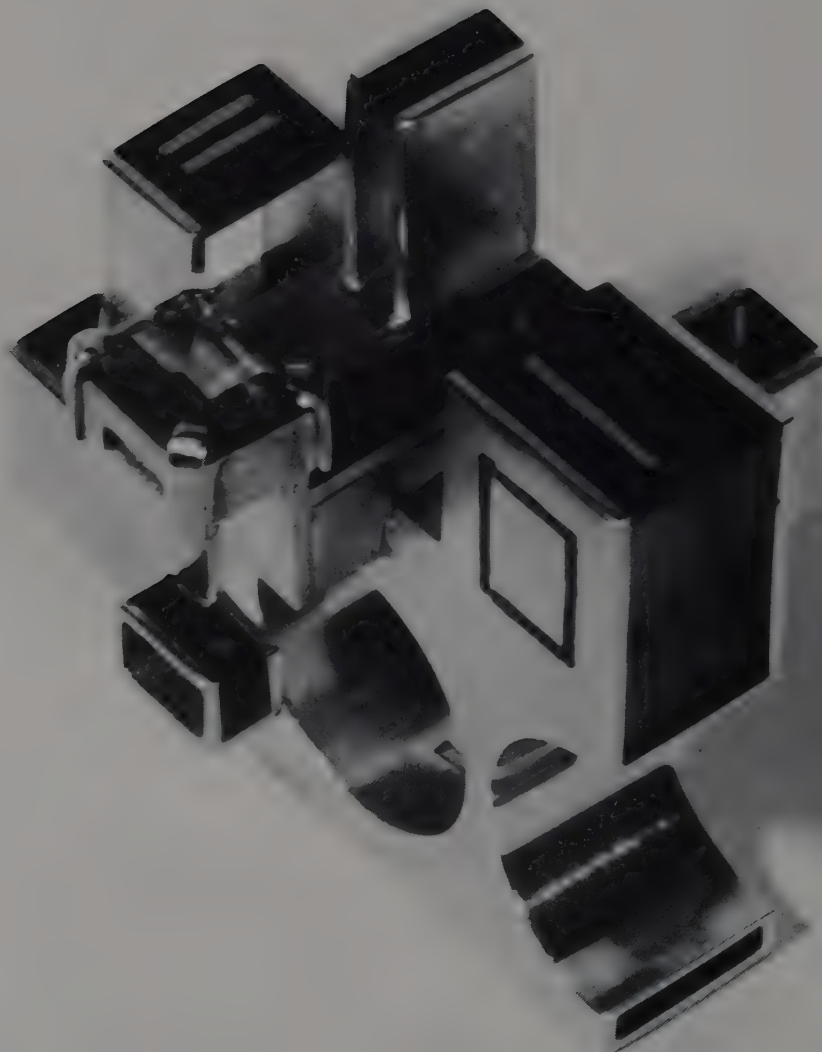
Sterling silver and copper with gold plating in parts. Danish, by Birte Stenbak. 1975. 6 × 6.3 × 9 cm. The artist's collection.

Born in 1938, Birte Stenbak spent several years working with Staalgard, jewellers in Copenhagen, after an apprenticeship as a silversmith with Paul Bang in Copenhagen. Finally she attended the Goldsmiths' College, Copenhagen, for four years, and in 1975 she opened her own workshop and salesroom together with her partner, the goldsmith Birte Jørgensen. Birte Stenbak has participated regularly in exhibitions throughout Scandinavia and has also exhibited in Tokyo and London. She has been given three awards, and her work is

represented in the collection of the Danish National Arts Foundation.

Stenbak's designs are illustrative of the enormous swing away from the pure disciplined form of Georg Jensen Silversmiths (Pl. 321, 323). Although this ring also demonstrates a certain nostalgia for Art Nouveau, it is clearly a product of the 1970s because of its large size. This four-finger ring was made up of four major sections modelled in wax, cast and subsequently soldered together. Then the copper stamens were added to the large flower, as well as the touches of gilding. Worn across four fingers, this Stenbak ring is surprisingly comfortable on the hand, and it rests easily on its base as a free-standing sculptural object when not worn.





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Silver, shakudo and amethysts. American, by Eugene and Hiroko Pijanowski. 1975 C. 4 x 5 cm. Private collection.

Eugene and Hiroko Pijanowski are a husband and wife team; Eugene was born in Detroit in 1938 and Hiroko in Tokyo in 1942. They have exhibited since the mid 1960s in America, Germany, Japan and Great Britain. Eugene is assistant professor of metal-work, jewellery and three-dimensional design at Purdue University, Indiana. Both Pijanowski

are active members of the World Crafts Council and the Society of North American Goldsmiths. Eugene has lectured widely in America and Japan.

This ring is made from sheet silver and is hollow. An interesting arrangement of different shapes and levels is achieved by blending the various materials and the rectangular amethysts. *Shakudo* is a Japanese alloy of copper containing 3 per cent to 5 per cent gold; the alloy is subsequently treated with a fluid that turns it blue-black.

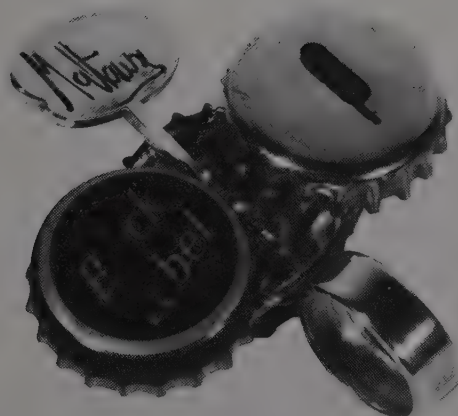
377
Silver and amber. Polish, by Joachim Sokolsky. 1975. 4.5 x 3 cm. Private collection.

Joachim Sokolski, born in 1946, was one of the first Polish jewellers to design original and unique jewellery. Here he has used the traditional amber that is so plentiful in his country; it is inlaid with silver which provides a contrast. The amber and silver sphere is mounted on two silver columns set onto a rectangular ring shape. Sokolski's designs are frequently based on the use of machine and



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engine components, a demanding type of design he developed further in his later work where precision in execution forms an integral part of the design concept.

378

Silver and resin. English, by Tom Saddington. 1975. 4 × 5 cm. Private collection.

Born in Birmingham in 1952, Tom Saddington studied at the Guildford School of Art and the Sir John Cass School in London from 1969 to 1973. Since leaving college, he has consistently explored the theme of throw-aways, the litter left as evidence of our modern 'culture'. Jewellery is just one of his means of expression in this research.

A direct social comment, the ring illustrated represents a conglomerate of bottle-tops. Saddington has made another ring that bears the stunted inscription 'Smarties', a well-known and much-consumed brand of sweets. The concept is, of course, a direct descendant of Pop Art, witty and certainly fun to wear.

379

Gold (18-carat) or silver. American, by Elsa Peretti for Tiffany's. 1975. 2.3 × 1.9 cm. Still in production today.



Elsa Peretti is one of Tiffany's most successful designers. She joined the company in 1974 and was responsible for making the first silver jewellery that Tiffany's had sold for twenty-five years. Born in Florence and educated in Rome, where she received a degree in interior design, Elsa Peretti came to New York first as a model; in 1969 she began designing silver jewellery.

This example of her work is in gold. Her designs are much concerned with organic shapes; they are sculptural, and the heart shape occurs frequently, as it does here.

380

Silver and marble. Japanese, by Kazuhiro Itoh. 1976. 1 × 3.3 cm. Private collection.

Kazuhiro Itoh was born on the island of Shikoku, Japan, in 1948. In 1967 he participated in an exhibition of conceptual art in Kyoto and in 1970 showed sculpture in Tokyo. He graduated in 1971 from Tama Art University, Tokyo, with a degree in oil painting. While continuing to work in sculpture and woodblock printing, Kazuhiro Itoh also worked for two years in the design studio of the Mikimoto Pearl Company, as well as with the Itoh Shoten Jewellery Company in Tokyo in 1973.

Unmistakably Japanese in concept but new in the context of jewellery, this ring is made from silver sheet set with a mat, yet glistening marble.





The ends of the slab of marble curve upwards very slightly. It is held in place by precision cuts in the sides of the rectangular ring shape and by two minute drops of jewellers' cement.

381
Gold (18-carat). *Venezuelan*, by Harry Abend. 1976.
Width c. 2.6 cm. The artist's collection.

Harry Abend was born in Poland in 1937 and came to Venezuela as a boy of twelve, after spending some years in the Soviet Union. In Caracas, Abend studied architecture under Carlos Raoul Villanueva and sculpture with Miguel Arroyo. Abend's jewellery is an extension of his preference for making small maquettes for his sculptures.

This ring is made from sheet gold and is hollow.

In some ways it is unusual for Abend, because of the vague figural reference. The over-all shape hints at a bird with a long tail. The sides are an even 0.7 centimetres wide throughout, while the outline is drawn in one sweep to unite the bezel with the shank. The artist's signature and the date are engraved on the flat surface of the 'head'.



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White gold (18-carat) and iron. Italian, by Bruno Martinazzi. 1977. Length 4 cm. Private collection, Vienna.

Born in Turin in 1923, Bruno Martinazzi took a doctorate in chemistry in 1946, before studying sculpture at Turin, Florence and Rome from 1953 to 1954. Finally he studied psychology at Turin with special emphasis on art-therapy as an aid to mentally handicapped children. From 1954 onwards, Martinazzi participated in numerous exhibitions of both sculpture and jewellery all over the world, and he has been awarded major prizes in those fields.

Martinazzi's educational background does much to put his total involvement as an artist into its proper perspective; he is a man of relentless drive always probing into the underlying meanings and connections among visual stimuli, materials and human relationships. Using the forum of jewellery, he has superbly exploited its tactile smallness to gain access to the inner responses — emotional and intellectual — of other human beings. His starkly formal portrayals of parts of the body (in this instance two finger-tips of iron, mounted on an open, white-gold shank) evoke strength and a masculine image of capability and touch. It is a theme he has explored consistently, in both male and female versions, concentrating on various parts of the body to emphasize the specific areas of each of the senses in visual and allegorical terms.

383

Gold (18-carat), coloured pearls and coloured diamonds. English, by Gerda Flöckinger. 1977. Width (shank) 1.5 cm., length (tails) 5.4 cm. The artist's collection.



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Born in Innsbruck in 1927, Gerda Flöckinger came to England as a refugee in 1938; there she completed her education and studied fine art at St Martin's School of Art from 1945 to 1950. During the following six years she painted, travelled, studied etching and later design, jewellery making and enamelling at the Central School of Art and Design, London. Since about 1955, she has had her own studio-workshop, and from 1962 to 1968 she was lecturer at the Hornsey College of Art, where she played an important rôle in organizing the course on modern jewellery. In 1971, Gerda Flöckinger was the first woman jeweller to have a 'one-man' show at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

She uses a special technique on metal, fusing it rather than soldering it, to achieve an enormous range of textures and fine lines, that often result in broken surfaces with uneven edges. This gives her rings a fluid, molten feeling. The ring illustrated is particularly effective worn on the little finger, which allows the tails to cascade freely down on the

side of the hand. Intensely feminine, Gerda Flöckinger's work also has great emotive quality, which brings out the very essence of gold or silver — here underlined by the addition of baroque pearls and tiny diamonds embedded within whorls of fused metal.

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Silver, steel and gold-plated copper. German, by Jens-Rüdiger Lorenzen. 1977. Height 3.7 cm., width 2 cm. Schmuckmuseum, Pforzheim.

Jens-Rüdiger Lorenzen was born in Hagen, Germany, in 1942 and apprenticed as a gold- and silversmith in Wuppertal from 1961 to 1964. For the next four years he studied at the Kunstwerk-schule in Pforzheim. Since 1968, Lorenzen has his own studio-workshop, and in 1974 he became a lecturer at the Staatliche Zeichenakademie, Hagen. Lorenzen's work has won much acclaim; he has six major awards to his credit and has exhibited in one-man shows and participated in group shows

on an international level. Lorenzen and his work are mentioned in a number of books on modern jewellery.

This ring is characteristic of an important aspect of ring design in the 1970s — the design is the result of an intellectual dialogue, of a profound investigation into the relationship between form and function, into the use of technical means to give visual expression to an artist's idea. The ring owes literally nothing to tradition but is a wearable object. It is a concrete expression of Lorenzen's ideas of contrasting colour and shape within the limitations of size, without losing impact. While the result is certainly wearable, Lorenzen himself is not concerned with that function alone; he is content to let the owner decide whether the ring serves its purpose as jewellery or as an object — or indeed as both. The ring is an assembly of diverse shapes (rectangular boxes, tubes and wires) constructed of steel, silver and gold-plated copper and mounted on a shank.



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Yellow gold (18-carat), a topaz baguette (3.6 carats) and 28 brilliant-cut diamonds (0.76 carats). English, by David Thomas. 1977. 1.2×2×2.5 cm. Private collection, Japan.

David Thomas was born at Hampton Hill, Middlesex, in 1938 and trained at Twickenham School of Art from 1952 to 1957, where he specialized in metal-work. During the following years he won a scholarship to study in Italy and France, worked for two years in Scandinavia with Blin's, the Swedish Crown Jewellers, and as a silversmith with Arne Gillgren. During Thomas's three years at the Royal College of Art, from 1959 to 1961, he was awarded the title 'Royal Scholar'.

Since 1965, when he opened his own studio-workshop, Thomas has successfully exhibited at many prestigious international exhibitions; he was commissioned to design coinage for the Royal Mint, and in 1974 he had a retrospective exhibition of his work at the Goldsmiths' Hall in London. (Thomas has been a freeman of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths since 1966.) The box section of this ring is constructed from gold sheet, one side of which consists of thin plates of sheet metal held apart by the small diamonds.

386

Silver, mother of pearl, yew, ebony and abalone shell. English, by David Hensel. 1977. 5×2.5×2.5 cm. Private collection.

The son of a doctor, David Hensel was born in Dorset, England, in 1945. He first studied medicine, then the moral and natural sciences at Cam-



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bridge. In 1965 he switched to the fine arts. As a jeweller, Hensel is self-taught. His sculpture has always consisted of small intricate objects, but in 1964, after reading a science-fiction story about a future where wood had become so scarce and precious that only engagement rings were allowed to be made from it, he decided to add the functional disciplines of jewellery to his sculpture to bring it still closer to the eventual possessor of his work.

The ring illustrated is very typical of this oblique, yet direct approach. The heads are portraits of one of Hensel's friends and his wife, made for them, carved in fine detail and inlaid. The heads open outwards revealing a 'secret' compartment; the shank is also hinged and, by removing the base pin, can be opened to convert it into a stand on which the ring can easily be displayed on a shelf.

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Gold (18-carat). Japanese, by Yasuki Hiramatsu. 1977. Size and whereabouts not available.

Born in Osaka in 1926. Yasuki Hiramatsu is now professor at the Tokyo University of Art of which he is himself a graduate. Yasuki Hiramatsu is not only a very fine artist-jeweller but is also very active in the educational field, a tireless promoter of jewellery exhibitions in Japan and of Japanese participation in shows abroad. He has done much to increase the appreciation of modern jewellery by the Japanese public and to encourage continuous contact between jewellers from all parts of the world and those in Japan. In 1980 Yasuki Hiramatsu retired from the post of general secretary of the Japan Jewellery Designers' Association.

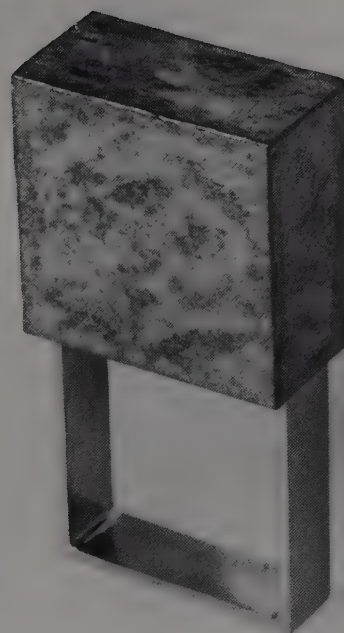
This ring is made from sheet gold; the mat finish is very subtly textured. It is a beautiful example of classic simplicity (Pl. 36), a hollow ring with a rectangular block (approximately 2 cm across and 1 cm deep) as the bezel. The block is made from sheet metal that has been soldered along the edges and joined onto the square shank to maintain the unity of the design. (The shank is a strip of sheet metal 1 mm thick.)

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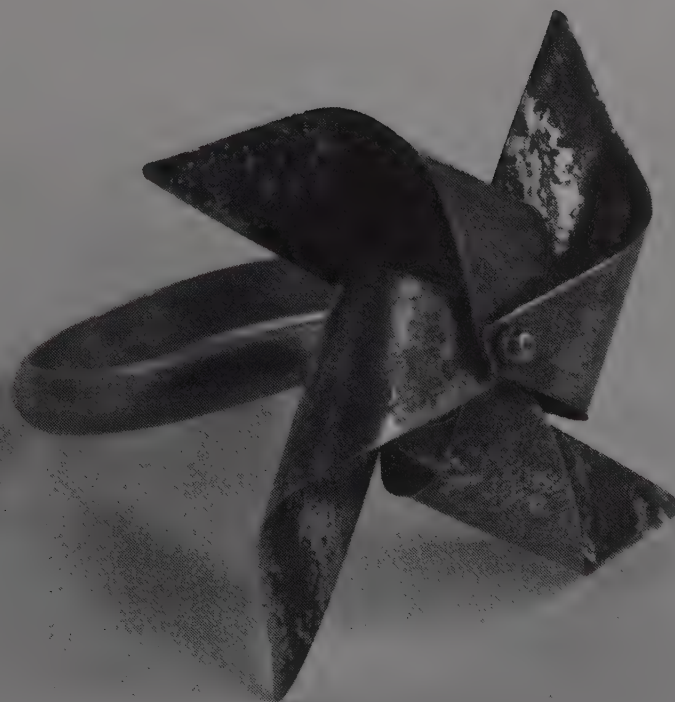
Gold (18-carat) and iron. Swiss, by Bernard Schobinger. 1977. Diameter 3 cm. Private collection.

Bernard Schobinger was born in Zurich in 1946 and attended the Kunstgewerbeschule there for five years, studying under Professor Max Fröhlich (Pl. 341). He graduated in 1967 and in 1971 won the International Diamond Award and in 1972 the second prize in the *Schmuck und Edelstein* ('Jewellery and Precious Stones') competition organized at Idar-Oberstein, Germany.

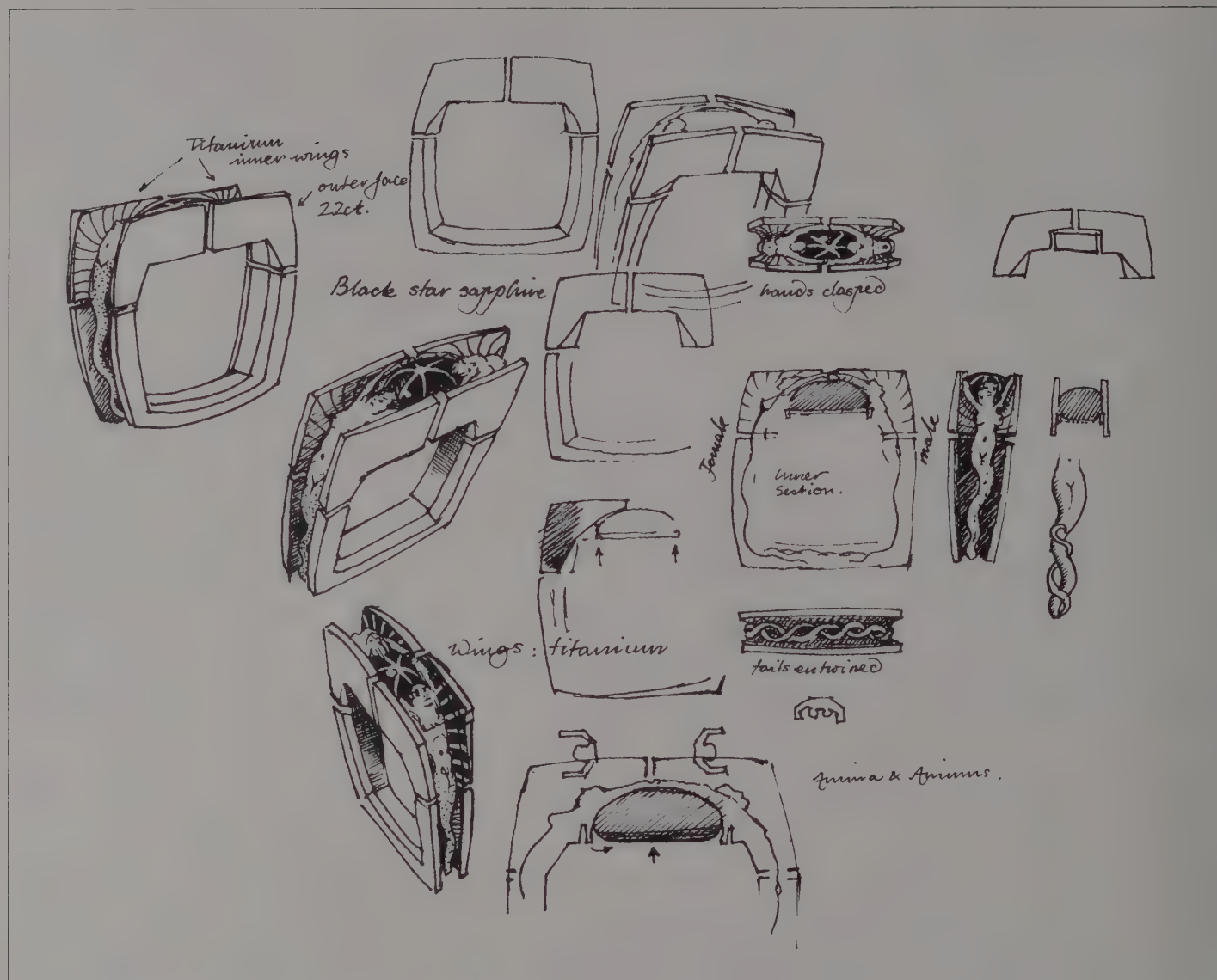
Schobinger's ring illustrated here expresses a desire to return to base metals like iron and to shapes that are fun, that can be played with — in this example a windmill that rotates on a gold pin. The windmill, of old iron, has a surface pitted by age and rust, but the ageing is now arrested by a thin coating of plastic spray that preserves the brownish-red colouring and stops deterioration.



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Gold (22-carat), titanium and a black star-sapphire, with drawing. English, by Kevin Coates. 1977. 2.3 x 2.5 cm. Private collection, Italy.

Kevin Coates, born in 1950 in Kingston, Surrey, trained at the Central School of Art and Design, London from 1970 to 1973 and graduated from the Royal College of Art, London, in 1976. Since then he has also gained a Ph.D. for his study of the use of geometry in the design of stringed musical instruments. (In addition to being a jeweller, Coates is also a specialist on baroque music and an accomplished musician who plays the instruments of that period, particularly the baroque mandolin.) He was made a freeman of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, London, in 1980.

The various components of this ring were made by casting. The design illustrated with the ring

embodies a medieval idea: that the soul was formed of two winged serpents — one male (a), one female (b) — whose tails intertwine (c). Coates's figures are part human, part serpent; their clasped hands form the inner circle of the ring, meeting over a black star-sapphire. Their wings (d), which line the upper corners of the ring, are of brownish-purple titanium. Coates's work is a unique blend of traditional and contemporary, and he makes very imaginative use of legends and operatic themes.

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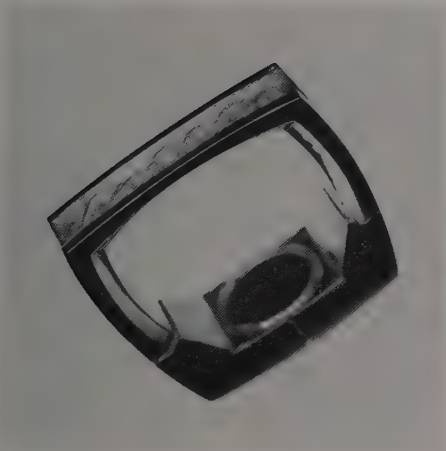
White gold (18-carat), diamonds and a sapphire (11 carats). American, by Angela Cummings for Tiffany's. 1977. 1.4 x 1.2 cm. Tiffany Collection.

A very original designer, Angela Cummings has worked for Tiffany's since 1967. She was born in

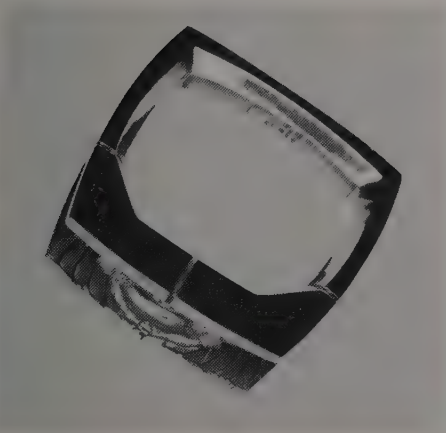
b



c



d





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Germany, the daughter of a German diplomat, and is a graduate of the Staatliche Zeichenakademie, Hanau. Angela Cummings also studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti, Perugia.

This ring was inspired by a 'splash of water'; its pavé-set diamonds cover most of the shank and form an irregular claw setting for the cushion-cut Burmese sapphire in the centre.

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Silver. Japanese, by Jurio Fujita. 1978. Size and whereabouts not available.

Jurio Fujita was born in Osaka in 1948 and is a graduate of the Japanese Photographic School.

This ring of sterling silver is made by centrifugal casting; it is based on an unusual design concept, rarely seen in contemporary Japanese jewellery. Although for centuries, Japan was a country where no jewellery as we know it was worn, many of its

traditional skills, employed on other artifacts, are eminently suited to making jewellery. However, they are more appropriate for ornamentation than for three-dimensional depictions like this ring. In this instance, the head which forms the bezel is sculpted with finely modelled features. The back of the head has been extended and hollowed out to form the ring's shank, which is wide at the back to balance the ring firmly on the wearer's finger.

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Gold (24-carat), painted plaster, plastic, pearls and feathers. Israeli, by Bianka Eshel-Gershuni. 1978. Width 2.5 cm, length 10 cm. The artist's collection.

Bianka Eshel-Gershuni was born in Sofia, Bulgaria. Her parents emigrated to Israel in 1939 when she was seven. She studied painting and sculpture at the Avni Institute, Tel Aviv, and made her first jewellery for herself while still a student. Since the

early 1960s, she has exhibited widely in Israel and abroad. In 1971, she won a gold medal in Munich, and her work is in the permanent collection of the Schmuckmuseum, Pforzheim.

Bianka Eshel-Gershuni's rings, and indeed her other jewellery as well, are a celebration of the triumph of fantasy over hide-bound conventions and technicalities. Uninhibited mixtures of materials, from the very precious to the utterly worthless, her rings are bold and picturesque, an explosion of colour and wit, derived from many influences such as Eastern folklore and the mystique of ancient Mediterranean cultures.

This ring covers almost the entire finger. It is composed of a longish piece of beaten gold attached to a shank. Feathers are slotted in from underneath. Pearls, a plastic rose and a rabbit on a painted plaster dish have been fixed on top of it.





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Gold (18-carat), a ruby (7.39 carats), 10 pear-shaped diamonds (1.7 carats) and 10 navette diamonds (1.46 carats) (left); gold (18-carat), an emerald (5.89 carats) and diamonds (1.23 carats) (right). French, for Chaumet. 1978. Sizes not available. Private collection.

In 1780, the predecessor of the famous jewellery house of Chaumet was a small jeweller's shop in the Rue St-Honoré in Paris, owned by Etienne Nitot. Around 1800, Nitot happened to go to the aid of the unfortunate victim of a carriage accident. By chance, the man turned out to be First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte, who, in gratitude for Nitot's thoughtfulness, began to patronize his establishment. Successive owners of the firm, including Joseph Chaumet and his son, Marcel, continued to produce jewellery of very high quality and had royal warrants from several European courts in addition to the French one. At present the business is managed by Joseph Chaumet's descendants, Jacques and Pierre Chaumet.

The two rings illustrated are typical examples from Chaumet's collection of unique pieces. The gold ring on the left has a ruby held by claws and surrounded by two layers of petals composed of pear-shaped diamonds. The ring on the right has a square-cut emerald, also set with claws of gold; there are diamonds on both shoulders, supported by a bar that is attached to the shank at either side.

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Gold, lapis lazuli and coral. French, by Hubert Mellerio. 1978. Herbert Mellerio Collection, Paris.

The firm of Mellerio is still in the hands of the direct descendants of its founder and traces its origins back to the time of François I. The first Mellerio was of Italian origin and came, under her royal patronage, with Catherine de Medici to Renaissance France in 1533. Today, the firm still ranks among the largest establishment jewellers in France and has clients all over the world.

The hand ornament on the right, consisting of four rings linked with chains, was obviously inspired by Eastern ethnic jewellery, but it is executed in a sophisticated Western manner. The lapis beads are suspended on gold wires and dangle in clusters. In the ring on the left, lapis lazuli and coral are combined on the bezel; the shank is textured.

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Gold (18-carat) and a fresh flower. German, by Gisela Seibert-Philippen. 1978. Size and whereabouts not available.

Born in 1939, Gisela Seibert-Philippen has had her own studio-workshop since 1965. Her work has been regularly exhibited in Germany and abroad and purchased by private collectors, the Schmuckmuseum, Pforzheim, and by the Berlin Museum. She is married to Georg Seibert, who is also a renowned artist-jeweller.

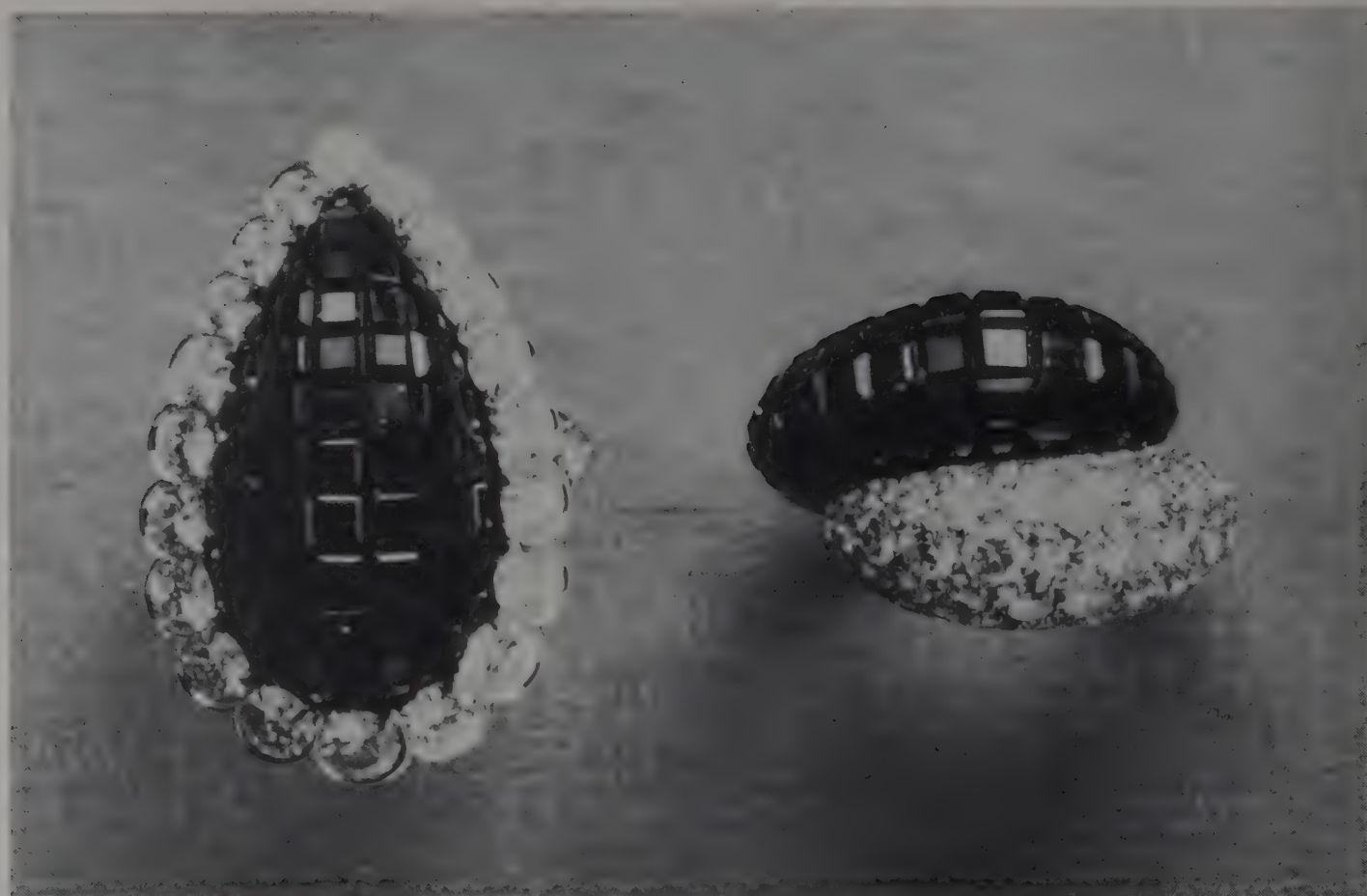
This ring was cast by the lost-wax method (Fig. 19) and hand-finished to bring out the detail. The design is very sculptural in concept, with surrealist overtones, a tendency that can be observed in the work of several artists of the period. This very



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distinctive and original ring, entitled 'gesture' by the artist, is a rather moving example of the

jeweller's art. The flower, being real, has to be changed daily.



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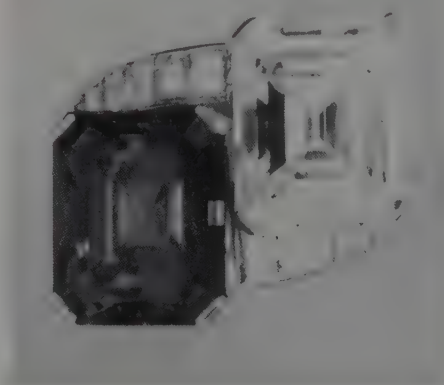
396
Sapphires and diamonds. French, by Van Cleef & Arpels. 1978. Height (right) 1.5 cm., (left) 3 cm. Still in production today.

The company of Van Cleef & Arpels was founded in 1906, which makes it one of the youngest of the famous French jewellery houses. Throughout its history, it has expanded and gained a reputation for producing precious and fine jewellery; nowadays Van Cleef & Arpels is represented in major cities throughout the world.

One of their spectacular specialties is the extremely difficult and labour-intensive 'mysterious setting' of which two examples are pictured here: the application of tiny rubies or sapphires to cover a concave shape or even a flower petal with all its irregularities. With painstaking accuracy and expert skill, the minute stones have to be perfectly matched for colour and shape and each little piece of the mosaic fitted and set into a gold grid base. The technique was developed exclusively by Van Cleef & Arpels in the mid 1920s for a royal client, and the 'mysterious setting' continues to be a star attraction of their collection. The two rings shown on the photograph demonstrate vividly the unusual effect of seeing the stones in their natural brilliance closely aligned and without a trace of the setting visible in the uninterrupted sequence of stones.

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397
Gold (18-carat), diamonds and a sapphire. English, by Laurence Graff for Graff's. 1979. Size not available. Private collection.



Founded in 1960 by Laurence Graff (who was twenty-two at the time), Graff's is one of the youngest of the big London jewellery houses. In just

twenty years, it has grown to be one of the largest jewellery producers in Britain, winning the Queen's Award for Export Achievement twice (in 1973 and 1977). Laurence Graff is a connoisseur of fine gems and specializes in diamond jewellery set in 18-carat gold. He has two retail showrooms in London, where his clients include royalty and distinguished international names, but Graff also sells his jewellery to selected retailers in Britain and abroad.

This ring, designed by Laurence Graff himself, is in one piece on a divided shank and set with pavé diamonds and two large stones, a sapphire and a diamond, weighing a total of 20.50 carats. They are held with claws in 18-carat gold, side by side and one slightly above the other. This ring was featured in Graff's recent publicity campaign with the slogan, 'some women have a beautiful eye for investment'.

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398
Gold (18-carat), stainless steel and a synthetic stone. Japanese, by Kimio Sakai. 1979. Size and whereabouts not available.

Another graduate of the Tokyo University of Art, Kimio Sakai was born in Tokyo in 1934.

The innovative use of gold with stainless steel in this ring and the general design itself were



influenced to a certain extent by Western trends but are interpreted here in an original way. Both rings are constructed from sheet, the one on the left has a hollow shank held together at the front and back only. The bezel is set between the sections forming the shank and has highly polished surfaces that reflect the sides of the square stone set in the centre. In the ring on the right a square stone is also set up high on top of a slightly lower circular inset in the square bezel. This ring has a curved undersection on the side opposite the shank to allow the top to remain balanced on the finger.

399

Iron engraved and inlaid with fine silver and gold. English, by Malcolm Appleby. 1979. Width c. 5 cm. Private collection.

Malcolm Appleby was born in Kent, England, in 1946. He attended several art schools, learning engraving rather than metal-working, since he felt the latter would tend to deflect him from his intended path.

Appleby lives in a former railway station near Aberdeen in Scotland where he works at turning old gun barrels and cart wheels into rings for an appreciative local clientele that includes farm labourers as well as the local gentry. He has made some exquisite and outstandingly beautiful rings, which were exhibited at the Goldsmiths' Hall and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and his work is present in the collections of both. But it is direct contact with basic materials like iron — even recycled iron taken from very old, everyday implements — and with the people for whom he makes his rings, that gives Appleby his greatest satisfaction. He cuts and reshapes iron to form half-round shanks, lines them with gold on the inside and turns the edges of the gold liner to hold the iron ring in position. By cutting into the surface of the iron, he makes ridges and lines, forming patterns that he inlays with gold.

400

Gold (18-carat) and ebony with an ebony box. Italian, by Giampaolo Babetto. 1979. 1.8 × 0.8 cm. The artist's collection.

Born in 1947 in Padua, Italy, Giampaolo Babetto trained as a jeweller for five years under Pietro Salvatico and studied sculpture for two years at the Accademia di Belle Arti, Venice. Since 1969, he has his own workshop in Padua and also teaches at a local art college. He has had his work on show in many major international exhibitions throughout Europe and the United States. Though his treatment of materials owes much in feeling to the classic Roman and Etruscan traditions, Babetto's design concepts are totally contemporary.

In the extremely sensitive approach to the balance between shape and material shown here, his basically geometric forms are emphasized by contrasting mat yellow gold inlaid with solid, black ebony. The front of this ring is composed of two perfect triangles neatly touching point to point. One is gold, the other ebony inlaid into gold. The success of the design rests on the perfection of Babetto's technique and the precision with which the wood is fitted into the metal.



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402



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Silver. German, by Gerd Rothmann. 1979. Length 6.5 cm. The artist's collection.

Gerd Rothmann comes from Frankfurt, where he was born in 1941. He studied at the Staatliche Zeichenakademie, Hanau, and after travelling on a student grant to Lapland in 1964, he has worked as a free-lance jeweller, except for a year spent working in Hermann Jünger's studio. Rothmann has continuously developed his ideas and experimented with shapes and materials, both for single, unique pieces and for multiples. He has also designed and made larger objects for church interiors, for instance for the chapel at Frankfurt airport.

Like Claus Bury (Pl. 364) and Fritz Maierhofer (Pl. 366), Rothmann made very original pieces of jewellery composed of different metals and acrylics; then he turned again to metals, working at first with flat surfaces and patterns obtained by mixing metals. Lately he has begun to explore the possibilities of three-dimensional forms; this ring is an example. It complements the contours of the hand rather than ornamenting the finger from the top. It is a hollow ring made from sheet silver in two sections that are soldered together.

402

Silver (inside), yellow, green, red and white gold (22-, 18- and 10-carat) (outside). American, by Rena-B. Koopman. 1979. Size not available. Private collection.

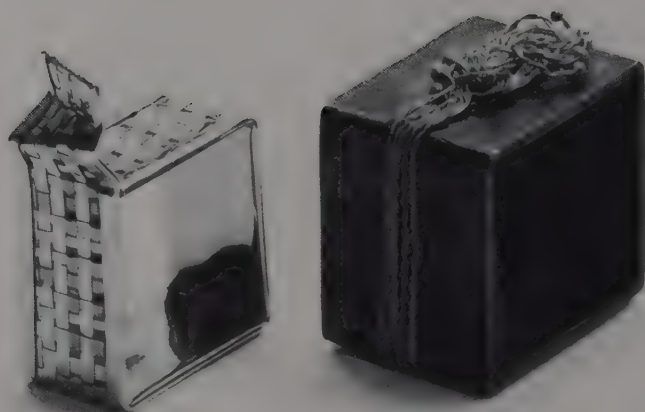
Rena-B. Koopman has a B.A. in art history from Vassar College. She studied sculpture at Cornell University and metalsmithing at the University of Wisconsin. From 1973 to 1976, she attended the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine, learning American-Indian and Japanese metal-working techniques. During the 1970s, Rena-B. Koopman exhibited her work at museums and important art galleries throughout the United States and taught at the Danforth Museum and Institute of Technology in Massachusetts, as well as at the Endicott College and the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts.

The rings shown here are fine examples of the interesting results achieved by blending new gold alloys, a technique being explored by several artists in completely individual ways. These alloys are mostly the result of the artist's own smelting; they are rolled out into sheet and cut up into small sections that are soldered together to form the pattern. Finally, the assembled sections are lined with a continuous band of silver to produce a smooth interior.

403

Platinum and gold (left); silver and gold (right). American, by Arline Fisch. 1980. 2 x 2 x 0.7 cm. (left); 2.3 x 2.3 x 1.3 cm. (right). The artist's collection.

Arline Fisch was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1931 and holds degrees in art from Skidmore College and the University of Illinois. Starting in 1958, she has exhibited her work at many important exhibitions all over the world; she has also travelled widely to study, lecture and work in many different countries. Her work is in the collections of



the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, London; the Vatican, Rome; the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York, and several other museums in the United States. Arline Fisch is enormously active in the promotion of crafts in general. She was vice-president of the World Crafts Council for five years, until 1980, in addition to being a member of the board of trustees of the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts and a founding member of the Society of North American Goldsmiths.

The ring on the left is an example of Fisch's technique of weaving strands of metal, which she has placed on a base of platinum sheet in this instance. The ring on the right has gold wire tied like twine around a silver 'parcel' and knotted in a bow. The silver square has received a special surface treatment to oxidize it and turn it black. Arline Fisch has written an excellent book about her work, in which she applies textile techniques (including weaving and knitting) to metal, and she has made some highly original jewellery using such techniques, as these rings demonstrate.

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Stainless steel and diamonds. German, by Friedrich Becker. 1980. Diameter 1.8 cm. The artist's collection.

This ring is a completely functional design, made from high-quality stainless steel and set with diamonds on the inside of the shank. The total weight of the diamonds is 2.46 carats, a fact that is recorded in stamped numbers on the side of the rim. The other numbers on the rim represent the serial number of an edition of thirty rings, the type of steel used (4301) and the date, together with the stamp of the maker — 'B' for Becker. Obviously this ring has been designed and made for a person who needs portable wealth: the hard mat surface of the outer rim successfully hides the precious contents from the unwelcome attention of prying eyes.

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Platinum and a diamond. American, by Tiffany's. Since the 1870s. Sizes as ordered. Still in production today.



In this classic Tiffany setting a brilliant-cut diamond is held in place by six platinum prongs. The setting lifts the stone and holds it away from the ring, showing off its brilliance. The Tiffany setting was created in the 1870s and has been traditional, in gold or platinum, for engagement rings for over one hundred years. Tiffany's produces engagement rings with this setting that range in price from \$449 to \$150,000 and more.



Appendices

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