Chapter 1

HAPTIC HISTORIES

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF RINGS IN FRENCH LATE MEDIEVAL INVENTORIES AND TESTAMENTS

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RINGS WERE AMONG the most charged objects of personal adornment in medieval Europe. Sensual, personal, portable, and laden with memories, these often-colourful objects signalled wealth, social connections, and access to the most expensive materials from far-flung mines of the world. Rings were popular gifts to give to friends and family within social networks. And while they certainly transmitted their meanings through the sense of sight, here I especially study rings in late medieval France as experienced by wearers through the sense of touch. Contact with the skin was so central to medieval Europeans' spiritual and interpersonal experiences that Christian relic veneration often involved touching the historic, spiritual objects with the hands or even the mouth. I argue that rings could similarly become haptic history markers, tangible objects of material culture that could function as relics of relationships, communicating via touch on the wearer's skin about key connections and networks.

Surviving rings, imagery, and written inventories and testaments supply a wealth of information about rings—not only about their gold, silver, and gemstones—but about the rings' previous owners and intended recipients, revealing nodes and edges within social networks.[1] This essay is the first to

1 I am grateful to Jitske Jasperse for her insights and suggestions on this essay as well as to Tracy Chapman Hamilton, who led a panel at the Conference of the Haskins Society in which I presented this work. I thank Marguerite Keane for her numerous suggestions and references on Blanche de Navarre. The anonymous readers both

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extract and study descriptions of rings from these numerous late medieval French sources to explore how rings as haptic things stimulated the creation and curation of social networks. I start by exploring the physical impression of power through signet rings. Then the focus shifts to rings moving as mementos through socio-political networks. Next, I examine love rings and amuletic rings as particularly poignant and tangible tokens of affection. And finally, I argue that rings listed in inventories and testaments were not only enumerations of individual pieces, but should be understood as collections that people explored with their eyes and hands in sensory experiences. So, while rings in inventories and testaments appear to be mute items, the records of their usage and transfer between associates help us decode social relationships because people wore, held, admired, gave, and inventoried them via touch, enabling owners to wear and handle emblems symbolizing their history.

Several approaches and tools enable evaluation of the meanings of rings and collections, including analysis of surviving rings and images, interpretation of written primary sources, as well as examination of literature, culture, and theories of collecting. In addition to documents and literature related to non-elite people, inventories and testaments of the following fourteenth- and fifteenth-century nobles from Capetian and Valois times form the textual foundation of this study: Queen Clémence de Hongrie (1328), King Jean le Bon (1364), Queen Jeanne d'Évreux (1371), Queen Blanche de Navarre (1396), King Charles V when he was dauphin (1363), King Charles VI (1400), and Jean, duc de Berry (1401 and 1413).[2] Comparing inventories from the

offered crucial insights that enriched the essay, and I appreciate Victoria Ferreyra and Cynthia Salazar, who contributed as research assistants for this article. Key scholarship on rings that particularly illuminates this study include the following: Hindman and Miller, *Take This Ring*; Hindman et al., *Toward an Art History of Medieval Rings*; Jasperse, "With This Ring," 67–84; Buettner, *The Mineral and the Visual*; Lightbown, *Mediaeval European Jewellery*. And works on the sense of touch that also contribute to this study include Williams, "Appealing to the Senses," 77–96; Classen *The Deepest Sense*; and Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*.

2 Key primary source documents include de Bourchenu, "Testament de Clemence de Hongrie"; Bapst, "Testament du roi Jean le Bon et inventaire de ses joyaux à Londres"; Leber, "Le compte de l'execution," 120–69; Gaborit-Chopin, *L'inventaire du trésor du dauphin futur Charles V*; Deslisle, *Testament de Blanche de Navarre*; Henwood, *Les collections du trésor royal*; Guiffrey, *Inventaires de Jean, duc de Berry*; Douët-d'Arcq, "Inventaire des meubles de la reine Jeanne de Boulogne." Many other documents from the period survive. I selected these based on the high level of detail about groups of rings. Also, on the significance of inventories, see Nash, "The Inventory as Royal Object."

fourteenth century—where rings were listed in manageable numbers—by entering them into spreadsheets makes key trends stand out. As these lists become much more extensive with hundreds of rings each by the early fifteenth century, reading them for distinctive trends reveals patterns related to touch and social networks, familial circles, and royal power structures.

One of the first things that emerges in reading these inventories and testaments is that the number of rings listed in individuals' documents increase dramatically between 1300–1420. However, we cannot imagine that the number of rings in each of the documents is definitive. For example, someone may have given away many of her rings before she died, meaning that these rings would have escaped a post-mortem inventory. Or, as in the case of Jeanne d'Évreux (1310–1371), clerks noted only the most expensive rings in this document that primarily records the disposition of her belongings after her death rather than focusing on the testator's attachment to or uses of rings. Nine lots in the execution of her testament include rings, the last of which hints at a much larger group left undescribed: "An infinity of other inexpensive [rings] that I omit" wrote the clerk.[3] This emphasis on financial value means that objects that were of little value were grouped and sometimes not described in detail, even if they may have been significant to the owner.

Alternatively, other documents made during life sometimes recorded no monetary valuation but a wealth of interpersonal information. For example, a testament like that of Blanche de Navarre (1331–1398), considered below, is shockingly detailed, noting rings' previous owners and intended recipients, the queen's relationships to these people, and recalling the special events for which Blanche received them. Similarly, the inventories made for Charles V (1338–1380) when he was dauphin, and those of Jean, duc de Berry (1340–1416), were made during the men's lives and documented their rich collections but did not include valuations because the rings were not for sale. Another variable that makes absolute numerical comparison of inventories difficult is that an inventory might also include only rings at one property when the owner might have had others elsewhere. Clerks made each type of document for a different purpose and therefore included distinctive and useful information. So, increasing numbers of rings in late medieval documents over time are not fully reliable and are only the start of the remarkable information the documents reveal about rings.

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3 "Item un annel dor a une esmeraude a losenge, prise XV francs, neant, car Madame le laissa a la comtesse dEstampes et a elle delivra par la quictance. Il y a une infinité d'autres de peu de prix que j'obmets." Leber, "Le compte de l'execution," 129.

The most intriguing details are in the recalling of rings' sensual and social functions that the documents and rings themselves reveal. The human sense of touch was much more than a way to gather information about one's environment in the European Middle Ages. In addition to the importance of touch in relic veneration, upon coronations, priests anointed kings and queens, touching them with sacred oil, highlighting rulers' divine calling and sanctifying them for their reigns.[4] Power could flow out from rulers as well. Beginning with Philippe I (ca. 1052–1108), kings physically touched people suffering from *scrofula*, or tubercular swelling of neck lymph nodes to heal them. Louis IX (1214–1270) particularly administered to the sick, physically touching even those suffering from leprosy. Touch, especially through the hands, was an opportunity for physical connection, so it is no wonder that people derived power, social connection, and historical importance through their hands adorned with rings.

Signet Rings: Passing Contact, Touching Power

Physical engagement with rings in the Middle Ages becomes visible through analysis of some signet rings, often the first category of rings that stands out in inventories.[5] People had long used signet rings to stamp and authenticate important documents, leaving an impression of the ring in warmed wax, functionally and symbolically tying signets to political power. Signets often included engraved images, and these stones were sometimes reused antique gems. Indeed, even the ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle used analogies of pressing a signet into wax to describe how memories were imprinted on the human mind.[6] This linkage between using a ring to make an impression in wax and evoking history continues to be an important way to think about medieval rings.

Perhaps the most famous surviving French signet is now in the Louvre (Figure 1.1). In the image, the crowned and haloed St. Louis stands holding his sceptre and a globe. Fleurs-de-lys adorn the band of the ring. Medieval people thought it had belonged to St. Louis (Louis IX), and the inscription on the inside of the band, which would touch the skin, signals this: "C'est+

4 Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, 46–47; Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges*, 42, 92.

5 Bedos-Rezak, "Women, Seals, and Power in Medieval France," 61–82; Bedos-Rezak, "Cultural Transactions," 1–14. See also Cherry et al., *Seals and Status*.

6 Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 19. For scholastic views on in signet rings for bishops, see Chapter 6 in this volume.

Figure 1.1. The signet ring said to be of St. Louis, France, fourteenth century. Sapphire and gold, h. 1.2 × w. 1 cm, diameter 2.3 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, MR 92. Note the engraved image of St. Louis in the sapphire in 1.1a and the inscription naming St. Louis on the inside of the band "duroi+Saint+" in 1.1b. © 1997 GrandPalaisRmn (Musée du Louvre) / Daniel Arnaudet. Courtesy of Musée du Louvre. https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010096530.

le+Sinet+duroi+Sant+Louis" (This is the signet of king St. Louis). However, the fourteenth-century style of the ring suggests that this association was made well after the king's death in 1270. The signet appears in inventories of the treasury of Saint-Denis beginning in 1505 and entered the Louvre in 1793.[7] Nevertheless, if people believed it to have been Louis's, it would have almost served as a contact relic of the saint, haptically linking later owners to the most revered French king. The voided space of the intaglio carving of the sapphire stone would have filled with warm wax, ultimately leaving a raised image of the king in the seal. And when later collectors held or wore the signet, they could feel the indentation, even pressing a finger into the carved negative space. Signets with precious stones were not necessarily subjected to the high-contact and potentially damaging usage of sealing in wax even though the class of object originated for this purpose. This might also have been the case with this particularly important signet.

In her analysis of rings connected with the Plantagenet dynasty, Jitske Jasperse sees that they were key in social networks there. And even when rings were first used by men, women were often the ones who later

7 Alcouffe, *Le trésor de Saint-Denis*, 262–63; Montesquiou-Frezensac and Gaborit-Chopin, *Le trésor de Saint-Denis*, 2:153–54, no. 57; 3:50–51.

transferred them through social networks. For example, Empress Matilda was probably the person who moved an important signet ring to her son Henry II.[8] Both women and men strengthened their social bonds by circulating the jewels.[9] Considering family members as nodes within a social network is an approach that of course applies within the French late medieval courts as well.

A similarly important transfer of a signet appears in the 1396 testament of Blanche de Navarre, queen of France. Blanche was renowned for her stunning beauty and wisdom. In fact, she was engaged to the son of Philippe VI (1293–1350), and when King Philippe's wife died, the king, forty years Blanche's senior, married Blanche, his son's fiancé. Philippe died later in 1350, just months after the wedding, and Blanche lived almost five more decades, all the while collecting historically charged objects and then strategically giving them away at the end of her life.[10] The movement of her rings highlights the connective fibres of Blanche's social network.

A profoundly historic signet was a gift Blanche offered to the reigning king of France, Charles VI (1368–1422) upon her death:

> And with this, a signet that my lord [Philippe VI] wore, which we wear continually on ourselves, and was of the king Charles [IV] father of our very dear daughter the duchess of Orléans [Blanche de France, duchesse d'Orléans], God pardon him, who used it, and also did my dear Lord after him, and us also in our lifetime.[11]

One can follow the path of the signet through Blanche's social network (Chart 1.1, Item 193). Charles IV—the last Capetian king—owned the signet, which passed to Philippe IV, who gave it to his wife Blanche, and then she finally gave it to Charles VI. In doing so, she bestowed a physical emblem of political power on the younger Charles, thereby connecting him both to the

8 Jasperse, "With This Ring," 74–76.

9 Jasperse, "With This Ring," 69.

10 In her masterful book on this testament, Marguerite Keane emphasizes the poignancy of jewels and objects that Blanche de Navarre cherished and offered others at the end of her life. Keane, *Material Culture and Queenship in 14th-Century France*, 152. Brigitte Buettner also analyzes Blanche's exciting testament. Buettner, "Le système des objets dans le testament de Blanche de Navarre," 37–62; Jasperse, "Manly Minds in Female Bodies," 295–321.

11 Delisle, *Testament de Blanche de Navarre*, 28–29, Item 193. "Et avecques un signet que portoit mon dit seigneur, lequel nous portons continuelment sur nous, et fu au roy Charles père de nostre trés chiere fille la duchesse d'Orleans, que Dieux pardoint, qui en usoit, et aussi fist mon dit seigneur après lui, et nous aussi en nostre vivant."

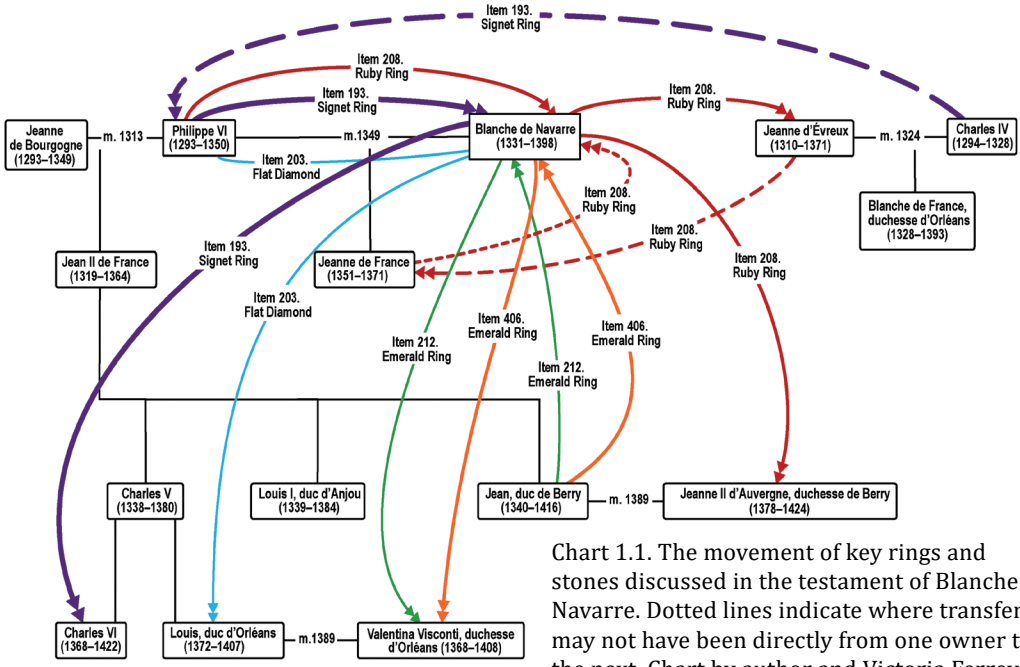

Chart 1.1. The movement of key rings and stones discussed in the testament of Blanche de Navarre. Dotted lines indicate where transfers may not have been directly from one owner to the next. Chart by author and Victoria Ferreyra.

last Capetian king, Charles IV, and to the younger king's great-grandfather, the first Valois king, Philippe VI.[12] As she did in multiple descriptions, Blanche emphasized that someone wore this object continually, again highlighting physical touch.[13] All of these people literally touched an embodiment of historic power as they handled, used, or placed this signet in a new owner's hands.

Rings as Mementos in Socio-Political Networks

Returning to Blanche's aforementioned signet, one sees that it was just one among at least nine rings or stones that may have been set in rings that she described and for which she charted social paths in her testament.[14] Blanche

12 The line between Charles IV and Philippe VI is dotted to suggest uncertainty. The document says that Charles owned it and Philippe owned it, rather than that Charles gave it to Philippe.

13 Marguerite Keane notes that this was probably a private signet rather than an official seal. Keane, "Most Beautiful and Next Best," 366.

14 Marguerite Keane suggests that these three "diamonds" may have been unset and worn in pouches by the queen, or they may have been set in rings. I thank her for sharing a draft of her forthcoming article, "Beloved Diamonds and Bedside Statues." It is not uncommon to find a ring described simply as a stone. For example, in the 1328

clearly prized her rings so much that they were among the most frequent gifts she gave to her loved ones. Superimposing onto the genealogy chart the trajectories of just five of her many rings or stones highlights how intricately she mobilized them to link people within her network.[15] In addition to the signet (Item 193) Blanche described the various owners of a ruby ring (Chart 1.1, Item 208). This ring first passed from Philippe to Blanche, then to Jeanne d'Évreux, then to Jeanne de France, before it went back to Blanche, who finally placed it in the care of Jeanne II d'Auvergne, wife of Jean, duc de Berry.[16] An emerald ring had been a gift from Jean, duc de Berry to Blanche, who in turn gave it to Valentina Visconti (1368–1408) at the end of Blanche's life (Chart 1.1, Item 406).[17]

Additionally, the movement of these rings in her testament illustrates just how fluidly rings moved between men and women. Evidently, the size of a ring was not an impediment to collecting and using them. It is possible that goldsmiths sized them for the fingers of new owners, but rings might also be placed in a pouch worn from the neck, belt, or on a brooch, where one could easily touch them. Blanche not only placed heirloom rings into her younger family members' possession, but she also instructed the recipients about their earlier owners, thereby enlivening the deceased family members for the younger generations. Giving them heirloom rings to wear, Blanche enabled her family members to connect with history as the recipients held, examined, and enjoyed them. To know that a ring on one's finger once weighed on the finger of a famous progenitor connected the later wearer to its earlier owner and encouraged the recipient to live up to the example of a renowned member of the family. One can only speculate about how this pointed messaging might have been received, but later owners seem to have valued the fact that a particular ring came from an older family

inventory of Queen Clémence de Hongrie, one reads that one of her ring cylinders held four rings, listed only by the stones: three sapphires and one a turquoise. "Item, un doit où il a 3 saphirs et une turquoise." Douët d'Arcq, "Inventaire et vente après décès des biens de la reine Clémence de Hongrie," Item 6.

15 Including all the trajectories of her rings and stones would have made the chart incomprehensible. Imagine the intricate nest of nodes and edges that a chart of Blanche's gifts including all her rings, manuscripts, jewels, and other gifts would render.

16 "Item, à nostre très chiere fille la duchesse de Berry un annel ruby, lequel nostre dit seigneur et espoux nous donna, et depuis le donnasmes à nostre très chiere dame madame la royne Jehanne d'Évreux, que Diex absoille, qui le lessa à Jehanne de France nostre fille." Delisle, *Testament de Blanche de Navarre*, Item 208.

17 Delisle, *Testament de Blanche de Navarre*, Item 406.

member because so many documents like those of Blanche de Navarre, Jean, duc de Berry, and Charles VI proudly named the earlier owners of the rings. Rings became visible and tangible evidence of history and sustaining familial or social networks, and their trajectories within groups were threads that bound members together.

Mary Carruthers convincingly argues that creation, preservation, and recollection of memory were foundational intellectual activities in the Middle Ages.[18] Particularly when only so many books existed to convey knowledge of family connections, rings might serve as tangible, primary evidence of history. I argue that rings were evidence of the past and verified claims to authenticity and authority, both to the wearer and to others. Women like Blanche de Navarre and Jeanne d'Évreux certainly saw themselves as history incarnate, and their rings reiterated their historic status through touch and sight.

Leaders and their chroniclers paid close attention to history, knowing that power derived from the stories and mythologies they built and perpetuated around themselves, their monasteries, their networks, and their dynasties. The *Grandes chroniques de France*, with its numerous surviving copies from the late thirteenth century onward, was just one manifestation of the history-writing impulse.[19] Described and depicted in the manuscript were explicit political gifts of rings that harnessed the power of touch to reiterate inclusion and exclusion. For example, symbolic decoration on them could amplify the bonds and bounds of social networks. The 1363 inventory of the future Charles V—made when he was dauphin—noted a ring decorated with a star.[20] Danielle Gaborit-Chopin traces such rings to the Order of the Star, or the Order of Notre-Dame de la Noble Maison that Charles's father, King Jean le Bon (1319–1364), established in 1351. Indeed, Jean le Bon's own inventory of 1364 included two signets associated with the Order of the Star: a signet with a sun in it, and a signet with a blue stone with a star in it.[21] Jean's letter of November 16, 1351 gave instructions to the members of the order directing them to wear rings

18 Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 9.

19 For more on this key French history text see Hedeman, *The Royal Image*.

20 "Item l'anel de l'Estelle," Gaborit-Chopin, *L'inventaire du trésor du dauphin futur Charles V*, 68, Item 569. Gaborit-Chopin tracks most of the jewels made for the occasion to the goldsmith Jean le Braelier (66 n. 552).

21 "I signet d'un grenat à I soulail dedens; Item I signet a une pierre bleue a une estoille dedens." Bapst, *Testament du roi Jean le Bon*, 30. These were among over fifty-four rings listed in Jean's testament.

Figure 1.2. King Charles V of France and Holy Roman Emperor, King Charles IV of Bohemia, exchanging rings. Detail from the *Grandes chroniques de France*, Paris, before 1379. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS français 2813, fol. 479r. Courtesy of BnF. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84472995/f969.

bearing their names *continually*.[22] Such a gift from his father the king, along with the instruction to always wear it, would have bound the heir apparent to the throne, encircling him within the bonds and responsibilities of knighthood and setting him apart from other people, and these political rings tied the dauphin to his father and the historical roots of the Valois power. As the prince saw and felt the ring on his hand, his sense of touch would have reminded him of the weight of its responsibilities and history.

The exchange of rings continued to be important throughout Charles V's life. For example, as detailed and depicted in his own copy of the *Grandes chroniques de France*, when he entertained the Holy Roman Emperor, King Charles IV of Bohemia in Paris in 1378, the two monarchs enthusiastically traded gifts of relics and rings (Figure 1.2).[23] The 1363 inventory made when Charles was even yet to ascend to the throne lists at least 250 rings,

22 "Et porteront continuelment un annel, entour la verge duquel sera leur nom et surnom, ouquel annel aura un esmail plat, vermail, en l'esmail une estoile blanche, ou milieu de l'estoille une rondèle d'azur, ou milieu d'icelle rondèle d'azur un petit soleil d'or, et ou mantel, sur l'espaule, ou devant, en leur chaperon, un fermail ouquel aura une estoile toute tele comme en l'annel est devisé." Gaborit-Chopin, *L'inventaire du trésor du dauphin futur Charles V*, 66.

23 Buettner, *The Mineral and the Visual*, 68. Buettner sees the illuminations in the *Grandes chroniques* emphasizing luminous sovereignty and the exchange of royal charisma between the rulers.

so scarcity was not the source of value or meaning in the French monarch's reception of a ring from the elder Bohemian emperor.[24] Rather, the men performed their reciprocal relationship while enriching their collections, cementing their political connections through these exchanges between Prague and Paris. On the left of the image, the Bohemian emperor wears a red, ermine-lined mantle and holds two rings with protruding gemstones, while the French monarch holds a third ring out to the elder ruler from Prague. Even the act of touching the parchment pages of this very copy of the *Grandes chroniques* manuscript while reading about and studying the vibrant image celebrating the ritual gift giving, would have enabled Charles V to relive and contemplate the ceremonial exchange of the rings and its historical and political connections.

Another poignant example of a bestowed ring that was also a political message is a ruby ring that Queen Clémence de Hongrie (1293–1328) in Paris received from her grandmother, Queen Marie de Hongrie (1257–1323) in Naples, where Clémence grew up. Marie, in turn, had received it from her husband (and Clémence's grandfather) Charles II d'Anjou (1254–1309).[25] Elsewhere, I have discussed how Clémence served the role of family representative in Paris for her French Angevin family from Naples.[26] She promoted their history, commissioning a tomb there for her great-grandfather Charles I d'Anjou (1227–1285). The ring from Clémence's grandmother could be a mnemonic object, encapsulating the grand Angevin history of her grandparents, and reinforcing her own status even though she was a satellite of the Angevin family, surrounded by Capetian royals in Paris. The gift would have been reassuring, especially after the 1316 deaths of her husband, Louis X (1289–1316), and her son, Jean (d. 1316).[27] A portable ring could serve as a haptic history marker of one's genealogy, legacy, and responsibility. As seen in this example, these social networks often stretched across Europe, especially as women were the mobile partners in exogamous marriages.[28]

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24 Gaborit-Chopin, *L'inventaire du trésor du dauphin futur Charles V*, 68, 74–76, 78.

25 "Item dominae Clementiae Reginae franciae anulum unum cum uno rubino, quem donavit ei quondam Rex Carolus secundus vir eius" Minieri-Riccio, "Testamento della Regina Maria vedova di Carlo II," 200; Proctor-Tiffany, *Medieval Art in Motion*, 61; Douët d'Arcq, "Inventaire et vente après décès des biens de la reine Clémence de Hongrie," Item 18.

26 Proctor-Tiffany, *Medieval Art in Motion*, 128.

27 Proctor-Tiffany, *Medieval Art in Motion*, 24.

28 Hamilton and Proctor-Tiffany, "Women and the Circulation of Material Culture," 1–12.

Non-royal groups, too, had similar patterns of gift exchanges that wove together emotional communities. For example, in the testament of Arnaud de Corbie, Chancellor of France, he left a ring that Madame d'Artois gave him to the abbess of the church of Yerre, Marguerite des Quesnes.[29] The fact that it had originated with an elite owner and moved from one woman through the testator to another respected woman would have connected the three.

Tightly legislatively controlled social networks depended on discriminating who was included—and who was excluded; and rings visually and tangibly reinforced the bands demarcating these groups. Rulers instituted sumptuary legislation that restricted ownership of gold and precious stones to the elite. King Philippe le Bel (1268–1314) dictated in 1294 that "no bourgeois man or woman shall wear gold, or precious stones, or crowns of gold, or silver."[30] Of course, the repetition of similar laws when these decrees failed demonstrates that this was a losing battle. More and more people of growing means sought to test these boundaries and visually demonstrate their own wealth and similarities to the elite.

Memory was crucial to the continuation of structures of power, and rings that authenticated and memorialized relationships and power structures were not only beautiful but physically triggered memories through touch. These tangible, wearable history signifiers reminded wearers and their viewers of their own places within social networks.

Love Rings

While marriages within courtly circles were most certainly political alliances, which would make wedding rings political gifts, love rings stand out in the documents for their special emotional properties. The custom of couples exchanging rings pre-dated the Middle Ages and continued throughout the medieval period. Lucy Freeman Sandler has studied numerous images of couples clasping hands in medieval depictions of marriage.[31]

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29 "Item, je laisse à religieuse dame Marguerite des Quesnes, à present abbesse de l'eglise d'Yerre, la somme de cents frans pour une foix, qui lui seront payez si tost que je serai trespassé. Et avec ce je lui laisse mon anel d'or, ouquel a un dyamant, que me donna madame d'Artoys, dont Dieux ai l'ame." Tuetey, *Testaments enregistrés au Parlement de Paris*, 49.

30 "Il ne porteront, ne pourront porter Or, ne pierres precieuses, ne couronnes d'Or, ne d'Argent." Laurière, Ordonnances des roys de France, 1:541, author's translation. Proctor-Tiffany, *Medieval Art in Motion*, 53.

31 Sandler, "The Handclasp in the Arnolfini Wedding," 488–91. See also Chapter 3 in this volume.

Figure 1.3. Two views of the gothic "fede" ring, England (or France), mid fourteenth century. Gold, four emeralds, and a ruby, 1.76 grams, hoop inner diam. 16 mm. Private collection. © Les Enluminures. Used with permission.

A surviving love ring with gold, a ruby, and emeralds from the fourteenth century alludes to this sacred handclasp through the delightful detail of clasped hands at the back of the band that the owner might touch with the thumb while wearing the ring (Figure 1.3).[32] This would have given the jewel even more meaning by recalling the hand clasping of a wedding ceremony.[33] The two strands of the braided band might evoke the history of two lives intertwined.

Meaningful ring exchanges between couples appear throughout late medieval inventories and testaments. For example, the ring discussed above that Charles II d'Anjou gave to Marie de Hongrie in Naples, which Marie, in turn, gave to her granddaughter Clémence de Hongrie in Paris, became a cherished heirloom because it could symbolize the union of Clémence's grandparents and therefore her own heritage.[34] Additionally, the testament of Blanche de Navarre provides ample evidence that marriage was not the only time when spouses might offer each other rings. Blanche carefully noted that her husband Philippe VI offered her a diamond on the occasion of Philippe's sister's wedding.[35] Four of Blanche's eight rings were gifts from her husband.

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32 This ring is published in Hindman et al, *Toward and Art History*, cat. no. 22, pp. 136 and 226.

33 Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England*, 33. Images of hands clasping appear across a number of media, including brooches and badges. Rasmussen, *Medieval Badges: Their Wearers and Their Worlds*, 207, 209.

34 "Item dominae Clementiae Reginae franciae anulum unum cum uno rubino, quem donavit ei quondam Rex Carolus secundus vir eius . . . ." Minieri-Riccio, "Testamento della Regina Maria vedova di Carlo II," 200.

35 "Et aussi un dyamant plat, que le roy nous donna aux noces de madame Katherine de France, sa soeur." Delisle, *Testament de Blanche de Navarre*, Item 203.

Figure 1.4. Purse depicting lovers and a ring, France, early fourteenth century. Silk, linen, gold leaf, and embroidery, 14 × 15.2 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum, 64.101.1364, Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964. CC0.

Love rings could be among the most intimate of gifts between people as they united their lives. The hands—with all their nerves—were prime sites of physical contact, and were among the most sensual body parts, so it makes sense that rings became popular parts of wedding traditions as couples united their lives. Love rings also often play crucial roles in fictional stories written in the Middle Ages. For example, rings appear as symbolic objects throughout the *Lais* of Marie de France, written around 1170, and in Chrétien de Troyes twelfth-century work *Yvain*. And, the thirteenth-century *Romance of the Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun describes a gift of a ring to a lover, "A gold ring he placed, there to gleam / Upon her finger, and then he said: / 'Sweet one, here now we are wed, / For I am yours, and you are mine.'"[36] In *The Book of the City of Ladies* completed around 1405, Christine de Pisan (ca. 1365–1431) recounts how the character Antonia and her fiancé exchanged rings.[37]

36 Guillaume de Lorris, *The Romance of the Rose*, 665.

37 Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies and Other Writings*, 109.

Visual evidence demonstrates the traditions of lovers offering rings as well. A carefully embroidered silk and linen French purse from the early fourteenth century illustrates this custom (Figure 1.4). Large leaves and an articulated green tree trunk suggest that the lovers depicted here are in a natural environment, perhaps a garden or glade, the quintessential Gothic meetup for lovers. The woman's body on the left has a gentle Gothic sway, even within her *hauberk*, and her hair appears to be braided or curled around her face, while she holds a small lapdog in one hand. Her beloved wears a long, striped and slashed robe, and the chin-length curls of his hair frame his face. Both lovers gaze at the large ring he holds out to her, and she reaches for it and for him. The anticipation of the exchange of this ring heightens the excitement of the touch of their coming union. And one can see how when the bag was suspended with something inside, the top of the bag would gather, bringing the depicted lovers together.[38]

While the most expensive rings like the Gothic "fede" ring appear in the inventories and testaments of the elite, laws and customs of the late Middle Ages indicate that by the fourteenth century, wedding rings were common among varied classes.[39] Anna Boeles Rowland points out that many of these would have been made with glass instead of precious stones, and some would have been just a band, but the tradition was the same.

Not only did couples exchange rings, but rings were also visually splendid elements within a bride's trousseau. Danielle Antille analyzes the objects in the trousseau of Valentina Visconti (1368–1404) when she travelled from Milan to Paris in 1389 to wed Louis, duc d'Orléans (1372–1407). Over thirty rings with rubies, sapphires, and diamonds demonstrated the princess's origins and status as a royal bride.[40] The rings touching new exogamous brides' fingers were physical memory devices that could remind women of their strong origins even as they proclaimed their wealth and status within their new and sometimes treacherous courts.

Magical and Amuletic Rings

Rings not only connected people, but some were thought to hold magical power. The famous Capetian widow Queen Jeanne d'Évreux lived four decades after her husband Charles IV died. Upon her death in 1371 she offered

38 For a diagram see Strohmaier, "Mobil, taktil und nah am Körper," 273.

39 Rowland, "'With this Rynge,'" 17–42.

40 Antille, "Valentina Visconti's Trousseau," 247–71.

"a gold ring with a stone good against venoms," to the reigning king of France, King Charles V. The document noted that the ring was "not appraised, [because] the king had it."[41] Since Charles already had the ring in his possession at the time of Jeanne's death, I argue that Jeanne did not wait until her own death to bestow this protective ring upon Charles because it was an urgent loan that he needed.[42] Nothing could have destabilized the kingdom more than the ever-present threat of the assassination of the king. Thus, what better gift could the renowned dowager queen and guardian of earlier Capetian legacy have given to the Valois Charles than one to insulate him from poisoning? As the king sensed the weight of this ring on his finger, perhaps he felt assured of its protection.

Good candidates for the stones in Jeanne's protective ring are a sapphire or a diamond, both of which Bartholomew the Englishman in his *Livre de la propriété des choses* (ca. 1240) specifically says are potent anti-venom agents.[43] In her brilliant book *The Mineral and the Visual: Precious Stones in Medieval Secular Culture*, Brigitte Buettner traces the association of magic with some stones in European medieval lapidaries, like that of Marbode de Rennes in his *De lapidus* (*On Stones*, ca. 1090), through the Syrian writer Qustā ibn Lūqā (d. ca. 912) back to Greek roots; medieval writers referred to ancient sources to authenticate their assertions about the protective or otherwise magical properties of stones.[44] Notably, Jeanne d'Évreux seems to have cherished this important amuletic ring in spite of ecclesiastical injunc-

41 "un anel dor ou a une pierre bonne contre les venins qui est sens prix, et leust le roy." Leber, "Le compte de l'execution," 169. On the innovative testamentary strategies of Jeanne d'Évreux see also Brown, "Jeanne d'Évreux," 57–83. Jeanne d'Évreux had negotiated the brilliant solution to unfulfilled testamentary wishes by negotiating with the king to be able to execute her own testament before her death. Jeanne d'Évreux was not alone in her appreciation of amuletic rings; Jean, duc de Berry also had one. "Item, un annel d'or, ouquel est assise une piarre contre venin." Guiffrey, *Inventaire de Jean, duc de Berry*, 1:31.

42 Charles had other magical stones in his inventory of 1379. "Item, une petite boursette, où dedens sont pendans à une chaynette d'or, chascune, deux pierres en os bonnes contre le venin, c'est assavoir une petite teste de serpent noire, nommé *Lapis Albazahar*, et ung autre petit osselet blanc carré." Labarte, "Inventaire du mobilier de Charles V," 90, no. 598. Strohmaier, "Mobil, taktil und nah am Körper," 282.

43 Bartholomew the Englishman, *La proprieté des choses*: "Derechief il vault (q)tre le venin car qui met vne yraigne en vne boiste et rient vng vray saphir longuemẽt sur la bouche de la boyste liraygne meurt par la force du saphir," 87. For magical rings, see also Bengtsson Melin, "For Love, Healing and Protection," 259–66.

44 Buettner, *The Mineral and the Visual*, 116. Signet rings could also be magical. An amuletic signet ring probably belonging to Guillaume de Flouri, survives from late-

tions against magical rings. At the University of Paris, Thomas Aquinas criticized their popularity, and the pope himself, John XXII, even threatened excommunication for those who used stones and rings with magical intent.[45] Yet by gathering, wearing, and giving such potent rings, women like Jeanne could demonstrate their affection and power, and even strive to control the uncontrollable.

Collections of Rings

Jean Baudrillard writes in *The System of Collecting*, that passionately gathering objects enables people to possess, sort, handle, and—to a degree—control their surroundings.[46] Nobles like Clémence de Hongrie, Jeanne d'Évreux, Blanche de Navarre, Charles V, Charles VI, and Jean, duc de Berry commissioned or acquired large numbers of rings, sometimes numbering in the hundreds, and I argue for several reasons that these groups of rings constitute collections.

One indicator of collecting is the repetition of types of rings in the lists. For example, in addition to many other rings, Charles VI had the huge sum of forty-two cameo rings.[47] The cameos, many of which dated to the ancient period, were mounted into new settings to be worn as rings in the Middle Ages. Such carved stones were collector's items both in the antique and medieval period, where they were prized for their multicoloured and high contrast visual qualities. The lighter layer of the stone was left in relief and stands in stark contrast to the darker lower layer. Charles had one depicting a head of a child, another with the head of a woman, another with a crouching lion, and another with nude figures of a man and a woman—just a few of the cameos described in his inventory.[48] By having some of these cameos set in rings, Charles could literally touch ancient history, and even visually equate his own reign with the great Roman empire.

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thirteenth-century Tyre, in present-day Lebanon. See Antoine, "A Thirteenth-Century Signet Ring and its Inscriptions," 101–11.

45 Hindman and Miller, *Take This Ring*, 123.

46 Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," 7–24.

47 Timothy Husband writes about the significance of antique cameos in the collection of Charles's uncle, Jean, duc de Berry. Husband, "Jean de France, Duc de Berry," 17–18.

48 Henwood, *Les collections du trésor royal*, 115–19.

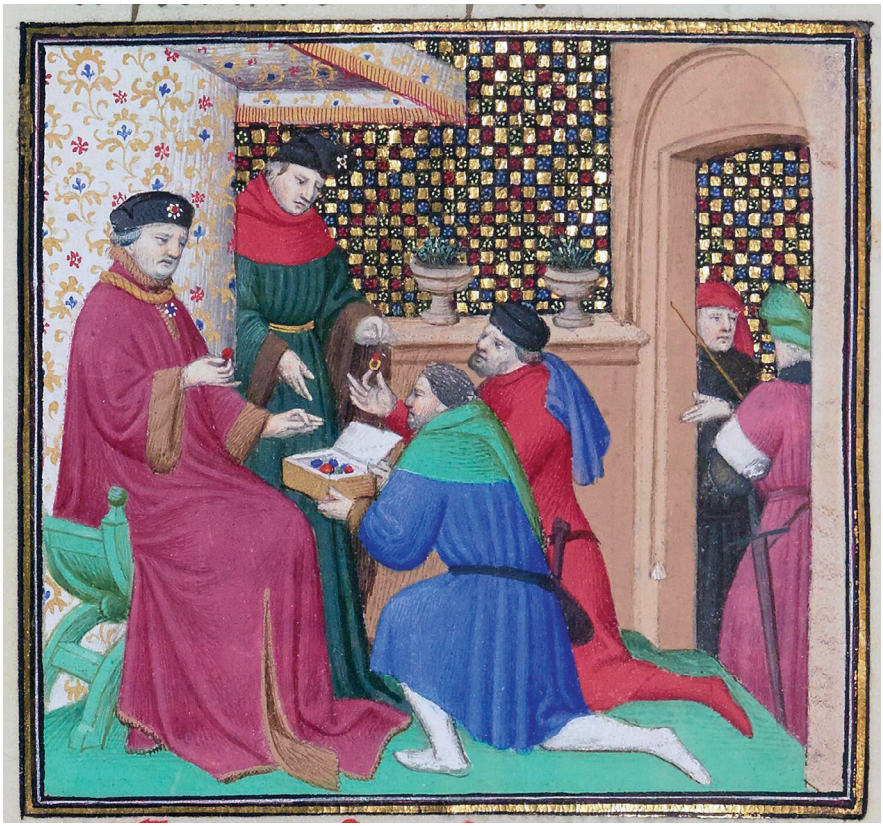

Figure 1.5. Jean, duc de Berry, considering a ring and precious stones. Detail from Bartholomew the Englishman (d. ca. 1272), *Le livre de la propriété des choses*, early fifteenth century. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS français 9141, fol. 235v. Courtesy of BnF. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10023008w/f474.item.

Another feature of the inventories that points to collecting is how many later owners named earlier owners of their rings in these documents. For example, Charles VI's clerk carefully wrote that a ring with a violet ruby had written on its band that it had belonged to St. Louis, and then had moved to Jeanne d'Évreux before it came to Charles VI.[49] Another ring with an intensely coloured ruby had belonged to King Jean le Bon.[50] Like Blanche

49 "Item un autre annel où est un ruby violet qui a un tro emply d'or et est escrit en la verge qu'il fu Sainct Louis, et le donna la reyne Jeanne d'Évreux." Henwood, *Les collections du trésor royal*, 109, Item 255.

50 "Item un autre annel où est un ruby bien chargé de couleur sur le violet, et est glaciée en aucuns lieux, à une petite fossette dessus, et fut du roy Jean." Henwood, *Les collections du trésor royal*, 109, Item 256.

de Navarre discussed above, Charles and his contemporaries avidly had recorded the famous previous owners of the rings they collected. By doing so, they established and affirmed the provenances of their treasured items, cataloguing their rings' ownership and authenticity, aspects that are clearly not only appreciated by modern auction houses and museums, but also by late medieval collectors.

Perhaps an even more acquisitive collector than Charles VI was his uncle, Jean, duc de Berry, who appears in an early-fifteenth-century copy of Bartholomew the Englishman's *Livre de la propriété des choses* (Figure 1.5). The duke sits in his canopied, ample chair, wearing a richly coloured and fur-lined robe.[51] A red and white jewel decorates his cap, and he wears a *fermail*, or brooch, on his chest. Kneeling before the duke, merchants hold up a ring with a large, red stone for his examination, and their box is filled with other gems for his delight. Touch would have been an essential action of collecting, as Jean held, admired, and inventoried his rings. No portrait of the duke could be more fitting than him reaching out to grasp a ring, one among many gems, like candies in a box.

The duke's inventories from 1401–1403 and 1413 include almost three hundred rings. The stones of these rings came from far-flung corners of the world.[52] Elsewhere, I map the late medieval "exotic" sources of emeralds, sapphires, chalcedony, gold, ivory, copper, diamonds, rubies, turquoise, and coral.[53] In much the same way that a ring could serve as a memento of a family relationship, colourful gemstones with their geographically infused names like "Rubies of Alexandria," and "Oriental Pearls," could, set in luxurious rings, act as a visual catalogue of these places, thereby enabling rings' owners to fondle the bounty of their geographic reach.[54] A collector like Jean, duc de Berry touched, studied, and enjoyed the signs of the economic, historic, and social networks that rings activated.

51 Husband, "Jean de France, Duc de Berry," 11–31.

52 Buettner, *The Mineral and the Visual*, 188–200.

53 Proctor-Tiffany, *Medieval Art in Motion*, 38.

54 Ronald Lightbown and Brigitte Buettner have each highlighted the distances traders traveled to buy, transport, and sell the bounty of the natural world. Lightbown, *Mediaeval European Jewellery*, 25–32; Buettner, *The Mineral and the Visual*, 148–64; Proctor-Tiffany, *Medieval Art in Motion*, 38–40.

Touching Relics of Relationships

Analyzing inventories and testaments in late medieval France has shown that rings embodied haptic histories. Moving from hand to hand and from finger to finger, rings demonstrate that social networks were much more palpable than network diagrams may suggest. Reading of objects enumerated in overwhelming lists of goods starts to call our attention to these objects, but it is only when we focus on the social lives of rings that we understand their affective, magical, and political power. Crucial to this potency is the sense of touch that communicated additional layers of personal, familial, political, and sensory histories as rings moved between lovers, friends, families, and allies during the long lives of these jewels. While sometimes treasured as prized collections reflecting the intellectual and social capital of their owners, it is through their haptics that rings became devices that served as actants in memory creation, fostering affective relationships and exhibiting legitimacy within sometimes fraught social and political situations. By touching, wearing, giving, and collecting these glittering relics of relationships, medieval people demonstrated their membership in rich historic social circles.

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