Epilogue

INSIDE THE VITRINE

RINGS IN MUSEUMS TODAY

SANDRA HINDMAN

In memory of Diana Scarisbrick (1928–2024)

Introduction

Entirely divorced from their original contexts—worn on someone's finger, stored in some type of casket or jewellery box—rings pose special problems for their study as the "social history of things." The essays in this book attempt to rectify this by exploring the "life of the ring," or how people in the past lived and engaged with rings. This means not only what was the symbolism for different typologies of rings, such as power, love, loyalty, and so forth, but what effect rings had on their wearers through touch or even taste, for example. As Arjun Appadurai's volume *The Social Life of Things* stresses, a social history involves not only a static moment in an object's history.[1] It also necessitates uncovering an object's itinerary: how it came into being, through what agency and with what materials; and how, through whom, and by whom it was acquired, whether by purchase, gift, exchange, inheritance, excavation, or simply happenstance; and eventually how it circulated after the moments of fabrication and initial ownership. Through time, the lives rings led changed, sometimes materially through wear, repair, alteration, acts which in themselves can elucidate meaning and function. Two examples come to mind. Iconographic rings display surfaces that are sometimes so worn through touching and rubbing in the act of prayer, and

* I thank Beatriz Chadour-Sampson, Griffith Mann, Ian Wardropper, Matthew Winterbottom, and Martha Wolff for their help.

1 Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*.

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some are re-engraved, suggesting that they continued to fulfil their original function at a later moment.[2] Roman cameos and intaglios used as spolia and set in medieval signet rings send messages of identity, status, power, and knowledge transforming the meaning of the original stone housed in its new framework.[3] Tracing the journey historic rings took to the present day inevitably leads us to ask where they are now. It will come as no surprise to readers that the overwhelming majority of extant historic finger rings are in museums throughout the world. How they are displayed there, what messages these different displays convey to today's viewers, are part of the social history of the ring, as the rings interact anew with their modern audiences. This is the subject of my Epilogue.

It is not feasible to provide here a comprehensive survey of every collection of rings held in museums. For this, I point you to an online article by Rachel Church, "Five Great Museums to see Jewellery," in which she summarizes a selection of the major collections with excellent bibliography.[4] They are: 1) the William and Judith Bollinger Gallery at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London showcasing over 3,000 jewels (including many of the 1,000 rings that are part of the collection);[5] 2) the British Museum in London, including the extensive bequests of Sir Augustus Woolaston Franks and Ann Hull-Grundy;[6] 3) the Galerie des Bijoux in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, especially rich in the modern eras including 300 works gifted by the art nouveau jeweller Henri Vever;[7] 4) the Schmuckmuseum in Pforzheim, a centre of the jewellery industry, the museum now housed in a modernist building constructed in 1961;[8] and 5) the Metropolitan Museum of Art, whose disparate collection spread throughout the museum was brought together and showcased in an exhibition and catalogue "The Body Transformed."[9]

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2 Hindman, "Medieval Iconographic Rings."

3 Henig, "The Re-use and Copying of Ancient Intaglios."

4 Church, "Five Great Museums to See Jewellery," https://thelifeofjewels.com/five-great-museums-to-see-jewellery/.

5 Catalogues of the collection include Bury, *Jewellery Gallery*; Oman, *Victoria and Albert Museum Catalogue of Rings 1930*; see also Church, *Rings*.

6 Catalogue of the Franks Collection, see Dalton, *Catalogue of the Finger Rings*; and of the Hull-Grundy Collection, see Tait, et al, *The Art of the Jeweller*.

7 For partial catalogues of the collection, see Mauriès and Possémé, *Flora*; Mauriès and Possémé, *Figures & Faces*.

8 Catalogued by Battke, *Geschichte des Ringes*.

9 Holcomb, *Jewelry*.

Select additions to Rachel Church's highlights include the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford with a special eight-panel display devoted to rings;[10] the City of London Museum, the site of the marvellous exhibition of their holdings from the Cheapside Hoard;[11] DIVA the diamond museum in Antwerp Belgium, with clever, interactive and multilingual displays and labelling; Das Museum für Angewandte Kunst Köln (MAKK) in Cologne Germany with more than 1,700 jewels in a newly opened installation;[12] and the Alice and Louis Koch Collection with 1,500 rings (out of an astonishing 2,500 in the collection) installed for the first time in 2019 in the historic buildings of the Swiss National Museum in Zurich.[13] In the United States, there is also the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore enriched over time since the initial endowment of Henry Walters;[14] and the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, with a newly renovated room dedicated to jewellery and the first-ever (?) curator of jewellery in an American museum appointed in 2006. I am certainly skipping over details of greater and lesser collections (the Getty Museum, the Musée du Louvre, the Musée de Cluny, the Musée d'Écouen, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Virginia Museum of Art, to name only a few), but this brief overview conveys an excellent sense of the incredible breadth and depth of public collections of jewellery, including rings. Literally many thousands of rings are regularly on view far and wide.

But how are they on view? When I first began handling medieval rings as a dealer and owner, in the late 1990s, most museum professionals, when asked about the possibility of acquiring, said to me "Oh no, we can't possibly buy rings, too small, too difficult to display." At the time, I carried around on my phone photographs of a small free-standing architectural kiosk designed by Stephen Saitas that sat on the first floor galleries around McKinlock Court in the Art Institute of Chicago and housed Marilynn Alsdorf's collection of Renaissance jewellery, including her rings but also her pendants, which were gifted in 1991 and installed in 1995.[15] I was quick to show off these photos

10 See the catalogue by Taylor and Scarisbrick, *Finger Rings*; and the handbook, Scarisbrick and Henig, *Finger Rings*.

11 Forsyth, *London's Lost Jewels*.

12 Chadour and Joppien, *Schmuck*; Exhibition catalogue by Hesse and Hoppe, *Faszination*, 2024; see also the accompanying website, https://makk.de/en/visit/exhibitions/the-fascination-of-jewellery, accessed January 2025.

13 Chadour, *Ringe*.

14 On the collections, see Garside, ed., *Jewelry Ancient to Modern*; and Albersmeier and Vikan, *Bedazzled*.

15 Wardropper et al., *Renaissance Jewelry in the Alsdorf Collection.*

Figure 9.1. Small free-standing architectural kiosk designed by Stephen Saitas for Marilynn Alsdorf's collection of Renaissance jewellery in the first-floor galleries around McKinlock Court at the Art Institute of Chicago (installed in 1995, now removed). Photograph courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.

and point out that there were clever ways of exhibiting small objects (Figure 9.1). Vitrine-like windows enclosed the kiosk. Some of them housed slanted boards with the jewels pinned to them. Others were see-through front to back, so that as viewers wandered inside, outside, as well as around the structure through little doors at either end, they experienced the jewels from different angles. The shallow space in the windows meant that the rings were viewed close-up (a problem with the Victoria and Albert Museum display since the objects are far away in the cases and difficult to see). They were also placed at eye level. The small scale and room-like setting was perfectly adapted to the intimate experience of viewing tiny objects, as though at home. In fact, now that I look at the kiosk again (it has long been removed to storage), I notice that its petite proportions and tiny slanting roof recall a little aedicule that appears in two of Giovanni di Paolo's Renaissance paintings upstairs in the museum, helping recreate a sense of time and place long ago, so difficult to achieve in a museum setting with the typical sterile vitrine.[16]

16 A group of six paintings by Giovanni di Paolo (Italian, 1398–1482) illustrating scenes from the life of St. John the Baptist is house in Gallery 204 at the Art Institute of Chicago. Two of them contains architectural details echoing with the kiosk, www.artic.edu/artworks/16171/the-head-of-saint-john-the-baptist-brought-before-herod;

Figure 9.2. Free-standing octagonal tower with sloping sides that houses the ring collection at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Photograph courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology. © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

I have selected four displays, all of which post-date Marilynn Alsdorf's charming little kiosk, and each of which attempts to tell different stories about the collections, engaging with the viewers in distinctive ways. They demonstrate how attitudes toward the acquisition and display of rings in museums have changed just in the past few decades.

The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford: Text, Image, and Ring

Mounted in 2009 and designed by Timothy Wilson, then Keeper of Western Art as well as Professor of Art at Oxford University, the Ashmolean Museum display was ahead of its times. An imposing tower located in the Fortnum Gallery section of the Ashmolean Museum incorporates some of the especially effective visual features of the Alsdorf kiosk (Figure 9.2). The collection, we learn, owes its origin to C. D. E. Fortnum (yes, of Fortnum & Mason fame), gifted to the museum on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond

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www.artic.edu/artworks/16166/salome-asking-herod-for-the-head-of-saint-john-the-baptist. See also the provocative collection of essays on display issues with the museum vitrine, Welchman, *Sculpture and the Vitrine*.

Jubilee in 1897; a bequest by Dame Joan Evans in 1933 mostly of posy rings; and a loan from an anonymous collector augmented this initial group of more than eight hundred rings. Displaying only 211 rings of the significantly larger collection of 9,387 rings, eight panels organize the rings frontally on blue velvet cloth; the shallow space between the glass and the cloth and the eye-level height of the tower enable the viewer to examine the rings closely. What is particularly appealing is the division of the panels into subject matter suggested by labels for each panel that include visual imagery of a related artwork, a relevant literary quotation, and a short explanatory text. Mr. Fortnum himself appears twice. The first panel, laying out the history of finger rings through the ages, opens with the well-known "Portrait of a Goldsmith" by Gerard David of ca. 1510 (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum) and a quotation by Fortnum describing his collection "representing the gathering of many years and of many individuals." The last, the eighth panel, on the subject of gift-giving and featuring mostly posy rings, opens with a portrait of C. D. E. Fortnum by Charles Alexander (1893–1894) and a quotation from a posy ring, "A giver gives himself." I will not rehearse the entire sequence, but rather share a few examples of how clever and provocative the entire arrangement is, engaging the viewer with the past in multi-media, text and image.

The remaining six panels are devoted to taste and learning (2); the law (3); ecclesiastics (4); magic (5); death and dying (6); and love (7). In each case a suitable quotation is paired with an image to set the stage for the rings. For example, a panel displaying many signet rings is introduced by a woodcut of the Merchant (Ferrara 1465) and a biblical quote from Jeremiah "So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom." Here, one of the star rings is a "papal" ring of Pope Pius II (1458–1464), whose insignia it bears, set in a pink-foiled crystal. The ring has the papal tiara with the angel perhaps symbolizing St. Matthew on one side and the crossed keys of St. Peter on the other.[17] An English clergyman Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667) declares "It is a great art to die well," next to an allegorical woodcut of ca. 1510 by Albrecht Durer of "Death and the Landsknecht." Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century rings with skulls and crossbones appear on this panel, of which one of the fanciest bears diamonds in the eye sockets, nose, and on the top, base, and sides.[18] Love is introduced by the English poet Robert Herrick (1591–1674), who

17 Taylor and Scarisbrick, *Finger Rings*, 62, no. 463.

18 Taylor and Scarisbrick, *Finger Rings*, 76, no. 721, and colour plate 7.

declared "so let our love as endless prove as pure as gold forever," with a double portrait by Lorenzo Lotto of Marsilio Cassotti and his bride Faustina of 1523 (Madrid, Prado). Here a gimmel ring, meaning twins, for the bride and groom like Faustina and Marsilio, stands out inscribed (in translation) "What God has joined together let no man put asunder."[19] This is also where the small collection Fortnum put together of Jewish wedding rings is displayed.[20]

Through the astute combination of printed word and image with a thoughtful visual mounting of the rings, viewers at the Ashmolean Museum can more fully understand how and why people in the past wore their rings. They can also begin to fathom the taste and intentions of collectors who enthusiastically gathered these historic objects that now have come to rest in their final journey in the vitrines of museums. It is worth adding that the summary catalogue of the collection by Gerard Taylor and Diana Scarisbrick—one of Diana Scarisbrick's first publications —with its introduction on hoop sections, ring types (in different periods), parts of the ring, and ring sizes remains nearly fifty years later one of the most comprehensive and succinct outlines of terminology.[21]

The Alice and Louis Koch Collection at the Swiss National Museum, Zurich: An Encyclopedia of Rings

Beatriz Chadour-Sampson, the longtime curator of the private collection known as the Alice and Louis Koch Collection put together by 1909 when it comprised 1,722 rings and since then has enjoyed four generations of ownership before its deposit in the museum, is responsible for the room devoted to this collection that opened in October 2019 in the nineteenth-century West Wing of the Swiss National Museum (Figure 9.3).[22] Chadour-Sampson is also the author of the multi-volume catalogue of the 2,500

19 "WAS GOT ZV SAMEN FIGET DAS // SOL DER MENSCH NIT SCHAIDEN," from St. Mark, X, v. 9, see Scarisbrick and Henig, *Finger Rings*, 64, pl. 23.1; and Taylor and Scarisbrick, *Finger Rings*, 76, no. 713.

20 Taylor and Scarisbrick, *Finger Rings*, 62–64, nos. 471–82.

21 Taylor and Scarisbrick, *Finger Rings*, 24–28.

22 A video tour of the collection was recorded during the New York Jewelry Week, November 15, 2020, featuring Dr. Luca Tori, deputy chief curator and project direction for "The Collection in the Westwing" at the National Museum Zürich, in a conversation with Beatriz Chadour-Sampson, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fvj_vSPRbQU&t=2s.

Figure 9.3. Alice and Louis Koch Collection in Zurich, Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum (Swiss National Museum). Photograph courtesy of Zurich, Swiss National Museum (DIG-53215).

rings belonging to the family.[23] She freely admits to inspiration from the Ashmolean Museum display just discussed. Comprehensively covering four thousand years of history, 1,500 rings selected from this historic collection—one of the larger and more comprehensive collections in existence—are placed near eye-level and with only a shallow space between the glass and the mounting board in a large circular structure divided into three sections. The three sections are arranged as follows: thematic displays, chronology, and artists' jewellery. Accompanying iPads below the display offer ample opportunity to delve further, and multilingual labels are in French, English, German, and Italian.

So large is the collection that multiple themes can be well represented. These include love, death and mourning, faith and devotion, superstition, signet rings, guild rings, personal portraits, portraits of historical figures, portraits of church dignitaries and popes, historical scenes, and rings with

23 Chadour, *Ringe*; Chadour-Sampson, *Rings*.

function. An unusual Roman ring from around 200 AD shown in the love section sports a carnelian intaglio with the image of a mouse driving a biga pulled by two cocks.[24] We learn from Chadour-Sampson that the mouse is a stand-in for Venus, the goddess of love, and the cocks for Mercury, the messenger. The utterly charming message around the bezel reads in translation: "May you be greeted, sweetheart." Another very rare ring in the section on church dignitaries belonged to Pope Pius IX. Made in 1846, it depicts a fisherman who represents St. Peter as the first pope and alludes to the apostles as the "fishers of men."[25] Tradition required that, upon the death of a pope, the papal ring be broken in two pieces, as this one is (a tradition vividly depicted in the 2024 film "Conclave"), with the result that they rarely survive. I could cite many other examples of important and interesting rings that enlighten us on the social history of rings, their meaning and function, but these few will have to suffice.

The vitrines on chronology, showing how forms and styles evolved, and on artists' jewellery, arranged by makers and countries, are equally thorough. Few collections worldwide could present groups of rings that so completely cover the chronology in seventeen sections: Ancient Egypt, Bronze Age, Phoenician, Etruscan, Greek, Roman, Early Christian, Byzantine, Early Islamic, Middle Ages, Renaissance and Baroque, Neoclassical, Romantic Period, Historicism, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco. Nor can I think of so deep a collection of artists' jewellery, which the fourth generation of the Koch family began actively buying only in the 1990s and which now consists of 620 examples from Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Some highlights include the kinetic jewellery by the German goldsmith and artist Friedrich Becker (1993) and the acrylic and gold experiments by the British artist Roger Morris (1975).[26] Fortunately, for those who cannot make the trip to Zurich, there are the magisterial, well-illustrated and researched catalogues by Beatriz Chadour-Sampson, the one on artists' jewellery being the most recent.[27]

24 Chadour, *Ringe*, 1: no. 324.

25 Chadour, *Ringe*, 2: no. 1523.

26 For Becker's rings, Chadour-Sampson, *Rings*, figs. 173–78; and for Morris's rings, Chadour-Sampson, *Rings*, fig. 270.

27 Chadour, *Ringe*; and Chadour-Sampson, *Rings*.

The Art Institute of Chicago and the Met Cloisters: Rings in Context

Of course, the holdings of individual museums dictate, in part, the type of display to which the collection can be adapted. Few museums could mount installations such as those in the Ashmolean Museum or the Swiss National Museum, because the depth of their holdings would not accommodate it. But that's not all. The philosophy behind different museum collections and what story the curator or curators want to tell their viewers also enters into choices of exhibition. My last two examples, one a permanent installation at the Art Institute of Chicago from 2017 and the other an ephemeral temporary exhibition at the Met Cloisters in 2015, both show medieval art objects, including rings, in "the contexts in which works of art would have been seen and used in their time." That is, both evoke the social history of rings by bringing them into contact with other actual works of art from the same period (instead of at the Ashmolean Museum where photographs of works of art suffice). Let's see how.

The installation of the medieval wing at the Art Institute of Chicago is the result of a multi-year project spearheaded by Martha Wolff, then the Eleanor Wood Prince Curator of European Painting and Sculpture before 1750 (now emerita), who was the senior curator, working alongside Jonathan Tavares, then Mellon Fellow (now Curator of Arms and Armor and of European Decorative Arts). Opened in March 2017 and named the Deering Family Galleries of Medieval and Renaissance Art, Arms, and Armor, this 8,000 square foot space is located on the second level of the Morton Wing at the southernmost point of the Michigan Avenue side buildings. In multiple sequential rooms of different sizes and shapes that intersect a long corridor after a large, cathedral-like space housing introductory objects—Romanesque capitals, sculptures of Christ and the Virgin and Child, the enormous Ayala Altarpiece, for example—seven hundred objects mostly from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries are brought together, many of which were either freshly restored or liberated from storage. An opening panel called "Medieval and Renaissance Art in Context 1200–1600," summarizes how the curators hope the galleries will be viewed: "these galleries feature a creative dialogue between sculpture, painting, metalwork, and textiles to convey a sense of the densely layered presence of art in medieval and Renaissance life." A review in the *Chicago Tribune* declared their intent a big success for the display made "even the saint-averse stop and take notice."[28] Bravo.

28 Johnson, "New Medieval Galleries Bring Knights' Gear Back to Art Institute."

Figure 9.4. Above: overview of the James W. and Marilynn Alsdorf Gallery at the Art Institute of Chicago (Morton Wing, Gallery 238 [as installed in 2017]). Photograph courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago. Left: Detail of the vitrine to the left of the portrait of Queen Margaret of Spain, with rings, pendants, an ivory mirror, and a medieval belt. Photograph by author.

Toward the end of the corridor just before the massive arms and armour installation, the rings are displayed in a small octagonal, wood-panelled space named the James W. and Marilynn Alsdorf Gallery (Figure 9.4). Designed by Charles Mack (as was the rest of the installation), the sombre room boasts dark wood panelling and chevron wood flooring. Standing out against the wood are shallow vitrines filled with small free-standing objects as well as jewels pinned to bright red cloth. An enormous portrait of Queen Margaret of Spain, wife of King Philip III, painted by Andrés Lopéz Polanco in ca. 1606 dominates the centre of the room.[29] Margaret is decked out with

29 Wardropper et al., *Renaissance Jewelry in the Alsdorf Collection*, 20, fig. 6;

jewels: decorative clasps fasten her skirt, strands of pearls hang around her neck, intricate enamelled and jewelled links of rosettes mounted in bracelets encircle her wrists and similarly adorn a dangling belt at her waist, and a prominent brooch pendant shows off two famous gems, a pearl known as "La Peregrina" (the Pilgrim) and a blue diamond called "El Estanque" (the Pond). She wears rings on three of the fingers of her left hand and on the forefinger of her right hand.

Nothing could set the stage better for the mounting of the actual jewels in the vitrines. Close to the painting of the queen a large case combines rings, pendants, an ivory mirror, and a medieval belt. This rich vitrine tells multiple stories, sacred and secular, of status and identity, devotion and piety, magic and the supernatural (even if not always explicitly). Pinned on the right is an iconographic ring of the Virgin and Child with Saints Margaret and Catherine.[30] The cult of the Virgin was all powerful; medieval women identified with Mary, an ordinary young woman who, interrupted while reading, learns of the future birth of her child. Margaret was the patron saint of childbirth. Could the owner have been a bride, anxiously anticipating her firstborn? Catherine, the patron saint of female wisdom, was widely venerated by men but especially by women. Accompanying the religious iconographic ring is a secular signet, probably worn on the thumb and used by a man for sealing in his legal affairs.[31] A handsome enamelled stag, symbol of love, conjures up a courtly context, for the stag was an emblem of the Valois kings at the French court at Fontainebleau.[32] Valued for the properties of their stones, rings set with tourmalines, like the Renaissance example here, held magical powers, cured ailments, and aided in distress, while garnets, here in a tart mould ring, were also talismanic, both protective and healing. A final ring, a stunning agate cameo of the preacher Giovanni Savonarola reminds us that the Renaissance revived both the arts of carved stone and of portraiture.[33]

Reference Number 1941.975, www.artic.edu/artworks/111637/queen-margaret-of-spain.

30 Unpublished, Gift of Dorothy Braude Edinburg, Reference Number 2019.1231, www.artic.edu/artworks/203695/ring-with-the-virgin-and-child-and-saints-margaret-and-catherine.

31 Unpublished, Reference Number 2016.12, www.artic.edu/artworks/229963/signet-ring.

32 Wardropper et al., *Renaissance Jewelry in the Alsdorf Collection*, 54, fig. 20. Reference Number 1992.500, www.artic.edu/artworks/119338/stag-with-herb-branch-mounted-as-a-ring.

33 Wardropper et al., *Renaissance Jewelry in the Alsdorf Collection*, 58, fig. 23,

The rings are not alone in this large vitrine. On the left a selection of pendants stresses how similar they were to rings in iconography and function; a reliquary pendant of St. Barbara and a hat badge of St. John the Baptist, both served as personal protection.[34] Placed in the foreground, a medieval belt[35]—often a dowry present and a promise of fertility, like St. Margaret on the iconographic ring—completes the imaginary outfit of a sitter not unlike Queen Margaret of Spain, and an ivory mirror evokes the intimate setting, as it prompts us to imagine the original owners admiring themselves, as we now gaze at the works in their modern vitrine. A new label—added since the 2017 opening—describes the room as "The Renaissance Jewel Cabinet" which served as "private retreats for contemplation and religious devotion," and was where "nobles stored their most precious items." I like this addition, because it complements the painting, suggesting how and where such objects were kept as well as worn.

Curated in 2015 by Griffith Mann, the Michel David-Weill Curator of Medieval Art at The Metropolitan Museum and The Cloisters, a couple of years before the medieval galleries at the Art Institute of Chicago opened, an exhibition at The Met Cloisters entitled "Treasures and Talismans: Rings from the Griffin Collection" displayed rings from a private collection in relationship to works from The Metropolitan Museum's collection.[36] Not unlike the display at the Art Institute of Chicago, the exhibition skilfully explored connections between rings and other works of art, as well as the significance of rings in the lives of medieval and Renaissance people. Along the right wall hung paintings related to the works that were organized thematically in the six large horizontal vitrines one after another in the Glass Gallery. The subjects of the vitrines were as follow: 1) the Goldsmith; 2) From Raw Material to the Finished Product; 3) Four Spectacular Rings; 4) Bishops and their Ecclesiastics, Devout and Memento Mori; 5) Spouses and Lovers; and 6) Identity.

Accession no. 1992.554.

34 For the reliquary pendant of St. Barbara, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson, Accession no. 1938.1179, unpublished, see Reference number www.artic.edu/artworks/89590/reliquary-pendant-of-saint-barbara; and for St. John the Baptist, Accession no. 1992.301, see Wardropper et al., *Renaissance Jewelry in the Alsdorf Collection*, 32–33, fig. 2. Reference Number 1992.301, www.artic.edu/artworks/119332/hat-badge-with-the-head-of-saint-john-the-baptist-adapted-as-a-pendant.

35 Unpublished; Reference Number 2018.131, www.artic.edu/artworks/241995/girdle-belt; on belts see Lightbown, *Mediaeval European Jewellery*, 332–41.

36 For an exhibition overview on the Met's website, see www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2015/treasures-and-talismans, accessed January 16, 2025.

Figure 9.5. Right: Petrus Christus, *A Goldsmith in his Shop*, 1449. Oil on oak panel, overall 100.1 × 85.8 cm, painted surface 98 × 85.2 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975, 1975.1.110. CC0.
Below: The Met's first vitrine reconstructs the Petrus Christus painting with objects from their collection. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The first vitrine was particularly clever. Placed next to the painting by Petrus Christus of "A Goldsmith in his Shop" of 1449, a vitrine reconstructed the shop with objects from The Met's collection (Robert Lehman Collection 1975.1.110) (Figure 9.5).[37] Cruets and beakers for use in the home and church line the shelves behind the goldsmith, and similar examples appear in the vitrine, along with a box with a bronze scale. Older in date than the scale the goldsmith uses to weigh a wedding band for the couple who appear before him, it nevertheless functioned similarly. Three ring brooches appear on a piece of cloth on the back wall in the painting and are replicated in the vitrine. A box containing rings sits on the lower shelf, the rings displayed on rolled up pieces of parchment. Manuscript illuminations of the period also display rings in this manner, kept on rolled skins. Displaying raw materials of use to the goldsmith as he practised his trade, pearls and precious stones are set on the ledge in the painting and provide a bridge to the focus on raw materials in the next vitrine. Different works of art in dialogue with rings also resonate in the fourth vitrine, where a fifteenth-century sculpture of St. Gregory, bishop and pope, is surrounded by a group of rings from a convent and juxtaposed with a bishop's ring (Figure 9.6). A nearby painting by the Master of Saint Augustine shows five rings visible on St. Augustine's gloved right hand (The Met Cloisters Collection, 61.199),[38] and a nearly intact rosary dangles in the case, stressing the connection between rings and devotion, along with a book of hours and an iconographic ring. Regrettably such exhibitions are ephemeral, but they serve to reinforce our appreciation of objects from the past, enhancing our views of how rings fit in a much broader social and cultural context.

The rings from "Treasures and Talismans" in the Griffin Collection, named after the mythical creature, part lion, part eagle, who was guardian of treasure and sought out gold in rocks, are featured in *Take this Ring*, a monograph I co-authored with Scott Miller that traces the life of the ring from the forge, to the marketplace, to the wearer, to their afterlives.[39] Further information on this extensive private collection can be found in monographs by Diana Scarisbrick, on its posy rings and highlights.[40] Most of the rings from "Treasures and Talismans" are currently on long-term loan to The Metro-

37 On the painting, see Van der Velden, "Defrocking St. Eloy."

38 Bolton, *Heavenly Bodies*, 2:131, 134.

39 Hindman and Miller, *Take This Ring*.

40 Scarisbrick, *"I like My Choyse"*, and Scarisbrick, *The Art of the Ring.*

Figure 9.6. The Met's fourth vitrine where a fifteenth-century sculpture of St. Gregory, bishop and pope, is surrounded by a group of rings from a convent and juxtaposed with a bishop's ring. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

politan Museum, searchable on their website, and often on display throughout the Fifth Avenue building and The Met Cloisters.

I have skirted over that intermediate stage in the itinerary of the ring, namely the collector, without whose enthusiastic philanthropy none of these museum displays would be possible. There are many cited here: Marilynn Alsdorf, C. D. E. Fortnum, Dame Joan Evans, Alice and Louis Koch (and the successive generations of that family), Martin Ryerson, Dorothy Braude Edinburg, and the anonymous owner of the Griffin Collection. Nor have I mentioned dealers or the art market, which account for another step in the itinerary. Times have changed since the latter 1990s, when I was greeted by "Oh no, not rings ...." Les Enluminures has now sold rings to many major institutions as museums revise their collecting perspectives and acquisition policies in line with more inclusive art historical scholarship, incorporating rings into the history of art, as well as more insightful "contextual" scholarship on the history of rings—such as the articles in this book. Collectors, dealers, and the art market remain subjects for another time. This brief Epilogue with its overview of museum displays demonstrates that the twenty-first century takes a new view of the history of the ring. As more and more rings become visible in museum vitrines that are imaginatively composed, I can only imagine that the interplay between continuing productive scholarship and thoughtful museum exhibitions will increasingly deepen, with the result that over time an even richer social history of rings will emerge.

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